

Meet Rudy “Saur” Kraut, WWII Submarine Sailor

By Kate Ramsay, USSVI Associate Member



Rudy was nicknamed “Saur” by his shipmate in 1944. With a last name of Kraut, it was bound to happen.

Ask any submarine sailor “What was the highlight of your career?” and you inevitably hear “The day I earned my Dolphins!” Another moment of pride happens 50 years later, when qualified submarine sailors are inducted into the United States Submarine Veterans, Inc. (USSVI) Holland Club, observing the 50th Anniversary of the year they earned their Dolphins.

This story is about one of these inductees, **Rudy Kraut, TM2 (SS)**, nickname “Saur”, of Pecatonica, IL, who on July 13, 2018, joined ranks with other fellow submarine sailors when he became a Holland Club member atop the deck of the USS Cobia (SS-245), located in Manitowoc, Wi. It is a tale of a spry 94-year-old World War II submarine sailor, whose Holland Club award was a mere 23-years overdue. He earned his Dolphins in 1945 during battle.

Rudy, a long-time member of the former WWII Submarine Veterans Association, joined USSVI and the USS Illinois Base a year ago. He is a spit-

fire, with a twinkle in his eye, a wide-smile on his face, and a passion for his service on submarines. The USS Illinois Base immediately took Rudy into its heart, not only for his service during WWII, but to his ties to the local submarine community. Rudy was on the commissioning crew of the USS Lizardfish SS-373, that was built and commissioned in Manitowoc, WI. It was one of the 28 freshwater boats build and launched in Manitowoc during WWII between 1944 and 1946.

This young man man came from an Illinois farming family with hogs, cattle, and milking cows and grew up with a sense of pride and duty. During Rudy’s junior year in high school, his dad became ill, requiring both Rudy and his brother to step up and take over farm duties.

“One day, my brother and I got into an argument,” Rudy said. That was the day he decided to enlist in the Navy. He received a deferment from his senior year, and headed to the recruitment office in Chicago. The recruiters gave him a choice. He could either be sent to bootcamp that day, or wait 10 days and be shipped to Idaho’s Farragut Naval Base. The Navy had five bases in northern Idaho during WWII, and this sounded like an adventure to Rudy.

After a few more days with his family, young Rudy headed for Idaho. He tells how the base was located next to a lake in the Coeur d’Alene Mountains, and he fondly recalls joining his fellow recruits in practicing how to row boats on the lake.

While at bootcamp Rudy and one of his friends, “Mr. Schultz,” volunteered for submarine service and were earmarked for Torpedo School. His friend was sent back to Chicago for Torpedo School, while Rudy was sent to San Diego, Calif., for his training.

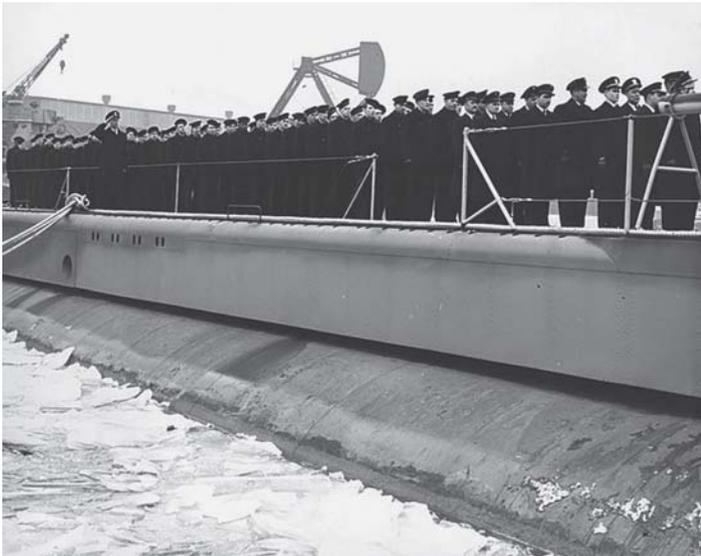
After Torpedo School, Rudy was shipped to New London, Conn., where he received orders to the USS Lizardfish (SS-373), a boat under construction in Manitowoc, Wis.

Manitowoc wasn’t ready for us yet,” Rudy explains, “so I was sent to Key West, Fla., aboard the R-4, a WWI submarine, that patrolled the Florida Straits and the Yucatan Channel. When space opened up, he was reassigned to Newport News, Va., for Gunnery practice. The new crew for the Lizardfish finally got their call, and they all headed to Manitowoc. Since con-

struction was still underway, the crew was housed on cots in a large open warehouse a few blocks from the shipyard. Rudy and his shipmates spent time on the boat during its final construction period, learning all the sub's components from how to fix valves to learning everything they could about the diesel engines.

"I remember good times in Manitowoc," he adds. "All the sailors used to congregate in one of the hotels. There were a lot of girls there. Too, the fact I was only 180 miles from my home in Pecatonica, I could hitchhike back and forth on many weekends, this made it special." He found the best method to flag down a ride at that time was to wave his Navy pea coat.

On Dec. 30, 1944, the USS Lizardfish was commissioned, with Rudy and the entire crew on the deck for the historic ceremony.



Plankowners of the Lizardfish (SS-373) line the boat's stern during the commissioning ceremony on Dec. 30, 1944. (Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Maritime Museum.)

