

## Mischief, Mayhem, and Masculinity in the Military

Although I grew up in Cincinnati Ohio, I spent my childhood as if on a ship. I grew up with two parents who served in the United States Navy and my childhood was defined by it. Dinner time was flooded with eccentric and lively stories of storms out at sea, pranks that went too far, and people who seemed as if characters out of stories. Along with these enthralling dinnertime tales, life was littered with sayings from my parents' time in the navy. When company was coming over our rooms were to be "spick spack and clean and ready for inspection." On top of having our rooms inspection ready my three older siblings and I, were expected to be "AJ squared away." Now with my two oldest brothers in the Navy I still feel as if the Navy is a part of me. I've lived so much of my life vicariously through the stories I was brought up with that it is impossible for them to ever be ripped from my side. Through interviewing my father about his experiences in the military I have successfully preserved a strong part of my childhood and my identity forever. As a child these epics that punctuated my childhood were merely sources of fantasy, odd glimpses into the adult world and what life might have in store. Rehearing these stories as an adult, however, completely changed my frame of references. They were no longer fantastical tales of adult life, but glimpses of the desperate social needs of humans in extreme circumstances and how those play out through pranks, storytelling, and tradition. It also gave me a glimpse of what chaotic worlds can be formed when women aren't around.

My mother and father were both in the military during the 80's. At this time women were not allowed on ships and the U.S. was still in a power struggle with the Soviet Union known as the Cold War. While men manned the ships by themselves, women had positions on

bases doing paperwork and helping run the preliminary computers they used for data compilation and for tracking Soviet Union movement. My mother was a part of a team tracking Soviet Union submarines from Adak Alaska, our closest base to the U.S.S.R. It is on this small island in the Bering Sea that my parents met. My father's life in the military before this consisted of him being deployed on destroyers throughout the Pacific as a member of the Supply Core, "Don't wanna die? Go supply." As a Supply Core Officer my father was in charge of keeping the ship store replenished, teaching people how to use equipment, getting people their paychecks, and keeping in contact with the cooks. The rigidity of a busy military schedule did not prevent antics and pranks from occurring, however. The military in the 80's is nothing like the military today. What happened on ship stayed on ship and traditions looked at now as dangerous and crude were simply their way of life. The military my brothers are in today is not the same military my father was in during the 80's. During my father's time in the Navy, it was expected that you would get called names by your superiors, maggot being the most infamous, physical threats were nothing to shake a stick at, and conflict mediation was, if nothing else, interpretive. In today's military, superiors are forbidden from calling their subordinates maggots, physical threats amongst crew members are not tolerated, and conflict is to be handled with in a structured manner with as little damage done as possible. With no women on board and no other form of entertainment than each other, the ship was a paradoxical structured free for all.

## Getting Your Sea Legs

Of all the stories of mischief, pranks, danger, and intriguing people my father has shared over the years, my father intriguingly begins his monologue broaching the subject of vomiting. After all, when you speak of the Navy you must speak of sea sickness. The strong willed, storm ready, and steady legged Naval Officers you see in movies fails to illustrate the sickening experience of the rookie Officers and Seamen. One's encounter with seasickness was such an integral part to the Naval experience that it is impossible to forget your own, none the less your shipmates'. My father remembered just about every occurrence of it onboard.

I have a saying, and I know you've heard me say it: There are those have been seasick and there are those who are going to be sea sick, and I know some people would say, 'I—I've never been sea sick and I'm not going to be!' There's a part of it I leave out. If you go to sea enough, you will be sea sick, and when I reported on the Paul F. Foster, DD9-64, the way I got sea sick was I got really tired, uh, and a little nauseous, but I got really tired, ummm, but eventually I got used to it. There was one time though we would go—we went to general quarters, which means the ship is locked down in case we get hit, then we're all in watertight compartments. We might lose one compartment but we won't lose the ship. So I was up in repair locker two which is the front part of the ship. We're all closed off, the ventilation is off, it was after lunch, I had eaten a big lunch and...it was kinda rough seas, and my stomach started feeling really bad, and I knew what was coming. So I took my helmet off, and it had a helmet liner, I took the liner out, and I threw up...in my helmet...just about filled it up, cause I ate so much at lunch, and I remember Seaman Go [redacted] laughing and I said, 'Oh you think it's funny? Here you can, ya know, go empty it for me.' He goes 'NO NO NO NO!' and he backed away, so I didn't make him empty it for me. So I had to ask for permission to break water tight so I could go dump my helmet out. (Wassel 2019 pg.24)

