



SPRING 2014

USS WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION

## 2014 Reunion is in San Antonio, Texas September 26-28

The USS West Virginia Ship's 2014 reunion plans are finalized! The reunion will be in historic San Antonio, TX. We suggest planning Thursday, September 25, 2014 as a travel day with group activities and tours planned for Friday and Saturday, September 26 & 27. As a result of some generous donations from friends of the Association, we are able to reduce the cost of the activities significantly this year.

**HOTEL:** We will stay at the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk located at 217 N. St. Mary's Street, San Antonio, TX 78205. The daily room rate is \$120 plus tax for single through quad occupancy. This special room rate is available for three days before and three days after the reunion. The newly renovated hotel is in the heart of downtown San Antonio, directly on the banks of the beautiful San Antonio Riverwalk. The hotel is close to major attractions, restaurants and shops. The Holiday Inn Riverwalk is 8 miles from the San Antonio International Airport. Shuttle services are conveniently located at the airport. A round-trip shuttle ticket costs \$34 per person. The hotel offers several restaurants and lounges with Riverwalk views and on-site parking. To make reservations simply call (210) 224-2500 and ask for the USS WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION GROUP RATE.

**THURSDAY:** The Tony Reiter clan will again sponsor a happy hour and pizza party in the complimentary hospitality room, allowing travelers to relax and socialize in our private suite.

**FRIDAY:** We will board a luxury motor coach at 9:00 AM for about a one hour ride to Fredericksburg, TX. A USS West Virginia plaque dedication ceremony will occur upon arrival on the grounds of the National Museum of the Pacific War. After the ceremony we will have plenty of time to tour both the Pacific War and the Nimitz museums. Several lunch spots (on your own) are within a short walking distance. We will leave the museum at about 3:00 PM, returning to the hotel to rest up before happy hour and socializing in our hospitality room. There will be **NO CHARGE** for the bus trip and tour.

**SATURDAY:** We will board our luxury motor coach at 9:00 AM for a day steeped in Texas history. With a local guide we will visit Mission San Jose, enjoy a documentary film and explore the sacred grounds. We will then venture to the Alamo Plaza to experience the award winning IMAX movie "The Price of Freedom" which chronicles the story of the battle of the Alamo. With these fresh images and the story in our mind we will proceed to the Alamo to explore the historic grounds. Lunch and souvenir shopping will be on your own around the Alamo Plaza. We will return by bus to the hotel ( 3 blocks away) at about 2:00 PM The cost of the tour is \$25 per person.

We will have our memorial service at the hotel at 4:00 PM After the service we will have an "open bar" at 5:00 PM in the reception lounge. Our banquet will be at 6:00 PM This sit down, plated dinner will include your choice of sautéed boneless breast of chicken with marsala sauce or petit grilled sirloin with a brandy peppercorn sauce. Dinner includes all the fixings, beverages, and dessert for \$25 per person.

**SUNDAY:** This will be a leisurely day. Those not traveling on Sunday can take advantage of many nearby attractions, restaurants and strolling the beautiful Riverwalk area.

Please mark your calendar now to attend, spread the word, enjoy catching up with your buddies and taking in the sites of historic San Antonio.

Your Reunion Committee (Tom Reiter, Joe Reiter, and Tim Dege)

## The Battle for Mt. Suribachi

Written by Francis T. Kleber, ENS, USN, Age 20, while serving aboard USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB48)

Safe in my quarters in the junior officers' bunk room aboard the battleship, USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB48), lying offshore of Mount Suribachi at the southern end of the island of Iwo Jima, I viewed the mounting death reports from the heavy fighting on the beach with increased apprehension. Somewhere in that living hell at Suribachi was my brother Vic, a Marine First Lieutenant.

It was February 19, 1945, and I was an Ensign serving as Junior Asst. Navigator with an additional assignment as Junior Officer of the Deck at General Quarters. The mighty "Wee Vee", as she was fondly referred to by her ship's company, had earned her share of battle stars since her temporary demise at Pearl Harbor, and we were all proud of her post-attack record. The ship had contributed her share of steel in pre-landing bombardment and close fire support tasks for the Philippine Islands landings at Leyte Gulf, Mindoro and Lingayen Gulf; and now it was ready to carry out those same duties at Iwo Jima. The fact that we were the "big gun" of the battle line of old battleships during the Battle of Surigao Straits when the "T" was crossed against a Japanese surface force made us feel pretty smug too. Yes, it had been well established that our ship, commanded by CAPT H. V. ("High Velocity") Wiley, had pumped more 16" main battery goods into the Japanese heavies that night of October 25, 1944 than any other battleship present. The "Wee Vee", the "newest" of the "old battleships" commissioned on December 1, 1923, had proved itself as a force to be reckoned with in spite of her age.

