



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS S-27 (SS 132)

June 19, 1942 - No Men Lost

*The Loss of USS S-27
By: George Herold*

Since the age of about ten, I can remember passing the little Naval recruiting station on Main St. in Paterson, N.J. on the way to the movies. In the window there were posters of Sailors on warships, and those magic words, "JOIN THE NAVY AND SEE THE WORLD." I started talking to the recruiter about a year before my 17th birthday. As a junior in High School my marks weren't the best, just good enough for me to remain on the varsity baseball team. The recruiter had given me some things for my dad to read and sign. He kept saying that this was a big decision for me, but I really wanted it.



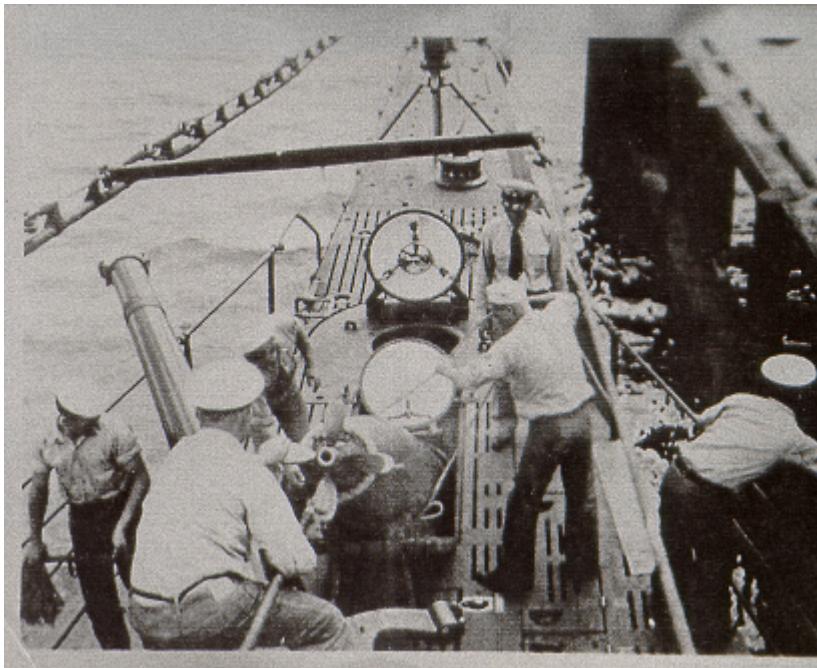
The last game of the 1941 season was on Friday, 23 May. The next day, the 24th of May, Saturday, was my 17th birthday and on Tuesday May 27th I enlisted. I loved it right from the start, for I was 17 and I was going to "see the world." Boot camp in Newport, R.I. went smoothly. At times there would be a submarine anchored out in the bay as the Newport Torpedo Station was nearby. I requested Sub School at New London, Conn. and, after passing a written test and physical, was accepted. While on boot-leave I told my Dad about my choice. He kind of paled a little and reminded me about the sub that sank with all hands about the time I enlisted. It was the USS O-9. But I wanted it and that was that.

We schooled on the O boats of WWI vintage, 475 tons, 172' long. I loved it. I wish I could remember my first dive, but I can't.

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October 1941, Sub School over, I was sent to San Diego to SUBDIV 41, six old S boats, circa 1922. They weren't much bigger, 210' long, 800 tons. I went aboard

my first ship, the USS S-27, and before the week was out the Exec told me that we were heading to Hawaii, I had a letter in the mail in about an hour.



After an eleven day cruise in a Liberty ship, peeling spuds and standing lookout watches, I was in Hawaii. School started right away and I dug right in, all types of signaling and navigation.

Thanksgiving dinner at the Sub Base proved interesting. Some local High School kids dined with us and some native Hawaiian girls. I was a 17 year old man of the sea with all of eight months in the Navy. I'm sure you old Sailors recall the old line, "I wrung more salt water out of my socks than---."

