

In Memory of Aristides Stephanos Phoutrides

Aug. 9, 1925 - June 7, 2018

www.laffey.org Shipmates

Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum Video In Memoriam:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3mxNeEhAkA>



1943

2017

Ari Phoutrides as we all knew him was a USS Laffey DD-724 Plankowner, Past President of the USS Laffey Association, Webmaster USS Laffey Association, and frequent participant in the Laffey Association Reunions and Workparties. His immense contribution to the USS Laffey and to the USS Laffey Association are beyond words.

Ari was born in Seattle Aug. 9, 1925. He was the youngest child of Reverend Stephanos and Presbyteria Calliope Phoutrides. His father was a priest at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church and, later, at the Church of the Assumption in Seattle. At 16, Aristides graduated from Broadway High School in Seattle and was admitted to Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

World War II on USS Laffey DD-724

In World War II at the age of 17, Ari entered the U.S. Navy. He went to Quartermaster School then reported aboard USS Laffey (DD-724) commissioned 8 February 1944. At the time, Laffey was the finest, most capable destroyer in the world. He felt immense pride and anticipation for the future. Everything was new. As quartermaster, Ari had to ensure the ship's navigation charts were aboard, available, and up-to-date. When orders came to proceed east to England, it was with great excitement, anticipation, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. Quartermasters must ensure all navigation charts and instruments were ready for voyage. Once the order "cast off all lines", Captain Becton, the Officer of the Deck, the Navigator, and the quartermaster are focused on the safety of the ship and the crew heading for "open ocean".



USS Laffey Launching 1943



USS Laffey Before Commissioning 1943

World War II D-Day Invasion of Normandy

Aboard Laffey, Ari participated in the Allied Invasion at Normandy beaches providing escort and shore bombardment. Depiction of the battle below. Ari spoke of the D-Day Invasion. The immense number of ships. The sight of damaged ships. The closeness to the shore. Firing on the German positions. The Laffey was so close that they could see flashes from German guns. The Laffey fired and fired their 5" guns then returned to England for more ammunition. Ari spoke of the 8" German shell that hit the Laffey but did not explode. Ari spoke of shells exploding close to the ship. He spoke of his respect, admiration, and gratitude for Captain Beckton.



World War II Battle of Okinawa

Laffey proceeded to the area near Okinawa to support ground force landings. On 16 April 1945, Laffey was on radar picket station 1 about 30 mi north of Okinawa and joined in repulsing Japanese air attacks but badly damaged. The Laffey withstood the most unrelenting kamikaze air attacks in history and earned the nickname "The Ship that Would Not Die." Ari's battle station was on the bridge with Captain Becton, Officer of the Deck, helmsmen, etc. Ari spoke of Battle of Okinawa and the relentless kamikaze and bomber attacks. He spoke of seeing a Japanese plane heading directly at the Bridge and yelling for gunners to engage the plane. They shot the plane down. He spoke of how Captain Becton told him to go aft to check on the damage. He saw the death, destruction, and mayhem of the attacks. He saw the gallantry, bravery, and selflessness of the Laffey gunners and fire fighting crews. He spoke of his pain and sorrow for the death of Laffey crewmembers. He spoke of his grief for the Navigator Ensign Thomsen who died assisting the fire fighting crews. He spoke of the heroism of crewmembers drilling a hole in a bulkhead to run an air hose into a smoke filled compartment. He recalled a seriously wounded shipmate requesting to hold the American flag before he died. He clearly spoke of April 16, 1943 as if it were yesterday. While he spoke of the horrors of war, he miraculously was able to positively look to the future. When asked, Ari would always answer questions and recall his memories of April 16, 1945. Ari knew first-hand the sacrifices others had made to enable his safe return from the war.



After the battle, Laffey proceeded for repairs in Seattle. Ari spoke of the joy of returning to the United States. He recalled the astonishment of visitors seeing the devastation of the battle. Visitors praised the men of the Laffey for their courage, persistence, and patriotism. He visited Ensign's Robert Clarence Thomsen mother. He said "One of the hardest things I've ever done was to visit Ensign Thomsen mother to tell her of her son's courage, bravery, and sacrifice." After repairs, Laffey resumed US Navy duties.



