



www.nmnavyleague.com

January 2024

Winter 2024 Issue

Page 1

- Chapter Sea Service Support

Page 2

- President's Message:

NM Council Updates

Page 3

- Local New Mexico News

Annual Meeting, Navy Ball

Pages 4-5

- From the Sea Chest

USS New Mexico (BB-40)

Page 6-7

- Nautical Items of Interest

The Rest of the Bullhead Story

Visit Sea Power magazine,
the official Publication of the
Navy League of the United States.
<https://seapowermagazine.org/>



Celebrating a Year of Support of our Sea Services and Community at the New Mexico Chapter Annual Meeting

by Mark Schaefer, newsletter editor

The New Mexico council reviewed and celebrated our support to the fleet throughout the past year at our Annual Meeting in Albuquerque. We supported the ribbon cutting ceremony of the new home of the University of New Mexico NROTC education complex, the presentation of JROTC Teddy Roosevelt Youth Awards, the U.S. Naval Academy Blue & Gold program, and the local Blue Star Mothers chapter and their care package efforts, and two Navy Birthday Balls. The sail of the former USS Albuquerque was brought back home to Kirtland AFB for a future submarine memorial display for the community. Our chapter's service to SSN-779 made national Navy League news when USS New Mexico's outgoing Commanding Officer, CDR Carlos Otero, recognized our support.

All of these and more were celebrated at Seasons 52 restaurant during our chapter Annual Meeting on December 3rd. Chapter business was conducted, new officers were elected for 2024, and a report out from each committee and activity was given that showed the many things this Chapter accomplished throughout the year. Thanks are due to all of our community members across the State of New Mexico. Here's to even more Navy support in 2024!



L-R: President John Jones, Website Editor Ed Nava,
and Secretary Tom Gutierrez

See more photos on page 3.

Thank You! When you keep your dues up to date with the Navy League national office, our New Mexico council receives a stipend for each active member. This makes a big difference in our ability to help support our namesake ships, our youth, our Sea Cadets, and the local active and reserve.

Join or renew at members.navyleague.org

2024 COUNCIL OFFICERS

David F Williams

President

John L Jones

Vice President

Chuck Vaughan

Treasurer

Marilyn Smith

Secretary

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Damon Runyan

USS New Mexico SSN-779

Ron Oleksak

USS Santa Fe SSN-763

Greg Trapp

*Historian and Chair of the
Interim 706 Sail Committee*

Marilyn Smith

Scholarship Chair

Rebecca Vigil

Public Affairs

Ed Nava

Website Editor

NAVY LEAGUE
NEW MEXICO COUNCIL

P.O. Box 91554

Albuquerque, NM 87199

Mark Schaefer

Newsletter Editor

(usnanm@comcast.net)

**New Council Officers were
elected at our Annual
Meeting on 12/3/2023. See
the 2024 slate of
volunteers shown above.**



NM Nautical Quiz:

What did the Pirate Say on
his 80th Birthday?

(see answer on page3)



President's Message



John Jones

President, New Mexico Council

Happy New Year!

Join us in celebrating the end of 2023 and the promise of what 2024 holds for us all, the maritime services we support and our Nation.

The Council elected new officers at the annual meeting in early December, and the new list is in the column on the left side of this page. Our new President, David F Williams, served as our Vice President the past four years and is a retired USNR Commander and Intelligence officer. Dave has served in combat zones from Vietnam to Iraq, been in law enforcement, and helped support the Philippine Coast Guard under an appointment from the US State Department. We bid fair winds and following seas to Tom Gutierrez, stepping down as Secretary. A Life member of the League, he has served our Council in many capacities, including President. Thank you, Tom.

Along with the Navy Reserve Center, we sponsored the Navy Ball on October 14th and we'll have photos posted soon on our web site. Of note was Dan Moss as the saltiest of sailors, having signed up in 1956 and GMMSN Kaitlin Coontz as the most junior sailor. Ten members of the Council attended the UNM NROTC Navy/Marine Corps Ball in November event on

November 5th. The event is used as a training opportunity for Navy Traditions and Ceremonies.

Our membership increased 7% in 2023 - please continue to tell your friends about us! The NM Council has adopted ships, honored and rewarded local enlisted personnel, and supported families of deployed sea service personnel. At the national level, the Legislative Affairs Team of the League supports legislation on behalf of our sea services and educates government officials. No prior military service is required to be a member. Active duty service members are now eligible for membership, and the spouses of those currently serving can join at no cost for one-year - just our way to thank you for all you do.

