

# Midwatch Deck Log Poetry Aboard U.S. Submarines: The Early Cold War Years

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of sailors over the years have experienced the joyous occasion of ringing in the New Year, not on liberty raising a glass or two with their shipmates, but standing watch as the old year turned to the new (the midwatch). Particularly depressing were the times when their vessel stood in port close enough to hear the celebrations of their comrades ashore. And, given the U.S. Navy custom of writing the New Year's log in verse, departing from standard practice by putting the mantle of maritime bard on the OOD (Duty Officer in port), some young officers have felt they were experiencing a double whammy.

The origins of this custom remain unknown.<sup>2</sup> The oldest verifiable midwatch deck log poem appeared in the 1926 log of USS IDAHO

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1. A few caveats regarding New Year's Day midwatch deck log poems: 1) The vast majority of logs originate from vessels. However, midwatch poems also appear in logs from land-based entities such as a Naval Air Station. In 1970, the staff of the Navy's All Hands magazine published one. There is at least one that was written by a Naval officer while aboard the international space station. 2). OODs may write the poems themselves. Sometimes they are assisted by other crewmembers, often with attribution. Occasionally, someone other than the OOD of record writes the poem. Again, the log may pay appropriate attribution to the actual author. 3) There is another occasion for which a deck log poem is appropriate. When a ship is commissioned the first log entry may be written in verse.

2. McNitt, Robert W., CAPT, USN. (1959, January). "The First Watch." Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute, Vol. 85 no. 1, 671.

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(BB 42), written by Ensign Edward V. Dockweiler. Early in the poem, Dockweiler wrote,

We are anchored in Pedro harbor  
Tho there isn't much of a lee  
And why they call it a harbor  
Is something I never could see.

He finished the poem with,

That's all the dope this morning  
Except, just between us two  
If the Captain ever sees this log  
My gawd what will he do?

What the Captain did was to sign the log with this annotation:

“The Captain is glad to see that the old Navy custom of writing up the first watch of the year in rhyme is known to the younger members of the Service. The watch stands as written.”

It is unclear how frequently midwatch poems appeared from the 1920s through the 1940s, but by the 1950s it was a well-established tradition that flourished into the 1970s. A recent review of thousands of deck logs from that era found that New Year's Day deck log poems were the rule rather than the exception.

The poems referenced in this article came from a collection of U.S. Navy logs from 1947 through 1978 — more than 10,000 midwatch poems from a variety of U.S. Navy vessels, both surface and submarine. All spelling and grammatical errors in the poem excerpts are as found in the original log entries.

### Poetry and Submarines

Poetry about submarines and by submariners has a long tradition. A poem appearing in the April 4, 1925, issue of *The Dolphin* (SUBASE New London Newsletter)<sup>3</sup> surely must have been written by a submariner of the time.

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3. <https://www.crwflags.com/chesbase/subpoem.html>

*Born in the shops of the Devil,  
Designed in the brains of a fiend;  
Filled with acid and crude oil,  
And christened "A Submarine".*

*The poets send in their ditties,  
Of Battleships spick and clean;  
But never a word in their columns,  
Do you see of a submarine.*

*I'll try and depict our story,  
In a very laconic way;  
Please have patience to listen,  
Until I have finished my say.*

*We eat where're we can find it,  
And sleep hanging up on the hooks;  
Conditions under which we're  
existing,  
Are never published in books.*

*Life on these boats is obnoxious,  
And that is using mild terms;  
We are never bothered by sickness,  
There isn't any room for germs.*

*We are never troubled with varmint,  
There are things even a cockroach  
can't stand.  
And any self-respecting rodent,*

*Quick as possible beats it for land.  
And that little one dollar per dive,  
We receive to submerge out of sight;  
Is often earned more than double,  
By charging batteries at night.*

*And that extra compensation,  
We receive on boats like these;  
We never really get at all,  
It's spent on soap and dungarees.*

*Machinists get soaked in fuel oil,  
Electricians in H2SO4;  
Gunnermates with 600W,  
And torpedo slush galore.*

*When we come into the Navy Yard,  
We are looked upon with disgrace;  
And they make out some new  
regulations,  
To fit our particular case.*

*Now all you Battleship sailors,  
When you are feelin' disgruntled  
and mean;*

*Just pack your bag and hammock,  
And go to "A Submarine"*

Sometimes early submarine poems were figurative rather than literal, such as one titled *Submarine*, published in 1917 by playwright Eugene O'Neill, who sailed with the Merchant Marine for three years. The poem is a metaphorical commentary on the materialism of society.

