2026
Mayport Navy League June Newsletter

President – Bob Whitkop (904) 900-8934 http://www.mayportnlus.org

Calendar of Events

June 4- MNL BOD meeting at Ocean Breeze Conference Ctr 6:30pm. All Mayport Navy Leaguers invited!

June 6 - D-Day & Battle of Midway Remembrance at Cypress Village in Egret Room at 5:30pm . Attire: formal or suit/dressy dress

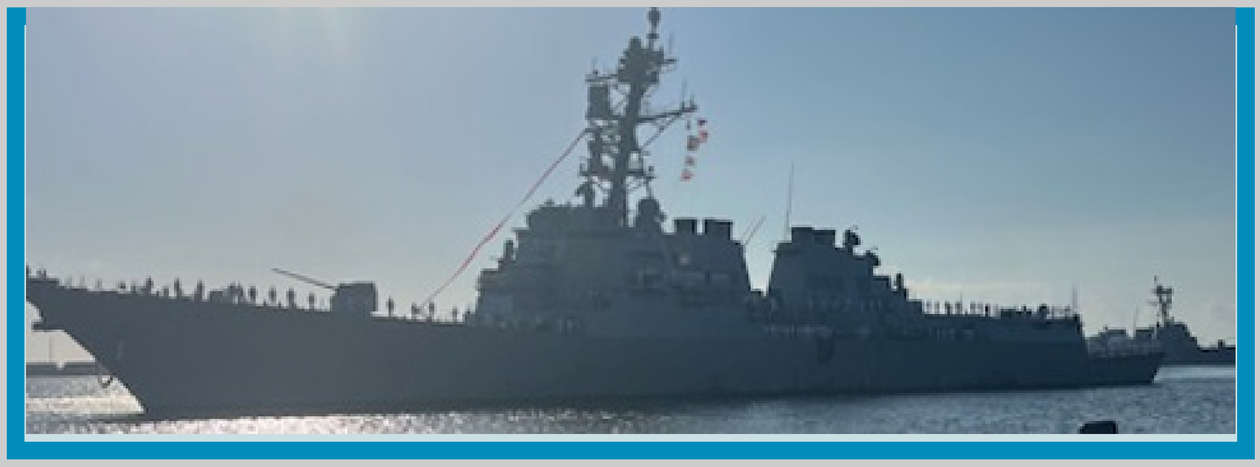
June 11 - Food Farmacy at Fleet Reserve Assoc at 390 Mayport Road 10am-noon

June 14 - Flag Day

June 19 - Juneteenth Day (Federal Holiday)

June 21 - Father's Day and Summer Solstice

June 25 - Food Farmacy at Fleet Reserve Assoc at 390 Mayport Road 2-4pm; NLUS Annual Dinner with the Propeller Club at the Ramada Beachfront Hotel 6pm



USS Winston S. Churchill returns from 11-month deployment

The USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) returned to Naval Station Mayport on May 16th with a historic, record-breaking nearly year-long deployment spanned roughly 330 days at sea, departing on June 21, 2025.

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer and its crew completed the deployment, operating across three major regions – the Middle East, Europe, and the Caribbean alongside the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group. The Carrier Strike Group included the USS Gerald F. Ford, nine aviation squadrons, and several destroyers to include the USS Winston S. Churchill.

The USS Winston S. Churchill is commanded by Capt. Judson Mallory, departed Mayport on June 21, 2025, and spent 11 months supporting the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier and its Strike Group. During the deployment, the ship worked alongside more than 15 allied nations and partner countries in support of combat situations.

The welcoming homecoming of over 500 families, friends, and pier side military colleagues lined the pier with “Welcome Home” posters, balloons, and US flags. Even before the ship was pier side the families were calling out and waving to their loved ones standing at attention and manning the ship rails. It was a very emotional welcoming with families from all over the United States such as Texas, California, Ohio, Virginia and many more.

The Mayport Navy League supported the homecoming by giving out American Flags as the families walked onto the pier. The MNL volunteers helping to celebrate the USS Winston Churchill’s return were Ryan Tillotson, Eric Alfaro, Nick Norfleet, Brian Kennedy, Barbara Ives, and Bob Whitkop.

