

destroyers and four destroyer escorts — came under attack by a superior Japanese naval force estimated to include four battleships, eight cruisers, and at least 16 destroyers.

For nearly 18 hours, the men of CVE-71 and the battle group fought in one of several naval and land engagements raging in the vicinity that decisively wrested control of the Leyte Gulf from the Japanese and into U.S. hands.

"I honestly don't know how we made it through (the battle) without suffering more losses than we did," Schuman said.

Other vessels and crews of the task force, which were supporting Gen. Douglas MacArthur's invasion operations on Leyte Island, were less fortunate than the Kitkun Bay.

The story of the men of the Kitkun Bay bears telling.

Last Saturday, four survivors of CVE-71 from Kansas and Oklahoma met at Schuman's home in Parsons for a day-long get-together. The wives of four of the five men were also present.

Later this year, they will travel to Westport, Mass., to meet the remainder of the ships' company for their annual reunion.

Each man has his own recollections of the happenings aboard ship during their tours of duty. Some humorous; others tragic and gruesome.

Schuman said he could remember some funny times aboard ship during the lulls, particularly the volleyball games.

"We had plenty of room to play, but the wind was a problem. We kept losing volleyballs because they were blown overboard," Schuman said.

When Schuman joined the Kitkun Bay shortly after her commissioning in December, 1943, he was about 15 years older than the average crew member.

Now at 83, Schuman is the oldest living crew member of CVE-71. Shuman and Jean, his wife of 35 years, reside at 3510 Gabriel, Apt. 211.

Charles Shepard, 66, Carbondale, former storekeeper third class, laughs now at his first week aboard ship.

"I was seasick for about a week when they first put the ship into commission. All I could do was hang over the side and throw up. Never bothered me after that," Shepard said.

Shepard was 19 when he signed aboard as an electrician's mate. But



From the personal collection of Don Wilkinson

**SHIP SURVIVORS** — Above: Five members of the surviving crew of the World War II escort carrier USS Kitkun Bay gathered in Parsons last Saturday to visit about their combat days in the South Pacific. From left are Emerson Freeman, Rose Hill, Charles Pritchett, Pryor, Okla., Alfred White, Wichita, Charles Shepard, Carbondale, and their host, Herman Schuman, seated, 3510 Gabriel. Left: Herman Schuman, right, watches as Charles Pritchett, left, thumbs through one of the photo albums. Below: Survivors of the Kitkun Bay are able to purchase the baseball caps, tote bags and other memorabilia at a store set up at the annual reunions. The ship's roster and a photo album are also prized possessions kept by the crew members. (Sun photos by Don Wilkinson)



being an "ol' country boy," he didn't like being cooped up at a generator in the hold during General Quarters.

"I had a chance to transfer to a deck action crew later, so I took it. Later, I started working as a storekeeper. I liked that a lot better," Shepard said.

Hailing from Rose Hill, Emerson Freeman, 66, former seaman first class gunner's mate/striker, was a late arrival on CVE-71. He was 19 when he came aboard in November 1944 just after the Leyte Gulf battle.

He said he remembered a parti-

cularly funny moment that happened to him aboard the Kitkun Bay while they were anchored in Tokyo Bay after the war.

"I had been relieved from watch one evening and climbed into my bunk to sleep. During the night, a typhoon hit and I slept right through it," Freeman said.

"I woke up at 8 a.m. (next day), the compartment was dark and everyone was gone. I went up on deck and they told me what happened."

Alfred White, 66, of Wichita, was a 19-year-old seaman first class in the aviation fueling divi-

sion. He spent most of his time on the hanger deck tending to the fuel needs of the carrier's aircraft.

White chuckled as he recalled an amusing event while returning to port after a mission.

"Our fresh water condensers were knocked out. No fresh water. So in order to keep from using the big bar of yellow soap they gave us to take salt water baths, they had guys up there (pilots) looking for rain storms. Whenever they spotted one, everyone was topside taking a shower," White said.

Charles Pritchett, 69, of Pryor, Okla., was about 21 when he came

aboard as a gunner's mate second class.

He said he remembered a time when his shipmates tried to recruit him for a boxing match against men from some of the other ships in the fleet.

"They wanted me to be a heavy-weight boxer in the Gambier Bay challenges. I've never boxed a day in my life ... and I didn't either," Pritchett said.

While the men agree that the battle for Leyte Gulf was perhaps their darkest hours together, the worst time would come at 6:57. See "Survivors" on Page 4.

at Memorial Hall, 600 N. Seventh St. in Kansas City, Kans.

Tickets are \$14 in advance, \$17 the day of the show and gold circle tickets center stage are \$27.

The Mormon Tabernacle Choir will perform at 8 p.m. July 31 at the RLDS Auditorium in Independence, Mo.

Tickets are \$5, \$8.50 and \$13 and are available by calling TicketMaster at (816) 931-3330.

No children under the age of 7 will be admitted.

"Side by Side by Sondheim" will be performed at the Cultural Education Center on the campus of Johnson County Community College, 12345 College Blvd., Overland Park.

The show will open at 8 p.m. June 20 and the final show will begin at 2 p.m. June 21.

For more information and tickets, which cost \$14.50 and \$19.50, call (913) 421-7500.

World's of Fun in Kansas City, Mo., in honor of Father's Day, is offering fathers free admission with the purchase of one full-priced adult admission ticket.

Activities planned for Father's Day include a 6 p.m. performance by the country music group "Riders in the Sky" in the Forum Amphitheatre. Babs and Buster Bunny and the Simpsons will be appearing as a part of the park's special feature for children, KidsFest. The Simpsons will appear at 12:30 and 2 p.m. at the Country Junction, while Babs and Buster Bunny will appear in the Americana section at 10:30 and 11:30 a.m., 12:30, 1:30 and 2:30 p.m.

Adult tickets are \$21.95 and tickets for children 12 and under cost \$14.95.

The Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum has an exhibit devoted to architect Frank Lloyd Wright's first Usonian design of 1935-36.

The design was never utilized, but served as a prototype for 140 Usonian houses built throughout the United States from 1936 to 1959.

The museum is located at 204 S. Main in Wichita and is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. It is closed on Mondays.

Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children.

An exhibit of Wright's and George Niedecken's designs for the Henry J. Allen house is on display at the Wichita Art Museum at 619 Stack- See "Spotlight" on Page 4.