

# Answering the Call: Honoring the Jersey Shore's Fallen Heroes



William J. Duffy at the Brick War Memorial, located in front of the Brick Township Municipal Building on Chambers Bridge Road.

a little boy, and it's still in me."

After graduating from Clark High School in 1967, Duffy's father suggested he enlist in the military rather than waiting to receive a draft notice because enlisted personnel were more likely to get a better MOS (military occupational specialty). "I entered the Army in August 1968 and got orders for Korea in March of 1969," he explained. "I spent thirteen months up near the DMZ (demilitarized zone) between North and South Korea as a hydraulic mechanic for M110 Howitzers in an artillery unit." Duffy noted that most do not realize that the United States is technically still at war with North Korea. "The Korean War reached an armistice in 1953, but peace was never declared nor a peace treaty ever signed."

Duffy returned from Korea and worked as a Drill Sergeant for eighteen months at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. He said, "That was the greatest job to this day I ever had."

He decided to take the civil service test instead of reenlisting in the Army, again as advised by his father, and after earning the highest possible score on the test, he was hired by the Clark Police Department in 1972.

It was during his first year as a police officer when his interest in fallen heroes piqued.

"I joined the department's Honor Guard, and during the 1972 Veterans Day Services at the Clark War Memorial, I saw the names of twelve fallen heroes from World War II and three from Vietnam," Duffy explained. "I asked the guys from the VFW and American Legion about these men, but nobody knew anything about them."

Duffy's innate love of history inspired him to research each fallen hero's story in a time when the internet was decades away from being invented. Unsuccessful research trips to the Clark Library and Clark High School forced him to painstakingly

**S**tories about retirees who spend their golden years at the Jersey Shore may be a dime a dozen, but every now and then, a diamond gleams from within the retirement pool's waters.

Consider Clark, New Jersey native William J. Duffy, who relocated to Ocean County with his wife, Ronnie, after retiring from forty years of law enforcement service in 2011.

Sounds like a typical retirement story, but Duffy is not your typical retiree.

Instead of golfing, fishing, or spending long days lying on the sand, Duffy's delight is an extension of his military and law enforcement background and a calling he considers to be his life's mission.

To date, he has researched and

preserved the stories of eighty New Jersey fallen heroes, most of whom called the Jersey Shore home.

"I love doing this," Duffy said. "It's a labor of love and my passion. I came home from a war zone, but they did not." Duffy considers it his duty and mission to honor the fallen heroes by sharing their stories. "Their sacrifice must never be forgotten."

Duffy's fervent interest in military history began as a child. "My father was a World War II Navy combat veteran and read books about World War II. When he'd put a book down, I'd pick it up and read it," Duffy said. "To this day, I have an addictive fascination with World War II, a war that had to be fought to save the world. I've loved United States history and military history ever since I was

## Jersey Shore Fallen Heroes Researched by William J. Duffy

Duffy is actively researching additional fallen heroes from the Jersey Shore and continues to add to this list.

### BAY HEAD:

**World War I:** Edward C. Bonnell, Charles Crane

**World War II:** Chester A. Forsyth

**Vietnam:** Jeremiah M. Hayes, Jr.

### BRICK TOWNSHIP:

**Civil War:** John Curtis, Aaron Elmer, Joel Gant, Henry C. Havens, Joel Hulse, Peter Layton

**World War I:** Joseph J. Clifton (also listed under Point Pleasant Boro; records show he lived in the West Point Pleasant Section of Brick Twp. and was included on the 1956 Brick War Memorial), Charles Miller

**World War II:** Robert H. Folsom

**Vietnam:** Robert Crouter, Raymond Dege, Don R. Harger, Carl Lamberson, Jr., James Lospinuso, Donald Marshall, James Nash, Cornelius Ram, Thomas Yohn

### Operation Iraqi Freedom:

Ryan Christensen, Christopher Duffy, Luigi Marciante

### LAVALLETTE:

**World War I:** Adolph Kurmin

**World War II:** Harry S. Bloom, Isaac J. Osborn

**Korea:** Martin J. Gavio

**Vietnam:** George J. Pollin, Donald A. Skinner

### MANTOLOKING:

**World War II:** Hugh W. Hill

### NEPTUNE:

**World War II:** John E. Comer

### POINT PLEASANT BEACH:

**World War I:** Reginald S. Newbury, Maitland B. Petrie

**World War II:** Robert Cafarelli, Frank D. Feimster, William L. Fleming, Max T. Henriksen, William A. Hey, Norman H. Kieb, Jr., Joseph O'Connor, Charles Solomon, John H. Townley

**Korea:** William H. Berg

**Vietnam:** Richard A. Nichols, Robert H. Wood

### POINT PLEASANT BORO:

**World War I:** Joseph J. Clifton (also listed on the Brick War Memorial, see above)

**World War II:** Brothers John P. Beecroft and Lawrence W. Beecroft, John R. Carleton, Joseph F. Greubel, Percy C. Hankins, Charles R. Miller, Robert W. Morris, Jr.

