

Betcha didn't know about the Silver Strands

By Phil Eakins



The Silver Strands, a rockabilly band formed aboard USS Jason (AR 8) in the late 1950s, frequently played at the CPO and Enlisted Men's clubs while the repair ship was deployed to Sasebo. Lenny Green (second from right) and Dave Wilson (far right) later formed The Thudernotes with shipmate Art Eastlick. Green eventually left the group to pursue a career in country music while Wilson and Eastlick, along with John Gummo, another former Jason crew member, became founding members of The Cascades. (Photo courtesy of Lenny Green)

2008 was a pretty good year for US Fleet Activities Sasebo as far as musical performances go, with appearances by hit makers Puddle of Mudd and Smash Mouth. But did you know that members of a music group that became famous in the early 1960s spent some time performing here on base while they were still in the Navy?

I was surfing the internet awhile back looking for photos of Sasebo when I stumbled across the website for USS *Jason* (AR 8), a repair ship that was decommissioned in 1995. One of the former crew members who contributed several photos to the website is Lenny Green, an engineman who spent a tour aboard *Jason* in the late 50s. Lenny also was a songwriter and guitarist for a band called The Silver Strands, named after the San Diego area beach where *Jason* was homeported.

According to Lenny, The Silver Strands played mostly rockabilly. The band was comprised of crew members from various departments onboard ship. The *Jason* spent time deployed to Sasebo while serving as relief flagship for Commander,

Service Squadron THREE, a duty the repair ship shared with USS *Ajax* (AR 6) and USS *Hector* (AR 7). While at Sasebo, The Silver Strands played gigs at both the Enlisted Men's Club and the CPO Club. In fact, their flashy band uniforms were made by a local tailor right here in Sasebo. "We were not great, but I think we were adequate for the time and place," Lenny wrote me in an e-mail. "I don't know if so many showed up for our music or to see our outrageous uniforms!"

Lenny and two other *Jason* shipmates, Art Eastlick and Dave Wilson, later formed a trio called The Thudernotes. They left the Navy and stayed in the San Diego area, where a few more fellows joined the group, including John Gummo, another former *Jason* crew member who had performed occasionally as lead vocalist with The Silver Strands during their Sasebo tour.

Like Lenny, John was also a songwriter. Shortly afterward, Lenny left the group to pursue a successful career in country music, where he penned numerous songs for some of country music's most famous acts during the 60s and 70s. With Lenny's departure, the group decided to change its name and, borrowing the name of a famous dishwashing detergent, became The Cascades.

Unlike the rest of the guys in the group, John was still in the Navy when The Cascades began recording their first songs in June 1962. I asked him if it was difficult to schedule gigs at the

clubs around San Diego so as not to interfere with his duty days. “Yes, it was quite difficult, but we managed to play quite often,” John wrote to me. “In the last two years of my Navy gig I was the yeoman to the Commander, Naval Air Pacific Fleet Chaplain and I only stood duty every 30 days. I was at North Island Naval Air Station at the time.”

The Cascades recorded several great songs with John as lead vocalist; their most famous hit, “Rhythm of the Rain” (written by John) was released in November 1962 and climbed to #3 on Billboard’s Hot 100 in early 1963. The song also became an international hit, reaching the #1 spot in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan.

The Cascades still perform occasionally today, with John singing lead and his old shipmate Lenny Green as his manager.