USS Iowa (SS-61)?
By Brad Goforth

Many accolades have come to USS Iowa, but few know that one of her first commanding officers was a famed submariner. Many times a sailor has said the ship might “go down like a stone,” but Captain Alan R. McCann was a CO who could also bring the great ship back up. He had unique experience.

Born in North Adams, Massachusetts, on 20 September 1896, McCann graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1917 and served in the battleship Kansas (BB-21) until 1919. He then received instruction in submarines and was then assigned to USS K-6 (SS-37). In 1921-24, Lieutenant McCann commanded the submarines N-4 (SS-56), L-3 (SS-42) and R-21 (SS-98). Two years of technical duties ashore were followed by command of USS S-46 (SS-157) in 1926-29.

During 1929-31, Lieutenant Commander McCann served in the Design Division, later in the Maintenance Division, Bureau of Construction and Repair. During that tour of duty he was assigned to diving operations in connection with development of submarine escape apparatus, and was in charge of the development of the McCann Submarine Rescue Chamber, which bears his name. Additionally he was assigned as Liaison Officer / Engineer when the submarine USS O-12 (SS-73) was converted for use in the under ice attempt to circumnavigate the Arctic Ice cap and voyage to the North Pole. Modifications to the submarine were extensive, and contained innovations of a telescoping conning tower, an ice drill, an incorporated diving bell and an Air Lock, designed by Simon Lake. The submarine was designated Nautilus and was used on Hubert Wilkins's and Lincoln Ellsworth's Arctic Expedition.

While assigned to the Bureau of Navigation, Commander McCann was sent to help with rescue and salvage operations on USS Squalus (SS-192), which had accidently sunk off Portsmouth, New Hampshire. As a member of the Squalus Salvage Unit, he played an important part in the rescue of 33 survivors and the salvage of the stricken submarine. He received a “Well Done,” commendation from the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the success of this extremely difficult operation. It utilized the McCann Submarine Rescue Chamber he and Commander Charles B. ‘Swede’ Momsen had designed 10 years earlier.

At the start of World War Two, McCann was serving on the staff of Commander, Submarine Squadron 6, Pacific Fleet. In January 1943, he was assigned additional duty in temporary command of Task Force 51.
in Perth, Australia, and as Senior Representative of Commander Submarines Southwest Pacific.

In April 1943, he had orders transferring him to duty as Commander, Submarine Squadron 7, in the Atlantic, a command which utilized captured foreign submarines to train sailors in Anti-submarine warfare techniques, and in September 1943 he returned to the United States. He was assigned for a tour of shore duty in the Fleet Maintenance Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, and served until July 1944. He was given command of the battleship USS Iowa (BB-61) and from August 16, to November 28, 1944, was in the Western Pacific.

Under Captain McCann’s command, Iowa sorted from Eniwetok as part of the 3d Fleet, and helped support the landings on Peleliu. She then protected the carriers during air strikes against the Central Philippines to neutralize enemy air power for the long awaited invasion of the Philippines. In a last ditch attempt to halt the United States campaign to recapture the Philippines, the Japanese Navy struck back with a three-pronged attack aimed at the destruction of American amphibious forces in Leyte Gulf. Iowa accompanied TF-38 during attacks against the Japanese Central Force as it steamed through the Sibuyan Sea toward San Bernardino Strait. The reported results of these attacks and the apparent retreat of the Japanese Central Force led Admiral Halsey to believe that this force had been ruined as an effective fighting group. Iowa, with Task Force 38, steamed after the Japanese Northern Force off Cape Engano, Luzon.

On 10 October, 1944, Iowa arrived off Okinawa for a series of air strikes on the Ryukyus and Formosa. She then supported air strikes against Luzon, 18 October and continued this vital duty during General MacArthur’s landing on Leyte.

On 20-25 October, 1944, a Japanese Central Force was attacking a group of American escort carriers off Samar. This threat to the American beachheads forced Iowa to reverse course and steam to support the vulnerable “baby carriers.” However, the valiant fight put up by the escort carriers and their screen had already caused the Japanese to retire and Iowa was denied a surface action. Following the Battle for Leyte Gulf, Iowa remained in the waters off the Philippines screening carriers during strikes against Luzon and Formosa.

Captain McCann was advanced to Rear Admiral in December, 1944. From there, he reported to Headquarters, Commander in Chief, US Fleet, and was assigned as his Assistant Chief of Staff (Anti-Submarine), and Chief of Staff to the Commander, Tenth Fleet, serving under immediate direction of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King. The Tenth Fleet, a fleet without a ship, was a highly specialized intelligence command, able to call upon the surface and air forces of the Atlantic Fleet and the Sea Frontier Forces as needed for special assignments, and was organized to exercise unity of control over the Navy’s war against U-boat operations in the Atlantic from Iceland to Cape Horn. The Tenth Fleet was dissolved in June 1945, and Rear AdmiralMcCann was transferred to duty on the staff of the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, and was subsequently designated Commander, Task Force 68, in the light cruiser USS Philadelphia (CL-41) during the Presidential trip to Berlin for the Potsdam Conference, July 4, to August 8, 1945. He personally reported to President Harry S. Truman the news of the successful atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan.
On December 18, 1945, he assumed duty as Commander, Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet, aboard light cruiser USS Fargo (CL-106) at the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii. As Commander Submarines Pacific, he was the commander of the first under-ice sonar testing missions off the Bering Strait, beginning July 30, 1947. Aboard the submarine USS Boarfish (SS-327), he made excursions with Dr. Waldo K. Lyon under the polar ice cap as far north as 72 degrees 15’ north latitude.

On September 3, 1948, he reported as a Member of the General Board of the Navy Department, and on June 14, 1949 he transferred to duty as Inspector General, Navy Department. He transferred to the Retired List of the Navy on May 1, 1950, and advanced in rank to Vice Admiral upon retirement, because of past combat citations.

Vice Admiral Allan R. McCann died on 22 February 1978. Few commanding officers have demonstrated the versatility and expertise that Vice Admiral McCann demonstrated during his illustrious career. We aboard USS Iowa were witness to his extraordinary abilities and leadership.

Vice Admiral McCann’s decorations included: Legion of Merit with Gold Star, Bronze Star, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, World War I Victory Medal, with Atlantic Fleet Clasp, American Defense Service Medal, with Fleet Clasp, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four service stars, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal and World War II Victory Medal.

BRONZE STAR MEDAL PRESENTED TO REAR ADMIRAL ALLAN ROCKWELL McCANN, U.S.N.

“For heroic service as Commanding Officer of the USS IOWA, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Western Pacific Area,’ Rear Admiral Allan Rockwell McCann, U.S.N., 43, today received the Bronze Star Medal. Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard presented the award during a ceremony in Room 2054, Navy Department.

Text of the citation is as follows: “For heroic service as Commanding Officer of the USS IOWA, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Western Pacific Area. Fighting his ship with determined aggressiveness during powerful raids executed in coordination with other units of the United States Fleet, Rear Admiral McCann consistently blasted the formidable defenses of strongly held enemy positions and, delivering his shattering broadsides with devastating accuracy, inflicted heavy losses upon the Japanese and aided materially in keeping to a minimum serious damage to his task force despite the enemy’s determined opposition. A forceful leader, Rear Admiral McCann, by his superb tactical skill, daring initiative and cool courage under fire, contributed essentially to the success of our forces during a prolonged period of fierce hostilities in the Pacific Theater and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”
Quicksilver, Quicksilver!

