

# USS Midway--Scope Dope News

DING DING --- DING DING --- SCHOOLBOY'S OI DIVISION, CIC OFFICERS AND OTHERS ARRIVING



## Reunion Report

### Day 1 (Thursday, Sept. 13)

From the moment they hit the hospitality room, the thirty-two shipmates and their mates who rendezvoused at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in San Diego, California, September 13-15, 2007, for the fifth ship's reunion of the USS Midway reunion group were ready for action.

Plenty of liquid and solid nourishment fueled them, though,

## Crew Returns To San Diego

truth be told, they needed little sustenance to keep them going, save willing ears to listen to their incredible sea stories, honed to a fine point over the years (though totally forgotten by the next reunion by both the teller and the listener). That, besides having served aboard the Midway at one time or another, was the common theme of these men. The sea stories, which started with a steady drone on day one and built to a crescendo by

day three at the reunion dinner, never stopped, at least not for long. For some, three days wasn't long enough, and they continued with the telling of their incredible stories to anyone who would listen, former shipmates or not, after the reunion was over.

Another common thread that tied this reunion group together was the knowledge that their leader and founder, Ron McPhail, was not with them—that he was seriously ill at his home in Winter Park, Florida. All understood

that his recovery would be touch and go. About the only time the sea stories stopped during the reunion was during the several times Ron was acknowledged by his shipmates for his founding and growing of the group.

### ***2008 San Diego "Mini-Reunion" Planned***

*Reunion members interested in attending a 2008 mini-reunion in San Diego should contact **Bill Kruper** at (218) 262-0009, email: [uncabil@msn.com](mailto:uncabil@msn.com). Several members have expressed an interest in returning to the ship earlier than 2011.*

At the reunion dinner two days later, there would be much better news concerning Ron's condition. Stay tuned.

There were no planned functions on the first day, so the men and their mates signed in, picked up their reunion packages, got reacquainted or acquainted with each other, and then reunion co-hosts Gerald Shaw and Chuck Peters laid out the general agenda for

the reunion. The second day would be the tour of the Midway, and the third day would be the business meeting and the reunion dinner. With these “niceties” out of the way and the pertinent information disseminated, the crew got down to business, jawing at each other across the tables, or headed out on their own tours of San Diego.



Reunion co-hosts **Chuck Peters** and **Gerald Shaw** were kept very busy coordinating the activities of the reunion group--kind of like herding cats.

### Day 2 (Friday, Sept. 14)

On the morning of second day, the Midway reunion group gathered early in the hospitality room. The main event was ahead—the tour of the Midway. We didn’t think of her as a “museum.” No, the Midway was (and still is) our ship. We’re just letting the city of San Diego borrow her for a while.

Those of us here in 2005 well remembered the occasion, and cherished the memory of walking her decks again after so many years. For those here for the first time, there was no way to describe it to them. They would have to experience it for them-

selves. Dennis Willis, talking about when he went aboard in 2005, put it best: “I cried.”

Pier-side, her signal pennants snapping smartly in a brisk breeze coming off the bay, awesome and ominous to behold, was the Midway. We went aboard her this time not as a group as we had in 2005, but individually, in couples, or in small groups. The point is: *We went aboard her.* She had been further restored since 2005, with more jets on her flight deck and fancy flight simulators in her hangar bay. But whatever improvements they had made mattered little to us. She was our ship, and we would have taken her any way we could get her, though some grumbling was heard from the men about so many modifications being made without their permission over the past forty-plus years. Topping the list of these were the relocation of the original CIC and the OI Division berthing quarters. One shipmate was so disgruntled by what they had done to the island, he flat refused to go up there.

And although we commingled with the tourists aboard our ship on this day, we were not tourists. We had served on her on the oceans and seas of the world, in wartime and in peace. And now we were home again. One of the men said, “I came on her a boy, and left a man.”



