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President's Message

Here we are again into a new year and I cannot believe the months have gone by so fast. We had a bad winter with the strong winds, rain and hurricanes, but thank God and hope the warm weather will arrive soon.

I hope you all had a very happy and joyous holiday. We are so very sorry to have heard about **Carol LeBlanc** losing his house and everything due to the terrible Hurricane. We hope Carol and family are doing well as they can. May God bless everyone who had a great loss of property and suffering due to the severe hurricane.

I'd like to inform you all about **Norman Jennewein** who had back surgery. He is doing very well and trying very hard to get on the run. Don Rennie had open heart surgery and he's trying to get on the road to good health. **Cactus Walters** had back surgery and he's trying to recover as soon as possible and he's doing as good as expected.

Lets hope and pray for these three and other shipmates who have suffered other illness for a speedy recovery and to get back to good health.

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U.S.S. Suwannee CVE 27 Newsletter

Spring 2006

Editor's Note

Instead of the usual editor's note, I would like to share with you a piece written during the Baton Rouge reunion in 1996. – Bill Reddell

For the Men of the U.S.S. Suwannee

There is a sentiment that I have heard all too often during this political season, and it goes something like this: "I am tired of hearing about World War II. That happened before I was born, and it just doesn't mean anything to me." It is an attitude that says a great deal about the self-centeredness of a good many people nowadays, and even more about how poor a job we are doing in passing on to our youth a sense of our history.

I feel very fortunate that, though World War II was over before I was born, it was a close call. My dad came home right after the war, and I came along in 1947. I started school during a period when educators still saw a compelling need to teach history. They still realized the benefits it could have in giving roots to each new generation.

The Second World War, at that point still in the not-too-distant past, was the focus of many of those history lessons. From school we learned the dates and the turning points, the national leaders and the global implications. At home, and around campfires, and on day-long horseback rides, I learned a much more personal version of history – that of the men of the *U.S.S. Suwannee*.

I heard the most about **Noble Brewington** ("Brew"), for whom I was named, and had the honor of meeting for the first time during this reunion. I learned about **Vince Randazo**, who had come to relieve my dad on watch just before the kamikaze hit. That was a story that changed, acquiring a happier ending. For 44 years Dad thought that Vince had died that day, until they met again at the Lafayette reunion.

There were newspaper clippings, and letters, and souvenirs, but most of all there were stories. Brief tales of ordinary men doing extraordinary things halfway around the world. That, I think, is what made the greatest impression. Here were men and boys who had left farms and factories and schools and homes and families, and had travelled vast distances to put themselves in harm's way. They may have never left their hometowns before, but now they crossed the Earth's greatest ocean to take on an empire that had brutally demonstrated its military might and its willingness to use it.

Why had they done so? Not because they were career military men, for most of them were not. They did these things because, in a time of great peril, their country required it of them. They did it because at that moment in history the way of life they had left behind hung in the balance. The future of those farms and factories and schools and homes and families could only be assured by the willingness of these men to sacrifice everything they had, and everything they ever hoped to be.

I think it is critically important that you men and your families realize that there are many of us who deeply appreciate that willingness to sacrifice, by those of you who came back from that war, and most of all by those who did not.

In a global sense, you saved the world from a tyranny that is impossible even to imagine by those of use who followed you. On a more personal level it is easier to understand. When we hear the individual stories of men like those on the *Suwannee*, it becomes clear. You gave up your youth and your hopes and your lives so that we might have freedom. For this we owe you nothing less than our eternal gratitude. We thank you and we thank God for you.

Larry Reddell

Proud son of Bill Reddell

Proud namesake of Noble Brewington

More Memories – Reunion 2005



Sheila Fischer (right) works on raffle ticket sales with Herman Touchet and Bill Powell.



Joan Bost visits with her father, John Eilts.



Milton Hemingway spends some time talking to Robert Eustace, the Association Chaplain.



William Riggs, Leo Reinkmeyer and Don Michie take a break during hospitality time.



Patricia Reinhart (left) visits with Mr. and Mrs. George Rodgers.



