



# LAFFEY NEWS

*Dedicated to those who served in battle and those who pre-served in peace.*



*"I'll never abandon ship as long as a gun will fire"  
—F. Julian Becton, CO*

USS LAFFEY, DD724 & DD459  
THE SHIP THAT WOULD NOT DIE

April, May, June 2017

USS Laffey Association • [www.Laffey.org](http://www.Laffey.org)

Καλό Πάσχα & Καλώς ήρθατε στο σκάφος

(Translated from Greek means *Happy Easter and Welcome Aboard*)

## President's Letter

**T**his being my second Newsletter, I think I will continue the tradition of starting off with something in Greek.



*Chris Kirhagis*

Only for Ari Phoutrides' purpose.

As of this writing, I have completed a half a year as your newly-elected President, and without all of the Executive Board as well as the Board of Directors, I would be at a loss. These people are dedicated to seeing to the success of this Association more than you can imagine.

What the majority of the Association does not see are the countless hours we spend at home, on the phone and the computer to get things done. As much as I contact our Past President Sonny Walker, when I call his home and his wife Cher answers, she refers to me as "her competition". So you know even the wives of these members have to be SAINTS.

Kathy Pereira (Membership



*Most of the April Work Party Crew*

Chairperson) also keeps a keen eye on the membership roster, constantly updating same. Kathy also receives updates from the Executive Board and Board of Directors on a weekly basis. Kathy is instrumental in keeping "Mikey" Mike Pereira in line for all of us to have fun with.

We have been going through the roster inquiring of each member whether they would prefer a paper copy or electronic (via email) of the newsletter. I know that we have not reached out to everyone to obtain their input, but after reading this newsletter, please

give us a call to let us know your preference.

Sonny and I had a meeting with Mac Burdette and Bob Howard pertaining to several issues. One being the feasibility of installing a fire suppression system for the Chiefs Quarters Galley. At this stage, I will be reaching out to a company, and our VP will be doing the same in order to get some proposals, and submit them to Patriots Point. So this will be a slow process, however it is not a dead issue. The other issue was an email that had been circulat-

*continued on page 2*

ing throughout the Association pertaining to vandalism involving spray-painted graffiti in CIC. The statements made in an editorial concerning this alleged incident are totally fabricated. The writer of the editorial now admits this and advised in writing that it was “fake news”. So I encourage every member who comes in contact with non-visiting members to please advise them of this matter.

Again, Richard Felsing visited the Laffey several times to get our input as to the revised website, and, thank God, Ari was at the work party to give his input also.

For personal reasons, Hank Ashton chose not to take the position of Newsletter Editor, however, I accidentally, (whew!) found Craig Keith, who served aboard the Laffey as a LTJG, 1969-71. Craig owns his own design company and has experience in designing newsletters for various groups. Thanks, Craig for jumping in, the timing could not have been more perfect.

We also had a new member join. Bill Blackstock from Enterprise, Alabama. Bill’s father William “Sanford” Blackstock was a SM1 who served aboard the Laffey 1958-1963. SM1 Blackstock also served aboard the battleship West Virginia BB48 at Pearl Harbor. Bill was so ecstatic over the comradeship every member had for each another, that he will be back. Bill is also a bugler, and played taps several times at 2000 hours during the work party. However. Bill was threatened with a blanket party if he played Reveille.

—Chris Kirhagis  
Laffey Association President

## It LIVES!

(No, this isn’t a Frankenstein story.)

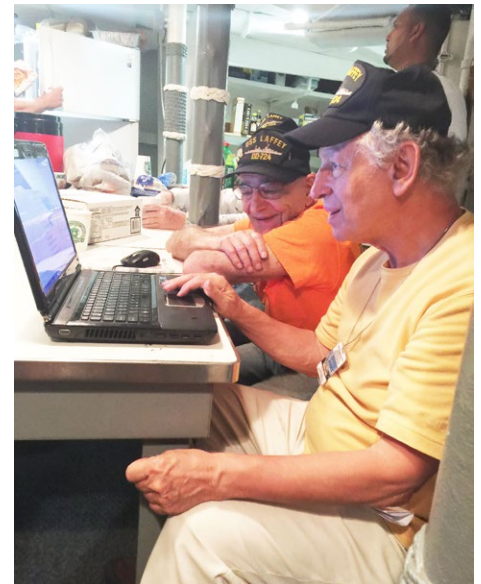
It is also not of a religious bent. (Though some have been praying for it.)