Ari, Charles Weygandt, Hans Walker, unknown



Ari, Cdr Waters, Lt Runk 1946

After the war, Ari resumed his studies at University of Washington graduating with a degree in Chemical Engineering. On Aug. 27, 1949, he married Betty Demas of Portland and had three children, Stephen, Elaine and Cynthia. Betty frequently came to reunions with Ari. Stephen, Elaine's husband Dana Banks and Dana's brother Paul Banks came to workparties.

USS Laffey Association Officer

As an early member of the Laffey Association in the late 1960's and 1970's, Ari worked to find his old shipmates. He worked to preserve the Laffey as a national monument after the Laffey decommissioning in 1975. He distributed early Laffey News. Early in the history of the USS Laffey Association, Ari was the 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."



2017 USS Laffey Association Current & Past Presidents: Chris Kirhagis, Sonny Walker, Bob Langevin, Ari

USS Laffey Association Reunions

Ari and his wife Betty frequently attended the annual USS Laffey Association Reunion. They were always cheerful, gracious, and fun loving.



1981 Laffey Association Reunion Admiral Becton Middle, Ari 3rd Row Middle.



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



Betty and Ari Phoutrides at
2001 Reunion in Las Vegas



Ari and Betty at the 2005 Laffey Reunion

2003 Laffey Association Reunion in Portland Maine

The 2003 Reunion was special because it brought together veterans from multiple military campaigns including War War II, Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Cold War. This was a special reunion with a trip to Bath Iron Works where USS Laffey was built and commissioned in 1944.



2003 Laffey Association Board of Directors: Left to right. Back row: Francis Lasala, Pete Lacore, Don Vorgity, Sonny Walker, Jim Spriggs, John Langevin Seated: Julie Becton, Ari Phoutrides. Missing: Al Csiszar, Joe Folino



2003 Reunion Plankowners: Glen Radder, Danny Essig, Jim Spriggs, Ari, Bob "Scoop" Powell



2003 Reunion: WWII Veterans with Ari in back row.



2003 Reunion: Veterans of the Korean Emergency



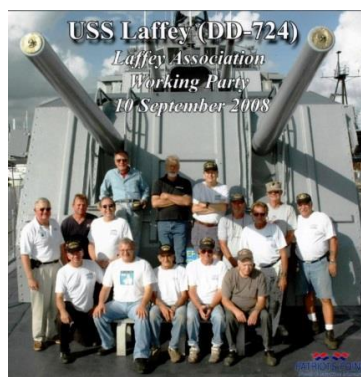
2003 Reunion: Veterans of the Cuban Missile Crisis

USS Laffey Association Workparties

Ari frequently participated in the workparties. It was a marvel to see 90 year old Ari chipping, scraping, and painting at the April 2017 workparty. At workparties, Ari was a celebrity. Visitors would view the movie, then see Ari working on the ship. They would ask “Was that you in the movie? Were you really on the ship in 1945? Were you terribly frightened? Ari would always smile and answer their questions. The most touching moments were visitors recalling a loved one who was lost in the war. Tearful, emotional comments like “My grandfather died in War War II, thank you for your service.”



2001 Fall Workparty



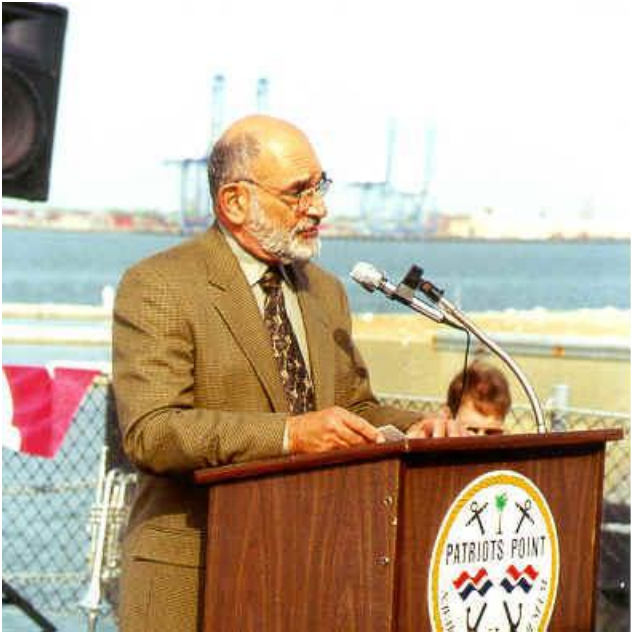
2008 Workparty: Steve Phoudrides Seated 2nd to Left, Ari seated in middle



