

### Now Hear This!

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#### Association Founded 1947

By Otto and Trudy Schwarz

## USS Houston (CA-30) & HMAS Perth (D-29) Remembered Despite the Pandemic



Houston-area participants in the wreath-laying ceremony at the USS Houston (CA-30) Monument on Friday, March 5, 2021 included: Matt Rejmanski; Jerald Broussard; Amy Conacher; Steve Cutrer; Benson Saulo; and Melissa Hutchings. (Not pictured: W.O. King; and Don Kehn, Jr.) (Photo: courtesy of Amy Conacher)

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## 79TH ANNIVERSARY REMEMBRANCES 2021

By Sue Kreutzer & John K. Schwarz

The nationwide Covid-19 pandemic hit Houston hard. In early February, 2021, the overall infection rate was so high the Association's Board of Managers decided to cancel our usual annual March, 2021 "Day of Remembrance" gathering. Fortunately, the City of Houston's officials and Alison Bell, Director of the Heritage Society, worked with us to create a revised "COVID-19-friendly" Memorial Service on Friday, March 5, 2021, honoring the men of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) & HMAS *Perth* (D-29).

(Continued on next page.)

COVID restrictions on the size of gatherings required a limit on the number of participants for the service. So, the Memorial Service was held in the afternoon of March 5<sup>th</sup> with a small band of dedicated Houstonians gathered at the base of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) monument, as we have done every year since the Monument was erected, and they placed wreaths to honor the crews of USS *Houston* (CA-30) & HMAS *Perth* (D-29).



(L to R): Don Kehn, Jr.; Steve Cutrer; and W. O. King stand next to the monument. (Photo: Courtesy of Don Kehn, Jr.)

The participants in this year's service were: **MMSGT Steve Cutrer, USMC (Retired)**, grandson of William Weissinger, who represented both the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors' Association and the Marine Corps Coordinating Council of Houston; **Matt Rejmaniak**, cousin of USS *Houston* (CA-30) crewman Edwin S. Dombroski; **CAPT W.O. King, USN (Retired)** and **Don Kehn Jr.**, Association Historian, both representing the Naval Order of the United States, Texas Commandery; Australian Consul General **Benson Saulo** and Australian Deputy Consul-General **Melissa Hutchings**, both representing Australia; **Amy Conacher**, from the Australian-American Chamber of Commerce; and **Jerald Broussard**, from the Houston-Perth Sister Cities Association.

Given both the pandemic and the recent weather challenges suffered by our Houston-area folks, we thank all participants for their willingness to take part and provide us with photos. Many thanks to Steve Cutrer for creating a video of the Service. A link to the video was emailed to all Association members in mid-March.

Also, special thanks go to **Steven Hall, PhD** and **Ricardo Magdaleno** from Houston City Hall for allowing the service to take place, as well as the gracious hosting by **Alison Bell**, Executive Director of The Heritage Society of Houston, TX.

We are so very pleased and grateful for having been able to continue to honor the brave men of both cruisers as has been our annual custom. This year's service marked the 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the loss of both ships at the WWII Battle of Sunda Strait and the 27th consecutive Memorial Service held at the USS *Houston* (CA-30) monument. Hopefully, next year (2022) we will return to our more "normal" Memorial Service with all of us, once again, in attendance to honor the brave crewmen of USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29).



Steve Cutrer spearheaded the effort to have Maria Santiago create the beautiful handmade wreath that was placed at the USS Houston (CA-30) Monument on March 5, 2021 to honor the heavy cruiser's Naval Officers, Sailors and Marines lost at the Battle of Sunda Strait on March 1, 1942. (Photo: Steve Cutrer).

## Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery



At Arlington National Ceremony on March 5th  
(L to R): Sam Cox; Jarst de Jong; Gary Miton;  
and Jim Morley. (Photo: John K. Schwarz)

As the Memorial Service was taking place in Houston, Texas, representatives of the four nations of ABDA also gathered on March 5<sup>th</sup> at the USS *Houston* (CA-30)/HMAS *Perth* (D-29) marker in Arlington National Cemetery to honor the crews of both cruisers. The marker was adorned with both flowers and four flags representing the nations of ABDA's combined fleet.

Representatives included:

Australia: **Gary Milton**, Commander RAN, Staff Officer Aviation, Office of the Naval Attaché, Embassy of Australia;

Great Britain: **Jim Morley**, Commander, Royal Navy, Assistant Naval Attaché, the British Embassy;

The Kingdom of the Netherlands: **Jarst de Jong**, Colonial Netherlands Marine Corps, Naval Attaché, Assistant Defence Attaché, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands;

The United States: **Sam Cox**, Rear Admiral, USN (Retired), Director, Naval History and Heritage Command and Curator of the Navy. We are so grateful to all of our volunteer participants who honored the brave men of USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29) as we traditionally have as close as possible to the date of their March 1st loss in WWII.

Commander Jim Morley, RN, wrote in an email: "It was an honour and privilege today to join with colleagues from USA, AUS, and NL to mark the action in which USS HOUSTON and HMAS PERTH were lost, along with HM Ships EXETER, ELECTRA, JUPITER, and ENCOUNTER lost in the ADDBA campaign.

The ABDA campaign was an example of joint and combined forces working in unison, the sort of co-operation that we take for granted now. The alliances and partnerships, such as NATO, that demonstrate our collective resolve and preserve the security and access to the maritime commons for all, had their foundations laid by the brave and gallant sailors of the ADDBA force. More than 70 years later we continue to work together to address today's challenges, stronger together; even with the challenges of COVID-19, we can still come together in some way and remember the actions of the Greatest Generation.

