



USS GREAT SITKIN (AE-17) ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

December 7, 2020



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President's Report

Hello shipmates time again for another newsletter to keep you up-to-date on the latest and greatest! Ok so it's the usual with a twist. Winter has finally arrived we had somewhere between 2-3 "with the temperature a balmy 37 degrees at the moment. Joy and I have been hibernating occasionally seeing our kids and grandkids at a reasonable social distancing but we appreciate their concern for us about the virus.

Enough of the virus dribble we are all going through it, I just hope 2021 doesn't come in and say "Here hold my beer"!

About the reunion in Cleveland...enough said! It has been tough getting things done. A lot of the places I would like to plan on are either closed or having some price increases which won't take place until a March time frame. Options we are looking at are a riverboat Dinner cruise, The USS Cod, an ore boat tour, Rock and Roll hall of Fame and the Christmas Story House. The Cod would love for us to hold the Honor Ceremony there with some special rates. Anyway there will be plenty to do.

The Crowne Plaza- Airport Hotel has a room rate of \$119 per night; hopefully I will have all the info needed by the next newsletter.

Our next 2 reunions are already in place being Columbus, GA and Norfolk VA, if you have any ideas or want to host one let us know the next time we get together or email me. Dues can still be sent to George, Tom will get your membership cards out, and Joe and Mark will continue to look good.

That's about it for me. Time to continue the task of Christmas shopping so Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!

Jim Dunno, President



Vice President's Report

Greetings all. I hope everyone is well in these trying times. At this point in time, we have 28 paid members. As a reminder, please send in your membership dues for 2021. That's it for now. I wish everyone a safe and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Be well.

Tom Stachelski, Vice President.

Treasurer's Report [a.k.a. Repair 3]

END OF YEAR 2020

Wow! This year is almost over. I will not go over all the sordid details or attempt to put a positive spin on things we might have gone through. Instead, I am going to go back 50 years to December 1970. Where were you?

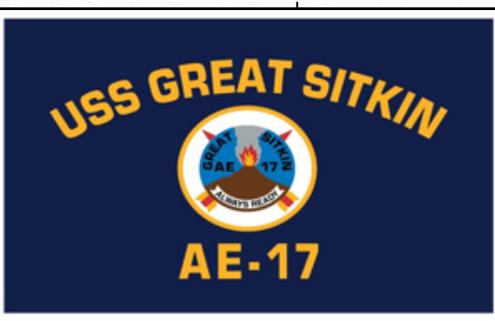
I was happily serving as a 3rd Class Damage Controlman in USS Great Sitkin AE-17. I was petty officer in charge of Repair 3. The ship had just returned from GITMO, where we were successful in our 2nd try at Refresher Training. We were in a stand-down period at our home port of Bayonne, NJ. but we were also preparing for our deployment to the Med with 6th Fleet. That was coming up the end of January 1971. I was 20 years old.

I've talked before about being a "gear head" having grown up in an auto repair environment. Being part of the engineering department, I spent most of my time in spaces occupied by some fantastic machinery. Anyone who served in Great Sitkin has to have marveled at how that big gray thing, 460 feet long, filled with 5 holds of ordnance and 267 Sailors, weighing 7700 tons empty, could move over the oceans with 1 steam engine and one propeller driving it. She was built at a shipyard in Wilmington, North Carolina, with steel and components from all over the country, and set off on her service to the US Navy on 20 January 1945. She served honorably for 28 years. If you're reading this, you probably walked her decks at some point during those years. You might have loved her or hated her. But I'll speak for myself here. I loved her. Maybe not as much on 2 August 1971 when I separated from her, but along about 1990, I started having thoughts about her. While the vessel that was Great Sitkin was long gone, the human element was alive and well. Over the next ten years, I found old patches, pictures, etc., items packed away and now found. With the advent of the Internet, the search suddenly became much easier. Mike Weeks and Glenn Frankenbach caught up with me in 1998, and in 2000 I attended my first reunion in Cleveland. And suddenly, USS Great Sitkin was alive again! We missed our 2020 Norfolk reunion, so hopefully you're all getting ready for Cleveland, Ohio in 2021!

Did you ever look at a picture of the ship and think, Wow! She's a beauty! Those of you that are Facebook, yeah, I know you have. Do you have her picture hanging somewhere in your home? A decal on your car or truck? A state registration plate with her hull number? A 2' x 3' ship's flag? A Great Sitkin shirt? Well, as for a registration plate, you're on your own. I got mine in Pennsylvania! But if you want a ship's flag, we have them! \$50 each, free shipping. A shirt? We have them too! Full color t-shirts for \$10, Polo shirts for \$15. Any ship's store items, send a check payable to USS Great Sitkin Association. Mail to: To: USS Great Sitkin Association, 311 W Oak Lane, Glenolden, Pa 19036

That's it from Repair 3. The repair party wants to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. Until then, wear a mask, wash your hands, and stay safe!

