**SUMMER 2007**

# HUGH BAKER

I go way back with my introduction to the U.S. Navy. I started out at the end of September 1936. By the time I had all I needed for entry in the Navy, January 1937 came in and it was off to NAS Norfolk for basic which lasted three weeks.

I was born in North Alabama July 13, 1914 and raised on a farm. No paved roads, just two big ruts to travel on with rocks and mountains every where. In June 1923 we moved to south Georgia, but everything slacked off on the farm. My father knew sawmills and he took a part time job until harvest time.

In steam boilers an automatic regulator is used to maintain a level of water while being fired. They sent the regulator to the shop for repairs and put a man in there to watch the water level. Some say he lay down and went to sleep and the water ran out. The guy awoke and saw no water in the boiler. Instead of pulling the fire from the boilers, he opened a 2 1/2 inch cold water line into the red hot boilers. The explosion killed my father and nine others and destroyed everything nearby.

I was 14 days from being nine years old—my first reality in life.

We went on farming. I had two brothers, one older, one younger. We grew up fast. I was 15 years old in 1929 when the Great Depression hit. "Calamity" is the word for that period. We were farming and had plenty of food. (Enough for a start).

In 1934 I came to Jacksonville, Florida and got a job at the ice and coal company—250 pound ice blocks, 100 pound bags of coal, \$1.00 a day, seven days per week. Downtown one day I went in to join the Marines. The sergeant sent us to the Navy recruiter and the Navy took me in.

After Basic they put a large bunch of us on a Navy supply transport, the USS Vega which served the Pacific fleet. Having been used to work all my life I asked the engineering officer if he could find me something to do. He did. I went to the fire room.

The Vega supplied the east and west coasts. It

took nearly two months to get to San Diego from the east coast. I served on the Vega from May 1937 to September 1939. Was transferred to Philadelphia and the USS Buck 420 destroyer. I made Machinist Mate 1st class on a north Atlantic convoy above the Arctic Circle.

I was told I could not make Chief on the Buck, since there was a chief on that WW I ship; and there was only room for one. (I learned) the USS Champlin was being built at the Quincy shipyards. (The Champlin was commissioned in) July or August 1942 and began convoy duty in the Atlantic. Then to the Mediterranean, Sicily, Italy, south of France.

(Looking for some shore duty,) I requested a job at the Destroyer school in Norfolk as an instructor. Got it. Went to Norfolk on Friday and Monday my name came over the p.a. system: "Baker report to the main office." I was told a chief of my rate had broken his leg and I had to replace him. I never served at the Destroyer school (The ship was) another DD 754, by name of Evans. I thought I would wait out the rest of the war (while) the Evans was being built on Staten Island, NY.

They put me on a ferry; then I got a cab at the ferry. When I got to the dock the Evans was pulling away. The OD told me to be at the Brooklyn Navy Yard the next morning; when I got there they were putting everyone off (who was not part of the crew). We headed out for a four-hour shake down cruise. We never stopped or turned back. The Evans went on through the Panama Canal and headed toward Guam. Then, on to Okinawa where 4,000 or 5,000 ships were shooting at the same suicide plane.

After a few days we were sent forward for picket duty between Okinawa and Kyushu; I thought the war would never end. (Then) August 6, 1945 the first atomic bomb and on the 9th the next one. The emperor said, "Stop." And it was like turning off the lights in a room.

Today I am 5'9" and weigh 160lbs; on the Champlin I was 6' tall and weighed 180. I will be 93 in July. I am glad to have been part of

World War II and have no regrets. For me, I have had an interesting life. I am old but not bitter.

My wife and I were married 58 years and four months. She came down with rheumatoid arthritis which lasted her 42 years and 10 months; she died Christmas day 1999. I took care of her many years, no nursing home. It was a 24 hour a day job, but I didn't do anything but what I promised when I married her. (That is the reason I did not attend more reunions).

I never smoked; no alcohol. Treated everyone the way I like being treated. Good luck to you and the rest; one thing sure, one generation follows another in this life. I still live alone, farming in the back yard; doing all for myself. Still drive.

The men in the Navy, and the Navy, did a lot for me.

