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July 2019

Newsletter of Charleston Base, United States Submarine Veterans, Inc.

**Base Meeting:**

BOD: None  
 Membership: July 11, 1900  
**Location:**  
 FRA Branch 269  
 Low Country Home  
 99 Wisteria Rd.  
 Goose Creek, SC



Base Commander	Mike Ciesielko	843.324.0011	Chief of the Boat	Joe Lunn	843.747.5368
Base Vice Commander	Tom Lawson	843.327.3282	Veterans Affairs	Tom Lawson	843.327.3282
Secretary	Gordon Long	843.214.2353	Membership	Larry Knutson	843.860.1155
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			Newsletter	Rick Wise	843.875.5559 (H) 843.276.0899 (C)
			Webmaster	Nick Nichols	843.452.3189
			Kaps for Kids	Bill Kennedy	843.875.3109



## Submarines Lost During the Month of July

<b>USS S-28 (SS 133)</b>	<b>July 4, 1944 – Training Exercise</b>	<b>LOST WITH ALL HANDS 49 SOULS</b>
<b>USS ROBALO (SS 273)</b>	<b>July 26, 1944 – 3<sup>rd</sup> War patrol</b>	<b>LOST WITH 77 MEN; 4 DIED AS POW'S; 81 SOULS</b>
<b>USS GRUNION (SS 216)</b>	<b>July 30, 1942 – 1<sup>ST</sup> War patrol</b>	<b>LOST WITH ALL HANDS 70 SOULS</b>

**THREE Boats and 200 Men Lost**

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### Upcoming Charleston Base Events

Base BOD Meeting	Thursday, Aug 1, 1800	FRA Branch 269 Goose Creek
NPS Class 1903 Graduation	Friday, Aug 2, 0900	Muster at NEX Parking Lot at 0800
Base Meeting	Thursday, Aug 8, 1900	FRA Branch 269 Goose Creek
Kap(SS)4Kid(SS)	Tuesday, Aug 13 1000	McLoud's Hospital, Florence
CPO Selectee Breakfast	Wednesday, Aug 28	Cracker Barrel, N. Charleston SubVet CPO's

Information on all these events are on the base website [www.ussvicb.org/events/index.html](http://www.ussvicb.org/events/index.html)

### Other Happenings of Interest

## From the Editor

This month gave me a problem. As most of you may not know besides putting the newsletter together I also print and mail it to those members who do not have e-mails. Because of the weight of the paper I must limit the printed version to 25 pages or it will take another 1 oz. stamp. The minutes for an online National Board Meeting is available via a link on the Charleston Base Website but if I include it the newsletter will be 31 pages. Even if I remove the USS Stickleback story it would still be more than 25 pages so I did not include it. If you are interested and don't have access to a computer see if a friend can help you and go to the base website [ussvicb.org](http://ussvicb.org) and follow the link to the story. Make sure you have plenty of caffeine available!

## From USSVI National

Normal message traffic from USSVI will be published on the Charleston Base Website [www.ussvicb.org](http://www.ussvicb.org) . If I see anything that should be brought to the notice of our non-computer members I will post it here.

### Nothing to report

### CNO Nominee Hearing

The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held a hearing for Vice Adm. Mike Gilday to become the next Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). The position requires Senate approval. SASC Chairman, Senator Inhofe expressed his concerns over the Navy's ability to maintain the current navy fleet let alone grow it to 350 ships. Vice Adm. Gilday said military housing is a priority for the Navy because it impacts readiness and sailors cannot focus on the mission if he/she is worried about housing conditions for their family. Other topics included the constant delays and cost of the aircraft carrier *USS FORD*, threats from China and Russia, the arctic, and working with the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Gilday stated that his priorities include sustaining readiness and modernizing.

Vice Adm. Gilday is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and holds Masters Degrees from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and the National War College. He has served on teams that have been recognized with numerous awards and is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal (four awards), Legion of Merit (three awards), Bronze Star, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat "V" and the Combat Action Ribbon. He is expected to be confirmed.

In related news, the SASC also approved (20-7) the nomination of Air Force Gen. John Hyten to be the second-highest ranking U.S. military officer (Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) amid a sexual-assault allegation against him.

### Senate Approves Budget Agreement

As predicted in last week's *NewsBytes* the Senate passed (67-28) the two-year budget deal (H.R.3877) that in effect repeals the Budget Control Act spending caps, known as sequestration. The bill now goes to President Trump and he is expected to sign it into law. The FRA opposes sequestration because it poses a threat to national security and would substantially impact service member pay and benefits. These automatic cuts require that 50 percent come from Defense, even though Defense makes up only 16 percent of the entire federal budget.

The budget deal will clear the way for appropriations (spending) bills for FY2020 and FY2021. Specifically, the bill provides \$738 billion in Defense spending for FY2020. That is less than requested by the administration (\$750 billion) and more than the House Democrats wanted to spend (\$733 billion). In addition, the agreement suspends the debt ceiling for two-years. The suspension will allow the federal government to borrow and spend without having to worry about being limited by the debt ceiling.

## New Admiral Osborn Scholarship Raffle

The Base Scholarship Committee will be running a new raffle starting at the July meeting. Raffle will run for two meetings with the drawing to be held at the end of the August meeting.

The raffle will consist of the following gifts to the winning ticket:

- One year gun range membership to ATP Gun Shop and Range
- One ATP Gun Shop and Range polo style shirt
- One ATP Gun Shop and Range long sleeve T-shirt
- One ATP Gun Shop and Range baseball cap
- One NEBO "The Lucy" 8 LED Flashlight
- One container Tannerite explosive target



Raffle is open to everyone; members and non-members. Ask your friends and neighbors! Winning ticket will be drawn at the end of the regular August meeting. If you will not be at the August meeting be sure to write your name and/or phone number on the back of the ticket that goes in the jar! See Rick Sparger, Marty or Carl. Ticket cost is \$1 each or 6 for \$5. Go ahead and buy a dozen or so and support the Admiral James B. Osborn Memorial Scholarship!

