

Navy vets dedicate ship's anchor in Quincy

By Shaun Robinson The Patriot Ledger

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QUINCY — Bob Cieri was 17 years old when he joined the Navy and first stepped on board the heavy cruiser USS Newport News about six decades ago.

He wasn't too scared.

“At that age you're invincible,” Cieri said. He served on the ship in Cuba during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. “You think nothing's going to happen to you.”

Cieri never saw combat. But one of the ship's tasks was to enforce a blockade of the island, and in one case, they nearly fired on a ship that wouldn't stop.

In Quincy Saturday morning, a group of local veterans unveiled two plaques commemorating the service of another heavy cruiser, the USS Des Moines. Cieri and dozens more veterans, as well as local elected officials, were on hand for the ceremony.

One plaque will sit next to the ship's 22,500 pound anchor, which is in the middle of the Route 3A rotary at the base of Fore River Bridge in Quincy. The other is on the deck of the USS Salem, which is docked nearby and has been converted into a museum.

The Salem is the only heavy cruiser still afloat; all of the others, including the Des Moines and the Newport News, have been scrapped. Several heavy cruisers, including the Des Moines, were built in the Fore River Shipyard during the height of ship production there.

At a second ceremony on board the Salem, attendees heard from Valerie Blouin, the president of an association that commemorates the link between the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet and a town on the French Riviera called Villefranche-sur-Mer.

While on tour in the Mediterranean Sea in the 1950s, the Sixth Fleet – which included the Des Moines and the Salem – docked in Villefranche and a woman who lived there, Germaine Brau, would visit the sailors. She was known as a sort of mother figure. She is also Blouin’s grandmother.

Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch, who was at the ceremony Saturday, said the city has a legacy of shipbuilding that is important to remember.

“Our city, from the time of the Revolution, has a rich tradition of people answering the call of service,” Koch said.

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