



Eagle Island Journal

A Publication of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island

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"Inveniam viam aut faciam."

Find a way or make one

President's Message

When a family member dies a void is created and it is said that only time can relieve the emptiness. The *Friends* family suffered a great loss with the death of Ed Stafford. It's hard for me to see how even the passage of time will fill the enormous space that has been left in our hearts.

Ed was one of the earliest supporters of the Friends of Peary's Eagle Island, so active that he could be called a founder. He regularly contributed delightful stories for the visitors to Eagle Island so that they would know who Admiral Peary was and of course about members of the Peary family and about growing up on Eagle Island. An author of four highly respected books he furnished us with accurate information to guide us and inspire us to continue to provide a fitting memorial to his famous grandfather and to his courageous family who followed him in their love for Eagle Island as strong as his.

I have fond memories of my 20 plus years of friendship with Ed. Far too many to relate here, but one example took place on a warm July day in my back yard on Dingley Island in Maine. Ed had been given a hand-held GPS unit for his birthday. While sitting in comfortable lawn chairs, sipping a cold beer, with Ed's new toy we navigated our way to Eagle Island, then to the North Pole and then returned to my backyard. Our speed of advance was impressive. The whole trip took less than an hour. We were dressed appropriately for our trip; short pants, polo shirts with boat shoes and no socks. Admiral Peary and his crew would have been envious.

While searching for the right words to say goodbye to Ed, I found a short poem that seemed to say it all. With apologies to the unknown author for the liberties I have taken with his or her poem, I offer this in memory of Commander Edward Peary Stafford: United States Navy (retired).

God saw he was getting tired
and a cure was not to be.
So He put His arms around him
and whispered, "Come with Me."
With tearful eyes we watched him go
and saw him fade away.
Although we loved him dearly
we could not make him stay.
A golden heart stopped beating,
hard working hands to rest
God broke our hearts to prove to us
He only takes the best.

Thank you Ed, for being our special *Friend*.



Commander Edward Peary Stafford, USN (Ret)

Obituary: Courtesy of Cox Gifford Seawinds Funeral home

Commander Edward Peary Stafford, USN (Ret) was born in Portland Maine, July 16, 1918 to Edward Stafford, a Washington DC attorney, son of Wendell Phillips Stafford, a sitting justice on the District of Columbia Supreme Court and Marie Peary Stafford, daughter of Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary, USN arctic explorer and discoverer of the North Pole. Having spent the summers of his adolescence at the Admiral's summer home on Eagle Island in Casco Bay, Maine and his school years in Washington, DC, he graduated from Western High School in 1937.

Ed's matriculation to Dartmouth College in 1938 was interrupted by the advent of World War II. Having been commissioned an Ensign in the Naval Reserve in September 1941 he was called immediately to active duty serving initially as Commanding Officer of the submarine chaser USS SC 692 performing convoy escort in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean as well as participating in the invasion of Sicily. In May of 1944 he was assigned to the Pacific Theater, as Executive Officer of the Destroyer Escort USS Abercrombie, where he was a participant in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval engagement in history. Having earned seven battle stars by the end of the war, Ed returned to Dartmouth, completing his BA in English and American Literature, Cum Laude.

Returning to active duty, Ed transitioned to Naval Aviation in March of 1950 where he served as both pilot and operations officer for hurricane and airborne early warning squadrons for the next 8 years. During this time he also completed his MA in English and American Literature from George Washington University and in 1958 was a successful contestant on the nationally televised \$64,000 Question quiz show. Following a tour as Naval Liaison Officer to the US Senate and Naval Representative at contractor Thiokol Chemical Corporation, Commander Stafford retired in 1962. Later that year he published his first book with Random House, a WWII carrier history, "the Big E." When the Vietnam War escalated, he was recalled to active duty to serve as Naval Historian for the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet from 1966 to the end of 1969. Ed was particularly proud of the time he was able to spend in country with small naval units, convinced that first hand experience was best for historical accuracy. In 1968, he published his second book, a submarine epic entitled "The Far and the Deep" with Putnam.

Departing his beloved Navy for the final time, Ed entered civil service in October 1969. For the next eleven years he would serve, consecutively, as speechwriter for the Secretary of the Navy; the Bicentennial Administrator; and the Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration. After retiring from civil service, he worked with Morrow to publish his third book in 1984, the autobiographical destroyer escort narrative, "Little Ship, Big War." 1988 witnessed the Naval Institute Press publication of Ed's fourth and final book, "Subchaser," chronicling his early World War II experiences as a twenty-four year old combat skipper.