Signing off/ *BAKER*

*Footnote: in a telephone interview Hugh Baker said sometime after he left the USS Buck 420 it was attacked on a trip to Russia and sunk losing most of the crew including the Chief who caused Hugh to transfer to the Champlin. The Champlin was a lucky move for Hugh.*

[illegible]

**This issue is brought you by the Shipmates who decided to share their stories, now it is your turn.**

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THIS ISSUE  
HUGH BAKER

JOE BLACK

### VIRGINIA RUSSELL'S LETTER

## RIBBONS & BARS

## MINI REUNION

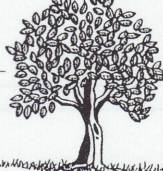
STYLES BAD LUCK FREEDOM

## OCTOBER REUNION

## WW I NAVY WOMAN VET DIES

## BIG JOHN RETIRES





## SUMMER

The sun  
is always  
shining.  
Whether  
gray or  
bright,  
day or  
night,  
the  
sun  
is  
shining  
somewhere.

TREATED  
GENTLY,  
THINGS  
BECOME  
GENTLE  
EVEN  
PEOPLE.  
TRY IT!

Laughter  
needs to be  
encouraged,  
like a small  
child, given  
room to grow,  
like a  
teenager,  
and highly  
respected, as  
one would a  
person  
of age.

## THE TRIP HOME FROM CASABLANCA—JOE BLACK

I really enjoyed the Spring issue of *The Seaweed*.

Going along with Admiral Baughan's 1942 Christmas memories, I remember the trip back from Casablanca. We had two meals per day; breakfast consisted of two very thin pancakes and lunch was a very thin spinach soup. I don't recall having dinner. To curb our appetites we were advised to smoke cigarettes.

The return trip was prolonged by a violent storm east of Cape Hatteras that delayed us five days just lying to.

When we came into New York, Commander Beverly Harrison ordered a DD tied up at a pier to move out so we could tie up, and that DD backed up in a hurry. I had liberty that night and went ashore; got the biggest steak I could find and mush-

rooms and two beers . . . For about \$6.00. I only had \$10.00, so I bought some sandwiches and brought them back to the ship where they were quickly consumed.

I couldn't attend the last reunion, but I read a statement that Capt. Schaffer was the only person lost off the USS Champlin. That is not entirely accurate, maybe the only one lost in an enemy action. During an alert one morning, Eddie Miller, a torpedoman striker, we washed overboard. Bill McGovern, a gunners mate, was shot coming back from liberty when he tried to board a DD tied up behind the Champlin.

JOE BLACK

*Note: "The quote from the Memorial Service was that Captain Schaffer was the only person lost in enemy action aboard the Champlin".*

## CAMPAIGN BARS AND STARS

When is a campaign ribbon not a campaign ribbon? And a battle star too? *When a poser wears them!*

Not long after I (Ted Johnson) joined the Champlin crew another guy came aboard. I've forgotten his name . . . And I'm glad I did. But I recall he was red-headed and a tad on the chunky side.

Getting acquainted, I learned he'd been in the Navy for three years. In all that time, all stateside, he'd been in three or four naval training programs—including officer candidate school—and flunked out of or quit every one.

I didn't think a whole lot about it at the time, except to wonder how a man could screw up so many opportunities.

A week or so later my buddy and I were taking, walking through a Charleston park when we spot chunky, red-haired guy sitting on a park bench soaking up the South Carolina's winter sunshine, but something's not right;

On the left breast of his uniform are three rows of campaign ribbons with a generous sprinkling of battle stars. Buddy and I look at each other; and I ask: "What the (bleep) are those? I thought you spent all your time flunking out of training schools?"

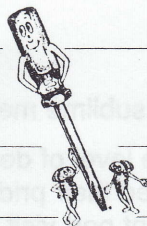
His answer: "I've been in the navy over three years. I figure I have the right to wear them!"

My buddy and I are processing this piece of strange logic when three other Champlin crewmen came swaggering down the sidewalk toward us—guys who really earned ribbons and stars, but weren't showing them this day. Buddy and I looked at each other thinking: "This should be interesting."

The trio of Champlin vets stop and chat a minute or two and move on, leaving us perplexed. Then we look down where chunky red-head is sitting. All those ribbons and stars were gone in one of the slickest, quickest disappearing acts I ever saw.

