

The BEXAR GROWL

Volume 12 Issue 1

October 2005

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF USS BEXAR APA 237



Items of Special Interest

- *The 2005 reunion was a very special one. Read about it in the articles on pages 1-3.*
- *Gene Aittala shares news about retirees and veteran issues with you on pages 3 & 4.*
- *We welcome six newly located shipmates on page 4 under Welcome Aboard!*
- *Cary Shore tells his recollection of losing a shipmate in the typhoon. See his story under Mail Call on page 4.*
- *Ed Sidebottom relates his short stay on the Bexar in his story on pages 4 & 5.*
- *Read about Chicago and turn in the survey for your 2006 reunion. See pages 7 & 8*

WASHINGTON, DC-GREAT SITE FOR 2005

USS Bexar (APA-237) held its 2005 reunion in Washington, DC, on September 22-25 at the Courtyard by Marriott Crystal City Hotel. Forty-seven former Bexar sailors and thirty-eight guests enjoyed the fellowship and sight-seeing in our nation's capital. Lois Nangle, ML&RS, Inc. on site representative, opened up the registration desk on Thursday around noon and got all the first day arrivals checked in for the event. The hospitality room, stocked with refreshments, opened at the same time, which allowed everyone to hang out there to await the arrival of others. Then at 5:00 PM the first official meet-

ing took place. The Welcome Reception featured hors d'oeuvres and drinks and was the first time everyone had been together at the same time. It was a good chance to see who was in attendance and to get reacquainted with old friends and to meet new ones. Jim Redding, the Bexar reunion coordinator, welcomed everyone and made the introductions. There were no more planned events for the evening, leaving it free to do what reunions are all about—get reacquainted and swap stories.

On Friday morning the tour of Washington, DC, left the hotel at 7:45 AM. Highlights of the tour included Arlington National Cemetery for the viewing of

the Changing of the Guard. The Old Guard, which has guarded the tomb since 1948, was having a reunion, and our group was able to view their laying on of a wreath at the Tomb. It was a very moving ceremony, one that will not soon be forgotten. After touring Arlington, the motor coach proceeded on to the Vietnam Memorial Wall and the Korean War Memorial. After viewing these memorials, the group had lunch at Union Station. The next stop on the agenda was the Navy Memorial for a wreath laying/memorial service and plaque presentation. The memorial service and wreath laying ceremony was led by RADM Richard Buchanan

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of the Navy Memorial. He was assisted by Jim Redding, Bexar reunion coordinator; Bill Patton, Chaplain and Art Henderson, bell ringer. The dedication of the Bexar plaque was led by Jon Mullarky and RADM Buchanan. Following the service the group moved into the IMAX theater for the viewing of "At Sea" and a tour of the museum. The last stop on the tour was to the World War II Memorial honoring 16 million who served in the Armed Forces, the more than 400,000 who died and all who supported the war.

The group returned to the hotel in time for a bit of a rest before the 6:30 PM social hour, where everyone could relax and share their day's experiences with one another. At 7:30 PM a Capital City Buffet was served and then a fun game based on the old "Name That Tune" was played. Part of a song was played and then the crowd was asked to name the tune, its singer and the next line. Between Bill Caudill's stories and his version of "Name That Tune" it was a fun evening. Prizes for the winners were the gifts brought by the participants. Most gifts were representative of each one's home town or state, and it was fun to see what each person had chosen to bring as their gift.

Saturday morning's tour was a Baltimore City tour, where the first stop of the day was at Pier One, home to the USS John Brown. Thanks to Jon Mullarky for saving the day and getting the group on to the oldest surviving ship of the famous Liberty Fleet, a class of cargo ships built during WWII. It is now a living memorial to the men and women of American industry who built the great Liberty Fleet and to the merchant seamen and Naval Armed Guards who sailed the ships on oceans all over the world. Upon leaving the ship, the tour departed for the Inner Harbor for lunch, shopping and visiting the USS Constellation and USS Trusk, a WWII submarine. After arriving back at the hotel, the annual business meeting was held at 3:30 PM. Jim Redding was

re-elected to serve as the group's coordinator for another year. Several sites for the 2006 reunion were discussed, including Cleveland, Kansas City, Branson/Springfield, and Minneapolis/St. Paul. But in the end, Chicago, IL, was selected for the honor of hosting the 2006 USS Bexar reunion.