Please consider a tax-deductible donation to the Council in support our educational efforts with the Sea Services, our scholarship program for men and women on active duty and in the reserves, our work with crews on our namesake New Mexico ships, and our recognition programs with the Navy ROTC and Junior Navy and Marine Corps ROTC programs around the State and El Paso.

We are anticipating a visit from the CO and several members of the NEW MEXICO (SSN-779) in January and Damon Runyan is feverishly putting together a schedule for them.

The Council Board continues to meet via Zoom on the 2nd Monday of each month. Should you wish to sit in on a meeting, let me know! We're looking forward to a terrific 2024.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to serve you the past four years. It has been an honor.

**Not for Self, but Country.
Semper Fortis.**

John L Jones, CDR SC USN (ret)

Local New Mexico News



New Mexico Chapter Annual Meeting *by Mark Schaefer, newsletter editor*

Bravo Zulu and thank you to Seasons 52 for hosting our annual meeting on December 3rd. Here are a few more photos.



Some of the many participants in the annual meeting included Marilyn Smith, newly elected Secretary for 2024 (far left), Lawrence Edwards and Greg Trapp (2nd photo), Michael Jacobs, Ruby Handler, Susan Collins, and Ron Olexsak (3rd photo), and Dave Williams, John Glynn, and Sherrie Williams (far right).

Navy Birthday Ball 2023 *story and photos by John Jones; President, Navy League of the United States, NM Chapter*

About 90 Navy and community supporters attended the 248th Navy Birthday Ball on October 14th. Our council member, Dan Moss, was evaluated to be the most seasoned sailor, having shipped over at the age of 17 in 1956. The youngest sailor was born in 2004 and is a GMMSN. They are shown in the photo at left. Other Navy League attendees included Dan and Layne Moss, Ed and Jeanette Nava, Greg Trapp, Dave Williams, Joseph and Terriane Quintana, Michael and Ruby Jacobs, Marilyn Smith, Janice and John Jones, and new member Mary Lou Thompson and husband Rick.



Filipino-American Veterans Day Ceremony

Incoming 2024 President of Navy League of the United States, New Mexico Council, Dave Williams, and his wife Sherrie met Ambassador MaryKay Carlson (center) at the American Cemetery Manila in November. Thank you, Dave and Sherrie, for representing the council.



Memoir Writing Skills Course

Jim Tritten, a Council member and Life Member of the League, has a grant of the NM Arts to teach a series of writing classes focusing on writing a memoir, and he's asked our help to get the word out. New Mexico veterans and active duty members interested in a free SouthWest Writers online memoir writing course can get detailed information at the following link: <https://www.southwestwriters.com/online-memoir-writing-course-for-nm-veterans/> or you can contact Navy League Member Jim Tritten at (505) 453-6795.

Answer to NM Nautical Quiz (from p. 2)
"Aye, Matey"!



From the Sea Chest — by Greg Trapp, JD, Chapter Historian

Tragedy of the Sea: The Collision of USS New Mexico (BB-40) and SS Oregon

by Greg Trapp, JD

USS New Mexico (BB-40) was anchored at Casco Bay on the fateful date of December 7, 1941. The 23-year-old battleship was affectionately known to her crew as “The Queen.” The battleship had been transferred from the Pacific to the Atlantic to participate in President Roosevelt’s neutrality patrol. The Neutrality Patrol was a thinly disguised effort for the United States to appear neutral while actually using American Navy and Coast Guard ships to help defend British convoys from German attack. The primary threat to the convoys came from U-boats, but German battleships, cruisers, and merchant raiders had also proven to be a serious threat. The commissioning of the German battleship Tirpitz, a sister-ship to the Bismarck, increased this threat even further. As a result, In May of 1941, USS New Mexico, along with her sister ships USS Mississippi and USS Idaho, were transferred from the Pacific to the Atlantic. This transfer meant that the Queen was not moored along Battleship Row at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941. After the attack, the three battleships were ordered to immediately return to the Pacific. That order would have tragic consequences on the morning of December 10, 1941.

The Queen was steaming 40 miles south of the Nantucket Shoals Lightship on the morning of December 10. The battleship was preceded by three escorting destroyers: USS Hughes, USS Sims, and USS Russell. The four vessels were steaming at 14 knots under an overcast sky. The destroyers formed an arc in front of New Mexico, with each destroyer about 2,000 yards from the Queen. All four ships were zigzagging and running without lights due to wartime conditions.

