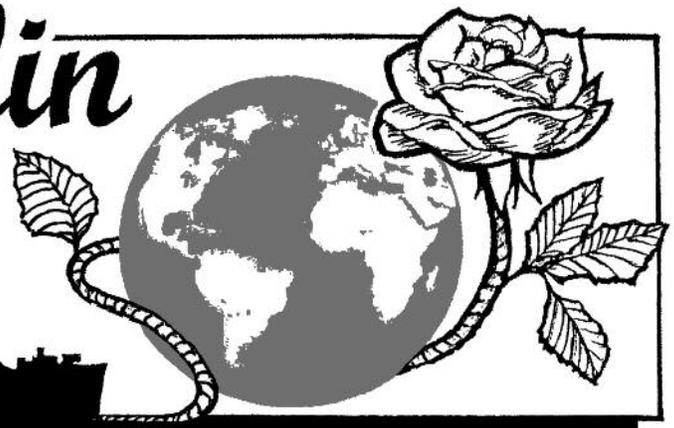




# Ramblin Rose



A Publication of the USS Montrose Association

Issue 70

## MOVIE CALL

By Tom Gamel

In 1963, most guys went into the Service at 18 or 19 which meant they were just a little (2 or 3 years) shy of the legal drinking age...stateside, that is! Everywhere else, you were good to go, just so long as you could afford it. For that matter, as long as you could afford it, you were able to indulge in just about any kind of debauchery money could buy...here or there! Enlisted guys weren't paid enough to enjoy as much 'American made' debauchery as we would have liked. We were, however, paid enough to go to the movies.

Going to the movies was A,OK with me, at least until I was old enough to drink in the bars, because I really and truly loved movies. And in San Diego, in those (good old) days, movies were still affordable. Today a movie and a medium popcorn will set you back the price of a three star restaurant...(that's 2 stars above Denny's). But I digress. Even though movies weren't as intense or the violence so realistic back then, I think they were more entertaining. In 1964, 'The Pink Panther' was one of the funniest movies I'd ever seen. Fran Jeffries was smoking hot, dancing and singing a romantic Italian song, in a ski lodge. I couldn't get her, or that beautiful melody out of my head. I hummed it the entire bus ride back to the base. Some years later, I found out the love song was about a flea, in the bed, that won't let you sleep. I said it was Italian!

In 1965's 'The Great Race', Natalie Wood was smoking, smoking hot, along with those other guys...uh, Tony Curtis and uh, Jack Lemmon and uh...you know, the Columbo guy. It also featured the world's largest, for real pie fight. Natalie Wood was, if anything, even more delectable, all covered with pie.

1963's 'It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World' introduced me to wrap-around screen and mega sound. Just about every movie star alive had at least one zany bit part. I laughed so hard I couldn't breathe. The mega sound liquified my eardrums and they never grew back. Movies knew how to keep you guessing back then. 1965's 'Sands of the Kalahari' with Stuart Whitman and Susannah York has me guessing to this day. Whitman's character slowly becomes more and more animalistic, long hair and all. Whitman was pretty hairy in real life, which probably explains how he got the part! At the end, out of bullets, he does hand to teeth battle with the baboon leader and kills it (with a rock). Whitman is wounded, lying in the sand and an overhead view shows the



# Movie Call (cont.)

baboon troupe closing in on him. Did they finish him off or make him their new leader, affording him the tastiest melons and choicest female baboons? The film might have been Italian!

Hollywood (and Italy) still made 'Westerns' ("Oaters") back then and I loved a good 'shootemup'. Sergio Leone directed most of the westerns back in the 60's. The guns never ran out of ammo. Being Italian, he didn't seem to know how many bullets were in a six-shooter. New math wasn't invented yet, so it probably had something to do with the 'metric system'!