After 35 days in the Lingayen area, the ship anchored in Ulithi Lagoon on February 16 for some well-deserved rest and recreation.. No sooner were her hooks into the coral and mud when a communication from CINCPAC was received which ordered the ship to refuel, take on stores and depart by sunset for Iwo. We were to proceed at best speed to replace the USS NEW YORK(BB34) which had damaged one of its propellers on an uncharted pinnacle. The "Wee VEE" was chosen for this task because it was the only heavy ship from the Lingayen fight group deemed to be in condition and ready for this mission. The ship steamed at a hard 18-knots and covered the 900 miles from Ulithi in 50 hours, earning a "Well Done" from Admiral Nimitz .

We arrived at the Iwo Jima landing scene on February 19 at 1030, an hour and a half after H-hour, ready to carry out the same fire support role which we had performed elsewhere in such an able manner. The island was smoky and cinder-like with a good sized bump at the southern end called Mount Suribachi. It appeared as if our naval surface forces were everywhere, and one couldn't help but appreciate and marvel at the long range planning which had been done by our Navy in bringing such a large body of men, weapons and supplies to such a small place. Shortly after our arrival, the ship was assigned to a fire support station, and we took our place along with other old battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and small amphibious rocket ships to give gunfire support to that part of the Navy ashore: the U.S. Marines.

After several days of gunfire support duties and retiring to an outer area at night time , our shipboard existence took on somewhat of a routine aspect. Not so with the Marines ashore, however. As reports came in, it appeared as if some of the unlucky ones would make a costly down payment with their lives before the exchange of any real estate, especially the craggy and apparently enemy-laden Suribachi. Requests for fire support to that area were many, and our spotting pilots who acted as air spotters for the main and secondary batteries verified that it really looked like an extremely tough objective.

I managed to take a hasty look at some of the operation orders which were received on board after our arrival. To my surprise and dismay, I discovered that my brother's regiment had been assigned the objective of capturing Suribachi. He was a reconnaissance platoon leader in the H. & S. Co., 28<sup>th</sup> Marines, FIFTH Division, and I immediately conjectured many visions of him, most of them bad. As a recon platoon leader, he would be taking his platoon out at night trying to determine the positions of the Japanese defenders, most of whom were later determined to be in underground fortresses. I had last seen him at Camp Pendleton as a member of the "Fighting Fifth", the "Spearhead Division" just before I shoved off from the States in September 1944. But now, how was he? How was he faring? Was he still alive? Had he been hit by a bullet? What kind of existence over there? Had he killed anybody? These and many other questions caused me to reflect about my own life on a battleship compared to his. While I am sleeping on clean sheets, eating fresh food in the wardroom served by stewards and using table silverware on starched tablecloths, what is happening to my brother, Vic?

The more I thought about my present life compared to his, the more guilty I felt. Here just the night before, since things had settled down to pretty much of a routine for us, the wardroom had enjoyed a movie, a Guadalcanal war movie at that, while those on the bridge watch steamed the ship in an oval-shaped race track pattern as the gunnery condition watches lobbed a predetermined hourly amount of 5-inch harassing and interdiction fire with star shells at Japanese positions on Suribachi ... just to ensure a sleepless night for the Japanese defenders.. What a contrast! Here I was on this floating hotel while my brother was in some stinking hole ashore, that is, if he was lucky enough to be alive. I visualized him in hand to hand combat with numerous "Banzai!" screaming Japanese fanatics, *(continued)*

## The Battle for Mt. Suribachi (continued)

but I couldn't settle on an ending to such encounters. I wondered if I would ever see him again.

I had tried to get into the Marine Corps prior to graduation from the Naval Academy less than a year before; but, because there were only 16 openings for many hopefuls and because I had not drawn a slip with an "X", I was commissioned an Ensign in the Navy. Well, I liked it all right but not under these conditions; here I was in the Navy having it pretty soft while God knows what was happening or had happened to my brother over there on Suribachi. The more I thought about it, the more frustrated I became; because I really couldn't do a damned thing about it.

Later that night, we, of all things, had strung dinner music in the wardroom provided by a small group of musicians from the ship's band! I guess the ship's Executive Officer was trying to create a "business as usual" atmosphere for morale purposes in spite of the fact that we were fighting a war. Well, we did go to GQ for main battery fire during the day and then the secondary battery condition watches would take over at dusk to provide harassing fire after our spotting plane returned. That band routine really took the cake.

"Oh, yeah, I was off Iwo ...we listened to dinner music in the wardroom. It was really rough!" I could hear myself saying that in answer to any questions I might be asked when I got back home. "Well, what the hell? What am I going to tell my brother about Iwo when I see him? ...if I see him?"

