

Buddy Line

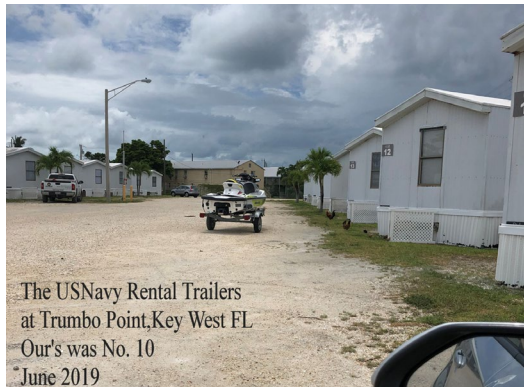


Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School, Key West, Florida

KEY WEST 2019



Key West FL June 2019
the Gate at entrance to the
USNaval Station



The USNavy Rental Trailers
at Trumbo Point, Key West FL
Our's was No. 10
* June 2019



Photos from Doc Riojas trip to Key West in June 2019

**Fraternal Order of
Underwater Swimmers
School Officers**



PRESIDENT:

Dave Byers

dabyers@uwss.org
386-295-9050

VICE PRESIDENT:

Dave Gholson

goatlocker@msn.com
(270) 945-0719

**SECRETARY/
TREASURER:**

Ken Recoy

kenrecoy@aol.com
(620) 305-9900
25810 East 330 Road
Chelsea, OK 74016-5262

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EDITORS:

Ray Hoglund

Raelyn Webster

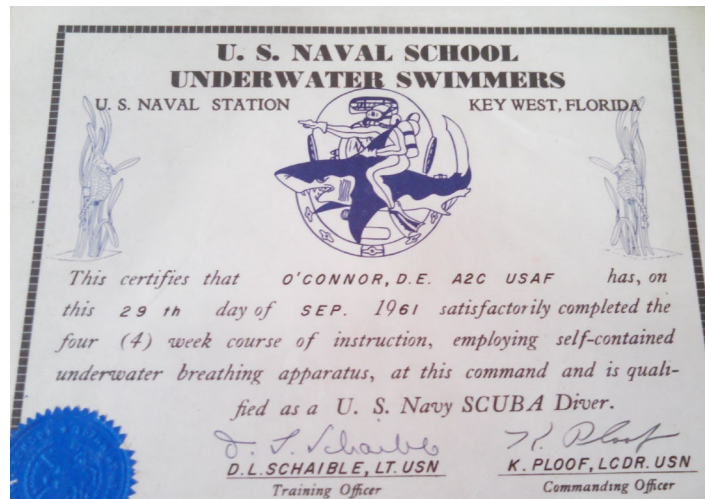
buddyline@uwss.org
(385) 222-9824
PO Box 593
Provo, UT 84603

WEBSITE:

Bob Bureker

navybob@q.com

www.uwss.org



*September 1961
sent by Delwyn O'Connor*



With our next reunion postponed again and again because of the Coronavirus, let's take another look at reunions past for reminders of good times to come.

The first reunion of U.S. Naval Underwater Swim School was held in Key West May 28, 1998, twenty-five years after the closing of the school. Eighty three former staff and students plus their guests attended the reunion.



Many of the reunion attendees toured the island to check out the changes twenty five years had brought. Some enjoyed a nostalgic ride on the Conch Tour Train



The best part of the reunion was connecting with old friends, and sitting around a table swapping stories about their experiences at the school.

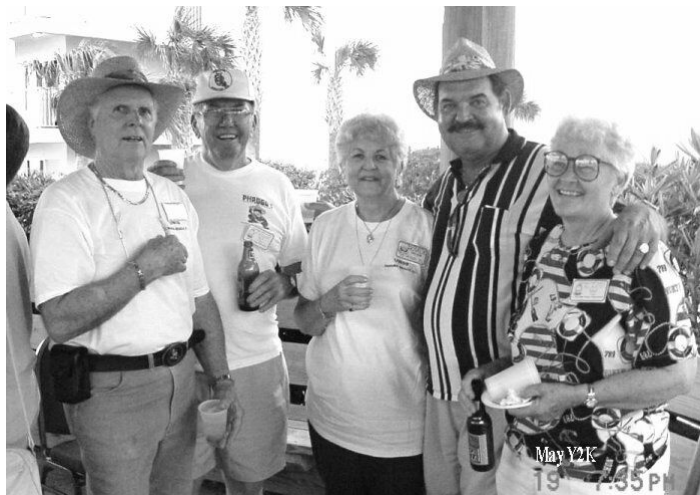


The second reunion of the former staff and students of US Navy Underwater Swimmers School was held at the Boardwalk Beach Resort Hotel in Panama City Beach, Florida, 19-21 May, 2000. A total of 49 people attended, including wives, friends and teammates in the Panama



City area.