The Phoenix of *Laffey.org* has risen from the ashes. It is true. I’ve seen it myself. Unlike Easter, this was man-made.

Many have awaited the new face and content of the Laffey web site. So, brush off your wwww’s and check it out. I have been assured that all of the worthwhile old content is there. The format has been changed, improved and modernized. You’ll have to go looking for old familiar stuff, but it’s worthwhile.

The best part is that it will be able to portray new items and retain them.

Once again, current events about the USS Laffey and the Laffey Association can be immortalized in their rightful places, for our fu-



Richard Felsing and Ari checking out *Laffey.org*.

ture reference. A prime example of this is in a block at the bottom of the new web page.

Clicking on News will get you to a current picture of our fine Chief’s Mess. You’re guaranteed a smile upon seeing some familiar faces.

ENJOY! And, KUDOS to the Laffey Web Workers.

—Ray Broll



Before



After: Sonny admires the polished plaque

The Mount 53 plaque listing the April 16, 1945 crew members was re-finished by Paul Richards in Florida. Member Harold Borton arranged for the work to be done. Paul came to the ship and spent the night with us. He was presented a plaque of thanks from the association.





## APRIL 2017 WORK PARTY

**T**raditionally our work party coincides with the anniversary of the April 16, 1945 attack, however, due to the fact that April 16th this year happened to fall on Easter Sunday, a decision was made to move it to 22-29 April, 2017.

We had one of the largest April work parties in the past fifteen years I have been attending. A total of thirty-six members were there with plenty of work for all.

My pet project was to clean out the entire focsle locker (except the paint supply locker) and move the tools aft to the HT Shop. This was done by all three Fitzsimmons, Homer, and others. Ed Fitzsimmons AKA "Tool Czar" was instrumental in organizing and labeling all of the bins. Now I know what the inside of Ed's garage looks like.

Bill & Bob Fitzsimmons and "Little Mikey" Pereira painted Mount 52, prepped and spot painted Mounts 51 & 52. Bill Fitzsimmons removed rust from the bow and 02 level deck around Mount 52.

Stephen Phoutrides, Dana Banks, and Bill Blackstock

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*Luncheon on the Yorktown at Sticky Fingers was hosted by Patrick Waters (Grandson of General George Patton) and Jeff Jacobs (President of the Patriots Point Foundation)*



*Sonny*



*Patrick Waters and Homer Doster*



*Ari Phoutrides & Major General Livingston (Medal of Honor recipient)*



*Waiting for lunch*



worked on deck around the ship. McKinney and Rohloff disassembled, rebuilt and lubricated three dogs on the DASH doors.

Rohloff disassembled and lubricated the ship's vise, numerous trips to the Yorktown for supplies, half a dozen trips to a hardware store, assisted in moving mooring lines from focsle to aft berthing.

John Hudak made two cuts of the combing around the focsle locker hatch and re-welded the combing, lowering it to five inches to eliminate a safety hazard. He was assisted by Homer, McKinney, and Hank.

McKinney and Miller installed new sewage line to the XO and Engineering Officer Quarters.

Bob and John Langevin gave away white hats to visiting children under the age of ten. Both of them also assisted in preparing three of our meals during the week. Kudos to the both of you.

Paul Banks (brother of Dana) also did a lot of chipping throughout the deck areas, as well as painting and twine wrapping the handle at forward hatch.

Ari Phoutrides chipped paint on the fantail and, with the assistance of Sonny Walker, helped paint Mount 53. WAIT A MINUTE !!!! REALLY !!! SONNY DID SOMETHING ???

Barylski, Nettle and Steve Papp replaced the netting on the life-line at gangway.

Tom Ault and Jim Berg cleaned and oiled all the seats in the mess deck. Now nobody has to suck their gut in to sit and eat.



