

# **Return to the Philippines**

## **PREFACE**

© 2005 Philippines Pilgrimage Log

A dream remains a dream if a determined effort is not made to make this dream a reality.

A show of determination inspires others to participate in its success.

Our dream would not have become a reality  
without the participation and cooperation of others.

## **OUR THANKS TO**

The shipmates, family, and friends who joined us at San Mateo.

Gambie's Travel Agency of San Jose, California.

Philippines Tourist Bureau Manila, Republic of the Philippines.

US Navy Subic Bay - R/Admiral Kilcline and staff.

Chief of U.S. Naval Operations - Admiral J.L. Holloway III.

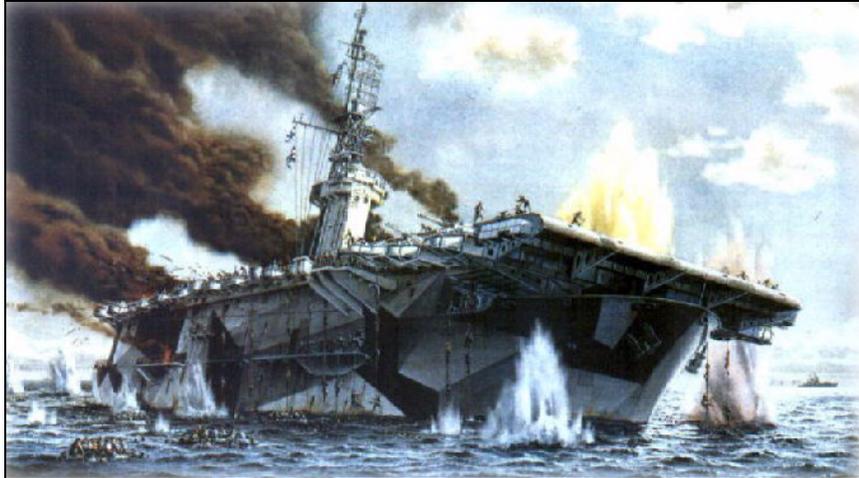
Flag Officer Philippines Navy - R/Admiral E.R. Ogbinar.

Officers and men of the R.P.S. Mt. Samat (TP-21)

The hundreds of Americans and Filipinos who helped.

Most of all, the 96 people who made this "Sentimental Journey."  
Without you, it never would have happened.

Respectfully,  
Tony Potochniak  
USS Gambier Bay Survivor



*Never to be forgotten, with shipmates' dead or dying and many trapped on board, it was a heart wrenching decision to abandon ship.*

### **A vow and acknowledgements of support.**

While swimming away from my sinking ship, I made a vow to some day return to the site where the USS Gambier Bay lies at the bottom of the Philippines Trench. This trip would be to honor our Killed in Action with a religious and military memorial service. They were God's children.

This vow would have remained a dream if not for the early dedicated support of Charles Heinl and Marty Showers in organizing an Association of survivors, family, and friends of the Gambier Bay and our Squadron VC-10. This was a critical first step to fulfilling a pledge.

The Association was the platform from which many positive actions and events evolved. There were too many persons involved over the decades to name them all, but their contributions were essential and greatly appreciated.

The Association received early critical support from the late V. Admiral Hugh H. Goodwin our first C.O, and Captain Edward Huxtable, the C.O. of our VC-10 Squadron.

When we abandoned ship, the late R/Admiral W.R. Vieweg was our C.O. He crossed the bar prior to our first efforts to organize an Association. He never knew, but would have been proud of our accomplishments. He would have been with us on our Philippines Pilgrimage.



# Telegram

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# Telegram

REURLETTER DAJIX PLSE HAVE NO DOUBTS ABOUT LINGERING AFFECTION OF FLIPINOS FOR AMERICA LIBERATORS STOP THERE WILL BE INVITABLE SNAFUS HERE AND THERE REGARDING ITINERARY AND PERHPAS SOME MINOR INCONVENIENCES

BUT WE HOPE THAT OUR NATONS HOSPITALITY WILL MAKE UP FOR THESE STOP PARTICIPATION OF PHILIPPINE NAVY IN YOUR PROGRAM IS ONLY HINT OF RECEPTION AWAITING YOUR GROUP STOP SEE YOU IN MANILA

REGARDS

PETER TUAZON

NNNN



CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

26 April 1977

Dear Mr. Potochniak,

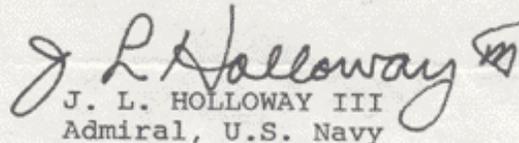
Thank you for bringing me up to date on the activities of USS GAMBIER BAY (CVE 73) and VC-10 Association, and for inviting me to join you for your return to the Philippines.

The patriotic and worthwhile endeavors of you and your shipmates in support of a strong Navy are greatly appreciated. We are particularly gratified for the assistance you give our recruiters, and I am pleased to hear that Chief Saxers has been of help to you.

My duties will not permit me to accompany you to the Philippines as you return to the place where USS GAMBIER BAY fought her last gallant battle. However, I am writing Rear Admiral Thomas J. Kiline, Commander, Naval Forces Philippines, asking that he greet you and arrange a tour of the Subic Bay Naval Base for your party if your schedule will accommodate it. You should hear from him in the near future.

I offer my best wishes for a most successful and memorable trip.

Sincerely,

  
J. L. HOLLOWAY III  
Admiral, U.S. Navy

Mr. Tony Potochniak  
1100 Holly Lane  
Endicott, New York 13760

Office of the President  
of the Philippines  
Malacañang

78/09877

June 5, 1978

Mr. Anthony Potochniak  
1100 Holly Lane  
Endicott, New York 13760  
U.S.A.

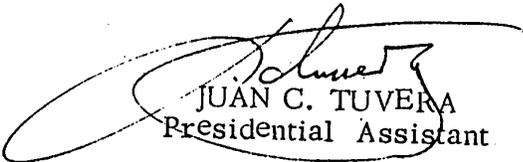
Sir:

On behalf of President Marcos, I am pleased to acknowledge receipt of your letter transmitting to him a copy of your excellent publication, *Old Shipmates*, which recounts the sentimental journey to the Philippines of the U.S.S. Gambier Bay survivors, members of the Composite Squadron V.C.-10, and their families.

The President enjoyed reading the magazine, which is indeed a fine record of a profoundly significant event in the war that sealed Fil-American friendship and cooperation for all time. The U.S.S. Gambier Bay episode is deeply etched in our people's consciousness and shall always symbolize man's uncompromising stand against tyrannical subjugation.

Thank you very much and warm regards to all our gallant Shipmates.

Sincerely,

  
JUAN C. TUVERA  
Presidential Assistant



**FLAG OFFICER IN COMMAND**  
**PHILIPPINE NAVY**  
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

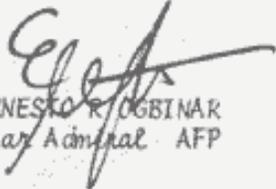
M E S S A G E

*On behalf of the Philippine Navy, allow me this opportunity to welcome the surviving crewmembers and their families of the USS Gambier Bay who are visiting the Philippines on a sentimental journey.*

*It is indeed a rare privilege for us to be of assistance to our former comrades-in-arms who had a hand in shaping the destiny of our country. Time has but all erased the stark memories of the holocaust and tragedies of the last World War which also laid the foundations of a lasting friendship and brotherhood among its veterans. Today, we reunite in peace to pledge our common commitment towards bringing about a more secured and brighter tomorrow for the coming generations.*

*I hope that you will find your stay in the Philippines a most memorable and pleasant one. You will perhaps note the various dynamic changes reflective of a country in progressive development as it seeks to firm its place further in the community of nations. That you had participated in its early years of growth is a fact that we will always cherish.*

*Again, my sincere felicitations to our visiting friends and a warm "Mabuhay" to all.*

  
ERNESTO R. OGBINAR  
Rear Admiral AFP

# LOG OF THE PHILIPPINES PILGRIMAGE

By  
Tony Potochniak  
October 12, 1977

Shipmates, family, and friends from remote corners of our country have been arriving at the San Francisco Airport for several days. Joining them are others who have driven, bussed, or taken the train. They have been meeting at the Royal Coach Inn in San Mateo. At the head of this group is Berman Deffenbaugh, the President of the USS GAMBIER BAY & VC-10 ASSOCIATION. Deffy and wife Loreli have driven their motor home from San Antonio, Texas to be with their shipmates who are about to embark on their Sentimental Journey to the Island of Leyte in the Philippines.

