



2nd Quarter  
2008

*"Rest well, yet sleep lightly and hear the call, if again sounded, to provide firepower for freedom..."*

***THE JERSEYMAN***

6 Years - Nr. 58

**USS NEW JERSEY'S CREW  
REMEMBER VIETNAM...**



May 1968

**"White water kicks fifty feet high as the battleship New Jersey (BB-62)  
starts a high-speed run"**

## THE JERSEYMAN

### Looking Back... by Paul Stillwell

#### Battleship Skipper

Forty years ago this spring, the Navy recommissioned the battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62). Thousands of people gathered at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard to see the reincarnation of a ship that had been mothballed twice previously—after World War II and after the Korean War. Now another war was in progress, and she would be headed for Vietnam.

The weather was sunny, the ship was draped in bunting, and music filled the air. So also did optimism. Even as public opinion was turning ever more steadily against the war, the new crewmen of the *New Jersey* had the feeling that they could exert a positive influence on the outcome.

On that April day, the new commanding officer, Captain J. Edward Snyder, Jr., used a simple gesture to express his feelings about the men he would take to war. During the ceremony the podium for speakers faced the crowd of VIPs and other guests ashore. When it came his turn to speak, the captain turned 90 degrees to face the fantail, where the families of the crew were sitting. He spoke directly to them, saying that to him they were the important ones. It was a grandstand move, and for Snyder there would be many others in the months ahead. The crew clearly perceived his loyalty downward and rewarded him with its affection in return.

In World War II, Snyder had been an ensign on board the battleship *Pennsylvania* (BB-38) during the 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf. He was thus infused with the battleship traditions of the old Navy and brought some with him to the new. For instance, he added a bugler to the crew. He insisted on smartness in professional matters—ship handling, traditional courtesies, spit-and-polish cleanliness, and an accuracy of shore bombardment gunfire that rivaled the performance of the old battleships of World War II.

But he also had an informality that sometimes leaned to the zany. He decreed that crew members did not have to wear hats when they were topside, explaining breezily that they might just blow off when the guns fire. He himself had an unruly shock of dark hair that fell across his forehead when he wasn't wearing a cap. Some of the gun tubs—left empty when the 40-mm antiaircraft guns were removed during reactivation—still remained in place. Snyder directed that two of them in the superstructure be painted light blue inside, and he dubbed them swimming pools. Once he had a “pool” filled and then playfully donned his swimming trunks and rode an air mattress atop the water.

When the ship was under way, the captain expressed confidence that those on watch on the bridge would handle their jobs well, and he wandered throughout the ship to spend time with the crew. He might show up in the bakery, for instance, in the wee small hours and compliment those who had the night shift in preparing for the next day's meals. Each month he presided over cake cutting in the mess deck when crewmen with birthdays gathered to celebrate.

By the time the *New Jersey* got to the war zone in the autumn of 1968, her mission had changed dramatically from the one intended. Most of North Vietnam was then off-limits to bombing and shelling—part of an attempt to bring the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table. Within a month of the ship's arrival, the rest of North Vietnam moved to the restricted list as well. The new mission was to provide gunfire support for Soldiers and Marines ashore. Snyder liked to brag that whenever the *New Jersey* showed up, the enemy troops backed off to be out of range of her guns.



US Naval Institute Photo Archive

*The USS New Jersey's Captain Edward Snyder, Jr., a shock of hair falling over his forehead, chats with Ann-Margret. The entertainer, as well as the rest of the Bob Hope Christmas Show, performed on board the battleship in 1968 off the coast of South Vietnam.*

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Sometimes, though, the enemy was bold, and then the battleship used her guns in anger. One night the calls for help came by radio from ashore; they specified precise positions where the projectiles should fall. The ship pumped out round after round. In the *New Jersey's* plotting room the spots gradually formed a circle. The Americans were surrounded and thus were saved by the ship from being obliterated. In another instance, the feedback came from Marine Major Ron Smaldone, in command of an outpost that was nearly overrun. His one-sentence testimonial to Snyder, "If it hadn't been for the *New Jersey*, they would have zapped our ass."

"The following spring the ship returned to the States at the end of the deployment, and I was privileged to join the crew at that point. I saw firsthand Ed Snyder's charismatic persona and its effect on his men. Too soon that summer's midshipman training cruise was over. The *New Jersey* was scheduled to steam again to Vietnam, but the order came to decommission her instead. When he spoke during the ceremony where he relinquished command to his successor, Captain Robert Peniston, Snyder expressed his bitterness: "War is hell, and it is also expensive, and the American people have tired of the expense of defending freedom."

With that, he drove away in his powder blue Thunderbird with New Jersey state license plates that bore the legend "BB-62." He became a rear admiral and later had a long tenure as Oceanographer of the Navy.

This past November Snyder died at age 83. Retired Master Chief Petty Officer Tom Helvig serves as editor of an on-line newsletter, *The Jerseyman*: (<http://www.battleshipnewjersey.org/history/thejerseyman.php>). After Snyder's passing, Helvig received many messages from former crew members who wrote of their admiration for the skipper. Several expressed the wish that they could have spent even more time under his command.

I share their wish.

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(See Paul Stillwell, April 2008, *Naval History*)

**Editor's Note:** All photos not individually credited within this issue were provided to *The Jerseyman* from the personal collection of **Rear Admiral J. Edward Snyder Jr.** - TH



## THE JERSEYMAN

**Lieutenant (Junior Grade) R. Scott Cheyne, USNR**  
**Assistant Public Affairs Officer**  
**USS *New Jersey* (BB-62)**



Photo courtesy of Scott Cheyne

### **My first sighting...**

I was commissioned Ensign at Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island on 2 February 1968. Because David Eisenhower, grandson of the former President and future son-in-law of the next President, was in my graduating class the featured speaker at the commissioning ceremony was presidential candidate Richard Milhous Nixon. I'm sure the Naval Base Commander was delighted with all the extra security and special requests that came with the Nixon entourage. I specifically recall a young press aide by the name of Diane Sawyer (now of ABC News) handing out press releases to the swarm of reporters covering the event.

I had already received my orders and within a few days of my commissioning I made my way to the Philadelphia Naval Base to join the pre-commissioning detail of USS *New Jersey* (BB-62). After I arrived at the base and checked in to the Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ; the ship had been moved from the "mothball" fleet to Pier 4 but was not yet ready to provide quarters for officers and crew) I asked someone for directions to Pier 4 and walked over. As I approached the pier she came into view: the largest and most beautiful fighting ship I had ever seen (at least from such a close distance).

I went up the gangway and presented my orders to the officer of the deck (we stood deck watches even though the ship was not yet commissioned). I was soon introduced to LTJG Bill Beuret who had been charged with greeting all newly arriving officers. I believe it was he who affectionately advised me that Ensigns were more commonly known as "Insects". Bill and I remain close friends to this day,

Given my designation as Assistant Public Affairs Officer I was assigned to the Executive Department. I was introduced to LT Dick Kerr to whom I was to report and, subsequently, to CDR Jim Elfelt, Executive Officer. Within a few days CDR Elfelt asked that I meet with New Jersey's Commanding Officer, Captain J. Edward Snyder, Jr., to hear his views on the ship's public image vis-a-vis the nation's media outlets (all our titles were preceded by "prospective" until the commissioning in April but I have omitted the reference in this document in the interest of simplicity).

