



**SBR Survivors' Ass'n. Newsletter Vol.11, No. 2  
July-August, 2001**

**REUNION**

The time has come for you to get out that pen and the checkbook and make your reservation for the reunion of the Samuel B. Roberts Survivors' Association. As you know, we will be meeting with The USS Johnston/Hoel Ass'n. in Albuquerque, New Mexico from Oct. 24-28, 2001.

Included in this NEWSLETTER is [a reservation form \[in Adobe Acrobat form here. or plain text below\] which](#) should be completed and returned to Bill Mercer of the Johnston/Hoel Association. Bill will be the one making reservations for the tours and meals and so it makes sense that he be the one to receive our reservations and money. Bill will keep me informed of SBR members who are signed up and I will keep a master list of our members attending.

Reservations for the hotel must be made directly with them.

The headquarters hotel is:

The Radisson Hotel and Conference Center

2500 Carlisle Northeast

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110

Telephone: 800 333-3333 or 505 888-3311

**Fly-Over**

Bill Mercer of the Johnston/Hoel Association has forwarded me the following information concerning an event which will occur during our reunion.

US Air Force and Kirtland Air Force Base

Will honor our fallen shipmates

With a Fly-Over at our Memorial Service.

While making arrangements for our reunion, Bill was in contact with Staff Sergeant Noll of Kirtland Air Force Base to

see about obtaining a Color Guard for the Memorial Service which was approved. Later on, he thought how great it would be if a "Fly-Over" could be arranged for our fallen comrades. He again called on Sergeant Noll who did not think that it would be possible, but provided the name of the Commanding Officer. Bill wrote the following letter:

Dear Colonel Eakle,

I represent two American destroyers, USS JOHNSTON AND USS HOEL both of which were sunk during an engagement with the Japanese fleet during the Battle of Leyte Gulf on 25 October 1944. During that surface engagement, three American escort vessels were sunk and one American CVE aircraft carrier. In addition to our two ships, the USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS, a DE was also sunk. From our three small ships, 525 men lost their lives that day. We meet each year to remember our brave and lost shipmates and will be meeting in Albuquerque from 24 October through 27 October, 2001.

We will conduct our memorial service on 25 October at the Veterans Memorial Park in Albuquerque. This will be the anniversary of the battle and the sinking of our ships some 57 years earlier.

We would consider it a great honor to our departed shipmates if Kirtland AFB could provide a "Fly-Over" during our memorial service which is planned for 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon on 25 October, 2001. Those of us still living would consider it an honor to us also.

Normally, only the USS JOHNSTON and USS HOEL are in attendance but this year for the first time the USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS will join us and will be present.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf has been acclaimed by Naval Historians as the greatest Naval Battle ever fought. Our small Task Unit 77.4.3 whose nickname was TAFFY III is credited with having saved the day for General Douglas MacArthur's landings on the Island of Leyte, Philippine Islands.

I have enclosed a photograph of a monument that we raised money to erect in Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego in honor of the 525 men from our three ships that died that day.

I have requested through channels an honor guard from your base for the memorial service also.

Respectfully submitted

Bill Mercer, survivor

### **USS JOHNSTON/HOEL Ass'n.**

Bill received the following reply, which I quote in part, from Colonel Jan D. Eakle, USAF Commander

"I am please to inform you that your request for a "fly over" during the memorial service on 25 October, has been approved by Colonel Mike Planert, Commander, 58th Special Operations Wing. Also, I understand that the base honor guard has this memorial service on their calendar and will be posting the colors for you.

Your special event is a heartwarming, patriotic tribute to both your fallen and surviving shipmates. We at Kirtland Air Force Base are proud to be a supporting element of this special memorial service."

Thank you Bill Mercer, Sergeant Noll and Colonels Eakle and Planert.

### **Our Family Keeps Growing**

Since the last time I wrote, we have heard from the families of two of our shipmates.

