

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 Alex Linville (January 2007).

Joseph Orleck Family Papers COLL/549

Creator: Lieutenant Joseph Orleck, USNR

Extent: 1 box
.3 cubic feet

Date Range: 1928-1953

Classification: Unclassified

Access: Open

Scope and Content Notes

This collection contains the personal papers of Joseph and Gertha Orleck, and Gertha's sister Majorie Cockerham. Some official materials are included but the vast majority is an eclectic blend of certificates, diplomas, photos, letters, official correspondence and naval records. In series I, the items of Lieutenant Joseph Orleck are processed. The first sub-series holds his official outgoing and incoming correspondences while the next sub-series contains his certificates, such as his honorable discharges and purple heart. Sub-series C retains publications relating to him and his work, such as newspaper and magazine articles. The last sub-series contains some photographs of Orleck and of his wife.

Series II consists of some the items relating to Gertha Orleck such as series A which contains a slew of letters and post cards from her family participating in World War II and also a stack of official correspondences from the Navy. The next sub-series contains of all her certificates, such as her marriage license and birth certificate. The last sub-series consists of a collection of newspaper articles.

Series III details the same type of materials as the previous two series for Majorie Cockerham, the sister of Gertha Orleck. The first sub-series is correspondence, both incoming and outgoing, while the second holds all her certificates. Sub-series C is a plethora of unrelated naval records such as leave slips and equipment lists. The final sub-series is a subject file containing Majorie's yearbook called *The Shield* from Lebanon Hospital Training School for Nurses, class of 1935.

Series IV is a collection of pictures, diplomas, and certificates that were too large to fit into the folders. Therefore, they are wrapped in acid-free paper in order to preserve these personal items of the Orleck family.

The final Series is a subject file that contains the hodgepodge of personal items such as an Argentinean peso that Joseph picked up while on cruise, as well as a newspaper clipping relating to Corporal Robert Cockerham, the brother of Gertha.

Subject Heading (LCSH)

Biography

Joseph Orleck was born in Columbus, Ohio on June 22, 1906. In 1924, after graduating high school, Joseph joined the US Navy. He was promoted to Boatswain in 1938 and served on USS *Quincy* as Boatswain until 1942. In 1942 Joseph married Gertha Cockerham, a young lady from North Carolina who had just recently graduated from nursing school. While Joseph was away, he wrote to Gertha constantly, as did Joseph's brother Ben and Gertha's sister Majorie. Majorie was also a nurse, but unlike Gertha, she decided to join the Army Nurse Corp., working at Fort Gordon, Georgia, and overseas during World War II.

In 1943, Joseph was transferred to USS *Raven* where in 1943, he was promoted to Ensign. While on *Raven*, Orleck was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for bravery. While attached to *Raven*, Orleck took charge of USS *Wainwright* during a storm. He successfully completed trips to the stranded USS *Lancaster*, bringing to safety roughly twelve men. Though his boat capsized during the second trip back to the *Lancaster*, trying to rescue more men, he swam to another boat and directed the operations from there. Because of his efforts, twenty people were saved.

Soon after this incident, on May 1, he was assigned to USS *Nauset* as its Commanding Officer and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. On Sept. 9, 1943, during the amphibious landings at Salerno, his ship was bombed by Italian aircraft and Lieutenant Orleck perished in the attack. However, his actions on that day saved a great many lives and for his he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

In 1945, Orleck received one of the greatest honors the Navy can bestow when it named a destroyer, USS *Orleck*, after him. His wife Gertha christened the ship on May 12, 1945 at the Consolidated Steel Corporation's Shipbuilding Division in Orange, Texas. USS *Orleck* was commissioned in the U.S. Navy on Sept. 15, 1945 and participated in the Korean War from 1951 to 1952.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1

Series I: Joseph Orleck, 1928-1945

Sub-series A: Correspondence, 1934-1942

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Incoming | Dec. 28, 1938-June 30, 1942 |
| 2. Outgoing | Feb. 17, 1934-Jan. 8, 1942 |

