

Vintage Oakleaf Profile: CAPT (ret) Kenneth M. Beyer

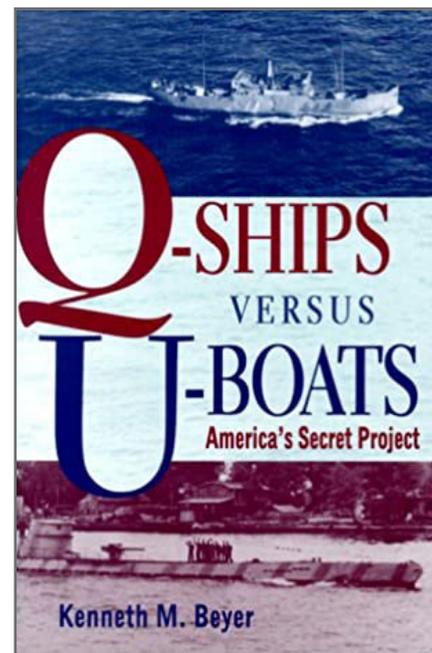
By CAPT Tiffany Schaud, SC, USN (Ret.)

Supply Corps CAPT (ret) **Ken Beyer** celebrated his 100th birthday this past August, a milestone that sets him apart as a member of our Vintage Oakleaf Club. As I interviewed CAPT Beyer, it soon became apparent that he has spent a lifetime achieving milestones, in the Navy and in industry. Upon retirement from the Navy, CAPT Beyer joined Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton Industries, later Northrup Grumman as director of ship logistics systems, with additional assignments in Iran and Saudi Arabia. CAPT Beyer authored the book *Q-Ships versus U-Boats, America's Secret Project*—a fascinating read. Below are some highlights from our conversation:

How did you become a Supply Corps officer?

Ken: I planned to attend the US Naval Academy after high school. I earned a US Commerce Department Certificate as a Merchant Marine Cadet and Assistant Pursuer by sailing with my Father, Edward F. Beyer, a Merchant Marine Captain (later, post WWII, a rear Admiral, US Navy Merchant Marine, Retired, and General Manager of ship operations for United Fruit Steam Ship Company) during the summers of high school. After graduating in 1938, there was a period of waiting before obtaining a Congressional appointment to the US Naval Academy. By 1939-40, the situation in Europe strongly indicated America's eventual involvement. My Father, an officer in the Navy Merchant Marine Reserve, suggested I apply for a commission in the Naval Reserve based on my Merchant Marine qualifications. I had no previous indication of being designated an Assistant Paymaster (Supply Corps) with the rank of ensign. In June of 1941, I was called to active duty. My orders directed me to the USS North Carolina. Upon reporting to the ship, Commander A. B. Clark, the Supply Officer, welcomed me aboard and said that I would be assigned to the ship for training. The other officers in the Supply Department were Lieutenant William P. Watts and two Warrant Officers, Mr. Baxter and Mr. Grigsby. I spent time under their supervision learning all aspects of the Supply Corps Manual Inventory Management, Clothing and Small Stores, Commissary, and Disbursing, as well as how to be an Assistant Division Officer.

In February 1942, coincidentally, as my training was coming to an end, I received orders to report to the Chief, Bureau of Supplies and Accounts Washington, DC (now Commander, Naval Supply Systems Command). My orders were forwarded by US Mail, which was not delivered until the ship arrived in New York after completing advanced battle practice in the Atlantic and Caribbean. I was required to report to the Bureau on the same day as arriving in New York! In Washington, DC, I reported to the Chief's office and was received by two lieutenant's whom I believe were Tom Montgomery and Robert "Bob" Northwood; however, I never confirmed this due to the ongoing Security Classification requirements of the Project (Project LQ). I was told that another Officer was expected and upon arrival we both would be taken to the Chief's conference room for a briefing. LTJG Ed Joyce arrived. Ed stated that he too was a Supply Corps Merchant Marine Reserve Officer stationed at the Brooklyn, NY Naval Shipyard and that he had been recently married. We were taken to the conference room and introduced to Commander Nick Carter and Commander Walter Honoker. We were told that we were selected because of our Merchant Marine experience and that we would be asked to volunteer for hazardous sea duty. The assignment was SECRET and if at any time during the briefing we chose not to volunteer, the briefing would cease and there would be no further record of the briefing having ever taken place. The briefing continued and we were told there would be two ships



