



Now Hear This!

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Association Founded 1947

By Otto and Trudy Schwarz

2024 "Day of Remembrance" HQ To be Located at Hilton Garden Inn



In This Issue...

- ◆ Save the DOR '24 Dates/ 1—2
- ◆ Executive Director's Report/ 3
- ◆ 2nd Sea Service Interns/ 4—5
- ◆ Legacies of 2 Stewards/ 5—6
- ◆ POW Families & War/ 7—8
- ◆ Our Railway Pilgrimage/ 9—12
- ◆ CA-30 Model to NHHHC/ 13
- ◆ Mailbag/ 14—15
- ◆ Veterans Day Presentation/ 15
- ◆ In Memoriam/ 16—17
- ◆ Ship's Store/ 18
- ◆ Board of Managers/ 19
- ◆ Communication Channels/ 19
- ◆ Thanks to Donors/ 20
- ◆ Financial Report/ 20
- ◆ Masthead/ 20
- ◆ DOR 2024 Events/ 21
- ◆ DOR 2024 Registration Form/22

DOR 2024: Save the Dates!

By Dana Charles

Save the Dates! The Association's 2024 Day of Remembrance (DOR) will be held in Houston, Texas, March 1-2, 2024, at a new "DOR Headquarters" location—The Hilton Garden Inn Houston/Galleria Area, 3201 Sage Road, Houston, TX, 77056. A special block of hotel rooms and a meeting room have been reserved at the hotel where we will gather together to mark the 82nd anniversary of the March 1, 1942, loss of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) and H.M.A.S. *Perth* (D-29) at the WWII Battle of Sunda Strait.

(continued on the next page)



Free bus transportation, generously provided by the Harris County Precinct Three Transportation Department, will be available to and from all DOR events. On Friday, March 1, a bus will depart the hotel at 1:30 p.m. to visit the Indonesian Consulate in Houston (see photo at left), which features a special display area with Indonesian costumes, artifacts, and a U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) exhibit.

The Friday night banquet at our hotel's "U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) meeting room" will include guest speaker Sally Mott Freeman, who is the author of the book [The Jersey Brothers](#). Whether you read the book before the DOR or purchase it directly from Sally that evening, we hope you participate in the discussion following her presentation!

Documents, photos, ship logs, maps, illustrations, and other U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30)-related materials will be available for perusing in our "U.S.S. *Houston* meeting room." CA-30 Merchandise will also be available for purchase!

On Saturday morning, March 2, we will gather at 9:00 a.m. for breakfast at our hotel's "U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) meeting room" where one of our newest association members Blane Amphor will present "From Pearl Harbor to Midway." At 12:30 p.m., buses will depart the hotel for the 29th annual U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Memorial Service at Sam Houston Park in downtown Houston. At 7:00 p.m., we will again gather for dinner at our hotel's "U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) meeting room." Association secretary Bernice Harapat, and CA-30 next generationers Jerry Ranger and Scott Ingram will discuss their recent Death Railway Pilgrimage to Thailand (see their article on page 9). Some videos featuring U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) survivors will also be shown. See the Tentative Schedule of Events on page 21.

To register for the Day of Remembrance 2024, either:

1. Print out the **Registration Form** on page 22. Fill out the form, and mail it in with your check, as indicated at the bottom of the form, as soon as possible, or...
2. Download and print out the **Registration Form**, which is available on page 22 or on the Association's website (Click on the following link): www.usshouston.org/news.html. Fill out the form, and mail it in with your check, as indicated at the bottom of the form, as soon as possible.

To reserve a hotel room at the special U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) block rate:

Go to our Association's website (Click on the following link): www.usshouston.org/news.html, then click on the link at the website marked: "**Click here for reservations online.**" Click for reservations and use Group Code SURV for our special rate.

Questions? Email: sue@usshouston.org or call: 720-313-6770.

See you at the "Day of Remembrance" 2024...!



*From the desk of the Executive Director
John K. Schwarz*

December 2023

This edition of the Blue Bonnet provides all the necessary information needed to plan for attending the forthcoming “Day of Remembrance” (DOR) gathering, **March 1-2, 2024, in Houston, TX**. We hope to have a great group attending and that we will find our monument site fully restored from the damage caused to it by a vehicular accident occurring last March 29th. We are grateful to the Parks Department of the City of Houston for its positive response to our request to make those repairs.

This year’s gathering will feature guest speaker Sally Mott Freeman, author of the book The Jersey Brothers. Feel free to purchase that book and read it before our March 2024 DOR, as there will be an extensive discussion period following her presentation. She will also have copies available on-site for purchase for those who have not read the book.

With regards to the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) monument, please be reminded that it is placed in a protected part of Sam Houston Park on the grounds of The Heritage Society, 1100 Bagby St., Houston, TX, 77002 (phone: 713-655-1912). It is important to note that direct access to the monument at times other than when our annual memorial service is being conducted is only available when The Heritage Society is open. Visitors should check in advance for The Heritage Society’s hours of operation.

The recovered/treated trumpet from the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) site, dating back to 2014, remains on display at the Pentagon. Our Association has provided the funding for a display case, which is on order and is targeted to house both the trumpet and the clapper from the ship’s bell as part of a lobby re-design at Naval History and Heritage Command headquarters at the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

Please check out the merchandise page for some terrific U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) apparel and other items available while they last.

Reminder: Open, ongoing lines of communication remain most important for our Association. Accordingly, please update us if/when any change occurs to either your email and/or physical address.

I am hoping for the best of health and happiness for everyone this Holiday season and for a great turnout on March 1-2, 2024, in Houston, TX!

John K. Schwarz



At the U.S.S. Houston (CA-30)/H.M.A.S. Perth (D-29) marker at Arlington National Cemetery (L to R): John K. Schwarz and interns: Matthew Kropelnicki, Ava Sullivan, Gavin Marcotte, Mercer Stipp, Hudson Stipp, and Nadine Ghattas.

