



USSVI Thresher Base News



January 2005

Last Local Squalus Survivor Dies at 90

By Michael Goot, Portsmouth Bureau Chief, Foster's Daily Online

Gerald C. McLees, one of the last men to survive the tragic sinking of the USS Squalus submarine off the Isle of Shoals, passed away at his Portsmouth home on Thursday, December 30.

Although his lifetime included military service at Pearl Harbor, dinner at the White House with former President George W. Bush, 10 combat missions in the Pacific Theater during World War II, and escaping the Dust Bowl in Kansas in his youth, McLees was best remembered for surviving the USS Squalus.

McLees was among 32 other submariners rescued on May 23, 1939 when the USS Squalus sank in 243 feet of water just southeast of the Isle of Shoals during a test dive. The men were underwater for 39 hours. Twenty-six sailors died when the interior compartments flooded.

There were only six living survivors of the Squalus accident in 2000. McLees was the last one from this area.

Interviewed several times for documentaries, articles and books over the years, McLees insisted that he and his crewmates were simply doing their

jobs and that the real heroes of the Squalus were the shipmates who lost their lives and the divers who risked their lives to effect the rescue."

The story of the USS Squalus was told in the book "The Terrible Hours," which was written by Peter Maas in 1999. A movie about the accident, "Submerged," was produced in 2001. McLees attended a private screening of the film at the White House.

McLees, who was 25 at the time of the accident, was an electrician's mate 3rd class. He served on the USS Sailfish and the USS Crevalle. When the war ended, he headed back to combat in the Pacific on the USS Sea Leopard.

After attaining the rank of chief, McLees retired from the Navy in 1956. He then worked at the Portsmouth Naval shipyard as chief electrical inspector of submarines until his retirement in 1972.

Graveside services with full military honors were held at Calvary Cemetery in Portsmouth on Tuesday, January 4. Memorials may be made to Portsmouth Home Health and Hospice at 95 Brewery Lane, Unit 11, Portsmouth, NH 03801.

Thresher Base Meeting and Potluck Lunch

The next Thresher Base meeting is scheduled for this Saturday, January 15 at 1300. This will be a joint meeting with the WWII veterans followed by our annual Holland Club Induction Ceremony. Following the Ceremony, all members, wives, and guests are invited to a potluck lunch. The

following food dishes can be expected: Red Beans and Rice; Chili; Meat Platter; Hot Meat dish; Deviled Eggs; Crock of Meatballs; Cheeseball and Crackers; Hamburger Noodle Casserole. Keep these selections in mind when planning your food contribution.

Sole Survivor of USS Thresher Dies

Retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Raymond A. McCoolle, 75, of Chester, died Saturday, Jan. 1, 2005, after a long illness. He was born Sept. 1, 1929, and was the son of the late Charles and Gladys McCoolle.

Mr. McCoolle retired as lieutenant commander after a distinguished career serving 24 years in the Navy's Submarine Service. He served on numerous submarines, including holding the rank of chief petty officer on the world's first nuclear submarine, the USS Nautilus, and was an officer and sole survivor of the ill-fated USS Thresher.

Mr. McCoolle received numerous commendations and awards, including a presidential citation and the National Defense Medal of Honor. After he left the Navy, he was a very successful real estate businessman in the Seacoast area.

He was a thoughtful and loving husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend who very much enjoyed sharing stories of the sea with anyone who would lend him their ear.

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Commander's Message

Greetings Shipmates,

Well winter is finally here.

Though each time we've had some

snow, warm temperatures quickly followed and melted it all. I hope you all had a joyous and safe holiday and are getting into the swing of the New Year. With our next meeting just around the corner, I hope all can brave anything the weatherman throws at us and attend. This is an especially important meeting, as we will be inducting a number of our members into the Holland Club immediately following the business of the day. Larry Oiler has spent a number of hours going through the records to ensure Thresher Base is caught up on who is eligible for induction. I appreciate his tireless efforts directed in this cause.

We will also be hosting our WWII Submarine Veteran brothers and their wives at this joint meeting. As previously discussed, we will enjoy a potluck lunch after the Holland Club Induction Ceremony; so don't forget to bring a covered dish to share your or your wife's culinary specialty.

