



# Nitro Blast

## See Your Shipmates in Seattle

Keep the Memories Alive

### Seattle 2009 Update

By Jim Timmons

As of this writing, we have filled most of the guestrooms originally blocked for the USS Nitro Association reunion. Additional guestrooms have been added to our block for those of you who have not yet made your reservations. A piece of advice - I would not wait until the last minute to make your Hilton Garden Inn reservations because I am not sure how many additional rooms will be available the closer we get to the cutoff date.

The Nitro Association had originally blocked a group of 10 guestrooms for

Wednesday, 17 June (for early arrivals); this number is now up to 18 rooms reserved. We have also increased the number of guestroom for each night - Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 25 to 35 guestrooms for each night.

Each person will be responsible for making his or her reservations. Individuals may call the hotel directly at 425-430-1414 or the Hilton Garden Inn toll free reservations number at 1-877-STAY HGI (877-782-9444), or online:

<http://hiltongardeninn.hilton.com/en/gi/groups/personalized/SEARHGI-UN617-20090612/index.jhtml>.

Please use the Group Code: UN617 when making all reservations. When placing your reservation for the 2009 reunion, let the reservation clerk know you want to reserve a room for the **USS Nitro Association** reunion for "x" number of nights. Your credit card will not be charged until you check out and you may cancel your reservations up to 24 hours prior to your planned day of arrival. *Anyone requiring special assistance should inform the hotel when making reservations.*

Reservations must be received on or before the cutoff date of **5/17/2009**. On the cutoff date, all unreserved rooms will be released back to the hotel for resale. Reservations received after 5/17/2009 will be accepted on a space and rate available basis.

The guestroom rate is \$109.00/night for 2 adults and children 18 years old or younger. Also included with the room rate is a full American Breakfast - made to order omelets, French toast, waffles, oatmeal, toast, bagels, cereal, fruit,

juice, yogurt, etc for each of the adults (2) and children 12 and younger. A limited number of guest rooms are available at our group rate, for up to 4 days prior to the reunion and 2 days after the reunion for attendees who want to visit the Seattle area prior to the reunion or stay later. You will need to contact the hotel concerning additional room night availability

Please find attached an activity sheet for the reunion. You will need to fill it out and return it along with a check for those activities in which you would like to partake. As usual, we have a very busy activity schedule on Friday and Saturday, but should be back early enough on Saturday evening so you will have some free time.

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**Early Seattle Arrivals** - For those attendees checking in on Wednesday or earlier, here are a few suggestions for places you might want to visit or things you might want to do prior to members checking in on Thursday afternoon. The Boeing Museum of Flight in south Seattle, the Tacoma Glass museum or Puget Sound cruise are just a few of many places you might want to visit.

**Rental Cars:** We have also arranged for discounted car rentals through Enterprise Car Rentals in Renton. The rental rates are as follows: \$35/day and \$175/week for any vehicle up to a full size car (i.e. Impala, Taurus, Altima) or \$45/day \$225/week for any specialty vehicle (Minivans, SUVs, Luxury Cars). Please contact the Enterprise Rental Cars in Renton directly for reservations at 425-277-5702 and

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**(Early arrivals cont.d)**  
identify yourself as being part of the USS Nitro Association reunion.

If you make a reservation and then decide to cancel it, there will not be a cancellation charge; however, please let the agency know as soon as possible so they can make the appropriate adjustments to their inventory of cars. Another advantage from renting a car in Renton is that you will avoid a higher tax rate that is charged on car rentals at the airport.

*Hotel Guestroom to share* - Rod Tibbetts will be attending this year's reunion alone and is looking for a roommate to share expenses. If interested, please contact him at 218-483-4208

## *"Take Me out to the Ball Game"*

**Mariner's Baseball, that is!**

*By Bill Wasser*

The Seattle Mariners will be playing a home game vs. the Arizona Diamondbacks on Saturday night 20 June and I wanted to check to see how many reunion attendees might be interested in attending the game. Since we will be in downtown Seattle during the afternoon, it seems like an ideal time to see a baseball game. If interested in attending baseball game, please contact me at 845-279-5442 or email me at [wwasser@comcast.net](mailto:wwasser@comcast.net).

