

USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



PIPELINE

June 2019

Celebrate in Savannah

By Jeff Sturgis

It's just a few more months before our next reunion which will be held in Savannah, GA. The final touches are being put on the details as this edition of the Pipeline is published. The dates of the reunion are Monday, Sept. 23-Thursday, Sept. 26, 2019. As has been mentioned, we have moved to a mid-week format to keep the prices affordable compared to the weekend prices in Savannah. We will follow the traditional agenda with a welcome reception on the first day, Monday; a tour on Tuesday, the second day; on the third day, Wednesday, a business meeting in the morning and a banquet that evening. A farewell breakfast will close the reunion on Thursday morning.

Pat Hurton has arranged a morning tour of historic Savannah on Tuesday with the afternoon and evening left open for individual activities or sightseeing. The highlight of the reunion is always the banquet on the last night. We have hired The Standards Jazz, a four-piece band, for entertainment at the banquet. However, the highlight of the banquet will be the celebration of John Creedon's 95th birthday with his wife Diane and most of John's family in attendance. As most of you know, John was one of the founders of the Caliente Association, and his strong and generous support has enabled us to continue our yearly reunions. As one of our few remaining WWII veterans, John still has the best sea stories of the Cal's early days serving in the Pacific theater of the war. You will not want to miss this celebration of John's birthday and the tribute to his service to our organization.

We will be headquartered at the Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott Savannah Downtown. All of the details about reserving a room are on the Reunion Agenda sheet at the back of this issue of the Pipeline. You will also find the registration form there, which you should send to Pat Hurton with your registration fee. It is important that you make your reservations soon. Our 20 room allotment has already been filled and the hotel has given us 10 more rooms at the reunion price.

The deadline to guarantee your room at the reunion price is Aug. 23. However, if our new room allotment is filled in late July or early August, the hotel cannot guarantee that more rooms will be available. So, if you have firm plans to attend, you should make your reservations as soon as possible. We will monitor the available rooms and try to have more become available if necessary, but this is easier to do when you register early.

This reunion promises have the largest attendance that we have had in years. You will not want to miss this milestone celebration in beautiful Savannah. As always, if you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com. On behalf of the Executive Committee of Mike Copeland, Dave Ludemann, Greg Perret, Tom Rawlinson, Steve Selzer; Treasurer (and tour director!) Pat Hurton; and Pipeline Editor Karl Seitz, we look forward to seeing you in Savannah.



Two of the free methods of getting around Savannah's historic sections. The ferries run on three routes and the buses run on two intersecting routes. Bus routes may be served by substitute vehicles. A trolley on River Street is out of service at this writing.

A charming city with much to see

By Pat Hurton

Savannah exudes a beauty and charm that few, if any, destinations can match. An optional tour is included on the reunion registration form.

This year's reunion will have a different format for our tour. Savannah is an historic city containing many squares with cobble stone streets. Large tour buses cannot navigate in these areas so we have chosen a 90-minute, fully narrated air conditioned trolley tour. The trolley has fully cushioned seats and will take us through Savannah highlighting more than 275 years of history. We will leave from the front of the hotel at 9:30 a.m. You will view historic squares lined with oaks dripping with Spanish moss and pass by beautiful historic Colonial and Victorian homes located on the cobble stone streets. Mansions and churches, parks and monuments, the City Market and River Street and historic Victorian cemeteries will also be viewed. The narration will include stories of colorful characters that have made the city so inviting.

What to do in Savannah.

Savannah has several free public transportation services targeted towards the needs of tourists. You can visit their website at gosouthsavannah.com for more information.

"Savannah Walks" offers a 1-hour 45-minute Civil War Walking Tour including the final destination of Sherman's famous "March to the Sea".

"Savannah Walks" offers a 1-hour 30-minute "Gates and Gardens Walking tour highlighting the oak lined parks and manicured squares.