This is a most diversified group of travelers. They come from all walks of life, religious conviction, political affiliation, and from every conceivable economic stratum that composes our nation. However, they possess a common bond.

This inseparable bond was created during the dark days of World War II when the United States Navy prepared a beachhead and transported General MacArthur and his troops to Leyte so he could keep his 'Sacred Pledge' of "I SHALL RETURN" to the Filipino People. This famous General did keep his pledge to our brave allies and the Filipinos, but the men of the USS GAMBIER BAY and their AIR SQUADRON VC-10 paid a price in life.

The battles that were associated with General MacArthur's return were numerous and took place in the skies, on the ground, and on the seas. They were vicious battles fought with an uncompromising enemy.

In battle, swirling lines of contact with the enemy are ever changing, as are the opportunities for victory or defeat.

"Dame Fate" is a fickle 'Brood' who revels in sheer joy at making the unexpected happen. And so it was for a 'Baby Flattop' the USS GAMBIER BAY when, prior to being commissioned, she bestowed notoriety upon her when the men and women of the 'Kaiser' shipyards in Vancouver, Washington presented her to President Roosevelt. A gift from shipyard workers to the American people and US Navy, the USS GAMBIER BAY was a 'bonus baby'. An extra ship. It was one above and beyond the impossible quota established by the wartime needs.

Names were drawn from among the list of shipyard workers who had built her. They were rewarded by sailing down the Columbia River aboard her to her Commissioning at Astoria, Oregon. The group of ship builders showered the USS Gambier Bay with gifts for her plank owner crew.

'Dame Fate' was about to point her finger at the USS Gambier Bay again. Unlike the role of a Escort Carrier that she was intended for, fate selected her and five of her sister ships - the

USS Fanshaw Bay, USS Kalinin Bay, USS Kitkun Bay, USS St. Lo and USS White Plains - for a more significant contribution in liberating the Philippines from a cruel oppressor and an important position in the Annals of Naval History.

'Dame Fate', that fickle broad, was hard at work on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1944 misaligning the plans of the Admirals of both the United States and Imperial Japanese Navies. What had been interpreted as a decisive victory by US Naval Intelligence circles by the sudden about face of the Japanese Central Force after they had been mauled by planes from 'Bull' Halsey's big carriers was in reality 'Dame Fate' again pointing a finger at USS Gambier Bay.

The supposition by 'Bull' Halsey that the Japanese Central Force was in headlong retreat into the China Sea rightfully allowed him to pursue major units of the Japanese Northern or Carrier Force to the North of Luzon. However, 'Dame Fate' reshuffled the deck and dealt out another hand. Japanese Admiral Kurita's Central Force and 'Taffy Three', a small lightly armed task unit of USS GAMBIER BAY, her five sister ships, 3 destroyers and 4 destroyer escorts were on a collision course. They had a date with destiny.

On the morning of October 25, 1944, the USS Gambier Bay, her sister ships and escorts were suddenly locked in a surface engagement of gigantic proportions. Dame Fate singled out the USS Gambier Bay again. The USS Gambier Bay went to her watery grave as a result of gunfire from hostile ships. She was the first and only Aircraft Carrier of the US Navy to be sunk in this manner - a dubious distinction.

The USS Gambier Bay went to the bottom of the Philippines Trench with many of her crew and aviators. It is one of the deepest parts of the Pacific Ocean. Those who survived the holocaust aboard ship were further tortured by the merciless sun and sea after abandoning ship. The sharks and battle that still swirled all around them also menaced them.

The friends who lost their lives aboard ship, in the air and in the sea were not forgotten. The survivors, family, and friends, who were gathered here at the San Mateo Royal Coach Inn were here to fulfill a pledge to their dying shipmates made during the height of battle. The pledge was to return to bury their dead with prayers to God for their souls and to afford a military burial with full honors. In spirit, AND SO IT SHALL BE."

Upon completion of luncheon at the Royal Coach Inn, many of the shipmates, family and friends traveled to the airport with the 'Pilgrims to the Philippines' to wish them a safe and pleasant journey. Unfortunately, they could not also go.

After the usual show of tickets and airport security search, the Philippines Airline aircraft took off. The approximate time of departure was 10:30 PM. The flight to Hawaii was uneventful. The aircraft was filled with smiling Filipino's who were homeward bound for a visit or extended vacation. They were a preview of the happy smiling faces we were to see throughout the Philippines. The food that was served aboard Philippines Air Lines was superb and plentiful.

We touched down in Hawaii to refuel. We landed and took off in total darkness. We touched down again in Guam after flying over Saipan and Tinian. This time a rainsquall greeted us. There were traces of daylight on the horizon. Perhaps this beginning of a new day was symbolic. It was here in the Marianas Islands that our first combat and Killed in Action losses took place while helping to liberate Saipan, Tinian and Guam.

NOTE: It was years later when I learned that many men from the New York National Guard who made the landing on Saipan were from my hometown. After the war, when some of the Killed in Action were returned home for burial, I attended many of the military services as a member of the First Ward Post American Legion Honor Guard. The liberation of Saipan had cost more than the shipmates and aviators we had lost from my ship. They now included hometown men. Some were from the neighborhood school that I had attended

### **OCTOBER 14th 1977**

Somewhere between Hawaii and Guam we crossed the 180th meridian and lost a day. There was no October 13, 1977 for the members of the Philippines Pilgrimage.

When we flew out of Hawaii we encountered severe head winds that caused an excessive use of fuel. It was because of this shortage of fuel that we set down at Guam. The unexpected detour had set us back some two hours in our flight plan.

The delay forced the Filipino reception committee at the Manila airport to stand in formation for two hours waiting for us. When we arrived, the Philippines Navy Band greeted us and Naval VIP's from the Philippines and United States Navy, as well as Filipino Veterans who had fought at Corregidor, been in the Battan death march, and fought in the jungles. These Filipinos had fought along side the Americans for four years. They too had taken tremendous losses. Their hand shakes and embraces were those of men who were proud and happy to again be with their wartime comrades. An unshakable bond exists between these men and their former comrades in arms.

***ANCHORS AWEIGH  
BY THE  
PHILIPPINES NAVY BAND.***

*The Filipino Navy Band waited for us  
in the rain.*



## Welcome to Manila, USS Gambier Bay

Some of the first to be greeted upon disembarking from the aircraft were Janet Lindow and Mr. and Mrs. Walter Flanders.

In the afternoon, a group led by our R/Admiral Richard R. Ballinger (USN Ret) and the Reverend Carlson Capt. (USN-Ret) went to the Philippines Navy Headquarters on Roxas Boulevard. Rear Admiral Ernesto Ogbinar who is the Flag Officer in command greeted us. We presented him with an aluminum plaque that depicts 'The Final Hour', a painting by Mr.C.G. Evers. Included on the plaque are all



After many hand shakes, embraces, flowers, and Mabuhay's, we were driven to the Bayside Plaza Hotel in Manila.

the names of our Killed in Action and a prayer by our Chaplain, Reverend Vern Carlsen. The plaque was a gift to Admiral Ogbinar in appreciation for all the assistance the Philippines Navy was giving to the survivors of USS GAMBIER BAY and her Squadron VC-10 in keeping their pledge to their dead.

