

Lt Paul B. Smith USS Laffey Gunnery Officer in Battle of Okinawa

Served on board USS Laffey (DD724) 2/44 - 6/45
Passed away on April 16, 2004



Lt Paul B. Smith 1944



Captain Paul B. Smith (US Navy
Retired)



Lt Smith's Battle Station Gun Director Directly Above the Bridge. Lt Smith was awarded the US Navy Silver Star for heroism, bravery and gallantry during WW II especially during the April 16, 1945 Battle of Okinawa.

ATLANTA

Paul B. Smith, 85, WWII hero

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World War II sailors call the USS Laffey "the ship that would not die," referring to the Navy destroyer's April 15, 1945, struggle for survival against 22 Japanese fighters and dive bombers north of Okinawa. Much of the credit for keeping the vessel from being sunk that day goes to Paul B. Smith of Atlanta.

For 80 harrowing minutes, the Laffey took a pounding. Five kamikaze pilots crashed into the ship, and several other enemy pilots scored hits with their bombs.

Thirty-three Laffey crew members were killed and more than 60 were wounded.

Yet throughout the ordeal, the Laffey's guns, under the command of then-Lt. Smith, kept firing, shooting down 11 enemy planes in the process, one of which was bearing down on the ship's bridge.

He was later awarded the Silver Star for his gallantry and skill that day. In a March 1989 article about heroes in the U.S. Naval Institute's journal, "Proceedings," the Laffey's skipper, Capt. Julian Becton, singled out Mr. Smith as his personal choice for averting disaster during the kamikaze attack.

Mr. Smith continued his Navy career, doing postgraduate work at the Naval Academy and George Washington University. During the Vietnam War, he commanded a ship repair facility on Guam and earned a Legion of Merit award for its efficiency. He retired in 1973 at the rank of captain.

The memorial service for

Mr. Smith, 85, of Atlanta is 10:30 a.m. Saturday at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church. He died April 16 of a cerebral hemorrhage at Emory University Hospital. The body was cremated. Lowndes & McLane Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Settling in Atlanta, he sold residential real estate for a time and concentrated on Rotary and church activities.

"Paul was good-humored, supportive, generous and involved in practically everything at St. Bart's," said fellow parishioner Ed Willingham of Atlanta.

"Dad did a lot of carpentry work in connection with the church, often helping out with St. Bart's projects to rehab houses in Summerhill and East Atlanta and putting up booths annually for St. Bart's medieval fairs. He would dress up as a monk each year and sell beer at the refreshment stand," said his daughter, Marcia Anderson of Fairfax, Va.

Golf was a favorite pastime. "Paul and his son-in-law, retired Marine Maj. Gen. Joe Anderson, consistently won prizes at the Naval Academy's alumni golf tournaments at Quantico, Va. Paul had a fine all-around game, but his iron play was especially good," said an Annapolis classmate, Norman Nash of Alexandria, Va.

Survivors include his wife, Jean Smith; three sons, Jim Smith of Columbia, Paul Smith Jr. of Atlanta and Stephen Smith of Bellevue, Neb.; nine grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

**March 1989 Edition of the Naval Institute Proceedings
“Do You Have a Hero” on Captain Paul B. Smith, U.S. Navy
(Retired).**

The skipper of the Laffey 724 in 1945, Captain F. Julian Becton, U.S. Navy (Retired), points to his gunnery officer then a lieutenant, who had trained his gun crews so well that they performed flawlessly throughout an 80 minute attack by 22 kamikazes.

“The five-inch gunners shot down three of the first four planes and combined with other ships to splash the fourth. The 40-mm and the 20-mm gunners shot down the next four planes. The ninth kamikaze struck amidships and fires in the vicinity of the 40-mm gun mounts. Two more planes both packing bombs crashed into and wrecked the after five inch mounts; two more crashed into the adjacent after deckhouse; and another dropped a bomb on the ship’s stern.

Near the end of the action, a plane came in on the starboard beam. Lieutenant Smith, in the gun director above the bridge, noticed his gunners at five inch mount #52 were aiming too low and cranked in an “up 50 yards” spot to elevate the guns slightly. The next salvo destroyed plane 1,000 yards from the ship. By this quick action Lieutenant Smith averted disaster, and today the Laffey is still float as a museum ship.” Frederick Julian Becton”

Paul B Smith and Jean Smith Family



Jean Smith (Left) with Lt Paul B. Smith Picture and Pat Runk with Lt Ted Runk Picture about 1944



Jim Smith Son of Paul and Jean Smith about 1945

Both Lt Smith and Lt Runk were plankowners on the commissioning crew. Pat and Jean roomed together while their husbands were deployed during WWII. They remained best friends after the war. For their heroism in WWII Lt Smith received the Silver Star Award and Lt Runk received the Navy Cross Award. Both continued their service in the US Navy retiring as Captains. Capt Runk died in 1990 and Pat Runk died in 2001.

In 2021 Jean Smith age 103 widow of Lt Paul B. Smith sent a beautiful letter to Kathy Pereira Membership Chairperson. Lt Paul B. Smith was the Gunnery Officer during WWII. She recalls attending the Laffey's commissioning ceremony on 8

February 1944 in Boston, Massachusetts. She recalls her anxiety and fear during the wartime years with their infant son.

Jean Smith

May 25th - 2021

Dear Kathy, —

I have decided to apply for a lifetime membership to the USS Laffey Association. It is time - as I am nearing 104 years in March.

