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Yankton, South Dakota

EUNICE SAGE OF NEBRASKA DIES AT 87 - 3 of Her Sons Died in Vietnam War-era Naval Tragedy

NIOBRARA, Neb. Eunice Sage, who lost three sons when their ship went down in a naval accident during the Vietnam War, has died at age 87.

Mrs. Sage died Friday, 24 September 24 2010, at a hospital in Yankton, S.D., said Greg Brockhaus, a spokesman for Brockhaus Funeral Home on Monday. She had lived in Niobrara, a small town in northeast Nebraska, where a monument to the loss of three young men had been erected.

The three brothers "Gary, Gregory and Kelly Jo Sage" died 3 June 1969, when the destroyer USS Frank E. Evans sank during naval exercises in the South China Sea. The Australian aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne had hit the 376-foot-long Frank E. Evans broadside. The severed bow sank in four minutes.

Seventy-four men aboard Frank E. Evans died. An inquiry determined that fault lay with the American ship's officers.

The U.S. Navy has refused to put the 74 men's names on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, saying they died outside the combat zone, not as a result of the war. The Frank E. Evans Association, which includes survivors and relatives of those killed, has asked President Barack Obama to overrule the Pentagon.

A White House spokesman, Pat Cunnane, said Monday that he couldn't immediately comment about the request.

John Coffey, a member of the Frank E. Evans Association, said Monday that Eunice Sage attended some of the group's reunions and would introduce herself. "When she met someone new, the first thing she would ask was, 'Do you know my boys?' It just tugged everybody's heartstrings," Coffey said.

Pete Peters, a survivor of the collision, said, "I am a better person because I met and hugged Eunice Sage. I will always have good memories of her," Peters said.

In an interview with the Norfolk Daily News in July, Eunice Sage remembered her days of worry during the war. "I had to work. That's all I did. I didn't sleep," Sage said. "All I did was worry about the boys ... and then they were gone," she said.

Doug Sage, the only surviving sibling lives in Brush, Colorado. He was seven years old when the tragedy struck.