## OCTOBER 15, 1977

We were up at the crack of dawn, had breakfast, and boarded our air-conditioned busses. Our destination this morning is the American Military Cemetery in Forbes Park on the outskirts of Manila. Reverend Carlsen led us in prayers for our Killed In Action and deceased shipmates.

The Military Cemetery is a beautiful garden. Trees, shrubs and flowers, as well as the lawn are meticulously cared for. Ponds with delicate lily pads adorn the entire cemetery. Long lines of Crosses and Stars of David mark the final resting places of thousands of G.I.'s, Navy, and Air Force men.

The men who perished in or were buried at sea have not been forgotten. A large memorial in the form of a semi circle has been erected in their memory. Numerous walls of marble support a portico. On these walls are engraved the names, serial numbers, and home states of those sailors who lie in the sea. Our traveling shipmates scanned these walls until they found the name of their lost in action friends. The thoughts that went through their minds were evident in their eyes as they stood in reverend silence.



*Merrill Kuster stands across the road from the American Military Cemetery, Forbes Park, Manila*



*Al and Alice Dahlen, brother and sister of Walter A. Dahlen Lieutenant (JG), stand before the engraved marble plaque that bears their brothers name. Walter Dahlen's aircraft had crashed after a strike on enemy fortifications on October 24th. A destroyer rescued him and his crew.*

*During the sea battle on October 25 1944, Walter was acting as a spotter on the destroyer's bridge. A shell from a Japanese vessel struck the bridge of the destroyer, Killing Walter and many of the destroyer's crew.*

The afternoon of this day was spent at the Pasanján Falls in Laguna. This is where the stream is that Hank and Tony raced down. Who won? Well the guy with the typewriter won. He's telling the story. Actually, it was no contest. Our boatmen met with a slight accident. For a while I thought that we had lost him in the raging stream. Needless to say, many of the ladies and shipmates shot the rapids and enjoyed themselves immensely. It was great fun going under the falls. I can still see our Old Exec. Dick Ballinger, smiling as the torrent of water capsized our raft. Some fun!

All fun things must come to an end and so it was at the Pagsanjan Falls. We boarded our busses and headed for Manila. Along the trail we drove through an open market place. Our nostrils detected fresh baked pastry. Yes, we stopped and were introduced to 'boka pie' - a hot pastry with a coconut filling that's out of this world. We also loaded up on citrus fruits and bananas. The Philippines must have invented bananas. There are at least 50 different varieties. We loaded up our busses with goodies and headed for our hotel in Manila. Tomorrow is going to be a busy day.

### **October 16, 1977**

Our travelers again arose with the crack of dawn and headed for the hotel dining room to have breakfast. Breakfast usually consisted of eggs up, over, or scrambled with bacon or ham. Breakfast cereals and French toast were available as was Danish and coffee. It was just like state side.

About half way through breakfast we could expect to hear Linda, our guide, sound off with, "Let's go. Busses are outside waiting."

Today we're going to the U.S. Naval Base at Subic Bay, Philippines. When the busses were loaded and finally began to roll the travelers relaxed and were entertained by the travel guides. The bus that I usually rode had Jack and Nito on board. Jack was of Chinese heritage and Nito's family laid claim to a long line of Spanish blood. These men were freelance guides. Both young men were super guys and did a tremendous job for us. Little Lady Linda and Rico, our cameraman, traveled with our shipmates and family.

In the second bus they also performed superbly. These four young people gave us the most unguided guided tour one could ask for. They took us where we wanted to go. As a result, we saw and visited with people at the top and bottom of the totem pole.

As we pulled away from the Bayview Plaza and onto Roxas Boulevard we picked up our escort. Our escorts were from the Manila Constabulary and were used exclusively to escort President Marcos' visiting foreign dignitaries and now our USS Gambier Bay Pilgrims. It was a hectic sixty-mile ride from Manila to Subic Bay with sirens wailing and lights flashing. I forgot to mention... no stop or yield signs, no traffic cops, and very few traffic lights in Manila. You have to see it to



*You judge by the smiles. Did they have a great time in the Philippines? Front, left: Salvador and Lupe Berlanga. Behind: Mary and Murray Brown Right: Bill and Evelyn Beaird.*

believe it. It is the biggest game of chicken in the world.

It was surprising though. We saw only one accident. That was when a mini car cut in front of our bus and stopped abruptly. Mini cars and 'Jeepnees' were everywhere. Wow! What traffic.

Upon our arrival at the US Naval Base at Subic Bay, we were greeted by Captain Jim Webster who guided us to the offices of R/Admiral T.J Kilcline, Commander of US Naval Forces in the Philippines. Admiral Kilcline briefed us on the operations and objectives of the Naval facility. He made a special note that 20 officers, 400 enlisted men, and almost 4,000 Filipino craftsmen performed highly technical and complex services operate the base.

He further stated that these Filipino Nationals were the backbone of the Subic Naval Complex. These were fine comments for him to inject into our briefing. These people were our loyal allies during the war and today our wonderful friends.

A framed print of the 'Final Hour' was presented to Admiral Kilcline; a fine Naval officer who took time from his pressing schedule to greet and make us American travelers feel at home. Strong Navy coffee was served.

We all attended Church Services and Mass at the Base Chapel. Rev. Carlsen, Andy Lindow, Lou Rice, and Don Reynders presented an aluminum plaque that depicts THE FINAL HOUR and lists the names of all our Killed in Action to the base Chaplains. This plaque is to be permanently mounted in the Base Chapel for our children and grand children to see and know that we have not forgotten our shipmates and to let them know that we have kept our pledge.



*Plaque being presented to the base Chaplains at Subic Bay, by 'Chief' Andy Lindow. Base Chaplains were very deeply moved and impressed with our Associations' drive.*



*Don Reynders, Fred Grabos, Lou Rice with Rev. Carlsen and the base Chaplain.*

A Filipino girls choir sang throughout the services. They were terrific. They were like angels from above.

Afterwards, we were bussed to the Destroyer USS John McCain DDG-36 and the supply ship USS White Plains AFS- 4 where we were served lunch and given a tour of the ships.

Next, we again boarded the busses and were given a rolling tour of this gigantic military complex. Captain Webster who met with us and wished us a continued successful trip as we departed Subic Bay Naval Base. We picked up our escort and again had a hectic 60 mile return trip to Manila.

We were exhausted. We retired early after a few San Miguel's'. We had to get rested up because tomorrow we would fly to Zamboanga.

*(Continued on next page.)*

## Welcome to Zamboanga International airport.



**October 17, 1977**

*“Zamboanga, beautiful Zamboanga. The gateway to an intriguing blend of cultures. Dome shaped mosques, Spanish forts, brightly sailed boats, quaint houses on stilts. Exotic young ladies and fair skinned mestizas.”* Sound like a travel brochure? Well, it is. However, it doesn't begin to describe this beautiful tropical paradise with a very modern airport.

We spent 3 days in Zamboanga at the Zamboanga Plaza Hotel which is located in Pasonanca Park. Located on the crest of a hill, this hotel is the best that I have ever been in. The lobby has marble floors and all wood trim that is polished solid mahogany. Many native carved plaques adorn the walls. There are no closed windows or doors. The lobby is wide open. The interior lobby is protected from the rain and sun by the generous overhang of the steep roofs and portico. There is no need for central heat or air conditioning of this lobby due to the ever-present tropical breeze that drifts in from the emerald sea.

Dressers and plush chairs were standard furniture in all the rooms. Each guest room has air conditioning and FM radio. The hallways were covered with thick soft carpeting as were the rooms. We have comfortable double sized beds and plenty smooth mood music. It is wonderful.

The hotel had a large dining room and coffee shop where an endless variety of foods and pastries were available. Food was excellently prepared and graciously served by friendly courteous waitresses and waiters.

Without sounding repetitious, I must again say that the Filipino people are the most hospitable people I have ever met. Their outward warmth and happiness radiated. It was contagious. Even us old swabbies laughed and smiled. Darn, there goes our image.

