

TO THE POINT

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THE MAN WHO TOLD LAFFEY'S STORY

By Colby Causey, Historian, and Alexis Mizell, Strategic Communications Coordinator



Frank Manson could have never expected that his Navy assignment would place him at the center of one of the most famous destroyer battles of World War II. On April 16, 1945, aboard the USS Laffey (DD-724), that's exactly where the young officer found himself, asking a question that would become part of Naval history.

As waves of enemy aircraft descended on the destroyer during the Battle of Okinawa, Manson approached Captain Frederick Julian Becton with a grim concern. Would the crew have to abandon ship?

"Hell no Frank, I'll never abandon ship as long as a gun will fire!" Becton's answer became legendary.

For Manson, the moment was unforgettable. He would become one of the first people to tell the story of the "Ship That Would Not Die."

Born in Drumwright, Oklahoma in 1920, Frank Albert Manson was a former high school teacher before eventually joining the Navy during the war. Commissioned in 1942, he was assigned to the USS Laffey in 1944 and became one of the ship's original plank owners, serving aboard her through combat operations in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters.

Months before the Laffey arrived off Okinawa, the Navy ordered every ship to

appoint a Public Relations Officer and Captain Becton selected Manson for the role. Alongside Yeoman Second Class Herbert Rick, Manson began gathering crew biographies and hometown newspapers, hoping to share the ship's accomplishments with the American public.

Manson had experience writing as a former college sports reporter and radio announcer, and he believed the American people would benefit from hearing stories from the front lines. But wartime censorship limited what he could report. Details about combat remained highly classified, forcing Manson and Rick to keep many of their accounts vague, and by the spring of 1945 there was very little time for writing.

The Laffey had joined the fight near Okinawa, where the crew spent much of their time at general quarters under constant threat of attack. Then came the assignment every sailor dreaded, radar picket duty. The Laffey was assigned to radar picket station one, nicknamed the "Graveyard Shift" because of the intense kamikaze activity in the area.

Over the next 80 minutes, the Laffey endured one of the most concentrated kamikaze attacks against a single ship during World War II. Kamikaze planes slammed into the destroyer, while bombs exploded around her. Gun mounts were destroyed, fires spread across the ship, flooding threatened to pull the stern beneath the waterline.

Despite the devastation, the crew kept fighting.

During a brief lull in the attack, Manson toured some of the ship's most heavily damaged areas. He saw sailors battling fires and working to stop flooding as the crippled destroyer struggled to survive. Returning to the bridge, he asked Captain Becton the question weighing on everyone's mind.

Manson later recalled how certain the captain sounded when he gave a resounding no, while Becton himself remembered seeing the concern disappear from Manson's face after hearing the surefooted answer.

Even after the attack ended, the crew still had to work to save the ship. As the battered and bruised Laffey was towed toward safety, Becton called Manson to the bridge to begin reconstructing the battle for the Navy's official records. Together, the two men drafted a timeline of the attack while the ship was still reeling from the damage.

Within hours, Manson was sent aboard Admiral Turner's flagship to brief Navy officials and reporters. On April 17, 1945, Manson delivered the first public account of the battle.

Without prepared remarks, he described the heroism of the crew and the now-famous exchange with Captain Becton. Air raid sirens interrupted the briefing as Okinawa itself remained under threat, with the war still raging around them.

Manson would say he knew this was his chance to tell the kind of story he had always hoped to share about the realities of life at sea. At the time, he had no way of knowing the Laffey would become one of the most celebrated destroyers of the war or be preserved at Patriots Point as a historic relic.

What he did know was that at the center of his firsthand account lay the determination of a crew that refused to quit.

Because of his reporting, the story of the USS Laffey quickly spread through newspapers and radio broadcasts across the country. Through Frank Manson, Americans learned not only about the Battle of Okinawa and the brutal war at sea, but about the sailors who fought against all odds and the legacy of the WWII ship that simply would not die.



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FEATURED ARTICLE

History is often told with simple dates or threads on a timeline. It's true, we measure history in time, but the truth of it lives somewhere closer to the heart, in the quiet moments and the memories that never quite fade.

Our newest exhibit brings that idea to life in a deeply personal way. Featuring first-hand accounts from our veteran volunteers, the wall offers visitors a glimpse into life in uniform and moments that are raw, even when they're funny.

VOLUNTEER VOICES: STORIES OF SERVICE

"I flew night missions out of Phu Loi, just north of Saigon, in a Huey gunship with night seeing capabilities. Our area of operation was 3 corps with the main mission of limiting the enemy's ability to move weapons and personnel forward at night. We were often called for close air support when our troops were under attack. I might say "we got you covered like a blanket", as we could bring fire right up to their perimeter with accuracy in the dark. Firefights were memorable. We also supported the Navy out of Na Bay to patrol the river routes from Cambodia. We made it imperative that rearming and refueling would always be at 0300 because that's when the donuts came out of the oven! My copilot, Bob, loaded up with donuts and was walking toward the ship with a grin on his face not noticing that he was headed straight for the green ditch. I yelled "watch out," a nanosecond too late. Bob went down and the donuts went up.

