



"Bryce Wellnitz" [REDACTED] on 05/21/2001 07:54:46 PM

Please respond to "Bryce Wellnitz" [REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]
cc:
Subject: Re: Reply to your USS Point Loma message

I remember you quite well, Melanie. There was no doubt when you came on board that you had your S___ together. For that, I was grateful beyond words.

I am no longer sure about the time-lines on some of these incidents but here we go:

When I reported for duty early 1979, I found a ship covered in rust, dirt in corners of passageways, bunkrooms, etc. The first thing I discovered in the Navigation team was that all the PQF's for the QM's had been gun-decked by the Chief I had relieved. There was a single book of training records that I found about 2 months later that was so far out of date it was appalling. The last entry was early 1977. I didn't make any friends with my division when I threw all their quals overboard and started a serious training schedule. One of the "general rules" of the operations people was that if you had the duty last night, then you got the next day off. I put a stop to that BS quickly. Here we had a non-qualified bunch of people, a dirty rusty ship, and a bunch going on liberty at 0800 on work days. Being an old 'can' sailor, this didn't impress me with the command leadership, or the rest of the CPO's.

I was there when the first compliment of women reported for duty. I had two assigned to me that were great workers, excellent learners, but also got in trouble with drugs. I can't remember everyone, but Lt. Thompson, Lt. Nichols, Lt. Leahy were 3 I got to know pretty well. I would have gone into battle with either Leahy or Thompson. They proved to me they knew what they were doing, and didn't take crap from anyone. It wasn't long before we started noticing strange things going on with Nichols and Grant. The sounding and security watch was making her rounds one night and opened the CO's door and found Nichols there in her nightgown. She made some remark about having an emergency message she needed to talk to the C.O. about, and then admonished the watch to not say anything to anyone about the incident. People started seeing them walking hand in hand on the beach, and leaving/arriving together on the ship. There was a report that some enlisted were at a hotel in Alcapulco when one of the same room came the two of them in swim suits. During this same period, it must be noted that enlisted personnel were being reduced in rank, restricted, etc, for the meeting together in the separate bunk rooms, no matter whether it was innocent or not. We had one male E-4 try to molest a female enlisted one night but he got caught. We had a pretty tough bunch of lesbians who were assualting the other females and we had to transfer somewhere around 5 of them off the ship.

sexual misconduct

We went to the Atlantic where we stopped at Fort Lauderdale, FL., then went to Norfolk, VA. The junior enlisted were really into

the drug scene. During searches it was not uncommon to find 3-4 garbage bags of drugs that had been stuffed in the overhead panels, paint lockers, storage bins, voids, etc. They had become quite smart about not keeping them anywhere around their personal areas. The Chiefs assisted in investigating the enlisted personnel when they were written up for drugs, etc. The Officers were overloaded to the point that they needed our assistance with these report chits.

I had talked to fellow CPO's about the QM's training records, and every one of them said they faced the same thing, but said they were going along with the status quo; screw training and gun-deck the records. One advised that we were a surface ship under sub command, and they didn't know a damn thing about what surface ships did anyway. When we went to our dive site off the Azore Islands, we lost all the feed pumps, boilers, power, etc. There we were, adrift on the blue Atlantic with the well-deck full of water, and the Trieste II in tow. I'll never forget the night we lost power as that damn av-gas bomb was running up our stern and only by the grace of God did we manage to stop her from running into us. The ship had the emergency Gas Turbine, but since the feed pumps were blown out, there we sat! We got a message to Norfolk and they flew a P-3 out and parachuted the parts we needed to us. After we got underway and recovered the Trieste, we pulled into the Azores for R&R. This is where an inspection team also met the ship. The findings were that (a). Training was not being held; (b) Training records were gun-decked; (c) PMS was being gun-decked, and the list went on. The new XO got fired, and Officers and Senior Enlisted (engineering types) got letters of reprimand. Of all the Chiefs, I was one of the few that came out unscathed.

While tied up in the Azores, the crew went on a drug buying binge. When we tried to get underway, the helmsman was so high he couldn't steer the ship. When we got clear of the harbor, we had a full inspection of the ship where we removed panels from the overhead, bulkheads, and left no stone unturned. We removed an amount of illegal drugs that would have staggered anyones imagination. 30 Gal garbage sacks; I think about 15-20 were full of drugs, but very few got punished due to not being able to prove ownership.

