



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors
December 14, 2015

“The ugly truth is revealed that fear is the foundation of obedience.” Churchill 1899

“To know how to command obedience is a very different thing from making them obey. Obedience is not the product of fear, but of understanding, and understanding is based on knowledge.” Brigadier-General S.L.A. Marshall 1950

“Fear is the beginning of wisdom” Union General William T. Sherman 1864

“You are not all going to die. Death must not be feared. Every man is frightened at first in battle. Some men are cowards, but they fight just the same or get the hell scared out of them. The real hero is the man who fights even though he is scared. The real man never lets the fear of death over-power his honor, his duty to his country and his innate manhood.” General George S. Patton, Jr., June 1944, speech to the Third Army

Our speaker for December is Bernie Siehling. Mr. Siehling, as a teenager (9-14), lived in Hitler’s Germany. He has made a previous presentation at the Grand Rapids Public Museum. He relishes an interruptive audience.

MEETINGS take place the second Monday of every month at the **Riverfront Hotel Grand Rapids** 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800), dinner at 7:00 (1900), business meeting 7:15 (1915), and program at 8:00 (2000).

GENERAL STAFF

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Company Notes

- ◆ **Dues to remain a member of the Company are still only \$40. They can sent to our Treasurer or given to him at our meeting.**
- ◆ **Brian Castner’s *The Long Walk* operatic adaptation had its debut at Opera Saratoga. The production moves to Opera Utah for the 2016/2017 season. Seen as a masterpiece.**
- ◆ **Mark Thompson www.MaritimeHelp.com advocates for maritime rights of injured veterans and workers. Injuries or accidents that occur on ships or other seagoing vessels are governed by “Maritime Law” not civil laws. Interesting site.**

Cemetery Watchman

Those left behind after the fighting find ways to remember those who had made the greatest sacrifice. The following is a recollection of an afternoon spent in service to aid those who will always remember those who have fallen.

"My friend Kevin and I are volunteers at a National cemetery in Oklahoma and put in a few days a month in a 'slightly larger' uniform. Today had been a long, long day and I just wanted to get the day over with and go down to Smokey's and have a cold one. Sneaking a look at my watch, I saw the time, 16:55. Five minutes to go before the cemetery gates are closed for the day.

Full dress was hot in the August sun, Oklahoma summertime was as bad as ever--the heat and humidity at the same level--both too high. I saw the car pull into the drive, '69 or '70 model Cadillac Deville, looked factory-new. It pulled into the parking lot at a snail's pace. An old woman got out so slow I thought she was paralyzed; she had a cane and a sheaf of flowers--about four or five bunches as best I could tell.

I couldn't help myself. The thought came unwanted, and left a slightly bitter taste: 'She's going to spend an hour, and for this old soldier, my hip hurts like hell and I'm ready to get out of here right now!' But for this day, my duty was to assist anyone coming in. Kevin would lock the 'In' gate and if I could hurry the old biddy along, we might make it to Smokey's in time. I broke post attention. My hip made gritty noises when I took the first step and the pain went up a notch. I must have made a real military sight: middle-aged man with a small pot gut and half a limp, in marine full-dress uniform, which had lost its razor crease about thirty minutes after I began the watch at the cemetery.

I stopped in front of her, halfway up the walk. She looked up at me with an old woman's squint. 'Ma'am, may I assist you in any way?'

She took long enough to answer. 'Yes, son. Can you carry these flowers? I seem to be moving a tad slow these days.'

'My pleasure, ma'am.'

She looked again. 'Marine, where were you stationed?'

'Vietnam, ma'am. Ground-pounder. '69 to '71.'

She looked at me closer. 'Wounded in action, I see. Well done, Marine. I'll be as quick as I can.'

I lied a little bigger: 'No hurry, ma'am.'

She smiled and winked at me. 'Son, I'm 85-years-old and I can tell a lie from a long way off. Let's get this done. Might be the last time I can do this. My name's Joanne Wieserman, and I've a few Marines I'd like to see one more time.'

'Yes, ma'am. At your service.'

She headed for the World War I section, stopping at a stone. She picked one of the flower bunches out of my arm and laid it on top of the stone. She murmured something I couldn't quite make out. The name on the marble was Donald S. Davidson, USMC: France, 1918. She turned away and made a straight line for the World War II section, stopping at one stone I saw a tear slowly tracking its way down

her cheek. She put a bunch on a stone; the name was Stephen X. Davidson, USMC, 1943. She went up the row a ways and laid another bunch on a stone, Stanley J. Wieserman, USMC, 1944. She paused for a second and more tears flowed. 'Two more, son, and we'll be done.'

