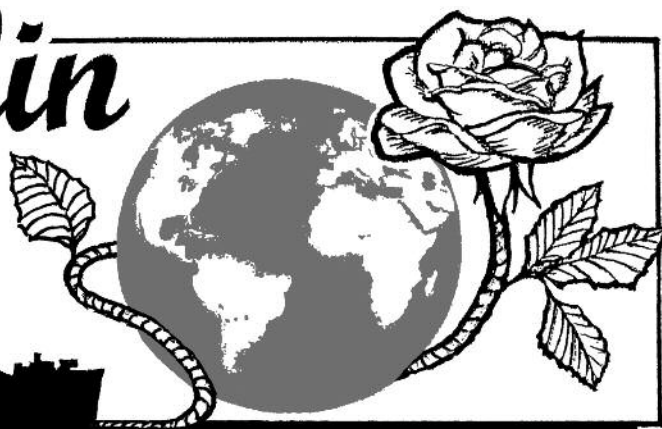




# Ramblin Rose



A Publication of the USS Montrose Association

Issue 77

## Return with Me to Those Thrilling Days of Yesteryear By Bill Forbes

**M**any of us who served aboard USS Montrose, if not most of us, visited Subic Bay in the Philippines during our time aboard. Certainly if you were aboard Montrose leading up to and during the Vietnam War you paid a visit to that port. This was the major staging area before entering the war zone. I still have memories of the town of Olongapo just outside the main gate; some good some not so good. Many of the streets in Olongapo were unpaved. I'll never forget the ever present jeepneys; those jeeps left over from World War II that were made into local taxis. It seemed like the more trinkets and bling the owner could tack onto his jeepney, the more proud he was of it. And who could forget buying "monkey meat" on the way to the base from liberty after drinking a little too much? On nearly every corner was a vendor with a wooden cart (with a fire onboard) cooking who knew what kind of meat. During our more sober time in town, we might observe that there were very few, if any, stray dogs on the street. Monkey meat indeed! Some brave souls, or very drunk souls, even tried the Philippine delicacy Balut. I was never that brave or that drunk.

I also remember the Enlisted Men's (EM) Club on base. You could get a beer for next to nothing. One could get a mixed drink for... I think it was a quarter. If you went into town and were not smart enough to return to the base and your ship a couple of hours before midnight (remember Cinderella liberty?) you were taking your life into your own hands. That's because most people weren't smart enough and they all waited until midnight to return. Remember? Almost everybody was drunk and many were the angry type of drunk. If you rode one of those big enclosed trucks (cattle cars we called them) from the main gate to the pier to



catch a boat back to Montrose anchored in the bay, you were REALLY taking your life into your hands because you were stuffed \*\*\*hole to belly button with little room to move. Many a fight broke out on those cattle cars. If you were unfortunate to be on Shore Patrol and assigned to a cattle car, just assume you were in trouble. Picture it: First to be thrown off the truck enroute to the pier would be the SP arm band. The next block would see the web belt and night stick landing on the pavement. And there were times (I'm told) when the Shore Patrolman himself would be bounced off the pavement. Ah yes, the good old days! My last visit to Subic Bay and Olongapo was 1967.

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By Bill Forbes

Fast forward 47 years. Here I am back in Olongapo, this time as a tourist. The Naval Base was closed in 1992 and returned to the Philippine Government. One thing I immediately noticed on this visit was the ever present jeepney. Yes, they still prowl the streets of Olongapo (and Manila). Filipinos now simply call them jeeps. They aren't the ones left over from WW II but they were such an icon in the Philippines, they are now manufactured to look like the old jeepney. They were seemingly everywhere. Most of them were painted yellow, as in yellow cab. And the streets are all paved and many are lined with modern buildings. But what about the old base? I just had to visit. The bridge at the main gate that crosses the Olongapo River is still there, although it's now only a pedestrian bridge. A new bridge for vehicular traffic was built a couple hundred yards downstream. Gone are the young boys who fastened a couple of bamboo sticks together for a raft so they could paddle out to mid-stream and yell to the Sailors going on liberty to toss them a coin. Remember these kids? How they could see in that murky water to locate and retrieve a coin is beyond me. But retrieve them they would. And they knew the value of an American coin. When a Sailor would toss a penny into the river, the kid would dive down and retrieve it, bring it to the surface and identify its value. That's when he would hold up a fist and cuss out the Sailor for being so cheap. Those cuss words were probably the only English words the kid knew.

