

Bryan Schaaf:

Back here on the Meat Speak podcast, quarantine edition, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand, Bryan Schaaf. Here with me in the telephone all the way from his home two counties away from where I'm currently sitting, Chef Tony Biggs. How you doing, Chef?

Tony Biggs:

Hey, Bryan and everybody. I hope you're doing well. I've been thinking about you and your family, along with our whole entire CAB family. Just hope everybody's good and we'll be able to weather this really unique storm.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, well said. Our thoughts and prayers and certainly with all the folks who are struggling to weather this. But it seems like every time that you turn the news on or you read the newspapers, there's one common theme. And I thought to break up some of the monotony, let's get as far away from that topic as possible today, both figuratively in a topic standpoint, but also literally. We're going to talk about some of the strangest places that you've cooked at, that people have cooked at. We're talking the most remote areas. Obviously, everybody in all corners of the planet eat, right? And there are chefs, right? Anywhere there are people eating, there are chefs, there are cooks, there are people preparing that food. You know what, Chef? You are one that I like to tell people, I think Chef Tony's actually like 160 years old because you've had so many experiences as you've gone. One of the ones that initially stuck out to me was, you cooked on an oil rig in the North Sea, correct?

Tony Biggs:

Would you like me to embellish on my experience working on an oil rig because-

Bryan Schaaf:

I would. If you could start from the beginning. Tell me how a kid from New England, the Boston area, or even Upstate New York and Buffalo ends up cooking on an oil rig in the North Sea. How did that all come about?

Tony Biggs:

Well, it was very unique because I grew up with a guy named Bill Blakeman, and Bill was a graduate of Mass. Maritime Academy down at Cape Cod, which spits out sea captains, okay? And anybody to do with the ocean, sea, crafting, they have all these graduates. Well, Bill was probably one of my best friends up to five years ago, God rest his soul, he passed away. But this was a period of time where I was working in a French restaurant down in Daytona Beach, and we closed two months a year. I had just gotten married, and I knew that October, November, we were going to shut down for the season, get ready for the races in February in Daytona. And Bill called me and says, "Hey. Why don't you come out to Scotland?" And we hadn't had a honeymoon. And, "Why don't you come out and stay with us?" Bill shares this house with six other oil riggers.

Tony Biggs:

And I spoke to my wife and she said, "Let's do it. We haven't had a honeymoon. We could stay there. We could stay there for a week or two weeks or whatever it takes." So we got on a plane and we went to Aberdeen, Scotland. And I've got to tell you, it was the most beautiful place in the world. We fell in

love with it. But we first drove... We landed in Heathrow Airport. We drove up the coast and we must have hit, Bryan, every single pub imaginable on our way to Aberdeen. So I collected all these bar towels with the different beer logos on it. I would give everybody a \$1 bill, a US dollar bill for a bar towel. And then I took all those bar towels, after I left Scotland, I must have had 100 bar towels. I decorated my man cave with it. But anyway. We drove up and we stayed in Scotland. We met all the roommates. It was just magical, and it was... We overstayed. We stayed October, November. And it was kind of like, we didn't want to go home yet because we were just having too much fun. We went salmon fishing. We went to Loch Ness to try to catch the Loch Ness monster, Nessy, to no avail. And-

Bryan Schaaf:

I'm glad you clarified that you were unsuccessful.

Tony Biggs:

To no avail. I mean, after drinking a pint of Glenlivet down on that historic rock that's always in pictures on Loch Ness, we just couldn't see Nessy or find him. So we just moved on. And my friend, Bill says, "Hey. If you want to stay, I could probably get you an interview with the general manager for the food service on the oil rigs." It's a US company. So he arranged it. I went down to the office, and this 6'5" Texan with sunglasses, I'm not kidding, rattlesnake boots, or not boots, but maybe alligator boots, just a menacing looking guy and he questioned me a couple minutes, and he said to me, "Can you cook?" I said, "Well, yeah, I can cook. That's why I'm here." He said to me, "Be down at the airport Monday morning. You're going on Sedco 704." I said, "Oh, okay. All right."