## Cruisebook and T-Shirt Project Update

*By Jim Timmons*

Due to a lack of response from our association membership providing designs for Nitro ship-specific T-shirts, we are delaying the implementation of this project.

On a positive note, we have had some additional interest from our member in providing us with cruisebooks to copy and make available (on disk) to our members through the ship's store. I will be contacting those members shortly with shipping directions. If there are any other members of our association who would also like to contribute a cruise book for copying, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

We hope to make some of the cruise books on disc available later this year.

## Nitro Association Officer Elections

*By Jim Timmons*

Phil Wise (and our shadow-secretary Donna) will be stepping down as Secretary of the USS Nitro Association after this year's reunion and Paul Licker will have his name placed in nomination for that position. This position does require attendance at our reunion's

annual meeting, or making arrangements with another Association member, who will be attending the reunion, to insure that accurate minutes of the annual meeting are kept and presented to the other board members upon request.

Phil and Donna have been in charge of recording the minutes of the Nitro Association annual meetings for several years and have done an outstanding job of keeping track of the items brought up for discussion during those meetings

With Paul Licker's name being placed in nomination for the vacated Secretary's position, this will leave one of our two Trustee positions available for anyone who would like to fill that position. The trustees of the Nitro Association receive and examine the quarterly financial reports from the Treasurer and report the condition of these books as well as the Secretary's minutes, if required, at the annual meeting.

**(Nitro Officers**

**Cont'd pg. 3)**

### *The Crow's Nest - News for and about Crewmembers*



The listing(s) are of former USS Nitro (AE-2) or (AE-23) crew members, which we have received since our last posting:

BM3 Jim Caithamer (AE-21) (66-68) - Sue Caithamer wishes to thank all of the Association members for their wishes and prayers during Jim's illness.

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#### **The Nitro Sage**

**"You know you're a Sailor when . . ."**

*You call your profession a canoe club.*

*You make your family qualify to operate each appliance in the house - dishwasher operator, blender technician, etc..*

*You paint your vehicle haze gray and one of your license plates reads "Haze Gray and Underway".*

**(Nitro officers cont'd)**

If any association members are interested in having their names placed on the ballot to either fill the open Trustee position or have their names placed on the ballot for the Secretary's position, please let me or one of the other board members know as soon as possible. All members of the USS Nitro Association board must be current members in good standing.

**Navy Times Article Recaps**

- 1 China considers its first carrier..
2. Sailors like new cammies but hate restrictions on when they can be worn.
- 3 Submariners now are using electronic charting for navigation.
- 4 Poll shows troops unsure of Obama military policies.
- 5 Bad economy good for recruiting and re-enlistments. Navy to retain only the best.
- 6 Soviet sub in Providence may be scrapped unless funding can be found.
- 7 Navy going "Green" by installing wind turbines, solar panels, etc at various bases.
- 8 USN and USCG looking at ways to extend hull life of ships.
- 9 Army defends use of 'burn pits' in Iraq.
- 10 Navy sacks several COs for a variety of reasons and problems.
- 11 Afghanistan "surge" grows in size.
- 12 Navy increases presence in pursuit of pirates with good early results.
- 13 Violence in Mexico means change in liberty/leave requests for Navy personnel.
- 14 Nimitz-class carriers end with commissioning of G H W Bush carrier.
- 15 New GI Bill transfer of rights to dependents being explained Navy-wide.
- 16 Average monthly military expenses in Iraq are \$10.9B and Afghanistan \$2.7B.
- 17 Several states are not allowing enough time for military personnel to vote.
- 18 Congress eyes an increase in health care enrollment fees and higher co-pay for military health care.
- 19 New National Infantry Museum to open in Columbus, GA.
- 20 Outgoing CNO calls for smaller crews and limit on carriers and cost-overruns.
- 21 Navy to increase intel specialists billets.
- 22 USS Green Bay (LPD-20) joins fleet.
- 23 POs with less than 10 yrs must ask permission to ship-over..
- 24 Iraq troop withdrawals start mid year.

