



USS Cusk Newsletter

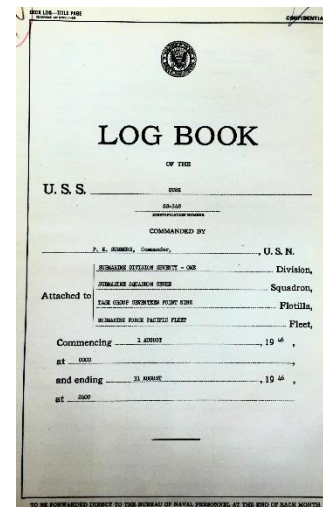
Spring 2016



From the Cusk's Deck Log: More excerpts randomly selected from the Cusk's Deck Log as found in our National Archives.

This first entry typically lacks detail and leaves one wondering what happened next (and why ComSubDiv71 was on the helm?), but it is interesting nonetheless. The date is 21 November 1946 and was coincidentally, the day Zeke Zellmer, the Cusk's first engineering officer, left the Cusk to be separated from the Navy. Muster was at 0730 and the following is the 8 to 12 entry by LTJG Walter E Dedrick, USN:

"...Moored as before. 0830 In accordance with SecNav letter #282826 of 1 November, Lieutenant Ernest J. Zellmer, #282826, United States Navy, was transferred to Receiving Station, Naval Station, San Diego, California for temporary duty in connection with separation processing, pursuant to resignation from Naval service. 0900 Underway in accordance with CTG 17.9 Operation Memorandum 44-46. ComSubDiv 71 on board, steering various courses at various speeds conforming to San Diego Channel, the Captain and Navigator on the bridge. 0945 Commenced man overboard drill. 0955 Secured from man overboard drill; resumed conforming to San Diego Harbor Channel. 1016 Set course 250 T and pgc, standard speed on all four engines. 1025 Airplane sighted crashing into sea; approximate bearing 205T, Distance three miles; Immediately proceeded to scene and commenced search operations with COUCAL and AVR5. 1042 Located exact spot of crash; green dye in water, oil and gasoline film, small bits of wreckage. 1145 Made daily inspection of magazine spaces and smokeless powder samples; conditions normal."



The next entry is from Wednesday, 31 August 1966. The Cusk was in the Bremerton Shipyard and nearing the end of an overhaul, which, one month later would be extended several months by a port main motor fire that occurred during sea trials in Puget Sound...but that's another story. This entry is by LT. Tracy Kosoff, USN.

"8 - 24 Moored as before. 0800 Held quarters for muster and inspection. Absentees: None. 1025 Heikes, Donald T., Puget Sound Naval Shipyard worker #128604 collapsed while working on the sail from an apparent heart seizure. Removed from ship by the shipyard ambulance crew in an unconscious condition. Pronounced dead on arrival at the station hospital. 2300 SOPA shifted to Commanding Officer, USS Blueback (SS581)."

Looking for a Shipmate? Just a reminder, we have a total of 1,075 names of men who rode the Cusk including temporary riders, Marines, etc. Of this number we have almost 200 email addresses and 310 home addresses. If you'd like to get in touch with a shipmate, or just see if we have any information about one, send an email to usscusk@att.net. At the same time, please help us keep track of you by sending your new email and/or home address whenever it changes. You can also check on fellow submariners at the USSVI www.ussvi.org.

New Cusk Patch: Commemorating the 2016 Cusk Reunion Cruise, a new unofficial ship's patch has been created and you can see it in the header of this newsletter. This patch is 4.5" wide and includes Dolphins and the war ribbons earned by the Cusk. It will be given to all reunion attendees this year (more than enough reason for you to come!) and it will be also available at a later date on a "cost + shipping" basis for about \$7.

USS Cusk Webpage: The Cusk Webpage (www.usscusk.com) is updated about once a week with pictures, history, audio/video clips, shipmate info, etc. Your donations of pictures, stories, memorabilia, and comments are always appreciated and helpful as we continue to expand and improve what has become known as the best submarine site on the web.

