

Now Hear This!

Association Address:

c/o John K. Schwarz,
Executive Director
2400 Clarendon Blvd., Apt. 211
Arlington, VA 22201

Association Phone Number:

703-867-0142

Address for Tax Deductible

Contributions:

USS Houston CA-30
Survivors' Association
c/o Pam Moura, Treasurer
2065 Sutter View Lane,
Lincoln, CA 95648
(Please specify which fund:
General or Scholarship)

Association Email Contact:

contact@usshouston.org

Association Founded 1947

By Otto and Trudy Schwarz

Interns Learn USS Houston History and More



The Interns at the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. (L to R): Samantha Coale, teacher and chaperone; Dr. Matt Fash; Jeff Fash (Matt's Dad); Jazmin McMillon of the Naval History & Heritage Command; Interns: Wyatt Hansen; Jameson Malvesta; and Ben Johnston; Matthew Kropelnicki, Intern Advisor; Interns: Jack Benjamin; Finn Durenberger; Preston Stewart; Dahlia Melendez; and Ashley Hjort.

The U.S. Navy Memorial Sea Service Student Internship

By John K. Schwarz

On June 26–July 2, 2025, a group of eight carefully selected students approaching their senior year at St. Vincent De Paul College Prep High School in Petaluma, CA participated in a special internship program that involved a week of training, development, and activities based at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. Known as the United States Navy Memorial Sea Service Student Internship, the program is dedicated to preserving American

In This Issue...

- ◆ 2025 Student Internship / 1-2
- ◆ Executive Director's Report/ 3
- ◆ Hearing the War Was Over/ 4-6
- ◆ Memorial Day Concert/ 7-8
- ◆ Eunell Weissinger Turns 98/ 8
- ◆ ABDA Chronology/ 9-12
- ◆ "A Capitol Fourth"/ 13-14
- ◆ *Houston* Survivors 1945/ 14
- ◆ Guard Your Tongue/15
- ◆ Mailbag/ 16
- ◆ Robert L. Hanley Honored/ 17
- ◆ CA-30 Merchandise/ 18
- ◆ Board of Managers/ 19
- ◆ Communication Channels/ 19
- ◆ Thanks to Donors/ 20
- ◆ Financial Report/ 20
- ◆ Masthead/ 20

(continued on the next page)

History. A key objective is to archive veterans' stories and create a dialogue that emphasizes United States military history. Dr. Matthew Fash, National Coordinator of the Stories of Service/Student Interview Programs, created and directs this annual internship program on behalf of the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. This year, he guided his fourth group, designated Squadron IV, and Association members John K. Schwarz and Blane Amphthor were invited again this year to take part in the development of this 2025 intern class.

Among the highlights of the participation of John and Blane:

- Taking part in being interviewed by the interns. Also interviewed were two naval attaches from Allied nations domiciled here in the Washington, DC area: Commander Luisa Winkler, Assistant Naval Attache, Federal Republic of Germany; and Lieutenant Commander Thomas Robertson of the Embassy of Australia. Mr. Sebastian Nolden, husband of CDR Luisa Winkler—a veteran of the Navy of the Federal Republic of Germany—was also interviewed.



(L to R): Blane Amphthor; Lieutenant Commander Thomas Robertson; Sebastian Nolden; Commander Luisa Winkler; John K. Schwarz.

- At Vinson Hall (McLean, VA), a retirement community inhabited mainly by former military officers, Blane and John were each able to make presentations to residents and the intern group. Blane told the story of his father's military service, including his role as an officer aboard the USS *Missouri* during the signing ceremony that marked the Japanese surrender and the end of World War II. John presented the story of the "USS *Houston* CA-30/POW Experience" to an enthusiastic gathering of Vinson Hall residents.
- Involvement in visitations to Arlington National Cemetery, including the USS *Houston* (CA-30)/HMAS *Perth* (D-29) marker, the graves of Joe & Isabelle Gans, Otto & Trudy Schwarz, and at the interns' group presentation of an honoring wreath (on behalf of the U.S. Navy Memorial) at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers.
- Coordination of a visit to the headquarters of the U.S. Navy History and Heritage Command at the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. where Retired Rear Admiral Sam Cox, NHHC Director, made a presentation to the interns (see photo at right).



It was a wonderful, enriching week representing our Association while participating in the development of such talented young students who offer much hope for the future of our great country.

We sincerely thank Dr. Matt Fash for this opportunity.



*From the desk of the Executive Director
John K. Schwarz*

August 2025

I hope this finds everyone well. Here are some key Association updates:

- The 2026 USS *Houston* (CA-30) annual Memorial Service will take place Saturday, March 7, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. at the USS *Houston* CA-30 monument in Sam Houston Park (The Heritage Society), Houston, Texas. We will be returning to the Doubletree Hotel in Houston in March 2026. The December 2025 issue of the Blue Bonnet will contain the particulars for the entire 2026 "Day of Remembrance" gathering.
- The USS *Houston* (CA-30) Internal Scholarship application deadline is: **November 1, 2025**. Please remind anyone whom you may be encouraging to apply for it.
- For those who have seen the presentation of the story of the USS *Houston* (CA-30)/POW Experience that I have been delivering, opportunities have continued with quite a few more dates/places booked for the remainder of 2025. At this point, over 1,000 attendees have heard the complete story. The best part about this is how the true story resonates with attendees. They are just as amazed as we are at what USS *Houston* survivors endured. The opportunity being given to tell the story contributes directly to our mission.

