

USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



PIPELINE

June 2011

President's message

By Pat Hurton

I hope all of you are had a great spring and, once again, were not too affected by the extremely unusual weather the country has been experiencing. By the time this Pipeline is distributed, it will officially be summer and we'll see what it has in store for us all.

Enclosed is the final (?) agenda for the Norfolk reunion. For those of you who responded to my request to indicate your interest (or lack thereof) in a luncheon or dinner cruise, I thank you very much. The result of my request indicates minimal interest or lack of time to respond. It does take some time to properly plan an agenda and therefore have an organized and successful reunion. I ask for responses not for my own amusement but for planning purposes.

The underwhelming response to my request has left the optional cruises in limbo. I still have some time to secure a group rate and make plans for either cruise but must get an idea of how many are interested. Once again, I ask for a response as soon as possible (less than two weeks). I have not included the cost of the luncheon (\$45) or dinner (\$65) cruise on the sign-up sheet. If I get sufficient enough interest I'll make arrangements to collect the money at a later date.

For those who didn't send in your money for the reunion when you sent your sign-up sheet in, please do so now.

Norfolk itself has many attractions; the Chrysler Museum of Art featuring Egyptian, ancient Greek, Roman, Oriental and Columbian exhibits; the Heritage Museum and Gardens; the Hunter House Victorian Museum, the Moses Myers House the Norfolk Botanical Gardens, the Virginia Zoo and St. Paul's Episcopal Church built in 1739. There is also the Victory Rover Naval Base Cruise. This is a two-hour cruise that has a snack bar on board.

There are a lot of other attractions in the Norfolk area. Williamsburg, Charles City, Jamestown and Yorktown are within easy driving distance and Richmond is not too far away. For those wishing to spend a little more time in Virginia there is the Shenandoah National Park that extends along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Monticello and the Lewis and Clark Sacagawea Memorial in the Charlottesville area.

Charleen and I hope to see you in Norfolk. And with your prompt response to my request, I hope to be able to finalize an agenda that works for all of us. The past reunions have yielded a great time for all and I'm sure this one will be as great.



**Join your shipmates Sept. 22-25
for the annual reunion
of the USS Caliente Association.
Registration information is on
pages 8 and 9**

Welcome aboard to our new members:

Paul Cirafesi, who lives in Norristown, PA, was a BM2 when he served aboard the Cal from 1943 to 1945.

Jimmie Riffin, who lives in Grafton, WY, was a BT2 when he served aboard the Cal from 1952 to 1955.

In memoriam:

We are sad to note the passing of two former shipmates:

Santiago Ramon "Jimmy" Curry, 73, of Corpus Christi, TX, died Feb. 1, 2010. Jimmy joined the Navy in 1956 after graduating from high school and retired in 1975. He was a BT1 when he served on the Caliente from 1969 to 1973. He is survived by his wife Pat, sons Jimmy Terry (Gail) and Ricky; daughters Fran Smyrak (Mike), Sharon, Cherrie (Mike) and Tina Mendoza; brothers Charlie and Alfred Curry.

Samuel Schmidtke, 74, of Phoenix, AZ, died Jan. 17, 2011. He was a MM2 when he served on the Caliente from 1957 to 1962. During part of that time, his brother Bill, who survives him, was also serving on the Cal. Samuel had been ill for a number of years, according to his wife, Barbara.

Editor's message

By Karl Seitz

As you read the memories in this edition of the Pipeline, you will notice that many of them are inspired by or follow up on memories from previous editions. I'm pleased by that. It means the Pipeline is doing its job of getting you back in touch with the time you spent with your shipmates aboard the Caliente. I will do my best to continue doing that job in future issues.

However, I can't do that alone. There are men in our organization from every year during which the Cal was in commission, 1943-1973. That includes three wars, but even during the years between shooting wars, there were interesting things happening involving the Caliente and its crew. Since your time on the Cal, some of you have kept in touch and have stories of those times. Spouses, too, have stories to tell, either from their own experiences or from stories told them by their husbands.

So please write down your stories about your time on the Caliente and send them to my postal or e-mail address, both of which are found on page 3. If you have pictures you want to share, send copies, not the originals. If you want to scan the pictures into digital files for transmission as e-mail attachments, please use a resolution of 300 dpi and jpeg format. If you already have a png format picture, it is not necessary to convert it. However, tiff-format files should be converted to jpeg format because of their size. Also, please include identifications of the people in the picture and information on when and where it was taken. If you don't know some of the people or the place and time, provide what you do know.

