

# USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



# PIPELINE

June 2014

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## Acting President's message

By Pat Hurton

We are now in the middle of spring and the weather, although seeming to have settled down a little, is still unusual with the recent bad storm in the Midwest and even some rain in California. I hope all is going well with you and that a comfortable and trouble free summer is before you.

The Chicago reunion is now moving beyond the preliminary planning stage and I still don't have a firm headcount. Thank you to those who have already sent in a sign-up sheet and for those who haven't — please do so. It is hard to plan without knowing how many are going to be there. If money is an issue you can send in the sign-up sheet with an amount that is convenient to you and send the balance when you can. If you haven't made hotel reservations please do so now. If I wind having too many rooms blocked I may be able to weasel out of some and lessen our financial exposure.

We appear to have quite a few attendees for the Chicago reunion and look forward to a great time. I will look into a luncheon cruise on the Lake for Friday afternoon or a dinner cruise for Friday evening.

As mentioned many times in past Pipelines, this will be the last reunion sponsored by the Association. No one has stepped forward to take a leadership role and Norm Street and I are not going run another reunion. Norm and I will probably pick a location each year or so and announce that anyone who wants to get together with old shipmates can show up. The only action we will do, is try and obtain a rate at a hotel. Karl has reaffirmed that he will continue to publish the Pipeline as long as he gets material from you. Remember it doesn't have to be of any length and tidbits are just are valued as complete articles. Pictures are especially welcome.

I haven't pushed anyone about dues but for those of you who haven't written a check lately to the Association please do so. We will continue to collect dues as only about half of the Pipelines are



delivered by email and we have to cover the printing and mailing costs.

I want to thank you shipmates and shipmates' children for the very generous donations I have received for the Association. One of the donations requested that I take a specific action at the Chicago reunion and I will do so as requested. I and my fellow shipmates are very grateful to those of you who are able to provide additional monetary support to our Association and do so.

As I do more planning for the Chicago reunion I will keep you informed. Have a great balance of spring and summer and look forward to seeing all of you who show up in Chicago.

### Richard Trogan

Richard Trogan served as a Pharmacists Mate 3rd Class aboard the Cal in 1945 and 1946 alongside shipmate and fellow pharmacist Joe Benziger. Richard loved the Caliente and his time in the Navy and always talked fondly about the Cal to his son Mike. Richard loved all the ports he visited and even occasionally glanced at some of the girls.



Richard's training in the Navy gave him the knowledge to be able to set a bone and dress the wound. As a young boy, Mike would frequently get hurt while riding his dirt bike and Richard would show him how to do a butterfly Band-Aid, how to do stitches and how to dress any wound. When Mike would come home bleeding, almost passing out because of the sight of his own blood, Richard would tell him to "suck it up like a man and take it like a sailor."

Richard was able to assist people for all his life because of his Navy training.

Mike believes that Richard's time on the Cal where the best years of his youth and is forever grateful for everything his dad passed onto him including the calm demeanor of a pharmacist mate. Richard was the calm in the storm when blood was flowing. His son Mike says, because of his dad's demeanor and training that, today, he is usually the one to be able to "take command" when someone gets scraped or cut.



Richard passed away 12 Nov. 1900. In addition to the memories of his dad, Richard's uniform and cap are some of Mike's valued possessions. The most treasured memento is the flag that covered his dad's coffin when Mike, his brother and his sister laid him to rest. Seeing the flag reminds Mike of how proud his dad was to serve his country.

## Taps

Dennis Earl Grenz of Bismarck, ND, died 23 Feb 2014 following a battle with cancer. Dennis served on the Caliente from 1965 to 1966 as an EN2. Born 22 May 1942, Dennis returned to North Dakota after his Navy service and eventually entered the automobile business. He retired as service manager of Parkway Ford in Dickinson in 2009. He is survived by his three children, Greg Grenze of Fargo, ND; Amanda (Chase) Gunwall of Bismarck; and Scott (Sarah) Kaelberer of Post Falls, Idaho.

