



## Navy Abandons Its Dead?

There has been significant press lately on an issue more than 200 years old: thirteen American Sailors, often referred to as the first predecessors of today's Navy SEALs, remain buried on Libyan soil. The families of some of those Sailors want the remains repatriated to the United States. Navy officials argue that the early practice of burying its dead at sea and along foreign coastlines near the site of death constitutes an official burial, and therefore considers the matter closed. Is the Navy honoring its dead? or doing an injustice to their memory? The issue is hotly contested.

Continued on Page 2. Image courtesy *Remember the Intrepid* blog.



Be sure to check out recent postings on [Facebook](#) and the [NHS Dockyard Blog!](#)



### This Week in Naval History

5 December 1830 - [Naval Observatory](#), the first U.S. national observatory, established at Washington, DC, under commander of Lieutenant Louis Malesherbes.

4 December 1843 - Launching of [USS Michigan](#) at Erie, Penn., America's first iron-hulled warship, as well as first prefabricated ship.

7 December 1941 - Japanese carrier aircraft attack U.S. Pacific Fleet based in [Pearl Harbor, Hawaii](#).

8 December 1942 - [Eight PT boats](#) (PT 36, PT 37, PT 40, PT 43, PT 44, PT 48, PT 59, and [PT 109](#)) turn back 8 Japanese destroyers attempting to reinforce Japanese forces on Guadalcanal.

11 December 1941 - Contract establishes the [Naval Salvage Service](#).

10 December 1979 - First Poseidon submarine configured with Trident missiles, [USS Francis Scott Key](#) (SSBN-657) completes initial deterrent patrol.

### In This Week's News

#### [1868 map sheds light on early Navy shipbuilding site](#)

Just over a month ago NHS received a very interesting donation.

#### [NHS researchers tackle the anatomy of a sea battle under sail](#)

New research concerning the action of USS Hornet vs HMS Peacock may settle age-old disputes.

#### [NHS Winter Retreat agenda](#)

The NHS Board of Directors has released the preliminary schedule, next week – a final agenda.

#### [Last witnesses: Pearl Harbor 70th marks a turning point](#)

First-hand accounts of one of the most famous surprise attacks in military history are getting hard to come by.

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Corrections, noted – but let us have our fun.

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Organizations assemble at Norfolk's St. Paul's Church to honor veterans buried there.

## Navy Abandons its dead?

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Will King, NHS Chairman | Opinion

The thirteen Sailors in question constituted the volunteer crew of USS *Intrepid*, a captured vessel rigged as a floating bomb that was sailed into Tripoli Harbor during the Barbary Wars. The vessel exploded before achieving its objective, and the bodies of the Sailors washed ashore. There, they were purposely subjected to being eaten by dogs and other atrocities, as American prisoners were forced to watch. Some of these prisoners finally appealed to the Tripolitan leader and were allowed to bury the remains in an unmarked grave. Later, the remains of several Sailors, presumably from the *Intrepid* crew, were discovered by an Italian occupation force in the 1930s while constructing a road, exhumed and reburied in a nearby protestant cemetery under unnamed headstones indicating they were part of the *Intrepid* crew.

What must be absolutely clear to everyone hearing about this is that those Sailors deserved better than they got. And while the issue of identifying and repatriating *all* of the *Intrepid* Sailors brings many logistical complications, such as lack of a means of identifying them, some would prove much easier. The families of Master Commandant Richard Somers, who commanded *Intrepid* and Lieutenant Henry Wadsworth, second in command, began efforts to repatriate their remains as early as 1830. These remains could be identified with DNA supplied by living descendants, who continue their ancestors' appeal. Furthermore, supporting research indicates that their remains are, in fact, located in the Protestant Cemetery, and have been since 1804.

The fact is, we have an obligation to these heroes to bring them home – if not to do so wholesale for all of the Sailors, at least to honor the almost 200-years of continual requests of the two families seeking the remains of their ancestors. The Navy, and indeed the Federal Government, cannot possibly undertake to locate and identify every Sailor buried overseas in the centuries when that practice was morally and socially acceptable, and repatriate their remains. But in this particular instance, where 1) those Sailors were clearly not buried in accordance with the standards and customs of the Navy, nor the honor due them, 2) the

families of the Sailors have requested the return of the remains, and 3) the location of the remains is known – the return of such remains should not be a question, but considered the duty and obligation of our nation to those Sailors and their families.

