

# USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



# PIPELINE

September 2010

## President's message

By Pat Hurton

I hope your all having a great summer. I apologize for not being available for the past month but Charleen and I celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary by taking a trip to Europe, including a river cruise on the Rhine.

I have just completed the arrangements for the San Diego reunion and am pleased to tell you that I've been able to arrange an optional tour of an active U.S. Navy vessel. It will be the USS New Orleans (LPD-18). The New Orleans was launched in December of 2004 and commissioned in March of 2007. She is the second San Antonio class amphibious dock and carries a large U.S. Marine detachment for amphibious landing. As there are only two of these vessels in the Navy it is very unusual to be able to go aboard one. Wives are welcome and even if you are not overly mobile you are welcome to come along. Wives and the not overly mobile can be escorted to the wardroom while the rest of us climb up and down ladders. The only climbing, if you want to stay in the wardroom, is up the brow and depending on what deck the wardroom is on to there. The cost of the New Orleans visit will depend on the number of persons attending. It will run from \$20 per head to \$39 per head and include a custom box lunch at Seaport after the tour.

I have also arranged an optional three-hour dinner cruise on the San Diego harbor. The dinner cruise will leave the hotel 5:30 Friday evening. I previously didn't include this as the organization I was working with wanted a minimum guarantee of persons and as it is not inexpensive I didn't feel I could make the commitment. The organization I am now working with has no minimum guarantee and provides transportation from the hotel to the pier. Whoever wants to go will be seated together and not split up among the other tourists. The cost of the dinner including transportation to and from will be \$79 per person.

I would ask those of you who are attending the reunion to please contact me as soon as possible and indicate if you want to tour the New Orleans or want to go on the dinner cruise as I must still tell the organization I am working with a head count to determine the transportation needs. Even if you're not planning to attend the reunion, live in the San Diego area and would like to meet up with your shipmates in one of these environments you are welcome to come along.



Downtown San Diego skyline seen from Coronado.

Picture from PD Photo.org

I must have a head count by Monday Sept. 6, so please respond to me immediately at [gigandpat@digitalpath.net](mailto:gigandpat@digitalpath.net) or phone me at (530)343-4060. The tour of the New Orleans should be quite interesting as this is the latest in amphibious warfare. You can pay me for the above when I see you at the reunion, but I must have your name now.

The DJ who will provide music during the reunion banquet has a website where you can make specific requests. Recipients of the electronic edition of Pipeline can click on this hyperlink <http://wwwv.KennethDayWeddings.com/request/usnavyreunion>. You access the page using the group name "usnavyreunion" and the password "Fun" without the quotations. (editor's note: If you type the URL into your browser window, note that the letters after the // are w w v v, not w w w)

This should be a great reunion as we have a first class hotel, an ex-Navy DJ and two great tours you can avail yourselves of if you desire.

Because the tour of the New Orleans will leave the hotel at 10:00 AM, the business meeting will be moved to Friday morning at 9:00. Remember, we voted in Minneapolis to have the next reunion in Newport/Virginia Beach, Virginia, and unless we want to change that we should discuss where we want to go in 2012.

If you live in the San Diego area and are not signed up for the reunion you are welcome to join us at our reception Thursday afternoon at the Westin San Diego, 400 West Broadway, or even for our banquet on Saturday evening. Remember that hors d'oeuvres will be provided at the reunion and they are paid for by the attendees so a donation would be appreciated. If you just want to come to the banquet please contact me immediately as I do need to firm up the head count by Sept. 1.

Charleen and I wish you smooth sailing and if we don't see you in San Diego, hopefully we can see you in Newport/Virginia Beach.

### **Welcome aboard to our new members:**

Derrick (Rick) Cheseborough, who lives in Villa Park, CA, was an MM3 when he served aboard the Cal from 1972 to 1973.

Calvin Kellerman, who lives in St. Paul, MN, served a year aboard the Cal.  
Jack Rasmussen, who lives with his wife Gaila in Greenbank, WA, was an IC2 when he served aboard the Cal in 1952.

