Interpreting Historic Spaces

Colossal. Immense. Gigantic. These are some of the words that come to mind when visitors arrive at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum and first see the historic aircraft carrier Intrepid. At approximately 900 feet long, if you were to stand the ship upright, Intrepid is only 150 feet shorter than New York City’s Chrysler Building and 595 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty. The mammoth ship, which at the height of World War II was home to more than 3,000 sailors, is now the centerpiece of the Museum—hosting the country’s only state of the art collection storage facility on board a ship, a 243 seat theater, an 18,000 square foot education facility which includes five classrooms, and enough offices to house the Museum’s entire staff.

While the immense size of Intrepid allows us to do so much, it also presents some unique challenges. Each year, our Operations team uses 1,500 gallons of paint to maintain the ship. This past winter, they had to clear over 400,000 cubic feet of snow from the flight deck. But there is a more subtle challenge that lies below decks, and it is one that the Museum’s Exhibits team is working diligently to address: how does one tell the story of a massive ship that saw three decades of active duty? How do you share what it was like to survive a kamikaze attack during World War II, and also interpret the complex emotions of those who served aboard Intrepid during the Vietnam War? The Museum’s Curator of History, Jessica Williams, with the help of the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) and a team of archivists and exhibit designers, is working to answer these questions.

The Museum’s main indoor exhibit space on the hangar deck provides much information on the history of Intrepid. Through artifacts and historic photographs, the exhibits shed light on the lives of those who served. The challenge arises when visitors venture into the ship’s historic interiors—spaces where the men lived and worked. Sometimes, a docent or tour guide can offer insight into the functions of particular spaces and share stories of those who worked there, but without this staff, interpretation is left to the imagination.

That is all about to change, thanks to two grants from NEH and the diligent work of the Museum’s Exhibits team. In 2009, NEH awarded the Museum a $35,000 planning grant focused on interpreting historic spaces on the ship. For the next five years, Williams gathered research from Intrepid former crew members, historians, curators and exhibit designers. The project gained traction in the spring of 2013, when the Exhibits team was awarded a $300,000 implementation grant from NEH. The goal? Make the ship’s history come to life by sharing the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the ship’s crew within the historic spaces where they lived and worked.

Armed with years of painstaking research, the Exhibits team will roll out the first interpretation prototype this summer in Intrepid’s combat information center (CIC). CIC was the operational “brain” of Intrepid, and a historic photo of Intrepid’s anchor chain room.

Alfred “Pete” Smith, an Intrepid Operations Officer, during his recent oral history interview.

A historic photo of Intrepid’s anchor chain room.
A temporary exhibition at the Museum, *Masters of Disguise: The World of Camouflage*, examines camouflage in the natural world and explains the variety of ways humans have adapted methods of camouflage for our own needs.

The exhibition highlights four types of camouflage—obscuring, mimicry, disruptive and countershading. Eric Boehm, the Museum’s Curator of Aviation and Aircraft Restoration, wanted to showcase samples from the natural world along with examples of human camouflage in order to illustrate the close correlation between the two.

“This exhibit on not seeing is well worth seeing.”
— the Wall Street Journal

When people imagine an exhibition on camouflage they may often think of traditional obscuring camouflage, such as when an object or animal blends in with its background. When you first enter *Masters of Disguise*, you are faced with a life-sized ghillie suit covered with foliage. The ghillie suit, an example of obscuring camouflage, helped scouts blend in with their surroundings. A model P-40 Warhawk, with its sand-colored paint scheme that hid it from view as it flew over the North African desert, is another example of man-made obscuring camouflage on display.

Mimicry camouflage is demonstrated with a display on owl butterflies and their huge eyespots, which resemble an owl’s eyes and protect the butterfly from predators. Disruptive camouflage includes the use of bold patterns and dazzling colors that are meant to confuse the eye, while hiding the true features of the target. The camouflage concept of countershading, popularized by artist Abbott H. Thayer, plays with light and shadow in such a way that the object appears flatter and thus less visible.

Interactive components throughout the exhibition make the visitor’s experience both fun and educational. Visitors can crawl into an 8-foot high tree stump to peer through holes and try to spot subtly hidden images of a ship, a cannon, a tank and an airplane. The stump is evocative of the faux tree stumps that were used as surveillance posts during World War I. To see examples of dazzle painted ships, visitors can gaze through a periscope to see what these camouflaged ships looked like from the perspective of a submarine commander, and in a hide and seek display, guests will enjoy trying to find the camouflaged object.

