

Manitowoc-built Submarines



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World War II and Beyond

The History of Manitowoc Submarines

World War II began long before the United States entered into the war in 1941. In Asia, Japan had begun a path of aggression in the 1920s and continued with it throughout the 1930s. In September of 1939, the onset of World War II in Europe began with Germany's invasion of Poland. Much of the world was at war, but the United States chose to continue with its policies of isolationism and neutrality. However, the president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was preparing the nation for what he believed would be its inevitable entry into this war. Thus the nation's first peacetime draft was begun, as were programs designed to help supply the Allies in Europe, most notably Great Britain. One aspect of preparing the United States for war was modernizing and increasing the amount of the nation's submarines. As part of this program the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company contracted with the Navy to build ten submarines. Ultimately this would be expanded to the completion of twenty-eight submarines. These Manitowoc-built vessels played a crucial role in the war effort of the United States that began on December 7, 1941, with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.



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The entire nation's population, including the residents of Manitowoc, were affected, not just those who were fighting or knew someone who was. To ensure that our men and women were supplied, sacrifices were made on the home front, and those who were able were expected to help however they could. Rationing of important goods was mandatory, and factories and their workforces converted to war production. The Manitowoc area was no exception. Citizens from the city itself were put to work in the factories, and when that proved to be an insufficient number, others were bussed in from neighboring areas. This pamphlet will attempt to tell the story, based on personal narratives, of those who served, either as members of the military or in a production capacity on the home front. Furthermore, the Manitowoc-built submarines would see duty after World War II, and stories from those who later served are also included.

Submarines Built in Manitowoc

The submarines built in Manitowoc made a direct contribution to the United States' victory in World War II. Of the twenty-eight subs that were built, twenty-four returned safely. *USS Golet* was sunk on June 14, 1944. It is believed to have been the victim of a Japanese depth charge. *USS Robalo* was sunk in July of 1944 off of Palawan Island. Four men survived the sinking but died as POWs. *USS Kete* was lost in the East China Sea in March of 1945, causes unknown. Finally, the Japanese sunk *USS Lagarto* in the Gulf of Thailand in May of 1945. The wreck of *USS Lagarto* was found on May 15, 2005. The rest of the submarines returned successfully from the Pacific, having destroyed 488,918 tons of enemy ships as well as damaging many thousands more. Many of the ships were decommissioned after the war, only to be returned to service with the start of the Cold War and the ensuing conflict in Korea. Some of the submarines continued their service into the 1960s and 1970s. Ultimately all were either permanently decommissioned or transferred to the navies of allied countries, including Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Argentina, Turkey and Greece. Following is a list of all the submarines that were built in Manitowoc during the war, including the dates on which they were launched.

Gato Class

USS PETO (SS - 265)
Launched 30 April, 1942

USS POGY (SS - 266)
Launched 23 June, 1942

USS POMPON (SS-267)
Launched 15 August, 1942

USS PUFFER (SS - 268)
Launched 22 November, 1942

USS RASHER (SS - 269)
Launched 20 December, 1942

USS RATON (SS - 270)
Launched 24, January 1943

USS RAY (SS - 271)
Launched 28 February, 1943

USS REDFIN (SS - 272)
Launched 4 April, 1943

USS ROBALO (SS - 273)
Launched 9 May, 1943

USS ROCK (SS - 274)
Launched 20 June, 1943



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Balao Class

USS GOLET (SS - 361)
Launched 1 August, 1943

USS GUAVINA (SS - 362)
Launched 29 August, 1943

USS GUITARRO (SS - 363)
Launched 26 September, 1943

USS HAMMERHEAD (SS - 364)
Launched 24 October, 1943

USS HARDHEAD (SS - 365)
Launched 12 December, 1943

USS HAWKBILL (SS - 366)
Launched 9 January, 1944

USS ICEFISH (SS - 367)
Launched 20 February, 1944

USS JALLAO (SS - 368)
Launched 12 March, 1944

USS KETE (SS - 369)
Launched 9 April, 1944

USS KRAKEN (SS - 370)
Launched 30 April, 1944

USS LAGARTO (SS - 371)
Launched 28 May, 1944

USS LAMPREY (SS - 372)
Launched 18 June, 1944

USS LIZARDFISH (SS - 373)
Launched 16 July, 1944

USS LOGGERHEAD (SS - 374)
Launched 13 August, 1944

USS MACABI (SS - 375)
Launched 19 September, 1944

USS MAPIRO (SS - 376)
Launched 13 August, 1944

USS MENHADEN (SS -377)
Launched 20 December, 1944

USS MERO (SS - 376)
Launched 17 January, 1945

Wartime Production



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“Well, to make a long story short, they went down to the river, but the river was just shallow water. Mr. West was down there one night and he could picture the submarine in a dry dock. What did the company do? They built a whole new dry dock to take that submarine down. On that river between Chicago and the Big Muddy (Mississippi River), there were a lot of bridges but then they had a delivery crew because it took a week or two to get them all down there.

