

Buddy Line



The United States Underwater

Swimmers, Key West, Florida

Reunion 2023 Report



We Dive the World

Danny Mize

Hey, Underwater Swimmers (UWS)! I hope you all had a blast at our reunion in Key West. It was great to see fresh faces and catch up on old times. Here is a quick recap of what we did and what is next for our group.

Thursday afternoon we kicked off the reunion with a welcome speech from Our president, Dave. He thanked us for coming and reminded us of the importance of staying connected as we get older. The initial rally point was in the CPO Club for registration and a short social hour. The CPOs were exceptionally nice and welcoming to our group of members and guests. Not to mention the CPO Club was literally the coolest place on the island. I do believe if they had not been having a Dining-In while we were in Key West very few members would have adventured outside in the heat. Jim and Faeth Houle man the door reg-

istering members and their guest as they arrived. I would like to applaud the Houle's for their volunteer work during the reunion. Thank you, Jim, and Faeth Houle. Art Stone brought numerous memorabilia pictures and other items to share on a table layout of pictures from the first reunion covering each year thereafter. Art also provided the name holders that were left over from previous reunions. The bar in the CPO Club was heavily used from the moment folks started arriving. However, there was not enough drinking to loosen lips enough to tell any Sea Stories. Some stories were told only at the tables with two or three people listening. The ones I had the opportunity to overhear were a little inappropriate for any larger audiences. Well, that might be a little harsh, but I believe we will leave story telling off the menu next reunion.

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James Lake was our happy griller for the evening meal. While Faeth and Jim Houle prepared the buffet table with various fixings, salads, and rest. Many folks left the CPO Club shortly after the meal.

The next morning, we had almost everyone leaving the docks on the Four-hour snorkeling trip.



There were no reported great white sharks seen near the snorkeling area.

It was hilarious but after ten to fifteen minutes in the water all the snorkelers began to model a flock of Mallard ducks feeding over a school of fish. Bobbing all around the boat. I was able to identify my daughter and two grandsons bobbing together just by the swimsuits popping up as they darted down to check out the coral life. Anyway, the trip seemed short for those not snorkeling but just enjoying the ride, bar, and snorkeling watching. As the captain's megaphone belated time to go. The swimmers loaded the vessel and the crew counted heads. The captain kept to the schedule. We returned to

the dock with all the snorkelers that had been taken to the reef. With one exception, most snorkelers were smiling and speaking of the different discoveries they had observed versus the looks of unknown anticipation as the boat departed the dock for the reef area.

Members meeting. Friday at one pm the members occupied the CPO Club for the members meeting. Dave Gholson opened the meeting with a short speech. There were only a few items on the agenda. Dave spoke of the possibility of this reunion being the last one. Rightfully so, Dave expressed concerns about the health of our aging members. The numbers of members attending was a good example of Dave's concerns. While not all but most members are reaching the age that traveling becomes just a bit too much.

He asked us to think about whether we should open our group to other military divers who share our passion and experience. He said he had sent a letter/email to the members last year with more details on this idea, but he wanted to hear our thoughts on it. (However, we had one member present who had gone through the Army combat divers' course at Key West not that long after the US Navy Underwater Swimmers School had closed.) Either way yes, we have already accepted fellow US military divers into our group. Hopefully we will be able to draw enough members to continue reunions. Dave never got a response one way or the other from any in attendance.

The meeting moved on with Jim

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Houle saying a few words about the secretary-treasurer. He gave a run-down that he had received from Ken Recoy. Nothing new with Ken's report, the usual report on our finances and expenses. He said we are doing okay, but we could use some more donations and sales from our ship store to keep things going.

Then it was back to Dave. He mentioned the advisory board, which is the elected officers and one volunteer. The one volunteer has not been identified as of this BuddyLine. Since the current advisory board seemed to work well the members had no recommendations for something different. So, the advisory board will remain as is.

Dave also talked about having monthly zoom meetings to stay in touch and for planning. We agreed that it is a clever idea, but we have not set a specific date or time yet. We will let the membership know soon as we get a date time established.

Next, we discussed the next reunion location and most present members wanted to stick with Key West, since it is a lovely place and the home of the organization. Pensacola, FL was mentioned. The members who attended the reunion there said it was great for the guys, but the wives were stuck on the facilities since they did not know much about the area. We will survey all members online later to confirm the next location.

Next item on the agenda was Board members elections. Dave had offered to remain on as president for the next six months if no one was

nominated for the president position. With that Dave asked for nominations for president. Ken Recoy was nominated and seconded.

