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## Ship Wisconsin's preservation gives peek into past

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By [Dianna Cahn](#)  
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NORFOLK

Navy inspectors swarmed aboard the retired battleship Wisconsin on Friday.

They poked voltage detectors into open electrical boxes and hanging wires - discovering more live ones than they'd like - and wondered aloud why some old parts were stripped, while others were still in place, on a ship that was decommissioned in 1991 after nearly 50 years of service.

Senior inspectors marveled over the similarities to current ships - racks stacked three high and tucked away in niches wherever space allowed - and the differences between an old steam engine and the nuclear or gas turbine varieties that power modern warships.

For them, it was a strange and nostalgic mix of doing what they normally do, but to preserve the history of an aging ship rather than prepare a modern one for a seafaring future.

"For me, to have been that prior enlisted (sailor) and made the move to the senior officer side, to see how they lived at the time the ship was in service - to be able to make that connection and preserve that opportunity is a unique experience," said Capt. Daniel Henderson, who enlisted in the Navy and now serves as deputy director of craft and auxiliary force inspections at the Navy's Board of Inspections and Surveys, known as INSURV.

Henderson and his boss, Capt. Mark Metzger, director of craft and auxiliary force inspections, led a volunteer team of INSURV inspectors who fanned out across the Wisconsin, now owned by the city of Norfolk and open to the public as a museum.

Their job was to help the city devise a plan for preserving the old vessel from corrosion, said John Elliker, who manages the Wisconsin.

"One of the things that is difficult for us in a time of tight budgets is to understand the priority of things to do on this ship - primarily to preserve her and also to show her off," Elliker told the inspectors before they got to work.

"It is a unique opportunity to have you all volunteer like this," he said. "It is important for us to put together a meaningful life-cycle plan, build a task list, assign cost and have a list to take to the city fathers."

Elliker said the Wisconsin's keel was laid in 1941 and the ship was launched on Dec. 7, 1943, exactly two years after the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor.

The Wisconsin served in the Pacific, participating in the bombardments of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and was deployed outside Tokyo Bay on the day Japan surrendered, to prevent enemy ships from escaping.

It was twice decommissioned and brought back into service, to fight in Korea and then in the first Gulf War.

Lt. Cmdr. Blaine Pitkin, a deck inspector, who served on a ship alongside the Wisconsin during the Gulf War, said he was excited to help preserve it.

"It's a great thrill," he said. "It's a great opportunity for us to use our skills to maintain a piece of history."

Elliker said parts of the ship - in particular the engineering rooms and the depths of the hull - are still off-limits because of asbestos. His goal is to make those areas accessible to the public as soon as possible.

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**GREAT TO HEAR. ANY WORD ON**

Submitted by [hope2Bimpartial](#) on Sat, 01/26/2013 at 2:49 pm.

Great to hear. Any word on the status of the USS OLYMPIA, up in Camden NJ? The only survivor of the Spanish-American War that is still around, I've heard she is in bad shape now...



**1 OF 3 PHOTOS:** Chief Warrant Officer Robert Gazzara checks out the wiring in a berthing area of the battleship Wisconsin in Norfolk on Friday, Jan. 25, 2013. He was among the group of volunteer ship inspectors from the U.S. Navy's Board of Inspections and Surveys that visited the ship to offer recommendations for a life-cycle maintenance. (Amanda Lucier | The Virginian-Pilot)

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