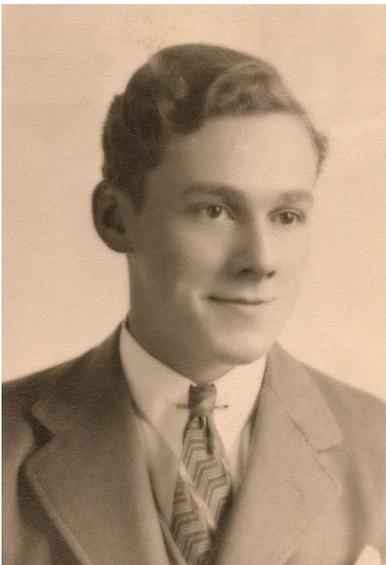


# Meet Jimmy Roberts One of Cranford's 86

By Don Sweeney

It was the morning of September 11, 2016. As a member of the Cranford 86 adopt a vet committee, I was scheduled to meet a family of one of our Cranford 86 to hear the story of their loved one who perished in World War II. When we arranged the meeting it hadn't occurred to me that this was 9/11. I spent my morning as many do on that sad day, watching the families of the 9/11 victims read the endless list of names that we have all become so familiar with. Although fifteen years ago it still has a way of feeling like yesterday, I wiped some tears from my eye as the names passed the letter G and went off to the home of Mary Roberts where she had gathered six Roberts/Benoit family members.



They lined the dining room table, stacked on the table were articles and scrapbooks from their family archives that told the story of this brave young Cranford boy, James D. Roberts that went to war shortly after his last day as a Cranford High School senior in 1943.

Donna Roberts, Jimmy's cousin, took the lead as the coordinator of the articles into the family scrapbook. They started telling me the stories and showing me their picture collection that would soon have everyone in attendance wiping tears from their eyes. For them 1944 was like yesterday.

The Roberts family already had 2 sons in the war by 1943, Alan and Edgar. Jimmy would be the third, he joined the Army at age 19 with his two school buddies Joe Griffin and Bob Greco. They reported before the actual commencement ceremony at Cranford High School. All three were assigned to the heavy cruiser Canberra. Bob Greco and Joe Griffin later told of a pact that was made between the three of them. If anything happened to any of them, they would visit the other families regularly upon their return.

As a part of an aircraft carrier task force they were positioned 70 miles off the China coast, making air strikes on the island of Formosa. On the evening of Friday October the 13<sup>th</sup> 1944 a Japanese attack squadron of 30 planes set out to take out this formation of destroyers, cruisers and four aircraft carriers. After a lengthy battle the guns went silent the black smoke was clearing, many enemy and American fighters were downed and it seemed that this battle was over. Then a stream of bubbles was spotted heading toward the Canberra. A torpedo had been dropped and was heading toward the center of the ship. It exploded a 55 by 140 foot hole in the boiler room, killing 23 of the nearly 3000 men on board. Jimmy was on duty that night in the boiler room.

On November 7<sup>th</sup> 1944 a Western Union car pulled up in front of the Roberts home on 163 N. Union Ave. Jimmy's younger brother Walter was on a ladder repairing a window. It is told that he put the hammer through the window as the courier walked up the drive. He didn't know which one it was, but he knew one of his brothers was gone.

Formosa was a crucial naval base for the Japanese; it housed a large number of the naval war ships and was the primary source of air attacks for the region. The battles at Formosa were carried out from October 10<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup>, more than 300 Japanese attack planes were downed during the 10 day encounter. The first report of a Kamikaze strike happened here. More details of the battle off Formosa and the strategies that followed can be found online by simply searching the words Formosa battles or [www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles\\_formosa.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_formosa.html)





Bob Greco, Jimmy Roberts childhood friend and crewmate aboard the USS Canberra.

After nine years a letter reached the Roberts family, they were informed that the remains of nine sailors from the Canberra would be relocated back to American soil. The family along with Bob Greco and Joe Griffin would travel to Zachary Taylor National Cemetery in Kentucky. They weren't given the opportunity to select the burial spot. It seemed that this spot was a central point for all the nine families. Interestingly, the remains of 9 sailors were put in 3 pine coffins. None of them identified individually.

