



The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse

Volume 3, No 2

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April 1, 2024

Welcome to the
The Wheelhouse,

a Newsletter
published quarterly
by **The Friends of the
Portsmouth Naval
Shipyards Museum**

Please visit the
Museum and see our
website for additional
information.

<https://www.friendsofportsmouthnsm.org/>

In this issue we bring
you messages from our

President, Gary

Bahena, a History
Column from our 1st

Vice President, Steve

Milner, a Report from

our **Treasurer, Robert**

Fogel

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Renée M. Russell

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Portsmouth Naval
Shipyards Museum**

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President's Message

Greeting Friends. In this issue of the Wheelhouse, we bring you Steve Milner's great piece on the *USS Alabama* and its legacy, an update on the Oral History Project, and news on the all-new Junior Paddle Battle. As always, a huge thanks to Renée and Steve for their continuing efforts on *The Wheelhouse*.

Treasurer's Report

As of March 28

The Friends have \$105,748.46 on hand. During this fiscal year we are funding the continuation of the Oral History Project with the IC Norcom TV Production students. We spent \$8,517 on the Oral History Project with \$4,117 for the purchase of video recording equipment to allow the Oral History Project to conduct additional interviews beyond the practical 3-interview-per-year limit using the IC Norcom studio. We continue to have approx. \$2,800 for projects not yet defined by the Museums for our FY ending April 30.

THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

Norfolk Naval Shipyards (NNSY) History

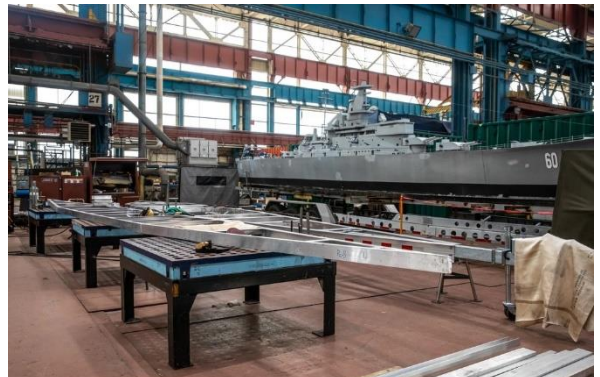
By: Steve Milner, First Vice President

USS Alabama float reminds parade goers of NNSY's WWII legacy; Baseball hero served on *USS Alabama*



Norfolk Naval Shipyards' *USS Alabama* float always is a crowd pleaser at the City of Portsmouth's Memorial Day parades. Photo by Steve Milner.

A highly detailed and attractive replica of an American battleship has been delighting spectators for many years at the City of Portsmouth's Memorial Day Parades and other community events. Built as an Apprentice



The *USS Alabama* float underwent extensive repairs in Norfolk Naval Shipyards' Structural Shop in 2020. NNSY photo by Shelby West.

USS Alabama Continued, Page 2



The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse

Volume 3, No 2

THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

USS Alabama Continued from Page 1



USS Alabama being constructed on Norfolk Naval Shipyard's Building Ways during World War II. Photo by Earl Parsons, head photographer. NNSY Archives.

class project at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, it's a float that depicts the battleship *USS Alabama* (BB 60). While I was researching and writing this story, I came across a 2004 book "The World War II Memorial," by Douglas Brinkley. In his book Brinkley noted that legendary baseball great Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians served aboard *USS Alabama* as a Chief Petty Officer and anti-aircraft gun captain in a 40-millimeter squad. He reportedly was the first major league player to enlist in the military after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Feller



Famous baseball pitcher Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians volunteered for Navy service during World War II. Here, he was a gun captain aboard USS Alabama. Naval History and Heritage Command.

could have received a military service deferment because his father was terminally ill.

But the noted young baseball player put his career on hold for four years and served honorably in combat. After the war he returned to pitch for the Cleveland Indians during his 18-year career and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.



Bob Feller's professional baseball card. Naval History and Heritage Command

USS Alabama led the ships that participated in Japan's official surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, when Japan signed surrender papers aboard the battleship *USS Missouri*.

USS Alabama was decommissioned in 1947 at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and was kept in the reserve fleet there until it was struck from the Naval Vessel Register in 1962. This noted ship was scheduled to be scrapped but was rescued in 1965,

when it found a permanent-home berthing in Mobile at the newly opened Battleship Memorial Park. A former WWII submarine *USS Drum* also is located at this park.



The camouflaged USS Alabama saw honorable combat service in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Naval History and Heritage Command.

I found another NNSY-*USS Alabama* connection during my research for this story: The son of former NNSY Commandant, Rear Admiral Frank Hardeman Brumby—U.S. Navy Captain Frank H. Brumby, Jr.—served as the Executive Director of the Battleship Memorial Park from 1972-1977.

And to honor the senior Brumby, NNSY started the "Brumby Bowl" in 1931, as a friendly annual golf rivalry between the facility's civilian and military personnel that's still celebrated in modern times.

USS Alabama also provided the backdrop for popular movies, including "Under Siege" in 1992.

In 2020, the *USS Alabama* float underwent extensive repairs in an NNSY shop. At that time a new

USS Alabama Continued, Page 3



The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse

Volume 3, No 2

THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

USS Alabama Continued from, Page 2

trailer was fabricated to carry the float.

Norfolk Naval Shipyard's *USS Alabama* float is scheduled to participate in the City of Portsmouth's 2024 Memorial Day Parade—its 140th.



Built by Norfolk Navy Yard during World War II, USS Alabama is permanently berthed at the USS Alabama Memorial Park in Mobile. Photo by Michael Milner.

