

Recollections of Beach Jumper Unit TWO by LT Ben Hoffmann

BJU2 occupied only three and a half of my 84 years on the planet, but it was a memorable time in my life. Not only were the duties interesting and usually enjoyable, but there were many extremely fine men, officers and enlisted, in the unit and a number of lifelong friendships developed.

I enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1947 at age 17 and learned the most important fact about Navy life -- Chief Petty Officers (CPO) run the Navy. I spent a year in a surface division in Baltimore, MD, three years in an Electronics Warfare Company in Charlottesville, VA and a year in a surface unit in New Haven, CT. When the Korean fracas began (1950), I expected to be called up. One of my hobbies was electronics and I was enrolled in an electronics class in the reserve unit in New Haven. After Christmas vacation in January, 1952, all but two of the 20 people in the class -- the instructor and myself, both grad students at Yale, had orders to active duty. I promptly hurried to the Office of Naval Officer Procurement in New York City and signed up for OCS. Fortunately I was able to complete the spring semester before reporting.

After sixteen weeks of indoctrination and chicken crap at OCS, I received orders to BJU2, along with Sayre 'Archie' Schwartztrauber. (On USNR training duty, seven years later, I met my company officer again, the CO of a DD, the USS Soley). Nobody knew what a BJU was, some said BJs ran through the surf carrying telephone poles, but I was assured that if I stood sideways on the beach, I would never be shot. In October 1952, before reporting to the unit, I attended two schools at NavPhiBase, Little Creek, VA. The course in naval gunfire support was outstanding, with excellent terrain models and smoke that rose where your shells hit so you could adjust the impact area until you hit the target.

BJU2 had been activated in 1951 and was located in the former base brig, surrounded by a page wire fence and patrolled by armed guards. Aside from the brig, an old dairy barn and a metal shop/communications building (similar to the hot boxes the Japanese used to subdue POWs) were located within the compound. Most of the officers were LTs who had served in WWII and were recalled for Korea. During the next two years, most of them were discharged and relieved by a flock of newly minted Ensigns and JGs. The LTs had perfected their skills at cut-throat lunchtime hearts games, played for money, and delighted in daily relieving the newcomers of small amounts of cash. As the LTs left, we continued the tradition with the newest Ensigns.

The unit had a number of wooden boats, and to pay my way through grad school, I had worked on Navy research projects testing tropical woods to find a substitute for teak for carrier flight decks and testing glue-line strength in laminated minesweeper keels and ribs. I did not get assigned to boats, probably because of my experience in electronics, and the fact that whip antennae and trees were both vertical in nature, I was assigned as Assistant Communications Officer under LTJG Al Depman and RMC Warren A. Sanders. The radio shack contained a number of work stations where RMs could practice copying code from the FOX training circuits. To stay out of mischief, I often sat with the enlisted men and copied FOX, hoping to become proficient in code and earn a ham license. We also had one very powerful transmitter that could reach us when on operations but its major value was in frying the mice that frequented the tin building. I also had to check, daily, on a number of pieces of equipment and the progress of the enlisted men. The result, a check-off list for all of the check-off lists. When Al Depman left and I became CommO, one of the RMs took over my job.

One of the interesting aspects of this assignment was to learn about Navy politics. Chief Sanders played golf with the CO, LCDR Phil Bucklew, on Saturdays. Bucklew played golf with Admiral Fahrion, ComPhibLant, on Sundays. A number of problems that developed in the unit from time to time were solved very quickly. One of the more interesting -- one of our boatswains mates was arrested, court-martialed, and transferred to sea duty for stealing a much needed piece of equipment from a repair ship. Two weeks later he was back aboard. In another incident, a rather incompetent ensign crossed a CPO and was gone within two weeks.

Buck's relations with the admiral had other benefits. When Fahrion's favorite steward had to be transferred to sea duty, BJU2 got him. He didn't have much to do other than patrol all of the offices and insure that every coffee cup was kept full. It was impossible to tell how much coffee we drank, but it must have been substantial. The Navy coffee blend was great, except for the time, in desperation, on a cold, windy day with rough seas, we ran the grounds twice.

Boats

When I reported aboard, we had seven boats, a 104-foot aviation rescue boat (AVR), two 63-foot AVRs, two 56 foot LCCs (Landing Craft, Control) and two 36-foot LCPLs (Landing Craft Personnel, without bow ramps). We gradually added two 45-foot AVRs, two more 63s, an 83-foot Coast Guard patrol boat and two experimental hydrofoils.

The 104 (AVR-1) referred to affectionately as “the one-boat” , “the great white mother” or “the old gray whore” was our flagship. On local unit operations, the XO was often the flag and on PhibLant operations, the CO was the flag. As communications officer, I was usually assigned to the 104 and usually functioned as the OTC. Even after I graduated to department head, Bucklew insisted that I be on the 104. I envied the officers who were assigned to the fun craft. With three screws, the 104 was a great boat for teaching ship-handling. You could use the two outboard crews to learn ship-handling of twin-screw vessels or the single inboard screw to learn how to handle a single-screw vessel. While learning single screw response, the engine conked out as I reversed it approaching the pier and we hit the seawall. The forgiving wooden hull showed no effects -- one of the aluminum PTs would have been 4-inches shorter with a noticeable dent. The only other person I have ever met who served on a 104 was an army officer assigned to a port in Alaska.

