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FRA *today*



THE USS LIBERTY STORY

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Featured

18 THE USS *LIBERTY* STORY

Israeli forces attacked the USS *Liberty* in 1967 in what was officially deemed a tragic case of mistaken identity. Crewmembers, including several FRA shipmates, contend it was a deliberate attack that killed 34 Americans and wounded 174 others.

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ON THE COVER

Prior to the Israeli attack, the USS *Liberty* was one of the United States Navy's most advanced intelligence gathering platforms. After the June 8, 1967, assault, she was deemed unsalvageable and sold for scrap. Photo from the Naval History and Heritage Command (www.history.navy.mil)

Living History



Lauren Armstrong

I'VE NEVER BEEN MUCH of a history buff. It certainly wasn't my favorite subject in school and memorizing historic dates and figures always seemed dry as dust to me. But history comes to life for me if I can put it into some sort of personal context. This month's feature on the USS *Liberty* is a perfect example.

Liberty crewmembers Ernie Gallo and Phil Tourney were kind enough to share their written accounts of the 1967 attack and allow *FRA Today* to reprint large portions of their work. Additionally, personal accounts by Don Pageler, John Gidusko and "Buffalo" Bob Casale; e-mail exchanges with Ron Kukal and a phone interview with Larry Bowen all made this tragic chapter in our nation's military history come alive for me. Hearing their stories was like having a front-row seat to the real-life spectacle that unfolded on that fateful day. And the passion with which they continue to pursue justice for their lost shipmates — nearly 50 years later — is better than any television drama. Thank you, gentlemen, for entrusting your story to me. I am sincerely humbled to have had the opportunity to retell it to our readers.

These men lived history and were generous enough to document it for posterity. Documenting personal accounts is so critically important to preserving history, particularly in cases like this, where there are conflicting versions of the truth.

I encourage everyone to share their personal stories with others. It doesn't have to be a dramatic account of a significant historic event, though I'm sure many of you have powerful and poignant stories of duty from WWII, Korea, Vietnam and the Arabian Gulf. But it's equally important to share your memories of liberty calls (keep 'em clean for the grandkids, though) and shipboard practical jokes. Write them down or share them orally with family members who can pass them on to future generations.

Today really is tomorrow's history and we're all writing this most current chapter in tomorrow's history books. We might not be mentioned on the nightly news and school children might not learn our names in history class, but our family and friends will appreciate our efforts to make a difference in the world. Be sure to document those efforts so your personal history isn't lost.

Lauren Armstrong is FRA's Director of Communications and serves as the Managing Editor of *FRA Today*. Please contact her at lauren@fra.org.

FRA today

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At a Crossroads as FRA Heads for 100

DURING FRA'S NATIONAL BOARD of Directors' mid-year meeting in April, board members heard reports from our finance officer, our auditors, our investment broker and our insurance administrator about the impact our declining membership is having on FRA's finances and its future. It's no surprise that our dues revenue is declining in direct proportion to our membership numbers, but the impact is much greater than that. Fewer shipmates also means fewer donors to our fundraising campaigns, lower rates paid by our magazine advertisers, reduced royalties from our affinity partners and a diminished voice on Capitol Hill. The bottom line is that FRA needs to increase its member base and associated revenue if we are going to remain viable for the future. Doing so will require some out-of-the-box thinking, some uncomfortable changes to our culture and some tough choices about advancing our organization.

Board members also heard a report from Brodie-Collins Consulting (BCC), a firm hired to examine our membership challenges and make recommendations for addressing them. Based on BCC's professional experience with organizations like ours, they believe that a membership base of at least 107,000 shipmates is required to sustain our organization. (This means we would need to more than double our current membership of approximately 51,000.) They also suggest that FRA's upcoming 100th anniversary is a prime opportunity to launch some membership and fundraising initiatives that will help us reach that goal by 2024.

Based on interviews with many shipmates and best business practices,

BCC recommends several strategies for streamlining National Headquarters operations, many of which can be implemented at little to no additional expense and without compromising service to our members. Other recommendations include more structured training for shipmates on recruiting tactics and strengthening our mentoring programs for branch and regional officers.

The bottom line is that FRA needs to increase its member base and associated revenue if we are going to remain viable for the future.

BCC also offers several recommendations for increasing FRA's membership base. The quickest and least expensive strategy is to expand FRA's membership eligibility to include spouses, children and grandchildren. Doing so would not compromise our tax-exempt status with the IRS and would allow us to attract people who are already familiar with our good work. Reaching out to prospective members who already know about our mission provides a better chance of success and, if each shipmate could recruit just one family member to support our mission, it would double our membership. Such an expanded membership criteria would obviously have



Virgil Courneya

an impact on the FRA Auxiliary, since their membership also draws on family members. FRA and Auxiliary leaders will be discussing this option to see how we might work together to protect the future of both organizations.

BCC also advocates the use of direct mail marketing to acquire new members who are not currently familiar with the FRA. Investing in such an effort will pay dividends in increased membership and revenue but requires a large up-front investment. To meet these costs, BCC suggests we establish a five-year Centennial Campaign to seek contributions from shipmates and other donors who support our efforts. Contributions provide the greatest and most immediate source of new funding, can close the gap between revenue and operational costs and can also be used to build an endowment fund to sustain FRA for the future. To advance this initiative, BCC recommends hiring a Director of Development to orchestrate these new fundraising initiatives.

Board members will be working with the National Headquarters staff to evaluate the BCC plan and decide how to proceed. Some resulting proposals will be introduced as resolutions to be considered and voted upon by delegates at FRA's national convention in October. I encourage each and every shipmate to have an open mind and take a long view of FRA's viability when considering these resolutions.

Change is seldom easy, but it is necessary to keep our organization relevant and thriving into our second century.

Virgil Courneya was elected to serve as FRA's national president during the 2015–2016 Association year. He is a member of Branch 274 (Reno, Nev.).

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Long-Term Care Rip-Off

I recently attended a hearing hosted by the Maryland Insurance Administration, the topic being long-term care (LTC) insurance. Dozens of policy holders gave testimonies as to how their LTC policies were becoming impossible to afford. These people were being priced out of policies for which they've been paying for many years. The appeal of these policies was that by purchasing them at a relatively early age, a lower rate would apply. Possible future rate increases were downplayed in the sales pitch. Now the insurance companies are saying that people are living longer than expected and more policy holders are holding on to their policies than originally anticipated. As a result, policy payouts are higher than projected and the insurance companies' investments did not meet expectations. Consequently, these companies have been steadily raising their rates at incredible levels to cover their losses. In other words, the policy holders are being forced to pay for the insurance companies' mistakes.

I've had a policy since 1999 and, like others, I purchased it to try to lock in a lower rate for the insurance I might need in the future. Since then, the insurance company has raised the fees several times, with the amount only limited by our state insurance administration. They routinely request almost 40-percent increases, which fortunately have been limited to 15 percent. They then repeat the increase requests and admit that they will continue to do so indefinitely. My guess is that none of the insurance company employees responsible for their poor business predictions and investments have been financially penalized as much as the policy holders have. Were it not for the Maryland Insurance Administration, policy holders would have had to give up policies or see a reduction in benefits to a near useless level. This is actually what the insurance companies want us to do.

I urge anyone considering purchasing this type of insurance to consider investing what they would have paid and self-insure. You will probably do better than the insurance companies have done. I hope this can help some shipmates avoid a costly mistake.

E. S. Dashiell

Supporting Spouses of the Fallen

Thank you so much for your great work in helping support our armed forces. *FRA Today* is a publication I look forward to receiving each month. The benefits of this organization are enormous. As you may know by my membership, I served with the Marine Corps in Vietnam and have been awarded the Purple Heart. I have a special place in my heart for wounded or fallen military men and women, and that's the reason for this letter.

I drive for a shuttle service and, on a particular occasion, took a group of women that were survivors of fallen "Special Ops Heroes" to a dinner. In speaking with them, I realized these very strong and courageous women get together to offer as much support for one another as they can. Their funds are limited, as are many things today, but I was wondering if any groups within the various armed forces could offer any assistance to this group?

God bless our military and God Bless this country!

Tim Holliday

FRA Response: *Thanks so much for sharing this with us, Shipmate!*

FRA and the FRA Auxiliary have branches and units all over the world and our members may be able to assist on a local level by sponsoring events or offering manpower support. If any shipmates or Auxiliary members want more information, they can visit <http://specialopssurvivors.org/>

Submissions Send *Shipmate Forum* letters to Editor, *FRA Today*, 125 N. West St. Alexandria, VA 22314. E-mail submissions may be sent to fratoday@fra.org. Please include "Shipmate Forum" in the subject line. FRA reserves the right to select and edit letters for publication. Letters published in *Shipmate Forum* reflect the opinions and views of FRA members. They do not necessarily reflect the official position of FRA as a whole. FRA is not responsible for the accuracy of letter content.



Have a BIG TIME in Jacksonville!!

Shipmates and Auxiliary members are gearing up for our national conventions, scheduled for October 11–16th.

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John Davis

More Devaluation of Military Service

HEALTH CARE FOR MILITARY personnel and their dependents is currently provided through two sources: at military treatment facilities (MTF) and by referrals to civilian medical personnel. Civilian providers are primarily used in areas where military physicians are not available, specialty care is required or when the local MTF is overcrowded.

