



# Tidewater

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TRAVELER

## ACTIVE DUTY

A salute to Tidewater's military sites

TO: BECKY CUTCHINS



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# TOURS OF DUTY

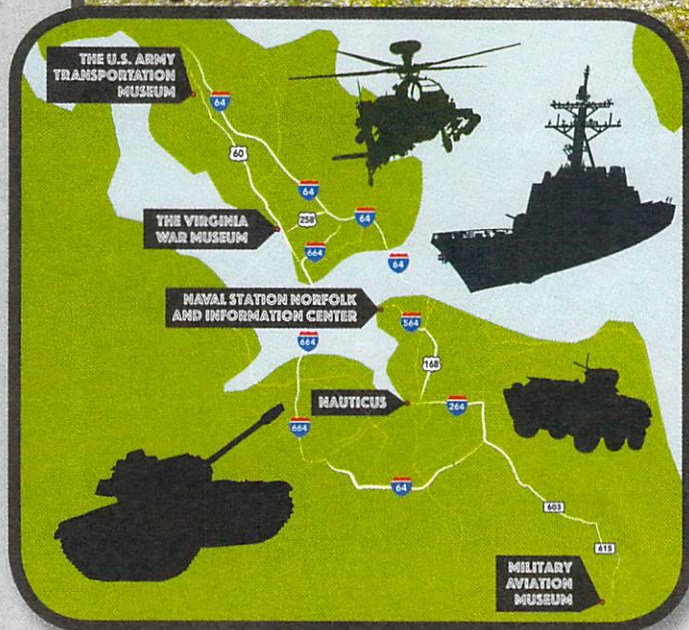
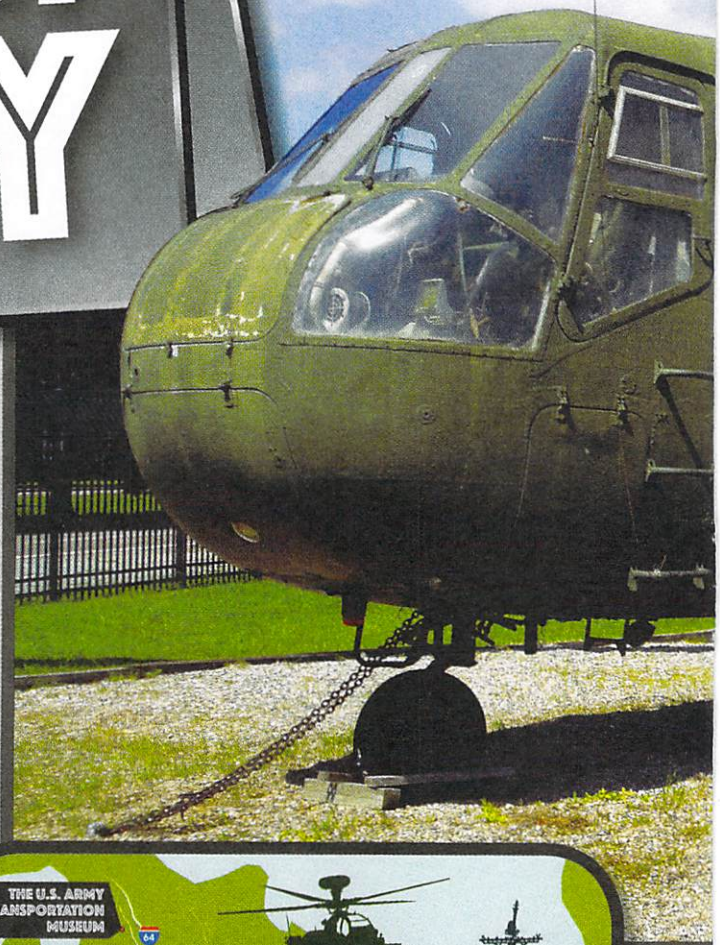
## Experience Tidewater's rich military heritage at these sites

BY LYNN SELDON

I am a proud Virginia Military Institute graduate and Army veteran who bleeds red, white, and blue. As a boy, I spent many summer weeks at Virginia Beach's Camp Pendleton while my father served in the Virginia Army National Guard. So it was natural for me to develop a deeply rooted interest in military history, and the Tidewater region holds a special place in my heart. Here, a plethora of military sites—and people—turn my free moments into a march down memory lane.

