



CA-30 BLUE BONNET

"The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast"

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REUNIONS

USS HOUSTON SURVIVORS MEMORIAL SERVICE

March 4-5, 2005

Doubletree- Allan Center

400 Dallas St, Houston, TX 77002

713 759-0202

LOST BATTALION / USS HOUSTON REUNION

August 12 – 13, 2005

Omni Hotel – Dallas Park West

1590 LBJ Freeway, Dallas, TX 75235

972 869-4300

Line from Lin

The **Lost Battalion Association** reunion was held in Farmers Branch, Texas, near the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport. Attending from the USS HOUSTON family were the following: Bob and Marti Charles and family, Jack and Marie Feliz, David and Donna Flynn, Al Kopp, Skip and Mary Schilperoort, Nadine Faulk and granddaughter, Theresa Papish and family, Jimmie Pryor and family (including a BEAUTIFUL 5 week-old grand baby), and Erma Snyder and family. Also attending were family members of the following: Albert McGarvey, Valdon Roberts, and James Raydell Wilson. Since the 131st Field Artillery was originally stationed in Texas and many of them still live in Texas, there were too many of them for me to name all in attendance. Many memories

and good times were shared, and at the Memorial Service, we remembered those who had passed away during the past year.

Lost Battalion Monument - Arrangements for a bus were made, and we were transported to the Dallas-Ft. Worth National Cemetery a short distance from our reunion hotel. There we viewed the new monument that had recently been placed on the Memorial Path. It is a beautiful marker with the following wording, at the top: LOST BATTALION, 2/BN. 131 F. A., USS HOUSTON CA-30, and on the front: DEDICATED TO THE 1548 MEN WHO SERVED THEIR COUNTRY. THOSE WHO DIED AND THE 736 WHO RETURNED HOME AFTER 42 MONTHS AS POWS. A stop was made at an office where we were able to access burial plot locations, and we were able to stop and remember the following USS HOUSTON men who are buried at this cemetery: Charlie Pryor and John Wisecup, and his wife, Iku. Several from the 131st F.A. are also buried there. We will have to thank Jody and Pat Cadenhead, 131st N.G., for their perseverance in getting this monument carved and installed.

Why Two Groups - the Difference - Many people have asked me about the Lost Battalion Association and the USS HOUSTON Survivors Association and why we have two associations. Here is the main difference. The Lost Battalion represents all the men who were POWs from **both** the 131st Field Artillery and the USS HOUSTON. The USS HOUSTON group covers not only the men who survived the sinking, but the men who went down with the ship. There were over 1,000 men on the HOUSTON when sunk - approximately 700 did not make it ashore - we cannot forget those men, nor their families.

PLANS FOR MARCH, 2005 - Plans were started in March, 2004! The Houston Brass Band has already agreed to return for next year - we always enjoy their musical talents on the brass instruments. Sharron Long and Patty Letze are again negotiating with the hotel and planning menus - we will again be downtown right across the street from the Monument. Julie Grob has sent us information about the UH Library reception - the reception will be back at UH in 2005 so Ron and I will make arrangements for the buses to transport people to UH. The Sea Cadets have agreed to serve as the Color Guard - and to help wherever needed. Val has many irons in the fire, plus making arrangements for the Memorial Service speakers for each ABDA country. Many other activities are also in the planning stages. ONE QUESTION - the Houston Park Service will not be able to provide a complimentary handicapped portable toilet for use during the Memorial Service. The Museum will allow us to use their facilities, do you think that we need a handicapped portable toilet? Let me know if you think that we should go to the expense of renting one ourselves which will cost at a minimum, \$150.

THE AUCTION - Please start making a list of your collectibles (from handmade items to books to anything) that you might bring to donate to the auction. The monies go toward the USS HOUSTON Scholarship. David Flynn brought a beautiful black cowboy hat in August - it has "history" and was purchased at a hat store across the street from a Lost Battalion reunion many years ago - Ron and I will bring it to the next reunion for the auction. If David's story is not good enough, I am sure that the 2 Crispi brothers (as auctioneer and model) can come up with a better story to enliven the auctioning.

As always, **we all** love putting together the reunion week-ends for our MEN - their families and friends ---- and appreciate all the volunteers during the week-end. Please consider volunteering for March, 2005.

