

THE MOUNTAINEER: USS WEST VIRGINIA, JANUARY 2004

FROM THE QUARTERDECK:

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL.

Those of you who missed our reunion in Boston, Sept 2003, you missed a great Historical get together. We had a great tour of several ships. A tour of the Freedom Trail, JFK Library and a great lunch at the Union Oyster House. We took a trip to the Plymouth Plantation where we saw the homes, gardens and fortress used by the Pilgrims. Probably the most interesting thing was the World War II Museum in Natick. Where these people came up with hundreds of artifacts from Europe and the Pacific, it was beyond belief. It was just a great reunion.

At our Banquet we had a super dinner with great entertainment. Of particular notice was one of our shipmates leading all hands in the lyrics of Bell Bottom Trousers. "Great Job", well done.

Sunday at our Business Meeting: Mel Kovechek made a motion to start charging dues at the rate of \$25.00 annually. Motion was seconded by Don Seibold and was accepted unanimously. The reason, after much discussion was the high cost of mailing, and at the reunions the rising cost of transportation, entertainment, bar beverages, snacks, and transporting small stores.

Don Seibold and myself were given an all expense stay in Tucson, Arizona by the Visitors and Convention Bureau. We were escorted around town and visited many Hotels and places of interest. One Of our guests at the Boston Reunion suggested we include the Annual Parade of Dead put on by the Mexican Residents of Tucson to honor the dead. It is a very colorful event and worthwhile seeing. The parade will be held Nov. 1,2004.

Tucson is a very interesting town with much to see. Included are thousands of Military Aircraft being held in reserve awaiting a call to duty, and open to visitors. There is a Dessert Museum, Caves to tour. Also a tram to take you to the higher elevations of the area. We will be taking a trip to Mexico. The town is abundant with fine restaurants with reasonable fare. Watch for details in the next newsletter.

There is a Iwo Jima Veterans Assoc. Reunion in Wichita Falls, Texas, Feb 18 thru 22, 04. If interested call: Phil Phillips @ 714-990-2560 or Fax @ 714-990-1565. I have attended one of these Reunions in the past, and found it to be quite interesting.

SHIPMATES PRESENT IN BOSTON

George Gackle	S Division 44-46	Robert Christy	E Division 44-46
Don Seibold	A,B,E,M 44-46	Dale Fravor	E Division 44-45
Tony Reiter	4 th Division 44-46	Marvin Childress	4 th Division 44-46
Hoy Little	8 th Division 44-45	Ralph Batchelor	B Division 34-37
Ed Maltock	9 th Division 44-46	Clarence Rittinger	5 th Division 43-46
Gery Porter	M Engine room-6/41-12/41	Bill Roseboom	11 th Division 44-45
John Raiche	Marine 42-45	Bob Sims	S Division 42-45
Leslie Salminen	E Division 44-46	James Downing	Postmaster 33-43
Ross Huffman	E Division 44-46	Morgan Pulver	8 th Division 43-46
Joe Variot	5 th Division 44-46	Joe Saragusa	11 th Division 44-45
Lou Balbinot	6 th CY 44-46	Ken Powell	11 th Division 43-45
Robert Andler	6 th Division 44-46	Art Yule	E Division 43-45
Mel Kovachek	Aviation 44-45	Maurice Featherman	4 th Div. 34-41
Tom Boyd	S Division 44-46	Blaise LePre	B Div. 43-46
Albert Voss	C Radio Flag 39-41		

R&R: ROUTINE AND RECREATION

By October 29 most of the American soldiers on Leyte were moving inland beyond the call fire range of Admiral Oldendorf's heavy warships. The old battleships, low on supplies and ammunition after the bombardments and the Battle of Surigao Strait, were now unnecessary to the invasion's further success. Rather than keep them around as "sitting ducks," exposed to continuing raids by the Imperial air forces, Admiral Kinkaid passed orders this day for all spare units of Task Group 77.2 to proceed south for rest, repair, and replenishment. Steaming via Manus and along the coasts of New Guinea and Guadalcanal, the West Virginia's journey was uneventful until she was within a day of her destination. On November 8 as the "Wee Vee" was turning to clear an area for a routine recovery of her floatplane, the Kingfisher lost a wing and crashed into the sea near the ship. Both the pilot, Lt. Commander Robert M. Rocktashel, and his radioman were killed. All aboard were saddened by these unexpected deaths—the first fatalities suffered by the dreadnought since December 7, 1941. Japanese fliers would soon attempt to increase the number of casualties, but would be unsuccessful for another five months.

On November 9, the West Virginia arrived at Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. Here after her ammunition was offloaded, she was immediately taken aboard the floating dry dock ABSD-1, anchored off Acssi Island, to have her damaged propellers fixed.

