



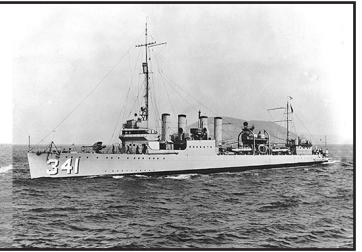
DDG-31



DDG-73



DD-936



DD-341

www.usdecatur.org

USS Decatur Association Newsletter



Winter -- 2014 -- Issue 5

Spotlight on Decatur Sailors



With wife Aida

DDG-31's Joe Whetstone (BTCM Retired)



Navy Commendation Medal



Shortly after turning 19, I received my notice from the local draft board informing me that I was being drafted into the military. Influenced by a fellow employee I decided that I would rather perform my obligated military service in the Navy. On the 10th of January, 1951, I entered the Navy and reported to Boot Camp in San Diego, CA. Since I was raised with Amish roots and therefore only had an 8th grade education and wound up taking the GED test that got me my High School GED. I didn't have a clue at that time what was actually taking place or how important this event was for my future.

After Boot leave I reported aboard my first ship, the USS Currier DE-700. The Currier was normally stationed either in San Diego, CA or Pearl Harbor, HA and was utilized as a Anti-Submarine Warfare training ship. Five days a week we would pick-up Sonar students from the local Sonar School and take them out to sea for training in as near real life conditions as possible. These students were being taught to be our future Sonar Operators disbursed through-out the fleet searching for enemy submarines. I remember very clear how we would cruise out past Point Loma at the beak of dawn each morning. Also, while on liberty, how we would stroll along Waikiki Beach where we would have an

unobstructed view of the beach all the way from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel to Diamond Head. This view has now been replaced by a solid line of hotels and condos blocking the view. We used stop for a beer at Don the Beachcomber, a local bar that is now considered to be a popular elite "Hot Spot" for local celebrities.



With Chief Parsons

DDG-31's Joe Whetstone

Continued from Page 1...



Boot Camp, 1951

It wasn't until 1952 that the USS Currier made a tour to the Far East stopping in Yokosuka, Japan and then on to Korea. We operated off the coast of Korea and were assigned the duty to act as spotter for the Battleship USS New Jersey who was setting some distance offshore providing heavy shore bombardment since they had long range firing capability. We would be stationed relatively close to shore in direct communication with a spotter on land who would relay information to us and we would relay this information on to the USS New Jersey who would then utilize their more heavy firepower to the assigned targets. We also did some assigned repetitive shore bombardment assignments where we would fire a shot on an assigned target at timed increments. I remembered how we would watch through binoculars and see the Koreans come out and work and then they would pick-up their tools and scurry back inside the tunnel before the next shot was fired. As soon as the shot was fired they would come back out and go to work again. On one occasion we were called in to assist several minesweepers who had been fired upon and requested our support. Our Commanding Officer, who was a savvy "Mustang", had our ship go in between the minesweepers and the shoreline firing full blast as we went at full speed allowing the minesweepers to get in and out of harm's way. He was personally awarded a metal for that good deed. Part of our assigned duties was on Formosa Patrol cruising between Mainland China and Taiwan hoping that our physical presence would help keep the peace between the two nations. Mainland China recognized Taiwan only as a renegade nation and every so often a shot would be fired by either one or the other. We also made the following foreign ports on this trip; Kaohsiung, Taiwan- Yokosuka, Japan- Sasebo, Japan-Subic Bay, Philippines and Hong Kong, China. Everyone one of these ports was considered to be outstanding liberty ports. One of the highlights of our cruise was experiencing the EM Club in Yokosuka, Japan. They had at least five locations in the club where they served beer and food and they all seemed to do a very good business. I saw enormous stacks of beer in the lobby before it was stored, I never saw beer stacked that high or a larger volume of beer consumed as it was there. This was also my first exposure of having contact with navy personnel from other countries. All of our allies utilized our EM Club to let off steam.

Continued in the Spring 2014 issue...

Decatur's Commanding Officers

DD-936 1958 - 1959 CDR John J. Skahill



John Joseph Skahill was born in Natick, Massachusetts, December 13, 1919, the son of Mr. and Mrs. James J. Skahill, now residing in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Commander Skahill attended the Wellesley Public Schools and Bridgewater State Teacher's College, from which he graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Education.