"Ptomaine": His full name was Rick Greer, CS2(SS), but sometime in 1965, the COB, Bob Shaeffer, christened him "Ptomaine". Most shipmates never used his first name after that, although it was hardly an appropriate name. Rick was an excellent cook, the kind who made you always want to make 'First Call'. Ptomaine was a fairly large sailor, about 6', 220 pounds, and he was a bit intimidating. He was also rather loud and he could tell stories of his adventures ashore and about his "Indian" girl that would have you rolling on the deck. He would not suffer fools or non-quals though, the latter on whom he was especially tough. Ptomaine was also a





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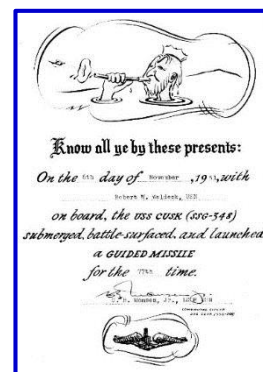
bit mischievous. One of his favorite tricks was to 'motivate' green-faced rookies suffering from seasickness. An unsuspecting victim would sit rocking, glassy-eyed in the mess hall, desperate to control his stomach spasms and his next call to "O'Rourke". Casually, Ptomaine, would sit down with a freshly opened, odiferous tin of smoked oysters or sardines and slide the open tin under the seasick sailor's nose. "Snack?", he would ask, then roar with laughter as the seaworthy-challenged youngster bolted from the compartment toward the Head.

Ptomaine took great pride in his cooking too. During one of his meals in port, a young torpedoman made a rather disparaging remark about the meat being served, unfortunately, loud enough for everyone to hear, including Ptomaine. The room got suddenly quiet as Ptomaine stormed out of the galley, grabbed the young, somewhat startled sailor, and pulled him over to the After Battery hatch. Then he grabbed one of his ankles and hauled him (upside down) up the ladder and topside where he promptly tossed him in the water. We generally agreed that he probably should have let him take his shoes off first, but it was Ptomaine's call.

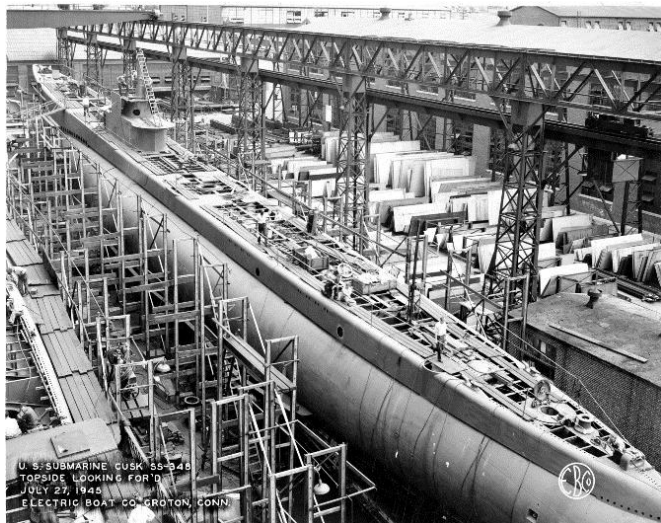


A great cook, shipmate, and friend, Rick Dale "Ptomaine" Greer departed on Eternal Patrol last Christmas Eve. He will be sorely missed and well-remembered by all who know him.

How many missiles did the Cusk launch? The specific number is unknown, but a reasonable guess would be approximately 90. Note the certificate to the right that was presented to Bob Waldeck on 6 November 1952. It documents the Cusk's 77th launch since her first historic one on 12 February 1947. Another certificate in the Cusk archives presented to Norm Carkeek on 15 September 1950 commemorates her 68th launch. Given the development of the Regulus Missile beginning in 1951 and that all of the Cusk's launch equipment except missile guidance was removed at Mare Island in 1954, all of her launches occurred during that seven year period between 1947 and 1954, hence the estimate of 90. If anyone has any additional information and/or documentation they would be willing to share, it will be much appreciated.



Only one USS Cusk: Thanks to knowledge gained from discussions with the curator of the U.S. Navy's Submarine



Force Museum in New London, and the excellent staff at NavSource.org, it is pretty clear that there was only one USS Cusk built by Electric Boat rather than the two that were speculated previously. Why a cachet was issued showing that the Cusk's keel was "Re-laid" in the North Yard of EB is unknown, but it seems that the Cusk was simply relocated to a different "Way" to accommodate other shipbuilding logistical needs. The picture on the left shows the Cusk under construction at EB on 27 July 1945, the day before her launch. Documentation received from the Submarine Force Museum states that the Cusk was 85% complete on this day just before her slide "Down the Way" into the Thames River. Note that there is no decking, and that all of the scaffolding is being disassembled and removed for the next day's launch.

