



The Klaxon

Newsletter of the Submarine Force Library and Museum Association

Groton, CT

Fall 2006

Black Submariners in the United States Navy, 1940-1975

Editor's note. In February 2007, as part of the observance of Black History Month, the Submarine Force Library & Museum will host author and lecturer Glenn A. Knoblock who will deliver a lecture on the history of Black submariners in the US Navy. Mr. Knoblock has written a book on the subject. The article following is a review and excerpts from his book.

This work documents the service of Black submariners from World War II through the Cold War, but importantly begins with a brief treatise on Black sailors' service prior to World War II.

Black sailors have proudly and bravely served American Naval forces for as long as those forces have existed. Black sailors manned merchant vessels during the colonial period. A large number of Black sailors, both free and slave, helped to man ships of the Continental Navy during the American War for Independence. Also, in the War of 1812, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry had Black sailors in his crews. Nearly 30,000 Blacks served in the Union Navy during the Civil War, with four being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. 2000 Black sailors served in the Spanish-American War with at least one receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor. Following the Spanish-American War efforts were made to phase out Black sailors from all ratings except for the messman's branch. Race relations in the Navy reflected those on land and restrictions on Black sailors tightened; their service being essentially limited to menial functions.

In 1919 Black enlistment in the Navy was stopped completely. This policy remained in effect until 1932 when Black enlistment was once again authorized but only as mess attendants. In June 1939 the Navy had 2807 Black men on active duty.

The bulk of the work is an exploration of the service of Black submariners from World War II through the Cold War era. Throughout, the author makes extensive use of personal accounts and histories to paint a complete picture of Black sailors experience in the Navy. Beginning with an overview of the Steward's Branch of the United States Navy during World War II; the book describes the experience of becoming a Steward including how Blacks joined the Navy either by voluntary enlistment or via the draft. It describes the Navy Book Camp experience including detailing the segregation experienced both as a result of official Navy policy and exposure to civilian communities surrounding the training centers. A discussion of the rating system, as it applied to Black sailors is also provided as a further example of the discrimination they experienced, discrimination that ex-



Officer's Cook First Class, George Washington Lytle

tended even to the wearing of different types of uniforms.

Next is an account of Becoming a Submariner, either directly from Boot Camp, transfer from the Surface Navy or from a Tender, Relief Crew or Shore Duty. Some were sent to Submarine School, but most were not. The train-

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From the Desk of the President

We wish you Seasons Greetings, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and all

that from the Submarine Capital of the World. The fall season has been benign in New England this year with no really cold weather to date; most unusual. We do not expect it to last for long, however. Wherever you are and whatever manner of weather you are experiencing, we hope this issue of the *Klaxon* finds you well and enjoying this joyous time of the year.

2006 has been a good year for the museum. The Navy was able to put a new roof on the building thus curing many troublesome leaks and additionally repainted all the outdoor exhibits and reinstalled one of the newly refurbished deck guns. We successfully established the docent program and thanks to 39 enthusiastic volunteers we have docents on watch Friday through Monday. We hope to have docents on watch on

all days the museum is open in the near future.

In February 2007, as part of Black History Month, we will be hosting a lecture by Mr Glenn Knoblock, author of *Black Submariners in the United States Navy, 1940-1975*. A review of the book and additional information on events of Black History Month are contained in this issue of *The Klaxon*.

By now you all should have received our annual fund raising appeal letter. If you have already sent in your donation for the year we thank you for your generosity. If you have not yet had an opportunity, please take time today to send in your donation. Remember, as long as it is postmarked on or before December 31 you can take advantage of the tax deduction on your 2006 income taxes. In 2007, one of our main thrusts will be in the education program. We have formed a partnership with the Groton Connecticut Public School System, and through that partnership will be developing curricula initially in support of the middle school science program and eventually for all grades K-12 in the

areas of science, math, history and social studies where the museum will be literally a lab for the schools and students will use the library for research. This is really exciting! Additionally we are converting the east end mini-theater in the museum to a temporary exhibit room where we can regularly rotate changing exhibits through the museum. Your donations will help the museum continue to preserve and display artifacts depicting the history of the U.S. Submarine Force and to make progress towards achieving our 2007 goals.

We continue to seek volunteers to serve as docents at the museum. If you are interested, or know someone who is, please let us know. No previous experience is necessary. We are also looking for donations of submarine related artifacts of interest to our community.

Once again, we wish you a safe and happy holiday season. Please stop by and visit the museum whenever you get a chance. You will not be disappointed!

David M. Goebel



From the Desk of the Museum Director

At the helm now for eight months, I am pleased to report that we continue to make progress in a number of

areas. Design work is complete on the new Temporary Exhibition Room, and construction is scheduled to start this February. Restoration of the museum's two deck guns is complete, and the Flasher's deck gun once again guards the entrance to the museum for all to enjoy. Our Docent program continues to thrive and has expanded

to 4-days per week. At a recent Docent meeting, the Docents provided valuable feedback on how to improve the museum experience for our visitors.

