

31 January 2017

The USCGC Blackthorn Ship's Bell and the Armed Forces History Museum

By

A.M. de Quesada, FCMHist  
DSO-PAH7, USCG Aux

The Armed Forces History Museum in Largo, Florida closed for the final time at 4 p.m. on 29 January 2017. The museum, which opened 16 August 2008, had operated in the red since the beginning even though it attracted about 25,000 visitors a year.

The museum was founded by Mr. Piazza who spent 55 years collecting military memorabilia ranging from grenades to tanks. The collection served as the basic display for the museum. His mission was to ensure that the museum honorably preserved the history and memories of the military and its veterans, as well as to educate youth. He funded the museum's deficit right up until his death this past 3 October 2016.

The United States Coast Guard and Merchant Marine are represented in the World War Two portion of the museum's exhibit timeline. In addition, elsewhere within the large museum complex is a display case exhibiting the ship's bell and artifacts from the USCGC Blackthorn.

The Blackthorn sank on 28 January 1980, after colliding with the tanker Capricorn, taking the lives of 23 Coast Guardsman. The Sun Coast Chief's Mess continues the tradition of honoring the memory of the lost sailors, gathering every 28th of January to read aloud their names during a ceremony at the Blackthorn Memorial Park in Tampa Bay. The recovered ship's bell is used to ring in the names of those that perished on that fateful day. After spending a number of years exhibited at the Veterans Memorial Museum and Park in Tampa, the bell was moved to the Armed Forces History Museum in 2010.

Although the museum is closed, the collection will remain intact until the end of March in the hopes that someone might step forward to ensure the museum carries on. The fate of the USCGC Blackthorn's Ship's bell, which is still USCG property, had not been disclosed at the time of writing.



Amongst the displays are Coast Guardsmen providing support in transporting troops from the ships to shore during World War Two.



A USCG landing craft unloading armored vehicles during the Normandy Invasion.



One of a number of USCG artifacts that were on display at the Armed Forces History Museum in Largo, Florida.



In addition the Merchant Marines were represented in the museum. Prior to World War Two and afterwards the USCG had a role in training and licensing merchant seamen.

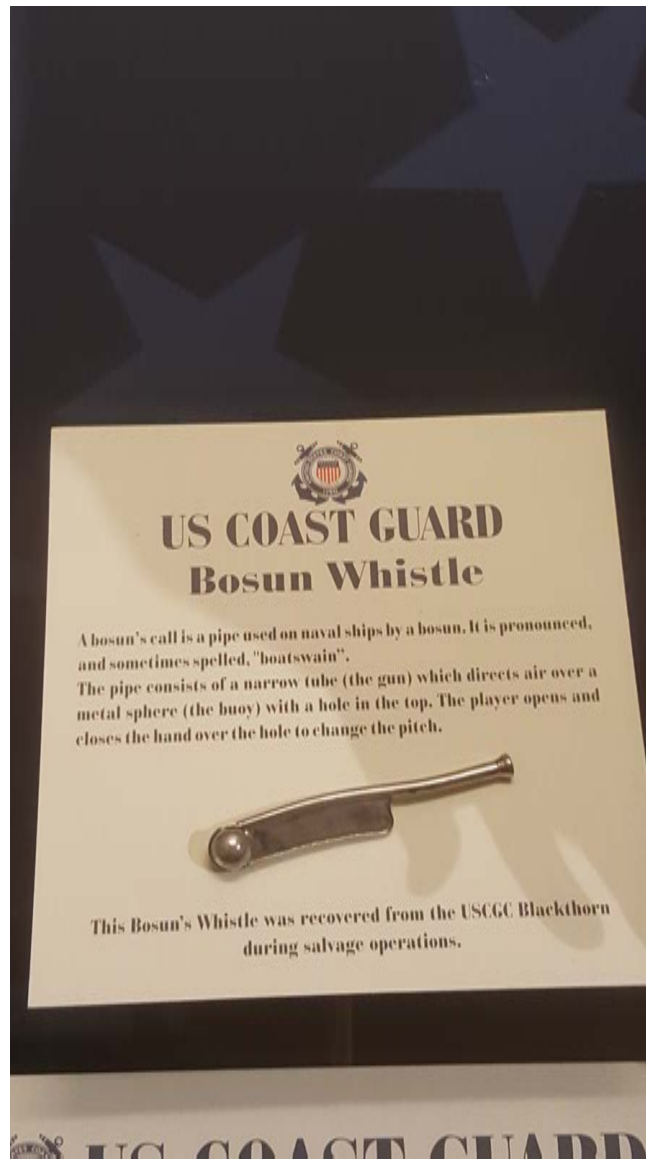




There is one display case dedicated to the memory of the USCGC Blackthorn.



Every 28 January the ship's bell is taken from the Armed Forces History Museum to the Blackthorn Memorial near the Skyway Bridge. The bell is used to commemorate the names of those Coast Guardsmen that lost their lives on the fateful night. Since the museum's closing the fate of the bell has not been determined at the time of writing.



One of the artifacts recovered from the sunken USCGC Blackthorn in 1980: A Boatswain's Pipe.