I am reaching out to ask if anyone is willing to step up to help with the project of applying for a financial grant for our Association. Please feel free to contact me directly (at john@usshouston.org), and thank you for considering this.

Future View: Many years ago, we added not only "Next Generation" to the Association name, but we also added an 's' to Generations with the hope that the next, next generation and beyond would step up to continue the mission to perpetuate the memory of the great Captain and crew of the USS *Houston* (CA-30). Over time, our Association's annual memorial service and our two scholarship programs have become established traditions. Today, our Association's regular activities also include maintenance of our website; communications to our membership, as well as others who reach us through the internet; newsletter editing; management of our finances; and a host of other special initiatives, including USS *Houston*-related artifact placement; and activities with the U.S. Navy and other groups.

Our Board of Managers welcomes the interest of our next generations in our programs and activities, and we are always available to mentor anyone interested in taking an active role in them. We are one of the declining numbers of WWII-associated groups that still exist. The future is in our hands to perpetuate what we do. We encourage the next generations to start preparing to contribute to our Association's longevity.

Looking forward to seeing you in March 2026 in Houston!

John K. Schwarz

What it Was Like to hear the War Was Over The Experiences of CA-30 Survivor H. Robert Charles

By Dana Charles



USS *Houston* (CA-30) Survivor
PFC H. Robert Charles, USMC

At 1200 (JST) on August 15, 1945—80 years ago this month—the prerecorded voice of Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced to the world that Japan was surrendering. The bloody Pacific War was finally over. By August 1945, those USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors and Lost Battalion soldiers who had survived 42 months of brutal POW captivity found themselves scattered throughout SE Asia in various Imperial Japanese POW camps. A few of these POWS had never left Java. Some had been transported only as far as Singapore. The majority of these American POWS captured in 1942 on Java—some 668 of them—had been among the 60,000 Allied POWS, and some 200,000 Asians forced to work in the brutal conditions of the Burma-Thailand Railway construction project. After the railway line was completed in October 1943, the Japanese forced a few *Houston* survivors to continue working in Burma and in Thailand on the railway—by repairing it or by cutting wood for the railway's locomotives or the cooking huts. By August 1945, the Japanese had transported most of the American POW survivors of the railway to POW camps in Thailand; or in Saigon, French Indochina; or in Japan; or in Singapore.

As prisoners of war, how and when USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors and soldiers of the 131st Field Artillery, 2nd Battalion learned that the war was over depended upon what POW camp they were in. Word of the end of the war reached POWS in some camps faster than others. How prisoners reacted to the news varied from camp to camp and from man to man.

My late father, USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivor Marine Private First-Class Howard Robert (Bob) Charles, was among 191 American POWS of Branch 3 forced to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway in Burma beginning in late October 1942. After the railroad was completed in 1943, Charles (age 24) was among the prisoners whom the Japanese transported first to the POW camp at Tamarkan, Thailand, then in 1944, to the POW camp in Saigon, French Indochina (Vietnam). There, the prisoners worked at the docks located by the Saigon River, at an oil refinery, and at an airfield—all targets for Allied bombers that increasingly bombed and strafed them. It was in Saigon in August 1945 that Charles learned that the war was over. The news triggered a range of emotions in him.

“There were twenty-foot-tall bamboo poles surrounding the prison [in Saigon], laced together so you couldn’t see out, and nobody could see in,” Charles explained. “They had a guard tower on the two rear corners...and then the Japanese made us build pillboxes all around the camp—facing in. We knew what that was for... [1] They had a machine gun pointing in at us, and that’s where we figured they were not planning to keep anybody out; they were planning to kill us. It didn’t take a smart man to figure that out,” he said.[\[2\]](#)

In early August 1945, via a secret radio, the prisoners learned that atomic bombs had been dropped on two Japanese cities. “So, we knew when they dropped the atomic bomb on August 6th [Charles’ birthday] and the other one on August 9th. Only a few of us were told because [the Japanese] were going to kill anybody that knew anything about radio. They knew we had one, but they couldn’t find it.” [\[3\]](#)

Right after the last of the two atomic bombs were dropped, the Japanese removed the pillboxes. "They had us tear all [the pillboxes] down, level the ground so there would be no trace of those pillboxes," Charles said... "We knew what those pillboxes were for, so we didn't know what to expect. But, you know, you can't imagine that feeling like you were going to be free pretty soon, or you were going to be killed—one or the other. Your feelings are running high at that point."[\[4\]](#)

One night in late August, while lying on his bunk, Charles heard some music coming from the other side of the Bamboo fence. "Across the fence I heard this music—an Australian song—being played on a record," he said. "It was being played by some Frenchman, I think, probably for our benefit...It was a popular song after the war, and we heard it across the fence that evening." [\[5\]](#)

The music proved to be a good omen. The next day, a plane came over, painted white, and dropped leaflets. "The leaflets missed the POW camp, but the natives grabbed them and threw some through the gate and crammed them between the bamboo fence," Charles said. "The leaflets said, 'The war is over. We'll be coming to get you soon. Don't eat anything unless you see it cooked, don't drink any water unless it's boiled, and don't antagonize your captors.' That's some of the orders they gave us, and not a soul jumped up and down with glee because [the Japanese] were shooting at [the plane] right away with anti-aircraft [weapons]. They didn't get him. He pulled out to sea and got away from them. But, the war's over, I could see that," Charles said.[\[6\]](#)