## Nitro Association Membership Update

USS Nitro (AE-2/AE-23) Association membership continues to grow. ***Our membership roll (cumulative total from '98 to present) now stands at 318.*** The following shipmates (Nitro tour dates) have signed on as members during the month indicated:

**January 09:** Karen Reyes-Benzi (Asso.Mbr.)

**March 09:** Jeffrey Williams, EM2 (68-72)

Anyone desiring to become a member of the USS NITRO Association may do so by sending a **check made payable to:**  
 USS NITRO Association  
 % Mr. Robert Peiffer  
 PO Box 1254  
 Mishawaka, Indiana 46546-1254

### 2009 Nitro Assn. Dues Classifications

**Regular Association Membership Dues are \$25.00 (including S/H).** The dues packet includes an USS Nitro Association watch cap (will have a silhouette of the USS Nitro (AE-23) and the hull numbers of both the AE-2 and AE-23 directly embroidered on it), quarterly newsletters, membership certificate (for **new** members only), crewmembers directory and a laminated membership card.

### **Active Duty Membership Dues - FREE**

A new classification of dues for former USS Nitro (AE-23) crewmembers, who are still on active duty, has been created. Former Nitro crewmember, still on active duty, will receive the items described in the regular association membership packet at no charge to them. In order to qualify for this classification of membership, the active duty person will need to supply the Association with a copy of their military ID (to show active status) as well as a copy of their NAVPERS 1070/605 entitled "History of Assignments".

**Associated Membership Dues are \$14.80 (\$12.50 dues + \$2.30 S/H)** This classification of membership is available for spouses and/or children of former or deceased USS Nitro (AE-2/AE-23) crewmembers or for any former U. S. Navy personnel having an interest in or desire to join the USS Nitro Association. This classification would allow those members to receive a membership certificate & card and 4 quarterly newsletters each year (**dues premiums and crewmember directory are not included in this classification**).

All USS Nitro Association memberships are valid for one calendar year (Jan - Dec.).

- 25 Japanese Navy to patrol for pirates.
- 26 New MCPON wants subpar senior enlisted out of Navy.
- 27 Officer retention becomes more selective.
- 28 Wars, US security top DOD agenda
- 29 USCG to start ship homeport rotation.
- 30 Survey of CPOs and Officers show they are not happy that lower enlisted are getting khaki service uniforms.
- 31 Some MSC (USNS) UNREP ships have individual plush staterooms for their smaller crews
- 32 Congressional committee targets retiree benefits and pay hikes for cuts.
- 33 Command ballcaps may become a thing of the past because of new uniforms (cammies and khaki).
- 34 More Marines go to sea, many for first time.
- 35 Tugs free grounded cruiser in HI. Navy orders "standdown" review.
- 36 San Diego's new BEQ high-rise complex opens..
- 37 Navy charges Naval History and Heritage Command with task of making naval history more relevant to today's sailor .
38. British and French subs collide.
- 39 Navy homeowners to get help from stimulus money.
- 40 Economic slump sure to hit all service budgets. Branches will have to do more with less.
- 42 Commission reviews ways to keep 30-year-old Perry-class frigates operational.
- 41 Corpsman awarded Silver Star in Afghanistan.
- 43 Navy freezes millions in maintenance funds surface ships
- 44 Navy UAV helo 'Fire Scout' to deploy in October.
- 45 Most Selective Re-enlistment Bonus (SRB) to end April 30.
- 46 Navy escorts MSC surveillance ship in Chinese waters.
- 47 Attack sub Hartford and amphib New Orleans collide in Gulf. Fifteen sailors injured.
- 48 Budget cuts effect non-deployed ships pre-deployment underway time.
- 49 Suicide rates for military increased significantly last year.
- 50 Military All-Star baseball team serves as recruiting tool.
- 51 Navy awaits appointment of new Secretary of the Navy