I asked the family if they could describe what kind of guy Jimmy was. They said he was a happy-go-lucky guy that loved to drive his mother crazy with wacky antics. He was a real fun character.

For many years the Roberts family members along with Bob Greco and Joe Griffin make their way to Canberra reunions around the country. Bob and Joe are gone now as well, but always remembered their pact, each year on October 13<sup>th</sup> they would always gather for a drink and a toast to their lost buddy and brother James D. Roberts.

We would like to thank the Roberts family for sharing the stories of their beloved Jimmy with all of us. If you have a story and a picture of one of our Cranford 86, please reach out to us. We are trying to put faces and identity to the names on the monuments. It was only through their bravery and sacrifice that we live in freedom here in Cranford, NJ in the greatest country in the world. If you'd like to sponsor a serviceman we are accepting \$25. donations to personalize the flags that represent these 86 men in our Memorial Day parade each year. Donation forms are available at the community center. We're on Facebook at Cranford86 or email [info@cranford86.org](mailto:info@cranford86.org)

# Help fund our mission to complete at 86 stories.

**CRANFORD 86**  
HOMETOWN HEROES  
Car magnets min. donation \$5.  
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All funds go directly to research and printing expenses.

The Cranford 86 Project is comprised strictly of volunteers.

**CRANFORD 86 Hometown Heroes.**

On Names: WW1 Blue Type WW2 Green Type Korean War Brown Type Vietnam War

Buried	Street Name	Cranford Address	KIA	Age	Sponsor	
1	At Sea	John B. Barger	No	30	Sue Buontempo	
2		Frances Jeanine Cizek				
3		Bruce Van Kousens Ditz				
4	France	Newell Rodgers Duke	Yes	24	Cranford WW #335	
5		John George Gravers				
6	Fairview	William A. Hays	18 Cranford Ave.	Civilian	23	Barbara Bilger
7		James Andrew Harris				
8		George H. Haddins				
9		Karl W. Heinrich				
10		Frederick Edgar Mills				
11		Robert McInerney				
12		Dominick Peluso			DOW	
13		Frederick M. Quine			Yes	
14		Stanley M. Smith				
15		Arthur Wisnigian				
16	Phelps NY	Charles G. Albury Jr.	202 North Ave.	Yes	23	Jerry Dobbins
17		John Barch			Yes	26
18		Ray W. Bellinger	218 Prospect Ave	Yes	33	
19		Richard A. Borrell	150 Elm St.	Yes	25	
20	Lost at sea	John S. Bromberg				The DeWeaver Family
21	Lost at sea	Francis S. Burton	29 Elizabeth Ave.	Yes	20	
22	Arlington	Archibald E. Cameron	33 Bedford Ave.	Yes	26	Cranford Jaycees
23		Crawford P. Carhart Jr.	115 Cranford Ave.	No	20	
24		Patrick P. Cataldo	103 Lincoln Ave.	Yes	20	
25		Sydney V. Crane		Yes	25	
26		Thomas Cullen	8 Cranford Terrace	Yes	23	
27		Augustine D'Allesandris		Yes	23	
28		Frank C. Deemerle Jr.		No	27	
29		Allen E. Dimmick		Yes	25	
30		Warren Dixon		Yes		
31	Lost at sea	Clifford L. Drake		Yes	21	
32		J. Kenneth Duffley	209 Manor Ave.	Yes	20	
33	Lost at sea	Ernie F. Frank		Yes	20	Cranford Hist Society
34		Arthur J. Galvin	830 Springfield Ave	Yes	20	
35		Robert N. Gevers	514 Centennial AVE	Yes	19	
36	Fairview	Robert E. Goldstein	39 Spruce St.	Yes	20	Cranford Girl Scouts
37		Robert A. Grabau		Yes	20	
38		Anthony J. Haaseck		Yes	27	
39		James F. Hewston	24 Hillcrest Ave.	Yes	36	Chris Lentz
40	Graceland	William F. Hinkle	334 North Ave.	DOW	24	The Hinkle Family
41	USS Arizona	Keith Jeffries	319 Elizabeth Ave.	Yes	23	Cranford Girl Scouts

**SEE THEIR FACES ... KNOW THEIR STORIES**  
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