

September 1, 2020

QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER

# 786 CLUB

## USS ILLINOIS



The 786 Club • Union League Club of Chicago  
65 West Jackson • Chicago, Illinois • 60604-3598

Colonel Richard Todas, President  
[www.786club.org](http://www.786club.org)

*"A lifetime alliance between crew and citizens."*

## Captain's Report

Aloha 786 Club Members!

The MIGHTY warship ILLINOIS has recently completed her Combat Readiness Evaluation (CRE) and I have to say, we did very well. The FIGHTING ILLINI proved our mettle in our warfare mission areas with very good results, achieving a stunning 92% hit rate against simulated surface contacts – well above the fleet standards. We shot 21 of our 22 torpedoes and successfully evaded 15 incoming light-weight torpedoes. I am very proud of our team's performance and are making great strides to deploy early next year.

Before CRE, we completed a grueling, two-week Intermediate Pre-Deployment Training (IPDT) period, where each of our three watch sections sharpened their peacetime skills in the trainer. Each watch team successfully gained experience tracking submerged contacts as well as position the ship at Periscope Depth (PD) in high contact density environments to collect on Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions. As our experience grows, all crew members are becoming eager to get the ship on deployment and project our nation's power at the pointy end of the spear.

As we go forward, we are supporting the training of Prospective Commanding Officers (PCO) and Executive Officers (PXO) in the upcoming Submarine Command Course (SCC). We are eager to exercise the ship safely against the boundaries of her capabilities. The SCC course is the premiere PCO training pipeline throughout the world.

As summer closes out and we move into the fall, we will conclude with another evaluation – this time for my engineering team. My Engineer (ENG) and his department is eager to show the inspection team that we conduct ourselves safely and effectively while we operate the nuclear reactor. Of course, the reactor enables our worldwide reach, as we are only limited by the amount of food we can carry (around 90 days).

Finally, in our current COVID-19 environment, we are staying healthy and safe. We promote wearing of masks, even while underway (until 14 days have passed), washing hands and routinely wipe down horizontal surfaces. We require that while out and about in town, our crew maintain at least 6ft from others (impossible to do while onboard!) and refrain from going to highly populated, non-essential locations, like bars. It is a challenging time we live in. One of my lines of effort in my Command Philosophy is "Building a High Performing Team through Camaraderie" which we have been challenged to do in this environment. The crew understands but is looking forward to the day we can conduct Command Physical Fitness together again.

We all still talk about the incredible events the 786 Club provided us in January and look forward to a time we can gather together again. Thank you for the continued support. Please know that the FIGHTING ILLINI are making every effort to deploy to the 7th Fleet on time and with a readiness that will make our families and friends proud. All the best,

CDR Ron Hatt  
Commanding Officer  
USS ILLINOIS (SSN 786)

# President's Report

The 786 Club continues to support the crew and families of the USS ILLINOIS. Travel restrictions prevent in-person visits; however, the Club maintains communications with crew and Family Resources Group (FRG). All members should read the latest Board Chairman's report for its information, as well as for proposed activities in the coming months. Given the quarantine mandates in Hawaii, no visits can occur until sometime in 2021. Any visit requires planning on both ends and remains subject to operational requirements of the USS ILLINOIS.

Any members who have not paid current dues must contact Chris Gaines (ccgaines@mindspring.com). If you are unsure of your status, Chris will advise you. Feel free to contact him. An accurate record of membership aids planning and supports efforts and activities.

We urge your participation in a September podcast. The date and time of this event will be coming out soon. Bob Ryan, one of our Board members, will hold a "Meet and Greet Online Cocktail Party" for all members. It will be a fun time. You should download the free edition of Zoom at [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us). The easy registration requires a password of your choosing. Your computer will need a camera and microphone (as well as a speaker or earphones) for full participation. Most laptops have these features built in. If your desktop or laptop doesn't have these features, you can purchase a "Webcam" (camera and microphone) from Amazon or Best Buy for \$30 to \$100.

