

## Synopsis for Manitowoc Submarines Exhibit

By Michael Downs

The Manitowoc Submarines have a significant history worth exploring, however, to understand my personal interest in them some background information about myself is useful. I spent six years in our navy, from 1970 through 1976 during which time I had the “honor” of serving on the SS-582. The Bonefish was one of the last diesel subs to be built by the navy, in the late 1950’s, and I believe the last “fast attack” diesel in the fleet until it was scrapped in the 1990’s. Life on board this relatively spacious boat was still rather unpleasant. There was a constant background odor of diesel fuel that was only overcome by the cigarette fumes as a significant number of the crew smoked. We worked twelve-hour shifts which allowed us to “hot rack” which meant that we shared our sleeping berth with the person we relieved on watch while the “enlisted man’s shower” was stocked with extra rations needed for the expanded special operations crew of one hundred men. During this time, I began to read naval history material and learned a great deal about the exploits of the Pacific Submarine Fleet during World War Two and in submarine postal history. My studies led me to the story of the Submarines that were constructed in Manitowoc, Wisconsin and in returning to the old mid-west after my military enlistment I had the opportunity to visit the city where so much history was made. Also, during my time with the navy, I had the opportunity to hear some of the “war stories” my shipmates would talk about being on board, for “spec-op” duties, some of the Manitowoc boats that even in the 1970’s were still being utilized. While attending Graduate School at Indiana University, in 1985, the Wolfgang Petersen movie “Das Boot” based on the novel by Lothar-Gunther Buchheim had just been released and again the experiences of the fictional sailors, but all too real in my mind, reinforced my interest in submarine naval history.

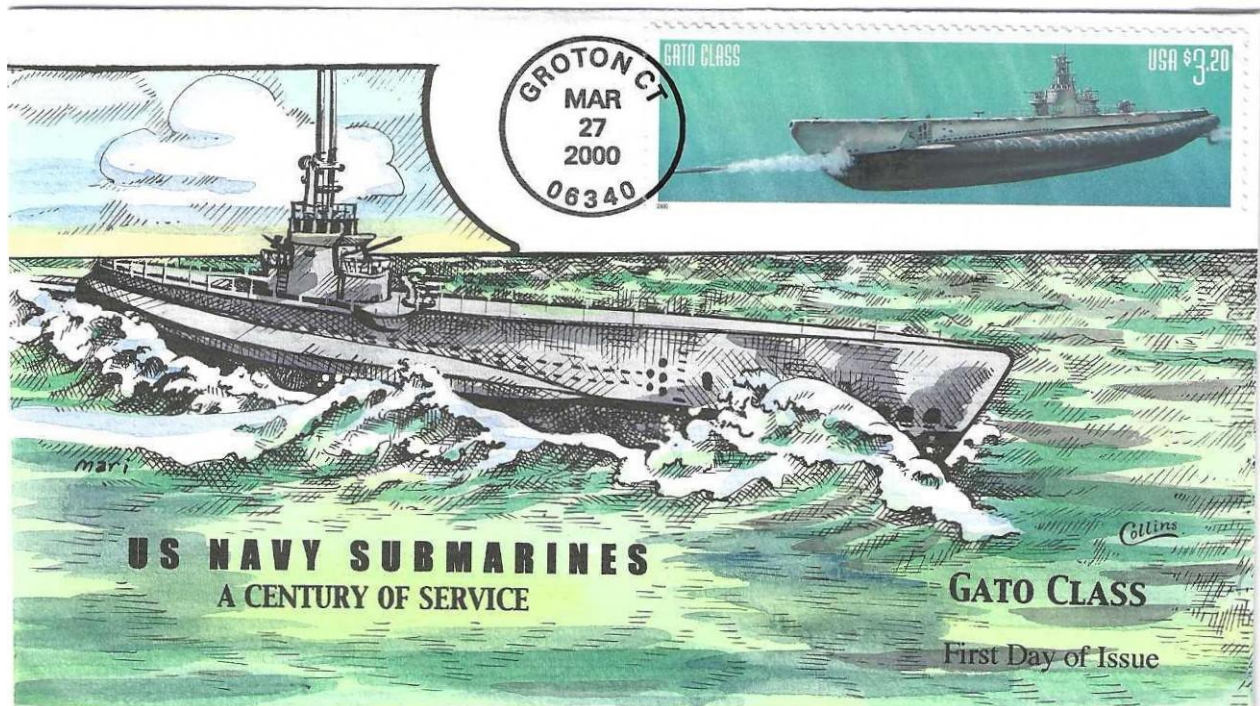
As my collection expanded I joined the Universal Ship Cancellation Society and began to talk with dealers such as Charlie Hamilton, the U.S.C.S. current Vice-President, Paul Huber of Fairwinds and a submarine veteran, and to hear the current President of the U.S.C.S., Laurie Bernstein’s presentation covering her collection of submarine covers. Unfortunately, the subs of Manitowoc did not have a famous cachet maker hand painting covers of boats that came out of the Electric Boat Yard’s such as Gow Ng, but there is still plentiful material available most of which is rather inexpensive, for the twenty-eight boats that went to sea from that small Lake Michigan town. Of the twenty-eight there were two different classes of submarines built by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company, first the Gato Class and finally the Balbo group. My one frame exhibit will focus only on the Gato class boats. Probably the best-known cachets were created by a local Priest, Father August G. Dusold, of the city of Manitowoc. There are three types of cachets usually associated with new construction ships and boats, first is the “keel laid” next the “launching” cachet and finally the cover issued for the actual “commissioning.” For the first seven of eight subs the keel laying cachets can be rather problematic to find if they were

## The Manitowoc Twenty-right

This exhibit illustrates the history of the twenty-eight submarines built in Manitowoc, Wisconsin by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company during World War Two. Using postal history, historic sources from that period and official United States Navy records I will attempt to resurface the valor of the sailors and the submarines they went to war in.

Beginning in 1942 and continuing until the completion of World War Two the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company built twenty-eight Gato and Balbo class submarines in addition to a new style of landing craft. A company that had started by building lake ore carriers and construction cranes switched to the wartime production of submarines on Lake

Michigan with delivery made to the United States at the port of New Orleans via the Chicago, Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company made an important contribution to winning the war. Each of the boats<sup>1</sup> went off to do battle with the "Empire of the Sun" with four of them finding a watery grave in the depths of the Pacific Ocean. Their overall war record was most impressive sinking tons of enemy shipping, rescuing downed American pilots returning from raids on the Japanese targets, completing reconnaissance's of future invasion sites and mining enemy harbors.



The above is a Fred Collins, First Day Cover, with a cachet illustrating a Gato Class World War Two submarine using a United States Postal Service commemorative stamp.

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<sup>1</sup> Note — submarines are referred to as boats while surface vessels, for the most part, are ships.