

USS Laffey Association

History and Presidents

The USS Laffey Association is dedicated honoring the destroyers USS Laffey (DD 459 and DD 724) who fought gallantly in World War II. We honor the memory of all who served on the USS Laffey especially the heroic WWII crewmembers – 32 killed and 71 wounded. The association honors the ships, crews, and families of the USS Laffey (DD 459 and DD 724). See www.laffey.org.



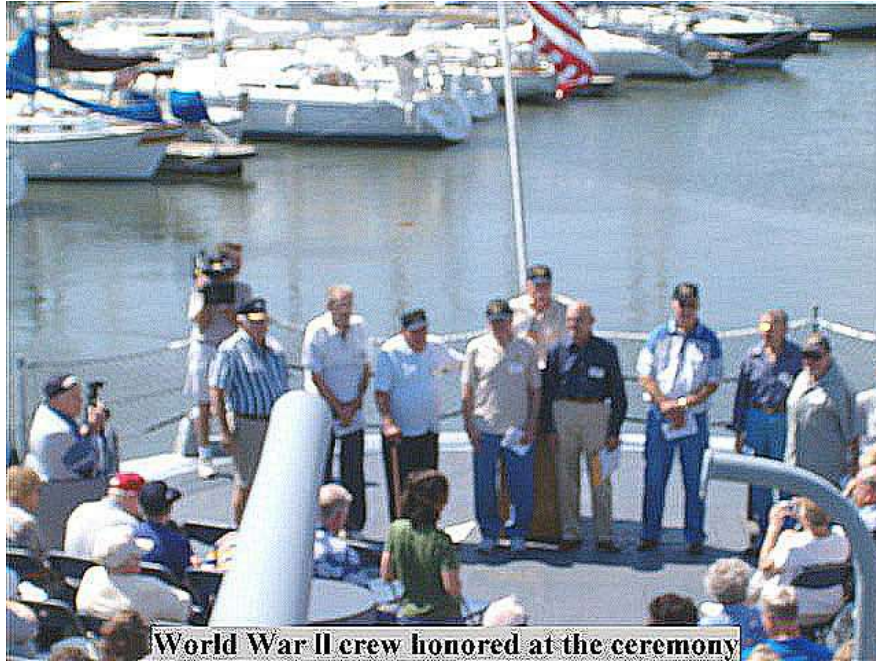
USS Laffey DD459 Sunk November 13, 1942



USS Laffey DD724 16 April 1945

1964 or 1965 Originally, the association was an informal group of USS Laffey World War II crew members who survived the 16 April Kamikaze attack and restored the ship to full fighting capability. The original group included DD459 and DD724 Korean War crew members. The association was formed about 1964 or 1965 while the USS Laffey was an active ship in the US Navy.

An important association tradition is to honor the 32 men who died on 16 April 1945 aboard the USS Laffey. Each man is named and a bell is rung. The oldest crew member tosses a wreath over the side in remembrance for their courage, bravery, and sacrifice.



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World War II crew honored at the ceremony

1966 First Association Reunion in Norfolk Virginia

The first association reunion was held on 16 April 1966. At the first reunion, there was a ship's family cruise aboard USS Laffey. This was special event for all to come aboard the ship at the US Naval Base, Norfolk, Virginia, get underway, experience pitching and rolling of the ship, have meal in wardroom or mess decks, and return to pier. This was particularly meaningful for Laffey veteran crew members, their families, and assigned officers and men of the ship.

First Reunion Dinner

of the

U.S.S. Laffey DD-724

Three Chiefs Restaurant

Norfolk, Virginia

16 April 1966



One For The Underway Watch

Left to right: Unknown???, Admiral Julian Becton in uniform (#3 in 1981 Reunion Photo), Frank Mason?? (#1 in 1981 Reunion Photo), Unknown???, Mathew Darnell?? (#2 on 1981 Reunion Photo)

[https://www.laffey.org/Mar%2007%20Entries/1966 first laffey reunion menu.htm](https://www.laffey.org/Mar%2007%20Entries/1966%20first%20laffey%20reunion%20menu.htm) and Ledger-Star Newspaper Article
<https://www.laffey.org/firstreunion27.htm>

1975 The USS Laffey (DD 724) was decommissioned on 9 March 1975 in Alexandria, Virginia. The first association newsletter was 1975-76. See <https://www.laffey.org/Newsletters/newsletter7576.htm>.

LAFFEY NEWSLETTER 1975-76

It is time to update you all on what has been happening. The Laffey was decommissioned March 29, 1975 at Alexandria, Va. Admiral Becton was there along with other former commanding officers. About twenty-five of the original crew attended the ceremony along with wives and families. The Navy did a nice job; they provided a band, a tent and a colorful ceremony. I don't believe there were many dry eyes when the colors came down for the last time.

