

Very Cramped Quarters by Charlie Roberts (20)

I made two 60-day Special Ops. on Remora, and not only are the quarters cramped, but you ran out of fresh food after about a week. After that everything was frozen or canned, but the cooks did a great job. The diesel boats made very little fresh water, so as soon as we got underway the showers were shut down. In the 3-bunk berthing area there was a pull-down sink so you could shave and take a 'bird bath.' But the air and everything else smelled of diesel. A lot of the guys smoked, and a box of cigars was passed around in the wardroom after dinner. At the 30-day point the showers were briefly opened for a very quick shower, and that was done again the day we were returning to Pearl Harbor.

When we were near our patrol station, we remained submerged, running on the battery. Each night we would pull away from the coast and used the snorkel to bring in air so the diesel engines could charge the batteries. When the seas were rough, it was difficult for the diving officer to keep the boat at periscope depth and keep the snorkel head valve above the surface. When you went below that or a wave washed over the head valve, it shut, and the diesel engines began pulling the air from inside the sub. That continued until the valve was above the surface or you reached 6" of vacuum inside the sub. At that point, the engines shut down. Then you had to get to the proper depth to get the head valve above the surface, get back to 'sea level' air pressure in the sub, and restart the engines. If you were off watch and trying to sleep while this was going on it was not pleasant.

After Remora I attended the SSBN navigator course at Dam Neck, VA, and joined USS Tecumseh (SSBN-628) during her shakedown cruise in 1964. After the Post Shakedown Availability, the other crew took her through the Panama Canal to Hawaii. There our crew took over and took her to Guam. Tecumseh and Daniel Boone were the first two Boomers operating in the Pacific. I did four 60-day patrols operating from Guam, and that was a lot more pleasant than on a diesel boat. Clean air, plenty of water to take a shower every day, a roomy stateroom and even my own office as navigator. All thanks to clean nuclear power. Thank you, Adm. Rickover, even though you would not send me to nuclear power school.