My father not only remembered in vivid detail one of his experiences getting seasick but was able to recount his old adages about the venture. Through distinguishing seasickness by assigning it its own storied folklore, my father set it apart from other Naval related sickness and discomforts. The process of becoming sick is not merely a gross or amusing tale to tell, but demonstrates one's worthiness and one's place amongst their fellow crewmates. My father speaks of the difference between the men

who took their seasickness “like men” and those who showed reluctance to undergo the uncomfortable initiation.

Um, there was another time where, I’ll never forget, Seaman G■■■■, he was uh, this really sweet kid from Mississippi...umm...and he was one of my phone talkers in repair locker two and he’s like[concerned and feeble] ‘Sir, I’m not feeling too good I think I’m gonna be sick,’ and—and a guy that actually worked for me, Seaman—or Petty Officer T■■■■, [I] said [urgently], ‘T■■■■! Get me a garbage bag, quick!’...Triace gets him a garbage bag that’s clear. [In disbelief] So Seaman G■■■■ starts throwing up in this clear garbage bag so can all see it! The repair locker’s not that big! There’s room for like, three people to stand up and that’s about it! And I’m sitting—I’m like, ‘T■■■■, you got him a clear garbage bag?!’ he starts laughing, you know, he thinks it’s funny.

Umm...

Yeah it’s tough. After lunch it was really tough, uh, and um, there were a lot of guys they’d get sick, they’d throw up over the bridge wing or um...but they eventually—most people got used to it. And we had a patch—there was a patch you could take to uh, I forget, Dramamine or some kind of patch you could put behind your ear, but...we had a...pejorative term for that patch, and um, if you could avoid it, you didn’t wear the patch, and we had a chaplain and he wore the patch as figured. (Wassel 2019 pg.24-25)

Those who chose to undergo the discomfort and pain of seasickness are remembered fondly as people to “never forget” and good natured. These people represent the quintessential Naval crewman having the will and courage to submit themselves to the inevitable fate of throwing up on the ship. These stories of vomiting are some of the most potent memories my father has as they mark the initiation of his men's place on the ship. How you get sick, how you handle it, and how it affects those around you sets up how you will be perceived for the rest of your time on board and how people will choose to remember you for decades to come. Those who are lucky enough to have an entertaining story such as in the case of Seaman G■■■■’s troubled stomach which added excitement to an otherwise underwhelming drill earned him the position of being viewed positively by all those present, even if only for that one encounter with them. The value of these stories, however, do not stop at their entertainment value; while getting sick on board ship you

are both symbolically and literally entering a new realm of discomfort, hardship, and adversity. In a world of men from different religions, races, beliefs, socioeconomic backgrounds, and even countries, the only uniting force is that of adversity. The community on board ship is formed by overcoming common struggles, triumphs, and failures. Seasickness is often a sailor's first run in with adversity. Until you experience the gut wrenching effect of the sea that you are now forced to call your home, you are the same as any other civilian. Only by giving yourself over to these hardships can you consider yourself an official part of the crew, and claim your place as an equal with the other men. The "pejorative term" used by the crewman to describe the Dramamine patch was not simply a disparaging term but served as a warning to those daring enough to push aside Naval custom (Wassel 2019 pg.42). When being in the Navy means "you will be seasick" one's attempt to prevent seasickness is the denial of the inevitable for a seaman (Wassel 2019 pg. 41). When denying yourself the experience of a position such as being a Naval crewman, you respectively deny your placement within the group successfully "othering" yourself. Being othered in the Navy when your fellow crew mates are the men responsible for your very livelihood is a reckless choice at best. Othering yourself from your crewmen included an array of possible reprisals.

