

USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



PIPELINE

December 2012

President's message

By Jack Hughes

Hello, everyone! As you read this, Thanksgiving has come and gone and we are well into the holiday season for 2012. I hope that you had a wonderful Thanksgiving and that you were able to spend time with family and friends. All I can say about 2012 is, "Where did it go and why so fast???!!" I'm happy to inform you that with a few months under my belt as your president, I have found this not to be an easy job by any means. Trying to keep everyone pleased is an impossible task, so you give it your best and hope that it will satisfy the majority. We've lost several of our shipmates during this period and they will be noted by our editor, Karl Seitz. Our hearts and prayers go out to their families and we wish them "fair winds and following seas" during their voyage through to eternity.

I have several things to report on. First, with the help of Herb Dorsey, we looking for the best accommodations we can find for all of you for our October 2013 reunion in Baltimore, Maryland. So far, we have not been able to choose a hotel, but we'll have one soon and we'll be able to give you all of the details so you can start making your plans.

Second, I am working on updating and enhancing the USS Caliente Website. It is slow going because I haven't done this sort of thing in a few years and things change rapidly in the way Web pages are constructed. As with most anything else these days, the technology will pass you by if you sit still for a while. In any event, it is coming along and I hope to have the new site built and put on display for you soon.

Third, in conjunction with working on the new site, Clyde Goodhue is working on getting the roster up-to-date and Karl Seitz is working on getting the email listing up-to-date as well.

Fourth, Pat Hurton is working diligently on a surprise gift for all of our attendees at the 2013 reunion in Baltimore. This will be a special gift commemorating the 70th anniversary of the USS Caliente commissioning and the 40th anniversary of her decommissioning. Only those attending the reunion will be able to get one of these special memorable gifts.

Fifth, I'm working on lining up a guest speaker, although I've had no luck so far with. I've contacted



This 4-inch gun fired the first shots at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Removed from the USS Ward (DD-139) in a 1942 refit, it sits on the grounds of the Minnesota state Capitol in St. Paul. For its link to the USS Caliente, see page 4

Picture from Wikipedia

the Navy League, but they have yet to reply. I'll continue trying to get someone.

It's time now for a little remembrance and some thoughts for all of our shipmates who were victims of Hurricane Sandy that battered the U.S. East Coast in October. Our hearts go out to all of you that suffered through this terrible storm, who may have been injured or lost family members and friends, and to all of those that may have suffered home damage. We're with you in your time of need.

This time of the year is for us to rejoice and to look forward to the New Year coming. It is time for giving and forgiving. Let us give thanks for all we have and to help those less fortunate than ourselves. Let us give thanks and also say a prayer for all of our service men and women throughout the world that protect our freedom throughout the year.

To all of you, may you have the best of holidays. Enjoy yourselves and stay healthy and safe. May God bless all of you!

In Memoriam:

We are sorry to note the passing of a former captain of the Caliente, three other shipmates and the wife of a shipmate.

Owen H. "Obie" Oberg, born Feb 3, 1925, died Oct. 22, 2012, in San Diego, Calif. Then Capt. Oberg commanded the Caliente from Sept. 1969 to Jan. 1971. Oberg entered the Naval Aviation Cadet Program in 1944. In 1946, after training in torpedo bombers, the Navy sent him to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he trained on the golf course for two and one-half years. He remained an avid golfer well into retirement. He then served as a flight instructor until his deployment as a jet fighter pilot aboard the USS Kearsarge (CVA-33) during the Korean War. He graduated from test pilot school in 1954 and served as a test pilot before receiving a bachelor degree from Stanford University in 1957. He commanded Fighter Squadron 41 (VF-41) in 1962. He received a master of science in international affairs degree from George Washington University in 1969. After leaving the Caliente, he became commanding officer of USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63) in 1971 and was promoted to rear admiral in 1972. He retired from the Navy in 1977. Obie is



Capt. Obie Oberg is seen on the USS Caliente and with his wife, Marge, at a Caliente ship's party in Subic Bay, Phillipines. Both pictures were taken about 1970.

Photos from Jack Hughes

survived by his wife of 67 years, Marge; and four children; nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He was buried in Miramar National Cemetery, San Diego.

Paul N. Cirafesi, born May 23, 1923, died March 16, 2012, in Norristown, Penn. Paul served on the Caliente from 1943 to 1945 as a BM2. He later served in the Merchant Marine during the Vietnam War. He is survived by his wife Regina and more than 75 nieces and nephews.