SECOND SEA SERVICE INTERNSHIP (SQUADRON II) PROGRAM CONDUCTED IN D.C.

By John K. Schwarz

On August 5 – 11, 2023, Dr. Matt Fash, National Coordinator for the “Stories of Service Program” through the U.S. Navy Memorial, Washington, D.C., conducted the second “Sea Service Internship” (Squadron II) program in Washington, D.C. This weeklong program was established to preserve the stories of our nation's veterans and active service personnel. The program is a national initiative facilitated by the U.S. Navy Memorial, which partners with our nation's schools to preserve American history. Oral histories of U.S. military veterans, active-duty personnel, civilian government employees associated with sea services, and family members of veterans are digitally recorded and added to the Navy Memorial's archives to preserve the stories of the past for future generations. For more information and how to join, visit (navymemorial.org/student-interview-program).

New Association member Blane Amphor and I were honored to contribute to Squadron II's week in Washington, D.C. We both made PowerPoint presentations during the training portion of the program. Blane offered one of his many presentations, on this occasion one titled, “From Pearl Harbor to Midway.” I presented “The Story of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) and her Survivors’ POW Experiences.” Both Blane and I were also interviewed, and we were able to honor our veteran fathers through descriptions of their respective services. We both were also able to speak about our own volunteer work in service to honoring veterans. On this same interview day, we were joined by three naval attaches representing our allied countries (ABDA): Commander Derek Powles, Great Britain; Commander Stefan Luteijn, the Kingdom of the Netherlands; and Lieutenant Commander Dirk Orreill, Australia. These distinguished servicemen and I participated in a round table Q & A discussion with the interns, after which each individual attaché was personally interviewed.

Plans for the following day included an interview opportunity at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. But unfortunately, it was postponed at the very last minute due to inclement weather causing early closure of governmental offices. Literally on her way when notified of the postponement to be interviewed was E. Machin Sarros, daughter of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) crewman Joseph Restine Smith, a Pharmacists Mate 1st class, who perished during enemy action on March 1, 1942. Machin had recently connected with me through her son, Michael Sarros (Mr. Smith's grandson).

Blane and I also participated in Arlington National Cemetery Day on August 11th, which included escorting interns to the cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknowns. At the Tomb, the Squadron participated in a wreath-laying exercise, which is part of the “Changing of the Guard” ceremony. Following that, the group paid honor to the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30)/H.M.A.S. *Perth* (D-29) marker and the gravesites of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) shipmates Joseph Gans, Otto Schwarz, and their spouses, Isabelle Gans and Trudy Schwarz.

It was indeed an honor to contribute to this wonderful program for these high school students entering their senior year at St. Vincent de Paul High School in Petaluma, CA. We extend to them our best wishes for success in their future endeavors. Among them are two possible candidates for entry into the U.S. Naval Academy, to whom we wish the best of luck. Based on what was observed during this intern service week, America will have six terrific young people making great contributions to our nation for many years to come. We thank Dr. Matt Fash for including members of the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors' Association and Next Generations® in this enriching program. It was our honor and pleasure to have participated.



LEGACIES OF TWO U.S.S. HOUSTON CA-30 STEWARDS

By Dana Charles

Before World War Two, the U.S. Navy allowed Chinese men to work aboard warships of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet as stewards, whose primary duty was to act as servants for U.S. Naval Officers. "In those days, those were about the only ratings in the Navy open to minorities," said RADM Robert B. Fulton, USN, who was an engineering officer aboard U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30). Fulton said they could rise to cooks or chiefs of ship's commissaries, "but that was a pretty steep climb" because there were so few of those positions. (1)

Among *Houston's* twenty-eight Chinese stewards were Zee Zhong Fong and Tai Chi Fat. Zee Zhong Fong's name mistakenly appears in various U.S. Naval records as Ah Fong, Fong Ah, and Fong Fong Ah. His actual surname was Zee. According to Chinese custom, Zee, his surname, would come first, followed by his middle name, Zhong, then his given name, Fong. Zee was among the twenty-three Chinese stewards who perished during the Battle of Sunda Strait on March 1, 1942.



Zee Zhong Fong



Tai Chi Fat

Known to crewmen of U.S.S. *Houston* as "Buda," Tai Chi Fat was among the Chinese stewards who served the ship's skipper, CAPT Albert H. Rooks, USN. "He was a chubby man," Fulton said, "and as I remember, he sat on a cigar box about two inches off the floor outside the captain's cabin. He was a very passive figure, and that's how he acquired his 'Buda' name." (2) In his book, *The Ghost That Died in Sunda Strait*, one of *Houston's* surviving officers, Walter G. Winslow, described how Tai was spotted sitting in darkness, holding the lifeless body of Captain Rooks during the sinking of *Houston* on March 1, 1942. When two officers urged Tai to abandon ship, Winslow wrote, "Buda's only response was a loud moan as he commenced rocking back and forth, holding the captain like a little boy asleep...he moaned again and repeated over and over, 'Captain die, *Houston* die, Buda die too.' Tai went down with the ship." (3)

The families of Zee and Tai did not learn of the fates of these two men until the war ended three and a half years later. According to a 1994 article by Bob Tutt in the *Houston Chronicle*, the widows of Zee and Tai were Zee Footsing and Tai Fung Mei. During the war, these two widows struggled to make a living in Shanghai, China, doing such things as selling produce and cigarettes. Fortunately, the Japanese occupying the city never learned of their U.S. Navy connections.

