



# THE DASHPOT



Issue 85 Newsletter of the Association of Minemen Winter 2015

## GUARDIAN MINEMAN RECOGNIZED FOR HEROISM

CONTRIBUTED BY RON SWART



On Jan. 17, 2013, Petty Officer 3rd Class Travis Kirckof, a mineman currently assigned to Naval Munitions Command on Joint Base Charleston - Weapons Station, S.C., knew immediately something was wrong. Kirckof had just been unceremoniously woken from a deep sleep at 2:30 a.m. aboard USS Guardian (MCM 5). But as his feet hit the floor, Kirckof had no way of knowing the next 48 hours would require him to push himself beyond his limits, both mentally and

physically, and eventually lead to him receiving one of the U.S. Navy's highest honors.

"I looked around and saw some of my shipmates had also been shaken awake," Kirckof said. "We didn't know what, but things just didn't feel right. We woke the rest of our shipmates in our berthing, got dressed and headed topside to see what was going on. As I moved down the passageway toward the stern, I noticed I was running downhill and I could tell the ship wasn't moving."

The Guardian, an Avenger-class mine countermeasures ship, wasn't moving because it had run aground on Tubbataha Reef in the Sulu Sea, about 70 nautical miles southeast of Palawan in the Philippines. At the time of the accident the ship was traveling from Subic Bay in the Philippines to Indonesia.

"I grabbed a battle lantern and we could see waves crashing over the fantail of the ship, but because it was dark, we couldn't tell how bad the situation was," Kirckof said.

The morning light confirmed the crew's worst fears. To better assess the situation, the ship's commanding officer had Kirckoff, one of the ship's two search and rescue swimmers, accompany the ship's damage control assistant over the side to assess the damage.

"I grew up in Toms River, N.J." Kirckof said. "I was always around water. When I was 20, I joined the Navy in hopes of becoming a diver, but I became a mineman instead. When I reported

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## **DEDICATED TO SERVING THE U.S. NAVY MINE FORCE**

The Dashpot,  
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knowledge of undersea mine  
warfare and championing its  
necessity as one of  
America's first lines  
of defense.

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Just a few late entries that did not make it to print in the Fall Issue #84.

## Scholarship Committee

CONTRIBUTED BY RON GLASEN

Dear Ronald,

I apologize that it took me so long to thank you for the scholarship that I have received. I've been very busy in my studies. Thank you for assisting me in attending college. The Association of Minemen has been very helpful in my goals of succeeding in college. I will continue to work as hard as I can towards graduating, and then getting a job after college. Thank you again for the scholarship. I have been rewarded.

Sincerely,

*Dominic Apugliese*

Dominic Apugliese

To The Minemen Association,

I am writing to you to express my profound gratitude towards you for your generous award you have given to me on behalf of the scholarship program. By awarding me this scholarship, you have helped relieve me of some of my financial burden, which now allows me to put my focus entirely on my education. I am so thankful for being honored this award. My appreciation towards The Minemen Association is sincere. Your generosity has greatly inspired me in ways I cannot even begin to describe. I am now encouraged to study hard and strive to do my greatest so that I can fulfill my dreams and become successful. I look forward to being capable of giving back to college students who are financially struggling in my future, just like you have done for me. Thank you tremendously for your consideration for my education, I truly am beyond grateful for my award.

- Sincerely, Rachel Ferguson

## TAPS



Some of you may remember MNCS Garry Mason who was an AOM member some time back. We are saddened to report the passing of his wife, Tommie Sue Mason.

Tommie Sue Parkinson Mason, 75, of Bonneau, SC, former owner and operator of Mason House Kennels, died Saturday afternoon June 14, 2014 in Bonneau, SC, at her residence.

Mrs. Mason was born May 12, 1939, in Stamford, Texas, a daughter of Thomas Parkinson and Mae Bureson Lollar Parkinson. She was a member of the Macedonia Christian Church and enjoyed running her kennels and being a foster parent. Mrs. Mason also loved horseback riding, camping, and spending time with all of her animals. She was married to Garry Mason on November 10, 1985 in Arizona.

Surviving are, her husband, retired Senior Chief Mineman, Garry Mason; a daughter, Terry Lou Brown of Orlando, FL; two sons, Tommy Brown of Oregon, and Danny Brown of Orlando, FL; two step daughters, Melissa Mason Hughes of Rockford, IL, and Bianca Smith of Oshkosh, WI; two step sons, Duane Mason and Darnell Mason both of New York, NY; a sister, Jackie Lou Propst of Dallas, TX; and eight grandchildren.