Today I remember all those sailors in the ABDA campaign, and I commend their memory and their legacy to you. Regards, Jim Morley." —John K. Schwarz

# 79th Anniversary Commemorations Down-Under



Colin Arthur Bancroft, Son of HMAS Perth (D-29) survivor Arthur Bancroft, participates in the Commemoration Service at St. John's Church in Fremantle, Western Australia.



February 28, 2021: Colin Arthur Bancroft, Son of HMAS Perth (D-29) survivor Arthur Bancroft, speaking at the HMAS Perth Commemoration Service at St. John's Church in Fremantle, Western Australia.



(Left): February 21, 2021: the 61st Anniversary HMAS Perth Memorial Regatta was held at the Nedlands Yacht Club near Perth, Australia. (Poster & Photos: Shauna McGee Kinney).



(Above): February 28, 2021: Louisa Garcia, her father and two sons attended the 79th Commemoration Service in Brisbane, Australia. Louisa is the granddaughter of HMAS Perth Survivor Roy Turner (pictured), who served as a sick bay attendant aboard the Perth. He passed away at age 86.



(Left): February 28, 2021: A wreath-laying ceremony was held at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, Australia to commemorate the sinking of HMAS Perth (D-29) and USS Houston (CA-30) on March 1, 1942. For more information, go to: [Commemorating the Battle of Sunda Strait | Defence News](#)

## **A MOST SIGNIFICANT STATEMENT**

By Dana Charles

After WWII, many former American POWS, including USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors and soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery/2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (aka: the “Lost Battalion”), applied to the U.S. Veterans Administration for war-connected disability payments. But *Houston* survivors and 131<sup>st</sup> men were among many former U.S. POWS of the Japanese who were denied such payments unless they could prove that they had actually been POWS and that their various postwar physical and psychiatric ailments were service-connected. Few, if any, *Houston* survivors or survivors of the Lost Battalion had access to any official Japanese paperwork which could prove they had been prisoners of the Japanese. After the war, what few records that DID exist, such as their post-liberation POW surveys and affidavits used in War Crimes trials, were apparently classified and not available to them.

Supposedly, the VA accepted statements by an applicant’s POW buddies as proof that the applicant had been a POW. But at least one USS *Houston* survivor, Bill Logan, submitted 5 statements from fellow POWS without success. In Logan’s case, the VA insisted on a POW doctor’s statement.<sup>1</sup> Facing such VA red tape, several *Houston* survivors and men of the Lost Battalion turned to Doctor Henri Hekking, MD, in Holland to supply them with statements naming them as his former POW patients.

Dr. Hekking, a colonial Dutch army medical doctor, had worked tirelessly in POW camps of the Burma-Thailand Railway from June 1943 to August 1945, attending to prisoners of war of “Branch 3” in Burma, which included 191 Americans—survivors of USS *Houston* (CA-30) and soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery/2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. According to many American survivors of the Burma-Thailand Railway’s forced labor camps, Doctor Hekking saved many of their lives due to his special knowledge of tropical diseases and tropical medicine, obtained while growing up in the Netherlands East Indies. Hekking even knew which tropical vegetation could be used to create poultices, and which plants could add vitamins to the inadequate diets of his fellow POWS.<sup>2</sup>

In 1978, having been contacted by several *Houston* survivors and men of the Lost Battalion, Dr. Hekking wrote perhaps the most significant eye-witness statement regarding the extent of physical and mental abuse suffered by USS *Houston* and Lost Battalion prisoners of war to help support the efforts of these former POW patients to obtain war-connected compensation:

### **Affidavit by H. Hekking, MD**

General Statement, The Hague, December 25, 1978

To Whom It May Concern:

I, the undersigned, Henri Hekking, MD, ex-medical officer of the former Royal Dutch East-Indian Army Medical Corps, declare that as a POW of the Japanese I was stationed in different camps along the well-known “Railway of Death” in Burma and Thailand from June 1943 ‘til August 1945.

During most of that time, by order of the Japanese commander, I was attached—as medical officer—to a group of American field artillery and Navy (USS *Houston*) servicemen, nowadays united in the “Lost Battalion Association” and the “USS *Houston* Survivors Association.”

Since 1956 I have visited their annual reunion several times and apart from that, 'til now, I have been in close contact with many of the members of the above mentioned organizations; [this is the] reason, why I am rather good informed about their weal and woe, and above all about their present state of health.

In the past I made several statements about American ex-POW who returned to their country from prison camps along the Burma Railroad. They came back alive, yes, but damaged in body and soul. My statements were necessary in their struggle—that started some years later—for war-connected pension.

For most doctors of the pension boards, it was extremely difficult to insert the not always visible traces of the tremendous impact of the POW-time on body and soul, into the general state of ill-health that caused the disability for which the pension was claimed.

The last few years I received a growing number of requests for assistance in the form of medical statements for men that were with me in Burma. As the drawing up of the requested reports—especially for an old and busy man, in, for him, a foreign language is rather time-consuming; I decided to make this general statement. In my opinion this is quite justified because all the men along the Burma Railroad sustained the same hardships and suffered from practically all diseases mentioned later on in this statement. The only difference is the variability in resistance of the different victims.

