

GOING DOWN

By Joseph Hankinson

I was having a hard time explaining to my wife why, whenever the phone rang and I was sleeping, I would jump out of bed and start lacing on my boots. The dreams, I told her, or I guess more accurately I would describe them as nightmares, were still going on several years after I got out of the Navy. The plot was usually the same, with some error in my discharge papers being discovered by some astute clerk and an armed detail showing up at my door to escort me back into the Navy. The first time I entered the service in 1983 was bad enough, but I did volunteer, and so I had little right to complain no matter how bad things were or how much I did not appreciate my treatment. But this time (in my dream) I am awakened in the middle of the night by a Master at Arms, wielding a nightstick and reading my orders to me. Backing him up are four armed flunkies without a stripe among them, two of them carrying rifles and two holstering side arms.

I am informed by the Master at Arms that if I come with them right away without a fuss, it will not be necessary to put me in shackles. Too dumbfounded in the dream to do anything, I am led away to a processing center where, without any meaningful explanation, I am told I did not actually fulfill my Active Obligated Service, and so therefore I am still obligated to serve. I am forced to strip naked, have my head shaved,

get probed and poked, and receive a series of inoculations I have already been given, including Anthrax and the slug of penicillin in my butt with a square needle that made it hard to walk and impossible to sit down. I am forced to stand in a very cold room, still naked, with dozens of other recruits, all standing at attention as a doctor makes his rounds, accompanied by an exceptionally beautiful E-3 trainee. The doctor feels around each man's genitals, and every few men he examines, he stops and has the beautiful woman feel this thing or that thing in a particular man's scrotum. When the doctor reaches me, he feels around my sack for quite some time, asking me to cough a few times. Then he asks the beautiful woman to feel my groin. She looks me in the eyes and blushes a little as she grasps my balls and gently begins to squeeze. The extreme cold and the awkwardness of the situation give me the turtle effect, which adds to my embarrassment. Satisfied the beautiful woman has examined me enough, the doctor finally moves on to the next man, leaving me feeling quite cold and conquered.

Next I find myself in a room with a man from the FBI who flashes a badge at me, and then begins asking me questions.

"Have you ever left the country?" When I tell him I visited Canada with my high school Latin club, he questions me more intently.

“Who did you talk to while you were there? Have you signed any allegiances to other nations? Have you ever smoked, consumed, ingested, or otherwise tried any of the following?” He then goes on to list more drugs than I had ever heard of, even after six years of foreign ports. Of course the right answer to everything is “No,” and although I want to say “Yes” to make all this insanity stop, I hear myself in the dream once again say no to all. I even fake stupidity and say mari-what? Next he describes a scenario for me that includes an order to launch all weapons and start World War Three. He tells me that I am standing watch in the control room when the captain orders me to push the red button and launch nuclear weapons targeted to kill millions. Would I do it? I hear myself once again say, “If I am so ordered, I will obey.” Good enough for the FBI.

Yet one more time I am issued clothes that do not fit and shoes that are not at all comfortable, but then without any further training I am whisked away from the induction center and straight back to my boat, which was the one place on earth I swore I would never set foot again. Before I know what is happening, there I am again, out to sea, submerged, standing the mid-watch, and bitching about how little sleep I am getting, all within a few hours of sleeping in my own bed. All the lifers are still there, and a bunch of nubs I do not know, but all the guys I got along with are all gone—out and enjoying their lives in the real world. Maybe, as some promised, they had taken jobs cleaning bedpans or scrubbing pig stalls to regain their self-respect, but they were free and clear of the Navy.

As soon as my watch is over, the chief with the slinky spine finds me and tells me that it is time for my interview with the captain, a man we un-affectionately called “The Goob.” I stand outside the captain’s stateroom, a little unsteady still from the exertion of the last drill,

and the extreme loss of sleep. Turns out the captain, who is looking to become squadron commander and a full bird, volunteered our boat for battle “E” testing, I guess for “Endurance.” The idea is to push a crew and a vessel to the breaking point and try to see how far things can go before everything begins to fall apart. This includes round-the-clock drills, especially all-hands drills on the mid-watch and throughout the day.

