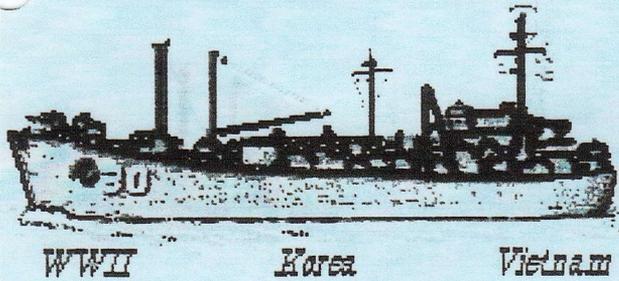


U.S.S. Askari Association

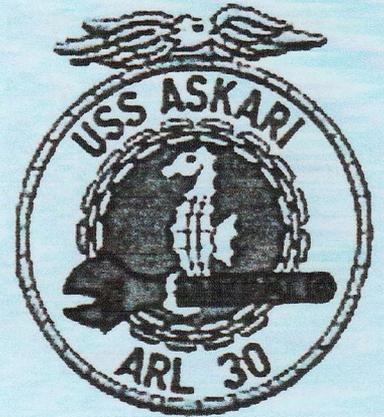
U.S.S. Askari Web Site
<http://arl30.vze.com>

September 2003 Issue



Association Officers

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A Message from President Ed Toth

It was great seeing former shipmates at the reunion in Ft. Mitchell, Ky. Four new members signed aboard – let's all welcome Max Hoover, Ken Kirkland, Norm Neulieb, and Bob Pettit. We are always happy to locate former shipmates and add them to our membership roles. If you know the whereabouts of someone who might like to join the Association, please give us a heads up and we'll contact the person. Bob Pettit has already referred a name to us – way to go Bob!

In addition to welcoming four new members, I was pleased that Virgene Toth (my wife) and Barbara Davis (Merrill's wife) were voted by acclamation to be honorary members for their contributions to the Association.

Many things were discussed at the business meeting. One involved a change in officers. With regret, I accepted John Roth's resignation as treasurer and thanked him for his valuable service to the Association during his 2-year term. Former vice president Al Wolfe was elected to fill the treasurer's position, and Lee Daley was elected to fill the vacant vice president position. Congratulations to both and special congratulations to Lee as our first Viet Nam era officer.

We began our newsletter this year and have been pleased with the positive comments received from Askari members. We want the newsletter to be a place where members can share Askari experiences.

We need input from you to keep the stories going. Please email your Askari experiences or other ideas to Merrill Davis at mfdavis33@insightbb.com or mail them to him at 3405 Ashwood Drive, Bloomington, IN 47401. You can also reach him by phone at 812-331-1641.

The reunion wasn't all business. We enjoyed good eats and a night of dancing while fellowshipping with shipmates. The attendance at this reunion was nearly double the 2001 reunion. I eagerly look forward to 2005 and the prospect of a similar increase in attendance.

U.S.S. Askari Reunion Attendees



Back row: Paul Erasmus, Max Hoover, Lee Daley, Ed Toth, Bob Pettit. Front row: John Roth, Roger Metz, Larry Ethridge, Merrill Davis, Norm Neulieb, John Schenck. Not pictured: Ken Kirkland

Bobby Freeman remembers...



CWO2 B. J. Freeman aboard Askari at General Quarters Battle Station.

[Nov. 1, 1968 – Anchorage off of Me Tho South Vietnam] As relieving Officer of the Deck on the Bridge, I was in the process of relieving the watch on the bridge of the Askari when two 250 lb satchel charges exploded on the starboard side of USS Westchester County LST 1167. The Westchester County lay anchored about 300 yards from the Askari when the dual blast occurred. The sky lit up like a nuclear blast had gone off to the North of us! This was the work of Vietnamese Viet Cong underwater sappers. Later we found that some of these underwater demolitionists were women.

