

The boy scouts of Davidson's Troop 58 chalked up another great adventure this week with an outing that included an overnight stay aboard the USS Yorktown. A total of 41 scouts and 14 adults traveled back from the Civil War to the heroic days of World War II and beyond onboard buses, boats, planes, and even a submarine. The trip was led by Senior Patrol Leader, Adam Brown, a junior at Hough High and Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, William DeCarolis, a freshman at the Community School of Davidson.

Meeting before sunrise on Saturday morning and pairing up using "the buddy system," the boys of Troop 58 stowed their gear onto a chartered bus for a journey to Patriots Point in South Carolina. The boys moved from bus to boat four and a half hours later, boarding a ferry to Fort Sumter, a National Parks Historic site built after the War of 1812 and still unfinished in 1861 when it became the flashpoint for the war between the states. Once on site, our scouts helped raised one of five flags on, explored the impressive canons and exposed brickwork of the original fortification, and imagined the many battles that had taken place in this strategic location. Unusual January weather brought temperatures reaching into the seventies as the troop also took in the impressive views of the Atlantic Ocean. The boat ride back-accompanied by seagulls in the air and dolphins in the sea-brought the boys back to Patriots Point directly in front of the aircraft carrier USS Yorktown and giving them an appreciation for the size of their weekend home.

The Yorktown loomed over the boys 100 feet in the air with bombers, jets, and helicopters visible up top. The carrier boasted state-of-the art naval technology and held with it a series of the most advanced planes and pioneering airmen of that time. The ship's orientation took place inside the Hanger Deck, which housed several historic planes ranging the history of flight. Gathered in front of a Wright Brothers Flyer above and a Gemini space capsule on the floor, scouts learned about fire drills, sleeping quarters, and the mess hall. The Yorktown once housed over 3,000 servicemen, and Troop 58 took over a room on the upper decks where bunk beds tightly stacked men four-deep like a human quadruple-decker sandwich. Beds were so close that most designated "slots" had less than two feet clearance and little room to roll over. After unloading gear, the troop assembled to eat a box lunch on deck before one group went immediately to fulfill merit badge requirements for Oceanography. Another group was able to explore the top and the bowels of the ship before their own merit badge session on Aviation. Both groups used every moment of their free time to walk through the miles of stairs and decks on the ship, learning its history through six different self-guided tours. One tour went up high into the tower and included sitting in the Captain's chair, while another tour went deep into the belly of the ship, featuring the tangle of pipes and controls in the Engine Room on one side and the brig on the other-complete with a scary skeleton!

The most highlighted tour back on the USS Yorktown led to the longest expanse of the ship and its most important function: providing a launch pad

and landing base for American aircraft. The ship's Flight Deck featured several jets like the F-4J Phantom II, the F/A-18A Hornet, the A-7E Corsair II, and the EA-3B Skywarrior. A helicopter and radar planes used for observation rounded out the collection. Scouts who completed the Aviation merit badge received more in depth background on the pioneer pilots of WWII and the evolving technology of flight. They even had the special privilege of sitting in cockpit of a fighter jet.

Right beside the Yorktown rests the USS Clamagore, the last diesel-fueled submarine that served over 30 years during the Cold War. The boys climbed in the torpedo room and went straight through the narrow steel corridors touching the past through the ship's controls, radar area, dining room, captain's quarters, living quarters, before finally exiting through the rear torpedo room. Several scouts were so fascinated by the equipment they went through twice.

After a dinner of spaghetti, chicken, and vanilla ice cream, one group of scouts took advantage of the warm, clear night to earn a merit badge for Astronomy. Another group was treated to a documentary of the Navy's aerobatic squadron, The Blue Angels, followed by the 1976 drama "Midway" (with a large cast of historic actors like Charlton Heston and Henry Fonda) which features historic footage of the USS Yorktown in combat. Even the two fire drills twice interrupting the movie did not spoil the excitement of seeing the ship as it looked in the heat of battle.

Bedtime came swiftly with the sound of "Taps" at 11pm, and the boys nestled into their multi-bed bunks. Sleep was interrupted by "Reveille" at 6am so that boys could quickly pack up their gear, grab eggs and a cinnamon bun for breakfast, and make their way out to the bus for home. One last look at the Yorktown reminded the boys of the sweep of history they absorbed between Saturday and Sunday morning, another memorable journey for Troop 58.

- Gerardo Marti, scout parent