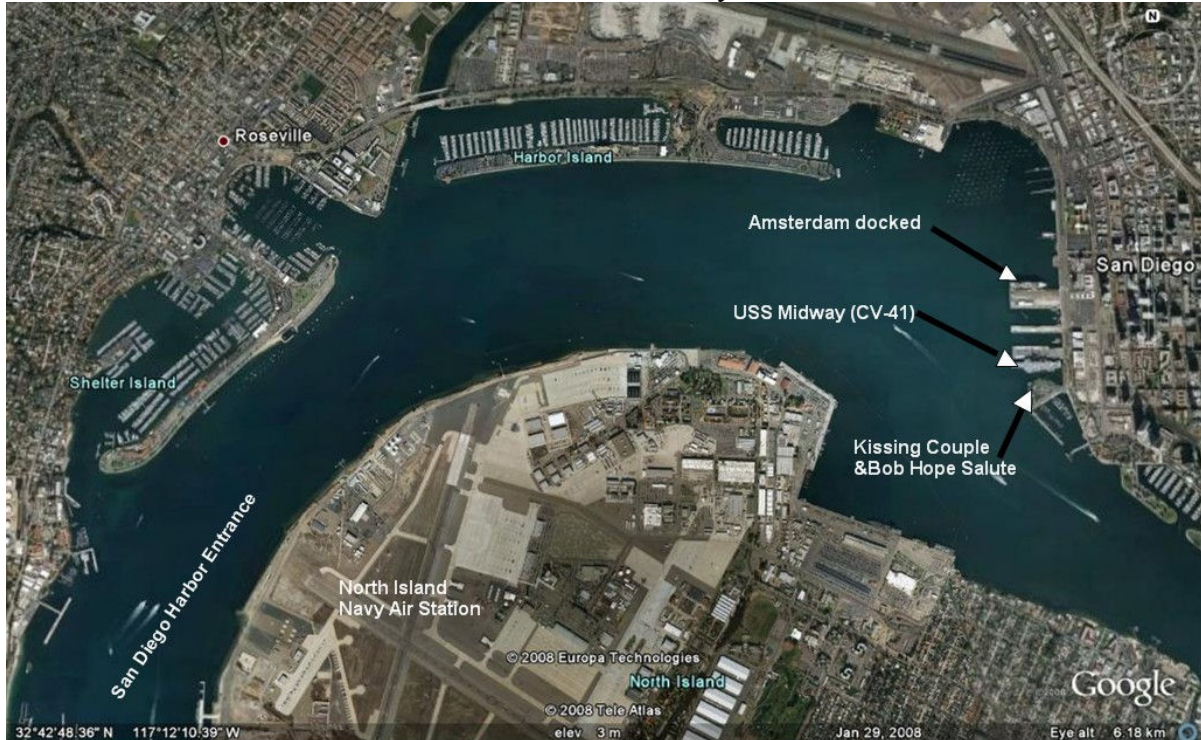


San Diego (Nov. 23-27) - Midway (CV-41) - Visiting Friends and Relatives - Going Home

It was November 23rd, the disembarkation day and we got up about 5am when it was still dark outside. We were expecting to see a bright glow of lights from San Diego and Tijuana off to the east but all we saw was a faint loom from the city. Fog and mist along the coastline was apparently blocking our view. We were too excited to go back to bed so we busied ourselves with packing last minute items and getting ready to leave the Amsterdam as soon as it docked. About 6am it was still dark and we noticed lights passing close by outside our cabin. We found that the Amsterdam was already in the San Diego Harbor entrance between Point Loma and North Island. Downtown San Diego was still not the blaze of lights we had expected but at least the lights of the high-rise buildings downtown were clearly visible. We joined our table mates, Bob, Esther and Joan for breakfast in the Lido as the ship made its approach to the cruise passenger terminal in San Diego. About 6:30am Barbara couldn't contain herself any longer and phoned Dave and Elsie, our friends with whom we were staying while in San Diego. Luckily, Dave was already up and arrangements were made for them to pick us up by about 8:30. The Amsterdam was docked at the passenger terminal and the final preparation for passenger disembarkation was underway by about 7:30. Here, on the right, is the view of San Diego skyline and harbor that we could see from the Amsterdam.



