

# PAWCATUCK PILOT

Volume 11 Issue 1

March 2002

## OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF USS PAWCATUCK AO-108



### Special Points of Interest

- *David Willis has some news on the reunion in the cover story. Hope you're making plans to attend.*
- *WELCOME MAT on page two has 40 new names. TAPS remembers seven.*
- *MAIL CALL begins on page two with more about the sinking of the tug boat.*
- *What did a labor strike have to do with the Pawcatuck? Read the story "Pawcatuck Beats Freeze" on pages four and five.*
- *More stories from Thomas Blood beginning on page five. They'll bring back memories.*

### WILLIS' WORDS OF WISDOM

Dear Pawcatuck Family,  
Hello. When you get this newsletter we will be just about three months away from our tenth annual reunion for the USS Pawcatuck. I hope many of you are planning on attending this year's reunion. We are hoping to have the largest crowd to date. The 19th of June will be here before we know it and for those who are planning on attending, I as your reunion coordinator, ask that you get your reservations in early. This will help the Locator Service at their end and also myself at this end. It will help get everything in order

so when you do arrive you will be able to get checked in and start enjoying the beautiful weather we have out here in the Great Southwest.

I hope some of you who happen to be a widow of a shipmate know that you are always welcome to join the rest of us and enjoy some time together with some of the finest people you will ever want to meet. We are a family and we hope you will join us for this, our tenth reunion. Please come and be part of the Pawcatuck family.

So far since April of last year, we have gained 47

new shipmates to add to the list from the last reunion. We have added 37 just since last November. We are up to 447 total with 57 deceased. That gives us a total of 504 on the mailing list. If any of you know of anybody who was on our ship and you are not sure if we have them on the mailing list, please give me a call or write to see if anybody you served with is on our list. Also if you know of any shipmate who might be deceased also call or write and I will let you know who is on our present list.

I would like to just give

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*(Continued from page 1)*

a few thoughts on coming to Arizona. First, you will not need any cold weather clothes. It will be warm both in Phoenix and for those going to Sedona. We will be dressing casually for the Memorial Service and the Banquet on Saturday night. I would hope all of you attending this year will be at the Memorial Service. I hope to have some special things for that service.

Those who will be flying, I suggest that you try and travel with one carry-on bag so you do not have to check your bags at your departure site. This will make it easier when you get to Phoenix. The airport has three terminals and terminal three and four are the busiest. I do also suggest that you plan your arrival time no later than 1430 to 1500 hours. If you arrive after 1500, the traffic on the freeways start to get really busy.

The hotel is 13 miles (approximately) from the airport. I will try and do this for those who are flying to Phoenix. If you will call me before the 12th of June and tell me what airlines you are coming in on, what the flight number is and time of scheduled arrival, I will try to have somebody there to pick you up at the airport. If you come a day or two early, I will also try to have you picked up at the airport. You will have to call me by 1800 hours on the 12th so I can get the schedule arranged to have you picked up. If you arrive after 1500 hours, you will be on your own. We will be getting ready for the start of the festivities at the hotel. They will start around 1645 on Wednesday the 19th of June.

So, until the 19th of June, I hope many of you will come to this our tenth reunion of our ship. The USS PAWCAUCK AO-108. We are hoping that we surpass last year's total of 98 who were in Charleston, SC. It is up to each of you and I make the challenge to all of you and let's make this the best reunion we have had. I have said this in the past, and I will say

it again. It's not what we eat, where we go for tours, the hotel—but the main reason for getting together each year is the comradeship we had while serving in the greatest Navy in the world. It is up to you. I feel that we will hit the 100 mark and with each of you who care for your Pawcatuck Family, you will show up in June.

David Willis  
Reunion Coordinator for the Greatest Oiler in the Fleet

## Financial Statement

Balance after 12/01 issue  
**\$144.08**

Funds received since 12/01  
**\$95.00**

Funds available for 03/02  
**\$239.08**

Funds used for 03/02 issue  
**\$311.01**

Balance remaining **Minus \$71.93**

**Funds will be needed for the next issue in September. There will be no June issue due to the reunion at that time.**

*The Pawcatuck Pilot is Published by:*

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*"Our Reunions Work So You Don't Have To"*

## STATEMENT OF PUBLICATION

The PAWCAUCK PILOT is the official publication of the USS PAWCAUCK AO-108 Association. It will be published quarterly in March, June, September, and December, *subject to receiving sufficient funding.* The Newsletter is funded by voluntary contributions from the membership. All members are encouraged to support the voice of the PAWCAUCK. A financial statement appears in each issue of the newsletter.