When we got back to San Diego, the morale was so poor I thought that prisons had it better than we did. Nichols had slowly taken over 2nd in command, bypassing the XO whenever it suited her. The incident with the sailor and the void tank was one of those accidents that truly didn't a reason except personal negligence on the part of the victim. He was in one of the engineering divisions, and one of the few qualified 'gas-free' guys we had. He had to work in this void, so he did everything by the book; red tagging the void and all the valves, etc. The void was scrubbed and he certified it as gas-free. He did his welding, etc. and closed up the void and cleared the red tags. I think it was an hour or two later he discovered he left some tools in the void, so he popped the cover and entered the space where he was overcome by the fumes of cleaning fluid that had been dumped in the void shortly before he reentered. Another round of investigations, but it was found that it was the victims fault. We still had a couple of bad reports of lack of training, etc if I remember correctly.

One night on a dive site, Nichols had the deck with the Trieste in tow when she tried to reverse course. It was night, and it was evident to the most casual observer that she had no idea what she was doing. She reversed rudder two or three times attempting

Incompetent -
watchstanders
↓ u/w

to reverse course, but the ship would get to a certain point and no further. She refused to listen to my recommendations, even though I was also a qualified underway OOD. She battled it for about 30 minutes when I was just about ready to call the C.O. to the bridge when the XO just happened to arrive on the Bridge. By now I think he was tired of her inabilities, so he had her increase speed on one of the shafts past the RPM's recommended by the Trieste crew, and we finally made the turn. The next morning we found all the lights, camera's had been ripped off the Trieste by the ships excessive engine speed. We had to dock her and remount lights and camera's, and restart the dive sequence again. Nothing more was said about the incident.

I was navigating us out of San Diego Bay when we found ourselves meeting an incoming ship. The weather was a little rough and of course the Point Loma was doing it's floundering routine, shifting about 5-10 degrees either side of our base course. We were at buoy 5 and the other ship was at 1-SD. We had plenty of water in all directions, so I recommended a large course change to Starboard so there would be no misunderstanding on the part of the other ship about our intentions. She ordered a 2-3 degree course change to Starboard, and informed the other ship of her intentions of a port to port passage. That was fine except by now the waves and wind had pushed the bow back to port about 10 degrees so it appeared that we would cross stbd to stbd. She started blowing whistle signals, and again it was apparent that Nichols had not a clue. I again recommended the large course change to stbd, but she ignored me, so I ordered the Bos'n Mate to sound "Captain to the Bridge". I had him repeat it twice for emphasis. He came charging up, and I explained what was occurring. He got Nichols off to the side and had her make the larger course change to starboard and we got out of a potentially bad situation. Nothing more was said, and she continued her watch as OOD.

In the Mare Is. shipyard is where a lot of crap happened. Grant got into a pissing contest with the yardbirds because they were not scheduling work properly. If there was nothing for a certain crew to do for a day or two, they were told to make themselves scarce but not get caught. We found them in life jacket lockers, fan rooms, etc., sleeping away the day. Instead of diplomacy, he called for the removal of any shipyard worker caught not working (using bodily force if necessary). That is when Ltjg Price looked down a hatch and saw a yardworker sitting on his butt doing nothing. He called for the worker to report topside. When he got there, he was asked what he was doing down there, and the man reported that he was working. He was turned over to the duty MAA and was bodily escorted off the ship. When they touched the pier, the worker turned and slugged the MAA. Of course, this was all set up by the yard workers who our command thought was stupid, and the fertilizer hit the westinghouse. The yardworkers threatened strikes and work slowdowns, and eventually SubPac got involved and somehow things got resolved, but the area of trust was gone, and everyone was bitter.

The command started a rigorous cleanup campaign every night on the ship. The crew was getting more bitter every day because they felt they were pawns in someones game. It was quite late at night when Nichols made her rounds of the ship. I had already made my rounds and reported the ship to be in satisfactory condition. She found all the sheets of metal and various pipes, valves, etc laying in passageways that the yardworkers had set up for installation the next day. Of course it looked like crap, but it was a normal shipyard environment; something she knew nothing about, so she told the duty section to hold field day and

remove all the crap laying around. Well, the crew was none to happy about this, so they started heaving everything overboard. They were going to teach those dirty yardbirds a thing or two. You can imagine the hell raised when the morning shift came to work and all their parts were not only removed from their workspaces, but had disappeared altogether. I swear to God it was the most stupid thing I have ever seen in my life. Of course, the skipper backed her 100%.

