

# Steel Valley Dolphins

November 2019



The official newsletter of the  
USS Requin Base of the USSVI  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

## USSVI Creed:

"To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of duties while serving their country. That their dedication, deeds, and supreme sacrifice be a constant source of motivation toward greater accomplishments. Pledge loyalty and patriotism to the United States of America and its Constitution."



Meetings held on the second Saturday of the month normally in BADen at the American Legion Post and quarterly meetings held around our membership area.

- **Make a difference, get to a meeting!**

----- Pride Runs Deep -----

Next Meeting: 1 December Christmas party at the German Club

## USS Requin Base Officers

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----- Pride Runs Deep -----



## Binnacle List

: Virginia Sutherin



### **COMMANDERS COLUMN:**

The October base meeting was one of our traveling meetings, which was held in New Castle, Pa, and almost broke the record in attendance. Shipmate Dave Cochenour made the arrangements and did an outstanding job – KUDOS David. We were honored to meet Frank Lambiase, a WWII tank commander with General Paton. We also had two submariner's sailors show up and filled out their application on the spot. They are Harrah from Ohio and Mason from Ellwood City. Shipmate Lacey joined earlier last week which was outstanding! That brings the base membership to 188. There are others who have applications and we are awaiting to receive them. They are Flaugh, Le Meau, McCullough and Bonnett. As we have done over the years, any member that recruits a new member, that member receives credit for his base dues for the next year.



### **REQUIN BASE ELECTION**

Bernie Sigler is the Base Election Committee/Chairman – he can be reached either by [menhaden377@yahoo.com](mailto:menhaden377@yahoo.com) or 724-301-1505. As of the October base meeting, all present elected officers of the base will continue to serve the base for 2020. November base meeting will be for nominations. The election if needed will be held at the December Base Meeting.



Singer Nick Fiasco will be the entertainment. The cost per person will be \$25.00, children under 12 free, over 12 to 17 \$10.00 and over 18 is an adult, for a German style buffet, with a cash bar. If anyone has a special diet, please let us know, so we can make accommodations for you. As in the past, there will be a gift exchange - \$15.00 limit – per (Male/Female).

There is a guarantee of 100 people, so sign up early before (Nov 24) then we open it up to our supporters and guests who help make our base so successful. If anyone wants to volunteer to pick up any of our WW2 shipmates or shipmates who don't drive, please let me know!

### **MEMBERSHIP RENEWEL**

As of Saturday, Nov 16, the membership drive is as follows:

Base Officers & Committee – (0) no dinqs – 100%

WW2 Shipmates (0) no dinqs 100%

Associate Members (0) no dinqs 100%

Pa Residence - 9 DINQS (due in Oct)

Non-Pa Residence – 8 (due in Nov)

New Members (2019) 1 (due in Dec)

No Payment for calendar 3

TOTAL RENEW members 170

BASE IS AT 90% on membership renewed

We are one new member shy of tying the recruiting record per year of the Requin Base (19

**UPDATE – NOV 22 – WE ARE AT 93% - WITH SIX COMING IN THE MAIL AND WAITING TO HEAR FROM FOUR ACTIVE DUEY SHIPMATES.)**

### **Birthdays**

### **Anniversaries**

#### **Member**

#### **Spouce**

Amenti, Mike 12/29/88	Marge Bookmiller 12/04	Bistyga, Richard & Claudia 12/31
Bistyga, Richard 12/21/50	Cindy Brown 12/07	Cantwell, Alfred & Patricia 12/16
Bittner, Robert 12/24/64	Priscilla Hawk 12/24	Deichler, Jason & Michelle 12/19
Brown, George 12/10/47	Erin Houpt 12/14	Krautstrunk, Rob & Ruth 12/29
Donnelly, John 12/10/30	Louis Kieler 12/18	Lawrence, Jared & Jordon 12/30
Geyer, Dick 12/15/42	Lisa McGinty 12/15	Lukasik, John & Ginny 12/17
Goron, Ron 12/24/47	Brenda Winters 12/24	Lyons, Ed & Carol 12/10
Hall, Robert 12/05/45	Dorothy Brown 12/01	MacKenzie, & Cass Smiric 12/22
Hughes, James 12/01/39		Sigler, Bernie & Dottie 12/07

Kopenhagen, Fred 12/29/43

Sutherin, Jack & Jenny 12/29

Lacey, Kyle 12/16/73

Masterson, Bat 12/30/55

McKinney, Steve 12/15/72

Sigler, Bernie 12/07/33

Stass, George 12/05/38

Underkoffer, Chad 12/24/47

# Redlands man was among crew of WWII submarine USS Grayback, sunk in 1944 and newly found



Chuck Brasch holds a photo of his brother Jack, who was killed during World War II, and Jack's Purple Heart at Brasch's home in Claremont on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2019. Brasch's brother was one of 80 crew members killed in the sinking of the USS Grayback submarine near Japan in 1944. The submarine wreckage was just recently located after having been missing for 75 years. (Photo by Jennifer Cappuccio Maher, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

By DAVID ALLEN | [dallen@scng.com](mailto:dallen@scng.com) | Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

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A mystery from World War II has been solved, and it settles the fate of a Redlands man.