As far back as 1775, Congress established a “hospital” (technically a medical department) to care for the military. In 1818, a permanent medical department was established and in 1943, Congress authorized the Emergency Maternal and Infant Care Program (EMIC). The EMIC extended military health care for the wives and children of service members in the lower pay grades. In 1966, the Civilian Health and Medical Program for the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) was established, which was the forerunner to the current TRICARE program that was established in 1993.

Active duty members and their families currently do not pay enrollment fees, annual deductibles or copayments in the TRICARE network, but that may change soon. The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) version of the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, H.R. 4909) proposes an annual enrollment fee for active duty personnel (and their dependents) who join the military on or after January 1, 2018. (See story below for more details on NDAA.)

This, along with last year’s reduction in retirement benefits for future service members, is part of an alarming, budget-driven trend to devalue benefits for active duty and the career military personnel. FRA will fight to preserve these earned benefits for the enlisted Sea Services. Members are urged to use the FRA Action Center (at <http://action.fra.org/action-center/>) to ask their legislators to oppose these new TRICARE fees.

HASC Approves: 2017 NDAA with new TRICARE Fees

The House Armed Services Committee’s (HASC) version of the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, H.R. 4909) proposes substantial changes to the TRICARE program, particularly for those currently serving and their family members. FRA is thankful that the HASC did not include the Administration’s request for a TRICARE for Life (TFL) enrollment fee for new beneficiaries or FY 2017 TRICARE fee increases and large pharmacy co-pays for retirees under age 65.

The HASC members approved:

- Authorizing TRICARE Prime enrollment increase (\$14 increase for individuals and \$18 increase for families);
- Authorizing a new TRICARE fee (\$150/year for individuals and \$300/year for families) for active duty personnel who join the military after January 1, 2018;
- Authorizing a new enrollment fee (\$100/year for individuals and \$200/year for families) for TRICARE Standard starting in 2020, if the U.S. Comptroller General certifies quality-of-care improvements;
- Reorganizing TRICARE for military retirees under age 65 into two programs, Prime (HMO) and TRICARE Standard (which would include TRICARE Retired Reserve, TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Young Adult);
- Rejecting the Administration’s request for FY 2017 TRICARE fee increases and large pharmacy co-pays for military retirees under age 65, and for a TRICARE for Life (TFL) enrollment fee for new beneficiaries;
- An active duty annual pay increase (2.1 percent) that keeps pace with civilian pay increases, which is larger than that requested by the Administration;
- Extending the expiration date from Oct. 1, 2017, to Oct. 1, 2018, for the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) for military widows/widowers, without any increase to the benefit;
- Providing a pilot program for select commissaries to offer variable pricing models and introduce private label products into the commissary system; and
- Revising the Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act (USFSPA) to require awards to former spouses be based on a service member’s grade/years of service at the time of divorce, not at the time of retirement.

Unfortunately, no amendments were offered improving concurrent receipt. As *FRA Today* goes to press, the bill is being considered by the full House. The Senate will soon begin subcommittee and committee markup of its version of the FY 2017 NDAA. Once both chambers approve their respective versions of the bill, a conference committee will be appointed to resolve the differences between the two. The final bill will be voted on by both chambers and, if approved, it will be sent to the president to sign into law or veto.

VETERANS ISSUES

FRA Honors Congressman Tim Walz

For the past 20 years, FRA has presented its highest award to a member of Congress who goes above and beyond to advance FRA's legislative agenda. FRA presented its prestigious, annual Pinnacle Award to Minnesota Congressman Tim Walz to honor his outstanding leadership in preserving and enhancing the quality of life for military personnel, retirees, veterans and their families.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee, Walz has championed important legislation aimed at reducing military and veteran suicides, streamlining the process by which the VA receives medical information for disability claims and securing "veteran status" for members of the reserve component who do not currently qualify for that recognition. He also co-chairs the House Guard and Reserve Caucus and is chairman of the House Democratic VSO/MSO roundtable group that meets quarterly to discuss the concerns in the military and veteran arena.



FRA National President Virgil Courneya and Auxiliary President Helen Courneya presented the 2015 Pinnacle Award to Rep. Tim Walz at a Capitol Hill ceremony. (FRA photo by Chris Slawinski.)

Subcommittee Hearing on Gulf War Illness

Two subcommittees (Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, and Oversight and Investigations) of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) recently held a joint hearing examining VA's disability claims process for veterans afflicted with Gulf War Illness. VA's own data reveals that at least 80 percent of claims for Gulf War Illness are denied. The data is specific to undiagnosed illnesses and chronic multi-symptom illnesses, both of which are presumed to be service-related conditions.

FRA continues its strong advocacy for a streamlined claims process and supports all initiatives that reduce the backlog of unresolved claims and appeals.

White House Launches VA Employment Website

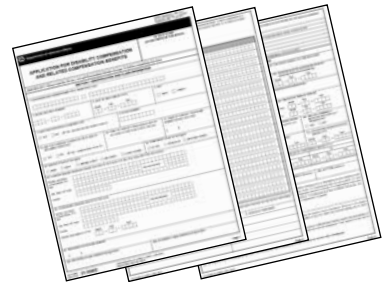
The Obama Administration recently launched a new website designed to help connect veterans with employers, called the Veterans Employment Center. The website is intended to consolidate and simplify government employment resources for veterans, while also giving employers a database of resumes for veterans and their spouses.

The program, hosted on the Department of Veterans Affairs website, is part of the Joining Forces initiative from First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Jill Biden. For more information visit www.vets.gov/employment/

Subcommittee Reviews IT Program for VA Choice Program

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee also held a hearing to scrutinize the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) implementation of improvements to its Information Technology (IT) related to the VA Choice Program. The committee heard directly from Dr. David Shulkin, VA Under-Secretary for Health, and Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology LaVerne H. Council on issues surrounding VA's IT scheduling and community care provider claims processing system, as well as the new system that will support the consolidation of community care networks.

FRA supported the enacting legislation for the VA Choice program in 2014 and welcomes the subcommittee's oversight hearing. FRA believes that the VA Choice program has merit, but it will require significant oversight by Congress to ensure its effectiveness.

VA Technology Helps Identify Claims Errors

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that it has identified claim processing errors for more than 14,000 veterans and survivors. The VA's Beneficiary Fiduciary Field System has helped the department to recognize processing mistakes on veterans' and survivors' claims that were initially filed over the course of many years. The errors are related to cases in which VA had determined the beneficiary was unable to manage his or her VA benefits without assistance, due to disability or age, but no action was taken to transfer the claim for appointment of a fiduciary. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has set up a team to immediately review the cases, notify beneficiaries, complete the claim processing steps and appoint a fiduciary as quickly as possible. For more information, members can call the VA fiduciary line 1-888-407-0144.

FRA Storms Capitol Hill

Members of FRA's National Board of Directors (NBOD) and other Association leaders brought the enlisted perspective to Capitol Hill in mid-April when they visited their respective elected officials in Washington, D.C. These shipmates shared the Association's position on priority legislative issues with their senators and representatives, asking them to oppose the Administration's call for drastically higher TRICARE Prime fees and co-pays, new enrollment fees for TRICARE Standard and new TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries.

FRA leaders asked lawmakers to pass legislation to reduce the disability claims backlog at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and to extend disability benefits to "Blue Water" Vietnam veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide while serving off the coast of Vietnam. These shipmates also asked legislators to support



Sen. John Cornyn (center) met Texas constituents RPSC Don Gibson, Margie Jean Gibson, NVP Don Larson and FRA's Assistant Director of Veterans Programs Brian Condon.

concurrent receipt reform and repeal the Survivor Benefit Program (SBP) Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset for military widows and widowers. FRA wants to thank the shipmates who sent more than 3,000 advocacy messages to

Capitol Hill in conjunction with the NBOD visits to Capitol Hill.

The issues enumerated above and other key issues are listed on the FRA Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center).

The FRA Legislative Team is National Executive Director Tom Snee, Director of Legislative Programs John Davis, Assistant Director of Legislative Programs Stephen Tassin, Assistant Director of Veterans' Programs Brian Condon and National Veterans Service Director Chris Slawinski.



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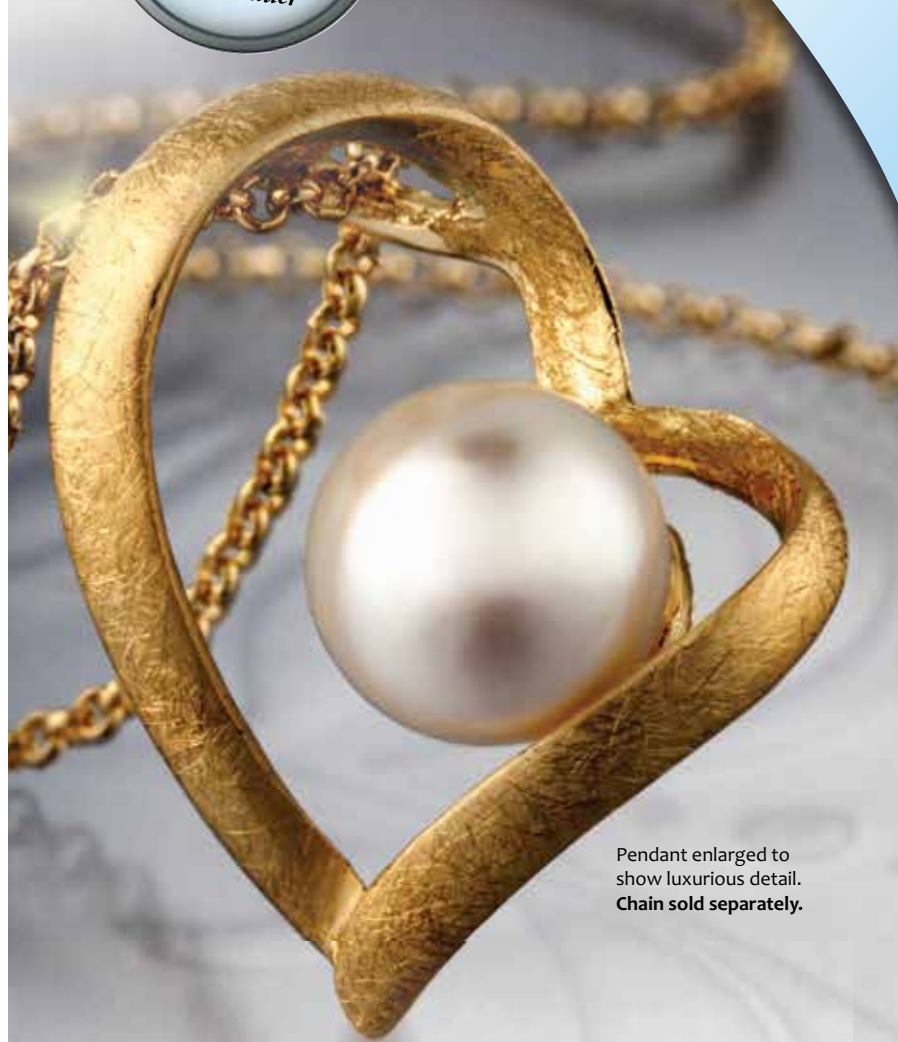
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Base Access is Base Success for FRA

FOR MANY YEARS, BASE command- ing officers and senior enlisted lead- ers have used the analogy that “If we let FRA on base, then we have to let on everyone else, too.” This has led to a broad-brushed ban on letting vari- ous groups set up information booths, stands, etc., on military installations. But in late 2014, then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel changed that when he sent policy memorandums to Defense Department leaders, offering guidelines on allowing non-profit or- ganizations access to bases. I recently had the opportunity to ask current SecDef Ashton Carter if the Hagel ini- tiatives are still in place for veteran ser- vice and military service organizations; Secretary Carter assured me they are.

In the memos, Hagel acknowl- edged that “National VSOs and MSOs are a critical component of our over- all framework of care for our service members throughout all phases of their military service, but especially their transition to civilian life and vet- eran status.” He also emphasized that it is in DoD’s best interest to maintain strong and positive relationships with organizations like FRA.

The memos included six directives that are designed to remove barriers to base access and make policies more consistent across the Department of Defense. The memos include the fol- lowing guidance*:

- Installation commanders will provide available space and as- sociated services on military installations allowing national VSOs and MSOs to provide VA- accredited representation services to transitioning service members.
- All requests and decisions on in- stallation access, use of space or logistical support will be made in writing.

- Installation commanders are directed to be welcoming and supportive of non-profit organi- zations that enhance morale and readiness of the force and are con- sistent with mission requirements and security constraints.
- Training and education will be provided in regular pre-com- mand, judge advocate and public affairs officer training courses to educate personnel on the authori- ties and flexibilities associated with procedures and support to both accredited VSOs and MSOs, and military support nonprofit organizations.
- DOD will use consistent and standard procedures to process requests for installation access with new tools and templates pro- vided to aid in consistent and fair assessment and adjudication of requests for access and space.
- Commanders are authorized to use official command com- munication channels, including Transition Assistance Program materials, to inform service troops of the availability of servic- es and support on the installation provided by VSOs, MSOs and military-supporting nonprofits.

It is critically important to notice that the installation commanders have the discretion to refuse access to any organization; they are not required to let MSOs and VSOs on installations to *recruit* new members. FRA will be allowed base access to provide infor- mation, improve morale or other- wise support the installation mission. Distributing *FRA Today* in base wait- ing areas (hospital, pharmacy, barber shop, etc.) and setting up information tables are the easiest and most com- mon examples, but don’t be afraid to



Tom Snee

propose more active forms of engage- ment. Host a welcome home event for service members returning from deployment; work with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) coordina- tor to offer a briefing or information to separating or retiring service mem- bers; or ask how you might provide support and information to the base Retired Activities Office.

If FRA shipmates provide useful information and prove themselves and our organization to be a reliable source of accurate and relevant infor- mation, both the service personnel and the FRA will benefit.

It’s equally important to remember that it is still up to the commander to review written requests to be on his/ her installation to conduct any sort of activity. It may be helpful to educate the commander about FRA’s mission and what you hope to accomplish by establishing an FRA presence on his/ her base. Be sure to include some or all of the following points when submit- ting your written request for access.

The FRA:

- Supports, on a non-interfering basis, the performance of official duties of the installation and its support enterprises, such as ex- changes, commissaries, etc.;
- Supports strong community ser- vice on bases in connection with local PAO and military training to better inform active, reserve, retired and veteran members and their families;
- Actively supports DoD events and their missions around the world;
- Supports social and recognition programs for DoD members and families; e.g., Sailor of the Year, Recruiter of the Year, Enlisted Persons of the Year (Coast Guard),

continued on page 16

* Source: *DoD News*, Jan. 16, 2015

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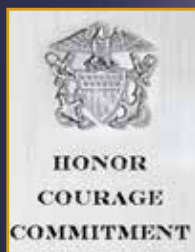
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Acompañado, Dominici B., USN	127	Fournier, Roger T, YNC, USN	042
Anderson, William E, MSGT, USMC	MAL	Fouts, Alan A, LT, USN	067
Anding, Loran C, ASCS, USN	276	Frick, John L, AFCM, USN	126
Angelini, James E, AKCS, USN	MAL	Fritz, Maurice W, AECS, USCG	051
Angle, Jimmy L, PO1, USN	MAL		
Atkins, Washington, AW1, USN	MAL	Getz, William A, MMCM, USN	MAL
		Gilpin, Orville E, MSGT, USMC	049
Baker, Donald V, EO1, USN	MAL	Green, Marvin J, BTC, USN	099
Bartkoviak, Emrick S, ADJ1, USN	201	Griffin, Willie L, PO2, USN	MAL
Bauer, William P, MMCS, USN	061		
Bauer, Dorothy J, S 1/C, USN	371	Hagan, Ralph, ADCS, LCDR, USN	124
Becker, Louis P, BUC, USN	117	Hagerty, Roger C, COL, USMC	244
Beuttel, Delmont R, HMC, USN	001	Harreschou, Robert C, CWO2, USN	MAL
Billington, Harry A, RMCM, USN	MAL	Harris, Michael G, AQC, USN	MAL
Blasen, John R, ABF2, USN	012	Hedley, Charles R, GYSGT, USMC	MAL
Boren, James A, AMS1, USN	MAL	Helberg, Glenn E., QMC, USN	089
Borucki, Edward F., CYM, USN	046	Henderson, Robert M, YNCS, USN	183
Boyer, Charles D, AMHC, USN	MAL	Herrick, Thomas C, AEC, USN	293
Bradshaw, Victor S, SH1, USN	MAL	Hingst, Darrell D, AO1, USN	273
Britt, Douglas G, EMC, USN	268	Hipp, William J, LCDR, USN	MAL
		Hotard, Emile D, SCPO, USN	092
Cantrell, Joe D, MS2, USN	280	Howard, Jerry O, RMC, USN	382
Carpenter, Fred D., SK1, USN	077	Howard, James P, ADC, USN	126
Carr, Kenneth M, VADM, USN	060	Hughes, Robert L, RMC, USN	MAL
Carroll, William J, BMC, USN	099		
Castagneri, Guido A, ADJC, USN	MAL	Jeffers, Ralph, ADC, USN	124
Chaney, Wayne C, YNC, USN	061	Johnson, Fae, SN, USN	130
Chmura, Bolac J, ADRC, USN	201	Jones, Franklin E, UTC, USN	120
Cobb, Dwight L, CWO 4, USN	046	Jordan, Donald E, AMS1, USN	MAL
Colern, Richard M, RM1, USN	175	Juntunen, Francis E, FTCS, USN	245
Copeland, C E, GYSGT, USMC	089		
Coutroubis, Peter, GMC, USN	MAL	Kelley, George L, RMCS, USN	MAL
Cunningham, Russell R, ETC, USN	342	Kelly, Fonville, LCDR, USN	MAL
		Knaley, Michael J, TM1, USN	117
Dacorte, George F, MSGT, USMC	175	Kurtzke, John F, RADM, USN	181
Dambrosio, Albert, DCC, USN	072		
Dechand, Richard C, MRC, USN	310	Lear, Donald N, AVCM/AC/TAR, USNR	089
Del Campo, Raymond E, PO1, USN	MAL	Leary, Raymond N, CSC, USN	146
Demitropoulos, Alex, LT, USN	038	Lefaver, Ralph J, LTJG, USN	120
Dempster, Lloyd R., ADCS, USN	120	Lemoine, Leo A, YNC, USN	MAL
Dodd, Richard E, POCS, USN	251	Lester, Elmer H, SK1, USN	MAL
		Lochner, Earl D, EMCM, USN	109
Eddy, De Wayne V, WO3, USN	008	Lucas, John S, BMC, USN	044
Emmons, Ronald K, DTC, USN	067	Lupejkis, Gerald F, AFCM, USN	060
Engelken, James K, LCDR, USN	070		
Engler, Robert E, GYSGT, USMC	070	Mackinnon, Phillip A, MGYSGT, USMC	MAL
Farmer, William H, EMC, USN	269	McClanahan, Richard L, PO1	244
Fedyski, John E, ATC, USN	012		