I almost didn't say anything, but, 'Yes, ma'am. Take your time.'

She looked confused. 'Where's the Vietnam section, son? I seem to have lost my way.'

I pointed with my chin. 'That way, ma'am.'

'Oh,' she chuckled quietly. 'Son, me and old age ain't too friendly.' She headed down the walk I'd pointed at. She stopped at a couple of stones before she found the ones she wanted. She placed a bunch on Larry Wieserman, USMC, 1968, and the last on Darrel Wieserman, USMC, 1970. She stood there and murmured a few words I still couldn't make out and more tears flowed. 'OK, son, I'm finished. Get me back to my car and you can go home.'

'Yes, ma'am. If I may ask, were those your kinfolk?'

She paused. 'Yes, Donald Davidson was my father, Stephen was my uncle, Stanley was my husband, Larry and Darrel were our sons. All killed in action, all Marines. She stopped! Whether she had finished, or couldn't finish, I don't know. She made her way to her car, slowly and painfully. I waited for a polite distance to come between us and then double-timed it over to Kevin, waiting by the car.

'Get to the 'Out' gate quick. I have something I've got to do.' Kevin started to say something, but saw the look I gave him. He broke the rules to get us down the service road fast. We beat her. She hadn't made it around the rotunda yet. 'Kevin, stand at attention next to the gatepost. Follow my lead.' I humped it across the drive to the other post.

When the Cadillac came pattering around from the hedges and began the short straight traverse to the gate, I called in my best gunny's voice: 'TenHut! Present Haaaarms!' I have to hand it to Kevin; he never blinked an eye--full dress attention and a salute that would make his DI proud. She drove through that gate with two old worn-out soldiers giving her a send-off she deserved, for service rendered to her country, and for knowing duty, honor and sacrifice far beyond the realm of most. I am not sure, but I think I saw a salute returned from that Cadillac. Instead of 'The End,' just think of 'Taps.'"

In the Netherlands, Liberation Day (Dutch: *Bevrijdingsdag*) is celebrated each year on May 5 to mark the end of the occupation by Nazi Germany during World War II. The nation was liberated largely by the First Canadian Army, which included in addition to the Canadian forces, the British I Corps, and the 1st Polish Armored Division, as well as, at various times, American, Belgian, Dutch and Czechoslovak troops. Parts of the country, in particular the south-east, were liberated by the British Second Army, which included American and Polish airborne forces, and French airbornes.

After the liberation in 1945, Liberation Day was commemorated every five years. Finally, in 1990, the day was declared to be a national holiday, when the Liberation would be commemorated and celebrated every year. On May 4, the Dutch hold "*Dodenherdenking*", Remembrance of the Dead for the people who fought and died during World War II and wars in general. There are remembrance gatherings all over the cities and throughout the country. The most renown is at the National Monument on Dam Square in Amsterdam and at the *Waaltdorpervlakte* on the dunes near The Hague,

one of the infamous Nazi execution places. Throughout the country, two minutes of silence are observed at 8 p.m. On May 5, the liberation is celebrated with memorial services for "the men who died to liberate Holland." The day concludes with a concert. The final piece is always "*Il Silenzio*," a memorial piece commissioned by the Dutch and first played in 1965 on the 20th anniversary of Holland's liberation. It has been the concluding piece of the memorial concert ever since and festivals are held at most places in the Netherlands, with parades of veterans and 14 musical festivals through the whole country. This year the soloist was a 13-year-old Dutch girl, Melissa Venema, backed by André Rieu and his orchestra (the Royal Orchestra of the Netherlands). This beautiful concert piece is based upon the original version of taps and was composed by Italian composer Nino Rossi. To hear her play go to this web site <<http://www.flixy.com/trumpet-solo-melissa-venema.htm>>

About six miles from Maastricht lie 8,301 American soldiers who died in "Operation Market Garden" in the fall/winter of 1944. Every one of the men buried in the cemetery, as well as those in the Canadian and British military cemeteries, have been adopted by a Dutch family who mind the grave, decorate it, and keep alive the memory of the soldier they have adopted. It is even the custom to keep a portrait of "their" soldier in a place of honor in their home.

