

"THE MOUNTAINEER"
IS THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
U.S.S. WEST VIRGINIA (BB-48) REUNION ASSOC.

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The main function of the "MOUNTAINEER" is to keep the crew members of *West Virginia* informed of the events sanctioned by our association and to promote the lore of which each of us had shared.

Our association does not have, or want to have, a dues program. We subsist off the revenue which is derived from our reunions. We are a non-profit organization and as such; we use our funds yearly to purchase a wreath to be placed December the 7th at the Remembrance Garden of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in honor of all our shipmates, past, present and future.

We also, in addition to publishing the "MOUNTAINEER" twice between each reunion, use our funds to support other memorials that are common to our tenets.

We believe that the primary purpose of our association is to keep the memory of our ship and shipmates alive as long as one of us is still able to do so.

**DO WE HAVE YOUR CORRECT
MAILING ADDRESS?**

If not please advise us.



FROM THE QUARTER DECK!

The twenty fifth reunion is now history. The 1997 beachhead was established at the Monarch Hotel in Portland (Clackmas), Oregon, August 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st. The crew fell in at quarters 220 strong. Hand shaking and sea stories prevailed during the entire operation. The hotel made sure that everything possible was done to make our reunion a success. We had all our activities in a central location with the "Hospitality Room" housing the refreshment area, small stores, check in services, Friday night social with entertainment and appetizers. Saturday night the doors were opened a little wider for our banquet. After our "Call to Colors", Shipmate Jim Downing led us in the Invocation prior to "Mess Gear". During the dinner hour, super sales persons Ken and June Butts hustled the raffle tickets for the "Grand Drawing". Following dinner we held a "Memorial Service" for our Departed Shipmates. Jim Downing officiated with the able assistance of Ernie Mangrum and Wallie Morgan. Our Field Music, Dick Fiske sounded "TAPS" in his usual professional manner. It was a sad thing to find that we had a known loss of 32 of our shipmates since our last reunion. After a few remarks from the M. C., three lovely ladies, known as "The String of Pearls" entertained us in the style of the Andrew's Sisters. The highlight of the floor show was the dance routine to the tune of *O Johnny!* by our own "Rubber Legs" Jack O'Neill. After the entertainment we had a few bad jokes by the M. C. followed by the drawing.

Sunday Morning Church Services was led by Jim Downing, Stu Hedley and Jack Franklin. Breakfast and a business meeting followed. It was then time bid adieu to all our great friends and head for home.

I would be in remiss if I did not acknowledge the help I had from Mickey Michenovich, Tom Bates, Harry Fessler and Joe Kinnaman at the bar. Bob Gallup for helping me with the drawing and his gifts for door prizes along with his presentation for the Navy Memorial. A. E. "Hoppy" Boyd for the VCR and TV along with a donation of refreshments, and Jim Reece for the VCR Tape. If I missed anyone I am extremely sorry. We really had a great Crew and a great time.

We wish to thank Julia Gatchel (George) for the beautiful clock, and Kathleen Schembari (Sister-in-Law of James Schembari Sr.) for the painting she made of *West Virginia*, that they donated it to the reunion for our opportunity drawing.

(Continued Next Page)

On the way home I got as far as Medford Oregon and the transmission in my motor home decided to quit. I was lucky that Shipmate Phil Stump lived 3 miles from the casualty because he and his wife had Marion, me and the dog for a week until the repairs were completed.

“Our Departed Shipmates”

(Since The Last Issue of The “Mountaineer”)



“ May They Rest In Peace”

Joseph L. Ashmore
Harold J. Carroll
Chester Dziengelski
Jack B. George
William Hardeman
R. J. “Red” O’Neill

Chet Blaylock
C. H. Childress
Adolph Engelman
Louis Guarino
Leonard Szejek
Lionel E. Wells

James F. Bobick
Finley Dittmar
John R. Farmer
Carl Lindsey
Stanley Trachta
John Wisner

Jack F. Miller Willie Fred Roberts

Sterling “Muscles” Hairell

Robert A. “Red” Reed



QUARTERS FOR MUSTER

THE FOLLOWING SHIPMATES ATTENDED THE TWENTY FIFTH REUNION

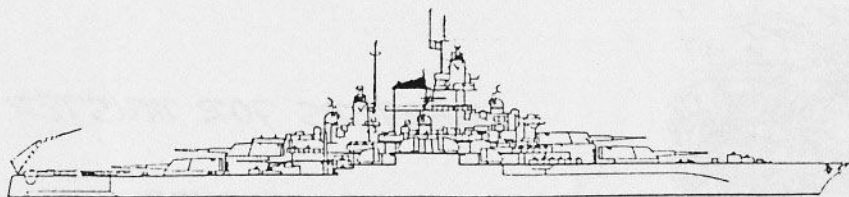
ALTMAN, Blitz,
BATES, Tom
BLOCK, Albert.
BRAY, Raymond
BROWN, Owen
COOPER, Frank
DIXON, Bryan
FERGUSON, Sam
FRANKLIN, Jack
GACKLE, George
GECI, George
HANNIBAL, Nick
HOLUP, Andrew
JACOBSON, Oscar
KANGAS, George
LANGSTON, William
LITTLE, Chester
MANGRUM, Ernest
McINTIRE, John
MORGAN, Wallie
ODAM, Archie
PLAISANCE, Jemy
POULSON, John
PULVER, Morgan
REITER, Tony
ROCKETT, Dick
SEIBOLD, Don
SMITH, Bill
STEVENS, John
VARIOT, Joseph
WOOD, Ced

