

17 Oct 01

From: Officer in Charge, Air Training Department, Naval Air
Technical Training Center, Pensacola FL
To: President, ABMA

Subj: NOMINATION OF CWO4 (RET) ROBERT M. HENDERSON FOR THE AB
LIVING LEGEND AWARD

1. It is with great pleasure that I submit this nomination. Robert M. Henderson was born in Whittier, California. He enlisted in the Navy on 20 November 1962, and attended Basic Training in San Diego, California. He reported to his first command, USS KITTY HAWK (CV-63), in February 1963. A young hard-charger, he earned his flight deck yellow shirt and his GED in his first year onboard. In December 1964, he reported to USS HORNET (CVS-12) serving as Fly Petty Officer in all three Fly's earning the rank of ABH2 before transferring to NATTC Lakehurst, New Jersey, in June 1969, to assume instructor duties. He was twice selected as Instructor of the Year and Sailor of the Year, and was advanced to ABH1. In May 1972, he reported to USS NEW ORLEANS (LPH-11) as Flight Deck Petty Officer and was later advanced to Chief Petty Officer. In May 1976, he headed to NALF, Orange Grove, Texas, where he was the Facility Leading Chief. A banner tour for the young ABHC Henderson as he was advanced to Senior Chief and was commissioned a CWO2 on 1 April 1978. The new CWO2 Henderson reported to USS NIMITZ (CVN-68), as Air Bos'n. A year later he invented and built the Navy's first adjustable wing/fuselage aircraft salvage dolly. Not content with the equipment available to crash and salvage crews, he designed and built the first rescue basket in 1980. Both items are now standard equipment on today's carriers. On 26 May 1981, a catastrophic aircraft accident onboard USS NIMITZ tested the mettle of Bos'n Henderson. For what was described as "A genuine heroic leadership performance in successfully combating a major flight deck conflagration," CWO3 Henderson was awarded the Heroic Legion of Merit. From September 1981 to March 1983, he was assigned as Enlisted Programs Officer at NRD, Denver, Colorado, before transferring to USS PELELIU (LHA-5), assuming the duties of Aircraft Handling Officer. Two years later it was off to Washington D.C., for the new CWO4 where he was attached to NAVAIRSYSCOM as NATOPS and Aircraft Firefighting Coordinator. He authored the Navy's first Shore Aircraft Salvage NATOPS Manual and was intimately involved in the research leading to our modern aircraft firefighting vehicles. In 1988, CWO4 Henderson was chosen as a Laurels Award Winner by Aviation Week and Space Technology for his contribution to aircraft carrier

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safety research and for rewriting the aviation crash and salvage manual. It is important to note that CWO4 Henderson was the most Junior Officer so honored. Other awardees in his group included Lord Carrington, Former NATO Secretary General; Paul H. Nitze, Ambassador at Large and Special Advisor to the President; Marshal Sergei Fedorovich Akhromeyev, Chief of the Soviet General Staff and First Deputy Minister of Defense; Canadian Defense Minister Henry Perrin Beatty; and Robert R. Fowler, Canadian Assistant Deputy Minister for Defense Policy. CWO4 Henderson's last sea tour was as Air Bos'n on USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (CVN-72), then back to NRD, Denver, Colorado, for his twilight tour retiring on 1 November 1992.

2. In November 2000, the AB School at NATTC Pensacola honored Bos'n Henderson and another legend, Bos'n Ed Hayes by dedicating the school's operations building, located in the Curry Complex, in their names. The plaque stated: "That with relentless persistence, first hand experience of the dangers of Naval Aviation operations at sea and ashore, Bos'n Henderson applied valuable life saving lessons learned and dedicated his entire lengthy Naval career towards improving firefighting and crash and salvage training. It is imperative that students who are trained at this great facility, on their way to perform their duties as life savers and aircraft firefighters on the flight decks of all U.S. Navy ships, feel the passion, dedication and wisdom passed down by this proud Air Boatswain".

3. Chief Warrant Officer Henderson has served as the President of the Aviation Boatswain's Mate Association (1988-1989) and on the Board of Directors of the Navy and Marine Corps Fire Protection Association. He is a graduate of Georgia Military College.

4. Chief Warrant Officer Henderson's decorations include the Legion of Merit (Heroic), Meritorious Service Medal (Two Awards), Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, Vietnam Service Medal (Ten Awards), Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, and numerous service, unit and campaign awards.

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5. His 30 years of distinguished service to the Navy and the AB
rate undoubtedly warrants awarding of the AB Living Legend
Award.

Very respectfully,

V. G. CUMBERBATCH
LCDR USN