



# LAFFEY NEWS

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



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

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

February 2024

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

## President's Message



Once again... before you begin to read this newsletter, please grab a cup of Joe or your favorite

adult beverage because we have a lot to tell you about our ship! We had two work parties this Fall that were both very productive; we have another coming up at the end of January, then another in April. Our Association Officers continue to work together diligently towards the common goal of keeping our Association, and our ship, going for many years into the future. Our VP, Jim, is the workhorse at our work parties, with former VP, Mike P, as his right-hand man and our Chief of the Paint Department.

Our Aft Fire/Boiler Room and Aft Engine Room are finally connected! Mike Honsinger, John Hudak, Ernie Doyle, and Harry Stoner had a short-notice Mini-Work party, staying aboard the Laffey 24-30 Sep to accomplish a very important milestone: to open the Aft Engine

Room into the Aft Fire Room. As many of you know, John has been trail bossing this project for 8+ years now. Having the Aft Fire Room open to the public will add an important piece to our museum since it allows us to tell the entire story of how the ship was propelled and energized. Before the two spaces could be joined with an opening that will allow tourists to walk forward (after viewing the Engine Room) we had to relocate two large 480 volt cables that provide shore power from the pier, relocate an electrical unit (the size of a refrigerator), remove an electrical junction box (the size of a microwave oven), remove/relocate dozens of large cables, and lay down decking for the tourists to walk on. Only then could we cut a doorway through a steel bulkhead and associated steel beams. John, Ernie, and Harry did the heavy lifting and dirty work while Mike tried to stay out of the way gathering tools & parts and coordinating with Patriots Point employees. In early October, Patriots Point

brought in a contractor to abate all of the asbestos issues. The next steps are to paint the room, improve the lighting, add barriers to keep the public safe, and add display items. We have come a long way, but still have ways to go before it will be "done".

Our Fall Work party also accomplished a lot! We had several folks arrive Thursday night to prepare to host the USS Mansfield (DD 728) reunion on Friday. We began repairs on Saturday morning and had seven good workdays with cooperative weather 95% of the time. We were about a dozen strong most of the week, with a couple of extra folks on a few days. As some of you know, for no clear reason, the aft bulkheads, just above the main deck, had morphed into a pinkish-grey over the years. Well, you will be happy to learn that the big accomplishment of the week was "No More Pink Laffey"! Here are the highlights of our week: Cleaned, then painted the port, starboard, and aft bulkheads, the top of gun mount 51 (the most

forward of the three big guns), the deck in front of gun mount 51, the port & starboard handrails, and the fire valves. Worked with museum curators to improve and add historical displays, and signage. Removed memorial tree and adjacent sign. Secured safety netting with nylon cord to stanchion cables on all exterior decks. Cleaned out the paint locker and tool room. Swept and vacuumed various public areas. Performed additional clean up from the Sep23 Work party. Please take a look at our website to see the many work party pictures posted there:

<http://www.laffey.org/LaffeyAssoc/WorkPartyPictures.html>

Corrosion, and specifically keeping water out of the interior of the Laffey, is our highest priority mission. As such, our workparties will continue to focus on sealing deck/bulkhead leaks and painting exterior surfaces. Additionally, we are working towards getting the Aft Boiler Room opened up to the public in the next year. We also have plans to refurbish the Gun Director (located just forward of the Signal Bridge), the Aft Crew Head (for viewing purposes only), and the Officers Quarters located between the Wardroom and Gun Mount 52. We could really use some new members at our work parties to help with these big projects, along with chipping away at the long list of miscellaneous ongoing repairs that we have, so please email me if you would like to join us!