From the beginning of World War I, camouflage experts consulted with and used techniques from artists—such as Thayer—who provided insight into colors and design that would trick the human eye and make equipment and uniforms less visible. Museum visitors can peruse books by scholar Roy R. Behrens, who has extensively studied the connection between the world of art and design and that of camouflage. Today’s top camouflage and tactical gear designers are almost as likely to come from art school backgrounds as they are to have service experience.

One such designer, Caleb Crye, is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Crye Precision, one of the leading tactical gear design companies in the country. Crye’s company, based at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, developed MultiCam, a now standard-issue camouflage pattern that helps the wearer hide in different environments. An example of the popular MultiCam pattern is on display in the exhibition.

*Masters of Disguise: The World of Camouflage* is open to the public through August 24, 2014, and is included with Museum admission.

“Masters of Disguise: The World of Camouflage” is on display through August 24, 2014.
For each visitor who gets to experience the Intrepid Museum first-hand, there are many others who would love to visit, but are unable due to age, health or financial restrictions. In direct response to this need, the Museum created Community Engagement programs which are designed to reach those individuals by venturing into the community to deliver cultural programs to diverse audiences throughout the city.

Museum Educators head to hospitals, libraries, and community and veteran centers to lead demonstrations, experiments and discussions, and guide artifact-based learning that provides enriching activities that enhance out-of-school experiences for students and promote family learning. This programming is set apart by its engaging historic and science content, produced by the unique objects in the Museum’s collections—including the aircraft carrier Intrepid and space shuttle Enterprise—and the human stories behind them.

Additionally, in collaboration with the New York City Department of Homeless Services and the New York City Administration for Child Services, the Museum hosts events for children and families in transitional housing and children awaiting placement into a foster home. These sessions occur during school breaks, holidays and weekends; select events coincide with the Museum’s Kids Week and Thanksgiving celebrations. The aim of these on-site programs is to help these families and children maintain a sense of normalcy during a challenging period of their life. All of these events include tours, educational programs, demonstrations, activities and meals. A portion of these events also include theatrical performances by professional NYC performance groups.

One performance group that Tom Barry, Manager of Community Engagement and STEM Initiatives, works with is Story Pirates—a musical comedy troupe that performs fun and imaginative stories written by students. After a recent Story Pirates performance at the Museum, nearly every child that attended worked with other family members and submitted their own creative tale to Story Pirates. It is our hope that the next time Story Pirates visits the stage at the Museum, they feature one of the original stories written by these children.

Community Engagement programs at the Intrepid Museum are generously supported by: the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; the New York State Council for the Arts; the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation; the Rose M. Badgley Residuary Charitable Trust; the Cowles Charitable Trust and Julia and Patricia Peloso-Barnes.
a vital hub where sailors gathered, analyzed and disseminated information about nearby aircraft and ships. The prototype will feature a touch-screen kiosk, where visitors will be able to navigate through first-hand accounts from men who served in the space. This kind of exploration is made possible by the launch of the Museum’s Oral History Project, which has recorded 31 oral histories to date.

For this project, Williams interviewed four individuals who served in CIC. Their service dates ranged from World War II to the ship’s final years of service. Ray Stone, of South Salem, NY, served from the day of Intrepid’s commissioning on August 16, 1943, until 1945. He was a radarman 2c, and in his interview he recalled the two kamikaze attacks that hit Intrepid on November 25, 1944: “I was both blessed and lucky. The terrible thing about having 26 of your fellow radarmen killed is that you knew them. You knew their hopes, and you knew their aspirations, and you hurt for them and their families, and you think of that all the time. That never left me.”

Peter Carle, a radarman 2c, like Ray Stone, served in a very different CIC from 1969–1971. Intrepid was not at war, but operating an aircraft carrier was still a dangerous activity: “We had pilots go in the water. You had to react immediately. You had to get right on the DRT [Dead Reckoning Tracer] and start plotting where you were, where the plane went in the water, and announce throughout the ship where this plane was so they could go and rescue the pilot. Ten seconds ago was too late.”

Williams also had the opportunity to interview an individual who led the entire CIC department—Alfred “Pete” Smith, who was an Operations Officer from 1970–1972 while the ship was serving in an antisubmarine role. His time aboard Intrepid was a challenging one: “My two years on Intrepid were probably the hardest I’ve ever worked in my entire life. Two hours sleep at any one time was a luxury. We all did it really proud of our contribution because we felt so strongly about the national need to stay strong and deter the threat [of Soviet submarines].”

