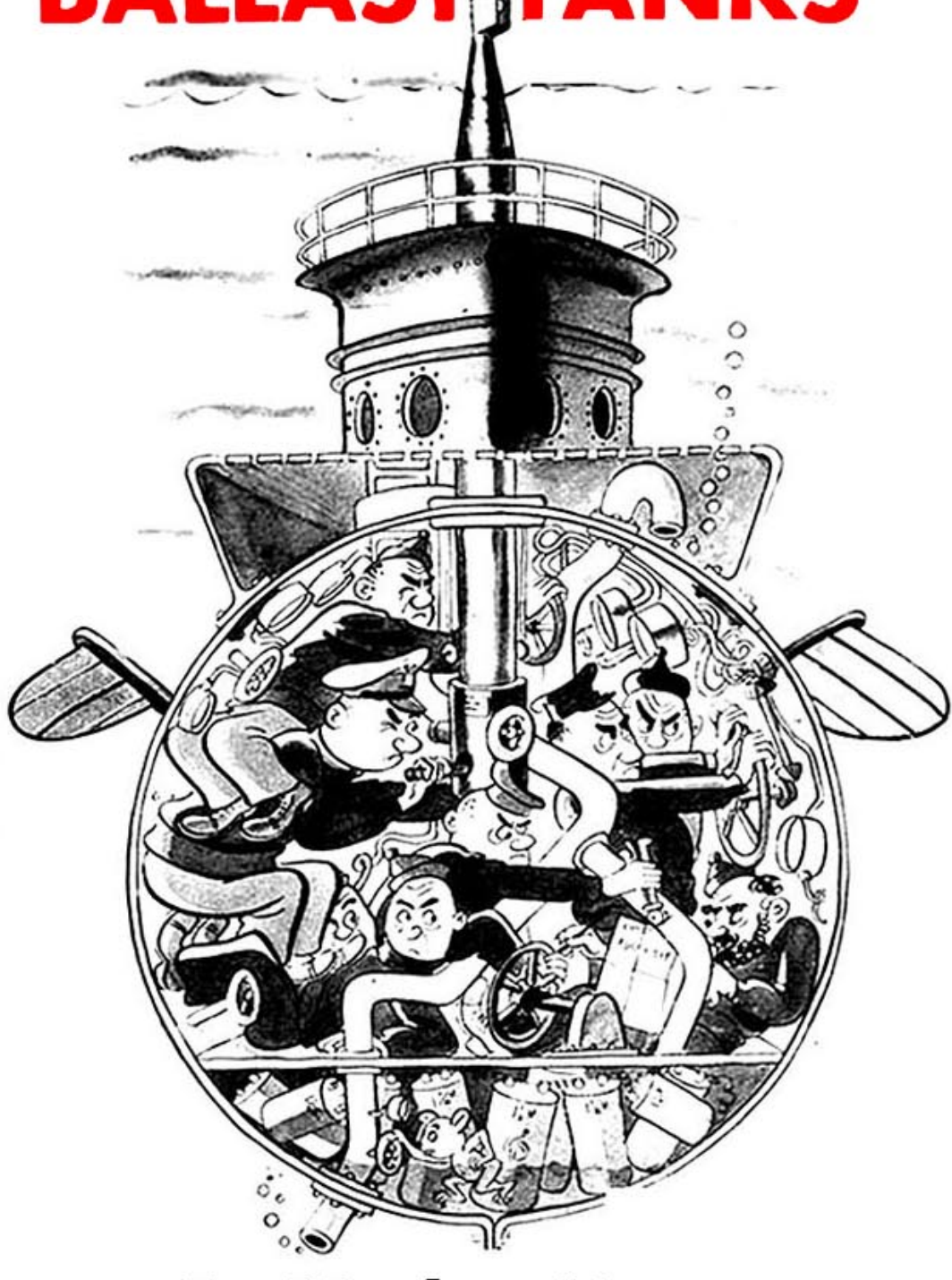


Blow It Out Your BALLAST TANKS



By Marion Hargrove

NEW LONDON, CONN.—To read articles about submarines, you'd think they were about as big around as a small beer keg and that the men worked curled around each other's elbows. To see submarine movies, you'd think the sailors spent their time bailing water, gasping, sweating, hammering on jammed doors and getting on each other's nerves.

