

**Retired Vice Admiral Albert J. Baciocco:  
Three Stars in the Lowcountry**

At two o'clock on March 21, 2014, I met the Retired Vice Admiral Albert J. Baciocco at the Daniel Library Museum Reading Room at The Citadel. We spent a few minutes arranging the room; the chairs were adjusted in front of the fireplace, and then readjusted just to the left. We centered the small end table between the two chairs, and we moved the palm plant to the right, and then the left, then back. We removed the American flag quietly from the hallway and placed it behind the Admiral's chair. The room was bright with the afternoon sun that cascaded through the great window staring west across The Citadel campus, parade grounds, and cadet dormitories. The Admiral spoke about his 34 years in the Navy. He spoke about his experiences during the Korean War and the Cold War and of his position and command experience in the Naval Nuclear Submarine Program. Finally, he spoke of his life after his long and productive career.

The Admiral started by briefly introducing himself in the time before his service in the United States Navy. He explained that he was born in San Francisco, California, in March of 1931—March 4, a Wednesday. As a young man, he was accepted to Stanford. However, before he even bought a book, he was appointed to the Naval Academy. In June of 1953, the Admiral graduated as an ensign and traveled to the West coast to sail to Japan.

He left out of San Francisco, sailed down to San Diego, and crossed the Pacific Ocean to Japan. The young ensign sailed with a detachment of Marines from San Diego. The trip to the Japan was long; even with many responsibilities on the ship, there was a lot of down time. To pass much of that time, the Admiral and his classmates beat the Marines soundly and continually at Monopoly. Yes, Monopoly. With sincere respect for the Marines, the Admiral confesses with

a laugh that those particular Marines were “not the best Monopoly players ever to ride a ship across a rough Pacific.”

As a newly commissioned ensign, Admiral Baciocco began his Naval career in the last days of the Korean War on board the *USS St. Paul*. The *USS St. Paul*, a heavy cruiser, is said to have fired the final shot of the Korean War. “[They] were on the bombing line...at 20:59:57 [the ship] squeezed off the last round,” he said. “I think the round landed in North Korea about twenty-three seconds after the cease-fire.” The Admiral smiled and allowed a slight chuckle. “I always thought that was an appropriate end to the war.”



The *USS St. Paul* shelling the Korean coast in 1952.

“On the *St. Paul* I learned to be a Naval officer,” the Admiral states with confidence. He laughs a little and describes seemingly frustrating but important “learning experiences” while on the *St. Paul*. “There would be a knock on my door at two in the morning and my Chief Warrant Officer would say, ‘C’mon Mr. Baciocco, we’re going to inspect...water sides of number eight boiler.’” He was expected to be prepared at all times. These types of experiences and expectations are how he learned to shape his senses of responsibility and accountability. That is part of his success, and the Admiral knows it.

As the Admiral recounted his early experience in the Navy, he reached a point where he revealed a little about his personal life. He shifted slightly in his chair, and a grin crossed his lips. I could see that his memory had peaked. “Well, actually, most important,” interrupting his own thought, he says, “in June of 1955 my best man and I drove out to Coronado, California, where I married my wife, Jane.” It was that quick. The woman who was his partner and support for the rest of his life earned the title of “most important” among all of the other career details, his own professional recognition, and his admiration of other officers.

Following his duty on the *St. Paul*, he served until 1957 on the diesel submarine *USS Wahoo*. Again, crediting his experience on a naval vessel, Admiral Baciocco explained, “I learned to become a submariner on the *USS Wahoo*.” With 19 torpedoes fired and impressive assignments from his commanding officer, Admiral Baciocco recounted that “the first time...we got under way [the Captain] said, ‘Al, get the ship under way.’ That afternoon we came in, and he said, ‘Al, bring the ship in and get the ship secured alongside. This is a great thing for an ensign...I was lucky.”

At the time of the Cold War, submarines were utilized by the United States Navy in an independent forward-operating detail. They operated as their own entities, not completely attached to a vessel or carrier battle group. This allowed the submarines to run highly classified orders in the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Mediterranean Sea. The specialized training of the submariners and the submarine commanders made the submarine a dominant force and an important part of the nuclear strategic deterrence program for the United States Navy during the Cold War.

In April of 1957, Admiral Baciocco was an early selectee for the Navy’s nuclear submarine program. He completed his nuclear training and subsequently served on three nuclear

attack submarines on the commissioning crew: the *USS Scorpion*, the *USS Barb*, and the *USS Gato*. The Admiral served as the Executive Officer on the *USS Barb* (1963-1965) and served as Commanding Officer on the *USS Gato* (1965-1969).

