

The Ship's Bell

**Placer County Council,
Navy League of the
United States
Auburn, CA**

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President's Message

By Bonnie Potter

The end of the year is always a very busy time for Placer County Council. In early November the Council ran a Vote Center in Foresthill for 4 days with the American Legion Auxiliary. My thanks to Becky Dunavent, Tom Dunavent, August Anema, Don Anderson, Mona Anderson, Carol Ann Hackley, Janelle Kershaw, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Greg Wilbur, and Alicia Wilbur for your willingness to work as election aides. It was a lot of work, but a great fundraiser for our Council.

On November 11th we participated in the annual Auburn Veterans Day Parade and ceremony. Our parade entry included several members walking or riding in Don and Mona Anderson's pickup followed by our Sacramento Sea Cadets. The Luther Burbank NJROTC color guard led the parade as the official Color Guard!!! And the Sea Cadets were the color guard for the ceremony. It was raining, so we all got wet, but we were all happy to be there. We have many veterans in our council and, on behalf of all our Council members, thank you for your service!

During our November meeting we celebrated the Marine Corps Birthday and Chuck Shumate's 101 st birthday! Board member Carol Ann Hackley installed our 2025 Officers and Directors. Becky Dunavent will be taking the helm as Council President beginning in January. I will continue to serve on the board as Vice President. Congratulations to Becky, Secretary Mona Anderson, Treasurer August Anema, and Directors Don Anderson, Natalie Brennan, Mike Holmes, Don Goard, Nancy Goard, Carol Ann Hackley, Janelle Kershaw, Alicia Wilbur and Greg Wilbur. I look forward to working with all of you in the upcoming year and supporting our new Council President Becky.

December 7th marks the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Don Guard planned a beautiful remembrance ceremony at the New Auburn Cemetery. Board member and Newsletter editor Natalie Brennan gave a moving tribute about our recently deceased Council member Lou Conter, who died on April 1 st as the last Arizona survivor. You can read her remarks in this newsletter. I was honored to speak about the battleships that were sunk or damaged that day.

Thank you to the many members who have purchased wreaths for the graves of our veterans buried in Auburn. As of today you have purchased 244 wreaths, so this has been a great fundraiser for our council!! The Wreaths Across America Remembrance Ceremony will take place on Saturday, December 14 th at 0900 at the New Auburn Cemetery. I look forward to participating again this year as the Master of Ceremonies, and I hope to see many of you there. Following the primary ceremony, there will be a brief ceremony at the Old Auburn Cemetery at 1000. I will also be the MC for the Newcastle Cemetery at 1100.

Another event happening in December is the annual Army-Navy football game on December 14th . We are planning a game watching party at the Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall, with the doors opening at 11 am and kickoff at Noon. Pizza by the slice will be available and the bar will be open. Army is 10 and 1, and Navy is 8 and 3, so it should be a great game!! (Go Navy Beat Army!!).

Our annual Christmas Party will be held on Monday, December 16th and we encourage you to bring an unwrapped toy/gift to donate to Toys for Tots for distribution to the children in

our area. We will enjoy good food and fellowship and this year we will have Santa and Mrs. Clause attending our meeting! There should be time to get your photo taken with Santa! Bring your kids and grand-kids too!!

And, as always, let us take a few minutes each day to remember our courageous men and women in uniform, especially those deployed away from home during the holidays, who are willing to risk their lives to protect our way of life and our freedoms. Also, please remember their family members for the sacrifices they make so that their loved ones may serve. As we wrap up 2024, I want to thank you for all the support you have provided me during my years as Council President. I wish you all the best during the holiday season and a Happy and Healthy New Year!

Cheers, Bonnie



Rummage Sale Update

By Mona Anderson

The Rummage Sale all began last Spring, with the idea. Bonnie and I met and talked it over and decided it was do-able. Bonnie started making arrangements to reserve the Hall and I started drafting publicity and handouts for the meetings and working on timing and logistics. The idea grew to include the Bake Sale, with coffee and shave ice refreshments also available. By August we were collecting donated goods. Bonnie stored donations in her buildings and I stored as much as I could cram into a spare bedroom and travel trailer. After every Navy League meeting, I came home with a trunk full of goods someone had brought to the meeting to give to me. And all the while Bonnie and I were sending out reminders and updates and reports at the meetings and board meetings and refining the logistics of the event.

Then came the final push: on Thursday, October 3, a half-dozen of us were at Memorial Hall all day, collecting last-minute donations. On Friday, October 4, dozens of us set up the sale. Our Luther Burbank NJROTC kids were there to help. They toted and carried and we couldn't have done it without them. Saturday, October 5, was the day of the sale. Again, dozens of us were there working, from about 7:00 a.m. setting out signs, to about 4:00 p.m. to begin the clean-up process. Our Sacramento Sea Cadets were there all day, helping carry purchases to customers' cars, keeping the tables stocked and neat and generally being a huge help.

We cleared an unbelievable \$2,0070. When you figure the number of people working times the number of hours worked and divide that into \$2,000.00, we (jokingly!) must have cleared at least 5 cents an hour! And we didn't spend a penny of our Council's money: all costs for baking ingredients, coffee, advertising, signage, etc., were donated.

Special thanks go out to so many who made big donations ... like Tom and Bonnie Jones, who donated brand new items from a casino contact they had, and Matthew Axelson Sea Cadets, for their huge donation of Norman Rockwell plates. I can't name everyone who donated or helped with the work. I wish I could extend a personal thanks to each who did, but there were simply too many.

