



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

## ★ First Woman to Receive the Navy Cross—100 Years Ago

On Nov. 11, 1920, [Lenah H. Higbee](#) became the first living woman to receive the [Navy Cross](#) for her leadership of the Navy Nurse Corps during [World War I](#). Higbee completed formal nursing training at the New York Postgraduate Hospital in 1899 and that same year married retired U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. John H. Higbee. She worked in the private sector until her husband passed away in April 1908. She later advanced her nursing career by completing a postgraduate course at Fordham Hospital in New York City. On May 13, 1908, Congress passed legislation allowing for the [establishment of the Navy Nurse Corps](#)—the equivalent of the Army Nurse Corps. The 36-year old Higbee joined 19 other females to make up the first group of female Navy nurses—known as the “Sacred Twenty.” For more, check out the [history of Lenah H. Sutcliffe Higbee](#) infographic at [NHHC's website](#). Also visit NHHC's [Navy medicine](#) page.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/news-and-events/multimedia-gallery/infographics/heritage/history-of-lenah-h--sutcliffe-higbee.html>

## ★ WWII@75: Congress Limited Navy Force Structure, Personnel

On Nov. 15, 1945, Congress placed limits on Navy force structure and personnel. A minimum of 33 percent of the fleet's [World War II](#) personnel—about a million Sailors—were to be discharged no later than Feb. 15, 1946, and of that, 327,000 by Christmas 1945, and 865,000 by New Year's Eve. In 1941, the size of the Navy was around 380,000 personnel. By war's end, the Navy grew to more than 3.4 million personnel. Active ship force levels grew from 790 in 1941 to 6,768 in 1945. The establishment of Naval Construction Battalions ([Seabees](#)) occurred on March 5, 1942, to provide infrastructure and temporary warfighting capabilities throughout the Pacific and Atlantic theaters. The [WAVES](#) (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) were established on July 30, 1942, to fill clerical billets. African Americans were accepted for [general naval service](#) on April 7, 1942. The massive buildup of people and materiel to win the war was a unified effort that all Americans contributed to directly or indirectly. For more on [manning the U.S. Navy](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1942/manning-the-us-navy.html>

## ★ Happy Birthday, Marine Corps!

On Nov. 10, 1775, the Continental Congress [established two battalions of Marines](#) who would be “able to serve for and during the present war between Great Britain and the colonies, unless dismissed by order of Congress.” After 245 years of partnership with the U.S. Navy, the bond between the two services has never been stronger—from fighting for our country's independence during the [American Revolution](#) to raising the American flag at the [Battle of Iwo Jima](#), “until every battle is won.” The Navy is proud to have the [U.S. Marines](#) as a partner, and we wish the Devil Dogs a happy birthday. For more on the [Navy and Marine Corps team](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/multimedia-gallery/infographics/heritage/navy-and-marines.html>

## ✦ Happy Veterans Day

Originally celebrated as Armistice Day to honor [World War I](#) veterans, Veterans Day is observed annually to honor all military veterans and recognize the sacrifices they have made for this country. Today, more than 18 million veterans have proudly worn the cloth of the nation. Veterans Day provides Americans the opportunity to celebrate and honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of this country, and willingness to serve. For more, check out the [history of Veterans Day](#) infographic. In addition, NHHC's [resources for veterans](#) page provides links to a plethora of information, including guidance for those who are attempting to locate records related to their military service.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/multimedia-gallery/infographics/history/history-of-veterans-day.html>

## ✦ What You Don't Know About American Indians in the Navy

On Oct. 31, 1972, Engineman 1st Class Michael E. Thornton was one of two [Navy SEALs](#) on patrol with three Vietnamese Special Forces members during the [Vietnam War](#). Thornton, who was of Cherokee descent, was looking to gather intelligence with the other operators when they came under intense fire from a numerically superior force of roughly 150 North Vietnamese. During the four-hour enemy engagement, the patrol changed positions often in an attempt to fool the enemy into thinking it was a larger force. Lt. Thomas Norris, the team's leader, covered the group as it attempted to head back to the waterline to seek extraction, but he was seriously wounded. Upon hearing the news, Thornton ran an estimated 400 yards to Norris's last location to render aid. As the enemy attempted to overtake their position, Thornton shot several of the enemy before putting Norris on his shoulders as he ran toward the water where they were subsequently rescued. Thornton [received the Medal of Honor](#) for saving his leader's life. For more on notable American Indians, [read the U.S. Navy release](#). For more on the [contributions of American Indians to the U.S. Navy](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/usn/USN-1150000/usn-1157421-michael-e--thornton.html>

