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USS Basilone Association



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KENWOOD

December 2024

Greetings Shipmates, Associate Members and the Crew of the DDG-122,

Well, the day we have been waiting for came on November 9, 2024. The USS John Basilone DDG122 was commissioned as a fighting ship into the United States Navy at Pier 88 in New York City. Hopefully, those of you who couldn't make the commissioning watched the live stream as Bob Barkalow and I did. You can still see it on You Tube by typing in USS John Basilone Commissioning Ceremony and select the commissioning video or go to our website and select the link to the commissioning video on our website either on the Home or USS John Basilone DDG-122 pages.

USS John Basilone DDG-122, Commissioning Weekend Events

Friday, November 8, 2024

On Friday November 8, 2024 two members of the commissioning committee sponsored a lunch on the USS John Basilone DDG-122. They brought in 6-foot submarine sandwiches, potato salad, coleslaw, etc. and took over the mess decks to serve lunch to the crew. Crew members of the USS Basilone DD-824 (Bob Clancy, Paul Ely, Ed Kelly, Robert Terhune, Richard Henderson, Dale Carrick and Geoffrey Bender) assisted in serving lunch to the crew of the 122 and we also passed out our Association's Challenge Coin to the crew.

After lunch was over, we took a brief tour of the ship starting with the Chief's Mess. We spoke with several chiefs about the 824 and 122. We then went to the wardroom where there was a copy of the 824's 1975 Mediterranean Cruise book and spoke with a couple of officers and then we went to the bridge. QMC Warner of the 122 was telling us about all the electronics on the bridge. How they can overlay on the radar a chart of the area in which the ship is sailing. Also, on the bridge are the controls for the 2 MK 38, 25 mm machine gun systems.

On Friday night November 8, 2024 the chairman of the commissioning committee, Frank Russo, sponsored a reception at a local restaurant. At the reception were the sponsors of the 122, Ryan Manion and Amy Looney Heffernan, Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro, Diane Hawkins, grandniece of John Basilone, the President of Bath Iron works, the CO, CDR Carne Livingston, crew members of the 122 and other VIPs. Speeches were given and Diane

Hawkins presented to the CO of the 122 a framed letter John Basilone wrote to his mother requesting she send his baptismal certificate to him so he could marry Lena Mae Riggi, who he described as a nice Italian girl who can cook. Geoffrey Bender attended this reception and presented 824's Challenge Coins to the Secretary of the Navy and the ship's sponsors.

Saturday, November 9 2024

The Commissioning Ceremony began at 10:00 am Saturday, November 9, 2024 in New York City at Pier 88. The ceremony MC was the XO of the 122, CDR Matthew Brooks. He asked Basilone family members to stand and be recognized then asked the crew of the USS Basilone DD-824 to stand and be recognized. He introduced several VIPs, including the Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro. The crew of the 824 who were present were seated on the second level of the pier building overlooking the ceremony platform on the 122. There were several speakers including Admiral Daryl Caudle, LT Gen Roberta L Shea USMC with SECNAV as the principal speaker.

The CO, CDR Carne Livingston asked SECNAV to place the 122 into commission, SECNAV told the CO to place the ship into commission. The CO then ordered the XO to hoist the Colors and the Commissioning Pennant. The CO then read his orders and took command of the USS John Basilone DDG-122 and had the XO set the watch. The ship's sponsors spoke and then asked the "Officers and Crew of the USS John Basilone man our ship and bring her to life." The crew responded Aye Aye Ma'am and ran from the pier onto the 122 and manned the rails as the Navy Band was playing Anchors Aweigh. While this was going on 3 helicopters made a flyover of the 122.

(While watching the video as the crew was running up the gangways to man the rails, I noticed that as the crew ran that some of them were running differently. It took me a minute to figure out that they weren't wearing their fruit salad (ribbons) but they were actually wearing their medals and they appeared to be holding on to their medals to keep them from falling off or ripping their dress blues. Phil.)

Also, the radar antennas, the gun mount and CIWS were moving, bringing the ship to life. When the ship was manned, the crew saluted the people on the pier. The CO spoke and thanked all those involved in building the USS John Basilone DDG-122 and spoke about the legacy of John Basilone. After the CO spoke, the Marine Corp Anthem was played in honor of John Basilone. In attendance at the ceremony there were marines from the 1st Division 7th Marines, John Basilone's unit.

After the ceremony the crew members of the 824 toured the 122.

Crew members of the USS Basilone DD-824 at the commissioning ceremony were Dale Carrick, Douglas Curto, Edward Kelly, Frank Stepka, Geoffrey Bender, Al Smith, Joe Fisher, Leonard Cerzosie, Paul Ely, Richard Henderson, Peter Schoen, Robert Clancy, Robert Lester, Robert Terhune, Tom Berry, John Carney, Ed Malec and Shirley Berger. Shirley was there to honor her husband John who served on the DDE-824 as an EM2 from 56-59.

