

Buracker & Boraker

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Jack Leon Baldwin 1925-2007

W*E sadly report that Jack L. Baldwin died on May 9, 2007. He was buried on Friday, May 18 at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Long Beach, California after a graveside service with Military Honors.*

Jack will be missed by his relatives, friends and fellow researchers since he was a keen genealogist who specialized in searching the family lines of Boraker, Mingus and Baldwin. His great grandmother was Elizabeth Boraker who married George Wesley Mingus.

Jack's database contained over 18,000 names that he had collected for his family history. He helped many others with their research but was frustrated when he couldn't establish the parents of his great-great grandfather, Ezekiel Clark Baldwin. On October 7, 2003, Jack wrote and posted the following autobiography:

I was born August 30th, 1925 in the town of Higgins, Texas. My parents lived and worked on the "CN" ranch about seven miles south of town. The ranch was a cattle ranch with several thousand acres of grazing land and with several hundred acres of wheat land. I lived there until I was 14 years old in 1940. I rode a horse of my own probably more miles than I had traveled in a car. I was never over all the property of the ranch in all of the 14 years.

My horse was named "Selum." This could be misspelled, and I was told it was an Indian name. I never knew the meaning, but he was a pure white quarter horse. I usually never rode with a saddle unless it was for a long distance roundup, so I got dumped many times while herding cattle. A quarter horse can stop and turn on a dime. Sometimes I didn't.

I went to "Dreyfus School" for the first six years. The school was about five miles from the ranch at a place called "Booster Station". The small community of people there worked for the oil company that pumped the oil to other parts of the state. I did well in school there under Miss Lois Richards. In fact, I was able to skip the third grade, but when I went to the seventh grade in town, I was told I was too young! (I still graduated from high school at the age of seventeen). Transportation to school was a school bus that picked me up at the front door of the house and delivered me back again after school. This was also true going to the school in town.

My first job that I can remember was when I was about eight years old, chopping up cactus and putting them into piles for one cent a bunch. Boy, was I in the money because my total allowance at home was ten cents a week. (Which I guess wasn't too bad considering I went to a show for six cents, and popcorn for four cents).

When I was 11 or 12, I got a job driving a big model "G" John Deer tractor, plowing the wheat fields for Mr. Charles Newcomer, the owner of the ranch. This really paid big money at \$1.00 per day, working from sun up until sundown. It was a good job, but if I happened to kill the engine of the tractor, I would have to go get someone to start it again for me as I was not big enough to crank it. (No electric starters in those days).



Jack in his Vultee. Photo submitted by Lin Robinson

R. C. Boraker, 14 Reynards Way, Bricket Wood, ST. ALBANS, Herts. AL2 3SF, England

We moved to California in 1940 after first making a trip in 1939 to visit my Aunt Thelma (mother's sister) and Uncle Tom Stout in Porterville. A job had been arranged for my father by Tom's boss that had a hog ranch. I think he worked there two weeks before quitting. He said they would never make a stinking hog rancher from a cattle rancher, and that's that.

We later moved to Tulare which was about 25 miles from Porterville. We worked at several small jobs. We even picked grapes and peaches for a short time before Dad took a job running a small dairy. The owner of the dairy also owned a trucking company which Dad decided he would like better. He did this job for several years.

My first real job in Tulare was helping at a small grocery store by a man named Mr. Sutton. He was a widower and I lived at the residence which was attached to the store. It was great as I got to eat anything I wanted that was in the store!

During my junior year in high school I got a job working at the Tulare Hospital emergency room. I liked this work and thought I would like to become a doctor. The hospital superintendent took a liking to me and when they had any unusual operation to perform she would call the school and ask if I could be excused to come and watch. I saw about every kind of operation you could think of.

I originally took this job to get money to buy a 1937 Lincoln Zephyr V12 coupe that I had seen for sale, but before I got enough money saved, the school nurse made me quit because of too many hours worked. I got out of school at 3:45 and went to work at 4:00 PM until midnight. I had no problems with this, but it was against the law, I was told.

