

# USS RANKIN (AKA/LKA-103) NEWS

June 2005

## USS RANKIN (AKA/LKA-103) 2004 REUNION REVIEW

Crewmembers of the great ship, *USS RANKIN* (AKA/LKA-103) held their annual reunion at the Norfolk Airport Hilton Hotel on October 28-31, 2004. One hundred sixty-seven (167) former shipmates and 122 spouses or guests pre-registered for this much anticipated event. An additional eight persons arrived unexpectedly for the banquet, but were accommodated, making a total of 297 persons attending the banquet on Saturday night.

The reunion officially "kicked off" at 12:00 noon on Thursday, October 28th when the registration desk and hospitality room opened. The hospitality room, the focal point of the reunion, was filled with ship memorabilia, coffee, cold drinks and snacks, and of course, sea stories. It was said that some of the stories were true, or at least based on something someone once said was true. As the afternoon wore on, the excitement increased with questions like, "Who is coming next?", "Who arrived while I checked into my room?", "When is so and so arriving?" It was a wonderful experience to see so many old friends getting reacquainted or meeting shipmates they did not know, or who served at a different time.

The first "planned" event was the welcome reception at 5:00 PM. Reunion Chairman Skip Sander welcomed everyone, and after some introductions, he previewed the activities for the coming days. Following his remarks, the bar opened and hors d'oeuvres were served. The remainder of the evening was spent socializing over cocktails, in the hospitality room or at dinner.

Friday morning began with a private breakfast buffet. Following breakfast, 76 members of the group boarded two motor coaches for a

trip to Williamsburg. This former colonial capital helped shape American history and is a true landmark. After lunch the group re-boarded the bus for a leisurely ride along the Colonial Parkway to the quaint little village of Yorktown. The siege of Yorktown marked the end of the American Colony and the beginning of a new nation, The United States of America. The struggle and adventures of those early years of our freedom are depicted with engaging exhibits. The group actually walked on the battle grounds where history was made, where our freedom was bought and paid for in the blood of our ancestors.

Meanwhile, back at the Hilton, more shipmates were arriving. They had the same questions as those who arrived yesterday, and to their credit, patiently waited for the tour to return. For the first few minutes after the buses came back, it was a mad house, new arrivals trying to see who got off the bus, and vice versa. Then it settled down to a dull roar in the hospital room.

At 6:00 PM the cocktail hour began and long lines formed at the bar where adult beverages were being dispensed. Almost too quickly an hour passed and it was time for dinner—a traditional Virginia ham dinner (what else would you expect in Virginia?). Following dinner, "Shag4U", a local DJ, provided Shag lessons (for the few who participated) and played a variety of dance music for the dancers in the crowd. All in all it was a fun evening.

Saturday began with a private breakfast buffet and shortly after the meal, 180 souls boarded *four* motor coaches for a visit to Nauticus, the National Maritime Center where they saw a series of ingenious interactive exhibits, plus the IMAX Theater presentation, "The Living Seas," which

celebrates the beauty, power and significance of the oceans. Next door to Nauticus is the famous Battleship *USS WISCONSIN*, which had action in World War II, Korea, and most recently in the Persian Gulf War. The *Wisconsin* is now a museum ship and the main deck and sections of the two upper decks were open to visitors. Following the trip to Nauticus, a short walk brought the group to the *Spirit of Norfolk* for a luncheon cruise of Norfolk Harbor. The food was good, the entertainment was good and the cruise was good! The highlight of the day came next, a visit to Norfolk Naval Base. Although we were not able to go on board a ship, a riding tour with views of the many ships was very special.

Upon the return of the touring group, the business meeting was held. San Diego was selected as the reunion city for 2005.

Saturday evening was the highlight of the reunion. The evening began with a photo session trying to capture the images of each couple and single attendee. Simultaneously, the cash bar opened and some members availed themselves to a variety of adult beverages. At 2000 hours (8:00 PM) sharp, the banquet ceremonies began with the playing of "Anchors Aweigh." Immediately following "Anchors Aweigh," the Top Hatters Squadron and Honor Guard of Naval Sea Cadets from Norfolk presented the National Colors while "The National Anthem" was played. Following the anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited and the Invocation was delivered. Chairman Skip Sander opened the banquet program with some welcome remarks for jobs well done. Then dinner was served. Following dinner, numerous items were raffled

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off, the proceeds going into the Association treasury.

