USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association

NEWSLETTER

3rd Issue 31st Year

November 2023

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From the President:

So I am sitting here (wearing shorts) contemplating on what I want to say in this newsletter article , but what is really on my mind is the fact that I am going to have to start wearing jeans again tomorrow. What's with this high of 51 this weekend! The week of the reunion had great weather and I believe that all 33 of our attendees had a great time. Tim, the temporary GM of the hotel, got the hotel van and took a group out for ice cream. Thanks, Tim for driving, and I believe Mark Rucker paid for it, so thanks Mark. The following night Tim brought in a tub of ice full of beer and wine

The Air Force Museum let us use one of their conference halls for our Memorial service. Since our last visit in 2008 they have opened up another hanger, brought the presidential planes inside and completed work on the Memphis Belle. The Newport Aquarium was another nice place to visit; you even got to walk across the "shark bridge" over some well fed sharks.

George is working on Providence, Rhode Island for 2024. George says it will be a real Navy week. Alex Paszly has said he and Joyce would do 2025 in Fredericksburg again. So with two great places coming up, those of you who have put off coming for the last few years should (pardon the pun) "get on board." If there is anyone who would like to host 2026, let me know. I can help you through it.

Now is the time for the usual add ins; Dues are still $20 and will gladly be received by George and Tom. If you have moved, changed phone numbers, or changed your e-mail address, please let us know so we can keep you in the system. That's all for me. Everyone stay healthy.

Jim Dunno, President

Secretary's Report:

We had another successful reunion in Cleveland/Kentucky. Members voted the existing officers back into office for 2023-2024.

President: Jim Dunno
Vice President : Tom Stachelski
Secretary: Joesph A Rios
Treasurer: George Kaiser
Chaplain: Mark Rucker (appointed)
Newsletter: Mike Kleinbeck (appointed)

Joseph Rios, Secretary

Reunion 2023

The guys, the gals, the Hawaiian shirt crew, and the restored Original Memphis Belle. Note the ship on the shirts!

Greetings From Repair 3:

Ships don't sink because of the water around them.

Ships sink because of the water that gets into them.

Don't let what's happening around you get inside you and weigh you down.

A simple observation from the repair locker this fall. On board a Navy ship, the repair locker was the central storage point for storage materials a sailor would need to keep water from sinking the ship. When a situation caused the need for action, General Quarters would be sounded, drawing sailors to their assigned repair lockers. Training and courage would then be put to work to mitigate the damage and keep the ship ready for service. When I served aboard Great Sitkin, the readiness of after Repair 3 was my sworn responsibility, and I took the job seriously.

As I write this, today is October 9th. Fifty years ago today I Joined Collingdale Volunteer Fire Co #1, continuing the job is started in the Navy in 1969. I guess the moral of this short story is in the last line of the prose. Be it our health, life events, or the world today, keep the water out. Practice good damage control, and

DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!

Speaking of ships, we had another amazing reunion in September. If you were there, you know it too, and if you weren't there, well, you missed it! Aside from the great venues, it seemed this year was great time for everyone sitting around telling sea stories of Great Sitkin days as well. Mark Rucker told very clearly about when we were at sea off the coast of Virginia and smoke from wild fires set off alarms in cargo holds on our ship, which understandably caused some excitement for a while.

We also picked up two new photojournalists to document this and, hopefully, future reunions! Lavonne Ohms, wife of shipmate David Ohms, and Pam Berge, wife of Rich Berge.

While I'm on the subject of reunions, save this date:

September 15, 2024

The planned start date is on a Sunday and represents a new, experimental departure from the Wednesday to Sunday reunions we've been having since 1992. It will be held in Warwick, Rhode Island, just 30 minutes from Newport. Proposed visits will be to the US Navy submarine base and USS Nautilus at Groton, Connecticut. Other highlights may include Mystic Seaport and Battleship Cove to name a few. Now here's where you all come in. Our thought is to make the reunion run a few days longer. It would involve having our dinner dance on Wednesday night, with another activity on Thursday and maybe Friday. Email, text, or call me with your thoughts.

And off we go into winter. Have a safe, blessed holiday season. Hopefully we'll see some of you on the Spring Great Sitkin "Sail Away" in April.