For newspaper or magazine clippings, please send only photocopies or scanned digital files.

For those of you who are attending the reunion in Norfolk in September, if you hear people telling interesting stories about the Caliente and its crew, encourage them to write down their

memories and send them to me for use in a future Pipeline. That will help make the Pipeline the best newsletter it can be.

Memories

Coincidence !

By René Pellet, ET2

1956

I had driven from San Jose to Gilroy, California on highway 101 and had reached my home a few minutes before the Loma Prieta earthquake hit on 17 October 1989. During the earthquake I was standing in a doorway of my home and my major thought was not “EARTHQUAKE.” Instead I was thinking that it was just like being back at sea on the Caliente.

Juergen (George) Muelder was driving south through Gilroy on Highway 101 when he thought something serious had happened to his car — an engine malfunction or as he jokingly suggested: his wheels had come off — before he realized that he had been in a big quake. (Loma Prieta quake)

The two of us were roughly four miles apart during the quake and didn't know each other; yet we both had been ETs on the USS Caliente about two years apart. Talk about coincidence! Chief



USS Caliente Association
President: Pat Hurton
Vice President: Norm Street
Secretary: Red Ward
Pipeline Editor: Karl Seitz



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 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.

Inspector Morse said that there is no such thing as coincidence. Or maybe it was Sherlock Holmes. Whichever it was, I have to tell him he was wrong. This was a definite coincidence.

As you know, members of the Caliente crew live all over the country not just in Northern California.

(A little side: For those of you who don't live anywhere near what we call the bay area in northern California: The Loma Prieta 6.9 earthquake hit on 17 October 1989 at 5:04 PM and did serious damage. (Obviously, nowhere near as much as the recent 9.0 or 9.1 quake in Japan.) You probably remember the national news broadcasts saying that a portion of the Bay Bridge between San Francisco and Oakland had broken. If you don't remember that, you probably remember that the third game of the 1989 World Series was about to begin, but didn't because of the quake. End of side.)

George and I became aware of each other through the Pipeline. As I was reading everything in the December issue, I saw that Juergen was a new member of the Caliente Association. I also saw that he was an ET and the dates of his time on the Caliente were shortly after I had been the leading ET. I got his mailing address and wrote him.

Since then he and I have exchanged emails and phone calls. We don't live in the same area now, but about three hours apart by car.

We decided we should meet for lunch in Gilroy. Over our good lunch we talked about many



René is on the left and George is on the right. Note that between us the Caliente was represented.

things, but the Caliente was the major topic. We obviously knew that the Caliente had been

decommissioned. That was an understandable occurrence; however, something we both find interesting is that the fact she has been scrapped is sad for both of us. I guess that means we still have strong feelings about her.

Something I think is very special is that, while serving on the Caliente, Juergen Muelder in full uniform was sworn in as an American citizen in Redwood City.

Notice that our meeting each other occurred because of an interested perusal of the Pipeline. Careful reading of the contents of the Pipeline is well worthwhile.

Caliente keel plates buckled

By Miguel F. Ronquillo, RD2

1958-1961

The storm documented in the March issue of the "Pipeline" is probably one of many storms the USS Caliente weathered in its years of service.

I recall a similar storm, however I do not recall the date. I do remember we were moored at the fuel depot in Yokuska, Japan. The word came down from the radio room that there was a big typhoon approaching the main island and to fire up all boilers. All Navy ships were being ordered out to sea. Once crew members on shore leave returned and were accounted for, we headed 180 out of Tokyo Bay. Out in open sea, we headed 090 towards our home port of Long Beach, having our last WestPac port of call cut short.

The wrath of the storm was unavoidable and we were soon in the midst of it. The seas were heavy, at times when we in the trough of the wave, the crest would be well above our pilot house fourth deck level. We pitched and rolled wildly for almost 24 hours until we were past the storm.

After that, I recall that our compasses were not working correctly, at times spinning wildly. We navigated by radio beacon for some time. It was eerie and at times we felt we were in a Bermuda Triangle situation.

In time we made it across the Pacific, stopped at Hawaii for a short time and then continued to Long Beach, going into dry dock immediately at the Todd Shipyard. Examination revealed that the center keel plates had buckled as a result of rolling and pitching weathering out the storm.

What repairs were made if any, is unknown. Six months later we were back out at sea, with a full load of NSFO and AVGAS, with the bow headed 270 headed for WestPac.

