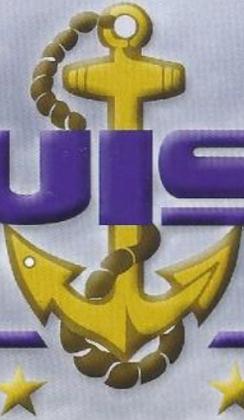


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# USS BREMERTON CA-130

## 1945-1974



# Preserving Our Naval Heritage



By **PHIL ROBERTS** (J02, USNR - retired)

*Here are my recent experiences involving the USS Salem Museum. As you will see, my son Pete and I chipped and repainted my ship's port anchor salvaged from the USS Des Moines (CA-134). I mention that this is the port anchor because that is the one most used as it had a 150 fathom anchor chain (starboard only 100 fathoms). It was a labor of love.*

The US Navy has a long and wonderful history. In terms of story-telling, this knowledge must be offered to future generations of Americans and to those who value its global contributions both in war and in peace. Ways of not only telling the Navy story but visualizing Navy life at sea are found aboard the Navy ships that have become museums. Unfortunately, I fear few of these museums have adequate funding to remain financially viable and are in danger of being lost. As former Navy crews age and pass away, interest in ship museums among those in the next generations is clearly at risk. Some continuing basic financial support is essential and must be found, particularly from the US Navy which logically benefits the most in terms of prestige and recruitment.

One of the museums in trouble is in Quincy, Massachusetts, the USS Salem Museum. The picture of the museum on the Cruiser Sailors Association website shows an attractive berth area, but this is not where the *USS Salem* is currently berthed. Instead, the ship has been moved to an out of the way berth with limited parking and in an uninviting environment for reasons

unknown - but likely involves money. Closed during the winter months, the museum is open only on weekends during the remainder of the year. A small professional staff maintains the technical equipment such as for heat, water and electricity, and a small voluntary group of former sailors attempt to maintain the physical appearance of the ship. With virtually no money for marketing or revenue raising activities, and with a management which appears to be filled with well-meaning individuals who have other full-time jobs, the museum is struggling.

## **The Importance of the USS Salem Museum**

The three USS Des Moines Class ships, the *USS Des Moines* (CA-134), *USS Salem* (CA-139) and the *Newport News* (CA-148) are the World's last and largest all-gun cruisers. The *Des Moines* and the *Newport News* have been scrapped and only the *Salem* remains. Exhibits featuring the *Des Moines* and the *Newport News* are part of the USS Salem Museum as is an exhibit maintained by the US Navy Cruiser Sailors Association.

I became involved when I found that the *USS Des Moines* had been scrapped. I served aboard the ship from February 1955 to December 1956, an active duty which was part of my eight-year Navy Reserve commitment. Its principle duties during my tour were to conduct Midshipman training cruises in the summer and to act as Flagship for the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean, with Villefranche, France, as home port. We crossed the Atlantic eight times, had several Guantanamo training assignments, and rode out a major hurricane off the Virginia coast. I was the ship's journalist and editor of the bi-monthly newspaper the *Daily Mae*. It was a wonderful time for a young man, and I wanted to pass on my experiences to my sons.

*Left: The anchor from the USS Des Moines heavy cruiser that was built at the Fore River shipyard in Quincy in 1948, now serves as a memorial on the Fore River Bridge rotary in Quincy. A dedication ceremony took place to add a plaque at the site in November 2019.*

As the *Salem* was identical to the *Des Moines*, and I found that we could stay aboard ship on weekends, my son Pete and I volunteered for a work party in May of 2019. We slept in warrant officer's quarters and ate in the warrant officer's mess. Knowing that I served on the *Des Moines*, Pete and I were assigned the job of chipping and repainting the *Des Moines'* anchor that resided in the Quincy rotary entrance to the city, several blocks from the ship. As Pete and I worked, we received encouragement from passing motorists, even though I'm certain none knew anything about this anchor. There was no sign or marker. Subsequently, I decided to fix this by donating a bronze plaque not only at the site of the anchor but also a plaque on the ship's quarterdeck as one boards the *Salem*. I found significant help from the work party supervisor, Steve Singlar, *USS Boston* Shipmates president Barry Probst, Bob Freeman of the Newport News Reunion Association, the city of Quincy, and from a completely unexpected source.

Valerie Blouin heads the Les Américains et la 6e Flotte à Villefranche-sur-Mer association which honors US Navy ships of the 6th Fleet which had Villefranche as home port from 1955 to 1967. In January 2017, her association hosted all sailors aboard these ships for a 4-day celebration. Becoming friends as a result, Valerie volunteered to come to Quincy and help celebrate an unveiling of these plaques. Not incidentally, we arranged to have poster boards created for the museum honoring her grandmother, Mom Germaine as she was known to us sailors. Mom was truly the mom to hundreds of "sailors" and it made no difference whether they were officers or crew, she loved them all.



*Navy veterans salute during the dedication of a plaque from the USS Des Moines at the Fore River Bridge rotary.*

As the timing of the plaque ceremony would have it, the event occurred on the Veterans Day weekend. A small idea became a big program. We had the mayor of Quincy, a state senator and the president of the local council as guests, along with some 30 shipmates and their families. We had great media coverage from the local paper and the *Boston Globe*. At the event luncheon, there was an outpouring of appreciation in bringing us all together.

### **A Way Forward**

As I mentioned, the USS Salem Museum is struggling, and it is difficult to see where management is going and whether this museum can survive. One program which may help is one proposed by Valerie Blouin. Her association is exploring the idea

of a museum partnership where the new museum that is being organized in Villefranche, can join with the Salem to promote larger attendance, exchange the portable exhibits, and jointly raise funds.

It would also be wonderful if the US Navy could also organize fund raising for its museum ships and preserve this legacy for future generations.

*A navy color guard stands at attention during the national anthem at the dedication ceremony for the plaque*



*Photos obtained from The Patriot Ledger website.*