Shown below is a map of San Diego Harbor showing the location of the Amsterdam and some landmarks around the harbor that we saw later in the day.



The San Diego personnel involved in receiving cruise ships seemed very efficient. The heavy duty equipment was there to get our luggage off the ship and load up the luggage for the people who would arrive later in the day. There was a dance going on between the fork lifts. One had a long extendable arm which extracted luggage from the ship. The long armed forklift transferred the luggage to a standard forklift which quickly moved it into the terminal building as shown on the right.



Through the Holland America package deal for the cruise most of our luggage was shipped via FedEx from our cabin directly to our home in Oak Ridge. Between the two of us we could carry our own luggage off the ship so we qualified for the expedited early disembarkation procedure. Elsie and Dave arrived at the pier about 8am and through cell phone connections we were able to spot them on the pier and exchange waves from our cabin. Finally, about 8:30 the announcement was made that the expedited disembarkation process had started. Of course, there was the expected rush to elevators and stairs to get down to

the gangway. Some people had plane connections to make and everyone had some reason to get off the ship as soon as possible so there was a bit of tension as passengers inched, with their luggage, through the junction of close packed corridors at the gangway. Fortunately, decorum and civility ruled the day and we were in high spirits as the bar code of our ship's Key Card was scanned for the last time at the gangway.

After 65 days of the shipboard routine and new port experiences on the cruise the feeling we had now when leaving the ship was vaguely like school graduation. This had been a significant and enjoyable event in our lives but we were ready to move on.

Dave and Elsie were circling the terminal parking lot and as soon as they saw us emerging from the terminal building they greeted us with open arms. It was great to be back with our long time friends. The plan of the day was to tour the USS Midway (CV-41) which has been restored and turned in to a floating museum on the San Diego waterfront. They had already toured the Midway and wanted us to see it. We were looking forward to the Midway visit but it was not open for business before 10am. We had the typical San Diego perfect weather conditions so we passed some time by walking around the Sea Port Village and Waterfront Park areas that are adjacent to the Midway.

The Waterfront Park contains a fascinating collection of sculptures that celebrate "The Greatest Generation" of World War II and they were a pleasure for us to see. The first sculpture that caught our eye was a giant reproduction of the famous image of sailor and white clad nurse engaged in an enthusiastic kiss in New York City during the celebration of the end of World War II. Elsie said the statue was not appreciated by many in the San Diego area because it was so garish. We were surprised by the size of the statue and vivid colors and instantly fell in love with it. It doesn't rise to the level of the Sydney Opera House or the Pearl TV Tower in Shanghai but we thought this daring sculpture could become an icon for San Diego. Here is one view of it on the right.





These little girls were probably fascinated by the "Kissing Couple" statue and were exploring the huge size of the people in the sculpture.

Another wonderful display in the Waterfront Park was a "Salute to Bob Hope". For people of "The Greatest Generation" in WWII and also for our generation, the trips of Bob Hope to entertain our military troops in theaters of war were legendary. The city of San Diego has put an extensive bronze sculpture in the Waterfront Park that portrays Bob Hope giving one of his

humorous monologues to a rag-tag assembly of battle worn troops. Here, on the right, is what this remarkable sculpture looks like. For those of us familiar with Bob Hope, the profile of his face is unmistakable in this photo.



Barbara grew up in San Diego and Orlin came to San Diego for his first Navy assignment. We are familiar with the contribution and sacrifice made by Navy, Marine and other military folks to

the San Diego community and to the nation. One of the bronze sculptures in the Waterfront Park was particularly effective in portraying a sailor's family in the emotional moment of departure or perhaps return from a long voyage. This sculpture, shown on the left, really tugged at our heartstrings.