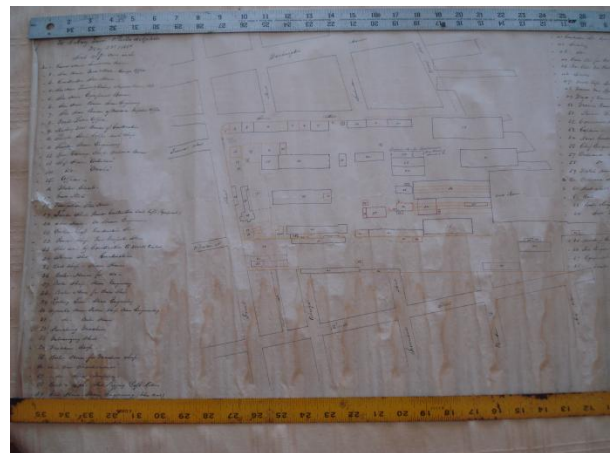
To learn more about the *Intrepid* crew, and efforts to repatriate their remains, visit author Bill Kelley's [excellent blog](#). I strongly encourage our members to give Mr. Kelley and the *Intrepid* Project their support in this great initiative.

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## 1868 map sheds light on early Navy shipbuilding site

NHS Staff | News

Just over a month ago NHS received a very interesting donation. Mike Cordasco, CDR USN (ret) was stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard at a time when some old structures were being demolished. Inside the wall of one of these structures, he found a detailed map of the original portion of the Navy Yard along Front Street dated 1868. The document, which measures 18 x 36 inches, is on a thin, lightweight but opaque material that may be velum. NHS Historical Director Victor Keranen accepted the donation on behalf of NHS in November this year.



The map details the various locations of Navy Yard buildings, including warehouses, workshops, slips and housing between Washington Avenue and Reed Street, and bears very little resemblance to the same location today - a US Coast Guard Station presently situated on

the riverfront at the northern limit of the map is the closest reminder of its former naval purpose.

The site depicted in the map came to be known as the Southwark Navy Yard after the requirements of iron shipbuilding forced relocation of primary facilities to League Island in 1871. But it was this location that was first leased by the Continental Congress for construction of vessels for the Continental Navy, and where the frigate *United States* and 74-gun ship *Franklin* were built, among many others. It was officially purchased by the Navy in 1801.

Between 1801 and 1876, the Navy developed ship houses, a floating dry dock, and nearly fifty craft shops and support facilities to construct and repair wooden sailing vessels. For more information, we recommend reading [The Philadelphia Navy Yard: from the birth of the U.S. Navy to the nuclear age](#) by Jeffery M. Dorwart and Jean K. Wolf. An online preview of the book is available and includes material on the Southwark Navy Yard.

The map will be professionally mounted and preserved before deciding how to best share it with our membership, and the public. Thank you, CDR Cordasco, for your valuable contribution!

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## NHS researchers tackle the anatomy of a sea battle under sail

NHS Staff | News

Research of the USS *Hornet* (III) continues in several critical areas of study. But one of these is gaining new attention as it attempts to settle, once and for all, contrary claims regarding one of the most one-sided victories of the War of 1812.

The engagement between *Hornet* and the British brig *Peacock* was a short but furious action off the coast of British Guyana in 1813. American accounts report that the action took place within sight of the fortified port of Georgetown and another anchored British warship, and that within 15 minutes of the first shots *Peacock* was reduced to a sinking condition. British accounts place the location farther away from the port, suggest it lasted for 25 minutes, and argue that it was an unfair fight.

Historians across the board cannot refute *Hornet's* superb gunnery, as regardless of all other facts, *Peacock* ended up sinking while *Hornet* suffered very little. But just how lopsided was this victory? Did it, in fact, take place within sight of the port – and significant British reinforcements – as American sources report?

