



Nitro Blast

Commanding Officer, Earle, Arriving!

Keep the Memories Alive

Earle Wreath Laying Surprises

By Jim Timmons

Ding, Ding; Ding, Ding! Earle arriving! was the announcement as Captain D. J. (Fuzz) Harrison, Commanding Officer, Naval Weapons Station, Earle, NJ arrived for our annual wreath laying ceremony.

This was the first of the surprises that awaited our attendees at NWS Earle on Friday afternoon, 17 June. The two busloads of attendees, who had gone to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty earlier that day, were also greeted by a handful of other former Nitro crew members at Earle's Waterfront Gate for

the ceremony.

Our ceremony, attended by approximately 80 former crewmembers and guests, took place at the site of a memorial for shipmates of the WW2 destroyer escort USS Solaris. Captain Harrison was kind enough to take part in our ceremony with welcoming remarks. He also received the Nitro Association donation of \$500 for NWS, Earle's office of the Navy & Marine Corp Relief Society.

Captain Harrison took time to visit and take photos with many of the crewmembers both before and after the service; especially the WW2 sailors in attendance.

Association visits the Earl piers:

The second surprise of our visit came with Captain Harrison's question: "You didn't come all the way here without going out to the piers, did you?" Needless to say, the reader probably knows what our answer was!

So, we loaded the buses and were escorted by base security to the end of the 'three-mile' piers. With a Navy IBU (Inshore Boat Unit) making repeated perimeter runs around the piers in Sandy Hook Bay and base security on the pier, we spent about 1/2 hour taking pictures and telling stories. It was a great addition to an already meaningful event.

Rain, Rain Go Away

Our outdoor reunion activities continue to be blessed with good weather, and our Friday activities were again a good example of how fortunate we have been.

The weather forecast called for rain showers for most of the day, and in the beginning it appeared as if that were going to be the case. As we prepared for the day's activities, the overnight rain was just ending and the sky was very overcast. As we approached our embarkation point for the ferry trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, the historic Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal, at Liberty State Park, the sky was still overcast but not threatening rain.

The closer we got to our morning sites, the better the weather became and the remainder of the morning turned out to be bright and sunny; however, that was to change as we headed for Earle.

The hour-long trip to Earle was in and out of rain showers, so you can imagine the weather we were expecting for the ceremony. When I met with the base PAO, Mike Brady, he said that they had alternate arrangements, in the gymnasium, for the ceremony in case it rained.

While we waited for Captain Harrison and his guests to arrive, we chatted with the members of the color guard and the bugler about what was happening on the base. The sun started breaking through the overcast and the near 90-degree heat returned. We were at Earle for about 1 1/2 hours that afternoon and not a drop of rain fell. This part of the afternoon could not have gone better.

Our return trip to the hotel, on the other hand, was made in a torrential downpour. It rained so hard the highway drainage could not keep up with the amount of water, and the water just ponded on the roadway.

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Newsletter of the
USS Nitro Association
PO Box 1254
MISHAWAKA IN 46546-1254

Nitro Association Dinner and Raffle/Auction

Our annual Nitro Association dinner was held in the Hilton Newark Airport hotel's main ballroom, and was attended by approximately 75 former crewmembers and their guests.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the ten Battle Streamers, which have been awarded to the ships named USS Nitro. The following battle streamers were presented to the crew members present from the AE-2:

- Second Nicaraguan Campaign 1926-1933
- WWII American Theater 1941-1946
- WWII Asiatic Pacific Theater 1941-1946
- WWII European African Middle Eastern Campaign – Normandy 1941-1946
- WWII European African Middle East Campaign – Southern France 1941-1946

The following battle streamers were presented to the crewmembers of the AE-23 that were present for the named operation.

