

the Deck Log

The Official Newsletter of Historic Ships in Baltimore

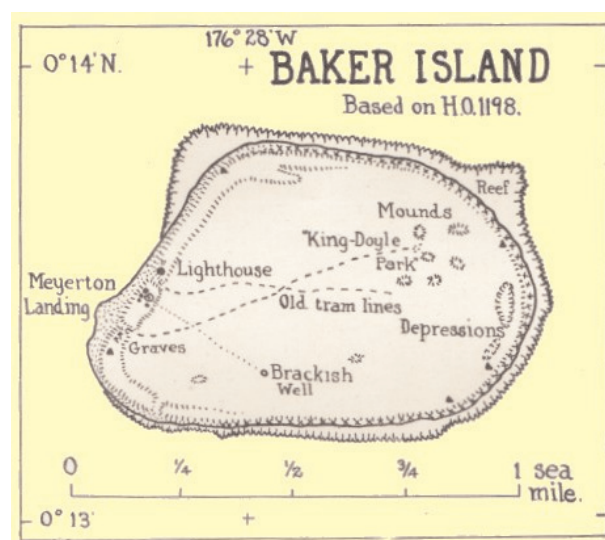


HISTORIC SHIPS
in BALTIMORE

USCGC TANEY - VOYAGE TO BAKER ISLAND

Newly Discovered Photos Document 1943 Mission

Baker Island, located just north of the Equator some 1,650 miles southwest of Hawaii, is today an uninhabited United States' territory under the jurisdiction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In mid 1943, this tiny equatorial island became the focus of American military planners as a potential site for an airstrip to support the coming "island hopping" campaign in the Gilbert and Marshall islands. In July of that year, USCGC TANEY was dispatched from Hawaii with a party of naval officers tasked with evaluating Baker's suitability for the plan. In carrying out that mission, TANEY made not one, but two trips to the island, the second after being attacked by a Japanese "Mavis" flying boat. Recently, Historic Ships in Baltimore acquired a remarkable collection of some 130 original photographs documenting TANEY's 1943 voyages to Baker and revealing many details about the operation itself. The collection also provides glimpses of life aboard TANEY during the mid-War period.



Detailed Map of Baker Island



Members of an armed survey party from USCGC TANEY photographed on Baker Island in the Central Pacific, July 1943. TANEY is visible in the background.

Baker Island is roughly circular and approximately one mile in diameter. Treeless and dotted with scrub vegetation, it is home to a wide variety of sea birds and aquatic life. The island was claimed by the United States in 1857, and during the 19th century was mostly used as a source of guano for fertilizer. Beginning in 1935, a small number of inhabitants arrived under a short-lived US government "colonization" program instituted not only on Baker but on several other US equatorial possessions in the vicinity. During this period a navigational day marker, resembling a small lighthouse tower, was built, along with a radio station and a number of dwellings and supporting structures. Shortly after the start of World War II, the settlement was evacuated after being bombarded by Japanese ships and aircraft.

USCGC TANEY's Baker survey assignment was not the first time the ship had been dispatched to those waters - far from it - though TANEY's wartime appearance and missions bore little resemblance to her earlier peacetime role. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, TANEY had made frequent voyages to the equatorial "Line Islands" (including Baker as well as Howland, Jarvis, Enderbury and Canton islands), regularly putting ashore

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Baker Island, Continued from Page 1

surfboats loaded with supplies and transporting colonists and government officials to and from Hawaii. In July 1943, however, Baker had been abandoned for more than a year and it was uncertain if any Japanese military presence had been established there.

The Baker Island survey was spearheaded by a party of five Navy officers, led by LCDR Richard B. Black, USNR. Called to active duty with the Navy in 1941, Commander Black had engaged in an interesting and varied pre-war career involving polar exploration and US territorial administration. In 1935 and 1939, he had taken part in Antarctic expeditions led by Admiral Richard Byrd. In 1937, between trips to Antarctica, Black had been the field representative for the Interior Department at Howland Island during Amelia Earhart's attempted round-the-world flight.

When TANEY steamed for Baker Island in mid July 1943 all hands were aware that encounters with Japanese warships and aircraft were possible. The crew was also aware that their mission would be to put ashore an armed landing force that would first sweep the island in search of any traces of Japanese activity before the airstrip survey began. Once the landing party went to work on



'Radar contact - 14 miles'. Here TANEY's forward 3"/50 gun crews train on the bearing of a Japanese "Mavis" flying boat during the first attempt at the July 1943 survey of Baker Island.



'Bomb splash - two sticks of 500-lb bombs.' Here TANEY crewman search the sky for the Japanese "Mavis" bomber. Note the disturbed area of water

Baker, TANEY would cruise offshore keeping visual, radar and sonar watches.