Please mark **March 4 and 5** on your 2005 calendar, and plan to come. Please note that the date of March 4-5, 2005, is different from the original date as indicated on the Memorial Service bulletin this past year. This year (as every year) we had MANY new faces - please join us in 2005.

Lin and Ron Drees, (our mailing address) 720 N. Commerce, P.M.Box #325, Ardmore, Oklahoma 73401, home phone and fax, 580-224-0510 - or lindrees.ca30@sbcglobal.net **Please note that we now live in Oklahoma - I still go back to Houston to check on the house and check the old computer and e-mail, but not on a monthly basis.

DEADLINE FOR SCHOLARSHIP – The Scholarship Committee announces they will be accepting applications for a \$1,000 Scholarship to be announced at the March '05 reunion! **WE HAVE NO APPLICATIONS AT THIS TIME!!** Please send your inquiries to: Marilyn Messier, USS Houston Survivors Scholarship, 49 Derby Ct., San Ramon, CA 94583. She will in turn mail the application & instructions to be **completed and returned no later than November 1st**. Criteria: Be at least a high school senior assured of entering/attending college up to and including a college junior who will enter his/her final year of undergraduate education. Be related (blood/marriage) to/or associated in some way with a crew member/descendant of the USS Houston (CA-30), Next Generation, the USS Houston Survivors Association and the Next Generation organization and/or has shown a keen interest in the history of the USS Houston CA-30's history and/or crew's legacy. This interest could come, for example, in the form of having participated in communications with any of the survivors and/or the organization while striving to learn more. Eligibility will be determined by the scholarship selection sub-committee, whose decisions are final. Be able to document current academic grades. Be able to document community/civic activity(s). Present an essay (not to exceed 5 pages) on; 'What does the memory of the USS Houston (CA-30) mean to me. Complete each item as indicated on the scholarship application including all necessary supporting documents.

NOW HEAR THIS – If you no longer wish to receive the Blue Bonnet, as a courtesy, *please* advise me. Over the last 1 ½ years, I've had to drop well over 100 NG's due to lack of response. Some are still receiving courtesy newsletters because their family member donates. You will receive a newsletter marked with a red @ if we haven't heard from you after receiving 6 issues. I hate to have to do this but expenses are getting higher and donations are getting smaller & farther in between. We will continue to provide free issues to the surviving spouses and survivors that do not donate. Please remember *we are a non-profit organization* and rely on you to function. I send out approximately 500 newsletters via email (expense for internet service provider) and snail mail (paper, printing and postage) – refer to the DONATIONS section to see the number that donate. Don't NOT donate because the amount is small --- every little bit helps!

SPECIAL EXTRA EARNINGS FOR MILITARY SERVICE:

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service from 1940 through 2001 can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

Special extra earnings are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Social Security cannot add these extra credits to your record until you file for Social Security benefits. (**Note:** Special extra earnings are **not** granted for inactive duty training.)

How You Get Credit For Special Extra Earnings

The information that follows applies **only** to active duty military service earnings from 1940 through 2001. Here's how the special extra earnings are credited:

Service In 1978 through 2001

For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details.

Service In 1957 Through 1977

You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.

Service In 1940 Through 1956

If you were in the military during this period, including attendance at a service academy, you did not pay Social Security taxes. However, your Social Security record may be credited with \$160 a month in earnings for military service from September 16, 1940, through December 31, 1956, under the following circumstances:

- You were honorably discharged after 90 or more days of service, or you were released because of a disability or injury received in the line of duty; or
- You are still on active duty; or
- You are applying for survivors benefits and the veteran died while on active duty.

You cannot receive credit for these special extra earnings if you are already receiving a federal benefit based on the same years of service. There is one exception: If you were on active duty after 1956, you can still get the special earnings for 1951 through 1956, even if you're receiving a military retirement based on service during that period. Please contact your local Social Security office for assistance.