There was a brief discussion. And after a little friendly debate, Danny Mize asked to be considered for the presidency and another member seconded the request. After a few comments by our president Dave Gholson. Dave asked for any nominations for vice president and Secretary/Treasurer. No members spoke up for either nomination. So, after a few more words from the president the vote was called. As you might imagine the votes were close with three names in the hat and only ten members to vote. The winner was Danny Mize by a close margin. Congrats, Danny! Dave asked if any other members would consider the vacancies of vice president. James Lake spoke for the vice president position and without any objections he is now the vice president. Congrats to James Lake.

Jim Houle had considered the secretary/treasurer position prior to the reunion, and he had spoken with Ken Recoy about the job requirements and so forth. Then a few minutes after James Lake was accepted as Vice President Jim Houle spoke for the treasurer/secretary position and was accepted unopposed for the Tres/secretary job. I would like to thank both for stepping up and serving our group.

After a few comments by the outgoing president, he passed the reunion folder containing the reunion events to the incoming president and departed the meeting.

The new president started looking thru the folder for any information

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that needed to be put out to the members.

Meanwhile the new Vice President, James Lake, started working right away by getting members to complete waivers online for the Sun Set Cruise that was to follow the membership meeting. He also identified the location to gather for the cruise.

The group ticket was in the folder with Houle and Gholson's names on the tickets which they had purchased the previous Tuesday. Alone with the Conch Train Tour tickets for Saturday morning.

After further discussion, several members suggested we forgo the BBQ planned after the Memorial Service on Saturday. The change was due to the forecasted high heat index forecast for the next day Saturday. After the remaining members agreed on the Sun Set Lounge and Hideaway Grill as the new venue and we put the word out, and with the completion of the venue change the president adjourned the Member meeting.

The incoming president provided the minutes. I must say if I got something wrong, reference the members meeting. Feel free to correct me and I will post the correction in the next BuddyLine.

That evening the members showed up for the evening Sun Set Cruise. The cruise was very enjoyable. As advertised, there was a live band and plenty of food and drinks. The food was the best we had at the whole reunion. The drinks were wet and cold. The band was very accommodating. They knew most of the requested songs and if not, they

gave it an award-winning try. It would have been hard to not find something not enjoyable on the cruise, especially the drinks.



Oh yes, the sunset was also very pretty. There were many pictures taken and no the boat did not tilt to the sunset side as just about all the folks onboard shifted to that side for pictures.

Saturday morning was nice and pleasant as we loaded the Conch train for the short tour around the primary business district of Key West. The next reunion we will schedule the train tour on the first full day. There were many interesting places that I had no recollection of as a student at Key West. The Conch Train Tour was great but not as many members showed up as for the Sun Set Cruise. Later I found out getting up and dressed in time to make the 9:15 train departure was not as exciting for some as others. Either way, the train departs



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every 15 minutes, so we did not have to get there as early as believed. Next time we are in Key West the Conch Train Tour will be scheduled closer to the start of the Reunion. The tour really helped with



getting one's bearings around Key West. Yes, the roosters were on every corner watching and crowing like they were telling everyone strangers were coming.

The Memorial Service started at 3 pm as scheduled and the Coast Guard did make an entrance and the remains and memorabilia were released to the waters just off-Key West. The Chaplain and the honor Guard did an outstanding job. A list of those being honored was read and the bell rang for each name. There were a few minutes of reflection by several family members and a story or two shared. We did get a group picture before the members



departed from the beachside memorial.

The Sun Set Lounge and the Hideaway Grill proved to be an excellent choice of venue change. The food was delicious, and the drinks got better with each order. There was live music and an outsider to the group (one lady) that maybe had a little too much to drink tried to get the guys seated next to what could have been called a dance floor to dance.



Jim Houle's Faeth came to the rescue with a stern look or two and the lady left quickly but you know Art Stone was sitting next to Faeth.

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I could not actually see that well. Art could have been in on the stern look with Faeth. Art broke out laughing as the lady departed the AO. The smile level had really increased from the first day of the reunion. The drinks were great, especially the mudslides which tasted like a milkshake but left you pleasantly numb and euphoric at the same time.

That wraps up the Reunion.