The next item on our agenda was a tour of the USS Midway (CV-41). The USS Midway Museum organization was formed in the late 1990s and after much community and military interaction the Museum was opened for visitors in 2004. There is a paid staff but the bulk of the restoration and tour leading is done by dedicated volunteers who commit to monthly, or more frequent, assignments. The tour leaders (docents) who guided us were very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the Midway. Anyone wanting more information about The Midway Museum can get it at www.midway.org.

The photo below shows how the Midway looks today as we viewed it across some docks from the deck of the Amsterdam.



The USS Midway was commissioned in 1945 at the end of WWII. It was the largest ship in the world for a decade and the first ship too large for the Panama Canal. In 1947 a German V-2 rocket was launched from the Midway in the dawn of naval missile warfare. In 1963 the

Midway carried out the first successful landing of a plane using "hands off" auto pilot technology. In 1975 the Midway participated in the evacuation of Saigon by rescuing 3073 refugees in two days. In 1990 it was the first carrier on station following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. In 1991 the Midway was the flagship for the Persian Gulf air operations in Operation Desert Storm. In 1992 the Midway was decommissioned in San Diego, California. In 2004 the USS Midway Museum opened in San Diego and in 2007 the number of visitors since opening surpassed 3 million.

The Midway was opened for touring at 10am and we climbed the stairs on the dock up to the entrance on the cavernous hanger deck.

Here on the left is a picture of our friends, Dave and Elsie, along with Barbara on the Midway hanger deck.



Henry, a knowledgeable docent, took us in tow and showed us part of the below deck facilities. Henry is pointing to part of a scullery facility in the picture on the right.



We toured the wardroom area where the officers had their meals. They had an interesting wardroom arrangement on the Midway to accommodate the hectic schedule of the 200 pilots and other officers on board. There was one wardroom reserved for the very senior officers. There was an adjacent wardroom for the other officers who were wearing the uniform of the day and they were served by stewards using regular dinnerware. Then there was a third wardroom which was for officers who were wearing flight gear or other work clothes. They used aluminum trays and took their food from a buffet line set up on one side of the room.

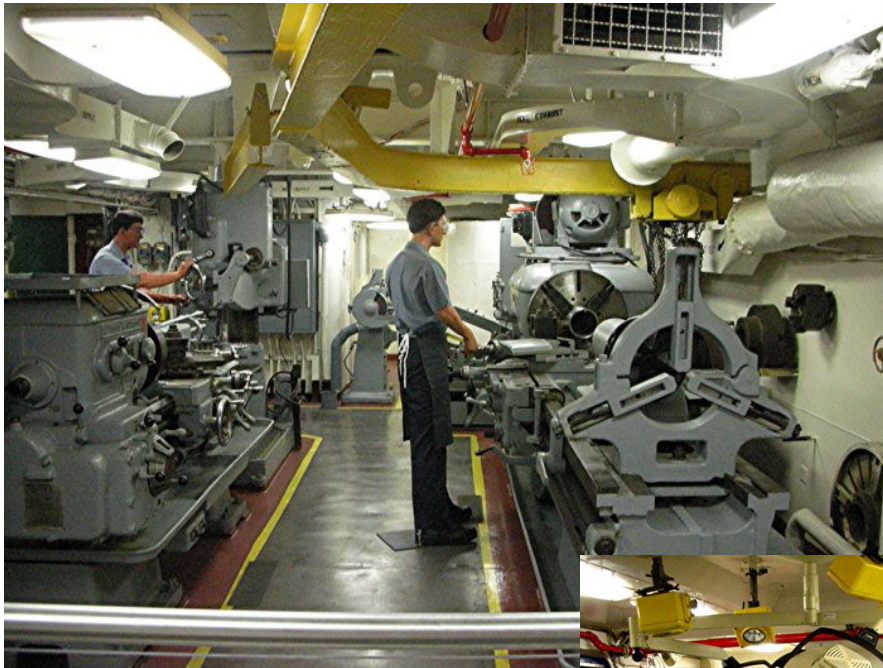


The next part of our tour was the weapon transfer area. The picture on the left shows a rocket at the bottom of an elevator shaft leading up to the hanger deck. A manikin in a red shirt is leaning over the rocket.