There were annual reunions. There was significant correspondence to "Save the Laffey" including promoting Patriot Point Naval & Maritime Museum. Admiral Julian Becton, Cy Simones, Captain Paul Smith, Tom Fern, Captain Frank Manson,

and others were very instrumental in getting the ship to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum. Literally, they saved the ship.

Since then, many letters have been written to the Secretary of the Navy and to Congressmen and Senators telling them of our desire that the Laffey not be scrapped. There is still much to be done. Senator Hugh Scott introduced an article from the "Main Line Chronicle" into the Congressional Record on March 26, 1975. The article outlined the Laffey's battle record and recommended that the Laffey be enshrined. I have a few copies provided by Frank Manson and will bring them along to our next reunion.



Cyril C. Simonis
3645 Farm Ranch Rd. So.
Bethpage, N. Y. 11714

11/30/75

From Sonny Walker: I recall meeting and listening to stories of many World War II crew members. I feel honored and fortunate that I heard their stories. Admiral Becton did a great job honoring all these heroes in "The Ship That Would Not Die".

"Hell from the Heavens: The Epic Story of the USS Laffey and World War II's Greatest Kamikaze Attack" by John Wukovits and The Indestructible USS Laffey (the Log of the Laffey) by Vodehnal., Slavomir J. Published by Cal Steward Printer, Lincoln, Nebr., 1980 also honors these heroes.



Ari Phoutrides "During the attack, I was in the pilot house with Captain Becton. I hollered 'Plane Approaching' Mount 52 swung around, fired, and scored a direct hit'.

I saw a plane diving on us – 3 of us dove under the chart tables – to this day, I don't know how we all got under the chart table.

The Captain ordered me to go aft to survey the damage – I could not believe the carnage that I saw – bleeding men, dying men, twisted metal, fires, exposed men

firing 20 and 40 mm guns, repair parties fighting fires, spent ammunition casings everywhere. I reported to the Captain what I saw – it was terrible!



Al Csiszar “Off the coast of France, an 8 inch artillery shell hit us but did not explode. I opened the Boatswains Locker and water gushed out. We found the unexploded shell. It was an 8 inch 400 pound projectile. The captain said ‘Get it off the ship!’ We hoisted it up and threw it over the side.”



Dan Essig “I was a cook. I was the sound powered phone operator in Crews Mess. During the attack, I relayed everything to others in the Crews Mess. Whenever I said “Bogie Starboard Side” everyone went to the port side. Whenever I said “Bogie Port Side” everyone went to the starboard side.”



John Michel – As told by his daughter Jill Michel “With a hammer and chisel he made a hole in the After Engine Room bulkhead, pushed a hose into the smoke filled After Diesel Generator Room, and saved the lives to two trapped shipmates.”



Bill Kelly “A wounded shipmate was laying outside of the wardroom with his leg blown off. He asked Bill, who was on his way back up to the signal bridge with the flag, if he could have it. Bill gave him the flag and he died clutching the flag to his chest.”



Larry Delewski “I was the Gun Captain Mount 53. In the attack, I was blown out through the hatch of the gun mount. I ended up next to the depth charge rack. Most of the men in Mount 53 were killed.”

Books: Admiral Becton did a great job honoring all the heroes on the USS Laffey in “The Ship That Would Not Die”.

“Hell from the Heavens: The Epic Story of the USS Laffey and World War II's Greatest Kamikaze Attack” by John Wukovits

“The Indestructible USS Laffey (the Log of the Laffey)” by Vodehnal., Slavomir J. Published by Cal Steward Printer, Lincoln, Nebr., 1980.

See Videos <https://www.laffey.org/HomePage/DD724WWII.html>

History Channel Video Dogfights²

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGRzlvviwc> USS Laffey Interview with Ari Phoutrides, Glen Radder, Jim Spriggs, Lawrence Delewski, and Sonny Walker.

Laffey Men <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7ALNzCVOzQ> Featuring Robert E Johnson, Glen Radder, Robert Powell, Danny Essig, Oliver "Jim" Spriggs, Ken Johnson, John Michel.

[Tributes to WWII Heroes](#) and [Awards](#)

1981 USS Laffey Arrives at Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum



Rich McKinney “The Laffey was being towed to its new berth at the Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum. Admiral Becton was aboard. The Admiral’s Flag was flying on the signal bridge. As we passed a US Navy ocean going tug, crew members on the tug manned the rail and saluted as passed by. Since the Laffey Association Reunion was in Mt Pleasant, SC, there were many, many family members aboard the Laffey moving from the Charleston Naval Shipyard to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum.”

