"LEAKY T" NEWS
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
U. S. S. TOLOVANA AO-64
"WE CARRY THE LOAD"

"If you were thirsty, we gave you a drink."

Dedicated to the deceased and living members of the best Fleet Oiler in the U. S. Navy.

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Below are three sea stories about occurrences between subs and the leaky T. There are probably more incidences but these are the ones I know about. Mega thanks to Captain Sotos for his write up and I am reprinting John Sater and Darrell Sage articles from previous newsletters.

Joe Moore forwarded the following email to me.

Hi Joe:

I'm an old Tolovana sailor who reads the newsletter regularly. Regrettably I have not been able to attend any of the reunions including the one in a few days. The program really looks interesting and I know you will all have a great time.

I have been writing memoirs, as most of us do at this age, and thought some one at the reunion might be interested in what I have written so far about my Tolovana recollections.

You are free to make copies of the attachment if desired.

Regards and have a good reunion,

George Sotos (CAPTAIN 1961)

MAN OVERBOARD

"Bridge, combat."

"Go ahead combat," said the Officer of the deck (OOD)

"Radar contact, eight miles dead astern."

"Roger combat, thank you." said the OOD

"Bridge, combat. The radar contact has disappeared."

"O K combat," said the OOD.

I happened to be sitting in my bridge chair enjoying the mid-night air as we were cruising toward our next rendezvous. "How many of those disappearing radar contacts have we had tonight?" I asked the OOD.

"That's the fourth one since sunset he replied.

I wasn't surprised. Many of the units of the seventh fleet were participating in an opposed exercise against a squadron of our submarines, and the latter were searching for them. What better place to look for the carriers, cruisers and destroyers than in the vicinity of one of their refueling ships. Technically my ship, the navy oiler USS Tolovana, was not a participant in the exercise so we could not report these disappearing radar contacts to the main surface force.

We knew, of course, that the disappearing radar contacts were submarines following us, knowing that sooner or later we would meet up with the big surface ships.

This was 1961 and there were no nuclear propelled surface ships in the seventh fleet at that time. So, by the end of the two week exercise we had logged eight disappearing radar contacts; Also I was so convinced that the submarines were following us to get to the carriers and other ships that I wrote a letter to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO).

In that letter, which I sent via the exercise task force commander, I pointed out that in an exercise or in actual hostilities, any smart submarine commander would just follow a fleet oiler, It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that sooner or later the carriers would need our fuel.

I recommended that fleet oilers like my ship be fitted with a special sonar gear and weapons which would permit us to attack those submarines.

About two months later I received a reply that agreed the submarines did indeed folllow the oilers to find the carriers and other surface ships. I was thanked for my recommendation and informed that the navy department was already investigating the feasibility of adding anti-submarine-warfare capabilities to large slow ships like mine.

Fleet oiler operations were far less stressful than that with destroyers. We did have our exciting and dangerous times during replenishment operations in bad weather but that was the exception rather than the rule.

For the most part, we proceeded independently from one refueling rendezvous to another until we were empty. Then we would go into Yokuska or some other port, fill up our tanks and return to the fleet operations.

Fueling for us was a breeze. All we had to do was remain on a good course and the other ships would come alongside. Carriers would remain alongside up to five hours as we topped them off. A destroyer would be topped off in less than an hour. Many times we would have a carrier on one side and a destroyer on the other-

each about 50 feet away from us as we steamed together at about 12 or 14 knots.

When the weather was good, yes it was a breeze. Nobody worked too hard. But bad weather was another matter! We would not fuel two ships at once in bad weather. It was simply too risky.

One doesn't appreciate how big carriers are until they come as close as ten feet from you as they try to maintain station in heavy weather. Yes we really earned our pay in heavy weather refueling.

After one cycle of refueling in heavy weather we returned to Yokuska and during a routine inspection learned that one of the heavy booms that held the oil lines was bent!

I had to make a decision.

Do we disregard the bend in the boom and continue with our schedule? Or do we play it safe, force some other oiler to take our schedule and have the boom fixed.

You can lose "brownie points" by not meeting your schedule. And I was tempted to take a chance that we wouldn't have any bad weather that might bend the boom more and hurt someone.

