



U.S.S. SUWANNEE CVE 27 NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2007

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President's Message

Our 20th annual reunion is just around the corner, and I really look forward to seeing all of the Suwannee crew, air group members and family in Washington, D.C. on October 25-27. If you have not received a registration packet, please call Bill Reddell right away at 210-561-7668. The deadline for registration is September 15, so you will need to do that right away if you have not already done so.

It is with a sad heart that I report to you on the losses of Kathy Highfield and Joy Beard. Kathy was the widow of "Mose" Highfield and Joy was the wife of T. A. Beard. Our prayers are with their families as they are with the families of the crewmen whose passing is reflected in the "Taps" section on page 3 of this Newsletter.

I'll see you in Washington, D.C. in October!

**Charles Casello,
President**

Editor's Note

I hope you are as excited about the upcoming reunion as I am. It is scheduled for October 25-27 at the Hyatt Fair Lakes Hotel in Fairfax, Virginia. Fairfax is just outside of Washington, D.C., and the location will allow us to take advantage of some very unique opportunities.

Events will kick off on Thursday night with a "Welcome to the Reunion" dinner, provided that enough participants sign up for it.

On Friday we will go on a tour that will include visits to the World War II Memorial, the U.S. Navy Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery and chances to see some of the great monuments in our nation's capitol. We will conduct a special wreath-laying ceremony for the Suwannee during our visit to the U.S. Navy Memorial. The traditional "Roll Call" service will be conducted on Friday night back at the hotel.

On Saturday, the hotel shuttle will take reunion participants to either the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum or the Fair Oaks Mall, or both. Saturday night will feature family portraits and the banquet. Our banquet speaker will be Robert Cressman, Head of the Ship's History Department of the Naval Historical Center. Following the raffle we will have dancing to the music of the 1940s.

I am especially excited about seeing the World War II Memorial and the U.S. Navy Memorial for the first time. I know from talking to many of you over the years that this is something that many of our members have hoped to do. Now is our opportunity.

If you have not sent in your registration and check, please do so right away. The deadline is September 15. Also, don't forget to call the Hyatt Fair Oaks in Fairfax to make your room reservations. Be sure to tell them that you are with the Suwannee Reunion so that you get our special rate (\$99.00). Finally, remember to make arrangements for transportation. If you have not received a registration packet, give me a call at 210-561-7668 and I will see that one is sent to you right away.

Finally, if you know a shipmate who is still deciding whether or not to attend this year's reunion, give him a call. We don't want anyone looking back afterwards and wishing that he had not missed out on this chance to see **our** memorials in Washington, D.C.

-- Bill Reddell

***Suwannee* Tribute at U.S. Navy Memorial Site**

The U.S. Navy Memorial, which will be the site of a wreath-laying ceremony during this year's reunion, features the following tribute to the *USS Suwannee* on its website.



Suwannee provided air support for the assault forces at Leyte Gulf with antisubmarine and combat air patrols and strikes against Japanese installations ashore. On 24 and 25 Oct. 1944, the Japanese launched a major surface offensive from three directions to contest the Leyte Gulf landings. While the Japanese Mobile Force sailed from Japan and drew the bulk of Admiral Halsey's 3d Fleet to the north, the Japanese 2d Striking Force attempted to force the Surigao Strait from the south. This drew the US Bombardment Group south to meet that threat in the Battle of Surigao Strait. With the old battleships fighting in Surigao Strait and Halsey's 3d Fleet scurrying north, Suwannee, with the other 15 escort carriers and 22

destroyers and destroyer escorts, formed the only Allied naval force operating off Leyte Gulf when the Japanese 1st Striking Force transited the unguarded San Bernadino Strait into the Philippine Sea. Just before 0700 on the 25th, the Japanese force of four battleships, eight cruisers, and numerous destroyers were detected by the northernmost group of escort carriers, Taffy 3, and the surface battle off Samar ensued. Suwannee, much farther south as an element of "Taffy 1" did not participate in this surface engagement, however. Her problems came from another quarter at 0740 when "Taffy 1" was attacked by land-based planes from Davao in the first suicide attack of the war. The first one crashed Santee (CVE-29) and, 30 seconds later, Suwannee splashed a kamikaze during its attack on Petrof Bay (CVE-80). Her gunners soon scratched a 2nd enemy plane, then engaged a 3rd attacking aircraft, circling in the clouds at 8,000 feet, which in its final drive, crashed into the flight deck of Suwannee 40 feet forward of the after elevator, opening a 10-foot hole in her flight deck. His bomb compounded the fracture when it exploded between the flight and hangar decks, tearing a 25-foot gash in the ship causing a number of casualties. Just after noon on the 26th, another group of kamikazes jumped "Taffy 1." A "Zeke" crashed Suwannee's flight deck and careened into a just recovered torpedo bomber. The two planes erupted into flame along with nine other planes on the flight deck. The resulting fire burned for several hours, but was finally brought under control.

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Wheelchairs for the Tour

If you or anyone in your group at the reunion will need a wheelchair for the tour on Friday, be sure to indicate this on your registration form.

Also, be sure to send in your registration form as soon as possible, as we will need as accurate a count as possible on the complete number of wheelchairs needed in order to make adequate arrangements in advance. Don't let a mobility issue keep anyone from seeing the memorials.

