



# Hawgfish Scuttlebutt



Razorback Base  
United States Submarine Veterans



MAR, 2018

## The Komsomolets Disaster

In 1985, a Russian Submarine Created an Atomic Disaster. The Radiation Lingers to This Day.



### Burial at sea

The Russian nuclear attack submarine Komsomolets sank in the Norwegian Sea. The event caused consternation in the Soviet Navy, high interest in NATO maritime and intelligence circles, and apprehension among environmentalists. This concern arose particularly in Norway, for the submarine's broken hull holds two nuclear reactors and at least two torpedoes with nuclear warheads containing plutonium, one of the most toxic substances known to man.

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**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 of America and its Constitution.**

### ***COMMANDER'S CORNER***

I was doing a little browsing on the computer this morning and decided to look up the history of the US Navy rating system. I learned that the rate SoM – Soundman was first introduced in 1942, changed to SOG - Sonarman (sonar) in 1943, and to STS - Sonar technician (submarine) in 1964. Coincidentally although no one knows who first coined the phrase, but the term “Hollywood shower” was also invented that same year. (sorry just kidding)

Saturday, February 24th was the base meeting at Golden Corral in NLR.

Unfortunately, because of the bad weather we only had 8 people in attendance, but the food was good everyone had a good time, and the rain cleared up for the drive home. Our next meeting/event is scheduled for March 24th at Oaklawn Race Track in Hot Springs. Mary Christians is making the arrangements for this month's base event at Oaklawn. The Caracal room is already booked, so seating will be in the stands. The price is \$14.50 per person, which gets you in the gate and a seat, and you will also receive \$10.00 in (Oaklawn Bucks) to use for food and drinks.



Mary asks that you send her an email at marychristians@sbcglobal.net so she can get a head count to purchase the tickets, and send her your check for \$14.50 per person to. Mary Christians PO BOX 8358 Hot Springs Village, AR 71910.

Early last week I sent out an email asking which location was preferred for the April US Submarine Birthday Dinner, the vote was overwhelming for Shorty Smalls in West Little Rock, so I have made a reservation for us to meet starting at 1700 for dinner and to celebrate our 118th birthday, and Holland Club induction for this year's new Holland Club members, so be sure to mark April 28th at 1700 on your calendar.

V/r,

Greg Schwerman  
Base Commander

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Schwerman".



(continued from page 1)

Since the sinking, Russian authorities have elicited to an unprecedented degree scientific assistance from other countries and used remote sensors and mini submersibles to find Komsomolets, measure radiation leakage, and assess the stability of the wreck. Ironically, the architect of this instrument of war who designed it to hunt US and Norwegian ships is asking for and receiving assistance in surveying the submarine and assessing its stability from Komsomolets' intended victims.

#### Komsomolets--One of a Kind

Komsomolets means "member of the Young Communist League." Launched in May 1983 in Severodvinsk, a closed Soviet city on the Barents Sea with the world's largest shipyard. She was 400 feet long, 37 feet high and 27 feet in the beam with a submerged displacement of 8,000 tons--a very large submarine indeed. Komsomolets had two nuclear reactors, long thought to be of revolutionary design (liquid-metal coolant) but actually water-cooled. Her inner pressure hull was titanium, light and strong, making her the world's deepest diving submarine, and her operating depth below 3,000 feet was far below that of the best of US subs. Manned by about 70 men, she could carry a mix of torpedoes and cruise missiles with conventional or nuclear warheads. NATO dubbed her type Mike and expected the unit to be first of a class of large attack submarines. She became operational in late 1984, but no further Mikes were built. Although a prototype, she went on operational patrols and was described as an antisubmarine warfare unit in May 1989.

#### The Sinking

It is 7 April 1989. Komsomolets, of the Soviet Northern Fleet, is cruising at 1,250 feet below the surface of the Norwegian Sea, some 100 miles southwest of Bjornoya (Bear Island) and 200 miles to the north of the Norwegian mainland. She has been on patrol for 39 days.

