Monday Maritime Matters: Memorial Day Edition

Description

Itâ€™s Memorial Day.Ã, This is my tribute to one who went before me:Ã, Seaman 1/C Omer Dee Simms, USN.Ã, Here is some of the story of this manâ€™s life that we are lucky to have heard.

(Note:Ã, All pictures below are the small versions.Ã, Click to get the original size provided)

Omer Dee Simms was a sailor aboard USS FRANKLIN (CV-13) on March 19th, 1945, when a Japanese kamikaze slammed into the flight deck and created a hellish place at sea for the crew of that aircraft carrier. 50 miles from the island of Kyushu, they were without power, on fire, and aircraft, on deck and in the hanger bay, loaded with aviation gas and ordnance were â€œcooking off.â€•

Who was Omer Simms? He was a son, a brother, a husband and a father.

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He was born in McKinney, Texas Nov 17th, 1911. When he was called to serve his country on Dec 16th, 1943 he was working at a boot factory. He was enlisted in the US Navy on Dec 31st, 1943.

Prepare in Duplicate

Local Board No. [illegible]
Tarrant County 4[illegible]
DEC 16 1943 004
Rm. 316, U. S. Court House
Fort Worth, Texas
(Local Board Date Stamp With Code)

Dec. 16, 1943
(Date of mailing)

ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION

The President of the United States,

To Omer (First name) Dee (Middle name) Simms (Last name)

Order No. 730

GREETING:

Having submitted yourself to a local board composed of your neighbors for the purpose of determining your availability for training and service in the land or naval forces of the United States, you are hereby notified that you have now been selected for training and service therein.

You will, therefore, report to the local board named above at 316 U.S. Court House Bldg. Fort Worth, Texas (Place of reporting)

at 7:30 A.m., on the 30th day of December, 1943
(Hour of reporting)

This local board will furnish transportation to an induction station. You will there be examined, and, if accepted for training and service, you will then be inducted into the land or naval forces.

Persons reporting to the induction station in some instances may be rejected for physical or other reasons. It is well to keep this in mind in arranging your affairs, to prevent any undue hardship if you are rejected at the induction station. If you are employed, you should advise your employer of this notice and of the possibility that you may not be accepted at the induction station. Your employer can then be prepared to replace you if you are accepted, or to continue your employment if you are rejected.

Willful failure to report promptly to this local board at the hour and on the day named in this notice is a violation of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, as amended, and subjects the violator to fine and imprisonment.

If you are so far removed from your own local board that reporting in compliance with this order will be a serious hardship and you desire to report to a local board in the area of which you are now located, go immediately to that local board and make written request for transfer of your delivery for induction, taking this order with you.

Sue G. Wills
~~Member or~~ clerk of the local board.

D. S. S. Form 150
(Revised 1-15-43)

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 10—[illegible]

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He was the father of Richard Don Simms.

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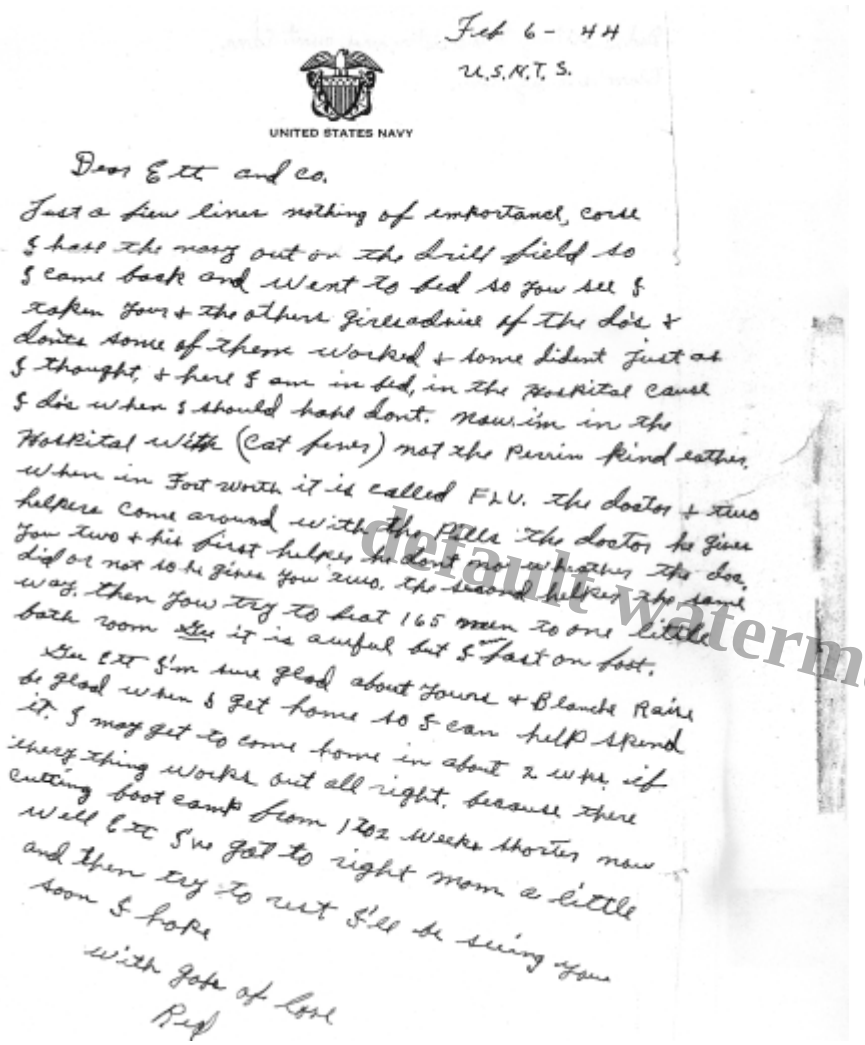
His wrote his wife, Blanche, and his son, Richard.