John F. Hanrahan of Cranston, RI, died 2 Oct 2013. Jack served on the Caliente from 1951 to 1954 as a RDM3. Several of Jack's pictures from his time on the Cal have been published in past Pipelines. Born 16 Nov 1925, Jack is survived by his wife Elena.

Antonio Benitez Pallera died 18 March 2014 at home in Long Beach, Calif. Born 14 Feb 1929 in the Philippines, Antonio served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years including on the Caliente from 1960 to 1962 as a BT3. He retired as BT1. After his discharge, he continued to work on the naval base for another 20 years as a patrolman. He is survived by his wife, Julita; children Leilani



USS Caliente Association  
President: Vacant  
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](mailto: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.

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

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(George) Sullivan, Lolette (Frank) Stevi and Michael (Renee) Pallera and by six grandchildren.

René Pellet of Gilroy, Calif., died 15 Feb 2014. René served on the Caliente in 1956 as an ET2. He contributed an essay and pictures to the December 2013 Pipeline in addition to earlier contributions. Born 7 July 1930 in Wyoming, René taught biology at San Jose (Calif) High School for 31 years. He is survived by his wife, Delean; daughters, Lorie, Rochelle and Celeste, son-in-laws, Willis and Nick and seven grandsons, who carried his coffin after the military funeral.



Delean Pellet receives flag from husband's coffin.

## Editor's message

By Karl Seitz

As most of you know, I'm a retired newspaper man, which has been good experience for being editor of the Pipeline. However, I also have a hobby, genealogy, that is proving equally useful.

A case in point is found in the obituaries in this issue. Pat Hurton was informed of a death and passed along the information he was given. What neither of us knew was that a man with the same name had died within a few days of our shipmate. If genealogy research had not taught me about the too frequent errors of confusing people with the same name, I might not have realized I had gathered information about the wrong person in preparing the Taps entry. Fortunately, the discovery was made before the Pipeline was finished.

Speaking of obituaries. As you may have noticed, we do not always have complete information about some shipmates who have died or the news appears many months, even years, after the death. This is because we don't receive more complete information in a timely fashion. The deceased's survivors may not know about the Pipeline. I don't know the Pipeline is no longer being received by the shipmate until one is returned by the postal service, usually months after the death. In the case of e-mail delivery, I might get a bounce message, but the reason is not known without further research and again, the bounce may not happen until months have passed..

The longer it is between the time a death occurs and I find out, the more difficult it is to find information because of the varied times newspapers leave obituaries on line. And the avenue of



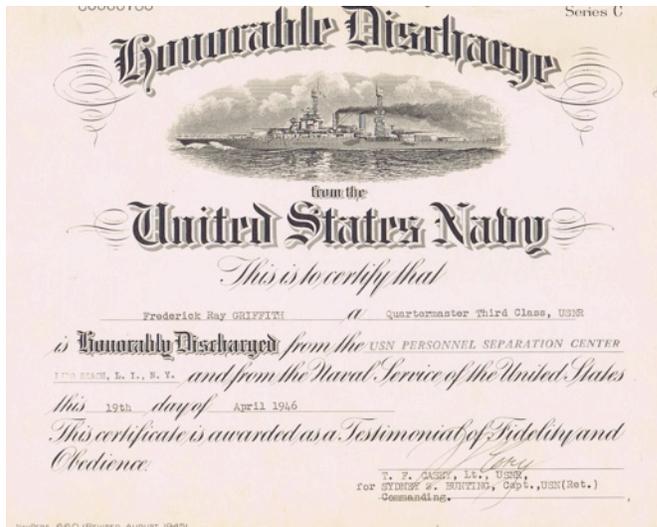
A reminder if you are on Facebook, Jack Hughes has created a Facebook group for former crew members of the USS Caliente (AO-53) and their families.

contact with relatives is broken by the time the bounce or returned mail arrives.