2017 Workparty Richard Felsing, Son in Law Dana, Ari, Son Steve

USS Laffey Association Memorial Services

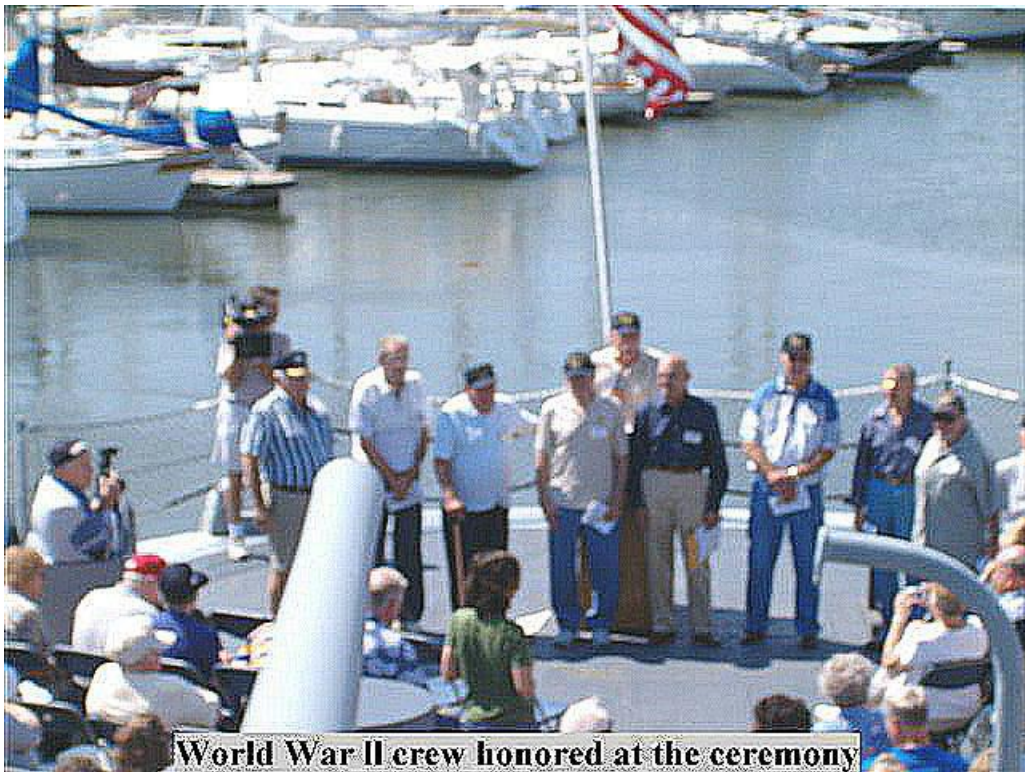
Ari frequently lead the April 16th Memorial Service for the USS Laffey fallen shipmates. At this solemn ceremony, the names of the 32 shipmates who sacrificed their lives on April 16, 1945 were read. Ari worked to keep their memories alive and to express gratitude for their service to the country.



USS Laffey Association President 2000 at Memorial Service Aboard USS Laffey



2006 Reunion Memorial Service



World War II crew honored at the ceremony

2006 Reunion Ari on right side of photo.



2014 Plaque In Memory of the Men on the USS Laffey DD-724

One of Ari's last communications with Association members was on 5 June 2017 in commemoration of the D Invasion. "On this day, when we remember the events that unfolded on June 6, 1944. I wish to salute all of those who are not with us and those who have been involved with the restoration and maintenance of our beautiful ship. Putting out to sea with you guys would be a great experience. Again, my thanks to all of you. Ari". The USS Laffey Association will commemorate Ari's life, contributions, and service at the Association Reunion Sept. 30 - Thursday Oct. 4, 2018.

Tributes to Ari Phoutrides

Chris Kirhagis, President USS Laffey Association

I have the greatest respect for Ari. He was the star and hero of the USS Laffey Association. Ari and I both had a Greek heritage. We always greeted each other and spoke a little Greek together. With this common heritage we had a special bond. Sitting in Chief's Quarters, we loved his stories of, USS Laffey, his family, and his Greek heritage. He was gentleman's gentleman worthy of our deepest respect.

