

FROM THE QUARTERDECK, MARCH OF 2006

I want to report to all, about the Reunion in Philadelphia. If you were unable to make it you missed a very Historic tour.

The visit to the USS New Jersey as great, we had a tour guide that explained every nook and corner of the Jersey , from stem to stern. I thought of particular interest was the tour of the 16 inch turret and the admirals bridge. Later that day we had a buffet dinner shared by our sister ships, USS Maryland and USS Colorado. Imagine three BB's in one room and not one fight. The following day we were able to tour the city of Philadelphia where we visited the Liberty Bell, Independence hall and other historic locations. What about that lunch in the shopping district, it was really something , selections of every thing imaginable. Those of you that were unable to make it , if you ever visit Philly you want to take in a meal at the Redding Terminal Market. Later that day we had our banquet of which we had a wonderful time.

Saturday afternoon we toured the historic Valley Forge National Historic Park where we were made aware of the hardship witnessed by George Washington's Revolutionary army. The things that those people were forced to endure is almost unbelievable . If you have never seen it, it's a must when visiting Valley Forge.

This visit to Washington D.C. should blow the top off of all reunions we have had. If you want your family to see you being awarded medals from the Philippine Government , please bring them along. It took a great deal of time and negotiating to put this trip together. I am sure you will be very happy when you take this tour.

We were very glad to see last year come to an end. We had a very unfortunate thing happen after the last reunion, soon after we got home we discovered we had been robbed or lost all of the checks, cash and receipts from the trip. Those of you who wrote checks during the reunion please check your bank statements to see if your check was cashed. If not and you feel you can , please replace your check with a new one. There were a couple of people that joined the life membership, we cannot remember which ones , please let us know if you did so. This concerns only money taken in at the Valley Forge Reunion. We will be much more careful in the future. Then on November 10th we were in an auto accident that totaled our 7 month old truck. We both had head injuries but are very grateful that was all. Joe had bumped his head when the roof had caved in while rolling over, and I had ten staples in my head. Christmas day Joe ended up in the hospital where a pool of blood had formed between the brain and skull we thought he was having a stroke. This was caused from the accident. He was in for three days, and they let him come home. Hoping that the blood would absorbed itself. A cat scan three weeks later showed that it was doing as doctors had hoped it would, absorb on its own. All is well though, this also has some bearing on why we are slow getting the letter out. We hope you all can get to the reunion in Washington and also Oregon in Sept. Then we will see how many want to continue having reunions on our own or maybe team up with our sister ships. We would still have our own hospitality room, but would be able to maybe get a better rate for hotels and tours as we never know how many are coming. Also we checked into having a Cruise which might be a good way to go and a less expensive way, considering everything is included. We talked to our travel agent and if this is something we would like to do she will handle it all. We were not aware that it could be done in such away that we would all have meals at the same sitting. They can just about

do anything for us. This might be the way to go since setting up the reunions requires us to give them a number of people to attend. It is difficult. A cruise would be fun.

In the near future we will have available for life members, a piece of planking from the WeeVee, that we picked up from the Naval Yard while touring Washington D.C. Not sure of the cost of cleaning up, lettering and shipping. We will keep you posted.

We continue to receive life memberships and are in the process of getting identification made to show that you are a life member of the USS West Virginia Organization. \$25 is all that it costs to be a life member. This is a list of those presently signed on.

Nick Aiello, Glen Atkins, Edwin Allison, Charles Bender, Sam Bennet, Ralph Batchelor, Dan Bishop, George Bland, Robert Christy, Marvin Childress, Jim Downing, Dale Favor, George Gackle, Howard Gist, George Hefner, Gene Hicks, Don Jones, Peter Karas, Archie Kelley, Herman Kelley, Bob Kronberger, Clyde Lathery, Hoy Little, Paul Lukas, Don Martin, Ed Matlock, Alton Meyer (dec), Peter Newberg, John o'Neil, Roger Parril, Gery porter, Mary Porzucek, C. Prozenica, Ken Powell, George Rasmussen, Arthur Rinetti, Al Rellergert, Tony Reiter, Roy Romano, William Rosebloom, Joe Saragusa, Don Seibold, Bob Sims, Anthony Schmitt, Charles Schmoll, Joe Variot, Frontis Winford, Leo Warner

If I missed your name, please let me know. It certainly was not intentional. And as we said that those that paid in Valley forge, you will have to let us know.

Remember we still have small stores, Caps, \$10, \$12 with eggs, Shirts \$16.50, Jackets \$23, Sweat Shirts, \$18, Pins with the old and new ship on it. \$2.50, Surigao Strait Cap \$10, Surigao Caps with My father was there, \$10, a few Surigao shirts, \$15

We want to thank Tom and Hoy Little for the donation of T-shirts for the last reunion. They were really nice. Thankyou

While in Wash. D.C. we will be visiting the Navy Memorial. There we will see the Commemoratives Wall displaying plaques of ships. This is an opportunity to have the memory of the Wee Vee and its history displayed for many future generations to come. I was sent the information for purchasing a plaque. The cost is \$2500. It may seem a lot to some of us, but for those who lost their lives it would be a great honor. The memory of those who served and especially those that gave their lives it is a deserving momento. If 200 of us were to send \$12.50 or 100 of us send \$25 or 50 of us send \$50 our memory would be preserved for many, many years. Our children, grand children, great grand children and etc. would remember our service to our country when visiting D.C. I will take \$500 from our accumulated funds and send it in to reserve a spot on the wall for the USS West Virginia. Then I will send \$50 from my personal account to start the ball rolling. Would it not be wonderful to have the plaque in place when we visit the memorial.