Suwannee Reunion 2007 topics and related Internet links appear below:

U.S. Navy Memorial (Friday Tour)
<http://www.lonesailor.org>

World War II Memorial (Friday Tour)
<http://www.wwiimemorial.com>

Smithsonian Air and Space Museum (Saturday)
<http://www.nasm.si.edu/udvarhazy/>

Fair Oaks Mall (Saturday)
<http://www.shopfairoaksmall.com/>

- Taps -

James H. Combs 10/26/06
Helmer R. Christensen 3/18/07
J. M. Kirchberg 7/29/07
William F. Lappin 7/29/07
John Eilts 8/21/07



!!!S.O.S.!!!

If you served aboard the *USS Suwannee*, we need your help. We cannot make this newsletter the kind of valuable tool it needs to be in telling the story of the ship without your assistance.

Please take the time to write down some of your experiences during your service and send them to Bill Reddell.

The history of the *Suwannee* is **your** history. **Please don't let it go untold!**

Reunion Reminder

Remember to:

1. Complete your registration form and send it in along with a check. (**Deadline is September 15!**)
2. Call the Hyatt Fair Lakes and reserve your room(s). (**703 818 1234**)
3. Make transportation arrangements.

A Son of the Suwannee Makes Contact

The son of a Suwannee air group member contacted Eryn Wingert (granddaughter of Bill Reddell) via an Internet forum on World War II. His message to her follows:

Eryn,

My father, Francis J. Capron served aboard the *Suwannee* from '42-'44 as an electricians mate. Today, I was looking at an entire box filled with old photos, and couldn't help but think of how WWII impacted my father's life. I found original newspaper clippings, navy discharge papers, war medals and photos of a young man in the prime of his life. It's amazing how we ourselves try to keep the memory alive of what was a fantastic era . . . WWII.

My father died in 1990. Enclosed you'll find photos. My father was on the far right in the photo of the three men. My father was on board the *USS Suwannee* with VGS 27 / Squadron 27 from '42 until after the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

I'm not sure if the photos will yield any queries. Maybe for someone it will give them a glimpse of someone they remember . . . my father as a young man.

Todd Capron



What Did They Do After the *Suwannee*?

By Jack Smith

Bill Reddell asked me to write an item concerning post-war activities of our shipmates. I naively said I would. What I didn't realize was how little I knew about the subject. I will therefore preface this with some qualifying factors. My duties in Air Group 60 were concerned predominately with activities on the hangar deck and the flight deck. Only rarely did I have occasion to go to levels below the hangar deck. One exception was that, while standing aircraft security watch on the flight deck during the hours of darkness, I was required to make one trip during the four-hour watch to check the paravane deck. To this day I don't know what I was supposed to check there, because we were operating at night under black out conditions. Thus the trip to and from the paravane deck was made by feeling one's way through inky blackness while being encumbered with frequently barked shins. Upon arrival at the paravane deck one could see, even with night-adapted eyes, absolutely nothing. (Hail to Navy logic!) In no instance did I meet anyone during one of these dark excursions. All factors combined to limit my exposure to personnel whose duties kept them outside this described domain. As a result what follows concerning post-war careers is limited with regard to the number of people that constitute the sample. Thus the data may not be a statistical sample so extrapolation to the total crew complement of some 1200 souls may or may not be valid. Nonetheless, I hope you find it interesting.

What I found was that the occupations chosen among this sample were as diverse as the locations around the country from which our personnel came. I once tried to count the states that were represented by one or more persons aboard ship, and I don't remember excluding any state except Alaska and Hawaii, which were then not yet states.

Let's start with Capt. Johnson. He made a career within the Navy and achieved flag rank. Apparently our rubbing noses with the Sangamon was not held against him since it was Adm. Ragsdale who gave the order for *Suwannee* to depart formation with a turn to port at the same time that the zigzag pattern called for the formation to make a turn to starboard. I made a refueling stop at NAS Memphis in the early 1950's and found that Johnson was Admiral in charge of both the Air Station and the Naval Air Technical Training Center that were

sited there. Three pilots from VF60, Dashiell, Singleton, and Shea, pursued Naval careers, along with the AG60 flight surgeon, Philips. All climbed to four-stripe rank.

(To be continued in the next newsletter.)

Reunion Banquet Speaker Robert Cressman

Robert J. Cressman, a Navy junior, was born in Bethesda, Maryland, and grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland; Whiawa, Oahu, T.H.; Norfolk, Virginia; and Wheaton, Maryland. Graduating from the University of Maryland with a BA in history in 1972, he began working as an intern with the Ship's History Branch of the Naval Historical Center (NHC) in 1976, contributing to the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships (DANFS), Vols. VII and VIII. Earning his MA in history at Maryland under Dr. Gordon W. Prange in 1978, Cressman then served as a reference historian for the Marine Corps Historical Center (1979-1981). Returning to the Ship's History Branch of the NHC in 1981, he contributed to DANFS, Vol. I-A (1991). After working in the Contemporary History Branch of the NHC (1992-2002), where he produced the John Lyman Book Award-winning *The Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in World War II* (1999), he returned to head the Ship's History Branch in 2002.

He has authored operational histories of the carriers Yorktown (CV-5) and Ranger (CV-4), and an account of the battle for Wake Island. He has also co-authored books on the Enterprise (CV-6) Air Group and Pearl Harbor, and on the Battle of Midway. He is currently writing a biography of Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., an operational history of the carrier Hornet (CV-8), and, in concert with two co-authors, a battle history of Pearl Harbor. He has also appeared on the History, Discovery and Fox News Channels.

Visit the *Suwannee* website at:
<http://www.ussuwannee.org>