ANDERSON, Dennis
BELLOWS, Jim
BOYD, A.E.
BROWN, John (CY)
BUTTS, Ken
CRUMPLER, Charles
DOWNING, Jim
FESSLER, Harry
FRAVOR, Dale
GALLUP, Bob
GOBEL, Chuck
HEDLEY, Stuart
HUFFMAN, Ross
JACQUOT, Stanley
KINNAMAN, Joseph
LARSON, Lauren
LITTLE, Clinton
MARTIN, R.A.
MEYER, Alton
NEWBERG, Pete
PASSOTH, Fred
PORTER, Gery
POWELL, Ken
REECE, Jim
RELLERGERT, Al
ROWLAND Jr. Rex
SIMS, R.T.
SPENCER, Herb
THORPE, Jim
WEBB, Arlow
WYMASTER, George

BALBINOT, Lou
BILLINGSLEY, G
BOYD, Tom
Brown, John (Ohio)
CAMM, Jim
DEEG, Wyman
EHM, Bob
FISKE, Dick
FRENCH, John
GALVIN, Patrick
GOBBEO, Rudolph
HILL, Keith
HUSEMAN, Howard
JONES, Forest
KRONBERGER, Bob
LEFKER, Raymond
LUTZ, Ken
McCOMAS, Bill
MOONEYHAM, L
O'NEILL, Jack
PIERCE, La Rue
POTTER, James
PRAZENICA, Charles
REED, Robert "Red"
RITTINGER, Clarence
SARAGUSA, Joe
SKINNER, Gordon
STEFFEY, G.W
STUMP, Philip R.
TIPPETS, Russel
Williams, Floyd

In addition to the above named shipmates we were pleased and blessed with the attendance of the widows of our departed shipmates. We welcomed the families and guests of all those who had attended the reunion

'We hope see you all again in Santa Rosa'



BIOGRAPHY OF A BATTLESHIP

"USS WEST VIRGINIA-(BB-48)"

PART 2

"Pearl Harbor Revenged"

Emerging from the extensive modernization at the Puget Sound Navy Yard at Bremerton, Washington, the battleship that had risen, Phoenix-like, from the destruction at Pearl Harbor looked totally different from the way she had appeared prior to 7 December, 1941. Gone were the "cage" masts that supported the three-tier fire-control tops, as well the two funnels, the open-mount 5-inch/25's and the casemates with the single purpose 5-inch/51's. A streamline superstructure now gave the ship a totally new silhouette; dual-purpose 5-inch/38-caliber guns, in gunhouses, gave the ship a potent anti-aircraft battery. In addition, 40-millimeter Bofors and 20-millimeter Oerlikon batteries studded the decks, giving the ship a heavy "punch" for dealing with close-in enemy planes.

West Virginia remained at Puget Sound until early July, 1944. Loading ammunition on the 2nd, the battleship got underway soon thereafter to conduct her sea trials out of Port Townsend, Washington. She ran a full power trial on the 6th, continuing her working-up until the 12th. Subsequently returning to Puget Sound for last-minute repairs, the battleship headed for San Pedro, California and her post-modernization shakedown.

Finally ready to rejoin the Fleet from which she had been away from for two years, *West Virginia* sailed for the Hawaiian Islands on 14th of September. Escorted by two destroyers, she made landfall on Oahu on the 23rd, ultimately pushing on for Manus, in the Admiralties, in company with the fleet carrier *Hancock* (CV-19), *West Virginia*, as a unit of Battleship Division (Bat Div) 4, reached Seeadler Harbor on 5 October. The next day, she again became a flagship when Rear Admiral Ruddock shifted his flag from *Maryland* (BB - 46) to the "Wee Vee" as Commander, BatDiv 4.

Underway on 12 October to participate in the invasion of the Philippine Islands, *West Virginia* sailed as part of Task Group (TG) 77.2 under the

overall command of Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf. On 18 October, the battle line passed into Leyte Gulf, *West Virginia* steaming astern of *California* (BB - 44).