Now back to our arrival day at Zamboanga. We were picked up at the airport by mini busses and driven to the hotel. The homes and parks along the way were adorned with tropical plants and flowers. It is a botanists dream.

I neglected to state during the earlier description of our ride to Subic Bay that the streets and homes were meticulously clean. The homes may have been made of bamboo with palm-thatched roofs, but there was no litter and no eye soars. These people have a lot of pride. The same cleanliness was evident in Zamboanga. All the families appeared to be trying to out do their neighbors with garden and floral arrangements.

After we had lunch at the hotel we returned to downtown Zamboanga and the Moslem section of the city.

In the Moslem section we saw the mills where beautiful woven goods were being manufactured. Of course, some of our travelers bought some of the tapestries and rugs that were on display.

The next stop was a shell factory where we saw delicate work being performed by Moslem craftsmen. There were beads, bracelets, and other types of jewelry for sale. Some items were made of inlaid mother of pearl. There were a great variety of strung and single pearls for rings.

We made one more stop to see the 'sea gypsies'. This community of nomads of the sea was very depressing. Utter filth, poverty, and frustration were evident all about us, as well as a run away population explosion. All efforts by the Philippines government to correct these deplorable conditions were being resisted by these people. They resisted having their children educated, inoculated, or trained. Training would have enhanced their children's opportunity for a better standard of living. The philosophy, I was told, was that what's good enough for the father is good enough for the son.

Once again we boarded the busses and returned to the hotel tired. Tomorrow is to be a rest day.

### **October 18, 1977**

The daily ritual of breakfast, board the busses, and move out was repeated. Today we were scheduled for a seafood picnic on the island of Santa Cruz.

Two small outrigger boats took us from the pier in Zamboanga to a tiny island in the middle of an emerald colored lagoon. The frisky athletic types took to the water skin diving and swimming with snorkels or just wading in the waves while the less athletic sat in the shade eating shrimp and drinking “San Miguel” beer.



*Liberty boat, to Santa Cruz Island, Let's wade ashore, warm crystal green water, blue skies, white fluffy clouds, great day for a seafood picnic. "Fantastic."*



*Fish, crabs, lobster, and clams make up the lunch, as well as a great variety of other Philippines dishes. All very different, but delicious and low on calories too. Three Men in the foreground:  
Left: Chief Flanders, Don Reynders, and Dick Roby*

A young Filipino singer named Eddie, who also played the guitar, provided musical entertainment. This young entertainer was very good. Too bad we didn't have a talent scout along. His performance was better than most of the entertainers we hear on the air today.

Lunch was fantastic. I won't try to describe it beyond saying it was delicious and there was plenty for all.

It really was a restful day and the rest was needed. We were becoming exhausted and the biggest part of the trip lies ahead.

Upon returning from Santa Cruz Island to the hotel, the spry members of our USS GAMBIER BAY PILGRIMAGE returned to down town Zamboanga. Our guides had long since given up trying to keep up with our group.

Our travelers mixed well with the locals as they went from shop to shop to haggle over the prices of souvenirs. (Haggling became fun.) It's also a way of life with the Philippine people. They have it perfected to a science.

In the evening we all joined together for dinner at poolside. It seemed as though we were always eating. During dinner a Filipino combo that took us back in time to a time when the "Ink Spots" were at their best. They sang and played tunes from the 1940's. They were exceptionally good. As the evening progressed, a few in our group had a cocktails at the poolside bar, but most of our weary travelers just dragged off to bed.

### **October 19, 1977**

This afternoon we fly to Cebu City on the Island of Cebu. But it's still early morning and some of our travelers haven't picked up all their souvenirs so, they skipped off to the 'flea market' in downtown Zamboanga. The rest of our group took a last minute dip in the pool or packed their luggage. A group picture was taken in front of our hotel prior to our departure for the airport.

Arriving at the airport, we boarded our aircraft and took off into a beautiful tropical sunset. After a few hours of flying we arrived in Cebu and glided to a smooth landing at this brightly lit airport.

The aircraft door was opened and the USS Gambier Bay pilgrims were asked to disembark first and we did to the tune of "ANCHORS AWEIGH." We were being greeted by the American Legion Philippines Department under the leadership of V/Commander Datu Z. Seifert.

Young lovely ladies in colorful long gowns greeted and bedecked us with shell and flower leis while the band played on. There was singing, embracing, hand shaking, and a few kisses were snuck in. What a reception. What a great bunch of young people, moms, and Legionnaires.

We were transported to the City Hall in Cebu City and greeted by a Mayoral Delegation. There was a platform with a backdrop that read, "WELCOME LIBERATORS OF THE PHILIPPINES." The mayor declared October 25th as USS GAMBIER BAY DAY in perpetuity for the City of Cebu.

Next, the youth of Cebu City sang danced and performed skits for us. They are beautiful children. They are talented children. It made us feel proud and privileged to help in the liberation of their homeland. We were very deeply touched by these Filipino children. They won our hearts.



*Mabuhay, Mabuhay.*

*Dear Liberators, welcome home. A message from the children whose parents many of our shipmates died for.*

We were invited into the City Hall where we were treated to a ‘Barrio Fiesta’. We mixed with Filipino Legionnaires who had fought along side American GI’s at Corregidor, Battan and throughout hundreds of guerrilla actions. These men were tremendous. Their sincerity, closeness, love of Americans, and their hospitality chokes one up. We were their guests. They were overjoyed to have us. They wouldn’t allow us to spend one peso. They would have given us City Hall if we could have carried it away.

After visiting late into the night, our mini busses arrived and we shoved off for the Magellan Hotel. By this time we were happy to get to bed.

### **October 20, 1977**

Two big air conditioned busses arrived and we were off to the airport. We boarded a British built BC 111 and flew to Tacloban on the Island of Leyte. Thirty-three years ago, we were just a scant 30 to 40 miles off the shore. Having once come unannounced and unexpected as liberators, today we were returning as pilgrims to participate in the dedication of the Douglas MacArthur Memorial. We were surprised by the reception that, unknown to us, had been awaiting the USS Gambier Bay pilgrims. We were received like returning servicemen who had been away from home a long, long time.

Young Filipinos sang and danced for us as we disembarked from our aircraft. A band was playing and young boys and girls placed leis around our necks. “Sir, may I hold your hand. Sir, may I hug you. Sir may I kiss you,” were greetings that echoed across the aircraft parking ramp and air terminal. It was as though family were greeting a son who was returning from a war. “Thank you sir for what you did for us.” a group of old men and women spoke as we were getting aboard our air-conditioned busses.

Few of our travelers knew, but our busses were transported from Manila to Leyte by LST. Our friends in the Philippine Navy and the office of President Ferdinand Marcos arranged this. It was a two-day trip each way for the busses.

We drove through the streets of Leyte to 'Freedom Park' where we were led to the reviewing stand. In the reviewing stand, we were joined with former GI's, Australian former servicemen and a delegation of Mexican airmen who flew combat missions in the area.

A parade of floats, young people, from various working groups, and civic organizations marched past. Our own USS Gambier Bay pilgrims were invited to join the parade. Chief Andy Lindow, Jack Turner, Nordeen Iverson and Freddie Grabos unfurled our Association Banner and did join in to the tremendous applause of the spectators.



The USS Gambier Bay Association was the only US Navy group on Leyte. We were honored and in humility stood erect. We were proud to represent all Navy men who lost their lives so that freedom could be returned to the Filipino people.

As the end of the parade passed the reviewing stand a throng of humanity moved on to the MacArthur Memorial for the dedication. It was at this time that Hank Pyzdrowski presented an anodized aluminum plaque of "The Final Hour" to the Philippines Secretary of Commerce. This plaque also bears the names of all our men who were Killed in Action. This presentation was in their memory. This plaque was mounted inside one of the buildings in Freedom Park.