Ed took maximum advantage of his often acknowledged gift of excellent health to remain active and engaged in both professional and family matters. He was a reliable attendee at all of his crew's WWII destroyer escort reunions, and active member and officer of the Patrick Air Force Base Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America. In addition, he routinely persuaded old shipmates to help him operate his "The Geriatric Delivery Service" delivering private vessels to east coast and Mississippi ports which, in the execution, generated both shared challenges and marvelous "sea stories." In April 1995 at age 77, Ed married the former Margaret ("Peggy") Christ of Melbourne Beach, Florida, where both continued to reside until his passing.

Commander Edward P. Stafford, USN (Ret) passed away peacefully, at age 95, of natural causes at Holmes Regional Medical Center, Melbourne, Florida at 12:26 PM on Tuesday, September 24, 2013 surrounded by family. He is survived by his beloved wife Peggy, her daughter Ms. Leslie Christ, her son Mr. Kevin Christ: as well as his five children; his daughter, Judge Peary Stafford Fowler, his sons LTC Edward P. Stafford Jr. USA (Ret), Harte P. Stafford, Esq., Robert P Stafford, Esq., Gregory P. Stafford, DDS; eleven grandchildren and one great grandchild.



Wreath at the Doorstep

If a wreath is placed at the foot of a door
And no one is there to see it

Is it still there?

Gone are the thousands of summer visitors, many having followed him on his Eagle
Island tours as he retraced the island paths of his childhood.

Gone are the volunteer docents who looked forward to his August arrivals and the
new chapters he would add to his oral history of family life on the island.

Gone are the workers, both State and volunteer, who maintain the Museum, the
Library, and the new Welcome Center he inspired - preserving the structures
that stand as tribute to his Grandfather, his hero, our hero.

Now

No one can follow in his footsteps to hear his tales of boyhood adventures.

No one can hear his gravelly voice, kept strong by a passion that comes from memories
of island summers that matured into a love of this glacier-spared rock.

No one can see the twinkle in his eye and the smile that crosses his lips as he recounts a
foolish prank, survival molding experience into discretion.

No one will see him on island again.

No one will see the wreath laid at the foot of the door.

Still, it is there.

In Memory

Cmdr. Edward Peary Stafford USN (Ret.)

An Appreciation

Commander Edward Peary Stafford, U.S. Navy (Retired): 1918-2013

The author of the classic book, *The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise*, “embarked on his final voyage,” his wife wrote us recently, on 24 September at his home in Melbourne, Florida. He was 95.

Ed Stafford wrote for *Naval History* and the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, as well as regular contributions for *National Geographic*. He is best known, however, for naval books, including *Subchaser*, *Little Ship*, *Big War: The Saga of DE-343*, and *The Far and the Deep*. Ed wrote not only with flair, but authority, too.

In World War II, he commanded a subchaser in the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas before he was executive officer of a destroyer escort in the Pacific. After the war, Ed graduated from Dartmouth College and was commissioned a lieutenant commander in December 1946. After serving as executive officer in a destroyer, he was ordered to flight training and assigned to hurricane-tracking with a patrol squadron.

What most people don't know about Ed is that he was “a successful contestant,” as he once characterized it, on the TV quiz show “The \$64,000 Question” in 1957. Even with all the success he'd enjoyed in the Navy and on the literary front, Edward Peary Stafford, the grandson of Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary, pursued a lifetime passion: preserving the honor of his family.

From the time then-Commander Peary claimed to “discover” the North Pole in 1909, “every few years,” Stafford wrote in the December 1971 *Proceedings*, “someone has come forth in public print to doubt or deny that he did so.” His article was a rebuttal to a piece that appeared in the June 1970 issue titled “Peary and the North Pole: The Lingering Doubt,” written by astronomer Dennis Rawlins. His major criticism was that no proof appeared to exist that would substantiate Peary's claim.

On the heels of an official report issued by the National Geographic Society in 1989, providing “photogrammetric” analysis of images taken of the Peary expedition (and thus proof of the claim), the Naval Institute revisited the dispute with “All Angles: Peary and the North Pole,” a panel discussion that highlighted its April 1991 Annual Meeting. Nearly 20 years after Ed's rebuttal appeared, the most vocal panelist that day was one Dennis Rawlins.

The debate often grew heated, with all apparent living members of the Peary/Stafford families on hand, and it reconvened after the allotted time in a Naval Academy classroom. The families put an offer on the table. Rawlins or anyone in the room would get a check for \$35,000 on the spot if conclusive evidence could disprove Peary's claim. No money ever changed hands.—Fred Schultz

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