



## Donald Ofte

August 23, 1929 - March 4, 2014

Donald Ofte, of Easton, MD, died on Tuesday, March 4 at the age of 84. Mr. Ofte's 50-plus year career spanning the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), DOE and private consulting included nuclear weapons development, production and retirement, as well as developing the heat source used to power the radioisotope thermocouple generators (RTGs) left on the moon by Apollo astronauts to power lunar experiments.

After serving as an officer in the Navy in the mid-1950s, Ofte joined Mound Laboratories in Miamisburg, OH, an AEC facility for nuclear weapon research during the Cold War. There Ofte became the first person to measure the viscosities of molten Plutonium (Pu) and Uranium (U) and invented a new plasma torch process to manufacture Plutonium Dioxide (PuO<sub>2</sub>) microspheres, for which Ofte holds a patent. In 1967, he joined the AEC to lead Space and Special Programs in the AEC's Albuquerque offices. That team developed the radioisotope thermocouple generators (the SNAP 27) that continue to power experiments left on the moon by Apollo astronauts. The heat source for the SNAP 27 is the PuO<sub>2</sub> microspheres Ofte developed at Mound Laboratories, and this technology remains the primary method of powering space equipment like the Curiosity robot now exploring the surface of Mars.

Ofte managed a series of nuclear weapon production sites in New Mexico, Colorado, Florida, and Idaho. He was the DOE Manager at the Rocky Flats Plant, a nuclear weapons production facility located near Denver, CO, and the Idaho National Laboratory, the nation's lead nuclear reactor research and development facility and the largest employer in the state of Idaho. His federal career culminated in the position of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs (DP) for the DOE in Washington, DC. DP was responsible for directing the US programs for the research, development, production and retirement of nuclear weapons. Ofte participated on the team negotiating the INF treaty with the then Soviet Union, and worked on the Salt II treaty as well.

After retiring from the DOE, Ofte was a nuclear consultant for many years, including a two year position as president of FERMCO, undertaking the decontamination, dismantlement and restoration of the Fernald Plant in Ohio, a major DOE uranium processing plant.

In 2011, Ofte was honored as one of five awardees at NASA's 50th Anniversary of a Half Century of Space Nuclear Flight, where he was recognized as a pioneer for his contributions at AEC's Mound Laboratories. He is also the recipient of the DOE Distinguished Career Service Award and Meritorious Service Award.

Mr. Ofte is survived by his sister, Gail Ofte Atha of Salem, VA, and his three children, Marc Ofte of Midlothian, VA, Nancy Appleby of Arlington, VA, and Kirk Ofte of Tempe, AZ. His wife of 56 years, the former Margaret "Meg" McHenney, died in 2012.

A funeral service will be held at 11 a.m. at Fellows, Helfenbein and Newnam Funeral Home, P.A., 200 S. Harrison St., Easton, MD on Saturday, March 29, 2014, with a visitation from 10 – 11 a.m. A reception will follow the interment at Oxford Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Talbot Hospice Foundation, 586 Cynwood Dr., Easton, MD 21601, or Mound Science and Energy Museum Association, 1075 Mound Road, Miamisburg, OH 45342, or The National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, 601 Eubank, Albuquerque, NM 87123.

# Cemetery Details

## Oxford Cemetery

Oxford, MD

# Previous Events

## Visitation

**MAR 29.** 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Easton Location  
200 S Harrison St  
Easton, MD 21601  
(410) 822-3131  
info@fhfuneralhome.com

## Service

**MAR 29.** 11:00 AM (ET)

Easton Location  
200 S Harrison St  
Easton, MD 21601  
(410) 822-3131  
info@fhfuneralhome.com

# Tribute Wall



“ *Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Donald Ofte* ”



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**Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home** - January 07, 2023 at 09:27 PM



“ *Donald Ofte* ”

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October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Donald Ofte* ”

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January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Donald Ofte* ”

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January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM

MW

“ I worked for your Dad in Florida at the Pinellas Plant in 1978 for albeit a way too short period of time. I remember him as a great leader with a wonderful sense of humor. He had an uncanny sense of when to insert a brief bit of humor to ease a very tense situation... and I still remember some of the jokes that he told. As nice as your Dad was, he was very willing to take a leadership position and make hard decisions when they need to be made.

Both your Dad and Mom were great to me personally and I was so grateful for their friendship. Whenever your Dad spoke of his children - it was so apparent that he loved each and every one of you.

After I moved several times and got married, I then ran into him when we were developing some proposals for a couple of companies going after DOE work. Unfortunately I never got the opportunity to work with him again and for that I am sorry.

I do have a couple of pictures of your Dad and Mom that I would love to share with you. Unfortunately they are the old hard copies and when I tried to upload them, the document type wasn't accepted. Please send me an email at [Les\\_Mag@comcast.net](mailto:Les_Mag@comcast.net) and I will send them on to you.

I am keeping you all in my prayers.

Maggie Schumann Wood

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**Maggie Wood** - March 20, 2014 at 06:34 PM

BM

“ I remember Don as a great part of the RTG program and always ready to help get the job done. Many NASA programs depended upon these RTGs that Don contributed his efforts to many make them successful and of course to the success of the NASA Space Missions too!  
*Bob Morrow*

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**Bob Morrow** - March 16, 2014 at 10:51 AM

GW

“ Please accept our sincere condolences on the passing of your Dad. I'm sure your Mom is happy to have him home. In this time of sorrow, I'm sure your family is surrounded by you Mom and Dad's numerous friends. I hope you can find their love comforting.

*I have known your Dad since the mid 80's. I also had an opportunity to work with him closely when he joined our company as a consultant. He was always real gentleman, known for his voice of reason and his incredible knowledge. One of his greatest tributes was the fact I never heard anyone say a bad word about him--he was universally respected. As other people have mentioned, both your Mom and Dad were very active in their communities, creating an example for all of us. If you asked Don what the secret to his great life, he would proudly tell you it was his family. He was very proud of you!*

*They will both be greatly missed!*

*George and Toni Wolf  
Albuquerque NM*

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**George Wolf** - March 12, 2014 at 05:30 PM

NT

“ *Don and Meg were a vital part of Idaho Falls, Idaho for many years. It was such an honor to know them and be their friend, and then be selected as their Realtor when they left Idaho Falls. They made a difference in many lives and were a positive influence where ever they went. Their children can be proud of the legacy they left.*  
*Nancy & Jim Thorsen*

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**Nancy Thorsen** - March 11, 2014 at 10:14 AM