COMBAT RELATED SPECIAL COMPENSATION (CRSC) - CRSC provides benefits to certain retirees with combat-related disabilities that qualify under the criteria of the law for Navy and Marine Corps Retirees. Basic eligibility requirements: Be in receipt of retired pay for a 20+ year retirement and one of the following: Have a current VA rating of 10% or more for injuries associated with a Purple Heart award or have a current VA rating of 60% or more for combat related injuries. Applications can be obtained by writing to: Naval Council of Personnel Boards, Combat Related Special Compensation Branch, 720 Kennon St. SE STE 300, Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5023 or download from the website www.dmdc.osd.mil/crsc/. Call toll free at 1-877-DON-CRSC (366-2772) to receive basic eligibility requirements and how to obtain an application (this is a recording). Another website is at the Naval Council of Personnel Boards: <http://www.hq.navy.mil/ncpb>. The DOD application will encourage you to provide as much documentation as you have & provide info on what types of documentation is appropriate. If you do not have this info, your case will be processed but will take much longer. The CRSC branch will forward approvals to you and the DFAS which will compute and enact the exact pay change. If your application is accepted for processing you will be notified by mail with estimated timeframes and procedures for obtaining a status update should the process exceed the estimates of time.

FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES: The changes in eligibility of DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC). Previously, surviving spouses receiving DIC because their spouse died from a service-connected cause lost this benefit if they remarried. Effective Dec., 16, 2003, qualifying spouses who remarry after age 57 retain the DIC benefit. *Those who remarried after age 57 but before the new law took effect can have their DIC benefit restored – but only if they apply for DIC reinstatement before Dec., 15, 2004.* Applications received after this date will be denied. Submit a written request for restoration of DIC along with a statement of dependence (VA form 21-686c). Go to www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/21-686c.pdf on the internet for a form. Mail your application to the nearest VA office go to www.va.gov and click on Facility Locator or look in the blue pages of your phone directory. For additional information call 800 827-1000 (hearing impaired call 800 829-4833 using their TDD device). This could mean \$967 a month or more! If you know any widows or widowers who lost their spouse because of a service-related cause, please call this to their attention immediately!

CHANGE OF ADDRESS – Pauline Hanline (surviving spouse) 8822 E. Timber Rd, Catoosa, OK 74015-5741. Please notify me of any change of mail and/or email address right away. If your email is rejected or the post office notifies me of any changes, I do not attempt to hunt for you.

MAILBAG – Cmdr. Howard Furness, RAN emailed me that he is being transferred back to Australia on July 22 and will no longer be able to attend our March reunions. He and his family will stop to visit family in Spain and the UK before reaching their final destination. We will miss him singing along with the others at the piano. Mattie Atterberry sends a note telling of her life on her place. She describes such beauty in the land and animals. WILLIAM STEWART sent a donation along with a request to send a picture of the ship's bell and information about the ship for a future issue of *The Jerseyman* magazine. I was more than happy to oblige. BOB CHARLES met a gentleman while on a plane trip. Bob told him about the Houston & organization. The next thing you know, he's made a donation! (After calling and talking to me, Bob chose the scholarship fund).

I received an email from Rodney (last name unknown) saying his mom had ordered him to write to say she's "received the newsletter for years and everyone should let Otto know how much he will be missed in the newsletter & how much his insights will be greatly missed". (I know Rodney and don't think for a minute that I don't continue to ask Otto for his guidance). He also relayed a lovely message to me but when I emailed back and asked who I was getting this message from, there was no reply... Darn! I thought I'd get her to adopt me (hee hee) I received the sweetest letter from the sweetest man---LLOYD WILLEY. He's disappointed to report that the doctor said "no way am I fit to go" to the August reunion. The family gathered to celebrate their 58th anniversary. We missed Dorothy and Lloyd so very much! Congratulations to our friend Jim Hornfisher! "The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors" won the Sam Elliot Morrison Award. Sadly, ADML. BOB FULTON sent information he found about yachts available for hire to dive the War Graves of the *USS Houston* and *Perth* for pleasure. We were very sad to learn that Clifford "Peanut" Johnson of the 131st died in July. Donia Burroughs writes that she is very happy at her new place-she would have moved there sooner if she had known how much she liked it!

DONATIONS: Thank you, thank you for the donations. We are a non-profit organization and are at your mercy! Some of you are as regular as clockwork with your generosity & some of you we have never heard from. Would I tempt you if I gave you the # for a tax deduction?? (Tax ID # 17053122009007) Rita Jedinak in memory of FREDRICK MILLS, Carol Pullen, Mattie Atterberry, Fred & Liz Seiker, George & Tom Jones in memory of WILLIAM S JONES, KIA, Pat Stoker, WILLIAM STEWART, BOB & MARTI CHARLES, Marion Beardsley in memory of MARVIN M. BEARDSLEY, Donia Burroughs, Jimmie Pryor.