The newsletter is intended to be a vehicle for the members to express opinions, make suggestions and especially share experiences.

Unless otherwise stated, the views and opinions printed in the newsletter are those of the article's writer, and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the Association leadership or the Editor of the Newsletter.

All letters and stories submitted will be considered for publication, except unsigned letters will not be published. Letters requesting the writer's name be withheld will be honored, but published on a space available basis. Signed letters with no restrictions will be given priority.

Letters demeaning to another shipmate will not be printed; letters espousing a political position will not be printed.

The editor reserves the right to edit letters to conform to space limitations and grammar.

You are encouraged to actively participate in the newsletter family by submitting your stories and suggestions.

**2002 REUNION  
JUNE 19-23  
PHOENIX, AZ  
SHERATON CRESCENT  
HOTEL**

## WELCOME MAT



The following shipmates have been located recently. Welcome aboard. We hope to see you at the reunion and that you will take an active part in the association. We welcome:

Donald Parker  
Wayne Coryell (1955-56)  
Sherrill Kitts  
James Mayotte  
Walter Beardslee  
David December  
John Obranovich  
Arthur Patteson  
Richard Dausses  
Sanford Becker  
Robert Vahovick  
Ronald Vahovick  
Walter Virden  
John Gutknecht  
Frank Ciesielski  
Daniel Gizzie  
Merle Burdick  
William Yarbrough (1964-65)  
Keith Mumby (1955-58)  
Owen Hensley CWO-4 (1955-58)  
Richard Hasting Ltjg  
Gerald Mendenhall Ltjg Nav Ops '54-57  
Hugh Peterson RM1 (1973-75)  
Bud Abernathy DK2 (1959-61)  
John Nisteleck CSC (1962-64)  
George Miller EN1 (1972-74)  
Frank Younie EN2  
Anthony DiDomenico SHSN (1960-63)  
Frank Rozansky  
Leroy Shinkle BM1 (1966-68)  
Dave Wendell  
Terry Witt RM1 (1967-70)  
John Lubitz (1991)  
Bill McCall (1962-65)  
Gene Johnson FA (1956-57)  
James Toennies (1962-65)  
Robert Mortvedt EM3 (1967-69)  
Jeffery Anderle  
Leroy Kloss  
Robert Russell (Last master of ship 1990-91)

There were too many addresses to be printed in the newsletter, but if you recognize an old buddy and would like

his address, just call, write, or e-mail to Military Locator & Reunion Service at either of our addresses on page two, and we will be glad to give it to you.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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2050 Austell Rd #1-3  
Marietta, GA 30008-4180  
tedrhill@yahoo.com

Raymond Stauback  
205 N Water St.  
Georgetown, OH 45121

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Chaska, MN 55318  
952-448-3931  
RogerNarkie@aol.com

Donald Wilson  
350 Grovers Ave Unit 11-E  
Bridgeport, CT 06605  
203-338-0157  
ewilson@qwestonline.com



## TAPS

The Pawcatuck Pilot has learned of the following deaths since the last newsletter. Our deepest sympathy goes to the widows, families and friends of the deceased. Anyone who knows or learns of a shipmate's death, you are requested to notify the newsletter so that person can be listed in TAPS and also on the Honor Roll at the next reunion.

David Reidenbach  
Died 1981

John Dutton, LCDR  
Date of death not known

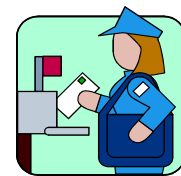
Walter Joyner  
Died June 2001

W.W. "Bill" Broach  
November 22, 2001

Gary Rado  
Died August 11, 1988

Henry A. Burt  
Died December 15, 1992

John Olsen  
Died September 10, 2001



## MAIL CALL

Reference December newsletter, Jerry Williams (SK2) story about Pawcatuck vs FDR and tug boat.

I well remember the collision with the FDR. I was on cargo deck when we were fueling. We came close to the FDR—separated and then came together. A destroyer on the starboard side broke away and took off with all of our rigging. We and the FDR broke away and we lost all of our rigging on the port side also. The First Class Storekeeper took a lot of pictures while the two ships were scraping together. I was on the fantail holding on to the lifeline. I looked up and thought an airplane was going to fall off the FDR and land on us. The Supply Officer was shouting to some of the crew on the next level up to throw down some life-jackets. The First Class Shipfitter tripped the CO2 on the avgas tanks just before we hit.

I remember the tugboat sinking at the Craney Island. We had off loaded fuel and the tug was taking us wherever and got caught under the bubble at the bow and flipped over. The cook was trapped in the galley and a shipmate swam down

*(Continued from page 3)*

to him with a line and rescued him.