Laffey Reunion August 27-28th, 1918 Newsletter No. 12

Our "big day" and the heart of the reunion will be Friday afternoon, August 28th. We expect to arrange a bus ride to the Charleston Navy Yard where we will board the Laffey at Pier Tango. A tug will then take her in tow at high tide (about 1400 hours) for her final sailing to her permanent resting place. The ship should arrive at Patriots Point about 1-1/2 to 2 hours later and be tied up shortly thereafter. We are hoping for maximum media coverage: TV cameras watching our wives and families waving to us from the pier as we arrive. It could possibly help in our efforts to locate those hundreds of men who served on the Laffey during her thirty years of service, as well as encourage financial support for her maintenance.

World War II destroyer USS Laffey returns to South Carolina home after \$9 million in repairs

Post and Courier News Article in August 1981

MOUNT PLEASANT, S.C. (AP) -- With the blare of air horns, cheers and a champagne toast, "The Ship That Would Not Die" returned Wednesday to its home at a maritime museum on Charleston Harbor on the South Carolina coast.

Just after sunrise, the World War II destroyer USS Laffey was towed slowly down the Cooper River to the Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum. It was moved more than two years ago to a dry dock so its hull could be repaired at a cost of about \$9 million.

A group of about 50 people, including more than a dozen former crew members, gathered on the flight deck of another World War II vessel, the aircraft carrier USS Yorktown, to welcome the Laffey home.

"This means a lot of years of fighting to get her saved again," said Sonny Walker of Abingdon, Md., who served on the Laffey in the early 1960s. "This is the third time. The Germans tried to sink her. The Japanese tried to sink her and then she tried to sink herself sitting here. She's whipped them all and she's back again."

The Laffey, built at Maine's Bath Iron Works in 1943, got its nickname as "The Ship That Would Not Die" when it was on picket duty off Okinawa in March 1945. About 50 Japanese planes attacked and about half got through to the Laffey. The ship suffered 103 casualties when it was hit by four bombs and five kamikaze planes.

The Laffey is also the only surviving American World War II destroyer that saw action in the Atlantic, where it was part of the D-Day invasion. Now designated a national historic landmark, it was decommissioned in 1975 and brought to Patriots Point in 1981.

"It's where I spent my youth. I grew up on that ship," said 85-year-old Lee Hunt of Charleston, S.C., a member of the original crew when it was commissioned. "I went on it when I was 17 and spent my 18th birthday killing people in Germany in

the invasion of France and right on into Okinawa and the Philippines and what have you. This means a lot. I spent a lot of time on that ship.”

He said it was no surprise that, by 1945, the Laffey would encounter suicide attacks by Japanese aviators.

“We knew we were going to get hit. Every destroyer out there on picket duty knew they were going to be attacked,” said Hunt, who said he had no time to get nervous because he was on the ship and doing what the crew was asked to do.

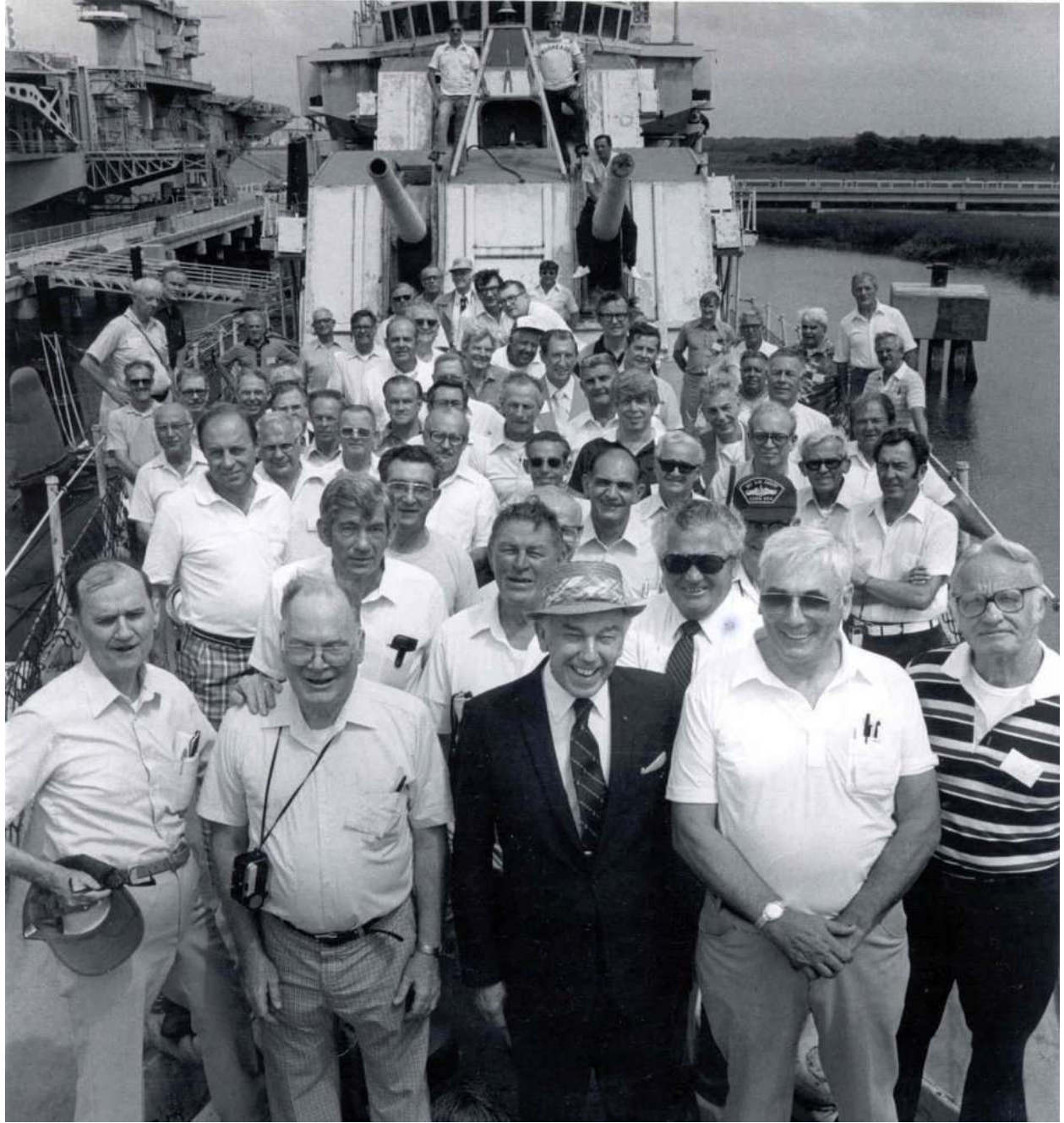
The renovation was paid for with a state loan, which the museum plans to repay with operating revenues.

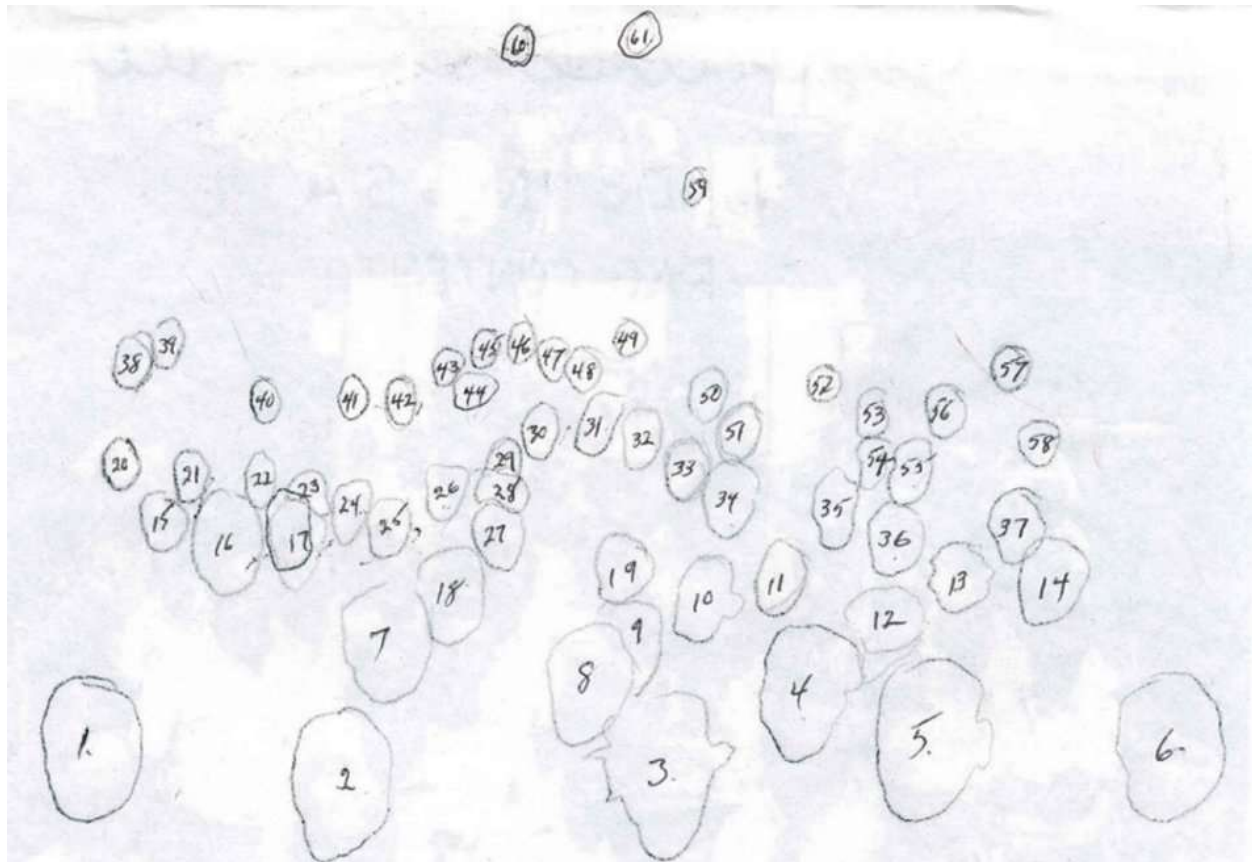
Bringing the Laffey back is not so much about ticket sales for a museum as it is about helping preserve the nation’s heritage, said Mac Burdette, the executive director of Patriots Point.

“More than ever we need reminders of what dedication and sacrifice are required if we are going to remain a free and independent nation,” he said. “Can we do without the Washington Monument that is going to take millions of dollars to repair from the earthquake? No. There are some things that are just worth paying for and this is part of it.” https://www.postandcourier.com/journal-scene/news/world-war-ii-destroyer-uss-laffey-returns-to-south-carolina-home-after-9-million-in/article_e1b09742-f13c-57b6-b3c2-0f7e40595fcb.html

1981 USS Laffey Association Reunion with Many WWII Crew Members

USS Laffey Association Reunion Charleston, S.C. August 28, 1981. This is perhaps the largest recorded gathering of the crew, many of whom were on board in April, 1945. <https://www.laffey.org/81%20reunion.htm>.





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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Frank Manson | 16. Edward Kycia | 31. | 46. |
| 2. Mathew Darnell | 17. Larry Delewski | 32. | 47. Frank Laskowski |
| 3. Frederick Julian Becton | 18. Olivion Marini | 33. | 48. Slavomir Vodenhal |
| 4. | 19. Robert Daugherty | 34. Robert McGinnis | 49. |
| 5. Cy Simonis | 20. | 35. Andy Anderson | 50. |
| 6. Frank Kodman | 21. Francis Gebhart | 36. | 51. |
| 7. Joe Edmonds | 22. Bob Karr | 37. | 52. Jim Cox |
| 8. Robert | 23. Ben Broome | 38. Gus | 53. Paul Smith |

Donstrom

- 9. Al Csiszar**
 - 10. Ari Phoutrides**
 - 11.**
 - 12. Steve Waite**
 - 13.**
 - 14.**
 - 15.**
- 24.**
 - 25. Ramon Pressburger**
 - 26. Louis Nordstrom**
 - 27.**
 - 28.**
 - 29.**
 - 30. Bert Remsen**

Englehardt

- 39. K.D. Jones**
 - 40.**
 - 41. Bill Welch**
 - 42. Jim Spriggs**
 - 43. Sam Wingrove**
 - 44. Tom Fern**
 - 45.**
- 54. Joe Doria**
 - 55. Warren Walker**
 - 56.**
 - 57.**
 - 58.**
 - 59. Dan Essig**
 - 60.**

Per Jill Vorgity: Don Vorgity is #45 below the gun barrel. Per Richie McKinney #60 is Rod Morgan and #61 is Richie McKinney on top of the gun mount.

2021 USS Laffey Returns to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum after Hull Repairs



USS Laffey returning to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum



Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum

Presidents of the USS Laffey Association 1966 – Present (Dates Approximate)

