The S-Boat sailors used to call them "ice cream sailors." Them being sailors who worked on the GATO class submarines in World War 2. These massive GATO subs were the envy of many as they had air conditioning, a very reliable water distiller, and, of course, an ice cream machine.

"Submarines came into play in World War 1 by the Germans," says Paul Farace, president of USS Cod Submarine Memorial in Cleveland, Ohio, "and the Americans and British quickly developed anti-submarine technologies during the years between the wars." By the time World War 2 arrived, the US had an arsenal of knowledge, along with several new subs, to utilize in the war.

"War Plan Orange was the war plan for Japan as it was clear to US intelligence that Japan was becoming hostile and belligerent towards America as early as the 20s," Farace says. As a result of this plan and knowing that the US will probably lose the Philippines, intelligence realized that the war would have to launch from Hawaii. With this knowledge, the US developed subs with a long range, the GATO class, that were air conditioned for the warm Pacific waters, could do 75 day patrols, and were massive. Other fleet boats were developed and they were all identical. "You could blindfold a submariner and put them in any of the 275 fleet boats built around this time and they could find their bunk," Farace explains. The submarines were built so well that with simple modifications they remained a threat well into the 1960s.

To add to their illustrative history is the successful campaigns of the fleet. "The US naval fleet destroyed 77% of the merchant ships coming into Japan. By contrast, the infamous German U-Boats, destroyed about 1% of ally forces merchant ships," Farace explains. The interesting history and misconception of the German U-Boats come from the subsequent Cold War after World War 2. "Many people feel the U-Boats were awesome and very successful. They were great ships, but not very successful," Farace explains. The reason why they are viewed as successful is Allied forced kept up the German propaganda going for the U-Boats after the war as the Soviets were interested in designing submarines based on their design. "It wasn't until the Cold War ended in the 1990s that the truth about the boats came to light," Farace explains. After their time in combat was over, Farace explains the ships were brought to ports
throughout the US. "Submariners are as well trained as pilots and the Navy didn't want to lose them. So these old boats were used for training purposes." The USS Cod was used until 1970 and was going to be dismantled, like many of the ships, but the friends of the USS Cod petitioned to save it and it was gifted to them by the Armed Forces.

The USS Cod retains much of the original relics from WW2 and is it is "the most authentic from the 18 or so that remain," Farace explains. He says that although it's wartime efforts were not particularly more impressive as compared to other boats, there is one story that makes it stand out - it performed the only International submarine to submarine rescue in history.

A Dutch sub was stranded in the South China Sea. The Cod came to the rescue and after two days of trying to free it from a coral reef, they realized it wasn't going to happen and rescued the Dutch crew and blew up the submarine. Although by military standards the patrols were not of particular note, to the layman they were spectacular and a tour guide will surely excited visitors with stories of stranded sailors, huge battles, and even actual film of patrol.

In the present, what makes USS Cod unique is that it is the “Martha Stewart boat,” chuckles Farace. Farace wanted the boat to have its original curtains, dishes, and everything it needs to go out on patrol. “Other submarine tours kind of make fun of me doing this, but I think it makes it even more exciting for visitors,” Farace says. Also, the Cod is the only ship that has tourists enter the same way submariners did – down a ladder. “All the other ships have stairs cut into them,” Farace explains, “we kept this one original and visitors tend to really enjoy it.”

World War 2 is a fascinating time in US history – filled with glory, violence, and spirit that illustrate the ingenuity and heart of Americans. Relics from the past, like USS Cod, give visitors a chance to experience that emotion and heart hands-on.

Andrew Malo
A graduate of Northeastern Illinois University in Education, Andrew has taught for the past decade in Chicago, New Mexico, and Japan. He enjoys tinkering with trucks and motorcycles, woodworking, reading and computer programming.

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