

# USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



# PIPELINE

Dec 2020

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## Our next reunion

By Jeff Sturgis

As the month of September passed by, I thought about the reunion in Long Beach that we had cancelled. When we cancelled the reunion with the hotel, I told them that we would postpone it for a year. The hotel recently contacted me to find out our new date in September of 2021. Unfortunately, the way this pandemic is going, I'm not sure that we will be able to safely have our reunion even then. My answer to them was that I will contact them next spring to plan our next move.

At the rate the pandemic is spreading, it doesn't seem that our country will be safe to return to normal until 2022. We on the executive committee will continue to monitor the situation. Since we all are in the group most susceptible to the effects of the pandemic, we feel that most of our members must be confident in their safety to travel and congregate before we reschedule the reunion. If the fall of 2021 doesn't work, we may have to consider the spring of 2022. I think the key will be the development and successful distribution of a reliable vaccine. Due to our ages, we know that we have a finite window to continue our reunions before our numbers dwindle to a small enough group that yearly reunions will be impracticable. We hope that the time is still some years in the future. Please know that we will continue to monitor the situation. In the meantime, if any of you have any thoughts, please don't hesitate to contact us at [jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com).

## John Creedon

1924-2020

By Jeff Sturgis

By now, most of you know that the USS Caliente Association has lost one of its most beloved members. John Creedon, one of the "founding fathers" of our organization passed away at his home in Larchmont, NY, on October 11, 2020. His life is a prime example of the value of hard work, determination and generosity.

Many of you know his story, but it's worth a brief retelling here. After high school, John got a job in the mailroom at Metlife. Leaving the mailroom in 1942 to join the Navy, he served as a quartermaster on the Caliente for the last three years of World War II. He would later remark that his service on the Cal was instrumental in his life. Not only was he serving



Association has lost two WW2 vets, John Creedon and Frederick Griffith.

his country, but he also was learning that the main difference between him and the officers on the Caliente was not necessarily ability, it was a college education. Consequently when the war ended, he returned to Metlife and began earning his bachelors degree by attending New York University nights using the GI Bill. After attaining his bachelors degree in the business school, he continued on at the NYU School of Law, and, after graduating, became an attorney. All the while he was climbing the corporate ladder at Metlife holding various executive titles until he was named CEO in 1983. After he retired as CEO in 1989, he continued to serve Metlife as a Director and a member of its Advisory Council.

John also had a productive life outside of the executive suite as he taught law at NYU where he became a Trustee. In addition, he supported and served on the boards of various local and national professional and charitable organizations. You can read a complete list of his professional accomplishments and service to his community in the obituary of which there is a link at the end of this article.

Of course, most of us knew John as an enthusiastic member of the USS Caliente Association. One of the founding members, he hosted the first Caliente reunion in New York City in 1989. The association has met regularly since then. John was a fierce advocate for the association working hard, often behind the scenes, to keep it going. I certainly can attest to his support as he has often quietly pulled me aside at a reunion to offer suggestions and to give his support, both moral and material, for our continued success.

I also remember John as a humble man. He told great sea stories of his time aboard the Caliente, but he never talked about or bragged of his professional accomplishments. I only found out about his accomplishments from others or by looking up his wikipedia page. I found out how powerful his legacy was at Metlife several years ago quite by accident. My younger daughter happened to be working for Metlife at the time. When I returned home after one of our reunions, I happened to visit my daughter and mentioned to her that I had met a former Metlife CEO, John Creedon at a Caliente reunion. Even though this was good 30 years after John had retired as CEO she knew his name immediately and was amazed that I knew John. She stated that he was still a revered figure at the company.

We are fortunate to have had John in our midst for so long. In addition, we are fortunate that we got to know his lovely wife, Diane, who supported John and was a wonderful addition at our reunions. Our last memories of John will certainly be wonderful as we were able, along with Diane and many members of his family, to celebrate John's 95th birthday at our last reunion in September 2019 in Savannah. As long as we are still able to keep going with our reunions, we will always remember John who was a major motivator of, and contributor to, the existence of our association. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Diane and his family, and we send our thanks to them for sharing this remarkable man with us.

