



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.

★ WWII@75: Battle of Leyte Gulf

On Oct. 23, 1944, the [Battle of Leyte Gulf](#)—considered the largest naval battle of [World War II](#)—began when [U.S. submarines](#) attacked two elements of the Japanese armada moving toward Leyte. In the Palawan Passage, [USS Darter](#) and [USS Dace](#) sank heavy cruisers *Maya* and *Atago*. *Takao* was also hit, but survived. Off Manila Bay, [USS Bream](#)'s torpedoes damaged the heavy cruiser *Aoba*. Over the course of the battle, nearly 200,000 men participated—282 ships fought in four separate engagements across 100,000 square miles of ocean. The [Battle off Samar](#) would prove to be the most dramatic naval engagement of the Leyte campaign. The fight ended on Oct. 26 with Navy carriers and U.S. Army Air Forces aircraft continuing the attack on the retreating Japanese. Three enemy light cruisers and several smaller ships were lost during the day. At a distinct disadvantage at the beginning of the fight, the Japanese Imperial Navy lost so many ships and men in the few days of battle that it could only play a minor role during the remainder of WWII. For more, read "[Calmness, Courage and Efficiency](#)": Remembering the Battle of Leyte Gulf by NHHC historian Martin R. Waldman at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-280000/80-G-284708.html>

★ NHHC Receives USS *Scorpion* Artifact Donation

Retired Rear Adm. Robert Fountain donated four [USS *Scorpion*](#) artifacts to NHHC during a ceremony at the [National Museum of the U.S. Navy](#), Oct. 15. The items included a tablecloth signed by crewmembers, plaque, bedsheet, and a print of *Scorpion*. Fountain served as *Scorpion*'s executive officer from 1965–1968. He received the items from the crew upon his departure. Fountain left *Scorpion* just six months before the [submarine](#) was "presumed lost" with all hands in June 1968. "It is a privilege for me to be here, and I especially want to thank Admiral Fountain in particular for his incredibly kind and generous donation with this artifact [signed tablecloth]," said NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#). "When I first read about it, I got choked up just thinking about it. This is a particularly moving and important artifact that adds to our significant understanding of what happened in the *Scorpion* and more importantly her crew." For more, [read the article](#) at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/news/2019/scorpion-artifact-article.html>

★ Deep-sea Explorers Seek Out Sunken WWII Ships

Hundreds of miles off Midway Atoll, deep-sea explorers are launching underwater robots miles under the ocean's surface to look for sunken [World War II](#) ships. The crew from *Petrel* has located more than 30 ships to date, and now they are turning their attention to the site of the famed [Battle of Midway](#). Two ships have already been located—Japanese carriers *Kaga* and *Akagi*. "We read about the battles, we know what happened. But when you see these wrecks on the bottom of the ocean and everything, you kind of get a feel for what the real price is for war," said [NHHC](#) historian Frank Thompson who is onboard *Petrel*. "You see the damage these things took, and it's humbling to watch some of the video of these vessels because they're war graves." For more, [read the AP article](#).



Photo Link:

<https://www.apnews.com/95f892b78ec44fbd8b4de02c4ad71792/gallery/f9b5c10f5fcc49f1a484f6cb95356af0>

★ **USS Constitution Underway**

The U.S. Navy was formed Oct. 13, 1775, and [USS Constitution](#) successfully launched on Oct. 21, 1797. In celebration of both events, *Constitution* was underway, Oct. 18. During the voyage, “Old Ironsides” fired a 21-gun salute and the 101st Field Artillery Regiment returned the salute. The ship fired an additional 17-gun salute when she passed U.S. Coast Guard Sector Boston. In attendance, Secretary of the Navy [Richard V. Spencer](#) and *Constitution* Commander Nathaniel R. Schick commemorated the 75th anniversary of the [Battle of Leyte Gulf](#) with a wreath laying ceremony. “I am profoundly grateful for all of you who work together to keep this story alive for those that visit here and remind all of why we need to serve today,” said Spencer. “You keep the fighting spirit of ‘Old Ironsides’ alive and afloat and, as Secretary of the Navy, I cannot thank you enough for what you’re doing.” For more, [read the article](#).



Photo Link: <https://northendwaterfront.com/2019/10/uss-constitution-celebrated-her-222nd-birthday-navys-244th-birthday-during-special-underway/>

★ **SECNAV Names Future Destroyer in Honor of Medal of Honor Recipient**

Secretary of the Navy [Richard V. Spencer](#) named a future *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile destroyer in honor of U.S. Navy Hospitalman [John E. Kilmer](#), Oct. 16. Kilmer [received the Medal of Honor](#) posthumously for his sacrifice in saving the life of a comrade. “Hospitalman Kilmer was a hero whose efforts during the [Korean War](#) continue to inspire,” Spencer said. “His dedication to his teammates represents everything good about our integrated naval force.” Kilmer was killed Aug. 13, 1952, during the attack on Bunker Hill, when he shielded another man with his body from enemy fire while caring for the wounded. Kilmer was serving with a Marine rifle company in the First Marine Division. The future USS *John E. Kilmer* will be constructed at Bath Iron Works in Bath, ME. For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/k/kilmer-john-e/80-g-708891.html>

★ **Naval Aviator Who Survived Six Years in Hanoi Hilton Dies**

Retired Rear Adm. Byron Fuller, a [naval aviator](#) who spent almost six years as a [prisoner of war](#) during the [Vietnam War](#), died with his family by his side in Atlantic Beach, FL, recently. He was 91. Fuller was forced to eject from his downed [A-4 Skyhawk](#) over North Vietnam on July 14, 1967, and was subsequently captured, tortured, and left for dead. A fellow POW nursed him back to health only to see him thrown into solitary confinement for the next 25 months. He would not be released from the prison camp—the “Hanoi Hilton”—until 1973. Fuller was highly decorated—[Navy Cross](#), two [Silver Stars](#), four Distinguished Flying Crosses, two [Bronze Stars](#), two [Purple Hearts](#), and the POW Medal. To pass the time during the long hours in solitary confinement, Fuller would design houses in his head. He later built one of those houses on Jacksonville Beach, complete with ocean view. For more, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*.



Photo Link: <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/byron-fuller-naval-aviator-who-survived-six-years-in-hanoi-hilton-and-rose-to-rear-admiral-dies-at-91-1.602447>

★ **A Summer Spent Under Glass**

Often times, a great find comes during a daunting and sometimes even overwhelming project. In this case, it came during the rehousing of the entire glass plate negative collection in the [photo archives](#) at NHHC. The term “glass plate negative” refers to two separate formats: the gelatin dry plate and the collodion wet plate negative. They are extremely fragile and more than 100 years old. Over the course of the project, at least 50 boxes labeled “U.S. Naval Electronics History Project” were discovered. Beneath the title were the city and state of a U.S. naval radio station location—most were labeled either from California or from Alaska. NHHC archivists decided the photos would make an excellent project for digitization and exhibit development. More than 100 glass plate slides of the [U.S. Naval Alaska Radio Station](#) and the [U.S. Naval California Radio Station](#) photo collections—dating back to as early as 1904—have been digitized. For more on the project, [read the blog](#) by NHHC’s photo archivist Lisa Crunk.