"Shortly after that run across there with those leaflets, one morning the Japanese lined us all up and marched us all out of camp on foot toward town," Charles said. "People were leaning out of their windows—old men and French women—clapping. You couldn't believe the feelings we had at that point. It was like you were fourteen feet high; you know, this is it! We have really won this thing!" [\[7\]](#)

The Japanese still had their guns, and they marched the prisoners to what had been a French Foreign Legion camp, not far from the airport. "There was a wall around it with glass pieces along the top embedded in the concrete...Then they brought us food like you'd never believe like you didn't even know existed anymore... The best food you could imagine—eggs and meat and lots of good rice and vegetables. You name it, and we had it. They gave us bunks with mattresses and all that stuff," Charles said.[\[8\]](#)

Charles and some other POWS went over the wall to explore the area nearest to the prison. But, because the Vietnamese were beginning their uprising against the French, they soon returned. "We didn't go very far," Charles said. "I know what we did was to see the condition and what was going on down there because these Vietnamese were raping the [French] women. There was a 16-year-old girl that they'd taken a bayonet and jammed her up against a telephone pole...and she was just left there...Outside [the prison], you have all this murdering and marauding going on, so I just turned right around and went over the fence and back into camp... Pretty soon, we commandeered a Japanese truck and went out and started bringing these old women and children into the camp...because the natives were just going berserk." [\[9\]](#)

Meanwhile, most of the Japanese guards disappeared. "There were two or three...The commander of the camp stayed; he had enough guts to stick it out. The rest of them ran off," Charles said.[\[10\]](#)

There were no celebrations inside the camp. "There was unbounded joy, but how do you express it?" Charles said. Charles himself kept his emotions in check until September 6, 1945, when he got on board the C-47, taking him out of French Indochina. "We got aboard this plane, and there was this gal bringing chicken sandwiches around," he said. "Bread—we hadn't seen bread in three-and-a-half years, and we hadn't seen a white woman until now. I sat there, and I was crying so hard that I couldn't eat anything...All I could do was

just look at it. I'm starving to death, and I'm looking at it, and I can't even eat it." [\[11\]](#)

In late August and early September 1945, U.S. transport aircraft transported most USS *Houston* and Lost Battalion survivors of the railroad, including Bob Charles, to Calcutta, India where they were taken to the U.S. Army 142nd General Hospital. There, medical doctors examined and treated them for a few weeks prior to their return to the USA.

In his 1998 Oral History, fifty-three years after his 1945 repatriation to America, my father reflected on the experience. "There is no way to describe the joy," he said. "It was totally unbridled and unbounded...No other feeling in the world will ever match it again, I'm sure. It never has before. It's freedom. If you've lost it for a long time and don't even know that you're ever going to get it back, or even your life, and suddenly there you are: the OSS is coming into camp, the British paratroopers are coming into camp, and you're flying out of that place." [\[12\]](#)

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#) University of North Texas Oral History Collection, Number 1243, Interview with Howard Charles, March 25, 1998, p. 164.

[\[2\]](#) Admiral Nimitz Historic Site, National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, Oral History Program, Fredericksburg, Texas, An Interview with Mr. Howard Robert Charles, USMC, USS *Houston*, April 2, 2005, p. 29.

[\[3\]](#) Ibid, p. 27.

[\[4\]](#) University of North Texas Oral History Collection, Number 1243, Interview with Howard Charles, March 25, 1998, p. 173-174.

[\[5\]](#) Ibid, p. 172-173.

[\[6\]](#) Admiral Nimitz Historic Site, National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, Oral History Program, Fredericksburg, Texas, An Interview with Mr. Howard Robert Charles, USMC, USS *Houston*, April 2, 2005, p. 29.

[\[7\]](#) University of North Texas Oral History Collection, Number 1243, Interview with Howard Charles, March 25, 1998, p.174.

[\[8\]](#) Ibid, p. 174.

[\[9\]](#) Ibid, p. 175-176.

[\[10\]](#) Ibid, p. 176.

[\[11\]](#) Ibid, p. 177.

[\[12\]](#) Ibid, p. 177.



Private First-Class H. Robert Charles, USMC,
before his assignment to USS *Houston* (CA-30)



At Media Day (Left to Right): M.J. Boice, representing the National Military Family Association; Vimbo Watson, AFI 2025 Washington Navy Yard Spouse of the Year; Scotty Hasting, Army veteran and country music singer; Shaun Beal, 2025 Armed Forces Insurance Air Force Spouse of the Year; John K. Schwarz, Executive Director, USS *Houston* CA-30 Survivors' Association & Next Generations; and Jennifer Barnhill, 2025 Armed Forces Insurance Navy Spouse of the Year.

2025 National Memorial Day Concert

By John K. Schwarz

This year, I was again offered the opportunity to join an interview team at Media Day for the 2025 National Memorial Day Concert, which was held in front of our nation's Capital on Sunday, May 25, 2025. The concert is a beloved tradition that honors the courage, sacrifice, and service of our military personnel and their families and pays tribute to all those who have given their lives in defense of our nation.

