

series | part 1

Exhibit offers insight into African American WWII Sailors

USS Mason featured at Newport News Museum

By David Todd
The Flagship Managing Editor

NORFOLK

During Black History Month, the New Journal and Guide and the Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center in Newport News are presenting a special exhibit dedicated to the Navy men who served on the USS Mason (DE 529), called “Black Pride At Sea: The Men of the USS Mason.” The exhibit pays special attention to the role of the Black Press and the untold heroism of the men who served on the ship during World War II.

The Mason, a 1,140-ton Evarts-class destroyer escort, was constructed at the Boston Navy Yard in Massachusetts and was commissioned on March 20, 1944. Although there were numerous other escort ships like the Mason, it was the nation’s first ship manned by a predominantly black enlisted crew – 160 enlisted. The additional crew included six officers, who were white.

Named in honor of Ens. Newton Henry Mason, a pilot with Fighting Squadron Three who was killed in action during the Battle of Coral Sea in May of 1942, the ship was employed on convoy escort duties in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea through the remainder of World War II. In the early post-war months, she served as a training and experimental ship. Some at the time called the ship “Eleanor’s Folly,” referring to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s efforts to desegregate the military and her campaign for equal opportunity in the military. The ship was not expected to succeed.

“I really got interested in the project about five or six years ago when the Nauticus had a showing of the movie ‘Proud’ during Black History Month,” said Brenda H. Andrews, Publisher, New Journal and Guide. “One of the Mason men, Lorenzo DuFau (Signalman 2nd Class), was there as one of the special guests. To be perfectly honest, that was the first time I had heard of the



New Journal and Guide archive photo

“What we try to do is fill in the gaps that the history books don’t provide”

- Donna Davis, Historic Site Curator

The crew of the USS Mason (DE 529) consisted of 160 enlisted and six officers, of which the enlisted crew was predominantly black.

Donna Davis, Historic Site Curator, The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center; Brenda H. Andrews, Publisher, New Journal and Guide; and Command Master Chief Raymond D. Kemp, USS Mason (DDG 87) at the opening of the USS Mason exhibit in Newport News.



Courtesy of New Journal & Guide | Randy Singleton

USS Mason.”

After viewing the movie and talking at length with DuFau, the Mason began to spark a personal interest for Andrews.

“My main interest, at that time and now continuing, was the role of the Black Press – and particularly the Journal and Guide staff that actually told that story,” she said. “In the book ‘Proudly We Served,’ written by Mary Pat Kelly, she read an article that Thomas W. Young, from the Journal and Guide, had written on how they (the Mason crew) were treated in Ireland.”

According to the book, Kelly talks about the Northern Ireland port of call, as having a profound effect

on the crew. Young even devoted a whole article on the experience, titled, “Irish First to Treat Mason Crew as Americans.”

Young was commissioned by the Navy as a war correspondent aboard the Mason. While embedded, his job was to report on this history-making venture, but ultimately it was his articles and photos that kept the ship, and the crew’s, stories alive through the years.

“In today’s era, to think of people doing the kinds of jobs they were doing is pretty routine,” said Andrews. “But, travel back 60 years, and these were the first men of color who were given an opportunity to do things that people do

together had broken, leaving the ship at risk of sinking. Despite the ordeal, the crew didn’t give up. Within two hours, the deck was repaired, a new antenna was in service and water had been pumped from the engine room. Mason stayed at sea three more days, assisting 12 additional ships in the convoy.

Lt. Cmdr. William “Bill” Blackford, Mason’s captain, recommended his crew for individual commendation for their efforts in saving Convoy NY-119, but it wasn’t until 1994, as a result of efforts by Congressional Black Caucus Congressman Charles Rangel of New York, a national tribute by President William Jefferson Clinton was held to honor the pioneering work of the forgotten African American heroes of the Mason, along

with other African American veterans of World War II. Andrews has vowed to continue her research to try to uncover more stories and photos about these historic men. The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center is also doing their part to help tell the story.

“What we try to do is fill in the gaps that the history books don’t provide,” said Donna Davis, Historic Site Curator, The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center. “So, we talk about little known Black History facts. A lot of things that were prevalent in the community, but not very well publicized in these days.”

■ the museum

The Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center is located at 2803 Oak Ave. in Newport News. It is open to the public Thurs. - Sat. from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Mon. - Wed. by appointment only).

The exhibit is free, with suggested adult donation of \$2. For more information, call 246-2360, or visit www.newsomehouse.org

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While at the Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center, many are encouraged to stay and watch the motion picture, “Proud: Based on the true story of the men of the USS Mason.” The movie features Ossie Davis, playing the part of DuFau, and was his last big screen performance before his death in 2005.

