

November 2019



# Lake Charles Times

## **PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER**

Dear USS Savage Reunion Association members, families and friends:

As I reflect on Veterans Day, November 11, 2019 I recall the pleasure I have in spending time with each one of you at our reunions as well as learning about all the veterans of the USS Savage and the history of the ship. I am personally in awe of the time that you served and the pride you feel in doing so. You are my inspiration for being part of the USS Savage Reunion Association and I am grateful for your acceptance. On this day, and at this time of year, I wonder even more about the time my father served aboard the ship and what he may have experienced. We are fortunate to have all the information that Ms. Diane Day has accumulated over the years via the USS Savage website, [www.usssavage.org](http://www.usssavage.org) to bring this history to light. Below you will find two profiles of USS Savage Veterans; one about my dad and another profiling Steve May, a fellow USS Savage Veteran who gratefully shared his remembrances of the ship. Please enjoy getting to know a little more about these two shipmates and thank you for your service.

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” — **John F. Kennedy**

## **USS Savage Reunion in Hawaii**

Here are some more great pictures of the 2019 USS Savage Reunion in Hawaii, courtesy of Tom Hendricks. If you go to [tomehendricks.com](http://tomehendricks.com) and under the Savage tab you will see all the reunion video's Tom has done so far, along with all photos are there.

## **USS Savage Reunion in Columbus Georgia, July 2020**

Jim and Gail Murphy have made their initial visit to our next site for the USS Savage Reunion, Columbus, Georgia. We are excited to finalize the details and will be sharing those details very soon. Please mark the week of July 13<sup>th</sup> – July 17<sup>th</sup> off on your calendar as your next opportunity to gather with us and share remembrances of your time on the Savage!

# News to Share...

## Steve May FTG3 1965-1967

Proudly serving aboard the USS Savage as a FTG3 from 1965 – 1967 was Steve May. Steve grew up in Youngstown, Ohio with parents who were both WWII veterans; his father a Sargent and his mother served as Captain in the Army and a nurse. While his father did not speak much about the war, Steve says his father is his hero and was active at the invasion of Pearl Harbor, The Battle of the Bulge, D-Day at Normandy and the liberation of Berlin. Steve hopes to visit Normandy someday to learn more about the experience of the day and the events that made his dad the hero that he is. Steve's younger brother was also in the military and served in Vietnam flying the P3 Orion. Steve's son served in Desert Storm and his grandson is now considering joining the military.

Steve remembers the choice to serve in the Navy had a lot to do with his father's influence. Steve said that his father took him to the Navy Recruiter's Office when he decided to join the service. Steve joined the service soon after high school and trained at Fire and Control Technician School in Bainbridge, MD where he received his Fire Controller Technician Striker naval rating, dealing with gunfire control systems. Steve remembers boarding the ship in Pearl Harbor and fondly recalls the crew of the USS Savage as a team with a dedication to purpose. Steve initially boarded the ship as a Mess Cook for the first three months and remembers how grateful the crew was to have a new person serving in the galley.

Steve eventually made it back to the Fire Control Team Steve where he was part of gunfire support with the three-inch guns. He began using the Mark 63 Gun Fire System on the forward end of the ship and the Mark 51 on the aft end of the ship. He recalls using the computer on the ship, which in those days was completely an analog style computer. Steve remembers that he stood sonar and bridge watches as well as Condition 1 watches at the fire control stations.

While serving on the ship, Steve recalls many fond memories. A particular memory he recalls was a Christmas party on a small island in Viet Nam with just a few people living there. Some shipmates spent their time water skiing while others enjoyed a pick-up game of baseball or kickball. The "refreshments", which was mostly San Miguel Beer, as well as the comradery of his shipmates allowed everyone to loosen up and enjoy their free time together. While everyone was enjoying the party, the attendees saw "Frenchie" with a carbine standing watch for the group. Everyone wondered why he was up on the forecandle "fo'c'sle" of the Captains gig with the carbine. Steve told them that Frenchie was watching for sharks. Thirty minutes later, Frenchie started shooting! This of course got everyone's immediate attention and everyone began to exit the water immediately, only to have Frenchie announce, "Just kidding!"

