

THE USS OKANOGAN ORGANIZATION'S 35th (and final) Annual Reunion

NEW ORLEANS

(September 14-18, 2025)





Dedication

This 2025 edition of the USS Okanogan Organization Reunion Booklet is dedicated to our friend and shipmate, Norman Laskay, who passed away just two days ago (10/12/25). Norm served aboard our ship as a deck division officer and later as our navigator in the mid-60s. A graduate of Maine Maritime Academy, Laskay spent most of his adult life in activities related to the sea and ships—first as a Navy and merchant seaman and later as one of the founders of DLS Marine, a leading worldwide marine surveying firm. All of us who attended the New Orleans Reunion and enjoyed our stay in NOLA and loved all of the tours and activities truly appreciate everything that Norm did to ensure that our final reunion would be one of the best—if not the best—of our organization’s 35 annual reunions. In fact it was Laskay who at the Business Meeting in Providence in 2023 proposed the New Orleans site as we were selecting a central-time-zone host city for 2025. Furthermore, it was his skillful and powerful presentation that convinced the membership that we should all gather in Louisiana this year.

Beyond that, Norm, a long-time resident of the New Orleans area, took on the responsibility of handling almost all of the details involved in the planning and organizing of the entire reunion. Thanks to Laskay’s efforts, thorough planning, and efficient manner in dealing with people at our reunion hotel, the bus company, and the WW II Museum, Pier 51, and the Cajun Swamp Tour, everything was right there waiting for us. The New Orleans Reunion was, in fact, NEARLY PERFECT. What city could possibly have been a better finale for a bunch of Gator Sailors than the “Home of the Higgins boat.” In addition, it is difficult to think of any reunion venue that we visited over the years that has been more appropriate for a veteran than the WW II Museum. What a place! Also, thanks to Norm Laskay, all of us became completely absorbed in New Orleans, for we toured the entire city, ate authentic New Orleans food, and even got to listen to a true Cajun for a couple of hours while checking out flora and fauna of the bayou. Thanks for sharing your city with us, Norm, and thanks for being our friend!



Finally, we are very sorry that Norm Laskay, who set up our entire New Orleans reunion, was prevented by his health problems from enjoying the “fruits of his labor.” We are happy, though that he did manage to make it to the Hospitality Room for 20 or 30 minutes to enjoy the company of his shipmates and to hear his shipmates thank him for all of his efforts. God bless our shipmate Norman Laskay!



OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM IS HAPPY THAT YOU JOINED US IN NOLA

Attendees With several last minute cancellations, thirty-eight shipmates, spouses, and guests gathered. at the Sheraton Metairie Hotel. These attendees represented 15 different states, and all but one of these shipmates were Vietnam-era sailors. The final one—Eddie Janek—is a veteran of both WW II and the Korean War.

First time attendees: **Shannon White** (Barry White’s daughter); **Pat Worley** (Betty Dowden’s friend), **Missy Bower** (Garry Mulick’s Daughter), and **Cecilia Moore-Cobb** (Don English’s wife). Thank you for joining us, ladies. It was a pleasure to be around you!

Special Thanks To **Richard Keel** for handling all of the registration, finances, and business dealings of the entire reunion.

To **Dave Meierhoff** experienced reunion coordinator who advised us and shepherded us through everything we needed to do to make sure everything ran smoothly and who was particularly adept at handling last-minute details.

To **Cheryl and Franky Singleton**—Our ship’s storekeepers who have, once again, prepared the best ship’s store ever and who provided us with excellent “Going out of Business Sales.”

To **Don Lazarus** for his tremendous help with reunion photography.

To **Eddie Janek** who talked his friend Budweiser beer distributor **Larry Del Papa** into supplying the beer for our reunion.

To **Beth and Colin Carney** for their slide show, Okanogan collections, reunion booklets, and for arranging the Face-time conversation with Margie and Dick Palazzolo.

To **Norm Laskay** See previous page.

Additional Thank You’s go out to all who contributed to the success of our Reunion Banquet: **Gordie Arnsperger, Mary Lou Mulick, and Mary Ann Schaefer** for their eloquent reading at the Banquet; **Kim Coleman** for reading and presenting us with a copy of the commendation from Texas governor Greg Abbott and the picture of all of us in front of the “This-Bud’s-for You” sign; **Sandy Cleveland** who provided us with the words to the songs that closed our banquet; and, finally, to all of you who shared a memory, a joke, a sea story, or a helping hand while contributing to the fun at the banquet and during the entire reunion. (Which was, by the way EVERYONE!!)