The evening's activities began at 7:00 PM with the pre-dinner cocktail hour and photo session. Then at 8:00 PM the USS Bexar (APA-237) banquet was held. Jim Redding welcomed the USS Bexar group. During the banquet, five Plankowners were saluted. They were: Bill Downs, James Fiorello, Jack London, Frank Matthews and John Turner. Also recognized were the seven first-time attendees. We hope they will return for many more reunions. Many wonderful handmade items were donated by members for the Bexar auction, which helps fund the Bexar Growl newsletter. There was a quilt with squares for the attendees to sign, a replica of the Bexar plaque, an Irish knit Afghan, a wooden Navy seal and a Bexar seal, lap quilts, a Bexar bear in uniform and many others. The auction brought in \$573.00 for the newsletter.

Sunday morning's private breakfast buffet was the last event of the reunion, and after that it was time for good byes. Washington, DC, was a great place for a reunion, with so much to see and do, but everyone now was looking forward to Chicago in 2006. It should be another great one that you won't want to miss.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

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(Mailed to subscription members only)
Balance remaining for 01/06 issue \$2688.50

Please send your \$5.00 subscription for the newsletter to ML&RS at our address on page eight.

2005 REUNION ATTENDEES

- Mike & Mazie Arthofer
- Robert & Helen Askren
- John & Sandi Beeler
- Celedonio & Clariza Blancaflor
- Arthur & Mary Canfield
- William Caudill
- Thomas "Bill" & Lois Downs
- Gordon Edwards
- James & DeEtta Engelken
- James & Barbara Fiorello
- Bob & Bette Fleming
- John Flynn
- Jay & Wanda Garrett
- Don & Josephine Grant
- Robert Grember
- Ronald Harris & Wanda Sparks
- Arthur & Valerie Henderson
- Martin & Katherine Hughes
- Raymond & Gwen Kirby
- Jack London
- Leonard & Mary Ann Ludwig
- Frank & Rosalie Matthews
- Robert & Dundee McManis
- Jon Mullarky
- William & Marlene Oviedo
- Ramond Pacheco
- William & Sally Patton
- Howard Pinskey
- Edward & Janet Poenicke
- Joe & Betty Jo Popejoy
- Chris Prater
- Clifford & Marilyn Prater
- James & Mary Catherine Redding
- James & Rita Register
- John & Linda Schleicher
- Mel & Judy Schweitzer
- John & Ginny Shaffran
- Wallace Smith
- Richard & Eunice Stiger
- Marvin & Dolly Tabor
- Gerald Tierney
- John & Geneva Turner
- Jed & Karen Weidell
- Victor Weiers
- Robert & Fumiko Weiss
- Thomas & Carolyn Whiteley
- John, Shirley, Linda & Lois Wysocki
- Fred & Marie Zoeller

Total Members: 47
Guests: 37
GRAND TOTAL: 84

REUNION HIGH-LIGHT

WREATH LAYING & PLAQUE DEDICATION CEREMONY

With a clear, blue sky overhead, BEXAR Shipmates gathered on the Granite Sea of the Navy Memorial to remember shipmates no longer with us. Following the presentation of the Colors by members of the Navy's Ceremonial Guard, Retired Rear Admiral Richard A. Buchanan, President of the Navy Memorial, welcomed our group to the Memorial. Escorted by Admiral Buchanan, Jim Redding and William Short, representing the USS RIGEL, placed a wreath next to the Lone Sailor Statue honoring those who served.

Following the Wreath Laying Ceremony, BEXAR Shipmates gathered in the Memorial's Arliegh Burke Theater for the dedicate of the USS BEXAR commemorative plaque at the Memorial. After welcoming remarks, Admi-

ral Buchanan traced the history and accomplishments of BEXAR from her commissioning in 1945. He noted that the BEXAR was the first amphibious type ship to complete a round the world cruise. The Admiral also demonstrated the Memorial's Navy Log register by calling up the names of log enrollees who had served on the USS BEXAR.