I hope everyone who wanted to become a Life Member did so before the dues went up New Year's Day. This was a significant increase in Life Membership, but according to National, the rate increase is comparable to other organizations with Life Memberships.

Again, It is unfortunate that I have to report to you some sad news. Last week Squalus Survivor, Gerald "Mac" C. McLees passed away. Sailors from Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and USS Montpelier

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November Meeting Minutes

The November meeting of Thresher Base was held at the Portsmouth VFW on November 20, 2004.

The meeting was called to order followed by a silent prayer and the pledge of allegiance. The Tolling of the Bells was conducted for all boats lost in November/December. A sound off of all those present was conducted along with the introduction of new member Joe Palmer

Secretary's Report was accepted as printed in the last newsletter. The Treasurer's Report, stating a balance of \$4004.34 was read by Roy Pierce and passed by the membership. Roy reminded members about the dues increase as of 1/1/05. There were not committee reports to be read.

Old Business -

Bill Seaward gave an update on the Albacore Park improvements. It is taking longer than expected to get a formal plan. A question was raised about using funds from the Memorial Monument Fund to clean up the area around the Monument or can the money only be used to clean the stone? Legs spoke up and said the money could be used for the cleanup and enhancement of the area surrounding the Monument. The membership approved \$1200 be made available from the Monument fund.

New business -

Larry Oiler will be taking over the Holland Club. He is verifying information and will be making calls to specific individuals. The goal is to have certificates to present at the January meeting.

Kudos were given to Kevin and Robin Galeaz for the work they have done on the improved Newsletter layout. Larry stressed the importance of WWII veterans to write bios for the newsletter and the website. Larry intends to nominate the newsletter for USSVI's Newsletter awards. Nomina-

tions are due in early January.

Kevin Galeaz received and read to the membership many thank yous from family and friends of those shipmates who had recently passed away.

Kevin then started a discussion about meeting Roy Graydon, Fleet Reserve, who is interested in joining USSVI. This discussion was about holding meetings in alternate locations, ex. Nashua and Manchester, which could help to grow membership and improve meeting turnout. It was agreed the the January meeting would be held in Portsmouth, the that an alternate location would be found for March.

Kevin let the membership know that Lillian Bellisle was in the hospital for getting to run down and that he had been keeping in touch with her.

It was discussed that one donation to the USSVI scholarship fund would be made in the names of Bob, Dick and Keith. \$160 was raised during the meeting.

Kevin let everyone know that the Convention was successful and passed around a photo album of the weekend's events.

In light of the recent passings, Gary made a plea to all members to get all paperwork in order (DD214 or Service Record) to make sure that arrangements can be made to have a Military presence at your funeral. Unfortunately Bob Bellisle did not have any such arrangements and to make up for this Gary is making arrangements for a burial at sea.

The recent passings also brought up a need to create a phone tree to pass along information in a timely manner, especially to those not on the internet. Unfortunately some members did not know about various calling hours and funerals.

The meeting was closed with the 50/50 raffle which Larry Oiler donated back to the base.

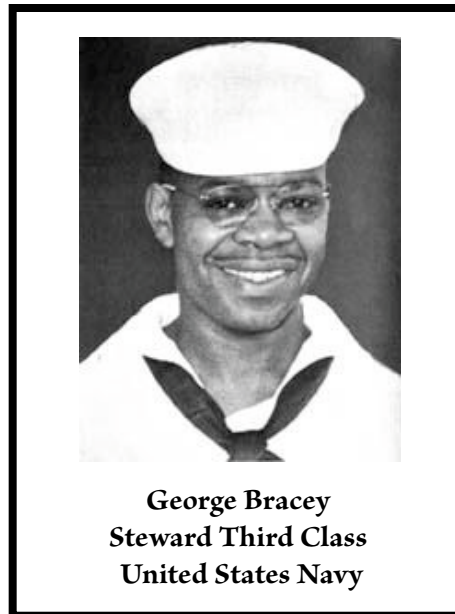


To Perpetuate the Memory



George Bracey was born on December 18, 1919, the only child of Lela Bracey and the late Milton Bracey of Jackson, Mississippi. He attended local schools in Jackson, and was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

