



# Hawgfish Scuttlebutt



Razorback Base  
United States Submarine Veterans



APRIL, 2021

## New Declassified Documents Reveal the Truth About Why the USS Thresher Sank



(CONT PG 3)

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**To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of their duties while serving their country. That their dedication, deeds, and supreme sacrifice be a constant source of motivation toward greater accomplishments. Pledge loyalty and patriotism to the United States of America and its Constitution.**

### ***COMMANDER'S CORNER***

*I hope to do a better job on getting word out in the future. We are (or will) have our first meeting by the time you read this. All members are encouraged to view the base Website periodically and read the "Hawgfish Scuttlebutt" for updates. I will promulgate and email this week to review the meeting. Hoping everyone is well.*



Billy Holloway  
Base Commander



(CONT FROM PG 1)

The U.S. Navy is in the process of declassifying files related to the sinking of the USS Thresher.

The submarine sank in April 1963 during a training exercise, killing all 129 people on board.

A lawsuit forced the Navy to release files from the accident investigation.

A trove of recently declassified files on the tragic 1963 sinking of the nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Thresher confirm the U.S. Navy didn't cover up the mysterious accident—and, in fact, there was no single event or error that caused the sub to sink.

Last year, a retired Navy submarine commander won a lawsuit forcing the service to release its report on what happened to the Thresher, which sank during diving tests in April 1963, claiming the lives of the entire 129-person crew. The Navy has since released several sets of documents that shed new light on the sinking.

USS Thresher was a first-of-its-class nuclear-powered attack sub. The Thresher class was only the second to use the new teardrop hull designed to maximize speed underwater; unlike conventionally powered submarines, nuclear-powered subs could stay underwater indefinitely and didn't require an efficient hull shape for sailing on the surface.

The Threshers were also the first to use the newer, stronger, HY-80 steel alloy. The subs were 278 feet long, displaced 4,369 tons underwater, and could make more than 30 knots submerged.

On April 9, 1963, the Thresher was conducting diving tests 220 miles east of Cape Cod. The submarine notified ships on the surface monitoring the tests it was encountering “minor difficulties,” and it would blow its ballast tanks to return to the surface. Sonar technicians reported hearing mysterious “air rushing” noises, but the sub failed to surface.

The Thresher never surfaced, and the Navy later found the sub in six pieces on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. All 129 personnel on board, including 112 crew members and 17 civilian contractors, were killed. People have come up with many theories about how the sub sank, including blaming the faulty welds that failed during the tests, shorting out the sub's critical electrical systems and sapping its power.

The Navy's investigation into the sinking remained classified for decades until James Bryant, a retired U.S. submarine commander who commanded three Thresher-class

submarines, sued the service in 2019 to release the files. In 2020, a judge agreed with Bryant, ordering the declassification of 3,600 pages of files. U.S. Naval Institute News has uploaded many of the files online for public viewing.

While the Navy investigation blamed the sinking on a failed seawater pipe, Bryant and other naval experts believe the declassified files show several factors all came together to create the fatal accident.

According to the panel of experts, the Navy was rushing to get the Thresher into the fleet to counter a new class of Soviet nuclear submarines. An expansion of the submarine fleet created a demand for more sub-trained crews, and some suggest crews went to sea inadequately trained. The crews themselves were overconfident in the systems, believing it was impossible for nuclear-powered submarines to lose power.

The Navy officially said improperly welded piping ruptured onboard the ship, causing a seawater leak that eventually shorted out the ship's electrical system. Crews were unable to reach equipment to stop the flooding in time, and the ballast tanks failed to work properly. Naval historian Normal Friedman believes inadequate training exacerbated these problems, with the crew unable to respond quickly enough to save the ship.

The loss of the Thresher, as well as the USS Scorpion in 1968, led to a revamping of both training and engineering practices aboard Navy nuclear submarines. The Navy also created a specialized agency, SUBSAFE, to oversee submarine design and construction to ensure that submarines could surface even under the most dire circumstances. Thanks to SUBSAFE, the Navy hasn't lost a submarine in 52 years.

