

1945 August 27-September 2

Sunset for the Rising Sun

Seventy-five years ago, on [September 2, 1945](#), Gordon W. Jamesson of La Crosse was part of one of the greatest events in human history, the end of the most destructive war mankind has ever inflicted on itself. As a crewman on the battleship *U.S.S. Missouri*, he was there when representatives of Japan signed the [surrender](#) document that officially ended World War II.



U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay
(The National WWII Museum)

The [Missouri](#) was one of more than 300 Allied ships that sailed into Tokyo Bay to accept the Japanese surrender and begin the occupation of Japan. The [Missouri](#) was the flagship of the United States Navy's Third Fleet, and General Douglas MacArthur had already been chosen to command the occupation of Japan, so they were the key players in this event.¹



Japanese delegation arriving on the *U.S.S. Missouri*
 [Japanese foreign minister on left in top hat]
 (National WW II Museum)

Eleven Japanese delegates arrived at 8:56 a.m. local time. General MacArthur and Admirals [Chester Nimitz](#) and [William Halsey](#) were at a table where the surrender documents were spread out. The ceremony began with a prayer, the playing of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and a short speech by MacArthur.² Japanese Foreign Minister [Mamoru Shigemitsu](#) and General [Yoshiji Umezu](#) signed the [surrender document](#) at 9:04 a.m. General MacArthur signed on behalf of the Allied Nations.³ Standing just behind MacArthur were British General [Arthur E. Percival](#) and American General [Jonathan M. Wainwright](#). Percival's British forces had been out-maneuvered and out-fought on the Malay Peninsula leading to the downfall of the British bastion at Singapore. Wainwright had taken over command of the doomed American and Filipino troops in the Philippines after MacArthur had been ordered to escape to Australia. Both had endured years of imprisonment by the Japanese. Representatives of other Allied nations signed for their countries, and the ceremony was over in just 23 minutes.⁴ Hundreds, and by some accounts thousands, of American planes then flew over Tokyo Bay.⁵



General Douglas MacArthur signing the surrender documents
(National WW II Museum)

An article in the *La Crosse Tribune*, September 5, 1945, states that **Gordon Jamesson**, seaman, second class, "was present when the Japanese envoys came aboard to sign the final surrender document." ⁶

Another La Crosse County man who was present during the surrender ceremony was Marine Corporal Leslie M. Holthaus of Onalaska.⁷

The Jamesson family was native to Virginia. Gordon Jamesson's great-grandfather came to La Crosse with his family in 1884 to work in the sawmills. His grandfather, Albert G. Jamesson, became La Crosse's first plumbing inspector in 1915. Albert G. Jamesson retired from that position at the age of 83 in 1953. Gordon Jamesson's father, Albert E. Jamesson, was a veteran of World War I.⁸

Gordon William Jamesson was born on December 4, 1925, in La Crosse.⁹ He grew up at 626 La Crosse Street,¹⁰ and he attended Central High School.¹¹

He enlisted in the United States Navy on December 3, 1943, when he was 18 years old.¹² Jamesson was on the [*U.S.S. Missouri*](#) for 24 months¹³ as part of a crew of 1,921 men. Construction began on the *Missouri* in January 1941, and she was launched on January 29, 1944. One year later, the *Missouri* was in the Pacific Theater where she bombarded Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and the Japanese home islands, as well as

escorting aircraft carriers conducting operations against Japanese forces.¹⁴ Seaman Jamesson was on the *Missouri* on that momentous day when World War II finally came to an end.

Gordon Jamesson had been promoted to Seaman, First Class, by the time he was discharged on May 15, 1946, at the Great Lakes separation center in Chicago.¹⁵

Even discharged veterans had to register with the Selective Service at that time. Jamesson did so on the same day he was discharged. At that time, he was five feet, seven inches tall, and weighed 173 pounds, and he had a tattoo on his left arm. The now twenty-year-old, newly-discharged veteran listed his employment status as "unemployed."¹⁶

Perhaps finding a job was difficult with all the other veterans flooding the labor force, or maybe civilian life did not agree with Gordon Jamesson.