The hull of the USS Grayback, one of the most successful American submarines of the war, was found in Japanese waters earlier this year, a find announced earlier this month on Veterans Day.

Among the 80 crew members was William Jack Brasch, a Redlands man.

His brother, Chuck, hadn't expected to ever hear word.

"Never in a million years did I expect anything like this to happen," Brasch, 78, told me Thursday in the dining room of his home in Claremont.

In fact, when he got an email Nov. 8 from a lieutenant commander with the Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command announcing the find, he thought it might be a prank. But within days the news made TV and newspapers.

The two brothers were 21 years apart in age.

"He was the first son of Dad's first marriage. I was the only son of my Dad's second marriage," Brasch explained. "He was up and out of the house before I was born."

William Jack went by Jack since his father was William Joseph. Jack was born in 1920 in Washington state and grew up in Yucaipa and Mentone. He attended Redlands High, where he was a track star, and graduated in 1938. He immediately enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

Photos show a serious young man, hair parted on the left, with thick lips and soulful eyes. He might have been popular with the ladies.

After training in San Diego, he served on the battleship California, then a submarine tender, the Fulton. His next assignment was the Grayback.

The submarine sank more than a dozen Japanese ships and damaged others in its patrols of the South Pacific and South China Sea while disrupting enemy shipping and rescuing downed American aviators.

Its 10th and last combat patrol began when it left Pearl Harbor on Jan. 28, 1944, three days after Jack turned 24.

She reported sinking two cargo ships on Feb. 19 and, with only two torpedoes remaining, was ordered back home. Even at that, she sank a naval transport on Feb. 27. The Grayback was never heard from again and was presumed lost.

Seventy-five years later, the submarine was found thanks to the Lost 52 Project, established by undersea explorer Tim Taylor to search for the 52 American submarines lost in the war. The Grayback was his team's fifth discovery since the effort began in 2010.

It came about because an amateur researcher in Japan working with Taylor went through wartime records of the Imperial Japanese Navy last year. An entry received by radio on Feb. 27, 1944, said a bomber had encountered a surfaced submarine and dropped a 500-pound bomb just behind the conning tower. The submarine exploded and sank, with no survivors.

The longitude and latitude in the report were off by a single digit from the translated version the U.S. Navy had relied upon. That changed the location by 100 miles and accounts for why the submarine had never been found.

With the correct coordinates, as well as underwater drones and computer imaging software, Taylor's team found the wreckage in June near Okinawa in waters 1,400 feet deep. The deck gun had landed about 400 feet away from the hull.

"It was amazing. Everyone was excited," Taylor told the Washington Post. "Then you realize there are 80 men buried there, and it's a sobering experience."

He and his crew held a ceremony the next day, reading the sailors' names aloud, one by one, and ringing a bell. In Claremont, Chuck Brasch is still taking it in.

On Thursday afternoon, the retired science and pottery teacher from Chaffey High in Ontario had set out memorabilia on his dining room table for me and photographer Jennifer Cappuccio Maher to review.

There was a photo album opened to photos that included his brother. Two short articles from the Redlands Daily Facts in 1944 about his brother being missing. His brother's Purple Heart, awarded posthumously in 1946. A book, "U.S. Submarine Losses," prepared by the Navy and sent to the family in 1948.

What does he know about Jack?

"Not a whole lot," Brasch replied. "My father was very close-lipped. He didn't talk about it much. His first son, gone."

Brasch wasn't born yet when his half-brother enlisted and was 3 when he died.

He finds one unusual similarity with his brother. Jack was a radioman first class. Chuck got interested in ham radio at Redlands High, where he graduated in 1959, 21 years after his brother. He mused about the possibility the interest was genetic.

A headstone for Jack is in Hillside Memorial Park in Redlands, even with no remains to bury. In an area known as Veterans' Memory Lane, stones recognize 26 missing World War II veterans from the Redlands area.

"The Military Order of the Purple Heart has an annual service of recognition there on POW Day," city spokesman Carl Baker said.

The stone has Brasch's name, the years 1920-1944, a profile image of the Grayback surrounded by stars, a cloud behind it, and the phrase "Submarine Grayback Lost in China Sea."





A marker for William Jack Brasch in Redlands' Hillside Memorial Park pays tribute to the sailor lost at sea in 1944. His submarine was recently located. (Courtesy City of Redlands)

Chuck Brasch said it's been probably 50 years since he's seen the stone, but he's thinking he should visit.

