



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.

★ Battle of Chosin Reservoir

After Gen. [Douglas MacArthur](#) successfully led the Inchon landings in August 1950, it appeared a victory for United Nations forces was imminent. MacArthur believed the [Korean War](#) would be over by Christmas and Communism in North Korea would be eradicated. However, Chinese Communists saw their regime increasingly threatened by UN Forces and felt compelled to react, quickly escalating the war. On Oct. 19, Chinese soldiers crossed the Manchurian border into North Korea, and six days later, South Korean units made first contact south of the Chosin Reservoir. On Nov. 2, the 1st Marine Division engaged a division of Chinese troops at Sudong and inflicted heavy casualties. Although it would seem the war had taken a turn, MacArthur was initially unconvinced of the threat posed by the Chinese and continued the northward advancement. By mid-November, an estimated 100,000 Chinese had infiltrated North Korea. For more, [read the essay](#) by COD's Emily J. Lambert at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-97000/NH-97023.html>

★ "This is Dad's Letter!"

On Oct. 26, 2019, an NHHC outreach team attended the [commissioning](#) of the newest USS *Indianapolis* (LCS-17) at Burns Harbor, IN. NHHC historian Dr. Richard Hulver was one of the members of the team. For the last few years, Hulver has conducted extensive research into the loss of WWII cruiser *Indianapolis* (CA-35), including the preparation and publication of the documentary history—[A Grave Misfortune: The Indianapolis Tragedy](#). Before attending the event, Hulver decided to bring relevant documents to display at the commissioning, which included two letters written in 1945 by survivors. While at the display booth, a man looked at NHHC's materials and reached for the letters. When asked, the man indicated that his father was a survivor of [Indianapolis](#), so Hulver asked for his father's name. He replied, "Richard McVay." The name sounded very familiar to Hulver, and he quickly connected the dots. "I'm pretty sure this is your father's letter. He wrote it to the Navy shortly after he was rescued in 1945," said Hulver. After hearing this news, the man looked at Hulver with a mix of surprise and skepticism. Skepticism quickly turned to enthusiasm when he recognized his father's handwriting, "This is Dad's letter!" For more, [read the blog](#) at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2019/11/27/this-is-dads-letter/>

★ The History of the Navy SEAL Trident

In January 1962, in response to President [John F. Kennedy](#)'s desire for the services to develop unconventional warfare, the Navy established SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) Teams ONE and TWO. Their mission is to conduct counter guerilla warfare and clandestine operations in riverine and maritime environments. To become a SEAL, Sailors must endure months of grueling training, including Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL BUD/S School; Parachute Jump School; and SEAL Qualification Training, followed by specialized training. The Navy SEAL Trident is issued to Sailors who have successfully completed all of the qualification training. It is composed of four objects—eagle, anchor, trident, and pistol—and is a symbol of honor and heritage. For more, [read the article](#) in *Popular Mechanics*. For more on [naval special warfare](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/191122-N-QC706-153.JPG>

★ Caught off Guard: Why Didn't America See Pearl Harbor Coming?

In the second half of 1941, the United States knew Japan was preparing for war in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia. The Japanese needed to secure items such as oil, tin, bauxite, and rubber to continue military operations in China. However, Washington was never aware of Japan's overall plan. Strategists knew they would eventually target Dutch and British possessions in the southeast, and the U.S. military presence in the [Philippines](#) at one point would come into contention. [Emperor Hirohito](#)'s expansionist regime had been beating the war drum since 1931 when it had entered Manchuria and, in 1937, began operations elsewhere in China. U.S. cryptographers had even broken the Japanese diplomatic cypher. Although the writing was on the wall, the United States underestimated the enemy. In addition, Japan's major triumph was that it kept the plan to [strike Pearl Harbor](#) secret and off the radio. For more, [read the article](#) in *BBC History Magazine*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/wars-and-events/world-war-ii/pearl-harbor-raid/japanese-forces-in-the-pearl-harbor-attack/miscellaneous-views-of-japanese-forces/80-G-71198.html>

