

The article below is about the 2008 memorial service at Kings Base that was featured in the base's newspaper "The Periscope." On the front page which has a picture of the WWII Subvets in attendance this year, Bill Morris, Joe Ritter, and Bill Whelan are in the picture. The other page continues the story on page 7 of the newspaper, Bill Morris has a good looking plate of barbecue.

World War II sub vets ashore for reunion

By MCSN Eric Tretter
Periscope Staff

Last week, World War II and Cold War submarine veterans began trickling in to Camden County. Wearing blue-and-black vests covered with patches identifying their former bases and boats of origins, the veterans shared stories and embraced memories of times gone by in submariner history.

"This is one of their happiest times," said John Crouse, manager of The St. Marys Submarine Museum. "They all love getting together, and this is the second or third largest event in the country. We have them come from all over, so they get to see shipmates they haven't seen for years."

As World War II submarine veteran Bill Castleberry Jr. put it, "I have shipmates that are still living like me. You never forget them, and they don't forget you."

The weekly calendar of events included several SSBN boat tours, Thursday's breakfast at the NSB Kings Bay Galley, a golf tournament, Friday's World War II Memorial Service followed by Trident Training Facility Tour and plenty of socializing thrown into the mix.

"We have 67 registered WW II vets," Crouse said. "We also have the Cold War guys, so there are a lot of 50s- and 60s-year boats and nuclear boats from the 60s and 70s, along with their families."

The festivities were centered around the service held Friday at the Submarine Veterans of World War II Memorial Pavilion in front of Trident Training Facility.

"Our boats in comparison would be like a Model-T Ford to a Rolls Royce."

Bill Castleberry Jr.
WW II sub veteran

The formal ceremony featured remarks and speeches from Kings Bay's various command leaders and singing by the Kingsland Elementary School Choir.

Capt. John Stewart, Commanding Officer of Trident Refit Facility, and Capt. Steve Davito, Commanding

Officer of Trident Training Facility, read aloud the names of the 52 U.S. submarines lost during World War II as CMDCM (SS) Andy Crider, Command Master Chief of Submarine Squadron 16, and Kings Bay SUBVET Base Commander MTCM (SS) Donald Racquer (retired) were responsible for the Tolling of the Bell in remembrance of each.

Though the ceremonies and festivities are meaningful for these men, it is the sharing of experiences that garners the true excitement of the veterans. Here are just a taste of the personalities and stories floating around Camden County last week.

Bill Castleberry Jr. found his interests in U.S. Navy submarines from 1930s pulp magazine stories about German U-Boats. He spent much of World War II aboard submarines and much of the past week in front of a crowd, here and seen praising military medical personnel at the Wounded Warriors Day in St. Marys. He fondly remembers the Pharmacist's Mate who aided him during the war.

"I had an air-locked door open on my heel as I was walking away from it — there should've been a rubber gasket on the bottom of it. Almost severed the tendon," he said.

"Old Doc Prothro, he numbed it, opened it, and that's when he found out the condition of the tendon. But he repaired that and saved me from being crippled for life."

Injury and recovery aside, Castleberry still managed to ride three submarines and make nine patrols during the war.

When asked about the differences between boats then and now, Castleberry said, "I



Bill Castleberry participated in the reunion and Wounded Warriors Day.

would hate to have to qualify on one because of the technical items they have to cope with that we didn't have. Our boats in comparison would be like a Model-T Ford to a Rolls Royce. It's a different Navy, but either like submarines or you don't."

Three men are responsible for the life, death and, a'hem, burial of the USS Barbero (SS/A/G-317). Rather, Paul "Ken" Rash (left) commissioned her in

1944. Mike Adams (center) was aboard for de-commissioning in the summer of '64 and Kent "Spider" Khuens (right) was part of the crew that sent her out for target practice for the USS Greenfish, sending Barbero to her resting place deep beneath the Pacific north far from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Khuens explained how he was a member of the five-man team — an engineman, electrician, auxiliaryman, quartermaster and an officer — who took the Barbero out and put it on remote control.