Following graduation from College, Commander Skahill entered the Reserve V – Midshipman Program at Annapolis and was commissioned Ensign E-VG in May 1942. He next joined the U.S.S. Morris (DD-417), and while attached to that destroyer as Engineer Officer, participated in the South Pacific and Aleutian Campaigns. Commander Skahill's designation was changed in 1943 to DE-VG and in 1944 he became Executive Officer of U.S.S. Russell (DD-414) and participated in the Phillipine and Okinawa Campaigns. In 1946 he was transferred to the United States Navy. In June of 1947 he joined the Staff of Commander Destroyer Squadron FOUR as Squadron Material Officer. In July of 1949 he became Executive Officer of U.S.S. Gearing (DD-710). In September 1950 he was ordered to Columbia University in New York City and became Head of the Navigation Department and Assistant Professor of Naval Science. In July 1952 he assumed command of U.S.S. Taberner (DE-418) and in November 1954 he was ordered to the Staff of Commander Destroyer Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet as Assistant Readiness and Training Officer for Engineering and Damage Control. In October 1956 he was ordered to Quincy, Massachusetts as Prospective Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Decatur (DD-936), and assumed command after the ship was placed in commission on 7 December 1956.

Commander Skahill is married to the former Marjorie Rita Wright of East Braintree, Massachusetts and they have three children.

Excerpted From: U.S.S. Decatur (DD-936) Mediterranean Cruise February to July 1958 Book

Note: We lost CDR Skahill in a plane crash in 1962.

*"I especially remember about him was his ship handling. Approaching an oiler or especially a carrier he would make the approach at high speed and do a quick reverse to slow the Decatur to refueling speed right on the button. It was classic showboating."
Dave Evans, DD-936*



Change of Command Ceremonies transitioning to CDR Seymour Dombroff

2013 San Diego Reunion



2014 Decatur Reunion Particulars

Baltimore, MD... WINS!!!

Our 2014 reunion will be held in Baltimore, MD from 11 September (Thursday) through 14 September (Sunday)...4 Nights...checking out 15 September (Monday) 2014...Star Spangled Week More details to follow...

ALL sailors that served aboard any Decatur are welcome to attend the reunions without joining the association.

Please send a \$40 reunion registration fee to:
(As soon as possible for negotiation numbers)
USS Decatur Association (Checks payable to):
P.O. Box 880442
Port St. Lucie, FL 34988

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Please join our USS Decatur Association:  
Send \$24 for TWO years of membership (or)  
our NEW option of a LIFETIME membership  
for \$125 to:

USS Decatur Association (Checks payable to):  
P.O. Box 880442  
Port St. Lucie, FL 34988

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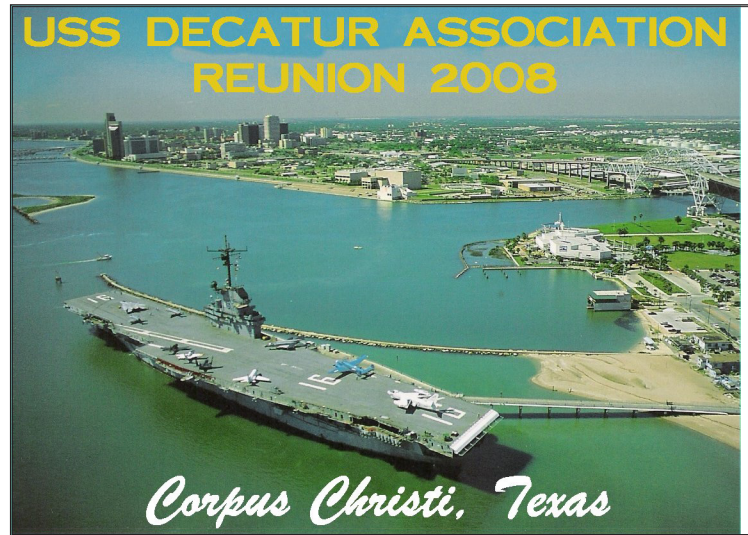
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### Next issue -- Look for:

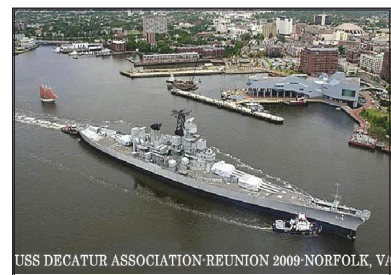


- The last installment of our own GM2 Orville T. Shipp's compelling DD-341 exploits during WW II.
- Joe Whetstone's spotlight continues --
- DD-936 Collision - Blakeley collection
- CAPT Seymour Dombroff (ret.) humor
- Bonnie Deringer's Boot Camp II

## Reunion Mug Logos



*by Mark Serafine*



*2009 in Norfolk, VA*



*by Karen West*

### Thinking of...and Praying for...

- Ed "Doc" Powers
- Betty Smith
- Pat Serafine
- Dottie Collins  
(Ted Hansen's friend)



This is GM2 Orville T. Shipp's (we lost him on 7 January 2010) article chronicling the USS Decatur (DD-341) throughout her WW II years. I'll provide a page each Newsletter. The pages are NOT edited and are presented directly as they came from his typewriter.