NAME	BRANCH
Memory, Gordon K, ET1, USN	MAL
Meneses, Crescencio A, SKC, USN	101
Nelson, Wilfred G, EMCM(SS), USN	020
Newkirk, David E, ETC(SS), USN	MAL
Parker, Albert W, ADCS, USN	086
Pettegrow, Dale A, FTCS, USN	MAL
Ratliff, Cecil W, HTCM, USN	MAL
Reynolds, Joe E, AT2, USN	294
Rice, William G, PRC, USN	022
Richards, John, CSCM, USN	MAL
Richardson, Donald C, LCDR, USN	162
Richmond, Wood H, ADRC, USN	126
Robinson, Charles H, CSCS, USN	219
Robinson, Lloyd, PO1(HM1), USN	208
Runowicz, Edward J, ADC, USN	MAL
Schonhorst, John B, AMS1, USN	161
Schultz, Robert W, AD1, USN	170
Sermonia, Frank I, PO1, USN	099
Smith, Claire H, RM1, USCG	MAL
Stein, Gerald A, USN	166
Stephenson, Frank L, MM, USN	061
Stoke, Henry W, LCDR, USN	289
Taylor, Charles R, BTC, USN	MAL
Tidwell, Walter S, AO1, USN	001
Vivian, John E, POC, USN	051
Walker, James E, WTCS, USN	MAL
Weiss, George W, HMC, USN	MAL
Worrall, George B, BMC, USN	061

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Holy Loch, Scotland

May 17–21, 2017, Dunoon, Scotland. Contact Doug Ebert at 307-249-3468 or lochsailor9@charter.net

NMCB1/MCB1/9/10

October 13-16, 2016, King Of Prussia, PA. Contact Peter Dowd, 89 Edwards Rd., Marshfield, MA 02050, 781-837-0393, mcb1reunion@verizon.net

Patron Four Five (VP-45) Association Reunion

October 19–23, 2016, Charleston, SC. Contact Doug Mitchell at 678-650-7500 or poohbearmit@aol.com

USS America (CV/CVA-66)

September 13–17, 2016, Buffalo, NY. Contact Harry Rodriguez, P.O. Box 1239, Hopewell Junction, NY 12533, 1-888-391-2866, hatron10@aol.com

USS Bache (DD/DDE-470)

September 12–17, 2016, Boston, MA. Contact Tom Blaszczyk, 18201 Patrick Ave., Country Club Hills, IL 60478, 708-798-8782, tblaszczyk@sbcglobal.net

USS Fairfax County (LST-1193)

March 3–5, 2017, New Orleans, LA. Contact Kurtiss Schroeder at 701-388-4386.

USS Mahan (DD-364/DLG-11/DDG-42/DDG-72)

October 12–16, 2016, Providence, RI. Contact Gary White, 10534 Rippling Fields Dr., Houston, TX 77064-4298, 713-501-7823 or 281-890-7823, gankintx@comcast.net

USS McMorris (DE-1036)

September 22–25, 2016, Boston, MA. Contact Jules Or Lorraine Galbreth, 313 Parkwood Place, Lewisville, TX 75067, 972-219-9674, julorgal@yahoo.com

USS Perkins (DD-26, DD-377, DDR-877)

September 14–17, 2016, San Pedro, CA. Contact George H. Melgarejo, 1280 W 2nd St., San Pedro, CA 90732-3208, 310-831-5417, melgarejogeorge@yahoo.com

USS Piedmont (AD-17)

October 5–9, 2016, Savannah Ga. Contact Kent Thomas, 7800 W. 158th St., Overland Park, KS 66223, 913-381-8934, kthomasgolf@aol.com

USCGC Southwind (WAGB-280)

September 15–18, 2016, San Antonio, TX. Contact Edward F. Clancy, 888 6th Street North, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250, 904-242-9070, clancyedward@bellsouth.net



USS Walke (DD-723) Association Reunion

September 25–30, 2016, Asheville, NC. Contact Gene Hansen, PO Box 1695, Cashiers, NC 28717-1695, 828-883-7231, gene@ha1040.com

USS Westchester County (LST-1167)

August 30–September 2, 2016, Kansas City, MO. Contact John Nosek at LST1167@gmail.com

All reunion notices must be submitted in writing. Members are authorized one free reunion posting/year and can post reunions online at www.fra.org, submit via e-mail to VictoriaD@fra.org or in writing to FRA Reunions, 125 N. West St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Please include your FRA member number and a daytime phone number. Questions regarding reunion submissions should be directed to 1-800-FRA-1924, ext. 124.

All *Looking For ...* notices must be submitted in writing. Members can submit requests via e-mail to Lauren@fra.org or in writing to FRA Looking For, 125 N. West St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Questions regarding *Looking For ...* submissions should be directed to 1-800-FRA-1924, ext. 126.

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Tom Snee is FRA's National Executive Director and can be reached at NEDFRA@fra.org.

Membership Matters continued from page 12

MOVING FORWARD

2016 – 2017



Continuing Programs

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Any FRA or Auxiliary member who recruits/sponsors three (3) new or reinstated FRA members will be eligible to receive the red/white/blue collectible pin.

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Artist's rendering of the Moving Forward Pins. Actual pin design may vary and is smaller than shown.



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A black and white photograph of the USS Liberty (GTR-5) at sea. The ship is a large, complex vessel with multiple masts, antennas, and a satellite dish. The hull number 'GTR-5' is clearly visible on the bow. The ship is moving through the water, with other vessels visible in the distance under a cloudy sky.

BEFORE

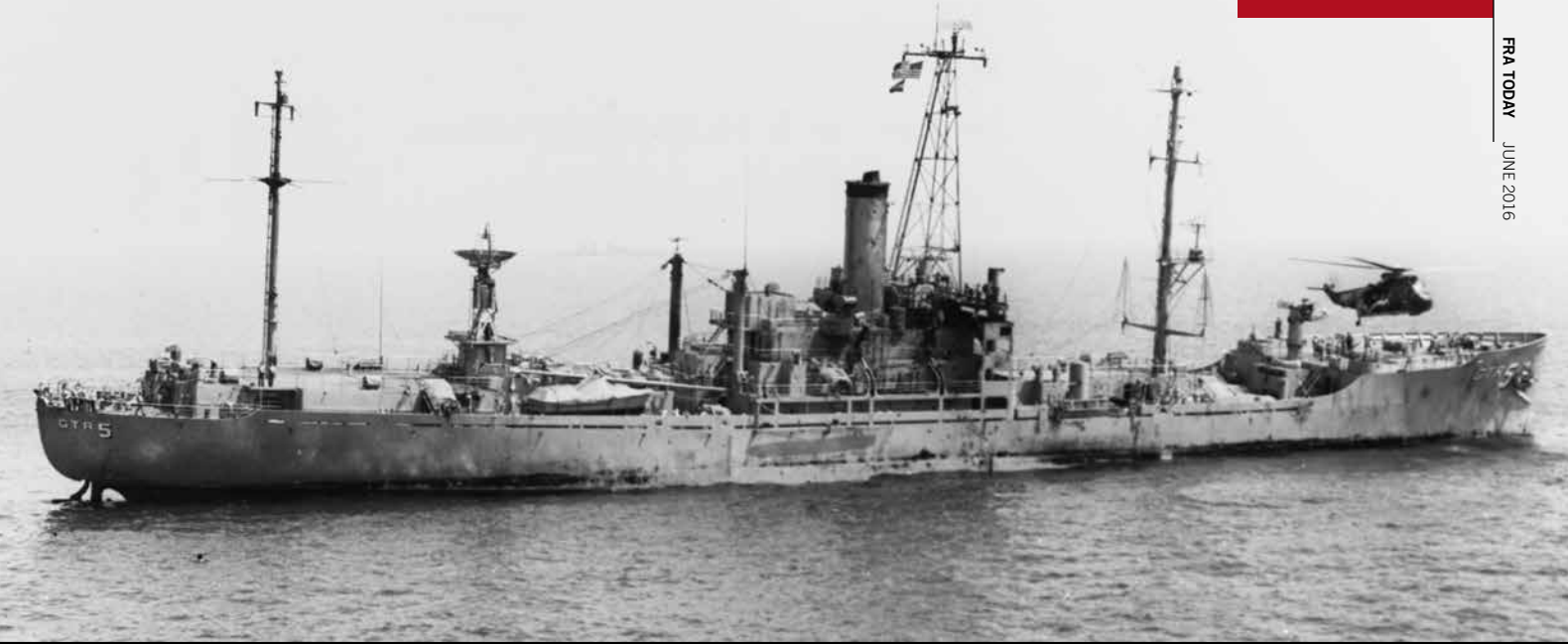
THE USS LIBE

By
Ernie Gallo,
Phil Tourney
and Lauren
Armstrong

Photos courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command

On June 8, 1967, the USS *Liberty* was attacked by Israeli Defense Forces while she was in international waters. The Israeli government said the U.S. vessel had been mistakenly identified as an Egyptian horse carrier and that the attack was a case of mistaken identity — “a tragic accident.” A U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry confirmed the Israeli position, but surviving crewmembers, including several FRA shipmates, wholeheartedly believe the attack was an intentional and willful act that killed 34 Americans and wounded 174 others. Survivors have fought for the past 49 years to have their perspective heard and a proper investigation undertaken. This is their story.

