



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

May 21, 2019



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Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ H-Gram 030

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#) provides his thoughts on the unprecedented—and never duplicated—sinking of six Japanese submarines in just 12 days by the destroyer escort [USS England](#) in May 1944 in the area between the Admiralty Islands (north of New Guinea) and Truk; the [capture of German submarine U-505](#) by [USS Guadalcanal](#)'s Hunter-Killer Task Group on June 9, 1944; and the first transatlantic crossing of an aircraft by U.S. Navy flying boat [NC-4](#) commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Albert Cushing Read in May 1919. To learn more, [read H-Gram 030](#) at the [Director's Corner](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-40000/80-G-49176.html>

★ Postal Service to Honor Battleship *Missouri* with Forever Stamp

In honor of the 75th anniversary of her commissioning in 1944, the famed American battleship [USS Missouri](#) will be celebrated with a Forever stamp by the U.S. Postal Service during a "First-Day-of-Issue Dedication Ceremony" at the [Battleship Missouri Memorial](#), June 11. Affectionately nicknamed "Mighty Mo," the ship is most famous for her role during [World War II](#) as the deck where the Allied and Japanese governments convened in Tokyo Bay to sign the documents confirming [Japan's surrender](#), ending the war. The stamp depicts *Missouri* in disruptive camouflage that she wore from her commissioning, and clouds loom in the background, tinged with gold and rose from the sun's rays. To learn more, [read the article](#) in *Stars and Stripes*. Although most remember *Missouri* as the symbolic end to WWII, the highly decorated ship earned five battle stars during the [Korean War](#) and participated in bombardment operations during [Operation Desert Storm](#). To learn more about the iconic ship, visit [USS Missouri \(BB-63\): "Mighty Mo"](#) at NHHC's [notable ships](#) page.



Photo Link: <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2019/0510-battleship-uss-missouri-honored-with-stamp.htm>

★ WWII@75: West Loch Ordnance Accident

On May 21, 1944, during the loading of ammunition and supplies for Operation Forager—the invasion of the Marianas Islands during [World War II](#)—an explosion occurred on [LST-353](#) that set off a series of explosions on the LSTs tied up in the area. Over the course of the next several hours, six tank landing ships were sunk and two others seriously damaged. Three tank landing craft and 17 tracked amphibious vehicles were destroyed along with other small craft sunk or damaged. At one point during the accident, there were as many as 200 men in the water. It took more than 24 hours to extinguish all the fires. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, 163 were killed and 396 injured, although the scattering of ships and departure for the Marianas a few days later meant that precise counts of casualties among Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps were impossible to compute. Although the accident was horrific, Operation Forager went ahead as planned. To learn more, read [Pearl Harbor Ablaze Again: The West Loch Disaster, 21 May 1944](#) by COD's Adam Bisno on NHHC's [1944 WWII](#) pages.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/sc-series/SC-100000/SC-185701.html>

★ Navy Performs Final Flyover to Honor Decorated Vietnam-Era Naval Aviator

A highly decorated Vietnam War-era [naval aviator](#) was honored with a flyover by two Navy T-45C [Goshawk](#) aircraft as he was laid to rest at Barrancas National Cemetery aboard [Naval Air Station Pensacola, FL](#), May 16. Surrounded by family, friends, and fellow servicemembers, retired Cmdr. Ralph Ellis Gaither Jr. was buried at the same location where he began training as a naval aviator more than five decades ago. “We were honored to be part of sending off such a great naval aviator and war hero,” said Cmdr. Michael Britt, one of the pilots who performed the flyover. “We are truly grateful for all Cmdr. Gaither’s and his family’s service and sacrifices.” During the [Vietnam War](#), Gaither was shot down near the Long Song Province of North Vietnam. He was quickly captured and was held as a [prisoner of war](#) in Hoa Lo Prison, better known as the Hanoi Hilton, for 2,675 days. Among his many awards during his career were two [Silver Stars](#), two Legions of Merit with Combat V, and the Distinguished Flying Cross. To learn more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=10042&t=4

★ USS Constitution Honors Vietnam War Vets Underway

In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the [Vietnam War](#), [USS Constitution](#)’s crew took more than 200 Vietnam-era veterans underway, May 17. “Old Ironsides” began the voyage from the ship’s berth in Charlestown, MA, went down the Charles River Basin, and out to Boston’s Inner Harbor. “One of the special memories myself and the crew will take away from today is the interaction—the ability to hear the stories and relive some of the moments with some of the Vietnam veterans here aboard [USS Constitution](#),” said Cmdr. Nathaniel R. Shick, [Constitution](#)’s 75th commanding officer. “As a small token of our appreciation, we were able to award those Vietnam War veterans with the [Vietnam War commemoration lapel pin](#), a very small symbol of our undying gratitude to their generation.” To learn more, [read the article](#) at North End Waterfront.



