

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

## DISCUSSION GUIDE & QUESTIONS

Place: Naval Submarine School New London in Groton, Connecticut

- ✚ Though he regarded his Exec, Lieutenant Jim Bledsoe, to be unready for independent command, Captain Edward Richardson was pressured by Captain Joseph Blunt, the Squadron Commander, to OK the Qualification Board’s testing of Bledsoe for promotion to captain. *Was Bledsoe’s lack of hands-on-training a criticism of Richardson’s priorities and time management skills?*
- Substance of the December 26, 1941 conference between Captain Edward Richardson and Captain Richardson:
  - Navy’s submarine production target was to be tripled in 1942
  - Subs to be constructed at the:
    - *Electric Boat Company* (later General Dynamics) in Groton, Connecticut: produced 5 subs in 1941; 15 in 1942; 22 in 1943; 22 in 1944; 12 in 1945
    - *Portsmouth Naval Shipyards* (Seavey’s Island, Kittery, Maine): produced 5 subs in 1941; 14 subs in 1942; 19 in 1943; 34 in 1944; 10 in 1945)
    - *Mare Island* (Vallejo, Solano County, California)
  - Blunt’s superiors assigned him the task of nominating officers from within his squadron to command these new subs while *simultaneously* keeping the boats within the training squadron at Groton captained and functioning.
    - Blunt considered making a captain out of Jim Bledsoe so that Bledsoe could in turn take over Richardson’s command of the school’s training sub, the *S-16*; freed of responsibility over the *S-16*, Richardson could then be given command of one of the new fleet subs.
    - Considering the long list of men senior to Richardson, he would be at the back of the line—Blunt was of the opinion that rank made no difference if a man knew what he was doing.

- Bledsoe had only been in the Navy for three years, and only a fraction of that time was with subs; though he knew a sub's mechanics as well as anyone, Richardson considered him immature, reckless, and flippant; his judgment under pressure was an untested/unproven commodity. Richardson believed it was too soon for Bledsoe to go before the Qualification Board and be accessed for independent command: he "needed more seasoning." Richardson felt the *S-16* and its crew would not be safe under Bledsoe's command. Despite Richardson's lack of faith, Blunt pressured him to get behind Bledsoe's promotion.
- Pressured to conclude the *S-16*'s refit in the paltry span of time allotted, Richardson was unable to give Bledsoe an opportunity to practice commanding the sub. He assumed that Blunt would wait till the *S-16* had completed its post refit trials before pursuing Bledsoe's examination—Blunt didn't: he cut short the sub's repair and upkeep period, forcing the crew to rush through the most urgent tasks and table everything else. Bledsoe was immediately brought before the examining board and, counting his chickens before they were hatched, planned out his new life with his fiancé, Laura.
- Indignant at being forced by Blunt to head the qualification, Lt. Comm. Roy Savage was bitter (he had already received his promotion and should have been away but he was not relived or absolved). Though it was unnecessary, he cautioned Richardson not to interfere during Bledsoe's examination (unless it was to avoid a calamity)—because if he did, the blowback would shame him as well as Bledsoe.

➤ ***After learning about his prospective promotion, what changes occurred in Bledsoe's behavior towards Richardson which Richardson found distressing?***

- Bledsoe leapt to conclusions
- Bledsoe spoke openly about the scuttlebutt he had heard concerning the increase in sub production and changes in Navy strategy ("loose lips sink ships")
- Occasionally, Bledsoe exercised a lack of concern towards important matters
- Occasionally, Bledsoe took too much time to assess a situation and decide what to do

