



SCUTTLEBUTT

August 2020

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What's Happening on the Showboat?

Activities continued on the Battleship *North Carolina* throughout the month of July with a steady stream of visitors finding plenty to see despite limited access to the ship. Ship's staff reports attendance, though below previous summer levels, has been good with visitors grateful for the opportunity to spend time exploring the Showboat.

Hull Repairs Underway - Visitors are also getting a rare glimpse at the ship's structure while work is being done to replace sections of the hull. The replacement steel has been delivered and portions of the bow have been cut away. The work is providing a unique view of some of the ship's interior framework and a closer look at the toll 80 years of saltwater has had on the Showboat's hull. The hull repair project got underway in mid-June and is expected to continue into December.





Bell Preservation - As we noted in the July edition of *Scuttlebutt*, the Friends Board of Directors recently authorized funds to have the ship's forward bell restored and preserved. The bronze and steel bell was issued to the ship in 1941 and is mounted aft of Turret II, below the bridge.

Raleigh-based professional conservator Mark Erdmann of Erdmann Art Conservation, spent several days in late June completing the multi-step process of repeatedly washing and scrubbing the bell, then applying a patina-like finish to the entire bell before finishing it with a final coating of polyethylene and wax that was melted on.

Volunteer Maintenance Teams - The hull and bell weren't the only parts of the Showboat receiving attention during the month. With visitors limited to the main deck and above, the Wednesday maintenance teams took advantage of the lack of traffic below decks to accomplish a number of maintenance and preservation actions that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish with visitors present. Several passageways, bulkheads and overheads received new coats of paint while engine rooms, turrets and gun mounts also received attention.

In an email to the maintenance volunteers, Battleship *North Carolina*'s Executive Director, Capt. Terry Bragg, USN(Ret), recognized coordinator Ken Rittenmeyer and the entire Wednesday group for their dedication and effort.

"Thanks to you and the entire Wednesday Maintenance gang for all you do supporting the Battleship *NORTH CAROLINA*, and what she represents," Bragg wrote. "The amount of work and quality reflects the very best in giving back to the community."

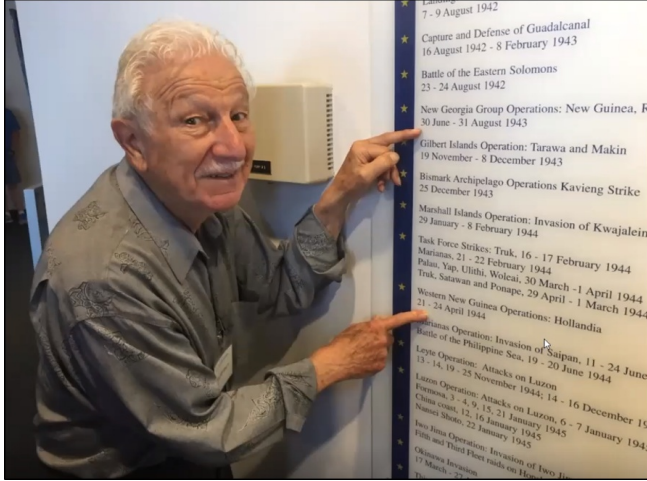


Learning from History - On July 11, the group of volunteers who regularly gather on Saturday mornings via Zoom, had another opportunity to get a feel for life aboard the Showboat when former crew member Bill Venuti joined the group for a virtual discussion session.

Venuti, a Seaman Second Class assigned to "L" (Lookout) Division, reported to the battleship during the ship's maintenance visit to Pearl Harbor in the fall of 1943.

Venuti remarked how impressed he was with the size of *North Carolina*, a fact he was reminded of every time he climbed the ladder on the exterior of the foremast to his battle station in Sky Control.

"It was a little scary - an experience that you've never had before," Venuti said of



Bill Venuti indicates the period he served on the Showboat.

his time in the Pacific on the Showboat.

According to Venuti, his tour aboard *North Carolina* remains an "important part of my life."

Venuti left USS *North Carolina* in the spring of 1944 and went on to earn a commission under the V-12 Navy College Training Program.