*MY soul is a submarine.  
My aspirations are torpedoes.*



*I will hide unseen  
Beneath the surface of life  
Watching for ships,  
Dull, heavy-laden merchant ships,  
Rust-eaten, grimy galleons of commerce  
Wallowing with obese assurance,  
Too sluggish to fear or wonder,  
Mocked by the laughter of waves  
And the spit of disdainful spray.*

*I will destroy them  
Because the sea is beautiful.*

*That is why I lurk  
Menacingly  
In green depths.<sup>4</sup>*

But with the advent of the New Year's deck log in verse, young sailor poets faced a problem — communicating the requirements of the log while making things rhyme. Submariners have always considered themselves a different breed, so the question arises — are poems by these sailors a different breed of poetry?

## **How are submarine midwatch poems like those of surface vessels?**

### **Complaints about having the mid on NYE and having to write in verse**

Regardless of whether a vessel is a submarine or surface ship, logs are rife with gripes about pulling duty on New Year's Eve. These complaints tend to focus on the pressure to produce a poem, the lack of alcohol on the ship, and the absence of female companionship, at times combining all of these complaints in the same stanza. By far, the pressure to write a log in verse, is the most common complaint.

LTJG H.D. Barker aboard USS POMFRET (SS 391) in 1956 finishes his midwatch log with comments about the quality of his poem and his frustration of a New Year's Eve *sans* alcohol.

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4. <https://allpoetry.com/Submarine>

*As we sit on board with fun out of reach,  
 And the liberty party on the beach  
 Is hot bathing, partying, and guzzling beer,  
 The best I can do is wish Happy New Year.  
 I am going to quit writing this miserable "pome",  
 Our New Year will start upon Pomfret's return home.*

Men of the sea often rely upon the intervention of maritime deities in times of trouble. According to LCDR R. E. Burns (USS WAHOO (SS 565), 1969) midwatch log-writing is one of those occasions.

*There's a legend told by Seamen,  
 That when logs are written free and  
 In a verse on New Years Day;  
 That the soul of Neptune Rex  
 With a special sort of hex,  
 Tells the writer what to say.*

*Well, I'm banking on that story  
 To help me in my tale of glory  
 On this very special day;  
 And I hope the good king's spell  
 Will make words flow swift and well  
 And in a most poetic way.*

Midwatch writers have also frequently invoked the names of poetic geniuses of yore. Possibly to lessen the fear of being viewed as a poetic lout, midwatch poets often contrast their own efforts with the skills of the masters. From the log of USS TENCH (SS 417), 1965:

*The new year's log is a Navy tradition  
 And a poem it must be is the gruesome condition  
 If only a Shakespeare I were – there's the rub  
 Then this rhyme with iambs I'd gracefully dub.*

LT G.W. Werenskjold, USN

Other midwatch poets embrace their role as bard and compose elegant verse that mimics famous poets of history. From Poe's *The Raven* and Longfellow's *Paul Revere's Ride* to the popular *'Twas the*



*Night Before Christmas*, some OODs have relished the opportunity to pit their skills for rhyme and meter against the masters' widely known works. More on this later.

Sometimes the reasoning for writing a log in verse is as simple as relieving the boredom of a four or eight hour watch on New Year's Day. As LCDR L. F. Brooks, USS GEORGE C. MARSHALL (SSBN 654), 1969 writes

*It's the custom of the service,  
Though it makes some people nervous,  
To write the New Year midwatch log in rhyme.  
When the watch is long and boring,  
And you'd rather be home snoring,  
Making verses sometimes helps to pass the time.*

Finally, bringing a log entry to an end usually involves the invocation of a "Happy New Year" but often is accompanied by one last shot at softening the reader's expectation of a competent poem.

*Now that I've written  
All that facts I must scribble.  
With a "Happy New Year"  
I will end all this dribble.*

LTJG B.L. Doggett, Jr., USN

USS SEA LEOPARD (SS 483), 1956

## **Complaints about lack of alcohol and the companionship of women**

On July 1, 1914, ships in the U.S. Navy became a desert with respect to the availability of alcoholic beverages. General Order No. 99 stated, "*The use or introduction for drinking purposes of alcoholic liquors on board any naval vessel, or within any navy yard or station, is strictly prohibited, and commanding officers will be held directly responsible for the enforcement of this order.*" Consequently, when a holiday noted for its prodigious consumption of spirits rolled around, those on-board ship were left high and dry. There is no shortage of complaints about this state of affairs contained in New Year's Day logs.

