



# Nitro Blast

## A Minnesota Viking Adventure !

Keep the Memories Alive

### Reunion Update

By Jim Timmons

The Crowne Plaza Bloomington, 5401 Green Valley Drive, Bloomington, MN has been selected as the USS Nitro Association's 2016 Reunion headquarters. We have blocked a group of 12 guestrooms for Wednesday, 22 June and 25 to 30 guestrooms for Thursday, 23 June through Sunday, 26 June, checkout.

The room rate is \$112/night (plus taxes) and does include a full buffet or breakfast for 2 people per room. On arrival at the Crowne Plaza Bloomington, you will receive coupons to be used for your

breakfasts. This guestroom rate is also available 3 days prior to the reunion and/or 3 days after the reunion, in case you decide to extend your stay in the Minneapolis area.

You may make your reservations by calling the Hotel directly at 952-831-8000 or toll free at 866-851-7242. When placing your reservation for the reunion, let the reservation clerk know you want to reserve a guestroom for the **USS Nitro 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 6 PM the date of your planned arrival. If you do not cancel your reservation by 6 PM the date of arrival, you may be charged for the first night's guestroom charge of \$112 plus applicable taxes.

The guestrooms at the Crowne Plaza Bloomington have 2 different bathroom configurations and you must let them know if you prefer a room with just a shower or a shower/tub combination.

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

Reservations must be received on or before the cutoff date of **Wednesday, 1 June 2016**. On the cutoff date, all unreserved rooms will be released back to the hotel for resale. Reservations received after 6/1/2016 will be accepted on a space and rate available basis.

As with all of our reunions, attendees are reminded to bring any photo books and/or memorabilia they would like to share with the attendees. We should have plenty of room in the Hospitality Room to display all items.

I wish I could report that the activities for this year's reunion are complete but, as of this writing, they aren't. The hang up involves the wreath laying ceremony at Ft. Snelling. Ft. Snelling does recreations of different time periods at the fort from pre Civil War through World War 2. As part of the recreations, the fort has a flag raising at 10 AM and we would like to blend our ceremony in with it.

Other than finalizing the Ft. Snelling visit, our activities are pretty much finalized. In addition to our annual Thursday evening business meeting, Friday evening Association dinner/raffle and auction, we will be doing the following:

**Friday-** Wreath laying at historic Fort Snelling, lunch and visit at the 934<sup>th</sup>. USAF Air Wing Reserve component followed by a visit to the Minnesota Vikings new home stadium.

**Note:** The Vikings stadium visit is courtesy of Mortenson Construction, the contractor for the stadium, and the Minnesota Vikings Football Club. US Bank Stadium is not scheduled to open until sometime in July so we are indeed privileged to have this sneak preview.

**Saturday-** A day long combination Minneapolis city tour, lunch and riverboat cruise.

Once the activities are finalized, hopefully early in February, the activity sheet will be mailed or emailed to you. The activity sheets will also be available on the reunion page of the Association website

<http://www.ussnitro.org/reunion.htm>

### Inside this Edition

January 2016  
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Editor: Jim Timmons  
Association Membership 348

1	Reunion Update
2	2017 Assn. Collector's Calendar
2	AE-2 Photos from 1925-27
2	Crow's Nest
2	Association Membership
3	Navy Times Article Recaps
4 & 5	Guest Columnist
5 & 6	Chaplains Corner
6	A Final Thought

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

## USS Nitro Association Collectors Wall Calendar

By Jim Timmons

As the 20<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of the USS Nitro Association is coming up in 2017, we will be putting together a collector's edition wall calendar of pictures of the AE-2 and AE-23 as our 2017 membership dues premium. As well as having a lot of pictures of both ships, it will also have highlighted dates of importance to both ships.

Over the years, we have accumulated a substantial collection of pictures of both the AE-2 and AE-23, from personal collections, various Navy, government and other Internet web sites. We are aiming to have 48 or so color and black and white pictures, evenly divided between both ships, available for the calendar.