It is easy to disregard the "play it safe route," and meet the schedule.

However, I had experienced enough heavy weather to respect it. And we stayed in Yokuska, and got our boom fixed.

But bad weather isn't the only cause of ships colliding or equipment being damaged.

One very clear beautiful day with a flat sea, the USS Henderson, a very competent destroyer that I had fueled many times before in some really rough weather, collided with me as he approached my port side to fuel.

I could see by the way he made his approach that he was going to hit me. He came in too fast and did not straighten out soon enough. I ordered all my people to the starboard side of the ship even as a I watched the Captain of the Henderson try to extricate himself from the pickle he had put himself in.

"Aw shit!"

It was a wind-less day. The sea was flat and his words, which floated clearly across the 30 foot gap that separated us, described the situation perfectly. He was stuck. There was nothing he could do to avoid hitting me. All his efforts were being devoted to reducing the angle and severity of the impact.

My bridge wing level was much higher than his and I was looking down at him. "What's your heading now?" I shouted in to my helmsman.

"275," sir

I was watching my compass repeater on the bridge wing and knew what my helmsman would say before he said it. I just wanted to make sure that our course at impact would be placed in the log to confirm that I did not contribute to the collision. 275 was our base course.

"Left full rudder, all engines back emergency!" shouted the Henderson captain. His maneuver swung his bow away from my side, brought him parallel to me and slowed him down as he slid sideways and hit me with his starboard side, For just an instant we were stuck together or so it seemed. Then the Henderson slid slowly aft rubbing and bouncing off my port side.

That's the part I was worried about.

Oil takers very often have very volatile fumes hugging their topside and it only takes a few sparks to cause a fire and explosion..

I saw the sparks fly as he rubbed against my side but we were clean-no fumes and no fire.

As the Henderson slid down my port side making sparks it came under the counter (the high part of the Tolovana's stern that curves around into the stern itself (the rear end of the ship). The destroyer's stern turned under my counter and I could see my counter crushing his steel boat davits (that held his whaleboat) like toothpicks, And then suddenly he was astern of me and in the

clear.

He had cleared all people from his starboard side and no one was injured. But his whaleboat was in pieces and his steel boat davits were like pretzels.

We did a quick check and could find no damage-just some scratches that ran down the port side. It all happened very quickly and quietly-except for the scratching.

A few days later the Task Force Commander sent his chief of staff (a friend of mine) to the Tolovana (by highline). He was investigating the collision.

I recommended no disciplinary action for the captain of the Henderson. I had fueled that ship may times . More than once in really bad weather and he had done a remarkably good job.

The damage to the Henderson amounted to about $25,000. But I understand there was no disciplinary action.

It's exciting but clearly no fun to be in a collision. It is something a captain always worries about especially when maneuvering close to another ship.

But collisions aren't all we worry about.

In another scary incident during a large task force replenishment operation involving many ships, we were refueling a carrier on the port side and a destroyer on the starboard side. . .

Just ahead of me about 1500 yards was a large "cargo" ship that also had two ships alongside receiving supplies. The weather was nice and things were running smoothly.

Suddenly, my port lookout shouted, "man overboard, man overboard -- dead ahead ! At the same time a flashing signal light from the cargo ship dead ahead came the same message. "Three men are in the water, Three men are in the water my port side."

I quickly put my binoculars on a small disruption in the water dead ahead and just aft of the cargo ship, and saw one man. I immediately picked up the bridge to bridge phone line connecting me to the bridges of the carrier and the destroyer.

"Get your captain on the line," I said.

The response was immediate from both ships.'This is the captain."

"I am going to turn right slowly."

"Roger"

:Roger," the responses were immediate

"My heading is 230 now I have 5 degrees right rudder on. I will report my heading as we turn." I didn't even wait for an acknowledgement. I nodded to my officer=of-the-deck and he ordered "right 5 degrees rudder."

"Rudder is right five degrees sir," responded the helmsman.

Then as my ship slowly but steadily turned to the right, I reported my headings. "Passing 232, " Then a minute or two later, " 234." In increasingly briefer intervals I reported. " 236, 238, 240, 242, 244, 246, 248, 250,"

I couldn't help but be proud and excited at the same time as all three ships turned gracefully to the right, almost as one, away from the men in the water.

