

Tyler J. Warman

NAMESAKE

- Richard Yeater Stafford was born December 11th, 1916, in Windsor, Missouri. The son of Frederick and Minnie Stafford, Richard, graduated from the University of Missouri with a degree in Business and Public administration in 1938.
- After College, Richard Stafford enlisted in the United States Marine Corps reserves on October 19th, 1940, at the age of 23
- On February 20th, 1940, Stafford accepted appointment as a second lieutenant at Quantico, VA, remaining there until the 29th of May when he was restationed to Camp Elliot in San Diego, CA
- Stafford was stationed at Camp Elliot from June 16th, 1941-July 1942. He was promoted to first lieutenant on April 11th, 1942.
- Stafford and the 2nd Marines deployed to Koro Island on July 25th, for the final rehearsal for the Guadalcanal landings which would take place August 7th, 1942.
- As commanding officer of C company, first battalion, Second Marines, Stafford, was promoted to Captain on September 12, 1942.
- Richard Y. Stafford was posthumously awarded the Silver Star medal, “Between October 9th- 11th, Captain Stafford led his company of marines on a forced march through the dense jungles and swamps of Guadalcanal. Upon arriving at his objective Stafford realized the enemy position was stronger and more reinforced than had been expected, and the ensuing fighting very brisk. Captain Stafford led his men in the assault and was killed by a Japanese rifleman, “for his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as

commanding officer, which constituted an inspiration to the men of his command in the fulfillment of an important mission.

SPECS

- The USS Stafford (DE-411) was a John C. Butler class destroyer escort with the call sign of N-H-V-V
- Her Keel was laid down November 29th, 1943, in Houston Texas, at Brown Shipbuilding company. She was launched on January 11, 1944.
- Commissioned January 11th, 1944, Lt Comdr. Volney. H Craig Jr, USNR, in command
- She weighed 1,350 tons, 306 ft long, 36.8ft wide at the beam with a top speed of 24 knots.
- She had a complement of 201 enlisted sailors and 14 officers

Armaments

- 2x single 5-inch guns
- 2x twin 40mm Bofors AA guns
- 10x 20mm Oerlikon AA guns
- 1x triple torpedo tubes
- 8x depth charge k-guns
- 2x depth charge racks
- Anti-submarine Hedgehog

Wartime Service

- Upon the completion of fitting around the Galveston-Houston area, Stafford sailed alongside with the USS La Prade (DE-409) on May 7th, 1944, for Bermuda to engage in her shakedown training.

- Her shakedown cruise was interrupted from May 17-19, when the Stafford joined forces with the convoy GUS-38 and escorted the fleet oiler Merrimac (AO-37) into the waters of Bermuda.
- USS Stafford completed training and post-shakedown availability early June
- June 9th, 1944, the USS Stafford joined the Italian submarine “Vortice” off Bermuda to escort the sub north.
- Three days later June 12th, the Stafford was relieved by YMS-169 (auxiliary motor mine sweeper) at the entrance of Casco Bay, Maine
- After being relieved, the Stafford moored at Charlestown, Mass. Undergoing post shakedown overhaul at the Boston Navy yard from June 13-June 22, heading south to moor at Norfolk, VA two days later
- On June 26th, 1944, Stafford once again joined by the La Prade, now with the USS Wasatch (AGC-9) the Mount McKinley class amphibious force command ship off the capes of Virginia to form Task Unit 29.6.6 which headed down to the Panama Canal.
- The three ships of the Task unit ventured through the Panama Canal on July 3rd and moored at Balboa in Panama City.
- Following Independence Day 1944, she reported to the Pacific fleet for duty and sailed to San Diego.
- Following repairs at the Destroyer repair base in San Diego, the Stafford was underway, once again, with the USS La Prade for Hawaii reaching Pearl Harbor July 25th
- For almost a month the crew of the Stafford engaged in Anti-Submarine warfare (ASW) training in the Hawaiian Islands.

- On August 18th, USS Stafford, and USS Fieberling (DE-640) sailed out of Pearl escorting Task Unit 16.8.1 to the Marshall Islands arriving at Kwajalein a week later. The Stafford would escort the SS Coast Skipper to Majuro the following day Aug 26th.
- On August 29th, the Stafford joined the USS Dionea (DE-261) in the screen of the escort carrier, USS Thetis Bay (CVE-90).
- The three warships arrived at Pearl Harbor on September 3rd, and the Stafford would operate out of Pearl Harbor for just under two months' time. During this period the Stafford's crew would participate in more ASW training.
- On October 31st, she departed Pearl Harbor after two months of ASW training and was appropriately assigned the task of finding and neutralizing a known enemy submarine threat hindering our Pacific sea lanes.
- Over the next two weeks, the task group made several contacts, attacking the contacts with depth charges but ultimately failed to locate and eliminate the enemy threat. However, on November 14th, the task group received word that a friendly task group had sunk their prey.
- The Stafford was ordered back to Pearl, arriving November 19th.
- Five days later, Stafford departed Pearl for Eniwetok as a part of TG 12.4 arriving December 2nd, reported for duty to the commander??? Third Fleet redesignated Task Group 30.6.
- The following day, the task groups continued west, stopping at Ulithi on the night of Dec. 7th and 8th and Saipan on the 10th and the 11th.

