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President's Message

I have been in the hospital for a few days, but I am doing very well right now, and am at home.

The 19th Annual Suwannee Reunion is rapidly approaching. I am looking forward to seeing all shipmates and their family members in Billings, Montana, September 14-16.

Your Chairman, **Carl Bell**, is planning a great program. By now you should have received a reunion packet. If this is not the case, please contact Carl at P.O. Box 868, Glasgow, MT 59230, or by calling 406-228-2145.

See you there!

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U.S.S. Suwannee CVE 27 Newsletter

Summer 2006

Editor's Note

Well, good shipmates, it is time to put together another newsletter and to remind you of our upcoming reunion in Billings, Montana. I hope you have received your information packet from **Carl Bell**, and that you will each act promptly in getting your registration submitted and reservations made.

Charlie Casello, our president, has been having some rather serious health problems, so we need to remember him in our thoughts and prayers. There are several others, including your editor, who are also having health problems. Please remember all of them, and share with me any information you have on others who are not doing well so that we can mention them in the next newsletter. I have contacted, or have been contacted by, over 20 family members during the last few days. Many of these calls have related to the deaths of various shipmates.

Some of you may have received a story via email about how "Taps" was written. The version you will find on page two is the official story, as told by the curator of the Taps Exhibit at Arlington National Cemetery.

– **Bill Reddell**

I Remember . . . From the Beginning

One of **Harold Lawson's** claims to fame is the fact that he was on the *Suwannee* even before it *was* the *Suwannee*. Harold, working in a shipyard, had a hand in the conversion of the Markay, a civilian oil tanker, into the *U.S.S. Suwannee* as a Navy oiler, then into a Sangamon-class escort carrier. He often mentioned to the crew that he had played a part in outfitting the ship they were all serving aboard.

One day one of Harold's shipmates needed to retrieve something from one of the first aid kits that were attached to bulkheads throughout the ship. He found that Harold had welded his name at the back of the first aid kit at the time he had installed it. Kilroy had nothing on Harold.

The crewman announced to Harold in front of a group of other shipmates, "Well, Lawson, I guess you really did help build this tub." He then looked at the others and continued, "Let's throw him overboard!" To their credit, they did not do so. It would not have been much of a reward for someone who helped to build such a fine craft as the *Suwannee*.



Harold Lawson

The Story Behind “Taps”

The following account, written by bugler Oliver Norton, appeared in the August, 1898 edition of *Century* magazine.

One day, soon after the seven days battles on the Peninsula, when the Army of the Potomac was lying in camp at Harrison's Landing, General Daniel Butterfield, then commanding our Brigade, sent for me, and showing me some notes on a staff written in pencil on the back of an envelope, asked me to sound them on my bugle. I did this several times, playing the music as written. He changed it somewhat, lengthening some notes and shortening others, but retaining the melody as he first gave it to me. After getting it to his satisfaction, he directed me to sound that call for Taps thereafter in place of the regulation call.

The music was beautiful on that still summer night, and was heard far beyond the limits of our Brigade. The next day I was visited by several buglers from neighboring Brigades, asking for copies of the

music which I gladly furnished. I think no general order was issued from army headquarters authorizing the substitution of this for the regulation call, but as each brigade commander exercised his own discretion in such minor matters, the call was gradually taken up through the Army of the Potomac.

I have been told that it was carried to the Western Armies by the 11th and 12th Corps, when they went to Chattanooga in the fall of 1863, and rapidly made its way through those armies. I did not presume to question General Butterfield at the time, but from the manner in which the call was given to me, I have no doubt he composed it in his tent at Harrison's Landing.
- Oliver W. Norton

Master Sergeant Jari Villarreal of Arlington National Cemetery tells the entire story at the following web address:

<http://www.tapsbugler.com/TapsMyth.html>

At a later time the following lyrics were written to match the melody.

Day is done
Gone the sun
From the lakes
From the hills
From the sky.
All is well
Safely rest
God is nigh.

Taps

Lloyd Burkley..... 5/6/06
James M. Harris..... 9/24/05
Kenneth Jordon..... 9/20/04
Robert McMurray 4/25/06
Ray Martin 1/9/06
John McGonigle 6/28/05
Glen Shields 3/9/06
Louis Theriot..... 3/14/05



The Suwannee’s Battle Stars

The *U.S.S. Suwannee – CVE 27* was one of the most highly-decorated ships of World War II. This was due at least in part to the length of time the ship and its crew and air groups spent in harm’s way. The *Suwannee* was in the Pacific theater of war longer than any other U.S. carrier. She was the first CVE to enter the Pacific, after seeing action off the coast of Morocco, where she was the first American ship to sink an enemy submarine and participated in the sinking of the French (Vichy) battleship, *Jean Bart*.