- Bledsoe snarled at his subordinates when dissatisfied with their performance; he demeaned them and openly questioned their competence and ability
  - Contrary to submarine etiquette, Bledsoe fell out of the habit of referring to Richardson as “Sir” or “Captain
  - Bledsoe became prone to losing his cool and blowing his top; became liable to swear, even directly at superior officers (i.e. Richardson)
- ***What sort of mistakes did Bledsoe make during the examination?***
- “He might have given some additional order to the helmsman standing on the bridge ...”
  - “...facing aft (the rear of the submarine), he must have (become disoriented and) confused port and starboard.”
  - To turn a vessel to the right, the rudder is turned to the left
  - To turn a vessel to the left, the rudder must be turned to the right
  - When reporting the angle of the *Falcon*’s bow, he didn’t speak with certainty or conviction—“... hard to tell—looks like ...”
  - ““Left full rudder!”” Jim had taken a little time to make the obvious move ...”
  - Bledsoe neglected to shift to series, thus causing a discharge rate from the sub’s batteries far in excess of their proscribed limits: drained of energy, the batteries could only then power the sub at a virtual crawl. When Larto took the initiative to compensate for the power drain, Bledsoe made no acknowledgment of his quick thinking and support.
  - Bledsoe had made only one observation concerning the target; the sub sped towards where he had anticipated it would be if it did not zigzag. Bledsoe should have been checking up on it every minute or two rather than blindly direct the sub to what could have amounted to the wrong location, thereby wasting precious time, fuel, and sacrificing his advantage over his target.
  - He failed to turn the periscope around to view 360 degrees around the sub (doing so would have alerted him to the presence of other vessels, other dangers/threats in the area)
  - Bledsoe lost his cool with Tom and then with Keith
  - Having convinced himself that the *Falcon* had zigzagged, Bledsoe erupted into violence and lost his composure. Keith tried to assure him that it had in fact remained on course: unbidden, Keith brought the periscope up and pushed Keith into place so that he could observe it to be so himself.
  - Regulations stated that sub skippers remain in the area until the practice torpedo was collected and safely brought onboard and stowed away before returning to harbor. Bledsoe was keen not to wait; Richardson had to

persuade him to remain. It was a good thing that they had because Savage questioned Bledsoe about the physical condition of the torpedo: Keith, who had been monitoring its recovery through binoculars, was able to provide a complete report concerning its extraction and collection.

- Before submerging, Bledsoe neglected to give the order to inspect the seal integrity of the main hatch. When reminded about it by Keith, Bledsoe told him to forget about it. The hatch, which had proved problematic over the past few days, became jammed in place leaving an inch exposed between itself and the superstructure. The tools required to fix it were unavailable: the sub submerged with Richardson drowning within the tiny conning tower—it was impossible to attempt to save him by opening up the hatch beneath him as the sea water would then flood the other compartments. Keith and Kohler saved not only Richardson but the entire crew by going out through the forward torpedo room hatch, across the deck to the stuck hatch and fixing the door from the outside.
- Bledsoe had left the periscope up for a full minute thereby betraying the sub's location—a few seconds was the maximum proscribed time.
- Richardson realized that the periscope's optical system had been placed in the low power setting rather than high power which consequently gave the false impression of everything being at a distance. Rather than being far away, as Bledsoe had thought, the battleship *Seemes* was about to barrel down upon them.
- Richardson ended the test prematurely to take command, thereby disqualifying Bledsoe.
- Richardson believed that he had no choice but to assume command if any of them were going to get back to port alive. With only seconds to spare, Richardson, having recognized their peril, assumed command of the sub and crashed dived.

**\*\*\*Richardson blamed himself. *“I should never have permitted our safety to rest upon such a narrow margin. I had waited too long to take over the periscope; I had let the situation develop too far before asserting myself. My job was to help protect trainees from their inexperience—it had been MY fault...”***

