



# San Diego<sup>1</sup> Ship Modelers' Guild

The San Diego Ship Modelers' Guild is affiliated with  
and supports the Maritime Museum of San Diego.



## Guild Meeting Report: 08 December 2010

Jan. 2011 Vol. XXXV No. 01

Bill Grolz welcomed members and guests to the annual holiday party which was held in lieu of the regular monthly meeting. This event took place aboard HMS SURPRISE. In addition to the several pizzas, other refreshments, and general good cheer; there was an auction of numerous items. The highlight of the auction was a partially completed (about 50%) model of AMERICO VESPUCCI (with parts, plans, etc). The actual ship is used as a training vessel for cadets. The model kit costs over \$700. The scale is 1:84 and the model is over four feet long. Don Dressel who supplied the model asked that there be an opening bid of \$50 for it. There were many superlative comments made about this model leading up to the auction. When the auction started the opening bid was quickly surpassed with much spirited bidding. It was finally "hammered down" at \$100. After the auction finally ended, Bill concluded the festivities and wished all a happy holiday.

As an additional note, the SMA will hold their well-known Western Ship Modelers Conference on April 1, 2, and 3, 2011. It will be held at the Newport Harbor Nautical Museum and Hyatt Newport Beach. There will be vendors, exhibits, and ship models. There will also be a silent auction of various high quality modeling tools. Starting bid for the tools will be at 25% of their value. Speakers will include: Mr. Peter Goodwin, Curator, HMS VICTORY; Mr. David Antscherl, author of SWAN CLASS SLOOPS; and Mr. Dan Davis, Archaeologist, ancient Black Sea Ships. Other speakers are also scheduled. For more information go to [www.shipmodelersassociation.org](http://www.shipmodelersassociation.org) or phone 562-212-6568 or 909-949-6931. If you would like to provide a ship model or models (complete or partially built) please contact Don Dressel.

## OFFICERS

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### *Guild Master*

Bill Grolz  
phone redacted

### *First Mate*

Chuck Seiler  
phone redacted

### *Purser*

Ron Hollod  
phone redacted

### *Editor*

Katherine Pogue  
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### *Log Keeper*

Bob McPhail  
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### *Newsletter Distribution*

Robert Hewitt

### *Write-Ups*

Dave Dana

### *Photographs*

John Wickman

*Established in 1972*

*by Bob Wright  
& Russ Merrill*

# DECEMBER PARTY

A b o a r d   S u r p r i s e

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Bill Grolz presenting Dr Kevin Sheehan with a \$500.00 donation to the Maritime Museum.



Inspecting the items up for auction.

# “SHOW & TELL”

Maritime Museum Fleet Models

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*Star of India* by **Bob Crawford**

*Californian* by **Howard Griffus**

*HMS Surprise* by **Chuck Seiler**

*Berkeley* by **Kevin Sheehan**

*Pilot* by **Howard Griffus**

B-39 Russian Submarine by **Howard Griffus**

*USS Dolphin* by **David Yotter**

*San Salvador* by **Robert Hewitt**

*America* by **Garry Seaton**

America's Cup yachts by **Ron Render**



# THROUGH THE LUBBER'S HOLE

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*Christmas at Sea in World War II ~ by Robert Hewitt*

In February 1943, my first cousin, Steve Pesany, at twenty-three years old, joined the United States Air force. Prior to that, he worked as a final assembler at the Curtiss Wright Aircraft factory in Buffalo, N.Y. One of his many tasks was to synchronize the firing of the fifty-caliber machine guns with the rotation of the propeller. One time, when assembling the landing struts, he accidentally squirted some shock absorber fluid into his mouth. He quickly rinsed out the fluid and had a cup of coffee. The taste of the coffee, with the lingering hint of aircraft shock absorber fluid was so bad the he, to this day, has never had another cup of coffee, and drinks only tea.

Steve's first assignment was boot camp in Miami, Florida. From there he went to Denver for weapons training, then on to Corvallis, Oregon to learn photo reconnaissance. This time he was assigned to the 116th fighter squadron. This outfit had been in operation under Captain Eddie Rickenbacker during World War I.

From there Steve went to Savannah, Georgia, and then to Hampton Roads Virginia. That is where he was introduced to the *Joseph Gale*, a Liberty ship. The *Joseph Gale* was built at the Oregon Ship Building Co. in Portland, Oregon. She was 422.8 ft long and had a breadth of 57 feet. She weighed 7,176 tons and had a crew of forty-four men. The keel was laid on October 16, 1942, launched on November 11, 1942, and delivered on November 21.



*LIBERTY SHIP*

Steve had never seen a bigger ship. After a briefing that included an equipment and clothes check, he boarded ship. He was surprised to find himself on a cargo ship. The deck was filled with trucks all lashed down with wire cable. He never found out what was in the holds, but the rumor was that they were carrying medical supplies and ammunition.

There were about three-hundred men in Steve's outfit, along with a few others in different divisions. They departed on December 23, 1943, not knowing where they were headed. The *Joseph Gale* was in a convoy of about thirty ships. A number of destroyer escorts circled the convoy.

