

U.S.S. Enterprise Crew Up In Arms

TROUBLE BREWING HERE ABOARD NUCLEAR SHIP

See Story Below



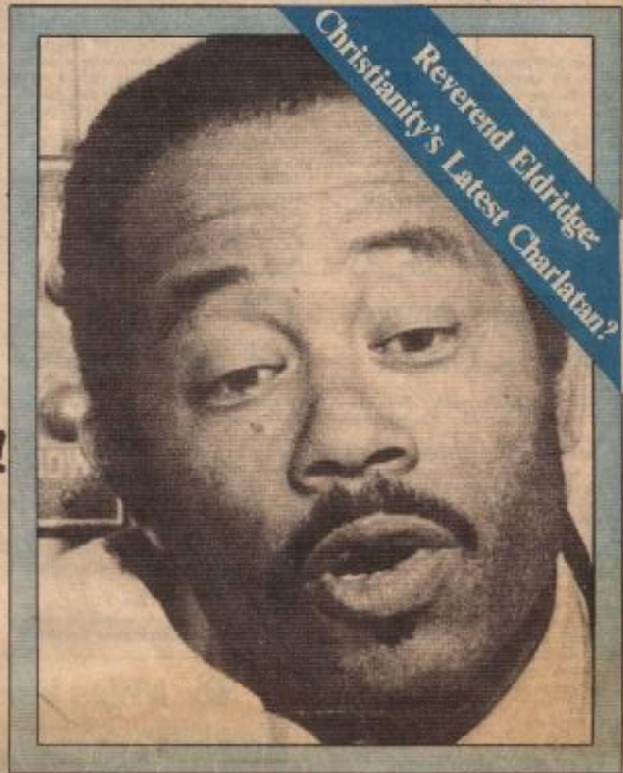
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Cancer Generation Next?

A Full Page Of Comics!

Plus Ray Charles, Sylvester,
Paul Krassner & Alternative
Travel Services



First of a two-part series.

by Gar Smith

It is the largest nuclear complex in the world. It is sitting in San Francisco Bay. It is the nuclear carrier USS Enterprise and it is in trouble.

The Enterprise -- commissioned in November 1968 at a cost of \$451 million -- is the pride of the U.S. Navy. The Enterprise is powered by eight nuclear reactors and, it is claimed, can do 35 knots in open seas. The Enterprise, unlike most of the ships in the fleet, has never missed a sailing date.

It may miss the next one.

Over the past weeks, in a number of meetings with individuals and groups, the Barb has received a rare glimpse of the world inside the Enterprise. A world of misadministration, uncertainty and cover-up. The information has come from enlisted men -- technicians, machinists, reactor officers and crew members' wives and civilian ship contractors.

There are two issues: morale and safety. Each affects the other.

"We are in a politically explosive situation," one of the ship's nuclear technician informed the Barb. "The executive officer feels that by making people work longer hours and separating them from their families, he's going to come up with more professional watch standards. What they don't understand is that by grinding people under their heel and working them to the limit, it doesn't make them more professional, it just makes them more discontent." ***

It is a warm, quiet night in southern Alameda County. Inside a ground-level apartment, rock music is playing softly as a dozen people share drinks and talk about life on the Enterprise. Those present include electronics technicians, machinists' mates, several chief reactor auxiliary officers, a supply division officer, their wives and lady friends.

There are "a thousand and one" things to complain about:



***"There's been a move towards the strictest compliance with procedure. But we've been finding violations of procedure by the officers themselves. While they hold us to a strict verbatim compliance, they have been skirting the Department Organizational Manual which tells how the plants are to be run. They have not followed basic procedures." ***

***"I agree 100 percent that you've got to push your men, you've got to go to extremes to insure safety. But they don't care about that anymore. They care about whether I've got a stencil right here on my pants and not on the other side."

***"They don't care that we're doing a good job as long as we look good doing it. It's like saying: you don't have to worry if the pump works as long as it's painted right."

***"I don't care about that kind of stuff: I do care about the equipment." ***

In May the "Big E" returned from a far-ranging WESPAC (Pacific cruise). Instead of lasting the usual seven months the WESPAC ran over to eight. When the ship returned, the men were only given a three-day lay-over instead of the traditional month, and were then ordered back into the Pacific for two more weeks -- to help qualify Navy carrier pilots from other ships.

