

USS Midway Reunion Group

Scope Dope News

OI Division

Orlando Reunion

DING DING . . . DING DING . . . SCHOOLBOY'S OI DIVISION, CIC OFFICERS, RADARMEN, OPERATIONS SPECIALISTS AND OTHERS ARRIVING



Reunion Report

"Thank you for your efforts in organizing the reunion. I really appreciate everything you did. The gifts will be treasured."

Ron McPhail (card sent to Oscar Granger following the reunion)

The men of the USS Midway OI Division Reunion Group converged on the Residence Inn at Altamonte Springs, Orlando, Florida, from all points across the country. Many of them were lost and too proud to ask for direc-

tions, they eventually rolled into town, bringing with them the usual assemblage of sea stories (long forgotten from their last tellings in San Diego in 2007), along with their enthusiasm, guile, cunning, wit, and high spirits. Altogether over fifty showed up counting wives, spouses, etc. to participate in the sixth OI Division reunion. Not bad considering the tough economy that has reduced our 401(k's) to 201(k's). The reunion ran from April 23 through April 25, 2009, Thursday through Saturday, and the attendees were determined to do it up right, to honor Ron McPhail for founding the group some

eleven years ago. Before the reunion was over, there would be plenty of surprises. But life is full of surprises, and this group was apparently ready for anything. They came and celebrated and had more than their share of fun. Perhaps it was the Florida sunshine that inspired them so. Or maybe the reunion's theme: "Re-up for 'McPhail's Navy' —It's a Three-Day Tour." Whatever it was, this group got the most out of its three days in the sun.

A day before the reunion, the advanced guard arrived in town. These were the members of the



Residence Inn Altamonte Springs

planning committee—Oscar Granger, Bill Kruper, Jim Hayter, Dave Payson, Clayton Sponseller, Joe Reiter, Craig Harper, and Gary Burk, plus their wives. Work commenced immediately to get the hospitality room ready—stocking the refrigerator with beer and food (after making a run to Costco), setting out the Midway memorabilia, and stuffing the registration packets with items such as Plans of the Day, dinner and Gator tour tickets, and name tags. Pictures from the 2007 reunion were taped on the walls. One picture in particular stood out—Jim “Boats” Kelly and his wife Lertlaksa, with his funeral notice (see below). “Boats” died last November in Clearwater, Florida. Onboard in ’49-’50, he was the life of the party at the two San Diego reunions, far outpacing everyone in the telling of sea stories. We put you near the beer, “Boats.” May you rest in peace.

Not surprisingly, also arriving on the scene a day ahead of the pack were Dennis Willis and his wife Terry. Dennis is famous for arriving in town early at these reunions to scout out the lay of the land and test the coldness of the



Jim “Boats” Kelly, 1928-2008

beer. George Fowler and his family also got into town early and found their way to the hospitality room. Chief brought with him his wife, Claire, son (a USN Commander), and grandson. Helen Kruper presented him with one of her special handmade Midway-theme quilts. And they kept coming, these former Midway sailors and their wives, until long after Florida sun dipped over the horizon.



Typical hospitality room scene

Day 1—Thursday, April 23

On the first official day of the reunion, the fun begins in earnest. With no official activities scheduled in the POD (plan of the



George Fowler admires his Midway quilt from Helen Kruper

day), our main mission is to get reacquainted—and get reacquainted we do, energized perhaps by the free breakfast in the hotel’s Gatehouse room, which served passable free chow for all three days of the reunion. Feed a sailor free food and he will be your friend for life. Early on, reunion co-host Clay Sponseller stole the show with his “Olan-gapo City/Subic Bay” T-shirt (yesterday it had been a “I Survived Hong Kong” T-shirt). But his real show-stopper is his navy skivvies display, which he claims to be his first pair of skivvies framed under glass, on show in the hospitality room for all to see and comment upon (pictured here).



