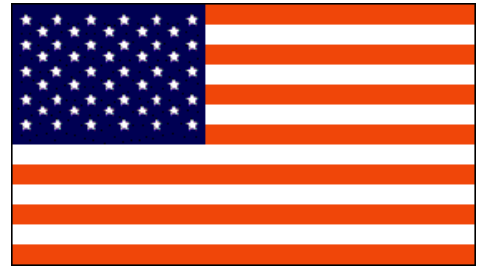




A Salute to a great Naval Officer and authentic American Patriot



RADM Carl J Seiberlich

7/4/21 – 3/24/06



Billions of people lived in the twentieth century and were *aware* of the major events that occurred. Of those, 125 million were Americans who struggled through the great depression in the 1930s, making personal sacrifices along the way.

But only 4 million of those actually participated in the next major event of the twentieth century, World War II, with fewer experiencing vicious front line combat. RADM Seiberlich 's career includes battling U-boats on the stormy Atlantic, destroying enemy tanks from a ship (!) in the Mediterranean, standing picket duty for kamikazes during the battle for Okinawa and lying at anchor in Tokyo Bay within sight of the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945. Furthermore - WWII was just a warm-up for Carl Seiberlich.

His ensuing Navy career encompassed many facets of naval aviation and maritime operations. For two decades, he was a key player in weaving the modern fleet “anti-submarine warfare” fabric by combining various types of airframes with state-of-the art anti-submarine warfare technologies. Each new assignment he was given had ever increasing responsibilities and culminated in his being a significant participant in helping America win the Cold War “space race.”

The USS Hornet Museum created this biographical sketch to help inspire future generations by documenting the great sacrifices made by one of the leading members of the “greatest generation”.



The Life and Times of RADM Carl J Seiberlich

Carl Joseph Seiberlich was born in Jenkintown, PA on the 4th of July, 1921. Throughout his life he marveled at how the country threw a huge birthday party for him every year! His natural ability for leadership showed itself early. During high school, he joined Sea Scout ship 128 and rose to the rank of Quartermaster, the highest rank attainable in the Sea Scouts (equivalent to a BSA Eagle Scout).



His first exposure to aviation occurred when he accepted a "demo" ride from Harold Pitcairn in an autogiro on the New Jersey seacoast in the mid-1930's. Carl flew around the NY City Harbor for a while in a PCA-2 such as the one in this photo showing Amelia Earhart flying over NYC in a 1930 publicity stunt. Carl was exhilarated by the experience and decided he would be a pilot "someday."

After graduation from high school, he was awarded an appointment to the US Naval Academy and reported to the Philadelphia Naval Yard for his physical exam. The Navy doctor discovered he had flat feet and said it would be impossible for him to become a naval officer. He then briefly attended the University of Pennsylvania, studying to become a CPA.

However, Seiberlich had a strong desire to go to sea and decided to enroll in the newly established US Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point, NY. In an odd twist of *deja vu*, he was quartered in a barracks named *Hornet*. He graduated from the academy with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation in 1943.

In June 1942, as part of the Academy's "on the job" work program, he reported aboard his first sea-going merchant marine vessel – the *SS Joseph Lykes*, a troopship. He was involved in several convoys across the dangerous Atlantic Ocean, dodging German U-boats and picking up survivors (and bodies) from ships that weren't so lucky. In November 1942, he reported aboard the *SS Mormachawk*, another troopship that carried 1,337 troops across the stormy Atlantic several times. By March 1943, Seiberlich, weary of being shot at by guns and torpedoes, decided he wanted a career path that would allow him to shoot back and left the merchant marine behind.



Due to his seagoing convoy experience as a navigator, he was commissioned in the naval reserve as an ensign in April. He was ordered aboard a destroyer as its navigator, the first merchant marine officer to be so designated. He served aboard the *USS Mayo* (DD-422), from June 1943 until it was decommissioned in early 1946.

In September 1943, the *Mayo* was part of the allied invasion force that landed at Salerno, Italy. Due to stiff resistance from German gun and tank emplacements, the allied ground forces made little headway initially. Finally, the plucky *Mayo* steamed very close to shore and blasted 46 German tanks, many pillboxes and other emplacements from point blank range, a major factor in the landing's eventual success. Even the German commander stated one of the reasons for their failure to drive the allies off the beach was this "sniper shooting" from the support destroyers.

Four months later, the *Mayo* also supported the allied invasion at Anzio. Again, she positioned herself close to shore, dodging repeated air attacks and providing close artillery support to the troops on shore until she hit a floating mine and was put out of action for many months.



In April 1945, the *Mayo* sailed into the Pacific and became part of a fast carrier task force, supporting the invasion of Okinawa. She performed anti-submarine warfare and plane guard operations and also served as a radar picket on the lookout for kamikaze attacks.

The *Mayo* was anchored in Tokyo Bay, close to the *USS Missouri*, when the formal Japanese surrender was signed on September 2, 1945. Lt Carl Seiberlich is the second man from the left in the front row in this picture taken on that historic day. The ship was then assigned to Japanese disarmament activities until she was ordered back to the US in

December 1945 and decommissioned shortly thereafter.

Seiberlich had received his orders to naval flight training during the battle for Okinawa. The *Mayo*'s skipper could not spare him and refused to let him go until the war had ended. On April 1, 1946, he reported to the Naval Air Training Center at NAS Lakehurst, NJ, where he underwent flight training in lighter-than-air craft (aka K-type blimps).

During this timeframe, he met his future wife, Trudy Germe, during a Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1949 (second from left in photo). After he graduated, he spent time at NAS Santa Ana and NAS Moffet flying these non-rigid airships.



When the west coast airship stations were decommissioned, he flew the Navy blimp ZPM-4 from Santa Ana, CA to Weeksville, NC in record transcontinental time (for blimps). He became a test pilot and made the first night landing on an aircraft carrier - the *USS Mindoro* CVE-120.



He soon became intimately involved with the initial design of the newly-developed towed, variable depth sonar systems.

In 1949, he worked on ASW ship-to-airship tactics with the *USS Sicily* (CVE-118), perfecting fleet techniques that later became standard practice for the Navy. This photo shows an actual landing made by Lt Seiberlich during this ASW exercise and tactics development session. This capability expanded the "eyes" of the fleet considerably as blimps had lengthy loiter time in the air.

He was awarded the 1951 Harmon International Trophy "in recognition of his developing a pilot technique for the use of lighter-than-air aircraft in towing underwater bodies, while piloting Navy airships at low altitudes, at night and in turbulent air, as well as under the most limited conditions of ceiling and visibility." It was presented on November 18, 1952 during a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden by President Truman.



In March 1952, he was ordered to NAS Pensacola to undertake his initial flight training in heavy-than-air patrol aircraft. He then reported to NAS Hutchinson, KS in January 1953 for multi-engine qualification in PB4Y-2 Privateer aircraft and won his second designation as a naval aviator. He was then assigned to various patrol squadrons, including VP-5 in Jacksonville, FL, and flew ASW patrol missions in P2V Neptunes. One of these included flying around the world in only 3 minutes during an arctic reconnaissance mission over the north pole from a base in Thule, Greenland.

In 1958, he became the Executive Officer of VS-36 on the *USS Valley Forge* (CVS-45), the flagship of Task Group ALPHA. The latter was the Navy's major ASW exercise unit whose objective was to create plans and tactics for fleet defense against enemy nuclear powered submarines. LtCdr Seiberlich was becoming one of the navy's premiere experts on anti-submarine warfare, but now using heavier-than-air craft as the hunter-killer platform.

In early 1959 he graduated from the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk and then assumed command of VS-26 on the *USS Randolph* (CVS-15), a squadron of S2F Tracker patrol aircraft.

In 1961, he became the Plans Officer for VADM E. B. Taylor, Commander of Antisubmarine Warfare Forces in the Atlantic. During the 1962 naval blockade of Cuba, in connection with the Cuban Missile Crisis, he had primary responsibility for surveillance, reconnaissance, and anti-submarine warfare. At this time, he needed to move among many ships and shore stations in the Caribbean, so he qualified to pilot seaplanes in a PBY such as this one in the photo.