We almost had a collision with an Ammo ship in the Med in 1959. They were going to highline a Chaplain for Sunday services. We got so close he could have stepped across. Also, we collided with the Canstieo while out on operations near Norfolk.

I could go on and on, but I just wanted to verify the tugboat sinking at Craney Island.

Barry Blacka, YNC, USNR-R, Retired  
3231 Highland Ln  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
703-560-2780  
bebret@aol.com

Could you possibly help me find my best buddy while we were serving on-board the USS Pawcatuck AO-108? His name is Jerry Huckstept (sp). (If anyone remembers the exact spelling of his last name, let me know also.) His middle initial is "D." He is part American Indian, I believe, from Jackson, Missouri. We were both on the Pawcatuck from 1966 'til 1969. Jerry was a Machinist Mate 3rd Class. I've tried off and on for three years to locate him, but no luck. Any help would be appreciated. Thank you.

Ernie Clem MM3 USS Pawcatuck  
801 5th St  
Pleasant Grove, AL 35127  
205-744-5619  
Choochoo32847@aol.com

Shipmates,

I was informed that Ray Brown from Lake View, SC was activated back into Naval Reserve. Have not heard where he is. He is the shipmate that blew the bosn pipe to start the banquet at Charleston last year.

Also, shipmate Gunther J. Freitag was activated about the middle of January. He also is in Naval Reserve.

Thanks,  
Dave Willis

## PAWCATUCK BEATS FREEZE

In late October 1966, Pawcatuck AO-108 with a Great Lakes pilot in control, backed out of the Black River, at Lorain, Ohio, into Lake Erie to start her voyage up the St. Lawrence Seaway and to Boston. On board were representatives and a contact crew of the American Shipbuilding Company which at that time technically owned the ship, and a skeleton Navy crew headed by Navy prospective Commanding Officer Captain Walter W. Honour. The ship was just leaving the lakes in time to make the passage up the Seaway prior to the annual closing for the winter. How it was able to make that tight schedule to return the ship to commission in the U.S. Navy took a strange twist.

In early August, Captain Honour reported with orders as prospective Commanding Officer to Lorain, OH to join with a small but talented unit of Officers and men. They had been with Pawcatuck during the major overhaul and jumboization during which over 100 feet was added to the length, new hydraulic pumps, air conditioning, and many other modernizing changes were made. In a brief ceremony Capt. Honour relieved LCDR Dan Garland as CO of the unit. For the next six or seven weeks daily monitoring of the progress on the ship's contracted work orders was tracked and plans were being formulated for a scheduled departure in early October.

Early on a Friday morning in mid-September, LCDR Garland called the Skipper to inform him that he might have a little trouble getting on board that day because one of the ship workers' unions had gone on strike and had set up picket lines. He said to be sure to identify yourself as ship's crew, and they would probably let you through. By the time the Captain had arrived at the ship, conditions had worsened, the eight other workers' unions had left the ship in sympathy strikes. The shipbuilding

company, apparently was concerned about making the contract schedule which called for Pawcatuck to be delivered to the Navy in Boston by 1 November which would be ahead of the annual closing of the Seaway. They set new rules for the allowed morning coffee break. The existing rule allowed a coffee break for all workers at 0830 following a reporting aboard for work time of 0730. The new rule called for the coffee break to be only 15 minutes to start at 0745 after the morning work schedules had been laid on. The rationale of the shipyard was that actually no real work was done under the existing rule until almost 0900, since workers would get coffee as soon as they arrived on board anyway, and the new rule would advance work commencement about an hour. The Navy skeleton crew members, of course, were innocent bystanders to this conflict.

A week went by with some negotiations with a labor arbitrator, but no solution seemed to be in sight. Daily situation reports were provided to COMSERVLANT, and the Navy Department. They reminded American Shipbuilders of their contractual obligations and the need for Pawcatuck to be back in service to support the fleet. After another couple of days of no action, the Captain called a meeting of the officers to devise a plan to retake possession of the ship and sail her to Boston for completion of the few remaining work orders by the Navy Shipyard there. The Coast Guard and Great Lakes Pilots Association were called into the discussions. Detailed plans were drawn up for necessary logistics. LCDR Garland, acting on the Captain's guidance, assigned tasks to LT Tom Callaway and Shipfitter Herb Strickland for decks, boats, gangways, fenders, anchors, and hawsers, etc. ENS Hilton was in charge of supplies and consumables for the voyage. Check-off lists were prepared, and the plans were in the rough final stage.

