



Mission around South America

by Phil Owens QMC(SS)Ret
USS Odax (SS-484)

In 1960 the USS Odax (SS-484) was stationed in Charleston, S.C. when we were given a mission to circumnavigate South America and to train various naval personnel in anti-submarine warfare.

We departed Charleston and headed south, to Cartagena, Columbia, where we docked giving several of the crew liberty. I was assigned Shore Patrol. At first I thought it was going to be a real bummer, but it turned out to be a very interesting experience, as I worked directly with



two English-speaking civilian officers. I received a real education on the good and bad neighborhoods and what could be expected. Fortunately, none of my shipmates were involved in the skirmishes we ran into.

From there we transited the Panama Canal, entered the Pacific Ocean, and headed to Guayaquil, Ecuador, for our first training mission. It was interesting seeing how clear the water was and how deep a submarine could be seen.

You have all heard about becoming a SHELLBACK! Well, let me tell you that on a Submarine it is a real experience. All the Pollywogs were lined up on deck to meet with "DAVY JONES." They pick the most rotund individual on the boat and grease his belly and then soak it with sea water. He is dressed in a grass skirt shorts and no top. All the POLLYWOGS must kneel before "KING DAVY and KISS his belly. When you bend down, someone pushes the back of your head deep into the grease, then they hit you with a salt water bath. You are then promoted to "SHELLBACK!" clean up and on to the exercises.

We were restricted to depth, course and speed, so it wasn't hard to find us. Just to make sure we knew they had us, some joker tied several practice depth charges together and dropped them on us. "BANG" what a racket they made! When we got back to port we found it put a hole in the aluminum sail. Needless to say, the skipper was NOT A HAPPY CAMPER! After Several days and nights in Ecuador we set sail again headed south. At that time, I was still a NON-Qual so no liberty--just STUDY.

Next Stop Callao, Peru this was to be my most harrowing experience aboard submarines. As before in Ecuador our movements were limited so the aviators in the P3 Orions could gain the experience recognizing a target. This time, we were running decks awash for a rapid dive when the alarm sounded and we cleared the bridge. The Officer of the Deck (OD) was the last man down and grabbed the lanyard to close the 21" hatch, but the latch got caught on the combing around the opening. We were going "DOWN," and water was pouring in that open hole in a big way.

As Quartermaster of the watch, my job was to dog the hatch shut. However, with the OD hanging onto the lanyard, I couldn't push the hatch up to release the latch. Finally, in desperation, I kicked the OD in the face and he released his hold on the lanyard, I reached in with two fingers to pull the latch, fully expecting to lose both fingers. Luck was with me that day as my fingers and the latch cleared the hatch combing and closed. I dogged the hatch and went to my maneuvering station in the back of the conning tower. We went DEEP-- further than we had ever

(continued next page)





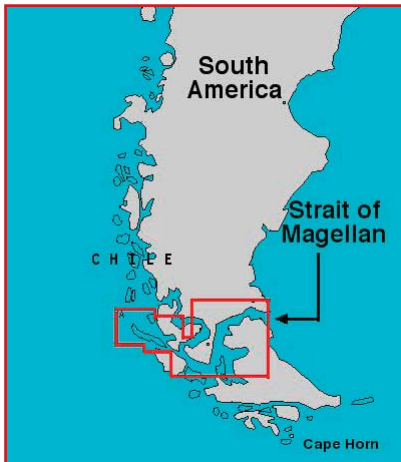
USS Odax (SS-484)
Christmas 1959 in Charleston, SC.

(Continued from page 1)

gone before, and both the Diving officer and the OLD MAN were struggling to regain control. Finally, they managed, but we had taken on a LOT of WATER!

We returned to periscope depth and fired a red flare to let everyone know we were going to make an emergency surface. Once on top, we fired the engines and pumped water out of the boat. While in port repairs were made to prevent another failure. The remainder of the mission in Peru went on as scheduled.

Next stop Antofagasta, Chile. This turned out to be fairly routine: same rules, same results, weather was much cooler, but the countryside was beautiful and the people friendly. Then, on down the coast to Valparaiso which was a larger metropolitan city than we had seen. My special event here was "Qualifications"!!! I had passed all my requirements and was been blessed with "DOLPHINS"!



Our next adventure on this six-month tour was to be a record setting event! We went SOUTH thru the Straights of Magellan--the 1st U.S. submarine to transit this area. COLD! COLD! COLD! Wind! Very nasty weather, and I was saddled with 72 hours straight on the helm--too cold to sleep, had to use a human element range extender at the wheel, had cold sandwiches and coffee!

Passed Punta Arenas and Terra Del Fuego the most southern point in South America.

There were times where the water was VERY SHALLOW, and we had to blow some tanks to give us a little extra room at the keel. I sure didn't want to get stuck down there.

Next, we were moving up the Atlantic side of South America headed to Montevideo, Uruguay. The leather works were spectacular and the prices very reasonable, so like any good sailor I had to pick up some things to take home. Missions now became very routine, certainly not like the excitement we had in the Pacific.

The next stop in the tour was Buenos Aires, Argentina. The food was something else--you would not believe the steaks. This is the first time I was permitted liberty as now I was Qualified, so two of my fellow QM'S decided we would take in the town, I was not prepared for what was going to happen.

We are walking down the famous brick walk when we saw three ladies coming our way, but they were not Argentinians. As they got closer I cannot believe my eyes. It was Miss Malish, my 3d grade school teacher from Portage, Wis. and two of her friends. SURPRISE! What fun! We invited them to lunch and had a great time. Amazing how small the world really is! Unfortunately, time was short and we were scheduled to get underway soon, so we said our goodbyes.

Next Stop: Sao Paulo, Brazil, was interesting, but we didn't have much time there as exercises were heavy, and we were getting anxious to get home.

We set sail from Sao Paulo headed for Charleston, SC. on a non-stop trip and let me tell you that is a LONG TRIP! Finally, back in Charleston, home to the family and we got a well-deserved break! Next into the Yards for upgrading!

While at the time I was only a QM₂(SS) this experience held excitement, scares, and accomplishments. We received a WELL DONE from SUBLANT.