Let me start with a description of the general camp conditions and the treatment of the POW along the different camps in Burma. Most camps consisted of miserable huts, built by the POW from bamboo, dry twigs and leaves and hardly giving protection against the rough climate conditions. The dry season was dry indeed, with just enough water for cooking and seldom for body-cleaning. I remember quite well that on many places the dust was 20 till 30cm thick. The wet season was damp and cold and really wet. The dust changed into a sticky mud that made walking and working extremely hard and tiring, and I have seen many chronic sick men, forced to join the daily work parties, completely exhausted after the relatively short walk from the camp to the working area.

The tropical rain-showers were a great nuisance because the roofs of the huts were leaking like a basket. The latrines were long, open ditches teeming with grub and millions of hatching “blue-bottles;” an ideal breeding ground for all possible tropical disease germs; the flies looking after the spread of the germs!

The treatment of the POW by the Japanese and Korean guards was a mere shame. Although 3 quarters of the camp populations was permanently ill, the guards would allow only 15% no-duty on account of disease. If you had only a little more missing on the morning parade, a beating for the missing patients and the doctor ensued. “No work, no food,” said the guard; so there were no rations for no-duty people. Reference to the Geneva Convention was soon given up because the Japanese never signed the Convention and the guards promised you an extra beating if you would use the word “Geneva” again.

Physical and mental torture were daily happenings in the camps and there was much beating during the labor on the railroad tract if the work did not proceed fast enough. The fatigue uniform was provided by the Japanese army and consisted of a small black loin-cloth, the so-called “G String.”

About medical supplies I can be short. Apart from a few chinine (sic) tablets, jodoform (sic) and some

bandages in the first month after my arrival in Burma, I could never squeeze out medical supplies from the guards; they had very little for their own use!

The food: The supply from the hinterland before the railway was finished was entirely insufficient. Our daily food consisted of old, musty by bugs completely decorticated rice and little salt. Sometimes, but so seldom that it was completely negligible, there was a little meat unfit for consumption by Japanese soldiers and a bit of pumpkin, just enough to divide among some very emaciated patients. As already mentioned, there was an abundance of flies in the camps and it was difficult to eat your rice without swallowing some living flies at the same time.

From a medical view-point there are some crucial camp conditions to be mentioned, especially from the Burma period, lasting more than a year.

1. The heavy labor under exceptional climatological influences ranging from unbearable heat till periods of cold, tropical rains; the constant emotional stress and the fear for unexpected punishment from the guards. The living in unsanitary, overcrowded huts (60cm per man), ideal for the promotion of tuberculosis and other pulmonary infections. In many camps normal sleep was impossible by the armies of body-lice and bed-bugs that fed upon the emaciated bodies.
2. The food consisting of mere carbohydrates with no vitamins and no fat, and only small traces of unfit (not derived from animal food) proteins. The dubious value of even this entirely deficient diet was still more diminished by the diarrhea-dependent rapid bowel movement.
3. The whole range of infectious and deficiency diseases, especially the enteric conditions with profuse diarrhea from which practically everyone suffered. The absence of mosquito-nets and chinine (sic) causing real epidemics of malaria. Although in the beginning—in spite of lack of indispensable nutrients—the body's reserves and regulatory systems could maintain homeostasis for some time, finally they broke down by inanition and the body started to consume its own cells and tissues with consequently much irreparable damage. What damage has been done to the intricate system of the many enzymes, necessary to maintain life, one can only guess. There probably won't be a single tissue or vital organ not badly affected for life by all the influences mentioned above.

At a rough estimation, I have the firm conviction that the mortality rate by all different causes in the Burma group is markedly greater than the national average; the same applies to diseases and medical disabilities as well. Even if a direct link between incident during POW-time and the present ailments is not clearly detectable, the possibility can never be denied that this ailment only could find expression in a body weakened by the tremendous impact of the POW-time, and this also means war-connected. The above statements are confirmed by countless articles in the international medical press and in the great textbook of medicine.

In case of war service-connected claims, the pension boards should in general adjudge a pension according to fair and humane consideration and with sincere sympathy for the ex-POW, who in fact is a very vulnerable creature. It is better to give 10 persons an undeserved pension than to withhold one man a rightful claim. It is not fair to force a patient to prove that his disease is war-connected. The pension board should prove that the ailment is not war-connected and with the least possible doubt should give the man the benefit and grant the pension.

I sincerely hope that this, my general statement, will give support to all ex-POW from the above mentioned groups, who serving their country, sustained the terrible hardships of the camps along the "Railway of Death" and till now the suffering from the aftereffects.

The Hague, December 25, 1978.

H. Hekking,

Ex-member of the Veterans Affairs Board of the Dutch Ministry of Defence."



**USS Houston's Marine survivors welcome "Doc Hekking" to the 1956 Lost Battalion Association Reunion. (L to R): Back Row: James Gee; F. H. King; Dr. Henri Hekking; H. Robert Charles; Charley Pryor; James "Packrat" McCone; Front Row: Marvin Robinson; Bert Page; Lloyd Willey; and Walter Grice.**

Exactly how many *Houston* survivors and men of the Lost Battalion were helped by this statement to obtain post war compensation is unknown. But the fact that Doctor Hekking took the time to attempt to assist his former POW patients with this postwar affidavit speaks volumes about his own character and his devotion to his POW comrades. The USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors and men of the Lost Battalion and their families will forever be grateful to Dutch Doctor Henri Hekking, MD for all his wartime and postwar efforts on their behalf.

