

USS OAK RIDGE (drydock ship for destroyers, submarines, and landing craft – named for our city)

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of December 11, 2023)

For several years now many of the surviving crew members of the US OAK RIDGE, named for Oak Ridge, have gathered for annual reunions in Oak Ridge. It has been a great experience to be able to get to know them and to enjoy their banter and fun of being gathered in reunion.

This year was likely the last formal reunion. Future gatherings will be informal and lower key. At this last formal gathering the city was given a porthole from the ship and a buoy ring. This is in addition to a commemorative bell that was presented to the city several years ago.

The following description of the ship's history was provided by Bob Rawls:

With a rich history beginning during World War II, USS OAK RIDGE, a Medium Auxiliary Repair Drydock, (ARDM-1), was a mainstay in the Rota harbor from 1964 until 1979. The ship, later referred to as USS OAK RIDGE, was originally commissioned as an ARD-12-class floating drydock designed for docking destroyers, submarines and a variety of landing craft.

In 1944 ARD-19, part of the ARD-12 class, was towed to the Pacific theater. Later that year, the ship was moored with USS ROSS (DD-563) in dock undergoing repairs. A Japanese aircraft launched a Kamikaze attack, crashing into the drydock. The aircraft passed through the starboard wingwall of the dock, significantly damaging both the ARD-19 and ROSS. Another aircraft conducted a strafing run, but was downed by gunfire from the ARD, ROSS, and LST-556. Repairs were made, and the ship resumed its drydocking mission in the Pacific until after the end of World War II.

In 1948, ARD-19 was towed back across the Pacific and served with the Pacific Reserve Fleet at Long Beach. In March of 1949, she was moved to Orange, Texas, for service with the Atlantic Reserve Fleet until her first decommissioning in September of 1949.

Thirteen years later in September 1962, ARD-19 was removed from decommissioned status and upgraded to enable support of Los Angeles class attack submarines. Subsequently, when reclassified as the ARDM-1 class in October 1963, the ship was recommissioned as USS OAK RIDGE. In June of 1964 OAK RIDGE was towed to Rota, Spain. The ship serviced nuclear powered attack submarines and other craft for fifteen years until June of 1979.

OAK RIDGE was then towed to Kings Bay, Georgia. After the ship was decommissioned and stricken from the Naval Register in 2001, it was transferred to the United States Coast Guard in 2002 and served at Curtis Bay Yard, Baltimore, MD, until being sold to a civilian contractor in 2018.

SIGNIFICANT SHIP DATES

MAR 1944	Commissioned as ARD-19
NOV 1944	Impacted by Japanese Kamikaze
OCT 1948	Assigned to the Pacific Reserve Fleet
SEP 1949	Decommissioned and assigned to the Atlantic Reserve Fleet
SEP 1962	Converted to support forward deployed submarines
OCT 1963	Recommissioned as USS OAK RIDGE (ARDM-1)
JUN 1964	Towed to homeport of Rota, Spain
JUN 1979	Towed to homeport of Kings Bay, GA
AUG 2001	Decommissioned and struck from Naval register
FEB 2002	Transferred to U. S. Coast Guard
DEC 2018	Transferred to civilian contractor

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COMMENDATION

LT R. S. Rawls

Commander Submarine Force, U. S. Atlantic Fleet has awarded USS OAK RIDGE (ARDM-1) the Battle Efficiency "E", Engineering "E", Supply "E", and Damage Control "DC" for Fiscal Year 1978. These awards recognize the outstanding performance of the officers and men of OAK RIDGE and represent exceptional reliability in assigned mission areas, complete readiness and overall excellence throughout the competitive year. Winning the Battle Efficiency, and the second consecutive Engineering, Damage Control "DC" and Supply "E" as a forward deployed unit Confirm the unequaled dedication and professional skill of all hands. As a crew member aboard OAK RIDGE participating in competitive exercises during Fiscal Year 1978, you can take great pride in these awards, for they were attained through the perseverance, dedication, and professional skill of all hands. For your part in this team effort and in the excellent results obtained you are hereby commended.

Congratulations on a job well done,

F. W. Clemenger, CDR, USN
COMMANDING OFFICER
BATTLE EFFICIENCY "E" 1978

I wrote a Historically Speaking column featuring the USS OAK RIDGE reunion in 2022 that includes more details you might like to review: <https://www.oakridger.com/story/lifestyle/features/2022/12/02/the-uss-oak-ridge-crewmembers-reunion/69668797007/>

I asked Bob to bring the history of USS OAK RIDGE up to date from 2002. He gave me the following details.