Heavy Bombers WWII

The Allies had the use of three different heavy bombers during most of WWII. At our recent Open Mess, member Richard Foster had a display of all three bombers with their specifications. A very impressive visual presentation made more so by the fact that you could make comparisons. The B-17 was most noteworthy because it was a beautiful looking plane, robust. The other two, with their slab-sided fuselages and high-mounted wings looked positively ugly; not something you would be proud to either fly or be a crew member of, until you read the specifications. Looking at them critically, I wondered why we even bothered to make the B-17. It has since joined part of the mythological legends of WWII as one of the weapons that won the war, along with the super-secret Norden Bombsight, the Navy's Mk 14 torpedo and the brilliant General Douglas MacArthur. All had failed to live up to their expectations and yet their faults have been ignored or glossed over while their limited contributions have been lionized.



The B-17 (as seen on the left) has the following specifications:

Empty weight: 35,000 pounds
Takeoff weight: 55,000 pounds
Engines: 4-Wright R-1820@1200 HP
Range: 2000 miles
Max speed: 280 mph
Cruise speed: 180 mph
Service ceiling: 35,000 feet
Crew: 10
Armament: 13-50 cal. machine guns
Bomb Load: 6000 pounds

In its defense, the B-17 was easy to fly and could sustain horrific damage and still return to base. 12,732 of these planes were produced during the war at a unit cost of \$238,329 (1945 dollars). They dropped 640,036 tons of bombs and were

primarily used by the 8th Air Force over Northern Europe flying mostly daylight missions. Luftwaffe fighter pilots likened attacking a B-17 combat box formation to encountering a *fliegendes Stachelschwein*, "flying porcupine", with dozens of machine guns on a combat box formation of bombers, aimed at them from almost every direction. However, the use of this rigid formation meant that individual aircraft could not engage in evasive maneuvers: they had to fly constantly in a straight line, which made them vulnerable to the German flak. Moreover, German fighter aircraft later used the tactic of high-speed strafing passes rather than engaging with individual aircraft to inflict damage with minimum risk.

Like our under-armed and thin-skinned Sherman tanks, the B-17 Flying Fortress, took 10 men into battle, with a payload that belies the risk. To feed their defensive armament they carried 11,000 rounds of 50 cal. ammo at a weight of almost 2,750 pounds, decreasing their available bomb load yet providing a more lethal defensive round than the British .303, carried by the Avro Lancaster.

The B-24 Liberator was a more effective bomber than the B-17. Over 19,000 units were produced. With over 8,000 manufactured by Ford Motor Company at its Willow Run plant. It had the largest assembly line in the world (3,500,000 sq. ft). At its peak in 1944, the Willow Run plant produced one B-24 per hour and 650 B-24s per month. By 1945, Ford made 70% of all B-24s in two nine-hour shifts. Pilots and crews slept on 1,300 cots at Willow Run waiting for their B-24s to roll off the assembly line. It holds the distinction of being the most produced heavy bomber in history and the most-produced American military aircraft. Production took place at 5 plants. At one time, one B-24 was being produced every 100 minutes, around the clock, a rate so large that production exceeded the military's ability to use the aircraft. It has been said that more aluminum, aircrew and effort went into the B-24 than any other aircraft in history. Its new fuselage was intentionally designed around twin bomb bays, each one being the same size and capacity of the B-17 bomb bay.

The specifications of the B-24 shown left:



Empty weight: 37,000 pounds
Takeoff weight: 65,000 pounds
Engines: 4-PW R-1830@1000 HP
Range: 2200 miles
Max speed: 290 mph
Cruise speed: 190 mph
Service ceiling: 28,000 feet
Crew: 10
Armament: 10-50 cal. machine guns
Bomb load: 8000 pounds
Unit cost: \$297,627 (1945 dollars)

The Liberator was difficult to fly and had poor low speed performance. It also had a lower ceiling and was less robust than its far

better known counterpart, the Boeing B-17. While aircrews tended to prefer the B-17, General Staff preferred the B-24, and procured it for a wide variety of roles. It was a very versatile aircraft and had many variants. It made a significant contribution to Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic against German U-boats. They had the ability to undertake surprise air attacks against surfaced submarines. For much of 1944, the B-24 was the predominant U.S. Strategic Air Forces (USSTAF), formerly the Eighth Air Force, choice in the Combined Bomber Offensive against Germany, forming nearly half of its heavy bomber strength in the ETO prior to August and most of the Italian-based force.