Puerto Rico on September 18, 1944, left the same day practiced gunnery off coast of St. Thomas with large cruiser USS Alaska and battleship USS Wisconsin. (Note: we were also escort for these ships). We arrived in Norfolk, VA on September 21, 1944. Arrived in New York, September 27, 1944, left New York, October 2, 1944. Arrived San Juan, Puerto Rico October 5, 1944 left San Juan, Puerto Rico October 5, 1944, left Trinidad October 8 1944, with USS Savanna, light cruiser sister ship to USS Boise which my boyhood friend, Robert Cole was killed on. I last saw the USS Savanna in Algeria. Arrived in Norfolk, VA on October 12, 1944, left Norfolk, VA on October 15, 1944 and arrived in Trinidad October 21, 1944. This duty with USS Bennington a new large aircraft carrier was on shake down cruise; she lost 3 planes on this cruise. Other destroyer with us was USS Champlin DD601. Arrived in Norfolk on November 13, 1944 left Norfolk November 16, 1944, arrived in Boston November 18, 1944, left Boston December 2, 1944 went through Cape Cod Canal, arrived in New London, CT. On December 2, 1944, left New London, CT. December 18, 1944 our starboard engine broke down. Left New London, CT December 31, 1944 arrived in Boston January 1, 1945, left Boston January 5, 1945 arrived in New York January 25, 1945, arrived Bermuda January 30, 1945. We were plane guard for formations of planes going across. Left Bermuda February 15, 1945. We arrived Norfolk, VA February 21, 1945. I was transferred from USS Decatur DD341 on February 25, 1945 to Washington D.C. navel gun electric and hydraulic school and was there 4 months. Then I was sent to Shoemaker, CA to await shipment out, and then sent to Philippines to a navy base on Tacloban in Leyte, an island off of Samatra. Tacloban was Leyte, so we were at Tacloban and could see Samatra across the channel. I was awaiting a ship there when the war was over. Sent back to Great Lakes Naval training station and discharged November 2, 1945

There was one trip through the Panama Canal that I did not record, this I believe was a trip made to give us a holiday; for we only went into the Pacific had

# Remembering Mark Serafine



*1964*

*1967*

*2008*

Albert M. Serafine, age 65, passed away January 26, 2010, in San Antonio, Texas.

He was a graduate of Central Catholic High School. Albert was a lifelong amateur radio operator. He proudly served in the U.S. Navy from 1964 to 1968 and was active in the USS Decatur Association.

He was preceded in death by his father, Dr. J.A. Serafine.

He is survived by his wife of 23 years, Patricia; sons, Mark Wesley Serafine and wife Christy, Joseph Serafine, and Frank Serafine; mother, Jeanne Serafine; brothers, Art Serafine and wife Dana, Patrick Serafine and wife Lil; sister, Kathleen Warren and husband Rob; three grandchildren; numerous nieces and nephews.

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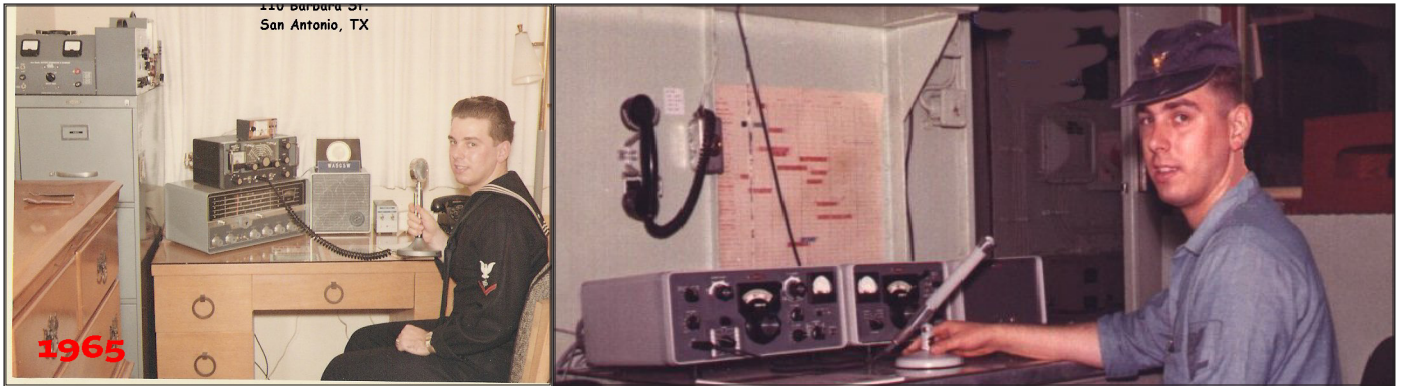
From Jim Stewart:

I was contacted by Mark to see if I would be interested in joining the USS Decatur Association several years ago. I wound up meeting him at a Subway in San Antonio. That was the first time I ever met him since I did not know him while we both served on 31. I chalked that up to the fact that he as a Deck Ape (Radioman) and I was a Snipe (Boiler Tech).

In any event, we had a nice chat and I joined up that same day as I recall. The thing that struck me about Mark's kindness and generosity was the "welcome gift" he gave me at that Subway meeting. It was his original sound powered phone that he used in the Radio Shack aboard 31. I think that when he and Jerry Hiln and a couple of other ex-Decaturites had that last visit aboard 31 prior to the Sink-Ex, they were allowed to take whatever they could carry off the ship and Mark pulled his phone off the bulkhead. Giving it to me was pretty cool. On a par with Jerry Hiln's gift to me at one of our Reunions: the original key to my Oil Shack!!

I keep Mark's phone on my desk in my office as a reminder of Decatur and all of the great people I have been blessed to re-acquaint with.

# Remembering Mark Serafine *(Continued)*

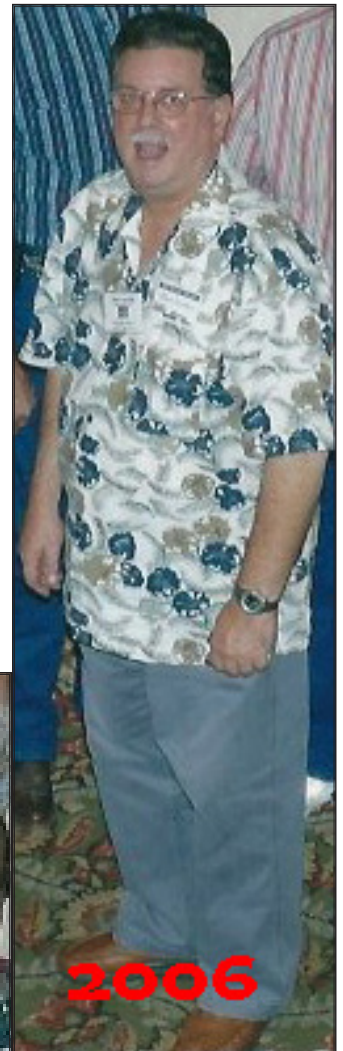


From Jerry Hihn:

Seeing Mark for the first time at LAX when we went to see the Decatur one last time.. Seeing Mark in the radio shack on board and got the phone off the wall for him.. OMG was he a happy camper. We had a great visit with mark when we were in San Antonio.. He gave us the grand tour and that night fixed a fine italian meal for us at their home.. We got to see most of his Star Trek collection. He was a Trekie for sure.

From Tony West:

I met Mark in 1966. We both became Decatur (DDG-31) plank-owners in 1967. We worked in close proximity to each other, he being an electronics technician and I was a radarman. Mark was one of my “go-to” guys in the USS Decatur Association. He understood the nuances of the Navy and was a great researcher and resource for Navy information and lore. I could count on him to perform any task and would e-mail him often for advice. Our 2008 reunion was slated for a Baltimore cruise but that fell through. I immediately called Mark for a fall back position and he, without hesitation, volunteered himself and Pat to host in Corpus Christi, TX. It was a great reunion and as usual, Mark and Pat went far beyond the call of duty to make it a success. I miss Mark and it gives me great joy to see Pat and their fine son, Frank, at our reunions each year. I tear up when Frank sings about his Dad because memories flood back and the words are so meaningful. He meant so much to so many. He’ll always be remembered...