FOR SALE (USS Houston items)- Caps \$15 (wool – Navy with gold lettering, twill – Navy with gold lettering or kaki with Navy lettering), T-shirts (Navy with gold lettering) \$15, coffee mugs (Navy with gold lettering) \$10, Monument and Bell pins \$2 each, "Death Becomes the Ghost" videos \$15, Avenue the Houston posters \$10, schematic of the HOUSTON \$5 for small, \$10 for large, Bumper stickers \$2.00, "A Traveller's Guide to the Burma Railway" by Lt Col Ron Beaton, (Ret.) \$16, "Mr. Michel's War" by John J A Michel \$10, (All PLUS postage).

Cruiser Houston Library Reception Encounters Some Exhibit Delays

Library staff are looking forward to welcoming the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors Association back to the newly expanded and renovated M.D. Anderson Library next spring. On March 5th, 2005, we will be hosting a reception for survivors and their guests in the new Rockwell Pavillion, adjacent to the new Cruiser Houston exhibit space.

Unfortunately, construction delays mean that the new Cruiser Houston exhibit will not be as far along as we had hoped. Only one of the two sets of exhibit cases will be completed in time for the reception. We apologize for this delay; these kinds of setbacks are difficult to avoid with a major construction project like ours.

At the reception, you will be able to view the new exhibit cases designed to hold oil paintings of the USS *Houston*, framed artwork and photographs, and plaques. We will also have some additional collection materials available for viewing. The cases that will not be ready in time are those for displaying letters, documents, photographs, and memorabilia.

I believe that this year's reception will be a very special one. We are excited about showing off our new library wing, and giving you a first look at the state-of-the-art exhibit cases. Most of all, we are delighted to welcome you back to the "home port" of the Cruiser Houston Collection.

For any additional information about the reception, please contact me by e-mail at jgrob@uh.edu, or by phone at 713-743-9744.

Julie Grob
Special Collections Librarian
University of Houston Libraries

FROM DOWN UNDER – David Manning (*Perth* survivor) sent us a copy of the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial Newsletter. It stated "Sixty two years after he was held prisoner in Burma by the Japanese, David Manning was given the honour of being the first ex-prisoner of war to lay a wreath at the Memorial during the Memorial's dedication ceremony. Mr. Manning, who was taken prisoner after his ship HMAS *Perth* was sunk, laid a wreath on behalf of the survivors on the USS *Houston*, an American warship that was sunk at the same time as the *Perth*. Mr. Manning says it was a moving and emotional moment and that he was proud to have represented the USS *Houston* survivors....."

A diver friend of Jerry Ranger, NG, states at the "*Perth* there were local salvage divers at the site hooking chains into the hull and pulling the plates open with their boat. The local divers, on surface supplied air, then used the opening to strip out all the plumbing, etc. to be carried off and sold as scrap. He said the salvors boat was heaped with hundreds of pounds of metal objects like pipes and fixtures from the interior of the ship. I guess they are working on the *Perth* because it is easier since the hull is already breaking up and the visibility is better than on the other two wrecks. But, I also imagine it is just a matter of time until they turn their attention to the *Houston* and the Japanese transport.

He also said there is a big construction project underway that will eventually turn the bay into a commercial seaport with a liquid natural gas pipeline that will run on the seafloor between the *Perth* and the *Houston*. At a minimum, thinking of the other commercial seaports I've seen in Indonesia, I suspect the bay will become so congested and polluted it will be more difficult to dive there. I don't have any idea about the construction schedule in the bay."

Diving for the USS Houston in the Sunda Strait; Part II
By David C. Faltot
(excerpts from an article by Brian Dinsley)

It had been 6 months since I had last dived the wreck of the USS *Houston*. During that dive I experienced a combination of equipment failures coupled with my own poor judgment that landed me in critical condition at Mt. Elizabeth hospital in Singapore. Needless to say I had mixed feelings when I was contacted by Brian Dinsley, a British diver who asked me to lead a group of British and Australian divers on a "tour" of the wrecks of the *Houston* and *Perth*.