Although the B-24 only dropped 463,544 tons of bombs against the 640,000 tons dropped by the B-17. It only took almost 116,000 B-24 flights versus 213,345 B-17 missions to deliver their respective payloads. A decrease of almost 100,000 sorties. If the B-24 had been tasked to carry the B-17 bomb loads, only 160,000 flights would have been needed. A decrease of over 53,000 flights, with a corresponding decrease in lost or captured air crew!

But the Avro Lancaster deserves the distinction of being the most effective bomber for a number of reasons. A long, unobstructed bomb bay meant that the Lancaster could take the largest bombs used by the RAF, including the 4,000 lb, 8,000 lb, and 12,000 lb blockbusters, loads often supplemented with smaller bombs or incendiaries. The versatility of the Lancaster was such that it was chosen to equip the 617 Squadron and was modified to carry the Upkeep "Bouncing bomb" designed by Barnes Wallis for Operation Chastise, the attack on Germany Ruhr Valley dams. Although the Lancaster was primarily a night bomber, it excelled in many other roles, including daylight precision bombing: in the latter role some Lancasters were adapted to carry the 12,000 lb Tallboy and then the 22,000 lb Grand Slam earthquake bombs. The specifications of the Lancaster (shown on the left):



Empty weight: 36,400 pounds
Takeoff weight: 68,000 pounds
Engines: 4 Rolls-Royce V-12@1280 HP
Range: 2,500 miles
Max speed: 282 mph
Cruise speed: 200 mph
Service ceiling: 21,400 feet
Crew: 7
Armament: 8-.303 caliber machine guns
Bomb load: 14,000 pounds!!
Unit cost: 50,000£=\$147,100, converted to 1945 dollars £=\$2.942

The "Lanc", as it was affectionately known, was the most successful of the WWII night bombers, delivering 681,645 tons of bombs in 156,000 sorties. It is difficult to make comparisons with the previous two bombers regarding bomb loads because the Lancaster carried bombs the B-17 and B-24 would find impossible to hold. Only 7,377 were produced in English factories. Engine production could not keep pace with completed airframes so Rolls-Royce licensed Packard to build the V-12 liquid-cooled Merlin engine after Henry Ford refused to have anything to do with it (he detested the English). The Merlin was an amazing engine and it consumed an enormous volume of air at full power (equivalent to the volume of a single-decker bus per minute). With the exhaust gases exiting at 1,300 mph it was realized that useful thrust could be gained simply by angling the gases backwards instead of venting sideways. During tests, 70 pounds of thrust at 300 mph, or roughly 70 horsepower was obtained. When employed in the Spitfire it increased the maximum speed at sea level by 10 mph to 360 mph, and the Lanc had four of them.

Another advantage enjoyed by the British was their bombsight. The Mark XIV Computing Bomb Sight was a vector bombsight developed and used by the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command during World War II. Developed in 1939, the Mk. XIV started replacing the World War I-era Course Setting Bomb Sight in 1942. The Mk. XIV required only 10 seconds of straight flight before the drop, and could account for shallow climbs and dives as well. More importantly, the Mk. XIV sighting unit was much smaller than the Course Setting sight, which allowed it to be mounted on a gyro-

stabilization platform. This kept the sight pointed at the target even as the bomber maneuvered, dramatically increasing its accuracy and ease of sighting. The Mk. XIV was theoretically less accurate than the contemporary Norden bombsight, but was smaller, easier to use, much more quick-acting, and better suited for night bombing. It equipped the majority of the RAF's bomber fleet.

The US used the Norden. In testing the Norden demonstrated a circular error probability (CEP) of 75 ft, an astonishing performance for that era. CEP is a measure of a weapon system's precision. It is defined as the radius of a circle, whose boundary is expected to include the landing points of 50% of the rounds. However, it was not possible to achieve this level of accuracy in combat conditions, with the average CEP in 1943 being 1,200 ft. Both the Navy and Air Forces had to give up on the idea of pinpoint attacks during the war. The Navy turned to dive bombing and skip bombing to attack ships, while the Air Forces developed the lead bomber concept to improve accuracy. Nevertheless, the Norden's reputation as a pin-point device lived on, due in no small part to Norden's own advertising of the device after secrecy was reduced during the war.

