

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

ARLENE KIETH BABBITT
CHIEF AVIATION MACHINIST'S MATE (AVIATION PILOT)
UNITED STATES NAVY

Born in Berwick, Illinois, on February 28, 1921, Arlene Keith Babbitt received his early education in Brager School, Star Route, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. He enlisted as Apprentice Seaman in the U. S. Navy for a period of six years, on January 9, 1940, at Chicago, Illinois. He was promoted to Seaman, second class on May 9, 1940; Aviation Machinists Mate, third, second and first, during the period April 30 to September 1, 1942, and served in the temporary rank of Ensign from December 1943 until October 1944. He then reverted to enlisted status and was designated Aviation Machinist's Mate, Chief (acting appointment Aviation Pilot). On April 2, 1945 he received his appointment as a permanent Chief Petty Officer, retaining his Aviation Pilot designation.

Following his enlistment in the Navy in January 1940, and recruit training at the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois, he reported on October 15, 1941, to Patrol Squadron 42, and later had duty with Patrol Squadron 12. He was awarded the Air Medal "For meritorious conduct while participating in aerial flight during action against enemy Japanese forces throughout the Aleutian Islands Campaign, June 1 to 15, 1942..." The citation states that "Under the most severe weather conditions of high winds, snow, rain and fog, and in the face of persistent anti-aircraft fire from enemy ship and shore batteries, Babbitt, with conscientious devotion to duty, carried out the tasks assigned him during patrol missions and bombing attacks against Japanese ships in Kiska Harbor..."

Transferred to Aviation Pre-Flight School at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, in February 1943, he had flight instruction at the Naval Air Stations, Dallas, Texas, and Pensacola, Florida. He was appointed Ensign (temporary) on December 6, 1943, while on duty at the Naval Air Training Center, Pensacola, and from December 22, 1943, to March 31, 1944, had successive service at the Naval Air Stations, Jacksonville, Florida; Lake City, Florida; and Beaufort, South Carolina. On April 30, 1944, he was ordered to Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing Six, based at Seattle, Washington, and on June 25, 1944, was transferred to Bombing Squadron 138.

Reverting to enlisted status in October 1944, he served for eight months with Patrol Bombing Squadron 199, then briefly with Fleet Air Wing TWO and Fleet Air Wing SEVENTEEN. On November 7, 1945, after the Japanese surrender, he was transferred to the USS CUMBERLAND SOUND (AV-17), and remained on board that seaplane tender until December 14 of that year.

He was honorably discharged on January 22, 1946, at the Naval Air Station, Whidbey Island, Washington, and the next day reenlisted. During that enlistment which was terminated on September 16, 1947, he served with Fleet Aircraft Squadrons 113 and 115, and with Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing FOUR.

Reenlisting on September 17, 1947, at the Naval Operating Base, Alaska, he served with Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron 115; at the Naval Receiving Stations, Seattle, Washington, and Brooklyn, New York; with Naval Technical Training Unit, Naval Air Station, Glenview, Illinois; and with Patrol Squadron 6 and Fleet Air Squadron 112. While at Glenview he attended the U. S. Navy's CIC Officers School, and was advanced to the rating of Chief Aviation Machinist.

On June 1, 1950 he was transferred to duty with Helicopter Squadron ONE, Helicopter Unit ONE, and except for brief duty on board the USS ESSEX in April 1951, he remained with that squadron during operations in the Korean Area, and until his honorable discharge at the Naval Auxiliary Landing Field, Ream, San Ysidro, California, on December 13, 1951. He immediately reenlisted, and since June 25, 1952, he has been assigned to the U. S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Kingsville, Texas.

"For extraordinary heroism as a Helicopter Pilot in Helicopter Squadron ONE, Unit FOURTEEN, attached to HMAS SYDNEY, during the rescue of two downed airmen behind enemy lines near Sariwon, Korea, on 26 October 1951..." he was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation continues: Although fully cognizant that failure of the mission would result in capture and possible death, and keenly aware of the grave hazards presented by approaching darkness and the limited flying range of his helicopter, Babbitt unhesitatingly volunteered to fly his extremely vulnerable aircraft deep into enemy-held territory in a brave attempt to bring back the two men. Boldly approaching his objective in the face of intense hostile anti-aircraft and small arms fire, he effected a daring landing in full view of the enemy, picked up the downed airmen and returned safe to Kimpo Airfield, 80 miles distant. By his outstanding courage, exceptional ability as an airman and selfless efforts in behalf of others at the risk of his own life, Babbitt served to inspire all who observed him and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

In addition to the Navy Cross, the Air Medal, and the Ribbons for the Presidential Unit Citation to Helicopter ONE "For extraordinary heroism in action against aggressor forces from July 3, 1950 to July 27, 1953..." and the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, Chief Babbitt has the Good Conduct Medal; the American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and Philippine Liberation Ribbon.