George Kaiser, Treasurer

Lavonne Ohms (L) & Pam Berge

Chaplain's Corner:

"Good Day" to all. Summer is gone, gardens are gone, and we are sitting around waiting for the cold weather to arrive.

I thought we had a good reunion in Covington this year. Dunno's did a real nice job this year. Hotel was nice, General Manager really took care of us.

Thought I would share these wonderful scriptures with you.

Psalms 61:1-8 *"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. [2] From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. [3] For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. [4] I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah., [5] For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name. [6] Thou wilt prolong the king's life: and his years as many generations. [7] He shall abide before God for ever: O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him. [8] So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows."*

Let us keep those families in our prayers that have lost a loved one who sailed aboard the Great Sitkin.

Mark Rucker, Chaplain

Honor Roll Update:

Robert E. Pratt

Edward Connors

Caribbean Sailaway 2024 Update:

There are a few cabins still available on Enchanted Princess for the April 20, 2024 Sitkin Sailaway, round trip from Ft. Lauderdale to San Juan, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. To date we have 8 couples signed up. If you are interested, contact mike.kleinbeck@gmail.com.

Navy Plans New Museum

Great Sitkin reunions have visited the Air Force, Army, and Marine national museums. Perhaps we will be able to visit a new Navy National Museum in a couple of years.

On April 13, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro unveiled conceptual renderings from five architecture firms at the National Museum of the U.S. Navy, finalizing the Navy's Artistic Ideas competition, an effort to explore the possibilities for the planned Navy museum.

Following the SECNAV's October announcement of the preferred location for the Navy's planned museum, Naval History and Heritage Command moved forward with its conceptual development phase and initiated the ideas competition in an effort to explore the full realm of artistic ideas that might be incorporated into a new museum.

The new museum will be located near the Washington Navy Yard in Southeast Washington, DC. A final design competition will be held in the near future. Groundbreaking is planned for 2025.

An Unscheduled Stop...

David R. Bull, Former DCA and Repair Officer

While crossing the Atlantic on our 1969 Med cruise, After Steering reported to the Bridge that they heard a loud sound and then it sounded like something was wrong with the propeller. “All Stop!” An EOD team, aboard for a planned future mission, offered to send divers down to check, but the sea was clear and by leaning over the fantail we could view the screw. The shaft was slowly jacked over, and we saw a blade, another one, another one, then nothing. A blade had broken off. What to do?

Fleet Command in Manhattan radioed to proceed at reduced speed to our original destination of Rota, Spain US Navy base, and await further orders. Upon arrival we learned that there was a dry dock available at the Royal Navy dockyard in Gibraltar.

Our cargo holds had to be emptied. While it took over a week for civilian workers to load the ship stateside, the Seabee’s in Rota unloaded us in only a day! Next, to find a replacement screw.

The Supply Officer at Rota had checked his store yard and none of the crated props there had the proper stock numbers. One was found stateside, and as it happened, our sister ship, the Mauna Loa, was scheduled to begin a Med cruise that week. The replacement prop was lashed to her afterdeck and she proceed toward Spain. In the meantime, the Rota Supply Officer checked his yard again, this time peeling away the crating and checking the actual stock numbers stamped on the prop hubs. Bingo! The correct prop had been in Rota all along!

Being the junior engineering officer, I was sent ahead over land to Gibraltar to deliver the ‘Sitkin’s docking blueprints, which specified how the blocks were to be deployed in drydock to support the hull. I guiltily enjoyed the hospitality of the friendly Royal Navy officers there while waiting for the ship to arrive, including a personal tour of “the rock.” Arrangements were made to put me up in a delightful hotel, and I was given a generous per diem meal allowance and sightseeing suggestions to fill my idle time.

I was impressed with the professionalism of the Royal Navy nautical engineers, and the skills of the shipworkers who ferried over from Morocco daily. Repairs were successful, and we resumed our mission. It was suspected that the propeller must have developed a hidden fault when it was originally cast, which over years of turning expanded into a crack that caused the blade to fall off.

You can’t make this stuff up!

...And Always Be Nice to the Chiefs!

First a little background. Here I am, a naive 23-year-old, fresh out of Navy OCS and terrified of the responsibility of being the Division Officer to some 40 sailors, especially onboard an old post-WWII ship that was constantly in need of repairs. I was taking my position way too seriously, getting stressed out, overwhelmed with the details.