The Norden bombsight had been considered a critical wartime instrument by the United States Army Air Forces, and American bombardiers were required to take an oath during their training stating that they would defend its secret with their own life, if needed. In spite of the security precautions, the entire Norden system had been passed to the Germans before the war had even started. Herman W. Lang, a German spy, had been employed by the Carl L. Norden Company. During a visit to Germany in 1938, Lang conferred with German military authorities and reconstructed plans of the confidential materials from memory. In 1941, Lang, along with the 32 other German agents of the Duquesne Spy Ring, was arrested by the FBI and convicted in the largest espionage prosecution in U.S. history. He received a sentence of 18 years in prison on espionage charges and a two-year concurrent sentence under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Later in the war, Luftwaffe bombers used the Carl Zeiss Lotfernrohr 7, or Lotfe 7, which had an advanced mechanical system similar to the Norden bombsight, but was much simpler to operate and maintain.

When Jimmy Doolittle took over command of the 8th Air Force from Ira Eaker in early 1944, precision bombing attempts were dropped. The Norden just did not live up to the USAAF expectations. Area bombing, like the RAF efforts, was widely used with 750 and then 1000 bomber raids against large targets. The main targets were railroad marshaling yards (27.4% of the bomb tonnage dropped), airfields (11.6%), oil refineries (9.5%), and military installations (8.8%). To some degree the targets were secondary missions. Doolittle used the bombers as an irresistible target to draw up Luftwaffe fighters into the ever-increasing swarms of Allied long-distance fighters. These missions decimated the Luftwaffe; later missions were carried out at lower altitudes, especially in bad weather when the 10 GHz frequency H2X radar could be used. In spite of abandoning precision attacks, accuracy nevertheless improved. By 1945, the 8th was putting up to 60% of its bombs within 1,000 ft, a CEP of about 900 ft.

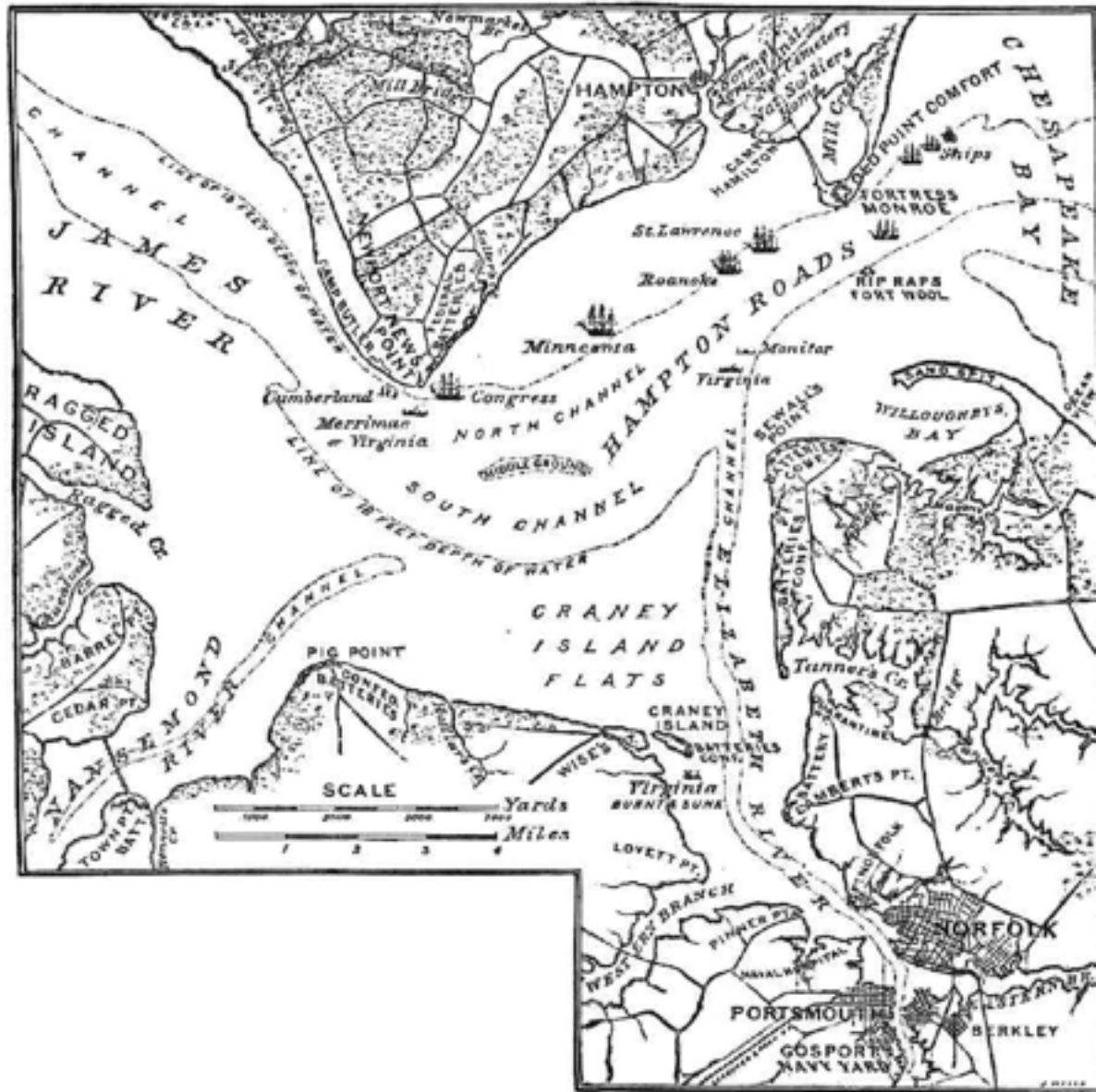
While a workhorse of the Allied bombing effort, the B-24 was not very popular with American air crews who preferred the more rugged B-17. Among the issues with the B-24 was its inability to sustain heavy damage and remain aloft. The wings in particular proved vulnerable to enemy fire and if hit in critical areas could give way completely. It was not uncommon to see a B-24 falling from the sky with its wings folded upwards like a butterfly. Also, the aircraft proved highly susceptible to fires as many of its fuel tanks were mounted in the upper parts of the fuselage. In addition, crews nicknamed the B-24 the "Flying Coffin" as it possessed only one exit which was located near the tail of the aircraft. This made it difficult or impossible for the flight crew to escape a crippled B-24. But with continuous fighter cover available the B-24 became the dominant bomber in the ETO as its weak points no longer came into play.

