

THE MOMENTOUS MOMENT

The Submarine Building Program at the Manitowoc Shipyards in World War II.

by Robert L. Lyman
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

"**MOMENTOUS MOMENT**" was written by Robert Lyman in 1969 to stimulate interest in the development of the Manitowoc Maritime Museum, and the Submarine Memorial Association.

Many people have been involved in this development, not only the building of the submarines, but also sailing on them, and returning one to Manitowoc and developing the Manitowoc Marine Museum and the Submarine Memorial Association. This article was written to bring all these components into better focus.

In 1969 it was the prime purpose of the Submarine Memorial Association to return the submarine "Redfin" to Manitowoc, but because of the cost involved in returning it from an eastern seacoast city to Manitowoc, the idea was soon abandoned. The Submarine "Cobia" was then offered and accepted, since it was based in Milwaukee when it was decommissioned out of the submarine fleet of the U.S. Navy. Although the Cobia was not built in Manitowoc, it was typical of those submarines that were built in Manitowoc, as the same blueprints were used in the construction of all of the submarines built in World War II.

Because of the length of "Momentous Moment" the manuscript was never published, although condensed versions of it were used in two publications of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. A brief version was printed in the Wisconsin Then and Now, October 1969, and another in Badger History, the 1970 issue.

THE MOMENTOUS MOMENT

It was a rather pleasant day, Thursday, April 30, 1942, for the northeastern Wisconsin community of Manitowoc. Thousands of people were wending their way to vantage points along the river. History was being made today, and they had come to see it. It was the launching of the "Peto", the first submarine for the United States Navy to be built on the Great Lakes, but further, the first side launching of a submarine anywhere in the world.

All who were witnessing this impressive ceremony felt a thrill of pride, as most of them helped build her. This was their boat, a part of their own, and they wanted to be here to see this launching, to wish it well, to hope and pray that it would successfully fill its mission: the protection of our land, and destruction of our enemies.

All launchings are impressive, but to the people of Manitowoc, this one was more so. The anxiety was tremendous! Would the Peto right itself after hitting the water sideways? At exactly 11:49 A.M. the Peto was christened with a bottle of champagne by Mrs. E. A. Lofquist, wife of Captain Lofquist, Chief of Staff, U.S. Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois. The Submariners Band was playing "Anchors, Aweigh," somewhat dimmed by the cheering of thousands and the blowing of horns and whistles. Children waved flags; some said a silent prayer. Quickly the Peto slid off her mooring blocks. There she goes! dipping dangerously far over on her side in the water! "THE MOMENTOUS MOMENT!"

Thousands held their breath.

The band stopped playing. Complete stillness filled the air. Would she capsize? Quickly, she righted herself perfectly on the swell that her own plunge had caused. A tremendous cheer arouse! The band began playing as it had never played before! Men of steel wiped tears from their eyes: The suspense had been broken! All the workers who witnessed this launching felt a thrill of pride in their accomplishment and a new urge to work better and faster.

It was a daring step the Navy took when in September of 1940 it awarded the contract to the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company for the construction of ten submarines. At the time of this contract, the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company had yet to build its first submarine. Many of its employees had never seen such a ship, much less to attempt to build one. Experience was lacking, personnel was lacking, facilities were lacking, but one thing was not lacking and that was spirit to achieve the impossible, a quality that has made this country so great.

On the existence of quality the Navy was willing to take a chance, for the Manitowoc Shipyards had experience. Ships had been built on the Manitowoc River since 1847 when Captain E. J. Edwards built the Citizen, a hardy little craft of 60 tons. The finest schooners on the Great Lakes had been built here, as well as Clipper ships. Manitowoc had the reputation for building the finest and fastest on the Lakes, hence the name Clipper City was given Manitowoc. From 1847 to 1892 a total of 116 schooners and clipper ships were built at Manitowoc. In addition 40 steamers and 35 tugs had been

built here. One oldtimer relates that he remembers as a boy there was over two feet of shavings and sawdust all over the yards from the construction of wooden boats. All these boats were built by various yards, but in 1903 the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company was formed. Since its beginning it has built up an unparalleled reputation for the construction of fine boats.

