



OCTOBER 2021

USS Indianapolis Legacy Organization 3-Minute Update: October Edition

Hello again, Indy Family!

I gotta level with you: This month's 3-Minute Update is more of a...well, 5-*Minute* Update. But with a beloved Survivor lost and family treasures found, there is a lot going on. So, grab a hot apple cider and find a cozy place to read...

Godspeed, Dear Friend

With heavy hearts and cherished memories, we honor USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) Survivor Richard "Dick" Thelen, of Lansing, Michigan. Dick passed away on September 13 at the age of 94.

“He had a larger-than-life personality,” said Peggy Campo on behalf of the CA-35 Survivors Organization. “Friends and strangers alike would listen in awe when he spoke of his World War II service and his survival after the sinking of his ship.”

Dick was instrumental in coordinating the first Survivors Reunion in 1960. Sixty-one years later, he was still serving. At the time of Dick's passing, he was vice chairman of the Survivors Organization. Like many of the survivors, Dick freely shared his story,

not to bring any attention to himself, but to honor his ship and shipmates, especially those who were lost.

“We loved hearing his stories about Indy, his involvement in the reunions, and his life outside of Indy, as much as he loved telling them,” said Jennifer Brunson, who leads Legacy’s Zoom with Survivors program.

Dick’s family remembers him as a devoted father, grandfather, and great grandfather. Jane Gwinn Goodall remembers how Dick and his wife Joanne were like a surrogate family to her own when Jane’s young family lived in Michigan, 2000 miles from their California home. Bonnie Buckett, who knew Dick most of her life, said he always lived up to his motto, “Never give up!”

On the day of his passing, Bart and Dianna Colvin honored Dick by raising an American flag over the CA-35 monument in the City of Indianapolis. Olivia Hussey then hand-delivered the flag to Dick’s son, David.

“Our hearts break as each of our beloved survivors passes from this life—but we must hold tight to our cherished memories,” Peggy said. “For those of us who had the privilege of knowing Dick, we will never forget his stories, his big smile and his laugh.”

Finding Family Treasures

When Yeoman First Class Theodore Ott put to sea with *Indianapolis* on July 16, 1945, he left a box of letters and medals safe at home. But there were two things he couldn’t have known. First, that he would never return. And second, that 76 years later, his keepsakes would still be blessing his family.

Theodore’s granddaughter, Dawn Ott Bollhoefer, recently got to take a closer look at some of those treasured memories. “I am fortunate to be in possession of my grandfather's scrapbook, which is a wonderful piece of his history and gives us a rare glimpse into his life and our family,” Dawn said. “My cousin holds something even a

bit more precious....the last letters that my grandfather wrote to my grandmother, Peggy, the love of his life.”

Dawn is one of many Indy lost-at-sea family members who are participating in Project 888. This new effort, spearheaded by Legacy’s Education Committee, is creating a biographical archive of CA-35 crewmembers killed in action or lost-at-sea. Since we announced Project 888, family members have been braving dusty attics, digging through old boxes, visiting libraries, and calling relatives— all to uncover and share more about the lives of men they loved and lost too soon.

Theodore Ott’s love letters to Peggy were written between July 16, 1945 — the day Indy sailed from Hunter’s Point, California, to deliver to Tinian Island the core of the first atomic bomb— and July 26, the day the ship pulled into Tinian Town Bay. But Peggy did not receive Theodore’s letters until after his death. The family has treasured them ever since.

Earlier this summer, Dawn’s cousin loaned her the letters. “I did not grasp how emotional it was going to make me to hold those letters and his Purple Heart in my hands,” Dawn said. “Tears overwhelmed me as I sat reading through those last few letters, most simply filled with a bit of his day-to-day life aboard ship, and always professing his deep love for my grandmother and his desire to be home with her once again.”

But that day would never come. On July 30, 1945, four days after Theodore wrote his last love letter, Indy sank in the center of the Philippine Sea.

“Those letters, his medal, and his scrapbook truly make my grandfather so much more than a young man who went down with the ship,” Dawn said. “They connect me and our family to the man he was—a kind, compassionate and gentle spirit who loved his wife and his job aboard ship and longed for a family.”

Tragically, Theodore was never sure he had one. He and Peggy suspected she had conceived while he was in port at Mare Island that May and June. Theodore asked

her to write him when she found out for sure. And Peggy did, writing with the joyous news that she was expecting...

But after the sinking, that letter was returned unopened. And so, Theodore never knew of his twins, born the following year, February 1946.

One of those twins would become Dawn's mother. Today, Dawn and her family are passionate about passing down Theodore's legacy of love and courage. And that's where Project 888 comes in. So far, Project 888 volunteers have collected more than 125 stories of the cruiser's lost crew.

Want to get involved? You are invited to join Dawn and the rest of our family historians in this important treasure hunt!

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.ussindianapolis.org/project-888>

2021 USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) Challenge Coins

Do you have your 2021 Challenge Coin yet? This year's unique, full-color coin features USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) on one side, with the reverse side dedicated to the ships who sped to the center of the Philippine Sea to rescue her surviving crew. Check it out on the [Challenge Coin page](#) at USSIndianapolis.com, or email Jason Witty at jjwitty78@yahoo.com for more information.

Legacy Membership: A Whole New Spin

If you've been thinking of joining Legacy—or still need to renew for 2021-22, now is a great time to do so. Anyone who joins or renews in the month of October will be entered in a drawing for a pair of Indy-related prizes.

That's right: Join or renew before November 1, and your name will be entered on "The Wheel!" You can support the Indy story *and* take home a prize. What better time to take membership for a spin?

Let's Get Together in Person, Y'all!

Round up your family and join us in Fredericksburg, Texas next spring. The Legacy Organization's next official in-person event is our regional reunion, set for Tuesday, May 17 – Friday, May 20, 2022, and y'all are welcome!

We are wrapping up a few more details, and registration information is coming soon. If you are receiving this newsletter, you'll also be getting an email notification when registration opens. If you or someone you know would prefer to receive a printed copy of the registration information via U.S. Mail, please let us know at admin@ussindianapolis.com.

Meanwhile, keep checking our website, www.ussindianapolis.com, to get the latest details. Our goal is to make the reunion memorable, fun, affordable, and educational for the whole family! Put the dates on your calendar and plan to join us!

Student Members Want to Hear YOUR Story

Legacy's student members and their mentors are gearing up for a new project, and they need your help. Why? Because this project is all about...well, **you**.

The student members have decided it would be great to know **Your Stories**. Whether you're an Indy family member, friend, researcher, supporter, or something else, the students want to know how you're connected to the Indy story.

So please pick up a pen (or keyboard), jot down your details, and pass them along. Include your name, where you're from, your connection to the Indy story, relevant family members, and best of all, pictures!

The students' goal is to organize **Your Stories** into a display for future events and reunions. Please snail-mail or email your info to:

Julie Rutherford Haas

10445 Adrian Road

Mascoutah, Illinois 62258

Or: julie.haas@bruceoakley.com

That's it for this month's **5-Minute Update**! See you next month!

Blessings,

Lynn

Lynn Vincent

Honorary Survivor

Legacy Chair