The 63s were aviation rescue boats (AVR, sometimes ARB) that had also been used by BJIs in Europe in WWII. AVRs 2, 3, 6 and 7 were every officer's choice of boat assignment. They were sleek, fast (about 35 knots), powered by two, 650 HP Hall-Scott engines running on aviation gas the 104 had 3 Hall-Scotts). Although I often took a 63 on local operations, I only had one once on a PhibLant operation and Bucklew took it over for the fun part, sneak attacks on amphibious shipping. AVRs 2, 3 and 6 were standard issue with engines amidships, but the 7-boat had the engines aft, and a cracked keel that had to be braced against the deck. In rough seas, the pounding of short hulls was incredible. Even if you didn't throw up, your guts hurt from the constant pounding. At one point we wrote specs for a new boat suitable for our many missions and about 6 years ago a prototype, built in Maine, reflected many of our recommendations, including a longer hull with a cross-section less susceptible to pounding.

Our two, radar-equipped, 56-foot LCCs (44, 66), with steel hulls and diesel power, had been used to control landing craft in the invasions of Europe. One was reputedly sunk and salvaged from a harbor in France. Rust was a constant problem and one hull was pierced by a chipping hammer. Our two 45s (AVR-4 and -5) lacked the luxurious accommodations of the 63s and were much faster. The Coast Guard 83-footer was the last boat we received before I left BJU-2. Although I took it out on at least once on a local operation, I knew very little about it.

The two, 36-foot LCPLs were not used much on local operations but managed to make it down the Intracoastal Waterway for the annual spring Phiblant operations off the Carolina coast. Because of their slow speed, they were usually towed out to sea before simulating a beach assault. My first command, by default, was an LCPL. I was assigned as assistant boat officer on AVR-3, under LT Bob Kilpatrick, a cushy learning experience. As we got underway, the O-in-C of one of the PLs, once of the many football/baseball jocks assigned to the unit, failed to show. When we reached the rendezvous area and began forming up for the beach approach, I was transferred to the PL, a green Ensign, with no green on my one gold stripe. I didn't know the crew and they didn't know me; we had to maintain darken ship and radio silence, we had no radar, we were so low in the water we could barely see the nearest AVR, and 15 minutes after getting underway, the boat compass quit. No lights, no radio, no radar, no compass, and we couldn't see the nearest boat. The coxswain (I think it was BM2 Baum) was, to say the least, upset. I had been watching a star on the western horizon and told him to steer slightly to the right of the star, and as the sun rose, we found ourselves in the proper position.

High Pockets was, as I recall, a 24-foot Chris-Craft with hydrofoils. Although our boat division performed a number of tests and evaluations on its performance, I was not involved with it. It was suitable for delivering recon teams to a beach but was not well suited to tactical deception operations, The same was true of the Karl boat which resembled a seaplane without wings, with a pusher prop. It was very fast and rumor had it that the boat hit a 2x4 at speed, puncturing its hull, and was saved from sinking by entering the well of an LSD.

Small boats in a saltwater environment were constantly plagued with minor problems rust, corrosion, peeling paint, electrical and electronic short circuits you name it. Every day, boat crews labored to get everything on their boat working properly it rarely happened. While I was acting exec, working on correspondence courses for promotion to LT, the course on leadership, cited a number of examples of how to motivate people to perform better. A light bulb came on how about rewarding boat crews with early liberty when their boats are up to snuff. I tried it. Toward the end of the first week, one boat was ready for inspection about 1430 and after it was checked out, the crew went on liberty. By the end of the second week, all of the boats were getting early liberty. Unfortunately, the base commander had complaints about all of the BJs leaving early and lowered the boom, no more early liberty. Within two weeks, we were back to where we had begun.

Seasickness

One of the four requirements for BJs in WWII was they could not be seasick. I didn't have a weak stomach, I could throw it as far as anybody, and I wasn't the only one. In even moderately rough seas, many men lost it. Before getting underway early one morning for celestial navigation training, LTJG Dick 'Skeeter' Werner, lying in his rack on the 104, threw up before we left the pier. Seas were so bad that the exercise was cancelled. In one four day operation, everyone on the 104 was sick but LT Gene Bunn (known affectionately, and unofficially, as ERB), then the unit exec. The last day, ERB made a Mulligan stew that most of us could hold down, with some help from hardtack. I can recall once steaming on a parallel course with the 104 seeing the entire, red-painted underside of the hull exposed when she rode the crest of a wave.

My reputation for leaning over the side was so bad that often, when I took a boat out, the crew would start a pool. Everyone pitched a quarter into a coffee cup and picked a time when they figured I would throw up. I felt betrayed when LTJG Dick Kenyon, the assistant boat officer, won the pool. On one exercise, landing a UDT team on the beach from a 63, the radioman (seaman striker) could not keep the TCS tuned so I frequently went below to help him and shared the same bucket in the radio room. At the con, I couldn't even speak and resorted to pointing to the compass heading for the coxswain. A new arrival, LTJG Bob Brown (Annapolis), was on board as an observer. When he looked at me, I could imagine what was going through his mind – "Where the hell did the Navy get officers like this?" We often got enlisted men from destroyer duty with the fleet who swore they never got seasick. We paid particular attention to them when the seas were rough, and most succumbed. The pounding of those small boats in rough seas was incredible. I actually threw up inside the Little Creek jetty once.