Sub-series B: Certificates, 1928-1944

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| 3. Certificates | |
| a. Letters about awards | undated |

b. Honorable discharges	May 17, 1928-March 7, 1938
c. Purple Heart award	Oct. 18, 1944
d. Certificate of Thanks	undated
Sub-series C: Publications, 1944	
4. Publications: <i>All Hands</i> Magazine	August 1944
5. Publications: Newspaper Clippings	undated
Sub-series D: Photographs, 1945	
6. Photographs	
a. USS <i>Orleck</i> floating in the water	May 12, 1945
b. Gertha Orleck christening USS <i>Orleck</i>	June 12, 1945
c. Joseph Orleck wearing his white uniform	undated
d. Unknown man smoking a cigarette	undated
e. Three unknown men at a bar in Cuba	undated
f. Joseph Orleck's parents at Rock Bridge, VA	undated
g. USS <i>Orleck</i> being lowered into the water	undated
h. Family and friends watching the USS <i>Orleck</i> ceremony	undated
i. Gertha Orleck at the ceremony	undated
j. Gertha Orleck getting ready to christen the ship	undated
k. Head shot of Joseph Orleck in uniform	undated
l. Head shot of Joseph Orleck out of uniform	undated
m. Head shot of unknown man in uniform	undated
n. Different angle of Gertha Orleck christening ship	undated
o. Gertha Orleck and friends standing next to the Ship	undated
Series II: Gertha Cockerham Orleck, 1929-1948	
Sub-series A: Correspondence	
7. Personal	May 20, 1943-Dec. 16, 1953
8. Official	Sept. 30, 1943-July, 1948
Sub-series B: Certificates, 1929-1942	
9. Certificates	
a. North Carolina Board of Nurse Examiners	April 23, 1929
b. Trained Nurse's Certificate of Registration	July 13, 1929
c. Certificate of Marriage	July 12, 1942
Sub-series C: Publications	
10. Newspaper Clippings	undated
Series III: Majorie Cockerham	
Sub-series A: Correspondence, 1943-1953	
11. Incoming	Jan. 14, 1943-Nov. 19, 1953
12. Outgoing	Feb. 8, 1943-Feb. 5, 1953
Sub-series B: Certificates, 1935-1952	
13. Certificates	
a. Birth Certificate	Feb. 19, 1906
b. Letter about Nursing certificate from New York	Nov 13, 1935
c. Registered Nurse certificate for Bronx County	Jan 13, 1936
d. Promotion to First Lieutenant	March 16, 1945

e. Separation Qualification Record	April 30, 1946
f. Promotion to First Lieutenant, Army Nurse Corps	Jan. 13, 1948
g. Training Certificate from Camp Gordon, GA	Feb. 21, 1952
h. Training Certificate from Camp Gordon, GA	May 29, 1952
i. Certificate of Thanks	undated
Sub-series C: Naval Records, 1943-1952	
14. Naval Records	Jan. 15, 1943-June 3, 1952
Sub-series D: Subject File, 1935	
15. Subject File: <i>The Shield</i> Yearbook	1935
Series IV: Poster Photos, 1926-1942	
16. Subject File	
a. High School Diploma of Majorie Cockerham	April 26, 1926
b. High School Diploma of Gertha Cockerham	April 26, 1926
c. Shorter Catechism Diploma of Gertha Cockerham	Jan. 1, 1926
d. Photo of Summer Session at Appalachian State	June 23, 1927
e. High School Diploma of Robert Cockerham	April 23, 1928
f. City Memorial Hospital Diploma of Gertha Cockerham	May 20, 1929
g. Photos of La Garde General Hospital	April, 1942
h. Certificate of Death	undated
Series V: Subject File, 1941-1985	
17. Subject File	
a. An Argentinean Peso	undated
b. "Blue and White Devils" booklet	undated
c. Draft of article discussing the death of Joseph Orleck	Sept. 10, 1945
d. ID Badge from US Navy Yard, New York	April 7, 1941
e. Invitation to the launching ceremony of USS <i>Orleck</i>	1945
f. List of Joseph Orleck's family members	undated
g. Newspaper Clipping regarding Corporal Robert Cockerham	undated
h. A note from "El Prefecto General de Puertos"	undated
i. Program from the commissioning ceremony for USS <i>Orleck</i>	May 12, 1945
j. Program of Gertha Orleck's funeral	Dec. 31, 1985