From the ocean to the beach and beyond, the U.S. military has had a major presence in Southeast Virginia for centuries—from the Revolutionary War to the frequent deployment of ships and soldiers today. It's easy to explore the military's past and present presence in our Tidewater area, thanks to varied museums, monuments, attractions, and bases where visitors are allowed.

"I'm really into military history and have been everywhere of interest in the area," Dick "Chipper" Chipchak told me during a tour of the battleship Wisconsin in Norfolk. Chipchak served in the Navy, including three tours in Vietnam, and is among many veteran volunteers who work at regional military history sites and love to share their stories and those of others who have served their country. Here are five top Tidewater military sites.

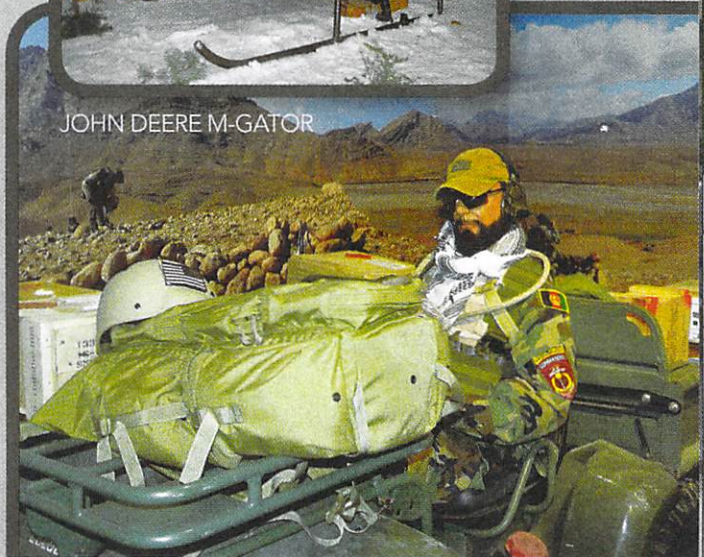




CH-54A SKYCRANE



H-13 SIOUX



JOHN DEERE M-GATOR

## THE U.S. ARMY TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM

300 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD, NEWPORT NEWS (FORT EUSTIS)  
(757) 878-1115; [WWW.TRANSPORTATION.ARMY.MIL/MUSEUM](http://WWW.TRANSPORTATION.ARMY.MIL/MUSEUM)

This museum's collection is so large, only 25 percent of it is on display at any one time. Indoor and outdoor exhibits showcase historic trucks, Jeeps, trains, planes, helicopters, and tugboats. Highlights include the only surviving gun truck from the Vietnam War, the only surviving hovercraft to see Vietnam conflict, and the first helicopter to fly at the South Pole. Besson Hall, the museum's main building is named for General Frank S. Besson, Jr., the first Army transporter to reach the rank of four-star general.

Free admission.

# NAUTICUS

ONE WATERSIDE DRIVE, NORFOLK  
(757) 664-1000; NAUTICUS.ORG

Located on the Elizabeth River, Nauticus features hands-on exhibits devoted to the sea and celebrates Norfolk's ties to the water. The Hampton Roads Naval Museum occupies the building's second floor and features exhibits covering more than 230 years of U.S. Navy history in coastal Virginia.

Berthed alongside Nauticus is the USS Wisconsin. At 887 feet long, the Wisconsin is the largest battleship the U.S. Navy ever built. From the museum, visitors reach the ship, where they can walk the teak decks and access many of the ship's areas. Veteran volunteers at both the museum and the battleship are happy to share personal anecdotes. "I volunteer aboard the USS Wisconsin as my payback," says Chipchak, who says the Navy gave him his career. "I love giving the Main Street USN tour, which goes through areas of the ship where the enlisted personnel spent their time, including the mess. I have a lot of funny memories about being a night baker."

Gold Ticket Adult Admission \$35.95; ages 4-12 \$31.50 (includes Nauticus, Wisconsin guided interior tour, self-guided Wisconsin tour, 3D movies). White Ticket Adult Admission \$15.95; ages 4-12 \$11.50 (includes Nauticus, self-guided Wisconsin tour, 3D movies).

