

Literary Frolic Fridays
September 27, 2019
Captain Edward “Ned” Latimer Beach, Jr.
Run Silent, Run Deep

Making the Film

On May 26, 1955, the *New York Times* reported that United Artists purchased the movie rights from then 30-year-old Captain Beach to *Run Silent, Run Deep*. It marked the very first time that the studio itself had bought the rights to a literary property; the studio thought it was so hot that though they were not then able to turn it into a movie they didn't want anyone else to have it. In time, the studio approached the production team of Hecht-Lancaster, a partnership between Burt Lancaster and his agent, Harold Hecht, which had hitherto produced eight motion pictures, to develop the property: the role of Bledsoe would be portrayed by Burt Lancaster himself. To portray Richardson, United Artists negotiated a one picture deal with Clark Gable.

Captain Beach found himself poorly treated by Hecht-Lancaster. Not only had he not been asked for script or production input he wasn't, at any time, offered a script to peruse (though the contract had promised him final script approval) or, at the very least, provided with any information with how the production was going. Despite this, the team's press agent, Bernie Kamber, against Beach's explicit wishes, had obligated him to a number of press junkets, even going so far as to speak with Beach's senior officers about it without cluing in Beach himself as to what he was up to. Beach, who had his hands full with the Navy, found himself at the mercy of a few senior officers who took an extremely dim view of commercialism. Beach even had to ask Hecht-Lancaster to be provided tickets for himself, his wife, his wife's parents, his mother and sister to see the movie when it debuted. Despite their differences, Beach wished everyone involved only the best.

Story Elements Reflected in the Screenplay

- The setting—Second World War, Pacific Theater, pre-1945; friction between a skipper (i.e. Richardson) and his EXEC (i.e. Bledsoe)—conflicting personalities, conflicting approaches; objective (to sink Japanese cargo freighters and Navy warships, particularly the *Akikaze* captained by “Bungo Pete”); sub crew being depth charged, with crewmen suffering injuries; malfunctioning of torpedoes; the mystery as to how “Bungo Pete” discovered, with pinpoint accuracy, the presence and whereabouts of US submarines; the discovery that the unsubmerged garbage tossed out of US subs was being collected and sifted through, the names of subs and crew being reported to “Bungo Pete”; crewmen listen to “Tokyo Rose’s” broadcasts and her speaking the names of subs and their crew; Richardson is struck on the head (many times in the book, once but mortally in the film); Richardson is incapacitated and is relieved by Bledsoe (for a short period in the book, but an extended one in the film); the Japanese believing that the sub has been sunk; Richardson figures out that a Japanese sub has been working in tandem with “Bungo Pete” and has been the primary factor in the sinking of the other subs; of the two competing men, one is killed (Bledsoe in the book, Richardson in the movie)

Story Elements Added to the Screenplay

- The conflict between obeying orders or fulfilling a personal vendetta (by attacking “Bungo Pete,” was Richardson more intent on honoring his fallen crewmen or driven by a personal vendetta against an enemy who had sunk him)—where is the dividing line; the story encompasses just one war patrol, while Bledsoe remaining onboard the entire time; there is antipathy between crew who served under Richardson and those under Bledsoe; Richardson’s head wound is ultimately fatal; a dead crewman is ejected to the surface to give the illusion that the sub has been sunk

The Gato Class Submarines

- The two submarines captained by the character Edward Richardson in the novel were of the Gato class (pronounced *Gate-oh*). The submarine featured in the movie was of the Balao class. Filming of *Run Silent, Run Deep* partially took place on and in the USS *Redfish*, which later saw duty as Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* in some scenes in Walt Disney's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. The *Redfish* was commissioned on April 12, 1944, fought in active combat against the Japanese till February, 1945, sending 54,000 tons of the Japanese Navy to the bottom (including a brand, spanking new aircraft carrier). She was decommissioned on June 27, 1968 and sunk as target practice off of San Diego less than a year later.
- Initially, Navy brass conceptualized the Gatos as adjuncts to a man battle fleet: they would be sent out ahead of a fleet to scout out and report back on the enemy's strength and then relied upon to sink as many of the enemy's warships as possible. They would later target convoys transporting enemy armament, raw and finished goods, and troops thereby interrupting the enemy's supply chain.
- The average length of the Gato class subs were 311 feet, with a beam (width) of 27 feet and a draft (the depth of a hull from the waterline to its keel) of 16-17 feet.
- Their test depth (maximum safe depth) was about 300 feet.
- Gatos were cramped. There were usually 6 officers and up to 64 enlisted men spending up to three months at a time together in quarters so close you couldn't swing a cat. There were only four toilets (heads) and three showers.
- Gatos' surface armament consisted of a 40 mm cannon, a 20mm canon, and a 5 inch deck gun. Their underwater armament consisted of six torpedo tubes in the bow and 4 in the stern.
- Their two screws were powered by four diesel motors which were run by four electric motors. It was possible when not under attack or in a state of emergency to power off any of the diesel motors at will for repair and maintenance.
- Pushed to their limits, Gatos (as well as their crews) could sustain patrols of about 70 days.
- Cruising on the surface at a speed of 10 knots (roughly 12 miles per hour in a car), a fully functioning Gato submarine could travel between Pearl Harbor and Japan and then back again to Pearl, an 11,400 nautical mile trip (roughly

12,400 miles). While submerged, Gato subs could only travel at 2 knots (roughly 3 miles per hour in a car): the limit for staying submerged was 48 consecutive hours (and that would have been pushing crew and sub to the breaking point).