

Injury and Illness

I am actually a little surprised that I am so far into the telling of my SeeStories and only now finally getting around to this topic. Injuries and illnesses are not something you spent a great deal of time thinking about when riding the boats. The primary reason for this was the fact that dealing with injuries or illnesses was **NOT** something you wanted to do or deal with. Yes things happened, and we did have some very nearby help in dealing with it.

DOC

First let me describe your available Medical help on board a submarine at sea. Every boat I rode had at least one US Navy Corpsman on board. If there were two, it was because the junior person was being trained, and the training was lengthy and intense. In this SeeStory I am going to tell you about is perhaps the most intense and involved story of all my time riding the boats over the ten missions I was on. It all came down to one guy's call, "the Doc."

As I just mentioned, there was usually just one guy and that person was typically very senior, typically a Chief Petty Officer. He was not a doctor. In the civilian world, he would have been a senior Emergency Room Nurse. They were experts in recognizing various illnesses and could set broken bones and stitch wounds with amazing results. In this one instance "our Doc" was a First Class Petty Officer and had just over ten years in the Navy. He was working intensively on being a Chief in short order. Following this particular circumstance, he made it to Chief shortly after it, perhaps because of his demonstrated expertise.

MEDIVAC

This story that I am telling you; there is actually going to have a second story interwoven. The second story is going to deal with the experience of what is called a **MEDIVAC**. The label itself is a quandary. It is the junction of two words together the first word being MEDICAL and the second word being EVACUATION. Merged together, the "I" of **MED**ical is kept and then the "E" and "UATION" are dropped from eVACuation, making the word **MEDIVAC**.

SETTING UP A MEDIVAC

When the decision to perform a **MEDIVAC** is made, it is no longer just the submarine you are on. It involves all the US Navy forces that could possibly expedite the transport of the stricken sailor to the best medical assistance possible.

This mission that I was on was one of my Diesel boat runs. On this particular one I was standing my "watch" assisting the Nav ETs and the Quartermasters in the Control Room. But I also had my official position as the maintenance "rider" for Radio and ESM. So, when the decision was made to set up a **MEDIVAC**, I was in the midst of it from beginning to end from the moment a message went out or came in to plotting the impact on the boat's movement.

At the beginning of our "mission", I had already briefed the CO about my idea regarding [tax free pay as our mission](#) as we were supporting the War in Vietnam. So, he had already been thinking about it when our ill crewman had started to appear to be serious. So, we were already en-route to our "war zone" entry when the decision for the **MEDIVAC** was made. Therefore, strictly by the CO's anticipation, we were already halfway between our "on station" location and the "war zone" when our message requesting the **MEDIVAC** was broadcast. This was something the rest of the world did not know.

THE MEDIVAC

Again, we had been technically, "On Station"; when one of our shipmates reported to the doctor that he was not feeling "right". The "Doc" gave the subject his recommendations and it was well into the second day when the Doc got more concerned as the symptoms and tests that he had run led to something that was most likely going to go beyond his capability. During that second day, several messages went back and forth between the Doc and his network of various supporters in a number of locations ashore. The illness was starting to look like an organ failure. Armed with this the CO who had already decided to depart our "on Station" location, now increased the speed. At the end of that second day the call got made. A discussion between the CO and the Doc, led to an open message being made that would go out to all US Forces in the immediate area. The message was requesting a **MEDIVAC**. At that point we surfaced and headed towards Yankee Station in the War Zone at full speed, because that was the most likely location of air support.

As we had hoped, the message was acknowledged almost immediately and it was the **USS MIDWAY** that responded with an affirmative to the request, and with it they provided their current latitude and longitude such that both of us could establish the location of the rendezvous, which they also provided as a suggestion. We immediately plotted both locations, and it was then that we learned that they had computed the rendezvous location based on our "on station" location and not our actual location at the time, their suggestion was exactly halfway between the two points they thought were involved. Since the location to meet up was very convenient to us, we responded to their "offer message" with a simple, "Thank You meet you there."

It was about two or three hours later that we received another message from the **MIDWAY**. It read: "Understand you are a Diesel Boat. We offer a change the rendezvous location to this new location in the interest of time." They had moved the location closer to the location where they thought we had started and actually only about 50 miles from where we were. Our CO read the message not as a generous offer, but as a slam to our capability regarding speed over water.

He drafted another very quick and brief message to the CO of the **MIDWAY**. It read, "Thank you for the offer, but we don't wish to inconvenience your normal operations to access. We will close and exceed the rendezvous point. If we can better it, we will advise." And with that he ordered up a flank bell. We were on our way at the best speed we could achieve.

A few hours later we were at the last position agreed to and there was no carrier on the Horizon. The CO sent a message to the CO of the **MIDWAY** again, "**MEDIVAC** by boat to boat or by Helo?" The answer came back "Helo."

Now came the fun part. The CO called the Executive Officer and the Engineer to his stateroom, just up the passageway from the Radio Room. Standing in the hallway I heard the requests. He asked the Exec to find out how many fishing poles were on board and how much fish we had in the refers. He then asked the Engineer if he could put together something that looked like a Bar-B-Que. It was with those requests that I figured out what he was thinking and when the answers came back about 10 minutes later the CO made his plans known to the crew.

BAR-B-QUE

When the lookout reported a super structure on the horizon, the CO responded with the request to be notified when the flight deck was visible. The CO then gave the orders to slow our progress to a 1/3 bell. Then he asked for those with fishing polls to go topside and go fishing and to set up the Bar-b-que grill forward of the torpedo room access hatch. At the same time the mess cooks were cooking some of the fish we had on board and started making fish sandwiches.

While that was taking place the CO sent another message for the CO of the **MIDWAY**. “We have you bearing 270 degrees true. Could you send a replacement gurney as our crewman will be lifted with the only one we have. We are preparing the fore deck for the transfer. We are also making smoke to assist you in seeing us.” The answer came back a few minutes later, “Be glad to, currently on course 090 true, no smoke yet.”

About 15 minutes later the flight deck came into view. Another message was sent, “Still have you at 270 true, and flight deck is visible estimated range 15 miles.” The answer was received almost immediately. “**MEDIVAC** FLIGHT UNDERWAY we see your smoke.”

A small dot departed the flight deck and got larger and larger as it approached us. It then started to lower an empty gurney with two guys, one on either side of it as it approached us. Shortly afterwards we had two visitors on board who assisted in removing the empty gurney and replacing it with the crewmates occupied one that had been brought topside via the weapons loading hatch.

As they were about to lift off the two guys were handed backpacks and they were asked to deliver both to their Commanding Officer along with 2 envelopes that was handed to each of them.

One of the envelopes contained our shipmate’s medical records and test results.

The other marked for the Commanding Officer of the **MIDWAY**:

“Thank you sir so much for your timely support of our shipmate’s medical issue. So glad that you responded so quickly and efficiently such that we could provide you with sufficient Bar-B-Qued Fish sandwiches for you, your wardroom and those who piloted our shipmate to your care.”

Shortly after the **MEDIVAC** the **MIDWAY** cruised past our position, those fishing and tending the Bar-B-Que drove our CO’s point home – ***Diesel Boats aren’t necessarily slow.***

In the map shown here the eastern boundary of the Vietnam War Zone is shown in red. The **red** dot shows the “closer” alternate location offered, that insulted our CO. The **blue** dot was the original location offered. The **green** dot shows where we actually performed the MEDIVAC.