“The movie was provided by Brenda Andrews,” said Davis. “So when people come to see the exhibit of the USS Mason, they are also invited to sit and watch the movie,” said Davis.

Next week we will continue by taking a deeper look into Mason’s crew and also see how the USS Mason (DDG 87) keeps DE-529’s legacy alive.



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series | part 2



USS Mason (DE 529) crew members look proudly at their ship while moored at the Boston Navy Yard in Boston, Mass., March 20, 1944.

The Mason was an Evarts-class destroyer escort during World War II. It was commissioned on March 20, 1944 and decommissioned on Oct. 12, 1945.

U.S. Navy archive photo

Exhibit offers insight into African American WWII Sailors

Mason legacy lives on through DDG-87

By David Todd
The Flagship Managing Editor

“It is vital that we take time and be acquainted with these great men and draw further inspiration, motivation and dedication from their example.”

- Command Master Chief Raymond D. Kemp

NORFOLK

The story of the USS Mason (DE 529), a World War II Evarts-class destroyer escort, offers a detailed look into naval history and its heroic crew. Hailed as the nation's first ship manned by a predominantly black enlisted crew, the ship and her crew were often put to the test, tasked with intercepting and decoding German U-boat messages and escorting supply convoys across the Atlantic, all the while having to overcome the constraints of segregation and racism of the time.

Although Mason's crew had definite highs and lows during the 19 months of active service, the overall experience was positive and they helped pave the way for equality in the Armed Forces. The crew mastered all rates and skills, moving at accelerated paces from the lowest to highest enlisted ranks, and proved that they could perform duties just as well, and sometimes better, than their white counterparts. A task that many thought would be a failure.

The legacy of DE-529 lives on today through the current crew of USS Mason (DDG 87), an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, homeported in Norfolk. The ship's motto is, "Proudly We Serve," a symbolic nod to the Sailors of DE-529 who sailed and made history in the defense of our country.

"I'm responsible for the ESWS (Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist) program, and through the program it is required that (Sailors) know the history of the ship and the namesake of the ship," said Command Master Chief Raymond D. Kemp, USS Mason (DDG 87). "DE-529 was named for Ens. Newton Henry Mason, who died in World War II, and he was the distant cousin of John Y. Mason, who was the former secretary of the Navy."

As a part of ESWS qualifications, Sailors are required to know the history and heritage of the USS Mason.

"Of course there are many other portions of ESWS, but that heritage piece, they have to know," said Kemp. "When Sailors check onboard the ship, they go through indoctrination - indoctrination is part of the 'Brilliant on the Basis' program, so every Sailor has a sponsor and they go through indoctrination when they first come to the ship - part of our indoctrination, (Sailors) watch the movie 'Proud,' which is about DE-529. That's how we integrate those two together for every member of the ship."

The movie "Proud," revolves around the recalled story of Signalman 2nd Class Lorenzo DuFau, played by actor Ossie Davis, and the inspirational tale of USS Mason's (DE 529) predominately black crew during World War II. Most importantly, the movie stands as a historical look back in time during the 40s and how these brave Sailors overcame occupational struggles, racism and a storm that nearly pushed the ship to its structural limits. In the end, the Mason crew was heroic and proved they could stand toe-to-toe alongside their peers of all races and backgrounds.

Kemp had the honor of meeting DuFau for the first time in October of 2011. Unbeknownst to him, DuFau is actually the uncle of one of his close friends.

"Interestingly, one of my friends told me about her uncle who had served in the Navy and was in some of the U-boat battles in World War II," said Kemp. "Years later, I realized her uncle was SM2 Lorenzo DuFau. I was super excited when I got orders to the Mason

and when I found out I was connected to this legacy of heroism through a family friend - how exhilarating!"

Kemp arranged for some of his crew members from DDG-87 to go to a film festival in Jersey City, N. J. where "Proud" was being reviewed. There, some of the crew members had the distinct honor of meeting DuFau and listened to his stories first-hand.

"A few of the Sailors were in tears, due to the powerful words of endurance, perseverance, honor, duty and service to our country," explained Kemp. "He made quite an impression and his words had an impact on my Sailors and me."

Mason gets her first crew

The first crew of the Mason began their military service by going to boot camp at Camp Robert Smalls in Great Lakes, Ill. The camp was named for Robert Smalls, a hero of the American Civil War who commandeered a Confederate freighter and navigated it skillfully to the North. It is said that many of the crew members found disappointment in boot camp because the facility was segregated due to the Jim Crow laws of the time. Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the U.S., enacted between 1876 and 1965, that mandated "separate, but equal" facilities for black Americans.

