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Spring 2024 Issue

Page 1

- **USS Santa Fe (SSN-763)**

Change of Command

Page 2

- **President's Message:**

NM Council Updates

Page 3

- **Local New Mexico News**

Network Navy

Tax Break for NM retirees

Pages 4-6

- **Namesake Ships**

SSN-706's Reactor Package

New Santa Fe CO visits NM

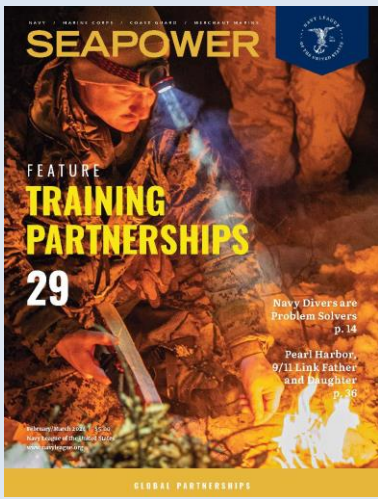
Page 7

- **From the Sea Chest**

USS Desert Ship (LSS-1)

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Change of Command at USS Santa Fe (SSN-763)

by Ron Olexsak, USS Santa Fe Committee Chair, and Mark Schaefer, newsletter editor

After spending Christmas at sea and some time on Guam thereafter, the crew of the USS Santa Fe (SSN-763) returned to homeport in San Diego to be reunited with families. A fun surprise happened in Guam when incoming Commanding Officer, CDR Eric Knepper, joined the boat there and got to ride her back to port to get to know the crew. This was prior to the Change of Command that happened on February 16th when CAPT Pianetta was relieved by CDR Knepper.

The New Mexico council attended the change of command to represent the people of New Mexico who are so proud of our namesake ship.



L-R: Navy League NM Chapter President David Williams, outgoing Commanding Officer of USS Santa Fe (SSN-763), and Navy League NM Chapter USS Santa Fe Committee Chair Ron Olexsak



Our council contributions were recognized several times during the ceremony, and we were presented with a plaque that Ron Olexsak holds in the photo shown. It was a privilege for David and Ron to spend about an hour on board on a very thorough tour.

There is more to the story and more photos on page 6.



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

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NM Nautical Quiz:

What is a sailor's favorite type of movie?

What do you call a forgetful sailor?

(see answer on page3)



President's Message



David F Williams

President, New Mexico Council

This is my first opportunity to address you as your new Council President. If only John Jones weren't term limited!

Fortunately, John is continuing as Vice President and "Executive Officer".

I also am grateful that each of our directors including committee chairmen have helped keep us on course. Edward Lawrence has taken over as USS Albuquerque Memorial Chairman and will be working closely with our legislative team, Rebecca Vigil and Tom Gutierrez. Greg Trapp, our Historian, continues to produce amazing articles including the "Desert Ship" in this issue of our award-winning newsletter, edited by Mark Schaefer. Our two submarine sponsorship committee chairmen, Ron Oleksak and Damon Runyan, continue their morale supporting activities for our two namesake submarines, the USS Santa Fe and USS New Mexico.

Kristelle Siarza Moon, Ron Oleksak and I attended the February 16th Change of Command of the USS Santa Fe. Our support was formally recognized during the ceremony, and informally by individual crew members when we visited the mess. On the horizon are possible crew visits from either or both boats.

A great addition to our activities has come from a new member and now Program Chairman, John Glynn. For our latest social

program at O'Niell's Pub on March 15th, John arranged two speakers from the U.S. Coast Guard Recruiting Office in Albuquerque. The program caught the attention of Navy League Headquarters with a photo and write up in its weekly Legislative Newsletter.

Speaking of "recruiters", each of us should continue to invite folks interested in supporting our sea services to join us.

We have moved our Zoom meetings to 1800 on the first Tuesday of each month. Please "tune in" for an informative hour. Any of our directors or current participants can forward you the link.

Finally, I should alert you that we still have a few sets of Navy Wardroom China available at a "fire sale" prices of \$15 a place setting or \$50 for four sets. Give me a call at 505-264-9187 to arrange pick up.



Dave Williams
Commander, U.S. Navy (ret)



Network Navy - Mexico Chapter *by David Williams*

Approximately thirty NM Council members and guests enjoyed good food and good times on Friday, March 15th at O'Niell's Pub in Albuquerque. John Glynn, Council Program Chairman, made all the arrangements including for our **United States Coast Guard** speakers, Chief Petty Officer Jeremy H. Crawford, Recruiter in Charge, Albuquerque, and Petty Officer First Class Kristen Bachicha, Recruiter, Albuquerque. Attendees were surprised by the breadth of USCG legal authorities and missions, and amazed by the size of some reenlistment bonuses currently being offered approaching \$100K.