We didn't rat the guy out. Maybe we should have. But we didn't spend any liberty time with him from that day on. *Ted Johnson*





## JOHN RUSSELL GM3c



*John Russell GM3c loved the sea and he loved the Champlin. The remembrance and insights are shared by his wife Virginia Rendel Russell.*

As a youngster, John wasn't much for being trapped inside a school house, so he would skip school or get into trouble while in class.

He was more at peace fixing things or building things with his dad. He also loved hunting and fishing which was a pleasure but also a necessity as it was the 1930's and deep in depression times.

His dad sent him to trade school to enhance John's exceptional mechanical aptitude. John turned 17 on December 10th and the following February joined the Navy. He loved the sea all his life and saw the Navy as a chance to break free from his tiny fishing village of Mystic, NY. He had never before been away from his parents so this was a big adventure at first. Even the storms of the North Atlantic didn't worry him.

The guns and the ship were a wonderful fit for his mechanical interests. He loved to tinker with all the machines. He enjoyed his shipmates who were from

places new and different to a young man who had always lived in the very, very rural country and somewhat backward compared to the rest of Long Island, NY.

John did not submit well to authority and ended up on report for not wearing his hat; and also ended up in the brig for climbing down the ropes and over the rat catchers to make liberty in Panama.

The incident which shook him up and brought the reality to him—"this is real war, not fun or make believe"—was when the Champlin rammed U-856 and Captain Schaffer was killed. The Captain's burial at sea changed the way John saw events from then on. A young man, Captain Schaffer, who John knew and admired, was now dead and not even able to be brought home.

Sounds of guns were no longer exciting; now they were terrifying. And until John died he couldn't tolerate thunderstorms as they reminded him of the big guns.

*Virginia Russell*

Be greedy  
with criticism  
and generous  
with praise,  
and you will  
have happy  
children,  
devoted  
friends,  
appreciative  
parents,  
admiring  
co-workers,  
and spouses  
not to mention  
a contented  
self!

"Heaven is a  
great big hug  
that lasts  
forever"

### MINI-REUNION 2007



The USS Champlin Mini Reunion was a major success, based on reports from the Ocean Holiday Inn in Wildwood Crest, N.J. The mini, held May 14 through May 18th, included wining, dining, dancing, a trip to Atlantic City and leisurely strolls along the boardwalk.

Champlin veterans attending included Tom and Honey Morton, Doris Higgins, Lou Gilbert, Larry and Margaret Suter, Dick and Shirley Berman, Bob McAfee, Charles Meehan and Harold and Becky Medvedeff. A number of special Irish guests also took part.

Truly missed were George and Gal Styles, Joe and Marie Tricarico, and Dick Valentine and Barbara Jones, key original motivators behind the mini reunions. They were unable to be present for various reasons.

Mini Reunion events: Monday: socializing and dinner at Duffy's on the Lake. Tuesday: a visit to Trump Casino in Atlantic City and a tour of the Renault Winery with dining, dancing and other entertainment. Wednesday: a promenading on the board walk and dinner and the show at Giardino's Ristorante. Thursday: Lunch on the open air deck of Lighthouse Point restaurant on Shawcrest Island.

Plans for the 2008 Mini-reunion are pending.



THE GRAND  
ESSENTIALS  
OF  
HAPPINESS,  
SOMETHING  
TO DO,  
SOMEONE  
TO LOVE  
AND  
SOMETHING  
TO  
HOPE FOR.



## THE LAST SURVIVING FEMALE WORLD WAR I NAVAL VETERAN DIES

*(Editor's note: This article from the Navy News Service suggests the oldest of us Champlin veterans can look forward to many good years.)*

Washington (NNS) - The last surviving female World War I veteran, Charlotte Winters, died March 27, 2007 in Boomsboro, Md. She was 109 years old. She was a veteran of the US Navy.

Winters served in the U.S. Naval Reserve as a yeoman, including service at a gun production facility at the Washington Navy Yard. She continued to work for the Navy in Washington until her retirement in 1953.

The Naval Reserve Act of 1916 enabled the Navy to begin enlisting women in mid March 1917. Nearly 600 were on duty by the end of April 1917. That number grew to more than 11,000 by December 1918, shortly after the armistice. These women were popularly known as "Yeomanettes."

They all held enlisted ranks and served in support positions, mainly secretarial and clerical, and almost all served in the U.S. Many worked in government and naval offices in defense companies and hospitals. They were all released from active duty in July 1919. Two of them ultimately became Naval officers in the Reserve, Capt. Joy Bright Hancock and Lt. Eunice Whyte.

Funeral services were held March 30 in Boomsboro, Md., with internment at the Mount Olivet Cemetery in Frederick, Md. The U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard presented military honors during the internment ceremony.

\* \* \* \* \*

### "BIG JOHN" Decommissioned After 38 years of Service

MAYPORT, Fla. (NNS) The aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy (CV67) was decommissioned in Mayport, Fla. March 23.

After a 17 gun salute, USS John F. Kennedy Commanding Officer Capt. Todd Zecchin addressed the more than 5,000 guests, former commanding officers, city officials and distinguished visitors. In his speech, he described his feelings for the ship and the legacy of its crew.

"While preparing for today, I realized that serving on this ship is akin to having a relationship with a tried and true friend," Zecchin said.

"Saying goodbye is a sublime melancholy."

Zecchin described the level of dedication the crew revealed. He illustrated their pride in professionalism in terms of a recent port visit to Boston, when 21 degree below zero wind chills made working conditions at night unforgiving.

"None of the watchstanders complained. In fact, I had to order them back inside the skin of the ship because they were so intent on getting the job done."

The ship's commanding officer took time not just to remember the crew's efforts, but of those backing each of them.

"Nobility of purpose, service to people, devotion to a cause and a deep belief in each other is what sustains us. We could not have done it without the support of family and friends," he said.

Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command Admiral John B. Nathman talked about the ship's history and the deployments to the Middle East that made headlines in the 1980s, 1990s and the present decade.

"You have served with honor and distinction," Nathman said, addressing the crew. "I commend you for facing challenges head-on and for welcoming your responsibility. Feel privileged to bear your responsibility. Wear it as a mantle on your shoulders with the pride it deserves."

To recognize some of the former commanding officers of USS John F. Kennedy, Zecchin asked all who had once commanded the warship to stand. A hearty applause erupted from all of the seated guests, young and old, military personnel and civilians.

The 80,000 ton warship, namesake of the 35th President of the United States, saw 18 deployments and 30 commanding officers in its 38 yrs of service. For more news from around the fleet, visit [www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil).

Aviation in Pensacola, Fla.  
([www.navalaviationmuseum.org](http://www.navalaviationmuseum.org).)

**Note:** Christened on May 27, 1967, by 9 year old Caroline Kennedy, "Big John" spent much of its career overseeing political tensions in the Middle East. In 1991 *Kennedy's* aircraft took part in the Gulf War. The carrier returned to the region in 2002 to suppress Taliban and al Qaeda targets. *Kennedy's* in port Captain's cabin, designed by Jacqueline Kennedy and outfitted with Kennedy family artifacts, will be disassembled and rebuilt in the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Fla.

([www.navalaviationmuseum.org](http://www.navalaviationmuseum.org)) Military History Vol.25 #5



Do you know? I didn't know.

Did you know that 47 countries have reestablished their embassies in Iraq?

Did you know that the Iraqi government currently employs 1.2 million Iraqi people?

Did you know that 3100 schools have been renovated,  
364 schools are under rehabilitation,

263 new schools are now under construction and 38 new schools have been completed in Iraq?

Did you know that Iraq's higher educational structure consists of 20 universities, 46 institutes or colleges and 4 research centers, all currently operating?

Did you know that 25 Iraq students departed for the United States in January 2005 for the re-established Fulbright program?

Did you know that the Iraqi Navy is operational?

They have 5 - 100-foot patrol craft, 34 smaller vessels and a naval infantry regiment.

Did you know that Iraq's Air Force consists of three operational squadrons, which includes 9 reconnaissance and 3 US C-130 transport aircraft (under Iraqi operational control) which operate day and night, and will soon add 16 UH-1 helicopters and 4 Bell Jet Rangers?

Did you know that Iraq has a counter-terrorist unit and a Commando Battalion?

Did you know that the Iraqi Police Service has over 55,000 fully trained and equipped police officers?

Did you know that there are 5 Police Academies in Iraq that produce over 3500 new officers each 8 weeks?

