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The University of Maryland

CONFLICT OF MEMORIES:

A COMPARISON OF THE POPULAR AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE  
BATTLESHIP USS MARYLAND

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Department of History

HIST 208L

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## Introduction

As her bell was rung in commemoration of the 189<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the memory of the battleship USS Maryland came alive in the hearts and minds of the public once more.<sup>1</sup> Although the rest of the Maryland was condemned to the scrap heap, her bell, which sat on the grounds of the Maryland State House in Annapolis, was a reminder of the heroic battleship once known as the “Queen of the Seas” and the memories she left behind, both in the minds of her crew and in the memory of the public.<sup>2</sup> The Maryland left behind two separate memories; popular memory which is the memory remembered and passed down by the general public often through the media, and collective memories, shared by members of her crew who experienced the memories first hand. While the popular memory of the USS Maryland remembered by the public focuses on the memory of heroism, bravery and pride, to fully understand the memory of the Maryland one must also understand the significance of the collective memory of the crew.

The battleship USS Maryland (BB 46) was commissioned in 1921 only five years after the funding had been secured.<sup>3</sup> Her sixteen inch main battery became the first of its kind in operation and USS Maryland also became the first battleship with the ability to carry, launch, and retrieve aircraft.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, these features made the Maryland the most advanced ship of the time and with the help of continuous upgrades throughout her service, the USS Maryland continued to complete many missions. These missions allowed her crew to accumulate a lifetime

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<sup>1</sup> “Let Freedom Ring”, *Annapolis Capital*, 6 July 1965, Pg.1, Access Newspaper Archive, <<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/annapolis-capital/1965-07-06?tag=bell+uss+maryland+state-house&rtserp=tags/bell-uss-maryland?pep=state-house&page=2>>.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Sauer, *The Last Big-Gun Naval Battle: The Battle of Surigao Strait* (Palo Alto, Ca: The Glencannon Press, 1999) 1.

<sup>4</sup> *USS Maryland (BB-46)* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1997) 14. The Maryland carried eight 16in guns and two aircraft catapults which allowed her to launch spotter aircraft to assist in accurate aiming of the guns.

of collective memories in only a few short years because of the constant action she and her crew faced on a daily basis. The crew's collective memories differ greatly from the popular memory because often, as popular memory was passed down through the media and other sources, certain biases were introduced which produced a memory skewed from the original account. Although no memory is guaranteed to be completely accurate, including the crew's collective memory, when the collective memory is compared to the public memory, collective memory is often much more accurate because the crewmember actually experienced the event they were remembering. The importance of the crew's collective memory laid in its ability to bring the memory of the USS Maryland to life, thus allowing future generations to experience it in a way not possible through popular memory.

While popular memory provides a sense of pride and heroism to the memory of the USS Maryland, the memory of its crew as seen through their memoirs adds "life" to the memory of the Maryland and makes the experience unlike anything popular memory could convey. The memories of the crew include the small details and accounts of the gruesome aspects of war, as well as lighthearted "human" moments they experienced during their service.<sup>5</sup> While popular memory remembers the USS Maryland as a majestic proud and heroic ship, her crew remembers her as much more. Popular memory seems to have forgotten the gruesome casualties as well as the cheerful moments and specific details that made the Maryland more than a military machine. These differences reveal popular memory's tendency to romanticize military conflict and in the process, forget the aspects of war that do not fit in to the typical idealistic outlook of war.

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<sup>5</sup> While it is impossible to represent the collective memories of the crew in its entirety, the memories discussed cover a wide range of ranks, positions and time periods, thus giving the most clear and accurate representation of the crew's collective memory as possible.

## Operational History

Ship builders laid the keel of the battleship USS Maryland on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 in Newport News, Virginia.<sup>6</sup> At the time of her launch and commissioning in 1921, military strategists were already beginning to contemplate the implications of air power replacing battleships in future wars, thus, before even firing a salvo, Maryland's critics were already sentencing her to the scrap yard.<sup>7</sup> Despite this stigma, the USS Maryland nevertheless proved to be an invaluable asset to the United States Navy throughout her service. Following her commission, the Maryland was named as flagship of the American fleet and served in a non combatant role highlighted by her selection to transport President Elect Hoover on his tour of Latin America in 1928.<sup>8</sup> Maryland's non-combatant role extended through the 1930's and in to the early 1940's when on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, Maryland's role as a non combatant ended as the United States was plunged in to the Second World War.

