



## Sun Ship Historical Society's Sun Ship History Page

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**Subject:** "Kilroy Was Here"

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Hope you enjoy this 'History Page'. As always, if you have any additional information, suggestions or corrections, please let me know.

While due diligence has been applied in the research of information herein, responsibility for any errors is the ultimate responsibility of the end-user.

Thank You,  
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**Note 1:** iDate (Initial Date) is the date that the folder for this subject was started.

### 1: A Short Introduction to 'Kilroy'

At shipyards during WWII inspectors were hired to check on the amount of work that riveters, who were on 'piece work', were actually doing, compared to what might have been reported. These production workers were paid on the quantity of work they did during the week. When James J. Kilroy would inspect a particular work area, he would make the now famous sketch and signed "Kilroy Was Here". This would let the riveters know their work had been audited. More to follow.

### 2: Share the Memories

1: While researching Sun Ship history I came across a picture of the 'Kilroy' drawing. The term "Kilroy Was Here" was famous throughout the Second World War and long after. You would see it in military movies, painted on buildings and walls as tanks rolled thru. This drawing showed up in many instances, inferring that 'Kilroy was watching you'. Seeing the picture brought back the following memory. My first recollection of the 'Kilroy' drawing was in 1964 at Sun Ship in the engine room of the **American Racer** H-629, my first ship.

2: The ship's main electrical switchboard was covered with cardboard to protect the front from damage during installation. George Zensen was the first-class ship-electrician that was in charge of the switchboard in the engine room. He would draw the famous 'Kilroy was here' drawing on the cardboard showing the top of a person's head looking over a 'wall', implying that George was watching you so be careful when working around 'his' switchboard.

3: I had the good fortune to work with George during my 900 hours assigned in the ship's engine room as an electrical apprentice. George was a great mentor to me during this period. When something of interest electrically was happening in the engine room, such as ship's generator testing, he would find out where I was working in the engine room and come and take me to the location where the event was occurring. There he would explain in great detail what was happening and why it was important to understand. Mentors like George are critically important to individuals in any career path. I just hope that I expressed, in some fashion, to George how valuable he was in creating my first 'building block', which was to be the foundation of the rest of my career.

Photo of George Zensen at the main switchboard on the Glomar Explorer  
SSHS: 705\_7312\_03c

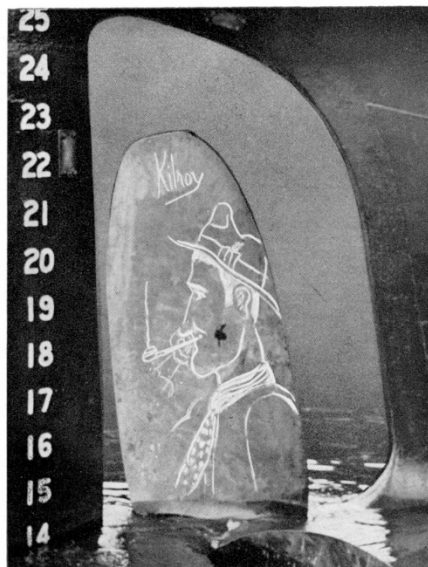


George Zensen, quite a guy in the eyes of many, will best be remembered for the menu he planned and had posted for the trial trip aboard the HUGHES GLOMAR EXPLORER. Mr. Zensen was an October retiree after 37½ years with the company. He was an electrician, first class. Those fortunate to have been aboard the EXPLORER sampled one of the best of "feasts" after many hours of hard work.

4: This photograph shows the main electrical switchboard of the **American Racer** H-629, where the cardboard covered the front to protect from damage during construction and where George Zensen drew the aforementioned caricature. This picture was taken during SSHS's visit to Suisun Bay, CA to tour a number of our ships that were in the reserve fleet in 2008.  
SSHHS: 443\_27\_0408a



5: Following scan was taken from the November, 1946 issue of Sun Ship's Our Yard magazine. Photo shows the propeller of Sun Ship's S.S. **Gelderland** H-557 just prior to launching. This shows a caricature of James J. Kilroy, the creator of the "Kilroy Was Here" drawing shown below.  
SSHHS: 705\_4611\_21



**KILROY WAS HERE.** All over Europe, Kilroy's slogan appeared and the Vets who came home to Sun Ship brought Kilroy along. His likeness was drawn on one of the blades of the wheel on the S.S. GELDERLAND and is shown here.