*Navy Networking at its finest!
(photo by Mark Schaefer, newsletter editor)*



*Chief Jeremy Crawford, John Glynn, and PO1 Kristen Bachicha
(photo by David Williams)*



*Lawrence Edwards provided an update on the status of the proposed USS Albuquerque sail monument, likely going to Tingley Beach.
(photo by Deborah Schaefer)*



*This plaque reads, "NAVY LEAGUE OF NEW MEXICO commemorates the superior service of CAPT TOM GUTIERREZ, USN (RET.) from 2011-2023 VP, Secretary and USS New Mexico Committee Member
(photo by Michael J. Jacobs)*

Legislative Alert for New Mexico Military Retirees and Surviving Spouses *from John Jones*



Our friends over at MOAA sent over this New Mexico legislative alert for 2024 HB252.

SUCCESS: In 2022 the legislature PASSED the graduated Military Retiree Pay Tax Exemption. However, it had two flaws:

1. It had an EXPIRATION date in Tax Year 2026
2. It omitted Surviving Spouses.

In this year's session (2024) the legislature removed the SUNSET, added Surviving Spouses and most importantly the GOVERNOR SIGNED the bill into law.

Answer to NM Nautical Quiz
(from p. 2)

- 1 A "sea-quel" of course!
- 2 A "sea-nile" old salt.

Editor's Note: The previous version of this bill allowed for a \$10,000 tax exemption for military retirees in 2022, \$20,000 in 2023, and \$30,000 in 2024-2026. Now the \$30,000 exemption will continue with no expiration and surviving spouses are included.

Seeking Nominees for Rocky Mountain Region President *by John Jones*

The Navy League of the United States (NLUS) Rocky Mountain Region is seeking nominees to serve as President of the Region. Members of the NM Council can self-nominate, nominees are reviewed by a committee, and a selection is recommended to National. Duties involving serving on National Board, attending NLUS meetings as necessary, visiting each chapter in the Region (Denver and New Mexico) - which can be done by zoom, and representing the Region to NLUS. Please contact JohnLJonesNM@gmail.com with your interest.

Namesake Ships



What Happened to the Albuquerque SSN-706 Reactor Compartment?

A letter and photos from CAPT Don Tenney, the last Commanding Officer of SSN-706, to members of our Navy League Council (Dick Brown, Chuck Vaughan, and Damon Runyan)

Dick, Chuck, and Damon... Last October I was able to go to Hanford and see the reactor compartment of USS Albuquerque be moved to its final resting place. The sail was cut off early in the recycle process and was shipped to Kirtland AFB well before the rest of the ship was cut up. Over the next few months PSNS completed cutting up and shipping all the forward compartment and engine room and sealed up the reactor compartment "package". At the end of September, it was shipped by barge from Puget Sound down to the Columbia River and up the river to the port of Benton. There it was put on a large land hauler and moved 23 miles to Trench 94 at the Hanford site. I got to observe unloading at the port of Benton and shipping to the trench. Here are a few photos of the work at the port.



I hope things are going well for all of you. I continue to cherish my association with each of you and I deeply appreciate your dedication to the Navy League and your support of the Submarine Force. Sincerely, Don



Where is that Final Resting Place at Hanford Site? *by Mark Schaefer, newsletter editor*



Trench 94 at the Hanford Site

Towards the end of my first sea tour as a junior officer (JO) on USS Cavalla (SSN-684), I had just completed my certification to be a Chief Engineer of nuclear reactors. This is a fairly standard path for JOs, and it involves a couple of months of study, followed by a trip to Naval Reactors in Washington, DC's Crystal City area to be tested and then interviewed by the staff of NAVSEA08. It's similar to the initial entry into the nuclear program (the feared Admiral Rickover interviews), but in my mind, this was more intense than those.

My "reward" for passing was my certification to be a submarine Chief Engineer, but my immediate duty was to help Cavalla's Chief engineer and another newly-certified Chief Engineer JO work in a 3-section rotation to oversee the refueling of Cavalla's reactor at Mare Island Shipyard in Vallejo, CA. That assignment is where I learned that the spent reactor fuel cells are pulled out of the top of the reactor compartment (into some heavily shielded containers), loaded onto train cars, and sent to the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) about 50 miles west of Idaho Falls, ID. The new replacement fuel cells for Cavalla's next 13 years were not yet subjected to criticality and were not yet highly radioactive. Dressed in full-body anti-contamination clothing every day for about 60 days of the defueling/refueling process, my main job was to man the "chicken-switches" that would flood the reactor compartment should something go wrong with the process.

