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Tree planting to memorialize ship

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TALLADEGA —More than 30 years after the USS Talladega APA 208 was struck from the Naval Register, a dedicated group of crewmen and spouses still meets for annual reunions.

The USS Talladega, an amphibious attack transport ship, was built in Richmond, Calif., and commissioned Oct. 31, 1944. It transported troops throughout World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War before being transferred to Maritime Administration Sept. 1, 1971, and being struck from the Naval Reserve five years later to the day. The ship earned two battle stars each in World War II and the Korean War and earned three battle stars in the Vietnam War for a total of seven.

The ship, named for the county and city of the same name in Alabama, was eventually sold for scrap in October of 1982.

As part of the USS Talladega Reunion Association's plans this year, a tree planting ceremony in Talladega is set for Wednesday, Oct. 14, to further memorialize the ship that already has a monument standing in its honor on the square in downtown Talladega. The group has planned to plant a maple tree with a plaque placed in front of it deeming it the "Tremblin' T Tree."

"Tremblin' T" was the nickname given to the USS Talladega by its crew members because of the bent propeller that would cause the ship to vibrate when it hit a certain speed.

Wayne Miller, who retired from the Navy in 1975 and was instrumental in making Talladega one of the reunion sites on the rotation for the group, said the group requested coming back to Talladega after a previous visit because association members remembered having so much fun the year they came here.

"I talked to some of the guys out in California who had gotten the group started and told them they needed to come to Talladega," Miller said. "They said a lot of people had been through here and there was nothing. I told them we had something to offer that no one else did: Southern hospitality. After the ceremony, we will go to the American Legion to have hamburgers and hot dogs and take a tour of the Hall of Fame because that is what everyone wanted to do."

While Talladega does not offer all the facilities in one place that the association members would like to have, the group plans to stay in Atlanta for most of the five-day reunion and drive over to Talladega for the day on Oct. 14.

Various members will fly into Atlanta Monday and enjoy sightseeing while staying at a hotel with a restaurant, a lounge and a meeting room. Then everyone will make the trip to Talladega for a tree dedication ceremony at about 9:30 a.m. that Wednesday.

The monument already standing on the courthouse square came about as the result of fundraising efforts the group used to bring in granite from Vermont and pay for the metal work on the front to immortalize the ship.

But Miller said the members have decided to take on the costs of planting the tree and having the plaque made themselves this time. He said each member will chip in some money until the tree and plaque are paid for in full.

Miller said he hopes local dignitaries will be available to welcome the group, and that a lot of people will come to create a good crowd for the event.

Last year's gathering in Portland, Ore., saw a group of about 136 gathered, and Miller has heard that 60 people from the association have confirmed their attendance so far for this year.

"We plan to send out invitations, of course, but we hope a lot of local citizens, politicians and office holders will come out for this event," Miller said. "We have people coming in from all over the United States and we want to make sure they feel welcome."

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