I can't speak for the rest of the Navy but USS Montrose had "Movie Call", whether we were at sea or in port, if memory serves. At sea, movies for enlisted men were shown on number 2 hatch and on the mess deck when we were in port. Chances were you'd seen the movie before but, for sure, you couldn't beat the price; free!

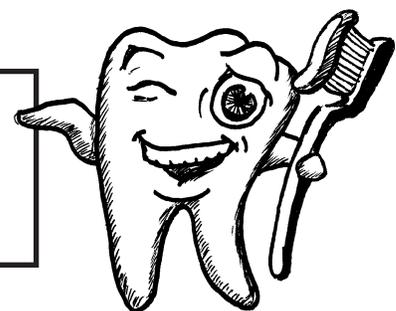
When I was a kid, in Canton, Texas, it had only cost a dime (.10 cents) for 2 feature films, 3 cartoons, and 'News of the World'. I thought that was a pretty good deal...Montrose was cheaper but she didn't have an 'all day caramel sucker on a stick', for only a nickel. After a while the caramel took on the shape of the roof of your mouth... fascinating to look at! Like Sergio's bullets, the caramel lasted forever; probably Italian caramel! \*

Officers aboard Montrose also had 'Movie Call', primarily in the wardroom, replete with comfortable chairs and quite often, popcorn. Enlisted men couldn't beg, borrow or steal popcorn and lacking chairs we were forced to sit as best we could, wherever we could; sometimes against a hard, cold bulkhead, sometimes cross-legged on the hard, cold deck. I, for one, still have an irregular curvature to my spine which harkens directly back to 'Movie Call'. It'll most likely go nowhere, but I think it's right up there with 'Agent Orange' and 'Asbestos'.

Part of the fun with 'Movie Call' was that you could almost count on the film breaking or snagging at some point and while the poor projectionist struggled frantically to get things patched and moving again, we helped him along by booing, hissing, cat calling, and using assorted profanity. We were still close enough to the silent film era (hissing the villain/cheering the hero) to make that sort of thing socially acceptable...mandatory! Officers being gentlemen and all probably had to exercise a certain decorum, making it socially unacceptable to harass their enlisted projectionist. It wasn't all fun and games being an officer, you know.

Smoking, just about anywhere these days, is socially unacceptable, inside or outside. I don't smoke anymore and find it hard to believe (knowing the health issues) people still do. And the costs!..." What's it gonna be pal, a pack of smokes, a T-bone steak, or a movie?" Back in the day, everybody smoked and we lit up early and often, above and below decks. At sea, if we ran out of stuff to do, another cheap form of entertainment was seeing who could blow the best smoke rings, Cigarettes were even cheap enough to tolerate 'cigarette mooches'. Almost as cheap as movies! Aboard Montrose, we didn't have ushers at 'movie call', who'd tell you to "Put that smoke out or leave the theater!". If we had, I'm pretty sure it would have been socially acceptable... maritime law, to boo, hiss, cat call, and use assorted profanity at him.

\* **Hey, 'Tommy Tooth' here!** Anyone remember the 10 cent, ¼ pound "Baby Ruth" and "Butter Finger" candy bars?? Absolute monsters, for only a dime! Each quarter pounder contained enough sugar to rot every ounce of enamel in a kid's head.





# resident's Letter

I can't believe it is already time to write another letter to the Montrose Family. I have no idea where the time goes. It is especially hard to write this letter. I know we are all reaching deep into those golden years, and there will be days when not everyone of us will get up the next morning, and I think most of us accept that. But to lose that battle to an accident such as Mike and Joann Phillips did just seems to be wrong. Mike and Joann were with the Montrose