- By December 17th, she had reached the Kossol passage in the Palaus. The task group made an anti-submarine sweep sixty miles in radius around Peleliu before heading to Ulithi, arriving on December 22nd.
- December 28th, Task group redesignated 77.4.13, returned to Palaus the following day.
- On January 1st, 1945, the USS Stafford sailed with the task unit from Kossol Roads screening units named Task Force 77 traveling toward Luzon. Sailing south from Leyte through the Surigao strait, then traversing the northwestern course off Mindanao
- Although air alerts were called from the second day out and HMAS Australia reported an unidentified plane splashing “close aboard”, kamikaze attacks did not successfully crash into a ship until late on Jan. 4, when a kamikaze struck the Escort carrier Ommaney Bay (CVE-79). The escort carrier would be scuttled by friendly American torpedoes.
- By January 5th, 1945, the Japanese had determined that Task Force 77 was headed for Lingayen, further intensifying air attacks, later that afternoon, Task force 77 came under relatively heavy kamikaze attack.

Kamikaze Attack

- At 1747, eight Japanese aircraft, most likely Mitsubishi A6m (Zero's) came in low and out of the sun
- The Stafford, Goss (DE-444), and Ulvert M. Moore (DE-442) (captained by Lt cmdr Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr.) were screening Escort Carrier Tulagi (CVE-52) when the three DEs ordered their anti-aircraft batteries to open to fire at the targets at the range of approximately 8,000 yards away. At this time, four enemy fighters peeled off to the right.
- The remaining four enemy aircraft bore down aiming for the bow of the vessel

- Stafford deck log states “Our AA fire splashed one plane at about 1500 yards on the port bow. Shortly thereafter, a second plane was hit. This plane continued about 500 yards across our port bow and then made a sharp right turn and headed for the bridge of this ship (DE-411). Being unable to gain altitude this plane made a deliberate (suicide) crash into the hull of this ship starboard side about frame 96. At this point another of the attacking planes was splashed by our AA fire at a point of about 1500 yards on the starboard bow. The fourth plane of the group was reported by lookouts to have crashed into the HMAS Australia.
- Speed of the USS Stafford began to decrease immediately, the #2 fireroom was flooded immediately. The #2 engine room flooded soon thereafter.
- The crashing plane had made a large hole in the hull in the vicinity of the distilling plant.
- The forward bulkhead to #2 engine room was also penetrated causing that space to flood, but more slowly.
- At this point preparations were made to abandon ship in case the flooding could not be controlled. All classified communication material was ordered destroyed
- The USS Halligan (DD 584) and the USS Ulvert C. Moore (DE-442) stood by to take off survivors. The USS Halligan would take aboard 55 men and 3 officers
- It was decided that the flooding could be checked, and an attempt would be made to save the ship, keeping onboard only a nucleus crew, A tow was requested, and all her topside depth charges, K-guns, and loading machined were to be jettisoned to maintain stability of the floundering vessel.

- USS Halligan (DD-584) dispatched a rescue and repair party to assist the vessel remain float
- The battered vessel then accompanied the USS Talbot (FFG4) to Lingayen Gulf, arriving Jan. 10. The 54 men and 3 officers (one man succumbed to his wounds aboard the Halligan) returned to their original ship. Even though serious doubt about the ships condition were beginning to prevail.
- Following the transfer of personnel, an alert was sounded as a lookout spotted three Japanese attack planes. One plane, identified as a Japanese Nakajima B5N (Kate) was shot down, the other planes splashing into the harbor.
- On Jan 11. As the Stafford regrouped with other vessels forming a slow moving convoy the Stafford managed to escape heavy attack by enemy aircraft.
- The Stafford arrived at Leyte, Jan. 16, hindered by a critical supply of fresh water, the Stafford was instructed to sail for Manus for temporary repairs. She soon got underway for Pearl Harbor, and now operating independently departed Pearl for Mare Island drydock in California, arriving March 4th, 1945.
- Repairs, trials, and replacements were fitted and completed on May 6th; the USS Stafford sailed the golden coast destined for Pearl Harbor.
- Due to the damage received on Jan. 5, the Stafford lost some of her speed and maneuverability, to counteract this fault, her torpedo tubes were replaced with two quad 40mm guns.
- At Pearl Harbor on May 24th, the Stafford performed escort duty at Eniwetok in the Marshal Islands, then she proceeded Ulithi on the Caroline's to join Task Unit 94.6.2 enroute to the ill-fated invasion of Okinawa in the Ryuku Islands.