I am enclosing samples of other ships plaques in pictures. A sample of what our plaque will look like will be enclosed in the next newsletter. If interested in donating make check payable to US Navy Memorial BB 48 Plaque and send to Joe Variot, 4564 Cedar River Rd. Mancelona, Mi. 49659

OKINAWA: "FLOWER BIRDS" AND CLOSE SUPPORT CONTINUED

By April 4, the US 7th and 96th Divisions moving south were meeting increased Japanese resistance as many positions were uncovered. The following day the soldier became heavily engaged with Rising Sun outpost strong points guarding the approaches to Kakazu. The one in the 7th Division sector was a coral outcrop known as "the Pinnacle" while that blocking the 96th's people was a long low hill called "Cactus Ridge." By 0630, the West Virginia, sent to help the Army, was lying to on station off shore while her floatplanes began to circle the obstacles. At 1043, her 5-inch batteries took the enemy positions under fire. After an hour and twenty six minute of firing, the battleship's guns fell silent to allow a yankee assault, which unhappily failed. The shoot and run was tried again on April 6 and was crowned with success.

Late in the morning of April 6, 198 "flower birds" divided into two waves, took off from various Kyushu airfields in the first of several massed Kamikaze raids, this one known as "Kikusui I." Of the raiders, 55 were downed by American carrier fighters, 35 by AA, and 41 returned. Twenty-seven US ships were hit, some more than once.

At 1330, the West Virginia opened fire with a salvo of 5-inch allowance on a twin engined Betty bomber first sighted about 10,000 yards off her starboard quarter. The plane flew parallel to the ship, which was maneuvered to maintain the enemy broad on the starboard beam. As the guns continued pounding away, a lone US Hellcat was seen to dive out of the clouds and splash the bomber before it could do any damage.

Later, at 1611, the men on the "WeeVee" went to Air Defense to repel an enemy plane attacking on her starboard bow. A Japanese aircraft, identified as a Val, was visually sighted just above the horizon, "flying fast at an altitude of 300 feet." As the 5-inchers opened up, the bird was seen to take evasive action, "consisting of radical course and altitude changes." At least three times during its turn, the aircraft's target angle was zero degrees, but each time it turned away. Observers noted that a 5-inch shell burst under the "flower bird" and set it afire. It then dropped a bomb near a destroyer and proceeded to crash the destroyer escort Witter, damaging it beyond repair. "It is believed, " Wiley wrote in his journal, "that the 5-inch fire from this ship caused the plane to crash."

On April 7 Vice Admiral Seiichi Ito's Japanese Second Fleet began a suicidal run towards Okinawa, hoping against hope to get within gunfire range of the American transport fleet. The giant battleship Yamato, leading the light cruiser Yahagi and eight destroyers, was sighted long before it came near the US area. At 1530, Admiral Deyo flashed a signal to the West Virginia and other battleships of his task force, ordering them to get underway to the north northwest. The "old battleships," as at Surigao Strait, steamed boldly out to sea in a battle line reminiscent of the 1920's or 1930's: their mission, to interpose themselves between the enemy and Admiral Turner's invasion force. Deyto would attack the Yamato if strikes by Admiral Mitscher's carrier planes were unsuccessful. Of course, the Yankee pilots were successful. For the loss of only ten aircraft, the 386 attackers sent down the Yamato, the Yahagi, and fives destroyers: some 3,665 Japanese sailors gave their lives in the useless "Operation Ten-go" without ever having reached their objective. When at about 1815 Captain Wiley and Admiral Sowell received news of Task Force 58's victory, the Imperial Japanese Navy-the same organization which sunk the "Wee Vee" at Pearl Harbor in 1941-had ceased to exist a fighting force.

The West Virginia lay off Okinawa for the next several days providing call fire support in missions frequently interrupted by the Air Defense gong. On April 10, she moved a point off the southern beaches to aid the 96th division assault on Kakuzu. Brig. General Claudius M. Easley had asked the Navy to unleash a devastating concentration of shells sufficient to bury the enemy defenders in their foxholes and to keep them there during the doughboys' advance.

When Commander Rodgers was over the target area, Wiley approved Commander Hardison's plan for hitting the various Japanese positions reported to be some 13,000 yards inland. The ward and back, although at one point the skipper was forced to check fire when several bullets landed dangerously close to American lines. The "Wee Vee's" performance continued all day, even when at noon a steady rain began. The US soldiers were unable to take the ridge and were forced to spend the damp night huddled in "foxholes covered with shelter halves." To make certain that Rising Sun infiltrators did not attempt to counterattack in the dark, the Mountain State dreadnought stood off the beaches and sent 255 rounds of 5-inch shell into the area as night illumination and harassing fire.

The Japanese mounted Kamikaze operation "Kikusui II" late on April 12 sending 83 naval and 60 military planes to attack the American armada near Okinawa. Just before 1445, lookouts on the West Virginia spied three "meatballs," believed to be Val's, about 8,000 yards off the port bow. The trio was flying low over the water parallel to the ship, which maneuvered to keep them on a constant bearing broad on the port beam. Despite intense AA fire, each aircraft found a target. Captain Wiley was informed by TBS that the Tennessee, Salt Lake City, and Zellars were each hit.

An hour after the Vals incident, a lone Kate was picked up and identified by the "Wee Vee's" 5-inch Directors Nos. 1 and 3 as it came in on her starboard bow. Fire was commenced immediately. By the starboard 5 inch mounts, followed by the 40mm's and 20mm's as the target closed. As Seaman Gogusky recalls: "Most of the air attacks were over before one hardly had time to think-it was the waiting that got to you." The old-style torpedo bomber of the type, which had nearly killed the battlewagon at Pearl Harbor, took no evasive action. Consequently, it was downed by hail of 5-inch bursts and crashed about 3,300 yards off the starboard bow.