According to Bob Tutt's article, "The two widows met after the war and became close friends while making numerous visits to the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai, China, to establish their claims for death benefits. The Chinese do not have American-style birth and marriage records, and providing the necessary documentation took a long time. Life for the young widows became better after the war when they started receiving death benefit payments from the U.S. Government, according to Lucy Zee, a granddaughter of the two U.S.S. *Houston* stewards."(4) "It wasn't a great amount by American standards, but it was a lot of money for someone living in China at the time." "The widows couldn't remarry because if they did, they would lose the benefits. They wouldn't be able to find anyone who was earning as much as they were getting from the U.S. Government," she said. "It was a kind of a sad life for my grandmothers, but they were strong women and did the best they could."(5)

"The four Zee children got to know the six Tai children through their mothers' friendship. When they grew up, Zee Deen Loong, a son of one family, married Tai Shui Ying, a daughter of the other. This couple, along with their three daughters and the rest of the Zee family, later immigrated to the United States. Some of the Zees have resided in Texas ever since." (6)

"Many years ago, family members toured the battleship U.S.S. *Texas* moored at the San Jacinto Battleground back when the ship contained a compartment dedicated to U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30). In a roster of *Houston's* crew, they spotted the names of the grandfathers, Tai Chi Fat and Zee Zhong Fong, still incorrectly listed as Ah Fong."(7) "We thought this was amazing," Lucy Zee said. "We never thought that by moving to [Texas] we would see this."(8)

Recently, after searching the Internet for descendants of the two U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) stewards, I was able via Facebook to locate and contact Kathleen Zee Boddie, who is one of the granddaughters of both stewards. "Ah Fong is my paternal grandfather, and Tai Chi Fat is my maternal grandfather," she wrote. Kathleen also wrote that she would tell her sisters and cousins about the upcoming March 2, 2024, U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Annual Memorial Service in Houston. "I would be honored to attend the ceremony," she said.

We look forward to welcoming the descendants of Tai Chi Fat and Zee Zhong Fong to our 2024 "Day of Remembrance" in Houston!

Sources:

- (1) "Unexpected Alliance" by Bob Tutt, Houston Chronicle, Sunday, February 27, 1994, p. 3C.
- (2) Ibid, p. 3C.
- (3) The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait by Walter Winslow, paperback version, p. 140.
- (4) "Unexpected Alliance" by Bob Tutt, Houston Chronicle, Sunday, February 27, 1994, p. 3C.
- (5) Ibid, p. 3C
- (6) Ibid, p. 3C
- (7) Ibid, p. 3C
- (8) Ibid, p. 3C

POW FAMILIES AND THE FOG OF WAR

Accurate information on the status of the officers and crew of the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) was impossible to come by until after the end of World War II.

By Robert J. Blair

Born on July 28, 1911, my uncle, Kenneth S. Blair, was a thirty-one-year-old CSM (Chief Signalman) onboard U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) at the time of its sinking on March 1, 1942, during the Battle of the Sunda Strait. He had enlisted in the Navy in New York, New York, at age 18 back in February 1929 and had been aboard *Houston* since September 13, 1941—less than six months before *Houston* was sunk.



KENNETH S. BLAIR

Kenneth survived the sinking and was captured on Java on March 1, 1942, held in Serang, and later at Bicycle Camp in Batavia, Java. On October 11, 1942, Kenneth was among the American prisoners of war—mostly U.S.S. *Houston* survivors and U.S. soldiers of the 131st Field Artillery/2nd Battalion—who were transported along with approximately 1400 allied POWs via hellship to Singapore and later to Burma and forced to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Kenneth was among the American POWs of Group 5, which started working on the infamous railroad construction project in January 1943. In March 1944, Kenneth became ill with beriberi in a railway POW camp in Thailand and died there on March 24, 1944.

Due to the enemy's possession of POWs and the "Fog of War," there was much confusion in America as to the survival and location of many of the U.S.S. *Houston's* crewmen. Many families were affected by this confusion. My Uncle Kenneth's family was but one example. Kenneth's mother, my grandmother, Ethel M. Blair, received various communications starting in 1942 and continuing until the war's end with conflicting information on her son's fate. These various communications were indicative of the following:

- A lack of reliable information available in a timely manner;
- The "Telephone Game" phenomenon, where information changes as it is passed from person to person; and
- Information that was out of date by the time it was distributed.

This experience was not unique to Kenneth Blair and his family. It was shared by many of the families of U.S.S. *Houston's* crewmen as well as the families of the sailors of other ships in the ABDA force lost in the spring of 1942.

Initial reports in March 1942 indicated that all hands were lost at the time of the U.S.S. *Houston's* sinking. Updates distributed in the fall of 1944 reported that Kenneth and other *Houston* sailors and Marines were POWs in Thailand. By the time of these updates, Kenneth had, in fact, died. His fate was only correctly identified in October 1945—after the war had ended.

A limited chronology of events:

- March 1, 1942 – U.S.S. *Houston* sinks with 368 survivors, including Kenneth Blair.
- March 16, 1942 – The Boston Globe: Headline – Cambridge Sailor Among Those Who Died on Houston
Excerpt – "...Kenneth S. Blair, Chief Signalman on the U.S.S. *Houston*, cruiser which the Navy Department yesterday said had sunk off Java with all aboard lost...."

- June 5, 1942 – the Boston Globe: Headline – Mothers to Get Diplomas for 2 Sons Lost at Sea
Excerpt – “...Kenneth Blair...went down at sea when the U.S.S. *Houston* was sunk off Java and all aboard were lost....”.
- November 17, 1944 – the Boston Globe: Headline – Officer, Missing 2 1/2 Years, Turns Up in Jap Prison
Excerpt – “Chief Petty Officer Kenneth S. Blair...who has been reported missing for two and one-half years, is now a prisoner of war in Thailand, according to word...from Chief of Navy Personnel...”
- September 7, 1945 – Tampa Bay Times: Headline – Clearwater Man Presumed Freed
Excerpt – “News of the arrival in Calcutta of liberated survivors of the U.S.S. *Houston*... Mrs. Blair...received word of her son’s survival last November after more than two and a half years had elapsed since the *Houston* was sunk off Java in February 1942...”
- September 14, 1945 – Tampa Bay Times: Headline – K. S. Blair Dies in Jap Prison
Excerpt – “Mrs. Ethel M. Blair ... received word yesterday from the War Department of the death of her son...in a Jap prison March 24, 1944, in Thailand...”
- October 23, 1945 – Letter to Ethel M. Blair from Harold S. Hamlin, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy.
Summary – A letter from Kenneth Blair’s commanding officer while they were both POWs. The letter confirmed Kenneth’s death and included condolences and details of their experiences as POWs.

