

# USS Samuel B. Roberts DE-413 Newsletter

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Dedicated in Memory of Shipmates Whit Felt and Dick Rohde

## FFG 58 Decommissioning May 22, 2015

On Friday May 22, 2015 a crowd of over 500 people watched and listened as the USS Samuel B. Roberts FFG-58 was decommissioned. As it was the first time that my wife Sue and I had attended a decommissioning to say it was quite impressive is an understatement.

From the beginning arrival of the Official Party, Presentation of Colors, National Anthem and a stirring invocation by Chaplain Gardner, all in the audience knew this was going to be a special ceremony. Commanding Officer of the FFG-58 **Commander Erica Hoffman** was introduced and spoke of "NO HIGHER HONOR" than serving aboard the FFG-58. She acknowledged her officers and crew as the finest the Navy had produced. She then introduced guest speakers **CAPT Paul X. Rinn (RET)**, **Michael T. Cipolla (DD-823)** and **Ernest (Glenn) Huffman**, survivor of DE-413.

As many of you know, Capt. Rinn was the first commander of the FFG-58 and also commander when the FFG-58 hit the mine in the Persian Gulf in 1988. As excellent a speaker as he was Commander of the

FFG-58, Capt. Rinn did not disappoint the audience.

Mike Cipolla spoke of his time on board the DD-823 and how proud he and his fellow shipmates were not only of the men who served before them on the DE-413 but also after them aboard the FFG-58.

Our own Glenn Huffman then spoke of his time aboard the DE-413 and how it affected him in later years. He thanked his son-Mike for helping him make the trip. Although humble about it, Glenn was somewhat of a celebrity at the event. So many people asked to be photographed with Glenn and he accommodated all of them.

After the speeches, the crowd watched as the crew departed the ship, the colors were hauled down, and the last watch was secured.

As the ceremony was concluded, many in the audience stayed and visited with old and new friends. We were so happy to see former FFG-58 Master Chief Keith Taylor and his wife Kathy along with Jeff Rush from Oklahoma. Jeff is a nephew of Paul Carr, DE-413 crew member who was killed in action on October 25, 1944.



I wasn't surprised when I overheard one retired Navy officer comment that he had attended many decommissioning ceremonies and had never seen a crowd as large as this one.

**Don't forget to check our website [de413.org](http://de413.org). Thanks to webmaster Cliff Rohde, the story of the "Sammy B" will stay alive for future generations.**





Thanks to Mike Huffman, son of shipmate Glenn Huffman, we had an expert photographer along with us during our mini-reunion in Jacksonville, FL. Mike took so many beautiful pictures it was hard to decide which ones to include. Many thanks, Mike, not only for the photos but also for making sure your dad got to Jacksonville for the ceremony.

**Pictured above from left to right:**

The DE-413 contingent included Mike Huffman, Glenn Huffman, Lee Williams (Bob LeClerc's daughter), Bob LeClerc, Sue Walsh, John Walsh.

**Pictured with bronze plaque:** John Walsh, Glenn Huffman, Bob LeClerc

**Pictured below:** Sailors from the FFG-58 with our DE-413 sailor Glenn Huffman







Thanks to **Tom “Gunner” Reinert GMCS (SW) (RET)** from the FFG 58 organization, our DE-413 people were escorted to and from the ship with ease. On Thursday (the day before the decommissioning) the FFG-58 guys made sure we got out to see the ship one last time. Then for the ceremony on Friday, we were invited to join the group being transported aboard school buses.

Pictured at left is one of our “drivers” :

Mr. and Mrs. **Shawn (ET1) Scully**.



Pictured below:

Flanking our DE -413 Survivor Glenn Huffman are FFG-58 sailors

**Daniel Clancy (RM1) and Capt. Brad Gutcher (Ret.)**



Pictured above: **Bob Lewis (GMG2)** and his son

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### A Few Thoughts From Bob LeClercq:

The following excerpts are from a note we received from Bob after the decommissioning:

“ I was fortunate to be invited to the decommissioning of the third Samuel B. Roberts FFG-58. One of the largest crowds ever to attend a funeral for a ship were present. I have attended many ceremonies and functions for Navy ships but this was the most impressive that I have witnessed...There is a direct correlation between a ship in battle and a catastrophic accident and the bond, compatibility, and camaraderie of shipmates. Their love and respect for the members that were involved last a lifetime.....The 413 and the 58 had this relationship in common.”





Pictured above clockwise from left: Mike Cipolla of the DD823 at the podium , Glenn Huffman in front of the FFG58 with the ship's flag that was presented to him, Honor Guard retiring the colors, "the first and the last" current CDR Erica Hoffman and Captain Paul Rinn (Ret) and last but not least pictured at left former FFG58 Command Master Chief Keith Taylor and his wife Kathy. Keith was so helpful to us on our last visit to the FFG58. He and Kathy are now retired and living in South Carolina. It was so good to see both of them and it was a great reminder of the similarity between the FFG58 "family" and the DE 413 "family". Once you're a part of it, you're bound for-forever!