Bryant says the release of the documents is good for the Navy. For decades, critics charged that keeping the Thresher investigation files secret was part of a coverup. The contents of the files make it clear there was no actual coverup, and the Navy only kept them secret to prevent operational details of U.S. nuclear submarines from being released and benefiting adversaries.

**Did some  
financial planning  
and it looks like I can  
retire at 62 and live  
comfortably for  
eleven  
minutes.**

## FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS SHIPMATE

It is with a heavy heart that I tell you we lost a shipmate and friend. Jim Gates was a past commander of the Razorback Base and was always involved in all activities. Additionally, he worked at AIMM and was always there for you anytime you needed anything. Jim was always counted on to cheer all of us up and his sense of humor was known by all. His ceremony will be held later when the weather and family travel allow for burial at sea from the RAZORBACK. Greg Zonner will keep us informed and volunteers will be needed. His obit is listed below.....Rest well Shipmate, we have the watch.



James Harvey Gates, Jr.

January 28, 1950 - March 15, 2021

James Harvey Gates Jr. age 71, of Bryant, passed away on Monday, March 15, 2021. He was born January 28, 1950 in Forrest City, Arkansas. James worked at the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum in Little Rock as a maintenance engineer, a US Navy Veteran and a Methodist. He was preceded in death by his parents, James Harvey Gates Sr., and Rosie Mae Ellis Gates, sister, Carol Ann Gates.

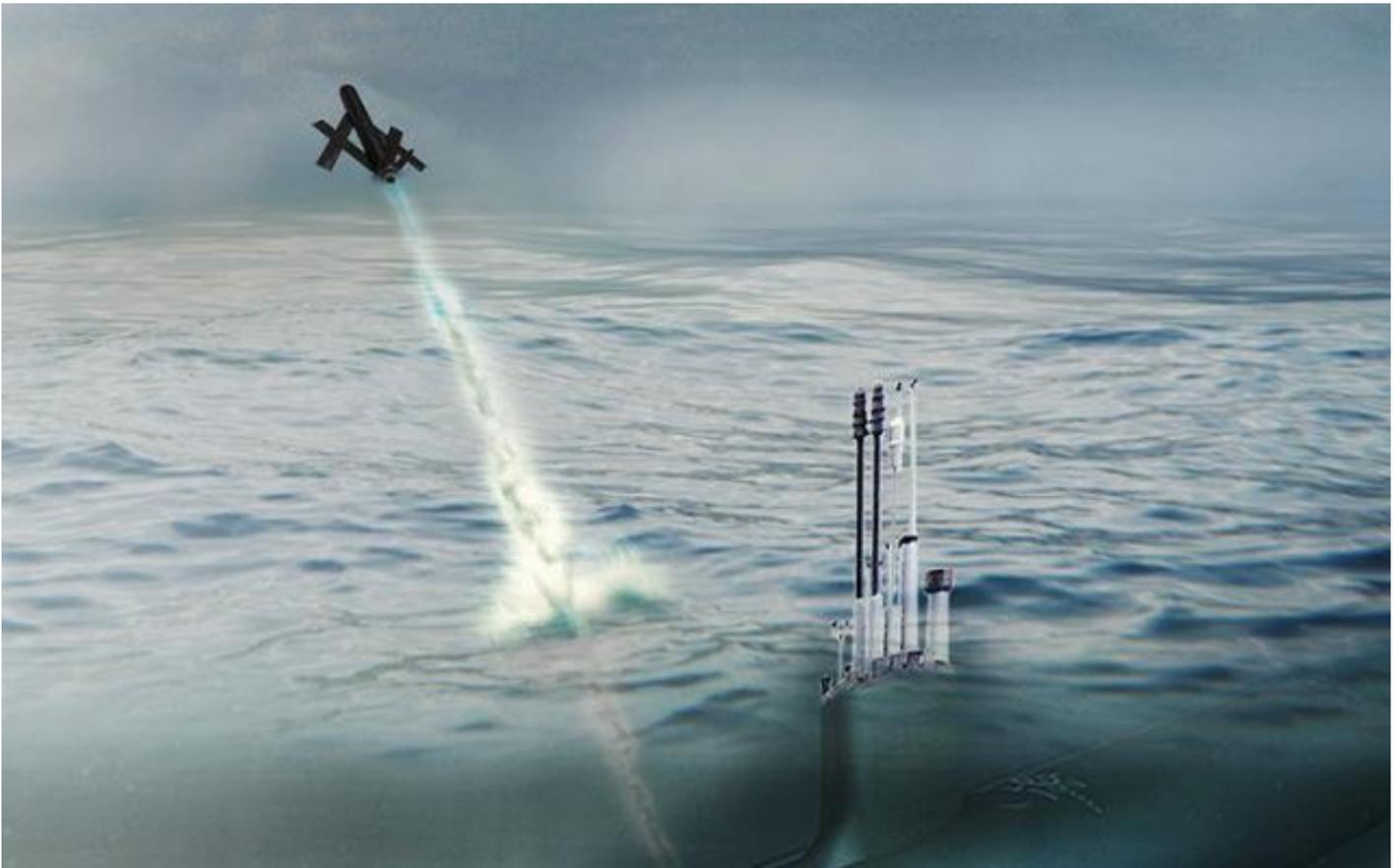
Survivors, sons and daughters-in-law, Travis James (Nicole) Gates, Ryan (Natalie) Gates, all of Texas; daughter, Jennifer Gates, Casper, Wyoming; brothers, Clyde Gates, Tumbling Shoals, Arkansas; Galey Gates, Hot Springs, Arkansas; George Gates, Palestine, Arkansas.