He remembered the crew standing for Captain's Inspection on the upper and lower decks in their dress whites on Ford Island. Some of the engineers decided at that time to shake all the carbon out of the stack. Upon doing so, they blew the carbon all over the crew standing there and many of the crew had very dirty uniforms. The Captain was very upset, but knew it was not the crew's fault. He also recalled a time when the engineers were working hard to get the ship's equipment ready to go back to Viet Nam, but the ship had some significant engine and pump problems. They just did not have time to get the ship cleaned properly and make it presentable enough for inspection. Steve remembers that everyone on the ship ranked E-6 and below worked to clean up the mess, pumping the grime out via the bilges and doing a lot of painting. Steve remembered when he was done, that he could not get the diesel fuel off his hands as hard as he tried.

Steve disembarked in May of 1967. After leaving the ship, Steve enrolled in engineering school at the local university and went to work for the Erie Lackawanna Railroad. He dedicated himself to school eventually and went on to work as a Draftsman at a local company designing projects for a facility constructing railroad cars. He worked here from 1968 through 1984. He progressed through the ranks to become General Foreman and eventually the Plant Engineer over this facility. He eventually moved to Texas with this company and retired after 35 years.

Steve now spends time with his 10 grand children attending all their sporting and educational events as well traveling with his wife of 43 years. He and his wife have recently built their dream house in Argyle, Texas. Steve still communicates with a few former shipmates and truly enjoys recalling his time on the ship. Finally, Steve wants to acknowledge his shipmates who worked in Engineering and how hard they worked, no matter the conditions.

### **John Burkhart GM1c 1943-1946**

*Credit: Patrick Burkhart, son of John Burkhart*

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941, John J. Burkhart was mid-way through the final year as an undergraduate at DeSales College in Toledo, Ohio. Six months later, he earned his degree in Political Science and began his preparations to enlist in the Service. However, the service he was contemplating was not the U.S. Navy, nor the U.S. Coast Guard. The furthest thing from his mind in 1942, was serving on a warship.

Indeed, John was the youngest child in a family of pacifists. It simply was unthinkable to his parents and siblings, that any member of the family would be firing weapons at the enemy, no matter how justifiable the cause. Thus, John's way out of that dilemma, of wanting to serve his country in the time of war, but not wanting to violate his family's beliefs, was to enlist in the Merchant Marine. There he could contribute to the war effort without having to shoot at anyone.

So, in the summer of 1942, John found himself standing inside the joint services recruiting building in downtown Toledo, trying to locate the recruiter for the Merchant Marine, when he felt a tug on his shoulder. "What are you looking for?" asked this big guy in a Coast Guard uniform. John said that he was there to enlist in the Merchant Marine. "WHAT?" the guy said. "Are you crazy? Nobody volunteers for the Merchant Marine unless they want to get killed. You come with me."

Fifteen minutes later, John was repeating the oath with his right hand hesitantly raised, along with several others who had been similarly convinced from the hallway. The Coast Guard Recruiter met his quota that day. The Coast Guard would not be so bad, John thought, and he believed that he could convince his parents and siblings that he would not be a combatant, if he were confined to protecting the U.S. coastlines.

After basic training, John was sent to torpedo school. That should have been the first hint that things were not going according to plan. Months later, in 1943, John was assigned as a Gunners Mate 1<sup>st</sup> Class aboard the USS Savage, which by then had been appropriated by the U.S. Navy as an destroyer escort for convoys in the North Atlantic.

John and his fellow crewmates were fortunate to have been in only one engagement when a convoy they were escorting, was attacked by the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean. In all of his stories about his adventures during the war, he was never truly specific about whether or not he actually fired a machine gun that day. Perhaps, if he did, he did not want to admit it aloud. As if doing so would have broken a promise that he made to his parents. Although, after the war, John would never use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning. The sudden jolt from sleep must have

triggered some sort of flashback of convoy duty and the klaxons going off when submarines were prowling nearby.

After the war, John got his law degree from Ohio Northern University, married the love of his life, Blanche and raised a family. He had a distinguish career as the Chief Legal Counsel for the City of Toledo.