During her brief layover, a third of the "WeeVee's" men were given the opportunity for liberty each day. This first "R and R" period for the crew is a good time to take a look at the non-duty life style of the battle-ship's sailormen.

When the "Wee Vee" jacks were able to get ashore in a secure anchorage, they invariably and immediately indulged their thirsts for beer, bourbon, or both in grand navy tradition. After all, many a salt wondered, who could trust the local water supply, especially on an island owned by the French? In similar regard for tradition, a few shore side brawls were not unheard of with men sometimes returned to the ship by the Shore Patrol. The supposed adventures of Marine flyers a la TV's Pappy Boyington would not have held a candle!

Although service aboard was often a matter of dull routine, especially with regards to the endless work details, drills, and training sessions, such routine helped to make for a safe ship. There were sundry times of AA or bombardment excitement, but each man would take away from his time on board recollections of good, ordinary times which were not quite so hectic.

Recreation afloat was limited, even on board a warship as large as the West Virginia. Films were shown on the fantail every night, "weather permitting and if the Japs didn't show up." Various physical education programs were sponsored by the Chaplain and his helpers, much to the chagrin of a few old CPO's who probably would have preferred to see more deck swabbing. Shuffleboard contests and a variety of volleyball, called "string ball," according to Commander Rodgers, because the balls were fastened to the goal posts, were arranged on the main deck aft in good weather. Dozens of softballs were available for games of catch, the large number being necessary because so many went over the side. Other sports were indulged, chief among which was boxing. Participants and spectators for the "manly art" were never lacking.

Aboard the West Virginia, these radio programs were under the "known hands" of Chaplain Williams. Each morning, he would check in on the bridge to read the night dispatches and prepare a news sheet for mimeographing. His notes complete, Williams got on the loud speaker, opened with a short prayer, and then announce the news over "Station K.O.R.N." On these rare occasions, when the Chaplain could not man the anchor deck, Seaman 1-CA.M. Vitelli took over the chair.

The Chaplain spent many hours organizing the "Wee Vee's" entertainment programs, popularly called "Happy Hours." There were a few professionals in the crew and these he "rooted out" to lead the festivities. A jazz band was put together from members of the ship's regular band and group sings were usual. Among the battleship's "hits" were "The Log of the "Wee Vee"" and "Hail West Virginia" by Musician 3-C Don Johnson.

Of course, if any of these activities were not a sailor's forte, he could always join in a card game. Acey-deucey was in progress in all parts of the ship at any hour of the day or night. "I played Blackjack for cigarettes," muses Seaman Robinson, "but the big games we played in the foc's'le." "Poker," adds Seaman Rogusky, was common in "out-of-the-way places." The bets on hands varied; however, one can be sure that they were just as large as any placed on the downing of Japanese aircraft back in Leyte Gulf in October.

These are only a few glimpses of life for the off-duty bluejacket aboard the "Wee Vee." It was not a glamorous life, but it was wholesome service with enough pleasantries and excitement to break whatever dullness or uncertainty might have lingered."

AND THE BEAT GOES ON: MINDORA AND LINGAYEN

On September 14, 1944, the workmen of ABSD-1 completed their task of hammering the West Virginia's damaged screws back into shape. The great floating dry dock was then submerged, the ship was floated out, and her ammunition was reloaded. The following day, with Rear Admiral Thomas D. Ruddock, Jr. aboard, the Mountain State Battleship departed Espiritu Santo and set a course back to the Philippines. Following brief layovers at Manus and Ulithi, the crew celebrated Thanksgiving at sea, but, as Lt. Baumrucker recorded in notes made at the time, "it was so hot we didn't have much of an appetite for the turkey." The "Wee Vee" dropped anchor amidst the fleet in Leyte Gulf on November 26, just in time for her blue jackets to witness one of the many Japanese air attacks, which were being mounted against the anchorage. Although little damage was done, the men received a small sample of what was to come in the days and weeks ahead.

One of the most powerful Japanese air raids of the Philippines operation took place on a cloudy November 27 and the West Virginia was right in the middle of the action. Having rejoined Rear Admiral Weyler's Task Group 77.2, off the Leyte coast, the "Wee Vee" Maryland, Colorado, New Mexico, and many smaller warships were subjected to several bombing and suicide attacks beginning just after noon.

The air alert aboard Captain Wiley's ship came suddenly. Taking on fuel from a tanker, the men were startled to see an unidentified Japanese plane spin down through the clouds and crash into the sea some 1,500 yards off the starboard quarter. The cause of the crash was unknown, as the Task Group was not yet firing; undoubtedly, an American fighter from Dulag or Tacloban had scored the kill. The Air Defense gong sounded, the AA guns were quickly manned, and the ship was unmoored from alongside the tanker.