The Mayport Navy League values membership volunteerism and support

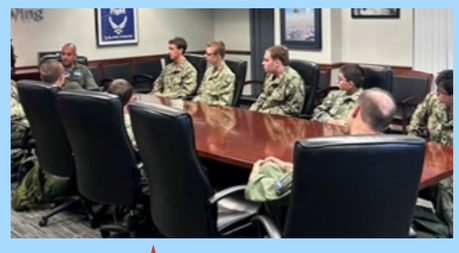
SEA CADETS CORNER

Sea Cadets May Drill

On May 2nd, the Mayport Sea Cadets were invited to tour the Air National Guard 125th Fighter Wing. Cadets performed a PRT upon arrival to prepare for summer training. They then changed into Type III's and were brought to the base HQ for a classroom style presentation by Deputy Commander Colonel David "Lipps" Simeon. The unit enjoyed lunch at the base mess hall before getting a close up encounter with the F-35 aircraft, which was incredible! A fire station tour followed, and the cadets learned how that station not only responds to the Air National Guard base but also assists in emergencies at Jacksonville International Airport since it sits adjacent to its main runway. A multi-vehicle military escorted the cadets back to HQ for a final briefing and dismissal.

On MAY 16th, the Unit held its final drill before summer break which consisted of an award and promotion ceremony. The Mayport Division also honorably discharged CPO Lucas Harnek, who graduates from High School in May and prepares to enter the US Coast Guard in July. Overall, we celebrated six promotions & advancements that took place over the past few months, and five cadets received awards and recognition for academic achievement, excellence in PRT results, and swim qualifications.

On behalf of the Mayport Navy League, Captain Bob Whitkop awarded LC3 Raymor the Roosevelt Youth Ribbon, and CPO Harnek the Roosevelt Youth Medal and a $500 Scholarship check from the Mayport Navy League. The ceremony took place at the Foc'sle Lounge/CPO Club, and beside Captain Whitkop, Jim Young, Brian Kennedy, and George Huchting also attended from the Navy League. We were also grateful that Naval Station Mayport Commanding Officer Captain Trumbull, and other honored guests from the Sea Cadets were able to join us for the celebration. It was a great way to wrap up this season.



The cadets will be on summer break until school resumes in mid-August. We are grateful for all the support the Sea Cadets have received from the Mayport Navy League and Naval Station Mayport this year, and we wish everyone a safe and happy summer.

Story and Photos from Ron Harnek

MILITARY MONDAYS-DINNERS TO GO(MMDTG)

and FOOD FARMACY (FF)

Military Monday resumes in September

About week before the MMDTG on May 13th, the event leaders agreed to cancel the event due to a threatening weather forecast of severe thunderstorms, heavy rain, and wind. It is always prudent to be cautious of weather that would affect our volunteers. Although the actual weather on the 13th was not as expected, our event leader team and the volunteers were appreciative of our concern for their safety.

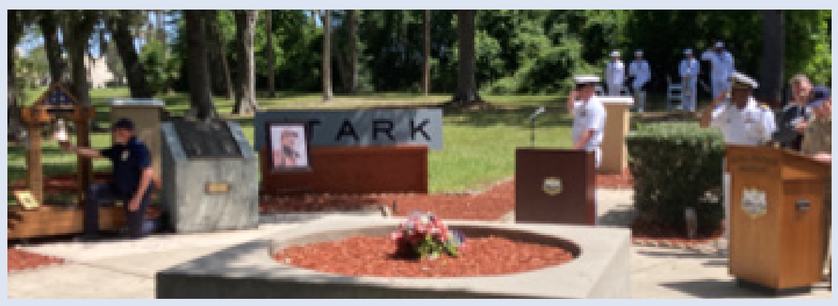
As following the pattern of the summer of 2025, the MMDTG program will take a respite for the summer months. With many military families moving due to PCS or on vacations, school summer closures, summer heat affecting volunteer participation and the inability to keep the dinners fresh due to the heat, the MMDTG MNL food program will take a break until September 7th when we continue the program.

A sincere and hearty thanks to all the volunteers who regularly share their time and talents in keeping our MNL food program robust and successful in providing food for our military members and their families.