Arriving off Baker on or about 18 July 1943 (subsequent deck log research will eventually provide HSIB with an exact date), the first attempt at the survey was cut short. Just as the landing party prepared to be lowered in the ship's surfboats, an unidentified aircraft, closing on Baker Island, was picked up on radar. "The 5 [inch] gun crew aft," recalled Boatswain's Mate Homer Compton, "was to make up the landing party. Not knowing if the island was occupied by the Japanese, rifles and grenades were issued. The power launch would tow the landing boat to the surf and then wait for their return. My 5 [inch] gun crew forward would take charge of lowering the boats as they departed and arrived. We were soon spotted by a 'Mavis' Japanese bomber. Needless to say, the landing was belayed."

Used extensively for long range reconnaissance and patrol by the Japanese Navy, the Kawanishi H6K flying boat, codenamed "Mavis" by US forces, was similar in overall capabilities to the American PBY "Catalina." For its anti-ship mission it was equipped to carry torpedoes or up to 2,200 lbs of bombs.

Once the radar contact appeared, TANEY went to general quarters while the ship's rangefinders and 3"/50 caliber gun crews trained on the approaching plane's bearing and awaited visual recognition and the order to open fire.

TANEY Seaman Second Class Richard E. "Dick" Phillips had only recently reported aboard at the time of the Baker Island voyage and had been preparing to go ashore with survey party when the general alarm sounded. Interviewed recently, he recalled standing near the ship's starboard bow looking up at the approaching plane and wondering what would happen next when suddenly a pair of vapor trails streaming downward from the aircraft indicated a bomb release. He and the rest of the landing party took cover

while the ship's four 3"/50 caliber guns began to fire at the "Mavis." When the pair of 500-lb bombs missed, the aircraft circled back for a second attack on the ship which was now maneuvering at high speed. Again scoring no hits, the Kawanishi patrol bomber chose to return to base, most likely in the Gilbert Islands, rather descend to strafing altitude amid the ship's gunfire.

One fact made clear during the first attempt to survey Baker was that the Japanese were actively patrolling the area. CDR Henry Perkins, TANEY's skipper, therefore decided to head for the nearest US airbase, located on the Palmyra Atoll. To carry out the survey mission would require air cover to guard against the return of Japanese planes, or possibly warships.

After getting in some additional anti-aircraft practice firing off Palmyra, TANEY returned to Baker Island on 25 July 1943 accompanied by several Navy PV-1 "Ventura" patrol bombers. With the armed landing party going in first, the cutter's surfboats hit the beach on the western shore near the island's day marker, where charts showed that the coral reef was navigable. Once ashore, the landing party fanned out to search the island for any evidence of recent enemy activity. Soon they located the remains of the pre-war settlement amid craters from Japanese bombs. Among the debris was evidence that the former radio station and settlers' huts had been strafed by planes at low level.

Satisfied that the island was deserted, the landing party set up camp on the beach while the surveyors went to work. LCDR Black and his fellow Navy officers were apparently prepared to conduct the survey themselves, but they were pleased to find that TANEY sailor "Dick" Phillips had some special skills to offer. Recalling the operation in a recent interview, Phillips related that when TANEY departed Honolulu for Baker, the Navy officers "were looking for

anyone that had surveying experience. I was 20, and recently assigned to the TANEY. Prior to joining the Coast Guard [I] had taken several surveying classes at Los Angeles City College. During the preceding summer I had worked, a short time, for the Los Angeles County Highway Department on a survey crew. So I fit their needs. I was chief of party, note keeper and instrument man....Our purpose was to run a contour line from one shore line to the other across the island, on a pre-determined azimuth." Many hours later, as the sun was beginning to set, the survey party completed its work on Baker and returned in their surfboats to TANEY, which had been steadily cruising off shore beyond the coral reef.

As a result of the survey, the 7th Air Force's 804th Engineer Aviation Battalion arrived at the island on 21 September 1943 to undertake the construction of a 5500- foot steel-mat runway. When finished, the field at Baker could accommodate up to 50 fighters and bombers and between 15 November 1943 and 10 January 1944 some 600 USAAF aircraft made use of the field during combat operations in the Gilbert Islands. Later in 1944, the Coast Guard established a LORAN radio navigation station on the island, though this was discontinued in 1946.

Today, Baker Island is a National Wildlife Refuge under the control of the Department of the Interior. An internet image search reveals that the old day marker still stands, though very little evidence of previous habitation exists beyond some traces of building foundations and a few lonely graves from the 19th Century. One remote-sensing image available on the web, however, shows the clear remains of the WWII runway eerily visible beneath Baker's scrub vegetation - lingering there as a sort of "calling card" leftover from TANEY's visit nearly 67 years ago.

