

# THE DECKPLATE

Volume 7 Issue 4

December 2009

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF USS SCHOFIELD (DEG/FFG-3)



## COORDINATOR'S COLUMN

It has been a short time since our last Deckplate, so this will be short (hopefully)!! We have not had too much going on since October, so just a few things worth mentioning.

As you know, we have voted and decided on Portland, OR as our 2010 reunion site. Details will follow once we get closer to the Sept. date. It will be a new experience for me and any of us in respect to location. We are hoping that the location will be a draw for some new faces and a return for some old faces. My enthusiasm has not waned and my wife Frani and myself truly look forward to the experience!!

One of our shipmates, Steve Nelson, has encountered a serious medical situation. Steve was a GMT2 in 3rd Division from 1973-1978. Mark Fletcher has been our contact and has updated us. Steve would love to hear from any and all!

His e-mail address is: Gunner72@cableone.net. I'm sure we will keep Steve in our thoughts and prayers. We look forward to seeing Steve in Portland next year.

John Winschel is doing better, as is Paul Roeper. Ed Palmer finally got back to work after a layoff. If we miss anyone with our well wishes, please accept my apology and we'll catch you next time. We have a nice network and with Carol and Mark Fletcher's help, I try and keep up.

We also have some new guys who have come aboard. New blood is great and we welcome them all. There is a note acknowledging the new arrivals in this issue. The best way to perpetuate our Schofield Association/family is to encourage new membership. We had a nice spike in dues since our Nashville reunion, and once again we thank you all for your generosity.

Last, Frani and I wish you all a Merry Christmas, a Happy, Healthy New Year and a great holiday season. This past year has been trying for many people for many reasons. My wife and I count our many blessings and are thankful for all we have. That mainly relates to family and friends, and health. We look forward to hearing from you all at some time and would love to see you in Portland next year!!!

Best always,  
Ron Spagna

**USS SCHOFIELD  
2010 REUNION**

**PORTLAND, OR**

**SEPT. 16-19**

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## TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasury Balance 10/04/09

**\$1,525.43**

ML&RS Oct. 09 Deckplate

**-\$381.77**

David Rayl monies rec'd at MLRS  
deducted from invoice **\$100.00**

Total Treasury Balance **\$1,358.66**

(CURRENT CASH BALANCE)

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



## TAPS

The Schofield Deckplate has learned of the following death since the last newsletter. Our deepest sympathy goes out to the family and friends of the deceased.

### *Lt. Chris Gruenther*

*Died July 18, 1988*

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.

## REMEMBERING CHRIS GRUENTHER

**LT CHRISTIAN L. GRUENTHER**  
**FFG-3 Plankowner, Comm Officer**  
**1943-1988**

Plankowners will recall our first Comm Officer, Chris Gruenther, for his board smile and his classic handlebar mustache. It's even been reported that he came on deck for the Mid Watch with a cheerful smile (some of us probably doubt that). Lt. Gruenther unexpectedly died in 1988 in an accident at the age of 44.

After leaving the Navy, he met and married his wife, Susan, and they lived in his hometown of Omaha, Nebraska. The mustache was long gone by then, but she's heard about it!

Chris' parents dissuaded him from his ambition to become a blackjack dealer, and instead he became the City Benefits Manager. He then moved to the Trust Department at First National Bank, and finally became a stockbroker. He and Susan have one daughter, now 32 years old.

Some shipmates have wondered what ever happened to LT Gruenther, and we half-expected him to just walk into a ship's reunion one day. But, sadly, that will not be the case. He will be missed, and remembered by those who served on Schofield's maiden voyages and deployments. R.I. P.

**Lee Witham**  
San Diego

Shipmates:

I remember Chris well. He sported an old-fashioned handlebar mustache, groomed into little spikes at the corners, like the ones worn by French military officers of the 1890s. He had a huge smile that came from the heart and lit up the bridge on the "Mid."