## ✦ Landlocked Santa Fe Celebrates Navy Week with Lighthearted Cook-off

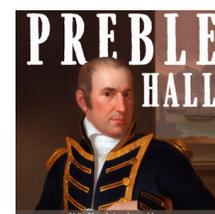
They say an Army travels on its stomach, and the Navy is no different. As Santa Fe, NM, celebrated Navy Week recently, a representative from NHHC took on a noted Santa Fe chef in a virtual cook-off, based on a recipe found in a 1945 U.S. Navy cookbook. The dish was a staple for Sailors during [World War II](#)—Spanish rice and beef. NHHC's Tom Frezza, a member of the Communication and Outreach Division, took on Santa Fe's executive chef Peter O'Brien. There were really no winners, but the contest helped the Navy demonstrate the importance of [naval service to the state](#). "Through a host of virtual events, including an online tour of the famed [USS Constitution](#) and a compilation of interviews with [veterans](#) and active-duty members, who talk about the things they love about Santa Fe, naval personnel helped create a connection between a high desert city and the high seas," said Frezza. For more, [read the article](#). For [delicious Navy recipes](#), visit [NHHC's website](#).



**Photo Link:** [https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local\\_news/landlocked-santa-fe-celebrates-navy-week-with-lighthearted-cook-off/article\\_efed7444-1d0f-11eb-8b04-bb5dfd0653ae.html](https://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/landlocked-santa-fe-celebrates-navy-week-with-lighthearted-cook-off/article_efed7444-1d0f-11eb-8b04-bb5dfd0653ae.html)

## ✦ Preble Hall Podcast

In a recent [naval history podcast](#) from Preble Hall, Canadian naval history author Roger Litwiller discusses the Canadian *Flower*-class corvettes during the Second World War. 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/>

## ★ WWII Submarine Veterans Honored at Kings Bay

At the annual ceremony that honors [World War II](#) submariners, there are usually about 1,500 attendees, but 2020 is different. This year at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, GA, only 45 were allowed with just three WWII submariners and three widows in attendance. Although the event was significantly scaled back this year, Rear Adm. John Spencer, commander of Submarine Group Ten and keynote speaker, noted that it was still important to have the ceremony. “It’s an honor to carry on that legacy and an obligation to carry it on,” he said. “Their legacy is legendary.” Although the [submarine force](#) made up only two percent of the Navy during the war, the boats were responsible for sinking half of the enemy’s fleet. “We inherited this legacy from you. We are honored to carry on that tradition,” Spencer told the veterans. For more, [read the article](#) in *Stars & Stripes*.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6415699/naval-submarine-base-kings-bay-holds-world-war-ii-submarine-veterans-memorial-ceremony>

## ★ Webpage of the Week

This week’s Webpage of the Week is new to NHHC’s [notable ships](#) pages. [USS Barb](#) was commissioned on July 8, 1942, at Groton, CT. Following shakedown and participation in [Operation Torch](#)—the invasion of North Africa—*Barb* was ordered in the spring of 1943 to the Pacific Fleet by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. [Ernest J. King](#). Over the course of her 12 war patrols, *Barb* was credited with destroying 96,628 tons of enemy shipping. She received four Presidential Unit Citations, a Navy Unit Commendation, and eight battle stars for her [World War II](#) service. Her commander, Eugene B. “Lucky” Fluckey, received the [Medal of Honor](#) for his actions as commander of the boat. On Jan. 23, 1945, *Barb* encountered a convoy of 30 enemy ships. *Barb* deployed a barrage of torpedoes that scored eight hits, sinking three ships and seriously damaging three others. For more, check out the page. It contains a short history, suggested reading, blogs, articles, and selected imagery.



**Photo Link:** <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-600000/80-G-649677.html>

## ★ Today in Naval History

On Nov. 10, 1959, [USS Triton](#) was commissioned at Groton, CT, with Capt. Edward L. Beach in command. On Feb. 15, 1960, *Triton* set sail for the South Atlantic. She arrived in the middle of the Atlantic on Feb. 24, ready to make a historic voyage. Having remained submerged since departing the east coast, the [submarine](#) continued south toward Cape Horn, rounded the tip of South America, and headed west across the Pacific. After transiting the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagoes and then crossing the Indian Ocean, *Triton* rounded the Cape of Good Hope, arriving off the St. Peter and Paul Rocks on April 10, 60 days and 21 hours after departing the mid-ocean landmark. She arrived back at Groton on May 10, having completed the first submerged circumnavigation of the earth.



*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/USN-1122000/USN-1122245.html>