Special thanks to Becky Dunavent and her sister, who baked and baked and baked and ran the Bake Sale and Coffee Bar all day on Saturday and to Don Anderson, who provided Shave Ice. Special thanks to some non-members who chipped in in big ways: Joy Saunders, who spent all day Friday getting the hundreds of books organized; Gerda Percival, who donated and worked part of the set-up, sale and clean-up days; Gus Morr, who donated wonderful items from his deceased sister's estate, and probably other non-members whose names I didn't get. Another special shout-out to Bill Poindexter, managing editor of the Auburn Journal, for giving us fantastic coverage and putting me in touch with his advertising manager, Shoni Jones, who helped me with a very cutely illustrated classified ad.

Also on the subject of getting the word out, Bonnie did a fantastic job of advertising the event on-line, something completely out of my field of expertise.

A big plus that I personally gained was that I feel like the event actually created new friendships, because of the members who I had known only slightly but now had a chance to work with and really appreciated and liked!

Another big plus: most of us bought less than we had donated, so, as a down-sizing event for all concerned, it went well! We may have recovered enough energy ... and accumulated enough new goods to donate ... to do it again in a couple of years, so start thinking about it.

Mona Anderson

FOOTLOCKER FUNDRAISER A WONDERFUL SUCCESS!

By Rebecca Dunavent

The calendar may have said that we were well into fall but the temperatures were summer-like for our Placer County Navy League Footlocker Fundraiser! By the time all of the final numbers were tallied, we raised over \$2,100 between the rummage sale items and the food sales. We also had wonderful support from several of our youth groups which was much appreciated.

When Mona Anderson proposed the fundraiser it is certain that she had no idea how incredibly generous our League members and their friends and family would be in donating items for our fundraiser. Donations had been made to the League for months and by the time the event came we were overflowing with items for the sale.

Set-up was held on Thursday/Friday, October 3/4. A huge shout-out to the CHIEF ALSTON AND THE LUTHER BURBANK NJROTC for their heavy lifting of items to get them downstairs for set-up. There were all kinds of items to be sorted in order to be ready the next day and these students were invaluable!

Saturday, October 5, was the actual sale day and we had people lining up at the Veteran's Hall doors even before we officially opened! There were incredible deals to be had with household goods, clothing, books, knick-knacks, tools, outdoor items, etc. Another shout-out to COREY AND MICHELLE SIMPSON, CO/XO. OF THE MATHEW AXELSON/TS RANDY GOODMAN unit (Yuba City) showed up with their minivan packed to overflowing Norman Rockwell Collector's plates that were available for purchase. They were there the entire day helping out.

As the day progressed the piles of donated goods slowly got smaller. Another shout-out to LT. CORTNEY KELLEHER (NSCC) UNIT COMMANDER, SACRAMENTO DIVISION / TS CALIFORNIA and her crew for all of their help during the day. They helped people carry their new-found treasures out to their cars and at the end of the day helped clean up what was left behind.

The items that didn't sell were donated to other nonprofits.

Everyone was hot and tired by the day's end but smiles were found as we realized the Mona's suggestion had brought in over \$2,100 in profits!

THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR ALL OF THE VOLUNTEERS THAT MADE THIS HAPPEN AND TO MONA FOR ALL OF HER EFFORTS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Rummage Sale Update



Above: CPO Luca Bortoletto assisting some shoppers (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Above: PO1 Maylin Liu provides service with a smile! (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Above: SN Theodore Burke, PO2 Sydnie Hoeltje (right to left) chatting with a shopper (Courtesy of Rebecca Dunavent).



Above: Photographs from the Rummage Sale (Courtesy of Carol Ann Hackley).

Veterans Day Parade

By Don and Mona Anderson

Placer County Council's presence was known in Auburn on Veterans Day. The Placer County Council of the Navy League was a large presence in the 106-year-old Auburn, California, Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony. Members of the Council participated in the planning and presentation of both the Parade and the Ceremony following the Parade in the Placer Building at Gold Country Fairgrounds.

Serving on the planning Committee were Council President Bonnie Potter, RAD, MC, USN, Retired, Council Board Member Mike Holmes, Captain, USN, Retired, and Paula Celick, also a Council member.

Every year, the parade honors a different group of Veterans. This year, Cold War Veterans were honored ... those who served during the tense years between the end of WWII and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Estimated audiences along the Parade route and at the Ceremony topped a couple of thousand, despite the steady rain that fell exactly during parade time. In the parade, Luther Burbank High School's NJROTC Unit, which is sponsored by the Council, was the Color Guard. Number 8 in the Parade, Council Vice-president Don Anderson, Retired Chief Petty Officer, drove his decorated truck with Veterans Service Officer Steve Johnson, Also a Council member, and Council Secretary Mona Anderson riding and waving flags. A contingent of the Sacramento Sea Cadet and Navy Leaguer Units, also sponsored by the Council, marched behind the truck, joined most of the way by County Supervisor Jim Holmes, also a Council member, and Council President Bonnie Potter.

At the Ceremony following the Parade, Sacramento Sea Cadets presented the Colors. Veterans Service Officer Steve Johnson emceed the Ceremony and Council President Bonnie Potter delivered remarks, specifically mentioning the sacrifices of Veterans' families and an explanation of the Cold War Era.

Other Council members volunteered their services in other, not-so-visible ways, most notably August Anema, Council Treasurer, who marked the Parade route with pylons and road closure signs and ran errands in the rain all morning so that the event would go smoothly. And as a last mention but equally important were the Council members with no specific tasks but who came to the Parade or attended the Ceremony to swell the ranks of Placer County's Citizens who highly honor Veterans.

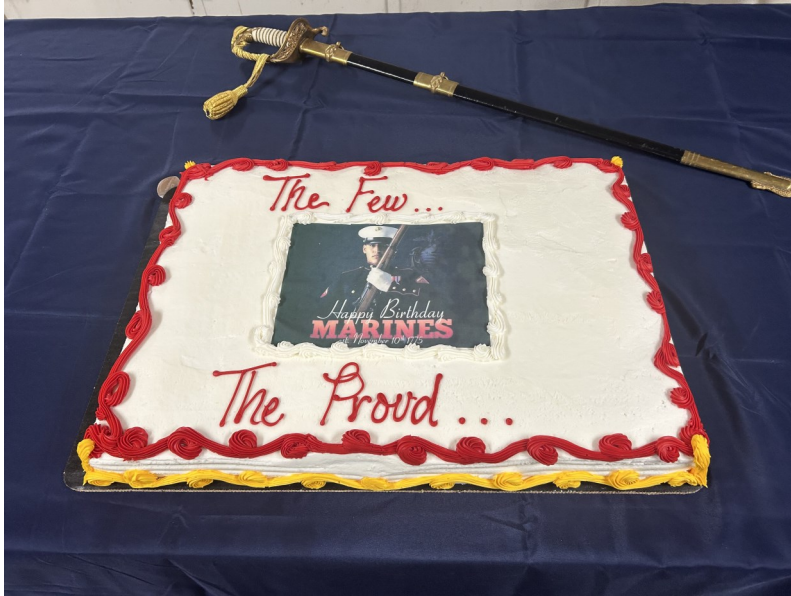


Above: NJROTC color guard at Auburn Veteran's Day Parade (Courtesy of Don & Mona Anderson).



Above: Sacramento Division Sea Cadets at Auburn Veteran's Day Parade (Courtesy of Don & Mona Anderson).

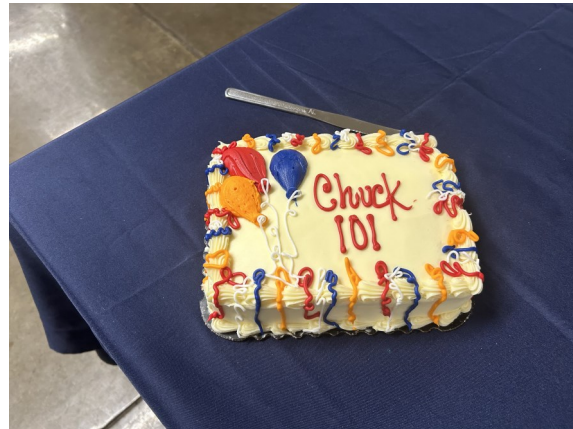
Marine Corps Birthday



*Left: USMC birthday cake
(Courtesy of Natalie Brennan).*

*Right: Chuck Shumate's 101st birthday cake
(Courtesy of Natalie Brennan).*

Below: The cake cutters. Left to right: Chuck Shumate, Jerry Rico, Francisco Caceres, Neva Kesselring, and Dale Ferguson (Courtesy of Natalie Brennan).



The Halifax Explosion

By Natalie Brennan

While the United States honors Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day on the 7th of December every year since the devastating attack in 1941, our maple syrup loving neighbor from the north also honors its own devastating event that took place on the 6th of December in 1917. This story is about Canada's disaster: the Halifax Harbor Explosion, and a touching tradition between the U.S. and Canada that came from it. Many videos of the Halifax Explosion exist on YouTube, two of which are by Fascinating Horror, and Maritime Horrors; I recommend giving those a watch as well for additional information, but here is the simplified version of what happened that day.

The year was 1917 in December. The United States had just barely entered the First World War, while Canada had been involved in the global conflict since 1914. The northeast of the country was home to the town of Halifax, a vital port city during the Great War. While Canada's male population experienced the devastation and extreme hardship of a modern war, the town of Halifax prospered from the war, becoming a vital port hub that supplied the country's war effort. This prosperity was due in major part to the fact that Halifax's harbor was one of the deepest harbors on the North American continent, with the added bonus of being relatively free of ice. Throughout the First World War, thousands of Canadian, British Colonial, and American troops would pass through Halifax harbor on their way to the European front.

By the time December 1917 rolled around, the town of Halifax had a population of nearly fifty thousand people, these numbers constantly increasing due to the influx of troops passing through on their way to the war. Halifax harbor was not only the backbone for all of Canada, but the entire war effort for the Allied powers as well because it served as a base for Royal Navy ships and merchant vessels from all over the world. With the prosperous boom in business due to the war, Halifax's population got the added bonus of getting much needed jobs such as working in the dockyards, railyards, and other factories. The citizens and workers of Halifax in turn formed tightknit communities, such as the town of Richmond in the northern end of Halifax, the entire city dotted with wooden homes, schools, and churches. Despite the devastation that World War I was wreaking on the world, Halifax was practically reaping economic benefits from the conflict, becoming a prosperous city that not only provided for the war effort, but for its civilians by supplying them with much desired jobs. Alas, this prosperity would not last forever.

Because of how vital Halifax harbor was to the Allied powers during the Great War, German U-boats prowled the Atlantic waters nearby, hunting any ships coming or going from it. To minimize the risks of either having enemy submarines from sneaking into the harbor and causing destruction or a seaborne German invasion, the entirety of Halifax's harbor was surrounded by fortified gun placements, observation posts. For the U-boats, underwater nets were strung across the harbor entrance to keep them out. These nets were also equipped with gates that would open throughout the day to allow ships to come and go after being cleared for entry.

On the morning of December 6, 1917, one ship was preparing to leave the harbor. The large Norwegian merchant ship, named *Imo*, was heading for New York to pick up relief supplies meant for Belgium. Outside of the harbor entrance, the French munition vessel named *Mont-Blanc*, whose hull was packed full with tons of benzol, a type of gasoline, TNT, and gun cotton, was waiting for the underwater net gates to open. It should be noted that before the war, when the harbor was under civilian control, munition ships were forbidden from entering the harbor's interior. It was only during the war, however, when the British Admiralty assumed control, that these rules changed. This was why the *Mont-Blanc* was even allowed near the harbor.