George Kaiser, Treasurer



SHOW YOUR GREAT SITKIN PRIDE BY FLYING THE COLORS!

We have 30 of these flags being made.
2FT x 3FT Nylon
Single reverse construction, digitally printed one side, white canvas header and 2 brass grommets.
\$50.00 and FREE shipping.

Late January delivery.

Polo Shirts: Men's and Ladies, Navy Blue, Grey and Pink \$15 ea



Ship's Picture Shirts:
T-Shirts - \$10

All Ship's Store purchases, make check payable to USS Great Sitkin Association. Mail payment to: USS Great Sitkin Association, 311 W Oak Lane, Glenolden, PA 19036

Secretary's Report

Hello again to all shipmates! I want to take this opportunity to say that I hope you and your family are doing well during this pandemic. I am doing well, still have some health issues but am looking forward hopefully to the next reunion.

I'd like to take a moment and share with you what I'm trying to do to help my fellow healthcare employees that are dealing with the day-to-day challenge of keeping people healthy. We think of first responders only being Policeman, Firemen, or EMT technicians. But I can say in my 52 years of healthcare the healthcare employees are in the same category. When you need to come to the hospital we're all there to make sure you get better and in so doing we are putting our health at risk.. So please find a way of protecting yourself and your family from the virus so we can deal with ongoing emergencies during this pandemic. I'm so proud of all employees working in small and large medical centers any sort of facility that keep us safe,

I am looking forward to seeing you at the next reunion.

Joe Rios, Secretary



The Chaplin's Corner

"Good Day to all of you".

Well winter is upon us now and we had our first measurable snow fall here at home in Ohio. At least it wasn't enough to run my snow blower.

I hope all are well and safe as this devastating pandemic continues to plaque or nation. We have all had to learn new ways of doing things and coping with major changes almost daily. My daughter is an RN at our local hospital and my wife Patsy is still an EMT and working on our local EMS department. She took two people in the other day that were positive for the virus. We need to keep the medical staff and first responders in our prayers daily.

I want to remind all today that God has not forgotten us and he is still watching over us.

Isiah 41:10 "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

It's time to say good bye for now. Let's keep those families in our prayers that have lost a loved one who sailed aboard the Great Sitkin.

May the Lord Bless and Keep

Honor Roll Update

Charles E. Starks

Mark Rucker, Chaplin



USNS Mercy (T-AH-19) and USNS Comfort (T-AH-20)
by Alex Paszly

Given all the news about the USNS Mercy (T-AH-19) and USNS Comfort (T-AH-20), two USN Hospital Ships, during the COVID 19 outbreak in early 2020, I feel compelled to write this story about my involvement in the commissioning of these ships. My last tour of Duty (1986-1989) was as Staff Supply Officer for the US Military Sealift Command (MSC).

Very briefly, back in the 1980s, MSC had over 100 ships, world wide, crewed by Department of the Navy civil service employees. That included all the Military Prepositioning Ships and Navy Research Ships. Today they have over 130 ships which now also includes control of all the replenishment ships (ammunition, oilers and stores resupply ships), all crewed by civil service employees. Back when we served on the Sitkin, ammunition ships (AEs), oilers (AOs) and stores ships (AKs) were under the Commander, Service Force Atlantic or Pacific and crewed by US Navy personnel like us. Times have changed.

When I arrived at MSC in the summer of 1986, work on the commissioning of the two Hospital Ships was well underway. These two ships were converted from "super tankers" (oilers), to today's 1,000 patient bed Hospitals with 2,000 personnel of which roughly 1,200 are Navy medical and communication personnel. The critical criteria for these ships was the requirement for the ship to be able to deploy within five days from initial call-up. That means that the ship had to be crewed and underway from a "semi-mothball" status to fully operational, with all ship's crew and hospital staff aboard and all stores (i.e., all medication, including whole blood and fresh/dry provisions) on board for an extended operation.

I wish I could take credit for the plans that were already in place for the deployment of the ship within the 5 day under-way call-up. For example, all the initial repair parts to support the ship were on board and in place. All "long term" shelf life medication, with the exception of whole blood, was on board and in place. All "long term" canned and dried provisions were on board and in place. My job was to help smooth out and work with the various organizations to facilitate the maintenance of those items already aboard prior to deployment. In addition, I worked with helping to staff the group of store keepers who were permanently stationed aboard ship to track and identify, survey, remove and reorder all expired shelf life items. I worked with the Navy Supply Center Norfolk and San Diego to maintain the magnetic "tapes" that were to be used to drop the requisitions to be filled and shipped to the Hospital Ships immediately upon "call up". These were all typical routine storekeeper chores and were not very interesting or challenging. The challenging and fun stuff was deciding on how to feed the crew coming aboard on day one, and what kind of items to be stocked in the Ship's Store.

