

Radarman Jim Hayter Still On Board the USS Midway

“Like nothing I’d ever seen before, incredibly massive, awe inspiring and deadly all at the same time,” is how Jim Hayter described the first time he saw the aircraft carrier USS Midway. Enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1959, Hayter went to radar school and reported to the mighty ship at its homeport in Alameda, CA in 1960. He worked in the Operations Intelligence (OI) division for the entire 38 months he was aboard the Midway. This group operated the vessel’s five radar systems, which were manned 24 hours a day while underway. Promoted to Radarman 2nd class prior to discharge, Hayter did two western Pacific cruises, one off Laos, which at the time was among the first hotbeds in Southeast Asia and home to part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

“We were running figure eights off the coast and always watching the screens as things were starting to intensify,” said Hayter, 77. “We saw the recon planes coming back full of holes in their tails and wings. “The Midway was our tip of the sword in the Far East and out there ready in case something went wrong.”

Commissioned a week after the Japanese surrender and named after the Battle of Midway, which in 1942 helped turn the war in the Pacific to the allies’ favor, the ship became the longest-serving carrier of the 20th century and at 971-feet long the largest ship in the world until 1955. She served 47 years and saw extensive action in Vietnam, receiving the Presidential Unit Citation from Nixon, noting crucial and devastating aerial attacks against the enemy. She operated through the entire Cold War and was the Persian Gulf flagship in Operation Desert Storm. Over the decades she was home to more than 200,000 sailors before being decommissioned in 1992. “With its size, you’d think there would be plenty of room for the 4,500 crewmen and there was, but not in the sleeping quarters, where we were packed in,” Hayter said.

Hayter left the service in 1963, graduated from Texas Tech University and enjoyed a career with ATT. He left the company in 1989 and worked for Mindbank Consulting Group until in 2013, retiring in Reston, VA with wife Pammela. It would be more than 35 years, but in 1998 he got a call that would eventually put him back aboard ship. “I was contacted by a retired chief from the Midway who had started the OI Division Reunion Group, We always enjoyed our gatherings, but the numbers were kind of small, so we decided to open it up to more people in 2010 as the USS Midway Veterans Association,” said Hayter, Vice President of Reunions for the organization.

As the lead ship of the Midway class, she lives on as the USS Midway Museum, berthed since 2004 at the Navy Pier in San Diego. “It was an unbelievable feeling to step back on board the first time”. Today she is the most visited museum ship in the world, just amazing and home to planes and memorabilia from 1945 to ’92,” Hayter said. “The first thing you do at our reunions is see someone you knew in your late teens, talk about what they did after their service and then start sharing some of the sea stories from our Navy days. The stories get bigger and better with each re-telling. We reestablish old friendships and make new ones. As soon as you hit the deck the memories start flooding back.”

Armed Forces Reunions, Inc. has been managing the association’s reunions for several years and will manage their 2017 gathering. “AFR is extremely helpful in planning our reunions and are a

complete full-service operation, providing the total package or just tailoring what we need done, they do it all.”

The association’s next reunion is Sept. 11 -13 in San Diego with the highlight being a flight deck dinner on the Midway for 400 and retired Rear Admiral Mac McLaughlin, museum CEO as guest speaker. “We are so lucky, most ships from that time have been decommissioned and scrapped,” Hayter said. “To think that 50 years later we’re enjoying a meal and sunset from where countless planes were launched and landed makes for a very reflective moment.”

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