

Hawaii News

Under a new lease deal, the Missouri memorial will stay in Pearl Harbor

By [William Cole](#)
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The USS Missouri Memorial Association has signed a 25-year lease with the Navy to keep the historic battleship right where it is now, bow to bow with the sunken USS Arizona, representing the initial defeat and eventual victory for the United States in World War II. At top, some of the 4,000 Chinese distributors for cosmetics company Nu Skin on an incentive trip to Hawaii visited the Mighty Mo.



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“This (long-term lease) is a huge milestone for our organization because it allows us to really plan for the future and help us realize our mission of making the Missouri the finest historic ship destination in the world,” said Michael A. Carr, president and CEO of the USS Missouri Memorial Association.

It’s hard to imagine the Battleship Missouri Memorial anywhere but bow to bow with the sunken USS Arizona, representing the startling initial defeat and ultimate victory for the United States in World War II.

In reality it’s taken nearly two decades at its location at Pier Foxtrot-5 off Ford Island to get what amounts to an extended lease on life.

The nonprofit USS Missouri Memorial Association signed a deal with the Navy on March 30 — retroactive to Jan. 1 — on an unprecedented 25-year lease for the battleship to remain just where it is, and where its relationship to the Arizona has an impact on hundreds of thousands of people a year.

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“Being where it is important,” said Doug Gabel, 60, a Kansas resident who toured the Missouri last week. “It helps people to understand the beginning and the end of one of the greatest conflicts in history. You don’t have to imagine it — it’s right there.”

Not all of the approximately 1.8 million people who visit the USS Arizona Memorial also step foot on the battleship famous as the site of Japan’s surrender in Tokyo Bay in 1945, but the “Mighty Mo” gets plenty of them, tallying a record 646,643 visitors in 2016.

“This (long-term lease) is a huge milestone for our organization because it allows us to really plan for the future and help us realize our mission of making the Missouri the finest historic ship destination in the world,” said Michael A. Carr, the Missouri association’s president and CEO.

The agreement, which provides a percentage of Missouri gate receipts to the Navy for the ongoing use of the \$29 million pier — ironically built for the Missouri when it was still a commissioned battleship — also launches a reorganization of pier-side facilities.

The 6,000-square-foot Building 468 just outside the Missouri’s gate is part of the new lease and is envisioned to be used for restrooms, staff space and to exhibit some extra Missouri collection items that aren’t displayed on the ship, Carr said.

New retail space, including the possibility of adding more food options on the 1,000-foot pier, also will be examined.

Carr said wherever the money comes from, whether a capital campaign or borrowing, “the first question that a donor or bank is going to ask is, ‘What’s the story with your lease?’ And so the long-term lease was the key for us.”

It’s been something of a struggle to get there.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Adm. Chester Nimitz were on the Missouri’s deck for Japan’s surrender to the United States in September 1945. In Operation Desert Storm in early 1991, the Missouri launched 27 Tomahawk cruise missiles and hurled 305 shells at Iraqi forces from its 16-inch guns.

The battleship was destined for duty at Pearl Harbor, but the era of the mighty warships drew to a close and it was decommissioned, for a second and final

time, in 1992. It opened as a museum and memorial on Jan. 29, 1999, opposite the sunken USS Arizona.

The first lease was signed with the understanding the 887-foot battle wagon would be moved in 2001. The memorial at the time was paying the Navy between \$220,000 and \$230,000 a year.

Under a Navy redevelopment plan for Ford Island, three locations for the Missouri were contemplated: its spot at F-5, 1,000 feet to the south, and even further to the south — and out of sight of the Arizona — at the old seaplane launch area.

In 1999 the Navy called the lease arrangement a “sensitive issue” because pier F-5 was one of the newest in the harbor. By 2001 it admitted it didn’t exactly need it, but it took many more years for the secretary of the Navy’s office to finally decide the Missouri could stay.

Some three-year leases led to a five-year deal covering 2012 through 2016, the association said.

Rear Adm. Frank Ponds, who left in 2013 as commander of Navy Region Hawaii, first “made the effort to go and actually persuade the powers that be at the secretary of the Navy’s office” of the importance of a long-term lease and “why without it we would never be able to improve these facilities,” Carr said.

The National Park Service initially had concerns that the Missouri’s current location would detract from the solemnity of the Arizona Memorial — sentiment that “has completely gone away” in ensuing years, Carr said.

“Everybody understands now the significance of us symbolically watching over the Arizona and the 1,177 men (who perished) and the beginning and the end of the war,” he said. “The story just makes complete sense. So the Park Service now is one of our strongest supporters in everything that we’re doing here.”

Carr said it’s “vitally important” for the Missouri to remain at pier F-5 and have the connection it does with the Arizona to help tell its story.

Navy Region Hawaii said that it is “pleased to be part of the 25-year lease agreement for the Battleship Missouri Memorial. This long-term lease affords stability, security and continuity of operations to ensure an enhanced visitor

experience in Pearl Harbor. Side by side, USS Arizona and USS Missouri remind us all of the tragedy and triumph of the Second World War and our need to preserve our history and heritage.”

Carr declined to specify the percentage of ticket sales that will go to the Navy as rent, but he did say it will be more than the roughly \$400,000 a year that the Missouri was paying under the former lease, minus credit for holding military ceremonies. The Missouri is one of four memorials and museums in Pearl Harbor, along with the USS Arizona Memorial, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor and USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park.

The Navy called the new lease a “win-win” that’s “good for everyone.” The proximity to the Arizona boosts Missouri visits, and paid visits help preserve the last U.S. battleship ever built. The Missouri association, which owns the ship, is working on a \$3 million project to repair some extensive corrosion high up on the superstructure. It’s the biggest repair and preservation effort since it was dry-docked in 2009-2010 for a \$15.5 million top-to-bottom paint job.

Asked why he was visiting the Missouri, Gabel, the Kansas resident, said, “Because it’s absolutely the most historic ship in the U.S. Navy.” The Army veteran said he was awed by the “size of everything — the guns and just the expanse of the whole ship.”

“I hope they keep them together,” Gabel’s wife, Linda, said of the Arizona and Missouri.



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