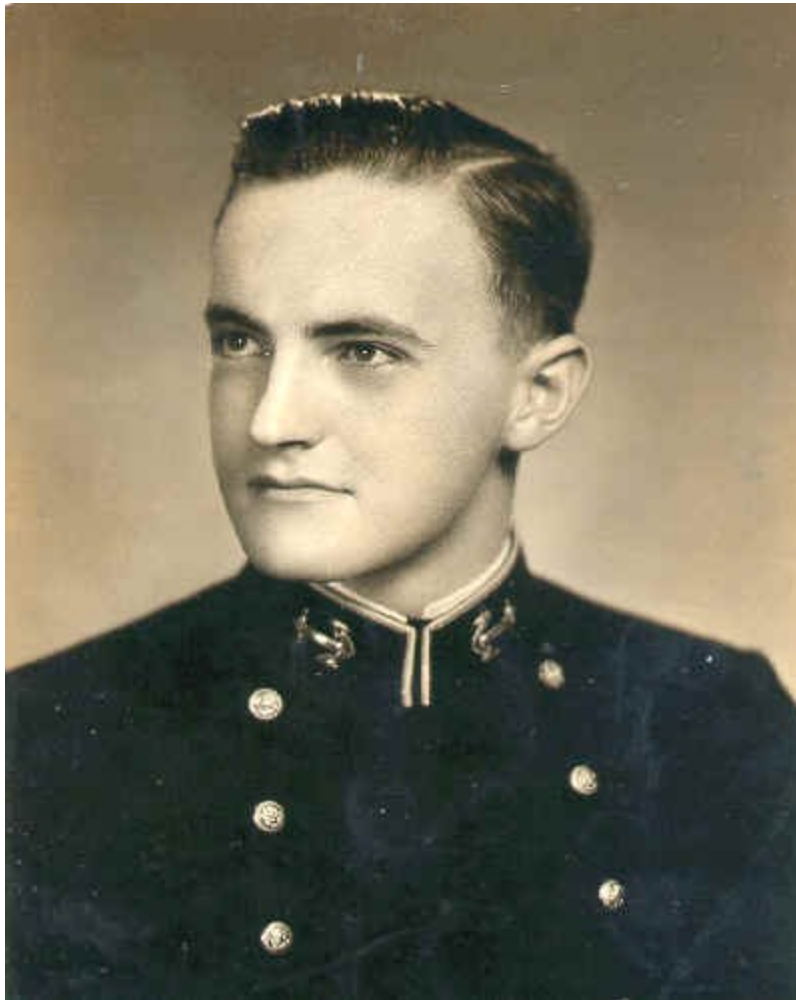


Ensign Robert Clarence Thomsen

1923 - 1945

Died April 16, 1945. Recipient of Navy Cross. In terms of US Navy Award precedence, the Navy Cross Metal is right below the Metal of Honor which is the highest US Navy award. Commander Becton, Ensign Thomsen, and Lt Runk received the Navy Cross Metal for their heroism on the USS Laffey.



Robert Clarence Thomsen

1923 - 1945

US Navy – Navy Cross

https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/ROBERT_C._THOMSEN,_ENS,_USN

<https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/21144>



THOMSEN, Robert Clarence Ens., USN 3900066

USS LAFFEY Okinawa

Recommended for NAVY CROSS (Post) by CO, USS LAFFEY File DD724/P15
CONFIDENTIAL Serial 031 dtd 5-10-45. CinCPac Ser. 033361. Rec'd.Bd.D&M 10-
11-45.

Awarded: NAVY CROSS (Post) 18 Oct. 1945 Bd.Awds.Mtg.P:

Approved: 31 Oct. 1945 SecNav.

"Ensign Thomsen, Navigator, served as assistant evaluator in C.I.C. during this action, performing his duties in a superior manner. After radars were put out of action two direct hits on the mast and his services were no longer required, he proceeded aft to assist in fighting fires that were raging as a result of two suicide crashes and a bomb hit. He fearlessly led a fire hose into the smoke and flame of Compartment C-204-

LM, where fires were threatening to set off ammunition in 5" mount 3 upper handling room and in the after 5" magazine. There he met his death when two suicide planes crashed near him. Although his primary duties were in C.I.C., he unhesitatingly risked, and lost, his life when he realized the urgency of the situation which threatened destruction of his ship. His conduct was exemplary and a source of inspiration to those who carried on the fight to save the ship, for which he had given his life."





This is a picture of Compartment C-204-LM showing the upper handling room to Mt. 53. It was in this area that Ensign Thomsen fought the fires.



Ensign Thomsen by Ari Phoutrides

Robert C. Thomsen was born in Culbertson, Montana to Jens and Dagmar Thomsen on April 9, 1923. They moved to Portland, Oregon in 1924. Bob had 2 younger brothers, Bill who served in the Marine Corps and Thomas (Fred) who served the Navy.