Willard A. Thurmond, S1/C

Willard, as you may remember, was a Radioman Striker who was killed in action. He died on the life raft, a few hours after the ship was sunk, and was buried at sea. He was married and was 29 years of age when he was a member of our crew. Do any of you recall that he used to buy boxes of candy bars and then sell them to those of us who were too lazy to go to the PX in Norfolk? His wife says that he was saving up the money to buy her a diamond ring. Willard received the Bronze Star for his activities and conduct during the battle. His great nephew, John Prior is the one who contacted me. John was a Navy Seal and strangely enough was a Radioman. Sherwood Lee Randall, S2/C

Via e-mail I received a letter from three of the daughters of shipmate Sherwood Randall who survived the battle but passed away in 1965. The daughters write as follows:

"Our father had a total of 10 living children when he passed away at 52 years old in 1965. He suffered all his life from the heartbreak of the war and seeing his shipmates perish in front of him. We heard many sad stories from him and have carried it with us all our lives. God bless you all."

They have asked for information on joining our association which I sent along with information on how they can get his Navy records. They would like to get the NEWSLETTER, which they shall, and are interested in receiving the certificate which Red Harrington and Judy Bruce were working on. I am looking into that.

The address for receiving Naval Records follows:

Navy Liaison Office

Room 3475

National Personnel Records Center

9700 Page Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63132

### **Tom Stevenson Writes**

Dear Dick,

While I was still in Florida I received a call from a friend of mine who is USNR retired Capt. He knew that I had been aboard Samuel B. Roberts and said that the S. B. Roberts, FFG 58 was coming to New York with the JF Kennedy and group of about 18 ships to celebrate Fleet Day. He was in charge of arrangements to welcome the Fleet and her men. He invited me to sit on the reviewing stand aboard the Kennedy for the parade of ships. I, of course, accepted with pleasure.

The Fleet arrived in mid June but unfortunately the parade of Ships was canceled because of a heavy fog. Instead I went aboard the Roberts which was tied up next to the Kennedy and a Destroyer (which was 8300 tons and looked like a cruiser). I was greeted on board the Roberts by the Officer at the gangway and taken to meet the Captain (Cdr. David LaBarbera) and the Executive Officer (Lt. Cdr. Dave Julian. They were most hospitable and gave me a tour of the ship and presented me with a cap on the rear of which was the logo COMMOFF. I thought that he was making me an honorary Commanding Officer. He said, "Oh no! That stands for Communications Officer." So I received no promotion and was back at the same old job after 57 years.

I was then invited to a reception for the commanding officers and the execs of all 18 ships which was on a fancy barge on the East River. The officers were all in their dress whites and it was quite an impressive sight. These officers were a fine group of men and I had the thought that our Navy is in good hands. I was introduced as a survivor of the original Samuel B. Roberts. I said a few words about the high caliber of men that we had on the Roberts and how the ship fought valiantly with heavy losses and how proud I was to have been a member of that crew. The little speech was well received and then the Capt of the FFG 58 presented me with a very nice plaque depicting his ship underway.

I was very proud to represent the DE 413 at this festive occasion. I was happy to learn that the current Roberts impresses on its men that they have a very proud heritage to live up to. The crew members that I met were very bright men and were very interested to hear about the Sammy B from someone who was actually aboard for the battle.

I thought that you might be able to use some of this for your Newsletter.

Tom

### **Caps, Shirts and Jackets**

In the last issue of the NEWSLETTER, I asked that you let me know if you had any interest in purchasing the above items. I gave an estimate of prices. I now have some firm prices, some information and a remarkable lack of interest expressed. Some of you did reply and I thank you for that. Six of you indicated that you wanted the caps. Those six represented 11 caps. On the basis of that, I ordered 50 caps and 50 additional emblems. The price for the caps will be \$8.50 each. I plan to have them in Albuquerque. If you want them mailed, there will be a charge for the shipping.

Only one person mentioned an interest in a shirt. They are excellent quality cotton, navy blue with yellow silk screening of the patch, similar to what is on the cap. The cost for the shirts, if I get some orders, will be \$14.00 plus any shipping costs.

Five of you indicated an interest in the jackets amounting to 8 jackets. The cost for the jackets is \$37.50 for most sizes with \$2 extra charge for XXL and \$4 for XXXL. They are navy blue nylon shell with flannel lining with the logo on the front and the large red and white SURVIVOR device on the back.

If you have a question about the jackets, please let me know. If we want to have them for the reunion, I need to put in an order for shirts and jackets very soon. It would not be financially possible for us to order a large inventory of these with the hope that people will buy them. Help!!!!

### **News from Here and There**

Following is potpourri of news, trivia and things you have always wondered about. Thanks for your contributions.

Tom Stevenson sent in an article which indicates that the Deadliest U.S. campaign in World War II, in the Pacific Theater was the Leyte/Luzon/Samar Islands with 20,569 deaths from 10/17/44 to 7/4/45. Second was the Philippines Campaign from 12/7/41 to 5/10/42 with 15,386 killed.

Vince Goodrich was interviewed by the Bradford Era on the 4th of July on the subject of PATRIOTISM. As for keeping patriotism alive, Vince said, "Fly the flag more often and teach children about the flag. They need to know about World War II. The outcome of the war did not change our lives. If we'd lost WW II we'd be speaking German or Japanese." He added that "We need to teach the Declaration of Independence, teach about how (children's) ancestors fought and died for the flag."

Carol W. Scoggins, widow of shipmate James Kenneth Weaver wrote to say how much it meant to her to finally hear from someone from the Sammy B. You may remember that we met James Kenneth's niece in Washington. I send Mrs. Scoggins the certificate from Pres. Clinton and a copy of the dedication booklet from Fort Rosecrans. She wanted me to know that her husband, Wilson, put up a flagpole on a memorial stone with James' name and service dates at the entrance to the cemetery in Bristol, TN where all his family is buried. They live fairly close to Checotah, OK and I suggested that they look up Peggy and Harry Dodd. They plan to do that and also hope to meet us in Albuquerque.

Admiral Nimitz Museum In Austin Texas, the State Senate voted to issue up to \$9 million in state revenue bonds to renovate the Admiral Nimitz Museum and Historical Center in Fredericksburg. The center is the only institution in the continental United States dedicated exclusively to telling the story of Fleet Admiral C.W. Nimitz and World War II in the Pacific Theater.

Joe Fortier writes that he is having financial problems with his medical coverage for Marie's care. Please remember them in your prayers. He keeps busy volunteering and taking care of Marie. We're with you Joe.

Don Young may be taking a Tiger Cruise on his grandson's destroyer from Pearl Harbor to San Diego. If it works out we should hear some great stories from him about the trip, unless of course, he decides to reenlist. Incidentally, I received a copy of the DESA East Pacific Chapter Newsletter which features a story written by Don about his memories of the battle.

In the same Newsletter appeared the following.

"A testimonial to the Samuel B. Roberts DE-413 from Robert L. Yohr, S1/c, USS Kitkun Bay CVE-71" from Our Navy Magazine

"At the battle for Leyte Gulf, our DE faced the Jap fleet while we ran-and I mean ran like hell! But they had orders to turn into the fleet for torpedo runs, and that they did. Many men knew what the result would be. But, by God, they kept the fleet off us. They lost a number of comrades. Those boys didn't want to do what they did, but it was orders, and they did it.

Let the boys on their tug boats and big ships chip their teeth, but who is always on hand when you need help-the DE.

Life aboard an escort carrier is heaven compared to what 'our' boys on DE's live."

Thank you Robert Rohr.

Lawrence Brown is the Webmaster of the International Shellback Association and tells me that we can get replacement Shellback Certificates and Cards. If you have a computer, log on to the website at <<<http://www.internationalshellback.com>>>. Once there, visit their "Links" page and click on Tiffany Publishing. Everything is there. As Larry says, you don't want to get caught at sea without one.

D. F. Autrey a Plank Owner of USS LEYTE GULF CH-55 from Aurora, CO wrote a note at our Website and said "It's nice to see the past kept alive."

### **Navy Memorial Plaque**

I am happy to report that the plaque to be hung on the Memorial Wall in the Navy Memorial Heritage Center in Washington, D.C. is just about finished. The wording has been selected and the design of the plaque is 99 and 44/100 % completed. Your contributions have been most generous but we could still use a few more to avoid going into our reserves. The final payment of \$1,250 is now due and will be paid by the time you read this. The Board of Directors thanks you so much for your support and encouragement in this project.