***What repercussions befell both Bledsoe and Richardson?***

- ❖ Having OK'd Bledsoe, then later withdrawing his candidacy before the end of the test made Richardson look bad
- ❖ Bledsoe's poor performance sank whatever chances Richardson had for promotion, too (as Bledsoe's captain, he should have been making opportunities for Bledsoe, his Exec, to gain on-the-job experience)
- ❖ What made matters worse (particularly for Richardson) is that Richardson, by taking the command away from Bledsoe, personally recognized Bledsoe's incompetence in front of the examining board (this placed Richardson's fitness as a captain under scrutiny)
- ❖ Partly as a consequence of his failure, Bledsoe had to postpone his marriage engagement to Laura
- ❖ Bledsoe heaped the blame for his ignominy upon Richardson, whom he'd come to hate—he now felt that he lacked Richardson's respect, support, and friendship and that he'd have no chance to bounce back while serving under Richardson
- ❖ Rather than fighting in the Pacific, Bledsoe wanted to take command of one of the school's boats till he found a captain whom he thought would stick with him till the end

➤ ***Should Richardson have endured Bledsoe's attitude longer than most other skippers would have?***

- Bledsoe had yelled at him: "I'm, looking out for Number One from here on. Nobody else will—not you! To hell with the *Walrus* and to hell with the war, too!" Richardson told him he was being disloyal and disrespectful and that he should stop "acting like a spoiled child. If you deserve command, you'll get it."
- Being understanding and patient with Bledsoe seemed to have paid off for Richardson because Bledsoe's behavior changed—thought "not a complete about face," he exhibited a "new contemplative awareness," demonstrating to Richardson that either he "might have finally understood" or was just "submerging what feelings he might have." Whatever it was, Richardson was grateful for the improvement in their relations.

- When Bledsoe arranged to have sufficient coverage to enable him to leave for three days before the *Walrus*' departure to go to New Haven Richardson allowed him to go – he ended up marrying Laura in secret

✚ ***Did you get the impression that Richardson was competing with Bledsoe, such as for Laura's affections?***

Richardson had thought it necessary to choose between having a career in the Navy, or a wife and family; he opted for the Navy, and broke his fiancé's heart. Seeing Bledsoe engaged, Richardson regretted he hadn't tried to have both, too.

- For Richardson, being around Laura brought “Emotions submerged for four and a half years to the surface ... had meeting with Laura opened me up emotionally? Had they taken me back to those firmly forgotten days when I had decided that a career was more important than marriage?”
- She was a tonic that eased his mind and helped him to relax
- Richardson was so entranced by her that he muscled in on her and Bledsoe while they were dancing (she left Bledsoe's arms and went into Richardson's without being self-consciousness).

*All my senses responded to hers. She moved when I moved, stayed when I stayed, and in a little while the side of her forehead rested against my cheek, and I felt the brush of an eyelash. I couldn't tell whether we were dancing or drifting on a cloud, and I fiercely willed the music to play on and on... Back on the S-16, I turned in to a deep, thankful slumber, punctuated by a recurring dream of having Laura for my very own for ever and ever ...*

- Laura seemed just as receptive to Richardson: she listened to him with “rapt” attention, resting the tips of her fingers on his arm
- Laura understood Richardson well enough to pick up on his innermost thoughts
- Though he was then unable to admit it to himself, Richardson was relieved that Laura would, with the war starting, so he thought, remain single (i.e. not be marrying Bledsoe anytime soon, that she was still within *his* reach)

- He was brokenhearted when Bledsoe and Laura married in such haste and by the coolness with which Laura treated him. Watching Laura in Bledsoe's arms filled him with a jealousy he had never felt before.

✚ ***Did Bledsoe's personal feelings towards Richardson change after he had been given his own independent command?***

"I swore then I'd get even with you. I swore I'd make you regret the day you did that to me. I was going to sabotage everything you tried to do. I was going to mess you up so bad you'd wish you'd never seen me ... I pretended to like you ... and all the time I hated your guts. I thought you were yellow ... Then when ole Bungo Pete got after us I saw a real submarine skipper in action, and I realized it was you that saved us all. And gradually I came to know that you were a prince of a fellow and that I didn't know the first thing about being a skipper ... You got to figure it all out yourself, 'cause you're all alone on your own. That's what you been trying to teach me ..."