Cyril Simonis First President USS Laffey Association 1966 - 1984

Pete Lacore President USS Laffey Association 1984 – 1986

Jim Phillips Acting President USS Laffey Association 1986 - 1987

Don Vorgity President USS Laffey Association 1987 – 1991

Bob Langevin President USS Laffey Association 1991 – 1994

Ari Phoutrides President USS Laffey Association 1995 – 2001

Sonny Walker President USS Laffey Association 2001 – 2016

Chris Kirhagis President USS Laffey Association 2016 – 2022

Mike Honsinger President USS Laffey Association 2022

Cyril Simonis Association President USS Laffey 1966 - 1984



Cyril C. Simonis, Jr. Sonarman 1/c 2/44 - 1/46

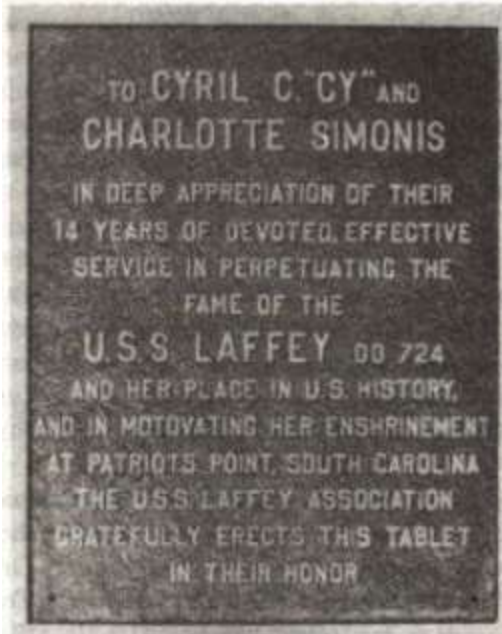
1966 Reunion



Veteran of WWII, SN 1/C. On board 16 April 1945, wife Charlotte from Beth Page, NY. First president of USS Laffey Association. Cy was instrumental in bringing the Laffey to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72530290>

[/cyril-c-simonis](#)



Plaque presented to Cyril and Charlotte Simonis

Pete LaCore President USS Laffey Association 1984 - 1986



Pete LaCore served aboard the Laffey as a TM3 from 1951-55 and was a veteran of the Korean War. Pete, along with his right arm man, Walt Harrington, were at many work parties. Wife Mary Lou from Cynthiana, KY.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/190360768/lyle-bernard-lacore>

[360768/lyle-bernard-lacore](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/190360768/lyle-bernard-lacore)



Pete LaCore 1951



Lyle "Pete" & Mary Lou LaCore

**Pete and Mary Lou LaCore
2006 Reunion**



000 by Todd Spangl
 crewman Lyle Lacore works on Laffey.

Laffey Survivors Gather To Exchange Memories

By PATRICIA McCARTHY
 Post-Courier Reporter

Time has dimmed V. Richard Hale's memory of the sinking of the original destroyer Laffey in 1942, but a few of the details won't escape his mind.

Hale, a 19-year-old signalman at the time, was wounded by flying fragments of the warship after it was blasted by a Japanese torpedo at Guadalcanal — about a year into World War II. He and dozens of other crewmembers clung wearily to a life raft for hours after watching their ship sink.

"I was wounded, bleeding and covered with fuel oil in the water. I knew if I could just see the sun rise, I'd be OK. It was more fear than pain I felt though, plus we were all in shock," he said.

The Laffey's mission was to provide cover for ships transporting Marines to Guadalcanal. Forty to 50 men died during the half-hour battle that night, Hale recalled. "It looked like a gigantic fireworks explosion. The bow of the ship went straight up — perpendicular in the water — and sank right down into the sea."

Hale, of Decatur, Ga., is one of about 60 men in Charleston for a week-long reunion of men who served aboard a second ship named the Laffey during World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The second Laffey is now berthed permanently at Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum on the Cooper River, and much of the reunion festivities will be held there.

The first reunion took place 21 years after the second ship's horrendous battle at Okinawa during World War II.

On a warm, bright Monday morning in April 1945, 33 men lost their lives and 71 were injured aboard the warship, according to its former skipper, Adm. F. Julian Becton.

The retired rear admiral from Philadelphia clearly described the day 38 years later.

The ship was about 50-60 miles off the coast of Okinawa when it detected what "looked like 50 or 60 planes — coming from all directions."

It was actually 22 Japanese fighters that zoomed in and opened on the Laffey five or six miles later. The 80-minute battle that ensued left the ship severely damaged and half sunk.

The Laffey was struck by five kamikaze planes and withstood several bomb attacks. Spilled gasoline and heavy fires in many portions of the ship, bombings caused the rudder jam, and the Laffey could do little more in circles, Becton recalled. "The metal punched holes through the deck and the ship was sinking because of flooding at the stern."

But "the ship that would not be retailed with a barrage of aircraft fire and shot down eight or nine kamikazes and eventually fended off the rest with the help of MiG fighter planes from Okinawa, he said.

"When the action was all over, it took us several days to figure out the sequence of attacks. All you can do in a situation like that is that you train the crew to the highest possible level and hope they perform well. And did. It was an all-around team effort," Becton said.

The majority of the men who served on that day were just out of camp at the time. Many echo the same thought: "We grew up in a hurry." Several had complained about strenuous training exercises being too hard, but as one sailor put it, "It's worth it — when it really counts anything other than reaction you have been too late."

The reunions rekindle painful memories — but also deep friendships, said Thomas B. Ferri, a former crewman from Agawam, Mass. "You don't survive combat action together without forging tight bonds," he said.