"Being in the Navy and doing what I did led to me getting a commission and going to college which I may never have done," declared Venuti.

The board of directors has set **September 19** for the date of the 2020 Friends of the Battleship *North Carolina* Annual Meeting. The agenda for the 10:30 a.m. meeting, which will most likely be conducted via Zoom, currently calls for the election of new board members, an overview of the past year's activities, and a look ahead to the coming year.

Save the Date -



Watch for details regarding the meeting in September's *Scuttlebutt*.

Every Thursday is Battleship Thursday - Grab your Showboat gear and display your support for Battleship *North Carolina* every Thursday by wearing your Battleship ball caps and shirts as you go about your business around town.

Don't have any gear? Stop by the Battleship Gift Shop and take advantage of the 25% off you receive by being a member of Friends. Just show the cashier your membership card when you check out.

**Every
Thursday
is**



**BATTLESHIP
THURSDAY**

**Show your support.
Wear your
"Showboat" gear.**

This Month in Showboat History

It's Showtime! - In August 1942, USS *North Carolina* officially joined the fight in the Pacific. Originally tasked with the protection of the aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* who were providing air support for operations at Guadalcanal, the Showboat got her first taste of combat operations on **August 24** when the carriers and their escorts steamed north to meet an advancing Japanese naval task force.

At 1701, the order to "stand by to repel enemy attack" was received from the task force commander, Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid. Over the next 25 minutes dozens of Japanese aircraft focused their attack on *Enterprise* and, after thinking they had taken the carrier out of the fight with three bomb hits, took aim at *North Carolina*. Throughout the Japanese attack the Showboat filled the air with such a barrage of steel and smoke that it caused Rear Adm. Kinkaid to signal from the *Enterprise*, "Are you on fire?"

By the end of the air action, *North Carolina* was credited with shooting down seven enemy aircraft and assisting with the downing of at least seven



The Showboat fills the air with steel and smoke, August 24, 1942.

others. The majority of the Japanese ordnance had been expended without causing serious damage. USS *Enterprise*, though receiving moderate damage, would sail to Pearl Harbor for repairs before returning to continue the fight through the end of the war.

North Carolina's action in the Eastern Solomons on August 24, was the first real test for her battle green crew. It was also the first real demonstration of the primary role for America's new fast battleships - providing protection for the aircraft carrier.

"This was the first occasion on which a battleship has been present as part of a carrier task force during attack," Rear Adm. Kinkaid wrote to *North Carolina's* Commanding Officer, Capt. George Fort, and his crew. "The presence of the *North Carolina* was a distinct advantage. My compliments."

In further recognition of *North Carolina's* battle efficiency, Fort was awarded the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism and distinguished service against enemy Japanese forces in the Battle of Solomon Islands, August 24, 1942." According to the citation, "the high combat efficiency, the skillful seamanship and gallant fighting spirit attained by his command were responsible for appreciable losses inflicted on the attacking Japanese air groups."

The Showboat had passed her first test.



AMM3/C George Conlon is buried at sea, August 24, 1942.

First Combat Death - Not only did *North Carolina* record its first enemy action on **August 24**, but it also suffered its first combat death that day.

During the final minutes of the air attack, as surviving Japanese aircraft withdrew over the horizon, one of the attackers made one last low pass down the starboard side of the Showboat, strafing the length of ship. Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class George Conlon, manning one of the aft starboard 20mm gun mounts, was hit and became the first USS *North Carolina* crew member to be killed in combat.

An entry in the ship's log for **August 24, 1942**, simply reads:

"2130 - CONLON, GEORGE EDWARD, 224-07-85, AMM3/C USN, was buried at sea Lat. 09°-40S, Long. 164°-02.3E, having been killed in action during enemy air attack this date."

Kingfisher to the Rescue - On **August 10, 1945**, one day after the atomic bomb had been dropped at Nagasaki, *North Carolina's* two Kingfisher aircraft were called upon to rescue a carrier pilot who had been shot down near Ominato Naval Air Station in northern Japan.