At 11:00 a.m. Seaman Nodari Bukhnikashvili reports all well in Compartment 7, the location of steering and the aftmost space on the ship. Moments later, a high-pressure air line connecting to main ballast tanks allowing the submarine to control its depth bursts its seal in the seventh compartment. Somehow a spray of oil hits a hot surface there, and a flash fire begins in the high-pressure oxygen-rich air. Three minutes later Capt. Third Rank Vyacheslav Yudin, Komsomolets' watch engineer in the control room, notes a sharp rise in temperature aft. He calls Bukhnikashvili on the intercom but receives no reply. Lt. Igor Molchanov notes the time in the deck log.

Chief Engineer Valentin Babenko and Commanding Officer Captain First Rank Yevgeniy Vanin are now in the control room. Babenko recommends Vanin smother the apparent fire with freon, a nonflammable gas. Vanin delays, knowing the gas would smother the seaman as well as the fire. But soon he reluctantly orders the system activated. The high-pressure air line is feeding the fire in Compartment 7 like a blast furnace. Bukhnikashvili is the first of the crew to die. The fire is now beyond containment.

Pressure aft forces oil into Compartment 6, and the fire arcs through cableways despite closed hatches. Turbine generators here wind down, the emergency system to protect the nuclear reactors from overload kicks in, and the propeller shaft stops. Fearing a meltdown, the reactor officer shuts down the submarine's main source of power. Now Komsomolets is powerless. With no way on and at a depth of 500 feet, she loses vital lift. Interior communications cut off. At 11:13 a.m. oil pumps shut down, and the sub loses hydraulic pressure to control surfaces. The vertical rudder jams and the stern diving planes cannot be controlled. Captain Vanin orders the main ballast tanks blown, and Komsomolets rises to nearly 300 feet. Here he repeats the procedure. Somehow, by blowing extra water ballast, Vanin manages to bring the sub to the surface. As she founders, he signals an encoded SOS to his headquarters.

But surfacing has not put Komsomolets out of danger. By 11:21 a.m., the fire has spread through cableways to all aft compartments and has reached nearly 2,000° F. The rubber coating on the outer hull designed to muffle acoustic detection begins to slide off in strips.

Vanin orders all hands not engaged in damage control topside. Those fighting to save the ship don masks using the emergency breathing system. But with the loss of high-pressure air, fumes from Compartment 7 have brought carbon monoxide (CO), a tasteless, odorless, and toxic gas, into the system. Men get dizzy and doctor Lt. Leonid Zayats suspects something wrong. He rips off his mask and tests the air. A fatal concentration of CO is detected. Now, most of the crew will fight for their ship in a swelter of smoke and foul air.

Vanin continues signaling Northern Fleet Headquarters. By 11:41 a.m. his message is received, but garbled--a Soviet submarine somewhere is in trouble, and aircrews are alerted.

By noon the fire reaches forward compartments. Nothing is heard from the nine crewmen manning the reactors in Compartment 4. Yudin and another officer don self-contained breathing gear, open the hatch and enter. Miraculously, they find two officers still alive in the smoke-filled compartment and bring them out. More rescuers try to ventilate Compartment 5 and bring out two crewmen. One survives. In Compartment 3 Seaman Roman Filippov tries to restart a diesel generator to provide ship's power. He succeeds but becomes ill and is ordered topside. Capt. Third Rank Anatoliy Ispenkov takes over and continues to man the post.

At 12:19 p.m. Vanin abandons security protocol and sends a message in the clear giving the submarine name, location, and dire circumstances. The Navy responds. Fleet Admiral Chernavin, the senior Soviet naval officer, is alerted while at a conference at the Defense Ministry. He orders his headquarters to take all steps to rescue the crew, including assistance from Norway. Fleet Headquarters finds three Soviet ships within 70 miles of Komsomolets and orders them to the scene. The first Red Banner Northern Fleet rescue aircraft takes off from the Kola Peninsula at 12:43 p.m. But M-12 amphibians are not dispatched, and no one alerts the Norwegians. Nonetheless, they know of the alert through intercepted communications, but delay sending help because it is unclear whether a practice rescue is underway.

At 2:20 p.m. the rescue aircraft radios Vanin and hears that the fire is not spreading. Most men assemble on the weather deck. At 2:40 p.m. the rescue aircraft breaks through the clouds and spots Komsomolets dead in the water. Visibility is fair, sea state moderate. The men are heartened by the sight of aircraft. Thinking that surface help will arrive soon, they do not don wetsuits, although the water is cold enough at 36° F to kill them in 15 minutes. In a short time the wind begins to kick up, seas rise to 4 feet, and the men hang on to the slippery deck. For the next two hours, everything seems under control. The crew clears Compartment 5, and the ship is not taking on water. Surface rescue is expected to arrive at 6:00 p.m. Most of the crew are now on the weather decks as the smoke inside the ship is becoming intolerable. In the control room visibility is less than 6 inches. Few now remain inside. Vanin, Yudin, and Molchanov in the control room, Ispenkov manning the generator, and Warrant Officers Slyusarenko, Krasnobayev, and Chernikov remain inside to save the ship.

For more than four hours Captain Vanin has been attempting to right his ship. Upon surfacing, he corrects an initial port list by counterflooding. Two hours later a starboard list develops. Vanin is handicapped by damaged equipment, hazardous conditions, and a nearly complete lack of information from his instruments.

About 4:30 p.m. Vanin orders two port ballast tanks blown to trim the sub; this does not work and serves only to accelerate taking on water. Komsomolets' after ballast tanks are not equipped with Kingston valves that would close under water, and her pressure hull has been breached. She begins taking on water quickly astern. No damage control measures can save her now. At 4:42 p.m. Captain Vanin orders the crew to abandon ship and minutes later sends his last radio message.

At 5:00 p.m. two life rafts are inflated on the bow, and the aircraft drops a rescue pod. Men begin to enter them. The captain goes below to get the last of his crew, but now Komsomolets is sinking fast. The last man on the bridge shuts the hatch as water pours over the conning tower. The water would drown those still inside if he left the hatch open. Komsomolets is equipped with an escape capsule, and perhaps they can use it. At 5:08 p.m. Komsomolets begins to sink stern first. It will be an hour before surface help arrives.

The self-rescue is not going well. One life raft overturns. Men crowd aboard, but some have to cling to the sides. The second raft goes down with the sub, breaks free, but too far for the men to reach. More small rafts are dropped from the rescue aircraft, but there are not enough for the 50 men in the water. On the large raft, men's hands are getting numb. Doctor Zayats tells them to hang on by their teeth. Some succeed, but in the next hour more than half, including Babyenko and Filippov, slip away and drown.

Inside the sinking Komsomolets, six men are still alive. Captain Vanin guides them to their last hope, the escape capsule. American submariners would not have this option. They close the hatch. Vanin counts, himself, Yudin, Slyusarenko, Krasnobayev, Chernikov . . . one is missing . . . Ispenkov. They hear a knocking, try to open the hatch, but it is too late. The outer compartment's walls collapse. Komsomolets goes down 300, 500, 1,000 feet. At 1,300 feet the scale no longer records, but the sub continues down. The men desperately try to release the capsule but without success. Another explosion rocks the ship, and suddenly the escape capsule breaks free--flying to the surface. Once there, the hatch blows off. But only Slyusarenko can get out, as the capsule floods in the rough seas. Vanin, Yudin, Krasnobayev, and Chernikov sink in the capsule to rejoin Komsomolets more than 5,000 feet below.

Shortly after 6:00 p.m. a fishing boat arrives and picks up 30 crewmen. Of the 69 crewmembers, 39 are already dead. Molchanov is recovered and feels fine, but the smoke inhaled while keeping the deck log in the control room and the water's chill have taken their toll. He and two more will soon die. Doctor Zayats and Warrant Officer Slyusarenko are among the survivors.