Many of the old crewmen and their families will be working on the Laffey — making repairs and painting during their visit this week.

THE EVENING POST CHARLESTON S.C. MAY 11 1983

<https://www.laffey.org/lacorein83.htm>

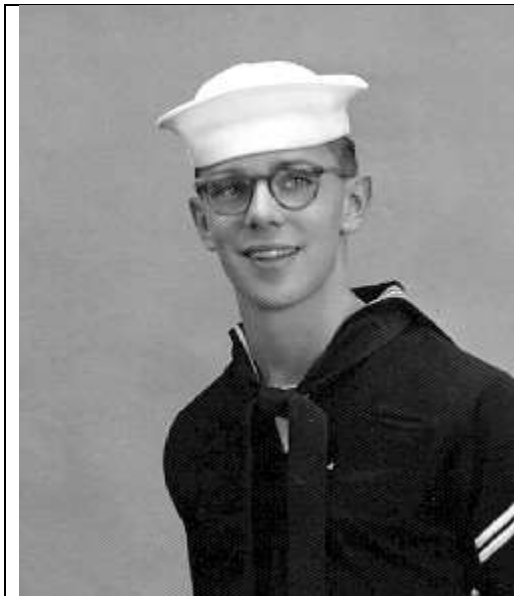
Jim Phillips Acting President USS Laffey Association 1986 - 1987

Don Vorgity President USS Laffey Association 1987 – 1991



Donald J. Vorgity QM 3/C (Quartermaster 3rd Class) served aboard USS Laffey 1952-56 during the Korean War. Don was elected president twice. In the early 1990, Don served briefly as President.

<http://findagrave.com/memorial/137038339/donald-vorgity>



Donald J. Vorgity QM 3/C served aboard USS Laffey 1952-56

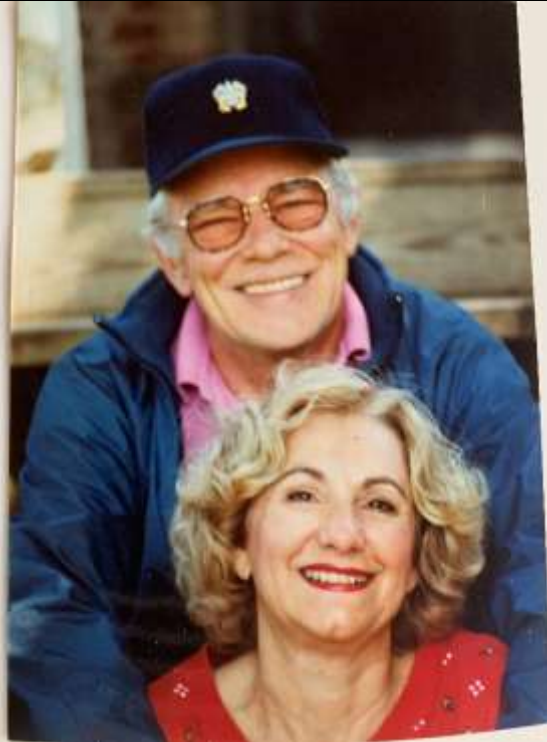


Association President, Don Vorgity, addressing the attendees as the Memorial Service

"C" Division: Left to Right, Top to Bottom: Clark, Mink, Pitts, Maxfield, Beason ,
Turner, McCann, Brannon, Mullins, Keys, Winn, Arellano, Proctor, Burfeindt,
Welland, Vorgiety, Culpepper, Maloney, Summerton.



Don Vorgiety 1954 World Cruise C Division 4th from right kneeling



Don and Nina Vorgity



Daughter Jill Vorgity Laffey Association Secretary with husband Bruce Lampe and son, Donald Lampe-Vorgity in 2023

Bob Langevin President USS Laffey Association 1991 – 1995

Bob Langevin father Reginald R. Langevin, F1c (Fireman First Class) was a plank owner member of USS Laffey commissioning crew. Bob served in US Navy Brown Water in Vietnam. He recalls an enemy shell exploding near four men. Three died. Bob was severely wounded and woke up on a hospital ship. Bob served as association president from 1991-1995.



Bob Langevin on Quarterdeck Watch

Appreciation Plaque for Bob Langevin Past President USS Laffey Association Bob Langevin has given wonderful support for the USS Laffey and the USS Laffey Association. His contributions at workparties, financial donations, American Legion support are greatly appreciated. As a token of our gratitude, the USS Laffey Association presented a specially made plaque with Laffey Challenge Collectable Coins to Bob.