Frequently, in the same poem another common complaint arose. Midwatch poem writers bemoaned the fact that they were separated from their wife or girlfriend or were unable to fraternize with women in port. There was no New Year's kiss for those on watch.

Some writers used one of the older phrases related to alcohol consumption that dates to the days of ships with sails. If one of the most important lines in the rigging of a ship (the mainbrace) was cut, crew members had to repair the line by splicing. This sometimes had to be done while under fire which made the challenging job even more difficult. The crew who performed the duty were given a ration of alcohol as a reward. Splicing the mainbrace became a euphemism for consuming alcohol. One of the more famous users of the term was Medal of Honor recipient Eugene Fluckey who began a practice of doling out alcohol to the crew of USS BARB (SS 220) when she was able to sink a Japanese ship. Here are some representative example responses to the prohibition-like conditions on board including a warning about consuming too much of a good thing.

USS SNOOK (SSN 592), 1962

*The duty section its vital watches stands  
With heavy heart and disappointed face  
Regretting the lost chance to join all hands  
In a New Year's soiree' to splice the-main-brace.*  
LT P. J. Vogelberge, Jr., USN

USS CAIMAN (SS 323), 1959

*Oh for a "scotch" or a can of cold beer  
Instead of black coffee to bring in the New Year;  
But we'll patiently wait 'till we get to Yokohama  
For an overdue "hot bath" and much "Akadama"*  
[Note: Akadama is a sweet fortified Japanese wine]  
LT R.M. Smith, USN

USS SWORDFISH (SSN 579), 1959

*So Happy New Year all you lugs,  
You alcoholic jitter bugs;  
Just keep in mind that we feel swell  
While your heads ache to beat all hell.*  
LT D.G. Smith, USN



Poem writers often bemoaned both the dearth of alcohol and the absence of their wives, girlfriends, or women in general. LT H. Sweet on ARGONAUT attempts to persuade himself that these deprivations work in his favor while LTJG Leike, Jr., aboard BREAM, tries to cope with only a dream.

USS ARGONAUT (SS 475), 1961

*Our crew is returning  
Their noses are red.  
They smell like Chanel  
As they fall into bed*

*But I have the duty  
And my thoughts – they are clear  
They are not clouded  
By whiskey or beer.  
No women to distract me.  
Nothing leads me toward sin  
What a helluva fix  
On New Years Eve – to be in.*

LT H. Sweet, USN

USS BREAM (SSK 242), 1965

*While out in Vallejo I hear the crew's happy shouts,  
As champagne and beer pour forth from their spouts.  
Alas, the various services received from the pier  
Contain no beautiful women, not one ounce of cheer.  
So it's early to bed and keep a taut watch  
As I wish all "Happy New Year," and dream about Scotch.*

LTJG H.W. Leike, Jr., USN

LT J. S. Lyman, Jr. brags about the amorous prowess of RONQUIL's crew but suggests that SOPA may have something to say about fraternizing with the local women,

USS RONQUIL (SS 396), 1959

*So mothers beware – as lovers we're famous.  
Keep your girls from the city, for their wits are no match*



*For the sailors who wear the Ronquil arm patch  
On the island of North at a Place called NAS  
There resides an admiral who can save your lass.*

[Authors' Note: LCDR John S. Lyman, Jr. remains on eternal patrol as a crewmember of USS THRESHER (SSN 593), lost on April 10, 1963]

But LT R.E. Hereford, Jr., suggests that consorting with local women is nevertheless occurring:

USS FLASHER (SSN 613), 1969  
*The ship receiving services from ashore  
While the off-duty sections enjoy wahine amour.*

Finally, LT E.C. Baldwin urges his SEA LEOPARD mates to have a great time, but issues a warning:

USS SEA LEOPARD (SS 483), 1962  
*I figure that since I gotta be here  
I'll think of my buddies over having a beer*

*So kiss the girls and drink up hearty  
And toast the duty section who missed the party  
And as I write this log in rhyme  
Remember  
It may be you with this duty next time.*

As noted earlier, midwatch poets often record their log entries in the style of well-known or popular poems. In surface vessel logs, the most used styles include Poe's *The Raven* and the ever-popular *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. A few ventured into less-traveled territory, yielding poems in the popular "beat" style of the 50's and 60s. One poet expertly wove his log into Hamlet's soliloquy, beginning with "To sea, or not to sea, that is the question" while another fulfilled his log-keeping duty with a series of haiku. Submariners also seemed to possess an affinity for *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. A standout among the submarine midwatch poems, though, appears in the 1960 log from USS TROUT (SS 566) by LTJG J. S. Hellewell, who mimics T. S. Elliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.