As I think about it, I realize I had not really gotten any sleep in the last week or so (even though in my dream technically I am still only a day out of the world). The realization makes me feel a bit lightheaded. Then the captain opens the door to his stateroom, and while not as large or as luxurious as the captains’ quarters on surface ships, for a submarine it is quite spacious. The Goob has a very round, completely bald head and an equally round tummy. His eyes are always bloodshot, and everyone wonders what he is on. I salute and he tells me to sit down. He begins to ask me a series of questions about my upbringing and schooling, but nothing about my ambitions. Every now and then, as I begin to talk gibberish due to the sleep deprivation-induced psychosis I was experiencing, the Goob would look up from the chart he was holding and one of his eyebrows would rise so far it almost looked like a toupee on his otherwise perfectly bald head. Perhaps this is why he is interviewing the crew—to see the effect the E competition is having on us. But at the time, when I have so little time to sleep, and this interview is eating into it, I am less than happy to be there.

“So what does your father do?”

“He works in a factory. Has his whole life since he got out of the Army.”

“What does your mother do?”

“She’s just a housewife.” At this he looks up from the chart again and his left eyebrow rises up his forehead, causing his left eye to look engorged.

“What? That’s BULL shit. You don’t think being a housewife is important?”

“Sure. But she’s not a brain surgeon or anything.” He lowers his eyebrow at this, only so he can shoot it straight back up again. Then, with no noticeable transition, the Goob produces a whiteboard and hands me a marker and tells me to draw the entire ship’s piping system, starting with the reactor and working outward. I had not studied, since I had not been informed I am having my captain’s board for both my dolphins and to stand engine room supervisor right at that moment. This means I would have to know everything about the entire sub, and without a crib sheet or a piping tab. I try to explain that I already had my dolphins, and I really did not want to earn them again because this was actually a horrible mistake someone had made, since I was already out—free—discharged.

The Goob’s eyebrow rockets up and he says, “BULL SHIT” most emphatically. He then accuses me of being under the influence and orders me to take yet another piss test. The captain answers my concerns by telling me to trace the path of an oxygen molecule through the ship’s ventilation, air compression, and emergency blow systems. I get confused (I am still hallucinating) and instead I explain how a drop of seawater goes from the ocean, through a heat exchanger, into the desalination plant, through the ship’s potable water system, into the ion exchanger, and then becomes part of the reactor coolant system as highly purified water. Oopsy. Wrong answer.

The Goob, who apparently had stopped listening to me anyway, congratulates me and pulls the backs from the sharp steel pins on a set of silver dolphins. He positions them just above an iron-on U.S. NAVY patch and my left nipple and “tacked” them on me by thumping the pin with his fist, forcing the steel pins through the cloth of my dungaree shirt and about a quarter of an inch into my skin. I cringe

but try to appear emotionless, although the pain is immense. I hardly have time to recover my breath before I notice all one hundred and twenty men on the crew are standing in line to take their turn at tacking on my dolphins. I protest that some of these guys are nubs, and that I had actually gone through this all before. This was just a great big fat mistake! Just then one of the electricians with a bad attitude and a well-formed physique levels me with a punch to the chest that leaves me on the floor, gasping for breath and bleeding badly from the puncture wounds in my chest.

Then, without any rack time, it is time for watch again. As I sit on mid-watch and befuddle myself with questions like, “How did this happen? I thought I was out?” an alarm sounds, then a loud siren, then a deafening gong, until I realize that not only am I losing sleep, but now my life is also in danger. In my nightmare, I don an Emergency Air Breathing apparatus and begin feeling my way along the bulkhead as the smoke thickens in the compartment and a sinking sensation permeates the space. I manage to locate a place to plug in my mask so I do not suffocate, and I retrieve a copy of the Emergency Operating Procedures, but the page I need is missing. My head begins to swim as the smoke thickens, with the alarms and bells and gongs going off until I lose consciousness.

Each time when I awake from this or a similar nightmare, I am shaking and drenched in sweat, unable for several minutes to conclude that I am NOT in the Navy, and I am not fighting for my life on a sinking ship off the northern coast of the Soviet Union. To this day, more than twenty years since I got out, I still need to unplug the phone at night and I never set an alarm clock that has a bell or a buzzer. Loud noises while I’m sleeping send me into a panic. Once, while my wife and I were living in Pennsylvania, someone called at about one in the morning on the last night I ever forgot

to unplug the phone. On the first ring I sprang straight out of bed and was lacing up my boots and running around our apartment looking for the EAB connection, when my wife touched my shoulder and told me the phone was ringing. I grabbed the phone and cussed out the person on the line for violating operating procedures and hung up without even asking for a name. I am certain some of the post-trauma was caused by an experience I had right before my discharge.

