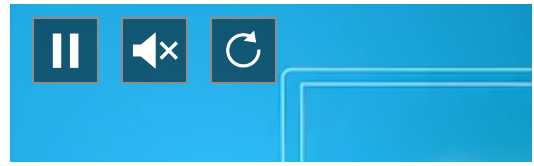


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GARDEN GROVE : Warship Crew to Be Honored

BY ROBERT BARKER

JUNE 25, 1992 12 AM PT



A heroic chapter during the waning days of World War II--the firestorm aboard the aircraft carrier Franklin that led to a rescue mission by Navy Lt. Donald A. Gary--will be commemorated at a local park, thanks to the efforts of resident Evelyn Newcomb, 64.

Gary, who became a neighbor of Newcomb's after the war, made three blinding, perilous trips below-decks of the burning aircraft carrier to guide more than 300 of his trapped shipmates to safety.

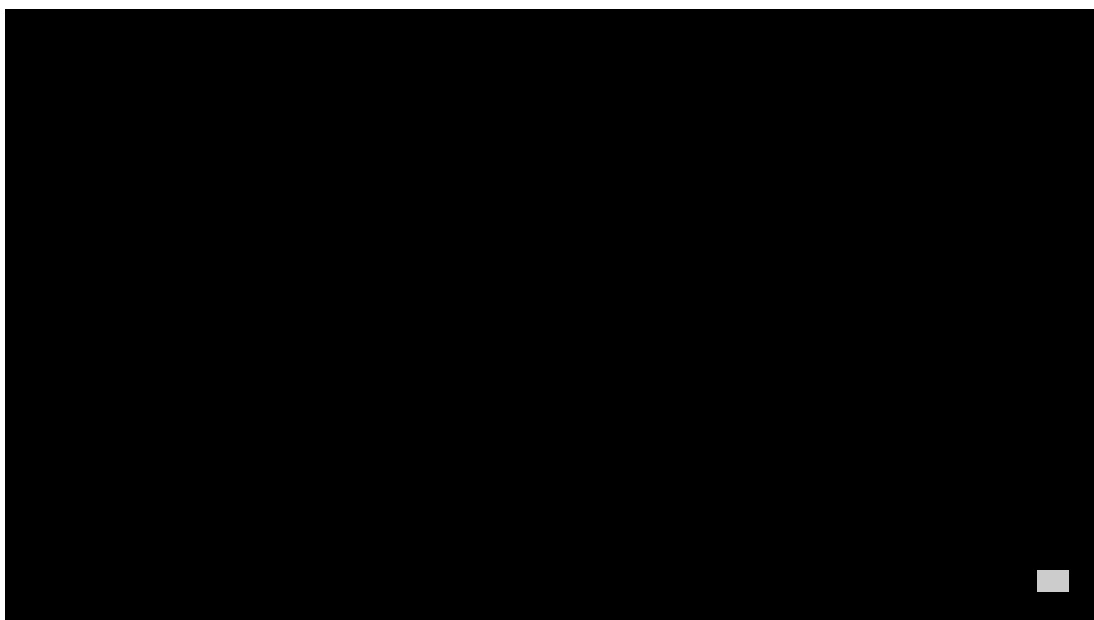
Forming a human chain, the men were led by Gary through dark ventilation ducts.

President Harry S. Truman awarded Gary the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest honor, at the White House on Jan. 23, 1946. Gary died in Garden Grove

in 1977 at the age of 73.

A Japanese airplane bombed the Franklin on March 19, 1945, just as its own warplanes were preparing for takeoff about 50 miles from Kobe, Japan.

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Fires and explosions involving the fuel, rockets and bombs from the Franklin's planes, racked the ship, killing more than 900 men. The casualty toll was the highest ever sustained by an American vessel in a single engagement, according to wartime newspaper reports.

The decimated crew, which had survived kamikaze airplane attacks in previous operations, somehow put out the fires that raged 100 feet into the sky, and managed to start the ship's engines. After a stop at Pearl Harbor, the crippled ship dropped anchor in New York Harbor on April 30.

The ship's ordeal inspired a book, "USS Franklin, the Ship That Wouldn't Die."

Newcomb has been engaged on a mission to keep the memory of Gary and the Franklin alive ever since making a pledge to Gary's wife before her death in 1986.

“I made a promise to her that I would help pursue the dream of keeping Don’s name, and the Franklin, alive,” Newcomb said. “He was her husband and her life, and I intend to keep that promise.”

Newcomb also believes that “the kids in today’s society should look up to heroes. And (Gary) definitely was a hero. Everybody loved him.”

Newcomb, an honorary crew member of the USS Franklin Assn., last week won approval from the Garden Grove City Council to install a 4-by-8-foot bronze plaque at the Donald Gary Bicentennial Mall near the Civic Center, with the names of the 913 men who lost their lives in the inferno. She expects the plaque to be ready by this fall.

The Franklin had the most decorated crew in naval history, Newcomb said. She and other members of the Franklin Assn., which is having a reunion in Nashville, Tenn. this week, are seeking to get a Franklin postage stamp.

Gary, his wife and son settled in Garden Grove in 1950 when he retired after 30 years in the Navy. The Gary, a guided missile frigate named in Gary’s honor, was launched in 1984.

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