Upcoming Events

Speakers Series

All Speaker events are on Saturday, 2-3PM, in the Police Auditorium at the Visitor's Center on the corner of Middle and High Streets.

June 1, The Secrets of NNSY, featuring NNSY Commanding Officer **Capt. James P. "Jip" Mosman.**

Annual Meeting

Tuesday, May 21, 2024, 2PM, at The Childrens Museum.

Smart Changes to Speakers' Series

(by Gary Bahena)

Earlier this year, I asked Keith Abernathy to take over the Speakers Program. He did. And Wow.

Keith moved it from Portsmouth's Churchland Branch Library to Olde Towne and from Wednesday night to Saturday afternoon in conjunction with the Farmers' Market.

Many helped. Keith developed posters to market the Series. The Police Department (Thank you Chief Jenkins) donated their auditorium. And the City decided to market our event for the first time.

And, thanks to The Friends' investment in camera equipment for the Oral History Project (in column to the right), our Speakers Series will now be posted on our webpage. Great job Keith!

This year's theme is The Secrets of Portsmouth.

The first Speakers' event, discussing The Secret Ship of NNSY, was held on March 23 and is covered in Keith's article on page 4 below. The next event, The Secrets of NNSY, is on June 1, from 2-3 PM, and will feature Capt. James P. "Jip" Mosman, the 111th CO of NNSY. See you there!

Oral History Project

(by Gary Bahena)

The Oral History Project with IC Norcom's TV Production students is well into its third year and pushing forward. In 2022, our students interviewed 12 Shipyards from 5 multi-generational families, dating back to the '40s, about their lives at the Shipyard and growing up in Portsmouth.



2023 saw the students interview 3 "First Woman" who broke female barriers at the Shipyard.

This year's focus is on NNSY's response to the October 12, 2000 bombing of the *USS Cole*.

We also recently purchased camera and interview equipment which will allow us to expand our interview schedule year-round. Our immediate goal is to interview the 18 still living COs from the Shipyard.

We also recently purchased editing software that will allow us to start posting all of our interviews on-line while we develop the Oral History Project exhibit for the Shipyard Museum.

Stay tuned and thank you for your continued support.



The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse

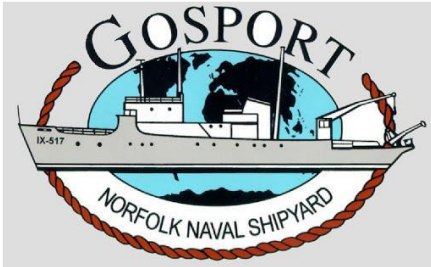
Volume 3, No 2

THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

Junior Paddle Battle

(By Gary Bahena)

Nope. You read that correctly. After three successful Portsmouth Paddle Battles, the 4th Annual Portsmouth Paddle Battle will be joined by the Junior Paddle Battle. The adult Paddle Battle will run from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 7, and will be



followed from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. by the Junior Paddle Battle. The Junior event will bring between 30-40 kids, ages 8-14, who have not previously paddled, down to High Street Basin for 20-30 minutes of kayak instruction. The City's Parks and Recreation folks are the official Sponsor of the Junior Paddle Battle with The Friends arranging for the volunteers and family friendly afternoon music and educational programming. And speaking about volunteers, we need 8 experienced kayakers to volunteer to teach our new paddlers. Please consider helping. All kayak volunteers will need to undergo a City background check.

Speaker Series Event Secrets of Portsmouth – Secret Ships of the Naval Shipyard

(By Keith Abernathy)

Part 1 of the 4 Part 2024 Speakers Series

Even a rainy and dreary day couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the kickoff of the 2024 Speaker Series, "The Secrets of Portsmouth".

With a *new location*, Downtown Portsmouth, a *new venue*, the Police Administration Auditorium at the Portsmouth Welcome Center, and a *new day and time*, Saturday afternoon at 2 pm - over fifty attendees welcomed the changes. **Welcoming remarks from City of Portsmouth Mayor Shannon Glover** underscored the support for this popular, long-standing program of the Friends.



Secret Ships of Norfolk Naval Shipyard." And, who better to discuss these ships than the former commanding officer of both the *USS Gosport (IX517)* and the *USS Prevail (TSV-1)*, **Captain George W. Fleck, USMM.**

CAPT Fleck presented the amazing and varied history of both ships, and discussed how they "gave birth" to an entire new training support vessel squadron.

Several past and present crew members were on hand to



The changes to the program seemed only to add to the excitement of the topic, "The

support their former skipper, including the Assistant Chief of

Speaker Series Continued, Page 5



*The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse*

Volume 3, No 2

THE FRIENDS OF THE
PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD
MUSEUM

Speaker Series Continued from Page 4



Capt. Jerry Reina (left) and Wayne Gittelman (right)

Staff for Carrier Strike Group Four.

These men and their ships continue to provide service to the U.S. Navy fleet in the form of submarine escort, torpedo and drone recovery, and training in boarding, search, and seizure.

There is little doubt that the excitement for this year's speaker series will only build as we prepare for **Part 2** of the series, "The Secrets of Norfolk Naval Shipyard." **On June 1**, the Friends will host the present Commanding Officer of Norfolk Naval Shipyard, **Captain James P. "Jip" Mosman, USN**, as he presents the history, the present-day capabilities, and, yes, "...shhh," the secrets of the shipyard which can service and repair "Any Ship, Any Time, Any Where."



Over fifty attendees



The audience enjoyed Mr. Fleck's (center) presentation and he stayed behind to exchange greetings with attendees.



Gary Bahena (left), Friends President and Steve Poole, Friends 2nd Vice President (right)



Marvin Teachey, NNSY (ret), and Steve Milner, Friends 1st Vice President.