When clear of the oiler, the West Virginia went to General Quarters and maneuvered to take station. Rising Sun suiciders simultaneously commenced a series of individual assaults on Weyler's various ships. The "Wee Vee's" AA batteries opened fire ten minutes after the mysterious crash and continued to challenge for almost an hour.

The first enemy plane taken under fire was sighted off the battleship's port beam as she cleared the tanker. It could not be clearly identified, but was either a fighter or dive bomber. The port 40mm guns, nevertheless, opened on it and shortly thereafter the bird went into a shallow dive and crashed into the cruiser St. Louis.

Two other unidentified planes made similar attacks on the ships off the "Wee Vee's" port bow in rapid succession. The first was fired on by her port 20mm and 40mm cannon as it attacked and smashed into the Colorado. The second was also taken under fire by the light portside guns before it hit the fantail of the St. Louis.

A little later a Judy dive bomber was sighted to starboard making a shallow dive towards Wiley's command. All of the 20mm and 40mm guns to starboard opened fire. Coming on, the plane's left wing was torn off by the high concentration of shells and the Kamikaze dropped into the water within 200 yards of her objective.

As the West Virginia continued maneuvering into the circular disposition of the task group, an Oscar fighter was sighted on the starboard bow. It came out of the haze and began a dive on the cruiser Columbia off the starboard quarter. The dreadnought's 20mm and 40mm guns joined those of the Columbia and escorting destroyers in cutting down the plane, which crashed just astern by a Japanese observer perched in a church steeple on the northwestern coast of Mindanao.

About the same time, an unidentified fighter was taken under fire by the West Virginia's two after starboard 5-inch mounts. It flew into a cloud, but was neatly taken under fire when it reappeared moments later. The plane, maneuvered to a point about 1,200 yards off the ship's bow, but was hit by 5-inches and crashed off the starboard beam.

Several minutes later, a twin-tailed Lilly was sighted on the port beam flying aft. This plane was then taken under fire by the port 40mm and 5-inch battery, made a turn off the port quarter, and flew forward, on a course slightly converging with the battlewagon. Other ships in the formation now opened on it, but observers could clearly see the "Wee Vee's" 5-inch bursts close to the aircraft, which was hit and fell into the water off the stern of the cruiser Denver. Again Wiley's men received an "assist."

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Thereafter, a Jill dive bomber attacked the group, but pulled up and escaped before the West Virginia's gunners could score. In addition to the Colorado and St. Louis, the light cruiser Montpelier was badly damaged. During the fight, the "Wee Vee's" gunners officially downed two aircraft and aided in the end of at least two others.

Ships of the US task group were subjected to additional assaults the next day. Again steaming in a circular "wagon train" formation at full speed, all combined to throw up a formidable wall of AA fire at the Japanese. The battleship Maryland was struck twice and two destroyers were also hit. Despite heavy loss of life, all American ships survived.

The situation was much the same on November 29. Again the Emperor's flyers came in land again Weyler's vessels took them on. In early afternoon, lookouts on the West Virginia's port side sighted a Val dive bomber preparing a suicide run. All of the port side 40mm guns opened fire joining a chorus from various nearby ships. Within seconds the plane was hit, flew over the quarterdeck, and crashed close aboard the starboard beam.

Later at dusk, an unidentified aircraft was sighted off the port quarter at medium altitude and taken under fire. It was momentarily lost in the overcast and twilight after only a few 5-inch and 40mm rounds were loosed. The Japanese plane then reappeared, crossed over the West Virginia's port bow, and crashed into the port bow of the Maryland.

During the "Wee Vee's" stay in the New Hebrides and even now as her gunners were earning their pay, other minds were putting final touches on plans for the next phase of the Philippine campaign. Earlier in the year when the high command laid out its goals for the "return" Mindoro was recognized as an essential stepping-stone on the sea road to Luzon. In hand, the island, just south of Luzon, could be developed as a stationary aircraft carrier from which fighters and bombers of the US Fifth Air Force could give aerial support for landings slated for Lingayen Gulf on the west coast of Luzon, north of Manila. Now in the face of daily shipping casualties being inflicted by the flyboys of the Divine Wind, such a base complex became vital.

The initial timetable called for landings on Mindoro early on December 5. A combined sea and airborne operation would secure the San Jose area near the southwest coast in order to make immediate use of the airstrips. Unfortunately for the planning team, as so often happens in war, several factors conspired to delay and change somewhat the face of the undertaking. The delay in the development of Leyte's airfields caused by poor weather, and the continuing need for close air support of General Krueger's 6th Army made it questionable whether land-based planes would be in position by December 5 to cover the dangerous trip through hostile seas, the landing, and the time needed to shape-up Mindoro's airdromes.

