

## **Herndon at Sea**

By Chuck Mauro

You probably know that our town was named after William Lewis Herndon, but did you know that two Navy destroyers were named after the famous Commander?

William Lewis Herndon, a Commander in the U.S. Navy, explored the entire length of the Amazon beginning in 1850. His goal was to spur steam travel on the river. In 1855, he became the Captain of the *S.S. Central America*. Captain Herndon went down with his ship in 1857 in a hurricane off of North Carolina. The sinking of the *Central America* was one of America's greatest maritime disasters. The train depot on the Alexandria Loudon & Hampshire Railroad was built in 1857, before the area became known as Herndon. The train allowed area residents to commute to Washington and Alexandria. In 1858, a post office was to be established at the railroad station. It needed a name, and local legend holds that, at a meeting to decide on the name, "Herndon" was suggested by a man who had survived the wreck of the ship *Central America*.

Tradition holds that Navy destroyers are traditionally named for naval heroes. On May 31, 1919 the destroyer *Herndon, DD-198* (Herndon I), was named for Commander William Lewis Herndon. His niece, Miss Lucy Herndon, sponsored the ship. Commissioned on September 14, 1920 at Norfolk, Herndon I was placed in reserve in Charleston, South Carolina, for training exercises and maneuvers along the east coast. It was decommissioned in 1922, having never served in combat.

Herndon I served the Coast Guard from 1930 to 1934, and was recommissioned in the Navy on December 4 1939. Decommissioned again from the Navy, she was turned over to Great Britain on September 9, 1940. Rechristened the HMS Churchill, she joined the search for the German battleship Bismarck. She was transferred yet again, this time to the Russian Navy on July 16 1944, and was renamed Delatelni. Her service finally ended when a U-boat sank her on January 16, 1945.

During World War II a second naval destroyer was named for Commander Herndon. *Herndon DD-638* (Herndon II) was launched on February 2, 1942, and commissioned on December 20 of the same year. Miss Lucy Herndon Crockett, the great-grandniece of Commander Herndon, sponsored the ship.

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Herndon II was deployed off of Omaha Beach ahead of the first assault waves. The ship effectively bombarded enemy targets on shore in spite of heavy counter fire from enemy batteries. On June 8, 1944, she encountered heavy fire off of Normandy Beach and, coming out whole, was dubbed the "Lucky Herndon." In April 1945, the ship, under Commander Granville A. Moore, was deployed to the war in the Pacific via the Panama Canal, where she continued escort service through the end of the war.

When the Japanese surrendered in September 1945, Herndon proceeded to the Tsingtao, China, coast to enforce provisions of the peace. On September 16, Japanese Vice Admiral Kanako and his staff came aboard the ship to sign and implement the unconditional surrender of all Japanese

combatant and merchant vessels in the Tsingtao area. (The Japanese flag that was surrendered and a photo of the surrender ceremony are housed in the Depot museum.)

On December 5, 1945, Herndon II was detached to participate in the transfer of U.S. veterans from the Pacific back to the States in operation Magic Carpet. She was decommissioned on May 8, 1946 in Charleston, South Carolina. She entered the Atlantic Reserve Fleet and was moved to Philadelphia in January 1947, and eventually was berthed in Orange, Texas. According to the National Association of Destroyer Veterans, the ship was “sunk as target” in May 1973. Herndon II received three battle stars for her service.

Although the ship’s service had come to an end, members of her crew continued to hold reunions, enjoying the opportunity to recall their wartime experiences. In September 2004, a number of the surviving crew members, who were meeting in Washington DC, visited the Herndon depot, which houses a number of artifacts from the ship.