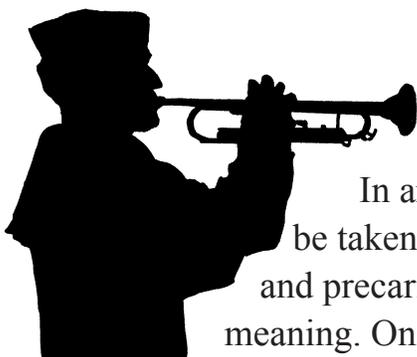
Association from day one. They attended every reunion, every mini-reunion and Mike served as Association President. They had a love for Montrose, Colorado, talked of moving there, and established the Montrose NJROTC link with the Association. I recently talked to the Commander of the NJROTC unit in Montrose and all he could talk about was Mike and Joann's love for the Montrose and Unit. Mike would always have a raffle at every reunion for the NJROTC. I want to ensure we do not forget this link. I will be visiting Montrose, CO in June, and will be meeting with the Commander of the NJROTC unit. I will be presenting him with a donation to the unit for \$500.00 from our Association. Even though Mike and Joann can't do this in the future, we can still support the unit and always keep Mike and Joann in our thoughts.

As you all know, and I have mentioned it several times, all our income is from dues and donations. It is from these monies that we are able to send out the newsletter. Every once in a while we have a special person send in a donation. I would like to thank Renie Halverson for her donation in memory of Clair (Rip) Halverson. I have to admit when I think of Rip, a smile comes to my face. He had more jokes and stories than any person I know. You could say Rip had a love for the Navy. He spent 23 years in the Navy, and worked for the Navy Department in Norfolk, VA for 21 years. Renie thank you so much for the wonderful donation.

Now I must tell you, we have a very excited reunion chairman planning the next reunion in Las Vegas. Russ (Mac) McDonald is very busy putting the event together. The next issue of the newsletter will provide you with details. So I would like all of you who are planning trips this year, save a little for next year, I can guarantee that you are in for a good time.

As always, please be safe and stay healthy. Thank you for your support of the Montrose and the Association.

Bob



## TAPS

In an instant those we love and who are so much a part of our lives can be taken. One day we are here and the next, gone. Because life is so fragile and precarious, let us never take for granted those who give our life value and meaning. Once departed, let us cherish their memory.

**Mike Phillips**, 3rd Division, 1960 to 1962 and **Joann Phillips**, Wife of Mike Phillips

Mike Phillips President, USS Montrose Association, 2007 to 2009

**William J. Scavona**, OE Division, 1967 to 1968

*Until we are together again, Rest in Peace*

# Believe It or Not

By Russ McDonald

**N**ovember, 1965, I was an 18 year old kid, away from home for the first time, somewhere in the beginning of the Vietnam War. Under the strong leadership of BM1, Roadlander, I became a hardcore member of First Division, which, I might add, was the finest deck division on Montrose. I like to think I was a reasonably sane individual, who only became slightly 'crazy' after a few too many beers.

Deck Divisions supplied the men for topside watches when Montrose was underway. It was during one of the mid-watches (00:00 to 04:00) something I still can't fully explain occurred. Conducting operations in Vietnam, we had offloaded our troops and their gear and by dusk got underway for night steaming. We were on a northern

course, with the beachhead off the port side. In the hills, we could see the firefights because of the red, orange and green tracers. All night the illumination flares floated slowly and eerily to the ground below.

The visibility that night was 7 to 14 miles, with spotty, high clouds. The Officer of the Deck and I were on the starboard wing talking. Suddenly a bright light appeared at about 010-015 relative bearing. In the distance it held steady for about 15 seconds, then, within the snap of a finger, came abeam of Montrose, in a cloud. The light held steady and was so bright, it illuminated the cloud for 5 or 6 seconds. In an instant, it went straight up and disappeared. In awe, I asked the OOD if I should report the incident to CIC. His reply was something like, "What for? Our radar is so old, it wouldn't have picked up anything that fast."