### 3: The Kilroy Story

1: Simulation of James J. Kilroy's drawing.  
SSHHS Acquired: 2014.03.03  
Courtesy of Wikipedia:  
SSHHS: Kilroy\_wiki\_01



### 2: James J. Kilroy Obituary

Born Sep. 26, 1902

Date: Nov 26, 1962

Source: Sun Times

Kilroy No Longer Here – James J. Kilroy, 60, a legend of World War II with his slogan "Kilroy Was Here" died Saturday night in Boston. The slogan started at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, Mass. Early in World War II, when Kilroy an inspector, chalked "Kilroy Was Here" on equipment to indicate to shipyard crews that he had checked the job. Other shipyard workers picked up the phrase and G.I.'s soon carried it to the war fronts all over the world.

Photo of James J. Kilroy courtesy of 'Find A Grave'.  
SSHHS: Kilroy\_004



#### 4. The Biography of 'Kilroy':

“American Folk Figure. He was the originator of the ubiquitous World War II expression and doodle "Kilroy Was Here", which became extremely popular with American servicemen. Its origin was not widely known until after the war had ended when the American Transit Association ran a contest in 1946 to find out where and why the phrase originated. The winner was James J. Kilroy of Boston, Massachusetts, who had been hired by the Fore River shipyard on December 5, 1941, two days before the Pearl Harbor attack, as an inspector. His job was to count the completed rivets and then leave chalk marks where he had left off. It was on this basis that the riveter's daily piece work counts were calculated. Some of the riveters were not too honest and would erase the mark left by Kilroy resulting in some of the rivets being counted twice. James Kilroy was informed of this practice and began to scrawl "Kilroy was here" on his rounds and added the head peering over a wall. Reportedly left his mark on such famous Fore River vessels as the battleship "USS Massachusetts" (BB-59) (now berthed permanently as a museum ship at "Battleship Cove", Fall River, Massachusetts), the aircraft carrier, "USS Lexington" (CV-16), the heavy cruiser "USS Baltimore" (CA-68), as well as numerous troop carriers. Millions of service men saw the slogan on the outgoing ships and all they knew was that "Kilroy" had been there first. Service men began placing the graffiti wherever the United States Forces landed, claiming it was already there when they arrived. This was the origin reported by the "New York Times" in 1946, with the addition that Kilroy had marked the ships themselves as they were being built - so, at a later date, the phrase would be found chalked in places that no graffiti-artist could have got to, such as inside sealed hull spaces, which then fed the mythical significance of the phrase ("after all, if Kilroy could leave his mark there, who knew what else he could do?"). James Kilroy was also a Boston City Councilor and state representative. He died in Halifax, Massachusetts.”

Biography courtesy of Find A Grave

Bio by: [Fred Beisser](#)

#### 4: Don Logan Update

The following text was from an email that was sent to us from Don Logan (45-40D) on 2020.07.08. Our thanks to Don for keeping us 'in the loop'.

##### Kilroy Was Here

Original Source: Unknown

In 1946 the American Transit Association, through its radio program, "Speak to America," sponsored a nationwide contest to find the real Kilroy, offering a prize of a real trolley car to the person who could prove himself to be the genuine article. Almost 40 men stepped forward to make that claim, but only James Kilroy from Halifax, Massachusetts, had evidence of his identity. 'Kilroy' was a 46-year old shipyard worker during the war who worked as a checker at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy. His job was to go around and check on the number of rivets completed. Riveters were on piecework and got paid by the rivet. He would count a block of rivets and put a check mark in semi-waxed lumber chalk, so the rivets wouldn't be counted twice. When Kilroy went off duty, the riveters would erase the mark. Later on, an off-shift inspector would come through and count the rivets a second time, resulting in double pay for the riveters.

