



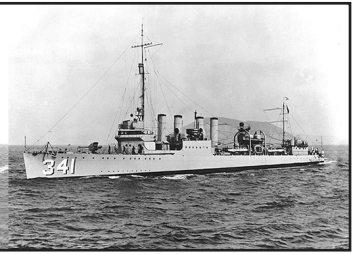
DDG-31



DDG-73



DD-936



DD-341

[www.usdecaturassoc.org](http://www.usdecaturassoc.org)



# USS Decatur Association Newsletter

## Spotlight on Decatur Sailors

### *DDG-31's Joe Whetstone (BTCM retired) Cont'd*



September 2014 -- Issue 7

The XO found out and informed the Captain who in turn called the FBI. This made for a very awkward situation since so many crew members were involved, for example, the entire duty section. Needless to say, the Captain who knew nothing about it suffered the most with several crew members volunteered to be reprimanded.

So after a stop in Pearl Harbor we arrived at our new "Home Port" which was now Yokosuka, Japan with the dependents living in Yokohama. Yokosuka had outstanding facilities as a liberty port but also had a large ship repair facility. Major ship repairs were normally done in Yokosuka and

most of our routine repairs were performed in Subic Bay, Philippines. We still spent a considerable amount of our time in Yokosuka in order to help prevent undue hardship on the families. Three of us shared an apartment which allowed us the luxury of not having to return to the ship every night after curfew plus this gave us a place to hang out when we were short of funds. Many parties were held there as almost all of my shipmates knew the location. We constantly made normal tours thru-out the Far East that took in visits to South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong we would normally remain for one

month at a time serving as "Station Ship". Serving as Station Ship meant that we would be representing the US Government by providing a diplomatic service, permanent shore patrol, pickup any stragglers left by visiting naval ships plus provide a military presence in the area.

(Note: To give you some idea how unique it is to pull duty in the Far East take note of the following. I was standing watch as the "Officer of the Deck" on a quiet Sunday morning when we observed a dead body floating off our Starboard Side in the Hong Kong Harbor. We called the local Port Authorities

who instructed us to just “keep an eye on the body” and if it appears to get too close to the ship then just utilize a fire hose and work the body away from the ship so that the body can continue on its “merry way” to the open sea beyond. I remember another occasion when Hong Kong was faced with a severe water shortage as their reservoir was extremely low. In order to cope with this situation, Red China provided water to Hong Kong every four days. Every four days they would open all the fire hydrants and the people who lived on the roof tops would line up to fill their containers. People living indoors would fill their bathtubs and sinks, enough to last for four more days.

Our squadron also made a tour “down under” where we became “Shellback’s” by crossing the Equator. We operated extensively with the Aussie Navy doing joint Naval Operations in the southern area and a few of us were even invited for drinks of “Brandy” in their mess. What a great bunch of guys they were. In my entire time in the Navy, I was never received in a more warm and sincere way as we were received during our visits in New Zealand and Australia. We made port of call visits in Auckland, New Zealand, Sydney, Perth and Melbourne, Australia. While on liberty, everywhere we went and everyone we met treated us like royalty as they were really glad to see us. It sure seemed that we were considered as something special.

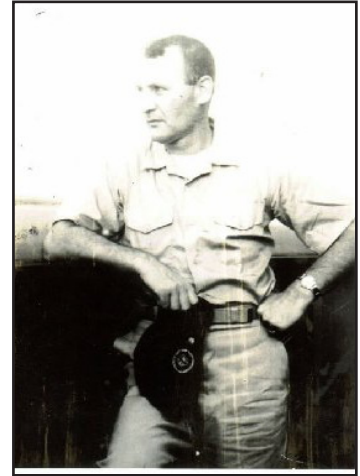
Our squadron made one cruise that was both long in time and distance that took the entire fleet into the Indian Ocean. This was evidently a feasibility study being conducted by our government as we wanted more military presence shown in the Indian Ocean. So a fleet of ships that included our squadron made this extended cruise where we visited ports in Madagascar, Diego Garcia and several ports along the coast of Africa winding up at Aden, Yemen. This trip was very unusual as considerable resentment was built up on board due to the fact that African Americans were not allowed to leave the ship for the entire cruise. What a bummer! They were concerned of the possibility that there could be potential confrontations while sailors were on liberty as the bars and local business establishments at all stops along the way were all still very segregated. We also were unable to mail any letters or have any other type of communication back home for the duration of the trip which I’m quite sure made the families back home very concerned. The trip must have been successful as there is now a prominent military facility in Diego Garcia that supports any Naval Operations that may be taking place in the Indian Ocean, which is now especially true since the pirates have become so active in that general locale.

