



# The Dolphin Brotherhood

## USS Virginia SSN-774 Christened 16 AUG



See "Virginia" on page 4...

### Commander's Corner

by Patrick Householder, Base Commander



Time sure flies when you're having fun. Since last issue of the paper it was my

pleasure to attend the SVWWII picnic near Granite Falls and the SSB Picnic at Browns Point. Both on beautiful days and with great shipmates.

Shipmate Tim Morin's presentation at our August meeting on his tour of duty in Iraq complete with photos taken there was fascinating and informative, and Prof. Adees brief presentation

on the Human Powered Submarine Project was also very interesting. We'll have him back in October, and he'll bring the submarine and several UW engineering students for a more complete presentation.

The Reno convention looms large on the horizon as I write this, and we have many shipmates

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## May Day Tragedy Haunted Mare Island Guitarro's Sinking a Stunner

by Jerry Bowen April 1, 2001

Sometimes events in a person's life are so indelibly imprinted on their mind that they can remember the tiniest of details for the rest of their life. So it was on the morning of May 16, 1969, as I drove from Napa to work at Mare Island. After working in the inside Weapons Electronics Shop 36 for two years, I was finally transferred to the waterfront to work on the submarine, Guitarro, SSN-665. That is where I wanted to be. I enjoyed the challenge of installing, testing and troubleshooting the torpedo and missile fire control systems.

I had been working on the boat for about a year when we were nearly ready for final testing on the torpedo fire control systems. The previous day we had been shooting water slugs (torpedo tubes full of water) as part of overall system testing. As I drove into work that day still somewhat drowsy and only half listening to the car radio, I thought I heard the news that the Guitarro had sunk alongside the pier during the night.

"Naahh, that can't be" I thought. "I must have missed something."

There was nothing out of the ordinary or sense of urgency as I passed through the North Gate and drove toward the waterfront. As I pulled up to the pier area, I was dumbfounded. There was the Guitarro leaning at a sharp angle with only its sail visible above the waterline. Floodlights were playing over a tugboat that was nudged up against the sail to keep the submarine from turning over. I can still see it as clearly as if it happened yesterday. All I could do for the next few minutes was stand and stare at the spectacle in disbelief and wonder how in blazes this could happen!

Rumors began to run rampant around the shipyard.

Navy officials began arriving at the shipyard from all over the country as the work began to raise the Guitarro. Three days later it was resting in dry-dock. The interior of the ship was a surreal scene. The decks were slippery with slime, and the overhead dripped like a rain forest. All the electronic equipment's video screens had imploded. Water poured out of the equipment when it was opened

and the air smelled like a fishy graveyard. With the Guitarro in dry-dock, 12-hour shifts began around the clock to remove everything from the ship's interior and wash it down with fresh water. It was disheartening to see months of painstaking and exacting work reduced to a mass of muddy debris being hosed down and soaked in hastily constructed tanks. Within a few days of the resurrection, the equipment was completely stripped from the hull.

Mare Island workers felt the reputation as one of the world's best shipyards had just suffered a major setback. In an all-out effort to help reduce the cost of the salvage and repairs, everyone volunteered to give up part of their vacation credits, but the offer was turned down.

As the investigations began, many of us wondered if our historic shipyard would survive the tragedy.

The inquiry conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services with Samuel Stratton presiding and members William Randall and John Hunt, started May 26, 1969, and lasted three days.

Their findings found a tragic lack of communication between two separate groups conducting system tests. Both test gangs required a certain forward and aft level of the ship to accomplish their particular system tests. Each group trimmed the ship by adding water to the ballast tanks unknown to the other test crew. The subsequent teeter-totter effect caused the ship to sink lower and lower until the Napa River poured into the forward hatch.

At this point it was too late to do anything about it. The hatch without a cofferdam was plugged with shore service cables and hoses. The ship sank in spite of considerable efforts of the safety watchman to contact someone in authority in time to stop the impending disaster. As luck would have it, many upper and middle management personnel were off-yard in Vallejo attending a speech by Assistant Secretary of the Navy James D. Little.

The only positive note in the incident was that the incident occurred during the lunch break, so there were no injuries or loss of life. Had the flooding taken place an hour earlier or later there probably would have been many casualties. Entering and exiting a submarine undergoing construction or renovation is generally difficult and slow.

Many new regulations and work processes were changed over the years after the Guitarro sank. New administrative offices were created to track and approve the different work and testing processes. Meetings to coordinate the work grew in number, and there certainly was no lack of communication as non-nuclear work was coordinated more and more like nuclear work.

As a result of the heightened controls, costs increased and schedules slipped even more. In spite of it all, shipyard workers were a talented group who could figuratively install 10 cubic feet of equipment into one cubic foot of space and make it work. Ingenuity was common and achieving the impossible was part of the normal day-to-day routine.

Occasionally, I am asked if the tragic events of that fateful day in May were instrumental in the closing. Hard to say, but the stigma of the incident certainly didn't contribute to its longevity. I do know that when Mare Island finally closed, submarines had grown so large that special flotation equipment was required just to get a boat into dry-dock. In addition, I would speculate that the cost of maintaining the 150-year-old shipyard's aging buildings and machinery were also a determining factor.

Whatever the reason or reasons for closing, an extremely talented work force was disbanded and spread throughout the world. And in this man's humble opinion, the working world became the benefactor of their wide ranging talents.

## Christmas of 1943: Submarine Veterans of World War II and United States Submarine Veterans Inc. Joint Holiday Lunch at the Seattle Yacht Club

**Reserve Saturday, December 20, 2003 from 11:00-3:00 on your social calendars!**



That's when Lockwood Chapter of Subvets of WWII and USSVI Seattle Base will hold this year's gala Christmas social and luncheon at the Seattle Yacht Club. Our private dining room overlooking yacht moorages and Portage Bay houseboats features a full size Christmas Tree, blazing fire and Bing Crosby Christmas songs playing softly in the background. It's the perfect ambiance for shipmates and spouses to catch up on the past year's events and plan new adventures for 2004.

Following a cocktail hour and three-course luncheon, WWII vets, post-war submarine veterans and guests will reminisce about past Christmas deployments and hear how the WWII vets spent the Christmas of '43.



The cost is \$35 for Subvets and \$35 for each guest; a no-host cash bar will offer cocktails, beer, wine and non-alcoholic beverages. USSVI Seattle Base voted at the 16 August meeting to contribute funds to reduce the price of tickets by a total of \$10 for the first 50 Seattle Base and Lockwood Chapter members who sign up and pay for tickets (e.g., a single ticket will cost \$25 and two tickets will cost \$60). Seating is limited and reservations will be honored in the order payment is received. A total of 21 Seattle Base members – plankowners! - signed up for themselves and 17 guests at the August meeting! Invitations with full details will be mailed to in October.

## USS Virginia SSN 774 Christened

By Journalist 2nd Class Steve Feller, Commander Navy Region Northeast Public Affairs

GROTON, Conn. (NNS) -- "In the name of the United States, I christen thee, Virginia. May God bless her and all who sail in her." With those words and a swing of a champagne bottle, PCU Virginia (SSN 774) sponsor Lynda Johnson Robb, wife of former U.S. Senator Charles S. Robb of Virginia and daughter of former President Lyndon B. Johnson, christened PCU Virginia Aug. 16 here at Electric Boat. "I'm very pleased to sponsor Virginia. I'm delighted to be here today, and I think I managed to bless about everyone on that platform with that champagne," said Robb.

As the crowd took their seats and Navy Band Northeast filled the air with patriotic music, Virginia Prospective Commanding Officer Capt. David J. Kern led his crew aboard the sub where they stood in ranks, ready to bear witness of Virginia's christening. For the crew of Virginia and for the Navy, Saturday's event had special significance for two reasons. According to Electric Boat (EB) President Mike Toner, when the submarine was "rolled out" from EB's construction hall, it was six years to the day since the last submarine was rolled out. Also, Virginia is the first submarine to be built through a collaboration of General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton and Northrop Grumman Newport News in Virginia. "The (designing) process would not just include the engineers and designers, but also the

shipbuilders, the vendors, the suppliers and the operators," said Toner. "Everybody who came to touch the ship throughout its life would have a say into how it was to be designed."