Jon Mullarky dedicated the plaque, noting the pride that BEXAR sailors had in their ship and its accomplishments. He also thanked the contributors who made the plaque project possible.

Following a special presentation of the movie "At Sea", shipmates viewed the BEXAR plaque on the Memorial Wall outside the Burke Theater.

Duplicates of the Plaque are available from the Navy Memorial at a cost of \$125. Contact Paul Haley (202 380 0760) or Paul-Haley@lonesailor.org

tance to everyone in the Retiree community that each and every one of us be politically active. If we are not politically active we lose. Again we are under attack, this time by Dr. David Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness. Dr. Chu states the generous benefits provide to Retirees are preventing the Department of Defense from providing the necessary and proper equipment for our Active Duty Forces on the fighting fronts of the war on terror. Are we going to take this untruth lying down or are we going to stand up and be counted?

Be in contact with your elected officials, both at the Federal level and at the State level.

Attend local town hall meetings sponsored by your Congressperson and Senators. Also, contact them via e-mail, letters and phone calls. Let them know that you are concerned about Veterans and Retiree benefits. Showing up in person has the most impact on your elected official. I find it appalling when I attend a Town Hall Meeting there will be only one or two Veterans/Retirees present. Where is your fighting spirit?

On the issue of Concurrent Receipt (Disabled Veteran Tax); Remember Retirees, we still have 400,000 Disabled Retirees still paying a **DISABLED VETERAN TAX**. Retirees with a VA rating of 40% and below have not but included in the elimination of the Disabled Veteran Tax. In addition, we need to continue the fight to have Retirees rated at a 100% by the VA because they are Individually Unemployable (IU) included at the 100% level with no phase in period. We need the help of all Retirees to continue this effort started by the **Fleet Reserve Association** (FRA) in the 1960s and then taken on as a single legislative item by the **Uniformed Services Disabled Retirees** (USDR) in 1981. Since then several other Veterans groups have signed on to the cause.

Join a Veterans organization of your choice and be active in the organization. It does little good to join an organization and then not be active in the unit.

Here are a few web sites that will put you in touch with your Federal Congressperson or Senator; www.fra.org, www.dav.org, www.moaa.org, <http://capwiz.com/moaa/home> and www.usdr.org. You may contact them via capitol toll free telephone number 1-866/877-4455 or 1-866/272-6622 (courtesy of MOAA) and ask for your Representatives office and when connected, ask to speak to the Military/

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BEXAR PLAQUE THAT WAS PRESENTED AT THE 2005 REUNION

RETIREE AND VETERAN ISSUES

This will be my last news letter column. I have found it is not practical to write a quarterly news letter. I receive so much Veterans information on a daily basis, and much of this information is old hat and is out of date in a matter of days. Much of what I receive requires action in short order.

For those of you who have a real interest in Veteran and Retiree issues, here is some information which may be of interest to you:

Here is a Web Site which may be of interest www.usdr.org. After the site comes up, go down the left side of the screen and click on Veterans Organizations. A list of 51 Veterans organizations will come up. You will find something for every Veteran.

The following is an article I had in the Redstone Arsenal Retiree Bulletin for Retiree

Appreciation Day (RAD) held at Redstone Arsenal on August 27, 2005. We mailed out some 17,000 plus bulletins to Retirees in our area of coverage. Much of what I have written applies to Retirees and Veterans alike.

Become active as a Veteran. Attend the Town Hall meetings of your elected officials. Let them know who you are. Most important, get a group of Veterans/Retirees together and attend as a group. Have questions written out you wish to ask. Nothing is more disappointing when I attend a Town Hall Meeting and I am the only Veteran in attendance. No wonder we get the short end of the stick!

RAD LETTER 2005

Attention all Military Retirees
Retirees, it is of the utmost impor-

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Veterans Affairs Assistant. Also, check your local newspaper.

To use any of the above web sites you do not have to be a member of the organization.