Sunday morning, 7 December, like all mornings, saw us out in front of the Sub Barracks in whites getting ready for colors. I was thinking about my beloved NY Giants who would be playing that afternoon in the Polo Grounds. But things got to changing quickly when all these planes came swooping down from over the Receiving Station heading down the channel between the Sub Base and the Navy Yard about a hundred feet high right towards Ford Island.

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I'm not going to repeat much about the attack itself. I was not involved in any heroics whatsoever. There were three boats tied up at the Sub Base, TAUTOG, NARWHAL and DOLPHIN, and the CACHALOT was over in the Navy Yard. They were using 30 cal. Lewis guns and later in the week TAUTOG was awarded half a kill so they painted half a plane on the conning tower. I have to mention Pete Chang, CTM, and MAA at the Sub Barracks. He lived in Pearl City or somewhere with his wife and son. He was like a mother hen with us and came racing back at 1100 to see if his little domain was okay. He was also the head man at the Torpedo Shop. He was a Captain Bligh type, and curtailed the school for a week so all of us non-rated men could be available for s-t details wherever needed. I got to know the Navy Yard pretty well during this time.

School started again on December 15 and both instructors, a CQM and SM1/c were all business now. I don't think I got much liberty until after New Years. Big changes now, blackouts, dark shades and gas masks. All letters were to be mailed unsealed. Marines were everywhere it seemed.

Some of the newer boats were arriving now, recently commissioned. Fleet boats, 315' in length, ten tubes, 24 torpedoes, 1600 tons. The USS FINBACK was one of them. I would serve on her later. Christmas dinner at the Sub Base, again with guests of the gold braid, and again we're acting like personal friends of King Neptune.

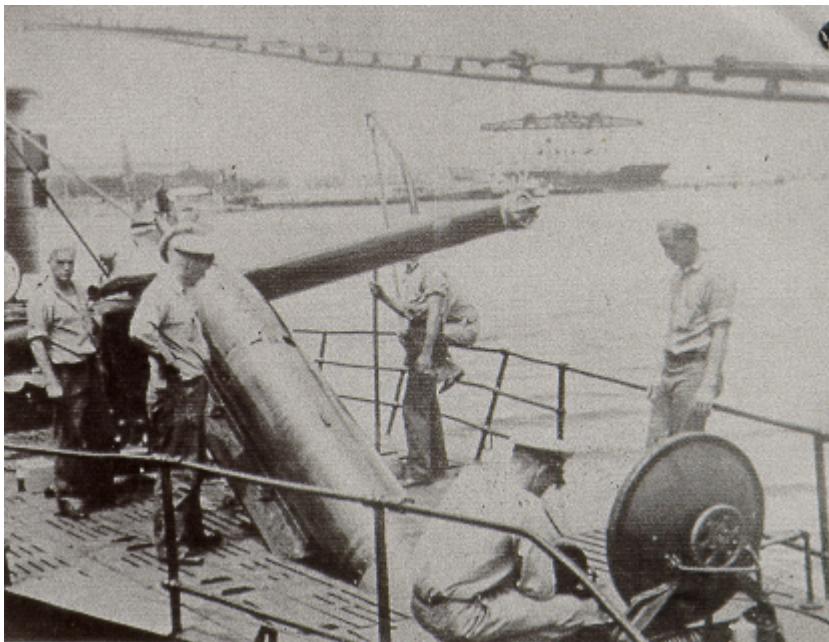
Fast forward now to March 1942, San Diego, SUBDIV 41, six S Boats, preparing for a move to Dutch Harbor, Alaska. On the way north our propulsion system had problems. The power for each of these boats were two-eight cylinder Nelseco diesels, 14 knots max. on surface and two-60 cell batteries. About 300 miles south of Seattle, an immense ground in both main motor developed and we limped into Bremerton Navy Yard. After a short stay, a couple of liberties and a visit to the USS WEST VIRGINIA which was undergoing repairs for damage received at Pearl Harbor 7 December, we sailed out of there through Puget Sound, very pretty.



