

Monday Maritime Matters: Memorial Day Edition

Description

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

(Note: All pictures below are the small versions. 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 "cooking off."

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.

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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.

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

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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 we'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 "Gramps." They probably looked up to



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

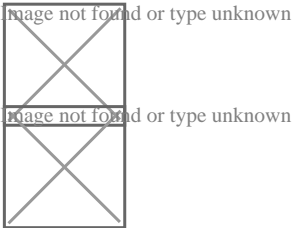
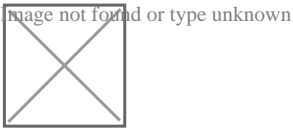
725 dead, 265 wounded in the attack. Omer Dee Simms was a hero that day. He saved 12 of his shipmates, by not giving up on getting the door open, to allow the 13 of them to remain trapped in a compartment, with fire raging around them. Once he led that group to safety, he went back inside the skin of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

Here is the notice Omer's family received from the Department of the Navy:

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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:

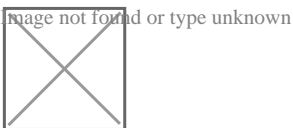


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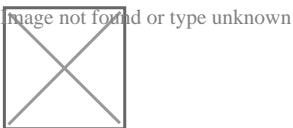
There are no bridges, streets, museums, schools or military barracks named after Omer Dee Simms, but, he, like so many others, had courage in the midst of battle and chose to carry on, to get the mission done, in this case to save your shipmates.

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 ["Inferno"](#) 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.



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:

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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:

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Category

1. Navy

Tags

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2. memorial day
3. Military History
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5. Omer Simms
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