Photo Link: <https://northendwaterfront.com/2019/05/uss-constitution-honors-vietnam-war-vets-underway/>

★ Mystery Solved Surrounding Downed Naval Aircraft on Wroten Island

In October 2018, a news helicopter from WBOC-TV [spotted a small crashed aircraft](#) sitting in shallow water in the middle of Wroten Island, just offshore from Dorchester County in Maryland. Curious about how the aircraft got there, a reporter from the station started asking around and was advised to contact NHHHC’s George Schwarz. [NHHHC’s underwater archaeology](#) team had been compiling a list of potential locations that had plane crashes out of Pax River in the 1940s and 1950s, and research indicated that a [TV-2 Shooting Star](#) had crashed in the early ‘50s. High-definition video footage clearly showed NATC—Naval Air Test Center—painted on the tail of the aircraft, but the bureau number and measurements of the aircraft would have to be taken to be certain. Fortunately, not long after the discovery story was aired, a viewer emailed the station informing them that he knew exactly how the plane got there. To learn how, [read the article](#) in the *Tester*.



Photo Link: https://www.dcmilitary.com/tester/news/local/mystery-solved-surrounding-downed-naval-aircraft-on-wroten-island/article_0b2e81a8-8a85-5383-b9c3-aff5290e7473.html

★ Seabees Save Parts of Arizona to Build Memorials

In 1995, Congress authorized the Navy to distribute pieces of [USS Arizona](#) to educational institutions and non-profit organizations. Dubbed the USS *Arizona* Relics Program, the pieces of wreckage are from a part of *Arizona* that was removed in the 1950s due to corrosion and safety concerns. Before it was removed, it served as a makeshift platform where visitors to the ship could stand, and it was the precursor to the [white memorial structure](#) of today. To date, [Seabees](#) of CBMU 303 Detachment Pearl Harbor have cut and shipped various sized pieces to multiple locations in the continental United States. They are currently working on shipping a piece to the [Imperial War Museum](#) in London. “Britain was an ally in [World War II](#),” said Jim Neuman, history and heritage outreach manager at Commander Navy Region Hawaii. “When the [Empire of Japan surrendered](#) on Sept. 2, 1945, on [USS Missouri](#), they didn’t only surrender to the U.S. they surrendered to the Allies as well.” The plan is to distribute pieces of *Arizona* until there is nothing left. To learn more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=9963&t=4

★ **Naval Aviators Key to U.S. Return to Moon by 2024**

Three NASA astronauts recently told hundreds of young aviators that naval aviators will be a critical part of a renewed push for manned missions to the moon and eventually Mars. “It is a lot easier to take a naval aviator and turn them into a space operator than it is to take a scientist without that background and turn them into a space operator,” said Cmdr. Reid Wiseman, who spent six months on the International Space Station in 2014. Wiseman also added that cooperation between governments and private companies will be key to space exploration in the future. The plan for the 2024 mission is to explore the moon’s south pole, which was not explored in the earlier lunar missions. The long term goal is to go to Mars, with the moon as the staging area. To learn more, read the article in the *Pensacola News Journal*. To learn more about the Navy’s role in space exploration, go to NHHC’s website.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/art/exhibits/exploration-and-technology/from-space-to-sea/all-us-navy-crew--apollo-12--manned-landing-mission.html>

★ **Lake Champlain Rescue: 10 Years Ago**

On May 23, 2009, 10 years ago, personnel from USS Lake Champlain responded to a vessel in distress in the Gulf of Aden and rescued 52 men, women, and children who had been adrift in a small skiff for about seven days. The crew of *Lake Champlain’s* embarked SH-60B Seahawk helicopter spotted the vessel and notified *Lake Champlain*, which was operating approximately 30 miles away. Upon arrival, medical personnel from the ship performed triage. Seventeen were immediately transferred to the ship with severe dehydration and other critical medical issues. The remainder of the Somali migrants were given food and water and later brought aboard. The skiff had experienced engine problems due to a bad fuel mixture. To learn more, read the U.S. Navy release.



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=71921&t=1

★ **Maritime Day—May 22**

Tomorrow the United States celebrates National Maritime Day. In 1933, Congress created National Maritime Day to commemorate the American steamship/sidewheel steamer *SS Savannah’s* voyage from the United States to England. The crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by *Savannah* marked the first successful transoceanic voyage under steam propulsion. “During World War II, more than 250,000 members of the American Merchant Marine served, with more than 6,700 giving their lives, hundreds being detained as prisoners of war, and more than 800 U.S. merchant ships being sunk or damaged,” according to the Maritime Administration, Department of Transportation. To learn more, read National Maritime Day: Remembering the Forgotten at Navy Live.



Photo Link: <https://navylive.dodlive.mil/2013/05/20/national-maritime-day-remembering-the-forgotten/>

★ **NHHC Webpage of the Week**

This week’s Webpage of the Week is new to NHHC’s website. Middle East Engagements provides historical summaries on the Iran Hostage Crisis, Operation Praying Mantis, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Inherent Resolve. Since World War II, the U.S. Navy has been the first line of defense, with the establishment of the Middle East Force in 1949 to the Central Command/Fifth Fleet of today. These pages explore some of the major events that have occurred in the Middle East that involve U.S. forces. Check it out today.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On May 21, 1918, during [World War I](#), Ensign Daniel A.J. Sullivan displayed “extraordinary heroism” during combat operations against a German U-boat while serving on [USS Christabel](#). During the engagement, a German depth bomb exploded near *Christabel*, badly shaking the ship. A number of depth charges that had been set for firing had been thrown about the deck, and there was imminent danger that the depth charges would explode at any moment. Sullivan immediately fell on the explosives and proceeded to secure them. His actions ultimately saved the ship and crew from disaster. For his actions, Sullivan received the [Medal of Honor](#).



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC's website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/s/sullivan-daniel-a-j/nh-44173.html>