The *Suwannee* earned 13 official battle stars, though she participated in more battles than that, including three of the most costly of the war, at New Georgia, Tarawa and Leyte Gulf. All in all, the *Suwannee* supported more landings than any other ship in the U.S. Navy. A bronze battle star was awarded for each single engagement and five engagements were indicated by a silver battle star. The 13 earned by the *Suwannee* were represented as below, with two silver stars (10 engagements) and three bronze (3 engagements).



North Africa (Casablanca)
 New Georgia (Solomon Islands)
 Kwajalein (Marshall Islands)
 Palau
 Marianas
 Philippines (Leyte Gulf)
 Borneo

Guadalcanal
 Tarawa (Gilbert Islands)
 Eniwetok (Marshall Islands)
 Western New Guinea
 Halmahera (Morotai)
 Okinawa

Recognition Well-Deserved

In the years since World War II ended, recognition for the trials and accomplishments of the men of the *U.S.S. Suwannee* have been hard to come by. It should be rewarding to remember that, immediately following the end of the war, Admiral C. W. Nimitz saw fit to pay tribute to all escort carriers in the following letter.

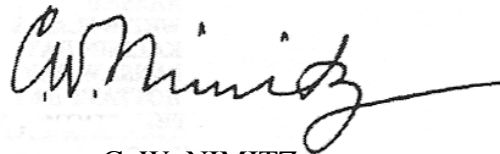
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AND PACIFIC OCEAN AREAS
HEADQUARTERS OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

24 September 1945.

The story of the escort aircraft carriers is like a story with a surprise ending. When the United States began to build them, there was a definite purpose in view – fighting off submarines and escorting convoys. But, as the war progressed, the small carrier demonstrated surprising versatility. It became a great deal more than its name implies.

From a purely defensive measure, the escort carrier emerged as an offensive weapon. In each of our operations from Tarawa to Okinawa, naval aircraft were over our amphibious forces continuously. Many of these planes came from the decks of the escort carriers – the so-called “jeeps” – which stood offshore for long periods in the most difficult circumstances. In heavy weather, against heavy enemy aircraft attack, and even in the face of the heaviest guns of the enemy fleet at Leyte, the escort carriers of the Pacific Fleet bore a heavy responsibility for the safety of our beachheads and the air support of our forces ashore during the critical days after the landings.

To the officers and men who made such success possible, I send a hearty “Well Done”.



C. W. NIMITZ
Fleet Admiral, U.S. Navy
Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet
And Pacific Ocean Areas

The Royal Order of the Purple Porpoises

While many of the experiences undergone by the men of the *Suwannee* were challenging, trying, even terrifying, time was taken whenever possible to support morale. Diversions and celebrations were conducted as a way of providing entertainment and taking the men's minds off of the war, even if for a brief time. One such diversion was represented by the Order of the Purple Porpoises.

The ship's veterans always took time at the crossing of the equator to initiate newer crewmen who were accomplishing that feat for the first time. On the *Suwannee* there were plenty of opportunities, as she and her crew made 62 total crossings. Those aboard ship who had never made a crossing were "Polywogs," while those who had crossed point of zero latitude were "Shellbacks." It was the duty of the Shellbacks to make sure that as the crossing was made that the Polywogs were initiated appropriately.

Crossing the International Dateline at 180 degrees of longitude was also a special occasion, and crossing the equator and the dateline at the same time was considered to be an even greater honor. The *Suwannee* stands out among the ships of the Pacific Fleet in that she crossed the intersection of the equator and the international dateline at the hour of the Vernal Equinox, on March 21, 1944. That means that the *Suwannee* and her men crossed that mystical intersection at the exact same time as the sun; a very rare event, indeed.

Those Polywogs aboard ship on that remarkable day were inducted as charter members of the Royal Order of the Purple Porpoises, with all attendant honors and privileges. At the direction of Rear Admiral Van H. Ragsdale and King Neptune, they were allowed to "cavort with Mermaids" and to receive "One Free Noggin of Grog" in celebration of the accomplishment.

Unfortunately for the Polywogs, while Admiral and King promised pleasures untold, the Shellbacks had misery in mind. The 'Wogs endured the "Slop Chute," followed by a much needed wash-off, accomplished by Shellbacks wielding high-pressure hoses. The initiates were turned into "Grease Monkeys," ran "The Gauntlet," and spent time confined in "The Stock," where the head and hands were confined so that they could be subjected to further taunting at the hands of the Shellbacks.

In the end it was all worth it, however, as former Polywogs were then recognized as Shellbacks, and could look forward to initiating the next group of 'Wogs when their time came. In addition, those initiated were provided with a certificate verifying their membership in a very exclusive club. A reproduction of that certificate appears below.

