



As Commanding Officer of USS GONZALEZ (DDG 66), I authorized creation of this blog as an easy access web portal for the family and friends of the best Sailors in the Navy. It contains our press releases and other links to new stories of happenings onboard GONZALEZ. Our blog meets all requirements of SECNAV Instruction 5720.47B on policy for content of publicly accessible world wide web sites, and does not contain personal information on GONZALEZ Sailors,

information related to our operational security, or express opinions other than my own related to the outstanding men and women who serve onboard GONZALEZ. For Sailors looking for orders to the best ship in the Navy, we think the blog speaks for itself and therefore have included our command philosophy on how we do business up front.

- CDR B.P. Fort, Commanding Officer USS GONZALEZ

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2009

GONZALEZ Hosts USS JOHNSTON (DD 821) Sailors

Gonzalez Sailors are currently at sea conducting a wide variety of tactical, seamanship, and engineering training evolutions. Of course, my favorites are always the no-notice drills or surprising the XO by taking over as boat officer to have a waterline tour of the ship in one of the small boats! And it's been a very good underway for us too, as many new and first term Sailors who reported during our SRA period are having their first chance to see the ship put through her paces. Naturally, the best Sailors in the Navy have risen to the challenge and are already showing off their operational prowess.

But I need to catch up our family and friends on an event which took place two weekends ago when we had a very unique opportunity to host some special guests onboard. As Gonzalez Sailors know, linking the past and the present and finding ways to incorporate heritage and history into our daily routine is easy and one of my favorite parts of the job. I'll let my PAO do the rest.

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On Saturday, 2 May, 71 former Sailors and family members from USS Johnston (DD-821) visited the Norfolk-based guided missile destroyer, USS Gonzalez (DDG 66) as part of the Johnston's annual reunion weekend. Although it is common for Navy ships to give tours, the destroyers Johnston and Gonzalez not only share a special bond and but also came together under a unique set of circumstances.

A month earlier in April, Gonzalez Sailors participated in the Blessing of the Fleets Ceremony in Washington DC. In addition

to meeting many of the guests and former Sailors in attendance, the Gonzalez crew had the opportunity to meet Mr. Toby Mack, Vice President of the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation. The meeting proved to be fortuitous as Mr. Mack had previously volunteered to coordinate a Norfolk ship tour for his former ship, USS Johnston's forthcoming summer reunion. "At the Blessing of the Fleets Ceremony, Toby asked me if we would host him and his former shipmates for a tour and knowing the great legacy of the name Johnston from the Battle of Leyte Gulf, I couldn't resist," said Gonzalez' Commanding Officer, Commander Brian Fort. "What I didn't know at the time was the historic link that also binds Johnston and Gonzalez."

USS Johnston (DD 821) was a Gearing class destroyer laid down in March 1945 and commissioned in August 1946. She was named for her fallen predecessor USS Johnston (DD-557), sunk on October 25, 1944 in the incredibly heroic battle against a much more heavily armed Japanese Task Force at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. For most of her career Johnston was a Cold Warrior, making many deployments to the Mediterranean and operating in the Atlantic and Caribbean out of Newport, Rhode Island and Charleston, South Carolina, but in late 1967 she deployed to the Western Pacific for Vietnam gun line and Tonkin Gulf escort duties. After surviving a typhoon in the mid-Pacific in late 1967 and doing escort duty with USS Ranger in the Gulf of Tonkin during January 1968, Johnston finally arrived off Hue City on 6 February and immediately engaged in intense gunfire support during the height of the Battle of Hue City. Remaining in a continuous gunfire support role until mid-March of 1968, the ship then returned to Charleston having expended over 10,000 5-inch rounds. Two days before Johnston's arrival off Hue City, on 4 February 1968, Sergeant Freddy Gonzalez gave his own life, displaying gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty, to save his fellow Marines while simultaneously and single-handedly repelling numerous enemy firing positions. The President posthumously awarded Sergeant Gonzalez the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions, the only Marine to be awarded such a decoration for the Battle of Hue City. Meanwhile, Johnston's actions in the days after Sergeant Gonzalez fell allowed the Marines to continue their assault on Viet Cong forces in the city. Johnston remained in commission until 1980 and was then transferred to the Taiwanese Navy and served until 2004 – an incredible 58 years of continuous service.

When Sailors from the two destroyers met for the first time during the Johnston's reunion tour, it was an emotional moment for both generations as they learned their linkage in history. "The group of Veterans who came onboard were the best tour group we have had.

They were enthusiastic about being here and asked a myriad of questions about the ship, the crew, and the modern day Navy. The contrast between the Navy of yesteryear and today was interesting, and I would gladly lead another tour group for them any day," commented Gonzalez Petty Officer Lemanda Lovelace.

Gonzalez Petty Officer Stephanie Ramales had a similar experience, "Our meeting with the Sailors of USS Johnston was enjoyable for us, and I think enlightening for them. It gave us the distinct opportunity to show how advanced our ships have become technologically, but more importantly, it showed us that some things never change, like our pride in service. If any of the Sailors from Johnston or their spouses have an opportunity to read an article about their Gonzalez tour, I would like to thank them for coming onboard and allowing us to show them how proud we are to serve our country."

Mr. Toby Mack couldn't have agreed more, "The courtesies and professionalism of Gonzalez Sailors were fully apparent as they showed us around their fabulous ship. Our guys were thrilled with the opportunity and fascinated with how far technology has come in 40+ years, as well as how many things haven't changed. It was the highlight of our reunion by a mile. Gonzalez truly rolled out the red carpet for us, which we deeply appreciate."