This problem is not universal. Some families do contact us in a timely fashion, including in the current issue. But we can reduce the number of problems if each of us makes sure loved

ones know that the Caliente Association (Pat Hurton or myself) should be notified when death occurs and those of us who know of a shipmate's death make sure the Association knows as soon as possible.

On a less somber note, we're happy to report that Frederick Griffin, QM3 on the Caliente between 1944 and 1946, is alive and well. When Frederick discovered he was listed as deceased on the Caliente Website, he contacted Pat Hurton to say that he was still on his feet and going strong at age 88, living in Cincinnati. Frederick later sent me copies of his discharge papers and said



he spent his entire time in the Navy on the Caliente, other than during transit.

## Shipmate Spotlight

### Miguel F. Ronquillo RD2 (1958-1961)

Born at the tail end of the Depression and just before World War II, life was hard for everyone. I remember food ration stamps, recycling of war-needed metals, long soup lines and the unemployed.

Living in a border town like I did might have been a blessing. Food prices were much cheaper and available in Mexico. The "Mercado" just two blocks south of the international border was a necessary stop for most Nogales U. S. citizens. Smuggling of some prohibited items, such as meat, was a common practice in order for families to survive.

Once the war ended, life slowly became more bearable as the restrictions imposed by our government on food and gasoline and many other items were lifted. My mother, who had divorced my father, found employment as a maid, which provided a roof over our heads. At a very young age, I was doing odd jobs mowing lawns, cleaning windows and yards earning a quarter here and a quarter there. At age 10, I was hired by a local grocery store as a bag boy and carry out.



Ronquillo at VFW Post 2066 in May.

As I grew older, I was given other responsibilities in other departments such as produce, dairy, stocking shelves, assisting the butcher and, in time, assistant cashier.

During my sophomore year in high school, I got my first taste of military life when I enlisted with the Arizona National Guard. This provided some much needed extra income.

Graduation in May of 1957 from high school brought about a change in my life. I had worked at the same grocery store for eight years, advancement was about as far as I would ever get. My enlistment with the National Guard ended. I pondered as to what I was going to do with the rest of my life.

A U.S. Navy poster at the post office caught my attention and I soon visited the recruiter and immediately signed up for four years. In September of that year I was sent to the recruiting office in Phoenix where I got my physical and was sworn in. The next day I was bound for San Diego with 16 other recruits.

Basic mandatory boot camp for me lasted only one week. The Recruit Drum and Bugle Corp was seeking recruits with musical talents. Having played drums in the high school band, I applied for admission and after an audition I was soon marching with Company 4006 Drum and Bugle Corp. Being a member of the D&B had its privileges. It got me out of being trained as a regular recruit. I could walk to my classes instead of marching with a recruit company. I chose the classes I needed to attend and best of all I could go to the head of the line at mess halls.

Unfortunately, all good things always come to an end and soon my 16-week period of boot camp ended. I was assigned to Radar School in San Diego and then sent to Great Lakes for secondary training in Fleet Air Defense. Once complete, I was shipped back to Treasure Island in San Francisco for damage control training.

In March of 1958, I received orders to report to the USS Caliente AO-53. As I boarded the ship in Long Beach, it was weighing anchor and soon heading out to sea. Thus began the first of my five cruises to WestPac. The sea was new to me. I had grown up in the dry and hot Sonoran Desert full of sand and cacti where water is almost nonexistent. I was sea sick as soon as we were past the Long Beach breakwater.

Three days later a boatswain brought me some salt crackers and oranges, which I was able to hold down. Soon I was able to go topside and view the vast Pacific Ocean for the first time. I soon acquired my sea legs and in time was bragging, "that if it was too rough for fish, it would be too rough for me."

Attesting to that fact, I weathered several typhoons in the South China and Philippine seas during service on the Caliente. We visited the usual ports of call in Hawaii, Philippine Islands, Japan, Formosa, Hong Kong, Alaska and several islands like Guam and Okinawa in the Western Pacific. There are many memories of shore visits to all those places. I have shared some of those experiences in articles in the Pipeline (Cruise around the world canceled, Dragon Boat Race, North to Alaska, Caliente keel plates buckled, The Rito Hernandez Story, and two "Letters To The Editor" dated October 2004 and April 2012.)

