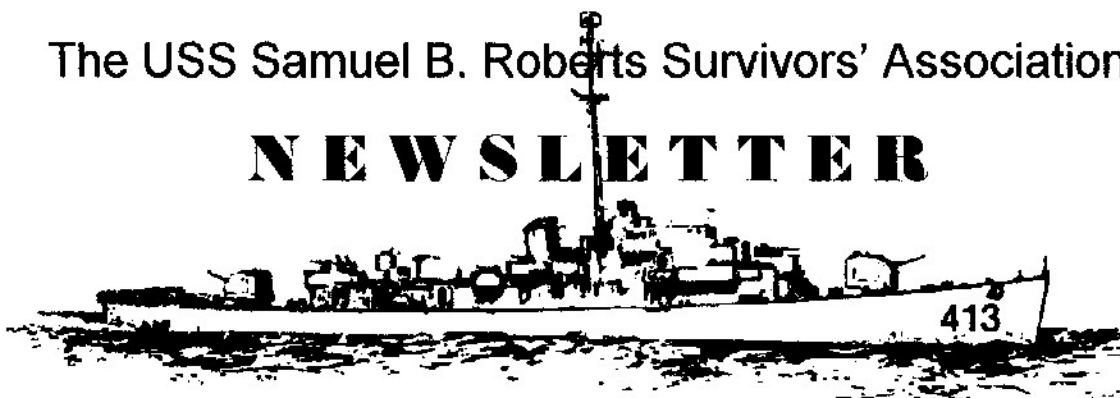


The USS Samuel B. Roberts Survivors' Association

NEWSLETTER



Dedicated to the memory of our shipmate and friend, Whit Felt.

January 2004

Volume 14, Number 1

It's Been a Long, Long Time!

Your editor apologizes for the long delay in getting this edition of the *Newsletter* put together. I know that you are not supposed to hibernate in the fall and wake up in the winter. Still trying to get used to Florida, I guess.

So many things have happened since the last issue. Our reunion in Albany, selection of the time and place of our next reunion, discovery of one of our shipmates, loss of other shipmates, birth of a new granddaughter, 2003 fades into history and 2004 is upon us. Jim Hornfischer's new book soon to be published and two other books about Leyte Gulf and Taffy 3 in the works. Bear with me and we'll cover all of the above and more.

To all of you, here in the States and on the high seas, I send my best wishes for a New Year blessed with good health and prosperity. I hope and pray that a peace might settle over all troubled areas. We offer our best wishes to all of our armed forces, home and abroad and support them, our nation, our President and Congress in their efforts to make peace and security a reality.

REUNION 2004

San Diego - October 24 - 28, 2004

Mark it down now. We will hold our reunion back in San Diego and will meet again with the members of the USS Johnston and USS Hoel. Our Memorial Service will be at the monument in Fort Rosekranz National Cemetery. Lest we forget, this is the 60th anniversary. Reunion headquarters will be The Red Lion Hanalei Hotel. The address is 2270 Hotel Circle North, San Diego CA 92108. The telephone number is 800 882-0858. The guaranteed room rate is \$90.00 plus 10.5% tax which brings the total to \$99.45. The rates are good for the three days prior to the reunion and three days after. When you make your reservation, say that you are part of the Samuel B. Roberts Survivors group and make sure that you get the \$90 rate.

This is a beautiful hotel and one that I am sure you will enjoy. Do not even think of comparing it to our hotel in Albany. This one has two very nice restaurants and a cocktail lounge, featuring appetizers. I don't even think that they have pizza. Nuff said.

Albany Reunion - 2003

On September 10, 2003 about 40 of us assembled in Albany for our reunion. There were seven survivors - Vince Goodrich, Lou Gould, Mel Harden, Dudley Moylan, Dick Rohde, Tom Stevenson and Bill Wilson. Together with family, friends and supporters we had a most wonderful time and enjoyed being together again.