Rep. Edward Schrock of Virginia said the partnership between the two companies will only benefit the Navy and the country. "The partnership between the folks at Northrop Grumman Newport News and General Dynamics is one that received great reviews, and one that has brought our communities together to build a new class of submarines," said Schrock. "That relationship will strengthen our nation's Navy and its ability to defend our nation, and protect our interests and sovereignty around the world."

Virginia is the ninth ship to bear the "Virginia" name. Six previous Virginias served in the U.S. Navy and two more served in the Confederate States Navy. This Virginia is far different from those ships, and despite its resemblance to a Los Angeles or Seawolf-class submarine, it is far different from other submarines, as well.

Virginia is lighter than the Seawolf-class submarines. It is also longer by 24 feet and has a beam six-feet less than its predecessor. Virginia has a payload of 40 weapons, and can accommodate special operations forces, an Advanced SEAL Delivery System (ASDS) and unmanned undersea vehicles.

Virginia and its 132-member crew can launch Tomahawk land-attack missiles from 12 vertical launch system tubes and Mark 48 advanced capability torpedoes from four 21-inch torpedo tubes.

"Its capabilities are so flexible and multifaceted...everything from deploying special forces, to long-term surveillance and launching Tomahawk cruise missiles, to detecting mines," said Sen. George Allen of Virginia.

"You think of every problem and challenge we're going to be facing now and into the future, and this (ship) can assist in a very important and powerful way in protecting our (nation's) security. It does have the best technology, the best communications and the greatest capabilities," said Allen. "This (sub) is the first in a long line of them. And we can't just have one Virginia-class submarine - we're going to need dozens more."

Vice Adm. John J. Grossenbacher, commander, Naval Submarine Forces,



echoed Allen's statement about needing more Virginia-class submarines. "Now Virginia should be followed by Texas (SSN 775) in a year and others following at a rate of about one a year. That's good, but it's not good enough," said Grossenbacher. "We're on the right course, but not the right speed. In order to have enough submarines to support our country's future security, we need to build two Virginia-class attack submarines per year."

Grossenbacher said the \$2 billion price tag on Virginia-class submarines may be a factor for their slower-than-desired build rate. "In my opinion, if you want the highest performance, the most advanced, the most reliable submarine in the world, and we do, it will never be cheap," said Grossenbacher.

"Speaking for our country's undersea warriors, the bottom line is that we think Virginia is worth every single penny of the taxpayers' dollars. We need her and her sister submarines, and we need them delivered faster than we are buying them today."

The Virginia-class submarines' value to the nation should continue well into the future due to her advanced capabilities.

"This submarine is superbly fitted for the world we live in and for the foreseeable future. Virginia is designed for undersea, surface and near-surface dominance across a broad spectrum of missions. With the focus on the littoral battle space, the Virginia has improved magnetic stealth, sophisticated surveillance capabilities and unique special warfare enhancements," Grossenbacher said.

While many compliments were delivered to Virginia's designers, builders and visionaries, a few speakers had kind words for the crew. "A submarine is the most complicated machine ever devised by mankind, and this submarine here today is the best of the best. But without the skill and dedication of our Navy crews and without the loyalty of our Navy families, the ship cannot perform its mission," said Rep. Rob Simmons of Connecticut. Robb said for her, being the sponsor of Virginia meant starting a new relationship. "It's a bonding with the sponsor and with the crew of the Virginia," said Robb. "For me, it is the starting of a new family with all of those crew members and all of their families. God bless them and may He protect them wherever they may sail."



Right now, Virginia is 91 percent complete and has about 40 weeks before it can be delivered to the Navy. According to Tom Schievelbein, corporate vice president of Northrop Grumman and president of Northrop Grumman Newport News, Virginia has been making history for a long time.

"This submarine was making history long before the first pieces of steel were welded together. This success speaks for the skill, the commitment and the dedication of the engineers, designers and shipbuilders," said Schievelbein. "Good shipbuilding takes people who are the best at their craft, who learn from each other and who are not satisfied with 'second best.' These are the kind of people who have built Virginia. They are the pioneers - they are the trailblazers of the 21st century...they like to push the envelope of possibility. Their work results in the most technologically advanced ship ever to sail under the seas. Their work will help the United States Navy with critical peacekeeping and wartime capabilities in this very uncertain world."