The two Kingfisher pilots, Lt. Ralph Jacobs and Lt(jg) Almon Oliver, located the downed pilot on the eastern shore of the bay adjacent to the air station. However, after landing on the bay to rescue the downed airman, Jacobs was hit by a wave and thrown from of his aircraft. Seeing that both pilots now needed rescuing, Oliver landed his plane and loaded the two pilots into the rear cockpit of his plane. Facing intense fire from ashore, Oliver managed to get his now overloaded plane into the air and back to the battleship that was operating some 230 miles to the southeast. Both Jacobs and Oliver were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for their actions that day.

Atomic Bombs Dropped - On **August 6, 1945**, an atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, followed by a second bomb being dropped on Nagasaki on **August 9**. USS *North Carolina* had been conducting operations in southern Japan with Task Force 38 in early August, but on **August 4**, the task force was ordered to move northeast to an area some 300 miles from where the bombs were dropped.

The dropping of the two atomic bombs led to Japanese Emperor Hirohito accepting the terms for Japan's surrender and offensive actions against Japan ceased on **August 15**.



Lt. Jacobs and Lt(jg) Oliver receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Did You Know?

Do You Hear Ringing? - Ship bells have been a part of the traditions of the world's navies and merchant fleets for centuries for both functional and ceremonial uses.

Used for signaling, keeping time, and sounding alarms, bells are an important part of a ship's routine and readiness. The age-old practice of sounding the bell on the hour and half hour still holds a place in the modern Navy. The sounding of a ship's bell can serve as a warning signal to other vessels in poor visibility and fog.

At times, ships have turned their bell upside down, filled it with water and used it as a christening bowl. Once the baptism was completed, the child's name could be inscribed inside the bell.

The ship's bell is also used to announce the presence of important persons. When the ship's captain, a flag officer, or other important person arrives or departs, watch standers make an announcement to the ship and strike the bell. The number of strikes is determined by the person's seniority.

U.S. Navy bells are part of the many artifacts removed from decommissioned vessels and preserved by the Naval History and Heritage Command. They may be provided on loan to new namesake ships, naval commands with an historical mission or functional connection, and to museums and other institutions that are interpreting specific historical themes and displays of naval history. Ship's bells remain the permanent property of the U.S. Government and the Department of the Navy. Bells remain a powerful and tangible reminder of the history, heritage, and accomplishments of the naval service. -- Source: Naval History and Heritage Command



The bell from USS *North Carolina* (ACR 12) sits aft of Turret III.

Taking Command - USS *North Carolina* had a total of nine commanding officers during the six years she was in service. The length of command for the nine ranged from 4 to 16 months with the average assignment being just over 6 months. In addition to having command of the Showboat in common, all were graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy, and all were promoted to Rear Admiral, eight of them upon departing *North Carolina*. The ninth, Captain Timothy O'Brien, the Showboat's final and longest (16 months) serving commanding officer, was promoted later.

Talk Like a Sailor

Knee Knockers (also Shinbuster) - A passageway opening through a bulkhead where the lower lip of the opening ("knife edge") is positioned anywhere from shin to knee height. Not lifting your leg high enough to clear the opening makes this term much easier to understand.

Deck - A deck is a horizontal, structural element of a ship. It also refers to the floor of a compartment or space onboard a ship.

Bulkhead - The upright wall within the hull of a ship, particularly a watertight, load-bearing wall.

Overhead - The ceiling of any enclosed space on a ship.

Passageway (also P-way) - A hallway running fore and aft, or port to starboard, connecting and providing access to various compartments within a ship.

Donate and Smile

The hull repair currently underway is largely funded through the Generations Campaign and is another visible reminder of the vast resources needed to operate and maintain a treasure such as the Battleship *North Carolina*. Donations to the Generations Campaign, help support the battleship repairs, maintenance, educational programs and implementation of the Living with Water Project.

D O N A T E

And remember, shopping online through AmazonSmile generates a donation of 0.5% of your eligible purchases for the Showboat. Make sure you designate the Friends of the Battleship *North Carolina* as the charitable organization to receive those donations.



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