

Jacob Munson The Blue Ghost and Corpus Christi.

[intro sound]¹

My name is Jacob Munson the podcast is South Texas stories story title is The Blue Ghost and Corpus Christi.

The CV-16 USS Lexington also known as the Blue Ghost was one out of the 14 Essex class carriers that were produced during World War II and was the flagship of the fast carrier task force for most of the task force history. CV 16 Lexington was not the first ship named after the battle of Lexington it wasn't even the first aircraft carrier with that name. Her predecessor and namesake the CV-2 USS Lexington was the namesake of its own class of carrier. Over the course of the war the CV-16 Lexington would gain several nicknames most famously as the blue ghost which originated from Japanese propagandists Tokyo Rose. The Lexington was the first of many things she was the first Aircraft carrier to have women aboard as part of the crew in 1980. The first carrier to deploy air to surface missiles and the first carrier to hold the CVT designation designating it as a US Navy Training Carrier². The Lexington also was the longest serving carrier of her class with 40 years of service.

Naval aviation prior to World War II was in its infancy the first naval aviation was the seaplanes which existed in WW I they could take off and land on water they were attached normally to sea plane tenders which some referred to as sea plane carriers which were sort of a proto aircraft carrier. The first aircraft carrier came after WW I with the USS Langley in 1920 and successfully launched airplanes however due to the limitations of her design she was converted into a seaplane tender before WW II. The next carriers were the CV-2 Lexington and CV-3 Saratoga as the two Lexington Class aircraft carrier. The two Lexington class carriers were originally designed to be battle cruisers but due to the Washington Naval treaty restrictions they were converted into aircraft carriers and are early pioneers of naval aviation tactics. By the time of the attacks of Pearl Harbor there were seven aircraft carriers in service most notably the two Lexington classes and the three Yorktown classes³.

The Lexington namesake the CV-2 Lexington had the nickname Lady Lex which would be inherited by the Blue Ghost and played a key role in the opening of the Pacific theater and the defense of Australia and naval operations in the region. The CV-2 Lexington was sunk at the Battle of Coral Sea. However, a new class of US aircraft carriers were under way that are often considered the best carriers design of the war the Essex class carriers.

¹ US Navy Band, *Assembly*, <https://www.navyband.navy.mil/media/ceremonial>.

² "The Facts," USS Lexington, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://usslexington.com/about-the-uss-lexington/the-museum/>.

³ Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations In World War II: XV Supplement and General Index* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958),: XV, 29-30.

The Essex class Launched with the lead ship CV-9 USS Essex. A total 24 being built with 14 in service during the war including the CV-16 Lexington, CV-11 Intrepid, and CV-17 Bunker Hill. Since the Essex class were built during the war their design weren't limited by the Washington Naval Treaty which allowed for a more capable ship compared to previous classes the Essex class could carry 103 aircraft⁴. But more often carried less⁵. They also had good speed and endurance and a very resilient design as not a single Essex carrier was lost in combat despite Japan's best attempts. An interesting fun fact is that several of the Essex carriers are named after carriers that were sunk during the war⁶.

The Lexington as the flagship of the fast carrier task force also referred to as Task Force 38 or 58 depending on if they are attached to the US third or fifth fleet. Which were a key player in the Battles of Leyte Gulf, and the liberation of the Philippines and the battle of the Philippines sea where the battle got the nickname the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot. In these battle the Lexington distinguished herself and by the end of the war is credited with shooting down 372 enemy aircraft with her planes and is credited with sinking 300,000 tons of enemy cargo and was at least reported as being sunk multiple times by Tokyo Rose which is how she got the nickname Blue Ghost ⁷.

After the war carriers due to their carrying capacity which is why they are often called floating cities, will assist in transporting troops and material home and aid in occupation detail. The Essex classes would continue seeing service all the way through Vietnam with some of them actively taking part in the conflict such as the Intrepid who launched jets to provide ground support in Vietnam⁸. The Lexington will provide similar missions but most noticeably become the first CVT of the Navy and will train naval aviators on how to take off and land on carriers. She was stationed in the Gulf of Mexico which had several Naval Air stations including Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. Due to being a CVT she was the last of the Essex class to be retired and became a museum ship.

Part of the process of how she ended up in Corpus Christi involves the city authorizing a bond offer for the Lexington and then competing with other communities and the result being passed in congress to finalize the deal. Texas senator Lloyd Bentsen and representative Solomen Ortiz were key in getting the bill passed⁹. Afterwards the Lex will arrive on January 29th, 1992, there was a large crowd including the mayor and the naval air station base commander as well as

⁴ Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations: XV*, 30.

⁵ Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations In World War II: XII Layte* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958), 13.

