

Subj: **Wow!!!**  
Date: 9/6/02 8:33:53 PM Pacific Daylight Time  
From: [REDACTED] (Deb Bruels)  
To: [REDACTED]

Melanie,

I guess the subject line says it all. I am actually writing this e-mail to you from my wife's account (she said she had already e-mailed you). I was the Comms and Ops Officer aboard the Point Loma during the 1977-1978 timeframe. I was actually relieved by the woman Lieutenant (can't remember her name – she had come from a tour at NSA) that you refer to. I heard that she had been discovered in the rack with Dick Waer (sp?) (who was the CO at the time) by the duty radioman with an Op Immediate message sometime during a mid-watch at sea. I hadn't heard about the pregnancy part or that they got married. What I did hear was that he got to retire with no penalty and that she had to leave the Navy. Let me tell you a little about the Point Loma story from my perspective – there was some bad news, but also quite a bit of good news.

I joined Point Loma after having spent my first 3.5 years on an LST. I was trying to get into the Navy's oceanographic program (had a degree in marine biology – had been a NROTC regular) and much of it had been outsourced to Scripps and Woods Hole. Point Loma was one of the few places that you could still get an 1820 designator change based on working with Trieste on some of the oceanographic missions that were being done then. Point Loma was actually a pretty tight ship at that point. Both the CO (Bud Branchflower) and XO (Dick Abbott) were old diesel boat guys but were pretty squared away. The SWO qualifications at that point were pretty stringent. I had gotten about half-way through the certification on my previous ship (the program only started in about 1976) and I had to finish it on Point Loma. They really held me to the task (by the way, I ultimately got nominated for the SUBPAC ship handler of the year award, although they ultimately gave it to a submariner (I would have gotten my choice of sub duty had I won – no thanks!!).

Unlike your week in and week out drill, we spent huge amounts of time at sea (in fact, the Navy classified Point Loma as hardship duty during that time). I picked up Point Loma mid-deployment in 1977 in Guantanamo Bay. They had just finished a dive series on the Puerto Rico trench – an underwater cliff that goes 16,000 feet straight down! On board at the time were both Bob Ballard (Titanic fame) and Emory Kristoff (photographer from National Geographic). We then went on to do some other oceanographic dives (e.g., Black Bahamas Outer Ridge with the Lamont Doherty Geological Observatory and another Continental Shelf dive with URI and U of Miami). However, on that cruise, we did another classified dive series where we MOD'ed OUT of the system (remember your old Ops Officer training!) for a month. While I can't describe what we did, you would have been proud. The drill on that deployment went like this: out for three weeks, in for three days (to provision), then two more reps like that, then three weeks in for an availability. Life at sea for that long got kind of interesting. You tried to maintain as much discipline as you could, but one concession was on Sunday where you could wear anything you wanted as long as you weren't on watch and there would often be volleyball in the well deck, BBQs, etc.

I also did the Mid-Pac cruise. The reason for the cruise can probably be disclosed now. You may or may not know that the Pac Missile Test Center is

507

out in that area and there are multiple rings of transducers that pick up the sound of the splash of a test missile coming in. One whole section of a ring suddenly went dead (unfortunately, these weren't powered in a conventional way – you figure it out!) and there was a great deal of concern that the Soviets were playing some tricks! So our job was to go find out what was going on. After the transit, we had to wait on weather for 3 weeks before we could dive. For about 3 days, we were allowed into port in Midway. This was right after they had changed Midway from being a family tour to being an unaccompanied tour (hence they had a lot of housing units they had to get rid of – more on that in a minute!). During our 3 days in port, the crew managed to buy out the club liquor store, drive most of the bicycles (the primary mode of transportation on the island) off the end of the pier into the ocean, hide out in the female enlisted quarters' shower room, etc. Needless to say, the base commander wasn't too thrilled. We did have an opportunity for redemption, however. They needed help burning the housing units to the ground so they could reclaim the land. Unfortunately our fire starting far exceeded our ability to put them out and we had an out of control fire for about four hours. For this distinguished service, we were asked to leave town – and wait at sea for nearly three weeks before we could dive. Upon diving, we discovered that the transducers were still there, but the piping carrying the power from the generator to the transducer was made of soft metal and had corroded – all of them went within days of each other. The rest of the cruise was largely uneventful. By the way, regarding pilots and potential groundings, I had the deck going into Midway – a very narrow channel with a good current and coral on both sides. If you were ever the OOD, you will remember that having a single screw and a single rudder made the Point Loma a real dog! It also had a terrible habit of backing to port. Well, the pilot was going way to fast and tried to back down when it was going in too fast. I had to grab the deck from the pilot to keep us from running aground (this was one of the big reasons I got my shiphandler nomination).

When we came back, we pulled into the yards in Long Beach. This must have been when the missile tracking mods were done. That also when we got our first complement of women on board – but first, about Dick Waer. Dick had been somewhat disgraced in his previous sub command and had been sent to shore duty at COMSUBDEVGRU One. I had met him when I was TDY to DEVGRU before I flew out to pick up the ship. A very smart man, but not a leader at all. He flew out for a couple of inspections when I was on board, but never seemed like anything but a staff guy. Everyone (including Branchflower) was surprised that Dick took over. I was shocked at how little he understood about seamanship – especially surface seamanship. In terms of his tendencies towards women, my wife, Deb, reminds me that he made a pass at her at one of the wardroom parties. I don't remember his wife – that may say something right there. Anyway, back to the women coming on board. There was a lot of controversy surrounding the women arriving. a few months before, the Norton Sound ( a tender that was the first ship to have women on board) had one of the enlisted women commit suicide after she had a bad break-up with one of the bosun' mates. During one night (on the mid-watch) she made her way to the fantail, removed all her clothes (which she folded into a neat pile) and went over the side. The fantail watch found the pile of clothes about an hour later and they searched – to no avail. Anyway, the officers that came aboard (as I remember, there were five – Admin, Ops, MPO, and DCA, and Deck) were all volunteers; the 40 enlisted weren't volunteers – many hated the idea of sea duty and tried the "lesbian" trick to get off of sea duty (the same thing that the guys had done in 1975). I guess what you are saying, however, was that it might not

508

have been a ploy – they really were lesbians!! I, frankly, was worried – not because women shouldn't have been at sea, but because you were forcing the marriage in possibly the worst test case environment because of the extended periods at sea (I heard that they went from volleyball in the well deck to disco in the well deck). Before I left, the spouses (both the wives of the husbands and the husbands of the wives) were expressing a lot of concern.

Anyway, I'm really sorry to hear what happened and how it impacted you. While the timing may have been right, the experiment was dead wrong. You had a ship that was barely in the Navy, led by a bunch of officers who had no home (diesels were on their way out) and didn't know surface warfare. I got my SCI tickets through some of those unmentionable ops, left the Point Loma and spent about 1.5 years in the Naval Security Group before I punched out. How has your life gone from there? ★

sorry to ramble on, but I thought I would share some of the stories – there are many more. If you want to contact me, my e-mail address is [REDACTED]. Hope to hear from you. Glen

\_\_\_\_ Headers \_\_\_\_\_