Richard C. "Spider" Irwin, born Nov. 8, 1940, died Oct. 29, 2012, in Springfield, Mo. Spider served on the Caliente from 1962 to 1963 as a DC3. His memory about serving on the Cal during the Cuban Missile Crisis appeared in the June 2012 Pipeline.

We belatedly note the death of Edward J. Kombol, born June 10, 1949, died Nov. 20, 2010. Edward served on the Cal from 1970 to 1972 as a RM2. He was a resident of Reedsport, Ore.

Julie Ronquillao, wife of Miquel Ronquillo, died Nov. 20, 2012. Miquel served on the Cal from 1958 to 1961 as a RM2. They lived in Nogales, Ariz. Miquel is a Pipeline contributor.

Dues:

Treasurer Pat Hurton reminds that 2013 dues are payable by Jan. 15. Make checks to The USS Caliente Association and mail to Pat Hurton, 156 Greenfield Drive, Chico, CA 95973-0185



USS Caliente Association
President: Jack Hughes
Vice President: vacant
Treasurer: Pat Hurton
Pipeline Editor: Karl Seitz



The Pipeline is the official quarterly newsletter of the USS Caliente Association. It is a place to share your memories and pictures. Please send them via e-mail to seitzao53@gmail.com or by regular mail to Karl Seitz, 1212 30th St. South, Birmingham, AL 35205-1910.

Association dues are \$10 per year due Jan. 1, payable by Jan. 15. Checks should be made out to The USS Caliente Association and mailed to treasurer Pat Hurton, 156 Greenfield Drive, Chico, CA 95973-0185.

Jack Hughes can be reached at 44041 Fieldstone Way, California, MD 20619-2097 or hughesjm@yahoo.com

Masthead picture of USS Caliente (AO-53) used with permission of Dan Davis.

April-May-June 2012

THE TIN CAN SAILOR

CAPTAIN O. WILLIAM GOEPNER, U.S.N.
Commanding Officer
Recruit Training Command

CAPTAIN GOEPNER began his naval career at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois where after four years of NROTC training he was commissioned Ensign in 1934.

In 1940 he was assigned to sea duty in the USS Ward (DD 139) as First Lieutenant, Gunnery Officer, and Executive Officer. As the Officer of the Deck in the WARD patrolling off Pearl Harbor about an hour before the infamous attack, he gave the order to commence firing on a Japanese submarine, as a result, is credited with firing the first shot in World War II.

From 1942 to 1944 Captain Goepner commanded USS DAVIS (DE 139), the USS MAJOR (DE 796) in both Atlantic and Pacific Theaters. In 1945 he was ordered as Commander, Escort Squadron ONE.

Subsequent to World War II his first shore duty began as Deputy Commandant, USAFI, Madison, Wisconsin, and a course of instruction at the U. S. Naval General Line School, Monterey, California. Early 1949 found him at sea again in command of JOHN R. PIERCE (DD 753) Atlantic Fleet. From 1950 to 1955 he served as an instructor General Line School at Monterey, Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia; Staff of Commander FIRST Fleet.

In 1955 he was selected for promotion to Captain and ordered to duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. He took command of USS CALIENTE (AO 53), a Pacific Fleet Oiler, in 1958.

For combat service in World War II, Captain Goepner was awarded the BRONZE STAR MEDAL and the Unit Commendation Ribbon.



A Caliente link to the attack on Pearl Harbor

Although the USS Caliente didn't come into existence until 1943, it has a link to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. The link is O. William Goepner, who was captain of the Cal from March 1958 to June 1959. In fact, Goepner, as a lieutenant (junior grade), ordered the first shot fired by either side on Dec. 7, 1941.

At the time, Goepner was gunnery officer on the USS Ward (DD-139). The Ward was patrolling the entrance to Pearl Harbor early on that fateful Sunday morning. The old four-stack destroyer had already searched for what was thought to be a miniature Japanese submarine before



A reminder if you are on Facebook, President Jack Hughes has created a Facebook group for former crew members of the USS Caliente (AO-53) and their families.

Goepner began his watch as officer of the deck. However, contact had been lost, perhaps because of the darkness.

After the ship ended general quarters, Goepner began his watch. Accounts differ on whether the Ward's lookouts or lookouts on the USS Antares (AKS-3), which was approaching the harbor with a barge in tow, were first to spot a second sub trying to sneak into Pearl Harbor in the Antares' wake. But it was the Ward that went in pursuit, returning to general quarters.