By Alexis Mizell, Strategic Communications Coordinator

The smell he carried to the ship was not the smell of donuts!" -Chauncey Clark, U.S. Army 1967-71

"My first duty station post-Hospital Corps School was the Dependents Ward at the Naval Hospital Great Lakes. As a newly minted Corpsman, there were certain skills I needed to master. Drawing blood on incoming patients was at the top of my list. My first attempt I was so nervous but hooray I got it, first try. I sprinted to the desk with my prize and promptly dropped and broke all the vials right next to the attending MD dressed in his summer whites. What a mess! I was mortified. Thankfully everyone had a sense of humor. I was able to re-draw the vials successfully and learned a little something about professionalism." -Christine Barron, U.S. Navy 1971-75.

These stories aren't long narratives or poli-

shed retellings. They're snapshots. A lesson learned under pressure. A laugh that carried them through the intensity of service. A sense of camaraderie found in even the most stressful environments.

Visitors are beckoned to the wall—to read, to pause, to connect. To better understand the people who share their time and experiences at Patriots Point. The quote about its purpose is a perfect synopsis:

"Our Volunteers are the heart of Patriots Point. These are snapshots from our Veteran Volunteers of life in uniform - tough lessons - long nights and the humor that carried them through. Their voices remind us that service is not just history; it is who they are and how we remember."

More a tribute than an exhibit, it's a reflection of the real moments that shaped the timeline of history still being told. A quiet commendation to those who were once there, and to their ongoing courage to keep sharing.



PEOPLE OF PATRIOTS POINT

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Colin Rager takes pride in helping preserve Patriots Point each day. Working in the Paint Shop for the past 20 months, Colin helps keep the museum looking its best through maintenance painting across the property.



"It makes my day, every day," he explains.

For Colin, one of the best parts of working at Patriots Point is the people. With a father who served and a son currently on active duty, the connection to patriotism and military service feels especially meaningful.

Outside of work, Colin enjoys fishing and crabbing in his free time—and he says his coworkers can attest to that.

He says one of his favorite parts of the day is coming down the pier each morning and seeing the flags waving overhead.

We're grateful for Colin's hard work and the pride he brings to Patriots Point.


Congratulations to our newest Employee of the Quarter. Thank you for all that you do!



PATRIOTS POINT
FLIGHT ACADEMY

★

LEARN. EXPLORE. TAKE FLIGHT.




LEARN



TAKE FLIGHT

AROUND THE FLEET



BEHIND THE WINGS: INSIDE THE BLUE ANGELS

By Alexis Mizell, Strategic Communications Coordinator

reenlistment. When he arrived, he was assigned as one of two crew chiefs on the #1 aircraft, stepping into a role that demanded complete ownership of the plane.

During show season, that aircraft wasn't just assigned to him, it was his. Every day. Every flight. Every detail. "You know exactly how the pilot wants the plane," he said.

That understanding wasn't optional. It was built over days that didn't end when the demonstration did. After each show, when the noise faded and the crowd moved on, the work started again. From cleaning and inspecting to fixing anything that needed attention, no matter how long it took.

Because by the next morning, it all had to be ready.

The Blue Angels team learns this through strategic training. Weeks spent in California, where the pace is relentless. Pilots and their crew working toward a standard that leaves no room for error. It takes around a hundred practice demonstrations before the team is cleared to begin the season. That rhythm carries them from mid-March through early November, ending in

Florida, before starting all over again.

During Tom's time, aircraft changed from the F-4 Phantom to the A-4 Skyhawk, and roles shifted along the way. Simons, who remained with the Blue Angels until 1976, moved from the #1 aircraft to the #3, and later to the #5 lead solo plane, but the expectation stayed the same.



"It's a privilege. We ride around the country in a nice C-130, we wear fancy show uniforms with Blue Angels written across the back, and we stay in hotels—everyone sees that," Simons said. "But they don't see the late nights and the long hours."

When the Blue Angels pass overhead, what you're seeing isn't just a moment of precision. It's the result of countless hours behind the scenes, carried forward by people whose work is written into every line those jets leave behind.

The 2026 Charleston Airshow brought scores of people to the waterfront, all waiting for that familiar sound to roll in overhead. When the Blue Angels finally cut across the sky for practice, it felt almost effortless. Tight formations, clean lines, perfect timing.

What you don't see in that moment is everything that made it possible.