You didn't mess with the cooks 'cause they're going to spit in your food or they're going to do something worse. So you don't mess with the cooks, and they might do eggs the way you want them or give you a little extra, always be nice to the cooks. Always be nice to the coremen because if something bad happens to you that's gonna be the guy to fix you up or make you feel better. You don't want the coremen saying, 'Oh I lost your shot records I gotta give you all new shots,' which could, theoretically, happen, that your shot records would get lost by the coremen and then you'd have to get all new shots. So you don't mess with the core men. The third person you don't mess with is the disbursing clerks, the guys who pay you, okay. (Wassel 2019 pg.48)

An offense to any one of these officers and your lifestyle undergoes an immediate degradation, let alone the risks in othering yourself from the regular crewmen whose main form of retaliation was direct physical confrontation. Refusing your placement not as an individual but as a part of a collective body was a choice that came with consequences and thus was a choice made intentionally; this choice all began with either the refusal or the acceptance of your stomach's subordination to the whims of the sea. Unlike other rites of initiation, however, seasickness is not a marker of growth, adulthood, or new responsibilities, but marks your initiation into losing yourself to something bigger.

The 1980's marked a unique time in the US Navy for such initiation practices. Political correctness was not yet in full swing, the government was distracted by threats from our Soviet adversaries, and men still reigned supreme in the military realm, reigning with complete control on ships (this meant no women to regulate the testosterone fueled choices made on board ship). During this time of relaxed supervision and lower behavioral expectations, initiation rituals thrived in Naval custom. Many of the rituals my father had to face during his time in service are things my brothers would never dream of experiencing during their service in 2019. One infamous example of such an outlawed ceremony would be the Crossing the Line Ceremony.

Before you cross the equator on a ship you are considered a Pollywog, or Wog for short. And that's not a good thing. You don't want to be a Wog, you want to be a Shellback, a trusty Shellback. So...I don't even think they do this anymore but the Wogs as you're crossing the equator have to go around on their hands and knees and these guys will cut up the hoses on the ship and turn them into what they call Shelaylees so they're whacking you with the Shelaylees and they're spraying you with the hoses, and this is up on deck and everything, you know, herding you around, and at the end they'd get this big fat guy and they'd put—they'd grease—put Crisco all over his belly and then they'd put a cherry in his belly button so you had to eat the cherry out of the-- they called him the baby, you had to eat the cherry out of the baby and then you had to slide down this slide into this-- they had-- the Shellbacks would keep all the old food scraps and everything, all the disgusting stuff, and then they'd out it in this big water

thing, you had to slide down into this crap, and then when you got done you were a trusty Shellback. (Wassel 2019

pg. 41-42)

Becoming a trusty Shellback was not an easy procedure, nor did it reap any obvious rewards. Despite the beatings with hoses and seemingly unsanitary behaviours that were required of the Pollywogs, the Crossing the Line Ceremony served as a protection. This now defunct initiation ceremony permitted men to reinstate themselves as willing participants in a collective effort. If seasickness is one's baptism into life at sea, the Crossing the Line Ceremony is one's Confirmation. A lapse in loyalty is not an option to those on board ship. By willingly jumping through the repulsive hoops of Crossing the Line, men reassert their loyalty to the group as well as their willingness to endure pain and discomfort for the benefit of others. Apart from loyalty and brotherhood, the level of hazing that occurred in the Crossing the Line Ceremony, acted not only as a symbolic Confirmation but a very physical release for the men. In a world of being continuously understaffed, overworked, and underpaid, cathartic activities outside of alcohol and tobacco were limited. The Crossing the Line Ceremony comes at a time when men are in the most need of such a release: when directly in the middle of the ocean with nothing to do. After drifting for days and repetitive daily duties with no stops at port, the Crossing the Line Ceremony comes at an integral time for the men when cabin sickness is at its height and monotony becomes consuming. In a life of repetition and regulation the initiation of men into trusty Shellbacks is their one promise of release. If they manage to keep working as usual for the majority of their duration at sea, they have a guarantee that their pent up energy and ambitions will be allowed to live their wildest dreams. What appears as a malicious hazing ritual has overlapping themes with traditional mumming ceremonies in cultures across the world. In a mumming ceremony men are permitted for one night to unleash their troubled energy on their