In my senior year, I took a job at a Standard Oil Company gas station. I also found another Lincoln Zephyr coupe that came into the station one day and I bought it. It was black and just what I wanted. I traded my little 1935 Ford coupe plus \$60.00 that I had saved for it

I graduated from high school in May 1943 and was drafted into service in November of that year. Knowing that I would probably go to war, I had changed my college preparatory to an industrial course. I later

realized this was a wrong move, but at the time I didn't see anything wrong with it. My girl friend at the time was Jean Nichols and she tried to tell me it was a mistake, but I didn't listen because I didn't want the war to be over before I got out there. Really dumb. I was put into the Navy and believe me it was still going on long after I went to sea. This is a separate story I have written named, "Days Of War" [available on request]. This story was written mostly while I was in the Naval Hospital at Ocean Side, California. Since I was there for 11 1/2 months, I had plenty of time to write.

After the war, I went to College for only one year. I just wasn't interested. I went to flight school at Rankin Academy, joining the Civil Air Patrol which at that time was part of the Air Force. I went to the rank of Captain in four years. I have enjoyed my flying experiences ever since, and have owned several airplanes. My first being a Vultee, commonly called a BT13, BT meaning Basic Trainer and it had a 450 HP radial engine by Pratt & Whittney. I had much fun with this plane, and even did acrobatics for air shows with it.

My last plane was a Comanche 250 which I had flown to the Bahama Islands and Washington, DC as well as most of the western states. I might add, I flew the BT13 back to the family ranch in Texas and landed in a wheat field next to the old house. I don't think Mr. Newcomer was too happy about this, but he was glad to see me saying, "I knew you would come back someday in an airplane because you were always fascinated with airplanes as a kid."

During the war, while taking training at San Diego, I had met a girl named Nadene Kealey, that was in nursing school. We spent much time together which led to us getting married. My parents would not sign for this marriage under the circumstances, so we went to Tijuana, Mexico where for \$50 you could buy anything. I later found out this was not the thing to do and we were divorced in 1953 without really living a married life. My son Tommy did visit me almost every summer, but when Nadene remarried and moved to Arizona, I lost contact with him and Nadene. I have not heard from either since 1960.

Naval Duty During World War 2

During the height of World War 2 in the Pacific region, Jack Baldwin served as a sonar technician and gunner on the USS GWIN, a destroyer fitted as a fast minelayer and designated DM 33. After the GWIN blasted shore targets at Saipan and Iwo Jima, the ship joined the battle at Okinawa, fending off desperate Japanese kamikaze suicide bombers. By her accurate gunfire, twelve hostile planes were shot down during this period in the spring of 1945. Jack was severely wounded when one plane hit his gun position. His account of this event follows.

Excerpts from “The Days of War” as remembered by Jack L. Baldwin:

The fourth of May, 1945 will long be remembered by the crew of the Gwin. In just twenty-six minutes of that day, enough action was packed to satisfy even the most three hungry of the men aboard for a lifetime. It all happened at sunset, a favorite time for kamikaze attacks. The ship was on radar picket station, fifty miles west of Okinawa in the South China Sea. The day had been beautiful with brilliant sun, calm waters, and a temperature in the mid eighties. There was no indication of the forthcoming events.

About seven o'clock two planes, comprising of the Combat Air Patrol, spotted several enemy planes flying high. The C.A.P. took after these planes, while the Gwin's main battery was swung around to port, ready to open fire if the Japs should slip past our fighters. Suddenly, word was received at the gunnery control station, “Enemy plane coming in low to starboard.” The clever enemy had played an ace.

With a high flying decoy, he had lured the Gwin's planes away from the formation and momentarily diverted the ship's attention to port while he slipped in his suicide planes, flying low on the starboard side (my side of the ship). The guns immediately swung to

starboard and commenced firing at the two closest planes that were about six thousand yards away. These planes only closed another two or three thousand yards before they crashed in flames. But the enemy had just begun.