✚ ***Richardson was given command of a sub of his very own—the USS Walrus***

- The *S-16* was assigned to officers of the Free Polish Navy whose submarine had been bombed by the Germans in her dry dock.
- The brass waited till Richardson and his team did the bulk of the repairs and modification *before* giving them the boot
- Richardson's assignment to the submarine school was terminated and he was assigned command of the *Walrus* and those crewman of the *S-16* that he chose to accompany him. He wanted Bledsoe to stick with him which the latter did, with great reluctance

✚ Richardson's assignment: **Area Seven—the Bungo Suido** (the strait or channel between the Japanese islands of Kyushu, Honshu, and Shikoku that connects the Pacific Ocean to the Inland Sea of Japan). During his 21 day patrol, Richardson was to observe:

- What types of maritime transport or warships utilized the channel
- In what numbers, in what formations, and at what time of day
- And to sink as many commercial ships as possible.



\*\*\*The captain of the previous patrol was certain that by some means the Japanese were aware of their presence and movements the entire time they were there—they were unable to fire a single torpedo.

- After sighting a sub of unknown origin, Richardson wanted to wait till receiving official word from COMSUBPAC that it wasn't friendly – he didn't want to take the risk of it being another US sub and having them fire on the *Walrus* by mistake or him attacking it; Bledsoe argued that they should have become closer, anyway—he was eager to attack and it was a challenge for Richardson to explain the need for caution, which Bledsoe treated with harshness and disaffection
- By the time the response came identifying the sub as that of the enemy's, Richardson had failed to position the *Walrus* in a proper firing position and consequently the *Walrus* had to leave the scene
- Bledsoe next proposed going closer to the shoreline, risking grounding the sub in the shallows in order to zero in on three particular ships which they had seen—this meant giving up watch over the Bungo Suido, which was their chief assignment.
- They kept on hearing a “sibilant hum,” an unattributable noise which seemed to originate at a distance from somewhere above or below the water. Whenever they heard it, a Japanese attack against them became imminent.
- The *Akikaze*, a Japanese destroyer of new design, captained by “Bungo Pete,” himself a former submarine commander, followed the *Walrus*. The *Akikaze*'s engines were off and only turned on after the *Walrus* had reached periscope depth; Richardson observed that it was waiting for them, less than 200 yards away, her decks lined with over 50 men with binoculars looking directly at *Walrus*' periscope.
- Afterwards, a German radio broadcast had been picked up mentioning the Japanese sinking of two US subs—the *Needlefish*, and the *Walrus*! Somehow, “Bungo Pete” always knew the identities of the subs he attacked.



Questions to which Richardson needed to find the answers:

- How was “Bungo Pete” able to detect the presence and movements of US submarines so easily and accurately?
- How was he able to identify the subs he encountered?
- Did the Germans equip the Japanese with anti-sub technology?

#### Return to Area Seven

- “Tokyo Rose:” How was it possible that the Japanese propaganda ministry had full knowledge of the *Walrus* and of its patrol area off of Kyushu!  
Two possibilities: Espionage/sabotage at Pearl Harbor or the Japanese were picking up the *Walrus*’ discarded garbage (which, not always weighted enough to sink, merely floated). To find out, Richardson had some official correspondence concerning the USS *Octopus* (a submarine no longer in service)—forged and had every reference to the *Walrus* removed.