After Pearl Harbor, the Maryland participated in combat operations in the South Pacific, Tarawa, Kwajalen, Saipan, Peleliu, Leyte Gulf, Surigao Strait, and Okinawa. These operations consisted primarily of shore bombardment and fire support but also included one incident of direct ship to ship combat within the narrow confines of Surigao Strait. Throughout this extensive combat career, the Maryland was damaged four times; she received two bomb hits at Pearl Harbor, a torpedo strike at Saipan, and two Kamikaze hits one at Leyte Gulf and one at Okinawa. Despite this damage, the Maryland made significant contributions at all stages of the war effort. Following the conclusion of hostilities, the Maryland continued to serve shuttling

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<sup>6</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) VIII.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* General William Mitchell was among the prominent advocates for naval air power. He proved his point decisively by sinking four obsolete battleships with aircraft; this would be an eerie foreshadowing of events to come.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

troops back from the Pacific in what was called “Magic Carpet” duty.<sup>9</sup> This final mission was soon followed by her decommissioning in 1946 and her eventual scrapping in 1959.

### The Crew’s Collective Memory and Popular Memory: Similarities

Although the USS Maryland was eventually sold for scrap, her memory and legacy continue to live on through both her crew’s collective memory and in popular memory that remembers her as the proud and heroic “queen of the seas”.<sup>10</sup> At the time of the Maryland’s launch, the American public and the world could not believe the size and power of the Maryland. Newspapers across the country featured articles about the new battleship USS Maryland and her seemingly mythical abilities. The *Miami Herald* stated that the USS Maryland, was “believed by American experts to be the most powerful fighting machine afloat”.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the *Tulsa Daily World* shared the same sentiment and stated that “The Queen of the Sea, is the most powerful war vessel afloat”.<sup>12</sup> Millions of Americans across the nation read about the technical achievement and military strength that the Maryland represented which led to the rise of pride for the Maryland itself, but also for U.S. military might.

The pride felt for the Maryland and the U.S. could then be captured through mediums such as Arthur Beaumont’s painting of the Maryland. Arthur Beaumont, an artist who specialized in painting nautical scenes painted the USS Maryland and captured the image of the Maryland instilled in the minds of the public (figure 2). The painting shows the USS Maryland

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>11</sup> “U.S.S. Maryland, world’s newest ship goes to sea,” *Miami Herald*, 22 June 1921, Pg.5, America’s Historical Newspapers, <[http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=z39.88-2004&rft\\_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft\\_val\\_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft\\_dat=11BB0531A4A33238&svc\\_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req\\_dat=10497FA79919C158](http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11BB0531A4A33238&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=10497FA79919C158)>.

<sup>12</sup> “U.S.S. Maryland Speediest Superdreadnought in Word,” *Tulsa Daily World*, 27 November 1921, Pg.12, Library of Congress Chronicling America Historic American Newspapers, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/lccn/sn85042345/1921-11-27/ed-1/seq-12/#date1=1920&index=0&rows=20&words=Maryland+U.S.S&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1922&proxtext=uss+maryland&y=-221&x=-1069&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>>.

steaming through rough seas with flags flying as what looks to be a Japanese destroyer is being swept away by the same storm. This representation of public pride showed how the public perceived the Maryland, as a manifestation of American supremacy compared to the smaller Japanese ship succumbing to the storm which represented the weakness of the Japanese. Beaumont's painting, together with newspapers from across the country acted as a representation of the pride for the Maryland and the power of the United States, felt by the public and thus remembered by popular memory