If you are not a shooter, you can still support the scholarship fund by buying tickets. If you win, donate back to the fund, give to a shipmate or sell on your own. It's a win-win for you and the scholarship fund!

### **Here's how 3 million more people will get military shopping benefits**

As about 3 million more people will soon be eligible to shop at military stores, officials are working to make sure these new customers will have access to bases, and that the shelves will be stocked.

Starting Jan. 1, all service-connected disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and primary veteran caregivers will be eligible to shop at commissaries and exchanges, and officials from three federal agencies are preparing the way.

The newly eligible customers will also be able to use certain morale, welfare and recreation activities.

It's the largest patronage expansion in more than 60 years, said Virginia Penrod, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs, who spoke at a recent meeting of the American Logistics Association.

The departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security have been planning for the expansion for more than six months, with four teams totaling about 70 people. Among other things, they've decided how the new customers will get access to military installations and to the stores; assessed the impact on the stores, and have been making plans to ensure enough products get to the shelves in the right assortment.

The fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act expanded the pool of eligible shoppers. Because the expansion also applies to Coast Guard facilities, the Department of Homeland Security has been

shortly after her arrival in the war zone, and her mission was converted to a rescue expedition: The Stickleback picked up 19 survivors of a torpedoed Japanese freighter from a couple of makeshift rafts at sea.

involved.

The law also included Medal of Honor recipients, but they already had shopping privileges. Previously, veterans with 100 percent service-connected disabilities were able to shop; now all with service-connected disabilities can shop. The benefit extends to MWR programs that are “revenue-generating facilities,” according to the law.

The expansion is about a 50 percent increase in customers. Currently, about 6 million total households are eligible for the benefit; this adds 3 million, said Justin Hall, director of the DoD office of MWR and Resale Policy. “That’s a huge lift across the entire system.” he said.

Officials have been mapping out the areas, using VA statistics, where there may be more of an impact on the stores. The impact assessments generally show there will be a low to moderate impact on military stores overall, said Penrod. But she called on representatives of industry for their help to make sure the supply chain “remains responsive to the increased sales volume to ensure no out of stock situations occur” at stores in states with high populations of disabled veterans and in states with higher cost of living.

States with a higher population density of disabled veterans are Florida, Texas and California, said Barry Patrick, in the DoD office of resale policy. High cost areas were identified as Hawaii; Alaska, California; the Washington metropolitan area; New York; New Jersey and Washington state, he said.

These new shoppers generally don’t have access to military bases. Officials have decided the best form of identification for these groups:

**Disabled and other eligible veterans:** For access into the installation, and for access to the stores, they’ll use the veterans health ID card, Patrick said. Officials are working to enable technology at the front gate to scan those veteran cards, and will start scanning the cards in October, he said. Commissary officials are working on adjusting their technology to enable systems to read the veterans health ID card.

**Caregivers:** The process will be different, initially, Patrick said, since they’re not directly affiliated with DoD or VA other than through their annual appointment to be a caregiver. The benefit applies to the primary caregiver of wounded/injured veterans who are registered in the Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program. Beginning in October, the VA will post a memo to VA.gov for caregivers, to be used for access at the front gate, along with driver’s license or other authorized form of ID. The VA process will later transition to a caregiver-type ID card, which will have scanning swipe capability, he said.

Currently there are about 30,000 VA caregivers who will qualify for this benefit, but over the next several years the number could potentially grow to about 250,000, Patrick noted.

#### Credit card fee

These new customers will pay a fee for using a credit card at commissaries, except for the military resale system’s Military Star card. The amount of the fee has not yet been determined. By law, this expansion can’t include extra costs associated with using credit cards in commissaries; the cost must be passed on to the customer. Except for the Military Star card, credit card companies charge transaction fees to retailers when customers use their credit cards.

There will be a flag built into the system at commissaries so that when the card is swiped the fee will be charged.

The fee applies only to new patrons using credit cards in commissaries, not to Medal of Honor recipients or others who were previously authorized to shop. New customers can avoid the fees by paying by cash, check or using the Military Star card. It only applies at the commissary, which is funded primarily by taxpayer dollars.

The DoD resale community has been working together to estimate the number of likely shoppers by location, and the merchandise categories that will interest those shoppers. For example, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service will be adjusting its inventory by location, said Chris Ward, spokesman for AAFES. "Extending the brick-and-mortar military exchange benefit to all disabled veterans is not expected to require material investments in facilities or technology," he said.

Patrick said officials will launch an information campaign to get out the word about the new benefit to the new customers, but also to installation officials.

## **'First-cut-of-steel' begins new era in nuclear weapons, submarine warfare**

By , Kris Osborn

Published June 25, 2019

Almost nobody knows where they are at any given time, yet nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines quietly patrol dark domains of the undersea realm in strategically vital waters around the globe, bringing the prospect of unprecedented destruction upon potential enemies -- all as a way to keep the peace.

It would not be an exaggeration to call the first "cut of steel" for the lead ship in a class of new nuclear-armed Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines a historic occasion, as the boat is intended to usher in a new era in firepower-reliant strategic deterrence.

A "cut-of-steel" for advanced construction of the first boat took place at Newport News Shipbuilding June 17 -- three weeks early -- marking the formal beginning of a long and carefully labored process of building the most technically advanced ballistic missile submarine ever to exist.

The submarine's mission is clear: ensure total destruction against anyone launching a first-strike nuclear attack upon the US.

"We have to have that first boat out on patrol no later than October 2030. I can tell you today, we are planning to beat that," Capt. John Rucker, Columbia-class program manager, said at the Navy League's Sea Air Space symposium in May.

Using first-of-its-kind digital modeling techniques, and advanced training, the Navy has been making rapid progress staying ahead of the original construction schedule. The ship specs are 100-percent complete, the arrangements are 97.5 percent complete and the ship disclosures are already 43-percent complete.

The Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarine USS Rhode Island Gold crew returns to homeport at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Georgia. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Bryan Tomforde)

"The lead ship Virginia had about one percent of the ship done in advanced construction. We are doing 11-percent of advanced construction to get ahead of the curve. We are trying to de-risk this program to get ahead," Rucker explained.

Early delivery could bring a number of needed advantages. Given the pace of retirement of the existing Ohio-class, there will likely be a submarine deficit in coming years. Faster arrival of Columbia's will not only increase deterrence-oriented firepower and mission scope but also bring unprecedented levels of quieting technology due to its X-shaped stern and electric drive propulsion. Furthermore, it takes no imagination to recognize that the nuclear-threat environment is rapidly becoming more serious for the US as it seeks to potentially add new, low-yield submarine-launched nuclear weapons and somehow counter Russia's more threatening "escalate to de-escalate" posture.

Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding described the first cut this way..."With the

press of a button, a plasma-burning machine cut the first steel plate that will be used to build the lead ballistic missile submarine.”

Research, prototyping, science and technology work and initial missile tube construction on Columbia-class submarines have been underway for several years. One key exercise, called tube-and-hull forging, involves building four-packs of missile tubes to assess welding and construction methods. These structures are intended to load into the boat’s modules as construction advances. Rucker said that the Navy recently awarded a new missile-tube construction deal in April. The Columbia-class will have 16 launch tubes rather than the 24 tubes currently on Ohio boats, yet the Columbias will be about 2-tons larger, according to Navy information.

Rucker also pointed to what service developers refer to as a modular construction technique designed to establish the technical infrastructure needed to keep upgrading the ship as new systems arrive.

“We put in different valves so you can do isolations for hydraulics to make it more sustainable. We sat with the operators and maintainers at the refit facilities and the training facilities.”

Using the same nuclear missiles with the Columbia that is currently used in the existing Ohio-class is also helping to expedite development.

The Trident II D5s have both been maintained and upgraded in recent years, a scenario which makes it possible for the Navy to literally integrate the exact same weapons system into the Columbia-class as is now arming the existing Ohio-class.

“Maintaining that commonality reduces risk and helps maintain the schedule,” Rucker said.

The Navy plans to have 12 Columbia’s built by 2042, carrying 70-percent of US strategic nuclear warheads.

“The most survivable leg of the strategic deterrent is ... the submarine,” Rucker said. “....so just sit back and think about that.”

## **The Sinking of the USS Stickleback**

By Charles G. Hood, MD

The seas were rough off the coast of Oahu that fateful day. It was Thursday, 29 May 1958, and the USS Stickleback (SS-415), a \$10-million converted snorkel submarine, was participating in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercises in a stiff wind about 19 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor in ocean waters about 9,000 feet deep. Captain Quinley R. (“Dutch”) Schulz was in the conning tower supervising the activities. Schulz, a native of Racine, Wisconsin, and a 1945 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, was joined on board by seven other officers and 74 enlisted men.

The Stickleback was enjoying a renaissance of sorts. Originally launched on New Year’s Day in 1945 at Mare Island, she was a Balao-class diesel-electric submarine measuring 311 feet in length. The Stickleback had a top speed of about 20 knots surfaced. She carried a crew of approximately 10 officers and 70 enlisted men. From forward to aft, there were eight compartments (plus the conning tower) separated by bulkheads and watertight doors: Forward Torpedo Room, Forward Battery, Control Room, After Battery, Forward Engine Room, After Engine Room, Maneuvering, and the After Torpedo Room.

Assigned to Pearl Harbor, the Stickleback left on her first war patrol in late July, arriving at Guam on 02 August 1945. She then departed for the Sea of Japan, but by the time she arrived, the two atomic bombs Little Boy and Fat Man had already been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. As a result, maritime hostilities had essentially ended. In fact, the cease-fire order was passed

After the official conclusion of the war, the Navy decommissioned the Stickleback in June 1946. Her mothballing proved short-lived, however, as she found new life in September of that year. Recommissioned as a training ship, she became attached to the Navy base at San Diego for six years, until she was brought back to the Mare Island Naval Shipyard in November 1952 for conversion to a "snorkel type" (GUPPY IIA) submarine. The Stickleback briefly supported U.S. operations along the Korean Peninsula in 1954 before returning to her eventual home at Pearl Harbor as a member of Submarine Squadron 11.

As the Cold War hostilities between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. escalated in the 1950s, the Stickleback was a key participant in the Pentagon strategy of developing new defensive and offensive submarine tactics. The German U-boats confiscated during World War II contained many innovations that the Navy brass were eager to incorporate into the U.S. fleet. Because the Soviets were independently dedicating tremendous resources to technological advances in submarine operations at the same time, the importance of cutting-edge ASW was undeniable.

On the morning of 28 May 1958, the Stickleback set sail from Pearl Harbor for routine ASW exercises along with the USS Silverstein (DE-534), a destroyer escort that had also seen some limited World War II action. The Stickleback had just completed a \$1 million overhaul as part of the standard 30-month cycle. The Silverstein had recently attracted some unwanted press a week earlier, after five crewmen were injured (one critically) when some impulse charges exploded prematurely while the ship was docked at Pearl Harbor. A torpedo retriever also accompanied the two ships, in order to track, recover and recycle the spent torpedoes used during the training exercises at sea. The ASW activities commenced that afternoon and continued uneventfully until the following day. That's when something went terribly wrong.

Seated on his customary stool at the rear of the conning tower, Commander Schulz had just ordered the Stickleback to conduct a simulated torpedo run upon the Silverstein from periscope depth—about 60 feet. It was around 1330 hours local time. Meanwhile, the commander of the Silverstein, Charles S. Swift, stood on the bridge of his destroyer escort surveying the open seas before him. Swift noticed how roiled the ocean surfaced appeared; the wind was whipping up some serious wave action. The Silverstein was traveling at 17 knots. The two ships were less than a quarter mile from one another at that moment.