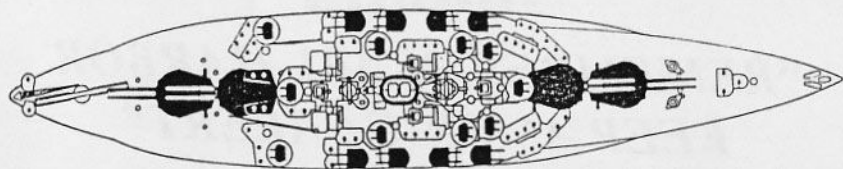
At 1645, *California* cut loose a mine with her paravanes; *West Virginia* successfully dodged the horned menace, it being destroyed a few moments later by gunfire from one of the destroyers in the screen. On 19 October, *West Virginia* steamed into her assigned station in San Pedro Bay at 0700 to stand off shore and provide shore bombardment against targets in the Tacloban area of Leyte. Retiring to sea that evening, the battleship and her consorts returned the next morning to lay down heavy gunfire on Japanese installations in the vicinity of the town of Tacloban.

On the 19th *West Virginia's* gunners sent 278 16-inch and 1,586 5-inch shells against Japanese installations, silencing enemy artillery and supporting the UDT (underwater demolition teams) preparing the beaches for the assault that came on the 20th. On the latter day, enemy planes made many appearances over the landing area. *West Virginia* took those within range under fire but did not down any.

On the 21st, as she was proceeding to her fire support area to render further gunfire support for the troops still pouring ashore, *West Virginia* touched bottom slightly damaging three of her four screws. The vibrations caused by the damaged blades limited speeds to 16 knots—18 in emergencies.

For the next two days, *West Virginia*, with her augmented antiaircraft batteries, remained off the beachhead during the daylight hours, retiring to seaward at night, providing antiaircraft covering fire for the unfolding invasion operations. Meanwhile, the Japanese, seeing that American operations against Leyte were on a large scale, decided to strike back. Accordingly, the enemy, willing to accept the heavy risks involved, set out in four widely separated forces to destroy the American invasion fleet.

Four carriers and two "Hermaphrodite" battleship-carriers (*Ise* and *Hyuga*) sailed toward the Philippine Sea from Japanese Home waters; a small surface force under Admiral Shima headed for the Sulu Sea; two striking forces consisting of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers sortied from Lingga Roads, Sumatra, before separating north of Borneo. The larger of those two groups, commanded by Admiral Kurita, passed north of the island of Palawan to transit the Sibuyan Sea.



American submarines *Darter*(SS-247) and *Dace* (SS-227 drew first blood in what would become known as the Battle for Leyte Gulf on 23 October when they sank, respectively, two of Kurita's cruisers- *Maya* and *Atago*. Undeterred, Kurita continued the transit, his force built around the giant battleship *Musashi*.

The smaller of the two forces, under Admiral Nishimura, turned south of Palawan and transited the Sula Sea to pass between the islands of Mindanao and Leyte. Shima's forces obediently followed Nishimura's heading for Leyte Gulf as the southern jaw of a pincer designed to hit the assemblage of amphibious ships and transports unloading off the Leyte beachhead.

Detailed to deal with the force heading in his direction Admiral Oldendorf deployed his sizeable force--six battleships, eight cruisers, and twenty eight destroyers--across the northern end of Surigao Strait. The American men-o-warsteamed along their assigned courses, their bows cleaving through the smooth sea.

At 2236 on 24 October 1944, the American PT boats deployed in the strait and its approaches made radar contact with Nishimura's force, conducting a harassing attack that annoyed, but did not stop, the oncoming enemy. Well into the strait by 0300 on the 25th, Nishimura took up battle formation when five destroyers launched a well-planned torpedo attack. Caught in the spread of torpedos, the battleship *Fuso* took hits and dropped out of formation; other spreads of "fish" dispatched a pair of Japanese destroyers and crippled a third.

Fuso's sistership *Yamashiro*, meanwhile, had taken one hit and was slowed down, only to be hit again within 15 minutes' time. *Fuso* herself, apparently ravaged by fires ignited by the torpedo hits, blew up with a tremendous explosion at 0338.

West Virginia, meanwhile, was maintaining her position ahead of *Maryland*, *Mississippi* (BB-41), *Tennessee*, *California*, and *Pennsylvania* (BB-38)--four of these ships, like *West Virginia*, veterans of Pearl Harbor. From 0021 on the 25th, the battleship had picked up reports on the PT boat and destroyer attacks: finally at 0316, *West Virginia*'s radar picked up Nishimura's force at a range of 42,000 yards. She tracked them as they approached in the pitch black night.

**"REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR
KEEP AMERICA ALERT"**

At 0352 *West Virginia* unleashed her 16-inch main battery; she fired 16 salvoes in the direction of Nishimura's ships as Admiral Oldendorf crossed the Japanese "T" and thus achieved the tactical mastery of a situation that almost every surface admiral dreams of. At 0413 the "Wee Vee" ceased fire; the Japanese remnants proceeded in disorder down the strait from whence they had come. Several burning Japanese ships littered the strait: *West Virginia* had contributed to *Yamashiro's* thus avenging her own crippling in the Pearl Harbor attack.

West Virginia had thus taken part in the last naval engagement fought by line-of-battle ships and, on the 29th, departed for Ulithi, in company with *Tennessee* and *Maryland*. Subsequently heading for Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides, after Admiral Ruddock had shifted his flag back from *West Virginia* to *Maryland*, the former underwent a period of upkeep in the floating drydock, ABSD-1, for damaged screws.

