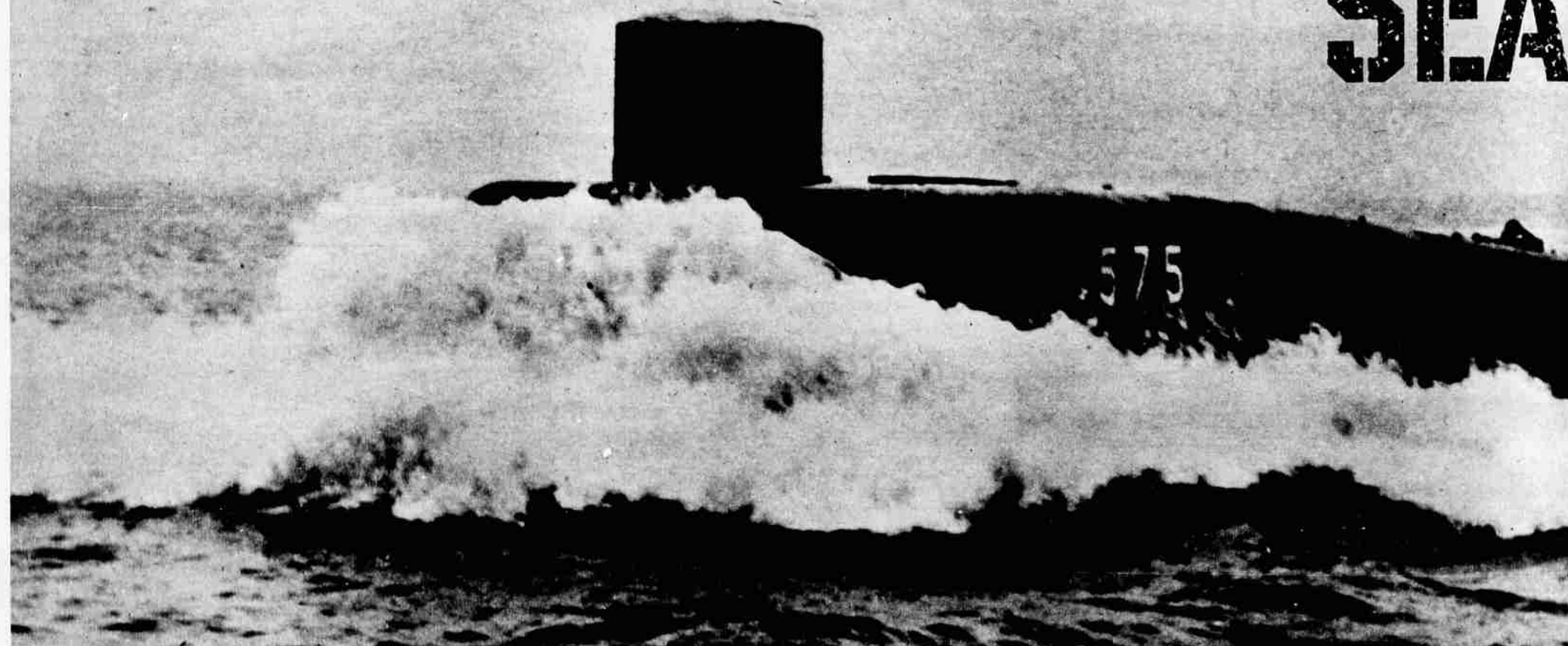


COME ABOARD THE U.S.S.

SEA WOLF



by James C. G. Conniff

HOURS AFTER SUNLIGHT washed the atomic submarine U.S.S. *Seawolf* for the first time in 60 days, I had lunch aboard with her crew. Maybe they weren't as tanned and ruddy as, say, farmers. But even under the shielded fluorescent lighting of their mess, they didn't look "bleached" by their record-breaking undersea run. Jumpy? Exhausted? Quite the reverse!

They weren't fat, either, but they were well-padded; and I found out why. That 60-day period was supposed to be an endurance test of the men, the vessel, and its many scientific components. But judging by the infinitely varied, appetite-tempting meals served, it must also have been a gourmet test.

Our lunch, for example, was typical: mountains of whipped potatoes, huge bowls of buttered string beans, big platters of fresh roasted pork and baked Virginia ham, the most unforgettable "red-eye" ham gravy I have ever savored, bread by the stack, and blocks of butter. Dessert was apple pie with a lump of ice cream as big as a lumberjack's fist. My 14-year-old son said several other vegetables were offered, but I shut my eyes and passed them up.

There was coffee, of course—there's no time aboard a Navy vessel when there isn't. And at this lunch on the A-sub *Seawolf*, there was some mild

grousing about the cook's failure to serve milk the first time he could get it fresh in two months. But this visitor washed down his meal with sea water.