Early in December, General MacArthur invited Admiral Kinkaid ashore to discuss the situation. Puffing on his famous pipe as staff people scurried about unrolling their maps, the hero of Bataan, New Guinea, and now Leyte laid out the itinerary. The Army did not have enough planes, he pointed out, "but the Mindoro operation must not be delayed." Could the Navy help? "It was then," the 7th fleet boss later recalled, "that I agreed to send CVE's (Escort carriers) through Surigao Strait with the sole mission of covering the convoy." It was not a good idea and Kinkaid did not like it even as he suggested it. "They weren't designed for such duty, they were designed for escort work only." On top of that, the weather could not be expected to co-operate. Army or Marine land-based aircraft on Leyte assigned escort duty would be tied down while flying conditions prevailing over Rising Sun airfields in the Sulu Sea area were excellent. Hostile warbirds flying in from the west would thus be permitted to attack a convoy enroute to Mindoro with little fear from grounded Allied planes. "After the landing, all combat ships must come back to Leyte," bargained Kinkaid, "they cannot stay in the area without complete air control." The general, by now becoming well versed in such naval matters, bought the argument, replying simply: "That's all right."

The conference over, Kinkaid returned to his flagship the Wasatch, to think the matter over. Before the meeting, he had only expected to send sixteen destroyers to Mindoro: now, he had to come up with battleships, carriers, and cruisers too. So it was that he summoned Rear Admiral Ruddock to discuss the situation.

Ruddock received his chief's radio message aboard the West Virginia while steaming with Weyler's formation on the outer fringe of Leyte Gulf. Waiting until after an air raid in which two US "tin cans" were damaged, he called a destroyer alongside the battleship and was soon escorted into Kinkaid's stateroom. There the 7th Fleet leader outlined the substance of his talk with Mac Arthur and requested the gunnery expert to offer his opinion. The slender, sharp-tongued Ruddock, recalling the air raids of November 27-29 was brief: "I think it's plain suicide." In a Nelsonian move, Kinkaid chose to ignore his subordinate's distaste and just as curtly queried: "What do you want- When can you go?"

With the ball back in his court, Ruddock drew heavily on a cigarette and paced quickly back and forth before his chief's desk considering the new responsibility suddenly dropped in his lap. None of the small carriers would survive the Kamikazes and no matter how many escort vessels were supplied, half would end up towing the other half back. Finally deciding, he broke the silence. To do the job, the escort group would need six CVE's, four battleships, four cruisers, and at least thirty destroyers. Kinkaid, having run a mental inventory of his fleet, shot back: "you can have six CVE's, three battleships, three cruisers, and eighteen destroyers." With a promise that the CVE's would be fresh, Ruddock and Kinkaid shook hands. Mac Arthur's goal was still intact; December 5 would be D-Day.

When Ruddock reached his stateroom on the West Virginia, he immediately set to planning. Air estimates were requested and when they arrived, the admiral's gloom deepened. According to American intelligence, the Japanese possessed between 700 and 750 planes within 150 miles of the Sulu Sea and could send 100 per raid against his force. This news had to be examined more closely and so he asked Rear Admiral Arthur D. Struble, who would command the Visayan Attack Force (Task Group 78.3) and land 28,000 soldiers on Mindoro, to come aboard for a talk. Struble, who knew the game plan but not the air estimated, was shocked. He thought, Ruddock remembered, that "we would just get the hell pounded out of us" The #1 "Wee Vee's" resident flag officer could not in good conscience be party to that would certainly be a massacre and conceivably the worst American Naval defeat in history.

In a further effort to dissuade Kinkaid, Ruddock placed his thoughts and information into a forceful Top Secret Memorandum, which, unlike many of these commentaries, came right to the point:

"In my opinion, the time is not appropriate for an invasion of Mindoro. We are courting disaster if the intelligence estimates are correct regarding the volume and known capabilities of the Japanese Air Force. Some of our ships would return undamaged and probably no carriers would survive. In addition to the suicide plane menace, it is estimated that seven or eight fleet type as well as many midget submarines are operating in the Sulu Sea. We will be operating in confined waters with limited speed. My urgent recommendation is that the operation be postponed until air superiority, but not necessarily complete control of the air, has been established by landbased planes."

Ruddock's memo reached the Wasatch while Kinkaid was meeting with Rear Admiral Felix Stump, a West Virginian and commander of his escort carriers. Stump also pointed out the problems, and when the 7th fleet boss read Ruddock's message, which by the way would probably not have been tolerated in any other navy, it was agreed that Mac Arthur should be informed.

