

FORTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE MAKING,
A COMMITMENT AND A VISION
BECOMES A REALITY
IN NORTH DAKOTA

By
Art Randall

At the 6th Reunion of the SubVets of WWII having defined a Creed at an earlier Reunion stating, "Our purpose is to perpetuate the memory of those shipmates who gave their lives in submarine Warfare," they had developed little of substance to support that Creed in the intervening years following receiving their Federal Charter in 1981. The solution? Each State "adopted" one of the 52 Submarines lost in WWII, New York and California each adopted two. The North Dakota delegation adopted the USS Robalo (SS273).

After completing a series of patrols with little or no success Robalo was reported to have sunk, just 10 months (July 26, 1944) after Commissioning. Her first Patrol produced no sinkings.

On her second in April 1944, she attacked several ships, one of which was reported to have been sunk but not confirmed. On her third patrol, while passing through the Balaback Strait, near Palawan, she struck a mine and quickly sank losing 77 of her 81 men (four swam ashore to Palawan Island, but were captured by Japanese stationed there and interned as POWS). None of the Robalo Crew Survived the War.

Little happened regarding North Dakota's adoption of the Robalo until a few years later at another Reunion. The body in attendance further committed to give substance to the adoption of the 52 boats, by committing to erect a lasting memorial to their adopted submarines.

The 45 year-old commitment made by the North Dakota delegates to erect a Memorial to their adopted submarine and its crewmembers lost 61 years ago, was fulfilled on Saturday, July 23, 2005. Those that made this commitment and on their eternal patrol, may now rest in peace... "Well done Shipmates, Well Done!"

Those that made this commitment so many years ago and are still among us today may now say "Mission Accomplished, Shipmates, Mission Accomplished." Ten of the eleven remaining members of the North Dakota SubVets of WWII were in attendance at the dedication of the USS Robalo Memorial, some traveling upwards of 600 miles to be a part of history and to witness first hand the results of their 45-year old Promise.

Dave Boisjolie
Jim Brenan
Joe Fisher
Ned Henry
Craig Hertsgaard
Erwin Holle
Ken Larson
George Moch
Bob Newton
Earl Fankhanel

Many people were involved in making this commitment become a reality, but the two most involved spearheading all that was needed to make it happen were Jim Brenan, North Dakota State Commander of the US SubVets of WWII and Roger Gress, Director of the Fargo Parks Department.

This dynamic duo developed and executed the strategies and plans necessary to achieve a successful dedication, including the memorial's design, keeping the press advised of the progress, soliciting donations of money and/or materials, trucking, among other activities required for such an undertaking.

There were of course, unexpected delays, and issues that needed addressing along the way before progress could continue, but it all came together this year and the dedication was set for July 23, just a few days shy of the day the USS Robalo lost on the evening of 26 July 1944.

With the completion of the Robalo Memorial, the commitment of North and South Dakota's SubVets of WWII has been realized as to their mission to erect a memorial to their adopted submarines. In 1992 the South Dakota SubVets of WWII dedicated a memorial to their adopted submarine, the USS Scorpion (SS278) lost 1 February 1944. The site chosen was on the bank of the Missouri River in Yankton.



The Dedication of the USS Robalo (SS273)
Lindenwood Park, Fargo, North Dakota July 23, 2005



Lindenwood Park, in Fargo North Dakota is the

site of the Robalo Memorial.
The entrance is graced with a beautiful fountain,
surrounded by several tall-poles with US Flags.



The dedication opened at 1500 as the Honor Guard of the Navy Reserve Color Guard
Posted the Colors while the Navy Reserve Unit stood at Parade Rest.



Also Supporting the Dedication was the Fargo Posts of the
American Legion, VFW and AMVETS



The number of guests attending the dedication was heart warming, as nearly 400
traveled many miles to attend this once in a lifetime memorial event!



Welcoming and Opening Remarks

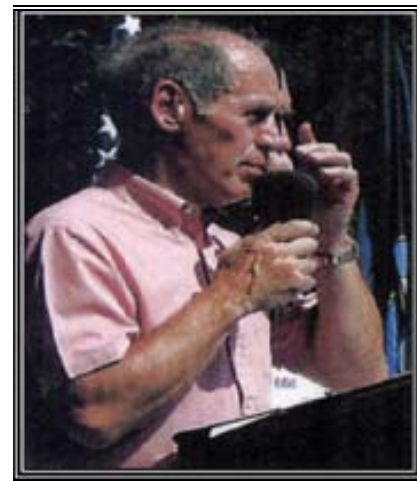
The Welcome and Opening Remarks were made by Art Randall, the National Anthem sung by John de Causemeaker, TM2 (SS), the Invocation given by Navy Chaplain Father James Cheney, LT, USNR followed by US SubVets WWII ND State Commander Jim Brenan, Wilbur Wright* who read a Proclamation from ND Governor Hoeven, concluding with welcoming remarks by Bruce Furness, Mayor of Fargo, North Dakota.