Whatever the reason, Jamesson enlisted in the United States Air Force on February 20, 1947, less than a year after he left the Navy.¹⁷ He was stationed with the [Military Air Transport Service](#) at Great Falls, Montana, and later the 1733rd Air Evacuation Squadron.¹⁸ At the beginning of 1951, Jamesson was promoted to staff sergeant. He was an airplane mechanic stationed at [McChord Air Force Base](#) in Tacoma, Washington.¹⁹

While he was at McChord, Gordon Jamesson married Helen Greer of King County, Washington, on April 29, 1951, at the Air Force Chapel on the base.²⁰

In June 1951, Jamesson was transferred to [Albrook Air Force Base](#) in the Panama Canal Zone. There he was assigned to the 26th Air Rescue Squadron. Jamesson and his wife had a son named Robert. They left the Canal Zone on May 24, 1954, returning to McChord Air Force Base at Tacoma, Washington, for assignment with the 43rd Air Rescue Squadron.²¹

Jamesson left the Air Force on March 31, 1965.²²

Like Gordon Jamesson, the battleship *Missouri* remained in service long after World War II ended. She saw action again in the Korean War before being decommissioned in 1955 at Bremerton, Washington. After 30 years in reserve, the *Missouri* was modernized and recommissioned in 1986. She launched Tomahawk missiles and shelled Iraq during [Operation Desert Storm](#). The *Missouri* was decommissioned again in 1992 and removed from Naval Vessel Register in January 1995.²³

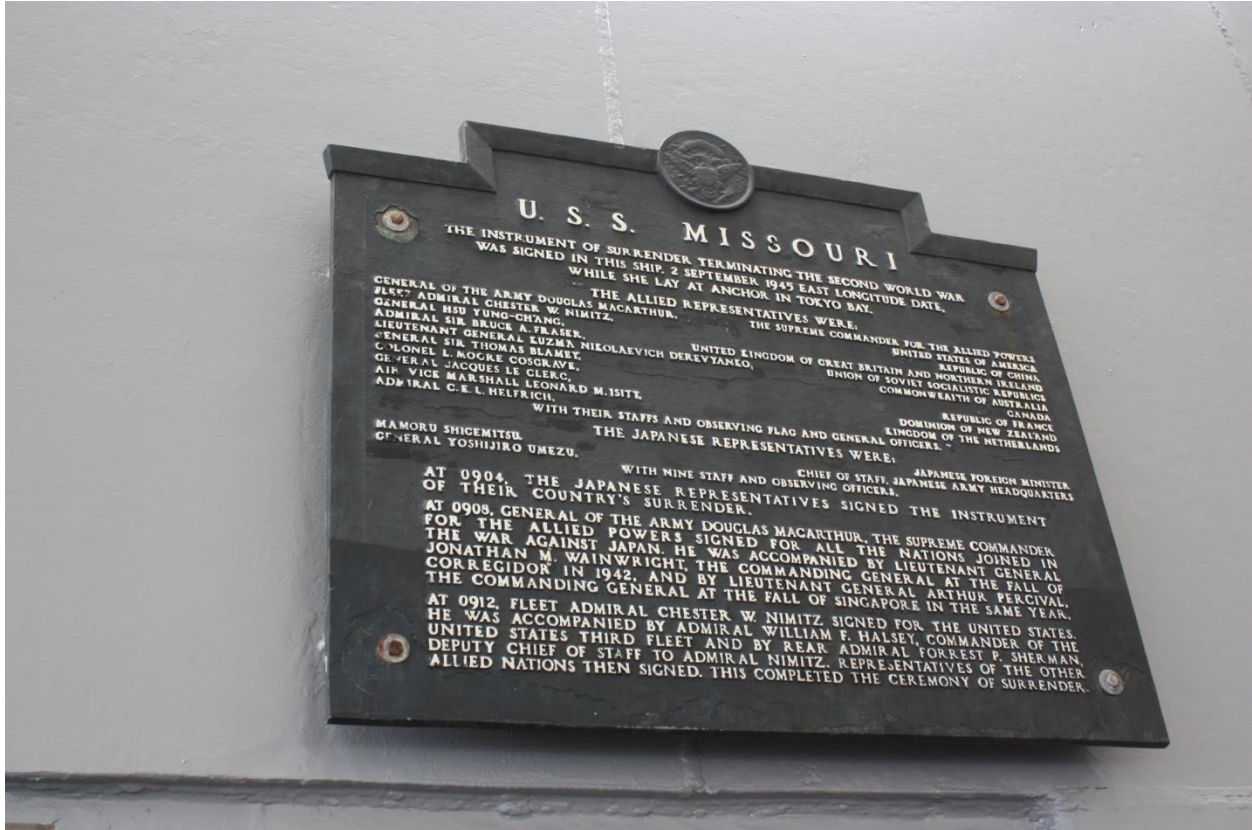
In May 1998, the [Missouri](#) was donated to be a museum and memorial at Pearl Harbor.²⁴ It remains there today and is open to the public for tours. Visitors can view a commemorative plaque on the deck that shows the spot where the World War II Japanese surrender ceremony took place, as well as photographs and facsimile documents from the event.