*Paul Bangs holding onto small snake found in his shorts in his rack*

*Ari Phoutrides signing pieces of bottom of original Laffey hull to be raffled*



*Hank Ashton and Bill Blackstock*



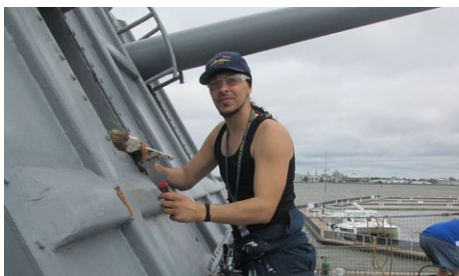
*John Nettle and Steve Papp*



*"Little Mikey" Pereira (VP's son)*



*D-Day flag with Ari Phoutrides*



*Mikey Pereira*



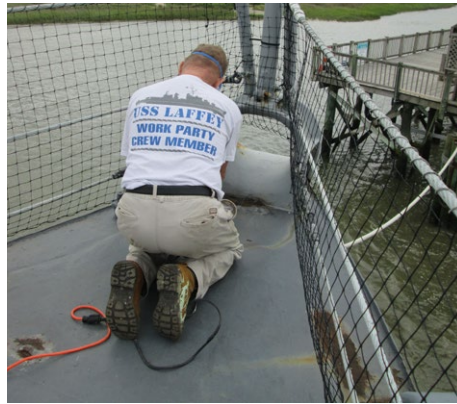
*Ari Phoutrides*

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*Brian Parsons (Supervisor, our go-to guy at Patriots Point)*



*Don Watson*



*Ed Fitzsimmons and the tool shop he organized*



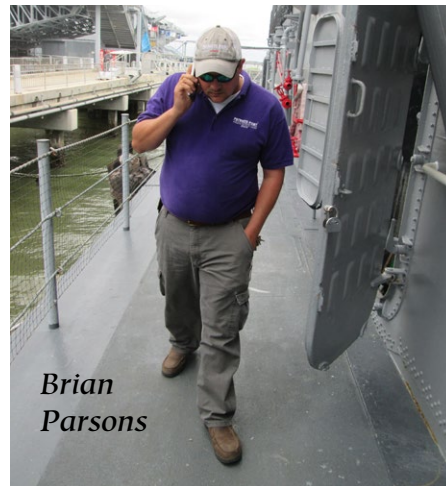
*Dana Bangs*



*Bob Fitzsimmons*



*Paul Bangs*



*Brian Parsons*



*Chow*



*John Hudak cutting hatch down to a safer height*



*Don Watson tries the new hatch*





*Lounging*



*Dave & Mary Bossard*



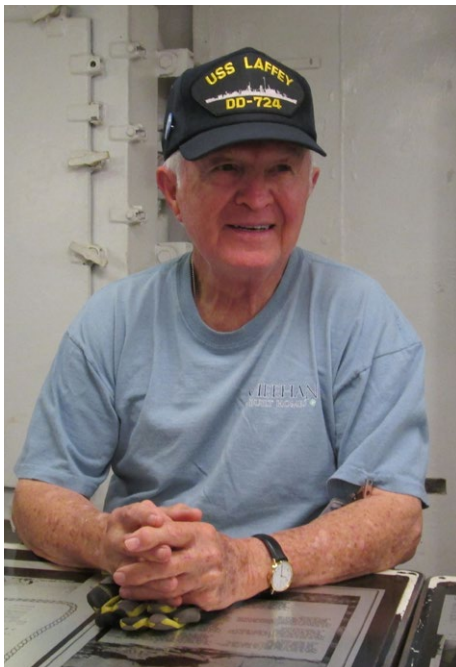
*Ari reading names of 32 deceased at the memorial service*



*Blackstock with his father's original Navy cup*



*Borton, Ari, Ed Fitzsimmons*



*Homer Doster*



*Chris Kirhagis and Ari Phoutrides*



*Ari's son Stephen Phoutrides*



*Sonny, Ari, Chris, and Bob Langevin (present & past three presidents)*





*John Kapusta & Paul Bangs*

Harold Borton worked in Radio Central pulling up old matting and found the deck in bad shape. He also helped Sonny and Homer mount a plaque on the port side of Mount 53.

Ron Bowman assisted in painting Mount 51 and did electrical work with Max Saus in the Radio Room. Ron mounted a hasp in Chief's Quarters



*Ed Fitzsimmons, VP Mike Pereira, and John Hudak*

Donnie Watson also assisted in painting Mount 52, removing rust from the focsle and spot priming.