How sad to know that his beautiful light has been extinguished, at least here on Earth. The truly typifies these timeless lines:

"No man is an island, entire in itself...any man's death diminisheth me...Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."  
John Donne, 1624

### **Steve McMikle**

DCA, 1968-70

I have often thought of Chris whenever I looked at my Cruise Book, because he would stop by Sickbay often just to chat. He was a great division officer. I ran into him in the late 70s while I was stationed in Omaha—he was a stockbroker at the time. We will all miss him. I was always hoping to see him at a reunion—in a way we will at our next one.

### **Jack Knoblock**

*This is a link to the cemetery info for Christian Gruenther, with a gravestone picture:*

<http://www.findagrave.com>

Then click on "Search 39 million grave records" and put in Christian Gruenther, born 1943, died 1988, then click on "Search" Click on his name in blue (beside RIP).

## CRHISTMAS GREETINGS

Karen:

I have been attending the USS Schofield reunion for the past six years with Ken Wilson. At my first reunion, I was very scared; not knowing anyone and being younger than most of the people attending. But from the first day, I fell in love with the guys from the Schofield. I never thought much about being an American and what the sacrifices made by servicemen and women

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meant. I am now keenly aware of my country and the people who represent it.

Living with a guy like Ken has taught me a lot about respecting the flag, honoring veterans and watching my elected politicians with a sharp eye. You are all a great bunch of guys and I will never miss another reunion.

#### Sha Marie Dixon

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I would like to share a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR to all Schofield shipmates around the country. My wife and I are hoping that we can make a reunion soon. Just a difficult thing to do and get it in my schedule. I still do a lot of traveling and it makes it hard to get there. Maybe some day I will actually retire like Paul Roeper. Just sit around and watch the grass grow with Paul and reminisce about old times. Blessings to all.

#### Ed and Mary Palmer

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It's that time of year again to offer our best wishes to our family, friends and all loved ones. I certainly have missed all of you for the past two reunions and wish everyone in our Schofield family a safe and merry holiday season. May we all get to enjoy each other's company at the 2010 reunion and all our respective family and friends of our own circle this season!

A Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and God's speed until we meet again.

Last, but not least, let's remember to celebrate the reason for this holiday! Jesus! And no matter the manner or denomination that you worship in, this is a time to pray for Him and our country. May the good Lord bless you and our country.

Sincerely with love,  
Your grateful Chaplain,  
**John W. Winschel**

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I want to say Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of my buds and shipmates from 1985/86! Especially the Sonar Gang! And Odle, if you're still out there, you'll be happy to hear I quit smoking when I left the Schofield. I won't need to bum one anymore!

STG2 **Eric Williams** USN 1984-90  
USS Schofield 1985-86  
Pastor, Long Prairie Baptist Church

## ADVENTURES IN HITCHHIKING

*Editor's Note: I sent out an e-mail asking for stories about hitchhiking while in the Navy. If you didn't receive an e-mail, please send in your story for the next issue. Here are the responses from your shipmates:*

#### Michael Clark:

It was the night before Thanksgiving in Long Beach and a friend of mine, James Hayes from the USS Bronstein, and I were out on the town. We were standing at the bus stop around 10 PM waiting to go back to the ship. All of a sudden this Volkswagen Bug pulls up. Now we all know how small a Volkswagen Bug is. Well, inside this Bug were two girls. James and I were shocked because each one of these girls weighed about 400 pounds each. They asked us if we wanted to go home with them and have Thanksgiving dinner with them and the family. We didn't want to hurt their feelings, so we said sure. James and I were in the back seat and we're whispering to each other saying, "How are we going to get out of this?" Unfortunately, we couldn't. So we arrived at their house about 1 PM and it was a total mad house there. They said they only had one king size bed in the spare room and asked us if we didn't mind sleeping in the same bed. We both joyfully said no problem. We weren't about to be separated in a strange house, so we shared the same bed and most of the night we were awake trying to figure out how to get out of there. But unfortunately, we couldn't figure anything out. Actually, we were kind of nervous because we didn't know them and they didn't know us. We were both Seamen in a strange town.