Captain Snyder advised me that, because New Jersey was about to become the only commissioned battleship in the world, with 16" guns capable of firing 2,000 pound projectiles more than 20 nautical miles, both he, and she, were the objects of tremendous attention and scrutiny from the press. It was his way of telling me that, since I was the liaison with the press, I had my work cut out for me. Because Captain Snyder was intently focused on news coverage of BB-62 he wanted me to be in regular contact with him and to keep him advised of any and all inquiries from reporters. The result was an unusual reporting relationship. In effect (though not in fact) an "Insect" was reporting directly to the Commanding Officer. I did my best to keep LT Kerr and, via him, CDR Elfelt, advised of all my communications with the Captain.

### **Commissioning Ceremony...**

When I had come aboard in February it appeared there were more civilians than naval personnel on the ship every day. New Jersey was undergoing a significant renovation and upgrading of systems after having lain idle and silent for 11 years. There were electricians, pipe fitters, technicians and crane operators everywhere. What's more the ship was in a disorderly state with tools, equipment and newly-arrived material strewn about both external and internal spaces.

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The ship and her officers and crew were in their glory (and dress blues) for the event that had been in the planning stages for more than a year: the hoisting of the National Ensign and Commission Pennant and the Acceptance of Command by Captain Snyder. Because of the significance of the occasion, the commissioning of the world's only active dreadnought, the official party included some distinguished guests. Rear Admiral Robert Speck, Commandant of the Fourth Naval District, delivered introductory remarks and the featured speaker was Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius.



Upon acceptance of command and the setting of the first watch, Captain Snyder then told the gathered crowd that New Jersey was fully prepared to fulfill her mission and live up to her motto: "Firepower for Freedom." We then prepared for our departure from Philadelphia and transit to our new home port, Long Beach, California (affectionately known as LOSA/LBEACH).

### Underway...

By May 1968 we had been at sea only once – for sea trials – during the yearlong refitting process. As the term suggests, sea trials are a three or four day period at sea during which all engineering, communications, weapons, navigation and other systems are tested and checked for readiness under the watchful eye of the Navy's Commander Operational Test and Evaluation Force (a two-star admiral) and his staff. Although I'm sure the admiral doesn't participate personally in every sea trials operation, he was aboard for ours. The process also provided an opportunity for live training of officers and crew.

As New Jersey steamed back up the Delaware River and toward Pier 4 at the conclusion of sea trials, Captain Snyder let it be known to the officer of the deck that he wanted an ordinary broom to be run up the mast. The order was relayed to the signal bridge and up went the broom, bristles skyward. This was Captain Snyder's way of signaling to all who cared to know that we had made a "clean sweep" of our sea trials – successful completion of every phase.

But now it was time to go. On a clear, calm morning in mid-May the boilers were fired up, the mooring lines were hauled aboard and, with one long blast of the ship's whistle, USS New Jersey was underway.

The first leg of the journey was probably the most arduous. The Delaware River runs 86 miles from Philadelphia to the Atlantic and, for us, it meant a 12-hour sea and anchor detail. That's a long time to stand watch.

It should be noted here that 1968 was a year of protest on college campuses and a host of other venues throughout the country. The protests were aimed at the U.S. presence in Vietnam and at the elected leaders responsible for the war effort. Yet, strangely, they did not appear to be aimed at us. As we steamed down the Delaware we passed (barely) under a number of bridges. My recollection is of cheering and flag-waving crowds seen on every bridge we passed.

After a brief port visit to Norfolk our sailing orders had us steaming around the east coast of Cuba, turning to starboard to pass Guantanamo Bay and then along the southern flank of the island. As we proceeded westward along the Cuban coast features on the island were clearly visible and it seemed we were only a few miles offshore. I remember thinking to myself there must be a reason for the proximity. Perhaps it was to give Fidel Castro and his regime an opportunity to advise their Soviet colleagues that we were on the way.



### The Panama Canal...

One of the most memorable parts of the voyage from Philadelphia to Long Beach was the transit of the Panama Canal. My recollection is that we arrived at the Caribbean entry to the canal late in the day and dropped anchor overnight in preparation for an early morning commencement of the transit. The trip took approximately 12 hours and included three sets of locks (Gatun, Pedro-Miguel, and Miraflores).

Iowa class battleships were designed and built with the Panama Canal in mind. New Jersey's beam is 108 feet 3 inches and the locks were constructed with a width of 110 feet – not much room to spare. The subsequent addition of pliable rubber bumpers reduced the width of the locks to approximately 108 feet and we literally had to squeeze through. Fire hoses were charged and manned along the port and starboard sides of the main deck and the crew periodically hosed down the sides to keep them cool against the heat that resulted from the friction. We made it through without incident and set a course to the northwest and our new home port.

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### **REFTRA...**

As I recall, we arrived at Naval Base Los Angeles Long Beach on 6 June, 1968. Other than a throng of local press, the arrival and mooring at Pier E were uneventful. Many of the officers and crew reunited with families who had traveled from Philadelphia and other points across the country. During transit we had been transferred from the Navy's Second Fleet to the First Fleet and to Cruiser Destroyer Group Long Beach. Shortly after our arrival and pursuant to communications between the Cruiser Destroyer Group Command, the Naval Base, and Captain Snyder, it was agreed New Jersey would host a two-day open house during which members of the public would be admitted to the Naval Base and a tour of the ship.

The event was held on a Saturday and Sunday and many members of ship's company volunteered to give up their weekend liberty to assist with the logistics of hosting and managing a large crowd. To our mild surprise the event drew 50,000 visitors but it came off without incident.

Once we were settled in at LOSA/LBEACH we began a three month period of REFTRA (Refresher Training), a process that had us at sea much of the time and in and out of both Long Beach and San Diego. The primary reason for our time in San Diego was the fact that Naval Air Station North Island controlled the San Clemente Island Range Complex, a naval bombing and firing range.

San Clemente is a 60-square mile island that has been operated by various naval commands since 1934. We spent many days firing both main battery (16") and secondary battery (5") rounds at designated targets on the island, providing officers and crew an opportunity to become more proficient in their gunnery skills. Even though San Clemente is approximately 50 miles from shore we heard through the chain of command the occasional complaint regarding windows and dishes rattling on the mainland.

San Diego was also the site of a weekend open house for the general public. Perhaps because of the large number of military and retired military personnel in the area the San Diego event drew crowds even larger than those we had seen in Long Beach.



Upon the successful completion of Refresher Training the time had come to steam west.

### **WESTPAC...**

As every sailor knows, the transit from the U.S. west coast to the western Pacific is a long one – between 5,000 and 6,000 miles depending on the destination. Even without port calls it would take us, steaming 24 hours a day at an average speed of 25 knots, approximately 10 days.

We departed Long Beach in early September in company with USS Towers (DDG-9). Our departure, like our arrival, was uneventful. After we said farewell to family and friends we quietly slipped out of our berth and left the harbor en route to Vietnam and New Jersey's first combat since Korea.

As I recall we did, in fact, make two port visits on the way across the Pacific. The first was Pearl Harbor where we went for briefings with CINCPACFLT and other Navy commands involved with our mission. For me the most memorable event of that port call was our entry into the harbor. As we passed by the Arizona Memorial we slowed to about 5 knots and all hands stood at attention as our saluting battery fired a 21-gun salute to honor Arizona and the battleship sailors who died there on December 7, 1941. It was a solemn and moving experience.

We stayed in Pearl for two or three days and set sail for our next destination, Subic Bay in the Philippines. Subic Bay, which is about 24 hours steaming from Vietnam, was to become our home away from home for the next eight months. After each four to six week stay on the gun line we returned to Subic to re-arm, re-fuel and re-supply as well to get some R&R. It should be noted here that Subic was not our only source for ammunition, fuel and supplies. We often received supplies via UNREP (Underway Replenishment) and, on least one occasion, via VERTREP (Vertical Replenishment, with Navy helicopters making numerous flights back and forth between us and a supply ship).