In late 1963 he was ordered aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Intrepid* (CVS-11) as the Navigator. At this time, he became acquainted with the early American spacecraft recovery program. *Intrepid* had already recovered Navy astronaut Scott Carpenter from his *Aurora 7* sub-orbital flight in May and was now in training for the Gemini series of missions. During his tour of duty on the *Intrepid*, Seiberlich qualified to land helicopters on an aircraft carrier in an HSS-1 Seabat (similar to the one in the photo trying to recover Liberty Bell 7).

This 3rd naval aviator designator made him *the first naval officer qualified to land and launch lighter-than-air, fixed-wing, and rotary-wing aircraft on an aircraft carrier.*

He then spent two years at the Naval Air Reserve Training Command at NAS Glenview, IL. He established procedures that resulted in a high state of readiness for the naval reserve aviators.

In December 1967 Captain Seiberlich gained his first ship command when he became the Commanding Officer of the *USS Salamonie* (AO-26) a deep draft fleet oiler. He assumed command in Malta, while the ship was involved in a Mediterranean Cruise with the 6th fleet.



In December 1968, Seiberlich presided over the ship's decommissioning ceremony in Philadelphia, noting her 27 years of service to the Navy and more than 9,000 at-sea refuelings.

In May 1969, Captain Seiberlich took command of the *USS Hornet* (CVS-12) in Long Beach, CA. The *Hornet* had just returned from her 3rd tour of combat duty off the coast of Vietnam. Due to her availability on the west coast, her skipper's knowledge of spacecraft recovery and her type of vessel (Essex-class aircraft carrier with 4 propellers) the *Hornet* was selected as the primary recovery ship for the first NASA moon landing mission, Apollo 11.



Captain Seiberlich was made Commander of the Primary Recovery Forces in the Pacific Ocean and as such, was the "on scene" boss for the entire recovery operation. The recovery process was greatly complicated by the moon germ issue and the potential for contamination of the earth.

After several weeks of intense training by Navy and NASA personnel, and much worldwide anticipation, the Apollo 11 command module *Columbia* splashed down in the Pacific Ocean, 800 nautical miles southwest of Hawaii on July 24, 1969. The *Hornet* was perfectly positioned 10 miles upwind, close enough to make a fast recovery but far enough to not endanger the ship's crew (or the President and his staff) in case lunar pathogens spewed from the command module during reentry.



With President Nixon and a host of Navy, NASA and government dignitaries watching from his bridge, Seiberlich and his crew executed a flawless recovery of astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins, as well as the spacecraft and its precious moon rocks. Once the astronauts were inside their quarantine trailer, the President welcomed them back to earth. This ceremony was watched on live TV worldwide by over 500 million people.

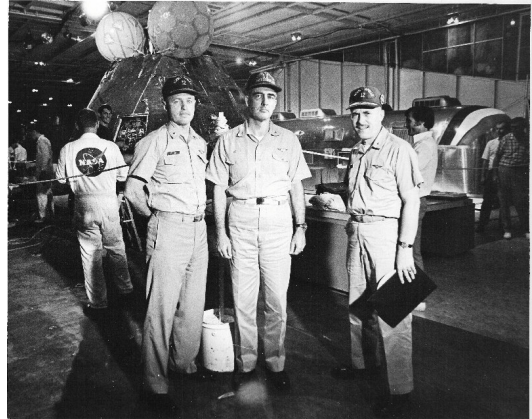
The *Hornet*, under the inspired leadership of its skipper, fulfilled President Kennedy's 1962 challenge to "send a man to the moon, and return him safely to earth, before this decade is out."

As the President was leaving the ship to start a worldwide tour, he congratulated Captain Seiberlich on a job well done, as seen in the photo taken on the flight deck.



Exactly 4 months later, the *USS Hornet* repeated this flawless performance as primary recovery ship for the second lunar landing mission, Apollo 12. On November 24, 1969 the all-Navy astronaut team of Pete Conrad, Alan Bean, and Dick Gordon splashed down only 2 miles from the *Hornet*. After decontamination procedures were completed, they were hoisted up into a helicopter, flown to the *Hornet* and placed in the Mobile Quarantine Facility.

Then the aircraft carrier pulled alongside the floating command module *Yankee Clipper* and the ship's crane hoisted it and the moon rocks onboard for a 3-day trip back to Pearl Harbor. This photo shows Captain Seiberlich with the CO and XO of HS-4, the helicopter recovery squadron, after the recovery was complete (note spacecraft and MQF in background).