Hardly had the gunners ceased firing when another plane was observed diving on a ship in company with the Gwin. Several salvos of the big five inchers were all that were needed before the plane crashed into the sea. It narrowly missed his intended victim. Up forward an unknown lookout, through the smoke of battle, spotted a Jap plane in a shallow dive about two thousand yards on the starboard beam heading directly for the ship. The main battery swung around again and sent this plane down in flames, but the Japs were not attacking without a system.

While this plane was being downed on starboard, another was coming in from the port side once more and one more suicider was sent to his glorious end! Meanwhile, the machine gunners in the stern of the ship had spotted an enemy plane attempting to sneak in, but with deadly fire from their light guns, the Jap plane was knocked down several thousand yards away.

It seemed incredible that a ship could safely outmaneuver and keep shooting down enemy planes attacking them from all directions at once! The enemy was clever and his suicide tactics had definitely improved since the beginning of the campaign when the “Divine Wind” had come down from Japan, literally by the thousands, only to crash ingloriously in the sea as he met the fighting pilots of the Navy and Marine Air Force, and the devastating fire from Navy gunners.

The Japs were not yet through with the Gwin. While the main battery had been engaged in shooting down the fifth plane and the machine gunners were dispatching the sixth, the last remaining kamikaze commenced a run

in on the starboard side. Dusk was falling and the smoke from burning powder made detection extremely difficult. The plane was first sighted by the after gunners who immediately opened fire, but the plane was now less than two thousand yards away.

The guns that Hersent and I were loading had jammed, probably from over heating. We both had nothing to do but watch this plane come straight at us. Knowing that this plane would definitely hit the ship, we braced ourselves together and waited for the impact. Before the main battery could swing completely around, the Japanese plane, riddled by gunfire from the automatic weapons, crashed into the ship. I remember hearing a terrific explosion and then the lights went out! When I came to, the ship had some fire and I remember seeing John Hersant with his head decapitated. Later, realizing that he was about four inches taller than me, I was glad that I was only five foot eight. This was a very unnerving experience that I will never forget for as long as I live....

I was shocked when I was told that I was the only one alive that had been on my quad forty gun mount, No. 44! I later found out that one more person may have survived, but I do not know his name. There was serious damage to several gun stations.

I was told that one of the twin five inch gun turrets was knocked clear off its mount. Several twenty millimetre machine guns were wiped out, and of course, the quad forty millimetre that I was on no longer existed

Out of an estimated force of ten or twelve Japanese planes, the Gwin shot down six or seven planes in addition to the one that crashed into the ship. The destroyer in company shot down two or three more.... I was cut up pretty good from head to toe – no hair, no front teeth, paralyzed and

had burned skin on my arms and back. With all this, I had no broken bones!.... I was at the Alameda Naval Hospital for about ten days then sent to Camp Pendleton Marine Hospital at Oceanside, California. To this day I do not remember how I was transported to this hospital.

Within about a week or so I was able to move my legs some and was allowed to sit in a wheel chair. This was the start of a long, slow process of getting back to normal. I had several operations on my leg to lengthen the tendon and a skin graft to cover the wound....

[Jack was in the Santa Margarita Ranch Hospital in California for eleven and a half months recovering from his wounds.]

On April 18th, 1946, I was discharged from the Santa Margarita Ranch Hospital at Camp Pendleton, California. My orders read to report to Camp Shoemaker in northern California for discharge from the Navy. This final order was received April 25, 1946. I was honorably discharged with Asiatic Pacific Medal with two battle stars, American Area Medal, Victory Medal, Presidential Navy Unit Citation Medal, and the Purple Heart Medal.

I was glad to have served the United States Navy in the time of war and in some way being a help to my country. There were many good times as well as some bad times. But don't get me wrong, I would not like to go through it again.

[Editor's note: Those interested in reading Jack's entire article and associated material, please request it from www.rboraker@ntlworld.com or www.RBoraker@vision.org]

Dema (Holman) Boraker celebrated her 100th birthday with a reception on the 26th May in Ferndale, WA and a dinner for relatives on the 27th. Congratulations, Dema.