

## Nuclear Submarine

Title 114

For me a quite unexpected bonus was a visit to a Nuclear Submarine at Port Canaveral, only a few kilometers from the Space Centre, on my last day before leaving the Cape in Florida. During the inevitable delays of all space launches, I had driven around in my car and had discovered a nuclear submarine on a quay in the Port. But how to visit it? I simply walked down the gangway and asked the guard to fetch the officer of the watch to come and see me. Explaining my press status I asked for permission to come aboard, but he politely refused and told me this had to be cleared in Washington by the Navy Department and the British Embassy. "Please return in 24 hours" he said.

It was another example of the admirable 'Open Information Policy' (see Title 107) towards the press which ruled in America at the time. I doubt if a similar approach by an American representative of the press to a British or French nuclear submarine officer would have produced a similar answer. I returned next day and was invited to see America's fiftieth nuclear-powered submarine, the then recently commissioned *Nathaniel Green*, 7800 tons.

She was at Port Canaveral to fire, while submerged, two *Polaris* practice missiles from about 100 km out at sea, a standard procedure for all new submarines in order to calibrate their instruments with the aid of the many radar tracking stations available at the Cape. I was given a three-hour tour of her 'unclassified areas'. Walking through her three decks I was amazed by her spaciousness, so utterly different from all previous submarines I had seen in museums.

Wide gangways led to the officers' individual staterooms, from there to the men's quarters, on to the command post and on to the torpedo chambers. At the command stand curtains had been drawn over some instruments so that I could not see any calibrations or upper limits on several of the many instruments, although their functions were freely explained as depth gauge, underwater speedometer and so on. Forward of the command post, in the stem, I saw the chambers of 16 missiles, the large black cylinders housing at the time only practice missiles. I was told that the real *Polaris* missiles have a range of 4000 km and as no point on Earth is more than 2700 km from the sea, the submarine can keep any target on our planet covered.

The complexity of older submarines in Museums was nothing compared with that of a nuclear-powered one. I was not allowed to see the reactor engine room in the stern, but shown the oxygen producing water electrolysis installation and the waste disposal unit. Her Commander William Cossaboom told me "Once out on patrol, we are in constant receipt of message traffic, we get daily news broadcasts, and what the crew considered most important, familygrams from home." My report was published in full in the *Daily Telegraph*.