Clay’s skivvies under glass

One dares not repeat some of the dialogue between Clay and his shipmates about those skivvies under glass. Clay’s wife Mary takes it all in stride. She’s seen

and heard it all before, having been married to the man for forty years. Besides she keeps him on a short lease. He treads lightly. Except when he thinks he can get away with something, like he's doing in the picture on the next page, sporting his Olongapo T-shirt and flirting with the ladies in "Camp CIC."



"Camp CIC"

In the middle of the room plank-owner Charlie Girolamo and George Fowler, with their wives Edelgard and Claire, are catching up on old times, and the men are gathered around the two old warriors listening in awe. Charlie hasn't been to one of these reunions since New Orleans, eight years ago, and he looks younger now than he did then. Between them, the Chief and the plank-owner can cover a wide spectrum of Midway and navy history, but they are low key compared to some of the younger men. They lead by example. They don't need to tell sea stories; they *are* living sea stories. Heard at this reunion and it fits here: "Move over shallow water, deep sea coming through."

In another part of the room, Bill Kruper is doing a good business selling Midway memorabilia. Bill and Helen Kruper drove here from their home in Hibbing, Minnesota, making it all the way in



Plank Owner Charlie Girolamo

two days. The Krupers rarely miss a reunion, if they've missed one at all. Helen, one of the mainstays among the wives in the group, is known for her beautiful, handmade Midway theme quilts.

Oscar is here, of course, and in his capacity as secretary/treasurer for the group, he's settling up dues payments for a couple of the men and keeping the reunion tally straight. Oscar keeps a solid set of books. He lives for these reunions, but this day he has to keep his head on straight, not do too much celebrating. For later this afternoon he will make the long drive out to Orlando International to pick up his wife Karen, who is flying in from Seattle. Their home, nestled in the shadow of the Cascade Mountains in North Bend, Washington, is at the opposite end of the country.

Reunion co-host Bill Hayter and his wife Pamm are talking up the OI Division Putt-Putt golf championship to be held this evening at the nearby Congo River Miniature Golf Course. Not only can you play miniature golf, he is boasting to anyone who will listen, but you can feed the baby gators they have up there and they will wave the \$3 per hunk of meat fee for us. From the looks of it, he's getting a bunch of the men

and their mates interested in the putt-putt match. Jim is a shameless marketer.

Joe Reiter, one of several Floridians at the reunion, and his partner Judi are at the far end of the room. Joe, a member of the reunion planning committee, is a fixture at these reunions. Joe and Judi are hanging out with Gil Wooden, Ronnie Jarvis and their wives Cathy and Becky. Surprisingly enough, these men aren't telling sea stories; it's driving the big rigs they're talking about. All three men have been truckers at some point in their careers. Gil has just finished telling them about the last day he drove truck; his rig had broken down outside of Seattle and spilled its diesel fuel, a HazMat condition, and that was it. The cops hassled him all day. He hung it up at that point and never looked back.

Ronnie Jarvis has an interesting story about his radar days on the Midway. For most of his time in OI Division, he was an ECM operator. Almost exclusively he worked in isolation in the ECM shack. "That's why," he complains, "hardly anyone remembers me at these reunions." Don't worry, Ronnie, we remember you.

Mary Seekamp and Craig Harper, shown on the next page in their formal dinner attire, are having a good visit. It's grown so noisy in the room that all conversations are at high volume by necessity. Craig, the group's webmaster, is looking bleary-eyed. He got a late flight and didn't get here until the wee morning hours, taking a taxi in from the airport. Craig

was on lookout duty on the Midway's bridge on the last day of the war, during Operation Frequent Wind, in 1975. Mary, an honorary member of the group, is the widow of Chuck Seekamp, a chief in the Midway radar gang from 1976-79. Mary's been a strong voice in the group since she started attending these reunions regularly.



"The Webmaster" Craig Harper

Benny Johnson and Ben Gaines are hanging out near the door. Benny appears to be demonstrating some of his basketball moves to Ben, and Ben is showing Benny the Midway shell casing he brings to every reunion, the shell casing he retrieved on the deck of the Midway that was fired following the assassination of President John Kennedy in 1963. The shell is one of Ben's claims to fame. That and the fact that he can still get into his uniform, which he will prove to us tomorrow night at the dinner.

