

Sirago Newsletter



Volume 8, Issue 4

November 2007

Reunion 2009

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Shipmates,

We are in negotiations with the Holiday Inn, Baltimore-Inner Harbor on Lombard Street. After visiting all the hotels on the inner Harbor strip this past summer, the only hotel to give us a reasonable rate was the Holiday Inn. Who knew how high the hotel rates would be in Baltimore? Well... Rich McCamant and I found out. And due to those high rates prevailing through September (with a drastic drop in October) we chose October 15 – October 18, 2009. At this moment in time no other group has chosen that particular weekend.

While we are happy with the rates, we are not too thrilled with the costs of the food. So, until we can get them down to a retirement friendly level, we are holding judgment on making a final decision.

The Inner Harbor is an ideal place for a reunion with all sorts of attractions within walking distance from the hotel along the harbor. I have personally been there many times and can attest to all the attractions along the harbor. However, we are not locked into Baltimore either. And if the Baltimore hotel fails to give us the prices we are willing to pay (I should know shortly if they are willing to come down) then we can still move down the coast and try to secure the Holiday Inn Executive Center, at Virginia Beach. I believe we have plenty of time to do that at this point.

In answer to the potential question of “What about other places?” – after checking out what is available in NLON we found nothing large enough to hold us all within an area that had fun things to see and do. The only place large enough for a banquet was across the river and I can tell you the food at that place is not very good. Plus... anything we would want to do as a group we would have utilize buses at a huge expense. Also... after receiving some negative emails and calls concerning Philly, it was decided to focus on Baltimore as a first priority.

We will continue our search for affordable accommodations and reasonable food costs.

Regards – **Joe Roche**



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 REUNION 2009
- 2-3 CAPT. CUSHING – TRAGIC LOSS!
- 4 DUES

Capt. Cushing – Tragic Loss!

Mike Bickel & Joanne Higgins (Cush's Daughter)

Shipmates,

We were informed of the untimely death of Capt. Prentice Cushing Jr. (CUSH) first by some members of the Hampton Roads Sub Vet base and also by Cecile Walraven (widow of "Wally" Walraven)... but details were spotty. We then received correspondence from his daughter Joanne Higgins (Jo) which clarified what happened. Since "Cush" was one of the key foundations stones for our reunion organization as was "Wally" we are adding this additional *Memorial Article* to the normal Lost & Found Crew reporting of his death also found in this newsletter. Bottom line... Cush fell and broke his neck late on the night of September 26th. Before noon on September 29th he was on Eternal Patrol. The following are some remarks by me and his daughter Jo.

Jo: He told me that he was checking his email at around 11pm on the 26th and decided it was time to go to bed. However, he slipped while getting up and hit his head on the desk filing cabinet. He thought if he could just get to the phone and pull on the cord with his teeth, then security would be alerted after a few minutes. However, he could not move at all. When his usual 0800 phone call from his girlfriend Marge went unanswered, she was concerned and called security to check on him.

The physicians told me that my father had broken his neck at a very high level in the cervical neck and that he was now a quadriplegic. The doctor also told me how bad the prognosis was and that the next 72 hours would probably get worse before better as there was a high likelihood that he would have trouble breathing and/or have an unstable heart rate. I was there with my dad when the doctor delivered this devastating news to him and he took it like a trooper calmly stating "Well... that explains why I couldn't move at all".

I was informed by the neurosurgeon that the prognosis was bad – Dad would lose one of his arms, and that he would have to be placed on a ventilator to help him breathe. I knew that my dad would never want to live the rest of his life like that and begged the doctor to be totally honest with my dad about his prognosis and what his life would ultimately be like. He was.

He explained all this to dad and dad closed his eyes for a moment. The doctor thought maybe he was drifting off to sleep and said "Mr. Cushing, do you understand everything I am saying and what I am asking you about?" My dad opened his blue eyes and said "I'M THINKING, I'M THINKING- This is not a decision you make in a minute! Can't you smell the smoke from the rubber burning?"

After conferring with me and his girlfriend – and confirming his status with his doctors, Dad said "I have had a good run- married, served my country, traveled, tried to help others and though I don't like it, I guess it's my time. So no- I do not want you to take unusual measures just to keep me alive." He had to be a bit forceful about this with another physician and stated that he'd kindly like to die with dignity.

Well – I think we all know what dying with dignity means... but for Dad, his decision relaxed him and for the rest of the few hours he lived he seemed to be more concerned about others than he was for himself. I was with him the whole time and can tell you that no matter what was going on in ICU, it wasn't important enough that you couldn't integrate a few jokes with it.

Once, as his breathing became a bit labored, he coughed and he told the doctor that "it tasted like shit". He then launched into telling the joke about the little boy raising money for a fair. The boy asked his dad for two bowls, vegetable soup and toothbrushes. The dad complied and when his dad returned later he had raised \$200 and told his dad he needed more tooth brushes. His dad asked how he had made so much money, and so he explained that he had two bowls, one was filled with weak vegetable soup and the other one he had crapped in. When the people would come up he told them that there was a free soup testing going on. When they ate the vegetable soup it was weak and not so good. But then they would take a taste from the bowl he had crapped in and they would say "this tastes like shit!"..... At that point, my dad stopped breathing for 45 seconds. When he finally took a breath- he finished the joke by saying "It IS shit... do you want to buy a toothbrush?" HE NEVER MISSED A BEAT TO GET THAT PUNCH LINE IN. We all just laughed.

