

CHAPTER TWELVE -- WEST COAST

We left Connecticut on the 6th of February 1965, to spend our first night in New York City. We had driven there a couple of times before, to see some Broadway shows. This time we did the normal tourist things, such as the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. Our next stop was Washington, D.C., where I had to report to the Canadian Embassy for an out-routine.

We continued driving south until we got into the heart of Dixie. I can't recall the names of all the places we stopped, but some names just stuck, such as, Opelika, Alabama -- Pascagoula, Mississippi -- Sweetwater, Texas, -- and many other places whose names had an interesting ring to them. Some were just overnight stops, while others were for two or three days.

In New Orleans, Shirley bought a new pair of shoes. Next morning as we were getting ready to leave the motel, a busybody who shall remain nameless, but was 22 months old at the time, hid the shoes in a drawer just after Shirley had emptied it, so of course they were left there. I hope they fitted the maid.

While we thoroughly enjoyed the whole trip, I think we enjoyed the southwestern states more than anywhere else. It was probably because it was so different from anything we had ever seen before. The vast spaces, the desert, the old cow towns, the sandstone monoliths. There were so many things to see. We visited Tombstone, Arizona, the site of the Gunfight at the OK Corral. I don't believe Tombstone had changed a great deal from those days. You just came upon the town, in the middle of nowhere, driving in from the desert, with all its sage and tumble weed. It was marvellous.

At one place, we stayed at an old Navajo Indian Trading Post, in a town called Cameron, not far from the south rim of the Grand Canyon. We found the Grand Canyon breathtaking, with its many colours of rock, its steep sides, and the Colorado River snaking through it a mile below.

Our first sight of the Pacific Ocean was at Morro Bay, a small town about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. From there we headed north, staying on the Pacific Coast Highway, through beautiful Carmel and Monterey, and the artists' colony of Big Sur.

Then it was north again, through the giant Redwood country, where trees, hundreds of years old, stood nearly four hundred feet high. Eventually we arrived at Port Angeles, in Washington state, just a two-hour ferry ride from Victoria, our ultimate destination. We had taken twenty-two days, and covered over six thousand miles.

The morning after we had checked in at a motel in Victoria, I reported on board HMCS GRILSE, at HMC Dockyard Esquimault, a suburb of Victoria. She was owned by the United States Navy, but was on a long-term lease to Canada. GRILSE had been built just before the end of the Second World War and had conducted two war patrols in the Pacific, before the cessation of hostilities. She was a Fleet Class submarine.

As the junior officer on board, even though I was the same age as the Captain, I was made the Supply Officer. Unless you were a professional Supply Officer, very few people wanted to be one. You looked after food, stores, pay, laundry, canteen, and anything else that was not technical or operational. In addition to your job, your main aim was to become qualified in submarines.

The Submarine Qualification Program was a structured course of learning, which would ensure that you knew your own submarine inside and out by the time you had finished the program, and were qualified to wear your "dolphins." For a rating, ie, non-officer, the program took about seven or eight months. For an officer, the program was usually about twelve to fourteen months. The difference in time was due to the additional amount of detail that an officer was expected to know about his submarine.

Each month you concentrated on different systems in the submarine. For example, the first month was a complete knowledge of all the tanks and their fittings. The second month was all air systems. Third month was hydraulics, and so on. Officers were also required to answer the written questions in the qualification notebook each month. Not only were the answers to be written, but they had to be typewritten. Needless to say, I called upon the expertise of the same person who helped me when I was doing my Master's ticket. Just as she learned a few things about the Rule of the Road then, Shirley learned quite a bit about submarines over the next year.

In addition to the written work, you had to pass an oral and practical examination each month. This was administered by the Executive Officer, who assigned one of the qualified officers to examine you on a walk through the submarine. If you didn't pass, you couldn't progress until you were re-examined and passed. The whole process was very intense, but as submarines were for volunteers only, you just got on with it. Even so, there were many times when you would ask yourself whether it was worth it. And of course the answer was obvious to me -- that's why I was there.

This system of "know your boat" engendered a real camaraderie amongst the ship's company. You knew that when you were eventually qualified and were awarded your dolphins, you could trust anybody wearing that insignia with your life, whatever his rank and trade.

A cook or a steward would know the boat, just the same as any technical trade. It might take him longer to qualify because he may not have the technical background, but when he qualified, he had the same level of knowledge as the next man. Rank or trade had nothing to do with knowing your boat. I was fascinated with submarines. It was hard work, and the living conditions were a bit unhygienic, but the whole thing appealed to me. I couldn't get enough of it.