After concluding her research on CIC, Williams reflected: “The interviews were fascinating. While each story was personal and unique, many of them touched on similar themes: the stress during combat or other critical operations, the thrill of being at the center of it all, the relationships between fellow sailors, the tedium of staring at a radar screen for hours, and, of course, humorous stories of life at sea. I think our visitors will enjoy hearing these very different points of view, and see how these sailors are connected across the span of time.”

In addition to the first-hand accounts, the prototype will also feature an illustrated text panel that will help visitors visualize what the space was like when the ship was in active service. The prototype will be on display for four to six weeks this summer, during which time the Exhibits team will make observations and collect visitor feedback, which will influence the design of the final elements. Following CIC, the next areas of focus will be the squadron ready room, the mess deck, the anchor chain room and officer berthing. Oral histories are now being collected from those who lived and worked in these areas, and the kiosks will debut in the fall of 2015. Once these are complete, the Exhibits team will look to other areas awaiting interpretation—including the submarine Growler.

We look forward to sharing updates on this extensive project as they develop, and we encourage you to visit the Museum this summer to give your feedback on the prototype as we work to craft a more immersive Museum experience.
Don and Eloise Bee met in December 1943, one month before Don was assigned to the USS Intrepid and headed off to fight in the Pacific War. On a recent visit to the Museum, the two sat down with Museum staff and retold their love story.

Don, originally from Cherry Tree, PA, and Eloise from Titusville, were introduced to each other by friends on a blind date. “She was beautiful,” Don said. “The moment I saw her, I knew that was my girl. That was the girl I wanted to marry.”

A month later, Don shipped off to war. The two kept in touch periodically over the coming months, and when Intrepid was struck by a kamikaze on November 25, 1944—an attack that killed 69 men and wounded 35—Don was sent home while the ship was repaired. While back home in Pennsylvania, Don and Eloise decided to get married. From then on they wrote to each other nearly every day until the war was over.

Don and Eloise Bee sat down with Museum staff to share their love story.

They kindly shared their letters with us, which our Collections staff scanned into the Museum’s digital archives. The originals remain in the same box they’ve been in for the past 70 years, securely tied with a velvet ribbon in Eloise’s dresser drawer.

February 1, 1945. My darling, I am doing fine and still being true. Which I always will....I am sending two dollars in this letter and if you need more, please let me know. — Eloise

February 3, 1945. We just came through Ogden, Utah, where we had an hour lay over. I dashed from the train, got a shower and a shave and bought this stationery and pen. Then back again to the train and on our way again. Right now we’re crossing the Great Salt Lake...my hat and coat smell like you still. — Don

Feb 9, 1945. I was so disappointed last night when we got back I didn’t know what to do—there weren’t any letters from you yet, so I’ll keep waiting until next mail call. — Don

Feb 24, 1945 This letter tonight was more like a line should be. Sorta gave me all the little things. For instance, your kid brother had been up to say hello, the furniture company had brought the stove, Dorothy came over and you’d taken a bath and gone out into the wind—all that stuff makes me feel nearer to you. Just as if I’d been there to see it all—wonderful. — Don

May 19, 1945. Dorothy and I went to see the movie “Hotel Berlin.” It was good, but the reel broke in the middle of the picture and when they got it fixed part of it was clouded over. — Eloise

May 20, 1945. I have the blues something awful tonight. I’ve cried ever since I sat down to write this letter. Why can’t you come home now and stay forever? — Eloise

Eloise got her wish on January 9, 1946, when Don headed back to Pennsylvania from Long Beach, CA, and arrived on the Erie Railroad. “When the train got in, he started running from the train, and I started running towards him,” Eloise recalled, laughing. Don shared the memory with a huge smile on his face saying, “We had a big hug right out on Main Street.”

Don experienced four kamikaze attacks while serving on Intrepid—he and his friend Harold Patterson were so close to one attack, they extinguished the flames from the resulting fire before the firemen even arrived on the scene. He knows how fortunate he was to make it home, when so many did not.

Reflecting on their 69 years of marriage—the first of which was sustained by their love letters while Don served aboard Intrepid—Don said, “I just don’t know what I would have done without her.”

January 27, 2015, will mark their 70th wedding anniversary. They plan on returning to Intrepid to renew their vows.

If you’d like to watch an excerpt from their interview, visit youtube.com/IntrepidMuseum

Are you a former crew member of Intrepid or Growler? We want to hear from you! Please contact Carly Goettel at 646-381-5279 or cgoettel@intrepidmuseum.org.
STUDENT HIGHLIGHT Anisah Rahaman

Anisah Rahaman is an incredibly energetic 17-year old—you would never guess that just two years ago she was so shy she rarely talked to other kids at school. But that was before she entered the Intrepid Museum’s Leadership Institute for Today and Tomorrow (also known as LIFTT) in the fall of 2012. LIFTT looks for students who have yet to realize their full potential, but have the drive and desire to improve their lives and the world around them. When Anisah applied, Museum educator Tom Barry knew she fit the bill.