★ Tassafaronga: Night of the Long Lances

On Nov. 30, 1942, Bill Eaton's life flashed before his eyes. He was a young Sailor struggling to stay afloat in the dark waters off [Tassafaronga](#) after a Japanese torpedo hit his ship. Eaton remembered his childhood playing drums in the school band, which ultimately led to his enlistment in the Navy's School of Music. Now he wondered if this was it. Suddenly, a voice shouted, "Don't give up, Bill! Don't give up!" Eaton had been assigned to [Northampton](#) in mid-June 1942, after it returned from the [Battle of Midway](#). In June, the ship headed out to sea to support operations off [Guadalcanal](#). After participating in several battles, *Northampton* prepared to sail for Australia in late November but received orders to search for a convoy of Japanese destroyers carrying troops to Guadalcanal. At 11:20 p.m. on Nov. 30, *Northampton* found the convoy off Tassafaronga and opened fire. Although surprised, the Japanese responded with startling efficiency, and at 11:50 p.m., *Northampton* took two torpedoes to the ship's port side. For more, [read the article](#) in *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams/h-gram-013/h-013-2.html>

★ Arrival of Langley Marked Beginning of an Era in Pacific Naval Aviation

On Nov. 29, 1924, the Navy's first carrier, [Langley](#), arrived at San Diego, CA, to join the Pacific Battle Fleet. The ship was built originally to carry coal for [World War I](#) fleets but was converted into an experimental aircraft carrier. Upon the ship's arrival, *The Evening Tribune* described it as "the queerest looking vessel in the United States Navy, and the first vessel of its type to be constructed." *The San Diego Union* called her the "deadliest ship afloat." For the next 12 years, the ship operated off the California coast and Hawaii engaged in training fleet units, experimentation, pilot training, and tactical fleet problems. *Langley* was sunk during [World War II](#) on Feb. 27, 1942, after the ship took five hits from Japanese aircraft. For more, [read the article](#) in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. For more on [naval aviation](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-93000/NH-93180.html>

★ For Sale: The Navy's First Operational Hydrofoil

It will run you the price of a loaded SUV and it requires a lot of work, but the Navy's first operational hydrofoil—[High Point](#)—is for sale. *High Point* comes with a 450 horsepower Detroit Diesel engine in need of new hydraulics, and it is sitting pierside in Astoria, OR. During her heyday, *High Point* could sail up to 50 knots on its submerged foils containing propulsion nacelles and propellers. It was built to track Soviet submarines that were becoming faster and faster in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was too noisy to listen for subs when on foils, and the solar equipment did not work well when the hydrofoil traveled at high speeds. For more, [read the article](#) at USNI News.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/kn-series/KN-20000/kn-21507-uss-high-point--pch-1-.html>

★ JFK Bunker, Historic Buildings in Disrepair

In 1961, the U.S. Navy built a [Cold War](#) fallout bunker for President [John F. Kennedy](#) on Peanut Island, FL, that has fallen into disrepair since it was closed to the public in October 2017. Windows have been boarded up, weeds cover walkways, and paint is chipping on the bunker and historic structures located on the island. The sites were once a museum, but the contract expired, and the facilities were locked up. “I think it is historically important for many reasons,” said Debi Murray, head of the Palm Beach County Historical Society. “It depicts a particular period time in our nation’s history. Cuba is only, what, 90 miles south of Florida? And [Khrushchev was sending missiles](#). Kennedy had a tendency to visit. The government decided he needed a bomb shelter. A lot of bomb shelters were built across the United States during the Cold War, and this was one more.” It is unknown when or if the bunker will again open to the public. For more, [read the article](#) in the *Palm Beach Post*.



Photo Link: <https://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/20191129/ifk-bunker-coast-guard-historic-buildings-in-disrepair-as-port-awaits-offer>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

In commemoration of the 78th anniversary of “a date which will live in infamy,” this week’s webpage of the week is the [Pearl Harbor attack](#) page on NHHC’s [1941 World War II](#) pages. Read stories of heroism, survivor reports, intelligence documents, and much, much more. Watch an interview with NHHC historian Robert J. Cressman as he discusses Japan’s strategic objective, and view a story map that outlines the attack. Also, explore the [Pearl Harbor remembrance](#) section that provides the history, imagery, and resources of the day that killed more than 2,000 Americans and left about 1,000 more wounded. The memory of Pearl Harbor inspired perseverance through the challenges of the years ahead and remains a reminder of the sacrifice of service members past and present.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/wars-and-events/world-war-ii/pearl-harbor-raid/battleship-row-during-the-pearl-harbor-attack/uss-arizona-during-the-pearl-harbor-attack/80-G-19942.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Dec. 3, 1775, the first American flag was raised onboard a Continental ship when Lt. [John Paul Jones](#) hoisted the Grand Union flag during Continental ship [Alfred](#)’s commissioning at Philadelphia, PA. *Alfred* was the flagship of Commodore Esek Hopkins’ Continental Navy flotilla during the remainder of 1775 and the first four months of 1776. Capt. Dudley Saltonstall commanded *Alfred*.



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-85000/NH-85212-KN.html>