## Guest Columnist

Howard H. Loving  
 Captain, USN (Ret.)  
 Commanding Officer 1980 - 1982

I am pleased to pass on a few remembrances as Commanding Officer, USS Nitro from 1980-1982. I assumed command of Nitro at the pier at NWS Earle, New Jersey just three weeks after leaving a ship in Japan as XO and just five days before a three-month NATO North Atlantic deployment. I skipped the normally compulsory six-month CO training. I had previously spent almost one-half of my career on ships in the Pacific. Though it may be the same Navy, operating procedures are not the same in the Atlantic and Pacific.

Some reflections. During our NATO deployment we exercised with an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and a Carrier Battle Group (CBG). The ARG was commanded by RADM Warren Hamm, a legendary Surface Flag Officer, who would be my immediate superior at my next command. After reaching the coast of Norway, Nitro operated independently from the ARG and CBG. At some point we received a message to exercise rearm the carrier and several destroyers. After determining the rendezvous position I directed the bridge watch to make the rendezvous and so informed RADM Hamm. He immediately informed me "I should ask permission to rearm the carrier as he was the Senior Flag Officer." Obviously embarrassed, and not quite understanding why I should have to, I requested permission to perform our mission with the carrier and her destroyers. Things are much clearer in the Pacific. When the carrier calls you respond, instantaneously. Nitro performed well during that deployment and RADM Hamm made a visit to the ship and told us so.

During this deployment Nitro transited the Bergen Fiord. This is a once in a lifetime experience. That is a mild understatement. We were directed to transit the Fiord, to

about mid-way, and provide communications relay to the Amphibs that had entered the previous day. When we picked up the Norwegian Pilot he informed me that "...no one has ever anchored in this fiord; it is too deep." There seemed to be a spot on the chart where we could successfully anchor. I tried it, with 100 fathoms of chain from the starboard anchor at the waters edge. The Pilot was right, utterly impossible to anchor. The anchor touched nothing! It is not easy to turn a slow reacting, 500-foot, 17,000 ton, single-screw ship around in a fiord without tugs at 0400!



During a short break, and of course complete munitions offload, we saw our families in Earle. In freezing January weather we on loaded and prepared for a routine seven-month Mediterranean deployment with the U.S. Sixth Fleet.

Another lesson learned occurred at incho at Rota, Spain. At turnover in Rota liberty was granted to the appropriate inport sections. I noticed that the Op-Order did not specify when we should get underway from Rota, transit the Straits of Gibraltar and formally report to Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet. I expected a specific message, which was normal WestPac procedure. Finally it occurred to me that a message was not forthcoming. Using the standard available pickup truck, I directed the XO to roundup crewmembers ashore immediately. With much luck we sailed late in the evening with a full crew and later rendezvoused with the USS America. I became friends with her skipper during the deployment and he gave me a timely heads-up and confirmed that Mediterranean operations were a bit looser than those in WestPac.

Two of my focus areas on Nitro were improving crew retention and increasing Damage Control readiness. We received

the Group's most significant retention award early in the Med deployment. Throughout the deployment we exercised at General Quarters. We played a cassette recording featuring battle sounds for added realism during the GQ's. I am certain some thought we were overdoing it.

