

PACIFIC OCEAN POLLYWOGS / SHELLBACKS NAVY TRADITION

In the U.S. Navy when a ship crosses the Equator and the International Date Line and enters the 'Royal Domain' there is a time honored and historical traditional ceremony that takes place. This is a Naval event consisting of hi-jinks among Navy ships and the seafaring sailors who are about to cross the equator for the first time. In this ceremony, Pollywogs (those who are about to cross the equator for the first time) are inducted into the "mysteries of the deep" by Neptunus Rex and His Royal Court of Shellbacks (those who have crossed the equator before).

I was on board the U.S.S. Swenning, Destroyer Escort (DE 394), during World War II. I had left the European Theater, Atlantic Ocean, the second largest ocean, after Victory in Europe (VE Day) and went through the Panama Canal and over to the Pacific Ocean, the first largest ocean.

Almost all of our crew were Pollywogs. And most of the crew who commissioned our ship was still aboard. This special experience is considered to be a highlight of your naval career but not all have the honor and opportunity. All Naval personnel are required to go through this traditional ceremony when crossing the Equator.

Prior to the time of this ceremony, my ship had been on the island of Guam, South Pacific for several days. We had left Guam with the assignment to patrol around several designated Islands looking for Jap gun emplacements, shell and destroy them, when found. We first patrolled around Truk Island. As we continued on, we stopped at Ulithie, in the Caroline Islands. Pulling out the next day we proceeded south patrolling around Yap Island. We also patrolled around the Gilbert Islands. We were scheduled to cross the Equator (Latitude 0) on our way to the Manus Island in the Admiralty group, which is just north of the Solomon's.

The day before we were scheduled to cross the equator word was passed that Davie Jones and his 'Royal Court' was to come aboard that night. A few of the Shellbacks were getting things ready and had already constructed the 'Royal Bath' that was located on the 'fantail'. We knew that the Pollywogs were all in for a good hazing.

On the historical day of the crossing of the Equator, at 1300, the Pollywogs were piped aft to the 'fantail' and the 'Jolly Roger' was hoisted up the yardarm. This meant that the hazing was underway. Arriving at the fantail we were presented to the 'Royal Court'. I now was about to be inducted by 'King Neptune', going from a mere Pollywog into the Grand Neptune realm of the Shellbacks.

King Neptune was wearing a majestic makeshift gold crown with a white sheet draped over his shoulders, he was holding a broom upside down, which was wrapped in toilet paper, as a scepter. Sitting next to him was the 'Royal Baby, also dressed in a white sheet that had been made into a diaper. The rest of the Court was also dressed in white sheets.

First, each one of the Pollywogs were required to entertain the 'Court'. My 'case' was brought to trial and King Neptune passed judgment on me. I was found guilty. Some had to dance, some had to recite poetry and others had to sing. I was lucky. My sentence was to dance. I just did my 'famous' soft shoe, tap dance. Then I had to kneel before the King Neptune Court. I was told to crawl up to the Court 'Royal Baby' with his white sheet diaper on. He had grease and diesel oil smeared all over his bare, fat, slimy belly. After crawling up to him, on sore knees caused by the rough surface of the deck, I was required to take a bite from the 'Irish apple' that he was holding, which turned out to be a raw, brown onion. Next, I was ordered to kiss the 'Royal Baby' on his belly. Of course, my face was shoved into his belly just as I was about to swallow the bite of onion and while I was trying to take a breath. Next, as I was choking, I had to go to the 'Royal Doctor' and was fed 'castor oil'. To this day I don't know what it was, but it was bitter. As I swallowed, I was taken over to the 'Royal Barber', who cut off a hunk of my hair. Next I was lead over to the 'Royal Bath'. With grease and oil all over my face and in my ears, I was required to jump over the top and into an enclosed

“Quad” 40 MM gun emplacement that had been made into a small ‘pool’ which was filled up, to my waist, mixed with sea water, diesel oil and old garbage that had been saved up for the last several days. Also I was required to say; “Shellback”, three times as they were dunking me. With the tossing and rolling of the ship we sloshed around in the slimy cold water for what seemed hours, while some shipmates dumped buckets filled with this gunk over our heads. After several minutes I was allowed to climb out and again, get back down on hands and knees. At the final stage of the ceremony, I crawled down the gauntlet. As I worked my way down the line I received swats and had rotten eggs broken on my head from both sides of the line until the end. When it was all over I took a deep breath and with great pride I said; “ Now I am a “Shellback.”

At the end of the ceremony, with congratulation and handshakes I officially became a member of the centuries old Naval tradition of the “Grand Neptune of Shellbacks”,

I also was awarded a prestigious “Official Shellback Certificate”, with the Official Seal of the Navy Department, United States of America, which reads in part:

IMPERIVM NEPTVNI REGIS

TO ALL SAILORS WHEREVER YE MAY BE:

That in LATITUDE 0000 there appeared within Our Royal Domain the U.S.S Swenning, DE 394 bound south for Manus, of the Admiralty Islands. And Be It Known: Who may be honored by his presence that Leslie B. Jones having been found worthy to be numbered as one of our Trusty Shellbacks of the Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Order of the Deep.

Davey Jones, His Majesty’s Scribe.

Neptunus Rex, Ruler of the Raining Main.

L. B. Jones, Trusty Shellback
December 4, 1945 (Nineteen years old)

Ancient Order of the Deep

TO ALL YE LANDLUBBERS AND POLLYWOGS
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

Leslie Bonner Jones

HAS BEEN GATHERED TO OUR FOLD AND DULY INITIATED AS

A TRUSTY SHELLBACK

HAVING CROSSED THE EQUATOR ON BOARD THE

United States Ship SWENNING

LATITUDE 00° 00' LONGITUDE 146° 20'

BOUND FROM GUAM, MARIANAS ISLANDS TO

MANUS, ADMIRALTY ISLANDS, DECEMBER 4, 1945

J. W. [Signature]
Davy Jones

HIS MAJESTY'S SCRIBE

Neptunus Rex

RULER OF THE RAGING MAIN