After the torpedo run was completed, the Diving Officer of the Watch (DOOW) stationed forward in the Control Room called for the Stickleback to begin a defensive dive. Such a maneuver represented a routine response during ASW training to thwart the expected counterattack from the destroyer escort. The planesmen executed the command. The OOD ordered the helmsman to ring up flank (maximum) speed on the maneuvering bell. Back in Maneuvering, the electrician's mate responded to the call for increased speed by turning a rheostat on the panel before him. Unfortunately, he turned the knob in the wrong direction, which resulted in a power surge that overloaded capacity. The circuit breakers tripped, cutting off all power to the submarine while it was at a depth of approximately 200 feet. The Stickleback was already in a 20-degree down angle, and the power failure certainly did nothing to prevent her from continuing to dive deeper and deeper.

The OOD called for auxiliary power. It failed. He then called for manual operation of the diving planes to stop the descent. Unfortunately, that procedure was slow and arduous, and the boat kept going downward. Meanwhile, the crew hurriedly worked to reset the breakers, but they tripped once again. One survivor of the incident said much later that the boat went down as much as 700-800 feet before the power was finally restored. At that depth, the DOOW had a split-second decision to make. As he recalled later during the official inquiry, the extraordinary circumstances required that he choose between breaking one of the two cardinal submarine rules:

1. Never exceed the test depth.

2. Never allow the submarine to unintentionally broach (reveal itself above the surface).

He decided to break rule #2, giving the order to surface as electrical power was again available. The Stickleback blew ballast and reversed the angles on her diving planes, returning quickly toward the surface at a 30-degree angle. In fact, the angle of ascent was so steep that the CO ordered, "All Hands Forward!" over the 1-MC. The idea was to help level out the submarine by moving as much weight as possible to the bow.

Commander Schulz knew that the nearby destroyer escort was not anticipating the emergency blow, so he attempted to initiate the necessary steps to warn the Silverstein of his submarine's impending arrival at the surface. He ordered the Quartermaster to push the collision button three times. However, the alert system had not regained sufficient power for some reason, so the warning horn was only barely audible. Schulz also called down to the After Torpedo Room to order a red signal flare to be fired out of the water; this would certainly alert the Silverstein that the submarine was surfacing unexpectedly. Again, Murphy's Law prevailed, because the CO's order could not be heard by the Torpedoman—he had followed the previous order of "All Hands Forward" and was no longer in the Torpedo Room to respond to the order. As a result of these miscues, the collision alarm wasn't heard, and the flare was never fired. The abrupt surfacing of the Stickleback would therefore come as a total surprise to the Silverstein.

Everyone held on as the Stickleback broke the ocean surface with a gigantic splash. The bow emerged a great distance out of the water and, with the crew packed up front, the submarine leveled out on the water quickly. But as fate would have it, the submarine had broached directly into the path of her companion destroyer escort.

From the bridge, Commander Swift of the Silverstein was stunned to witness the submarine suddenly pop up right in front of him, its bow pointing to his left. The Stickleback was 200 yards dead ahead at a nearly 90-degree angle on the bow. Even though Swift already knew what was about to happen, he acted quickly. "All back full!" "Hard left rudder!" Neither measure had enough time to matter, though. A ship traveling at 17 knots covers almost 600 yards in a minute, meaning that collision was inevitable in a matter of seconds.

In the conning tower of the Stickleback, the Captain was stunned to see the approaching escort more than fill the field of view of his periscope. He first called for General Quarters, but then realizing that there was insufficient time, he bellowed, "Brace for impact!" A few seconds later, the bow of the destroyer escort struck the port side of the submarine just forward of the sail. The hull of the Stickleback sustained a vertical gash at the forward bulkhead of the Control Room, creating an open pathway for seawater to rush into two adjacent compartments: the Control Room and the Forward Battery. The men on board the Stickleback felt the monumental shock from the direct blow, which produced a very steep roll to starboard. Everyone was knocked to the deck. The impact also lifted the submarine out of the water momentarily; the Stickleback then clung to the escort bow as she dropped back down into the water, impaled by the destroyer.



Inside the Control Room, which bore the brunt of the initial water intrusion, key personnel responded nearly reflexively to the sudden crisis. The crew acted promptly to sequester the flooding by closing and dogging the water-tight doors on the bulkhead between the Control Room and the two adjacent rooms, the Forward Battery and After Battery. (Note: Had there been enough time to go to General Quarters, all bulkhead watertight doors would have been preemptively closed and dogged throughout the submarine.) While these measures helped to mitigate the flooding, water continued to pour into the affected compartments and drain down to the bilge. Meanwhile, a small fire had erupted in the Forward Torpedo Room, and additional water was used there during attempts to extinguish it. The Stickleback was thankfully on the surface, but it was taking on a large volume of water very quickly.

Survivors of the ordeal recalled how Captain Schulz maintained his typically calm demeanor even as the submarine was flooding rapidly. Remaining on the surface, opening the hatches and getting personnel topside were critical priorities. Fire kills quickly for several reasons aboard a submarine: intense heat, electrical damage, smoke inhalation, and oxygen deprivation represent the main offenders. The wrath of fire and flood—the two events that submariners fear the most—had stricken the Stickleback nearly simultaneously.

Surprisingly, the Stickleback still had power after the collision. The CO gathered status reports and relied on his years of experience at that moment to decide what to do next. The fire was successfully extinguished in less than two minutes, but otherwise the news wasn't good. The Forward Torpedo Room was completely flooded, and the men stationed there had been forced to vacate their stations. Since the Forward Torpedo Room wasn't directly rammed by the destroyer, one could con-

clude that water had either entered that compartment from an open door to the adjacent Forward Battery or the result of the attempts to combat the fire there.

In the Control Room, Commander Schulz watched the water rise above his waist. No more than five minutes had elapsed since the collision by that point, but Schulz was certainly growing very uneasy about his ship's prospects for survival. The Chief of the Boat oversaw the distribution of lifejackets as the men were herded to the aft, away from the smoke and flooding in the forward compartments.