The *Hornet* was initially scheduled to be the recovery ship for Apollo 13 but the NASA launch schedule slipped. In the meantime, the Navy decided to decommission the venerable WWII aircraft carrier. In June 1970, Captain Seiberlich presided over the decommissioning ceremony of the *Hornet* in Bremerton, WA.

After selection for flag rank, Admiral Seiberlich was assigned as Commander, Anti-submarine Warfare Group Three with the *USS Ticonderoga* (CV-14) as his flagship. During this timeframe, the Navy held additional ASW exercises called Project UPTIDE to modernize doctrine for defending a carrier battle group against nuclear submarines.

Following that assignment, he served as Director of Aviation Programs, then Assistant Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Air Warfare, then Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel, and finally Commander, Naval Military Personnel Command. While President of the Naval Uniform Board, he directed the development of the first maternity uniform for active and reserve personnel. From 1974 to 1980, he also served as the Senior Navy Member of the Navy/Maritime Administration Working Group.

He retired from the Navy in 1980 having also been decorated with the Legion of Merit (6 times) and the Air Medal.

Following his retirement, he became Director of Personnel with VSE Corporation and in 1982 he became the President of the U.S. Maritime Resource Center in King's Point, NY. In 1983 he joined American President Lines as the Director of their Military programs. For his work in streamlining APL's sealift operations in support of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, he was awarded the 1994 Vincent T. Hirsch Maritime Award for Outstanding Leadership by the Navy League of the U.S.

In 1997 he joined Transsystems Corporation as a consultant for transportation and military programs. Seiberlich also served as the U.S. representative to the International Standards Organization subcommittee on Intermodal and Short Sea Shipping. He was also the representative on the International Maritime Security Working Group and Ship/Port Interface Committee.

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Notes



When my wife and I first met Carl Seiberlich in a crowded Washington DC restaurant in 2000, he was quiet and unassuming but carried an air of authority and dignity. Even ignoring the white hair and seagoing gait, we picked him out of the arriving lunch crowd immediately. His demeanor was one of “been there, done that,” rather than rushing around or yelling into a cell-phone. For two hours he held us spellbound, describing just a few incidents that occurred in his life.

Somehow, a person who has been in command of a major seagoing vessel is unlike anyone else in this world (who else would smack the top of his head while he tells an old sea story and shout “Captain has the conn”)! Over the next 6 years, we carved a little time out of our busy schedules to work on historical research activities for the USS Hornet Museum. Since I live in the San Francisco Bay area and he lived in the northern Virginia, it wasn’t nearly enough.

One of his fondest memories dealt with the Apollo 11 recovery as President Nixon was walking across the flight deck of the *Hornet* to leave on his worldwide tour. For a moment, Nixon stopped to chat with a group of sailors and shook the hands of a couple. To one African-American deck hand he said “*well done !*”. The sailor eloquently replied “Yes sir, we’re *Hornet*.” The President wasn’t exactly sure what that meant, so he asked Captain Seiberlich, who briefly explained about the long and excellent heritage of the name *Hornet* in the US Navy, beginning with the Revolutionary War. As he walked to the steps of his helicopter, the President leaned toward the Captain and said “today, this crew lived up to the *Hornet’s* heritage and you be sure to tell ‘em I said so”. In a letter sent to all crewmen, and their families, Captain Seiberlich did.

Apparently, many others beside myself tried to get him to write his memoirs. He resisted oh-so-politely, so we had to resort to making video-taped oral histories on that rare occasion when he’d agree to sit still for an hour or two. During our very last lunch, only weeks before he unexpectedly passed away, I again asked him to jot down some notes. He looked my wife in the eye and snapped in a confident tone of voice “don’t worry – there’s no way I’m going to die as long as Arlington Cemetery has such a long waiting list.”

In retirement, he remained actively involved in many organizations such as the Sea Scouts, Naval Airship Association, the Golden Eagles, the US Merchant Marine Academy, the USS Salamonie Association, the USS Hornet Association and the USS Hornet Museum.

RADM Seiberlich served his country in the finest tradition of the Navy and his legacy provides a shining path for future generations to follow.



Bob Fish
Trustee
USS Hornet Museum
April 24, 2006