At his captain's direction, Goepner ordered the forward gun to fire at the sub. The first shot missed, but a second shot hit the sub's conning tower. That apparently finished the sub, but the Ward followed up with depth charges and a PBY patrol plane also bombed the sub, its pilot even claiming credit for the kill in his report. Unfortunately, neither the Ward's report nor the pilot's report traveled up through the chain-of-command bureaucracy fast enough to alert the ships sitting in the harbor. Japanese aircraft attacked 70 minutes after the sub was sunk.

Goepner has another distinction: He probably had more Caliente sailors serve under his command at some point in their Navy careers than any other Caliente skipper, although most of those sailors don't know it.

After leaving the Caliente in 1959, Capt. Goepner became commander of the Recruit Training Command at the Naval Training Center, San Diego. Some time after mid-1962, he apparently moved up to commander of the entire training center. Between 1959 and his retirement in 1964, thousands of sailors underwent recruit training and a lesser number attended specialized schools while he was in command. A number of them joined the Caliente crew.

Capt. Goepner died Jan 19, 1982, in Coronado, Calif. He was 70.

The article from *The Tin Can Sailor* that precedes this article and the initial information that Capt. Goepner had served as commander of recruit training came from Andy Anderson, BT3, who served on the Cal from 1959 to 1962. Additional information comes from a variety of sources.

A response to questions from Robert George Bateman

By Ron Hagen, MM3

1965-67

I was on board the Caliente when BT2 Bateman and his brother were part of the crew. Nice guys. Both were great crew members. Hard workers. We had many laughs together. I am addressing their query in the September Pipeline about our possible exposure to Agent Orange while on Caliente.

I left the Caliente in June 1967 and went on shore duty in Danang, Republic of Vietnam, until August 1968 when I was separated from the Navy after four years of service with approximately two years on the Caliente. I also helped a friend whose husband passed away from non-Hodgkins lymphoma with her wrongful death Agent Orange claim. While he was not on the ground in Vietnam (too young) he served on the Korean DMZ on patrols in the late '70s where AO had been widely sprayed as a defoliant in the '60s and then on Johnson Atoll where Agent Orange was stored before disposal. He was a explosives ordinance technician in the Army.

I researched it quite extensively. Another reason I did so was because I had experienced a

cardiac arrest in 1981 and another in 1982. After the second one and a month at the Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minn., it was determined by biopsy that an unidentified virus had formed on my heart lining and sent it into fibrillation. They were never able to identify the virus and AO was not an issue at that time, so there was no reason to suspect it.

When I was researching my friends case for her I began to think my cardiac arrest might have been as a result of exposure. There is an Agent Orange program called Blue Water that encompasses ships that were engaged in activities in the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam. However, the key is that a ship had to have docked at a port in Vietnam in the course of its duties. Also, if it was anchored out and select crew members went ashore for any reason, those crew members would be considered as having been exposed to AO. My duty in Danang as well as many trips "Up River" ensured I had been exposed. However, that still does not guarantee any illnesses I may have contracted are a result of that exposure.

There is a specific list of "covered ailments" that can be attributed to Agent Orange and you need pretty good medical documentation to prove your claim. The closest I think we ever came to "Boots on the Ground" (VA terminology) while on board Caliente was when we anchored out at a small island off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam for swim call and a BBQ. Reportedly that island held political prisoners, but that may have been just scuttlebutt. In my memory there was no evidence of defoliation like I had seen and experienced in and around Danang.

I suffered no permanent heart damage as a result of the cardiac arrest and even if it *was* as a result of exposure (which would be difficult for me to prove), since there is/was no permanent damage, I do not have a viable claim.

Most of the information is readily available on the Internet but it can require some time and work. I have been retired for nearly seven years ... I have *lots* of time. Hope this helps to answer your questions and concern.

Editor's message

by Karl Seitz

It is not often that a single issue of the Pipeline can touch as many eras of the Caliente's existence as this one does. Starting with Pearl Harbor, the event that caused the Caliente to be built and so many of its first crew to join the Navy, we jump to the late 1950s with Capt. Goepner's command, continue into the 1960s with his role in the training of several years of recruits. The rest of the 1960s are covered by the latest contribution to the discussion about exposure to Agent Orange. And the death of Adm. Owen recalls his command of the Caliente in 1970.

However, this is also the shortest Pipeline compiled by this editor. In part, this is caused by the absence of official business connected to the annual reunions. But it also reflects a lack of contributions. The Pipeline can't publish what it doesn't receive. We need your memories and pictures from your time on the Cal.

Your shipmates want you to share them. Send those memories to one of my addresses on page 3 so they can be part of future Pipelines.