

THE SHOVEL & IT'S HISTORY



The information presented on this page has been **painstakingly** compiled by D. H. 'Buster' Brown. The SAOC Central gratefully acknowledges the extract from his upcoming book *Sons of Neptune*, and his many hours spent researching the history of this most interesting object.

There are still gaps in the narrative and, like any good tale, there will be a few inaccuracies here and there. Additions, corrections, or updates will be [gratefully received](#) and forwarded to Buster.

The Plates mounted in the Shovel Frame are as follows:

1. CHIEF & PETTY OFFICERS MESS, HMCS STADACONA, SOD TURNED, CMDRE M.A. MEDLAND, RCN, 26 SEPTEMBER 1961

During the night of the 27th February, 1959, the Chiefs' and Petty Officers' Mess in HMCS Stadacona, Halifax, burned to the ground leaving just a skeleton of its brick walls. All of the inhabitants escaped without injury due to the quick response of the fire sentry, Able Seaman Raymond 'Topsy' Turner. Many records, memorabilia, and personal belongings went up in smoke but had it not been for the sharp awareness of good old Topsy, results would have been more catastrophic. Chiefs and Petty Officers were now in desperate need of modernized accommodation and shortly thereafter, work began on construction of a new mess that faced onto Barrington Street. Conforming to tradition, a special commemorative shovel was used in turning the first sod and Commodore M. A. Medland, RCN Barracks, HMCS Stadacona, was bestowed with the honour of doing so on the 26th of September, 1961. A prominent tally plate was attached to the business end of the implement, whereupon the details of the Commodore's garden work were etched. The shovel was then displayed in the foyer of the completed mess and no one really paid much attention to it at first. After all, it was only a shovel...

2. MISAPPRPRIATED BY THE SODS OF HMS/M ALDERNEY, 10 APRIL 1963

In April of 1963, HMS ALDERNEY was based on the Halifax Station of the 6th Submarine Squadron and after a successful and lengthy exchange program with the RCN's Atlantic Command, she was scheduled to return to the UK for a major refit. In celebration on the eve prior to departure, CPO Andy Maclean, Coxswain, and his messmates were beering it up in Stadacona's new C&PO's Mess. During a chorus of Knees Up Mother Brown, they elusively nicked the shovel. In the following morning, as the boat backed out from Jetty 5 in the dockyard, mess staff watched with inquisitive interest from the windows on Barrington Street. Then, in bewildered surprise, they noticed someone on ALDERNEY's bridge waving what appeared to look like...a shovel. The mess staff quickly ran to the trophy cabinet to find that where the shovel used reside, someone had replaced it with a box of Tide dhubey dust and a pair of mankey shitnicks. After the crossing, the submarine drew alongside HMS Dolphin in Gosport, England. The shovel was then transported ashore in Dolphin's C&PO's Mess and a new tally plate was added. The lark had started!

3. RE-APPROPRIATED IN '63, BY THE SODS OF ATHABEE, HMCS ATHABASKAN, 17 OCTOBER 1963

Later in that same year, HMCS ATHABASKAN (DDE 219) visited Portsmouth, England. Aboard the Tribal-class destroyer was Chief G.I. 'Bud' Flanagan, who had a personal interest in the shovel - his

recent job ashore was on the Stad Mess Committee during the ALDERNEY pinch. Accompanied by the Buffer, Petty Officer Sid McNevin, they went on their mission. Bud Flanagan recalls:

"I had no help from within, but I picked up that it was in the Chief's Mess in HMS Dolphin, the submarine base across the harbour. I took the buffer with me and, both in uniform, we headed for the King's Steps where the Admiral's barge was berthed. I convinced the barge Coxswain that we had to get to Dolphin for an important conference and he agreed to ferry us across. We arrived about 1400 and inquired where the mess was. When we got there, Sid and I discovered that lunch had come and gone, the bar was shut, and the mess completely empty. There on the bulkhead was the missing shovel!"

"I used a sixpenny coin as a screwdriver to get it adrift and as we had brought our burberry's with us, it would be easy to hide. The Main Gate was much closer to the mess than the pierhead so we exited and caught a bus over to the civvy ferry terminal instead. Once back over in Pompey, Sid, the shovel and I started to hit the pubs to show off our prize but we almost lost it. In one of the pubs a patron contacted the local press but instead we quickly repaired back to the ship and I locked it up in 'B' gun support. At 0900 the next morning, I heard this shattering pipe: "Chief G.I. and Chief Bosun's Mate..lay aft...report to the Captain's Day Cabin." Our CO was Cdr. Peter Hinton and by the time we got to his cabin door, we found that the press was onboard and looking for the story. After the press left, the skipper said, "You two get back into my cabin now!" He then read us the riot act for not knowing better, then he shook our hands and invited us to sit down and join him for a wet."

"By the time we sailed, a couple of attempts had been made to reacquire it by they all failed. On the way out of harbour, the C.O. had the shovel hoisted at the 'yard, as we were to do when we entered Halifax at the end of the trip."

4. RETURNED TO PROPER OWNERS AND STORAGE, INDIANS OF STAD, 8 NOV 1963, CDR. JOHNSTON

On arrival in Halifax, ATHABASKAN secured at Jetty 5, which was also the berthing jetty for SM6 submarines. Some days later, a ceremony took place that would see a joint marching contingent being formed on the jetty by none other than Chief G.I. Flanagan, who had also pre-arranged a shovel reception with the Stadacona C&PO's Mess President. The recovered trophy was chained and padlocked to PO George Carrick's wrist and he was armed-escorted by two other petty officers with FN's at the shoulder. Following the escort party was the entire complement of ATHABASKAN's Chief and Petty Officers who had mustered a bunch of noisy, clanging mess traps to provide march music. Behind them were two uniformed submarine chiefs who, in an upright position, each supported a boat hook mysteriously acquired from the RCN Admiral's barge which lay at the inner camber of Jetty Five. Straddled between the boat hooks was a Jolly Roger flag, symbolic of the submarine service. Following the colour party were the senior rates of HMS AURIGA, the boat that had since relieved ALDERNEY on station.

The parade moved off and up the dockyard roadway exiting through North Gate onto Barrington Street. Civilian police were closed up to hold traffic so that the contingent could march south on Barrington without interruption to the front entrance of the Stadacona mess. On arrival, the steps leading into the mess were seen to be lined with uniformed mess members sporting plastic shovels at the 'slope'. This line led well into the mess to where the shovel would be returned to a new and better-secured display cabinet now re-located deep into the mess instead of at the front entrance. In attendance were the Commodore and Commander Johnston, both of RCN Barracks, Commander SM6, C.O. HMS AURIGA, C.O. HMCS ATHABASKAN, Danny Cram - the mess president, and a large shower of mess members.

With great ceremony, Cdr. Johnston stowed the shovel. All Canadians present applauded with cheer while the Brit submariners booed and hissed. The bar was opened and stayed that way until very late and into the night and early morning. Bud recounted later: "Unfortunately, although I had assured Cdr. Hinton earlier that we had cleared permission with the Admiral (whose office windows we had to march past) and the Halifax City Police, I had failed on both counts. So I got another blast followed by another wet." The fourth inscription was now on the shovel.

5. RE-MISAPPROPRIATED BY THE KIPPERS OF AURIGA, 10 SEPT 64

In anticipation of AURIGA's departure to UK nearly a year later, a replica shovel was then created to divert attention. It didn't. They got away with the real one and, as it arrived back in Dolphin, it was carted back up to the Chief's Mess once more. This time, it was secured on display in such a way

that security at Fort Knox was child's play compared to what a would-be purloiner was now confronted with.

The replica was now also up for grabs and the travelling stories of the shovel(s) continued now, by another navy whose scheming ways were also successful.

6. NICKED FROM THE DINKS OF PLATYPUS BY THE POMS OF SPARE CREW AND TRUMP, 01 Jan 1969, R.I.P.

The next stop for the genuine shovel was one that extended temporary ownership to a third continent. Many Australians visited HMS Dolphin in the mid-sixties and it is surmised that some of them removed it from there to HMAS Penguin, in Sydney, but failed to inscribe their feat on a tally. As it arrived down under, the shovel was then displayed on the bulkhead of the Junior Rates wet canteen in HMAS Penguin barracks which indicated that the appropriators had somehow gained entry into the Chief's Mess at Dolphin to make the pinch.

There it remained for nearly a year, as home to the RN's 4th Submarine Squadron. Above it, someone had attached a crayon drawing of two very pleased and happy ducks with the caption "FLY UNITED". Was this an indication that the spade had been shipped south via air-mail? Soon after, and in the interests of Commonwealth relations, it was wilfully transported to New Zealand on a goodwill visit by HMS/m TACITURN. On arrival, it was presented to the wet canteen at HMNZS Philomel, the naval base in Auckland. The recipients were trustingly instructed to take care of it and display it in their bar for sailors from around the world to see. The times and dates of ownership changes are not recorded, but what is surely known is where the shovel was. Within the next 2 to 3 years it was to return to Sydney at HMAS Platypus but they too never attached a message of accomplishment.