Tony Biggs:

So back then, I was young kind of... I was a young lad. I just went along for the ride. And on Monday morning, I got on the plane with four other guys, and we set out for Sedco 704, the oil rig. But we had to change planes in Stavanger, Norway. So can you imagine going from Aberdeen to Stavanger, Norway, and you're seeing the fjords. You're seeing Russian submarines going in and out of the fjords. And if you've never been to Norway, it is just absolutely... From the sky, it's just beautiful. So we get to Stavanger, Norway, and we don't take another plane. We take a helicopter. And so there's about 12 of us from all different parts of the world on this helicopter. People from Canada, guys from Norway, guys from England, myself, Scottish, Scotland. And we're all on this... This is kind of like going to work on a bus but you're in a helicopter.

Tony Biggs:

So we cruise up the coast of Norway, going over icebergs. I felt like I was in a Godzilla movie with King Kong. Godzilla, he'd just break open an iceberg and start to do his thing. So I was like, "Wow." This was what I was imagining. And I was like... Well, on the helicopter, I was like, "Wow. This is kind of like, "What am I doing?" Like what am I doing moment. Do I have to be crazy here?" I mean because I was going to go on for two weeks, and that's it. Two weeks on and two weeks off the rig. And so when the helicopter reached the oil rig, we landed. And you kind of look around and you go, "Where in the hell am I? I'm in the North Sea near the Arctic circle with icebergs around me, with people I don't know, and I'm going to cook for them."

Tony Biggs:

And it was like, are you... Was I nuts? Was I insane to take this job? Really, really. I felt like this because I got on the rig and it was like, you're on this rig and there's no fanfare. There's no red carpet treatment.

It's like, "Here's where you work. We'll see you in the morning. And here's where you sleep and we'll see you in the morning. And guess what? No drinking, no drugs, no extracurricular activity or you're absolutely off this rig in a New York minute." That's the rules, right? I mean, so it's like, "Whoa." So I found my quarters. I had a roommate. I learned so much about... You're a musician, Bryan. I love music. I learned so much about the British rock and pop scene. And they introduced me to music that was just like, "Oh, wow. This is incredible. I love this." But, anyway.

Tony Biggs:

My first shift, I remember going down to the galley. And my shift was 8:00 at night. 8 o'clock. Show up at 8 o'clock at night, and I worked till 8 o'clock the next morning. So my responsibility was the midnight meal, okay, for the riggers, the oil guys. And then I would do the breakfast the next morning, okay? And my counterpart, there was no training. Because I just showed up at 8 o'clock and he gave me 30 minutes of his time, and he said, "We need an entrée. We need this. We need that. We need a dessert. We need this. And we'll see you at 8 o'clock." That was it. That was my training, all right? Yeah, right?

Tony Biggs:

"And here's the cooler and you're going to cook for 50 guys." 50. Okay, 50. You're going to cook for 50 at the midnight meal, and you can cook breakfast. I go, "What do I cook? Is there a menu?" He goes, "No. Do whatever you want to do." I said, "Really? Okay. Wow, okay." So the first midnight meal was mine and I can remember pulling out American steaks. We had a freezer and it was just packed with food. And it was really good food. It wasn't pulling stuff... It wasn't TV dinners or it wasn't already prepared. I think I did a steak, strip steaks with baked potato. It was very simple. Broccoli. Trying to get my feet on the ground. You know what I mean, right?

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. Yeah.

Tony Biggs:

So it wasn't this gourmet thing. And then the next morning, breakfast came and I made oatmeal, and I did eggs, and I did pancakes and I did some nice stuff. And then I got to meet... Like, "Oh, you're the new guy," right? So you had all these different nationalities. Americans, Canadians, Norwegians. We had a little dining room that looked into the kitchen, so it was kind of like a chef's table where they knew who was cooking for them. They knew their chef. They knew, "Hey. What do we got today, mate?" And all this, just the chit-chat going back and forth.