In Boot Camp, he got to experience the wisdom of the military medical system, and he shared this with his sister in a letter:



Feb 6 - 44
U.S.N.T.S.

UNITED STATES NAVY

Dear Ett and co.
Just a few lines nothing of importance, corse
I have the navy out on the drill field so
I came back and went to bed so you see I
taken your + the others girls advice of the do's +
don'ts some of them worked + some dident just as
I thought, + here I am in bed, in the Hospital cause
I do's when I should have dont. now i'm in the
Hospital with (cat fever) not the Perrin kind eather.
when in Fort worth it is called FLU. the doctor + two
helpers come around with the pills the doctor he gives
you two + his first helper he dont no wheather the doc.
did or not so he gives you two. the second helper the same
way. then you try to beat 165 men to one little
bath room Gee it is awful but I'm fast on foot.
Gee Ett I'm sure glad about yours + Blanche Raise
be glad when I get home so I can help spend
it. I may get to come home in about 2 wks. if
every thing works out all right. because there
cutting boot camp from 1 to 2 weeks shorter now
Well Ett I've got to right mom a little
and then try to rest I'll be seeing you
soon I hope
with gobs of love
Red

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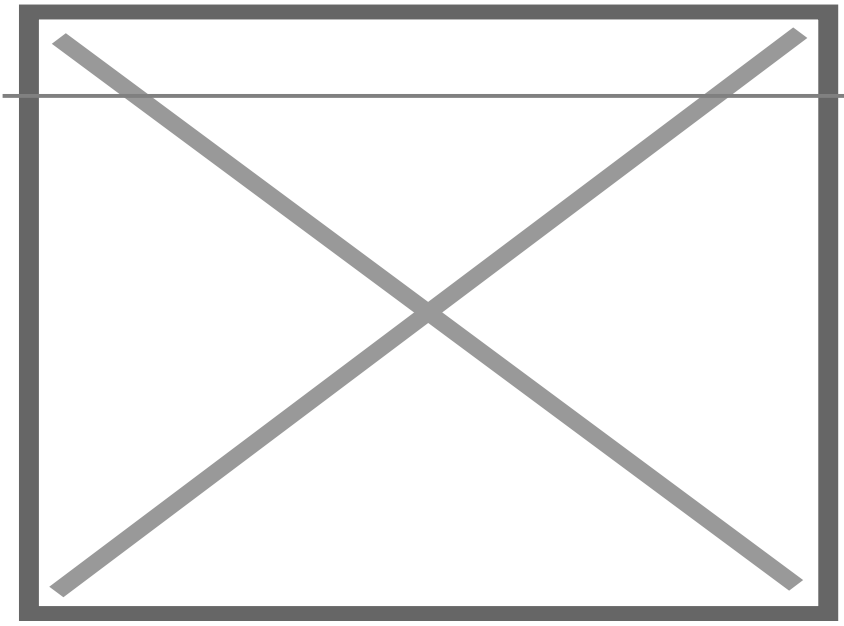
He was assigned as a cook aboard USS FRANKLIN (CV-13) and rode her into battle, as the noose of the Allied Forces tightened around the virtual neck of the Japanese Homeland. The Japanese weâ€™re going down without a fight, and, on the 19th of March, 1945, a single pilot brought hell to earth for that crew. Omer was 31 years old when he joined the service, so, the service being what it is across many generations, I imagine he picked up a nickname of â€œPopsâ€• or â€œGramps.â€• They probably looked up to him, because he had more life behind him than they did.