In April of 2004 Dinsley called me and asked for some help. He had a group of divers (British and Australian) who wanted to dive the wrecks of the American heavy cruiser *Houston*, and the

Australian cruiser Perth. Both ships were casualties of the Battle of the Sunda Straits when they ran into an entire Japanese task force that was conducting a midnight invasion of the island of Java. The two cruisers were trying to pass through the Straits to the Indian Ocean when they observed strange lights from ships in the vicinity of the northwest tip of Java. The Houston flashed a message and challenged the ships but did not receive the correct response. A gunfight quickly ensued and the Houston and Perth both found themselves surrounded by the entire Japanese fleet. Within two hours it was all over. Both ships had gone down with the bulk of their crews and those who survived fought against strong currents and the Japanese, who were shooting the survivors while they struggled in the water. Those who passed through this ordeal faced several years of malnutrition, privation and torture in Japanese prison camps.

I gave Brian's request some thought and agreed to take them to the wrecks. We met at my home in Jakarta for a safety and logistics meeting and made our final preparations for the expedition.

We made arrangements for a 65 foot sailboat powered by inboard diesels. It was a great boat and its skipper and owner, Cameron, was an Australian diver who was also part of the dive team. We planned to get underway from the port of Merak before 8 pm the night of the 26th of June. We needed to get out at that time due to the shifting of the tides. We sailed that night for several hours and dropped anchor for the night in the vicinity of Nicholas Point at the northwest tip of Java. Due to the possibility of strong winds we wanted to be in a sheltered area rather than motor directly to the Houston and anchor in unprotected waters. The weather was clear, seas were relatively calm and, after dropping anchor, we had a good meal while setting up and testing our equipment (wreck diving is much more technical in nature and requires additional safety precautions over simple recreational diving). We talked a bit about the wreck and its history and then went below to our bunks for the night.

While we slept a boat quietly pulled up alongside. It was a group of pirates intent on helping themselves to our equipment. They boarded us but one of our Indonesian crew members woke and called out an alert. The pirates, who were in no mood for a fight, quickly retreated as we scrambled up onto the deck. From that time on our crew rotated guard shifts to preclude another attack.

We woke at about 5 am to prepare for our dive. It was a gray, overcast morning and the seas were a bit choppy. We got underway again to head toward the wreck of the Houston using our GPS to position ourselves on the north side of the hull. The ship lays on its starboard side on a heading of 080 degrees. So to avoid the possibility of fouling our anchor on the wreck we approached from the south side, saw the indication of a huge anomaly (the Houston) on the fathometer, and then dropped anchor after we cleared the hull of the ship. The plan was to have Paul Behrens and I suit up, go down the anchor chain to the ocean bottom, swim to the hull of the wreck and then find the bollard on the port stern side of the Houston from which we would send up a buoy. The Australian and British divers would then go down the buoy line and meet Paul and I on the Houston, vicinity of number 3 turret.

Paul and I began getting out gear ready which was a considerable effort considering we were both using twin steel high pressure tanks, each with two separate, independent regulator sets. We use this configuration due to the challenging nature of the dive and our desire to have completely

redundant systems including air sources, dive lights, knives, etc. But the result is increased preparation time and a very heavy outfit for each of us.

We finally entered the water, swam to the anchor line and began our descent. We were surprised at the strength of the current as it is usually much more calm early in the morning. We had to carefully pull ourselves down the anchor line because if we happened to let go we would be swept away and would not be able to get back. As we descended the water around us became increasingly dim and we found ourselves in need of our HID lights. We found the bottom at about 125 feet. Visibility was only about 6 feet and I pulled myself across the ocean bottom on the anchor chain with Paul close behind. Once we found the anchor we knew we needed to take a 180 degree compass reading and swim along the bottom, on that heading, while crabbing into the current. Although it was not quite dark on the bottom, it was very dim and we needed our lights to see where we were going. As we swam I noticed that the light went from dim to dark and we still had not found the hull of the ship. We continued to swim and then, directly ahead, appeared a wall of steel. I thought we had found the bottom of the hull and so we began to ascend. To my surprise, and concern, there was a steel ceiling directly overhead that stopped our ascent. As we investigated we found we were surrounded by steel so we began to pull ourselves back, along the ceiling, in the direction from which we came hoping to find the exit. After a few minutes of pulling ourselves through wreckage we saw the dim green light that showed open water. We exited from what we discovered was a large torpedo hole that was in the bottom of the ship.

