A Date with Destiny â€“ Part VIII

Description



21 years ago, the USS BONEFISH (SS-582), while operating to simulate a Soviet diesel submarine, experienced a fire in the battery well.Ã, The fire spread quickly, resulting in the surfacing and abandoning, while at sea, the boat.Ã, The prior post in this series discuss the lead to, and operations on that day, to rescue the crew at sea.



Lt Ray Everts, Jr, USN

In this post, Iâ€™d like to ensure the story of LT Ray Everts, USN, is highlighted.Ã, It appears that LT Everts, made a decision that cost him his life, but made sure the conditions he and his shipmates were facing, was not compounded by a collision with one of the two ships using them as a training target.Ã, Last year, a former crew member, FT2(SS) Bill Baker, on the BONEFISH had found the posts by accident, and left this comment, with more details, specifically about LT Everts, and also about other

details of the conditions of the equipment, and what it was like to be in that fire.Ã, He ends with some well deserved some BZs for his shipmates, all of this not reported elsewhere:

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Update 4/24/09 PM: Some other commenters at Bubbleheadâ€™s blog add more detail the postâ€™s comments.

Update 4/25/09:Ã, Hayballâ€™s comments on the US Naval Institute blog shed more light on who Lt Everts was, and a more detailed role he played in this story.

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> Bill Baker FT2(SS) said:
> April 15th, 2008 at 2:28 pm
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> Funny, I was looking for something else and came across this.
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> I have read RichardÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s recollection of it many times. I will give you some of my remembrances:
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> I was on watch as messenger of the watch at the time of the accident (we didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t run a full time FTOW -Fire Control Technician of the Watch because it was the old Mk101 system).
>
> When the call came out Ã¢â‚¬Å“Fire in Berthing, Fire on Third StreetÃ¢â‚¬Â•, I sounded the general alarm. ***I then got out an EAB for me and one for the officer of the Deck (Lt. Ray Everts). The OOD disregarded the EAB to take the ship to PD. If anyone has ever been on a scope with an EAB on, you know that you canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t really do a good search. I believe he disregarded it because of the Carr and Kennedy being in the area, he wanted to get to PD quickly but more importantly, safely.*** While the boat was on the way to PD, I heard what can only be described as the sound you hear when you throw an old wet decomposing log on a fire. That crackling sound. At that point, smoke entered the control room. I have never believed in smoke as a living thing, but the smoke looked like a hand closing around Lt. Everts. At that point, things are a bit fuzzy. Things I do remember are my EAB getting filled with warm smoke (which I later found out was the dirt, oil, dust from the MSA filters installed in the system burning off). The entire ship went black and literally, you could not see your hand in front of your face.
> The next thing I remember was a couple of hands raking down my arm and someone wheezing Ã¢â‚¬Å“Help, I canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t breatheÃ¢â‚¬Â•. I didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t know who it was but found the persons head, took my own EAB off and put it on his face. Immediately his hands flew to the facemask and I realized he didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t want to give it back. I forcibly

took it back, took 3 breaths and gave it back to him and told him we were going to buddy breath while I secure another mask. When he had the mask, I got out another one. We buddy breathed till I got the mask setup. During all this, the CO came into control and stated Ã¢â‚¬Å“XO, itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s not worth it. Abandon shipÃ¢â‚¬Â•. I know that the word went out on the 1MC. I later heard that people aft of the engine room door didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t hear the word.

I lost track of Lt. Everts at this time. I know from other accounts that he went to the bridge (without an EAB), tried to open the bridge hatch, but couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t. It was known on-board that the dogs were misaligned, but Lt. Everts came from our sister ship Barbel (SS-580) and was already qualified the ship. Squadron also knew that the hatches were messed up but when the TM1 who transferred to squadron tried to do hatch inspections and they started failing, he was ordered to stop. The inspections were later nowhere to be found. Anyway, I saw Lt. Everts on the deck nearby. I grabbed him, got out another EAB and put it on him. I will never forget the next events. I had Lt. Everts head in my lap and I was sitting cross legged. Lt. Ellsworth had gotten the hatch open and the smoke was starting to clear. Lt. Everts proceeded to go into convulsions from smoke inhalation and looked me directly in the eyes. Just thinking it caused a picture of it in my mind that was as vivid as the day it happened. I heard someone calling for people by station to leave. I distinctly heard helmsman, planesman, etc. What I never heard was messenger. The control room got deathly quiet. I called out Ã¢â‚¬Å“is anyone thereÃ¢â‚¬Â• and got no response. I did it again, and then lifted the mask thinking people couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t hear me because I had the EAB on. Again, I heard nothing. Lt. Everts breathing became very shallow and he was unresponsive. I looked down at him and thought to myself, I can stay here and die with him, or I can get out. I chose the latter. I stood up, and then did the stupidest thing in my entire life. I took the mask off and then attempted to get it free of my belt. In my panic, I ended up pulling my entire belt off. While attempting to locate the bridge trunk, I found the chart table next to the DRT table had come down blocking the ladder. I climbed over it and got about half way up the trunk when I heard my wifeÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s voice Ã¢â‚¬Å“they arenÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t going to do anything about that boat till it kills someoneÃ¢â‚¬Â•. My response was always Ã¢â‚¬Å“IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m not going to leave you a rich widowÃ¢â‚¬Â•. I then made it to the upper level and told someone up there I was the last man alive out of control. Funny thing was, Tony Silvia was behind me coming out of the hatch and he had the connection of an EAB in his hand. Tony was in distress. On the other end was Bob Bordelon. Shawn Glappa dropped down to the nav level and was attempting to push Bob up. I had hold of his Ã¢â‚¬Å“poopy suitÃ¢â‚¬Â• at the collar. None of the three of us was able to pull Bob up. Bob was not a big guy, but our strength was just sapped. I can still hear the sound of his body tumbling down the trunk.