"DE-529 was actually set up as a 'social experiment,' in fact it was often times referred to as 'Eleanor's Folly,'" said Kemp. "Socially, America was just in a different place and once that 'experiment' was found to be a very positive one, more integration followed. Now, our diversity is from the commander-in-chief to every Seaman, Airman, Fireman that's al-



Courtesy of CMDCM Raymond D. Kemp, USS Mason (DDG 87) Signalman 2nd Class Lorenzo DuFau (left) speaks with several crew members from USS Mason (DDG 87) after a showing of the movie "Proud." His powerful words of endurance, perseverance, honor, duty and service to the country made a lasting impression on the Sailors.

lowed to come into the Navy. So, we are certainly much more diverse at every level."

Although technology has advanced significantly through the years, the men of the Mason held jobs very similar to today's Navy.

"In those days, they didn't have sonar technicians at the level of ours, but they did have radiomen, which are now IT's (information systems technicians), they had OS's (operations specialists), and signalmen, which are quartermasters now," explained Kemp. "So, a lot of those ratings we do still have."

Many of these jobs and experiences were documented in the Norfolk-based Journal and Guide, currently on exhibit through the end of February at the Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center in Newport News. The exhibit is called "Black Pride At Sea: The Men of the USS Mason."

"The exhibit itself, I think, for Sailors to see some of the personal stories of the Sailors who were on DE-529, there's always value in what we would call 'sea stories,'" said Kemp. "There is always a value in seeing the official report of what that crew was doing. I would say that, what Sailors would get - especially Mason Sailors, but any Sailor, black or white - a sense of our heritage to see from whence we've come and to see the personal stories that (emotionally) attach you to those crew members."

Black History Month is an opportunity to remember and celebrate the accomplishments of African American's throughout history and the positive impact they have had towards America's success. It's also a great opportunity to honor the fear-

Six Bailey Brothers Fighting On Land, On Sea And In The Air, In Europe, On Pacific And Atlantic



THE BAILEYS OF PUNTA GORDA, FLA.—Six sons of Mr. and Mrs. Archie Bailey in U. S. armed forces overseas are shown above, left to right, top, Harding C., Bertin J., and Charles P.; bottom, Arthur L., Paul L., and Maurice Al. Bailey. One is a pilot in the famed 99th Fighter Squadron, one in the Marine Corps, two are in Army ground forces and two in the Navy, one of whom is a third class electrician's mate on the USS Mason. (See story below.)

By THOMAS W. YOUNG
Journal and Guide War Correspondent
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New Journal and Guide archive photo
A clipping from the Journal and Guide, featuring the writing of Thomas W. Young, a war correspondent aboard USS Mason (DE 529).

less men of DE-529.

"All of us should be aware of this great meritocracy, in which we serve, was earned by Sailors like SM2 DuFau and his shipmates - their courageous efforts paved a way for integration of all ratings, career fields and warfare areas," said Kemp. "It is vital that we take time and be acquainted with these great men and draw further inspiration, motivation and dedication from their example. 'Proudly We Serve!'"

Next week we will conclude the series and take a final look at the crew of the USS Mason (DE 529) and the roll journalism played in documenting their historical presence.

■ the museum

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USS Mason (DE 529) crew members mustered in Dress Blues on the ship's bow while moored at New York Harbor, New York.

Naval History and Heritage Command archive photo

Exhibit offers insight into African American WWII Sailors

Journalism helped preserve Mason's (DE-529) legacy

By David Todd
The Flagship Managing Editor

NORFOLK
During World War II, hundreds of thousands of black men were given the opportunity to serve in the military, but a majority of these men were only allowed to serve in a support capacity.

In the Navy, black men often held jobs as stewards and were tasked with manning the Officers' Mess and maintained the officers' bil-

lets aboard the ships. Some were also engaged in mess management, menu planning and purchasing supplies.

For the enlisted crew of the USS Mason (DE 529), an Evarts-class destroyer escort, the opportunity to serve aboard a U.S. Navy ship during the war was not only a chance to defend the country, it was also a chance for job and racial equality. In fact, it was the first time that black men were able to hold jobs like sonar technicians,

“During this time, the Black Press was very instrumental in covering those World War II stories.”

- Brenda H. Andrews

signalmen and operations specialists in the Navy.