<sup>1</sup>The Blue Bonnet newsletter, September 1979 issue, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Last Man Out by H. Robert Charles, Eakin Publishing, 1988.

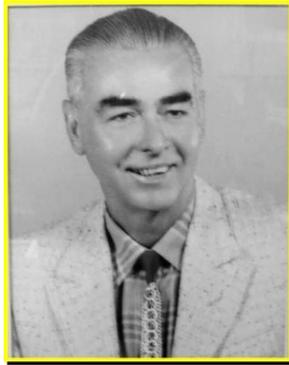
<sup>3</sup>"The Japanese Story," American Ex-POW National Medical Research Comm., Packet #10, pp 71-73.

## You Shop, Amazon Gives

*By Pam Crispi Moura, Treasurer*

Many of us already shop online at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Did you know that Amazon has a program to donate a portion of your purchase price to the USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association and Next Generations®? There is no additional cost to you or to the association and the proceeds help to perpetuate the memory of our ship and the sacrifices made by her crew. Visit our website: [www.usshouston.org](http://www.usshouston.org) and click on the AmazonSmile link or go to the website shown below. This is a win-win situation for all of us.

Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the **USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association and Next Generations®** whenever you shop on AmazonSmile. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know. Same products, same prices, same service. Support the **USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association and Next Generations®** by starting your shopping at <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/74-2814051>.



## Doctor Henri Hekking - A Man to Remember\*

By Lloyd Willey

Burma and the "Death Railway" we remember so well.  
And there we met "Doc" Hekking in that green, infested hell.  
He tended to our sick, exhausted men with tenderness and care.  
Of medicine and bandages he had none, and the Japs just would not share.  
He had to improvise in every way with whatever was on hand  
And so he earned the love and trust of the men from "Yankee-land."

He continually out-foxed the guards, switching medicine they would bring;  
They had no doctors of their own to ease the jungle's sting.  
By doing this he helped our men in every way he knew--  
The brave "Lost Battalion" men and gallant *Houston* crew.  
He made doctors of "Slug" and "Torpedo," who helped in every way,  
And learned English from the Texans in language not used today.

So finally the war was over, no more misery or strife,  
And we all returned to home again to regain our hold on life.  
In 1956 he came to Dallas, son Fred attended, too.  
A reunion we'll all remember to give "Doc" all honors due.  
The lives he saved were many, and we speak of him with pride,  
And thank our blessed Lord above that he was on our side!

\*Originally published in the Blue Bonnet, April 1994 issue  
to honor Dr. Hekking, who passed away 26 January 1994

Notes on news received via email at [contact@usshouston.org](mailto:contact@usshouston.org) and via regular mail...

- 1/2/2021 – Received the following announcement from the LBA’s **Terry Shields**: “It is with great sadness that I share the news of **Leeta Ficklin’s** (Widow of Frank Ficklin, 131<sup>st</sup>) passing on December 31, 2020; she was 96 years young. Susan was by her mother’s side when she passed. Leeta is now with her beloved Frank and all her loved ones that have passed before... I spoke with Susan this morning and she is doing well...There are no arrangements at this time; I should know by Monday evening and will send another email with details. Susan has shared that in lieu of flowers memorials can be made to: The Lost Battalion Association, 1000 E Tarrant Street, Bowie, Texas 76230...If you would like to send Susan a card her address is: **Susan Ficklin**, 1028 Roberts Bend Court, Granbury, Texas 76048. Lost Battalion Association, Terry Shields.”
- 1/17/2021 – Received the following email: “Dana, Thanks for the heads up on the [Zoom] program [by John Schwarz] Saturday morning. Melisse and I both watched on Zoom. It was good to see John and to hear Otto’s familiar voice again. A very interesting hour. I was also interested in the second program by the orphan of an 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force World War 2 casualty. Her Dad was shot down in March 1945 piloting a B24 Liberator bomber. She has written a book and had a video clip of her Dad’s plane going down in flames taken by another plane in the formation. My Mother’s first husband, a waist gunner in a B24, was killed May 13, 1944 over Germany when his plane was shot down by German fighters. She married in October of 1943 at 19 and was widowed in May of 1944 at 20. The greatest generation went through a lot.... Thanks again to you and John for helping to spread the word about the USS *Houston*... **Joe Kollmyer.**”
- 2/2/2021: Received the following email from Terry Shields (LBA): “Wanda Clark of Belton, Texas passed away on January 29,2021. She is the widow of Arthur "Buddy" Clark [131st] also known as "Youngun". Wanda was 93 years young. I ask that you remember her daughters Prissy Jackson, Shelly Beale, and son Mark Clark and their families in your prayer.”
- 2/10/2021: Received the following email from **Tom Jowett** (An NG of the HMS *Exeter* Survivors’ Group): “Good Evening Dana, We had planned for our usual wreath-laying service at the memorial window in Exeter Cathedral on 27th February, but as we are under travel restrictions, regretfully, it has been cancelled. The Cathedral has been approached to hold the service and stream it live onto the internet, I'll send you the link as/when I receive it. We always have a mention of all the Allied ships that took part in the Battle of the Java Sea. 80 years anniversary next year, are you planning anything special?”
- 2/11/2021: I replied to Tom’s email as follows: “Our Association has had to cancel our annual Memorial Service at the USS *Houston* Monument in Houston, TX, which features a British, an Australian, a Dutch and an American speaker coupled with a wreath-laying ceremony; a band plays; a couple makes free coffee and cookies available; and about 250 people attend. We’ve had to put all of that aside due to the pandemic. Instead, about 6 Houston-area volunteers will be placing a wreath at the base of the monument in a very small ceremony during the first week of March. The public is not invited this year... We haven’t started planning the 2022 “Day of Remembrance” yet. Although, I am pretty sure it will involve the usual annual Memorial Service which will include everything I mentioned above. We shall not forget the servicemen of ABDA who fought at the Battle of the Java Sea and the Battle of Sunda Strait.... I am happy to learn that the crew of HMS *Exeter* is being remembered this year—despite the pandemic! I would like very much to see the service streamed from the Cathedral, if possible. Thanks for asking...! Stay safe and well! Best regards, Dana.” *[Editor’s note: I joined in on the Exeter group’s Zoom call and spoke with approximately 12 sons, daughters, and granddaughters of HMS Exeter survivors who were located in England and Australia. I shared with them the WWII story of the USS Houston (CA-30) Survivors, and enjoyed hearing some stories about HMS Exeter survivors].*

