

Air and Space this Week

Item of the Week

The Silent Service (Part 2)

Originally appeared January 20, 2020

KEY WORDS: DeForest Kelley James Dempsey Edward L. Beach

USS Archerfish USS Archer-Fish USS Tang USS S-37 USS Spot USS Cod

There are as many submarine A+StW items of note this week as there are aviation and Space exploration ones, it seems. The launch of the first nuclear submarine, the USS Nautilus, was on 1/24/1954 and the 75th anniversary of the first sub-to-shore rocket bombardment was on 1/23.

You know I love connections.

Actor DeForest Kelley would have been 100 years old on 1/20/2020. Although best known for portraying “Dr. McCoy” on the original series of *Star Trek* and the first few *Star Trek* movies, he had many supporting roles in both film and TV. The two most interesting pre-ST roles he had (IMHO) were a bit part in the movie, [Raintree County](#) (with Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor) and in the 1950’s TV series, [The Silent Service](#), produced by famed [WWII sub vet](#) Tommy Dykers. *Raintree County* was filmed in part in Danville, Kentucky, where I was born. My Mom hoped for a walk-on part, but was way too pregnant with me. I’ve mentioned *The Silent Service* before, in part because so many of the people who appeared in it went on to much larger roles; one of the examples I previously cited was [Jerry Parris](#), who portrayed top US sub ace Dick O’Kane in three episodes before becoming Rob Petrie’s neighbor on *The Dick van Dyke Show* and directing many TV shows after that.

A few weeks ago, I wrote the first part of this story, about the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the largest aircraft carrier of the War, the *IJN Shinano*, by torpedoes fired by Joseph Enright, captain of the *USS Archer-Fish*. This was the largest ship sunk by a sub in WWII, and was, of course, the focus of an episode of *The Silent Service*. Care to guess who played skipper Enright?

Yup, [DeForest Kelley](#)! [See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euLP2h-8AVk>]

But wait, there’s more....

The *Archerfish* episode was not the only one DeForest Kelley appeared in. He also played [James Dempsey](#), the captain of the [USS Spearfish](#), the submarine that made the last call on the island of Corregidor before it fell (May 3, 1942). Earlier, he commanded the [USS S-37](#), one of the very few S-boats to sink a Japanese warship (the destroyer [IJN Natsushio](#) on February 8, 1942). The S-37 was eventually going to be used as a target after the War, but she broke her tow and sank. An attempt was made to raise her for scrap, but the wreck got away and still lies just off Imperial Beach south of San Diego, where it has been a [popular scuba dive](#) ever since.)

Dempsey was able to depart Corregidor loaded heavily with evacuees, including a dozen nurses, a feat turned both into an episode of *TSS* (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDsLiZa8C9s>) and into a Cary Grant movie, *Operation Petticoat* (with the pink paint part of the story lifted from another WWII sub).

Back in 1988, I had the pleasure of attending the annual convention of Submarine Veterans in Phoenix, the guest of the father of one of my grad school colleagues. It was there that I got to meet Jesse DeSilva and [Clayton Decker](#), survivors of the [USS Tang](#). DeSilva's story was particularly interesting; he was stationed in the after torpedo room and, if he'd been at his normal post, he'd have died instantly. However, his chief had put his team on a rotating break, and DeSilva was in the galley drawing a cup of coffee when the Tang's torpedo hit. I had a wonderful visit with them! And it was all due to the father of my friend, who had served aboard two wartime subs. One was the *USS Spot*, where he was Chief of the Boat. Care to guess which sub he served on before the *Spot*?

Yup, the *Spearfish*, and he was on the mission to Corregidor!

It is difficult to imagine that the *TSS* episode with [Edward Platt](#) (Chief of CONTROL, and, Didja Know, a professional singer) and [Joe Flynn](#) (*McHale's Navy* Captain Binghamton) would be a serious production! But it was: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfFv8whpJZQ>.

Other notable *TSS* bit players include Bob Denver, Leonard Nimoy (thrice), and Stanley Adams (*Star Trek's* Cyrano Jones; twice; he was also the villain in the [worst episode](#) of *Lost in Space*, a rather low bar...).