Barry Sensenig and his wife Elaine are also moving around the room. Barry has been taking a considerable amount of ribbing from the men about his exploits at the last reunion in San Diego when he was presented a blowup doll by Elaine that she won at a neighboring ship's reunion (the

USS Albany), and Barry was photographed holding the doll in a familiar manner. In fact, there's the picture of him with the doll taped on the wall behind him. It's pretty hard to deny, Barry, with the evidence at hand.

Mike Walker and his wife Susan are also present in the room on this first day. Mike doesn't know it yet because it doesn't happen until tomorrow's general business meeting, but since he lives in Southern California, he will be "volunteered" to serve as a co-host for the 2010 reunion in San Diego. He will graciously accept the responsibility.

Dave Payson and his wife Mina Jo aren't to be found around here this afternoon, for they, along with their children Amy and Adam are at Disney's Animal Kingdom, some forty miles to the south. At about this time, they are on a time machine ride at Dino-Rama Park, headed back to the present from a million years ago where they were sent to capture a rogue iguanodon and bring it back to the present. Evidently they didn't catch the beast, and Payson, dazed and confused, is stepping from the ride and looking around apprehensively, making sure it is safe.

Knowing he wouldn't be back in time for the putt-putt golf tourney in the evening, Payson commissioned Jim Hayter to write a complete report on the tourney for the newsletter. Jim's report is presented below.



Dave Payson and Jim Hayter trying to figure out what went wrong with their reunion planning

The Putt Putt Golf Event at Congo River Golf

Sixteen of our former shipmates and their wives/guests joined us for the inaugural OI Division miniature golf championship on the evening of the first day of the reunion. We shuttled to the golf course from the hotel, so all the challenging and betting was done before we picked up our sticks. The layout of this course was truly outstanding—we faced hills, curves, bi- and tri-level greens, water hazards, and blind shots to the hole. They even had a par 4 hole on this course. It was interesting to see how each player faced the challenges of a new hole—play it safe and lag up to a hazard, or throw caution to the wind and go for it. While it was all in fun, it was easy to tighten up on those long par putts toward the end. We had a number of holes in one, but Mary Seekamp was the only person I heard of who got two in the round that we played. I never saw the final score cards, but the lowest score I heard mentioned was 49.

The fun continued at the end of the round when we got to feed the **LIVE ALLIGATORS**. Because we were a large group, your ad-

vance team negotiated free gator food (sliced hot dogs) for all our players. We learned quickly that the correct way to do this was using the pole provided by the course that was designed for this purpose—it turns out that even three- to-four-foot gators can jump when food is present. Another lesson learned was the most important part of gator feeding was being sure your wife was not behind you when you got close to the edge of the gator pit. I am glad to report all 16 people safely returned to the Residence Inn. It was further reported that some tall tales were spun at the hospitality suite after the match and some bets were laid for the next event in San Diego.



Dennis Willis and Gil Wooden

Thus concluded Day One of the Orlando reunion, not a bad start for what would turn out to be a very memorable reunion indeed.

Day 2—Friday, April 24

The general business meeting

Over the years at these OI Division reunions there have been general business meetings and then there have been GENERAL BUSINESS MEETINGS. This one was the all-cap variety.

Assembled in an upstairs meeting room in the main building, the men and several of the women, were highly engaged in the business meeting as well, particularly Mary Seekamp. At issue was the content of the new Articles of Confederation and Bylaws, which had been heavily revised from the original bylaws drafted at the first reunion in Branson. Oscar Granger and Bill Kruper, who had drafted the revised version, led much of the discussion. The new concept contemplated in their rewrite was a formalization of the group through the election of officers: President, Vice President, Secretary, and Special Advisor. Other proposed changes—for example, should we open up the membership to the entire ship—impacted the very organization of the group. So there was much to vote on this morning, and the debate over content and charter went on for nearly two hours until a vote by show of hands was finally cast by the members. The minutes and results of that vote are provided below.