“My guidance counselor knew I loved history, so she said, ‘you’ve got to apply for this!’ I was so nervous when I came in to interview for the program, but the Museum staff made me feel at ease. I am so glad I took the leap.”

When asked if she had a favorite experience during the program, she exclaimed, “There were so many!” But one stuck out in particular—when Anisah came back to intern at the Museum after she completed LIFTT, she helped lead a “touch tour” specially designed for children with limited vision. “We were in Growler, guiding the students through the submarine and describing what they were feeling. One student got to a particularly small space, and was nervous to keep going. I told her we could turn back, but she said, ‘If I try hard enough, I know I can do this.’ And then we kept going. I thought that was really incredible.”

Anisah says she woke up every morning of the program excited to head to the Museum, and realized she wanted to find a career that gives her the same feeling. She plans to become a cardiothoracic surgeon, minoring in education so that she can work as a museum educator to help pay for medical school. So far, she has been accepted into eight universities, and we can’t wait to see what the future brings for this bright, young woman.

The LIFTT program is made possible through the generous support of the Pinkerton Foundation and the ADP Foundation.

“I felt so strong whenever I was leading or participating in programs at the Museum—like I could do anything. And now I know that I can.”

Are you interested in the LIFTT program? Contact us at 646-381-5174 or email us at schoolprograms@intrepidmuseum.org.
Submerged: a New Interactive Experience

The Exploreum is the Intrepid Museum’s home for hands-on learning, a place that brings many elements of the Museum together in one engaging, interactive space. As the Museum’s collection has expanded to encompass sea, air, space and large-scale artifacts, Exploreum exhibits have evolved. This summer, the Exploreum will unveil its largest interactive exhibit yet—a forty-foot submarine where visitors can learn about its mechanics and what life was like on board.

This new exhibit not only presents opportunities for our education department to immerse students in science, technology and history, it also affords visitors who may not have the mobility necessary to visit submarine Growler the opportunity to experience the inside of this type of vessel. Providing access is a core mission of the Intrepid Museum, and we are glad to extend this experience to a wider audience.

The interactive submarine will be comprised of four sections: Propulsion, Navigation, Mess Deck and Bunk Compartments. Propulsion will explain how submarines move through the water powered by multipurpose diesel-electric engines and will showcase comparisons to vehicles of today, like hybrid cars. The Navigation area will include an interactive periscope where visitors will observe sight-lines and learn how submarines dive and surface. Lastly, the Mess Deck and Bunk Compartments will allow visitors to understand life as a submariner, exploring such concepts as the multiuse of small spaces, “hot bunking” and food preparation on board.

DONOR HIGHLIGHT Robert La Blanc

Robert La Blanc has lived the American dream. Born in Forest Hills, Queens, he put his nose to the grindstone and won a scholarship to MIT, but opted to stay close to his family by attending Manhattan College and graduated with a degree in Electrical Engineering in 1956. He secured a job at New York Telephone and was conscripted by the U.S. Air Force shortly thereafter, honing his telecommunications skills as a Base Communications Officer in Newfoundland monitoring Soviet activity—including the recently launched Sputnik satellite. When he returned home, he quickly rose up the corporate ladder, eventually founding his own firm specializing in information technologies consulting.

Robert and his wife Betty had five children—Elizabeth, Robert, Paul, Michelle and Jeannie. At the young age of 14, Jeannie asked a question that would have far reaching implications: why was their family so fortunate, while others were not? When Jeannie passed away suddenly, Bob and Betty made a commitment to honor their child by making it their lives’ work to share the American dream with as many young adults as possible.

Since 1981, Robert and Betty have provided more than 325 inner city students with scholarships for high school and college education. And when Bob started volunteering as a Museum docent two years ago, he and Betty decided they wanted to invest in the Museum’s education programs. When asked whether there was a specific area of education he thought was most important, he said: “Science, math, history, technology, the stories of human triumph—all of it! It’s all important for kids to learn. And I’m fortunate enough to help them do that.”

“The American dream is still alive, and it exists in our education programs. Through education, anything is possible.”

Robert La Blanc on the flight deck of Intrepid.
From the Archives

In this 1950s photograph from the collection of William Young, crew members take a break on Intrepid's flight deck in front of an A-1 Skyraider. The Skyraider series of aircraft played an important role on Intrepid and Museum visitors will be able to see a Skyraider being restored on the flight deck this summer. We are excited to welcome this brand new addition to the Museum's aircraft collection!

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT James Eng

James Eng, of Fresh Meadows, Queens, began volunteering at the Museum in 2012. A 37 year veteran of aerospace industry, Jim has always had a fascination with the Museum's aircraft collection and decided to become a volunteer the moment he stepped aboard Intrepid. Jim has worked as a Human Factors Engineer at Northrop Grumman in Bethpage, NY, since 1983. His job is to analyze how humans interact with technology with the aim of designing more “user friendly” control systems.

With the heart of a researcher, he started visiting Northrop Grumman’s History Center soon after becoming a volunteer to research the Grumman planes in the Museum’s collection (six of the Museum’s aircraft were built by the company, in addition to space shuttle Enterprise’s wings). He soon learned of a retired Grumman employee named Ben St. John, who had flown Avengers in World War II. Jim reached out to Ben to learn more about his experiences, and he was amazed to discover that not only did Ben fly Avengers, he flew them off Intrepid! A friendship was struck, culminating in Jim and his colleagues pooling together to purchase a Seat of Honor in the Museum’s theater for Ben, which will be dedicated on Memorial Day.

“I love making the history come alive for our visitors. The Intrepid Museum is so much more than the artifacts on display—each object comes with its own story, from the people who designed the technology to those who put it to use and maintained it. I'm glad to be a part of it!”

Jim, who has always been interested in history, found his interest taken to a whole new level by volunteering each Sunday at the Museum. He loves turning the facts that he learns into stories, and enjoys serving as a link between the aerospace industry and those who actually used the equipment he helped create (one of Jim’s projects at Grumman was the redesign of the F-14 cockpit).

Are you interested in volunteering at the Intrepid Museum? Contact our Volunteer Hotline at 646-381-5058 or email us at volunteers@intrepidmuseum.org.

James Eng standing in front of the Grumman Avenger, the type flown by his friend Ben St. John from Intrepid in World War II.
SUMMER EVENTS AT THE INTREPID MUSEUM

Join us throughout the summer to meet pilots connected to Intrepid’s aircraft, enjoy Movie and Astronomy Nights, celebrate space exploration and much more.

FLEET WEEK
May 21-27
Watch the Parade of Ships from Pier 86, enjoy activities on the pier and join us to honor our veterans at the annual Memorial Day Ceremony.

Friday, May 23
Our free Summer Movie series kicks-off on Friday, May 23. Movie Nights on the flight deck continue on Thursdays in July and August. Museum Members enjoy early ticket reservations and priority admission.

Monday, May 26 9:00am to 10:30am
Memorial Day Members Breakfast: Enjoy spectacular views of the Hudson River and have breakfast under the Concorde. The event is open to members at the Family/Dual level and above.

SUBMERGED EXHIBIT OPENS
Summer 2014
Visit the Exploreum, the Museum’s hands-on gallery, to experience its newest addition, a 40-foot interactive submarine. Members will be the first to experience the exhibit. Check our website for details.

ASTRONOMY NIGHTS
Thursday, May 29
Friday, July 18
Saturday, August 23
7:30pm to 10:30pm
Join amateur astronomers for stargazing and guided viewings of celestial events.

MEET THE PILOTS
Over the summer, top pilots who are connected to the Intrepid Museum’s aircraft collection will share stories of their flight experiences and their place in aviation history. Dates are coming soon.

SPACE & SCIENCE FESTIVAL
July 16-20
Interested in space, science, technology, astronauts and robotics? This five-day celebration of space, STEM and innovation is for you!

Intrepid Museum Launches Patron Program

In April, the Intrepid Museum launched the Anchor Society—a distinctive group of museum patrons whose generous support inspires exploration, innovation and wonder. The Anchor Society plays an integral role in charting a course to establish the Intrepid Museum as a leading institution that utilizes history and technology to inspire innovation, as we develop the next generation of leaders in science, technology, engineering and math.

ANCHOR SOCIETY

Members enjoyed a cocktail reception on April 22 with astronaut Mike Massimino, following a discussion on the future of space exploration. Members of the Anchor Society enjoy a wide array of benefits, including access to Museum curators, invitations to special events like our annual symposium on the future of the Museum and private behind-the-scenes tours—all while providing vital support for the Museum’s education programs and exhibits.

If you are interested in becoming a founding member of the Anchor Society, please visit intrepidmuseum.org/ AnchorSociety.aspx or call Carly Goettel at 646-381-5279.

Panelists Mike Massimino and Ira Flatow with Anchor Society members following the Future of Space panel discussion.
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