This is really a lot of Navy propaganda, designed to keep surface fleets from being stripped of their personnel by a rush of volunteers for submarine duty.

Although older subs have few modern conveniences, the latest models are equipped with air conditioning, silent electric motors that won't drown out the swapping of lies, and trimmings of aluminum and stainless steel that please the most aesthetic sailor's eye.

Instead of hairy-chested Victor McLaglens wrestling with monstrous wheels and levers, today we see neat and sober youths turning off their phonographs, putting away their albums of Beethoven records and sauntering to the control room for their turn at reading the streamlined gauges and pushing the pretty little rows of red and green buttons.

This luxurious craft has only one drawback, so far as our astute army eye can see. It looks like a submarine. In modern warfare every combat vehicle is carefully disguised. In our modest way we tried to figure out camouflage for the submarine that would make her look like a mermaid, but her bumps are in the wrong places. Therefore we humbly submit to the Navy the suggestion that a bit of paint could make her look like a 5-cent cigar, in which case nobody would give her a second look.

Whereas men of the surface fleets usually occupy their leisure hours by going on deck and frivolling around, submarine sailors have found that when their sub is under water, walking on deck is chilly and often fatal. Therefore they stay below and get acquainted with each other.

This results in a remarkable comradeship in which the usual naval formality is forgotten. Apprentice seamen sometimes address chief petty officers as "Mac" and quartermasters second class have been known to give their captains a hot-foot. This latter prank, however, does not go unpunished. As soon as the captain gets a chance, he gives the quartermaster a hotfoot in return.

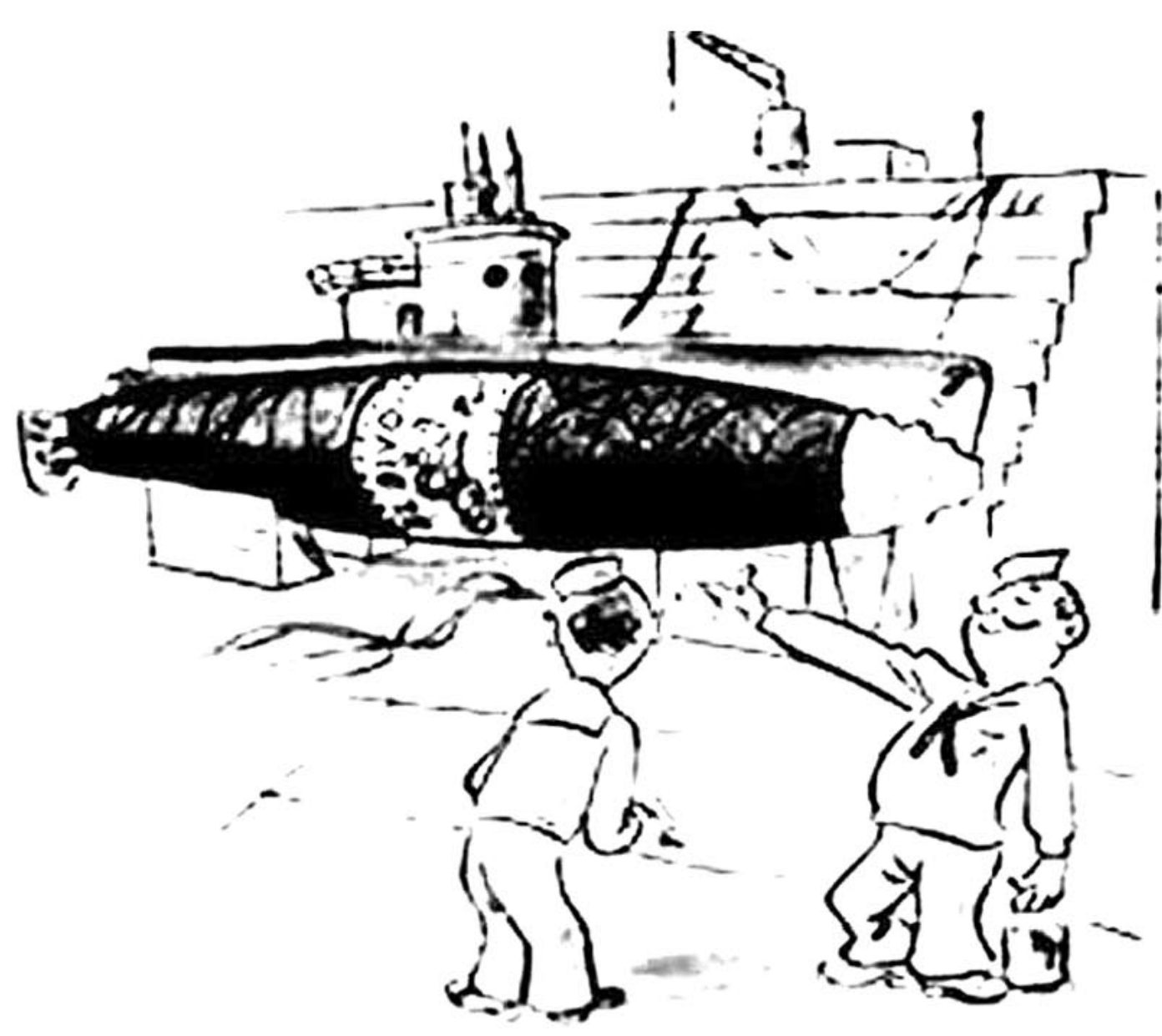
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In the submarine fleet, men never get the rough talk, even from the brass, that soldiers and marines get from foul-mouthed first sergeants. A typical order from the diving officer might go: "Gentlemen, as a favor to the captain, who is having a hard time finding his mouth with his fork in this choppy weather, I suggest that we descend to approximately 60 feet, where absolute calm prevails and the captain may eat his breakfast with equanimity. Flood main ballast tanks, set bow planes at five degrees."