On June 26, 2018, Bob was on the USS OAK RIDGE in Baltimore, MD, at the US Coast Guard Curtis Bay Yard with Ken Forsberg. They raised flags in commemoration of the ship arriving in Rota, Spain for duty. Bob then mailed the flags and photo of each flag hoist to crew members and sent one to Mayor Gooch. The flag used for their ceremony this year in Oak Ridge was also one that was raised over the USS OAK RIDGE.

On October 8, 2018, during the ship sale process, Bob and two other crew members were given permission to remove some historical items before the ship left Curtis Bay Yard. That is when the porthole was removed from what used to be the Executive Officer's (second in command) stateroom.

Bob said he thought it more appropriate for the porthole to be displayed indefinitely somewhere in Oak Ridge - the ship's namesake - rather than kept personally, only to be tossed away by some future generation. I agree and am proud that an exhibit is being planned for the items from the USS OAK RIDGE.

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Bob has provided the name and email for the current owner, and I have sent a request to know what has happened to the USS OAK RIDGE. His response was: "...walls were cut down two levels, for use as a commercial drydock. It's coming to Norfolk in the next week or two and will be used to drydock a submarine that's being demilitarized and scrapped, then ownership is likely transferring to another Norfolk company for their shipyard so I can semi retire.

So, that is the latest we know about the final destiny of the USS OAK RIDGE. I am anxious for the museum exhibit to be completed so visitors to Oak Ridge can see and appreciate the ship named for our city!



Bob Rawls



Bob Rawls and his father Robert S. Rawls

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USS OAK RIDGE drydock ship



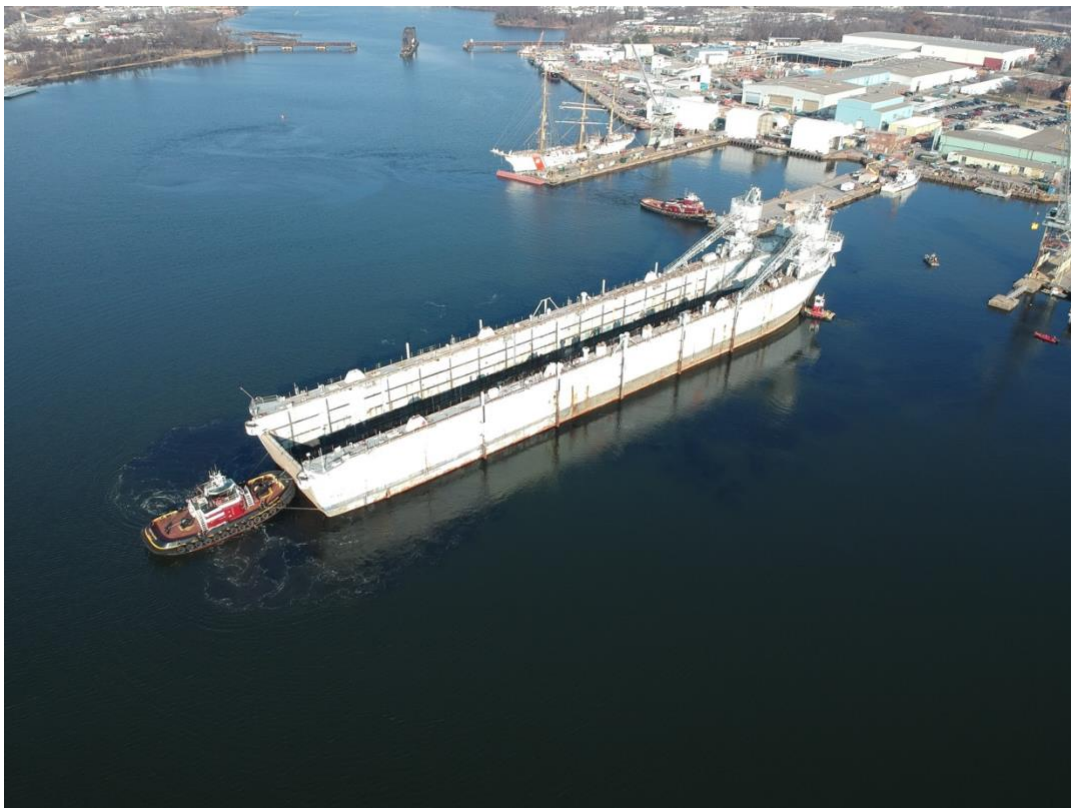
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Looking through our porthole at the dock of the USS OAK RIDGE



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The Memorial Ceremony at the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell