

1923—Official Update for members of the former USS Colorado Alumni Association—1947

Editors: Michael Reither and Steven Leek

Save the Date: May 29, 2023 (Memorial Day)  
*USS Colorado* Veterans invited to the Grand Opening  
of a new Veterans Memorial near Denver - featuring  
a USS Colorado battleship replica!



Dear Veterans, Wives, Sons/Daughters, Grandchildren, Family, and Friends of the former *USS Colorado Alumni Association*:

This is a special edition of *The Colorado Lookout* - the newsletter of the former *USS Colorado Alumni Association*. The last issue was published in April 2018 after the submarine USS Colorado (SSN-788) commissioning event in New London, CT. We have some exciting news to share! Adams County, Colorado (near Denver) is building a new Veterans Memorial at a local park that will prominently feature a replica of the battleship *USS Colorado*! The photo above is a rendering of the future memorial. For the grand opening of the Veterans Memorial - scheduled for Veterans Day (May 29, 2023) - Adams County has invited our *USS Colorado* veterans to be VIP guests for the event. Although we have sadly lost many *USS Colorado* veterans and their wives over the last few years, I am honored to report that five (5) *USS Colorado* veterans are planning to attend this event: **Ken Jones, Charles Johnson, Charles Inman, William "Bill" Meadows Sr., and Frank Weber**. Steven Leek is our liaison with Adams County and will share additional event details soon. Please mark this event on your calendar and save the date. We would love to see you there as Adams County honors our *USS Colorado* veterans, all American veterans, and every military service branch with this new Veterans Memorial. This Veterans Memorial grand opening ceremony is a public event and everyone is welcome.

**What:** Grand Opening Event for a new Veterans Memorial - featuring our *USS Colorado* Veterans  
**Where:** Riverdale Regional Park; 9755 Henderson Rd, Brighton, CO 80601 (Adams County, CO)  
**When:** Veterans Day, Monday, May 29, 2023; 10 AM Mountain Time

**In work:** May 26 - 29 (Friday - Monday); other activities and social events for former *USS Colorado Alumni Association* members are tentatively being planned pending final logistics by Adams County, Colorado.

The link below is from the official Adams County, Colorado website with renderings of the future Veterans Memorial. I have included photos from the website so you can see what is being constructed to honor our nation's veterans.

Adams County government website link:

<https://adcogov.org/veterans-memorial-project>



# A battleship is being built in Brighton

Navy on hand to commemorate on Veterans Memorial

Source: <https://northglenn-thorntonsentinel.com/stories/a-battleship-is-being-built-in-brighton,410143>

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A lifesized replica of World War II-era battleship USS Colorado that's taking shape on the banks of Brighton's Mann-Nyholt Lake will never see naval service, but it's already received honors from the U.S. Navy.

Several U.S. Navy officers joined veterans and Adams County officials for the official "mast stepping" ceremony for the replica battleship, destined to debut by Memorial Day 2023 as the county's new Veterans Memorial.

"The Navy is excited about it because they want to use it as a recruitment tool, bring potential recruits, maybe bring out veterans to do physical therapy, weddings, military weddings, or commissioning of officers or chiefs, or retirements. We are going to have the USS Colorado's bell the same one on the submarine," said Adams County Commissioner Charles "Chaz" Tedesco, a retired Navy Veteran.

Crews are continuing to build the Veterans Memorial at the Riverdale Regional Park, on the shore of Mann-Nyholt Lake. It's meant to honor past, present, and future veterans for their sacrifices to defend our country, Tedesco said.

## Meaning behind mast stepping

The mast stepping ceremony was celebrated on Dec. 7, which is the Remembrance Day of Pearl Harbor. Veterans and community members placed mementos in a box that were placed inside the battleship's mast.

U.S. Navy Command Master Chief Benjamin Chester, a 22-year veteran who has deployed on three different ships, gave of speech on what the stepping of the mast means and the ceremony's history.

"The stepping of the mast is a meaningful event of the building a ship," Chester said. "The mast is carefully lowered through the whole main deck surrounded by reinforcing shocks reinforcing shocks security structural beams, the mast was in jostled into position through a slot into the keelson."

Chester said the tradition started with the ancient Greeks and Romans placing coins under the step of the mast to pay a toll for the crew to cross the dangers of the sea – and into the afterlife in case the ship sank. The Roman tradition paid Charon the ferryman to cross a river, Styx, into the afterlife.

"Placing the coins in ship functions as a form of advice, thanking the gods for successful construction, and requests for divine protection," Chester said.

Chester said it was also the practice when a ship was demasted, losing its mast to a storm or some other trauma; coins are placed in the new mast for good luck.