The "Wee Vee" returned to the Philippines, via Manus, on 25 November, resuming her patrols in Leyte Gulf and serving as part of the antiaircraft screen for the transports and amphibious ships. At 1139 on the 27th, *West Virginia's* antiaircraft guns splashed a sui cider and assisted in downing others while on duty the next day.

Rear Admiral Ruddock shifted back aboard on the 30th, *West Virginia* maintaining her operations off Leyte until 2 December, when the battleship headed for the Palaus. The battlewagon was then made the flagship for the newly formed TG 77.12 and proceeded toward the Sulu Sea to cover the landings made by the Southwest Pacific Force on the island of Mindoro.

Entering Leyte Gulf late on the evening of 12 December, *West Virginia* transited the Surigao strait on the 13th and steamed into the Sulu Sea with a carrier force to provide cover for the transports in TG 78.3.

She subsequently covered the retirement of the transports on 15 December, later fueling in Leyte Gulf before she returned to Kossol Roads, Palaus, at mid day on the 19th. There, *West Virginia* spent Christmas of 1944.

There was more work to be done, however, for the battleship as the "return" to the Philippines continued apace. On New Year's Day, Rear Admiral Ingram C. Sowell relieved Rear Admiral Ruddock as Commander BatDiv 4, and the ship got underway for Leyte Gulf as part of TG 77.2.

Entering the gulf during the pre-dawn hours of 3 January, *West Virginia* proceeded into the Sulu Sea. Japanese air opposition, intensifying since the early part of the Philippine campaign, was becoming more deadly. *West Virginia's* men saw evidence of that when a two-engined "Frances" crashed the escort carrier *Ommaney Bay* (CVE-79) at 1712 on the 4th. Fires and explosions ultimately forced the "jeep carrier's" abandonment, her survivors being picked up by other ships in the screen. *Burns* (DD-588) dispatched the blazing CVE with torpedoes.

Taking on board survivors from *Ommaney Bay* from the destroyer *Twiggs* (DD-591), *West Virginia* entered the South China Sea on the morning of the following day, 5 January 1945, defending the carriers during the day from Japanese air attacks. Subsequently, the battleship moved closer inshore with the carriers outside to carry out a bombardment mission on San Fernando Point. *West Virginia* hammered Japanese installations ashore with her 16-inch rifles.

Suiciders, however, kept up their attacks in the face of heavy antiaircraft barrages and combat air patrol (CAP) fighters. Losses among Allied shipping continued to mount; kamikazes claimed damage to HMAS *Australia* and the battleships *California* and *New Mexico* (BB-40) on the 5th. *West Virginia* participated in putting up volumes of antiaircraft fire during those attacks, emerging unscathed herself.

West Virginia—in addition to the *Ommaney Bay* sailors on board—soon took on board survivors from yet another ship:: the men from the high-speed minesweeper *Hovey* (DMS-11) which had been sunk by a Japanese torpedo on the 6th. Before she could transfer the escort carrier's and minesweeper's sailors elsewhere, though, she had to carry out her assigned tasks first. Accordingly, *West Virginia's* 16-inch rifles again hammered Japanese positions ashore at San Fabian on the 8th and 9th, as troops went ashore on the latter day. It was not until the night of 9 January that the battleship finally transferred her passengers of the ship.

After providing call fire support all day on the 10th, *West Virginia* patrolled off Lingayen Gulf for the next week before proceeding to an anchorage where she replenished her ammunition. During her shore bombardment tours off San Fabian, *West Virginia* had proved herself most helpful, covering UDT

operations destroying mortar positions, entrenchments, gun emplacements, and leveling the town on San Fabian. In addition, "WEE VEE" destroyed ammunition dumps, railway and road junctions, and machine gun positions and warehouses. During that time, the ship expended 395 16-inch shells and over 2,800 5 inch projectiles.

Underway again at 0707 on the 21st, *West Virginia* commenced call fire support duties at 0815, operating in readiness for cooperation with the Army units ashore in the vicinity of the towns of Rosario and Santo Tomas. After a few more days of standing ready to provide call-fire support twen needed, *West Virginia* anchored in Lingayen Gulf on 1 February.

Subsequently, as part of TG 77.2, *West Virginia* protected shipping arriving at the Lingayen beachheads and stood ready to provide call fire for the army when needed. She later departed Lingayen Gulf, her duty completed there, on 10 February, bound for Leyte Gulf. Before her departure, she received 79 bags of United States Mail-- the first she had received since the day before Christmas.

After touching first at San Pedro Bay, Leyte, *West Virginia* arrived at Ulithi on 16 February, reporting for duty with the 5th Fleet upon arrival. Ordered to prepare in all haste for another operation, the battleship provisioned and refueled with the highest priority. The ship completed loading some 300 tons of stores by 0400 on the 17th, *West Virginia* got underway bound for Iwo Jima in company with the destroyers *Izard* (DD-589) and *McCall* (DD-400). As she headed off to Iwo Jima to join TF 51, *West Virginia* received a "Well Done" from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz for the manner in which she had readied herself for her new duty after being released from the 7Th Fleet such a short time before.

