

# USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



# PIPELINE

Sept.-Oct. 2014

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## Acting President's message

By Pat Hurton

We had a very successful reunion in Chicago and I believe all who attended had a great time. The highlight of the reunion was the presence of five WWII vets: Joe Benziger, John Creedon, Fred Griffith, Ed Ruimerman and J.C. Van Deusen. Sharing their experiences and hearing them tell stories was, by far, the best part of the reunion.

Fred had not heard about our Association until shortly before the reunion. I know he, his daughter (Jennifer), son-in-law (Gary) and friend Lois who attended with him, wished they had known about us a lot earlier.

Joe Benziger's son Richard had arranged for something special for Joe and John Creedon. The Chicago Cubs were playing at Wrigley on the Friday of our reunion and they honor veterans during the game. Joe and John were called to the field (aptly wearing Cal t-shirts) and were recognized for their service as WWII vets. Their names and the Cal were announced during the ceremony and they received a standing ovation from 40,000 attendees. Richard said everyone was standing and applauding until Joe and John returned to their seats.

This was a great honor for two of the founding members of the Association. I hope that reading this will encourage other shipmates who served on the Cal during WWII, or were in WWII but on another



Five veterans of World War II attended this year's Caliente Reunion in Chicago. Four of them served on the Cal during the war and one served elsewhere. From left are Ed Ruimerman, FN, 1945-46; Joe Benziger, PHM2/c, 1945-46; John Creedon, QM1, 1943-45; Fred Griffith, S1/c, 1944-46; and J.C. Van Deusen, SFC, 1961-65. (All reunion photographs in this issue are courtesy of Bill Lawler, LTJG, 1968-70.) More Reunion coverage on pages 2, 8 and 9.

ship, to make it to our next reunion. We do encourage family members to attend our reunions. In addition to those already mentioned, John's daughter, Juliette, attended with John and his wife Diane and Milan and Barbara Nickevich's daughter and son-in-law attended our reception.

I hope summer has been good to all of you and that the upcoming holiday season will be enjoyable. Holidays are a great time. They brighten up darker days and long nights, allow us to relax and enjoy life and to be with family and friends. It's always a lot of fun to see our youngest generation in their Halloween costumes, gather with family around the Thanksgiving dinner table and finish up the season enjoying the end of the year festivities.

In the last few editions of the Pipeline, I've been bemoaning the potential demise of the Association. I'm extremely pleased to announce that, rather than looking forward to bleak days for the Association, the Association has brighter and cheerier days ahead.

At the Chicago reunion several of our shipmates stepped forward to "assume the con." Jeff Sturgis will lead a team consisting of Greg Perett, Tom Rawlinson, Dave Ludemann, Mike Copeland and Steve Selzer to run the Association starting after the 2015 reunion. Norm and I are very grateful for Jeff, Greg, Tom, Dave, Mike and Steve stepping up.

All of these shipmates served on the Cal during its last years and we could look forward to another ten years of the Pipeline and reunions. Norm and I worked with the team in the selection of the hotel for the New Orleans reunion and will continue to work with them up to the next reunion.



The young (relatively speaking) gang that will be taking over leadership of the USS Caliente Association after next year's reunion in New Orleans pose for a picture at the Chicago reunion. From left are Mike Copeland, SK3, 1971-73, Steve Selzer, CS3, 1971-72, Dave Ludemann, SK3, 1969-73, Jeff Sturgis, LTJG, 1970-72, Tom Rawlinson, CS3, 1970-73, and Greg Perett, LTJG, 1970-71.

We have selected a hotel and dates for the New Orleans reunion. The dates are 10 through 13 September 2015. The Hotel is the Hyatt Place in New Orleans. The rate is \$109.00 per night plus 14.75 percent tax and a \$1.00 per night occupancy fee. That total is about \$126.00. The rate is about \$50.00 less per night than the last several reunions. Jeff Sturgis and his team and Norm and I are working on the details and will determine the cost per head for the reunion in the next month. We anticipate the same format as previous reunions; reception on Thursday afternoon, continental breakfast available on Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning and our banquet on Saturday evening. As usual a sign-up sheet will be sent to all shipmates and, as usual, we hope that you will be able to sign-up early allowing us to see how many will attend and enable us to work out the details early in the game.

We hope the lower cost of the hotel will allow more of our shipmates to attend. We will try to keep the cost per head as low as possible but I believe it will have to go up from the past several reunions. We were able to keep the cost in Chicago down because we received several very generous donations. Without those donations the cost per head would have been higher. The Association welcomes and appreciates any donations you can give.