Schulz gave the order to Abandon Ship as the hatch in the After Torpedo Room was opened. All expendable personnel scrambled topside to safety and regrouped above on the weather deck. The men in the Conn, Sonar and Radio escaped separately through the conning tower with great difficulty. The water level had risen above their shoulders by then, and the lower hatch was dogged with considerable effort after the last man was safely out. Apart from the progressive flooding, the exit from the damaged submarine was very timely: in the inundated Forward Battery, the seawater began to permeate the individual cells, causing the release of deadly chlorine gas. The continued occupancy of the crippled submarine was becoming very unsafe.

A May Day call had gone out from both ships immediately after the collision, prompting the rapid deployment of multiple rescue boats and aircraft from Pearl Harbor. As fate would have it, a Navy helicopter was already conducting training drills nearby. The bird happened to have an official photographer on board: Robert Ahlgren of Billings, Montana. Hearing the distress call, the pilot flew over to the scene, and Ahlgren began snapping photographs of the incident, several of which are included in the picture gallery accompanying this essay.

The Silverstein had knifed the submarine at nearly a right angle, her bow initially stuck in the gash. CO Swift of the Silverstein intentionally maintained his position there. There was no immediate attempt to separate the two ships because withdrawal of the bow of the destroyer from the hole it had created would only accelerate the flooding. However, a few minutes later, heavy sea action caused the disengagement of the Silverstein from the Stickleback. The destroyer then pulled up alongside and tied to the submarine, which was nearly identical in length. Robert Ahlgren chronicled these events with his camera from his aerial perspective aboard the helo, producing some truly amazing photographs for the historical record. It must have been a surreal sight to witness these events unfold from above.

Meanwhile, the shaken crewmen of the Silverstein were also reacting to the collision. No one had been seriously injured, and the destroyer remained entirely seaworthy. The submarine had clearly absorbed the lion's share of the impact. Except for one distraught sailor aboard the Stickleback who became so agitated that he dove into the sea from the submarine deck—much to the consternation of the others who watched another submarine approach to pick him up—there was no general sense of panic on either ship. Indeed, the exodus of men on the gradually sinking submarine had occurred in extraordinarily calm fashion. Gathered topside, they all stood in shock, awaiting the next move. Even though no one could see the extent of the damage, the men all knew that the Stickleback was slowly filling up with seawater—one compartment after another—as the freeboard continued to diminish over the course of the afternoon.

This inexorable slow sinking process took place despite valiant efforts to save the Stickleback. One of the first rescue boats dispatched from Pearl Harbor to arrive was the USS Greenlet (ASR-10). The Greenlet pulled alongside the starboard side of the disabled submarine, whereupon the rescue crew attempted to deploy external salvage air fittings in order to augment the Stickleback's ballast. The submarine had been designed for this contingency with special fittings for injecting pressurized air into all ballast tanks and interior compartments. For certain damage situations—where flooding was limited and the negative buoyancy caused by the excess water was not excessive—this approach offered a reasonable chance for salvage. Other members of the rescue team began placing gasoline-powered portable pumps down the reopened hatches to attempt to drain the excess water.

In order to determine if these efforts were worthwhile, the team needed to ascertain the full extent of invisible damage below the water surface. If the hull damage was too extensive, allowing seawater to rush in unencumbered, then no amount of pumping or external ballasting was going to save the Stickleback. A Navy scuba diver from the Greenlet was sent down below to make a direct visual assessment of the damage. The intrepid diver came back a few minutes later and reported an extensive hull breach; the gaping wound was so large that he could actually see the wardroom curtains dangling into the water. Also, the bow of the Stickleback, initially dry after the collision, had disappeared below the ocean surface. The situation looked bleak.

Upon receiving this bit of bad news, the CO of the Stickleback ordered the remainder of his skeleton crew to immediately transfer to the Greenlet, while the salvage efforts continued into the early evening. The transfer had already been underway for a while, but a few curious or daring crewmembers had stayed back. They were milling about on the deck of the Stickleback to keep a closer eye on her prognosis. However, once the order had been given to unconditionally vacate, the last few remaining men reluctantly stepped off their beloved submarine for the final time.

The last enlisted man to leave the Stickleback was Chief Petty Officer Larry Hughes, from Salem, Oregon. Hughes, like many of his fellow sailors, had called the Stickleback his home for years. He cried as he walked off his boat and was immediately consoled by other crewmembers once aboard the Greenlet. The final person off the boat, fittingly, was Commander Schulz. By the time he stepped off the Stickleback, the base of her sail was below water. Other men who were normally inclined to the bluster and swagger of the submarine force also broke down. Their common home was sliding beneath the waves. It was a sobering moment that the survivors would never forget.

Despite the efforts of multiple additional ships that had come swiftly to the aid of the Stickleback, including the USS Sabalo (SS-302) and USS Sturtevant (DE-239), the salvage operation indeed proved unsuccessful. The men cut the remaining mooring lines, and the submarine sank silently to the bottom of the Pacific around 1900 hours. The final message sent with the call sign of the Stickleback actually originated from the Greenlet; the message simply reported the coordinates of the incident, the fact that everyone had survived, and the loss of the submarine.

Although the incident had miraculously resulted in zero casualties, the mood aboard the Greenlet on the two-hour ride back to Pearl Harbor was anything but celebratory. The men stood quietly on deck, comforting one another and counting their blessings. Everything on board the Stickleback was lost except for the deck log, the pay records, and the battle flag. The loss of the Stickleback was certainly regrettable but not unprecedented during peacetime. Nearly a decade earlier in the North Sea, the USS Cuchino (SS-345) had been lost to a battery explosion and fire (another amazing story that appears in the 3rd Edition of our book, "Poopie Suits and Cowboy Boots"). One of the first public statements about the accident was made by Capt. Paul C. Stimson, the Commander of Submarine Squadron 11, to which the Stickleback was attached. His message was short and sweet: "I'm only glad we are not consoling widows on this Memorial Day." All hands were alive.