The soldiers in Steve's outfit quickly settled down to a routine of gambling. There were card and dice games in every corner of the hold. The bunks that filled the hold were eight to ten high, with no more than two feet of space between them. The deck of the hold was covered in knapsacks and gear. Steve was one of the last on board and all that was left was a bottom bunk, next to all of the knapsacks. It was the worst place to be. At the time, most men were smokers. The smoke in the hold was so thick that it was impossible to see from one end of the hold to the other. The only relief was to go up on deck.

The head for the soldiers was nothing more than a long pipe, sixteen inches in diameter. There were holes cut in the top of the pipe, to which toilet seats were welded. Steve thinks there were about twenty seats in a row. The trick was to gently lift oneself off the seat as the ship rolled. This prevented one's bottom from being splashed. There were also pranksters, who would make little paper boats and set them on fire as they launched them from the high end of the tube. For some strange reason they would enjoy seeing the soldiers pop off the seats as the flaming boat drifted by.

## **Green Powdered Eggs**

Christmas day started out with a cold shower in sea water, using special sea soap. Water was at a premium and they were issued only one canteen full per day. Breakfast was served in a small cabin next to their hold. The soldiers did not have seats, and had to stand to eat. Steve can still recall seeing the green powdered eggs in the mess. They weren't entirely green, but had green streaks running through the white and yellow mixture. This was enough to wipe out any memory of a Christmas turkey dinner served that day; it may have well been a chicken. One of the officers did conduct a type of Christmas service, as there was no chaplain on board. Most of the soldiers continued to shoot craps, play cards, and smoke. By this time the hold began to look like a gambling casino. The only thing missing was the blinking lights.

No tree, no family, no presents and having to spend twenty-four hours in a smoke-filled, diesel smelling hold was not a very good way to spend Christmas. The men in

# THROUGH THE LUBBER'S HOLE

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*Christmas at Sea in World War II ~ by Robert Hewitt*

the hold were not allowed to remove any of their clothing except shoes. They were each issued a life jacket, which was to be carried with them at all times, and to be worn when they went on deck.

## Gleeful Sailors

Soon the weather warmed, and the men who could not stand the smoke-filled hold, slept on deck. Since there was a complete blackout, the men slept behind heavy canvas drapes, which led to another problem. Some men insisted on smoking behind the drapes which led to crumpled butts, torn cigarette paper and tobacco everywhere. Deck sleepers would awaken to find tobacco and paper in every fold of their blankets and in their hair. The deck was hosed down every morning, and the sailors would gleefully hose down any sleeping soldier.

Steve's most memorable time was spent on the bow at night, watching the porpoises and other marine life that glowed with an iridescent light. One night he stayed up all night just to see the Rock of Gibraltar. He remembers how blue the Mediterranean Sea looked. The soldiers were allowed the run of the ship as long as they stayed out of the sailors' way. Another favorite spot of Steve's was the engine room. He was especially impressed with the neatness and cleanliness of the steam engine, and all of the polished brass.

The *Joseph Gale* arrived in Oran, Algeria, on January 11, 1944. Steve's outfit left Oran on January 31, on board the *Chantilly*, a French liner with a British and Indian crew. The ship was later converted to a hospital ship. The men had to sleep in the hold on tables or on the floor. Officers were given the state rooms. The food was even worse on this ship, with kippers and porridge for breakfast. Steve lost about twenty pounds. Off through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea to Bombay. From there he went by train and river boat to Dhaka, India.



CHANTILLY

## Aluminum Trail

Steve spent the remainder of the war in India and China. He flew over the Himalayas, also known as the Hump or Aluminum Trail. He became a Staff Sergeant and ran a crew of four men that readied the fighters for combat. His outfit serviced between twenty-five and thirty aircraft. There were many times when they loaded a flatbed truck onto a railroad car with all of their tools and equipment. They would take the train, then the truck to locate aircraft wrecks and salvage the parts. He said they always destroyed the remainder of the salvaged wreck.

When the war ended, Steve spent another Christmas at sea, on his way home. This time he was in the Mediterranean off Algeria. The ship was the U.S.S. *General Brooke*, a troop carrier. Steve saved the December 24, 1944 ship's newsletter titled "Babbling Brook". Christmas festivities commenced at 1930 with a community sing of Christmas carols on top of hatch number 5. A midnight mass in the enlisted men's hall was conducted by Father Brosnan of Boston.



USS GENERAL BROOKE

A turkey dinner was served with all of the trimmings. A special treat was given after dinner. What that treat was has long since been forgotten. At 2030 that evening there was a radio broadcast on the ship of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* with Ronald Coleman playing Scrooge.

Some of the news briefs of the day was:

1. The burial of General Patton in the U.S. Army Cemetery at Luxembourg.
2. Assassination threats made to General Macarthur in Japan.
3. Air service would soon open between the U.S. and most European cities.
4. High hopes that the United Nations would succeed.

The best part of the trip was seeing the Statue of Liberty. The *General Brooke* was greeted in New York Harbor with horns blowing, fire boats shooting streams of water into the air, and people cheering from the docks. The *Joseph Gale* was scrapped in 1961 at Bordentown New Jersey. Steve is still sailing along at 90, but only on land.



# San Diego Ship Modelers' Guild

The next meeting will be  
Wednesday, 12 January 2011  
aboard the *Berkeley* at 7:00pm



*Lady Washington* visiting San Diego