Tony Biggs:

At times, I would sit with the Norwegians because they seemed to be the best divers in the world, and they would share all these hair raising experiences where people died on the rigs. And I'm like going, "What the hell am I doing here, Bryan?" I mean, are you serious? I mean, it was just incredible talking to these guys. The next morning, the tool pusher... Now, the tool pusher is American. The tool pusher is the general manager on an oil rig. That's what they call them. So it's called the tool pusher. They don't call him GM. They don't call him president. These oil rigs are multi-billion dollar operations in the sea, and so safety is very important. How they treat their guys is very important. There's a protocol. Everybody's got to be on their best behavior. No fighting. No nothing. No drinking.

Tony Biggs:

And he calls me to his office. And he was a... This is the first time and I'm like going, "Oh my God. I'm going to the tool pusher's office." So here I'm thinking, "Wow. They must like my food. Oh my gosh. They must love me," right? Or, "He wants to talk me," right? First thing out of his mouth, he goes, "Do you want to get your ass fired from here?" And I turn red. My stomach dropped. I was petrified. I go, "No. Why? Why? Why sir? Why?" He goes, "Do you know how to f-ing make porridge?" I go, "Well yeah." He goes, "Tell me how you make it." I go, "Well I put brown sugar. I put raisins. I put almonds and I put cream." He goes, "Do you know who your audience is?" I go, "Yeah." He goes, "No, you don't. You don't know your audience." I go, "Okay." He goes, "If you knew your audience, you know the Scots that are on this... 80% of our men are Scots and Norwegians. They eat their porridge with water and salt."

Bryan Schaaf:

And that's it.

Tony Biggs:

And that is it. And they complained about your porridge. And I was mummified. And to this day, that moment with that tool pusher resonated with me when he said, "Know your audience. Know who you're preparing food for. Know who you're marketing for. Know who you're talking to." That was the shining moment in my life where... I was just a cocky cook, and I just thought that everybody would just love my food because I got the job and this is why they picked me, right? But no. But after that, I took a step back, took 10 steps back to take 5 steps forward. And after that when I left, they were asking for me. Where's the American? Where's the American?

Tony Biggs:

I cooked some fantastic meals for these guys, and home cooked family-style. I changed it up. I made my grandmother's fried chicken. But I tell you, a couple of different things that really kind of I remember was getting our shipment, and they would say, "Okay. The shipments here." Okay. Well, this is at 1:00 in the morning. You have 30 foot, 40 foot waves breaking over the deck floor, and here comes this tug boat and it's got a crane, and here comes all your product, and they just leave it on the deck and you... Sleet, snow and about 20 of us have to grab a box and walk up 30 flights of stairs to the kitchen to put it away. Oh come on, brother. You know? Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me, right? So that was one of the things I remember.

Tony Biggs:

Another thing I remember is one of the oil riggers comes in one day and he's got his thumb covered up and he spoke... He had such a heavy Scottish brogue, a brogue, that I was trying to understand what he was asking me. And he was saying, "Mate, do you have an adhesive strip?" An adhesive strip. I'm going, "What the F is an adhesive strip?" Well, it's a band-aid. We call them band-aids, right? And this is what he wanted, and I didn't know what he wanted, right? And as blood is like Yellowstone National Park, just popping out, popping out, I go, "Buddy, you need more than an adhesive strip, all right?" So I wrapped it up with a kitchen towel and he goes, "Thanks, mate." And then he left, and I guess he almost had his thumb chopped off up on the oil rig deck. So that was one of the experiences I can remember.

Bryan Schaaf:

So-

Tony Biggs:

One of the best experiences I remember is, when we're getting off the rig, you just pray and hope that your replacement is on that helicopter because if he's not, you've got to stay another two weeks, okay? And I learned this the minute I was supposed to get on the helicopter. I don't know if they were messing with me. They were going, "Tony, if your guy doesn't come, you've got to stay here another two weeks," right? I'm going, "You've got to be kidding me? You've got to be kidding me? No way. No way," right? And so I was having this anxiety attack. Well, luckily, while I was there, the year or the year and half I was there on the rig, my replacement always showed up.

Tony Biggs:

So now, we get off the rig, and now I've made a lot of good buddies, British and Scotch and Norwegians and Americans. And their wives aren't there to pick them up at the airport. No. They grab me and we go to the pub across the street from the airport, and I tell you, I've never drank so much Glenlivet and Glenmorangie in my life, okay? And then about an hour, two hours later, here come all the wives in the cars, picking up their husbands off the floor of the pub, and then we go home. And then I don't see them for another two weeks. And so that-

Bryan Schaaf:

That's glamorous.

