

Shortly after the loss of the THRESHER, Dr. Joyce Brothers wrote this piece on submariners.

RISK IS AN INSPIRATION IN SUBMARINE SERVICE

The tragic loss of the submarine Thresher and 129 men had a special kind of impact on the nation.....a special kind of sadness, mixed with universal admiration for the men who chose this kind of work.

One could not mention the Thresher without observing, in the same breath how utterly final and alone the end is when a ship dies at the bottom of the sea.....and what a remarkable specimen of man it must be who accepts such a risk.

Most of us might be moved to conclude, too, that a tragedy of this kind would have a damaging effect on the moral of the other men in the submarine service and tend to discourage future enlistments. Actually, there is no evidence that this is so.

What is it, then, that lures men to careers in which they spend so much of their time in cramped quarters, under great psychological stress, with danger lurking all about them?

Bond Among Them

Togetherness is an overworked term, but in no other branch of our military service is it given such full meaning as in the so-called "silent service."

In an under sea craft, each man is totally dependent upon the skill of every other man in the crew, not only for top performance but for actual survival. Each knows that his very life depends on the others and because this is so, there is a bond among them that both challenges and comforts them.

All of this gives the submariner a special feeling of pride, because he is indeed a member of an elite corps. The risks, then, are an inspiration, rather than a deterrent.

The challenge of masculinity is another factor, which attracts men to serve on submarines. It certainly is a test of man's prowess and power to know he can qualify for this highly selective service. However, it should be emphasized that this desire to prove masculinity is not pathological, as it might be in certain daredevil pursuits, such as driving a motorcycle through a flaming hoop.

Emotionally Healthy

There is nothing daredevilish about the motivations of the man who decides to dedicate his life to the submarine service. He does, indeed, take pride in demonstrating that he is quite a man, but he does not do so to practice a form of foolhardy brinkmanship, to see how close he can get to failure and still snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. On the contrary, the aim in the submarine service is to battle the danger, to minimize the risk, to take every measure to make certain that safety rather than danger, is maintained at all times.

Are the men in submarines braver than those in other pursuits where the possibility of sudden tragedy is not constant? The glib answer would be that they are. It is much more accurate, from a psychological point of view, to say they are not necessarily braver, but that they have a little more insight into themselves and their capabilities.

They know themselves a little better than the next man. This has to be so with men who have a healthy reason to volunteer for a risk. They are generally a cut healthier emotionally than others of similar age and background because of their willingness to push themselves a little bit farther and not settle for an easier kind of existence.

We all have tremendous capabilities but are rarely straining at the upper level of what we can do; these men are.

The country can be proud and grateful that so many of its sound, young, eager men care enough about their own status in life—and the welfare of their country—to pool their skills and match them collectively against the power of the sea.