Chester said the Vikings placed coins in a container over the mast. Navies have continued the tradition, and coins were placed in the USS Constitution, Old Iron Sides, and on the original six heavy frigates of the U.S. Navy, still in service today.

"It's a rich tradition carried forward to the present. Though today the mass stepping ceremony involves placing or welding coins and other significant objects into the hollow part of the mast of the ship during its construction to bring good luck," Chester said. It's essentially a time capsule onboard the ship."

Chester said there is no official instruction or regulation which covers mass stepping. The ceremony is a time-honored tradition and an important part of bringing a ship to life.

"Today the ceremonies vary greatly from region to region and even throughout the individual shipyards. It focuses on history, heritage and ships' namesake enduring tie between the shipbuilder's crew, the plank owners and the sponsors of the ship, linking the past with future," Chester said.

Chester placed a Navy Talent Acquisition Group Rocky Mountain Command Chief challenge coin on the USS Colorado mast.

"I hope that it may bring luck and strength, I'm happy to be part of this today with Veterans Advisory Committee," Chester said.

Adam County Commissioner Charles Chaz Tedesco also served in the Navy for six years as a Boiler Technician taking care of the power units for the ship, the boiler, which ran on steam back in the day. He also served part of his Navy career on the USS Midway before its decommission.

Tedesco said his father, who adopted him, also served in the Navy in Sasebo, Japan, right after the bombing of Japan. In honor of his father, he placed his Good Conduct Medal from World War II on the mast.

"I served almost 45 years later, in Sasebo, Japan, that was my base," Tedesco said.

## **USS Colorado**

Stephen Leek, another former sailor, served in the Navy from 1993 and 1997 as an aviation machinist working on airplanes on the carriers. He came in from Seattle to help with this memorial; his grandfather Elmer Hitchcock served on the original USS Colorado battleship in World War II as a first-class seaman.

"After he passed away, I started volunteering with his alumni group that served with my grandfather on the USS Colorado," Leek said. "They would have annual reunions after the war; they were all busy with their lives working and raising families. But as they got older, the reunions didn't happen as often. It was a regular part of my life with them, who fought in World War II with my grandfather."

Leek said when they couldn't take care of themselves, he answered the phones and sent out the newsletter.

About 12 to 13 years ago, there were up to 200 of them. Now we are down to four.

"The good news is that with the help of Adams County, all four plan on coming here to open the official ribbon cutting in May for Memorial Day," Leek said.

## **The Lucky Ship**

Leek said the original USS Colorado History battleship was commissioned after World War I and was considered a dinosaur by World War II– one of the older ships in the Navy at the time.

"The Navy realized in World War II during Pearl Harbor that battleships were very vulnerable and became obsolete, and as December 8, 1941, the aircraft carrier had become the ship of battleships," Leek said.

When the attack on the Pacific Fleet began on Dec. 7, 1941, the USS Colorado was the only battleship that was not at Pearl Harbor.

"She had electrical problems and was at the Puget Sound Navy Yard on that morning that every other Pacific Fleet battleship was at Pearl Harbor and every one of them was damaged to some extent or another that morning. She was considered a lucky ship," Leek said.

The attack created a new role for battleships.

"The World War I era dreadnought kind of a ship couldn't keep up with faster battleships and aircraft carriers they were making," Leek said.

Leek said the USS Colorado still had a purpose as support for ground invasions such as Tarawa, Okinawa, etc.

"Those older slower battleships they would go in with the invasion forces soften up the beaches, so it kind of became her purpose after that," Leek said.

## **Found foghorn**

The USS Colorado was decommissioned in 1947 and scrapped in 1959 and 1960.

Leek said all the parts from the battleship were sold and scrapped in Seattle as well.

"A lot of the pieces of the battleship have been found. Since I'm part of that alumni group, I get called about found pieces. A company near the Seattle airport had the USS Colorado's foghorn since 1960, using it inside its factory as emergency evacuation and about seven years, it upgraded to a modern system," Leek said.

One of those pieces was the ship's original foghorn. Lee said it's been placed on campus at the University of Colorado museum. He contacted them and they plan on bringing the foghorn to the ceremony in May to blow her horn when the memorial is complete.

"I've been getting more original parts and pieces and have some of the teak wood deckings from the ship that I'm bringing to be built into this battleship," said Leek.

See photos from the Mast Ceremony on the next page.



Colorado Navy soldiers came in honor of the stepping mast ceremony.



Command Master Chief Benjamin Chester from the United States Navy is carrying the box of mementos to be placed on the battleship mast.