Tony Biggs:

... that was my story on the oil rig. I probably left a few things out but it was the most interesting place where I cooked because there's another thing. When the seas are really heavy and really fierce and they were angry, I could be in the kitchen going back and forth, walking this way, walking that way, walking this way. Oh my God, is the souffle going to drop because the oil rig is moving? These were the things that I was petrified. So I hope everybody enjoyed that story of Sedco 704.

Bryan Schaaf:

And if you were taking notes at home and our good friend, Simon [Bruin 00:19:40] from Dundee, Scotland may be listening. If you're cooking for a Scot, makes sure you include salt and water in your porridge-

Tony Biggs:

Yes.

Bryan Schaaf:

... and adhesive strips are band-aids.

Tony Biggs:

Now, you know this was in the '70s so they've probably graduated. I'm probably talking to a different style of Scot now where they do have the cream, the brown sugar, the raisin. I wasn't crazy back then.

Bryan Schaaf:

You were just ahead of the curve. Chef, we are going to change gears and take a break, and we are going to come back with an interview with our good friend, Anthony DiBernardo from Swig & Swine Barbecue down in Charleston, South Carolina. Anthony is going to talk barbecue, but more to the point in terms of

what we're discussing today, Anthony has a Naval background, and he actually would cook on a submarine that would be underwater for months at a time. So stick around. Chef, you and I will come back and put a bow on this, and we appreciate you taking time to listen to the Meat Speak podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand.

Bryan Schaaf:

Back here on the Meat Speak podcast, Bryan Schaaf. Here with me, joining us is a good friend of the podcast, of Certified Angus Beef, a long time supporter, a well-known pitmaster, veteran, brisket aficionado, fine Italian, fine representative of his original home city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We're talking about chef and pitmaster, Anthony DiBernardo. How you doing, sir?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Good, Bryan. How you doing?

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. Outstanding. I hope everybody, we'll apologize for the bit of background noise. Clearly, we're not in the usual studio at which we cut this podcast every other week. In fact, we're actually in Asheville, North Carolina in the mountains.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Oh, we're in heaven right now.

Bryan Schaaf:

This is glorious, isn't it?

Anthony DiBernardo:

This is absolutely beautiful.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's amazing.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Little breeze coming through the mountains right now.

Bryan Schaaf:

Ugh-

Anthony DiBernardo:

It's so nice.

Bryan Schaaf:

I'm going to fall asleep right here, outside.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah, it's nice.

Bryan Schaaf:

Some people call that passing out, but I... It's sleeping. Anthony, we wanted to talk to you specifically on this episode as we really look to commemorate Veterans Day, right? And you're somebody who obviously is well known across the country in the food world for what you do at Swig & Swine, to your tagline, horrifying vegetarians since 20-

Anthony DiBernardo:

2013.

Bryan Schaaf:

... 2013. Three locations, correct?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Correct.

Bryan Schaaf:

But who you are goes much deeper than what you do in the restaurants, and particularly your past as a veteran in the Navy, correct?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yes.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. So can you tell us a little bit about that, how you go into the Navy? And really how what you did in the Navy ties into cooking?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Sure. So just like any young man, I was getting ready to finish up high school, and I wasn't quite set on college. I wasn't the best student in the world. So I had always had military service in the back of my mind. My father was in the Navy. His brother served in the Army. So right before my senior year of high school started, I joined the Navy. I did what they called the delayed enlistment program. So I was enlisted. I finished high school. Two weeks after high school, I left. I reported to San Diego for basic training. I wanted to cook. That's all I've ever done. So in the military, my goal was to cook. So they sent me to a mess specialist class-A school in San Diego for about six weeks. And then I volunteered for submarine duty, and then I got sent to New London, Connecticut, or Groton, Connecticut, and I did six weeks of submarine school there.

Bryan Schaaf:

No kidding.

Anthony DiBernardo:

So.

Bryan Schaaf:

And would you cook on the submarines then?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yes.