The next recorded 'theft' was from HMAS Platypus to the UK in 1969. This would indicate the involvement of HMS/m TRUMP (a.k.a. 'the floating fart'), a 'T'-class submarine attached to SM4 in Sydney. She was probably near out of a refit and was closely associated with the squadron spare crew.

7. NICKED FROM THE DINKS OOF PLATYPUS BY THE BULLS OF OXLEY, JUNE 1971

The escapades and nicking continued after the shovel lay peacefully at rest for a year and half until, once again, in 1971, the shovel was graced with tally #7.

8. LIFED FROM THE AUSSIES, 21 JULY 1972, USS SALMON SS573

Then another navy got involved during a goodwill visit by some US submariners, resulting in Tally #8.

9. STOLEN BY THE SODS OF HMS ODIN FROM THE CHIEF'S MESS, HMAS PLAYTPUS, AUSTRALIA 1975

Beyond SALMON's theft and a re-emergence in Australia, the plight of the shovel stands as a mystery as no one has been found who can attest. It is theorized that it ambled its way to Pearl Harbor or, in fact, crossed the Pacific to San Diego in SALMON. It is then assumed that an Aussie O-boat doing a state-side visit, or a stop in Pearl Harbor, nicked it back. It was then taken down under to Platypus with no explanation as to who, when or how. During that time, however, the Royal Navy stepped back into the game and added tally #10.

Next it reappeared in Dolphin, under the assumption that HMS/M ODIN returned it to the UK. Four years would 'shovel along', but although not recorded two events took place. Three Canadian submariners showed up in Dolphin on course - Fred Schatz, Jake Allen, and George Sullivan, and visited the mess for some international socializing and a little shovel-stowage reconnaissance. In the commission of the nick, the day arrived when it was time to leave Dolphin and return to Canada.

Farewell wets were appropriate at the mess, and so was some mis-appropriation. George Sullivan explained:

"I had to put the shaft down my pant leg with the blade digging into my shit-locker. Didn't that smart? Then I had to walk peg-legged through Dolphin Main Gate. I told the gate sentry that I had a stiff leg from sports or something and, later, packed it away in my bag and put it in the left luggage at Portsmouth Harbour train station."

Then another theft saw the shovel return to Dolphin. It is known that HMS/m SEA LION and a Chief Mech named Yogi Barker were involved during this time. SEA LION was destined to Halifax for a docking where the shovel was certainly a number one requirement among the docking items. This should have prompted Canadians to pay closer attention to reputation, but they didn't. When SEA

LION's docking completed some four months later, she headed home to Dolphin - with the shovel, of course. A tally to record that event never got made either. It was taken to the C&PO's Mess and locked up tight behind the bar. The mess committee and participants were now quite proud of their security arrangements which were better than the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.

10. CAPTURED BY THE SODS OF OKANAGAN, 5 JUN 1979, FROM CPO'S MESS HMS DOLPHIN

Enter, once more, Canada's own HMCS OKANAGAN and an individual named Jim "Lucky" Gordon. This ploy was to be the most scheming, devious and outwitting deed ever accomplished by an individual in challenging such foolproof security. Lucky admitted several years later:

"The boat was alongside Dolphin and I think we were doing some acoustic training in the school. While there, I spent some off time at the mess making it well-known that I was interested in the spade. A few of the mess attendees were taking the mick because the shovel was behind the manned bar, gated and locked up when the bar was shut. 'No chance of nickin' it, Canada!', they said with assured certainty."

"Well, over a period of the next three or four days, I cased for a possible access. During my visits to the mess, I took some casual undetected peeks at the construction of the bar gate and then, finally, smuggled in some tools and stowed them from sight under a settee. The last night alongside, 'Flush' Laviolette, a British sailor serving on the OKANAGAN, and I, went up to the mess. We stayed until time was called and as the Duty Mess President was going around checking all the windows were secure, I was sitting at a settee along the back wall of the mess where the windows behind me overlooked the galley roof. It was accessible by a fire escape ladder. When he reached behind me to lock the window, with a smirk, he took another shot at me about not being able to get the spade. But, as he moved on, I reached back and unlocked the window. He and the bartender then invited me to observe the lockup ceremony, snapping as many as three locks between me and the shovel. Later, on the sidewalk outside, they bid me 'Goodnight, goodbye, and better luck next time, Canada!'"