For Navy veteran and Patriots Point volunteer Tom Simons, that work started long before the crowd. He joined the Navy in 1967 and made his way to the Blue Angels in the summer of 1971, putting in a request during

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sweat on the Ship
June 20 & 21

Sweat on the Ship
June 27 & 28

4th of July Fireworks
EVENT SOLD OUT
July 4

Sweat on the Ship
July 9

Member Movie Night
August 28 | 5 PM to 8:30 PM

Holes Fore Heroes
USS Yorktown Foundation
Annual Charity Golf Tournament
October 5

HOUSEKEEPING

Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum is open daily from 10 AM - 5 PM
Ticket Office Closes: 4 PM



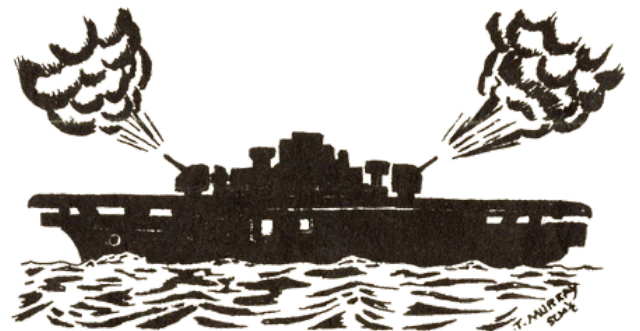
On July 4, 2026, Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum will close at 3:00 PM. Last general admission tickets will be sold at 2:00 PM

DECKSIDE DOODLES



Keep your feet out of loose coils of line!

From the Archives: U.S. Navy training Dilbert cartoon with the caption "Keep your feet out of loose coils of line".



From the Archives: Independence Day Menu for July 4, 1945 aboard U.S.S. Yorktown (CV-10).

MEMBERSHIP



CAPTAIN'S CHAIR

Hello, friends!

Summer has arrived at Patriots Point, bringing with it some of the busiest and most exciting days of the year along the harbor. From summer break adventures and family vacations to holidays and special events, this season is filled with opportunities for visitors to experience and celebrate history.

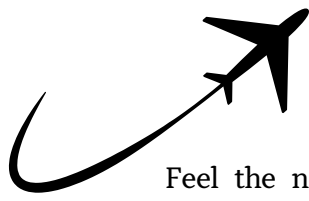
Throughout the summer, we welcome guests from across the country as they explore stories of service and sacrifice while taking in the Charleston waterfront. We're looking forward to one of our favorite annual traditions, the 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular aboard the USS Yorktown, as we gather together to celebrate America's 250th Independence Day.

As our own 50th anniversary celebration continues, we remain grateful for the support of the community, staff, volunteers, and visitors who help make Patriots Point a place where history continues to connect generations year after year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Allison Hunt".

Allison Hunt
Patriots Point, Executive Director



MEMBER MOVIE NIGHT

August 28 | 5:00– 8:00 PM

Feel the need for speed aboard the USS Yorktown during our upcoming Member Movie Night featuring Top Gun: Maverick. As part of our 50th anniversary celebration at Patriots Point, members are invited to enjoy this high-flying favorite in the Smokey Stover Theater for a one-of-a-kind experience.

Guests are encouraged to dress in their best Top Gun-inspired attire, snap photos on the Flight Deck before the movie begins, and experience one of the many exclusive benefits of membership at Patriots Point.

*This free event is for members only. Popcorn and movie snacks will be available for purchase.

Not a member yet? Scan the QR code to join today or visit us at PatriotsPoint.org/membership.



HOLES FORE HEROES ANNUAL CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

This premier event brings together veterans, active-duty military, corporate partners, and community supporters for a day of camaraderie, competition, and meaningful impact. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our sponsors, players, and supporters, last year's tournament raised more than \$105,000 in support of the Foundation's mission. These funds helped support meaningful museum projects, including completing Phase I of Operation Restoration (restoring all 12 aircraft on the Yorktown's Flight Deck), and providing more than 900 students the opportunity to spend the night aboard the Yorktown through Operation Overnight, up from approximately 600 last year. This year, we are setting our sights even higher, and with your help, we know we can make an even greater impact.

New for 2026, the Foundation is excited to introduce the Flatley Heroes Raffle in honor of Rear Admiral James "Jim" Flatley III, who passed away in December, and the extraordinary Flatley family legacy of service, leadership, and dedication to our nation. This exciting new fundraiser gives participants the chance to win cash prizes while making a direct impact on our mission. Winners will be drawn on tournament day.

As Patriots Point celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year, Holes Fore Heroes serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving the stories, service, and sacrifice that connect generations of Americans. Whether you are teeing off in honor of a veteran, sponsoring the event, purchasing a raffle ticket, or simply supporting the cause, your participation helps preserve history, honor service, and invest in the leaders of tomorrow.

DATE: OCTOBER 5

LOCATION: CHS NATIONAL GOLF CLUB
1360 NATIONAL DR, MT. PLEASANT, SC

For questions, contact:

KAYLA WEBBER | (843) 216-5023
Director of Development & Membership
kaylawebber@ussyorktownfoundation.org

Learn more by visiting,
patriotspoint.org/fundraising-events



FUELING THE MISSION

Welcome to our newest corporate sponsor!

Explore Charleston is the official destination marketing organization for the Charleston area, sharing the story of our region's rich history and vibrant culture and making them a natural partner in inspiring visitors to experience and preserve our nation's heritage at Patriots Point.



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