Exhausted by the sea-days and embittered by the current 80-hour-per-week schedule of duty, a machinist's mate challenged: "Count up the number of days you guys were home in the last couple of years." His wife replied quickly, "Really! The three years we've been married I think we've been together eight months!"

But these are only the outward signs of what seems to be a fundamental malaise within the Enterprise crew and, perhaps, throughout the fleet.

"I think the seat of this whole thing can be summed up in two words," said one petty officer: "Human rights." ***

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-- Enterprise

Continued from Cover

"The Enterprise is a very political ship."
--A "Big E" crewmember.

The shit hit the fan last November when the Big E limited its annual (and reactor) Subaquatics Evaluation (ORSE). The ORSE board decided we were "highly unsafe" in our knowledge levels in some areas," the man reported. "They said the operators were academically trained" in our administration. Although the men could not elaborate without violating security, the ORSE board apparently found other irregularities which caused considerable embarrassment to the ship's officers, and may have delayed the promotion of the ship's captain. According to our sources, there had been a cover-up the blame had to be shifted to the enlisted personnel.

"There were times when people in the higher echelons moved to protect themselves," said one man. "These were people dedicated to staying in this outfit even if it meant destroying other people."

"Enlisted men get burned all the time when officers write up 'incidental reports,'" another man added. "This is the enlisted personnel's function to set-up for these incompetent officers."

Subsequent operational evaluations were reportedly even more critical of the Big E's administration. The captain and executive officer "tried to reorganize everything completely instead of one thing at a time," the crewman said. "The result was chaos. They created a complete schism between the officers and the enlisted men. That's something else we cannot afford."

After a special deluge in Hawaii last year to "show the colors," the Enterprise was three days behind its sailing schedule. "The Captain held a meeting in the base line to with our department," said one petty officer. "He pleaded with us. We made up the time. We steamed 27 knots across the Indian Ocean -- faster than any other sea-going war vessel in the Navy -- and the Captain talks us the only reason we were able to do this is because our engineering and Reactor Department are the best."

"And then," said another man, "when we get to port they ship us down because our shores aren't cleaned or we didn't request 'permission to culter.'" The Enterprise was back in port and the fleet was on the reactor instrument personnel. No more days off. Only two weeks a month. Work days from 7:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. were insufficient to include an 800-hour "training" lecture to "upgrade you in your instruments." They were being treated as "sea dogs," and as professional Navy men, and they resented it.

Another crewmember had an answer for the sudden obsession with formality. "There hasn't been a reactor accident in 20 years of naval operations," he said. "But NAVSO-8 underwent a study. They figured -- 'We haven't had one so far so we're bound to have one pretty soon.' They tried to figure out how it's going to happen. The answer came out that some kind of personnel error in 'watch formality' will set it off." Hence the pressure to conform to procedures. To do everything "by the book."

"I don't think I could come down here and stand the reactor watch. I know I can't do it properly."

-- an Enterprise reactor officer

"This is my third reactor officer (RO) since I joined the Enterprise in 1973," said one man. "We had a check to observe a lot of them in addition and the reactions of people to their leadership. I've seen the last three ORSEs, and as usual the downgrades have been caused by the actions of an officer. Officers were quick to accuse."

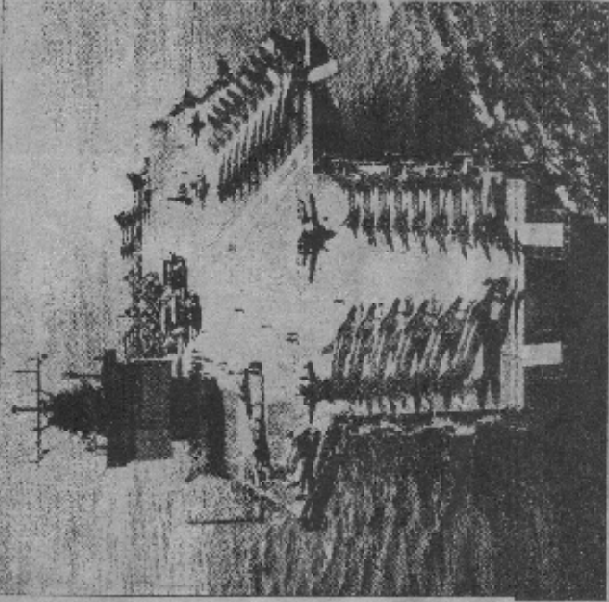
"The Power Plant Watch Officer (PPWO) -- he's the one in charge of everything -- but half the time the Junior Supervisors will have to correct him because he'll give the wrong order or get confused. You know from your operating experience when something's wrong. A couple of minutes later he'll say, 'Oh,