Accepting his admirals' advice, Kinkaid again met the general and pointed out the dangers of the situation. With its supplies low, AAF airfield construction lagging, and the Navy now requesting a slow-down, Mac Arthur decided to postpone the Mindoro invasion for ten days to December 15. When informed of the decision aboard the West Virginia, Rear Admiral Ruddock was pleased to have the additional time and doubtless glad that his men would not be playing "wagon train" for the "Indians" of the Divine Wind. As an added delight, he was soon thereafter informed that on pay day, December 7, the officers and men for his flagship would take out pledges for \$51,480 from their \$225,000 monthly pay for the purchase of War Bonds.

Mac Arthur's delay was not lengthy, but it gave Ruddock the opportunity to carefully organize the formation and role of his Heavy Covering and Carrier Group (Task Unit 77.12). Meeting with Rear Admiral Stump, the group boss agreed that the former would have tactical command of the fleet during flight operations while control for night operations would pass back to the West Virginia. Both flag officers would maintain close contact with Ruddock charged with the ultimate responsibility. During the passage, fighter planes from the six small carriers (Natoma Bay, Manila Bay, Marcus Island, Kadashan Bay, Savo Island, and Ommaney Bay) would provide cover over themselves and the invasion vessels of admiral Struble's Visayan Attack Force. With luck and good weather, Marine Corsairs and Army Lightnings from Leyte would join in the Navy air effort. Meanwhile, the carriers would be screened against submarine attack by eighteen destroyers, including the Bennion, and against the threat of Japanese surface raiders by the big guns of the battleships West Virginia (flag), Colorado, and New Mexico plus the light cruisers Denver, Columbia, and Montpelier. Ruddock's fleet would maneuver as a miniature version of cruisers, and dreadnoughts close enough to provide massive AA protection for the carriers. The thirty ships were formed up in rain swept Kossol Passage on December 12 and departed under the cover of darkness.

The distance to Mindoro was 480 miles and throughout December 13, men aboard the "Wee Vee" and other vessels of Task Unit 77.12 were amazed that Imperial flyers did not appear. By early evening as the warships steamed deeper into the Sulu Sea, this respite became troublesome. Was something wrong? Aside

from giving air support, the escort carriers were actually supposed to bait to keep the enemy away from Struble. They were "the honey of the operation," but where were the Japanese bees?

The fact was that the American thrust caught the Emperor's people completely by surprise. As they had little use for Mindoro, they could not believe that their enemy prized it more. When reconnaissance aircraft reported the invasion force early on December 13, it was estimated that Negros or Panay was its destination. Regardless of the pay-off point, the Air Force would have to try and intercept the proceedings.

Early on Dec. 13, two Saiun reconnaissance planes, three Suisei dive bombers, six Ginga bombers, and fifty-three Shiden and Zero fighters took off from Mabalacat airfield, approximately 50 miles from Manila. This was the largest suicide group yet put into the air. Since no one on the Imperial payroll knew for sure where the Yanks were or were going, the planes were instructed to fly near the south coast of Negros and continue out over the Mindanao Sea if nothing was found.

The big Japanese formation reached a point 125 miles from base when it was "bounced" by US Hellcats from Halsey's carriers assigned to blanket Luzon. The Rising Sun aircraft were forced to scatter and before the group could be reformed, the weather deteriorated. Under the circumstances, most of the pilots elected to abandon their mission and return to the nearest base. The largest Kamikaze force yet fielded was, from an American viewpoint, fortunately thwarted.

A few of the Japanese continued their search and in early afternoon found Struble's transports. In ones and twos, the bomb laden aircraft went into shallow dives, with most being downed by AA fire or attentive Marine Corsairs. Once suicide plane got through the American fire and smashed into the flagship Nashville. Badly damaged and with 133 casualties, the cruiser was forced to return to Leyte after transferring the admiral, ground leader General Dunkel, and surviving staff members to the destroyer Dashiell. When the "tin can" was under way, Stuble radioed news of the attack over to Ruddock and Stump, who as yet had seen nothing of the enemy.

As the gunners of the West Virginia stood to their AA stations at dusk, Lt. Arendts was handed an urgent radio message from Admiral Stump's flagship, the Natoma Bay. "Bogies," it read, "twenty-nine miles, closing from northeast" Flying from Cebu, seven Japanese Naval Air Force 201st Air Group Zero suicide planes, escorted by three conventional fighters, locked in on Ruddock's ships and began to attack. Interceptors were scrambled off the escort carriers and downed five Divine Wind planes. Still, two got past and prepared to dive.