The USS Bergall, a fast attack submarine, was running deep off the coast of the Soviet Union. We had been deployed for a couple of months already, and Willie and I were standing

port and starboard watches the whole time—six on, six off, day after day after day. But the six hours off were not really “off” because the captain was running drills non-stop for some reason, and so I had not really slept in days. Willie and I were up on the mid-watch together, expecting another drill after just finishing one. Willie was not on watch, since I had just relieved him, but it

was usually better to be aft when running all-hands drills so as to not get caught up with a bunch of Coners taking charge of the situation and giving out the orders. One day I was up forward when a drill was run, and I had the Navigator order me to man the phones. He started telling me to pass a lot of information to Control, but I had no idea what he was talking about, so I had to keep asking him to repeat himself, right in the middle of a simulated catastrophe. THAT was stressful. I would rather be back in the engine-room where I at least knew what was going on for almost any scenario.

I was the Engine Room Supervisor, a watch

station I had only recently passed qualification to stand. I already had my dolphins and I was not interested in trying to qualify for the next level, which was the Engineering Watch Supervisor. I had had about enough, and I was getting short, counting the days. Oddly enough, Willie and I had joined on the exact same day, so we also shared an EAOS (End of Active Obligated Service) that made our bond stronger than brothers, even though our childhoods were quite different, aside from the poverty. Together, we had formed BARF, or the Bergall Anti Retention Force, and we were more than willing to harass anyone thinking of re-enlisting endlessly for the entire deployment if necessary, until the nub saw the error of his ways.

“What’s up, Hank?”

“Not much, Willie. Happy 99 day!”

“I can’t believe it.

Double digit midgets after all these years!” We both instinctively reached for the small green “Memoranda” notepad everyone used for his calendar. One evening, almost two thousand days ago, Willie and I sat up on

a similar mid-watch and carefully drew grids and monthly calendars for every month we had left—about fifty-four back then. Each day was then filled in with not only the actual date, but the “day” it was for us. In blue, we had the actual date, and in red, we had the more important, always decreasing number of days left until our favorite acronym of the thousands in the Navy—EAOS. For years, we had religiously taken out the notepads as soon as midnight had passed, or first thing in the morning if not on the mid-watch, and turned to the current month, and after looking longingly at the days to come, we would place a nice dark black X through the day that had now passed.

We were sinking, and it was on us to save the ship! I positioned the switch to level the planes, and inserted a small metal rod into the hand pump and started pumping.

To cross a day off before midnight was not allowed, no matter how much we may have wanted to jump ahead in time, even if only for a few minutes—anything to shorten the time left.

“Just a few more months to go! I can’t wait to get the hell out of here!”

“Me neither. I just have to get off this boat so I can get my life back!”

“Quiet. Here comes a lifer...” We both clammed up in an exaggerated fashion as Todd walked up. “Hey, why aren’t you down in lower level?”

“Don’t worry. Everything is on auto-pilot. I need to get something to drink.”

Willie held his fingers in an L shape against his forehead. “So when you gonna sign the papers? The Navy needs you. I can tell a Lifer-Loser-Navy-Chooser when I see one. Wouldn’t you rather be here than back home tippin’ cows, farmer Todd?”

Todd groaned. “How many times do I have to tell you, I’ve never been on a farm. I’m from Minneapolis, and it’s a bigger city than any of you are from.”

“Yea, I’ll bet it’s a big city. Got to be big to fit all them cows in there.” At that we both started laughing uncontrollably. “Don’t they give y’all a cow just for deciding to live out there?” Willie and I high-fived and fluttered our fingers as part of a new dap we were practicing.

“You guys are morons.”

“Yea, but we’re double digit morons! How many days you got left? Nineteen hundred and what?” We high-fived and busted a gut in a further exaggerated display. Todd got steaming water for his hot chocolate and huffed off. He almost ran into Pookie, who was coming through the hatch to the engine-room. We called him Pookie after someone looked over his shoulder and saw that his girlfriend called him that in one of her letters. So, from that day forward, his real name was rarely used (I think it was Chris), and he was known as Pookie to

everyone, from the greenest of nubs to the XO. I even heard the captain call him Pookie one day. He was short and round, like a teddy bear, so the name seemed more than fitting.

“Man, is this a Lifer parade or what?” Willie shook his head as Pookie came over and acknowledged us.

“Hank. Willie. What’s up?”

“Your days! You must be, what, a five digit lifer? Ten thousand days left?” Willie and I started rolling over sideways as we cracked up. Willie had the funniest laugh I ever heard. He would hit these high notes and act like he was in physical pain from the side-splitting ordeal.

