

# USAWC students, staff make sure Navy vet receives his piece of history

*Thomas Zimmerman, Public Affairs Office*

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*James Foster (center) a Navy vet who served on the first crew of USS WORCESTER, holds a plank from the ship's deck after being presented it by nine members of the Army War College Community, CAPT Tim Sheridan, CH (Cmdr) Joseph "Vic" Sheldon III, CAPT Mark Light, Cmdr. J. J. Patterson, Cmdr. Michael Matis, CAPT Steven*

*Gardiner, Cmdr. Brian Montgomery, Cmdr. Nels Swanson, and Cmdr. Bruce Apgar. Standing with them is his wife, Mila. courtesy photo.*

April 26, 2012 -- A long-standing U.S. Navy tradition says that any Sailor who serves on the first crew of a Navy vessel is called a "plank owner", implying bragging rights and ownership of one of the planks of the ship's deck. Earlier this week, nine Navy members of the Army War College community made sure that a Navy vet received his long overdue piece of history.

James Foster, who served in the Navy from 1947-1968 was on the crew that commissioned and first served on USS WORCESTER, received his plank thanks to the hard work of his hospice chaplain Timothy Wheeler, who works at Celtic Healthcare in Carlisle, and Navy Capt. Mark Light, USAWC faculty member.

Light was contacted by Wheeler who shared Foster's story, including the years he served in the Military Sealift Command, serving on ships that are owned and operated by the Navy using mostly civilian crew. "These ships constitute the bulk of the Navy's surface logistics assets and operate closely with active Naval combat ships," said Light. Several of members of the USAWC Class of 2013 serve or

have served in the MSC.

***Foster holds a photo of the USS WORCESTER and his plank after the presentation.***

Wheeler contacted the USS WORCESTER Association, and they provided a piece of the original teak decking from the ship. Wheeler contacted the USAWC to see if someone from the Navy could make the presentation.

“Mr. Foster dedicated his life to the service of his country - not only through his more than 40 years at sea, but through his wife who stood by him, and his three children who also served in the military,” said Light. Foster’s two daughters were present on Tuesday, and his son is in Guam, retiring this month from the Navy after 20 years.

“He is rightfully very proud of his service, and said he has been waiting a long time to get a plank of USS WORCESTER,” he said. “The WORCESTER was one of only two ships in its class of Light Cruisers and he has remained very fond of his first Navy ship.”

Light said it was an honor to make the presentation.

“At present his health is failing and it was very rewarding to be able to come together as a group and honor Jim's dedication, along with that of his family, and present to him a very small but significant token in recognition of his service to his country.”