George and Lee Norrell visit with Dotty and Paul Swenson.

Another *Suwannee* Memory

Machinist Mate 3rd Class **Mike Frkovic** reached down and picked up one corner of a heavy canvas bundle in unison with three other sailors.

The sailors slowly, respectfully, marched the bundle to a platform on the side of the *USS Suwannee's* hangar deck. The ship's chaplain, a Catholic priest, said a short prayer. The sailors obeyed a whispered command, raised the board and slid the bundle into the dark ocean in the age-old naval tradition of burial at sea. The men returned for another bundle and the ceremony was repeated, time and time again, for those young men aboard the small carrier who died fighting for their country.

Frkovic, of Englewood, remembers the sad rite that took place in the middle of the night off Okinawa. "I buried 17 men that first night. We lost about 260 men in that two days of action there." The *Suwannee* was hit by two Japanese Kamikaze planes on subsequent days, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Frkovic recalls the first episode of terror. "I was part of a work gang, on another part of the ship, when it first hit. We heard it hit. We were out there for 2 1/2 years and had never been hit. We didn't know what to think. There was an 8- to 10-foot hole in the flight deck, and the plane crashed through to the hangar deck where they were getting planes ready. It was terrible, really terrible. I spent the night in the CPO quarters. They

only had a few corpsmen (medics), so I helped. All these guys got flash-burned. Most thought they were blind because their eyes were swelled shut. We just tried to help them, and make them as comfortable as possible..."

The next day, the *Suwannee* would be hit by the second Japanese kamikaze plane. "This one hit the forward elevator and made it tip. We were out of commission. The ship stopped dead in the water. I could see all of our ships going over the horizon and I thought, 'We're in trouble,' but in about 15 minutes we got her running again and we made it back. We knew what happened the day before, and we were upset, but it wasn't as bad the second day. There wasn't as many men killed that day." The vessel, however, was put out of action and had to return to Bremerton, Wash., for repairs.

The *Suwannee* had started war in the Atlantic, participating in the invasion of North Africa. She then went through the Panama Canal, and entered the fray in the Pacific, participating in numerous campaigns and invasions. After her repairs from the kamikaze attacks, she again returned to babble, raking up 13 battle stars along the way. There were only four Sangamon-class carriers, all named after rivers. All four were badly damaged during the war. The exploits of the Jeep carriers, as they are called, have been largely overshadowed by their bigger, more famous, sister carriers, like the

Yorktown, Enterprise, Saratoga, Intrepid and Lexington.

After the atomic bomb ended the war, the *Suwannee* wound up in Japan. Frkovic recalls visiting the site of one of the atomic blasts a few weeks after it occurred. "We got up to Nagasaki not long after they dropped the bomb. They put us in trucks for a tour. It was a mess. The brick buildings held up a little, but anything else, like metal or wood, just evaporated. There wasn't a hell of a lot left of the place. The Japanese people looked dazed. We were ordered not to touch anything, and we pretty much stayed on the trucks. We just drove around the town and came back. It was just really a bad spot. I hope that never happens again, any place."

After a stop in Tokyo, where thousands of bunks were put aboard the ship, the *Suwannee* loaded Army troops and carried them back to the United States. "We were lucky to come back; a lot of them didn't make it," said Frkovic of his fellow crew members. In 1994, 50 years after the attack, a group of men who served aboard the *Suwannee* joined together and returned to Okinawa. They took a vessel out to the same spot where the first kamikaze plane hit them, exactly a half-century before, and dropped a bottle over the side for their shipmates.

Excerpted from an article written by Paul DeGaeta in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune

President's Message (Continued from front page)

This year's reunion will be September 14-16 in Billings, Montana. Hotel rates will be as follows:

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|--------------------|---------|
| East Wing (Single) | \$69.00 |
| East Wing (Double) | \$69.00 |
| Tower Wing | \$87.00 |
| Tower Suite | \$99.00 |

Carl Bell will be sending out a letter with the name, address and phone number of the hotel.