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Arriving at Dutch, we saw that it had been bombed and the pier we tied up to had taken a direct hit with a small bomb. You had to be careful where you put your feet or into the drink you went. The local town was Unalaska, a small one. Boards for sidewalks and lots of mud. I remember a wooden roller rink and

some Aleutian kids skating on it.



After topping off with fuel and more stores, we were underway now for the serious stuff. This was going to be IT now, two or more months at sea. The enemy was on Attu, Aggatu, Kiska and maybe others. We had been patrolling the Kuluk Bay area south of Tanaga Island. This time of

the year up here means 19 hour days and five hour nights. Long dives on this old girl. We didn't see any shipping, but did see many enemy aircraft to avoid. I had my 18th birthday on this patrol and standing QM watches. We were in a period of very bad weather-a lot of rain and continual overcast. Occasionally, when visibility permitted, we would pick out an island, correctly we hoped, and try for a decent tangential fix. Sun lines and star sights were put on the shelf.

After surfacing shortly after sunset on 16 June, we received a message directing us to leave our patrol area at Kuluk Bay and proceed to an assigned area at Kiska, via Amchitka Pass. Prior to leaving Dutch Harbor the skipper had received verbal orders from the Division Commander to inspect Constantine Harbor on Amchitka Island for enemy activity. We set course to clear to northward of the islands for five miles and the distance to travel indicated our arrival off Constantine about 0100 (plus 12) on 18 June. We were able to obtain fixes until we rounded Garelo Island and headed across Amchitka Pass on course 245T. At 2345 the Captain went to the bridge to see if Amchitka Island had been sighted and to be present if a landfall was made. At 2400, when nothing could be seen ahead, we changed course to 270T in order to make certain of landfall in case the current (on which we had not data) had set us to the south and east during the passage. After steaming for one hour at two-thirds speed (8 knots) on this course without sighting anything, the decision was made to circle with ten-degree rudder until light conditions were better. The Captain was concerned about not being able to see land because the

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Coastal Pilot and confidential chart showed that the entire island was low and we might not see it in time to prevent grounding. This was done even knowing that our 0100 DR position still gave us 7 and a half miles of open water.

At 0204 we steadied on course 090T and dived at 0207. From that time until 0556 we steered various courses until we picked up the island and obtained a fix. We patrolled until 1200, then started rounding the southern end before time to surface and change batteries. It deemed advisable to remain submerged during daylight because periscope observations confirmed enemy air activity.

The decision to round the island to the southward was based on the following factors: First, previous reports indicated the presence of the enemy on the island of Semisopochnoi, a small one. Therefore knowing that they were also at Kiska, it seemed likely that there might be air patrols between two. A northern route might disclose our presence, and we wanted to reach our area from the north of Kiska Harbor undetected if possible. Second, to have entered this area from the north would have hemmed us in by Rat Island, Little Sitka Island, and subsequently the unknown currents of Oglala Pass, where little enemy surface shipping might be expected, whereas a southern approach leaving us free water rounding Amchitka Island to the south, seemed the most logical route.

After rounding East Cape on Amchitka at 1330, numerous tangential fixes were obtained and a set to the north of about 2 knots determined. Currents such as this are known to exist and had been previously encountered in all of the other Aleutian passes. At 1735 we increased speed to about 6 knots and adjusted course in order to round St. Makarius Point and be at least 5 miles from the island prior to 2000. It would be necessary to surface and lie to for a period of at least four hours to conduct a battery charge. This position should remove us from the influence of the currents in the pass (so we thought). No data on currents to be encountered in this area were available.