“Ten thousand days! I don’t think trees live that long! You should put a lump of coal in your pocket and it will probably turn into a diamond before you get out!” Willie chattered away a familiar round of lifer one-liners in a high-pitched voice.

“You guys are hysterical. I only have twenty two fourteen left.” Willie and I opened our eyes widely like we were staring in total disbelief.

“You mean twenty two years! Once a lifer, always a lifer. I can’t even count that high. I was already under two thousand when I got here.”

“How could you do that to yourself? When I get out I’m going to spend some time cleaning up horse stalls to get my self respect back. Maybe I’ll volunteer to clean bed pans in some old folks’ home.”

“Hey, I’ve got job security AND job satisfaction.” Pookie was pretty good at taking his plight in stride. He delivered a message to the Engineering Officer of the Watch and went to lower level to relieve Todd.

“I would shoot myself in the head if I had that many days left. He already spent all his reenlistment bonus, so what does he have left to show for it?”

“Oh, about six and a half more years!” We howled until we were wiping away tears. We immediately stopped when Lt. O’Keefe entered

through the hatch. Willie and I sat at perfect attention, not moving a muscle and stared straight ahead. Not really attention, I suppose, since we did not stand up or acknowledge the oncoming Engineering Officer of the Watch in any way. Ever since he turned me in to the Engineer, I had vowed the man is dead to me, and I shall never utter his name again, or so much as respond to him in more than two syllables, the first being yes or no, and the second being sir. Mr. O'Keefe looked briefly in our direction before requesting permission to enter maneuvering for his stated purpose of relieving the watch. As soon as he was out of sight, Willie and I scrambled out of there as fast as we could and met back by the anchor.

"I can't stand that backstabber. I hope he leaves his hat back here again."

"Remember how we messed up Master Chief's hat back on the barge? If that punk Cheeseburger didn't feel bad for him and throw it over the side, he could have wondered what that smell was every time he put it on from that moment forward. It would have been a classic." Willie added his last comments in a fake radio announcer voice he had been practicing over the last few weeks of this, our final deployment. This trip was just a routine sixteen-weeker over the North Pole with no stops and tons of drills. This last voyage also gave us one last chance to gloat at all those who had more days left than we did. Of course, this deployment also gave us one more chance of not returning.

Willie and I took every opportunity to mess with the lifers and remind them of the comparison between the number of days they had left and the lifespan of trees, rocks, and glaciers. We would tell the unhappily re-enlisted how he should start collecting a penny for every day he has left, so as to be quite wealthy when finally retiring at an advanced age. We would pop to attention whenever we saw a lifer, and we would form our index

fingers and thumbs into an "L" shape, and hold it up to our forehead while saying "Lifer Loser Navy Chooser." Not once or twice, or even a few times, but every single time we would encounter a shipmate who had re-enlisted, which was frequent due to the close quarters.

When I say close quarters, I mean uncomfortably close. On this particular cruise, Willie and I were on port and starboard watches and hot racking. He was on watch for six hours, and then I was on watch for six hours, so the rack was supposed to be empty whenever we were not on watch. I hated hot racking, not because I had anything against Willie. He showered regularly, or at least as regular as a person could while deployed and standing port and starboard watches. Once every three or four days was considered as good as a Hollywood celebrity, under the circumstances. But when one hot-racked, one only had half the normal allotted space for personal belongings, which was not very large to start. Two watches every day, maybe four or five hours of sleep when the captain was not running drills on the third and mid-watches, a shower every couple of days and maybe time for a meal or two.

With this schedule, the days would drag on and on and the time seemed endless. I was propped up on the rails around the reduction gears, my face pointing directly into an air duct. I had not showered in days, and I was getting to the point where I could not stand the smell of myself. Additionally, my last meal was fit for the TDU. In fact, I am certain the meal came from a Trash Disposal Unit that had not yet been discharged. I think the meal must have tasted exactly like the orange goo that leaked from the seams of the trash disposal can when it was compressed. My logs were wedged between the reduction gears and the chrome rail, certainly creating a sound short, but I was too short to care. I was also about two hours behind on my logs, because I was reaching that point of extreme fatigue, right before the part

where a person really starts to hallucinate, so I really just did not give a shit. The boat could sink to the bottom of the ocean for all I cared.

