

Cameron Harrington
John Bishop
Periods 1,2

T Michael Bircumshaw
US Navy Submarine Service
1956-1976
2016



T Michael Bircumshaw

T Michael Bircumshaw was born on the 18th of May, 1939 at 2:14 AM. It was a Thursday and slightly overcast.

At barely 17 years of age in 1956, he ditched the last one and a half years of High School and enlisted in the US Navy as a Seaman Recruit (E-1). His first deployment following Boot Camp began in October of 1956 and lasted until April of 1960, during which time he had been stationed aboard a Fleet Tanker, the USS Aucilla AO-56, home ported in Barcelona, Spain. During his tour aboard he developed an interest in the Submarine Service due to the influence of his Commanding Officer, Captain Eli T Reich, a WWII Submariner who commanded the USS Sealion SS-315 and sank the Japanese Battleship, Kongo, with 880 men aboard. In addition to this he also sank a Jap Destroyer and a POW Ship. Captain Eli T Reich had personally written the names of the 4 men he lost when the Japanese bombed and sank the USS Sealion SS-195, where he served as Chief Engineer. The Sealion was the first Submarine sank in WWII while it was in overhaul in Cavite Bay, Philippines on the 10th of December, 1941. It is reported that upon sinking the Japanese ship, Kongo, Eli T Reich said “880 of those yellow bastards for 4 of

my Sailors, we are still not even.” Reich’s actions had a major influence on T Michael Bircumshaw.

Eli T Reich was the recipient of 3 Navy Crosses, 2 distinguished Service Medals, a Legion of Merit, and a Bronze Star. Bircumshaw does not understand why Vice Admiral Reich did not receive the Medal of Honor.

Bircumshaw got out of the Navy in April 1960 as a Second Class Petty Officer Interior Communications Electrician, IC2 (E-5), vowing never to return, however in October of 1960, due to a lousy job situation, he re-upped for Submarine School in New London, CT. He chose Submarines for the “excitement and danger” and the “incredible challenge” to become a Submariner. Submariners are all volunteers and are selected from the top 10% of the Navy and only 10% of those selected qualify for their Submarine Dolphins. Submariners make up less than 2% of the entire US Navy.

Submarine training begins with psychological testing, pressure (depth) training, a free ascent from 110 feet in the New London Submarine Base Escape Tower, which was closed in 1982 and later demolished due to the extreme depths of Submarine operations in today’s Navy, making safe escape less likely. This is followed by up assignment to an operating vessel and roughly a year of qualifying on basically every system on the “boat”, hydraulics, low and high pressure air, torpedoes, missiles, reactors, steering, diving, emergency air, emergency lighting, etc., etc., etc. Once the qualifying is completed including being accepted by a reviewing board, the coveted Submarine Dolphins are awarded and the individual becomes a **“SUBMARINER”**.

Bircumshaw described life on a Submarine as being very demanding. Once the plug is pulled and the initial dive of a patrol is made, there is no sunshine, no more other world, your life is all about making sure the Submarine carries out its mission for at least 60 days.

While on patrol sailors can receive messages from their families, but they are not allowed to transmit any outgoing messages. Submariners never receive bad news, no matter what is sent the end result is always good news, it is all about getting the mission completed, the individual is expendable.

There is a brotherhood like no other among Submariners. Onboard, Bircumshaw stated, "You rely on your shipmates for your very life, as do your shipmates when you are on duty". If a terminal mistake is made, one does not necessarily pay for it with just their life. If a Submarine goes down, as a general rule, everyone onboard perishes. When people perish on a Submarine they are said to go on **Eternal Patrol**. Bircumshaw shared a sobering statistic that 90% of Submarines lost had a 100% loss of crew. In WWII the US lost a total of 52 Submarines. 1 of every 5 Submarines were sunk, and 1 of 5 Submariners lost their life. That 20% loss number was the greatest of any of our Armed Forces during that conflict. The Japanese paid a terrible price for our loss, as the USS Submarine force sank more than 55% of all Japanese shipping sank with the Submarines making up only 2% of the Navy. The entirety of the Japanese merchant marine was sank.

Captured Airmen and Submariners were treated the worst by the Japanese and were not recognized as Prisoners of War when captured, they were considered to be Criminals and the most were sent to the Ashio Copper Mines to work as slave labor, 18-20 hours a day.

Bircumshaw served 17 ½ years on Sea Duty, 10 of that on Submarines, and lived 800

days submerged. He was in the invasion of Lebanon in 1958, The VietNam War, The Six Day War, and The Cold War. In 1961 he was aboard the USS Scamp SSN-588, 400 feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean with a mile of saltwater below them just a few miles off the coast of San Francisco when the propeller shaft sheared and broke within inches of leaving an 18 inch hole in the Submarine that could not be plugged against the 44.44 PSI per 100 ft. of seawater pressure.

Bircumshaw was sent to London, England for a 3 year tour of foreign shore duty, which counted as Sea Duty. Although not having completed High School, But having a GED, he enrolled in the University of Maryland overseas program, telling the enrollment administrator that he wanted a Bachelor's Degree and was told that in a three year tour he would be lucky to get an Associates Degree. The paper work reads like this; June 1971, Bircumshaw graduated from Redlands High School, "Go Terriers"; January 1972, Bircumshaw received an Associate Degree from the University of Maryland; June 1972, Bircumshaw graduated from the University of Maryland in Heidelberg, Germany with a Bachelor Degree with Honors. Note: Margaret Mead was the commencement speaker.

Bircumshaw served in the Mediterranean, home ported in Barcelona, Spain aboard a tanker, USS Aucilla A0-56 (57-60), USS Alstede AF-48 (58), USS Scamp SSN-588 (60-62), USS Robert E Lee SSBN-601 (64-67), USS Grayling SSN-646 (67), USS John Adams SSBN-620 (67-70) where he served as the senior enlisted man on board, Chief of the Boat, Us Naval Communications Unit (CINCUSNAVEUR), London, England (70-72), USS LASalle AGF-3, (Bahrain), Electrical Officer, Personnel and Administration Officer (72-73),

COMIDEASTFORCE Staff, (73-74), Director, Human Resources Management Department, San Diego Naval Training center, Personnel Officer (74-76).

Bircumshaw retired as a Commissioned Chief Warrant Officer and reverted to Master Chief Electrician, EMCM (SS). The reason, the money was better at Master Chief, go figure.

Bircumshaw believes that if you volunteer to serve your country, it is a lifetime job and he continues to serve having being the National Commander of the United States Submarine Veterans Inc. from 2010-2014, an organization of Submariners with nearly 14,000 members in 165 chapters throughout the USA. He spent 3 years as the President of the Military Officers Association (MOAA) in Temecula, CA. and since 2007 has been Executive Director of the Path of Honor Scholarship Trust, a California 501 C3, which oversees the receipt of donations for bricks which are engraved with service member's names and other pertinent data about their service and are in pathways leading to a beautiful Bronze Memorial Monument named "Letters Home" located at the Duck Pond in Temecula. Most of the donations go towards maintenance and the cost of engraving paid to the City of Temecula, however, there is some money left over and it goes to Scholarships for the JROTC Seniors at the 6 local High Schools in the Murrieta-Temecula area. Bircumshaw has given out 21 scholarships since 2007, the total amount normally being at least \$3,000.00 per year.

Bircumshaw is a 100% disabled veteran and also works to inform other veterans of their rights and how to deal with the VA. He is well qualified in this area as it took him 39 years and 5 months to finally get his 100% disability rating. His first appeal lasted 24 years. It is not a pretty story.

