

SERVICE TO THE FLEET TURNS 70

BY MARCUS W. ROBBINS • NNSY HISTORIAN AND ARCHIVIST

October 18, 1945 was a special day in this shipyard's long and proud history because the newspaper we know in the present day as *Service to the Fleet* made its first appearance under that masthead. A local newspaper is like a family member, so this birthday celebration creates an opportunity to trace our heritage.

The name was born after a shipyardwide contest with thousands of entries considered by a committee consisting of a cross section of the yard in order to select a name that would best signify victory and keeping of the peace. Erma Brinkley received a \$100 Victory Bond donated by the Norfolk Navy Yard Co-Operative Association for her winning entry.

The Norfolk Navy Yard had already published a weekly newspaper under two different names; first *Defender* and then *Speed Victory* a few years later.

The issue announcing *Service to the Fleet* as the winning name explained, "Conclusion of active warfare last August has brought many changes and now the name *Speed Victory* goes out with many other war time innovations. The name served its purpose well, providing a slogan as well as an appropriate title for a war time paper, which was distributed not only to each employee in the Navy Yard, but was looked for with keen interest by thousands of servicemen and women stationed in all parts of the world."

As we would trace the genealogy of any 70-year-old, it is best to start at the beginning.

For a very short run in 1920, there was a small format news monthly called *The Crows Nest*, followed by decades of inactivity and no regularly published newsprint at the shipyard. This monthly publication

featured various shop news and activities supplemented by local business advertising. It survives today only as a bound reproduced volume, yet it is quite insightful for the historical activities of the local workers and how the yard prospered and the local area adapted after World War I.

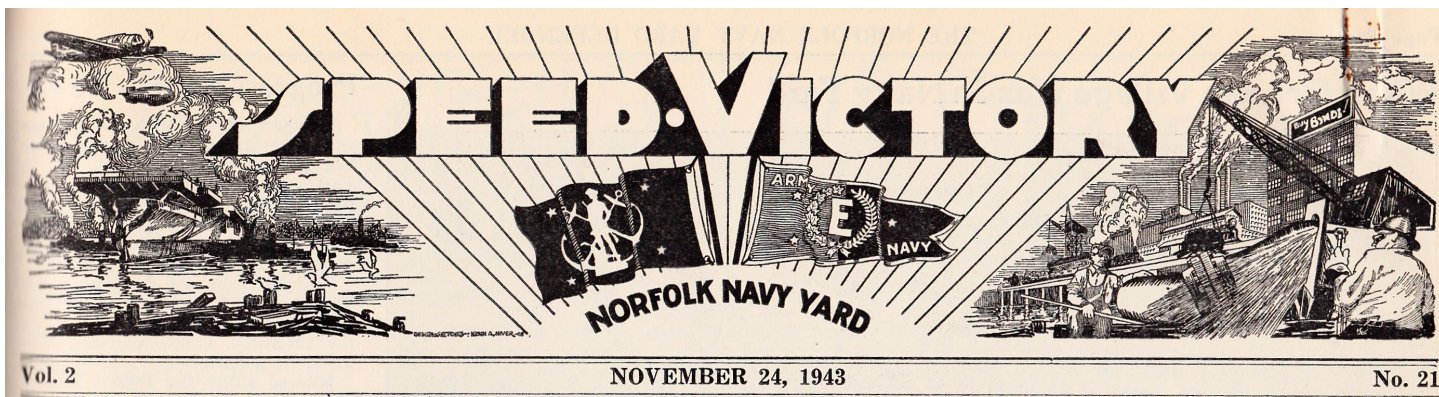
On March 4, 1942 with the advent of World War II, the local press awakened and under the guidance of Admiral Felix Gyax, a true weekly newspaper was born using the name *Defender*. Gyax's Shipyard Commander's comments on the front page of this first issue say:

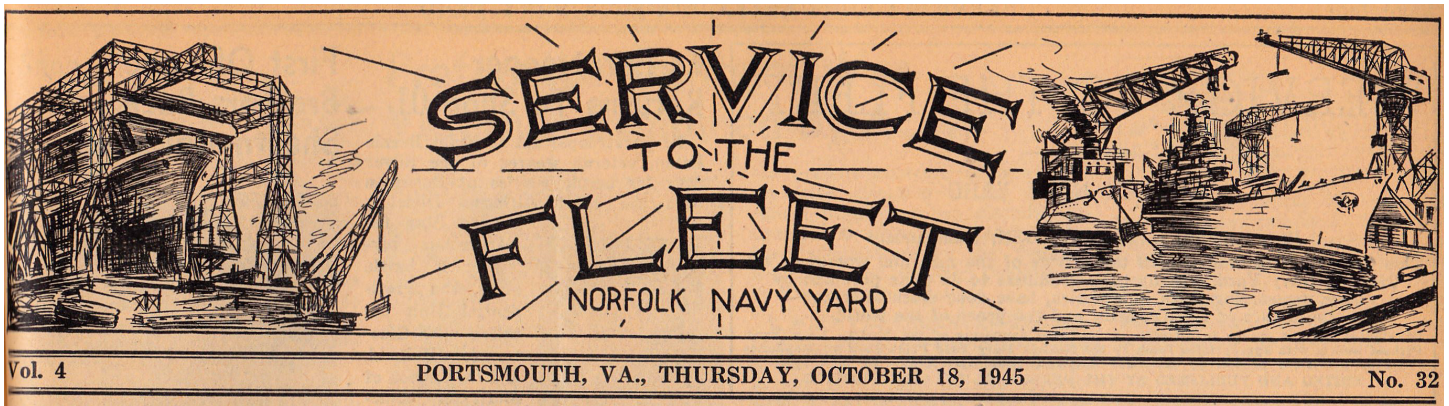
"Today we launch *Defender*. Although it will not make as big a splash in the Elizabeth River, or in the public eye, as the *Alabama's* recent launching, it is, nevertheless, an event of major importance to the Norfolk Navy Yard. My cordial greetings and best wishes to the *Defender*, our own newspaper."

