

## USS Enterprise Remembers Those Lost In 1969 Fire

Several years after a group of USS *Enterprise* veterans set out to dedicate a commemorative plaque at the Navy Memorial in honor of the 28 killed and 343 wounded in the tragic shipboard fire of 1969, a large contingent of ship veterans, families and friends convened in the Naval Heritage Center to see their efforts come to fruition. Three plaques honoring those who were lost and wounded were dedicated that day in an emotional ceremony. Adm. Robert Willard, USN, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, witnessed the event and current commanding officer Capt. Kent Lee sent video greetings.

In 1993, fire veteran Michael Joe Carlin published *Trial: Ordeal Of The USS Enterprise*, a riveting account of the fire and a moving tribute to the brave crew who fought to save the ship. Several years later another fire veteran, Mike Neville, inspired by Carlin's book, sought to reunite his shipmates at a reunion and memorial service at Pearl Harbor on January 14, 2004, the 35th anniversary of the fire.

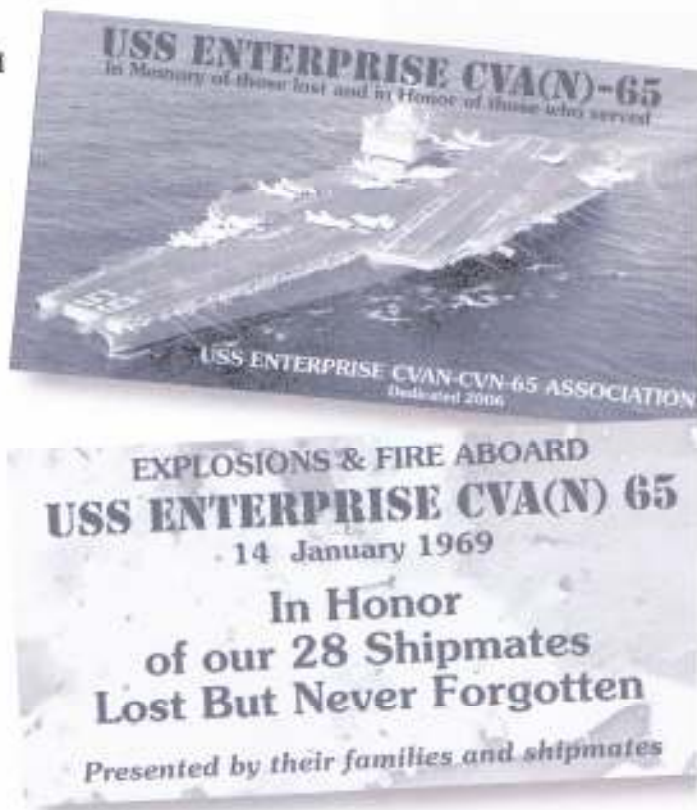
In attendance at the 2004 reunion were the widows and other family members of three of those lost in the fire. Each of these women, and other widows and family members who were contacted after the reunion, expressed their disappointment in the absence of their loved ones' names on the Vietnam Wall. This issue, a circumstance that Neville refers to as "an accident of geography," prompted him to pursue an alternative venue to memorialize his lost shipmates. He found the Navy Memorial's Commemorative Plaque Wall to be an ideal choice and he and his shipmates raised the necessary funds for two plaques memorializing the fire and honoring the 28 men who died.

While Neville was working on the fire plaque project, Navy Memorial Director of Planned Giving Paul T. Haley pointed out to him that there was not a plaque commemorating the USS *Enterprise* CVA(N) 65 and that if one could be commissioned,

it could be appropriately placed adjacent to the fire plaques. Neville immediately contacted USS *Enterprise* Association Chairman Chas Folcik who quickly secured the commission of the ship's plaque in time to join the fire plaques on the Commemorative Wall. As Neville has put it, "The combined dedication was a prime example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts."

Because *Enterprise* was at sea at the time of the dedication, her representation was limited but impressive. Speaking on behalf of the ship was Chief Karl Parsons. Also in attendance were Jan Rice and Terrie DeClercq, the wives of the current commanding officer and command master chief. In addition to his comments, Chief Parsons presented a short video produced by the *Enterprise* crew, highlighting the ship's 45 years of honorable service and honoring the 1969 crew and surviving family members by speaking of the lessons learned, thanking them for saving the ship, and remembering their dead.

Representing the 1969 crew were more than 50 shipmates and their families, two sailors from the USS *Rogers*, whose aid to *Enterprise* during the fire was crucial, and roughly 40 family members of the 28 lost shipmates. Speaking on behalf of the 1969 crew was retired Vice Adm. Kent Lee, *Enterprise* commanding officer at the time of the fire, and speaking on behalf of the surviving families was Robert Pyeatt, father of fire victim Lt.(j.g.) Buddy Pyeatt.



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