And as other submarines return from their mission of power projection and force from the sea, the christening ceremony showcased the Navy's and country's commitment to ensuring freedom. "Today we are united to celebrate this great ship," said Sen. Jack Reed from Rhode Island. "But throughout the years, we have been united by something more profound - the understanding that it is our task to mesh the courage and skill of our magnificent Sailors by providing them with the greatest submarines in the world."

## Birthday planned for USS Albacore

By Nancy Cicco  
ncicco@seacoastonline.com

PORTSMOUTH - She was the forerunner of the modern-day submarine, and present-day undersea warfare owes much to her design.

Fifty years ago today an uncommissioned Albacore was launched from Portsmouth Naval Shipyard following a ceremony that both paid homage to the men lost on her namesake and heralded the future of these stealthy vessels.

On Aug. 16, men who once served on the USS Albacore will get together at Albacore Park off Market Street to commemorate the submarine's birthday and her role in history.



"Many former crew members from all over the country are coming back," said Albacore Park board member Russell Van Billiard this week. "It appears there may be over 100."

The Albacore was built at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard between 1952 and 1953 for \$5.3 million, according to Van Billiard, who worked at the shipyard as a submarine design engineer for 35 years.

Originally measuring 200 feet long and 25 feet wide, the submarine reached a standard displacement of 1,200 tons and carried 40 crew members.

She didn't become the USS Albacore until December 1953, when she was commissioned by the U.S. Navy. Once she joined the Navy fleet,

she served until 1972, when she was retired to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard.

The first in a class of research submarines, she never carried a weapon or served in war. But in her day, the USS Albacore was the world's fastest submarine and a standard-bearer for all submarines to follow.

"It wasn't built to kill people. It was primarily built to test out a new hull shape that would go faster under the water," Van Billiard said. Once that streamlined hull design was married with submarines with nuclear capabilities, the modern-day vessel was born.

"All of our subs since have been built that way, and most subs in foreign navies have been built that way, too," Van Billiard said.

Championing the new hull design was Navy Vice Adm. Charles "Swede" Momsen, who in 1939 was in charge of the rescue of 33 sailors trapped in the USS Squalus, another submarine built at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. When the Squalus sank off the Portsmouth coast during a test run, 29 crew members lost their lives. But survivors were saved by a rescue chamber invented by Momsen that attaches to a submarine's hatch in order to free trapped crew members and lift them to the water's surface.

During the USS Albacore's tour of duty, she was used to test control systems, dive brakes, sonar equipment and escape mechanisms, according to information provided by Van Billiard.

The submarine was named after the original USS Albacore (SS 218). That submarine, built in Groton, Conn., was pressed into service at Pearl

(See "Underway" on page 7)

Harbor in 1942. She sunk many enemy vessels during World War II, but on her 11th war patrol, on Nov. 7, 1944, she struck a mine while in enemy waters off the coast of Japan.

In honor of the men lost in that event, the widow of J.E. Jowers, one of the crew members, christened the second USS Albacore by breaking a bottle on her bow during the launch ceremony. The new vessel, commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Kenneth C. Gummerson, would have 11 other commanders before she was retired, according to information provided by Van Billiard.

Many of the Albacore's crew members went on to serve as commanders of nuclear submarines, according to Charlie Perry, an 86-year-old former shipyard worker who helped build the submarine. Perry, of Kittery, Maine, was one of a handful of people who was inside the vessel when she was launched in 1953.

"We had an idea that it was going to be very fast and very maneuverable," said Perry. "It was truly a plum."

Perry was a first-level supervisor in the shipyard's pipe shop while the USS Albacore was being built. The submarine's design received an award from the National Mechanical Association, according to Perry.

"I stand in awe of the people who designed it and the people who operated it," he said.

#### **RENO 2003 – The First Joint Submarine Veterans Convention**

There were 3,349 registered for our joint convention. If you add the individual boat reunions that were taking place at other hotels around the city, the number was well over 4000 + submariners in Reno during the week. It was by far, the largest ever gathering of our shipmates to date.