Why the boats were all painted a bilious green below decks was always a mystery to me. Adding to that the greasy pork chops that were usually the first scheduled meal on an operation created a perfect storm. The beneficiaries of all this were the married enlisted men. Small crews always got extra rations, and sick crews always had many leftovers. The leftovers went to the married sailors and their families, a big help with their food budgets.

Unforgettable characters

As I recall, our complement was about 18 officers and 125 enlisted, always in a state of flux with new junior officers coming aboard as those recalled in 1950 were released. In a group that size, there are always a few who stand out. Our exec, LT E.R. Bunn (from Gravity, Iowa, a big Navy town) rarely carried his own cigarettes. If you smoked, ERB had a habit of tapping you on your left shirt pocket and asking, "Gotta butt, son?" After several months of this, we smokers had enough. Someone garnered a supply of WWII sea-store cartons of Camels, about as dry as a popcorn fart. We kept our good cigs in our pants pockets and were careful that ERB never saw us use them. One day, as he bummed a butt from me, he made a priceless comment. "Wonder why everybody in this outfit started smoking Camels?"

When I became Electronics Dept. Head, I handled a lot of correspondence for the captain, and it all had to pass Bunn's inspection. I used to prop my foot up on the radiator in his office and argue with him over sentence structure and content. One letter contained four sentences that clearly stated all pertinent information. Bunn absolutely would not approve it -- it was too short, Navy correspondence was never that

short. In desperation, I added two or three sentences, about as meaningful as a current legal document, and he sent it on to the captain.

Another colorful character was QMC Gallimore. A jolly Irishman who could talk anybody out of anything. If we needed any tool or equipment that could not be acquired through normal supply channels, Gallimore would take off in a jeep and return with the item. Size didn't matter, he even got some boat anchors for us. When the unit was away on operations, Gallimore was left behind in charge of 'procurement' of anything we might need in an emergency.

BM2 Baum, another character, had been in the Navy long enough to be a CPO but usually found some way to screw up and get bounced back a grade. For one trip down the ICW he managed to obtain a public address system and mount the speakers on the bridge of AVR2. Just west of Portsmouth, the ICW swings left, out of the river, and channel markings switch from ocean to inland waters. The black marker at the entrance marked the left edge of a sandbar - instead of red, right, returning, you needed to go left of this marker. I was conning the 104 and realized, too late, that we would pass on the wrong side, right over the sandbar. I was going too fast to change so cut the engines and the following wake lifted the stern and carried us over the sandbar. We had barely crossed when Baum's PA speakers roared something about making a new channel in the ICW, loud enough that Captain Bucklew came to the bridge to find out what was going on.

Sandbars were a problem on the ICW, especially on the many sounds that we crossed. On another occasion we hit a sandbar, hard, right in the middle of the channel, and a nameless person popped out of the forward head without his pants. Another sandbar in Bogue Sound caused AVR3, LTJG Bill Wallace O-in-C, to go hard aground. When the engines failed to move the boat, Bill, a 6'-3", well-proportioned football player, jumped in the water and pulled the boat off with the bow line. We didn't call him Bogart, but the 3-boat was afterward known as 'The African Queen'. Another sandbar in Bogue sound caused me some problems. On returning to AVR-3, hard aground, in a PL, the water was too shallow for the PL, so I donned some hip waders and waded to the 3. As I reached up to the hands waiting to help me up, I stepped into the hole created by the screws churning up the mud when they tried to back off. My waders filled with water and I went down, saved by four hands that grabbed my arms, shirt and wader straps.

LTJg Chuck Pollock, one of our recon swimmers, was O-in-C of an LCC on one operation. He had a slight collision with a USMC amphibious vehicle that made a slit in the steel hull, barely above the water line. When underway, water entered through the slit. The solution "the crew" chewed gum and tried to seal the leak. Chuck also created some problems when he fell over the side of a rubber raft with one of those heavy WWII walkie-talkies on his back. While being dragged deeper, he decided the radio was more expendable than he and let it go to the bottom. As communications Officer at the time, I was signed out for the radio and the paperwork to survey it was a major pain, with possible repercussions. We did it the easy way, got a junker from NAS salvage in Norfolk, altered the serial number, and turned it back in.

It has been said that the only thing more difficult than getting a ship in a bottle was to get a bottle on a ship. LT Bill 'Willie' Witt liked his alcohol, never in excess, and was reputed to maintain a stash aboard his AVR when on operations. Willie was a very sociable guy and once took me to DC on a weekend so I could visit home (Baltimore). The return trip in his '47 Plymouth sedan, down one of Virginia's secondary highways, on rain-slicked roads, with bald tires, was an unnerving, white knuckle experience. At the traffic intersection to the Little Creek ferry terminal, he rear-ended a vehicle that stopped suddenly for the light. The damage was minimal, but in the process of exchanging names and addresses, he managed to make a date with the driver, a pretty nurse.

QM1 William Clemente was the chief navigator and signalman on the 104. Bill eventually pulled a second tour with BJU2 as an officer and retired as LCDR. His seat of the pants navigation often used his thumb and forefinger in lieu of dividers. He was a never-ending source of encouragement for young officers.