You may find John's obituary at the following link: <https://jjffh.com/tribute/details/808/John-Creedon/obituary.html>.

## **“From the Helm of the USS Caliente to the Helm of Metropolitan Life”**

A personal memory by Pat Hurton

I first met John Creedon at the 1999 reunion in Washington DC. The reunion was run by ex USS Caliente Captain Bob Jackson (12/66-04/68) and I thought Bob was the Association

Captain. When the business meeting was called to order by John Creedon, I came to realize that John was the Captain and Bob was the Reunion Chairperson. John continued with the meeting and heavily praise Bob Jackson for his, and his team's hard work that went into making the reunion successful. John never mentioned any of the support he gave to Bob and his team.

As I got to know John more and more over the years, I was continuously struck by how unassuming he was and how he never sought the limelight. John quietly supported every elected President/Committee leader and, behind the scenes, always gave sound advice to the Association leader. John's suggestions over the years helped keep the Association running smoothly.

John entered the Navy as a seaman recruit and rose to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Class Quartermaster. After his discharge he returned to work at the Metropolitan Life Company and rose through the ranks to the very top. In both cases he guided and steered his "ship" through calm and rough seas. All the time keeping his eyes on the goal of mission success.

John was instrumental in founding the USS Caliente Association in 1988. Over 30 years later it goes without saying that his goal of keeping shipmate in touch and bringing them together at reunions has been a resounding success. The Association has held 25 reunions since its founding.

John was a most fervent supporter of the Association and, with his wife Diane, attended almost every USS Caliente reunion since the first one in 1988. I was honored to make a

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USS Caliente Association  
Chairman: Jeff Sturgis  
Executive Committee: Mike Copeland, Dave Ludemann, Greg Perett, Tom Rawlinson and Steve Selzer  
Treasurer: Pat Hurton  
Pipeline Editor: Karl Seitz



The Pipeline is the official quarterly newsletter of the USS Caliente Association. It is a place to share your memories and pictures. Please send them via e-mail to [seitzao53@gmail.com](mailto:seitzao53@gmail.com) or by regular mail to Karl Seitz, 1212 30th St. South, Birmingham, AL 35205-1910.

Association dues are \$10 per year due Jan. 1, payable by Jan. 15. Checks should be made out to The USS Caliente Association and mailed to treasurer Pat Hurton, 156 Greenfield Drive, Chico, CA 95973-0185.

Chairman Jeff Sturgis can be reached via email at [jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreysturgis54@gmail.com) or by mail at 84 Old Woodman Hill Rd, Minot, ME 04258

Masthead picture of USS Caliente (AO-53) used with permission of Dan Davis.

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presentation at his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at our 2019 Savannah reunion. Diane arranged to have many, many members of their family attend and I hope they all saw the high esteem his shipmates had for him.

His advice guided me during my terms in office and eased my anxieties over the years. I will fondly remember he and Diane each time I think of the Association and the great times Charleen and I have had at all our reunions. Without John the reunions might never had happened.

His charm and wit will be missed by all. As mentioned, John and his wife Diane have been honored guests at many. many reunions and I hope that Diane will grace us with her presence at future reunions.

**Pictures from John Creedon's life**



Left, in the Navy; above, 1970s or 1980s; right, passing baton at MetLife.



John with Connie Coia 2016.



John and Diane 2017.



John departs 2017.



A reminder if you are on Facebook, the association has a Facebook group for former crew members of the USS Caliente (AO-53) and their families.



The Creedon clan gathered at 2019 Caliente Reunion to celebrate John's 95th birthday.

## Frederick Griffith

1916-2020

By Karl Seitz

Pipeline Editor

As preparation of this Pipeline began, we received word that another of the Association's World War II veterans has passed away. Frederick Ray Griffith, 94, died 21 Nov. 2020 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Frederick served on the Cal from 1944 to 1946 as a QM3. He had been a frequent attendee at reunions in recent years.

At the 2019 Reunion in Savannah, Frederick was presented with a plaque from the Association honoring him for his service. Frederick was a reserved presence at reunions, but asked the right questions he could provide insightful and sometimes humorous anecdotes about life on the Cal during his time.