One more. Perhaps you are familiar with the writings of [Edward L. Beach](#) (e.g. *Run Silent, Run Deep*, which had two sequels and was made into a [movie](#), and many books about naval history). He had an amazing career, and served with distinction in several WWII submarines, including the *USS Tirante*. Care to guess who played him *The Silent Service*? Our favorite *Gilligan's Island* castaway professor, Roy Hinkley, aka Russell Johnson! [BTW: Johnson flew 44 combat missions as a B-25 navigator in the PTO, and was shot down and injured in the Philippines on March 4, 1945. He was a close friend of Audie Murphy. Kinda puts that whole nerdy professor thing in a new light, doesn't it?]

Geez. The Professor flew bombing missions in the Philippines, Oliver Wendell Douglass rescued wounded Marines at Tarawa, Gene Autrey flew supply missions "over the Hump," and Uncle Fester flew gliders full of troops into isolated parts of Burma!

Yes, indeed, I do love connections!

P.S. Bob Newhart spoofed *The Silent Service* in 1960 with his piece, "[The Cruise of the USS Codfish](#)," on *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart*, his debut comedy album, which was the Album of the Year at the 1961 Grammys. Sixty years ago! Hang in there, Professor Proton!

P.P.S. There was, of course, no *USS Codfish*. However, there was a *USS Cod* (SS-224), [now on display](#) in [Cleveland](#). Our buddy from the *S-37* and *Spearfish*, James Dempsey, was her first skipper! He put the *USS Cod* into commission on June 21, 1943, and commanded her first three War patrols. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cod.

Dempsey was in three episodes of *TSS*, all portrayed by DeForest Kelley.

See *The Silent Service* episode about the *Cod*'s Lost Boarding Party [here](#). It originally aired on May 30, 1958, Robert Knapp played its then-skipper, Franklin S. Kimball. Knapp was in five *TSS* episodes, and had guest roles on many 1960's shows.

Dempsey was the [plank-owning](#) skipper; Kimball was CEM initially, but made skipper of *Cod* by time of boarding party incident

The Silent Service's Episode List: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050061/episodes>

The Silent Service cast and crew: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050061/fullcredits>

Cod Boarding Party Rescue pix:

<http://www.submarinesailor.com/boats/324blenny/franktoon/rescue.html>

BTW: The last bit of *The Secret Service*'s *Cod* boarding party episode had an interview with Captain Kimball. The episode's technical advisor was [F. Gordon Selby](#), who served in that role for all 36 *TSS* episodes), and the submarine shots were filmed aboard the *USS Sawfish*. F. Gordon Selby is not to be confused with British submariner [Gordon Selby](#), who had an interesting, and [lucky](#), career. *TSS*' Selby won two Navy Crosses and the Silver Star for his WWII service, He commanded the *USS Puffer* (SS-268) on five war patrols. The *Puffer* suffered one of the most severe depth-chargings of the War; her captain lost control of his crew and the sub barely escaped. The sub's leadership was relieved, with *R-1*'s former skipper, W.R. Laughon taking over briefly, before giving way to Selby. Laughon would have some success on the *USS Rasher*; Selby had *Puffer* for four patrols. *Puffer* then needed a major overhaul, after which she conducted three patrols under C.R. Dwyer before the War's end.

Tough guy [Peter Leeds](#) played "Bobick" in the *TSS Cod* episode; he was a comedian who appeared on TV more than 8000 times, and was a prolific voice-over actor, and worked with Bob Hope on numerous USO shows up until 1991. Another actor in the episode was William Phipps, who appeared in several of the early 1950's science fiction movies, including *War of the Worlds* (1953). He also voiced Prince Charming in Disney's *Cinderella* (1950), Another bit player in the *Cod* episode was Burt Metcalfe, who was the Executive Producer for "Memories of M*A*S*H" (1991) and the "M*A*S*H: 30th Anniversary Reunion" (2002) shows (he had been an associate/executive producer for the entirety of M*A*S*H's run).

One final note: The Associate Producer of the *Cod* *Silent Service* episode was Bill Tinsman, who became a successful TV casting director after the War, handing casting chores for *Green Acres*, *Petticoat Junction*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Born: 7/29/1910, in Chicago. He died on November 3, 1978, in San Diego. Tinsman's former home in Palm Springs, complete with numerous celebrity photographs on its walls, is presently an Airbnb; see #7 [here](#).

Last Edited on 14 October 2020