A big part of the reason for such a successful reunion was due to the help and hard work of Patti Hedgeman. Patti is the daughter of our shipmate Jack Conway. Patti and members of the Conway family made our stay a memorable one. They provided vans, wheel chairs, flowers and refreshments. Patty came up with a bagpiper, singer, and color guard for our Memorial Service aboard the Slater. She recommended side trips and restaurants. She did shopping for us, shared her knowledge of the Albany area and was with us for every event. Our hats are off to Patty and her family.

Our advance scouts for the event were Vince Goodrich and Sam Stewart and they did a wonderful job. While the hotel did lack a few of the amenities to which we have become accustomed, it could not have been more convenient to the USS Slater which was within walking distance.

On Thursday morning, we left by bus for the Albany Visitors Center and enjoyed a film about the history of Albany and viewed the many exhibits. After touring the city, we enjoyed luncheon at the Albany Pump Station. I'm trying to remember whether or not Sam Stewart tried the "yard of beer". Chances are he did. On our return to the hotel, we had our business meeting and then enjoyed a cocktail party put on by the Ramada Inn and then had dinner on our own.

Friday saw us off on our way to Cooperstown and the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. A highlight of that day was a conference telephone conversation with Bob Feller. On that fateful day back in 1944, Bob was in the Navy and a Chief Petty Officer on the USS Alabama with Halsey's Task Force 34. He did say that Admiral Halsey had perhaps made a few mistakes in his career and that one of them occurred when

he chased after Admiral Ozawa and the Japanese carriers.

Our group was introduced to the crowd at the Hall of Fame and given a guided tour of the archives. Most interesting for the baseball aficionados. Luncheon followed at the beautiful Otesaga Resort Hotel. This magnificent old hotel is on the shore of Lake Otsego. Remember "Glimmerglass" lake from James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales? This is it. After luncheon, we visited museums and shops or just sat and enjoyed the beautiful day and scenery. Then back to the hotel. Hospitality room and dinner beckoned and the day was over.

Saturday morning found us on our way to the USS Slater, DE 766 and our Memorial Service. Through the years our families had heard about DE's but had never seen one other than in pictures. Those of us who served on the Sammy B had memories of the ship but some had dimmed through the years and so it was decided to visit Albany and The Slater. Speaking just for myself, it was almost more than I could handle. Even though the Slater was a different class than our Butler class Samuel B. Roberts, there were much more similarities than there were differences.

The survivors and those who had a part in the service were piped aboard the ship and the audience was seated ashore where they could see and hear what was going on, (depending on the amount of traffic passing by). Following the presentation of Colors, the National Anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag the Invocation was given by the Rev. William Hempel of the Marine Ministry. A proclamation from the Mayor of Albany was read declaring Saturday, September 13, 2003 as USS Samuel B. Roberts, DE 413 Day. Vince Goodrich gave a reminiscence of that day, 59 years ago.

The ship's bell was rung for our four shipmates who died during the past year, Ken Saunders QM3/c, Harold "Whitey Weiners GM3/c, Doyle E. Tase S1/c and James S. Graves S1/c. A Memorial Wreath was released by Leah Felt, widow of Whit Felt SoM3/c and Olga Macko, widow of John Macko F1/c. The ceremony concluded with the playing of The Navy Hymn, a rifle salute by Tri County Council of Viet Nam Veterans and the playing of echo Taps. Bagpiper Tim Enright of the Albany Police played as we left the ship. This was a day to remember as we honored our fallen shipmates.

(continued on page 6)

The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors

by James D. Hornfischer

Early in October, the above book will be available for purchase. I heartily recommend it to anyone who has any interest in what went on in that battle some 60 years ago. Following are some excerpts from the book, printed with permission of the author and Bantam Books.

The opening: OCTOBER 25, 1944

SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT, THE PHILIPPINES

A giant stalked through the darkness. In the moonless calm after midnight, the great fleet seemed not so much to navigate the narrow strait as to fill it with armor and steel. Barely visible even to a night-trained eye, the long silhouettes of twenty-three warships passed in a column ten miles long, guided by the dim glow of the channel lights in the passage threading between the headlands of Luzon and Samar.

That such a majestic procession should move without challenge was surprising, inexplicable even, in light of the vicious reception the Americans had already given it on its journey from Borneo to this critical point. Having weathered submarine ambush the night before, and assault by wave after wave of angry blue aircraft the previous afternoon, Vice Adm. Takeo Kurita, steward of the last hopes of the Japanese empire, would have been right to expect the worst. But then Kurita knew that heavenly influences could be counted upon to trump human planning.

* * *

In the radio shack next to the CIC, the Samuel B. Roberts's communications department - Tom Stevenson's group - had been picking up an unusual amount of radio traffic. It was all in code, its meaning mysterious until the inscrutable five-character sequences could be transcribed and decrypted by radiomen using decoding wheels. The only unfiltered real-time information they got came via the Talk Between Ships radio. They sat around the plotting table, studying charts, building a visual picture from the clues coming over the TBS frequency. As the fragmentary broadcasts began to resolve into a notion of what was happening in the narrow straits south of Leyte Gulf, no level of drill or training could quite suppress their jubilation.

They felt no concern for their own safety. The flanks of Taffy 3 - and of their sibling task units Taffy 1 and Taffy 2 - were guarded by the Seventh and Third Fleets, the greatest gathering of naval strength the world had yet seen. Let the Imperial Japanese Navy come to challenge the invasion. The contest had begun, and the men aboard the Samuel B. Roberts had it right there on the radio.

* * *

(With Bill Brooks, Avenger pilot from USS St. Lo)

Some 20 miles northwest of Taffy 3, Bill Brooks, at the stick of his Avenger, continued searching for openings in the layers of cumulus. The weather did not cooperate. As he finished an eastbound leg of his improvised search pattern and turned to the left heading north, another Avenger came into view. The pilot, probably Ens. Hans Jensen from the Taffy 2 carrier Kadashan Bay, who was investigating a strange blip on his radioman's radar display, waved at him and went on his way. A few minutes later Brooks swung his plane clear of a big squall and found what he was looking for: a large hole in the floor of the clouds.

Then ensign Brooks found what he was not looking for: there, spanning the visible slice of ocean below, were ships, lots of them. Against the blue-black dawning sea, their darkened shapes appeared, a majestic assortment of battleships, cruisers and destroyers trailing white wakes that betrayed their southeasterly course and considerable speed. Brooks flipped on the intercom and told Downs and Travers, "Hey look at that. Halsey must have come down from the north." It had to be Halsey, the heavy units of the Third Fleet, in all their armor-clad glory.

Downs pressed the intercom button and said, "Thank God they're on our side."

Brooks felt a twinge of doubt. There were no carriers among them. *If this was Halsey, where were his carriers?* And the ships: to the extent that their contours could be distinguished from his perch in the clouds, they didn't look like American ships.

Were these American ships? Looking down as the armada filed by below him, Brooks made out the tall pagoda towers of Japanese battleships and cruisers. The doubt evaporated into a stunning realization: *They are Japanese.*

The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors (additional excerpts)

When a ship sinks, the battlefield goes away. Currents move, thermal layers mix, and by the time the surveyors and rescuers arrive, the water that bore witness to the slaughter is nowhere to be found. The dead disappear, carried under with their ruined vehicles. No wreckage remains for tacticians to study. There are no corpses for stretcher-bearers to spirit away, no remains to shovel, bag, and bury. On the sea there is no place to anchor a memorial flagpole or a headstone. It is a vanishing graveyard.

The sudden silence was the first thing many survivors of the *Hoel*, the *Gambier Bay*, the *Samuel B. Roberts* and the *Johnston* noticed after their ships had been smashed and swallowed. To many, the quiet was unwelcome. The noise of battle - the roar of machinery, the shrieks and blasts of shells incoming and outbound, the shouts and screams of their buddies - had anesthetized fear. Now the noise lifted like a curtain, unveiling the hidden inner vistas of their grief and shock. When their ships sank, their duties went down with them. Permanently discharged, the survivors were left without the distraction of work to do. The things they had seen could now be contemplated. The wounds they had suffered began to ache, sting, and burn.