A few months after our return to Long Beach, CA I left the Blue and reported for an 8 week training course for Recruiting Duty in San Diego, CA. Prior to this I had purchased what I now consider my “fun car”, a Triumph Spitfire that I drove back east and visited my brothers on the way, one living in Florida, another in Georgia, and the other living in Ohio before reporting to US NAVCRUITSTA, in Chicago, Illinois for further transfer to my first recruiting assignment in Rock Island, Illinois. Rock Island was known as one of the Quad Cities with population enough to support a 2 man station. I was only there for several months before I was transferred to a one man recruiting station located in the beautiful town of Galesburg, IL that covered Knox and Fulton counties. Fortunately for me, the recruiter that I relieved was an extremely good recruiter so that I just had to continue following the program that he already had implemented. This was prior to any school consolidations, so I had 17 high schools in my territory. This was to be my main difficulty as public speaking was never my forte as I was expected to make an appearance at each high school in my area. I took a Dale Carnegie Course for public speaking in an effort to cope with this situation.

*Continued...*

# *Dinner in the Lap of Luxury*

*by: Sey Dombroff, Captain, USN (Ret.)*



*In 1959 I was Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Decatur (DD 936), one of the latest of the Forrest Sherman Class of destroyers. During a deployment to the Mediterranean Sea, I had made it a point, upon entering a harbor for a port call, to spot the largest private yacht present. I would then extend the owner of the most magnificent craft present an invitation to have dinner with me aboard Decatur. Thus, when Decatur arrived for a 10-day visit to the island of Rhodes in the eastern Mediterranean, I spotted a magnificent two-masted schooner – the Olympia – that I recognized from an article I'd read in Sports Illustrated magazine.*

*After anchoring, I sent the most personable ensign on the ship to invite the owner to dinner. That owner was Stavros Niarchos, brother-in-law of Aristotle Onassis, one of Greece's most influential shipping magnates and years later the husband of John F. Kennedy's widow. He replied that while unfortunately he was unable to accept my invitation, would I do him the honor of having dinner aboard his ship. I accepted that invitation with a great deal of anticipation.*

*The ship was magnificent. The dining salon walls were filled with French impressionist paintings – I subsequently learned that Niarchos was advised to have them removed because of the deleterious effect of sea air on all paintings. In a post-dinner tour of the schooner, I was amused to see silk stockings draped over the bathtub and shower stall – evidently Mrs. Niarchos did some of her own laundry.*

*It turned out to be a uniquely wonderful evening. "Steve" Niarchos and his wife were gracious hosts. My dinner partner that evening was David Rockefeller, world-renown banker and certainly no stranger to opulence. He said to me, in the course of the evening "I have never seen such an affluent lifestyle like 'Steve' and his wife enjoy." I was impressed – if a Rockefeller was awed by someone else's lifestyle, it must really be something.*

*The next morning, back aboard Decatur, when I went on deck, the Olympia had sailed. I never encountered the Niarchos' or David Rockefeller again but memories of that evening have never been forgotten.*

*We lost Captain Dombroff on 15 November 2012 (RIP)*

# DD-936 -- From the Bob Blakeley collection



*Damage inspected on 8 May 1964  
Official Navy Photograph*

## 2014 Decatur Reunion Particulars

Please attend our 2014 reunion in Baltimore, MD. It will be in September, 11-15 2014(4 nights)...Thursday-Sunday.

ALL sailors that served aboard any Decatur are welcome.

Please send a \$40 reunion registration fee to:

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

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

Next issue -- Look for:



### Inside NEXT issue -- March 2015

Spotlighting Joe Whetstone (BTCM ret)  
Baltimore Reunion Pictures  
Bob Blakeley's DD-936 Pictures  
Bonnie Deringer's Boot Camp  
and much more....

