



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

January 26, 2021



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 058: Desert Storm, Korean War

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#) focuses first on [Operation Desert Storm](#). At 1:30 a.m. on Jan. 17, 1991, Persian Gulf time, USS *San Jacinto*, operating in the Red Sea, launched the first U.S. Navy [Tomahawk land-attack cruise missile](#) in combat. Eleven minutes later, destroyer [USS Paul F. Foster](#) and USS *Bunker Hill* commenced launching from the Arabian Gulf. Within minutes, the first salvo of 48 TLAMS were en route to targets in Iraq. Battleships [USS Missouri](#) and [USS Wisconsin](#) also launched TLAMs in the first salvo. Roughly 80 percent of the TLAMs reached their targets, which is excellent considering the flat elevation of Iraq. Also covered in this H-Gram is the enemy third-phase offensive during the [Korean War](#). On New Year's Day 1951, the Chinese offensive commenced, and by Jan. 4, Seoul had fallen into enemy hands. As the Chinese attacked, U.S. Navy forces evacuated more than 69,000 U.S. personnel and 64,000 Korean nationals from Inchon. They then blew the port facility before the Chinese took that city as well. Finally, the passing of Rear Adm. Phillip F. McNall, who served during the [Vietnam War](#) and Desert Storm, is covered. For more, [read H-Gram 058](#) at the [Director's Corner](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/dn-series/dn-sn-91-09313-uss-missouri--bb-63--fires-tlam.html>

★ Bridging the Gap Between Sea, Shore

In an effort to connect Sailors of the [Navy Expeditionary Combat Command](#) with their rich history and heritage and in commemoration of NECC's 15th anniversary, [NHHC](#)—throughout 2021—will support and celebrate NECC as it shares stories in speeches, social media, written materials, and in discussions with colleagues, Sailors, and other partners. "NECC is responsible for organizing, manning, training, equipping, and sustaining the Navy Expeditionary Combat Force to execute combat, combat support, and combat service support missions across the full spectrum of naval, joint, and combined operations which enable access from the sea and freedom of action throughout the sea-to-shore and inland operating environments." For more, [read the blog](#) at [The Sextant](#). For the entry, NHHC created a photo blog that includes each component command of NECC and tailored photos to show its history and heritage. Check out how NECC has changed over the past 15 years.



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2021/01/15/celebrating-15-years-of-the-naval-expeditionary-combat-command-through-pictures/>

★ Space Shuttle *Challenger* Lost—35 Years Ago

On Jan. 28, 1986, at 11:40 a.m., space shuttle [Challenger](#) tragically exploded 73 seconds into the flight, killing all seven astronauts, including Navy Cmdr. Michael Smith. The explosion was the result of a leak in one of the two solid rocket boosters that ignited the main liquid fuel tank. Smith was a graduate of the [U.S. Naval Academy](#), class of 1967, and earned his [aviator wings](#) in May 1969. He was selected as a NASA astronaut in May 1980 and after completing further training, received his first assignment as a space shuttle pilot—the *Challenger* mission. The explosion of *Challenger* became one of the most significant events of the 1980s, as billions around the world watched it on live television.



Photo Link: https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/images/106994main_image_feature_256_ajhfull.jpg

★ U.S. Navy Formally Notifies Families of Long-Lost Seattle Plane

The families of two [naval aviators](#) who disappeared in March 1949 have received formal notification recently on the likely whereabouts of their loved ones and their SNJ-5 trainer aircraft. Lt. (j.g.) Benjamin Vreeland and Ensign Gaston Mayes were lost while on a flight in the Pacific Northwest. After the disappearance, Mayes' mother, Nora, spent most of the next 20 years visiting the area searching for her son. The Navy believes "it is probable that the remains of the SNJ-5 are buried in the silty bottom of Black Lake" in east King County. Three local men are credited for their research and search efforts. "It is our hope that the determination of Black Lake as the probable final resting place of the SNJ-5 provides some measure of closure to you and your family as you continue to grieve the loss of your loved ones," according to a letter from Robert Neyland, head of NHHC's [Underwater Archaeology Branch](#). "The service of Lt. (j.g.) Vreeland and Ensign Mayes will always be remembered, honored, and valued. We are grateful for the immeasurable sacrifice your family made in defending our nation. Thank you." For more, [read the article](#).



Photo Link: <https://mynorthwest.com/2473978/us-navy-formally-notifies-families-about-long-lost-seattle-plane/>

★ All is Well for the Ship's Bell

Sometimes you can find the craziest things at a garage sale. In this case, it was a Navy [ship's bell](#). Late last year, after trading emails, Dana Mace turned over to a local Navy base an 80-pound bell from the destroyer, [USS Dunlap](#), which saw action in the Pacific during [World War II](#). Mace's uncle-in-law bought the bell years ago at a garage sale, and after his passing, it was rediscovered. Mace had spent months trying to contact the family of the ship's namesake—Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Robert H. Dunlap—in hopes of returning it to them, but had no luck. Then he saw an episode of "American Pickers," which [featured a bell](#) from another WWII-era destroyer, [USS Cole](#), discovered a few years ago in New Hampshire. Mace followed the "American Pickers" lead and contacted NHHC. NHHC then reached out to Naval Air Facility El Centro, CA, which was delighted to take custody of the bell from Mace. "This is an amazing story, and something you just can't make up," said Lt. Christopher John, the supply officer at NAF El Centro. "We will see that this historic piece of Navy tradition is properly packed and sent home." For more, [read the article](#).



Photo Link: https://www.thedesertreview.com/news/all-is-well-for-the-ship-s-bell/article_8a870470-5c3a-11eb-8504-e71364acb2cb.html

★ Wolfson Becomes 110th Commander, First Female Leader of Norfolk Naval Shipyard

On Jan. 15, Capt. Dianna Wolfson became the 110th commander of [Norfolk Naval Shipyard](#), VA, and the first female leader in the shipyard's 253-year history. "Capt. Wolfson is truly the right leader at the right time for the NNSY," said departing shipyard commander Rear Adm. Howard Markle. "Her deep sense of care and commitment to our Navy and the NNSY workforce will be at the forefront of meeting the shipyard's priorities of developing our people and delivering on our mission." One of Wolfson's initial goals is meeting with the shipyard's production work groups and ensuring understanding of open lines of communication in improving the organization's leadership performance, organizational culture, employee development, and mission execution. For more, [read the article](#). For more on [women in the U.S. Navy](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/15/2002565802/-1/-1/0/210115-N-XX785-005.JPG>

★ Preble Hall Podcast

In a recent [naval history podcast](#) from Preble Hall, retired Capt. Mark Vandroff and retired Capt. Jerry Hendrix discuss key strategies, technologies, and personnel in the past 40 years of the U.S. Navy. 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/>

★ Eddie Robinson Helped Make Military Baseball “The Show” During War Years

Eddie Robinson, who turned 100-years-old in December 2020, is the oldest living Major League Baseball player. He is among several dozen major leaguers who served in both [World War II](#) and the [Korean War](#). Known as the “Big Easy,” Robinson was known for his easy smile and laid-back demeanor during the golden age of baseball. The native Texan played for seven of the eight American League teams of his era. He also made four All-Star teams and helped several ballclubs win pennants and World Series titles as a manager and player. While serving in the Navy, he played first base for Norfolk Naval Training Station’s Bluejackets. He is the sole surviving player from Norfolk’s 1943 Navy World Series team that battled it out in a tough series against the Airmen. “The Bluejackets had the best of everything. Gary (Bodie) didn’t spare any horses, we had two or three uniforms, the best bats, the best gloves, and padded seats in the dugout,” said Robinson. For more on his life, [read the article](#) in the *Navy Times*. For more on [Navy athletics](#), go to [NHHC’s website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.navytimes.com/off-duty/2021/01/24/eddie-robinson-who-just-turned-100-helped-make-military-baseball-the-show-during-war-years/>

★ Webpage of the Week

In observance of African American/Black History Month, celebrated every year during the month of February, this week’s webpage of the week is the [Private First Class Oscar P. Austin](#) page under NHHC’s [namesakes](#). *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer USS *Oscar Austin* proudly bears the name of U.S. Marine Pfc. Oscar P. Austin, who received the [Medal of Honor](#) posthumously for extraordinary heroism during the [Vietnam War](#). On the morning of Feb. 23, 1969, Austin’s observation post came under a fierce ground attack by a large North Vietnamese army force. After observing a wounded Marine in a position dangerously exposed to hostile fire, Austin left the security of his foxhole and ran across the fire-swept battlefield to move the unconscious Marine. As he neared the casualty, an enemy grenade landed nearby. Without hesitation, Austin leaped between the casualty and the grenade, absorbing the detonation. Badly wounded, Austin turned to examine the Marine, and when he did, he saw an enemy soldier aiming his weapon at the unconscious Marine. With full knowledge of the consequences, Austin threw himself between the casualty and enemy fire. In doing so, he gallantly gave his life for his fellow Marine and his country. Check out the page today. It provides a brief history, ship information, and additional resources.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/people/namesakes/oscar-austin.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Jan. 26, 1913, the body of [John Paul Jones](#) was laid to rest in the Chapel of the [U.S. Naval Academy](#), Annapolis, MD. Jones, known as the “Father of the U.S. Navy,” served courageously in the [Continental Navy](#) during the [American Revolution](#). Born in Scotland, Jones went to sea as a youth and by his early twenties was a merchant shipmaster. Having taken up residence in Virginia, he volunteered early in the war to serve in the young country’s infant navy. Jones was known for his tenacity of taking the war to the enemy’s homeland with daring raids along the British coast. Probably his most famous sea battle was the [Bonhomme Richard](#) and HMS *Serapis* engagement. After *Bonhomme Richard* began taking on water and fires broke out onboard, the British commander asked Jones if he had struck his flag. Jones replied, “I have not yet begun to fight!” In the end, the British commander surrendered.



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-02000/NH-2139.html>