### The Aftermath

Komsomolets did not die quietly. In the era of glasnost, this incident could not be covered up, even in the Soviet media. Moreover, the Norwegians observed the rescue attempts and were worried about radioactivity released in their economic zone. Recriminations mounted. The Norwegians claimed they could have reached the scene by air or surface two hours before the submarine sank. Within a week a blow-by-blow account appeared in the widely circulated Soviet newspapers Komsmolskaya Pravda and Sovietskaya Rossiya with detailed time-events from the rescue aircraft point of view. Within a month the crew, dead and alive, was awarded the Order of the Red Banner, and more stories explained why it took so long for help to arrive. Two months after the sinking, the oceanographic rescue ship Akademik Mstislav Keldysh using submersibles found Komsomolets a mile down.

### Epilogue

Many surveys have been done and decisions on what to do were based on those surveys. Near the end of 1993, a decision was finally reached. The Russian Government's Special Committee for the Conduct of Underwater Work found that radioactive seepage was at that time insignificant but that deterioration of the torpedoes could cause serious consequences in two to three years. Therefore, it would be necessary to seal the bow of Komsomolets, using a special compound yet to be developed, entombing it in a special sarcophagus.

A Reuters wire release from Moscow on 12 July 1994 stated, "Russia said yesterday it had sealed a sunken nuclear submarine off Norway to prevent radioactive leaks. The Komsomolets . . . is now embedded in mud in international waters."

Komsomolets lies broken a mile deep in a quiet part of the Norwegian Sea. Natural sediment drifts down slowly burying the wreck, its debris, and most of its crew. Few artifacts have been raised. One of them, the ship's clock, was sent to the Central Naval Museum in Leningrad. It stopped at 5:43 p.m. on 7 April 1989.



## Lost Boats –March

EDITOR NOTE: We have seen many newsletters and reports of lost boats such that it is now somewhat redundant. We should never forget and that is what we are about, however I am going to list in the newsletter a boat lost during the month of issue but instead of listing how the boat was lost as we have for some time, I am going to list "who" we lost by focusing on some of our shipmates we lost including some pictures of them. Certainly we have too many to include them all, but we can take a moment and honor their memories. Alan

### USS GRAMPUS (SS 207)

The following men were lost while serving on USS GRAMPUS (SS 207).

1	<a href="#">Louis Dixon Ball</a>
2	<a href="#">John Basel</a>
3	<a href="#">Walter Kent Wilson Bathgate</a>
4	<a href="#">Michael Belev, Jr.</a>
5	<a href="#">John Lewis Benton</a>
6	<a href="#">Neil Thomas Berresford</a>
7	<a href="#">Vernon Joseph Biggy</a>
8	<a href="#">Curtheal Black</a>
9	<a href="#">Robert Joseph Bohler</a>
10	<a href="#">Donald William Bowlby</a>
11	<a href="#">Friedrick Leopold Brunner</a>
12	<a href="#">Walter Allen Bruns, Jr.</a>
13	<a href="#">William Elmo Burdette</a>
14	<a href="#">Kenneth Leroy Chaffin</a>
15	<a href="#">Thomas Robert Collins</a>
16	<a href="#">Thomas Lewis Conley</a>
17	<a href="#">Eugene Field Corder</a>
18	<a href="#">Richard Ernest Corum</a>
19	<a href="#">John Rich Craig</a>
20	<a href="#">Robert Lee Dexter</a>
21	<a href="#">Jesse Hugh Dunnivant</a>
22	<a href="#">Orville Franklin Fanning, Jr.</a>
23	<a href="#">Donald Massey Fenner</a>
24	<a href="#">Herminio Gonzales</a>
25	<a href="#">Herbert Curtis Goodrum</a>

26	<a href="#">Arthur Mac Griffith</a>
27	<a href="#">Robert Pollock Guiler, III</a>
28	<a href="#">Wilbur Dale Handy</a>
29	<a href="#">Edward Paul Haupt, Jr.</a>
30	<a href="#">Walter Charles Hendry</a>
31	<a href="#">Hollis Earland Herrin</a>
32	<a href="#">Michael Patrick Joyce</a>
33	<a href="#">Sam Kane</a>
34	<a href="#">Duane John Kilpatrick</a>
35	<a href="#">Harris Raymond Larson</a>
36	<a href="#">Vernon Wade Law</a>
37	<a href="#">William Jennings McClure</a>
38	<a href="#">Rayhugh George Michael</a>
39	<a href="#">George Willard Mitchell</a>
40	<a href="#">Willard Moeller</a>
41	<a href="#">Joseph Henry Nash</a>
42	<a href="#">Edward Roger O'Connor</a>
43	<a href="#">David Edward Olexa</a>
44	<a href="#">James Wesley O'Neal</a>
45	<a href="#">Charles Woodrow Patrick</a>
46	<a href="#">George Francis Phelps</a>
47	<a href="#">Howard Cooper Pillsbury</a>
48	<a href="#">Thomas Earl Poyner</a>
49	<a href="#">Louis Elmore Presley</a>

50	<a href="#">Verl Monroe Purdom</a>
51	<a href="#">Leland Hayward Roberts</a>
52	<a href="#">Chester Eugene Rudd</a>
53	<a href="#">Robert Vernon Sager</a>
54	<a href="#">Ivan John Sandell</a>
55	<a href="#">Alvin Francis Sbisa</a>
56	<a href="#">William Bernard Schmidt</a>
57	<a href="#">Francis Donald Shafranski</a>
58	<a href="#">Marcus Waitus Shepard</a>
59	<a href="#">Alvin Roger Tagesen</a>
60	<a href="#">Alvin Westly Tevis</a>
61	<a href="#">George Lewis Thomas</a>
62	<a href="#">James Henry Thomas</a>
63	<a href="#">Robert Theodore Thrasher</a>
64	<a href="#">Millard Clark Townley</a>
65	<a href="#">Roger Vance Trego</a>
66	<a href="#">Louis Elmer Tremmel</a>
67	<a href="#">Myron Peter Tuttle</a>
68	<a href="#">Roy Vander Reyden</a>
69	<a href="#">Grant Albert Vedder</a>
70	<a href="#">Wendell Maxwell Walters</a>
71	<a href="#">Norman Eugene Wilson</a>



# Millard Clark Townley



Rank/Rate Fire Controlman, First Class  
 Service Number 274 18 67  
 Birth Date December 20, 1909  
 From Richey, Mississippi  
 Decorations Purple Heart  
 Submarine [USS Grampus \(SS-207\)](#)  
 Loss Date March 5, 1943  
 Location In or near Blackett Strait  
 Circumstances Lost at sea, cause unknown

# Louis Elmore Presley



Rank/Rate Chief Gunner's Mate  
 Service Number 274 06 89  
 Birth Date April 12, 1909  
 From Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
 Decorations Silver Star, Purple Heart  
 Submarine [USS Grampus \(SS-207\)](#)  
 Loss Date March 5, 1943  
 Location In or near Blackett Strait



DEEPEST SYMPATHY - Betty Rouch, age 79 passed away peacefully on Firday, March 2, 2018 with Julian Rouch by her side. Julian and Betty were founding members of the Razorback Base and many of you may remember them. Fair winds and following seas Betty.

### **Eternal Patrol Poem**

In ocean wastes no poppies blow,  
No crosses stand in ordered row,  
Their young hearts sleep... beneath the wave...  
The spirited, the good, the brave,  
But stars a constant vigil keep,...  
For them who lie beneath the deep.  
'Tis true you cannot kneel in prayer  
On certain spot and think. "He's there."  
But you can to the ocean go...  
See whitecaps marching row on row;  
Know one for him will always ride...  
In and out... with every tide.  
And when your span of life is passed,  
He'll meet you at the "Captain's Mast."  
And they who mourn on distant shore  
For sailors who'll come home no more,  
Can dry their tears and pray for these  
Who rest beneath the heaving seas...  
For stars that shine and winds that blow  
And whitecaps marching row on row.  
And they can never lonely be  
For when they lived... they chose the sea.  
By Eileen Mahoney