The deck officer on New Mexico was LTJG Waliszewski. At about 4:30 AM, he spotted the darkened loom of an unidentified ship approximately 45 degrees off the New Mexico’s port bow. He estimated the ship to be at a distance of about 5,000 to 6,000 yards. About two or three minutes later, the unidentified ship turned on her lights. New Mexico responded by quickly turning on her own lights. The captain of New Mexico, Walter E. Brown, was then summoned from his nearby sea cabin, at which point he observed through his binoculars that the ships were about 2,000 yards apart. Captain Brown kept the unidentified ship under observation for three or four minutes. When the ships were about 700 yards apart, and after determining that the other ship could no longer avoid a collision by her own efforts, Captain Brown ordered, “Right full, full speed astern.” Despite Captain Brown’s efforts to avoid a collision, New Mexico and the unidentified ship collided at approximately 4:42 AM.

The ship which USS New Mexico struck was the freighter SS Oregon. Oregon was owned by the Pacific-Atlantic Steamship Company and was on her maiden voyage. New Mexico’s bow tore a gaping hole in the starboard side of Oregon, just ahead of the freighter’s bridge. The damage to the 33,000-ton battleship was relatively minimal, primarily comprising the crushing of the New Mexico’s portside torpedo blister.

The normal course of action when a collision takes place at sea is for the ships to stop and render assistance, which is what happened immediately after the collision. However, the morning of December 10 was not just any morning. The United States was at war with Japan, the battleship was urgently needed in the Pacific, and war with Germany was imminent. The stationary battleship would also be a prime target for German U-Boats. As a result, after about one hour of remaining with the damaged freighter, New Mexico, Hughes, and Russell left to head to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Captain Gillette of Oregon had also decided his damaged freighter could return under her own power to Boston. The destroyer Sims was ordered to escort Oregon for as long as was necessary. At about 10:30 AM, and with calm seas and the Oregon’s holds pumped dry, Captain Gillette decided his ship no longer needed an escort. This allowed Sims to return to New Mexico, enabling the valuable battleship to be fully protected by her screen of three destroyers. It also proved to be a fateful decision as about an hour later the weather deteriorated and the damaged Oregon sank in the early afternoon with the loss of seventeen lives.

Shown in the photo at right is USS New Mexico (BB-40) at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard on December 31, 1941. The battleship had sailed to Norfolk for repairs after the collision with the freighter SS Oregon. This photo shows the repair work being performed on New Mexico. The photo is looking aft from the bow, and notably does not reveal the actual damage to the battleship (Official U.S. Navy Photo).



On January 6, the now repaired battleship left Norfolk and set a course for the Panama Canal. The Queen arrived at the Panama Canal on January 17, 1942, and five days later joined the war in the Pacific. The Queen would go on to earn six battle stars for her service in World War II.

The exigencies of war meant that the ultimate cause of the collision would not be determined until the cessation of hostilities. When the war ended, the Pacific-Atlantic Steamship Company was allowed to pursue litigation against the United States for the loss of SS Oregon. The case was *Pacific-Atlantic S.S. Co. v. United States*, 175 F.2d 632 (4th Cir. 06/09/1949). The suit was filed in the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. The Court determined that the “starboard hand rule” was applicable, which under the International Rules for

Navigation at Sea, says that “When two steam vessels are crossing, so as to involve risk of collision, the vessel which has the other on her own starboard side shall keep out of the way.” The Court found that the starboard location of New Mexico gave the battleship the right of way and the duty to maintain her course. The Court also took note of the fact that the lookouts on New Mexico saw the “dark loom” of the much smaller Oregon before the Oregon saw the “dark loom” of the much larger battleship. The Court also noted that Oregon failed to spot any of the escorting destroyers until immediately before the collision, while Sims and Hughes had both spotted Oregon prior to the collision and had used their “blinker tubes” to signal Oregon. The holding of the Court was aptly summarized in “Vital Conclusion of Law No. 5,” which states: “5. The Oregon was in fault in the following respects, which were the direct and proximate, and sole causes of the collision: (a) She failed to keep a proper lookout, (b) She failed to take proper precautions when she first sighted the New Mexico on her starboard side, (c) After the ships were lighted and it was disclosed that they were crossing courses, she continued her course and speed and failed to make any effort to keep out of the way of the New Mexico and to avoid crossing ahead while there was adequate time to have taken avoiding action, (d) When turning to her left immediately before the collision, she failed to give any warning of her change of course.”

The 1949 decision of the Court of Appeals determined with finality that it was Oregon that was at fault for the collision and the tragic loss of life. However, the collision had created a long-lasting shadow which would “haunt” the crew of New Mexico. This shadow can be seen in the writings of John Wickland, who was a Second Class Seaman aboard New Mexico at the time of the collision and who wrote extensively about the history of the Queen. One of his works was an article titled “My War - Collision at Dawn: USS New Mexico and the SS Oregon,” (Sea Classics, October 2006, Vol. 39/No.10). As Wickland put it, “A momentary lapse in judgment on the bridge of a fast-moving 33,000-ton battleship caused a calamity that was little grieved and even less noticed in a nation fighting a two-ocean war.” Describing the mood on the repaired battleship after New Mexico sailed from the Norfolk Naval Yard in January of 1942, Wickland wrote, “Our collision with the Oregon was still a hot topic among the crew and many believed it was a tragic black mark against our proud old battlewagon.” Wickland continued, “If her record was tarnished (which I doubt), she would redeem herself many times over in battle action against the enemy before the war was over.” Ironically, there was no reason for redemption as the collision was not the fault of New Mexico. Any shadow of blame had long ago been dispelled by the decision of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.



USS New Mexico (BB-40) with Mount Fuji in the background. New Mexico was part of an armada of over 300 allied warships that were in Tokyo Bay for the surrender ceremonies on September 2, 1945, bringing to an end the war that began on December 7, 1941. For New Mexico, it was a triumphant end to a war that had begun with tragedy (Official U.S. Navy Photo).

The District Court held that the collision of USS New Mexico with SS Oregon “was caused entirely by faults and errors in navigation on the part of the Oregon.” Addressing the subsequent sinking of Oregon, the Court of Appeals stated, “We must sustain the District Judge’s conclusion that the Captain of the Oregon was free from negligence in either his decision to make for the port of Boston or his seamanship in attempting to carry out that decision.” In the words of the Court of Appeals, the collision was a “tragedy of the sea.”

Nautical Items of Interest

NEW MEXICO
Council



The Rest of the USS Bullhead Story *story and photos from Dick Brown, USS New Mexico Council*

Editor’s note: This story follows up on last issue’s article about Albuquerque’s Bullhead Park and its Significance to the Atomic Age, a story by Elaine D. Briseno as published in the Albuquerque Journal on September 3, 2023. Dick Brown gives us more to the story.

The USS Bullhead (SS-332), named after catfish and other large-headed fish, was a Balao-class diesel-electric submarine. She was the very last US Navy ship sunk by enemy action during World War II, ironically on the same day we dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

On January 9, 1945, about a month after commissioning, Bullhead left New London with CDR Walter Griffith as skipper, bound for Sound School at Key West. A month later she transited the Panama Canal, entering the Pacific on February 11th. On the first day out, a near disaster occurred. During a practice dive, the main induction failed to close rapidly enough because of low hydraulic pressure, and tons of water flooded in before it could be shut. The crew saved the submarine by shifting ballast, pumping out water, and continuing the dive. Without further incident, Bullhead arrived at Pearl Harbor on February 26th.



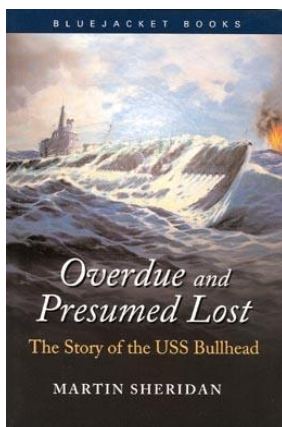
USS Bullhead at Sea



On the Bridge

During this initial patrol, she carried Martin Sheridan of the *Boston Globe*, the only war correspondent ever embedded aboard a US submarine on a WWII combat mission. After the war, Sheridan authored the book, *Overdue and Presumed Lost – The Story of the USS Bullhead* in which he tells of near misses with enemy mines,

Bullhead left Pearl Harbor on her first war patrol on March 9th. She stopped in Guam for fuel and provisions, then on March 21st began patrolling the South China Sea. She provided lifeguard services for allied aviators and bombarded and damaged radio installations on enemy-held Pratas Island, China. She had the unenviable experience of being mistakenly attacked by an American bomber; it was April 8th and fortunately the bombs missed their target by 75 yards. Undamaged, but severely shaken, Bullhead continued her patrol.



Martin Sheridan Talking to Crew

crash dives to avoid enemy aircraft, and a daring mission to rescue downed airmen.

On April 16th, four miles off the China coast, Bullhead rescued three badly injured survivors of a downed B-29 bomber, along with the bodies of their three dead comrades. Her first patrol ended on April 28th at Subic Bay, Philippines where she was refitted and conducted exercises along the Luzon coast.

She left on her second patrol on May 21st, still under command of CDR Griffith, assigned to the Gulf of Siam and the Java Sea. This time the submarine operated with Bergall (SS-320) and Kraken (SS-370) as part of a coordinated attack group. At this point in the war, targets were few and far between. In June Bullhead sank two small freighters, a schooner and a sub chaser totaling 1800 tons and damaged two more sub chasers and another small freighter, all by deck gun fire. Her second patrol ended on July 2nd at Fremantle, Australia, where she was refitted with a new 5-inch gun.

On July 31, 1945 Bullhead left Fremantle, heading back to the Java Sea under command of LCDR Edward Holt, to commence her third war patrol. Her orders were to patrol in a wolf pack with Capitaine (SS-336) and Puffer (SS-268) until September 5th and then head for Subic Bay.

Bullhead rendezvoused with Dutch submarine Q-21 on August 2nd and transferred mail to her. She reported on August 6th that she had passed through Lombok Strait and was in her patrol area. That was the last word received from Bullhead. On August 12th, Capitaine ordered Bullhead to take position in a scouting line with Capitaine and Puffer. Receiving no reply, Capitaine reported on August 15th, "Have been unable to contact Bullhead by any means since arriving in area." On August 24th, she was reported overdue and presumed lost.

It is difficult to determine precisely which of the many Japanese anti-submarine attacks was the one that sank Bullhead. However, postwar analyses of Japanese records reveal that at 0803 hours on August 6, 1945, a Japanese Army plane, belonging to the 73rd Chutai based on Bali, attacked a submarine off the Bali coast, at the west end of Lombok Strait. The pilot claimed two direct hits, and for ten minutes, observed a great amount of gushing oil and air bubbles rising in the water. It is presumed that the proximity of mountain peaks shortened Bullhead's radar range and prevented her from detecting the plane's approach. She went down with all-hands, eight officers and 76 enlisted men.

Later, Commander Griffith wrote "I had the honor to command the USS Bullhead during her first two war patrols and was transferred to the Operations Staff of the Commander, Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet, only a month before the submarine and my shipmates were lost. However, I am certain the men of the Bullhead met their death courageously in the highest traditions of the United States Navy."

American submarines destroyed most of the Japanese merchant fleet, isolating the homeland, crippling Japanese industry, and preventing resupply and reinforcement of Japanese forces in the Pacific islands. Submarines comprised less than 2% of the US Navy but sank more than half of all Japanese tonnage. However, they paid dearly for their successes. We lost 52 submarines during WWII, that is, 18% of all submarines which saw combat duty, and we lost 3,505 submariners. To honor and perpetuate the memory of the 374 submarine officers and 3,131 enlisted men on eternal patrol, their submarines were assigned to each of the 50 states (California and New York each got two boats), USS Bullhead was assigned to New Mexico.

At the southern end of San Pedro Boulevard in southeast Albuquerque, adjacent to Kirtland Air Force Base, there is a city park, USS Bullhead Park. This park is home to a very special memorial to the brave sailors who lost their lives when



USS Bullhead Memorial

Bullhead was sunk by enemy action. It is a simple memorial, just two brass plaques, listing 84 American submariners who gave their lives for our country, guarded by three Mark 14 torpedoes. Even though none of the sailors onboard Bullhead were from Albuquerque or New Mexico, we are honored to commemorate their valiant service.

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

In a fantastic way of marking December 7, 1941, SECNAV Carlos del Toro named 3 new VA-class submarines after namesake battleships on Pearl Harbor Day 2023:

[USS Utah \(SSN-801\)](#)

[USS Oklahoma \(SSN-802\)](#)

[USS Arizona \(SSN-803\)](#)

NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES
NEW MEXICO COUNCIL
P.O. BOX 91554
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87199
Return Service Requested

The Navy League New Mexico Council thanks
ABQ Grafix
for their continued service to country
via discounted printing of the NM Nautical News!
send 'em your business!



Navy League of the United States New Mexico Council, P.O. Box 91554, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87199-1554. The Navy League is classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and your donation is tax-deductible.

2024 Upcoming Events for Navy League, New Mexico Council

January 8	Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom
January 14-20	Namesake Ship visit, USS New Mexico; January 17 council/ship dinner (El Pinto)
February 12	Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom
February 16	Change of Command, USS Santa Fe, San Diego CA
March 11	Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom