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.

✦ H-Gram 057: Operation Downfall

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director Sam Cox focuses on the U.S. plan to invade Japan on Nov. 1, 1945—Operation Downfall—and the Japanese plan to wage biological warfare against the United States in World War II using submarine-launched kamikaze aircraft with plague bombs (Operation Cherry Blossoms at Night). Also covered is the epic tale of survival following the grounding of the sidewheel steam sloop-of-war *Saginaw* on Kure Atoll in 1870, as well as additional details on the disappearance of the five Avengers of Flight 19 in December 1945 (as promised in H-Gram 056). For more, read H-Gram 057 at the Director's Corner.

Photo Link: https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-73000/NH-73096.html

✦ Desert Storm Begins—30 Years Ago

On Jan. 18, 1991, combat operations commenced in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. When the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, the United States deployed a major joint force as part of a multination coalition to stop President Saddam Hussein's brutal aggression. The U.S. Navy provided sea control and maritime superiority, which paved the way for the introduction of U.S. and allied air and ground forces. Hussein's repeated rejection to abandon the invasion and leave Kuwait led to the commencement of combat operations. The subsequent bombardment by air assets and the effects of the economic embargo decimated Iraq's military infrastructure and morale, degraded communications and supplies, and devastated weapons arsenals. During the beginnings of the war, Navy ships launched salvos of Tomahawk cruise missiles against military targets in Iraq to "soften" the battlefield for ground troops. After the 38-day air campaign, ground troops began sweeping through Kuwait in blitzkrieg fashion. In a mere 100 hours, the Iraqi army was crushed. Iraqi soldiers surrendered by the thousands. Kuwait was free again.

Photo Link: https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/the-gulf-war-1990-1991--operation-desert-shield--desert-storm-/a-closer-look.html

✦ Navy Posthumously Awards Navy Cross to USS *Indianapolis* Chaplain

On Jan. 8, the Department of the Navy awarded the Navy Cross posthumously to a World War II chaplain in his native city of Waterbury, CT. Lt. Thomas M. Conway, a Catholic priest, received the Navy and Marine Corps second highest military decoration for his extraordinary heroism from July 30 to Aug. 2, 1945, while serving on USS *Indianapolis*. "Today, we are here to right the record and send a message that we shall never forget," said Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite. "My mother taught me that it's never too late to say you are sorry. Today, the Navy is sorry for not recognizing Chaplain Conway's heroism, dedication and courage sooner. Throughout the brutal war in the Pacific, Father Conway stood by his men and provided comfort, leadership, and spiritual guidance when needed most. I can think of no better example of honor, courage, and commitment. Our Sailors and Marines live those core values every day, and they carry with them the spirit of this great Sailor, officer, and pastor." For more, read the U.S. Navy release. For more on the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps, go to NHHC's website.

Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2467118/navy-posthumously-awards-navy-cross-to-wwii-chaplain/#images-1

✦ Medal of Honor Recipient Navy Hospital Corpsman John E. Kilmer

During combat, hospital corpsmen serve as vital members of the team, helping servicemembers stay alive under the most difficult circumstances. On Aug. 13, 1952, while in combat with a 1st Marine Division Rifle Company, Hospitalman John E. Kilmer exhibited great heroism in administering aid to wounded Marines. He was mortally wounded while using his own body to shield an injured man from enemy fire. For his "gallantry and intrepidity," Kilmer received the Medal of Honor posthumously. Kilmer was born Aug. 15, 1930, and during World War II lived in San Antonio, TX. Kilmer always wanted to join the military growing up, so the day after his 17th birthday he dropped out of high school and joined the Navy. When the Korean War broke out, his enlistment was almost up, but he wanted to put his medical skills to use. He reenlisted in 1951, and shortly thereafter was transferred to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. For more, read the article at DOD's website. For more on Navy medicine, go to NHHC's website.

Photo Link: https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/k/kilmer-john-e/80-g-708891.html

✦ First Aircraft Landing on a Ship—110 Years Ago

On Jan. 18, 1911, at 10:48 a.m., civilian exhibition stunt pilot Eugene B. Ely flew the same Curtiss pusher that he had used during his launch from *Birmingham* on Nov. 14, 1910. He took off from Selfridge Field south of San Francisco, CA, and at 11:01 a.m. landed onboard *Pennsylvania* at anchor off Hunters Point in San Francisco Bay. The plane made a smooth landing from astern onto a specifically built 130-foot long by 32-foot-wide platform. At 11:58 a.m., Ely took off and returned to Selfridge Field, completing the earliest demonstration of the adaptability of aircraft to shipboard operations. For more naval aviation firsts, 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-76000/NH-76215.html

✦ *Mount Whitney* Commissioned—50 Years Ago

On Jan. 16, 1971, amphibious command ship USS *Mount Whitney* was commissioned at Norfolk Navy Shipyard in Portsmouth, VA. The ship is named for a peak in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, on the Inyo-Tulare County line at the eastern edge of Sequoia National Park. As the second of a powerful and sophisticated new type of amphibious command ship, she provides integrated command and control facilities for sea, air, and land commanders in amphibious operations and while steaming with the fleet. Today, *Mount Whitney* serves as the flagship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet forward-deployed to Gaeta, Italy. The ship has a complement of 150 enlisted personnel, 12 officers, and 150 civilian mariners from Military Sealift Command. *Mount Whitney* was the first U.S. Navy combatant to permanently accommodate women onboard.

Photo Link: https://www.c6f.navy.mil/About-Us/Our-Task-Forces/CTF-63/USS-Mount-Whitney-LCC-20/

✦ Retired Naval Academy Goat Mascot Bill 33 Has Died

The U.S. Naval Academy recently announced that goat mascot Bill has died. He would have been 14 years old next week. Bill served the Navy from 2008 to 2015 as team mascot. He always stood out because his horns were longer than any other goat in his herd, and his startling blue eyes served as inspiration for the midshipmen. In 2012, Bill was kidnapped in an infamous Army-Navy prank that had gone too far. His kidnapping occurred at his home at the Maryland Sunrise Farm in Gambrills, where other so-called "goatnappings" had taken place. After the incident, the Academy began to keep the mascots' location secret from the public. For more, read the article in the *Navy Times*. For more on goats and the U.S. Navy, go to NHHC's website.

Photo Link: https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2021/01/11/retired-naval-academy-goat-mascot-bill-33-has-died/

✦ Webpage of the Week

This week's webpage of the week is new to NHHC's notable ships pages. USS *Wahoo* was commissioned on May 15, 1942. On Dec. 31, 1942, Lt. Cmdr. Dudley W. "Mush" Morton took command of *Wahoo*. Before departing on the boat's third war patrol, the first under Morton, he gave a rousing pep talk to the crew. "*Wahoo* is expendable. We will take every reasonable precaution, but our mission is to sink enemy shipping. . . . Now, if anyone doesn't want to go along under these conditions, just see the yeoman. I am giving him verbal authority now to transfer anyone who is not a volunteer. . . . Nothing will ever be said about you remaining in Brisbane." Not one member of the crew asked for a transfer. Morton was considered an innovative leader, and one of his initiatives was to have his executive officer, Lt. Dick O'Kane, man the periscope. Few captains had enough faith in a junior officer to operate the periscope, but Morton saw something in O'Kane. Later in the war, O'Kane would receive the Medal of Honor for his leadership as commander of USS *Tang*. For more on the extraordinary story of *Wahoo*, check out the page today. It contains a short history, suggested reading, articles, and selected imagery.

Photo Link: https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/19-n/19-N-40000/19-N-48937.html

✦ Today in Naval History

On Jan. 12, 1813, during the War of 1812, the frigate *Chesapeake*, commanded by Capt. Samuel Evans, captured British merchant *Volunteer* and, two days later, British brig *Liverpool Hero*. Evans placed a crew on *Volunteer* and ordered her to sail to the United States. *Liverpool Hero* was captured in an attempt to collect information on a British convoy. Although there was little of value onboard, Evans decided to use *Liverpool Hero*'s main mast to replace one of *Chesapeake*'s main top masts that had been destroyed in a storm days prior. About six months after *Chesapeake* captured the British ships, she was captured by British ship *Shannon* with most of her crew killed within the first few minutes of the battle. The *Chesapeake-Shannon* incident was one of the bloodiest naval battles of the war.

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-65000/NH-65811-KN.html