Deciding on how to feed personnel coming aboard on day one, before the galley crew arrived and fresh/frozen food items were delivered aboard ship, was a challenge. However, from my experience in Viet Nam, anyone with any time in a combat zone learned how to exist on "Meals Ready to Eat" (MREs). So, I recommended that we order and stock "MREs" aboard the ships to feed those crew members arriving early before galley operations were established.

My recommendations were met with some skepticism. So I ordered enough MREs to feed the entire MSC Supply Office for a week. Our entire staff would gather together at noon, randomly take a meal and eat it. Actually, it became a time we looked forward to and enjoyed. There was a lot of kidding and bantering. Invariably, someone would try to trade for an entree they preferred. After the week, there was an almost unanimous decision to recommend stocking MREs to feed the ships' crew before galley operations could be established. Our recommendation was accepted and we stocked MREs as part of the initial outfitting of the two hospital ships.

The fun really started when we began to discuss what items were needed in the Ship's Store for the women coming aboard the ship. The Ship's Store, like the food service operation, is a major morale booster on the ship. Back in the 1980s, there were no women aboard Navy ships. Items for men were well established. However, for women, there was no precedence. We all knew that we had to get it right.

I have to tell you that we all had a lot of fun discussing some of the different items of necessity. I have to admit that sometimes it was at the expense of our dedicated women in the MSC Supply Office. But they were brave, and we began to identify items that were necessary. It encompassed everything from brands of health and beauty items, i.e., lipstick, cosmetics, hair products and personnel hygiene items, to magazines, etc. We also worked with the Navy Purchasing Office (if my memory serves me right), in Brooklyn, New York, who purchased the items for Ship's Stores.

Finally, we had to discuss the unmentionable. We were going to have a lot of young, single men and women aboard with no liberty or time off the ship. When a Hospital Ship deploys, there is no liberty. We all knew that prophylactics (i.e. condoms) were routinely stocked in every Navy Ship's Store. The question was how much to stock on the Hospital Ship that would now have both men and women.

To determine the quantity, we had some funny and embarrassing discussions. My senior staff and I visited the ship on numerous occasions, and we were very familiar with the physical layout of the ship including the hospital and berthing spaces, etc. One of the most significant items that hit us as we toured the ship was that there was virtually "zero" privacy for the crew. There were only two private staterooms aboard: one for the civilian Master (responsible for the Civil Service crew and the ship underway and in-port) and one for the Commanding Officer of the Hospital and military staff. Both the civilian crew and military staff of the hospital bunked in typical large berthing compartments, with bunks stacked 3 high with 50 or more people in each compartment. Men and women bunked in separate berthing compartments. There was virtually no privacy anywhere on the ship.

Given the lack of privacy, we thought that the "opportunity" for liaisons was low. We took this into consideration in trying to determine the quantity and brand of prophylactics to stock in the Ship's Store. You can let your imagination run wild about our discussions and you would be right. It was a hoot! We finally came to a decision which was accepted and included in the initial outfitting of the Ship's Store.

I retired from the Navy in the summer of 1989. The USNS Comfort deployed to Kuwait in 1990 on its first humanitarian mission. When I heard the news, I called my former Deputy Supply Officer at the Military Sealift Command. I was anxious to find out how our supply activation planning had performed. He informed me that everything went very well, according to plan. Whole blood, consumables and crew loaded as planned. The food service operation went as planned. The five day deployment time table was met. Our months of diligent planning performed "Right On", except for one small glitch. The Ship's Store ran out of condoms well before the ship reached its destination.

GO NAVY!



USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association Active Membership: Active Member status in the USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association is open to all crew members. Dues are \$20.00 per year and are used to cover the cost of the newsletters, website hosting, domain name, administrative and other expenses. The membership year is 1 January through 31 December. Membership cards will be issued to all crew members paying dues and will identify the individual by name, expiration date and number of years of Active Membership.

Payment of dues is not required to participate in any official function of the Association but is required for being an Active Member. Notices pertaining to dues will be posted on the website and in the newsletters. Active Members must have their dues paid prior to the annual meeting each year in order to retain their status and eligibility to vote.

To become an Active Member of the USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association, please complete the application form below and send it along with a check made payable to:

USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association, c/o George Kaiser, 311 W. Oak Lane, Glenolden, PA 19036

USS Great Sitkin (AE1-17) Association Active Member Application & Renewal Form

Name: _____ E-Mail: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Dates Served Aboard: _____ Application Date: _____ [] New [] Renewal

Amount Submitted: \$ _____ [] 2019 (\$20) [] 2020 (Free Yr) [] 2021 (\$20)

[] Please send me a copy of the Constitution and Bylaws.

Comments: _____

Signature: _____

December 7, 1941
Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor



Nazi Germany Submarines "Wolf Pack"
Attacking U.S. Convoys



Remember the reason we were built and tell your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. When mankind forgets it's history they are more likely or not repeat it.