This is not to say that the submarine sailor is a softie. On the contrary, without superhuman courage and determination he could not have braved the dreadful propaganda nor waded through the marshes of scare-talk to get into the sub service. All of this he did, really thinking all the time that he was getting into a tough life.

After finishing boot camp (if he survives it), the submarine sailor comes here to New London to the training school, where he learns the intricacies of the hydrophones, the periscopes, the thousands of little gadgets and the john. Then he goes through several chambers of horror.

The first of these is the pressure chamber, a combination sewer pipe and pressure cooker. Instructors tuck the men safely in and then turn up the air pressure until the recruits' hair curls. Then he tells them to keep swallowing. They do. They swallow lumps in their throats. After an incredibly long time, the instructor sticks a fork in them to see if they're done and lets the air out of the chamber. Then he lets the men out.



The hapless victims are then fitted with Momsen lungs. A Momsen lung is a canvas breathing-bag filled with chemicals which convert a man's natural halitosis into mountain-fresh oxygen which he breathes back in again. Its practical purpose is to keep a man alive under water.

Fitted with a canvas lung, each man goes to the famous diving tower, a vertical pipe 135 feet high, with enough water in it to make a geyser out of every toilet in Connecticut if hooked up properly. (This, however, is not under consideration).

By entering the tank at a level of 12, 18, 50 or 100 feet and then working one's way slowly up to the surface, the recruit learns the technique of under-water escape. The 18-foot escape is required, but many men make deeper ones until they've finally come up from 100 feet. This they do because 1) they want to see

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the pretty mermaids painted on the sides at the lower levels, 2) the other fellows would call them sissies if they didn't, 3) they get a certificate for doing it, and 4) the other fellows would call them sissies if they didn't.

Having gone through these ordeals, the submarine sailor can retire to the quiet and easy-going submarine life, enjoying the social routine, doing his work unhurriedly as he awaits the joys of the glorious post-war world.

YANK

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