Li'l Linda gave us the word, "Busses are ready." The travelers got aboard and were driven to Olat Tolosa Leyte. This is the summer retreat of the First Lady. It is similar to Camp David in the U.S. It is a luxurious building with open, screened slides and a large overhanging



*Aloha ... Aloha ... Dear Friends Welcome to the Governors Luncheon.*

thatched roof. It also has hardwood floors with an enormous stage for entertainers and seating for about 800 persons. We joined a party that had been in progress for hours. As one group completed dinner and moved out into the garden another took its place. The food ... oh my never-ending battle of 'the bulge'. My diet would have to wait another day.

All these festivities for this luxurious setting were being presented in honor of the World War II Veterans by the Honorable Governor of the Island of

Leyte and Mrs. Benjamin Romualdez.

After dinner we went into the garden to see the splendid flowers and shrubs. A garden? It was like the Garden of Eden. Beautiful. It was here that we met the gorgeous ladies and handsome young men who played and sang songs of the islands. It was an atmosphere of complete serenity.

“Aloha ---- Aloha --- remember us dear friends --- please come back, please come back again.” There wasn’t a dry eye on our bus as these young Filipino ladies sang to us and blew kisses at us as our busses pulled away and headed for the airport. They had tears that they tried to brush away. It was a very emotional departure for guests and hosts. A few sobbed without shame.

We again boarded our BC-111 and took off into a brilliant southwest Pacific sunset. We climbed into the sky. We are above the Island of Samar and over the exact position that our shipmates lie entombed in our ship, the USS Gambier Bay. There is complete silence. Then a hushed voice, “That’s where she went down.” That’s where our shipmates are buried. God, it seems like only yesterday. Then our Chaplain Rev. Carlsen says, “We shall be back in a few days to keep our pledge. We have not forgotten.”

We arrived in Manila with minds full of memories and hearts bursting with love for the new friends we had made.

No time. No time. Tomorrow we go to visit hallowed ground at Corregidor and Battan. This held special memories for a shipmate and family who lost a brother here during the early days of the war.

### **October 21, 1977**

It is another bright and beautiful tropical morning with breakfast in the dining room of the Bayside Plaza. Our busses were waiting out doors. Let’s go. It’s going to be another busy day. We load our floral wreath into the bus, load up and away we go.

We pulled out onto Roxas Boulevard, pull a left, and go past the US Embassy. It is large, silent, and way back off the Boulevard. It is a beautiful building. A few miles down the Boulevard we pull a right and go through the gates of the Philippines Navy Headquarters. There are guards at the gates dressed in crisp white bell-bottom uniforms. We receive a snappy salute as we go by.

The bus doors open and we disembark into a neat military base. Young sailors and sailorettes with beaming smiles great and direct us to President Ferdinand Marcos’ yacht. A sign along the walkway states *‘All military courtesies are observed on this base at all times’*.

We’re greeted by Commander Salvador G. Peran, the Captain of the President’s yacht, the R.P.S. Mt Samat (TP-21), and Captain Dominar Villena of the Philippines Navy, and the officers and men of this good ship.

Preparations to get underway are made. The gangplank is hoisted, lines are cast off, and we pull away from the dock. The dull throb of the engines is heard and the turn of the screws is felt through the hardwood deck as we pick up speed and head for Manila Bay.

Snacks and San Miguel beer are served courtesy of the Officers and Men of the Mt. Samat as we ‘make knots’ headed for Corregidor, a name that has been etched into my mind since I was a youth of 16 years of age. I learned of the gallant, brave, super human stand of its Filipino and American defenders against overwhelming odds.

We pull up to the docks at Corregidor; more affectionately called ‘The Rock’, and transferred over to busses that took us to the heart of this once mighty military fortification.

The young Filipino driver gives us a briefing on ‘The Rock’ and turns the commentaries over to an older man.

As we drive up the winding roads, this Filipino points to a pile of rubble and identifies it, “That was the location of a mortar unit. This is where an artillery company was based. This was the mile long barracks. The Americans lived on this end and we Filipino’s on the other end. The Offices and administration units were located in the center. The B.O.Q. was over here and all officers with dependents lived over here. This is the Malinta Tunnel carved out of solid rock and is where our ammunition, food, and medicine supplies were stored. This is where General Wainwright was when we surrendered to the Japanese.”



*Jerry Gutzwiler, greeting his shipmates to the ‘Rock’.*

With the exception of the Malinta Tunnel, all was rubble. “Destroyed by the Japanese and then by the Americans, who returned in 1944,” he spoke with a voice of authority. And he should. He is one of the heroic defenders of ‘THE ROCK’.

We boarded the busses for a short ride to the Corregidor Memorial, a memorial dedicated to the defenders of ‘THE ROCK’. Beautiful and silent of white stone with water fountains, falls, and pools that surrounded ‘The Eternal Flame.’ It is a place to meditate. Tropical flowers and plants neatly trimmed lined the sidewalks.

“You see sir, we have not forgotten your brave or ours who fought and died here together defending liberty. Please ask your veterans to come and visit us. Our Veterans Federation and our people will welcome them. We have not forgotten them. We shall always remember what they did for us,” he said.

We boarded the busses for a short ride to the Corregidor Memorial, a memorial dedicated to the defenders of ‘THE ROCK’. It is beautiful. Its white stone with waterfalls, fountains, and

pools surround 'The Eternal Flame.' It is a place to meditate with its tropical flowers and plants neatly trimmed lining the sidewalks.

We boarded our busses again and drove down the winding road to the docks where we went aboard the R.P.S. Mt. Samat. Lines were cast off and we headed for the docks of Bataan.

Arriving at Bataan, we went ashore. Our travelers and floral wreath were transferred to our air-conditioned busses. This time we drove up narrow roads and up the steep side of a mountain. People waved, children jumped and ran along side our creeping busses smiling, waving, and shouting, "Americans, Americans." This was characteristic of the receptions we had received since we first set foot on the Philippines soil. Our hosts, the Filipino people, were indeed gracious and receptive.

We continued to drive up the winding, twisting road until we reached a parking lot near the summit. We had to walk the rest of the way. At the summit was a cross of white stone. It stood more than 300 feet in height. It was located on the very highest peak in this area. Just below it stood a museum that held historical memorabilia. In the center of this museum was an altar where memorial services had been held in the past.

The 'Pilgrims' carried their Associations' wreath up the side of this hill and placed it at the altar where they were led in prayer by their USS Gambier Bay ships Chaplain, Rev. Vern Carlsen. There were a large number of Filipino tourists who were visiting this historical national shrine. They stood in silence with heads bowed. They too had lost many loved ones here on Bataan.

During the march, the Bataan death march, when the Japanese forcibly marched Filipino's and G.I.'s, who had been taken prisoner on both Corregidor and Bataan. This march was in excess of 80 miles through the hot steaming jungles without food, water, or medical supplies. Beaten or shot, thousands died as they fell out of line during the march.

A young Filipino Army Officer who had been taken prisoner was very deeply touched by all this sacrifice. He told his fellow P.O.W.'s that some day he would build a monument to

*At right: Upon the highest peak on Bataan stands a memorial cross to those who died in the death march. This monument was erected by President Marcos.*



*A now silent defender of Corregidor from a bygone era. Silenced by Japanese naval gunfire and air attack.*



all these men who were dying all about him. An idle promise perhaps, but this young officer went on to become President of the Philippines. He was decorated more than thirty times for bravery and service to his country. HE DID KEEP HIS PROMISE. This man was Ferdinand E. Marcos.

NOTE: President Marcos, our host, made our Philippines' Pilgrimage a reality. He supplied his Presidential Yacht after my request to the US Navy for assistance in supplying boat service from Manila to Leyte was rejected. We met President Marcos in his Presidential Office on October 28, 1977.)

Night was approaching rapidly. Weary travelers, we climbed aboard our busses and crept down the twisting and narrow roads. I guess we all said a few prayers for God to give assistance to our bus drivers. To give them a firm grasp on the wheel and a keen eye to bring us safely off this mountaintop. The road flattened out and we sped on our way toward the hotel.