West Virginia sighted Iwo Jima at a range of 32 miles at 0907 on 19 February. As she drew nearer, she saw several ships bombarding the isle from all sides and the initial landings taking place. At 1125, she received her operations orders, via dispatch boat and, 20 minutes later, proceeded to her fire support station off the volcanic sand beaches. At 1245, her big guns bellowed to lend support to the marines ashore--gun positions, revetments, block houses, tanks, vehicles, caves, and supply dumps-- all came under her heavy guns. On 21 February, the ship returned and, at 0800, commenced her duties afresh.

Her 16-inch shells sealed caves, destroyed antiaircraft gun positions and blockhouses; one salvo struck an ammunition or fuel dump, explosions occurring for about two hours thereafter. On the 22nd, a small caliber shell hit the battleship near turret II, wounding one enlisted man. That same day, another significant event occurred ashore—marines took Mount Suribachi, the prominent land mark on one end of Iwo Jima. From their position offshore, *West Virginia's* sailors could see the flag flying from the top.

For the remainder of February, *West Virginia* continued her daily fire support missions for the marines ashore. Again, Japanese positions felt the heavy blows of the battleship's 16-inch shells. She hit troop concentrations and trucks, block houses, trenches, and houses. During the course of that time spent off the beaches on 27 February, she spotted a Japanese shore battery firing *Bryant* (DD-665). *West Virginia* closed the range and, when about 600 yards from shore, opened fire with her secondary (5 inch) battery, silencing the enemy guns.

Replenishing her depleted ammunition stocks early on 28 February, *West Virginia* was back on the line again that afternoon, firing continuous night harassing and interdiction rounds, silencing enemy batteries with air bursts from her secondary batteries. For the first three days of March, the ship set sail for the Caroline Islands, reaching Ulithi on 6 March.

Joining TF 54 for the invasion of Okinawa Gunto Area, *West Virginia* sailed on 21 March, reaching her objective four days later on the 25th. In fire support section one, *West Virginia* spent the ensuing days softening up Okinawa for the American landings slated to commence on 1 April. At 1029 on 26 March, Lookouts reported a gun flash from shore, followed by a splash in the water some 5,000 yards off the port bow. Firing her first salvos of the operation, *West Virginia* let fly 28 rounds of 16-inch gunfire against the pugnacious Japanese batteries.

The following day, the "Wee Vee" fought against enemy air opposition, taking a "Frances" under fire at 0520. The twin-engine bomber crashed off the battleship's port quarter—the victim of *West Virginia's* antiaircraft guns. Over the days that followed, enemy opposition continued in the form of suicide attacks by Japanese planes. Mines, too, began making themselves felt; one sank the minesweeper *Skylark* (AM-63), 3,000 yards off *West Virginia's* port bow at 0930 on the 28th.

After taking on ammunition at Kerama Retto--the island seized to provide an advance base for the armada massing against Okinawa--*West Virginia* sailed for Okinawa to give direct gunfire support to the landings. Scheduled to fire at 0630, the battleship headed for her assigned zone off the Okinawa beaches. While enroute, though, at 0455, she had to back down all engines when an unidentified destroyer stood across her bow, thus avoiding a collision

As she prepared to commence her bombardment, *West Virginia* spotted a Japanese plane off her port quarter; her antiaircraft batteries tracked the target and open fire, downing the enemy aircraft 200 yards away. Four more enemy planes passed within her vicinity soon thereafter--*West Virginia* claimed one of them.

Finally, at 0630, *West Virginia* opened fire as landing craft dotted the sea as far as the eye could reach, all heading for the shores of Okinawa. *West Virginia's* sailors, some 900 yards off the beaches, could see the craft heading shoreward like hundreds of tadpoles; at 0842, lookouts reported seeing some of the first troops going ashore. The battle for Okinawa was underway.

West Virginia continued her bombardment duties throughout the day, on the alert to provide counter-battery fire in support of the troops as they advanced rapidly inland. There appeared little resistance on 1 April, and *West Virginia* lay to offshore, awaiting further orders. At 1903, however, an enemy plane brought the war down on *West Virginia*.

The battleship picked up three enemy planes on her radar and tracked them as they approached: flack peppered the skies but still they came. One crossed over the port side and then looped over and crash-dived into *West Virginia*, smashing into a superstructure deck just forward of secondary battery director number two. Four men were killed by the blast, and seven were wounded in a nearby 20-millimeter gun gallery. The bomb carried by the plane broke loose from its shackle and penetrated to the second deck. Fortunately, it did not explode and it was rendered harmless by the battleship's bomb disposal officer. Although her galley and laundry looked hard-hit, *West Virginia*--reporting her damage as repairable by ship's force--carried on, rendering night illumination fire to the marines ashore.

