

Memories of an Officer and Gentlemen – Part II

The following article is a continuation of Lt. Steven Anastasion's memories regarding his time aboard the USS Champlin – this is the second of a three part article...the final portion of the article will be published in the Fall 2009 Seaweed

During many Champlin reunions, we often discuss the action which resulted in the sinking of U-856, the damage which the ship sustained in the heavy seas from the U-boat's conning tower made as jagged as a can opener by Champlin's gunfire, and the sad loss of our leader, Captain Shaffer. What may not be known to many of our shipmates is what transpired after we limped into the New York shipyard for repairs. Because of the death of the Captain during the action, an intense investigation was started. The result was the assembling of a formal Court of Inquiry. I was brought before the Court as was Smith, now Warrant Officer. I was the Gunnery Officer, having taken over from Archa Knowlton a few weeks before; Smith had relieved me as Machine Gun Officer. The inquiry was made fairly tense by a Legal Officer brought in by the Court. Instead of questioning to bring out facts, he took on the role as Prosecuting attorney at a trial. However, his sails were visibly deflated after many hours of questioning when a note was brought to the Court Presiding Officer by messenger.

The Champlin had a 20mm machine gun on each wing of the bridge. Replacement ammunition canisters were stored in magazine boxes just forward of the gun mounts. The firing limits of each gun were set by pipe rails designed to avoid spraying the bridge or hitting the covers of the ammunition boxes when opened. An Ordnance Alteration (OrdAlt) required at the time of our latest Navy Yard visit was the removal of the lowest rails to extend the depression at which the guns could fire. This was done. However, there was a second part to the OrdAlt. This was to unhinge the ammunition box covers so that they could be taken off and not in the path of fire. Although shown on shipyard records as having been

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Captain Anastasion – USS Leahy

completed, this part of the OrdAlt was never done and was judged by the Court as the cause of the incidents on the bridge during the action. So, an abrupt end of the Court session; and we all went back to work.

But the Champlin's first U-boat was not the U-856. The first was the highly decorated German boat, the U-130. The U-130 had great successes as part of the wolf packs scouring the US coasts from 1941 through 1943. She was a relatively new boat, launched and commissioned in 1941. During her 6 patrols, the U-130 had sunk 21 ships and 3 auxiliary warships. When we caught up with her on her sixth patrol, she had just acquired a new CO, Siegfried Keller.

Some of our shipmates may recall that on one of our escort operations with an East-bound convoy, with very rough weather conditions limiting sonar range only to about 700 yards, our sonarmen did get a submarine contact on the night of March 12, 1943. I was on the bridge with Captain Melson as GQ OOD and as Sound Recorder operator. I still remember Chief Quartermaster Mothershed excitedly pointing and shouting early in the action that he did see a submarine on the surface. We laid down many depth charge patterns but saw no results. So, for some time the action was lost in my memories. Then a few years ago, I received a call from the VADM Melson that the continuing search of German records of its submarine warfare did identify U-boat 130 as having been sunk on March 12, 1943 on the spot in the Atlantic west of the Azores where the Champlin operated that night. Recently, Gary Gustin sent me a note with a U-boat web link which, on its page for U-130, credits its sinking as resulting from the USS Champlin's depth charges.

In 1944 the Champlin was part of the Task Force doing a sweeping patrol along the Northern coast of Africa and the Mediterranean preliminary to the invasion of Southern France. During daylight, Champlin was several miles scouting ahead of the Task Force. At dusk, we returned to the Anti-submarine ring around the cruisers. Instructions from the Admiral commanding the Task Force were to maintain absolutely strict silence. This included noise and communications of any kind. One evening while we were at our Battle Stations, I was at my GQ station in the Gun Director above the Bridge, our Surface radar picked up a contact off our starboard bow, obviously an aircraft because of the track speed. The initial track in the combat information center, led by Exec Bob Baughan, indicated that it was crossing well ahead of the Task Force. The Gun Director moved to acquire the target. Shortly thereafter, the track in the combat center and in the Gun Director's fire control computer indicated that the plane was now coming directly at us. Since the target was easily tracked by the surface radar it was clear that the plane was very close to the sea level, perhaps about 50 to 100 feet.

Going back a few months, I had read in an Ordnance Bulletin that a fix could be installed into our Fire Control computer to provide an option for a firing solution that would time the burst at the projected range computed, as usual, but would also allow the shell burst to occur at about 50 feet above the sea surface. I ordered the fix and Chief Gunners Mate Thaisto Ranta made the modifications needed to the computer.