By Jeff Bolander

16-inch and 5-inch guns, Tomahawk cruise and Harpoon Antiship missiles. Could it be that M-16’s and M-14 combat assault rifles were just as important in defending BB-61 during her Persian Gulf cruise during the final years of the Cold War?

Battleship Iowa’s 1987-88 deployment to the Persian Gulf is notable in naval history for several reasons. It was the first time Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV’s- then referred to as Remotely Piloted Vehicles, RPV’s) were based on warships in a warzone. It was the first time an Iowa class battleship served in Straits of Hormuz; and it was the first time battleships were used to escort merchant ships since World War II.

The deployment to the Gulf was also remarkable because the threat was different from previous conflicts. The threat included conventional forces and weapons such as mobile Chinese manufactured Silk-worm Missiles along the coast of Iran, Soviet surface combatants in the North Arabian Sea. Tactics, and techniques and procedures for those threats had been developed and practiced for decades.

Another type of threat, however, faced the Big Stick as she prepared for operations in the Gulf. Iranian Republican Guard forces were equipped with Boghammar speed boats that blended easily with civilian shipping and that could utilized swarm tactics against US naval combatants. Just months before Iowa’s deployment from Norfolk, Iran conducted maneuvers, code-named “Martyrdom” with its speedboats in the Straits of Hormuz.

To prepare for this irregular threat, the Weapons Department developed a plan to maximize the employment of the ship’s small arms on the main deck to engage potential attacks with weapons that typically sat unused in the ship’s armories. The chief architect of the plan was the Marine Detachment’s Executive Officer- Captain Paul Schreiber. As an infantry officer, Schreiber had extensive experience developing fire plans with intersecting fields of fire that engaged targets at maximum effective ranges with accuracy and precision.

The fire plan to defend BB-61 from suicide attack by multiple speed boats included crew served small arms such as .50 caliber heavy machine guns, M-60 7.62 medium machineguns and Mk-19 automatic grenade launchers as well as M-16 and M-14 rifles from the Marine and Navy armories. Schreiber conducted a detailed study of the battleship’s stationary crew served weapons firing positions and filled the gaps with the new M-60’s, M-14’s, and M-16’s firing positions.

Shreiber was also instrumental in developing a training program to prepare Sailors and Marines to rapidly respond to a small boat attack. When the words “Quicksilver, Quicksilver” were announced on the ship’s 1MC, the Marine Reaction Force and augmentees from throughout the ship’s crew sprang to action. Augmentees included Sailors from the Remote Piloted Vehicle (RPV-now know as “UAVs”) and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Detachments.

Preparations for the possibility of a small boat attack proved to be visionary. Although Battleship Iowa never had to actually respond to an actual attack by the Iranians during its 1988 deployment, terrorist tactics eventually evolved to the point that small boat became a primary threat against US naval warships.
(reprinted from PhillyNews.com, April 29, 2004)

PAUL K. Schreiber was a highly regarded Marine officer, but he loved to come back to Philly every New Year’s Day to march with the rowdy Froggy Carr Comic Brigade in the Mummers Parade.

Although Schreiber grew up in Mayfair, he spent a lot of time in the famous Two Street neighborhood in South Philadelphia, where his mother came from and relatives still live, and he relished the Mummer ambience that pervades the area. But somehow his credentials as a Marine and a Swarthmore College graduate seemed incompatible with Froggy Carr, a wench outfit and one of the parade’s wildest aggregations.

But Schreiber loved it. “He loved to have fun,” said Joe Pooler, his uncle and longtime friend, who lives in the 2nd Street neighborhood and whose sons are Mummers. Schreiber was so highly thought of in the Marine Corps that he was promoted from lieutenant colonel to full colonel on his deathbed. He died Monday in the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland with some 25 family members and friends crowded into his room. He was 47.

His promotion, approved by Marine Commandant Gen. Michael W. Hagee, was administered by his brother-in-law, Michael Blaine, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, who told Schreiber, “Now you outrank me.” Schreiber had been in Iraq since last April. He had been sent there by the U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Fla., to study ways to reconstruct the country. He returned home at Christmas for a two-week leave and became critically ill with a blood clot in the bowel.

Schreiber’s wife, the former Gretchen Winans, said her husband was able to say goodbye to everybody. Their son, Kevin, had hurried to his father’s bedside from Tennessee where he was traveling with his high school band. “He said many Marines don’t get a chance to say goodbye to their families before they die,” his wife said. “He said he felt blessed.”

Paul Schreiber, whose nickname was “Dutch,” was born in Philadelphia to Paul and Ellen Schreiber. He graduated from Father Judge High School, where he played end on the football team. He also played football at Swarthmore College and excelled academically. It was his brother-in-law, Mike Blaine, who inspired him to join the Marines, but he was turned down repeatedly because of a knee injury suffered playing football.

He worked as an administrative assistant to former U.S. Rep. Charles Dougherty for a time, and in the same capacity for former U.S. Sen. Richard S. Schweiker. When Schweiker left the Senate, Schreiber moved on to work for Sen. Jeremiah A. Denton, of Alabama, retired Navy admiral who had been a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He worked on defense-related issues for Denton, who was urging
the rebuilding of the Navy, including recommissioning battleships. When Schreiber told Denton of his dream of becoming a Marine, the senator contacted the then-Marine Commandant Gen. P.X. Kelly. “When he went to take his physical, the captain in charge said, ‘You’ve been recommended by General Kelly. You’re OK. You pass,’ ” Pooler said.

Schreiber participated in several “floats,” missions in which a detachment of Marines is taken by ship to various world trouble spots to be deployed if necessary. One of his assignments was as executive officer of the Marine detachment on the USS Iowa, one of the battleships recommissioned at Denton’s urging.

He was an instructor at the Amphibious War School at Quantico, Va. Schreiber was selected to represent the Marine Corps at the Center for Strategic and International Services, a public policy research group in Washington comprised of one officer from each of the services and civilian experts. “It was a great honor for him,” his wife said. She and Schreiber met as students at Swarthmore. She is the daughter of Dr. Edgar Winans, a well-known anthropologist, and was born in Uganda.

Whatever Schreiber’s assignment with the Marines, he almost always got leave to return to Philly for the Mummers Parade, said Pooler, who is married to Schreiber’s mother’s sister, Catherine. Gretchen Schreiber said she would go to the parades just to “cheer.” Their son, Kevin, marched with his Dad.

“I got my face smeared with greasepaint from both Paul and Kevin,” she said. The Schreibers were married for 19 years.

In addition to his parents, wife and son, he is survived by two daughters, Caroline and Catherine, and twin sisters, Helen Ricci and Elizabeth Blaine.
Why Marines?

