



# NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

March 10, 2020



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](http://history.navy.mil)), your authoritative source for Navy history.

## ★ Navy Commissions USS *Hershel "Woody" Williams*

The Navy commissioned its newest expeditionary sea base, USS *Hershel "Woody" Williams* (ESB-4), during a ceremony held in Norfolk, VA, March 7. The ship is the first to bear the name of 96-year-old retired Marine Corps Chief Warrant Officer 4 [Hershel Woodrow Williams](#), the last surviving [Medal of Honor](#) recipient from the [Battle for Iwo Jima](#). Williams described the commissioning as a moment in history that is beyond comprehension. "May all those who serve aboard this ship that bears my name be safe and proud," he said. "May she have God's blessings for a long life of service to America, the greatest country on Earth." For more on the commissioning, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*. An NHHC outreach team was at the event with the [World War II](#) hero and spread the word about NHHC's services. Check out the new [USS \*Hershel "Woody" Williams\* infographic](#) pictured with Williams.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.facebook.com/USNHistory/photos/rpp.76845133343/10156914376278344/?type=3&theater>

## ★ WWII@75: Task Force 58 Forms for Okinawa

On March 15, 1945, Task Force 58 formed for the upcoming [Battle for Okinawa](#), codenamed [Operation Iceberg](#). American military planners wanted to capture the island of Okinawa for use as a base to blockade Japan and to launch the invasion of the Japanese mainland scheduled for later that year. Okinawa was considered the most important island of the Ryukyu Group, the threshold of the four main islands of Japan. The decision to invade signaled that the United States was ready to penetrate the inner ring of Japanese defenses. For the enemy, failure at Okinawa meant the need to prepare to resist an invasion of the homeland or surrender. The task of seizing the objective was assigned to a huge joint Army-Navy task force commanded by Adm. [Raymond Spruance](#). Spruance had at his disposal Vice Adm. [Marc Mitscher's](#) fast carrier force (Task Force 58), which had a major share of the mission neutralizing Japanese air strength.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/80-G-312000/80-G-312124.html>

## ★ WWII@75: POW Nurses Return to United States

On March 10, 1945, Navy and civilian nurses interned in the Philippines as [prisoners of war](#) since early January 1942 returned to the United States, landing in San Francisco, CA. The nurses were working at the naval hospital in Cañacao when the [war began](#). They were captured in Manila and had been at the Los Baños Internment Camp on Luzon since May 1943. While at the camp, they treated other internees the best they could considering dreadful conditions in a makeshift hospital. Their rescue came around 7 a.m. on Feb. 23, 1945, when U.S. Army paratroopers descended on the internment camp, which was still behind enemy lines. The nurses received the [Bronze Star](#) medal from the Army for their three years' work as [medical specialists](#) while incarcerated. For more, [read the essay](#) by COD's Adam Bisno 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-94000/NH-94947.html>

## ★ WWII@75: First Use of LCVPs

On March 11, 1945, the Navy began use of [LCVPs](#) (landing craft, vehicle, personnel) to [ferry troops](#) across the Rhine River at Bad Neuenahr, Germany. The LCVPs were an improvement from the previous amphibious landing craft in that they were designed to run through the surf to a beach, lower a ramp, unload servicemembers and cargo, retract through the breakers, and return to the transport or dock. The predecessor of the LCVP was built so that the coxswain stood in an exposed position near the stern of the craft. The LCVP provided an armor plate sheathe on the forward portion of the hull, giving protection against small arms fire. The craft carried a crew of four and could transport 36 people or 8,100 pounds of cargo. An LCVP could travel up to 100 miles at normal speeds with two 100-gallon fuel tanks and delivered 225 horsepower from its Gray Marine Diesel engine. [Crossing the Rhine](#) was a significant operation for the Allies because Germany pledged to defend it at all costs after the Battle of the Bulge failed to stop the Allies' march to Berlin.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/USA-C/usa-c-908-campaign-in-germany--1945.html>