Early on April 16, the West Virginia steamed at a leisurely 5 knots on various courses to help in the scheduled pre-landing bombardment of Ie Shima, an island east of Okinawa's Motobu Peninsula. Arriving at a point 3,000 yards off the beaches, the battleship hoisted out two spotters, which took off from the smooth sea alongside and went to GQ. Just before sunrise, the skipper gave the order to begin the bombardment with both the main and secondary batteries.

In company with other warships and carrier planes, the "Wee Vee" pounded the beach area on this "Willard Day" until several fires were seen burning. A "Flash Red" signal forced the dreadnought to break off and proceed to sea with Task Unit 51.21.1 for mutual AA fire support, but no enemy planes came near. At 0800 the 77th Division was put ashore, meeting little initial resistance, though it would develop later as the troops pushed inland. Our battleship remained off Ie Shima through April 17 providing call fire.

When the West Virginia returned to Hagushi anchorage on April 18, Admiral Sowell and Captain Wiley learned that the Army's lines on Okinawa had not changed in their absence. American Troops were up against General Ushijima's strong defenses and XXIV Corps boss Major General John R. Hodges needed a new plan. The key point in the enemy's line was the old walled city of Shuri visited about a hundred years earlier by Commodore Perry's flotilla. The whole terrain was well adapted to Rising Sun tactics, based as it was on underground caves connected by tunnels. Shortly after the battleship dropped her anchors, ComBat 4 and the skipper were informed that the infantry would jump off the next morning following what all officers and men hoped would be a devastating sea-air barrage.

Captain Wiley was on the "Wee Vee's" bridge early on April 19. "Today," he told Lt. Arendts for the record, "The 10th Army is to make the all-out attack on southern Okinawa and we are to provide deep supporting fire." Shifting to a spot more suitable for the shoot, the battleship launched two planes for spotting and went to General Quarters. At 0540 the skipper passed word to Commander Hardison to begin firing both the 16- and 5-inch guns: five other battlewagons, six cruisers, and eight destroyers would join in this near maximum attempt to smother the enemy's positions. For forty minutes the West Virginia pumped HC and common shells into the hills, not halting even as 650 Navy and Marine planes added to the din with bombs and rockets. At 0640 three divisions of XXIV Corps attacked, trusting that "the great mass of explosive material" had destroyed the contested strong points or at least left their defenders stunned to resist. It wasn't so. The Americans "were stopped cold when the relatively untouched Japanese came out of their deep caves and manned their well-designed defense positions."

For the next few days fierce fighting continued along the line. On several occasions the "Wee Vee" stood in to lend Yankee soldiers the support of her main and secondary batteries. After a final 5-inch call fire mission on April 24, her commander received orders to return to Ulithi. At 1500 that afternoon the proud old lady was heading south, leaving the smoke and death of that "inevitable island" temporarily in her wake."

The West Virginia reached the vast Ulithi fleet anchorage on April 28. Then her crew was given the opportunity for leave on the island of Mog Mog, where at least one officer was nicknamed the "Hog of Mog Mog" for his indulgences. About this time, both Captain Wiley and Exec King learned that they would be promoted and soon detached to other duties. New men were coming out to command the veteran battleship.

On May 2, the crew was assembled on the quarterdeck for a brief ceremony. Wiley and King took their official leave, pausing to shake hands with Admiral Sowell and various officers. Stepping forward, Captain Raymond W. Holsinger, a native of Arlington Virginia, read his orders and assumed command. The new Executive Officer would be Commander John Fitzgibbon. At this time, Gunner Hardison, Engineering Officer Sugarman, and Dr. Wiggins also left. Lt. Commander Edwin W. Hammond became the new "Guns," while the "black gang" leadership passed to an ex-warrant officer who had come up through the ranks and the Sick Bay to a reservist.

Unlike Skipper Wiley, Captain Holsinger was an ordinance expert who had not been far from cannon or powder since Hitler began the war in 1939. Let us take a quick look at his wartime career thus far.

When German tanks rolled into Poland, Lt. Commander Holsinger was Gunner Officer aboard the dradnought Colorado. Late in 1939 he was detached from the "Wee Vee's" sister ship and sent to Washington for a tour as Chief of Ammunition in the Navy's Bureau of Ordinance. There he was responsible for the procurement, issue, assembly and safe storage of all ammunition and explosives for the entire US Navy. After Pearl Harbor Holsinger's job turned into a "Herculean task, particularly with regards to anti-aircraft ammunition."

In September 1942 the promoted ammo boss was ordered to be in command of the anti-aircraft training ship Wyoming. Built in 1911, this vessel was actually a sister of the battleship Arkansas, converted to her educational role in 1932 as a result of the London Naval Treaty. This vessel, which has never been fully explored in nautical literature, performed the same sort of duty as the ex-dreadnought Utah, which was sunk at Pearl Harbor. The 19,700 ton craft, still capable of making 18 knots, had at this time six 12-inch, sixteen 5-inch, eight 3-inch guns together with a variety of AA weapons. In time, her two remaining 12-inch turrets were removed and double 5-inch turrets mounted on the barbettes. Equipped with only a single pole mast forward and a cut down cage mast

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aft, she would also receive four single turret 5-inch guns(as on Fletcher-class destroyers) fore and center on the 0-2 deck, two more double turrets aft on 0-2, and tubs for single and multiple 40mm and 20mm rapid firers. To say that the Wyoming's final appearance was unique would be an understatement!

