



Lieutenant and Mrs. Raymond McCool read to baby Kerry, 9 months old, at their home in Dover, N. H. The McCools' other children are (left to right): Kevin, 9, Michael, 4, Daniel, 3, and Timothy, 7.

## I'll Still Sail Nuclear Subs!

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was because when I pulled up in front of his home, he said: "I've never seen a better ship and crew—especially your 'E' Division. You've done a good job, so don't worry. It'll be good to have you aboard."

I was grateful for that compliment, and I went home feeling a lot better. Less than 48 hours later Captain Larcombe called me.

As each nuclear-submarine captain completes his training, Vice Adm. Hyman Rickover, who pioneered the development of this type of craft, presents him with a bronze plaque that says:

Oh God, Thy sea is so great  
And my ship so small.

It is an old Breton fisherman's prayer, but it sums up the feeling of all seamen and their families. The sea brings a sense of humility and acceptance of God's will, and in the next days I would see how this faith brings strength.

I left the message center at 8 Thursday morning, still refusing to believe a growing fact. When I opened the door of my home, I found Barbara and Kay listening to radio reports. They hadn't slept all night. Barbara asked only one question: "Is there any further word?"

"You know as much as I do," I said and went to shave.

My wife is not a talkative woman in any case. A couple who are very close don't have to talk about some things. We have never discussed the *Thresher*, for example, or the fate that left me behind the day she went down. Relatives, friends, reporters have said to me: "Wasn't your wife's accident lucky? . . . How do you feel about it? . . . Why do you think such things happen?" At home, I haven't had to answer these questions.

In an hour or so I was back at the shipyard and later began helping call relatives of the *Thresher's* complement. At first we had said she was "overdue." At 2 a.m. Thursday, however, we had further word from Washington. "The *Thresher* is missing," we said then. "The Navy holds little hope." The voices at the other end of the line were tight but composed, and the phrases

strangely hollow: "I see . . . thank you for calling us . . . let us know."

By Friday the *Thresher's* loss was accepted even by me. "We ought to build a memorial," somebody was saying. "What do you think, Lieutenant?" I mumbled something—I don't know what—but a hunk of concrete or a statue just didn't seem important then.

Later I got into my car and began calling on as many of the families as I could. I drove down the same street I had many times before with John Lyman and stopped at his house.

As I did, I kept remembering the well-wishers who told me how lucky I was. And, truly, I realize this. Nobody wants death. But that old phrase kept coming back: "An extra pair of hands, an extra pair of eyes." Mine? If mine had been the extra pair of hands and eyes, would the *Thresher* somehow have survived? Probably I'll never know, and that thought will haunt me the rest of my life.

JOAN LYMAN greeted me at the door. I told her there was no hope now. She nodded understandingly. Her three children played, too young to realize their loss fully. Joan explained what she had been doing. From the first, she had worried about the other wives. Some had nobody to turn to at this moment; others might have specific problems—money, baby sitters, transportation. Joan planned a meeting. She would get all the wives together and let them know they weren't alone in their loss, that they would feel better helping one another.

I visited John Smarz' home, too. Barbara and I had spent almost as much time there as at our own place. Our five kids and John's and Joyce's three really could make a home ring out. Now it was quiet, but Joyce was too concerned with others to feel sorry for herself. Death had to be explained to the children; there were arrangements to be made, relatives to see. I asked if I could do anything, but Joyce was in full control.

No, there was nothing I could do. These were families of friends and shipmates. They were

suffering deep personal loss, but all I could do was say, "I'm sorry," and wonder if there wasn't some way I could provide an extra pair of hands and eyes to those to whom I felt so bound.

I don't think it has been publicized much, but more than 200 children were left fatherless when the *Thresher* went down. Children without fathers need help—being fatherless myself, I especially know this. But how could I help?

One wife I visited was deeply broken by the tragedy. She was Mrs. Jo Ann Brann, and she had good reason for tears. In a few weeks she expected a baby. "What will we do?" she asked. "Where will we turn?" When I got back to the shipyard, I thought there might be an answer for her as well as myself.

"We were talking about a memorial," I said. "But what good does a monument or something do? Now if we raised funds for scholarships for the kids' education, that would mean something."

The next weeks were crowded ones: a court of inquiry, efforts to locate the *Thresher* 8,400 feet below the Atlantic, my temporary assignment to New London, Conn. But nothing could get that scholarship idea out of my mind. Here was something we could do, and a lot of us started to work on it.

Funny, some people think you can memorialize heroes just with inscriptions and granite. But the men in the *Thresher* were more than heroes to me. They were men like ourselves, husbands and fathers whose main concern was their children's future; it was what gave them their greatest purpose and satisfaction.

If anybody didn't agree with the scholarship idea, we had a clinching argument—more than 200 fatherless children. A few weeks ago I got this notice:

"THE *THRESHER* Memorial Fund Committee met yesterday in order to define the purpose and establish administrative procedures for this fund . . . It was resolved at the committee meeting that this money would be used primarily as an educational fund for the dependent children of both Navy and civilian personnel lost on *Thresher* . . . The spontaneous action on the part of many individuals and groups throughout the country, as well as personnel within the military services, brought this fund into being."

Incidentally, I visited Jo Ann Brann not long ago. She is very busy nowadays taking care of a baby girl. There are no more tears. She told me she "was looking to the future now," and I guess that is what all of us are doing.

My own future is still the sea and subs. As soon as possible, I hopefully requested assignment to one of the *Thresher's* sister ships. Just about the time I learned about the *Thresher* Memorial Fund, I got some other good news. It seems I will soon get a ship. I'll be happy to be back where I belong. And I will take with me always some words Admiral Rickover said after the *Thresher* went down:

"I pray that those of us responsible for submarines will learn to design, build, and operate them in a manner worthy of the men who gave their lives in the *Thresher*."

*Editors' Note: If you would like to contribute to the educational fund for the children of the men lost aboard the Thresher, please send your donation to:*

Thresher Memorial Fund  
c/o Dolphin Scholarship Foundation  
West Virginia House, Norfolk 11, Va.