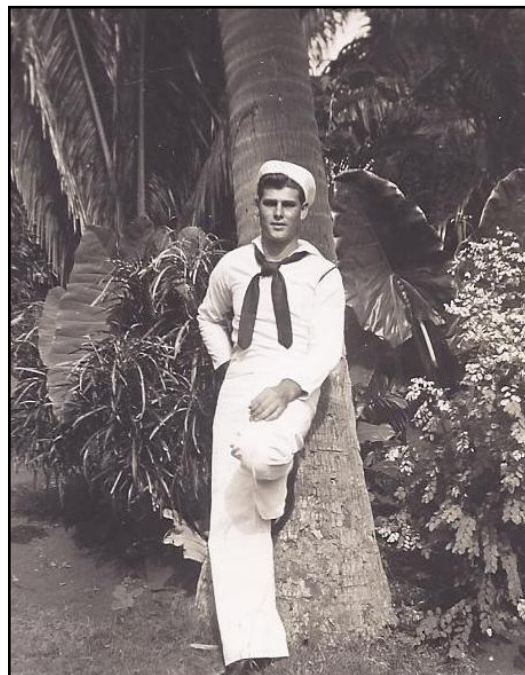


William M. "Buster" Horak

William M. “Buster” Horak

Born October 25, 1920
Killed in Action November 13, 1943

This document is to honor the life of Buster Horak, who was serving with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific when he died.



*Buster on Palace Grounds in Honolulu,
August 13, 1941*

Buster's sister, Pearl Horak Griggs, with the help of a neighbor for military information, developed the record below in 2000. It was felt appropriate to provide her biography of Buster here, with additional pictures added. Buster survived the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the Battle of Midway on June 4 & 5, 1942, both of which are discussed herein.

PREFACE

Although many years have passed since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, I recently received information that I previously had no knowledge. I must acknowledge my neighbor, Ed Bravo, who as a former Navy man took it upon himself to search the internet seeking information pertaining to the ships that Buster served on during World War II in the South Pacific. As a result of his efforts, he obtained copies of "U.S.S. Maury, The Ship and Her History", "U.S.S. Denver Deck Log Book and War Diary, December 1, 1942 to December 31, 1942," and the "U.S.S. Denver Deck Log Book & War Diary, November 1, 1943 to November 30, 1943". The Log and War Diary were transcribed as a tribute to the 2700 men who served in the ship during her brief career.

Mr. Bravo also e-mailed a letter to Paul L. Grace, who is the Secretary- Treasurer of the U.S.S. Denver's Newsletter, Dots & Dashes. Mr. Grace responded that he is researching the records and memberships roster to identify anyone who might have known William Horak. He stated that he would include Ed's e-mail letter in their next edition of the newsletter. He believed this might attract some response from other sailors. His uncle was also killed in action on November 13, 1943, during the torpedo attack. The starting point of his interest in the Denver was when he discovered the web site about 1998.

Another letter from a man in Oklahoma, Homer G. Schooling, stated and I quote "What I remember about him he was a nice looking young fellow, he was liked by all and he never gave anyone any trouble. He was in the aft engine room I was in the forward engine room, also a First Class Machinist Mate at the time we were torpedoed."

Russell M. Miatt, who lives in Orlando, Florida, stated his uncle was also killed in action the on same day. He was a Chief Machinist Mate in that particular engine room and, no doubt, knew Buster quite well. Mr. Hiatt also sent me a form to send to the Navy in Washington, D.C., and gave me explicit instructions on how to fill out the form. However, he stated that it may take 6 months to a year to receive the information but it was well worth it. It was 9 months before he received the material he requested. It included a one page summary of his "Entitlement to Awards", a one page summary of civilian stores which would be able to sell me the items not provided by the government (e.g; foreign awards, stars, and so forth), a one page summary titled "Summary of Service," and lastly a one page "Certificate of Death." He told me that the certificate of death spelled out rather graphically the condition of the body when it was recovered, so I might want to give that some thought. However, I did send the form to Washington.

Everything was censored during the war, and we had no idea what was happening. I was never interested in history when I was in high school, but I have been intrigued by what I have been reading.

All of this came about because of my neighbor's great assistance in his search and the information I received from the other men. I have answered these letters to let the men know how grateful I am that they took the time to inform me of the events that took place on that particular day.

Pearl H. Griggs

December 2000

William M. “Buster” Horak

I don't profess to be a writer; however, I hope that I will be able to convey a brief summary of Buster's young life.

"Buster" as he was affectionately known by his family and friends, was born on October 25, 1920, in Prince George County, Virginia, a part of which was later annexed by the City of Petersburg. He was the oldest of five children born to Henry and Mary Vrable Horak.

Growing up during the Great Depression, money was in short supply. Daddy was a substitute at the Post Office at that time and many days he would stay there all day just to see if he could fill in for somebody. However, we never considered ourselves poor; there was always food on the table and clean clothes to wear. Buster worked in the early morning hours before school at a dairy farm and later as a caddie at the Crater Golf Course to earn money. Most of it was deposited in the bank, which was thought to be a safe place. But when the banks started losing money, he lost about half of what he had tried to save. What a sad day that was, and we all felt so sorry for him.