Danny Mize
The Reunion Scribe
662-617-9282
pjaviator@hotmail.com

The United States Underwater Swimmers

Officers:

President/Editor

Danny Mize

BuddyLine@uwss.org

(662) 617-9282

Vice President:

James Lake

vicepresident@uwss.org

(703) 489-5902

Secretary/ Treasurer and Ship Store:

Jim Houle

shipstore@uwss.org

(620) 422-2838

3220 W. Peddle Beach
Lecanto, FL 34461

Webmaster:

Bob Bureker

navyeodbob@gmail.com

Tell us your story:


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James Lake

My First Dive by Captain Jim Lake (USN, Ret)
Vise President FO UWSS

I enlisted in the Navy in April 1958, and I had hoped to be a Seabee, but in boot camp I was informed that this would not happen and left Boot Camp with no idea of what I was going to be in the Navy, and I had no thoughts of being a Navy Diver. Let us fast forward to 1960 when, as a third-class Nuclear Weapons man, I reported to the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43) being recommissioned at the Bremerton Naval Shipyard. They assigned me to W Division where I became friends with fellow shipmates working and going on liberty together. During the shipyard period a couple of my shipmates took one evening SCUBA training in a shallow bay and he bought SCUBA gear so he could go diving while on deployment at port calls. Shortly before the ship deployment, my shipmates convinced me to buy a single seventy-two with a backpack, double hose regulator, swim fins, and face mask - 2 months of pay. I had no time to take any SCUBA lessons, but my shipmates assured me that they would give me ample instructions before our first dive – I thought - what could go wrong?

The Coral Sea departed Alameda, CA in December 1960 for its first WestPac deployment with our first stop in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Perfect opportunity for me and my good friends to make our first open ocean SCUBA dive and, of course, my first ever SCUBA dive – what could go wrong? I thought. Four of us decided to make the trip but only two decided to dive Hanauma Bay located on the Southeast tip side of the Island about twenty miles from where the ship was located in Pearl Harbor. The only way we could afford to get there was by city bus. So, we got into our dress whites, put our SCUBA gear on our backs and walked off the ship and the base where we caught a city bus that dropped us off at the parking lot at the top of the path down to Hanauma Bay beach.

The difficult walk down to the beach was going to be the easy part of my day. After descending to the beach, we found a place to change clothes and rolled up our white uniforms and put on our swim trunks. The four of us walked carrying all our gear and uniforms on the very rocky and uneven

terrain to the point near the mouth of the North side of the bay. I had my SCUBA lesson: ‘stay with your swim buddy and do not hold your breath when ascending to the surface and if you get separated go to the surface.’ The conditions for the dive were not ideal, it was winter and there were 1-2ft waves with 8-10 knot winds and choppy seas and reduced visibility. My swim buddy and I got our gear on and entered the water, I thought: what could go wrong?

My first dive – we swam away from the shore so not to get washed back up on the rocks and soon we were about 100 ft from where we entered the water, so we exchanged OK and started down. I had trouble clearing on the way down but soon I was on the sandy bottom at about 40 ft with visibility about 5-10 ft – and I was alone, I could not see my swim buddy. I swam around looking for him for about 1 minute, but no joy, so I went to the surface as briefed. You guessed it, I did not see my swim buddy with the unfavorable sea conditions, so I went back down to the bottom for a quick look and still no swim buddy. I repeated this a couple of times and decided that maybe he had done the same and swam back to shore. By this time, I had drifted to the middle of the entrance of the bay because of the very strong current and I could barely see my friends on the shore where I had entered the water, and the sea conditions were getting worst as I drifted away from the protection of the shore. Yelling at them did not work. I started to swim on the surface to the place where my friends were located but I was not making any progress and I seemed to be getting further away from them and out to sea. Because the sea swells were favoring the south side of the bay I started to swim to the south side.

Suddenly I ran out of air, but I was on the surface - no problem. It did not take long before I realized I had been at this dive for maybe an hour or so, I was getting tired and my progress to the south side of the bay was going terribly slow. That is when I made the decision that my SCUBA tank and regulator were a drag and of little use to me for a surface swim, so I let them go because I knew I was in trouble, and I still had a long swim

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James Lake

ahead of me. Now you may be thinking that I should inflate my life jacket a little and light my day/night flare – clever idea if I had them, but they were not part of my dive gear nor my training.

I continued my swim towards the south shore while hoping my friends were seeking help to find me, but I was alone, and it was up to me to reach the shore. I was getting closer, but this was not going to be easy because my point of landing was a rocky coral cliff about five feet high and I was running out of energy to change direction. As I hit the coral cliff I was pounded by the breaking waves as I tried to climb up to the top. Lucky for me a fisherman saw me and threw me a line and pulled me to safety. My first dive was over, lost contact with my swim buddy, lost my SCUBA gear, and my body was a bloody mess of coral cuts – but I was alive.

