



# Nitro Blast

## Come, Join Us in Norfolk!

Keep the Memories Alive

### Norfolk Hotel Update!

By Jim Timmons

The Nitro Association has blocked a group of 20 guestrooms at the Norfolk Airport Hilton for Wednesday, 18 June (for early arrivals) and 35 guestrooms for each night - Thursday, Friday and Saturday (19 - 21 June). The association's guestroom rate is \$104.00/night. This rate is good for 2 adults and children 18 years old or younger. Included with the room rate is a full hot breakfast buffet, including a made to order omelet station.

Our group rate is available for up to 3

days prior to and after the reunion. Each person will be responsible for making his or her reservations. Individuals may call the hotel's toll free reservations number at 1-800-HILTON or directly at 1-757-466-8000. The hotel has also set up the following web page where you will be able to make reservation:

<http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/groups/personalized/O/ORFAHHF-USSNIT-20140620/index.jhtml>

*(Editor's note: use Internet Explorer when trying to reach this URL)*

When placing your reservation for the 2014 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.

*(NOTE: If you need to cancel your reservations, you must do so 72 hours ahead of arrival in order to avoid being charged for the first night. This does not apply to reservation cancellations caused by medical or family emergencies, or travel restrictions due to weather conditions.)*

**Anyone requiring special assistance should inform the hotel when making reservations.**

Reservations must be received on or before the cutoff date of **5/18/2014**. On the cutoff date, all unreserved rooms will be released back to the hotel for resale. Reservations received after the cutoff date will be accepted on a space and rate available basis.

The hotel provides complementary airport transportation. After you collect

your baggage, see if the Hilton shuttle is waiting at courtesy vehicle area #1. If it is not there, you may call the hotel on the courtesy phone at the baggage claim, the hotel will then dispatch the shuttle to pick you up at courtesy area #1.

When returning home on Sunday, the hotel runs shuttles to the airport on the half-hour until 10AM. If you are leaving after 10 AM, you must tell the front desk, ahead of time, when you want to go to the airport for your departing flight.

### Fishing Trip Opportunity

Commander Craig Huber, former CO of the USS Nitro (AE-23), has offered to host 2 or 3 half-day saltwater fishing trips while we are in Norfolk. The best time for these trips would be Saturday afternoon (as an alternative to the MacArthur Mall/Memorial), or Sunday 22 June, either morning or afternoon, for those departing on Monday.

It would be best to contact Craig directly by either email at [nitro23@gmail.com](mailto:nitro23@gmail.com) or by phone at 757-828-6393 for details and to make arrangements. Craig has said a comfortable limit for his boat is 4 fisherman plus him as coxswain, so first come first serve.

### Star pins

By Jim Timmons

While sending out the dues premiums for 2014, I noticed that there were several Association members who have reached milestones in the recent past. If you were wondering why there is a "star pin" in your dues premium packet, it is for

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January 2014  
Volume 16, Issue 3

Editor: Jim Timmons  
Association Membership 343

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

being a member of the USS Nitro Association for 5, 10 or 15 years.

The pins are presented, for each five years you are a member, at the reunion dinner to those in attendance. For those not in attendance, the pins are usually sent by mail.

So, congratulations to you from your fellow Association members for having achieved your milestone. We hope you have enjoyed being a member of the Nitro Association and we look forward to having you as a member for a long time.

## Mt. Soledad Cross update

*Summary of Reuters article from 13 December 2013*

The Mount Soledad Memorial Association has been ordered to dismantle the 43-foot tall hilltop cross, which has stood above the war memorial since 1913, within 90 days. A federal judge grudgingly ordered it on Thursday after the Supreme Court (June 2012) declined to hear an appeal of the Ninth Circuit Court decision against the Obama administration and the Memorial Association.

The cross, on government land, has been a subject of litigation since 1989.

## VA Issues Fraud Alert

*From Military.com, week of December 02, 2013*

Veterans should be aware of a marketing scam targeting callers trying to reach the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Call Center or GI Bill Call Center.

A marketing company has established two fraudulent numbers that differ from the two official VA call center numbers by one digit. If the fraudulent number is dialed by mistake, the answering party will offer a gift card and try to obtain personal and financial information, including credit card information, from the caller. The answering party may even transfer the caller to the VA after the caller's information is obtained. The numbers to be avoided are: 800-872-1000 (the VA National Call Center number is 800-827-1000) and 888-442-4511 (the VA GI Bill Call Center number is 888-442-4551). VA has notified law enforcement authorities to address this situation.