This sense of pride was not unique to civilians; pride for their ship, was a common virtue among the crew that served aboard the Maryland as well. For sailors serving aboard Maryland, she was more than a ship; she was their home away from home, their comrade in arms, their guardian, their sustenance and their child.<sup>13</sup> Because their ship represented so much, a sense of pride in the Maryland was common place. According to one of Maryland's crew; "it really matters not when a man served aboard the USS Maryland, BB-46, because every man shares the same pride and everlasting fond memories of this grand lady, the queen of the seas".<sup>14</sup> This powerful statement exhibited to great effect, the collective memory of pride aboard the Maryland. It really did not matter when a sailor served aboard the Maryland because by the time they and the Maryland parted ways, the sailor had the same impression as all his fellow crew members, past, present as well as those yet to serve. In addition to the communal aspect of pride, the feeling of pride itself was so intense that it remained with Maryland's crew for the rest of their lives and even inspired one sailor to write a song about his beloved and proud ship

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<sup>13</sup> Many of Maryland's crew were so attached to their ship that in their memoirs they regretted not being able to "walk her decks one last time, pat her 16in guns and say one last goodbye". Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 132.

<sup>14</sup> *USS Maryland (BB-46)* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1997) 14.

(Appendix 1).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, as Herbert O'Quin, who served onboard USS Maryland before the beginning of U.S. involvement in the Second World War, wrote his memoirs some five decades after the end of his service, he made a point that the pride he felt when serving aboard Maryland never diminished.<sup>16</sup> These examples showed the pride of those who served aboard the USS Maryland, regardless of when they served or how much time has passed since their service. This tremendous pride that the crew felt for the Maryland was, similar to the pride felt by the public and remembered through popular memory. In both cases the feeling of pride made up a significant portion of the memory and was thus one of the major similarities between collective and popular memory.

In addition to feelings of pride by both the public and the crew, the Maryland is remembered as a brave and heroic ship. The root of this vision of bravery and heroism in popular memory can inevitably be traced back to reports in the media. Newspapers such as the *Abilene Reporter* printed stories of bravery and heroism such as the story of eight Marines serving aboard the Maryland. This article detailed a specific incident where a Marine stationed on an anti aircraft gun shot down a Japanese plane in the midst of making a potentially deadly bombing run on the Maryland, which potentially saved lives of the crew.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, a story published in the *Washington Post* about the heroics of the Maryland throughout the war included a statement from the governor of the state of Maryland praising the heroism of the battleship named for his state. Gov. Herbert O'Conor was quoted which praised the battleship USS Maryland for her

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>16</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 8.

<sup>17</sup> "Eight Texas Marines, one from Snyder find plenty of excitement aboard the USS Maryland," *Abilene Reporter News*, 28 January 1945, Pg.13, Access Newspaper Archive, <<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/abilene-reporter-news/1945-01-28/page-39?tag=uss+maryland&rtserp=tags/uss-maryland?page=2>>.

“vital and heroic role” in the war effort during a speech in Annapolis.<sup>18</sup> Articles such as these shaped the opinions and memories of the public thus allowing popular memory to remember the bravery and heroism of the USS Maryland.

Similar memories of a heroic and brave ship also prevailed among the crew, but while these memories were spread throughout Maryland’s service career, a disproportionate number of them stemmed from the events of December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. One example of uncommon bravery aboard the Maryland on December 7<sup>th</sup> which gave the ship much notoriety involved the actions of a Seaman First Class who allegedly shot down the first Japanese aircraft of the war.<sup>19</sup> Seaman First Class Leslie Short from Kansas was sitting on a 50 caliber machine gun writing Christmas cards as the attacks began.<sup>20</sup> As Japanese aircraft began to make attack runs on the U.S. battleships, Short grabbed the gun and began to fire at the Japanese and in a stroke of luck managed to shoot one down, in what was reported to be the first downed Japanese aircraft in the war.<sup>21</sup> Short took a risk in opening fire and in doing so may have saved lives by destroying that plane before it inflicted more damage. While others in similar positions stood by and awaited orders Short took action on his own accord and for his heroic actions, Short received a letter of commendation from Admiral Nimitz.<sup>22</sup> Throughout her service, Maryland played host to many other heroic acts remembered by the crew, from a gunner putting out a fire with his bare hands to avoid an explosion, or a scout pilot dive-bombing Japanese

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<sup>18</sup> “Adm. Fitch lauds USS Maryland’s vital war role”, *The Washington Post*, 11 September 1945, Pg.7, Pro Quest, <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/151803513?accountid=14696>>.