⁶ Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations In World War II: XV Supplement and General Index* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958),: XV, 29-30.

⁷ "The Ship," USS Lexington, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://usslexington.com/about-the-uss-lexington/the-ship/>.

⁸ "Current Exhibitions," Intrepid Museum, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://www.intrepidmuseum.org/The-Intrepid-Experience/Current-Exhibitions>.

⁹ "Museum," USS Lexington, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://usslexington.com/about-the-uss-lexington/the-museum/>.

many veterans who served on the ship¹⁰. The 20-year anniversary PDF on the Lexington website provides parts of many articles showing the process as well as the history of the Museum its impressive I recommend checking it out if you have the time¹¹.

The Lexington wasn't the only museum carrier there are a total of 5 today 4 of which are Essex class carriers the Lexington at Corpus Christi, the Intrepid at New York city, the Yorktown at Mount Pleasant, and Hornet at Alameda Point California. Until the CV-41 Midway became a museum carrier all US carrier museums were Essex class.

The Lexington benefits the community in many ways. Earlier this year I had the opportunity to interview my high school naval science instructor retired senior chief Mark Test. He served in the US Navy and after retirement he worked on the museum ship USS Lexington before becoming a NJROTC instructor.

During the interview I asked senior chief what the Lexington provides to the community this is how he responded.

(play clip) {"what the Lexington provides for the community differently the revenue the tourist revenue that it brings in helping out local businesses. That's being restaurants hotels, motels of course the shopping that's brought in. So, the tourist the commerce that's definitely something the Lexington brings in. and it's an living history by that I mean you are there walking on a WWII aircraft carrier. So you learn that, that living history going on there, the sacrifice of that generation the WWII vets and what they went through and how they lived onboard the ship how they fought the ship all that."} (End clip)

Indeed, in the aforementioned PDF according to the Caller times the projected total for the attendance of the first year was 330,000 visitors the actual numbers for the first year was 471,000 visitors with an income of \$3.65 million. The Lexington 1 millionth visitor was in 1995 and currently on their website has counted over 8 million visitors have visited the Lex¹².

As such I think its safe to say the Lexington does bring in tourist to Corpus which benefits the local economy. I can vouch for the Exhibits they are excellent the Pearl Harbor exhibit gives a very detail overview of the attack on Pearl Harbor with excellent sound quality there's many attractions in the ship and you can go on tours seeing deferent parts of the ship such as the bridge and flight deck which has aircraft, naval guns, and AA guns. The tours teach a lot of WWII history and naval history and what life onboard a ship was like. One of my personal favorite rooms is the small model room with models of aircraft and ships I just really like that room and can easily spend hours just looking at them. I have been to the Lexington many times the most memorable times were in High School JROTC where we often did community service at the Lex

¹⁰ *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (Corpus Christi, Texas), Jan. 29, 1992.

¹¹ "Museum," USS Lexington, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://usslexington.com/about-the-uss-lexington/the-museum/>.

¹² "Museum," USS Lexington, Accessed Nov 14, 2022, <https://usslexington.com/about-the-uss-lexington/the-museum/>.

we sometimes painted or help clean up rooms in restricted area that might be turned into new exhibits in the future. After finishing community service, we were provided lunch and allowed to explore the ship as a guest and go through the tours.

The maintenance of the ship is expensive, and the community can help out the Lex in many ways. During my oral history interview, I ask that question to Senior Chief.

(Play clip) {"And for the community to help out to make sure Lex stays here, just go to the ship if you're in Corpus and you know every couple of months if you can you, got downtime on a Sunday they are open 7 days a week go to the Lex you know take your kids their or something support them that way. They do charity events onboard so go and do that from dances to other events and yeah, the biggest one I'll say just visit the Lex from time to time. Yeah, thinks that sums it up in a nutshell."} (End clip).

I definitely have to agree just visiting the Lex once in a while does help keep the Lex funded and allows for the development of new exhibits. The most popular event that I know about is the "Haunting of the Blue Ghost" which is a haunted house event during October they also do look for volunteers for the event when I did two semesters of the Army ROTC I assisted as a volunteer for the event there are other groups that assist and I'm pretty sure anyone can volunteer but you most likely will have to contact the Lex staff first to make sure.

The Lex is also interested in models' photos or uniforms that can be donated to the ship and plans for new exhibits this is viewable on the Curatorial page additionally the Lex does have positions for volunteers for many jobs including for the ship library and even have a few employment listings. The Lex thanks to the community support has been fortunate enough to be self-sustaining without requiring government funding.

I am Jacob Munson and that concludes the brief story safe travels.

[play anchors aweigh and stop recording]¹³

¹³ US Navy Band, *Anchors Aweigh*, <https://www.navyband.navy.mil/media/ceremonial>.

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