Thomas Weldon Smith, who lives in Reno, NV, with his wife Barbara, was a LTJG when he served on the Cal from 1964 to 1966.

Don Turner, who lives with his wife Carolyn in Sterlington, LA, was an SF3 when he served aboard the Cal from 1965 to 1967.

### **In memoriam:**

We are sad to note the passing of five former shipmates.

Capt. Donald A. McGuinness died May 19, 2010. Capt. McGuinness commanded the USS Caliente from January 1972 to November 1973, which included the Cal's final deployment. An engineer by training, he spent 24 years on active service. Following his retirement, McGuinness and his wife, Shirley, built a successful real estate business in San Diego. He was buried June 22 at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego. In addition to his wife, Capt. McGuinness is

survived by his children Sherry Anne, Deborah Lee, David Arthur, Stephen Arthur and Lon Jeanne; sisters Barbara Mandell and Beverley Murphy; ten grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Steven M. Dunlap died March 26, 2010, in Gilbert, AZ, at age 60. His ashes were spread from a naval ship in San Diego. He served on the Cal from 1969 to 1972 as an HT3. He spent 21 years in the Navy. Steven is survived by his wife of 30 years, Dale K. Dunlap; mother, Margaret M. Ling of Juneau, AK; brothers, Alex Dunlap, Robert (Robin) Dunlap and Michael Dunlap; sisters, Barbara Anderson, Becky Coleman and Kim Ling, all of Juneau and Dorcey Ling of Fairbanks, AK.

Lou Erickson died Jan. 6, 2010, at his home in Rogers, AR, at age 76. He served on the Cal from 1952 to 1956 as an EM1. Lou is survived by his wife of 50 years, Mary; children, Susan (Rick) Shissler of Altoona, Iowa; Dr. Jeff (Susan) Erickson of Rogers, AR; sister Joanne Erickson of Topeka, KS; five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. In her recent message informing the editor of Lou's death, Mary wrote: "Lou enjoyed all of the reunions so much, visting with all the ships former crewmembers and visting different parts of the country was enjoyed by both of us. I will be thinking of all of you at this year's reuion wishing we could join you."

Burton Redmond died March 29, 2010, in Biloxi, MS, at age 75. He served on the Cal from 1952 to 1955 as an SN with his brother Henry C. Redmond. He is survived by his wife of 55



USS Caliente Association  
President: Pat Hurton  
Vice President: Norm Street  
Secretary: Red Ward  
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The Pipeline is the official quarterly newsletter of the USS Caliente Association. It is a place to share your memories. 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.

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

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 Pat Hurton, 14075 Kelsey Drive, Chico, CA 95973-9262.

years, Judy L. Redmond of Biloxi; three children, DeAnn (David) Fairley of Magnolia, TX, Randy Redmond of Woolmarket and Lisa (Jason) Gillenwater of Ocean Springs, MS; six grandchildren and three great-grand children.

James Ridley died Aug. 12, 2010, at his home in Santa Rosa, CA, at age 78. He served on the Cal from 1952 to 1956 as a BM3. He is survived by his wife, Rosemarie; stepson Dino (Paula) Alden; children Georgia Ohler, Judy (Cathy) Beardsley, Jennifer (Dale) Beatty, Jane Detwiller, Joel (Olga) ridley and James (Tonya) Ridley Jr, 13 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren; siblings Ernest (Betty) Ridley and Barbara Turner.

## **Editor's message**

by Karl Seitz

The 2010 Caliente reunion is mere weeks away and I'm sure many of you can't wait to weigh anchor for San Diego. I wish I could, but circumstances preclude my attendance this year. However, I'd like to ask a favor of everybody who attends.

As I discovered last year in Minneapolis, one of the more enjoyable aspects of attending a reunion is listening to all the tales that our shipmates have to tell about their time on the Cal. Some of the incidents you hear about were funny when they happened. Others have acquired a humorous coloring with the passage of time. Still others were and remain serious times for the men who were serving when the events took place. A few are tragic tales.