Are you interested in becoming a MNL Board Member? If so, contact Bob Whitkop for more information.

USS Stark Annual Memorial Service

The USS Stark FFG-31 was assigned to Naval Station Mayport in Mayport, FL. On May 17th, 1987, while on deployment in the Persian Gulf, the ship was attacked by an Iraqi plane that fired two Exocet missiles killing 37 sailors. The first missile failed to detonate. It penetrated the ship on the port side below the bridge just a few feet above the waterline and exited midships by the galley. The fuel from the missile caused massive fires and instantly killed three Senior Chiefs in the Chiefs berthing compartment. The warhead landed in a passageway by the galley. Less than a minute later, the second missile detonated just a few feet from where the first missile entered the ship.



Ringing the bells for 37 Sailors

To pay his respect, President Reagan arrived at Naval Station Mayport on May 22, 1987. He spoke with and greeted the family members as well as 300 more family and friends in the helo hangar next to the air strip on base. His speech is also available on the website, www.ussstarkmemorial.com

Had it not been for the actions of the crew to save the ship, the Stark would surely be at the bottom of the sea. Not only are they dealing with the destruction of the explosion and the fire it caused, but they also had to control flooding from all the water used to fight the fires. The crew, in real time, had to modify their firefighting skills to overcome the complete loss of the forward fire main system due to the destruction caused by the missiles. Today, those lessons are still taught in firefighting schools throughout the Navy.

Every year, Naval Station Mayport and the Naval Order of the United States co-host a Memorial Service for the 37 Sailors who lost their lives during the Iraqi attack on USS Stark. The Mayport Navy League also provides a memorial wreath.

The Service has grown in attendance each year with some survivors attending for the first time, even after 35 years. The ceremony includes the tradition of "tolling the bell" as each name is called for each Stark shipmate that was lost that night. Shipmates from other commands that helped save the ship also attend including USS Acadia AD-42, USS Conyngham DDG-17, USS Waddell DDG-24, and USS La Salle AGF-3.

Rest easy shipmates, we have the watch.

Shown with Captain (ret) Bob Whitkop MNL President and Captain (ret) Bob Buehn Naval Order NOUS President honoring the wreath laying

Story written by Nick Norfleet and photos by George Huchting

Are you interested in becoming a MNL Board Member? If so, contact Bob Whitkop for more information.

D-Day and Battle of Midway Remembered

The 2026 Naval Order of the United States D-Day and Battle of Midway commemoration dinner will be on Saturday, June 6, from 5:30 PM to 9:00 PM at Cypress Village near Mayo Hospital. Mayport Navy Leaguers are cordially invited to join this remembrance of those days of valor.

The cocktails hour (cash bar) will be from 5:30pm to 6:15pm followed by dinner in the Cypress Village Egret Hall Dining Room. Dinner choices are Cypress Salad, Petite Filet, Mashed Potatoes, Asparagus or Cypress Salad, Mahi Mahi , Rice Pilaf, and Asparagus followed by Key Lime Pie for dessert. The cost of the meal is $40 and can be paid via the link shown below or a check to the Naval Order of the United States. The dinner and program's attire is Formal or appropriate Civilian Dress.

Following dinner, the keynote speaker is Captain (retired) Ed Turner, USN Executive Director of the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum. He will reflect on the historic events which changed the tide of WWII and how they still influence today!

Link for payment https://square.link/u/Nc2N2A2u

Honoring Our Fallen Heroes - A Monument of Remembrance

The Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Wall is a 65 ft black granite monument that represents a great tribute to the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our nation. The memorial wall honors over 1,700 Jacksonville-area service members who have given their lives while in the service of our country - four (4) more names were added to the wall this year.

As the nation's second-largest veterans memorial, the wall recognizes veterans from all seven branches of the military: Army / Marines / Navy / Air Force / Space Force / Coast Guard / Merchant Marine. In the center of the memorial stands a torch with an eternal flame, symbolizing the enduring gratitude of our community.

MNL Member Brian Kennedy presented the MNL wreath and saluted the Wall of Honor at Monday's Memorial Day ceremony on May 25th.

Are you interested in becoming a MNL Board Member? If so, contact Bob Whitkop for more information.