During World War I it expanded its facilities to employ 2300 workers and produced 35 freighters for the U.S. Shipping Board. For all her experience in the first World War, however, the fact still remained that in the fall of 1940 at the time of signing a contract with the Navy, Manitowoc was a small and inadequately equipped yard to undertake such a pretentious task as the construction of submarines. There were many obstacles to be overcome. There was a total work force of only 500 men, none of them with the slightest training in the new line of work about to be undertaken. Supplies of most of the necessary materials and equipment were either on the East or West coasts of the U.S., thousands of miles away. In addition, the yard location on the narrow and shallow Manitowoc River made the normal procedure of end on launching very dangerous, and once these boats were built that fact remained that they would have to be delivered hundreds of miles to the open seas.

Manitowoc yards had several things going for them, though. They had experience and know-how of building quality boats, and in building submarines quality was the utmost importance. One mistake in construction could cost the lives of an entire crew. They had virtually an untouched work force in the rural areas around Manitowoc. Lake Michigan had its greatest depth North of Manitowoc, making excellent proving grounds. The threat of sabotage had to be considered. The fact that this yard was a thousand miles away from open sea had its advantages; no enemy force could be landed to destroy this vital work.

The obstacles they met were

overcome. The physical inadequacies of the yard were removed with a 1½ million dollar expansion program financed by the overnment. The lack of know-how in submarine construction was relieved by enlisting the aid of the country's most experienced builders of submarines, the Electric Boat Company. They undertook the furnishing of all necessary plans, the ordering of basic materials, and supplying the services of experienced engineers to lend technical instructions.

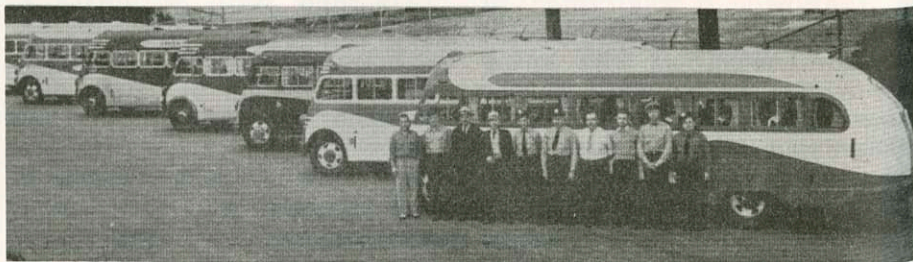
The call went out for the largest work force this area had ever seen, and the call was answered. At the completion of this project, over 7,000 persons were employed, working around the clock on the construction of the deadliest vessel afloat. Farmers milked their cows at dawn, welded steel plates all day, and tilled their lands at night. Sears-Roebuck did a land-office business on selling electric light conversion units for farm tractors. Some workers recall how the subs in construction carried the aroma of cow barns. Brewery workers turned electricians, teachers and cheesemakers split shifts, retired craftsmen were recalled. Even a midget was hired to string electrical cables and piping in tight places.

The transportation of workers was a serious problem. As many lived in the rural areas, commuting was difficult. Shuttle bus lines were set up from as far as Appleton, Menasha, Green Bay and Sheboygan. Workers combined their gas ration

stamps and formed car pools; worn rubber tires were replaced by synthetics; Model A Fords equipped with manifold heaters were converted to water heaters so the long, cold drives in Wisconsin winters could be endured.

Housing was another problem. Stately old homes were converted into duplex apartments. Attics and vacant stores were also used for the much needed housing. The government housing authority set up a project on Manitowoc's Southwest side. Custerdale's 2560 units went up in record time; 36 living-bedroom units and 214 one bedroom units. These units rented for \$31.00, which included gas, water and light. Tenants furnished their own coal and ice. A large community center was also built as part of this project. The streets in this project were all named after the subs being constructed; Peto, Red Fin, Ray, etc. It was traditional that each American sub bear the name of a fish, and if this sub building project was to continue at this record-breaking pace they would be in danger of running out of fish to name them by.

