



Photo by Christine Cochrane

Albert Ciriello speaks to seniors at last week's veterans' coffee at the Aurelia Newell Center at Town Hall. The photo at the top right shows Ciriello in the service.



Adventures aboard the 'Mighty Mo'

By Brian Burns
Staff writer

If it weren't for a chance encounter in the Ashmont's parking lot, members of the veterans' coffee group at the senior center may never have learned about the World War II experiences of Cedar Street resident Albert Ciriello.

Ciriello, who was stationed aboard the U.S.S. Missouri while he was enlisted in the Navy, has a commemorative sticker of the ship attached to the bumper of his car.

One day, veterans' coffee moderator Florence Sundquist was walking into Ashmont's when she noticed Ciriello's car and was intrigued by the sticker.

Entering the store, she asked the staff at Ashmont's to page the car's owner.

After Sundquist talked to Ciriello for a bit, he agreed to stop by the senior center last week to relate his story to a larger audience.

Known affectionately by those who sailed on it as "the Mighty Mo," the U.S.S. Missouri was the

last of the great battleships commissioned and built by the U.S. Navy.

The ship, 887 feet long, was staffed by a crew of more than 2,500 sailors.

Ciriello told the group that he was 17 years old when he enlisted in the Navy in the spring of 1944.

New recruits like himself were called "the mothball group" he said, because of the distinctive smell that their Navy clothes had after being taken out of storage.

Following boot camp, Ciriello was assigned to work on a newly-commissioned battleship, the Missouri.

His working environment in the ship's intercommunications room was pleasant, he recalled, because it was one of the few that had to be air conditioned in order to protect the equipment.

That Missouri's shakedown cruise to South America brought the smell of lemon and lime blossoms, he recalled.

In 1945, the Missouri supported

the landings on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

On April 11, 1945 the Mo was attacked by a Japanese kamikaze squad. One plane did hit the deck of the ship, but luckily the 500-pound bomb that was attached to it rolled harmlessly into the water, saving the ship and its crew from far more serious harm.

After about nine months of heavy action in the Pacific, the Mo anchored in Tokyo Bay on Sept. 2, 1945 to accept the Japanese surrender that ended World War II.

The surrender came less than a month after the U.S. dropped the second of two atomic bombs on Japan.

Ciriello said that while he didn't know that the first A-bomb was being dropped, he could tell that something was up that day. The Mo did a quick 180-degree turn and headed away from Japan at a furious pace.

At the time, he said, it was hard to believe that one bomb could have caused so much damage.