Reports of casualties indicated the Marines could use all possible support. I was still on that damned pleasure craft about 6000 yards or so from my brother. If I could only do something! Yes, the ship was helping out all right, but I was such a small part of it that it was difficult to fully identify myself with any concrete assistance to those Marines ashore.

On the morning of February 23, 1945, the Troop Commander ashore notified all ships present that Old Glory was flying from the top of Suribachi as a result of a successful assault by the 28<sup>th</sup> Marines. With the possession of this mountain, our whole endeavor to capture the entire island had been strengthened greatly. I felt extremely proud to have had something, 'though small, to do with this success, but my feelings of guilt were still there too. I felt more proud that my brother was in the regiment which took Suribachi. I still had no idea of whether he was alive or dead, so my emotions were mixed with joyous thoughts of the partial victory and anxiety over his well-being. What could I do to assist him? ... to let him know that I was there even though in sort of a 'man behind the man behind the gun' position?

I could write him a letter and let him know that I was nearby, that I was very proud of him, that I knew God would watch over him safely and that we would see one another again after the war was over. At least I could do that, but how could I get it to him? If I could get that letter to him, I was sure he would get a boost out of opening a letter from someone "back home" while he was in a foxhole on Iwo. The next day as our OS2U "Kingfisher" float plane was catapulted from the WEST VIRGINIA, my letter was aboard carrying a three-cent stamp. One of our pilots had agreed to drop it in a conspicuous place in an official message carrier designed for air drop use. When he returned, he assured me that it had landed right smack in the center of airfield #1 which was already ours and that he had seen a Marine pick it up.

Sometime after the mopping up was complete and all enemy resistance on the island had ended, regular US Mail service was initiated. Much to my surprise and elation, I received a letter from brother Vic after the "Wee Vee" had left Iwo Jima to prepare for the Okinawa invasion. He said that he had, indeed, received the letter in a foxhole the same day it was dropped, that it was a great source of comfort to him and that my words of encouragement about the future helped him to realize that the death and destruction of his surroundings were only temporary and there were better things in store for him.

Years later he wrote to me: "The letter's delivery under those circumstances was nothing short of fantastic. Its loss, when the back pocket of my utility pants became torn, denied me possession of one of the most precious items ever given to me in my lifetime. That letter was priceless and graphically depicted the deep and abiding filial love between brothers." While this letter meant so much to us, two brothers during war time, to others it was merely the first piece of U.S. Mail delivered on Iwo Jima before its surrender.

## Memorial Plaque at the Nimitz Museum

Thanks to the generous contributions from our members and friends, we were able to raise the funds necessary to place a new plaque honoring our ship and her crew at the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, TX. We'll now be represented in a manner deserving of the history of USS West Virginia (BB-48). We'll have a prominent memorial at the museum that is on par with those of many other ships including the sister ships of the USS West Virginia—USS Colorado and USS Maryland.

During the reunion in San Antonio, we are taking a special trip to Fredericksburg for the dedication of the memorial.

## Case of the Missing Silver Service by William C. Blizzard

Published in the Sunday Gazette Mail—June 21, 1959

It was a proud day for West Virginia. A cool December breeze ruffled the finery of dignitaries and their ladies, and a weak winter sun highlighted the colorful uniforms of nearly 1,000 naval personnel and invited guests assembled upon the quarter deck of the mighty battleship West Virginia.

Her 16-inch guns – only the West Virginia and her sister ships, the Colorado and Maryland, had such awesome armament – frowned upon the Norfolk Navy Yard as Mrs. John Dice of Lewisburg presented a set of colors, the American flag, and the insignia of the state of West Virginia to Captain Thomas J. Senn.

Raymond Kenney of Grafton made the presentation address and Captain Senn gave the order to “pipe down.” This order was not directed to Kenney, but to the officers and enlisted men who settled down to ship routine after the guests departed. The USS West Virginia had been formally commissioned.

This happened on December 1, 1923. The Mountain State could be proud that one of the most powerful battlewagons afloat was her namesake.

The Charleston Gazette of that date concludes a description of the ceremonies with the following words: “The battleship will be presented with a silver service by the people of W. Va.”

This is customary when a battleship with a state designation is commissioned. And funds for the silver service project were collected, at least in part, from West Virginia club women, school children and civic groups.

A silver service for a battleship is not bought at the five-and-dime. The price to the Navy would probably be about \$3,000. What happened to the collected funds for the West Virginia silver is shrouded in mystery to this day.

But is it unclouded fact that no silver service was purchased; the brand new USS West Virginia was forced to make do with secondhand silver from another battleship.

Naturally, any mystery worth the name has half-a-dozen probably solutions worked out by the amateur sleuths. The Case of the Missing Silver is no exception. One, which seemed to have the most adherents, was given particular attention in chasing down the story on the USS West Virginia’s beginnings.