Typhoon photographer identifies himself

By Pete McFarland, YNT3

1952-1953

I just wanted to let you know that I took all of the typhoon pictures on pages 5, 7, and 8 of the June 2011 Pipeline; as well as the picture of Taylor and Beard in the March 2010 Pipeline.

I have two photograph albums of pictures taken and assembled while on the Caliente in 1951-52. The albums are a little fragile now, and the color photos have faded; but most photos are annotated with names and dates. There are a total of more than 75 photos (all black and white) of the typhoon and its aftermath. Unfortunately all the negatives and letters describing the activities and incidences were stored at my parents home and destroyed after my Mother died in 1996.

Several years ago I had considered creating a web album to share these photos; but decided against it since it would take more time than I have to spare and I get too frustrated trying to learn new computer skills.

I enjoyed the typhoon reminiscences in the March Pipeline — it's been a long time since I thought about the typhoon in that detail.

Circumcision patient steps forward

By Jack Beatrice, SK2

1943-1946

I did not realize when I was reading the December 2010 Pipeline that I was being induced to write. On page 8 under Memories, I was the sailor for whom the late Dr. Bradford performed the circumcision.

We had just left Port Arthur, Texas when Dr. Bradford called for a short-arm inspection on the cargo deck. The doctor was surprised that Storekeeper Second Class John J. Beatrice had a green substance on his short-arm and requested the sailor report to sick bay after inspection.

As it turned out, the green substance was Palmolive soap. It was at this time the doctor stated that Sailor Beatrice was going to have lots of trouble with this subject and suggested I be circumcised and he could perform it. So, as they say, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." Doc Bradford performed the operation the next day and I was a crippled sailor when we went through the Panama Canal.

Editor's note: Since the receipt of Jack's memory and the earlier memory from Nancy M. Greenberg and Jane Bradford, the editor has done some on-line research and found that the American military was a big promoter of circumcisions during much of the 20th century. Circumcisions were far more common in military outfits than we realize. A now deceased friend of ours once told my wife about a short-arm inspection aboard the USS Pennsylvania in World War II that resulted in several men being sent off for the operation.

How he assembled a winning dragon boat crew

By B.A. Buscher, LCDR, SC, RET

1958-1960

I thought Pipeline readers might be interested in the story of how the Caliente won the dragon boat race on the Love Canal in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

We were assigned station ship at Kaohsiung, Taiwan, for a three-week period. At the time Kaohsiung's claim to fame was that it had 19 bars, all of which had dirt floors. The first day there, our captain returned after paying his obligatory courtesy calls. He called me to his cabin and said that the local Chinese admiral had challenged us to a dragon boat race. At the time I was supply officer and one of my collateral duties was athletic officer.

My first question was "What is a dragon boat and where is the Love River? It turned out the race was a yearly event with 15 or 20 boats entered. The Chinese Navy graciously was going to loan us one of its boats.

Next question: "When is the race and what do we use for a crew (we would need about 20

men)" The Captain said the race was four days away and he would allow us to leave the ship for practice as often as we thought necessary.

I put a notice in the Plan of the Day and made several announcements over the PA system. Net results: about four or five volunteers. Looking around I noticed that the biggest and strongest members of the crew were nearly all on some form of restriction or waiting for Captain's Mast. Being the "slick operator" that most Supply types were, I went back to the Captain and asked if he would drop the minor charges against the men awaiting Captain's Mast and drop the restriction on some of the other types. He bought it, and we now had a big, strong dragon boat crew with no experience.

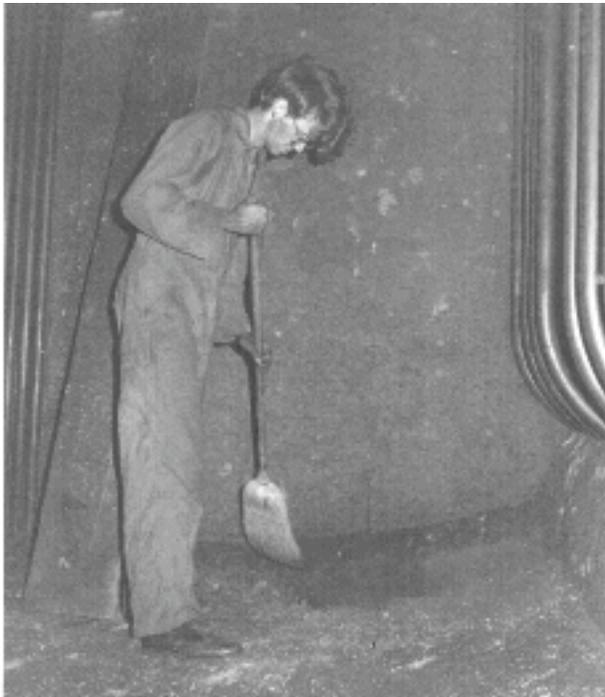
We had about three practices and learned how to really make the boat move. The secret was to dig the oar in only about a foot and not the full length.

