

# USS Lexington Junior Class Tour

## Post Tour Report

### Orientation

The group arrived at the USS Lexington at 9:45am on May 11, 2017. They were met at the entrance by their respective Veteran Tour Guides, divided into four groups and received their individual Dog Tags.

The entire group of Students, Guides and Chaperones then attended a special program presented by members of the Ship's Crew which showcased Three Heroes of WWII who now serve as Volunteer Exhibit guides and experts on the South Pacific Theater during WWII.



### Bob Batterson (left)

Mr. Batterson is a Pearl Harbor Survivor. He described for the students a jaw dropping account of what it was like to witness one of most famous aerial attacks in history. After surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor he served as a fighter pilot aboard the USS Lexington's sister ship, the USS Bennington CV 20. He was a member of Fighter Squadron One, and flew the F6F Hellcat, which was the fighter aircraft that gave our pilots the dog fight advantage over the Japanese Zero. He told the students, "once we got those Hellcats we had no problem taking care of them Zeros". He served in the United States Navy for 30 years and is now 94.

### Joe Sassman – (Center)

Mr. Sassman served aboard the Lexington as a F4F Wildcat fighter pilot in Air Group 19 from July through November of 1944. He details for the students, while in the middle of a battle on November 5, 1944, he was in the cockpit of his fighter just seconds from launching when the sirens went off and he was told to get out and take cover. He barely made it to safety by jumping onto the catwalk just below the flight deck. "In less than a second" he recalls, a Kamikaze struck the command tower of the ship. "The ball of fire was beyond description" he stated. 50 crew members were lost in the attack. "Joe is too modest to tell you this, stated Mr. Batterson, but Joe also shot down 3 enemy Zeros. He served in the United States Navy for 11 years and is the eldest of the three at 96.

## **Orientation - continued**

### **Merton Bobo – (Right)**

Mr. Bobo joined the Navy Air Corps in 1943 at the young age of 17, and served as a Radioman/Gunner on an Avenger Fighter Bomber. He flew hundreds of combat missions for the duration of the war. His heroic service is evidenced by a cache of medals and commendations on display next to the restored Avenger located in the Hanger Deck of the Lexington. He fought in many major battles including the battle for Iwo Jima. He recalled for the students his memory of flying bombing missions for 4 weeks straight over Iwo Jima and fighting in that last major battle where he could see from the air the newly raised American Flag. News Photos of this planting of the flag became the Icon and inspiration for the famous Iwo Jima WWII Monument in Virginia. He served in the United States Navy for 3 ½ years, and an additional 2 years on a flight training ship. He is now 92, however he will tell you he should be 93 but he was sick for a year.

**Following** the personal accounts from the WWII Vets the students viewed an incredible 3D movie showing the history of large ships and purpose for the modern day Aircraft Carrier. The theme of this movie was “we stay strong so there can be peace”.

### **Lunch**

After the movie they had lunch in the Ship’s Mess with their respective Veteran Tour Guides where they could ask questions and converse about life on board an aircraft carrier.

## **Veteran Tour Guides**

### **Terry Leber – Flight Wing Group**

Entered U.S. Naval Reserve at Ohio State University at age 20 Completed basic at Great Lakes Training Center in late 1966. Assigned to The USS Lexington in January 1967 as an E-3 airdale working in Air Operations until October 1968. Responsible for training the Navy pilots in aircraft carrier launch and recovery operations. Bachelor of Science in Agriculture in 1971.

### **Ken Kohlstedt – Anchors Away Group**

Graduate of DePauw University, Greencastle IN – 1958

Graduate School – University of IL -1959-1960

Officer Candidate School, US Navy– Rhode Island -1960

Discharged from the Navy in 1970 as the Vietnam War was winding down. Had a 26 years as a stock broker for Morgan Stanley. Moved to Corpus Christi to be close to family.

### **Jerry Scheerer – Ship Mates Group**

20 year veteran, Retired Master Sargent – United States Air Force- was station in many countries during his service and moved to Corpus after retiring.

Bachelors in Business Administration, Masters in Systems Management

### **Steve Phalon – Hook Runners Group**

Became a Midshipman at the age of 18 and was commission as an Ensign, Civil Engineer Corps, USN. He started his naval career in 1973 at age 21 and served during Gulf War 1 in Norfolk, VA. Retired in 1994. His inspiration for choosing the Navy was his High School Mentor, CAPT George L. Street. CAPT Street was a WW2 submarine skipper and was awarded the Medal of Honor.

# THE TOUR

The Four groups of students and their guides began the tour from different parts of the ship and received expert instruction on functions of the ship, from the lowest part, the Engine Room, to the highest part, the Ships Bridge. They would hear the stories of events and could touch, feel and inspect actual equipment and parts of the ship while imagining what it was like to be on an aircraft carrier during the greatest struggle the world has ever known.



# Flatonia Junior Class 2017



Photo take in front of the WWII Grumman Avenger Fighter Bomber Exhibit, Hanger Bay

## Comments from the Rotary Club's Tour Coordinator

I am pleased to report that the students were exemplary in their behavior, attitude, and attention to the speakers. They showed immense respect to the Heroes, Guides and Staff of the USS Lexington. They made a stellar effort of being ambassadors for their School and Community of Flatonia Texas.

And, they seemed to have had a great time experiencing a portion of this country's astounding history. Hopefully they will realize a greater awareness and appreciation for their national heritage and those who now serve and have served to keep this nation free.

With Appreciation,  
Robert Rannebarger