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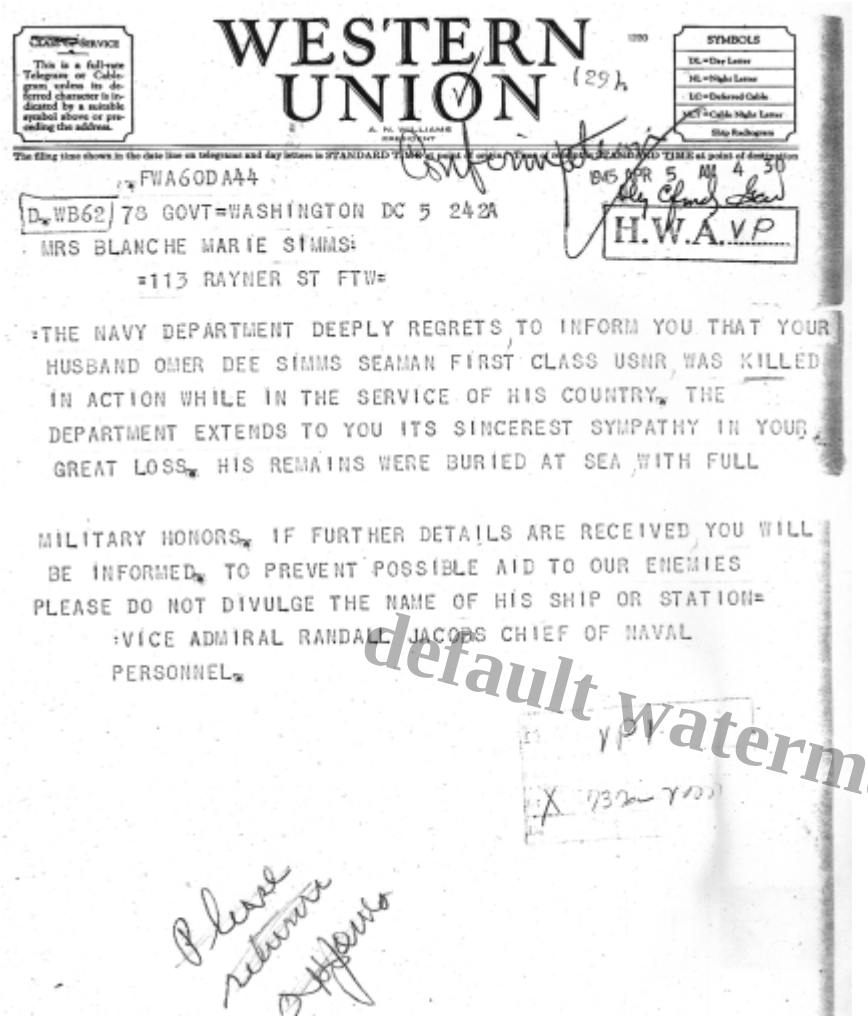
(Click on the picture for the archived photos of the attack on NavSource)

725 dead, 265 wounded in the attack. Omer Dee Simms was a hero that day. He saved 12 of his shipmates, by not giving up on getting the door open, to allow the 13 of them to remain trapped in a compartment, with fire raging around them. Once he led that group to safety, he went back inside the skin of the ship to help get others to safety. He did not survive the day.

Here is the notice Omerâ€™s family received from the Department of the Navy:



WESTERN UNION

FWA60DA44

D WB62 78 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 5 242A

MRS BLANCHE MARIE SIMMS:

=113 RAYNER ST FTW=

:THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND OMER DEE SIMMS SEAMAN FIRST CLASS USNR WAS KILLED IN ACTION WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT EXTENDS TO YOU ITS SINCEREST SYMPATHY IN YOUR GREAT LOSS. HIS REMAINS WERE BURIED AT SEA WITH FULL MILITARY HONORS. IF FURTHER DETAILS ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE INFORMED. TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION=

:VICE ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.

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George Black owes his life to Omer Simms. He made the following statement to describe the efforts and situation he faced that horrible day in battle:

Affidavit of George Fain Black

This affidavit concerns an event that occurred at about 0700 hours 19 March 1945 in Franklin, CV 13, approximately 50 miles southeast of Kyushu Island, Japan.

