Local veterans donated medals to the stew as Plimoth Plantation cast a new bell for Mayflower II over Labor Day weekend.

PLYMOUTH – When the call went out to veterans for help casting a new bell for Mayflower II, Bob Davidson knew just what to donate.

A local Navy veteran who served aboard a minesweeper in the Vietnam War, Davidson turned over his Vietnam Service Medal and watched with pride as the rounded bronze medal was placed in a cauldron and melted into the stew that became the ship’s new bell.

“I thought about what I should put in for a couple of hours, actually, and I just thought what better, fitting place for my service medal than into a pot to make a bell that’s going to be on the Mayflower and probably will be there for hundreds of years,” Davidson said. “Every time they ring that bell they’ll be ringing it with Vietnam veterans being part of it. I didn’t just put it in for me. I put it in for everyone.”

Vietnam veterans were well represented but were certainly not alone over Labor Day weekend when Plimoth Plantation cast a new bell for Mayflower II. Several veterans of more recent conflicts also added service medals or memorabilia to the molten mix. Others donated medals in memory of relatives who fought in World War II.

Mayflower II is back in the water
A brightly painted Mayflower II awaits its launch at Mystic Seaport. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

“The Mayflower is in the water!” [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

A large crowd prepares for the launch of the Mayflower II at Mystic Seaport Museum. [Courtesy Photo/John Spinnato of Plimoth Plantation]

Bestselling author Nathaniel Philbrick delivered the keynote address at the launch of the Mayflower II. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]


Visitors check out the Mayflower II in the water at Mystic Seaport. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

The Mayflower II is slowly lowered into the water at Mystic Seaport. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

The large crowd stands and sings the National Anthem during the ceremony. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

British Counsel General Harriet Cross christens the Mayflower II on at Mystic Seaport. [Courtesy Photo/Andy Price of Mystic Seaport Museum]

Cannon fire celebrates the launch of the Mayflower II. [Courtesy Photo/John Spinnato of Plimoth Plantation]

A fire boat salutes the Mayflower II. [Courtesy Photo/John Spinnato of Plimoth Plantation]

Reverend Anne Robertson and Kerri Helme deliver the invocation prior to the launch of the Mayflower II. [Courtesy Photo/John Spinnato of Plimoth Plantation]

A brightly painted Mayflower II awaits its launch at Mystic Seaport. [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]

“The Mayflower is in the water!” [Wicked Local Photo/Dave Kindy]
Denis Russell, who served in the Navy in Vietnam, donated the service lapel pin his father, John M. Russell, earned while storming the beaches of Normandy in 1944. Russell also donated a brass belt buckle that he wore during combat and troop support missions off the coast of North Vietnam during the Easter offensive of 1972.

Speaking to the crowd assembled for the historic bell casting, Russell drew some chuckles when he noted that his belt buckle still had the name of his
old girlfriend etched in it. “She said yes,” he explained, introducing Debbie, his wife of 47 years, to a round of applause.

More than two dozen veterans participated in the casting ceremony, which added the medals to a pot of melted bronze ingots for use in the new bell mold.

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**VIDEO: Historic Mayflower II bell casting dazzles visitors at Plimoth Plantation**

*September 6, 2019*

**Mayflower II is back in the water**

Plimoth Plantation spokesman Kate Sheehan said the World War II-era donations were especially meaningful, given Mayflower II’s history as a gift from the people of England to the people of America for this country’s help in the war effort.

“We are honored that, through the wonderful leadership of Plymouth VFW Post 1822 and the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, so many veterans accepted our invitation to play an important role in the ship’s bell casting. The medals the veterans shared represent deeply personal memories of their military service and it means a great deal that they are now part of Mayflower’s future. The ship is in many ways a memorial to World War II alliances, so this collaboration was really a perfect fit,” Sheehan said.

“These things may look just as a metal object, but they hold tremendous memories of significant times,” Russell said. “It had a great deal of meaning to see my dad’s medal and my belt buckle in the cauldron together. Twenty or 50 years from now, they might have been dust-covered things in a desk drawer, but this has some real meaning.”

The commander of VFW Post 1822, Russell was among the first to ring the new bell after the mold was broken. He rang three times – once for active service men and women currently in harm’s way, twice for all veterans who have served with honor and distinction around the world and the third time for veterans who served and have since passed.

Russell said he sees quite a bit of intertwining between the Pilgrims, who set out in search of freedom, and veterans, who are sworn to protect it.

“Veterans take an oath and really don’t know where they’re going to be assigned or what adversary they will face,” Russell said, noting how the
Pilgrims faced uncertain fate in crossing the Atlantic and lost nearly half their company that first winter. “To me it made a lot of sense and I’m glad veterans have a place and part in this.”

Ron Flockton, another Navy veteran, also rang the bell after the belt buckle he wore in Vietnam made its way into the mold.

One of the earliest Navy Seals, Flockton joked that his buckle, embossed with the trident seal of the Underwater Demolition Team, had gotten hard to shine over the years. “They can polish it now for me when they’re polishing the bell,” Flockton said.

Several of the veterans who donated medals attended the bell casting as members of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, the official military honor guard for Plymouth 400 ceremonies.

Capt. Nicholas Schiarizzi, the captain commander, donated an image printed on metal depicting Mayflower II Captain Alan Villiers’ visit to the artillery company’s headquarters in Faneuil Hall in the 1956.

Lt. Donald Schiarizzi contributed gold cuff links that belonged to his father, a World War II veteran who served in the Battle of the Bulge. Lt. John Mitchell donated a dog tag from his father, an Air Force veteran. Capt. Daniel May, a past commander of the company, donated commemorative coins and his father’s Plymouth Yacht Club burgee pin.

Local veterans donating to the cause included a husband and wife who saw more recent service.

Major Jim Paulette Jr., a Marine Corps veteran, donated his Good Conduct and Navy/Marine Corps Achievement medals. He was deployed to Kosovo in 2018 with the Army. His wife, MSgt. Carin Paulette, donated her honor guard belt buckle. An Army veteran, she was deployed to Kuwait in 2005.

The world-renowned Verdin Company cast the bell, using a mobile bell foundry the company drove to Plymouth from Ohio. Davidson, a former teacher, studied the process and plans to feature the making of the bell in an exhibit at the American Legion Museum he runs at Memorial Hall.

Davidson rang the bell four times to signal all’s clear after the mold was broken and plans to visit the waterfront to give the bell another ring when Mayflower II returns home from repairs in Connecticut next spring.
“When the Mayflower comes back they will ring that bell and that bell will ring every day from now on,” Davidson said. “And that’s the part that I like.”