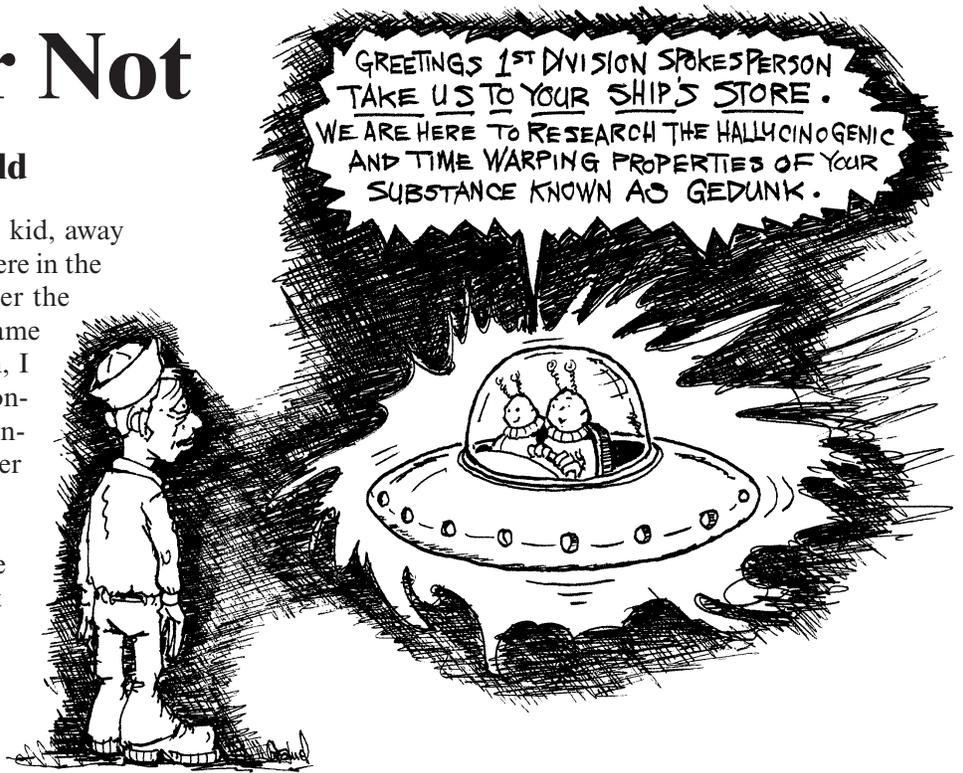
To this day, I believe it was a UFO. With one eye on the 'Sea Story Writer's Award', I called Tom Gamel, who's always crying the blues about lack of material for our 'Ramblin Rose' newsletter. After relating the story to him, he asked if anyone could corroborate what had happened and, if so, we might have a first for the newsletter. Facts; we want facts!

I put in a call to the officer (no names), now a civilian, who I'd stood watch with to see if he would back me up. Recounting the story to him as I remembered it, I was met with a stony silence. "Hello, hello", I said, thinking I'd lost him. Finally he spoke; "Mac, I don't remember anything like that. Are you sure it was me?" He probably sensed he'd taken the wind out of my sails and said, "Well Mac, maybe it was some other officer." "Yes," I said, "I just got my officers mixed up." It seemed very similar to the 'Area 51' government denial. Perhaps the aliens had gotten to him and erased his memory. Well, there went my credibility and the 'Writer's Award', right down the tube.

After telling Tom I had no one to back me up, he told me about a similar, well documented incident that happened to a friend of his, who was aboard the carrier, USS Franklin D. Roosevelt, CVA-42. In September/October, 1958, sailing off Guantanamo, Cuba, up to 25 sailors on the flight deck reported a bright red/orange UFO, shaped like a cigar, which hovered for about 5 minutes, then disappeared in a flash. Tom encouraged me to write my story anyway, if only to give Pacific sailors equal representation to those Atlantic guys.

Whether you choose to 'believe it or not', that's my story and I'm sticking to it. Time does have a way of playing little tricks on our memories; maybe the OD that night was Don Johnston...or maybe Bud Goss!? But, I'm still reasonably sane and I'm pretty sure, if I don't get that 'Writer's Award', the 'little green men' will have somehow gotten to the 'Ramblin Rose's staff and messed with their sense of "Truth, Justice, and the American Way".