USS WISCONSIN





B-25J MITCHELL

## MILITARY AVIATION MUSEUM

1341 PRINCESS ANNE ROAD, VIRGINIA BEACH  
(757) 721-7767; MILITARYAVIATIONMUSEUM.ORG

Situated in southeastern Virginia Beach, the sprawling Military Aviation Museum contains one of the largest private collections of historic military aircraft in the world. With a focus on the two world wars, there are planes from the U.S. Army Air Corps, the U.S. Navy, Great Britain, Germany, and France. Planes feature historically correct markings and have been restored to their original condition, using original parts whenever possible. Incredibly, many of the planes on display are frequently flown in local demonstration flights, museum air shows, and elsewhere around the country. Uniforms, ground equipment, and even a 1934 German aircraft hangar are also on display. Veterans and other volunteers bring history alive. "I'm always fascinated by the variety of people that come to visit," says volunteer Norman Hecht. "I remember an 85-year-old German woman who met Adolf Hitler as a young girl. She remembered American bombers that bombed her city, and she came to the museum to see if they had the kinds of bombers that had devastated her town. It's a very emotional experience for so many for a variety of reasons. I've often seen tears in people's eyes."

Adult admission \$12; ages 6-18 \$6; 65 and over \$10; active-duty military \$10.



N3N-3 CANARY



P-51D MUSTANG

## THE VIRGINIA WAR MUSEUM

9285 WARWICK BOULEVARD, NEWPORT NEWS  
(757) 247-8523; WARMUSEUM.ORG

Providing an extensive introductory overview of military history in Virginia and around the world, this museum documents America's wars from 1775 to today. American Legion Post 25 established it in 1923 as the American Legion Memorial Museum of Virginia. Today, the museum houses more than 60,000 artifacts and archival documents, including a 1776 letter from General George Washington, a Renault FT17 tank, a helmet used by Harry S. Truman as an artillery officer in World War I, a portion of the outer wall from the concentration camp at Dachau, and a 10' x 10' section of the Berlin Wall. "Visitors constantly express their surprise at the depth and breadth of the museum's collection and displays," says museum curator Dick Hoffeditz. "Tidewater, Virginia, has a rich tradition, and our museum has greatly benefited from the tens of thousands of active duty and retired service members in the area."

Adult admission \$7; active military and ages 62 and older \$6; ages 7-18 \$5.

M5A1 STUART LIGHT TANK



## NAVAL STATION NORFOLK AND INFORMATION CENTER

9079 HAMPTON BOULEVARD, NORFOLK; (757) 444-7955; CNIC.NAVY.MIL/NORFOLKSTA

Norfolk is home to the world's largest naval base, and frequent 45-minute bus tours allow visitors to see whatever ships are in port, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, and other Atlantic Fleet naval vessels. Tours also take visitors past houses built here by several states for the Jamestown Exposition of 1907. At the exposition, each state showcased its distinctive architectural style. The Pennsylvania Building, for example, was a two-thirds reproduction of Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and the North Carolina Building was constructed and finished with native yellow pine. Visitors may not leave the

bus during the tours, which are narrated by enlisted personnel assigned to the base. For a different view of the fleet, the two-hour narrated Naval Base Cruise aboard the 150-passenger *Victory Rover* (757) 627-7406; [navalbasecruises.com](http://navalbasecruises.com)) departs downtown Norfolk at Nauticus. ♦

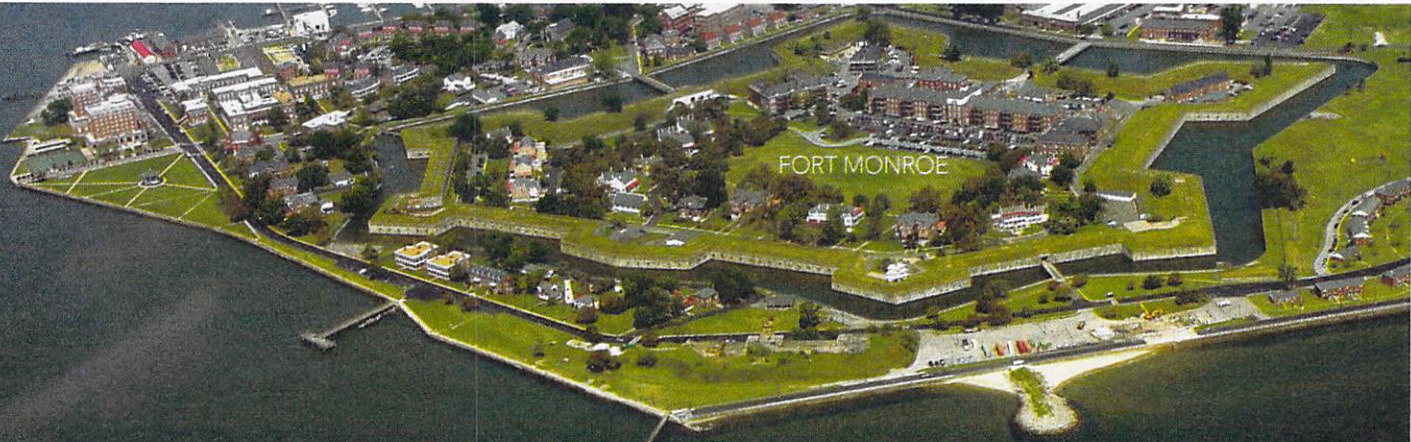
Adult admission \$10, ages 3-11 \$5;  
60 and above \$5; active-duty military free.