That's right: sea water. They distill it from right outside the hull, at any depth. Taste salty? Not a bit. Tastes sweet, in fact, though it's said to be a little flat at first for the landlubber because it's thoroughly distilled. With ice cubes clattering pleasantly in the frosty-cold pitcher, I frankly didn't notice. Those ice cubes, too, were frozen (distilled) sea water.

In our underwater fleet, I learned, officers and men are on the young side. In the nuclear boats they are, on the average, a little older: between 25 and 30. It takes longer to qualify for A-sub duty—as much as 18 months in the nuclear-engineering department—and previous experience in conventional submarines helps. But these "older" atomic crews are still young enough to enjoy those little niceties which make the good life.

Because food and youth go together, one of the most welcome gifts taken aboard the *Seawolf* the evening she surfaced was a brimming crate of fresh fruit, the first her crew had seen in two months. It was gone in hours. Unasked, the donor—submarine tender U.S.S. *Fulton*—sent another bulging crateful. By the following lunchtime I could almost see the bottom of a third crate.

Unlike other Navy vessels, atomic subs not only serve their officers and men three whopping good meals a day but also permit crew members to eat anything they want, any time of day or night. You can come off watch at 4 a.m. with a yen for a sirloin steak and, if you cook it yourself and clean up afterward, feel free to enjoy it.

What if a hungry loner like that doesn't clean up? Usually such a man is new to submarine life, so he will be spoken to by older hands. If he offends several times and talking does no good, he gets some rugged extra duty as a warning.

Cooks and bakers aboard an A-sub are always busy because watches are four hours on and eight hours off, around the clock. Most baking—bread (white, rye, whole wheat, cinnamon) and cakes, pies, rolls, fancy pastries, and cookies—is done at "night," as determined, when submerged, by the sub's chronometer. One of the homiest touches about this practice is that a man coming off watch at 4 a.m. can load up on oven-hot rolls and bring them to his quarters to share with others. Or he can distribute them to shipmates standing the new watch. It helps make A-sub life close-knit.

NUCLEAR SUBMARINES are the first submersibles with true upper and lower decks. Directly below the officer's wardroom is the crew's mess—a

spacious, well-lighted dining room finished in cream with pastel pink and green panels. Formica-top tables seat eight to ten men each on pull-out metal benches with foam-rubber, leather-covered seats. Tables and benches are on tracks which permit conversion of the mess hall into a theater where the latest movies—normally one for each day of a voyage—are shown twice daily to accommodate all watches. Battle lamps that go on automatically if there's a sudden power loss festoon the messroom's ceiling. Four such lamps focus around a large canvas-shrouded lamp for emergency surgery on the table beneath. If power loss occurs during surgery, on go the battle lamps.

Other comforts of the crew's mess include a juke box (free) with new recordings, a hi-fi set, radio receivers for use when surfaced (signals don't come through submerged), and a 21-inch TV set. Can they get television shows on an A-sub at sea? No, it's used for closed-circuit programming, but the *Seawolf's* crew is hoping to take taped TV shows a-voyaging and move another step closer to normal living.

One non-normal note about the *Seawolf's* mess is a complete lack of cooking odors even at mealtime. Electrostatic precipitators completely filter galley air of smoke, grease, and odors. Stainless metal equipment throughout—including electric

food mixers, ice-cream machines, and capacious 450-volt AC ranges—combines with ceramic-tile floors to make a scrubdown of the galley easy.