The plankowners and their ladies



Activities got underway Friday afternoon with an Icebreaker on the beach.



Then the group got down to business. The “Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School” (UWSS) was established and officers were elected.

Don Stone was elected President, Andy Anderson was elected Vice President, and A Dee Clark was elected Secretary/Treasurer

Don and Art Stone volunteered to publish a quarterly newsletter to be called the Buddy Line.



Andy A Dee Don



Saturday night’s dinner featured guest speaker Retired Captain Ron Yeaw, UWSS graduate and former CO of UDT 21 and DEVGRU, who spoke about what the school meant to him and the UWSS staff’s contribution to the U.S. Navy. Several others related stories about people and experiences at UWSS.



The master of ceremonies, Bob "Doc" Clark, presented an award and gave special thanks to "Doc Rio", Erasmo Riojas, for his efforts and personal expense over the past two years to make this reunion happen.



Sunday morning included tours of the Diving School and the Experimental Diving Unit arranged and guided by Woody Woodward and Bob Barth.



(Continued from May 2020 BuddyLine)

Before leaving, Commander Roe let me know I had been promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR, and he offered his congratulations.

I had ten days leave before reporting to EOD School. Scott told me about a sunken barge off Clearwater, Florida and that he would take leave if I decided to dive the wreck. We drove together in my Thunderbird and rented a charter boat. The weather was beautiful so the captain had no trouble finding the barge in 75 feet of water. This was no easy dive. It required a 50-foot swim through the tiny fish schools hovering above the wreck. At 60 feet the barge came into full view exposing unbelievable marine life. Permits, barracudas, amberjacks, snappers, groupers, and many jewfish appeared at different levels with jewfish hugging the bottom. We shot so many groupers and snappers it no longer became a challenge. We then decided to free dive for a giant jewfish. Scott dove ahead of me and hit one about 200 pounds. I immediately fired my spear shaft through the fish. I kicked as hard as I could for the surface holding the gun between my legs with the huge fish on the end of the line. The fish came to life ten feet below the surface, quickly pulling me to the bottom. Why I didn't release the gun I'll never know, but it was too late. I was in deep trouble. I knew I didn't have enough air to make it to the surface, so I pulled the CO2 toggle on my inflatable UDT life jacket and swam up. I began to get dizzy then blacked out, yet I had awareness before convulsing and passing out completely. I



UWSS pals, Rudy is at the top right

woke up on the surface wondering where in the hell I was and what I was doing. Scott was on the surface looking down when I passed out and saw my head shaking violently. It was a close call. Later Scott donned a lung to retrieve the fish and gun. We shot four jewfish that day and donated them to the captain. To my knowledge the fish we speared would have been the largest ever caught by a free diver in that depth of water. After this dive, Scott and I parted with the understanding I'd be back in a year, hopefully to resume our diving adventures.

I checked into the EOD School located on the Potomac River at the Naval Powder Factory, Indian Head, Maryland. I reported to Lt. Bill Hamilton, the man responsible for me being there. He was a tall, handsome officer with a great sense of humor. He was a Navy fighter pilot as well as a UDT officer and currently the school's Administration Officer. He had heard about my UWSS performance from Commander Roe and was glad I made a



good showing. We developed an immediate friendship, which has lasted to this day. Bill has always been an officer and a gentleman and is in a class by himself. An Annapolis graduate class of 1949, Bill was intelligent, articulate, and extremely athletic. He was one of Navy's fastest free-style swimmers and considered a bear in the water. In short, Bill was a leader of men. I was also greeted by my friend Mickey Kappes, the other man responsible for me being there. Mickey was a month short of finishing the course and was studying bomb disposal at the time. At Kings Point, he founded the Academy's diving club, the Trident Club, becoming its first President. As an upper classman, Mickey introduced me to spearfishing. We spent countless weekends together in the waters around Long Island. Mickey initially volunteered for UDT, but had to leave training when his knees began to swell because of chronic cartilage damage. After a brief hated tour aboard a Navy ship, he asked and was accepted for EOD. We double dated the night he was supposed to report to EOD School. I told him the Navy wouldn't take kindly to an officer being AWOL (Absent Without Leave), but Mickey turned a deaf ear saying, "Don't worry, I'll give them a good excuse." Mickey reported to EOD School the following morning while Bill Hamilton was on duty. The best way to describe what happened is Bill Hamilton's description of the event. "Here was this young Ensign reporting two hours late. I asked him where he'd been and he fed me the most incredible line of bullshit I've ever heard. I knew this