community in a ritualistic manner that often involves wearing masks and going from home to home demanding food and goods from the homeowners all with the understanding that the rest of the year the young men will behave and serve as productive members of their community. Although the Crossing the Line Ceremony does not require the use of masks or costumes to obscure identity, there is still an element of roll play necessary to the ceremony which is evident in the assignment of crewmen as either Pollywogs or Shellbacks. The inhuman names given to the men delivers the same caliber of detachment as the masks worn in more traditional mumming ceremonies (Foster 2013). While the Crossing Ceremony serves as a physical release, its purpose inevitably circles back around to loyalty. Deindividuation that occurs during mumming events, however, should not be seen as “savage,” or ruthless, or even dehumanizing. The process of deindividuation in this instance is a communication between the Shellbacks and their inferior Pollywogs. Shellbacks must trust the Pollywogs to participate in the crucial ceremony allowing them their release while Pollywogs must trust the Shellbacks to ensure their safety while being “shelayled.” This unusual ceremony thus allowed group cohesion to remain intact even during the most challenging aspects of life at sea.

In most occupations rite of passage ceremonies emphasize distinction; they are about setting apart those who are not the average workplace personnel and emphasizing the exceptional through promotions, trips, and special responsibilities and privileges. Although these elements are still present in the military in a formal matter, the rites of passage that play out in day to day life on ship are about losing your distinction and giving yourself over to deindividuation and complete trust of the elements and your shipmates. In an institution that places so much emphasis on rank and hierarchy, so much of their informal time on ship is spent reestablishing an



egalitarian presence with as little disparity between experiences as possible. In institutions with heavy hierarchical systems attempts at reestablishing a sense of equality and the destruction of the hierarchy through rituals and rites of passage are inevitable. Simply looking at another heavily stratified institution, the family, emphasizes this desire for the lack of distinction.

Family game nights place all members of the family in equal positions as players in the same game with more or less the same advantages and disadvantages at winning. Family dinners place everyone at the same table, excluding large family gathering such as Thanksgiving where a kids' table may be present, promoting a sense of sameness. Even family holidays where everyone is expected to reciprocate gifts establish a sense of unity. In all other aspects of family life, however, the pecking order of parent over child and oldest over youngest can be a harsh reality kinmen are forced to live with often for their entire lives. Rites of initiation in hierarchical institutions must not be looked at from the position of the individual but from the position of community. Just as funerals are done just as much for the living as the dead, rites of initiation are done just as much for those being initiated as those who have been initiated .

### Sea Monsters on Board

While discussing this project with my coworkers at a local cafe, their immediate reaction was to comment on the brutality and “madness” of Naval officers stemming from what they witnessed in the movies and heard in the news. Sailors have a long history of folklore surrounding the idea of brutality. Whether it be stories about pirates, cruel captains, or poor living conditions, sailors are usually associated with anything but being gentlemanly. Even today folklore persists that perpetuates the “savage” state of sailors such as the saying “sailor’s mouth” to indicate someone who uses foul language. While the public has an unforgiving view

of men onboard ships, the perspective of my father was a direct contrast to the popular view of savagery. A persistent statement made by my father throughout the entire course of my interview with him was the presence of good men on ship, repeating, “There were a lot of good guys on the ship. There were a lot of good guys,” (Wassel 2019 pg.37). The incongruence between the perspective of my father and the public sparked an important question for me: How can these two perspectives be so different when many of the stories told by my father seemed to perpetuate the public’s idea of brutality? Even as I listened to the stories my father told of these supposed “good men” I was shocked by their seeming lack of humanity. The only explanation for this contradiction in perspective is a contradiction in definition of good and bad. The military has their own court system for the transgressions of servicemen and women to accommodate for the variation in morality that occurs in the military. When everyday is life or death and the ability to do your job accurately and efficiently affects the well being of a whole nation, the black and white scale of morality used by the public proves insufficient to the colorful lives of those in service. Two stories told by my father help draw out the military definition of “good and bad.” The first story he tells is of a man on board ship who was overheard complaining about the ship cook, John Pemberton, and the consequences that followed.

