



USS Sunfish (SSN-649)



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Fall 2006



Reunion 2006

Norfolk, Virginia

The USS Sunfish Reunion was another smashing success: seeing old friends from your time on the boat and new friends you have met at the reunions over the past few years, and telling the same old lies makes our get togethers the most fun you have all year!

Tours of Colonial Williamsburg and the Williamsburg Winery kicked off the reunion activities. Friday was filled with the tour of the USS Wisconsin, BB-64, and a memorial service held at the Lone Sailor Park. The moving memorial service included the reading of those shipmates names that we have lost and, in a true Sunfish family way, we included Joe and Mary Pulawski's son, Tim. Also, we have the ashes of former shipmate, Linton Ray Henry, which we take to each reunion and leave in his memory at the memorial service.

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USS Sunfish Newsletter

Keeping up with your shipmates and families

This newsletter is meant to keep your shipmates informed of your latest and greatest news and special events. If you have any news or interests that you want to get out to your shipmates, please forward them to Rich Edens (rwedens@zoominternet.net), Maggi Wilson (mvanos@garnet.acns.fsu.edu), or Jeff Cox (jeffcox00@arthlink.net).

Sunfish Reunions

I don't know about the rest of you... but when I left the Navy after six years I wasn't sure I wanted to have anything more to do with the Navy. Not that my time in the Navy was all bad. In fact, if you ask my shipmates they would tell you I had it easy. I came on the Sunfish about halfway through the yards in Pascagoula, I was the log room yeoman. I talked my way into the sail phone talker during maneuvering watch... yes it was a sweet gig. I lived off the boat in Charleston, as most folks did, out on the Isle of Palms. I found that my time off the boat was more fun than on the boat. After all it was hard work to keep Sally running as you all know.

A few years ago I received a call from Dennis Hightower. He informed me that the Sunfish was being decommissioned and we should plan to meet in Norfolk to attend the ceremony. My kids were 10 years old and I thought it might be nice to let them see where the old man was for a few years. Lacy Smith and I drove up with our kids from Raleigh and met several other shipmates there for the ceremony: Matt Knuth, Brian Moore, Joe Coppolo, & Steve Houston. While there, remember talking with Jack Marchant, Bob Rosand, Gene Loeffler, and Joe Martin from the early Sunfish crew about trying to pull together a reunion. I wonder

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Lone Sailor Park – Norfolk, Va

Tour of the Nauticus Marine Museum (www.thenmc.org) and a harbor cruise aboard the Spirit of Norfolk rounded out a full day of fun.

Saturday we toured the Norfolk Naval Base and lunched at the Breezy Point Officers Club. Some were welcomed aboard the USS Newport News (SSN-750) others were hosted by the USS Montpelier (SSN-765). The sailors aboard those boats were eager to show them off. The folks that were lucky enough to tour the USS Montpelier were given a packet that included the history and a picture of the boat underway signed by the captain. I don't know about the rest of you, but either I got bigger or the boats got smaller!

Saturday evening's dinner was highlighted by a reading of the "Last Voyage of the USS Sunfish: The Closing of a Circle," by Tony Robles, which was a first hand recounting of the trip from Norfolk to Bremerton after Sally was decommissioned. You can read it again just to the right. We were honored to have guests with us. Admiral Marc Pelaez, CO of SSN 649 during the 80's and Captain John Reed, CO of the SS 281. After dinner the Sunfish Choir regaled us with another humorous offering. A raffle and finally dancing to the DJ... which brought the guests from a much more boring get together to party with us.

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Last Voyage of the USS Sunfish: The Closing of a Circle

September 27, 1996, nearly 28 years after her first sea trial, Sunfish's low black silhouette hunkers beside a concrete pier at the Ballast Point Naval Station in San Diego. For the first time in more than a quarter century the warrior is unarmed, stripped of the torpedoes she carried through much of the cold war.

The crew of the Sturgeon class nuclear-powered submarine is the last of a line of sailors that threads back through time to the day her keel was laid in 1965. Most are seasoned submariners with time in. A few have orders to new commands. Others will remain with Sunfish for a time, watching over her final days as she is dismantled piece by piece. For now their job is to accompany this proud and noble warship to her final resting place, to close the last chapter of a story that spans four decades. If there is sadness in their souls I cannot see it. Some have put boats to rest before. For them this is just another job. For me it is the closing of a circle. I was part of the commissioning crew that took her on the first sea trial.

The crew treats me like a V.I.P. The XO shares his stateroom. He lets me use the upper bunk. I recall that Admiral Rickover slept here during the first sea trial. As a young seaman, I stood watch outside the door just in case the admiral needed something.

The maneuvering watch is set. On a sun-splashed San Diego afternoon Sunfish gets underway. I get permission to go to the bridge. As Sunfish heads out of the harbor, a fishing boat is in her path. The officer of the deck calls to the boat on a marine radio. We are a U.S. warship outbound, he says. A warship! I like the sound of that. It has been a long time since I was underway on a warship.

The status board above the quartermaster's station says Sunfish's next dive will be number 1022. I am in the control room to watch. The diving officer asks me if I would like to take the helm for Sunfish's last dive. I think I am speechless, but I hear myself say, "yes!" I am nervous as I mark the course and speed and request permission from the officer of the deck to relieve the helm under instruction. I slide into the helmsman's seat and grip the wheel with sweaty hands. The officer of the deck gives the command to dive. The helmsman leans over my shoulder, instructing me as I push the stick forward. Sunfish and I slip beneath the waves together for the last time.

