



FLAMIN' CAIMAN TALES

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JANUARY 2019

COMMANDER'S SCUTTLEBUTT

Christmas season has just passed, and I hope that Santa comforted all CAIMAN shipmates, families and friends!!

This past October, nine CAIMAN Sailors along with their adult supervisors and friends took a seven-day USSVI Caribbean cruise out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. We traveled to Jamaica, Grand Cayman Islands and Cozumel, Mexico. An outstanding time was had by our group of USSVI Submarine Veterans. We learned this at the banquet – words that are downright impossible for a submariner to say when thoroughly intoxicated: 1. No thanks I'm married; 2. Nope. No more booze for me; 3. Sorry, but you're not really my type; 4. No thanks, I'm not hungry; 5. I'm not interested in fighting you; 6. Thank you, but I won't make any attempt to dance. I have no coordination and would hate to look like a real fool; and 7 Oh no, I must be going home now as I must work in the morning. If any of this ring a bell, then you are in for a 2.8% Trump pay increase this next year. My best, John "Yeo" Fagereng, Commander

SUB VETS CONVENTION CRUISE

There were nine CAIMAN sailors and another 491 Sub Vets that attended the 2018 Sub Vets Convention Caribbean cruise. I sent an email to the Editor of the, "American Submariner", the USSVI magazine, stating that CAIMAN had nine crewmembers in attendance and we believe we had the most for any diesel boat. A boomer may have had more crewmembers at the convention, but they have two crews. On the diesels all crewmembers went to sea every time the boat did. I did not add but wanted to add that boomer sailors are part-time sailors. I received an answer from the editor and my letter will be in the January issue. I am curious if there will be any response from other boats.

ALASKA EARTHQUAKE

CAIMANITES Jim O'Toole and Clete Boyer live in Alaska and so does Ding's, (our Vice Commander) daughter and family. We are all glad to hear that they all came through just fine and only had minor damage such as broken windows to their homes. It's Deja Vu as CAIMANITE Bill Bales was living in Anchorage, Alaska in 1964 during the 9.1 mega-earthquake. He moved to California after that.

LOCATIONS

We have CAIMAN sailors in 44 of the 50 states and one in South Korea. California leads with 92 CAIMANITES, Washington is next with 45. Oregon beats Florida by one at 25. The last of the top five is Texas at 21. There are six states without CAIMAN sailors, don't you feel sorry for them. They are Delaware, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Dakota, Rhode Island and Vermont. Since there are 66 on our lost list those six states still have chance to become privileged like the other states

USS THRESHER MEMORIAL

U.S. senators from three New England states recently wrote a letter urging Secretary of the Army Mark Esper to consider the USS Thresher Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Project. This would establish a monument honoring the 129 men who perished aboard the submarine USS Thresher. The USS Thresher sank off the coast of New England April 10, 1963. The submarine was built and maintained at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME), Angus King (I-ME), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) wrote the recent letter asking for commemoration of the 16 officers, 96 sailors and 17 civilians who lost their lives when the Thresher sank during a post-maintenance sea trial dive.

"As we pass the 55th anniversary since we lost the Thresher, we believe a memorial at Arlington National Cemetery would be a fitting tribute to its legacy," the senators wrote. "We believe a memorial to the USS Thresher would reflect the Arlington National Cemetery's long legacy as a national shrine and a 'living history of freedom...where dignity and honor rest in solemn repose.' This memorial would serve not only to honor the sacrifice of those that lost their lives but as a reminder of the dangers that all submariners face when they volunteer for duty."

In response to the Thresher tragedy, the U.S. Navy instituted a new program to ensure the health and safety of U.S. submarines, establishing the Submarine Safety and Quality Assurance Program. SUBSAFE is one of the world's most comprehensive military safety programs and has helped provide maximum protection for Navy crews. No SUBSAFE certified submarine has ever been lost. In Kittery, Maine, the flagpole at the traffic circle stands as a Thresher memorial.

MEDICARE PART B UPDATE

The Social Security Administration recently announced that the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will raise benefits by 2.8% for 2019. The average retirement benefit of \$1,400 will increase by \$39.20 per month, to \$1,439.20. The Medicare Part B premium increase for 2019 will be \$135.50 per month — just \$1.50 per month more than the \$134 in 2018. The COLA, the highest in 7 years, and a low Medicare Part B premium increase, should mean most retirees can finally expect a modest boost in net Social Security benefits.

Two million retirees receiving Social Security benefits of less than \$600 per month in 2018, won't see an increase after the deduction for their Medicare Part B premiums. Part B premiums will increase by more than \$1.50, for this group of retirees because they are paying less than the current Part B premium of \$134 today. This is because of the Social Security "hold harmless" provision. **Ed note: Military retired pay and VA disability pay will increase by the same 2.8 percentage.**

REUNION

Dings and I will be traveling to Albuquerque, New Mexico in April or May to plan the 2020 reunion. This will be CAIMAN's ninth reunion. Time flies when you are having fun. We have four hotels interested in hosting our reunion. We will check out the hotels plus we will sample the local restaurants. The next newsletter will have the information on the hotel that will be the lucky one that will get to host our next reunion.

ARGENTINE SUBMARINE FOUND

A submarine that went missing over a year ago together with 44 crewmen aboard has been found, the Argentinian navy has reported.

The ARA San Juan submarine disappeared on Nov. 15 last year sparking an international search operation assisted by the United States and other countries. The discovery of the sub was announced just days after families of the missing sailors held a one-year commemoration when Argentinian President Mauricio Macri promised the families that he will find "the truth" about the submarine.

The submarine was detected more than 2,600 feet deep in the waters off the Valdes Peninsula in Argentine Patagonia, the navy's statement said.

It said the navy made a "positive identification" by a remote-operated submersible belonging to American ship Ocean Infinity, which famously was involved in the hunt for MH370 plane.

Navy spokesman Rodolfo Ramallo said the discovery was made thanks to the company that "decided to do a new search and, thanks to God, it was able to find the zone," according to [Sky News](#).

"Now another chapter opens. From the analysis of the state in which the submarine has been found, we will see how to proceed," he said.

Oscar Aguad, Argentina's defense minister, said later that the navy lacks the submersibles with "modern technology" capable of rescuing the sub from the seabed. He said officials still need to determine the next steps.

The government of Argentina gave up on finding the sailors alive after the intense search, but the efforts to locate the vessel continued.

It remains unclear what exactly happened to the submarine and why it lost contact on its return to its base in the coastal city of Mar del Plata a year ago.

The navy previously stated that the captain of the vessel reported – the same day as the vessel went missing – that water entered the snorkel and caused one of the sub's batteries to short-circuit, though the issue was said to be fixed at the time.

An explosion was later detected at the place where the sub was last heard, potentially caused by a "concentration of hydrogen" and the problem caused by the battery.

The missing vessel was a German-built diesel-electric TR-1700 class submarine commissioned in the 1980s. It was refitted between 2008 and 2014, costing around \$12 million.

Experts say that such upgrades are risky as they require cutting the submarine in half and integrating different systems produced by various manufacturers. A small mistake in the process could lead to fatal consequences to the vessel and the crew aboard.

CALIFORNIA FIRES

The recent fires in California have had a major effect on one CAIMANITE that we know of. Bill Bales and his wife were evacuated from Paradise. A fire fighter friend of Bills went to their house after the fire passed through his neighborhood and found Bill's house along with three other houses were the only ones left.

BLUE WATER NAVY

The "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299) has passed the House unanimously (382-0) and now is in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee awaiting a vote. The proposal would clarify that service members serving off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict and those serving near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Korea have a presumption for filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for ailments associated with exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide. The legislation will also extend health care, vocational training, rehabilitation and monetary allowance to a child who was born with spina bifida if at least one of the child's parents served in Thailand between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 and had been exposed to an herbicide agent during that period. The bill also now includes changes and improvements to VA's home loan program.

Ed note: hope for the best.

ETERNAL PATROL

We have lost shipmates and friends again. I wish I could leave this article out of our newsletter. This is another reminder that reunions are becoming very important. Helle, Arvid TMSN(SS) (45/46) 3 January 2018
McKenzie, William CAPT (49/51) 8 November 2018
Whitwell, Ivan P. ENC(SS) (64/70) 16 December 2018
Ehrnschwender, David CS3(SS) (68/71) 3 Dec. 2018
Sailor rest your oars.

SAILING LIST

As you can see the number that is increasing is not what we hope for. Although unavoidable, it is becoming apparent that we are a fading group. Reunions are our chance to see shipmates, reminisce about the good old times and meet other shipmates.

Sailing List:	1353
Hopefully at the next reunion:	475
Eternal Patrol:	878
Lost List:	66

"May God grant there will be no World War III; but, if there is, whether it be fought with the weapons we know or with weapons at whose type we can only guess, submarines and submariners will be in the thick of the combat, fighting with skill, determination, and matchless daring for all of us and for our United States of America." Charles A. Lockwood, Vice Admiral USN Retired, veteran WWI and WWII.

MAINTENANCE BACKLOG RESULTS IN COSTLY DELAYS IN RETURNING SUBMARINES TO THE FLEET

[Julianne Stanford](#), Kitsap Sun Published 6:33 p.m. PT Nov. 27, 2018

The Navy has spent more than \$1.5 billion in the past decade to support the operating costs for submarines that idly sat in the water, all while the Navy's four shipyards worked through a backlog of delayed maintenance availabilities.

A number of the fleet's fast attack submarines have collectively spent more than 10,600 days pierside, waiting to start or complete a maintenance availability since 2008, according to [a recently released report](#) from the Government Accountability Office.

The Navy would foot the bill for the operating costs of those vessels — including crew salaries. But whether they were deployed or waiting for maintenance at the shipyard, the delays meant the submarines were unable to perform missions.

"Without addressing this challenge, the Navy risks continued expenditure of operating and support funding to crew, maintain, and support attack submarines that provide no operational capability because they are delayed in getting into an out of maintenance," the report said.

Overall, it costs the Navy about \$9 billion a year to operate and sustain the 51 commissioned nuclear-powered fast attack submarines in the fleet, which includes 33 Los Angeles-class submarines, 15 Virginia-class submarines and three Seawolf-class submarines.