“These were the first men of color who were given an opportunity to do things that people do on ship,” said Brenda H. Andrews, Publisher, New Journal and Guide.

Black journalists also played an important part in that equation. They covered the war conflicts and reported on what they saw, and like all journalists traveling with the military at the time, what they saw was restricted and what they published was often censored.

Thomas W. Young, a journalist from the Journal and Guide in Norfolk, was commissioned by the Navy as a war correspondent aboard the Mason. While embedded, his job was to report on this history-making venture, and it was his articles and photos that kept the ship, and the crew's, stories alive through the years.

“During this time, the Black Press was very instrumental in covering those World War II stories,” said Andrews. “There were five black newspapers, that were called ‘national newspapers,’



Courtesy of THEntertainment War correspondent, Thomas W. Young, aboard the USS Mason in 1944, as seen in the movie “Proud.” Actor Darnell Williams portrayed Young in the film.

The Journal and Guide was one of them – The Baltimore Afro-American, The New York Amsterdam News, The Chicago Defender and The Pittsburg Courier – were all power houses. The interesting thing about that lineup is that the Journal and Guide was the only one below the Mason-Dixon line.”

That fact was significant because being below the Mason-Dixon line and being headquartered in a Southern town, the Journal and Guide was under different constraints than some of the other black publications of the time.

“The publisher of the Journal and Guide, P.B. Young (founder), had to do his stories in a way that he got the story out, but he didn't get run out of town,” explained Andrews. “If you are in Chicago, you can pretty much call a spade a spade. Or if you are in Pittsburgh, or New York, or even Baltimore, but if you are in Norfolk, Va., then when you call a spade a spade, sometimes it is clothed in some other language that may be more palatable to the environment that you are operating out of.”

The Journal and Guide played a major part in telling not only the ‘sea stories,’ but also many of the pressing issues that faced the local black community.

“The Black Press, in particular the Journal and Guide,

covered all the major stories of the day,” said Andrews. “Certainly the war stories were significant, and that was in telling families here (in Norfolk) how their sons were being treated abroad and bringing that story back.”

During the early 40s and 50s, the Black Press became a vehicle to record the stories of racial equality, civil rights accolades and social advancement in the United States.

“When it came to desegregation of the schools, when it came to integration of the various job forces, these were all covered in the Black Press,” she said. “Up until the 1950s, The Black Press was really the only place where black people could read about themselves, and about who they were. That continued in the 1960s when we began to have more desegregated environments.”

Through the end of February, the New Journal and Guide, a successor of the Journal and Guide, and the Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center in Newport News are presenting a special exhibit dedicated to the USS Mason (DE 529), called “Black Pride At Sea: The Men of the USS Mason.” The exhibit pays special attention to the role of the Black Press and the untold heroism of the men who served on the ship during World War II.

“Our exhibit is primarily centered around the Journal

and Guide and around the stories that P.B. Young told about how the men felt on this first mission,” explained Andrews. “We have 10 full page (newspapers) from 1944.”

Uncovering these documents was quite challenging for Andrews, because although the historical pages have been digitized, the filing conventions were often unique to specific writers and events.

“What we discovered is sometimes things had been digitized under another name, so you've kind of got to know the other name as well,” said Andrews. “... With the Navy men of the USS Mason, I believe they were called ‘Blue Jackets,’ so they may have been filed under that versus USS Mason.”

Ultimately, the exhibit is a way for Hampton Roads residents – military and non-military – to experience a moment history and reflect on the accomplishments of Mason's crew and to celebrate Black History Month.

“This is a Navy town, this is a Navy story, this is a great American story,” said Andrews, “that until 1994 was just in the minds of those remaining USS Mason men and in the pages of black newspapers.”

Writer Says USS Mason Showed White And Colored Men Mix Well In New Navy



DEMOCRACY AT WORK— Everything is compact on a destroyer escort, and every foot of space must serve at least one good purpose. A chow hall by day (above) becomes crew's sleeping quarters at night as tables and benches are folded away and bunks let down. But it heats C rations in a foehole, men in the Navy are quick to say. Three white members of the USS Mason crew can be seen among group in top photo. Below are three of the cooks who help prepare meals on the Mason. Left to right are Donald L. Dairymple, ship's cook 2e of Boston, Mass., and Chicago; Marion Johnson, seaman 1c of Orangeburg, S. C.; and John Murray, steward's mate 1c of Philadelphia. (Exclusive photos by Guide war correspondent).

By THOMAS W. YOUNG
Journal and Guide War Correspondent
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New Journal and Guide archive photo

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