After the commissioning, the new sub was launched in a traditional Manitowoc "sideways" manner, and headed onto Lake Michigan for its test dives. The sub traveled 60 plus miles across the lake and back again, over and over again, testing all the diesels. "We never surfaced during these tests, so no one saw us on the lake," he said. "I was on the bow planes during these tests and watched the gauge go down to 221 feet. I hoped I was going to come back," he remembers about this first dive. It was "so COLD" in the water, he recalls. It was also cold on shore in upper Wisconsin lake De-

ember and early January, but "it was much colder in Lake Michigan!"

The next test for a Manitowoc submarine was to find its way to war, and that was done by loading the submarine on a barge with a crew aboard. It was transported down Lake Michigan to the Cal-Sag Canal in Chicago where it joined the Illinois River. The crew's first Liberty Port on the Illinois River was in Peoria, Ill. From there the sub followed the Illinois river south to the Mississippi River, where it was finally sent to sea through the Gulf of Mexico.

Rudy was assigned to travel with the boat for this historic leg of the journey. However, a shipmate of his was going through a divorce, and wanted out of town fast, Rudy explains. There was a "pass of \$20" and a promise of a 9-day leave, resulting in Rudy and the shipmate changing places at the last minute. Rudy, and other shipmates not on the barge, were to report to New Orleans in 10 days. The boat was late a couple of days, which landed Rudy in New Orleans during Mardi Gras! "Did I have a good time!" he smiled.

The reality of the voyage ahead for this young sailor hit him hard, as the USS Lizardfish sailed farther and farther from the lights of New Orleans. "I didn't know if I was going to see these lights again," he solemnly added. He was off to war in the Pacific.

The boat arrived in Honolulu in 17 days. And, left for its first war patrol toward the Philippines on April 7, 1945. "We went to Saipan to refuel," he said, "and then we headed toward the Equator. I was the aft lookout one day, when I looked up and saw a plane coming out of the sun. I yelled, 'plane out of the Sun,' and dove below deck before the dive alarms sounded."

After a stopover in Freemantle, Australia, the Lizardfish completed her 1st patrol.

The second patrol put the Lizardfish and crew to task while patrolling the straits near Bali. On July 5 "we spotted a camouflaged submarine on the Isle of Bali. We fired a torpedo and sunk it. There were sub chasers, 50-60 landing crafts, and a supply ship there too," he describes. "We also sunk the sub chaser."

Rudy describes the Isle of Bali with its roads wrapped around and up the hill. The lights up the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

winding road to the top of the island, lit it up like a Christmas tree.

“We missed the supply ship,” he added, “but the torpedo hit the fuel dump on the island, and everything blew up. We immediately dived and got out of the area.”

The excitement didn't end there, as the Lizardfish followed the Japanese for four days as it trailed a hospital ship. The Lizardfish fired on the Japanese ships and they returned fire. While an unsettling experience, their patrol was ending in three days. Before they headed back to the Philippines for rest, the Lizardfish managed to meet up with a fellow sub and transfer the Lizardfish's remaining 5" shells to them.

“We were watching a movie in the Philippines, when word came that the WWII had ended. All of a sudden the lights turned on and we celebrated,” he said. “They gave each of us a free can of beer.”

In the rest camp, the sub's crew was residing in Quonset huts. With time on their hands for the first time, Rudy and a couple of guys went hiking around the island to see other friends.

We hitchhiked up to some locations where there were machine gun nests. Then we hiked to Manila, where we saw General MacArthur and his crew walk by us.” Rudy added. “We then went to the air field to hitch a ride on a plane back to Clarke Field where the plane that took us to Subic Bay was located.”

With the war over, the USS Lizardfish and its tender came back to San Francisco as a unit, and docked between Alcatraz and the city. The Navy had plans to decommission the Lizardfish and eventually sell it to Italy. So, without a boat, Rudy was transferred to the USS Blueback (SS-326) for his last eight weeks in the Navy.

When discharged, he returned to Illinois, where he got a job with Henney Motors in Freeport, Ill, which built hearses and ambulances from the late 20's to mid-50's. Rudy worked for them for 2-3 years, before moving into the construction business with his future father-in-law, Richard Meyer. In 1948, Rudy married Caroline Meyer. Together they had two children, a son, Mark and a daughter, Julie. What puts the topping on this tale is the fondness

Rudy has for northern Wisconsin, and particularly the Manitowoc area, to this day. He took his bride there on their honeymoon. He packed his family up and took them on multiple summer trips to northern Wisconsin while the kids were growing up.

When Rudy and Caroline celebrated their 50th Anniversary with family – where did they go? – just 12 miles north of Manitowoc to Two Rivers, Wis

Sadly, his wife passed away January 4, 2013 at the age of 91

With the help of his daughter, Julie, and son-in-law Terry Carius, Rudy still makes his way to Manitowoc for the Annual Subfest festivities at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, where the USS Cobia is moored. You can't take a submarine sailor away from a sub too long.



From R-L, Rudy Kraut was inducted into the Holland Club Topside aboard the USS Cobia (SS-245) by USS Illinois Base Commander Tom Ramsay. Also inducted was Sherman Buetsch, who Qualified aboard USS Ulysses S. Grant (SSBN-631) 1968.

Note: Northwest Illinois is fortunate to have three surviving members of the WWII Submarines Veterans Association. Surviving with Rudy are 92-year-young GM2(SS) Archie Holtz, of Machesney Park, also a member of the USSVI Illinois Base, and 98-year-old Jim Moorehead, MM2(SS), of Rochelle.

This trio gets together monthly at a local restaurant to keep their memories intact..

SAD NOTE: Rudy departed on Eternal Patrol on 11/22/18, Thanksgiving Day