Admiral Baciocco served his next at-sea assignments at the headquarters in Charleston, South Carolina. He served as Commander of Submarine Division Forty-Two from 1969 to 1971; here he was responsible for operational training readiness. He was Commander of Submarine Squadron Four from 1974 to 1976, and in this role he was responsible for both operational and material readiness. During the height of the Cold War, he was responsible for the preparation and readiness of a large part of the Atlantic Fleet submarine force as Commander of Submarine Group Six from 1981 to 1983. Here he commanded several force commands including 40 strategic submarine crews totaling about 20,000 military personnel. In 1982, he served as Commander of the Naval Base Charleston.

The Admiral's shore duty was dispersed among his sea duty. In 1971, he was assigned to the Chief of Naval Operations staff submarine directorate and was subsequently selected as the Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy in financial management; he served in this position until 1974. His responsibilities included senior technical and management positions in submarine warfare, antisubmarine warfare, financial management, science and technology, and acquisitions. Admiral Baciocco returned to the Chief of Naval Operations staff following command service in Charleston in 1976. In 1977 he was selected for Flag rank and served as the division director for Naval attack submarines and deep submergence system. Here his responsibilities included policy, planning, budgeting for force structure, readiness, modernization, and supporting infrastructure for all Naval attack submarines and deep submergence systems.

After a very successful career both at sea and on shore, Admiral Baciocco was nominated to be the Chief of Naval Research in 1978 and was confirmed by the Senate. He served as Chief of Naval Research until June of 1981. His responsibilities included execution of the Navy's basic research program and the management and oversight of government-sponsored Independent Research and Development by the defense industry. After he was promoted to Vice Admiral in 1983, Admiral Baciocco was appointed as Director of Research, Development, Test and Evaluation in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. His appointed responsibilities included, but were not exclusive to, the oversight of all research and development, test and evaluation, and Naval acquisitions. He was also in charge of a budget that exceeded \$10 billion during a period of heavy Naval expansion.

Admiral Baciocco has been awarded an impressive collection of American and foreign service medals and citations: three stars as an Admiral, the Distinguished Service Medal with Gold Star, the Legion of Merit with three Gold Stars, the United Nations Medal, and the French National Order of Merit with the rank of Commander, among others. In 1987, after 34 years of commissioned service, he retired from the United States Navy.

So, what is it that a retired Three-Star Admiral does when he has finished his Naval career? He doesn't spend all of his time on the beach with his feet buried in the sand, chair leaning back, sun steadily tanning him. The Retired Admiral created The Baciocco Group Inc. and continued to work in Washington D.C. in advisory and pro bono technical and management consulting for industrial interests, governmental concerns, and academia. He and his wife moved to Charleston after many years of post-retirement private-sector success. Although time moves slower in Charleston than in the Nation's capital, the Admiral hasn't slowed down. He remains very active in the community and has participated in important local and national initiatives.

If you live in the Lowcountry, or have even visited Charleston, you are aware of the Patriot's Point Naval and Maritime Museum and the *USS Yorktown*. But, if you look a little closer, Patriot's Point is also the home of the Cold War Submarine Memorial. Just off of Patriot's Point Road and cleverly crafted into the landscape, this memorial pays tribute to “the dedicated men who served on in our naval submarines during the Cold War from 1947-1989,” as described by the Patriot's Point website.



A view of the *USS Louis and Clark* and the Cold War Submarine Memorial at Patriot's Point.

Admiral Baciocco focused and became firm and serious as he spoke about the city of Charleston: “You couldn't drive over the old bridge, or stand in the harbor without seeing a black hull going in or out... We've really got to somehow memorialize this unique time in the Navy and Charleston's history.” The Admiral and the foundation raised around \$2 million to purchase the necessary material and to fund the memorial, which utilizes the sail and rudder of the *USS Louis and Clark*, to serve as a reminder of the service and sacrifice of the submarines and the submariners and their families that were a large part of Charleston military history. The memorial also recognizes and thanks the men and women of South Carolina and the Lowcountry

for their shared naval history and the Cold War military and civilian partnership. It is important, the Admiral said, that we remember that “[t]he legacy of Charleston is built on deeper things” than wine and cheese and social gatherings.

Our interview wrapped up, and I recognized that Retired Admiral Baciocco had led an extraordinary life; he has had an impressive career in the United States Navy, and he has been a productive retiree. I also realized that the Admiral was not yet finished with his life’s mission—he is someone always striving to make the world a better place.

- Matthew Orosz