Bob Langevin at an early workparty.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/190767736/aristides-phoutrides>



1943



2017

Early in the history of the USS Laffey Association, Ari was the Secretary and Treasurer. Later he became the President. Later he served as Webmaster, creating the www.laffey.org website. As webmaster he preserved and presented the History of the USS Laffey. He collected and published thousands of documents, pictures, videos, interviews, newsletters, cruisebooks, etc for the generations to come. His words "This site is dedicated to the destroyers USS Laffey (DD 459 and DD 724). We, of the Laffey, honor all ships and crews that fought and served in defense of world freedom."



Betty and Ari at the 1985 Reunion. Left Side: Betty Phoutrides, Adm Becton, Frank Hoag, Bob Dockery. Right Side: Cy Simonis, Ari, Charlotte Simonis, Gloria Hoag, Jean Dockery, Bill Kelly

Sonny Walker President USS Laffey Association 2001 – 2016

<https://www.laffey.org/Shipmates/Walker.pdf>



Edgar D. "Sonny" Walker, III
RM 2/c 1960-63



"Sonny" Walker 2006 Reunion





“Sonny” Edgar Walker joined the US Navy in 1960 in Baltimore Maryland. He went to boot camp in San Diego, California. He then went to A School to become a Radioman. He reported to the USS Laffey DD724 in September 1960 in Norfolk Virginia. He was a crew member on the 1961 deployment to the Mediterranean Sea

during the Cold War. His photos:

<https://www.laffey.org/Cruises/SonnyWalkerpix/SonnyWalkerpix/sonnywalker1/sonnywalker1.htm>



David & Judy Harhager



Edgar & Cheri Walker

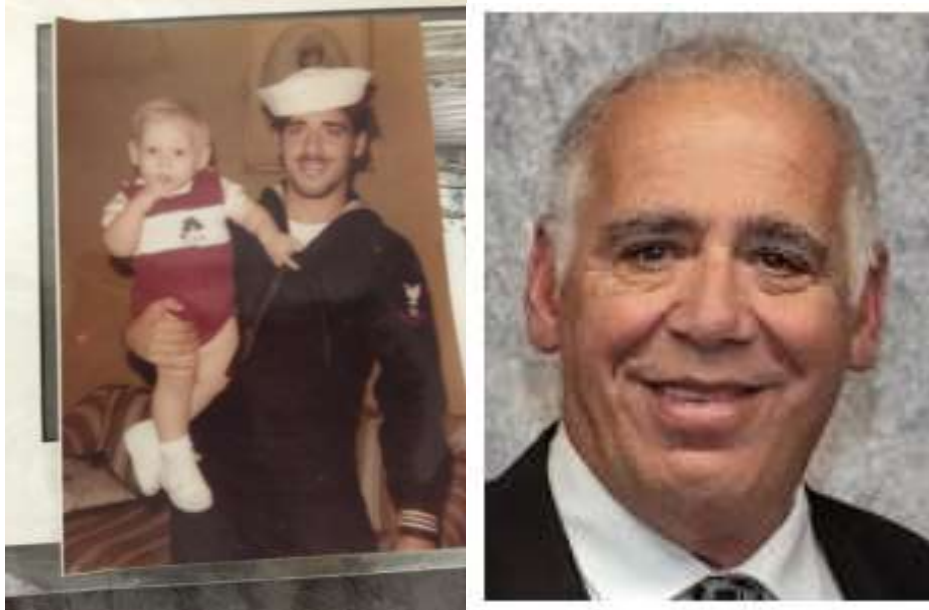
Shipmates at 2006 Reunion

Chris Kirhagis President USS Laffey Association 2016 – 2022



Chris Kirhagis joined the US Navy in 1973. He was Storekeeper responsible for ordering, stocking and issuing repair parts, clothing and

general supplies. He was responsible for maintaining the ship's storeroom compartments to maintaining required stores, e.g. repair parts, consumables,



<https://www.laffey.org/Shipmates/Kirhagis.pdf>

Chris was President USS Laffey Association from 2016 -2022 after Sonny Walker. He made an important contribution to the USS Laffey Association to maintain the USS Laffey as the Premiere US Navy Museum Ship.



Chris and his wife Bernice (left side of photo) at a reunion

Mike Honsinger President USS Laffey Association 2022

<https://www.laffey.org/Shipmates/Honsinger.pdf>



Captain "Chip: Vernon Honsinger Age 86, USN (Retired) and Mike Honsinger in 2021

Mike's father Chip Honsinger served on USS Laffey from 1956-1959. Mike was in the US Air Force 33 years flying helicopters and airplanes then 12 years in the US Customs Service. Since 2010 Mike has been guiding snowmobile adventure vacations in Maine each winter. He was elected President of the Association on 5 October 2022 at the Annual Meeting in Mt Pleasant, SC. He has frequently served as cook at work parties.

