



MidWeek Oahu | March 19, 2014

HAWAII'S FAVORITE NEWSPAPER | Postal Customer  
Vol. 30, No. 35 | Nathalie Walker photo  
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## Good Neighbor



Photo from Michael Lilly

**Michael  
LILLY**

Historical memorials awe us with their sheer size and magnitude. One such monument sits not on a hill or in a museum, but in the waters of Pearl Harbor.

USS Missouri was docked in the harbor in 1998, all thanks to the hard work of retired Navy Capt. Michael Lilly.

However, the real effort began 20 years ago. In 1994, the Navy retired four battleships, including USS Missouri, which served in Desert Storm in 1991-92. While it has seen a good amount of action in battle, its most historic memory lies in the World War II Japanese surrender, which took place aboard the Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

USS Missouri Memorial Association also came to fruition in 1994 in order to bring the Missouri back "home."

Upon the decommissioning of USS Missouri (which at the time was docked in Birmingham), the Navy made battleships available to worthy causes

that would apply for them. Other cities vying for the Missouri include San Francisco and Long Beach in California and Bremerton, Wash.

"We felt that the Missouri, being the place where the end of the war happened, could have no more important place than near its fallen sister ship, the Arizona, where the war started," says Lilly, a lawyer.

Lilly and four other USS Missouri Memorial Association volunteers produced a business plan that articulated a purpose for the Missouri to be used as a memorial and educational facility. In 1996, the plan was submitted to the Navy, along with a video that superimposed the Missouri next to the Arizona.

"It (the video) demonstrated visually why the Missouri needed to be in proximity of its fallen sister ship where the war began, and the Missouri is where the war ended," Lilly says. "You can't adequately experience the tragedy that happened Dec. 7, 1941, to the Arizona without seeing a live battleship nearby."

Thanks to the hard work by Lilly and other volunteers (Lilly also credits the work of the late Sen. Dan Inouye), the Navy awarded the Missouri to the USS Missouri Memorial Association in 1998.

Lilly is the last founding director of the board of the USS Missouri Memorial Association, which included notables such as Fred Hemmings, retired state Sen. Ed Carter, Adm. Ron Hayes and the late Harold Estes.

Lilly also has a personal connection to the Missouri.

"My uncle, Henry Walker, stood watch on the bridge as he watched the surrender ceremonies taking place," he explains. "He was also one of the financial contributors to our association to bring the ship here."

The future looks bright for USS Missouri and the association, which has welcomed more than 100,000 volunteers over 20 years. The plan is to make the ship more interactive to parallel this technological era we live in.

"Reaching out to future generations is one of the challenges we're going to meet," he says. To reach this budding demographic, Lilly envisions visitors being able to walk through the ship with an iPad to see things in action.

"We don't want to just tell a WWII story," he adds, "but tell a story about how important it is to have a Navy, and the Missouri symbolizes that." —*Nicole Kato*