USS Great Sitkin (AE-17) Association

NEWSLETTER

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From the President:

For those of you thatdid not make the reunion this year, you missed another great time. George and Mary planned this year's reunion with a few twists, a Sunday through Wednesday reunion, which gave us a reduced room rate. We had meat, cheese, crackers, tea, water and snacks all day Wednesday—actually all week long. We had a tour company plan the excursions both days (with the Kaisers' blessings).

The sad part of the reunion was the passing of our Chaplain, Mark Rucker. Mark will be greatly missed by all of us.

A memory of Mark was when we had our reunion in Cincinnati. It was the first time we used the new bugle to play Taps at the memorial service. After Mark had finished the service and George started playing, there was a loud clang. The speaker had fallen out of the bugle!

Needless to say, it was kind of funny. So at this year's reunion, George took over the duties of Chaplain with me as the bugler and yes, it happened again. Mark, that one was for you.

I would like to welcome Fred Applegate as our new Vice President and Dan Prior as our new Secretary. Thank you to Tom Stachelski and Joe Rio for their service these past several years. Well done and greatly appreciated.

Also, dues will stay at $20 annually. We reinstated the policy of helping a Veterans' group each year, like we did in Columbus, Georgia.

The idea of another sail away for 2025 has been batted around. We need to determine how much interest there is before we proceed. So let Mike Kleinbeck (Doc), George or me know if you are interested. The clock on the desk tells me it's time to go watch another grandchild activity, stay safe and be well.

P.S. Check out page 3 for preliminary information on our 2025 reunion!

Jim Dunno, President

Chaplain's Corner:

Mark Rucker, our chaplain and shipmate, passed away on 5 September. (Obituary on page 3). Coming less than a week before our 2024 reunion, it really hit us all hard. Mark had been our rock in so many ways since he and Patsy joined our association in 2001.

President Emeritus Ron Zimmerman recognized Mark's gifts as a people person and pastor of his church and asked him to be our association chaplain, a position we never had.

(continued on page 2)

Mark Rucker, 1952-2024

Chaplain's Corner *(continued)*:

Mark took to the role of chaplain with fervor. He conducted our annual memorial service for shipmates who passed away; he sent out family sympathy cards; he led us all in prayer for meals and meetings; and he was a friend and brother to us all, in plenty and in want.

On the morning of 5 September, we awoke to see this on Patsy's Facebook page:

"My heart is broken. Mark passed away this morning. The tumor in his brain caused too much damage, and he was unable to survive. He was my partner for 53 years. He was dearly loved by many. His faith in God was strong and I know that he is in a Better Place."

Mary and I, Jim and Joy Dunno, and David and Lavonne Ohms went to Springfield, Ohio to represent the Great Sitkin Association at Mark's funeral. Our presence was greatly appreciated by Mark's family, friends and church.

While we were there, I felt it was appropriate for me to take responsibility to be the next chaplain for our association—not as Mark's replacement but to follow in his footsteps in caring for our awesome group of Great Sitkin sailors. I would ask going forward that you would keep in touch with me concerning needs and, most importantly, updating us on shipmates who have left us in death.

As chaplain, Mark sent flowers to the families of association members who had passed. Mark never really felt good about that because it usually cost at least $150 and sometimes much more. After Fred Gallagher passed away 2 years ago, the Executive Board decided to send a monetary contribution to an organization that provided for veterans needs.

We have chosen Valor Clinic Foundation as the donation recipient (see page 3 for more information). We made donations of $200, in the name of Mark and Fred Gallagher, and we will continue to do that for association members going forward. It is a simple fact of life that as our group ages, we will pass from this life. In this small way, we can leave a lasting legacy from Great Sitkin to pay it forward to our fellow veterans.

In closing, I'd like to leave you with a verse Mark left us with in his final report in June.

John 14; 1-3: *"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.'*

George Kaiser, Chaplain

Honor Roll Update

Mark Rucker

Greetings From Repair 3:

Well, having recapped a little of the reunion story in Chaplain's Corner, I'll get right to the state of the association's finances. At the meeting in Warwick, I expressed my feelings about members still sending annual dues of $20 when we have minimal expenses outside of the newsletter. The discussion that followed was good, with members generally saying that $20 is not a budget buster. If it is for anyone, let me as the treasurer know about it. So we are going to leave it at that for now. We might eventually change the wording to "association support" but more on that later.

Also on the dues subject, Fred Applegate is on board as our new Association vice president and will be taking on the duty of membership facilitator. Please continue sending your dues to me, and I will forward the information to Fred.

I would like to give a big BRAVO/ ZULU to outgoing VP Tom Stachelski for his service and for the amazing way he was able to coordinate tracking our membership . In light of that, I'd also like to ask for your patience as Fred and I navigate the procedures of recording the incoming membership information.

I mentioned we made a contribution to Valor Clinic Foundation on behalf of Fred and Mark. That is another beneficial use of your dues going forward. While going over my records, I realized never took any action in memory of Ron Zimmerman or Charles Stephanski, so I will be doing that in the near future. To add to that, we also decided at the meeting to only make those memorial contributions for members who have been part of the association for years.

We did have a good time at Warwick. The weather was good. The hotel was very accommodating, but again, our attendance was low. Jim and Joy are taking the lead for 2025, I'm sure he will have something to say about it in this letter.

I guess that's it for now. Keep your home fires burning this winter, and we'll see you all in the Spring.

George Kaiser, Treasurer

Secretary's Report:

Hi everyone! I am your new secretary, elected at the September reunion. My name is Dan Prior, and I was aboard the Great Sitkin from 1968-1972. I was a radarman.