Pookie came back to the aft end of Engine Room Upper Level where Willie and I were hanging out, discussing the probability of the correctness of the log readings we were creating, ensemble. "Are you guys radioing your logs again?" Willie and I rolled our eyes in large exaggerated arcs and held our fingers to our forehead, forming the letter L. What did it mean to radio logs? Well, we would sit in one spot and guesstimate what the actual gauge readings should be, and write the numbers down, almost as if received by radio waves. Sometimes we would sit and radio logs for gauges that were not even a few feet away, rather than get up and look at them.

Often when nubs or junior officers would wander into the engine room, we would do various things as we radioed logs, such as hold up a finger as though testing the direction of the wind. Or we would cup a hand over one ear and act as though we were listening intently before radioing another log reading. Sometimes we would flip a coin, all to make it appear even more random than it really was. The mid-watch was the worst for taking logs, because we had to do epic log entries for the new day that included several long sentences regarding the status of the entire propulsion plant.

A few times after a long night of radioing logs, a somewhat more conscientious watch-stander would actually go around and take a set of real logs, often coming back and noting to us vast discrepancies between what we had written down and the actual pressure or temperature on the gauges. This would cause us to go back and doctor the logs, attempting to show a "trend" over time. Zeroes, threes, and sixes could be turned into eights. Ones were easy to change into fours or sevens, and so on. If the discrepancies were particularly egregious, we would have to go back and re-

write the entire log sheet, which took more time than actually taking logs in the first place would have taken. Then, after the conscientious watch-stander finished his watch with his perfect logs, the next one, two, or even three watch-standers would radio the logs until the conscientious watch-stander came back on watch. But since Willie and I were port and starboard, there was no conscientious watch-stander to correct the logs, and we made a bet to see who could go the longest without taking a real log reading. Pookie seemed incredulous.

"Aren't you afraid something has changed? Remember that time everyone radioed the cooling tank riser level, right up until we got the low level alarm? You guys would have been fried if not for the fact that when the Engineer looked at the logs, he discovered everyone in the division had radioed off that level, including the chief!"

"You worry too much, Pookie. Must be that lifer in you. What are you doing up here? Aren't you supposed to be in lower level?"

"Yea, but it's a friggin' oven down there. I'm trying to line up the cooling vents to create some air flow and hopefully draw some of the heat out from below." Willie and I began to crack up again. Pookie was the only sailor I ever met who really did say "friggin'."

"Where did you get that nonsense? Heat Transfer and Fluid Flow class? The air from the cooling vents can't be felt even two feet away. How are you going to create enough air flow to move anything?" Willie waved his arm around as he spoke, with exaggerated gesticulations, as though he were trying to make a very serious point. Pookie, completely undeterred, went about his business, turning each air vent in the space to point forward, toward the front of the engine room. The vents were made out of a series of wedge-shaped sections that twisted to angle in different directions. By lining up the sections thick side to skinny side to thick side to skinny side and so on, one could cause the

vent to point straight down.

Pookie carefully twisted the wedges, trying to line them up thick side to thick side to thick side for maximum right angle and therefore most direct air path forward. On the starboard side, next to the hydraulic station for control of the stern planes, Pookie attempted to reach a duct that was a little over his head, he not being a very tall person. He stretched and reached and tried banging the vent with the clipboard that was holding the radioed logs. Pookie was still trying to reach the vent that was proving to be elusive, when he placed his foot on a small pipe that connected to the hydraulic plant.

“Watch your foot, Pookie, that line is under high pr...” The line snapped as I was speaking. Atomized oil rapidly filled the compartment, drenching us all instantly with the hydraulic fluid.

“JAM DIVE! JAM DIVE! Loss of stern plane control! Take manual control of the stern planes!” came booming over the MC. We had been operating rather deep, and at a full bell when this occurred, at a significant down angle. Without stern plane control, the ship could reach crush depth in short order, the pressure outside the boat overtaking the pressure inside the pressure hull, causing the boat to implode. Pookie began turning valves, trying to isolate the leak as the oil shot straight up into his face. Willie and I ran over to the manual control station, slipping and sliding on the oil-drenched deck plates. I grabbed the procedure that was posted near the station (luckily it was laminated), wiped the oil from its surface and began to turn valves with the greatest urgency.

At this angle, an Emergency Blow, where air is used to push all the water out of the ballast tanks to send the boat to the surface, would not be feasible. We were sinking, and it was on us to save the ship! I positioned the switch to level the planes and inserted a small metal rod into the hand pump and started pumping. To my absolute shock and dismay, the little pump

was incredibly hard to pump, and the rod was painfully too short to allow one to apply much torque. Additionally, and worst of all, the pump was in an overly cramped location, hard to reach, and even then at an unnatural angle, with the hand-wheels of other valves blocking much of the space around the hand pump.