A key learning from the defueling process is that the reactor compartment, even with no fuel cells, still has enough radioactivity that it needs to be stored safely upon a boat's deactivation. Because the fuel cells are removed and because the reactor compartments are sealed, they are determined to be low level radioactive waste by the Navy and the Department of Energy.

This map, courtesy of DOE, shows the circuitous path that the ex-Albuquerque's defueled reactor compartment took from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard to the Hanford Site in Washington state. The color-coding is mine and shows the shipyard in green, the tow path through the ocean and up the Columbia River in blue, and the finish of the tow and exit from the River at the Port of Benton in red.



The Navy decommissions about two submarines per year, removes the fuel cells, and sends the sealed reactor compartments to the Hanford site. The ex-Albuquerque's reactor compartment joined those of other distinguished submarines and several decommissioned nuclear cruiser reactor compartments in Trench 94 and should be there for at least a couple of hundred more years.



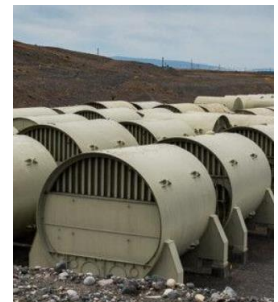
The defueled reactor compartment graveyard.

Namesake Ships



Editor's Note: I ran into Gary Eklund recently in Albuquerque. He worked at Puget Sound shipyard and he spent some time working at the Hanford site as well. He told me some interesting facts about the recycle process of reactor compartments:

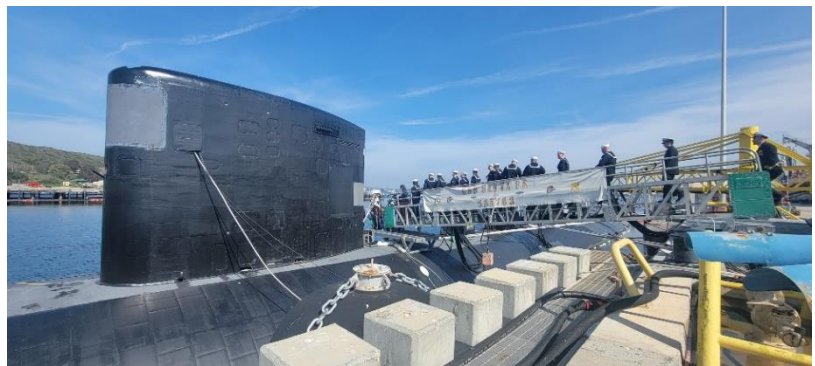
- Why on land burial of Reactor compartments? Of all the options (at sea, incineration etc), on land burial was the best in that it allows easy monitoring, low environmental impact and possible recovery of recyclable materials at a later date. This Submarine and Nuclear Navy Surface Ship inactivation program is the first in history of a country completely inactivating and safely recycling of war machines with a safe and minimal impact to the environment. The burial trench will remain open for future inactivations and may never be covered over.
- All the Navy reactor compartments at Hanford have had all the nuclear fuel removed (to recover and reuse valuable unused nuclear fuel) and every system drained and sealed. There are no hazardous materials such as lead or PCB hull sound insulation left in the Reactor compartments.
- Originally the sealed reactor compartments were left painted with the original black submarine paint. But because of the sun and weather, the paint was failing, and the more environmentally pleasing sand color was chosen to blend in and last longer.
- When (during shipping season-storm free fall and late spring months) the Reactor compartments are transported by barge to the port of Benton, the level of the Columbia River is lowered by the Corps of Engineers so that the barge may be landed on a gravel bed bottom to match up with pier for land transport.



More on the USS Santa Fe (SSN-763) Change of Command

by Ron Olexsak, USS Santa Fe Committee Chair; cake photos by David Williams; crew photo courtesy of Kristelle Siarza Moon

To show his commitment to the City of Santa Fe, the new Commanding Officer of USS Santa Fe, CDR Knepper, and his family visited the City Different over Thanksgiving week to check out the scene and the food. He reports that he is ready to continue the relationship our city has with SSN-763. We are hoping to get a chance to bring some of the boat's sailors to New Mexico during the next Navy Week in Albuquerque (should coincide with the State Fair again in Fall 2024). The Change of Command was the first opportunity to see the outgoing and incoming skippers together (along with the COB - Senior Chief Mike Lee - who will be extending with the Boat another few years!).