Did you know there are more than 1100 building projects going on in Iraq?

They include 364 schools, 67 public clinics, 15 hospitals, 83 railroad stations, 22 oil facilities, 93 water facilities and 69 electrical facilities.

Did you know that 96% of Iraqi children under the age of 5 have received the first 2 series of polio vaccinations?

Did you know that 4.3 million Iraqi children were enrolled in primary school by mid October?

Did you know that there are 1,192,000 cell phone subscribers in Iraq and phone use has gone up 158%?

Did you know that Iraq has an independent media that consists of 75 radio stations.

180 newspapers and 10 television stations?

Did you know that the Baghdad Stock Exchange opened in June of 2004?

Did you know that 2 candidates in the Iraqi presidential election had a televised debate recently?

OF COURSE WE DIDN'T KNOW! WHY DIDN'T WE KNOW? OUR MEDIA WOULDN'T TELL US!

Instead of reflecting our love for our country, we get photos of flag burning incidents at Abu Ghraib and people throwing snowballs at the presidential motorcades.

Tragically, the lack of accentuating the positive in Iraq serves two purposes:

It is intended to undermine the world's perception of the United States thus minimizing consequent support, and it is intended to discourage American citizens.

---- Above facts are verifiable on the Department of Defense web site.

## Share this information— Give it a Wide Dissemination

E.S.(Gene)Dempsey

## Central Planning Cell Adviser Afghanistan

Telephone: 0799 231 125 [gene\\_dempsey1@yahoo.com](mailto:gene_dempsey1@yahoo.com)

[illegible]

## Ramblings of a Retired Mind

I was thinking about how a status symbol of today is those cell phones that everyone has clipped onto their belt or purse. I can't afford one. So, I'm wearing my garage door opener.

You know, I spent a fortune on deodorant before I realized that people didn't like me anyway.

**I was thinking that women should put pictures of missing husbands on beer cans!**

I was thinking about old age and decided that old age is 'when you still have something on the ball, but you are just too tired to bounce it.'

I thought about making a fitness movie, for folks my age, and call it "Pumping Rust."

I have gotten that dreaded furniture disease. That's when your chest is falling into your drawers!

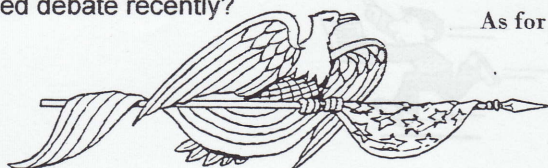
I know, when people see a cat's litter box, they always say, "Oh, have you got a cat?" Just once I want to say, "No, it's for company!"

Employment application blanks always ask 'who is to be notified in case of an emergency.' I think you should write, "A Good Doctor!"

Why do they put pictures of criminals up in the Post Office? What are we supposed to do... write to these men? Why don't they just put their picture on the postage stamps so the mailmen could look for them while they deliver the mail? Or better yet, arrest them while they are taking their pictures!

■ I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older. Then, it dawned on me, they were cramming for their finals.

As for me, I'm just hoping God grades on the curve.



God Bless Our Native Land!



# FREEDOM

I watched the flag pass by one day,  
it fluttered in the breeze  
A young Marine saluted it  
and then he stood at ease.

I looked at him in uniform,  
so young, so tall so proud,  
With hair cut square and eyes alert  
he'd stand out in any crowd.

I wondered how many men like him  
had fallen through the years.  
How many died on foreign soil?  
How many mothers' tears?

How many pilots' planes shot down?  
How many died at sea?  
How many foxholes were soldiers' graves?

No, freedom isn't free.

I heard the sound of taps one night  
when everything was still.

I listened to the bugler play,  
and I felt a sudden chill.

I wondered how many times taps had meant "Amen."

When a flag had covered a coffin  
of a brother or a friend.

I thought about a graveyard  
at the bottom of the sea...

And unmarked graves in Arlington.

No, freedom isn't free!

(from George Styles)

~~~~~

IT IS TIME -DO IT NOW!

## FILL OUT YOUR REGISTRATION FOR THE REUNION IN CHARLESTON

## Checks to Champlin Reunion

Mail to Norman Prewitt 2049 Eastridge  
Drive, Excelsior Springs, Missouri 64024  
Phone 816-630-7272