At 1920 we surfaced the boat, visibility was 2/3 miles and the island was not in sight because of a fog bank. In order to close the line to steer for our area, we came to course 315T at a speed of 8 knots and stopped at 2005 in order to start

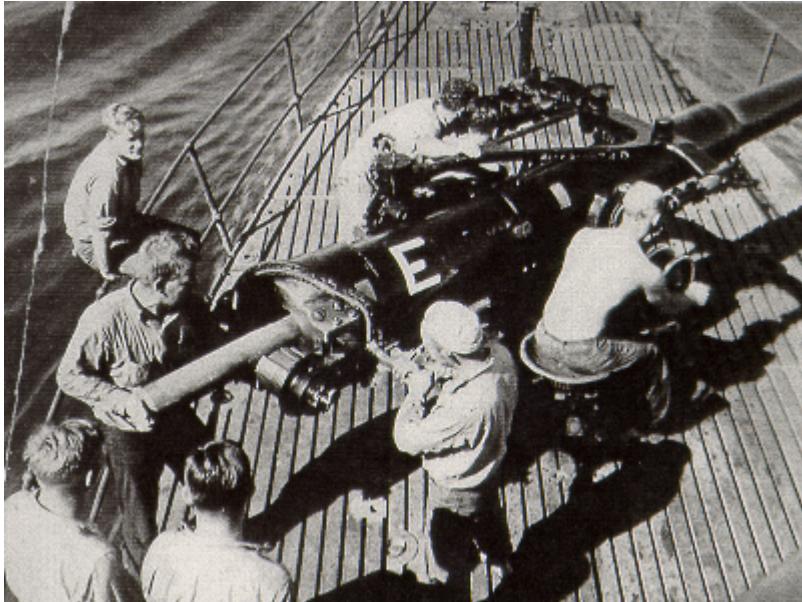


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a battery charge. Our DR position at this time placed the boat 5 miles west of St. Makarius Point or any known enemy position. Also, this position provided the least chance to detection either by radar or visual search because of our blending in with the shore background.

At 2010 the charge was started. Conditions at this time: Visibility 2/3 miles, sea calm, sky overcast and the island not in sight. The bridge watch was ordered to be especially alert for land.

At 2200 the Captain's night order book was written and made available to the OOD. In it were instructions to set course 305T, speed 6 knots, when one engine was released from the charge, to keep a careful watch for land, breakers or any other indication of land as we may be set towards shore. Upon sighting any vessel dive immediately. Call the Captain when the charge is complete.



At 0027, the OOD went ahead 6 knots on the starboard engine and came to course, left, to 305T as per instructions and informed the Captain. About 0043 the OOD reported he was coming left 225T with full left rudder as he thought he had spotted land on the starboard bow. The

Captain was on his way to the bridge when the boat went aground with a terrific jolt. I was in my bunk in the forward battery compartment. I was off watch. I had the four to eight watches. About 42 of the crew of 50 slept in the forward battery. Whoever was asleep was surely awake now.

A dark object, believed to be land, suddenly loomed up about one point on the starboard bow and was sighted at the same time by Boatswain Krueger (OOD), Dick Lister (QM) and the starboard lookout, Stan Jorgensen. Krueger immediately ordered, "Left full rudder, come to course 225T and report to the Captain that I think I have sighted land on the starboard bow and am changing course to 225T." Immediately thereafter the OOD saw small breakers about 25 yards dead ahead and rang up "all Back emergency" on both engines and sounded the collision alarm. The boat grounded almost immediately.

The Captain arrived on the bridge at this time, followed by the Exec, Mr.

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Smith. The Captain relieved the OOD. The port screw was backing and the starboard screw started backing within a few seconds and the boat was reported "rigged for collision." We were bumping violently on the rocks and rolling about 15 or 20 degrees. The motors continued backing emergency, to no avail. Nelly, F1/c, was yelling, "What the hell are we doing on railroad tracks?" He was the ship's comedian. Orders were given to blow the fuel from No.3 MBT, the after fuel group and all variable tanks. We kept trying to back clear as the boat became lighter. However, as we became lighter, the stern began to swing to starboard and bang against the rocks. Then the starboard screw hit the rocks and was disabled. We had to move the boat in order to clear the stern. At this time we found that the boat could be moved only about 20 feet forward or aft before it became held fast. We even sounded with lead line for a possible passage through which the boat might be warped, but found none.