Mary Bossard washed sheets for two days and did a wonderful job. Takes a lot off of us upon our return in October. *Thanks a bunch, Mary!*

Now is the time to acknowledge Antonio, who stepped up and volunteered to be our cook. Nothing like a little twank to our meals, and they were delicious.

"Too Much Milk" John Kapusta, Nettles, and Papp deserves kudos for helping out in the Chief's Quarters and basically everywhere else they were asked.

Saving the best for last, our VP, Mike Pereira, was running around with his head cut off, forward to aft, starboard to port, jumping in helping wherever he could and at the same time making sure everyone had something to do. I even heard Mike say "I was surprised we accomplished what we did in one week" Couldn't do it without you Mike.

Please accept my apology if I left anyone out of the work party description. It was not intentional, just a lot of jotting down and memory. But in the future please approach me with a piece of paper describing your contribution to the work party. Speaking of work parties, we are looking at

*continued on page 8*



*Ari Phourides and Susan (Patriots Point Foundation Board Member)*



*Crew dinner: Sonny Walker, Jeff Jacobs, Chris Kirhagis*



*Nettle, Saus, Bowman, Bob Langevin and his brother John Langevin*



*John Hudak and Ari*

October 28th through November 4th for our fall work party. I realize this is only sixteen days after our reunion, but we have to fit in where we can.

The Friday before we all went home, the Association treated the Laffey attendees to a steak dinner at our normal watering hole, VFW Post 10624. There were nineteen attendees. Other than our members, to show support, we included Jeff Jacobs

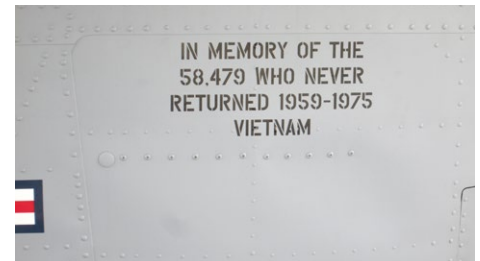
(President of Patriots Point Foundation), Past Employee Cindy Lee, plus Judy Edgar and her husband. Judy was a tour guide in Charleston, SC and she befriended us some years back, absorbing all she could about Laffey's history. Judy claims that she has benefited from this information. She will be greatly missed as Judy and her husband will be moving to Italy the middle of May to pursue other careers.

In the middle of our working week work party members were invited to a luncheon on the Yorktown at Sticky Fingers in the Fighting Lady restaurant. The luncheon was hosted by Jeff Jacobs and Patrick Waters. Special guests in attendance was General James Livingston (Medal of Honor recipient) and Susan Marlowe (Patriots Point Foundation Board Member). Approx. 95% of our members attended this affair. Thanks so much Jeff & Patrick.

**S**onny Walker & Chris Kirhagis were guests of Patriots Point Foundation's President Jeff Jacobs at the air show at Beaufort Marine Air Base including the Blue Angels, an F35, and a Harrier. A Corsair like the one that aided the stricken Laffey on April 16, 1945 was also shown. There were numerous displays of helicopters and other fixed winged aircraft.



Sonny and Chris were wine and dine and rubbed elbows with numerous VIPs, including General Livingston. It was inspiring to see the sharp salute the young Marines gave the general.



## An Opportunity to Help Our Association & Patriots Point

**P**atriots Point Foundation (PPF) has been a big supporter of Laffey and the Association for years. Now PPF is asking the Laffey family, not only to participate, but also to spread the word about an opportunity to help. If everyone on the Laffey email list were to sign up for Amazon Smile and each one was to get friends to also sign up, it could significantly help both PPF and the Laffey financially.

Amazon Smile is painless, easy to set up, and costs the donor

nothing. Amazon will donate 1/2% of all purchases made by anyone who designates PPF as their charitable organization. There is NO difference to the customer: prices, shipping, wish lists, Prime, are all unchanged. Your shopping and personal data are not saved. To sign up, just go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/51-0195240>. Amazon will send you a browser shortcut to use. You will then be on [Smile.amazon.com](http://Smile.amazon.com) instead of [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). That's the only difference.