\* Remember

It was the Veteran, not the reporter,  
who has given us freedom of the press.

It was the Veteran, not the poet,  
who has given us freedom of speech.

It was the Veteran, not the lawyer,  
who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It was the Veteran, not the campus organizer,  
who has given us freedom to demonstrate.

It was the Veteran, who salutes the flag,

who served under the flag, and whose coffin  
is draped by the flag,  
who allows the protester to burn the flag.

## **Reunion Details**

On the last page of this NEWSLETTER you will find the registration form for our reunion. Be sure to fill it out completely and mail it to Bill Mercer of the Johnson/Hoel Association. Bill is handling all of the reservations and will keep me informed of all reservations received from the SBR Survivors' Association. Be sure to send him your check made out to their Association.

Hotel reservations should be made directly with the hotel. A large block of rooms has been reserved under the name of the Johnston/Hoel/Samuel B. Roberts Reunion Group. Be sure to mention that name to get the guaranteed rate of \$60 plus tax which will amount to \$65.29 per room per night. The Radisson Hotel and Conference Center

2500 Carlisle Northeast

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110

Telephone: 800 333-3333 or 505 888-3311

Free shuttle available from airport.

## **SCHEDULE**

Wednesday, October 24

Arrival, check in and register.

Hospitality Room open every day.

Thursday, October 25

Buffet breakfast (\$12.00)

Business meeting to follow

11:00 a.m. Buses depart for Veterans Memorial Park and Memorial Service including Fly-Over. (\$20.00 includes bus transportation and luncheon.)

12:15 p.m. Buses depart for Kirtland Air Force base for luncheon. Then visit National Atomic Museum.

Evening free.

Friday, October 26

9:00 a.m. Buses depart for Santa Fe.

Luncheon on own in Santa Fe. Back to hotel by 4:00 pm. (\$28 per person)

Evening free.

Saturday, October 27

10:00 a.m. Author's Round Table with

Henry Doscher, John Wukovits, Jim Hornfischer and Marshall Fredericks. Moderated by Jack Yusen.

6:00 p.m. Banquet and Door Prize drawing. Combined beef and chicken dinner. (\$24.00 per person)

Sunday, October 28

8:00 a.m. Farewell Breakfast for Samuel B. Roberts. (\$12 per person)

This first time joint meeting of our two survivor associations promises to be a memorable one and we are grateful to Bill Mercer for setting up the reunion and taking care of all of the details and to their Association for inviting us to join them. For the survivors it will be really the first time that we will be able to talk to our brothers from the USS HOEL and the USS JOHNSTON. Fifty seven years ago, our ships were quite close, sometimes entirely too close. We will now have the opportunity to get to know those who shared that unimaginable and unbelievable morning with us.

Please make every effort to join us in Albuquerque. Although we will be with the Hoel and Johnston folks, we will also have every opportunity to continue the friendships that we have enjoyed in our own survivors' group.

May God's love and peace be with you all.

Richard K. Rohde, Editor  
E-mail: [rkrohde@aol.com](mailto:rkrohde@aol.com)

**USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS ASSOCIATION REUNION**  
**with USS JOHNSTON/HOEL ASSOCIATION**

Albuquerque, New Mexico - October 24-28, 2001

The following persons plan to attend the reunion and have chosen the following functions.

Registration Fee:..... \_\_\_\_people @ \$10 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Oct. 25, Buffet Breakfast ..... \_\_\_\_people @ \$12 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Oct. 25, Bus trip to Veterans Memorial Park.. \_\_\_\_people @ \$20 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_ and Kirtland Air Force Base Lunch included

Oct. 26, Bus trip to Santa Fe ..... \_\_\_\_people @ \$28 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Oct. 27, Banquet at Radisson Hotel ..... \_\_\_\_people @ \$24 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Oct. 28, Farewell Breakfast (DE 413 only) ... \_\_\_\_people @ \$12 per person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: USS Johnston/USS Hoel Association and send with this form to:

Bill Mercer

707 Clebud Drive

Eules, TX 76040

Please print names as you would like them to appear on name tags and your home town.

NAME HOME TOWN