Back to the action. When it was obvious that the plane was coming right at the Champlin, I called to the Captain on the Bridge and repeated several times that the plane had turned and was now coming straight for us, urging that he let me open fire. The Combat Center may have been doing the same. In spite of the warning from the TF Commander to keep silent no matter what, it wasn't long before the Captain said OK Steve go ahead and fire. Our fire control solution and the surface-burst fix we had installed worked perfectly. It took forward mounts #1 and #2 only 4 rounds in the dark for a direct hit on the target which burst into flames.

Now, from the Flagship, the Admiral spoke up. Over the ship-to-ship radio (since silence had obviously been broken) he asked "who fired that shot!!? He first called to the destroyer squadron flagship, the USS Boyle. "It wasn't us" was the reply from the Boyle's Captain, and from a few others, as well. Then, our Captain, Francis Fleck, cut in and owned up. "It was us, the Champlin". Instead of a stern caution, the Admiral said something

like "Great shooting. Congratulations", perhaps, I like to think, to the dismay of the others.

The end of the story was the Captain and I later going down to the Wardroom for coffee where he just sat down and said, "OK Steve, tell me how you did it."

I should say that I did take one big risk. When the plane blew up, and after I had cleared the guns of any shells remaining in the barrels, I called down to the Gun Captains and authorized them to let the crew in the lower and upper ammunition handling rooms come up and take a look at what they had been part of. If another plane or group of planes had suddenly appeared at that time---well, they didn't.

Now, for the invasion. As usual, the Champlin was the lead ship going in. We were sent ahead, about 5-10 miles or so ahead of the invasion Task Force. Our mission was to take a designated position about 1 mile or so off-shore, drop or anchor and stay silent. At a fixed time, we were to turn on all our lights so that the invasion force could use our position as the navigation marker for the troop ships and others. All our guns, four 5"/38 caliber guns and many 40mm and other machine guns were ready. The waiting and expectation of what might happen when we turned on our lights made us a little anxious. In any case, we were calm and ready. Champlin went in to the spot we were assigned and at the appointed time turned on all our lights. We were surprised that we were not spotted early from shore and that nothing happened when the lights came on.

After the landing, our guns responded often to calls for fire support from our troops ashore. Champlin was credited with effectively conducting shore bombardments against enemy coastal defenses, neutralizing several hostile strong points, troop and tank concentrations, and disrupting supply lines.

We spent much of the time after the invasion patrolling off the southern coast of France with an eye out for German E-boats. On one occasion we poked into the Bay at Cannes and were soon out after being fired at by a battery we could not see; we had nothing to shoot at. Later, we went a little further east up into the bay at Villefrance. And again we were fired at; but here, we did not have sea room to turn around and head out. The Captain ordered "all back full" and we went out stern first. There was no damage in either frustrating event but some of the crew later did find shell fragments on the main deck.... *(to be continued in Fall 2009 issue)*

Destroyers: "Then and Now"

USS Champlin DD-601

Weapon Systems:

- 10 – 21 inch (53cm) Torpedo Tubes
- 2 Depth Charge Racks – aft
600 lb. Depth Charges
- 6 K-Mount Depth Charge Projectors
300 lb Depth Charges



USS Roosevelt DDG-80

Weapon Systems:

- MK Mod 2 Vertical Launching System
32 cells forward and 64 cells aft

Capable of firing the following:

Vertically Launched Anti Submarine Rockets

Tomahawk Cruise Missiles

SM2 Surface-to-Air Missiles

- 2 MK 32 Mod 15 Triple Torpedo Mounts

Reunion 2009 – Valley Forge

The USS Champlin / USS Boyle 2009 Reunion plans are being finalized. The reunion is scheduled for October 7-11, 2009. So, mark your calendars now!

The reunion will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel, Valley Forge. The hotel is an all suites hotel with many amenities, and will feature a daily full cooked breakfast, and a manager's reception each evening. Meeting rooms will be available to all attendees from 3:00 PM – 9:00 PM daily.

Additional information regarding activities and registration information will be mailed in the near future.

We will be posting links to registration packages, forms, etcetera on the USS Champlin website – both on the "Home" Page as well as on the Reunion Group page. From this links you will be able to download additional registration forms if needed, or to replace any lost forms.