Bryan Schaaf:

Tell me about that-

Anthony DiBernardo:

Sure.

Bryan Schaaf:

... I mean because when submarines go underwater, it's not just your 30-minute tour, right?

Anthony DiBernardo:

No. So my longest time submerged, if you can put it in perspective, was four months and 16 days.

Bryan Schaaf:

Holy cow. Without ever seeing the light of day?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Right, with no light. So I cooked for a crew of 130. We did four meals a day. We did breakfast, lunch, dinner, and then we did a midnight meal for the guys coming off watch. My kitchen, to put... I'm rather large. I'm 6'5". I was a lot skinnier back then though. I was actually half of what I am now. I'm about 300 pounds now. I was 150 then. But my kitchen was 10'x8' with a island down the middle. I had four electric burners. I had an electric oven. I had a 3 gallon electric kettle. A 20 quart Hobart mixer that stood on the floor. And I had a little 15 pound fryer and a 24 inch flattop griddle, and that was it. For anything longer than three months, we would turn our refrigerator into a freezer, and our torpedo tubes became our refrigerator. So we'd stock all your fruits and vegetables and eggs in the torpedo tubes, and you just kind of eat your way through.

Bryan Schaaf:

Holy cow. So you're on a submarine for four months. I mean, you're feeding that many people in a kitchen and it doesn't sound like, I mean, you can hardly walk in because it's so jam-packed with things. What are you cooking for people?

Anthony DiBernardo:

You name it, man. The thing about submarine duty, the only thing to look forward to is a meal. And that's even to this day. I mean, you're down there, there's some movies. But really, the only thing... We were responsible for morale. And it took a very short time to understand that, and then once you embrace that, you were successful because if you were grumpy all day long, it reflected in your food, and then everybody else is grumpy. So you took it upon yourself to kind of be the cheerleader, do the best you could with the food, make everybody happy, and just give them something to look forward to.

Anthony DiBernardo:

But we'd have boneless prime ribs and we'd steak them out, and we'd start them on the flattop and finish them in the oven. We would do lobster tails. We'd do Swiss steak. I mean, you name it. Midnight meal was normally pizza. We'd make dough. And we did all the baking ourselves too. I tell everybody to this day that those four years really solidified me as a cook. It really did. There's nothing that comes into my wheelhouse today that I can't handle. And there's nothing in the day-to-day business that stresses me out because of that experience.

Bryan Schaaf:

Can you tell me about the idea of procuring product and storing product and ordering product? A friend of mine was a... He was one of the chefs overseeing one of the Norwegian cruise lines, and he talked about, if they were taking, I don't know, a three to six-week cruise, and of course, cruise lines, they've got steak out. They got all the... And he was talking about just the insane amount of logistics just in terms of how food had to be stored. I would imagine you guys probably went through a lot of the same things on the submarine, yeah?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah. So we load it out according to menu. So we had a six-week rotating menu. So when we knew we were leaving, we would order accordingly. That stuff would hit the pier, and then we'd have one or two guys on the pier that were pulling in order of the menu. So whatever was on that menu for six weeks from now, was in the back of the freezer first and then you loaded your way to the front. The freezer itself was only about 4-foot high, but it was about maybe 8 to 10-foot long, so you just stacked it to the top. And when we went on extended trips, we'd turn the refrigerator into a freezer so we had double freezer space. All the dry goods, coffee, flour, sugar, they came in the 35 pound metal tins, and they would actually line the floor in the berthing compartments. So we would walk on those for the first couple weeks until we ate our way through them.

Bryan Schaaf:

So as you look at running a restaurant today, the idea of forgetting to place an order for something probably didn't really ever happen, right?

Anthony DiBernardo:

No. But my favorite part of running a restaurant today is when the Sysco truck comes in and it's got all of our fine Certified Angus Beef product on it, and I hear all these guys complaining about there's nowhere to store it. And then I get in there and rearrange everything, and just make it happen. You never tell a submariner that there's no room for something.

Bryan Schaaf:

So tell us about, I guess, when you got out of the Navy, and when did it happen that you went from the Navy to where you're at today? I guess, how did that all take place?