"The biggest problem is they don't understand the caliber of people working under them."

One of the ROs who is particularly disapprovable was previously the captain of a mine-sweeper. "He's 'lateral input' -- the crewman explained. "Having come in to the system at a high rank or middle management level, he's a very intelligent person. He came very far, very fast. But he's got a lot of a SOB's's just not fit to bandit."

"He's insecure. He seems to have lost his point, his creativity. We tell him things and you know he doesn't understand them. But being who he is and being above us, he's not trained to take advice from us. He's an officer and we're enlisted men. Nothing in his experience has prepared him for this."

"He is condescending. Like talking down to a 10-year-old kid, except we're adults. We're older, more mature than the average personnel aboard the Enterprise. Since day one we're told that we're



Personnel problems aboard the Enterprise are burning hotter than the ship's eight nuclear reactors.

in the top 10 percent of the Navy. They train us to use our heads, to think before we act. Then his new assistant reactor officer comes in, slaps you around and tells you you aren't supposed to think at all!"

"I am a better human being than you because I wear brown." -- An officer on board the Enterprise.

Many of these new "make" officers are

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apochrymic and eager to make the best of an obligatory "two year ball" on a nuclear ship. They are used to giving orders and getting an instant response.

"They don't understand what we're doing," the crewman explained. "and they want to clamp a tight control down until they can."

"This type of job requires some individuality. The new discipline is completely an oxymoron. Captain Edwards observed that if you stiff people with military discipline you lose that spark of necessary individuality, that maturity about why something isn't the way it's supposed to be."

"You can't make the hierarchy understand this because they're raised in the Naval Academy. Discipline is number one with them and individuality is a distant second."

"You can have two years' experience and another guy, who's an officer, can have only three weeks' experience. It's pretty hard to have respect for a guy that constantly falls all over himself and you have to pick him up and get he's the one who's telling you what to do."

"When contradictory or conflicting orders occur, obey the last orders given you..."
-- Article 1330, Navy Regulations.

Lacking a deep understanding of reactor operations, these new "lateral-input" officers are completely dependent on "the book." But, as the crewman pointed out, "there's a lot of his and suits that aren't put down on paper." And then there are even cases where following the book could lead to disaster...

"I'll give you an example of that," one chief auxiliary reactor officer said. "There's a 'basically procedure' -- a drill you learn in case something did happen which might damage the reactor or reaction life -- there is one set of responses in the book. They are all important as far as reactor safety is concerned and the procedure in the book is 100 percent unsafe."

"It was only because of a typographical error. Somebody put it in there and it's all wrong. The way we're trained is slightly different from what's written in the book, okay? The difference, of course, is the 'safety factor' involved."

"I can't go into it because that would involve describing equipment... but there have been Manual Change Requests submitted out to the RO what is wrong with it and what happens if you follow it, scrolling, but until they get it changed we're sitting right on a fence. If we do it the way we're supposed to they can call us for not going 'by the book,' but if you do it the way it's in the book then it's unsafe. You take your choices."

Next week: The midship, lower-echelon and government pointers that these officers see. Why the Enterprise may just be dead -- why we may never know about it's 160 BFC.

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This week's cover features a photo of Charles Island discipline. Eldridge Clark, taken before the accession by photographer Richard Hill. Bahlu to a photograph of the ship's interior. The intimacy could relate to the ship's atmosphere, but the cover is a tribute to the ship's crew and the good and country (courtesy of the Blue-jackets' Museum).