Cusk Trivia: In honor of our dear departed shipmate, Dave Lawrence, STS3(SS) 68-69, who always boasted remembering such qualification trivia...The Cusk's shaft bearings were made of a special material that is an extraordinary combination of strength, toughness, and density. What is the name of that material, and where does it come from? (Answer on page 4)

I saw the submariners, the way they stood aloof and silent, watching their pigboat with loving eyes. They are alone in the Navy. I admired the PT boys. And I often wondered how the aviators had the courage to go out day after day, and I forgave their boasting. But the submariners! In the entire fleet they stand apart!"

- James Michener





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The Saga of Admiral Poresport: As was fairly routine whenever the Cusk was not deployed, we would often spend one or two weeks off the California coast performing exercises with other submarines of our flotilla and with various other ships of the Seventh Fleet. On the morning of 10 June 1969, we were assigned to a three-submarine wolfpack just outside of Long Beach Harbor. The battleship USS New Jersey (BB-62) would be leaving Long Beach escorted by a large contingency of destroyers, frigates, and P3 Orion Sub Hunters. Our mission was to try and penetrate the New Jersey's screens and attempt to simulate sinking this famous battleship which, unknown to us, was also carrying the Admiral's flag. The New Jersey had recently been reactivated for the Vietnam War and she had arrived at her new home port of Long Beach just nine days earlier. Her eventual departure for the war zone would be just a few months later, so sea time for her new crew was a must.

Early that morning, we received our "COMEX" and we immediately submerged and rigged for Patrol Quiet. Soon we heard the pinging of several surface ships as the mini-armada made its way out of Long Beach Harbor. The Cusk's bathythermograph showed a significant layer near periscope depth so we began our approach at a relatively shallow depth. Before long, Sonar identified a twin-screwed heavy coming out of the harbor and a quick peek through the scope verified that the New Jersey was indeed emerging through the early morning fog.

"Man Battle Stations Torpedo, man Battle Stations Torpedo" came the call over the 1MC accompanied by the clanging of the General Alarm. Soon we were all at our stations as we began plotting the New Jersey's course and speed. As we eased ever closer through her screen, we heard the DE's, DD's and DLG's passing us by with their chorus of active sonar pinging while they searched for us in vain. Their pinging stayed on long range pulses in spite of our close proximity, a sure sign that they did not see us.

The pinging began to fade as the noise from the New Jersey's huge screws grew louder. Before long, we had our solution and simulated firing several torpedoes at the New Jersey. Then from the Conn came the order, "Tubes Aft, Conn, launch a green flare!"

"Launch a green flare, Tubes Aft aye.", came the reply. Soon our not-so-subtle visible announcement of the New Jersey's simulated demise was soaring through the air for all to see.

Later that evening we tied up in Long Beach and liberty commenced for the non-duty sections. At the same time, Captain Houston departed the Cusk for his debriefing with the Admiral, the Admiral's staff, and the captains of the other ships in the exercise. The following is paraphrased from memory when I chatted with "Sam" Houston and Dottie over coffee at his home in 2007, just months before his departure on Eternal Patrol:

As the debriefing started, Admiral Poresport looked at Captain Houston and stated in a somewhat sarcastic voice, "Sam, I understand you think you might have sunk the New Jersey today?"

"Yes sir, Admiral, we believe we got a good solution and simulated firing four fish at her."

"Indeed, and just how close do you think you were when you simulated those shots, Commander?," he asked.

"Pretty close, Sir." And with that, Captain Houston opened this three section, 45" x 10" photo composite of the New Jersey and placed it in front of the Admiral.



This is the actual composite given to me by the Cusk's Commanding Officer, CDR. Albert W. "Sam" Houston in 2007, the same one he presented to the Admiral that evening of 10 June 1969. If you look closely, you can see the crosshairs of the Cusk's periscope in 5 different locations. We were literally so close to the USS New Jersey that a complete picture was not possible with just one photo. Unfortunately, there was a small amount of fog and we were unable to identify the personnel on the Bridge.





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Admiral Poresport was noticeably annoyed, although he reluctantly congratulated Captain Houston and the crew on our success, and then moved on with the other briefings. Not the end of it, we were to learn.

