



Submariners Association of Canada West Branch History

During the autumn of 1984 the idea of establishing a Submariners Association on the West Coast of Canada was born. The prime movers being retired submariners Alfie Betts, Tod Slaughter, Bob Eveleigh and Larry Skaalrud. Assisted by Neil Boivin, then a senior staff officer at Headquarters Maritime Command Pacific, initiatives were implemented in the spring of 1985 to determine if sufficient interest and commitment existed to support a viable Submariners Association.

A most heartening and positive response from some 35 individuals, with both Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Navy submarine backgrounds, resulted in the formation of the Submarine Old Comrades Association (SOCA) Canadian Pacific Branch.

We reported directly to the parent organization in the United Kingdom and our inaugural Branch meeting was held in January of 1986.

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In 1994 our membership elected to form a distinct CANADIAN SUBMARINE ASSOCIATION and in January of 1995 the inaugural meeting of the Submariners Association of Canada (SAOC) was held.

In January of 1996 we welcomed SOCA members from central Canada, who became the Submariners Association of Canada—Central Branch, based in Ottawa, Ont.

With the establishment of the Submariners Association of Canada—Central Branch it became necessary to rename our Submariners Association of Canada to include the description of the geographic area that it represented. The Submariners Association of Canada - West Branch regional area encompassing members located in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the states of Alaska, Hawaii & Washington.

In early 2002 the members of Submariners Association Halifax voted to become a branch of the Submariners Association of Canada and are now known as the Submariners Association of Canada - East Coast Branch.

In April of 1996 The Submariners Memorial Cairn was unveiled in HMC Dockyard, Esquimalt, B.C. by Rear Admiral Bruce Johnston, Commander Maritime Forces Pacific and SAOC West President Hal Zerbin. This Memorial is dedicated to all who have served in Boats of the 'Silent Service' and to Canada's West Coast Submarines.

Additionally during 1996, SAOC West members toured the United States submarine facility at Bangor, Washington and attended the United States Submarines Veterans, Inc. Convention in Portland, Oregon.

May of 1997 saw our second Submariner's Reunion in Victoria, BC, the guests of honour being Flag Officer Submarines Royal Navy, Rear Admiral James Perowne and Mr. Bob Wonsley, President of the United States Submarines Veterans, Inc. The Reunion was truly an international event. Two hundred and forty-six persons attended, including six from England, two from Australia and twenty-five from the United States. During this Reunion a Time Capsule, to be opened after a period of fifty years and containing Submarine Memorabilia and 1997 artifacts, was loaded into the Submariners Memorial Cairn.

Subsequent years found our Association members busier than ever with a display of Submarine Memorabilia in the Naden Naval Museum and our Annual Summer BBQ & Horseshoes Tourney's at the Batchelor's residence overlooking Cowichan Bay, along with attendances at the USSVI Convention in Reno, Nevada, the 2000 United States Navy Submarine Centennial celebrations and during 2001, the Royal Navy Submarine Service Centenary in the United Kingdom and the dedication ceremonies for Deterrent Park, Bangor Submarine Base, Washington, USA.

2003 was another banner year for our Association with another successful Submariner's Reunion hosted in Victoria, BC, guest of honour being Captain (now Vice-Admiral) Bob Davidson. August of 2003 saw the arrival of HMCS Victoria SSK876 and, after a period of almost 30 years, the reactivation of Canadian Submarine Force in the Pacific.

Our Association is privileged to enjoy a close rapport with Canadian Submarine Force and submariners of HMCS Victoria, HMCS Chicoutimi, HMCS Cornerbook and HMC Dockyard Submarine Support Facility – having being invited to Mess Dinners, Ship's Socials & Retirement Functions.

2007 found members of our Association busier than ever, with our Annual Summer BBQ & Horseshoe Tourney during the month of July, along with attendance on the USSVI National Convention Cruise to Alaska (including a port visit to Victoria) during the month of September – aboard a 90,000 ton Cruise Ship – full of Submariners!!

Our 2008 Gathering of Submariners was hosted in Victoria, BC, May 2-3-4, with guest of honour being Captain Ray Hunt (Ret'd), Commanding Officer HMC Submarines Rainbow & Okanagan and Commander 1st Canadian Submarine Squadron. Yet another great success with 187 Attendees from across Canada, the United States, England & Scotland.