CAPT Beyer lives in Tennessee near his daughter Lisa. A complete biography of CAPT Beyer's career in the Navy and beyond is included in the book. Visit our [Vintage Oakleaf webpage](#) for links to CAPT Beyer's book and to read our complete interview.

both operating in the Atlantic as 'decoys' to entrap German U-boats. The ships would be heavily armed and have a Navy crew made up of specially selected officers and enlisted personnel. The ships would operate as foreign merchantmen as SS Evelyn and SS Carolyn, with no indication of Navy affiliation. My job was to take care of all of the logistical requirements of the ship and personnel and to act as Disbursing Officer; I was the Treasurer of a bogus shipping company and had a revolving 'fund' of \$100,000 chargeable to President Roosevelt's Emergency Fund at Riggs National Bank in Washington, DC. I maintained an 'accounts ledger' under the name "Asterion Shipping Company" and paid all expenses by Company check. We both volunteered and because LTJG Joyce had recently married, I volunteered to go on the first ship headed out, the USS Asterion. Very unfortunately, two days after leaving the Navy Shipyard in Portsmouth, NH, LTJG Joyce's ship, the USS Atik, was attacked simultaneously by two U-boats and was sunk by three torpedo hits after a surface artillery engagement with one of the submarines; all hands were lost.

What inspired you to write your book?

Ken: As to what inspired me to write the book, I felt that the families of the USS Atik (SS Carolyn) should be told what I knew from research and direct contact from personnel what happened with the sinking of the ship and the loss of all hands. After the end of the war, the Department of the Navy awarded the Purple Heart medals to each the 165 officers and enlisted men lost with the ship. Nothing further was stated officially to the families because the Q-Ship Project had not yet been declassified—it remained SECRET. It was not until 1999 when I was doing the research for the book and coordinating my efforts with Dr. Dean Allard, the US Navy Director of Naval History, that the authorization was given for me to use my judgement in the de-classification of the materials and documents that were in the US Navy archives related to the Q-Ship Project. The Commanding Officer of USS Asterion told me that he had submitted to the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) a written proposed commendation to all his officers and certain petty officers but received no response or positive action. Based on my research, in 1999 Senator John Warner of Virginia recommended awarding the Presidential Unit Citation to USS Asterion and USS Atik. The Secretary of the Navy declined to respond in writing to the Senator. According to the Navy Officer Assistant in the Senator's office, the matter was discussed by both the Secretary and the Senator, but no further action was taken. The reason remained private.

Regretfully, I have out-lived even my younger colleagues.

How have people in the US changed over the past 100 years in personality and outlook?

Ken: People have changed, influenced by changes brought about by themselves: television, jet propulsion, computers and the internet, politics, the economy, social sensitivity, family life, electronics, radiation, medication, robotics; these are a few of the changes that readily come to mind. A book could be written about the impact that these innovations and activities have had on the human race. Most of these changes have been beneficial some have not been. We now live at a much faster tempo, but we suffer with many more health problems caused mostly by stress. We seem to accomplish more, but with less efficiency; and we expedite, but we sacrifice common sense. We explore artificial intelligence at the expense of the human thought process. We are ignoring the value and meaning of dignity, truth, integrity, ethics, and respect of others. While the benefits are apparent in the conveniences of modern daily life, the cost is obvious in our weakened educational system, human relations, and in our overly competitive economy. In my opinion, the problems we face today began with the Vietnam War which was demoralizing to most citizens, physically and mentally; it adversely impacted much of our middle-aged population and disrupted, in many cases, our strong and solid American families, the source of our stability and moral strength. There is no doubt in my mind that in the future the desirous American spirit will be reawakened and flourish.



The Heritage Committee archives the rich historical impact that our most senior Supply Corps officers have had on our Navy and our Community. Our most senior Supply Corps officers are called the "The Vintage Oakleaf Club".

If you know of any Supply Corps officers 90 years and older who we should add to our list, please contact [CAPT \(ret\) Joe Spruill](#).