## ★ WWI@75: Francis Pierce

During the [Battle for Iwo Jima](#), Pharmacist's Mate First Class Francis Pierce repeatedly opened himself up to enemy fire to protect Marines under his care while attached to the 4th Marine Division. On March 15, 1945, while caught in heavy enemy machinegun fire that wounded multiple Marines, Pierce quickly took charge, carried the wounded to safety, and rendered first aid. After directing the evacuation of three of the casualties, he stood in the open with his weapon blasting to draw enemy fire, enabling the litter bearers to reach cover. Turning his attention to other casualties, Pierce attempted to stop the profuse bleeding of a casualty when a Japanese soldier fired at him from less than 20 yards away, wounding his patient. Pierce proceeded to kill the enemy with the last of his ammunition. He then lifted the patient on his back and trekked 200 feet unarmed, bringing him to safety. Despite extreme exhaustion, he backtracked the same terrain and rescued another fallen Marine. The following morning, he led a combat patrol to a sniper nest and, while providing aid to a stricken Marine, was seriously wounded. Pierce [received the Medal of Honor](#) for his extraordinary valor and heroism.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-700000/80-G-705728.html>

## ★ Second U.S. Aircraft Carrier Visits Vietnam

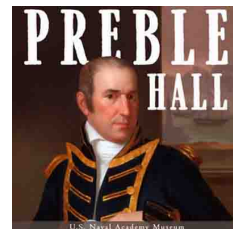
USS *Theodore Roosevelt* arrived in Vietnam March 5, marking the second time a U.S. aircraft carrier has made a port call to the country since the [Vietnam War](#) ended in 1975. USS *Bunker Hill*, USS *Russell*, USS *Paul Hamilton*, [USS Pinckney](#), USS *Kidd*, and [USS Rafael Peralta](#) accompanied *Theodore Roosevelt*. The strike group includes about 6,500 personnel. USS *Carl Vinson* made the first historic visit back in March 2018. This port call marks 25 years since the two former enemies normalized diplomatic relations. *Theodore Roosevelt* expects to be in port five days, and its visit includes community service projects, sports competitions, and other events. "The visit will not only serve to strengthen our bilateral defense relationship, but also help further advance our cultural and professional ties," said Capt. Brett Crozier, commanding officer of *Theodore Roosevelt*. For more, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*.



**Photo Link:** <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/us-aircraft-carrier-visits-vietnam-second-in-two-years-4064565.html>

## ★ The Shogunate Navy

In the [latest naval history podcast](#) from Preble Hall, Dr. Nyri Bakkalian discusses mid-19th century Japan and the factors that led to the rise of Japan's navy as well as three U.S. Naval Academy alumni who are part of that story. The [Preble Hall podcast](#), conducted by personnel at the U.S. 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.usna.edu/Museum/PrebleHall/>

### ★ Bancroft Takes Office, Naval School Established

On March 11, 1845, 175 years ago, [George Bancroft](#) of Massachusetts took office as the 17th [Secretary of the Navy](#). Although he served in that position only 18 months, he established the Naval School at Annapolis, MD, and encouraged the growth and importance of the Naval Observatory. Through the efforts of Bancroft, the Naval School was established at a 10-acre Army post named Fort Severn on Oct. 10, 1845, with a class of 50 midshipmen and seven professors. The curriculum included mathematics and navigation, gunnery and steam, chemistry, English, natural philosophy, and French. In 1850, the Naval School became the [United States Naval Academy](#). A new curriculum also went into effect requiring midshipmen to study at the academy for four years and to train aboard ships each summer. As the Navy grew, the academy expanded. The campus of 10 acres increased to 338. The original student body of 50 midshipmen grew to about 4,000, and modern granite buildings replaced the old wooden structures of Fort Severn.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhmc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhmc-series/nh-series/USN-901000/USN-901100.html>