## 70 Years Later...Sailor's Dog Tags Returned

On June 15, 2015, I received an e-mail from Mike Cipolla of the Samuel B. Roberts DD-823 shipmates association. Mike informed me that he got a phone call from BMC Leroy Campbell, USN (RET) of Winchendon, MA who told Mr. Cipolla that he had in his possession a dog tag belonging to Russell Abair Jr. S1/c from Indiana who served aboard the USS Samuel B. Roberts DE-413 who unfortunately was killed in action on October 25, 1944. Mr. Campbell wanted to return the dog tag to Russell's family but didn't know where to begin. Mike then contacted me and I called Mr. Campbell who told me the following story:

In late 1943 or early 1944 Campbell and Abair were good friends who were assigned to the USS Mount Baker (AE-4), a type C2 ship originally commissioned as USS Kilauea in May 1941. According to Mr. Campbell, all ammunition ships at that time were named after volcanic mountains: Mount Baker in Washington and Mount Kilauea in Hawaii.

During that time, Abair was stricken with appendicitis and was sent to the hospital. During Abair's recovery time, Mr. Campbell thought Abair must have received his order to report to the DE-413 as Abair never returned to the Mount Baker nor did Mr. Campbell see him again. After Abair left, Mr. Campbell decided that Abair's locker was in a better location than his and Mr. Campbell took that locker. While putting his possessions in the locker, he notice one of Abair's dog tags. Campbell put it with his things, thinking he would return it to Abair "some day" and forgot about it.

In early 2015, Mr. Campbell was reading an American Legion magazine and saw an article that the SBR FFG-58 was being decommissioned. Upon seeing the name Samuel B. Roberts, Mr. Campbell immediately thought of his friend Russell Abair and his dog tag. Noticing that the article included Mr. Cipolla's name and telephone number, Mr. Campbell called Mr. Cipolla who then e-mailed me.

When I spoke to Mr. Campbell, he told me that he could still remember how Russell Abair looked as a young man, how he often thought of him, and how he hoped that Russell's family could receive the dog tag. With that in mind, Mr. Campbell sent the dog tag to me.



Pictured above: Russell Abair's dog tag and a photo of Russell (in dress blues)

After talking to Mr. Campbell, I contacted Joann Abair of Plymouth, IN. Joann is the widow of James Abair who was Russell's brother. Joann and James have been long time supporters of the SBR DE-413 Survivors' Association and we were able to contact them easily.

Mrs. Abair was excited to hear that a dog tag of Russell's existed and of course the family would love to receive it. We then forwarded the dog tag to the Abair family.

Mr. Campbell who is 93 years old informs me that he is in excellent health and had only one request. He asked if he could have a picture of Russell Abair when Russell was in the Navy. I asked Joann Abair if she had a picture of Russell which she did and happily forwarded it to Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell told me later that the picture of Russell was exactly how he remembered him from 70 years ago.

Many thanks to Leroy Campbell, Mike Cipolla and the Abair family for what has turned out to be a great story !

## Painting Finds A New Home

During all of the decommissioning activities, we had several conversations regarding two very important items that were on board the FFG-58. One was the painting “No Higher Honor” and the other was the bronze plaque which bore the names of all of the original crew of the DE-413. As far as the bronze plaque goes, we do not have any information as to its current whereabouts. We were assured that it would eventually be put in a place of honor and hopefully that will happen someday.

Concerning the painting, however, no worries there. We received the following e-mail from Bob LeClerc a few weeks after our trip to Jacksonville:

Bob writes:

While volunteering at the Pacific War Museum this past Sunday the curator came in (unusual for him on a Sunday) and came to tell me that he received a painting from a CDR Erica Hoffman on Friday. I told him I was sure of what he had received because I could not imagine it being any thing else but Don Young’s painting “No Higher Honor”. He had no idea of what was the meaning of the painting. On Monday he brought it to the front desk. It was the Don Young painting. I explained who the painter was and he was a survivor of the 413 and Red Harrington helped with the two phrases. The painting hung on the wall of the FFG-58 for 16 years. I then explained the five ships and the portraits above three of the ships. I

told him about the bronze plaque and the almost disaster in the Persian Gulf and heroics of Capt. Paul Rinn and crew of the 58. when I returned to San Antonio on Tuesday I put the story in writing as he wanted to have it in the file for any one else in the future to understand its meaning.

Mike (curator) then said we had one problem. CDR Hoffman had mentioned in her note that the possibility of a future need for the painting may happen if a fourth Samuel B. Roberts were to be built. He explained they never take any archive that isn’t donated in total to the museum with no recovery possible. Mike told me that the painting was so representative of the Pacific war and the story it told so complete in one framed picture he would figure out a way around the rule and place it in the archives. I think I can speak for the museum that we are proud that it will find a special place in the archives and it completes the story surrounding the DE-413 that enjoys a large footprint in the facility. If any of you have CDR Hoffman e-mail please forward this.

Bob LeClerc

Bob, I think I can speak for the DE-413 Survivors’ Association in saying “thank you!” for being our advocate at the Pacific War Museum. They are so lucky to have you as a volunteer and we are truly blessed to have you in our organization.



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Association dues are \$10.00 per year

Payable to:

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Phone, write or e-mail us with any news or information for the next Newsletter

Thank you!

