

## EPILOGUE

# *Enterprise is Gone, Long Live Enterprise*

**D**uring her final voyage USS Enterprise proved that although she was an old ship, she was as capable as when she first sailed. The deployment was a success on all counts: all crew who departed were brought back, except, sadly, for one chief, who died as a result of illness; all ship and flight ops were a success; there were no operational or combat losses experienced by Air Wing One. The carrier although requiring much more upkeep and maintenance while underway, was able to perform like a brand-new carrier, attaining and sustaining the fast, still classified speed

that she had done on her very first speed trials. She made it home with all reactor plants producing steam and all four screws turning. Big E returned home on a high point and deserving of her upcoming retirement from the fleet.

Four days prior to the inactivation of *Enterprise*, the crew prepared for her last ceremony. For three days the doors were opened for old shipmates, family and friends to go aboard and tour the ship. Many shipmates met again for the first time in a long time. A service was conducted for those who were aboard during the 1969 fire, with respects paid



Big E at pier 12, NavSta, Norfolk on December 4, 2012.

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to the men lost or harmed in the disaster. Thousands of crew were able once again to walk the deck plates, no doubt recalling the distinct smell of Big E that impregnates one's clothes and skin while aboard. These men and women were not always prepared for the emotions experienced when they climbed the brow and entered the now empty cavernous hangar bay. This reaction reinforced the notion that *Enterprise* was not just a steel vessel, but embodied spirit.

For two returning shipmates, Cmdr. Norman Davis USN (Ret.) and his old friend Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel USN (Ret.), this was particularly so. Neither had been back aboard Big E since their service tours in the 1960s.

Top, left to right: Cmdr. Norman Davis USN (Ret.), Dorothy McDaniel and Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel USN (Ret.), with *Enterprise* in the background, at pier 12 on December 1, 2012. The visit marked the shipmates' first time aboard big E since the 1960s and represented the completion of Red's 81st mission, 45 years after he launched. It was Dorothy's first time aboard *Enterprise*.



Bottom: Red McDaniel stands in approximately the place he was sitting over when his A-6A was coupled to cat 3 for launch on May 19, 1967. Lt. Trent Turner, a naval aviator and "shooter" during Big E's last deployment ceremoniously performed the last (virtual) cat shot on *Enterprise*, December 1, 2012, depicting Red's last launch from *Enterprise* 45 years earlier.



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Cmdr. Davis began his association with *Enterprise* first as a young pilot, then as a lieutenant and maintenance officer in VA-65 "Tigers", flying the A-1 Skyraider in CAG-6 during the workup to the first Med deployment in 1962 (see Chapter 7). He was later attached to ship's company as ordnance officer, now a lieutenant commander, during combat cruises to Vietnam from 1965 to 1968, maintaining his carrier flight currency with limited flight duty in the ship's C-1 Trader COD (see Chapter 8). Capt. "Red" McDaniel was an old squadron mate of Norm's, and their friendship remained strong. They had flown together previously and on *Enterprise* it was Norm who, that 19th day of May, 1967, oversaw Red's ordnance on-load to his A-6A and then descended to strike ops to listen in on the mission. This was the day Red and his B/N, Lt. James Patterson of VA-35 Black Panthers, launched on their 81st mission, never to return to *Enterprise* (see Chapter 8).

Forty-five years had elapsed. Six of those years Red had spent in captivity as a POW in North Vietnam. His

friend James Patterson remains Missing in Action. Red was brutally tortured over the long years of captivity, but did not give up hope and his wife Dorothy never lost faith that he would return from Vietnam. During his time in the “Hanoi Hilton” Red rekindled his Christian faith and became a beacon of hope to other prisoners of war, assisting them in their survival. For this he was awarded the Navy Cross, two silver stars, three bronze stars, the Legion of Merit, and the Naval Commendation Medal. Although he returned home and continued his navy career, including command of USS *Niagara Falls* (AFS-3) and the training carrier USS *Lexington* (AVT-16), he had never returned to *Enterprise* until now.

Norm and Red, along with Red’s wife Dorothy, now rekindled their friendship and together attended the inactivation ceremony on December 1, 2012. It was especially significant for Red as returning aboard for the first time since his launch commemorated the completion of his 81st mission, as noted by Capt. Hamilton during his formal inactivation ceremony address. Red represented all those who had been shot down and taken prisoner and those who had been lost in combat. Prior to his release his wife had worked tirelessly on behalf of all POWs and those missing in action and Dorothy and her husband continued this work long after his return. For both of them their arrival on Big E was a significant mark in a 45-year journey.