It revolves around a Southern West Virginia industrialist who had a fortune once estimated at many millions.

A man with that much money is likely to be prominent in the political life of his native state, and it is true that the industrialist in question knew Gov. Ephriam F. Morgan quite well. So well, in fact, that he was present with other dignitaries on the quarter deck of the West Virginia that chilly December day when she was formally commissioned.

His presence was justified, of course, on the unassailable premise that those who guide the ship of state are entitled to the honor of giving a new battleship a shove in the right direction. Shoving a battlewagon takes some doing. Gov. Morgan, no doubt, needed help.

Since men of means are frequently associated with banking institutions, the story goes that the industrialist on the quarter deck also was associated with a bank, and that was supposed to have made him an ideal choice for the silver fund raisers.

He is supposed to have been given the fundraisers’ poke for the West Virginia’s silver service. Who could blame them if they secretly hoped that he, with all his wealth, would sweeten the kitty when the mortgage came due on the table armament?

So much for the logic. Now, for the fantasy. The industrialist is supposed to have had financial setbacks in the 20’s and a little later. His multi-million fortune was wiped out. Some say the silver service money, relatively small though it was, went down the drain with the rest.

Since the industrialist now is dead, I addressed a letter to his estate, administered by an officer of the bank he was associated with. I received this reply:

“In all my experience . . . and my connection with the estate . . . I have never noted any funds that I could identify for the purpose indicated in your letter.”

In other words, my dear Watsons, there were no silver threads among the gold. Or, perhaps I didn’t follow up on the right industrialist.

But, whatever the solution to the mystery, the silver service money was never spent to decorate the tables of the USS West Virginia.

West Virginia had to be satisfied with the leavings from residents of another state. If you see something symbolic in this, pertaining to more than a silver service, I congratulate you on your astuteness.

# 2014 Reunion Activity Registration Form

Listed below are all registration, tour, and meal costs for the reunion. Please enter how many people will be participating in each event and the total amount. Send that amount payable to **USS West Virginia Association** in the form of a **check or money order** (no credit cards or phone reservations) to: USS West Virginia Association, c/o Mike Mullins, 2933 Cottonwood Lane, Chester Springs, PA 19425. All registration forms and payments must be received by mail on or before **August 15, 2014**.

DATE	PRICE (\$/PP)	NUMBER	TOTAL (\$)
<b>09/25/2014 Thursday</b> Welcome Aboard! Pizza Party in the Hospitality Room at 6:00PM	\$ FREE		
<b>09/26/2014 Friday</b> National Museum of the Pacific War Load bus at 9:00AM, Return at 4:30PM Hospitality Room open on return	\$ FREE		
<b>09/27/2014 Saturday</b> Mission San Jose Visit the Alamo Load bus at 9:00AM, Return at 2:00PM Hospitality Room open on return	\$25.00 pp		
<b>09/27/2014 Saturday</b> Banquet Dinner at 6:00PM Hospitality Room open following the banquet	\$25.00 pp	Chicken / Beef /	
Registration	\$25.00 pp		
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For hotel reservations at the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk , call (210) 224-2500 . The special group rate is \$120 per night. This rate is good for three (3) nights before and three (3) nights after the reunion events. In order to obtain your special group rate, guests need to ask for the USS WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION GROUP RATE .

## ATTENDEES (For name tags)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DIVISION \_\_\_\_\_ YEARS ABOARD 19 \_\_\_\_ to 19 \_\_\_\_

GUEST NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY CONTACT NAME & PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

## INDEMNITY CLAUSE (Must be signed regardless of payment method)

I, the undersigned, hereby assume liability for and shall indemnify, defend, protect, save and hold harmless the USS West Virginia Association and the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk, its parent, subsidiaries and affiliates, and their officers, agents, subcontractors, and employees, from and against any and all liabilities, claims, judgments, damages, losses, including all costs, fees, and expenses incidental there to 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 \_\_\_\_\_

PRINTED NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

# San Antonio is Ready! Are You?

**2014 USS West Virginia (BB-48) Reunion - September 26-28, 2014**



**USS West Virginia Association**

**Mike Mullins – Curator**

2933 Cottonwood Lane  
Chester Springs, PA 19425

Phone: 610-952-3542

**We're on the Web!**  
**[www.usswestvirginia.org](http://www.usswestvirginia.org)**

The USS West Virginia Association's collection of information and artifacts is kept in the care of Mike Mullins, Curator. Our web site is one of the largest online collections of information about a battleship that you will see anywhere.



The Alamo (*above*) and San Antonio Riverwalk (*below*), two attractions that will be enjoyed during the 2014 reunion in San Antonio, Texas.