U.S.S. Missouri at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
(Jeff Rand, 2018 September 2)



The place where World War II ended
(Jeff Rand, 2018 September 2)



Plaque with details of the surrender ceremony
(Jeff Rand, 2018 September 2)



Surrender table display
(Jeff Rand, 2018 September 2)



U.S.S. Arizona Memorial (left) and bow of the U.S.S. Missouri
(Jeff Rand, 2018 September 2)

Although the *Missouri* lives on, Gordon Jamesson does not. He lived in Kitsap, Washington, at the time of his death at the age of 64. Gordon W. Jamesson, formerly of La Crosse, died on September 6, 1990, just four days after the 45th anniversary of the historic end to World War II to which he had been a witness.²⁵

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Sources & Notes:

¹ Ed Lengel, "Full Circle: The Japanese Surrender in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945," *The National WWII Museum*, 2020 September 2, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/japanese-surrender-tokyo-bay-september-2-1945>.

² Lengel.

³ "Japan Surrenders," *National Archives*, 2017 March 9, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/japanese-surrender-document>.

⁴ Lengel.

⁵ "Japanese surrender celebrated with joy ride," *Greensboro News & Record*, Greensboro, North Carolina, 2015 January 25, https://greensboro.com/news/japanese-surrender-celebrated-with-joy-ride/article_6b402b3d-9176-51cc-9202-fefbaf0e0599.html.

⁶ "Jamesson On USS Missouri," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 September 5, page 5.

⁷ "Marine Corporal Leslie M. Holthaus," *La Crosse County Record*, Onalaska, Wisconsin, 1945 November 8, page 8.

⁸ "City's Plumbing Inspector To Retire After 36 Years," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1953 June 28, page 2.

⁹ The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin*, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System*, 147; Box: 318; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 September 3).

¹⁰ "Discharges," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1946 May 17, page 8.

¹¹ "City Airman Transferred To Base In West," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1954 May 23, page 7. This article states that Jamesson graduated from Central High School; the author found Jamesson in a large group photo of a senior class but not as an individual graduate when checking the Central yearbooks for the time period.

¹² U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs, *Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) Death File*, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 3).

¹³ "Jamesson Promoted," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1951 January 8, page 8.

¹⁴ "Missouri III (BB-63) 1944-1995," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, accessed 2020 September 6, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/m/missouri-iii.html>.

¹⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1946 May 17.

¹⁶ *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin*.

¹⁷ *Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File*.

¹⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1954 May 17.

¹⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1951 January 8.

²⁰ Certificate of Marriage, Gordon William Jamesson to Helen Greer, 1951 April 29, King County, Washington, King County Auditor, Series A, 173560.

²¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1954 May 23.

²² *Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File*. The *Beneficiary Identification Records Locator System (BIRLS) Death File* for Jamesson shows that he enlisted in the Air Force in February 1947 and was released in February 1950. Then he enlisted in the Air Force again in February 1962 and was released in March 1965. There are newspaper articles, however, that show him in the Air Force in 1951 and 1954, as previously mentioned. The author was unable to locate an obituary for Gordon Jamesson that might have clarified this and filled in some gaps in the rest of his life.

²³ *Naval History and Heritage Command*.

²⁴ *Naval History and Heritage Command*.

²⁵ Washington State Department of Health, *State Death Records Index, 1940-1996*, Gordon W. Jamesson; Washington State Archives, Olympia; transcription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 September 3).