

U.S.S. Mississinewa

AO-59

SCUTTLEBUTT

Fall 1999

AO-59 Reunion

Corpus Christi, TX • April 14th - 17th

The reunion started on Wednesday, April 14th, with crew members and family arriving throughout the day. The three reunion co-hosts, Mike Mair, Sarah Bright and Ron Fulleman greeted the attendees in the Ramada Inn Bayfront's hospitality suite on the 10th floor. It afforded a terrific view of the bay and was large enough to accommodate the impressive layout of literature, documents and photographs that co-host, Mike Mair (son of Jack Mair) had brought. His information covered about 10 tables. Joe Zikewich, who along with his wife, Alice, had accompanied Lucille Chaffee (widow of Jim Chaffee) had also set up a table describing his efforts in setting up the Peacoat Memorial, remembering those sailors who were buried at sea. There were literally several days worth of new and fascinating information regarding the U.S.S. Mississinewa (AO-59) available.

That first day was spent greeting new arrivals. For the crew the time was mostly spent getting reacquainted. The "family" atmosphere began right away. It hasn't really ended yet.

Common topics of discussion were mutual friends, shipboard antics and, of course, the sinking. Late into the evening, people could still be found talking over



Mike Mair, Sarah Bright, Ron Fulleman
Reunion Co-hosts: (Left to Right)

"old times" in the hospitality room. Sarah Bright and her sister, Judy Bradley (daughters of Tommie Sue and Earl Givens) did a marvelous job keeping the refreshments stocked in the hospitality room.

The next day, Thursday, started with a 10 a.m. meeting of all the attendees. Mike Mair described, in detail, the coming activities, his book efforts and also made official introductions of the other co-hosts, Sarah and myself, Ron (son of Ray Fulleman). Also introduced were some special guests; Linus Hawkins (of the U.S.S. Lackawanna), Sid Harris (who photographed the sinking), Drury Lee (who was at Ulithi on Nov. 20th, '44), Joe Zikewich, Bob Farrar (video photographer) and Virginia Williams (hotel's meeting coordinator).

That day was spent by many in the hospitality room reminiscing and

going over the interesting information supplied by Mike. Again, late into the night, attendees could be found with their families swapping sea stories in the hospitality room.

The next morning started early with a visit to the Ingleside Naval Base. We were greeted at



Sarah Bright, Judy Bradley, Earl Givens, Jack Mair, and Mike Mair
Earl and Jack Receiving Shellback Certificates:

the front gate by Petty Officer Jill Cook who took us to the Mess Hall where we ate lunch. There, we were met by Lt. Comdr. Humberto Quintanilla, who dined with us. The weather had turned a little chilly that morning but Lt. Comdr. Quintanilla's warm welcome to the AO-59 crew and family more than made up for the weather.

After thanking the AO-59 crew for their service to the Navy and the United States, the Lt. Comdr. said it was due to the efforts of those men of the Navy in World War II that gave him much of his direction in his naval career. He had served aboard the 2nd U.S.S. Mt. Hood and had been aboard the 2nd U.S.S. Mississinewa (AO-144), as well. He kindly offered his ship, the U.S.S. Warrior, MCM10, and his crew to be at the disposal of our group and to make ourselves at home. After that, he made himself available for questions while most of us climbed all over the ship, from the engine room to the bridge, fore and aft. For

those of us who had a more difficult time getting around, Lt. Comdr. Quintanilla had a longer ramp brought over to afford easier access to the upper decks. We could not have felt more welcomed by him and his crew.

After returning to the hotel, there was time for more reminiscing, document/photograph perusing and interviews conducted by Mike with some videotaping help from Al Bell, Jr. (son of Al Bell, Sr.) along with Mike's own son, BJ. Between events, Mike conducted group interviews (primarily by work division) for his book effort.

Saturday morning, with clear, blue skies, we started with a tour of the ship-turned-museum, U.S.S. Lexington, CV16. The Lexington group had reserved a stage and seating area on their hangar deck. Mike emceed over a beautiful memorial service to honor those men who had passed away serving our country aboard the U.S.S. Mississinewa (AO-59). A local color guard did a very proper job of presenting the colors, followed by a moving and poignant invocation by Larry Glaser. Along with that were emotionally moving addresses made by Tom Maher (brother of Jack Maher) and



Robert Kimbel, Wanda and Larry Glaser, Tom Maher, along with the Honor Guard
Memorial Service aboard the U.S.S. Lexington

Robert Kimbel (son of Robert Kimbel, Sr.). Tom's brother and Robert's father were both killed November 20, 1944, when



John "Jack" Mair at the Memorial Service aboard the U.S.S. Lexington

the AO-59 was torpedoed. Joe Zikewich remembered his friend, crewman Dick Dutton and spoke more about the Peacoat Memorial for sailors buried at sea.

The memorial service concluded with each of

the attending AO-59 crewmen, shoulder-to-shoulder, passing a wreath to the ship's rail. There it was slid over the side to the water below. This was done while the color guard's bugler played "Taps". It was truly an emotional culmination of the memorial service.