**Clay Sponseller**, shown here with his lovely wife **Mary**, retired a couple of years ago to manage their properties in Florida. Mary continues to work as the breadwinner of the family. Clay, who perfected the art (or is it a science?) of looking busy when he was a young man on the Midway, apparently has taken this talent to a whole new level in his later years.

For many hours, we walked her decks and explored her every nook and cranny, and tolerated the civilians who were underfoot. And even the hardest among us had to agree: *This is something to behold, this ship of ours.* And when we finally came down her gangplank and onto the pier, we craned our heads back up at her, gawking in disbelief, for she was always the most imposing at this angle, when you were standing under her and looking up, dwarfed by the sheer size of her, a skyscraper turned on its side, and you feeling the size of a single-cell amoeba.



**Oscar ("Oz") Granger** holds up his dress blue jumper that he donated to the Midway Museum's CIC space during the tour of the ship this reunion. Hopefully it'll be on display in CIC when we come back in 2011.

Later, on the harbor tour, which was a popular draw for the reunion men, who coming off the their old ship now craved a taste of the sea. One of the men was overheard talking to a civilian--a very attractive female civilian, at that. She had asked him about the Midway radarman shirt he was wearing. "Radarmen," he explained, "were the only sailors on a ship at sea who really knew where they were at all times. Everyone else was just guessing." How true. The young woman, thinking this over for a minute, seemed very impressed. This shipmate's wife, however, gave him a hard look that we all recognized, and that was the end of that.

As the tour boat pulled past the USS Ronald Reagan, CVN-76, which was berthed not too far from the Midway, the guide said

she (the Reagan) was not much longer than the Midway, and this sparked a lively discussion among the men (only half in jest, perhaps) about the possibility of the Midway being able to take the Reagan in a fair fight, all things being equal, which of course they weren't. (A recurring theme of many of the sea stories told during the reunion was how the Midway had consistently kicked the butt of every carrier in the fleet at one time or another during her heyday.)

Eventually everyone found their way back to the hotel, and the sea stories started up again in the hospitality room, ever the more energized now, since touring the ship, the "old salts'" memories jogged. The night wore on until the second day merged into the third, and all the while the noise level increased exponentially.

### **Day 3 (Saturday, Sept. 15)**

On the the last scheduled day of the reunion, two items headed the agenda: 1) the conduct the business meeting in the morning and 2) the gathering for the traditional reunion dinner in the evening.

Reunion co-hosts Chuck Peters and Jerry Shaw called the business meeting to order at approximately 0900, with all dues-paying members present and accounted for. The chief order of business was to select a site for



**Ben Gaines** holds the 40mm saluting shell he retrieved from the 03-level of the Midway, November 26, 1963, in Pearl Harbor, following a memorial salute to President John Kennedy the day after he was assassinated in Houston. Ben has brought the shell to every one of the OI Division reunions except St. Louis.

the 2009 reunion, and to determine who would be the coordinator. But first, Oscar Granger updated the crew on Ron McPhail's condition. Ron had suffered a heart attack and stroke and was currently in rehabilitation. It was also known that Ron had been passing off some of his duties before he got sick. The reunion newsletter was now the job of Dave ("The Boot") Payson, while Bill Krupa agreed to be in charge of selling Midway memorabilia, and Craig Harper volunteered to be backup webmaster in case Ron needed help.

Next, locations for the 2009 reunion were considered, including Virginia Beach, Branson, and Orlando. With little debate, Orlando was selected as the 2009 site. The men understood that this would be Ron's reunion; he had been unable to attend the last two in San Diego, but 2009's would be his. The vote approving Orlando, Florida, as the site of the 2009 OI Division reunion was unanimous. Ron and Jim Hayter would be co-hosts. Clay Sponseller, Joe Reiter, and Bill Krupa agreed to help out as they could. Joe Reiter made the point that the reunion would best be held between April 17 and May 15, after spring vacation and before hurricane season and stifling humidity set in. Oscar argued that from this point on, the reunion should be held every other year in San Diego since that's where the ship is. No one contested that proposal, and with that, the business meeting was officially adjourned.