By Brad Goforth

Over the years many have asked why Marines were stationed on capital chips. Even when watching motion pictures like “Master and Commander,” Marines were shown serving onboard the ship with the sailors. Most do not know the history and reasons behind this unique and very strong tradition which has bound the Navy and Marine Corps since their inception.

In reality, the first Marines came into being in Spain, in the year 1537, when Charles I of Spain formed the Compañías Viejas del Mar de Nápoles (Naples Sea Old Companies) and added them to the Escuadras de Galeras del Mediterráneo (Mediterranean Galley Squadrons). But it was Philip II who established today’s concept of a landing force. His design of the Spanish Armada was to take the Compañías Viejas del Mar de Nápoles, to England where they would perform the first ever amphibious assault against that nation. This was a pure naval power projection ashore by forces deployed from ships that could maintain their ability to fight despite being based on board ships. This is the period of the famous Tercios (literally “One Third”, due to its organisation: one third of musketeers, one third of spearmen and the final third of pikemen).

The Portuguese Marines have their direct origin in the oldest permanent military unit of Portugal, the Terço of the Navy of the Crown of Portugal, created in 1618. However, since 1585 specialized troops existed to provide artillery and riflemen in the Portuguese warships. The Terço of the Navy was soon considered an elite unit, also being responsible for the bodyguard of the King of Portugal.

In France, the Troupes de marine were formed from the compagnies ordinaires de la mer created in 1622, by Cardinal Richelieu. These were troops dedicated to naval combat. The French colonies were under the control of the Ministère de la Marine (analogous to the British Admiralty), so it used its marines for colonial defense as well.

Prior to the First Republic, the Corps royal de l’infanterie de la marine had been superseded by the Corps royal de canonniers-matelots on January 1, 1786. The Corps royal de canonniers-matelots was an early attempt to use sailors for duties previously done by marines – soldiers specializing in naval and amphibious combat.

But it was the English and Dutch who made the best use of Marines in an amphibious warfare doctrine. On the October 28, 1664, an Order-in-Council was issued in England, calling for 1200 soldiers to be recruited for service in the Fleet, to be known as the Duke of York and Albany’s Maritime Regiment of Foot. As the Duke of York was The Lord High Admiral, it became known as the Admiral’s Regiment.
The Regiment was paid by the Admiralty, its and its successors being the only long service troops in the 17th and 18th century navy. They were therefore not only soldiers but also seamen, who were part of the complement of all warships.

By the early 1700s, the Dutch had also formed a small marine force. In 1704, during the war with France and Spain, the British attacked the Rock of Gibraltar. 1,900 British and 400 Dutch Marines prevented Spanish reinforcements reaching the fortress. Later, British ships bombarded the city while marines and seamen stormed the defenses. These later withstood nine months of siege. Today the Royal Marines display only the battle honor «Gibraltar», and their close relationship with the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps continues.

Throughout the 18th and 19th century the Royal Marines played a major part in fighting to win Britain the largest empire ever created. Marines were aboard the first ships to arrive in Australia in 1788. The policy of «Imperial Policing» took the Marines to the bombardment of Algiers in 1816, to the Ashantee Wars, and to the destruction of the Turkish Fleet at Navarino, in 1827. In 1805, some 2700 Royal Marines took part in the great naval victory at Trafalgar. Closer to home, they maintained civil order in Northern Ireland and in Newcastle during the coal dispute of 1831. By the outbreak of war in 1914, Britain had the largest fleet in commission in the world, with all ships above that of destroyer size having Royal Marines detachments. Onboard ship, marines were required to operate one of the main gun turrets, as well as secondary armament. Royal Marines also fought on land, notably in the amphibious assault at Gallipoli in 1915, together with ANZAC forces, and led the famous assault on the harbor at Zeebrugge in 1918.

During World War Two some 80,000 men served in the Royal Marines, and they continued to operate at sea and in land formations. The Royal Marines continue to be an integral part of the Royal Navy and British military.

The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps continues as a part of the Dutch Navy, operating anywhere in the world. Their Latin motto consequently is ‘Qua Patet Orbis,’ ‘As wide as the world extends.’ The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps consists of approximately 2,800 marines.

United States Marine Corps
The United States Marine Corps traces its institutional roots to the Continental Marines of the American Revolutionary War, formed by Captain Samuel Nicholas by a resolution of the Second Continental Congress on November 10, 1775, to raise two battalions of Marines. That date is regarded and celebrated as the date of the Marine Corps’ “birthday”. The Continental Marines were founded to serve as an infantry unit aboard naval vessels and was responsible for the security of the ship and its crew by conducting offensive and defensive combat during boarding actions and defending the ship’s officers from mutiny; to the latter end, their quarters on ship were often strategically positioned between the officers’ quarters and the rest of the vessel. Continental Marines manned raiding parties, both at sea and ashore. During naval engagements Marine sharpshooters were stationed in the fighting tops of the ships’ masts, and were supposed to shoot the opponent’s officers, naval gunners, and helmsmen.

At the end of the American Revolution, both the Continental Navy and Continental Marines were disbanded in April 1783. The institution itself would not be resurrected until July 11, 1798. At that time, in preparation for the Quasi-War with France, Congress created the United States Marine Corps. Marines had been enlisted by the War Department as early as August, 1797, for service in the new-build frigates authorized by the Congressional “Act to provide a Naval Armament” of March 18, 1794, which specified the numbers of Marines to be recruited for each frigate.

The Marines’ most famous action of this period occurred during the First Barbary War (1801–1805) against the Barbary pirates, when William Eaton and First Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon led eight Marines and 500 mercenaries in an effort to capture Tripoli. Though they only reached Derna, the action at Tripoli has been immortalized in the Marines’ Hymn and the Mameluke Sword carried by Marine officers.

During the War of 1812, Marine naval detachments took part in the great frigate duels that characterized the war, which were the first American victories in the conflict. Their most significant contributions were delaying the British march to Washington, D.C. at the Battle of Bladensburg and holding the center of Gen. Andrew Jackson’s defensive line at the defense of New Orleans. By the end of the war, the Marines had acquired a well-deserved reputation as expert marksmen, especially in ship-to-ship actions.

After the war, the Marine Corps fell into a depression that ended with the appointment of Archibald Henderson as its fifth Commandant in 1820. Under his tenure, the Corps took on expeditionary duties...
Archibald Henderson (USMC) in the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, Key West, West Africa, the Falkland Islands, and Sumatra. Commandant Henderson is credited with thwarting President Jackson’s attempts to combine and integrate the Marine Corps with the Army. Instead, Congress passed the Act for the Better Organization of the Marine Corps in 1834, stipulating that the Corps was part of the Department of the Navy as a sister service to the Navy. This would be the first of many times that the existence of the Corps was challenged.

The Marine Corps’ counterpart under the Department of the Navy is the United States Navy. As a result, the Navy and Marine Corps have a close relationship, more so than with other branches of the military. Whitepapers and promotional literature have commonly used the phrase “Navy-Marine Corps Team”, or refer to “the Naval Service”. Both the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and Commandant of the Marine Corps report directly to the Secretary of the Navy.

