

**REMARKS AT USS FORRESTAL
FORTY YEAR MEMORIAL TRIBUTE
FARRIER FIRE FIGHTING SCHOOL
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA JULY 27, 2007**

By Tom Wimberly, Captain, U. S. Navy (Retired)

It is indeed a privilege and an honor to be with you today, and share some thoughts with you, and attempt to pay tribute adequately on this solemn day. I thank Joe Costello and the Forrestal Association for the invitation, and I thank the Farrier Fire Fighting School and the Navy for providing the use of these facilities.

We are gathered in a fitting setting to honor the 134 shipmates who some forty years ago, gave what Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg address, referred to as, "that last full measure of devotion."

Our program today honors those 134 who lost their lives, but it also recognizes the actions of the survivors who participated in that drama. Many of those involved performed heroic deeds. Some were recognized with decorations. Many were not.

Here at this magnificent facility are taught many of the lessons learned from the events of 1966, 67, 69 - the tragic aircraft carrier fires of the Vietnam era - *Oriskany, Forrestal, Enterprise*. Our improved knowledge has lead to better equipment, better procedures, and better training to deal with fires and other shipboard emergencies. In that respect, we benefit greatly from the sacrifice of those lives. If there are any here who are students or instructors, I encourage you to learn from the training, and take or send your knowledge and skill out to the fleet.

The story of Chief Farrier, for whom this facility is named, is legend. His story is covered briefly in the printed program.

Let me tell you about four other men that I knew. Two are living, and two are deceased victims of the fire. They are Dale Goldinger, Tom Treanor, Johnny Wayne Spivey, and Robert A. Rhuda.

Dale Goldinger was an airman in the VF-74 line crew. At the time the fire started, I and my wingman had been started up, and we were chained down on the port side abeam the after part of the island structure. When the fire started, none of our squadron line personnel was in sight. It was obvious we needed to move those planes farther from the fire. I told Jim Martin, in the back seat of my *Phantom*, 'if someone doesn't come and unchain us, I'm going to go into afterburner and see if I can break the tiedown chains.' At that time, I spotted Goldinger. He was running to us, toward the fire, to unchain me and my wingman. What a welcome sight he was. Just about this time, the first bomb detonated. It was about a minute and twenty or thirty seconds after the fire started. Until this time, I was calm. It is difficult to describe what the detonation of those bombs felt like. The shock was severe; it rattled my teeth, and my knees began to shake so badly that my feet did a dance on the floor of the cockpit. With each explosion, as I taxied up the flight deck, the air overhead was filled with debris flying forward. For Goldinger's action, I recommended him for a Navy Commendation Medal, and it was approved by the Air Wing Awards board, and the recommendation left the ship, but no award was approved. Through the magic of the internet, I located Dale and talked to him on the phone a year or two ago, and thanked him.

Tom Treanor was a lieutenant in the squadron. He lives right here in Chesapeake. You have invited him to speak here, but he has had conflicts. I recommend you invite him again. He's a retired captain, had a very successful career including command of a carrier. Tom and one Peter Blake Booth, who was a lieutenant commander in VF-74, both went from the ready room to the flight deck as the fire burned, and assumed leadership roles in directing the efforts of various groups of sailors who had formed up to do whatever seemed appropriate to deal with the fire. Both of those officers were recommended for Navy Commendation Medals, and the awards were approved. Peter Booth went on to be one of the commanding officers of *Forrestal*, and retired as a rear admiral. I believe he will be the speaker at the memorial at the Vietnam Wall tomorrow morning. But back to Tom Treanor.

I can't remember exactly why, but in VF-74, after the fire, we put Tom Treanor in charge of our efforts to recover our deceased shipmates from the living compartment in which they perished. Not a pleasant task, and I remember that when we thought we were done, I inspected the compartment, and we

found that there was work still remaining, I assigned the job to Tom to continue, and he looked at me with such a sad and mournful expression, that I have never forgotten it.

Johnny Wayne Spivey of Willacoochee, Georgia was a third class aviation ordnanceman who perished in the fire. In December of 2004, the State of Georgia dedicated a small bridge situated on a country road near his hometown -- the Johnny Wayne Spivey Memorial Bridge. I was fortunate to be able to attend that dedication, with several of the people who are here today. What a wonderful thing! An elected official in Georgia, at the suggestion of a friend of the Spivey family, was able to get a bridge dedicated to one of our shipmates! I am so proud of that. I think we ought to try to get more bridges dedicated to our fallen heroes.

And lastly, I would like to mention a deceased hero of VF-74, Robert A. Rhuda. He was in an assignment we called "police petty officer" -- his assignment placed him in charge of our living compartment, to see that it was orderly and properly equipped and maintained and cleaned. When the fire started, Rhuda left the compartment and was headed forward to safety and then he stopped and was heard to say, "Wait a minute; I've got to go back in there and make sure everyone gets up." And he did that; he turned around and returned to the compartment. And that was the last time he was seen alive. He saw his duty, and he did it, and it cost him his life. We recommended him for a Navy and Marine Corps Life Saving Medal, and he received it posthumously.

A line in a play by Shakespeare is, "Thou owest God a death." These men whom we honor today settled their debt forty years ago, and many did so at a very young age. They proceeded onward in that journey we are all traveling to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.

There is another bit of literature, a verse, which appeals to me as appropriate for today's program. In World War I, there was horrible fighting in the trenches in France. Some of this warfare took place in what anciently had been the province of Flanders, in the extreme northern part of France. About events in that area, a poet wrote:

"In Flanders fields the poppies blow
between the crosses row on row that mark our place
And in the sky the larks still bravely singing fly,
scarce heard amidst the guns below.
We are the dead.
Short days ago we lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
loved and were loved,
And now we lie in Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from failing hands we throw the torch --
be yours to hold it high!
If you break faith with us who die
we shall not sleep
though poppies grow in Flanders Fields."

And so these honored and memorialized dead from the USS *Forrestal* and from all other conflicts and skirmishes have thrown the torch to us who remain.

We salute them. We thank them for their valor. We pray God's blessings on their loved ones who survived them. May our actions, as members of the armed services or as citizens, be worthy of them. May we take that torch and indeed hold it high. May we rise up and accomplish that which is necessary to preserve this great nation.

God bless those who have given their lives.

God bless their sacrifice.

And God bless America.

I thank you.