**Edward Paul Von der Porten (29 October 29, 1933 to 9 April 2018)**

Maritime Historian, Teacher, Archaeologist, Museum Director, Family Patriarch

Always working to expand the world’s view of maritime history, Ed Von der Porten led a life of exploration and teaching.

Born in New York to German immigrants, Ed graduated from Stuyvesant High School and then came to San Francisco to join his parents who had moved for his father’s career in banking. Ed earned a BA (11 June 1955) and an MA (26 January 1965) in history from San Francisco State University.

[Ed’s extensive knowledge of so many subjects is illustrated by his master’s degree test. After many hours and many, many pages of writing, and staying hours beyond the other examinees, he had answered only a single essay question. His degree was granted without answering the other questions.]

Deferred by the Navy because of poor eyesight and McCarthyist prejudices against his parents’ German nationality, Ed pursued his interests in maritime history and archaeology.

While at San Francisco State, Ed met Saryl Corrick. They married in 1954 and began a life-long journey together.

Following up on his master’s thesis *German Naval Strategy in the Second World War*, Ed visited surviving Admirals and Captains in Germany. The resulting book, *The German Navy in WW II* earned an introduction from Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz.

First teaching in Fremont and Vallejo, Ed joined the Santa Rosa City Schools in 1958. After one year at Cook Junior High, he joined the Santa Rosa High School staff where he taught US History, American Government, English, Geography, and Journalism until 1985.

Along with Gene Desoto and Claire Elmore, he was known as one of the three key academic teachers at SRHS who prepared students for college. Ed spent thousands of hours teaching students how to write term papers and carefully grading each one. He graded tens of thousands of students’ 3” X 5” note cards for term papers and graded thousands of pages of formal note-taking. Not satisfied with the available materials, he published *Write in Style – A Guide to the Short Term Paper*. This was followed by *The Short Report*. *Voyages: A Primary Source Anthology* is a group of excerpts from documents that shaped America. All are still in print.

[Many students received written work back with three concentric red circles identifying a common grammatical error. Students had to get to/too/two, lie/lay/laid/lain and “try and” used properly!]

For years, Ed rotated a classroom exhibit of materials related to the week’s material. His presentation on WW II Germany included a large Nazi flag and German military music at the beginning of class. To teach the dangerous power of propaganda and authoritarian ideology, his first question to each class was, “why did you sit down and pay attention *today*?”

Ed and Saryl’s 2,000-piece collection of WW II Home Front items is now part of the permanent collection at the Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond, CA.

Ed began teaching night classes at Santa Rosa Junior College in 1961. In the 1960s, bull dozers were destroying Native American middens in the future Point Reyes National Seashore, so he developed an introductory archaeology class and archaeological field school. For years, Ed’s classes spent weekends saving this heritage. Many of his SRJC students went on to make major contributions to the field of California archaeology. He remained director of the SRJC archaeology program until 1982. He continued as a guest lecturer to 2004.

Ed’s analysis of the porcelain fragments found in the Native American sites at Drakes Bay, in collaboration with Clarence Shangraw at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, determined that there were two distinct Chinese porcelain sets at Point Reyes corresponding to historically documented visits by early European explorers: Drake in 1579 and Cermeño in 1595.

Through this work, Ed became a noted expert on 16th century Chinese porcelains, using evidence from shipwrecks to help Chinese scholars date their materials.

Work with the Drake Navigators Guild led to a lifetime’s work on this 1579 Marin County visit. A member from 1956, he served as President from 2003.

Ed and three co-authors investigated the story of Drake’s Plate of Brass, the hoax perpetrated on UC Berkeley Professor Herbert Bolton which got out of control. A book manuscript is ready for publication.

Starting in 1996, Ed led the work to have the Drakes Bay National Historic and Archeological District National Historic Landmark established. In 2011, he gave the presentations in Washington, DC, and in Florida leading to the Secretary of the Interior’s approval in 2012. A dedication ceremony was held at Point Reyes in 2016.

Ed was the author of several articles and books on Drake and 16th century porcelains.

Twenty years ago, Ed and his wife, Saryl, became aware of Chinese porcelain fragments found on a remote beach in Baja California, Mexico. That led to the discovery of the lost wreck site of a 16th century Manila galleon (most likely the *San Juanillo* of 1578). Working with Mexican authorities, technical experts from many fields, and a diverse crew of volunteers, Ed built teams for fieldwork trips each year. These included both land and sea explorations of the site. A book about those expeditions is forthcoming.

[Although Ed found many artifacts in his work, he only found one item popularly known as “treasure:” one small Spanish coin which is safely in the archives in Mexico City.]

An expert model builder, Ed spent 2,300 hours building a large model of the *San Juan*, a 16th century galleon found substantially complete in Red Bay, Canada. That work was published in 13 sections in the magazine *Seaways’ Ships in Scale.* He was a member of several model-building societies.

For many summers, Ed and Saryl traveled Europe in a 1970s VW camper van visiting historic sites, meeting archaeologists, and consulting on shipwreck projects including the raising of the *Mary Rose*. His research throughout northern Europe led to a 1994 article in National Geographic: *The Hanseatic League*.

Ed became the founding designer of the Sonoma County Museum and served on its History Committee until his death. He also worked as Director of the Treasure Island Museum from 1985 to 1992. Finding most museum labeling to be abysmal, he promoted a clear, three-deck style of signage. Overall, he assisted nearly twenty museums in their work.

Inducted into the Explorers’ Club, Ed and Saryl enjoyed many visits with its members.

When the *Jeremiah O’Brien* Liberty Ship returned to Europe in 1994, Ed and Saryl met the ship and managed the gift shop in England and France. Ed’s later work includes an extensive museum on the *O’Brien*.

At the celebrations of 50 years of Maritime Archaeology, Ed was recognized as one of the few to have “seen it all.” Overall, the count of his significant publications exceeds 90.

Ed is survived by his brother, Ronald of Las Vegas, NV, and Ron’s wife Marsha.

Married 56 years, Ed’s wife Saryl passed away in 2011. They had two sons: Michael and Eric (deceased), and two daughters-in-law: Elaine and Cathy. They have four grandchildren: Steven (with Stephanie), Kevin, Peter, and Laura, and one great-granddaughter: Sophia.

Services will be announced at a later date. Donations in lieu of flowers may be made to the Drake Navigators Guild, the SS Jeremiah O’Brien National Liberty Ship Memorial, the Society for California Archaeology, or the Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

[www.DrakeNavigatorsGuild.org](http://www.DrakeNavigatorsGuild.org)

<https://www.ssjeremiahobrien.org/pages/donate>

<https://scahome.org/donate.php>

<https://nauticalarch.org/online-giving/>

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