The day of the race, there were a dozen other boats with crews who had been doing this for years. At any rate, our size and strength won the day. The Caliente came in first, beating the Chinese Navy boat by several yards. They had won the race for the previous two or three years.

The Captain, true to his word, dropped the Captain's masts and restriction. COMSERVPAC wrote us a nice letter and also ran the story in its magazine.

And that is how the Caliente won the dragon boat race on the Love River in Kaoshuing.

Editor's note: Two of the dragon boat crew members provided their memories of the race in the March 2009 Pipeline. Love Canal is the name for a channelized section of the Love River.



In these 1972 pictures from the files of the late Capt. Donald McGuiness, Gary Cooke, BTFA, performs the dirty clean-up jobs so often needed to keep the Caliente sailing. At right, he is emerging from the fire box of Number Two boiler.

**USS CALIENTE (AO-53) 17th REUNION
Thursday Sept. 22nd – Sunday Sept. 25th 2011
The Marriott Norfolk Waterside**



Reservations can be made at the Marriott Norfolk Waterside, Norfolk, VA by calling 800-874-0264 and identifying yourself as part of the USS Caliente Group. The rate is \$129.00 plus Norfolk city tax (8%), a Virginia State tax (5%) and a \$1.00 bed tax per room per night. The room rate is good for 3 days prior and 3 days post the reunion dates on a space available basis. Reservations must be made by 9 Sept. 2011. As in the past, room availability will be at 4:00 PM on arrival day. An early check-in may be requested but some hotels are good about this and some are not. I don't think the hotel will be full on the Sept.22, so an earlier check-in should be OK.

AGENDA FOR THE REUNION

Thursday Sept. 22

- a) Hotel check-in
- b) 3:00 PM until ??? – Reunion check-in at the Hospitality Room – all hands are invited to join in as we catch up with our shipmates, get (re)acquainted and share stories. Hors D'Ouevres will be provided at the reception from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM. A no host bar will be available (I'm always available to be hosted)

Friday Sept. 23

- a) Coffee, tea, juice and rolls will be provided in the Hospitality Room from 7:00 AM until 9:30 AM
- b) Free Time; or I can arrange either a 2 hour luncheon cruise or a 3 hour dinner cruise.

Saturday Sept. 24

- a) 9:00 AM – Annual business meeting; Coffee, tea, juice and rolls will be provided from 7:00 AM until 9:00 AM
- b) Free time until the banquet
- c) For those not interested in the dinner cruise on Friday night I could make arrangements for an optional two-hour luncheon cruise. The cost would be \$45 per person. The luncheon is buffet style.
- d) 6:00 PM – no host cocktails and pictures in the Banquet Room. Dinner will be served at 6:45 PM and will be followed by dancing to a DJ.

Sunday Sept. 25

- a) Farewells in the Hospitality Room; Coffee, tea, juice and rolls will be provided from 7:00 AM until 9:00 AM
- b) 12:00 PM – Hospitality room closes

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGN-UP SHEET TO:

Pat Hurton
14075 Kelsey Drive
Chico, CA 95973-9262
Phone: (530)343-4060
Email: gigandpat@digitalpath.net

Shipmates Name: _____

Spouse or Guests Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip: _____

Tel: _____ Yrs on Cal 19__ to 19__ Rate/Rank on Cal _____

Registration Fee: No. of attendees: _____ x \$125.00 per person = _____

Optional cruises: Please indicate whether or not you are interested in taking the optional cruises

Luncheon Cruise: Yes _____ No _____ No. of persons _____

Dinner Cruise: Yes _____ No _____ No. of persons _____

If you are interested in these options I need to know as soon as possible so I can firm up the plans. I will include one (or both) cruises in the final agenda and put the information in the June Pipeline. I will also include the payment arrangements for the options in the June Pipeline.

Please select from the following banquet entrees:

a) Herb Roasted Chicken No. _____

b) Roast Prime Rib of Beef with Herb Jus and Horseradish Cream No. _____

c) Fresh Atlantic Salmon with Leeks and Lobster Butter No. _____