- On June 20th, Lt Cmdr. Volney H. Craig Jr. relieved of his duties as ships captain by Lt Cmdr. Dewitt McDougall Patterson.
- During her duty off Okinawa, the Stafford engaged in antisubmarine patrols up and down a 7,000 ft stretch of water nine miles off the shore, joining a hunter killer group with the USS Finnegan (DE-307) and the USS Daniel T. Griffin (APD-38).
- While traversing the water with the hunter killer group the vessels came under steady enemy fire from enemy aircraft.
- The Stafford nearly took more damage on July 27th, when she was the target of a Japanese torpedo that missed her fantail by a slim margin of 15 yards.
- The following day in the Stafford “Radio Shack” a naval dispatch read “ Last night’s experience indicates (A) Jap is coming in low and hard (B) Only the utmost vigilance in all respects and in all lookout departments can keep him off our necks (C) More and faster shooting is in order (D) Okinawa is still in the war.
- During the month of August, mother nature put the conflict on pause through a series of devastating typhoons that damaged a number of U.S ships and killed over a thousand Navy personnel at Buckner Bay on the southern coast of the Okinawa Island.
- Following the Japanese surrender on August 15th, the Stafford was still on antisubmarine patrol, believing the Stafford’s sonar to have contact with an enemy submarine threat, dropping five depth charges as a result.
- The Stafford search party also found the remains of the wreckage USS Twiggs (DD-591) which had been missing since the early hours of the Okinawa campaign.

- During September and October, the Stafford was an escort to hospital ships in the transport of Allied prisoners of war from Japan to Okinawa, taking the Stafford to seaports such as Sasebo and Nagasaki, less than a month after the devastating atomic bomb.
- In the Japanese waters the Stafford remained on constant alert for enemy mines, destroying nine mines.
- October 28th, the Stafford continued to Wakayama to pick up mail and crew, and two days later was en route to the harbor at Yokosuka, which was crowded with ships including the USS New Jersey near a fallen Japanese battleship. As the Stafford passed the two ships the skipper of the Stafford snidely remarked, “take a good look at that Jap battlewagon, then look at the New Jersey, and you can easily see who won the war.
- After a brief period of liberty in Tokyo on November 3rd, the Stafford, once again, got underway for Pearl Harbor, then to proceed to San Pedro Bay, California. Arriving stateside the Stafford was ordered to San Francisco for plane guard duty for the escort carrier USS Corregidor (CV-58), qualifying naval flight personnel as they practiced flying in rough weather.
- The war ended for the beautifully battered USS Stafford (DE-411) on December 12th, 1945 when she unceremoniously unloaded her ammunition at the Naval ammunition depot at Seal Beach, California,
- The USS Stafford was decommissioned May 16th, 1946

AFTER ACTION REPORT

- In the “Report of War Damage”, the Chief of the Bureau of Ships stated, “the offensive fighting efficiency of the ship after damage was negligible. Defensively, all armament was operative at least in local control. The lack of speed and maneuverability due to the flooding and to the loss of half the engine plant was the most serious result that effected the fighting efficiency. The engineering plant was being operated “split” and no failures or interruptions occurred in either propulsion or auxiliary services from the forward plant. The ship survived (after action) winds of 30-40 knots, rough seas, and moderate short swells, although under these conditions speed was reduced to 4-5 knots.
- From the large amount of shrapnel and blast damage, and from metal fragments collected, it is believed that the enemy aircraft was carrying a bomb which exploded with a low order detonation on impact was centered at about frame 95 starboard and to the waterline.
- From “Report of War Damage” The impact ripped a rectangular hole into the hull about 16 feet wide and 12 feet deep. The indentation extended from bulkhead 86 through frame 105, a distance of 33 feet from the main deck to the bilge keel.
- “It is believed that this ship was selected as a suicide target because of the extremely heavy and effective fire being developed. Of the three guns it is considered that the 40mm is the most effective. In order to defeat suicide attacks, it is necessary to completely destroy the attacking plane at a considerable distance from the ship. Moderate damage and killing the pilot do not appear sufficient. For this reason, the 20mm gun is of little to no value.

- In an after-action report from the Escort Carrier Tulagi (CVE-72) it states “Too much cannot credit cannot be given to the determination and zeal of the commanding officer (Volney H. Craig Jr.) and the crew of the Stafford in having their ship to fight future battles. The commanding officer is deserving of the highest commendation and in separate correspondence he is being recommended for an appropriate reward.