**Vietnam:** Clifford A. McKennan

examine the Elizabeth Daily Journal's microfilm archives while learning from headstone inscriptions and asking families for shoeboxes.

"World War II mothers and wives were known to have a shoebox filled with letters home, telegrams from the War Department, medals, and more," Duffy explained. "I interviewed families after getting details off headstones and asked for those shoeboxes."

Duffy's grit and resolve fueled his research, but while patrolling Clark, he noticed that only a handful of streets were dedicated to the town's fallen heroes. He approached the Clark Town Council in 1995 with

an idea to name all new streets after the town's fallen heroes, and they approved his request. "To date, nineteen out of twenty-one heroes have had streets named after them," Duffy said.

Following his 2000 retirement from the Clark Police Department as Captain of Detectives with twenty-eight years of service, Duffy spent ten years in the Megan's Law unit of the Union County Prosecutor's Office. He continued researching and educating about the Clark Fallen Heroes by creating displays and presentations for schools and community groups from his accumulated volumes of research and press clippings.

Duffy joined the Brick Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter upon moving to Brick Township in 2012. While participating in his first service as an Honor Guard member in front of the Brick Township Town Hall building

*continued on page 12*



Earlier this year, Duffy researched his eightieth fallen hero, Sgt. John E. Comer, and restored his gravestone at St. Catharine's Cemetery in Sea Girt.

Jill Ocone

on Chambers Bridge Road, he noticed a memorial to the town's fallen heroes, but just like his encounter in Clark, nobody knew much about the names etched on the monument.

"Now I had the internet," Duffy recalled, "and access to ancestry.com, newspapers.com, digital archives, and more." He spent countless hours searching online and utilizing Ocean County Library archives and resources. His hard work resulted in obtaining information about the fallen heroes from Brick, and in turn, sharing their stories with the community by speaking about them and creating a booklet which can be viewed by visiting [bit.ly/bricknfallenheroes](http://bit.ly/bricknfallenheroes).

Because Brick Township was almost fully developed, Duffy proposed honoring the fallen heroes with banners at Windward Park instead of naming streets after them. With help from Councilwoman Lisa Crate, Mayor John Ducey, and a committee of members from Brick's chapters of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and the town council, the banners were hung and dedicated in April 2019.



*The Brick War Memorial includes the name of every one of Brick's fallen heroes from the Civil War through Operation Iraqi Freedom.*

Duffy and the committee also raised \$16,000 to rehabilitate and update the Brick War Memorial, which was originally dedicated in 1956. His efforts resulted in new bronze plaques, which included the name of every one of Brick's fallen

heroes from the Civil War through Operation Iraqi Freedom placed over the original cement etchings. The new memorial was officially dedicated in May 2020.

Last November, the Brick VFW received a call from Chris Wilson, vice principal of Point Pleasant Beach High School, who inquired about a Veterans Day presentation for the students. Duffy, who currently serves the Brick VFW as Officer of the Day, jumped at the chance. "I talked about my own experience and the fallen heroes from Brick," he said, "and after I was finished, he (Wilson) took me in the hall and showed me a wall dedicated in 1945 with the names of students who graduated from the high school who went to war and never came home."

A new flame sparked inside Duffy, and by the spring of 2022, he had finished researching fallen heroes from Bay Head, Lavallette, Mantoloking, Point Pleasant Beach, and Point Pleasant Boro. "I returned to Point Pleasant Beach High School for a presentation about their heroes via a PowerPoint display created by students and teachers for Memorial Day 2022." He has also presented to Point Pleasant Boro High School students and to the Point Pleasant Historical Society.

## They Didn't Come Home

by William Duffy

Two of them would be killed in action on the same day at the same battle in World War II, 13,000 miles away from home.

One would be killed in action on his birthday coming to the aid of a wounded soldier in World War II.

One would write a last letter home to his son and would be killed in action a month later in World War II.