The transit from Pearl to Subic was pretty routine – just steer a straight course hour after hour and day after day. Two events, however, left me with lasting memories. The first occurred when I was standing the mid-watch as JOOD. Although I'm not certain of this, I believe the OOD was LT Rockwell.

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We were in the middle of the Pacific (it seemed like the middle of nowhere) when our surface search radar picked up a contact about 25 miles off our port bow. While picking up a radar contact in the middle of the night was not an unusual occurrence, this one merited attention: he was tracking at constant bearing and decreasing range. Given that he was off our port bow we had the right of way and were required by the Rules of the Road to maintain course and speed. He was required to maneuver so as to avoid a collision. The problem was he didn't.

As the contact grew closer the OOD sent a message to the Captain advising him of the situation. The Captain's reply was that he wanted us to keep him posted. As the contact drew closer still we could see him visually – masthead and range lights, starboard running light. He showed no sign of changing course or speed. We assumed, though we didn't know, that the helmsman had fallen asleep or left his post.

When the contact was within a few miles the OOD sent another message to the Captain: "Captain to the Bridge." Within a minute or so Captain Snyder stepped onto the bridge and announced so all could hear, "This is the Captain. I have the deck and the conn."

His eyes alternated between the radar screen and the contact which turned out to be a large merchant vessel of unknown origin. The contact came closer and closer and I kept waiting for the Captain to order a course or speed change because I thought we were *in extremis*.

He said nothing. He kept his eyes fixed on the contact as it approached to what appeared to be a few hundred yards. His years at sea told him it would be close, but there would be no collision. A few seconds later the ship silently passed across our bow and, by the time his stern had cleared, he was less than a hundred feet away. I could hear the hiss of his prop wash. Once he was clear the Captain returned the deck to the OOD and the conn to me and returned to his cabin. I don't think the other ship ever knew we were there.

The second memorable event in the transit occurred a day or two later, this time during daylight. Naval intelligence had picked up two Russian "Bear" bombers out over the Pacific and heading directly toward us. Everyone knew there was no hostile intent – the Soviets just wanted us to know they knew where we were.

As the bombers approached the Captain ordered radio silence and cessation of all electronic emissions for us and for Towers. We maintained course and speed. As the aircraft – large, propeller driven, four engines – approached to the point we made visual contact the Captain ordered all hands on deck to "smile for the camera." They made two large, slow loops around our formation at an altitude of about 1,000 feet. A radio operator aboard one of the aircraft called us on Fleet Common, in perfect English, correctly using both New Jersey's and Towers' call signs. We didn't bite. After their over flight was concluded they headed back in the direction from which they had come and we proceeded on to Subic.

### On station, Vietnam...

After taking on fuel, ammunition and supplies at Subic we left port and headed to Vietnam. Finally, after more than a year of refitting, training and steaming across the Pacific we were ready to fulfill the mission for which we had been reactivated: firing 2,000 pound projectiles to destroy enemy targets.

Our first day on the gun line was 30 September 1968. As with most major evolutions involving BB-62, our first mission was covered by an on-board delegation of reporters and camera crews representing a number of national news organizations. They, and we, got a little more excitement than anticipated.

The rules of engagement for New Jersey required that all main battery missions (16") be spotted by aerial spotters in order to confirm targets and enhance the accuracy of our rifles. Our first mission was against two North Vietnamese gun positions and two supply areas just north of the DMZ. Our spotter was a Marine A-4 Skyhawk with a two-man crew out of Danang. The spotting was extremely helpful. As I recall, our first round was within about 200 meters of the target and the spotter walked us in until the target was destroyed. He then gave us the coordinates of the next target and we continued firing until we had destroyed all four.



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The unanticipated excitement came when the A-4 Skyhawk was hit by antiaircraft fire and began to lose fuel. The spotter and his pilot made a quick decision to head out to sea before bailing out in order to improve their chance of rescue. They made “feet wet” and bailed out within a mile or two of the beach. USS Towers which, as Captain Snyder described it, was “riding shotgun” for us spotted two chutes coming down and had a boat in the water even before the Marines splashed. The aircraft plunged into the sea within a few hundred yards of the ship but the two Marines were pulled out of the water unharmed. After the two were brought aboard Towers the spotter came aboard New Jersey (via Towers’ life boat) for a brief meeting with the Captain, the gunners and the media. As I recall it the same

spotter was up in a different aircraft the very next day.

We spent the month of October firing at targets in North Vietnam, ranging as far north as Haiphong. We took incoming from shore batteries on a couple of occasions but were not hit. The closest we came to getting hit was when we could see rounds (most likely 155mm) splashing within 50 or 100 yards.

### Below the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel...

President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a bombing halt north of Vietnam’s DMZ (the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel) on 1 November 1968. The halt included shore bombardment (SHORBOM) by surface ships including, of course, USS New Jersey. Thus the rest of our deployment was spent off the coast of South Vietnam firing missions in support of a myriad of troop units on the ground. Among those I recall are the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (The Big Red One), the RVN (Republic of Vietnam) Army, the ROK (Republic of Korea) Marines and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. Though we occasionally ventured south, the majority of our time was spent in I Corps, the area just south of the DMZ.

We would typically be assigned to support a specific unit for a period of several days or a week or more. The standard procedure was for the commander of the unit (typically a bird colonel or flag officer) and his staff to fly out via helicopter on day #1 to meet with Captain Snyder and his senior staff to go over targets, coordinates, GLO (gunfire liaison officer) and communications coordination. It was a tradition for the unit commander to present a gift to the Captain – most often a captured AK 47. By the end of our deployment Captain Snyder had so many AK 47s (all purposefully disabled by our Weapons Department) that he began giving them away.



After a time the missions seemed to become routine. We communicated with our assigned unit, we fired main and secondary battery missions in their support, and we moved on to the next assignment. Two missions, however, still stand out in my mind, and the first was a mission in support of an Army unit. We were about two miles off the beach and preparing to fire our 16” guns at a target given to us by the unit. A spotter was in the air and I was on the bridge (JOOD). As we were getting ready to fire a U.S. Coast Guard Cutter entered and slowed on our firing line, directly between us and the target. The OOD, LT Rockwell, contacted the cutter via Fleet Common and advised that we were about to fire and that, perhaps, he might want to get out of the way. The cutter replied that he, too, was on a mission and could or would not move. LT Rockwell’s responded by saying, “OK, but I suggest you roll down your windows because we’re about to shoot.” The cutter didn’t move, and we fired right over him. No harm, no foul.

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The second memorable event began at 0100 one night when we were steaming off the coast in the vicinity of the DMZ. At that hour we received an urgent radio message from a Marine observation post at the southern edge of the zone. I cannot recall the name of the unit but I will never forget its call sign: *Rock crusher 26 Charlie*.

When we got the call the unit was being overrun by a much larger unit of NVA (North Vietnamese Army) regulars. The guys who wore the black pajamas. Rock crusher was in urgent need of gunfire support to fend off the invasion. We immediately went to GQ and began firing 5” projectiles at the coordinates given us by Rock crusher.

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Among the munitions we fired were star shells, 5" projectiles that drop a flare held aloft by a small parachute for illumination to enable Rock crusher to see the bad guys. We fired all night, killing several enemy soldiers, and the NVA left at daylight.

The observation post was saved. We fired a total of 1,710 rounds in about five hours and, by morning, the 01 level was piled high with shell casings...

