H-Gram 076: There Are No Headstones at Sea

20 December 2022

I regret that due to the press of business I have fallen way behind on H-gram writing, but there are Vietnam War, Korean War, and Guadalcanal updates in various stages of completion on my computer. I've had many people say, "You have the best job in the Navy." I would agree, although it turns out to be a real job, with the usual challenges of an Echelon 2 command. So, with the holidays approaching, which I always view as a time for reflection and not just merriment, I thought I would recycle one of my favorite H-grams, "There Are No Headstones at Sea," which speaks to why I do what I do, and why I consider it such an honor to tell the stories of the valor and sacrifice of the American Sailor in preserving the freedom that we hold so dear, but frequently take for granted.

However, I would first like to take a moment to pass some information about Naval History and Heritage Command as this has literally been a banner year that has seen the culmination of several projects resulting from years of planning, and yes, fighting for money.

- In August, CNO Admiral Gilday cut the ribbon for the new Operational Archives, Library, and Naval History Research Center on the Washington Navy Yard. We are now in the process of "fitting out" the facility, which fixes long-standing festering environmental issues

During the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands on 26 October 1942, a Japanese Type 99 shipboard bomber ("Val") trails smoke as it dives toward USS *Hornet* (CV-8). This aircraft struck the ship's stack and then her flight deck. A Type 97 shipboard attack plane ("Kate") is flying over *Hornet* after dropping its torpedo, and another Val is off her bow. Note the anti-aircraft shell burst between *Hornet* and the camera, with its fragments striking the water nearby. The heavily damaged carrier was lost on the following day (80-G-33947).

consistently identified as critical deficiencies in IG reports at least as far back as 1969 (and arguably 1922), for which funding could never seem to be found. This is the largest infrastructure project in NHHC's—or in our predecessor Naval Historical Center's—history. It provides the proper environmental control for the long-term preservation of the Navy's operational archives (our institutional memory), the Navy Department Library collection, as well as the Navy's 1.5 million–image photo collection, 20,000-piece combat art collection, rare book collection, fragile artifact collections, and the underwater archaeology laboratory and collection. At $45 million, this project came in on time and on budget, despite a variety of issues that included finding a very much alive two-foot-

long juvenile alligator under the construction site (I'm not making this up).

- In September, with the help of many other commands, we completed the first major drydock/overhaul of the historic submarine *Nautilus* since she was decommissioned 40 years ago. (Although decommissioned, the reactor and power plant are still onboard and classified, so she has a skeleton active duty crew for security and monitoring.) This work will allow *Nautilus* to remain a safe museum ship for another 30 years. At $6 million in prep work and $36 million to complete, this project was actually finished ahead of schedule, under budget, and with no impact on operational submarine maintenance. Scrapping her would have cost $78 million, taken years, and would have entailed the headache of getting the President to approve getting rid of a National Historic Landmark. A huge thanks to Naval Reactors for developing maintenance standards for a "museum" submarine from scratch that brought the cost down from original unpalatable estimates of up to $148 million. And, a huge thanks to former VCNO Admiral Bill Moran for pushing this and the archive project over the funding goal line.

- In October, Secretary of the Navy Carlos del Toro publicly announced the Navy's intention to build a new National Museum of the United States Navy in a location just outside the Washington Navy Yard, and that the Navy Museum Development Foundation (NMDF) will be the Navy's partner to raise the money to do so (with Vice Admiral [Ret.] Al Konetzni in the lead). The SECNAV's announcement was in conjunction with a land-swap agreement with a developer to trade underutilized land on the Navy Yard for land we wanted outside the yard, with the benefit of saving the Navy the nearly $300 million in force protection costs had the developer built commercial buildings on the land we wanted. This agreement culminated years of work initiated by CNO Roughead in 2011.

- The museum will be built in phases with money raised by the NMDF, although when complete, the Navy will man, operate, and maintain the museum (as we do now). The foundation will continue to provide support via revenue-generation operations (café, bookstore, restaurant, conference center, parking) to significantly defray operating costs. The current national museum on the Navy Yard, besides being in a building never meant to be a museum, is not meeting the mission of telling the story of the U.S. Navy to the American public, due primarily to the challenges (some perceived and some real) of getting through security onto the yard. So, instead of the current less than 100,000 visitors comprising mostly DoD personnel, the new site is projected to attract 1.5 to 2 million people per year to a world-class museum that not only tells the story of naval history, but is also being designed to tell the story of what the Navy is doing for this country today and into the future. In my view, the new museum will be a center of U.S. Navy public history for the next century.

Our goal for the new museum is a ground-breaking in conjunction with the 250th birthday of the U.S. Navy in 2025. I will happily pass the NMDF's contact info to anyone interested in helping with this task.

Please see attachment H-027-1 for "There Are No Headstones at Sea: The Search for *Wasp* and *Hornet*." [https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams/h-gram-027/h-027-1.html]