Cooperation between the two services really begins with the training and instruction of Marines. The Corps receives a significant portion of its officers from the United States Naval Academy and Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC). NROTC staff includes Marine instructors, while Marine drill instructors contribute to training of officers in the Navy’s Officer Candidate School. Marine aviators are trained in the Naval Aviation training pipeline and are winged as Naval Aviators.

Training alongside each other is viewed as critical, as the Navy provides transport, logistical, and combat support to put Marine units into the fight, for example, the Maritime Prepositioning ships and naval gunfire support. Most Marine aviation assets ultimately derive from the Navy, with regard to acquisition, funding, and testing, and Navy aircraft carriers typically deploy with a Marine squadron alongside Navy squadrons. Marines do not recruit or train noncombatants such as chaplains or medical/dental personnel; naval personnel fill these roles. Some of these sailors, particularly Hospital Corpsmen and Religious Programs Specialists, generally wear Marine uniforms emblazoned with Navy insignia. Conversely, the Marine Corps is responsible for conducting land operations to support naval campaigns, including the seizure of naval and air bases. Both services operate a network security team in conjunction.

Like the Royal Navy, throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, Marine detachments served aboard Navy cruisers, battleships and carriers. Marine detachments (generally one platoon per cruiser, a company for battleships or carriers) served their traditional duties as ship’s landing force, manning the ship’s weapons and providing shipboard security. Marine detachments were augmented by members of the ship’s company for landing parties, such as in the
First Sumatran Expedition of 1832, and continuing in the Caribbean and Mexican campaigns of the early 20th centuries. Marines would develop tactics and techniques of amphibious assault on defended coastlines in time for use in World War II. During World War II, Marines continued to serve on capital ships. They often were assigned to man anti-aircraft batteries. When gun cruisers were retired by the 1960s, the remaining Marine detachments were only seen on battleships and carriers. Its original mission of providing shipboard security finally ended in the 1990s when nuclear weapons were withdrawn from active deployment and the battleships were retired.

Over the years, the mission of the Marine Corps has evolved with changing military doctrine and American foreign policy. The Marine Corps has served in every American armed conflict and attained prominence in the 20th century when its theories and practices of amphibious warfare formed the cornerstone of the Pacific campaign of World War II. By the mid-20th century, the Marine Corps had become the dominant theorist and practitioner of amphibious warfare. Its ability to rapidly respond on short notice to expeditionary crises gives it a strong role in the implementation and execution of American foreign policy.

Aboard USS Iowa, we remember the Marine Detachment as they carried on the shipboard traditions that date back to their honored beginnings. Although they are no longer needed to protect the officers from mutineers, they did man the secondary battery, protect the ship and her weapons, and were ready when called for as an arm of power projection from the sea.

**Medal of Honor**

**Patrick Francis Bresnahan**

Patrick Francis Bresnahan was a watertender serving in the United States Navy who received the Medal of Honor for bravery. He was born May 1, 1872 in Peabody, Massachusetts and later joined the navy. He was stationed aboard the USS Iowa (BB-4) as a watertender. On January 25, 1905 a boiler plate blew out from boiler D. For his actions during the explosion he received the medal March 20, 1905.

He died January 29, 1940 and is buried in Saint Marys Cemetery Salem, Massachusetts.

Citation:

Serving on board the U.S.S. Iowa for extraordinary heroism at the time of the blowing out of the manhole plate of boiler D on board that vessel, 25 January 1905.
The Mail Buoy
By Brad Goforth

The Navy has its traditions, but the sea has others. Anyone who has plied the world’s oceans has stories of the experiences they share that relate the inventive things sailors have come up with to pass the hours spent watching the waves go by. Not all the time is spent on watch. Not all the time is spent conducting ship’s business – performing maintenance, preparing meals, cleaning and otherwise keeping the ship afloat. For those hours with little to do (although most senior officers would gladly provide something) a sailor’s mind turns to other things – usually something to get a laugh and mostly pranks they can pull on others.

One of the oldest sea traditions involves a mail buoy. As you all know, the mail buoy was devised by the US Postal Service as a means to get mail to ships at sea. The idea was to drop the buoy into the water by plane or ship along the ship’s transit route. The ship would set a watch and when seen, the ship would hook the buoy and bring it aboard.

When the watch was set, it was usually manned by the greenest new seaman (they were expendable in case the buoy dragged them under the ship). The seaman was positioned on the bow of the ship wearing such items as a life preserver, helmet, binoculars, a flashlight (for signaling at night), a set of sound powered phones and a long boat hook or grappling hook. There was a piece of line fastened to the life preserver running back to an eye somewhere on the deck (green seamen sometimes didn’t have the greatest balance, or a rogue wave might wash the seaman overboard). That way if lost overboard, the line would prevent him from tangling in the ship’s screws. There was also hope that the binoculars would be recovered.

The watch stander was given the orders to watch out for a red-white-and blue painted buoy. There would be a bell on or in it, and at night there would be a green light on it. Once seen, the watch would call out on the phones that the mail buoy was in sight, point towards it, and help lead the bridge crew to it for recovery. At night the watch would also flash the red tinted flashlight toward the bridge to get their attention. Only when the buoy was recovered would the watch be relieved. In many cases, several seamen were stationed on the ship to keep watch just in case the bow watch missed it.

In some cases a seaman might stand for hours before it dawned on him that the idea of a “mail buoy” didn’t really make sense. Of course, the more salty crewmen were enjoying every minute of it. Once the “watch” came to his or her senses, they became eager to assign that watch to someone else in the future.

This brings me to 1974, when assigned to USS Midway on a Midshipman cruise. One of the department heads, Andy, decided that it would be good for the crew of 10 midshipmen to stand a mail buoy watch. It didn’t matter that we all knew better. “You need to learn to follow orders without question,” he said. I was one of two assigned duty on the bow of the carrier. The watch started at midnight.

After getting our assignments we met together in our berthing space. From there, we hatched a diabolical plan to make the whole evolution worth our while. First, we went to the HT shop and got them to give us a 35 gallon oil drum which was sealed on the bottom and had a removable top. Onto this top we had them weld a bracket where we attached a small bell. Once done, we took the barrel and painted it red, white and blue on the outside. The ship’s post office provided a US Postal Service sticker which was attached to the side. They also gave us a canvas mail bag. We spent the whole afternoon writing letters to “Andy” and sticking them in the...
bag. It was later sealed with a Postal Service seal and placed inside the barrel. Some green chemical lights were obtained from 1st Division and tied to the top. The whole thing was then taken to the boat deck to wait for midnight.

It was a dark night with no moon. Five of us had the first watch. Two were on the bow, one on the signal bridge, one on the aft lookout and one on the boat deck. By now, all the Bosn’s Mates were in on it. Here I was in khakis, with the life jacket, binoculars, flashlight, boat hook, and helmet. There was no line holding me on the ship since the fall would probably kill me anyway. The sound powered phones were hooked up, but we found that the only people on the circuit were the mail buoy watch standers.

