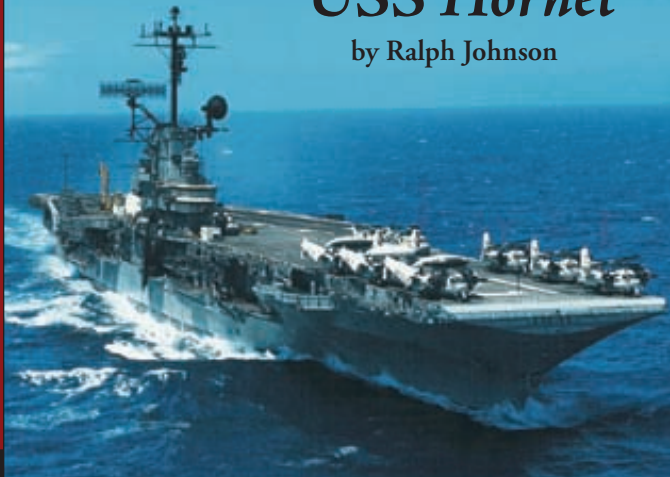


Historic Ships

USS *Hornet*

by Ralph Johnson



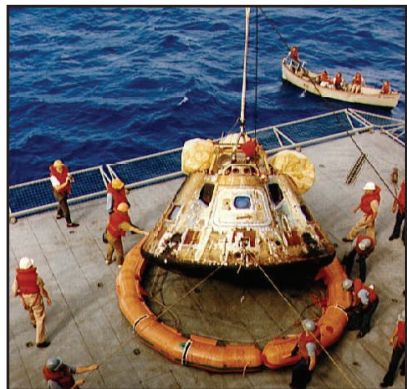
COURTESY USS HORNET MUSEUM

In 1998, the Aircraft Carrier Hornet Foundation (ACHF), a private non-profit organization, acquired the world-famous and highly-decorated USS *Hornet* (CVS-12) from the US Navy and converted her into a museum. She has been moored at Pier 3 at the former Alameda Naval Air Station on San Francisco Bay since October of that year.

This 41,000-ton *Essex*-class carrier made significant contributions to the United States throughout her history. During World War II, she earned nine battle stars and a Presidential Unit Citation for sustained combat operations. She spent fifteen continuous months in the thick of the island invasion campaign and was attacked fifty-nine times but never seriously damaged. Her air groups destroyed 1,410 enemy aircraft and sank over 1.2 million tons of enemy shipping. Her only significant damage was sustained near the end of the war when a typhoon ripped up the forward 24 feet of her flight deck. *Hornet* was converted to an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) ship in 1958 and did three tours of duty on Yankee Station during the Vietnam conflict.

Hornet gained world fame in 1969 when, on July 24th, she recovered *Apollo 11*, the first mission to land humans on the surface of the moon.

Over 500 million people worldwide watched live as she flawlessly gathered up the crew, capsule, and soil samples, while President Nixon stood on the bridge intently following the operation. USS *Hornet* was decommissioned in 1970 and lay dormant at Bremerton, Washington, until



COURTESY NASA

Apollo 11 spacecraft Command Module hoisted aboard USS Hornet

the Navy awarded a salvage contract to scrap her. She was towed to the San Francisco Bay Area for scrapping in 1995. Before salvage work could begin, the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station (NAS) Alameda, California, Captain James Dodge, requested her presence as the centerpiece for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Soon the ACHF was formed, \$2.4 million raised, and the Navy was petitioned to overturn the scrapping order and release her to become a public museum. By October 1998, the *Hornet* Museum opened with its principal source of income coming from gate admissions and store sales. With fantastic support from a wide array of volunteers, significant ship restoration work was accomplished and other programs were put in place. Many corporations chose to have private events aboard *Hornet* and rented her for an evening. *Hornet* began community outreach programs: one was a youth overnight live-aboard experience, initially created for Boy and Girl Scouts and now expanded to school and other youth groups; the other was quarterly Big Band dances to add a unique air of nostalgia to the swing craze.

Then the "perfect storm" swept into Alameda. In 2000 the dot-com business implosion sent the Bay Area into a steep recession, which still exists four years later. In September 2001, immediately following the



COURTESY NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER

40mm quad gun mount and crew in action on USS Hornet, 1945

World Trade Center disaster, tourism in San Francisco plummeted. Lastly, the former Alameda NAS was supposed to be handed over to the city for redevelopment starting in 2004. Due to a Navy-City issue concerning toxic waste cleanup, this privatization has

stalled and full redevelopment of the base area may not be completed until well beyond the original date.