- Navy Unit Commendation with numeral "1" for period 17 Jan – 7 Feb 1991 – Persian Gulf
- Meritorious Unit Commendation with numeral "1" for period 18 May 1972 – 13 Feb 1973 – Vietnam Service
- Armed Forces Expeditionary with 2 Bronze Stars – Cuba and Lebanon
- Vietnam Service with 1 Bronze Star
- Southwest Asia with 1 Bronze Star

Since we did not have any crew members present who were on board the AE-23 during the Persian Gulf, the presentation of these awards were made to Juan and Renie Reyes-Matos's daughter and son-in-law, who are still both on active duty and have served in the Persian Gulf. Karen Reyes-Benzi is a HMCS and Bill Benzi is an EMCS. It was a delight to

have them both attending our reunion and dinner.

After the streamer presentations were made, they were put on the battle streamer ring, which was then attached to the Navy flag.

New York, New York!

Saturday in NYC was interesting to say the least. We started early with a bus trip, via the Holland Tunnel, to the Empire State Building. Surprisingly, the trip from the Newark Airport Hilton did not take all that long to reach Manhattan.

Not many of our attendees had visited the Empire State Building, so we spent a couple of hours taking in the skyline, snapping a few photos and shopping at this historic New York landmark. Several of our members finished their tour early and did some additional shopping at stores nearby.

After our visit, we took a ride past Ground Zero (later to be visited), Battery Park, Governors Island Ferry Terminal and NYC's Vietnam Veterans Memorial while on our way to lunch at South Street Seaport.

After lunch we went to Ground Zero, hoping to be able to take pictures of the work going on there. We were disappointed that the fencing surrounding the site was covered with canvas that obstructed the view of the work. The canvas, on the other hand, did have pictures of what structures would be going up in place of the World Trade Center. It would have been nice if there had been some view ports at various spots along the fencing, so pictures could have been taken.

From Ground Zero, we had the bus make a stop at Times Square where a number of our attendees spent time taking photos, shopping at the various vendors stands which occupy a good portion of Broadway and 7th. Ave., and taking in the ambiance of the street performers and food vendors.

Those who chose not to visit Times Square stayed on the bus and were taken to the USS Intrepid Museum for some more shopping and picture taking. As usual, at the end of the day, there was one tired bunch of people who made their way back to the hotel.

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:

Walter D. Gaines, AE-23, MM2, 1959 plank owner;

The Nitro Sage

If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you tried.

A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.

Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism.

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 333.*** The following shipmates (Nitro tour dates) have signed on as members during the month indicated:

June: Daniel Eddy, MM, early 1980s
Donald Welch, Jr., MM, early 1980s

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

2010 Nitro Assn. Dues Classifications

Regular Association Membership Dues are \$25.00 (including S/H). The dues packet this year will include a USS Nitro Association automatic opening umbrella (with the Association crest silk-screened on it) to be mailed in March, 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.).

Navy Times Article Recaps

1. Second 9/11 ship named USS Arlington has been christened.
2. US troops in Europe may no longer wear uniforms off base.
3. Up to 240 senior officers could face forced retirement later this year.
4. Navy cancels 3 ship deployments due to budget worries; more in offing.
5. 9,000 sailors to be cut by Navy in next 4 years. E-4 to E-8 in 24 over-manned ratings being scrutinized.
6. Donations to military relief societies remain steady.
7. Military estimates it will take up to three years to repair, rebuild or replace equipment from Iraq & Afghan wars.
8. SECNAV stresses that budget shortfalls, low manning and expanded mission will continue to be problems for Navy.
9. China's first aircraft carrier goes to sea trials..
10. Pentagon: Future budget cuts jeopardize future military missions.
11. Proposed House Bill would allow older veterans to use Medicare at VAs.
12. Cruiser, USS Mobile Bay, fails INSURV. Severe problems with engines, missiles, guns and commo.
13. Naval History and Heritage Command cited by Navy inspector general for significant deficiencies in maintaining artifacts and documents.
14. U-2 spy planes still flying above Afghanistan battlefields.
15. New Zealand Defence Force and US swap 13 sailors for 2-week cultural exchange period.
- 16 \$20 billion dollar shortfall has Navy rethinking retirement pay.
18. WikiLeaks soldier moved to Ft. Leavenworth.
19. Some sailors may be eligible for up to a 2-year early release from Navy.
20. Nine new exercises replace 1.5 mile run and sit-ups in Navy PRT.
21. College basketball game to be played on board San Diego based aircraft carrier in November.
22. Panetta named as new SECDEF.
23. Navy fires 1 Commodore, 3 COs and 1 XO in ten day period in April.
24. Gen. Petraeus to become head of CIA after leaving Afghan post.
25. Navy Seals kill Osama bin Laden.
26. Pentagon board examines privatizing military overseas postal service.
27. SECNAV to hold COs responsible for sexual assaults in their commands.

