



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D
Lt. Gov. Matt Michels (left) visits with local veterans Bob Hanson (right) and Jim Black prior to a memorial service near Meridian Bridge for the *USS Scorpion* and all submariners. The ceremony was held in May 2013.

Local Men Among The Last Of State's WWII Submariners

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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When it came time to perform their military mission, Jim Black and Bob Hanson submerged from sight.

The Yankton men represent an often-overlooked part of the World War II effort. They served on submarines, patrolling the seas and either torpedoing or tracking enemy craft.

Black and Hanson, both around 90 years old, represent a vanishing piece of that history. They are two of only three living World War II submarine veterans in South Dakota.

"There is one more World War II sub vet out in Rapid City. Ward Chaney is his name, and he is still quite active," said Kent Winter of Sioux Falls, a base commander for the U.S. Submarine Veterans Inc. (USSVI).

Submarine veterans such as Black and Hanson played a crucial role in the underwater force known as the "silent service."

The two Yankton men form part of an elite — and rapidly dwindling — fraternity.

"I went over on a U.S. sub and came back with a Japanese sub," Hanson said, referring to a captured enemy vessel. The Japanese submarine was later inspected for clues to the enemy's naval operations.

Black, who was stationed at Guam during World War II, recalled the infamous sounds of Tokyo Rose, the female radio announcer who played propaganda to demoralize American forces.

"Tokyo Rose played all the Big Band songs for those of us out on the submarines, then tell us we're losing the war," Black said.

Hanson and Black were honored during last May's service in Yankton for the USSVI and the U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II. The ceremony was held at the memorial next to the Meridian Bridge in Yankton.

The memorial, overlooking the Missouri River banks, was given to the State of South Dakota by the American people.

The annual memorial service is held on the second Saturday of May. The service honors the 77 crew members of the *USS Scorpion SS-278*, presumed lost March 6, 1944, and all submariners lost at sea.

The *USS Scorpion* memorial provides an important tribute, Winter said.

The Yankton memorial, dedicated Oct. 6, 2002, was erected by the South Dakota chapter of the U.S. Submarine Veterans of World War II. A memorial service is now held every year, on the second Saturday in May.

Fifty-two U.S. Navy submarines were lost in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. There were 374 officers and 3,131 enlisted men who perished on submarine crews during World War II.

The memorial's location in Yankton is no accident, Winter said. He credited the work of Hanson and Black in securing the granite memorial for the River City. Black was the USSVI state commander at the time of the memorial's dedication.

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Ghosts In The Twilight: Honoring The Scorpion

A Memorial At The Foot Of Meridian Bridge Honors A Submarine That's Lost To The Ages

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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Nearly 70 years later, questions continue to surround the mysterious disappearance of the *USS Scorpion SS-278* submarine during World War II.

The submarine and its 77 crew members were presumed lost March 6, 1944, in the closing months of World War II.

At its national meeting last August in Rochester, Minn., the U.S. Submarine Veterans Inc. (USSVI) learned new information regarding the loss of the boat. The USSVI passed a motion requesting the U.S. Navy to reopen the investigation.

While the *Scorpion* may be gone, its memory is not forgotten.

Yankton residents Jim Black and Bob Hanson played key roles in getting the *USS Scorpion* memorial located in Yankton. The memorial, formally dedicated in 2002, stands next to Meridian Bridge.

Black and Hanson weren't part of the *Scorpion*, but they can relate to the lost sub's mission. They are two of only three remaining South Dakota residents who were World War II submariners.

"They (Black and Hanson) were instrumental in getting a memorial here in Yankton," said Kent Winter of Sioux Falls. Through his affiliation with the USSVI, Winter serves as the *USS Scorpion* base commander.

Yankton plays a solemn role in hosting the *USS Scorpion* memorial, Winter said.

"On the banks of the Missouri River rests a World War II granite memorial given to the State of South Dakota by the American people," he said. "Yankton has been honored with this duty since that time!"

The *USS Scorpion* memorial was held last May in Yankton. The brief but reverent service was held at the memorial, located on a small grassy area overlooking the Missouri River.

The service honored not only the *USS Scorpion* but all U.S. submarine veterans of World War II lost at sea. Lt. Gov. Matt Michels of Yankton served as special guest



KELLY HERTZ/P&D
A memorial to the *U.S.S. Scorpion* is perched near the north end of the Meridian Bridge in Yankton. It honors a submarine that went missing in 1944. Its fate remains unknown.

speaker. The event was finalized with a tossing of a memorial wreath into the river.

Fifty-two U.S. Navy submarines were lost in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. There were 374 officers

and 3,131 enlisted men who perished on submarine crews during World War II.

The USSVI committee provided a brief history of the *Scorpion's* final weeks.

Scorpion's first war patrol was in the approaches to Tokyo in April 1943. Here, the submarine sank two freighters, four sampans and two patrol craft. In addition, she damaged a freighter. On *Scorpion's* second patrol, conducted in the Yellow Sea, she sank two freighters. Her third patrol was made in the Mariana Islands and resulted in damage to a tanker.

In her first three patrols, the *Scorpion* sank 10 ships for a total of 24,000 tons and damaged two more for 16,000 tons.

The *Scorpion* departed Pearl Harbor Dec. 29, 1943, under Commander M.G. Schmidt. The submarine stopped at Midway to top off with fuel, leaving Jan. 3, 1944, to conduct her fourth

6 and stated "*Scorpion* reports case under control."

Scorpion was never seen or heard from again after her departure from the rendezvous. On Feb. 16, 1944, the *USS Steelhead* and *USS*

Scorpion were warned they were close together, and an enemy submarine was in the vicinity.

When no report was received from the *Scorpion*

by Feb. 24, 1944, Midway was directed to keep a careful watch for her, and *Scorpion* was directed to make a transmission. Neither of these measures provide fruitful, and *Scorpion* was reported March 6, 1944, as presumed lost.

Winter offered a narrative and thoughts on the *Scorpion's* presumed ending.

"No information was received from the Japanese indicating *Scorpion's* loss resulted from enemy anti-submarine tactics. There

KENT WINTER

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This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.

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Ranney

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as an obstetrician-gynecologist."

Although he is part of the lauded "Greatest Generation," Ranney is hesitant to believe he and his peers were exceptional.

"We were just there. We had to do it," he said. "I think any generation would have done the same thing. I don't disagree with my good friend (former NBC News anchor and author of "The Greatest Generation") Tom Brokaw, but the 'Greatest Generation' concept — that would have been present in any group of people who were there at that particular time."

The past several years, Ranney and his wife, Vi, have

led many tour groups through Europe, although he hasn't traveled there for about five years. He visited places he had been during the war multiple times and was often accompanied by other veterans. Ranney said he felt an obligation to lead the tours.

After the war, he completed his training in obstetrics and gynecology at Wesley Memorial Hospital, and moved his family to Yankton in 1948.

From 1952-1976, Ranney was the chair of the Department of OB/GYN at the University of South Dakota School of Medicine and director of the OB/GYN residency program there from 1955-1981.

In 1982, he became the president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

During his career, Ranney

also authored 75 medical articles. In 2000, he was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame under the professional category.

In 1958, Ranney was elected to the Yankton City Commission and became mayor in 1964.

He still enjoys learning about the history of the war but doesn't care to get too caught up in the commemorations of it.

Now, he is one of an estimated 1.7 million World War II veterans still alive of the more than 16 million who served during the conflict.

"I'm just a guy who inherited longevity," Ranney says with a chuckle.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

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