He attended Kenton grade school, and graduated from Jefferson High School in 1941 with honors. Upon graduation, he received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy from U.S.

Representative Homer D. Angel and reported to the academy that fall. Although scheduled for graduation in the class of 1945, because of the war, he was graduated in 1944. He joined the Laffey in Pearl Harbor during the month of August 1944.

Bob's general quarter's station was in the Combat Information Center. At the height of the attack, he volunteered to fight fires that had spread below decks in the after part of the ship. While attempting to put out these fires, 2 more kamikazes hit the ship above the compartment in which he and others were attempting to put out the fire. He was awarded the Navy Cross posthumously for his actions.

On a personal note. I saw Bob for the first time in Hawaii as he approached the ship to report for duty. He was a tall, lanky young man. One would never suspect that he was an Annapolis graduate. In fact, I do not remember him ever mentioning it. He certainly did not act the role of an Annapolis man as we pictured it in our minds.

His primary duty was that of Navigator and it did not take us long to realize his proficiency in this field. He was a quiet, intense, competent and unassuming officer who, for relaxation, took to reading and smoking an occasional cigar in the chart room. Had it not been for his heroic actions, I am certain the ship would have sunk and the loss of life would have been extremely high.

***First Memorial Services held for those who lost their lives on
April 16, 1945***

Courtesy and Comments by Ari Phoutrides

Services were held on May 31, 1945 at Pier 1 where the ship had been placed on display to the public. Of the relatives shown, the only people I recognize and remember are the three persons on the extreme right hand side of the picture - Mr. and Mrs. Jens Thomsen and their son Fred.

They were the family of Ensign Robert Thomsen, our Navigator.

Relatives at Laffey Rites



RELATIVES of four men who died on the Laffey are shown at memorial services yesterday on board the destroyer.

The Laffey Memorial service, held on the fantail of the destroyer, where the entire ship's crew was lined up, opened with a solo by Storekeeper 3/C Emil Lundgren, accompanied by Specialist 2/C James Watt.

Then Captain Forsander delivered his eulogy after first reading the prayer that was recited at Okinawa, off which island the destroyer received her all but mortal wounds.

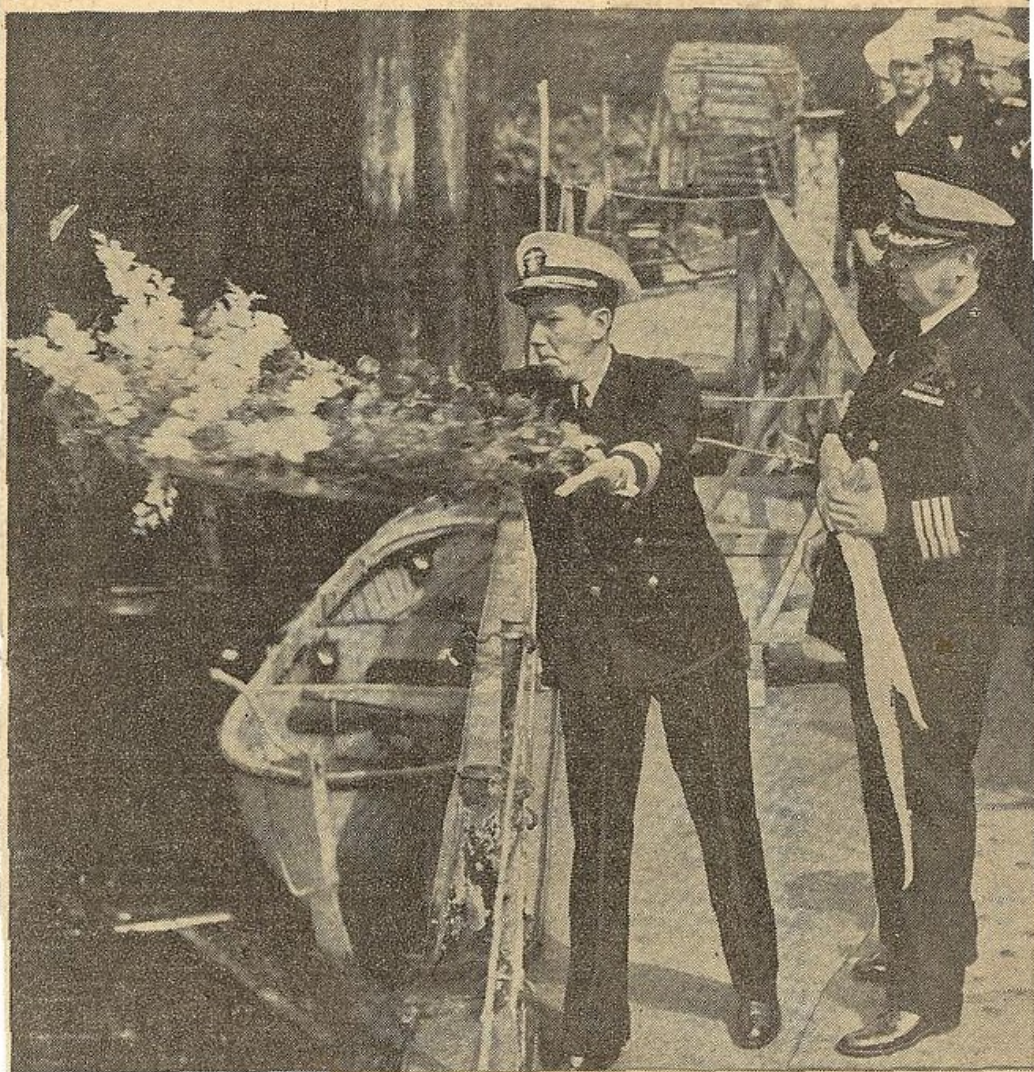
Comdr. Frederick J. Becton introduced the guests of honor and then, after a memorial prayer by Captain Forsander, he and the chaplain tossed a memorial wreath overboard. The brief rites concluded with the firing of volleys by a detachment of marines and the sounding of taps.