### **The Bob Hope show...**

Between missions there was a brief hiatus over Christmas when, as I recall, both sides declared and adhered to a 24-hour cease fire. We remained on the gun line and had the good fortune of receiving a visit by comedian Bob Hope and his entourage including the gorgeous Ann Margret and 20 beautiful "Gold Diggers". As every modern day U. S. military man and woman knows, Bob Hope traveled the world for years entertaining the troops during the Christmas season, and 1968 was no exception.

The troupe had been in-country entertaining soldiers and Marines but on Christmas day they landed on New Jersey's helicopter deck, three or four choppers landing one at a time. Hope and his singers and dancers performed from the top of a 16" gun turret (I believe it was turret #1) and most of ship's company watched from the main deck. The show was a big hit. The show lasted about 90 minutes after which the helicopters returned to pick them up and transport them to their next performance. We remained on station until the end of the cease fire and then it was back to work.

### **The long way home...**

We spent the first three months of 1969 on the gun line, with brief trips out to sea for UNREP and a few two or three-day visits to Subic. Our combat assignment ended at the end of March and, after a final stop at Subic to off-load ammunition (everyone assumed we would be back in WESTPAC before year's end to pick it up for another deployment), we were ordered to sail home to Long Beach.

As Public Affairs Officer I was responsible for gathering and disseminating vital statistics regarding our deployment. One statistic I remember to this day (I'm sure a shipmate will correct me if I'm wrong) is 7,688. That's how many 16" rounds of ammunition we fired at enemy targets during our 8-month deployment. We fired many times that number of 5" rounds.

Our assignment complete, we headed east and out of the western Pacific on 9 April with a scheduled arrival date in Long Beach of 19 April. During the trip home we were in company with USS Coral Sea (CVA 43).

Then on 15 April, when we were more than half way back across the Pacific, North Korean fighter jets shot down a U. S. Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane in international waters over the Sea of Japan. The Navy immediately ordered a carrier group into the area and USS New Jersey was ordered to turn around and set a course for the Sea of Japan and await further instructions.

We made a brief stop at Yokosuka to re-arm and immediately went back to sea. Over the next several days the crisis eased and, when it became apparent that no combat operations were imminent, we were released once again and ordered to sail to Long Beach. This time we made it all the way, arriving back at our home port on 5 May 1969.

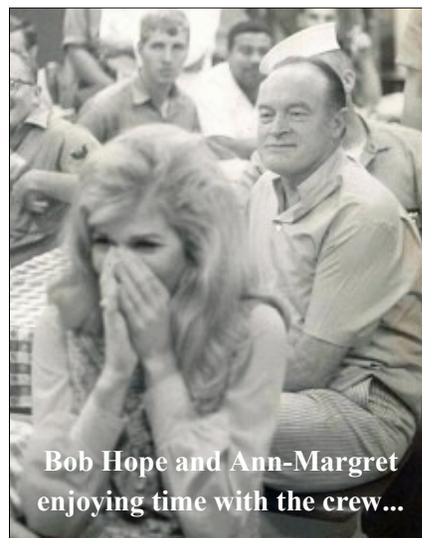
We hosted a midshipmen's cruise over the summer with port calls at Alameda, Tacoma and Pearl Harbor. I remember sitting at the bar at the officers' club in Pearl watching Astronaut Neil Armstrong's famous "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" pronouncement as he set foot on the moon.

We returned to Long Beach in August and, on 22 August, received the shocking news that the Navy had decided to include USS New Jersey on a list of vessels to be decommissioned as a result of budget reductions. Five days later, as a result of orders that had been cut months before, we held a Change of Command ceremony. Captain J. Edward Snyder, Jr. headed east to become Chief of Staff for Commander Cruiser Destroyer Force Atlantic Fleet in Newport, Rhode Island and command of USS New Jersey (BB-62) was assumed by Captain Robert C Peniston, USN.

**Submitted by:**

**R. Scott Cheyne**

**Boxford, Massachusetts - January 8, 2008**



**Bob Hope and Ann-Margret  
enjoying time with the crew...**

## THE JERSEYMAN

# 1968



May 1968

“Admiral Halsey’s daughter, along with her son, present the Admiral’s personal flag to the ship on the occasion of a formal visit.”



10 September 1968

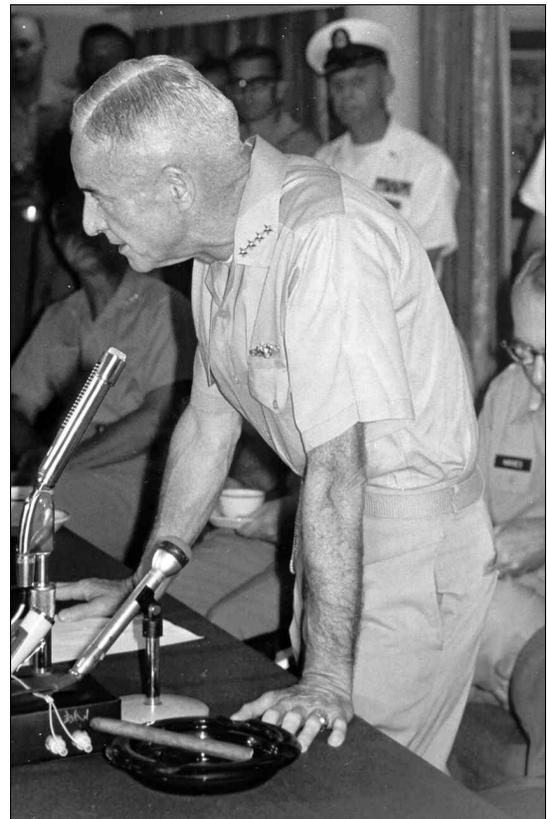
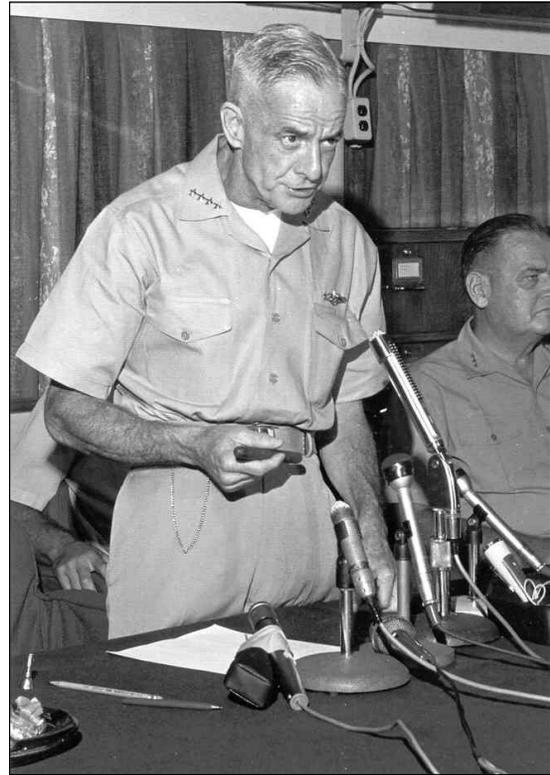
“Being led by the Chief Master-at-Arms, BMCM Lyle E. Chastain, Admiral John S. McCain Jr., Commander in Chief Pacific Forces and his staff are given a tour of the Battleship New Jersey (BB-62).

The ship paused in the Hawaiian Islands while in transit to join other units of the Seventh Fleet.”

**THE JERSEYMAN****1968****10 September 1968**

**“...While aboard, the Admiral was  
presented with a ship’s plaque and  
“Admiral ”Bull” Halsey’s battle flag.”**

**The presentation was conducted by Commanding Officer  
USS *New Jersey* (BB-62),  
Captain J. Edward Snyder, Jr.”**



## THE JERSEYMAN

### Forty Years and Counting... by George Stavros

April 6, 1968—"Today is when history starts again, yet still chained with the past by links of men and links of steel."