They put the submarine in the dry dock and pumped the dry dock dry and it floated up and they got it through the shallow water.”

Harold Bieberitz, shipyard worker at Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company

“I started working on July 3, 1943. Welding was the only way to get into the shipyards. I didn’t know how to weld, so I went to Sheboygan and went to school there for 40 hours. They put you in a booth and told you what to do. Seven buses came to Sheboygan every day to bring workers. There were also buses from Appleton and Green Bay. My shifts were from 7:00-3:00 or 3:30 everyday. There were shifts around the clock though. People always worked Saturdays and sometimes on Sunday. I couldn’t hear the



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first couple of days from the noise from work. I didn’t even know where Manitowoc was or that they were building subs. People worked all year round. I started with 40¢ an hour and asked for a 5¢ raise. I got 9¢ and the other girls were jealous. Subs were made upside down. They brought the subs out with two cranes, and they had to turn the subs upside down and put them together. It was built in two halves.

Later on, I got laid off and didn’t eat for three days.” **Rosella Siebert, shipyard worker**

“We started building subs for inland, taking them down to salt water. The crew stayed with the sub all the way down until it got handed over to the Navy. And of course, when it got down there they started running sea trials. The crew lived aboard and every night had a wingding going, but every night it was interesting. I would say we were doing all right. We pipefitters got paid \$1.20 an hour, and of course I was a night foreman, so I got \$1.33. What they would do was take it down to Lake Michigan and run all of their tests, and of course it [USS Peto] being the first sub, there were a lot of deficiencies that they’d put on a list for us to fix before the next morning.”

Harold Bieberitz, shipyard worker

Wartime Rationing

“After many attempts to transfer off the *West Virginia*, I was given orders to go to Submarine School in New London, Connecticut. I drove my car from Mare Island, California to New London. Two of my shipmates were transferred and traveled with me. They were Ray

Tireachi, a signalman or quartermaster and Clarence Watson, the ship’s cook. Clarence brought his wife, too. We were given enough ration stamps for ten gallons each. We drove over the Sierra Mountains to Reno, Nevada, and headed for Salt Lake City, Utah. There was

very little traffic. Gas being rationed, there were not many gas stations still open. I watched my gas gauge in the car, but we were getting low, and there were no stations. We reached a small community, but no gas stations. So we asked some of the people where we could get gas. A person finally told us a barn at the edge of town had a gas pump inside. The farmer would sell us gas.



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Tires were also rationed. The Japanese had control of the part of the world that produced most of the rubber. While going through Nebraska the front tire lost the recapped rubber. It peeled off and made a loud noise when it hit the underside of the car. The rubber inner tube was still inflated and ok. There was no tubeless tire as yet. I carried a spare and put it on the car. When we arrived at the next town, I went to the rationing board to see if I could get another tire so I could have a spare. I was told that I didn’t need a spare and the four tires on the car were good enough.”

Floyd C. Proffitt, *USS Macabi*



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“There were no shortages for building supplies for submarines because they came first. There were no cars built between 1939 and 1945. I don’t think we had any new cars. Anyway, materials for the submarines came first.”

Harold Bieberitz, on whether wartime rationing affected production

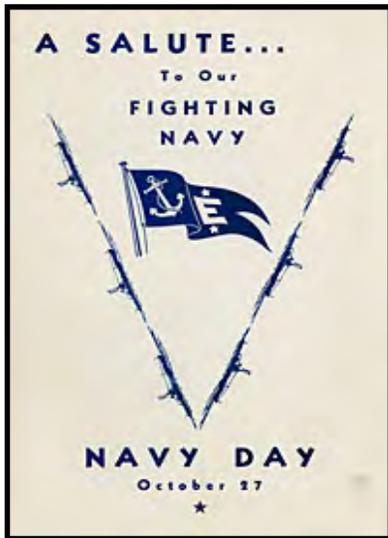
“I remember gasoline and sugar being rationed. I think they affected us most, even though we didn’t have a car at the time, but later on it affected us. We all had ration books, me and my sisters. My brothers didn’t because they were in the war. But it was like everyone in our family was doing their part.”