Chief Stovall (ETC) submitted a purchase order for a piece of test equipment for the new Sat Com gear. Of course the cost of the test equipment reached into the lower 6 figures, but the price on the PO didn't mean a thing. The equipment was allocated to the ship, and the PO was just the formality. She took one look at the cost and told Stovall that there was no way she was going to spend this kind of money for a single piece of test equipment, and since he was the head ET, he could damn well make one out of parts. During the next couple of months I remember trying to console Stovall, who became severely depressed and started twisting his hair out. Then she became the Navigator a few months after Willy the Weasel (Bill Welsh) got out. (By the way, he and I still are in contact with each other. I pointed out your website last night and you should be getting a note pretty soon.) The only good thing I can say about her abilities as Navigator is that I was damn glad we were in the shipyard. We all went down to Ballist Point on Pt. Loma to run the Navigation trainer at SubPac. I went first so everyone could see how it was done. QM1 Podvin ran it the next couple of times for the practice he really needed, then a couple of QM's ran it. When they were done, Grant wanted Nichols to do it. I had figured as much, so during a coffee break the Chief running the simulator and I got together and decided if she took over the plot, we would crank in a set and drift of 270 degrees and 5 kts right abeam of the lighthouse on Pt. Loma. She took over the plot and ran it aground. We reset it and she commenced to run aground again. After the third time she caught on, and was she pissed!

The nickname I gave Nichols before I left in 82 was "Posty". She knew that I would confront her bad decisions right on the spot, so she would sneak into the charthouse on the barge and leave Post-it Notes all over the place. Most of them got thrown away. I remember the day that BMCS Fordham threw his hat at her when she started bothering him during an docking operation with the Trieste. He told her that if he ever caught her interfering with his operations again he would throw her overboard.

Our Chief Yeoman (Chief Munyon) and I bunked together in one of the CPO 2 man rooms. I also relieved him as JOOD on the bridge when underway. Nickols had the Deck and Munyon was her JOOD when I came up to relieve him at 1145. I said, "Hi Frank, I'm ready to releave you". He said, "Hi Frank, I'm ready to be relieved". Now, neither of our names were Frank, but ol' Nichols bit on it. She said that it was neat that we bunked in the same room, and that both of our names were Frank. Munyon looked her in the eye and said, " Yep, we're real Frank with each other. He gets to be Frank tonight, and I get to be Frank tomorrow night!" The look on her face was worth a thousand words!

I don't have any confirmation of this, but I understood at one time in Vallejo, someone had talked about taking out a hit on her. It could have been BS, but then again, who knows?

She had made out my transfer evals, and they were exactly the same as my last eval only a couple of months earlier. I then went through the checkout process, and when I got to the XO, he

gave me a copy of my evals to sign, and everything was 1 full mark lower. At first appearance, everything looked exactly the same. But I caught the changes and went back into the XO's room and confronted him. He had no idea what I was talking about but he would check with the skipper. He came back from the skippers office with everything marked back where it should have been and initialled by Grant.

AG1 ^{DUANE} Dewey Eckerman was assigned by the Meterologists at N. Island Naval Air Station as our temporary weatherman when we had ops. Nichols was instrumental in getting him permanently assigned to the Point. This was something that had never been done before. She and the command made his life such a living hell that he got out of the Navy after 14 years!

That covers the major stuff that I can remember. I know it is only the tip of the iceberg and that so many stupid things happened with that sorry command, that I have forgotten many of them. I do remember playing golf at the Mare Is. golf course one day when I joined 3 other older gentlemen. They asked me what I did and I told them I was on the Pt. Loma. They laughed so hard and started telling me stories about what they knew about the "Love Boat". The very next day the skipper had a meeting with the entire crew to rack them over the coals about the 100+ unsigned letters written by the crew to Mrs. Grant in reference to an alledged affair he was having with Nichols. I knew the crew was in for a rough time after that incident.

I am very curious as to this law suit, and would like to know more at your convenience.
Very Respectfully

Bryce Wellnitz QMCS (Ret)
----- Original Message -----