The remarkable collection of photographs from the 1943 Baker Island survey which prompted this article have allowed the museum not only to piece together more accurately the details of the operation, but have furnished numerous views of wartime ship-board life previously unseen. The photographic prints were most likely collected by Coast Guard Academy graduate Kenneth L. Peterson, who had been a Lieutenant (jg). aboard TANEY in 1943.



Members of the landing party on the beach at Baker Island, 25 July 1943. At center, with pipe, is LCDR Richard B. Black, USNR, who led the survey mission.

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For Information Contact Laura Givens

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(1 November, 2009 through 15 May, 2010)

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EDUCATION REPORT

The Overnight Adventure Series (2 of 3)

New Coasties Aboard USCGC TANEY

On March 13, 2010, Master-at-Arms Earl Needhammer greeted Cub Scout Pack 91 from Yardville, New Jersey (three hours north of Baltimore, Maryland) to the United States Coast Guard Cutter *Taney*. The scouts and parents had waited almost six months for their adventure to begin and they would not leave disappointed.

After properly storing their sea bags, the new "Coasties" were guided through *Taney* to learn the differences between the United States Navy and the Coast Guard, how steam was utilized to power many of *Taney's* systems including the engines, and how many people it took to operate the 5-inch, 38 gun mount. Then, the entire crew filed into the Mess Deck for a meal prepared and served by Ms. Samantha Schilling that included cheese pizza and green beans - because every good Coastie needs to eat his vegetables.

Eager to learn more about *Taney*, the Cub Scouts were quick to jump out of their seats and follow Mr. Needhammer, but were shocked to learn they were responsible for cleaning-up after dinner. Surprised Cubs swept the floor, took out the trash, and wiped down tables as their parents collected photographic evidence that their scouts did, in fact, know how to use brooms and sponges. Once Ms. Schilling was satisfied, the scouts followed Mr. Needhammer to the Bridge.

The scouts listened attentively to stories about former Coasties keeping a weather eye out for ships in distress and about Coasties who fought off boredom by attempting to turn the ship 360° degrees without anyone noticing. Afterwards, they helped Mr. Needhammer lower the ensign and followed him to the Engine Room. Down in the third level of the ship, the scouts conducted an experiment using a Hero's Engine to understand how



Cub Scout Pack 91 from Yardville, New Jersey

steam was used to spin *Taney's* propellers. Then, Mr. Needhammer assigned bunks and turned the lights out, knowing that few scouts would sleep due to the excitement.

At 0600 Hours, Mr. Needhammer's boatswain's pipe disrupted everyone's sleep and began the day. After a nutritious breakfast and thorough clean-up, the scouts learned how to send signals using wig-wag and semaphore with flags and Morse code using a light attached to a door bell buzzer. Mr. Needhammer interrupted the scouts' fun when he announced a bulkhead in officer's staterooms was collapsing! In moments, anxious Cubs moved to the point of danger and applied wooden shores to bolster the crumpling bulkheads. After preventing the threatened flood, triumphant Cubs followed Mr. Needhammer to the 5-inch, 38 gun mount where they were able to explore to their heart's content as a reward for saving the ship.

At 0900, Mr. Needhammer and Ms. Schilling piped the members of Cub Scout Pack 91 down the gangway and wished them a safe journey home. In return, the Cubs and parents shouted a thankful, "GO GUARD!" and went on their way home to New Jersey with memories that will last a lifetime.

SHIPYARD SCUTTLEBUTT

The first quarter of this year was a real challenge. It seemed like we spent more time shoveling snow than doing actual restoration or maintenance work! I checked the draft marks on *Constellation* before and after we cleared the ship of the "big one", and she came up over four inches. That means that we shoveled around thirty-six tons of snow! I want to shout a big THANK YOU to the maintenance and operations staff for their help with this immense chore.

On board *Constellation*, Tim Fowler and the crew have made great progress on the hull and deck repair project. They worked inside over the winter and completed the repair of the rot in the main hatch on the gun deck. This part of the project entailed the removal and replacement of a twenty-foot section of one of the huge gun deck beams as well as the several other rotten timbers. The deck beam section was so massive that it had to be laminated in place using hydraulic jacks. In order to get to the rotten timbers, about a hundred square feet of the laminated decking had to be removed and rebuilt. The crew recently hung and caulked the shutter or "whiskey" plank to complete the port side hull repair, and they are now reinstalling the chain plates and painting the hull. After the turnaround, we will put on our riggers' hats and concentrate on getting the lower shrouds set up on all three masts.

On Pier Three, Jim Reeb has been busy rust busting, priming and painting *Chesapeake's* deck and superstructure as well as the boarding platform handrails. In addition, Jim continues to coordinate the work of the volunteer SEABEES on *Torsk's* deck replacement project and the lighthouse volunteer group with their projects on *Chesapeake* and at Seven Foot Knoll.