Marjorie Zimmerman, whose brother, Wesley Shackelford, was killed aboard the *USS Lagarto*



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Enlisting



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“On December 9, 1939, I became 18 years of age. In January of 1940, I graduated from David Starr Jordan High School in Long Beach, CA. The Depression was still with us and jobs were scarce. Seeing that I fell between the ages of 18 and 31, I ventured to the navy recruiting office at the US Post Office in Long Beach. In January, I was sent to Los Angeles City Hall to enlist. I was doing OK. I barely met the minimum weight requirements of 120 lbs, because dripping wet I weighed 120 lbs. I was doing OK until one of the hospital corpsman examining the new recruits stuck a thermometer in my mouth. Unbeknownst to me, I was running a fever. As it turned out I was coming down with the flu. I was told to come back in a couple of months. So, on March 12th, I went back to Los Angeles and was enlisted in the Navy for six years. You had a choice: six years or you didn’t get in.”

Floyd C. Proffitt, *USS Macabi*

“I wouldn’t change it for anything. I didn’t know what I was getting into when I actually volunteered for subs to keep me from going to Vietnam. I found out that it had a higher priority. That was mainly the reason that I got onto subs, but having been there, I wouldn’t change it. If I had not been married I would have stayed there. It was not a life for a married person.”

Charles Mongan, Jr., *USS Hardhead*

“My name is Jim Kaufmann from New Jersey. I wasn’t much college material, and I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I joined the Navy. When I joined the Navy I found out about submarines and it was the greatest thing I had ever done in my life. It taught me so many things, gave me discipline, gave me drive to do jobs properly (not do it like a numskull), because if you didn’t do it right they would tell you how to do it right. Now all these guys had come back after all these years and if that isn’t better than Harvard or Yale I’ll give 1,000 dollars right now.”

Jim Kaufmann, *USS Menhaden*

“I grew up in Gary Indiana. I had two older brothers who also enlisted. One was stationed on the *USS Trout*. I was also an engineman. I didn’t want to be in the army; I chose the Navy. I can dodge submarines, but I couldn’t dodge them bullets.”

Darcel R. Moffett, *USS Rasher*

“I enlisted in September of 1954. I had no desire to go to college. I signed up for an eight year commitment. I spent three years on the *Rasher* and then six months on the *USS Rock*. My brothers were in the Navy and worked in the submarines, so it was kind of an obligation.”

Al Stevens, *USS Rasher*



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Before World War II



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“**H**e [the brother of the interviewee] was born in Great Bend, Kansas, and was a butcher before the draft. He had three other brothers, and three sisters. I was a twin and we had an older sister of seven years. He was a good brother even though he was 19 years older.”
Marjorie Zimmerman, whose brother, Wesley Shackelford, was killed aboard the USS Lagarto



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“**S**ome of the men in my company #15 were assigned to restoring the destroyers to become seaworthy. They were in mothballs in San Diego. The United States had agreed to lend 50 destroyers to England. England needed the ships to combat the German U-boat submarine problem.”

Floyd C. Proffitt, on American involvement before entering the war



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“**I** was working for Manitowoc shipping at that time and someone said, “Hey we are going to start building submarines,” and everybody thought he was out of this world. The biggest problem was... “How are we going to get that submarine down to saltwater?”

Harold Bieberitz, shipyard worker

During World War II

“The commissioning party was March 23, 1945, and the sub was commissioned on March 29, 1945. We made sea (lake) trial runs and dives in Lake Michigan. We visited the Great Lakes Naval Training Station on one of the trial runs. Being in charge of the forward torpedo room, I felt sort of bad because the ladder that dropped down in the room was not as clean as it should have been. We had visitors from the Training Station and some were WAVES with their dress uniforms and white gloves. Well, their gloves were not so white when they reached the bottom of the ladder. The handrails were not clean, they were not happy, and we didn’t make a very good impression.”

Floyd C. Proffitt,
USS Macabi



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“Well, we had some idea that the war was coming to a close, but no knowledge of the atomic bomb. We were on patrol in the Pacific, and we had nothing to do. There were no boats in sight. Hadn’t been for some time.”

Floyd C. Proffitt, in response to whether there were rumors in the military about the impending end of the war and the atomic bombs.