He's been reading up on the find and watching news reports and videos, piecing together what happened into a narrative. The Japanese radio report about the explosion, and the distance on the ocean floor between the hull and the deck gun, suggests the bomb may have detonated the ship's ammo, Brasch said.

"The thing immediately sank. So it was very quick," he said. "If that was the case, everyone died instantly." That offers a measure of comfort, he said.

How has the news of the find affected him, given that his brother was a stranger?

"I guess I've had my melancholy moments," Brasch said. "I didn't really know him; he was just a name. But he was my brother. Him and 79 other guys were lost. It kind of chokes me up now thinking about it."

*David Allen writes Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, brashly. Email [dallen@scng.com](mailto:dallen@scng.com), phone 909-483-9339, visit [insidesocal.com/davidallen](http://insidesocal.com/davidallen), like [davidallencolumnist](#) on Facebook and follow [@davidallen909](#) on Twitter.*



# 75 Years Ago the USS Grayback Was Lost in the Pacific Ocean: This is the Doomed Submarine's Epic Story.

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Here is the story of what happened.

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**by Sebastien Roblin**

On February 27, 1944, a Japanese Nakajima B5N torpedo bomber patrolling over the East China Sea near Okinawa spotted the glinting hull of a submarine surfaced above the water.

Earlier that very day, the freighter *Celyon Maru* had been sunk by two torpedoes.

The three-man bomber swooped down and reported a direct hit with a 500-pound, causing the submarine to “explode and sink immediately.”

To play it safe, Japanese warships closed in on a trail of bubbles left at the scene and laced the ocean with depth charges. As concussive blasts wracked the water, a black oil slick surged to the surface.

Ten days later, on March 7, the submarine *USS Grayback* failed to return to Pearl Harbor from her tenth war patrol as scheduled. Nor did she reply to a radio inquiry three days later.

After waiting three weeks, the Navy listed *Grayback* and the eighty sailors aboard her as “missing, presumed lost with all hands.”

After the Japanese surrender, researchers correlated *Grayback's* disappearance with Japanese records. They concluded 1,652-ton submarine had been on something of a rampage before meeting her last patrol, possibly sinking as many as four ships totaling 21,000 tons.

***Grayback* Found at Last**



Seventy-five years later, a privately funded expedition set out to find *Grayback*'s lost wreck. Team leader Tim Taylor and partner Christina Dennison had previously located the wrecks of four other U.S. World War II submarines as part of a project called Lost 52, leveraging new autonomous underwater vehicle technology that could search wide areas without having to be continuously tethered to a boat.

Two years earlier, I chatted with Taylor and Dennison about their first find in 2010: Navy coastal defense submarine *R-12*, which sank mysteriously off the coast of Florida, taking with her forty-three crew. They expressed their wish to preserve the memory of the heroic submariners who sacrificed their lives in the conflict and give relatives a sense of closure by identifying the sites of their remains.

According to the *New York Times*, the wreck's discovery was only possible thanks to team historian Yutaka Iwasaki finding an error in the latitude and longitude of the original U.S. loss report from 1949, which implied a location 100 miles away from the site of the actual attack.

In June 2019, the team deployed an AUV that spent hours systematically scanning a ten square mile section of seafloor with sonar before surfacing to upload its findings to its mothership for analysis.

That data was used to deploy a second remote-control submarine with powerful cameras that finally revealed the submarine's wreck 427 meters below the surface.

Video feeds revealed *Grayback*'s bow had been torn at an angle, and her stern imploded, supporting the report of a direct hit. Her deck gun lay over 100 meters away. But *Grayback*'s nameplate remained perfectly legible.

The team waited several months for confirmation from the U.S. Navy before declaring their find on November 10, 2019, making sure the relatives of the entombed sailors were amongst the first to see the footage.

## **The Silent Service**



World War II submariners fought a lonely, deadly war. While German submarines famously tried and failed to strangle U.S. convoy transiting the Atlantic in World Wars I and II, Allied submarines largely succeeded at crippling Imperial Japan's economy during World War II—sinking roughly 80 percent of her merchant shipping by one count.

But the “Silent Service” was also one of the riskiest occupations in the U.S. Navy, as the loss of fifty-two boats during World War II attests. Planes ambushed submarines recharging batteries on the surface, and escort ships bombarded them with depth charges while submerged. Only rarely did lost submarines leave behind survivors who could attest to their fates.

However, we know a good deal of *Grayback's* story, thanks to the *Dictionary of American Naval Fight Ships*.

*Grayback* (SS-208) was laid down in 1940 in Groton, Connecticut by Electric Boat and commissioned June 1941—you can see pictures of her [here](#). She was one of twelve *Tambor*-class fleet submarines—only five of which survived the war.

