



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: Crossing the Rhine

On March 23, 1945, U.S. Navy landing craft, Task Unit 122.5.1, took part in the crossing of the Rhine River at Oppenheim, Germany. [LCVPs](#) (landing craft, vehicle, personnel) and LCMs (landing craft, medium) ferried 4,000–4,500 troops from Gen. George G. Patton's Third Army. Navy landing craft had been moved from the Atlantic seaboard to the Rhine. This colossal riverine exploit was the prelude to the final overwhelming assault on Nazi Germany that would end [World War II](#) in Europe. The Army expressed its sincere gratitude to the Navy for its help in crossing the Rhine. The Third Army's official report stated, "...the Navy again demonstrated its ability to be the most useful and effective in a crossing operation.... Soon after the naval craft hit the water, they poured over such a continual stream of troops, vehicles, and tank destroyers in the early crucial hours that the enemy artillery was silenced, and further ferrying and bridging was able to proceed without interference." For more, read [Operation Plunder: Crossing the Rhine](#), an essay by NHHC intern Rachael A. Beath, at [NHHC's website](#).



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

★ WWII@75: Donald Gary

On March 19, 1945, [USS Franklin](#) was operating near the Japanese home islands close to Kobe, Japan, when an enemy bomber dropped two 550-pound bombs on the ship. The attack set off a series of violent explosions fueled by the ship's bombs, rockets, and ammunition. Lt. (j.g.) Donald Gary, who at the time of the attack was on the third deck, unhesitatingly went below to assist several hundred men trapped in a messing compartment filled with smoke and no apparent way out. As the men below decks became increasingly panic stricken by the continuous explosions, Gary calmly assured them he would find a way to get them out. Probing through the dark debris-filled corridors, he ultimately discovered a way for the men to escape. Stanchly determined to save the men, Gary traveled to the messing compartment three times—despite the fires and explosions—to lead the men to safety. For his heroic actions, Gary [received the Medal of Honor](#). [USS Gary](#) honored the [World War II](#) hero.



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-701805.html>

★ WWII@75: Joseph T. O'Callahan

On March 19, 1945, aboard severely damaged [USS Franklin](#) near Kobe, Japan, [Chaplain](#) Cmdr. Joseph T. O'Callahan heroically rendered aid to the fallen, assisted in fighting fires, directed the jettisoning of live ammunition, ministered to the wounded and dying, and comforted men of all faiths. His actions inspired the officers and the men of [Franklin](#) to fight to save their stricken ship. For his bravery and leadership, O'Callahan [received the Medal of Honor](#) for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty." [USS O'Callahan](#) honored the [World War II](#) hero.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/b/blanchard-robert-c/80-g-49132.html>

★ Decatur Mortally Wounded in Duel—200 Years Ago

On March 22, 1820, Commodore [Stephen Decatur](#) was mortally wounded in a duel with Capt. [James Barron](#) at [Bladensburg, MD](#). The heated dispute stemmed from Barron's actions in an incident between [Chesapeake](#) and HMS *Leopard*. On June 22, 1807, *Chesapeake* set sail from Hampton Roads, but was soon boarded by an officer of the British Squadron lying near the Capes. The British officer wanted to search the ship for deserters, but Barron refused. Shortly after the officer left *Chesapeake*, HMS *Leopard* opened fire on Barron's ship, killing three and wounding a number of men. *Chesapeake* only fired one gun before striking her colors. After the exchange, a British officer came onboard and took four of the crew. The British government would later apologize for the unwarranted attack and return the men. Command of *Chesapeake* was given to Decatur, and Barron was court martialed. He was sentenced to five years suspension without pay or emoluments. Criticism regarding Barron's surrender of his ship sparked a bitter feud between Decatur, who sat on the court martial, and Barron.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/USN-900000/USN-900995.html>

★ Seabee 78th Anniversary Celebration

The [Naval Facilities Engineering Command](#) recently held a ceremonial wreath laying at the Seabee Memorial in Arlington Memorial Cemetery to commemorate the 78th birthday of the [Seabees](#). "It's been 78 years since we embarked on this journey of building and fighting," said Rear Adm. [John Korka](#), commander of NAVFAC. "Seventy-eight years since Adm. Ben Moreell put into action the team to fulfill the dire need for construction workers capable of defending themselves while moving forward and constructing vital facilities to support our troops in the Pacific and Europe." For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/38-MCN-00001/38-MCN-379-1.html>