For Media Day (the day before the actual concert), a group of representatives associated with military organizations assembled. The USS *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors' Association and Next Generations is always proud and thankful to receive an invitation to participate with this group of representatives, interviewing stars who are engaged in rehearsals for the concert. The day also provides an opportunity to introduce our respective organizations and their missions. I was on-site to participate in the actual interviews, while member Marta Bota assisted with posting pictures and articles on social media, including the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Facebook page.

Because 2025 is the 80th anniversary year of the conclusion of WWII, acclaimed actor Robert Patrick (who played Colonel Chandler in the 2006 movie "Flags of Our Fathers") delivered a special salute during the concert to the millions of Americans who served the nation in World War II, in uniform, and on the home front. The concert also featured Mr. Patrick narrating the story of U.S. Marine Veteran Don Graves, who fought as a flamethrower at the bloody 36-day Battle of Iwo Jima, a volcanic island of strategic importance to the invasion of Japan and the end of the war. Members of the "Greatest Generation" were also honored on stage and given a lengthy standing ovation. It was not possible to hold back tears during this part of the program as I thought of our beloved heroes of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) and their tremendous service and sacrifice during WWII.



At Media Day, Actor Robert Patrick (left) was interviewed by John K. Schwarz.

On Media Day, our military organization's team interviewed Mr. Patrick along with other performers including Angel Blue, Scotty Hastings, Gretchen Mol, and Blair Underwood.



Pictured at left is singer/songwriter Scotty Hastings, who, along with Robert Patrick, provided a special interview related to our USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors. Scotty is very active in helping veterans deal with PTSD. I was able to particularly thank Scotty for his service to our country (a former Army infantryman shot ten times while on deployment in Afghanistan), as well as explain to him the plight of USS *Houston* survivors. He was totally focused as I thanked him for his work in this area and told the tale of our men. I told him that most of our surviving POWs likely suffered from PTSD upon being liberated, yet it was not even known nor understood back then, leaving them to fend for themselves. Spouses of many USS *Houston* survivors played a crucial role in helping their husbands cope with the effects of war. So, thankfully, many *Houston* survivors were not left alone, given these beloved spouses. In light of that history, the work Scotty does today is very significant.

During the concert, Scotty Hasting performed one of his latest hit songs titled "I'm America." I highly recommend it to everyone, as it was very inspiring.

Many thanks again to the wonderful team (Marta, MJ, Vimbo, Shaun, and Jennifer) with whom I had the honor of working on this great day. It was a wonderful experience.



Surrounded by family, Eunell Weissinger (center), widow of USS *Houston* CA-30 Survivor William J. Weissinger, Jr., SEA1/c, recently celebrated her 98th birthday!

ABDA Naval Forces: A Brief History and Chronology

By Robert J. Blair

ABDA Command - Background

ABDA Command (aka: ABDACOM) was an American, British, Dutch, and Australian multinational force created after the declaration of war with Japan. It consisted of the naval, air, and land units of the four countries. First discussed before the start of the Pacific War, ABDA was officially activated on January 15, 1942, five weeks after the commencement of hostilities by the Japanese. ABDACOM was the naval component of ABDA Command, created to organize Allied naval defenses against Japan and defend the Malay Barrier, which runs south down the Malay peninsula through Singapore and east through Java to New Guinea. ABDACOM's area of operation covered over 10,000 square miles. The U.S. contributed the ships of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet to this force. The heavy cruisers USS *Houston* and HMS *Exeter* and the modern light cruiser USS *Boise* were the most powerful ships in ABDACOM.



ABDA's Combined Striking Force, led by the Dutch light cruiser *DeRuyter*, at the Battle of the Java Sea, February 27, 1942.

Japanese Strategy

Japan aimed to establish an Asian empire, known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The Western colonial powers were to be evicted. Japan would be positioned as the leading country in the sphere. Japan's strategy had two objectives: 1. To acquire the resources produced by the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), Malaya, and Borneo, notably oil, rubber, and food; and 2. To establish a defensive perimeter from the Kurile Islands to Wake, the Marshalls in the east, and around the southern and western edges of the Malay Barrier to the eastern border of India. Japan's objectives were to be achieved by destroying the U.S. fleet and the U.S. and British air forces in Hawaii, the Philippines, Malaya, and the NEI and by invading and occupying the islands of the Western colonial powers.

Japanese Tactics

The Japanese were on the offensive throughout the early months of the Pacific War, which began (in the Pacific region) on December 8, 1941. Flying from bases in Indochina, Formosa, Hainan Island, and from aircraft carriers, Japan's air forces initially targeted Allied aircraft, destroying most American aircraft in the Philippines on the 8th. After establishing air superiority, Japan conducted amphibious landings to seize Allied airfields and resource areas. Japanese aircraft then flew into the newly captured airfields. The process was then repeated. New air attacks were conducted on land targets, and shipping further south until the resource areas and planned defensive perimeter were under Japanese occupation. Multiple operations took place simultaneously, overwhelming Allied forces.

Allied Tactics

On land, Allied defensive operations attempted to defeat or delay the Japanese forces. At sea, ABDACOM attempted to intercept and prevent or delay Japanese landings, organize convoys for troop transports and supply ships, and evacuate Allied forces. The absence of Allied air cover put Allied forces under increasing pressure.