## USS HOUSTON CA-30 MERCHANDISE UPDATE

***Now Hear This!***

**We have...**

- Received a new shipment of USS *Houston* (CA-30) hats so orders can be placed and filled; \$15.00 ea. plus shipping.
- Two new men's Polo shirts available due to our most recent special order, both in men's medium, one dark grey and the other red. Both are embroidered with the USS *Houston* (CA-30) logo; \$23.00 ea. plus shipping.
- Plenty of USS *Houston* (CA-30) challenge coins available; \$9.50 ea. plus shipping.
- USS *Houston* (CA-30) ship pins—Gold or Silver trimmed; 2 for \$5.00 plus shipping.

Contact: [johnk.schwarz@yahoo.com](mailto:johnk.schwarz@yahoo.com) for all merchandise questions and information.

Wear your USS *Houston* (CA-30) apparel proudly and help keep the memory of the ship alive!



USS *Houston* (CA-30) hat  
(Navy Blue)



USS *Houston* (CA-30) Polo Shirt  
(Dark grey)



USS *Houston* (CA-30) Polo Shirt  
(Red)



## REPORT FROM JAKARTA

### CAPTAIN STACEY A. PRESCOTT, USN

I am happy to share that even with COVID considerations we were able to host a successful Commemoration of the Battle of the Sunda Strait [on] March 1<sup>st</sup> at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta. Though we could not lay wreaths over the USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29) in Banten Bay, we did lay wreaths in the Embassy Reflecting Pool and, as highlighted by Chargé d’Affaires Heather Variava, those wreaths were also laid in honor of all of the families who will be unable to do so in Houston, Texas this year.



**1 March 2021: The gathering at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia to remember and honor USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29) on the 79th anniversary of the loss of both WWII cruisers.**

It was miraculously a bright sunny day in the middle of Indonesia’s rainy season, and we were fortunate the rain held off until approximately an hour after the ceremony. The commemoration began with the playing of the Indonesian, Australian and U.S. National Anthems. Then I delivered welcome remarks to the gathered guests and provided an overview of the Battle of Sunda Strait. Captain Rod Griffiths, Australian Naval Attaché then delivered further remarks on the HMAS *Perth I*, and the senior representative from the Government of Indonesia, Major General Rodon Pedrason, Director General for Defense Strategy, made brief remarks on the importance of commemorating the occasion and highlighting the continued cooperation between our countries to protect these important sites. We then welcomed U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Ms. Heather Variava to the podium where she shared her honor at being able to host and take part in this special commemoration, particularly given the constraints on holding events as we used to. She also shared *Houston’s* story of that night 79 years ago, and expressed her appreciation of and commitment to continued cooperation with the Government of Indonesia in moving forward with declaring the site of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) a Maritime Conservation Zone.

We concluded the ceremony with the laying of and saluting the wreaths while the Navy Hymn (Eternal Father) played in the background.

We were very happy to have so many representatives from the different aspects of the Government of Indonesia join us yesterday. We had representatives from the Ministry of Defense, Indonesian Veterans’ Legion, Indonesian Navy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and the National Archeology Research Center. We were unable to have representatives from the Province of Banten join, but we did record the ceremony and plan to forward the highlights for them to view.

*(Continued on next page)*

I have attached a few photos, as well as the English press release the Embassy released today (See below — Ed.) Within that document is a link to the google drive folder with all photos from the event as well as the video.

Warm regards,

CAPT Stacey A. Prescott  
U.S. Naval Attaché, Jakarta  
Acting U.S. Defense Attaché, Jakarta  
Acting U.S. Marine Attaché, Jakarta



## PRESS RELEASE

March 2, 2021

### **U.S. Embassy Hosts Commemoration of Battle of Sunda Strait**

Jakarta – On March 1, 2021, the U.S. Embassy was honored to host distinguished guests from the Indonesian, Australian, and U.S. Navies, Armed Forces, and Governments for a day of remembrance of shared history in commemoration of the Battle of Sunda Strait. After playing the national anthems of Indonesia, Australia, and the United States, remarks were given by the U.S. Naval Attaché, the Australian Naval Attaché, a representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense, and the Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Mission to Indonesia. The ceremony, held on the grounds of the U.S. Embassy, concluded with all representatives laying their respective wreaths in the water, a time-honored naval tradition.

