

Okaloosa County,FL News Release



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USS Okaloosa Bell Dedication *“A National Treasure”*

The Ceremony: The Okaloosa Board of County Commissioners and the Northwest Florida Regional Airport will unveil and dedicate the USS Okaloosa WWII ship bell on **April 26, 2012**, at 11:00 a.m. at the airport. The public is invited to attend and free event parking will be available at the airport. There will be dedicated, free parking and the (**new**) Helen Back Restaurant will host a ribbon cutting and refreshments following the ceremony.

Ceremony highlights include two WWII veterans that served on the USS Okaloosa, and two sons of now deceased veterans, who served aboard the ship. The veterans will be ushered in on a “gang plank,” as the USS Okaloosa “docks,” and then veterans will be piped aboard by the Boatswain pipe and the USS Okaloosa bell will be rung for their arrival. The memorial itself looks as if you have just stepped on the USS Okaloosa. Following this bell ceremony, a personal history of the ship and its bell will be shared, ending with the unveiling of the memorial plaque.

The Bell: The USS Okaloosa ship’s bell was discovered in Baldwin County, Alabama, displayed in front of the Baldwin County Foley Satellite Courthouse since the 1980’s, with the assistance of local Baldwin County residents, the Louis Ray Eiland family. The bell has been brought back home to Okaloosa County, with assistance from U.S. Representatives Jeff Miller and Jo Bonner, along with the Baldwin County Commissioners and the Department of the U.S. Navy.

The ship’s bell will be dedicated on the same day in 2012, as the day it arrived off the beaches of Okinawa. Bells remain a powerful, tangible reminder of the history and accomplishments of naval service – they remain the permanent property of the U.S. Government and the Department of the Navy. (Naval History & Heritage Command web site). **Ringling bells still signal the presence of important persons on a ship, important announcements, daily routines and inclement weather such as heavy fog.**

The Ship: The USS Okaloosa APA 219 Attack Transport has quite a history in addition to being named after Okaloosa County, Florida. The **USS Okaloosa arrived off Okinawa on April 26, 1945**, and offloaded troops without incident during the next four days, under frequent enemy attacks. She received a battle star during WWII and her sailors received medals as well. She was commissioned in 1944 and decommissioned in 1977 and not much is known after that date.

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