Several survivors poignantly recalled a beautiful and deeply spiritual moment during the quiet ride back to Pearl Harbor. The Hawaiian sunset over the western ocean horizon was particularly sublime that evening—a near religious experience to behold, some said. The striking beauty of the setting sun at the end of such a traumatic day seemed to reassure many of the men of the Stickleback that God still had plans for them on Earth. It wasn't their time to go just yet. Yet, the ride had a mournful feel, because the men realized that their sense of brotherhood and camaraderie aboard a common submarine had likely come to an unexpected end. It was around 2245 hours when the Greenlet finally made port.

Consoling each man as they exited the brow of the Greenlet was the Chief Engineman of the Stickleback, Pappy Rail. Pappy was well respected by all, since he had made many war patrols during World War II aboard the USS Sealion (SS-195) and the USS Sailfish (SS-192). He had earned a

Purple Heart during his time on the Sealion when he was injured during the Japanese bombardment at Cavite in the Philippines only three days after the attack at Pearl Harbor. Pappy hugged each man as they exited the pier and headed to the chapel for a brief service. The men finally hit the hay after midnight that day.

An official brief inquiry into the cause of the disaster was conducted, and the matter was expeditiously put to rest in June 1958. The First Class Electrician's Mate who had turned the rheostat the wrong way was not punished for his mistake, which was determined to be one of misunderstanding and not complacency. When the OOD had ordered up flank speed on the maneuvering bell, the other Electrician's Mate in Maneuvering said to "come off" the panel; he had determined that the ship's propulsion motors didn't have enough field current to switch to flank speed at that moment. (When switching to flank speed, the ship's batteries are converted from parallel to series wiring, and this change cannot successfully occur at insufficient amperage without tripping a breaker.) His simple phrase, "come off", had been misheard by his shipmate as "come on", and that error snowballed into the series of events that culminated in the demise of the Stickleback.

That singular miscommunication was a stark reminder how one seemingly inconsequential blunder can trigger a cascade of events resulting in the loss of an entire submarine. On a related note, that is also why submariners are trained to use the term "shut" not "close" in conjunction with valve position orders, because "close" may sound very similar to "blow" in an emergency situation.

As the 82 crewmen of the Stickleback had come to realize early on, they were no longer a team. Their submarine lay at the bottom of the Pacific, and their subsequent orders scattered them all to other Navy positions far and wide. The common experiences that they shared, culminating with the 1958 collision, stayed with each man for the duration of their careers. Many of the Stickleback survivors maintained close relationships well after their sea journeys had ended. The CO, Dutch Schulz, was cleared of any wrongdoing by the inquiry board, and he went on to become the skipper of the USS Catfish (SS-339). He died in 2006 at the age of 86 and was interred at the U.S. Naval Academy Cemetery.

The very real possibility of a dire emergency arising at any time during submarine operation explains the intensely rigorous training required for gaining qualification in submarines. The training process places particular emphasis on repetitive emergency drilling; every crewmember learns exactly what is expected of him or her in the case of a crisis. Those taking watch at any time on a submarine must know precisely what to do when things abruptly go wrong, in order to save the lives of themselves and their shipmates. "Zero mistakes" is the mantra of the Silent Service for this compelling reason.



# United States Submarine Veterans, Inc., Charleston Base

## Minutes of Business Meeting

### 11 July 2019

#### Opening Ceremonies:

The July 2019 Base Meeting was called to order by Base Commander Mike Ciesielko with a quorum of four officers and a total of 60 members present. The meeting started at 1900 with the sound of the diving alarm.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Vice Commander Mike Tom Lawson and recited by the members in attendance.

The Invocation and the Tolling of the Boats lost during the month of July was given by Base Chaplain Nick Nichols. Submarines lost during the month of July:

**USS S-28 (SS-133) July 4, 1944 – Training Exercise Lost with All Hands – 49 Souls**

**USS ROBALO (SS-273) July 26, 1944 – 3<sup>RD</sup> war patrol Lost with 77 Men – 4 Died as  
POWs – 81 Souls**

**USS GRUNNION (SS-216) July 30, 1942 – 1<sup>ST</sup> war patrol Lost with All Hands – 70 Souls  
THREE Boats and 200 Men Lost**

The USSVI Creed was read by Vice Commander Tom Lawson

Base Commander Mike Ciesielko welcomed members and guests to the meeting.

#### Introductions of New Attendees:

Two men were present at the Base meeting for the first time:

Donovan Powell – EMC – Qualified on USS Skipjack SSN585 – MAR 1989 – Also served aboard USS Simon Bolivar SSBN641G, USS Finback SSN670 and MTS635

Bill Yaeger, Jr. – ET1 – Qualified on USS L. Mendel Rivers SSN686 – OCT 1987 – Also served aboard USS Simon Bolivar SSBN641G and MTS635

#### Old Business:

Charleston Base By-Laws Amendments – Carl Chinn

Carl read and explained the Amendments for the second reading of each. The purpose and reasoning are also printed below for each amendment. Carl requested a motion to enact these amendments. Rick Wise made the motion with Ed Stank seconding. In order to maintain clarity, Base Commander Mike Ciesielko held two separate votes – one for each amendment. Both votes by the Base membership affirmed the amendments. The complete text of both are printed here:

#### **Amendment to Charleston Base Bylaws, Article V Membership**

**Purpose:** To do away with Article V, Section 2, Regular, Paragraph B.

“Anyone who is a regular member of the U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II is eligible for Regular Membership in USSVI.”

**Reasoning:** Submarine Veterans of World War II formally shut down in September 2012. Removing this paragraph from the Bylaws in no way changes our commitment to honor and cherish those brave men who have gone before us.

**Impact:** There is no financial impact on our organization. Remaining World War II submarine veterans are not affected in any way.