Navy Times Article Recaps

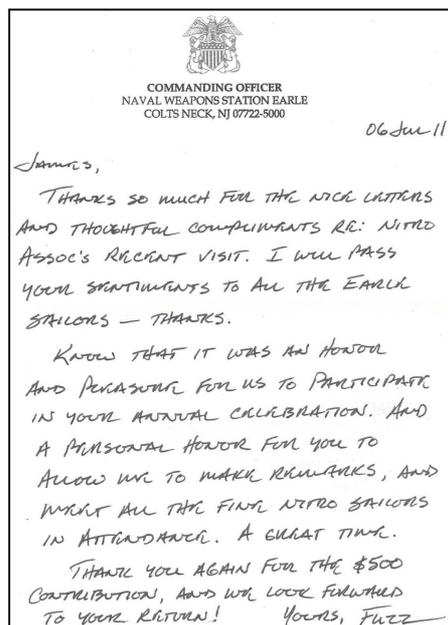
28. Navy program to increase chiefs' leadership capabilities.
29. COs of future commands could be chosen by a panel of officers, chiefs and lower enlisted in those commands.
30. Navy authorizes medal for Haiti first responders.
31. San Diego Navy medical personnel scan bones of 500 year old Peruvian mummies.
32. 2019 is planned movement of aircraft carrier from VA to Florida.
33. House committee OKs first Tricare fee hike in history.
34. Federal appeals court rules VA must provide better PTSD care.
35. Command Master Chief fired for wearing ribbons not awarded to him.
36. USAF grounds all of its F-22 aircraft due to oxygen generation equipment failures.
37. War-zone dust shown to be full of harmful metals, bacteria and fungi.
38. VA caregiver benefits program draws hundreds of applicants on 1st day.
39. Surface fleet readiness, both personnel and material, may take years to correct due to continued budget cuts.
40. US 2nd. Fleet command shutdown, merging with Fleet Force Command.
41. Ship's Facebook page shut down because of posts violating operational security.
42. Study shows significant percentage of Army's senior enlisted and junior officers leaving because of poor leadership.
43. Female veteran of starts own VFW post in New York State.
44. Next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (JCS) will Army Gen. Martin Dempsey.
45. House panel wants overhaul of VA medical benefits oversight.
46. Senate caucus pushes for National Guard seat on JCS.
47. Blue Angels CO resigns.
48. CO Norfolk Naval Shipyard sacked.
49. Remainder of Perry class frigates to be decommissioned by 2017.
50. Navy tests engine room 'hybrid manning' (civilian and sailor). Could mean hundreds of billet cuts.
51. Port Huron (MI) Museum selling decommissioned USCG cutter.
52. 17 year-old high school junior graduates from a Seabee 'A' school.
53. Army Ranger receives Medal of Honor at White House ceremony.
54. Iraq may ask for US troops to stay.