But whatever the story, many of them deserve to reach larger audiences than the few of you gathered around a single table. That's where the Pipeline comes in.

When you hear a story in San Diego that you enjoy, encourage the teller to write it down and send it to me by mail or e-mail at the addresses on page 3. If you hear two or more men talking about the same incident from differing points of view, encourage both or all of them to write their own versions of the event. One of the things I've most enjoyed about being editor of the Pipeline is receiving two stories about the same event in which the writers were in different parts of the ship or seeing it from very different perspectives. The more contributions I receive like that, the better your Pipeline will be.

It doesn't matter how well you think you write, just get it down on paper, handwritten or typed, or into a computer text file and send me the results. It's my job to do the polishing.

If you have pictures, I need them, too.

So when you hear a story in San Diego that you think your shipmates will enjoy, tell the storyteller he should send it to the Pipeline. And if one of your shipmates encourages you to send your own story to the Pipeline, please do so. You will make future readers of this publication ever so happy.

## **The Birth of the USS Caliente (AO-53) Association A Gleam in the Eye of Robert L. Le Gacy, BM 2/c**

Consistent with being a man of action as Boatswain 2/c on the Caliente from 1943 to 1945, Bob Le Gacy thought there should be a reunion of the ship's crew. He regularly read about

reunions of other ships in publications of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans. Showing his usual extraordinary patience, Bob waited almost 45 years before expressing great exasperation to his companion, Nancy (now for many years his wife), that no one had taken the lead to make it happen. Nancy, being even more action oriented, suggested that Bob take the lead and put a notice in these three publications, which in 1987 and 1988 he did.

The rest is history. Joe Benziger, Phm 2d, was one of the early responders. One of John Creedon's high school classmates, Camil Spiecens, an army veteran seriously wounded in the European war, brought John's attention to Bob's notice about the proposed Caliente reunion. John (QM 1/c 1943-1945 on the Caliente) told Bob Define a fellow New Yorker, (also QM 1/c 1943-1945) about the notice and both contacted Bob Le Gacy in early 1988.

Bob's reunion notices in the veteran publications continued to produce letters and phone calls from Caliente veterans so that by mid to late 1988, 40 or more expressions of interest had been received by Bob.

Interestingly, all the responses were from men who served on the Caliente during World War II. One of the earliest responses was from E.M. Whitlock, a gunnery officer who enthusiastically told Bob that he would like to help, donate money and participate. When Bob called back some time later, his wife sadly reported that he passed away a few days before from a heart attack.

An initial letter was sent on Feb. 6, 1989, to all those who had expressed a reunion interest. It was signed by Bob Le Gacy, John Creedon and Bob Define. A follow-up letter issued some months later had four signatures, including Ben Greenberg's, a communications officer.

In discussions with Bob Le Gacy, John offered to make arrangements for a reunion in New York City. John had significant help and advice from MetLife people in choosing a hotel, scheduling meetings, arranging for dining, photographs, music, dancing, etc. To allow time for planning, the weekend of April 28-30, 1989 was chosen for our first reunion. It turned out to be an auspicious choice because we later learned the fleet was scheduled to be in the city at that time.

The fleet's presence was for participation in the 200th year celebration of the inauguration of President George Washington in 1789. President George H.W. Bush re-enacted President Washington's inauguration with a stand-in for our first president. On April 29, 1989, the New York Daily News donated two full pages to the weekend events with headlines, "CITY HIT BY WAVES — FROM GEORGE TO GEORGE." Taking up most of the first page in the News was an aerial picture of the aircraft carrier Forrester sailing beneath the Verrazano Bridge. But a full page-length column left of the picture, "OLD DAYS SAIL BACK FOR CREW," describes our reunion and quotes Bob Le Gacy. "We got to put this together because the guys are dying off like flies." Bob had contacted a number of Caliente veterans in 1987 and 1988, some of whom had since died. As George Washington was being celebrated that weekend as founder of our country, Bob Le Gacy was demonstrably being founder of the Caliente Association.