...we had a guy on the ship named T■■■■ F■■■■, uh, don’t mind mentioning his name, guy was a jerk, probably still a jerk! This T■■■■ F■■■■ was just giving him [John] FITS in the kitchen, just complaining about the food, or jerking him around or jerking *me* around and I remember John Pemberton, and I know you’ve heard me say this, John Pemberton goes [growling voice], ‘He set me up. Oh Bob, Bob! We’re gonna show P■■■■ how the cow eats the grassss.’ So P■■■■ would run down from the bridge, and sit down in the Wardroom and would go, ‘I’ll have some soup,’ well John was back in the *pantry* where they’d prepare the food, John would take the soup, he’d put it in the microwave for about 3-4 minutes, it’s basically bubbling it’s so hot, he brings it out, serves it, and P■■■■ goes, [in a whining voice] ‘I can’t eat this it’s too hot!’ and John goes, “Well, blow on it, wait,” and he was like, “Well I don’t have time!” So then P■■■■ would come back and go, ‘Don’t heat it up too much,’

[enthusiastically] 'OKAY!' we'd microwave it again until it's basically bubbling. He'd go, "You heated it up--ugh!"

it's like, you don't mess with the cooks! (Wassel 2019 pg.33)

In P█████'s case, what began as a complaint about the cook resulted in the consequence of being deprived of food along with a permanent stain on his reputation. My father spoke of P█████ as if the man had committed treason or seriously jeopardize the safety of his men. In a job where sleep is limited and physical demands are high, not having access to food can be the straw that breaks the camel's back for one's sanity, but in P█████'s case, this risk was seen as a worthy punishment for his actions. It should not be assumed, however, from T█████ P█████'s story that all transgressions in the Navy have harsher than necessary repercussions. When looking at the story of a loan shark on staff named Ca█████ who was "the baby" during the Crossing the Line Ceremony and was also known for unwarranted threats, the question may arise if there are any consequences for misconduct on board ship at all.

So what would happen is some of the junior seamen, we'd pull into port, they'd spend all their money and they'd go to Ca█████ and say—Ca█████ would give them \$20 and their next payday they'd give Ca█████ \$30. Yeah, so it was 20 for 30. And he would never do it so I could see him because I wouldn't have let him do it, but somewhere--we paid people on the mess decks--somewhere off of the mess decks as that seaman came out Ca█████ was waiting to make sure he got his money. So yeah, Ca█████ made a little extra money there. And every once in a while, we had a little gym on the ship and the gym had a punching bag, eeevery once in awhile Ca█████ would go down there and punch the punching bag just to show like, this is going to be what happens to your *face* if you don't pay up, you know. Ca█████ never hit anybody that I know of. But uh, just a little extra insurance in Ca█████'s thing. And he was a nice enough guy, he was a nice enough guy. But he was the one who said, 'Do you feel safe enough walking through this,' and I'm like, 'I don't know, do you feel safe getting paid?' (Wassel 2019 pg.33)

The most striking aspect of this story to me was not the several threats Ca█████ makes to his fellow shipmates, or to my father, or the fact that he gets away with it, but the fact that at the end of it all, Ca█████ still earns the classification of a "good guy." How is it that the man who complains about the cook is denied food for days and classified as a jerk for decades to come, yet

the man who steals money away from junior officers and threatens all the men on board ship is allowed to get away with it and decades later is still considered a “good guy?” As we’ve seen from the almost hazing-like ritual of the Crossing the Line Ceremony and Ca█’s ability to evade punishment for his several wrongdoings, it is not the severity of what you do, but instead the implications of what you do. T█ P█’s complaints implied three things: 1. P█’s negative remarks about the cook who made food for everyone on the ship insinuated that P█ somehow deserved better quality food than the rest of the men on board ship. 2. Pemberton was also known to be a talented cook as well as a hard working Officer who climbed the ranks quickly and deservedly, making P█ come across as needlessly critical and ungrateful. 3. P█’s inability to cope with a hardship as small as the food, put into question his ability to handle more stressful situations that could determine the life or death of the others onboard. This small smear of the cook’s skills was not simply schoolgirl gossip but indicative of much larger character flaws that othered himself from the rest of the ship, assumed misplaced superiority, and called into question his ability to uphold the safety and well being of his shipmates. These same traits may be seen at first glance in Officer Ca█’s actions as well, but when compared to Naval values, Ca█’s misconduct aligns perfectly with the psychological needs of the men on board ship. Ca█’s position as a loan shark did indeed serve a greater purpose to both the junior Seamen he was loaning to as well as the Officers who oversaw the dealings. The junior Seamen went to Ca█ willingly and knowledgeable of the conditions of trade from the beginning; none of them were ever blind sided by Ca█’s well known 20/30 system. The otherwise unattainable money loaned by Ca█ also gave opportunist Seamen the means to release as much pressure as possible while in the respite of being at port. From the perspective