I twisted my arms and grasped the rod the best I could and started pumping. And pumping and pumping and pumping and pumping until I thought my arms would fall off, with little noticeable effect on the angle of the boat as indicated by the large bubble in the middle of a gauge mounted for exactly this purpose to the box holding the anchor chain. The bubble was pegged to one side, indicating we were sinking, even though the extreme angle of the boat already made that clear to us. Luckily, Willie was back there with me, his well-defined muscles pressing through his oil-covered arms. Willie took over when I began to get light headed and began pumping like a wild man who knew his life was at stake. I pulled an adjustable wrench from my pocket and attempted to remove the nut on one of the hand-wheels blocking our progress, but the wrench just kept slipping due to all the oil in the air.

“Take manual control of the stern planes and level the stern planes!” The voice over the MC did little to disguise his heightened anxiety. I grabbed a sound-powered phone and acknowledged the order and informed Control that we had taken manual control and were pumping like crazy and we needed help. Pookie got on another phone at the same time, and I heard him tell Control the leak had been isolated. Willie began to lose steam as the boat was still going down, but no longer at such a steep angle. I took over again and pumped until my arms were cramping and then Willie took over again. The boat began to groan as we sank deeper and deeper. Willie pumped the metal rod as fast as he could, and I was amazed once

again at his physicality.

Willie was slim and not real tall, but he was solid, with rock-hard muscles from head to toe. When we tested the main steam stops from the reactor compartment to the engine room, the automatic switches would trip, and these giant valves would spin shut in a matter of seconds. Sadly, the valves could not also be opened automatically, but instead some poor soul, usually a nub, would need to use the heavy swinging knocker handle to break the disc loose from the seat and then stay on it for the ten minutes or so it took to fully open the valve. Sometimes a couple of us would race, since the valves were both port and starboard, and Willie was one of the best. Every muscle, tendon, and vein would be visible under his taut brown skin as he opened the valve on his side and would sometimes even help his opponent finish the other. He never seemed to do anything in particular to stay in shape, and in fact, his eating habits were atrocious. On the rare Sunday we were not at sea or on duty, if we caught a football game, Willie would kick back in his skivvies with a bag of Oreos and kill a two-liter bottle of Bartles & James, occasionally rubbing his fingers against his rippling stomach muscles.

The plane level indicator gauge over Willie's head had barely moved, its bubble in the tube seemingly glued into place. Willie strained and groaned in time with the groaning of the boat as it became compressed by the increasing pressure of the water. I stared at the gauge as Willie almost blew a gasket pumping, until the bubble finally broke loose and moved a small amount. Willie looked light headed as I reached in to relieve him once again. I attacked the small pipe sticking out of the hand pump with a ferociousness I had not as yet displayed. I got mad—real mad—and the pump was the object of my aggression. I pumped furiously until the tendon in my right elbow felt as though it was

separating, and I slumped down, exhausted. But the bubble shown that we were level, and no longer sinking. Other machinist mates had showed up, and Longosky told Sizemore to help us out with the pump.

“Ba Hank, Willie, what happened back here? How did the ba pipe break?”

“Beats me. I was taking logs. Didn't see a thing.”

“Ba Willie, did you see anything?”

“Nope. Not a thing.”

“Ba Pookie? Ba, what happened?”

“I don't know, unless I banged up against it or something.”

“Ba why aren't you in lower level?”

“Just trying to help. I'm heading back now.” Longo, a lifer first class who said “Ba” every few words as he spoke, began to direct emergency repairs on the hydraulic plant, and Willie and I limped away as others took our place. Sizemore manned the hand pump and struggled to make small adjustments to the bubble while Todd stayed on the headphones with Control. We were both drenched with oil and sweat, and we each rubbed our aching biceps and elbows. I wanted badly to grab a Hollywood shower, but I still had three more hours of watch to stand. Willie was too amped to sleep, so he sat between the main engines with me. We expected that any minute the Goob, or at least the XO or Engineer would be back to thank us and congratulate us for saving the boat, but recognition of our feat never came. Minutes, then hours, and eventually days passed with not even so much as a thank you or job well done, or anything! The only thing I got for saving the nuclear armed and powered submarine and its crew was one nightmare after another where I can ride the boat to the bottom yet again.