We also just completed a very ambitious upkeep period focused on improving the Museum and grounds. We repainted seven of the exterior exhibits, installed new buoys around the NAUTILUS, replaced the 20-year old roof, resealed all of the exterior building panels with an advanced silicon material, retiled the main entrance, added a programmable sign at the site entrance, and installed partitions in the classroom - all intended to maintain the

Museum's world-class image.

Finally, I am excited about our recent efforts to make our extensive library holdings more accessible to the public. We just awarded a contract to have our entire card catalog converted to digital format and hosted on the Internet. Soon, visitors to our web site will be able to research online what our library has to offer.

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season, and if your travel plans bring you to the Groton area, please drop by to see what your association is doing for the museum.

LCDR Randolph Tupas

Black Submariners in the United States Navy, 1940-1975

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ing they received was starkly different from that received by Whites and perhaps reflective of the Steward's Branch being at the bottom of the hierarchy. Following is a lengthy account of life as a wartime submariner, covering all aspects including the daily routine for Stewards, Submarine qualification, battle stations action, other shipboard activities, crew relations aboard the boats, R&R ashore, leaving the boat and War's end. Strong bonds were frequently formed by the stewards, particularly if they were both Black and the only Black sailors serving on the submarine. Their qualification was frequently limited to the forward torpedo room, forward battery, and the galley and sometimes control room, spaces where they performed the bulk of duties. But many enthusiastic stewards qualified throughout the boat although few were encouraged to do so. Most who did qualify throughout the boat recounted encouraging experiences. Black stewards acquitted themselves well at battle stations as described in the next section which includes many first hand accounts of action including several experiences of being depth charged. Battle stations surface action is also described.

The author also includes sections on crew relations aboard the boat and R&R ashore. For the most part, as one might expect, there was little overt discrimination onboard the boats amongst the crews. Most Black submariners described how the crews treated them onboard ship as submarine sailors first without regard for their color. For R&R ashore, experiences largely depended upon where they were geographically located. In the States, particularly south of the Mason-Dixon Line, treatment of Black submariners ashore was the same as their civilian counterparts with strong regional prejudice being the norm. With exception of Hawaii, experiences at ad-



Crew of the SEAHORSE stateside in late 1944. Steward's Mate 1st Class Samuel Sharp is in the third row (center), and Officers Cook 3rd Class Culasket Adams, Jr. is in the row behind him to the right.

vance sites tended to be better; Australia was about as good as it could get. However, Hawaii was definitely not a paradise for Black submariners.

In his treatment of the postwar years, the author touches upon many landmark issues; the end of the 1940s and President Harry Truman's Executive Order ending segregation in the military, the 1950s and the dawn of the Nuclear Age, the 1960s with boomers and fast attacks and 1970 to 1975 and end and a beginning. In every decade, changes occurred that had an effect on all submariners. This section of the book is an informal history told by the men who were in the service during those times. One of the important differences; Black submariners would now serve in a variety of ratings and would no longer be restricted to the steward's branch of the Navy. Several experiences are re-

counted of Black submariners who were able to change rate from steward to other ratings and of men who were able to go into other ratings directly from enlistment.

Black submariners participated in and witnessed the birth of the nuclear navy, the evolution of the nuclear submarine and some of the extreme tensions of the cold war. They paved the way for those that followed, experienced desegregation in the Navy as it happened in the rest of the country, finally ending in the Navy with the conversion of the steward's branch along with the commissary man rating to the Mess Management Specialist rating and finally equal opportunity for all Blacks in the Navy.

Photographs are included throughout, many taken during WWII, of the many men whose histories are chronicled in the book. The

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final chapter contains histories of 81 Black submariners who served in World War II. There are 37 firsthand accounts of living Black submariners and 44 biographies of men who served in World War II but are either deceased, too ill to give their story or could not be located.

The author includes five appendices which provide (a) The Steward Rating System from 1939 to 1974, (b) the 74 Black stewards lost or killed during WWII, (c) a list of the 127 Black submariners who made 6 or more war patrols and (d) a boat by boat listing of most of the Black submariners that served during the war from 1941 to 1945.

This book is recommended for any student of submarine history interested in rounding out their knowledge of the silent service and in particular learning more about the brave service of African American sailors in defense of the United States of America.

By way of example, one of the histories in the final chapter of the book is included in its entirety, with permission of the author.