Jim Brenan



Wilbur Wright



Mayor Bruce Furness

Karen Engelter, Aide to ND Senator Byron Dorgan presented words of congratulations to the US SubVets of WWII as they enjoyed their long awaited accomplishment on that momentous day!

One of the Pathways on the Robalo Memorial Route



Two years ago, there were no US Submarine Veterans, Inc Bases (Chapters) in either of the Dakota states. Today, due to the publicity generated regarding the then underway plans for a memorial in both North (USS Robalo) and South Dakota (USS Scorpion in Yankton), there exists three USSVI Bases, the USS Scorpion Base in Sioux Falls, and the Polaris Base in Grand Rapids South Dakota and the USS Robalo Base in Fargo.

Bob Jacobson, Commander of the new USS Robalo US SubVets Base in Fargo also worked diligently to make this day a memorable event for all attendees. He too welcomed those gathered at the July 23rd Dedication and in particular he congratulated all of the North Dakota SubVets of WWII in their achieving a milestone that most thought would never be realized, but it did become a reality, with the help of many like Bob Jacobson, Jim Brenan, Wilbur and Carolyn Wright, Roger Gress and the members of the IL-MO Rebel Squadron SubVets WWII of St. Louis, Missouri to name but a few!



The Tolling of the Boats Ceremony would be the last and most impressive event before the closing of the Dedication. The narration of each boat lost in WWII was given by Art Randall (far left) accompanied by Senior Chief Dave Rice, of the Naval Reserve tolling the Bell in a two-bell tolling ceremony at center stage. There were many without a dry eye in what is often a very emotional experience for submarine veterans and their guests. After sixty years, the pain of the survivors remembering the fate of their lost shipmates still endures! After the tolling of the 52 lost WWII Boats, the Colors were retired and the Memorial Services and Dedication closed with the Benediction given by Pastor Susan Engholm, Great Niece of LCDR Harold Wright*. *“Commitments made, Commitments kept,”* were the by-words of the day for the ND SubVets of WWII!

The Memorial to the loss of the USS Robalo and her Crew

It was time for those that had not seen the Memorial to do so. Below shows a side view of the Memorial.



The front side of the Memorial provides a historical overview of the USS Robalo from its first Patrol in January 1944 to its sinking on The evening of July 26, 1944 believed to have hit a Mine!



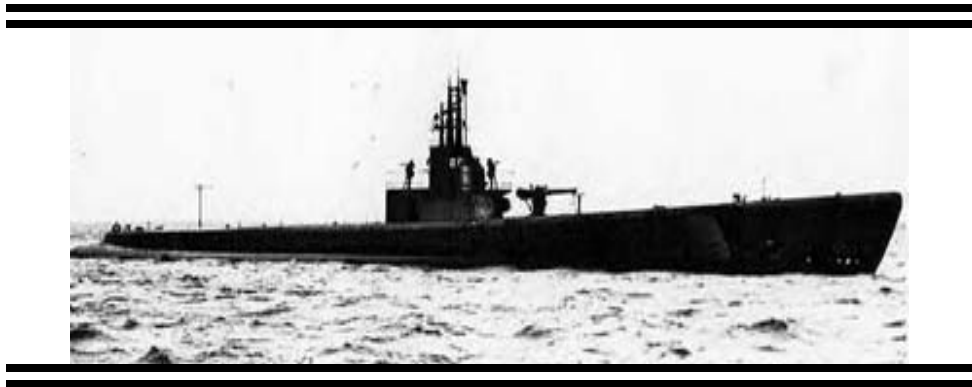
The obverse side lists the names of the members of the lost Robalo crew



The following is in Recognition of the 39 ND WWII Submariners and in Remembrance the three Submariners that were killed in action!



Everyone in attendance received a Certificate of Attendance, and many also attended the Naval Reserve Picnic in the Park. Everyone talked about what a wonderful day it was for the US Submarine Veterans of WWII. The Robalo (SS273) at Sea, just one month before she would be lost forever, with her crew of 81 men on the evening of July 26, 1944. May all rest in peace on their Eternal Patrol!



For the Trivia Mavins and Buffs of the World

During the 1930s and World War II and a part of the Korean War, Submarines were named after fish. The Robalo is any fish in a large diverse family that ranges from large ocean fish such as the Snook to the tiny glassfish popular with aquarists. The Robalo is of the Family: Centroponmidae.

The pronunciation of the name “Robalo,” is varied.”
Accepted pronunciations include

- Ro-bah-lo
- Row-buh-lo
- Ro-Bal-lo

Since the fish don’t care what they are called and those that eat them don’t really care, any name close to the above seems to be acceptable. However the preferred pronunciation seems to be, “ROW-BALL-OH.”

USS Robalo's Namesake Fish