USS OKANOGAN (APA 220)
CIRCA 1949

by Howland



The Higgins Boat

The Missions of the USS Okanogan (APA 220) in World War II and all of the other conflicts in which she took part were always the

same: ***“To carry and disembark with its landing craft a full battalion of troops and to evacuate troops, casualties, and prisoners of war from the objective.”*** Essential to the accomplishment of these missions were the boats stored aboard our ship and employed to land troops, evacuate casualties, and transport personnel from ship to shore: 2 LCMs (Mike Boats); 2 LCPLs (Captain’s gig and Repair boat); and 20 LCVPs (Pappa Boats). All of these boats were designed and built by the company of Andrew Jackson Higgins, a boat builder in New Orleans, who is rightfully credited as the designer of the boat that bears his name. Therefore, one could easily say that there is no place more fitting to “close out” our Okanogan Organization than New Orleans, which is known to historians, ship-builders and Gator Sailors as the “Home of the Higgins Boat.” So crucial was the Higgins boat to our nation’s success in WW II that General Eisenhower once said: “Higgins won the war for us.” Thus all of us Okanogan sailors were delighted to see a Higgins Papa Boat on full display as we entered the Louisiana Memorial Pavilion of the World War II Museum



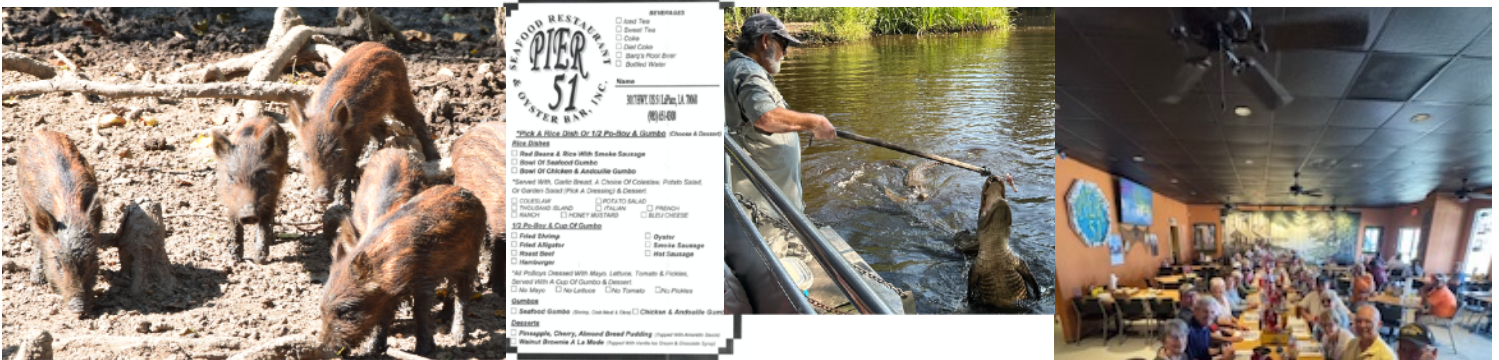
Pictured above are Papa 17 (left) as she looked in 1949 and the Higgins LCVP replica in the WW II Museum (right). On the immediate left is Dave Meierhoff, recalling His days as Mike Boat engineer. To the Right are Darlene and Gordie Arnspiger (standing) and Cliff Perkins. (I am guessing that Carolyn Meierhoff and Karen Perkins took the pictures.)



To the left is a photo of our shipmate and this year’s Reunion Consultant and New Orleans resident Norm Laskay, wearing his Mardi Gras hat and Okanogan t-shirt, posing next to a sign on the site of the Higgins office and first plant.

THE FOOD OF NEW ORLEANS

There are many words that could be used to describe this year's reunion: memorable, bitter-sweet, uplifting, fantastic, patriotic, fun-filled, and enjoyable. It was also delicious as we ate our way through it from beginning to end. Our dining experience began with the Welcome Reception in the Hospitality Room on Sunday night where we were treated to a Complimentary Buffet; which featured a wide variety and plenty of delicious munchies, dips, sandwiches, and heavy hors devours; and it ended with the Reunion Banquet, which provided us with a choice of Catfish Almandine or Roasted Prime Rib of Beef—served soup, potato, vegetables, rolls & butter, and dessert. It was delicious! Also delicious were the dining experiences we enjoyed between these two events. For example, all of us seemed to enjoy the complimentary breakfasts that our hotel served buffet style every morning in the hospitality room. Breakfast time (7-8 AM) seemed a little early to some, but no one ever missed it—even though at least one member appeared at the last minute on Monday in his PJ's. We all also thoroughly enjoyed our lunch at the Pier 51 Seafood Restaurant on Tuesday following our "Swamp Tour." For that meal, each of us had filled out our choices of authentic New Orleans chow—Rice dishes, Gumbos, Po-Boy sandwiches, beverages, salads and deserts. It was during this dining experiences that someone compared our group to some of the animals that we saw on the swamp tour. Finally, about half of our members used our Wednesday "free day" to check out the food on Bourbon Street and at other iconic NOLA locations.