Training exercises

Our primary mission was tactical deception and electronics countermeasures but we were a versatile group with small craft that could be used in a number of ways. One non-military exercise involved a deep-sea fishing

expedition with two boats for Edward R. Murrow. Another involved the destruction of over-aged beer from the base exchange, requiring two boats and a sizeable number of volunteers. Needless to say, most of the beer was processed before going into the ocean. On another instance, we were called on to test some experimental British Search and Rescue and Homing (SARAH) equipment, supervised by a retired admiral who wore his CAPT eagles so as not to disrupt the base. I took him out on the 104 to find the SARAH transmitter which happened to be on Fisherman's Island. The weather was calm and the water so clear we could easily steer between some large, submerged rocks off the beach. I asked him how close he wanted to get; he looked down at the Ford sedan-sized rocks and said, "That's close enough, son!"

One fun exercise was penetrating the harbor defense system at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. LTJG (later RADM) Archie Schwarztrauber was assigned the task with one of the 56-foot LCCs. The LCC was fitted out with a false cabin on the forward deck, spray-painted white, and the after deck was loaded with fishing nets. The crew dressed like fishermen, and I believe one of them even spoke Portuguese. Needless to say, they were intercepted and questioned, but managed to get through, to the embarrassment of the harbor defense command.

Small, fast boats, slightly smaller and slower than PTs, were a great means of conducting sneak attacks on amphibious ships anchored off an invasion beach. The ships were always warned and usually prepared, but the one time I was assigned a 63-footer for operations, I figured a way to get through. I borrowed a two-star admiral's flag and a commander's hat with scrambled eggs on the visor. I returned from an errand just as the engines were warming up, ready to get underway and was surprised to see one of my crew carrying my luggage off the boat and Captain Bucklew sitting in the right-hand bridge chair. When I asked what was going on, Buck replied, pointing to the 104, "The radios don't work - fix it!", then ordered "my" boat away from the pier. Fifteen minutes later, Sanders had everything under control and we were underway.

The story I later got about the sneak attack involved the aircraft carrier, USS Sigourney. They were aware of the threat of torpedo boat attacks, and alert, but when they spied a boat approaching at high speed, with a two star flag and scrambled eggs on the bridge, they manned the rail and prepared to receive the admiral at the outboard plane elevator. The AVR pulled alongside and someone threw a beer bottle up on the platform with a message inside, "You have just been sunk courtesy of Beach Jumper Unit TWO."

In one exercise, the unit was split in two, one group assigned to man and protect Fisherman's Island. I was to lead the invading group. It was a good learning experience, as my "enemy" retrieved the mimeograph masters of our operations plan from the waste basket and knew what we planned, requiring some last minute changes on our part. We holed up with the 104 in Sand Shoals Inlet, on the east side of DelMarVa Peninsula. LTJg Brad Noyes, of the opposing group, took his boat into one of the towns and leaned from some fishermen that "some Navy boat" had gone into the inlet. About dusk, as we were getting underway, we could see Brad's 63 moving into the inlet, looking for us.

We were fairly well hidden by some trees, and he was going up the wrong channel, but there was no way we could get out unobserved. We loaded some weather balloons with window (aluminum chaff to reflect radar), attached blasting caps, and turned them loose after dusk. The resulting cloud of large radar image ensured there was no way he could pick us up with his radar, and we slipped out of the inlet into the sea. Though we had filed a Notice to Mariners that Navy vessels would be operating in the vicinity of FI without lights, the ferry leaving Kiptopeke picked us up on radar as we approached the island and proceeded to light us up with their searchlight. Needless to say, our approach was no surprise. The only casualty of the operation was Chuck, our supply officer, whose shirt and hide were penetrated by the paper wad of a 45 blank cartridge. One interesting repair occurred when the radar antenna motor failed. ET3 Sam Whitesell took the ventilating fan motor from my stateroom and managed to attach it so that we had 1 RPM on the radar.

All of us received training in recon techniques and many of us attended the UDT demolitions training school. It was great fun clearing the beach shrubbery with Bangalore torpedoes and cutting loblolly pines in half with primacord. One other aspect of recon training was learning how to launch and land rubber rafts in the surf, in January. We were supplied with cotton/wool long johns that were supposed to retain body heat when wet and mistakenly told that there was no need to get wet above the knees. Nobody drowned, but we all got wet above the knees and hot showers were welcomed.

Our boats were often called on to transport personnel to the firing range at Bloodworth Island. On one occasion there was a terrific afternoon wind out of the north and we had great difficulty getting a 63 away from the pier. Once we got into Chesapeake Bay, the shallow waters were really churned up. We had a following sea all the way back to Little Creek, and the only recourse was to stay just behind the crest of the wave ahead. With the bow up and the stern down, the crest of the following wave was poised about 8 feet above the well deck, a rather unnerving situation.

At one point, someone decided that we should go north and conduct an operation in winter in Casco Bay, Maine. I was involved in the planning of this operation and coined the name FroGonEx, short for frozen gonad exercise. Buck showed the final operation plan to the admiral, who asked, Buck, what's this 'FrogoNex'. I never heard what the admiral's response was to the question. After living through 27 Maine winters, I think it is fortunate that the exercise was cancelled.

Tactical deception

LCDR Carol Truss was heading the research and development operation when I reported aboard, with LTJG Dick Werner as his assistant. Their task was primarily to find means to make a small boat appear as a ship on enemy radar. Since 104 and 63 foot AVRs were a small radar target and not high enough to be picked up very far beyond the horizon, they tried corner reflectors, largely the kind used by downed flyers in WWII for rescue, to produce a large target. In order to get these reflectors high enough to be picked up miles beyond the horizon, and to represent different size ships, the reflectors were mounted on lightweight, triangular masts erected on the boats. For larger targets, visible at a greater distance, miniature barrage balloons, about 6-8 feet long, were used to fly the reflectors 30-50 feet above a boat. At one point, we obtained balloons with internal, collapsed reflectors that were aerodynamically better and without the relatively heavy, dangling reflectors. This type of deception would be impossible with today's satellite scanning of the earth's surface.