I would like all Plank Owners to please contact me with your name, rank, division, home address, phone number and email address if you have it. Thank you. May God bless you all and try to have a pleasant summer.

Pres. C. P. Casello
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I remember . . . the Japanese Pilot

My name is **Robert Moniz**, and I was aboard the *U.S.S. Suwannee* for about 3 1/2 years. My story happened a couple of days before the start of the Leyte Campaign. I was on the flight deck on October 22, 1944 when I saw this "Tony" (Japanese torpedo plane) coming right at us, amidship. He was just above the surface of the water, so we were not picking him up on radar. He passed all of our warships, carriers, cruisers and battle wagons, heading right for us. I said, "Oh, God, help us!" and right after that he dropped the torpedo, then he went right over the island of the *Suwannee*.

The torpedo hit below the water line, striking the section that held fuel. Thank God it was a dud, or it would surely have blown up the ship.

The carrier just to the north of us shot him down. They brought him to our

ship in order to interrogate him. He spoke very good English. Our skipper, **Captain Johnson**, and our top officers talked to him, but he said, "I am not telling you people anything." He went on to say, "In 24 hours if nothing happens I will tell you what you want to know."

BMI/C **Victor "Frenchy" Kilechrist** told me to take him down to the rear of the ship, which is where the brig was located. I took him down carrying only a billy club and placed him in the brig. He identified himself as a lieutenant and asked me where I was from. I said, "What the hell do you care?" He said, "Try me," and I told him that I was from Oakland, California. He began to laugh, and I asked him, "What the hell are you laughing about?" He told me that he had gone to the University of California for four years, then said "Sailor, we are

going to bury the U. S." I told him, "The shit you are!" He then spit in my face, at which point I got hold of him through the bars and hit him with the billy club. The blow split his skull open and he went down. I thought that I had killed him, as blood was gushing out.

About ten minutes after I hit him general quarters sounded and I went back to my duty station on the flight deck. Three days later, on the 25th of October, all hell broke loose during the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Many years later at one of our reunions I asked **John McCoy**, "What ever happened to that Jap we had in the brig?" He told me that they took him off the ship at Palai Island. (Editor's Note: This is where we transferred our more severely wounded to a hospital ship, also.)

– **Robert Moniz**



"K" Division, Left-to-Right, Front-to-Back

Yuncker, Pickett, DiGiovine, Frazier, Peek, Savatgy, DiSessa, Andrese, Cohen, Beese, Harris, Paulus
Krieger, Hegwer, Alexander, Tipping, McCune, Frick, Blesz, Skinner, Bennett, Roberts
LeFaive, Sicosky, Shaffer, Rice, Reddell, Pinkston, Brown, Howell, Reed, Darity, Roberts, Smuszkiewicz, Jennewein, Updike
Olsson, Henderson, McHale, Johnson, Phillips, Reinhart, Altice, Maddox, Pane, Spriggs, Pace, Higdon, Price, Hitt, Fines, Hamilton, Perez, Hemingway, Polejewski

Office DEPOT
Taking Care of Business

We want to thank Office Depot for their agreement to provide printing services for the *Suwannee* newsletter at a greatly discounted price.

Next time you are looking for office products of any type, be sure to visit Office Depot, and give them a word of thanks for their support of our organization.

Taps

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|--------------------------|---------------|
| C. G. Casper | No Date Given |
| Joseph M. Frosio | Mar. 19, 2005 |
| Richard Johns | Jun. 20, 2005 |
| Roger J. McMurray | Sep. 16, 2005 |
| C. E. Miller | Oct. 24, 2004 |
| Graham S. Wright | Jun. 18, 2004 |
| Elmer Zitzman | Jan. 3, 2006 |



Moment of Impact

Any crewman or surviving family who has not yet received a copy of the DVD "Moment of Impact" can request one as follows:

Bill Reddell
12101 Mission Trace
San Antonio, TX 78230
(210) 561-7668
bill.reddell@sbcglobal.net

The DVD tells the story of October 24-26, 1944, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf.