

Where Else Could You Get

By Margaret Scott

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NORFOLK — As "large messes afloat" go, the kitchens of the submarine tender L.Y. Spear are outstanding.

The Norfolk-based vessel may well have the Navy's only chow lines where enlisted men are greeted by mess cooks in bright red jackets and black bow ties, bearing hors d'oeuvre-laden trays.

Or the only salad bar decorated daily by a cook who can transform rutabagas into roses, daisies, or pansies with a twist of his paring knife.

"It's enough to make many an old salt feel the Navy is getting soft," comments a visiting chief.

It was also enough, earlier this month, to make the Spear the 1971 recipient of the Captain Edward Francis Ney Award for the Navy's top dining facility in a large mess afloat.

The contest is sponsored annually by the Secretary of the Navy and the Food Service Executives Association, an international group of experts in food procurement, service and management.

This year's five-man team of judges traveled more than 25,000 miles from the far Pacific to Europe to the United States to make their selection.

The Spear—competing with all messes on ships with crews of more than 300 men, including aircraft carriers—was named to the top spot on July 1.

"It's something we started working for from the very beginning," said Cmdr. P. T. McMahan, ship supply officer, this week. The Spear, commissioned in February, 1970, was the second ship ever to win the award within



SH Larry Deaver greets ETN2 Clyde DeVilling with the hors d'oeuvre tray.



In Service Circles

17 months of commissioning, he said.

McMahan credits the success to Lt. (jg) Kevin Dolan, food service officer, and Master Chief Hugh McCracken, his assistant. They, in turn, cite a team of 78 cooks and messmen as responsible for the victory.

Judging for the award covered everything from "clean finger-

nails to the taste of the food," Dolan said. General categories included such things as sanitation, food preparation, and management.

Innovations like the hors d'oeuvre trays may help, but are not enough to win the award, McMahan said. "The emphasis is not on the motif, but on the preparation of food and management," he said.

The staff believes their food is good. "We think it's delicious," Dolan said. The day of the Ney award inspection, Newport fried chicken was on the menu. One of the inspectors—owner of a fried chicken franchise—dubbed the chicken superior to his own, he said.

"Joking aside, this is the best

Navy food I've ever eaten," DP1 Ronald Rogers agreed over a leg of chicken.

"The variety's better here than on most ships," added SK1 Carlos Lewis, who said that he sometimes brings his family to eat aboard ship. "The salad bar here's as good as anywhere downtown."

Daily menus are planned by McCracken who has more than 20 years of service in the Navy's food line. The Spear serves approximately 300 men at breakfast, 750 to 800 for lunch, and 300 for supper. There is also a mid-night snack.

The meals require 485 gallons of milk, 540 loaves of bread, 100 pounds of butter, 1500 pounds of meat and seafood, 285 pounds of potatoes, 630 dozen eggs and 450 pounds of fresh fruit weekly.

The Navy allots \$1.52 per man per day—enough to allow for steaks or some specialty like lobster tails at least once a week, Dolan said. The food is free for the enlisted men.

Keeping everyone on the ship happy with food service is difficult if not impossible, Dolan said. "One man may think we don't have enough beef, so we hit up on beef. But then another will say, 'Good God, steak again,'" he said.

"Thought for food" suggestion blanks are available to all crew members in an effort to please as many as possible. The suggestions are often implemented.

"One man said that our ice cream cups were too soft, so we bought an ice cream freezer and fixed that," Dolan said. Menu suggestions are also taken regularly from the blanks.

In another program, one officer and three enlisted men are selected at random daily to write

Hors d'Oeuvres in the Mess?



Virginian-Pilot Photos by J. T. McCleary

A Castagnacci centerpiece highlights the salad bar.

evaluations of their meal.

At regular intervals, a group is named "division of the day." The men are allowed to select the day's menu and are given head-of-the-line privileges and reserved tables.

The salad bar is one of the prides of the food team. Its decoration falls to CS2 Edward Castagnacci who speaks with an artist's pride of his work. (Castagnacci recently took second place

honors at the Virginia State Culinary Art Show in Richmond, and first place in the vegetable carving category.)

The salad bar is covered with a red, white and blue canopy — Castagnacci's idea — and is laden with an assortment of oranges, apples, grapes, plums, and other fruit.