It is our hope to chronologically document, as much as possible with pictures of both ships, their lifespan from building through commissioning, active service and decommissioning.

### *USS Nitro (AE-2) Photo Album From 1925*

by Jim Timmons

Bob Eberlein found and purchased, with the Association funds, a photo album of the USS Nitro (AE-2). The seventy photos represent activities aboard the AE-2 during the 1925 to 1927 time period.

These photographs and other AE-2 and AE-23 archive materials will be available for viewing at our Minneapolis and future reunions.

BRAVO ZULU – BOB!

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

***December: Lloyd Goodrich, HMC, 1975-77***

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

### 2015 Nitro Assn. Dues Classifications

***Regular Association Membership Dues are \$25.00 (including S/H).*** The dues packet this year will include an Association 70 page 6" x 7" notebook and pen, quarterly newsletters, membership certificate (for **new** members only), crew members directory and a laminated membership card.

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

Former USS Nitro (AE-23) crew members, 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) crew members 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 crew member 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:

**Ronald G. Gniewek, AE-23, 1970-71**

**Morris 'Jim' Holman, EMCM, AE-23, 1964-67**

**George L Cassell, Commanding Officer, AE-23, 1963-64**

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#### **The Nitro Sage**

*How many times is it appropriate to say "What?" before you just nod and smile because you still didn't hear or understand a word they said?*

*I love the sense of camaraderie when an entire line of cars team up to prevent a jerk from cutting in at the front. Stay strong, brothers and sisters! .*

*Even under ideal conditions people have trouble locating their car keys in a pocket, finding their cell phone, and Pinning the Tail on the Donkey - but I'd bet everyone can find and push the snooze button from 3 feet away, in about 1.7 seconds, eyes closed, first time, every time!*

