

“Captain, Piss in Your Shoe” by Harris Sperling (7)

Shortly after getting orders to a WWII destroyer, I was on watch as Junior OOD to a crusty Lieutenant who was OOD. It was night and we were steaming to an assignment when a merchant ship appeared on radar and was expected to pass at a distance that required us to notify the captain, who was sleeping in his sea cabin. Bill, the OOD, looked passively out the bridge window with no apparent intention of notifying anyone.

At first, I suggested we call the captain and became more anxious as the merchant ship was closely at a rapid pace. Bill remained undaunted, until annoyed with my pleading, went to the brass voice tube and opened the cover latch. The voice tube wound its way across the bridge into the sea cabin above the captain’s bunk bed. Bill, holding the cover open, shouted, “Captain, piss in your shoe.” He waited a few seconds and then repeated. “Piss in your shoe.” I was frozen with shock.

Our captain, a mustang commander, was a hardnosed, no-nonsense guy, with little or no sense humor. I fully expected him to come thundering to the bridge, but nothing happened. Bill closed the voice tube cover, the merchant ship passed without incident, and I stood there, mouth opened, looking at Bill.

After a good laugh, Bill explained that the captain was deaf in one ear and slept on his side with the good ear pressed to the pillow. To awaken him, someone had to enter his cabin and give him a shake.

On another night watch at sea, I had to waken the captain from his side sleep on the good ear, but that is another sea story for another time.