After learning about the fleet plans, John made contact with naval authorities and the secretary of Navy invited the Caliente group or any of its members to participate in the fleet maneuvers off the coast of Virginia aboard the aircraft carrier Forrester, which would then come

up to New York for April 28-30.

No one accepted this special offer. We were also extended invitations by the admiral of the visiting fleet units for VIP tours on the fleet ships in New York at the time. A visit was set up for Sunday morning on one of the ships in the fleet, which some of the group visited.

The Vista, a luxury hotel in downtown Manhattan, was chosen as headquarters for the reunion because of its proximity to the World Trade Center where we planned to hold our Saturday night banquet. For \$125 a couple per night with full breakfast, we had a bargain. At a reception on Friday evening in John Creedon's hospitality suite, most of us saw each other for the first time in 45 years. There were 15 veterans, six of whom had been officers and 12 with wives or a companion.

Other highlights of the '89 reunion included an exciting helicopter ride over and around Manhattan with great views of the Statue of Liberty, the city and the fleet on Saturday morning. Ben Greenberg arranged for a great boat ride on the Spirit of New York on the East and Hudson Fiivers, with a buffet lunch and a cabaret performance by singing waiters featuring favorite songs about New York City.

There was a spectacular gala dinner at the top of the World Trade Center on Saturday evening. The food, music, dancing and comradeship made for a pleasant, fun and enjoyable evening. A first issue of The Pipeline (the name of the publication received aboard the Caliente during the war) Volume 90 No. 1, prepared by Ben Greenberg after the reunion, was sent to shipmates who attended or had expressed an interest in the reunion. It contained the following description of part of the evening: "Each shipmate stood and told some reminiscences about his tour on the 'fat lady' and then related what he had done since leaving AO-53. Some of the wives got up and spoke, too. All the events and the talks by the Caliente vets were videotaped by a camera crew supplied by John and an edited version, which included Navy footage of the Pacific War from Ben's collection, was added and the finished tape was distributed by John to all attendees later." John also sent out to those attending a copy of a bound book of pictures taken during the meeting by a photographer and/or our shipmates.

Bob Le Gacy and John Creedon both received comments from shipmates at the reunion following their receipt of the videotape and bound book of photographs.

From Pappy Nichols (Exec.) who also sent John the Commission Penant flying when the Caliente entered Tokyo Bay:

"The album is magnificent. The tape performances were outstanding. The reunion was a marvelous success."

From Fletcher Gordy:

"Looking at the video brings back wonderful memories of the weekend and I will treasure it forever."

From Bob and Ruth Define:

"The reunion album is magnificent."

From Ciss and Frank Lang (Captain):

"A fine piece of work — magnificent."

Harold Hainebach:

“Fabulous history of our reunion.”

Trudy and Brad Lynch:

“A weekend of golden hours. We were all in tears at the end of the tape.”

The first reunion provided an opportunity to renew acquaintances, establish new friends, enjoy our crewmates' company and appreciate the part we all played in history.

One side benefit of the first reunion was that a number of those attending indicated an interest in participating in plans for additional reunions and other activities. Ben Greenberg who had been communications officer in 1943-1945, had already stepped forward to help plan the first reunion, then wrote the first "Pipeline" and later served as leader of the second and third reunions in Baltimore and New Orleans respectively. Another gem who surfaced in New York was Joe Benziger (Ph/2). Joe started with the reunion in Boston and all the way up to the reunion in Long Beach, Calif., in 1995 acted as secretary, treasurer and editor of the Pipeline. Joe was also a spark plug for many reunions thereafter.

Frank Lang who for many of us had been our most admired, respected and loved captain for part of his time on the Caliente also took a strong interest and was leader with Bob Le Gacy for the fourth reunion in Boston in 1993. At that meeting a decision was made to create a legal structure for the Association, draft a charter and by-lines and establish a formal organization of officers and other positions. Bob Le Gacy's dream was realized and legitimized.