The “Fog of War” prevailed to obscure the fates of Kenneth Blair and his shipmates on the U.S.S. *Houston*. His survival of the sinking and death in captivity were only correctly reported three years and seven months after his death. The families of the officers and crews of the other ABDA force ships, including H.N.L.M.S. *DeRuyter*, H.M.A.S. *Perth*, H.M.S. *Exeter*, U.S.S. *Pope*, among others likely had similar experiences of limited, misleading, or dated information on the status their loved ones.

Sources:

1. www.newspapers.com/image/431790436
2. www.newspapers.com/image/431803653
3. www.newspapers.com/image/314909335
4. www.newspapers.com/image/315004834
5. www.newspapers.com/image/315010330
6. Blair family records. A copy of the letter is now on file with the U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Survivor’s Association & Next Generations’ Kenneth S. Blair folder.
7. POW Record of Kenneth S. Blair, maintained by U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) survivors during captivity.

Forward Turrets 1 and 2 mounted on U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30).



OUR DEATH RAILWAY PILGRIMAGE

By Bernice Harapat

“Someday, I want to go see it in person.” How many of us have said that? I said the same thing when Scott Ingram, Jerry Ranger, and I discussed it over dinner at the March 2023 DOR. “Someday.” But a call from Scott in April changed that, and suddenly, the three of us were planning a trip!

The first step in our journey was to contact the Thai-Burma Railway Centre (TBRC). Located next to the War Cemetery in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, it was founded by Rod Beattie, an Australian. My family and I first met Rod on a visit in 1995. He was clearing the abandoned rail bed in the jungle by himself and took us out to see it, telling us of his dream to build a museum to commemorate the Railway. In 2003, that museum became a reality and now includes research and pilgrimages for family members.



Scott Ingram, Bernice Harapat and Jerry Ranger in Banpong, Thailand, August, 2023.

Scott, Jerry and I decided on a 5-day pilgrimage—August 8-15, 2023. Once provided with our fathers’ names, General Manager Terry Manttan and Researcher Andrew Snow worked their magic, tracking down each one’s POW records (and a few of my uncles’ records, too). They even listed where William Ingram, John Ranger, and Willem Terluin were together and may have met! Based on this information and our wishes about how much strenuous hiking we wanted, a personalized, all-inclusive itinerary was designed for us; our only task was to get to Bangkok.

Day 1-2:

We arrived in Bangkok! EVA Air is outstanding; the long flight was comfortable. After a night at the Century Park Hotel downtown and a big breakfast, the TBRC folks came to take us to Kanchanaburi, with stops for snacks and lunch, and a visit to Ban Pong, the beginning of the Thailand end of the Railway and still a functioning train stop.

We arrived at the Centre. Over coffee and delicious Thai snacks, we finally met the gracious and knowledgeable fellow NGs (H.M.A.S. *Perth* and Australian Army, Singapore) who made our trip possible. Both Terry and Andrew lost their fathers very early because of their captivity; the desire to learn more brought them to Thailand. Terry presented each of us with a printed report of their findings for each man, with pictures and maps and a gift of Otto Kreeft’s beautiful book. He then proceeded to tell us about our fathers’ POW years—more than we ever knew in our lives (it turns out Terry’s father, an H.M.A.S. *Perth* survivor, was on a hellship with Scott’s Dad). We brought U.S.S. *Houston* hats, shirts, and challenge coins to give them.

After our briefing, they turned us loose to explore the museum. We stayed until closing time—not nearly long enough. I don’t want to spoil it for anyone, but some displays stopped us in our tracks! Powerful stuff, even more so knowing the victims are buried literally outside the window. Seeing their graves in the beautiful, lovingly tended cemetery, it’s hard to conjure up the events that brought them there, but here they speak to us. We then checked into our hotel, the River Kwai Resort, located where Tha Makham (Tamarkan) camp met the river.



Scott Ingram, Bernice Harapat, Jerry Ranger, and Terry Manttan, General Manager of the TBRC.

Day 3: Breakfast was served on a terrace overlooking the river. The bridge is right there—pretty surreal. It’s impossible not to think, “Our fathers never had it this good.” Andrew took us to the War Cemeteries at Kanchanaburi and Chungkai. A few friends and relatives had asked me to check on their loved ones’ graves, and Poom, our guide, kindly brought me flowers for them. There are no American graves; all on the Thailand side were repatriated to the US. Nearby are the sites of F&H Force Hospital Camp, now a community sports facility, and Kanchanaburi HQ #3 Aerodrome Camp.

The sites have not been built upon; Andrew explained that the Thais don’t build in a place where

many people died so as not to disturb their spirits. In the historic part of the town, we passed the home and shop of Mr. Boon Pong and his family, who risked death to help the POWs.

The next stop was the Chungkai cutting and POW campsite. It's hard to imagine what it was like for the POWs to cut straight down through rock with hand tools and dynamite and haul all the rubble away by hand. Our day also included a visit to the famous Wang Po Viaduct, where we walked on the tracks to the cave on the cliffside and the original JEATH museum. Not to be confused with a museum of the same name near our hotel (not affiliated), it was founded by a Buddhist abbot. The museum is housed in replicas of the POW huts. We found a surprise among the exhibits: a group photo of newly repatriated U.S.S. *Houston* survivors. We knew one of them, Mr. Bill Ingram! He’s smiling at us from the center of the group.

Our day concluded with a ride in a long-tail boat, disembarking at the bridge. It’s quite a tourist attraction, swamped with people strolling and taking selfies. There are restaurants, a marketplace, and an outdoor venue called, oddly, “Prisoner of War Camp,” though there was no camp on the site. It was tacky but appeared to bring in customers because it was lively at night.

