

USS Clamagore – A Submarine for Oak Ridge!

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on August 8, 2016)

When the Manhattan Project National Historical Park was established in November 2015, among the first things done locally was to engage volunteers and to seek input from the public for the Foundation documentation that will form the basis of implementation of the park. It was during this public meeting to gain input for the Foundation document that I first learned of the USS Clamagore submarine.

Marlin Helms who is the Smoky Mountain Submarine Veterans Base Commander, the USSVI Central Region District 5 Commander and Vice Chairman of the USS Clamagore Preservation and Memorial Association, approached me asking if I thought there might be a way to add a submarine to the Manhattan Project National Historical Park!

My initial reaction was WOW, what a great idea! I suggested he talk to the Park representatives who were there to listen to the public input of ideas. What a great idea! He did exactly that.

The next thing I heard about the submarine idea was when Gordon Fee sent me an email asking that I set up a meeting with him and the representatives who were attempting to find a location for the USS Clamagore. I did that and we met at Aubrey's a few weeks ago. That was a resoundingly informative meeting! I did not know what to expect, but it surely was not the overwhelming enthusiasm for locating this submarine in the Clinch River which serves as Oak Ridge's southern border.

Think about it! This submarine carried nuclear weapons which had components made at Y-12. It was the first one to be armed with nuclear torpedoes. The USS Clamagore submarine was built in 1945, served throughout much of the Cold War before being decommissioned in June 1975. The submarine became a museum ship in Charleston, SC, in August 1979.

Here is a link to the USS Clamagore web site: <http://www.patriotspoint.org/explore/uss-clamagore/>

The USS Clamagore was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark in June 1989! It is truly a national treasure that I think we could be honored to have here in Oak Ridge. It would be a HUGE Heritage Tourism destination and certainly a complimentary attraction to our Manhattan Project National Historical Park!

After the first meeting, I agreed to contact the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Department of Energy, the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee and the City of Oak Ridge to make them aware of the group attempting to bring the USS Clamagore to Oak Ridge and to set up a follow up meeting. I made the contacts and arranged a follow up meeting. Before telling you about that meeting, let me tell you why this submarine is even being considered as a possible tourist attraction for Oak Ridge.

The USS Clamagore is available because it has been in Patriots Point, Charleston, SC, for 40 years. It is in need of restoration and the required maintenance can no longer be supported there because of other demands. The US Navy has indicated that if the ship is not restored it will be removed from public display.

The USS Clamagore Preservation and Memorial Association intends to save the historic submarine and is in search of a location other than Charleston, SC, as they no longer are able to maintain it as required by the US Navy. These people are confident they can raise the needed funds to move the submarine, locate it in a permanent spot, and restore the hull and superstructure. They only need a location.

Can you see this tourist attraction on the Clinch River just south of the upcoming K-25 History Center complex at the old S-50 Thermal Diffusion Plant site where there is already a barge dock and connected via railroad to the Manhattan Project National Park site there? Or, what about a location between the railroad bridge and our new Calhoun's Restaurant? Or, what about a location near the Solway Bridge near the south entrance to our city? Or, what about Clark Center Park? See, we have a number of suitable locations where the submarine could be moored in the Clinch River with ready Heritage Tourist access!

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So, I talked to the groups mentioned above and received positive response from all of them. A second meeting was arranged where more specific details were discussed.

Attending the meeting were: Josh Richardson, USS Clamagore Preservation and Memorial Association Chairman; Marlin Helms UCPMA Vice Chairman and Base Commander Smoky Mountain Submarine Veterans; Edie Clemons UCPMA Public Relations and a community volunteer serving in a public affairs role of connecting opinion leaders to worthy causes, with a particular interest in military veterans; Evonne M. Kautz UCPMA Treasurer, is an Enrolled Agent admitted to practice before the IRS, and has a specialty niche in serving the Military in all tax matters; and Chip Heard, Chairman of the UCPMA Building Committee, a Mechanical Engineering graduate of the University of Tennessee, and the nephew of Jack F. Heard (USN) the eighth commanding officer of the Clamagore.

At this time, this group's efforts are focused on gaining public and private support to obtain the authorization from Patriots Point and the US Navy to transfer the SS-343 to the UCPMA here in East Tennessee. The immediate need is for commitment of waterfront property for the berthing the Clamagore after her overhaul and transport to East Tennessee.

Here is their progress so far:

- July 2014, Friends of the Clamagore Facebook page started
- August 2014, Two local Knoxville TN TV stations had stories on the relocation effort, 355' x 35' x 9' transport barge preliminary design completed and Chattanooga Times Free --Press ran article
- September 2014, Reunion at the Knoxville Holiday Inn Cedar Buff with approximately 80 attendees with Knox County Major attending, Knoxville News Sentinel article
- First Video completed – developed in Charleston SC area, Bi-Laws completed, Board Members elected and Committees established
- October 2014, Letter of Interest written from the Knox County Mayor to Patriots Point, Letter written from Tennessee governor to the Secretary of Navy, First printing of Tee Shirts available, hydrodynamic calculations for barge completed and 90 slot parking area designed/drawn
- November 2014, State organization established as USS Clamagore Preservation and Memorial Association, two posters completed, Facebook encountered 2,700 likes/followers, decals completed, Patriots Point expressed wish to visit Knoxville governmental offices and preliminary route survey completed
- December 2014, 31-page preliminary hull survey completed by NavCal Marine Services, list of similar submarine museums and their websites compiled, quote for full marine survey received.

What do you think? Can you see the advantage of bringing a tourist destination submarine museum to Oak Ridge?

That is only the beginning! These folks also have an idea of bringing a full-fledged military history museum to East Tennessee. They are thinking of guided tours, educational programs and overnight adventures. Can't you just see a B-29 Bomber sitting near the K-25 History Center with the "Sunday Punch" decoration to commemorate the real "Sunday Punch" which was purchased by K-25 workers contributing their overtime to pay? The real Sunday Punch was destroyed in China. But the story is an important one to Oak Ridge history!

This group says that museums such as this, "draw military reunion groups and can have a significant impact on the local economy." I think a submarine that could be boarded and explored would certainly attract visitors. I am already seeing increased numbers of military retirees coming to Oak Ridge.

Just last week, two of us historians from Y-12 went to Knoxville and boarded two 60-passenger buses loaded with the retirees of the 4th Inventory Division and gave them a guided tour of Oak Ridge that included the Y-12 History Center and the Graphite Reactor before leaving them as they headed to the

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Museum of Appalachia for lunch. I only wish we could have convinced them to add the American Museum of Science and Energy to their tour! If we had had a submarine, it would have helped! And just think if we had a full-fledged military history museum here in Oak Ridge with all that entails, maybe we could expect such groups to stay a couple of nights in Oak Ridge! I am convinced we are NOT THINKING BIG ENOUGH in our planning for Heritage Tourism...What do you think?



The USS Clamagore shown at sea



A decal sticker of the USS Clamagore created by the USS Clamagore Preservation and Memorial Association

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The USS Clamagore as it sits now in Charleston, SC