New evidence gathered by NHS researchers is piecing together the battle with new evidence, including an analysis of winds and currents, historical topography and even the location of *Peacock's* final resting place. The new research is scheduled to be released at the NHS winter retreat on January 14, 2012 in a presentation that will be filmed and posted online.

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## NHS Winter Retreat agenda

NHS Staff | Announcements

The NHS Board of Directors is currently finalizing plans for our 2012 Winter Retreat, the theme of which will be the upcoming bicentennial of the War of 1812. Several presentations will be made, video recorded and posted to YouTube soon after. The formal agenda will be posted in next week's edition, but the rough schedule is as follows:

### Friday, 13 January 2012

- 1900 Participant and guest arrival and accommodation begins
- 2100 Meet-and-greet reception, main room

### Saturday, 14 January

- 0800 Breakfast
- 0900 Welcome presentation, NHS departmental reports
- 0930 First session (presentation/discussion)
- 1100 Break, working lunch
- 1300 Second session
- 1500 Break
- 1530 Third session
- 1700 Dinner
- 1900 Social time

### Sunday, 15 January

- 0900 Breakfast
- 1000 Future Operations Planning session
- 1200 Light lunch/farewell participants

The entire event takes place in a large, spacious beach house in Avon, NC, where despite the seasonal cold, participants can enjoy spectacular views, accommodations in private suites, and heated pool facilities.

The retreat is open to NHS Members and their vetted guests. Members are asked to forward vetting requests to [info@navalheritage.org](mailto:info@navalheritage.org).

Several carpools are currently being arranged from the NHS Dockyard in Norfolk. Please contact the Dockyard Staff at [dockyard@navalheritage.org](mailto:dockyard@navalheritage.org) for more information.

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## Last witnesses | Pearl Harbor 70th marks a turning point

By Bill Sizemore | The Virginian-Pilot  
© December 4, 2011

First-hand accounts of one of the most famous surprise attacks in military history are getting hard to come by.

Wednesday will be the 70th anniversary of the Japanese raid on U.S. military forces at Pearl Harbor, which, literally overnight, catapulted a shocked nation into World War II.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it's hard to fathom why U.S. leaders didn't see the audacious assault coming. Relations with Japan had been deteriorating for years, and the huge U.S. military complex on the Hawaiian island of Oahu was a tempting target.

The Navy's entire Pacific Fleet was based there, but that's only half the story. Nearly 40,000 of the 84,000 American military personnel on the island were Army soldiers, many of them aviators.

Most of the fleet was in port, including all of its battleships. Guns were unmanned. Ammunition lockers were locked. Aircraft were parked wingtip-to-wingtip on the ground. Many officers and sailors were on liberty.

The two waves of bombs, torpedoes and strafing from 353 Japanese aircraft on that early Sunday morning killed 2,403 Americans.

After 70 years, most of the survivors are gone, too.

The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, organized in 1958, had 29,000 members at its peak. The roster has

now dropped below 3,000, according to Bill Muehleib of Virginia Beach, the group's national president.

By extrapolation, that means roughly 8,000 survivors are left nationwide, he said.

A handful of them live in Hampton Roads. Now in their late 80s and early 90s, they are a cross-section of those who served. They came from all over: the red-clay farm country of North Carolina, small-town New England, the coal-rich hills of Kentucky.

Each of their stories from Dec. 7, 1941, is different. Some survivors were still asleep in their bunks when the first wave of Japanese fighters darkened the sky. Some were at breakfast. One was ashore, waiting for a bus to take him to Sunday Mass.

One was wounded. One lost his best friend.

There is one common theme in their stories: They don't see themselves as having done anything grand or heroic. They did what needed to be done, on that day and over the nearly four years of warfare that followed.

And then they came home. Some made a career of the military; some got out.

Today they live in circumstances ranging from humble to opulent. Some are in assisted-living homes. Many have outlived spouses and other kin.

While their memory of recent events may be failing, the scenes of that day 70 years ago are still vivid, etched in their consciousness.

But for some, there comes a time to lay it all aside.

At a recent board meeting, the national survivors association decided to give up its charter and disband the organization as of Dec. 31.

