

## **Paul H. Carr inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame**

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<https://austin-carr.org/paul-h-carr-inducted-into-the-oklahoma-military-hall-of-fame/>



My uncle, Paul H. Carr, is a man of legend in my mother's family. He was one of 9 surviving children, 8 of whom were girls, with my mother as the youngest. I don't know the exact date, but my grandparents divorced, something very unusual for that period of time. This left my grandmother to raise the last part of the brood by herself. She did whatever was necessary to keep all fed, housed and clothed. While doing that, she was famous for helping those in need who were not part of her family. It was just who she was. In many ways my grandmother, aka Mama Carr, is also a family legend. Proof of this was the summers at Mama Carr's house where "The Sisters" would faithfully return with their own broods to stay for various lengths of time. I remember that there always seemed to be a gang of cousins there. I believe "The Sisters" truly revered my grandmother.

Paul H. Carr came of age, and by this I mean he graduated high school, right in the middle of War World II. He was an only son, he was a farm boy, it would have been easy for him to have gotten a deferment and stay out of the war. Like so many of his generation he chose not to. He chose country and patriotism above all other considerations. I'm not quite sure why he chose the Navy, but, anecdotally, this seems to be common with young men from land locked states. I suppose it seems more romantic than slogging around in the mud with the infantry.



He ended up as a gunnery captain on the destroyer escort, USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413). He ended up in [the largest naval battle in history](#), The Battle of Leyte Gulf<sup>1</sup>. The essence of the Battle of Leyte Gulf is that Admiral Halsey was faked out by the Japanese into giving chase to a decoy portion of the

Japanese fleet. This left the smaller American ships like the USS Samuel B Roberts to protect the American aircraft carriers from Japanese cruisers, destroyers and a battleship, obviously a David vs. Goliath situation.

This excerpt is from the website for the [USS Carr \(FFG-52\)](#). It details what happened aboard the [USS Samuel B Roberts](#):

*When SAMUEL B. ROBERTS engaged Japanese heavy cruisers attacking a force of escort carriers off Samar during the battle of Leyte Gulf, the fire of her after 5-inch guns inspired "every man on the ship." As the destroyer escort maneuvered radically, and used minimal fire control equipment, Carr's mount fired over 300 rounds of 5-inch ammunition, scoring, at close range, "a great many hits" on one of the enemy heavy cruisers, knocking out an 8-inch turret, demolishing her bridge and starting fires aft.*

*Ultimately, the damage received from Japanese shells knocked out all power, compressed air, and communications, crippling the ship. Knowing the hazards involved, Carr's close-knit crew loaded, rammed, and fired six charges by hand, without the safety device of a gas ejection system. In attempting to fire a seventh round, however, the powder charge "cooked-off" before the breech was closed, wrecking the gun and killing or wounding all but three men in the gun house.*

*After the order to abandon ship had been given, a Petty Officer entered the mount, to find Carr, literally torn open from neck to thigh, holding a 54-pound projectile, trying unassisted to load and ram the only shell available. Carr begged the man to help him get off the last round, but the latter, seeing that the gun had been destroyed and its breach rendered an unrecognizable mass of steel, took the projectile from the gunner's hands. After helping one of the other wounded men to the main deck, the Petty Officer returned to find Carr again attempting, although horribly wounded, to place the projectile on the loading tray of the inoperative gun. Carr perished a few minutes later after he was dragged from the mount.*

There are many books and documentaries about this naval battle. Many of these include the story of Paul H. Carr in them. Among the medals Paul H. Carr received was the Silver Star. His Captain wanted him to get the Navy Cross, but there were not enough witnesses to his actions.

When the news of my uncle's death was received in Oklahoma, it was devastating as you might imagine. Throughout my childhood, my mother, her sisters and my grandmother continued to talk about my uncle, or as they called him "Brother" like he had just gone on a short trip and would soon be back. I remember my grandmother kept his medals, including the Silver Star, in the top drawer of a dresser. She would occasionally bring them out to show to us. The Navy also produced what I thought of as a comic book, I suppose today we might term it a graphic story, of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. It included two or three dramatic pages of my uncle's actions during the battle. Of course, my grandmother kept this and would let us grandchildren look at it from time to time. I did not know my uncle, but I seemed to have always have felt his presence.