George enlisted in the Navy on October 9, 1942, and received his basic training at the U.S. Naval Training Center, Norfolk, Virginia. His first duty assignment upon completing training was on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Ranger (CV 4). He served in that command until June 18, 1943, when he then volunteered for submarine duty. Upon being accepted, George was enrolled in the Submarine School at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut. Successfully completing the course, he was assigned to the U.S.S. Pargo (SS 264). George subsequently saw service in the U.S.S. Griffin (AS 13), U.S.S. Vogelgesang (DD 862), U.S.S. Bluefish (SS 222), in which he became quali-



George Bracey
Steward Third Class
United States Navy

fied as a submariner and was awarded his silver dolphins; U.S.S. Clamagore (SS 343), U.S.S. Thornback (SS 418), U.S.S. Razorback (SS 394), U.S.S. Sea Poacher (SS 406), and the U.S.S. Amberjack (SS 522).

In July, 1960, George was assigned to the nuclear-powered submarine,

U.S.S. Thresher (SSN 593).

During his naval service, George had earned the Submarine Combat Insignia with two gold stars, World War II Victory Medal, American Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Theater Service Medal, Philippine Liberation Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal (three awards); Commendation for outstanding performance while assigned to the U.S.S. Razorback, and letter of commendation from the commanding officer of Thresher (SS 593).

George was an ardent church worker and was an ordained deacon at the People's Baptist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He was a 32d Degree Mason of the D. G. Lett Lodge.

He is survived by his widow, the former Letha Reed of Raymond, Mississippi, seven children, and his widowed mother, Mrs. Milton Bracey of Jackson, Mississippi.

Commander's Message

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provided the full military honors for his burial. Though Gerald was not a member of Thresher Base, at the request of his daughter I oversaw his funeral. It was an absolute honor and privilege to be asked to do this for Gerald who was a huge personality in our business. Helen Momsen, Swede Momsen's granddaughter, and Carl Bryson, last living Squalus survivor, were also in attendance. It was a fitting way for Gerald to ship out on Eternal Patrol. For such a small man he was a huge impact on our legacy, he will be definitely missed.

Well, be safe on those roads out there and hold the rails on those ladders. Till our next meeting.

Holland Club Induction

During this Saturday's meeting, the following base members will be inducted into the USSVI Holland Club. Please join us in recognizing their achievement.

Anderson, Robert J.
Babcock, Roger E.
Bennett, Charles D.
Cloutier, Leo L.
Czajkowski, John W.
Dineen, Norman J.
Franceware, Eugene E.
Furlong, Carl I.
MacIsaac, Daniel R.
O'Neill, Edward J.
Simpson, Donald V.
Yates, Michael L.
Young, Thomas

Raymond McCoolle

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Members of his family include his loving wife of 51 years, Barbara (Roy) and their six children: Kevin McCoolle, Timothy McCoolle, Michael McCoolle, Daniel McCoolle, Kerry McCoolle and Kathleen Knox; 13 grandchildren; his brother, John; his sisters, Marilyn Bunkley, and Shirley Mattingly.

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated on Wednesday, Jan. 5, at St. Joseph's Church in Epping. The family has asked that donations be made in honor of Mr. McCoolle to the charity of their choosing.

THRESHER Base
United States Submarine Veterans, Inc.
c/o Kevin Galeaz
1465 Hooksett Road #239
Hooksett, NH 03106

**Next Thresher Base Meeting
Saturday, January 15, 2005 @ 1300
Portsmouth VFW - Deer Street**



USSVI Thresher Base

USSVI Thresher Base was chartered on 15 November 1989 in the memory of those 129 gallant men who at 9:17 AM on 10 April 1963 lost their lives in the performance of their duties aboard USS THRESHER (SSN 593).

Our mission is "to perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of their 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 Government."

The base newsletter, *Thresher Base News*, and base website, www.thresherbase.org, are used to inform the membership and community about meeting happenings and upcoming events. Any member who has information to share with the membership is encouraged to submit articles to the editor for publishing. Send submissions to Kevin Galeaz, Editor, 1465 Hooksett Road #239, Hooksett, NH 03106 or webmaster@thresherbase.org.

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