Gray Line Savannah offers a half day bus tour of Old Fort Jackson & Bonaventure Cemetery. The cost is \$49.00 per person.

Gray Line Savannah offers a 5-hour bus tour to the coastal area of Savannah including Wormsloe plantation and the Isle of Hope Historic District. The cost is \$45.00 per person.

Gray Line Savannah offers a 5-hour Tybee Island Dolphin tour. The cost is \$49.00 per person.

Savannah Riverboat Sightseeing Lunch or Dinner Cruise. Check “Savannah Riverboat Cruises” for details.

Taps

Donald Eugene Chamley, 78, died 14 March 2019 at home in Egan, SD, under hospice care. Don served on the Cal from 1959 to 1963 as a RM3. The third of nine children, he was born 4 Dec 1940 in Flandreau, SD to Russell and Marguerite Chamley. Following his discharge from the Navy, Don returned to Egan where he was employed by Sioux Falls Construction until a work accident ended his construction career. He married Joy Knutson 23 June 1973. He worked for the Flandreau Indian School in the recreation department and as a dorm parent for more than 30 years. Don was an avid hunter and fisherman. In addition to his wife, Don is survived by sons Todd (Karla) and Mark (Chris Carlblom); grandson Gunnar; brothers Robert, Wayne and Larry; sisters Joyce (Butch) Britton, Diane (Jerome) Olson, Debbie Behrens, Carol (David) Smith and a host of nephews and nieces. He was predeceased by his parents and brother Richard. He is buried in Hillside Cemetery in Egan, SD.



Roy Dean Henson, CWO3, USN (Ret) died 25 April 2019 in Richland, MO. Roy served on the Cal from 1960 to 1964 as a BM3. He attended several Caliente reunions. Roy is survived by wife



USS Caliente Association
 Chairman: Jeff Sturgis
 Executive Committee: Mike Copeland, Dave Ludemann, Greg Perett, Tom Rawlinson and Steve Selzer
 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.

Chairman Jeff Sturgis can be reached via email at jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com or by mail at 84 Old Woodman Hill Rd, Minot, ME 04258

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

Lois Henson of Stoutland, MO; children Jody, Lonny (Laurie) and Terry Henson, Lacy (Daniel) Powell and Cody (Katie) Henson; 12 grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren; sister Dorothy Ray (Gene) Wells; brother Rick (Ellen) Henson and several nieces and nephews. Roy was buried with military honors at Missouri Veterans Cemetery of Fort Leonard Wood-Waynesville, MO



Stephen Francis Leene died 9 Feb 2019 at home in Bremerton, WA. Steve served on the Cal from 1959 to 1961 as a BT1. He was born in Brooklyn, NY on 3 March 1938 to Morris and Hannah Leene. Steve retired from the Navy after 20 years and went to work for the Bremerton Ship Yard, from which he also retired. He belonged to the Brownsville Yacht Club, serving as commander for one year. Later Steve joined the Bremerton Yacht Club and also served as commander. Steve is survived by his wife Shirley and four step children, Teresa Lucero, Tom, Tim and John Carter.

William Obach died at home in Plains, MT, 25 Apr 2018 at age 96. Bill served 42 months on the Cal and other ships in the Pacific War Zone during and after World War II, rising to the rank of GM1. He was born 2 Apr 1922 in Zenith, ND, to Mike and Elizabeth Obach. After his discharge in 1950, Bill worked many years in oilfields in many states. He also farmed with his father. He later purchased and ran a bar in Plains, MT until retirement. Bill is survived by brother Michael (Roberta) Obach; sisters Emily Hope Hill and Cecelia Oshanick and ten nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his parents and sister Josephine Norden. Per his request, Bill was cremated with a military burial later.

