

A WWII SUBVET'S PRESPECTIVE OF THE ANNUAL KINGS BAY SUBMARINE VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL SERVICE

On November 3, 4 and 5th, Lois and I were at the Naval Submarine Base, Kings Bay, GA. This is located in the town of Saint Mary's, GA about thirty five miles north of Jacksonville, FL. This is the east coast submarine base for the larger of the nuclear submarines - the boomers! From here they depart on their undersea patrol and remain submerged until they return. Patrols usually last 60 days, but could be longer depending on the circumstances.

Each year this Naval Submarine Base puts on a Memorial Service where they honor all World War Two submarine veterans - living and those on Eternal Patrol. The ceremony is very impressive and does justice to the living and especially those on Eternal Patrol.

Last year in attendance were 65 WWII submarine veterans. While this year there were 45 in attendance. A few had health problems and could not attend and the others got their orders to go on Eternal Patrol. Many were accompanied by a son or daughter.

Looking at the nuclear submarine navy to me is looking at a 1930 Model T and a 2011 Cadillac. WWII submarines - at their best were 311 feet long and had an 18 foot beam. The boomer submarine is 560 feet long (almost two football fields), with a beam of 45 feet and a height of four stores (44 feet). We had one deck and they have four - we had very little fresh water and they pump fresh water overboard as they make too much. We got a short shower, if we were lucky, about every three weeks. They can bathe as often as desired. They wear fresh clothing every day while our clothing had to stand up by themselves before we changed. Everything on our diesel boat was coated with diesel fumes. You dipped oil off your coffee before drinking or if you needed a laxative you just consumed coffee and oil! A diesel boat submariner never got away from the smell of diesel. It was like you used a diesel based cologne - nuclear boats only have a fresh oxygen smell - no stink. I don't know how they stand it!

Oh yes, they also have all the oxygen they can breathe, while we diesel boat sailors often got to where even a match would not burn for the lack of oxygen. We could go about 17 hours, with using CO2 absorbent and bleeding oxygen into the boat from the few oxygen tanks we carried. If you have not been there you can't realize how weak you get when you cannot get a decent breath of oxygen into your lungs. A very simple task becomes a climb up Mount Everest.

A nuclear submarine has a machine that takes in salt water and produces fresh water and oxygen - as much as they want! Diesel boats could not take anything out of salt water - not even the smell of diesel fumes!

Lois and I were berthed in a suite at the Gateway Hotel, which is on the submarine base. It was a deluxe suite, complete with kitchen, living room, bedroom and bath. Plenty of closets, drawers and all the other things that make a trip enjoyable. Might add that the price was \$50.00 a day - no taxes!

For breakfast we ate at the Base Galley - breakfast cost us \$4.60 for two. Folks, you could not have gone to the best of best cafeterias and found more food or nicer furnishing. The decor was first class, the server's attitude towards us was outstanding and I can't begin to tell you about all the extras. We were served on china platters, excellent silver and no paper or plastic cups anywhere. We also ate Saturday Brunch there at the cost of \$4.20 a person. Our group almost cleaned out the dessert case.

A number of our friends, who are submariners also attended. Hop and Carol Hopkins, Luke and Linda Riley, Charlie Cross and his son, Jeff, David and Henri Dalke and quite a few of my shipmates from the Nathaniel Greene Submarine Base in North Carolina.

We were given three banquet dinners. One night a barbecue dinner; the following night a steak dinner and the next night a "low country boil." The barbecue dinner was held at the Cumberland Inn & Suites and was put on by the hosts. The steak dinner was at the Chief Petty Officer's Club (Goat Locker) and the steaks covered the plate. The Low Country Boil was put on by the Eagles. It was at their Club House in Saint Mary's. Shrimp, corn on the cob, potatoes, rhubarb, carrots, onions and other items are steamed and then brought into the Club House where a large galvanized trough is set up and its all dumped into the trough. Yep - we did eat alike pigs as it was gooood!

At the steak dinner I sat across from two WWII sailors who came from Alabama. In the talking it got around to what boats (submarine) did you ride. The one sitting across from me said, the Boarfish. Well.....I was 16 when I was in the commissioning crew of the USS Boarfish SS-327 and made the first two war patrols on her. This was the second submarine sailors that I have met that also served on the Boarfish since I left her in 1945. The other one was Basil Simms and he and I met in Jacksonville in the 70's for lunch. Shortly thereafter Basil went on Eternal Patrol. What a nice small world this turned out to be.

The Nuclear Submarine Navy gives the WWII submarine veterans the credit for setting the work standards, the crew loyalty, the "can do" attitude, which they have carried over to the nuclear submarine navy. To the nuclear submarine Navy the WWII submarine sailor is a real hero. Thus - they honor them every year and will continue as long as there is a US Submarine Navy.

We were given a luncheon after the Memorial Service and a tour of the Nuclear Submarine Training Center. Watching the diving trainer go up and down was giving some a quezy stomach. In WWII a torpedo was 21 inches in diameter. A boomer missile is well over six feet in diameter and the WWII torpedo had a warhead of 600 pounds of torpex. Just one boomer missile carries more explosive power than all the explosives used in WWII, including the two atomic bombs. And these nukes carry 24 of them!

Do not ever get the crew of a boomer submarine mad at you!!!! They are out there 24/7 every day of the year protecting your freedom.

At the Memorial Service we had several guest speakers. The Camden County High School sang the National Anthem, God Bless America and God Bless the USA. Most of the audience was singing along with them. The Reading of the Boats, where the names of all 52 submarines sunk during WWII were called and the tolling of the bell after each name. It was also told when and where each submarine was sunk (if known).

A large wreath was placed at the Memorial site, a gun salute and the playing of Taps. The program ended with the High School singing the Navy Hymn.

During the service the WWII Submarine Vets sat in the front rows. Some needed assistance to stand, some were on oxygen and some could not stand but all were in their splendid "submarine vest" decorated with many patches and names of submarines served on. Look around and you could see a patch for every submarine event that ever happen depicted. It was a real history lesson to a student of history concerning WWII.

I was certainly impressed. The time spent to make this happening go over in the excellent manner, the friendship, the light up look in the eyes when they shook hands with a WWII submarine vet. The fact that a WWII vet did not pay for any of the banquets or lunch served. I had to pay \$70.00 for all the events for Lois and she was respected as much as I at every event.

One other thing - security. The security of this nuclear submarine base was tight and I mean tight. We had filled out forms months ago so that a background check could be done. Once we were cleared we had to have a photo ID each time we moved into the Base. Large barriers were placed as well as heavy cables so that no vehicle could run into the base. In addition large metal plates were imbedded in the roads so that with one push of a button not even a tank could get through. Security was impressive and we were impressed.

It was just an outstanding event and we will be there next year (good Lord willing).

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