

ACCENT



Thought of the day...



"Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen."

— Albert Einstein, German-born physicist (1879-1955)

Former Alliance sailor has never forgotten his ship

By BARBARA GRAF
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More than 25 years after completing naval service as a yeoman in the engineering log room aboard the U.S.S. Albany, John Heitsman of Oakhill Avenue is still a sailor at heart.

True, there are just a few farm ponds around his home and he's pretty far from either the Atlantic of the Pacific but he thinks about his adventure on the Albany nearly every day as he plans the eighth reunion of the U.S.S. Albany Association being held this Aug. 6-10 at the Canton Hilton. He expects more than 200 former Albany crewmates and their wives to come and tour Amish country, the Pro-Football Hall of Fame, and to dance, exchange stories of the past and enjoy sumptuous banquets which he and his wife Sandy have carefully planned. The association was founded by Heitsman and others who love to remember their old ship and other old and new U.S.S. Albanys in 1990.

Heitsman, who has been employed by American Steel for the last 22 years, joined the Navy immediately following graduation from Marlinton High School in 1967 and served until 1970. The Albany was his only assigned ship and he arrived



there right after boot camp. He remembers that he served under John Glenn Jr., son of Sen. John Glenn, then an astronaut, and plans to invite both Glenns to the reunion.

Although John and Sandy were high school sweethearts they did not marry during the war years because her father had been a prisoner of war and asked them to wait as they would be separated for quite a while. "But with her letters and phone calls she kept me steering straight and always has encouraged me. She's a bit like my rudder," he said of the mother of their three children, all landlubbers.

In the year 2000 it has already been arranged for the U.S.S. Albany Association to have their annual reunion back in Albany. By that time Heitsman plans to have his four foot long scale model of the original ship of 1846 built. He will donate it to the Albany Naval Museum at that time but for this year his fellow sailors will get a look at his progress as the half finished ship

model also will be attending the convention.

The U.S.S. Albany Association marked its 50th anniversary last year. Their oldest member recently died at age 99. Included in the association are men and women who enjoy the lore and history of the six Albanys although they probably only served on one of them.

The original was designed and built by Francis Grice in the New York Navy Yard. It took marines to Taxpan for the Mexican-American War and also to Tripoli after its launching in 1852. When it left Panama for New York and home in 1854, it never returned with all 210 men on board believed to have perished.

In military history it was a sad time and significant because it marked the first time that survivor benefits were awarded by the Navy.

The second Albany was three masted like the first and bought from the British in 1863. It originated with the name of Concoocooks and was a protective cruiser. It patrolled in the Caribbean, the Bahamas, Jamaica and Honduras and was sold about 1872.

The 1898 version of the Albany was made in England and was originally Brazilian renamed for Albany in 1899 and outfitted with a far more impressive rack of armaments to patrol Gibraltar, the Suez region, the Philippines, Mediterranean and the French coast. It was sold in 1930 and there was a long stretch without a U.S.S. Albany.

The keel for the fourth Albany was laid in 1944 with the city of Albany conducting an impressive war bond drive to help finance it. It was finished in 1946 when the war had ended. In 1962 the ship was redesigned with missiles and it was about five years later that Heitsman stepped on board at Boston.

"I drew pretty easy duty in the Atlantic fleet mostly in tropical waters at a time when my buddies were fighting and dying in Vietnam and I've always felt bad about cruising when others were



John Heitsman of Oakhill Avenue adds a piece to the redwood deck of his model of the original U.S.S. Albany circa 1846. He plans to donate it to the Albany Historical Museum when the U.S.S. Albany Association meets there for the year 2000 reunion.

in battle," said Heitsman as he cruised through his memory bank.

But the Albany is still making history. The cruiser is gone and replaced by a nuclear sub launched in 1990. Members of the Albany Association were allowed to tour it at the time of one of their reunions. John did not take the plunge in the sub because he did not want to leave Sandy behind.

Heitsman is now about 75 hours behind in his boat building but up to date and shipshape for the August reunion. He would like anyone reading this article who has an interest in the Albany Association to contact him and decide on attending the August reunion.

Materials for his model have been provided in part by a shipmate from Plymouth, Mass., who

sent him a generous supply of redwood from his carpentry shop. Even with this gift from a friend the model project has cost Heitsman \$1,500 and a

great deal of time very freely given as he thinks back over his short but significant time protecting his country aboard the U.S.S. Albany.