On board the Wyoming, Holsinger held schools of one to six weeks duration for about 300 men at a time. Gun crews were trained in every class of cannon for every warship class. "mostly new construction." "There were a number of interesting personalities among the trainees," the skipper later remembered to this writer, "Bob Feller was possibly the most famous. Most of my battery instructors were professional football players and very good they were." In September 1943, the Wyoming's chief was ordered back to the Bureau of Ordinance where he served as Director of Production until March 1945.

In April 1945, higher authorities decided that Holsinger was deserving of a real command and sea duty. He was sent to the Commanding Officers school at Pearl Harbor for a two week polishing tour and then flew via Guam to Ulithi and the West Virginia.

Following the change of command ceremony, Captains Wiley and Holsinger went below for a bit of fellowship and updating, including a tour of the latter's new command. The ex-airship chief filled the ex-production boss in on significant events during the "Wee Vee's" first eight months in the war zone, including the Battle of Surigao Strait and the Kamikaze hit of April 1, now being finally put right as the noise from hammers above testified. Wiley told the new man that the ship and her people were efficient and dependable. That night as Holsinger began to pour over the "Wee Vee's" mass of paperwork and duty roster, he found a note from Wiley concerning a young lieutenant from Nashville. "You can sleep when he's on watch," it read, "because he never hesitates to call the Captain when anything comes up." This reassuring bit of humor brought a smile of confidence to the new skipper's face

The West Virginia departed Ulithi and the joys of Mog Mog on May 14 and headed north for her second tour off Okinawa. Four days later she came to anchor off Hagushi where ships were thick as flies "Practically every night we were under (a) smoke (screen)", the skipper recalls, "and most days wee spent on bombardment missions at the south end of the island." Again, we highlight the more interesting moments because, as Holsinger himself admits, "most of our stay was humdrum."

Since May 11 the US 77th Division had been making slow progress overland from south of Maeda through flat, broken terrain in the island's center east toward three stubborn ground features called, incongruously, "Wart Hill," "Flattop Hill," and the "Chocolate Drop." If these could be overcome, the troops might seize General Ushijima's headquarters of Shuri Castle. To aid in Army's big push, the guns of the Navy were frequently asked for support."

Shortly after sunrise on May 19, the West Virginia moved to Fire Support Area Five, a point approximately two miles south of the Hagushi anchorage. At 0650 the General Quarters Bugle sounded and the ship prepared for a shot as all unnecessary personnel, except those in the two forward 16 inch turrets were secured. While a plane was hoisted out over the stern onto the water from which it would take off for spotting, Captain Holsinger touched base with his new Exec Fitzgibbon and new "Guns" Hammond. The skipper wanted to be certain that his first firing, based on orders received the previous evening to support the 77th Division, would go off without a hitch. About 0820 the divisional headquarters gave the ship several target areas and requested that three rounds of 16-inch HC be dropped in each region as directed by the now-circling Kingfisher.

Forty minutes later, the OS2U radioed that spotting would not be possible as visibility was too low. This news was sent to the Army which, nevertheless, requested Holsinger to send off five rounds of 16-inch HC at irregular intervals during the period of overcast. The plane was recalled.

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Having secured from GQ awaiting better visibility, the "Wee Vee" returned to that condition and at 1115 began sending one gun salvos from 16-inch turret One. Fifteen minutes later, the vessel's youngest pilot, Lt. (jg) Donald Walker, was catapulted off to spot should visibility improve. Coming in over his assigned area, the young man reported the target area was still socked in: going down a thousand feet to the 500 foot level, he found it still impossible to observe. Walker, too, was recalled: however, Holsinger allowed his gunners to fire on several chart targets, including an ammunition dump, gun emplacements, troops, and "a possible radar station."

As he was returning to the ship, pilot Walker's OS21 was hit in both wings and the main pontoon by AA shells "believed to be Japanese 40mm." He reported his situation and in his captain's eyes, "very ably flew the plane into the hook, and was picked up before the Kingfisher could sink." We will sadly hear more about Donald Walker later on.

Around 1600 after having expended fifty five huge HC's the battleship was secured from GQ. In the course of her leisurely shoot, Hammond's people had fired on all of the assigned targets, "except one which was obscured by cloud cover." Two hours later after shifting her berth a short way, the "Wee Vee" cast anchor. That night she expended 160 5inch common allowance in illumination and harassing fire.

On May 22 the West Virginia was again asked to help 77th Division GI's moving on Shuri. In poor visibility, the Army asked Holsinger to fire five rounds of 16-inch HC per hour at enemy positions deep in the rear and even as close as a thousand yards from the front lines. Obliging, the skipper even added his 5-inchers to a superb demonstration of marksmanship reported by shore spotters as "very good." At one point, "a couple of hundred Japs were caught in a road cut. S" Usually personnel targets were invisible, but not his time. For its carelessness, the enemy suffered many casualties when the "Wee Vee" walked "5-inch salvos back and forth through them."

Two days later the 77th Division asked the battleship "for fifty rounds of 16-inch AP on Shuri Castle." The Army hoped the big armor-piercing shells would "do some good against the massive rock tunnels." At 1051 as Commander Rodgers flew an OS2U overhead, the "Wee Vee's" great guns began sending forth their battle bullets for the first time in number since Surigao Strait. The shoot continued for four hours after which a call came in from the divisional HQ stating that her fire "had done the most good of all on very important target."

While Holsinger's new command was supporting troops ashore, the Divine Wind had not blown out. Often thus far in her second tour the "old battleship" had sounded Air Defense, but it was not until she had shifted over to the east side of Okinawa where submarine nets were being placed to enclose Nakagusuki or "Buckner" Bay that she was bothered.

