

World War II SUBVETS Memorial Service Held

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NORFOLK (NNS) -- Submarine Learning Facility (SUBLRNFAC), Naval Station Norfolk hosted the annual Submarine Veterans of World War II Memorial Service May 21.

The service honored the 52 submarines and Sailors lost during World War II, and the losses of the USS Thresher (SSN 593), April 10, 1963, and the USS Scorpion (SSN 589), May 22, 1968.

"This ceremony is our connection to the living history of the submarine force and highlights commitment, courage, and professionalism of past, present, and future generations of submariners," said Master Chief Machinist's Mate Franklin Gardner, SUBLRNFAC Engineering Department master chief. "The ceremony symbolizes active duty and retired submariners' commitment to honoring submariners lost at sea in defense of our country and our way of life.

"World War II-era submariners are specifically recognized because the submarine force immediately carried the fight to the enemy after Pearl Harbor, and kept up the pressure through out the war at the cost of 52 submarines and more than 3,000 lives."

During the 2009 ceremony, Sturgeon-class USS Lapon (SSN 661) was the 11th submarine inducted into the Submarine Hall of Fame. Selection into the Hall of Fame is merited by the submarine's contribution to national security, and selection is conducted by the Hampton Roads Chapter of the U.S. Submarine Veterans organization.

Retired U.S. Navy Capt. Peter Flannery, served as guest

speaker. Flannery is a former commanding officer of USS Lapon, and also former commander, Submarine Squadron 6 and commander, Submarine Squadron 8, both home based in Norfolk.

"Lapon was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism while conducting some 1969 operations of vital importance to national security," said Flannery. "She is only one of five post World War II submarines to be recognized. The citation specifically cited the courage, resourcefulness, persistence, and aggressiveness of the officers and men of Lapon.

"Our nation expected Lapon's crew to be physically harder and mentally stronger than any adversary at sea. Lapon's men persevered, never quit, and thrived on adversity.

"We are more skillful as submariners today than we were forty or sixty years ago. We have better equipment, are more connected, and technology allows us to make good decisions more consistently. But make no mistake, the technological advancements will be diminished if we do not understand and then act on the need for sustaining the submarine culture that breeds such outstanding performance and accomplishment."

Lapon was commissioned December 14, 1967 in Hampton Roads and decommissioned August 8, 1992. The ship's sail is memorialized in Springfield, Mo.

"We are in our 11th year inducting submarines in our Submarine Hall of Fame," said Gardner. "The inductions recognize significant contributions of post World War II submarines and helps the young submariners today view their contribution to national security with pride. Lapon was a workhorse during the Cold War and the command provided invaluable insight and

intelligence on operation of Soviet submarines."

Distinguished visitors included Vice Adm. John J. Donnelly, commander, Submarine Force, and John Panneton, military liaison for U.S. Rep. Glenn Nye and former national president of the Navy League of the United States.

For more news from Commander, Submarine Force, visit www.navy.mil/local/sublant/.

Full Text of Capt. Peter Flannery Speech, Memorial Day – 2009 Ceremony including USS Lapon Induction into the Submarine Hall of Fame

On September 11, 1942 in the South China Sea, 59 years and 8000 miles distant from the events that would eventually make that day and month forever known, Wheeler Lipes and Darrell Rector were involved in their own life and death situation.

Who were Wheeler Lipes and Darrell Rector? Wheeler Lipes was a 22-year old Pharmacist's Mate, and Darrell Rector a 19-year old Seaman. They were crewmembers onboard USS Seadragon, conducting US submarine operations against enemy merchant shipping. Only the day before, Seaman Rector had complained to Lipes that he wasn't feeling well. Lipes observed as Rector's temperature rose gradually to 106°F and he demonstrated all the symptoms of appendicitis.

Pharmacist's Mate Lipes had a long conversation with Seadragon's Commanding Officer, LCDR William Ferrall, the two of them sizing up the challenge they were now facing. There was a life-threatening medical situation requiring surgery, but there was no surgical expertise; there was rudimentary medical

equipment; there was a six-day transit to the nearest port at Brisbane; there was an enemy seeking to destroy their submarine; and there was the ever-present knowledge that with surgery, you bury your mistakes. The Commanding Officer, with the patient's concurrence, ordered Lipes to perform the appendectomy.

Let me describe Seadragon's reality on that day. The wardroom table was used as the operating table. Because the patient was longer than the table, his feet were placed in the drawer of a nearby cabinet. Instruments were sterilized with boiling water. Bent spoons were used as retractors to hold open the incision. Ground-up sulfa pills were used as disinfectant. Navy-issue pajamas, sterilized with torpedo alcohol, were worn by the surgical team. Gauze, taped to faces, served as surgical masks. The ship's communicator functioned as the anesthetist. A tea strainer was used as a makeshift anesthesia mask for the ether-filled gauze pads that were placed over it. Pharmacist's Mate Lipes, who was technically trained as an electrocardiographer, had been an operating room assistant during two appendectomies. His experience and an onboard medical volume provided all the available guidance and procedural know-how for the volunteer surgical team. And young Seaman Rector's life was in the balance.

Circumstances were not kind to Pharmacist's Mate Lipes that day during his first ever work as a surgeon. The appendix was not where he expected it to be. It had adhered to the wall of Rector's intestine; it was enlarged, and it had become gangrenous. Lipes had to surgically remove the adhered appendix without puncturing it, or he would lose Rector on the table. After a two hour and thirty-six minute surgery, Lipes had successfully removed Rector's appendix and sutured his work.