The day before we kicked off our 2023 Fall Work party, our Association hosted a reunion for the USS Mansfield Association. See their report on this event at [www.USSMansfield.com](http://www.USSMansfield.com)

Sixteen Mansfield crewmembers arrived at 0830, then, at their request, requested permission to board from Capt. Chip Honsinger, USN (Ret), and were piped aboard the Laffey by Machinist 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Ken McCullough. This made for a fun and interesting kick-off for the 30+ Mansfield family members. Several of our Fall Workparty crewmembers arrived a day early so they could show the Mansfield folks what we have created on the Laffey so far, the areas of the ship that we occupy, and what we are improving for the public to enjoy in the future. The Mansfield folks funded our lunch together in the crews mess area, which gave both groups a chance to get to know each other better. That afternoon, Chip treated all to a Happy Hour on board. It is your President's vision that this was the first of many such opportunities for our former crewmembers to have fun sharing their many years of hard work preserving the Laffey with the former crewmembers of other Sumner ships. There were 58 Sumner class destroyers built and another 12 were built as destroyer minelayers. The Laffey is the only surviving ship in the U.S. of the 70, and is seemingly the only one in the world (29 of them were sold to other navies). So, hosting reunions for sister ships is a great opportunity to not only share what we have built,

but also to recruit some new support for maintaining and improving the Laffey. We received several significant cash donations from the Mansfield crewmembers.

You may recall that in January 2023 I visited Tin Can Sailors DesRon 3 (See <http://www.tincansailorsofgoosecreek.org/>) for their monthly meeting in Goose Creek, just outside of Charleston, and walked away with a \$1000 donation. I visited DesRon 3 again this September and was again presented with another \$1,000.

Regrettably, our Laffey Memorial Tree has left us. The construction for the new resort at Patriots Point began last year and is expected to continue for another five to ten years. The resort itself will not be owned by the Patriots Point Development Authority (PPDA, the entity that owns the museum complex), but the resort will sit on land leased from the PPDA. All of the land-side Patriots Point displays, buildings, and parking lots, as you see them today, will be moved, torn down, or changed. The pier and the Yorktown will remain as is. There is a chance that the Laffey could move to a new position on the pier, but that decision will not be finalized until the Laffey goes to drydock for a short inspection and minor repair trip, which will not take place until at least late 2024 or early 2025. I looked extensively into moving our tree to a new location. The advice from several professional arborists was not to

try to move the tree, particularly knowing that its root ball would have to sit in a box for several years before being replanted. A move attempt would have cost \$3,000 - \$5,000, and was given perhaps a 10% success rate. The tree's survivability potential was hampered by the fact that it had grown at about a thirty degree angle over the years, rather than straight up. We did salvage the trunk of the tree, for a future project of some sort. It is stored in the berthing compartment just forward of the tool room, as is the bronze sign and the galvanized steel sign stand.

After searching for a volunteer webmaster for the last couple of years, and having not been successful at finding one, we have hired a webmaster. Cindy Lee is currently employed as the Executive Director for the Yorktown Association, a position that she has held for a number of years. She often works from her office aboard the Yorktown where she handles the sales from their Association's Ships Store, organizes reunions, and handles all their communication and financial affairs. She has also created, and maintains, the Yorktown Association website. In previous Patriots Point roles, Cindy has worked professionally hands-on the Laffey on a number of historical display projects, to

include the extensive Combat Information Center display that was created a few years ago. Having spent many days aboard our ship, she is very familiar with the Laffey, as well as other naval ships, and is a former Navy wife. She began building our new website a few months ago, carefully moving the many pages of data and photos compiled by Richard Felsing, Jeff Jacobs, and their predecessors. Cindy kindly gave us an incredibly generous price on building and maintaining our website. It is our goal to transition to the newly formatted website later this Spring.

- Mike Honsinger

### **Upcoming Association Events**

#### **Winter Workparty**

Fri 26 Jan - Sat 3 Feb 2024

#### **Spring Workparty**

Fri 12 Apr - Sat 20 Apr 2024

#### **2024 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

The USS Laffey was commissioned on February 8, 1944. In celebration of this, there will be an event during the spring workparty, which also falls on the anniversary of the April 16, 1945 battle.