Lyle Raymond Winn died 23 Jan 2019 at University Hospital in Iowa City, Iowa, at age 89. Rip served on the Cal from 1952 to 1955 as a BM3. He was born 2 Mar 1929 to James Afton and Zola Irene Woody Winn on the family farm near Taintor, Iowa. Rip married Geneva M. Stein on 7 Nov 1948 in Sigourney, Iowa. Rip joined the Navy in 1951 and was discharged in 1955. When he returned to Iowa, Rip worked for Keokuk County, farmed and for Kingsberry Homes until starting a tilling business from which he retired in 1988. Rip enjoyed wintering in Arizona with friends, golfing, fishing and dancing



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

with Geneva. He is survived by Geneva, children Jeff (Amy) Winn, Melissa Strempeke, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his parents and brothers Merlin, Norman and Roger Winn and sister Helen Blake.

Quest for Agent Orange benefits grows more complicated

By Karl Seitz

The effort to restore Agent Orange benefits for Blue Water Navy sailors has become more complicated, but progress is being made. Scattered claims have been approved, although most remain in limbo.

The Court of Appeals ruling, *Procopio v Wilkie*, may yet be appealed, but it won't be by the Department of Veteran Affairs. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie does not want to appeal. However, the Department of Justice, which handles court cases involving federal agencies, has asked for another and final extension of its time to file an appeal. If granted, the new deadline will be near the end of June. If the appeal is filed, the Supreme Court will then decide whether to hear it.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has unanimously passed HR 299 to establish expanded boundaries for Agent Orange claims with an even larger vote than for last year's legislation that died in the Senate. However, the people who worked on the previous legislation now oppose the House version because it limits the impact of the court case. The Senate is waiting for the court case to be finished to move on its own bill, S1195, that fully embraces the court ruling and leaves open expansion to include ships outside the territorial sea of Vietnam.

Not having seen all Caliente deck logs for days in the general area of Vietnam between 1962 and 1973, much less plotted positions, I cannot say how many of us qualify for benefits if we have one or more of the conditions presumed caused by Agent Orange. But it appears many of us will qualify when Congress and/or the courts finish their work.

Memories

General Quarters for real

By Jeff Sturgis, LTJG, 1970-72

During my two years on the Cal, we steamed almost all the time independently, and rarely, if ever, had to maintain station in a formation. Due to the fact that North Vietnam didn't present much of an air threat for those of us in the blue water Navy, we steamed independently on all of our line swings, scheduling unrep's with ships individually or in groups.

Having been built in 1943, the Cal had basically the same armament that it had during World War II, four 3" 50 caliber mounts (editor's note: a 5" gun was removed from the fantail in the late 1950s). They were only fired during refresher training in San Diego, and I don't remember firing them at any other time for training purposes.

My first GQ station during refresher training as a green ensign was as the after mount safety officer, a station for which I had no training. My assignment was to stand between the after mounts and to make sure that all the safety regulations were followed. Of course, my assignment was made the day before we fired the guns and no safety regulations were made available to me. As I remember, a gunner's mate gave me a two-minute rundown of what I should look for. I do remember that the noise when the guns fired was deafening, and I was glad when my GQ station was changed to crypto.

The crypto compartment was a very small interior compartment off CIC. During GQ, the other crypto officer, Greg Perret, and I were locked in for security purposes. We crypto officers had to have a top secret clearance and had to be certified at crypto school in San Diego which lasted a week. The radiomen slipped encrypted messages through a slot in the solid steel door, and we used a machine to decrypt the messages returning them to radio through the slot. The reverse process was used for out-going messages. The consequence of this situation was that while in crypto, we had no idea what was happening outside of our confined space.

Generally, the Cal faced little danger during our line swings. Even though we operated constantly in the three-mile-wide combat zone, we were only occasionally witness to fighting. One night while watching a movie on the cargo deck, we were treated to a spectacular light and sound show as a battle on the shore filled the night sky with star shells and tracer bullets. It was a strange sensation watching Rock Hudson and Doris Day on the screen while our troops and the Viet Cong were shooting at each other about three miles away off our port side.