At 0115 we sent out our first message in code: "ANY AND ALL USN SHIPS X AGROUND SOUTHEAST SIDE AMCHITKA ISLAND."

The rocks on the starboard side were high, almost as high as the bridge. If we backed down, the stern would go into a reef and ride up a little, and then shear to starboard. It was starting to get a little light now, and we could see another group of rocks just off the starboard quarter and on several occasions the stern got close against these rocks and we kicked ahead. We didn't do any good with this maneuver with only one screw operational, so we stopped for awhile and took some soundings all around the boat. They were all very shallow except ahead there was one spot 20 or 30 feet deep but there was apparently another reef beyond. The bilge plating in the motor room was buckled in. You could notice it coming in if you were in there while she was pounding. After this had been noticed, we secured the motor room, shut the water-tight door and put air pressure in the compartment.

Lt. Butler, at this time, was busy encoding messages to be sent. This island was only about a mile wide and four miles long. We weren't sure if any enemy were on it. We grounded on the S/E corner and several days ago we noticed a small village of several houses on the N/E corner through periscope observations. It appeared uninhabited, or was there enemy there? At 0145 we sent out our second message, a repeat of the first one. The pounding was increasing and we thought the tanks might give at any moment. Our one rubber life raft was brought topside and made ready. One officer and one enlisted man, both capable swimmers, took the raft with a line to the beach. With fog lifting and dawn coming, this island was starting to look like a calendar picture of a rocky Maine coast. They returned and reported that conditions were favorable, once the raft cleared the first set of rocks close to the boat. A ferry system was set up between the beach and the boat with lines.

At 0440 our third message was sent: "CANCEL MY 191640 X WEDGED SOLIDLY ST. MARKARIUS POINT AMCHITKA X PORT SCREW WORKING ON MOTOR BUT MOTOR

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ROOM FLOODING X ALL TANKS DRY X UNABLE TO BACK OVER ROCKS X
POUNDING IS BAD X AM PREPARING TO ABANDON X HEAVY FOG."

Provisions, dry and warm clothing, guns, medical supplies, food and crew were safely transferred to the beach using the rubber raft and, by 1100, all but the Captain and five men were landed. By this time the breakers had increased so that further trips for provisions were not safe. The Captain and those who remained aboard destroyed the following equipment. 1. ECM- all wheels broken and scattered in deep water, typewrite part destroyed by hammer and thrown into deep water. Nothing remains in the boat but the empty safe. 2. QC-JK- equipment demolished with a hammer. QC head was run out when we grounded. 3. JK in torpedo room demolished. 4. All torpedo approach data and tables burned. 5. Mk. 8 torpedo angle solver thrown overboard as far as possible, seaward. 6. All confidential and secret publications, codes, ciphers, and crypto aids were taken ashore and burned. Unburnable items were smashed and thrown into deep water.

At 1345 another message was sent: "HEAVY POUNDING CONTINUES X HELPLESS X ALL ASHORE EXCEPT SIX X ALL COMPARTMENTS DRY EXCEPT TORPEDO ROOM X WILL STAY UNTIL UNTENABLE X ALL CRYPTO AIDS DESTROYED BUT THIS X WHEN ABANDONED WILL WALK TO CONSTANTINE IF FREE ON ENEMY OF EIGHTEENTH."