#### **2024 Reunion**

**Charleston, South Carolina, September 22-25**

To book accommodations for the reunion, please contact Comfort Inn & Suites, Patriots Point, USS Laffey Reunion Reservations at 843-856-8817 or use the link below. The link will 'land' attendees on the group specific page to make a reservation.

<https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/IZ37R8>

If you need to book a reservation for specific room types or dates outside of the group block, please call the hotel directly. Please call the number 843-856-8817 and not the number listed on the Choice Hotels website. They cannot assist you with booking room types or dates outside of the group block.

Contact Jill Michel for more information: reunions@laffey.org

#### **Fall Workparty**

Late Oct 2024, dates TBD

## Current News

### Join us at a Work Party!

Typically, we have three work parties aboard ship each year: Fall, Winter, and Spring. They kick off on a Friday and end the following Saturday, eight days later. All work party crewmembers must be USS Laffey Association members and be at least 18 years of age. There are currently 28 male-only bunks on the Laffey. However, we have begun discussions on making accommodations for women to stay aboard either the Laffey or the Yorktown during work parties. If you are an 18+ year old female that would be willing to contribute a week's work if we were able to provide free bunk space on board, please contact Mike Honsinger to provide your input. Bunks, linens, towels, hearty meals, laundry facilities, parking and access to Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum are all provided free of charge at work parties. If you fly or take the train in, we will pick you up. We spend a good deal of time repairing corroded areas with new metal and paint. In addition, we fix electrical and plumbing issues, as well as improve and maintain the museum displays aboard the ship. Work parties provide a meaningful experience preserving history, are a great opportunity to see the many ship compartments which are typically closed to the public, and also provide an opportunity to meet visitors to the ship. Often multiple Association family members attend together to create a working vacation.

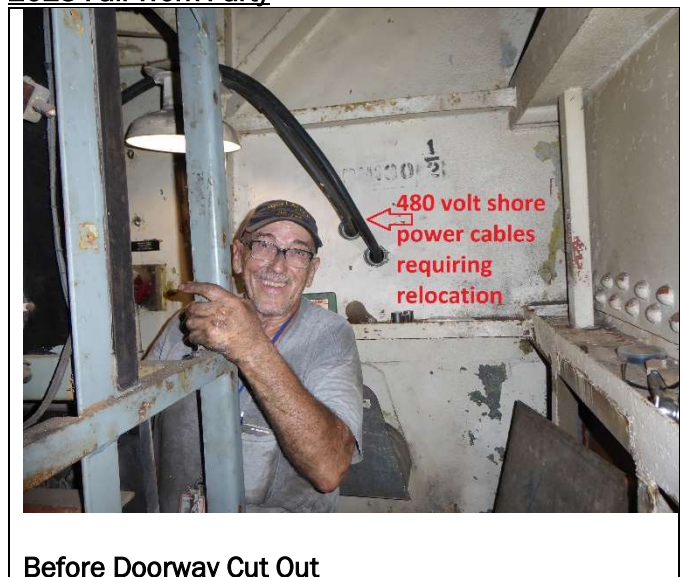
We have shirts and sweatshirts, which are fluorescent green and have wording to clearly identify you as a work party member. They will be given and sold to work party crewmembers in accordance with this policy: If you do not have four serviceable work party T-shirts, we will issue you one free at each work party, until you do have four serviceable T-shirts. During any work party you may purchase unlimited additional T-shirts for \$10 each, or sweatshirts for \$20 each. We also sell Laffey baseball caps for \$10.

The Comfort Inn & Suites Patriots Point provides deeply discounted rates to our members, not only during work parties, but also year-round. For those who serve at our work parties, your Patriots Point security badge not only allows you free access to Patriots Point year-round, but also gives you free

access to nearly 50 tourist activities in the greater Charleston area. The "Reciprocity List" showing these 50 places is posted on our website.