Frederick was born 1 April 1926 in Olcott, WVA, to William and Lucy Griffith. He was predeceased by his first wife, Jane Bryant Lewis Griffith, who died in 1972 at age 43. They were married in 1949. He later married Lois Reynolds, who survives him. Other survivors include son Steven Draper (Cindy) Griffith; daughter Jennifer Jane (Gary) Cowgill; three grandchildren; six



great grandchildren and siblings Vera Casto and Barbara Lanterman. He was predeceased by siblings Vaughn Miller, June Meyers, Howard Griffith and Stuart W. Griffith.

He was buried at Tyler Mountain Memorial Garden, Cross Lane, WVA.

While checking my computer files I rediscovered some unpublished memories that Frederick sent to the Pipeline a few years ago. One of them follows this obituary. Others will appear in future Pipelines.



Steve and Cindy Griffith, Frederick, Jennifer and Gary Cowgill at 2018 reunion.

### **Two beers and the baker**

By Frederick Griffith, QM3, 1944-46

Whenever the ship was anchored and the guys were let off the ship for the day, they were issued two bottles of beer. I was one of the few who did not like to drink beer, but I still was able to put it to good use.

The baker loved his beer and I loved any sweets that I could sink my teeth in. So, the baker and I worked out a great deal, he got my beer and I got a great dessert whenever he could make an extra. My birthday was easy to remember April 1. I remember once when the cook came to me at dinner and said be sure to leave room for dessert. The officers happen to be having chocolate pie that night and from his order of six pies he was able to make a seventh pie.

He and I had a great dessert .

## Taps



Edwin Fred Birdsall, 82, died 15 April 2020 in Hemet, CA. Edwin served on the Cal from 1955 to 1957 as a GMSN. Born 28 Jul 1937 in Madrid, Iowa, to Frederick and Marjorie Birdsall, Edwin worked as a dairyman for more than 30 years after leaving the Navy. His pastimes included cooking, coaching many sports, fishing, playing shuffle board and enjoying baseball, particularly when the Dodgers were involved.

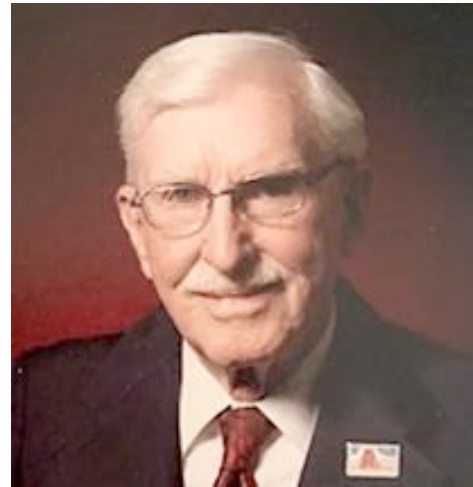
Edwin is survived by his wife of 62 years, Eugenie Birdsall; children Renee Swallow, Margie Thomas, Mark and Joseph Birdsall; 15 grandchildren; 23 great grandchildren; sisters Betty Brown, Faye Johnston and Connie LaValley and other family members and friends.

Calvin Russell Kellerman, 93, of Mendota Heights, MN, died 26 Oct 2019 while in the care of the VA and Hospice of the Midwest. He was born 11 Jan. 1926 in Davenport, ND. Calvin served one year on the Cal apparently during World War II, although we have not been able to determine exact dates or his rank and rating. He served with the Seabees in the same era.

Following the war, he graduated from North Dakota State University with a degree in general agriculture. He taught World War II veteran farmers, managed a ranch in South Dakota and worked for the Soil Conservation Service in North Dakota before joining the Army as an officer from 1961 to 1963, some of which was in Vietnam.