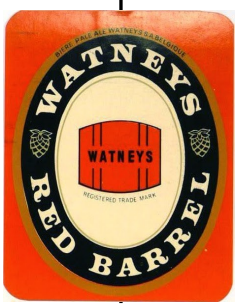
After a few days of this, along comes Chief Ben Rowley. He saw me trying to micro-manage everything, took me aside and counseled: “Mr. Bull, you have two choices: you can try to do all of this by yourself, going crazy, and I’ll just stay in the Chief’s Quarters drinking coffee all day. Or, you can let me handle things and they’ll get done.”

It took me about 10 seconds before I said, “I give”! I don’t know how he did it, but with all the different trades in action all over the ship, he knew exactly who was doing what, while sitting in the Chief’s Quarters! All to my relief.

Now, on to the unscheduled stop at Gibraltar. Chief Rowley knew I was being sent ahead to meet the Royal Navy engineers with the docking plans, and I’d be there a few days before the ship arrived. Just as I was departing, he asked me (more like an “order”) to scope out the best pubs in town, so he’d know exactly where to go on liberty. He made it clear he didn’t want me to waste his precious liberty time searching.

So, I diligently checked out as many pubs as possible (a very taxing endeavor!), and finally found one where all the locals hung out, had a fun time, and there was a pretty barmaid, who called me “Luv.” (Naïve me, she called everyone “Luv.”) Staggering back to my hotel that night, I remembered my promise to Chief Rowley, stopped, turned around, and noted the name on the front window: “Watneys.”

As soon as the ship arrived and all was settled, liberty was called. Chief Rowley cornered me and asked what I found out for him. I told him the name of the pub, and roughly where it was. The next morning, he accosted me and complained that every pub in town had the name “Watneys” in front—it was the name of a beer, like a ‘Millers’ sign! He spent all night wandering.



So, I asked him if he had a good time anyway, which he admitted he did, and stopped complaining. I considered the Chief to be a good friend, and advisor, for all our time onboard together.

Another Perspective from Charles Stephanski

0931hrs, 22 April 1969 Engineering Log: MMC J.R. Tomlinson logged abnormal noise coming from ship's screw and excessive stern tube cooling leakage.

0950 hrs, Ch Eng LT Bob Holt and my inspection revealed that about 2/3 of a blade of our prop had broken off. We limped the rest of the trip to Rota Spain where we off loaded ALL of our ammo in preparation to go to the shipyard in Gibraltar to have a new prop installed.

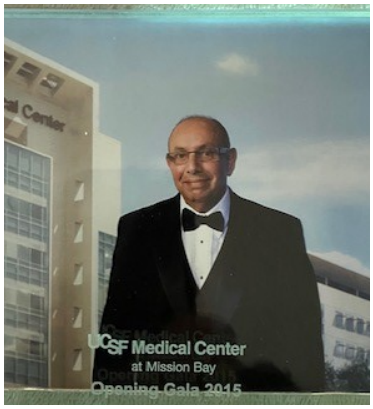
NAVSEA (technical designers in Philadelphia) determined that a prop in storage in Rota would fit if a "distance piece" was bolted to the aft end of the prop. So we on loaded the prop. BUT wait: There is/was a 16' bolted plate in the overhead of the shaft-alley to allow access to replacing of spring bearings/shaft. But the bolts (about 150 of them) were not visible from the deck in #4 hold). The Gunners mates pulled up a couple of the dunnage boards in the bottom of #4 hold and BEHOLD there was a full load of 2000 lb. bombs that did not show on any inventory. Needless to say there was much embarrassment to go around in the cargo/gunnery people. Unload the bombs, load the replacement prop plus 16 lignum-vitae logs (underwater bearing stock) and away we went. The shipyard in Gibraltar replaced the prop (with the distance piece) and back to Rota we went.

What We Did Then and Later

David Bull

Then: LTjg Damage Control Assistant/Repair Officer

Later: Trial attorney, specialized in workers' compensation claims



Joe Rios

Then: Seaman/Disbursing Clerk

Later: Biomedical/mechanical engineer in health care field

We're trying a new feature: Send in two photos with the same or a similar pose. One should be recent and one from your time in the Navy. Include a brief summary of your Navy job and what you did after.

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 issued to all crew members paying dues 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

Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Dates Served Aboard: _____

Application Date: _____ [ ] New [ ] Renewal