These medium-sized submarines were fast enough to accompany surface fleets, had an ocean-spanning range of 12,600 miles, and an expanded armament of six 21-inch bow torpedo tubes plus four in the stern, with fourteen reloads available. A 3” deck gun and two rapid-firing anti-aircraft cannons gave the subs modest firepower while surfaced.

The *Tambor's* conning tower also featured a Mark III mechanical targeting computer. Most torpedoes then were unguided straight-line weapons. The Mark III not only helped calculate intercepts but could program the torpedoes' internal gyroscope to slew away after launch, making it unnecessary to turn the entire submarine to aim. Unfortunately, gyros in early-war American Mark 14 torpedoes were notoriously defective.

## **Submarine Duels**

Five weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Grayback* sallied forth on her first war patrol off Saipan and Guam under command of Willard Saunders. Just a week later, she

was ambushed while surfaced by a Japanese submarine that launched two torpedoes. Both missed.

For the next four days, the two submarines engaged in a high-stakes game of tag, trying to catch the other exposed on the surface. World War II-era submarines weren't designed with the capability to attack each other underwater (an event that occurred only once, ever). However, they *did* have to surface frequently to recharge batteries. A *Tambor* could go at most two days without surfacing, but only while crawling at 2 knots.

Despite spotting each other multiple times, neither managed to line up another attack. *Grayback* finally eluded her counterpart on February 26 and sank first victim, the coal transport *Ishikaru Maru* on March 17 near Chichi Jima.

*Grayback* skirmished repeatedly with Japanese ships and submarines in the waters surrounding Guadalcanal, on three subsequent patrol damaging but not sinking any. She was damaged in turn by depth charge attacks by ships and Japanese E8N2 float-plane in November 1942.

The *Grayback's* fortune turned with her fifth patrol under Lt. Cdr. Edward Stephan begun December 7, 1942. On Christmas Day she pounced on four Japanese barges and sank them with her deck gun. Then at five minutes past midnight on January 2/3, 1943 Stephan spotted the huge Japanese cruiser submarine *I-18* south of New Britain—a boat previously involved in mini-submarine attacks on Sydney and Pearl Harbor.

When *I-18* abruptly began submerging, Stephan fired two torpedoes. He reported hearing explosions and was credited with a kill. In truth, the Japanese submarine survived only to be sunk on February 11.

## The Rescue

Two days later, *Grayback* received word that six crew of a downed B-26 bomber *Queenie* had crash-landed on Rendova Island two days early. But locating the airmen and getting them back on board without exposing *Grayback* was not going to be easy.

On the evening of January 5, two boats rowed ashore while the *Grayback* hastily ducked back underwater. The sailors found the downed crew and laid low until nightfall, whereupon they used signal lamps to guide their boat back to the waiting sub.

But *Grayback*'s luck nearly ran out twelve days later when her torpedoes missed a Japanese destroyer escorting a convoy. The destroyer's counter-attack badly damaged *Grayback*, forcing her to limp back to Brisbane.

Stephan commanded *Grayback* on a sixth and seventh patrol—sinking two ships and damaging three more on the latter, before sailing her back to San Francisco on May 30 for a major refurbishment

### **Moore's Navy Crosses**

In September, *Grayback* cruised back into action under Texan John Anderson Moore who would be awarded a Navy Crosses for each of his three patrols.

*Grayback* joined submarines *Shad* and *Cero* to debut new wolf pack tactics in which they patrolled together to box in enemy ships. This proved a resounding success, with *Grayback* sinking a tanker and the 8,100-ton armed merchant cruiser *Awata Maru*, and shared in the sinking of the *Fuji Maru* with *Shad*.

Moore's following patrol, begun December 2, saw the submarine fire off all 24 of her torpedoes in just five days of furious action, beginning with the sinking of a freighter on December 18, northeast of Okinawa. When her radar detected the escorting destroyer *Numakaze* barreling towards her out for revenge, Moore crash-dived *Grayback* and launched a spread four torpedoes behind her from her stern tubes. Three hit *Numakaze*, sinking her.

The sub sank two more freighters the night of December 20/21, and a large sampan with gunfire on December 27.

*Grayback*'s final patrol (described at beginning of article) was her most effective yet, increasing her wartime gross sunk by nearly a third to 63,800 tons and 14 ships sunk.



The crew of the *Grayback*, and those of her victims, sacrificed their lives for their countries in a pitiless war of unsurpassed scale and violence. Her rediscovery three-quarters of a century later is a unique opportunity to commemorate the bravery of the eighty souls that remain entombed within her.

*Sébastien Roblin holds a master's degree in conflict resolution from Georgetown University and served as a university instructor for the Peace Corps in China. He has also worked in education, editing, and refugee resettlement in France and the United States. He currently writes on security and military history for War Is Boring.*

*Image: Wikimedia Commons*

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