## US Navy plans to buy 120 submarine-launched Blackwing UAVs

The US Navy (USN) plans to acquire up to 120 AeroVironment Blackwing unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) for its submarines.

The first drone is expected to be delivered as early as August 2021, says the service in a sole source notice it posted online on 9 March. The last UAV is scheduled to be delivered by May 2023.



The Blackwing can be launched into the air via a submerged submarine. The UAV is packed into a canister that is ejected from an underwater submarine, the canister then floats to the surface and shoots the Blackwing into the air.

In order to fit inside a canister, the small UAV has two pop-out wing sets. It has a wingspan of 68.6cm (27in) and is powered by an electric motor-driven pusher propeller. On its nose, the UAV carries electro-optical and infrared sensors. It also carries GPS and inertial navigation systems. Those sensors combined with a tactical data link allow the UAV to pass back targeting information to a submarine.

The service has been experimenting with the Blackwing for several years. After several demonstrations in 2019 and 2020, initial operational capability for the Blackwing was declared in September, said Rear Admiral Dave Goggins, programme executive officer for submarines, reported Seapower magazine last November. The USN has demonstrated launching the Blackwing from the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Annapolis, he said.

As part of those tests, the service practiced launching the UAV from periscope depth, and controlling the drone out to “tactically significant ranges – well beyond the line of sight”, Goggins said. “By doing so she was able to target and conduct a rapid simulated torpedo attack against a participating surface ship, in this case the USS Charleston, pretty much at near-maximum effective range of that torpedo, by flying that UAV to obtain a fire-point solution after gaining that initial sonar gain.”

Using UAVs to find and target ships helps submarines avoid detection and attack by remaining further away from an adversary. AeroVironment has not disclosed the range of the Blackwing. However, it is based on the Switchblade 300 loitering munition, which has a range of 5.4nm (10km).





