



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

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Compiled by Brent Hunt, Naval History and Heritage Command's Communication and Outreach Division

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 042

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#), in commemoration of the 75th anniversary, covers the U.S. Navy's role in the [Battle for Iwo Jima](#). On Feb. 19, 1945, Marines landed on the tiny island of Iwo Jima for what would become one of the bloodiest battles of [World War II](#). More than 5,900 Marines gave their lives, including more than 500 in just the first few hours. More than 880 U.S. Navy personnel were also killed. The Japanese were extremely well prepared for the amphibious assault, with gun positions that were virtually impervious to air and sea bombardment, and they were better led than probably any other battle of the war. Hard lessons were learned, and many were put to the test during the subsequent [Battle for Okinawa](#). For more, [read H-Gram 042](#) at the [Director's Corner](#). In addition to the new H-Gram, Director Cox wrote about [Pearl Harbor](#) survivor Donald Stratton, who recently passed away at the age of 97. Read [Fair Winds, Donald Stratton, USS Arizona Hero](#) at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1945/battle-for-iwo-jima.html>

★ The Search for Seaman Joachim Pease

The Medal of Honor was introduced during the [Civil War](#), and it would come to represent the nation's highest military honor. By the end of the war, 328 received the [U.S. Navy Medal of Honor](#) and, of those, eight were people of color. One of the recipients, Seaman Joachim Pease, is recognized as one of the first to receive the medal. On June 19, 1864, while serving as a seaman onboard [USS Kearsarge](#), Pease "exhibited marked coolness and good conduct and was highly recommended by the divisional officer for gallantry under fire" as a gun loader during the engagement that destroyed Confederate ship [Alabama](#). His Medal of Honor is on display at the [National Museum of the U.S. Navy](#). To learn what NHHC's Danny Stevens and Jennie Ashton found about Pease through their research, [read the blog](#) at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2020/02/18/the-search-for-seaman-joachim-pease/>

★ WWII@75: First Women to Enter Active Combat Zone

On March 2, 1945, 75 years ago, Navy war correspondent Barbara Miller Finch, volunteering as a nurse's assistant, became the first female to enter an active combat zone during the [Battle for Iwo Jima](#). Four days later, 22-year-old Ensign Jane Kendeigh became the first female flight nurse to intentionally enter a combat zone in the Pacific Theater. Finch was not only the first female on Iwo Jima, but also the first American reporter on the scene. During [World War II](#), the Navy prohibited female correspondents from entering combat zones, but there was a loophole in the Navy's policy. Female reporters were allowed to travel in unarmed hospital ships and on hospital planes. By volunteering as a nurse's assistant, Finch was able to be the first. Kendeigh was one of the Navy's 48 newly trained flight nurses whose plane happened to be the first of the squadron to land on Iwo Jima. For more, [read the blog](#) by NHHC historian Richard Hulver at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2017/03/27/the-wartime-experiences-of-two-women-at-iwo-jima-and-okinawa/>

★ Women's History Month

Women's History Month—observed annually each March—celebrates the struggles and achievements of women throughout the history of the United States. This year's theme is "Honoring the Past, Securing the Future." The first women to serve in the U.S. Navy were nurses, beginning with the "Sacred Twenty," who were appointed after the Navy Nurse Corps was established on May 13, 1908. During both world wars, large-scale enlistment of women into the Navy met clerical shortages. Today, women serve in every rank from seaman to admiral and in every job from pilot to deep-sea diver. For more on women in the U.S. Navy, go to NHHC's website.



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

★ WWII@75: John Harlan Willis

On Feb. 28, 1945, 75 years ago during the Battle for Iwo Jima, Pharmacist's Mate First Class John Harlan Willis, while under heavy mortar and sniper fire, advanced to the extreme front lines to render aid to a fallen Marine. The enemy continuously threw hand grenades at his position while he was providing aid. After throwing eight grenades back at the enemy, Willis was killed when the ninth exploded in his hand. For "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life," Willis received the Medal of Honor posthumously. The Tennessee native's exceptional valor at the sacrifice of his own life inspired his comrades to launch a ferocious attack and repulse the numerically superior enemy force. USS John Willis honored the World War II hero.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/us-people/w/willis-john-h/nh-76441-a.html>

★ Tyler Approves Resolution to Annex Texas—175 Years Ago

On March 1, 1845, the foundation of the Mexican-American War was laid when President John Tyler signed a joint resolution annexing Texas. Since 1836, the Republic of Texas had sought to become part of the United States after winning independence from Mexico. The Texas minister to Washington proposed annexation to President Martin Van Buren in August 1837, but it was rejected due to fear of reprisal from Mexico and the controversy of adding another slave state. After the joint resolution was signed and a state constitution was drafted, Texas was officially annexed on Dec. 29, 1845. Mexico responded by ending diplomatic relations with the United States. In response, President James K. Polk asked Congress to declare war on Mexico and, on May 13, 1846, Congress approved. The war ended on Feb. 2, 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico agreed to extend the southern border of Texas and surrender present-day California, New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada. Parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming were ceded as well.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhnc-series/nh-series/NH-65000/NH-65708.html>

★ Baseball and the Navy

In the latest naval history podcast from Preble Hall, Megan Churchwell, curator of Puget Sound Navy Museum, discusses the recently concluded exhibit, "When Baseball Went to War," a history of baseball and the Navy. The first ship-based baseball teams formed in the 1880s and, by World War I, baseball had become fully integrated into Navy training. America's involvement in World War II resulted in an unprecedented explosion in Navy baseball. During the war, service baseball flourished in the European and Pacific theaters, as well as at Navy bases throughout the United States. The Preble Hall podcast, conducted by personnel at the United States Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, MD, interviews historians, practitioners, military personnel, and other experts on a variety of naval history topics from ancient history to more current events.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/us-people/b/bartlett-frank-w/nh-58843.html>

✦ Three Downed Aircraft From Famous WWII Battle Located

The nonprofit organization Project Recover announced the discovery of three U.S. aircraft wrecks in the Pacific associated with seven Americans missing in action during [World War II](#). Researchers identified wreckage from two SBD-5 Dauntless and one TBM/F-1 Avenger aircraft in what is now the Federated States of Micronesia. The airplanes reportedly launched from the carriers [USS Enterprise](#) and [USS Intrepid](#) during [Operation Hailstone](#). According to the lead historian of the organization, the site may contain as many as 33 aircraft that carried nearly 100 servicemembers still missing in action. The announcement of the find came exactly 76 years after the carrier raid took place. At dawn on Feb. 17, 1944, five U.S. fleet aircraft carriers attacked the Japanese forward base at Truk Island, destroying hundreds of Japanese aircraft and demolishing 80 percent of the supplies on the island. The surprise attack killed more than 4,500 Japanese. For more, [read the article](#) in the *Military Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2020/02/20/three-downed-aircraft-associated-with-seven-mias-from-famous-wwii-battle-located-in-pacific-ocean/>

✦ USS Puget Sound, Only Navy Vessel with Totem on Its Bow, Immortalized in Model

Wherever they were stationed, they had with them a 40-inch-long model of a Navy destroyer tender with a totem pole on its bow. The miniature *USS Puget Sound* was a reminder of Karen Jacobs-Elton's father's service. Richard B. Jacobs was the first commanding officer of the actual *USS Puget Sound*. He served 34 years in the Navy and earned a [Silver Star](#) and [Purple Heart](#) during [World War II](#). Jacobs passed away in 1992, and this past fall Jacobs-Elton's mother passed away. Their daughter was not sure what she should do with the ship but, after much contemplation, she decided the model's new home would be the Kitsap Historical Society and Museum in downtown Bremerton, WA. "I feel it needs to be seen; people need to know this history," she said. "Its heart is in Kitsap." For more, [read the article](#) in the *Kitsap Sun*.



Photo Link: <https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/2020/02/18/puget-sound-navy-model-surface-first-time-more-than-50-years/4762713002/>

✦ "We Can Do It": Teen Determined to Honor Working Women of WWII

Raya Kenney, now 18-years-old, has had a dream since she was in the fifth grade of building a monument that honors women of [World War II](#), known as the "Rosies." In an effort to help the country during the war, Rosies donned overalls and went to work as riveters and welders in shipyards and warehouses across the country. Kenney said her inspiration for a Washington, DC, monument came from the movie [A League of Their Own](#). "It was the first time that I had seen women taking a role that a man had held previously, and that a woman had never had," she said. Kenney built a model of the monument for a fifth grade assignment and says she still has the dream. She is even in contact with one of the surviving Rosies, Phyllis Gould, 98, who worked in the San Francisco bay area as a shipyard welder. "It's so perfect, it's just incredible. She's just a determined young woman. She'll get it done too," Gould said. For more, [watch the story](#) at CBS News.



Photo Link: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/wwii-monument-working-women-teen-project-2020-02-19/>

✦ NHHC Webpage of the Week

In celebration of Women's History Month, which starts this Sunday, this week's Webpage of the Week is the [Commander Mary Sears](#) page located under NHHC's [namesakes](#). Sears, a legend in the field of oceanography, was appointed head of the Navy Hydrographic Office's new Oceanographic Unit during [World War II](#). Her intelligence reports, which predicted thermoclines, proved critical to the survivability of [U.S. submarines](#). Submarines could hide in thermoclines to escape enemy detection by surface sonar. After the war, Sears transferred to the U.S. Navy Reserve and continued her work as senior scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Oceanographic survey ship *USNS Mary Sears* proudly bears her name.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhbc/browse-by-topic/people/namesakes/mary-sears.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Feb. 25, 1933, [USS Ranger](#)—the first U.S. ship built from the keel up as a carrier—was launched at Newport News, VA. The ship was commissioned June 4, 1934, at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, VA. Her first [naval aviation](#) operations were conducted later that year off Cape Henry. For nearly four years, *Ranger* participated in fleet problems in the Pacific theater before returning to Norfolk in 1939. When the Japanese [attacked Pearl Harbor](#), *Ranger* was conducting neutrality patrol operations in the middle Atlantic and up the eastern seaboard.



During [World War II](#), *Ranger* conducted operations in the Atlantic until July 1944, and then she set sail for the Pacific, operating mostly out of San Diego and Pearl Harbor. *Ranger* received two battle stars for her WWII service.

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-75000/NH-75709.html>