guy needed watching and kept an eye on him from day one." No wonder Mickey told me not to mention his name when I called Hamilton to get into the program.

Initially, Navy students at the school were exposed to foreign and US underwater ordnance consisting of mines, depth charges, and torpedoes. We learned every characteristic of these weapons, including their arming, fusing, and render safe procedure. There were frequent exams which required constant study.

By the beginning of winter, 1957, we began instruction in hard hat and shallow water diving. The muddy Potomac River became our torture chamber. The deep sea rig wasn't too bad because the suit's air kept you insulated from the cold water. When you went under it was like someone painting the portholes of your Mark V helmet black. The suit weighed roughly 250 pounds causing you to sink six feet into the mud, unless you carefully controlled your buoyancy through a chin valve near your mouth. The heavy rubber gloves made delicate work underwater extremely difficult. We worked on different underwater projects using various tools. Performance was measured in time and how well the job was performed. Most of our instructors were old deep-sea divers who let it be known they hated SCUBA diving. I felt they held this attitude because most were old and too out of shape to swim without a constant flow of air across their nose.

(to be continued in the next BuddyLine)

FROM THE MAILBAG:



QUESTION TO UWSS:

I'm reading the recent Buddy Line about UWSS, and I'm a bit confused. One person said they did 4 weeks, another person did 5 weeks, etc.

When I went through UWSS in 1961-62, I swear we did 10 weeks, maybe 12, because the last two weeks were hard hat MK5.

Was it just people who were going on to EOD School, who had a longer schedule?

Thanks, I've got some good stories too. Maybe I'll send you a few, some day.

Dean Ab-Hugh
North Ridgeville, Ohio

What do you remember about how long training was at UWSS?

Send it to buddyline@uwss.org

ANSWERS:

Not sure you got an answer but I believe the basic scuba course lasted 4 weeks. If you were moving on to EOD/UDT, you stuck around longer for mixed gas training, etc.

Anyone else to confirm?
Dave Byers

In 1962 the basic SCUBA course was 20 training days

Dave Gholson

Large BZ.... A keeper 4 sure - Hart

Thank you for the video. Great memories too. After a night swim in July of 1971, I lost a contact lens on that beach. Still looking. Be safe.

Chip Harman

Me and 4 others were dragged up on that beach sucking for wind.

We were hit by tentacles of a Portugese Man O War. 40 foot long wrapped around us. Never saw the jellyfish

TJ Hodgins

Thanks for the memories!

Michael Murray

Definitely not the beach we used to come in on back in January/February of '64. Some use to come in inside the trash dump there just right of the harbor...we used to rob the lobster traps right off the beach about 200 yards...the chief at that time ran the scuba locker...he also was the one who made up the plaques for us to purchase and I still have mine. I also remember the comm bunker that was there on the beach, as I was stationed there during part of the Bay of Pigs event or was it during the Cuban crisis!!!

Larry Keen

FROM THE MAILBAG:



Terrific, Thank you. I remember as a 21 year old young man worrying about my 34 year old swim partner as we managed to come in first on an underwater swim, beating the USMC 1st Lt and his buddy. Instructor Cappaser(?) was very happy about that and never let the Lt (Hiram J Walker, the 3rd) forget it.

Stay Safe.
Cheers from Poulsbo, WA,
Red Charlie Morgan
(Graduating class of Mar 1961)



June 2019
Key West FL
LouLu and our
Godson/Nephew
Damien Rio Vasquez, son
of Lucia Tolentino Her
sister. They live about 4
blocks from our home.



from Doc Riojas:

We visited Key West June 2019. Stayed at Trumbo Point in a trailer fully equipped except for food of course. But they have a little store there. \$75.00 a day. The cheapest hotel in town: \$300.00 a day. There were two huge tourist ships in town. People running over each other except for the protected chickens. LOL We enjoyed and only wished we could have stayed longer.



