

JAMES A. HOUGH
2851 Greenbriar Street
Reedsport, OR 97467-1817

May 15, 2005

Mr. Robert Behm
USS Monticello Reunion Coordinator
3011 Dunn Road
Valley Springs, CA 95252

Dear Robert,

I regret that I cannot join the many members of the USS Monticello crew who will gather in June for the reunion that you have so superbly coordinated. But I did want to take this opportunity to thank you and the others who have put together such a fine reunion. I also want to send greetings to all of the shipmates of the good-ship Monticello and thank you all for serving on such a wonderful ship.

By way of a little bit of introduction, I am Jim Hough and I was the last full Commanding Officer of the Monticello. I say full, because technically Commander Greg Ertel was the last Commanding Officer who actually decommissioned Monticello. Greg relieved me pierside in June, 1985 at the Naval Station San Diego so that I could transfer to become the Executive Officer of USS Belleau Wood (LHA-3). By that time Monticello was very deeply into decommissioning and would soon be towed up to the Inactive Ship Facility, Bremerton, WA.

Let me proudly say that the crew who ended Monticello's long career was absolutely superb in every respect; and carried on the fine tradition set by the Commissioning Crew and every subsequent crewman of LSD-35. Sailors have a special spot in their hearts for the ship in which they serve; every one of them. Sometimes we remember the seeming perpetual preservation required by the salt air, or the difficult times maintaining the engineering plant, but we always have a feeling of pride in the ship and our shipmates who man her.

Monticello was no different. We sometimes swore at the old-girl but never, never let someone else do so, at any time. We sometimes wondered why we were doing what we were doing, but we never doubted what we were doing, or the fact that we would do it to the best of our abilities. Every sailor who stepped aboard Monticello, including me,

gained a healthy respect for what she could do with the right crew, and immediately committed ourselves to service of our country in the finest ship in the fleet.

Some of you who are gathered for the reunion will no doubt have some wonderful sea-stories about Monticello, and I regret that I am not there to share them with you. I too remember a few myself. One in particular was the second to the last deployment in 1983/84. It was an interesting time. The Secretary of the Navy was determined to have a 600-ship navy and even though Monticello was scheduled to decommission he kept the ship in service for one more year or so. Having been, literally, scheduled for decommissioning, our crew had set about getting rid of everything that could be of use to other ships in the Squadron, only to be told at the last minute that the ship would make one more deployment and to go get all of the stuff back. I don't know how the crew did it but we got put back together and made that deployment. And what a deployment it was!

It turns out that in West Pac there was a requirement that every amphibious ship conduct one training evolution using the "Close-In Method" of refueling so that should an emergency ever arise fuel could be transferred. Every ship, that is, except those in the Thomaston Class LSD. For some reason, that could not be done. Or so everyone thought. Not only did Monticello rig and receive fuel via the Close-In Method, but the Oiler skipper said that it was the best evolution he had seen from any close-in ship. Well done to the deck crew, the engineers and of course the cooks who helped man the lines and then cooked a wonderful celebration meal afterward.

After coming home from that supposedly last cruise, we were to do whatever was needed in the way of operations for one year and then finally decommission. So we got assigned to help transfer some marine units with a deploying Squadron to Hawaii, where we would offload and then train some Amtrac Units in splashing from a LSD and heading into the Hawaiian surf. Again, the ship and crew performed majestically, and we got some well-deserved liberty in Lahaina, Maui, a port seldom visited by the U.S. Navy. On our way home from Hawaii, to San Diego, we were notified that a Newport Class LST would be late coming out of overhaul, and because we were so well trained and ready, we would make the first half of the LST's six-month deployment and then head home to really decommission.

Again, the crew was so good at what they did that we headed to San Diego, joined the other Squadron and deployed with troops aplenty for WestPac. Then at the halfway point, the LST came over and we were sent home across the Pacific as a lone ship headed to a final resting place. Again, we had Marines on board and I talked with the Navigator and Executive Officer and we adjusted our course track to pass Iwo Jima during daylight hours. The Marines were ecstatic and we all got to see that important place in Marine Corps history, Mount Suribachi.

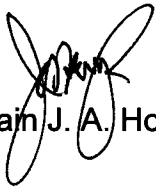
So as you can see, the reputation Monticello had for being a can-do squared away ship, ready to operate as necessary in defense of our country, was held right up until

the last. As matter of fact, I was in Bremerton (on USS Belleau Wood in overhaul) when the Monticello was towed in to the INACTSHIPFAC, and talked with the harbor pilot who brought her in. He said that the ship was the best looking decommissioned ship he had every seen, and that it was a tribute to the crew and the legacy of previous crews.

Gentleman of USS Monticello, please accept my grateful appreciation for your service in the U.S. Navy and in USS Monticello, and please accept the grateful appreciation and admiration of your country for serving during such an important time in our history. Well Done!!!

And may you all have fair winds and following seas throughout the rest of your life, knowing that you have served in the finest navy in the world.

Respectfully and Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. A. Hough', with a large, stylized flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Captain J. A. Hough, USN (Ret.)