Stay in contact with your State elected officials. For state officials, check your local newspaper.

Thank you,

Gene Aittala, USN Retired

*See disclaimer on page six.

WELCOME ABOARD!

*Fred Mainor
(1964-67) CS3 Supply*

*Harvey Jenkins
(1950-53) BM3 5th (Bt Grp)*

*Darwin Bowles
(1964-66)*

*James Fry
(1965-67) PN1 Admin/X*

*Courtney Fenet, Jr.
(1969-70)*

*Willie McInnis
(1962-65) BMSN Bt Grp*

At the request of your association, we will no longer publish the addresses and phone numbers of the new shipmates. If you would like to have an address, please contact ML&RS at our address on page eight.



TAPS

The Growl was notified of the following shipmate's death since the last newsletter was published. Our deepest sympathy goes to the family and friends of the deceased.

*Tony Baker (1958-62) RD2 OPS
Died 1993*



MAIL CALL

Bexar Growl,

I served on the BEXAR from 1959 to 1961. My memory of the typhoon incident is that we lost one sailor (a fireman) overboard. We never found him. A Marine also went overboard, but managed to hang on to a life raft that went over the side with him. An officer who attempted to rescue the Marine drowned in the attempt. I was on the line handling party on the well deck that was backing him up. We finally shot a line to the marine and were able to get him back safely. It seems to me that his CO took him straight to the brig because he had disobeyed the order to stay off the weather decks while we were in the storm.

After the incident, we got underway again, turning back to Japan instead of going to our original destination, Okinawa. I went on lookout watch and my most vivid memories were of standing on the bridge wings and the ship was listing so much in rough water that the outboard landing craft keels were touching the water.

I was in First Division with Bob Weiss back then and I also have no memory of the Washoe County being anywhere near us. We were steaming independently because we were supposed to be transporting a small number of Marines from R&R in Japan back to their bases on Okinawa.

Cary Shore

Bexar Growl,

Hi, my name is John Rumer and I was aboard the USS Thomaston LSD-28 and recall steaming with the Bexar at the time of the storm that did in fact wash some men over board. I don't remember how many, but there was at least five total and one was a young Marine who tried to save another guy, I think. I hope this helps clear up part of the mystery.

John H. Rumer

MM2 1959-62

USS Thomaston LSD 28

MY PLANKOWNER ASSIGNMENT TO THE USS BEXAR

I was only on the Bexar for two months after commissioning but this is my story:

I didn't get off to a good start. I was in San Francisco when I received orders to report to Portland NRS for eventual assignment to the Bexar. When I arrived at the receiving station and checked in, I did not know where the ship was and I expected someone from the ship to send a bus to pick me up. After two years in the southwest Pacific, I wasn't all that gung ho about another assignment, but wanted to do my duty. So I waited around at the station for a couple of days. Finally, the engineering officer showed up and gave me what for. I could only reply that I was waiting for a ride. Things were a little cool for a while, but I eventually got on good terms with the engineering officer. I was in charge of the Auxiliary Section. I learned to drink coffee during my assignment to the Bexar.

After commissioning, from Portland we wandered down the Columbia River to Astoria where we docked for the night and had liberty. Then we meandered on down the coast for nearly a week of shakedown and into San Francisco Bay for several days and nights of liberty. San Francisco was a great liberty town. Then a few more days of shakedown and we pulled into Long Beach with more days of liberty. As Chief, I probably had more than my share. About the middle of November, we arrived at San Diego and were in and out several times. It was at this time that I actually saw my first American war casualty after being in the southwest Pacific for two years.

A young fighter pilot crashed his plane in San Diego Harbor and our crew recovered the body. I recall seeing his naked body on a table in the galley. I thought it was highly ironic because the war was over. Finally, when I was released for

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eventual discharge, I was told to put my fleece lined flight jacket on a pile. When the chief turned his back, I recovered it. He returned and noticed it was gone. He told me again to deposit it. When he left, I liberated it again—successfully. I still have the jacket, but strangely, it has shrunk. That's my story and I am sticking with it. I may have told this story before, but that is what happens when you get old.

