

My Living conditions on the USS Cobbler SS 344

When I reported for duty on the USS Cobbler SS-344 stationed in Norfolk, VA, there were not enough bunks to go around so I had to sleep in the forward torpedo room on a mattress laying on a torpedo skid. After a couple of months I was assigned to "hot bunking". This was a bunk of a crew member who was on leave. Eventually I was assigned a bunk of my own in the crew quarters. The bunks were stacked about four high with about two feet between each bunk. You had to slide in sideways to get in the bunk. My bunk was below the cook's bunk. The cook was a bit overweight so the clearance between our bunks was reduced to a few inches. The mattresses were foam and very comfortable.

The crew quarters had two heads to accommodate 65-70 crew members. The waste from the heads was expelled to sea once a day using compressed air. When we were submerged the heads were vented to the ship interior through charcoal filters along with cooking odors and cigarette smoke.

There was one wash basin and shower. When at sea we were not allowed to shower because of the scarcity of water. We were allowed to use the water basin to wash up.

The submarine batteries required a lot of water. We had 4 batteries which had a total of 256 cells. Each cell weighed 2000 lbs. The ship had a salt water still which produced distilled water from sea water for the batteries. It could not produce enough water for crew use. The still was located in the forward engine room. Combined with the heat generated by two locomotive sized diesel engines, the still heated the forward engine room to over 100 deg F. The two Engine rooms were also very noisy when the engines were running. Needless to say Engine men did not have decent working conditions. The diesel fuel odor resulting from running four diesel engines permeated our clothing causing a slight diesel body odor.

During my two and a half years on the Cobbler, I went from seaman apprentice (lowest rank in Navy) to seaman to sonar man third class to sonar man second class (the highest rank attainable in one four year hitch). The sonar man ranks were attained by taking correspondence courses and passing a fleet wide test in competition with other sailors applying for the same rank.