Navy Times Article Recaps

55. Next Ford-class carrier to be named in honor of John F. Kennedy.
56. Food stamp usage increases in commissaries.
57. Congressman considers bill to reduce 100% tuition assistance.
58. LPD San Antonio, undergoing repairs for 2 years, may almost be ready to rejoin fleet. Passes sea trials.
59. Navy's two, nearly 40 year-old command ships, may have service life extended another 30 years.
60. Riverine patrol boats may be added to 'pirate hunters'.
61. Electronic service records to be completed by September.
62. DOD may shift some missions away from active units to reserve units, in an attempt to cut costs.
63. Congress pushes for registry of military exposed to hazardous materials.
64. Officers punished and sailors kicked off subs after being caught in nuclear test answer key cheating ring.
65. No comment from Navy about LCS deployment to Singapore.
66. Navy to deploy updated aircraft hostile fire missile detection software.
67. Senate Veteran Affairs committee considering new legislation to ban protesters at military funerals.
68. Mine countermeasures ship CO's firing is overturned on appeal.
69. Sailors may transfer from active duty to reserve status more easily.
70. President tabs Admiral Jon Greenert as next CNO.
71. Two Marines awarded Navy Crosses for bravery in Afghanistan.
72. President plans to bring 10,000 troops home from Afghanistan by year's end.
73. Fleet Command Master Chiefs (FCMC) get down to specifics of what is expected on board subordinate commands during ship & base visits.
74. Navy considers a ribbon for '6 outstanding' PRT scores. Five additional 'outstanding' scores would earn a star for the ribbon!
75. Many DoD schools for military children in appalling condition. Some date back to late '50s & early '60s.
76. Tradition or hazing? Six sailors receive NJP for taking part in 'tacking-on' ceremony.
77. USCG fast response cutters delayed due to structural improvements.

Guest Columnists

Letter from CO, NWS, Earle:



Editor's note: I am not sure how well this letter will print out so here is the printed text:

"James,

Thanks so much for the nice letters and thoughtful compliments re: Nitro Assoc's recent visit. I will pass your sentiments to all the Earle Sailors - Thanks.

Know that it was an honor and pleasure for us to participate in your annual celebration. And a personal honor for you to allow me to make remarks, and visit all the fine Nitro Sailors in attendance. A great time.

Thank you again for the \$500 contribution, and we look forward to your reunion.

Yours, Fuzz"

George Argy, CS2, 1969-71

I was aboard the Nitro from March 1969 until July 1971. There were four instances that stick in my mind. These occurred while on the second Med. cruise when I was baking at night.

I always made sure the bridge got hot baked bread or pastries, and they would call me up to let me know if anything strange was going on. Well, one night they called and I asked what 's going on. They said come out on main deck and you'll see. I don't remember where we were in the Med., but had to be close to Greece. When I got out on main deck, there was one Greek Naval patrol boat, the Nitro and 7 to 9 Russian Naval ships. The Greek's shined their spot light on our flag, then each flag of the Russian ships, then I hear them rev up their engines and they were out of there in a flash. I thought what do they know that we don't. Of course nothing happened but still wish we had a few destroyers with us.

The other time the bridge called me, and again come out you'll see, and it was something I never saw before or after. There was lightning streaking across the sky in every direction to the horizon. It lasted a while and felt like a Jules Verne movie or the Twilight Zone.

The third was watching night flight ops off the JFK or any of the other carriers. I'm not sure which one of the three it was, but I burned 90 loaves of bread, threw them overboard and had to start again from scratch.

The last one was enjoying seeing the Bob Hope Christmas show aboard the JFK off of Crete.

George Argy, USS Nitro (AE-23)

Chaplain's Corner

Our youngest son was almost three years old when I reported aboard USS NITRO AE-23. When I was recalled to active duty in late 1989, we were dealing with the reality of our youngest child being born with a heart defect called a VSD-ventricular septal defect (basically- a hole between the two larger chambers of the heart). This weighed heavily upon us as active duty loomed, but God willing, we'd get through all of this—however, we had no idea quite how that might play out.

As it turned out, two and a half years after I reported to the NITRO, our son Steven had open-heart surgery to repair that defect. We were told that, because of the compromised pericardium (the defensive sack around the heart) he would be more highly susceptible to infections throughout his life, and that he would likely be medically disqualified from military service at whatever point that might be an option. That was confirmed later (the military disqualification) by a military doctor.