#### **Amendment to Charleston Base Bylaws, Article VII Officers**

**Purpose:** To amend Article VII, Section 2, Appointed, Paragraph A.

*As written:*

The following Officers will be appointed by the Base Commander:

Chief of the Boat    Public Affairs Scholarship  
Chaplain    Storekeeper Historian  
Membership Veterans Affairs    Webmaster  
Newsletter Editor/Publisher    Holland Club

*Amend to read:*

The following Officers will be appointed by the Base Commander:

Chief of the Boat	Public Affairs	Scholarship
Chaplain	Storekeeper	Recreation Committee
Membership	Special Events Coordinator	Webmaster
Newsletter Editor/ Publisher	Holland Club	

Reasoning: The positions of Recreation Committee Chair and Special Events Coordinator are a regular part of Base operations. These positions have been appointed as Officers for several years and should be added. The positions of Historian and Veterans Affairs, although important, are informational in nature and not directly responsible for Base operations and should be regarded as committees vice officers.

Impact: There is no financial impact on our organization

**New Business:**

**None**

**Secretary – Gordon Long:**

The Minutes from the June Base meeting have been published in the Base Newsletter and promulgated on the Base website. There were no other additions or deletions to the June Base meeting minutes. The minutes were approved.

**Treasurer – Gordon Williams:**

The Treasurer's Report for June has been published and promulgated on the website. There were no additions or deletions. The report was approved.

**Chaplain – Nick Nichols:**

**Highlighted boat of the month:**

**S-28 (SS 133)** was lost on July 4, 1944 with the loss of 49 crew members. She was conducting training exercises off Hawaii with the US Coast Guard Cutter Reliance. After S-28 dove for a practice torpedo approach, Reliance lost contact. No distress signal or explosion was heard. Two days later, an oil slick was found near where S-28 had dove. The exact cause of her loss still remains a mystery.

There are several shipmates and family members who have given Nick information which they wish to be kept confidential at this time.

**RM2(SS) Milton R. Berkey** departed on Eternal Patrol on July 1. Milt qualified in 1962 aboard Corsair SS/AGSS-435 and served on Cubera SS-347 and Lewis & Clark SSBN-644. He was a member of Palmetto Base. The service will be July 19 followed by internment at Fort Jackson with an escort by the American Legion Riders. Online condolence was sent.

**Joseph B. McCracken** of Ridgeville departed on Eternal Patrol on July 1. He served in the submarine service. Not a USSVI member. Online condolence was sent.

**LCDR(SS) Charles Decker, USN Ret.**, 79, departed on Eternal Patrol May 20. Not a USSVI member. Online condolence was sent.

**Doris Rash, Sonny's wife**, passed away peacefully on Monday night, July 8 at Trident Hospital. There will be a couple of Memorial services held, one at the church and another at the American Legion. Dates are pending and will be put out when known.

**George Gallagher** let me know he had a botched back operation May 18 and had a heart attack during the operation, so he went to MUSC for a stent. Now the two herniated discs are really hurting. He was scheduled for another MRI on 7-5 to see if it can be corrected.

**James Graham** and his son had a serious accident on June 28. A truck ran the red light and we hit him. He was able to turn the wheel to the right and we hit side to side. The vehicle was spun

around, flipped over and spun around more. James noticed fluid leak and, although they were upside down, he was able to get them both out of the vehicle. Injuries were seat belt bruises and glass fragments in both their bodies. They have a clean bill of health but are now having to handle the lawyers and the insurance in court. **Bob Snyder** is home with palliative care. He would like to talk to you so give him a call. His cell #: 843.412.2530. He has been able to show up at the After Battery. If there is anyone living in his area he would like to have a ride to the base meeting if possible.

**Soupy Campbell** is still healing at home. Home: 843.871.2524 Cell: 843.810.3805

**Ken Curtis** is still conducting his DAV sessions at the VA Clinic on Monday mornings even while he fights all of his health issues.

**Roy Robertson** is in NHC Rehabilitation Center in West Ashley (2230 Ashley Crossing Dr, Charleston, SC 29414). He's been there for 4 months now. Very hard to understand his speech.

**Gordon Smith's** cancer has returned. Nothing can be done at this point.

**Wanda Nelms** has been diagnosed with T-cell lymphoma and is going through chemo treatments.

**Don Londergan** is moving to Cypress Place Assisted Living (on Midland Park Rd) on Saturday.

**Jamie Feltner**, Roger Gibson's step-son, passed away on 20 June. His service was on 29 June.

We have been having very low attendance. Please check with your base shipmates to see if you can help them out with a ride to the meeting next month.

#### **Webmaster – Nick Nichols:**

Website is constantly updated.

Make use of the EVENTS page on the Charleston Base website. All events that are put out to the membership via email will be listed and updated on the events page.

There is a great blog site that you should all visit. **TheLeanSubmariner.com**

You may have noticed that you are now receiving only one email each month which contains the Treasurer's Report, the Newsletter and the past month Base minutes. If you're having problems getting this email please let me know.

#### **Submarine Veterans of WWII – George Sharf:**

We recognized Stacy Power here tonight.

#### **Social Media – Lewis Leal:**

If any member has anything that you would like posted onto the Base Facebook page, send Lou an email [social@ussvicb.org](mailto:social@ussvicb.org).

#### **Kaps for Kids – Mike Emerson for Bill Kennedy**

The next Kaps for Kids visit will be at McLeod Hospital in Florence on Tuesday, August 13.

A visit to Shriner's Hospital in Greenville is scheduled for Monday, October 7. This trip will involve staying overnight. The group will be staying at Baymont Inn & Suites. Mike has the hotel information for those who want to make this trip. When you make your reservation, be sure to mention that you are going to the Shriner's Hospital. The information about this trip will be placed on the Base website.

#### **Membership – Mike Ciesielko for Larry Knutson**

The Base currently has 280 members.

#### **VA – Tom Lawson**

Effective June 24, the VA will no longer consider net worth to be a factor when it comes to eligibility for treatment from the VA. At this time, annual income is the measurement. Service-connected disability will reduce the requirement further.

#### **Scholarship – Carl Chinn**

The committee is starting the push for next year's scholarship presentations. As such, a new raffle is in progress. It is a package of items containing:

A one-year gun range membership from ATP Gunshop

An ATP polo style shirt.

An ATP baseball cap.

An 8 LED flashlight.

A container of tannerite explosive target powder.

Tickets for the raffle are \$1 or six for \$5. The drawing will be at the August Base meeting.