**MEMBERSHIP JULY 31, 2020**

Members in Database = 290

Total Active Members = 238

Currently 41 Memberships expired
5/1/2020 ActiveCurrently 68 Memberships expired
5/1/2019 ActiveCurrently 21 Memberships expired
5/1/2017 InactiveCurrently 23 Memberships expired
5/1/2015 InactiveCurrently 8 Memberships expired
5/1/2013 Inactive

No Obituaries to report this Quarter.

We currently have 8 Hardship Cases
(brothers) we are helping. Donations
accepted.

New Members this Quarter = 2

BERNIE SIEBERT - Joined 6/9/2020:
USAF graduated UWSS May 1962DELWYN O'CONNOR - Joined
7/24/2020: POW in Vietnam for 9 days
near the end of the War. Served in both
the US Air Force ParaRescue and US
Army Green Beret, graduated UWSS
September 1961.**TREASURER'S REPORT**

Account Balance:

May 1, 2020 \$16,512.41

Dues Income + \$245.88

Label Fees Income + \$20.00

Logo Gear Sales Income + \$544.60

Other (reunion, etc.) Income + \$0.00

Reunion Expenses - \$0.00

Logo Gear Expenses - \$1,291.36

(coins, shirts, flashlights...)

BuddyLine Expenses - \$176.37

Business Expenses - \$173.93

(stamps, ink, envelopes...)

Account Balance:

July 31, 2020 \$15,681.23

Wonder if you are up to date on your
dues? Contact Ken at kenrecoy@aol.com
or 620-305-9900 and he will let you know.**UWSS SHIP STORE:**Check out all the UWSS Logo Gear
on the web sitewww.uwss.org/LogoGear.html



SECRETARY NOTES & UPDATES

1. If you are able to serve as the FO UWSS Chaplain, please let Dave Byers know.
2. Dave Gholson our Reunion Committee Chair, is working hard. Watch for updates.
3. Jim Houle is our Logo Gear Chair. You can order (and pay) by going to the UWSS Website or by sending an email to: kenrecoy@aol.com And you can also pay by check. My address is in this Buddyline and on our Website. Watch for upcoming Logo Gear Special Sales!
4. Please be sure to pay your "Label fees" if you intend to continue to receive your Buddyline by regular mail. Label Fees are \$5.00 per year. We currently have 26 members that receive their Buddyline by regular mail and for 13 of those, their Label Fees have expired.
5. Please check to make sure you have paid your Membership Dues. We currently have 41 Members that their Dues expired 5/1/2020. FO UWSS Dues remain at \$25.00 for 2 years.
6. UWSS Graduating Class pictures. If you do not see your Class picture on the FO UWSS Website, please send in a copy for the FO UWSS Archives.
7. If you have changed your address, phone number/s, or email address, please send me an update, so we can be sure to stay in contact for important news and updates.

8. So we may honor them, if you know of a UWSS brother that has passed, please let us know and send in a copy of the Obituary.

9. Important to reach out to your UWSS dive buddies and check on each other from time to time. Especially in this time of COVID 19, and none of us are getting any younger. It is always good to hear from a brother. Thumbs up!

Stay in touch. Stay safe. HooYah!

Ken Recoy, FO UWSS Secretary/Treasurer

620-305-9900 Cell (And text is ok).

UWSS Graduation Class March 1972.
US Submariner, Radioman & US Navy Diver.

www.uwss.org

REUNION UPDATE

The military is in such flux with Covid-19 that any plans before the spring of 2021 is not available.

I am hopeful that we can have our reunion at NSDC Panama City Beach or NAS Key West, FL in the spring of 2021, but it won't be until early in the year that we will know if that is possible. I encourage all members to go to the UWSS Facebook page (U S Naval Under Water Swimmers School) and vote their choice for a reunion location.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/682196168496022>

Dave Gholson

Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School
Buddy Line Newsletter
25810 East 330 Road
Chelsea, OK 74016-5262

*The Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School was formed
in order to keep lines of communication open between personnel of the armed forces
who were staff or students at the U.S. Naval Underwater Swimmers School
Key West, Florida from 1954 to 1973.
One of the most important reasons for our existence as an organized group
is to plan for and participate in biannual reunions.*

MISSION:

FO/UWSS