The four groups of men were scattered over roughly thirty miles of ocean. Survivors of the *Hoel*, sunk first at 8:55, constituted the northernmost group. The Japanese had been in the heat of pursuit when the destroyer went down. The men of the *Hoel* were then treated to a full fleet review as the Center Force's leviathans paraded past them to the south. After that, the survivors had no idea what had become of the enemy - or the rest of Taffy 3 for that matter. South of where the *Hoel's* men swam were the survivors of the *Gambier Bay*. They had the distinction of serving on the only aircraft carrier in history ever sunk by enemy naval gunfire. Like the destroyermen, they had seen the enemy up close, had felt the heat of his muzzles firing. Finally, farther south still, floated the men from the *Johnston* and *Samuel B. Roberts*, whose ships, having fought to the last, sank within a few minutes and a few thousand yards of each other.

Such descriptions of the groups' proximities, given with the benefit of a backward-looking bird's eye, were unavailable to the men in that terrible moment. The currents and wind took hold of them, and from their initial entry into the water, there was no telling how they moved relative to one another. A thousand men dotted the ocean's swells, cast about by the waters. For small groups and individuals alike, however, the experience of survival was one of sudden, sinking aloneness.

The lazy swells of the Philippine Sea raised and lowered the men at regular intervals. At the top of a swell, if he was inclined, a man could take in his wide surroundings and look for other survivors to merge his fortunes with. In the bottoms, surrounded by gentle slopes of seawater like the sides of a shallow bowl, he would be left to contemplate his private misery. Land was but an abstraction; though the peaks of Samar were visible where the squalls and clouds permitted, reaching up from beneath the horizon, the beaches that lay beneath them were out of sight, some thirty miles away. For a wounded, exhausted swimmer, it might as well have been a whole ocean.

Swimming in the bloodied waters that had swallowed their ship, none of the survivors of the late, great screening ships of Taffy 3 were in position to distinguish victory from defeat. The Japanese men-of-war that had sunk them had charged blithely past, presumably to sweep away the remains of Taffy 3 and to charge through Taffies 2 and 1 on the way into Leyte Gulf itself.

Who was going to tell them what had really happened? And would they even have believed it? The men of the destroyers and destroyer escorts had helped win a victory of the most impossibly resounding kind. Their dashing skippers had put themselves on the line first and started an improbable rout. Now Bill Brooks and friends, the avenging angels from the escort carrier squadrons, would help finish it.

James D. Hornfischer's book
will be on sale beginning Feb. 3, 2004
wherever books are sold.

The publisher is
Bantam Dell Publishing Group
A division of Random House, Inc.

This and That from Here and There

I received a telephone call from Olga Macko this past month and she asked me to apologize to any of you who had expected a Christmas card. When she returned home from the reunion, she learned that her sister was quite ill and Olga's time was taken up in caring for her. Consequently, she was not able to send out any cards. She did want to say that she was so glad to be back with us again and was very happy to have been involved with the laying of the wreath with Leah Felt.

Tom Stevenson managed to get tangled up with the leash of his favorite dog and tumbled down some stairs. He broke several ribs and also did some damage to his back. He was hospitalized for a while but is now safely back in Florida. The accident occurred while he was visiting his daughter on Long Island. No golf for a while Tom and have you ever considered having fish for pets?

I received an interesting e-mail and then followed it up with a telephone call to Laurie Stadig. He says that he was on the Samuel B. Roberts. He joined the ship just before the battle to replace one of our Firemen who had appendicitis. His name was never on our roster. He says that he was on a life net, doesn't know which one. Came back to the States but not sure how. Had survivor's leave and then was assigned to the USS DIXIE, a destroyer tender. I have checked with several of the survivors but no one remembers him. Can anyone shed any light?