HOSTILITIES

December 1941

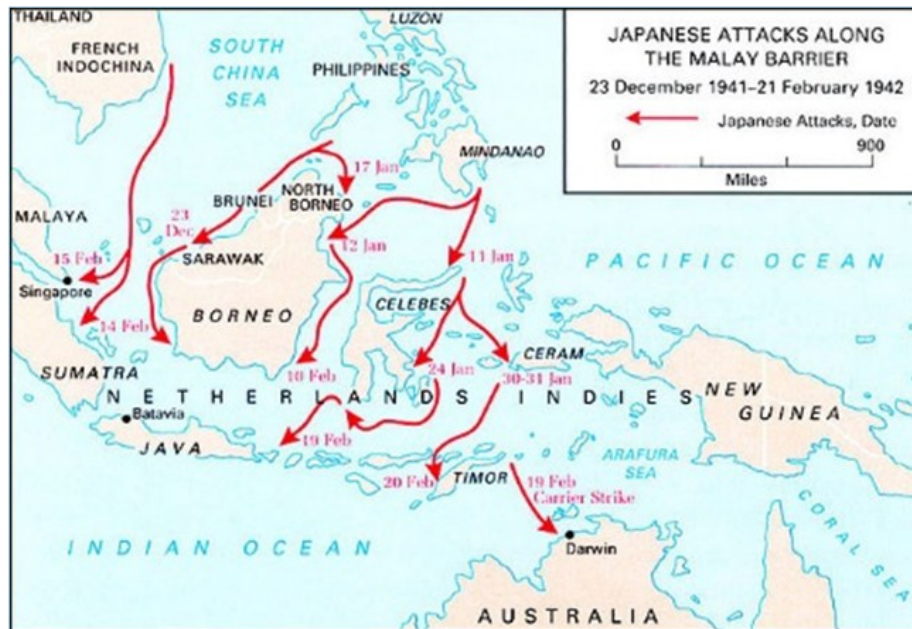
- **December 8** – Japanese attacks in the Pacific commenced immediately, even before a declaration of war.
First, in Malaya and Thailand: Japan initiated air attacks and landings, immediately establishing air superiority. British airfields in northern Malaya and Thailand were captured and used to extend air operations.
Second, at Pearl Harbor: Japanese naval aircraft heavily damaged or sunk most ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, including all battleships. Most U.S. aircraft were destroyed. U.S. carrier forces remained operational. Japan declared war on the U.S.A.
Third, in the Philippines: Japanese aerial attack 8 to 10 hours after Pearl Harbor. Most U.S. aircraft were destroyed on the ground.
- **December 10** - Guam surrendered to Japanese forces. The capital ships of Force Z, the new British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales*, and its consort, the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*, were sunk by Japanese aerial attack in the South China Sea. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (The Grand Alliance, Cassell, 1950, page 551) on hearing the news of Force Z's loss:
"In all the war, I never received a more direct shock...As I turned over and twisted in bed, the full of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over this vast expanse of waters, Japan was supreme, and we were everywhere weak and naked."
With the sinking of Force Z, no Allied battleships or battlecruisers were present in the western Pacific.
- **December 16** – British Borneo was occupied. **December 21** - Thailand allied with Japan. **December 22** – The amphibious invasion of the Philippines commenced.
- **December 25** – Hong Kong surrendered. **December 27** – By this time, most of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet had transferred from the Philippines to NEI, either in response to the November 27 'war warning' sent out by the Navy, or due to the effectiveness of air attacks on the naval base at Cavite. The *Houston* was operating in NEI.

January 1942

- **In early January** - Allied armies retreated to Bataan and Corregidor. Manila was occupied. *Houston* was operating off Darwin and the Torres Strait as a convoy escort.
- **January 11** – Japan declared war on the Netherlands. Japan occupied Kuala Lumpur.
- **January 15** - ABDA Command was activated.
- **January 21** – Light cruiser USS *Boise* struck a shoal and withdrew to Ceylon for repairs.
- **January 27** - The Japanese occupied all of the Malay Peninsula.

February-March 1942

- **February 15** - Singapore and Malaya surrendered to the Japanese.
- **February 19** – Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin harbor, sinking 11 Allied ships, including the destroyer USS *Peary*.
- **February 27** - ABDAfloat attacked the eastern component of the Japanese naval force headed for Java.
- **February 28** - Java was invaded.
- **March 9** – Allied resistance on Java ceased. Java surrendered.



Japanese Expansion in the Southwest Pacific

ABDAfloat's Battles

- **January 24** – The Battle of Balikpapan (Borneo) – Four U.S. Navy destroyers attacked a Japanese landing force, sinking four transport ships.
- **February 4** – The Battle of Makassar Strait (Bali Sea) - First sortie of ABDA's Combined Striking Force (under RADM Doorman) was repulsed by aerial attack. *Houston* (number 3 turret disabled) and *Marblehead* were severely damaged. *Marblehead* withdrew to Ceylon for repairs.
- **February 18-20**—The Battle of Badung Strait—Allied ships attacked a Japanese naval force. Allied ships: three cruisers and seven destroyers. ABDA forces were driven off with losses: one destroyer was sunk, and two were damaged.
- **February 27** —The Battle of the Java Sea - ABDA's Combined Striking Force of five cruisers, including USS *Houston*, and nine destroyers engaged and were defeated by Imperial Japanese convoy escorts, including four cruisers and 14 destroyers. Allied ships lost: Two light cruisers and three destroyers. Japanese ships lost: None. **Also, on February 27**, USS *Langley* (AV-3) was sunk south of Java.
- **February 28 - March 1** – The Battle of Sunda Strait - Two Allied ships (cruisers USS *Houston* and HMAS *Perth*) encountered an invasion covering force of 12 Japanese ships (3 cruisers, 9 destroyers) while attempting to withdraw from the Java Sea to Tjilatjap. Both Allied cruisers were sunk. Five Japanese ships were lost by friendly fire.
- **March 1** –HMS *Exeter* and two destroyers were intercepted and sunk by Japanese air and naval forces while attempting to withdraw to Tjilatjap. Also, on March 1, the Dutch destroyer, HMNLS *Evertsen*, was sunk in Sunda Strait.
- **March 1** - Four U.S. destroyers of DesDiv 58 escaped through Bali Strait to Australia, arriving on March 4. Additional U.S. ships sunk by enemy action: A U.S. destroyer (USS *Pecos*, March 2) and a U.S. gunboat (USS *Ashville*, March 3).