I had just arrived in the aft mess hall, starboard side in a chow line, was served and sat down to eat breakfast. After a few seconds there was a terrific explosion aboard the ship and I believe it was forward and at the hangar deck. The concussion threw me and others seated, along with the mess table, across the compartment to starboard among bombs on racks, seabags, and mattresses for hammocks. Being completely addled and ears ringing I managed to get to my feet and obey the order given me by Walter Bigusiak, RM1/C, to follow him to Radio # 2 starboard side aft just under the flight deck. A cook who was wearing a white uniform and white apron was leading us. There were 13 of us in a line who, on the double, were going topside to the hangar deck from the port side main hatch. The lights went out. The PA system announcing General Quarters quit. The aft mess hall was heavy in smoke; several sailors did not regain consciousness and in a desperate lunge, we all headed for the ladder. The first deck above us contained a small compartment holding six bunks and lockers; a telephone and scuttlebutt. The leader, the cook named Simms, ran up the ladder and grabbed the scuttle wheel and turned it loose saying it was too hot to handle. The 13 of us then attempted to retreat back to the mess hall, and opening that hatch fire and smoke entered the small compartment. We were trapped. Someone picked up the phone and attempted to call ship's operator and got no response. It was announced the phone was dead. Simms and Bigusiak told us all to sit down on the bunks and conserve energy and oxygen. This was our position for several hours. There were many explosions that were nearby and some were so close to us that we were racking around in the bunks. To attempt to stand would only get you knocked down. Several attempts were made to use the telephone to no avail. I along with others removed towels from the bunks, wetted them in the scuttlebutt, and wore them as face masks as the air was stale, heavy and hot. On occasion Simms would say it was too hot. His position was a sitting position on the ladder. In near panic it was said we had blundered into a shelling; another said he thought we had been torpedoed. The ship started listing to starboard and everyone thought we were going to be capsizing. Explosions continued intermittedly and at intervals for a very long time.

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There was a lull but the wheel still wouldn't budge. There was another explosion, this time on the hangar deck and near us. It started letting smoke into the compartment through the vent system. Simms who was about 15 years older than the rest of us including my leader, Walter, took charge of things. He yelled that the wheel had cooled and he put all his weight into the loosening of the wheel and it finally began to turn; however, the hatch would not budge. Simms put his shoulder to it and it began to open. Water then began to pour into the opening and onto the ladder.

Everyone was on his feet now and clamoring to get to the ladder. Simms yelled that the hangar deck was afire but we had to move fast. Everyone thought we were going to be caught in a capsizing. Simms managed to get through a maze of airplane wreckage and yelled to form a line and come on out. I was beginning to choke but I yelled out a number for everyone climbing up and through the hatch. Simms pulled a guy up and out and he in turn did the same. I kept yelling the numbers and when # 11 was pulled through a guy wearing a gas mask motioned for me to go on out. I did so and pulled him out. We were inside a burned out bomber that had been lying across the hatch. The list probably caused the wreckage to slide away from the hatch allowing us to be freed. A water pipe had burst by the explosion and water put out the fire above us.

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We dodged fire, smoke, ruined aircraft, carnage and a big black hole going in line; one on one to the only light we could see starboard. Radio # 2 was heavily damaged. We didn't see any body still alive and made it to the gun mount for the 20's and 40's starboard aft for air. In a second or two we all gathered together in the gun mount and squatted down hoping to miss all the exploding ammo and rockets.

Then the gasoline and napalm tanks exploded. All of

It was Simms who made the judgment call to go forward. He was the one who finally forced the wheel and hatch and led the 12 of us out. He saved us all there; however, the events of the sea left me as the only one to be rescued later by the destroyer Hunt.

Before me the undersigned personally appeared George Fain Black who is known to me and personally has sworn that the facts written herein and above are true and correct.

George Fain Black

Signed and sealed this the 8th of January, 2003 in Houston, Harris County, Texas.

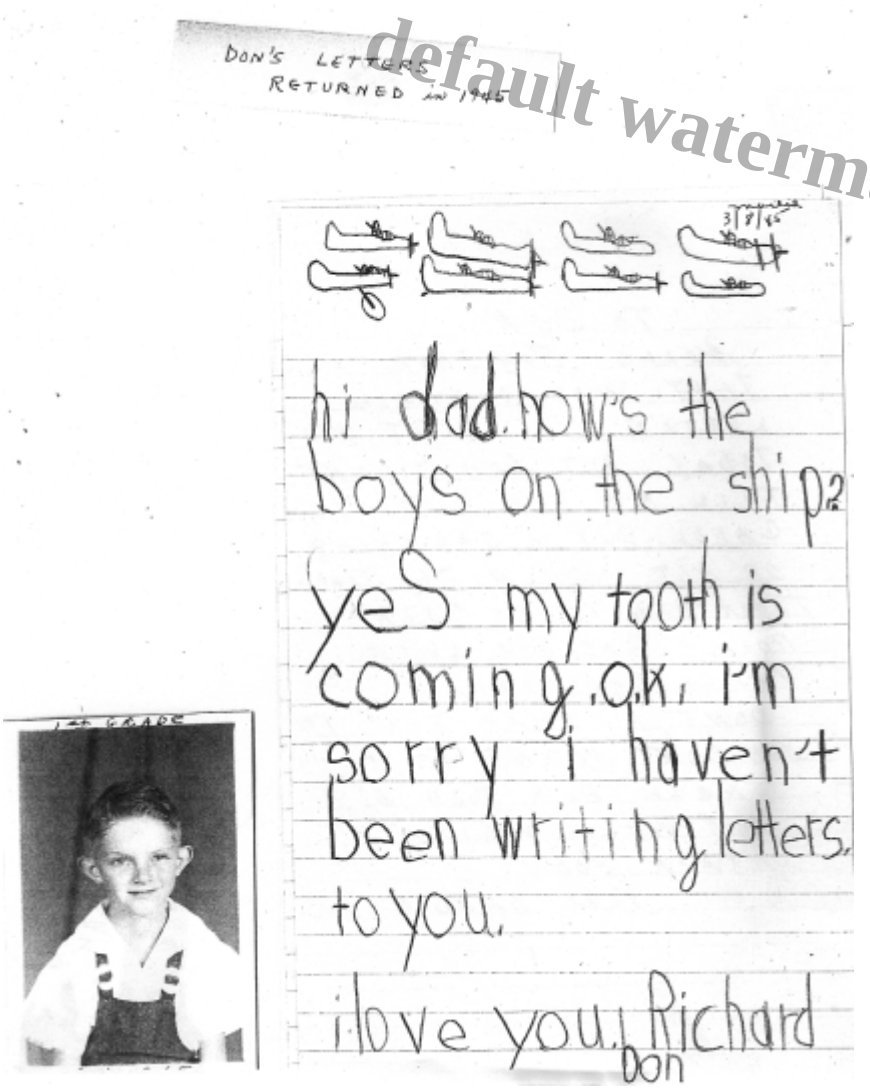
GEORGE D. HARAKA
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES
JULY 24, 2003