On board USCGC *Taney*, Paul Cora has had to hang up his curator's hat and put on his coveralls for most of the year, so



far; in addition to coordinating plumbing and heating repairs, he has been chasing electrical bugs and trying to keep the deck and superstructure coatings intact. He also discovered a leak in one of the sewage lines and board member Derick Lynch sent his troops from General Ship to do the repair.

On the personnel front, Josh Tingler left our employ in January. Josh came to us from Living Classrooms' Fresh Start program and he did a lot of growing up in his year or so with us. He called "Mr. Jim" (Reeb) a couple of weeks ago to let him know that he had passed his GED exams and to thank him for all of his help while he was studying for them. We all wish Josh the best in his new job as a yacht systems and rigger's helper at Zanhiser's in Solomons, MD. Matt Singleton, from the operations crew will be transferring to our team to fill the position as soon as Stan can phase him out of his busy spring overnight schedule. Matt has boat building as well as construction, plumbing, and electrical experience, and he will be a great addition to the team. In the interim, Kelvin Gibson from LCF's Project Serve is helping the gang with the painting project.

The Torsk Volunteer Association and our group of intrepid SEABEES are doing a fantastic job on their maintenance and restoration projects on board *Torsk*. Their team has put in well over a thousand hours so far this year, and we're still in May! Paul Cora's core group of Coast Guard volunteers were on board *Taney* for one of their annual work weeks in April and "Captain Greg" and the lighthouse volunteers are busy with projects on board *Chesapeake* as well as over at Seven Foot Knoll. On board *Constellation*, our volunteer rigging team is back after a slow winter. We were once again chosen by the University of Baltimore as one of the sites for their annual Community Service Day, and we had twelve students this year, our biggest crowd in the five years that we have been a part of their program. We also had a group of folks from "Visit Baltimore" who were part of a city-wide volunteer day project. Without the help of all of our volunteers, we could not keep these sites in the condition our visitors presently enjoy. If you want to volunteer and help preserve our historic vessels, or the lighthouse, contact Paul Powichroski at 410-539-1797 ext. 448, or via e-mail at pgp@historicships.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JULY 4TH INDEPENDENCE DAY DECK PARTY!

Sunday, 4 July, 7pm to 10pm

Celebrate INDEPENDENCE DAY with great food, drink, live music and watch the spectacular Inner Harbor Fireworks from the deck of USS *Constellation*, high above the Inner Harbor crowds. A July 4th picnic menu, provided by the Classic Catering People will be served with local ale, wine and soft drinks. There will be live music, special tours, cannon firings and more. Reservations required. For tickets please visit the Historic Ships website: www.historicships.org or call 410-539-1797 X 422.

2010 SECOND SATURDAY SERIES

Please visit the Historic Ships website for updates to the schedule of events, including the Second Saturday Lecture Series.

2010 CREW & DESCENDENT REUNION

Saturday, 21 August, from 6pm to 8pm

Walk in the footsteps of your ancestors. Former Historic Ships crew members and their descendants are always welcome aboard, particularly for the annual Crew and Descendant Reunion. Come join descendants and their families and get to know the shipmates of your ancestor!! This delightful event is free to all museum members, volunteers, former crew and their descendants. The next reunion will be held in on board USGCG *Taney* Saturday, August 21, 2010 from 6pm-8pm. If you are a former crewmember or descendant who is not yet on our mailing list, give us a call at 410-539-1797 X 422 or e-mail administration@historicships.org.

NINTH Maritime Heritage CONFERENCE Baltimore • September 15-19, 2010

HOSTED BY HISTORIC SHIPS IN BALTIMORE AND THE NAVAL HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

15 - 18 September at the Hyatt Regency, Inner Harbor

Held every three years, this conference provides an opportunity for all people interested in the preservation of our nation's maritime heritage to interface with members of local, national, and international maritime heritage and preservation organizations. There will be presentations on a host of maritime topics including Oceanic Trade, Admiralty Courts, Shipbuilding, Small Craft, Lighthouses & Lifesaving Stations, Underwater Archeology, Ship Preservation, Sailors' Life Ashore, African-American Maritime History, Maritime Museums, Mercantile & Naval Port Operations, Naval History, the War of 1812, Maritime Literature, Maritime Art and Music, Maritime Education, and other topics related to our collective maritime heritage. For more information visit the website of the National Maritime Historical Society at www.seahistory.org and look under the events tab.



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Yes, I would like to become a member of Historic Ships in Baltimore. Please enroll me as a member so that I may help the cause, receive the museum's newsletter, *The Deck Log*, and enjoy the many other benefits of membership.

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On board USS *Constellation***

For tickets and information

www.historicships.org or 410-539-1797 X 422