There is a link on our website on the Home and USS John Basilone DDG-122 pages to a page that contains pictures from the Commissioning and Memorial Service and links to the

commissioning video on You Tube. Or, go to You Tube and type in USS John Basilone Commissioning Ceremony and select the commissioning video.

On Saturday night, November 9, 2024, two members of the commissioning committee sponsored a dinner for a few members of the 122 crew. Al Smith, Bob Clancy, Paul Ely, Frank Stepka and Geoffrey Bender attended the dinner. We got to interact with the 122 crew.

Sunday, November 10, 2024

Thanks to Lt CDR Keisha Castillo's last-minute efforts, we were able to hold our memorial service on the fantail of the USS John Basilone DDG-122. Crew members of the 122 participated in the memorial service. Crew members of the 824 in attendance were Joseph Fisher, Frank Stepka, Geoffrey Bender and their families.

After the memorial service was completed. Frank Stepka presented a flag that was on the USS Basilone DD-824 to Lt CDR Keisha Castillo. Lt CDR Keisha Castillo had a Quartermaster obtain a flag from the 122, flew it from the flagstaff on the 122 and presented it to Frank Stepka.

Geoffrey Bender asked to see where they mounted the shadow box that was presented to the crew during the meet and greet after the Mast Stepping Ceremony June 17, 2022, (the day before the Christening of the 122, June 18, 2022). The shadow box contains pictures of the USS Basilone in its DDE and DD configurations, ship's and DESRON patches. The shadow box was mounted on an inside passageway near the XO's stateroom

Joe Fisher, FN 65, printed out a certificate promoting Frank Stepka and Geoffrey Bender to ATTA BOY First Class along with a small pin he made for their service to the to the association and their outstanding work in making the commissioning get together a success. Hopefully, Joe made a certificate and a pin for himself as he did a lot of leg work for this event.

Other News

Dues are due. Annual dues are \$25.00 for a year or \$125.00 for a life membership. Associate members, members of the Basilone family and the crew of the 122 do not have to pay dues. Special thanks to Les Carter, Phil Poplaski and Mark Powers for donating to the special commissioning project, the purchasing of 824 challenge coins for the crew of the 122. Donations can also be made to the association as we are a 503 non-profit. Dues and donations can be sent to our treasurer Fred Gehrish at 5640 Whistling Cove Road Gainesville, GA 30504.

Reunion news: Joe Fisher has been looking into places for a possible reunion next year and right now the leading candidate is Jacksonville, FL sometime in September. Another possibility is Ohio. The reunion committee will get together to discuss the options. Would you like to host a reunion, if so, contact Phil Poplaski, email: pepumkc8@aol.com or go to our website and click on Contact Webmaster and complete the online form. We will help you.

Keep an eye peeled to the association website for information updates (www.ussbasilone.org) concerning any possible reunion next year.

The association officers will continue as before. Philip Poplaski as President, Geoffrey Bender as Vice-President, Fred Gehrisch as Treasurer, Frank Stepka as Historian/Chaplin

We have found the following shipmates from all eras: Leroy Shankes, Thomas Reed, Edward Deitzler, Larry Bayless, Bill Gardner, Richard Moss, Joseph Ramsack, Porfino Bracero, James Graff and Jon Eikenberg.

Also, crew members from the 122 joined our association: LtCdr Kiesha Castillo, ET3 Alexander Streuli, CTR2 Brandon Paschall.

It is my sad duty to inform you of the passing of the following shipmates: Eugene Pattison, Ludwig Bardoff, Michael Bacigalupo, Herman Schichel, Vernon Brown, Delmar Lane, Toby Wasson, Dennis Henningham, Joseph Boyd, Lee Shaver, Willard Peak, Marvin Oltmanns, George Haskins, Richard Vivian, Lawrence Smith, PLANK OWNER, Ed Stolark, Basil Hart, Richard Papesca, Carl Johnson, James Neighbors, Steven Sanders, John Shemas, Lawrence Peake, Mordy Moss, Michael Stein, John Berger, Allen Woodhouse, Douglas Hanahan and Leonard Gonzales and Mary T. Poplaski also known as "MOM". During the days when snail mail was the way to communicate, people would respond to my search letters to potential association membership and call to make contact, I was on the road working and my mom would answer the phone and the caller would say, tell your husband and my mother would say, no I'm Phil's mom. So, everyone that made multiple calls to me started calling her MOM. After many years of people asking her to come to a reunion, she finally decided to go to the Buffalo reunion. She enjoyed the reunion so much that she went to every reunion after that, including her last reunion in Atlanta. These names were read at the memorial service held on the fantail of USS John Basilone DDG122 in New York City.

If we can get things together, I hope to see you at the next reunion.

Your Shipmate,

Phil Poplaski
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