The USS *Liberty* was a technical research ship, equipped with the day’s latest technology and manned by Navy communications technicians (CTs) and other specialized crew members who held high-level security clearances. A repurposed WWII Victory cargo ship, she was lightly armed with four .50 caliber machine guns for repelling boarders. Her military mission in 1967 was to monitor, intercept, and record all radio transmissions in the ambient ether. In the days leading up to Israel’s Six-Day War with several Arab nations, she was positioned off the coast of Egypt. Although the United States remained neutral in the conflict, *Liberty’s* crew continued recovering and reporting on communications traffic in the area.



RTY STORY

THE SURVEILLANCE

June 8, 1967, dawned bright and clear, providing morning watchstanders an unencumbered view of the Israeli photo-reconnaissance aircraft that flew over the ship in the early hours of the day. These planes subjected the ship to intense scrutiny for six hours, as they conducted multiple flights over the ship, sometimes as low as 200 feet above the deck, and orbited *Liberty's* position. Like all U.S. military vessels, *Liberty* had traditional American markings: a hull number (GTR-5) on her bow and her name (*USS LIBERTY*) emblazoned across her stern. She was also flying a large U.S. flag that was standing out in the breeze on this sunny day.

Firefighter Specialist Third Class (SPF3) Phil Tourney (FRA member at large) was assigned to Sounding and Security aboard *Liberty*, which meant he was responsible for making sure the tanks of potable water were good and checking the watertight integrity of the ship. He was below decks when the "visitors" arrived, but his shipmates told him about the planes, which "were unquestionably Israeli, as the Star of David was easy to see. The guys described them as low and slow, and there was a general belief amongst the crew that Washington and Tel Aviv were working together to make sure we were safe. Knowing our 'friends' were checking on us caused the general mood to improve drastically."

THE AIR ATTACK

At approximately 1400 hours, with *Liberty* about 17 miles off the Gaza coast, the ship's radar crew observed three high-speed aircraft heading toward the ship. Without warning, the fighter aircraft launched an attack on *Liberty*, assaulting the ship with rockets, cannon fire and napalm for approximately 25 minutes.

Larry Bowen (FRA Member at Large) was a 21-year-old CT2 Radioman in the Radio Research shop, when he "heard what sounded like large, heavy deck chains being dragged across the deck. It was rocket and gunfire coming from the Israeli strafing attack. We heard the General Quarters call, followed by 'This is not a drill.' I was below decks, so I didn't have a visual perspective, but there were several flights that sent rockets, armor-piercing .50 caliber rounds, cannon fire and napalm down on us."

Tourney was returning to his workstation in the shipfitter's shop when the attack began. "As soon as I stepped in and closed the hatch, I heard an order over the PA to test the motor whale boat. A few moments after that, I heard a huge explosion right next to the hatch I'd just closed. The only logical explanation in my mind was that whoever was carrying out that order had done something wrong and the whale boat had blown up. The idea that we were under attack was the farthest thing from my mind."

Tourney made his way to his battle station, where his duty involved making sure all persons in the damage control party were accounted for and ready to take care of the ship in the event of a mishap or attack. As he was noting those who were missing amid the torrent of explosions, he suddenly noticed “a thousand points of light as holes began to appear everywhere around us. As the rocket and cannon fire struck the side and deck of the ship, sunlight was coming in where before there was none.”

He was hit with a four-inch piece of shrapnel before he moved his party to the main deck. “We were not prepared for what we would see there,” he continued. He and his shipmate Rick Aimetti immediately went to the forward gun tub to look for survivors. “I saw nothing but a pile of human remains. We knew there was no life to be saved there, so we moved on ... all while machine gun bullets and rocket fire were raining down on us. Dead and wounded bodies were everywhere on the main deck. In between volleys of fire, we darted out from safe cover, grabbed the ones who were still alive, one at a time, dragged them across the deck and threw them down the hatch. Others down below picked them up and took them someplace where they could be treated.”

Once the decks were cleared, Tourney was ordered to the log room, the location of Damage Control Central. “As was standard procedure, my supervisor was burning documents to prevent the enemy from getting any useful information. I kept thinking, ‘Who but an enemy would be attacking us?’”

He then went to the bridge, where he saw that Captain William McGonagle was badly wounded in the leg, but still calmly and professionally in command. “There were rocket and cannon holes everywhere, and burning napalm was dripping through the holes and into the bridge compartment,” he recalls. The CO2 canisters were basically useless against the intense heat of the napalm fires, so he requested a fire team with water hoses. “In hindsight, I realize this was just a waste of time, since the hoses had been shot up like a snake hit with birdshot.”

He left the bridge to secure more CO2 canisters and, upon his return, he slipped in something wet and fell violently on his back. When he got up, he realized he had slipped in the blood of his good friend Francis Brown, who’d been shot in the head. “It’s something no human being should ever have to see, especially when it’s your good friend. My first thought was, ‘Those Arab bastards just blew my friend to pieces.’ How could I have thought otherwise? I figured this attack [on our ship] was the Arabs’ last gasp after having just gotten their clocks cleaned by the Israelis [who waged a sneak attack on the Arab nations on June 5th as part of the Six-Day War] and they’d naturally be unhappy with America. We were a defenseless ship and an easy target. It would be like a turkey shoot for them, giving them a trophy to hang on the wall and talk about years later in order to lessen the sting of what was such a humiliating loss.” Tourney’s suspicions were strengthened when he learned that



The torpedo hit *Liberty* at and below the waterline, creating a 24- by 39-foot hole in her hull.

the attacking aircraft had no markings on them.

At the beginning of the attack, the *Liberty*'s radiomen and electronic technicians attempted to send a May day. Their SOS did not identify the attacker, as it was unknown at that time. The transmission antenna had been damaged during the initial stages of the attack, but a makeshift antenna was rigged and calls for help were sent. There is reason to believe that those distress signals were jammed by the attackers, but eventually the calls for backup were received and, about 15 minutes into the Israeli air attack, the USS *Saratoga* responded by launching fighter aircraft to assist *Liberty*. Although the crew wouldn't learn of it until later, the rescue flights were aborted within minutes after launch.

“The White House recalled all aircraft, abandoning the USS *Liberty* and subjecting her to an additional hour of an Israeli turkey shoot,” says Ernie Gallo, who was a CT2 at the time of the attack. “In disbelief, RADM Raymond Geis, Sixth Fleet Carrier Division Commander, challenged the order, as was his right and responsibility in this situation. Unbelievably, the White House reaffirmed the order to recall all aircraft despite *Liberty*'s plea for help. Without a full and complete investigation, it cannot be determined if Sixth Fleet aircraft would have prevented the subsequent Israeli torpedo boat attack, that accounted for 25 of the 34 crew deaths that day.”

Gallo didn't personally hear the exchange, but he and other crewmembers quote President Johnson's reported command: “Recall the damn planes. I don't care who dies; I'm not going to embarrass my allies.”

“USS *America* was able to communicate with Washington, D.C., and had an open line with President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The order to recall the United States strike force was given by McNamara,” says Bob Casale, who reported to *Liberty* in 1964 as a CT2. He was not aboard during the attack, but has done considerable research and estimates the air attack was ending at about the same time U.S.

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jets left the USS *Saratoga*. Casale and many of his shipmates believe that if the U.S. jets had not been recalled, they would have arrived on the scene about the same time Israeli torpedo boats were posturing for their attack on *Liberty*. They contend that, if the American jets had been deployed as originally ordered, the 25 deaths that resulted from the torpedo blast might have been prevented.

THE TORPEDO ATTACK

When the jets realized they couldn't sink *Liberty*, they called off the attack and left. Before the crew could breathe a sigh of relief, Captain McGonagle came over the intercom, ordering the crew to prepare for a torpedo hit, starboard side.

"I could see the torpedo boats coming at us at a high rate of speed," Tourney recalls. "Unlike the jets, the boats were proudly flying their flag with its Star of David. I initially breathed a sigh of relief, foolishly thinking that our beloved ally had scared off the jets and were coming to our rescue. That delusion lasted for only a minute, until I saw the splash of several torpedoes being dropped in the water as they headed toward us. Unable to find a big enough vein during the air assault, the vampire now moved to a different part of our neck, searching out the jugular."

Three torpedo boats fired 40mm cannons and launched five torpedoes at *Liberty*. Since she was a virtually unarmed vessel and not a military threat, at no time did the torpedo boats request the *Liberty* surrender.

The crew braced themselves in "torpedo attack mode, which meant bending your knees and elbows, putting your hands against the bulkhead and relaxing your neck. This last action is nearly impossible when you know that death is approaching," says Tourney.

Many crewmembers credit their skipper for his skill and professionalism under pressure. "Realizing *Liberty* was in immediate danger, [McGonagle] took evasive action and yelled to Helmsman Frank Brown to make a hard left," notes Casale from his research. This action forced four of the five torpedoes to miss the ship, but the fifth found its mark, "striking *Liberty* on the starboard side, a little forward of the bridge [piercing the hull at the waterline]."

"I was directly above the explosion ... a mere eight feet away ... and it was literally deafening," says Tourney. "My eardrums were blown out, something I live with to this day as a reminder of what happened. My feet remained on the floor and, at the same time, I was airborne. We all were, because the ship was picked completely up out of the water by the force of the explosion. When it came back down, it bounced like ball that had been tossed onto the pavement."