<sup>19</sup> It is assumed that this incident was well known because it is referenced several times in other sources such as Sauer’s and Vreeken’s books.

<sup>20</sup> “Battleship Maryland’s Part In War Told For First Time,” *Frederick News Post*, 11 September 1945, Pg.8, Access Newspaper Archive, <<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/frederick-news-post/1945-09-11/page-7?tag=uss+maryland&rtserp=tags/uss-maryland?page=2>>. Name of the Seaman from: Howard Sauer, *The Last Big-Gun Naval Battle: The Battle of Surigao Strait* (Palo Alto, Ca: The Glencannon Press, 1999) 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

emplacements on Tarawa with hand grenades Maryland's crew always did what was necessary to protect their ship and American lives.<sup>23</sup> Events such as these were well known and fairly common aboard the Maryland and thus remembered by crewmembers such as Fred Vreeken and Howard Sauer who published their memoirs many decades later. The crew did not hesitate to risk their lives in order to protect a shipmate or a soldier on the ground. Therefore, through their selfless actions, the crew of the USS Maryland engraved the memory of bravery and heroism in to collective memory much as it had been in the memory of the public.

Pride and heroism aboard the Maryland were a large part of both the crew's collective memory and the popular memory of the public. Whether experienced firsthand or through other mediums, these virtues were forever engraved in the memories of both the crew and the public. In this regard, both public and collective memories were similar, each composed of pride and heroism. But despite a seemingly similar effect on both sides of memory, the memory of pride and heroism composed a majority of popular memory because of its prevalence in the media. This is compared to a rather small fraction in the crew's memory, which is also composed of other factors that will be discussed in the following section. Because of this difference in the composition of the two sides of memory, popular memory remained with an idealized view of a brave and heroic war effort while the crew of the Maryland had a more complex memory of the same war effort.

#### The Crew's Collective Memory and Popular Memory: Differences

The memories of veterans include more than the heroism and pride that makeup popular memory. There is another side to the memory of veterans composed of memories that the public was not exposed to. While the public's memory of pride and heroism was pleasing and

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<sup>23</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 42, 61.

memorable, in the memory of the crew these aspects of memory were paralleled by other memories that they experienced. Of these aspects of war, three of the most influential and most written about in the crew's memoirs were: memory of specific details that gave a lifelike quality to the experience, the unsettling gruesome experiences that gave war its horrific nature, and the light hearted human moments that made up fond memories of comradery. These three aspects of memory were the major differences between crew memory and popular memory. As specific details, gruesome experiences and, lighthearted memories were added to the existing memories of pride and heroism that make up the popular memory; the real experience of the war began to emerge showing the lack of realism in popular memory and also the inaccuracy of the idealistic outlook of war

The memory of small events that were forgotten by popular memory is important to the collective memory of the Maryland's crew because the little details that may have seemed unimportant or un-interesting to the public gave life and realism to the memory. These specifics played a major role in the memory of the crew, because without them, the memory ceases to be a memory and becomes a story. Among these memories forgotten by history; were the two forgotten casualties of the attack on Pearl Harbor, lunch and dinner. Meals were particularly important aboard the Maryland and were often the highlight of each day, but on December 7<sup>th</sup> plans for lunch and dinner had to be changed. According to the memories of Robert Robertson, during the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup>, the cooks were preparing chicken for the crew, but as luck would have it, the bomb damage during the attack shattered the light bulbs in the galley contaminating the chicken and rendering it uneatable, thus forcing the crew to eat nothing but sandwiches while battling their way through the first hours of the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> While

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Robertson, "Former USS Maryland Sailor Reviews Pearl Harbor Attack," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, 7 December 1967, Pg.2B, Access Newspaper Archive, <<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.proxy->

this seemed like an unimportant footnote of history, remembering such details made the memory of war much more realistic because it forced the crew to relate with the experience on the most basic level, the need for food. This was contrary to the popular memory which remembered large events and emotions, but did not force the public to relate with the war on a human level. Again in a similar incident of sailors being deprived of something they cherished, Fred Vreeken remembered how the kamikaze attack at Leyte Gulf shattered the ship fitters department's coffee pot and the thereby forced the entire department to go without coffee until the next time Maryland could pull in to port.<sup>25</sup> While this did not seem of much importance to the memory of the USS Maryland because it told of a broken coffee pot rather than telling a story of heroism and bravery, similarly to the memory of the contaminated chicken, the broken coffee pot forced the crew to experience war on a human level that simply could not be experienced through popular memory.