Fast-attack submarines are among some of the Navy's most sought-after assets because their "stealthy nature provides an asymmetric advantage for gathering intelligence undetected and, due to their nuclear power, allows for prolonged underwater operations with few practical limits," according to the report.

Most of the fleet's fast-attack submarines are homeported at bases in Connecticut, Hawaii, Virginia, California and Guam. All three of the Navy's Seawolf-class fast-attack submarines are homeported at Naval Base Kitsap, near where they receive maintenance at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

The USS Jimmy Carter has been homeported at Bangor since 2005. The USS Seawolf and USS Connecticut have been homeported in Bremerton since 2007.

The report found the majority of delays resulted from depot-level maintenance periods, which requires entering one of the Navy's often-backlogged shipyards, like PSNS.

A similar [GAO report published in September 2017](#) found systemic facility restoration and maintenance backlogs across all four Navy-owned shipyards had resulted in more than 13,000 lost operational days for the fleet's aircraft carriers and submarines of all classes after their maintenance availabilities could not be completed on time.

Within the past decade, the Navy has spent more than an estimated \$350 million to support the Kitsap-based fast-attack submarines as they waited to either start or complete a maintenance availability at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, according to the report.

The three Seawolf-class subs have collectively waited more than 1,600 days to complete work packages that had fallen behind schedule. Combined, they have sat idle for almost 80 days as they waited to enter dry dock.

At the average estimated daily cost of more than \$205,000 to operate, Seawolf-class submarines were the most expensive vessels for the Navy to support per day during a delayed maintenance period compared with Los Angeles-class or Virginia-class submarines, the GAO found.

Maintenance projects on those vessels often ran into unforeseen roadblocks after they got underway, according to Naval Sea Systems Command spokesman Bill Couch.

The resulting delays were "due to higher-priority work leading to a lack of available resources, along with growth and new work in excess of the original plan," Couch said.

The Seawolf's first major depot-level maintenance period, which began in September 2009, ran almost 20 months behind schedule. It was completed in April 2012.

The Seawolf is once again laid up in the shipyard after delays arose during the course of the submarine's current dry dock maintenance period that began in October 2015. The availability will likely be completed next month, Couch said.

At that rate, the project will be more than two years behind the schedule of its original estimated completion date of July 2016, according to the Navy's fiscal year 2019 budget.

The next submarine in the Seawolf-class, the Connecticut, entered the shipyard for its first major maintenance period in July 2012. By the time its work package was completed in November 2016, the project had run almost 32 months longer than what the Navy planned.

The last dry dock period for the Jimmy Carter — the third and final submarine in the Seawolf class — ran more than eight months behind schedule after it began in September 2013. It was completed in October 2014.

The delays to that particular project resulted because of the "one-of-a-kind maintenance program" required for the specialty sub, which has unique modifications to support special operations missions and intelligence-gathering operations, Couch said.

The Jimmy Carter once again entered the shipyard for dry-dock maintenance in July. The work package is scheduled for completion in January 2020, according to the Navy's budget.

Solutions to resolve the backlog

If the maintenance delays continue unaddressed, the GAO estimates that Navy will spend another \$266 million to support idle fast attack submarines during the next five years.

One possible solution to addressing the backlog would be for the Navy to consider passing along of the fleet's fast-attack submarine maintenance needs to private shipyards with greater frequency.

The report recommends the Navy should conduct a business-case analysis that takes a closer look at the maintenance workload allocation between the Navy's public shipyards and private ventures, including an assessment of the costs and risks associated with allowing submarines sitting idle versus passing along some of the workload to private-sector counterparts.

Shipbuilders like General Dynamics Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding, which manufacture nuclear-powered fast-attack submarines for the Navy, already provide depot-level maintenance for those vessels as needed on a case-by-case basis. Going forward, those shipyards could be a viable solution to working through maintenance backlog for vessels of that class, the report suggested.

The report found that the Navy has shifted an estimated 8 million man-hours of maintenance on fast-attack submarines to private shipyards during the past five years, but "has done so sporadically, having decided to do so in some cases only after experiencing lengthy periods of idle time," according to the report.

In one extreme case, the Los Angeles-class submarine USS Boise was scheduled to undergo maintenance at Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia in 2013, but the Navy had to push back the work package's start date due to shipyard's heavy workload. As such, the Boise's certificate to safely dive the submarine expired in 2016 and the crew has sat idle pier side since.

The Navy awarded a contract to the private shipyard Huntington-Ingalls to perform the required maintenance in October 2017, but by the time the Boise enters the company's shipyard in January, it will have idled for more than 960 days.

The GAO also recommended the Navy continue to work toward addressing workforce shortages and a facility restoration backlog found at all found shipyards, as detailed in the organization's September 2017 report.

In the year since then, the Navy has already started to take steps to alleviate those problems.

Almost 1,500 new employees have started working at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in the past year since that report came out, according to shipyard spokesman J.C. Mathews.

In the past decade, the PSNS' workforce has surged from almost 9,500 employees to the current workforce of more than 14,000 employees.