Day 4: We headed north towards the Burma border, visiting places our fathers and uncles saw and where some of them died. Kanchanaburi was sunny and dry; going north, it gets greener and wetter—the jungle our dads spoke of. It’s beautiful, but then, we’re not out there building a railroad. Kinsaiyok camp, with its famous waterfall, has been preserved as a national park, including a coal dump for the trains, the wooden sleepers (ties) still in place, and coal still on the ground. We continued to Prang Kasi, where my uncle spent time, and spent the night at a mountain resort in Sangklaburi. The Railway here is submerged by a dam built in the 1980s. It’s a spectacular spot and a popular getaway for Thai people.

Everywhere we went, the food was *amazing*. Well, almost everywhere; there was one single exception. On our first evening, we were tired from our day, and we ventured to an open-air restaurant across the street. It looked like a burger place; what could go wrong?

Jerry: “The meat looks really red.”

Bernice: “Maybe it’s some kind of special marinade.” (*cuts a piece to try*)

A horrified waitress came running with the hibachi to cook the meat.

Scott: (*Looking at his extremely fatty pork roast*) “I think I’m not hungry.”

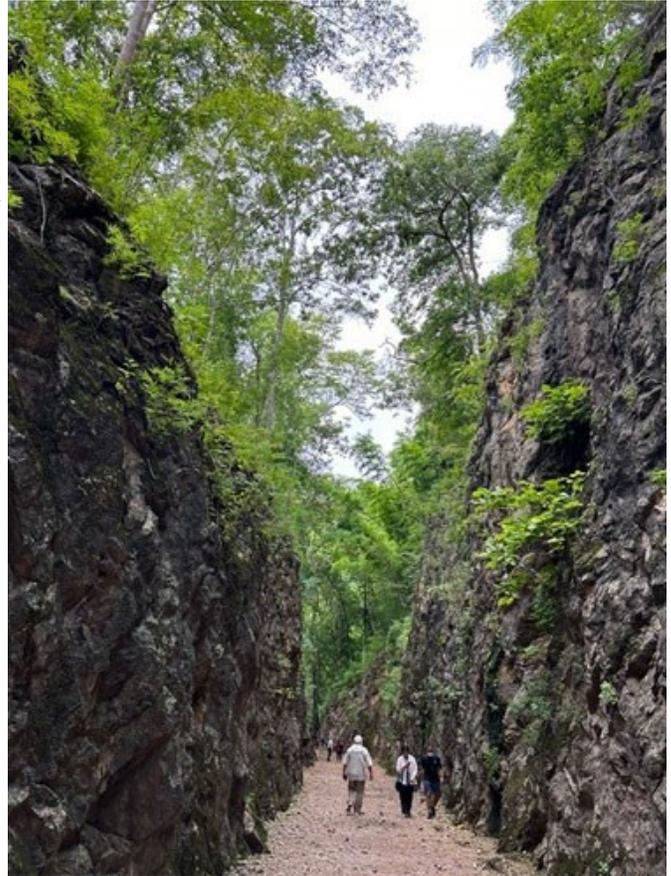
Beer comes in BIG bottles- 620 ml! Oh well, waste not want not; maybe it will kill any worms.

Day 5: We awakened the next morning to the sounds of the jungle: Birds singing, roosters crowing, cicadas making a racket. Our fathers must have heard these sounds, along with elephants and the occasional tiger! It was raining, but nice and warm. After walking on the wooden bridge over the reservoir and exploring the charming town, we headed to Three Pagodas Pass, where the Burma POWs entered Thailand. The little pagodas are draped in bright fabrics and set in a landscaped enclosure, very different from how they looked to the POWs! There's a duty-free marketplace, and upon exiting the market, we were right at the border. It's easy to inadvertently cross into Burma while taking a picture or examining the stretch of railway on the other side of the border sign. Did any of us do that? We are not telling!

Hellfire Pass was next. It's impressive, with a museum and interpretive center built by Australia. The cutting is huge: 25 meters high and 600 meters long—three times the length of U.S.S. *Houston*! It was overwhelming for its size and the knowledge that so many died constructing it. Visitors have left photos and little mementos—very moving, especially those from the ex-POWs. The wind moves through the trees in the highest part of the cutting. It sounds like the men are speaking, thanking us for not forgetting them. They are never far away in these places; we won't forget them.

There's a trail leading to the Hintok camp, and we walked part of it. At the end, there's a pile of items people picked up on the way: railroad spikes and other bits. It's as if they brought them that far and then thought better about taking them away. Surprising, unlike other places in the world where people will take even rocks and dirt home as souvenirs.

Our trip back to Kanchanaburi was by train along the route laid by our fathers. It was quiet in our train car, everyone with their thoughts. Our route from Nam Tok (Tarsao) took us back over Wang Po Viaduct, which was a little scary! I hope the happy, chattering tourists who boarded at the various stops take a minute in their vacation to remember what happened here. A surprising number are young Japanese people; we're told they are not taught this at school and want to learn.



Hellfire Pass, Thailand, August, 2023.

We had a nice surprise waiting for us at the end of the line: Dinner with Terry, his wife Thitiya, and Andrew at one of the outdoor riverfront restaurants. We could not ask for a more perfect ending to our day!

Day 6: Last day. We've already decided it won't be our last visit, though! Back to the Centre to wrap things up. We revisited the museum, bought locally made items in the gift shop, and loaded up on books from the large selection in English and Dutch. Excess baggage fees- don't care! I visited the little Catholic church by the Cemetery, built by a former Dutch ambassador. The angels flanking the altar are brown-skinned, like the people of the Indies and Thailand. Like my Dad. Love that. Over the door, the last thing one sees before leaving is the first verse from the prayer for the departed: "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord."