The interior of diesel submarines had a very distinctive aroma, which was very apparent if the submarine had been deployed for a considerable amount of time. The smell was a combination of diesel fuel, stale cooking odours and unwashed bodies. It permeated everything. Ashore, one could always tell when a submariner walked into a room, even when he was dressed in a suit, if that suit had been stowed in a locker on board. It took some days for the smell to dissipate when you brought your clothes home.

Although there were shower stalls in diesel submarines, the showers themselves were rarely used, except in harbour. This was due to the limited quantity of fresh water that diesel submarines carried. The capability to make water was there, but that required electrical power, which came off the battery. As a submarine's lifeblood was its battery and air systems, battery power was conserved for more demanding requirements than making fresh water for someone to have a shower. Perhaps the fact that conditions were less than pristine, and the fact that this did not unduly worry me was a throwback to my childhood days, when I was always regarded as that "scruffy kid."

Shortly after we arrived in Victoria we managed to rent an attractive, but small, two-bedroom house on Allenby Street, in Oak Bay. We lived opposite my Executive Officer (second-in-command) and his wife, Maurice and Diane Tate, who are still my very good friends.

Victoria was, and is, a beautiful city. It's known as the City of Gardens -- a name that's very much justified. It was everything Halifax was not. It was clean. It was white collar. It was a very structured society. Because of its mild climate it had become a haven for retired wealthy seniors, and as such it had the oldest per capita population in Canada. It was sometimes referred to, jokingly, as the only graveyard in Canada with a bus service. Our only negative feeling for Victoria was that it was very obvious that you lived on an island, as the only way off was by air or ferry.

Some months after we arrived in Victoria, GRILSE was to deploy through the Panama Canal to the West Indies and the east coast of South America. This was a long trip for a submarine, but although conditions in the submarine might become a little rank with such a long time at sea, we were all looking forward to it. It was also my first trip through the Panama Canal.

When we arrived in Trinidad, we spent the first day at anchor in Chagauramus Bay, by the Coast Guard Base. They came out to greet us, and I could hardly believe it when I discovered the Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard was a David Bloom, who had been an officer in Harrison's when I was there. It was a small world.

That evening, after the reception on the aircraft carrier that was in our group, David brought his Coast Guard steel band on board the submarine. I believe a certain amount of liquor was involved that evening. I'm still intrigued how the band managed to get their steel drums down the hatch into the boat!

Our West Coast ships had now been joined by our East Coast fleet, including a Royal Navy submarine, HMS ACHERON. We conducted anti-submarine exercises every day all the way to our next port of Rio. While the harbour and the beaches of Rio are very impressive, we were appalled by the petty crime, from stealing towels or clothes on the beach, to slipping off a person's wristwatch while walking down the street and running away.

Our next port of call was Montevideo, in Uruguay. The thing I remember most about that port was the laundry. When we arrived, as Supply Officer I arranged for a contractor to come down to pick up the laundry. I asked the ship's company to put their belongings in individual bundles, with their names and a list of contents inside the clothes. When it was returned on board it came back in two big linen bags, with all the clothes together in two great bundles! We had seventy-two people standing on the casing going through identical (more or less) underwear and work clothes, to find their own. The laundry man was not very popular!

On entering and leaving harbour, I was the casing officer, and was responsible for securing the casing (upper deck) when we left port. On departing Montevideo, the anchor had not been secured properly. It could be heard banging from inside the submarine, so I had to take my team out on the casing again to secure it. Because there are no deck rails on a submarine, when you go on the casing at sea you must wear a safety belt. A rope line on the belt is hooked into a track on the deck, which allows you to walk along the casing.

The weather wasn't bad, but there was a large swell running. While we were working on the anchor, our bow dipped under the water, and I found myself being picked up and washed over the side. Because of my safety belt I didn't go far, but as the bow came up again I was washed back on board, landing in a kneeling position with a grease nipple on the deck having pierced my knee. If I had not been wearing a safety belt, I may not have been writing this now.

Safety belts were nothing new in submarines. When a submarine is on the surface in bad weather, the entire bridge staff are open to the sea from waves above them, and the water filling up the bridge

from below the free flooding casing. It is not uncommon to have the entire bridge full of water, which means that safety belts are mandatory under those conditions. The last words you wanted to hear when someone woke you up to go on watch at midnight were, "It's cold and very wet on the bridge." It used to be, "Seven bells, sir." Things had changed. Is it any wonder why submariners would much rather be dived, out of the cold and wet weather? Submariners do not like being on the surface, unless they have to.