Seattle Base attendees included Robbie & Terry Robertson, Cliff Nutter, Bob Oppe, Pat & Debbie Householder, John Bush and son, Jan & Sharon Stiffey, Don Smith, Rich Glaza, Ian Ellis, Jim Davis, Hugh Latham & Gloria Christopherson, Ted & Loma Taylor, Mike Bennett, Angus MacDonald, Don

*(See "Reno" -Continued on page 10)*

## **Tolling of the Boats—2003**

The Seattle Base of the United States Submarine Veterans Inc. will host a Tolling of Boats Ceremony on September 20, 2003 at pier 48 in Seattle at 3:00 P.M. This ceremony honors the memory of all 62 United States submarines and their crews that have been lost.



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**Binnacle List**

None reported.

**Lockwood Chapter USSV WWII Summer Picnic**

Under beautiful North Cascades blue skies, the Lockwood Chapter of USSV WWII held their westside picnic at Ed Kirchgessner's Pilaguamish Community Club near Robe, WA.

Folks in attendance included Robbie and Terry Robertson and Terry's sister Anita, Ted and Loma Taylor, Ed and Betty Kirchgessner, John and Barbara Baker, Erv & June Schmidt, Cliff and Jo Nutter, Lem and Marianne Riddell, Vern & Alice Salsbery and a couple non submariner folks too. Although not Lockwood members, Pat & Debbie Householder were invited as guests as well.

Following the brief business meeting conducted by Ted Taylor, everybody dug into the great variety of delicious foods brought and a very pleasant time was had by all.

Following the feast, the Senior Submariners (John Baker and Ted Taylor) challenged the young bucks (Cliff Nutter and Pat Householder) to horseshoes. It was a seesaw match back and forth! Both teams were, well, just awful, but in the end the young bucks squeaked out a win.

Everyone had a really good time, so I guess everyone was a winner.

(See the picnic photos on the opposite page)

**2003 Seattle Base Officers and Chairs**

Commander:	Patrick Householder	425-392-0440
Sr. Vice Commander:	Bob Oppe	425-747-1247
Jr. Vice Commander:	Peter McCafferty	206 784-8920
Secretary:	Charlie Ryan	206 525-0935
Treasurer:	Jim Harper	425-357-6485
Membership Chair:	Peter McCafferty	206 784-8920
Ceremonies Chair:	Don Masoero	253 941-4133
Base Chaplain:		
Chief of the Boat:	Ted Taylor	425-228-3764
Newsletter Editor:	Don Gentry	425-227-5410
Base Storekeeper	Bill Giese	425-355-5590
Webmaster	Ric Hedman	
Foxtrot COB	Dave Goodson	425-823-3507

**Upcoming Meetings—Seattle Base**

**Location: VFW Hall, Redmond**

**6:30 Social Gathering**

**7:00—10:00pm Mtg**

Wednesday - Oct 15, 2003	Dr. Bruce Adey: Human Powered Sub Project
Wednesday - Nov 19, 2003	Speaker to be announced

**Welcome Aboard to New Crewmembers**

**None this month**

*(Tolling—Continued from page 7)*

This year there will be special recognition of any WW II submarine veterans who are present at the ceremony. There will also be an induction ceremony into the Holland Club that consists of the those living submariners that qualified on submarines 50 or more years ago.

A Seattle Fire Department fire boat, the Bangor Submarine Base, Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs, the Washington State Legislature and VFW Post 2995 ceremonial drill team are sending representatives in support of the ceremony.

Following the ceremony, there will be social gathering from 1630 to 1800.





The horseshoe crew: John Baker, Pat Householder, Cliff Nutter and Ted Taylor above and the feast below.





Members of Seattle and South Sound Bases gathered on a beautiful Friday night August 1 to watch the Tacoma Rainiers get soundly trounced by the Edmonton Trappers, which was followed by a lovely fireworks display. Jan Stiffey brought his motor home over and we had a pre game food fest tailgate party. Attendees included Jan "Bear" & Sharon Stiffey plus grandkids, Bob and Chris Oppe, George & Nikki Debo, Don & Nadine Masoero, Ken and Vivian Board, Pat & Debbie Householder, Charlie Quimby, Robbie Robertson, Mike Ellis, Charlie Ryan and John and Lori Mansfield

*(Reno—Continued from page 7)*

Masoero, Phil Ward, George Debo, Claude & Bettye Cunningham & John Baker.