#### ***In fulfillment of duty, how did Richardson court death throughout the novel?***

- During Bledsoe’s qualifying outing, he ordered to dive without having properly checked one of the hatches opening to the surface—which was jammed open. To save the sub and the crew, Richardson (springing down upon it and weighting it down with his body) helped shut the hatch to the control room (which, to shut, required outside pressure to bear down upon it)—but at the same time exposed himself to drowning in the conning tower.
- In the book, Richardson is struck in the head when the periscope yoke collar unexpectedly descended with it; in the movie, Richardson is struck in the heads by the falling torpedo
- While on the bridge during the attack on the convoy, Richardson was injured by a 4 inch Japanese shell that had exploded nearby, rendering him unconscious (for three days) and breaking his right leg
- Because, in the gale with waves 15 to 20 feet high and 50 feet across, a fix on the Q-ship could not be obtained through the periscopes, Richardson had to stay on the bridge, exposing himself to the open sea (cascades of which rolled over him), to be able to obtain the range through the TBT binoculars.

- Richardson was ordered to position the *Eel* to rescue any US pilots whose fighters, being too damaged to make it back to their carriers, needed to be crashed into the sea. Richardson organized six of his men into a rescue squad. Lines were fastened to the *Eel*'s cleats that kept the rescue rafts from floating away. However, when Japanese fighters launched an attack against them, and the *Eel* needed to submerge, the lines were still affixed (both Richardson and his Exec forgot to cut them)—the injured men, too weak to help themselves, would be dragged into the sea and drowned. Recognizing this, Richardson fought with the lines to release them as the sub submerged. He was taken under with it and nearly drowned.

✚ ***What were Richardson and Bledsoe's attitudes/philosophies towards war and the enemy?***

- Richardson's views:

- “War rarely generates personal animosities between members of the opposing forces, for it is too big for that. The hate is there, but it is a larger hatred, a hatred for everything the enemy stands for, for all of his professed ideals, for his very way of life. Individuals stand for nothing in this mammoth hate, and that is why friends—even members of the same family—can at times be on opposite sides, and why, after the fighting is over, it is possible to respect and even like the man who lately wished to kill you.”

“Bungo, however, had done us *personal injury*, and thereby lost his anonymity. We had learned to *know him* by his works and by his name ... we (were) consumed with bitter personal enmity toward a *certain personality* among the enemy. That this individual was only doing his duty as he saw it, as he had a right to see it, made not the slightest difference.” (Italics are mine)

- “There was a war, the basic immorality of which transcended temporarily the more lasting and better motives of peace.”

- A warrior's approach to combat is forever altered once a face and a name can be attributed to the enemy and personal injury ascribed to his hands.
  - Richardson: Arriving in Area Seven, Richardson sometimes felt "weak in the knees as (he) gave the necessary orders" to attack. As a consequence of his encounters with the Japanese, his emotions changed so that during combat he "felt curiously detached and emotionless." After learning of the loss of Jim and his command, the *Walrus* (Richardson's own former command), he was "determined, reckless, in a mad fury" to be assigned the objective of personally killing "Bungo Pete" and terminating his whole operation. Later, having no option but to kill the three lifeboat loads of survivors of the *Akikaze* (lest one of them be "Bungo" Pete and he returns in a week having thought out and organized an even deadlier trap for US subs), Richardson was wracked by sobs that came "boiling up out of the hard, twisted knot that was (his) belly."
- Though he had accomplished what he had set out to do, destroying "Bungo Pete," Richardson was appalled at himself for having, he believed "crossed the boundary between the decent and the indecent; the thin line between the moral and immoral." Condemning himself as a pariah, Richardson thought he could "never be able to look a decent, untarnished man in the face again." Days afterward, he was haunted by the "tortured faces" of the "screaming" Japanese survivors who he believed had prophesized his doom, swearing "ever-lasting revenge."
- Bledsoe's bloodlust
  - While serving as Richardson's XO
    - For Bledsoe, the anticipation of and eagerness for combat gave him a thrill which had demonstrably "made a different person out of him."
    - Bledsoe considered any opportunity to kill the enemy which was not taken to be almost inexcusable.
    - Bledsoe was more a man of impulse, of the moment, rather than of nuance, of the big picture