## **HELP NEEDED WITH OVERNIGHTS**

**Six dates listed below when AIMM needs help with a sub vet for overnights.**

**Please contact Greg Zonner directly  
at [gzonner@aimmuseum.org](mailto:gzonner@aimmuseum.org) or [zonnerg@yahoo.com](mailto:zonnerg@yahoo.com) or call at 501-307-5522**

**Thanks to all that can provide assistance. AIMM had a fairly bad month in February. All the rain cut in to open days for tours. These overnights are thus even more important for revenue.**

**March 17 Saturday, March 31, Saturday, April 13, Friday, April 21 Saturday, May 12, Saturday**



TREASURER'S REPORT		Feb-18
<b>TOTAL BASE FUNDS BEGINNING BALANCE</b>		<b>\$ 16,379.94</b>
<b>General Fund Beginning Balance</b>		<b>\$ 6,550.06</b>
	Dues National	<b>\$ 25.00</b>
	Dues Base	<b>\$ 30.00</b>
	Dues National	<b>\$ 75.00</b>
<b>General Fund Ending Balance</b>		<b>\$ 6,530.06</b>
<b>Designated Funds Beg. Balance</b>		<b>\$ 4,511.52</b>
	Maint. Fund Balance	<b>\$ 2,752.66</b>
	Charity Fund Balance	<b>\$ 372.00</b>
	Snook Memorial Fund Balance	<b>\$ 1,386.86</b>
<b>Designated Funds Ending Balance</b>		<b>\$ 4,511.52</b>
<b>Checking Balance (General + Designated Funds)</b>		<b>\$ 11,041.58</b>
<b>Other Funds</b>		
	CD Balance	<b>\$ 5,236.36</b>
	Cash on Hand	<b>\$ 82.00</b>
<b>TOTAL BASE FUNDS ENDING BALANCE</b>		<b>\$ 16,359.94</b>

March 2018	
James E. Baker	6
Michael D. Drew	7
James R. Grinstead	8
John Ranguette	16
Joe Ward	23
Greg Scherman	23
Richard Childs	26
Bonny Schmidt	27
Gearge Fore	30
Bill Woods	31
April	
James Bjorklund	2
Richard McCarstle	4
Edward Alves	5
Michael Wingeier	8

***Booster Club***  
**Suzann & John Barr (6)**  
**Ron Hines (10)**  
**Terence & Kathleen Murphy (6)**  
**Frank C. Tillery (3)**



## Base Officers

Base Commander Membership Chair & Past Base Commander	Greg Schwerman	501-804-0386	gschwerman@suddenlink.net
Base Vice Commander Mem. and Ceremonies , Past Base Commander Base Newsletter	Alan Malone	501-206-7248	O5retired@yahoo.com
Base Treasurer	Mark Taylor	501-416-2488	Empty704@aol.com
Chief of the Boat	Jerry Stanek	501-538-3529	Jstanek9@earthlink.net
Chaplain	Joe Manning	501-366-0331	Joe.manning@att.net
Holland Club & Storekeeper Past Base Commander	Billy Hollaway	501-758-3266	retldousn@earthlink.net
Yeoman	Myna Miller	215-360-5960	Mynamiller63@hotmail.com
Membership	Need Volunteer	501-804-0386	gschwerman@suddenlink.net
Base Historian National Archives Chairman	Joe Mathis	501-565-6021	usnjrm@yahoo.com
Base Webmaster Past Base Commander	Greg Zonner	501-307-5522	gzonner@aimmmuseum.org
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Past Base Commander	Paul Honeck	501-319-5888	pneckerar@gmail.com
Past Base Commander	James Barnes	501-778-6583	jimandsue59@sbcglobal.net
Past Base Commander	Carl Schmidt	501-843-7855	bonnyclyde@classicnet.net