The End of ABDACOM

ABDA formally existed for less than two months before being overwhelmed by Japanese advances. ABDACOM was deactivated on February 25. ABDACOM ships continued to operate together until March 1, 1942 by which time ABDACOM was almost completely destroyed, losing 11 ships.

Why ABDACOM Was Defeated

Allied limitations and Japan's superior numbers and capabilities contributed to Japan's success. Japanese forces had the initiative throughout.

- Japanese air superiority - Japanese air forces wreaked havoc with Allied air forces, destroying large numbers of aircraft on the ground. Dominant Japanese numbers and more modern, more capable aircraft hampered Allied operations on land and sea.
- ABDACOM ships were encumbered by a hastily composed organization with different languages, codes, and doctrine. ABDACOM members had differing national objectives.
- Allied forces had limited or no access to maintenance services, resupply, and reinforcement.
- Japanese forces had several technological and doctrinal advantages. An example: The difference in torpedo performance shows these two opponents' comparative strengths and weaknesses. The Japanese Long Lance (Type 93) torpedo had a longer range, faster speed, and a more powerful warhead when compared to US torpedoes. From Samuel Eliot Morison (The Two Ocean War, Atlantic-Little Brown, 1963):

"Within four months of the Pearl Harbor strike, Japan had achieved her Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere." (page 100).

"...we mourn Houston and the other gallant ships of four navies that went down with most of their officers and men after fighting so bravely and well...we should not regard their efforts as vain; their desperate exploit should forever be held in proud and affectionate remembrance by the ABDACOM nations...." (page 101).



The U.S. Asiatic Fleet which participated in ABDACOM beginning in January 1942



At Media Day, July 3, 2025: Foreground (L to R): Marta Bota, Katherine Martinez; Background (L to R): Grace Wood, Crystal Wood, Adam Wood, Shaun Beal; To the right of Josh Turner (L to R): Jennifer Barnhill, John K. Schwarz, Vimbo Watson, Stephani Shepherd.

Performers at “A Capitol Fourth” Interviewed

By John K. Schwarz

Association members Marta Bota and John K. Schwarz were invited to join the military organizations' interview team covering this year's concert, "A Capitol Fourth," celebrating 45 years of music, fun, and fireworks from the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol. The program is a co-production of Capital Concerts and WETA, Washington, D.C.

The day before the July 4th concert, as part of "Media Day" and dress rehearsals for the concert, Marta and John represented the USS *Houston* CA-30 Survivors' Association & Next Generations® in speaking with individual performers, including those who were veterans.

One exceptional performer, country music star Josh Turner, participated in a Zoom call with the team several days before the concert. Josh told an interesting story. His late grandfather (Drexel Turner) served in World War II as part of the U.S. Army in the European Theater. Approximately 10 years ago, at a family gathering, Josh discovered from his uncle, Drexel's son, that his grandfather's Purple Heart Medal had gone missing. Josh's growing interest in his grandfather's story of service inspired him, and he started writing one day — a piece that morphed into his hugely popular hit song, “Unsung Hero.” This story and song, in turn, greatly inspired both Marta (a daughter of a WWII Army veteran herself) and John, who mentioned to Josh during the Zoom call that we believe the medal could be replaced. I also stressed to Josh how profoundly honoring the song is to his grandfather AND the many thousands of other WWII veterans who returned home as "unsung heroes." During our subsequent interview with Josh on media day, we presented him with

a document outlining the process for replacing the medal and, in honor of Drexel Turner, offered him a USS *Houston* (CA-30) challenge coin. At the actual concert, Josh performed "Unsung Hero" and introduced the audience to four WWII veterans in attendance (one of whom was a "Rosie the Riveter"). Needless to say, the audience erupted with an immense and lengthy standing ovation to those WWII heroes now, not so unsung.



WWII Veterans introduced during "A Capitol Fourth" (L to R): Lester Schrenk, U.S. Army Veteran; Mae Krier, a "Rosie the Riveter;" Robert Garabedian, U.S. Army Air Forces Veteran; and Arlester Brown, U.S. Army Veteran.

Other performers interviewed included program host Alfonso Ribeiro whose wife's grandmother was also a "Rosie the Riveter;" the Temptations, including group member Terry Weeks who is an U.S. Air Force veteran; Mike Love of the Beach Boys; Lauren Daigle; LOCASH members; Abi Carter, season 22 American Idol winner; and New Orleans's own Trombone Shorty.

We were fortunate to interview such excellent performers at this outstanding concert's "Media Day," where we were also able to discuss the existence and work of our Survivors' Association.