Regards to all,
Ed Sidebottom
Former MOMMC 1945/08-1945/12

Rising Reunion Costs

Larry H Eckard, President, ML & RS, Inc

Anyone paying attention to the reunion costs have seen a sharp rise in past two years, and you're probably concerned about them. We are just as concerned as you are because it does no good to plan a wonderful reunion and price it so high that people can't afford to attend.

First let me make it very clear that we (ML&RS, Inc) have not increased our fees. The rising costs are 100% due to the increased cost of hotels, food & beverage, tours, entertainment, etc. We cannot control those costs, but we still get the best possible rates—better than you can get for your self—and pass them on to you.

Although prices have increased all across the country, some areas are still more expensive than others. Our on site representative has a ton of information about potential reunion sites so take advantage of it; let our representative answer questions about locations in your meeting when it's time to discuss reunion sites.

Also, in every hospitality room you will find a blue three-ring binder notebook full of information about potential reunion sites. The book gives you suggestions for tours and/or activities, information about at least one hotel, an itinerary and cost sheet from a recent reunion if one has been held in that city. Look over that book.

Here is some other information that

you may find helpful. Option A (arriving on Thursday and departing on Sunday) for a couple is used as the standard for the prices that are cited below. There are of course some exceptions to the prices, depending upon the time of year and the other activities going on in the city at the same time.

In any of the following cities (and this is not a complete list) you can expect to pay a minimum of \$740.00 and as much as \$800.00: Baltimore/Washington, DC; Charleston, SC; Savannah, GA; Boston, MA; Newport, RI; Charleston, SC; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco or San Diego, CA; Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Dallas, TX; Nashville, TN; Minneapolis/St Paul, MN.

If you choose a city like one of these, you're going to pay top dollar, expect it and don't be surprised when it happens. Room rates are going to be near \$100.00 plus tax.

In the following cities you can expect to pay a minimum of \$665.00 upward to \$725.00: Myrtle Beach, SC; Norfolk, VA; St Louis, Mo; Tucson, AZ; Albuquerque, NM; Colorado Springs, CO; Milwaukee, WI; Harrisburg/Lancaster, PA; New Orleans, LA; Pensacola, FL; Reno, NV; Branson, MO; Columbus OH; Pittsburgh, PA; Omaha, NE; Cincinnati, OH/Northern KY; Buffalo, NY; Corpus Christi, TX.

Room rates will range between \$75.00-90.00 plus tax.

In the following cities you can expect to pay a minimum of \$625.00 upward to \$675.00: Biloxi, MS; Asheville, NC; Fargo, ND.

Room rates will probably be below \$75.00 plus tax.

For the past several years, Jacksonville, FL is the least expensive reunion city in the country with room rates in the \$60's and total package around \$600.00. If you haven't been there and cost is a concern, you should give Jacksonville strong consideration.

In any city no downtown hotels ever have complimentary airport shuttle service, and many have daily parking fees of \$12.00 and more. Hotels nearer the airport usually do not have parking fees and generally have complimentary airport shuttle service.

Here are some other points you may wish to consider. There are hundreds of

military reunions held every year. The vast majority are held in April and May or September or October. *They don't have to be!* Passover, Palm Sunday, and Easter usually (but not always) fall in April; Mother's Day and Memorial Day weekends are in May. So with these holidays, the reunions are crammed into the remaining available weeks—and do you think for an instant that hotels don't know this and price accordingly? Labor Day weekend, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are in September or October and it's the same thing. You can move your reunion forward to mid-late March (depending upon the location) and you'll get a better deal; the same with early November. Also, some groups ask for specific dates, without ever knowing what else is going on at the same time in your city of choice. We can help you best when there is a two or three week window to work in.

If you take this information into account when you make the decision on where to hold your next reunion, you won't be nearly as surprised when you see the prices.

VETERANS DAY 2005

I will commence this news letter with a tribute to all Veterans on this coming VETERANS DAY 2005. This was originally written for a tribute to all Veterans for MEMORIAL DAY 2005. Due to space limitations in the news letter it was omitted. It was printed in several local newspapers around the country under the title of "VETERANS DESERVE BETTER".

Veterans Day is a time to remember and honor all of the Veterans of this great nation of ours, the UNITED STATES of AMERICA. Veterans Day is to pay tribute to all living Veterans and to say THANK YOU for defending our country. We must also always remember the Veterans who gave the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, for our beliefs in our system of democracy "That All Men Are Created Equal." Greater love hath no man than to give his life for his country.

We take the freedom we enjoy all too lightly. Most citizens simply take for granted the freedoms we have come to enjoy in the United States. Too many citizens say that freedom is not my job,

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let some one else fight for my freedom. Even most of the local clergy have forgotten that it is the Veteran who has given us the freedom of religion. Also, it seems our elected officials have forgotten the Veteran. I know who paid the price for the freedom my family and I enjoy. Does your family, relatives and friends know who paid the price for the freedom they enjoy?

For Veterans to compete with the special interest groups they need to join a Veterans Organization of their choice. This is the only way Veterans can have an input to their elected officials. This is the only way we Veterans can be organized and be heard in Washington DC. Veterans and Military Retirees, you cannot just sit around and let some one else do the job for you when it comes to Veteran and Retiree Benefits. And do not forget to get out and vote. If you do not vote, you do not have a gripe.

The true greatness of a country is measured by how well the government lives up to the promises made to its military. The United States has not been good at living up to the promises it has made to the military forces. All too frequently Veterans and Military Retirees are treated according to what I call the "Dog Theory"; you have crime in the neighborhood you buy a big bad dog, crime goes away you shoot the dog. "You have a crisis some where in the world you call up the American Military, when the crisis is over, send the troops home; we will call you; do not call us and if you are having any medical problems it is all in your head."

You read of case after case where the Veterans must take the United States Government to court to receive the benefits and medical care they were promised for their service to their country. Frequently, it may take years for our government to fess up to things our military is exposed to.

Veterans and Retirees we are under attack by the current administration. The leader of this attack on our benefits is Dr. David Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness. Dr. Chu has only two bosses. He answers directly to the Secretary of Defense and by extension to the President. According to Dr. Chu the benefits provided to Veterans and to Military Retirees is preventing the Department of Defense from providing the necessary fighting equipment to our Active Duty Forces on the fighting fronts of the war on terror. Veterans, Reservist and Retirees, are we going to take this untruth lying down, or

are we going to stand up and fight?

At a time when Veterans Administration Health budget should be increasing in real dollars it is decreasing due to rising cost of medical care. The VA Health care budget was increased by 3.5% from FY 2005, but an increase of 10% to 14% is needed just to keep up with current services. Let your elected officials know this is just not acceptable. VA health care must be a priority to provide quality care for all Veterans.

Citizens take note; Rome did not collapse over a period of a few years, but over a period of time as the Roman citizens became soft. At the peak of Rome's glory the military man was honored and revered by his countrymen. As the glory of being a military man declined so did the Roman Empire and the rest is history. Is this the path we in the United States are headed down?

If it is the goal of the citizens of this country to have our military as an ALL VOLUNTEER force, then we must be prepared to pay for and an ALL VOLUNTEER military. We must once again make the military an Honorable Profession. Too few of our citizens have a direct investment in the freedom of our beloved country.

You can condemn our country for all of its faults, for the way the politicians sell out our system of democracy to the special interest groups that line the pockets of our elected officials. I call it "Democracy for Sale to the Highest Bidder." Despite all of our short comings, people of the world are lined up at our doors waiting to get in! I have found no other country on this earth that I would rather be a citizen of, despite all of our faults.

We are still the Greatest Nation in the History of mankind. If we wish this to continue to be The Greatest Nation on the earth we must stand behind our Military and say they deserve the best. It is a small price to pay for the freedoms we enjoy and take for granted.

Enjoy your Freedom, thank a Veteran. Let us give a SPECIAL THANK YOU to all the latest Veterans of the WARS on terrorism in the Middle East and the other places around the world where we have our military on duty protecting the freedoms we have in America. Let us welcome our troops home, giving them the honor and dignity they deserve. And let your elected officials know that the Citizens of this Great Country will not tolerate the poor treatment of Veterans which has been the history of our government.

We must remember "WITHOUT VET-

ERANS THERE WOULD BE NO UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" we could still *British Citizens*, or we could be paying homage to the *Nazi Swastikas*, the *Flag of the Rising Sun* or the *Hammer and Sickle*. The price of freedom is paid for in blood and guts. War has no glory and is a bloody business. There are no real winners in war; one side just does not lose as bad as the other side. And here in America, Veterans seem to be on the losing side and short end of the stick.

In closing, I do wish individuals who have never served in the military would stop telling Active Duty, Reservist, Veterans and Retirees just what benefits they enjoy. All too frequently they do not know what they are talking about. When an individual is on active duty defending The Constitution of the United States, he is not protected under The Constitution, but falls under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Also, while on active duty the military member does not have the right to speak out against the government or the officers appointed over him/her, in particular the President of the United States, who is the Commander in Chief of the military forces. All Veterans (any one who has served in the military and was discharged under honorable conditions) are eligible for Veterans Administration health care, but are not covered by Tricare (formerly Champus). Retirees (any one who has served in the military 20 or more countable years and was honorable discharge and is eligible to draw retirement pay) qualify for VA health care, Tricare and if 65 or older Tricare for life.

Thank you,
Gene Aittala, USN Retired

DISCLAIMER: *The information & opinions contained in the articles from Gene Aittala are the views of the writer and are not to be considered as an official source of information. If you have questions or wish to express your views, you can contact me at www.GBAittala@aol.com or by telephone at 256-773-6283.*

Thank you.
Gene Aittala, USN Retired

IT'S ON TO CHICAGO FOR 2006!

Chicago is the city chosen by the USS BEXAR for its 2006 reunion site. Your choice is certainly a good one, as there are many, many sites and activities in the Chicago area—far more than can be seen during a short reunion stay. We have chosen a few of the most popular attractions to describe for you here and ask that you choose those you would most like to visit. As usual, we request that you read the descriptions and then fill out and return the survey to ML&RS by November 21. The turn-around time on the surveys is shorter than usual because it will be important to book early if you choose to attend a recruit graduation at Great Lakes Training Center. Now, settle back and read about Chicago.

ABOUT THE CITY OF CHICAGO

Nicknamed the "Windy City," Chicago is located on Lake Michigan and is the third largest city in the United States with over 8 million people. Also called the "City with the Big Shoulders," it has made itself known as a workingman's city. It is the commercial, financial, industrial and cultural center for a vast region and a mid-continental shipping point. Chicago covers over 200 sq. mi. and extends more than 20 miles along the lakefront. Its downtown section is called the Loop because of the huge rectangle of elevated railways, expressways and boulevards that extend into and around the heart of the city. Come explore Chicago in 2006.

ATTRACTIONS

Great Lakes Naval Training Center

Commissioned in 1911, Great Lakes Training Center has remained the Navy's largest training center and home to the Navy's only Recruit Training Command, more commonly known as "boot camp."

Since WWI, more than 2 million new sailors have passed through the Recruit Training Command and an equal number through its technical schools. There are currently more than 16,700 active duty and 2,400 civilians assigned to the base.

If we book early, we may be able to attend a recruit graduation on Friday during the reunion. This would be an early wake-up call, because we would have to be seated by 8:00 AM at Great Lakes for the ceremony. Keep in mind also, that this would be an all-day trip, leaving only one other day for other tours. This is truly an awe-inspiring ceremony and one that is always a favorite with any group that is lucky enough to be able to attend.

Narrated City Tour of Chicago

A fully narrated riding tour of the city would include an overview of the city's sites such as the **Sears Tower**, the **Navy Pier**, and other famous buildings and monuments. See buildings designed by famous architects such as **Frank Lloyd Wright** and **I.M. Pei**. A ride along **South Lake Shore Drive** between **Hyde Park** and downtown is especially worthwhile for its spectacular views of the downtown skyline and the lake. A stop will probably be made at the **Navy Pier** for some shopping and at the **Museum of Science and Industry**. (Actual stops will be determined by the chosen tour company contracted for the tour.) This is your chance to see the city in an easy, relaxed, unhassled way.