We experienced a Main Engineering Space fire on June 1, 1981. Fire at sea is the seaman's worst enemy. It occurred at dusk and the crew reacted in an extraordinary manner. I can share with you my fitness report, which reflects the crew's efforts. It states: "The main space was evacuated, then began a 90-minute struggle to save the ship. The damage control effort was superb. It was a total success story in that there were only six minor injuries and the actual damage was repaired in 30 days...Praise for Nitro and her crew came from all corners, including the CNO, who visited the ship two days after the fire. RADM Fontaine, who investigated the incident, said it best: "The discipline, loyalty and morale of the ship's company to fight a fire of this magnitude is heartwarming...Nitro was well drilled, well disciplined and performed like true professionals. I am proud of them and proud for them"

Having had four tours as a Commanding Officer during a 30-year career, it is a rare CO that does not experience some significant adversity during an at-sea tour. Recently a carrier experienced a severe fire, which led to "relief for cause" of the Captain and the ship's senior leadership. As I write this, an Aegis Cruiser is hard aground in Pearl Harbor. Without training and essential professional crew support casualties severely damage valuable fleet assets and quickly end Navy careers. Nitro can be proud of her performance when it counted most.

Sincerely,

Howard H. Loving, Jr.

## Chaplain's Corner

By Chaplain Deanna Smitha

### Faith in Most Difficult Times

As I share these thoughts with you during the Passover and Easter season, a very troubling phenomenon is occurring, not just in our own country but around the world. Picking up the e-newspaper each morning I find more often than not another tragic incident/occurrence where someone finally reached the end of their rope and committed a horrific act of violence upon not just one, but many people in their proximity. Law enforcement personnel are targets of those whose cause is to further the fight against gun control. Motivating factors/causes continue to center around blind prejudice and hatred of those “unlike the assailants.”

Having grown up in a military family coupled with my own military service, the expression “there are no atheists in foxholes” is one of great familiarity. When one is truly under fire and things are not looking good, the willing folks ultimately look beyond themselves and their own finitude to seek greater meaning and understanding. *Where*

people “invest” their search *can* be a very telling factor in their perception of themselves, the world, and their hope for better things to come.

In recent years many have invested their well-being in “certainty,” relying upon a very ‘black and white’ view of life and the pursuit of happiness, only to find those perpetrating those myths to be greedy, self-serving, and lacking any integrity or concern for anyone beyond themselves. The increasing news of past and present unscrupulous and downright illegal practices—the roots of our current economic and societal woes—has overwhelmed our nation and world already numbed by deep pain. Folks continue to seek having their hands held and their fears assuaged instead of facing the reality of uncertainty, self-denial for the betterment of all (including themselves) in the long-term. People are finding huge difficulties in going beyond the “folly of their certainty” to once again become a people of faith and vision who can reach beyond their comfort zone and stretch to grow and build a new and better life and world.

Just like the soldier bogged down in the quagmire of mud and despair in that foxhole, in order to move beyond our predicament we too have to honestly

commit to look beyond ourselves and that “certainty myth” that only black and white belief will allow. We must once again move ourselves into the difficult dimension of faith and vision to perceive and achieve the betterment of the world, our society and ourselves.

Together we will succeed, or together we will be destined to fail **IF** we choose **NOT** to move and grow beyond the spoon-fed quagmire we are stuck in, and once again become a nation whose leadership touts real vision, faith, and peace for our futures - not the continuing greed and self-serving behavior we have lived through in recent years.

May God continue to give us, our leaders and our country the faith and courage to move beyond false “certainty,” and continued strong resource and direction in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Fair winds and following seas, and richest blessings to you and yours..... Hope to see you in Seattle in June.

*Grace and peace....*

Chaps...

### *A Final Thought*

The Association officers usually receive obituaries, letters or emails, with the passing of a former crew members. On the evening of April the 4th, Jim Caithamer's wife called Jim Timmons and myself and said her husband had passed away. This was the first time we received this information first hand. At the funeral five Association members were present. Jim Timmons and I were honored to be pallbearers for a member of our extended Nitro family.

For those of you who have not had the pleasure to attend the annual reunion, we read the names of our

departed USS Nitro AE-2 and USS Nitro AE-23 crewmembers and a bell is rung eight times in their memory. This year will be the hardest, as one of names on the list will be that of an Association members who has been present and part of these services in the past.

