



History of the USS Salamonie Association

Current Officers 2014

President: Chuck Wazenegger
Vice President: John Lichoff
Treasurer - Mike Seidel
Trustee - Roger Reller
Chaplin - Barry Stark
News Letter - Rita Wood

Approximately eight years ago fate brought two different U.S.S. Salamonie groups together. Until that time, neither knew the other existed; one was a World War II group under the auspices of Raleigh Masters, FC3 (1942-1945), and the other, headed up by James Thomas of Indianapolis, a member of the 1965-1968 crew of the U.S.S. Salamonie.

The first group was made up mostly of retirees who lived in Florida, and they were holding mini-reunions in their area. The second group was trying to gather the crews from the mid-1960s to 1968, when the ship was decommissioned.

Unbeknownst to each other, both groups advertised about their prospective reunions. A connection was made via VFW Reunions and the American Legion magazine. Each group had already set up their reunions, and the leaders put their heads together and decided to hold both reunions instead of canceling one out. So, in 1997, we had two reunions, one in April and one in August.

The first reunion was held in Charleston, South Carolina, where everyone met, including members from other eras who had found the reunion through the magazine. Since that small reunion, everything has been nothing short of success, with each reunion getting bigger and better as more and more crewmen and officers of all eras are being located. We now have 747 known living members in our association and are constantly looking for more. Sadly, we have documented approximately 180 known deceased crewmen. Each has been inducted into our Honor Roll. These crewmen are listed as having been "Reassigned to a higher command." This includes all personnel from 1941 to 1968.

Since our beginning we have met in Charleston, SC (1997); Indianapolis, IN (1997); Philadelphia, PA (1998); Las Vegas, NV (1999); Biloxi, MS (2000); Newport, RI (2001); Dayton, OH (2002), Buffalo NY (2003), Niagara Falls NY (2004), Bahamas (2005), Reno NV (2006), Branson MO (2007), Nashville TN (2009), Branson MO (2010), St. Augustine FL(2011), St. Louis MO (2012), Virginia Beach VA (2013) and Wichita KS (2014).

Each year there is usually a small mini-reunion in Florida with the retirees in that area.

The first Officers of the Association were Raleigh Masters, James Thomas and Tom Keske. After the first reunion, James Thomas (MM3 63-67) of Indianapolis, IN, became the first President of the Association. Thomas Keske (MM2 64-68) of Blaine, MN, became Treasurer. Tom also started our newsletter, "The Fantail Scuttlebutt" which comes out four times a year updating everyone as to the Association's happenings.

In July of 2001 Jim Thomas had a relapse from throat cancer from the previous year. He contacted John Lichoff (RM3 57-59) to see if John would take over the Association until he, Jim, was able to resume his duties. In August 2001, Jim informed John and Tom that his doctors had informed him "that there was no more they could do" for him and gave him six months. On December 24, 2001, Jim Thomas, our first Association President, was laid to rest. The attendees and his pallbearers were U.S.S. Salamonie crewmen who came from all over the country to attend.

At the next reunion, John Lichoff was elected the new President of the Association with Tom Keske being reelected Treasurer. Then Thomas Graham CSSN (55-56) and Joseph Cuneo YN3 (52) stepped forward and volunteered their services as Trustees for the Association to help with the workload.

Under the guidance of Gordon Cook LTJG (42-44), our book, "Memories of Old Sal" was written and edited, with contribution of articles and pictures from many crewmen. Since that time many other items have been created and made available to the crew. Without the hard and diligent work of numerous individuals who have worked behind the scenes, this Association would not be enjoying the success we are today.

Plaques commemorating the USS Salamonie (AO-26) have been placed on the Wall of Honor in the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Texas and in the Navy Memorial Foundation in Washington DC.

The Warren connection: How it all came about:

It all started one evening in January 2003 when I was doing some research on the USS Salamonie AO-26.

I punched in Salamonie on Google.com and up came articles on Warren, IN and the Salamonie Valley Museum.

After checking the numerous sites out, I then called Tom Keske in Minnesota telling him what I had come across.

We then spent the next hour on the phone and computer looking over the sites and decided that the next morning that I would try to make contact with someone in Warren.

I did not know whom to call, so I called the clerk-treasurer that was listed on the web site.

As luck would have it, I reached Marilyn Morrison on the very first phone call. I identified myself as the president of the USS Salamonie Association and her reply was, "Oh Yeah?"