Anthony DiBernardo:

So I shared a little bit of that story tonight. So I got of the military, I got out of the Navy, off of submarines in Charleston, 1994. That's how I got to Charleston. My first job was at Blossom Café, which was one of the up-and-coming restaurants. Back then, that was when the dining scene in Charleston

really started to evolve. Chefs like Jeremiah Bacon over here, was part of that charge and... So I got in there on the ground floor and I really learned. I really embraced it. I used the dedication and the attention to detail that I picked up in the military and the hard work ethic, and I really applied it to just putting my head down, working and learning everything I could. I mean, I don't want to say I worked circles around everybody, but I did because I felt very fortunate to be in that position because of where I came from. So I really took advantage of it. I did that for a couple years.

Anthony DiBernardo:

And then I went down to the old hotel at Kiawah Island resort, and I ran that hotel. I ran that property from 1998 to 2002. I took it from three diamond to four diamond. So I have a well-rounded background. I do come from a fine dining background, and a lot of people don't realize that. One day in particular at Kiawah, it was the summertime and we had a lot of vacationers. I was out to check reservations at the front desk, and there was a family of four, a husband and wife, a daughter who was probably 12, and a son who was probably about 6. And probably going to get choked up because it just really turned the way my life went. But I overheard the daughter tell the father it's okay if we can't eat here. It's okay if we can't afford to eat here. That was a shitty dinner service for me because it really made me self-check. And I went home that night and I thought to myself, "Who am I?" I'm blue-collar. I grew up blue-collar. Who am I to be here, charging these prices for the gift that somebody gave me? And it really changed things. So I put my resignation in the next day, and changed my whole course. And here we are.

Bryan Schaaf:

And that's what led you into barbecue. Had you always had an interest in barbecue? Because obviously-

Anthony DiBernardo:

So at the hotel... And that's a funny story because it's a whole bunch of little pieces, now that you look back on it. So at the hotel, all those four years, every Monday night, we did whole hogs and oysters for the customers. So that was my... Growing up Italian, pig was very big and we always did a lot of whole pigs and pork but I never really did it over fire. So every Monday night, we would do pigs over fire, and that really, no pun intended, but ignited my fire for this style of cooking.

Anthony DiBernardo:

So from that point on, it went to... To me, it was more about value-driven, and I joined a group that was just that, value-driven. I was a chef for him for six years. I helped him develop multiple concepts and we opened about six locations. Then I went with another group, became an operating partner. They got bought out in 2013, and I was at that next level of life changing decisions. Keep doing this for somebody else or do it for myself and that was when the idea for... The wheels for Swig & Swine had been born about two years prior to that and I had started my own little catering on the side, so this was my chance it really take the leap and just cash it all in and try it, so. And here we are.

Bryan Schaaf:

Here we are five years later.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Five years, three stores later.

Bryan Schaaf:

That amazing.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Sort of switching gears but staying in the barbecue realm, especially the fact that you're in Charleston, South Carolina. I felt fortunate to be in the room when it happened, but a couple years ago, a good friend of yours, Rodney Scott, won a James Beard award. A James Beard award given to barbecue, right?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Previously, I think it had happened to Aaron Franklin, and gosh, not many others.

Anthony DiBernardo:

That's it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Barbecue as a genre was always just kind of, I don't know the most politically correct way to term it, but by the upper echelons of fine dining and James Beard award-

Anthony DiBernardo:

It was peasant food.

Bryan Schaaf:

... Yeah. And-

Anthony DiBernardo:

Always has been.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. So as somebody in that realm, not only in barbecue, but also somebody whose been pretty close with Rodney Scott, and I guess, what did that mean to you to see him bring home that medal?

Anthony DiBernardo:

It was funny because for me, it was heart warming. I mean, I'm so proud of that guy. He's amazing. He's such a good human being too. But there's a lot of controversy there. And it's funny for me to watch this and the only thing I can say, and I say this, whoever has an issue with it, think about dedicating your whole life to doing one thing, and one thing only. Cooking a pig over fire. That's what you've dedicated your life to. This is your masterpiece. I mean, you have perfected this art. You can do it with your eyes closed. And who else would be more deserving of that award? It doesn't matter what you cook. It doesn't matter if you have table clothes or paper on the table. How have you dedicated your life to your

craft? Did you come out of school and you've been cooking for four years, and you got your break and you deserve a medal? No. You dedicate your life and you spend every day of your life in a pit over fire cooking a pig. You deserve that medal.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. Looking back, what years were you in the Navy?