Those words from the 1968 U.S. Navy documentary about the USS New Jersey sum up the mix of emotions I felt as I stood with shipmates on the fantail of "The Big J" as it was recommissioned and on its way to becoming the longest-serving, most highly decorated battleship in U.S. Navy history.

Now 40 years later, the recollections, like the legacy of this ship, come drifting through my memories like the fading billows of smoke from those 16-inch guns. In our two years together, the Big J and I lived a lifetime of memories. Here are just a few.



Photo courtesy of George Stavros

Being an avid student and lover of history, I think that was part of the overwhelming emotion and pride I felt at being a crewmember of the Big J. In addition to her distinguished history (past, present and future), this was once the flagship of Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey at the battles of Leyte Gulf and Iwo Jima, two of the more famous episodes in her long and glorious career. I would often stroll the fantail and think of Admiral Halsey playing deck tennis back there which he often did whenever time allowed. I could pace those magnificent teakwood decks and gaze at this steel miracle of speed and firepower and imagine it was World War II and Korea. Captain Snyder kept Admiral Halsey's flag cabin intact as a shrine, complete with the period furnishings and whenever I had the opportunity to escort guests into it, I almost expected the Admiral to greet us.

When the Navy announced the New Jersey would be recommissioned for Vietnam, I was among 15,000 Navy-men who applied for one of the 1,500 billets. I was astonished and gratified that I was among the elite (as we were told), that had been chosen. So too was a first-class petty officer (I now forget his name) who, after winning one of the coveted billets, was informed that he had passed his exam for chief petty officer. But, because his billet on the New Jersey was for a first class petty officer, he would now be reassigned. Any enlisted man who ever managed to make it to chief petty officer can understand what it means. Yet this man declined his promotion in order to go aboard the Big J. I am happy to relate that we heard the Navy was so impressed, that he was allowed to take his billet aboard USS *New Jersey* - as a chief petty officer.

When we left Philadelphia in May 1968 after recommissioning, it was at the height of the huge antiwar demonstrations that were fracturing the nation. One group of protesters vowed to string a line of rowboats tied to each other across the Delaware River and "prevent" the Big J from sailing out to the ocean on her voyage to her home port of Long Beach, California. When a reporter asked Captain Snyder what he would do if he confronted this "obstacle" on his way down the river, he patiently explained that when the 57,000-ton ship was moving ahead at standard speed and he gave the order to reverse engines, it would still take a mile and a half for the ship to come to a complete halt. With that dry, sardonic and no-nonsense wit for which he was so famous, the Captain said, "Any rowboat that gets in our way is going to have a 108-foot-wide hole in it." I don't know if the protesters ever heard that comment, but we didn't see any on our way out into the Atlantic.

One of the most poignant moments for me aboard the Big J came as we steamed into Pearl Harbor in the fall of 1969 on our way to Vietnam. Everyone knows that two U.S. Navy ships that pass at close quarters follow a time-honored and strict tradition of rendering honors. Junior officers consult manuals that identify the rank and date of rank of the commanding officer of the ship they are encountering. The ship whose captain is junior is then obligated to render honors to the senior, usually by announcing on the PA system, "Attention to Port (or Starboard)" and everyone outside comes to attention and at the command "hand salute" salutes the honored vessel, which then reciprocates by calling its crew to attention and returning the salute. These sorts of encounters happen frequently and are more or less routine. I was on only one other ship in my Navy career besides the Big J but it was the only ship on which I remember being saluted by civilian vessels, who would lower their national flag to a half-mast dip in salute, to which the Big J would respond with a similar salute. I was informed that our flag was only dipped in response to a salute and never dipped to salute any other flag. So with all this in mind, we manned the rails in our dress whites as we steamed into Pearl Harbor and came upon the sunken hulk of the battleship *Arizona*, sunk at Pearl Harbor by a Japanese bomb.

## THE JERSEYMAN

Her flag is raised and lowered each day as it is on every Navy ship moored or at anchor on the memorial platform built above the rusting remains from which oil from her fuel tanks still seeps to the surface 67 years later. The Navy decreed that since her crew is still aboard, and because of her heroic sacrifice and service, she is considered still in service to the nation and is senior to every ship in the Navy. When we rendered full honors to that gallant sister battleship, my eyes filled with tears and my emotions even 40 years later are indescribable. The only thought I can recall as we saluted was that this was the first time since Korea that another battleship was saluting the Arizona and that she and crew felt as much pride as the Big J and her crew.

One month after September 29, 1968, the first day the Big J fired her guns in anger since the Korean War, we got our first real understanding of what our presence meant. Marine SSGT Robert Gauthier was one of 50 members of the Third Marine Division who spent a few days aboard ship. This was arranged by Captain Snyder to let his crew know from the men on the ground why we were needed. Gauthier, interviewed on our TV station, said something we were to hear from hundreds of American fighting men. "Every time we go on patrol, someone says, 'The Big One is out there. Nobody better mess with us or she'll get them.' You are saving lives out here. American lives. And we thank you."

A Yonkers, NY paper published a letter from a mother of one of the men in the Third Marines who quoted her son: "The NEW JERSEY arrived here last week, and man, is she playing hell with Charlie! She sits out there about seven miles, big and beautiful, and when she lets go with her 16-inch guns, Charlie knows he is in for some big trouble. I hope she stays out there for 135 more days. That is my time to come home, Mom, so just pray for me that I make it."

We quickly got to know the men ashore through Captain Snyder's effort and we just as quickly became totally committed to their welfare and well-being. So on October 18, 1968 when the Hutchinson, Kansas NEWS published an inaccurate article about the Big J saying we were living a country club life of luxury while Marines and Soldiers did the fighting and dying, the resulting broadside from the crew was heard all the way to Kansas and beyond. The XO, Commander Elfelt, published the article in the Plan of the Day and I told him the crew was outraged over the story. He said, "I know. That's why I put it in the POD." I don't know how many angry letters that newspaper got from crewmembers, their family and others, but I wrote one which I broadcast live over the ship's radio station. We got so many requests to hear it again I did it live two more times. I sent copies to everyone I could think of including Congress and the Mayor of our homeport, Long beach, California who tore the newspaper apart with scathing responses. Later, the newspaper published an article larger than the original containing excerpts of the scores of letters it received. The headline: "New Jersey Fires Back."

I believe I speak for the crew when I say that it wasn't the factual inaccuracies in the story which bothered us but the implication that somehow we were more interested in our relative comforts than the combat troops ashore. Yes, there is traditional enmity between Sailors and Marines and Soldiers but when it came to the business of war, there were no such feelings. We on New Jersey took personal responsibility for "our" Marines and Soldiers ashore and we made a pledge that would not be broken until a political decision the following year to decommission the Big J: That as long as "our" Marines and Soldiers were in harm's way, we would be there to protect them and allow no harm to befall them. The one and only regret I have about my service on the Big J is that someone else broke that pledge for us.



April 16, 1969 - Birthday cake honors by Captain Snyder for (L/R)ETN2 Bob Gillis, RMI George Stavros, ETN3 Ed Campbell no name was shown for crewman at the right...