In an unusual night attack, Admiral Ugaki dispatched nearly 160 planes from bases on Kyushu on the evening of May 24/25 to strike the Yankee fleet off Okinawa. On they came and soon:

"Search lights, shellbursts, and tracer bullets lit up the whole sky. Now and then a searchlight would catch a diving plane in its beam and a moment later there would be either a blinding flash from a stricken ship or, more often, a huge iridescent splash where the plane had plunged into the ocean."

Although our battleship, together with other vessels, lay under a smoke screen, at least one enemy flier found the "Wee Vee" as stick of bombs "straddled" the ship. Four minor personnel casualties were quickly taken to the Sick Bay, but a Kingfisher exposed on the catapult aft was riddled.

Another suicide plane passed directly over the West Virginia, which did not open fire due to fleet orders preventing return fire while under smoke. From an altitude of 200 feet, "he was letting down slowly into the smoke." "I don't see how he missed seeing us," the Captain reminisces, "because we were in a slightly open space between two streams of smoke." About two minutes later, the

nearby destroyer O'Neill did open on the plane with her 20mm's and "the plane went down the line of tracers and crashed her."

Thinking back on this night raid, skipper Holsinger raises a question on Japanese tactics: "I never could understand why the Japs didn't go for underwater hits with this form of attack. Their mode of attack caused lots of casualties, but did not sink ships. If they had sent torpedo planes and released into the smoke where the ships were thickly anchored, they couldn't have helped but hit something."

Maybe the answer lay in the state of Imperial navy torpedo bomber training. One wonders if there were enough skilled "tin fish" pilots left in Japan to accomplish anything.

Two days later as the "WeeVee" lay to in Buckner Bay, the Japanese returned again. Two Frances were sighted low on the water flying up the starboard side. The 40 mm Sector 3 Control Officer opened fire with Quad No. 8 to indicate the planes to the 5 inch batteries. These in turn took the enemy twins on, forcing them to turn away into the haze.

Simultaneously, an old Betty bomber was observed 7,500 yards off at an altitude of 500 feet. It took no evasive action, did not attack, was not fired on, and flew off. The West Virginia's gunners failed to give battle to it because their eyes and trigger fingers were elsewhere needed.

The nearby destroyer escort Butler had been struck in the engine room and was drifting without power. The "Wee Vee" and a destroyer began to circle the damaged ship providing AA cover. The dreadnought sent over a medical party, which sent back a dozen wounded men for treatment. Ten were badly scalded when they reached the Sick Bay, but Chaplain William, who had suffered a back injury in a recent fall, got out of bed to render what assistance and consolation he could. Unfortunately as the tug Owl was towing their ship to safety, the burned men began to expire, with all ten dead within three days. In an honorable mass ceremony later, Holsinger commended those brave souls to the deep.

The West Virginia was anchored in Buckner Bay on May 28 supplying various small craft with bread, water, and ice cream, when two Japanese pilots tried to mark her account closed. They didn't although one came very close.

The morning weather was good and the seas calm when a Marine gunner at 40mm Quad No. 7, a leatherneck post, reported an unidentified plane off the tip of Chinon Peninsula. Other lookouts confirmed the intruder as a Zero, which was now streaking in low over the water directly at the ship. Immediately, all of the starboard 40mm and 20mm guns opened up spitting lead at a tremendous rate. Taking no evasive action, the "flower bird" pressed on until, less than 100 yards out, a stream of shells cut off one wing. Wobbling and spinning, the fighter plunged into the sea close aboard the starboard quarter and only twenty feet short of its target. The severed wing sailed across the battleship landing in the water to port while the fuselage exploded showering the quarterdeck with scrap. Credit for the kill went to the Marines aft and skipper Holsinger, examining the debris on his deck, ordered "a pair of aluminum dice manufactured from the propeller hub."

As the men scraped away the mess, some looking out over the side for dents, the "Wee Vee" got up steam and put out to await further expected air attacks. Her sailors would not be disappointed. Within an hour of weighing anchor, 5-inch Director No. 2 picked up a Judy about 11,000 yards off over the transport area. The dive bomber was immediately taken under fire by the two forward port 5-inchers. In seconds the plane went into a thirty degree dive and crashed into the sea behind little Tsukan Island. Another Japanese flag could now be painted on the bridge.

The following afternoon the West Virginia received a call to hit a "red hot" camouflaged, concrete blockhouse holding up elements of the 96th Division. Two spotters were sent up, but

visibility was too poor to allow proper observations. The target would have to wait awhile as a severe typhoon was reported near with great gusts of wind.

Holsinger's command waited out the foul weather for three days before tackling the 96th's obstacles. As the ship sat out the storm, her captain debated the difficulties of the shot. "We had two choices," he later remembered, "go to sea and fire an extreme range or position in Buckner bay about 300 yards square at 11,000 yards, just skimming over the ridge." The second plan was adopted and two OS2U's catapulted off to spot. The Wee Vee fired thirty rounds of 16-inch AP, got six direct hits, and collapsed the blockhouse. "It was" Holsinger proudly notes, "a very nice bit of precision firing."

About this time, the West Virginia's dentist, Lt. F.A. Sines of Charleston, learned that his brother had been killed in the battle for the Shuri ridges. Admiral Sowell requested a jeep and, together with Holsinger and Sines, drove up to the Castle. While the junior officer sought further word of his kin, the admiral and his captain inspected the Japanese defenses and "looked out over the valley, where wrecked trucks and tanks were still strewn over the landscape"

The "Wee Vee" remained in Buckner Bay throughout the month of June operating in fire support of Army troops ashore. Several times during that period, aircraft bombs were dropped at night by Imperial bombers and the ship took some shrapnel damage and had five minor personnel casualties. The most exciting events in this period concerned the battlewagon's floatplane aviators, one of which ended in tragedy.