Jim and Sue Caithamer have been attendees since the San Diego, CA reunion. Jimmy C has taken what seem like an endless number of photos each time and posted to the website so those who did not attend could view the actives that took place. His easy going matter will be missed. Fair winds and following seas to you, our brother AE sailor.

Time is getting short, and for those of you who have not made reservations, now is the time to go to the Internet and make them. 18 June will be here before we know it. Once more, bring any memorabilia for sharing with the other attendees. Also, if your local newspaper has a section where local happenings can be posted, I will send you attending the reunion notice to it.

***Please remember our service personnel, who man-the-watch, in your thoughts and prayers.***

*Fair winds and following seas,*

Bob Eberlein, Founder,  
USS Nitro Association.

## 2009 Nitro Reunion Activity Form

(please return as soon as possible with your payment)

Below are activities that will be held during the USS Nitro Association's 2009 Reunion to be held in Seattle (Renton), Washington from 18-21 June. There is a cost associated with each of these activities, so please review this information carefully. The cost shown below include admission price, taxes and tip (where applicable) and transportation. If a tour does not have enough people signed up, you will be notified prior to the reunion.

**Payment for these trips must be received by the Nitro Association treasurer by May 15<sup>th</sup> in order to assure seating is available.**  
**Lunch on Friday will not be a group activity and is not included in the trip price. We will be stopping in Poulsbo, WA on Friday for lunch and time for shopping.**

**Friday (6/19) (Approx. 8:30 AM - 5:30 PM):** AM trip to Bremerton Naval Museum - USS Nitro (AE-2) bell is located here (approx. 2 hrs.), drive by Mothball Fleet, lunch and shopping, Naval Undersea Museum, Keyport, WA. **(need 35 people)**  
**Cost: \$22.00/per person                      Lunch and shopping not included in prices ☹**

**Friday night: Association Dinner, Raffle and Auction** (6:30 - 11 PM)                      **Dinner Cost: (includes tax and gratuity)**  
**The All American Buffet will include 3Entrées:** Grilled Salmon, Sirloin of Roast Beef, Grilled Herb Chicken; **served with** Rice, Garlic Mashed Potato, Seasoned, Vegetables, Caesar or Mixed Green Salad rolls, coffee or iced tea and dessert  
**Adult: \$33.50/per person                      Children: \$25.50/per person (Ages 12 and under)**

**Saturday (6/20) (Approx. 8:30 AM - 5 PM):**  
Wreath Laying, tour & lunch NAVSTA Everett galley; afternoon Seattle visit **(need 35 people)**  
**Cost: \$25.00 per person    Transportation, lunch, tax and gratuity included in price**

**(Return with Payment)**

Name of Family Attending \_\_\_\_\_ Number Attending \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print First and Last Name)  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_, ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Activity</b>	<b># Attending</b>	<b>Cost/per person</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><u>Friday: Naval Museum, &amp; Naval Undersea Museum</u></b>	Adult _____	x \$22.00	= _____
	Children _____	x \$22.00	= _____
<b><u>Friday Night Association Dinner</u></b>	Adults _____	x \$33.50	= _____
	Children (Ages 12 and under) _____	x \$25.50	= _____
<b>All American Buffet will include: Entrées:</b> Grilled Salmon, Sirloin of Roast Beef, Grilled Herb Chicken <b>Served with</b> Rice, Garlic Mashed Potato, Seasoned, Vegetables, Caesar or Mixed Green Salad rolls, coffee or iced tea and dessert			
<b><u>Saturday: NAVSTA, Everett and Seattle</u></b>	Adults _____	x \$25.00	= _____
AM Includes: Wreath Laying Ceremony	Children _____	x \$25.00	= _____
Lunch and tour of base			
PM Visit to Seattle			
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>\$ _____</b>

There may be slight alterations to the activity line up  
Please return the bottom portion of this form with your check payable to:

**USS NITRO Association**  
PO Box 1254  
Mishawaka, IN 46546-1254