

# contagious situation

When I was riding the boats, it was way before the COVID “like” issue of a contagious illness scenario. Of course, there were small outbreaks of the common cold and flu, but nothing of any real consequence. For the most part our very controlled environment took care of most things that were transmitted via the atmosphere. In every space there was a constant flow of fresh manufactured air coming in and almost immediately being removed by the ventilation system.

Perhaps the most difficult medical aspect falling into the category of “contagious” would be venereal diseases. Now quickly I will say that sexual activity between crew members was unheard of. I’m not saying it didn’t exist, just that you never heard about it or witnessed any hint of it. But the spread of venereal diseases following almost every port call (except home port), was very common. I even suffered with a case of NSU during one run, and while I won’t deny that it followed a specific port call that was widely known for “activities” ashore. It did not fully impact me until I was at sea. It was then that I first experienced “**making modifications to the piping tab**” (see below). It was then that I visited with the corpsman.

Upon doing so, I discovered that I was not alone. There was actually a line. I was instructed as to what I had caught and was given a series of pills to take over the next seven days. Even if the “issues” went away, I was to keep taking them daily to complete the bacteria “kill” as he put it. I was also going to be restricted to using a specific commode and shower on board.

To complete the treatment description and simultaneously answer the questions that prompted me to write this. How did this “contagious” disease impact the operation of the submarine? Well, those of us being treated were restricted to using just one of the six commodes available to the enlisted men, and one of the showers. Also, IF you were a Chief Petty Officer you could not use the facilities in the “Goat Locker” (Chiefs Quarters). Additionally, we were ordered by the Doc with full command authorization to clean the walls and the commode itself following our use thereof. In that commode was a spray bottle of disinfecting cleaner and a ready supply of disposable paper towels for that task. Following the cleaning of the commode and area the used paper towels would be placed in a TDU (Trash Disposal Unit) bag provided and located in that specific commode area. When the TDU bag was full that person was to take the bag and the cleaner to the TDU itself during a visit to periscope depth and get permission to jettison the bag via the TDU and cleaning the TDU area that had contact with the bag prior to the jettisoning. Finally in this particular aspect, the TDU weight (to insure that the bag went to the bottom of the ocean properly), was placed at the top of the bag and the bag would be tied shut tightly to insure full containment of the paper towels, with the weight placed blocking the tied opening.

The second “treatment” came to where and how you slept. If you were hot-racking, that stopped and you were given a skid in the torpedo room to sleep on. With regards to the bunk itself, you were not allowed to sleep on sheet covered mattresses, no matter where you slept you slept on top of the “flash-covers”, that you would clean with the same spray disinfecting cleaner – your private spray bottle.

This entire process continued for at least 10 days following the very first diagnosis performed by the Doc that someone had contracted a contagious venereal disease. If more time was needed the Doc would advise.

**making modifications to the piping tab** = This is an expression used widely on the boats. When you were suffering from a venereal disease, you were accused of this. It was an expression one step removed from being derogatory. So let me explain: All of the enlisted commodes, showers, and sinks were surrounded by various pipes of the piping systems on the boats. It wasn’t just the vents and water supply for the toilets. You could be right alongside sea water ballast tank piping as well as the freshwater piping used for the sinks and showers. So, in moments of extreme pain, you would reach out and grab things to dull the sensation. Hence, you could, if strong enough, make modifications to the piping tab, that described the various piping systems on board the boat.