 The OI Division REUNION ASSOCIATION GENERAL MEETING meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by reunion committee co-hosts Jim Hayter and Clay Sponseller. General discussion was held regarding reunion activities.

It was suggested that the next reunion be held in mid-September 2010, in the San Diego area. Discussion followed. There was a request for activities planned for the wives. Discussion followed. The current committee will help the new co-hosts with planning.

It was suggested that R.C. Morton (not present) and Mike Walker serve as co-hosts since they live in the area.

The meeting was turned over to Oscar Granger and Bill Kruper to discuss the new Bylaws and Articles of Confederation. Discussion opened regarding whether or not to open the organization to former USS Midway crewmembers outside the OI Division, though this was already being done on a limited basis. Discussion continued about the future direction of the organization. It was moved-seconded-passed to accept the new Bylaws and Articles of Confederation as a framework for further development.

Election of officers followed:

- President –Oscar Granger
- Vice President—Bill Kruper
- Secretary—Dave Payson
- Honorary Advisor—Ron McPhail, by acclamation.
- Craig Harper was recognized as webmaster.



Task force hard at work developing its new mission and vision

The President was tasked with appointing a task force to develop the vision and mission statement and develop a method for the organization to perpetuate itself. Members appointed to this task

force were the governing body, Mike Walker, Bob Ammann, Andy Perez, Clay Sponseller and Jim Hayter. The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

Not long after the business meeting, the task force met. (See picture on previous page.) Karen Granger and Mina Jo Payson also participated, Karen as an advisor on planning and Mina Jo as the secretary to the secretary, running the laptop. Two former CIC officers distinguished themselves at the task force meeting, as well as at the earlier business meeting, by applying their knowledge and expertise in Robert's Rules of Order (newly revised) in the conduct of business: Andy Perez (wife: Julia) and Bob Ammann (wife: Cyndy).



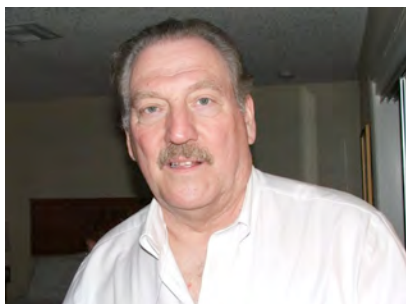
Secretary Dave Payson



Advisor Ron McPhail



President Oscar "Oz" Granger and wife Karen



Vice President Bill Kruper

Bad News Happens

About three hours before the reunion dinner, Oscar learned from Ron's wife Mary that Ron was not feeling well enough to attend the reunion dinner. Nor did his family members feel they could attend in his absence.

So there it was. Bad news, albeit not totally unexpected, because Oscar and Kruper had visited Ron the day before the reunion and learned of the potential situation.

But know this about the men and mates of the USS Midway OI Division Reunion Group in attendance at the reunion (and this should be a surprise to no one): they weren't about to let this news get in the way of their fun.

The show would go on.

The Reunion Dinner

(Editor's note: many of the formal dinner pictures taken of us by Helen and Bill Kruper can be found on our website [see the link on the last page]; as good as they are, they're too numerous to show here.)

Now on to the description of the reunion dinner . . .

Maison & Jardin, the site of the reunion dinner, about a mile from the hotel, was, as advertised, a classy place, private, low key, with a certain understated elegance, just the kind of place you'd expect a bunch of ex-sailors of our caliber to gather.



Reunion dinner at M & J's

First off, newly elected President Oscar Granger made the official announcement about Ron and his family being unable to attend the dinner. The news was greeted with disappointment, of course, but not surprise. Oscar announced that Ron and his family would be glad to see some of the men at Ron's home the next day. So there it was. Ron wasn't going to be here. But this group was determined. With or without him, the show would go on. And our videographer, Joe Reiter, would capture it all on tape for

him. A bold, high-tech solution made by a bunch of old schoolers.

Next, Bill Beuret, the manager of M&J, got up in front of the group and said a few kind words about us and honored military veterans in general. A USN veteran himself, Bill was on the battleship New Jersey, BB-62, in 1968, when she was doing serious damage to the enemy off the coast of Vietnam with her big guns. Those of us over there during that time, will never forget the sound of those huge shells from the battleships whistling overhead.