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2019/10/18/a-summer-spent-under-glass/>

✦ Detachment Boston Established

Following the closure of the Boston Navy Yard and the disestablishment of the Supervisor of Shipbuilding's office, the Naval Historical Center Detachment Boston was established on Oct. 25, 1991, to maintain and repair the sail frigate [USS Constitution](#). The origins of what is now known as [NHHC Detachment Boston](#) can be traced back to September 1897, when "Old Ironsides" returned to Boston for the 100th anniversary of her October 1797 launch. In 1954, Public Law 523 authorized the Secretary of the Navy "to repair, equip, and restore the United States ship *Constitution* as far as may be practicable, to her original condition, but not for active service, and thereafter to maintain the United States ship *Constitution* at Boston, MA." Today, *Constitution* remains the oldest commissioned warship in the world.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/ships/ships-of-sail/uss-constitution-americas-ship-of-state/ship-history-highlights/2015-17-restoration/150518-n-og138-191.html>

✦ Alfred Thayer Mahan and His Vain Quest to Keep Ships Straight

During the nineteenth century, he was perhaps the most celebrated naval historian of his time. The author of numerous articles and books, [Alfred Thayer Mahan](#) was widely regarded as a champion of the U.S. Navy. However, he hated the sea. He lived in constant fear of ocean storms and colliding ships. His fear of accidents was not unfounded. Mahan was involved in numerous mishaps over the course of his 40-year naval career. As a young first lieutenant in 1861, Mahan was the executive officer of [Percival Drayton's Pocahontas](#) when his standard for mishaps began. On Nov. 7, a small Union fleet assaulted Fort Walker at Port Royal, SC. Delayed by a storm and mechanical issues, *Pocahontas* arrived late on the scene. As the ship moved through the water to join the rest of the flotilla, she slammed into the anchored Union sloop [Seminole](#). The vain executive officer deflected, blaming the incident on his superior officer, but the mishaps would continue. For more, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-48000/NH-48058.html>

✦ Makin Island Commissioned 10 Years Ago

On Oct. 24, 2009, amphibious assault ship [USS Makin Island](#) was commissioned as the eighth and final vessel of the *Wasp*-class at Naval Air Station North Island, CA. The ship is the second to be named for a coral atoll in the northern Gilberts—the scene of two landings by American troops during [World War II](#). The *Wasp*-class LHDs are currently the largest amphibious ships in the world, resembling a small aircraft carrier. They are designed to sail in harm's way and enable rapid combat power buildup ashore in the face of opposition. In 2016, *Makin Island* received the Battle Effectiveness Award ([Battle "E"](#)), marking the second time the ship received the honor. The Battle "E" is presented to ships throughout the Navy that consistently exhibit excellence in wartime capabilities and optimal mission readiness within their region and hull class.



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/161206-N-GB595-556.jpg>

✦ NHHC Webpage of the Week

On Oct. 22, 1962, President [John F. Kennedy](#) ordered a surface blockade of Cuba to prevent Soviet offensive weapons from entering the country. By forcefully employing U.S. naval forces, Kennedy was able to achieve his strategic objectives and deal with a dangerous and well-armed Soviet Union without war. In commemoration of this event, this week's webpage of the week is the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#). On this page, you will find a short history of the event, articles, blogs, documents, essays, and much, much more. Check it out today and learn more about one of the most dangerous times of the [Cold War](#) for the continental United States.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/art/exhibits/communities/100th-anniversary-cno/admiral-george-w--anderson/flag-plot-at-guantanamo-bay.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Oct. 22, 1862, the screw frigate [Wabash](#) provided artillery support for Union infantry troops at the Battle of Pocotaligo, SC. The battery from *Wabash* took part in artillery operations all along the South Atlantic coast during the [Civil War](#). One of the gun crew, seriously injured at Pocotaligo, was Ordinary Seaman Oscar W. Farenholt, the first enlisted man in the Navy to reach flag rank. Farenholt entered the Navy as a seaman on April 24, 1861, and distinguished service led to his appointment as acting ensign on Aug. 19, 1864. Later that year, he was given command of the mortar schooner [Henry Janes](#). His last of many important billets at sea was in command of [Monocacy](#), which acted as base of procurement at Shanghai for Dewey's fleet in the [Spanish-American War](#). Farenholt retired as a rear admiral on Sept. 1, 1901. He died June 30, 1920, at Mare Island, CA.



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-49000/NH-49688.html>