of the Officers, Ca■■■■ was teaching the Seamen an important lesson in financial responsibility. Some of them being fresh out of high school, the Seamen had never experienced credit card payments or had to pay for insurance or rent. Ca■■■■'s 20/30 system was the only form of financial responsibility they were expected to uphold. To the junior Seamen, Ca■■■■ was a source of economic means. To the Officers, Ca■■■■ was a source of economic responsibility and a preventative measure thwarting future threats of paperwork for financial misconduct. As for Ca■■■■'s not uncommon threats to Seamen and Officers alike, this was a perfectly acceptable display of masculinity for the time. Not only did the threats allow Ca■■■■ to prove his masculinity and fearlessness to the rest of the men on board ship, but it opened up a platform for the men on the receiving end to come up with a witty and fearless response, thus in the end allowing both parties to prove their manliness (Cashman 2012). Most importantly, however, these threats made by Ca■■■■ ironically corresponds to a sense of security to those Ca■■■■ serves with; if Ca■■■■ had enough courage to threaten them, imagine what he could do to an actual enemy. By our societal standards, Ca■■■■'s dirty money side hustle and unprompted threats have no excuse. To the military realm of the 1980's, however, Ca■■■■ wasn't responsible for extortion as much as he was responsible for instilling order in his shipmates.

While one's ability to protect and serve his fellow shipmates was a key factor in their judgement as good or bad, the story of a young man named Ch■■■■ offers a second course on which one's character could be redeemed, completely contrary to the redeeming factors of Ca■■■■. The first story my father remembers of Ch■■■■ takes place during marksmanship training when Ch■■■■ accidentally shoots the Gunner's Mate in the hand while trying to get his gun unjammed. While recalling the story, my father exclaimed, "Ch■■■■ was a heck of a

nice kid, but GOD he was dumber than a sack of rocks. But just a heck of a nice kid,” (Wassel 2019 pg.22) In another story, my father recalls Ch [REDACTED]’s public embarrassment of their ship.

Well, when you’re at sea, the ship’s bell, which is how you tell time basically, is on the bridge. When you pull into *port*, you’re supposed to move the bell from the bridge down to the quarter deck because that’s where the officer of the deck is. You know when the captain’s coming down the pier you go[imitating bell noise], ‘Bong bong! Bong bong! Paul F. Foster: arriving,’ so everybody knows the captain’s coming. And then when he steps foot on that ship you go[imitating bell noise], ‘Bong!’ so you know he’s on the ship. That’s what you’re supposed to do. Well apparently one time we pulled in, they didn’t move the bell from the bridge to the quarter deck, so Ma [REDACTED]’s the Officer of the deck, Ch [REDACTED] is the petty officer of the watch and Ch [REDACTED] doesn’t have the bell. So he gets over the MC which is the loudspeaker, oh and by the way, this is being topside too, so everybody within about half a mile is going to hear this, so instead of going with the bell ‘Gung gung!’ Ch [REDACTED] goes, ‘bong BONG, BONG bong. Paul F, Foster arriving.’ So there’s the captain in the middle of the pier standing there, everybody’s going like, ‘Who is this guy?! They don’t have a *bell?!!*’ Ooooh my! And I think Ma [REDACTED] was ready to shoot Ch [REDACTED]! But that was one of the stories of uh, that was one of the stories of Ch [REDACTED]. Um, he’d get lost, um, he worked in the laundry and that was a good place for Ch [REDACTED]...the *laundry*. (Wassel 2019 pg.46-47)

