



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

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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.

★ Army Corps of Engineers Discover WWII Aircraft, Weapons

After three years, the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#) wrapped up its [World War II](#) munitions and aircraft removal efforts on the land and inland waters of Cape Poge Bay, MA, uncovering weapons, aircraft, and what are believed to be human remains. The site was used to train [naval aviators](#) during the war. During their efforts, engineers recovered the remnants of a WWII-era Curtiss SB2C-4E Helldiver bomber. The aircraft falls under the [Sunken Military Craft Act of 2004](#), which states sunken Navy aircraft cannot be disturbed without contacting the U.S. Navy. Engineers coordinated with [NHHC's Underwater Archaeology Branch](#), and some 1,300 aircraft artifacts, including three propeller blades and two Browning .30-caliber machine guns, were recovered. Some of the artifacts were shipped to the [Texas A&M Conservation Research Laboratory](#) to be evaluated for historical significance. Once complete, all of the artifacts will be [curated at NHHC](#). To learn more, [read the article](#) at *The Martha's Vineyard Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.mvtimes.com/2019/08/13/world-war-ii-munitions-recovery-wraps/>

★ Boxer Resurrects WWII Communication Tactic

Despite all the communication technology available today, amphibious assault ship [USS Boxer](#) tested an old silent communication tactic—a “beanbag drop” used during [World War II](#)—in the Persian Gulf recently. During the war, pilots dropped weighted beanbags carrying messages onto the decks of ships to avoid having their transmissions intercepted by enemy forces. The tactic is much like the [carrier pigeons](#) that carried battlefield messages across frontlines during [World War I](#). “We’ve got the best communication technology onboard our helos [helicopters] but today we practiced the use of a more conventional form of aircraft-to-ship communication in the event electronic communication is not an option,” said Navy Lt. Taryn Steiger, the pilot who flew the HSC-21 Seahawk that dropped the beanbag. To learn more, [read the article](#) in the *Marine Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5642885/bean-bag-drop>

★ Navy to Honor Bellino

The U.S. Naval Academy Director of Athletics Chet Gladchuk announced that [Joe Bellino's](#) No. 27 will be placed on the turf at the 27-yard line at both ends of Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis, MD. The 1960 Heisman Trophy winner's number will face the Navy sideline as a tribute and in memory of the gridiron hero who died last year at the age of 81. “Joe Bellino epitomized honor, character, humility and an unwavering love for his alma mater,” said Gladchuk. Bellino's No. 27 was retired after the 1960 season. He played a three-year stint with the Boston Patriots and then, after football, served in the Navy Reserves for 24 more years, reaching the rank of captain. To learn more, [read the article](#) in the *Capital Gazette*. The Midshipmen [2019 football season](#) begins Aug. 31 at home against Holy Cross. To learn more about [Navy athletics](#), including the [scores of every Army-Navy football game](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.capitalgazette.com/sports/navy/ac-cs-college-roundup-0816-20190815-g6lizzgs6zfifnfki5plvec7m-story.html>

★ Women’s Equality Day

In 1971, U.S. Congress designated Aug. 26 as Women’s Equality Day. The day was selected to commemorate the 1920 passage of the [19th Amendment](#) to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote. This year’s poster, provided by [DEOMI](#), showcases the 36 states—beginning with Illinois and ending with Tennessee—that were needed for a two-thirds majority to ratify the amendment. Women in the armed forces, public service, and government have long served this nation. Women’s Equality Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the many benefits of true equality and the role of women serving the nation. To learn more, check out the [women in the U.S. Navy](#) page at [NHHC’s website](#).

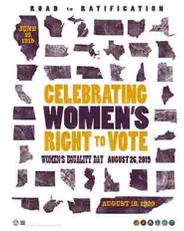


Photo Link: <https://www.deomi.org/human-relations/special-observances.cfm?tab=8>

★ PSNM Moved to Current Home

On Aug. 25, 2007, after years in various locations around Bremerton, WA, and with several name changes, the [Puget Sound Navy Museum](#) opened doors at its current home in historic Building 50. It became an [official U.S. Navy museum](#) in March 2008. Building 50 provides 6,049 square feet of exhibition space and 4,170 square feet of collections storage. The museum now has more than 18,000 objects in its collection. Visitors can explore the naval history of the region and experience life as a Sailor through exhibits about the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, USS *John C. Stennis*, special operations submarines, and more. The Navy built historic Building 50 on the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in 1896. It underwent a city-funded \$6 million renovation prior to the PSNM move. To learn more, read the [history of PSNM](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/psnm.html>

★ “Mom”: The Navy’s 1st Asian American Female Officer

She was just “Mom” to siblings Flip and Christine Cuddy, but to the Navy, “Mom” trained pilots to shoot down the enemy during [World War II](#). [Susan Ahn Cuddy](#), who was born in Los Angeles in 1915, was the first Asian American female to serve in the U.S. Navy when she joined the [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services](#) (WAVES) in 1942. She was also the first female gunnery officer, achieving the rank of lieutenant before leaving the service in 1947. Although her accomplishments were known at the time, her children had not learned about their mother’s activities until a biography was published in 2002 about her. “Mom basically was a trained killer,” her son, Flip, said. “She’s a much different parent than, you know, someone who owned a bakery.” After leaving the Navy, Cuddy worked for the National Security Agency before moving back to Los Angeles in 1959. She died in 2015 at the age of 100. To learn more, [read the article](#) at NPR. To learn more about [Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. Navy](#), go to [NHHC’s website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/news-and-events/news/2015/may-2015/susan-cuddy--first-asian-american-woman-in-the-navy--to-speak-at.html>

★ The Operation Dragoon Drama of Douglas Fairbanks

In early 1943 during [World War II](#), Allied forces were battling across [North Africa](#) and were contemplating amphibious assaults on [Italy](#) and France. U.S. Navy Radioman Bob Rainie, a 22-year-old seagoing veteran bored with shore duty, spotted a bulletin at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, VA: “The Navy requests volunteers for prolonged, hazardous, distant duty for a secret project.” Rainie jumped at the opportunity. Among the officers screening volunteers was Lt. Cmdr. Harold Burris-Meyer, who surprised Rainie by asking very technical questions that were not covered in radio school. Fortunately, Rainie had studied electrical engineering before the war. The mystery surrounding the project deepened with each question, but the presence of another screener—[Douglas Fairbanks Jr.](#)—added even more intrigue. At the time, Fairbanks was a Hollywood icon. The suave 33-year-old lieutenant had starred in films such as “Dawn Patrol,” “The Prisoner of Zenda,” and “The Corsican Brothers.” Turns out, Fairbanks and Burris-Meyer were recruiting for the [Beach Jumpers](#), a unit that conducted diversion operations much as they did during [Operation Dragoon: The Invasion of Southern France](#). To learn more, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhnc-series/nh-series/NH-54000/NH-54383.html>

★ “They Fought for Our Language”: Navajo Code Talkers Honored for Service

Silence fell over the audience when Navajo Code Talker Thomas H. Begay sang the “Marines Hymn” in *Dine Bizaad*—Navajo for the [Navajo language](#). Begay knows all too well how to sing the hymn. He was one of about 420 Navajo men who used the language as an unbreakable code to transmit messages during the Pacific campaign of [World War II](#). It would not be until 1968 when their work was declassified, and 1982 until they were nationally recognized with a presidential proclamation. Now observed as a tribal holiday for the Navajo Nation, Aug. 14 is designated as National Navajo Code Talkers Day. Begay, along with three other Navajo code talkers, were honored during a ceremony and parade at Window Rock, AZ. “We have to be really, really thankful and I know that we are. They fought for our language, they fought for our freedom,” said Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne. To learn more, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*. Also, check out [contributions of American Indians to the U.S. Navy](#) at [NHHC’s website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.nhnews.com/photos/2019/aug/15/41622/>

★ Lost at Sea a Century Ago, Coast Guardsman’s Family to Receive Purple Heart

On Aug. 26, Steven and Nancy Finch of Brewster, MA, are scheduled to attend a special remembrance ceremony for Steven’s great uncle, Norman, at Coast Guard Station Chatham, MA. At the ceremony, the Finch family will receive a Purple Heart honoring Norman’s service and ultimate sacrifice. Norman was onboard Coast Guard Cutter [Tampa](#) during [World War I](#) when it was sunk by German submarine *UB-91* with the loss of all hands. At the time, *Tampa* was under the command of the U.S. Navy, escorting convoys between Gibraltar, the Irish Sea, and the southern coast of England. About six months ago, the Finch family learned that the Coast Guard was seeking information on Norman Finch. “We’re so honored,” Nancy said. “It never really occurred to us that it happened in our own family, because it wasn’t talked about.” To learn more, [read the article](#) in *The Cape Cod Chronicle*.



Photo Link: <https://capecodchronicle.com/en/5433/chatham/4813/Lost-At-Sea-A-Century-Ago-Coast-Guardsman-To-Get-Purple-Heart-History-Coast-Guard.htm>

★ Legacy of Military Naturalists

During the Battle of Alcañiz, Spain, on May 23, 1809, Col. Pierre François Marie Auguste Dejean happened to look down. The air was thick with gunpowder, but on a flower he saw a beetle—a species unknown to him. Immediately, he collected it and pinned the specimen to a piece of cork affixed to the inside of his helmet. After collecting his latest prize, Dejean swung up into the saddle and ordered fixed bayonets as his French forces advanced upslope toward the Spanish artillery. As the gap between them closed, a Spanish cannon roared, killing hundreds of French soldiers. Although the cannon shot shattered Dejean’s helmet, he and his specimen survived. Years later, he would attempt to name the specimen *Cebrio ustulatus*. Collecting specimens during the heat of a battle might seem insane, but in the 18th and 19th centuries, sailors and soldiers often led the hunt for new species, as they were typically the ones who were first outside their regions. To learn more, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/08/16/the-navys-ex-ex-and-a-legacy-of-military-naturalists/>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

Since the middle of the 19th century, the U.S. Navy has used divers for the salvage and repair of ships, construction, and other military operations. In honor of their extremely important work, this week’s webpage of the week is [Navy divers](#). On this page, there is a short history, listing of notable Navy divers, articles, blogs, selected imagery, and much more. U.S. Navy divers are part of an extraordinary community that takes them from the darkest depths of the world’s oceans to freezing arctic-like conditions underneath icebergs, accomplishing tasks that can only be performed by this highly trained naval community. Check this page out today and learn more.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/scenes-from-our-navy--combat-art-of-the-twenty-first-century/navy-divers-prepare.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Aug. 20, 1959, USS *Thetis Bay* completed a six-day humanitarian operation after floods left thousands homeless in Taiwan. During the operation, the ship delivered a total of 1,600,540 pounds of supplies. In addition, her helicopters lifted 850 passengers to and from various sites in the flooded area. Formally an escort aircraft carrier, *Thetis Bay* began conversion in May 1955 to be the Navy's first assault helicopter aircraft carrier and, on July 1, 1955, her designation was changed from CVE-90 to CVHA-1. The carrier was homeported at Long Beach, CA, and there Marine Corps Test Unit No. 1 demonstrated landing and take-off techniques. *Thetis Bay* participated in multiple amphibious training exercises before her designation was changed to LPH-6, amphibious assault ship.



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/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-106000/NH-106713.html>