"A submarine rescue vessel pulled alongside, and we jumped on board that ship," he said. "The rescue vessel moved out about a mile or two, and then the Greenfish fired the torpedo that hit the Barbero but didn't sink her though. From what I understand, they dropped bombs, fired rockets

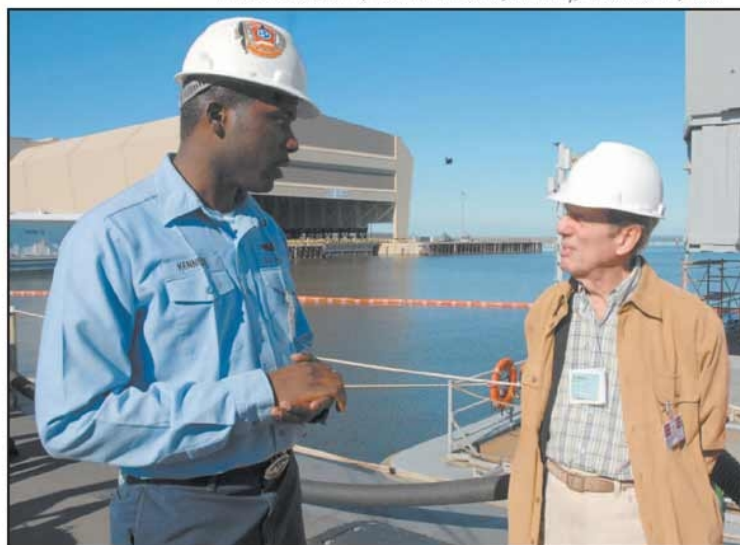


Nearly 50 World War II submarine veterans stand near the Submarine Veterans of World War II Memorial Pavilion.

Photos By MCSN Eric Tretter



World War II submarine veteran William G. Morris searches for a seat at the Naval Submarine Support Center barbecue Nov. 6 at the Kingsland Ramada Inn.



Albert Cabana chats with a Sailor during his visit to Kings Bay for the World War II submarine veterans' reunion.

Sea stories abound as vets gather to remember old friends

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and dropped hedgehogs, and she wouldn't go down."

Eventually, 5-inch shells from a destroyer did the deed, though Rash seems to take great pride in the Barbero's stubbornness.

"She was a great boat," he said with a smile. "We had a great skipper and a great crew. We made two war patrols and had to be towed back because we took two aerial bombs real close aboard aft and goofed up our reduction gear. We came back on one screw. Those skippers during World War II really took care of their crew."

The three men met by chance over the course of the week, and all have fond if varied memories of their USS Barbero experiences.

Pete Sococo said he waited until 1965 to get married

because of the 31 years of Navy service.

A native of Guam, Sococo spent the better part of World War II on a record 16 patrols, the only submariner to do so many during the war.

"The funny thing about being on board a submarine, when you got on board the first thing they try to do is qualify you because, hey, when something happens to a sub and they're out in the ocean you can't call the Coast Guard," he said. "You're going to have to do the best you can for your life, your crew and your boat, too."

Sococo spent nine months after the war teaching the Turkish Navy how to run four former U.S. Navy submarines. From his Navy experience Sococo said, "I'm 87 years old, and every time I see all these young kids I say, go for it man



Rash



Adams



Khuens



Sococo

and study hard boy because it's a lot different type of ball game!"

Of his many years of Naval service, coupled with meeting

and greeting a variety shipmates from different years, Sococo said, "I've got a couple of those shipmates that are down here now, and I never forget, they say, 'damn that Pete Sococo is still looking the same!'"

He said hard work is the key to maintaining a young disposition.

World War II submarine veteran, Albert Cabana stood topside of the USS Tennessee (SSBN-734) as YN3 William Kennedy served as tour guide.

The last time Cabana set foot aboard a boat was under unusual circumstances, approximately 40 years ago, aboard his World War II boat, the USS Sea Cat (SS/AGSS-399).

"We were out fishing off St. Pete Beach (St. Petersburg, Fla.) and my buddy I was fishing with said, 'take a look over

there, I think I see a periscope,' and I said, 'oh that's impossible.' So I looked over and sure enough, there was a submarine surfacing and out of the side there was a huge 399 which was the number that commissioned my Sea Cat," Cabana said. The commanding officer then offered Cabana a tour upon reaching port.

"I think it's a 180 degrees difference," Cabana said when asked about changes between the Tennessee and his Sea Cat.

"The Sea Cat for me was a complicated thing to qualify on, but I can't imagine how the boys on this boat would ever get qualified with all the equipment and the amount of wiring and the different departments they have on the sub. It's absolutely incredible."

Cabana had the pleasure to be aboard the Sea Cat as she pulled into Tokyo Bay for the signing of the Japanese surrender, Sept. 2, 1945, officially ending World War II.