Over the following days the ship’s crew still serving on board were stationed on an adjacent accommodation barge, and assisted with the gradual preparation for de-fueling and combat systems and furnishing removal. Cranes moved in and lifted shipyard workers’ huts up on



Top: December 1, 2012 was a sunny day, warm and relaxed for around 10,000 gathered to witness Big E’s inactivation. Elevators 1 and 2 were lowered for guests, the address made from number 2.

Middle: During the inactivation ceremony, Capt. Hamilton presented a flag flown from *Enterprise* during the 25th deployment, and a piece of hardwood railing from the captain’s inport cabin to Ms. Carol Freeman, granddaughter of Mrs. Bertha Franke, the sponsor of *Enterprise*, who had christened the ship on September 24, 1960.

Bottom: Carol Freeman, holding a small piece of *Enterprise* presented to her during the inactivation ceremony.

Ray Helmer Godfrey



*Enterprise*: post inactivation the ship began her last “yard period” at pier 12. Following removal of all recyclable equipment and drainage of her tanks, she was towed as “cold iron” over to her birth place, Newport News, for removal of her reactor core fuel rods and drainage of reactor coolant water, prior to being towed all the way to Puget Sound, Washington in the Pacific northwest for careful deconstruction and reactor plant removal.

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deck and large hoses were inserted into her JP-5 tanks to drain remaining fuel. With no delay the ship’s final journey toward decommissioning had begun. It now seemed right and proper that this ship that had served for fully one half of the time US naval aviation had been in existence, was finally at rest.

For now the name *Enterprise* was to leave the US fleet. During the ceremony,

however, it had been announced that the next US carrier to be built – a new, improved Ford-class supercarrier – will carry the name USS *Enterprise* (CVN-80). It was of considerable relief to all those associated with the ship that the good name would be passed on to another aircraft carrier. The legend and the name would be kept alive. *Enterprise*, gone for now, will return in a new carrier, CVN-80.

## Capt. W. C. Hamilton Jr. – Last CO of USS *Enterprise* CVN-65

The beginning of the *Enterprise* lineage pre-dates the United States Navy and the Declaration of Independence. The immediate predecessor to CVN-65 carried the fight in the Pacific during World War II and was the most decorated warship in our nation's history. The name *Enterprise* defines its own ethos. A compilation of definitions from several of the most popular dictionaries could be assembled into the following appropriate description:

*Enterprise*: An especially daring and courageous undertaking driven by a bold and adventurous spirit.

It was the perfect description of USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65). The ship was one-of-a-kind, the likes of which will never be seen again. It was built at great technical risk and was, at the time of its construction, the largest ship in the world. Powered by eight nuclear reactors, its complicated propulsion plant was a nightmare to operate and maintain but provided redundancy and flexibility its successors could never match. Without siblings, the ship's singular existence required unusually arduous effort and undivided attention from its Sailors and

Marines, which numbered in excess of 200,000 during its 51 years of service. The tasking was no less challenging for shipyard workers, some of whom spent their entire professional lives designing, building, overhauling, and upgrading CVN-65. The education, skill, hard work, and complete devotion to duty required to keep this unique warship ready for combat was well known on the waterfront. Revealing that one had been assigned to *Enterprise* was often met with muffled laughter and false condolences from those who had never served aboard her and genuine respect from those who had.

Once aboard, Sailors and Marines quickly acclimated to the challenge of being *Enterprise*. Dread was replaced with pride as they became experts on the warship others avoided. They embraced the long-standing motto, “There's tough, and there's *Enterprise* tough,” proud to be part of something difficult, something historic; something special. At the end of their assigned tours they often transferred from the ship physically and emotionally drained, seeking orders to somewhere they could recuperate. But more often than not they would, by their own choice, return later in their careers

in pursuit of the pride, the challenge, and the rush of being *Enterprise*.

While some may insist that a ship has a soul, others might consider the idea of an inanimate object having a spirit inane or even blasphemous. The thought that a piece of steel could be self-aware, harbor emotion, and, most importantly, be at its best when times are the worst, is something found only in science fiction. However, if one reviewed the life and times of USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) and passed judgment based wholly on observation, while discounting socially and scientifically acceptable paradigms and religious beliefs, the evidence would clearly support the notion that she did indeed have a soul.