If you have an interest in helping us out during the upcoming Winter or Spring Work parties (26 Jan – 3 Feb and 12 – 20 Apr), please email Mike at [President@Laffey.org](mailto:President@Laffey.org), preferably at least a week in advance. Jim and I have collected an extensive list of projects that we would all like to see addressed in the coming years. For each project, it is our goal to do our best to anticipate the manpower, tools, supplies, permits and financing required so that when our crews show up, we can put everyone to work and keep you busy while you give of your time, energy, and finances to join us. If you can attend a work party, please do your best to commit to specific dates when you will be aboard to eat, sleep and work, then email those commitments to Mike ideally at least a week prior to the work party. Thank you for all the work so many of you have put in over the years to preserve the USS Laffey for America's citizens.

### 2023 Fall Work Party



**Before Doorway Cut Out**





After Doorway Cut Out



John Hudak watching Ernie Doyle Cut the Doorway

Taps for Fallen Shipmates



<http://www.laffey.org/Shipmates/TapsToHonorFallenShipmates.pdf>

**Chief Radioman CRM Jack Najork Plankowner**  
 Jack Najork was Chief Radio Man on the ship during D-Day and the Battle of Okinawa. He passed away in August of 2021. His son, Chris, and Chris' family recently visited Charleston and Mike Honsinger set up a tour for them of the USS Laffey. Chris provided the following pictures of his father.



John Hudak Surveying the Doorway Cut



CRM Jack Najork  
1945



Najork Family in USS Laffey  
Radio Room at Patriots Point

**Patrick Striplin  
GM3**

Passed away on January 26, 2024 due to complications from dementia which has been plaguing him for several years. He will



be buried in Wellington Cemetery in Florida. Pat attended many Laffey Association work parties and reunions. He served on the USS Laffey from 1967 – 1970. He described his work as Gunners Mate on the 5" 38 gun mount. You can find it and other Laffey videos at the following link:

[http://www.eugeneleeslover.com/VIDEOS/USS\\_Laffey\\_Tour.html](http://www.eugeneleeslover.com/VIDEOS/USS_Laffey_Tour.html)

**Robert Klimesh EM2**



Robert Klimesh, age 89, of Fort Atkinson, IA, passed away Wednesday, September 6, 2023, at Saint Mary's hospital in Rochester, MN surrounded by his family. Robert was an electrician

aboard USS Laffey (1952-1955). He was a mechanic at the Klimesh Ford Dealer in Calmar, Iowa for 42 years. In October 2022 Robert attended the USS Laffey Reunion with 15 family members at Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum Mt Pleasant, SC.

**Georgia Watson**

Although not a shipmate, we would also like to recognize the loss of Georgia Watson, wife of Donnie Watson. She passed away Tuesday, January 2, 2024. She was a good friend to many and will be missed. Please say a prayer for Don and his family.

**Who's Who at Patriots Point?**

Patriots Point Development Authority (PPDA) is the entity that owns the Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum complex: [www.PatriotsPoint.org](http://www.PatriotsPoint.org)

The Yorktown Foundation ( <http://www.ussyorktownfoundation.org/> ) and the Patriots Point Foundation ( <http://www.patriotspointfoundation.org/> ) both provide funding for projects at the Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum.

The Yorktown Association ( [www.USSYorktown.org](http://www.USSYorktown.org) ) is the equivalent of our Association, for former crewmembers of the USS Yorktown.

**Access to Locked Chiefs Quarters**

We now have a lockbox bolted to the wall just outside our galley. In it is a tethered key to access the galley, where the rest of our keys are in another combo lockbox. We limit the distribution of these combinations to limit the number of folks with access to the Chiefs Quarters, outside of work party timeframes. If you require access to the Chiefs Quarters, please call President Mike (281-923-4969) or VP Jim (484-824-1117) to obtain the lock combination(s).

**Update Your Contact Information**

We would like to begin adding cell phone numbers to our membership database, particularly if you will be attending any of our work parties. You can check the accuracy of most of the data we have on file for you by taking a look at <https://www.laffey.org/LaffeyAssoc/LaffeyAssocMembersWeb.pdf>. To provide corrections, verify your home phone or email address on file, or to add your cell phone, please contact Joyce Hanau at [membership@laffey.org](mailto:membership@laffey.org) or 347-439-2452.