That fateful morning, *Imo* was making her way out of the harbor, travelling south through what was known as the Narrows, which was the tightest navigation section of the harbor. She was supposed to move on the western side of the Narrows closest to Halifax since she was leaving the harbor. However, *Imo* was traveling on the eastern side closest to Dartmouth, where incoming ships would make their way into the harbor. Moving the way *Imo* did required incoming ships to have to pass by her on the starboard side, but as a consequence, it resulted in *Imo* occupying the wrong side of the Narrows. This would be like travelling eastbound in the westbound lanes of the highway. Meanwhile, the French munitions ship *Mont-Blanc* was anchored since the night before December 6 at the harbor entrance because the anti-submarine gates were closed. Once those gates opened in the morning, she was given clearance to enter the harbor. Even though *Mont-Blanc* was carrying extremely dangerous cargo, during 1917 there was no real protocol that told ships within the harbor to hold their positions until the munitions ship made safe passage through the port. It was partially because of this lack of protocol that *Imo* did not stop sailing.

The pilot of *Mont-Blanc*, Francis Mackey, steered the ship on the eastern side of the Narrows until he saw *Imo* quickly sailing straight for him. Mackey maintained his stance that the Norwegian ship was not only sailing on the wrong side of the Narrows, but she was going at an speed that was dangerous for her size. Whether these statements are accurate we can never truly know, but what historians *do* know is that *Imo* was sailing too far on the east side, right in the area that should have been for the *Mont-Blanc* to sail through.

Both the Norwegian and French ships saw what was coming and began blowing their whistles at each other to try and avoid colliding, but these efforts were fruitless. Due to the miscommunications between the officers and pilots of the two ships, their maneuvers to avoid collision failed. With a sickening shriek of metal, *Imo* struck the starboard bow of *Mont-Blanc*'s hull, sending a shower of sparks into the volatile grains of dry picric acid—an extremely flammable and poisonous chemical—stored below deck. The acid caught fire and soon *Mont-Blanc* was belching ominous black smoke into the air as the fire rapidly spread. Realizing what was about to happen, the crew of *Mont-Blanc* made for their lifeboats, abandoning ship and fleeing to the Dartmouth side of the Narrows. Once on land, the French crew began trying to tell the gathering crowd of curious civilians to get out of the danger zone; one crewman even going so far as to allegedly grab a woman's baby and getting her to chase him to safety. Many of the civilians were not lucky and did not listen to the Frenchmen, so the crew had to leave them behind.

Now without a crew to steer her, the burning *Mont-Blanc* drifted towards Pier number six on the Halifax side of the Narrows. The area where she was heading was packed with houses, moored ships, businesses, a large sugar refinery, and the home of the Royal Naval College of Canada. *Mont-Blanc* burned for the next twenty minutes, the blaze soon reaching the big drums of benzol that were stored on the top decks, further sending up plumes of black acrid smoke into the sky. The sight of a burning ship sailing slowly into port attracted many curious onlookers who were either standing at the shoreline, on their way to work or school, or even from their windows. They all gathered nearer to see the spectacle. In the harbor itself, teams of sailors on other ships and firefighters headed for the *Mont-Blanc*, hoping to douse the fire before it spread to the harbor.

The old saying of curiosity being fatal to cats sadly applies to people, and this event is proof of it. The curious spectators gathered around, not realizing how much danger they were in. The only people who knew of the danger were a handful of harbor and Naval officials, as well as the French-speaking crew of *Mont-Blanc*.

At the nearby railyards, two workers figured out what the burning ship's cargo was, and that danger was imminent. Chief clerk William Lovett told everyone in the yards about the

The Halifax Explosion cont.

danger and urged them to run. Another worker, a railway dispatcher named Patrick Vincent Coleman was at his post where he controlled the very busy freight and passenger train traffic coming and going from Halifax. Realizing the danger, he too, was about to run until something stopped him. He realized that trains were due to arrive at Halifax, including the 08:55 passenger train from Saint John, New Brunswick, and that hundreds of people would be endangered. While *Mont-Blanc* burned in the harbor, Coleman stayed at his post, tapping out a message on his telegraph key, warning the stations up the line to halt any and all trains bound for Halifax. This message read: “Hold up the train. Ammunition ship afire in harbor making for Pier 6 and will explode. Guess this will be my last message. Good-bye boys.” Tragically, this was indeed Coleman’s final message. The train from Saint John was saved, not necessarily because of the message, but because it was running late, so it never made it to Halifax. Coleman’s message was amongst the earliest alerts that the rest of the world received about the disaster, delivered during his final minutes. Both Patrick Vincent Coleman and William Lovett were killed by the explosion.

At exactly 09:04, the fires on the *Mont-Blanc* reached the explosive cargo, and the ship blew up, sending out a shockwave in all directions, which generated a powerful tsunami that slammed into Halifax and Dartmouth. More than 1.5 miles of the little town of Richmond were wiped out, either by the explosion, the tsunami, the structure fires that ignited by buildings collapsing onto lit furnaces, or a combination of all of the aforementioned. The explosion was so powerful and scorching that it caused houses, offices, factories, churches, the railway station, freight yards, ships—including the gutted *Mont-Blanc*—and hundreds of spectating civilians, sailors, and firefighters in the immediate area, to be incinerated. Farther from the epicenter of the explosion, shattered windows and displaced doors were the predominant damage and causes of casualties. Windows were shattered in towns that were 62 miles away, the blast was heard all the way over at Prince Edward Island, with some even saying that they could hear it off the coast of Massachusetts.