"Flush and I then headed down onto the boat. Flush, being from the enemy Royal Navy, worried me a little because you just can't be sure where loyalties step in and he might have blown the whistle. When he went down below, I reversed my course ashore and disappeared into the shadows. I made my way to the back of the galley, up the ladder onto the roof, and then into the mess through the unlocked window. The mess was now a lot darker than I expected and I didn't want to risk too much light so I whipped out my reliable Zippo and went to work."

I disconnected the gate, secured with several small nuts and bolts on the inside, from the locking teebar on the top of the bar. The gate then rolled up and I climbed over. I unbolted the shovel and replaced it with an OKANAGAN 'Pink Panther' decal. Then, mysteriously, I was struck with a gale force 'south wind' so I gave one of the beer-pumps a little flick. Well, what to my wondering eyes should appear? A wee, golden stream of cellar temp beer. Proudly, I began to pour off a pint with a long haul off the top of the handle when I was now struck with pangs of conscience and guilt. The spade was fair dinkum, but to pilfer a pint was not too right, so I left the price on the bar and began to make my escape. I couldn't properly reconnect the gate, so I tied it down with bar towels, finished my pint, and crawled out the window with you-know-what."

"The next day, the buzz had it that the job wasn't discovered until opening time at noon, when the bartender couldn't figure out the deal with the towels. By that time of the day, it was four hours since we backed out of Haslar Creek and by then we were well away to sea. I later learnt that the Mess President (a skimmer) was real threadbare - and wanted me charged for breaking in. Some of the mess members finally calmed him down by explaining the 'thieving traditions and travels' of the spade."

"We were now about to be overwhelmed. We were in Faslane a month or so later when some junior rates joined the boat from Halifax. They came looking for me and proudly presented me with the duplicate. They had gone through Dolphin on a course and, just by chance, were present when someone delivered it to the mess, having nicked it from Stadacona. We had a mess dinner at sea to celebrate the occasion. We took a photo of "Pinky" in black tie with a glass of champagne, sitting under an emblematic 'crossed spades'. When OKANAGAN came home there were now two shovels aboard for delivery to the mess."

11. REMOVED FROM HMCS OKANAGAN BY GEORGE GALLEY ON 28 Jun 1980, RETURNED HOME TO WO'S & CPO'S HMS DOLPHIN

By now, it was getting real hectic. As the shovel(s) re-arrived in Halifax, they were returned to the mess at Stadacona by an anxious shower of submariners who were confident they'd be rewarded with copious amounts of free quaff. It had been eleven years since the original had left home. The reward was only one beer each and it seemed that someone was irritated. The mess president became so fed up that he decided to shed the responsibility of ownership and security of the gardening tool. He willed that the new custodians of the real shovel would be CANSUBRONONE Chiefs and Petty Officers and its official home would now be in the mess down in the dockyard. He was satisfied that the duplicate shovel would capably serve as the sod-turning shovel on display and, if it should disappear, there would be little fanfare. There wasn't much interest with the duplicate shovel, anyway, because nobody cared to keep records on diversionary jury rigs. Nor were they worthy of being nicked. So the inboard mess president (Buster Brown) graciously accepted it officially and the submarine Chief's and PO's became the new wardens, with OKANAGAN the present holder...for the time being.

Off it went to sea and was to be mounted on the cable run panelling in the boat's Senior Rates Mess. Fear reigned, however, because now the shovel was mobile and very vulnerable. To discourage theft, precautions were introduced. As an example, physically, stainless steel collars surrounded two mounting bolts to discard the possibilities of hacksaws. Fearful word had it that the shovel was mounted in such a way that it was wired to the boat's main batteries...positive to one bolt, negative to the other, so that if anyone meddled they would get zapped by 880 volts. While alongside Fort Blockhouse, at Dolphin, OKANAGAN's Duty Petty Officer sauntered into the mess to find a Kipper 'tiffy electrician' standing on the mess table with an AVO meter in his mitts checking for voltage across the two bolts.

Some time later, and for the first time, individual personalities would now appear on the shovel tallies. Like 'Flush' Laviolette, George Galley was also on a swap-exchange from the RN and was aboard OKANAGAN. He wasn't fooled by AVO meters and now had legal access, but as feared with Flush, what George didn't swap were his loyalties. When he packed his bags to go on a course in Dolphin, he placed the shovel among his shaving kit and towel.