Caliente visited the usual ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Francisco and San Diego. San Pedro was the favorite to my shipmates and I. We would always go ashore together, for it was our home away from home with Beacon Street as our watering hole.

Being a radar apprentice, I was assigned to the Radar Gang. Standing watch was at times boring and monotonous for we steamed independently for days with nothing to see on radar

except a passing distant ship or high flying aircraft. Replenishment operations sometimes lasted many hours in all kinds of weather. Fueling a carrier, cruiser and several destroyers was a common operation. At one replenishment, we refueled two carrier groups, which lasted just under 24 hours and depleted our NSFO tanks.

Initially my duty station during replenishment was tending the phone line between the Caliente and the ship on the starboard side. After I made 3rd Class, I was assigned radar operator duties in CIC. During the Anchor Detail entering port, I was on the Bridge Radar. In General Quarters mode, I was on the Surface plot. I took the test for 2nd class, with results not arriving until a week before I was scheduled to leave the ship to be discharged into civilian life.

When we began my fifth cruise we left Long Beach bound for WestPac with the entire crew in great spirits. Scuttlebutt had it that we were headed for a round-the-world cruise, which meant Suez Canal, Meditenanean Sea and its ports of call, Atlantic Ocean, Panama Canal and back to our home port in Long Beach.

After concluding numerous replenishment operations in the South China and Philippine seas, we navigated through the Malacca Straits after visiting Singapore and steamed into the Indian Ocean. To our disappointment we were recalled and ordered toward the Taiwan Straits and Formosa. The Chinese and Taiwanese were squabbling over territorial rights.

What a laugh of an assignment. We were not there to replenish ships. We were there to take the place of a destroyer on radar picket duty. For several days we steamed north and south, back and forth in the strait serving only as a moving target for fire control radar on the Chinese mainland until relieved by a destroyer several days later. Sadly upon completion of that duty, we steamed 090 back to our home port of Long Beach.

Long hours on replenishment or on watch are faint memories of bad times. Mostly I remember the good times with shipmates on shore leave, traveling and visiting strange and exotic places. Most of all are the many memories enjoying night life in pubs and entertainment spots. I still have a cruise book and an album full of photos to remind me of those unforgettable memories.

The four-year enlistment went by quickly. The yearning to go home was stronger then the call of the sea. Upon discharge I returned home and soon found employment in the local police department as a radio dispatcher. I requested transfer to the field and was soon assigned to the patrol division. I was promoted to sergeant six months later. A year later I was assigned to the detective division and several years later made lieutenant. In 1975 I was promoted to captain.

Unfortunately, small town politics created many problems and I resigned in late 1978. Politicians do not know the difference between written law and their personal agendas. I was hired immediately by American Smelting and Refining Company as a laborer and went to work in the Mill for two years. Low copper prices brought about reduction of crews and I was transferred to the Mechanical Department until I was laid off in 1986.

I attended Automotive Mechanics School under a federal rehabilitation program for a while, but commuting to school in Tucson was too much. I found employment working for the local school district as a security guard. In 1997, I applied for a position working security for U. S. Customs at the Nogales Port of Entry. I was hired and given the supervisor's post, a position which I held until I retired in 2003.

I married my wife Julia in 1969 and we had five wonderful children (Elizabeth, Miguel Jr., David, Karla and Ina). Life as usual gave us many trials and tribulations, but also many good times and triumphs. We bought a house on top of a hill overlooking Monte Carlo, Nogales and Mexico three miles away.

My children in time grew up and left home for college. All have graduated from the University of Arizona and are enjoying life in their chosen field of endeavor, some have married and have children of their own and are prospering in life.

With retirement came a new change to my life. I chose not to sit in a rocking chair looking out the window at the passing clouds. I became very active with American Legion where after being elected to several minor posts, I was appointed adjutant and finance officer, a position which I have now held for seven years. Veterans of Foreign Wars appointed me as post adjutant also. (editor's note: Miguel was installed for a new term as adjutant in May.)