**Navy Times Article Recaps**

1. From Military.com - In a recent Annapolis *Capital* newspaper poll of 4,000, 90% were opposed to 'man' being dropped from the title Midshipman and being replaced by something more gender neutral.
2. In a related section of the same Military.com article, the Navy is considering dropping 'man' from ratings like Construction man, Corpsman and Torpedoman to better explain what the rating actually does and make them gender neutral.
3. CENTCOM data shows 196 US troop deaths in Iraq directly linked to Iran.
4. A congressional proposal could see monthly pensions increase from \$1,200 to \$3,000 for Medal of Honor recipients.
6. Navy still searching for 'tag line' for it's advertisements. Says 'America's Navy' part will probably stay as the beginning of the tag line.
7. US and Russia still at odds on how best to fight ISIS in Syria.
8. A comprehensive Congressional report states that the VA is in need of a complete overhaul and has a significant leadership crisis.
9. Navy on track to 300 ship fleet by end of the decade.
10. New military jet fighters may have lasers primarily for missile defense by 2020.
11. Cruisers Cowpens and Gettysburg to have a caretaker crew of only 45 while receiving a complete overhaul of mechanical and combat systems to lengthen lifespans of the ships.
12. USMC prepositions thousands of reconditioned vehicles in Norwegian caves in advance of next assignment.
13. Navy has decommissioned its last frigate, the USS Sampson.
14. SecDef Carter opens all combat roles to women.
15. US does not recognize China's man-made islands in South China Sea nor its 12 mile territorial claim and will continue to contest with presence of US naval ships and aircraft.
16. New 'body-fat' standards may ease fitness requirements and help sailors stay in Navy.
17. U. of Phoenix put on probation by Pentagon and has been restricted from base visits.
18. Nearly 30,000 Navy personnel who were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan war zones, either as Individual Augmentees or in small groups, were trained Camp McGrady, SC (Army).
19. F-35C, Joint Strike Fighter, will complete final carrier tests late this summer.
20. Navy introduces 'Tour with Industry' program, where selected officers and (soon to be) enlisted, are 1-year TAD with positions in large civilian companies. Purpose is to see what concepts and practices they might be able to bring back to be used in the service.
21. COM 6<sup>th</sup>. Fleet (Med) sees Russian naval force build up in Black Sea and Med (Syria) as an attempt for permanent naval base in Med and more pressure on southern NATO allies.
22. Samsung donates \$1 million to Korean War Memorial Foundation for continued maintenance of memorial.
23. Reserve advocates propose overhaul of the Individual Ready Reserve program (IRR - those who 'recently' completed active duty, do not drill or get Reserve pay). If IRRs agree to come back serve in times of crisis and the proposal is enacted, they would be considered as 'short term consultants' and might be offered access to Tricare health coverage and retirement benefits
24. Crossing-the-line ceremonies still part of Navy tradition, although to avoid hazing policies it has been toned down.
25. President signs \$573B Defense Authorization Act for 2016, which includes a 1.3% pay raise for troops.
26. Since 2012, DOD has ignored rule that would include environmental risk assessments in deployed troops health records.
27. Navy concerned over Russian threats to tap into or cut undersea communication cables .
28. VA attempting to recoup \$200M from veterans who drop or do not complete classes under 911 GI Bill.
29. Free, 2-year, grad school may be offered to top Navy LTs who agree to extend service obligations by three years
30. SECDEF Carter's Army 3-star aide fired amid misconduct allegations.
31. The Alamo to receive a \$31.5M Texas state funded restoration.
32. Congress to look at military health care reform in 2017 legislative year.
33. Female naval officers voice displeasure with new uniforms and in out of pocket expense
34. Destroyer Zumwalt enters sea trial phase. Navy to take delivery late this year or early 2017.
35. Eighteen Navy commanding officers relieved in 2015 .
36. Navy Department posthumously awarded Purple Heart medals to 4 Marines and 1 sailor killed in Chattanooga shootings.
37. Only 3 of original 24 women to earn dolphin pins decide to stay in Navy.
38. Navy Chaplains celebrate Navy's 240<sup>th</sup> birthday.
39. Health care and IT are hottest jobs for veterans.
40. Navy Supply Corp RADM fired because drunkenness and nudity after a Florida trade show dinner.
41. USS Milwaukee (LCS-5) breaks-down in Atlantic three weeks after commissioning.
42. VFW donates \$100,000 to the Desert Storm War Memorial foundation to help in their efforts to build a Gulf War memorial.
43. New York University study indicates little is known about or how to diagnose lung diseases effecting troops returning from the Middle East and Afghanistan.
44. Aircraft carrier, George Washington, returns to Norfolk after 7 years of forward basing in Japan.
45. Pentagon directs Navy to cap LCS fleet to 40 ships from a single supplier.
46. DOD endorses changes and updates to the UCMJ, which call for updated list of crimes, more empowerment for judges. At sea commanders could more easily handle low-level misconduct.
47. Navy announces the carrier, Nimitz, will stay homeported in Bremerton, WA through 2018 .
48. According to Navy Personnel boss, at sea manning levels are at 91% .
49. With Iranian navy firing missiles near US Navy ships in Gulf, Central Command sees a likely confrontation between the two navies in 2016.
50. Sub sailor advances from Seaman to Chief in six years.

## Guest Columnist

### Phil Wise and the US Navy

*By Phil Wise, MM3, AE-23, 1966-69*

Let's start off with the draft. Sedgwick County, Kansas where I live was going to draft 80 guys in May and I was number 17 on the list, so I joined the Navy for the schools and to avoid the army. When I was ready to sign up I asked the recruiter "Can you get me a school?" He said, "As long as you are going to be in, I can get you two schools."

So I went to boot camp in San Diego where I got sun burned and learned how to tie square knots. Then I went to Machinist Mate school with Steve Tyas. The navy found out I could put a nut on a bolt, that I knew equipment, and I could wipe up oil in the engine room.

From Chicago (Great Lakes) I flew to Naples, Italy where I joined the Nitro in January. What a shock! I learned how to stand watch in the engine room in port and underway hot and cold. I completed half a Mediterranean cruise then back to the USA with a view from the engine room in "M" division.