The center serves a monetary as well as an aesthetic purpose — filling the men up on salads can

save dollars elsewhere, McCracken noted.

The day's centerpiece was an arrangement of canteloupe, cucumber, and radish flowers — "not one of my best," Castagnacci said. "I can make a million things." His specialties are the rutabaga flowers.

The ship is also installing a grill on each end of the serving line for preparing "cook to order" foods. "A man will be able

to get his eggs just the way he likes them," Mc Mahan said. "This is something no other ship has."

The food team is convinced that their job is essential to a well-run, happy ship. "Suppose you'd just had a hard day, and you got to the meal line to find bad food," Dolan said. "That could be bad for morale."

The Ney award is the Navy's way of agreeing.

NOT ONE SINGLE WORD of the U.S. Navy chicken rumor is true. Colonel Sanders is NOT going to buy the USS Spear and convert it into a floating fried chicken factory.

This kind of talk started last May 20 at 8:15 in the morning. That is when a team of five food experts came aboard the brawny submarine tender. The visitors included Marshall Scott, who owns six Kentucky Fried Chicken places up north.

All along the ship's berth, Pier 22, Destroyer-Submarine Piers, the gossip spread like butter on hot corn. The Spear is headed for the finger lickin' fleet.

Now hear this. It was only scuttlebutt, which is Navy for idle talk. Restaurateur Scott was aboard to help decide if the Spear's galley should win the Ney Award for "sustained excellence." At the time, the Spear was in competition with the USS Austin and USS Sperry.

The Spear won.

No wonder

After visiting the ship the other day, I have to say, "How could the Spear lose?"

Enlisted men are served hors d'oeuvres as they wait in line.

The messmen wear red dinner jackets and black ties.

Steamed lobster tails is a specialty of the house.

For dieters, there is skim milk and cottage cheese salads. For everybody, there is popsicles.

The assistant food service officer of the Spear gave the galley the ultimate endorsement when he said, "I wouldn't serve anything here I wouldn't eat myself." Then Hugh McCracken, Chief Commisaryman, joined me for lunch of oven-roast of pork loin, mushroom gravy, applesauce, whipped potatoes and I forget what else.

I spent about a thousand years in the Navy. But I never ate like they eat on the Spear. The chefs on that ship often prepare individual chicken or trukey pot pies.

Then there is Fried Chicken Newport. The cooks bake the chicken until it is three-quarters done. Then they deep-fry it. "Just like the nectar of the gods," said McCracken.

Stiff competition

The Spear competed with approximately 1,000 large ships. Last January, the ship's food service officer was told the good news. The Spear was among the finalists in the Ney competition.

What does the contest consist of? Lt. jg. K. C. Dolan explained, "We are graded for that sustained excellence in everything from menu planning to how clean the messmen keep their fingernails."

On the Spear, the enlisted men eat in a reasonably cheery atmosphere. There are tablecloths. I recall Navy mess decks as sunny and winsome as Dracula's crypt. I used to eat in 9.5 minutes or less. That is all I could take of the galley. Today, I still eat like Jim Ryun runs. The habit lingers.

When I told this to McCracken, he laughed and said, "I know what you mean. You would get gravy on top of your apple pie."

The chief must have been at sea with me. McCracken pays attention to what his clients have to say. There is a suggestion box.

The chief closely inspects leftovers. "If there is more than three ounces of waste per man, then I know the men don't like what is on the menu." Spear sailors have turned their noses up at fried rabbit, leg of lamb, braised beef livers, chitterlings and, believe it or not, beef stroganoff.

Unique items

The Spear has two unique appointments in the galley. There is a private dining area for petty officers first class (it has a brick wall around it) and there is a canopied salad bar. "For color," said McCracken.

Because the Spear is a submarine tender, the galley is under pressure. Crews from neighboring ships often drop by to sample the sauteed mushrooms and au-gratin asparagus. There is room for 1,252 enlisted men and 95 officers. This floating repair, supply and support ship is commanded by Capt. Ralph M. Ghormley. You must have me up to the captain's table some day, Captain Ghormley.

Speaking of the ney award, McCracken said, "All I promised the galley crew of 78 for this was a sense of pride. It was enough. They turned and burned."

Before I leave, could I have a little blueberry shortcake?