At 1330 three of the remaining men came ashore. One Machinist's Mate, one Radioman and the Captain remained onboard. At this time heavy pounding had definitely loosened the side plating, for it could be heard rattling with each jar of the boat. The torpedo room was slowly flooding, though air pressure had been built up in this compartment. An angle of six degrees down by the bow was now noticed. The screws are both now clear of water. At 1513 we sent our last message: "DUE SEA CONDITIONS I AM ABANDONING SHIP X IF POSSIBLE WILL RETURN TOMORROW OTHERWISE CONSTANTINE MY 200145."

At 1550, since nothing further could be done to help the boat, and the torpedo room was half flooded, the two remaining men and the Captain came ashore.

We were in sort of an unsheltered cove with all of our provisions, clothing and a little ammo piled on the beach. I suppose this was the lesser of two evils. Our boat was a goner now, resting on the bottom and generating chlorine gas from both batteries. All of us were wet and the temperature was about 60 degrees, uncomfortable at the very best. Fires were started and wet clothing removed. No injuries were reported and, other than being exhausted, we were OK. A couple of ounces of grog in some coffee picked us up a little.

We all agreed that if there were any enemy on this island, they were probably at the other end, 3 or 4 miles distant. So, at darkness we doused the fires. A cliff about 50 feet high overlooked the cove and we posted a lookout up on top to be relieved every hour. Naturally, the non-rated men got this assignment. I

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had to relieve Scott Horton at some time and it was dark. I mean DARK. The only noise was the surf and that poor old boat moaning and breaking up. I climbed up on the hill and called, not too loud, "Horton." If there were any enemy nearby I sure didn't want to be heard. I called out again and we got together. He said he heard me the first time and thought in was an enemy trick. He probably saw the same movies I did. After he went below, I didn't move far from that spot. I had a 45 caliber on my hip, but the only time I fired any guns, except BBs, was that little bit of that rifle business in Boots.

The next day it was decided that there were no enemy on this island after all so all 50 of us carried what we could in our arms and on our backs to the other side, a couple of miles distant. The island was all mushy tundra, slow going with a load to carry. We arrived there about dusk, 2030. Right away we saw what it was and what had happened. This had been a Russian fishing settlement of six houses, a few storage bunkers and a church. The inhabitants probably pulled out right after the Pearl Harbor attack. After the Japanese invaded, or before, they dropped a string of bombs and three of the houses were destroyed.

We moved right in. The Russians must have pulled out in a hurry. Utensils of all sorts, kerosene stoves and drums of kerosene were left. Plus school books, all in Russian. We were shipwrecked now, with nothing to do but hope. Of all the messages we sent, only one was received and it didn't give our position. But we didn't know at the time.

Naturally, food rationing started right away, two meals a day, no griping. Fifty seven years ago it was a tough spot to be in and today I realize that we could have all expired there after the food ran out. But in 1942 that never entered our minds.

We had a man stationed on top of the church and if he spotted anything, ship or aircraft, he was to ring that bell and we would all take cover. The idea was not to make any changes that could be noticeable from the air. The weather cleared and it was beautiful for the next week, we caught fish in the bay and they were cleaned and eaten. We would spot aircraft maybe eight or ten miles distant, ours or theirs, we never knew. We held muster every morning and made jokes about it. Who would be AWOL anyway. We were doing OK, maybe a little hungry on 3/4 rations, but really not bad.

Eight days later on 28 June that old church bell rang. All hands ran and took cover inside. A plane was headed straight for our little "retreat." Nelly yells, "He's either going to drop bombs or supplies, take your pick." Closing we saw it was a PBY at about 1500 feet. Everyone in outside waving and some went down to the beach and scratched "S-27" in the sand. We laid out the flag and he is circling eyeing us, now just about 300 feet up. He sends us a message via aldis lamp, "WILL SEND POSIT X WILL LAND." Everyone is ecstatic. He comes down

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beautifully on the bay. The Russians were nice enough to leave an old dory, all worm eaten, but floatable, which we used to row out and introduce ourselves. He threw a lot of his equipment over the side to lighten up so about 15 of us could become passengers. I'm not one, but who cares now. Three more would be coming back the next day for the rest of us. That night we cooked everything and had Christmas and Thanksgiving dinner all into one. We stuffed ourselves and laid back like fat cats.