Then as I saw a rescue destroyer close aboard the carrier's port bow, I knew we were clear of the men.

"I will steady up on course 255," I told the captains.

The carrier skipper repeated it. "New course 255 roger."

"Steer new course 255," I ordered my helmsman, I could see that the destroyer was gone. He had completed fueling and was steaming away at high speed

In just a few minutes both the carrier and I were steady on course 255 .

The destroyer that picked up the three sailors from the water sent us a message that the men were in good shape.

I talked to the carrier skipper and we returned to the base course using the same procedure. This time, as I turned inward toward him, he slowed and stayed abreast of me nicely until we were back on the base course of 230.

We ended up a little to the right of the main formation, but we stayed there until refueling was completed about an hour later. All during this emergency maneuver we kept the fuel moving so there was really no delay to the task force's schedule. ,

The carrier skipper and I patted ourselves on the back and I sent a "well done" to the destroyer that had been alongside.

I complimented my helmsman, the lookouts and everyone on the ship for making a real emergency look like a routine maneuver.

Turning three different size large ships steaming at twelve knots that are just 50 feet apart is not as routine as I make it sound. I had the easiest job. I kept my speed the same and just turned slowly. But the carrier had to increase speed slightly as we turned right to make sure he kept up and didn't tear the fuel lines loose. On the other hand the destroyer had to slow down .

This maneuver is never practiced. It is not very often that three men go overboard in front of three large ships linked together by fuel and other lines, Can you imagine how the men in the water felt when they looked up and saw those ships heading right for them?

In my 32 years in the navy this particular type experience is the only one I heard or read about.

How did those men go overboard.?

They were working cargo, placing boxes in a huge cargo net when the winch-man mistakenly picked up the net with the boxes and the three men still in it, swung it over the side on its way to a ship alongside-- when the men fell out of the net. It was an act of carelessness that could very easily have turned into a terrible tragedy. Replenishment operations are a critical component of the navy's ability to remain at sea for months at s time but they are far from risk free routine operations.

A fleet oiler like the Tolovana is a workhorse type ship as are the other logistic support ships. At the same time they are ready to shoot warships that don't spend a lot of time maneuvering with the fast carrier strike units. Nevertheless they are clearly essential to the strike force's ability to perform its mission.

One handicap is their age. Most of them, like the ponderously slow Tolovana, are much older than their sleek fast moving destroyer and carrier customers. One price they pay for this old age is that the crew isn't always up to date on what keeps the ship operating.

For example, one hot day when we were refueling a carrier, we received a report on the bridge that there was some smoke coming out of a large vent forward on the port side. Smoke is usually caused by a fire of some type but our damage control party could not find a fire. Meanwhile the vent continued to produce smoke.

I was reluctant to declare an emergency and stop refueling the carrier. But smoke on a tanker, especially the location of this smoke not far from our aviation fuel, is something to worry about. I left the bridge and ran to the port bow where a group of my men were standing looking up at a large vent that was leaking smoke (this particular vent was a large conduit for air that was sucked into the ship foe internal ventilation).

When I joined the men standing there it was obvious they did not know what to do. Careful searches of the vent system had revealed no heat or fire. Nevertheless the smoke was continuing. I, of course, could add no new knowledge to the problem.

I was about to return to the bridge and terminate the

refueling when a young sailor carrying a big pick and a fire extinguisher joined the group. Without a word to anyone he started swinging the pick at the smoking vent.

"What the hell are you doing?" I shouted. But he ignored me and kept chopping away. In a minute or two he had a large hole in the vent and the smoke really poured out!

Then he picked up the fire extinguisher, stuck the nozzle in the hole he had made and let the foam fly. After an even large burst. the smoke suddenly receded and in a few minutes had almost disappeared.

He turned to me and said, "there's a motor in there and I figured that was causing the smoke." It turned out he was right. He was the only sailor on the ship who knew that a motor that helped move the air through the vent--was inside the vent! And the only way to get to it was to dismantle the vent or chop a hole in it as he did.

I thanked him profusely. Had he not figured out the problem I am sure the motor would have caught fire and created a serious problem. I was so happy at what he had done that I awarded him a commendation. However, I failed to ask him how he knew there was a motor inside that vent.