After the transition to our new team at the 2015 reunion, I will continue as treasurer and Norm and I will continue to work with Jeff and his team as long as necessary. Karl Seitz will continue as editor of the Pipeline. Having Jeff, Greg, Tom, Dave, Mike and Steve step up is a great thing



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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for the Association, and Norm and I express our gratitude to them for putting the Association on sound footing and ensuring a strong future.

### **She seeks to know more about her father**

One of the attendees at the New Orleans reunion will be a daughter seeking to learn more about her late father. At the urging of Norm Street, she has written the following:

My name is Lissette Hernandez. David M. Hernandez was my father and his wife was Juanita. My parents were married in February 1969 and they were blessed with five children David, Ricky, Nolbert, Audie and myself. As the only girl, I was one spoiled girl. Yes, I was a Daddy's Girl, well I still am a Daddy's Girl. I was very young when my brothers and I lost our father, but there are things I do remember. He was very outgoing, had a lot of friends and was very giving. He loved his family, his parents, his siblings, his nephew and nieces, of which he had a lot.

Our father passed away Nov. 10, 1986, which still is the hardest day I have endured, but I know that he's always with all of us. After our father passed away, my mother and oldest brother David did an amazing job raising all four of us kids. David was the oldest at 16 when our dad passed. A lot of responsibilities fell on his shoulders. He graduated from high school and went to work full time to do what he could for the household.

My mother, is truly the strongest woman I have ever known. She did awesome as a single parent and as our best friend.

I have always wanted to know who my father was. For a long time now, I've asked questions about him, and always found myself intrigued by his stories that others shared of him. Which leads me to this journey. For quite some time I've been trying to get my hands on a flag, and his medals that he received when he was on the USS Caliente. As I was looking for information on the USS Caliente, I came across the USS Caliente Crew Member List. With excitement and feeling all kinds of emotions I located his name. I sent an email out to find out how I can update his information with the help of Pat Hurton and Norm Street. I have received so many blessings with their help.

As David's daughter I have always wanted to have as much information and/or memorabilia of him as well as memorabilia of the USS Caliente.

My goal is to meet someone or everyone that was on the USS Caliente during the years of 1972 and 1973 with my dad at the reunion in New Orleans in 2015. My family and I are super excited for this trip and hope to meet some wonderful people.

Thank you,  
Lissette Hernandez



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.

## Taps

We have belatedly learned of the death of Billy Dean Bishop, 78, of Hodenville, OK. Billy died 14 Feb 2013. He was a BM3 on the Cal from 1952 to 1954. Billy was born 12 Nov. 1934. He coached youth baseball and was an Elk in Hodenville. Billy is survived by his wife, DeeAnn, who is in a nursing home; children Debbie (Frank) Meade, Barbie (Jerry) and Willy Bishop; four grandchildren; and siblings Vivian Womack, Shirley Cook, Frank Martin and Jerry Martin.

James R. Davis, 76, died 26 May 2014, while he and his wife were returning home to Wichita, Kan., from attending the Indianapolis 500. Jim was a BT3 on the Cal from 1956 to 1958. He was a retired accountant for Petroleum, Inc., and owner of The Mail Room in Wichita. Jim is survived by his wife of 51 years, Joyce, son Michael L. Davis, a grandson and sister Naomi (David) Easley.

We have belatedly learned of the death of Michael Dromboski, 89, of Trenton, NJ. Mike died 3 May 2011. Born 7 Dec 1921, he served as a MMC on the Cal from 1943 to 1946. He owned the Andike Machine Shop in Trenton for many years. Mike is survived by his daughter, Judith Vaccaro, two grandchildren, brother Alex (Pat) Dromboski and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Douglas George Hanenburg, 81, died 31 Jan 2014. Doug was a MR2 on the Cal from 1958 to 1959. Born 25 Aug 1932, he first enlisted in the Navy in January 1950 at age 17. After leaving the Navy and spending more than a decade in Seattle and California, Doug and his wife settled in Port Orchard, Wash. He worked for more than 30 years at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard as a Maintenance Machinist. Doug is survived by sons Greg (Kate), Steve (Donna), Randy (Debbie) and Mike Hanenburg; daughter Laurie (Ken) Burnett, 11 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

## Editor's message

By Karl Seitz

This issue of the Pipeline is later than usual because of the effort to line up facilities for next year's reunion in New Orleans before publishing. There's still a lot of work ahead for those who are involved in planning and executing the reunion. Additional help from other members will be more than welcome.

Meanwhile, we still have the other main component of the USS Caliente Association that needs some help. The Pipeline cannot exist without contributions from you, the former crew of the Caliente. Memories, pictures, newspaper or magazine clippings and other memorabilia from your time on the Cal can provide enjoyment for those who served with you, for those who served before or after you did and for family members of all of the above. The Pipeline is running low on things to share.