The USS Laffey has been a deciding factor in my life as I followed my husband, Lt Paul B Smith to Bath, Maine that cold January in 1943. I sat behind the skipper's wife at the commissioning ceremony in April. Always remembering the cherries on her hat. I followed the ship to Boston on her "shake down" cruise. Then headed back home to Atlanta with our 9 month old "Skippy" to wait out the war in the Pacific. A year of anxiety, fear, few letters, and fewer hints as to the Laffey's participation in the series of battles there.

New finally came of the disastrous battle of Okinawa!
Luckily, Lt. Smith, survived the carnage and was on his way
to Georgia 6 weeks later. The memory of that day never
left our memories. Our hearts are always with the families
with the lost loved ones - and we continued to watch over the
the ship as she was re-built.

Later - our grandson was instrumental in having the ship
repaired for further service at Patriots Point. On visits there we
proudly show our friends the "Story of Okinawa"

My congratulations and praise go to all those "giving"
people who spend time and talents to keep that great ship
in the forefront. -

And, I thank you, Kathy, for taking up the leadership of
keeping us all informed.

- fondly - Joan Smith

you will please forgive the errors in penmanship, etc. in this note. Somehow
the pen is faster than the brain!

From Chris Kirhagis President, USS Laffey Association June 2021 - Jean, we greatly appreciate your wonderful support for the USS Laffey Association. We are touched by your thoughtfulness and memories. We honor Lt Smith's service and heroism. We greatly appreciate the support of your son Lt James E. "Jim" Smith, grandson James E. Smith, Jr and other family members for the USS Laffey Association. Chris Kirhagis President, USS Laffey Association

Sadly, Jean Smith passed away on 24 August 2021. We are honored Jean communicated with us with a touching handwritten letter.

Awards for Captain Paul B. Smith

<https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/56463>

Paul Bridges Smith

DATE OF BIRTH: December 8, 1918

HOME OF RECORD:

Olean, New York

Paul Smith graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Class of 1942. He retired as a U.S. Navy Captain.

AWARDS BY DATE OF ACTION: 1 of 3



Silver Star

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING [World War II](#)

Service: [Navy](#)

Rank: [Lieutenant](#)

Division: U.S.S. Laffey (DD-724)

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Lieutenant Paul Bridges Smith, United States Navy, for gallantry and intrepidity in action as Gunnery Officer in the Destroyer U.S.S. LAFHEY (DD-459), when she was attacked by Japanese planes while serving as radar picket ship northwest of Okinawa, on 16 April 1945. Lieutenant Smith performed his duties courageously and with sound judgment by splitting up the main battery when necessary in order that as many attacking planes as possible could be taken under fire. He was constantly alert and quick to spot and take under fire the most dangerous targets. His continuous vigilance, keen perception and ability to keep the guns firing saved his ship from probable destruction. His conduct was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Paul Bridges Smith

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Olean, New York

Paul Smith graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Class of 1942. He retired as a U.S. Navy Captain.

AWARDS BY DATE OF ACTION: 2 of 3



Legion of Merit

Service: [Navy](#)

Rank: [Captain](#)

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Legion of Merit to Captain Paul Bridges Smith, United States Navy, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics, Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, U.S.

Pacific Fleet, from 16 September 1966 to 18 September 1969. Captain Smith contributed significantly to the continued high state of readiness of the Cruiser-Destroyer Force in material and logistics matters. Through diligent application of administrative ability, determination and meticulous execution of programs he provided a system for cost reduction through better utilization of scarce ships' manpower, increased coordination with shipyards and more work accomplished by ships' forces. He instituted programs to oversee the needs and demands of ships operating at a high tempo to meet the challenges of Southeast Asian commitments while meeting the constraints of continued fiscal reduction. Captain Smith's performance was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Paul Bridges Smith

DATE OF BIRTH: December 8, 1918

HOME OF RECORD:

Olean, New York

Paul Smith graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Class of 1942. He retired as a U.S. Navy Captain.

AWARDS BY DATE OF ACTION: 3 of 3



Legion of Merit

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING [Vietnam War](#)

Service: [Navy](#)

Rank: [Captain](#)

GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting a Gold Star in lieu of a Second Award of the Legion of Merit to Captain Paul Bridges

Smith, United States Navy, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility, Guam, during the period 29 October 1969 through 4 October 1972. An extremely competent and resourceful leader, Captain Smith was responsible for and directly supervised the actions of U.S. Naval Ship Repair Facility, Guam, in carrying out its mission to overhaul and repair ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and of friendly Foreign Navies. By his leadership and dedication, Captain Smith markedly enhanced the readiness of the Navy of the Republic of Vietnam by successfully completing all required overhauls of Vietnam Navy ships, some in an extremely limited time frame. Providing technical guidance and enlightened leadership, he enabled the facility to markedly increase the readiness of the Patrol Gunboats of Coastal Squadron THREE. By his wise leadership of the military personnel of this command, he enabled the command to contribute to the strategic readiness posture of the United States by successfully completing all required scheduled and emergency dockings of all Polaris submarines deployed in the Pacific. During his tour of command, it was necessary to reduce the size of the workforce by approximately one-third. Captain Smith's careful planning, wise judgment and calm leadership enabled the facility to accomplish this difficult reduction with a minimum of disruption and disturbance to the activities of the command. By his outstanding leadership, judgment and inspiring devotion to duty throughout, Captain Smith upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Captain Paul Smith's service to the USS Laffey, US Navy and United States was unsurpassed in many, many respects. We in the USS Laffey Association honor and cherish his service.

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