The Gold Star guests included Mr. and Mrs. Jens Thomsen of Portland, whose son, Ens. Robert C. Thomsen, was one of the three officers killed on the ship, with Fred Thomsen, brother, and Mr. and Mrs. T. Thomsen, uncle and aunt; Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Ondracek, parents, and Mrs. W. C. Ragan, sister of Torpedoman 2/C Jack Harris Ondracek, who died in his gun straps; Mrs. Frances Hallas, wife, and Mrs. Joseph Hallas, mother of Fireman 1/C Francis Ray Hallas of Struthers, O., and Mr. and Mrs. William Heyes, parents, and Mrs. Harry Bruemer, sister of Baker William E. Heyes of Bellingham. The Heyes party was accompanied by two uncles and two aunts from Bellingham, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Pederson and Mr. and Mrs. P. M. Hanson.

The recently bereaved visitors stood proudly during the memorial services, with only occasional tear, but many had broken down before when they were taken through the ship and shown just where their loved ones had died.

"I'd rather have been back in the Western Pacific than where I was right then," observed a young officer who had acted as a guide for some of them.

Wreath for the Laffey's Slain



CMDR. FREDERICK J. BECTON, commanding officer of the destroyer, consigning a wreath to the sea from the war-torn U. S. S. Laffey. **Capt. J. P. Forsander**, senior chaplain of the 13th Naval District, looks on, standing in front of members of ship's crew. —(Post-Intelligencer Photo).

Notes on the Memorial Service held on board the USS Laffey (DD 724) by Ari Phoutrides

Seattle, Washington

May 30, 1945

These notes were found recently by my niece.(Stephanie Stafford). They were made by my father, a priest in the Eastern Orthodox Church who was present at this service. I remember him as always retaining copious notes.

He used an extremely fine pen and for this reason, at times, his handwriting was difficult to read. For this reason, I have retyped his notes in text that is readable to all.

I do not remember all of the details, but it appears that in a portion of this memorial service, emphasis was placed on those who had lived in the immediate area (Washington and Oregon).

Memorial Service
on the U.S.S. Caffey
Comdr. Frederick Julian Beeton
Capt. J. P. Fossowder, Senior
Chaplain of the 13th Naval District
Wed. May 30, 1945

Honored Dead
Ens. Robert C. Thomsen

Present Relatives
Mr. Mrs. Jens Thomsen of Portland
parents
Fred Thomsen, brother
Mr. Mrs. T. Thomsen,
uncle and aunt.

Jack Harris Oudranch,
torpedoman 2/c
(discharged gun straps)

Mr. Mrs. J. G. Oudranch,
parents
Mrs. W. C. Rogan,
sister.

Francis Roy Hattas
Fireman 1/c, of
Struthers, O.

Mrs. Frances Hattas,
wife.
Mrs. Joseph Hattas,
mother.

Baller William E. Hayes
of Bellingham

Mr. Mrs. William Hayes,
parents
Mrs. Harry Bruemmer,
sister.
Mr. Mrs. Joe Pederson
Mr. Mrs. P. M. Hanson
of Bellingham
uncles & parents.

Memorial Ensign Robert Clarence Thomsen



BIRTH 9 Apr 1923 Culbertson, Roosevelt County, Montana, USA

DEATH 16 Apr 1945 (aged 22) At Sea

BURIAL River View Cemetery, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, USA

PLOT Sec 122, Lot 556, Grave 3

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/70529559/robert-clarence-thomsen>

For corrections or updates, contact President, USS Laffey Association
president@laffey.org and webmaster@laffey.org