While that incident reflected the age of the Tolovana it also reflected the very high quality of my very young crew.

Spending as much time as we did in the South Pacific can get really boring, especially when you operate alone and go to the same ports to to replenish cargo. There's plenty to do during the working day and that part remains challenging and interesting,

It's a different story after working hours when the

sailors go ashore in ports like Yokuska and Sasebo. Only rarely did we have enough time there to permit the sailors to take the a train to Tokyo and back. So after the first visit to those ports there really was not much to do or see.

For the most part the Tolovana sailors were an exceptionably responsible and well behaved group when they went ashore. But we had our exceptions.

At anchor in Sasebo one afternoon we had just finished the working day and part of the crew was going ashore on liberty. The launch was alongside our long gangway leading down the port side and the men were entering the launch.

All of a sudden the alarm was passed "man overboard, man overboard,"
Many of the sailors had seen the man go into the water and he was quickly fished out wet and bewildered!

Once I was assured by the ship's pharmcists mate that man who had been in the water was O k and could respond to question, I ordered a Captain's mast.

With the quarterdeck watch that had been supervising the liberty party going down the gangway, and the man, still soaked in what had been a a spotless uniform, standing before me, I told him that I wanted to find out what happened but that he didn't have to answer any of my questions or say anything that might incriminate him or get him into any kind of trouble. Then I asked if he understood my warning and he answered in the affirmative,
Then I asked," what happened?

The quartermaster of the watch spoke first. "Captain, everything was perfectly normal. The men were going down the ladder and getting into the launch. But when Wright here," he pointed to the soaking wet sailor, "got to the bottom of the gangway, he didn't turn and get into the launch. He just kept going straight ahead and walked

off the platform into the water, And then we fished him out."

I turned to Wright. " Is that what happened?" I asked.

Looking me straight in the eyes, Wright said, "yes sir, That's what I did,"

I was dumb-founded and for a while I didn't know what to say. "Why didn't you get in the launch as the other sailors did?? I finally said,

Still looking me straight in the eyes he answered, "Captain I thought I could walk on the water,"

His answer surprised us all and I didn't say anything for a minutes. The Chief Master at Arms (CMAA) the ships security officer, interjected, "Wright, what have you been taking?"

Wright's forthright demeanor changed and he mumbled something none of us understood. The CMAA then asked. "Captain, request permission to inspect Wright's locker?"

I knew right away what the CMAA was thinking, "Permission granted," I said, "Be sure to take Wright with you."

And that's how we determined that Wright and two others were taking some little white pills. I never dod find out exactly what was in the pills but we determined that it was enough to make Wright think he could walk on water.

Of course, I was disappointed and angry at the same time. It was the first time in my entire career that I had any of my sailors take something like that aboard ship. And the worse part was that the sailors involved,including Wright all had clean records.

All three of the culprits admitted they were taking the pills, which they had purchased ashore in a previous port,

There was no way I could overlook or minimize the seriousness of what they had done. And at a formal

Captains mast I awarded a lengthy restriction to the ship and a reduction in rate for all three. However, I also stated that after six months, if they maintained a clean record and had the support of their leading petty officer and department head, I would rescind the reduction in rate and remove all trace of their offense from their record.

And six months later, just before I was turning over command of the Tolovana to my relief, I removed all trace of their offense from their record.

A SEA STORY

It was the Winter of 1951-52, and the Tolovana was cruising South in the Formosa (now Taiwan) Straits enroute from Keelung to Kaoshiung to continue our R&R break from refueling duties off North Korea. Suddenly in the middle of the night came the announcement "General Quarters, General Quarters, All Hands Man Your Battle Stations" and then the ominous "This is not a drill!", accompanied by the intermittent buzzing of the alarm. All moved quickly to dress and race to our Battle Stations, which in my case was as Director Operator of the Starboard Twin 40mm mount. I raced across the Cargo Deck and up the ladders to my Gun Director, threw off the canvas cover, turned the switch from Standby to Power, unlocked the director in Train and Elevation, plugged my Sound Powered Phone into the jack, put on my life jacket and helmet and called in that my director was "Manned and Ready". At the same time, the gun crew had uncovered the gun mount and had loaded clips of 40mm shells and announced that they also were "Manned and Ready". They shifted the "Local" control switch to "Director" and we were ready for action. We were told to "Standby".