## Fun from the Past Reunions



2012 Farewell Dinner in Washington, DC



2011 at Fenway Park in Boston, MA

### Inside this issue

### Page

Spotlighting Joe Whetstone (BTCM ret).....	1-2
Dinner in the Lap of Luxury by Sey Dombroff..	3
DD-936 Post Collison by Bob Blakeley.....	4
2014 Reunion Particulars.....	5
Boot Camp II by Bonnie Deringer.....	6
Decatur travels.....	7
Jim Jamison's DD-341 readies for WW II.....	8
Decatur Gives back.....	9
1970 Decatur sends letters home.....	10

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

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



## Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Boot Camp II

by Bonnie Deringer, HM3

*We had an instructor who taught us U. S. Naval History. She read the funny papers to us each morning, because she told us that while we were in isolation from our family, friends, mail, telephones, and news, she could read us the funny papers. She was a great instructor and I learned to love history. I thought it was a real bore in High School, but she changed that! In our company, were two women who were related to some of the early ships commanders from the Revolutionary War, and to current times. I learned that the Navy is the tradition in many families, and these women had come of age in their families and were to serve, if there were no boys old enough for service. We learned about famous ships and their commanders, by role playing them, their ships and the historic battles of the American Navy in war.*

*Now came the best part of boot camp for me, and that was swimming! Californians, Floridians, one Puerto Rican and one Hawaiian were going to excel here! We had a great time feeling sorry and making fun of those that had never been in a pool or an ocean. If they were in danger of drowning, a WAVE would take a boat gaff and hook it onto the back strap of her wool issued swim suite and pull her out of the pool. Some made it some didn't. If the recruit could not swim, much less jump off a 40 foot tower into the water, pull off her jeans, make a life preserver out of the legs, then she would fail boot camp and be washed. Luckily for me, it was easy, and I loved jumping off that tower. I joined the other "sun belt" women and made as many jumps as we were allowed by the instructor. Then there was the gas chamber test and more classes, and teaching some poor women how to iron a blouse, in a special unit they had aside from the regular barracks.*

*There was a lot of snow by then men's barracks that we passed three times, every day on the hill on our march to chow. One day the men were outside. They made snowballs and as we passed by they threw them at us. One hit me in the back and it was hard! I yelled and the Chief came up and asked me why I yelled? I told her I had never been hit with a snowball before and it hurt. One of our recruits yelled out "It's not fair Chief, it had a rock in it!" The Chief, who was a thin and normally a quiet woman, took off up that hill toward the men and the Petty Officer in charge. She looked like a long legged sprinter. She lowered her voice, there was fire in her eyes as she looked up over her glasses and then she yelled out at the Petty Officer, a few words that we overheard as, IF I EVER...and YOUR COMMANDER WILL....YOU'RE ON REPORT!!! She was fierce and brave in our defense of her women of Company 4. It was then we had so much pride in her that we would have done anything for her, except we never could learn to march very well.*