Author Laura Mac Donald described the disaster’s ferocity:

The air blast blew through the narrow streets, toppling buildings and crashing through windows, doors, walls, and chimneys until it slowed to 756 miles an hour, five miles below the speed of sound. The blast crushed internal organs, exploding lungs and eardrums of those standing closest to the ship, most of whom died instantly. It picked up others, only to thrash them against trees, walls, and lampposts with enough force to kill them. Roofs and ceilings collapsed on top of their owners. Floors dropped into the basement and trapped families under timber, beams and furniture. This was particularly dangerous for those close to the harbor because a fireball, which was invisible in the daylight, shot out over a 1–4 mile area surrounding the *Mont-Blanc*. Richmond houses caught fire like so much kindling. In houses able to withstand the blast, windows stretched inward until the glass shattered around its weakest point, sending out a shower of arrow-shaped slivers that cut their way through curtains, wallpaper and walls. The glass spared no one. Some people were beheaded where they stood; others were saved by a falling bed or bookshelf.... Many others who had watched the fire seconds before awoke to find themselves unable to see (Mac Donald, Canadian Encyclopedia).

The blast fired vaporized sections of the gutted *Mont-Blanc* upwards in a giant fireball, only to rain down on any survivors. A chunk of the ship’s anchor was thrown nearly 2.4 miles away, where it still remains. Even the *Imo*, peppered with shrapnel from *Mont-Blanc*, was tossed onto the Dartmouth shore like it was little more than a toy. Only one man from the Norwegian vessel survived. People were blown through the sky; how and where they landed determined if they lived or not. One man named Charles Mayers, a third officer of the ship *Middleham Castle*, was launched nearly 0.6 miles away, losing all of his clothes, save for his

boots in the process. Mayers said that “there was a little girl near me, and I asked her where we were. She was crying and said she did not know where we were.”

The northern sectors of Halifax and Dartmouth suffered the brunt of the explosion; the town of Richmond was a scene of apocalyptic surrealism. Telegraph lines and trees were snapped like trees, houses were piles of splintered wood, some split open, many still burning. The railyards and harbor were destroyed. The injured survivors, majorly incapacitated from being thrown around like dolls and blinded by shards of glass that also lacerated their bodies, wandered about in shock, some even crawling through the ruins trying to process what had just happened. Many children who were walking to school were killed by the blast and shrapnel, others were permanently blinded by glass flying into their eyes. Those youth who did survive stumbled back to their homes, only to find them destroyed, their parents either dead or wounded laying among the wreckage.

Relief efforts were horribly ill-equipped to respond to such a disaster considering that the Deputy Mayor Henry Colwell only had a small police force and fire services to call upon. To add to the complications, the fire chief, Edward Condon, was killed and the city’s only water pumping fire truck was destroyed. As if things were not bad enough, winter set in immediately the next day, hitting the ruined city with a blizzard and further throwing a wrench into the relief efforts. Despite the challenges, Halifax had legions of surviving military personnel to call upon to bring aid and order. Crews from surviving vessels and ships that arrived after the disaster helped in the rescue and relief efforts. Many of the homeless and wounded victims were giving medical care and shelter on Canadian, American, and other ships in what was left of the harbor. Halifax’s first Black doctor, Dr. Clement Ligoure, treated hundreds of victims free of charge in the coming weeks.

The understandably peeved survivors demanded answers and scapegoats in the wake of the disaster. Many were casting blame on the crew of the *Imo*; after all, she was speeding on the wrong side of the harbor and refused to yield to the *Mont-Blanc*. However, since only one man survived the *Imo*, blame was soon cast on three crewmen of the *Mont-Blanc*, including its pilot Francis Mackey, because they abandoned ship to save themselves rather than warn people. They were found guilty of manslaughter, but the charges were eventually dropped due to lack of evidence. In 1919 the Supreme Court of Canada declared that both ships and their crews were at fault.

Even after over one hundred years, memories of the explosion still haunt Halifax, living on in the memories of the survivors, and their descendants who heard their stories. Numerous plaques, markers, graves, and pieces of the wreckages are scattered throughout the city to honor the dead. One reminder is the city’s Hydrostone neighborhood, formerly known as the town of Richmond, the once devastated north end of Halifax, whose structures were built using Hydrostone bricks to provide shelter for the homeless victims. Next to the Hydrostone is a grassy hill named Fort Needham Park, topped with a concrete memorial that serves as a mecca for people. Every December 6, crowds gather at the top of the hill overlooking the Narrows where the *Mont-Blanc* blew up. There, they ring the memorial bells, and remember the lives lost. In a museum dedicated to the disaster, the telegraph key and pocket watch of Patrick Vincent Coleman, the heroic railway dispatcher who remained at his post to warn inbound trains, sits on display, the hands of the watch blown off at the very moment his life was snuffed out by the blast. Perhaps a more poignant memory of the tragic day, and the response to it, is the annual cutting down of a large Christmas tree. The tree is cut every year and placed in central Boston as a gift of gratitude from the people of Halifax to a city that provided vital support in the days following the disaster.

The Halifax Explosion cont.

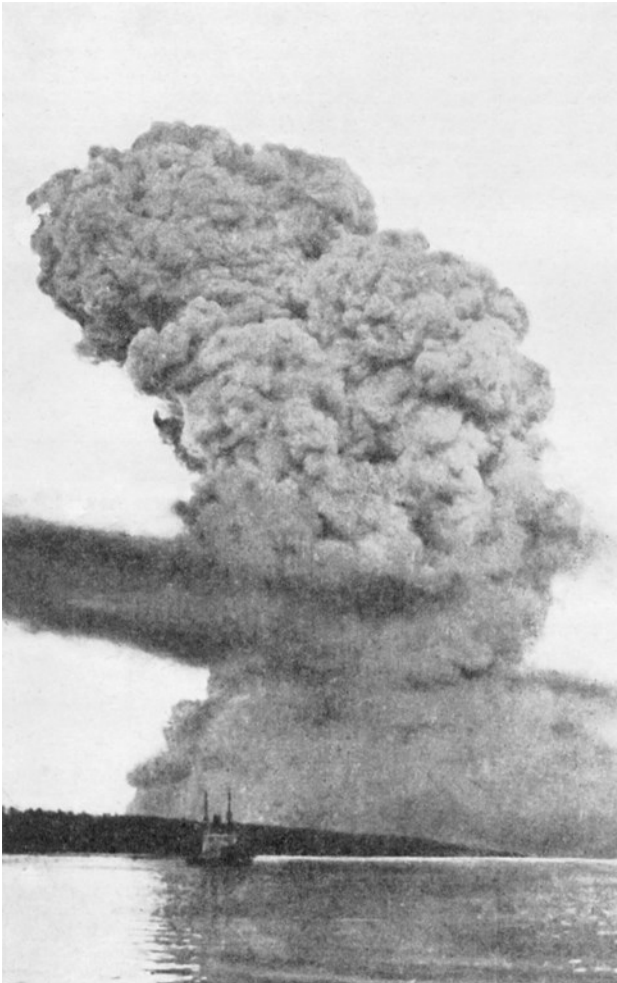
According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, the Halifax Harbor Explosion killed an estimated 1,600 people instantly, including hundreds of children. An additional 400 died from their injuries in the following days. Causes of death were varying; either from the explosion, being thrown miles away, flying debris decapitating or tearing off limbs, glass shards cutting them to ribbons, and severe burns. The morgue records that came from 1918 stated that 1,631 were known to be dead or missing, about 1/3 of them under the age of 15. Also, according to the Canadian Encyclopedia, the numbers were revised in 2014 to be 1,946.

So, while America honors the lives lost on December 7, 1941, it is also worth acknowledging that our northern ally of Canada suffered its own tragedy that occurred on December 6, 1917. The response by Canada's allies, such as the U.S., in the wake of the explosion served to strengthen the bond between allies that still remains strong to this day. So, if you ever make a trip to central Boston during the month of December, and you see a Nova Scotia pine tree, you will know the story of this tradition born of tragedy, with the silver lining that the bond between Americans and Canadians will hopefully remain strong until the end of time.

Sources:

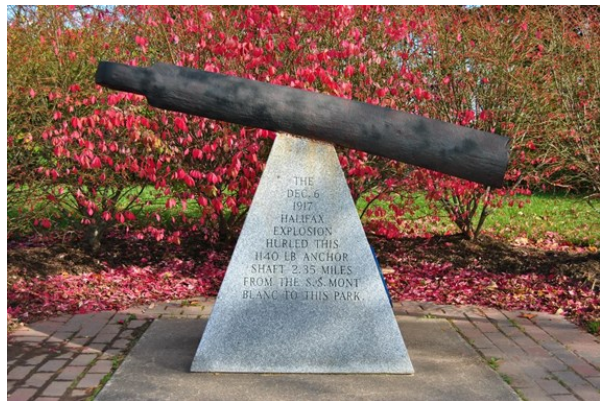
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/halifax-explosion>

<https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/halifax-explosion/vincent-coleman-and-halifax-explosion>



Left: The Mont-Blanc after she exploded (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halifax_Explosion).

Below: Fragment of Mont-Blanc's anchor, memorialized where it landed after the explosion (https://www.reddit.com/r/BeAmazed/comments/18cd9ws/in_1917_an_explosion_in_the_harbour_of_halifax/?rdt=34248).





*Above: Portrait of Patrick Vincent Coleman, the railway dispatcher who warned incoming trains.
Top right: Coleman's telegraph key, recovered after the explosion.
Right: Coleman's pocket watch, recovered after the explosion.
(Photographs found at <https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/what-see-do/halifax-explosion/vincent-coleman-and-halifax-explosion>).*

Below: The Christmas tree that is gifted by the people of Halifax to Boston for the city's help in the immediate aftermath of the disaster (<https://novascotia.ca/treeforboston/>).



Pearl Harbor

Bonnie Potter's Speech:

We are gathered here today to remember all of those we lost on December 7th, 1941. We also are here to honor the bravery and skill of all who fought back, those who saved lives, and those who persevered. We will hear more about one of those brave Sailors when Natalie speaks about Lou Conter.

83 years ago today, just before 8 am, a swarm of Japanese planes descended on Pearl Harbor and began dropping bombs and torpedoes. In just under two hours, 21 ships of the Pacific Fleet were either sunk or damaged. 188 aircraft were destroyed, and another 159 damaged. The material costs were significant. But ... the human costs were even worse. 2,403 dead and 1,178 wounded. Sailors. Marines. Soldiers. And Civilians.

On December 7, our aircraft carriers were at sea, but seven battleships were moored at Pearl Harbor's Ford Island in a formation known as "Battleship Row". These seven battleships represented all but two of those available to the Pacific Fleet. The Fleet flagship, *Pennsylvania*, was also in Pearl Harbor, drydocked at the nearby Navy Yard. The ninth, USS *Colorado*, was undergoing overhaul on the west coast. The battleships were a threat to Japanese plans for Pacific Ocean dominance, and they were the priority targets for the Japanese bombers that morning.

Shortly after the attack started, an armor-piercing bomb penetrated the decks of USS ARIZONA, igniting her forward ammunition magazine. The resulting explosion and fire killed 1,177 Sailors and Marines, the greatest loss of life ever on any US Navy ship. Due to the extensive damage, the USS *Arizona* was never salvaged and still rests at the bottom of Pearl Harbor. When people think of Pearl Harbor, they think of the USS Arizona. But what about the other battleships?

The USS *Nevada* was moored just behind the USS Arizona. She was the only battleship to get underway that morning. Despite sustaining damage, Nevada's crew managed to steer her aground off Hospital Point to prevent blocking the vital harbor channel. This bold effort inspired those fighting back that day, providing a critical morale boost. She lost 50 Sailors but was repaired and went on to serve in many Pacific missions before being sent to Europe. On June 6, 1944, she served as the flagship for the D-Day invasion, making her the only ship to have fought in both the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Normandy landings.