At 0015, the guy on the boat deck was doused with seawater. On the bow, both of us began flashing our flashlights towards the bridge indicating we saw something. “Andy,” who was on watch on the bridge, ignored us – but not for long. The boat deck watch grabbed one of the boat crew and they carried the 35 gallon “Mail Buoy” from the ship’s boat deck on the port side, up the six levels to just outside the bridge. There, they removed the top, unfastened the clapper on the bell, and gently locked the top back on the buoy. Stepping down to the flight deck, another bucket of seawater was thrown onto the boat deck watch stander, who returned to the bridge, saluted, and asked to secure the mail buoy watch.

At this point, Andy asked if the buoy was aboard. “Yes, sir,” came the reply. Then Andy made the mistake of having him bring the buoy onto the bridge. He tasked the Boatswain’s Mate of the Watch to help bring it in. You can’t imagine the look on the face of the guy when he lays eyes on a red, white and blue barrel with Postal Service markings, and a green light glowing on the top. The smile got even bigger when the two men picked it up and the bell started clanging loudly on the inside. The thing made a racket until finally being deposited on the bridge - to the snickers of all the enlisted watch standers.

Andy was about to question the watch’s heritage when the Captain – woken from a sound sleep by the buoy - entered the bridge. Looking around, he immediately saw the mail buoy and a midshipman who looked like a drowned rat. Without missing a beat, he said, “I see you got the mail buoy this evening.”

The Captain dismissed the buoy watch then opened the buoy. Seeing a mail bag inside, he opened it. “Seems like all these are addressed to you,” he said to Andy. As the watch left the bridge he heard the Captain say to Andy, “You did this, so I guess you need to clean it up,” as he pointed to the buoy.

That buoy stayed with the ship the rest of the cruise. I understand it was kept long after that. So if you are ever in San Diego and go aboard USS Midway, take a look around. Sitting in some corner of the deck you may just see a genuine Mail Buoy.
The Impact of Captain J. J. Chernesky, USN,
By Dave Chambers

I had a lot of Executive Officer’s during my Naval career. I had some great ones, but there was only one Captain Chernesky, and he made a profound effect on me and the way I served our country after I had the honor of serving with him.

My first meeting with the XO was as a First Class Petty Officer just reporting onboard IOWA. He had all of the newly arrived Sailors in his cabin to welcome us aboard and to let us know of his expectations of his crew. It is a meeting I will never forget.

As he sat in his chair in his cabin with the Darth Vader helmet mount on the door, we were all instructed to enter and have a seat or stand, whichever we preferred. I stood as the message that I got was not to get too comfortable. He began telling us that we were so lucky to be onboard the greatest ship in the Navy and it was our job to work hard, keep her clean, and love her. Then, he told us that we were to be professional at all times and to wear our uniforms clean and proud every day.

I was the senior enlisted in his cabin at the time and most of the new arrivals were either Sailors right out of boot camp or “A” School. There were also three or four young Marines that had just reported to the Marine Detachment. Captain Chernesky spoke with such great authority although he was leaning back relaxing in his chair with his infamous large cigar in the corner of his mouth. It was not lit although it had been half smoked, but it looked as though it was attached to his face and when he spoke, it was as if the cigar wasn’t even there.

He began telling us what a giving guy he was and that his cabin and desk were always unlocked, and feel free to come take whatever we wanted out of there. He looked at me with a slight grin as the others were shocked that he would let anyone take anything they desired. Then, he stated that he hated thieves and he then retrieved his .45 from his desk drawer and sat it on the top of the desk. After that, he welcomed us aboard again and dismissed us.

Below is an interview I conducted with a Lieutenant Commander that was onboard IOWA with Captain Chernesky. Read it and see if you can figure out who this officer was at the time. Obviously, he was not Jimmy Woods.

CAPTAIN JOHN JOSEPH CHERNESKY, JR, XO, SAILOR, FRIEND, A SEA STORY by Jimmy Woods

There is a line in Kevin Costner’s movie where Doc Holiday is asked why he could possibly like that mean SOB Wyatt Earp. Doc replies: “He is my friend and I don’t have many friends and he was my friend when I needed him!” I guess you could sum up my relationship with Captain Chernesky the same way, he was my friend, regardless, and at a time when I did not have many friends at all; I could turn to Captain Chernesky and he would listen.

Captain Chernesky loved Sailors, and I was a Sailor; what more can I say... and he, himself was an amazing Sailor! I also recognized that no matter how mad he was at you, no matter what you did, he was tolerant and always allowed you to recover from your mistakes...he was vulnerable and knew all
Sailors make mistakes! I first met Captain Chernesky in 1985 and was called into his cabin where he pushed a letter across his desk and asked me to look at the return address. I did so and noted that it was from my former XO of my former ship. Captain Chernesky then grilled me about my former XO and asked if I thought my former XO was tough and I said, “Yes.” He proceeded to flip a switch in his room and the TV came on and the movie Dirty Harry was playing in the background and the scene was Clint Eastwood standing over a perp saying “Do you feel lucky, well do you punk!” Without ever looking at the screen Captain Chernesky said the same words in unison while looking at me and then yelled “Well do you punk!” I smiled and he said, Oh you think this is funny and he proceeded to take out a Bull Whip and snapped it in the space between his office and his stateroom and then he laid out a 440 magnum on the table ... and yelled “How about now Punk!” Once again I smiled and he asked me if my former XO could even light a candle and be as mean as he was or if my former XO could chew ass as good as he could and I said: “Captain Chernesky, when you are second best, you just need to try harder!” He then picked up one of those old round brown glass ashtrays full of cigar butts and threw it at me and yelled “Get out and stay out!” I later found out that he brought the bullwhip and 440 magnum to XOI with him for effect!!! I also decided that what some people called being chewed out, I simply considered that Captain Chernesky was not only entertaining himself but me as well and I rather enjoyed it because you never knew what he was going to do!

I had no sooner gotten out of his office and was heading aft when over the 1MC came those infamous words with the four digits of his phone: “LCDR Woods 7095” I found a phone not knowing at the time that it was his number and I dialed it and he yelled “Get in here punk!” ...and I said “Who is this?” He laughed and said, the XO, so I turned and returned to his cabin and said Yes Sir and he proceeded to chew me out for not cleaning up the mess in his office for which I told him that he made it, he could clean it up and I left. Once again, before I got down the passageway, over the 1MC came LCDR Woods, 7095! When I returned, he was leaning back listening to the four tenors and asked me to sit down and tell him about myself! This started a wonderful relationship where we became close personal friends. We swapped sea stories for about an hour and then he told me once again to “Get out and stay out!” I have just given you my first impression of Captain Chernesky and it is a story and as a Sailor, I love stories...so did Captain Chernesky and you know what they say about Sailors and their stories....”