Following a social hour of engaging small talk between table mates (more sea stories) and a no-host bar (the line never got any shorter), dinner was served. As promised, it was a meal several cuts above your standard rubber chicken banquet fare.

Master of Ceremony Jim Hayter then commenced the main program by urging the men to come forward and share their memories and stories about Ron. Before this, George "Chief" Fowler received special recognition for being himself and so counted on for so many years by the men. President Granger and Vice President Kruper presented him with a custom-made jacket with ship's emblem and reunion patch. Then, after a little prompting, Claire came forward and told a wonderful, from-the-heart story about her husband which had George squirming and the audience near tears.



"Oz" presents George Fowler with his custom-made jacket



Claire

Following Chief Fowler's award, Dave Payson took the mic, made a lame teleprompter joke, and proceeded to read his prepared material about how Ron had always been good to him except the time he'd removed Payson's sea story, *Mission to Hainan*, from the Web site because its installments were taking too many weird twists. Nevertheless, Payson said, Ron would eventually present him with the Order of the Bull Award for the story and repost it on the Web site. But only after Payson had rewritten it and swore on the Blue Jacket's Manuel to never read Stephen King again.

Coincidentally, Payson's teleprompter joke led to the revelation that Karen and Oscar Granger's guest, Andrea Sawchuk, here with her husband Craig, was a teleprompter operator in real life, and when they

shouted this up to him, he was caught off guard and thought a real teleprompter was going to magically appear before him. This didn't happen, of course, so he stumbled through the rest of his lines before retiring to his table.

The men came up one by one, cool as cucumbers for the most part and funny (and many times serious) as they told their stories and remembrances about Ron. We all handled it pretty much the same: focused, as if Ron was right there in the room with us.

One of the funnier stories was Benny Johnson's recollection of how he was protected from any discipline or dirty jobs Ron might throw his way because he was on Chief Fowler's basketball team, and as long as he scored his 25 points a game for the Chief, Ron couldn't touch him.

To this, Chief shouted from his table, "Benny, you never scored 25 points in your life!"

Clay Sponseller told a very un-Clay-like story about how he always got along well with Ron, what a good guy Ron was, etc. To the early 60s vets in the room, this immediately cast suspicion on Sponseller's true motivations. What does he want? What's his hidden agenda? Does he think that Ron's really is here in the room with us?

Then Ben Gaines got up, wearing his dress blues just like it was 1963 again, still fitting into them smartly. The rest of us may have been jealous of Ben, but we ap-

preciated the fact that he brought his 40mm shell, as is his tradition, retrieved from the 03 level of the Midway following the salute to the just assassinated President Kennedy in 1963.

Next, Oscar told still another variation of his classic sea story (which gets better with time) about how Ron sent him on shore patrol duty in Olongapo his final several days in the Navy as retribution for Oscar getting an early out of the Navy to go to college. Ron's "punishment" followed Oscar back to the states, for when Oscar got to Treasure Island to be processed for separation, he found out he had shore patrol duty waiting for him there, in downtown San Francisco. Evidently, Ron had pulled a few strings and his reach extended all the way across the Pacific.

In what was probably the first time he has ever told the story publicly, Barry Sensenig confessed how he got revenge on Ron for canceling Barry's liberty for some offense. He removed Ron's coffee mug from the coffee board outside CIC and tossed it over the side of the ship. Ouch!

Bill Kruper stood before us and related how he got his nickname "Kroop." The first time he walked into CIC and introduced himself as Bill Kruper, he said, Chief Fowler took one look at him and said from now on your name's "Kroop." And it was.



Helen and Bill Kruper

Several of the men told stories about how Ron contacted them for the first time and asked them how they felt about joining the reunion group he was trying to form. Notable among these was Ronnie Jarvis's memory of Ron contacting him and asking Ronnie if he'd be willing to help host the first-ever reunion in Branson, Missouri, in 1999. So Jarvis goes down in OI Division history as the group's first reunion host.