Click here for this file scanned and converted to PDF

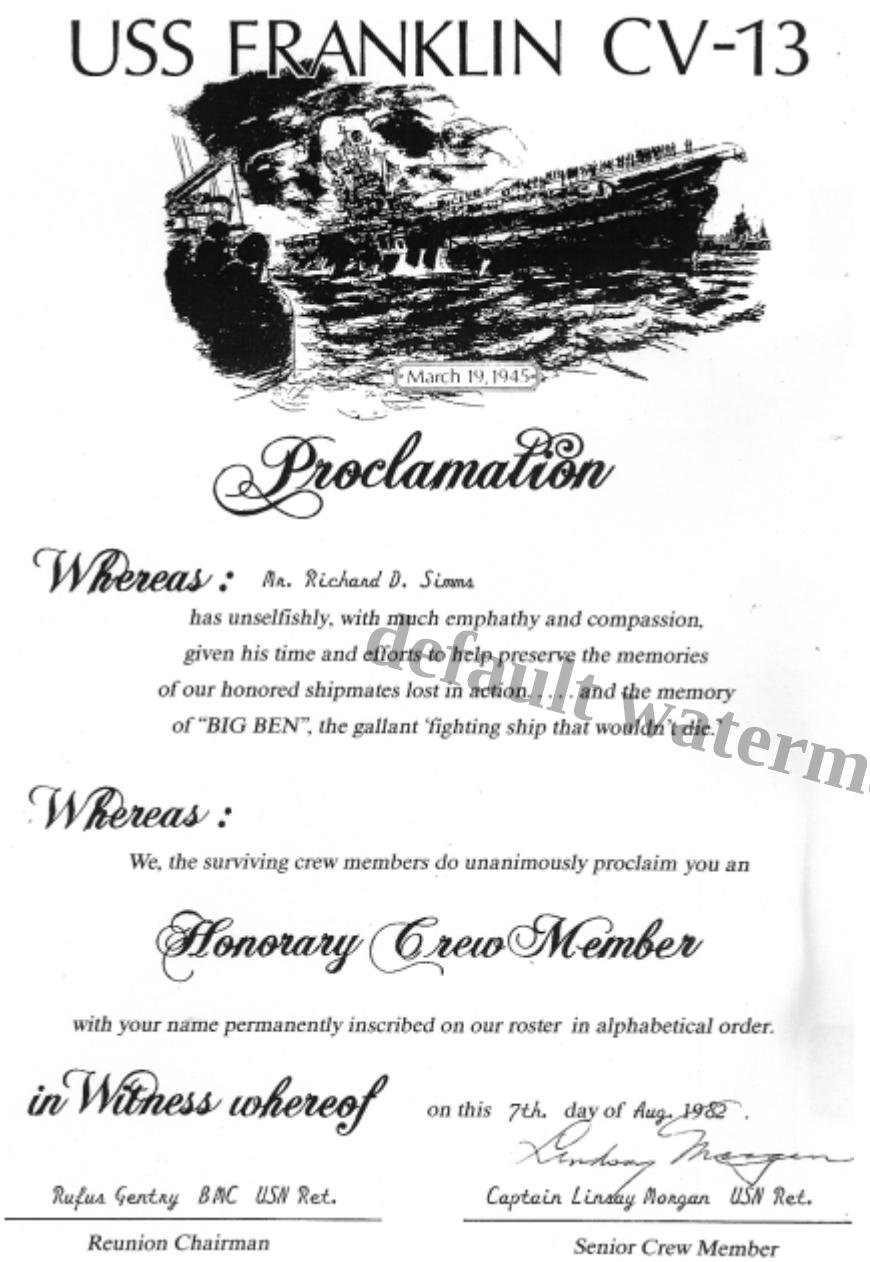
There are no bridges, streets, museums, schools or military barracks named after Omer Dee Simms, but, he, like so many others, had courage in the midst of battle and chose to carry on, to get the mission done, in this case to save your shipmates.