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## AOM Reunion 2015, Reno Nevada

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FEMRITE

This year our reunion will be held in Reno Nevada at the Sands Regency Hotel and Casino. The dates are October 6, 7, and 8, 2015. I have been talking to the Hotel Sales Coordinator, and the rates are somewhat lower then we are used to for rooms. Standard room rates Sunday through Thursday are \$36.04 per night, which includes tax; Friday and Saturday are \$70.09 per night, which includes tax. Tuesday Oct 6th will be the Early Birds held in a hospitality room, open from 800 to 2000 throughout the reunion. Wednesday Oct 7th will be the Banquet Dinner no host bar with our own bartender, 1800 to 2000. Thursday Oct 8th will be the picnic and auction. We will be inside at their COPA Bar and Grill. The costs for the dinner and picnic are still being negotiated.

The Board of Directors meeting will be Wednesday Oct 7, at 1000 and the Membership Meeting will follow at 1400.

Transportation to and from the airport will be provided by the Sands Regency Hotel and Casino at no cost.

I have never been to Reno but other members say it is a great place. I am looking forward to this reunion and hope to see all of you there.

*Mike Femrite*

AOM Secretary

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## Editors Corner

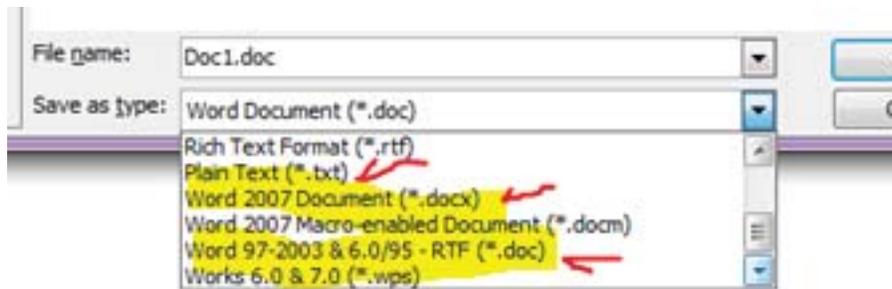


I made it to my first Reunion this past October and have had a bug since, must have been that northern weather up there in South Carolina.

This year I will put more effort into getting the DASHPOT to print during the first weeks of Jan, Apr, Jul, and Oct. With that in mind, please make your best effort to get material for the DASHPOT to me before these dates.

I can use just about any form of media I receive, however, when sending articles that have images, if possible, send those as attachments, and again, any image format is Ok with me. Full page news paper articles, well that I cannot deal with. If you have something like that, please summerize and provide a source of information such as, mailing address, email, or web link for those that may want to followup.

I also continue to use MS-Office 2003. I have access to Office 360, but I would prefer to receive documents as Office 97-2003 or 2007. When saving your document use the <save as> feature and select the format from the drop-down box.



Well that's my nickle, hope everyone had a safe holiday, and be sure to take good care of yuorself.

Regards,

Don Healer, Dashpot Editor



## 2015 Reno Reunion Notes

CONTRIBUTED BY DERICK HARTSHORN

Hi Folks,

It seems like there is a good deal of interest in the 2015 Reno reunion.

Several folks have written me, volunteering their services for event planning.

At the recent reunion, the BoD accepted Mike Femrite as event organizer with help from Dick Schommer.

Dick, in turn says that we can obtain rooms at the Sands for \$25/night + tax (\$10)

Continued on page 15

AOM WINTER ISSUE 5

# MINE WARFARE DETACHMENTS

CONTRIBUTED BY MNC (SW) MICHAEL BALAZS



*THE CREST:* Golden line rope all around the crest with super imposed silver eagle and golden trident surrounded by the golden stars. The mine with the crossed cutlass and saber on the red and white shield. The banner on the bottom of the crest with super imposed motto:

**“CLEARING THE WAY”**

*SHIELD:* Dark blue and gold are the colors traditionally used by the Navy and symbolizes the sea and excellence. The crossed cutlass and sword represents the combat readiness of the enlisted personnel and officers aboard LCS Mine Warfare. Red, white and blue are our national colors. Red chevron rumpus symbolizes valor and sacrifice and suggests the troops. Blue and gold are the colors traditionally associated with the Naval Service and represent the sea and excellence.

*SEVEN GOLDEN STARS:* Means the seven seas are the North Atlantic, South Atlantic, North Pacific, South Pacific, Indian Ocean, Antarctic Ocean, and Arctic Oceans.

*THE TWO SILVER STARS:* Means the two detachments. The pioneers who started building everything together.

*THE TRIDENT:* The triad of Mine Warfare to signify the expertise and mastery at surface, air and sub surface.

*SILVER SPREAD WING EAGLE:* Representation of the United States Navy.

*THE TWO SWORDS:* Represent the Enlisted Community and the Officer Community together for one mission.

*THE MK-6 MINE:* This is the mine used as a Representation for the Mineman rating.

*SMALLER SHIELD:* From the United States Coat of Arms a representation of our national heritage.

*LINE ROPE BORDER:* Reflects the Coastline of the Littoral Maritime areas of operation of the LCS. The mine highlights the ship’s mission; to search and clear the minefield.



# LCS MCM DETACHMENTS

CONTRIBUTED BY MNC (SW) MICHAEL BALAZS

Happy Holidays from Littoral Combat Ship Mine Warfare!



The 2014 year has been by far the busiest for all MCM Detachments. Our personnel have seen amazing advancements, awards and recognition. We received the LCS' first group of young talented junior Sailors onboard. They have hit the deck plates running. They are the future of the LCS Program and the Mine force and we are very comfortable passing the torch to these bright front runners.

## Newest Mineman Chief Petty Officers



Congratulations to our new Mineman Chief Petty Officers,  
MNC (SW) Michael Balazs, MNC (SW) Rachel Chapman and MNC (SW) Phillip Sweet

**Congratulations to MCM DET ONE  
New Engineman Chief Petty Officer**



ENC (SW) Sylbert Daniel

**ASSOCIATION OF MINEMAN  
2014 Mineman of the Year (SEA)**



MN1 (SW) Steven Hassler of MCM DET  
TWO

**COMLCSRON ONE MCM Command Advanced (CAP) Sailors**



Congratulations to Mineman First Class Petty Officer, Jason Watson (Left) and Mineman Third Class Petty Officer, Justin Weatherford (Right). CAP Presentation for MN1 Watson was done by CAPT Randy Gardner, COMLCSRON ONE and MN3 Weatherford was conducted by CDR Michael L. Smith, Commanding Officer, LCS CREW 201.

## MCM DET TWO Advancements



Congratulations to our newest petty officers, Mineman First Class Kenneth Pospisil (Right) and Mineman Third Class Tyler Nicholson (Left). Both Sailors are the best at what they do and were very deserving of the advancement.

## MCM DET THREE Advancement



Congratulations to MN2 Hunter Kliest!

## USS INDEPENDENCE (LCS 2) Developmental Testing (DT)



### **MCM DETACHMENT ONE**

MCM DET ONE has completed a highly successful DT onboard USS INDEPENDENCE. Since this was the last test before Technical Evaluation and Initial Operational Test & Evaluation (IOT&E), their input will greatly improve the system for the final test. They have since rotated off the ship and are engaged in different training opportunities to build proficiency before the high level final test. MCM DET ONE will be the Detachment to complete final MCM testing next year.

### **MCM DETACHMENT TWO**

MCM DET TWO also completed a highly successful DT onboard USS INDEPENDENCE by accomplishing 3 Launch/Recoveries and 11 Pre/Post dives which encompassed 1088 Man-Hours of maintenance and 42 Hours of mission time to include an overnight mission. This highly successful testing was critical for this program, which moved us one step closer to the final system testing.

## MCM DET THREE



MCM DET THREE has been the driving force behind the continuous developmental testing from Lockheed Martin's shore based facilities in West Palm Beach, Florida. They have spent countless months away from their families in order to provide endless hours of input and direct sailors hands on that will greatly enhance the future of this program. Their invaluable feedback is the reason this program has made it this far. They have been the driving force behind many changes to the RMV.

### **Awards**

COMLCSRON SOY Sea (MCM  
DET ONE)  
AG1 Traci Burt

COMLCSRON SOY Shore  
(COMLCSRON ONE)  
MN1 Alnesugi Rivera

COMLCSRON JSOY Sea  
(MCM DET TWO)  
MN3 Justin Weatherford

### **2014 Advancements**

MNCS Craig Rosenburg  
MNC Michael Balazs  
MNC Rachel Chapman  
MNC Phillip Sweet  
ENC Sylbert Daniel  
MN1 Kenneth Pospisil  
MN1 Camaryn Camacho  
MN1 Craig Bennett  
MN1 Robin Taylor  
MN2 Hunter Kliest  
MN2 Alexander Parmo  
MN3 Michael Metoyer  
MN3 Ryan Sanders

### **Welcome Aboard MCM DETS 5 & 6!**

Both DETS have stood up and are beginning the very long training pipeline to certify as a team to operate the RMS.



to the Guardian, they needed a SAR swimmer and I volunteered.”

Dozens of sharks were swarming around the ship, so every Sailor who was qualified to handle a rifle was instructed to stand “shark watch” to ensure the two Sailors’ safety while in the water. Kirckof swam along with the DCA, who reported the ship’s condition to the captain. At that time, the ship was not too damaged and the propellers were still in open water, so the crew spent the day trying everything in their power to move the 224-foot ship off the reef.

But the sea state was building. Waves began crashing into the ship and by nightfall, flooding below decks was becoming more severe. The waves eventually pushed the ship broadside, shoving the entire length of the ship onto the reef as they continued to batter the port side of the ship. The crew spent the night feverishly and heroically conducting damage control to minimize the flooding.

By the morning of the 18th, it was clear the crew needed to be evacuated. Two small boats arrived from MSV C-Champion and removed crewmembers who were not confident swimmers. Then, the order was given to deploy the ship’s two Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boats, followed by the life rafts. After the first RHIB was lowered into the water, Kirckof jumped over the side and swam to it, taking his appointed place as a SAR swimmer, waiting for the impending exodus. But due to the high seas battering the ship, as the port side life rafts were lowered into the ocean, their lines snapped and the boats drifted away, leaving only three usable rafts for the remainder of the crew.

Those rafts, located on the starboard side of the ship, which was now completely over the reef, were released and floated to where a senior chief petty officer grabbed the lines and held them fast. The senior chief had jumped off the ship’s fantail and swam to the reef to make sure others could make the treacherous swim. He had spent 20 minutes fighting to make it to safety and was bruised and bloody from the coral.

It was now time for the crew to leave the ship. They had been fighting to save their ship for more than 36 hours in the baking, equatorial heat with no sleep. Making the swim through the strong, churning ocean currents would require every bit of strength they could muster. To ensure their safety, Kirckof positioned himself in the swirling water behind the fantail as his shipmates began to leave the Guardian.

“I grabbed hold of the first Sailor that jumped in and started moving him toward the reef, but the waves separated us. I swam as hard as I could, grabbed him and got him to safety,” Kirckof said.

Safety was the life boats on top of the reef itself, a distance of almost 70 yards. It was 70 yards back against the strong ocean current to the fantail to get the next Sailor. Kirckof was only able to get four Sailors to safety in the first hour, so he directed his shipmates to tie two lines together and secure one to the ship so he could haul himself back against the current instead of trying to swim, speeding up the process.

Kirckof spent almost five hours in the swirling ocean, ensuring 46 of his shipmates made it to safety. He is credited with saving at least two lives that day and for his heroism, the Director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, Adm. John Richardson, presented Kirckof the Navy and Marine Corps Medal in front of his shipmates and his family.



“We’re here today to recognize a real Navy hero,” Richardson said during the ceremony. “A typical rescue is over in a matter of minutes. Petty Officer Kirckof was in the water for more than four hours, sacrificing his personal safety. Only after his last shipmate had been helped to safety, and he had used up everything in his body, did he stop. He had given it his all.”

Other than some minor injuries, the entire Guardian crew made it off the ship safely and was picked up by the Champion and USNS Bowditch (T-AG 62). The Guardian, damaged beyond repair, was later dismantled and removed from the reef and stricken from the register of U.S. Navy vessels.

“This was probably the most humbling experience I have ever had in my life,” Kirckof said. “I’ve made a few wrong turns in my life, and I

occasionally wondered if the Navy was another wrong turn, but after this experience, I knew that joining the Navy was the right decision for me.

“Every SAR swimmer wonders how they will react when the time comes and people’s lives are on the line. I happened to be the SAR on the Guardian. I’m pretty proud of the fact that when the occasion came to put my training to use, I lived up to the standards.”



## NMC Unit Charleston SC

CONTRIBUTED BY MN1(SW) BEASLEY, PRESTON A. VEMS/ET LPO



The following events that had occurred this quarter have been really exciting and rewarding for our sailors. The command had six Mineman First Class Petty Officers and one Mineman Second Class Petty Officer advanced this cycle.

The command recently selected its Sailor of the Year-MN1(SW) Stevens, Junior Sailor Of The Year-MN1(SW) Roellinghoff, Junior Sailor Of The Quarter-MN1(SW) Templeton, Blue Jacket of the Quarter-ET3 Holmes, and Blue Jacket Of The Year-MNSN Holloway.

NMC Unit Charleston has participated in three exercises this quarter: IMCMEX-14, Operation Vigilant Shield, and VACAPS.

We also have been working each month on upgrades in preparation of NMRCI that will take place in March. These significant events are on-going to improve our sailors ability to operate as a team in Naval Mine Warfare.



# Stephanie Cowart Retirement

CONTRIBUTED BY DERICK HARTSHORN



I personally never thought this day would come. Really! Any mineman who has ever met Stephanie will come away with some really good vibes. She has been one of the most ardent supporters of AOM and has achieved “rock star” status in the surface fleet. As a close friend of Stephanie, I join in with her friends and shipmates in wishing her a wonderful life and comfortable retirement after a great career as an officer and a mineman. I hope that her retirement party will be well-attended by those who hold her in as high regard as she deserves.

Stephanie writes:

My time has finally come and I will be retiring 6 Dec 2014. For most of you, I know you aren't able to attend, but out of my respect for you, I am sending you an invitation. For those that I know are planning on attending, I don't have your mailing address to send an invitation to.

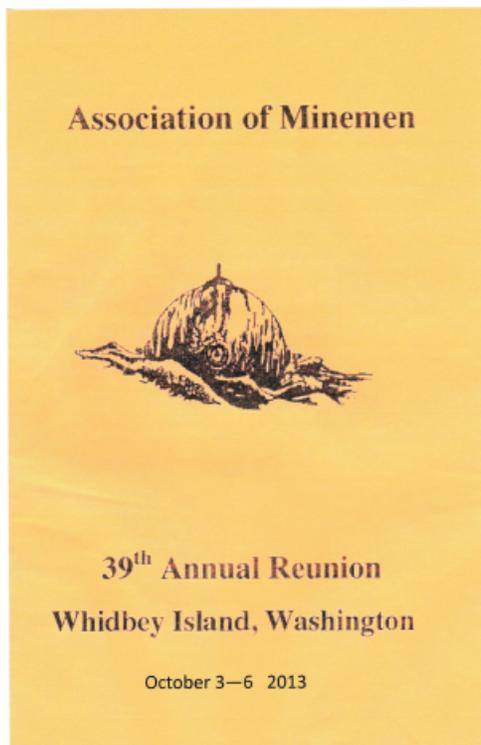
I would like to thank each and every one of you...if you are on this email, you had had a positive impact on my career in some form or fashion or we had a blast working together. It's been one hell of a ride!

Very Respectfully,

LT Stephanie “The Princess” Cowart



39th AOM Annual Reunion Whidbey Island, Washington



The Whidbey Island reunion photo booklet is available through the Storekeeper. See page 2 for address. almost 34 pages of color photos of the reunion for a \$15. donation to the Scholarship Fund.

Continued from Reunion notes page 5

Meanwhile, if you organizers need any assistance, here are copies of two messages I have received so far:

-----  
Hi Derick

Doug Guy here.

Sorry I could not attend the Charleston reunion but, between health issues, selling our condo and buying a house and numerous other issues it was impossible.

At the Whidbey Island reunion I said I would try to help with the Reno reunion. Can you tell me who else is on that planning board. I need to contact them and see if they have a resting place or casino yet. Also I need the dates and what will happen on each date. I have casino hosts in Reno who possibly could help us out.

Hope this finds you fit as a fiddle. Will see you in Reno.>

Doug

I live just less than 60 miles east of Reno, about a 45 minute drive.

If I'm still alive, I'll make a point to meet up with you.

Have you got a host and a hotel/casino in line for your reunion? If not, I have a good point of contact that is great for reunions. I hosted a mini west coast EOD Reunion (we call these reunion, rendezvous) back in 2011 and was considering doing the same for our overall association in 2016 at the same place. Let me know and will send info.

'Rebb'



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