When I got out of the Navy, I married my wife Donna, and we have been married for 52 years. We have three grown children and seven grandkids. We live in the small town of Suffield, just east of Akron, Ohio. When I left the Navy, I worked for Ohio Edison for 43 years until I retired in 2010.

I found about the reunions through my friend, Mark Rucker, who recently passed away. My wife and I attended our second reunion in September. It was great! The reunion is a time to reconnect with fellow shipmates and share ship memories. At the reunion, I met many shipmates I had never met before because I was always alone in the radar room. We still shared stories about our time on the ship.

Dan Prior, Secretary

Vice President's Report:

Greetings to the crew. I thank you for voting me VP, and I hope to do a good job. It has been a little hectic for my wife and me with two hurricanes in Florida. We live just north of Venice and only 6 miles from where Milton came ashore. The house survived well but the landscaping took a beating. We have lots of cleanup to do.

I have been in touch with Tom Stachelski, and we are working on a "peaceful transfer of power." When this is done, I plan on touching base with all of you.

May you all have a good Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas.

Fred Applegate, Vice President

Mark Rucker Obituary

Mark A. Rucker, 72 of Springfield, Ohio went home to join friends and family with the Lord on Thursday, September 5, 2024.

He was born in Springfield on April 26, 1952 the son of Victor and Margaret (Snyder) Rucker. He attended Springfield South High School and was a volunteer firefighter/paramedic for the Springfield Township Fire Department. Mark retired as a Supervisor from Ohio Edison after 39 years of service. Mark was also the former Pastor at First Free Will Baptist Church for 34 years. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy and Air National Guard. He loved his church picnics and attending annual Navy reunions. Survivors include his wife, Patsy (Williams); two children, Nicole (Brian) Leciejewski and Matthew Rucker; two grandchildren, Laynee Mowell and Lexi (Jake) Bush; twin sister, Marta (Joe) Stalder and many nieces, nephews and cousins.

He was preceded in death by a daughter, Melissa Rucker; granddaughter, Olivia Mowell and siblings, Ann Wolfenbarger, James, Victor, Wayne and Michael Rucker. His family would like to thank Dr. Umerani, Dr. Varghese, Dr. Akhter, Dr. Dorbish and the staff of S.R.M.C. and Riverside Methodist Hospital.

Visitation and Mark's funeral service were held at First Free Will Baptist Church. with Pastor Adam McCarty officiating. Burial was in Newcomers Cemetery. Memorial donations may be made to the charity of your choice.

Navy Trivia Answer

The Hospital Corps is the most decorated rating in the Navy and one of the most decorated in the military. Members of the Navy Hospital Corps have earned 22 Medals of Honor, 199 Navy Crosses, 984 Silver Stars and more than 1,600 Bronze Stars while 20 ships have been named in honor of Navy Hospital Corps personnel.

Reunion 2025 Heading Back to Columbus, Georgia.

Jim Dunno has arranged for us to revisit Columbus, Georgia, the site of two previous successful reunions.

We will again be staying at the Hilton Garden Inn, located just a few miles from the local airport and shopping. The room rate of $144 per night includes breakfast, Wi-Fi, and free parking. The hotel is newly remodeled since our last visit.

The hotel is providing a welcome reception and hospitality room for free. Rooms have a microwave, refrigerator and coffee maker. The hotel has a restaurant at hotel, three walking trails, a heated indoor pool, and laundry. Rates will be good for 3 days before and after the reunion.

Jim is working with local tourism representatives to finalize dates and lock in new venues to visit.

VALOR
A HAND UP ON THE HOME FRONT

Veterans Assisted Living Out Reach (VALOR) is the organization the Association selected to receive donations in honor of our departed shipmates. The first two donations were made in the name of Fred Gallagher and Mark Rucker. The association is following up with belated donations in memory of Ron Zimmerman and Charles Stephanski.

VALOR is a regional charity supporting veterans in the Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey area.

VALOR Clinic Foundation (VCF) helps veterans who have limited or no access to benefits and shelter. It helps find shelter for veterans who, due to health or financial means, are unable to find or keep shelter of their own. It offers resources to veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through their Veterans Unstoppable program.

They support all five services, including the Reserves and National Guard.

They welcome hometown heroes into their Veterans Unstoppable program. They also help first responders deal with challenges similar to those faced by veterans.

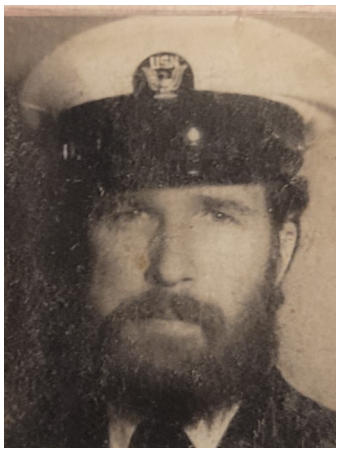
They do not help veterans with dishonorable or in Lieu of court martial discharges

For more information, there are two sources on the Internet,

https://valorclinic.org/

https://www.facebook.com/valorclinic

What We Did Then and Later



Jim Dunno

Then: Boiler Tender, retired as BT1 after 24 years of active duty and reserve service. Tours included several ships, 1 sub dry dock and finally, with Fleet Training Group at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Later: 38 years at GE Superabrasives/Sandvik. Volunteered for the Johnstown and Monroe Township fire departments for 30+ years

Hey shipmates! 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

Amount Submitted ($20 per year): $_____ [ ] 2024 YR [ ] 2025 YR [ ] 2026 YR

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

Comments: _____

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