Also, General Livingston gave us permission to have a special PPF edition of his book printed. PPF sells signed copies for \$45 delivered, or, if anyone at a work party wants a signed copy, PPF's Jeff Jacobs will bring one to the ship for \$40. Books can be ordered online at [Tinyurl.com/OrderNobleWarrior](http://Tinyurl.com/OrderNobleWarrior).

Please encourage everyone to visit [PatriotsPointFoundation.org](http://PatriotsPointFoundation.org) to see what we have done and our current projects.

Thanks, Jeff Jacobs



## PayPal

We are now able to receive PayPal donations. You will need a personal PayPal account to make a donation. Click on [www.paypal.me/usslaffeyassociation](http://www.paypal.me/usslaffeyassociation).

The treasurer will periodically check the site and transfer money to the Association's account. The web master and the Newsletter Editor will also post this link. The site also allows donors to designate whether the monies are for a donation, dues, ongoing fundraisers or others. If making a payment, please indicate in the comment section any updated information for inclusion to our membership roster. Any suggestions for use or improvement of this link will be greatly appreciated.

### Editor's Note

I am happy to take over as editor and designer of *Laffey News*!

I served as Laffey Communications Officer from October, 1969 to May, 1971 before being sent to WESTPAC. I hope to retire soon (but not from doing the newsletter) and will then have a better chance of making it to a work party. Based on the photos in this issue, it looks like hard work but also a lot of fun, all for a good cause. We are so lucky to still have our ship.

Please feel free to email me with suggestions, complaints, photos, and articles. —Craig Keith  
[newsletter@laffey.org](mailto:newsletter@laffey.org)



*Here's what I looked like back then. I haven't changed a bit, of course!*

## Mel Gibson Visits the Laffey



Photo courtesy of Patriots Point

*Above: Sonny, Mel Gibson, and Chris*

*At right: Mel, his son Lars, and girlfriend Rosalind Ross, who is reportedly writing a screenplay about the Laffey and the Kamikaze attack of 1945.*



## Own a Piece of The Laffey

The Association will be selling tickets at \$5.00 each to win a piece of the original hull of the Laffey mounted on a plaque. Our VP Mike Pereira owns the one seen here. The Association will be raffling off one approximately 10"x12" piece of hull with rivets which have been sandblasted and powder-coated. I have two unsigned and the rest were auto-

graphed by Ari Phoutrides. Make copies of the ticket and send in \$5.00 for each entry. The drawing will take place at the work party on Monday April 16, 2018



### USS LAFFEY HULL PLAQUE RAFFLE TICKET

#### Own a Piece of the Laffey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Copy and fill out copies of this ticket if you want to enter multiple times. Cut out ticket and send to:

Chris Kirhagis, 6714 Hudson Street, Baltimore, MD 21224.

Make check out to USS Laffey Association or pay through PayPal through *Laffey.org* site.

All funds will be used to support future work parties.



## Honorary Member Rita Maier

We welcome our newest honorary member, Rita Maier, into the USS Laffey Association. She is shown here visiting with Bill Kelly—former SM3/c, plank owner and Okinawa survivor. Rita’s three therapy dogs share in this picture.

Rita’s life story to date is an interesting and inspirational one. Her work career started upon graduation from high school and continued until her retirement in 2009. During this period, she worked as a typist, a bookkeeper, and finally as an analyst for the FBI. She provided support for countless agents for 17 years before retiring. Not satisfied with the responsibilities associated with her work, she managed to raise a family of three children and share in the lives of two grandchildren.

Upon retiring, she enlarged her family by adopting a Dachshund (whose name is Frankie) and who was eventually certified as a therapy dog. Since 2011, and on a weekly basis for several hours, Rita and Frankie have been visiting and comforting the occupants of the Claremont Care Center located in Point Pleasant, New Jersey. Many of its residents are veterans of WWII.

Her motivation for working with therapy dogs—and visiting veterans in particular—has its roots in the Cardinal Spellman Servicemen’s Center in New York City. Her volunteer work in this organization occurred in the late 1960’s and was the result of her concern for the young men involved in the Vietnam War. This desire to assist and support servicemen remained with her in



*Honorary Member Rita Maier visits with Bill Kelly*

the years that followed, and manifested itself in her present therapeutic activities at the Claremont Center.