12. REMOVED TO HALIFAX AGAIN, NOV 1980, FORENDS ONONDAGA + RECOVERED BY 2 AIR MOVEMENTS UNIT, AIR MOVERS OF THE WORLD, DECEMBER 1980

By late 1980, it was time for the spade to take its first confirmed ride in an airplane. PO Brian Cooper and a small but modest group belonged to ONONDAGA and were attending a weapons course in Dolphin. During the 70's and 80's, service air on Boeing 707's meant that anyone travelling to all points in Europe transited through CFB Lahr in Germany. Cooper and company were showing off the shovel and boasting of their accomplishment while yapping off about this prize that was totally unheard of within the air force. At CFB Lahr, the shovel was checked through as unaccompanied baggage but was then swiped by the AMU baggage handlers. When the Boeing arrived in CFB Trenton the shovel didn't show up on the luggage carousel. PO Cooper raised so much shite about this gardening apparatus being stolen out of bond, that the AMU handlers were charged with tampering with baggage - the misinformed and authoritative elements of the military illustrating their 'wetness' through their lack of a sense of humour. They were then ordered to return the shovel to the rightful owners, who really weren't anymore, were they? In the process, however, two more tallies were added to announce the double commissioning's.

13. REMOVED FROM HALIFAX AGAIN, MAY 1981, FORENDS HMS/S OPPORTUNE

Soon after, HMS/m OPPORTUNE was to visit Halifax once again. The shovel had to be in the mess somewhere, to make it available for both view and would-be appropriation. The night before the boat's visit had ended, it was decided to play the game by obscuring the shovel above the suspended ceiling in the mess. By now, RN-er George Galley was preparing to return to UK as his exchange time was nearly completed. He had always maintained, 'As long as I'm aboard OKANAGAN, I won't pinch it!', but through his own interpretation of his leaving, he basically "handed" the shovel to OPPORTUNE. When she arrived in Dolphin, another tally was attached. The inscription gave proof to the fact and where George Galley's home really was, but where the shovel's home wasn't: He had told OPPORTUNE where the shovel was. They took it sometime during the night evidenced by the dusty footprints on a black vinyl chair cover and an ajar ceiling panel.

But now a technicality arose because, for the first time, the wardroom became involved in abetting. The boat's first lieutenant had left his brief case behind the squadron offices ashore. Still in the harbour approaches, a message was sent appealing for the brief case to be run out by an auxiliary

vessel or flown out by helicopter. At the same time, the squadron returned with the reply, "Can do...provided the shovel is surrendered in trade." OPPORTUNE was not to be foiled, so they quickly went aft to the gland space and fabricated something with the weight and dimensions of a shovel that was wrapped in black, plastic sheeting. The trade was made, only to discover that when unwrapped, a bad facsimile had been passed. "Blackmail" had now joined "stealing" and "abetting" in the "thou shalt not" commandments of the shovel's conditions.

14. RE-APPROPRIATED BY CPO1 G. SULLIVAN FROM CPO'S MESS HMS DOLPHIN, 20 SEP 1982

Enter George Sullivan once again, who was now Submarine Squadron Coxswain. He attended a Submarine Escape Coxswain's course and stole it from Dolphin after raising considerable upheaval about the shovel still being locked up. It was then un-locked at his insistency, and later absconded with. He placed it in his garment bag and then carried it ashore via the duty boat to HMS VERNON on the other side of the harbour.

15. INADVERTTANTLY REMOVED FROM CANSUBRON ONE BY AUSSUBRON PERSONNEL, 1983

It had now been eight years since the Australians had their hands on the shovel and it was time for it to go down under once more, this time from Canada.

16. FILCHED BY THE ROYAL NAVY'S SPECIAL BREED OF BIRDS "WRENS" FROM HMAS PLATYPUS ON SEPTEMBER 8TH 1985, ASSOCIATION OF WRENS, SYDNEY BRANCH, AUSTRALIA

Then the "Shielas" got involved...they were right...they were "sweet as a bun".

17. FETCHED FROM HMAS PLATYPUS B OKANAGAN COMMAND TEAM, MARCH 1986

Followed by the attack team from OKANAGAN who did a little more than sink targets - the Polish Prince, George Byzewski, had struck.

18. ONE FOR ONE CAN'T BE BAD OPPOSUM JULY 1986

From Canada back to UK via the work of Jack Kershaw.

