

## **A Holy Loch Duty Day** **LCDR Steve Kurak, USN, Ret.**

In 1990 I was serving in USS *SIMON LAKE* (AS-33) anchored out in the Holy Loch, near Dunoon Scotland. In addition to *SIMON LAKE*, there was A YNFB Barge (a Steel Covered Lighter) which housed the Tug and Boat Ops crew, a floating dry dock and a floating crane. COM-SUBRON 14 was embarked on *SIMON LAKE*. Collectively, we were referred to as "Site One".

The mission of Site One was the refit of Ballistic Missile Submarines. We were anchored out in the Loch due to British political sensibilities about US Nuclear Submarines touching the Homeland. Because of this, Site On personnel had short ride on a "Mike Boat" to transit between site and shore.

I stood in-port duty as Command Duty Officer (CDO) for *SIMON LAKE*. One day when I left home to assume the duty, it was windy and rainy. The official Navy forecast out of Norfolk called for 25 - 35 knot winds gusting up to 45. The BBC called for much higher winds - Force 9 gales to last 2 - 3 days.

The daily routine started off normally. The ship was scheduled for a general quarters drill, which would include "pulling fires" in the boiler room. The engineers would use this opportunity to perform "cold iron" maintenance. The ship and the submarine alongside were both to go on emergency diesel generator from 1500 to 1800.

By noon, the winds were sustained at 30 knots and we secured operation of fiberglass bottom boats. The alongside sub (T-1) was unhappy with their moor and requested a tug alongside so that they could adjust their mooring lines. During this evolution, they parted the tattletale on number 4 line due to excess strain. As a result, they contacted the tender and requested line handlers to "triple" #4 line. Because of *SIMON LAKE*'s configuration, line handling a sub requires putting a man over the side in a bosn chair to put the line over the bollard.

By this time the winds were gusting to 40 knots, so I ensured that we had a good crew, led by a BM2. Shortly after tripling line #4, the T-1 Duty Officer called me and said that the after fender was "not doing its job". They were concerned that the fender was too low in the water and

that the separation between sub and tender was not enough to keep the sub's stern planes from hitting the tender. Despite our protestations that submarines had been moored in the same manner for 30 years, they continued their complaint and finally won squadron over to their side, and we made preparations to adjust the height of the fender by lifting it with a crane and shortening the strap by which it was hung from the tender.

The winds now sustained at 40 knots and I had to get CO's permission to use a crane. Just as we were about to raise the fender, T-1's engineer came up to the main deck and asked me how we wouldn't lift the fender too high. I told him "because we know what we are doing, and this is the only way it is going to get done. He stomped off and we completed the evolution.

The sub was still unhappy with the moor and was lobbying for a third fender to be placed in the water. The wind was gusting to 50 knots and by rights all cranes should have been cradled. We agreed in principle to give them a third fender, but it was now 1430 with loss of ships power schedule to occur in thirty minutes, our electric cranes would be unable to provide.

The next few hours were relatively quiet. 1800 came and went and we were still operating on emergency diesel. At 1900 the EDO told me that they would be lighting fires in #1 boiler and the ship would be back to normal power approximately one hour later. At 1930 I received the word - "pulled fires in #1 boiler due to cracked atomizing steam strainer cap. ETR 20 minutes. At 2030 I was told that we were again lighting fires in #1 boiler.

Shortly after, I was making a tour on deck. This was becoming difficult, as the winds were now sustained at 50 knots and gusting to 60. While checking the forward anchor chain, I noticed a geyser of water shooting out from the mooring buoy. A check of the potable water line confirmed my guess. Our potable water line from the local water works had parted from the motion of the mooring buoy. I notified the waterworks, secured the onboard fill valves, and got CO's permission to light off evaporators.

About this time, I was receiving frequent calls from the OOD recommending that we secure all small boat operations. I was reluctant to do this because the 1st Lieutenant did not deem it necessary and also

because of the overall disruption to the ship caused by securing boat ops. I was down at the quarterdeck discussing this when a frantic voice came over the radio saying that there was fuel oil spilling out of the YNFB-31 (31 Barge).

We tried to talk to the voice on the radio, but he was panicked. I went down to the barge into the boat dispatch office and talked to the Petty Officer, but he was freaked and couldn't tell me anything. I went around to the side of the barge and saw what had happened. The boat landing pontoon, which is chained to the barge had rocked so violently that the padeye on the side of the 31 barge had been ripped out. This particular bulkhead happened to be part of a fuel oil storage tank. Suitably impressed at the volume of fuel oil pouring out of the hole, I ran back up to the ship, secured boat ops and called away the duty fire party.

In a short time, I had a large number of people mustered on the fantail. Someone ran down to the barge and pounded DC plugs into the hole and stopped the spill. About this time the CHENG arrived on the scene and took charge. The 1st Lieutenant was close on his heels and I left it for them to resolve.

About this time, the wind shifted direction a little, which kicked up the seas even more. One of the results was that the garbage barge started to beat fiercely against the side of the ship. We talked of moving it but decided it was too dangerous to put someone on the barge to untie it from the tender.

Shortly after that, it was reported that there was a CONEX box adrift in the lock and it was pounding against Arnandam pier, where we pick up and discharge people coming out to Site One. The shore based Naval Support Activity (NSA) CDO expressed concern that the CONEX box was doing damage to the pier and secured the pier to traffic. We again discussed getting a tug underway to tow the container way from the pier but realized the water was too shallow. We instead got an LCM-8 boat underway, but the water was too shallow for even that.

We secured boat ops and made arrangements with NSA that any personnel stranded ashore would be put up in the club for the night. By now it was almost 2300. The banging of the garbage barge against the ship was getting worse and my Greek chorus of Repair Officer, CHENG, and 1st Lieutenant kept telling me to move the garbage barge. The 1st LT fi-

nally came up with the scenario that if the barge parted its lines it would wind up on the front of the sub. That sold me. I carried that thought to the squadron Duty Officer who carried it to the Commodore. He agreed that it was sufficient reason to get a tug crew underway.

Even before the tug was underway, I got the word that the YC (flat) barge on the port side of the tender had parted its forward mooring line. Sure enough, it had given up fighting, had broken the forward line and was now righting straight into the sea (probably a good move).

I then spent the next ninety minutes with my heart in my throat while the tug crew moved the garbage barge and then put guys on the YC barge to re-secure the forward mooring line. This was a tough evolution. The sea was crashing over the forward end of the barge and sending huge sprays over the surface. At one point I thought that the line handlers were simply going to quit, they all huddled behind the nearest break. From the main deck I could sense their fear and bewilderment. To their credit they made a made a bight out of the line that was left on board the barge, got it over the bollard and got back on the tug - in 70 knot winds.

Once this evolution was over, I thought that I could call it a night. I was walking aft with the duty Bosn to check the after anchor. When I got to the QDeck the OOD said "I just got word of a medical emergency in CIC, I have no other details." I ran up there and found that a female Sailor had fainted while talking to her Marine boyfriend. There was a Doctor in attendance, so I left it alone.

It was 0230. I went to bed. I got up at 0530 and briefed the CO by phone. NSA inspected the pier and decided it was safe. I restarted boatops. By 0720 it was business as usual at Site One.