Captain Honour reviewed plans

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and when satisfied it was an achievable evolution, sent messages to the effect to COMSERVLANT and the Navy Department in the Pentagon. A meeting was called in the Pentagon to discuss the plan. The American Shipbuilding Company was invited to the meeting which was scheduled for midmorning on a Tuesday. Captain Honour arranged for a very early flight out of Cleveland International Airport on that Tuesday. When he got out to his rental car in the early morning twilight on that Tuesday to drive the twenty miles to the airport, he could see the car was sitting at an awkward angle. One front wheel was completely gone, lugs and all, and the front right side was resting on a brake drum!

Time had become a dominant factor in the situation. He capitalized on an early rising befriended neighbor who appeared on the scene and talked him into a ride to the airport in Cleveland. Before boarding his flight he did have enough time to call the XO and have him contact the police to report the theft and to apprise them of suspected sabotage. The meeting in the Pentagon went as scheduled with a complete review of the situation. The president of American Shipbuilding said that he was doing everything that he could to get the ship out of the lakes before the annual freeze—he did not want to renege on the contract, and was hoping for follow on Navy contracts. He felt that the action they had taken with the shipyard workers was absolutely necessary to accelerate finishing work orders to allow for scheduled sea trials on Lake Erie prior to departure for Boston. The skeleton crew proposed plan for repossession of the ship was reviewed and given tentative approval based upon successful sea trials and possible assistance from Boston Naval Shipyard of sending additional personnel to Pawcatuck.

On return to Cleveland late that afternoon, the Skipper was met by the XO who was all smiles. Miracu-

lously, or so it seemed, earlier that afternoon, he reported that the labor arbitrator had notified him that the strike was over and the shipyard workers would return to the job in the morning with or without a coffee break!

P.S. The police never recovered the wheel and it was suspected that they lacked the dredging equipment for a search of bottom of Black River, however, the insuring company put the car back on all four wheels.

Capt. W.W. Honour USN (Ret)  
CO USS Pawcatuck (1966-67)  
5203 Antares Court  
Atlantic Beach, FL 32233

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### HAVE A LAUGH!

My wife and I have the secret to making a marriage last:

1. Two times a week, we go to a nice restaurant, have a little wine, some good food and companionship. She goes Tuesdays, I go Fridays.
2. We also sleep in separate beds. Hers is in Ontario and mine is in B.C.
3. I take my wife everywhere, but she keeps finding her way back.
4. I asked my wife where she wanted to go for our anniversary. "Somewhere I haven't been in a long time!" she said. So I suggested the kitchen.
5. We always hold hands. If I let go, she shops.
6. She has an electric blender, electric toaster, and electric bread maker. Then she said, "There are too many gadgets, and no place to sit down!" So I bought her an electric chair.
7. My wife told me the car wasn't running well because there was water in the carburetor. I asked where the car was, she told me, "In the lake."
8. She got a mudpack and looked great for two days. Then the mud fell off.

9. She ran after the garbage truck yelling, "Am I too late for the garbage?" The driver said, "No, jump in!"
10. Remember...Marriage is the number one cause of divorce.
11. Statistically, 100% of all divorces start with marriage.
12. I married Miss Right. I just didn't know her first name was Always.
13. I haven't spoken to my wife for 18 months. I don't like to interrupt her.
14. The last fight was my fault. My wife asked, "What's on the TV?"...I said, "Dust!"
15. In the beginning, God created earth and rested. Then God created man and rested. Then God created woman....Since then, neither God nor man has rested.

Submitted by Dave Willis

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### CHECK OUT THIS WEB SITE

David Willis informed the Pilot that he came across a web site for the Sun Shipbuilding Co. that built the Pawcatuck. It is [www.sunship.org](http://www.sunship.org).

### NO NEWSLETTER IN JUNE

David Willis, reunion coordinator for the USS PAWCATUCK, suggested that we not publish a newsletter in June due to the fact that the reunion will be going on then. The September issue will tell you all about the reunion and the plans that were made for the next one.

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## FROM "MEMOIRS OF A SNIPE ABOARD USS PAWCATUCK AO 108 1945 TO 1950

*By Thomas Blood, Plankowner*

### IT'S ONLY A MOVIE

We showed movies, mostly on the cargo deck, and most of these were picked up at NOB Norfolk.

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Some were traded ship to ship if we were out for any length of time. Needless to say, it was rare that we ever got the pick of the crop. If we were not anchored out in Hampton Roads we would have to drive from Newport News, around the Princess Ann Speedway, while the "non-working" fleet was tied up at NOB, hence a 5 min drive to the film locker.