The next morning three PBYs landed on the bay and inside two hours they were airborne again with the rest of us. After a seven and a half hour flight, a rough one, we set down in Chernofsky Bay in pitch darkness. After a couple of big bounces we stayed on the water and swore we would never get into another airplane. A couple of launches took us to a converted four-piper, USS HULBERT, AVD6 (seaplane tender) for a medical, bath and a clean bunk.

The next day we were flown back to Dutch Harbor and issued a complete sea bag. We had to leave what ever we got off the boat on Amchitka Island. I left a 30 dollar set of "tailor made's," dress blues, I had bought in San Diego about eight months previous.

Years later at reunions, it was often mentioned that if any of that crew of the PBY that found us was sitting here with us, we could really fete them. Then in 1995 the newspaper had a notice of a get-together of ex-PBY airmen of WW2 and a phone number in Satellite Beach. I called and introduced myself and this man said he would be attending and would make some inquiries. A few weeks later I heard from him, and he had some info,-but it was not good. He said that the plane was in VP-41, the pilot's name was Jules Raven, ENS and the co-pilot was Rock Bannister. Evidently, Banister was covering for someone else that day and said that Raven and his regular crew was lost two weeks later on a routine patrol. A sad note, for I can still see him standing up in his cockpit with the hatch open, waving after landing.

I have to add another odd note. That same week in June 1942, my High School Class of 1942 were holding their prom and graduating exercises.

The war went on another three or more years, five patrols on the USS FINBACK sinking one passenger liner, eight freighters, one gunboat, one passenger/cargo vessel, one submarine chaser and one oil tanker. After a 30 day leave in the fall of 1943, on a newly commissioned boat, USS PICUDA, six more patrols, sinking one gunboat, five freighters, two destroyers and four passenger/cargo vessels. None of this was accomplished without the inevitable depth charge attacks, some lasting twelve/fifteen hours. They'll make a believer out of you. I called on my LORD many times.

In the entire war I only came face to face with the enemy on one occasion. In August 1944, in the Luzon Strait, early one morning we passed through an area

of about one square mile of many enemy soldiers clinging to pieces of wreckage. The Captain decided we would pick one up. This was something that was seldom done. He beckoned with megaphone from the bridge, but all refused. However, one gave in and we pulled him aboard. They all had been in the water for quite a while for this guy was full of open sores from the sea water and jelly-fish. We only had him a couple of days, and transferred him to another boat in our pack, USS SPADEFISH, as they were heading back to Pearl.

I was preparing to stay maybe 30 years. I loved the Navy. However, it was not to happen. A severely broken leg and dislocated hip forced an early out for me in 1949. Period, end of it all.

I'M NOT OLD, JUST MATURE

[Poem read at the October meeting by Chris Ward]

Today at the drugstore, the clerk was a gent.

From my purchase this chap took off ten percent.

I asked for the cause of a lesser amount;

And he answered, "Because of the Seniors Discount."

I went to McDonald's for a burger and fries;

And there once again, got quite a surprise.

The clerk poured some coffee which he handed to me.

He said, "For you, Seniors, the coffee is free."

Understand-I'm not old-I'm merely mature

But some things are changing, temporarily, I'm sure.

The newspaper print gets smaller each day,

And people speak softer-can't hear what they say.

My teeth are my own (I have the receipt),

And my glasses identify people I meet.

Oh, I've slowed down a bit... not a lot, I'm sure.

You see, I'm not old... I'm only mature.

The gold in my hair has been bleached by the sun.

You should see all the damage that chlorine has done.

Washing my hair has turned it all white,

But don't call it gray... saying "blonde" is just right.

My car is all paid for... not a nickel is owed.

Yet a kid yells, "Old duffer... get off of the road!"