- Bledsoe pleaded for opportunities to attack the enemy: in anticipation he exhibited a hard, tight grin, or bared his teeth in a curious grimace; his eyes danced
  - Richardson held a screaming Bledsoe back from massacring Japanese survivors with a Browning machine gun.
  - Richardson saw in Jim an “unholy exhilaration” whenever he gave a command to shoot
  - When Richardson permitted Bledsoe to officiate over the sinking of a tanker, Bledsoe—instead of lowering the periscope after firing and then raising it after the torpedoes exploded—kept the periscope surfaced to observe the torpedoes running towards the tanker and then to observe its demise, allowing anyone in the conning tower and control room to look who wanted to do so
- While as captain of the *Walrus*
- Bledsoe’s style was tough, devil-may-care: his approach was to fight at night while on the surface
  - When entering Brisbane harbor. Bledsoe had hoisted and hung a cockscorn comprised of eight Japanese flags, one for each of the enemy vessels which the *Walrus* had sunk (they were all part of a single convoy which Bledsoe had pursued until each and every vessel comprising it had been sunk)—“he had been like a wild man, driving *Walrus* and himself relentlessly ...”
  - When she returned after her seventh patrol, Richardson hung a clothesline suspended from which were Japanese flags representing the ships *Walrus* had sunk.
  - His brazen, reckless daring had increased with each consecutive patrol: miraculously, the *Walrus* escaped each encounter with no serious injuries to crew or sub—this fueled his need to constantly outdo himself. His number of confirmed kills became legendary

- Despite having made seven consecutive patrols, and entitled to furlough back in the states, Bledsoe and the *Walrus* were ordered by ComSubPac to leave immediately for the Area-Seven—the Bungo Strait. Despite having sunk six vessels, and having only four aft torpedoes remaining, ComSubPac still kept the *Walrus* in Area-Seven: the *Walrus* was sunk the same day as having been told to wait till her replacement arrived

*Would you say that the when Richardson took the lives of the enemy, it was because they were the enemy, and that they had to be stopped before they could kill additional Americans?*

*Would you say that when Bledsoe took the lives of the enemy, he was driven by a combination of both duty and a liking for killing?*

- **“Bungo Pete’s” modus operandi**

Captain Tateo Nakame, Imperial Japanese Navy, aka “Bungo Pete”—himself a former submarine skipper

- Seemingly innocuous sampans and fishing boats would reconnoiter for US subs and relay the information back to “Bungo Pete.”
- Alerted to the presence of US subs, “Bungo Pete” dispatched his team: while a Japanese submarine prowled submerged, the decoy freighters, the Q-ship (a freighter with disguised armament), and the *Akikaze* destroyer waited to be attacked. Alerted by the Japanese sub, the *Akikaze* and the Q-ship knew exactly when to expect attack and where to target depth charges

***What events in the novel actually happened to Beach?***

- Among Beach's most harrowing combat experiences was being in the conning tower of a sub (the *Trigger*) that was about to be rammed by a Japanese warship barreling down upon her on the surface. Carefully, calmly, Beach calculated the speed and distance of the oncoming vessel and at the appropriate moment, ordered the firing of the torpedoes—the enemy had been so close that when her bow exploded pieces of it rained down all over Beach and upon the sub.

This is an event that occurs to Bledsoe

- On another occasion, while attacking a convoy of Japanese freighters, his sub (the *Trigger*) was spotted by an enemy warship and had to crash dive. On the surface, enemy escorts maintained a circular course above his general location and dropped a total of 100 depth charges over the course of 17 straight hours. Submerged, the sub was a virtual captive.
- In temperatures that exceeded 120 degrees Fahrenheit inside the *Trigger*, Beach and his fellow submariners endured the carnage wrought by the explosions.

With their atmosphere now made up almost entirely of carbon monoxide, *Trigger's* batteries nearly empty, and sea water spraying in, the crew had no choice but to ascend. Luckily, one of the enemy vessels had left a large enough gap where the *Trigger* was able to stealthfully escape the deadly circle.