West Virginia buried her dead at sea in the wake of the Kamikazi attack of 1 April and resumed her gunfire support duties soon thereafter. In the course of her tour offshore in early April, she shot down a "Val" on the 6th.

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In early April, the Japanese attempted to strike at the invasion fleet in a last-gasp offensive formed around the super-battleship, *Yamamoto*. On the nights of 7 and 8 April, Commander, TF 58, reported that most of the ships in that enemy force had been sunk-including *Yamamoto*, whose last sortie had been made with enough fuel to get her to Okinawa-but not to return. Thus, the Japanese Navy's largest kamikaze perished-- many miles from her objective.

For *West Virginia*, however, her duties went on, providing illumination and counterbattery fire with both main and secondary batteries and giving her antiaircraft gunners a good workout due to the heavy presence of many suiciders. Her TBS crackled with reports of ships under attack and damaged-- *Zellers* (DD-777), *Tennessee*, *Salt Lake City* (CA-24), *Stanley* (DD-478)--and others, all victims of the "divine wind", or kamikaze. Her shore bombardments elicited nothing but praise from those enjoying the benefits of the ship's firing, one spotter reported happily on 14 April; you're shooting perfectly, you could shoot no better, no change, no change," and, "your shooting is strictly marvelous. I cannot express just how good it is." she delivered sterling support fire for the 6th Marines upon that occasion; later, she continued in that fine tradition for the 10th Army and the XXIVth Army Corps.

West Virginia continued fire support for the Army until 20 April, at which point she headed for Ulithi, only to turn back to Okinawa, hurriedly recalled because of *Colorado's* (BB-45) suffering damage when a powder charge exploded while she was loading powder at Kerama Retto. Returning to Hagushi beach, *West Virginia* fired night harassment and interdiction fire for the 10th Army and the XXIVth Army Corps. Ultimately, *West Virginia* sailed for Ulithi, in company with *San Francisco* (CA-38) and *Hobson* (DD-464), reaching her destination--this time without a recall en route--on 28 April.

Returning to Okinawa after a brief sojourn at Ulithi, *West Virginia* remained in support of the Army and the Marines on the embattled island into the end of June. There were highlights of the tour--on 1 June, she sent her spotting plane aloft to locate a troublesome enemy blockhouse reportedly holding up an Army advance. A couple of rounds hurled in the enemy's direction produced no results; she had to settle for obliterating some of the enemy's motor transport and troop concentrations during the day instead. The next day, 2 June, while in support of the Army's XXIVth Corps, *West Virginia* scored four direct hits and seven near-misses on the blockhouse that had been hit the day before.

West Virginia then operated off the southeast coast of Okinawa, breaking up Japanese troop concentrations and destroying enemy caves. She also disrupted Japanese road traffic by scoring a direct hit a road intersection and blasted a staging area. On 16 June, she was firing an assignment for the 1st Marines off Southwestern Okinawa when her spotting plane, a Vought OS2U Kingfisher, took hits from Japanese fire and headed down in flames, her pilot and observer bailing out over enemy-held territory. Within a short time, aided by *Putnam* (DD-757) and an LCI, *West Virginia* closed and blasted enemy guns in attempt to rescue her plane crew who had "dug in for the day" to await the arrival of the rescuers. The attempt to recover her aircrew, however, was not successful. Loaned a kingfisher from *Tennessee*, *West Virginia* kept up her gunfire support activities for the balance of June.

Shifting to San Pedro Bay, Leyte, at the end of June, the battleship reached her destination on 1 July, escorted by *Connolly* (DE-306). There on the morning of 5 July, she received her first draft of replacements since Pearl Harbor in 1944. After loading ammunition, *West Virginia* commenced training in the Philippine area, an activity she carried out through the end of July.

Sailing on 3 August for Okinawa, *West Virginia* reached Buckner Bay on the 6th, the same day that the first atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Three days later, a second bomb obliterated the greater part of the city of Nagasaki. Those two events hastened Japan's collapse. On 10 August, at 2115, *West Virginia* picked up a garbled report on radio that the Japanese government had agreed to surrender under the Potsdam Declaration, provided that they could keep the Emperor as their ruler. The American ships in Buckner Bay soon commenced celebrating--the indiscriminate use of anti-aircraft fire and pyrotechnics (not only from naval vessels in the bay, but from marines and Army troops ashore) endangering friendly planes. Such celebrations however proved premature--at 2004 on 12 August, *West Virginia* sailors felt a heavy under-water explosion; soon thereafter, at 2058, the battleship intercepted a radio dispatch from *Pennsylvania* (BB-38) reporting that she had been torpedoed. *West Virginia* sent over a whaleboat at 0023 on the 13th with pumps for the damaged *Pennsylvania*.

The war ended on 15 August 1945. *West Virginia* drilled her landing force in preparation for the upcoming occupation of the erstwhile enemy's homeland and sailed for Tokyo Bay on the 24th as part of TG 35.90. She reached Tokyo Bay on the last day of August and was present at the time of the formal surrender on 2 September 1945. For that occasion, five musicians from *West Virginia's* band were transferred to *Missouri* (BB-63) to play at the ceremonies.