Although restoration work and a variety of public and private events continue to take place, the USS *Hornet* remains in an out-of-the-way location with little ability to control its destiny (or even put up signage showing its location) and facing a two-year decline in attendance due to the poor local economy and the tourism decline. The *Hornet* Museum obtained a loan to maintain basic operations through the most difficult period but continues to seek additional benefactor or grant support to assist it until the economy rebounds and/or the Alameda redevelopment issue is overcome. ↓

Ralph Johnson is the CEO of the USS Hornet Museum. For more information, contact: USS Hornet Museum, PO Box 460, Alameda, CA 94501; Ph. 510 521-8448 ext. 239; e-mail: ralph.johnson@uss-hornet.org; web site: www.uss-hornet.org.

on a Lee Shore

D*uwamish* was launched in 1909 for service in Seattle's fire department. Designed by Eugene McAllaster, she was unique—McAllaster fitted her with many more water monitors (or fixed water nozzles) than was typical. They provided a total capacity of 9,000 gallons per minute at 200 psi. The fireboat was also built with a ramming bow to enable firefighters to ram and sink a vessel at the pier if a blaze could not be extinguished quickly.

Duwamish's riveted-steel hull measured 120 ft. long with a beam of 28 ft. In one of her first trials in 1911, the boat was called out to douse a fire at the Eyers Storage and Distributing Company. A crowd of spectators gathered to watch the fire, and when *Duwamish* turned on her forward monitor, the stream passed over the crowd and hit a series of power lines that instantly started to arc and spark—not an impressive start for a vessel that ultimately served the city so well over the decades to follow. Nevertheless, *Duwamish* was not to suffer from a bad reputation for long. In 1914, fire broke out at the Grand Trunk Pacific Dock—the largest wooden dock on the west coast, which supported a lumber warehouse, office spaces, and a large clock tower. The entire pier burst into flames and *Duwamish* placed herself between the Grand Trunk and the Coleman Dock to the south, where radiant heat had caused the roof of the Coleman to ignite as well. *Duwamish* found herself fighting flames on both sides, but together with the US revenue cutter *Unalga*, the two boats were able to save the Coleman pier.

In World War I, *Duwamish* served as a harbor patrol vessel. Throughout the 1930s, *Duwamish* provided protection for Elliott Bay and extinguished innumerable blazes. By the time the Second World War broke out, *Duwamish* had aged, and her role as primary fireboat for downtown Seattle had been filled by a newer vessel. The war brought new opportunities, however, and she once again became a harbor patrol vessel with the US Coast Guard. At the end of the war, many people argued that the vessel was at the end of her serviceable life. Seattle Fire Chief

William Fitzgerald saw the advantages to having such a large boat and argued that it would be cheaper to rebuild her. Her hull was still in excellent shape and new pumps and engines would make her a very powerful tool. In 1949, she was refitted with a clipper bow and three new Cooper-Bessemer 900hp supercharged diesels. Her stacks were replaced by a single funnel, and her two new pumps each rated at 11,400 gallons per minute. This made the *Duwamish* the most powerful municipal fireboat in the world in terms of pumping capacity. What emerged from the slips was practically a new boat—faster, more maneuverable, and able to blast twenty-four streams of water with her various monitors and hose couplings. She once again became Seattle's premier fireboat.

In 1958, the worst fire in Seattle's history since the blaze of 1889 erupted at the Seattle Cedar Mill, where millions of board feet of lumber were stored. *Duwamish* roared out of her slip, sirens wailing. When she reached Shilshole Bay, the flames were already reaching thousands of feet into the air and sending engulfed planks aloft.

Fireboat *Duwamish*

by John M. Rose



COURTESY OF ANDREW TURPIN

To the astonishment of her crew, when they turned on the huge forward monitor at 10,000 gallons per minute, they saw the water stream evaporate before it ever reached the flames. *Duwamish* aimed to prevent the fire from spreading to other areas of the waterfront—it was six hours before the fire was contained. Paint on the hull blistered and the firefighters' rubber boots melted. For twenty-five hours *Duwamish* and her crew fought this fire until only charred embers remained.



Duwamish in 1909, pumping water for the first time

COURTESY OF SEATTLE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND INDUSTRY

This was not the last of the great fires of Seattle that *Duwamish* would fight. Throughout *Duwamish's* long history, her greatest enemy had been the thousands of creosote-covered pilings that dotted the waterfront. Eventually, her wear and a changing city rendered *Duwamish* obsolete. With the rise in recreational boating, the city needed a boat that was suitable to both fire fighting and marine rescue, something the *Duwamish* could never accomplish with a top speed of only fourteen knots. In 1984 *Duwamish* was replaced and the old boat was tied up at the government locks in Shilshole. Many found it hard simply to scrap the venerable lady, and various plans were put forward to purchase and restore her. In 1994 she was purchased by a small group of dedicated enthusiasts who saw her as an excellent platform for building civic pride, teaching local history, and as a center for youth development. Since 1997 she has participated in public events, greeting large crowds with her impressive water displays. The work of restoring this old heroine goes on, so that she can remain a symbol of Seattle well into the 21st century. ↓

Duwamish is currently berthed at the south end of Lake Union in downtown Seattle. The city plans on building a maritime park on this site within the next five years and hopes to include *Duwamish*. A National Historic Landmark, the vessel is owned by the Puget Sound Fireboat Foundation. Web site: www.fireboatDuwamish.org; e-mail: info@FireboatDuwamish.org.