The crew settles smoothly into underway routine. The captain has cleared me for "confidential" sea stories. It says so in the plan of the day. I am allowed to visit every part of the ship. I put on my old, faded Sunfish sweatshirt and wander around the boat, shooting the breeze and reminiscing.

Dinner is served and the line forms, beginning aft of the crew's mess and winding down the stairs into the torpedo room. I take a place at the end of the line. A sailor offers to let me move ahead. I decline. I am not a member of the crew, only a rider. I say let the workingmen eat first.

Watches are relieved. Sailors head to the mess deck or to the rack. Today's sailors still have the same preoccupations: food and sleep. The perennial topics of discussion are what's for dinner and how much rack time they will get. I try to sleep, but I am too excited. I get up and wander around the ship. I drift into the sonar room. I hang out in the control room. I peek at the chart and listen

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to the banter and good-natured insults. I go down to the crew's mess. I sit at one of the padded benches at the forward, starboard corner. The movie screen used to hang here. Now there is a TV built into the forward bulkhead. I rest my back against the starboard bulkhead and stretch my legs on the bench. Just like old times, I get sleepy and nod off.

I head for the rack. I lay in the XO's upper bunk with the privacy curtain drawn listening to the sounds of the ship and feeling her vibration. She feels the same, smells the same. She's humming and thrumming, lulling me gently into sleep. I fluff the pillow and roll over, pulling the blanket around me like a cocoon. At last, I relax and let sleep overtake me. I have come back to snuggle like a child in the bosom of my beloved boat.

As Sunfish nears the coast of Washington her license to run submerged expires. Her last trip from the depths will be an emergency surface from 400 feet. I ask permission to take the helm. Permission is granted. Slowly, cautiously, Sunfish climbs to periscope depth. The sea is choppy. Sunfish bucks and I struggle to control her. I do not want to broach. It would be embarrassing - for me and for Sunfish. Having confirmed that the coast is clear, we get the order to take her deep. Some of my new friends have come to the control room to watch me bring Sunfish up. At 400 feet the order comes to surface. On command I pull back the stick. Sunfish points her prow upward and shoots to the surface for the last time.

Nighttime, transiting on the surface, Sunfish makes her way along the coast of Washington. The control room is rigged for black. I stand under the trunk and look up at the dark circle of the upper hatch. "Can I go up to the bridge?" I ask the Chief of the Watch. He reaches for the microphone and asks, "Permission for the only plank owner onboard to go to the bridge." A response comes that will resonate within my soul forever: "send all plank owners to the bridge!"

The waves rock her relentlessly. Her prow dips beneath the froth, cutting through the cold, black water. The breeze wets my face with salty spray. A large wave licks up her sail and splashes me. That's it, I say, I'm going below. In the crew's mess, the cook has served up a cream soup. Grey and oily, it sloshes around in the big pot. I fill a bowl and grab some crackers. In spite of its appearance, the soup tastes good! I scoop myself a second bowl. I surprise myself by taking the rough seas like a seasoned sailor. Some in the crew are not faring as well. In a scene reminiscent of the first sea trial, the quartermaster throws up on the chart table.

The following afternoon, the last maneuvering watch is set. It is a clear sunny day. I stand on the curved deck with the line handlers as the proud warship sails into her last harbor. Her job is done. It is time for the warrior to sleep.

Tony Robles

how that ever turned out?

It was then it hit me. The guys I served with were what really mattered. I knew that even after all these years I could call anyone of them and they would be there. Just like being on the boat, these are the guys I could count on to have my back, depend on them, because you had to. Dennis, Lacy and I have stayed in contact with each other since we left the Navy. Being there as groomsman in their wedding to being there when babies are born.

I think that's why I really enjoy the reunions so much... not only hooking up with my old friends... but meeting the men and families from outside my time on the boat who I know I could have counted on then and know they would be there for me today.

2006 Business Meeting

Another desperate plea from Gonzo...

The USS Sunfish business meeting held in Norfolk on day 3. We covered the budget and then opened it up for where and when we might have the next reunion.

After a spirited debate over several reunion sites including a passionate plea to have the next site be in Pheonix from Ed Gonsowski, the group in attendance voted that the next reunion will be held in San Diego, California.

There is a reunion committee setup to plan and coordinate the reunion in 2008. If you have any ideas or concerns please feel free to contact the committee.

Big thank you to everyone who pitched in to make this reunion a successful one.

P.S. Better start studying now... Barry is working on a new trivia test that will be harder than the last one!

Christmas is coming! Remember to visit the USS Sunfish Alumni website www.SSN649.net and pick up those t-shirts and other memorabilia. All proceeds support the USS Sunfish Reunion Fund.



Caps - double bill \$20 (regular \$18)



Polo Shirts - \$25



T-Shirts - \$15



Check out the new addition to the Hagardorn Clan:



Let's Say **Thanks**

In support of our troops

If you go to the website above you can pick out a thank you card and Xerox will print it and it will be sent to a soldier that is currently serving in Iraq. You can't pick out who gets it, but it will go to some member of the armed services. How AMAZING it would be if we could get everyone we know to send one!!!! This is a great site. Please send a card.

It is FREE and it will only take a few seconds. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the soldiers received a bunch of these? Whether you are for or against the war, our guys and gals over there need to know we are behind them.

<http://www.letssaythanks.com>