She had never heard of the USS Salamonie and did not know that it ever existed. She thought that this was a prank call from one of her fellow practical jokers but she was going to go along with the joke for the time being.

As time progressed she started to think, wait a minute, this might be legitimate and she started to listen more and more as she heard about the ship and our association looking for a home. I then asked her if she had a computer in front of her and she said yes. I asked her to punch in USS Salamonie AO-26. In a few seconds I heard out loud "OH MY GOD".

Now it was a different story and she realized the potential of what was happening.

After our phone conversation, I sent her some of our books, "Memories of Ole Sal".

Marilyn then went to the web and researched information on the USS Salamonie. Then all hell broke out with excitement of the good news and things then started to snowball from there.

There was news abounding everywhere on both sides about our soon to be new acquaintances and potential museum home for the USS Salamonie AO-26.

On February 1, 2003, Tom Keske and I were then invited to Warren, IN with our wives to visit the city and museum and meet every one.

We had a breakfast luncheon, noon meeting with the local veterans, tour of the Methodist home and tour of the city and school and an evening banquet reception with all interested parties.

We had brought several items with us to be placed with honor in their museum if we saw that things would work out.

From this beginning it has snow balled to the success that it is today.

To date many items that former crewmembers have had at home have been donated to the museum in their name and many more items have been promised.

Without the untiring work of Marilyn Morrison, Janice Jordan, Karen Herr, Tom Applegate and their devoted friends and volunteers this would not be the success that it is today.

We have enjoyed all of our visits to Warren, IN and look forward to the many more trips and to see all of our newfound family.

John D. Lichoff (Vice president USS Salamonie AO-26 Association)

Independence Day Celebration Warren, IN

Warren, IN is a small town that celebrates Independence Day in a big way. They have a four day celebration on the weekend closest to July 4 each year (for 2014, just three days). Many family friendly activities take place including a huge parade and a fireworks demonstration and hundreds of people attend from around the region.

USS Salamonie members attend and stay at a local hotel. There is a hospitality room there so that we can get together to meet and greet and share stories. Three activities specific to our members are visits to our museum, participation in the parade and a banquet.

The USS Salamonie museum is open to the public and veterans man the place as docents to greet visitors and share information. People enjoy seeing the many artifacts on display and children love to ring the original Salamonie bell.

On Friday veterans and guests ride a large float in the annual parade. Hundreds of spectators line the streets of Warren to see the parade filled with more than a hundred floats and bands. The folks in Warren have built a float for our veterans and guests to ride in. It is decorated in patriotic colors and a Boy Scout troop carries the huge Salamonie American flag in front of the float. Spectators throw coins into the outstretched flag and this provides funds for troop activities. We also participate in the tradition of throwing pieces of wrapped candy to the children along the way who come to the parade waiting for this to happen. We decided to also toss beads in a Mardi Gras fashion and the kids love them. It is heart-warming to us when the spectators stand and salute us as our float passes by.

On Saturday evening we have a banquet catered by a local person. Highlights of the evening include a speech given by an interesting person and news from Lilly Nutter.

Lilly celebrated her 100th birthday on 12/12/12 and she has been sending boxes of "goodies" to troops in harm's way foreign lands for several years. Association members have adopted her and we provide hundreds of dollars to her for postage. She has several scrap books filled with thank you notes and pictures from the recipients that she shares with us. She loves to attend this banquet.

A fireworks demonstration takes place on Sunday evening.

The Lilly Nutter Connection
John Lichoff

At one of our 4th of July reunions, a sweet little lady came up to me and wanted to ask a question, not realizing that at that instant in time my life would be changed forever.

She said that her name was Lilly Nutter and that she had a grandson in the service in harm's way and she wanted to send him a care package and did not know what to send and asked what I had gotten and/or what I liked and what would something like this cost.

I called over some of my buddy's and we talked to her and told what we had gotten in our packages from home when we were in and what we liked to get.

So, on the spur of the moment after talking to her, we all dug into our pockets and gave her some money to help with the postage for her grandson.

At our banquet it was discussed and voted on helping her out since her grandson was in harm's way and serving us all and gave her a check.

Next thing you know she had another address and asked if it was ok to use some of the money and we said that was ok.

Little did I know at that time that more than 1,300 packages and more than \$10,000.00 dollars later Lilly is still part of the Association's life.

She has helped so many of our men and women and has been honored by many for her dedication.