This annual event commemorates the sinking of the HMAS *Perth* I and USS *Houston* (CA-30) on March 1, 1942. 696 American men and 353 Australian sailors and marines were lost in the waters of Banten Bay just after midnight on March 1st, 1942 -- many of them fighting until the very end. The 368 Houston Sailors that survived the sinking of their ship continued to resist while in captivity in Java, Singapore, Burma, Thailand, and Japan – until the end of the World War II, when 291 Houston sailors returned home as heroes. Through this commemoration, the U.S. Embassy remembers the ships and their brave crews and looks to the future as we work with Indonesian friends to convert the site of the USS Houston Banten Bay into a maritime conservation area.

Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Embassy Heather Variava expressed gratitude to Indonesian National Government and Banten Government officials for their commitment to protecting the sites as a marine conservation area. “We are especially grateful for your continued support and cooperation in designating the site of the USS Houston a Maritime Conservation Zone, and are committed to working with you towards that goal,” Variava said.

Please open the following [link](#) for videos and photos.

# SOUVENIRS OF WORLD WAR II

By Joseph L. McCain

In September 1945, a young *USS Houston* sailor wrote a letter from his bed in the 142<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital at Calcutta, India, to his parents, telling them, "I will not be bringing home many souvenirs, but I am coming home in one piece."

That sailor, R. Edgar Morris, Mus2/c, USN, was to become my father-in-law some twenty-three years later. As the *Houston* went down in Sunda Strait, her surviving crew abandoned ship in the hope of reaching the distant shores of Java. Most arrived clad only in their skivvies as all else had to be discarded during the long, difficult swim.

Webster's dictionary defines a souvenir as an article kept as a reminder of a place or an occasion. In war, such souvenirs or trophies are more likely to be acquired by the men who faced the enemy on land, rather than at sea. For the POWs, this activity becomes nearly impossible. It is little wonder that my father-in-law didn't think he would have much to bring home to show his family in Illinois. Having said all of this, let us briefly explore the most sought-after trophies of the Second World War by citing the experiences of two prolific collectors of battlefield memorabilia.

## EUROPEAN THEATER

The favorite souvenir would definitely be pistols of the Third Reich. These Lugers, Walthers and Mausers were precision made and many German officers even carried fancy engraved examples. Second to this would be the ornate dress daggers and swords which were of different designs and styles for each branch of service. These items command premium prices in today's market.

Roscoe C. Blunt, Jr. of the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division sent home many such trophies. As an Army-trained expert in the removal of mines and booby traps, he was constantly at the battlefield and had first chance to pick up souvenirs. He was able to mail a steady procession of packages to his parents in Massachusetts until his collection reached museum proportions.

## PACIFIC THEATER

Samurai swords were the most desired souvenir and very difficult to acquire. Many older examples are still treasured by the Japanese as family heirlooms. Handguns were also valued trophies, especially the Nambu pistols which somewhat resembled the German Lugers.

Stephen Prosnik was orphaned at age three and grew up on the streets of New York City's Hell's Kitchen area. His only known relative was an elderly woman whom he called his aunt. By the time he joined the Army at the age of seventeen and was assigned to the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry, he had been in trouble with the authorities many times. He first entered combat at Eniwetok Island in 1944 where he proved himself to be a one-man army by wiping out a strong Japanese position unassisted. Then he realized the Japanese soldiers were loaded with potential souvenirs that were his for the taking. By the war's end, Prosnik had sent his aunt 74 Samurai swords, 379 Japanese flags, 17,000 dollars in Japanese yen notes, three Nambu pistols and many other battlefield trophies. About the only thing he wasn't able to send home was a Japanese 77-mm artillery gun. Although he disassembled it, he couldn't find a way to mail the barrel!

*(Continued on next page)*

## THE USS HOUSTON POW EXPERIENCE

So what souvenirs did my father-in-law, bring home? One thing we have is a spoon he carried while he was a Japanese POW. The edge of the spoon is worn thin from scraping his food bowl to get the last ounce of nourishment. It is a mute testimony to a terribly meager Japanese ration that persisted for three and a half long years. Also, we have a tiny American P38 can opener used to open C-Ration tins during the rescue flight to a Calcutta hospital. By 1945, most American G.I.s detested Army field rations, but to the POWs they tasted better than caviar.



USS Houston Survivor Edgar Morris' POW Souvenirs.



Recently liberated USS Houston Survivors  
Edgar Morris and Joe Schertz in 1945.

Finally, we have a photo taken shortly after arriving stateside of my father-in-law and fellow *USS Houston* survivor, Joe Schertz, at Jack Dempsey's famous Broadway Lounge & Restaurant. Note the leftover dinner rolls still on the table. Can anything say better that Changi Prison Camp was now a distant memory and they were finally home!

I will close this with an observation from the late Lewis Grizzard who wrote that those of our parents' generation who had lived through the Great Depression and a World War were “. . . a hard people, who had lived through hard

times. But they endured and the country endured, and they came away from their experiences with a deep belief in a system that had been tested, but had emerged with glorious victory.” Truly, they deserved to be remembered as the “greatest generation” and we are honored to have known them.

