

Buffalo, NY proved to be beautiful destination in September enlightening us with history, an abundance of excellent food and scenery! We drove from Texas to Buffalo. I had driven through all the states enroute except upstate New York, so I was excited to get to see the NY landscape. The biggest surprise was the vineyards, sprawling acres of very healthy grape vines. Our next trip to upstate New York will include a tour of a winery.

Monday was arrival day and everyone enjoyed greeting longtime friends, and new acquaintances, with pizza and chicken wings for dinner. Our tour planner, Ray, knows the best restaurants in every city! 40 sailors (members) and 29 spouses/guests from the USS CVA-64 plus another 21 sailors and 26 spouses/guests from the USS Hornet filled the hospitality suite and 2+ buses. Twins with their parents and grandparents from the USS Hornet participated in all the tours and meals... excellent young tourists!

The weather cooperated, not too hot, cold or wet...except for the Maid of the Mist (U.S. side) tour and the walk along the fence (Canadian side) which were both needed to experience fully the Niagara Falls' grandeur...100% worth the extra daily shower!

Tuesday's AM tour of Buffalo showed us what happens when technology changes the need for manpower resulting in the shrinking of the city's population and the city's budget. A change in focus to medical facilities and attractions for tourists like our group keep the economy moving. A convenience in our autos, which we take for granted when we enjoy rain showers, was invented in Buffalo by Mary Anderson in 1903, after a fatal vehicle accident...the windshield wiper. But don't forget the beginning of the National Weather Service that started with watching the weather changes across Lake Erie.

After a quick lunch, we headed for Horseshoe Falls, crossing Grand Island. A fairly long walk alongside the Niagara River to the boarding area for the Maid of the Mist boat gave us a glimpse of the rushing river and thunder of the Falls. But the boat ride to the Falls was truly the "icing on the cake" to experience the power of the Falls. Disposable raincoats were provided, but the best spots on the boat to see the Falls were also the best spots for experiencing the wind and mist created by the Falls. As a friend recently told me, "Water gets into everything", including our "mist" gear. Expecting light rain that day, we did not know which moisture we were feeling, and did not care. We were tired, and wet with an awestruck quietness on the ride back to the hotel, but all were ready for the Canadian Niagara Falls trip Thursday morning.

Wednesday's AM tour of the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park included tours of two decommissioned naval ships in the harbor, the USS Little Rock (CLG-4) cruiser and the USS The Sullivans (DD-537) destroyer. The Memorial Service for the Fallen was held on the USS Little Rock and brought fond memories of life aboard the USS Constellation and USS Hornet. Thanks to our hostess and creative helpers, a wreath of appropriate decomposable materials was made on Monday and Tuesday and presented overboard during the service.

Lunch at the Blue Beer Brewery was wonderful...great food, beverages, and noisy in the warehouse-like setting. The retired sailors quickly found the open cash bar.

Getting through the Canadian border at Rainbow Bridge created a little anxiety but everyone was passed through the border without any incidents. Canada has created a huge park alongside the

river which includes the Niagara Botanical Gardens, hotels, restaurants and gaming areas which we toured by bus with our Canadian guide. Stops at the dangerous Whirlpool area created by the Falls and the walk alongside the Falls provided time for photography and gift shopping...and getting wet. My goal was to get as close to the river next to the walkway but a few feet below the walkway just before the cliff that causes the waterfall. I was able to feel and hear the thundering rush of the water before it went over the cliff, and of course the mist created! It brought back memories of our BWCA canoe trips.

Lunch at the top of the Skylon in the revolving dining room, about 775' above the bottom of the Falls, provided views and excellent photo opportunities of the Falls, the city and even Toronto in the distant west. The ozone that has accumulated on the river mentioned by the tour guide was very visible from this view.

After the "rush" of the Falls, we enjoyed quiet cruising on the Erie Canal on Friday morning, going through two locks and then enjoying a buffet lunch. Visitors to the park alongside the Canal greeted us with small-town friendliness. Ducks in the locks were diving for something...the tour boat captain said it was zebra mussels. These mussels have been labeled an "invasive species" that is undesirable, because of their prolific reproduction and damage to water industries. However, in reading literature at the hotel, it was mentioned that the zebra mussels have contributed to the cleanup of Lake Erie. Interesting! This was the coolest morning of the week, but the only breeze was from the boat's slow forward motion. Occasionally, the sun peeked through the clouds to warm us...just enough to make for a very pleasant tour. Returning through the locks, we saw the beginnings of some beautiful fall colors.

I haven't mentioned all the gatherings and meals that were included. Meals provided were generously sized...and qualified for the "Texas-sized" label. All were excellent! Also, there were leftovers from Monday evening's pizza and wings that were served nightly, as desired, in the hospitality suite. The hotel coffee shop served us a buffet breakfast each morning, which also served as a gathering place. Another gathering place was the hotel lobby. Everyone arrived earlier than the scheduled bus departure times, knowing that there would be others to greet. At every reunion, we get to know members and their spouses better and to meet long-time and new members.

The guides and bus drivers were excellent, providing historical and current commentary (even with a surprise actor for President Roosevelt) to give us a more in depth understanding of the Buffalo/Niagara Falls area. Canada is visible from various locations on the Lake Erie shores, something that was mentioned on nearly every bus ride. I was surprised by this comment. But, relations between Canada, the U.S. and the Indians have not always been as friendly as some of us believe, as evidenced by the various wars mentioned. I am glad that we live in the friendlier times.

On the business side, in 2023, many of us will go to Carthage, TX for the Mini Reunion, on April 25 - 28 2023 and to Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX for the full reunion in October. The current plan is to go to Colorado Springs, CO for the reunion in 2024, but that requires more coordination with the USS Hornet and maybe members from a third ship.

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