USS WILLARD KEITH DD-775

REUNION REPORT FROM NASHVILLE: 23 TO 26 OCTOBER 2017

After last assembling in 2016 near the White River in Branson, MO, it was "all hands to quarters for muster, inspection, and instruction" near the banks of the Cumberland River at Nashville, TN for our 27th annual reunion. On Monday the 23rd of October, we convened about 12 miles from downtown Nashville at the Guest House Inn & Suites, but near the Grand Ole Opry Theatre, Opry Mills Mall, and Gaylord Resort. Ship's Company was up from the previous year to 15 sailors and about the same number of guests.

At 1600 hours on the 23rd, the Hospitality Room was opened with our displays, Ship's Store, and geedunk. If only we could have gotten the hotel to paint the room haze gray, and the galley to serve up some SOS, the setup would have been complete! By 1800, the chow line was open for "supper for the crew", consisting of ribs, mesquite chicken, and associated barbeque buffet fixins. This gathering was also the occasion for our uniform contest and Chinese auction. Perhaps the most significant moment was the arrival of the original **SHIP'S** BELL, removed from the forward mast under mysterious circumstances the night before the ship was decommissioned in July 1972, stationed in a garage during retirement in Florida for decades, and finally on station in her brassy elegance with the crew at Music City. Following "Knock off ship's work" and "Lay before the mast all 8 o'clock reports", after hours refreshments were served in any of the three restaurants nearby.

The next morning being Tuesday, we boarded a vehicle from the Anchor Bus Company [very funny, Magnolia Tours] for the retirement home of Andrew Jackson: the Hermitage Mansion and Estate. This was our second brush with the 6th President because the site of one of our recent reunions was renamed from Cow Ford to Jacksonville. Rachel's Church, named after Jackson's wife, was the site of our traditional Memorial Service. After an initial setback with the failure of our portable "lMC", the service went forward with some artful innovation by Paul Goldberg and Don Hempstead. The Church sits by itself in the 1,200 acre present estate, down from its Jackson time size of 3,000 acres. It is the final resting place of some 400 confederate soldiers. The Mansion must have been plush for the early 1800s, and several nearby building are well preserved as kitchen, smoke house, slave quarters, and original Jackson cabin. Lunch was at a local smorgasbord [must be Swedish for mess deck]; thereafter, back to the hotel.

Dinner was at the Dave & Busters at the Opry Mill Mall which is a destination in itself. Next was the radio show for WSM 650 AM at the Grand Ole Opry House. The theme this night was "Opry Goes Pink" with an emphasis on breast cancer treatment and lady performers. The headliners were Trisha Yearwood and Kelsea Ballerini. The show was terrific, and not to be missed if in the area. Back at the hotel by 2200, it was: "Taps, taps, lights out. All hands turn into your racks. Maintain silence about the decks. The smoking lamp is out in all berthing spaces. Now, taps."

Wednesday the 25th day of October found the 30 ofus aboard the Anchor Bus for a tour of Music City. As the "Athens of the South", Nashville has a full scale rebuild of the Parthenon of ancient Greek fame, though it was unfortunately not open to the public during our stop there.