I started walking back to the beach and my friends were running towards me looking extremely glad to see me. They told me that my swim buddy had to pull himself on the bottom because the current was so strong, and he also lost his SCUBA gear as well. I told them what had happened to me as we changed clothes back to our uniforms and walked back up the hill to catch the city bus. The walk up was easy for me because all I had left was my face mask to carry notwithstanding, I was very tired and bleeding through my whites. As soon as we got back to the ship, I went to sickbay to have my wounds from my first dive taken care of and I hit the sack for some needed rest thinking that maybe I was not cut out to be a diver.

Fast forward 2 months, I met First class petty officer Meyers who was the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Diver onboard. I told him about my first dive and he explained to me that I just needed some good training and suggested that I apply for EOD School where I would first attend the Naval Underwater Swimmers School, Key West, FL, and receive the best Diver Training in the world there, and then the Naval School EOD training at Indian Head, MD, followed by great duty all over the world. He sold me so I immediately sent a Special

Request Chit up the chain for transfer to EOD training. The crusty old Warrant Officer that I worked for first said he would not approve the request stating that I most likely would not complete the training, hopefully he did not hear about my first dive, but he probably did. I explained to him that this is something I must do and pleaded with him to approve my request, and he did. The Navy approved my transfer. So, in March 1961 I was off the ship as a second-class petty officer heading to UWSS.

I arrived at UWSS Key West FL in May 1961 where I completed the 2-month EOD Diver course that included SCUBA, Deep Sea MK 5, Jack Brown, and various mixed gas rigs. Following UWSS I completed the 6-month EOD Training Course at Indian Head, MD. After 7 years in EOD, I applied for, and I was approved for Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training beginning in 1969 and graduated from the 6-month course in BUDS Class 55 in February 1970. I had tours in UDT-13 and SEAL Team One and qualified as a UDT and SEAL Officer. After 5 years with the Teams, I returned to EOD with many tours to include 2 Command Tours and retiring as a Navy Captain with 42 years of continuous service.

Although I was destined to be a Navy Diver and made many dives in my career that included SCUBA, MARK 5 deep sea, Mark 12, MK 5, and MK 6 UBA, and Draeger, I will never forget My First Dive.

Tell us your story:


We Dive the World

Rudy Ender

(Continued from May 2023) EOD divers work on magnetic mines. If a SCUBA diver approaches such a mine with a magnetic substance such as his tanks, knife, etc., the mine will detonate. To overcome this possibility, the NAVY introduced the Mark V. This unit was entirely non-magnetic, and the gas mixture could be varied to accommodate various depths and bottom times. Basically, the Mark V contained two tanks, a CO₂ absorbent canister, and a breathing bag. The exhaled breath passes through a scrubber where CO₂ is removed. CO₂ is re-circulated back into the breathing bag where it is combined with the mix flowing from the bottles. This offers the diver a longer bottom time with fewer bubbles. For deeper dives, the gas is mixed to give less oxygen.

Our record at the school for safety was perfect. I wanted to keep it that way and the new Mark V rig never ceased to worry me. On one dive, we had a student pass out and fall backward as he reached the top rung of the LCU's diving ladder. We dove in and saved him before he descended ten feet. We took the Mark V rig and inspected it thoroughly. Nothing seemed wrong. We even took it down to 150 feet in the recompression chamber and it worked perfectly. We cautioned our swim buddies to stay alert and our good fortune continued. On our first swim with Emerson Lung to qualify UDT closed circuit instructors, one of our most seasoned UDT swimmers nearly drowned. He was paired with a civilian from the Mine Laboratory in Panama City named Steve Bullock. Bullock was leading the way when he felt the swim buddy line pull tight. He grabbed his buddy, inflated the bag, and made it to the surface. The man was convulsing with his eyes laid back and teeth clenching the mouthpiece. With quick thinking,

Bullock took out his dive knife, cut the man's inhalation hose and administered artificial respiration through the cut hose. Other than an eye squeeze, which made our UDT man look like a panda, he recovered fully. Again, we never could determine the cause of the accident.

My active Navy duty was to end in June 1960. I had put in for an extension but had not heard anything from them by April the same year. The thought of leaving the Keys sent chills through my spine. Above anything else I tried to find a way to stay. After reading the business section in the local paper for a few months, I came upon an advertisement offering a drift fishing boat and business for sale in Marathon, Florida. I drove to Vaca Key and spoke with the owner, Maurey Savor, of the party fishing boat *Mystery*, a 46-foot wooden hull open deck fisherman powered by twin Ford four-cylinder diesel engines. The boat was tied up alongside Leonard's Fishing Store, now Captain Hooks, within sight of the Overseas Highway at Vaca Cut, Marathon. I reviewed the boat's income, tax records, and U.S. Coast Guard certificates. The boat showed promise. Because of low fuel costs and dockage, the boat could show a profit by sailing with as little as four passengers a day, provided it sailed seven days a week. The boat could carry forty passengers for hire, and I felt confident it would sail at full to capacity during the prime season from Christmas to April. I had enough cash saved so I bought the vessel and hired Ed Lowe, an experienced guide and licensed Captain, to run it for me. After I bought the *Mystery*, my extension came through and I visited the boat about twice a month to keep track of how things were going. Though I was not making a killing, money was starting to accumulate. I felt I could pay off the boat within two years. Alt-