At 1800 hours, the reunion group reassembled in the hospitality room area, and following the taking of the official group pictures, the last official function of the 2007 reunion, the reunion dinner, commenced. As tradition would have it, the ladies and gentlemen of the Midway reunion group were "dressed to the nines" for the dinner, and they seated themselves in orderly fashion



*Mary Seekamp, honorary member of the reunion group and wife of the late Chuck Seekamp, OSCM, a chief in the Midway radar gang from 1976 to 79, displays her husband's Midway sweater, which she donated to the Midway Museum. Mary was invaluable at the reunion, helping to organize the activities and keep the men squared away.*

at the banquet tables. The guest speaker, Retired Rear Adm. Mac McLaughlin, president of the Midway Museum, was a no-show at the dinner due to illness (his own), but we went on without him without missing a beat. A no-host bar did a booming business, which helped loosen a few tongues, though tongues were already plenty loose from three days of non-stop sea story telling.

Oscar took the mike and gave the group the welcome news that before the dinner he had talked to Ron McPhail in Winter Park, Florida. Ron told Oscar that he was doing better and would be going home from his rehab. This news was met by a loud chorus of cheers from the group.

Oscar also had a chance to tell Ron that at the business meeting that morning, the men had voted Orlando as the site of the 2009 reunion, and Ron would be the head coordinator in Orlando.

After the good news about Ron, the reunion group fell upon its dinner like a pack of hungry wolves. The women did their best to keep the men in line. One could well imagine how this group, inspired perhaps by their tour of the Midway mess decks the previous day, could become unruly at the formal dinner, lobbying for their old favorites of SOS and fried spam. But it didn't happen that way. The mens' behavior at the dinner was passable, as good as anyone could have expected, nothing even close to rude. Just loud.

Then Oscar took center stage, and showed the group the beta version of the OI Division reunion group DVD. Assembling the footage and the soundtrack for the DVD had been a labor of love for Ron and Oscar, he explained, and although the soundtrack and images were slightly out of sync in places, the presentation did an excellent job of telling the history of the group's formation, beginning with the first contacts made with the crew and the first reunion in Branson right up to the 2005 reunion in San Diego. And when Oscar finished, the group rose collec-

tively and gave him a “standing O.” It was an emotional moment for Oscar. A copy of the DVD was provided to each member in attendance.

So that was it. The reunion had officially come to an end, and not surprisingly, many of the men stayed on into the night, resuming their sea stories. But by the next day most of them were headed back to their homes across the country, and they would be replaced by new reunion groups, such as the WW-II veterans from the USS Essex, CVA-9. You can imagine the tales they had to tell!

After three days of steady steaming, the reunion was over. But these men and their mates will be back to San Diego, some sooner than others, for this is where their ship is.



*All aboard! The view seen by the reunion group as they entered the Midway's hangar bay.*

**See you in Orlando in 2009!**

The men of the '07 reunion group (below)



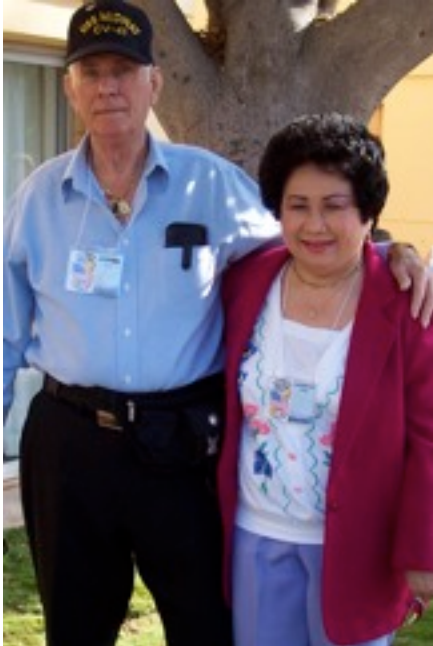
**The lovely ladies of the '07 reunion group**



**Midway memorabilia available for order in near future**

**Notice:** Ordering of Midway memorabilia (hats, hat pins, patches, etc.) from this newsletter is temporarily on hold until we can get the memorabilia transferred to Bill Kruper, who has agreed to take the job over from Ron McPhail. The Midway memorabilia should be available to order by the time the next newsletter comes out.