This came as quite a blow to our Steven, as he had always wanted to be considered for service. He was forever the child who wanted to shoot and blow things up, and not being able to even have the chance to do so added to his disappointments and sometimes to his behavior as he grew up. Yet, grow up he did, into a wonderful young man who had aspirations which were blocked to him.

After graduating from high school, attending community college and being in the work world (and moving out from home), he let us know just before Christmas 2010 that he would be out of touch with us due to work travel until June. As parents, we were deeply concerned, as Steven has always been a rather non-self-disclosing child when it came to his daily activities. All we could say was, "Okay, Sweetie, please let us know how you are as soon as you can." And we waited, and worried....and prayed.

In June, we got an e-mail from him (second choice next to texting for him) that he was fine, working, healthy, and was now in the Army, having completed his basic and AIT (advanced individualized training). OUR SON, who was medically disqualified for most of his life, had found a legitimate window of opportunity (he did disclose his medical condition—although it was hard to miss, with the scar in the middle of his chest), and capitalized upon that opportunity to fulfill what he always said he wanted to do. Our conversations

continued, by e-mail, text and by phone. He sounded more relaxed and very happy with what he is doing (for those who know Army MOSes, he is a 13F (fire support specialist)), an artillery occupational specialty, as he wants to become a forward observer. (OMG—if you want to be on the POINT, you may as well be an 11B (infantry soldier)). Oh well... We sighed, gave thanks he's okay, and eased back into the worried attitude of being parents of a service member easily destined to see service in Iraq and or Afghanistan. We are very proud of him, of his fortitude, commitment and accomplishments. We are proud of him and his service to our country, carrying forward that family tradition to a new generation. We worry and pray like most parents before us for the safety of our child and all our nation's service members in Harm's Way.

Life presents many great and interesting challenges, and somehow, despite what might look to be overwhelming odds, those challenges are met and the achievements of our people and our nation rise to astound us. It is my hope and prayer that whatever challenges you are facing or may face in the days and years ahead will also be met with incredible courage, deep commitment and fortitude, and bedrock faith, as to continue to grow an excellent and strong people and nation, and that your hopes and dreams may see wonderful fulfillment.

Fair winds and following seas in all of your endeavors, continuing to serve the fleet and the world..."making the critical difference".

Grace and peace....

Chaps...

A Final Thought

By Robert Eberlein

If you were watching "The Today Show" on June 16, 2011, you would have seen two poster boards with USS Nitro AE-2

and AE-23 Reunion written on them. Bill Toohey and I were the men behind these boards. This was our way for the association to receive coast-to-coast coverage for the 2011 annual reunion. Did any one see us on the tube?

Bill and I did not know that actor Jim Carey was to be on the program the day we went to the show. Security for him and Ann Currey kept them moving along the corral fence until they stopped to talk to an Army veteran, Bill and myself. Veterans were allowed to talk with Mr. Carey and Miss Currey as long as we wished. I'm glad veterans are not treated now as they were during the Vietnam Conflict.

If you did not join the group for the Weapons Station Earle, NJ wreath ceremony, you may not see another ceremony there in the future. From what the personnel told us, the base most likely will be closed in the near future.

We had the pleasure of the Commanding Officer and friends in attendance. We were able to go out to the end of the piers and take some photos. For those of you who remembered the old wooden piers, they were replaced with one made of concrete.

I attended the "Displacement Ceremony" (closing) for the Great Lakes Hospital Corps "A" School at the end of July. Security is at a high state of readiness. Got a huge run around trying to get on base. The ceremony was attended by only a hand full of ex-students and maybe two rows of military active duty members, some family members of the last class to graduate from there. From what was told, the Navy plans to implode the now empty hospital next year. The Corps School closed after 94 years. End of another chapter in Navy history.

Remember those who man-the-watch and the fair winds and following seas.

Fair winds and following seas,

Bob Eberlein, Founder,
USS Nitro Association.