

Death of Navy Tradition By Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Sousa (ret.)

240 Years of Navy Tradition Unhampered by Progress

An obituary for Navy Tradition (USN, retired) – 1775-2015: In a press release from Washington D. C., the Navy Department announced the death of Navy Tradition today after a long illness.

Navy Tradition was born into a world of turmoil and revolution in 1775. Starting with nothing as a child, Navy Tradition evolved to become an essential part of the most powerful Navy the world had ever seen. He was present when James Lawrence ordered "Don't give up the ship" as he lay mortally wounded on the deck of the Chesapeake. He witnessed cannon balls bouncing off the copper-shielded sides of the USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides."

He fought pirates off the Barbary Coast and suffered with his shipmates on the battleship Arizona during the attack at Pearl Harbor. He fought his way across the Pacific with Nimitz and saw MacArthur fulfill his promise to return to the Philippines. Navy Tradition was there when sailors fought bravely to save the frigate Stark after it was hit by a cruise missile and witnessed the launch of Tomahawk missiles from the battleship Missouri at the outset of Desert Storm.

Through all the strife, good times and bad, Navy Tradition was there to support his shipmates and give a balance to the misery that sometimes accompanied a life at sea. Be the nation at peace or at war, Navy Tradition made sure that we always remembered we were sailors.

He made sure that promotions were celebrated with an appropriate "wetting down"; crows, dolphins and wings were tacked on as a sign of respect from those already so celebrated; chiefs were promoted in solemn ceremony after being "initiated" by their fellow brethren; and only those worthy were allowed to earn the title "shellback."

But in his later years, Navy Tradition was unable to fight the cancer of political correctness. He tired as his beloved Navy went from providing rations of rum to its sail-ors to conducting Breathalyzer tests on the brow. He weakened as he saw "Going into harm's way" turn into "Cover your backside," and as "Wooden ships and iron men" morphed into "U.S. Navy, Inc."

A lifelong friend of Navy Tradition recalled a crossing-the-equator ceremony during World War II: " I had to eat a cherry out of the belly button of the fattest sailor on the ship. It was disgusting.

But for that few minutes, it took our minds off the war and to this day it is one of my greatest memories."

In lieu of flowers, the family of Navy Tradition has asked that all sailors who have earned their shellback and drunk their dolphins; who remember sore arms from where their crows were tacked on and were sent on a search for "relative bearing grease" or a length of "water line"; who've been through chiefs' initiation or answered ship's call in a bar fight in some exotic port of call, to raise a toast one more time and remember Navy Tradition in his youth and grandeur.

Fair winds and following seas, Shipmate. You will be missed.

(Submitted by Sal Contello, Jan. 2015)