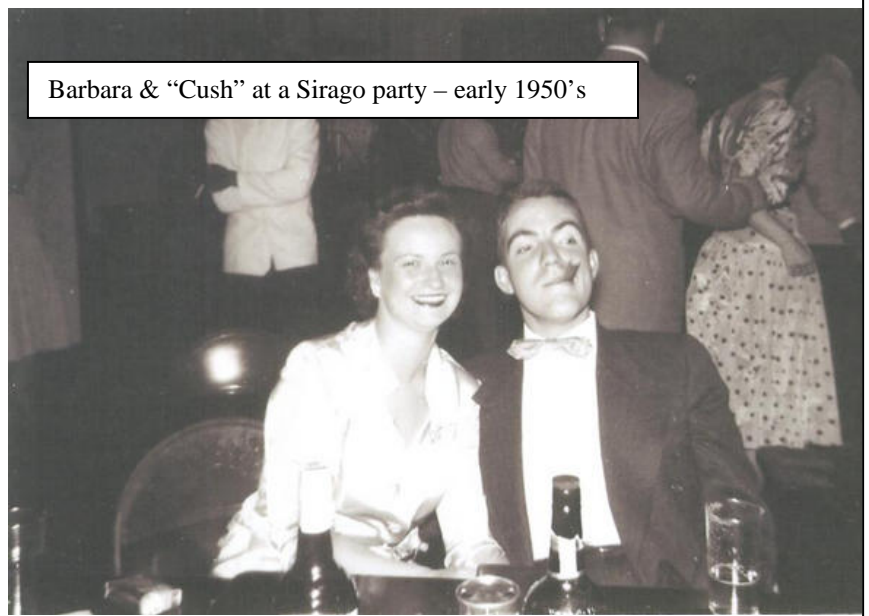
He never lost his sense of humor. When visitors asked him how he got his head all banged up and the black eye, he said "Bar room brawl - you should see the other guy!" Over his last few hours he changed this answer to: "Chasing the nurses around the bed - one socked me".

My dad passed in peace a few minutes after 1100 on Saturday the 29th of September. He never cried, he never complained. During his whole life he was strong and even right up until the end, he showed this strength coupled with dignity and resolve. I am so proud to have known him as a man, but most of all to have him as a dad. I thank all of his friends in the Navy, on the Sirago and throughout his life.

Mike: I only knew Cush through the reunions and I can attest to the fact that he always concerned himself with the crew and their needs at the reunions. He didn't like the limelight but he made sure that I was providing beer for the crew – “real beer - not that light stuff”. I know indirectly how much the crew that he served with loved him because when Morton Appelbaum (a Seaman, disabled and blind) came to his first reunion, the FIRST person he wanted to see was “Cush”. I led him to Cush's table and the first thing that Morton did was whisper a funny story into Cush's ear and they both laughed uproariously. Bill Gerber, Leroy Ippoliti, Wally Walraven and Cush were key pillars of the original reunion organization, and now they are all gone. May we all serve as they did – with “strength, dignity, and resolve”.... and an occasional joke to break the tension.



Capt Cushing at a Reunion



Barbara & "Cush" at a Sirago party – early 1950's

Dues

Every year in our November issue, we draw attention to the subject of “dues”. So... if you are receiving this newsletter through your mailbox, take a minute to look at the label on the front. You will notice either next to your name or below it something that looks like: /F2005/ or /H2007/ or /A2007/. The first letter tells what “class” of membership you have. “F” is for “Found” crew member and crew members do NOT have to pay dues so you could think of the “F” as meaning “Free” if you like. “A” and “H” are for “Associate” and “Honorary” respectively and this class of membership IS required to pay \$5.00 per year dues. There is one other class called “O” for “Other” that, like a crew member is not requiring dues – this is only for outside organizations that our association needs to communicate with for our own benefit and thus we are funding these few memberships.

There is also a date (year) after that class of membership indicator. It represents the year through which your dues are paid. Associates and Honoraries should have a 2007 date right now, but

are now needing to send in \$5.00 to move that “dues marker” (the year) forward by one year (to 2008). Anybody can “pay ahead” so if you send in \$20.00 we just move that date forward by 4 years.

Since crew members (F) don’t officially have to pay dues, we offer a benefit IF they DO, in fact, keep their “dues marker” current – although, they don’t have to – we will still always try to send newsletters and get the word out, and invite you to reunions, regardless. BUT... IF you DO keep your dues marker current, we offer crew members the additional benefit of being a VOTING member of our organization. You also can hold office in our association.

To pay dues you make out a check to USS Sirago and mark it “Dues” and send it to:

Garry Goetschius, Treasurer
3620 Locust Circle East
Prospect, KY 40059-9020

Rich McCamant
10225 Ocean Gateway
Easton, MD 21601

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