And so it went. The night wore on until finally, the stories petered out, despite Hayter's best effort to get more men to step up to the mic. Joe Reiter passed because he was too busy video-recording the event on his camcorder, he claimed. Later, we learned that he meant business, judging from the excellent quality of the movie he had made of the dinner.



Videographer Joe Reiter

So the dinner program was a wrap, a thing of beauty. Ron may

have only been here in spirit, but we gave him one helluva testimonial anyway.

Day Two of the reunion came to an end and everyone left M & J's fat and happy, so to speak.

One of the great pictures of this reunion, and one of the great stories as well, is a picture of Herb Choy and his Midway shipmate Bill English together again after fifty years. See their picture and hear their story in the next newsletter.

Day 3—Saturday, April 25

The Gator Tour

Day Three of the reunion commenced with a surprisingly energetic bunch of reunion revelers gathered in the hotel parking lot, waiting for the green light to load aboard the Gator tour bus, which had rolled in early. The tourers showed no ill effects from the previous night's dinner festivities, almost like they were a different group altogether. When the word came, they loaded onto the bus in an orderly fashion but with enthusiasm.

Our driver and guide, Mike "The Magic Man" from Pennsylvania, came equipped with quips and funny stories. Perfect! He wheeled us around the city for half an hour, showing off Orlando, which was somehow unremarkably remarkable. There was the stair-stepped profile of the building where they'd filmed the AT&T commercial ("more bars in more places"). There was the mini Statue of Liberty which had cost some \$700 thousand to

erect for reasons that Mike never made clear to us. And there was the Orlando Coliseum, home of the NBA's Orlando Magic, Mike's favorite team, to say the least. And over there was where Nixon stood in 1973 before the press and said "I am not a crook." Mike was buying time until the Scenic Boat Tour people were ready for us to converge upon them.

Not much later, we were at the boat dock at Winter Park loading on to small boats, about eight to a boat, and heading out onto the first lake. The reunion flier promoting this tour had said that "we'd be like so many Humphrey Bogarts and Katharine Hepburns making our way up river in several miniature African Queens." And remarkably enough, now that we were out here on a lake, it felt something like that, liberating, chugging along over 12 miles of water on three different lakes and winding through narrow canals to get from one lake to the next. Funny thing, you put an old sailor on the water—any water, in any kind of a ship or boat—and it doesn't take long for him to revert to his sailing days, in his mind. That is to say, we had some men gazing out to sea.



Scenic boat tour at Winter Park

Our skipper and guide, who wore a floppy-brimmed hat and had a southern gentleman look about him, was excellent at keeping us on course and informed about the shoreline attractions—Rollins College, the Old Seminole Boat House, Kraft Azalea Gardens, Eleanor Roosevelt's summer home, and even his own place—as we motored along.

He pointed out all manner of flora and fauna—birds and ducks, and flower specimens, vines and ivy. All the while we kept a close watch out for gators. There were reputed to be alligators in these waters, and this *was* called the Gator tour, after all.

It was a nice morning to be on these lakes, someone remarked, temperature comfortably in the mid-70s with a cooling breeze. Cutting through the narrow canals that led from one lake to the next, you could almost reach out and touch the boat garages and houses nestled along the both sides of the canals. Though the boat pilots would throttle down their engines to idle speed while transiting through the canals, with the houses being so close, you couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to live in one of those houses and have to put up with a steady stream of boats loaded with tourists cutting through your "backyard." No one stepped out on their back porch and pegged a tomato at us, though.

At one point, Payson thought he spotted some gators sunning themselves on the roofs of nearby houses, but they turned out to be bundles of shakes. Finally we

were done with the hourlong boat tour of three lakes over 12 water miles, and headed ashore. At the pier we de-boated and walked to the bus, waiting for us a quarter mile away. Here, the Gator tour people did a very nice thing by sending the owner's SUV to the boat dock to pick up George and Claire Fowler and give them a ride back to the bus, and, sure enough, when we got back to the bus, the Fowlers were sitting there quite comfortably. The Chief quipped: "What took you guys so long."

