

APPRENTICE SCHOOL AND OTHER NNS MEMORIES

by Bill Lee (Designer, Atomic, 1959)

Over almost thirty years of service at Newport News Shipbuilding, I was an apprentice, a designer, a test engineer and an engineering manager; not to mention my most interesting of all titles there – *A4W Mock-Up King*. But, for me, it all comes down to being privileged to be called a *shipbuilder*. In that regard, I consider my greatest contribution to the good works of NNS as being a small part of the talented team that designed the propulsion system for the NIMITZ-class carriers.

In retirement, I often look back and reminisce about that infectious occupation, the many talented people I once looked up to, and my Apprentice School peers. Since I've been absent from "Shipyard Virginia" for almost a quarter of a century, I've largely forgotten the hard times, the long hours and the disappointments.

Instead I remember, now, and with some idyllic fondness, what my wife calls "the shipyard that was". Back when ships were launched and slid to the sea, when the accomplishments of NNS included a healthy percentage of commercial ship design and construction, and when nuclear propulsion was new and novel.



But I don't just reminisce; I often augment or, admittedly, adjust my memory through careful research, then write about Newport News Shipbuilding, its many famous products and the shipbuilders who conceived and created them. I prefer to write, for the most part, short stories, and I have what seems to be an endless backlog. Accordingly, this foreword introduces a work-in-progress; one that is often encouraged by fellow apprentice alumnus.

The index that follows will be modified, periodically, as this collection of stories, is expanded. As I am fond of saying, these days: *That's my job, that's what I do*.

Most of all, I like to write about the *SS AMERICA* (NNS Hull No. 369). Born within sight of her shipbuilding cradle (Shipway #8), I attended her launching ceremonies in August, 1939 at the tender age of three. That inspiration, coupled with a



childhood of frequent visual and audible memories of her – both as *AMERICA* and *WEST POINT* - created the basis for my life-long affection for this former Queen of the American Merchant Marine.

A number of fellow enthusiasts, or "amerifans", as I like to refer to them consider me to be the unofficial historian of this once-proud and beautiful vessel. I do not disagree.

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