Even with his impaired hearing, Tourney could hear "moaning, groaning and wailing ... not of wounded men, but rather of a

wounded ship, as metal gave way to the rush of sea water in the compartment directly below me." Grateful that the torpedo hadn't hit the engine room and blown the *Liberty* to bits, Tourney still braced himself as the ship settled and began to list. "It seemed impossible that she would not go down, but miraculously ... and I do mean *miraculously* ... she steadied herself."

Bowen was one deck above the secure Communications section and the Process and Reporting (P&R) shop, which was where the torpedo hit, at and below the water level. "We were thrown from the deck to the overhead and back, as was a lot of the equipment. Many suffered concussions and injuries as a result. And the torpedo hit knocked out all our [electrical power]. We immediately realized that the shipmates below needed to be evacuated from the research spaces that had been hit. Lt. Maurice Bennett sent me to secure the entrance to the research space, which was restricted to CTs. I was positioned at the door to ensure security and also to hand out life jackets to those who were evacuated from the flooded compartment.

"When we believed we'd gotten all the surviving crew out of the compartment, the water was four or five inches from coming over the hatch. Lt. Bennett yelled in, asking if anyone was still down there. He told them to bang on something if they weren't able to yell." Bowen's voice catches as he continues, "After 49 years, that memory is just as vivid as if it happened yesterday. Bennett gave the command to dog down the hatch. If he hadn't, we would have sunk. He had to do it to save the ship and the rest of the crew."

After helping to secure the Comm spaces, Tourney and Aimetti returned to the main deck and where they helped get survivors to a hatch or corner that might provide some protection as they fought for their lives. The fight wasn't over yet.

"Now, instead of the jets firing at us with machine guns, it was the gunner aboard the torpedo boats," recalls Tourney. "They circled the ship like vultures and shot at anything that moved; including firefighters or stretcher bearers. It seemed to last forever. They were also shooting at the waterline, as well, right in the direction of the boilers and from no further than 35 yards away. There's no way, from less than 100 feet, they could have missed 'USS LIBERTY' and 'GTR-5' on our hull. It was obvious to me they were trying to blow up the ship by hitting the boilers."

As the captain ordered the crew to prepare to abandon ship, it became even clearer that the attackers were bent to sink the ship and kill the crew. "When we started our voyage from Norfolk, we had enough life rafts for 294 crewmembers. Most of them had been destroyed by rockets, gunfire or napalm and there were only three left ... each large enough to hold about a dozen men," explains Tourney. "I personally jettisoned one of them into the water and watched as all three inflated. A few minutes later, I watched in horror as they were machine-gunned by Israeli gunners. In an act that still makes my blood



When she made her way to Malta, sailors worked tirelessly to clean *Liberty* and salvage whatever they could. The torpedo damage was so extensive, however, the Navy was forced to scrap the vessel.

boil, I watched as one of the destroyed rafts was taken aboard a torpedo boat as a trophy, while the other two were sunk. Those life rafts were intended to evacuate our most seriously wounded and gunning those rafts was a war crime. I realized then that there was no hope for our crew. Israel clearly understood [what they were doing] and they were not about to allow even one of us to live to tell our story.”

“The Israeli choice that day was live target practice as the USS *Liberty* could not fight back,” recalls Gallo. “The motor torpedo boats leisurely circled our ship, shooting at anything that moved and whatever target suited their whim. It defies logic as to why they expended so many munitions on a defenseless ship unless they were trying to send the United States a message. When they were finished, the *Liberty* was riddled with 821 holes [the size of a man’s fist or larger], sustained two napalm bombs, and had a 24- by 39-foot hole in her starboard side from a direct torpedo hit. It was obvious to the *Liberty* crew that survivors were not to be taken.”

The revelation that the ship and crew had been attacked by an ally hit hard. “Betrayal is always heartbreaking, especially when it’s coming from someone really close to you. I could make no sense of it. The knowledge that this had been done to us by a friend filled me with seething rage,” remembers Tourney. “I was determined to do whatever was necessary and at whatever cost to save the ship in whatever way I could. Knowing we had been betrayed by a friend made me stronger. And, as angry as I was at the time, it was nothing compared to when I later learned the terrible truth that we were also betrayed by others even closer to home.”

THE HELICOPTER ASSAULT

When the torpedo boats finally left the scene, helicopters were observed overhead with Israeli commandos at the ready. Despite his impaired hearing, Phil Tourney could hear

the unmistakable “whomp whomp” sound of troop-carrying helicopters approaching from the starboard side. When he saw them, he felt they were looming like birds of prey.

“As they approached, a call came over the intercom: ‘All ship’s personnel prepare to repel boarders.’ Aimetti and I went to the arms locker to prepare for a firefight with the few small arms we had on the ship. I couldn’t stop the jets or the torpedoes, but, by God, if it was going to be a man-to-man fight with whoever was aboard that helicopter, then I was going to try to make up for lost time. I was filled with such rage that I could envision nothing better than delivering a little payback,” says Tourney. Unfortunately, the locker was locked and, though “beaten to death, it would not give. We left the area, unarmed and just as defenseless as we had been earlier when the jets and torpedo boats attacked.”

The choppers hovered about 50 feet above the deck; close enough for Tourney to see a “hornet-swollen hive” filled with special forces commandos armed with sub-machine guns and ready for close-quarter combat. “They were not here to give us help. They were going to murder the entire crew and, once we were all dead, they could move about the ship as they pleased to place explosives and sink us all. The perfect crime, leaving no witnesses.

“They were only about 75 feet away and, like a dumbass, I stood in an open doorway, where they had a clear shot at me. I locked eyes with one of my would-be assassins who was sitting on the floor of the helicopter, with his legs hanging out and one foot on the skid as he waited for the order to rappel down to the ship’s deck.” Helpless and enraged, Tourney stepped out from the doorway and stood on the deck of his battered and bloody ship. “The only thing I could do to let my killers know what I thought about what they’d done to my ship, my friend and my country was to give them the finger. The Israeli with whom I’d locked eyes merely chuckled at the sight of something so impotent and harmless as my middle finger. In the midst of all his machine gun-toting buddies, he simply smiled and gave me the finger back.”

They left without apparent reason or warning, sending a wave of euphoria through the crew. A short while later, another helicopter approached the ship and, “like the one before, it hovered above us. A sack was dropped from the helicopter, which was taken to the bridge. Inside were some oranges, along with a card from Commander Cassel, the American attaché for the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Handwritten on the back of his card was a single line: ‘Have you casualties?’ Upon reading the card, Capt. McGonagle became furious. He limped out of the enclosed part of the bridge and yelled, ‘Get out of here! We don’t want any help from you!’ This helicopter was hovering above our once-pristine, beautiful ship, now riddled with holes. There’s blood all over the place, the deck is covered with body parts and this idiot asks something as inane as ‘Have you casualties?’ The helicopter left,” recalls Tourney. “We had

defeated the beast without firing a shot, but by merely staying alive and remaining afloat.”

AFTER THE ATTACK

Miraculously, the *Liberty* refused to sink and was able to get underway on her own power. The crew worked tirelessly through the night to care for the wounded and secure the ship for its voyage to Malta. Despite the *USS Saratoga* and *USS America* being only 15 air minutes from *Liberty*, help did not arrive until 18 hours after the attack.

“We received no immediate air or sea support from Sixth Fleet. We learned later that support had been recalled. We did what we could to keep the ship afloat and prepare her for transport. She was listing and it took us some time to restore power. The next morning, the *USS Davis*, *USS Popago* [and other vessels] arrived, then *America* and *Saratoga* provided support,” remembers Bowen. “We eventually headed to Malta in a zig-zagging pattern, with a Soviet vessel trailing us.”

USS Liberty, one of the most advanced intelligence ships of the day, would eventually be declared a total loss. Besides the loss of life and two-thirds of the crew being wounded, a \$40 million, state-of-the-art signals intelligence platform was later declared unsalvageable and sold for scrap.

THE COVER-UP

Many of the crew believe they were not only betrayed by the Israelis, but also by their own government. It started with the recall of U.S. air support during the early stages of the attack, and after the ship limped into Malta it became apparent that the investigation into the attack was not conducted appropriately.

“We were surprised that the Court of Inquiry didn’t include the entire crew. I don’t know how many enlisted personnel were included, but certainly not me and certainly not the whole crew,” says Bowen.

THE USS LIBERTY VETERANS ASSOCIATION (LVA)

Many of the surviving crewmembers belong to the *USS Liberty Veterans Association (LVA)* and work to pursue the publication of the true story. Readers can contact the LVA at *USS Liberty Veterans Association*, PO Box 680275, Marietta, GA 30068 or by phone at 770-363-3986. To learn more, visit www.usliberty.org or www.uslibertyveterans.org



“You can see by the way the metal is spread that the hole in the hatch was created when a rocket exited. I feel sure the rocket entered on the starboard side and passed through the ship to exit on the port side,” says Don Pageler, who shared this photo with *FRA Today*.

“The subsequent U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry was a sham,” according to Gallo — a view supported by many *Liberty* crewmembers. “It sorely lacked naval judicial standards (as cited by Rear Admiral Merlin Staring, former Judge Advocate General of the Navy) and was deliberately falsified to complement the Israeli story (as observed by retired Navy Lawyer Captain Ward Boston in a sworn affidavit). Details acquired were either changed or dropped [to reflect Israel’s claim] that the attack was a tragic mistake. The orders to falsify came directly from President Johnson. This is obstruction of justice at the highest levels. The rights of 291 military personnel were violated.”

