



Starting Jan. 1, one of the liveliest spots aboard most submarines will wither away into the history books. RIP, Smoke Pit. Its death was scripted in April, when Navy officials announced smoking would no longer be allowed on submarines at sea. The reason: Testing showed that despite air filtering, there were "unacceptable levels" of secondhand smoke on submerged submarines.

Chief Petty Officer Robert Mueller Jr. used to head to the smoke pit before and after his shifts as assistant navigator aboard the submarine Albany.

It was always a popular spot. Los Angeles-class attack submarines like the Albany allowed smoking in the engine room at the very back and very bottom of the boat, a spot that typically was the nerve center of the boat. It's where gossip -- "gouge," in Navy lingo -- was traded. Only three men were allowed to light up at a time, so lines formed quickly.

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