(Photo courtesy of George Stavros)

## THE JERSEYMAN

On October 15, 1968, as we engaged in harassment and interdiction fire at targets in North Vietnam just north of the DMZ for the first and only time, it began as routine. We were firing from Turret 3 aft and I was forward on the main deck near Turret 2 and chatting with a shipmate as our 16-inch guns blasted away from the fantail. It was safe to be out on the main deck forward if the ship was firing from the fantail. Suddenly, there was a huge geyser of water off our port side about 500 yards from the ship and I remember joking to my companion, "That one must have been a dud" thinking it came from us. Then general quarters was sounded and an announcement that the ship was taking hostile fire from shore. We had unknowingly strayed into the path of a camouflaged battery of 115-millimeter North Vietnamese artillery located on a triangular shaped peninsula that jutted out from the mainland. As we scrambled to our GQ stations, the ship took evasive action and rang up flank speed, headed for the safety of the South China Sea. We had been steaming along the coast about 5-10 miles offshore and been using an Army spotter plane flown by Captain Roger Bounds who told us what we were facing. Captain Snyder knew the range of those guns was about 15 miles so he steamed out to 20 miles and then lined up the Big J.

With the assistance of Captain Bounds (I still remember his callsign of "Dam Shaker 26 Charlie") we fired a few single 16-inch rounds at the target and he then told us we were on target and to "fire for effect." We then fired a salvo of three 16-inch armor-piercing 2,700 pound projectiles from near our maximum range of 23 miles. It took several seconds for the projectiles to land and after what seemed like an eternity, the mission firing officer requested a report from Captain Bounds. I listened on the radio. "Damshaker 26 Charlie this is Onrush (The Big J). Do you have a GDA? (gun damage assessment)" After only silence, the request was repeated and Captain Bounds finally came on the air and said to wait, he was going down to take a look but there was so much smoke and debris in the air he couldn't see anything. Suddenly the radio exploded with expletives... and the mission firing officer urgently inquired, "Damshaker 26 Charlie, are you taking enemy fire? Have you been hit?" ... concerned by the urgency in his voice. Finally Captain Bounds came on and said, "Onrush, you aren't going to believe this." He then explained that the three projectiles we fired landed where the peninsula met the mainland and that were evenly spaced across the neck of the peninsula, causing the **entire peninsula**, including the 115-mm gun battery, their crews, structures, vehicles and everything including the trees and foliage, to break completely off the mainland and slide/sink into the South China Sea. Several weeks later someone sent a stateside newspaper to the ship with the story and a headline that read, "New Jersey Sinks Island!"

The Third Marines were involved in one of the ship's most famous episodes on February 23, 1969. A 20-man Marine outpost in the DMZ was attacked by 130 enemy troops and put out an SOS at 1 AM. The ship went to GQ and fired continuously until 6:30 AM after firing over 1,700 rounds of main and secondary battery fire. I listened to the radio talk between us and **Lance Corporal Roger Clouse**, the ground spotter coordinating our fire. He kept calling in our fire closer to his position as the enemy advanced until finally the New Jersey refused, saying it was too dangerous. I remember hearing sounds of firing in the background as Clouse said, "They're all around me. Just aim for me!" Clouse got the Bronze Star but for 40 years I wondered if he made it. When I joined the USS New Jersey Veterans association, I found a website posting from Clouse, who recounted the incident and thanked us all for saving him and his comrades.

In April 1969, we received the long-awaited word to end our deployment and head for home. We were overjoyed at the prospect of home and loved ones but couldn't help a parochial feeling that only the Big J could protect our Marines and Sailors and even as we anticipated joyful reunions, we were already thinking ahead to coming back to finish the job. But there was to be a fateful and unexpected interruption. As we steamed across the Pacific heading east, a U.S. electronic reconnaissance plane designated EC-121 was shot down over international waters by North Korea. This quickly exploded into an international incident and the U.S. Government decided to make a clear statement of the seriousness of the incident and their intention. There we were steaming east and bound for home and one shipmate who was in after steering watching the gyrocompass gaped in astonishment as he watched it suddenly swing around from 090 degrees (east) to 270 degrees (west). RM1 Jim Weber, one of my radio shack buddies, had received a "Flash" message ordering the New Jersey to immediately reverse course, sail into the South China Sea, avoid contact with all other ships and remain off shipping lanes until further ordered. He still recalls heading to the bridge with the message as word quickly spread the ship had turned around, besieged by crewmembers to know what was going on and being as tight-lipped as a clam in fresh water.

Then came the announcement the New Jersey had been ordered to return to the Western Pacific. For a few moments there was stunned silence and then some low swearing and the sound of objects breaking (I remember the sound of a shattering glass or cup) as the reality sunk in. For the next few weeks, the whereabouts of the Big J became a state secret.

## THE JERSEYMAN

We were ordered to limit communications to a daily position report. These reports were normally unclassified but were now encoded and sent as Secret messages. I watched in amazement as all incoming messages giving us orders came not from the Pacific Fleet commander, not from even the Commander-in-Chief Pacific, but from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C., and my eyes widened even more as I saw among the information addressees, a who's who of highest ranking military and civilian brass titles, and the awesome words... "The White House."

I remember taking one of these messages to Captain Snyder who wanted to respond with a position report, but lacked a message form. He finished drinking his coffee from a paper cup and scribbled out a position report on the side of the cup, signed it and handed it to me with an order to send it. I returned to the radio shack and we sent the message. I still remember trying to figure out how to file this unusual official message. I carefully cut the paper cup at the seam, flattened it out, stamped it "Secret", punched two holes in it and placed it on the clipboard of the outgoing file messages. In August of 1969 when Captain Snyder received orders relieving him as CO of the New Jersey and going on to his next assignment, I retrieved that paper cup message (which was now declassified) and had one of the ship's shipfitters mount it on a small plaque and presented it to the skipper as a memento. He was absolutely delighted. The crisis passed and we eventually returned home, relishing our moment in the world spotlight when the world wondered where in the world the battleship New Jersey was. It was a tribute to the ship and its crew that we could become an instrument of national purpose and that heads were scratched in North Korea and other hostile lands trying to decipher the strategic implications in our disappearance.

Sadly, there was an unhappy ending to this story. In August 1969, the Navy announced the New Jersey would be decommissioned instead of returning to a second deployment in Vietnam as we anticipated with the normal emotional tearing away from families and homes but with a determination to return and protect our Marines and Soldiers as we knew only we could. I was astonished that despite what a second deployment would mean there was genuine anger at this decision. I again wrote letters to everyone I could think of, particularly Members of Congress, trying desperately to convince them to reverse this decision. It was not until decades later that it would be revealed this was not a military decision as asserted at the time but a cold, calculated political decision and that the Big J was a victim of the same prominence that had placed her in the middle of the EC-121 incident. The U.S. government was trying to begin a negotiated end to the Vietnam war and it was determined that sending the New Jersey back would cause the North Vietnamese to disbelieve our wish and intent to withdraw from the war.



One of the many letters I received in response was from Democratic Congressman L. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, then the chairman of the powerful House Armed Services Committee. It was a neat typed letter on his Committee stationery in which he expressed disagreement with the decision to decommission the Big J. Now normally, such letters tend to be form letters signed by an addressograph machine. But there was no doubt in my mind this letter was dictated and signed by the chairman. At the bottom of the letter was a scrawled postscript in Rivers' handwriting: "I disagree with the decision and certainly regret Laird's [Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense] action. As a member of Congress, he opposed recom."

I mentioned earlier the encounter with the Hutchinson Kansas, NEWS. But there was one more story about the Big J, this time in the Las Vegas, Nevada SUN newspaper. A deeply emotional and poignantly written tribute to the Big J and her untimely forced retirement which broke the bond her crew felt and their pledge to the Marines and Soldiers fighting for their lives in Vietnam, it described how the New Jersey would sit silent, forlorn and abandoned in Bremerton, Washington, and how Americans who could have been spared by her as so many were, would die. And it concluded with this line: "And when a boy dies, the New Jersey will strain at the hawsers that keep her from war."