LET US GO THEN, YOU AND ME  
WHEN TROUT IS LAID OUT IN CHARELSTON'S SEA  
LIKE A FISH EMBALMED IN FORMALDEHYDE  
MOORED AT THE STARBOARD SIDE  
TO SS FIVE SEVEN SIX USS DARTER  
IN A NEST OF TWO. AS TWO MARTYRS  
WITH APPROPRIATE AND MEET  
UNITS OF THE ATLANTIC FLEET  
IS COMMANDER MINE LANT, SIR

THE LIEUTENANT'S WATCH IS LONG  
HE LISTENS TO THE SIREN'S SONG  
AS HE HEARKENS DOWN THE BEACH  
THE MERMAIDS SINGING, EACH TO EACH  
HE DOES NOT THINK IT IS TO HIM THEY SING  
AS HE WATCHES COLD, UNSEEN

THE STARS FLICKER BRIGHT MIRAGES  
OF A THOUSAND DISTANT IMAGES.  
THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT HALF-RECALLS  
GAY MUSIC AND GLOW OF NEW YEAR'S BALLS.  
EXCITED LAUGHTER, HOLIDAY SOUND,  
TOASTS RAISED HIGH, ROUND AFTER ROUND

BUT CHRISTMAS LEAVE IS BUT A MEMORY  
THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT DRIFTS INTO REVERIE  
IT IS MIDNIGHT; WITHOUT A SIGN  
THE OLD YEAR PASSES INTO TIME.

IN THE COLD DECEMBER NIGHT  
THE SHIP IS DESERTED, QUITE  
SOLEMN AND ALONE, NO SOUND  
OF MERRYMAKING WILL RESOUND  
THROUGH THE DARK HOURS OF CHEER  
THE COMING OF THE INFANT YEAR

THE MERMAIDS SING UPON THE BEACH  
HE HEARS THEM SINGING, EACH TO EACH  
BUT AS HE WATCHES, COLD UNSEEN,  
IT IS NOT TO HIM THEY SING.

## Midwatch poems as reflections of the social and political milieu

Many midwatch poems reflect world political and social conditions of the post-WWII era. Cold War tensions, nuclear proliferation, the space race, and proxy wars around the globe take center stage in many New Year's logs. In 1962, LTJG James R. Burnett, aboard USS SPIKEFISH (SS 404), pens one of the most eloquent discourses about the West's fears of the Soviet threat.

[Preceded by ship information]

*For we are vigilant here tonight  
As vigilant we must be.  
To guard against that menace red  
That has come to our southern sea.*

*This menace red that creeps and craws  
And slithers in our path,  
Has eaten up our neighbor south  
And that slaketh not it's rath*

*For this catastrophic iconoclast  
Would masticate the earth  
Then turn and feed itself again  
On those who gave it birth.*

*Appease it not nor approbate  
It knows no honored word.  
But uses trust and promise false  
To mesmerize the herd.*

*But shotted gun it understands  
And steel at highest port  
The malled fist makes it stand at bay  
And pay differential court.*

*So set the watch my shipmates bold  
And keep it taunt and well.  
And squarely face this manace red  
This excrement from hell.*



*Do your duty, do it well  
With resolution grand  
And we will beat this menace red  
And keep it from our land.*

LT K.S. Porter, USS MEDREGAL (SS 480), 1959, sums up the changing political and social conditions around the world and offers some reasons for these changes, along with some words of hope. After several stanzas of typical ship's conditions reports, Porter writes

*The call for this log, in verse writ so fine,  
Is the very first hour of the year fifty-nine.*

*The end of the year of our Lord fifty-eight,  
Generates thought of some deeds that were great.*

*The end of the world did not come as forecast,  
Nor even the submarine without any mast.*

*The gain of our sciences seem so enormous,  
Our space deeds assure us the Russians won't swarm us.*

*The rise of football, the hoop, and Van Cliburn  
More TV, more sports cars, they both make the eye burn.*

*Yet history may find that the largest effect,  
Judged many years hence when the view is silent.*

*Is not that of merchandise, glittering and neat,  
Nor even our missiles, nor nuclear fleet.*

