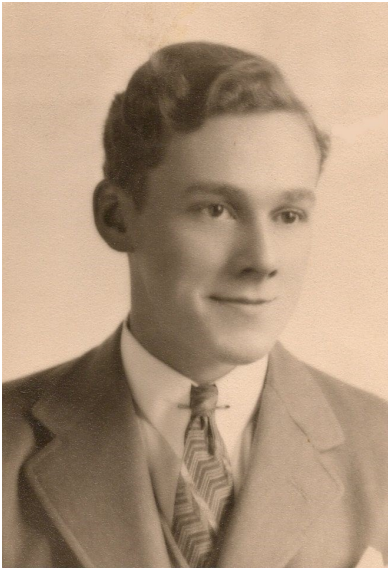


Meet Jimmy Roberts One of Cranford's 86

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 13th 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 7th 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 10th -20th, 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



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 13th 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

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On Names and Type 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. Bunch	20 Norman Pl.	No	30	Sun Buontempo
2		James Andrew Hains				
3	France	Robert M. Quince	Riverside Dr	Yes	24	Cranford WW #335
4		William A. Jones	18 Cranford Ave.	Civilian	23	Barbara Bilger
5	Fairview	James Andrew Hains				
6		George A. Haines				
7		Karl W. Hainisch				
8		Frederick Edwin Hains				
9		Robert McInerney				
10		Dominick Peluso				
11		Frederick M. Quince		DOW		
12		Stanley A. Smith				
13		Arthur Weisskopf				
14	Phelps NY	Charles G. Albury Jr.	202 North Ave.	Yes	23	Jerry Dobbins
15		John Bunch		Yes	26	
16		Ray M. Bollinger	218 Prospect Ave.	Yes	33	
17		Richard A. Borell	150 Elm St.	Yes	25	
18	Lost at sea	John S. Brimlage				
19		Edward S. Burns	29 Elizabeth Ave.	Yes	20	The DeWeaver Family
20	Arlington	Archibald B. Cameron	33 Bedford Ave.	Yes	26	Cranford Jaycees
21		Crawford P. Carhart Jr.	115 Cranford Ave.	No	20	
22		Patrick P. Cataldo	103 Lincoln Ave.	Yes	20	
23		Stephen V. Craig		Yes	25	
24		Thomas Cullen	8 Cranford Terrace	Yes	25	
25		Augustine D'Allesandris		Yes	23	
26		Joseph C. Deemerle Jr.		No	27	
27		Allen E. Dimmick		Yes	25	
28		Warren Dixon				
29	Lost at sea	Clifford L. Drake	209 Manor Ave.	Yes	21	
30		F. Kenneth Duffley		Yes	20	Cranford Hist Society
31	Lost at sea	Ernest F. Frank		Yes	20	
32		Arthur J. Gahm	830 Springfield Ave	Yes	20	
33		Robert N. Gentry	514 Centennial Ave.	Yes	27	Cranford Girl Scouts
34	Fairview	Howard A. Grabau	39 Spruce St.	Yes	20	
35		Anthony A. Hascok		Yes	27	Chris Lenza
36		James F. Hewston	24 Hillcrest Ave.	DOW	24	The Hinkle Family
37	Graceland	William E. Hinkle	334 North Ave.	Yes	23	Cranford Girl Scouts
38		Keith Jeffries	319 Elizabeth Ave.	Yes	23	
39	USS Arizona					

An * in the street column tell which men have had a Cranford street named in their honor

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Joseph Minnock Vietnam War
William Hinkle WW2
Eugene McGarry WW2
Alan O'Neil WW2
Raymond Ashnault Vietnam War
Paul Sweeney WW2
Juan Vargas WW1
Roger Norton Jr. WW2
Keith Jeffries WW2
Gallagher Senior Vietnam War

The yellow highlight denotes that this story has been written.
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