The committee has some other items, including some USS George Bancroft objects, which were donated by Jenny Viering available for purchase. The prices for these vary. Please see Carl or Marty.

### **Special Events – Rick Sparger**

Not Present

### **CRAMA – Butch Bryar**

Not Present

### **NPS – Ray Sparks**

The next Nuclear Power School graduation will be on August 2.

### **Fleet Reserve Association – Skip Chilton**

The FRA Mixed Bowling League will be starting in September. Marrington Lanes – 1900 on Wednesdays. For those interested, there will be a meeting at the FRA on August 28.

There will be a Barbeque on July 13 at the FRA put on by the Tin Can Sailors.

The FRA will be holding a yard sale on July 27.

### **Public Affairs – Jerry Stout**

Nothing to Report

### **Newsletter – Rick Wise**

Nothing to Report

### **Recreation – Ed Stank**

From LCDR A.J. Wallace, he has developed an LDO/Warrant lapel pin. If interested, the cost is \$25 plus \$3 shipping. See Ed for more info.

Ed took a poll of who would be interested in attending the CITADEL/GA SOUTHERN football game on September 21. He will contact the Citadel about seating. The game will start at 1800.

### **Storekeeper – Ken Hutchison**

The FRA also has a weekly drawing.

Nothing to Report as Storekeeper.

### **COB – Joe Lunn**

Joe would like to have the next Oyster Roast in March 2020 – this time to be held at the FRA – actual date TBD.

### **Vice Commander – Tom Lawson**

The Chief Selectee Breakfast will be Wednesday, 28 August at 0600 at the Cracker Barrel in North Charleston. All SubVet Chiefs are invited to attend.

### **Base Commander – Mike Ciesielko.**

Nothing to Report

Thanked the Base Members for attending.

## Good of the Order

### **After Battery – Ray Sparks**

The After Battery is open every Wednesday. They have two good cooks. The chow is great so come on out. Ray said that he works as a mess-crank.

### **Gun Club – Mike Ciesielko**

Nothing to Report

### **Nuclear Historian – Rick Carlson**

A Nuclear News Flash!!!

The era of the **41 For Freedom** is officially coming to an end. The **USS Daniel Webster** and the **USS Sam Rayburn** are going the way of the manual typewriter and the IBM Selectric. The Navy is replacing them with two “newer” boats – The **USS San Francisco** and the **USS La Jolla** (both, which are also older decom units.)

But now the rest of the story!

The USS San Francisco, having just completed a shipyard overhaul and received a new reactor core job was on her first deployment and was steaming just off Guam – flank speed at 500 feet (I don't recall what the limits are to remain within the safe operating envelope). This was in January 2005. She hit an underwater mountain. She made it to the surface with propulsion. Her EMBT blow was ineffective since MBT 1, 2 and 3 being mangled, multiple personnel injured and one man dead. She limped into Guam staying on the surface using the Low Pressure Blower continuously for several days. Her main deck (Topside) was just barely out of the water; her sonar dome and bow were crushed. MBT1 and 2 were destroyed and MBT 3 was also damaged, but could hold some air. The torpedo tube and shutter door area were destroyed along with the sonar sphere.

To make a long story short, the thought to decom the San Francisco was highly considered due to the extensive damage to the ship. The damage was to the entire forward part of the ship.

At the same time, the USS Honolulu was getting ready for decom, due to the fact that she had not had an overhaul or core change and dollars were tight. The Honolulu was a one-of-a-kind off shoot with several experimental items onboard. She had split stern planes and split hydraulics to them and other mods throughout the boat. Many things were given consideration, but the final thought was to use the Honolulu as a donor boat and to cut off the entire bow of the San Francisco and replace it with the entire bow from the Honolulu. This first-of-a-kind option was chosen and both ships were taken to the shipyard and the removal of both forward sections and the installation of the Honolulu forward section was performed. According to the engineers, it was a nightmare.

The Honolulu was officially decommissioned. The San Francisco returned to service and operated for several years until the San Fran-Lulu was decommissioned and removed from active operational service. She has been undergoing the transformation to a training MTS for the last three years.

So, you ask, “Why the San Francisco at NNPTC?”

Well, consider this: The Chief of Naval Operations is to retire 1 August 2019; who had been the head of Naval Reactors and also, the head of all submarines (COMSUBLANT) is the one who made this choice. His name is Admiral John Richardson.

His first at-sea command, he was Commanding Officer of ----- USS HONOLULU!!!

And NOW you know – the rest of the story!!

A bit of military humor:

Olney, the smoothest talking Norwegian in the Minnesota National Guard got called up to Active Duty. Olney's first assignment was in the Military Induction Center. Because he was a good talker, they assigned him the duty of advising new recruits about government benefits – especially the G.I. Life Insurance to which they were entitled. The Officer In Charge soon noticed that Olney was getting a 99 percent sign-up rate for the more expensive supplemental form of G.I. insurance. This was remarkable, because it cost these low income recruits \$30 per month for the higher coverage compared to what the government was already providing at no charge. The officer decided to sit in the back of the room and observe Olney's sales pitch. Olney sat up in front of the latest group of inductees and said, 'If you have the normal G.I. insurance and you go to Afghanistan and get yourself killed, the government pays your beneficiaries \$20,000. If you take out the supplemental insurance, it costs you \$30 per month, then, the government pays your beneficiaries \$200,000.'

"Now," Olney concluded, "Which bunch ya think they're gonna send to Afghanistan first?"

### **Drawings & Auctions**

FRA Drawing – Steve Morris

Depth Charge – Bill Narowski

### **Closing Ceremony**

Nick Nichols led the group in a prayer of Benediction.

Base Commander Mike Ciesielko announced adjournment of the meeting followed by three blasts on the diving alarm.

The meeting was closed at 1956.

## **FOR SALE**

Charleston Base members who have items they wish to sell may send me the information for inclusion in the newsletter. Items will run for three issues or until I'm notified by the person submitting the ad that it is no longer needed.

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