A Taste of New Orleans

1. The six little piggies...2. Pier 51 Menu...3. Capt. Thom feeds gator...4. Table for 34... 5.Marjorie, Joe, Larry, Sandy downtown...6. Larry and Sandy eating AGAIN with Missy and Cathy.





USS OKANOGAN ORGANIZATION REUNION HISTORY

Reunion History Our New Orleans marked the 35th time in 36 years that her crew members met as a group (the only exception being 2020—the Covid year). In 1996 our membership decided that we should rotate the location of our reunion city from one in a Western time zone, to an Eastern time zone city, then to the Central time zone and then back to the west, etc., etc. It was their hope that this arrangement would ensure that at least once every three years, everyone would find the reunion site relatively close to their home. As a result, our reunions have taken place in 30 different cities, and our members have visited historic sites like the Alamo, Valley Forge, and Mount Rushmore, experienced the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Oceans, and Rocky Mountains, enjoyed traditional “resort” features of places like Myrtle Beach, Branson, and Nevada, and paid tribute to the Naval traditions of towns like Norfolk, Newport, and Jacksonville. Thus, our attending these reunions we were not only treated to the joys of catching up with former shipmates and forming friendships beyond compare but also we were able to “check-out” various locals of our glorious country.

35 Reunion Sites

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1991 - Las Vegas, NV | 2008 - Mesa, AZ |
| 1992 - Okanogan, WA (mini reunion) | 2009- Branson, MO |
| 1993 - Las Vegas, NV | 2010 - Plymouth Meeting, PA |
| 1994 - Boston & Bayou (mini reunions) | 2011 - Reno, NV |
| 1995 - Myrtle Beach, SC | 2012 - Omaha, NE |
| 1996 - Las Vegas, NV | 2013 - Charleston, SC |
| 1997 - St. Louis, MO | 2014 - Portland, OR |
| 1998 - Virginia Beach, VA | 2015 - San Antonio, TX |
| 1999 - Las Vegas, NV | 2016 - Jacksonville, FL |
| 2020 -San Antonio, TX | 2017 - Boise, ID |
| 2001 -Plymouth, MA | 2018 - Grand Rapids, MI |
| 2002 - San Diego, CA | 2019 - Hershey/Harrisburg |
| 2003 - Chicago, IL. | 2020 - Covid Year |
| 2004 - Washington, DC | 2021 - Colorado Springs |
| 2005 Seattle WA | 2022 - Nashville, TN |
| 2006 Galveston, TX | 2023 - Providence RI |
| 2007 Norfolk VA | 2024 - Rapid City, SD |
| | 2025 New Orleans LA |

A LIST OF USS OKANOGAN ORGANIZATION PRESIDENTS

The USS Okanogan Organization has been very fortunate to have had solid leadership over the years of its existence. Therefore, we salute those thirteen shipmates who have "stepped up" since 1992 to grab the helm and keep our organization on an even keel.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1992-1994 Bill O'Connor | 1995-1996 Ed Collins | 1996-1998 Joe Pinero |
| 1998-2000 Joe Flatley | 2000-2001 Joe Quintana | 2001 2002-Bob Parker |
| 2002-2003 Ed Collins | 2004-2005 Chuck Zito | 2006-2007 Karl Bond |
| 2008-2008 Dick Smith | 2010-2011 Dick Palazzolo | 2012-2015 Colin Carney |
| 2016-2020 Dave Meierhoff | 2021-202 Garry Mulick | Note: Organization was run by a leadership Committee from mid-2024 to dissolution in 2026 |



A Brief History of USS Okanogan (APA 220)



USS Okanogan (APA-220), built under Maritime Administration contract by Permanente Metals Corp., Richmond, CA, was launched 26 October 1944, sponsored by Mrs. E. J. Husted, and acquired and commissioned 3 December 1944, with Comdr. Frederick Fender, USNR, in command. Okanogan's primary mission as an attack transport was to carry and disembark (with her own landing craft) a full battalion of troops and to evacuate troops, casualties, and prisoners of war from the objective. In line with this, she provided all facilities for the troops embarked; messing, berthing, medical and dental, and recreational facilities. Her first mission began 16 February 1945, when she sailed from San Francisco bound for Hawaii with the staff of Transport Division 57, along with a number of Navy, Marine, and civilian passengers. When she arrived at Pearl Harbor, Okanogan embarked some 740 Army assault troops--reinforcements for Okinawa, where she arrived 17 April. After five days off shore of this fiercely embattled island, "where the fleet had come to stay," she sailed for Saipan, with 160 battle casualties. At Saipan 1,000 veterans embarked for San Francisco which the Okanogan reached 1 June.