**Jim Kelly**, the “saltiest” member of this year’s reunion group, was aboard the Midway from ’48-’51. He’s shown here with his lovely wife **Lertlaksana**. A Boatswains Mate in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> divisions, he told a record number of sea stories during the reunion, some of them even believable. Perhaps his best one: “During a 1949 exercise in the Atlantic, I was in the forward magazine, on an ammo-loading party, when a 212-pound Tiny Tim rocket dumped out of its sling four decks up, scoring a direct hit on me below and knocking me out cold. The last thing I remember was someone yelling, ‘Look out below!’ and then the lights went out. I came to in Sick Bay several hours later.”



**Barry Sensenig’s** wife **Elaine** presented him with this inflatable doll which she bid on and won at an auction given by the reunion group from the USS Albany. The ladies of the Albany invited the ladies of the Midway to attend the auction during the business meeting. Barry, aboard in ’65, wasn’t seen a lot after this picture was taken.



**Joe Reiter**, ’63-’64, told about the time he had sea detail on the bridge and the Midway captain had the con entering San Francisco Bay. As Joe tells it, the captain must’ve had a hot date that night because he blew under the Golden Gate Bridge at full speed ahead and into the harbor like he was driving a hot rod instead of an aircraft carrier. He steamed right past the harbor pilot, and a couple hundred yards from the pier at Alameda, he ordered engines back two-thirds, left full rudder and brought the Midway alongside the pier in perfect position. Almost in the same motion, according to Joe, he turned the con over to the XO and left the bridge on the run.



**Craig Harper**, ’75-’77, told how two weeks after he’d come aboard the Midway in ’75 he’d been assigned forward lookout duty during Operation Frequent Wind on April 29, 1975, as the Midway conducted rescue operations in the Gulf of Tonkin. It was the last day of the Vietnam War, and from his lookout station Craig had the best seat in the house, and watched in awe as the chaotic scene unfolded below him on the flight deck. The Midway served as a beacon of hope, as well as a landing platform for South Vietnamese pilots who flew out to the Midway in anything that would get off the ground to save themselves and their families from the conquering North Vietnamese Army. Mostly they flew out in choppers, but in one case the flight deck was cleared for a Cessna OH-1 Bird Dog that came in on a wing and a prayer and landed safely. The Midway also picked up many boat people on that day, and Craig saw it all from forward lookout!



**The Scope Dope Newsletter**  
**USS Midway OI Division**  
**Reunion Group**

Published quarterly for and about former OI Division (and other) personnel, their times, and activities aboard the aircraft carrier USS Midway, currently “station ship” San Diego, California

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**Sea Stories Sought**

Now Hear This - We're looking for sea stories to publish in future editions of *Scope Dope News*. We know you told a lot of them in San Diego, Men. But, surely, you know a few more! E-mail your stories to the newsletter editor (below). Keep 'em short (no longer than 150 words) and mostly factual, of course!



*Oscar Granger shown here displaying his Midway logo T-shirt with this year's logo. Oscar has designed the logo for several previous OI Division reunions as well.*

**Operation Troop Ties**

Ben Gaines brought with him to the reunion a compelling flier describing a program sponsored by a church near his hometown to provide our troops in Iraq with handmade neck ties filled with a polymer material that absorbs cold and will stay cool for hours.

If you would like to sponsor sending a cooling tie (or ties) to the men and women serving in the often stifling heat over there, please donate a few dollars per tie by sending your name, address, and check to Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, 1735 Main Street, Ramona, CA 92065. (Make checks payable to SOJ/ Operation Troop Ties)

Contact Ben if you want more information on this very worthy program at email [poleclimber2@juno.com](mailto:poleclimber2@juno.com) or phone 510-785-6470.

