

**Archives Branch**  
**Naval History and Heritage Command**  
**805 Kidder Breese Street, SE**  
**Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060**

**Processor:** Roy Grossnick (Updated October 2012) and originally processed by Ariana A. Jacob (October 1997).

## **Fred H. Spiess Papers**

### **COLL/229**

**Creator:** Sonar Operator Fred H. Spiess, USN

**Extent:** 1 box  
.3 cubic feet

**Date Range:** 1917-1919, 1983 and 1991

**Classification:** Unclassified

**Access:** Open

#### **Scope and Content Notes**

The papers relating to the naval service of Fred H. Speiss, sonar operator, during World War I. The collection consists of biographical data and a diary which he kept from 11 May 1917 through 23 February 1919. The 49 glass slides relating to his naval service on SC 331 in the Atlantic and Mediterranean during 1918 were transferred to the Center's Curator Branch, Photographic Section

**Restrictions on Use:** The donor, CAPT Fred Noel Spiess, USNR, Retired, requested (see Deed of Gift form for details) that a report be sent to him on the use of the collection for the years 1997, 1998, and 1999. Any researcher using this collection is required to provide information for this report. The form is inside Box 1.

#### **Biographical Sketch.**

Mr. Spiess was born in 1894 in New York City and in 1913 he settled in the Bay Area of California. He joined the first Congregational Church of Oakland in 1917 and married Elva H. Monck on 16 February 1918.

He served in the U.S. Navy as a sonar operator during World War I at sea in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. He reported aboard Submarine Chaser (SC) 331 on 3 June 1918 at State Pier, New London. In his first job he had watch in the crow's nest and deck while they were underway. SC 331 was third boat in "M" Division off Montreal Point. SC 132, the flagship of his division, was burned and sunk on 5 June 1918. His ship helped rescue the survivors. Later, they found out that the cruiser TACOMA mistook SC 132 for an enemy submarine and rammed her. On 8 November, while SC 331 was patrolling in the Straits of Gibraltar between Morocco and Spain, the ship received word that a German submarine was sighted at Pearl Rock. On 9 November his

sonar was very busy and he received word that a British cruiser had been torpedoed. On 11 November the U-boat was sighted; SC 331 crossed over the submarine and dropped five depth bombs. According to his diary entry for that day, SC 331 got her "first sub." [*The diary he kept, which covers his naval service for the period 11 May 1917 through 23 February 1919, is an excellent source for additional information on this period of his life.*]

After his naval service, Mr. Spiess worked as a public accountant and was active in civic affairs. He served on the Piedmont City Planning Commission from 1957-1974. A lifetime member of the Oakland Consistory M.R.S. Orinda- Plymouth Lodge #521 F. & A.M. earned him a 50 year pin in 1973. He was also a member of the American Legion.

In 1977 he and his wife moved to Rossmoor, California. During his residence in Rossmoor he became a member of the High Twelve Masonic Club, Peralta Branch #12 of SIRS. His wife died in 1983. (They had been married 65 years.) In 1988 he moved in with his son, Fred N. Spiess, of La Jolla, California. He died on 20 November, 1991.

### **Box and Folder Listing**

#### **Box 1**

Series I: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA, 1983 and 1991

1. Anniversary Announcement from Rossmoor News Rossmoor, CA, May 11, 1983 and Obituary from Oakland Tribune, Oakland, CA December 14, 1991.

Series II: DIARY, 1917-1919

2. Diary, "The War Years," covers period 11 May 1917 through 23 February 1919.

Note: 49 glass slides relating to his naval service on SC-331 in the Atlantic and Mediterranean during 1918 are held in the Center's CURATOR BRANCH, Photograph Section.