80 Years Ago: Some Liberated USS *Houston* (CA-30) Survivors Met with Former CA-30 CO, Admiral Jesse Olendorf.



Pictured left to right: Ray Goodson, Seaman 1st Class; George Stoddard, Seaman 1st Class; Chief Churti; Admiral Olendorf; man seated under lamp unknown; Art Duhaine, Seaman 1st Class

WARNING

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

YOU are free now. Anything you say in public or to the press is liable to be published throughout the whole world.

You have direct or indirect knowledge of the fate of many of your comrades who died in enemy hands as a result of brutality or neglect.

Your story, if published in the more sensational press, would cause much unnecessary unhappiness to relatives and friends.

If you had not been lucky enough to have survived and had died an unpleasant death at the hands of the Japanese, you would not have wished your family and friends to have been harrowed by lurid details of your death.

That is just what will happen to the families of your comrades who did die in that way if you start talking too freely about your experience.

It is felt certain that now you know the reason for this order you will take pains to spare the feelings of others.

Arrangements have been made for you to tell your story to interrogating officers who will then ask you to write it down.

*You are not to say anything
to anyone until after you have
written out your statement
and handed it in.*

SPE/U/2

Don't talk about your POW experiences! That was the message given to British POWs of the Imperial Japanese as they were liberated in 1945—80 years ago. The above official notice was a "warning" explaining reasons for keeping silent.

Notes on news received via email at contact@usshouston.org and via regular mail...

- 5/9/2025: In response to the request of **Jim Sterling** of the Naval Order of the U.S., Texas Commandery, the Association's Board of Managers released the following statement: "To Whom It May Concern, We support the erection of a monument honoring the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth* (D-29) to be installed near the site of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Monument in Sam Houston Park, Houston, Texas. USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29) were sunk as they fought together against a large Imperial Japanese naval force at the Battle of Sunda Strait on February 28 - March 1, 1942. Approximately 1,000 American and Australian crewmen perished as a result of the battle. Imperial Japanese forces captured the survivors of both *Houston* and *Perth*. As prisoners of war, most survivors were forced by the Japanese to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand Death Railway construction project. After 42 months of inhumane POW captivity, survivors of *Houston* and *Perth* were liberated when the war ended in 1945. It is fitting that monuments honoring USS *Houston* (CA-30) and HMAS *Perth* (D-29) should stand together in Sam Houston Park. Sincerely, The Board of Managers."
- 5/10/2025: **Jim Sterling** responded via email as follows: "My dear friend John, and the rest of your crew of managers for the USS *Houston* Foundation: THANK YOU for the wonderful letter you sent concerning the HMAS *Perth*. It is exactly what I needed. The City of Houston has a punch list of items needed for them to approve our monument to the HMAS *Perth*, and one of which is several letters from "neighbors and other interested parties" supporting this monument. Yours hit a "home run" I think... I will queue you in as to our progress on the monument. After we get written approval from the city, I can start on fund raising. It should not be a big item, as we are looking at around \$12,000 to \$15,000 to complete this project. The Naval Order Foundation has pledged us some support, and I will put some funds in also... I hope you and your group have a nice summer. Hope to see y'all soon! Very respectfully, Jim Sterling."
- 5/25/2025: **Pete Johnston** of the HMAS *Perth* National Association in Victoria, Australia emailed as follows: "Hi JKS, The US-Ex-Servicemen's Association holds their Memorial on the nearest Sunday to the actual day. It was today. I laid a wreath on behalf of HMAS *Perth* & an U.S. Ex Navy man laid the USS *Houston* one (Picture below). A great day at The Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, [Australia]. **Alisa Modica**, Political-Economic Chief, Consulate General, Melbourne gave the Presidential Proclamation. Hope all are well in the U.S. of A. Kind Regards, Pete Johnston."



On July 15, 2025, Rep. Pete Stauber of Minnesota honored the late USS Houston (CA-30) survivor Robert L. Hanley by reading his story into the U.S. Congressional Record. Our thanks to Mindy Kotler, Director of Asia Policy Point and Congressman Stauber's veterans staffer Nick Hazelbaker, for helping arrange for Mr. Hanley's story to be placed into the Congressional Record. —Editor.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ROBERT L. "BOB" HANLEY

**HON. PETE STAUBER OF MINNESOTA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Tuesday, July 15, 2025

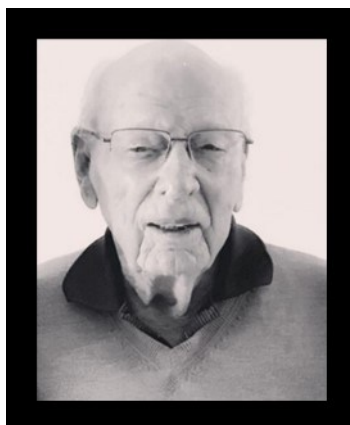
Mr. STAUBER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the extraordinary life of Seaman Second Class Robert L. "Bob" Hanley, the last living survivor of the sinking of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) in the Sunda Strait off the coast of Java on February 29, 1942, ending the storied U.S. Asiatic Fleet.

As one of only 368 of the ship's complement of 1,060 to survive this sea battle, he showcased American grit, tenacity, and commitment in the fight against fascism and tyranny. He endured multiple POW camps, "hell ships" to Singapore and Burma, and slave labor on the infamous Thai-Burma Death Railway.