I have served as committee chairmen for the Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony and the Memorial Day activities at our local Veterans Memorial Cemetery for eight years.

Some of my veteran comrades want me to run for City Council. But I am reluctant to do so. Politics in my home town are no different today then they were in 1978 when I resigned from the Police Department. I keep telling them that I can not be a politician "my head is too big to fit up my posterior."

My wife passed away in 2012, leaving a very large void in my life. Life has to continue and providing good health and longevity, I hope to continue living life one day at a time, doing what I am doing now and looking forward to seeing the sun rise every day.

## **Memories**

### **A lesson learned**

By Shelby Sanders, EN2, 1962-65

When the Caliente collided with USS Nereus (AS-17) in October 1963, I was an engineman in A Division. My GQ station was No. 1 pump room emergency diesel fire pump forward, 30 feet down between the anchor room and AVGAS tanks (or between AVGAS and jet fuel tanks).

Just before the collision, I had slipped back to the mess deck for a break. I had been in the pump room seems like several hours. It was also my UNREP station and I was taking a big risk leaving. I just sat down at a table when the alarm was sounded. I quickly went forward double timing on the port side of the well deck. About half way, I felt the ship shaking and saw sparks everywhere on the starboard side.

Then I really took off, up and over forward berth quarters and on forward well deck in plain view of the bridge. Down the ladder (straight down), fired up the engine and reported in.

I just knew I was facing court-martial and brig time or dishonorable discharge. I figured the captain might have seen me but nothing was ever said.

I never left station after that.

Recipients of the print edition may want to use a photocopy of page 10 to sign up for the reunion so they can keep the tentative schedule on page 9.



## USS CALIENTE CHICAGO REUNION

Thursday 4 Sept. 2014 – Sunday 7 Sept. 2014

### Hyatt Regency Chicago

Reservations can be made at the Hyatt Regency, Chicago at 151 E. Wacker Dr. by calling 888-421-1442 and identifying yourself as part of the USS Caliente Reunion. You may also call (non toll free) 402-592-6464. Or online at <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/USSCalienteReunion>. The group rate is \$159.00 plus 16% state and local taxes. The cutoff date for reservations is Monday 4 Aug. 2014. Cancellations must be made seventy-two (72) hours prior to your arrival date. The rate is good for two days prior to the reunion and one day after (2 Sept. through 7 Sept.).

### Agenda for the Reunion

#### Thursday 4 September

- a) Hotel check-in
- b) 3:00 PM until 6:00 PM – Reception (hors d'oeuvres will be provided)

#### Friday 5 September

Free time

#### Saturday 6 September

- a) 9:00 AM – Annual business meeting
- b) Free time until banquet
- c) 6:30 PM – Social gathering in banquet room
- d) 7:00 Dinner

#### Sunday 7 September

- a) Farewells and Goodbyes (location TBD)

Please return a copy of the “sign-up sheet” on the next page to: USS Caliente Association, c/o Pat Hurton, 156 Greenfield Drive, Chico, CA 95973-0185.

# 2014 Chicago Reunion Sign Up Sheet

Shipmate's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse or Guest's Name a) : \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Yrs on Caliente: 19 \_\_\_\_ to 19 \_\_\_\_ Rate/Rank on while on Cal \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee: \$150.00 per person x \_\_\_\_\_ persons = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Entrees for the banquet will be determined at a later date and will you will be contacted separately for your choice.

**a) Please list additional guests as necessary**

I have established the \$150.00 per person rate based on experience with other reunions. The rate will be "not to exceed" and my detail planning for "goodies" etc. will be based on the total amount of revenue received.

I would appreciate it if you could return this sign-up sheet as soon as possible.  
Please return this sheet to: USS Caliente Association  
c/o Pat Hurton  
156 Greenfield Drive  
Chico, CA 95973-0185.