

Battleship Missouri Memorial

A place for retention, retirement



Capt. John Morris (left) of Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet promotes Lt. Cmdr. Paul A. Amoldo of Fleet and Industrial Supply Center San Diego onboard the Battleship Missouri Memorial



Since January 1999, numerous servicemembers have reenlisted, retired or held their promotion ceremonies onboard the "Mighty Mo" through a program started by the Battleship Missouri Memorial Association.



(Above) Clark Thompson briefs a reenlistment party onboard the Veranda Deck of the Battleship Missouri Memorial before a reenlistment ceremony.



(Right) AG1 Gary E. Warner of NAVPACMETOCEN raises a flag on the port side signal bridge with his father, Dan Warner of Hastings, Neb. as part of his reenlistment ceremony.

In January 1999, just seven months after the decommissioned battleship USS Missouri (BB 63) arrived in Pearl Harbor, it opened to the public as a memorial. Tourists, servicemembers and local Hawaiians alike jumped at the opportunity to climb onboard and see a legendary part of United States Navy history.

Since then numerous servicemembers have reenlisted, retired or held their promotion ceremonies onboard the historic "Mighty Mo."

Although the opportunity to hold those ceremonies on the Missouri Memorial has existed since the day it opened to the public, there was no actual program for reenlistments and retirements. However, Clark Thompson changed that a year and a half ago when he joined the team at the Missouri and began to build a foundation for the program.

"When I was active duty, I was in and out of Pearl Harbor - I was stationed on a few different ships out here and was also stationed at Naval Station Pearl Harbor," said Clark. "I know a lot of people in the harbor and also have experienced working as a Navy career counselor. I took my contacts and built a database here and combined them with the existing contacts," added Clark.

After starting up the program, Thompson looked for ways to improve it. At issue was holding reenlistments on the fantail in the hot sun and the problem with tourists walking through interrupting the ceremonies.

"I looked at it and thought, this is not the way it should be. I felt that the military deserved something a little bit better," explained Thompson.

Thompson was able to move the reenlistments up to the covered Veranda Deck away from tourist traffic. The Surrender Deck is also available for reenlistments, but Thompson suggests that they are done prior to opening to avoid the possible distraction from tourists.

"We get hundreds of people coming through, most wanting to see the Surrender Deck," said Thompson. "For the most part they are respectful, but there are some who aren't and it's not fair to the reenlistee."

He starts by greeting the party near the front gate and briefs them on what they will do onboard that day. From there, he escorts the party down the pier and to the forward bow.

"At that point, I like to share a little bit of the history of the ship," said Thompson. "I get a lot of folks who visit the Mighty Mo because of the history. They are aware that the surrender was signed onboard so there's a strong feeling of honor and dignity."

Thompson then takes the party to the Surrender Deck, if it is available, then turns it over to the reenlistment party to conduct their ceremony.

"There are things that we look at that make for a quality reenlistment," said Thompson. "Sometimes we get reenlisting officers who have not done it before. If they look like they need some help, I will jump in. The wording for the ceremony is available upon request," he added.

Upon conclusion of the ceremony, the party has the option to perform a formal flag raising over the Missouri from the signal bridge.

"I come across a lot of people who are not familiar with how the halyards work," said Thompson. "I am there to teach them how to fold and raise the flag properly. Although we like to have the reenlistees raise their own flag, we try to get family members involved, too. That always gets a positive response."

After the ceremony, if it is still early morning and the ship is not too crowded, the party has the option to go down to the foc'sle to take pictures in front of the number one gun turret. Flag certificates are also available for a \$5 fee.

"I had a lot of friends stationed on the Missouri so this means a lot to me," said Aerographer's Mate 1st Class Gary E. Warner of Naval Pacific Meteorology and Oceanography Center, Pearl Harbor who reenlisted on Missouri Memorial Aug. 10. "It's the last of the battleships and is a great honor for me to be onboard. It has been part of our history for many years, not just Navy history, but world history," said Warner.

Retirements are also held onboard the historic ship, but are more time-consuming and require a scheduled familiarization tour beforehand. Thompson suggests they be scheduled at least four to six weeks in advance to be sure the equipment is available. It is also helpful that the retirees have a speech prepared to help them.

"I get people who try to get up there and wing it," said Thompson. "Unless you are a very dynamic speaker, I suggest you prepare a speech. In fact, one may want to prepare two in the event that you get up there and get a little misty-eyed."

"Retirements are not just for the retiree, they are for the whole family, your command, your shipmates, your friends and your Ohana," said Thompson. "A lot of people are involved in this. If a service member is married, his spouse has probably spent a good portion of his naval career with him. So this is every bit his or her retirement ceremony as well. It's important to recognize them, too."

Thompson averages three and a half reenlistments a day, but still wants to increase his numbers.

He is in the process of transitioning his files to email, but for now operates through voicemail. He hopes that once he is online, he will be inundated with requests.

Said Thompson, "I spend a good portion of my day on the ship and I do not have anybody here to answer the phones. We are a non-profit organization and we manage with what we have."

Thompson suggests that when people call to make a request, they leave a detailed message and wait at least two working days for him to get back to them.

"I've got the coolest job in the world, I really do," said Thompson. "I am so excited about being here. Not only am I a history buff, but I am able to share my knowledge of history and the history of the ship."

"Twenty years in the Navy, this is a great way for me to do something for not just the Navy, but all branches of the military," added Thompson. "I get to see some really dynamic people. The country is in good hands and that is very reassuring."

For more information on how to schedule a reenlistment on the Missouri Memorial, call Clark Thompson at 455-1600 (ext. 225).

Story and Photos by J02 Erin M. Tholen