Battle of Hampton Roads

March 9, 1862 was an auspicious day in naval history for it heralded a new era in fighting ships. Although there would be a short transition period when newly built craft were a hybrid of sail and steam power; gone forever was the need for countries to maintain a stockpile of wood products in order to build and repair wind-powered vessels. This day also proved that the prevailing offensive weaponry needed to be much improved in order to defeat the newly emerging men-of-war.

Hampton Roads is the name of the body of water where the James, Nansemond and Elizabeth Rivers meet before they enter Chesapeake Bay. At the entrance to the bay the Union Forces had a fort that controlled the channel approach even though it was in a Confederate state. President Lincoln had Fort Monroe immediately reinforced after South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861,

thereby preventing it from falling into Confederate hands. It was held by Union forces throughout the Civil War. On April 20 the Union Navy burned and evacuated the Gosport Navy Yard, destroying nine ships in the process, but keeping Fort Monroe at Old Point Comfort as the last bastion of the United States in Tidewater Virginia. The Confederacy's occupation of Norfolk gave it a major shipyard and thousands of heavy guns. The Union then dispatched a fleet to Hampton Roads to enforce a blockade of the two major ports of the Confederacy, Norfolk and Richmond. The South needed to break that blockade.



When steam propulsion began to be applied to warships, naval constructors renewed their interest in armor for their vessels. Experiments had been tried with armor during the Crimean War (1853-56) but there had yet been a battle between two iron ships. The Confederacy could not match the industrial North in numbers of ships at sea, so they would have to compete by building vessels that would be individually superior to those of the Union. The needed edge would be provided by armor.

The Confederates salvaged the wreck of the scuttled steam frigate *USS Merrimack* that the fleeing Federal Navy had burnt to the waterline. The wreck was surveyed and her lower hull and machinery were discovered to be undamaged. She was converted into a casemate ironclad where all the guns were carried on a single deck, firing through fixed gunports and protected by a sloping iron shield. The casemate was built up of 24 inches of oak and pine in several layers, topped with two 2-inch layers of iron plating oriented perpendicular to each other, and angled at 36 degrees from the horizontal to deflect enemy shells. This ship was seen as an intermediate stage between the traditional broadside frigate and the upcoming modern warships.