*But rather the growth in the minds of us all  
Of the seeds of a movement of stature so tall.*

*If war is defined as a contest of wills,  
Effectiveness hinges on needs it fulfills.*

*Morality, spirit, intensity, honor,  
Though technically strong, without we're a goner.*

*Though it seems that a stalemate of arms is before us,  
This kindling of chances for greatness can soar us,*

*Thus pointing for all of the nation to see,  
How men can improve when on needs they agree.*

*The impact inherent makes the big picture clear:  
That the ideological war we not fear,*

*Since this shining example for the best of all worlds  
Abundantly shows as this movement unfurls.*

*So here's to the start of another new year,  
Just bristling with reasons for all to take cheer!*

In a time of great apprehension, LT Porter was able to find room for optimism and hope.

### **Do Submarine Midwatch Poems Differ from Surface Vessel Poems?**

New Year's Day midwatch poems appearing in submarine deck logs show a few differences from those of surface vessels. Two clear examples from the opening lines of midwatch poems contrast submarines' most obvious differences.

From USS CUBERA (SS 347) in 1959, LTJG J.W. Smith writes

*The Seawolf's record it might be fine,  
But we submerged in '58 and came up in '59.  
That may be a record some may say,  
To us in Task Group Alfa, it's just another day.*

While in that same year, LTJG L.L. Ingram aboard USS STERLET (SS 392) begins with

*From the ocean depth we arose,  
To see what the hell goes.*

These expressions clearly differentiate submarines from most other



vessels. No surface ship sailor wants to contemplate the experience of being submerged! As poet Siew David Hii puts it, “Every ship gets to be a submarine *once*.”<sup>25</sup> [Authors’ emphasis]

Given that these logs were entered during some of the hottest periods of The Cold War, and given the secrecy involved in their operations, it is not surprising that submarine logs often reflected action during special operations. Brevity of log entries often reflected this situation with a simple “underway on special operations,” but at least one OOD still used the occasion to spin a rhyme with

SUBMERGED ON SPECIAL OPERATIONS,  
KEEPING PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS.

LT G.S. Murphy, USN  
USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (SSBN 602)  
January 1, 1962

This succinct verse may be the shortest rhyming midwatch poem found from any type of vessel.

Another notable difference between surface vessel midwatch poems and poems by the wearers of dolphins involves mentioning crewmembers by name. Although a few poets on surface ships mention the names of the ship’s captain or XO, with the occasional addition of a quartermaster or bos’n, several submariners went to great lengths to mention more shipmates. The 1965 log of the USS CAPITAINE (AGSS 336) mentioned 84 specific crew names, which is probably the entire sub’s complement. LT J. L. Potter began the recitation with the captain’s name and the name of the most junior crewmember, then went on to incorporate the wardroom, chiefs, and other crewmembers, mostly by section. Other submarine log entries that mention multiple crewmembers by name include:

USS BONITA (SSK 3) in 1958 mentions 47 crewmembers; USS JOHN ADAMS (SSBN 620) 1968 mentions 38; and USS SEAWOLF (SSN 575) 1958 mentions 27. [See Figures 1 and 2]

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5. <https://electricliterature.com/ships-in-the-desert-and-the-waterer-by-siew-david-hii/>

THERE'S A MESSAGE WE WISH TO EXPRESS TO YOU,  
 A MESSAGE FROM US OF THE CAPITAINE CREW,  
 FROM CAPTAIN HOVATER WHO IS OUR GREAT SKIPPER,  
 TO THE JUNIOR WHO'S ADAMS, YOUNG, STRONG AND CHIPPER.  
 THERE'S MYERS AND WITNER WHO'RE LT COMMANDERS—  
 THEY'RE QUIET AND CALM, DON'T GET UP THEIR DANDERS.  
 WE HAVE LT POTTER AND TWO JUNIOR GRADE,  
 RAETZMAN AND NICHOLS AND THAT'S ALL THE GOLD BRAID.  
 NOW COMES THE ENLISTED, THE SENIOR NAMED SAMPSON,  
 HE'S BRIGHT, EASY GOING, SHORT, STOCKY AND HANDSOME.  
 THE REST OF THE CHIEFS, AND THERE ARE QUITE A FEW,  
 THEY'RE ALL OLD HANDS AND NONE OF THEM NEW.