CVN-65 did not like to be awakened from a long slumber. The appearance of a cold start-up on the operational calendar was always met with groans from the Engineering and Reactor departments. Chances were slim that eight reactors, eight coolant turbine generators, eight ship service turbine generators, and four propulsion plants could be brought to life without technical difficulties. The 1961-model ship shared the cold-natured

characteristics of a 1961-model Chevrolet, except that a true comparison was only possible if the Chevrolet was equipped with eight manually choked engines, eight generators, four-wheel drive, and was the only example ever built. Once the crew got the ship running it seemed as if she would run forever. It was as though the ship resented being shut down to cold iron and wouldn't forgive the transgression until she was once again running at 30 knots in an open ocean.

Most of my experience with *Enterprise* came fairly late in her life when she was challenging the crew almost hourly. Many times the ship would take the crew to the brink such that any additional failure would render it unable to accomplish its mission. But that additional failure either never happened or it happened at a time when it wasn't critical to the operational schedule. *Enterprise* seemed somehow to know just how hard the crew was working and what the limits were. Maybe she understood what was at stake, both for her and the crew.

As Captain, I saw the ship hang on until the last airplane was aboard more than once, squeezing out that last knot of wind across the deck required for the Hawkeye while running through oil fields in the North Arabian Gulf. I saw it finish a downwind launch at maximum speed with lowering main engine vacuum because it was circulating 96-degree seawater through the condensers. I saw the ship labor through the Thimble Shoals Channel, its seawater intakes rapidly clogging with a major bryozoan spawn, and make it to safe waters on a single remaining operational shaft. And I saw the number three arresting gear engine blow its main packing on the last trap the night before the ship was scheduled to pull into port. When it appeared things





were going badly, *Enterprise* always got the job done. Maybe the ship understood that if she demonstrated an inability to accomplish the mission, she might be sent to the scrap yard.

This *Enterprise* was designed to last approximately 25 years and the Navy had no intention of keeping her past about 20 or so. She served honorably and superbly for 51 years, more than half the history of Naval Aviation at the time of inactivation in December of 2012. USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) sailed on 25 extended deployments in support of America's national interests, more than any other aircraft carrier whether calculated in total or per year of life. She sailed virtually every ocean on the planet. She saw the Cuban missile crisis up close. She saw airplanes launch and never recover off the coast of Vietnam. And she launched the first strikes against the Taliban after 9/11.

To truly appreciate the longevity of CVN-65, one must contrast the America of 1961 with that of 2012. The most prominent difference was illustrated in the diversification of the crew. There were few prospects for minorities or women aboard warships in 1961. In 2012, the crew mix was such that minorities were the majority and both minorities and women served in positions of great responsibility. They operated nuclear reactors, conned the ship, flew jet aircraft, lead major departments comprised of hundreds of Sailors and Marines, and commanded Carrier Strike Groups. They redefined the "bold and adventurous spirit" of *Enterprise* and were an integral part of its ethos.

It is easy to romanticize about the prospect of the ship having a soul. But I don't for a minute believe that a piece of steel alone can have a soul. I do, however,

firmly believe that *Enterprise* – the ship, her faithful and devoted crew, and the shipyard folks that spent their lives building and maintaining her – comprised a collective soul born before America was the United States that will continue long after CVN-65 is decommissioned.

The greatest honor and privilege of my professional life was to be a part of *Enterprise*, to serve with the finest and

most dedicated Sailors and Marines in the history of the Naval Service, and to briefly occupy the Captain's Chair on CVN-65. It is my sincere hope that someday in the not too distant future another Captain will enjoy the life-defining moment of watching the first aircraft launch from the deck of his aircraft carrier, an aircraft carrier with a soul; an aircraft carrier named USS *Enterprise*.



Captain William C. Hamilton Jr. is a native of Alabama, where he earned an undergraduate degree in Aerospace Engineering from Auburn University in 1981. He also holds a Master of Science degree from the University of Tennessee. His first deployment in USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) was to fly patrol missions over Bosnia and Iraq, later followed by

a tour as executive officer, during which he deployed to the North Atlantic for Summer Pulse '04. Capt. Hamilton has logged over 5500 total flight hours and over 850 carrier landings during his career. During 2012 he was serving as the 23rd and final commanding officer of USS *Enterprise*.