I had read where Subic Bay was now a hotel and resort area. I had visions of modern high rise hotels scattered along the waterfront. The only hotel I saw on my brief walk on the old base was a three story barracks converted into a hotel. I guess there are new hotels in the general area but I didn't see any on base. Between the main gate and that hotel was a line of people outside of a small building. I was told they were waiting to get inside to watch a cock fight. Such events are perfectly legal in the Philippines. Going further into what used to be the base, there it was, the old EM Club. You might be interested to know that it's still a bar and grill, although now a civilian establishment. It was Sunday when I visited and the place was closed so I couldn't go inside.



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The nearby Cubi Point Naval Air Station was also closed and returned to the Philippine Government. Today, it's the Olongapo International Airport. I think they took some license in naming it an international airport. In fact, it might be a stretch to consider it a commercial airport.

When you're in the town of Olongapo you must be very careful when crossing the street, just as in most Asian cities. It seems no one, pedestrian or vehicle, has the right of way. To put it another way, everybody has the right of way if you're brave enough to take it. Once you step inside what used to be the U.S. Naval Base, even though it's no longer a military base, pedestrians have the right of way. My tour guide told me this rule is strictly enforced.

Before heading back to Manila on this tour, I just had to have a picture to prove I visited. That's me

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standing on the left with my tour guide in a much different Olongapo than I remembered. While I enjoyed this visit a great deal, I might have had more raw fun in Olongapo when I was a young Sailor.

## Editors Note:

I spoke with Bill about this trip. I remember the Jeepneys being far more colorful. I also remember the river and the kids diving for coins. I never wound up in that river but I knew a few people who did. Not a pleasant thought at the time. How much Monkey meat on a stick did you eat in Olongapo? As I remember there was usually a vendor next to the bridge. Strange I never saw any stray cats or dogs in town. It's good to know the old EM club is still there and operating. I wonder what happened to the Sky Club, another fun place when the liberty fund ran a little low. Thanks for the story Bill!!

# Small Acts of Heroism

It seems to me that small acts of heroism occur every day and are rarely noticed or recognized. I thought I would start a regular column to recognize these acts. Russ McDonald send me an article printed in the Monterey Herald written by Phil Bowhay. I don't know Mr. Bowhay but he did serve on the Montrose in 1953. I am including the article in it's entirety.

Closing in on Armed Forces Day and Memorial Day, those of us involved one way or another can remember all sorts of bravery and heroism. Some saw first hand, or heard about it, and maybe were even a part of it, and realize that it is still happening. Yep, right now! Today!

In 1953 I was a boot ensign aboard the USS Montrose, APA 212 Attack Transport. You saw it in that B movie, "Away All Boats."

We were training off Coronado Beach in Southern California. Lowering landing craft in the water, piloting them to the beach, than heading back to the ship to be reloaded.

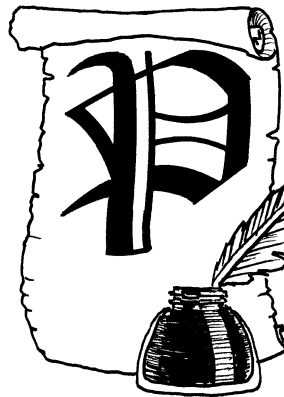
There was a heavy swell, with the landing craft banging alongside as we hoisted them aboard. All well until an LCM "Mike Boat," back aboard and ready to be secured, parted a line and started to sway.

These are big boats, designed to carry vehicles, and weigh several tons. Under the conditions that day, this could have caused a lot of damage, both to the ship and personnel.

As the Montrose careened to port and starboard the "Mike Boat" cleared the deck by maybe two feet. Then a young sailor, a little guy from the plains of West Texas, threw himself, prone, under the suspended boat. It cleared him by inches. Her grabbed a loose line, snubbed it onto a cleat, and saved the day.

This may not sound like "brave" to you, and the sailor didn't think it of himself, but he could have been crushed by one more swing of the boat. No medals, commendations, or extra liberty. It was his job. Did get a "Nice work sailor," and back to work. All in a days work for the deck gang. "Sometimes "bravery" is reaction, instant.

I don't know who that sailor was, that was not printed in the article, but maybe one of you remembers him. Things like this happen every day and I think most of us have seen them occur. If anyone has a similar story I would love to print it.



# President's Letter

**T**oday we embark on a new adventure, our first newsletter by Harry Thy. Harry, thank you so much for stepping up to the plate and taking on this task.

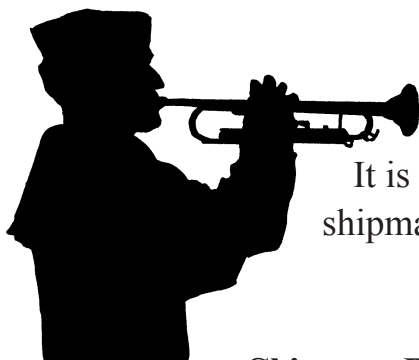
Hopefully by now those of our Montrose crew that live in colder areas are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel with spring around the corner. I know for some it's been a tough winter. But here is something that will brighten your day. As many of you know, we are having a Mini-Reunion in Montrose, Co in June 13 – 17, 2014. At this reunion we will be presenting the city and county of Montrose, CO with a ship model of the USS Montrose that was presented to the Association at the Las Vegas Reunion. Please see the enclosed information/agenda for the reunion. The city of Montrose is pulling out all the stops to make this one great event. Invitees include SecNav, State, County and Local officials. If you can make the reunion please make your reservations early, and let me know. The city has been very helpful in getting lodging through the Red Arrow Inn. This is the busiest time of year in Montrose. To learn more about the City of Montrose and County please visit the web sites included.

As many of you know we have been working on a project chaired by Bill Crowden to get another naval ship named USS Montrose. Unfortunately, Bill has suffered a stroke. As a result we are in a temporary stand-down. Bill is recovering and will be home soon. When Bill is ready we will go forward with the project.

As always please keep the Association informed about of the health and welfare of Montrose Family members.

I hope many of you can make the Montrose Mini-Reunion. I look forward to seeing you in Colorado.

Bob



## TAPS

It is my sad duty to inform you of the passing of the following shipmates and family members.

**Shipmate HM1 Joseph R Hammersmith, (50-52).**

**Shipmate Ronald "Pappy" King of Supply Division, (67 – 69)**

**Donna Pickett, wife of Dale Pickett of BC Division**

Please keep their families in your thoughts and prayers.



# MONTROSE, CO

## 2014 Reunion Schedule of Events

### June 13th, 2014

- Arrival/Check-In/Registration

### June 14th

- Arrival/Check-In/Registration
- 6 – 8 P.M. Formal reception with Montrose County and City at the Warrior Resource Center (WRC). Invitees will include:
  - Secretary of the Navy
  - Under Secretary Muro
  - Colorado Elected Officials
- Presentation of USS Montrose (APA-212) Replica Ship to the Montrose Community. Ship remains on display at the WRC.

### June 15th

- A.M. Crew assemble at City Hall for photo's at site of USS Montrose Ships Bell
- 6 – 9 P.M. Informal reception at home of Mayor Judy Ann Files.

### June 16th

- 6 – 7 P.M. USS Montrose Association attends City Council Meeting to receive a Proclamation declaring June 17th as USS Montrose Day. The day the ships keel was laid in 1944.

### June 17th

- Farewells for those departing.

### Lodging Information:

#### Best Western Red Arrow Inn

1702 E Main St, Montrose, CO 81401

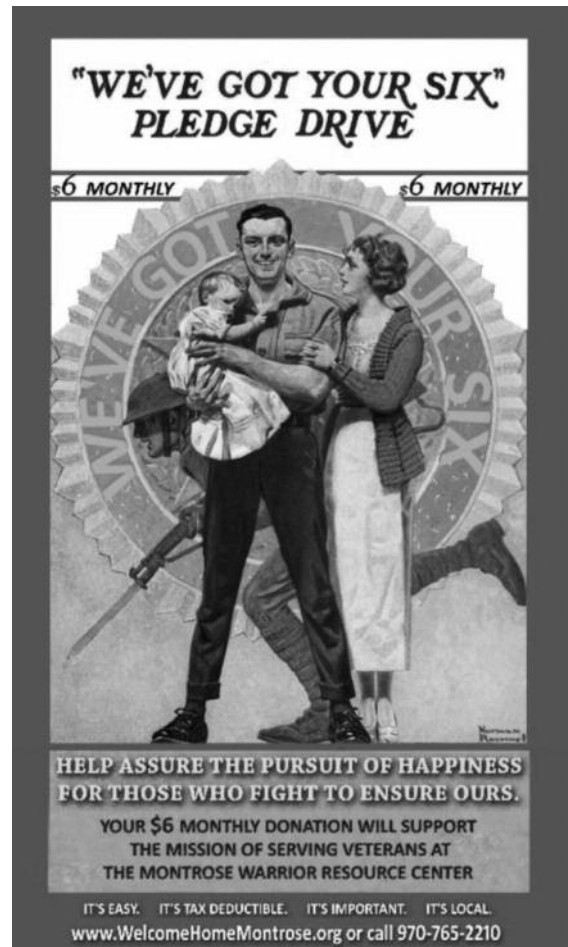
Telephone: (970) 249-9641

Group ID: USS Montrose

Group rate: \$89.00

### Web Sites:

- Visitor Package: <http://www.visitmontrose.com/documentcenter/view/121>
- Visit Visitor Center: <http://www.visitmontrose.com/>
- Ute Indian Museum: <http://www.historycolorado.org/museums/ute-indian-museum-0>
- The Warrior Resource Center: <http://welcomehomemontrose.org/warrior-resource-center/>
- Black Canyon National Park (Guided Tour): <http://www.nps.gov/blca/index.htm>



# From The Editor



**M**y name is Harry Thy. This is my first attempt at editing “Ramblin Rose”. I served on the Montrose from October 1964 through October 1966. After trying a couple of jobs I settled on the signal bridge and never looked back. I had found my home with the likes of Tom Gamel, Avery Lynam, Dennis Ralph and the rest of the guys. There was nothing like great guys to work with, fresh air and being literally above it all!

After leaving the Navy I tried a few different jobs and wound up working with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, another home. I retired from the Fire Department after a 28 year career and am enjoying life travelling and spoiling grandchildren.

At the Las Vegas Reunion, my first, I reconnected with a number of old shipmates. The stories were flying and fun was had by all. My wife Teresa and I were seated with Juanita Juarez Taylor, daughter of our late Captain Robert Juarez, and her husband. They as well as the others at our table were truly delightful dinner companions. I apologize for not naming the others at our table and can only fall back on a failing memory. I think some call it CRS disease (Can't Remember S\*#t). Please forgive me and if you remember, I would really like to know! I do remember how pleasant dinner was!

After the reunion in Las Vegas I agreed to make an attempt at editing the newsletter. I'm sure most of you know how persuasive Tom can be and I succumbed to unbridled flattery. He did say he would help me out if I needed it. I agreed to try one newsletter to see how things go so feedback will be critical to my doing any more. My primary motivation was Tom's retirement. I have so enjoyed the Ramblin Rose I could not let it die without at least an attempt to keep it going. I have no journalistic background and my writing experience was writing somewhat factual, straight forward and somewhat terse reports on the origin and cause of fires during my time as an arson investigator. I don't think I'll be able to fill Tom's shoes but I'm going to give it a shot so please bear with me and try to remember I'm trying! As I've heard Tom say time and time again the newsletter cannot go on without input so please help! I'm always open for phone calls, emails etc. I enjoy renewing old friendships and hearing all the old sea stories. The way my memory works all those old sea stories seem brand new so don't hold back!

My email address is [horso@earthlink.net](mailto:horso@earthlink.net) and my telephone number is (661)259-3714, Cell (661)645-0825

Many Thanks to Bill Forbes for taking us back to Olongapo and Jeepneys and Subic Bay. A delightful story even if he didn't renew his taste for monkey meat!!

Also, thanks to Mac for the first “Small Acts of Heroism” article and the idea for a new column. I hope my first attempt at editing the “Ramblin Rose” proves enjoyable and informative. With some incoming stories and feedback I may stay on for a while.

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but not forgotten by those of us who  
spent a few liberties in town  
shopping!!

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