# Decatur Travels

Send me your Travel pictures wearing your Decatur hat



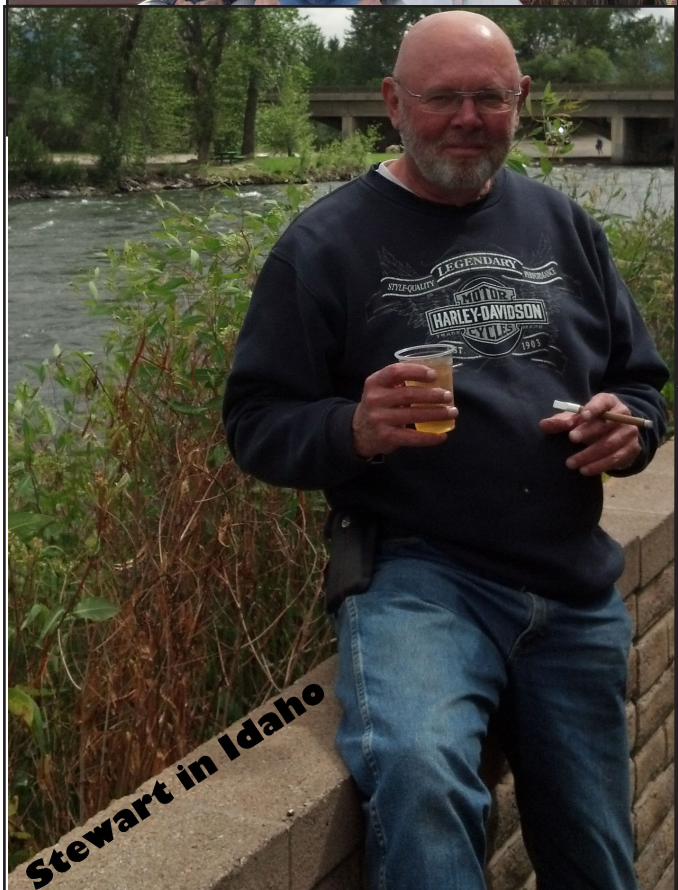
Kathey and Jerry at the Grand Canyon



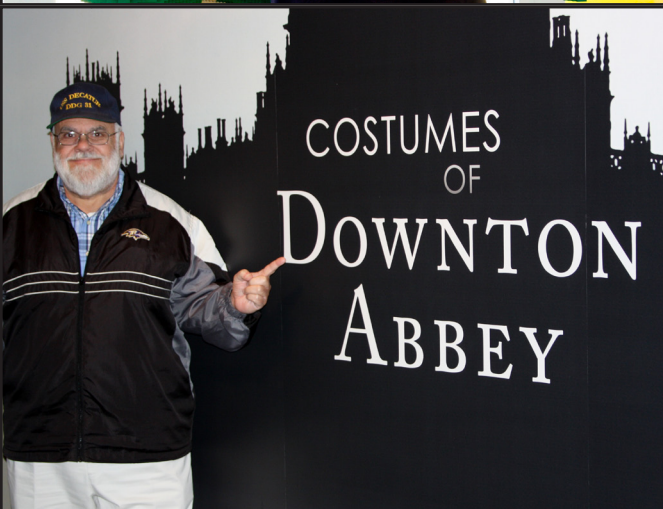
Jerry and Kathey at the Grand Canyon



Jerry in Williams, AZ



Stewart in Idaho



## ***USS DECATUR DD-341 (September 1941 - December 1942) by CAPT James P. Jamison (retired)***

*There was a danger that at dawn you would find yourself all alone with no convoy in sight. It happened, and it took quite some time to find them. On the Decatur, the watch officers agreed that we would not relieve the watch unless we could be shown three merchant ships. Sometimes this required almost getting inside the convoy.*

*We had an uneventful trip to Iceland, our destination. We had some stragglers but most kept up. The merchant ships went into Reykjavik harbor, and the escort continued about 15 miles up a fjord. There was a signal tower about halfway, which asked us for a recognition signal. They controlled a submarine net which could close the channel. There was a roomy anchorage at the end of the fjord; an administrative commander and staff were embarked in a yacht, and there was a U.S. repair ship and a British destroyer tender. There were U. S., British and Canadian escort ships and an American cruiser and an old battleship.*

*When the eastbound convoy was ready, we picked them up at Reykjavik and were on our way. The first night, the escort commander circled the convoy, telling each ship by light to "Follow Me". We left our convoy to proceed without escort and were ordered to reinforce one under attack by a "Wolf Pack" of German U-boats. They would also be reinforced during the next daylight hours.*

*We joined the eastbound convoy, SC48 the next day, October 16, 1941. Their escort was a collection of Free Canadian Corvettes, and Free French DD's and small escorts from other nations. Our commodore took charge and assigned us escort stations, and we waited for dark. I had the 8-12 watch. I hadn't been on the bridge very long when there was a tremendous fireball in the convoy and the first ship was sunk. We went to General Quarters; the Executive Officer relieved me as Officer of the Deck, the Captain had the Conn, and I moved up to the fire control platform, and we began a very long night. The submarine submerged to go under the escort screen and surfaced inside the convoy. A lot of star shells were fired, and depth charges rolled into the water, including ours. A lot of sound contacts were made but none verified as actual subs. Six merchant ships were sunk, and about midnight one of our modern DD's the KEARNEY, was torpedoed. She was hit in the forward fireroom. To add to the confusion her siren sounded, and apparently couldn't be turned off. That was the last casualty of the night. The damage to the KEARNEY was contained and she left the formation with a four-piper escort to go to Iceland. The repair ship there patched her hull and she eventually went back to Boston under her own power.*

*It turned out that our Executive Officer lost touch with reality during the attack. He didn't make any entries in the log or keep track of our position. The remainder of the cruise he sat in his darkened stateroom; he left the ship when we reached Boston.*

*The next morning our escort group was detached as the convoy was close enough to land so that they would get air cover. We proceeded at a good speed to Argentia and on to Boston. We made two more round trips on this route which were uneventful except for the terrible weather that is normal in the North Atlantic in the winter. As we approached Argentia at the end of the second one, we learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor.*



# Decatur Gives Back



A DECADE OF SERVICE.