In the spring of 1966 we started unloading the ship in order to go to the shipyard. For four hours I rolled five hundred pound bombs over to the elevator four decks down. I looked and saw stenciled on the bombs "REBUILT 1955". Then I rolled one over and saw another stencil "REBUILT 1947" on the other side. It didn't give me a lot of confidence that the bombs were stable.

One unloading four hour shift we were getting 250 pound bombs loose. The ship was listing real bad and the bombs were on the high side of the hold. The gunner's mate knocked the wood wedges and beams away from the bombs. We jumped for the ceiling, grabbed the overhead structure and lifted our feet. The bombs slid across the bottom of the ship and racked up against the other side. Do you know you can smell the paint burning off a bomb when it slides?

The bombs were being lifted out of the hold using a cable winch. Four bombs hit the top deck as they were being lifted, came loose and fell to the bottom of the ship. One sailor saw what was happening and put his hands over his ears. If the bombs had exploded, it would have been called the York Crater rather than the York River, so he wouldn't have had to worry about his hearing.

R. Smith and J. Corcoran said, "As long as you have to go in the Navy, Wise, you need to put in to stay with the Nitro in the shipyard." So I did. So here I am, a



farmer from Kansas, in the shipyard in Baltimore, MD. The officers did not know what to do with us, so a bunch of us were assigned to get out of the office, sweep up sandblasting sand on the ship and throw it over the side. This is your Navy at work. The shipyard union protested and stopped that because that was their job. I was assigned to be the Captain's driver while in the shipyard. I picked up the officer's kids from the airport. I picked up the officers from bars. I took officer's kids shopping. I took officers to Norfolk, VA and the Pentagon.

I took an officer to Yorktown ammunition pier at Yorktown base. We were going to drive out to the USS Suribachi in the middle of the York River. It was a beautiful big gray ship in a dead calm river with green trees in the background. They were offloading something under a tarp onto a train car. The Marine with an M-16 stopped us at the river's edge and said, "You have to wait a little while." The officer thought the scene was so noteworthy he pulled out a camera. Being a salty sailor of 2 years I knew what was going on. There was something under the tarp that was top secret. I thought the Marine was going to start shooting before we got the camera put away. But everything cooled down, the train left and we drove on the pier out to the ship.

I went to Refrigeration and Air Conditioning school in Norfolk, VA and

met G. Kear who later went to the Nitro. When I left Baltimore, Executive Officer Lt. Cote said, "Don't you flunk out." I DID NOT HAVE A BEER FOR SIX WEEKS. In Norfolk I ran across the rest of the sailors from "A" division going to F.A.S.T. school. I had to hitchhike back to Baltimore.

After school in Norfolk I was put into "A" division. I was standing watch in after-steering with D. Williams in really rough sea. A gallon spit can was between our chairs. When the stern dropped down the can would float off the deck. Did I say really rough sea?

One time an air conditioner would not run. We had two just alike on the ship, but the chief wanted the 75 ton unit fixed, so we'd have both available. I knew what the problem was before I picked up the instruction book. The oil safety switch died after 2 months of use. My gunner's mate friend, M. McGrath, my driver, drove us down to the Norfolk Navy shipyard store building which was one block square and nine stories high. It even had a gun barrel for a battleship. I got the switch, got an electrician, put the switch in and everything worked.

We went to the Caribbean for a shakedown cruise. I was standing at the top of the stairs to the lower level watching J. Corcoran run the ship's throttles when a bell on the engine order telegraph went to "full astern". It was too late. The engine room couldn't get the ship stopped before we ran aground on Cuba.

My job with "A" division on the Sea and Anchor Detail was to raise the anchor with the winch or to use the winch to tighten up the lines at the dock and grease the anchor windlass. Being on the Sea and Anchor Detail was a great job – except in Nova Scotia. I was at the anchor at every port for two years.