One day Kilroy's boss called him into his office. The foreman was upset about all the wages being paid to riveters, and asked him to investigate. It was then he realized what had been going on. The tight spaces he had to crawl in to check the rivets didn't lend themselves to lugging around a paint can and brush, so Kilroy decided to stick with the waxy chalk. He continued to put his check mark on each job he inspected, but added 'KILROY WAS HERE' in king-sized letters next to the check, and eventually added the sketch of the chap with the long nose peering over the fence and that became part of the Kilroy message.

Once he did that, the riveters stopped trying to wipe away his marks. Ordinarily the rivets and chalk marks would have been covered up with paint. With the war on, however, ships were leaving the Quincy Yard so fast that there wasn't time to paint them. As a result, Kilroy's inspection "trademark" was seen by thousands of servicemen who boarded the troopships the yard produced.

His message apparently rang a bell with the servicemen, because they picked it up and spread it all over Europe and the South Pacific.



Before war's end, "Kilroy" had been here, there, and everywhere on the long hauls to Berlin and Tokyo. To the troops outbound in those ships, however, he was a complete mystery; all they knew for sure was that someone named Kilroy had "been there first." As a joke, U.S. servicemen began placing the graffiti wherever they landed, claiming it was already there when they arrived.

Kilroy became the U.S. super-GI who had always "already been" wherever GIs went. It became a challenge to place the logo in the most unlikely places imaginable (it is said to be atop Mt. Everest, the Statue of Liberty, the underside of the Arc de Triumphant, and even scrawled in the dust on the moon.

As the war went on, the legend grew. Underwater demolition teams routinely sneaked ashore on Japanese-held islands in the Pacific to map the terrain for coming invasions by U.S. troops (and thus, presumably, were = the first GIs there). On one occasion, however, they reported seeing enemy troops painting over the Kilroy logo!

To help prove his authenticity in 1946, James Kilroy brought along officials from the shipyard and some of the riveters. He won the trolley car, which he gave to his nine children as a Christmas gift and set it up as a playhouse in the Kilroy yard in Halifax, Massachusetts.

### 5: The 'Kilroy' Story Continues at Sun Ship

While doing research for another Sun Ship subject, I came across the following from our files on the Sun Ship newspaper-*Sun Ship Log*:

#### 1: 96 Department Task Force

##### ...making the shipyard a better place to work

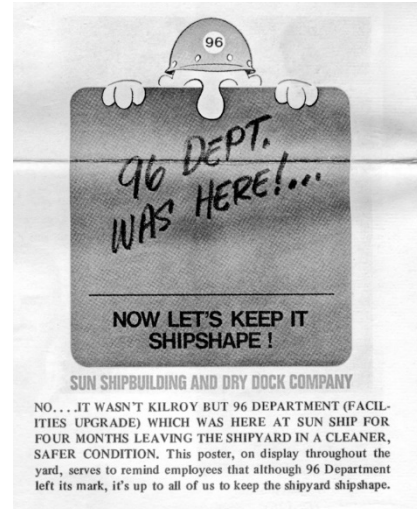
Improvements throughout the yard are the handiwork of the men in Sun Ship's newly-created 96 Department Task Force. The 96 Department Task Force came about through the joint efforts of Sun Ship and Lodge No. 802 officials to improve shipyard working conditions while providing temporary employment opportunities to veteran shipyard production workers who face layoff during the recent reduction in the yard's work force.

Source: *Sun Ship Log*-April 1978

SSHS: 706-7804\_03

2: The following was cropped from our August 1978 edition of the *Sun Ship Log*.

SSHS: 706\_7808\_06c



3: Sun Ship's 'Kilroy' now appears in the *Sun Ship Log* and is used as an index.

Source: *Sun Ship Log* September 1979 edition

SSHS: 706\_7909\_01c