The ironclad's casemate had 14 gun ports, three each in the bow and stern, one firing directly along the ship's centerline, the two others angled at 45° from the center line; these six bow and stern gun ports had exterior iron shutters installed to protect their cannon. There were four gun ports on each broadside; their protective iron shutters remained uninstalled during both days of the Battle of Hampton Roads. The battery consisted of four muzzle-loading single-banded Brooke rifles and six smoothbore 9-inch Dahlgren guns salvaged from the old *Merrimack*. Two of the rifles, the bow and stern pivot guns, were 7-inch caliber and weighed 14,500 pounds each. They fired a 104-pound shell. The other two were 6.4-inch cannon of about 9,100 pounds, one on each broadside. The 9-inch Dahlgrens were mounted three to a side; each weighed approximately 9,200 pounds and could fire a 72.5-pound shell up to a range of 3,357 yards at an elevation of 15°. The two amidship Dahlgrens nearest the boiler furnaces were fitted-out to fire heated shot. The former federal frigate was renamed the *CSS Virginia* and was equipped with a naval battering ram. It had a turning radius of about 1 mile and required 45 minutes to complete a full circle, which would later prove to be a major handicap in battle with the far more nimble *USS Monitor*.

The Battle of Hampton Roads began on March 8, 1862, when *Virginia* engaged the blockading Union fleet. Despite an all-out effort to complete her, the new ironclad still had workmen on board when she sailed into Hampton Roads. The first Union ship to be engaged by *Virginia* was the all-wood, sail-powered *USS Cumberland*, which was first crippled during a furious cannon exchange, and then rammed in her forward starboard bow by *Virginia*. As *Cumberland* began to sink, *Virginia*'s iron ram was broken off, causing a bow leak. Seeing what had happened to *Cumberland*, the captain of *USS Congress* ordered his frigate into shallower water, where she soon grounded. Fleeing the carnage the steam frigate *USS Minnesota* became stranded on a sandbar. *Virginia* did not emerge from the battle unscathed. Her bow was leaking from the loss of her ram; shots from the *USS Cumberland*, *USS Congress*, and the shore-based Union batteries had riddled her smokestack, reducing her already slow speed; two of her heavy cannon were put out of commission by shell hits and a number of her armor plates had been loosened. With the receding tide the *Virginia*, with her 22 foot draft, retired from the conflict for fear of grounding and returned to Norfolk to effect repairs; with the expectation of returning the next day and completing the destruction of the remaining Union blockaders.

Late that evening the *USS Monitor* arrived at Fort Monroe. This entirely new design was an iron-hulled steamship with a revolving turret. It housed two 11 inch smoothbore Dahlgren cannons protected by 8 layers of 1 inch curved iron plate bolted together. These were mounted in a cylindrical turret, 20 ft in diameter, 9 ft high. The whole rotated on a central spindle, and was moved by a steam engine that could be controlled by one man. She drew less than half of the *Virginia* and was more maneuverable. Ordered to defend the *Minnesota*, the *Monitor* placed herself in front of the frigate and waited for the *Virginia* as she came out of the morning fog. The Confederates believed the strange craft—which one Confederate sailor mocked as "a cheese on a raft"—to be a boiler being towed from the *Minnesota*, not realizing the nature of their opponent. Soon, however, it was apparent that they had no choice but to fight her. The first shot of the engagement was fired at *Monitor* by *Virginia*. The

shot flew past *Monitor* and struck *Minnesota*, which answered with a broadside; thus began what would be a lengthy engagement.

After fighting for hours, mostly at close range, neither ship could overcome the other. The armor of both ships proved adequate. In part, this was because each was handicapped in her

offensive capabilities. The *Virginia* had not expected to fight another armored vessel, so her guns were supplied only with shell rather than armor-piercing shot. *Monitor*'s guns were used with the standard service charge of only 15 lb of powder, which did not give the projectile sufficient momentum to penetrate her opponent's armor. Tests conducted after the battle showed that the Dahlgren guns could be operated safely and efficiently with charges of as much as 30 lb. The battle finally ceased when a shell from *Virginia* struck the pilot house of *Monitor* and exploded, driving fragments of paint and iron through the viewing slits into the captain's eyes and temporarily blinding him. As no one else could see to commandeer the ship, *Monitor* was forced to draw off. The executive officer took over, and *Monitor* returned to the fight. In the period of command confusion, however, the crew of *Virginia* believed that their opponent had withdrawn. Although *Minnesota* was still aground, the falling tide meant that she was out of reach. Furthermore, *Virginia* had suffered enough damage to require extensive repair. Convinced that the South had won the day, the *Virginia* went back to Norfolk. At about this time, *Monitor* returned, only to discover her opponent apparently giving up the fight. Convinced that *Virginia* was quitting and with orders to protect the *Minnesota* and not risk his ship unnecessarily, she did not pursue. Thus, each side misinterpreted the moves of the other, and as a result each claimed victory.