But it all could have withered and died without the enthusiasm and dedication of those who followed. The three signers of this memo continued to have an active interest in reunions up through at least 1999, but Captains Jackson, Hengle and especially Bob Howard who was the leader for five years continued the momentum. Twenty years after that first reunion we have the strongest team ever with Pat Hurton who has been a great treasurer for many years and an unrivaled captain for two, Norm Street, whose energy and vision has brought us to a new level of membership, innovation and success and now Karl Seitz, a professional, for a demonstrably improved Pipeline. The Dream goes on!



*Joe Benziger*  
Joe Benziger



*John Creedon*  
John Creedon



*Bob Le Gacy*  
Bob Le Gacy

## Memories



The late Capt. Donald A. McGuiness, skipper of the Caliente during its last deployments, included these pictures in a box of memorabilia for the Caliente Association. Additional pictures may find their way into future Pipelines. On the left, engineers Steve Meier and Bob Waterman are racing for the last- and next-to-last-in-the-water prizes during a swim call on 4 March 1972. On the right, Mother Superior Pauline and eight high school seniors visit the Caliente in April 1972. The young ladies were among 15 economically needy Philippine students whose high school tuition was paid by Caliente crewmembers. The seniors received a few gifts, including money to purchase graduate dresses, during their visit.

### Day he will never forget

By Jack Hanrahan, RM3

1951-1954

In 1951, we left Korea, our second trip after a short first. We arrived in Pearl Harbor Dec. 6 and moored at Ford Island because all the slips were full.

The next morning after chow, I went up to the flying bridge and looked into harbor and saw all the big ships moored. I looked aft and saw a gig with Vice President Alben Barkley. In a couple minutes, he placed a wreath and at the same time all ships started playing "The Star Spangled Banner."

It was something to see and hear Dec. 7, 1951, the day I'll never forget.

### New members write

#### A ship out of trim makes for an unhappy captain

By Thomas Weldon Smith, LTJG

1964-1966

It was early 1965 and just fresh out of OCS I joined the USS Caliente only days before she left Long Beach. As she pulled into Pearl Harbor, our skipper had some of his fellow flyers take



some aerial pictures of her entry.

Later when the captain saw the pictures of his deep draft command plowing into the harbor, down by the bow and up in the stern, he was heard to say, "Send that \*\*\*\*\* greenhorn ensign cargo officer to me."

Needless to say, it never happened on my watch again.

## **A near hit and a stopped up head**

By Donald D. Turner, SF3

August 1965-August 1967

The USS Ticonderoga almost hit us and her elevator decks were almost on top of us.

The captain and officers' head was stopped up and the only way we could unstop the drain lines was with a high pressure fire hose. That is what we did, but se blew out all lines in that area, including the bridge and chart room. We made a real mess in the chart room, but we did get the lines unstopped and never had any more trouble with stoppage

I retired from a local hospital as assistant director. My wife is still working as a librarian at a high school. We have three children and five grandchildren. My wife and I do lots of traveling. We have been to Alaska, Canada, several places out west, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Mexico and plan to travel more.

## **Butting in backfires**

By Jack Rasmussen, IC3

1952-1952

This involves Fred Barten, MM2, and an unnamed boot ensign. Barten had just gotten off watch in the engine room and was out on the well deck with his usual cigar butt in his mouth. A voice from the catwalk yelled out, "The smoking lamp is out on the well deck!"

Barten turned his head and replied, "I'm not smoking."

"You've got a cigar in your mouth."

"I've got an ass hole, but I'm not shitting."

"I'm placing you on report."

He was never placed on report.

## **Last official portrait?**

The picture of the Caliente on the final page of this Pipeline comes from the material given to the Caliente Association by Capt. Don McGuiness. Because it is an official U.S. Navy photograph and because McGuiness was skipper of the Cal for its final deployment, this may be the last official photograph taken of the ship while it was in commission.