Arriving at 'Kamaya Point' hotel, which we found superb and equal to the fantastic hotel in Zamboanga, we once again disembarked and headed for our rooms. Unfortunately, this hotel was having power problems and it wasn't unusual to see people walking about, with candles or flashlights. A few of us nervous types managed to find the pub, and relaxed with a few San Miguel beers prior to retiring.

Tomorrow we return to Manila to prepare for our prime reason for being in the Philippines. The Presidents' yacht, MT Samat, had returned to the Philippines Navy Headquarters yard after transporting us to Bataan. She was being refueled, re-provisioned, and making ready to take us to Leyte Gulf.

### **October 22, 1977**

Another beautiful tropical sunrise and day greets the USS Gambier Bay Association. A breakfast of scrambled eggs, ham, toast, and coffee or a great variety of pastries are available to the early risers. A few of the hearty take an early morning plunge into the gigantic swimming pool. Oh, this is the life! Easy chairs ring the pool. Flowers were everywhere.

It's now time to get aboard the busses. Li'l Linda is counting noses to make sure all get aboard. A few of the travelers choose to take the hovercraft back instead. As we board, the Manila Constabulary arrives to escort us back. Off we go with sirens wailing and lights flashing. The President's private escorts clear the road ahead for us. As we cruise along, the ever-present children and people beside the road wave and blow kisses.

After several hours we approach a rest area and pulled off the highway to a stop. We are at the Apollo Inland Resort at Orani, Bataan. Tables have been set and food is being brought



*USS Gambier Bay Assoc. leaves flowers at the Mount Samat Memorial. American survivors remember their lost ship and Squadron mates.*

out for 80 people. Too much travel, food, and rushing about have combined to curb the travelers appetites. What to do with all that food we had ordered.

Mike Pyzdrowski and I played basketball with some of the young children while all the preparations for dinner had taken place.

I haven't been able to determine where it originated, but the word got out to take the busses into town and fill them with children. The busses would bring the children here, seat them at the tables, and we GAMBIER BAY PILGRIMS will serve them our lunches. Out the busses went with Mike acting Chief Bosn's Mate in charge of this mission.

The busses returned loaded with happy smiling kids. All were neatly dressed and sparkling clean. They sparkled and were very orderly. The children lined up and took seats at the tables. There was no pushing, shoving, or rowdiness. There was just happiness and laughter.

We stopped counting after the 150th youngster had been served. After the last bit of food was served and the last child had completed his meal, one of the older young ladies asked the children, "How do we thank all these guests of our country?" "Thank you GI Joe. Thank you. Thank you GI Joe." Their voices pierced the air as a couple hundred happy kids sounded off. One of them shouted, "Let's sing for them." The children lined up on the stairs of a dance pavilion. They continued to sing with joy until we boarded our busses.

The operator of the resort, Mr. Gonzalo P. Nuguid Jr., came to us and said, "You people have done more to establish the true image of America in the eyes of these children and their families than your Government or State Department could possibly do if they sent a delegation and funded it a hundred times more than your generous hearts spent on our children here today. You have made personal contact with



*Children of Orani are lunch guests of USS Gambier Bay. The children are neat, orderly and very well mannered. Gambier Bay members served the meals to the children.*



*Children of Orani, Bataan line up and sing native songs for the USS GAMBIER BAY PILGRIMS. So beautiful.*

the average Filipino. God Bless you.

*NOTE: The Association and its travelers jointly paid for this bit of unplanned public relations. The good will it created, in the minds of these children, is priceless. It was a pleasure to get to know them. This entire Philippines Pilgrimage reprint. will be placed on the [WWW.USSGambierBay-VC10.com](http://WWW.USSGambierBay-VC10.com) and [WWW.OurOldNavy.com](http://WWW.OurOldNavy.com) web site for today's world to know about who we are and what the American Spirit is.*

Down the road we cruised behind the escorts on the last leg of our trip to Manila and the Bayview Plaza at last. It was time for rest, rest, and more rest. Tomorrow we sail aboard the Mt. Samat to our destination 60 miles off the coast of Samar. We would make this trip to keep our pledge to our Killed in Action shipmates.

### **October 23, 1977**

This is the moment we have waited thirty-three years for. Today, the Philippines Navy and government will make it possible for us to keep our sacred vow to our shipmates who gave their lives defending the United States as members of the United States Navy.

One can feel the tension and anticipation of waiting for so many years to keep a promise to a very close friend who God selected to join him while he was in the prime of his life. Many thoughts go through the minds of these USS GAMBIER BAY PILGRIMS and their guests as they prepare for the late afternoon departure.

The early morning and afternoon hours are spent in last minute projects. For those who are responsible for the Memorial Services there are a host of last minute details that require attention. It must run smooth. The Memorial Service must be perfect. We must do it with perfection. We must do it for all those who are at home and unable to be here with us today. We can and we do anticipate their wishes. It will be perfect.

Upon our return from Leyte Gulf there will be a banquet. Members of our Pilgrimage and the Association have invited many Filipino's. Our newly found friends will be our guests.

Many women are our shopping for gowns for themselves and barongs for their men. A few are still shopping for gifts to take home. There won't be enough time to shop when we return from sea. Our schedule is getting tight. We are running out of time. This fantastic journey is too soon coming to an end.

It's time to go. The busses have arrived and we load up. Our Filipino coordinators, the Philippines Navy, and our USS Gambier Bay Pilgrims who made so many personal sacrifices to be here today carefully lay out all the plans. These plans are about to become reality.

We retrace our route of October 21st down the southbound side of Roxas Boulevard past the silent US Embassy building and into the Philippines Navy Base. Again, we are greeted with a snappy salute by the young sailor in bell-bottom whites and neatly white hat. . We disembark

from our bus and again are guided by neatly attired young men and women of the Philippines Navy to the Republic of the Philippines Ship, RPS Mt. Samat, TP-21.



*We board and shake hands with Captain Valenna, CDR S.G. Peran, and many other officers and men. An orchestra is playing 'Red Sails In The Sunset'. Men are rushing about.*

*"Make ready to go to sea." The gangplank is raised. The lines are cast off. "One quarter astern." We back away from the pier and come about. "Half ahead." It's thump, thump and the screws churn up the bottom.*

We're on our way and soon into clear deep water. The watch is set. Snacks and drinks are available in the dining quarters while the orchestra plays on. They play tunes from the Forties. Music we understand.

It has been a tiring day. Bunks have been turned down and many retire. Some go to the bridge where the radar screen illuminates the darkness. CDR Peran, the ship's skipper and tremendous person who I believe will some day be of 'flag rank', sits in the 'Old Man's' chair. He is ever alert giving instructions and checking data as we weave our way between islands, fishing boats, and other ships. Other shipmates are on the Folk'sle looking over the side into the sea deep in thought.

Yes, this is a time for reflection. My personal thoughts were was it all worth it? Do we have the America we fought for? Did our shipmates give their lives in vain? Would I do it again? The simple fact that the questions went through my mind indicates that there has been some erosion in my personal convictions.

Off to the sack we went. The steady throb of the engines soon had all the travelers deep in sleep.

**October 24, 1977**

It was tough to get out of the sack, but chow is now being served. All of us chow hounds made it to breakfast this morning.

There is excitement on the Folk'sle. The travelers are leaning over the rail. No, they are not seasick. We are in the midst of a school of porpoise that are gliding, rolling, and jumping out of the water. They put on a beautiful show and then vanish.

Last minute preparations for the Memorial Service take place. The capsule is sealed with all the personal items that were placed into it with care by shipmates, family, and friends. Flags that were supplied by the US Naval Recruiting Station (CPO Roy Saxer) and the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 60 (Skeeter Esposito), both in Binghamton, New York had been unfurled then folded.