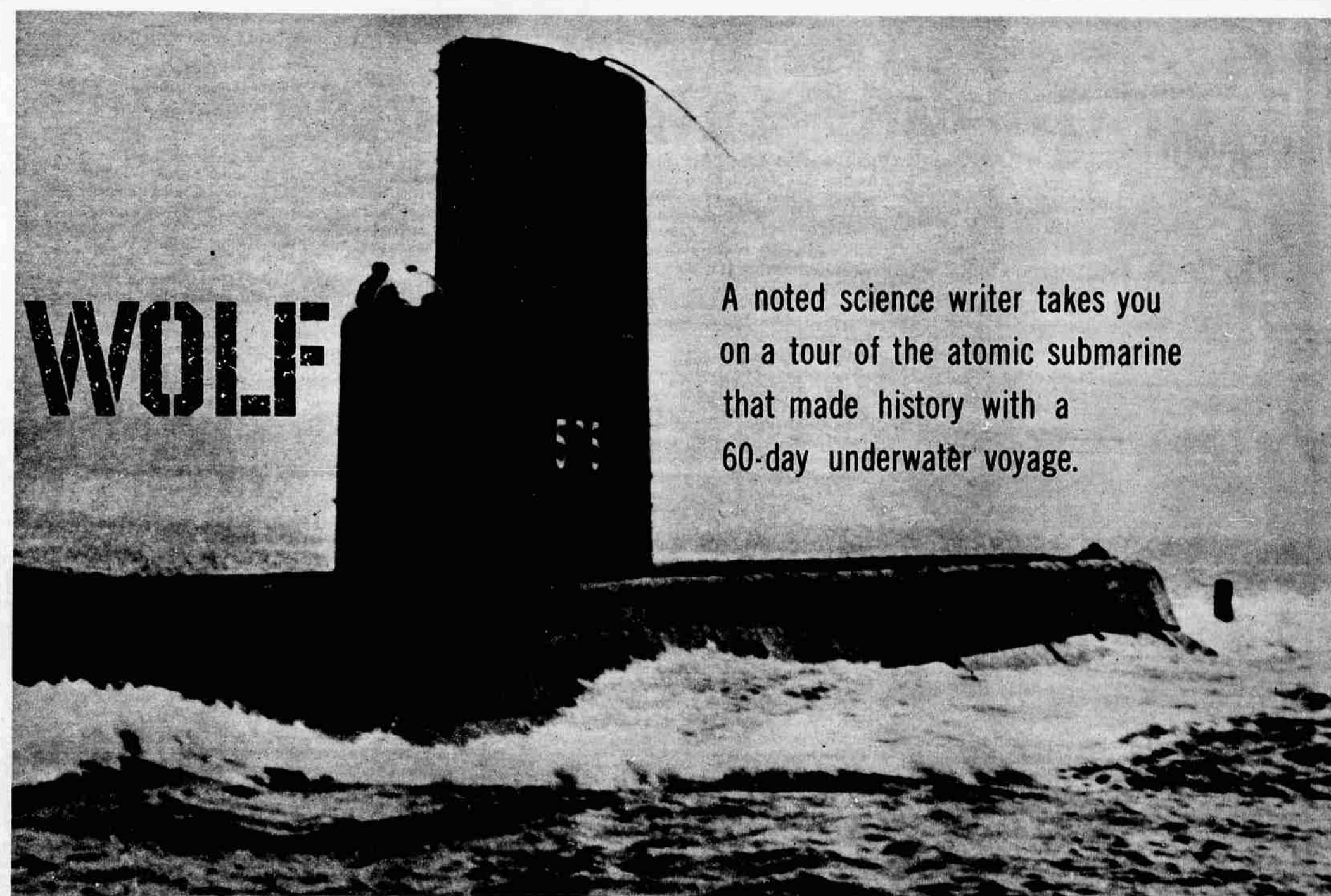
Via dumbwaiter from galley to wardroom, an A-sub's officers eat exactly the same food as the crew. This makes for a greater feeling of unity aboard. And as more than one nuclear submariner (pronounced sub-MA-riner, not sub-ma-REEN-er) has observed, "It also helps guarantee we'll have good cooks."

One of the most challenging tasks aboard a nuclear submarine is how to make pleasant or productive use of so much leisure. This job falls upon an extremely important person known as Chief of the Boat. On the *Seawolf* he is a strapping, crew-cropped redhead with cheerful mien named Lloyd-allan Berkey.

Like any Chief of the Boat—and the *Seawolf's* hundred-odd officers and men consider theirs the best in the fleet—Chief Berkey is father confessor to anyone with troubles, intermediary between two men who've squabbled ("usually the best of friends, who flare up briefly because they are so close"), and go-between from officers to enlisted men and vice versa.

In addition, it's up to him to provide new diversions every trip. How did he prepare for the record 60-day submersion? For one thing, he in-

A noted science writer takes you on a tour of the atomic submarine that made history with a 60-day underwater voyage.



troduced oil-painting sets, which went over big.

Leathercraft kits for ladies' purses, identification cases, wallets, and key cases also got a big play, and will repeat. While Chief Berkey learned the hard way about the popularity of leatherwork and oil painting, he points out, "Next trip maybe nobody will touch either. It's a chance you take."

A high-interest cribbage tournament and bingo are further aids in the anti-boredom campaign. Here, as in popular card games like gin rummy and Navy pinochle (two decks, nines missing), money is seldom involved.

Probably the most valuable card in Chief Berkey's own hand is the rule that a man serve nine months (it used to be six) on nuclear sub duty before being considered "permanent." This means constant study to know everything about the vessel and meet rigid qualification standards. Because the very existence of the A-sub and its crew depends on each individual's competence, this study program is known simply as "life insurance." Nobody jokes about the idea, for it is putting into practice a favorite saying in this branch of service: "We have room for everything but a mistake."

HOW MUCH ROOM, for practical living (and staying alive), does the crew have? You'd be surprised. *Seawolf*, our second nuclear submarine, is