On the morning of June 16, US destroyers were firing on sundry shore targets. Cues were given to the "tin Cans" by a pair of West Virginia Kingfishers, one piloted by Commander Rodgers and the other by Lt. (j.g.) Donald Walker, with his radioman/gunner Petty Officer 3-C Landson. Volunteering to seek a closer look, Walker's plane was suddenly hit at 1,200 feet by a destroyer's 5-inch shell, forcing its crew to bail out. After reporting the event, Rodgers was ordered to orbit the area and requested the Marine Corsairs help him search through the overcast. Walker and Landson were seen to land, the latter heading for the bushes to take cover as the former was met "by a group of people." Walker was able to break away and run for the beach. The American fighters swooped low and tried to point him to where small boats were putting in for a rescue, but lost sight of him. The rescue effort was unsuccessful and both men were captured by the enemy.

In a conversation with Professor Gary McAllister of Salem College thirty-two years later, Commander Rodgers gave a sad postmortem. About two weeks after the men were downed, the affected territory fell into American hands. The "Wee Vee's" senior aviator and a party received permission to go ashore to seek their comrades. They were found all right-dead from Japanese bullets in the backs of their heads. Except for Pearl Harbor, that was the saddest day ever for the ship's crew. To die in combat was one thing, but the shock of the double murders left many shaking their heads and quite bitter.

Ten days after Walker and Landson were lost, Lt. Emil E. Kovachek and his radioman nearly met the same fate while on another observation mission. The electrical system for their Kingfisher went out and with it the radio and direction finder. It was impossible under those circumstances to vector the plane back to the battleship. Fortunately, Kovachek had just enough fuel to make Kerama Retto where the plane was safely landed. One June 30, the two men were returned to the West Virginia by the dreadnought Tennessee. On July 1, the "Wee Vee" steamed down to Leyte for "R and R," returning to Buckner Bay on August 6 with many hands feeling poorly after bouts with dysentery.

Despite the news of the A-bombing of Hiroshima received the day the Mountain State battleship returned to Okinawa, it was necessary for her to remain off that island until August 24 when she was ordered to Japan for the surrender. Two days before her departure, Admiral Sowell was relieved.

Before leaving, however, the BatDiv 4 chief called a ceremony to make awards, many of a general nature for service rendered on various occasions. Captain Holsinger received a Bronze Star, Aviators Rodgers and Kovachek was Distinguished Flying Crosses, Chaplain Williams had a Bronze Star pinned on, as did Gunnery Officer Hammond. Other officers had a number of men received lesser honors, including a flock of Purple Hearts. It was a grand moment, but the proudest was yet to come."

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

This is a list of those remembered at the memorial service for 2005:

Pat Galvin	Arnold Mashura
Clyde J. Hibbs	William Harrison Hitt
LCDR Paul W. Hebert	Gene Hicks
Alton Meyer	Charles Fowler
Clinton B. Little	Howard Adams
John Lanoutte	Harold Hiles
Owen L. Brown	A.E. Juenger
William (Bill) Orr	Leo Greenwood
Albert Tindal	John Milner
Harold Carrol	Jack Gordon Franklin
Bill Bender	John Freebery
Donald Orr	Wilbur A. "Bill" Walters
Mrs. C.L. Broadway	Paul Bechtolt
Holland Rowberg	Eugene Henry
Lawrence Mooneyham	Mrs. Richard Schultz
Edwin E. Manville	Charles Goebel
Dale Slane	

DEPART FROM EMBASSY SUITES HOTEL , DULLES NORTH

Thurs,

May 25,06----- Depart from hotel at 2pm Visit Philippine Embassy from 3-5;30pm.dinner on your own- Drive by Capitol, White House, Iwo Jima Monument, return to hotel at 10pm.(ALL SHIPMATE ATTENDEES, WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PHILIPPINE CAMPAIGNS, WILL RECEIVE A CERTIFICATE AND A MEDALS FROM THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT.

Fri,

May 26,06----- Depart from hotel at 9 am. 10:30 am visit the Pentagon (lunch on our own) visit WWII memorial (dinner on our own) 7:30 arrive at Marine Barracks Wash. D.C.10:00pm leave to return to hotel. When visiting the Pentagon, all purses carried into the Pentagon are subject to search. The following items are not prohibited but are highly discouraged as they will slow down processing into the building:

1. Anything with batteries, for example: cell phones, camera phones, picture cameras, video cameras, PDA's, blackberry's, laptops, etc.
2. Bags, knapsacks, camera bags, backpacks, shopping bags, etc. Tour groups with the mentioned items will not be allowed to go on tour with items. There is no storage space at the Pentagon for these items so it is highly recommended that these items be left in the bus or van. In the event that these items cannot be left in a bus or van one member of your group will be designated to remain outside with the items and will not go on the tour.
3. Cigarette packs
4. Weapons of any sort, for example: Pocket knives, mace, pepper spray, etc.

Proper Identification must be shown to building security.

1. Ages 12 and under-ID not required.
2. Ages 13 to 17- require 1 form of Photo ID or a parent/guardian to vouch for them.
3. Ages 18 and up, require 2 forms of ID (one form must be a Photo ID, the other may be social security card, birth certificate, any club card, anything with the individuals name on it. (Excluding business cards)
4. Please contact Pentagon Force Protection Agency directly at (703) 697-1001, (703)692-7184or (7030 695-3206 regarding acceptable forms of ID.

