

## A Visit to the Miami Fins Project *by Mike Petsch*

I was certain that I'd never touch the fairwater planes from the Von Steuben again after she was decommissioned in 1994 and scrapped in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. It seems a little strange to see these fins again after so many years now cutting through the sandy earth instead of the deep blue. I'd only recently heard about the "Fins" project from our Columbus Sub Vet's group e-mail, so a visit to Miami on spring break in 2006 seemed compelling. I was disappointed to find that any information concerning the "Fins" project had been somehow omitted from the stacks of Miami tourist brochures.



The web site <http://faculty.washington.edu/jtyoung/fins.html> for the sculptor, John T. Young, was the best source for information. With a Google search completed and armed with satellite photos, it was easy to locate on a small island in Biscayne Bay, just after the drawbridge on North Bay Causeway (SR934). Any old navigators or quartermasters can plot a course to coordinates: 25-50.820N and 80-09.985W. Captains can moor at the Pelican Harbor marina across the street, if they don't mind cleaning up bird droppings from their deck, since a bird hospital was thoughtfully located on the same docks.



The official designation for the Pelican Harbor Fin Project is a "public artwork with a memorial component specific to U.S. Submariners of the Cold War era". It was installed in 2002 and dedicated on Veterans Day 2003. This sculpture park is located at the south east edge of a boat ramp parking lot. There is a small weathered plaque guarding the entrance that also identifies that submarines included in the display: Von Steuben SSBN 632, Sea Devil SSN 664, Pogy SSN 647, Sand Lance SSN 660, Pintado SSN 672, Trepang SSN 674, Billfish SSN 676, Archerfish SSN 678, Tunny SSN 682, Sculpin SSN 590, and Cavalla SSN 684.



I was disappointed to find there was no site location map or even name tags to identify what fins came from what submarine. Since the Von Steuben was the only Boomer listed on site, I felt pretty safe claiming the largest fin with non-skid surface and stanchion holes as her old fairwater planes. Just to be sure that I hadn't been mistaken, I gave every other fin in the display a little hug.



It was a little sad to see the scrubby grass growing at the base and the rust streaks on my old friend. I wanted to scrape away this weathered grey paint and apply a proper

coat of submarine black paint. I was more than thankful that the little island location was a far enough walk into the bay to escape the pervasive graffiti just off the west side of the drawbridge.

I expected more people here because everything else in springtime Florida was crowded, but we had the place all to ourselves. These grey fins just blended into the grey sky as almost a strange quiet tribute to the silent service. I not sure that I fully understand what the artist was trying to say concerning recycling submarine parts as “*turning swords into plowshares*” or about his statement on war and peace.



I prefer to think of the Von Steuben not as a sword of war, but as very effective tool of global peace. For her entire career that lasted from 1963 to 1994, she never fired a shot in anger to sink an enemy vessel.

Although she did accidentally sink the *SeaLady*, an old liberty ship being towed off Cadiz in 1975 with an emergency surface. The Von Steuben was never called upon to send any of her sixteen deadly Poseidon missiles to the old USSR. We drilled, we patrolled, and we were ready to fire if the order ever came. The ultimate deterrent for the cold war was the mutual nuclear devastation that the alternative promised. If the objective was to keep the world at peace for over 30 years, then --- Mission Accomplished!

Boomers and submariners still keep the nuclear peace in an increasingly dangerous world. We tend to forget that although the Salt Treaty reduced the total number of warheads it didn't eliminate the threat. I find it strange that we somehow feel safer because we only have 6,000 missiles pointed our way. I dread any possibility that a new potential enemy technology could ever compromise the submarine's stealth and power. I am grateful for the sailors still on patrol to protect our peace and hope our leaders can remain vigilant.

I left Miami troubled by these pieces from my submarine and my own past that are now forlornly resting in this forgotten field. I prefer to remember the Von Steuben on the surface heading out the Firth of Clyde, with a fresh coat of black paint, slicing through the water, smelling the salt spray in the air, a bow wave streaming towards the sail, seagulls circling the periscope, dolphins jumping as escorts off the bow, and the sun shining brightly over the green hills of Scotland.