If you were at the Chicago reunion, you heard many tales about the Cal and its crew. Maybe you were one of those telling the tales or contributing to the stories of others. Why not share those stories with the crew members who weren't there?

Couldn't make it to Chicago? You have your own tales. Why not share them with the rest of us?

I've heard most of the excuses, many of which boil down to the belief that "I can't write." Yes, you can. Even if it isn't the most polished prose, most of us have learned to express

ourselves in ways that are understandable to others. That's all it takes. The polishing is my job as editor.

So dig through your memories and wherever you have stored your memorabilia. Find something to share. Write those tales. Duplicate those pictures. Take photographs or make photocopies of other souvenirs.

When you have your contribution ready, send it to me, via e-mail or the U.S. Postal Service, at the appropriate address found on page 3.

If mailing pictures, please send copies if at all possible, although I will try to return any originals. For best reproduction in the Pipeline, e-mailed pictures (preferably in jpeg or png format) should be either at least 300 dpi or very large so that I can increase the resolution when I put them in the Pipeline.

Stories don't have to be very long for readers to enjoy them. Pictures don't have to be action-filled and dramatic to convey what life was like when you were on the Caliente.

But I do need to receive them if readers are to continue to enjoy the Pipeline. The lateness of this Pipeline also means there is less time than usual before the next edition. So please send your contributions as soon as possible. Your shipmates will thank you.

Readers will note there is a lot about Jeff Sturgis in this issue. That is not by design. Jeff responded to my request for a spotlight article several months ago and I scheduled it for September based on the order in which it and previously published spotlights were received. I did not know at that time that he would become deeply involved in the effort to rejuvenate the association, which accounts for the rest of his presence on these pages. However, the combined coverage does provide a good introduction to Jeff if you don't already know him.

### **Defense bill contains Agent Orange provision**

Vietnam-era Caliente shipmates should keep an eye on Congress when it returns for a lame-duck session after the November elections. Among the unfinished business is the Defense appropriation bill for 2015. Both the House-passed version (H.R. 4435) and the proposed Senate version (S.2410) contain a provision that should make it easier for some Blue Water sailors to receive Agent Orange benefits.

As written, Section 1090 of the House bill and the identical Section 1062 of the Senate bill require the secretary of Defense, within one year of passage, to review the logs of every Navy ship known to have operated in the waters near Vietnam between 9 Jan 1962 and 7 May 1975 to determine which ships operated in the territorial waters of the Republic of Vietnam, the date or dates when each did so and the closest distance from shore during such operations.

For every ship that did operate in Vietnamese territorial waters, the secretary of Defense will provide all of the gathered information to the secretary of Veteran Affairs.

In practical terms, this provision would give an unknown number of Blue Water sailors proof acceptable to the VA that they were exposed to Agent Orange, the key step in obtaining benefits.

This legislation is not as comprehensive as other attempts to restore Agent Orange benefits to Blue Water sailors who received the Vietnam War Medal and have any of a specific list of ailments. But it would be a step toward undoing the restrictions imposed by the Department of Veteran Affairs. That is assuming the provision remains in the legislation at final passage. Letting your senators and representatives know your views might help.

*Thanks to Jack Hughes for forwarding the tip about this legislation.*

## Shipmate Spotlight

### LTJG Jeff Sturgis (1970-1972)

Having a father and two uncles who were U.S. Navy veterans from World War II and Korea, as a young man I was steeped in the Navy tradition, so my decision to join the Navy was predictable. As a college student from 1965 to 1969 I faced the realities of the draft and the Vietnam War. In the summer of '68 I took the Officer Qualifying Test for the U.S. Navy and was accepted as a candidate for Officer Candidate School at Newport, RI. After graduation from Bates College in the spring of '69, I reported to OCS in June as a member of company November 6911. Rich Nyquist, who ended up on the Caliente the same time as I did, was in the same company.

I was commissioned an ensign on Oct. 24, 1969, and was married to Sue, my lovely wife of 44 years, on Oct. 26. Ironically, one month later the first draft lottery was held on Dec. 1, and the number associated with my birth date came out to be 363, a number so high that I probably wouldn't have been drafted if it was WW III! I heard that after the lottery, officer candidates at Newport who got high draft numbers like mine were allowed to leave OCS without any penalty. That being said, I never regretted my Navy service and felt that my Navy years benefited me in many ways.

When I took my physical for OCS in December 1969, it was officially determined that I was colorblind, a fact which didn't surprise me. Therefore, from the beginning of OCS, I knew that I was slated for the Supply Corps. My new bride and I headed for a pleasant six months at the Navy Supply Corps School in Athens, GA, learning the intricacies of the Navy supply system. Upon graduation, my first nine choices on my dream list were for East Coast or Atlantic ports, so naturally, I was assigned to the Caliente on the West Coast!