I had damaged my leg, but it didn't put me out of action. We were now bound for "Harrison country" -- Barbados. As we came around the breakwater I could see the familiar "two of fat and one of lean" funnel markings, further down the jetty. It was the mv. Diplomat, and its Master was -- Captain John Sharman.

I invited Captain Sharman and his Chief Officer over for a drink after dinner that evening, because they were sailing next morning. They must have come over at about seven-thirty, and it was gone three in the morning before they left! We had more than one drink. That was the last time I saw Captain Sharman, but we still keep in contact through Christmas cards.

We eventually arrived back in Victoria, after spending a couple of days in San Diego. Because we had spent quite a bit of time away, I had managed to progress my submarine qualification reasonably quickly. However, I had written my notebook in long hand, so I still had to have it all typed. Shirley was not impressed.

With the notebook finally typed and having been coached as much as possible by my fellow officers, I was ready for my qualification. This involved a Commander from the USN coming to sea with us, and spending a week on board. When I wasn't on watch, we would walk through the submarine, where he would test my knowledge about everything in that submarine. This involved questions on equipment, followed by me operating the equipment -- then further questions on general submarine matters. It was a very intensive few days.

I was very proud the day I received my dolphins from Commander Charles Miko, USN. I think Shirley deserved a good deal of the credit, due to her efforts in trying to decipher the notations in my notebook, written by my Captain, John Rodocanachi.

Shortly after I became qualified, the ship received a visit from the Director of Officers Posting and Careers, or Career Manager as he was called. Career Managers were supposed to map out your individual careers, but the feeling was, that they used a dart board when they decided where you were going next.

Any officer who wished to see his Career Manager could ask for an interview, which normally resulted in you being told all the things you wanted to hear -- but were not necessarily true. Career Managers

liked to have happy clients!

In light of my subsequent career in the Canadian Navy, I have copied part of the written reply I received from the Career Manager, as a result of my request for a prognosis of my career prospects in submarines:

"In view of the fact that you are now thirty-three years of age, and that you have only recently qualified in submarines, it is possible that you might advance to the position of Executive Officer of a submarine. A career in submarines beyond that point is extremely doubtful.

Yours sincerely,

Leslie J. Hutchins
Captain, Royal Canadian Navy."

In March 1967, Lindsey's sister was born. Kerry Elizabeth Hunt was born on the 4th of March, the same date as my father's birthday. She was placed with us about a month later. Now the world was twice as good as it was before. We now had two lovely daughters, born at different ends of the continent -- four thousand miles and four time zones apart. Kerry was as skinny as Lindsey was chubby. She also had lovely eyes. Unfortunately, she was troubled with colic, which made her a very noisy baby. I didn't know so much noise could come out of anything so small. Whereas Lindsey was calm, Kerry was into everything. We thought that there was some monkey in her!

Unfortunately, at about that time, the injury to my leg was causing me some problems, so I had to go into hospital to have some work done on my knee cap. I am still not clear about what happened while I was in there, but somehow or other, after the operation I lost the use of the muscles in the same leg and the opposite shoulder. The doctors spent months trying to find out what happened, without ever producing a real diagnosis.

When I came out of hospital I had to have physiotherapy for nine months on both my arm and leg. Even today, my right thigh muscle has a lot less bulk than my left one. Shirley was convinced that I had developed polio while I was in hospital. I am not convinced -- but whatever it was, it attacked my leg and shoulder muscles.

My medical problems nearly curtailed my career. At one time there was talk of bringing me ashore permanently, but I convinced them that I had recovered sufficiently, and that I was now fit for sea. The doctors agreed, so I was back in submarines again.

At about this same time, Canada was building three new submarines in England. This required a substantial number of trained submariners to crew them. As a result, we started to lose some of the more senior lieutenants that we had, as they were posted to

England.

What with them being posted, and the Executive Officer being selected for submarine command training, I was told that I would be staying on board, and would become Executive Officer, or second in command, of HMCS GRILSE. Things were starting to look up, as at that time I only had three years service in submarines, and four years seniority as a Lieutenant. On April Fools Day 1968 I became Executive Officer of HMCS GRILSE. Was there some significance in the date?