

Half Staff – Frank J. Scalli

Saturday, June 25, 2004

Frank J. Scalli, 73, of 36 Thurston Point Road, died peacefully at his home from Alzheimer's disease Thursday, with his wife Mary at his side. Born in Charlestown April 13, 1931, he was the son of the late Pasquale and Annie (Ganley) Scalli. He lost his father when he was 13 and became a source of comfort for his mother all of her life. He met his wife, Mary, while they were teenagers in Charlestown. They were married there in 1953. He joined the U.S. Army and served proudly during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953 as a paratrooper with the 11th Airborne Division, 188th AIR, out of Fort Campbell, Ky.

He was one of the original Army "Atomic Soldiers," having participated in the first live nuclear detonation tests involving U.S. troops during November 1951 in the Nevada desert. He returned to Boston to pursue the activity that he first experienced in the service and that would become one of his life's passions: scuba diving.

He was one of the founding fathers of sport diving in the United States. He helped to develop the science of sport diving instruction by writing the first nationally adopted scuba instruction manual in 1954, which is still in use today. He was one of the founders of the Boston Sea Rovers, one of the oldest dive clubs in the country. He was an originator of their annual education and training clinic, where he was honored this past March at their 50th annual show.

He was instrumental in legitimizing diving by introducing scuba instruction to colleges and universities through his teaching at institutions such as Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the U.S. military academies at West Point and Annapolis. He served simultaneously for many years on the boards of directors of all three national diving education and certification organizations, PADI, NAUI and the YMCA.

He assisted in establishing the Massachusetts District Commission and Massachusetts State Police underwater search and rescue teams in the early 1960s, following 10 years of volunteer search and rescue work for the state. As a diver, he had few equals, whether participating in the first dive expedition to the sunken Italian luxury liner Andrea Doria or pioneering a new drift dive adventure in the Caribbean.

For more than 30 years, he led the business development for the diving industry's leading company, U.S. Divers Company, chaired by Jacques Cousteau. He and Cousteau shared a lifetime of diving and business adventures. Cousteau would visit Mr. Scalli at his home in Gloucester frequently, beginning with his family's permanent move there in 1967.

He has received every major award in the diving industry in recognition of his hard work and dedication, including his induction last year into the Diving Hall of Fame.

Mr. Scalli considered his most important accomplishments the ones in which he helped those most in need. For more than 40 years, he supported the children of the Cotting School in Boston. He founded the annual fund-raiser Seamark, raising money from the local diving community for the school. He also raised funds to build their vision clinic, which now bears his name.

Last March, his beloved Boston Sea Rovers continued his tradition of diving education and support of deserving youth by initiating the Frank Scalli Annual Summer Internship, in which a deserving high school senior spends a summer learning about a variety of career opportunities in the underwater world. It was his last great honor to be able to participate in the award presentation.

He is survived by his loving wife of 51 years, Mary L. (Jenks) Scalli; five children, Kathleen Scalli Johnson and her husband Charles of Gloucester, Patrick Scalli and his fiancé Angela Alsup of Gloucester, Mary Scalli Powers and her husband James of Maine, Eileen Scalli Badgewick and her husband John of Maine, Frank Scalli Jr. and his wife Lynette of Rockport; 12 grandchildren, Elizabeth MacKenzie VanKnowe and her husband Brian, Collin MacKenzie, Molly J. Scalli, Nicholas, Anthony and Frank Crosen, Colleen, Michael and Brian Harnish, Makayla, Jacquelyn and Kylie Scalli; three great-grandchildren, Tyler, Carson and Landon VanKnowe; sisters Josephine Clark of Florida, Frances Pietrella of Malden, Anne McDaniel and her husband Arthur of California, Patricia LaBella of Malden; brother Donald Scalli and his wife Collette of Malden; aunt Josephine George and uncle Jake of Falmouth; aunt

Elizabeth D'Avolio and uncle Nicholas of East Boston; aunt Frances Scalli of Somerville; aunt Jane Scalli of Falmouth; brother-in-law Joseph Jenks and his wife Roberta of Milford; brother-in-law James Jenks and his wife Marlene of California; sister-in-law Catherine DeAngelis and her husband Joseph of Burlington; sister-in-law Theresa G. Leone of Medford; brother-in-law John Jenks and his wife Theresa of Reading; and many loving nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by a grandson, Joseph Crosen.

Visiting hours will be held Monday, from 4 to 8 p.m. in the James C. Greely Funeral Home, 212 Washington St., Gloucester. Relatives and friends are invited to attend. A funeral Mass will be held Tuesday, at 10 a.m., at St. Ann Church, 60 Prospect St., Gloucester. Burial will follow at Seaside Cemetery.

Donations in his honor may be made to the Frank Scalli Annual Summer Internship, c/o Boston Sea Rovers, P.O. Box 935, Bedford, MA 01730-0935.