My wife and I traveled to Long Beach following the path of the famous Route 66 as much as possible, and I settled her in an apartment on Cerritos Avenue in July before leaving for the Caliente via Travis Air Force Base. When I arrived on the Cal, I took over as Supply Division Officer while Greg Perett "fleeted up" to Supply Department Officer. Included in my duties were disbursing, ship's service (laundry, barbershop, ship's store) and the stewards. I later added the ship's mess to those duties. The Caliente was my only duty station during my two-plus years in the fleet. Aboard her from July of '70 until June of '72, I was aboard for the final four months of the Westpac cruise that ended in October of '70, the yard and training period that lasted most of '71, and the first eight months of the cruise that started in October of '71. I served under three captains, Capt. Oberg, Capt. Howard and Cmdr. McGuinness. Greg Perett and I supervised the Supply Department almost that whole time.



The main hardship for me during my service was being separated from my new wife, and after our daughter was born during our year the Cal was stateside, missing most of the first year of her life. That being said, I view my Navy days very positively. Few other occupations give a young person right out of college so much responsibility at such a young age. Being responsible for the payroll for 250 men, feeding and provisioning a Navy ship, supervising a division of 30-40 men and servicing other Navy ships all over the Pacific Ocean teaches a young officer a lot about leadership, logistics and organization. Much of what I learned as a young officer has served me well in later life. In addition, I got to visit a lot of great Pacific ports and most importantly, serve with a lot of great shipmates.

After I left the Navy in July of '72, I pursued my dream of becoming a teacher and a coach. Over a 40-year career in public education I was a math teacher, a basketball and football coach, an athletic director, an assistant principal and a principal, all at the high school level in my home state of Maine. The culmination of my career came in the last nine years of my career when I worked for the Maine Principals' Association organizing statewide conferences for school administrators and administering state championships in 12 high school sports and activities. Of those 40 years, I spent 35 as an administrator, and I feel strongly that my Navy service gave me the leadership skills and the administrative background to be successful.

However, as much as cherish the career skills I learned, the most lasting memories are of the men I served with on the Caliente. I enjoyed working with the crew of the Cal, especially those in Supply Division, and I am proud of the services we provided aboard the ship and to the fleet. I have enjoyed the reunions and reconnecting with old shipmates as well as meeting those from other eras. I especially enjoy the WWII vets who appear at some of the reunions. I realize that reunions can't last forever, but I hope that we can revive them for a few more years.

## Cubs honor Caliente pair



On Friday, Sept. 5, 2014, the Chicago Cubs recognized Joe Benziger and John Creedon during a game at Wrigley Field. The following is the text of that recognition:

Ladies and gentlemen ... we ask you to please stand as we welcome a special guest to Wrigley Field. Throughout the 2014 season, the Cubs and Bank of America are honoring our military service members and veterans.

Eighty-nine-year-old Joe Benziger and 90-year-old John Creedon served side-by-side in the U.S. Navy aboard the U.S.S. Caliente during World War II. They are here today as part of the annual reunion of the Caliente.

Let's give a warm Cubs welcome to World War II veterans, Joe Benziger and John Creedon. The Cubs and Bank of America thank you for your service, sacrifice and dedication to our country.

...

Cubs fans, you can thank our troops right now by sharing a message of support using hashtag troop thanks. When you do, Bank of America will make a donation to military nonprofits dedicated to helping our troops succeed here at home.



## 2015 Caliente Reunion at the Hyatt Regency Chicago



June and Jim Niquette



Crab cake appetizer



Milan and Barbara Nikceвич



Norm and Susan Street

### Attendees

Larry and Ida Baker  
Joe Benziger and son Richard Benziger  
Frank Brownell  
Mike Copeland  
John and Diane Creedon  
and daughter Juliette Kvernland  
Herb Dorsey  
Robert and Susan Ecker  
Ed Fordyce  
Bob and Barbara French  
Fred Griffith and Lois Reynolds  
with Gary and Jennifer (Griffith) Cowgill  
Pat and Charleen Hurton  
Bill and Nancy Lawler

Dave Ludemann  
Milan and Barbara Nikceвич  
Jim and June Niquette  
Greg Perett  
James T. (Tom) Rawlinson  
Ed Ruimerman  
Shelby and Mary Sanders  
Stephen and Linda Selzer  
Karl and Pat Seitz  
Norm and Susan Street  
Jeff and Susan Sturgis  
J.C. and Betty Van Deusen  
Pete and Pat Werner



The Singing  
JayGees, Jeff Sturgis  
and Greg Perett,  
entertain banquet  
crowd at Caliente  
Reunion.



USS Caliente (AO-53) refuels USS Tripoli (LPH-10), probably in 1972.

*From files of Capt. Don McGuinness*