Standing in honor while listening to trumpet playing Taps. Left, Command Master Chief Benjamin Chester, Adams County Jim Siedlecki, deputy county manager, Commissioner Lynn Baca, Charles Chaz Tedesco, Steve O'Doriso, and Emma Pinter.



Two construction workers with a cherry picker placed the silver box on the mast. It's a time capsule of history.

We will send you another bulletin very soon with more information as the final details of the grand-opening event are shared by Adams County, Colorado. Adams County government is in charge of the grand opening ceremony and we hope to support and supplement their plans so we (former *USS Colorado Alumni Association* members) can meet again.

Fair winds and following Seas to all of you!

*Michael Reither*

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Above photo: USS Colorado - Puget Sound Navy Yard, 25 April 1944; bow view, port side.



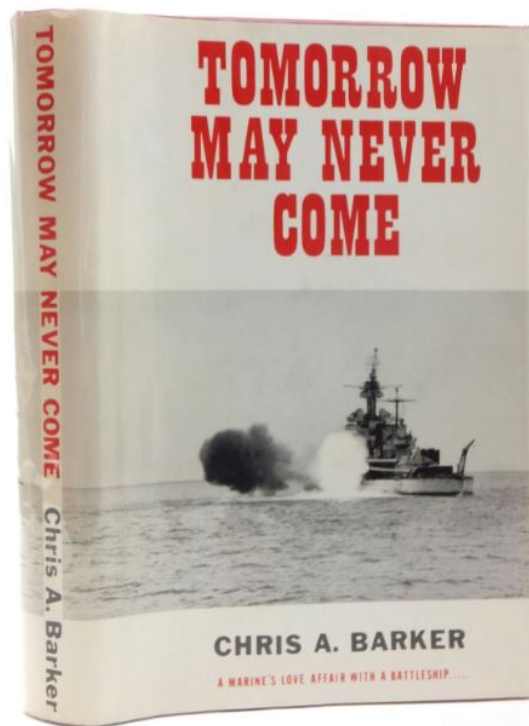
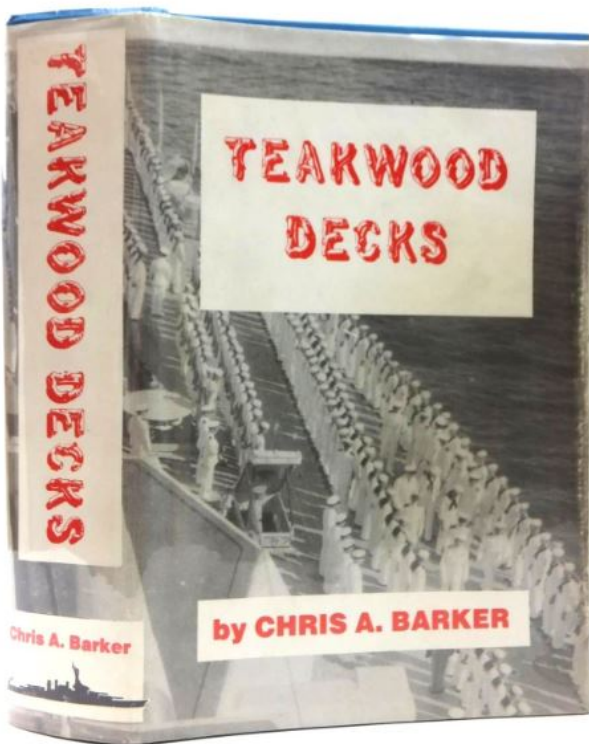
# USS COLORADO HISTORY - RECOMMENDED READING

Are you looking for an excellent book about our favorite battleship - the USS Colorado? I strongly recommend the following two books written by shipmate and U.S. Marine/Chris A. Barker (1912 - 1992).

**Teakwood Decks** - a history of the three USS Colorado ships (frigate, armored cruiser, and battleship) but mostly covers the pre-war and war years of BB-45.

**Tomorrow May Never Come - A Marine's Love Affair with a Battleship** - a detailed history of BB-45 during WWII and Chris Barker's service as a Marine aboard the battleship.

Chris Barker wrote these books in the mid-1980s and found a publisher who printed 1000 copies each - so they are hard to find but I usually see a copy of both books for sale on Ebay or Amazon a couple times a year. Teakwood Decks is a very large book - over 700 pages - and can be expensive.



# GRAND OPENING CEREMONY

at the

# ADAMS COUNTY VETERANS MEMORIAL

STAY  
TUNED  
FOR MORE  
DETAILS.



**Monday, May 29, 2023, 10 a.m.**

**Riverdale Regional Park**  
9755 Henderson Rd., Brighton



**ADAMS COUNTY**  
COLORADO