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

**Charles Ewing, OS3, 1972-73; Michael Flynn, SK3, 1971-72; Steve Swierczek, LTjg, 1977-80**

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

**2014 Nitro Assn. Dues Classifications**  
***Regular Association Membership Dues are \$25.00 (including S/H).*** The dues packet this year will include a 2014 pocket calendar, a lighted key chain with bottle opener, quarterly newsletters, membership certificate (for new members only), crewmembers directory and a laminated membership card.

***Active Duty Membership Dues - FREE***  
Former USS Nitro (AE-23) crewmembers, 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 photocopy of their military ID (to show active status) as well as a photocopy 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 Association memberships are valid for one calendar year (Jan - Dec.).

## 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:

**Paul Wockenfuss, AE-23, 1982-84**

\* \* \* \* \*

### The Nitro Sage

***"PHILOSOPHIES TO GET YOU THROUGH THE DAY"***

*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.*

## Guest Columnist

*CDR Craig Huber, Commanding Officer  
November 1993 – April 1995*

**Fellow Nitro Association Members** - It has come to my attention that several of our members are avoiding the 2014 Norfolk Reunion due to negative impressions that were formed while assigned here many years ago. I'm dating myself here, but when I reported to my first ship in Norfolk as a brand new Ensign in 1977, the ship was at a repair dock in Metro Machine, the shipyard established in the Berkley Section of Norfolk in 1971, across the water from what is now The Waterside & Marina in downtown Norfolk. A collection of what had been the old Imperial Tobacco Company docks & barns, I thought that this must surely be as bad as it could get. The local's attitude back then was "sailors and dogs keep off the grass". The area surrounding the base enclosure fence was a collection of sailor bars, tattoo parlors, and junk car lots. Thankfully, all of that is gone now, and the people in Norfolk finally came to the realization that the military is a vital part of the community. Well, the good news is that the situation had nowhere to go but up, and it certainly has done that, especially over the past 30 years. (BTW, in 2011 Metro Machine Co. was acquired by General Dynamics Marine Systems.)

Naval Station Norfolk is situated in the Sewells Point area of the City of Norfolk, near the site of the battle of the Monitor and Merrimac (CSS Virginia), and is the largest naval complex in the world. You can tour the base daily on one of nine tours (from 1000-1400), and on your tour you will certainly be able to view several Aircraft Carriers, the New DDGs, LPD 17s, LCS, T-AKEs, as well as T-AOs and Attack Submarines (see attached photo #1).

During the reunion you will also have an opportunity to tour the General Douglas MacArthur Memorial (<http://www.macarthurmemorial.org/>), which recently underwent a \$1.1 million expansion of the theatre and research center. The memorial is located in the heart of Norfolk,

next to MacArthur Mall, the largest indoor up-scale mall in Hampton Roads. The entire downtown area is serviced by the new "Tide" Light Rail Transit System, which for us old folks is just \$1.75 for the whole day (see the info at: <http://www.gohrt.com/services/the-tide/>) (see attached photo #2). Two blocks away is Nauticus and the USS Wisconsin (<http://www.nauticus.org/>), both fascinating venues in their own right, but now Nauticus admission includes access to the Battleship Wisconsin (Topside, Engine Room, Gun Turrets, Wardroom and Officer's Country), as well as the new exhibit "For All Those in Uniform Who Have Served".

If you arrive a little early, you will be in Norfolk during the 38th Annual Norfolk Harborfest (June 5-8<sup>th</sup>) and afterwards, the 25th Annual Bayou Boogaloo & Cajun Food Festival in the Town Point Fountain Park (<http://www.festevents.org/> and <http://www.visitnorfolktoday.com/>). The Waterside and Town Point Park first opened in June 1983, is about to undergo a \$28M renovation project (see attached photo #3).

Of course, you cannot visit Hampton Roads area without a visit to the oceanfront and boardwalk (see attached photo #4), which stretches for over 3 miles along the Atlantic Ocean (see attached photo #5). Saltwater fishing, my personal passion, is abundant in the area, with the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel one of the largest fish havens on the Atlantic Ocean (see attached photo #6). An awesome saltwater fishing adventure can be had during June while fishing for Black Drum, Croaker, Flounder, Red Drum, Sea Bass, Speckled Trout and Tautog. Fishing is available (all inclusive) from designated piers, Party Boats, Charter Boats, and boat rentals.

Do not miss this opportunity for a terrific reunion and an unforgettable time in Norfolk, Virginia. I hope to see you all here in June 2014!