During and after dinner, the "Just Friends Trio" entertained the group with a bevy of popular songs and closing the evening with a medley of patriotic songs.

Suddenly it was Sunday morning and almost time to go. The farewell breakfast was somewhat more som-

ber than the previous breakfasts, each person realizing the time to go was nearly at hand. The majority of those at breakfast remained for the memorial service which paid tribute to deceased shipmates. Over 200 deceased shipmates' names were read and honored.

When it was over, no one wanted to be the first to leave, but ever-so-slowly a few began inching

toward the door. Then, as if by magic, the handshakes and hugs began, and more than a few tears were seen. It had been a wonderful experience, some calling it "the best three days of my life." In a few minutes all that remained in the room was the echoes of, "See you in San Diego."

## COMMENTS FROM REUNION ATTENDEES

"I would recommend everyone attend the reunion. We had good food, good drink, excellent tours and best of all, lots of sea stories with friends we lived with for a couple of years of our lives. Looking forward to seeing all my old shipmates in San Diego."

Ed Smith, Combat Cargo Officer '59-60

"We had a great time and my husband enjoyed so much seeing his old buddies. They have kept in contact through the year and we are looking so forward to being able to attend this year's reunion as well."

Janet Banky

"The USS Rankin '04 Reunion was the highlight of my year...it was so well organized, fun and the food was great, as well as meeting with so many former Rankin members. I have so many fond memories of serving and this was a culmination of such good will among all."

James Stubbs

"The 2004 Reunion of officers and men who served aboard the USS Rankin was certainly a wonderful affair. I am truly looking forward to San Diego in 2005. San Diego is a great place and all should have plenty to enjoy there."

Roger Crane (1957-1959 MR3)

"I really enjoyed the reunion at the Hilton and was impressed with the turnout and events scheduled. Talked to no one that was not thrilled with the overall event. I am looking forward to the next one and any more that may be in the future.

J. W. Smits

"It was so good to see so many of my shipmates after 40+ years. I got an opportunity to catch up on so many things in our time together. I am looking forward to the next reunion. Hope to see all those that were there last year and some of you I haven't seen in 40 years."

John Mazzarini (1960-1962)

"My wife and I attended only the banquet on Saturday night, but it was great. We enjoyed seeing several shipmates, although it took a long search to track them down."

Capt. Luther Johnson, USN Ret.

"I served aboard the Rankin from 1962 to 1964. Since that time, I only maintained contact with a couple of my fellow officers, but often wondered what happened to the other crew members. The reunion gave me an opportunity to catch up with the last 40 years in their lives and also a chance to reminisce about our days aboard ship. It exceeded my greatest expectations. I look forward to seeing everyone in San Diego."

George Beminger

"The time spent at the 2004 Rankin reunion in Norfolk was worth more than the time and money spent. The opportunity to re-unite with shipmates is a priceless commodity. I would encourage everyone to make the effort to get to a reunion while they can. It is worthwhile."

Don Wilburn, USN, Ret.

"To all you out there who are undecided about attending, I want to say that the 2004 reunion was one of the best that I have attended and plan to attend again."

LTjg Leo Savio

"I would like to encourage all to attend the reunion this year. We had an excellent

time and enjoyed ourselves very much last year. Looking forward to the one this year."

Tony Haring

"Thought the reunion was great and I think if you never went to one you should go at least once. I had the most wonderful time meeting my past Navy buddies. I encourage everyone to go to the one in San Diego."

Denny Houser

"This is a testimony to the great time we had at the first Rankin reunion in Norfolk. I was pleasantly surprised to meet so many shipmates from my division at this first reunion and am looking forward to seeing even more down in San Diego."

Jack Nelson EM3 1961-62

"For those of you who knew me, Swede Hanson, you missed a great get together for last year's reunion, and I know this reunion will be bigger & better than ever. I guarantee you'll have a lifetime of experience—so don't miss it."

Gunner "Swede" Hanson

"A tip of the hat to Skip Sander and the Commissioning Board for putting together a great, great weekend in honor of the greatest ship that the US Navy ever launched, the USS Rankin (AKA-103). The chance to renew and remember is worth a million."

Ollie Bates 1964-67

"The reunion in Norfolk was my first, and my wife and I enjoyed it very much. We thought the activities available were excellent and we are looking forward to seeing everyone at the reunion in San Diego.

Thomas Lobello