Star 'Trekkie' tours U.S.S. Enterprise VIII

Chris Hodges had two missions when he flew to Norfolk, VA, to tour the U.S.S. Enterprise VII.

The ship was the first of the Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and was involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War and in numerous conflicts in the Middle East.

On Dec. 1, after 51 years of service, the craft was deactivated.

In early November, Hodges—a self-professed Star Wars television and movie fanatic—discovered that tours of the vessel were being offered.

"A customer said it was being decommissioned and I thought it was a joke," said Hodges, a maintenance worker at I-80 Pit Stop/ Plaza Shell Plaza.

Once he found the information true, Hodges heard "opportunity knocking."

"Let's see if I can make it work if it's meant to be," he remembers telling himself.

On Nov. 27, the 41-year-old landed in Norfolk, spent the night in a motel and took a taxi to the pier where the transporter was moored.

“Wow,” Hodges said, describing his first glimpse of the giant ship. “She took my breath away.”

All he said he could think of was a line in the Star Trek movie “Voyage Home” when crew members find an Enterprise aircraft carrier.

While on board, Hodges accomplished mission No. 1 when he first touched the carrier, likening it to a scene in the “First Contact” movie.

The second mission completed was having his picture taken while sitting in the captain’s chair.

Hodges then bought souvenirs, including U.S.S. Enterprise coins and literature, a bag and a shirt and cap before returning to Denver where his father, whom he calls “the Admiral” from Star Trek, picked him up.

The day before, while Hodges was on board the U.S.S. Enterprise, his father called.

“I was on the backside of a tower and my dad calls and I said, ‘Hello Admiral,’ ” Hodges said. “Everyone around me stopped and turned. They thought an admiral was on board.”

The quick trip to Norfolk hasn’t been the only adventure for Hodges.

Eight years ago, he traveled to a national Lions Club convention in New York City and toured the United Nations.

“I had double ambassador duty,” he said with a laugh. “I represented the Gothenburg Lions and the state of Nebraska.”

Another adventure, yet to be lived, Hodges put on the back burner.

He plans to return to New York City in four to five years to see a space shuttle, named the Enterprise (after Star Trek), U.S. astronauts used for training before going into space.

“Once I get this latest Enterprise trip paid off, I’m going to go on this once-in-a-lifetime trip,” he said.

After his most recent voyage, Hodges said he has a new motto to live by: “Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away.”

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