The next morning I walked into my new office and there was the Command Master Chief, BMCM Bobby Scott! BMCM Bobby Scott already had 40 years of active duty...he was holding “school” on about twelve Sailors, all White Hats ranging from Seaman Apprentice to Petty Officer First Class! He took one look at me and said, Oh My God... you Sailors are in for it now, you best put in for a transfer now because there stands the meanest Son of a Bitch that walks the face of the earth in the entire U.S. Navy...it’s true and that’s what they’ve been calling him since we served together in Vietnam...he then pointed to a Bronze Star on his chest and said “you see this Bronze Star, I got that Bronze star by saving that son of a bitch’s life in Vietnam...”there we were on PBR’s in a God-Awful firefight and that SOB got hit and was in the water face down; I dove in swam through the burning oil and fire on the water, grabbed that SOB and brought him to shore and saved his life and then got chewed out by my CO for saving him because he was so mean...” Master Chief Scott then told the Sailors to get out of the office as he wanted to talk with me! The Sailors left and I turned to Master Chief Scott whom I had not seen in 18 years and said Master Chief, the way I remember that story is that it was not you that saved my life, but a Gunner’s Mate Chief, you were nowhere around and he looked at me and said: “Son, Never Let the Facts Get in the Way of a Good Story!” I smiled, we hugged and shook hands and he welcomed me aboard and he asked me if I met the XO, Captain Chernesky for
which I said “Last night!” He said I would get along fine with the XO because the XO was the only one on the ship as mean as I was and he walked out laughing and muttering to himself, “boy are we in for it now”...little did he know that every time one of my Sailors got in trouble or did not get named the Sailor of the month, that I would personally chew out Master Chief Scott. It got to the point, where he would barely open the door to my office and whisper either to one of the Sailors and ask if I was there, because he did not want to get chewed out. I did not have that luxury as the 1MC would sound again: LCDR Woods, 7095! The Sailors started keeping a log in the office with marks on it for the number of times I would get called into see Captain Chernesky...once, it was 14 times in a four hour period. I laughed until almost immediately, over the 1MC came those chilling words “LCDR Woods, 7095!”

My first week there, Captain Chernesky said he had heard I played racquetball and he directed that I get us a reservation to play. He did not ask if I had other plans; it wouldn’t have mattered as I would have simply canceled them as he wanted to play racquetball and I saw my job as keeping him happy. So, I said Yes Sir and came back with a reservation at 1500 for which he chewed me out and said we would still be at work, so I came back with one at 1600 and he threw a stack of papers at me, so I came back and said I have a reservation at 2100, the gym closes at 2200 and he said “Perfect time!” We got to the court and he walked in, no warm up, went to the server’s box and slammed a shot past me and said that is One/Nothing! ...and I said we hadn’t warmed up or lobbed for serve and he slammed another past me and said Two/Nothing! Then he said, “what’s the bet?” I said you name it and he slammed another past me and said Three/Nothing! He then said a Case of Scotch and he slammed another but I caught the ball and said Five/Nothing and I asked what happened to Four and he slammed his serve past me and said “Your parking spot is mine!” and he said: “That’s just the first game, it is always two out of three” and he slammed his serve past me and said One/Nothing. Then I beat him Fifteen/One. We left the gym in separate cars...we both lived on the ship from Sunday night through Saturday morning...he would drive home to Virginia Beach on Saturday afternoons and I would drive home to Northern Virginia. When we got to the pier, I drove onto the pier and parked my car in his space; he parked in Fleet Parking. The next morning at Officer’s Call, the OPS-O asked who won the racquetball match and Captain Chernesky told him to shut-up with a few descriptive adjectives before the ‘shut-up’! The OPS-O then asked me and I told him just to look and see who was parked on the pier! However, once again came those immortal words “LCDR Woods 7095” and I proceeded to his state-room where he told me I was not allowed to discuss the racquetball game with anyone!

During that first week, I noticed everyday that there were a line of officers and Chiefs outside his door starting around 1600 and he would just keep them waiting. One of the officers in line worked for me and I asked him what he was doing and he said he was waiting to check out with the XO. I told him he worked for me and to get the hell off the ship. I then came to find out that all my officers and Chiefs had to check out personally with the XO every day...since Captain Chernesky lived on the ship he took his time seeing them. The next day he sent for one of my officers that I had secured early and I went to see the XO and asked him what he needed and he chewed me out because that officer was gone and had not checked out with him. I told him my people no longer had to check out with him; they worked for me, not him and they would check out with me and if I could not do what he wanted them for, then he could fire me. So, he said “you’re fired! now get out and stay out!” Twenty minutes later: “LCDR Woods,
7095!” I did not call him, so five minutes later “LCDR Woods, 7095” I still did not call! Then “LCDR Woods, XO’s Cabin Now” I did not go! Soon, he came down to my office and just started yelling up a storm and I turned and said: “What we have here is failure to communicate (a quote from Cool Hand Luke) and then said I can’t hear you because I am not here...you fired me!” He immediately said “You’re hired and started chewing me out again!” When he left I could hear him laughing all the way down the passageway!

In the first few weeks I was there, these were the things that stood out most: 1) he was death on anyone wearing khaki that did not know their whitehats; you could be the most senior officer or the most junior Chief, but once you put on that khaki or reported wearing khaki, you better know everything there was to know about your junior Sailors and I mean everything and God help you if he knew something about one of your whitehats that you did not know and never let it come out at XOI; 2) he was very generous with praise for his whitehats and very critical of khaki leading whitehats; 3) if you made Chief while onboard Iowa you better immediately know everything there was to know about whitehats; 4) don’t ever come to him with a problem without a solution or a recommended solution...if you brought him a problem without a process of improving the situation, you were done for and he would take over the problem himself until someone else came forward and said they would do it; 5) he loved to hear sea stories at XOI and he would usually laugh out loud at the excuses Sailors came up with and say “Does this look like the face of an idiot”...then he would pause for affect and then say: “...don’t answer that!” 6) When refueling alongside, he would train the 16 inch guns on the ship providing the fuel and sometimes he would throw Frisbees from bridge to bridge; 7) he had a constant cigar in his mouth; in fact he is the only person I have ever known that had his picture for his ID card taken with a cigar in his mouth; 8) he loved his liberty in foreign ports, not so much in Tidewater, except occasionally ... 9) he worked harder and longer hours than any one person I ever met; he was extremely demanding on himself and his duty preference card said he would take any job that demanded 20 hour working days, seven days a week; and I learned 10) that with Captain John Chernesky, “perfection was barely satisfactory!”

One evening prior to getting underway for Central and South America, Captain Chernesky was asked to host a visiting Flag Officer. He toured the Flag Officer around Battleship Iowa and then they went to dinner, but prior to came: “LCDR Woods, 7095”, he knew I lived on the ship so he told me I was going to dinner and to bring along another officer...I immediately brought the Ship’s Bosun, who along with BMCM T.C. Oneyear was one of the many former Vietnam Sailors I knew that claimed to have saved my life...there were at least a dozen to do so and they each had a competing story up to the point that even Captain Chernesky claimed to have saved my life...it simply became a one upsmanship for sea stories. So, Captain Chernesky, the Flag Officer and the two of us headed out to dinner. When the dinner was over the Flag Officer looked at the Ship’s Bosun and asked if he had plans for the rest of the night and he said “Sir, I am a Bosun, I am going out to drink and chase women...” for which he looked at me and asked the same question for which I gave the same reply and he looked at Captain Chernesky and asked him and Captain Chernesky simply said “I’m with them!” The Flag Officer asked if he could tag along.