Next up on the tour was lunch at Dexter's, at the recommendation of Gary and Sandy Burk, our people "on the ground" in Orlando. Dexter's was an excellent restaurant for the occasion, good food, drink, and good atmosphere. We had a chance to visit and learn more about each other. The Fowlers, for example, are "reverse snowbirds," living in Arizona most of the year and then migrating to Canada during the summer. The Krupers are just plain snow people, living with the polar bears in Hibbing, Minnesota, year around.



Lunch at Dexter's

After lunch, Mike pulled the bus around and we loaded aboard, well-fed and our thirsts

quenched. The final stop on the tour was Lake Eola Park in downtown Orlando, where most of us de-bussed and spent time stretching out legs and taking in the waterfront attractions, such as the swan-shaped gondola boats and an impressive amphitheater. It was a placid scene, this park, the kind of place where, joggers, bicyclists and lovers go, along with and old sailors at the end of bus tours.



Gator Tour - so where's our bus?

At about 1400 Mike from Pennsylvania brought us back to the hotel, and the Gator Tour of Orlando was history. It's a good bet that Mike made some good money in tips from us, dispelling the myth that sailors are cheap S.O.B.s except when it comes to spending on wine, women, and song; we just know how to get the best in entertainment value for our bucks! In our younger days we spent money like drunken sailors because that's what we were. But we learned from those days of being broke all the time, and as old sailors we do a much better job holding onto our money. Except for when it comes time to turn over our paychecks to our wives.

Night at the Bowling Alley

The best plans of mice and men often go awry, which is how we ended up gathering in the lounge of the Altamonte Bowling Alley close by the hotel for our last official get-together on the last night of the reunion. Originally it was going to be at Hughey's Restaurant, close by the hotel in the other direction. However, we found out a week before the reunion that Hughey's was closed, a victim of the ailing economy.

Gary Burk, our man in Orlando, along with his wife Sandy, did some exploring and found us the bowling alley deal, which turned out to be a good gathering place, although some of the men and their wives never made it there due to confusion on just when and where and what time. That part was regrettable, but the rest was fun. We situated ourselves, some thirty-five of us, in the bowling alley lounge, pulling tables together and enjoying decent food and drink at happy hour prices. There was a pool table in the room, and the pool sharks came out looking for a hustle, Gil Wooden, Ronnie Jarvis, Mary Seekamp, and Clay Sponseller among them. Eight-balls were diving into corner pockets like crazy.

Over in the corner of the lounge, a jukebox throbbed—or at least it would've if Karen Granger and Dave Payson had been able to figure out how to make it work; it was not the kind of jukebox they remembered from their teen years a few years ago. That is to say, it was no Wurlitzer, and it didn't

matter how many Fonzie moves Payson put on it, it wouldn't play. It was a machine designed to separate you from your coinage. Eventually, with help from the management and the Payson children, who had just returned from Kennedy Space Center, music emerged from the confounding machine, including some spectacular Beach Boys and Beatles tunes that took them way back.

Wine, women, and song. The men of the OI Division, on this their sixth ship's reunion, had everything they wanted there for the time being in the bowling alley lounge. The good times were a-flowin', and this place could've just as easily been Fiddler's Green, Sasebo, Japan, as the men remembered it.

In fact, Payson was about to order a Singapore Sling and wait for the floor show to begin when Oscar "Oz" Granger, newly elected President of the group, brought us down to earth in a hurry ("Where the Boys Are," by Connie Francis, even stopped playing on the jukebox at that moment) when he announced that we had to clear out and get back to the hotel, to the hospitality room, where more of our reunion mates were waiting for us for final good-byes. About 2100, and it was time to close this thing out, it seemed.

So, on foot, we headed back to the hotel, double-time, feeling better about the hasty departure from the bowling alley lounge because "Oz" picked up the tab with reunion money, and, hell, you can't hardly beat a deal like that!