Having been in country for about 6 months, the Westchester County mining was something like no-one including myself had ever seen. Immediately the Askari's Repair Department went into action and, under the supervision of WO Morris Fleischman USN (now deceased), two of the Askari's boats, a Mike 6 and an LCVP, deployed to the Westchester County with Welders, 5 Underwater Divers, Hull Technicians with tools and equipment, and Damage Controlmen with their fire fighting gear. The Westchester County's Engineers and available deck hands joined Askari's recovery team and a number of the men involved in the blast were immediately saved. The recovery team extracted several trapped men from the Westchester County's berthing spaces in the vicinity of the dual blast. At first count, the Askari recovery team reported about 16 Westchester County men dead and about 20 to 25 wounded and transported to the Hospital ship nearby.

The 1st Class Petty Officers Quarters was hit as was another adjoining berthing space over a couple of JP5 (Diesel) tanks on the Westchester County's

amidships starboard side at the waterline. The recovery team-leader reported that when the mines exploded, the deck of several berthing spaces blew upward from the center and peeled upward and back trapping many men between the bulkheads and the peeled deck of the berthing spaces.

The Askari's repair recovery team had to take care in extracting a number of men because of the flood of flammable fuel leaking from the nearby ruptured fuel tanks. Diesel fuel was everywhere, but remarkably there was no fire! It can be surmised there was no fire because the river was flowing downstream at about 5 to 7 knots, taking the leaking fuel with it.

The Askari's recovery crews were joined by Askari Captain Al Festag in SCUBA diving gear. He and 3 other Askari divers were instrumental in rescuing numerous survivors of the Westchester County's mining. The team found about 10 fatal casualties.

With a year of in-country experience behind them, the Askari's Repair Department Recovery Team worked as fast as they could. After 19 to 20 hours working in the fuel engulfed spaces, elements of the Askari's R-1 Division returned to the Askari for food, rest, and change of clothing before returning to continue assisting Westchester County. At this time, the Askari went to General Quarters and all gun batteries were manned and the ship made battle ready. Co-ordination of the recovery team's efforts was conducted from the Repair Office. The Repair Officer was Lt. Bill Bush and the XO was Lt. Mike Colonna (both now deceased).

The following day, the Westchester County weighed anchor, got underway on her own power, and moved to Dong Tam (Delta Tango) several miles downstream. The Askari's R-1 Division Damage Controlmen and carpenters provided sheet after sheet of plywood and 2x4s to shore up the Westchester County's damaged hull for transit to the Philippines for repairs at the Subic Bay naval Ships Support Activity. There was no dry-dock in Subic Bay, but sufficient hull repairs were made so the Westchester County could proceed to a dry-dock in Yokosuka Japan.

The write-ups of Army and Navy field reporters said nothing about what the Askari crew had accomplished in assisting during this dreadful event so it is time that an acknowledgement is completed.

Updating Membership Information

Many of you received an email from Secretary Merrill Davis regarding updating membership information. Thanks for responding so our information is accurate. We did not have email addresses for many members and some messages bounced back because we had an incorrect address. If you have an email address and did not receive an email from Merrill to verify information, please send an email to him at mfdavis33@insightbb.com, so he can add your email address to our records. In the subject line enter, "Email from (your name)". When Merrill receives the email from you, he will respond with a message showing the data we have in our records for you. You can then review the information and make any needed additions or corrections.

Dues are Due

I'm happy to have the opportunity to serve as your Treasurer. I'm sorry that my first action is to ask for money, but I guess that's what a treasurer does. Dues for the U.S.S. Askari Association are \$15.00 per year. Since we operate on a fiscal year, the dues you pay now will be for July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004. When I receive your dues, I will send you a current membership card and an Amphibious Forces patch. Please use the form at the bottom of the newsletter so I can be sure to properly credit your payment.

Thanks,
Al Wolfe
Treasurer

Actions for our members

Email Addresses needed

If you did not receive an email from Merrill Davis, it means we do not have your current email address. If you do not have email, take no action. If you do have email, send a message to mfdavis33@insightbb.com. Your message just needs a subject line that says, "Email from (your name)". Merrill will send a reply to verify membership information.

Dues

If you have already paid your July 2003-June 2004 dues, no action is needed. If you have not paid your dues, please fill out the form below and send it to Al Wolfe along with a check or money order for \$15.00.

July 2003-June 2004 Dues Payment

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Dues: \$15.00

Send to: Al Wolfe
148 5th St.
LaSalle, IL 61301