Equally important were the memories of the sights and sounds experienced by those who served aboard the Maryland. These sights and sounds, again increase the realism of memories and therefore allowed the memory to be remembered as the crew experienced it, rather than the idealized story it had been spun into by popular memory. The crew aboard the Maryland had the opportunity to see and hear some of the most awe inspiring and the most saddening sights and sounds that any of them could ever imagine. Among these experiences the most memorable was the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor as recalled by William Roberts. After the attack, ships everywhere were burning; the capsized USS Oklahoma with crew still trapped inside along

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um.researchport.umd.edu/oshkosh-daily-northwestern/1967-12-07/page-22?tag=uss+maryland&rtserp=tags/-uss-maryland->. This same memory is referenced in the following interview: William Roberts Interview by Nick Weinsaf, *Veterans History Project*, 26 Sept. 2001, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.64990/video?ID=mv0001001>>.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 74.

with the USS West Virginia, USS Tennessee and USS California blocked the Maryland in her berth from all sides, which effectively surrounded her with flaming wrecks of damaged of battleships.<sup>26</sup> The doomed USS Arizona billowed smoke so thick that one could not see anything in the harbor; meanwhile the oil filled began to burn.<sup>27</sup> From a nearby ship, another sailor heard a lone bugler playing taps in a mournful tribute to those who had perished.<sup>28</sup> These details including sights and sounds are an integral part of the crew's collective memory and while they do not portray the idealized war remembered by popular memory these small details helped bring to life the reality of war as it was experienced by the crew of the Maryland.

In stark contrast to the accounts of the individuals who experienced the war first hand, popular memory did not remember specifics but rather conveyed a general understanding of events. This general understanding in effect bleached popular memory of the life-like details that were so prevalent in the crew's account of the same event. An example, of this phenomena can be seen in an American newspaper published announcing the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>29</sup> The publication essentially simplified the entire account of the attack into just a few paragraphs which effectively removed any detail from popular memory. This phenomenon occurred regularly throughout the war because it was simply not possible to condense the details of veteran's memory into a publication that the public would be interested in reading. In effect, this consolidation of the war greatly contributed to popular memory's idealization of war. Rather than seeing the war with the same detail and realism as those who experienced it themselves, the

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<sup>26</sup> William Roberts Interview by Nick Weinsaf, *Veterans History Project*, 26 Sept. 2001. Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 18- 43.

<sup>27</sup> John Cockburn Interview by Gary Swanson, *Veterans History Project*, December 3, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 23. It should also be noted that later in the war Maryland's crew had the displeasure of hearing another even more disheartening sound, that of, as one sailor recalled it; the Maryland screaming in pain not unlike a wounded whale, as she limped back to port after the torpedo strike in Saipan.

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Burns, "JAPS DECLARE WAR ON U. S Honolulu, manila bombed NAVAL BATTLE OFF HAWAII," *The Sun*, 7 December 1941, <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/538534905?accountid=14696>>.

public experienced the war in the form of condensed detail less publications that could be read as a brief story rather than a detailed, life-like account of actual events.

War's grisly horror has been an aspect of combat that has existed since its beginning, but unlike in the crew's memory, popular memory does not often remember this gruesome horror. The public was not exposed first hand to these horrors involved with combat, thus, this aspect of war does not live on in popular memory. For combat veterans such as the crew of the USS Maryland, such luxury did not exist. Veterans could not cast aside the horrors they experienced in combat in favor of the memories experienced by those at home. While popular memory had the luxury to forget these memories, forgetting them left a void in popular memory's understanding of war that allowed for the idealization of war without the burden of its horror carried by those who experienced it. In effect, the horrors of war, acted as a reality check, ensuring that war could never be truly idealized as long as war's horrific nature remained part of its memory. Therefore, as the crew of the USS Maryland encountered the horrors of war that became engrained in their memory, they furthered their separation from the idealized popular memory.