Sonny Walker, Past President USS Laffey Association

This is the saddest of all.

Our leader and mentor has passed away.

Ari Phoutrides has gone to meet his maker and join his shipmates.

Ari was the gentleman of all gentlemen. He taught us all how to act like men and do our jobs. I can't say enough about him right now as it is too difficult.

If you never met Ari, you missed a true legend in our time.

Hilary Becton Wagner, Secretary USS Laffey Association

He was an amazing man. He served under my father, Julian Becton, on April 16, 1945. They became best friends. Rest in peace my friend and enjoy eternity with Jesus and your shipmates.

Richard Felsing, Webmaster USS Laffey Association

I have deep sadness on Ari's passing. He was man of courage, patriotism, love, and courtesy. Working with Ari on the USS Laffey Association website (www.laffey.org), I learned the value of dedication, helpfulness, and good spirits. He set a wonderful example of optimism, smiles and laughter. I say to myself "If I can be as positive and frequently laugh like Ari, I will extend my life". Ari created the website from an idea to an immense website with over a thousand pages, documents, pictures, videos, etc. He scanned an immense number of old photos, documents, newsletters, and cruise books. He meticulously linked everything together. We salute US Navy Quartermaster and Officer Aristides Phoutrides. We offer "Bravo Zulu" – underway signal flags meaning "Well Done".

Jeff Jacobs, President Patriots Point Foundation

Anyone who met Ari Phoutrides was immediately drawn to him because he was so humble, unassuming and amiable. For someone who lived through both Normandy and Okinawa, he was remarkably at ease with it and welcomed the opportunity to talk of his shipmates and their bravery and accomplishments without a mention of himself. Ari, or Pappou, as he was known, was everyone's grandfather, a man who lived a full life and shared his feelings for his beloved Laffey and shipmates with everyone whom he met. He was a hero in every sense of the word, yet never accepted that characterization of himself, saving it for his shipmates who perished in Okinawa. There are precious few men like Ari Phoutrides whom you get a chance to meet in your lifetime. Ari will be long remembered for his bravery, class and love of all things Laffey. Our lives are forever enriched having met him.

Obituary in the Portland Oregonian

Aristides Stephanos Phoutrides succinctly and accurately, described himself as "an imperfect man who loved his entire family, his church, his country, his ship and shipmates, and cherished his friends."

Aristides was born in Seattle Aug. 9, 1925. He was the youngest child of Reverend Stephanos and Presbyteria Calliope Phoutrides. His father was a priest at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church and, later, at the Church of the Assumption in Seattle. At 16, Aristides graduated from Broadway High School in Seattle and was admitted to Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

World War II intervened, and at 17, he entered the U.S. Navy. His combat experiences on the USS Laffey—both at Utah Beach and Okinawa—were formative. During the battle of Okinawa, the Laffey withstood the most unrelenting kamikaze air attacks in history and earned the

nickname "The Ship that Would Not Die." He knew first-hand the sacrifices others had made to enable his safe return from the war.

After the war, he resumed his studies at University of Washington graduating with a degree in Chemical Engineering. On Aug. 27, 1949, he married Betty Demas of Portland. Their family includes three children, Stephen and his wife Kathy, Elaine and her husband Dana, Cynthia and her spouse Paula; six grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Aristides had a long and rich retirement fueled by boundless energy. Dedicated to his church and his ship, he volunteered for many years in service to the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Portland. He was a proud, past-president of the USS Laffey Association and a regular volunteer at Patriots Point in South Carolina where the Laffey—now a National Historic Landmark—is preserved as a museum ship. With the keen and exacting mind of an engineer, he embraced computer technology; became an avid, meticulous gardener and traveled extensively across the world.

As Pappou, he was beloved by his family and his many friends. They, in turn, were embraced by his love, buoyed by his unwavering support and graced by his generosity of spirit. He died peacefully at his home, surrounded by family June 7, 2018.

A funeral will be held at 11 a.m., Tuesday, June 12, 2018, at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, 3131 N.E. Glisan St.

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/legacyremembers/aristides-phoutrides-obituary?id=16757802>

Send remembrances and tributes to webmaster@laffey.org.