The next day James and I stuck together like glue. We actually had a good day and had a really good Thanksgiving dinner. Later on that night, we were driven back to the ship and we never saw either one of them again. But little did I know James pulled a fast one on me. He gave the younger sister my name and ship and told her to come and visit me. I had duty that Sunday and about 2 in the afternoon I was paged to the quarterdeck. I was so embarrassed because the younger sister was about 300 pounds herself. So I took her up to the signal bridge where no one could see us. When it was time for her to go, I paid James back. I gave her his name and ship and he got a visit that afternoon.

Needless to say, we both had a good laugh and we were still friends.

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#### Bob Fledman, 1973-76:

A funny incident happened in Bandar Abbas, Iran in 1974 while on a port visit. We were at anchor a couple miles out and had to take the whale boat in for Liberty Call.

Coming back late in the day a group consisting of FN Tibbs, FN Shaw, and FN Goodman hitched a ride back to the liberty boat landing.

They hitched a ride with a local in a small pickup. They piled in the back and the driver took off. This truck had a railing around the truck bed which allowed people to stand up and hang on to the rails.

Well...these guys were standing, and they were drunk. Tibbs and Shaw then proceeded to push one another while standing. Tibbs pushed a bit too hard, and Shaw flew out of the truck and landed flat on his back on the road. He bounced a few times, straight as a board. The truck stopped in a hurry and the fellows went back to rescue Shaw. In this case thank goodness for alcohol, because Shaw did not have a clue what had happened. Luckily he was okay until the next morning. He was black and blue and other than that, he turned out okay.

Another "Black Gang" episode while on liberty. This fireroom crew was out of control at times, but a heck of a lot of fun!

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#### Kevin Siefken:

In childhood, my parents always told me that one should never ever "hitch hike" as it was very dangerous. They told me that there were many people in the world that had some rather demented "ulterior motives". The resulting consequence was that I never did "thumb" for a ride. However, I did pick up a "hitch hiker" once; that was the first and the last time I ever did.

I was in the navy at this time as well as being billeted to the Schofield when this took place. It so happens that I was heading to Los Angeles to do something, I do not remember what the reason was, more than likely to party, I did do far too much of that back then.

I was driving along, minding the traffic and I was in the far right lane; and over as far as I could be. I happened to see a man walking and he was "thumbing". He looked to be in his early to mid twenties as far as I could tell. This is when it hit me of course; right square in the head on Interstate

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Five. "What was it that hit me"? you ask. That amazing bout of inevitable, "STUPIDITY". I decided then and there, surely this man is not going to do anything rash. He appeared to be above board, as well as clean cut. I had decided; I signaled and pulled over to the shoulder of the freeway and stopped. I remained there and he ran up behind the vehicle and alongside the passenger side. I lowered the electric window and asked him where he was heading. He said that he was trying to get to Los Angeles. Well, this was working out fairly well; he was heading to the same destination as I was. I told him to get in and proceeded to re-enter traffic.

We engaged in the usual pleasantries and small talk, ever so familiar, when with a stranger. Now, up to this point, things were fairly even keeled and seemed to be alright; not for long though. Unbeknownst to me, he had surreptitiously removed a dagger type weapon that he had concealed on his person somewhere. He turned towards me, began to threaten me with the dagger, and became increasingly hostile and aggressive. Now, at this juncture, I was in total shock and YES, bone chilling fear. I was thinking to myself; what is this man going to do, is he going to force me to go elsewhere, or is he going to steal my car while leaving me for dead? I knew that I had to do something fast in order to turn the tables on him.