"Age and ill health are taking their toll," Muehleib said. "And at this point in their lives, people have other priorities."

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## Staff Editorial Note

In the last several weeks, the NHS Publishing Team has received several emails correcting typographical errors in LT Will King's article on the history of USS HORNET (III) published on the NHS website. We would like our readers to know we appreciate and respect your feedback, but we enjoy using those errors, many of which were the subject of recent reader corrections, to

taunt the author's erstwhile proclivity for perfection, or at least his insistence of it on our part.

We respectfully request our readers permit us the leeway of their patience while we enjoy jovially ribbing our chairman. The updated and corrected version of the article will be uploaded to the site shortly. Thanks.

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## New plaques commemorate veterans of Revolutionary War, 1812

NHS Staff | News

Last Saturday, December 3rd a dedication ceremony was held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Norfolk, VA for two new plaques listing Revolutionary War patriots and War of 1812 veterans.

From the event program: "The Church by the Mall with the Ball in the Wall" is a contemporary reference to Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, situated adjacent to the relatively new MacArthur Mall parking garage. Elizabeth River Parish was established in 1637 and included the current structure of Saint Paul's Church, formerly Borough Church, built in 1739. Embedded in its southeastern wall (and marked by the DAR), is a cannonball fired by Lord Dunmore's Royal Navy. From the early 1600s to 1827, the property served as Norfolk's public burying ground, historically known as the "Old Churchyard." About the year 2000, a reporter who visited the church and its surrounding yard referred to it as a "piece of living history... the only remaining structure that connects the city [of Norfolk] with its colonial past." That past, of course, refers to the relevant "Burning of Norfolk" as a result of Dunmore's defeat at Great Bridge and the lack of provisions from Col. Woodford, which radically altered Dunmore's eye on Norfolk as a potential base of British operations.

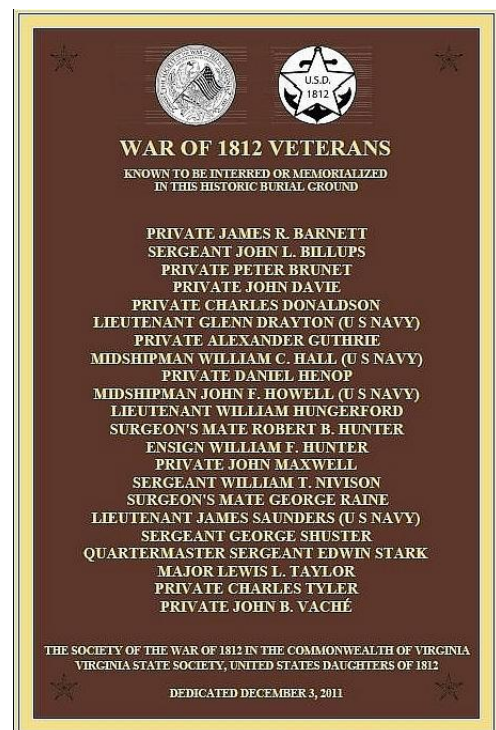
The new plaques commemorate veterans of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 buried in the churchyard. Among these are Lieutenants Glenn Drayton and James Saunders, and Midshipmen William C. Hall and John F. Howell, of the US Navy, who died during the War of 1812.

Participants in the ceremony included representatives of the Norfolk Chapter and Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, several

local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Society of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the Virginia State Society, United States Daughters of 1812.

Christopher Melhuish, CAPT USN (ret), 65<sup>th</sup> Commanding Officer of USS *Constitution*, advisor to our own USS HORNET Project, and member of the Sons of the American Revolution, organized and led the ceremony's elaborate color guard which consisted of more than a dozen flags.

The keynote speaker Michael Kranish, author of *Flight from Monticello: Thomas Jefferson at War*, discussed the 1776 bombardment and burning of Norfolk.



Above: The plaque erected at St. Paul's Church in Norfolk honoring veterans of the War of 1812, including four US Navy officers.

## Call for Submissions

If you would like to have your material published in *The Pennant*, email us at [info@navalheritage.org](mailto:info@navalheritage.org).