George Washington Lytle

While little is known about big George Lytle, he has an impressive war record. When he joined the navy is uncertain, but it was probably sometime between 1938 and 1939. He joined the commissioning crew of *DRUM* in November 1941 as a mess attendant 1st class and made her first ten war patrols. The first three patrols were conducted by Captain Robert Rice, from April to October 1942, and the next four were under Captain Bernard McMahon from November 1942 to September 1943. Lytle was virtually one and the same with *DRUM*, for he would continue on with her, making two more runs under Captain Delbert Williamson, from November 1943 to May 1944 and a final run under Captain Maurice Rindskopf in June to July 1944. Only Rindskopf, who had served as executive officer on the boat, made more patrols on the boat than Lytle. During Lytle's time on *DRUM*, she sank twelve ships worth over 60,000 tons, including a large seaplane tender on their first patrol. Lytle was one of



Crew of the *PUFFER* in 1944. The man in the chief's hat at far left in the fourth row is Officer's Cook James Woodley Patton. He was part of the commissioning crew of *PUFFER* and made all nine of her war patrols.

the few stewards during the war to win a Bronze Star. Rindskopf believes this was not only for his overall service on the boat but may also have been related to his final patrol on *DRUM* when Lytle and the deck gun crew saw action in sinking a sampan and taking several prisoners, and later when they shot up an island-based radio station. By the time George Lytle left *DRUM*, he was an officer's cook 1st class.

After the war, George Lytle stayed in the navy and worked out of New London. The boats he served on are unknown. Upon retiring from the navy, Lytle was active in veteran's organizations and attended reunions with his old crew from *DRUM*. Even in his old age, he was a giant of a man and cut an impressive figure. When he became ill in 1986, Captain O.B. Adams, a former ensign on *DRUM* during the war, wrote to his old shipmate these encouraging words:

You were such a robust and vital person that it is difficult for me to be-

lieve that illness could ever strike at you. You were the number-one morale booster in the boat, handling those shells as number-one loader of the deck gun and stomping up and down the passageway in your depth-charge shoes. I just wanted to tell you to hang in there and fight with your stamina of old.

However, Lytle eventually lost his battle and passed away in 1987. His photograph and Bronze Star citation are now on display at the Submarine Force Library & Museum; George Washington Lytle is the only African American submariner to be so honored. This came about because of pressure placed on the museum by Lytle's friends and fellow stewards to see that not only would Lytle be honored but also that the contribution of men of the steward's branch as a whole would be recognized. They picked a good man to represent them.

Black History Month

As you know, February is Black History Month. The Submarine Force Library & Museum will have a special exhibit on display for the entire month of February honoring the Black submariners who have proudly and bravely served in the United States Navy Submarine Service. Additionally, as part of the observance of Black History Month, the



museum will host author and lecturer Glenn Knoblock who will deliver a lecture on his book *Black Submariners in the United States Navy, 1940-1975*. Following the lecture, Mr. Knoblock will be available to sign copies of his book. The book may be purchased in the museum store.

New Email Address

Please note, the new email address for The Submarine Force Library & Museum Association is association@tvconnect.net. The email address for the SFLMA office administrator is sflma@tvconnect.net, and for the store manager it's museumstore@tvconnect.net. The old email addresses will remain active until 1 February 2007 at which time they will be deactivated.

Museum Store

Museum store merchandise is officially available on the Internet at

["www.submarinemuseum.com."](http://www.submarinemuseum.com)

Response has been strong and feedback from new "online" customers has been very favorable regarding selection, response and timeliness of delivery. The store has a wide array of submarine related mementos, gifts and collectibles. Why not give the site a look and order a gift for that "special someone?"

VISIT US AT WWW.SUBMARINEMUSEUM.COM

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Newsletters and other publications are welcome to copy and reprint anything appearing in *The Klaxon*. When using *The Klaxon* material, editors are requested to include the following credit line: "From *The Klaxon*, Submarine Force Library and Museum Association, Groton, CT"

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Reunions

If you have a submarine reunion coming up and would like it mentioned in *The Klaxon*, please send us the particulars. We will include as much information as space allows. We will only publish information on submarine reunions.

USS SPRINGFIELD (CL66/CLG7/SSN 761)

April 26-29, 2007

Location: *Omni Hotel*

Newort News, VA

Contact: *John W. Adams*

71 Brookview Rd.

Windham, NH 03087-1780

Telephone: *603.598.2806*

Email: *johnmrwillie@aol.com*

USS CAPITAIN (SS/AGSS-336)

October 15-17, 2007

Location: *Las Vegas, NV*

Contact: *Gary LaRonge*

1801 Heritage Dr.

Pahrump, NV 89048

Telephone: *775.751.9435*

Email: *Saltracer552@juno.com*

Web site: *www.decklog.com*

Wanted: New Members

If you received a complimentary copy of *The Klaxon*, why not consider becoming a member of the Association and join the growing numbers who are "Helping to Preserve Our Proud Submarine Heritage?" Use the form provided in this issue to join.

The Association supports the Museum and NAUTILUS by providing funds for displays and other projects when such funding is not available from appropriated funds. Income for the Association is provided by membership dues, donations and museum store profits.

Donations, which are always appreciated, are also tax-deductible.

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