He ordered me to take the next off ramp and get off of the freeway. I did as I was instructed and exited off of the freeway and started to head east on a road that seemed to get little use; it was desolate. We drove on for a short while and I had a brief respite in which to analyze the situation. It was now or never. I reached over and did a quick type of karate chop on his arm-the one he was using to hold the dagger towards me with. This caused him quite a bit of pain and to drop the weapon on the floor of the car. I then leaned over his lap in a real quick fashion, flung open the door and then I shoved him out of the vehicle and onto the road; this did not kill him but am sure it hurt pretty good. I was doing somewhere around fifty miles an hour when I pushed him out and he was laying off to the side of the road, reeling from the abrupt impact with the pavement. I hurriedly did a 360° turn, drove back out onto the freeway and got away from him, thank God.

Needless, to say, I do not pick up "hitch hikers" nor do I "thumb" for a ride either. I definitely learned a valuable lesson; not to do that anymore and that

my folks most assuredly knew what they were talking about.

### And last, but not least!!!

#### Steve McMikle:

I may be Schofield's (reluctant) holder of the title, "Most Outrageous Hitchhiker Story". My epic "hitchhike" stretched approximately 1,522 nautical miles, and took almost 10 miserable days to complete. No, this is NOT a "sea story". I'm sure there are a few other Plankowners who will remember the incident. I can laugh about it 40 years later, but at the time I was far from amused, nor were my superiors...

In the late summer of 1969, we were inport Kaohsiung, Taiwan for maintenance. As DCA, I always had equipment in need of maintenance/repair, so it was within the scope of my duties to pay personal attention to critical items...in this case, a package conveyor motor. The CHENG sent me ashore with a requisition chit and this 30-lb motor on a strap, to have the windings dipped and baked at a Taiwanese electrical shop. My orders were to wait for the job to be done and bring the motor back. It took all afternoon.

When I finally got back to the pier, it was almost sunset...but there was enough daylight for me to make out the Schofield's silhouette on the horizon! There was a note for me left with the dockhands: "Meet us in Yokosuka". I was absolutely aghast. There I was, in working khakis, with my ID card and \$20 in my pocket, and that #@!\*\*\*# motor-on-a-strap.

I'll summarize the next series of events and spare you the gory details:

---Drew \$300 emergency pay from *USS Nichols*, the only other US ship inport at the time;

---Bought a simple khaki plaid shirt and tennis shoes to wear so I wouldn't be in a slovenly work uniform; bought basic toiletries and kit from Nichols' ships store;

---Arranged my itinerary from Nancy's New Harbor Hotel (the only relatively pleasant stage of my journey);

---Caught a hop from Kaohsiung to Taipei in the back seat of a Taiwanese AF training plane;

---Caught a MAC flight from Taipei to

Kadena AFB, Okinawa;

---Caught another one from Kadena to Yokota;

---Paid \$50 to a local trucker for a ride from Yokota to Atsugi;

---A two-star in Atsugi took pity on me (after chortling so hard he bit through his cigar), and dispatched me in his staff car to Yokosuka; pulled up dockside to *Schofield* at approx. 1800 hrs on Day 10. The ship was due to re-deploy to Yankee Station the next morning.

I was battered, exhausted, and unshaven...but I still had that motor on its strap. I had some nice blisters and callosities on both hands, and matching port and starboard bruises on the sides of my thighs, from that motor banging against them for 10 days. I emerged from the Admiral's staff car, thanked the driver, and walked up the gangway, hoping to make a quiet appearance. But I winced when the 1MC blared: "LTJG McMikle, returning"... immediately followed by, "LTJG McMikle, report to the XO's stateroom on the double".

The XO, LCDR Noland, listened to my saga with a mixture of sympathy and disbelief. I avoided serious punishment only because I had completed my mission: I had the motor, repaired as ordered. He showed me a handful of message traffic. The top one read, "Where is LTJG McMikle?", and some others that were less cordial. Simple fact is, I had missed movement. Ignorance of changes in the ship's OPSCHED was no excuse, but...

Anyway, there's my hitchhiker ordeal. I would love to hear that some shipmate has a worse one.