On March 26, 1982 the Navy began construction on a new missile frigate that was to be named the [USS Carr \(FFG-52\)](#). It was launched February 26, 1983. The ship's motto was, "Courage, Will, Determination", an apt tribute to my uncle's heroic actions. This ship being named after Paul H. Carr was obviously a huge, huge honor for my family. All the sisters, my uncle's wife, and many other relatives attended the christening ceremonies. Carr's wife, Goldie, broke the champagne bottle across the bow of the ship.

The Navy and the various captains of the vessel were diligent about keeping the family informed about the activities of the ship. They also kept the family involved in other ways. I once attended a Friends and Family cruise on the USS Carr in Norfolk. My mother was the only remaining sister able to get around well. They treated her like royalty, including piping her on board like she was a Fleet officer. It was quite some day.

After many years of service the USS Carr was decommissioned on March 13, 2013.

Towards the end of the service of the USS Carr the family, with help, installed an exhibit honoring Paul H. Carr inside the restored 1890-era Katy Depot Museum, the MKT's (Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad) oldest surviving wooden train station. It is located just off Highway 69 at 1000 Paul Carr Drive, Checotah, OK. Checotah was his home town. Interesting enough, if it were still standing, my grandmother's house I remember returning to, would be just across the highway and visible from the Katy Depot. [Cheryl Smallwood-Roberts](#) designed the exhibit and [Crain Displays](#) installed it.

There is an organization in Oklahoma that I did not know about until recently, the [Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame](#), OMHF. It is a non-profit organization whose mission is "*supporting our uniformed services, in particular, honoring those Oklahomans, living or deceased, who serve or have served in the military, with records of outstanding service to our nation.*"

Paul H. Carr had been nominated two previously times for induction into the OMHF, but not been selected. I am sure it is a difficult process as there are many worthy possibilities. But on the other hand how many Oklahomans have had ships named after them? To answer my own question, five, and one of those was a gentleman named Will Rogers who had a Polaris class submarine named for him<sup>2</sup>. Also while not unheard of, it is less common to name ships after enlisted sailors. The USS Carr is one of the few.

The third time was the charm. This happened with the help of two individuals. One was Bob Vanek. OMHF has what is known as Ambassadors. Their function is to help to identify individuals for induction, and then to shepherd the nomination and family/people associated with the nominee through the process. Some nominees are living and some are not. Bob Vanek was our Ambassador. I would like to give him a shout out. I for one am very grateful for all he has done, and without a doubt the rest of my family feels the same way. I think I must have pumped Bob Vanek's arm thanking him for his part in this so much his arm came out of the socket. Hopefully, he will forgive me for that. Again, Bob, thanks.

The final push came from the last Skipper of the USS Carr, Captain Patrick E. Kulakowski, USN. He wrote a letter to the OMHF promoting the inclusion of Paul H. Carr into the Hall. I would like to give a shout out to him also.

It turned out the induction ceremony was a big deal and a huge event. A black tie preferred event. The

majority of the civilians were in their best evening wear. The military were in their dress formals or service best. I found some of the female military formal interesting as it was a hybrid between military and formal. While elegant, there was no doubt that it was military. Also interesting to me were some of the veterans wearing formal military dress of their period of service. It was quite a show. It was much more interesting than your standard black tie event.



All my brothers went with spouses and or accompanying relatives. If you did not go, you missed the thrill of seeing my brother Paul in formal wear. That was certainly a sight I thought I would never see. Many of my cousins were there. I believe we had two full tables and a partial third. I say this as the ticket price to the event was \$70 per person. While not prohibitive, the price of two tickets I am sure made a few folks reconsider going as did the black tie nature of the affair. That aside it was a wonderful evening and much more emotional than I expected it to be.

As with all things military there was a lot of pomp and circumstance. Having grown up essentially as a military brat, I was harkening back to my younger days during those portions of the evening. The pomp and circumstance was the part of being around military bases that I did enjoy. There was a local high school ROTC section that did many of the ceremonies, and they did an excellent job. My brother remembers them as being from Stillwater.

There were a total of ten inductees. For each inductee one of the presenters would read the history of the nominee and the reason for the induction. After that, the nominee or a representative of the nominee would come forward to receive the medal. A few of the stories were very touching. A couple of the recipients' acceptance speeches were very moving.