As we nervously scanned the pitch dark sea for something to shoot at we waited for direction but nothing came. After some time, the ship began to accelerate (I use the term rather loosely) and we continued to wait for further direction. As we moved away we began to hear explosions as our Destroyer Escort began to drop depth charges. Finally we were told to "Secure from General Quarters" with no further explanation. There was scuttlebutt that we had been followed by a submarine, but there was no official word given to us. A couple of months later I happened upon an article in Time magazine that stated that a submarine of unknown origin had reportedly stalked a tanker in the straits of Formosa and, after the Captain of the Destroyer had been in direct contact with Washington for direction, he had been advised to sink the submarine. After dropping depth charges, the Destroyer stayed in the area overnight and in the morning found oil slick coming from the area that had been depth charged. The magazine article stated that the Pentagon advised them that it was determined to be coming from the US Submarine Tang that had been lost in that area in WWII. The PO1 Sonarman that had been on duty at that time insisted that he knew the difference between a wrecked submarine and an active one, and that the contact he monitored was without a doubt an active target. Because of the Cold War and the secret activities of both the Soviet Union and US military, neither country would acknowledge having any submarines in the area at that time.

The above story is courtesy of John Sater, FT2c, picture from Biloxi reunion attached.

The following sea story is from Darrell Sage.

It was starry night with a medium swell in the Tonkin Gulf that early summer. We had been on Yankee station for a week or so and were riding high on our way back to Subic Bay. Those of us not on watch and who hadn't already seen Rosemary's Baby a dozen times were topside watching it once again.

Night time and headed "home" was one of those rare opportunities for down time recreation, sleeping being number one followed by cards on the mess decks, reading in your rack, jamming tunes in the sports locker starboard side of the forward gun mount or writing letters wherever a sailor boy could find some privacy....like nowhere as I remember for me other than the air conditioned CIC transmitter room, or whatever it was called, I forget now after all these years.

We were cruising SSE with nary a breeze, gently surfing the medium swell coming from aft when suddenly we came down hard on something metal. BANG!!! and the Leaky T shuddered rather violently. I ran up to the bridge where the OOD had no idea what we hit. He was peering intently into the scope and visibly shaken. He was Lt. Lincoln, a supply officer. Blonde guy, very nice fellow, took the rap for when we touched aground during our ORI just off Coronado Island before we left for WestPac some months before. He had the con at that time as well. Anyway, I initially thought surely we hit a small steel hull fishing boat or freighter. But as I was running up to the bridge I was thinking,
"no, we came down on something squarely amidships, just aft of the bridge." You could feel the way we rocked fore to aft when it hit. I hurried thru the Quartermaster's room and into CIC to grill "Blackie" who had the scope. He swears he didn't see anything and I saw no returns within the immediate area. Back on the bridge the old man and XO were in a dither and alternately staring into the bridge scope or interrogating every one on watch thru the sound powered phones. The XO was on Mr. Lincoln like a shark on bloody meat, but the Lt. was holding his own. Nobody saw nothing as I remember everyone saying the next morning eating breakfast on the mess decks.

Back in Subic a few days later I was watching the two UDT divers looking over the hull fore to aft. They came up, crawled to the pier, pulled off the fins and chatted it up with Captain Gorsline but I wasn't privy to the conversation as they purposely walked some distance from where I was watching from the pier. I'm assuming no damage since we never went into dry dock and perhaps all we received was some scraped bottom paint, but I'm sure there had to be a big dent somewhere as we hit that puppy damned hard.

It wasn't till years later that I told this story to a Yankee Station bubble head who figured we had come down hard on a sub that was mere feet beneath us and

sneaking out of the Tonkin Gulf as it was standard procedure to be cruising just below a large ship and using it as a sonar shield, either one of ours or one of the Russians. Makes perfect sense to me.

Darrell Sage RD2
USS Tolovana '68-'69

Any one else have a sea story? I think all of us like to hear a shipmates view of his time on the Tolovana. Send them to me and I will send them out to the crew.

Howard Hensley
RD1 1952-56