Maryland's crew, throughout their numerous deployments in the Pacific had many experiences with the gruesome horrors of war. In one such experience, Fred Vreeken recalled the memory of a young sailor with the gruesome and unsettling duty of washing blood and traumatically amputated human remains off the Maryland's deck and in to the sea following the torpedo strike in Saipan.<sup>30</sup> In a similarly unsettling experience, a sailor by the name of Jesse Jackson, was tasked with pumping out the flooded compartments in the bow of the damaged

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<sup>30</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 80. To make matters worse, this same sailor lost his best friend in that attack, so it is very much possible the remains he was washing overboard were those of his friend.

USS Maryland after Pearl Harbor.<sup>31</sup> In the process of pumping out each compartment he suddenly noticed that his pump was sucking in the saturated remains of a fellow sailor who was stationed in that compartment several days before.<sup>32</sup> These sailors were not alone; Fred Rasmussen recalled his experience at Pearl Harbor:

I remember bodies floating on the water; ships burning, and that awful thick black smoke. I remember hearing tapping on ships hulls by men trapped in sunken ships hoping to attract rescuers, I saw many horrible things.<sup>33</sup>

Stories such as these were countless among the memoirs of the Maryland's crew, but one above the rest was most disheartening and unsettling. As Fred Vreeken wrote in his memoir, he recalled the little known mass civilian suicide at Saipan. Vreeken told of the propaganda distributed to the civilian population of Saipan and other Japanese held islands informing the population of the supposed atrocities perpetrated by American troops and how civilians would be tortured if they fell in to the hands of the American invaders.<sup>34</sup> He also told of the tragic scene of mothers taking their families up to the cliffs overlooking the protruding jagged rocks of the shoreline below and pushing each child off the cliff, before they themselves jumped off.<sup>35</sup> These bodies were then swept out to sea passed the Maryland where her Marine detachment was under orders to shoot each of the bodies as they passed in order to ensure explosives were not attached to Maryland's hull.<sup>36</sup>

These accounts of the Maryland's crew were in stark contrast to the depiction of events by popular memory. This contrast between the memory of the crew and the popular memory can

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<sup>31</sup> Jesse Jackson Interview by Phil Shawl, *Veterans History Project*, March 8, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Fred Rasmussen, "USS Maryland survived pearl harbor attack; battleship: A week later, 'Fighting Mary' was able to sail away for repairs, and later lived up to its nickname as the U.S. pushed Japan back in the Pacific," *The Sun* 7, December 1997, Pg.6J, Pro Quest, <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/407001770?accountid=14696>>.

<sup>34</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 68.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

be seen in newspaper accounts of the USS Maryland's service, where casualties were often noted but rarely discussed in any detail.<sup>37</sup> In effect, the gruesome tragedies of war that were often forgotten in favor of the idealized visions of largely unrealistic military conflicts that popular memory is adept at convening.<sup>38</sup> Because of this lack of gruesome and horrific experiences in popular memory, the public's perception of military conflict was painted in the idealistic light of a glorious struggle with no tangible consequences.

Along with war's terror and violence came a side effect that works to make war more bearable for those experiencing it. This all important side effect resulted in the friendship, comradery and light hearted moments that arose from the terrors of war. Aboard the USS Maryland these fond memories were countless.<sup>39</sup> Among the crew's memoirs, there were endless mentions of how even though their purpose was to wage war they legitimately enjoyed the time spent onboard the Maryland.<sup>40</sup> Several moments and themes from Maryland's operational history during the war in the Pacific exhibited the true lighthearted side of the crew and how memorable these moments were.

Contrary to the stereotypical image of a clean cut navy crew passed down by popular memory, a visitor aboard the Maryland could expect to see something that resembled a petting zoo being tended to by sailors. This was the experience of Secretary of State Evan Hughes when

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<sup>37</sup> "Battleship Maryland's Part In War Told For First Time," *Frederick News Post*, 11 September 1945, Pg.8, Access Newspaper Archive, <<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/frederick-news-post/1945-09-11/page-7?tag=uss+maryland&rtserp=tags/uss-maryland?page=2>>.