For a detailed story of a newly built carrier, that entered the Pacific and went straight to combat, took a seemingly mortal wounding off Japan, yet was underway on her own power the later that day, and steamed stateside herself to arrive at the shipyard for repairs, get the book â€œInfernoâ€• by Joseph Springer. The story of Omer Dee Simms is in there, with the other reports of danger and death and courage.

The memory of Omer Dee Simms is kept alive by his son. Richard Don Simms, pictured above, who graciously provide me with the information and materials for this post. Richard shared in his items, a letter he sent to his father, but was returned unread:



In addition to that help, he has been one to help keep the memory of the crew of the USS FRANKLIN (CV-13) in the public eye, having attended the reunions and being declared an honorary crew member of the storied vessel.



USS FRANKLIN CV-13

March 19, 1945

Proclamation

Whereas: Mr. Richard D. Simms
has unselfishly, with much emphathy and compassion,
given his time and efforts to help preserve the memories
of our honored shipmates lost in action . . . . and the memory
of "BIG BEN", the gallant 'fighting ship that wouldn't die.'

Whereas:
We, the surviving crew members do unanimously proclaim you an

Honorary Crew Member

with your name permanently inscribed on our roster in alphabetical order.

in Witness whereof on this 7th. day of Aug. 1982.

Rufus Gentry BMC USN Ret. — Reunion Chairman

Lindsay Morgan
Captain Lindsay Morgan USN Ret. — Senior Crew Member

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Richard also shows his appreciation to our service members today, providing them with his presence at the DFW Airport, as reported in these two articles:

PONDER

World War II veteran's son entertains servicemen

By Scott Price
Staff Writer

When Richard Don Simms plays banjo on Thursdays at the USO at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, he thinks of his father.

He greets servicemen and women going to war in Iraq and Afghanistan and remembers how his father died during World War II, trying to save men's lives on an aircraft carrier after it was bombed by the Japanese.

Omer Dee Simms, who was raised on a farm in Ponder, was a cook and a gunner on the USS Franklin. He died on March 19, 1945, when he was 33 and his son, Richard, was 7 and in first grade.

"He didn't get to see his boy go to the first grade of school or play baseball," Richard said. "He was wanting to be here and not over there."

Richard, now 68, said that his father joined the National Guard and was released three months later when officials realized he was only 16.

After that he moved around until he settled in Fort Worth. Omer worked for Justin Boots and for an auto parts manufacturer, Richard said.

In 1936, Omer won $1,100 "Buck Nite Award" at the Majestic Theater in Fort Worth. Richard said this was about a year's salary for his father, and he believes he used $900 of the money to purchase the house where Richard grew up.

In 1943, Omer was drafted into the Navy.

On March 19, 1945, the Franklin was 50 miles southwest of Kyushu Island, Japan, when it was hit by two bombs from Japanese planes.

In 2001, Richard met George Fain Black of Houston who provided an affidavit that tells how Omer saved his life on the Franklin.

Black said he had just sat down to eat breakfast in the mess hall when a bomb struck the ship and the concussion threw him and other men across the room.

He was one of 13 men who went to a small compartment below a hangar deck. The men couldn't go forward because a hatch was too hot to touch and they couldn't go back because there was smoke.

Omer, who was older than the other men, took charge, telling them to sit down and conserve energy and oxygen.

As they listened to explosions around them, the men wrapped wet towels around their faces to make breathing easier. The ship began to list to the starboard and the men feared that the aircraft carrier would capsize.

After an explosion in the hangar deck, smoke began coming in the vent. Omer climbed the ladder and found the hatch wheel had cooled, so with considerable effort, he opened the hatch and water poured in.

He told the men that the hangar deck was on fire and they needed to move fast. They were able to get through airplane wreckage on the deck and formed a line, reaching a gun mount where there was better air.

The men were gathered at the gun mount when gasoline and napalm exploded. Those who survived the explosion jumped into the water. There were no floatation devices, and 12 men drowned.

"It was Simms who made the judgment call to go forward," Black wrote. "He was the one who finally forced the wheel and hatch and led the 12 of us out. He saved us all there; however, the events of the sea left me as the only one to be rescued later by the destroyer Hunt."

Richard Don Simms, center, with his parents, Blanche Marie Simms and Omer Don Simms, a Ponder native who died during World War II.