The weather was awesome, 80-85 degrees with 10-15% humidity. Bravo Zulu to the Corvina Base and their convention staff for having the largest gathering of submariners I have ever seen and making everyone feel at home and treating us like family. We all have fond memories that will be with us forever.

We did all we were supposed to do at the various meetings during the week and got the business of USSVI taken care of without much fuss. The officers of USSVI are a great bunch of guys and they are very well suited to keeping our organization on track. Our National Commander – John Peters, is a no nonsense guy and cut to the chase on many issues to keep everything moving to conclusion. He really knows how to keep a meeting moving.

The Hospitality Room was huge – the WWII vets had more tables than anybody, and battle flags and various mementos were on exhibit around the place. In the parking lot a 1/3 scale model of a S boat was on exhibit.

Future Conventions are as follows:

- 2004: Albany-Saratoga, NY
- 2005: Kansas City, MO
- 2006: Cleveland, OH
- 2007: Cruise Ship to Alaska from Seattle
- 2008: Ft Worth, TX

Next year's convention will be in Saratoga, New York. The entire community is supporting us coming there. They are having a full-blown town parade in our honor and the US Navy Band will also be there. The welcome video they played was a great pro-

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**Repel Boarders!!!:** Bill “Goose” Giese reports that if you were not there when the Rusty Ruskie came under attack by the Seafair Pirates, you missed a good time.

"The Seafair Pirates were great. We defended the sub with brooms and lost. They took down the flag and raised their own. We got a lot of pictures of the whole affair. Channel 7, 5, and Fox were there to film. I had taped the news to see what coverage we would get, but we didn't receive much. I didn't tape Fox so I don't know what they said."

*(Continued from page 10)*

duction and it looks like the Submarine Service is alive and Well in Saratoga – See Ya There.

The Hilton Hotel in Reno is incredible – the 3000 + people at the banquet were served in the most expeditious and professional manner that I have ever experienced. The food was excellent and the presentation was beautiful. The rooms were also great. The casino was also spread out and you never felt crowded or uncomfortable with all the people there. The buffet and other restaurants were also excellent.

The memorial service was well attended and made the local TV news. The Tolling of the Boats ceremony was well done and included support from the local high school ROTC members. As each bell was tolled, the ROTC member extinguished their candle until all 65 candles and the room was dark. The closing banquet had close to 1,000 bubbleheads in attendance and VADM Al Konetzni gave an inspiring talk about duty, honor and sacrifice.

We all hope the first joint SVWWII-USVVI convention will not be the last.



**Get your 2004 Subvet Calendar:** A fifteen (15) month calendar, this lovely work honors our submarine past by featuring the SQUALUS memorial on the front (above), and USS VIRGINIA on the back. The dates of loss for our submarines are on the calendar and watermarks and image profiles of the fifteen classes of nuclear subs are featured as well. See the base storekeeper (Bill Geise) to get one!

USSVI Seattle Base  
c/o Patrick Householder  
25003 SE 146th St  
Issaquah, WA 98027

To:

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*"No matter where you travel, when you meet a guy who's been...  
There's an instant kind of friendship 'cause we're brothers of the 'phin."*

— Robert Reed, G.W. Carver (SSBN-656)

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*(Corner—continued from page 1)*

attending this year. Saturday, Sept 20 brings our annual Tolling the Boats and Holland Club induction ceremony down at the Foxtrot. Don Masoero is putting together a splendid event for us, as only a Master Chief can.

Further out the timeline, Charlie Ryan is putting together a real classy Joint USSVI-SVWWII Christmas luncheon (a "Christmas in 1943" theme) at the Seattle Yacht Club on Sat Dec 20th to round out the year.

Our meetings are well attended, the programs have been well received, and I expect we'll have chow at our October meeting. How much better can it get? — Pat



**2003 National Subvet Scholarship Winner:**

Ms. Jennifer Aaby (center) received her \$750.00 award from Seattle Base Commander Pat Householder (right) in a presentation in front of forty two proud base members at the August 20, 2003 meeting. Jennifer, (Grand-daughter of Base Member Thomas G. Rice, who qualified on USS S-23 in 1935) is a Senior at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon and is a 4.0 Journalism Major.