

Oldest FDNY retiree who died at 103 remembered for lifetime of heroics, including response to 1960 NYC plane crash

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The oldest FDNY [retiree who died at 103 Friday](#) bravely raced toward the wreckage of the infamous 1960 mid-air plane collision over the Big Apple as part of a lifetime of service – but remained humble throughout his heroics, his son recalled Sunday.

Anthony Aquaro — who died just short of his 104th birthday after battling dementia in hospice care — displayed unflappable courage dating back to his service in the Navy during World War II and throughout his nearly 30-year career as a firefighter responding to blazes with Engine Company 269 in Park Slope.

“He loved the fire department,” his son, Anthony Aquaro Jr. told The Post. “It was his second family.”



Anthony Aquaro died just short of his 104th birthday after battling dementia in hospice care. Facebook/UFOA Local 854

Aquaro Jr. said his father rose to the occasion along with his colleagues [when a United Airlines flight collided with a smaller TWA Super Constellation](#), killing all 128 passengers and crew on both flights, as well as six people on the ground in the Brooklyn borough.

“The plane that crashed in Brooklyn flew right over their firehouse, and then it crashed,” his son said.

“He didn’t come home for three days, my father. He was in rescue and recovery. He spent three days collecting body parts. It affected him somewhat, but it was all part of that job. You saw a lot of things that regular citizens didn’t.”

When he served in the Navy as a boatswain’s mate third-class, he was stationed in the North Atlantic on a destroyer escort that was involved in sinking German U-boats, the younger Aquaro said.

“We would watch all the war pictures together and he would tell me about the war,” he said. After serving in the Navy between 1942 and 1945, Aquaro Sr. became a firefighter in 1953 at the age of 31, [SILive reported](#).

Aquaro was never one to boast about his lifetime of saving others’ lives though, his son said.

“He was the calmest person you ever met,” he recalled.

“He didn’t like to have the spotlight shined on him. He just went about his business and everyone loved him. He was the kindest man that you would ever meet.”

The fire department threw a 100th birthday party and celebrated each of his birthdays the following three years.

“The fire department is incredible, the things they did for my father, it’s hard to say in words,” his grateful son said, noting he kept in touch with his friends from the department until he was the only one left.

Aquaro is survived by his wife Gloria of 81 years who he did “everything” with, as well as two children, four grandchildren and eight grandchildren.

“I can’t remember a day when I wasn’t with my father. We did everything together,” Aquaro Jr. said.

“It’s still a shock, even though he was in hospice. I’m 72 years old and my father was 103 years old, and I still went to him for advice, believe it or not.