

# Buddy Line



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*Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School, Key West, Florida*

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## REUNION UPDATE!



Next FO/USWW in Key West, Florida  
Thursday, May 19 to Saturday, May 21, 2022

**Fraternal Order of  
Underwater Swimmers  
School Officers**



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*The BuddyLine newsletter  
is published quarterly in  
February, May, August & November.*

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*Dave Gholson has been working hard to put together the next reunion. It has been decided that Thursday, May 19 through Saturday, May 21, 2022 would be a good time and then it was between Key West and Panama City Beach for the location. Thanks Dave for all your thoughtful research into this decision. Here is an update from our reunion committee chair:*

A lot of thought went into the decision to hold our next reunion in Key West. Some of the points were;

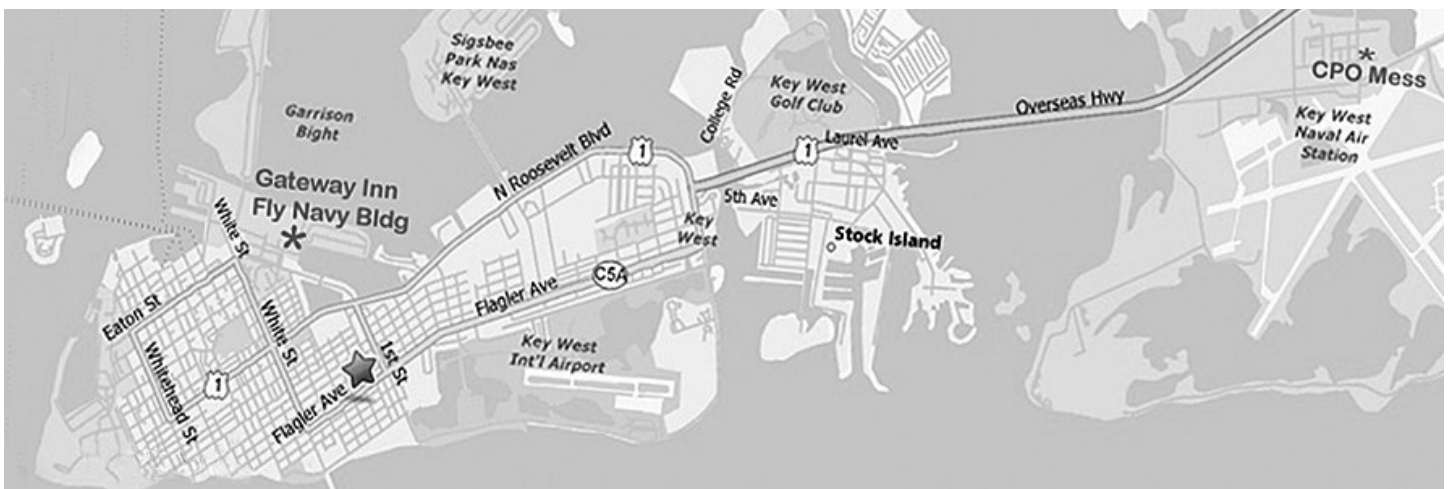
- Panama City Beach is very expensive for rooms and meals. In Key West we have base facilities to use. The Gateway Inn (Fly Navy or BOQ) .
- Panama City Beach MWR facilities have been damaged by Hurricane Michael. Where we held our Ice Breaker in 2015 is closed and one facility on the beach is available. MWR charged us for use and food. Command at Key West has given us again the use of the Chief's mess, for free. We can cook our own burgers and enjoy an open bar.
- Very little for the spouses to do in Panama City Beach, in Key West we have sunset cruises, boat trips to the reefs and island tours on the Conch Train.

We also are organizing a Saturday trip to the Big Pine Key Flea Market. Don't buy any Keys stuff or gifts until you spend a few hours at the Flea Market. There is no ITT office in Panama City Beach, where in Key West they have a large operation. All the tickets for tours and activities are 30% to 60% off gate prices. We just have to reserve and pay in advance.

- Eating is an issue in Panama City Beach in 2015 we went to a local restaurant for Breakfast, Gateway Inn does not have breakfast, but will put out a breakfast buffet that weekend for us.
- And lastly, as Dave Byers, UWSS president said, "Key West is our heritage." While I was there two years, many of you were there for 4 weeks, and were too exhausted to look around the Island.

Keep in touch, we will post activities and schedules in the Buddyline and on the Face book page.

*Fraternally, Dave Gholson, Reunion Chair.*







## Rudy's Memories

*(continued from the February BuddyLine)*

Instruction at the Underwater Swimmers School followed a certain pattern. Early training was conducted in the pool where students were taught how to swim. Believe it or not, some men couldn't swim a stroke when they arrived at our school. Most graduated and developed into excellent swimmers. Before we began ocean swims, we wanted to be sure everyone was in good enough condition. Each early morning physical training period was followed by a long run. The running distance increased until the class made it to Boca Chica and back, about six miles. Swim pair assignments were based on a timed 300 meter swim in the pool. After the class completed a 2000-yard swim with fins, they had to make two 500 and 1000 yard swims without fins and a few night swims. The class then continued with pool training in SCUBA. We used double hose regulators mounted on twin 70 cu in tanks filled with compressed air at 2200 pounds. Students were taught to ditch and don their equipment at the deep end of the swimming pool.

Buoyant ascent training was an important part of the curriculum. Two diving bells were lowered from our LCU (Landing Craft Utility) to depths of 18 feet and 36 feet respectively. The student would free-dive with fins and mask and enter the 18 foot bell, breathe inside, then descend to the 36 foot bell again swimming inside. After breathing compressed air, the student would exit and ascend to the surface

slowly exhaling on the way up. The exercise was designed to prevent air embolisms and to identify those who might be claustrophobic. Every now and then we would run into a claustic (claustrophobia), as we called them. It was a job keeping them under control while we punched the air out of their stomach. Had we failed, they would most likely die from an air embolism. Claustrophobia is an uncontrollable response in some people. The larynx chokes off and the subject is unable to breath. There is nothing macho about the condition, it can affect anyone. The worst thing a claustic can do is hide the condition. Some students tried to do this. We had to constantly keep an eye on every student, especially on deep dives.

*What do you remember about buoyant ascent training at UWSS?*

*Send them to [buddyline@uwss.org](mailto:buddyline@uwss.org)*

After another series of SCUBA swims, everyone had to make a qualifying dive to 130 feet. Here we really had to be careful. I normally sent the best instructors with the worst students and made our officers accompany them. It worked because we never lost a man, though we had some close calls.

The students also received a preliminary course in demolitions. Each student was required to cut a time fuse, tie in a blasting cap, and place on the igniter. We used half-



pound blocks of TNT tied to a prima cord trunk line for the explosive train. We also exposed them to electric blasting caps.

At the end of the six-week course, students graduated as qualified SCUBA divers. We had men from all the services, foreign students, and even civilians from various Government agencies. Everyone did his best to make our underwater school the finest of its kind in the nation.

Sports competition for the military in Key West centered on winning the Admiral's Cup. The Command with the highest point total won the Cup. Smaller Commands such as ours received extra bonus points to level the playing field; yet, it was extremely difficult for us to compete against much larger components such as fighter squadrons, helicopter units, and submarine detachments. Most of us participated in several sports. I played basketball, football, track, swimming, and volleyball. The sports program welded us together. We were always the underdog going against the big guys who had over 6,000 men to choose from. We were just lucky to field a team. Nevertheless, we were always competitive. Before I left the school we would win the Cup.

Periodically, hilarious incidents occurred keeping us in stitches for weeks. One such occasion was during a night swim. We had just lowered the bow ramp on a 1000-yard night swim when one of the students thought he was sideswiped by a shark. While the class was taking bearings to the shore, he yelled "SHARK."

I've never seen such panic. One student was so frightened he grabbed the wires holding the closed bow ramp and pulled himself over it with two 70-pound SCUBA tanks strapped to his back. It takes a lot of adrenalin to do that. Another classmate was yelling, "ME FIRST," while others jumped into the rubber UDT life raft towed alongside the boat. We had a pair of swimmers from a Latin American country who hardly spoke English and I could hear one of their screams echoing out of the darkness, "I QUEET, I QUEET." We had a hell of a time getting everyone aboard and back into the water. Another time the instructors were teaching a pair of poor swimmers to reach the pool's bottom at the deep end. One of these students was extremely buoyant and would float upward on every dive attempt. Our Commanding Officer decided to help out. He gave the student a ten-pound weight belt and told him to try again. With the Old Man there, the enlisted instructors backed off. The poor guy dove to the bottom of the pool and stayed there. He couldn't get up. With the man obviously drowning, two instructors dove in the water and rescued him. We revived the man with CPR. Nobody said anything until the class was back at the School. Chief Stanley got wind of the near drowning and asked Frank Kappesser, "What happened?" The CO was nearby getting coffee at the time. Frank related the story without mentioning names. Stanley then asked, "Who was the stupid idiot that put on the weight belt?" "I was," replied the Skipper. We all slid away trying not to die laughing.



One time Hazelwood was preparing to enter the water on a deep dive. He was sitting on a bench 10 feet from the lowered bow ramp, putting on his size triple Z, super extra large fins. In typical Hazelwood fashion, he grabbed his double tanks, flipped them over his head dramatically and marched forward with great determination. The class stood in awe watching their hero start for the water. After pausing for a second to adjust his facemask, he leaped off the ramp, legs correctly apart, and splashed into the water. All was silent for a few seconds when up comes a head, followed by a loud swooshing gasp. He had forgotten to turn on his air valve. I told Hazelwood afterwards, “I would have rather died underwater trying to turn on my air than let the class see me screw up.”

On another dive, Scott Slaughter and I were seeing how deep we could free dive. We lowered a 100-foot descent line with tags every ten feet from 50 feet to the bottom. A safety instructor in SCUBA gear was on the bottom and another positioned at the 60-foot mark. Scott and I took turns going down. Both of us made it to the bottom without much difficulty. We could have gone deeper but worried about a possible lung squeeze. (Should the air in one’s lungs compress too far, the heavy pressure could conceivably collapse the lung cage causing serious injury, so we were told.) Jim Hazelwood was taking all this in. Not to be outdone, he decided to try. After hyperventilating for about five minutes, which will cause dizziness, he plunged into the water, descending

deep into the blue. About 15 seconds later surfaced and began climbing up the bow ladder sideways. He had blown out an eardrum and lost his equilibrium. The hyperventilation apparently deadened his mind for he never cleared his ears properly on the way down.

Once, the weather was too rough to swim at our normal swim area. We thus moved to the first small island directly west of the harbor. We had a large Marine Force Reconnaissance group in the class under the supervision of a master sergeant. In taking care of his men on this 1000 yard compass swim, he took a bearing on the island and yelled, “The course to the beach men is one three zero men. Set you compasses.” We nearly died laughing. He took his bearing while leaning on the engine box, giving him an erroneous bearing. I wasn’t too concerned since the men were supposed to check their heading periodically and adjust accordingly. There must be something strange about a marine’s mentality, for none of them did that. All of their little orange swim buoys headed for the Main Key West Ship Channel without changing course. We went crazy chasing after them as they were being swept out to sea in the fast outgoing tide.

*What do you remember about claustrophobia at UWSS?*

*Send them to [buddyline@uwss.org](mailto:buddyline@uwss.org)*



As Training Officer, I had ordered our instructors to make all student swims. They were expected to concentrate on weaker swimmers, particularly those who might show signs of claustrophobia. One or more of our School's officers would normally make the swim, but one day we didn't because of a meeting we had with the base admiral. Afterwards, I drove to the swim area beach to find out how the swim went. I immediately noticed none of the instructors had been in the water with the students as instructed. I reported this to the XO and Bill said, "OK, I'll fix their little asses." After reading them the riot act at quarters the following morning, Bill ended his tirade by saying. "I want to see all of you here 0600 sharp Saturday morning. We're going on a weekend swim." Lee Barber, a newly assigned UDT man from the west coast, had just reported in and Hamilton asked laughingly, "Lee are you going to make the swim on Saturday or are you going to be a candy ass?" (For his background, Lee volunteered to go. Lee was another great study. His WWII team of Combat Engineers led the Normandy invasion at Omaha Beach. Their mission was to clear Field Marshall Rommel's beach obstacles preventing the landing. The team had practiced daily off the frigid English coastal waters when Lee suddenly became sick and was hospitalized. Tears rolled down his eyes when he learned his team went to the "Big Show" without him. To hear him tell it, "I really felt bad until I learned a week later the reality of war. Ninety percent of my team was lost in the invasion." He added,

"One LCPR (Landing Craft Personnel) took a direct hit from a German 88mm gun killing everyone. A prima cord explosive trunk line was hit by a German bullet and detonated as the men were tying in their demolition packages. And the rest of my team dodged bullets all day, hiding behind the obstacles they were supposed to destroy." All the School's instructors, including officers minus our CO, boarded the LCPRs early that Saturday morning.) With all aboard, the coxswain headed offshore until the land disappeared. Everyone kept asking, "What the hell is going on?" Bill smiled and answered, "See Sand Key Light over there, the LCPR will drop us off at that point and we're swimming all the way home today. If you can't make it, inflate your rubber life vest, the LCPR will pick you up at sundown. You'll have another chance to finish on Sunday." They looked shocked. Bill and I led the pack. For me, this was just another all day snorkel swim, only without a spear gun. The water was exceptionally clear, warm and extremely interesting. We passed over large patches of eelgrass covered with hundreds of live conch. Every time I saw an unusual king and helmet conch, I would motion the LCPR over and dump it aboard. After three hours, I took my fins off and tied them to my belt. They caused blisters and chafed the softened calluses off my feet. We were making good headway until early afternoon when we ran into the outgoing tide. We were near one of the red buoys marking the southeast channel. We couldn't close on it no matter how hard we tried. We must have stayed





in place for over an hour when the tide suddenly slowed, stopped, and changed direction. From then on we moved rapidly, hitting the beach by mid afternoon. Everyone finished the eight-mile swim that Saturday. The guys that made it would boast about “THE SWIM” many years later. To this day, I believe that the Sand Key swim did more to boost instructor morale at the school than any other single event.

Because we had the most experienced SCUBA divers in the Navy, our Command was often called upon to assist in such underwater projects as experimental testing and search and recover. We gladly volunteered. Class instruction became monotonous and most dives proved quite exciting. Besides, we were helping to save lives while receiving extra diving pay as well.

In the late 50’s, Navy carrier aircraft flying in northern waters experienced a high flame out rate on takeoff. The unlucky pilot had no other choice but to ditch to the right or left of the carrier’s path to avoid being run over. The plane usually floated a while as water gushed in before sinking. If the pilot hadn’t ejected, he was forced to ride his plane down experiencing canopy implosion at some point below 30 feet. Rarely was the canopy released beforehand. Speculations as to “why” included; damage to the canopy release, pilot injury preventing arm movement to pull the ejection curtain handle down that was located behind the pilot’s head, and water pressure sealing the canopy shut. The first tests involved dropping an F-86 Shooting Star from a barge in 150 foot of water. Numerous cameras

were fixed to the orange colored aircraft as it was hoisted up by a large barge crane and dropped. A short while later, however, the buoy markers attached to the jet never showed. We sent a set of divers down the descending line expecting to find the plane close to the barge’s anchor line. They returned after exhausting their bottom time with negative results. We sent two other diving pairs down that afternoon, still they found nothing. The damn thing had vanished. We returned to the exact site the following morning. We laid out a rectangular string of buoys bracketing the area, then ran a north south line on the western side. We would conduct a straight-line search in the 50-foot visibility water with 8 swimmers positioned 80 yards apart. This would enable us to cover a 640-foot swath, swimming a compass course downstream to the far buoys. I took the southern position in the deepest water. We all descended in unison. We went through a thermal layer at 120 feet as the visibility shrank to around 40 feet. I was expecting the bottom at any moment but it took a long time to appear. By this time narcotic effects of nitrogen narcosis began to set in. I quickly checked my depth gauge and the needle was hard pressed against the 240-foot limit. The damn chart was wrong; the 150-foot plateau had a steep drop off. I expected the deepest water to be around 220 feet and computed my decompression time accordingly. Only now I had been beyond 240 feet. How much more, I didn’t know? We were in deep trouble. . . .

*(to be continued in the August BuddyLine)*





## JOHN WESLEY HOBBS

John Wesley Hobbs (USN Retired) passed away peacefully on Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at age 93. John was born November 23, 1927 in Ellis County, Texas. John lived in Seal Beach, California.

John joined the Navy in 1944 and rose through enlisted rank to Chief Petty Officer (E-8). He graduated from diving school and EOD Explosive Ordnance Disposal the year 1956, class of 4/56 and after many team assignments in the Navy through 1965 he was an instructor of Underwater Swim School (UWSS) till his retirement in 1967.

John continued his love and dedication to the deep-sea after his retirement, he undertook many assignments: Makai Undersea Test Range; Texas Instruments Inc. as party chief (field manager) on Research Vessel North Seal to depths of 20,000 feet; Kentron Hawaii Ltd., as a Diver/Submersible pilot making 60 submersible dives as pilot of Perry Submarine. Not well known was his participation of the recovery of the sunken Soviet submarine K-129 underneath the Pacific Ocean floor in the early 70s.

John returned to Hawaii for his last deep sea assignment was 1975 to 1978 for Naval Underseas Center. There he trained about 45 civilian Navy divers for undersea research involving all aspects of manned underwater project

John served on various ships and stations, notably in the participation of the recovery



of Gemini MC-9 Space Capsule, also he participated in the recovery of the ditched Sea King Anti-Submarine helicopter.

From 1979 to 1995, John became an owner-operator long haul truck driver running 48 states cross country.

John liked RV traveling most of his life. He met and married Mary, a partner to travel and together traveled 50 states for 20 years.

John never missed the Hobbs Reunions, UWSS Reunions, and NEODA Reunions.

The memorial service for John Wesley Hobbs will be held at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday July 7, 2021 at Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery.



## MEMBERSHIP APRIL 30, 2021

Members in database = 279

Total Active Members = 238

We learned of the loss of John Hobbs this quarter. He passed 4/20/2021 Grad. Class 5604. Rest in Peace Hero. We currently have four brothers in Hardship that FO UWSS is helping. Donations are accepted.

New Members this Quarter = 2

- David Lee Williams 6906 (Lady Wanda) 2/11/21.
- Paul Payne 7201 (Lady Brenda) 3/6/2021.

## TREASURER'S QUARTERLY REPORT

Account Balance:

February 1, 2021	\$13,719.72
Dues Income	+ \$122.94
Label Fees Income	+ \$0.00
Logo Gear Sales Income	+ \$805.02
Other (Donations) Income	+ \$35.00

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Reunion Expenses	- \$0.00
Logo Gear Expenses	- \$1,145.82
BuddyLine Expenses	- \$60.83
Business Expenses	- \$0.00

Account Balance:

April 30, 2021	\$13,476.03
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## NOTES AND UPDATES

1. If you are able to Volunteer as our FO UWSS Chaplain, please let Dave Byers know.
2. Dave Gholson is our Reunion Committee Chair. See updates in this edition.
3. Jim Houle is our Logo Gear Chair. You can order (and pay) by going to the

UWSS Website or by sending an email to: kenrecoy@aol.com. You can also pay by check. My address is in the Buddyline and on our UWSS Website.

4. Please be sure to pay your "Label Fees" to receive your Buddyline by regular mail. Label Fees are \$5.00 per year. We currently have 24 members that receive their Buddyline by regular mail.
5. Please check to make sure you have paid your UWSS Membership Dues. We currently have 102 Members that have expired Dues. FO UWSS Dues remain at \$25.00 for 2 years.
6. UWSS Graduating Class pictures. If you do not see your Class picture on the FO UWSS Website, please send in a copy for the FO UWSS Archives.
7. If you have changed your address, phone number/s, or email address, please send me an update, so we can be sure to stay in contact for important news, updates and the Buddyline.
8. So we may honor them, if you know of a UWSS brother that has passed, please let us know and if available send in a copy of the Obituary.
9. It is important to reach out to your UWSS dive buddies and check on each other from time to time. Especially in this time of COVID 19. None of us are getting any younger. It is always good to hear from a brother.

*Stay in touch. Stay safe. HooYah!*  
 Ken Recoy, FO UWSS Secretary/Treasurer  
 620-305-9900 Cell (Text is ok).  
 UWSS Graduation Class March 1972.  
 Submariner, Radioman and US Navy Diver.  
[www.uwss.org](http://www.uwss.org)



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**Ken Recoy, Treasurer**

**25810 East 330 Road**

**Chelsea, OK 74016-5262**

Make checks out to FO/UWSS.

Questions? e-mail: [jhoule@me.com](mailto:jhoule@me.com)

or phone (352) 249-9140

**New Performance T's  
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*Small Logo on left front*

*Large Logo on back*

*Small \$25*

*Medium \$25*

*Large \$25*

*Xtra Large \$25*

*XXtra Large \$28*



We have a limited supply of Face Masks

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Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School  
Buddy Line Newsletter  
25810 East 330 Road  
Chelsea, OK 74016-5262

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*The Fraternal Order of Underwater Swimmers School was formed  
in order to keep lines of communication open between personnel of the armed forces  
who were staff or students at the U.S. Naval Underwater Swimmers School  
Key West, Florida from 1954 to 1973.  
One of the most important reasons for our existence as an organized group  
is to plan for and participate in biannual reunions.*

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**MISSION:**

**FO/UWSS**

