

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JOSEPH E. CHAMPE
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE

Joseph Elbert Champe was born on February 2, 1912, in Montgomery, West Virginia, and was appointed to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from his native state in 1929. On May 29, 1931 he resigned because of defective vision. Between 1934 and 1939 he attended night course in electrical engineering at Cooper Union, New York, New York. On May 21, 1942 he was appointed a Lieutenant (junior grade) in the U. S. Naval Reserve, and advanced in rank to that of Lieutenant Commander, to date from October 3, 1945.

Called to active duty in August 1942, he had indoctrination at the Naval Training School, Fort Schuyler, New York. Completing the course there in October of that year, he then joined the USS BULLFINCH. Detached from that minesweeper in December 1942, he returned to the United States for temporary duty until February 1943, in the Bureau of Ordnance, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.

Following a brief period of instruction in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, he was assigned to the Office of the United States Naval Observer, American Embassy, Chungking, China. Continuing duty in China, he served from April 1944 until relieved of all active duty, on January 2, 1946, as Commanding Officer of the Yangtze Naval Unit, U. S. Naval Group, China. "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity (in the latter duty)...in action against enemy Japanese forces in Central China, from May 1944 to May 1945..." he was awarded the Silver Star Medal. The citation continues in part:

"Penetrating an enemy-held area notorious for organized banditry, recurring attacks by Japanese puppet personnel and traitors, widespread espionage activity and a high incidence of tropical diseases, Lieutenant Champe established a secret training and operations base from which he directed 250 carefully instructed Chinese guerrilla warriors in effective sabotage strikes against vital hostile lines of communication and transportation feeding the enemy drive into the heart of China. In a lightning blow on September 16, one of his detachments destroyed the important Puchi Railway Bridge, preventing all enemy shipments to Changsha for three days. On November 9 he led another group in a strike against a Japanese ammunition train on the Hankow-Canton Railroad, blowing up the train and killing 31 of the enemy. Despite shortages of elemental necessities and the constant threat of encirclement and annihilation by the Japanese, other small groups under (his) brilliant leadership demolished military warehouses, bridges, trucks and railroads without a casualty, inflicting serious losses on the enemy in equipment, supplies and rail and water lines throughout a period of intensified guerrilla warfare in China..."

In addition to the Silver Star Medal, Lieutenant Commander Champe has the American Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; the World War II Victory Medal; and the China Service Medal.

Naval biography
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