When the guys from "R" division released the anchor brake, that anchor (which weighed about 15 tons) would drop until they set the brake. Every link holding the anchor weighed 1500 pounds. When the anchor was going out with a lot of chain and they set the brake,

the front of the ship would go down because of all of the weight and momentum. Whenever the chain went out further than usual due to deeper water, the rust and dirt covered chain would create a fountain of rust and dirt ten feet high. The sailors on the brake wore safety goggles to protect their eyes. Everyone knew the last link of the chain was welded to the inside of the ship. The guys on the brake were standing just above the chain locker. Those were some brave guys.

I have a picture of the anchor destroying what was left of the pier on the starboard side of the ship in Guantanamo Bay after the ship had peeled off 90 feet of the pier. Oh, well, it was condemned by then anyway.

While we were on the shakedown cruise, we were tied up in a port. The smoking lamp was lit by the #4 hold and at noon, chow time, everyone smoking threw their cigarette in a bucket of rags. The ventilator fan caught the smoke and blew it into the hold and smoke came out everywhere. There was no ammunition on board – just some three inch shells for target practice – but the fire alarm went off and people freaked out. One sailor named Gibbson went down one deck in the empty hold looking for the fire. While wandering around in the smoked filled hold, he tripped over the safety chain and fell to the bottom of the elevator shaft. He missed the springs at the bottom, but was messed up. They loaded up the elevator with corpsmen, firefighters and fire extinguishers and went down. By then they had found the bucket of burning rags, got Gibbson on a stretcher and took him to a hospital.

We took on ammunition and headed out on a Mediterranean cruise. We encountered a 1943 submarine with a broken down ice cream machine. I think our man Ed Gibbons made five gallons of ice cream for them. I'll give Ed the credit anyway.

It was about November 15, 1968 in the Med that someone discovered smoke coming out of the main bearing on the propeller shaft. We sprayed water on the bearing until we could limp over to a

place to drop anchor and take the bearing out. We were going to put the new spare bearing in, but it was the wrong size. We took the burnt bearing out, scraped it to the right size and put it back together. Away we went and when the bearing stayed cool we went faster. The Nitro had dropped anchor in a Russian refueling area, so there were three Russian ships and the Nitro until some US Navy ships showed up. What the Admiral on the USS Topeka (CLG-8) said to the Nitro Captain (Snyder) could have helped us get going.

In Palma (Majorca) Spain, the fleet was in and I had to go over to the aircraft carrier, USS Forrestal (CVA-59), to pick-up a pipe fitting or two. The first problem is to find the supply office in an aircraft carrier. Finally a chief showed me where to find the pipe fittings in the supply office. They did not have that special part and it wasn't on order. "Sorry" they said. After that, I went down pipe shop and borrowed the two fittings. To get back to the Nitro, I caught a Forrestal boat to fleet landing, then I caught a Nitro mail boat from fleet landing to the Topeka. Then over to the Forrestal and then over to the Nitro. Only took 3½ hours.

On the way out of the Mediterranean, we picked up 2500 old five foot rocket motors at Rota, Spain. On the way across the Atlantic, all hands gathered on the helo deck and threw rocket motors over the side but we saved the copper bands and wood boxes.

On watch in the engine room in-port (the 2000 to 2400 watch), I saw on my rounds of the lower level the fire main pump was scattered in pieces all over the deck to be repaired. I was relieved from watch at midnight and headed for my rack. At five minutes after midnight, the fire alarm went off. "Fire in the laundry room. All hands man your fire station." The fire crew opened a hose to fight the fire and all they got was a dribble – enough for flushing the stools. The quarter deck said "engine room, we need a fire pump." I thought "Oh, crap!" So I

ran all the way forward on the ship and four decks down and tried to start the diesel fire pump, because on the other side of the bulkhead from the laundry was the five inch shells. On the second try the diesel started. I opened the discharge valve and 140 lbs. pressure hit the fire hose which was open in the laundry. This was at exactly the same time the engine room machinist started the electric fire pump in the shaft alley. The 140 lbs. pressure hit the open hose at the same time and I heard that the hose whipped around and sprayed a lot before someone was able to grab it. Problem solved, fire out, secure everything. But Phil Wise had to fix the laundry press steam lines the next day. That was an "A" division job.