**Annual Dues Reminder from Membership Chairperson  
Joyce Hanau.**

Annual dues are payable the 1st of each year. There are quite a few members that have not paid their dues for a year or two. These funds are essential to our operation, please send your dues promptly.

You may mail your check to: Joyce Hanau 1956 Lincoln Avenue East Meadow, NY 11554 347-439-2452 email [membership@laffey.org](mailto:membership@laffey.org)

You may also pay using PayPal. Click on the PayPal icon on the USS Laffey home page [www.laffey.org](http://www.laffey.org). Be sure to include your name and the words "Annual Dues".

Annual members (renews every January 1st regardless of when you join): \$25/year. Life membership (one-time payment): 55 years old and younger \$375; 56 to 60 \$250; 61 to 64 \$225; 65 and older \$125

Thanks! Joyce

### Donations from Treasurer George Kessler

We spend about \$800 - \$1000 per workparty for food, paper goods, and cleaning supplies. That works out to about one man-hour of work on our ship for every dollar spent. Pretty good, eh? We also spend about \$2,000 per year on tools and supplies.

All donations are greatly appreciated. Anyone wishing to make a donation, should make the check payable to the USS Laffey Association and mail to

George Kessler  
9686 Baughman Rd  
Harrison, Ohio 45030

You may also make a donation on PayPal. On the <http://www.laffey.org/>, tap on the PayPal icon at the bottom of the page. Enter the donation amount and comments, e.g. In Memory of.....

### **Memorial Donations:**

In Memory of Ralph R.Doll

Frank Doll (son) ----- \$50.00

In Honor of Jack Najork

Chris Najork (son) & family ---- \$1000.00

In Honor of Al Cornwell (father)

George Cornwell (uncle)

Junior Cornwell (uncle)

Betrand Cornwell (uncle)

All WWII Vets

Jay Cornwell ----- \$500.00

In Honor of the USS Lloyd Thomas

DD-764 and in recognition of Gene

Slover's US Navy Pages

Scott S. Sheffer ----- \$ 75.00

### **General Donations:**

L.C. Mills ----- \$500.00

Tin Can Sailors of Goose Creek ---- \$500.00

Pamela Evans ----- \$ 20.00

USS Mansfield DD-728 Assoc.----- \$600.00

Leonard Singleton ----- \$100.00

Randy & Faye Smith ----- \$100.00

Mike & Jan Backlund ----- \$100.00

Briana Hirth ----- \$ 25.00

### **Work Party Donations:**

William & Linda Townsend ----- \$ 250.00

Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum

Foundation ----- \$3000.00

### USS Laffey Website [www.laffey.org](http://www.laffey.org)

Send inputs to Richard Felsing

[webmaster@laffey.org](mailto:webmaster@laffey.org)

843-367-2208.

### Laffey News

As you know, Pam does a great job keeping us all connected via our newsletter. We have now reduced the number of annual newsletters to only two, rather than quarterly, as we had been doing in the past, one after the Fall Work party and the other after the Spring Work party. In recent years our annual cost to publish and mail hardcopy newsletters has cost us about the same (\$1,000 +/-) as it does to feed an entire work party. Because your officers feel that our money is better spent on work parties, beginning this year, we will only mail hardcopy newsletters to former Laffey crewmembers. All other members of the Association will only receive newsletters via email or our website. Please keep your email address current by sending your info to [membership@laffey.org](mailto:membership@laffey.org), or call or text Joyce Hanau, Membership Chairperson, at 347-439-2452.

Send inputs or comments to Pam Barylski Newsletter

Editor [newsletter@laffey.org](mailto:newsletter@laffey.org)

Currently we are publishing the Laffey News on the website <http://www.laffey.org/> Tap on Laffey News at the bottom of the page.



USS Laffey DD724 Association  
Pamela Barylski, Editor  
1476 Remsing Street  
Hartland, MI 48353

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