One Beach Jumper Unit was supposed to be capable of representing a Battalion Landing Team of Marines assaulting a beach. To do this, we would have to simulate not only the naval vessels themselves, but the tactics (mine sweeping, naval gunfire support and transports) and also the tactical and pre-operation administrative communications. Although we experimented with communications deception, studying, recording, and scripting tactical traffic, we never got to the point of actually doing it. There were too many other tasks and not enough personnel.

Each spring we conducted a simulated landing off Onslow Beach, NC, in conjunction with a large amphibious exercise. One operation that I recall simulated the shipping and used smokescreens off the beach and para-dummies dropped behind the beach to create confusion. Para-dummies were miniature figures parachuted behind enemy lines which, on hitting the ground, produced pyrotechnics that sounded like sub-machine guns. They were very effective in Europe in WWII. The only simulation of gunfire support was at the firing range at Bloodworth Island with 5-inch rockets.

We listened to and recorded many tactical circuits to get an idea of the kind of traffic involved but never actually tried any. Admin traffic would have to begin in advance of a real operation, peak before sailing, then drop off. Radio silence would prevail until operations began off the target beachhead, then the tactical traffic would begin. Most admin traffic would be in 5-letter code groups, easily simulated.

Window, or chaff, reflective metal foil cut to enemy radar frequencies, could be employed to screen vessels. The only time we used it was in some unit exercises. The chaff was loaded into weather balloons, inflated with helium, with a blasting cap and short fuse to spread it. The only time we used it, in a dead calm, the balloon was very slow to rise, a concern to all on deck.

We once tested the 5-inch rockets at the Bloodworth Island range. Spray from the moderate seas shorted out several launchers and it was too dangerous to try to retrieve the rockets. On the return trip down Chesapeake Bay, rockets on the last boat in column finally ignited and fortunately overshot the entire column, the only time in four years that I was exposed to 'enemy' fire.

We also had a small recon team, originated by LT Robert Coughlan. LTjgs Chuck Pollock, Vern Wynott and Bernie Wolfe were the three officers that I remember as being active. They scored a 'coup' working with aggressor cadre in one of the spring amphibious exercises by capturing the USMC headquarters and staff. We worked with both UDT and USMC recon teams, using our boats to drop them off at 'enemy' beaches. One group scared the daylighters out of an illegal beach party at Camp Pendleton, just above Virginia Beach, and ended up invited to share their beer.

We had several smoke generators, but the only time I think they were used was in our simulated assault in spring 1953.

Electronics Department

After LCDR Truss was released from active duty, the R&D Division was eliminated. The work of maintaining the balloons and masts was taken over by the Boat Division. Electronic Technicians were under LTJG Bob Skorheim, Communications under me, and Radar/Sonar under LTjg Brad Noyes., ENS Jack Marscher came in as Asst. Communications Officer, and ENS Dick Kenyon took over the ETs when Bob Skorheim left. Shortly thereafter, LTjg Bob 'Mac' MacBride came aboard and took over Radar/Sonar, Brad went to Operations, Jack took communications and I was assigned as Electronics Department Head.

The four of us - Kenyon, MacBride, Marscher, and I got along extremely well, and still do after more than 50 years. In 40 years of working in organizations, this was the closest thing to an organism that I ever experienced. Fortunately, the three of them were all electrical engineers and very proficient in electronics. I only knew enough to be dangerous, but I did have a vision of what we could and should do. Working together, instead of as three separate divisions, we began tackling some of the problems that had plagued us for years, chiefly equipment maintenance and radio reliability. Small boats, close to the water, without heat, were hell on electronics equipment and we did not have enough ETs to keep up with the problems. We began a preventive maintenance program in which the ETs taught the radio, radar and sonar operators to perform rudimentary checks and cleaning to improve operating reliability, and it worked.

Radio communications had always been a problem. We had five HF, VHF and UHF transceivers on each boat and often, when underway, all boats could not communicate on one circuit. It was frustrating to try to maneuver 6-12 boats simultaneously when instructions had to be relayed. One problem was the number of antennas on each boat, a small boat with radar, 5 whip antennae, two direction finder antennae, intercept antennas, and often an aluminum mast for radar reflectors. To try and solve the problem, we did an antenna radiation study by mooring one boat and having it transmit, one frequency band at a time, while a second boat with a signal strength meter circled it and noted the blind spots. After charting the blind spots, we realized that much of the signal loss was a result of antenna placement.

I called BuShips, eventually finding the responsible person, told him what we had found and asked if there was any particular reason for the antennae placement. His reply, "We put them wherever we could find room." I asked if we could change it, expecting some bureaucratic red tape. He said we could change them any way we liked, we did, and that eliminated the problem.