★ National Medal of Honor Center Opens

When the [Medal of Honor](#) is draped around the neck of an American hero, tales of bravery on Pacific shores, sacrifice in the jungles of [Vietnam](#), or heroic actions in the sands of [Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#) come to life. Although many are familiar with today's recipients, the first medals were actually passed down during the [Civil War](#). The actions of Andrews' Raiders in "The Great Locomotive Chase" played out where Tennessee and Georgia meet, and that is where the [Charles H. Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center](#) opened its doors recently in Chattanooga, TN. Ten Medal of Honor recipients attended the grand opening. The nonprofit organization highlights Chattanooga as the birthplace of the Medal of Honor and educates youth about the character associated with its recipients. For more, [read the article](#) in the *Military Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/03/12/national-medal-of-honor-center-opens-where-it-all-began/>

★ The Navy's Fight Against Scurvy

There have been few diseases more synonymous with Sailors than scurvy. Vitamin C deprivation can cause extreme dental problems, ulcers, uncontrolled bleeding, and even death. Once more deadly than smallpox, scurvy has been described as the "Black Death of the Sea." Years after the British Royal Navy successfully prevented and treated the affliction with citrus fruit and lemon juice rations, the U.S. Navy continued to struggle with the disease. In 1803, while aboard [New York](#), the ship's surgeon reported scurvy was his number one medical concern, citing daily increases. In 1809, Dr. [William P.C. Barton](#) took the fight to scurvy while aboard the frigate [United States](#)—under the command of Commodore [Stephen Decatur](#). Barton administered a citrus concoction to crewmembers who were severely affected with scurvy. For more on Barton's work, [read the blog](#) by André B. Sobocinski at [Navy Medicine Live](#).



Photo Link: <https://navymedicine.navylive.dodlive.mil/archives/13070>

★ Cold War-era Submarine Wreck Discovered

According to researchers from the Lost 52 Project, a U.S. submarine that sank more than 60 years ago has been discovered off Oahu, HI, in almost 11,000 feet of water. USS Stickleback sank in May 1958, during a simulated torpedo run on USS Silverstein. As *Stickleback* was going to a safe depth, the submarine lost power and broached approximately 200 yards ahead of the destroyer escort. *Silverstein* backed full and put her rudder hard left in an effort to avoid a collision but holed the submarine on her port side. The boat's crew was removed by a retriever boat, but efforts to save the submarine failed when compartment after compartment flooded. The submarine, which conducted one partial war patrol in the waning days of World War II, was found in two sections. Recently, the Lost 52 Project has been credited with discovering USS Grayback off Japan and USS Grunion off the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. For more, [read the article](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.foxnews.com/science/cold-war-era-submarine-wreck-discovered>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

This week's Webpage of the Week is a new entry on NHHC's DANFS index. Named for the renowned historian and naval officer, USS Samuel Eliot Morison was formally commissioned on Oct. 11, 1980, at Constitution Park in Boston, MA. The ship's namesake, Rear Adm. Samuel Eliot Morison, enjoyed a prolific career writing maritime and United States history. Following the outbreak of World War II, Morison was tasked to write an operational history of the U.S. Navy. He served on several Navy vessels during the war and, by 1958, published the fifteenth and final volume of *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*. *Samuel Eliot Morison* was the seventh ship of the Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigates. Throughout the early 1980s, the ship's mission was to support NATO commitments in the Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. By the late '80s and into the early 1990s, with the escalation on the war on drugs, *Samuel Eliot Morison* participated in a number of joint counternarcotics operations in the Caribbean Sea. After completing a Great Lakes cruise in 1995, then conducting several exercises and counternarcotics operations, the ship was decommissioned on April 10, 2002. 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-107000/NH-107569-KN.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On March 17, 1959, USS Skate became the first submarine to surface at the North Pole. During the voyage, *Skate*, the first of her class, steamed 3,900 miles under pack ice, surfacing ten times. On March 17, she surfaced at the North Pole to commit the ashes of famed explorer Hubert Wilkins. When the submarine returned to port, *Skate* was awarded a bronze star in lieu of a second Navy Commendation for demonstrating "...for the first time the ability of submarines to operate in and under the Arctic ice in the dead of winter...."



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-108000/NH-108790.html>