Okanogan voyaged across the Pacific and between the combat areas twice more as the war closed. Only brief periods in West Coast ports broke her heavy schedule, brought on by the urgent need to redeploy troops for occupation duties and to return combat veterans to the United States. She completed a voyage at San Francisco 9 January 1946, and a month later sailed for Norfolk, Va., her home port for operations with the Atlantic Fleet for the next four years. As the Navy and Marines sharpened the techniques of warfare born in wartime, Okanogan made reserve training cruises and took part in maneuvers and exercises along the eastern seaboard, in the Caribbean, and, in the fall of 1949, in the Hawaiian Islands.

Okanogan rejoined the Pacific Fleet upon the outbreak of the Korean War, and in August 1950 loaded part of the 1st Marine Division at San Diego for Japan. These troops had been urgently requested by General MacArthur for a counter-offensive against North Korean aggression. Okanogan landed the men at Inchon 15 September in an amphibious assault of incredible difficulty. The skill with which the operation was executed won acclaim from General MacArthur, who exclaimed "...the Navy and Marine Corps have never shown brighter" Okanogan landed men of the same division in the assault on Wonsan 26 October. Okanogan evacuated three thousand refugees from Chinampo in December; one more was born at sea and later named for the ship by its grateful parents. In January 1951, Okanogan brought more troops to Inchon, and in April served as flagship in demonstration landings at Kojo.

Returning to San Diego in May 1951, Okanogan trained indefatigably for future combat assignments. In September and October, she carried men of the Air Force to Yokohama and sailed again for Japan in March 1952, carrying Naval Beach Group One. She transported the staff of Landing Ship Flotilla One to Kojedo, Korea, and carried out amphibious exercises off Japan, before returning to Long Beach in December.

For the next eight years, Okanogan continued a tight program of training both for herself and for Marines when she was not deployed to the Far East. Such six to seven-month cruises were made from 1954 to 1959. An experience of her 1958 cruise illustrates the ability of the Navy to make a world-wide response to any crisis. When the 6th Fleet landed Marines in Lebanon in July, Okanogan, half a world away, at once proceeded to Okinawa, ready to load more marines and carry them to the Mediterranean should they be needed. Okanogan left Long Beach once more 16 February 1960, and after participating in a large scale exercise with Marines at Taiwan, sailed for Southeast Asia. Her first mission was the delivery of ten landing craft to the Laotian government; her second, the loading of Thai and Vietnamese art treasures for a planned tour of the United States. She returned to Long Beach 25 July.

In 1962, and 1963-4, Okanogan again cruised with the 7th Fleet in the Western Pacific and in between was called to the Caribbean by the Dominican crisis. When she once again left Long Beach 19 April 1965, it was for direct participation in the Vietnam War. Through May and June she carried men and ammunition between Okinawa and Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Qui Nhon; from July to November, she served as station ship at Da Nang, providing the Navy Support Activity there with berthing and messing facilities for 700 to 900 persons. Her boats operated 18 to 20 hours a day in this essential support for build-up of one of the major bases for the Allied effort to repel Communist aggression. Okanogan returned to Long Beach 17 December, and in June and July 1966 again voyaged to South Vietnam, carrying Marine communications technicians. On 17 November 1966, she returned to Da Nang as station ship, making her unique contribution to the cause of freedom in South Viet Nam. As a member of Amphibious Force Pacific Okanogan continued her mission in transporting, training and supporting the fleet into 1968. The USS Okanogan (APA 220) was decommissioned on 5 February 1970.

USS OKANOGAN (APA 220) SKIPPERS



CDR F. Fender—First Captain



Capt. Gallatin--Last Captain

Cdr. F. Fender (44-46)

Capt. F. Donohue(50)

Capt. H.E. Day (51-52)

Capt. F. Winant, Jr. (54-55)

Capt. A.T. Hathaway (58-59)

Capt. C.Carmichael (62-63)

Capt. J.W. Perkins (65-66)

Capt. F.K. Feagin (68)

Capt. E.L. Schleif (46-47)

Capt. B. Denton (50)

Capt. P.R. Osborn (52-53)

Capt. W.F. Hardman (55-57)

Capt. R.E. Cutts (59-60)

Capt. R.E. Oliver (63-64)

Capt. P. Payne (66-67)

Capt. Capt. M.E. Kelly (68)

Capt. B. Schumm (48-50)

Capt. J. Gallagher (50—51)

Capt. M. Adamson (53-54)

Capt. J.O Phillips, Jr. (57-58)

Capt. W.E. Lewis (60-62)

Capt. G.E. Hartley (64-65)

Capt. R.C. May (66-68)

Capt. R.E. Gallatin (68-69)



CAPT G. E. HARTLEY 64-65



CAPT J. W. PERKINS 65-66



CAPT P. E. PAYNE 66-67

Popular Captains of the mid-60s