

# LEGACY OF VALOR

## THE SACRED DUTY OF MEMORIALIZING THE SACRIFICE AND SERVICE OF WWII VETERANS

*In 2024, Shipmate is honoring the service, sacrifice, courage and leadership of U.S. Naval Academy alumni during World War II. As the nation commemorates the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion on 6 June 2024, Shipmate continues its series featuring interviews with living alumni WWII veterans. To follow this series and access digital content, visit [www.usna.com/Shipmate\\_WWII](http://www.usna.com/Shipmate_WWII).*

Lieutenant Commander Jacob Britt '29, USN

Lieutenant Lion Tyler Miles '31, USN

Lieutenant Louis Joseph Gulliver Jr. '36, USN

Lieutenant John Wythe Hayes '36, USN

Lieutenant Kenneth Edward Pound '37, USN

**The USS ASHEVILLE (PG-21) at anchor in the Panama Canal Zone. ASHEVILLE was sunk by three Japanese warships on 3 March 1942, all but one of her 166-man crew perished.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND



**U**.S. Naval Academy alumni spanning the Classes of 1972 to 2004 gathered on 3 March 2024 to honor the valor and sacrifice of five alumni who perished 82 years earlier 300 miles south of Java. The 166-man crew of the USS ASHEVILLE (PG-21) fought valiantly but was no match for three Japanese warships.

The 1920 American gunboat held out for 30 minutes. All but one of ASHEVILLE's crew perished that day. Their bravery was honored during a solemn moment at Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, NC, with the assembled Naval Academy alumni commemorating their fallen fellow alumni by reading their names alongside a newly unveiled monument dedicated to ASHEVILLE's crew.

Captain Kerry Ingalls '83, USN (Ret.), a former commanding officer of USS ASHEVILLE (SSN-758), told an audience of sailors, alumni, elected officials and veterans how Lieutenant Walter Ashe, SC, USN (Ret.), inspired him. Ashe served in the first ASHEVILLE in the late 1930s. He moved to Asheville, NC, based on his name, his connection with PG-21 and his desire to keep the memories of his shipmates alive.

During his tour as commanding officer, Ingalls surfaced ASHEVILLE (SSN-758) at the site of the original ship's sinking. His crew laid a wreath, performed a rifle salute and created a video of the commemoration for the city of Asheville.

"It's critically important that our sailors know upon whose shoulders they stand," Ingalls said. "It's critically important our citizens understand the sacrifices our men and women in uniform, and their families, make every day on behalf of freedom."

"It was a privilege for me to participate. To know that even though the bodies of those sailors are resting in the South Java Sea, their spirit, their memory and the



**Left:** CAPT Doug Guthe '76, USN (Ret.), lays a challenge coin from USS ASHEVILLE (SSN-758) alongside the USS ASHEVILLE (PG-21) monument on 3 March 2024.

**Below:** Prior to the USS ASHEVILLE (PG-21) commemoration ceremony, Naval Academy alumni gathered to honor the five alumni who died in the 3 March 1942 battle with Japanese warships. They read the names of those lost and laid challenge coins on the monument at Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, NC.



honor of their sacrifice is here with us today and for now on."

The dedication of the Asheville monument exemplifies the alumni community's commitment to document and ensure stories of valor are preserved to inspire future generations. Chris Perrien '74 spearheaded the effort to formally recognize ASHEVILLE's crew. Supported by his fellow alumni in North Carolina, including members of the North Carolina Triangle Chapter, Perrien partnered with Asheville city officials, local veterans and alumni, and the city's fire department to make the monument a reality.

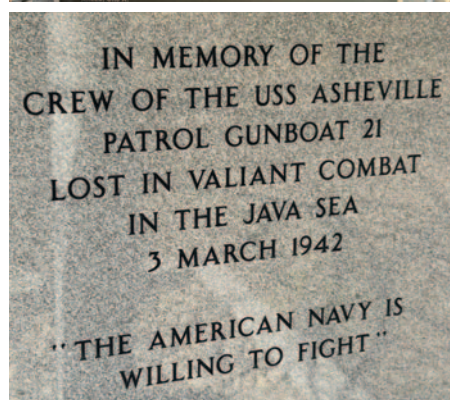
Perrien said Britt and his crew showcased incredible honor in the face of overwhelming odds. It reminded Perrien of the Naval Academy's Honor Concept. He said Britt likely knew his ship's fate when he led the crew into battle.

"We're supposed to go out there and get in the way of the enemy," Perrien said. "You have to have the confidence of conviction to do the right thing despite the circumstances."

While the city of Asheville never forgot PG-21, Perrien said the community

**"It's important for all of us to remember the sacrifices of a crew that might otherwise be forgotten. Although ASHEVILLE might be a footnote in World War II history, it was 160-plus souls who went down defending our country and our freedoms."**

—LtCol John Walls '86, USMC (Ret.)



To commemorate the loss of USS Asheville (PG-21), a monument was placed at Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, NC, on 3 March 2024. Five Naval Academy alumni were among those lost during the ship's sinking. The back of the monument honors the crew of USS Asheville for their courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

**"We weren't worried about (our place in history), we just wanted to beat the Japanese and Germans."**

—LCDR William S. Berkshire Jr. '45, USN (Ret.)

rallied so the ship's crew will remain an inspiration in perpetuity.

"We've ensured she'll always be remembered," Perrien said.

Captain Doug Guthe '76, USN (Ret.), was among the Naval Academy contingent at the Riverside Cemetery ceremony. The second commanding officer of USS Asheville (SSN-758) was joined by Captain Fred Dohse '72, USN (Ret.), Rear Admiral Samuel J. Cox '80, USN (Ret.), Commander Bob Byron '85, USN (Ret.), Captain Scott Steadley '85, USN (Ret.), Lieutenant Colonel John Walls '86, USMC (Ret.), Captain Reece Morgan '89, USN (Ret.), Eric Shangle '97, and Noah White '04.

Guthe said 166 city residents enlisted following the loss of ASHEVILLE.

"That indicates the dedication that the people of Asheville and people of the United States have for supporting our military," Guthe said.

White said the valor of ASHEVILLE's crew deepens his respect for the freedoms Americans enjoy. He supported the ASHEVILLE commemoration to honor those who put others before themselves and to perpetuate that legacy.

"It's who we are," White said. "When it was on the line, they did their duty until the very end. It's important to remember that, and what it means to be an American, especially one with a naval background."

The valiant actions of ASHEVILLE's crew is just one story of courage under fire by Naval Academy alumni. World War II alumni revealed the value of ensuring these stories are preserved for future generations.

### 'VITALLY IMPORTANT'

Captain Jack Gillooly '45, USN (Ret.), remembers the excruciating heat. A Japanese pilot rammed his plane into the light cruiser COLUMBIA's port side. The kamikaze attack turned the light cruiser's main battery director into an inferno in Lingayen Gulf.

"Heat like you wouldn't believe," Gillooly said.

The former Naval Academy offensive lineman was frantic. He hurled himself down a hatch into a lower deck. Gillooly was distraught. Thankfully, he ran into a friend from the Academy who calmed him down. Eventually, Gillooly regained his composure, amid a second kamikaze strike,

to man COLUMBIA's forward 5-inch director.

Gillooly hopes sharing his World War II experiences will benefit future generations of midshipmen.

"That's vitally important," Gillooly said. "They need to know there were people who were stepping up to the plate in those days. They need to know something about Guadalcanal and the sacrifices that were made. It will help them become better naval officers if they understand that."

While the Greatest Generation might not have appreciated the significance of their actions during World War II, their courage is obvious. Bob Taylor, son of Commander Dawson Taylor '46, USNR (Ret.), said time can chip away the magnitude of the consequences of World War II if the experiences are allowed to wither.

Then-Ensign Taylor was underway in LEYTE GULF when Nagasaki and Hiroshima were bombed. While that brought a sigh of relief, Taylor's tour included transporting sailors and soldiers back to the United States from the Philippines.

Bob Taylor said it's essential to preserve their stories.

"That history starts to get lost or diminished the further you get away from it," Taylor said. "Most folks would say that is an amazing story. They knew what they were sailing into."

Lieutenant Commander Charles G. Sobel '45, USNR (Ret.), was a submariner during World War II. He and his classmates understood what awaited them upon commissioning a year early from the United States Naval Academy.

Sobel said the World War II generation didn't contextualize their place in history as it was happening, they were just committed to eliminating the threats facing the nation and world.

"We didn't think in those terms," Sobel said in an August 2023 interview. He died 14 November 2023. "We thought of our patriotism. We were anxious to show the world we were the best Navy, and we did that."

