

## **HOW THE REUNIONS OF THE USS MULIPHEN BEGAN**

**I left the USS Muliphen on December 6, 1958 after serving as a BT3. She was in the Newport News Shipyard's dry dock at that time. I was homeward bound and ready to continue my life as a husband and father. I didn't get a single bit of information as to how to get in touch with any of my shipmates.**

**After a lot of years passed by, I found myself wondering whatever happened to the "Mule" and all of my buddies. I could remember where some of the men lived back then but I had no way of knowing how to reach them now. I started paying more attention to advertisements of military reunions in the VFW magazines. I can't remember how many months or years I kept looking but one day --- there it was!!! I was so excited to see that there was going to be a reunion for the USS Lore / USS Muliphen. It was to be held in Ft. Pierce, FL on Nov.5 - 7 in 1993.**

**I had just retired from Union Carbide in September of that year so when Pat, my wife, was able to get vacation from her job we made our reservations to attend. We drove down and settled into our room at the Holiday Inn and walked to the restaurant. Bob and Ruby Poye from Minnesota were seated there and we were soon joined by Robert Welkner from New York. After a short period of time went by and no one else seemed to be arriving we started asking questions of the hotel staff and found that we were at the wrong Holiday Inn. We got directions and transferred to the correct hotel and were very pleased to see a crowd of Navy Veterans. They kept coming and soon we met up with Bob Villwock, John Suits and his wife Belle, Arthur Harry and his wife Helen, and Walter Saucier who served as the Ship's Barber during his time on board, along with many others. There were eleven men from the Muliphen in attendance, as I recall.**

**It was at this reunion that we learned the fate of our Ship. We actually saw the video of the "Mighty Mule" going down. You should have seen the reaction of John Suits as he watched with**

tears in his eyes as She settled on the ocean floor at about a 35 degree list to the port side on January 20, 1989. He said "I just wish She had set down straight." This reunion was to serve as a memorial to Her. If weather had permitted, we would have been able to go out to where She was resting and toss in a wreath. We attended a memorial service instead, at Port St. Lucie, that was held for the USS LORE and the USS MULIPHEN. Afterward we toured a museum that held several articles that were removed from Her before sinking. We saw some of the bunks, desks, typewriters, a dixie cup hat with the name of Woods on it, a medical table from the dispensary, and outside there was one of Her hatch covers that had been made into a bench that we sat on. We took lots of pictures and made many wonderful memories that day.

At dinner that evening Bob Villwock and I discussed the fact that we shouldn't let this moment end. We needed to put together a reunion for the USS Muliphen because of John Suits's failing health and his loyalty to the Navy and his Ship. The comradery was just getting started. We all exchanged addresses and phone numbers and went back to our homes with all these plans and ideas.

We didn't meet again until May of 1995. Bob Villwock and I, along with our wives, drove to Hamilton, NC to visit John and Belle Suits. We had a wonderful three day weekend and when we got ready to leave we had definite plans to all meet again in September at Virginia Beach, VA to see if we could figure out how to get started. When we got to Virginia Beach that Sept. it was pouring down the rain so the girls stayed in their rooms and we started walking, planning to get information from all the hotels that we could. Well, we made all the plans and practically finalized the first reunion at the one and only hotel we visited. Our First reunion was to be held in May of 1996. Talk about being GREEN! Now we had 8 months to plan a reunion and we had no idea what we were doing.

**We started advertising in any military publication we had ever heard of. Pat and I were the contact people in all the ads placed and the phone rang off the hook. Pat and I could see that we were going to be overwhelmed by the response of over 120 calls. We were planning to provide a hospitality room for meeting and greeting but we hadn't thought of food or snacks or anything to drink. We didn't have any money for it except our own. We went around to some of our local businesses at home and put on our saddest faces and started begging. Corey Brothers Produce Co., in Charleston, WV came through for us with some beautiful fruit and vegetables for relish and fruit trays. Robert Hamon, a renowned glass artisan who provided the White House with Presidential Awards and helped establish the Glassworks at Colonial Williamsburg, VA., crafted for us a one of a kind vase with an etching of the Muliphen's Bow, then donated it to be given as a doorprize. Bob was also was a Navy veteran and he continued to donate his glasswork for some of our reunions that followed until he retired. He is now deceased and his glasswork should be cherished if you happened to be the recipient if any of it.**

**We could barely get our luggage to fit in the car as we were loaded down. The hospitality room was to be in Bob and Bev Villwock's suite and they weren't there yet! Thank goodness our room had a kitchenette and a small fridge. Bob and Ruby Poye and John and Belle Suits arrived about the same time that we did so the girls started getting the fruit and veggies ready and the guys went to get some chips and pretzels and soft drinks and ice and more. It was still early in the day but soon shipmates started showing up and, since Bob and Bev hadn't arrived to unlock the hospitality room, we made a sign to put on our door and soon our room was packed with Shipmates and their wives.**

**This reunion was meant to be! We could only accommodate 48 people in the hotel's dining facility for our banquet and we had to turn people away for dinner. They went to the hotel's restaurant and ate then came back afterward and nobody was upset over it. We had the time of our lives. It was like a big happy party and**

**we didn't want it to end. We were up until the wee hours and I remember the drive home being a very sleepy but happy one.**

**Our phone started ringing as soon as we got home. Everyone wanted to offer suggestions for the next reunion. Several of the men had their hearts set on going to Atlantic Beach, NC for the second reunion. We called Bob Villwock to share the suggestions and he wasn't enthused at all. He said that he felt left out and didn't wish to participate any longer. He confirmed his feelings in a letter and sent a computer disc with the "data base." Bob was a man ahead of his time and wanted to computerize the reunion. If I can recall in 1996 there weren't many retired Navy veterans that owned, let alone knew how to use, a computer. Bob wanted to advertise, notify, and do all of his conversing by computer and fax. For him to give up the "data base" was a really big thing. He could show us all a thing or two back then and now but we haven't heard from him since. We have tried several times to reach him and have left messages but he won't return our calls. When John Suits passed away we called and called and left messages and heard nothing. We wish he would come back. I think he would be rather proud of what he helped get started.**

**We continued alone and we took the Second Reunion to Atlantic Beach, NC on May 2 - 4 in 1997. Many of you returned from the first reunion and many of you were new to us but it was sure that we were continuing to grow. We had 46 crewmen and there were 86 in attendance for the banquet. It was at that time that John Burpulis and Fred Rodriguez stepped forward and volunteered their time and assistance for future reunions. It was also an overall opinion that an Association be formed with an annual dues of \$12.00 be paid to John Burpulis who was to serve as our membership representative. John issued membership cards, upon receipt of dues collected, in his famous penmanship that he enjoyed doing for all of us. Fred Rodriguez took a poll by issuing a questionnaire for all of us to fill out regarding "What is SOS really made of?" We never quite resolved this issue as the question has popped up ever since. Some of you may remember**

**the "Pretty Committee" that was formed there. We also sadly realized that we needed to start a TAPS list too.**

**On May 1 - 3, 1998 we held the Third Reunion at the Sand Castle Hotel back in Virginia Beach, VA. We thought we were in great shape this time. We had lots of space in our Hospitality Room, we had collected some dues to work with, the Pretty Committee was back and working together again and we never dreamed that we would be feeding 156 people that year, and 86 were crewmen. We were elbow to elbow in that great big room. Captain Ernest G. "Scotty" Campbell and his lovely wife Renee' were seated with us. He was the Skipper in 1956 when I went on board the Muliphen. He took the podium and entertained us with tales of some of the crewmen that were present. Bernie Foust from Wisconsin called me a day or two before we were planning to leave and announced that he had the video of The Muliphen being taken out to sea to Her final resting place in Ft. Pierce, FL. He stopped by our house and spent the night to drop off the video before heading to the reunion along with Donald Beane. Bernie volunteered to emcee the reunion and put together a program that also served as an additional souvenir.**

**Sadly Pat's parents had both become very ill by the time to plan the Fourth Reunion. John Burpulis worked very hard in laying the groundwork at Valley Forge, PA. We were guests at the Park Ridge Hotel from May 6 - 9, in 1999. At this time we were needing for someone to "step up to the plate" as we called it, to take charge of planning the future reunions. It was at that time that Ron Wiant came forward and became your "Helmsman." Ron has moved forward with all of the remaining reunions from 2000 to 2009.**

**I suppose you could call this the "History of How the USS Muliphen Reunions got started." I was asked to put this together a couple of years ago. I started to outline it and this is all so personal I decided to make it as more of a recollection. I hope you enjoyed this trip down Memory Lane, as I KNOW I did.**

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

*David K. Means*  
**David K. Means**

**April 2009**