### References, sources and notes:

1. Foot Soldier by Roscoe C. Blunt, Jr., 1994. The personal account of a combat infantryman's war in Europe.
2. War is a Private Affair by Edmund G. Love, 1951. The author completed officer's candidate school and was assigned to the Historical Division of the War Department. The story of Stephen Prosnik is the first chapter of his book. Each subsequent chapter tells of other fascinating stories the author encountered during the war.
3. Lewis Grizzard was a syndicated newspaper columnist in Atlanta and author of many best-selling books. One of his best known was Elvis is Dead and I Don't Feel So Good Myself which chronicles the baby boomer generation. The partial quote about our parents' generation is from that book, published in 1984.
4. Journalist and best-selling author, Tom Brokaw, can be credited with the phrase “The Greatest Generation” which he used as a book title in 1998. It has since become an accepted part of our dialogue regarding those who lived through the Depression and the Second World War.
5. The quote in the first paragraph is from a letter previously published by the Blue Bonnet in the article entitled “My First Three Days Back with Americans”.

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS UPDATE

By John K. Schwarz

### “USS Houston CA-30 Scholarship”

With the announcement of our 2021 “internal scholarship” awardee in this edition of the Blue Bonnet, we have awarded **17** scholarships since the inception of this valuable program, providing for the recipients a grand total of **\$40,250.00** to assist with higher educational pursuits.

A new scholarship program “window” opens **June 1** and runs through **November 1, 2021** for the 2022 award offering. “Coaches of candidates” should be reminded to encourage candidates to begin research as soon as is feasible to attempt to avoid waiting to the very last minute to file an application. Often, applications miss an element(s). Earlier filing ensures that discrepancies can be corrected to still meet the **November 1** deadline. Application packets can be obtained through the website, [www.usshouston.org](http://www.usshouston.org). Click on the “scholarship program” tab, scroll to the bottom of the page. Plenty of books and other resources (for example USS *Houston* CA-30 survivor oral histories) are available to help candidates prepare for the essay composition.

For any further information or clarification feel free to contact the program’s administrator, Executive Director John K. Schwarz, or any member of the Scholarship Program Committee (Sue Kreutzer, Pam Moura, Bernice Harapat, Scott Ingram), through [contact@usshouston.org](mailto:contact@usshouston.org).

### U.S. Naval Academy Foundation Scholarship Program “The USS Houston (CA-30) Scholarship.”

To date, this second USS *Houston* CA-30 scholarship has resulted in: **6** graduated Naval Officers; **1** graduated Marine Officer; and **1** award designee in progress toward graduation.

The outstanding success of these two scholarship programs could not have been possible without the generous donations of so many of you, our trusted CA-30 group. We thank you so very much.



Target practice: USS Houston (CA-30) firing at a target being towed by a small vessel (upper left) sometime in the 1930's

## Meet our 2021 USS Houston (CA-30) Annual Scholarship Recipient



**Brooke Chambliss**

Great grand-daughter of the late USS *Houston* CA-30 survivor Julius Cecil Chambliss, Sr., Brooke becomes the latest and seventeenth awardee of the USS *Houston* CA-30 Scholarship. Her cousin, Katie Fort, is our scholarship's second awardee and is the granddaughter of J. Cecil Chambliss, Sr.

Brooke hails from Stafford, VA and is finishing up her last year at Mountain View High School. She is to be awarded \$3,000.00 to be utilized once she decides on, and enters, her initial year of college. There are quite a few universities on Brooke's application list and she is still awaiting word from several. She has been accepted into the University of Virginia and Georgia Tech already.

In addition to her outstanding academic grades, Brooke is active in many activities including: Marching Band; National Honor Society; Summer Foreign Exchange Program; and Spanish Honor Society, among others.

Brooke recalled about her late great grandfather, USS *Houston* CA-30 Survivor Julius Cecil Chambliss, Sr.: "He was among those CA-30 survivors who were forced to work as POW slave laborers on the Burma-Thailand 'Death Railway.' While a POW, he contracted malaria, tropical ulcers and carried a body temperature well in excess of 100 degrees, yet was forced to continue to work daily. He recalled being subjected to continuous interrogations where most men would only offer name, rank and serial number."

Regarding her course to become a scholarship candidate, Brooke shared this: "My dad was actually the person who told me about the scholarship. His cousin, **Katie Fort**, won in 2004, so he knew that I should apply when I was old enough. I prepared by reading some of the books he had about USS *Houston*. I also used my great-grandfather's Oral History, recorded by the University of Southern Mississippi, to learn more about his experience as a survivor since he passed away before I was old enough to comprehend the events."

## Stories Behind the Stars

By John K. Schwarz

The “Stories Behind the Stars” initiative was created by Don Milne to collect and organize into one central digital location the stories of the 400,000+ Americans who were killed during World War II. This national effort, researched, written, and financially supported by all those who want to see the fallen remembered, will ensure that future generations will be able to learn about each of the Americans who paid the ultimate price for the freedoms we take for granted every day.

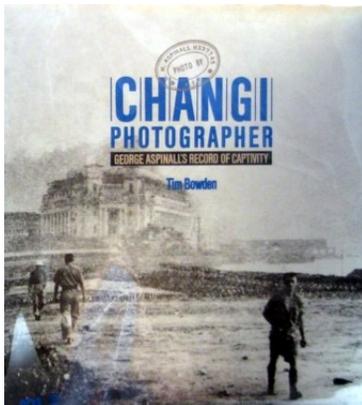


Don Milne

In the case of USS *Houston* CA-30 and its February 1942 ship complement of about 1,057, approximately 65% of her brave crew, including Captain Albert Rooks, were killed while serving aboard the cruiser during WWII. We encourage any next-of-kin who are related to any of the USS *Houston* CA-30 crewmen who did not make it home to consider getting involved with this important initiative.

