

# U.S.S. Mississinewa

# AO-59

# SCUTTLEBUTT



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<http://www.usmississinewa.com>

May 18, 1944 -

**Ms. Margaret Pence sends the U.S.S. Mississinewa, AO-59 on her way to serve the U.S. Navy fueling ships at sea.**

By Ron Fulleman



An amazing thing happened. Margaret Pence (now, Margaret "Peggy" Howell) contacted me after finding the USS *Mississinewa* website. Margaret, at 18-years of age, was the young woman who christened the *Mississinewa* back on May 18, 1944.

Margaret now lives in La Jolla, California, with one of her daughters, Ruth. While visiting her other daughter, Susan and son-in-law, Peter, in Los Angeles, my wife and I were able to meet these truly gracious people. It was not a surprise to see the nautically themed decorations in Susan and Peter's house. They had many photographs of Margaret's father, Captain Henry Pence, who was a "career" Navy man. One photo showed Captain Pence standing with President Herbert Hoover and the president of Argentina at the time. Amongst many other accomplishments, Captain Pence commanded the U.S.S. *McFarland* (1921-1924), and later was as a member of the Joint Post War Committee (which evolved into the Joint Chiefs of Staff) as a senior member of the Subcommittee on Far Eastern Affairs (1944-1945).

Margaret told me that her father, Captain Pence, encouraged his daughters to christen Navy ships. And that fatherly

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advice resulted in Margaret christening not only the USS *Mississinewa*, but also a tug boat and, in 1943, the US submarine, *Mingo*. Proudly on display was the container that the champagne bottle was in from the *Mingo* christening. Margaret said the encasement for the *Mississinewa's* bottle was similar. It was a silver encasement for a bottle with the date and ship's name inscribed on it.

Our meeting lasted for about 3 hours in which, Margaret, showed us some pictures she had from an album about the christening and explained who some of the people were in the photographs.

Margaret reminisced about that cold day in May of 1944, christening the USS *Mississinewa*. Breaking the bottle on the bow of the *Mississinewa* at about the five-foot level, the ship looked like a tall building to Margaret who had her mother and father on the ceremonial platform as well as Captain Beck, his wife, and some other dignitaries. She remembered her joy in being successful in breaking the champagne bottle on her first try. After the christening ceremony, Margaret and her family kept in contact with Captain Beck and eventually heard about the sinking. She described how her family went into a mourning period themselves at the loss of the ship and some of its crew, to which they felt a strong connection.

I, in return, was able to fill her in on more of the *Mississinewa* story. Margaret told me how she thrilled she was to hear the stories I was able to tell her about the *Miss* and gave me some photos of the Shellback ceremony held aboard the *Mississinewa* sent to her by Captain Beck. I brought an enlargement of the crew photo, the berthing chart of Ulithi Atoll, and the blueprint of the ship to show her and her family.

It was certainly a memorable visit with such a military family; with Margaret's father's Navy career, her late husband, Dr. Fancis Howell, having been a colonel in the Army, and Peter's son a new ensign in the Navy. It was truly an honor to have had the opportunity to not only meet such a key person in the history of the USS *Mississinewa* as Margaret, but also to meet such wonderful people. Margaret and her family could not have been nicer, or more welcoming to my wife and me. It was a visit that I will remember fondly for the rest of my life.



November 2009 -

Margaret Pence Howell, looking over a copy of the U.S.S. *Mississinewa* ship's plans with Ron Fulleman