History, linked by chains of men and steel, still resonates like the pounding feet of generations of men who have walked those teakwood decks and in the hearts of old sailors like me, the bonds that secure the friendship of fighting men remain as strong and shining as that day on the fantail 40 years ago.

**Submitted by:**

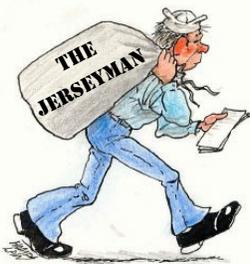
**George Stavros**

**Portland, Oregon**

**WORLD WAR II...**

## **THE JERSEYMAN**

### **USS HOUSTON (CA-30)...**



This past February, we received a letter from **Retired Master Chief Electricians Mate William J. Stewart of Independence, Kansas**. Master Chief Stewart, a survivor of the sinking of USS *Houston* Feb29/March 1, 1942, spent 42 months in a Japanese prison camp, and is one of 31 HOUSTON survivors still with us. The letter also contained a speech given by **Ms. Val Poss, USS Houston (CA-30) Second Generation**, aboard USS *Missouri* (BB-63) on Veteran's day 2007, and Master Chief Stewart asked if we would reprint it for *The Jerseyman's* readers. We are proud to do so. - TH

#### **History of USS *Houston*...**

Heavy Cruiser USS *Houston* was commissioned on 7 September 1929, and she was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's favorite "fishing yacht" during four separate trips. During the war, she was the Asiatic Fleet's Flagship, and was nicknamed "The Ghost of the Java Coast" due to the Japanese reporting her sunk so often. Her ship's company consisted of 50 Officers, 963 Enlisted men, and a Marine detachment of 65.

USS *Houston* participated in three major battles. The Battle of the Flores Sea on 4 February 1942— (Damage to Turret #3 with a direct hit that took the lives of 48 men), the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942, and the Battle of Sunda Strait on 1 March 1942.

Her final Sunda Strait battle was fought alongside HMAS Perth. These two ships encountered a Japanese landing force consisting of 60 transports, 1 aircraft carrier, 7 cruisers, at least 20 destroyers. During the battle, both PERTH and HOUSTON were sunk, but not before damaging 1 cruiser, a tanker and 4 destroyers. They also sank 3 troop transports and 1 mine sweeper.

Of the survivors, these were the numbers captured by the Japanese: USS *Houston* 368, HMAS Perth 328, 131st Field Artillery 557, Locals conscripted 250,000. Miles of railroad built - 258. Number of bridges built- 688. Numbers of **years** forecast to complete the bridge building - 5 years. Number of **months** to actually build - 14 months. Prisoner diseases incurred with heavy loss of life: Beri Beri, Dysentery, Cholera, Malaria, Typhoid.

In the Spring of 1942, the citizens of Houston, Texas raised \$85 million to replace USS *Houston* (CA-30), and two ships were built with their donations. USS *Houston* (CL-81), and USS *San Jacinto* (CVL-30), on which President George H.W. Bush served during World War II. On November 11, 1995, a USS *Houston* (CA-30) monument was dedicated in Sam Houston Park, Houston, Texas. Her ship's bell sits atop the monument listing the history of the ship and a list of the crewman names.

#### **2007 Veteran's Day speech presented aboard USS *Missouri*, (BB-63)**

**by Val Poss, USS *Houston* (CA-30) Second Generation...**

"... The USS *Houston* has a proud link with the USS *Missouri*. Two brothers were aboard HOUSTON when she was sunk. Wilmer Ebaugh was KIA, and his brother Forest "Red" Erbaugh died in the POW camps. The 3rd and only surviving son, Harry, was aboard the *Missouri* the day the peace treaty was signed, Also, my uncle, the late Chief George Cramer served aboard the "Mighty Mo" prior to the onset of WWII.

The story of USS *Houston* stands alone among others for her valiant fighting and courageous crew. The USS *Rooks* and USS *Rentz* are named after two of her officers, and we currently have the USS *Houston* submarine proudly named for the CA-30..."

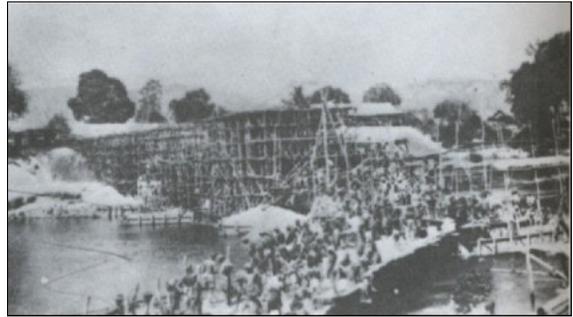
**WORLD WAR II...**

## **THE JERSEYMAN**

“... When Pearl Harbor was bombed, the Asiatic Fleet joined with the British, Dutch and Australian ships and became the ABDA fleet. In the 85 days after Pearl Harbor was bombed, the ABDA fleet changed the course of history, and yet we don't hear of it. These men were told to hold back the enemy, *at all costs*, from the rich oil reserves in the area. Our men didn't have to be told. It was obvious that they were on a suicide mission. We were losing ships within days, sometimes within hours of each other. Young men were dying by the thousands! These unsung heroes were giving the ultimate sacrifice, and giving up their tomorrows for our todays. The Navy Memorial in Washington, DC today lists the sea battles of World War II, however, the Battle of the Flores Sea, the Battle of the Java Sea, or the Battle of Sunda Strait are not listed there.

When the HOUSTON took 4 torpedo hits in the early hours of March 1, 1942, the ABDA fleet was no more. As she sank, Old Glory waved proud and defiant. 700 were killed in action that night. The 368 survivors swam for their lives only to be captured by the enemy, and began their 3 1/2 year journey into hell as POW's.

They were forced to build a supply route for the enemy notoriously called “The Death Railway” through dense jungles from Thailand to Burma. Their story was made known by the Academy Award winning movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai.” However, many liberties were taken with this story to make it more palatable for the general public. A little known movie starring Keifer Sutherland called “To End All Wars” was an excellent example of their lives as POW's in those camps



**Burma-Siam Railroad/Bridge building  
(Australian War Memorial photo)**

Most of the crewmen were children of the depression and were familiar with hardship. They spent their adolescence witnessing the vileness of war, and they returned as mature men forced to adjust to so much that had changed at home. These men never received Purple Hearts for the blood they shed at the hands of their enemies while POW's. They never received medals of valor for their heroic deeds to help their buddies while captured. My own father came home an inch shorter and weighed 86 pounds. Dad was treated no better, nor worse than the next man. When they returned home, the doctors told them that due to the diseases and malnourishment, they could never have children - their life expectancy was approximately another 10 years. True to Navy/Marine “can-do” attitude, they fathered many children, and we also have with us today survivor Jack Feliz - 98 years young!

The founder of the USS Houston survivors Association, Otto Schwarz, had the foresight to realize that many of the organizations of WWII veterans were folding due to the loss of membership. And we expanded the name to *The USS Houston CA-30 Survivors Association and Next Generations* - the only one of it's kind in the country! We NG's take great pride in calling ourselves the “Houston family...” We have witnessed their bond among ourselves - a true brotherhood. We have pledged to these unsung and forgotten heroes to continue their story after the last man is gone. The ship, and crew, represent the ultimate courage and determination it takes to defend this great nation!