Notes on Business Meeting - 9/11/03

1. Co-Treasurer Mel Harden reported a balance of \$7,414.21 on 7/25/03. Reunion expenses still to be deducted.
2. A motion to hold our next reunion with the Johnston Hoel group in San Diego around Oct. 25. We would have separate banquet and business meetings. Approved.
3. A motion by Vince Goodrich to donate \$1000 to DEHF Foundation Endowment Fund. Approved.
4. Dick Rohde moved that current Board of Goodrich, Harden, LeClercq, Moylan, Rohde, Stewart and Young be continued in office. Carried.

Do you remember meeting Ed Arnold at our reunion? His group of DE's was having its reunion in the room next to ours at the Ramada Inn and he came in to say a few kind words to us. He has a friend, Lisa Hilbers who writes patriotic poetry. Ed gave her a copy of Capt. Copeland's book and the following is what she wrote.

USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS

In Nineteen and Forty-Four, with
World War Two in full swing
Just off the Island of Samar
Battle cries would loudly sing.

On deck of the Sammy B
A Naval Princess quite divine
Stood a crew of sailors brave
None ever so fine.

She would face a dilemma
With a superior Japanese fleet,
Knowing full well
She had not a chance at defeat.

An Escort she was
With her skin thin and gray
She met battle with honor
And held her enemy at bay.

Her crew fought with valor
With dignity and with pride
Even after enemy shells
Had pierced her lovely side

Fatally wounded and sinking
With blood running cold
Her gunners kept firing
Their spirits wouldn't fold.

She lay dead in the water
With eighty-nine lives lost
Both her and her men
Had paid this war's cost.

Her Captain with reluctance
After realizing their fate
Gave orders to abandon
Before it was too late.

With a handful of men
From a life raft at sea
Watched with tear filled eyes
The demise of the Sammy B.

From the bottom of the deepest blue
Her spirit still lives today
The Crew of the USS Samuel B. Roberts
Made history in a great way.

Some of you had indicated that you had seen this poem on the Internet and so I felt that it should be in our NEWSLETTER. Thanks to Ed Arnold for bringing us to the attention of a very talented poet, Lisa Hilbers. Thank you Lisa.

Albany Reunion (continued from page 2)

Following the Memorial Service, we walked over to the *Dutch Apple* for a luncheon cruise on the Hudson River. It was a bit cloudy but we more than made up for that with reminiscing, picture taking, story telling and enjoying the scenery along the stately Hudson. The food was excellent. We were happy to share our trip with a group of young ladies having a wedding shower.

Our final banquet was one to remember. Our keynote speaker was Captain David LaBarbera who was Commanding Officer of the USS SAMUEL B ROBERTS, FFG 58 from April 2000 to December 2001. He gave a most interesting talk about our Navy today. It was such a pleasure to get to know Capt. LaBarbera and his lovely wife Kelly. He is currently stationed in Newport RI where he is the Director of the Division Officer Training Department, Surface Warfare Officers School Command. We can all rest easy knowing that our Navy is in the hands of such capable people as David LaBarbera.

As is our tradition, long stemmed red roses were given to all the ladies present and all of those who contributed to the success of the reunion, especially Patti Hedgeman, were recognized.

On the following morning, Sunday, we attempted to have our Farewell Breakfast. Management of the hotel had forgotten about the breakfast and then to compound matters, they decided to enforce the rule that tables could not be moved together. Despite all of the above, we did manage to get breakfast and bid one another farewell. That rule came from the same book which said that their van would pick us up at the airport but would not return us to the airport. Oh well, there are more important things going on in the world to worry about.