*Practice – practice – and more practice. Commander Peron and Honor Guard consisting of riflemen and drummer go through the exercises over and over. Tomorrow the Memorial Service must be perfect. WE must be perfect for our USS Gambier Bay friends.*

One of the flags that the US Naval Recruiter furnished us was opened fully and held by your shipmates as Filipino sailors did the same with a Filipino flag. They were then folded together and placed into the canister. This ceremony was an obvious symbol to show that our two nations were united in their recognition and appreciation of the sacrifices all Navy men made in these waters.

The second flag that was given to our Association by the US Navy Recruiters will be flown at our next reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi. The one that was donated to us by the Disabled American Veterans Post 60 will be placed into the display that the USS Gambier Bay will have at the Pensacola, Florida Naval Air Museum. The second flag that we received from the Naval Recruiting Station will be flown at future USS Gambier Bay & VC-10 Association Reunions. We have special plans for its final resting place.

There is activity amid ships. CDR Peron, the CO, is supervising a practice run of the roll of the ceremonial drums. Everything must be perfect for memorial service tomorrow. We have worked and planned for many years and now the Navy of the Philippines is at our side working with us to make it all come true. The drummer is superb.

In late afternoon the seas begin to kick up. We were approaching the Westward side of the San Bernardino Straits. The Straits are a rough body of water at all times. Word was received

in the communications room to use caution. The seas will be running high and Leyte Gulf is rough. The fringe of a typhoon will lash that area tomorrow.

Off to bed we go. Tomorrow is the day we have waited for. During the night the seas get very heavy. It's a small yacht we're aboard. The Captain had abandon ship plans that assigned all travelers to specific boats. The decision to announce them to the travelers or not is discussed. How would the travelers receive these instructions? The Captain of the ship makes a decision. He will hug the leeward side of the islands to avoid the rough seas. It will take time to take this route and our trip will be longer. No need to unduly alarm the travelers. The seas are rough. We all retired for the night being rocked to sleep by the pitching and rolling sea.

### **October 25, 1977 - A Sacred vow is kept.**

This is it. The day we have waited for. The sky is clear and the sea has large swells. A shipmate says, "They're telling us that they know we're here and they appreciate that we have come to keep our vow. Now they can rest in piece. They're kicking up the sea from below."

There are very few in line for breakfast this morning. Emotions are on the surface. It is hard to believe that it's really happening. The day we have waited for is here.

#### **9:00 AM**

"Dear Father in Heaven", our USS GAMBIER BAY ship's chaplain begins the 'Memorial Service'.

The Captain of the RPS Mt. Samat has slowed the ship. Only the voice of our 'Padre' and the crashing of the waves against the ship are heard. Many are up tight and trying to fight back the tears.



This is an awesome moment for us. It was into these waters that we

were able to abandon ship, cling to the life rafts and wait those interminable long days for our rescuers to come. Our Chaplain spoke as the Memorial Services continued.

We all joined in prayer as the eulogy and services progressed. Our Filipino Honor Guard stood at attention throughout this service. They had gotten to know us and our reason for being here. We had become quite close. The emotions of the moment affected these young sailors. They fought to hold back tears.

“We now commit this capsule to the deep in loving memory of you, our killed in action and deceased shipmates.” (Tony Potochniak tosses the capsule over the port side of the bow.)

The ‘ROLL OF HONOR of our Killed in Action’ is called...

“ALLEN Robin E.,  
ALM Frederick E.,  
BELL Verene H.,  
BUTTRY, Robert H.,  
COLE, Norman C.,  
DAHLEN Walter A.,  
FISH, Joseph S.,  
SMURDA, John R.....” and on until all names had been called.

With the calling of each name, a bright red carnation is dropped into the sea and a Filipino Honor Guard fires a solitary shot into the bright sky.

We all joined our Reverend Carlsen in the Navy Hymn. The Philippines Navy Chaplain, Father Nanocatcat, led a brief Catholic Service. Rev. Carlsen and Father Nanocatcat jointly led us in the ‘Lord’s Prayer’.

There is complete silence. The roll of the drums begins.

Our Philippines Navy Honor Guard fires three volleys and neatly snaps to attention.

Again, there is silence. The Honor Guard then begins to play Taps. There are tears and red eyes by Filipino’s and Americans alike. This is the first Memorial Service ever held by the crew of a sunken US Navy ship over the position the ship was sunk at sea during combat.



*Preston Pollock and Nordeen Iverson hold the capsule that is about to be committed to the deep... “In loving memory of you, our killed in action and deceased shipmates.”*



*Reverend Carlsen begins the Memorial Service, while our ladies hold the red carnations. One carnation for each of our shipmates who lost their lives.*



“AIM – FIRE, AIM-FIRE, AIM-FIRE, PRERSENT ARMS, TAPS, SILENCE.” “SOUND TAPS”

“FATHER WE HAVE KEPT OUR VOW, MAY THEY REST IN PEACE. WE SHALL NEVER FORGET THEM.”



It is now the afternoon of the 25th of October; the dining room is full for lunch. There is an inner peace. We had accomplished our greatest single objective. We owe much thanks to the Philippines Navy and the men of RPS Mt. Samat. Without their help we, men formerly of the United States Navy, would never had attained our goal.

### **October 25, 1977**

#### **AFTERNOON**

Commander Peran heads the long way around for Leyte and Tacloban. We, again, must avoid the storm that’s moving into the San Bernardino Straits. We also must replenish our fuel and stores. The journey at sea is taking much longer than had been planned.

We arrive at Tacloban after dark and pick up our supplies and a pilot to take us through the narrows. It’s slow going in the dark. We inch our way through the narrows. Success. Open waters and clear sailing ahead.

### **October 26, 1977**

We wake this morning to have breakfast and enjoy some rest. We will spend this day sailing for Manila. Shipmates are to be found all over the ship. Some are sunning themselves on the forward end of the deck, others are in the air-conditioned dining room and still more are on the bridge or wheelhouse visiting with the Filipino sailors.

Lunch is served. Most of our travelers take a nap. It’s been an action packed journey.

In the evening, after dinner, the orchestra plays for our enjoyment. We have snacks and drinks that are available all night. Travelers are getting tired. It’s been a tough trip and the seas are a little rough. Most head for bed while it’s windy top side. The tail of the typhoon is still affecting this area.

### **October 27, 1977**

Rise and shine. It’s beautiful topside. The air is warm and seas are a beautiful blue, but first things first. Breakfast is being served.

The time to prepare to leave our hosts and their ship is rapidly approaching. We start packing. We expect to be in Manila by 5:00 pm. We will have our last meal on board at 4:00 o'clock.

Manila, in the distance, is one (1) hour away. We glide thru smooth waters. "Look," way up on the mountaintop. You can barely see it. It's the cross on Mt. Samat. How symbolic to be returning from sea where we kept our pledge and see on the far away mountain top another pledge kept.

Thank you President Marcos for keeping your pledge to the Filipino and American GI's who died on Corregidor and Bataan. Thank you Mr. President for the loan of your yacht and its crew to help us keep our pledge. We shall ALWAYS remember this kindness.

We arrive at the 'Philippines Navy Headquarters' dock. The band plays. Congratulations to you Gambier Bay pilgrims from Captain Valenna and Commander Peran. Best wishes from Admiral Ogbinar.

In appreciation to you of the RPS Mt. Samat for your kindness and understanding we, of the USS Gambier Bay Association in behalf of our living and deceased, do present you with this plaque. May you remember us. We shall never forget you. May God be with you ... always.

*Permission to go ashore.* Travelers disembark. Busses are waiting at the gate and the weary travelers all board. There is no time for rest. Tonight is our farewell banquet. We will have many Filipino Veterans present as guests. We now have the opportunity to host our RPS Mt. Samat (TP-21) friends. We shall also have friends from the Tourist Bureau. The Tourist Bureau worked behind the scenes and up front to make it all happen. We're going to have a full dining room. All guests, shipmates, family, and friends arrive at the Manila Hotel for dinner. Wow. Lavish. The Manila Hotel was General MacArthur's former headquarters.

