

Brittany Pointe Estates Veterans Affairs Committee



BPE Pointer Article

Veterans' Corner

by Bob Berger

Remembering the “Greatest Generation”

During 2019, your Veterans Affairs Committee will provide different formats to remember those who served during World War II. This article tells the story of just one of the thousand battles for which our brave men and women fought. Least we never forget them or their heroic deeds.

This past January, the research ship Petrel’s crew found the final resting place of the CV-8 Hornet. Using its advanced sonar and a remotely controlled vehicle (ROV), they found the Hornet resting at 17,500 feet below the surface. Several of the pictures taken during the examination of the ship have been posted on the web for all to see. The Hornet was only in service for one year and 6 days, but it was one of the most decorated ships in the fleet winning four battle stars. We all remember the famous Doolittle Raid (April 1942) when B-25 bombers took off from her deck to bomb Japan. The Battle of Midway (June 1942) proved to be the pivotal change in direction for our fleet. The Hornets planes made incredible attacks on the Imperial Japanese Navy’s carriers. Her last action was at the Battle of Santa Cruz, off the coast of the Solomon Islands. She was there supporting the invasion and defense of Guadalcanal.

On October 26, 1942, some 77 years ago, this part of the Pacific Ocean was a blaze with anti-aircraft cannon fire, bombs exploding and torpedoes racing through the ocean. During this action, the Hornet was hit by 3 bombs, 2 torpedoes and 2 dive bombers crashing into the ship’s island, with the other hitting the portside bow. All of this happened in only 15 minutes. With no electrical power or engines, a cruiser was directed to tow the Hornet out of the battle area to safety. Repairs crews got the power back on, but not the engines, just before another attack began. Eight of the nine torpedo bombers were shot down by anti-aircraft guns, but the last enemy plane’s torpedo hit the Hornet and caused tremendous damage. She lost all electrical power again and began listing over to 17 degrees. Without electrical power, none of her anti-aircraft guns could fire. At this point, the abandon ship order was given. Several of her escorts removed the surviving crew members with the captain being the last to leave. Two U.S. Navy destroyers fired 9 torpedoes at her but most failed to explode. They also fired almost 400 rounds

from their 5” guns into her with little effect. Imperial Japanese Navy surface ships were identified approaching the screen. Our destroyers left to rejoin the fleet. Two Japanese destroyers fired 4 “Long Lance” torpedoes into the abandoned Hornet. At 01:35, on October 27, 1942, the Hornet slipped beneath the waves. She was the LAST fleet carrier to be sunk by enemy action during World War II.

One-hundred and eleven sailors lost their lives in this action, according to the U.S. Navy. The crew was very well trained on how to abandon ship in case of an emergency. She, the Hornet, protected her crew until the very last man, her captain, Charles P. Mason, safely disembarked. It is amazing that her highly flammable aviation fuel did not ignite, her huge stores of bombs and torpedoes did not explode, and all the ammunition for both planes and guns did not blow up. She managed to stay afloat until all her crew made it to safety. She was a real heroin in so many ways, but most of all, she saved 2089 of her sailors’ lives. Her exact location will never be published but we all will remember her story and her final resting place beneath the waves, the CV-8 Hornet memorial for all time.



Figure 1 Title: USS Hornet (CV-8) underway in Hampton Roads, Virginia (USA), on 27 October 1941.

Description: U.S. Navy photo 80-G-463613 - This media is available in the holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration, cataloged under the National Archives Identifier (NAID) 520587.



Figure 2 Title: Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, October 1942

*Description: A Japanese Type 99 shipboard bomber (Allied codename Val) trails smoke as it dives toward USS Hornet (CV-8), during the morning of 26 October 1942. This plane struck the ship's stack and then her flight deck. A Type 97 shipboard attack plane (Kate) is flying over Hornet after dropping its torpedo, and another Val is off her bow. Note anti-aircraft shell burst between Hornet and the camera, with its fragments striking the water nearby. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the U.S. National Archives. **Catalog #:** 80-G-33947*



Figure 3 Title: October 26, 1942 Hornet being towed, US Navy photograph.

Description: USS Hornet under tow. Some electrical power restored but no propulsion.



Figure 4 Title: USS Hornet, may she rest in peace.

Description: *The Hornet was discovered by the research ship RV Petrel, January 2019 in the Solomon Sea. She is laying 17, 500 feet under the waves. Designated a war memorial for all time.*