

Albacore reunion stirs memories

◆ **Historic submarine:** Eighty former crewmembers gather in Portsmouth.

By **DAVE TURBIDE**
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PORTSMOUTH — The USS Albacore holds a very special place in the evolution of the modern submarine, and 80 former crewmembers gathered here this weekend to relive memories of their years aboard the historic vessel.

Three "plank owners" — people who were on duty when the boat was commissioned at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in 1953 — attended the reunion.

As the first boat specifically designed to operate under water — all previous subs were essentially surface boats that could dive for short periods of time — she was the prototype for the Navy's modern nuclear-powered undersea forces.

Albacore was truly a unique Navy floating laboratory used for testing control and propulsion systems, sonar equipment, dive brakes, escape mechanisms, and various innovative theories and equipment. She was retired in 1972 and was brought to her permanent berth in Albacore Park at the intersection of Market Street and Route 1 Bypass 12 years later.

"I served on 10 submarines during my career and Albacore was then best one of them," said Tom Poole, who commanded the Albacore from 1969 to 1971.

When asked why he talked about the dedication and cohesiveness.

"You never really know what's going to happen (on a research vessel). You just have to train and prepare, and then deal with each situation as it comes up. These were good crews," Poole said.

"There were some oddball personalities but when it came down to business, it was all business. They worked together and got the job done," he said.

Poole spoke matter-of-factly about a leak at the main shaft seal that occurred when the sub was at 300 feet below the surface. A listener would think he was describing something no more serious than a flat tire along the highway.

Austin "Butch" Jordan and Robert St. Pierre had a similar tale to tell. In the mid-1960s, they were both on board when a main shaft seal gave way and the boat began to take on water. Emergency procedures brought the sub to the surface and Albacore returned to Portsmouth for repairs.

Reunion attendees came from as far away as California, New Mexico, Wisconsin and Idaho, although many settled in New England after their Navy careers.

Activities spread throughout the weekend included a harbor tour on Friday followed by a lobster bake at Foster's in York, a ceremonial dinner at the VFW Hall yesterday, and a Sunday breakfast at the Naval Station officer's club.

There have been other reunions, but the Friends of the Albacore committee made a special effort to find and contact crew members this time around.

The Albacore is included in the Submarine Hall of Fame alongside the Nautilus (first nuclear-powered submarine), the Holland (first submarine), the Triton (first submarine to circumnavigate the globe submerged and first twin reactor submarine) and others.



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Richard Burke, right, John Herbig, center, and Norm Pressler try to identify former shipmates in old photographs of their time as crew members aboard the Albacore as Annette Pressler, left, looks on.

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