The USS *Tennessee* was moored south of Arizona, inboard to USS *West Virginia*. Although damaged during the assault, with 5 Sailors killed, she survived and was quickly repaired and modernized. The USS *Tennessee* would go on to play a vital role in numerous battles throughout the Pacific Theater during World War II.

The USS *West Virginia*, being outboard to Tennessee, was struck by six torpedoes and two bombs, leading to her sinking and the loss of 106 crew members. In May 1942, the ship was salvaged and sent for repairs. After being restored, she returned to service and played a key role in many battles across the Pacific. She was also present at Tokyo Bay during the Japanese surrender, marking the end of World War II.

Next was the USS *Maryland*, moored inboard to USS *Oklahoma*. She sustained only minor damage from bombs and lost 4 crewmembers. By June 1942, she became the first ship damaged during the attack to be fully repaired and returned to active duty, playing a key role in the war that followed.

The USS *Oklahoma's* port side was struck by eight torpedoes. In less than twelve minutes, the battleship capsized, her masts touching the harbor floor, trapping hundreds of crew members inside. Tragically, 429 sailors lost their lives, and only 32 of those trapped within the ship could be rescued from the wreckage.

The USS *California*, moored alone, was struck and sunk, with the loss of 105 crew

members. Despite this devastating blow, the ship was salvaged, reconstructed, and returned to service. The USS *California* went on to fight in key battles throughout the remainder of World War II.

While much of the focus of the attack on Pearl Harbor was on Battleship Row, several other ships across the harbor faced similar devastation. The USS *Pennsylvania* was in drydock undergoing repairs when the attack began. Despite her position, she was one of the first ships to open fire on the incoming Japanese planes. She sustained bomb damage and heavy strafing during the assault, resulting in the deaths of 31 servicemembers. After repairs in March 1942, she was sent back into action, continuing her service in the Pacific throughout World War II.

The *Utah* was moored on the opposite side of Ford Island. In 1931, she was demilitarized and converted into a target ship and outfitted with anti-aircraft guns for training purposes. She was struck by torpedoes early in the attack. Within moments, she capsized and sank, resulting in the loss of 58 crew members. The USS *Utah* was never salvaged and remains submerged where she sank, a silent memorial to those who perished.

The repair ship USS *Vestal* was moored next to the USS *Arizona*. Although not a primary target, she was hit by two Japanese bombs and received additional damage from the force and heat of Arizona's explosion. 7 of her sailors were killed. Despite the chaos and destruction, the crew of the *Vestal* played a critical role in rescuing sailors from the *Arizona*.

With the attack, the Japanese had put out of action all seven battleships present on "Battleship Row." Two, *Maryland* and *Tennessee*, were repaired in a matter of weeks, as was the *Pennsylvania*. However, three were under repair for a year or more. *Oklahoma* and *Arizona* would never return to service. Even with the addition of three more battleships brought around from the Atlantic, the Japanese battleline was assured of absolute superiority in the critical months to come.

I cannot imagine the shock and chaos that gripped Pearl Harbor eighty-three years ago today. I can't imagine the smoke, the flames, the rush of torpedoes, the broken ships and planes, and men running to their battle stations, running to fight, and not knowing what would happen next. I can't imagine the burns, the broken bones, or the bodies covered with oil. The sacrifices made by America's Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen, both past and present, **and many civilians**, can never truly be measured, but they certainly can be appreciated. Their histories can be retold and their memories kept alive, which is why ceremonies like this are so important. Thank you.



*Left: Auburn Area Honor Guard
(Courtesy of Michael Brennan).*

Pearl Harbor cont.

Natalie Brennan's Speech

Thank you all for coming today on this somber day of infamy. On this day, 83 years ago, the previously isolationist United States was thrown into a world war against Japan, and later Fascist Germany and Italy, and their allies, in the deadliest war in human history that cost a grand total of seventy million people.

Today, 83 years ago, we lost 2,403 good Americans, Vern Knipp was one of them. Knipp was aboard the battleship USS *Oklahoma* on that day. On the morning of 12/7/1941, Vern was last seen in the ship's weight room when the first of nine modified torpedoes slammed into the ship's port hull. Vern was killed instantly, but he was not the only life lost aboard. Because of how many torpedoes struck the ship in the short amount of time, *Oklahoma* quickly began listing and in twelve minutes, had completely capsized. 429 sailors died within her hull, many of whom succumbed in the coming days to suffocation. Only 32 men were rescued. Vern's remains were recovered and placed into the Punchbowl Military Cemetery, as an unknown victim. Thankfully, with the new advances in forensic technology, Vern and many other unknown victims were identified through DNA testing, and returned to their families, where they now rest with their names restored.

But today also marks another anniversary, and unfortunately, this is the first of an infinite number of anniversaries where he will not be here. This year we lost a national treasure; a great man, a father, a grandfather, great and great-great grandfather, and a dear friend to many. Lieutenant Commander Lou Conter was the last of the battleship USS *Arizona* survivors. 83 years ago, Conter was a 20-year-old Quartermaster 3rd Class, whose task during the attack was to secure his station on the quarterdeck alongside his fellow shipmates before reporting to the bridge with Captain Franklin Van Valkenburg and Admiral Issac Kidd. Had he been five minutes earlier in completing his task, he would have been in the bridge at 08:09, when the ship was torn apart and gutted by a high altitude armor-piercing bomb that detonated in the forward ammunition magazine, incinerating everyone in the forward end and the bridge. Conter was the only Quartermaster 3rd Class to survive, and he participated in guiding survivors off the ship and even in the recovery efforts after the ship's fires were extinguished days later.