I believe this torpedo hole was the last of the torpedoes fired by the Japanese. As the Houston was sinking it was listing severely to starboard such that the yardarms were nearly dipping into the water. There was a tremendous explosion as a torpedo hit from the port side. The port side began flooding and the ship righted itself before making its final plunge to the ocean bottom. The survivors reported that this torpedo hit occurred on the forward port side. During our dives on this ship during the past three years we searched for a port side torpedo hole but never found one until now. I believe we had not previously found it because of continual poor visibility and strong currents.

After we exited the torpedo hole we swam up over the top of the hull and found ourselves in the vicinity of number 1 gun turret. We swam back past the Admirals cabin, quarterdeck, hangar bays until we reached the bollard on the port side adjacent to number 3 gun turret. Paul and I stopped here and sent up a buoy, tied to the bollard, for the Australian and British divers. We then hung on to the port side propeller guard and waited for them to join us. After about a ten minute wait we saw the lights of our group as they worked themselves down the buoy line. Upon reaching the ship Paul and I split them up and took them on a very short tour of the ship but we could not stay down long because our air was running low from our ordeal in the torpedo hole and we were already in decompression mode. We slowly made our way up the ascent line stopping at our required decompression stops. The single tank British and Australian divers had no need to decompress so they went directly to their safety stop and then the surface. Paul and I surfaced about 20 minutes later.

Conditions that day on the Houston were poor and our group decided to move to the wreck of the Perth (3 nautical miles distant) to see if things were any better. We left the buoy on the Houston, motored off and found the Perth with no problems. Conditions gradually improved throughout the day and our group completed three dives on the Perth. The Perth is also a heavy cruiser although

not quite as large as the Houston. It is deeper than the Houston, about 135 feet, and is laying on its port side with its now silent guns pointing toward the surface. Visibility was much better here and there was virtually no current.

I am sure that all the guys harbored their own special thoughts of what the ships crew must have gone through that terrible night 62 years ago. It is one of the worst war tragedies in view of loss of life for Australia. The same or similar can be said about the USS Houston. The loss of life on both ships was very high...well into the 600 - 700 plus for each.

We could see a lot of shell damage to the hull and of course the damage the torpedoes caused was obvious. The ship took a massive battering and is more broken up than the USS Houston. The Houston also experienced a massive loss of life but was perhaps more sturdy in its construction as it appeared much more intact, especially in the main body of the ship.

The next morning we motored back to the Houston, albeit the weather turned on us, making it even less appealing. All the same a decision was made to dive the Houston again as the shot line had to be released and recovered. Paul and I wanted to see if we could enter a compartment we found on a previous trip to see if there was anything worth recovering for the US Navy museum onboard the carrier Lexington in Corpus Christi. The weather continued to turn bad while Paul and I suited up for one last dive.

We entered the water and swam to the buoy that we had previously positioned. Once there we completed our final safety checks and began our descent. We made it to the bollard and then began our descent to the open hatch that led into the bowels of the ship. We entered the crew galley area careful not to position ourselves under anything that could fall on top of us and then looked for the hatch that led into the officer's quarters. I entered first as I had the camera and I wanted to get some photos before stirring up the deadly silt that seemed to pervade every crevice on this ship. Even with the use of my HID light the water was murky and visibility was not great. The first thing I saw was bunks that had crashed down onto the starboard side of the compartment. There was a great deal of rubble and, I would surmise, personal effects buried in the silt of the compartment. We saw several steel columns that would have been vertical, floor to ceiling, had the ship been upright. The walls were brown with silt but, with a slight touch, revealed what appeared to be white paint underneath. I tried getting some photos as Paul began exploring the extent of the room. We saw what appeared to be bookshelves as well as fans and lights that were still plugged into the wall. The portholes also appeared to be intact with the battleports still closed. It was an eerie feeling to be in that compartment, knowing we were the first to enter since that fateful night 62 years ago. But we could not stay long. For each minute we remained in that room visibility began to decrease as silt was inadvertently stirred up by our air bubbles and movement. As our visibility decreased we made our way back to the exit hatch which was in the corner of the compartment. We positioned ourselves on the adjacent wall and Paul continued to explore up toward the port side. At this point, with visibility rapidly going to zero, I was more interested in finding the exit hatch. I felt for the hatch along what would have been the ceiling of the compartment and finally my hand bumped into what appeared to be the hatch frame. I quickly ducked my head outside and, sure enough, was looking into the crew's galley. I then remained where I was, one hand on the now invisible hatch, and with my HID light on waiting for Paul. I could see his HID light as he moved, about ten feet above my head and he gradually worked his

way back down to me. In his exploration he found a ships lamp that was still plugged in and attached to the wall. He recovered it and we subsequently exited the ship.