At dinner on Day five (L to R): Andrew Snow, Terry Manttan and his wife Thitiya, Bernice Harapat, Scott Ingram and Jerry Ranger.

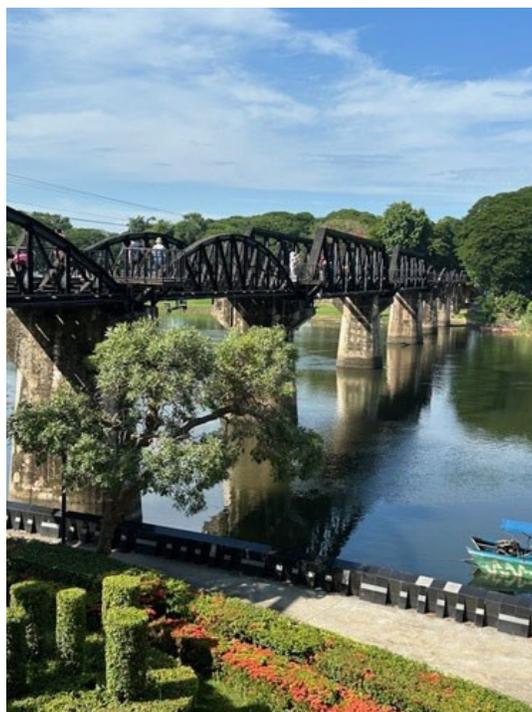
them could be reunited. They had many adventures after they regained their health, but since I was “a kid,” they weren’t about to tell me any details! They loved Thailand and the people; it was a happy time for them after going through hell, and this was most likely where they stayed!

Time to say goodbye. We reminded ourselves that we would return; otherwise, we would be too sad. Our driver made a detour to the site of Emma Camp for us. Then, we went to Bangkok and EVA Air back to the U.S.A.

Thank you, Scotty and Jerry, for inviting me on this trip of a lifetime. We were close to our fathers before; now, after visiting the places where they sacrificed so much, we feel even more connected to them. Heck, sometimes it was like they were walking beside us. Anyone thinking of visiting, we wholeheartedly recommend the TBRC pilgrimages. Ask us about it at the DOR, and just try and shut us up! See you then!

“When you go home, tell them of us, and say for your tomorrow, we gave our today.”

John Maxwell Edmonds



(At left): The Bridge On the River Kwai, Kanchanaburi, Thailand, August 2023

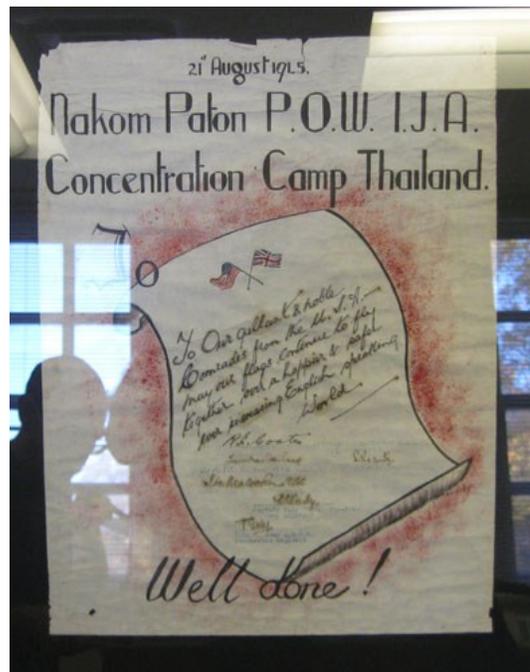


CA-30 MODEL PRESENTED TO NHHC

By John K. Schwarz

On November 16, 2023, the Association’s Executive Director, John K. Schwarz, presented to Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) Director, RADM Samuel Cox, USN (retired), a 2-foot-long scale model of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30). The model is targeted as part of a new display within the re-designed lobby/greeting entrance to Naval History & Heritage Command Headquarters at the Navy Yard, Washington, DC. Also presented to RADM Cox was a framed document that U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) survivor Harold P. Smith obtained upon his liberation from Japanese POW captivity in August 1945. Both the model and the framed document were donated to the Association by the recently deceased Annette Smith, widow of Harold P. Smith, and Mr. Smith's son Jeff Smith of Arlington, VA.

(At right): A hand-lettered document commemorating the August 21, 1945 liberation of American and British POWS from the Nakom Paton POW camp in Thailand, which reads: “To our gallant and noble comrades from the U.S.A.— May our flags continue to fly together over a happier and safer ever-increasing English speaking world...Well done!”



We sincerely thank the Smith family for the thoughtful and generous donation of these important items, which help perpetuate the memory of the ship and POW experiences endured by U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) survivors.

The Mailbag *By Dana Charles, Association Correspondent*

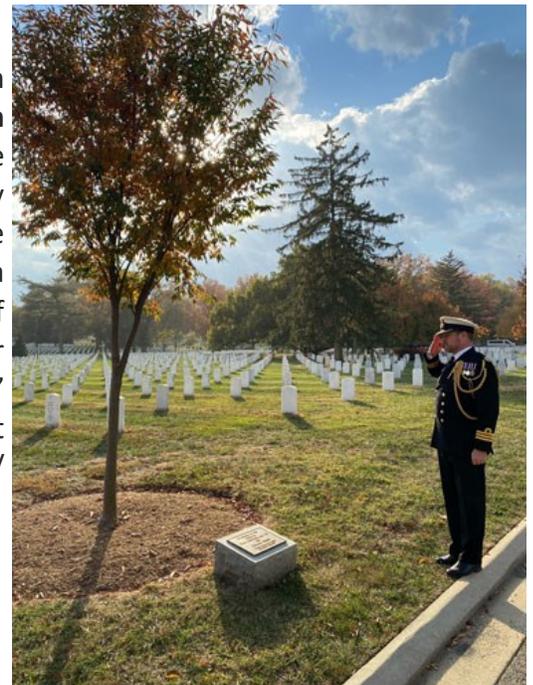
Notes on news received via email at contact@usshouston.org and via regular mail...

- 9/25/2023: Received the following email from NG Jo Klenk (former editor of the Blue Bonnet): “[My husband] Tim received a very special honor on September 25, 2023. He was presented with a beautiful patriotic quilt handmade by a member of the Stars & Stripes chapter of the Quilts of Valor Foundation (QOV) to honor him for his service in the U.S. Army. The presentation by two ladies from QOV was very thoughtful, meaningful, and touching. We were overwhelmed by the kindness of the lady who made the quilt and those who came to present it to him.



The quilt is amazing and stunningly beautiful, with a picture of Mt. Rushmore and several patriotic fabrics. The quilt has three layers, each with a special meaning. The top layer, with its many colors and fabrics, represents the many communities and individuals we are. The middle batting layer represents the hope that the quilt will provide warmth, comfort, and peace. The bottom layer, which holds the layers together, represents the love, gratitude, and often tears of the maker. The quilt’s message is to honor and comfort the recipient and to recognize that FREEDOM IS NOT FREE. It requires the dedication and service of our military men and women. We are grateful Americans!

- 11/9/2023: John Schwarz received the following email from **Commander Derek Powles, British Naval Attaché at the British Embassy, Washington D.C.**: “Today we were in Arlington to place crosses and poppies on the graves of the British military personnel buried in Arlington Cemetery, and I also went to the USS *Houston*/HMAS *Perth* memorial to pay my respects. I laid a cross at the grave of a deckhand, John Prowse, who died of pneumonia onboard HMS *Warrior* while in the U.S. just after WWI. There were 3 others who died onboard as well.” Commander Powles granted permission to publish the photo (at right) taken of him on November 9, 2023, at the U.S.S. *Houston*/H.M.A.S. *Perth* marker located at Arlington National Cemetery.



- 11/12/2023: John K. Schwarz received the following email message from **NG Matt Rejmaniak**: “I wanted to let you know about my father’s U.S. Army Veteran Medallion. My father was a Next Generations family member (relative of Edwin Dombrowski, Gunner and Gunner Trainer aboard USS *Houston*), and as you know he attended the Memorial Service on several occasions. I began the process of requesting his honorable discharge papers back in 2020. Due to COVID-19, which had caused most work at the Archives to come to a stop, and the fact that most of my father’s Military Service Records were lost in the Archives’ fire of 1973, it took until now to receive his proof of service and to obtain his Veterans medallion. I am proud to say it was installed in time for Veterans Day 2023.”



U.S.S. HOUSTON (CA-30) STORY PRESENTED ON VETERANS DAY

By John K. Schwarz

At Tohickon Middle School in Doyleston, Pennsylvania, Veterans Day was observed on Wednesday, November 8th, 2023, under the direction of the school's Assistant Principal, Dr. Matt Fash. Association Executive Director John K. Schwarz and new member Blane Amphthor were invited to speak at this event along with many local area veterans from various U.S. conflicts and other service periods. Addressing five individual class sessions of 45 minutes each, Blane spoke on the service of his late father, Francis J. Amphthor, who served in the U.S. Navy aboard the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri* and was present on September 2, 1945, at the signing of the Japanese surrender marking the end of WWII. John delivered his “U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30)/ Pow Experience” presentation that Otto Schwarz originally produced. With approximately 30 students in each class session, Blane and John reached 150 students with their respective messages. It was an honor to be a part of this wonderful day and to work alongside the veterans who spoke about their service experiences. (Pictured above: Back row standing, third from the left John K. Schwarz, fourth from the left Blane Amphthor).

In Memoriam

Cletus Mathew Flynn



JANUARY 20, 1963—SEPTEMBER 17, 2023

**Son of David C. Flynn,
U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Survivor**

Obituary: Published by Sun-Sentinel on Sep. 24, 2023

Cletus Mathew Flynn passed away on September 17, 2023. He is survived by his loving wife Sandy, son Justin, wife Rachel, grandson Conrad David, Mother Donna Mae Flynn of Boca Raton, and brothers Shawn of California, Dennis and Fulton of Polk County. Nieces Erin, Katie Mae, Emily, and Mary. He was predeceased by his father, David C. Flynn. Cletus was a musician. He played guitar, piano, and flute with perfect pitch. He attended Harker's School in CA. St Joan of Arc, and Valedictorian at the Prep School of Boca Raton. Cletus was amazing; his energy was boundless. His laugh lit up the room. The world has lost someone very special. We are all poorer for his death. Love mother. In lieu of flowers, make contributions to the USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association and Next Generations®.

Obituary: Minor Funeral Home, Milton, VT

Cletus Mathew Flynn passed away peacefully on Sunday, September 17th, 2023. He was born on January 20, 1964, in Palo Alto, CA. He was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, and musician. Cletus was the worship leader at Cornerstone Church for over a decade. Also, he was loved by all who had the pleasure of knowing the "Cleteman." Clete loved running his dogs, Barkley and Maggie Mae, in the snow. He graduated from Vermont Technical College and loved his 30-year career as a Yield Engineer with IBM/Global Foundries. He was preceded in death by his father, David C. Flynn. He is survived by his wife Sandy of 29 years, son Justin and wife Rachel Racicot, and his grandson Conrad. Also, his Flynn family, mother Donna Mae, brothers Shawn, Dennis, and Fulton. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to SD Ireland Cancer Research Fund here -<http://sdicancerresearch.org/support/donate/>

In Memoriam

Annette Smith



APRIL 17, 1926—OCTOBER 20, 2023

Widow of U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Survivor Harold Smith

Annette Smith passed away on October 20, 2023, in Leesburg, Virginia. Annette was born in Newark, New Jersey on April 17, 1926, to Samuel and Rose Vacca. Annette married Harold Smith (US Navy veteran and WWII Japanese prisoner of war) and together they raised five children. Annette enjoyed life as a homemaker, raising their children, during Harold's 26-year career in the Navy. Harold passed away in 1998, and Annette moved into Falcons Landing in April 2000. Annette loved her family, cooking, and sharing coffee and companionship with her many wonderful friends at Falcons Landing. She was also an active member of the Catholic Community. Annette is predeceased by her husband, Harold, and survived by her children Harold Smith, Jr.; Sherri Schultz; Karen Pitts; Maureen Bingham; Jeffrey Smith; their spouses; grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Now See This!

USS *Houston* (CA-30) Merchandise! Wear with pride!

Email johnk.schwarz@yahoo.com to place an order.

- USS *Houston* CA-30 Challenge Coins – (\$10.00 ea.)
- USS *Houston* CA-30 Hats – (\$25.00 ea.)
- USS *Houston* CA-30 Large Men's Polos – (\$28.00 ea.) (2) in Navy Blue; (2) in Black; (1) in Red; and (1) in Light Green.

Visit our website's 'Ship's Store' at www.usshouston.org/shipsstore.html and see all USS *Houston* CA-30 items!

(All Items: Plus Shipping)

USS *Houston* CA-30 Challenge Coin



Front

Back



USS *Houston* CA-30 Hats



USS *Houston* CA-30 Men's Polo Shirts

Meet your...

Board of Managers

...here to serve you!*



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Son of USN survivor Otto Schwarz and Trudy Schwarz
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Scholarship Committee, Merchandise
Email: John@usshouston.org



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Special Projects, Scholarship Committee
Email: Bernice@usshouston.org

* 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), 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, 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.
- All email correspondence for the Association is directed through: 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 U.S.S. Houston (CA-30) Survivors’ Association and Next Generations®, including: Eli Bressler (NG) and John Foley

Thank you!

Donations

July 12, 2023 - November 7, 2023

*In memory of Cletus Flynn
Kathy and Mary Drayna*

Other Donations

Blane Amphor
Peter Bota
Bernice Harapat
Loudoun County Public Library
Joe and Marlene McCain

AmazonSmile donations received: \$93.97
(Amazon has discontinued the AmazonSmile program)

Financial Report

January 1 – November 7, 2023

General Fund

Beginning Balance:	\$30,828.73
Receipts:	+ 9,858.50
Expenses:	- <u>6,594.34</u>
Ending Balance:	\$34,092.89



Scholarship Fund

Beginning Balance:	\$24,406.31
Receipts:	+ 3,089.54
Expenses:	- <u>3,000.00</u>
Ending Balance:	\$24,495.85



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Distribution: Dana Charles, Pam Moura.

Articles or information may be sent to:
contact@usshouston.org or bluebonnet@usshouston.org.

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.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

**U.S.S. HOUSTON (CA-30) SURVIVORS' ASSOCIATION
AND NEXT GENERATIONS®**

Day of Remembrance 2024

**82nd Anniversary of the Loss of
U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) and H.M.A.S. *Perth* (D-29)**

Hilton Garden Inn, Houston, Galleria Area 3201 Sage Road, Houston, TX, 77056

Tentative Schedule of Events

March 1-2, 2024

FRIDAY (March 1)

Visit to the Indonesian Consulate - Houston 2:00 p.m.

*A Bus will leave from the hotel promptly at 1:30 p.m. to take guests to the Consulate.
Please be on board by 1:15 p.m.*

Registration/Hospitality	6:00 – 10:00 p.m.	Hospitality
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Dinner	6:30 p.m.	Hotel
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- Executive Director’s Year-end Report Presentation.
- Scholarship Announcements.
- Naval History and Heritage Command Update.
- Keynote Speaker: Sally Mott Freeman, author of The Jersey Brothers.

SATURDAY (March 2)

Breakfast	9:00 – 11 a.m.	Hotel
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- Guest Speaker: Blane Amphor, presenting “From Pearl Harbor to Midway.”

*Buses will leave from the hotel promptly at 12:30 p.m. to take guests to Sam Houston Park.
Please be on board by 12:15 p.m.*

2024 Memorial Service	1:30 p.m.	Sam Houston Park
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Dinner	7:00 p.m.	Hotel
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- Bernice Harapat, Jerry Ranger, and Scott Ingram discuss “Our Death Railway Pilgrimage.”
- Showing of videos featuring U.S.S. *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors.

REGISTRATION FORM

82nd Anniversary USS Houston CA-30 Survivors' Association & Next Generations (R)
Day of Remembrance
March 1-2, 2024
Hilton Garden Inn Houston Galleria
3201 Sage Road
Houston, TX 77056

Click here for hotel reservations:
[USS HOUSTON SURVIVORS ASSN \(hilton.com\)](http://USSHOUSTONSURVIVORSASSN(hilton.com))

DEADLINE – MUST BE RECEIVED BY FEBRUARY 21, 2024

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY AND LIST THE NAME OF EACH PERSON INCLUDED IN THIS REGISTRATION (Use the back of this form if necessary)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name of crew member you are honoring and relationship (or state you are a friend). Please include branch of service: _____

Anticipated date and time of arrival: _____
=====

Friday Dinner - 6:30 PM

Brown Sugar and Mustard Glazed Salmon # _____ X \$35.00 = \$ _____

or

Stuffed Chicken Roulade # _____ X \$35.00 = \$ _____

Saturday Breakfast – 9:00 AM # _____ X \$33.00 = \$ _____

Saturday Dinner – 7:00 PM

Seared Rib Eye Steak # _____ X \$35.00 = \$ _____

or

Vegetable Wellington # _____ X \$35.00 = \$ _____

Registration # _____ X \$40 per person = \$ _____

Late Registration # _____ X \$15 per person = \$ _____
(Received after February 21, 2024)

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Please include a check for the total cost made payable to: USS Houston-Next Generations (your check is your receipt). Payment is non-refundable.

Mail registration to: Pam Moura, 2065 Sutter View Lane, Lincoln, CA 95648