

From George Hecker, one of our WWII Tarheel Base Subvets, whose observation of a recent sub school graduation would be of interest to all of us.

Lucia and I attended subject event for a small (4) reunion of TIRANTE ('56-'58). We had a great time. The last time I was in New London was 1958, so it was a big deal to me. I was so impressed with the whole scene I wrote out my observations Best regards to all, George Hecker.

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Men for Our Times

If you are afraid that today's teenagers show little sign of preparing to become responsible citizens, then you need to read on.

Recently at a reunion of submarine veterans in Groton, Connecticut, we had the privilege of attending a graduation ceremony of enlisted basic submarine school students. There were about 200 of them and they were impressive sitting silently erect in their immaculate, pressed whites and very short haircuts. The staff welcomed us and identified us to the class as the men who have set the outstanding standard of service for them to match or exceed.

The ceremony was conducted by Navy Master Chief Gaylord Humphries ETCM(SS) - Master Chief Electronics Technician - Qualified in Submarines. His size, tailor-made to fit comfortably in tight spaces aboard a sub, and demeanor, crisp and friendly, briefly masked the fingertip control this highly decorated leader had over his charges who instantly, in perfect unison, raised a resounding "HOO-YAH", at signaled points.

The keynote address was given by another staff member, Chief Wes Koshoffer CMDCM(SS) - Command Master Chief - Qualified in Submarines. The address was another stellar performance, both in appearance and delivery. This was without doubt the best motivational speech I have ever heard in similar circumstances, and at 87, I have heard many. Again in a friendly relaxed manner, not preaching or even lecturing, the Chief gave the graduates clear guidance for their future performance of duty, emphasizing preservation of personal integrity.

Before and after the ceremony, we had an opportunity to talk to groups of the young men, ages 17 to 20. They came from all over the country and from all backgrounds. Most had completed high school. The others were accepted on the basis of GED scores. Several of those I spoke with had not concentrated on academic courses in high school. Two we talked to who had not completed high school, scored high enough on their tests to be selected for tough class A schools (such as Electronics Technician).

The presentation of diplomas was conducted in a relaxed and friendly manner; Chief Humphries announcing the names and rates of the men as they came on the stage, and Chief Koshoffer presenting the diplomas, each with a personal comment and embellished handshake. Friends and families present were encouraged to take pictures, and the flow across stage was frequently interrupted with good humor until the photos were taken.

The Submarine Veterans and their guests were given tours and demonstrations of the training facilities. These included firefighting, damage control, torpedo maintenance, submarine escape training, and electronic practice with firearms. Here again, the young men conducting the demonstrations were knowledgeable, confident and eloquent.

We visited the USS VIRGINIA, recently returned from an extensive deployment. Our guide was a Radioman Third Class. It was awesome that this young man, perhaps 20, could explain the functioning of the ship so clearly and in great detail in every compartment and at each station.

The last event for the submarine veterans was a banquet. We were fortunate to have two of the sub school students join our table, so that we could continue our contact between the past and the future. One young man said that his grandfather had made war patrols aboard the USS CARBONERO during World War II, and wondered if there was anyone present who had also served on her. An announcement over the PA system produced such a man, complete with the sub's logo on his jacket. It was said that both men were seen to dab their eyes.

The young men in our submarine force today are sharper, better educated, more self assured and more articulate than the outstanding sailors we went to sea with in the 40's. They have to be in order to deal with the vastly increased complexities and capabilities of their submarines. One submarine today has potentially more firepower than a World War II Task Force, and its mission can be conducted without being detected.

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