Attending the reunion were the following: Bob and Normajean Bingaman, Ray Conway (son of shipmate Jack Conway), Leah Felt, widow of Whit Felt, Doug and Linda Ferm with daughter Kasey, Vince and Fran Goodrich, Lou and Barb Gould, Mel and Leona Harden, Patti & Joe Hedgeman (Patti is daughter of Jack Conway), Greg Johnson and daughter Mary (Greg is son-in-law of Hedgemans, Joe and Sandra Losito (Sandra is daughter of

John Macko), David and Kelly LaBarbera, Bob LeClercq, Olga Macko (widow of John Macko), John and Shirley Montgomery, Dudley Moylan, Marshall Richards, Dick and Helen Rohde, Tom Stevenson, Tom Stevenson Jr., Sam Stewart, Hooper and Georgia Van Voorst (Georgia is daughter of Jack Conway), John and Susan Walsh, Bill and Esther Wilson and Bea Williams (author and friend of Leah Felt). Also visiting with us was David Sears USN Ret. who is writing a book about the Battle of Leyte Gulf. We were sorry that Sam and Louise Blue had to cancel at the last moment due to illness. Also canceling because of last minute problems was Ralph DeSantis, a new member of our Association who served on the USS DELONG with Vince Goodrich.



"Master and Commander"

Captain David LaBarbera USN and Commander Vince Goodrich USN Ret. are pictured above discussing strategies in the event that the *Dutch Apple* should come under enemy attack and have to be abandoned. Vince is explaining that he will go in the first life boat with the bridesmaids from the wedding party, after, of course, he sets the depth charges on "safe". David is wondering whether Vince plans to take Fran along.

Fortunately there were no attacks, the journey was made uneventfully and the plans did not have to go into effect. And so, another marriage was saved and Vince and Fran returned to Bradford, Pennsylvania safely, in love and harmony.

OBITUARY

I regret having to inform you of the death of our shipmate **JAMES E. PATTERSON, SR.** on September 7, 2003 in Columbus, Georgia. He is survived by his wife Helen Powers Patterson, a son James E. Patterson, Jr., two daughters-in-law, six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and other relatives.

We extend our prayers and sympathies to Helen and all of the family.

Jim was a Watertender 3/C.

From the Mail Bag

Tom Stevenson received the following letter from Tim Rizzuto, Ship Superintendent of the USS SLATER.

Thank you for your letter, we were proud to host and take part in the Samuel B. Roberts reunion. The Memorial Service was very moving for the staff and volunteers of the Slater as well. We can receive no greater validation than a - Well Done - from a DE sailor. We will continue to restore and maintain the ship, keeping the history of the great contribution DE's and their crews made during WWII alive for future generations.

We would be pleased if you were able to visit the ship again. You can also keep up with our progress on our web site and in our quarterly newsletter Trim but Deadly, if you are a member of DEHM. Thanks again for your kind words.

Their address is:
USS SLATER DE 766
Destroyer Escort Historical Museum
PO Box 1926
Albany, NY 12201-1926
Telephone: 518 431-1943
Web Site
<http://www.usslater.org>

Another Survivor Heard From

Through the wonderful medium of cyber space and the internet we were able to make contact with one of our shipmates who had been hidden from us all of these years. His daughter found our website and then everything fell together. Bonnie Bruno contacted me and said that she was the daughter of one of our crew, George B. Carbon, S 1/C.

George lives in Ohio and had never heard from anyone connected with our ship for 59 years. As you can guess, he had given up any hope of connecting with us.

His address is: 14742 E. Bagley Road #310
Middleburg Heights, Ohio 44130. Tel: 440 888-0220

After speaking with him, I contacted Dudley Moylan who had spent much time with George on the life raft. Bud Comet also remembered him well and called. I'm sure he would love to hear from you.

Don't forget to check out our website.
www.de413.org

Richard K. Rohde, Newsletter Editor
USS Samuel B. Roberts Survivors Ass'n.
9045 SW 91st Circle
Ocala, FL 34481-8404
E-Mail: rkr6@cornell.edu
Telephone: 352 861-0616
Fax: 352 861-1276

In Sick Bay

Elbert Gentry
Bill Wilson

Please keep me informed of what goes on in your life and I'll share it through this Newsletter and also on the Website. Be sure to hug one another. May God bless you all and watch over you - especially you men and women overseas. We're with you 100%.