

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 especially my Apprentice School peers. Since I've been absent from "Shipyard Virginia" for over two decades, I've mostly forgotten the hard work, the long hours and the frequent 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.