Embassy Suites Hotel – Valley Forge/Philadelphia

Current Information as we have it:

Dates: October 7, 2009 – October 11, 2009

Location: Embassy Suites Hotel
888 Chesterbrook Blvd
Chesterbrook, PA 19087

Phone: 610 – 647 – 6700
Toll Free: 866 – 388 – 6106

Room Rates:
\$ 129.00 + 8% tax per suite / per night

Reunion Registration Fee:
\$ 200.00 per person attending

Tentative Tours:
Philadelphia Luncheon Cruise
Philadelphia Trolley Tour,
Philadelphia Naval Shipyard

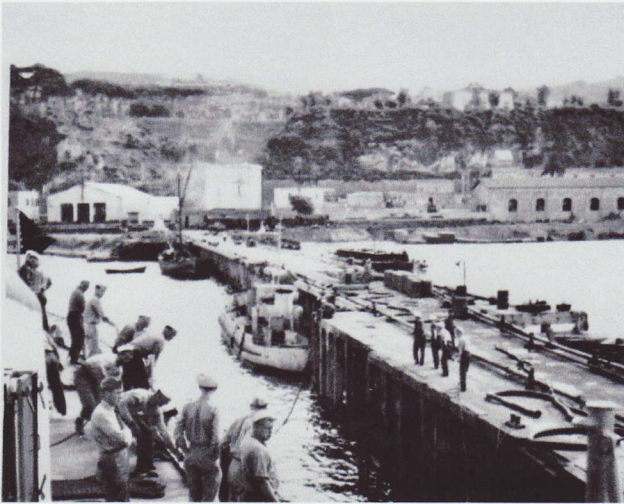
Welcome Aboard USS Boyle

We'd like to send out a warm welcome to the following USS Boyle Crewmembers who have either joined the Reunion Group, or subscribed to the newsletter:

Joe Howard, Stanley Poslosky, Omer Green, Robert Townsend, Conrad Petrillo, Robert Perez, Richard Gebhardt, David Overbey, Maurice Munsey, Earl Farabaugh,

If each of you can 'recruit' just one more USS Boyle member – you can double your presence...

Also, we'd love to hear your stories of times aboard the USS Boyle – so, think back in time, get out those pens, and send us your USS Boyle memories.



Naples, Italy – Summer 1944 - (Fred H Weber Collection)

USS Champlin Merchandise

Norm Prewitt has a small quantity of the following USS Champlin items available for sale. He can also arrange for ordering more where needed. To purchase any of the following, or for more information on the items – contact Norm Prewitt by phone at: 816-630-7272

Embroidered Hats - \$10.00 plus shipping
Colors: Navy, Light Blue, White

Polo Shirts - \$25.00 plus Shipping
Colors: Navy, Light Blue, White
Sizes: S-M-L-XL

Sweatshirts: \$20.00 plus shipping (XXL \$25.00)
Colors: Navy, White
Sizes: S-M-L-XL-XXL

Belated Thanks to Dick Berman

President Larry Suter says we are a little belated in offering our thanks and praise to Dick Berman for the wonderful job he did as president of the USS Champlin Reunion Group. .

Dick and Shirley Berman hosted the Champlin Reunion Group in Buffalo, New York with a side trip to Niagara Falls. Dick also got the ball rolling to have a plaque of the USS Champlin made up and mounted on the Wall of Memory at the Naval Memorial Building in Washington D.C. He also arranged for the unveiling of the plaque and the speech by the Admiral while we were there.

Dick was one of the powers behind the USS Boyle and the USS Champlin Reunion groups joining forces. The co-op reunion in Portsmouth, NH was a huge success.

There are probably many other things that we could mention. We join USS Champlin Reunion Group President Larry Suter in congratulating Dick for a job well done. Larry Suter says "I have some big shoes to fill."

Comments, Suggestions, Submissions?

We welcome all comments, suggestions for future articles, and any of your submissions for publication.

We also need articles regarding the USS Boyle – come on all you new USS Boyle Crew – let's start writing!

Contact the Seaweed Editors at:

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USS Champlin Treasures – Secured

By Gary S Gustin – Seaweed Editor, Website Admin.

Flashback – February 1, 1943 – Ithaca, New York

Fred Henry Weber, having recently completed his Engineering Degree, enlisted in the US Navy after being offered officer candidate status. He was sworn in and began his training which included several weeks of additional schooling at Cornell University.

June 23, 1943. Having completed his officers training Ensign Fred Weber boarded the USS Champlin, and was assigned duty under the supervision of then Engineering Officer Lt Ernest E Simmons. Ensign Weber continued to serve, was promoted to Lt and eventually replaced Lt Simmons as Engineering Officer aboard the USS Champlin.

