

# Preserve Your Unit's History and Heritage

Story and Photos by JO1 Dan Ball

Imagine thirty years from now that you are researching events that happened while you served at a command that has since been disestablished, deactivated, or decommissioned. You may need the information for a reunion group's newsletter, a Veterans Administration claim, a legal matter, or any number of reasons. You visit the Naval Historical Center to start your research only to find that your old command never submitted the records and materials you need, and chances are good they no longer exist.

History is important. That is why commands must follow the guidelines for preserving it. A major issue commands face is deciding what needs to be preserved. The best starting point is the Naval Historical Center's website at [www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil). In the Frequently Asked Questions page, the question titled "What a Navy Command should do if it is going to be Disestablished (Shore Commands), Deactivated (Aviation Squadrons), or Decommissioned (Ships)" provides links to instructions covering records disposition and operational histories, along with basic guidelines to help commands decide what materials are relevant for preservation. Preserved materials are maintained at the National Archives' Records Centers and the Naval Historical Center.

The Naval Historical Center is the primary collector of Navy operational records and artifacts. The responsibility for records is divided among several branches. The Aviation History and the Ships History branches maintain historical records including command histories, war diaries, and deck logs for aviation commands and U.S. Navy ships and submarines. The Operational Archives Branch collects records of Navy shore establishments and commands that are not

The types of records that should be submitted include, but are not limited to, the following: combat and action reports, awards and citations, biography and photographs of CO/XO, cruise books or other published documents, cruise/deployment reports, photographs, etc.

specifically related to ships, submarines, or aviation. The Curator Branch collects and preserves artifacts such as uniforms, ships' bells, and other items. The staffs of these branches can help you determine what is needed for retention.

Artifacts that should be retained include bells, flags, name and ribbon boards, pennants, life rings, etc. Any item of historical value should be submitted; the Center can assist in determining an item's significance.

For a more thorough list of submission items visit [www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil).



LT. COMDR. H. L. HOPPING	USN	VS-6
ENS. C. T. FOGG	USN	VS-6
ENS. E. R. DONNELL JR	USNR	VS-6
ENS. DAVID SEIB	USNR	VS-6
ENS. J. J. O'NESEY	USNR	VS-6
ENS. D. W. REISBERG	USN	VS-6
H. R. THOMAS	EM-3	VS-6
A. J. TRAVIS	AMM-3	VS-6
D. F. GRIFFIN	AMM-3	VS-6
G. L. GRIFFIN	SM-3	VS-6
W. E. RAYE	ADM-3	VS-6
G. H. SMITH	SM-2	S. DIV.



## Tips for Material Submissions

### Questions the Unit Decommissioning Coordinator Should Ask

What were the unit's primary missions? What were its most notable accomplishments during its history? Did anyone who achieved prominence in later life serve in the unit? What recognition has the unit won (PUC, NUC, Battle "E," etc.)?

Ask yourself what materials reflect the answers to the above. What tells the unit's story to sailors and their families? What would you want to see featured on your mission and history in a museum or in a command display?

### Common Mistakes

Items are often damaged by careless packing (for example, framed items put in the bottom of a box with heavy metal objects on top). Work with the local Fleet & Industrial Supply Center, or other supply activity, to pack your submissions properly.

Some units assume that items are required to go to certain personnel. For example, many units assume

that bells used for baptism are to go to the family whose child's name is first inscribed in the bell. Or that certain awards or materials are the "perpetual responsibility" of the last CO or Command Master Chief, assuming that "the Navy will know where it is when needed." Such assumptions are incorrect. The Naval Historical Center preserves documents and artifacts so future units can learn from and be inspired by the accomplishments of their predecessors. For example, the Center received the bell of *Wasp* (CV 7) on removal from the ship. The bell was used aboard the next *Wasp* (CV 18), and now is displayed aboard LHD 1. This use of history and heritage is key to accomplishing the Navy's mission.

### Improving the Process

Units should contact the Naval Historical Center as soon as the disestablishment order comes down. If time and resources allow, we will come on site and guide the selection process. Our goal is to make the process of preparing for disestablishment, deactivation, or decommissioning as painless as possible.

It's especially important for commands to provide an informal inventory with their submissions and to label photos, floppy disks, CDs, and other enclosures. This helps ensure the accessibility of the material. Of crucial importance is the final command operations report, covering the period from the start of the calendar year to the date of disestablishment, deactivation, or decommissioning as outlined in the OPNAVINST 5750.12 series.

Thoroughness is crucial with all submissions. Command operations reports should be as detailed as possible, and submitted artifacts should reflect the historical and individual aspects of the command.

For more information, please write to the Naval Historical Center, 805 Kidder Breese Street SE, Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060 to the attention of the appropriate branch. ✈