We photographed the lamp as we exited the hull and then swam forward to the maintenance spaces and 5 inch gun deck. We entered the maintenance spaces, swam forward and exited the port aircraft hanger. In the process we found an empty ammunition box that we also recovered. We then swam back to our entry bollard, dropped the ammunition box and began our ascent and decompression. Due to its weight we could not recover the ammunition box at that time and positioned it to allow for easy recovery at a later date. We decompressed for about 40 minutes and then made our way to the surface. Our fearless skipper, Cameron, picked us up in the zodiac inflatable and we made our way back to the boat.

As the weather turned, it was just a matter of making it back into port, any port for that matter, so we could get off board and head back to Jakarta. We had strong winds and heavy seas, not something for the faint of heart. We finally had to seek refuge in the port of Merak as we rounded Nicholas Point. This is one of west Java's jewels in the crown. A city that has directed its focus on presenting itself as an environmentally focused town, devoid of the usual rubbish that finds its way to the edge of shores, streets etc. In fact the local people that we meet, as result of hiring them to ferry us to shore and to carry all the luggage and gear, clearly had the local environment as a top priority. The people were friendly and we even had welcome smiles from two of the local Indonesian Navy representatives.

With each dive the Houston and Perth reveal even more of themselves to us. We know that some divers have taken advantage of these wrecks to loot them and sell their wares on the black market. These vessels are war graves and should be treated with the utmost respect. As we continue to dive the Houston and if we find anything of note, we will send those items to the Houston Survivors Association and US Navy museum and so that a tangible memento will exist to bear witness to the sacrifice of its crew.

BURIAL BENEFITS FOR NATIONAL CEMETERIES - Burial benefits in a Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery include the gravesite, opening and closing of the gravesite, a government graveliner if the burial is in a casket, government headstone or marker, and maintaining the cemetery as a national shrine. Many national cemeteries have columbaria or other special designated gravesites for cremated remains.

Headstones and markers are provided at ALL national cemeteries at no charge to the veteran or eligible dependent. Space permitting, an optional inscription, commonly referred to as a Term of Endearment, may be added to the headstone or marker at no cost. In order to expedite the delivery of the headstone or marker, families need to provide their desired term of endearment as soon as possible upon completion of the burial.

The veteran, eligible dependents and service members are eligible for burial in one of the VA's 120 national cemeteries. An eligible veteran must have been discharged or completed the required period of service. Persons who served in the National Guard of a reserve component, are also eligible for burial. It does not matter which person predeceases the other since eligibility is based upon the vet's service. Remarriage of a surviving spouse to a non-veteran will cancel the surviving spouse's entitlement to burial benefits. However, if the marriage to the non-vet is terminated by death, divorce or annulment, the spouse regains eligibility for burial in a national cemetery.

Gravesites in a national cemetery cannot be reserved. Persons wishing to make prearrangements for burial can contact a funeral home of their choice and make arrangements for pre-need burial with the funeral home. At the time of death of either the vet or eligible dependent, the funeral home would contact the national cemetery and request burial. The funeral home or family would provide a copy of the veteran's discharge document, i.e. DD214 or equivalent, and the date and time for burial would be scheduled.

Military honors are provided by the Department of Defense facilities and are requested through the funeral home in most cases.

The End of the Houston

By Vic Miller

Skip Schillperoort was a sailor.
He sailed on a warship of might.
But a Japanese bomb found her deck
And took out her all her fight.

The crew who survived just floated.
They were specks in a measureless sea.
Each wondered as they struggled and drifted:
"Will anyone ever find me?"

The Japanese gathered them up.
Free labor is hard to come by.
They packed them into a tramp steamer
To go build a railroad—and die.

Then two American planes did appear:
And one sank a companion ship.
Then the Bombardier in the second plane
Did drop all his bombs—with no hit!

He thought he would live in disgrace
For having missed that sitting duck
Then the survivors at their reunion honored him
For letting them live with good luck!

