



SUBMARINER'S ADVOCACY GROUP

Submariners Helping Submariners

October 18, 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

In addition to being the VFW Department of Missouri District 7 Commander, I am the Executive Director of the **Submariners' Advocacy Group** (SAG). While the VFW has stoked the fires of my passion for serving veterans, my greatest passion is serving my Brother and Sister Submariners. That is why a group of 14 Brothers, most of them VFW members, and I joined together and established SAG in April of this year.

For too long, submarine veterans have been overlooked by the general veteran community. We have not received the voice for our very unique service that has been crucial to our national defense complex. Our duties and service have subjected us to stresses and exposures that are unknown to the rest of the military. Yet, the major VSOs have never taken a look at submarine veterans' disability issues nor have they ever attempted to address the complexities of submarine-connected disabilities.

As a result, submarine veterans seeking to file a claim with the VA for service-connected disabilities are told one of two things: 1) "there are no submarine connected disabilities recognized by the VA," or 2) "we may be able to work with something else for you to submit this claim." The VA has no established concessions for exposures to submarine-related radiation hazards or toxic/hazardous chemicals found only in the confined environment of a submarine. Yet, many of these exposures have been present for almost 70 years. In short, Submariners have no voice.

SAG was established to be that voice and fill the gap for submarine veterans. No one has the ability to understand submarines, the submarine environment, stresses, exposures, or the mindset of a Submariner like another Submariner. We, Submariners, do not profess to have more of the above than other veterans, only that ours are both different and unimaginable. We comprise **less than one percent** of the US' veteran population. Yes, we did something that 99% of veterans and over 99.5% of civilians would not or could not do, go to sea, submerge, and live in a sealed, hollow metal tube for weeks or months. We cannot adequately explain our service to the uninitiated, and it does give us a unique sense of pride and accomplishment.

Yes, the Submarine Force is known as the Silent Service, and our missions and duties require that Submariners adhere to strict secrecy regarding our missions, patrols, capabilities, and locations. As far as the locations are concerned, while a submarine is underway and submerged, only the crew knows the boat's exact location. That location is not even known by higher command authority. Then, after the mission or patrol is completed and the reports are submitted, they are classified as Secret and remain classified for decades. Simply, we **cannot** and **will not** divulge submarine secrets that could imperil submarines, ever.

Submariners have suffered from health issues that are in all probability connected to their service for far too long. These dedicated individuals have paid the high cost of their service on their own, or by using private insurance. There is not enough adequate research or studies investigating this

distinctive issue. At the same time, **no** VSO has stepped up and made any effort to support Submariners. Too many have suffered immeasurable pain and/or died too young from a plethora of respiratory ailments, digestive tract disorders, unknown or rare cancers, blood diseases, neurological problems, autoimmune disorders, ALS, early onset Parkinson's Disease, hypo- and hyperthyroidism, and the list goes on.

SAG was created after discovering information about submarine atmospheric contaminants and communications with other submarine veterans regarding possibly connected health issues. In the last 7 months, SAG has collected a list of approximately 70 different health issues that are "as likely as not" connected to the exposures on submarines.

Sag has launched an endeavor to write and then publish a report fashioned in the manner suggested by the DAV and MOAA's *Ending the Wait...* report published last month. We are working closely with these organizations and soliciting endorsements from others. As proud members of the VFW, some of our members are asking that we pursue an endorsement from VFW's National HQ and leadership team.

Again, Submariners have suffered too long and paid too heavy of a physical price for our service to this great nation. Please review the information in this packet and get back to me regarding how the VFW may support our efforts to "Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country." (The VFW's Vision Statement)

Respectfully,

David Bozarth FTB1(SS)
President/Executive Director
Submariners Advocacy Group