The first "Zeke" avoided all AA fire. Jinking and weaving low over the water, it crashed into the bridge of the rapidly-turning destroyer Haraden. This hit killed most of the men in the area and severely damaged the topside superstructure. No longer of use in the operation, Admiral Ruddock ordered the battered little ship to return to Leyte Gulf.

Shortly after the Haraden smash, lookouts aboard the "Wee Vee" sighted the second Zero in line with a vessel off the starboard bow. It flew very low toward our battleship, which opened fire with her forward starboard 20mm and 40mm guns as soon as the range was clear. The Kamikaze passed across the bow of the big warship, then in a right turn, and flew down her port side close inboard. All port pom-poms that could bear took the Japanese under fire as it passed aft and several hits were observed as it moved abeam. These scores caused the aircraft to burst into flames and disintegrate, its pieces falling into the sea some 250 yards astern.

The attack had been successfully beaten off, but the day's activities were not quite to the task of the unit boss' liking. "We had hoped to catch the Japs with their pants at the dip and wearing weak suspenders," Ruddock later commented, "but now they had found us."

That night as Struble's transports continued on towards Mindoro, Ruddock played a ruse. Task Unit 77.12 made a feint towards Puerto Princesa, trying to make the Japanese believe that invasion was coming to Palawan. This ploy worked. Most of the Rising Sun raids sent out on Dec. 14, scouted the Palawan area, but found no targets. The American carriers were only attacked once, with no damage resulting. That evening, Ruddock made another run on Palawan and discerned correctly that "by this time, they were trying to figure out what the hell was going on."

The following morning, Dec. 15, troops of the US 503rd Parachute Regiment and elements of the 24th Division were landed near San Jose on schedule. Opposition on the beaches was negligible and no casualties were suffered. In the air, the Japanese reception was warmer and two LST's were fatally hit. During the invasion, Task Unit 77.12 stood guard out to sea south of the tip of Panay. Up to "this point," Ruddock notes, "we were more surprised than anyone that we hadn't been damaged." Soon, however, the breeze of the Divine Wind would be felt in his arena.

The Japanese laid on a haphazard series of assaults over a three hour period that morning. About 0724, an Oscar fighter was sighted by Director 4 on the West Virginia's port quarter. As the plane approached on a slightly converging course, the two after port side 5-inch mounts took it under fire. Immediately thereafter, Director 2 picked up the war bird and the two forward port side 5-inchers opened up. The Japanese pilot maintained a constant altitude, but was apparently unnerved. When about abeam of the ship, he reversed course and fled away.

At approximately 0940 as the aerial assault on Task unit 77.12 continued, Captain Wiley was informed by the CIC that several enemy planes were approaching the "Wee Vee." Shortly thereafter, lookouts sighted two Japanese planes on the starboard quarter about 5,000 yards distant. One of the planes which could not be identified, was shot down as it attempted to crash a ship on the West Virginia's starboard beam.

The second plane, soon identified as a Judy dive bomber, made a circle and flew directly toward the West Virginia's starboard quarter in a shallow dive. As it approached, all starboard 20mm and 40mm guns opened. The Judy passed across the stern at a range of approximately 600 yards and flew up the port side on a course slightly converging with that of the dreadnought. The after 20mm's followed the warbird around the stern and the port side 20mm and 40mm cannon opened fire as it flew alongside. Numerous hits were observed and the tail was shot off as the kite passed abeam, forcing the bomber to crash into the sea.

When the smoke of the morning cleared, US AA fire and carrier planes had downed five "meatballs." After another day in the area, Ruddock's ships returned to Leyte Gulf. Thanks to the West Virginia, her consorts, and her crafty flag officer, General MacArthur's men were quickly able to seize his springboard to Luzon.

**TAKEN FROM 'THE MOUNTAIN STATE BATTLESHIP' USS WEST VIRGINIA
BY: MYRON J. SMITH, JR.**

A MEMORIAL SERVICE WAS HELD AT THE REUNION FOR SHIPMATES PASSED AWAY IN 2003

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Elmer John Specht | Frank I. Gurlin |
| Taylor Marion Jeffords | Thomas Lanane |
| Wally Morgan | Hurley C. Hume |
| Doyle Roddy | Warren D. Hall |
| Donald Clingenpeel | Arthur Lidman |
| Sol Blaine | Jerry Wilson |
| Jim Dittoe | James Robert "Shep" Fields |
| Mike G. Branson | Joseph P. Maloney |
| Lewis F. Napolitana | Bryan Dixon |
| Robert C. Lindell | Duane Sayre |
| Mack Miller | James Carol Gridley |
| A.T. Byrd | John Cyrus McIntire |
| Herman Kimble | William H. Raub |
| Allen Rightmer | C. Rex Scott |
| G.W. Steff | |

The Hilton Hotel in Tucson, has informed us that the earlier our reservations are made, the better chance we have of all the rooms including the hospitality being on the same floor. The room rate includes breakfast and a Welcome Aboard Margarita Party.