# U.S.S. Decatur (DD-341) Readies for WW I I

By CAPT James Jamison, USN  
(Retired)



*In late spring, 1941, the Decatur and one division of our squadron moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico.. About this time President Roosevelt made a deal with England. He gave them 50 mothballed destroyers for much needed convoy escort, in return for 90 years lease for naval bases in various British owned Islands in the Carib-*

*bean and Bermuda. Our commodore proposed to the Navy Department that he and his flagship went to visit those islands to establish contact and how they could be best used. His request was approved and a delightful Caribbean cruise ensued, visiting many islands. Our commodore called on the governor and the rest of us went ashore to a unspoiled beach to swim and play ball. Our only contact with the natives were with the boats that came out to sell papayas and other tropical treats. These islands now are great tourist attractions, like Antigua and St. Luca. Major US bases were established in Bermuda and Trinidad.*

*This cruise reminded us that there was a real war in progress. We came upon a British cruiser who flashed us a recognition signal after some confusion we dug up the correct answer. The cruiser was keeping an eye on the Vichy French carrier in Martinique. The cruiser went by our anchorage at night, completely darkened, so they were keeping an eye on us, too.*

*From that cruise we went to the New York Navy Yard (n Brooklyn) to prepare the ship for operations in the stormy North Atlantic. Britain still needed help with escorting convoys and we were nominated. The work included cutting down our stacks, replacing the gun battery, installing a gun tub amid ships with 50 caliber guns, removing all the port holes and strengthening the bridge structure.*

*We left the yard in September with a completely new gun battery. We now had 3 inch fifty anti-aircraft guns and no director. The Chief Gunners Mate didn't know the guns any better than I did and the two of us were working on one of them when the Chief Torpedo man came along and volunteered that he knew all about them, since he had worked one on a submarine.*

*Fire control was conducted over the telephone. I designated the target, gave the guns the range and deflection settings. All we needed were good gun captains and strong men to load the 3" fixed ammunition. We found that you had to slam big projectiles into the barrel really hard. I got in pretty good physical condition working on the loading machine with the first loaders.*

*We left the navy yard on a Saturday afternoon in September and after a stop in Bayonne, NJ for de-gaussing, headed for Casco Bay, Maine for refresher training. The DD 341 was ready for war.*

# Merry Christmas from the 2013 Reunion



Have a Great and Safe New Year

# Harold Robison (DD-341) remembered by his daughter: Janet Oglesby



*My dad lived in the New Castle area of Pennsylvania his entire life, except when he served his country in World War II. On October 1, 1943, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, a day before his 18th birthday. He had just started his senior year of high school six weeks before, and mentioned that the draft board would come after him once he turned 18. My dad was very small in stature, and when his mother took him to the train station she had the heart wrenching thought that her “little boy” who she remembered swinging on the lamppost with his younger sisters was going to war. His dad worked on the railroad and kept a daily diary of his trips. He also wrote in it when he received letters and when family members came home. All that my dad ever mentioned about basic training at Great Lakes was that the barracks were very cold. They were built off the ground and the cold air came up through the cracks in the floor. Being a farm boy the physical training didn’t faze him. The picture taken on November 5, 1943 is of Company 1516, Jay L. Jones, C.S.P. Company Commander. My dad had some vocational training in electronics in high school. After basic training, his Class “A” Service School at Great Lakes was for Fire Controlman which he completed on April 10th 1944. In his dad’s dairy on April 9th was this entry, went to Great Lakes. On April 10th this entry, Harold graduated from firecontrol. I can’t find an exact date when my dad reported aboard the USS Decatur (DD-341), his dad’s entry, April 16th, Harold was home for a few hours. I believe my dad reported to the USS Decatur in Boston of 1944. In the Decatur history I found on Wikipedia, the ship arrived in Boston on May 2nd for brief overhaul and refresher training.*

*Also, from Decatur history, arriving at Norfolk July 2, 1944 Decatur sailed from this port on escort and training duty in the Caribbean Sea until the last day of June 1945 when she entered Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for inactivation. With the Decatur being home ported in Norfolk, he would catch a train home whenever he had weekend liberty. His photo album has pictures of Bermuda; he probably purchased a camera after a few paychecks on the Decatur. My dad mentioned several times about being in a hurricane in the Caribbean. On Saturday, September 30th, his dad entered, Harold home, back tomorrow. This is when he started school for 10 weeks at Norfolk for Elementary Fire Control. A certificate stated that he completed Elementary Fire Control School in Norfolk, Virginia December 21st 1944. Then December 22nd his dad’s entry was Harold came home this a.m. My dad took the USS Decatur to the Philadelphia Naval Ship Yards for scrap in June 1945.*

*Continued in Issue #6*