

Hank's Son Recalls

It was the rarest of days for me – a day out of school, the dreaded 5th grade, and a day spent with my father, whom you knew as Hank, and I knew only as Dad. But what made it even more exciting was that we were headed down to the Washington Channel docks to see a certain ship with a weird name. A ship that had fought a war long ago and come home with her captain and crew, and now years later was making a port call to Washington. And we had almost missed it – a short notice in the Alexandria Gazette about a submarine coming to town, that was all.

Dad was quiet as he drove us towards the docks. It was a gray day, and the water and fish smells were strong. We drove over the Potomac, then along the waterfront, past tenements and fish markets. Parking near a ferry terminal, I remember stepping over lines and hoses as we made our way along the dock. All this was a familiar landscape to a Navy kid, but a ship like this I had never seen, much less thought to go inside.

Suddenly, around a shack and there, low and gray and rather used-looking, lay my father's submarine – the USS Crevalle. A more mysterious and curious thing I had never seen. And my father, who I had thought would be thrilled and talkative, was quiet and reserved, almost shy. Like approaching a lady with whom one had had earlier adventures, and not sure how she would be now, he seemed to be holding back. Perhaps thinking which visions of those times and challenges would come back to the present. Or perhaps what war memories and regrets he might be reviewing – things he never shared but I know crossed his mind from time to time. They had to return; those memories were too big to remain dormant. But he didn't speak them, then or ever, at least not to me. But we walked her length together alongside, from the dented bow with ribs showing under her skin, to the conning tower with its odd appendages, and on to the stern where the simple-style letters spelled out "USS Crevalle".

There was no one around. No guard, no starched Marine or sauntering Shore Patrol, not even a city cop. Just a small ship. But there was a gangplank in place, and we stepped aboard, and walked to a hatchway behind the conning tower. It was covered with some kind of awning. We peered down the ladder, and then I smelled it. The mix of diesel and coffee cologne you guys frequent wafted up through the hatch. There were lights on, and the rumble of machinery, and the sound of a radio. She was alive after all.

'Hello aboard' hailed my Dad – and this was immediately answered by a friendly challenge – 'Sorry no visitors until 1300.....' the voice trailed off as a friendly face below straightened in sight of my father's Captain's uniform.

You know, I always thought my father's informality around folk in uniform was not in keeping with what I saw in the movies. He was always friendly, interested and talkative, especially with enlisted men. And this was no exception, in a moment all was smiles and 'of course sir, please come down and would you care for a cup of coffee?' I had hot chocolate, and we sat in the galley of a living submarine, while I took it in, and while Dad slowly explained who he was, and that he was here to show his son around a real fighting ship. The Chief made us right at home, and we were given the tour through the boat. To me it was a blur of pipes, dials and levers. To my Dad – he had every fitting memorized, and their proper positions 'Had to', he explained – the

intricacies were familiar and routine. The boat was immaculate – I remember him saying that to the Chief, who grinned in response. In every compartment we saw the same pride and skill in keeping a war veteran in E condition. We even were allowed up into the conning tower, where I was able to line up the attack scope on the US Capital in the distance. What else would you expect his son to do?

We spent an hour on her. There were only a handful of crew onboard – the rest were off in town being submariners. I think the shock of a Captain prowling the boat wore off pretty quick as word passed – and not on the intercom, of who this Captain really was. Men came up and said hello. And were very, very proud of their boat, and her First Captain. We signed the log retrieved from the Yeoman's shack, and spent a little more time below, taking in the sights, and smells. For Hank, there must have been memories of men rushing back and forth, of silence shattered by explosions, of long hours of quiet waiting – then moments of exhilarating near-terror as the attack was closed. And prayerful rest after, and thoughts of loved ones they would live to embrace again, when the sea and Crevalle brought them home.

Rest your oars, men of Crevalle. The days of conflict are past, the waters are quiet again. Rest, and Godspeed.

Chris Munson
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