In this area of the Midway during active service there was access to the bombs and rockets. The Midway carried nuclear weapons and Marine guards had order to shoot to kill any person who stepped into the entrance to the nuclear weapon storage area. In that regard we saw this poster with the scary warning shown on the right. The display indicated that "break into this access route" consisted of merely stepping onto a 2 foot by 2 foot square of yellow tile in front of the barred door to the storage area where the Marine guard stood.



The maintenance of aircraft and all the auxiliary equipment on the Midway required a full time crew working in an extensive machine shop.



Shown on the left is a display of the several industrial scale lathes and milling machines in the ship's machine shop with manikins in place.

Henry took us to the sick bay which was equipped

to treat all injuries and sickness that the crew of 4500 might experience. The casualties resulting from the particularly hazardous work with the high powered equipment and airplanes were minimized by the presence of the high-tech operating room and treatment areas that we saw. There were 2 physicians, 1 dentist and 40 medical corpsmen on board. One of the operating rooms is shown in the picture on the right.



We next went to the flight deck of the Midway where Barbara obligingly posed for this picture on the right. Both propeller and jet planes were parked around the periphery of the flight deck and they were available for close inspection.

The planes are moved back and forth from the flight deck to the hanger deck by way of huge elevators that make up part of the flight deck. One of the elevators that protrude out toward the dock is shown in the photo below.





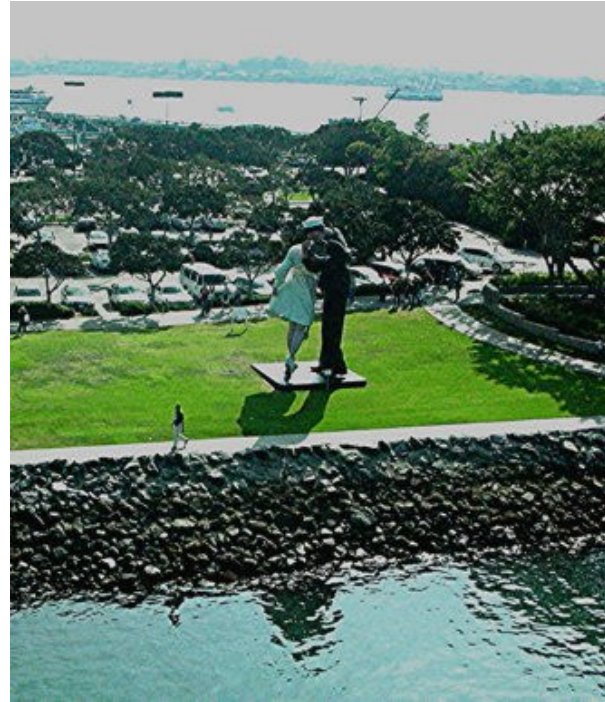
In the picture above, the superstructure called the "Island" is visible on the right. The control of flight operations and navigation of the ship is carried out from the island and a tour of those spaces was our next objective.

We climbed a series of ladders and came onto the Bridge. There we met our docent named Rusty and he was excellent. In this picture on the right, Rusty is explaining the operations on the Bridge where the windows behind him look forward to the horizon and down onto the flight deck.