The next day was to be a repeat of the previous day's exercise. The Cusk got underway early and exited Long Beach Harbor to our assigned area. As we cleared the harbor, one of the lookouts noted that a large cabin cruiser appeared to be following us from a distance of about 3,000 yards. After a while it was determined that the boat was indeed the Admiral's barge, but we paid little attention to it. The assumption was that the Admiral just wanted to keep his barge handy or might want to go in early. We were mistaken, he wasn't aboard.

A short time later we received our COMEX and we submerged to stalk the New Jersey again. But before we could rig for Patrol Quiet, no less than three destroyers, two helicopters, and a P-3 Orion descended on us with a fury. PDC's (Practice Depth Charges) began raining down on us like a summer squall, and the short quick pinging of the helicopter sonar buoys and the surface ships' sonars made it clear that we had been found, attacked, and quickly eliminated from the exercise. It was as if they knew exactly where we were before the exercise started. Said Captain Houston many years later, "...I guess I must have really pissed off the Admiral!"

No, Admiral "Poresport" wasn't his real name, albeit apropos. Ironically, albeit unrelated, that was the Cusk's last major exercise as an active warship of the U. S. Navy. A few weeks later, we received word that the Cusk was one of 100 ships to be decommissioned, and on 24 September 1969 she was removed from service. The Cusk's decommissioning ceremony was conducted just six days before the New Jersey fired her first shots against the North Vietnamese Army near the 17th Parallel on Yankee Station.



Sailors of the submarine Cusk crew fold the boat's flag following her decommissioning Wednesday morning in ceremonies at Mare Island. The Cusk was the 8th overage submarine to be taken out of service at Mare Island since July.—Navy Photo.

USS Cusk's Last Colors, 24 September

Present Arms! They probably don't want their names mentioned, but hearty and sincere "Thank You's" are due to the following contributors to the Cusk Newsletter: Sid Paskowitz, Gary Long, Jim Branske, Don Birch, Bob Duncan, Jack Dunnaway, John Tracey, and E. B. "Monte" Herring. BZ! You guys rock!

Eternal Patrol Page: (www.ussscusk.com/Eternal.htm) - Unfortunately, this section of the Cusk Webpage continues to grow more than others. The following are shipmates who have recently gotten underway for the last time:

Name	Departed	Served aboard Cusk
Arthur Q Merrill, EMFN(SS)	6 January 2015	1948 to 1950
Harold M Page, Jr., QM3(SS)	21 February 2015	1948 to 1950
Clyde Kirk, FT/ST(MOMM)I, Cusk Plankowner	28 February 2015	45 to 46
Robert C Zimmerman, SM2(SS)	2 July 2015	1946
Roland "Ronnie" J Quick, CS3(SS)	25 November 2015	1959 to 1960
Robert Dominic Comperini, EN3(SS)	1 December 2015	1949 - 1952
Rick Dale "Ptomaine" Greer, CS2(SS)	24 December 2015	1965 to 1967

SAILORS! REST YOU OARS!

Cusk Trivia answer - The Cusk's shaft bearings were made of *Lignum Vitae*, also called "Iron Wood". It is three times as hard as oak and comes from the Guayacan, a tree that is indigenous to the Caribbean and northern South America.

Cusk 2016 Reunion Update: No date changes but there is a slight itinerary change. Regretfully we must cancel the tour of Cape Canaveral due to the increased terror threat. The raised DEFCON level at CCAFS will likely stay up for some time, and that inhibits my ability to conduct tours. Our Welcome Reception is still planned for Saturday evening, 23 April at the Cocoa Beach Best Western. Sunday morning and early afternoon will be a free time to visit Cocoa Beach, RonJon's Surf Shop, the beach, etc. Our Veteran's Museum tour and Reunion banquet Sunday afternoon will occur as planned beginning at 4:00 P.M. Our cruise to the Bahamas will get underway Monday morning, 25 April from Port Canaveral and return early Friday morning, 29 April.

Cruise Reservations - Cabins still available - call Carol at (800) 910-9291 Final Payment due 9 February 2016

Cocoa Beach Days Inn - (800) 245-5225 or (321) 784-2550

Cocoa Beach Best Western - (800) 962-0028 or (321) 783-7621

Remember - You can check-in online up to three days in advance prior to boarding. See your cruise travel package.