Many people will remember Lou Conter for surviving the battleship that contributed to over half of the fatalities on that day with 1,177 losses. However, if he were here now, he would have said that Pearl Harbor was only one day out of 37,230 days in his whole life. He got his wings in 1942, joined VP-11 Black Cat Squadron flying PBY-Catalina flying boats during the war, night fighting, strafing enemy convoys, sub-chasing and rescuing over 200 Australian Coastwatchers on the Sepik River in New Guinea. During the Sepik River Rescue, he even befriended the headhunter tribes in Papua New Guinea who offered to cook a twelve-year-old girl from a neighboring tribe for him and his crew (he politely declined this offer). His post-WWII career was also full of adventures; serving as advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, founding the SERE training that saved many downed airmen and POWs during the Vietnam War, including Commander James Stockdale, who, after being released from enemy captivity and returning to the states, called Lou up to thank him for being so tough on the students. Lou said that that moment was probably the best moment in his military career. In his civilian career, Lou was a businessman who worked in real estate, befriending many famous people, including the Rat Pack, and even Bing Crosby. To this day, I follow the Bing Crosby diet that Lou told me about: eat half on your plate and save the other half for later. I even find myself using his funny little catchphrases like 'watching the Idiot Tube' and seeing that big smile on his face whenever I think about it.

I had the honor and privilege of meeting Mr. Conter when he was 93 years old at a Navy League meeting when I was a junior in high school writing about President Franklin Roosevelt's 'Day of Infamy' speech. At this point I was beginning to take a deep interest in World War II and Pearl Harbor, so meeting Mr. Conter and many other veterans for me, at least from an outsider's perspective, was like meeting someone like Elvis or the Beatles. Since I was the only young person there, I caught Mr. Conter's attention, and he began quizzing me on the history of the Second World War. After answering all of his questions correctly, he told me that he was at Pearl Harbor on the *Arizona*. A fast friendship began from there. I must have impressed him enough with my knowledge and passion that he invited my family to accompany him to that year's 73rd Pearl Harbor Anniversary, which we readily accepted. That year's ceremony, and the ones after, were perhaps the greatest moments of my 27 years; meeting his surviving shipmates (I fangirled so hard that I actually cried tears of joy), going onto the ship's memorial, seeing him stand before the shrine that listed all 1,177 of his shipmates, and having him point out the ones he knew so well who were lost that day. Even simply going to lunch with him in Grass Valley and visiting his house were special treats for me.

I was so moved by the fact that I, an insignificantly simple, shy, quiet, person was able to befriend a great man, a national treasure who saw and did so many big things when he was my age. Not too surprisingly, he was the inspiration for me to get my master's degree in World War II Studies. After the 73rd anniversary Pearl Harbor trip, I wanted to do something special for this man for Christmas. I made a vector illustration of a photograph of the ship's memorial in my high school graphic design class. When I presented it to him at that December Navy League meeting, he gently took my hand and asked why I did this for him. I was honest and told him that it was because he was my friend; I later got a letter from his wife saying that he loved it so much that he could not wait to show her. It hung in his house museum and was even showed during a Fox 40 news story on December 2, 2020.

All of those memories are somewhat dampened now; knowing that I will never get more days with him, no longer hearing his voice or his funny little catchphrases. Even saying those catchphrases, like Idiot Tube, I can't stop myself from feeling a twinge of sorrow now. I admit I am selfish in wanting him to still be here, but beneath all of the bereavement, I am glad that he is able to be with his wife, son, shipmates, and comrades now.

During his funeral, Pearl Harbor historian Dan Martinez brought up a conversation that he had had with Mr. Conter regarding where he wanted to be laid to rest: with his wife in Grass Valley, or on the *Arizona* with his shipmates. Mr. Conter had said that he felt like he was letting his shipmates down by wanting to be buried with his wife. Part of me wondered what I would have said if he told me about this, and I think I found an answer. His shipmates would probably tell him to be with his wife; that he got to live his life, get married, have a family when many of them were unable to. A small part of Mr. Conter will always remain at Pearl Harbor, he left a piece of his twenty-year-old self there that day, but he lived many days after, living to be 102 (I don't doubt he would have kept on going if he could); so, I think his shipmates would have been happy for him, being able to be buried next to his wife.

So, as somber as today is in history, it is even more so now that we all lost a man who was not only there but was loved dearly by all who knew him, not just for his illustrious military career, but for being such a sweet man with a big heart and a bright-eyed charming smile. I don't know about anyone else, but I am beyond honored to have called Lou Conter a dear friend. I made him a promise that I would continue his story and those of his comrades for the rest of my life. I hope that one day I can completely fulfill this promise; it's the very least I can do for everything Mr. Conter and everyone else who served can do. Rest well, all who were lost that day, and our dear friend Mr. Conter, don't party too hard in the next realm.

Pearl Harbor cont.



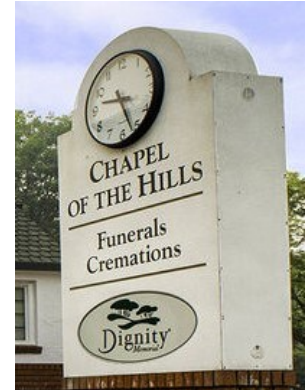
Above: Table dedicated to the USS Arizona (Courtesy of Michael Brennan).

Below: The grave of USS Oklahoma sailor Vern Knipp (Courtesy of Michael Brennan).



Special Thanks to Our Community Affiliates

Special thanks goes to one of our Community Affiliates, Lassila Funeral Chapel, Chapel of the Hills, and TGH Aviation. Your partnership with the Placer County Council Navy League is most appreciated.



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Thank You For Reading!



Above: Portrait of Lou Conter at New Auburn Cemetery's Pearl Harbor Ceremony (Courtesy of Michael Brennan).