

March 2022

Hello again, Indy family!

I'm excited about this newsletter because it contains Indy stories that you've probably never heard. I think you'll be touched and inspired. Meanwhile, we are **counting down** to the May reunion in Fredericksburg, Texas. Details on that—including opportunities you should not miss—below.

The Immortal Cleatus Lebow

The account below comes from Cindy Wilson, whose uncle, William "Billy" Stier, perished in the sinking of Indianapolis.

My mom did not talk about her brother very much. We knew Uncle Billy had served on a Navy ship and that he had passed away. But that was all she told us growing up. As my mom got older she actually started to talk about her brother Billy, but still never mentioned anything about the Indianapolis (CA-35.) I did some research and after learning of Indy, I contacted Kim Roller. After speaking with Kim, we decided to take my mom to the July 2014 reunion. She did not want to go but agreed for me. Sadly, on July 14, 2014, my mom passed away at 92 years old, never getting to see a reunion.

My husband Ray and I had the task of cleaning out the house she lived in for 60 years. Inside a pocketbook found in a closet was a piece of pink tissue paper and wrapped inside was a letter from an Indy survivor, Cleatus Lebow, to my mom expressing his sorrow for Billy who was lost at sea.

In 2015, I again contacted Kim Roller and asked her if Cleatus Lebow was still alive. She said yes. So, Ray and I headed out to the 2015 reunion. I was very scared and didn't think we belonged there. While at the reunion one late afternoon we went upstairs to a large open area. There were a lot of people standing around and we later found out some of them were Cleatus Lebow's family. I found Kim Roller and asked if I would be allowed to talk to him. She laughed and said, "Sure you can!"

We approached the Lebow family, told them who we were, and mentioned the letter Cleatus wrote. We asked Cleatus if he knew William Stier, and he said he didn't remember him. Cleatus's son asked me if by chance if we had the letter with us. Ray went upstairs to our hotel room and got the letter, which we kept in a memorial album.

Knowing I could not read the letter without crying, Ray knelt down next to Cleatus and read the letter out loud.

There was not a dry eye in the group. Cleatus recognized his own handwriting, but still didn't quite remember who Billy was. That is, until till Ray turned the album page to a picture of Billy and Cleatus exclaimed, "Hey that's my friend Reds!" It was Billy's nickname. We were all stunned.

Someone started to say something, but Cleatus said gently, "Be quiet." Then he bowed his head to pray and remember. It was a moment that Ray and I will never forget. Every reunion after that we spent time with Cleatus and his family. We also became friends with Cleatus's friend and caretaker Jack Barnes, retired Navy chief. Jack kept us in the loop on how Cleatus was doing.

At one of the reunions, we met Rory Latimer from South Africa and became good friends with him. I would talk a lot with Rory, and he became like a little brother to me as he was aware I lost my brother and mother. Rory had an artist friend in South Africa, Stephanie Reith. Stephanie is a painter. She had seen the photo of Ray kneeling next to Cleatus and had an idea: She would remove Ray from the picture and put Billy Stier in his place—the way he looked when he was on the ship at age 19.

Stephanie's oil painting now hangs in our family room with other memorabilia of USS Indianapolis. We are blessed in so many ways from this letter and the many wonderful, kind, caring people of the USS *Indianapolis* Legacy Organization.

Here is the original photo of Cleatus and Ray...and a photo of the painting they inspired...



Discount on Memorial Bricks at National Museum of the Pacific War

USS *Indianapolis* CA-35 is leaving its permanent mark at the National Museum of the Pacific War. The museum staff is literally laying the groundwork for a special section of their walkway dedicated to the men of Indy. Please consider honoring your loved one in this renowned setting. For a limited time, the Museum is offering a discount price of \$160 (normally \$200) for commemorative pavers honoring individuals who served aboard USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35.)

Orders must be made by the end of March to make sure they are in place for the reunion! All donations are tax-deductible. [Click here to order.](#)

Reunion Update! May 17-20, 2022

Okay: In my day job as a writer, I don't use a lot of exclamation points. If I do,

there's a reason. But....

- If you are planning to join us at the upcoming USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Reunion gathering in Fredericksburg, TX, please make sure that you have sent in your registration payment!
- Capacity is limited!
- Please don't delay!

The deadline for reunion registration is just over three weeks away, on April 15, 2022. Also, the last hotel block expires on April 17, 2022.

Remember: Fredericksburg is a destination city, hotel rooms are hard to come by, and if you do manage to grab one, it'll be way more expensive than those in our remaining room block. Our advance planning team is gathering the final counts for the caterers and museum tickets prior to our event. We'll have it all ready and waiting for your arrival! [Click here to RSVP!](#)

Kamikaze Anniversary

This month marks the anniversary of the kamikaze attack on USS *Indianapolis*—an event that triggered the chain of events that resulted in Indy's assignment to deliver atomic bomb components to Tinian Island.

On March 31, 1945, at 7:08 a.m., a Japanese Army Peregrine Falcon, attacked. After trading fire with Indy's gunners, the pilot changed course, then seemed to lose control. The kamikaze slammed into the main deck aft, just inside the port gunwale—then hung on Indy's port rail. Four sailors rushed over, laid hands wherever they could, and shoved the plane overboard—but not before a 500-pound bomb, loosened by the force of the crash, plummeted down through the ship.

The bomb crashed through one deck after another before punching through the ship's skin between frames 112 and 113 and exiting into the sea. Then the bomb

exploded. The damage was catastrophic, enough to take Indy out of the Pacific and back to Mare Island, California, for repairs. Much worse, though: Captain Charles McVay learned that he'd lost nine men.

At this year's regional reunion in Fredericksburg, during the reenactment of the Battle of Okinawa, we will have a special tribute to the nine men killed in action that day. And we are incredibly honored that family members of two of those men, Earl Procai and Epifanio Lobato, Jr., will be joining us for that tribute. Don't miss this unprecedented event!

A Sister Remembers

At age 89 Mary Kozeluh remembers her brother well. Harley Moore's birth order sandwiched him between two older and two younger sisters. As his kid sister, Mary was Harley's shadow, tied at the hip, going everywhere with Harley – movies every Sunday; ice cream at the drugstore. Her fondest memory is riding on the center bar of Harley's bike going bump, bump, bump across railroad tracks – calculated to tease his kid sister.

Mary shared memories of her only brother during a one hour recorded Zoom session with Sara Vladic and Marilyn Henry. Memories brought laughter and tears. Mary's voice grew quiet as she told the story: Harley's dad signed for his son to enter the Navy. Boarding *Indianapolis* in December 1943, Harley served 19 months before being lost-at-sea at age 19 in the sinking of *Indianapolis* on July 30, 1945. Mary reflected on a wooden chest and wood lamp kept in their home. Harley's dad had guided his son in creating these in his dad's woodworking shop.



Stories like these are so important in honoring Indy and her lost crew, and the Education Committee is hard at work collecting them! Please consider sharing your memories of your beloved member of the final sailing crew of Indianapolis. You are invited to participate in a recorded Zoom session or to send your story in writing. Contact Marilyn Henry, bmcp56@att.net

That's it for this month's *3-Minute Update*. See you next month!

Lynn

Lynn Vincent
Honorary Survivor
Legacy Chair