For more information visit [www.storiesbehindthestars.org](http://www.storiesbehindthestars.org) or email Don Milne at: [don@storiesbehindthestars.org](mailto:don@storiesbehindthestars.org).

### Book Review



### ***Changi Photographer, George Aspinall's Record of Captivity*** By Tim Bowden

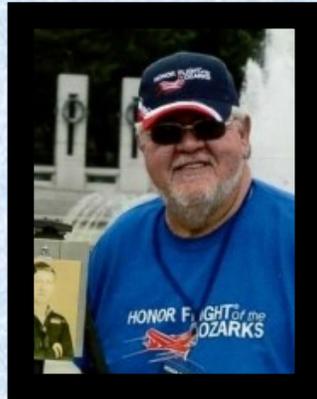
Recently, I started delivering to audiences via Zoom a presentation originally created by my late father, USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivor Otto C. Schwarz, regarding the *Houston* and her crew during WWII. Included in the presentation is a set of slides showing allied POW life in the WWII POW camps of the Japanese. To answer audience questions about the origin of these photos, I needed to do some research: Who could have taken these photos, and how were they able to be brought out of POW captivity intact?

What I discovered was that at least two allied prisoners of war are known today to have taken photos secretly and brought them out from their respective POW camps: U.S. Marine Terence Kirk, who was captured in China, later held in Japan, and wrote about his WWII POW experiences in the 1982 book ***The Secret Camera*** and George Aspinall, who was an Australian POW held at Changi Prison and the Burma-Thailand Railroad. This review focuses on a book written about George Aspinall, entitled ***Changi Photographer, George Aspinall's Record of Captivity*** by Tim Bowden.

In this book, Mr. Aspinall describes his WWII POW experiences supported by his incredible pictures, which he secretly managed to photograph, develop, and bring out of captivity undetected. This book is as full and as real an account as can be imagined and is at times closely related to the stories of many of the survivors of USS *Houston* CA-30; it is fascinating and impactful. Please note: Some details are very gory. Online, copies of this book are limited. Recommended. – John K. Schwarz

# IN MEMORIAM

**Harry T. Kelley, Jr.**



**February 7, 1949 — March 11, 2021**

**Battlefield, Missouri**

Son of the late USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivor  
Harry T. Kelley, Sr. (Navy) and Audrey Kelley

To read Harry T. Kelley, Jr.'s Obituary, click on the next line:

[Harry T Kelley Obituary - Visitation & Funeral Information \(meadorsfuneralhome.com\)](https://www.meadorsfuneralhome.com/obituary/harry-t-kelley-jr)

Meet your...

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...here to serve you!\*



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\* The Board of Managers is available to members for questions, concerns, input, or to clarify any matter regarding the Association via email (to [contact@usshouston.org](mailto:contact@usshouston.org)), phone, or regular mail.

## Membership

Our Association continues to grow as more folks reach us—through such avenues as our websites—and want to know more about the *Houston*, or just simply seek to contribute to the perpetuation of the memory of this gallant warship. To those interested in taking it further and joining our Association: go to [www.usshouston.org](http://www.usshouston.org), click on the “news tab,” scroll to the bottom and review the Association’s bylaws, then click on the link to membership form (<http://www.usshouston.org/memberform.pdf>). After filling out the form, send it in as directed on the form. Our Association is funded through voluntary donations rather than mandatory annual dues. To make a donation, please refer to page one of this newsletter, or review the instructions on the “news tab” of our website.

## Association Communication Channels

- Association information, including current and archived newsletter editions, is available at the Association's official website: [www.usshouston.org](http://www.usshouston.org).
- All email correspondence for the Association is directed through: [contact@usshouston.org](mailto:contact@usshouston.org)
- The Association’s regular mailing address and phone number is listed on the first page of each issue of the Blue Bonnet newsletter.
- Our Association's only social media presence is on Facebook at: **USS Houston CA-30**.



*We would like to extend a hearty welcome to everyone who has recently joined our USS Houston (CA-30) Survivors' Association and Next Generations®!*

**Thank you...!**

...on behalf of the Association to those who have made donations, as follows:

**Donations**

**November 15, 2020 – March 14, 2021**

*In Memory of David Flynn*

Donna Mae Flynn

*In Memory of Trudy Schwarz*

Donna Mae Flynn

**Other Donations**

Bernice Harapat

Tim & Jo Klenk

Joe & Melisse Kollmyer

Sue Kreutzer

Joe & Marlene McCain

John Schwarz

Tony Whaley

Amazon Smile Donations Received  
January – March 2021: \$62.92

**Financial Report**

*by Pam Moura, Treasurer*

**January 1 – March 14, 2021**

**General Fund**

Beginning Balance:	\$26,844.57
Receipts:	+375.92
Expenses:	<u>- 00.00</u>
Ending Balance:	\$27,220.49



**Scholarship Fund**

Beginning Balance:	\$23,040.58
Receipts:	+00.36
Expenses:	<u>-00.00</u>
Ending Balance:	\$23,040.94



**Published by:**

*USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association and Next Generations®* (April, August, December)

**Editor:** *Dana Charles*

**Proofreaders:** *Pam Moura, John Schwarz, Sue Kreutzer, Bernice Harapat, Marlene McCain.*

**Distribution:** *Dana Charles, Pam Moura*

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**All articles submitted are subject to editing.**

*Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of this Association, its members, or its Board of Managers.*

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Photo by Amy Conacher