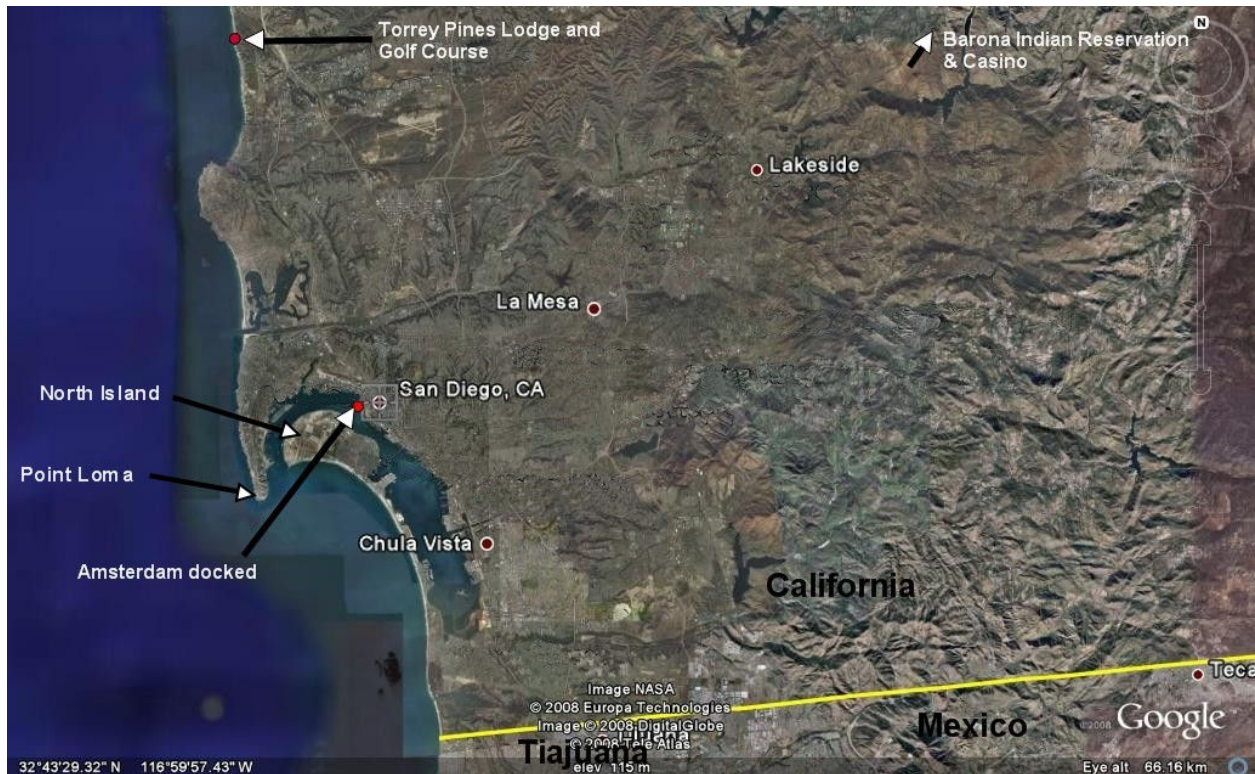


Rusty had served in active duty on the Midway and his enthusiasm for explaining how the ship was run added to the fun of exploring this great ship. In the picture on the left Rusty is telling us how the Officer of the Deck (OOD) communicated course changes to the quartermaster turning the ship's wheel. Our friend, Dave, an ex-Army dude looks on; probably wishing he had chosen Navy blue in his youth.

We toured the Midway from stem to stern and finally it was time to go. Before leaving we had to take a quick peek from the flight deck down to the "Kissing Couple" sculpture in the Waterfront Park. Since this scene, shown on the right, originally took place in New York City we thought it was a real coup for San Diego to recreate it in giant proportions as part of their salute to "The Greatest Generation".



After our tour of the Waterfront Park we picked up a rental car and headed out to Lakeside. We stayed with Dave and Elsie for the next three days while we visited with them and others in the San Diego area. A Google map of San Diego and suburbs is shown below with the locations identified for the communities and sites we saw or visited.



On Monday November 24th we got the day off to a good start when Dave and Elsie took us to their favorite walking area. We hiked about 3 miles around the lake that gave Lakeside its name. A large flock of white pelicans had taken up residence on the lake and they were fun to watch.