"Hey, bartender, cut me off after one more round!"



# FORBES' *Freewheelin'* FOC'SLE

ONE MEDIUM AND ONE SMALL  
POPCORN; THAT'LL BE \$14.00.  
AND, FOR ONLY \$8.50 MORE,  
YOU CAN HAVE A CHAIR!

## Rank Has It's Popcorn

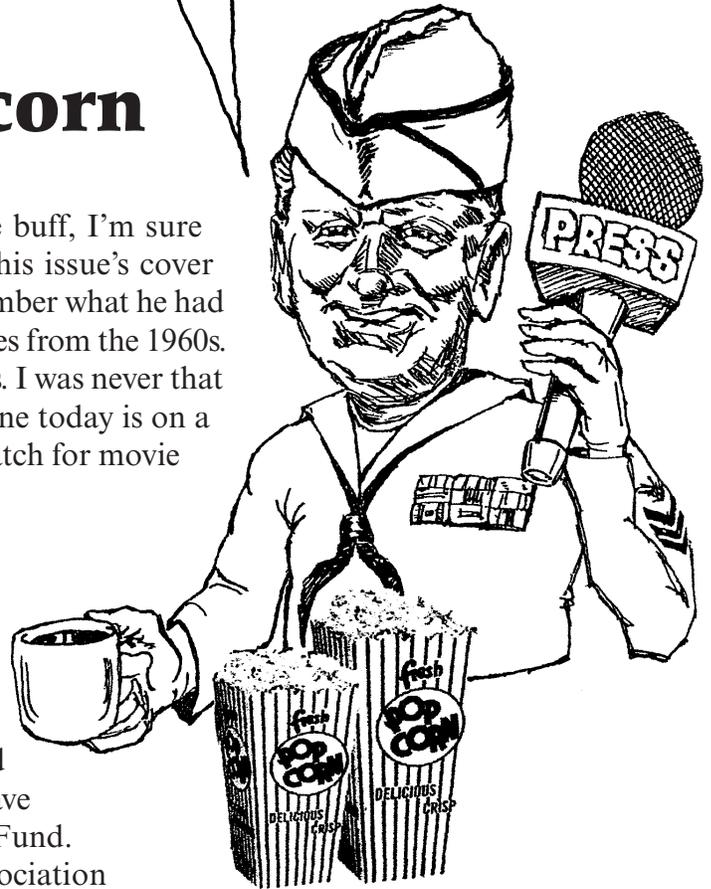
If anyone doubted that Tom Gamel is a movie buff, I'm sure those doubts have been erased after reading this issue's cover story, MOVIE CALL. Tom probably can't remember what he had for lunch yesterday but he can tell you the cast of movies from the 1960s. He can even quote some of the lines from those movies. I was never that much into movies. About the only time I will watch one today is on a long airplane trip. I wasn't on the mess decks or #2 hatch for movie call very often back in my Montrose days.

I knew officers had movie call in the wardroom and I knew they had comfortable chairs but I didn't know, until Tom told me in his story, that officers had popcorn during those flicks. It must have been nice. Even though I didn't watch many of the movies back then, as I think about it today, I'm a bit miffed that we didn't have popcorn too. Perhaps it could have been purchased by the ship's Welfare and Recreation Fund.

I thought I would ask one of today's Montrose Association members who was an officer back in the day about this Gamel exposé. This former officer, whose initials are Don Johnston, hemmed and hawed for a little while and as he suddenly found something interesting to study on his shoes, he sheepishly said, "Yeah....we had popcorn." He apparently felt some remorse (or not) that the old line "Rank has its privileges" really was true. But he quickly insisted that the officers had popcorn because they paid for it just as they paid for their food. He added that the enlisted men weren't the only ones deprived of their popcorn. He told me a story about the time an Admiral came aboard temporarily. The guy's rank was Rear Admiral (lower half) because he was a one star Admiral. A two star Admiral's rank was, and is, Rear Admiral (upper half). Feel free to make your own joke about that upper/ lower thing. But back in those Montrose days, this guy also carried the title Commodore because he was the Big Kahuna in charge of RivFlotOne when we anchored near Vung Tau and played host to the river boat crews. Most called him Commodore (at least to his face).

According to Don, the Commodore had an arrogant streak and apparently didn't care what people thought of him. He was told by someone on the CincPacFlt staff in Pearl Harbor that he couldn't use Army Green paint for his command's boats and ships as he had requested. The way he got around the order to paint them haze gray was really quite simple...he ignored it and used green paint anyway.

And then...you aren't going to believe this.... And then he brought a pair of Dachshund pups on board Montrose with him. One was named Lucy and the other one Linus. The Commodore assigned a Chief Petty



# Rank Has It's Popcorn (cont.)

Officer on his staff to take care of the dogs. I knew that was the case because they were kept in a pen on the 01 level during the day. The 01 level was my Division's cleaning space. Fortunately for us, the Chief did a good job of cleaning up after Lucy and Linus.

"But wait", Don said, "it gets worse." Apparently this Commodore was as big a movie buff as Tom Gamel because he rarely missed one of the Wardroom movies. And he NEVER-EVER missed his popcorn. In fact, he always demanded more. It got to the point where the Montrose officers had their popcorn ration cut so the Commodore's appetite could be satisfied. Don shook his head as he recalled those days 45 years ago as if it were yesterday. In an apparent attempt to make a sarcastic statement and point out to the Commodore that he was hogging too much of the popcorn, Don said, "one night the Commodore was served popcorn in a bowl this big". To make his point, Don made a big circle with his arms to let me know it was a humongous sized bowl. "It was an 18 inch salad bowl", he insisted. That meant the Montrose officers didn't get any popcorn at all to go with their movie that night. Don doesn't remember who was responsible for this attempt to embarrass the Commodore but it didn't work. That one star Admiral, a.k.a. Commodore, not only refused to share these salty treats, he looked at his subordinate officers with disdain as if to say, "Hey, I'm entitled and I don't care if you have popcorn or not." The next night it was back to the Commodore's regular bowl and shortened rations for junior officers. The ploy didn't work any better than Henry Fonda's character in the movie Mr. Roberts when he tried to embarrass the ship's skipper, played by James Cagney.

An officer and a gentleman back in the day would never share this with an enlisted man back in the day. Don Johnston is no longer an officer but he is still a gentleman. When I asked recently what he and his fellow junior officers thought of the Commodore on a personal level, his shoes got real interesting again. I didn't hear his mumbled answer. Don sometimes reminds me of some Navy Public Affairs Officers I've known.

## I MISSED IT TOO!

By Bill Forbes

**Y**ou may remember from the last issue of Ramblin Rose that Tom Gamel had some artwork of a cocktail glass on the front cover. That artwork went with the story about my trip to the Antarctic. But did you pay close attention to the detail of that cocktail glass? I guess I didn't because Tom had to point out to me that the ice (in the glass) was really an iceberg. Most of it was under the surface of the drink, much as an iceberg is in the ocean. But there's more. What did you see to the right of that iceberg? If you can't find the March edition of the newsletter in one minute, shame on you. When you find it, look very closely. Pretty cool, huh? That rascal Gamel is very clever. For the first 25 people who respond and tell us what you see to the right of the iceberg, we'll let you come to California and pay more than \$4.00 for a gallon of gas.

*Hmmm, I wonder what else I missed. Let me know at [skyforb@roadrunner.com](mailto:skyforb@roadrunner.com).*



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Further proof positive that we are what we eat; an untouched photo of Commodore "What's His Face" referred to in 'Forbes' Foc'sle' of this very issue.

Although rumored to have been tight, he would always 'pop' for a movie.

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