

MY SUBAMARINE QUALIFICATION JOURNEY

Statement from the psychologist at submarine school

To begin, submarine duty is voluntary. Less than 2% of the navy serves on submarines including their support staff. They are known as the silent service. During the second world war the submarine service was credited with over 55% of the tonnage sunk.

Because of the nature of the submarine duties, the psychological fitness of applicants for submarine training must be carefully appraised. The submarine environment demands psychological resilience to workplace stressors. What the hell do a bunch of shrinks know about sub sailors? Besides I already knew what I wanted, I had already spoken to my recruiter, that was qualified on a subs. And everyone knows that a recruiter would never mislead anyone intentionally especially a young sailor. As he put it don't worry kid, you're gonna love it. Best time of your life. Any way they let me in. In 1964 right after boot camp and volunteering for submarine duty I completed 8 weeks in submarine school in New London Connecticut, where they taught Skipjack class and George Washington class submarines. Note to new nuke sailors these were the first nuke boats they taught in sub school. They did not teach the older diesel subs any longer, they had converted to the newer nuclear subs. I thought I was ready to join the fleet, I thought I knew all about subs. You could say I was a little naïve, at 18 years old, 170 pounds, looking good, bullet proof and a virgin. Hell, just a little while ago I was living at home eating meals my mom and dad had prepared and being told don't stay out too late. Enough of that, I am a sailor.

My first submarine the USS THREADFIN SS 410 it is homeported in Key West Florida. It was a Guppy; II the word guppy indicates snorkel air induction mast and greater under water propulsion. boat was built in 1944. Served with honor in the second world war. After arriving in Key West , after three days on a greyhound bus in the same uniform, and needing a shower I find myself checking in at Squadron twelve headquarters, Key West in the middle of the night, the only person there was the night watch, as I waited for the day crew to arrive and point out my ship. I was confused, they didn't see my ship anywhere some people thought it was in the Med whatever that was. However, it was in the ARD AUXILLARY REPAIR DOCK which is like a floating dry dock, when a ship is in the ARD you cannot see it. The ship was going through a battery job, which means the shipyard is replacing all of its batteries. This is not a small job. We had two batteries one forward and one aft each battery had 126 cells each cell weighted one ton and a capacity of sixty gallons of electrolyte in each cell. Access to the battery wells is through a soft path in the pressure hull and a crane was used to replace the cells. These cells on average when fully charged had a max voltage 2.1 volts.

The first day aboard is very intimidating, being the newest and most junior person present among a crew of highly trained qualified sailors can be very daunting. As a new sailor reporting aboard, you are new meat, being a non-qual which stands for non-qualified puke which means you are lower than a whale turd (you know where they land) that's right on the sea floor. Being non-qualified means that you know nothing about this submarine, and you are a liability to the ship and crew. This means that someone has to show you how to use the head to piss and everything else. However, in most cases you are not alone there are other NQP'S on the ship in various stages of qualifying still not qualified thus NQPS. These are your new best friends and you depend on them to show you the ropes. You are under the microscope, from the first second you report on board. Everyone wants to know if you will cut it or not, and you must prove your worth. In addition, you will be subjected to constant harassment, belittlement and criticism from the qualified crew, during your qualification period, which normally runs

about nine months. This harassment is done to stress you to quit. Because they don't want quitters, on board. If they think they can get to you, they will go to any length to make you quit.

On the ship. When I first reported on board, I was given a qualification card and told not to lose it and get busy qualifying they said. The qualification process was then, explained to me. During this process you must learn all of the ships systems, and their components, how to draw them, and show how they work, fight any casualties from fire, to flooding to poison gas in the air, in any situation. This is done in order to ensure every crew member can be relied to know what to do in case of an emergency. The qual card has all the systems you must learn listed in it with a signature block next to it. When he is done is done studying a particular, part of the boat he must go to a crew member that works directly with or on that that system and get a check out. This is a verbal quiz designed to test knowledge required by everyone going through qualification must get a signature for each system showing that you have all the required information required for the signature. Should you present yourself to get a signature and you are not ready or cannot answer any of the qualified man's questions he will initial your card and not sign it thereby stopping any other qualified man from signing your card and you must return to him for check off. Believe me you do not want to hear the words (you're not ready asshole come back to me in a couple of weeks.) Not only does that put you on the dink list but he will tell everyone what a piece of shit you are. There are no secrets on board a submarine if you fuck up everyone knows about it. Being a submariner is serious business. They make that very clear early on. You foul up and your gone. It is that simple. They do not give a shit about you.

If you do not obtain the required number of points each week you become delinquent or "dink". The number of points required for qualification certainly seemed to be out of reach for the average sailor. But if you are average you wouldn't be here. Each week you needed about 50 points to stay on track. If you became dink everyone on board knew it, and your life becomes even more miserable. In addition, you had mandatory study each night until you came off the dink list. All of a non-quals free time is to be dedicated towards qualification. There is a fast track way out of sub duty stay dink and you will be gone no problem. Each non-qual is given only 9 months to complete this task and he is expected to complete at least three to four check outs per week.

Qualifying is not only a mental challenge, but a physical one as well. Qualification can only be done on pukes own time meaning after he has completed all of his regular work. The submarine, while at sea does not shut down it goes on around the clock it works on an 24-hour schedule that rotates through three or four sections depending on the number of crew members for example section one-8 to 12 watch, the next 4 hours are spent on ships work the other eight are "off time. 'when section one gets off watch at 12Then section two comes on watch for four hours etc. etc. This is a very general term. There is still ships work to be done every day during the 8 hour day.. There are ships drills scheduled during this time that are designed to test the crew on their abilities to fight casualties. There are also long lists of maintenance and cleaning that each crew member is assigned in order to keep the boat running. This means that the eight hour period normally used for sleeping by most qualified crew members, must be used for qualifying by NQP'S ..

In addition, you are added to the watch quarter and station bill. This bill tells you where you have to be for every evolution that the ship holds. From line handling to maneuvering watch to your watch section, your battle stations to firefighting, collision alarm, to repel boarders. The WQS displays your duties for each emergency and watch condition.

As the non qual nears the end of his qualification he is required to do a walkthrough of the ship. This is not a fun evolution it is very stressful. This is a process where a senior member of the crew or the COB "chief of the boat" walks with you through the boat and asks you to explain the uses for all the equipment. Once this complete you have a walk thru with either the engineering officer or the Captain. Once this is completed successfully the non-qual gets his dolphins pinned on by the Captain in front of the entire crew and receives his certificate he is welcomed into the ranks of qualified men. At which time he is thrown overboard, a longstanding naval tradition.

(Insert your name here) "Having successfully completed the rigorous professional requirements for qualification in submarines, having gained a thorough knowledge of submarine constructions and operation, having demonstrated his reliability under stress, and having my full confidence and trust, hereby certify that he is qualified in submarines. This is a moment of enormous pride and satisfaction. It is not only a process of learning, but also of acceptance into an organization that is larger than yourself. From this moment on He will always be able to call himself a submariner, even long after he hangs up his navy uniform. After work all the qualified men on the ship meet at the local ship's favorite watering hole, where all the men buy the newly qualified man a drink. The drinks are poured into a picture along with his dolphins. The newly qualified man drinks his his drink catching his dolphins in his teeth to the wild cheers from his shipmates. The insignia that is pinned on your chest and that all qualified men wear is a submarine flanked by two stylized dolphins named castor and pollux..The dolphins date back to 1928,when Captain Earnest King suggested to the sectary of the navy that a device for qualified submariners be adopted. It should be noted that every submarine crew from every navy in the world has a pin similar to our dolphins.

This is the way we used to do it, I don't know for sure how they do it today, probably don't drink their dolphins any more not politically correct, but I don't know for sure I hope they still do. There are traditions that should remain traditions.

Qualification in submarines is a daunting task. However, once finished you become part of a fellowship that can only be understood by those who have done it themselves. That can only be recognized by the very small and special group of men that have the pride and honor off calling themselves SUBMARINERS. You know that recruiter was 100% right. The best times of my life.

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