

Submarine veterans get new group



ABOUT VETERANS

In the early 1930s, the submarine service of the United States Navy averaged about 80 boats, manned by about 500 officers and a few thousand enlisted sailors.

By the end of World War II, 250 American submarines had seen service in the Pacific War. These submarines were manned by 16,000 American sailors. They were all volunteers.

We lost 52 submarines and about 3,500 sailors in the Pacific War. They and those who lived through the war wrote a magnificent chapter in offensive naval warfare.

Submariners were less than 2 percent of all naval personnel in the Pacific Theater; yet these few men sank about 55 percent of the Japanese merchant fleet and 35 percent of the Imperial Japanese Navy, including two of its last aircraft carriers. It is a record that none of the other services can match.

A new group for veteran submariners — the Nathanael Greene Submarine Veterans Base — has sailed into Greensboro. It is one of the proudest and most accomplished groups ever to fight under the American flag.

To learn more about this new organization, contact Jim Myers, vice commander of Nathanael Greene Base, at 595-8616.

Submarine warfare came of age during World War II, and some veterans of that war and our following wars have established a new base for all veterans of the "silent service."

I was honored to be invited to attend the inaugural luncheon ceremony for this new veterans group at the Cardinal Country Club.

Sixty-three former submariners along with 21 wives and another eight or so guests attended. It was a dynamic event and the drive of these veterans merely replicated what they showed during our several wars: These are exceptional people, goal-oriented and self-starters. All were volunteers for submarine duty, one of the most hazardous of all military posts — and the country is lucky to have men like these.

In addition to sinking enemy vessels, submarines were positioned at intervals along the route back from Japan to American air bases in the Mariana Islands. They could assist a Navy flier, disabled in combat with



Myers

the enemy; or a B-29 bomber, an engine (or engines) shot out in a raid over Japan and forced to ditch in the huge Pacific. By the end of the war, American submarines had rescued more than 500 Army and Navy aircrew, men who surely would have been lost if it were not for American submarines.

In the years after World War II, a group of submarine veterans of the war decided to organize a group for those who had served on submarines during the war. The first meeting was in 1955 and they slowly grew as a national organization.

In 1973, the Tarheel Chapter was chartered in North Carolina. Four bases had already been formed in the state when their fifth base, the Nathanael Greene base, was chartered on Aug. 10, 2010. These five bases are part of the national organization with more than 13,000 members.

At the luncheon, my tablemates were all veteran submariners. John Trubee from Rush, N.Y., served aboard the USS Nathanael Greene, SSBN 636, and the USS Francis Scott Key, SSBN 657. Chaplain Bill Whelen, from Cary, served aboard the USS Brill, SS 530. George Bass, Salisbury, served aboard the USS Boarfish, SS327. Ray Moore, Statesville, was aboard the USS Bang, SS 385 and the USS Francis Scott Key, SSBN 657; Joe Clark, Greensboro, served on the

USS Bream, SS 243.

The submariners at the meeting were asked to stand and say a few words. Each veteran proudly listed the exact name and number of the submarine or submarines on which he had served.

The keynote speaker was Terry Gentry, commander of the submarine Nathanael Greene from 1973 to 1976. He credited those who had been on submarines during WWII for having set the standards upon which the later American force was based. He noted these talented men understood they could survive only if every man on the ship performed his duties by the book.

The crews are the heart of the ship. They formed bonds that have endured over generations. This legacy has been passed down from WWII through the years to those currently manning our nation's submarines.

The captain made three more points in his brief remarks. The Revolutionary War hero for which this new submarine base is named, Nathanael Greene, was the best combat general during the war; he was a fighting general, and it was he who was largely responsible for our winning the Revolution.

The legacy of a fighting leader was passed on and best exemplified by the fighting submariners of WWII. This precept has been the guiding force for America's submarines. They defeated

both hardship and hazard; they helped win the war.

Gentry noted that the Nathanael Greene is no good in the water by itself — it is just a lot of high-tech steel. What makes this a fighting vessel and a huge factor in our national defense is the crew. Submarine crews are outstanding people and technicians, able to function under pressure.

Gentry said he never had to drive the crew. He simply made known what needed to be done, and the crew responded even better than the job called for. That is high praise.



If you will send me the names of any veterans who have died in 2010, it will be an honor for this veterans column to remember them in the last column of the year. Please include the veteran's full name; which war they were part of; branch of service (Army, Navy, Marines, etc.); rank (Sergeant, Petty Officer, Lieutenant, etc.); and your name and telephone number. Write me before Nov. 30.

Ned Harrison, a veteran of World War II, wants to hear from veterans of all our nation's wars. Send your war stories and observations to: Ned Harrison, News & Record, P. O. Box 20848, Greensboro, NC 27420. Send e-mail to: vetspeak@earthlink.net