Let's take a moment to reflect on four attributes that are

prominent here. They are: the courage, resourcefulness, persistence, and aggressiveness of these Sailors.

The kind of Courage that enables a person to order, perform, assist with, and undergo life-saving surgery, performed by a 22-year old, with no expertise, with rudimentary resources, in a submarine, operating in wartime, 120 feet beneath the surface of the South China Sea.

The kind of Resourcefulness that creates a way to make things work in dire circumstances.

The kind of Persistence that moves a person to find the facts, face the facts, and do the right thing.

The kind of Aggressiveness that focuses an individual's instinct for self-preservation with conviction.

The 1943 Pulitzer Prize for reporting was awarded to Chicago Daily News reporter George Weller for his reporting on this story. Years later Pharmacist's Mate Lipes, the one-time surgeon, said that Seaman Rector, the compliant patient, was the world's most courageous man ...probably not what you want to hear from your surgeon.

Why are Wheeler Lipes and Darrell Rector and the crew of Seadragon important to us today? This Seadragon story is a story of outstanding performance and accomplishment. These events really occurred. The people really performed and accomplished with excellence. These were very common men with an uncommonly inspired drive to succeed. The story, and others like it, serves to sustain our submarine culture. The story, and others like it, needs to be told. Its meaning needs to be understood so that the same outstanding performance and accomplishment are expected and delivered now and in the

future.

Here in the shadow of the Submarine Learning Facility it is appropriate to ask the following “Are we, as a Submarine Force, a learning organization, and if we are, how is that so?” Are undersea warriors indeed learning, growing, leading, and excelling, as the Submarine Learning Center’s crest indicates? The Seadragon story provides the context that illustrates:

- * what the undersea warrior should be learning
- * how the undersea warrior should be growing
- * where the undersea warrior should be leading
- * if the undersea warrior’s excelling is good enough.

How do the warriors learn what, not just performance, but outstanding performance, looks like? How do they learn what, not just accomplishment, but outstanding accomplishment, looks like? For it is to outstanding performance and accomplishment that this profession calls them. Appreciating our history, understanding what they are part of, understanding what submariners have accomplished, and having a vision of what remains for them to do are important objectives for the true learning organization.

To build our future, we must know our past. So it is with the story of the men who were called to perform and accomplish during a life-saving appendectomy onboard Seadragon in September of 1942.

So it is, also, with the story of the submarine and crew that are memorialized on the waterfront here at Naval Base, Norfolk. Forty-one years ago tomorrow USS Scorpion was lost in the Atlantic as she returned to Norfolk from a Mediterranean deployment. We remember their performance and accomplishment, even as we mourn their loss. As it has been with Scorpion, any situation in which risk overcomes reliability

acts as a lens through which we assess and improve our submarine culture.

And so, too, is the purpose of our Submarine Hall of Fame. Today we induct USS Lapon into that Hall. There, the performance and accomplishment of Lapon's crews will serve as examples for our learning organization. In 1969, and again in later years, USS Lapon conducted operations of vital importance to national security. For these 1969 operations, Lapon was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism, one of only five post World War II submarines to be so recognized. Lapon joins Halibut, Parche, Triton, and Nautilus in a highly select group. Lapon's award citation for those 1969 operations did cite specifically the courage, resourcefulness, persistence, and aggressiveness of the officers and men of Lapon. Not by coincidence, these are the same attributes that we saw in the crew of Seadragon, but in Lapon's situation, they were somewhat differently applied.

Lapon's was the kind of Courage that leads young men to dare boldly to become the best in the world at what they do.

Lapon's was the kind of Resourcefulness that creates tactical opportunity and the willingness and skill to pursue it.

Lapon's was the kind of Persistence that motivates shipmates to work through fatigue, perform when challenged, and accomplish the mission.

Lapon's was the kind of Aggressiveness that focuses teamwork using individual dedication and conviction.

Our nation expected Lapon's crew to be physically harder and mentally stronger than any adversary at sea. Lapon's crew was men who would never quit. They persevered. They thrived on

adversity. Like Seadragon's, Lapon's story needs to be told, its meaning needs to be understood so that the same outstanding performance and accomplishment are expected and delivered now and in the future.

We are more skillful as submariners today than we were 40 or 60-years ago. We have better equipment. We are more connected. Technology allows us to make good decisions more consistently. But make no mistake; the technological advancements will be diminished if we do not understand and then act on the need for sustaining the submarine culture, a culture that breeds such outstanding performance and accomplishment.

Back to Seaman Rector for a moment, remember him? Seaman Rector returned to full-duty only thirteen days after his appendectomy. Tragically, he eventually perished along with 77 shipmates, while serving onboard USS Tang on October 25, 1944 in the Formosa Strait when a MK-14 torpedo fired by Tang circled around and hit Tang. His brother, Earl Rector, had been captured when Corregidor was surrendered. His brother was a survivor of the Bataan Death March. His brother survived three and a half years of imprisonment in a POW camp. His brother learned of Seaman Rector's death upon being released from that camp. Such was the reality of sacrifice, such was the reality of the time, and such was the reality of being part of an effort that was so much larger than the individual.

My name is Peter Flannery and for a time some years ago I was afforded the privilege of commanding the crew of USS Lapon. I am thankful for that time. I love the men who were Lapon's crew. I am grateful that Lapon will serve in this manner as a part of the history of our organization, continuing to define our submarine culture of outstanding performance and accomplishment. With appreciation and humility I speak for all the crews of Lapon, from

her commissioning in December, 1967 to her decommissioning in June, 1992. I thank the Submarine Veterans and the Submarine Learning Facility for affording our submarine the privilege of serving in this very important way.