We have 31 survivors that are still with us. One cannot imagine the atrocities they endured as most worked on the railway, and a few were sent to work in the mines or docks in Japan. They have worn their scars quietly and tried to bury the memories of those nightmarish times. Through their actions, they exemplify humor, humility and honor with grace and dignity.

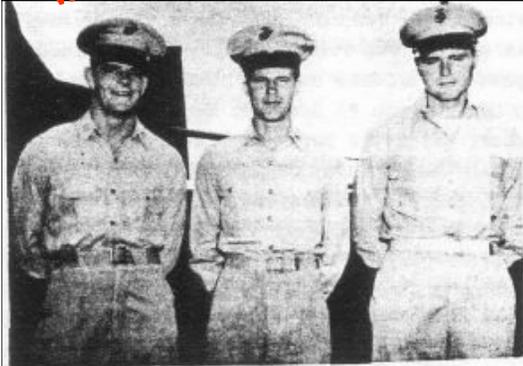
Most of all, they teach us to be proud to be Americans: to understand our freedoms are not entitlements and there are responsibilities that come with them. The freedoms we enjoy today have been hard earned...

Per Navy tradition, 8 bells signify the end of the watch. Our founder, Otto Schwarz stood his watch in life with fidelity and pride for all of Houston's crew. His watch is done. He has joined his shipmates in eternal rest and standing watch over Sunda Strait. We, as the next generations, now take up the watch in his stead with even greater determination.

In conclusion, I would be remiss not to acknowledge all of the veterans here today... including my husband. May God always hold you, and our men and women now serving this great nation, in the palms of His hands and close to His heart... Thank you.”

**WORLD WAR II...**

## THE JERSEYMAN



Presenting the Marines, in order from left to right:

Captain F.X. Regan, Lieut. E.H. Greason and Lieut. A. H. Topham, commanding officer of the Marine Detachment, and his two assistants respectively.

**“...Lieutenant Al Topham, USMC...** In late October 2007, **Bob Walters**, former Archives Manager of Battleship New Jersey, received an email from **OS2 Amy Topham**, serving aboard USS *Kitty Hawk* as a member of the DesRon15 staff. Petty officer Topham wanted to link up her grandfather, **Al Topham**, with shipmates from his WW2 days as a Marine officer aboard USS *New Jersey*. We then had the privilege of talking with “Big Al” Topham by phone, and asked if he would talk about what he recalls of duty with the Marine Detachment aboard USS *New Jersey* during WWII. He remembered quite a bit...

**“Well, I was a plankowner, and first came aboard the ship in April of 1943 - about a month before her commissioning, and I was aboard until September of 1945. Our detachment had 88 of the finest Marines you would ever want to have, and our C.O. Frank**

**Regan, was great to work for - he delegated easily and just let us do what needed to be done. Greason was another good man, and he went on to a full career in the Marine Corps and retired a Colonel.**

The Marines manned about half of the ship’s forward 20mm guns, and it was my job to log total rounds fired on all of the ship’s 20mm guns, We had 96 of them, and I had to keep close check on the barrels after each firing...

I want you to know, we had the finest gun mechanic in the Marine Corps serving aboard New Jersey. His name was Sergeant Bernard Greene and there wasn’t anything he couldn’t fix when it came to guns. You know, in theory, our planes were supposed to break off action when they got within range of our screen, but in real life, this just didn’t happen. So our planes, right along with the Jap planes, were flying within range of the 20mm guns, but the big problem was that when we’re under attack, the 20mm gunners would not stop pulling the trigger. They just would not let up on it. Well, Sergeant Greene came up with an idea, and manufactured a cutoff switch that the gun’s trainer could reach from his position, and when he hit it... that would stop the gun from firing. We put them on each one of our 20’s, and they worked... he was the best I ever knew... we also had two 20mm guns up at the bow. They were always under water in heavy seas and froze up all the time. Although it is tough to do, and not recommended, he built a jig to hold back the powerful spring on the 20’s, and was able to machine these guns back to normal operation. He used to also grease them up with a special mix of heavy grease and graphite for heavy seas - and that worked too.

Then there was that damn Typhoon... (*Typhoon “Cobra” - December 18, 1945*) and I can still remember the destroyers bouncing like corks trying to refuel alongside. We parted fuel lines in those heavy seas at least five times, and there was oil all over the ship. Then Halsey got on the horn, and began barking orders over to one of the destroyer skippers. That’s when the destroyer captain lost it... he gave as good as he got, and didn’t mince any words when they broke off. We lost three destroyers in that typhoon... I think you can tell I don’t have much good to say about Admiral Halsey. But Admiral Spruance was very different from Halsey. He was one of the finest officers I had ever met, and I was privileged to talk with him a few times. He would think nothing of coming down to talk with the men for 20 minutes or so, and would do it whenever he got the chance... a wonderful man.”

Today, “Big Al” Topham is 87 years young, and has a memory for details about 60 year old events that most of us can only wish for. He is very proud of the men he served with aboard USS *New Jersey*, and talked far more about them than he did of himself. *Semper Fi* - TH



Photo courtesy of Al Topham  
Dallas, Texas

## THE JERSEYMAN

### Volunteers - About the decks...



**William Lutz, Sr., Collingswood, NJ**  
World War 2 & Korean War Veteran  
US Coast Guard WW2, US Army Korea  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 6 years



**Dave Smith, Burlington, NJ**  
US Navy 1948-1952  
USS *Robert L. Wilson* (DD-847)  
USS *Forrest Royal* (DD-872)  
USS *Shenandoah* (AD-28)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. 6 years



**Mayer Falk, Claymont, DE**  
US Navy 1950-1954  
USS *Boxer* (CVA-21)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 7 years



**Ted Speer, Edgewater Park, NJ**  
US Navy 1954-1958  
USS *Caperton* (DD-650)  
(Built/donated Q'deck Podium-7/23/2002)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 7 years



**Dave Boone, Oaklyn, NJ**  
Maritime Painter (Tugboats)  
(Hand restoring all existing  
ship's artwork.)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 7 years



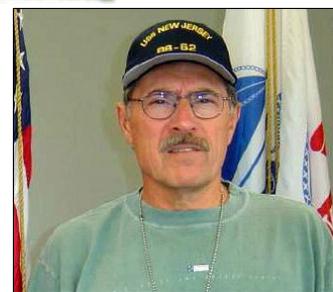
**Frank Brennan, Haddonfield, NJ**  
USN/USNR 1947-1950  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 7 years



**Bob Westcott, Bridgeton, NJ**  
WW2 Veteran 1943-1945 (Radioman)  
Plankowner - USS *New Jersey* (BB-62)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 7 years



**Jim Standiford, Millville, NJ**  
Public School Teacher  
Grades 8-9 (Science)  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. 6 years



**Al Giumetti, Piles Grove, NJ**  
NJ Army National Guard  
114th Inf. & Co A, 1st Bn., 50th Armor Div.  
Battleship New Jersey Vol. - 5 years

**Editor's Note:** Although we only provide one page of ship's volunteers with this issue, more are to follow. Once again, we thank volunteers **George LoPresti, Skip de Glavina, Max Newhart, Richard Thrash, Rich Zimmerman, Joe Groppenbacher, Charles Higgins, and Dave and Margaret Burgess** for their help in providing the volunteer photos and compiling each of the brief biographies... Many thanks! - TH

## THE JERSEYMAN

### *Battleship days...* by Hamp Law



...PORT IS LEFT  
STARBOARD IS RIGHT  
REMEMBER...  
ALWAYS ASK  
TH' CHIEF  
BEFORE I DO  
ANYTHING...



Logo courtesy of Maritime Artist and former USS NEW JERSEY crewman,  
**James A. Flood**

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