Before and after the Med cruise, I stood watch in the lower level of the engine room. I stood watch on the evaporators. I stood watch on people in the brig, watch on the fire pump, watch in after-steering. Standing watch is your job besides working.

I worked with some really great sailors and drank beer. We did our duty.

## Chaplain's Corner

*By Chaplain Donna Wise*

Well, here it is mid-January and it has already been a busy New Year! We had our chance at being billionaires in the Powerball jackpot. If any of our members won the prize, I just want you to know we won't hold it against you and you are still welcome to be a member and come to reunions.

Election year noise is enough to make me want to flee to another country or at least turn off the TV. Each candidate is sure they are the one, and the only one, who can get us out of the mess our country is in. I have my doubts about all of them.

It is frustrating to listen to all of the noise and know that no one will be able to keep all of the promises they are making unless they have other people on board

and they all decide to work together. It is helpful for me to remember that even in what were considered to be times of great achievement and prosperity in the U.S., it wasn't the politicians who made it happen. They were not perfect then and we must not expect anyone to be perfect now. If we are not perfect, why should we expect anyone else to be perfect?

It was just a few weeks ago that we were anticipating the beginning of a new year and many people were making resolutions to do things better in the coming year. I suspect that some of you reading this made some resolutions while others said their only resolution was to not make resolutions. Resolutions can sometimes be like campaign promises we make to ourselves. We want them to be true. We want to have the power and ability and persistence to make them be true. We have our doubts that it will happen.

We make resolutions for some of the same reasons that politicians make campaign promises. We see ways that we can be better, or do better. We have hope that we can improve our circumstances whether it be for better health or improved financial condition or more fulfilling relationships. Hope is a great motivator.

In the biblical story of Job, he had a wonderful life and was devoted to God. Then Satan arranged for him to lose all of his property and his children to be killed. Satan's purpose was to make Job curse God. Despite losing his family, his possessions and his health Job still refused to curse God. He knew that whatever hope he had for better circumstances was dependent upon God. The word "hope" appears eighteen times in the book of Job. Sometimes we look at the world and we begin to feel like Job. We are afraid for the economy and we know that the US has enemies that wish to do us harm. We're not sure our retirement savings will be enough or how long our health will hold out.

I suggest we dial back our world view when those feelings begin to overwhelm us. We are okay right now. Maybe things are not quite as good as we'd like, but they could be worse. If we have someone to love and who loves us, we can be grateful. If we have enough food for today, we are better off than some. Though our country does have enemies, they are not at our doorstep. And even though we may not be thrilled with those who are running for political office, we can be glad we live in a country that has free elections. And we have a wonderful Nitro Association to remind us of friends and times that we have shared.

I say go ahead and make those resolutions. Do what you can to make your life better. There is hope for tomorrow. May God bless you with hope and courage to face what is before you and the knowledge that what you do will make a difference.

Grace and Peace,

Donna

## A Final Thought

*By Robert Eberlein,*

It's hard to get excited about the New Year when the last one was riddled (no pun intended) with so much violence. And we thought the (19) 60's were bad.

The Land of a Thousand Lakes! Yea, that's where we are headed for the 2016 annual reunion. Maybe we can do some fishing in for those who show up early or leave late. My final arrangements for the activities are being made as this publication goes to press.

Time waits for no one, so if attending a ship's reunion is on your bucket list, now would be the time to get this one marked off. The association has lost most of our World War Two members, who were glad that they made the ones they did to relive the good old days and see other AE-2 members at the reunions.

I would like to thank the members of last year's reunion who continue to vote the

top officers (President, Vice-president, Treasurer, Trustees and Master At Arms) into office again. It's good to think we are worthy of your confidence in our leadership.

As always, please take time to remember our young men and women who man-the-watch, be it the military, police, firefighters or EMS Service. Can't forget the hospital staff.

*Fair winds and following seas.*

Bob Eberlein, Founder,  
USS Nitro Association