Herald Times Reporter Collection

“In New Orleans the submarine *Macabi* was delivered to the navy by the Manitowoc Company. The *Macabi* then sailed to Panama and to the Pacific theater of war. After going through the Panama Canal we stayed a few days test firing our torpedoes every day. The warhead of the torpedo was filled with water and would blow the water out at the end of the run, and then it was picked up by a small boat and returned to the *Macabi*. We spent the rest of the day and into the night getting ready for firing the next day. One of the torpedoes that fired from the boat went out and came back at us. I thought, “This is not good,” and expected something to be said. Perhaps I was in big trouble. But nothing was said, and we went on with firing the torpedoes. The steam torpedoes were guided to their target by a gyro. A computer that was changing and keeping the correct direction to hit the target set the axis of the gyro. You have to remember several factors were involved for the torpedo to hit the target, such as our speed and heading and the distance and angle from our boat. Would you believe that the rotation of the earth and what latitude we were at could be a factor?”

Floyd C. Proffitt, *USS Macabi*

Life Aboard a Submarine

“But that is what we did. We kept track of each other. So some of the deployments were very long and those days were very arduous. I had one 70-some day patrol where it never went above freezing in the torpedo room for the entire 70 days. We were up in the Arctic, and it gets rather cold, and you don’t run the heat because you don’t want to run the batteries down. Your batteries are there to help you get out of trouble. So you don’t waste any battery power. You also don’t have showers.”

Joe Garrett, *USS Hardhead*



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“Most of us, when we were taken up at sea, we had crews divided up into three people, and we had six-hour watches. After the six-hour watch we would be off 18 hours. During those 18 hours you had your personal job to do, and you also get your rest so when you went back to watch you would be alert.”

Tony Gray, *USS Rock*

“He (her boyfriend) wrote to me and used different color ink for the different places he went in the military because locations were usually kept secret.”

Rosella Siebert, shipyard worker

“He was married and mailed letters to my mom and his wife. A lot of the letters had holes in them, due to them being censored.”

Marjorie Zimmerman, whose brother, Wesley Shackelford, was killed aboard the *USS Lagarto*

“Our crew, when at sea, was divided in three. One was on duty, while the other two rested. Most sailors rested, unless you were new. The new guys had to qualify. Qualifying was when you learned how to do everyone else’s job. You didn’t learn the specifics, but you learned how to do everyone else’s job. As long as they weren’t short of people, we worked in shifts, 6 hours on, 6 hours off. That could get a little old though, like model T’s and Cadillac’s. We could only stay down for about 17 hours. Now the only thing that limits them are supplies and the mental health of the crew. Like Darsh (Darcel Moffet) said, we were mostly limited on supplies. We had 22-hour charge batteries. We were dependant on air from the surface to run the engines.

Ship parties were my fondest memory. Being part of something successful is also another fond memory.”

Al Stevens, *USS Rasher*

“Well in port we had steak, eggs, and French fries every Sunday morning, and it was all you can eat. There was one guy aboard and he would order like twelve eggs, six steaks, and a plate of French fries and devour them. But the food was great and the menu varied. I mean everyday there was a new menu.”

Charles Mongan, Jr., *USS Hardhead*

“I had two older brothers in the navy. I was at home when they were gone and saw how my mother worried about them. So I made sure I wrote home often. I took 35mm slides wherever I went. I sent the pictures home and didn’t see them until I got out from the war. Those are some pictures now I wouldn’t take one million dollars for.”

Darcel R. Moffet, *USS Rasher*



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“Water was at a premium; they had 4,000 gallons of water and two stills. The stills made only battery water. You have to check the salt content of the water; it has to be low, below six on the scale. You didn’t take showers; you washed your body down then rinsed that was it. You didn’t use more than ½ gallon of water. When you got on shore you could take long drawn out showers. You could always tell a guy who just came back by the way he smelled. The only people to usually get showers were the cooks and hospital core men.”

Darcel R. Moffett, *USS Rasher*



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“It was crowded because space is at a premium in a submarine. Most of the space went for storage of food primarily. All the fuel tanks were external to the hull. Most of the space was living quarters. It was very tight. You were practically right next to the person in the next bunk. It was an adventure. I really enjoyed it, and I had a lot of fun.”

Tony Gray, *USS Rock*

(Laughing)... **“What’s a shower? Fresh water?** No, we didn’t regularly take showers. Maybe if we were pulling into a liberty port. The showers would be open because then they could take on fresh water but on a diesel submarine 4120 gallons of water doesn’t last long. It’s used mainly for dishes, cooking, and the coffee. They had to have their coffee. To run the stills, it’s doable, each still made 40 gallons at a time. We were pretty proud of not taking showers, but once we got to the barracks the shower would last an hour, hour and half, two hours.”