### SERVICE MATTERS

Admiral Cox, director of Naval History and Heritage Command, said Americans owe the Greatest Generation an unpayable debt. The valor veterans' demonstrated



and the steep price of victory demands their stories be remembered and shared for successive generations.

“War is hell, and we shouldn’t glorify it,” Cox said. “But, we should always honor and remember not only those who made the ultimate sacrifice, but also those who served and survived horrific battles in forsaken deserts, jungles, treacherous seas or being adrift in the ocean.”

“World War II was the bloodiest and most costly war in human history; an existential global fight between tyranny and freedom. We owe all these veterans for our freedom, because victory came at such a very high price.”

Midshipman Max Bueno ’24 finds inspiration in his grandfather’s service aboard the destroyer KEARNEY during World War II. Bueno said with the last of the surviving members of the Greatest Generation leaving us, it’s critical to appreciate their sacrifices.



The National World War II Museum in New Orleans features immersive exhibits and thousands of oral histories from war veterans. It is committed to preserving the history of the Greatest Generation.

He participated in welcoming Honor Flights veterans to the Washington, DC, area. It was a small way to give back, Bueno said.

“It was awesome to see the veterans come off the plane and salute them,” said Bueno, who served as Midshipmen Action Group president in fall 2023. “It felt very inspiring knowing we were paying back in some way by showing our appreciation for these veterans.”



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ADM Alan G. Kirk, USN (Ret.), Class of 1909

## USNA Museum

The United States Naval Academy Museum's exhibits include an extensive artifact collection including World War II submarine battle flags, the flag PRINCETON flew during the Battle for Leyte Gulf, and the uniform Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Class of 1905, wore on board MISSOURI when he signed the Instrument of Surrender with Japan on 2 September 1945.

The museum's World War II exhibit also highlights D-Day and Admiral Alan G. Kirk, Class of 1909, USN (Ret.), who was chief of staff to the commander of the American Naval Forces in Europe. Kirk was the senior American naval officer in planning the invasion of Normandy.

To view the museum's exhibits virtually, visit <https://tinyurl.com/bp7mtjdy> or scan this QR code.



**"To those families and friends of other members of the greatest generation, may I suggest you now begin to ask the questions and hear the stories that have been locked in memory for too long."**

—Dave Burlin '69 son of CDR Charles W. "Bill" Burlin '44, USN (Ret.), cited a passage from Tom Brokaw's 1998 book *The Greatest Generation* on the importance of preserving stories of World War II veterans.

"It's even more important for us to show up and make sure the remaining (World War II veterans) know their service matters and is appreciated by the generations now."

Ensuring the service stories of officers and individual citizen soldiers are preserved is a passion for Jeremy Collins, director of conferences and symposia at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. The museum's archives include more than 10,000 personal accounts of veterans, eyewitnesses to the war and Holocaust survivors.

Collins said he is inspired by the museum's veteran volunteers. He said recalling conversations with those veterans can turn a tough day into brighter one.

"It is a good reminder of why we are here," Collins said. "To make sure somebody is telling their stories, now that they're going and soon to be gone."

### 'VITAL TO OUR SURVIVAL'

Captain Bill Toti '79, USN (Ret.), served as commodore of Submarine Squadron 3 in Pearl Harbor, HI, in the early 2000s. He spent much of his active-duty career based in Hawaii where reminders of the cost of freedom are omnipresent.

Toti, a cohost of the "Unauthorized History of the Pacific War" podcast, said current and future generations can honor the Greatest Generation by living up to the ideals that inspired millions

of Americans to rally in support of the war effort.

"It's critical that we remember our World War II veterans for two reasons: to honor them and to provide for our future," Toti said. "Those veterans suffered the most horrific war in the history of mankind for our benefit, and we should continually ask ourselves if we are behaving in a way that, as the Tom Hanks character said in the movie "Saving Private Ryan," 'earns this.'"

"There are so many lessons from that war that must not be forgotten, lessons that can help us avoid a future similarly tragic conflagration. Those lessons are vital to our survival."

Over the past 20 years, Bob Abate '63 has made it his mission to document and share the stories of World War II veterans. He has conducted nearly 200 interviews including veterans of the D-Day invasion.

Abate said many of the veterans are hesitant and too humble to tell their stories. His appreciation for the Greatest Generation was sparked growing up in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, where many of his neighbors were veterans.

"I feel a certain moral obligation to tell their stories because without them we would not be where we are today," said Abate, who separated from the Academy and graduated from Fordham University. ⚓