Figure 1. From USS CAPITAINE (AGSS 336), 1961

NEXT FOR YOUR PLEASURE, THE TMS YOU SHOULD GREET—  
 HALDEMAN, THOMPSON AND MILLER YOU SHOULD MEET.  
 PEÑA, SASSENGER AND MACKELPRANG ARE ALL HERE  
 AND GRANDFATHER BRUNDAGE IN HIS 60<sup>TH</sup> YEAR.  
 AND NOW FOR OUR COOKS, WHO'RE REAL NECESSARY,  
 WE HAVE COLAVECHIO, CARR AND ALSO NERTI.  
 FOR STEWARDS WE HAVE MERCADO AND DUPLON,  
 GUTIERREZ AND CADACIO OF WHOM WE'RE REAL PROUD.

Figure 2. From USS CAPITAINE (AGSS 336), 1961

It is difficult to know whether this penchant for listing crewmembers by name is due to the smaller crew size as compared to many surface vessels, enhanced crew cohesion resulting from the unique physical constraints of subs, or some other factor.

One final difference seen in submarine midwatch poems involves their physical structure. Sailors from all types of vessels used a variety of methods to present their poetic efforts. Some merely write or type their poem upside down on the pages of the log. Two use red ink. One poem cleverly pictures a ship using what can only be described as word art. Yet others express their creativity by reaching back over hundreds of years to record their midwatch poem using calligraphy and/or illumination. LTJG Charles E. Johnson, aboard USS ATULE (SS 403), penned the midwatch in an Old English-type style in both 1961 and 1962 [See Figure 3]. LT

John W. Roberts, USS BARBEL (SS 580) in 1961 was the only poet who used a classic Medieval first initial or drop cap to begin his log [See Figure 4]. Of thousands of logs reviewed, only eight use some type of calligraphic representation. Five of those are submitted from subs.

00-08 In ARD Twelve we rest tonight  
 On keel blocks firm and shored up tight  
 This New Years night for us goes hard  
 At Charleston, S.C.; U.S. Naval Shipyard  
 Those vessels present are sharp and neat  
 Atlantic units of our U.S. Fleet  
 Foreign vessels we'll see this day  
 You'll find them listed by SOPA  
 Yard and District craft are here  
 Moored hard and fast each to their pier  
 In chain of command there's no new slant  
 Our SOPA is COMINLANT  
 Services received - none extraneous  
 ARD Twelve provides - all miscellaneous  
 The whistles blow and sirens blast  
 And Sixty-One is here at last.

APPROVED: EXAMINED: C. E. Johnson  
 LTJG USNR

Figure 3. From USS ATULE (SS 403), 1961 (Authors' note: "ARD Twelve" was a floating drydock)

REMARKS

**T**his New Years Eve a poem I'll make  
 While moored portside to Kiltiwake  
 The ASR sporting number thirteen  
 She's ready to aid any submarine  
 We're both standing guard in Navy Blue  
 In berth two two four, Pier twenty-two  
 On Norfolk's shores off Chesapeake Bay  
 The Fleets gaily lighted in Christmas array  
 In Northampton is SOPA. COMSECONDFLEET  
 So our celebration, of course, has been most discreet  
 No wild drunken parties or raising of hell  
 We tooted our whistle and rang the ship's bell  
 Thirteen strokes at midnight in Navy tradition  
 Sounded by Walters, an electronics technician  
 For he was the youngest man we could find.  
 (Engineman Mathey played Old Father Time  
 The hour has passed and the Job has been done

Figure 4. From USS BARBEL (SS 580), 1961



Nevertheless, New Year's Day midwatch poems aboard U.S. Navy submarines resemble those entered into the logs of surface vessels in most ways, with only a few interesting differences. Regardless of vessel type, poem writers likely assume their log in verse will be relegated to the anonymity of millions of pages of deck logs archived as official ship records. What would the writers of these poems think about them being read by a much larger audience than the ship's captain, navigator, quartermaster, and a few others? A few poems in the 1960s reached a wider audience when All Hands, an official U.S. Navy publication, printed a few judged to be the best of the previous year. But for the most part, few people saw them, and the writers were probably just happy to be done with their bardic task. Many authors' sentiments likely mirrored those of LTJG J.M. Leeds aboard USS SIRAGO (SS 485) in 1962.

*We're steaming in circles with batteries chargin'  
(If you can rhyme better make notes in the margin)  
Here's to the lady in the Pentagon cellars  
Who reads the logs of us sea-going fellers  
If you don't like our poem don't make a fuss  
Just don't send the deck log back to us.*