John Barnes, *USS Hardhead*

“I served twenty-two and a half years in the Navy. In order to talk to our families we used small recording tapes. We would record a message on it and mail it home. We would write letters and sometimes had phone calls. Aboard the nuclear submarine you could not send messages out to family. We got messages that were called family grams.”

Tony Gray, *USS Rock*

“The atomic bombs had been dropped and the war ended. I was then sent to San Diego with a shipmate, Art Wibrich, to learn how to put a boat into mothballs. Coming back from San Diego, I stopped to visit with my parents. Art and I stopped for some refreshments along the way. By the time we arrived at my parents’ house, we were feeling very refreshed. Unknown to me, my wife in Wisconsin had our baby girl. My parents thought this was why we were celebrating. They were not too happy with me when they realized we were just celebrating.”

Floyd C. Proffitt, *USS Macabi*

After World War II

“My six-year enlistment was up on March 11, 1946, and I moved to Long Beach. Again, getting a job was not easy. The war was over and lots of people were laid off. Unbelievably, I was back to the same situation as I was in six years before. I had enough of the military and didn’t want to re-enlist. A neighbor of my parents got me a job with the City of Long Beach digging ditches for putting in sewers. It was a job. I had a friend that worked for the Southern California Edison Company, and he said I could possibly get a job with them in Visalia, CA. His brother was the superintendent of the substation department. I was familiar with Visalia for I had an aunt and uncle in the little town of Ivanhoe where I had spent the summers. Taking vacation days from the City of Long Beach, I went to Ivanhoe. On a Friday I went to see Roy Talbort about a job. It was a tough exam. He asked if I could drive a car, and I said, “Yes.” He told me to report to work on Monday morning, proving that it is not what you know but who. I stayed with the Southern California Edison Company for 35 years.”

**Floyd C. Proffitt,
USS Macabi**

“I was relieved to know where he’s at. I’m the last one left really. My sister is in a nursing home and my mother just passed. Before the war he lived about 50 miles north of us, but he visited.”

Marjorie Zimmerman, on the finding of USS Lagarto in 2005



Herald Times Reporter Collection

“We stay very much in contact. They are all over the United States, and we try our best to stay in contact. We try to visit them once every year. My wife and I live in an RV all the time.”

Tony Gray, on his fellow submariners

“One of the interesting things I find when I go back to the reunions is that we didn’t know we were spying. Most of us didn’t have a clue that this guy that just checked on board was a spook (spy) and that he had a specific mission that we were transporting him to and they would conduct their tests that they had to do and then be gone. When we were taking on guys in sub school and went out, we knew what that was, that was just for a ride to scare them to stay on or not come back. But it was interesting going to the reunions to see that we were actually on missions that could have been critical.”

John Barnes, on submarine life during the Cold War

“I got out in May of 1957. The economy was poor and it was hard to find a job. I applied at the NYC railroad and the man in charge of the roundhouse was an ex-sub sailor. When he saw my application he hired me. I move up quickly but hated working for the railroad. When I left the railroad I worked for companies and rebuilt engines and then I made my own companies.”

Darcel R. Moffett, USS Rasher

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All notes were compiled as accurately as possible. Some editing for content,
spacing or clarity may have occurred.

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The History Channel, in collaboration with leading educators from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), developed a comprehensive Educators' Manual containing standards-based lesson plans, enrichment activities, and resources that help elementary, middle and high school teachers connect American History content to their local history. The manual guides teachers to engage students in hands-on, experiential preservation projects. The Educator's Manual is supplemented by monthly *Save Our History* lesson plans, available online at www.saveourhistory.com. To date, more than 60,000 educators at schools, youth groups, history museums, and historic sites have used the educational materials to teach over 1.8 Million students about their local history and the importance of preserving it.

About Save Our History

Save Our History is an Emmy® Award-winning strategic philanthropic initiative of The History Channel that launched in 1998, designed to further historic preservation and history education. The program supplements the teaching of history in America's classrooms, educates the public on the importance of historical preservation and motivates communities across the country to help save endangered local historic treasures. The *Save Our History* campaign includes original documentaries, special teachers' materials, national promotion on The History Channel, broadband activities in schools, and has worked with The Smithsonian Institution, National Park Service, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National World War II Memorial, American Rivers and The White House 200th Anniversary.

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