My father also recalled Ch [REDACTED]’s nickname of Scooby Doo while on ship because they were constantly losing him, yet unlike while speaking about P [REDACTED], my father recounts Ch [REDACTED]’s missteps with a playful, almost nostalgic tone. Even though Ch [REDACTED] did not provide any sense of safety or security to the ship, Ch [REDACTED] still had an important role in the ship’s dynamics. Ch [REDACTED] not only dutifully accomplished his role as ship laundryman, but served as a source of entertainment to the men. The childish and clumsy nature of Ch [REDACTED] made him a walking character as if out of a movie. *Ch [REDACTED] did what? He shot someone?! Of course he did! Oh look at that, we lost Ch [REDACTED] again.* By having Ch [REDACTED] as a shipmate, it ensured a constant source of relief to all those working with him. Even when things were tough, you were tired, got no sleep, and hadn’t had fresh food in months, you could count on Ch [REDACTED] doing something to make you laugh. The antics of Ch [REDACTED] kept a sense of sanity

among the men, breaking the painful monotony of the day. While in the military, feeling sane is just as crucial as feeling safe. Although Ch [REDACTED] could not provide the same physical protection for the group that Ca [REDACTED] could, he still held an integral position on the ship both as laundryman and local character. P [REDACTED] was neither aggressive enough to provide physical safety, nor had the means of providing entertainment for the crew. His lack of position within the ranks thus relegated him to nothing more than “a jerk.”

In any occupation where life and death is on the line or during any historical event where the future remains uncertain, such as during war or natural disaster, one can not afford to look at the morality of every choice an ally makes. In times of need who is good and who is bad is simply determined by who can get the job done, whether it be physical protection and labor or the upkeep of spirits, and who can not. Assessment of any other aspect of one’s character proves to be unnecessarily emotionally exhausting; it is much easier to wake up in the morning to a job with with a sense of amiability over waking up to needless hostility. During times of war and stress, people are forced to break down walls and form connections with those otherwise outside their perceived norms. During wars, some people recount feeling an odd sense of joy that they may even miss afterwards due to the strong sense of dependence on each other and the resulting sense of companionship and community (Junger 2017). Judging one’s personal choices and likability is not a natural human instinct, it is a human privilege for those lucky enough to have the time and emotional resources to make such judgements. It is the correlation between privilege and judgement that has allowed oppressors to smear the reputation of minorities and maintain almost complete control. While being severely oppressed, one does not have the emotional energy to spread gossip or propaganda against their oppressor. It is simply the

privileged state of the oppressor that allows them to emotional energy to focus on such things. While in the military, few are in a place of privilege, thus community doesn't come down to luck, chance, or compatibility, community is a necessity.

## Conclusions

Although some anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers may dismiss racism, sexism, and classism as evolutionary tools protecting us from those who may not be covered by the safety blanket of our "tribe", the military paradigm highlights the mass entitlement in the concepts of self-distinction and the judgement of others. When people are subjected to constant fear of life or death, are deprived of sleep, food, or water, or classified as a minority group and oppressed, the need for individuality is almost completely over ridden by the need of unity in which self-distinction and judgement can not live. The day before completing this paper I learned that Pearl Harbor, the former site of deployment for my brother, Thomas, was shot up in a matter of 23 seconds, killing two people, and the aviation school my oldest brother, Bobby, currently attends in the Pensacola Naval base was also shot up killing three people in unrelated events. Although one could argue, and many have, that my brothers' jobs in the Navy aren't particularly perilous, the reality of life versus death in every little decision is still a glaring reality for them. When the hearses of the Pensacola shooting victims were being driven through the city, the fellow aviation students wore their service dress blues and lined the roads to honor their fallen classmates. This distinctive display of honor was not to call out any heroes, nor did those of higher ranks stand in better positions than those of lower ranks, but everyone stood together in the same service dress blues once again highlighting their unity. It does not take much threat of danger or insecurity for people to form united fronts and forgo their strong individuality. While



some sense of individuality must be maintained at all times to avoid dehumanization, excessive individualization continues to be a sign of privilege and entitlement. It is also important to note however, the importance of humor during even the most harrowing of times. Even at their most stressed, my father's shipmates were never short of laughter. Their crazy traditions, quick wits, and local characters were means of entertainment and the fulfillment of an emotional necessity. Even where oppression persists, deindividualization is rampant, and life and death are a daily question, humor prevails.

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