USS West Virginia Reunion – November 1-8, 2004 Hotel Reservation Form

Mail to: Hilton Tucson East, 7600 East Broadway Boulevard, Tucson, AZ 85710
Or Call 520-721-5600 ask for reservations or Fax to 520-721-5698

Name: _____ **Sharing with:** _____
Please print clearly

Address: _____ **Zip:** _____
Street or PO Box / City / State

Phone: _____ **Fax:** _____ **E-mail:** _____

Arrival Date: _____ **Departure Date:** _____

of rooms _____ **# of guests in each room** _____

handicap smoking non-smoking king bed 2 queen beds
Please circle your request(s). If room type is not available, nearest room type will be assigned

Confirmation # _____
(for hotel use)

Rate: \$75.00 single or double occupancy, plus 11.5% tax and \$1.00 occupancy tax. Rate will be honored three (3) days before and after reunion dates, based on availability. Additional charge of \$7.00 per person, per day, for the third and fourth guest per room.

Cutoff date: October 2, 2004. Reservations received after this date will be processed on space and rate availability. We can not guarantee the group rate once the cutoff date has passed. All reservations must be guaranteed by a major credit card or first night's deposit. If guaranteeing by first night's deposit please enclose a check with the reservation form.

Credit Card Type: Amex Diners Visa Mastercard Discover

Credit Card Number _____ Exp date _____

Name of Card Holder _____

I, the undersigned, hereby assumes liability for, and shall indemnify, defend, protect, save and hold harmless the USS West Virginia Reunion Association and Interstate Hotels & Resorts, Inc., it's parent, subsidiaries and affiliates and their officers, agents, subcontractors and employees from and against any and all liabilities, claims, judgements, damages, and losses, including all costs, fees and expenses incidental thereto, caused by or arising out of the gross negligence or willful misconduct on my behalf and which are in any way related to the services or goods contemplated by this agreement.

Signature _____ Date _____

2nd Guest _____ Date _____

Signature is required regardless of payment method.

Cancellation Policy: Deposit is refundable if reservation is canceled 48 hours prior to arrival.

Airport Transportation: If need for airport shuttle service is required, please complete the following and return to the hotel by 10/2/04:

Arrival: Airline _____ Date _____ Flight Number _____ Time _____

Departure: Airline _____ Date _____ Flight Number _____ Time _____

Number of passengers each flight: _____

If there is a change or delay in your flight itinerary as you travel to Tucson, please contact the transportation company directly. Call Lionel at 520-631-2293. Should a change occur prior to your travel, call the hotel directly.

Our staff is looking forward to welcoming the members of the USS West Virginia Association and their guests. It is our goal to hear all of you say "this was the best reunion ever!" We will make it happen. Enjoy your trip to Tucson. The welcome mat is out.

-THINGS WE HAVE LEARNED-

RAISING TEENAGERS IS LIKE TRYING TO NAIL JELLO TO A TREE
 MIDDLE AGE IS WHEN YOU CHOOSE CEREAL FOR THE FIBER, NOT THE TOY
 IF YOU CAN REMAIN CALM YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE FACTS
 YOUR GETTING OLD WHEN YOU STOOP TO TIE YOUR SHOE AND WONDER
 WHAT ELSE YOU CN DO WHILE YOU'RE DOWN THERE
 YOU APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT WRINKLES DON'T HURT

-THINGS OUR CHILDREN HAVE LEARNED-

NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY, YOU CAN'T BAPTISE CATS
 WHEN MOM IS MAD AT DAD, DON'T LET HER BRUSH YOUR HAIR
 YOU CAN'T TRUST DOGS TO WATCH YOUR FOOD
 YOU CAN'T HIDE A PIECE OF BROCCOLLI IN A GLASS OF MILK
 PUPPIES STILL HAVE BAD BREATH EVEN AFTER EATING A TIC-TAC