Plan to attend our first meeting on January 20, 2021. We shall enjoy each other's camaraderie in the well-ventilated, spacious and magnificent Crystal Room, in the Union League Club of Chicago. Any and all social distancing, masks, and other public health requirements, required at that time, will be followed. Rear Admiral Rick Seif, USN, formerly Deputy ComSubLant in Pearl Harbor and now Commander, Undersea Warfighting Development Center, Groton, will be our guest speaker. His new command develops the high-tech capabilities and equipment that keeps our formidable, fearsome and dominant Submarine Force ahead of our enemies.

I look forward to your participation in the Zoom gathering and the in-person January 20 meeting!

Richard Todas, Colonel (R), USA



**786 CLUB**  
USS ILLINOIS

# Chairman's Report: Plans for 2020 and 2021 for the 786 Club

The 786 Club continues to support the crew and families of the USS ILLINOIS.  
To the Members of the 786 Club:

August 3, 2020

Your Board met online with all Officers present and participating a few days ago. In light of the continued uncertainties in the Covid Pandemic environment, several important decisions were made, and the Board asked me to relay these to you.

1. In place of personal quarterly luncheon meetings at the Union League Club of Chicago (ULCC), we will hold several podcasts, hopefully of sufficient interest to our members to promote strong attendance. In particular these podcasts would include:

- In September we are developing a moderated panel discussion, with three retired Admirals speaking on topics related to national defense and the Submarine Force during their times of active service. We would select panelists separated by a decade in age, going back to the 1950's through recent times. This would cover the Cold War onward. We hope to have former Commanders of the Submarine Force, Fleet Commanders, and perhaps STRATCOM Commanders (Omaha). Q&A would follow the panel discussion.

- In October we would have the Commanding Officer of the USS ILLINOIS, Captain Ron Hatt, speaking to us online from Pearl Harbor along with a few others from the crew and families. All would report on what has been happening since our January visit and on plans for the remainder of 2020. If possible, we would hear from the COB, the Family Resources Group (FRG), and Ombudsman. The boat is expected to deploy in early 2021 so this podcast would be timely.

- Board member Bob Ryan, who is also a ULCC Board member, will develop a "Fun and Get to Know One Another" podcast from the ULCC. It will give us an opportunity to get to know our fellow members better and have a fun time, perhaps at an online cocktail party. No time has yet been set.

2. Our 2021 786 Club annual visit to Pearl Harbor and the boat will be set for a week either in September or October of next year. Captain Ron Hatt indicated to me that he is looking forward to hosting a Submerged VIP Day Cruise for 786 Club members during that visit.

3. In the meanwhile, Danica Thompson will be in touch with the FRG to see how we might support any pre-deployment plans, as well as help with procuring items to be packed for all the single sailors to be opened at the Mid-Deployment Party (submerged, of course). Last time the FRG put a "want list" on Amazon and our members purchased various items which were sent to the FRG for assembly. We envision a similar program coming up later this year and will keep you informed.

4. The Board voted to grant \$1,200 to the FRG for its efforts to raise money for a "Reunion Party," once the (very onerous State of Hawaii) Covid restrictions are lifted. The FRG used \$1,200 of its own money to pay for printed T-shirts it sold to raise funds for this "Reunion Party" of the spouses. We advised the CO and FRG that, once a firm date was set for the party, we would mail them the check.

5. Personal quarterly luncheons at the ULCC will resume on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 in the beautiful Crystal Room. Our guest speaker will be Rear Admiral Rick Seif, Commander Undersea Warfighting Center. Many of you have met him and wife Erin when he was Deputy and Chief of Staff for ComSubPac during our January visit to Pearl Harbor. We congratulate him on promotion to Admiral and welcome him to Chicago in January.

6. The 786 Club Newsletter will be issued quarterly with a few new volunteers to make that a reality. Kurt Todas, our President's son, will publish the Newsletter from his Montana home. Shirley Wass will be the Editor. Each edition will have updates from the CO, COB, FRG, Ombudsman, and 786 Club President, as well as some other relevant feature articles. We will relay each Newsletter to you by email, as well as by posting it on our Website, [www.786club.org](http://www.786club.org)



## Chairman's Report (Continued): Plans for 2020 and 2021 for the 786 Club

7. Dues collection has always been a problem. The Board decided to issue invoices each year, prior to the March 31st deadline to alert members that payment is due. We also will urge additional voluntary donations are made along with the dues. Our Secretary and our Treasurer, Chris Gaines and Sue Jelinek, will develop a plan to implement this decision. Per our Bylaws, there is a six-month grace period, starting March 31, after which unpaid members are dropped from the rolls and must pay another initiation fee to be reinstated. If you're not sure you paid your 2020 dues, contact Chris Gaines at [ccgaines@mindspring.com](mailto:ccgaines@mindspring.com)

8. Finally, WE NEED YOUR HELP in identifying a volunteer who would update our 786 Club website periodically. We use WORDPRESS, a common software, and for someone knowledgeable it is easy and not time consuming. Please let the Club know if you have any ideas for us to follow up on. Church, other organizations, businesses, etc. might be the source of the volunteer person we seek.

Thank you for your continued support of the 786 Club. You make a huge difference in the lives of the young sailors and their families aboard the USS ILLINOIS. In turn, these young sailors go into harm's way each time they deploy to WestPac in the dangerous world we live in.

Sincerely,  
Leonard R. Wass  
Chairman, 786 Club



**786 CLUB**  
USS ILLINOIS

# Chief of the Boat's (COB's) Report

The ILLINOIS OHANA welcomes a new addition, Catherine Huber. Catherine weighed 6 lbs. 9 oz. Proud parents are Sadie Huber and CSS1 (SS) Miles Huber. Our strong dedication to our families enabled CSS1 Huber to be able to be at home for Catherine's birth and the crew spending a few weeks with their families, before heading back out to sea. The ILLINOIS expects four more Junior FIGHTING ILLINI in the coming months, and we are excited to welcome them to the team.

The Junior Sailor of the Quarter for the 2nd Quarter is MMA3 (SS) Jason Buffi, a native of Dalran, NJ. MMA3 (SS) Buffi is fully qualified, having completed all his required watches, and he has expanded his horizons to support our Supply Department. He is now a subject matter expert, in all matters concerning Supply and Auxiliary systems. His expertise ensured that the ILLINOIS was able to complete a major supply inspection, with superior results, and complete over 100 maintenance items and repairs to auxiliary equipment throughout the ship. MMA3 Buffi is a hard charging American and has a bright future in our Submarine Force.

The Sailor of the Quarter for the 2nd Quarter is STS1 (SS) Joseph Fludovich, a native of Mechanicsburg, PA. STS1 Fludovich is the First Lieutenant and a Mission Sonar Supervisor. As Sonar Supervisor and subject matter expert in Sonar systems, he ensured the ship's safety while navigating through challenging ocean environments. His dedication to learning and expertise enabled the successful completion of our most recent Combat Readiness Evaluation (CRE) with high marks, ensuring the ILLINOIS to be combat ready, if our great country called upon us. As our First Lieutenant, he tirelessly painted and preserved the ILLINOIS, ensuring this mighty warship remains in the fight for more than 30 years. STS1 Fludovich is a hard charging American and, as COB, I am looking forward to pinning anchors on his uniform, when the time is right.

V/R

CMDCM(SS) Christopher Bean

USS ILLINOIS (SSN 786)

CHIEF OF THE BOAT



**786 CLUB**  
USS ILLINOIS

## Where Are They Now?

### Update from CDR Preston Gilmore, Past Executive Officer of the USS Illinois

My fondest memory of the 786 Club is when we conducted the Distinguished Visitor Cruise, out of Port Canaveral. We prepared several days for the visit and were able to conduct at-sea operations, including a Dive and Surface. Being able to share that experience and allowing us to show a piece of our jobs, with people who mean so much to the crew, was special.

Since transferring from the USS ILLINOIS, I completed a 2-year tour working for Commander Submarine Forces Pacific (COMSUBPAC), and I am now in the Submarine Command Course. I have orders to be the next Commanding Officer of the USS HAWAII, out of Pearl Harbor, and will take command in the spring of 2021. My wife and four kids are enjoying island life, and my oldest son started his senior year, though all kids are distance learning. I am looking forward to getting back to Hawaii, rejoining them and taking command of my own submarine!

### Update from the Steinhagen's by Board Member & Past President Mark McClain

The Steinhagen's moved to Guam shortly after the ILLINOIS returned from its first deployment last year. Neil recently exchanged updates with Club Past President, Mark McClain. Neil, Rebecca and their three children are all fine and successfully avoiding the virus. They enjoy this new assignment as Deputy Commander of Commander Submarine Squadron 15 (COMSUBRON 15), one of our two forward-deployed Pacific attack submarine squadrons. They find Guam to be an excellent place to be during the virus.

They expect to be in this position for another 12 to 15 months and then on to another shore-based or major sea command; at this time they don't know where that will be. Neil appreciated the update Mark provided on the 786 Club and again sent his Thanks to Club members for their support and wished us all the best as we continue our work with the USS ILLINOIS crew and families.

### Update from LCDR (Ret) Josh Hoops, the Commissioning Executive Officer of the USS Illinois

The 786 Club has provided outstanding support for the crew and families of the USS ILLINOIS since before the boat was off the keel blocks. I had the tremendous honor to serve as ILLINOIS' XO for two years and, during that time, I worked closely with the 786 Club Staff to assist in the development of a sustainable support program and did my best to ensure "A lifetime alliance between crew and citizens" is achieved. The 786 Club was instrumental in helping to improve crew morale. Additionally, they played a key role in connecting the crew of ILLINOIS to the fine people throughout the state of Illinois who were all staunch supporters of our Military, the Navy, and the Submarine Force. From parades to Christmas parties, the 786 Club was there for the crew! I continue to communicate with the 786 Club and offer my full support for all their future endeavors. Since my retirement in 2016, I settled in NW New Jersey and have been working in management consulting in mission critical industries. In my current role as Global Director, Program & Project Management at CAI, I have had the incredible opportunity to work in the pharmaceutical and data center industries. These industries have played a crucial role in solving some of the most complex challenges, particularly in recent months, and it truly is inspiring to see how people come together to solve problems to improve quality of life around the globe.

If circumstances permit and you're able to donate  
to the SSN 786 Club, visit our website  
[www.786club.org/donate](http://www.786club.org/donate)

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USS ILLINOIS

## 786 Club First Deployment Challenge Coin

To recognize the superb performance of the USS ILLINOIS during her first deployment, the 786 Club commissioned the creation and production of a special challenge coin. Challenge coins are extremely popular among active duty personnel. The 786 Club intends to produce a coin to recognize each deployment of ILLINOIS.

The coin was handed to each crewmember by 786 Club members pierside in Pearl Harbor. Additional coins were produced and are available for purchase. The coins measure two inches in diameter and come packaged in a vinyl pouch.

Coins will be available for purchase at our in-person meetings, once such meetings are permitted. You can order yours now. Proceeds add to our general fund in support of our mission to support the crew and families of ILLINOIS.

Price is \$15 per coin plus \$5 postage (up to two coins, if mailed).

Contact Chris Gaines to place your order; [ccgaines@mindspring.com](mailto:ccgaines@mindspring.com) or 630-319-8110.



## Coin of the Realm

Our recently commissioned First Deployment Challenge Coin was received so well that a second coin was commissioned. This coin recognizes your membership in, and support of, the 786 Club.

Front: "786 CLUB" in very large font, centered on the coin; "A LIFETIME ALLIANCE BETWEEN CREW AND CITIZENS" around the perimeter.

Back: "USS ILLINOIS SSN-786" around the perimeter; an outline of the state of Illinois and a likeness of a Virginia class submarine cutting through the center; the boat's motto, "NEMO MAGIS FORTITER," on lower perimeter below the boat.

The coins measure two inches in diameter and come packaged in a vinyl pouch.

Coins will be available for purchase at our in-person meetings, once such meetings are permitted. You can order yours now, in advance of our next meeting. Proceeds add to our general fund, in support of our mission to support the crew and families of ILLINOIS.

Price is \$15 per coin plus \$5 postage (up to two coins, if mailed).

Contact Chris Gaines to place your order; [ccgaines@mindspring.com](mailto:ccgaines@mindspring.com) or 630-319-8110.



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