One would be shot down on a bombing mission and would be executed by his captors in Vietnam.

One would be killed by friendly fire as he drove in a truck in Vietnam.

One would take his own life in Vietnam after receiving a "Dear John" letter from his wife.

One would be killed in action in Vietnam and his mother would never accept that fact for the rest of her life.

One would be killed in action in Iraq after returning from leave where he witnessed the birth of his son.

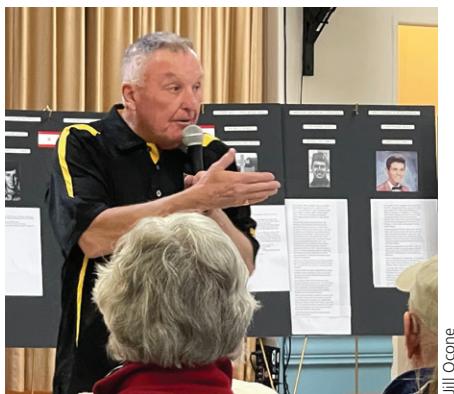
One brother was killed in action during World War II. Another brother would be executed later in the war by his captors as a Prisoner of War.

One would be killed in action after coming back from special duty as part of the honor guard for a deceased president.

*These are just some of the eighty fallen heroes that Duffy has researched over the last forty years.*

Jill Ocone

This summer, Duffy's dedication to the fallen heroes of the Jersey Shore led him to cemeteries around the region, where he single-handedly cleaned up grave sites and rehabilitated headstones by using a special solution. While at St. Catharine's Cemetery in Sea Girt, an attendant showed him the gravestone of Sgt. John Comer that was neglected. "My eightieth fallen hero to research is John Comer," he said. "Here's a guy from Neptune that was in the Battle of the Bulge, who earned two silver stars and two purple hearts. He deserves a clean gravesite."



Duffy speaking at a presentation to the Point Pleasant Historical Society.

His tireless dedication to fallen heroes has led to him being featured in such media outlets as the Star Ledger, CBS, NJ.com, The Ocean Star, The Coast Star, and more. He acknowledges the support he's received from his wife, his three children, and his two grandchildren as he pursues his life mission.

Duffy's next project is to spearhead new memorials for Point Pleasant Beach's War Memorial Park, Point Pleasant Boro (location to be determined), and Bay Head that will expand upon existing monuments and list the names of every fallen hero, similar to the Brick War Memorial. Duffy looks forward to working with the mayors and councils from those towns, along with community groups and volunteers, to make his vision a reality.

"Each fallen hero's name deserves to be listed and their stories need to be told," Duffy said. "That's my goal, and it will happen."

-Jill Ocone

## Letter from Private First Class Melvyn F. Graves to His Son in Rahway/Clark for Christmas 1944



Dec 24, 1944

Dear Son,

Right here I am starting a very difficult task. I am writing to a person who I hardly know except by what your Mommie tells me and the pictures that the folks send me of you.

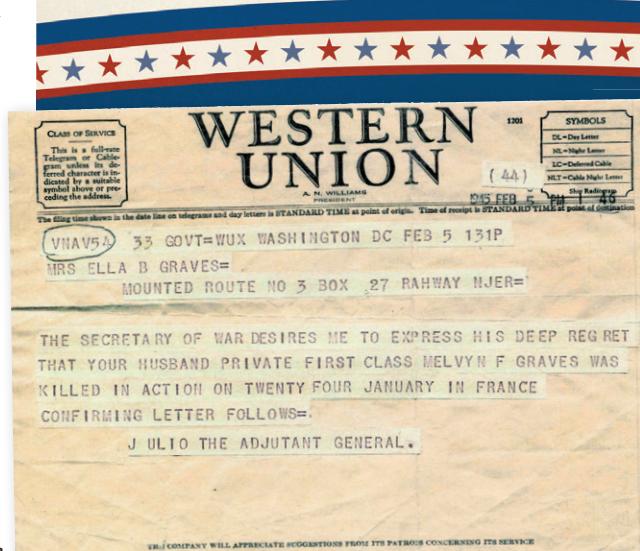
I know you won't be able to read this for quite a while yet or even understand what it means, but you tell Mommie to read it to you.

The real reason I am writing though is to wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Maybe by this time next year I can be with you and Mommie and we can have a swell time together on Christmas day when Santa comes.

For this time I will say so long and be a good boy until I get back. God bless you and Mommie.

Your loving  
Dad

Graves would be killed in action a month later.



images courtesy of William J. Duffy