### **MOVIES, MOVIES, YOU CAN'T PLEASE ANYBODY**

Not only that, but the Capt. chose what movie was to be shown that night, good or bad. In those days we had 35 mm Bell and Howell projectors, heavy beasts by any standard, not to mention the cans of 35 mm film. A movie like "Forever Amber" could run 10 cans. This was quite a chore just to get them from a pitching liberty launch up the side of the accommodation ladder. In foul weather we had to go up the Jacob's ladder, and the film canisters were hauled up via a hand line.

### **TARZAN AND THAT WAS NO JANE WHO GRABBED YOU**

The crew was always critical of what movies you picked up, even though you had little choice in the selection. However, they seemed to be an emotional outlet for the men. If we showed a movie about boxing, the next day there would be those on the cargo deck reliving the part. One day we showed a Tarzan movie (we seemed to get a lot of those) and by golly, sure enough, the next day they were swinging off the edge of the cargo deck grating. One of the deck crew jumped up, grabbed the edge and his mate, jumped and grabbed him around the waist. The combined weight was too much and when the first man let go, his wedding ring caught and stripped the flesh off both sides of his finger. You talk about your blood curdling Tarzan yells, Johnny Weismuller could never have matched it.

Months later, I sat across from

him in the mess hall and noticed something different. Upon closer observation, he only had 3 fingers on his left hand. They had taken the bone out up to his wrist. From that time on, I would never wear any jewelry while working around machinery, especially rotating machinery. I firmly believe it has saved me more than one digit.

### **NO SEE-UMS**

One thing about the skipper and the ship, sometimes we wound up in some pretty interesting places, and the Captain was generous with R & R when we deserved it. I'm afraid at times we stretched our credibility a tad. On one of the beach parties in Newfoundland, while the crew was playing baseball, I decided to hike up to the top of the hill. A grand view it was! I could see the ship and the crew, after working up a sweat, were laying back, shirts off, pants rolled up, enjoying the sun. From my perch at 500 feet above them, with a nice breeze to my back, life was good. I had spent some of my youth in Alaska and knew about bears, mosquitoes, and the likes of "no-see-ums", while apparently, most of the beach party did not. When we returned to the ship that afternoon as well as the next day, most of them looked pretty miserable, puffed up and itchy in anyplace that had exposed flesh. At least it was an honorable form of misery.

## **Taken From the Spring-Summer 1952 Cruise Journal**

### **HISTORY OF THE USS PAWCATUCK (AO-108)**

Commissioned at the Sun Shipbuilding & Drydock Company, Chester, PA, in May 1946 under command of Captain McKinney, USNR. After refitting and shake-down at Philadelphia and Norfolk,

commenced hauling diesel oil and gasoline to Labrador, Newfoundland, and various Caribbean ports from Texas and Louisiana during summer and latter part of 1946 under the command of Captain Stokes, USN. In February 1947 converted to Navy Special Fuel in Norfolk. Participated in fleet maneuvers and hauled black oil in Caribbean in spring and summer of 1947. August, 1947 Captain Chase, USN, assumed command. Hauled black oil in Mediterranean touching Arabia, Tangiers, Malta, etc. September 1947 returned to the United States carrying 150 Greek Naval personnel from Piraeus, Greece. Winter of 1947 and early spring of 1948 alongside tender and in Navy Yard at Norfolk. Spring and summer of 1948 hauled planes to Casablanca; several trips between Aruba and Mediterranean touching various Mediterranean ports. Returned to Norfolk by way of Northern France and Azores. Winter of 1948-49 in Navy Yard and tender Norfolk. Captain Fitzgibbons, USN, assumed command. Remained Norfolk area during 1949. Spring 1950 Captain Carter, USN, assumed command. To Newport, Rhode Island, for tender. Miami, Florida, for Armed Forces Day. New York for 4th of July. September, 1950 hauled black oil to Mediterranean by way of Plymouth and Portsmouth, England to drop off British two man submarine. Remained in Mediterranean until December, 1950 touching various ports. Returned to Norfolk December 1950, Captain Wood, USN, assumed command. Hauled black oil from Houston, Texas, remained in Norfolk area from December 1950 until April 1951 when Captain Fitzgerald, USN, assumed command. May, 1951 participated in Convex to Newfoundland as flagship Commander Service Squadron TWO. July 1951 in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for service to fleet. Fall, 1951, participated in Lantflex 51 in Caribbean as flagship Commander Service Squadron TWO. Winter, 1951-52, returned to Norfolk tender and shipyard.