“I retired from the Navy in 1986 and then spent another 22 years as a civilian contractor working with the National Security Agency (NSA),” says Bowen. “I had a top secret document in my desk that was released in 1980 or so. NSA folks would tell me to my face that they never believed the attack was a case of mistaken identity, but that document ... the official position ... was that it was just a tragic mistake.”

Surviving crewmembers don’t buy Israel’s claim that they didn’t know *Liberty* was an American vessel. In his video essay on the attack (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYjvOhuFr5g>), Casale notes that “the 5 [on the ship’s bow] was almost the size of a phone booth. [Fellow crewmember] Jim Ennes could see the pilots, so surely the pilots could see the U.S. flag. *Liberty* radio operators heard the pilots reporting that it was a U.S. ship and could see the flag.”

“After the air attack, the captain looked up at the yard arm and noticed that our flag was shot down,” echoes Gallo. “He ordered the signalmen to run up our holiday colors — a 9-by-15-foot U.S. flag.”

Bowen agrees. “It is impossible for the Israelis NOT to know we were a technical research ship. They flew over us, took photos and they knew what we were doing, which is why they attacked us, in my opinion. In a war, you know who your target

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is, just like when you go hunting. There is no doubt among the crew that the attack was deliberate.”

Gallo, who has written a book and numerous essays on the attack, cites more decisive proof. He references three U.S. Air Force intelligence personnel (Ronald Gotcher, Steve Forslund and Richard Block) who observed real-time U.S. Air Force Security Group aircraft translations (Hebrew to English) of intercepted communication between the attacking Israeli fighter pilots and their ground controllers. When the Israeli pilots confirmed the target was American, ground control then ordered the aircraft to attack, sink the target and ensure no survivors. This has been confirmed by other reliable news sources, as well, and Gallo says everything he’s written about the *Liberty* attack “is accurate and can be proven by corroborated individual witness testimony, logical deduction and documentation.”

The survivors of the attack were told never to talk about the incident under penalty of fine and/or imprisonment. This order was followed by a White House directive that Israel not be referenced as the attacker in any documents, monuments and the like. As an example, the USS *Liberty* skipper was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions to keep the ship afloat and operational, saving countless lives. Captain William McGonagle’s award was presented not by President Johnson at the White House, as is customary, but by the Secretary of the Navy at a low level Washington Navy Yard ceremony. His citation lacked any mention of an Israeli attack.

According to *Liberty* crewmember Ron Kukul (FRA Member at Large) and many other survivors of the attack, “USS *Liberty* is the most decorated ship in the U.S. Navy for a single action, but that is rarely mentioned.” Among the awards earned by the officers and crew of the USS *Liberty* are the Medal of Honor, two Navy Crosses, 11 Silver Stars, 20 Bronze Stars, nine Navy Commendations, 208 Purple Hearts, 294 Combat Action Ribbons and a Presidential Unit Citation and a Navy “E” Ribbon for Battle Efficiency.

“What gnaws at the crew is that we were abandoned,” says Bowen. “Israel is a key ally, particularly with regard to the Middle East. Politics being what they are, I can understand why we wouldn’t want to embarrass them. But when you choose to protect an ally over defending your own troops, you’re telling those troops that they are, indeed, just cannon fodder.”

MOTIVE

If the attack was intentional, what would be the motive? Why would an ally attack a defenseless American vessel?

There are a variety of theories, but none can be proved or disproved. Many believe the intent was to sink the ship and kill everyone aboard so Egypt would be blamed for the tragedy. This would convince President Johnson and the American

public to join in the fight against Israel’s enemy. Others believe that Israel perceived *Liberty* as a threat to its war agenda to take the Golan Heights, and it didn’t want to risk U.S. involvement or intervention in the Six-Day War.

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS, ANTI-SEMITES AND MORE

Many surviving crewmembers feel they’ve been dishonored by the cover-up. “We’ve been made to appear as bigots and the lies frustrate our efforts to distance ourselves from neo-Nazi organizations [and other anti-Jewish groups],” says Gallo. “Our government put the Israeli relationship over and above the crew and, time after time, the eye witnesses of the attack are called conspiracy theorists. Because the events involved Israel and are compounded by a state lie, we are automatically labeled a bunch of whiners. I guess we are supposed to keep our mouths shut. I suppose if no one was killed or wounded, we could possibly do that. However, [Israel] attempted to murder 294 Americans. We would be remiss as Americans if we did not speak out and our 34 shipmates would have died for nothing.”

Kukul feels the same way. “It’s easy for those who want this kept under wraps to call us names such as anti-Semitic. You can call us what you want, but common sense will tell you that almost three-fourths of the crew were Communications Technicians. All of them, including me, held a security clearance with the government. So we were considered the most trusted men in the Navy. Do you really think we banded together to lie about what we saw? Do you really think that these men banded together after the attack, and decided to become racists and haters of Jews, when some of the crew were Jews?” Kukul and Tourney co-host a radio show on the Republic Broadcasting Network. (Visit <http://republicbroadcasting.org/listen-live/> to listen to the live broadcasts.) “I ran a guy off our show because his remarks were entirely against the Jewish faith. We wouldn’t tolerate his remarks.”

IMPACT

Some survivors haven’t borne these insults, simply because they never let anyone know they experienced this trauma and tragedy. “I’ve never been called anti-Semitic and I’ll tell you why,” explains Bowen. “I never talked about the *Liberty* incident. For 43 years I didn’t speak or write about it. If anything, I was anti-government. I was angry that the government didn’t get the true story out, but I just kept my mouth shut because I didn’t want to lose my [security] clearances.”

Shortly after the attack, Phil Tourney got a letter and a check from the State Department. “They said, ‘Here’s \$300 for your wounds, sign this document that says you agree to never sue



Members of the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association gather regularly to reconnect with their shipmates and supporters.

the state of Israel.' I was a scared kid at 21 and I signed it. I just wanted it all to go away."

But Tourney understands now that it never really goes away. "After it was all over and I was debriefed, they said 'You've got the highest security clearance anybody can get in this country. When you walk away, never talk about this to anybody, including your family.' So for 20 years, I kept it all bottled up inside."

Larry Bowen still gets choked up when recalling the need to seal the hatch and won't forget his efforts to find and identify the body of his "good friend, Bob Eisenburg — a 23-year-old Jewish kid from Minnesota. Bob was supposed to separate from the Navy in August." It took Bowen nearly five decades, but he finally located Bob's family and was able to tell Bob's nephew that he'd died instantly and hadn't suffered.

Don Pageler (FRA Branch 175, Orange County, Calif.) was a 21-year-old Navy seaman assigned as a CT on *Liberty* when it departed from Norfolk in May of 1967. He witnessed the same trauma, horror and fear as his shipmates and carried tremendous guilt afterward. He was very young and did as he was told, but he felt like that wasn't enough.

"One of the guilt trips I laid on myself was that I don't have the right to feel sorry for myself. I felt guilty because all I did was survive. I felt like I should have been able to grab those planes out of the sky, slam them down in the water and [make them stop]. During the attack you have a job to do. You can't fall down and start crying. After the attack, you've got to help the wounded and get the ship to port. You've got to get the thing cleaned up. I think you get yourself in a habit of [knowing you just need to carry on]. Pretty soon, it becomes the easier thing to do, instead of having to deal with it. When I got home, I didn't really want to talk about it, but as time goes on, all those bad feelings keep wanting to come out."

CONCLUSION

The crew of the USS *Liberty* did everything possible not to give up their ship and fought the only way they could by maintaining vital engineering propulsion machinery, water tight integrity and most of all, helping keep their wounded shipmates alive. Individual survivors have different perspectives on the attack and how it impacted the rest of their lives, but most agree that they simply want the truth to be known.

"Our frustration remains that our government didn't do what they had a legal requirement to do and that's to conduct a legitimate inquiry into the attack," summarizes Bowen. "I don't think there's any need to discredit anyone. We're not anti-Jew or anti-Israel, just disappointed that the two governments couldn't get together and tell the truth. We don't expect any additional compensation; we just want the American public to know the truth. I don't believe it will ever happen, but I think that might bring closure or appease some of my shipmates. There are some who will never get over it.

"I lived through it and I'll never forget," he continues. "It's painful to recall it and brings tears to my eyes sometimes, but that's part of getting through it. The bond between the *Liberty* shipmates is extremely strong. We lived through it together; we're brothers and that bond will never be broken."



Ernest A. Gallo is a USS *Liberty* survivor and a member and former president of the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association. He is also the author of *Liberty Injustices – A Survivor's Account of American Bigotry* and can be reached at ernie7900@aol.com



Phillip Francis Tourney is a three-time president of the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association and author of *What I Saw That Day*. He can be reached at tonktime5@tds.net



Lauren Armstrong is the Contributing Editor and Member of the FRA Auxiliary. She can be reached at lauren@fra.org



WHAT THE UNITED STATES FLAG STANDS FOR

By Angela Bell, a 12th grade student at Centennial High School in Peoria, Arizona.

SHE WAS CRAFTED in the hands of liberty and washed in the name of justice. She is saluted by the bravest heroes to walk this earth and a wretched curse to her foreign enemies. She is flown over battlefields as a symbol of victory and in remembrance of those she lost. Like a mourning mother, she weeps and drapes herself over her fallen soldier's coffin, for they paid the ultimate price in her name. Their sacrifice gives her life. She watches over the future leaders of this nation as they gain knowledge in her classrooms. She resides along the bright stars as she gazes down at her loved one from her mount on the moon. She is the United States flag and she is revered by her people.