This sets the stage for what happened to us in the spring of 1972 when, for the only time in my two Westpac deployments, we went to general quarters for real. At the time the Navy was escalating the action up near Haiphong Harbor. We had destroyers operating in and around the harbor harassing the NVA by doing hit and run shore bombardment. As I remember, we were up north steaming independently and refueling the Blue Ridge, LCC 19, which was a new amphibious communications ship that was commissioned in November of 1970. (By the way, the Blue Ridge is still in service today, a long life of 49 years for a Navy ship!)

Suddenly, the Blue Ridge received a communication that a North Vietnamese MIG was heading our way. We executed an emergency breakaway with the Blue Ridge decoupling all our rigs and dropping them into the ocean. We frantically reeled the rigs out of the water as the ships peeled away from each other. General quarters was sounded and we simultaneously manned our battle stations as the deck crew struggled to secure the hoses and rigs.

Greg and I rushed from our station on the cargo deck into crypto on the 02 level locking the door behind us. For the next hour, we had only each other's company with absolutely no information as to what was happening outside our confined space. We knew that if the MIG attacked our ship, our guns would be useless against either rocket or cannon fire from the MIG. In addition, any direct hit would light the Cal up like a Roman candle due to all the fuel we were carrying. We had no idea whether the Cal or some other ship was the target of the enemy interloper. We could only speculate as to what was happening outside the bulkhead that contained us. With no messages to work on, our idle minds were left to anticipate the worst, interspersed with thoughts of family and friends back home. What little conversation we had was low-key, with both of us trying not to show the anxiety that we both felt.

Finally, the 1MC barked out the order to secure from general quarters, and we exited crypto drenched in sweat, some of it from the stifling temperature in the non-air conditioned compartment, and some of it from our worries about what a missile strike would do to the Cal. We found out that, apparently, we had a guided missile cruiser in the area whose missiles took out the MIG before it could fire its own missiles. To this day I don't know the name of the cruiser that brought that MIG down, but whether we were the target or not, I have been forever grateful for her presence in the area.



USS Caliente (AO-53)
Savannah Reunion
Sept. 23-26, 2019
Fairfield Inn and Suites
by Marriott
Savannah Downtown
135 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.,
Savannah, GA 31401



Reservations may be made by calling 1-888-236-2427 and identifying yourself as part of the USS Calliente reunion. You may also go online to [book your group rate for USS Caliente Reunion 2019](#).

The group rate is \$134 a night for a double queen or single king room and is good for Sunday, 9/22 through Thursday, 9/27 of reunion. The cutoff for reservations at the reunion rate is 8/23/19. Parking is available at \$25 per day per vehicle.

Reunion Agenda

Monday, September 23

- a) Hotel Check-in
- b) 2:00-6:00 PM—Welcome Reception

Tuesday, September 24

- a) 7:00-9:00 AM—Breakfast
- b) 9:15 AM-11:00 AM—Tour of Historic Savannah

Wednesday, September 25

- a) 7:00-9:00 AM—Breakfast
- b) 9:00 AM—Business Meeting
- c) 6:30 PM—Reception
- d) 7:00 PM—Banquet

Thursday, September 26

- a) 7:00-9:00 AM—Breakfast
- b) 9:00-Noon—Farewells

Savannah Registration Form

Shipmate's Name _____

Spouse or Guest Name _____

Additional Guests: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Years on Cal 19__ to 19__ Rate/Rank while aboard _____

Registration Fee: \$180.00 per person X _____ persons = \$ _____

Registration fee includes Monday reception, Wednesday reception and the banquet buffet and entertainment. Daily breakfasts are included in your room fees.

Tuesday Guided Tour \$20.00 per person x _____ persons = \$ _____

Registrations \$ _____ plus tour \$ _____ = Grand Total _____

Please return with check to: USS Caliente Association, c/o Pat Hurton,
156 Greenfield Drive, Chico, CA 95973-0185