I remember one man whose father was killed in action while his mother was pregnant with him. The story of his father was the motivation factor through much of his life. He felt much of what he did, he did to make his unmet father proud. This individual did not join the military, but chose to serve via police service. He is now a Chief of Police in a New Jersey town, and he has an advanced degree.

Another recipient told the story of the inductee who had spent 999 days in a Chinese prisoner of war camp. This individual seemed to have emerged from that experience as a Zen master, although I am sure he would have termed it differently. He became an individual who was not bothered by human foibles. He also came out of that experience dedicated to a life of service giving much back to the community and individuals. His story also made me remember my Uncle Johnny who spent an extraordinary long time in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. He came out of that experience a very quiet man, basically just wanting to live the remainder of his life in peace.

My cousin, Perry Schulze, gave the acceptance speech for Paul H. Carr. He did so graciously and with dignity. He adhered to my primary rule of speech giving, brevity. I would like to give him a shout out too for his excellent job. The text of his speech is below:

*Our family would like to thank Sergeant Robert Vanek for nominating our uncle.*

*And the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation for inducting Paul Carr into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame.*

*Paul's youngest sister Juanita Carr Rush wrote this about her brother.*

*"If I could have only one wish and I believe I speak for all my family in this. I would wish that all who hear this story of my brother, including future generations, would realize that heroic deeds are the end result of all those seemingly insignificant, small, mundane, day to day living experiences that go into molding our character. If we would look at each experience, each task as a "DIVINE APPOINTMENT" we might approach them differently."*

*Thank You*

During the induction of Paul H. Carr, I remember sitting at the table feeling proud. I remember thinking of my grandmother and her daughters, and how they responded to the loss of their beloved "Brother". I remember thinking what an honor it was for the Navy to name a ship after this Oklahoma farm boy, and how well they treated my family during the life of the ship. I remember wondering what sort of man my uncle would have become if he had come home from the Navy. I am sure he would have still been a role model to my generation of cousins. That is just who he was.

It was an incredible evening, and for me full of emotion. I am so glad the OMHF chose to induct Paul H. Carr. Those that felt the loss most acutely are gone, but Paul's memories lives on in the hearts of their descendants. We are all so proud of what he did in defense of our country. Our family truly feels him to be a legend, and we are working hard to keep the memory of his actions alive. Thank you OMHF for including him.

Footnotes:

1. *Leyte Gulf, October 23–26, 1944. The largest in terms of tonnage of ships in the combined orders of battle, if not necessarily in terms of tonnage of the ships engaged; it is also the largest in terms of the tonnage of ships sunk, and in terms of the size of the area within which the component battles took place. The United States Third and Seventh Fleets, including some Australian warships, comprised 8 large aircraft carriers, 8 light carriers, 18 escort carriers, 12 battleships, 24 cruisers, 141 destroyers and destroyer escorts, many other ships, and around 1,500 aircraft. They won a decisive victory over Japanese forces, which consisted of 1 large aircraft carrier, 3 light carriers, nine battleships, 19 cruisers, 34 destroyers and several hundred aircraft. The opposing fleets carried a total of about 200,000 personnel. Leyte Gulf consisted of four major subsidiary battles: Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, Battle of Surigao Strait, Battle of Samar and Battle of Cape Engano, along with other actions. These are counted together by virtue of their all being caused by the Japanese operation Sho-Go, which was aimed at destroying the Allied amphibious*

*forces involved in the invasion of Leyte. However, the individual battles were separated by distances as great as two hundred miles, as well as several days time, from the first submarine action to the Japanese withdrawal.*

2. *Wikipedia article on Oklahoma related Navy ships*

To help support the Paul Henry Carr Memorial Foundation go to [Help Support The Carr Exhibit](#) for information on how with Amazon Smile or by making a direct donation.

References (There is more out there, I am familiar with these):

1. [Book ~ Battle of Leyete Gulf](#)
2. [Book ~ The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors](#)
3. [USS Carr Website](#)
4. [Samuel B. Roberts Survivors Assoc.](#)
5. [YouTube video – The Biggest Naval Battle Ever | Battle of Leyte Gulf](#)

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