He returned to Vietnam in 1966 as an USAID agriculture advisor in Long An Province. In 1970, he became regional agricultural advisor in Da Nang and Can Tho, leaving in 1972. Rice production doubled during his tenure. Calvin's story of his Vietnam service can be found on line at <https://www.mnvietnam.org/story/calvin-kellerman/>

Calvin is survived by daughters, Renee Trier and Barb Kellerman, one grandson and nieces and nephews. He is buried at the Fargo, ND, National Cemetery



We have belatedly learned of the death of Rodney LeRoy McKinney on 25 Dec. 2011. Rodney served on the Cal from 1962 to 1964 as a SK2. Rodney was born 11 Aug. 1941 in Malone, NY, to Frederick and Irene (Leboeuf) McKinney. He enlisted in the Navy after graduated from high school. When he completed his four-year enlistment he settled in Long Beach, CA, working as a manager in the grocery industry for more that 23 years. Because of the length of time that has passed since his death, we are not listing the survivors from the time of his death.

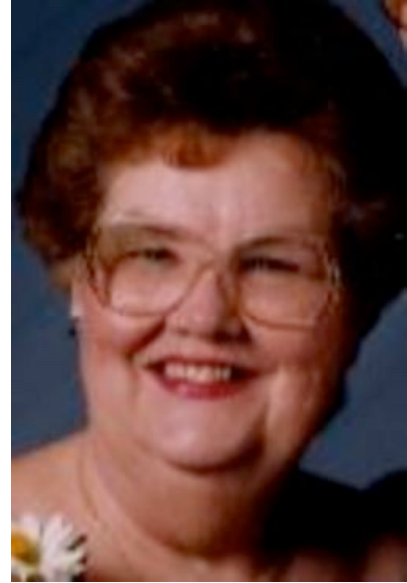
We have belatedly learned of the death of Barbara Moyer, widow of Donald W. Moyer, who served on the Cal from 1951 to 1953 as a LTJG. Barbara was born 3 Aug. 1929 in Charleston,

SC, and died 16 Feb 2018 in Westerville, Ohio. She married Donald 30 April 1955 in Cradock, VA. He preceded her in death 27 Jan 2016.

Barbara received an associates degree in fashion design from Richmond Proefessional Institute. She later went back to college, graduating in 1972 from Bowling Green State University with a bachelor's degree in education in home economics. She taught home economics at Bowling Green (Ohio) Junior High until retiring in 1988. She was an active member of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Bowling Green. During her daughters' childhood, she served as 4-H advisor and their Girl Scout leader.

In retirement, Barbara and Don traveled to every continent, including Antarctica.

She is survived by daughters Ginny (Bruce) Blake and Cindy (Tom) Bonds; sister Marjorie Glick; and three grandchildren. Barbara is buried with her husband in Wood County Memory Gardens, Bowling Green, Ohio.



We have belatedly learned of the death of John Joseph Zwack, 81, on 7 Oct. 2017 in Conway, SC. John served on the Cal from 1956 to 1957 as a BT3. He was born in Kalamazoo, MI to John and Nellie Slis Zwack. An avid sailor, he competed in the race from Chicago to Mackinaw, MI and was former owner of the Sea Pearl Sailboat Co. After relocating to Myrtle Beach, SC, in 1985, he founded Roto Rooter and Atlas Plumbing. He had a passion for building and showing his rail car.

John is survived by his wife of 28 years, Gloria Chestnut Zwack, children Laurie Zwack of Holland, MI, and Kelly Zwack of Wayland, MI; three grandchildren; brother Tom Zwack of Page, AZ; sisters Mary Ann Wunderlin of Congress, AZ and Carol (Lewis) Matyas of Helena, MT; and many nieces, nephews and extended family

## Caliente Website

By Jeff Sturgis

As we announced in the last issue of the Pipeline, Pat Hurton has produced a new and more up-to-date website for the Caliente Association. You may view the website at <https://usscalienteao-53.com>.

Pat has put in a tremendous amount of work into this new website. He does this work in addition to similar work for his local VFW chapter. Please take a look at the website and enjoy the improvements that Pat has made.

Please don't hesitate to contact Pat with comment, suggestions and possible additions. You may contact Pat at [patrick.hurton@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.hurton@gmail.com).

We are all appreciative of the great work that Pat puts in on behalf of our association. Thank you Pat!