It is interesting to note that according to Rita, initially, Bill was somewhat less than enthusiastic about new visitors and other therapy dogs and their handlers. He liked Frankie right away though, and her interest in our ship and the stories that had to be told, slowly made Bill feel much more comfortable during the visitations.

She speaks highly of our website and the information she has gleaned from it—information she has treasured and has put to good use. Bill especially appreciated reading all the oral histories of shipmates that Rita printed for him. He learned that his feelings, all those years later, closely matched the feelings of many of his shipmates. Another outstanding illustration of this involves a former plank owner, Karl Lebrecht. Through her efforts, she arranged for a meeting at the Jersey Shore, with Bill Kelly and two of Karl’s daughters. The younger members of his family

knew very little of their father’s experiences on the Laffey and were extremely happy to learn of anything relative to their father. One of the daughters described the visit as “one of the highlights of my entire life.”

Rita continues to show a sincere and deep interest not only in the Laffey and its activities, but equally important, she continues to show compassion and appreciation toward not only veterans, but also to other men and women who—for whatever the reason—are confined to care centers

She has written these words to me: “.....I feel a strong connection to your amazing ship and to the countless men who served on the Laffey. I am so honored to know of these fine men and feel a little part of your history. I could never thank you enough for all your service and sacrifice for our great Country. You will always be in my prayers.”

The members of the Association in turn, thank you for your voluntary efforts and for your desire to make life a little better for all of us.



# Challenge Coins

Twenty Laffey Challenge Coins were sold at the April work party. Chris ordered 200 (150 gold and 50 silver) He picked more gold as we do brass in the Navy not silver, but silver coins are available for those who prefer them. Either style is \$20 each plus \$.75 each coin for shipping.

You can purchase these coins through PayPal and make a notation what they are for. Or send your payment directly to George Kessler who will then inform me to release the coin(s). Proceeds will go to funding future work parties.



## 2017 USS Laffey Reunion

Memphis, TN • October 8-11

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Names of those attending:

\_\_\_\_\_

Email:

Home Phone:

\_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone:

\_\_\_\_\_

What years did you serve on the Laffey? \_\_\_\_\_

What was your rate or rank?

\_\_\_\_\_

What day do you expect to arrive? \_\_\_\_\_

Will this be the first reunion you have attended? \_\_\_\_\_

Special needs or allergies?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please let us know if you will NOT be attending a specific function that is part of the planned itinerary during the reunion. We must pay per person, you will not receive a refund, but the money would stay in the associa-

tion instead of being used to pay for something that is not used.

Activities charge \$150 per person. Send registration and check made out to **USS Laffey Association** to Jill Michel, 26 Quaker Road, Mickleton, NJ 08056-1303

Contact info: Jill.Michel@comcast.net or call 609-870-0600 or 856-423-4263

Please contact the Memphis Sheraton Downtown directly at 901-527-7300 to reserve your room. Room rate is \$119 per night plus taxes. Make sure to mention USS Laffey to receive this special rate.



USS Laffey DD724 Association

Craig Keith, Editor

201 N. Fairfax St. #32

Alexandria VA 22314

## *A Note of Thanks*

*Shipmate Bob:*

I want to thank you for your assistance in my getting a new Laffey ball cap. I sure wear it with pride! I also get inquiries about the Laffey and thanking me for my service.

You really do have a terrific newsletter. I sure do thank everyone for all the hard work keeping the Laffey “ship-shape”. As to having the newsletter go to electronics I vote for the “hard copy, the print edition”. In a few weeks, I’ll be 90 years old. I’m from the old school: We do not have a computer or e-mail.

I went to serve on the Laffey right from boot camp in 1946. Due to my health problems, I cannot participate in the work parties. Smooth sailing to all!

*Jim Deckman, CSG2*

Bob’s Comment: Thank you, Jim, for your kind comments, and we know that your spirit will be with all work party attendees

This photo of the Laffey is from the collection of Gus Scutari, FC2c, USS Haynsworth, DD 700. Shared with permission. Taken in 1945 prior to April 6th (the date of the kamikaze attack against the Haynsworth).

Marty Irons book, *Phalanx Against a Divine Wind! The USS Haynsworth and Destroyer Squadron 62 During the Final Battles of WWII* will be coming out this summer.

