



# COUNCIL ON AMERICA'S MILITARY PAST - U.S.A.

*PRESERVING, INTERPRETING AND SHARING OUR MILITARY HERITAGE*

*presents*

## The Persistent Pandemic Preservationist March 2021

*Editor's Note:*

*Welcome! This is Number 3, Volume II of a monthly newsletter featuring historic sites across the country responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The intent is to stay in touch with old and new members, and to share information that is interesting and useful, in the hope that we will create a community of practice among those preserving the nation's military past. Each issue will focus on one or more sites. The original Persistent Preservationist was an excellent newsletter produced by esteemed CAMP member Col. Hal Youmans, USA (Ret).*

*This issue features a regional museum in California and an intriguing artifact that one of our loyal members recognized and brought to our attention. We are also adding a couple of announcements from and about members.*

*Thanks to all who contributed!*

*Stay safe, everyone! — Nick Reynolds, Editor*

### **Deep Submergence, Anyone?**

Not all of us know that on the Central Coast of California, north of Los Angeles and south of the Big Sur, lies the town of Morro Bay. Among its distinctions are its own Gibraltar-like rock and the Morro Bay Maritime Museum (MBMM). This private, not-for-profit museum features a mix of civilian and naval artifacts, prominent among them something called a Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle, or DSRV, named *Avalon* that stands outside the museum along the Embarcadero, the town's main street. *Avalon* has helped to sustain the museum during the pandemic. CAMP member Mary Ellen Cortellini explained that primarily because of its central location, people have continued to stop by to learn about it. Its unique design, and curiosity about it, have not dwindled despite the persistent lockdowns in California.

Museum treasurer Bonnie Jones informed PPP that, like all museums, MBMM had to make major changes during Covid:

*We get no government money and have our regular overhead expenses, so we had no choice. We decided to put far more emphasis on our outside exhibits and our website. We put QR codes on them and also on the website ([www.morrobaymaritime.org](http://www.morrobaymaritime.org)). We added donation boxes to all outside exhibits. We brought items from our gift shop outside and had docents with masks outside selling and encouraging donations. We also have had three drive-thru dinners that have been a huge success. Not having to have to dip into savings came because we took action quickly to readjust to the pandemic.*

The DSRV is certainly a strange-looking artifact. Launched in July 1972, it was the second of two identical submersibles built as a result of the tragic loss of the submarine USS *Thresher* with all hands in April 1963. (Another submarine, the *Scorpion*, would be lost five years later.) As the museum signage explains, the Navy proceeded to develop a dependable, rapid deployment rescue system for downed

submarines. DSRVs offered a quick response, all-weather system for rescuing the crew of a submarine immobilized on the sea floor.

*Avalon* and its sister ship *Mystic* were the first submersibles designed to be readily transported by land, air, on or beneath the sea. They could respond to an emergency virtually anywhere in the world within hours, then operate independent of surface conditions or under ice to a depth of 5000 feet. After arriving at a rescue site, they could dive, locate and attach itself to a disabled submarine. At that point, the submarine's hatches would open and its crew could enter directly into the DSRV. The DSRV could then detach itself from the submarine and transfer the rescued personnel to the support ship, either a specially modified submarine or a surface ship. *Avalon*, which was never called to an actual emergency, was deactivated in 2000 as a new system came online.

Museum artifacts exist to connect visitors to the past, which *Avalon* does in a personal way for Mary Ellen. From 1965 to 1973, her father, Bernard J. Murphy, was Deputy Associate Director and System Engineer of the Deep Submergence Projects at the Charles Stark Laboratory, a division of MIT in Cambridge, MA. As Mary Ellen explained, "the DSRV was my father's 'baby' throughout his career. He took great pride in its development and the fact that the same navigational system was also used in the Apollo program and the landing on the moon. I remember him taking my siblings and me to his place of work as youngsters. We even sat in a mock-up of the cockpit/simulator of the DSRV when we went to MIT Day Camp. So it was amazing to come across the DSRV in its current home many years later."



*Then and now: Mary Ellen and her mom visiting her Dad's lab; the DSRV on display today at the Morro Bay Maritime Museum, where you can even buy a souvenir coffee cup at the store.*



## Announcements

(1) Our president, Ann Todd, Ph.D., will be speaking (online) about OSS Morale Operations at the National Museum of the Pacific War from 1pm to 2pm (Central Daylight Time) on March 31! Register at: [pacificwarmuseum.org/education](http://pacificwarmuseum.org/education).

(2) For those of you who happen to be in the right area, the Army Heritage Museum Store in Carlisle, PA, the home of another renowned Army museum, is holding a book sale, an encouraging sign that the pandemic may be ending. At the same location on April 17, toy soldiers from the remarkable collection of the estate of the renowned scholar Richard J. Sommers will be on sale.



**Army Heritage Museum Store**

***HUGE USED BOOK SALE!***

Saturday April 17<sup>th</sup> 10 am-4 pm  
Sunday April 18<sup>th</sup> 12 pm-4 pm

Completely restocked collections, books, records, etc. Come browse all the "new" used books we have. Used Book Sale located in Multi Purpose Rooms. Masks required.



Personalized Dog Tags made on the spot! The perfect gift for anyone!

950 Soldiers Drive - Carlisle  
(717) 258-1102  
Located at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center  
Monday-Saturday 10 am-4:30 pm • Sunday 12 pm-4:30 pm

*CAMP is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization whose members are interested in the identification, restoration, preservation, and memorialization of old military installations as well as their history and traditions. All persons sharing these interests are invited to join. CAMP publishes an academic journal (The Journal of America's Military Past) and a newsletter on recent developments in historic preservation (Headquarters Heliogram) and holds an annual conference. Find out more at: [www.campjump.org](http://www.campjump.org).*