-THINGS WE SHOULD ALL LEARN-

IF YOU THINK YOU'RE TOO SMALL TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, YOU HAVEN'T
 BEEN IN BED WITH A MOSQUITO
 WHY DOES A SLIGHT TAX INCREASE COST YOU \$200, AND A SUBSTANTIAL
 TAX CUT SAVE YOU ONLY THIRTY CENTS
 YOU NEVER SAW A FISH ON THE WALL WITH ITS MOUTH SHUT
 PRIDE IS TASTELESS, COLORLESS AND SIZELESS, YET IT IS THE HARDEST
 THING TO SWALLOW
 MONEY WILL BUY A PRETTY DOG, BUT IT WON'T WAG HIS TAIL
 A SHIP IN A SAFE HARBOR IS SAFE, BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT A SHIP IS
 BUILT FOR
 THE BEST BRIDGE BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE IS A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP
 IF OPPORTUNITY DOESN'T KNOCK, BUILD A DOOR
 SUCCESS SEEMS TO BE LARGELY A MATTER OF HANGING ON AFTER
 OTHERS LET GO.
 YOU CAN EITHER COMPLAIN THAT ROSE BUSHES HAVE THORNS-OR
 REJOICE THAT THORN BUSHES HAVE ROSES

REUNION ASSOCIATION

C/O JOSEPH VARIOT
4564 CEDAR RIVER RD
MANCELONA, MI. 49659

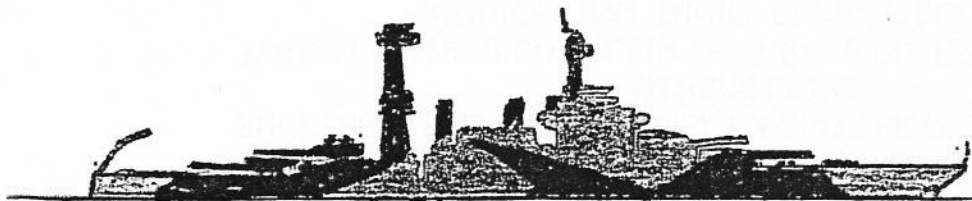
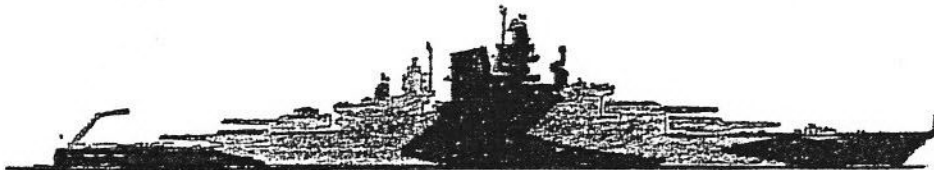


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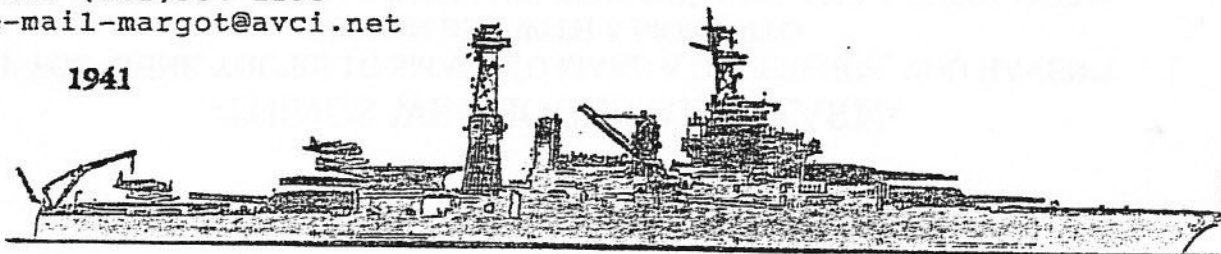
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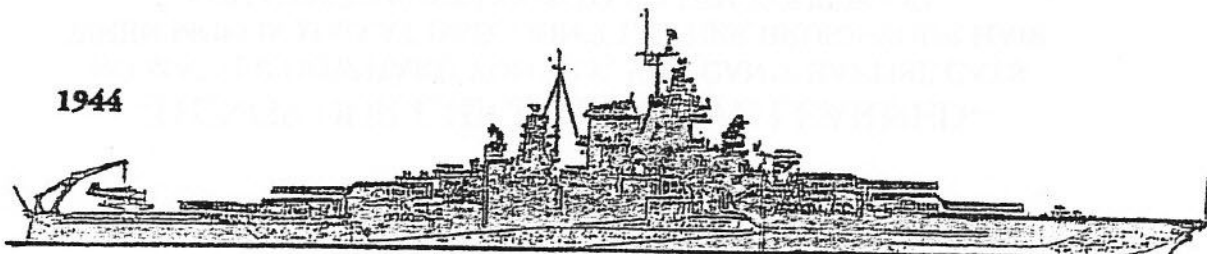
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COLORADO CLASS BATTLESHIP - USS WEST VIRGINA (BB48)
AS OUTFITTED IN THE WINTER OF 1941

1941



1944



COLORADO CLASS BATTLESHIP - USS WEST VIRGINA (BB48)
AS OUTFITTED IN THE SUMMER OF 1944