TREASURER'S REPORT		Mar-21
<b>TOTAL BASE FUNDS BEGINNING BALANCE</b>		<b>\$ 14,232.21</b>
<u>General Fund Beginning Balance</u>		\$ 4,305.79
<u>National Dues</u>		\$ 25.00
<u>Booster Club Pete Jilek</u>		\$ 100.00
<u>In Memory of James Woods</u>		\$ 100.00
<u>National Dues</u>		\$ 100.00
<u>General Fund Ending Balance</u>		\$ 4,230.79
<b>Designated Funds</b>		
Maint. Fund Balance		\$ 2,652.66
Charity Fund Balance		\$ 372.00
Snook Memorial Fund Balance		\$ 1,386.86
Designated Fund Balance		\$ 4,411.52
<b>Checking Balance (General + Designated Funds)</b>		<b>\$ 8,642.31</b>
<b>Other Funds</b>		
CD Balance		\$ 5,367.80
Cash on hand		\$ 147.00
<b>TOTAL BASE FUNDS ENDING BALANCE</b>		<b>\$ 14,157.21</b>

## Booster Club

Pete Jilek (1)  
 Mark Taylor (4)  
 George Fore (4)  
 John Barr (5)  
 Mem. Of Lee Huss (5)

## BIRTHDAYS FOR APRIL

Adrian M. Wills	2
James C. Bjorklund	2
Richard Wayne McCarstle	4
Edward John Alves	5
Herbert F. Wise	8
Bobby L. Barge	9
Tom Desaulniers	11
Carl L. Eubanks	12
Robert McBride	14
Harold D. Haislip III	15
James W. Morehouse	18
Hershel W. Kelley	22
Paul Harless	23



## Base Officers

<b>Base Commander Holland Club &amp; Storekeeper, Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Billy Hollaway</b>	<b>501-758-3266</b>	<b><a href="mailto:retldousn@earthlink.net">retldousn@earthlink.net</a></b>
<b>Base Vice Commander Past Base Commander Mem. and Ceremonies</b>	<b>James Barnes</b>	<b>501-319-5888</b>	<b><a href="mailto:jimandsue59@sbcglobal.net">jimandsue59@sbcglobal.net</a></b>
<b>Base Treasurer</b>	<b>Mark Taylor</b>	<b>501-416-2488</b>	<b>empty704@aol.com</b>
<b>Chaplain, COB</b>	<b>Joe Manning</b>	<b>501-366-0331</b>	<b>joe.manning@att.net</b>
<b>Newsletter, Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Alan Malone</b>	<b>501-206-7248</b>	<b><a href="mailto:o5retired@yahoo.com">o5retired@yahoo.com</a></b>
<b>Base Yeoman</b>	<b>Myna Miller</b>	<b>215-360-5960</b>	<b>mynamiller63@hotmail.com</b>
<b>Base Historian National Archives Chairman</b>	<b>Joe Mathis</b>	<b>501-565-6021</b>	<b>rnc95ret05@gmail.com</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Johnny Baker</b>	<b>607-426-6492</b>	<b>johnnie@smarthomeintegration.net</b>
<b>Base Webmaster Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Greg Zonner</b>	<b>501-307-5522</b>	<b>gzonner@aimmmuseum.org</b>
<b>Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Paul Honeck</b>	<b>501-580-4680</b>	<b>pneckerar@gmail.com</b>
<b>Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Carl Schmidt</b>	<b>501-778-6583</b>	<b>bonnyclyde@classicnet.net</b>
<b>Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Ray Wewers</b>	<b>501-843-7855</b>	<b><a href="mailto:raywewers@gmail.com">raywewers@gmail.com</a></b>
<b>Past Base Commander</b>	<b>Greg Schwerman</b>	<b>501-804-0386</b>	<b><a href="mailto:gschwerman@suddenlink.net">gschwerman@suddenlink.net</a></b>
<b>Past Base Commander</b>	<b>David Boyer</b>	<b>479-227-9633</b>	<b>chopper1267@yahoo.com</b>