Guests are seated with shipmates at round dining tables for dinner. Nineteen guests and shipmates are seated at the head table. One seat remains empty at the head table. ONE SEAT REMAINS EMPTY for our shipmates who didn't survive. Our Association banner adorns the head table.

Reverend Carlsen opens with a prayer. It's followed by a toast. "To American Filipino Friendship." Reverend Carlsen proclaims. Dinner is served and the orchestra plays smooth, pleasant, and soothing music that we all understand.

Henry and Chuck Dugan are Co-Masters of Ceremonies. Honored guests are introduced followed by speeches from the head table. Admiral Ogbinar presents medals to our ship and squadron mates who participated in the liberation of the Philippines.

A print showing the USS Gambier Bay under attack is presented to Pete Tuason of the Philippines Tourist Bureau for his Herculean efforts in making our Pilgrimage get off the ground. His untiring efforts behind the scenes and up front made it possible.

After many pleasant exchanges between Hosts and Guests, the hours seemed to just float away. That's the way it is when the company is pleasant. Our 'Padre' Vern Carlsen arose and closed our evening with a prayer.

All were tired. It was again a hectic day and now time to retire for the night. We shall meet President Marcos tomorrow.

### **October 28, 1977**

We enjoy an early breakfast in the Bay View Plaza Hotel. It will be our last. We fly for home today. Our busses arrive and Li'l Linda our perfect guide and hostess tells us, "Let's go." for the final time. She isn't her cheery self today. Our guides, Linda, Nito, and Rico are all saddened. We have become fast friends.

Our luggage is sent to the airport while we all board our busses. It's a short drive to the Presidents Offices. Again, our escort leads us with sirens wailing and lights flashing. The people along the street wave as they see us. The press has carried daily accounts of our travels throughout their homeland. They know the name GAMBIER BAY well.

A delegation of Gambier Bay Pilgrims is invited into the inner office of the President. Among them, Rev Vern Carlsen, RADM Richard Ballinger and others including association founder, Tony Potochniak. We shake hands and exchange greetings.

President Marcos asks, "Where are the rest of your travelers?" He is told, "out in the reception room." "Well let's go greet them," said the President



*Side of Presidential Residence in Manila, October 28, 1977 We arrive at the Presidents Office and are served fruit juices. We mill around admiring the beautiful reception. The Spaniards built it, a long time ago.*



*An entrance to the Philippines White House known as Malacalan." This is the office of President Marcos.*

The President entered the reception Room, shook hands and exchanged greetings with our USS Gambier Bay travelers and friends from the Natoma Bay and Kitkun Bay who had joined us on this pilgrimage.

The President said, “The suffering and sacrifices that you made during the last war created and enduring friendship between the Philippines and the United States. The shifting policies of our two nations resulting from the changing impressions and perceptions of the world situation will not diminish the enduring bonds of friendship between us allies. If and when it should become necessary for America to fight again in this part of the world, the Philippines will be your staunchest ally.”

Reverend Carlsen addresses the President and thanks him for the kindness of the various Governmental agencies and most of all the Filipino people. The President is presented a framed print of ‘THE GAMBIER BAY’ painted by Charles G. Evers. President Marcos responds with a very sincere, ‘Thank You.’”

Time, tide, and the airlines wait for no one. We head for the Manila Airport. It’s been a wonderful journey. We’re heading for home, but we shall leave a piece of our hearts behind in the Philippines. We have made many friends.

We board our (PAL) Philippines Air Lines DC-10 and climb into the bright blue sky.

With jest, the Filipino’s say that "PAL" stands for Plane Always Late. We all got a chuckle out of that interpretation. The Filipinos are a light-hearted people.

We touch down in Guam for a short lay over. Many of our travelers head for the duty free shops. In a short while, the (PAL) Philippines flight is boarding at gate 5. We board and take off again. Next stop Hawaii and Customs.

We get through without losing a single soul. Back aboard our DC-10 dinner is being served. Next stop San Francisco.

The joy of the journey begins to turn to sorrow as we approach the California Coast. We shall have to leave new friends that we met on this sentimental journey.

Touching down at the San Francisco airport, hugs, handshakes, and embraces are shared. “See you in Biloxi. God willing,” are the parting words exchanged.

**NOTE:** Dame Fate had again bestowed notoriety in a very negative way on USS Gambier Bay on October 25, 1944 That was the day the Gambier Bay had the dubious distinction of becoming the only United States Aircraft carrier to be sunk in a surface engagement with Japanese Battleships, Cruisers and Destroyers. Her survivors had to swim for two days and two nights before being rescued by the US Navy PC’s, and LCI’s.

In October of 1977, one more time Dame Fate entered the picture by turning the impossible into reality. She was not alone. As he swam from the sinking ship, the vow of one survivor was realized with the participation of shipmates, families, friends, Filipinos and Americans on both sides of the Pacific. His vow was to bring his shipmates together and return to hold religious and military memorial services for those seriously wounded, dead and dying who were left behind or trapped aboard.

A Sacred vow was kept. The men of Gambier Bay and VC-10, who sleep within her hull, can now rest in peace.



Pictured at left are a few of our wonderful ladies who made this “Sentimental Journey” with their aged combat veterans. Their men went to war as youths to defend the United States of America and preserve our “ONE NATION UNDER GOD.”

ON OCTOBER 24, 1996, A PERMANENT MONUMENT WAS DEDICATED IN FT. ROSECRANS NATIONAL CEMETERY, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA. THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED IN MEMORY OF OUR SHIPMATES WHO DIDN'T RETURN HOME TO LOVING FAMILIES. TO SAY THEY WERE LOST IS NOT APPROPRIATE. “THEY ARE NOT LOST.” ”THEY LIVE ON IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF FAMILY AND SHIPMATES.”

To view the Memorial Monument and see the youthful faces of our Killed In Action visit the Gambier Bay – VC10 web site at <http://www.ussgambierbay-vc10.com/> . A direct link to the memorial page is <http://www.ussgambierbay-vc10.com/kia.htm>



**V/ Admiral Hugh H. Goodwin**  
Commissioning Commanding Officer

Transferred from the Gambier Bay prior to the last battle at Samar, Philippines.

2 November 1977

Dear Tony,

What a wonderful thing to have your dream come true! I do wish that I could have been with you, in the tossing sea off Samar, during the Memorial Service. I thought of the group on that day, for I kept track of your progress through the itinerary, which had been sent out.

Jeannie and Hank came down with Charles and Nathalie Westbrook, and spent Saturday and Sunday here to see their son, and give us a report on the trip. It was wonderfully exciting to hear everything from them first hand. I am greatly relieved that things went so well. I wrote Admiral Ogbinar a letter of thanks, for all the courtesies extended by the Philippines Navy.

I do wish that Jo had made the trip with you, for she would have added to the grace and beauty of the distaff contingent, as well as enjoying it herself. Perhaps she will join you on a trip to the West Coast sometime soon and give us an opportunity to see her.

We are having a continuation of our drought and there seems to be little relief in sight. I suppose every Garden of Eden is destined to have its serpent and this lack of water is a terrific burden for us.

Take care of yourselves and drop a line when you can. Eleanor joins me in sending affectionate greetings to Jo, you and the boys.

Sincerely,  
Hugh H. Goodwin V/Admiral (Retired)  
82 High Meadow Lane,  
Carmel, CA 93923

\*Mr. Goodwin "Crossed the Bar" on February 5, 1980

\*\*Retyped from original letter.

This concludes the Log of our Philippines Pilgrimage. It would not have become a reality but for the total dedication of three of your shipmates:

Charles Heintl of Maria Stein Ohio  
Marty Showers Deceased of Akron Ohio  
Tony Potochniak of Endicott, New York

Shown below at their first meeting in Maria Stein, Ohio in 1968, Charles, Marty and Tony plan for the first reunion that took place in 1969 in St. Louis.