Since the inception of organized civilizations, societies have adopted symbols to represent their virtues and distinguish them from others. In this sense, America is no different. Founding father, revolutionary general and first U.S. President George Washington defined the flag as such

"We take the stars from heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty."

Along with Washington's definition are countless others; each differently embodies the nature of the star-spangled banner and what it stands for. It stands for freedom and a democratic government by the people. It stands for the blood, sweat and tears of the nation's bravest soldiers. It stands for the trials and tribulations that a unified country overcame, against all odds. And it stands for the wildest dream of the youngest, purest American child.

Those stars and stripes are a beacon of hope for men, women and children of all nations; may the flag forever fly over a free people and may the United States never forget the cloth from which she was cut.

2015–2016 FRA AMERICANISM ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

OVERALL WINNER

Angela Bell, Branch 77 Green Valley, AZ

7TH GRADE

1st Place: Gabriella Amos, Branch 99, Virginia Beach, VA

2nd Place: Kiana Tuttle, Branch 46, Honolulu, HI

3rd Place: Annabel Peltzer, Branch 260, Golden Valley, AZ

8TH GRADE

1st Place: Payton Tapp, Branch 11, Mesquite, TX

2nd Place: Grace Mauro, Branch 275, Placerville, CA

3rd Place: Caroline Cykoski, Branch 89, Jasper, GA

9TH GRADE

1st Place: Dominique Trull, Branch 289, Chula Vista, CA

2nd Place: Kevin Harmon, Branch 22, Pensacola, FL

3rd Place: Helen Linford, Branch 185, North Ogden, UT

10TH GRADE

1st Place: Phoebe White, Branch 316, Springfield, MO

2nd Place: Elise Devlin, Branch 115, Philipsburg, NJ

3rd Place: Megan Vallieve, Branch 21, Ft. Collins, CO

11TH GRADE

1st Place: Taryn Patricia Murphy, Branch 47, El Cajon, CA

2nd Place: Kiara Simone Mickens, Branch 66, Everett, MA

3rd Place: Julia Ziegler, Branch 278, Hanieville, AL

12TH GRADE

1st Place: Angela Bell, Branch 77, Green Valley, AZ

2nd Place: Jeremy A. Herrera, Branch 94, Corpus Christi, TX

3rd Place: Kayla Scharberg, Branch 44, Johnson City, TN

What Memorial Day Means to Me



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FRA AMERICANISM ESSAY CONTEST RULES

- All entrants shall be students in grades seven through 12 (or equivalent).
- Entrants must be sponsored by a member or branch of the Fleet Reserve Association or a unit of the Auxiliary of the Fleet Reserve Association.
- The essay shall be on the theme designated and shall not exceed 350 words.
- The essay shall be legibly written or typed on one side of the paper.
- A student may submit only one entry each year.
- Each entry must be accompanied by a separate sheet stating: the entrant's name; address; zip code; telephone number; school grade (or equivalent); name of school or the words “home schooled;” number of words in essay; and the sponsoring shipmate/branch/unit. A parent or guardian must also sign the cover sheet.
- Entries submitted to branches shall be submitted to the Branch Americanism-Patriotism Committee and postmarked not later than December 1 for judging at the branch level.
- Entries sponsored by members-at-large shall be submitted to the national chairman and forwarded to an appropriate branch for judging in their respective grade group. All entries shall be post-marked not later than December 1, 2016.
- All entries become the property of the Fleet Reserve Association.



BRANCH 93 PATUXENT RIVER, MD.
 FRA Branch President Tom Vatter (left) and Essay Committee Chairman Rob Reed (right) congratulate Angela-Leigh Sewell, the branch's overall winner of the FRA Americanism Essay Contest for 12th grade.



BRANCH 29 BREMERTON, WASH.
 Winners from the 2016 Americanism Essay Contest received plaques, checks and flags flown from the USS *Arizona* by (left to right) Shipmate Glen Wahlbrink, who chairs the branch's Americanism-Patriotism Committee, and Bremerton City Councilman Jerry McDonald.



BRANCH 146 JOHNSTVILLE, PENN.
 Shipmates Joe Millman and Charlie Glass congratulate Aidan Mesure of St. Isidore Catholic School, Quakertown, Penn., for his outstanding work in FRA's Americanism Essay Contest. He was the local first place winner for 8th graders.



BRANCH 113 STOCKTON, CALIF.
 Shipmates celebrate the U.S. Navy's 240th birthday with a traditional Cutting of the Cake Ceremony, which featured the eldest and youngest members of the branch: Shipmate Frank Niewiadomski and Branch President HM2 Maria Behm.



BRANCH 208 JACKSONVILLE, N.C.
 Shipmate Raymond Applewhite (left) poses with his former boss, Captain (Select) Kimberly Taylor. Applewhite was honored at the 8th annual Ordinary People Banquet for his sustained hard work, dedication and outstanding community service. The inscription on the trophy reads, "We applaud the few that inspire many." Congratulations to Shipmate Applewhite!



BRANCH 22 PENSACOLA, FLA.

Branch President Jim Richmond (left) presents Shipmate John Johnson with his 60-year continuous membership pin, certificate and National President's letter.



BRANCH 242 DAVENPORT, IOWA

Branch President Don Devore (right) and Secretary/Treasurer Bill Craig (left) present certificates and checks to North Central Regional Essay Contest winner (1st Place, 7th Grade) Kyle Skinner.

BRANCH 285 SYRACUSE, N.Y.

Shipmates Robert Deming and Branch Secretary Donald Groesbeck were on hand to congratulate Branch President Lynn Swetland as he receives his 40-year FRA continuous membership pin and certificate from Branch Vice President Gary W. Williams.



BRANCH 34 TALLAHASSEE, FLA.

Branch President Earnest Reed (left) recognizes Shipmate Jesse Childs for his 40 years of continuous FRA membership.



BRANCH 344 PORTLAND, MAINE

Branch President Don Parker (right) congratulates two new members, Tony Batchelor and June Escott. Tony presented a USCG flag to the branch and June is the first female and WAV member to join since the branch was incorporated in 1978. Welcome, Shipmates!

To submit a photo for *Shipmate News*, please e-mail a photo as an attachment in jpeg format to FRAToday@fra.org or mail a high-quality photograph to *FRA Today*, 125 N. West Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Please include a brief description of the photograph and include the names of those pictured. Laser prints and scanned copies of photographs cannot be accepted.

Message from the National President

WHAT A WHIRLWIND THIS last six months has been serving as the National President! In November, I traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Veterans Day Events; then on to Hawaii for the Pearl Harbor ceremony. The 75th anniversary for Pearl Harbor will be held in December 2016. If you ever have a chance to attend, it will be a rewarding experience.

I have been traveling to the various Sailor of the Year Awards ceremonies and have learned many different facets of each of the men and women who wear the uniform and who serve in the Navy proudly. Each sailor has contributed so much to this country each in his or her own way. They have been recognized by their peers for community service projects, as well as doing outstanding work in their career.

The weather was great for our annual pilgrimage. The ceremony returned to the Mast of the Maine. Many things have changed over the years and now that the Army has taken over the ceremony, we had to adapt to the new rules.

I was invited to speak at the USS *Hobson* Memorial ceremony in Charleston, S.C., and had the pleasure of meeting survivors and families who continue to honor the fallen sailors each year. I received a warm welcome from Branch and Unit 269 during the visit and I want to send a special thank you to FRA PNP Don Muccheck, who has been keeping the memory of the USS *Hobson* alive for the past 43 years. I am sure that he will keep it going for years to come.

Each unit has its own projects that have been keeping them very busy and we express our gratitude for all the work done at the various veterans medical centers. I am asking that those Units doing the work at these centers please consider enrolling their unit into the VAVS program. We have gone downhill on the VAVS program and we need to have 15 units in the program to reestablish our accreditation through the VA. Rozena McVey has accepted the chairmanship and will have a report after attending the annual VAVS conference in Albuquerque, N.M.

During my travels I was asked about the Auxiliary's use of technology and have appointed a committee to research how we might use technology to streamline our processes. Committee members are working on diverse and unique possibilities that will save us time and money and allow us to better serve our members.

As we move forward in the Auxiliary, we must admire all those willing to serve as officers in their regions. If you have the time and inclination to serve the Auxiliary, we will truly appreciate your efforts to keep our organization thriving in the future. Remember the National President's Project "Warrior to Soulmate," which will enable military chaplains to continue on the path of reuniting families and empowering them with new perspective to improve veterans' overall quality of life.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as the National President. I will be looking forward to seeing many during my visits to the regional conventions and national convention in Jacksonville, Fla.



HELEN COURNEYA
National President



Photos (left to right): Auxiliary National President (NP) Helen Courneya and FRA NP Virgil Courneya flank a survivor of the USS *Hobson*; NP Helen Courneya speaks at the *Hobson* Memorial Ceremony, while FRA Past National President Don Muccheck looks on; Auxiliary members participate in the annual Pilgrimage at Arlington National Cemetery.

Correction

The caption in the lower corner of page 36 in last month's issue of *FRA Today* was incorrect. The photo showed RPEC Kathy Bearden installing officers in Unit 67; not Unit 76 as it was written. We apologize for any confusion the error may have caused.



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