Anthony DiBernardo:

1990 to '94.

Bryan Schaaf:

1990, '94. When you look back at that and you look at who you are today, and how you run a restaurant, how you give back to the community... Obviously, you're in a community. Operation Barbecue is obviously a big thing. I mean, the barbecue world in general, is filled with people who are, as Michael [Oehler 00:34:19] would say, who are givers, right? How has that time that you think... Those four years in the Navy, how has that kind of shaped who you are today?

Anthony DiBernardo:

I think it just... I don't know if it necessarily shaped me or if it brought out the things that were already there and honed them and sharpened them a little bit. Because I like to look at everything that I do now, and I like to reflect even back further than that to my parents and those are the values that they instilled in me. And the military just kind of hardened them a little bit and solidified them, and then just going through the day-to-day life now, I actually get to practice them, so. But the military definitely helped me with dedication and attention to detail. I mean, those four years and comradery and like I said, the ability... I mean, honestly, probably the biggest piece of this puzzle is the ability to handle stress because we all know how stressful the restaurant business is and can be, and it's how you face that adversity. And to be a leader, you have to keep your head. You cannot be the one in there losing your head, and there was a brief period of time where I had an issue with that. And having kids kind of mellowed me out a little bit on that too, but it was... And that was another reason I got out of the fine dining world. It was meant to be, so.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. One last thing before we adjourn this, tell us about Swig & Swine. Obviously, the three locations around Charleston. Swig & Swine, people probably expect nothing but whole hog, right, but you guys are much more than that, right?

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah. We do pig. We do pork butt. We do ribs. We do chicken. We do wings. We do bellies. We do turkey. And we do sausage, a house-made sausage. And then of course, we serve the finest beef in the land in the form of Certified Angus Prime brisket.

Bryan Schaaf:

Check's in the mail for that plug. Thank you, sir.

Anthony DiBernardo:

But it's good, man. I tell these guys, all the farmers and the ranchers that I meet here too, I mean, they make my job easy. You start with quality. You end with quality. You just got to treat it right.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Anthony DiBernardo, veteran pitmaster, fire master, whole hog, brisket aficionado, all around solid-

Anthony DiBernardo:

I don't have enough room on my jacket for all those titles.

Bryan Schaaf:

Don't worry. We've got an embroiderer. We've got you covered. Man, thank you so much for taking time to hang out with us.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Yeah, man. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Bryan Schaaf:

If you're ever in Charleston, go see our good friend, Anthony DiBernardo.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Swig & Swine Barbecue. Instagram, swigswinebbq. Facebook, Swig & Swine Barbecue. You can find me online, swigandswinebbq.com. Buy all my sausage retail. T-shirts, hats, coozies, whatever you want.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen.

Anthony DiBernardo:

Thank you very much.

Bryan Schaaf:

Bless you, sir. Thank you. Right back here on the Meat Speak podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand, Bryan Schaaf. Chef Tony Biggs here. Chef, that was a fantastic time we spent with Mr. DiBernardo. One of the things that really stuck out to me was the logistics that went into how they would have to load food, and the types of food that they would be cooking. Can you talk a little bit about, you'd mentioned knowing your audience. What were some of those dishes that you cooked that you had in mind, knowing that you were cooking for really, a bunch of vikings, if you really want to [inaudible 00:37:45].

Tony Biggs:

Yeah, right? I mean, yeah. So like I said before in our opening, a tug boat would come at 1:00 in the morning. The waves could be crashing and 15 or 20 of us would have to grab cases of product and walk them up flights of stairs, frozen stairs. When it gets cold in Ohio and it rains and then it snows and then it's icy, that type of scenario. And you're doing that for an hour, freezing with a jacket on in the North

Sea, Arctic circle, you just can't wait to put this stuff away. So once we got it up into the kitchen and to the walk-in cooler, we're just chucking it in the cooler, man. I mean, we're not going to... I'm freezing already, right? Now you want me to go into a walk-in cooler, right, and separate the boxes. No. Chuck it in there. I'll get it tomorrow when I defrost, okay, when I defrost. And that food is going to be fine.