Our first port visit was Limon Moin, Costa Rica and when we got underway from Costa Rica, we had to call the CO’s Gig to come pick him, myself and the Ship’s Bosun up on the beach to get back to the ship. Captain Chernesky said over the 1MC, “Shipmates, Sailors, in lieu of a liberty incident free port visit, our first day underway will be holiday routine”...then came “LCDR Woods, 7095”. I went to his stateroom where he had written out the underway watch bill, I had the first watch and the Ship’s Bosun had the second watch and we relieved each other for
the next 24 hours! Captain Chernesky after handing me the watch bill told me to “get out and stay out!” he then closed the door, locked it and did not open it for 24 hours.

Shortly after we got underway for Northern Europe, the ship received a SPECAT Exclusive Eyes Only message for which Captain Chernesky was the subject...it seems our TYCOM was not to happy that we had left five guys behind that had popped positive for marijuana and prior to sending them to the TPU, Captain Chernesky had each of them sign a page 13 warning statement...it seems the TYCOM’s JAG felt Captain Chernesky interfered with due process. Rather than keep the message quiet as one would think of a Eyes Only message, Captain Chernesky on the 1MC announced an All Officers Meeting in the Wardroom where he read the message to the entire wardroom word for word. He then did the same to the Chief’s Mess and the Enlisted Mess. He wanted to publicly hold himself accountable for his own actions...he never pointed the finger except at himself.

Once I had close to a dozen Sailors brought back to the ship for fighting with an equal number of Theodore Roosevelt Sailors. Captain Chernesky wanted them at Mast that very same day...I did some digging...Battleship Iowa’s motto was “The Big Stick is Back”; Theodore Roosevelt’s motto was “The Big Stick”...so Sailors of the middle 80’s did what Sailors did in those days, they fought each other. At XO, Captain Chernesky started yelling at the khaki only for not controlling their Sailors and said they were all going to NJP and I simply said “No Sir, they are not!” He looked at me and I could see the veins popping on his neck and I said, “how can you take these Sailors to mast for defending your honor!” He blew up and said “What” and I told him the Sailors were fighting on who had the better ship and when the TR Sailors started talking about Iowa’s XO, Captain Chernesky, the TR Sailors had taken it too far and the Iowa Sailors settled the matter as to who was “The Big Stick” and which ship had the “better XO”? You could see the blood drain out of his face and he yelled “is that true?” I said, “Sir, you would not believe what they said about you and they were defending your honor...” and I just let it hang there, and he looked back at them and said: “Dismissed, now get out and stay out!” When it was just the two of us left; he lit a cigar and he once again asked “So, what did they say about me?” ...and I said “I don’t know, I made that up because I would never let the facts get in the way of a good story!” He just started laughing and then he paid a call on the TR and the matter was settled and he and the TR XO became pretty good friends!

...and then it was off to Northern Europe and for some reason when Battleship Iowa was getting underway from Aarhus, Demark, one of my Sailors and myself missed ship’s movement and we did not catch up with the ship for another seven days. When we did, we immediately went to see Captain Chernesky; the ship was only in for refueling and would be getting underway again and liberty was not authorized for anyone. I knew I had to think quick and come up with a sea story that would lighten the crime and lighten Captain Chernesky’s mood. We both immediately went to his stateroom and before he said a word I simply said: “I can explain!” I then talked about Sailors and when Sailors are in trouble, the Senior Sailor is responsible and a good Sailor “leaves no one behind” and I knew that I had to find my Sailor and get him back to the ship and out of harm and by the time I did so, the ship was gone...it was a long story made up on the spot. Captain Chernesky took out another cigar, lit it from the remainder of the one he was already smoking, blew his smoke right into my face and then looked at the Sailor who just happened to be the Sailor of the Year and simply asked him, “so, what’s your story?” The Sailor looked at Captain Chernesky and said: “Sir, a junior Sailor does not question his senior Sailor, I was just following orders!” We did not know what was going to happen so I said, sir, I know we are getting underway, but “could we please go on liberty
and not get underway with the ship” and that is when he blew up and started yelling unbelievably and then said: “Get out and stay out!” We turned to walk away, and then he stopped us and said why do you want off the ship and I said “well Sir, you see my Sailor has met a very nice young lady and he said he would see her tonight and I want to make sure he gets back OK!” Captain Chernesky just shook his head, laughed and then said, “I have a guy waiting a Summary Court Martial...if you can do the Summary Court and have it completed and done before we get underway, then you both can go on liberty...” I said “Yes Sir!” Well, I changed into uniform, convened the Summary Court and had it finished in 1/2 hour start to finish and reported back to Captain Chernesky in civilian clothes and requested liberty! He laughed, picked up the phone and had the bridge call: “First Lieutenant, 7095” The First Lieutenant called immediately and Captain Chernesky ordered him to put a boat in the water because he had two Sailors going ashore! We were out of there and once again we did not see the ship until the ship pulled into Kiel, Germany.

After Northern Europe, Battleship Iowa failed an inport fire drill and we had just won the Battenburg Cup as the best ship in the Fleet, so Captain Chernesky blew up. He called an All Officer’s Meeting, a meeting in the Chiefs and Enlisted Mess and then he went on the 1MC. We failed because a Division Officer had approved a standby watch for another Sailor and the Sailor that assumed the watch was not qualified. So, Captain Chernesky said that from now on only he could “approve a standby request for a change of watches” and he alone. He then said not to even have any Sailor bother putting a request in because if it got to him, he would light up the LCPO, the DIVO and the Department Head for that Sailor even putting in the chit. He continued to go off over and over again and did not let up. So, what happens, the very next morning a Fireman put in a request for a standby watch and it was routed up the chain of command to the XO. The chit was disapproved by the LCPO, DIVO and Department Head and each and everyone in the chain had written down that “this is not an emergency!” The chit came to my office to take into the XO; I read the chit and the letter attached to it for the Sailor’s request. My Chief read the chit, started laughing and started calling this Sailor a stupid SOB. I asked him to hand me the chit before it went to Captain Chernesky; I smiled, handed it back to the Chief and said I would bet him $50.00 that Captain Chernesky would approve it because I, for one, considered his request an emergency. We both took out $50.00 and handed it to the first class to hold and then I let the Chief walk the chit into the XO’s cabin; I went with him so the Chief could see that I did not call Captain Chernesky beforehand. The Chief handed Captain Chernesky the chit, started laughing and said XO, you are not going to believe this, but I have a chit for a Sailor requesting a standby. The XO blew a gasket, grabbed the chit, got ready to sign it, then looked at the memo attached explaining the reason. The Sailor told the XO he knew the policy, but had met a young lady in Copenhagen, Denmark, and he just found out that she was flying into Norfolk that very day and if he was not there to meet her, she would be all on her own. He went on to explain that he loved her, missed her and needed to be there because the USA was foreign to her. The XO, put the chit aside, took out an XO memo pad and wrote a note to the Chief Engineer which said: “CHENG, this is a blank, blank, blank, emergency...approved!” He then handed the chit back to the Chief who was in shock and the first class gave me the hundred bucks he was holding; the Chief asked me “how in the hell did you know he would approve that chit?!” “Simple”, I said, “Captain Chernesky is a Sailor who loves a love story!” Then came “LCDR Woods, 7095”...he told me he wanted to meet this young lady. So, the Sailor got off, he
picked her up and brought her to the ship and Captain Chernesky hosted her for lunch and gave her a tour of Battleship Iowa and told the Sailor he had made a wise choice and to take a 96 hour liberty! As we stood on the brow watching the Fireman and the young lady depart; Captain Chernesky put his arm around my shoulder and said: “I love it when a plan comes together!” You see, I understood Captain Chernesky!