West Virginia played her part in the occupation, remaining in Tokyo Bay into September 1945, weathering a storm on the 15th that had winds clocked at 65 knots at one point. On 14 September, she received on board 270 passengers for transportation to the west coast of the United States. She got underway at midnight on the 20th, bound for Okinawa as part of TG 30.4. Shifting to Buckner Bay on the 23rd, the battleship sailed for Pearl Harbor soon thereafter, reaching her destination on 4 October.

There, the crew painted ship and kept on board those passengers slated for transportation to San Diego, California. Bound for that port on the 9th, *West Virginia* moored at the Navy Pier at San Diego at 1328 on 22 October. Two days later, Rear Admiral I. C. Sowell hauled down his flag as Commander, Bat Div 4.

On Navy Day--27 October--25,554 visitors (more the next day) came on board the ship. Three days later, on the 30th, she got underway for Hawaiian waters to take her place as part of the "Magic Carpet" operation returning veteran soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen home to the states. After one run between San Diego and Pearl Harbor, *West Virginia* made another, the second time embarking Rear Admiral William W. Smith, who broke his flag in the battle ship for the return voyage to San Francisco, California.

After making yet another run between the west coast and Hawaii, *West Virginia* reached San Pedro, Calif., on 17 December. There, she spent Christmas debarking her third draft of passengers. The veteran battlewagon upped-anchor on 4 January 1946 and sailed for Bremerton, Wash.. She reached her distinction soon thereafter, shifting to Seattle, Wash., on the 16th where she moored alongside sistership *Colorado*.

West Virginia entered her final stages of inactivation in the latter part of February 1946 and was decommissioned on 9 January 1947 and placed in reserve, as part of the Pacific Reserve Fleet. She never again received the call to active duty, remaining inactive until struck from the Navy list on 1 March 1959. On 24 August 1959, she was sold for scrapping to the Union Minerals and Alloys Corp. of New York City.

West Virginia (BB-48), although heavily damaged at Pearl Harbor and missing much of the war, nevertheless earned five battle stars.

"Well Done Mountaineers"



Sonoma County

Hilton
Santa Rosa

TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

AIRPORT INFORMATION

SONOMA COUNTY AIRPORT

Just six miles north of the Hilton. Taxi service available by calling (707) 544-4444. Car rental service also available at the airport (see below).

SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT

60 miles south of the Hilton. Serviced by all major car rental agencies. Service to Santa Rosa by two shuttle companies:

AIRPORT EXPRESS: \$22. Round trip, \$15 one way. Stops at Petaluma, Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa. Guest can take taxi from Santa Rosa stop, three miles from hotel, approx. \$13 taxi fare. Departs every two hours at 6AM from SFO with final departure at 12 midnight. Phone (707) 837-8700.

SANTA ROSA AIRPORTER: \$22 Round trip, \$15 one way. Stops in San Rafael, Petaluma, Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa. Guest can take taxi from Santa Rosa stop, miles from hotel, \$13 approx. taxi fare. Departs SFO every hour 35 minutes after the hour: first departure from SFO at 6:34AM, last at 11:35 PM. Phone (707) 545-8015.

TAXI SERVICE

Yellow Taxi (707) 544-4444

Airport Connections & Taxi (707) 526-4888 or (707) 545-8015

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Hertz Rent-A-Car (Sonoma County Airport) (707) 528-0834

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DESTINATION MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

California Wine Tours (Bus, Limo, Town Cars and Vans)
Contact: Liz Capurro or Mike Marino (707) 938-4248