Tony Biggs:

So the next day, we would... If I saw Finnan haddie. Finnan haddie is a smoked haddock that is cooked in milk and butter, and so that would be a really favorite with mashed potatoes with sauteed leeks. That's kind of a British dish. Sausages. Bangers and mash, sausages from Great Britain. Mashed potatoes. Some roasted tomatoes for breakfast and fried eggs would be another. Definitely lamb. Sunday, I would do lamb stew. Some days I would do a rack of lamb. I would do a leg of lamb, and then a beautiful gravy with it, mint sauce with mint jelly, a little bit of fresh mint. Of course, there's no alcohol so anytime you wanted to cook with alcohol, that was out. So you really had to be creative in your dishes.

Tony Biggs:

I would make some American desserts like I would make a coconut cream pie, a lemon meringue pie. I would do a lot of pies and cakes. Nothing really fancy but they were fresh. They were homemade. And these oil riggers could just tell. And they would throw things out at me like, "Hey, Chef. We're from Norway. Could you make a beet salad or borsch? Could you do that with a little bit of crema on top." Borsch is like a beet soup. So yeah, sure. Why not? I can do it. So they would throw things at me. Some mornings I would do Crepe Suzette with orange sauce, orange rind, and then just that would be kind of like breakfast. That would be one of the breakfast items we did. So we were very fortunate to not really have a food cost because you had to keep these guys happy. But there's one thing I want to tell you that I missed in the first segment, okay? Do we have time?

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh, yeah.

Tony Biggs:

Do we have time? One more. Okay. So when we got off the oil rig, they scheduled a survival course for us, okay? So we had to go through these four or five different scenario survivals, okay? One was we would go out to this house. The fire department, the Aberdeen fire department would be there. They would set it on fire. And then we had to go in and get a 350 pound sack of sand out of there with the supervision of the fire department. So that was kind of cool, going in there chocking on smoke and then pulling out a 350 pound sack of sand, right? Okay. That was to emulate a body, right? Okay. But my favorite one was, if you look at these cruise ships or container ships, there looks like on the side of the ship, the ship is so big. It has this orange looking pill. Looks like a Tylenol pill. You know what I'm talking about, Bryan?

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Tony Biggs:

It's a little orange. It's on the side, right? Well, that is a survival boat. Did you know that?

Bryan Schaaf:

I-

Tony Biggs:

That's a survival boat. It gets about 10 folks in it from head to toe. So you're on the bottom. Somebody climbs up and the foot stool is right above your head. So somebody's on top of you. And this thing just can turn around in the water like a top. Can you picture that?

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Tony Biggs:

So we went out on this. It was a brutal day in the North Sea. And some of my comrades because it was spinning so much and turning, and it was just going everywhere, can you imagine what happened, Bryan?

Bryan Schaaf:

I think I'm getting a little queasy just listening to [inaudible 00:42:51].

Tony Biggs:

You're getting queasy, seasick, and puking. And guess what? That is just, that's a domino effect, right? On my head. All over the place. It was just a terrible feeling. And I'll leave you at that. But it was exciting times when you talk about it, and you just kind of reminisce.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's amazing, chef. It's not all so glamorous, huh?

Tony Biggs:

The novelty wears off when you get on the rig.

Bryan Schaaf:

You're on a tilt-a-whirl in the North Sea. It's great. Chef, on that note, I believe it is the witching hour so we're going to go ahead and put a wrap on this. If this is your first time listening to the Meat Speak podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand, please know that you catch us across all of your major podcasting platforms, or also simply by visiting [certifiedangusbeef/podcast](https://www.certifiedangusbeef.com/podcast), and you'll see our faces there. Chef, hey. Love you brother. Stay safe in quarantine my friend.

Tony Biggs:

Okay buddy. Later.

Bryan Schaaf:

See you.