Tony was taken off from the fairwater planes by helo. I ended up on the aft deck just past the sail. When the boat would go down in the wave, it would lift us up and when the boat would come back up, we would scramble back to the center and attempt to hold onto the safety track and each other.

When it was my turn to go, I go up, went to the side of the sail and threw my new sneakers into the water. When the lifeboat got close and the boat was up and going down, I jumped on top of the raft and pulled myself inside. The next 2 hours were some of the worst in my life. I was seasick and the only place I could throw up was to unzip my poopy suit and throw

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up into it. I was by a hatch but couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t lean out. I remember just wanting to close my eyes and sleep. TMC Blackburn grabbed my hand and told me I could close my eyes, but I had to occasionally squeeze his hand to let him know I was still alive. I appreciated that. After a while, a diver came to the hatch and we were taken out one by one to a helicopter. I remember when I was in the water with the guy holding me, telling me what was going to happen, I threw up on him *[ed: I suspect this was the wet crewman from the HSL-44 helo, AW Brian Hendrix]*. To his credit, he just washed it off and kept going. He later ended up on the Kennedy on a makeshift bed next to me. He had rescued about twice the number of people he was supposed to.
From the helo, I was deposited on the Carr and I remember a gung ho corpsman (he had just finished a tour with the marines) *[ed: HMC(SW) Mentzer â€“ a superior HMC!]* came up to me. All I wanted was to get horizontal. They took my clothes and gave me a dry poopy suit and I lay down. I got an IV and then transferred me to the Kennedy. When the chopper started to take off, the door was open, I was strapped into a stretcher and the stretcher moved. I grabbed the post holding the seats and held on for dear life.

While aboard the Kennedy, they had a fire. I remember having trouble getting to sleep (couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t breathe well and throat was sore). On the CCTV was a Captains mast when the fire alarm went off. No one moved. I questioned what I was to do and they told me to go to bed, the fire department will take care of it.

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The next day, we go on a helo and were taken to the hospital. En-route, I was allowed to put on a harness and look out the open door. It was cool.

Once at the hospital, they did triage and it was determined that I had pretty extensive smoke inhalation. I ended up on oxygen and albuteral. I was finally able to get in touch with my wife and family. Maybe another time I will tell you what she went through during all this. Suffice it to say, squadron was very unprepared for something like this to happen.

I was discharged a few days later and went home.

There were some definite heroes that day:
Lt. Everts â€“ For getting the ship safely to PD and the surface.
Tony Silvia â€“ For trying to save Bob Bordelons life.
??? Ledbetter â€“ For jumping in and getting the life rafts to the boat when they were dropped off.
Rescue swimmers â€“ For going above and beyond.
Jim Yates â€“ For telling squadron about the hatches -though they shut him down on this.

TMC ??? â€“ Who tried like hell to get squadron to allow the hatches to be inspected.
Lt. Ellsworth â€“ For getting up there and getting the hatch open.

If you havenâ€™t read that entire comment thread, then youâ€™re missing some other first person info, too.

Jim Chapman loaned me the December 1988 Approach magazine, which his parents had saved all these years, so I could scan two articles, one by the SH-3 Helo pilot, CDR Waickwicz (later ADM), and

the other by Jim. Click on the cover picture below to get to the .pdf of those pages from Approach.



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Well done, LT Ray Everts.Ã¸ Rest in peace.

Other shipmates of the BONEFISH crew who were lost 4/24/2009 were:

YN3(SS) Marshall Lindgren, USN and RM1(SS) Robert W. Bordelon, Jr, USN

If anyone has any info regarding this disaster, particularly on the salvage operations, please leave a comment and let me know how to contact you.

Category

1. Public Service

Tags

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