That last comment, "our own newspaper," should not be lost. As was true back then with the call for correspondents from the various shops to write copy, the same is true today of your interaction with the current Public Affairs Office. They want to hear of your deckplate successes!

Other thoughts from this first edition were "that it would chronicle the news of the yard, which means you and your fellow workers." The newspaper stressed "that each worker is a defender, for each can play his part in the mighty effort that will be necessary to pave our way to victory." As the tide changed with the war, so did the name of our local newspaper to keep pace with the times.

On November 24, 1943, after a shipyardwide naming contest, Carl Allen won a \$100 War Bond and our newspaper was renamed *Speed*



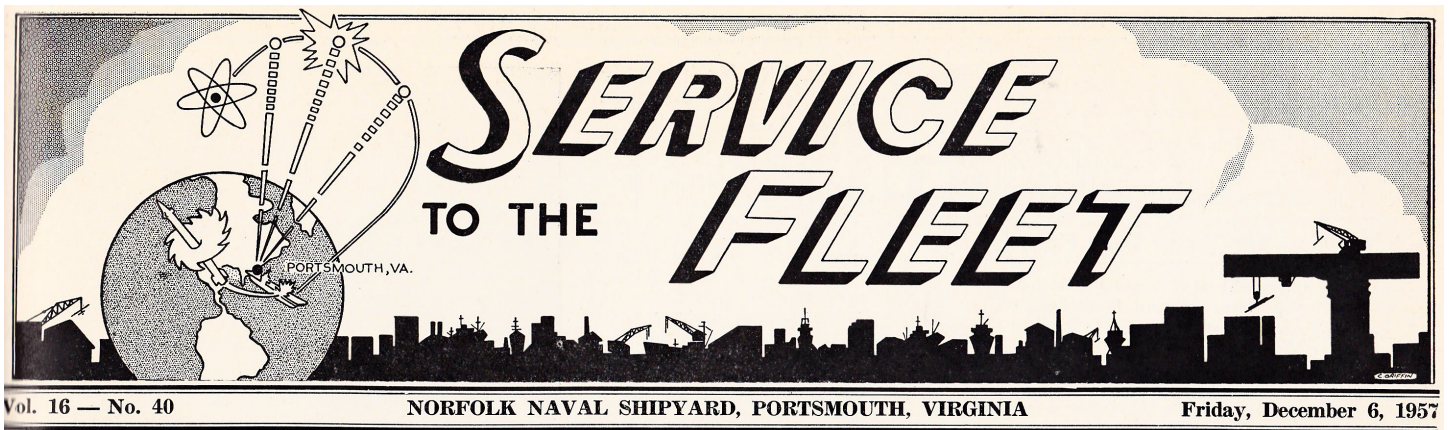


Victory. With a masthead drawn by Kenn Niver of the Machinery Drafting Room, the paper continued to convey the news to our workforce that soon exceeded 43,000 men and women. This name would serve for the duration of the war until peace returned to the home front in 1945.

The magazine has seen many changes, from the frequency of issue from weekly to bi-weekly to monthly, to the various masthead artwork changes, to the physical format transition from a true newspaper broadside into a magazine style, but this paper was almost always totally

typeset in black and white for more than sixty years. The monthly color magazine format that we are all familiar with today made its first appearance in May 2008, and continues to this day to tell the good news of America's Shipyard.

Today, *Service to the Fleet* provides insightful stories about the accomplishments about our employees. It features the work of the magnificent Norfolk Naval Shipyard industrial waterfront and continues to provide focus on the success stories of the complex Navy ships for which we provide world class repair service.



▲ The Norfolk Navy Yard Defender, Speed Victory, and Service to the Fleet mastheads kindly provided courtesy of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum library. The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum, located at 2 High Street in downtown Portsmouth offers a unique perspective on U.S. and NNSY history, from Colonial to Civil War times and beyond.