Crew of USS Santa Fe (SSN-763) looking mighty sharp topside at Change of Command



CAPT Pianetta and CDR Knepper perform the cake cutting honors



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

The Desert Navy: The Story of USS Desert Ship (LLS-1) by Greg Trapp, JD

One of the U.S. Navy's most unusual "ships" is not a ship at all, but rather a specially built concrete-block test platform that is designed to reproduce the characteristics of a naval warship. The "ship" is USS Desert ship (LLS-1), and it looms above the dry desert sands of southern New Mexico. USS Desert Ship is a part of Launch Complex 35, which is operated by the Naval Surface Warfare Center at White Sands Missile Range. Although USS Desert Ship was never commissioned, a special act of Congress authorized the name USS Desert Ship and the designation of "Land Locked Ship-1."

USS Desert Ship can trace its origins back to 1946. That was when the Navy established a presence at what was then White Sands Proving Grounds (WSPG). The remoteness and large size of WSPG had made the area an ideal location for the Army and Navy to test captured German V-2 rockets. This early V-2 research led to the development of the Viking missile program, which was a series of twelve single-stage sounding rockets based on the V-2. One of those rockets was Viking XI, which was launched from USS Desert Ship on May 24, 1954. You can read more about the Viking missile program at "Vikings in New Mexico: The Navy's Viking Missile Program," New Mexico Nautical News, Fall 2021.

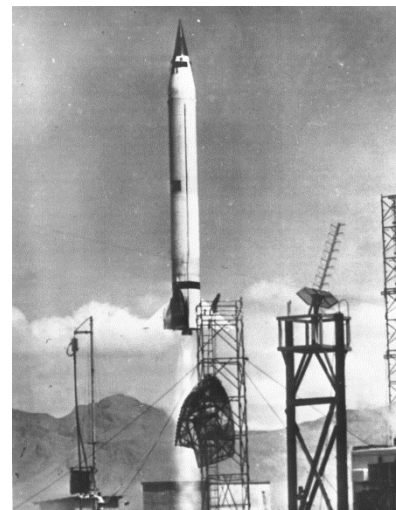
(Editor's Note → to see past issues, go to nmnavyleague.com and click on the "Newsletters" link)

Sources disagree on the date of the construction of USS Desert Ship, with the date of construction being variously placed between 1953 and 1957. However, USS Desert Ship was most likely constructed in June of 1953, having been built to test the Navy supersonic Talos missile system which was being developed at the time. Talos was one of the Navy's Three Ts, consisting of Talos, Terrier, and Tartar. The Three Ts were developed as a part of Operation Bumblebee, which was a response to the development of anti-ship missiles.

Before new weapon systems are placed on Navy ships, they are first tested on USS Desert Ship. USS Desert Ship has been integral to the development and testing of some of the Navy's most important weapons systems, including the Talos, the Tartar, the Terrier, the Standard Missiles, and the Aegis Combat System. The Navy's other land locked test platform is the Vice Admiral James H. Doyle, Jr. Combat System Engineering Development Site (CSEDS). Previously named USS

Rancocas (LS-1), it is primarily used to further develop the Aegis Combat System. CSEDS is located in New Jersey, and is clearly visible from the New Jersey Turnpike. It is known by locals as the "Cornfield Cruiser." While USS Desert ship is not the Navy's only land locked test platform, its location in a large and remote missile range means it can be used to launch and recover missiles that could not be test fired in a more populated area. In addition to missile systems, USS Desert Ship is home to a MK-39 5"/54 naval gun, which would likely be a little disconcerting to drivers traveling along the New Jersey Turnpike.

There are today some thirty sailors of the "Desert Navy" who crew USS Desert Ship. Although built seventy years ago, USS Desert ship will continue to be a vital part of the testing and development of future Navy weapons systems for decades to come.



Viking XI was launched from USS Desert Ship on May 24, 1954. Viking XI reached an altitude of 158 miles, a record for the Viking program. (United Press Telephoto)



A pair of Talos missiles mounted on USS Desert Ship and being tested for adoption by the U.S. Army. Photo dated October 15, 1957. Talos was a large surface-to-air missile that was mounted on cruisers.



This is a 1954 dated postcard of USS Desert Ship with Tartar and Terrier missiles in a Mk-5 launcher. (Arcadia Publishing)

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2024 Upcoming Events for Navy League, New Mexico Council

April 2	1800 Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom
April 13-14	Blue Angels at NAS JRB Fort Worth, TX – Fort Worth Air Power Expo
May 7	1800 Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom
June 4	1800 Navy League, New Mexico Council board meeting via Zoom
September 9-15	Navy Week 2024 – Albuquerque