Now, it was time for Captain Chernesky to transfer and he assembled the Wardroom, then the Chiefs Mess and then the enlisted Mess and he thanked his Sailors for their support and he then directed them that he would have no going away party, no farewell, no send off and no gifts and if anyone tried he would take them to Mast. So on the day he left the ship, he worked until 2130 until he figured the only ones left on the ship were the duty section. He went to the quarterdeck and requested permission to go ashore and they sounded four bells and said, Captain, U.S. Navy Departing; he saluted and started walking down the brow and I yelled as loud as I could: “Get Out and Stay Out!” He stutter stepped, stopped took out a cigar and lit it, never turned around, got in his car and drove off. One hour later, my phone rang in my office and it was Captain Chernesky, he said that when his son was unpacking his car he found a rather large gift and he asked what he was supposed to do with it and asked if I knew where it came from; I told him to read the back and engraved on the gift were these words: “Captain Chernesky, 7095, Get Out and Stay Out!” He said “Thank you!” and hung up. This was not the end of our friendship; he left for Office of Legislative Affairs and I stayed on the ship for another year and then transferred to D.C. myself. Shortly after my arrival, I had to have extensive stomach surgery and he found out about it and called me right into the ICU where they connected me and he told me that the surgery would be a piece of cake and not to worry about it and I asked him “why is that?” and he said, “because bad things only happen to good people!” We laughed and then he called me in recovery and he gloated.

Captain Chernesky went on to be the CO of Battleship Missouri and he called me on the day of his change of command from Hawaii at 0400 in the A.M. and said: “This is your wakeup call!” We remained friends, kept in touch right up to his retirement. Some of you may remember when Cher sang the song “If I Could Turn Back Time” from the Turret on Battleship Missouri and for some reason it raised eyebrows even though it had been approved by CHINFO. So, at his departing change of command, he got up to introduce his guest speaker whom I do not remember, but he started by saying: “Cher was my first choice to be my guest speaker but she couldn’t find a thing to wear!” The Sailors loved him.

Captain Chernesky eventually moved to New York and we continued to stay in touch. His lovely wife called me to let me know “John has cancer and is being prepped for surgery and he asked me to call you!” I got on the phone with him and we talked and I told him he had nothing to worry about and he asked why? And I said the same thing: “bad things only happen to good people! He laughed and then when the surgery was over, he actually called me from the recovery room in ICU and he said: “Guess what I’m doing?” ...I said you are smoking a cigar! He just laughed and laughed. Later I invited him to my change of command when I assumed Major Command. He called that night and said he couldn’t make it but wondered how many IG complaints I had against me since assuming command about 12 hours earlier; when I told him, “only three”, he said “you’re slipping!” We talked for about 1/2 hour and he said he would talk to me the next day. The next day I received a call from his wife telling me that John had passed during the night. He had a wonderful ceremony at Arlington.
where his son gave a terrific eulogy and talked about John the human being that simply loved life and loved people, Sailors and those that are less fortunate than others. The program for his ceremony had a picture of him when he was a Lieutenant with a cigar in his mouth and he was laughing at us all! I wish I could turn back time, but I know I will see John again someday, I am just not sure when I see him if it will be in the light or if I will see flames! I miss my friend; I think of him daily and I always ask myself when making decisions: What would Captain John Joseph Chernesky, Junior do!!!

Always remember: “SAILORS NEVER LET THE FACTS GET IN THE WAY OF A GOOD STORY!”

Celebrities in the Navy
Wayne Morris

Wayne Morris was a Hollywood actor. While filming Flight Angels (1940), Morris got interested in flying and became a pilot. Morris was one of the first Hollywood actors to enter the service. After Pearl Harbor, he was commissioned in the Naval Reserve and became a Navy flier in 1942, leaving his film career behind for the duration of the war. Following flight training and a year as an instructor, Morris was considered by the Navy as physically ‘too big’ to fly fighters. After being turned down several times as a fighter pilot, he went to his brother in law, Cdr. David McCampbell, imploring him for the chance to fly fighters. Cdr. McCampbell said “Give me a letter”. That’s how he became a fighter pilot. Morris was thrust immediately in the Pacific air war, assigned to VF-15 aboard the carrier USS Essex flying the Grumman F-6F Hellcat.

He would go on to fly 57 missions, shooting down seven Japanese aircraft, and contributing to the sinking of five ships, making him one of the noted American aces of the war. Lt. Morris claimed his first victory on June 11, 1944, when he downed a Mavis four-engine flying boat, and on June 20, he was credited with probably destroying a Zero. Three days later, he got a confirmed Zero during the great Marianas Turkey Shoot. In September, he shot down a Topsy and a Zero over the Philippines.

He was awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses four times and the Air Medal three times. Of the 57 missions he flew, three of his Hellcats were so full of holes when he returned to his carrier, they were rendered “unfit for duty” and dumped overboard. Wayne Morris’ tragic death on September 14, 1959 at the age of 45 was a bizarre and ironic one. While visiting his old wartime commander and watching aerial maneuvers on the bridge of the carrier USS Bon Homme Richard, he suffered a heart attack and collapsed. He was pronounced dead after being transported to Oakland Naval Hospital in Oakland, California. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. His younger brother, Richard, a B-17 pilot shot down during WWII, also reposes at Arlington.

Tally Record: 7 confirmed
Decorations: Distinguished Flying Cross with 3 gold stars, Air Medal with 2 gold stars
Letter from the Editor

Thanks for all the emails about our newsletter. I’m glad you are enjoying it. There is so much history surrounding our ship it is fun to look back and see her from many different sets of eyes. There are a lot of interesting things coming up concerning our ship. In particular, there are stories about the people who built and sailed on her. This edition is about several interesting crewmembers who brought their own personality and expertise to add to the “spirit” of the Iowa.

Once again I ask your help. Who knows better about things that happened aboard our ship or her sisters than you? If you remember some special time or person, write it down and send it in. Emails are great! You are a part of history and that history you hold deserves telling. Even something like story about sending someone for a “BT Punch” is great to share. No matter what, it may spark something in your shipmates or family that reminds them of the ship or you. Just look upon me as your literary scuttlebutt.

Take the time. Write it down. Send it to me. I can massage it and do the edits to make the best story ever.

Send your works to:
Brad Goforth, 1200 Somersby Lane,
Matthews, NC  28105
or email it to: bgoforth@thesamaritanhouse.org

Without your help, we can’t make this letter happen! I look forward to reading about you.

Brad Goforth

Recognize this guy?

When was it taken?
Who are some of the others?
Send the identities to the editor at the email above. We’ll share unnamed photos periodically just to test your memories.

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