Both forces considered how best to eliminate the threat posed by its opponent, and after *Virginia* returned from a month in drydock each side tried to goad the other into attacking under unfavorable circumstances. Consequently, each vessel spent the next month in what amounted to posturing. Not only did the two ships not fight each other, neither ship ever fought again after March 9. The final toll of that encounter was 261 Union sailors killed with 108 wounded. One frigate was sunk, one was damaged, and one sloop-of-war was sunk. The Confederates had 78 killed with 17 wounded and one ironclad damaged. The end came first for *Virginia*. Because the blockade was unbroken, Norfolk was of little strategic use to the Confederacy. Before adequate preparations could be made, the Confederate Army abandoned the city on May 9, without consulting anyone from the Navy. *Virginia*'s draft was too great to permit her to pass up the river to Richmond. She was trapped and could only be captured or sunk by the Union Navy. Rather than allow either, she was towed upstream and set afire. She burned through the rest of the day and most of the following night; shortly before dawn, the flames reached her magazine, and she blew up. *Monitor* likewise did not survive the year. She was ordered to Beaufort, North Carolina to take part in the blockade there. She sank while being towed through high winds and waves. 16 sailors went down with her in the early hours of December 31, 1862.

The battle received worldwide attention, and had an immediate effect on navies around the world. The preeminent naval powers, Great Britain and France, halted further construction of all wooden-hulled ships, and others followed suit. A new type of warship was being produced, the monitor, based on the principle of the original. The use of a small number of very heavy guns, mounted so that they could fire in all directions was first demonstrated by *Monitor* but soon became



standard in warships of all types. Shipbuilders also incorporated rams into the designs of warship hulls for the rest of the century.

Bill Sefton, who survived the D-Day Invasion, the Siege of Bastogne and other harrowing World War II battles before building Grand Rapids' largest advertising agency, joked about having a "last man standing" drink from his bottle of Johnnie Walker whiskey.

George William "Bill" Sefton had that final drink less than a half-hour before he died on Sunday, Dec. 6, said Susie Sefton, his daughter. He was 93. Sefton, who had been in declining health in recent weeks, bit down on the whiskey-soaked swab she gave him, she said.

It was a fitting departure for Sefton, who parachuted into Normandy five hours before the seaborne D-Day invasion began on Omaha Beach as a lieutenant in the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division.

Sefton later fought in the Netherlands in Operation Market Garden and was trapped in the Siege of Bastogne during the climactic Battle of the Bulge. He wrote about his experiences in a book, "It was My

War (I'll Remember It the Way I Want To!)" He met his wife, Elizabeth Margaret (Beth) Huie, an army nurse on active duty, in Mourmelon, France.

He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster. His 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment won the American Distinguished Unit Citation, French Croix de Guerre with Palm, Belgian Croix de Guerre, and Netherlands Orange Lanyard.

Sefton was promoted to the rank of colonel and continued to serve in the Army Reserve for more than 25 years. He remained active in military reunions, hosting a 2014 reunion in Grand Rapids for the 70th anniversary of D-Day. He attended his last reunion in Kentucky this past June, his daughter said.

After the war, the Anderson, Indiana, native landed a job in Chicago with McCann-Erickson advertising agency. He and Beth moved to Grand Rapids in the 1950s, where he founded Sefton Associates, an advertising agency that grew to become the city's largest in its heyday. He sold the agency in 1988.

Sefton is survived by his 10 children, Mary Beth Sefton (Tom Edmonds), Michael Sefton (Betty), Amy Sefton (James Killus), Susie Sefton (Frank Burns), Laurie Sefton, Becky Sefton (Hubert Kraemer), Bill Sefton (Sharon), Sarah Simon (Ed), David Sefton (Crystal), Kathy Miller (Alex), 25 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren.

Bill was a long time member of the MCMH&C and the featured speaker at our 1989 Open Mess. He was a most pleasant dinner companion at the Company's monthly meetings and will be greatly missed. Upon first meeting him he threw a dinner roll at this writer and yelled "grenade!" Seconds later he smiled and muttered something about a Navy man not knowing enough to hit the deck.