The classic example of communications deception was before our first operation, a false message, sent on the FOX circuit, calling all ship captains to a meeting with the admiral. There were a number of red faced captains at the meeting. We had the latest (then) equipment for electronic intercept and determining the direction and approximate signal strength. These were never used against an actual enemy but they made it possible to locate and screw up PhibLant and USMC communications on operations. Brad Noyes and I were both sent to the one-month ECM school at Great Lakes early in our careers

Our attempts to confuse USN and USMC communications had a noticeable effect on improving PhibLant communications security. We could intercept tactical circuits, jump in with appropriate call signs and pass false messages. We also clogged circuits with bogus transmissions and jamming. On the first exercise where we employed these tactics, normal communications were so screwed up that we couldn't make them worse, but the next year, the amount of superfluous traffic was down and we could easily work our way into tactical circuits and disrupt operations. The next year, the fleet was more attentive and many insisted on

authentication. We didn't harm the enemy, but we sure did improve the performance of our own ships and troops.

LCDR Phil H. Bucklew

Called 'Buck' by his friends, he was one of the most decorated naval heroes of WWII, with two Navy Crosses. He is often referred to as "the father of navy special operations", and the SEAL Training Center in Coronado, CA, is named after him. During my time at BJU-2, a 30 minute TV program, "A bucket of sand", reputedly described one of his several recons of the French coast to determine the suitability of beach soils for transit by tracked vehicles. He was a very modest man and few of us were aware of his reputation. He is buried in Arlington.

Buck had been a football coach at Bucknell and was coach of the NavPhiBase football and baseball teams. Many of the PhibLant baseball and football athletes were assigned to BJU-2 and some on the roster were never seen. As a coach, he could be heard at quite some distance without any need for an amplifier. On one trip up the ICW after operations, my 63 was anchored out in one of the sounds. In the morning, while my crew sat on the flying bridge and watched, I took a swab and swabbed the foredeck to remove the morning dew. Buck, on the 104, nearly 200 yards away, yelled, "Hoffman, put that swab down!" We heard him.

Another occasion was early in my time at BJU-2 when he asked me to report on our capabilities in communications deception. He was referring to the forthcoming PhibLant spring exercise, I spoke on our ability to deceive the Russians. At that point, we had about 30 officers on board, new ensigns and short-timer LTs, crowded into the classroom in the tin shack behind the brig. About 1/3 of the way through my presentation, his loud, clear voice from the back of the room interrupted, explaining that I was not addressing the issue. My response began with, "I assumed....." interrupted by a loud "Don't ever assume anything!" It was probably the most embarrassing moment of my life to be chewed out royally in front of that group.

In major training operations, when Buck rode the 104, he insisted that I be aboard. If anything went wrong with communications, a common occurrence, he chewed me out, publicly. It was so bad that many officers and enlisted men privately expressed their sympathy for me. Strangely, it never affected me, as I was not really responsible. I just had to grin and bear it. He eventually confided in me that the reason he picked on me was that the officer responsible for the problems would defy correction but would feel sorry for me and do his job.

When ERB was promoted to LCDR, he was over rank for the exec position and was soon transferred. As the senior JG in the outfit, I was named acting XO, a task that I really enjoyed, except for conducting inspections. With all of the admin work as Electronics Dept. Head, I had worked closely with the XO and was well acquainted with the task. As XO, I was supposed to know the COs whereabouts when he was absent. As he left one day, I asked where he was going. The response, by one with a bald head and only a fringe of hair, "To get a haircut," left no doubt as to his destination essentially, "It's none of your business."

The one occasion that was forever etched in my memory was the day I realized that I was a day late getting an important report to the admiral's office. Buck was headed out the door when I realized my failure and mentioned it to him. He stopped, picked up my phone, called the Chief of Staff, and told him, "I screwed up. That report the admiral wanted isn't finished." No blame, no reprimand, just the admission of his ultimate responsibility. A real man! The report went out that afternoon.

Bucklew was transferred out in late 1955 or early 1956 and replaced by LCDR Vincent Bono. Before he left, Buck tried to get me to ship over and go to the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey to pursue electronics. I told him I did not have the technical background, but he said he could get a waiver. It was tempting, but I declined and have never regretted my decision. I have always loved the Navy, but it was not the career for me. After my release in May, 1956, I stayed in touch with Buck, including visits when I was in the DC area, until he died. I was in Alaska at the time but on several trips east managed to visit his widow, Helen, until she passed away. The one time we had Buck and Helen at our home for dinner, I let him run my model railroad. He figured that was the highest tribute I could pay to anyone.

Ingenuity

BJU-2, known unofficially as Bucklew's Canoe Club, was a can-do outfit. We did not have enough ETs to properly maintain our electronic equipment, and we did not have some of the tools we needed, but we did our job. Lacking a jammer for screwing up 'enemy' radio transmissions, the ETs built one, and some signal generators for playing 'bagpipes'. And some of the equipment we needed but could not acquire through channels mysteriously showed up. Unfortunately, some of our procurement activities upset other Navy units and it was impossible to even go aboard other ships to get showers when we were on operations. Eventually we had an LST assigned for PhibLant operations to carry some of our gear, our supply officer, and provide showers in Morehead City. The LST, on one really rough trip, reputedly passed Cape Hatteras four times in one 4-hour watch..

I figured I had 'arrived' when, two weeks after one exercise, I received a phone call asking if I knew the whereabouts of a piece of equipment we needed. I was innocent, and never stole anything, but I could be persuasive. We received ten of the newest small, lightweight walkie-talkies, but no batteries, and no authority to legally draw batteries, an expendable item. At that point, the batteries weren't even in the navy supply system. In desperation, while operating with aggressor cadre at Camp Lejeune, and knowing that the Marines had both radios and batteries, I went to the USMC supply depot. After pleading with the Marine captain for about 20 minutes, he, with tears streaming down his cheeks, gave me ten batteries. Our recon boys put them to good use against the Marine defenders. and one of our radioman even sat on top of a Marine observation tower 'excellent reception' -- and passed false traffic on their tactical circuits.