Regards,

Craig Huber  
CO, USS Nitro AE-23 (Nov93 - Apr95)  
757-681-7111  
nitro23@gmail.com



### Navy Times Article Recaps

1. Shipboard manning improving since cash perks and involuntary assignment put into effect last year.
2. Navy discontinues 6-year old 'flying warrant officer' program because it is no longer needed.
3. Sailor evals and fitreps will include what actions they take or training programs completed to deter sexual assaults and hazing.
4. Navy testing new flame resistant coveralls and lightweight NWUs.
5. Army National Guard aviators work with 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet ships on takeoffs, landings and close support for riverine ops.
6. Pentagon supports reducing number of LCS ships to 32 from 52.
7. Navy EOD team removes 2 unexploded bombs dropped on Great Barrier Reef during exercises.
8. CNO to seek more cooperation, joint training and personnel exchanges with Chinese Navy.
10. Sailors and Marines teach 'brown water' tactics to Central and South American military.
11. Marine earns helmsman certification for amphib dock landing ships.
12. Destroyers, Decatur and Lake Erie, pass ballistic missile defense test by intercepting and destroying missiles during BMD exercises.
13. Research shows longer deployments could lead to more divorces.
14. O-4 board denies selection for promotion of candidate, possibly due to his gay-rights advocacy.
15. Thousands of active duty military take advantage of apprenticeship programs to receive Dept. of Labor certification for their trade skills. Certification could lead to journeyman status in civilian life.
17. Navy launches 5<sup>th</sup>. LCS named after the City of Milwaukee.
18. Pentagon in process of developing a ship-killing missile that can be launched from either air or sea.
19. Families upset when Arlington Cemetery officials start crackdown on mementos being left at Sect. 60 (Gulf War) graves.
20. VA disability evaluation system not showing results expected.
21. More general military training for all personnel in 2014- topics to include, alcohol and sexual abuse, hazing, personal finance management, anger and risk management, etc.
22. Two midshipmen face court-martial in sexual assault case.
23. More and more Navy reference books and manuals are being replaced with electronic tablet-style documents.
24. USCG opens Warrant billets for environmental disaster experts.
25. Former SecDef Gates new book raises questions about Obama Administration military policies and interactions with top military brass.
26. U S Pacific Command boss is now Admiral Harry Harris.
27. FDA warns 1991 Gulf War vets having taken Cipro (antibiotic) may have link to nerve damage.
28. Navy still researching how sleep is effecting late-night watchstanders.
29. A debate has arisen about Navy traditions of "tacking on a crow", induction, "King Neptune", etc., being changed or done away with because of political correctness.
30. First two Navy attack subs to have female officers on board in 2015.
31. Navy Times lists 10 bases, boats and battlefields where multiple apparition sightings have been recorded. Among them are Gettysburg, Little Big Horn, Ft. Leavenworth and USS Hornet.
32. Involuntary separations not part of Navy plan to deal with budget cuts.
33. Blue Angels will perform at 65 air shows this year.
34. Command specific ball caps return to the Navy, as part of uniform changes.
35. Navy pays Texas shipbreaker one cent to dismantle the USS Forrestal. Ex carriers Saratoga and Constellation are also on a schedule to be scrapped.
36. x-AE 32, Flint, scrapped in Charleston, SC.
37. DOD researching future Flag Officer requirements. May develop two career tracks for operational (defense management) and enterprise (institutional issues management).
38. Navy seeks new slogan to replace 'Global Force for Good'.
39. Construction starts on US, European ballistic missile, defense base in Romania.
40. Carrier Gerald R. Ford christened and DDG Zumwalt launched.
41. SecDef Hagel weighing cuts in military personnel vs. advancements in technology.
42. SecNav Mabus pushing 'unisex' uniforms for enlisted and officers of Navy and USMC.
43. Women to join riverine units by year's end.
44. Navy steps up on base patrols looking for heavy drinking, assaults and other mischief.
45. Man guilty in \$100M Navy-vet charity scam may face 67 years in prison.
46. Congress concerned about increasing violence in Iraq by Iranian backed al-Quaida.
47. Permanent Change of Station orders during budget cuts are causing problems because of short notices and extended tours.
48. Navy looks for military training instructors for boot camp and A & C school barracks throughout country.
49. Navy was heavily involved in Typhoon Haiyan Philippine relief efforts.
50. Dept. of Navy officials and naval officers involved multi-million dollar Malaysian bribery scandal.
51. Parts of Navy nuclear-powered research sub, NR-1, to be on display at sub museum in Groton, CT.
52. Cruiser Chancellorsville hit by test drone, size of Tomahawk missile, during the ship's tracking exercise. Investigation underway
53. DOD considers closing all US commissaries. No timeline was given.
54. Mayport to be home of Joint High Speed Vehicles, to be used for various purposes including maritime intercept.
55. Appeals court to hear Iraqi 'burn pit' lawsuit against contractor, KBR.
56. DOD looking at ways of patrolling the ever increasing open waters of the Arctic. Russia also beefing up patrols in region.
57. Lawmakers concerned over longer deployment negative effects not only on ships but sailors and their families.
58. Michigan offers in-state tuition for veterans, regardless of where they live, at any public state universities.
59. Military on alert for gang violence in Guam.
60. Senate proposal would allow services to speed cutbacks of officers and Army and Marine enlisted.
61. Afghan president still at odds with Obama administration over US troop remaining in Afghanistan beyond 2014.
62. New phrase "tiered readiness" being heard at DOD, which means many units of military may be ill-prepared for deployment.
63. Veterans groups challenge VA's progress of reducing claims backlog.

## Chaplain's Corner

By Deanna Smitha, Nitro Association  
Chaplain

### SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE WHO ARE THERE AND RETURN

We were very blessed to have had both of our sons home for the holidays. Our elder son lives four hours away on California's Central Coast. Our younger son is stationed with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Brigade Team at Ft. Drum, NY, when his unit is not deployed. His unit returned from Afghanistan in October, and he DROVE both directions from Ft. Drum to the West Coast during the most recent polar intrusion into our country. That trip made us almost as nervous as having him deployed, but not quite..

Our children have grown up, with all that comes along with having adult children. One thing that I noticed much more on this trip home was our youngest son Steven's change of mannerisms and demeanor since his return from the war zone. When he came home previously, his general demeanor was one which we hadn't seen in quite a while. He was much more polite to us—something he was lacking in his late teens and early 20s. He was also a bit more willing to give others a bit more slack.

Something was a bit more changed, I noticed, and we began to look with a renewed appreciation at the effects of wartime service has upon our servicemembers and their families. On one hand our son was a bit more quiet, and introspective—it was more difficult to read him and his thoughts. He had matured in a way far beyond his young years, and had seen combat, his friends hurt and killed, and took the experience at a much more personal level than he had the opportunity to do so previously.

The other side of our son was an acceleration of the loud, boisterous bravado that he tended to show with his military friends...the macho, hard-living, hard-drinking stuff we often see of young folks, especially young men. From my

many years of service with our troops, I've seen both sides of these young people many times; but seeing it in your own children is an eye-opening experience for most parents, even those who are veterans themselves.

I was reminded that those who anticipate further service deployed use the behavior as a way to help them cope, process what they have been through, and prepare themselves for another round of the kind of hellish tragedy that wartime service and combat experience can bring, and have an impact upon the servicemember. The other side of the equation is also often in play, when a troop is anticipating separation from the military and that chapter of their life, and the impact that their deployed experience with have on their relationships outside of the military as they make their way once again in a civilian environment.

These encounters with those who defend our nation and are our loved ones and friends have significant impact on us as well. As they have changed, so must we to surround them with the love and support they are going to need to continue their journeys, whether in continued military service or integrating back into our general society—which can be much different from their most recent experiences. Caring family, friends, and colleagues...professionals and other veterans alike, can be pivotal to the health and success of our servicemembers' lives and well-being. As you--as we are---encountering those type of life challenges, please be mindful and caring of the experience and emotional state of your servicemember, and if you see need, please point them...lead them...accompany them to receive the assistance and caring they may need and so deeply deserve.

Grace and peace always to you and yours, with fair winds and following seas in all of your endeavors, continuing to serve the fleet and the world... *"making a critical difference."*

Chaps...

## A Final Thought

By Robert Eberlein

### Why Wait for the Next One?

When the USS Nitro AE-2/AE-23 Association first met under the banner of an organization, we had about a dozen World War Two members present at the Philly reunion. Now their numbers are about three or four at the annual reunions.

Why wait for the next one, when we will meet in Norfolk this June. Hey, maybe a member or two of your particular crew will be present.

What brings this train of thought to mind you might ask? Friday, as a member of the combined burial squad of my local VFW and American Legion, we will be rendering the military funeral rites to one of our own - he was only 64 years old.

The officers of the Association are in the final stages of making the June arrangements. For anyone not having gone aboard an active duty ship since your Navy days, hopefully once again we will be holding a wreath ceremony aboard one in Norfolk. The men and women who man-the-watch now are so young - (did we ever look that young? I guess so!).

For you first timers - if you should have any memorabilia that you "acquired" off the Nitro's, please feel free to bring it to share with the other attendees.

Hope to see some new members and can't wait to hear what has happen since last year's Denver reunion.

As always, take time remember the men and women who now man-the-watch and our deceased comrades of both the AE-2 and the AE-23.

Fair winds and following seas,

Bob Eberlein, Founder,  
USS Nitro Association