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Mr. B. Peters / P. #2

Charles Jennings

United States Navy (USN)

27 Years (1965 – 1992)

1965 – 1970 on aircraft carriers

1970 – 1992 on submarines

Charles "Chuck" Jennings

Mr. Jennings was a Navy man who was part of the one percent of Navy personnel who served on submarines during the Cold War. Charles Jennings is originally from Danville, California. He graduated from San Ramon High School in 1965 with his class of about 300. He currently lives in Temecula, California with his family as a retiree from the Navy after serving for 27 years.

He originally registered with the selective service when he turned 18, since they had a military draft before 1980. However, Mr. Jennings knew he wanted to go into the Navy since his junior year in high school. After he registered with the selective service, he signed up with the Navy and started boot camp as soon as he graduated.

After bootcamp, he was sent to an aircraft carrier in Alameda, California. After being transferred a few times, he was sent to his first submarine in 1970, a diesel boat named Trumpetfish. Then he went to a fast attack submarine (which is like a fighter under water). This one was faster and what he was in for most of his naval career. His last submarine was an FBM (Fleet Ballistic Missile) in Washington State.

In his naval career, he served as a cook and got his dolphins early in his career. The dolphins were a requirement, since they needed the entire crew to know how to work the sub they were in, just in case anything happened. It took a full year to earn your dolphins. When they were transferred to another boat, they had to re-qualify, but this time it only took 6 weeks, since they had the major basics down already. They spent periods of time on sea duty up to 5 years (not all the time but mainly at sea) and then 3 years on shore duty serving on land. Since Charles served so many years, he was able to see the Philippines, Scotland, Hong Kong, Japan, Great Britain, Germany and many other places.

Mr. Jennings also served in the Vietnam War for a short time, while he was in the Navy. He was sent to an air base in South Vietnam. He was stationed temporarily at Da Nang Air Base in South Vietnam. The problem was that they could not identify during the day who were Viet Cong, since they mainly attacked them at night from the base. After being ordered to leave Da Nang Air Base, he was sent back to his ship in the Pacific.

Then everything changed in 1981. The draft ended and the military became all volunteer. No one was drafted into the military any more. The government stimulated the people to join through a raise in pay grade to all who served. The pay of the armed forces doubled (or more) overnight. Having a full voluntary force meant that everyone who enlisted was serving because he so desired.

During the Cold War, fast attack submarines came very close to the Soviet Union's submarines. If war were to break out, the fast attack submarines were to go after the FBMs (Fleet Ballistic Missile)

submarines) of the the Soviets. The submarined had to worry about Soviet planes spotting them. The planes went as low as 15 feet above the water looking for them. This made the 3 section duty more important than ever. The 3 section duty on submarines was 6 hours on (working in their area), 6 hour off (fixing gear) and lastly sleeping for 6 hours. This was all for the safety of the boat. Once they went up a Russian river into the bays and stayed there spying on the Russians.

Mr. Jennings' longest time submerged without coming up to the surface of the water or to land was for 92 days straight. Since he was with the crew such long periods of time, he stayed close to some of the people he served with. They also enjoyed checking the new guys for "leaks".

The military desegregated in 1948 under President Truman. However, the Navy continued to have a rate, called Stewards, who served the officers. They were primarily Filipinos. In 1976 the Navy combined the Steward and Commissaryman (cook) rates into one group, called Mess Management Specialists.

Advancement and changes came slowly. When Mr. Jennings served on submarines, communication was limited to 50 words from his wife. He could not answer back, since the enemy could locate them using their powerful sonar and microphones. They never risked their location. If something went wrong and they needed to leave the boat, they could request Emergency Leave. But they could only do so if it would not risk the boat's mission. Knowing the sound of every screw (propulsion device) of the submarines, which were unique, so they could tell if the submarine was friendly or hostile, helped to protect them. That gave them safety and security. Nuclear submarines at that time could only go up to 30 knots. They had everything they needed to survive in the submarine. Their major issue that limited how long they could stay submerged was running out of food.

When Mr. Jennings' service ended, he had a retirement ceremony on his last day. He received a flag to commemorate his service and everyone said their thanks. He then began his retirement.