



Friday, August 14, 2020 | 📰 Today's Paper | ☀️ 81°

HAWAII NEWS

The battleship Missouri hosts a new exhibit that remembers the Japan atomic bombing

By [William Cole](#) • Today • Updated 12:52 am

The battleship Missouri has been referred to as an “altar of peace” because the deadliest conflict in the history of mankind ended on her decks on Sept. 2, 1945, president and CEO Mike Carr said.

“Because of that, we also have always taken the time to honor the dead and those who suffered to bring about the end of the war,” Carr said.

Somewhere between 50 million and 80 million people died in World War II.

On Thursday, the battleship memorial in Pearl Harbor held a blessing and formally opened a traveling exhibit in partnership with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that’s focused on the atomic bombings of those two cities.

The unveiling comes as the “Mighty Mo” plans to host a 75th anniversary commemoration of the end of the war on Sept. 2 expected to be attended by the secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This month also is the 75th anniversary of the Aug. 6 and 9, 1945, atomic bombings in Japan as the Allies closed in on the home isles.

“Of Silhouettes & Ash” is in Hawaii for the first time since its creation in 1995. It will be on the Missouri until Nov. 30.

The exhibit is not only part of the bookends of World War II history represented by the sunken USS Arizona and triumphant USS Missouri — but also the 75 years of enduring peace with Japan, now one of America’s staunchest allies.

In that space since the end of the war has come the ability to reflect on the loss of life on both sides.

Across the crew mess from the Of Silhouettes & Ash display is a kamikaze exhibit that reveals a human side of the devoted pilots and in one case, American respect for that bravery.

When a Japanese Zero crashed into the starboard side of the USS Missouri on April 11, 1945 — and the dead pilot’s body ended up on the ship — some of the crew wanted to toss the enemy overboard.

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But Missouri commander Capt. William M. Callaghan made the controversial decision to bury the aviator at sea the next morning with military honors, including a makeshift Japanese flag draped over the body.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki exhibit, meanwhile, focuses on a darker moment in the evolution of weapons of mass destruction — and fervent hope that nuclear weapons won’t be used again.

A message from the mayors of both cities that's among a series of wall displays reads in part: "In August 1945, atomic bombs instantaneously reduced our cities to utter ruin. By the end of that year, they had taken over 200,000 precious lives. Those who managed to survive have since suffered the devastating aftereffects of radiation, the peculiar horror of a nuclear weapon."

The political leaders noted that the exhibit includes belongings left by the victims and other information about the bombings "that convey what actually happened under the giant mushroom clouds that darkened the skies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As you view these exhibits, our hope is that you will encounter the reality of the terrible damage wrought by nuclear weapons and deepen your understanding of nuclear weapons as an absolute evil."

One cased exhibit reveals a tiny paper crane folded by Sadako Sasaki and one of four folded by President Barack Obama in 2016.

Sadako was 2 when she was exposed to radiation just over a mile from ground zero in the Hiroshima blast. Her family fled the fire in a boat on a river as rain full of black soot fell.

As a preteen, when Sadako got sick with leukemia, she started folding tiny paper cranes. Legend held that by folding 1,000, a wish would be granted. Hoping to get well, she painstakingly folded that many and more.

Sadako died when she was just 12. The young girl's plight became an international symbol of innocent lives lost in war and the desire for peace.

The exhibit also includes, among other items, a rosary from a victim at Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki and a replica of a bronze Buddha statue partially melted by the heat found 550 yards from the Hiroshima hypocenter.

A panel describing damage from the blast said "the atomic bomb exploded into a fireball that reached a diameter of more than 440 yards in 0.2 seconds. For about three seconds immediately following the explosion, the heat emitted in all directions by this fireball scorched the ground."

Glass melted and the surface of roofing tiles bubbled. The heat ray caused building surfaces to lighten, with surfaces that were shielded by people or objects creating a shadow effect.

The exhibit, like overall operations at the Missouri, has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delays in getting the items led to the opening after the anniversary of the bombings, Carr said.

No tourists has meant hardly any business. Visitation "has been horrible, in a word," he said.

On weekends, with Oahu residents including military coming out, "we've had 100 to 200 people, and on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, less than that." The museum now is closed Monday and Tuesday.

At 11:45 a.m., only 11 people returned on a Navy launch from a visit to the nearby USS Arizona Memorial. Eighteen visitor cars were in the parking lot.

Planners of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II commemoration on Sept. 2 are expecting about 225 people on the fantail of the Missouri, with about half of them aged veterans and their families.



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