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"SUPER SOMERS" '46

Here's the story: SOMERS was my first "real" ship--I'd done 2 coastal mine sweeps in a row--and I got a swap into her in late '69 so I could actually deploy & go out "there" & do sailor stuff.

By the time I'd been aboard a while & we got to WestPac, 1970, I'd come up with the drawing for this patch. Each feature on it has an origin in something that happened or that we did in SOMERS. We got to Sasebo, and I took my drawing over to the special services counter in the NEX, where an old Japanese guy who made patches agreed to make mine. I left him the drawing, with all the colors indicated, and picked up the patch our next inport. He'd done a terrific job, as you can see.

My original intent was to have it sewn on my blue work jacket, and instantly become the talk of the ship. However: after some solid reflection on my daily life as a PO3, I changed my mind. My jacket was routinely soaked in fuel oil, grease, salt water, stack gas, etc., from mandatory attendance at work parties, unreps, working on the mast, line handling, etc. The patch was too pretty to screw up, so I left it in its NEX bag and put it away. There it remained, moving from ship-to-house- to-house, right up until yesterday. And until this morning, I'd never shown it to anyone but my wife--I just got done sending the above photo to Hugh Scriven, who was my leading ET and later Chief in SOMERS (he's on your crew list). So, you're the 2nd guy who's seen it.

As for the symbology. . .

As I said, SOMERS was my first no-kidding ship, and the first time I'd ever seen any ASW being done, during part of one of our pre-deployment exercises off SoCal. We were in a line of about 5 escort-types, including a Coast Guard cutter, doing 5 knots, somewhere in the Op Areas off San Clemente Island, in the evening of truly beautiful, balmy, pond-flat Pacific day. I'd just eaten chow, and wandered aft down the port side to "pause and reflect" before going on watch. We were at the tag end of the line of cans, and the CG cutter, in the lead, had just started a Form One turn to port--she was clearly visible, maybe 2 miles ahead, hauling out to the left. All the ships had their active sonars going, pinging like mad.

I stopped at the lifelines just outside the aft crew's head, looked around at the blank, flat horizon, and then heard a "swish" noise and looked down, as a periscope emerged from the sea, not 50 feet away, and began leaving a small wake as it travelled in the opposite direction to us & the line of ships. I'd watched enough "Silent Service" as a kid to know instantly what it was.

So I'm watching the glass window on the scope, and it's moving left/right, and then it looked right at me. I nearly flipped it the bird, but decided that whoever was looking through it probably outranked me, so I waved instead. It quickly sank back into the sea.

I walked back to the fantail, where the Aft Lookout sat perched up on a ventilator top, wearing his SP phones and a completely bored expression. As I got to him and tapped his shoulder, the scope popped back up, right opposite us. I pointed at it, and said, "That's a periscope." He said, "It is?" I said, "Yeah, and they usually have a submarine attached to the other end," and he said, "Really? No shit?" I said, "Yup, that's no shit, and you might want to tell the Bridge."

He pulled the other earpiece down over his ear, keyed the phones, yelled, "Silence on the line! Hey, Bridge, there's a submarine back here!" A short pause, and he pointed at the scope and yelled, "Right fucking THERE!" as if they could see where he was pointing.

So, there's the periscope.

We had the then-new Mk 42 Mod-whatever 5"/54, and it had a lot of teething trouble. I can't recall the number of times the 1MC passed "Now Super Somers will rapid fire ten rounds from Mount Fifty One!" And there'd be a "BANG" followed by silence. The silence could last for a while. Then maybe another "BANG" -- or not -- and then we'd go back in to Long Beach to get the gun fixed. The mount was chock-a-block with micro-switches, which seemed to get hernias or become frightened with the shock of the gun going off, and things would jam and the GMGs would start climbing around inside there and curse a lot. [As a segue, I voluntarily helped man the powder and shell mags when we

got to the VN gun line--on our 2nd deployment, I personally handled every round we fired before it left the barrel. We shot the shit out of the gooks, and the gun did not jam. Much of that I attribute to our little mad-dog, red-headed, hyper-excitabile, stone crazy Chief Gunner's Mate: he knew that gun better than anyone alive. I have technicolor memories of that little madman hanging from piping and structure next to the gun while it fired, grabbing Sick Bay tongue depressors out of his pockets & jamming them into inoperable microswitches to keep the gun in battery, and howling like a banshee the whole time. Every time Captain Hugh said "Shoot", by God, we shot. I'd love to remember that Chief's name. They shoulda given him a medal.]

So there's the gun, blazing away and shaking the fo'c'sle.

One other thing we did was go out to PMTR and shoot Tartar missiles at every damned thing, which is one hell of a hoot. They let us watch if we stayed forward, and one time we must have fired 5 or 6 in a row -- probably an exaggeration, but hey? It's my story -- and one of them was straight freaking up. I watched it spiral completely out of sight. Beeeeeyoooooooooteeeeeeeeful.

And that's the missiles all over the place.

And now I'll let you go. Feel free to share the photo - and the stories, if anyone needs to be bored witless.

JD

ETN3/2 DDG-34

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