At that time, the Navy was switching from the old, metal spare parts boxes for each piece of equipment to an inventory system of individual parts. But there were many of the parts boxes at NAS salvage and we could easily get them. I don't remember how it worked, but that was immaterial. We would get parts boxes for radar transmitters, remove the magnetron tubes, and turn the tubes into the supply system for a monetary credit. We then used the credits to purchase the latest 'kytoons', miniature barrage balloons with internal radar reflectors.

One of the rumored procurement actions involved a chrome-plated, 20-foot whip antenna, acquired from Admiral Fahrion's barge, located inside a boathouse, guarded by a sentry. It was quickly painted black and installed on one of the AVRs, and, despite a lengthy search, it was never recovered. After the admiral retired, the black paint was removed. I think Baum, then elevated to Boat Captain of an AVR, was at least involved in the installation of the antenna on his boat.

We probably had one of the first front-wheel drive vehicles in the US, and the only front-wheel drive jeep. When the rear end failed, Chief Sanders simply shifted it into four-wheel drive and we used it that way for several weeks until we could get it repaired.

Morale

Esprit de corps was high in BJU-2. Our mission was classified top secret and much our equipment was classified secret or confidential. Nobody else knew who we were or what we did, and there was much conjecture among other navy personnel. The unit's 'honor' was often defended with fists, and I served on one court martial board dealing with a BJ involved in a brawl in East Ocean View.

Officially, fraternization among officers and enlisted men was frowned upon, but we negotiated that easily. Two officers and 8 men working on a 63-foot boat become close, especially when both throw up in the same bucket. My wife and I never had a problem getting baby sitters 'any man would happily sit in a quiet home with his feet propped up and a television to watch'. Some absolutely refused to accept payment, but ET Sam Whitesell loved White Owl cigars and would not turn down a box. Ed Clark, then RM3, and his buddy Ruby Prow both played guitars and came to the house one time to jam. Ed bought my drums when I left.

On my first two-week reserve cruise as a 17-year-old Apprentice Seaman, a 6'-4", well-proportioned BM1 named Sepulvedo protected me in a bar in Newport News. When a sailor at an adjoining table tried to force me to drink a beer, Sepulvedo stood up and said, "If my buddy don't want beer, he don't have to drink

beer.” End of discussion. A similar occurrence took place in Miami on one of our southern operations. Most of the unit went on liberty the first night in Miami, and Bucklew cornered LTjg Brad Noyes and I to act as Shore Patrol, a rather unusual assignment. Brad and I each got an SP armband, a belt with an empty 45, and we were assigned a jeep. We checked out most of the bars in south Miami, and at one, where several of our men were ‘relaxing’, a large, somewhat inebriated Marine asked, “What are you two boys gonna do if I decide to work you over?” Several BJs arose from the next booth and one said, “You’ll have to go through ten of us, first!” End of discussion.

Security

Most of our mission was classified as SECRET or TOP SECRET, much of our equipment was classified as CONFIDENTIAL, and we were careful to whom we talked, what we said, and who was allowed inside the compound. At one point, I was sent to DC for a week for a TOP SECRET school on tactical deception. I had an interim clearance and on arriving for the first day of class was denied access and left to sit in the hallway. By early afternoon I was cleared and able to attend classes. Some of the documents we read had only been seen by half a dozen other people. Believe me, I forgot what I read so I could never be charged with a security leak. I am appalled at the current (2014) lack of security.

Social life

There were not many opportunities for social life for young, unmarried officers. If you were single and carefree, there was always the ‘O Club’ and there was no shortage of feminine companionship. If you were committed to someone who did not live in the Norfolk area, you had a problem. Archie Schartztrauber and I graduated from OCS in the same class and shared a room in the BOQ. Arch had a girl in New Jersey and I had one in Connecticut. The year was 1952 and I had a 1939 Olds with a leaking rear main bearing. We used my car until Arch got a 1950 Olds 88 with the ‘Rocket Engine’.

The problem of getting north was the Kiptopeke ferry, dubbed the Kipoptapeck ferry by ENS Ken Kern.. The ferry left Little Creek around 5:30 PM and made it to the DelMarVa Peninsula in about an hour and a half. The alternative was driving around through Richmond, DC and Baltimore, about 250-300 extra miles, and much traffic. The problem on Friday afternoon, there were a lot of sailors heading north via ferry. In order to get on the ferry, you had to be in line about 1:30 PM. There were enough BJs going north that one would drive to the ferry and get in line right after lunch and 4 or 5 others would take turns sitting in the car until 1630 liberty when everybody could get to the car. Fortunately, it was not until the week after I was married and had my new wife in Norfolk that the unit had a 1630 muster.

Those trips up the peninsula were interesting. Most could sleep and we took turns driving. The road was flat and straight and sometimes speed got a little out of control. We were pulled over one night and bought several yards of pavement for one of the small towns in Maryland. I remember waking up one night to see the speedometer of the Rocket 88 at 80 and a guy hanging over the back seat saying, “Faster, Mr. Werner, faster!” My car had a preprogrammed speed of 65 with frequent stops ‘every 50-100 miles’ to add oil because of the rear main leak. After most of us were married and somewhat settled, the travel ceased.

