

Archives Branch
Naval History and Heritage Command
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Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060

Processor: Roy Grossnick (Updated November 2012) and originally processed by Elizabeth M. Bernard (August 2008).

Plummer Papers

COLL/580

Creator: Commander John E. Plummer, USN and Lieutenant Commander Mary E. Birch (later Plummer), USN

Extent: 2 boxes
.7 cubic feet

Date Range: 1943-1958

Classification: Unclassified

Access: Open

Scope and Content Notes

This Collection consists of approximately 300 letters, postcards, and greeting cards written by and to Lieutenant Commander Mary E. Birch and her later husband, Commander John E. “Jake” Plummer, and is organized into three Series:

Series I contains the original correspondence exchanged between Commander Plummer’s future wife, Mary Birch, and her family from January through April of 1943 and November of 1944 while she was a Midshipman at the Naval Reserve Midshipmen’s School (USNRMS) in Northampton, Massachusetts. This Series provides a glimpse into the training of a WAVES officer during World War II, and contains approximately 40 letters and postcards arranged chronologically.

Series II contains approximately 250 pieces of original correspondence from January 1949 through April 1958, including a number of attached newspaper clippings and other enclosures, exchanged between Commander Plummer, his wife and two children. This Series reflects the regular exchange between a Naval officer and his family during the early years of the Cold War, and provides a unique snapshot of domestic life in 1950s America. Of particular interest are examples of Operation Deep Freeze letterhead and envelopes from Commander Plummer’s voyages to the Arctic on board *Edisto*. Additional items of note include rose scented “scratch-n-sniff” stationery, Girl Scout stationery, and a number of Valentines, St. Patrick’s Day, and Birthday cards, all in very good condition. This Series is arranged chronologically, and the association of all newspaper clippings and other miscellanea with the letters in which they were originally enclosed has been retained.

Series III contains a pair of original photographs of Mary Birch in uniform: one of her as a Midshipman in 1943, and one of her as a Lieutenant Commander in 1949. Also included are individual portraits of Commander and Mrs. Plummer (Mrs. Plummer's is dated July 28, 1957) and their children during the 1950s, as well as a photocopy of a newspaper article on USS *Edisto*'s arctic operations during the summer of 1957 and an original issue of the USNRMS newsletter *Wavelengths* from March 1943.

Subject Heading (LCSH)

United States. Navy — History — Arctic Exploration
United States. Navy — History — Military Sea Transportation Service
United States. Navy — History — Operation Deep Freeze
United States. Navy — History — WAVES, Training
United States. Navy — History — WAVES, World War II
United States. Navy — History — World War II

Biography

John Everett "Jake" Plummer was born in Eldorado, Maryland on April 23, 1918 to John W. and Carrie Windsor Plummer. After attending Baltimore City College, he attended the U.S. Naval Academy from which he graduated in 1940. At the Academy, he participated on the soccer and fencing teams.

Mary E. Birch attended the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (USNRMS W-R) in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1943. By 1949, she had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and served at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base in New London, CT.

Mary Birch and John Plummer married in the late 1940s, although Mary did not change her last name to Plummer until 1949. They had two children together, John and Susan. Plummer was trained in submarine operations at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base in New London, CT, and went on to serve as a Lieutenant Commander on board USS *Corsair*. He received further training at the Anti-Submarine Tactical Warfare School in Key West, Florida in 1950. On January 1, 1950, Plummer was promoted to Commander, after which he served as Commanding Officer of USS *Tench*, a submarine of the same class as *Corsair*. He held this command for approximately one year before assuming command of USS *Thuban*, an attack cargo ship. In 1956, Commander Plummer was assigned command of USS *Edisto*, one of the Navy's most powerful icebreakers. As part of Task Force 43, *Edisto* was dispatched to the Arctic on missions to re-supply bases and aid shipping in the Newfoundland and Labrador areas of the far north. On December 31, 1957, Commander Plummer was transferred to the Bureau of Ordnance in Washington DC where he spent a year and a half before retiring from the Navy on July 1, 1960.

Places served by Lieutenant Commander Birch during the period covered by this collection:

U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (USNRMS) 1943-1944
Northampton, Massachusetts
Midshipman

U.S. Naval Submarine Base 1949
New London, CT
Lieutenant Commander (possibly as a nurse)

Places and ships served by Commander Plummer during the period covered by this collection:

U.S. Naval Submarine Base intermittent:
New London, CT 1949, 1952, 1954

USS *Corsair* (SS-435) 1949
Tench Class Diesel-Electric Submarine
Lieutenant Commander

Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Tactical School 1950
Key West, FL
Lieutenant Commander

USS *Tench* (SS-417) 1954
Tench Class Diesel-Electric Submarine
Commanding Officer

USS *Thuban* (AKA-19) 1955 – 1956
Andromeda Class Attack Cargo Ship
Commanding Officer

USS *Edisto* (AGB-2) 1956 – 1957
Wind Class Icebreaker
Commanding Officer

Bureau of Ordnance 1958 – 1960
Department of the Navy
Washington, DC

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1

Series I: Original Correspondence, Jan. 1943 – Nov. 1944

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jan. – Feb. 1943, |
| 2. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Mar. – Apr. 1943,
Nov. 1944 |
| 3. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Undated |

Series II: Original Correspondence, Jan. 1949 – Sep. 1955

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|-----|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 4. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jan. – Sep. 1949 |
| 5. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jan. – Jun. 1950 |
| 6. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Oct. 1951 |
| 7. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | May, Sep. 1952 |
| 8. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Apr. – Nov. 1954 |
| 9. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | May – Jul. 1955 |
| 10. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Aug. – Sep. 1955 |
| 11. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Feb. – Jun. 1956 |
| 12. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jul. 1956 |
| 13. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Aug. 1956 |
| 14. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Sep. 1956 |

Box 2**Series II: Original Correspondence, Feb. 1956 – Apr. 1958**

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|-----|--|------------------|
| 15. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jan. – Mar. 1957 |
| 16. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Apr. – Jun. 1957 |
| 17. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Jul. – Aug. 1957 |
| 18. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Sep. – Nov. 1957 |
| 19. | Incoming/Outgoing Correspondence | Feb. – Apr. 1958 |
| 20. | Gift Notes from
Commander Plummer to Mrs. Plummer | Undated |
| 21. | Mother's Day Notes to Mrs. Plummer | Undated |

Series III: Family Information and Photographs

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|-----|---|----------------------|
| 22. | Photographs (2): Mary E. Birch | |
| | As Midshipman | 1943 |
| | As Lieutenant Commander | 1949 |
| 23. | Photographs (2):
Commander Plummer
Mrs. Plummer | Undated
Jul. 1957 |
| 24. | Photographs (2) : Johnny and Susan Plummer | Undated |
| 25. | Newspaper Clipping re: USS <i>Edisto</i> | Aug. 1957 |
| 26. | <i>Wavelengths</i> Newsletter | Mar. 1943 |