“Turn Out the Lights, the Party’s Over”

And just like that we were back at the hospitality room, saying goodbyes, exchanging high fives and secret handshakes, and telling each other a final sea story. There was still some beer in the fridge but it was going fast. Gradually the crowd began to thin out; the Floridians—the Spon-sellers, the Reiters, and the Burks—merely had to hop in their cars and drive off into the warm Florida night to their homes. Bill and Helen Kruper would leave in the morning, driving the thousand-plus miles to their home in Hibbing, Minnesota, in a day and a half. Bill was already starting to cool down just thinking about it. Most of the others, with morning flights to catch, headed back to their rooms to get a good night’s sleep.

Whatever their individual situations, they had come to Altamonte Springs, Orlando, Florida, from all points in the country to honor their founder, Ron McPhail, and they had accomplished this under some pretty spectacular conditions. Now, the sixth biannual ship’s reunion of the OI Division Reunion Group was officially over. And those who experienced it firsthand would agree: it was one for the record books.

Yes, they were headed home. But they were already pointed westward—toward San Diego in 2010. There, the USS Midway Museum awaits them.

Postscript

The day after the reunion, Dave Payson and his son Adam visited Ron, his wife Mary, and their granddaughter at Ron’s home in Winter Park. Payson presented Ron with the the official reunion poster displaying the emblem (“the three Midways”) and words of dedication from the men of OI Division. He also gave Ron a laminated copy of his Chief’s picture, which was another prominent symbol of the reunion. Ron expressed his appreciation to all of us for making this reunion happen in his honor, and although he was on oxygen, he looked vigorous enough.

Ron had other former shipmates visit him during the reunion period. Oscar and Bill dropped by the day before the reunion, and several of the men paid him a visit after the Gator tour, on the last day of the reunion. This group, led by Andy Perez, presented Ron with a Midway hat, a U.S. flag that was flown over the Midway, a Certificate of Appreciation from the Midway, a custom-made jacket, a reunion T-shirt, and meals from the dinner.



Ben Gaines - sleek as a bullet in his dress blues!

Message from the Vice President

Hello Shipmates and reunion members. First, I’d like to thank everyone for electing me as your Vice President. I am honored and will serve you to the best of my ability.

We’ve recently begun the planning for the San Diego reunion in September of 2010, and as a reminder, it’s not too early to make your decision to attend another unforgettable experience.

Orlando was a unique experience where the camaraderie and close friendship prevailed the entire time, and San Diego in 2010 will prove even more so. Along with that we have the Task Force that is charged with forging ahead toward us becoming the official reunion group for the USS Midway SDACM. This new course for the reunion group will have its challenges and uncharted waters to face, but no matter what becomes of this endeavor we will always retain our identity as the OI/OS Division Reunion Group.

It was a privilege we all shared in to honor Ron McPhail and George Fowler in Orlando. For those of you who didn’t know, George, a World War II veteran, received the Purple Heart while serving in the Pacific. He was also a veteran of Korea and Vietnam.

Look for another memorabilia sheet in a future issue of the *Scope Dope News*.

Sail on shipmates.... sincerely,

Bill Kruper

The Ladies Corner

In future issues of *Scope Dope News*, I hope to make “The Ladies Corner” a regular feature—a column where the women of the reunion group can write in with ideas on women’s activities during the reunions while the men are out playing and/or conducting their “manly” business, such as the telling of tall stories and/or the slogging of beer.

So, women of the OI Division Reunion Group, don’t be bashful. Send in your ideas on women’s reunion activities/entertainment, and I’ll publish them here.

Dave Payson

Orlando Reunion Planning Committee

*Jim Hayter Clay Sponseller Joe Reiter
 Bill Kruper Oscar Granger Dave Payson
 Craig Harper Special thanks to:
 Gary Burk and Sandy Burk*

What an incredible job they did!

OI Division Reunion Group Web Site
<http://ussmidway.net/home.html>



See you in San Diego September 2010!

The Masthead
USS Midway OI Division
Reunion Group

A newsletter covering former OI Division (and other) veterans who served together on the USS Midway, and who are friends eternal.

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