

## **Splashdown 50 Onboard USS Hornet\***

**by John Stonesifer**

For those of you who were aboard for Apollo 202, Apollo 8, Apollo 11, and 12, you will not notice much different today from back in those days. At first sighting, you will notice there are large steps to go aboard and an elevator (not ship's elevator 3) for loading shipboard maintenance equipment, large displays, and the numerous historic aircraft.

It still is impressive walking next to that bow remembering the history of the USS Hornet, all who served aboard, and proud of all the volunteer workers who work so diligently to keep its history alive.

As the anniversary approached, the program developers put together programs weeks in advance of the actual anniversary. They take advantage of any interesting ship celebrations like Splashdown 50 to keep the visitors coming. Operating a museum ship of this size requires volunteer support.

Advice given to the NASA and Navy personnel Splashdown 50 invitees was to arrive on Friday July 19, review the schedule for the big day on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and of course renew stories. Several of my family chose to travel with me and not miss this 50th. (I also needed occasional help as I used a walker for the long walks in travel). Fortunately, I arranged for retired crew members and volunteers to take the family visitors on a tour thru the ship - up and down they will never forget.

The Splashdown 50 invitees included Dr. Bill Carpentier (Flight Surgeon), John Hirasaki (MQF Recovery Engineer), Clancy Hatleberg (Cdr. of the swim teams and decontamination swimmer), Paul Rambaut (NASA Food Officer), Bruce Johnson (Co-Pilot of Retrieval helo No. 66), Larry Duncan (Co-Pilot of Photo helo) and John Stonesifer (NASA Recovery Team Leader for Quarantine/Isolation).

One of the most interesting exhibits for the visitors is an Apollo spacecraft that was launched as an unmanned spacecraft AS-202/CM-011. This flight tested the Apollo heat shield for the heat of reentry. Later in its history it was further tested to determine possible damage during land impact tests. Fortunately, the Hornet can actually exhibit a flown Apollo spacecraft. Placed next to a boilerplate Gemini is an excellent example of size and shape of the two spacecraft. In addition, the

museum houses the MQF used on Apollo 14, which has a display of a copy of the supposed custom declaration for bringing astronauts and lunar material thru Hawaii. JSC history office claims to have an original with astronaut signature. Mike Collins and I have convinced those who care that supposed original and copy are fake. The times cited in the form do not agree with official times in route. Most important is that Mike was a deputized custom official and was cleared to pass Apollo 11 material and crew through Hawaii.

The biggest change from Friday to Saturday activities was the sudden filling of the hangar deck with vendors and many people displaying their role in Apollo 11. These activities plus the Apollo official displays provided entertainment for visitors throughout the day. The busiest activity was at the Hornet store where all kinds of NASA, Navy items were on sale. Visitor's bags were filled quickly, and supplies were gone quickly.

I had numerous conversations with Melissa Jones, the KFC Orion Recovery coordinator, and was familiar with parts of their operation based on our visit arranged by Milt Heflin at JSC in the Weightless Environment Training Facility (WETF). She gave a very complete briefing after the panel discussions on the present Artemis program. I was pleased that in their recovery operation the present mode is to bring the crew to the ship by helo prior to bringing the Orion into the ship.

At times I was introduced to crew members who were aboard for Apollo 11 recovery. A point I always try to do is thank all the DoD personnel I meet for their devotion to support NASA through all the space missions.

The best part, of course, was being aboard and striking up old conversations with participants. My most remembered thing was as we told our stories the conclusion always was, "How did we do it?"

October 16, 2019

\*Splashdown 50 was a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apollo 11 recovery on July 16-24, 2019, at the USS Hornet Sea, Air, and Space Museum in Alameda, California (<https://www.uss-hornet.org/>).



Photos:



Splashdown 50 Invitees: John Hirasaki, Bill Carpentier, Clancy Hatleberg, Bruce Johnson, John Stonesifer, Larry Duncan, Paul Rambaut.



The MQF is still in great shape. John's Daughter Jill and husband Brad had many questions. Steps were provided for viewing.



Clancy Hatleberg, John, Dr. Bill Carpentier in front of WWII Avenger.



John's wife, Marge, finally believing all his stories.



John in front of the helo painted like the famous 66, and all the recoveries it participated in. This helo was later found, based on aircraft numbers, to have participated in Gemini 4 and was the helo used in the film Apollo 13.



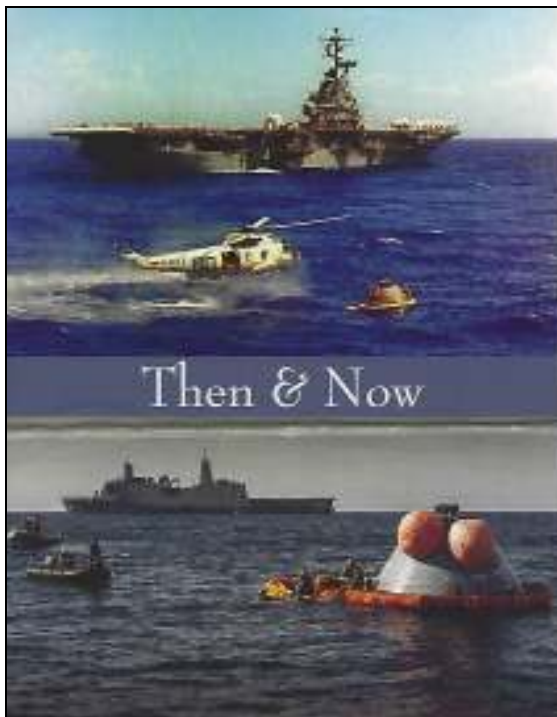
John's son, Greg, standing beside the MQF. Greg represents a second Generation as he is associated with the ISS space suits and EVA equipment. The plaques at the MQF describe the role of the MQF's in Apollos 11, 12, and 14.



The panel session for the main audience. On stage is Bob Fish, who introduced the panel members who were called on to briefly describe their role in the Apollo 11 recovery: Dr Bill Carpentier (MQF Flight Surgeon), John Hirasaki (MQF Recovery Engineer), John Stonesifer (NASA Recovery Team Leader for Quarantine/Isolation), Paul Rambaut (NASA Food Specialist), Bruce Johnson (Recovery helo Copilot), Larry Duncan (Photo helo Copilot).



John in front of USS Hornet.



### Human Space Flight Support

Detachment 3, of the 45th Operations Group, coordinates DoD contingency support for our nation's human space flight programs. Chartered in 1959 by the Secretary of Defense as the DoD Mercury Support Office [later renamed DoD Manned Space Flight Support Office, its express purpose is providing DoD support to our nation's human space flight programs . . . putting people into space and returning them safely to Earth. Since its inception, this unit has continued to be the principle facilitator for all DoD nominal and contingency support to Projects Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo; the Apollo/Soyuz Test Project; the Space Shuttle Program; the International Space Station (ISS)/Soyuz Program; the Orion Program; and the Commercial Crew Program.

Det. 3 is responsible for coordinating astronaut rescue and recovery, contingency landing site support, payload security, medical support, coordination of airlift/sealift for contingency operations, as well as other support services required in the event of a spacecraft emergency. The office further develops functional/operational documents with USSTRATCOM and coordinates with elements of the military departments, combatant commands, DoD agencies, and other agencies, and then monitors the status of those forces during mission execution.

DoD handout at SB50 onboard USS Hornet.

(Additional SB50 photos at <https://www.susanwoodphotography.com/Clients/50th-Apollo-11-Recovery-Reunion/i-GffzM2B>.)