The spirit and drive of the men in this yard was a tremendous thing. They were doing the impossible; the calculated risk for the Navy. Their efficiency was so great that by the time the Peto was complete, she was nine months ahead of schedule, in the time the Navy allotted for the construction of 10 submarines; 28 were built. The Manitowoc yard won the coveted Navy "E" for production achievement, with four renewal stars. They

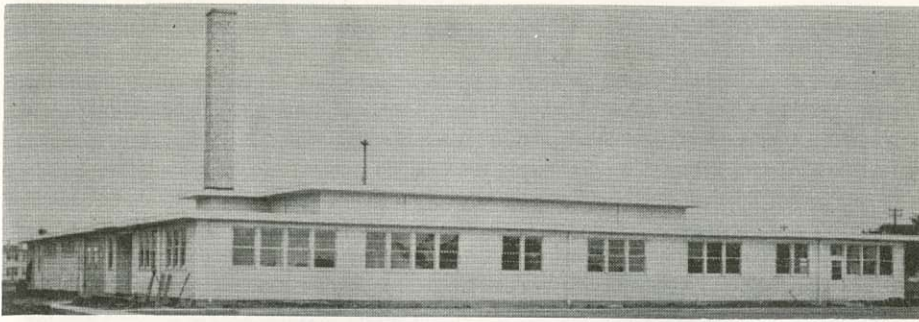


Bus Transportation—The Green Bay Stage line furnished service to patrons from Sheboygan, Neenah, Menasha, Appleton and Green Bay as well as intermediate points.

A bus service was started by Ernest Sorenson from Mishicot via Shoto. Plans for a bus for people in the Larabee area were under consideration while the buses from Two Rivers were carrying nice loads.

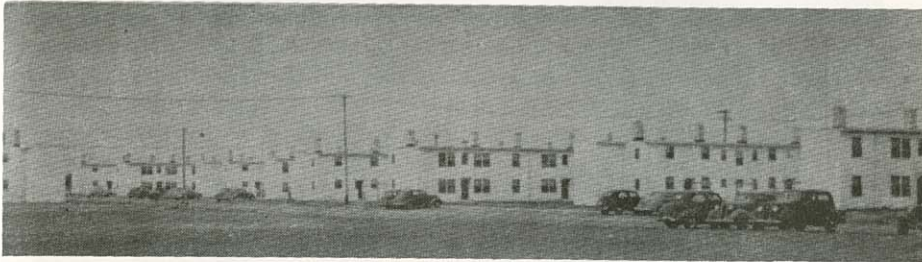
The photographer was on hand when a fleet of busses arrived from Green Bay, Sheboygan and Appleton.

—taken from Aug. 1942 KEEL BLOCK



The Custerdale Community House—July 25, 1943 the dedication of Manitowoc's 'little city'-Custerdale took place.

A living-bedroom unit rented for \$28.75 which included gas, water and light; one bedroom units rented for \$31.00 and included all utilities except for oil and ice, which was furnished by each tenant.



—taken from the July-Aug. 1943 issue of the *KEEL BLOCK*

achieved their first pennant award May 15, 1942, two weeks after the Peto was launched.

The construction methods used were radically new at this time. The subs were built in sections, 15 to 24 feet in length and weighing from 37 to 68 tons. These sections were built inside the shops. Workers claimed they had to do this as the yards in the winter were the coldest place in Manitowoc. They were then transported to the keel blocks by specially constructed caterpillar transport tractors and lifted right side up into place by giant cranes, and then welded together.

Submarine school was at New London, Connecticut. The sailors usually spent two months training in the operations of these undersea craft. Because of the shortage of boats, they were trained in World War I subs, commonly called O and R boats in the Navy. Sea runs usually paralleled the Eastern coast of the United States down to the Florida Keys. One veteran related how on the R boats there were portholes in the conveying towers—the World War II subs didn't have these—and he would spend hours watching the fish in the clear Southern waters. It was a magnificent sight to travel about

three knots and observe the fascination of undersea life.

The men in the Submarine Corps all volunteered for this branch of the service. These brave men knew what they were doing. They had a job to do; their country needed them. They knew also that purple hearts were almost non-existent in their branch of the service. Of the 52 American subs lost in World War II there were only four men that had survived and they were captured by Japanese forces and not heard of again.

As each sub neared completion at the Manitowoc yards, these crews were brought here to train on the craft, to which they were assigned. The crews spent two months here; the first month was spent learning how these subs were constructed: analyzing the heart of these completed crafts, the compressors, pumps, the motors and the Diesel engines; going over all blueprints and learning how to exist inside these crafts. There wasn't an inch of space wasted. Eighty men had to live here for 60 day war patrols, and sometimes longer. All their ammunition, fuel, food and supplies had to be crammed in this space. These boats were only 311' 9" long with a beam of

27' 3". They were devised for eight officers and 72 enlisted men, although they usually carried more, and on some rescue mercy missions of ship-wrecked boats they carried twice that number.

While training in Manitowoc the enlisted men lived in barracks outside the gates of the ship yards on 16th street. The men recall that the second month of training was really exceptional. They spent two or three hours a day making dive after dive in Lake Michigan. The rest of the day and all evening they had liberty. The people of Manitowoc treated these sailors like Admirals! They opened up their city and their hearts to these brave men, making their short stay as memorable as possible. Dances and movies were free and they couldn't walk into a bar without getting more free beer than they could handle. Their pay was only \$54.00 a month, but it always seemed to be plenty. Manitowoc was known by the Submarine Corps as Sub City. It was truly a heaven on earth before they left for sea duty.

After the subs were commissioned and turned over to the Navy they were thoroughly tested in Lake Michigan off Manitowoc. To begin their long journey to the open sea, a distance of 1800 miles, the subs traveled under their own power to Chicago, and were then towed by tugs up the Chicago River and into the Illinois Drainage Canal at Lockport, Illinois. Here they were placed in cradle-type floating docks (because of their 15 foot draught, they required greater bouyancy) and transported down the shallow Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. At New Orleans they would receive their periscopes, torpedos, ammunition and supplies. Once in the Gulf of Mexico they would head for the Panama Canal. Several weeks were spent on practice dives here because of the greater depth of the Pacific Ocean.

The Rock was the tenth submarine built at Manitowoc. She was launched June 20, 1943, and left in November 1943, headed for her first war patrol. James Gogats was one of her young crew. Jim was a forward helmsman and only 17 years old

when he enlisted in the Navy. Before he had graduated from high school he decided he wanted to be in the Navy on a submarine. Now he was in the South Pacific, stalking enemy ships on his first war patrol. It was February 29, 1944. He will never forget that date as long as he lives; it was Leap Year. The Rock contacted a large enemy convoy enroute to Turk. While making a night surface approach on the convoy, she was detected by an enemy destroyer, which, unfortunately, the destroyer avoided. She was then illuminated by the destroyer's search light, and came under fire from the destroyer's five inch guns. They were almost blasted out of the water. The order to crash dive was given. They had suffered severe damage to the top side after four hours of depth charges, but, had weathered the attack by the destroyer.

During the attack, Jim was at his position operating the forward diving plane, and his Chief Petty Officer was sitting right behind him. Being a green horn, Jim had received much ribbing from this old timer on how their first attack would really separate the men from the boys. During the crash dive, this same Chief's knees were shaking so hard that Jim could feel them knocking against his back. When it was all over, Jim laughingly reminded his Chief, "I thought we were going to separate the men from the boys!"

On a later patrol in the Sea of Japan, the Rock was attacked by another enemy sub. This was what all submariners feared the most because they knew the maneuverability and the damage that another sub could do. They were struck in the forward engine room by a torpedo. This could have been the end of all of them, but, by the grace of God, the torpedo was a dud!

During the long weeks of a war patrol there was not much to do. Four hours on duty and eight hours off, and submerged all day. The first weeks the men passed the time reading all the books they had on board, but soon there was not much else to do but eat, sleep and think. Jim Gogats thought about a lot of things: his family back in New Jersey, the

wonderful time he had back in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, during his training, those friendly people, the Old World taverns and dance pavilions, the rolling farms and, the picturesque rivers and clear lakes, the clean, well kept stately homes, and most of all the girl he had met on a blind date and saw so much of while he was there! What a wonderful place to settle down and raise a family! One other thing he thought of, too . . . how appropriate it would be to bring



The LONG and SHORT of It—Big things are expected of Paul, our new Outside Machinist, whose work will be closely confined to big installations into the small spaces of the submarine hull. While friend Paul is perspiring in the "inards," Arthur Wells will be sewing up the outside seams of this same sub hull. Close cooperation between these two should result to bigger boats with smaller "waste lines."

Paul, from the advantage of his 4'2" and weighing 73 lbs., looks down on Arthur who is a mere 6'4" and weighs 260 lbs., the reason being apparent in the picture.

—taken from the October, 1941 issue of the
KEEL BLOCK

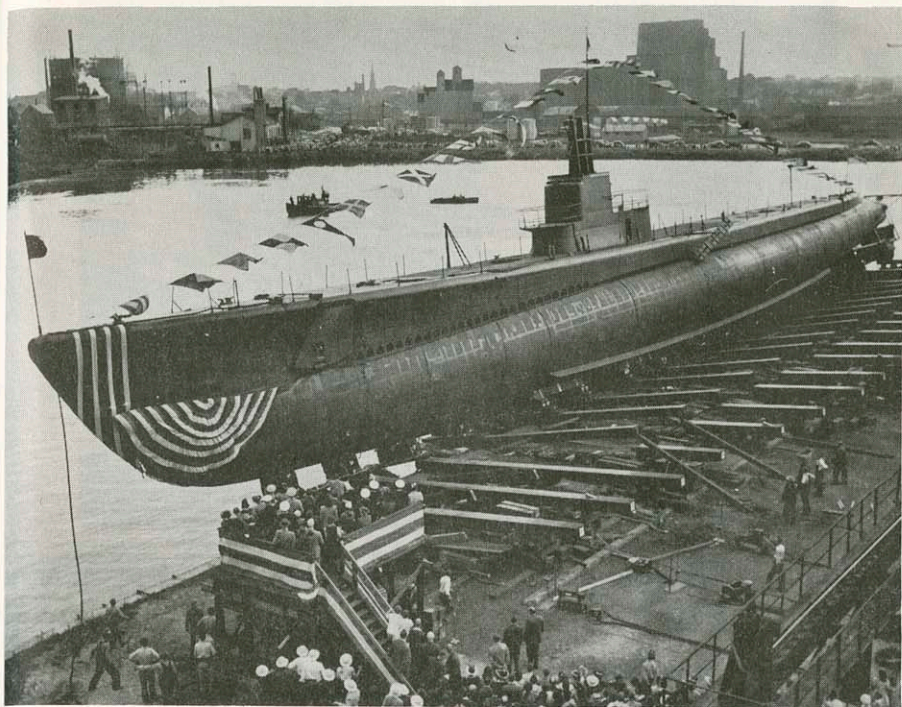
back one of these Manitowoc-built submarines as a permanent war memorial! When the Submariners got together during the war, their conversations frequently turned to comparisons of subs they had served on. It was the boast of both sailors and officers that Manitowoc-built subs were the best in the

Navy, and the City of Manitowoc had been their best port-of-call.

The Manitowoc shipyards had made an impressive contribution to the war effort. A total of 28 submarines had been built at an estimated cost of 165 million dollars, almost 6 million dollars for each ship. In order of their completion they were the Peto, Pogy, Pompon, Puffer, Rasher, Raton Ray, Red Fin, Robalo, Rock, Golet, Guavina, Guitarro, Hammerhead, Hawkbill, Ice Fish, Jallao, Kete, Kraken, Largato, Lamphey, Lizzard Fish, Loggerhead, Macabi, Mapiro, Menhaden and Mero. At the war's end on August 15, 1945, the twenty-five submarines that had seen action were credited with sinking 132 Japanese ships, with a total of 488, 918 tons. One Manitowoc ship, the U.S.S. Rasher, was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. Six submarines were awarded the Navy Unit Commendations. Twenty-six American flyers had been rescued after being forced down at sea. By wars end, twenty special missions such as landing troops and delivering supplies to guerillas had been carried out by the fighting submarines built in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Four of the Manitowoc submarines were lost, victims of the enemy: The Golet, in June, 1944, off the Northwestern main island of Japan; the Robalo in July, 1944, West of Palawan in the Philippines in the South China Sea; the Kete in March, 1945, between Japan and Iwo Jima; the Largato in May, 1945, along the coast of Malaysia in the South China Sea. All four submarines were lost with all hands, a total of 337 brave officers and men.

After the war, James Gogats did come back to the girl he had left. They were married and settled in Manitowoc, the town he loved so much. But James was not the only Navy man to do this. In fact, so many of these Navy men had met their future wives here and later settled down in Manitowoc that they decided to form a Submariners social group, to get together and talk over their war experiences. So, the Manitowoc Chapter of U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II was started in 1956, and year by year the experiences they recall are getting better and



Red Fin on the ways—The keel was laid September 3, 1942 and was launched on April 4, 1943. The Red Fin was commissioned on August 31, 1943. Her sponsor was Mrs. B. B. Wygant, wife of Captain B. B. Wygant.

better. At each meeting the discussion would somehow always turn to the thought of bringing back a Manitowoc submarine as a war memorial. Many different groups and individuals had thought of this also, but Jim's group was like everyone else: they waited for someone else to get the project started. Finally, in 1967, they realized there weren't many of these Manitowoc submarines still being used by the Navy and if they wanted to start such a project they could delay no longer.

Investigations showed the Peto had been cut up for scrap in 1960 by a Houston metal firm. The Rasher and the Red Fin were being used as non-operational training ships. The Guavina was rebuilt into an undersea oil tanker, and the Lizzardfish was given to Italy in 1960 under the Military Assistance Program. The Icefish was loaned to the Netherlands and the Guitarro and Hammerhead were transferred to Turkey in the 1950's. A total of eleven Manitowoc subs now serve other countries. The Hardhead and Jallao are operational and used for training on the east coast. The Rock, Ratan and Menhaden are operational and used for training on the west coast.

There were five men in the chapter of Manitowoc Submarine Veterans of World War II that were extremely interested in bringing back a sub to Manitowoc. James Gogats, Fred A. Galli, Gerald R. Pilger, Stephen Petreshak and Clifford Schaes. These men knew from the beginning they couldn't accomplish this momentous task as a veteran's group alone. They needed political, business and private interests to get this job done, so the first thing they did was to form a group called the Manitowoc Submariners Memorial Association. All the community service organizations were contacted, and an explanation of what they were doing to try to do was given. Much interest was generated by the public and the first meeting of the Manitowoc Submariners was held January 11, 1968, in the City Hall Council Chambers. A constitution was set up, officers elected and committees formed. Jim Gogats was elected president. The membership consisted of doctors, lawyers, farmers, educators, Roman Catholic Sisters, business men, tradesmen, politicians, a circuit judge and a newspaper editor, all with the explicit purpose of bringing back a memorial, not just for the men that fought and died on them, but also for the men

that built them. Although 28 were built at Manitowoc during the war, relatively few people had ever gotten an opportunity to get inside a submarine. The first order of business was to make formal request to the Navy for a retired Manitowoc Submarine. Other cities had acquired boats from the Navy, but never a Submarine. Congressman John Byrnes and Senator Gaylord Nelson were contacted to assist with this acquisition in Washington, D.C. It was learned that two of the Manitowoc subs were scheduled to be disposed of by the Navy in the summer of 1971. The Red Fin, stationed in Baltimore, Maryland and the Rasher in California. These ships, if acquired, would have to be accepted at their present base, as both were non-operational, having their propellers and batteries removed.

To acquire the Rasher meant too long a trip through the Panama Canal, so formal request was made by the Manitowoc Submariners Memorial Association for the Red Fin, as it was the closest to her destination of Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

While waiting word from the Navy the Manitowoc Submariners Memorial Association printed a booklet on the service history of each submarine, and the City Planning Commission was asked to recommend a site for the sub if they got one. This would have to be near Lake Michigan or the Manitowoc River. When exhibited the subs would have to be on dry land and since these boats weigh 2,400 tons they couldn't be moved very far from the water.

On April 18, 1968, Jim Gogats was at his job in the Manitowoc Post Office. He received an urgent phone call. The voice at the other end said, "How would you like the Red Fin?" Jim thought it was some joker. "Yeah, sure, I'd like it." "O.K., you've got it," replied the unknown voice. It was Roy Valitchka, editor of the Manitowoc Herald Times. He had just received word from Washington that the Navy was releasing the Red Fin to the Manitowoc Submariners Memorial Association in 1970.

The response by the people of Manitowoc was terrific! The Red Fin was coming home! Now it

was certain! A more appropriate boat couldn't have been picked. The U.S.S. Red Fin had earned six battle stars, and received the Navy Occupation Service Medal. She was credited with sinking six Japanese vessels with a total tonnage of 23,724 tons. And Stephen Peteshack, one of the men most interested in bringing back a submarine, had served on her as a torpedoman!

A deadline would have to be met. This meant funds had to be raised. To tow the Red Fin from Baltimore, Maryland, would require many thousands of dollars, and to bring it up out of the water meant many thousands more. An appeal went out for 200 memberships in the corporation, and contributions were accepted from interested people throughout the United States.

Veteran groups were contacted. Paper place mats, with the story of the Red Fin, were distributed to all restaurants in the areas to interest tourists. Newspaper articles were written on the war patrols of each sub. Movies and slide show lectures were set up to be given.

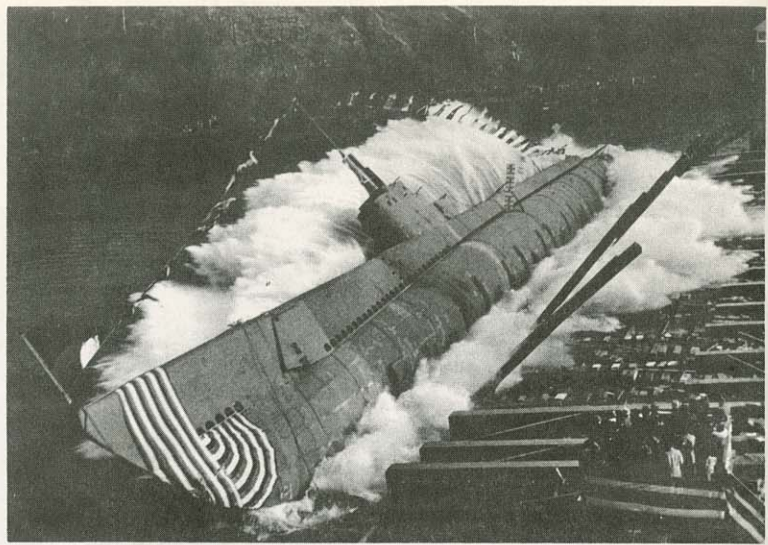
Originally, the plan was to build a small marine museum along side the submarine exhibit and show many of the artifacts from the war, and the submarine building program during the war.

Someone had made the comment, "why wait until 1971 when the Red Fin comes? The old library building is not being used. That would make an excellent museum. And a marine museum would stimulate support for the Red Fin."

The city fathers agreed to lease the old library to the association for \$1.00 a year. The Navy had many artifacts they could acquire for exhibits; a periscope, radar equipment, torpedos, records, charts, and so on. The Milwaukee Museum and the Wisconsin State Historical Society also offered to help. They had a model of the Battleship Wisconsin and many other artifacts not being used.

This museum will also have exhibits of geology, formation of the Great Lakes, historical information on all boats that were built, sailed and lost on these lakes.

Clipper City is rich in marine history. The old Goodrich Transportation Company headquarters were here for over 75 years. Its fleet over the years consisted of 63 ships, transporting passengers and freight throughout the lakes. City of



The Hardhead Splash—On July 7, 1943 the keel of the Hardhead was laid, launched December 12, 1943 and commissioned April 18, 1944. The U.S.S. Hardhead earned six Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific area Service Medal.

Ludington, City of Grand Rapids, Skylark, Corona, and the Columbian Exposition whale back Christopher Columbus were just a few of these boats. The Ann Arbor lines have operated a fleet of car-ferries here since 1896 and the C. & O. also have car-ferries. Many captains and sailors had made their home in Manitowoc.

A deadline of June 1, 1969, was set for opening this museum. This marine museum will be the only one of its kind west of Detroit, Michigan, but what really makes it so unique is that it will be directed and staffed by non-professionals, the brave men that fought and served the Manitowoc submarines during the war.

A vantage point of the ship yards, where these submarines were built and launched, is just two blocks away from the museum. How interesting this will be for visitors to actually see this ship yard and talk to the men that made that part of our history!

In the span of almost a quarter of a century since the last sub was built in Manitowoc,

residents haven't forgotten or lost their pride in being part of the submarine building program.

A welder and mechanic that now repairs farm machinery proudly tells how he worked as an assembler on all 28 of the subs. He can rattle off all the statistics of the diesel engines like it was yesterday. Bore and stroke, size of manifold and valve, he proudly displays a nine inch oil ring from one of the diesel engines over his work bench.

Almost every resident in Manitowoc County had been directly or indirectly affected by the submarine program, and they are proud that one of these ships is to return. When the history of Manitowoc is written, the day the Red Fin enters the harbor will have to be one of the greatest. The band will play, horns and whistles will be blowing, the church bells will ring, young and old will have flags, strong men will wipe tears from their eyes. It will be a ceremony of pride and accomplishment. It will be truly a **MOMENTOUS MOMENT!**

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