19. RAN AWAY TO CANADA FROM DOLPHIN MESS WITH BOB P., ROD L., JOE H. AND SPUD T., 1 NOV 1986

And from UK back to Canada.

20. SKIMMED FROM CANSUBRON 1 MESS BY "IROQUOIS RENEGADES" 18 JUN 87

Now resting in the Senior Rates Mess in the Submarine Squadron, in the following year the shovel was well looked after by none other than Lucky Gordon, the Squadron Coxswain. Up to the surface it was to go, however, for the first time since the old Atha-bee had retrieved it in 1963. HMCS IROQUOIS was about to sail on a 6-month NATO trip and Lucky was to be drafted aboard as the ship's Coxswain. Invariably, she was to stand back-to-back NATO's, not returning to Halifax until March of the following year. The shovel didn't. Lucky recalled:

"There were several submariners aboard IROQUOIS, and nothing 'ex' about them. They were aware of my history with the spade and custodian of the shovel as mess prez. Headed up by PO1 Larry Schneider, they paid a social visit to old messmates at the squadron and, while there, pinched it while nobody even suspected. So now my loyalties would have to shift. Now proudly displayed aboard IROQUOIS, my greatest fear was that the spade would be nicked by foreign sailors visiting the mess among those from other navies like the Portuguese, German, Dutch, etc. It would vanish into obscurity or be gone for a very long time. The popularity of the shovel became well known among the NATO squadron and several failed attempts to steal it were encountered. Failed so by the distinction of my presence as custodian and, with that, as ship's Coxswain and mess president, I determined to assign a 'Shovel Sentry', with the fear of God instilled within him. He was directed to station himself directly below the mounted spade whenever the squadron was alongside during port visits. That worked well until GUZZ dockyard at Devenport in England. I had decided that while I was going to take some short shore leave, I stood down the sentry in thinking that the squadron was aware of the iron-handed security of the shovel. However, lads from the squadron's RN frigate HMS DANAE and destroyer HMS EXETER had provided forward intelligence to the RN submariners in GUZZ who were well familiar with the glory that goes with getting the shovel back. Now, without a sentry, they smartly went to work to later have it transported back to Dolphin in Gosport."

- 21. EASY COME, EASY GO, BACK TO CANADA I DID GO. JANUARY 17, 1988. R. MILES, M. DESPATIES, R. MACDONALD, J. CLAHANE, DOLPHIN CODE 22, 26A**
Stokers John Clahane, Mickie Despaties, "Black Mac" MacDonald, and Ronnie Miles were on an ASR1 Engine Rebuild course. The shovel now once more locked up at the mess in Dolphin. They borrowed some tools from CPO(RN) Allan Jackson. During an afternoon, they were left all alone in the mess playing snooker. They removed the shovel and took it to "Red" Lavers home ashore who was on RN exchange in Dolphin. Into the next week they made and presented a replica of the shovel to the mess during the Thursday raffle...just to make sure that everyone involved with the pinch got proper recognition. The boys thanked Allan Jackson in particular.
- 22. MOUNTBATTEN NIGHT IN THE PRESENCE OF HRH PRINCE CHARLES AT WO'S AND CHIEF'S MESS HMS DOLPHIN 1988**
The senior rates of HMS Dolphin had in their midst another prince one evening - Cdr (RN) Prince Charles who presided for a celebration. You can bet that the tallies on that shovel got blue-bell'ed for that occasion. For the first time, an inscription was attached that had nothing to do with theft. Charles then headed back to the palace, but in keeping with the honour of royalty the temptation must have been torturing.
- 23. SEIZED THRU TRICKERY AND DARING BY FLYNN & RILEY, CPO'S OF USS SKIPJACK (SSN 585) US SUBMARINE BASE, GROTON, CT, 14 MARCH 1988**
Across (or under) the Atlantic it went to the good ole USA and the home of US submarines. But not for long...
- 24. SHOVEL STOLEN BUT NOT FORGOTTEN BY CPO2 BYZEWSKI STOLEN BACK FROM ROTTEN GROTTEN, APRIL 24, 1988**
George Byzewski got back into the act, making SKIPJACK's pinch very brief and short-lived. He told of his deviousness and how the perils of shovel-stealin' can sometimes be physically dangerous. George explained:
"At the time, I had a little thing going with the manager of the CPO club (The Goat Locker) at the submarine base in Groton, who I had met while on a Mk 48 torpedo course down there. Once I heard that the shovel was mounted on a bulkhead in the club, I drove back down to Groton for a long weekend and a visit. A little thievery and hanky-panky was on my mind. The spade was bolted to a bulkhead outside the bar. I went to work by loosening the bolts a turn at a time over two days so then early on the Saturday evening, I got a hold of the shovel with little problem while the bar-keep was doing his cash prior to getting his relief. I escaped the mess via a side door but in the fading light, I hadn't noticed that in the parking lot outside, there was some excavation going on in making pits for new light standards. In the "heat and panic" of my getaway, I stepped out the door and fell straight down into one of the pits. Shovel still in hand, I managed to survive. I went back to the club later that night to be met with howls of "foul" and "skullduggery". Fair game that it was, I succeeded. I had the Golden Fleece and it would be on its way...HOME!"
- 25. REMOVED FROM CANSUBRONONE TO AUSSIES AGAIN (HAPPY DAYS)**
Then back down under...
- 26. OUT OF AUSTRALIA BACK TO HMS DOLPHIN BY HMS/M ONYX**
Then back to sea...
- 27. SET FREE TOO RUN BACK HOME TO CANADA FROM DOLPHIN BY THE TRAMP (PO2 YEMEN) 02/10/88**
Then a lone wayward matelot went to the mess for a pint...
- 28. STOLEN BY USS NORFOLK, DUE TO THEIR CARELESSNESS RETURNED BY CHANCE, STICKY & DES THE SAME DAY, MARCH 1989**
A few months later, in Halifax, two thefts in one day. The shovel had been appropriated by CPO Joe Simons from the fast-attack submarine USS NORFOLK while on an invitation for a reception in the Submarine Squadron C&PO's Mess in Halifax. Due to Joe's weakness in mounting a successful escape with the goods, a two-man counter-attack was undertaken just a few hours later by mess members "Sticky Buns" Fairbairn and Sherwin 'Des' Desprey.

