

Stepping Through History

By Kristi Britt, Code 1160
Public Affairs Specialist

Catesby ap C. Jones, descendant of CSS *Virginia* (the former USS *Merrimack* until captured) Commander Catesby ap. R Jones, came to NNSY on November 15 as part of a tour of the historical landmarks of his grandfather's stint in the Navy.

"I wanted to see where all the history took place," said C. Jones in response to why he wished to visit NNSY. "I appreciate being here."

C. Jones and his sponsor Bill Lockridge toured around the United States to 'track down the remnants of *Virginia* such as they were'; the artifacts scattered and ready to be sought out.

"There are several artifacts related to CSS *Virginia* and his great grandfather that he had not seen," Lockridge said when he was asked what brought C. Jones to NNSY. Lockridge is the Principal Research Manager from the Selma Research Project and he was determined to aid C. Jones in his search. "These things (artifacts) he had not seen and at age 86, it was time to come see them. The dry dock here was of paramount interest to us because it played such a large part in his great grandfather's history and service."

The Jones line was made up of Virginians, spanning as far back as the 14th century. R. Jones was the eldest son of Army Maj. Gen. Roger Jones and Mary Ann Mason Page. He served at sea in the United States Navy as a midshipman in 1836, eventually ranking Lieutenant in 1849. He was heavily involved with the developmental work of the Navy and had served as the ordinance officer on



Merrimack when she became active in 1856.

When the Commonwealth of Virginia left the Union to join the Confederacy, R. Jones resigned from the U.S. Navy and joined the Virginia State Navy. He was assigned to be the executive officer of *Merrimack*, which had then become the *Virginia*. During the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 8, 1862, Commanding Officer Captain Franklin Buchanan was wounded in battle and R. Jones assumed command of the ship. He led her into the historic engagement with USS *Monitor*.

It was special for C. Jones to be able to witness the places his grandfather had been in history, escorted by NNSY Historian Marc Robbins. When asked what his favorite part of the visit to NNSY was, C. Jones said, "I really enjoyed seeing the Tar House (museum) [and the Civil War artifacts at M1] but seeing the drydock (where the ship was) was the highlight of the trip. I also got a chance to sit in the Admiral's chair."

So far, C. Jones has been able to touch 14 of 15 landed artifacts of CSS *Virginia*, one of them lost before he had a chance to see it. He hopes to be able to see more artifacts recovered as he celebrates the history stores within his family's name.

"I had a wonderful time and everyone treated me well and welcomed me," said C. Jones.



On a stop to tour the NNSY Tar House, Catesby ap. C. Jones admires a painting of the Battle of Hampton Roads painted by former shipyard employee, Harry E. Harris in 1950. (Digital Image by Bill Black, Code 1170 Photographer)