Lynn Seldon, a Virginia Military Institute graduate and former Army officer, is the author of the novel *Virginia's Ring*, about VMI.

GUIDED-MISSILE  
DESTROYER  
USS LABOON

HOSPITAL SHIP  
USS COMFORT





# TEN-HUT!

Other Tidewater sites focus on various military aspects.

## The Mariners' Museum and Park

The USS *Monitor* Center highlights the famed Civil War ironclad and its battle with the USS *Virginia*. "The Nelson Touch" exhibit chronicles the naval career of Admiral Horatio Nelson. 100 Museum Drive, Newport News. (757) 596-2222; [marinersmuseum.org](http://marinersmuseum.org).

## The MacArthur Memorial

Housed in Norfolk's 19th century former City Hall, the memorial's two floors feature nine galleries of exhibits, artifacts, inscriptions, and banners honoring General Douglas MacArthur. General and Mrs. MacArthur are also buried in the monumental rotunda. 198 Bank Street, Norfolk. (757) 441-2965; [macarthurmemorial.org](http://macarthurmemorial.org).

## Armed Forces Memorial

This waterfront plaza features 22 bronze sculptures etched with the text of actual letters sent by U.S. soldiers before they died in military conflicts. Town Point Park, Norfolk.

## Fort Monroe National Monument

Known as "Freedom's Fortress" due to its strategic position defending Hampton Roads Harbor, Fort Monroe was the largest stone fort built in the U.S. Part of what is now the Casemate Museum served as General Robert E. Lee's quarters from 1831 to 1834. 20 Bernard Road, Hampton. (757) 722-3678; [nps.gov/fomr](http://nps.gov/fomr).

## Fort Norfolk

The last remaining example of 19 harbor-front forts authorized by President George Washington in 1794 sits on a 4-acre site overlooking the Elizabeth River and includes ramparts, a dungeon, a powder magazine, officers' quarters, and barracks. Most buildings date from 1810. 803 Front Street, Norfolk. (757) 201-7606.

## Naval Aviation Monument Park

Along Virginia Beach's oceanfront boardwalk, six large bronze sculptures depict three eras of naval aviation. 25th Street and Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach.

## Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum

The city of Portsmouth and shipbuilding have been intertwined since the founding of Gosport Shipyard in 1767. The collection includes ship models, uniforms, and military artifacts. Tours of the nearby 1915 lightship *Portsmouth* includes quarters, uniforms, and photographs. 2 High Street, Portsmouth. (757) 393-8591; [portsmouthnavalshipyardmuseum.com](http://portsmouthnavalshipyardmuseum.com).

## Old Coast Guard Station Museum

Housed in a former 1903 U.S. Life Saving Station, this little museum highlights coastal shipwrecks, lifesaving efforts, and coastal military history. 2401 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach. (757) 422-1587; [oldcoastguardstation.com](http://oldcoastguardstation.com).

## Joint Expeditionary Base East/ Cape Henry Lighthouse

Situated on a still-active base, the Cape Henry Lighthouse once guarded the entryway to Chesapeake Bay. It was the first lighthouse structure completed and lighted by the federal government. 583 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach.

U.S. AIR FORCE F/A-22 RAPTOR FLIES OVER FORT MONROE. 2005/AF PHOTO/TECH. SGT. BEN BLOKER