29. TAKEN AWAY ACROSS THE BROW AND SO I REST ON WARSPITE NOW. D. KINGSTON, 15 OCT 89

Back to Blighty...

30. IT'S OURS NOW WITH EYES AGLEAN T'WAS STOLEN BY OTTAWA'S O-BOAT TEAM, W. BROYDEN, B. CARBRAY

Until a couple of skimmer submariners from the Canadian destroyer OTTAWA paid a visit to Dolphin from Portsmouth Dockyard.

31. CONNED FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S SIGNATURE, SUBRON WILL ACCEPT ANY OOLD STORY TO GET THE SHOVEL A LITTLE MORE GLORY. HOWEVER, AS MUCH AS I REALLY DID TRY THE OLD PRIM MINISTER JUST WOULDN'T COMPLY. DECEMBER 1989, NDHQ OTTAWA, CPO1 GEORGE SULLIVAN

The shovel-figurative George Sullivan was still lurking in the wings. He was now in the "Fort Fumble" career shop at NDHQ, and while on a visit to Halifax convinced mess president 'Des' Desprey in a proposition. George relates:

"Des! Lend me the shovel and I will get Prime Minister Mulroney to endorse it." -thus acknowledging that the shovel had been to the nation's capital. "Once done, I will return it immediately!", affirmed George. He then went on to say, "Des wouldn't buy this at 1130 but by 1630, and beaucoup pints later, I had him convinced and he passed it to me. It took a great amount of willpower to maintain a sincere look upon my mug and not burst out laughing. I held on to it for about eight months just to get Des sweatin' a bit. He used to call me about every two weeks after that wondering how I was, how things were going, etc. Never having called prior to the loan, by the way. Then he would slip in a quiet and shifty query, 'How's the shovel, George?'. I always wanted to say, "What fukkin' shovel?", but never did. Then I'd say "Oh you know Des. These things take time!"

"Anyway, I did go to the Prime Minister's office with a letter outlining the history and significance of the shovel, and requested that he 'sign' the shovel. The first time around his office didn't respond, guessing they thought I was some kind of a nutter or something. I went again a second time. Although I couldn't get "Lyin' Brian" to agree, I did get a letter from his office in acknowledgement. I finally and personally took it to the Ottawa AMU, sighted it and loaded it aboard a Shearwater-bound Boeing. Lucky Gordon met the plane in Shearwater and returned it to the squadron mess.

32. SWIPED FROM HMS DOLPHIN 23 MARCH 1992, CPO'S USS BERGALL ALEXANDER GENERALLY SIMONS AND AN UNKNOWN FEMALE. "MAKE YOUR OPPORTUNITY AND SEIZE THE MOMENT

The next theft is not recorded. The shovel then got back to the UK but soon was in American hands once more. Three years earlier, MMCM(SS) Joe Simons headed the robbery gang from USS NORFOLK that was thwarted while in Halifax. He was now Chief of the Boat (COB) aboard USS BERGALL alongside HMS DOLPHIN in Gosport. Here is an account of the assistance that led to a finally successful steal:

"In December of 1990, I relieved MMCM(SS) Brad Nelson as Chief of the Boat and served onboard BERGALL through December 1993. The shovel is a true artefact and has sometimes been referred to as the "Mountbatten Cup". In an effort to set the record straight, I think that it is finally time for the so-called 'unknown female' who assisted us, to receive credit for her efforts. Her name was Valerie Williams...she was our CPO Mess hostess while we were visiting HMS Dolphin. She did not assist in the procurement of the property of CANSUBRONONE but did unknowingly aid our escape with the purloined shovel. The old bait and switch routine, it works every time. :-)"

33. WO TIM GREENSIDES & DAVE BIRD, UKSUBCAMS, SPIRITED OFF USS BERGALL FOR HMS DOLPHIN MAY 1992

Then, just two months later, a couple of lonely Brits were in US Naval Station Norfolk on assignment...and a jolly. They spotted the shovel in the CPO club where it was displayed on BERGALL's behalf.

34. HOME AGAIN. JIM HEWITT, DAVE VROOMAN

And finally...

April of 1993 was to become the last recorded theft, but somehow and mysteriously it did end up in Dolphin for the last time. Times were changing and people were either getting lazy or the perks and

convenience of getting a tally engraved in a pusser machine shop was coming to an end. By 1995, HMS Dolphin saw the laying up of the Upholder-class submarines, the last of the RN diesels, and invariably the base no longer had a need to provide submarine support and training capability. In the true spirit of 'swiping the shovel' among submariners, and skimmers now and again, the Mess Committee of the day was concerned that it might no longer be held in 'obeyance of the conditions'. Fear was that the shovel might end up aboard anything, in any navy, anywhere in the world, and the symbol of crafty and daring history that continued for over thirty years would vanish from the earth. Thus, the shovel was returned to Canada and rightful custody assumed by the senior rates of the First Canadian Submarine Squadron.

The squadron itself was soon to meet its demise and, in support of the decision at Dolphin, it was determined to have it laid up in the Maritime Command Museum, in Stadacona. This occurred in January of 1996, a time when many 'very proud of their accomplishment' stealers, brigands, burglars, expropriators, abettors, deceivers, finks, and the well-informed of bygone years were no longer in their respective navies and had gone into retirement. They would all agree in disappointment that this was the wrong decision...but a modern navy and its sailors are much purer today and stealin' ain't on the agenda...or else! So at the museum, the shovel was to be locked up in solitary confinement for what maybe appeared as a life sentence.

The shovel was viewed by many submariners as precious in comparison to the Stanley Cup or Olympic gold, that had more sea time than any sailor in the navy. While never standing a watch, it sailed aboard more than 21 different ships and submarines, in some more than once. In passing lighthouses aplenty around the world or proceeding to the darkest depths, it also amassed its share of flying hours from spanning the Atlantic and the Pacific several times. Then only whisked away into captivity, locked up and hidden in darkness, while the 'keeper of the key' remains obscure of all the facts. If that shovel could talk, it would insist "I am one of the most historical sea-going artifacts in the Royal Canadian Navy...and others too. As I Rust In Peace, come and get me oppos!"

Well, they did. Wily old 'retireds' from the east coast branch of the Submariners Association of Canada took steps to have it released and returned to the Senior Rates Mess of Maritime Operations Group Five (MOG 5) in HMC Dockyard, Halifax. Today it is the grand centrepiece on a bulkhead displaying submarine memorabilia maintained by the Association. Laid up forever for those of yesteryear to marvel in the memory and for those of today to honour. Just like a beautiful pin-up girl..."Look, but don't touch!", the accompanying tally reads:

THE GARDENING TOOL THAT TRAVELLED THE WORLD
1963 - 2003
AS DID MY HANDLERS, I TOO
HAVE RETIRED. PLEASE RESPECT
MY PRESENCE AS I RUST IN PEACE.
DOLPHIN 68E