ON THE EUROPEAN FRONT - Fred Seiker writes that the POW organization in Holland contacted him only to turn around and challenge his credibility. He had to contact an attorney. His accuser stubbornly apologized. There was news coverage over the fiasco & Fred came out the winner. I am always awed by you ex-POW's and your fight for what is right. Good job!! I hope that little man learned a valuable lesson to respect our aging warriors.

JAPANESE DESTROYERS IN BATTLE OF SUNDA STRAIT – The Battle of Sunda Strait was won by Japanese destroyers. In no other action in the Pacific War were their destroyers given the opportunity of using the tactics they had practiced since the Battle of Tsushima. This account of the battle in which HMAS PERTH and USS HOUSTON were lost is a translation of the official Japanese proceedings.

First Phase

The action began when the destroyer *Harukaze* sighted two enemy cruisers southeast of Babi Island at 2305. Two minutes later, the Allied cruisers commenced firing at the transports on the eastern side of St. Nicholas Point. *Harukaze* promptly laid a very effective smoke-screen to cover the transports. Prior to the commencement of the action the destroyer *Fubuki*, on patrol off Babi Island, had sighted the Allied cruisers, and after making an enemy report had shadowed them for some period.

At 2313 *Fubuki* observed the Allied cruisers alter course to starboard and one minute later the destroyer fired 9 torpedoes at Houston at the short range of 2,500 meters. While on the same course *Fubuki* illuminated the two cruisers to port and fired 16 shells; *Fubuki* observed one torpedo hit and that the *Houston* had reduced speed. In the meantime *Perth* illuminated the Japanese destroyer and opened fire on her – there were no hits.

At 2315 Admiral Hara ordered all destroyers of the 5th and 11th Squadrons to make an attack. At the same time, he ordered the heavy cruisers *Mogami* and *Mikuma*, which were escorting a convoy to the north, to join his force. At 2322 the destroyer *Katakaze* fired at *Perth* at a range of 3,500 meters and started a fire. At the same time, the destroyer illuminated the cruiser. *Perth* shot at the destroyer furiously, but no hit was scored. Admiral Hara now ordered the 5th Destroyer Squadron to make a torpedo attack at 2326. *Katekaze* joined in the attack which was made at 2332 at a range of 10,000 meters. This ended the first phase of the battle.

~~~~~ the next 3 phases will be continued in the next issues

### MILITARY NEWS IN 1944 – 60 YEARS AGO

Japanese Army withdraws from Myitkyina in Burma.

Japanese government introduces measure to conscript all women between 12 and 40 for war-related work.

U. S. Army and Marine Corps capture Guam.

U.S. forces reach France's old Maginot Line, U.S. 3rd Army crosses Meuse River; U.S. Marines land on Iwo Jima.

## FINANCIAL REPORT -

DEBITS

CREDITS

CURRENT BALANCE

**IN CONCLUSION** – Whew, this has been an expensive quarter. At the last reunion in Houston, we were charged over \$700 for the use of a new fangled projector that attaches to computers. Actually, they quoted \$500 then there were these fees that drove it up. We have speakers lined up for the next reunion and need one for the display room. We're talking A LOT of money for the 4 (four) days we would use it. I have been able to acquire a projector and laptop for just over \$3,200. (I'll be able to use this for presentations at clubs and schools also.) We've got the equipment to not only re-use at the next reunion but future reunions. Please, please, *please* be aware that I am now living with our daughter to help out with the 4 grandsons while our son in law is in Iraq. He's in Balad just 43 miles north of Bagdad. We hope to have him home between December & February. I have VERY limited time on the internet so please refrain from sending jokes, etc. I will be contacting many of you for extra help in planning our reunion. In addition to my job for y'all & my dedication to my family, Max and I were elected President of the Lost Battalion Association (131<sup>st</sup> AND USS Houston survivors) for 2005 which means we run the August '05 reunion (with the help of NG's). Let me remind you --- not just a few run this organization --- **YOU-are-the-organization**. We're a strong, close family and can work together as a team to have both reunions for our survivors. In the mean time, wish me all kinds of luck staying organized. If you catch me slipping up, nudge me back in the right direction!

**UNTIL THE DECEMBER ISSUE,**

**GOD BLESS**

**AND SEND IN THOSE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS!**