His nearly four years of as a POW of Japan were marked by starvation, torture, and beatings. As a POW medical orderly, he labored without medicines and supplies to save the lives of his fellow brutalized POWs. He, himself, survived bouts of dysentery, malaria, and pellagra. At liberation in August 1945, he was among just 291 remaining USS *Houston* (CA-30) survivors.

Bob's resilience never wavered, and his service did not end with his Navy discharge in 1947. He continued serving his country by enlisting in the U.S. Army for 15 years. After his military career, he worked in security at 3M for another 15 years, retiring in 1978 due to medical issues caused by his wartime imprisonment.

Throughout his life, Bob's deep faith as a devout member of the Catholic Church of Saint Peter in Forest Lake, Minnesota, guided him through the darkest times and brightest moments, serving as a cornerstone of his strength. On September 12, 2024, Seaman Second Class Robert L. Hanley passed away at 102 years old. May he rest in peace.



Robert L. "Bob" Hanley, SEA2/c, USN

Now See This!

USS *Houston* (CA-30) Merchandise! Wear with pride!

Email john@usshouston.org to place an order.

- USS *Houston* CA-30 Challenge Coins – (\$10.00 ea.)
- USS *Houston* CA-30 Hats – (\$25.00 ea.)
- USS *Houston* CA-30 Large Men's Polos in Navy Blue and Black – (\$24.00 ea.)
- USS *Houston* CA-30 T-Shirts - Navy Blue — (\$15.00 ea.) **NEW!**

Visit our website's [Ship's Store](#) and see all USS *Houston* CA-30 items!

(All Items: Plus Shipping)

USS *Houston* CA-30 Challenge Coin



Front

Back



USS *Houston* CA-30 Hats



USS *Houston* CA-30 Men's Polo Shirts



New!
USS *Houston* CA-30 T-Shirts

Meet your...

Board of Managers

...here to serve you!*



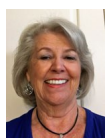
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Son of USN survivor Otto Schwarz and Trudy Schwarz
Association strategy/outreach, Special Projects,
Scholarship Committee, Merchandise
Email: John@usshouston.org



President: Sue Kreutzer
Daughter of USN survivor Paul Papish
Webmaster, archives, membership,
Scholarship Committee
Email: Sue@usshouston.org



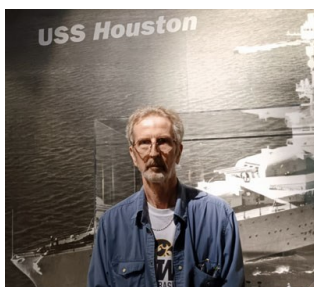
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Son of USMC survivor Bob Charles
Crew and POW camp records,
Blue Bonnet Editor, researcher, correspondent
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Email: Pam@usshouston.org



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Daughter of KNIL POW survivor Willem Terluin
Special Projects, Scholarship Committee
Email: Bernice@usshouston.org



Our Association's Historian,
Donald M. Kehn, Jr. is the
author of two U.S. Naval
History books: [A Blue Sea of
Blood](#) and [In the Highest
Degree Tragic](#).



[Blue Bonnet](#) Staff Photographer:
Dennis Flynn,
Son of USN Survivor David C. Flynn.

Membership

Our Association continues to grow as more folks reach us—through such avenues as our websites—and want to know more about the *Houston*, or just simply seek to contribute to the perpetuation of the memory of this gallant warship. To those interested in taking it further and joining our Association: go to www.usshouston.org, click on the “news tab,” scroll to the bottom and review the Association’s bylaws, then click on the link to membership form (<http://www.usshouston.org/memberform.pdf>). After filling out the form, send it in as directed on the form. Our Association is funded through voluntary donations rather than mandatory annual dues. To make a donation, please refer to page one of this newsletter, or review the instructions on the “news tab” of our website.

Association Communication Channels

- Association information, including current and archived newsletter editions, is available at the Association's official website: www.usshouston.org.
- All email correspondence for the Association is directed through: contact@usshouston.org
- The Association’s regular mailing address and phone number is listed on the first page of each issue of the [Blue Bonnet](#) newsletter.
- Our Association's only social media presence is on Facebook at: **USS Houston CA-30**.

* The Board of Managers is available to members for questions, concerns, input, or to clarify any matter regarding the Association via email contact@usshouston.org, phone, or regular mail.

Thank you!

Donations

In Memory of Bill Ingram, Jr.
Scott Ingram

In Memory of John Stefanek
Henry & Jane Matthews

Other Donations

Laurie Babastow
Alex Fraiola
Bernice Harapat
Charles & Linda Swick

Financial Report

March 28 to July 24, 2025

General Fund

Beginning Balance	\$34,407.71
Receipts	\$7,644.00
Expenses	<u>-\$5,992.03</u>
Ending Balance	\$36,059.68

Scholarship Fund

Beginning Balance	\$26,117.86
Receipts	\$2,478.96
Expenses	<u>-\$0.00</u>
Ending Balance	\$28,596.82



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Articles or information may be sent to:

contact@usshouston.org or bluebonnet@usshouston.org.

All submitted articles are subject to editing.

Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of this Association, its members, or its Board of Managers.



Memorial Day, 2025: At the USS Houston/HMAS Perth marker at Arlington National Cemetery. Lest We Forget.