Plane schedules were as bad as the ferry. One night when I had the duty, one of the enlisted men woke me to sign him out on leave at 0001, but his plane left at something like 0045. There was no way he could get a cab, sign out at 0001 and get to the air terminal for the plane. What do you do? I left the ‘brig’ to check the mess hall on the main base, and on the way drove him to the airport in my car and signed him out at 0001.

Married couples usually started out in a furnished apartment in Bondale, just off the base in Norfolk. The rent was \$40 a week and my take home, because of a ‘dead horse’ to buy uniforms, was \$160 a month. Fortunately, Brad Noyes and I were both saved at the same time to attend ECM school in Great Lakes. What few personal belongings we had both of us could fit them in our cars were stored in the old cow barn with the balloons and radar reflectors. We came back from GLAKES to find apartments ready at the new Wherry Housing across from the main gate. Archie was already living there, having moved in while the toilet was still sitting in the middle of the living room floor. If the cockroaches weren’t already there, they traveled in the folds of paper bags from the commissary. The three of us lived in adjoining apartments, Brad in the middle unit.

Wherry Housing was a target for an unending succession of salesmen who bugged you every evening to buy something you didn't need or couldn't afford. Fortunately, Brad and June had a Doberman, Suzanne, on a chain long enough to protect our two doorways. One of Susanne's toys was a baby doll named 'Baby'. Brad would throw it out on the lawn and say, "Go get Baby!" Susanne would grab the doll and shake it fiercely as she brought it back. When June became pregnant with Gail, 'Baby' had a new meaning, and value. Susanne had to go. There were some nice homes in the Wherry project for married personnel with children. Across the street from us was a CPO with several kids and a four striper with some teens. Rank didn't interfere with neighborliness.

Night life varied. Marge and I spent nights at the NAS hobby shop refinishing antiques that we bought cheap from a junk shop on East Ocean View Avenue. Our mattress rested on four metal milk crates from the commissary and our furniture was either early attic, unfinished or railroad salvage. When Bob MacBride came aboard, he and his wife Marge hosted a weekly game of cut-throat Monopoly, accompanied with a bottle of Andy Griffith's 'big orange'. Occasionally, the unit held a cocktail party at the 'O Club'. We all chipped in the estimated cost, but some folks stashed extra drinks in the windows before the bar closed. The result was a bill from the 'O Club' about a week later which did not sit well with those of us who didn't drink. At one point, the scheduled cocktail party conflicted with my planned leave to go north. But me and my big mouth, when the organizers came around, I said, "I'm not going to subsidize everybody else's drinking!" Somehow, I ended up with the duty the night of the party and was a day late going on leave. At the next scheduled affair, there were enough of us malcontents that we had a dinner party instead of a cocktail party.

Supply Officers

We had two supply officers during my tenure at BJU2, the first of whom I believe was named Dukeshier. He had an unusual accident, likely under the influence, with his car. I am sure the story he told the insurance company was not the same one he told his wife. He was following too close and plowed into the car ahead when it slowed, causing the hood to fly back over the windshield, then was hit by the car behind. His story the windshield flew up in the wind, blocking his vision, and the guy ahead, hearing the noise, stopped. Duke then plowed into that car and was rammed from behind by the car following him. Duke made me sign out for every piece of electronic equipment in the department.

Duke's replacement, Chuck, didn't commit any sin worthy of remembering his last name, but I do recall that he was shot with a 45 while defending Fisherman's Island during an exercise. The paper wad of the blank cartridge passed through his shirt and skin and entered his flesh, necessitating prompt medical attention. When I left the unit, he supervised my turning over all of the electronic equipment that was signed out to me that included all of the radio, radar and ECM equipment on all of the boats and vehicles. I was released from everything but one test meter. Nobody could find the custody card, so I refused to return the meter. I kept it for about 20 years before giving it to someone who could use it.

Inspections

I never liked inspections, especially in my last year; as acting exec, I had to conduct them. But we had all kinds of inspections by higher authority operational readiness and administrative. I remember one, in particular, a physical inspection of all of our equipment, checked against our allowance list. Because we had acquired some equipment outside the supply system (a nice way to put it), we had a problem. We loaded all of the stuff we did not legally own into a 3/4 ton weapons carrier we weren't supposed to have and assigned a man we were not supposed to have, to drive it around the base until the inspection was over.

RM3 Ed Clark recently reminded me of another inspection in which he returned from liberty too late to shower, shave, dress, and get to his duty station. I don't recall the incident, but according to Ed, I told him to strip his bed, put everything in his locker, lock it, and get lost. When he ran into Captain Bucklew after the inspection, Buck asked Ed if he had been the 'authorized absentee'.

In good weather, we always mustered in front of the brig for morning quarters,. Fortunately, we never mustered on Friday afternoons when there was usually one unauthorized absentee tending to a car in the line for the Kiptopeke ferry.

Hurricanes

Fortunately, we did not have as many hurricanes as the east coast has had in recent years, but they always required some extra effort to prevent damage. There wasn't much we could do with the boats but maintain a partial crew to watch lines and, if necessary, pump bilges. I always got a chuckle out of staking down the 20-ton radar van along with the other motor vehicles. I recall one time when we went to sea as the fleet headed for storm anchorage, the cause of many seasick sailors. At home, we always filled the bath tub with water. Our only family casualty -- the hood of our new, '53 Buick was sandblasted in one storm and had to be repainted.

LT. Ben Hoffman

c 2018