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Bulletin

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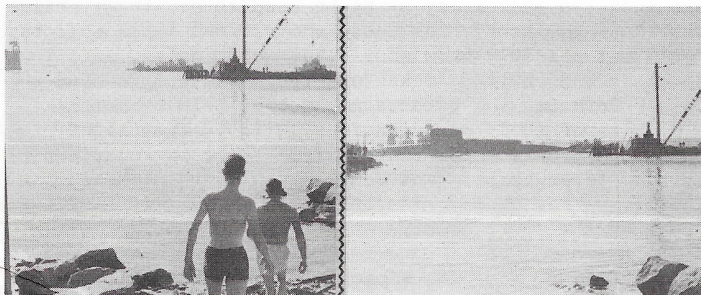
Nine Arrested in New London

ALL ABOARD ETHAN ALLEN

by Bill Henry

From the New London City Dock we could see the first two of our boats—a canoe and a dory—towed away by the Coast Guard. They had set out to obstruct the launching of the Ethan Allen. About 11:35 AM, a third boat named Leo Tolstoy and manned by Vic Richman and Larry Orenstein, left City Dock and headed for the launching ways of EB.

Don Martin and I had planned to begin swimming toward the sub from the Groton shore when the third boat entered the restricted area surrounding the launching site. Our timing was poor. The boat left too soon and we arrived at our jumping off place rather late. Only two minutes remained before the Ethan Allen was to be launched. We quickly stripped down to bathing trunks. Then we walked absurdly through the sunny, cool November air onto the shore which was grouped with people gathered for the launching. Into the calm, dark, icy water we strode. The cold pierced us and we gasped for air. The numbness which began to pierce us was forgotten as whistles blew and the Ethan Allen slid smoothly and cautiously down the ways into the silent waters with the occupants on her deck presenting themselves in beautiful symmetry.



"We're too late," I thought, but Don and I agreed to survey the situation from a piling near the ways before making our next move. As we swam, shipyard workers waved warnings to halt. Others shouted to us to stay out. A C.G. boat pulled up to us just as we reached the pilings. A Guardsman yelled at us to come aboard. "Are we under arrest?" I asked. "Yes," he replied, but unconvincingly. He said the same when asked again.

I swam over, grabbed on to the boat and pulled myself up. Suddenly, the Guardsman stopped me and ordered, "Hold it." A voice over the ship's radio instructed, "Let them swim." The Guardsman I understood to say, "Navy says let them swim so you have to go back. I soon rejoined Don in the water. He had decided not to go aboard in the first place. We pushed off in the direction of the sub, situated in the center of the river with its colorfully draped bow pointing toward us about 250 yards away.

A number of C.G. launches were in the area. Don and I talked and decided that we could both swim way across the estuary to the other side if it were necessary. With this confidence in mind we struck out toward the sub. Almost

immediately a C.G. launch moved into our path. But our swimming battle of three pacifists against four boats at Newport News served us well. A word between us and we split up. I headed around the rear of the launch while Don headed around the bow. One boat cannot stop two swimmers. The launch retreated. The launch regrouped with another launch, bow to bow. This time we didn't even slow down. We swam for the point where the two bows nearly touched and because neither launch could move ahead without ramming the other, we were able to swim between the bows.

Another boat blocked us. Don headed for the bow and went around it. I headed for the stern but the launch backed up. I headed for the bow but the launch went forward. I was blocked. I swam in close to the launch in order to try and pull myself around the bow by holding on to projections from the hull and pulling myself forward even while the launch moved. I held to a water escape valve temporarily and then made a lunge and several quick strokes to pull myself in front of the boat before it would move ahead. I got around it as it moved ahead and then I pushed off from its hull. It moved in position ahead of me again. Don had disappeared.

The considerate young skipper of the launch asked me to come aboard. I told him that I felt obligated to keep trying until I was exhausted. Someone said, "You'll never make it." Just then, another Guardsman said, "Look, his buddy is there already." I reached up and grabbed the horizontal edge of the deck and by swinging hand over hand I was able to move around the bow to open water. I could see Don clinging to the drapery halfway up the sub's bow 150 feet away.

The launch blocked me again. I was wearying and numb as two launches created waves which wearied me further. The considerate young skipper threw me a buoyant ring but I avoided it. He told me very nicely that he felt responsible for my life and I told him that I would be careful but that I felt I had a duty just as he had a duty. After several minutes I was able to swim around the stern. Maybe I was permitted to do so.

As I moved closer to the sub a huge section of wooden launching cradle bobbed to the surface. A man amidships yelled, "You'll be killed if you stay there." I moved toward the bow and the ship seemed to start moving ahead. I grabbed the red, white and blue streamers and pulled myself up. The slope of the hull was about 45°. I climbed to the same point Don had. An official on deck kindly warned me of the weakness of a thick string I was depending on. I grasped a different hold and pulled my stiff body up to the rope guard rails around the deck.

The coldness had penetrated so far and so long that the outside of me was stiff like the exoskeleton of a bug. I shivered violently and the numbness seemed to move deeper and deeper. I had to concentrate to walk straight. My body weaved and my consciousness was barely with me. I took a life jacket in a vain effort to retain body heat. I arose when directed. A rope was tied around my waist and I voluntarily proceeded down a steel ladder to a waiting Navy boat. There Don was being held. He was in no sense waiting.

We were taken to the Coast Guard Station where we joined the seven other disobedients. They greeted us with shouts of How close did you get? Dick Zink offered his warm coat. Military personnel volunteered in a very considerate manner a hot radiator, a warm blanket and a hot cup of coffee.