Cameras are not allowed on the tour.

Tour groups must stay to the center of the corridor to allow Pentagon personnel to pass by on either side and must keep up with the tour pace.

Food and beverages are not permitted on the tour.

Any violation of these security measures will cause the tour to be terminated.

Visitors taking part in a Pentagon tour should wear comfortable clothing and shoes. If you have any questions, please call (703) 697-1776

SAT:

May 27,06---- Depart hotel at 8:00 am. Visit Arlington National cemetery ,11:30 US Navy Memorial and Heritage Center , until 2:30 pm. Return to hotel 3:30. Rest and get ready for banquet.

Sun.

May 28,06----7:am. Visit Annapolis Naval Academy, lunch on our own at academy, 2:30, Mt. Vernon , George Washington Estate. Arrive back at hotel at 6:00pm.

Mon.

May 29,06---Depart hotel at 9:30 am. Visit Smithsonian Inst. Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center Air and Space Museum Lunch McDonalds on premises, leave and visit Navy Museum at the Navy Pier. Return to hotel at 5pm.

BOATSAILORS AND PEACOATS, BY BOB 'Dex' Armstrong

You remember them...Those ton and a half monsters that took the annual production of thirty-five sheep to make. Those thick black rascals with black plastic buttons the size of poker chips. The issue coats that drove shore duty chief petty officers stark raving nuts if they caught you with the collar turned up or your g---hands in your pockets.

"Hey, you rubber sock, get those g-----m hands outta them d--- pockets! Didn't they issue you black leather gloves?"

So you took your hands out of your pockets and risked digital frostbite rather than face whatever the Navy had in store for violators of the 'No G-----m Hands in Pea-coat Pockets' policy. There's probably a special barracks in Hell full of old E-3's caught hitchhiking in sub-zero weather with hands in pea-coat pockets.

As for those leather gloves, one glove always went missing.

"Son, where in the hell are the gloves we issued you?"

We??? I don't remember this nasty, ugly b-----d being at Great Lakes when the "jocks and socks" petty officers were throwing my initial issue seabag me and yelling, "Move It!!"

As for the gloves, once you inadvertently leave one glove on a whorehouse night table or on the seat of a Greyhound bus, the remaining glove is only useful if a tank rolls over the hand that fit the lost glove.

In the days long ago, a navy spec. pea-coat weighed about the same as a flat car load of cinder blocks. When it rained, it absorbed water until your spine warped, your shins cracked and your ankles split. Five minutes standing in the rain waiting on a bus and you felt like you wee piggy-backing the statue of liberty.

When a pea-coat got wet, it smelled a lot like sheep dip. It had that wet wool smell, times three. It weighed three and a half tons and smelled like "Mary had a little lamb's" gym shorts

You know how damn heavy a late '50's pea-coat was? Well, they had little metal chains sewn in the back of the collar to hang them up by. Like diluted navy coffee, sexual sensitivity instruction, comfortable air conditioned topside security bungalows, patent leather plastic-looking shoes and wearing raghats configured to look like bidet bowls, the pea-coat spec. has been watered down to the point you could hang them up with dental

floss. In the old days, pea-coat buttons and grocery cart wheels were interchangeable parts. The gear issued by the U.S. Navy was tough as hell, bluejacket-tested clothing with the durability of rino hide and construction equipment tires.

Peacoats came with wide, heavy collars. In a cold, hard wind, you could turn that wide collar up to cover your neck and it was like poking your head in a tank turret.

The things were warm, but I never thought they were long enough. Standing out in the wind in those "big-legged britches" (Bell bottoms), the wind whistled up your cuffs and took away body warmth like a thief. But, they were perfect to pull over you for a blanket when sleeping on a bus or a bus terminal bench.

Every sailor remembers stretching out on one of those oak bus station pews with his raghat over his face, his head up against his AWOL bag and covered with his pea-coat. There was always some 'SP' who had not fully evolved from apehood, who poked you with his billy bat and said, "HEY, YOU!! Get up! Waddya think yer doin? You wanna sleep, get a G----m room!"

Pea-coats were lined with quilted satin or rayon. I never realized it at the time, but sleeping on bus seats and station benches would be the closest I would ever get to sleeping on satin sheets.

Early in my naval career, a career-hardened (lifer) first class gunner's mate told me to put my ID and liberty card in the inside pocket of my pea-coat.

"Put the sob in that g---m inside pocket and pin the damn thing closed with a diaper pin. Then, take your heavy folding money and put it in your sock. If you do that, learn to never take your socks off in a cathouse. Them damn dockside pickpockets pat 'cha down for a lumpy wallet and they can relieve you of said wallet so fast you'll never know you've been snookered.

Only a dumb ass idiot will clam-fold his wallet and tuck it in his thirteen button bellbottoms. Every kid above the age of six in Italy knows how to lift a wallet an idiot pokes in his pants. Those little b---- learned to pick sailor's pockets in kindergarten.

"Rolling bluejackets is the national sport in Italy"

In Washington DC, they have a wonderful marble and granite plaza honoring the United States Navy. Every man or woman who served this nation in a naval uniform, owes it to himself or herself to visit this memorial and take their families.

It honors all naval service and any red-blooded American bluejacket or officer will feel the gentle warmth of pride, his or her service is honored within this truly magical place.

The focal point of this memorial is a bronze statue of a lone American sailor. No crow on his sleeve tells you that he is non-rated. And, there are further indications that suggest maybe, once upon a time, the sculpturer himself may have once been an E-3 raghat.

