



mother nature network

June 6, 2018

[874.5K](#) - Facebook

[197.5K](#) - Twitter

Undersea memorial of reef balls pays tribute to lost submariners

[Noel Kirkpatrick](#)

June 6, 2018, 9:35 a.m.



These Eternal Reef Balls will commemorate the dead and help to restore the marine environment. (Photo: Brian Dombrowski/EternalReefs.com)

On the Sunday before Memorial Day, hundreds of people seeking to honor and remember lost U.S. submariners gathered in a park in Sarasota, Florida, even as subtropical storm Alberta put a damper on the event.

The ceremony featured 65 Eternal Reef balls, one for each submarine lost since 1900, and a 66th one to honor those lost in non-sinking accidents. More than 4,000 sailors were lost in these incidents.



(Photo: Brian Dombrowski/EternalReefs.com)

Constructed with a special concrete that allows the balls to have a neutral pH balance, the Eternal Reef Balls will not only honor the submarines and their crews — each is adorned with a plaque, like the one pictured above — but it will also help the waters off the Sarasota coast thrive.

Microorganisms and fish will call the balls home shortly after they're placed in the sea, depending on water conditions, sometimes as quickly as 90 days. Their whiffle ball-like appearance not only permits organisms to flourish inside the balls but also prevents storm energy from moving the balls around. Once they're entrenched, the balls should bolster the marine environment for a very long time.



(Photo: Brian Dombrowski/LSK Drones/EternalReefs.com)

The reef balls in Sarasota will form the On Eternal Patrol Memorial Reef, the first ever undersea memorial created in honor U.S. submarines and their crews, [according to Eternal Reef](#), the company that produces the monuments.

Once a submarine leaves its port, it is said to be on "patrol." If a submarine sinks before returning to a port, its patrol is considered an "eternal" one.

On Memorial Day, a single reef ball was supposed to be deposited in the ocean about nine miles off the Sarasota coast, but the Alberto-influenced weather delayed the plans. The balls will be deployed to the location over the next few months.



(Photo: Brian Dombrowski/Eternal Reefs.com)

While the bad weather may have prevented one of the balls from going into the ocean, it didn't stop people from honoring the dead submariners.

Full military honors were granted to each of the 65 lost subs, and in many instances this was the first time such honors were given. Over the course of the ceremony, rifle salutes and buglers playing "Taps" were performed and folded flags were presented to either veterans or family members of those lost.

Students from Port Charlotte High School Naval Junior ROTC Unit served as color guard for the ceremony, and middle school cadets from the Sarasota Military Academy Prep School were on hand to provide guests with information about each submarine and to present the folded flags.



(Photo: Brian Dombrowski/EternalReefs.com)

"The strategic value of the Navy's submarine force in World War II and since cannot be overestimated. It is fitting that the On Eternal Patrol Memorial Reef honors the brave submariners who gave their lives in service to our nation," Rear Admiral Donald P. Harvey, USN (Ret), [said in a statement](#).

Harvey, at age 94, is Sarasota's oldest living naval serviceman and highest ranking retired naval officer.



(Photo: Brian Dombrowski/EternalReefs.com)

"I think it's great," Navy veteran J. Al Smith [told Reuters about the memorial's location](#). "That's where we submariners lived — under the water."

The dedication ceremony can be viewed in the video below.

(On Eternal Patrol Memorial Reef dedication ceremony - full video linked from Facebook)

<https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/stories/get-buried-in-a-reef-ball>