<sup>38</sup> The obvious exception to this is in cases of blatant mass killings such as the German Final Solution which is remembered by popular memory as a case of mass killing perpetrated by a genuinely evil force rather than military conflict fought between two fairly equal sides.

<sup>39</sup> Examples of the lighthearted "happy" times aboard the Maryland could be seen in a vast majority of the crew's memoirs. There were many stories of sports and games aboard the ship, both friendly and not so friendly competitions between ships, and even stories of older sailors holding makeshift classes preparing them for high school when the war was over. John Cockburn Interview by Gary Swanson, *Veterans History Project*, December 3, 2003. Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990) 78. Raymond Crane Interview by Marry Morallis, *Veterans History Project*, January 4, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Fred Vreeken, ed. *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1990).

he first walked aboard the Maryland and saw a sailor walking around with his pet parrot which he had obtained in Rio.<sup>41</sup> Although amusing the parrot was neither the only nor the most exotic pet on the ship. Also aboard, in addition to a second parrot, were two dogs (Cinco and Peso) who loved to crawl in to bed with unsuspecting sailors, two monkeys who roamed around on the deck (one of which jumped overboard from the mast), the ships mascot “King Neptune” the pig and even allegedly a cheetah which one of the Marines paraded around on a leash.<sup>42</sup> According to the memory of Howard Sauer, the most interesting pet aboard the Maryland was an owl which underwent the bombardment of Okinawa and wisely flew from the island to the safety of the Maryland (Figure 3).<sup>43</sup> These pets that lived alongside the crew aboard the USS Maryland showed the lack of realism in popular memories understanding of the soldiers and sailors who fought in the Second World War. These pets showed that there was more to the sailors and marines aboard the Maryland than the strictly ridged and stern stereotype in which they were portrayed. Rather the addition of pets aboard the ship showed the humanity in those who served aboard the Maryland thereby disallowing the idealization of war in their memory.

Another light hearted though potentially terrifying moment aboard the USS Maryland was motivated by the relative boredom of an uneventful patrol in the South Pacific. Sauer recalled how in a combination of boredom and curiosity, some of Maryland’s junior officers tried to catch a shark.<sup>44</sup> They accomplished their misguided goal and hauled a twenty foot shark on to the deck with some chain and a butcher’s meat hook. Following this monumental task, the group of officers had to retrieve the hook from the mouth of the thrashing shark which was now

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>43</sup> Howard Sauer, *The Last Big-Gun Naval Battle: The Battle of Surigao Strait* (Palo Alto, Ca: The Glencannon Press, 1999) 165.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 49. During this long patrol the crew, freshly out of cigarettes, was pleasantly surprised by a shipment of cigarettes from the “associated students of the University Of Maryland”.

sitting on the fantail of an American battleship amidst shouts of “throw him back”.<sup>45</sup> The comical madness came to an end as the captain finally had enough and announced over the loud speaker “Whatever those officers are doing for fun on the quarterdeck, please knock it off”, and the contingent of officers cut the line and “slid [their] reluctant visitor over the edge.”<sup>46</sup> This light hearted memory again showed that those who served aboard the Maryland were very much human and had misguided ideas and moments of foolishness like everyone else. Collective memories such as this ensured that the humanity and lightheartedness of the crew was never forgotten thereby avoiding the idealization of war as an un-human entity that the public cannot relate to.

Situations like this involving a shark or those involving unusual pets aboard a warship are not commonly documented in popular memory, but lighthearted situations like these became fairly common in accounts of the crew’s memory. Popular memory included few if any references to lighthearted moments because these moments did not exist in the public’s idealized view of war. The public’s perception of soldiers and sailors comprised mostly of strict discipline and a ridged lifestyle, rather than that of just another human with the embedded need for fun and enjoyment. Because of this inherent incompatibility of human or lighthearted qualities with the idealized picture of war, very rarely did popular memory allow for the human qualities to shine through the idealized image of war being portrayed. Only by looking at the collective memories of the crew, could the real picture of war be painted showing the error of popular memory’s understanding of war.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 50.