The Franklin was left dead in the water, but another ship towed it out of the area because Japanese planes were still trying to sink it. Men on the Franklin were able to restore power to the ship and it traveled to New York.

Omer's body was recovered and he was buried at sea with the other men who died on the ship.

Now Richard plays one day a week for servicemen and women going off to war, and he said in each face he sees his father.

He would like to use the letters, pictures, newspaper articles, and other material he has collected to write a book about his father and his service aboard the USS Franklin. A photo of Richard and his father appeared in the December 2005 issue of Texas Highways.

"I have a book in me that I need to get out," he said.

dcf bookmark

Coming up
In Ponder

Today
■ Deadline to order Valentine gifts at Ponder Elementary. Sales help the Angel Fund. Order forms at www.ponderisd.net

Valentine sales
■ Ponder Junior High Student Council Valentine Gram Sales through Feb. 14. $1 or $2 Contact any Student Council member.

FEb. 10
■ Staff in-service day and student holiday for Ponder schools

FEB. 3, 2006

NORTHWEST SCHOOLS

Denton Record-Chronicle

Old Tyme Restaurant & Bakery
GINGER BROWN'S
817-237-2117
cell: 817-312-1704
6312 Jackshore Hwy • Lake Worth, TX

Mindy Lu's Pies
Glenn Mayer
Marty Mayer
THE PIE COMPANY
721 E. Loop 820
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817 457-7437
www.mindylupies.com

AUG 24, 2006
DFW PEOPLE

dfwpeople.com

Richard Don Simms serenades the troops embarking for Iraq

Banjo picker was seven years old when he heard his father was killed in the Pacific during World War II

by Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Richard Don Simms was just seven years old when his father died on an aircraft carrier during World War II, but he still remembers how the tragic news, delivered in a telegram, shaped his life.

"Ever since then, I always thought a lot about the military," says the east Fort Worth resident, now age 68. "I admire the men who serve this country."

So when the patriotic Texan heard about a USO going in at DFW Airport to serve troops being deployed, he wanted to get involved. In a phone call to then USO director Pat Little, Simms volunteered his talents.

"I said 'Sir, I'm just an old banjo player who would like to entertain the troops as they come into the airport,'" he recalls. "And that's just what I've been doing every Thursday since January 2005."

DONATED ROLLS

But before Simms makes the trek from his Meadowbrook home to the airport, he makes a stop in Lake Worth to pick up four and 1/2 dozen cinnamon rolls donated by Ginger Brown's Old Tyme Restaurant.

"That's my routine," explains the performer who has entertained audiences with music and comedy for more than 30 years. "The soldiers come up to hear me play and then I let them go inside (the USO) to get a cinnamon roll. They look at me kind of funny at first but then they figure it out."

Simms, along with a troupe of other USO volunteers, work in the secure side of the airport where military troops gather before heading back to Iraq. Offering a few snacks and some entertainment helps keep the mood upbeat.

Dressed in overalls, a funny hat and tie, Simms uses his banjo, stump fiddle and spoons to break the ice with soldiers.

"One guy came up to me and said that he played a five-string banjo too and I invited him to play mine," the musician says, recalling one of many happy memories he has of performing

See Richard Simms page 27

RICHARD DON SIMMS
(Photo submitted)

Richard Don Simms

Continued from page 26

in the Terminal B USO lounge. "He just played the daylights out of that banjo plucking away with his fingers. He had more fun than he could stand."

On another day, a departing infantryman asked Simms if he knew the religious hymn "How Great Thou Art," because he wanted to sing it.

"This fellow played the guitar so he got one of the two guitars they keep at the USO and he just started playing and singing," the volunteer remembers. "You could have taken up a collection. It was just like a church service in there."

In the past 19 months, Simms has collected a storehouse of memorable moments — as opportunity for which he's grateful.

"Doing this makes me feel good," says Simms who never served in the military himself because of a hip injury. "I'm not much of anything, just a good banjo player but when you get a handshake from one of these guys, it's wonderful."

Soldiers coming through DFW Airport are always expressing their appreciation for the hospitality they receive at the USO in Terminal B.

"They tell me this USO is the talk around the world. Everybody knows about it" Simms continues. "These volunteers and this organization just go all out for the military who come through here. I just feel good being a part of that."