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Rudy Ender

ough Captain Lowe was a chronic complainer, he proved conscientious, reliable, and likable. As the season approached, however, he became more interested in guiding bone fishing parties than running my drift fishing boat. I had to sympathize with him because he could make twice the money I could afford to pay. Anyway, there were no hard feelings on my part when he quit, plus I was getting tired of driving back and forth to and from Marathon and began to look for a berthing site for the Mystery at Key West.

In the early 1960s, Key West was a conch town. Locals there are called conchs because that is what their ancestors used to signal the shipwrecks they preyed upon. The conch's are a very clannish bunch and hold an inbred animosity toward outsiders, especially young Navy lieutenants I thought. The rules for moving my boat to Key West were quite clear. The only site available for commercial use then was an area west of the sand spit off Truman Avenue. The sand spit later became the entrance of the bridge bypass leading to the southern areas of Key West. What made it impossible for an outsider was that the entire commercial area was controlled by the Key West Charter Boatmen Association. I tried to join but they simply laughed at me. A small marine gasoline refueling dock stood at the end of the bight off Truman Avenue. I noticed for some time the pump stood idle because most small boat operators fill their tanks in regular gas stations before launching. I approached the owner, who also owned the corner City Service gasoline station, and asked him if he would be interested in leasing me the dock. He said "Yes, make me an offer." I told him I would. I then went to Ignacious Lester, the brother of my Doctor fishing buddy, Lance Lester. I told him what I had in mind and asked him to draft the leasing papers. He wrote an airtight paragraph enabling me to operate my boat off the fueling dock with no restrictions. After the City Service station

owner signed the lease, I told him what I had in mind. He seemed joyous, claiming none of the charter boats ever bought gasoline from him anyway. I was now in business. I shortly moved my boat from Marathon and tied up before the Key West fishing fleet could return to their berths. The shocked look on their faces made the whole venture worthwhile. They didn't know what to do. The only ones who welcomed me were my real competitors, Captain Tommy Lones of the Gulfstream and Captain Tony Terracino of the Greyhound. They had all the business they could handle and looked upon me to carry the overflow. I hired a retired Coast Guard Commander, Martin Williams, to captain the Mystery. Martin was a fine boat captain but a lousy fisherman. While the Gulfstream and Greyhound hung up forty-pound grouper, the Mystery displayed one-pound grunts. However, weekends were a different story. I ran the boat Saturday and Sunday and caught more fish than my competitors continuously. My boat was easier to bridle over the narrow drop offs where large groupers congregate. When the fishing was slow, I invited Scott Slaughter to dive off the Mystery and we always managed to spear plenty of impressively large fish. I also hung the fish off the largest sign in all of Garrison Bight. Naturally, business picked up the following day and tapered off to Friday as Captain Williams continuously failed to produce any worthwhile catches. With the arrival of kingfish in late December, business boomed. The boat would be filled to capacity by 0600. It didn't take me long to realize I could make more money selling kingfish than I could from the passenger fares. Most people keep only one fish; however, I posted signs explaining the most any one person could keep was five fish. I also stressed this before sailing. To make sure the tourists wouldn't unnecessarily lose fish, I spooled the reels with eightypound monofilament and tightened the drag heavily. This prevented mass entanglement. Because my boat was relatively small, I was able to

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***We Dive the World***

Rudy Ender

bridle the boat and fish everyone off the starboard or port side instead of the stern. I had 40 people bailing kingfish rather than only six at the stern. I also chummed heavily with shrimp heads, which I collected previously in forty-gallon garbage cans at the Key West shrimp docks. It didn't take the chum slick long to attract large schools of kingfish. We had the whole Key West charter fleet trolling through our slick and circling us all day long. We averaged between two and three thousand pounds of kingfish every day throughout the three-week kingfish season. This short run enabled me to pay off the boat.

Crossing the Bar:



Henry H Holder III



We Dive the World



GMCS Henry H, Holder III (retired)
born 1936 and departed for his final
duty station June 13, 2023.
Bruce Holder, his son says there is
no obituary yet. Funeral services are
scheduled for October 23, 2023, at 2
pm Arlington National Cemetery,
Arlington, VA.

