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Navy chief reunites with his ship's bell after 70 years

NEWPORT, R.I. – In a fitting end to a week-long celebration of the 122nd birthday of the Navy chief petty officer, the Surface Warfare Officers School (SWOS) welcomed World War II veteran, retired Chief Petty Officer Armando Napoli on April 3.

“We should never forget that everything we accomplish today was made possible by the sacrifices of our brothers and sisters of the past like Armando Napoli,” said SWOS command master chief John Butcher.

Accompanied by family and friends, Napoli visited SWOS to view the ship's bell of the ship he served on 70 years ago, USS Ballard (DD 267 and AVD 10), and to view today's state-of-the-art shiphandling trainers.

Armando's son, Jay Napoli, was moved by the effort SWOS made to honor his father's service.

“We are so appreciative for everything SWOS did today,” Jay said. “This visit was well beyond our expectations; we were expecting to come here, view the bell, and take a few photos, but SWOS took the extra step to make this memorable. This was a special day for my father, and our entire family.”

Armando was born to Italian immigrants on January 16, 1925 in Brockton Mass. and was raised in Worcester, Mass. He attempted to enlist in the Navy in 1941 at the age of 16, but was denied enlistment due to being too young. Determined to serve in the Navy, he successfully enlisted in March 1943. He underwent basic training in San Diego, and was assigned to the *Ballard* in March of 1943 as a Seaman 1st Class (E-1), where he was assigned to the Deck Department. He initially became a boatswain's mate, but eventually converted to electronics technician, and remained with the *Ballard* until it was sold in May 1946. Armando retired from active duty in 1962 as a chief petty officer. Upon retirement, he moved to Newport, R.I. and worked at the Naval Underwater Systems Center (NUSC), now the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC), and retired from civil service in 1987.

During the SWOS tour, Armando told the staff about his time at-sea during World War II.

"I was always scared when I was out there, but I was glad I was there serving my country," said Armando.

Ballard was built in Squantum, Mass. and initially commissioned as a destroyer in June 1919. In 1940, she was converted to an auxiliary seaplane tender and redesignated as AVD 10. She was placed in full commission in January 1941 and reported to Aircraft Scouting Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Throughout WWII, *Ballard's* responsibilities included tending patrol planes, laying aircraft buoys, escorting convoys, and patrolling throughout the Eastern Pacific. Additionally, she participated in the operation at Saipan and the seizure

of the Palau Islands. *Ballard* was decommissioned December 5, 1945 in Philadelphia.

Armando said he was thankful for his opportunity to visit SWOS and see his ship's bell after so many years.

"I can't thank the Navy and SWOS enough for the presentation they put on. I am overwhelmed with emotion, and this just proves to me how great an institution the Navy is, now and always," said Armando. "Every day, I appreciate what the Navy has done to better my life, and what they have done and always will do for this country."

According to the SWOS staff, the ship's bell has significance for various reasons and serves multiple purposes on ships. Bells are used as alarms, in ceremonies, as timekeepers, for safety of navigation and communication, and in religious ceremonies such as christenings. The ship's bell is always removed from decommissioned vessels and preserved by the Naval History and Heritage Command, and they can be loaned to various institutions connected with naval history. In this instance, SWOS was chosen to display *Ballard's* bell.

Cmdr. Kevin Meyers, executive officer of SWOS, underscored the importance of visits like this one by Chief Napoli.

"It means a lot to the veterans, but honestly, it means even more to our Sailors here on the staff. These visits bring to life the courage of these heroes," said Meyers. "It's one thing to read about our naval history during your academic studies. Listening to Armando vividly recount what he saw at the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" and see the pride on his face at what his shipmates achieved, is a priceless memory for me personally."

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