At some point during early 1944 the supply officer approached Fred and handed over a 35mm camera and a 8mm movie camera – explaining that the US Navy had made these available to each vessel, and should be used to record “battle action” aboard ship. To this day Fred recalls thinking, “only in the US Navy would an engineering officer who spends 90% of his working day below deck, be assigned to film, and photograph “battle action” taking place above deck”!

Orders were Orders, and Fred dutifully performed this assigned task to the best of his ability from below deck.

Modern Day – March 2009

Arriving home from work, I found a package on the front steps having been delivered by the US Postal Service – inside, well packaged and well preserved was an old photo album. Browsing quickly through the album, I found previously undiscovered USS Champlin Treasures. The album was broken down into sections with title pages written in the neat script befitting of an Engineer. There were more than 220 USS Champlin related, black and white photos – many with carefully annotated titles depicting, time, location and names.

My initial impression of this ‘find’ was, “WOW – what a treasure. My second impression of this ‘find’ was, “WOW – what a lot of work this is going to be”! After giving careful consideration to finding the best way to process these new photos, preserve their historic integrity, and yet make these ‘treasures’ available to as many as possible – I set about scanning the entire album of photos individually.

The photos were scanned at the highest possible resolution, each was carefully edited for correction of contrast, color, brightness, sharpness, and as many imperfections as possible were corrected. Eventually, each photo was saved into a digital format for publication and distribution.

“Houston – We have a problem”

Having completed the task of processing the photos – I then needed to turn my attention to the problem of publishing a large number of photos in a format that would be user friendly to all interested viewers. The USS Champlin Website Photo page already had an extensive number of photos displayed, and adding an additional 220+ photos would have made it difficult for even the most patient internet user to find and view the photos they were interested in.

“Houston – We have a solution”

During a recently completed three week cruise around Hawaii, I had the opportunity to take a series of photography classes. Drawing on information and new technology learned in transit from San Diego to Hawaii – I realized that this new technology was just what the “Ships Doctor” had ordered. Utilizing the new technology I was able to take all the previous Champlin Photos, and all the new Champlin Photos from Lt Fred Weber’s collection and create both ‘slideshows’ and photo albums. There was no longer a need to choose one format or the other – we could have the best of both worlds – a slideshow format where a user can click on a link from the USS Champlin website, then just sit back and enjoy the show as each photo displays.

Photo Albums on the other hand, will allow users to download individual photos and save them to their computers, or save them to a digital files and have them printed as photographs at their favorite photo store.

A New Look USS Champlin Photo Page...

The final stage of securing the USS Champlin Treasures – was to setup a new website photo page. I have taken all available photos (older acquisitions and the new acquisitions) and broken them down into several groups – a slideshow and album for each group was developed and links to both the slideshow and album were placed on the USS Champlin photo page – now a user can select either display option. The end result for our photo page is that it is much less cluttered, and much easier to find the subject matter. Once you try it out – I think you’ll agree that the slideshows are absolutely great!

Recollections of Robert Maitre S1c

Bonus Photos added to USS Champlin Photo Page...

Having redone the photo page, I also had several collections of photos, cards, and artwork that I had never been able to share on the website. With our new format you may now view all of them from the USS Champlin website.

USS Champlin – Ships Photos

USS Champlin – Officer and Crew Photos

USS Champlin – Fred H Weber Collection

USS Champlin – German U-Boat Action Photos

World War II Destroyer Tour

World War II – Naval Postcards

World War II Navy Art – Dwight Shepler USN

World War II – Naval Scenes (work in progress)



USS Champlin Crew – Italy – Summer 1944 (Fred Weber Collection)

Thanks !

My sincere thanks to Fred Weber for entrusting his album to me, and for making his USS Champlin treasures available to everyone.

I'd like to invite everyone to take an opportunity to visit the USS Champlin Website at www.usschamplin.com to view all the new photos, postcards, and artwork.

Bob Maitre sent us some of his memories of his time aboard the USS Champlin – Bob writes...

My first recollection is:

Sometime during the years 1943-44, our ship, USS Champlin, was sailing in the Mediterranean Sea and I was a lookout on duty about lunch time. I saw an accumulation of seaweed about several hundred feet in front of our ship. I shouted down to the bridge officer and the ship made a sharp turn to the port side. A large mine with spokes passed us on the starboard side, covered with seaweed. It was destroyed by ships to our rear. Apparently, I saved my life and my shipmates lives. I did not get any recognition for this. It's only a five-year time period. At this time, Joseph Tricarico is my only living witness.

My second memory is:

When we lost our great skipper CDR John Shaffer and sank the U-856, I was assigned to the five inch mount # 2. We were shooting at the sub automatically when we were flooded and the automatic system was flooded and knocked out. There was a five inch shell in our breech, so I aimed at the sub and used my foot mechanism to fire the gun. . . but I missed by a mile !

Finally, I'll never forget...

Our ship was tied up with two other destroyers in San Diego. I was the messenger and we had a big inspection going on. The ship was spic and span . . . and so was I. I was sent to to the other destroyer with a message. I stood on the gangplank, saluted the flag on the fantail. . . when the gangplank collapsed. I fell into the water between the two ships and they started to close in on me. Somebody threw a rope down to me and I was able to climb up. I was covered with oil and grease, but all anybody cared about was that the Commodore would see me. So the officers had me hiding from the Commodore all over the ship. I have a good laugh when I think about this.

S1c Robert Maitre is a USS Champlin Plank Holder, having come aboard on September 12, 1942, and serving aboard until September 1945. Bob spent more than 1000 days aboard the Champlin – Bob currently lives in Yonkers, New York, and remains active in the USS Champlin Reunion Group – Thanks Bob!

Letters Home - NTS Sampson

Editor's note: this is the first of several letters home from inductees and enlistees assigned to training at US Naval Training Station Sampson, New York. The authors remain anonymous, and while these letters are from sailors at Sampson, the settings could well have been any US Naval Training Station – see if this ongoing series bring back any fond, or not so fond memories...

Reveille is sounded at 0545 (5:45 a.m. to you land-lubbers). That means hit the deck—and hit it fast. The day of turning off the alarm clock just to gain another forty winks has gone by. Yes—it's hit the deck—and get ready to do a hard day's work—a day's work that includes, among other things, plenty of close order drill. Close order drill is just another term for marching. We'll probably do very little marching aboard ship—but drill of this nature accustoms us to following commands quickly. Furthermore, it enables our officers to get us from one spot to another in an orderly fashion.

So, it's "Hep, two, three, four. To the rear—Harch, Hep, two, three, four. By the right flank Harch," and "Company Halt!" Hour after hour, day after day, we march back and forth, across and around our Regimental Drill Field, a quarter mile by two hundred yard plot of grass that is surrounded by barracks, drill hall, mess hall and Ship's Service Store. At first, we were a pretty clumsy, ragged looking bunch of fellows, and the cadence of our marching feet didn't correspond very well with the count that was being called by apprentice petty officers who were selected to help the Company Commander, a Chief Petty Officer, maintain discipline. Within a week or two, though, we march like veterans, and the tramp of feet is even as we carry out commands with snap and precision.

Calisthenics and other types of drill designed to strengthen us for the duties that lie ahead take up a good deal of our time. The Manual of Arms and Butts Manual are more interesting, in a way, than some others, because in these phases of our work we acquire the feel of a rifle.

At the command "Right shoulder—arms" we carry our pieces from their order arms position to their resting places on our right shoulders. Then, at the command, "Present—arms," we bring them to the prescribed position in front of us. "Parade Rest", "Port Arms", and other orders are given us in swift sequence with a view to quickening our wits. "Come on. Sailor, clown on your belly. Dig your heels into the deck. Now, start firing—quick. That Jap isn't going to wait for you to fire first." Our instructor in the use of small arms seems impatient as he comments on the manner in which we drop from an "Off Hand" to a prone position at the sound of simulated machine gun fire.

"Remember. Five rounds is all you have in your rifle. Don't fire any more," he warns.

Thus, in a realistic manner, do we get instruction in the use of rifles as we fire "dry", bringing the target into the sights of our pieces.

Earlier instruction in classrooms had made us familiar with our arms) and we had learned to adjust the slings which help us to fire more accurately. Later, on the same day, we fired the pieces with live ammunition, endeavoring to get a good score.

Look for more letters home from US Naval Training Station Sampson in future Seaweeds.



Isle of Capri Harbor Area – Summer 1944 (Fred Weber Collection)

Comments Received

We've received the following comments, either by email or left on the USS Champlin Website:

"Glad to see you fellows are still steaming along. We miss the reunions and shipmates, but you know the old saying; "I would if I could, but I can't"
Best regards - Frank Koster – USS Champlin

"This is very exciting to find the ship that my late dad, Harry William Katz, was on. He always talked about his memories and it's great to know that this website exists."
Elyse Flier – USS Champlin Website



USS Champlin – Summer 1944 – “Ready for Liberty”

(Fred Weber Collection)

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