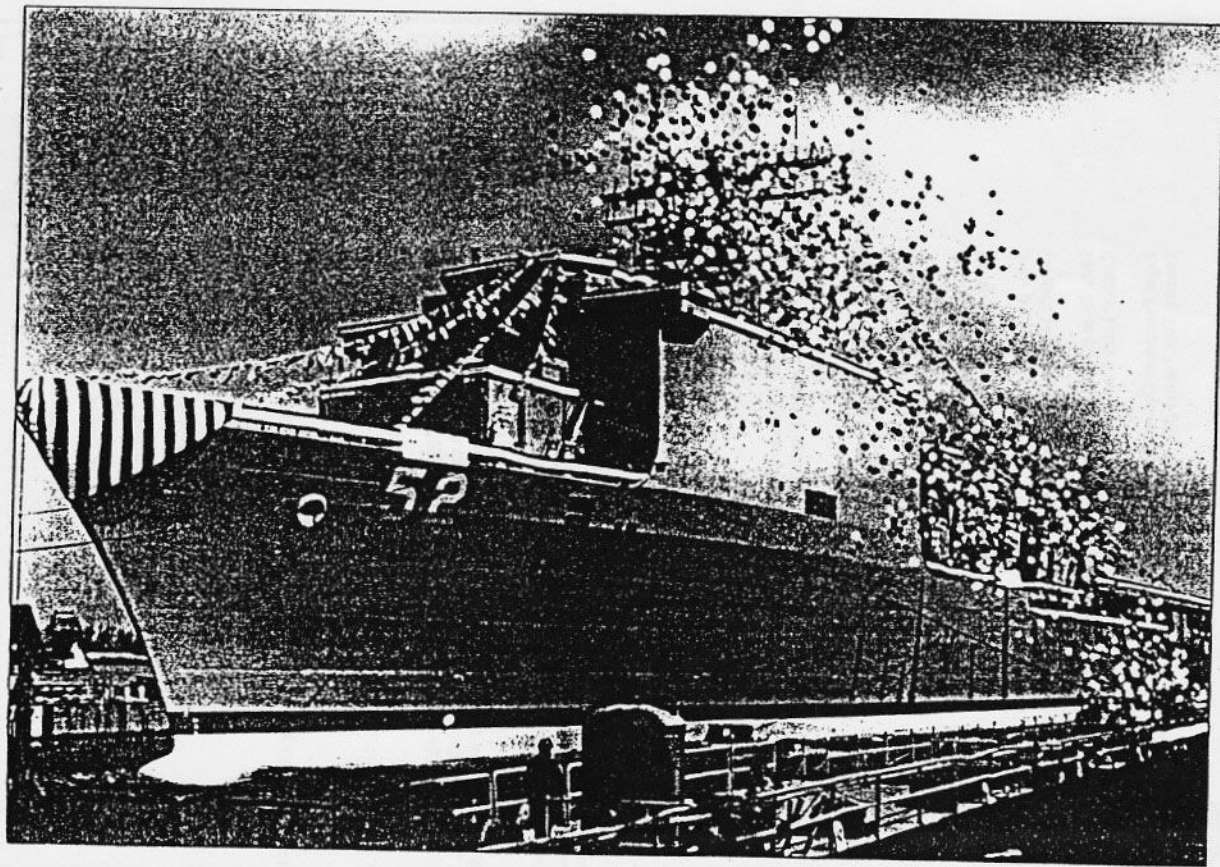
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LSD 52-USS PEARL HARBOR

USS WEST VIRGINIA REUNION ASSN.

FINANCIAL REPORT--31 OCTOBER 1997

CASH BALANCE 10/31/96 \$5968.18 \$5968.18

Support & Renenue 1997

Roster Sales \$ 240.00

Small Stores (Reunion Sales) 850.00

Reunion Registrations 2160.00

Cash Donations (1997) 360.00

Misc. Reunion Sales 328.50

TOTAL INCOME 1997

\$3938.50 + \$5968.18 = \$9906.68

Expenditures 1997

Small Stores \$ 284.58

Donations:

WW II Memorial 100.00

WVa Wreath 12/7/41

at Arizona Memorial 100.00

Navy Memorial (DC) 100.00

School Donation 50.00

News Letters (2&Reminder) 2407.64

Misc. Office Expenses 40.00

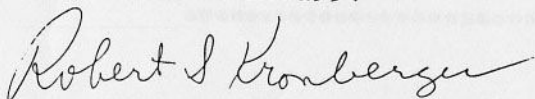
Telephone Expenses 57.36

Reunion Incidentals 212.00

TOTAL EXPENSES \$3351.58 - \$3351.58 = \$6555.10

Small Stores Inventory 97 \$ 400.00 \$ 400.00

Total Assets 31 Oct 1997 \$6955.10



Robert S. Kronberger, Reunion Coordinator

1998 W Va REUNION

September 16th-20th 1998

Santa Rosa, California



Sonoma County

Hilton
Santa Rosa

54 Miles North of San Francisco

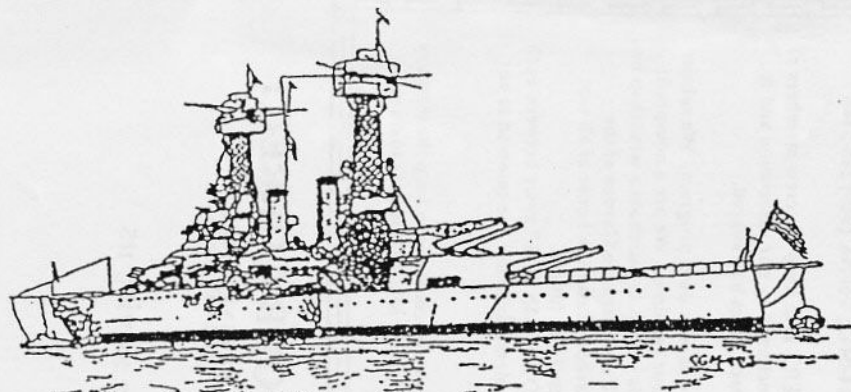
Commuter Air Or

Bus Service from Oakland or

San Francisco Airports

(complete data in next issue of Mountaineer)

Start Making Your Plans Now!



U. S. S. WEST VIRGINIA

Reunion Association
c/o Robert S. Kronberger
PO Box 442, Big Bear City, CA 92314-0442

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