

# **First-Timer's Impressions Of the Ware's 60<sup>th</sup> Year Reunion**

By Dick Teel

## **Last time I saw the USSS Charles R Ware (DD-865).**

When Frank Biondo asked me before our recent reunion to write a brief article for the newsletter on my impressions as a first timer, I agreed but with a bittersweet mixture of emotions. "Why was I having mixed feelings?" I asked myself? Upon reflection, I decided it went back tot the last time I saw the Charles R. Ware. That was on a brilliant, hot summer day in 1973, when the "Chargin' Charlie" steamed out of her old homeport at Mayport, Florida with her signal flags flying for her new assignment in the Reserve Fleet, homeport Galveston, Texas. And there I stood on the dock, of all places, instead of at my duty station for Sea and Anchor Detail, as the ship that had been my home for the past year and one-half and the crew that had been my family on a round the world cruise disappeared over the horizon, forever.

Although I looked forward to my next ship assignment, part of me felt a profound sense of loss that I would never again see that home or family again. How could I write anything about a ship's reunion that would not seem trivial compared to the friendships shared and experiences gained aboard the Ware, my first ship?

I was soon to learn that I was wrong to doubt.

## **An extended family and we like ourselves.**

Some 300 Waremen and their spouses came from 28 states and 2 foreign countries (California and Alabama!) to celebrate the Ware's 13<sup>th</sup> reunion since the DD-865 was commissioned 60 years ago, making this the largest reunion ever for a single destroyer.

In attendance were three former commanding officers: Norman Bohan (61-63), Thomas Mathis (70-72) and Joseph Neville (66-69). Particularly heart warming was the presence of the ten "Plank Owners" who were members of the Ware's original crew when the ship was commissioned in April of 1945 – Bravo Zulu to them for making it to the reunion!

It became very clear to me after only a very short period of time that all Waremen and their wives are an extended family that shares the common bond of serving on the Ware. And if you don't think that the wives served, just ask them (if you dare!). You don't have to be told about this bond – you could just feel it when you arrive. It also became clear that we like ourselves and know how to have a good time!

Although I had initial concerns about not knowing anyone at my first reunion, it wasn't long before old shipmates were found, favorite sea stories fondly retold and current activities and family stories shared. What a great experience!

### **Athens is a good, permanent Ware homeport.**

Athens' local dignitaries such as City Mayor John Proffitt and county Mayor John Gentry went out of their way to truly welcome we Waremen and our spouses to their town, which is known as the "Friendly City." It well deserves that name. The warmth and friendly, self deprecating manner of all the city officials put us at ease and made us feel like part of their families.

Perhaps the most humorous moment came with the friendly repartee between Austin Fesmire, Director, Parks & Recreation and our own Frank Biondo. Austin's tongue in cheek imitation of Frank's New York accent and Frank's counter imitation of Austin's Southern accent were hilarious. We laughed until our sides ached. Because of their efforts, Austin and Frank deserve much credit for the success of this reunion.

### **Day of Remembrance and Celebration.**

The Ware Display in the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum is truly first rate. It is more than suitable to forever document the heroic deeds and sacrifice of naval aviator Lt. Charles Ware at The Battle of Midway and the ship that was to bear his name. Many thanks go to all those who contributed artifacts for the display, funds for the beautiful ship model and labored to make them come together.

The Brick Ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park was a "day of remembrance and celebration" for those Waremen who have gone before us. From singing "God Bless America," reciting the Oath of Confirmation, to hearing Taps, all in attendance were deeply touched.

### **You can go home again.**

In conclusion, I greatly enjoyed the camaraderie of my first reunion and learned much history about the ship and LT Ware that I did not know. And it was great to see old shipmates that I thought I would never see again. I wish that I had known earlier about our association and reunions. You can go home again. I will go to future reunions.

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About the author. LTJG Dick Teel served as Combat Information Center Officer on the Ware from 1972 to 1973, which included the ship's round the world cruise. He is presently writing the biography of Major Trevanion Teel, CSA who commanded the artillery in the ill-fated Sibley Brigade during New Mexico Campaign of the Civil War.