A LIFETIME OF COMMITMENT.

February 27, 2014

USS Decatur Association  
PO Box 829  
Pittsfield, MA 01202-0829

Dear caring friend,

Thank you so much for your generous gift of \$500.00 on 02/14/2014 to Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP). I cannot thank you enough for your support of the thousands of truly deserving servicemen and women who have been wounded in our current military conflicts.

Our work begins at the bedsides of injured warriors as they undergo rehabilitation and return to civilian life, but it certainly doesn't stop there. As a result of their injuries, these brave heroes will face greater challenges today finding assistance and jobs that will enable them to provide for their families. Their battle against the long-term effects of combat will continue throughout their lives.

Only with your continued support is WWP able to reach these wounded service members. Through your generosity, WWP provides them with the assistance they need in order to regain their independence and begin rebuilding their lives. You give these injured warriors and their families hope for a brighter future.

Wounded Warrior Project is dedicated to assisting this new generation of injured heroes. These men and women who have served with honor deserve our respect and support. Again, I cannot thank you enough for your partnership with WWP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Steven Nardizzi'.

Steven Nardizzi  
Executive Director  
Wounded Warrior Project

# This letter was sent to Ron Sechrist's parents in 1970.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

COMMANDING OFFICER  
USS DECATUR (DDG-31)  
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 98601

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

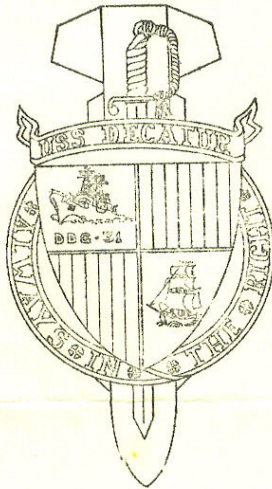


Mr. and Mrs. Richard Sechrist  
Box 686  
Vanderbilt, Penn. 15486

21

5 May 1970

Dear Families and Friends,



Since the last familygram, DECATUR has had a full and varied schedule with several "firsts" scored for the ship and many of her crew. The first VERTREP (vertical replenishment) of the cruise took place on 4 April with USS NIAGARA FALLS (AFS-3) providing the stores. Try to picture this scene. DECATUR is steaming alongside an oiler ship at about a hundred feet distance with span wires, hoses and high-line lacing the two together as we receive fuel. A quarter-mile away NIAGARA FALLS keeps station as her two large helos cycle between her flight deck and DECATUR, lowering pallet after pallet of supplies - food, spare parts and consumables - onto the fantail deck, where all hands work feverishly to move the boxes out of the landing area into the various storerooms throughout the ship. In this manner the VERTREP and the refueling are both completed quickly and simultaneously permitting the destroyer to resume her operational duties with a minimum of lost time. The key to success in this complicated evolution is sound planning and the teamwork which I have mentioned before.

Another "first" was our visit to KEELUNG, the northern port city of Taiwan, Republic of China. The capital city of TAIPEI is only a short ride by bus or taxi from KEELUNG, and DECATUR cameramen, shoppers, and tourists found the large city to be fascinating and very interesting.

Leaving KEELUNG on Monday, 13 April, we steamed northeast to OKINAWA for our first, though brief, call there the next day. After fueling and embarking Commander Destroyer Squadron TWENTY-ONE, DECATUR sailed in company with several amphibious assault ships northward into the Sea of Japan while participating in exercise "Golden Dragon". This was a combined U.S./Republic of Korea landing exercise in the vicinity of YANG PO RI, South Korea. On completion of "Golden Dragon" on 24 April, the ship headed south again, stopping briefly at SASEBO, Japan, and KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan, for fuel enroute to Subic Bay and three days of needed upkeep time. Today we returned to Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf where we are scheduled to support our attack aircraft carrier operations for a week before visiting that famous "Pearl of the Orient", HONG KONG, B.C.C.

In my last letter I talked about the functions and responsibilities of the Engineering Department. This time I would like to discuss two departments, Supply and Weapons.

The function of any shipboard department is implicit in the title of the department, but to merely say that "the Supply Department provides the ship with needed supplies" would be a gross oversimplification. A ship of the size and complexity of DECATUR requires literally thousands