Drury Lane Dinner Theater

This facility is a 971-seat proscenium style live theater featuring musicals, comedy, Hollywood personalities and dinner theater. This would have to be for a Thursday or Friday night activity.

Billy Graham Museum

Take pleasure in a unique visual overview of the history of Christian evangelism and its influence on

American society. Beginning with the early history of America and climaxing with a powerful 3-D presentation of the Gospel message. The Billy Graham Museum is a division of Wheaton College.

National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum

View the many artifacts, paintings, sculptures, and memoirs donated by fellow veterans.

Brookfield Zoo

One of the country's largest zoos, it houses more than 2,800 animals representing 425 different species—many living in award winning indoor immersion exhibits. Its permanent exhibits include: Habitat Africa!, a five-acre savannah exhibit that highlights Africa's diverse wildlife; The Swamp, featuring the wonders of wetlands, and The Living Coast, featuring Humboldt penguins, green sea turtles, small sharks, vampire bats and free flying birds.

Shedd Aquarium

See the world's largest indoor aquarium, home to approximately 8,000 aquatic animals from around the globe. There are recreations of aquatic environments from around the world, including major exhibits focusing on the Pacific Northwest coastline, the Amazon River and Caribbean coral reef. You have underwater views of everything from beluga whales to piranhas to sea-turtles.

Now that you have read about some of the attractions in the Chicago area, please take a moment to fill out and return the survey on the next page. We will use your responses to develop an agenda for your reunion. Please let your voice be heard.

STATEMENT OF PUBLICATION

The BEXAR GROWL is the official publication of the USS BEXAR Association. From now on it will be published quarterly in January, April, July, and October, *subject to receiving sufficient funding*. The Newsletter is currently funded by annual subscription of \$5.00 per annum, per member and all other monies raised/donated are added to this fund. 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.

ML&RS, Inc is not responsible for the accuracy of articles submitted for publication. It would be a monumental task to check each story. Therefore, we rely on the submitter to research each article.

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

It should be understood that this newsletter is for the participation in, by and for the enjoyment of all Bexar shipmates. That it is also recognized that many shipmates for reasons of health, distance/travel, etc. are not able to attend reunions and may feel left out is a concern. To address this, we urge these folks, most especially, to write in letters and articles that reflect on memorable experiences/incidents/shipmates. You may be surprised that such may provoke a former shipmate to seek you out, via phone, regular mail or e-mail to reminisce and get reacquainted. That is the main reason for maintaining and disseminating the mailing list... to provide "contact" information. Don't pass up the experience.

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"Our Reunions work So You don't have To"

USS BEXAR 2006 REUNION SURVEY

In order to provide the kind of reunion you want, not what we "think" you'd like, please take a few minutes to look over, complete and return this survey to ML&RS, Inc. right away. The reunion agenda will be created from the responses and the chairman's input. Let your voice be heard. Mail surveys to:

**Military Locator & Reunion Service, Inc.
P O Drawer 11399
Hickory, NC 28603-6402**

Fax: 828-256-6559

Reunion format:

Do you want a welcome reception the first evening? yes no

Do you prefer breakfast all three mornings as a group?
or just a farewell breakfast on Sunday?

Do you want entertainment after the Saturday night banquet?
yes no

Activities: *Please indicate which activities you would like to see on your reunion agenda.*

Great Lakes Training Center

Narrated City Tour of Chicago

Drury Lane Dinner Theater

Billy Graham Museum

National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum

Brookfield Zoo

Shedd Aquarium

Your suggestions and comments are welcome: _____

If you have questions, call **828-256-6008** or e-mail **dinamlrs@charterinternet.com**

RETURN SURVEYS BY NOVEMBER 21, 2005

REGISTRATION PACKETS WILL BE MAILED OUT APPROXIMATELY 90 DAYS PRIOR TO THE REUNION.