## Conclusion

The popular memory of the USS Maryland, like the popular memory of many other military units, ships and conflicts tends to romanticize the idea of war. This romanticized outlook on war was a largely fictitious view where the memories of pride and heroism over shadow the actual experience of war told by those who fought in it. This romanticized notion of war allows for the public to accept and even relish in the idea of war as an expression of national pride and strength. In this way popular memory changed how the USS Maryland is remembered; from the original memory of her crew, slowly transitioning to the highly romanticized caricature of the USS Maryland remembered by the general public. While not intentional, the romanticizing of the Maryland and her experiences were rooted in the public's lack of personal experiences with war and the ship. Therefore, because the public's view of war became rooted in non personal experiences, it also became easily manipulated by the media and other sources which may have left out aspects of the war that defined the experience of the veterans such as, specific details, gruesome casualties and lightheartedness that was often involved in war. As the generation of those who served aboard the Maryland and elsewhere during the Second World War are rapidly dwindling, so are their experiences and memories. This void of lost memories is being filled by the memoirs and accounts the crew has left behind which are all too often overshadowed by the rapidly expanding popular memory of the general public.

The popular memory of the USS Maryland is keeping her alive in the hearts and minds of the public, but this memory is a far cry from that of her crew. This romanticized memory in turn, influences the opinions and ideas of young and old alike, allowing war to live on in a romantic light. While this conflict of memory affects the USS Maryland, in a broader context it can be brought to encompass all military conflicts. In this regard the consequences of allowing this

conflict of memories to go un-studied and un-addressed are far reaching. The USS Maryland is just one case in a much broader field where the collective memory of veterans must be preserved in order to preserve the most authentic experience of war possible.

As the bell of the USS Maryland is rung in commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, so too, is the USS Maryland commemorated. Maryland's bell is one of the last tangible reminders of this once great ship and her excellent crew. Her bell was preserved as a memorial for all to see and experience regardless of age, and so too, should the memory of Maryland's crew be preserved for all generations to experience. As the popular memory of the USS Maryland ages, it regrettably fades and changes, but the collective memory of her crew remains constant. Their memories are set, unchanging and seemingly unaffected by time; through these memories, will the legacy of the USS Maryland BB 46 live on.

*DRUM note:  
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copyright restrictions.*

Figure 1: The severely damaged bow of the USS Maryland after being torpedoed at Saipan. U.S. Navy photo taken from Fred Vreeken's *Memoirs of the Crew of the Battleship U.S.S. Maryland BB46*. Page 77.

*DRUM note:  
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Figure 2: Painting of the USS Maryland as she appeared in 1941. By **Arthur Beaumont**  
[www.navyart.com](http://www.navyart.com)

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Figure 3: A picture of the owl that flew to the USS Maryland from Okinawa during the bombardment. Taken from Howard Sauer's *The Last Big-Gun Naval Battle: The Battle of Surigao Strait*. Page 165.

## Appendix 1

### “Here’s To The Mary Maru”

By Fred Vreeken

Her bow stood tall and proud she be,  
this ship which sailed so many a sea,

Mastheads rose through a cloud filled sky,  
how proud I was of the flag she’d fly,

Her decks were clean and very wide,  
her crew was brave and filled with pride,

If she could talk, how much she’d tell,  
of roaring guns and a living hell.

Now sealed in silence... waiting there,  
with her ghostly crew and a quiet stare.

Her engines rest and her screws lie still,  
as she patiently waits for a mission to fill.

But the “Mary Maru” which stood so great  
was doomed to meet a degrading fate!

Once so proud, with head held high...  
now she silently waits to die!

Sold for scrap, they saved her bell,  
but her body was cut and sent to hell!

They melted down her once proud steel.  
Why, Oh Lord? How sad we feel.

Her ghosts are but a memory now,  
But she’ll live in glory! And this is how!

Her crew that lives, with honor will tell,  
of her scars and pride, as they touch her bell!

The “Mary Maru” we’ll not forget!  
for her place in history is firmly set!