

SEA STORIES



Holiday antics and Memories

by USS Illinois Base members

Christmas at Sea: Santa looks for naughty or nice.



Special Christmas Surprise from Wayne Orrison, STSCS (SS)

Wayne Orrison recalls how absolutely surprised he was when he made his second Boomer Patrol on the USS George Bancroft SSBN 643 in the winter of 67.

“Unbeknown to me,” he said, “the COB’s wife had contacted all the single sailor’s families (my parents in my case) and asked them to send a simple wrapped Christmas gift that would be given out by Santa on Christmas while we were on patrol. I was totally stunned and surprised. It really meant a lot. The married guys’ families were also contacted, so some of the married crew with children received a gift from their kids, and those without children got one from their spouse.”

Wayne was part of a junior cruise box detail that loaded those extra-heavy cruise boxes. “Later, when I was thinking about it,” he added, “those heavy boxes I loaded for the New London to Scotland trip were those darn Christmas gifts.”

No matter, it was a very special surprise on Christmas Day.

Dreaming of a White Christmas from Phil Owens, QMC (SS)

Phil Owens (QMSN) recalls Christmas 1957 when he was in route from Hawaii to Yokosuka, Japan on the USS Cape Esperance TCVU-88.

“We were in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, with skies so clear you could see the horizon 360 degrees around the ship. Dolphins were playing in the ships wake, and the Captain had ordered Christmas music

played throughout the ship.

“It was strange for a boy from Wisconsin, who was used to cold snowy Christmas, to be on watch looking out over the clear blue ocean. The crew had decorated the hangar deck with a tree made out of whatnots that they could scrounge, and we all had a great meal.

“Two days later we were fighting a massive Typhoon with waves coming over the flight deck. We made it to Yokosuka—eventually--at a top speed of 13 knots.....Merry Christmas? and Happy New Year?”

Let there be music from Tom Ramsay, MS1 (SS)

Too many years at sea on Christmas Day can do some strange things to a sub sailor.

During my 16 patrols on the USS Tecumseh (the T-Cup), I was on the Gold Crew and spent many a Christmas at sea.

Before we went into shipyard, we had spent the past two years at sea during Christmas. After the Shipyard overhaul, the new skipper volunteered us for our 3rd Christmas at sea AGAIN!

Move ahead one year—this time we were told the Blue Crew would relieve us two days before Christmas, so we could spend the holidays at home with our family. The Captain called us together and told us we couldn’t tease them about being away from home by playing Christmas music, or by decorating the boat with holiday decorations (*as if the Blue Crew never did that to us*).

Being a longtime crew member of the T-Cup gave me a few advantages for pranks. My bunk was located directly under the Wardroom, and

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above my bunk was an emergency access hatch that opened under the Wardroom Table near the junior officer's seating.

When the Gold Crew had emptied the boat, the Skipper told me he forgot something in his office, and asked me to retrieve it for him.

The opportunity confronted me, so I grabbed the envelope from the Skipper's room and headed into the Wardroom, where I locked all of the doors from the inside, including the pantry access door. I then turned on the Ship's sound system

located in the Wardroom to play repeating Christmas music throughout the boat. I then left the Wardroom through the emergency access hatch under the table and dropped onto my bunk. I then quickly left the boat.



We heard the Blue Crew was frustrated when they boarded, because no one could turn the loud, never-ending Christmas music off. It went on for hours over the PA, because no one could figure out how to open the Wardroom doors.

The Captain and XO forgot who had the key. The key was always locked in the Captain's cabin in a safe, but the Blue Crew Skipper was new and didn't know he had the key.