### ★ Tom Hanks Takes on Nazi Submarines for WWII movie *Greyhound*

Tom Hanks is back in a charismatic [World War II](#) role as Navy Capt. Ernest Krause in the film *Greyhound*. The movie, based on C.S. Forester's 1955 novel *The Good Shepherd*, takes place in the early days of the war. Krause is entrusted with his first command of a U.S. Navy destroyer (codename: Greyhound) protecting an [Allied convoy](#) of 37 ships as it crosses the Atlantic. During their voyage, the Allies find themselves fending off packs of Nazi submarines. Krause, vows to "bring hell down from on high" on the attackers. Of note, Hanks—who also starred in *Saving Private Ryan*—wrote the script for the action-packed drama, and Aaron Schneider directed. Stephen Graham, Elisabeth Shue, and Rob Morgan co-star. *Greyhound* is scheduled to be in theaters June 12. [Watch the trailer](#) at USA Today.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2020/03/05/greyhound-movie-first-trailer-tom-hanks-takes-on-wwii-nazis/4965903002/>

### ★ The Story Behind Van Halen's Music Video Featuring Blue Angels

In 1986, the popular rock band Van Halen was in transition. Its lead singer, David Lee Roth, had left the band to pursue a solo career, and the "Red Rocker," Sammy Hagar, replaced him—to mixed reactions from fans. The first album featuring Hagar had a soaring track "Dreams," but Van Halen did not do music videos which, at the time, producers considered a must. A top executive at Warner Bros. had seen *Top Gun* but thought the movie would have been better if it had a rock soundtrack. Using the movie as inspiration, Warner Bros. produced a video featuring the [U.S. Navy's Blue Angels](#) that was released over the Independence Day holiday. The video used decade-old stock footage of the Blue Angels flying the iconic A-4F Skyhawk II, and Warner Bros. edited the content to the song "Dreams." It was a perfect match. Warner Bros. was happy, the band approved, and the Navy was pleased because the video would help commemorate the Blue Angel's 40th anniversary. Once it was released, the video went "crazy popular." MTV was overwhelmed with phone calls from teenage boys asking about the Blue Angels. The Navy, on the heels of the "two-hour recruiting commercial *Top Gun*," now had one of the nation's top bands featuring its aircraft, and it cost them nothing. For more, [read the article](#).



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/USN-1171000/USN-1171053.html>

### ★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

This week's Webpage of the Week is a new entry on NHHC's [DANFS](#) index. Named in honor of one of the U.S. Navy's most decorated officers, [USS Hayler](#) was commissioned on March 5, 1983, at Pascagoula, MS. The ship's namesake, Vice Adm. Robert W. Hayler, was a distinguished [surface warfare](#) commander in the Pacific theater during [World War II](#). *Hayler* was the last of the Navy's Spruance-class destroyers, which were the first Navy destroyers powered by gas turbine engines. The destroyer got underway on her first deployment on Oct. 17, 1984, and patrolled the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean before returning to homeport on April 6, 1985. The ship's crew participated in several exercises over the next few years. In 1994, *Hayler* participated in Operation Support Democracy and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. Following the [terrorist attacks](#) on Sept. 11, 2001, the ship deployed to the Mediterranean in support of [Operation Enduring Freedom](#). *Hayler* was decommissioned on April 6, 2004. NHHC historian Jeremiah D. Foster authored the history.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-106000/NH-106913-KN.html>

### ★ Today in Naval History

On March 10, 2001, [USS Winston S. Churchill](#) was commissioned at her homeport of Naval Station Norfolk, VA. *Winston S. Churchill* has a Royal Navy officer assigned permanently to the ship, and she flies the Royal Navy's White Ensign as well as the Stars and Stripes. The ship is named in honor of Sir Winston Spencer Churchill, who is best known for his courageous leadership as Britain's prime minister during [World War II](#). *Winston S. Churchill* is the fifth U.S. warship to be named in honor of an Englishman and the 16th warship to be named after a foreign national—the only one in active service today.



*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-106855-KN.html>