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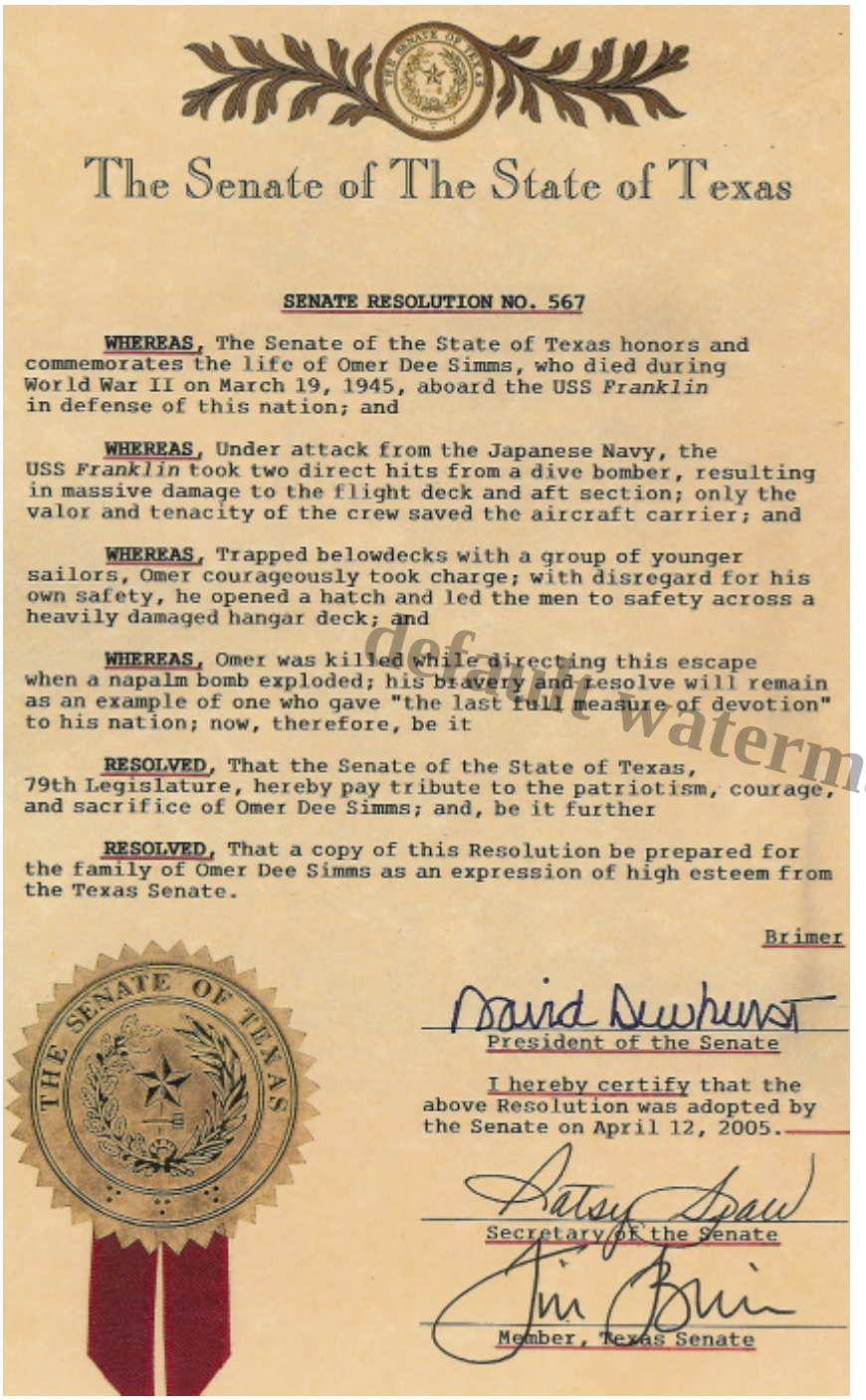
To complete my post, it is worthy of note that Seaman 1/C Omer Dee Simms, USN, has been honored by his home state of Texas in the following resolution in 2006:



The Senate of The State of Texas

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 567

WHEREAS, The Senate of the State of Texas honors and commemorates the life of Omer Dee Simms, who died during World War II on March 19, 1945, aboard the USS *Franklin* in defense of this nation; and

WHEREAS, Under attack from the Japanese Navy, the USS *Franklin* took two direct hits from a dive bomber, resulting in massive damage to the flight deck and aft section; only the valor and tenacity of the crew saved the aircraft carrier; and

WHEREAS, Trapped belowdecks with a group of younger sailors, Omer courageously took charge; with disregard for his own safety, he opened a hatch and led the men to safety across a heavily damaged hangar deck; and

WHEREAS, Omer was killed while directing this escape when a napalm bomb exploded; his bravery and resolve will remain as an example of one who gave "the last full measure of devotion" to his nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 79th Legislature, hereby pay tribute to the patriotism, courage, and sacrifice of Omer Dee Simms; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be prepared for the family of Omer Dee Simms as an expression of high esteem from the Texas Senate.

Brimer

David Dewhurst
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on April 12, 2005.

Patsy Spaw
Secretary of the Senate

Jim Brim
Member, Texas Senate

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Category

1. Navy

Tags

1. CV-13
2. memorial day
3. Military History
4. Omer Dee Simms
5. Omer Simms

6. USS FRANKLIN
7. USS FRANKLIN (CV-13)

Date Created
May 25, 2009
Author
admin

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