Later that evening, the banquet was held in the 10th floor banquet room of the hotel where Sarah and Judy had handsomely decorated the tables in a patriotic theme. Again, Mike emceed the banquet and Larry Glaser said Grace. The food was excellent! Many commented on it being the best meal they had during their stay in Corpus Christi.

After the banquet portion of the evening had finished, the Dunning Company took photographs for the Reunion Memory Book. Following the photography session, the group adjourned downstairs to a different banquet room. There we had a presentation of Shellback Certificates to Earl Givens and Jack Mair, two of the co-host's fathers whose certificates had gone down with the ship, but only after they went through a "toned-down" version of the original Shellback ceremony. Gus Livekos kindly brought up the fact that if a sailor didn't have his certificate for proof, the sailor would have to go through the ceremony again.

A "Thank You" card was presented to each of the co-hosts (Mike Mair, Sarah Bright and Ron Fulleman) by Joanne Lichte

(accompanying Jack Mair). All the crew present at the reunion had signed the cards. Mike updated everyone on his efforts with writing the book on the AO-59 and its crew. Lastly came the highlight of the evening, Sid Harris' presentation of the photographs he took during the fire fighting efforts to save the AO-59 back on November 20th, 1944. Sid had taken 39 pictures that Mike was able to put on overhead slides and projected on a screen to Sid's narrative. It was an incredible story of the efforts to save the Mississinewa only minutes after the AO-59 crew were being brought aboard rescue ships. Fleet tugs battled the fire amid tremendously thick black clouds of burning oil and exploding ammunition. Sid was a crewman of the fleet tug, U.S.S. Muncee. Sid's photographs captured the last minutes of the U.S.S. Mississinewa (AO-59) as she rolled over and slid under the surface of the water.

Our farewells were mostly said that night, followed by a few the next morning. Though we who attended the reunion went our separate ways, the family atmosphere of the event still stays with us. We will always remember the openness, friendship



and hospitality that were present at the reunion. We will long remember the stories we heard and the people we met.

I know I speak for all the co-hosts when I say to the crew and their family members that wherever you go, our hearts go with you.

- Ron Fulleman



U.S.S. Mississinewa AO-59 Crew Reunion

Bottom Row, Left to Right:

John Bayak, Ed Kinsler,
Larry Glaser, Fred Schaufus,
Andrew Johnson, Winston
Whitten, Harold Ritchie,
William Gimmeson, Al Bell,
Jack Mair, John D'Anna,
Fernando Cuevas, Jim Lewis

Top Row, Left to Right:

Robert Jones, Earl Givens,
Ray Fulleman, Earl Van Orden,
James Cunningham, Gus Liveakos,
James Hammond, Fred Caplinger



Left to Right:
Joanne Lichte,
Fred Schaufus,
Ray Fulleman &
Ron Fulleman



Special Note:

BJ Mair has put together a set of video tapes with crew members' interviews. Please contact Mike for a free copy.

Just some of the fascinating material on display thanks to Mike Mair's great efforts.



Left to Right:

1. John Bayak, Earle & Eileen Van Orden
2. Mike Mair, John D'Anna
3. James Cunningham, Harold Ritchie, Earl Givens
4. Winston Whitten, Andrew Johnson, John Mair, Fred Schaufus



Greetings... (Continued)

I made arrangements for a video interview with crewmen that were interested in visiting in a hotel conference room on Sunday October 17. Much to my surprise, ALL 22 crew members showed up to chat! We had a wonderful time together! The Lackawanna sailors recall to this day the tragic events at Ulithi. They expressed their admiration for the courage and bravery of the USS Mississinewa sailors as they escaped the AO-59.

Linus Hawkins, President, presided over the Sunday evening banquet that included sea stories and Ens. Tom Wicker (now Federal Court Judge Wicker) satire impersonation of their own Captain Homan. Yes indeed, the B.S.'er Award is alive and well with Judge Wicker impersonation. He still has a long way to go to compete with our beloved AO-59 B.S.'er, Gus Liveakos!

The USS Lackawanna AO-40 group will meet in Seattle in the fall of 2000 with tentative plans for a cross country Amtrak train trip with veterans and their spouses joining the Amtrak as it passes through their area. Sounds like fun! You may wish to consider joining this delightful group for their reunion in 2000! BJ is checking out Technical Schools this Fall for Police Science, Tracy just started driving and Nancy had Lasik surgery so that her contact lenses and eyeglasses are no longer necessary. We are getting settled in our new home. Our NEW address is 1525 Deborah Ct. Platteville, WI 53818. You may reach me toll free at 1-800-236-4327 CST 9am-5pm M-F. I'd like to hear from you!

- Mike Mair

AO-59

Suggestions for future newsletters!

Please send them to:

Bob Fulleman

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e-mail: azfull@usa.net

**AO-59 Ball Caps
Still available!**

Use "Merchandise" link
on website menu to
order

Peacoat Memorial

**...dedicated to all the men
who were buried at sea.**

**Help give them the
recognition
they deserve.**

Contact:

Joe Zikewich

789 Tonkawa Trail

Lake Orion, MI 48362

Phone: (248) 693-6348



Sorry, AO-59 polo shirts
are no longer available for
purchase.

U.S.S. MISSISSINEWA
AO-59

May 18, 1944 — November 20, 1944