Later we drove to Chula Vista where we visited and had lunch with Barbara's cousin Pat and her husband Don. We caught up on the recent activities of Pat and Don and other relatives and acquaintances in the area. Pat's kitchen had been remodeled since we last visited and the new one was beautiful. We particularly liked the refrigerator drawers in the kitchen island. They are in addition to a standard refrigerator and are used for cooling vegetables and drinks. We drove to a local restaurant for lunch but before we left a picture of Pat and Barbara was necessary. As the picture on the right testifies, Pat and Barbara come from the same gene pool.



We said goodbye to Pat and Don and drove over to La Mesa where we visited Barbara's cousin Marilyn and her husband Louie. Louie and Marilyn have done extensive traveling so we had fun exchanging travel experience stories. Before leaving we got a photo of Marilyn and Barbara in their living room.



After seeing Marilyn and Louie we drove by our former home in San Diego just to see what it looked like. We left it about 20 years ago and it looked like the new owners are taking real good care of it.

In the evening we visited with Dave and Elsie. Later we all went to a great Italian Restaurant in a nearby community.

On Tuesday November 25th we got together with long time friends Ben and Fran in the evening. We met at the Torrey Pines Lodge which is a beautiful hotel on the edge of the Torrey Pines Golf Course. The Torrey Pines Golf Course was the site of the 2008 US Open Golf Tournament in June this year and the grounds were still immaculate and picture perfect. Ben and Fran took an active interest in our blog for the 2008 Asia & Australia Voyage and were the source of several emails with cogent comments. This evening Ben was questioning the blog entry about the visit to the battleship Missouri (BB-63) when we were in Honolulu on day 59 of the cruise. We had called the 16 inch cannons on the Missouri "rifles" and Ben thought they should be called "guns". Orlin did some Internet research after getting home and decided the use of "rifle" to describe the Missouri's cannons was an obsolete practice so Ben was correct. Later in the evening we had a wonderful meal in the Lodge and got this picture of the four of us.



On Wednesday, November 26 Dave and Elsie drove us out to the Barona Indian Casino where we met our long time friends Joe and Sally. We had lunch together and then engaged in about an hour of unproductive slot machine gambling. We said goodbye to the Casino and all of us went to Dave and Elsie's place. We had a good time chewing over recent and past events. We all plan to meet in Las Vegas in January for a few days and planning for that was fun. Before the evening ended we got this picture of the six of us.



We ended the night early because tomorrow we get up at 5am so that we can catch our flight home.

On Thursday, November 27, Thanksgiving Day, we turned in our rental car and caught our Delta flight to Knoxville at 9am. As predicted, because of the Thanksgiving Holiday the terminals in San Diego and Atlanta were not packed. The weather was good and flights were on time. There was a minor miracle in Atlanta when, because of low flight volume, there was no waiting in a line of airplanes for take-off. We arrived in Knoxville about 6pm and were overjoyed to see Steve and his family there to greet us. We got this picture with Becky, Andrew, Steve and Emily along with the carved black bear in the terminal shortly after arrival. Everyone looked so good to us and we were happy to be home again. Steve took us on the 40 minute ride to Oak Ridge. We were happy to see that the old home place looked better than ever even though covered with oak and hickory leaves. Inside we were greeted by the bag of mail that Steve had accumulated for us over the 65 day cruise. Ugh!



The telephone answering machine blinked back at us with its news that we had 16 new messages. We were surprised there weren't more messages; probably memory overload shielded us from more.



Later we were getting ready for bed when with great trepidation we weighed ourselves. Another miracle! We had both lost 3 pounds on the cruise! All that sweating in the tunnels of Cu Chi back on Day 27 finally paid off.

Well -- we were safely home from our 65 Day Asia & Australia Grand Voyage. Yes, we enjoyed it and would do it again but for now it's time to enjoy Home Sweet Home.

We expect to receive our FedEx shipped luggage by December 1. We'll put the receipt of the luggage in our last blog entry a few days after it comes and we will include some closing comments. Until then we'll be signing off.