The lad had his collar turned up and his hands in his pockets.

I am sure the Goddess of Main Induction nearly wets her panties laughing at the old, crusty chiefs standing there with veins popping out on their old, wrinkled necks, muttering.

"Look at that idiot SOB standing there with his collar up and his g----m hands in his pockets. In my day, I would have ripped that jerk a new one!"

Ah, the satisfied glow of E-3 revenge.

Peacoats...One of God's better inventions.

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 Reunion in form of check or money order (no credit cards or phone reservations accepted) to: USS West Virginia Reunion, c/o Joseph Variot, 4564 Cedar River Rd., Mancelona, Michigan 49659-8694. Your canceled check will serve as your confirmation. All registrations forms and payments must be received by mail on or before May 1, 2006. Keep or mail a copy.

Date	Price p.p.	Num. People	Total Due
Thur. May 25,06—Philippine Embassy, Dinner			
Monument tour	\$30		
Fri. May 26,06----Pentagon, WWII Memorial,			
Dinner, Marine Ceremony	\$55		
Sat. May 27,06----Arlington Cemetery, Navy Mem.			
Regan Bldg.	\$30		
Sun. May 28,06----Annapolis, Md.,Mt. Vernon			
George Washington Estate	\$40		
Mon. May 29,06---National Air Museum, American			
History Museum	\$30		
Banquet Sat. May 27,06, One choice per person			
Grilled Salmon Fillet	\$39		
Roast Breast of Chicken	\$39		
New York Strip Steak	\$39		
Registration Fee Per Person	\$15		
TOTAL			

In addition to the above, we hope to have a tour of the White House at no additional cost. We don't know which of the listed dates we will be allowed to do it, if it becomes a reality.

FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS AT EMBASSY SUITED,DULLES

Call (703) 723-5300. Mention USS West Virginia Special. \$99.00 plus tax. May 25 through May 29, 2006 inclusive. Two room suites, internet access, evening reception daily and indoor and out door swimming pool. For more then 2 people per room there is a charge of \$20 per each additional person. Rate upon availability may be used May 24, 30, 31 and June 1, 2006. This rate includes complimentary cooked to order breakfast, airport shuttle. Call the desk for pick up.

I the undersigned, hereby assume liability for and shall indemnify, defend, protect, save and hold harmless the USS West Virginia Reunion Association and the Embassy Suites Hotel Dulles-North, 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 _____
(regardless of payment method)

**In Memory of the
USS South Dakota (BB57)**



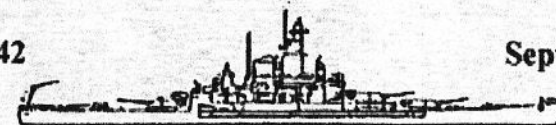
**and the crew who served
Battleship "X"**

Donated by the 2nd Generation Group

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April 30, 1942

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1947



USS Maryland BB-46

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USS West Virginia BB 48

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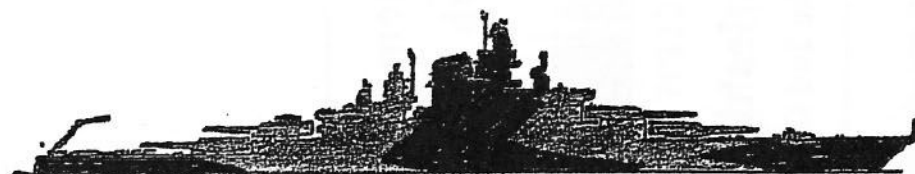


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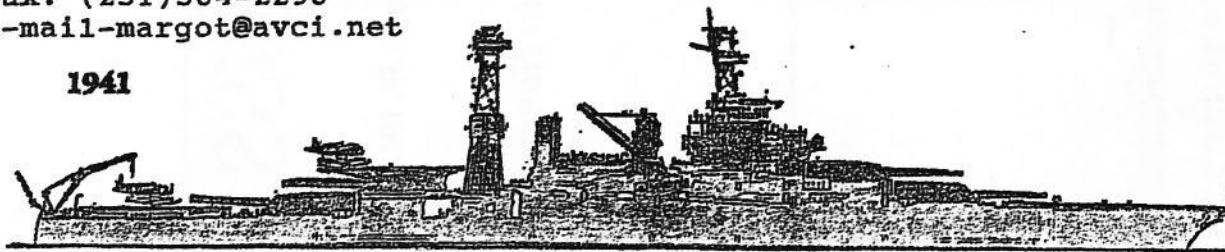
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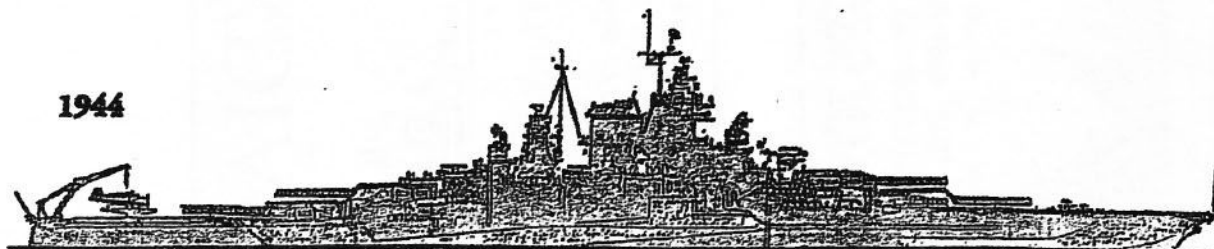
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Fax: (231) 584-2290
e-mail-margot@avci.net

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

1941



1944



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