Buster and I were always very close. As an older brother, he didn't mind if I tagged along when he went to play with the other boys. It didn't matter whether it was baseball, football, volleyball, swinging on a grapevine across a creek, or sleigh riding down a big hill at the crater. The first time I saw that hill, I didn't want to go down it. A piece of galvanized tin was used instead of a sled, and eight or 10 people could ride at the same time. But he talked me into taking that ride and went with me so I wouldn't be afraid. In those days we didn't have the advantages that children have today. There was no television and no money to go to the movies. The children had to be creative and make up their own entertainment. Buster was also a big help to me when I had to write essays for English class in high school. The night before the essay was due, he paced the floor and dictated the contents, which always turned out to be good. However, all during his younger years he wanted to be a sailor.

Buster was a devout Catholic and served as an altar boy during High Mass for several years. He was also a chauffeur for the nuns at St. Joseph's Catholic School. He touched many lives along the way. After graduation from high school, he fulfilled his dream of becoming a sailor by enlisting in the Navy on May 8, 1939, as an apprentice seaman to serve for four years.

Basic Training, School, and Duty Aboard the U.S.S. Downes

Buster completed Recruit Training in August, 1939, and qualified in swimming and Indoor Rifle Range with a score of 320 out of a possible score of 400. On February 9, 1940, he graduated from Machinist's School with a final mark of 3.11 and was qualified for several different types of duty but was especially qualified to strike for Machinist's Mate or Aviation Machinist's Mate.

On February 22, 1940, he was transferred as Fireman Third Class to San Diego, California.

U.S.S. Downes

In March 1940, he was transferred to the U.S.S. Downes for duty. In November 1940, he was promoted to Fireman Second Class.

On March 2, 1941, after leaving Pearl Harbor, the ship started on a cruise, but no one knew where they were going. When they crossed the equator, they sighted their destination. After 6 days, they came to a group of islands; however, he was not able to mention what they were at that time. Later, he was able to tell us they went to Pago Pago, Samoa. On March 20, the ship arrived at Sidney, Australia. In his letters he gave an account of his visit to Down Under. They received a grand welcome and, although it was raining, on-half million people watched them pull into the harbor. Their hospitality was outstanding, and they were insulted if the sailors offered to pay for anything. While there he met a man whose wife had been to Richmond twice; she had four brothers who lived there. He was also made a member of a veteran's club from the last war. The send off was something he said he would never forget. There were 5,000 small boats in the water and 800,000 people on the beach to see them off. It took them 3 hours to go about 10 miles to where the ship was docked.

From Sydney, they went to Brisbane, about 30 miles up a river. They arrived there about 6:00a.m.; however, thousands of people had waited hours to welcome them. There was a parade and the traffic was backed up in some places for 5 hours. That night a big dance was held at the town hall for all the sailors, and the police had to hold back the crowds wanting autographs. They all had a grand and glorious time in both places, although they were in each place for 3 days.

On the way back to Pearl Harbor, they stopped at Suva in the Fiji Islands for two days. He said he could write a book about where they had been, seen and done.

In May 1941 his rating changed to Fireman First Class. On December 7, 1941, the ship was stationed in Pearl Harbor when all hell broke loose during the Japanese attack.

I remember that day very well. My younger brother, Henry, and I were at home that Sunday afternoon when I heard the news broadcast on the radio. The rest of the family had taken their regular weekly ride to the country to visit Daddy's parents. They didn't have a telephone and I didn't have a car; therefore, there was no way I could let them know what had happened before they returned home. We didn't know whether Buster was dead or alive. He didn't have time to write to us until December 15 to let us know that he was all right.

The raid started right after he got off watch so he was right there to see everything. Fortunately, he didn't get a scratch, but he lost everything he had. In the letter, he said that he saw enough action that one day to last him the rest of the war, but he still would like to get back at those _??. He saw some of his best buddies go down with the ship. To show how much he was thought of the men at the Post Office took up a collection to replace the money order he was going to send me for his Mother's Christmas present.

The following information pertaining to the U.S.S. Maury and the U.S.S. Denver was extracted from the History and Deck Log Books mentioned in the Preface.

U.S.S. Maury

The Maury was operating out of Pearl Harbor when the United States entered World War II. She was steaming with the Enterprise, en route to Hawaii from operations near Wake Island, when word of the Japanese attack reached her soon after 0900, December 7, 1941. The next day Buster was transferred to the Maury. His captain wanted to get all of his former crew on a new ship, and all of the crew wanted to get back together. They believed they would have the fightingest ship in the Navy because they really had something to fight for. For the remainder of 1941, in the screen of the Enterprise, the ship stayed in the Hawaiian area to guard against a follow-up attack by the Japanese.

With the New Year, 1942, the Japanese advanced south and east through the islands of the southwest Pacific. Maury, with the Enterprise and Yorktown, headed in that direction for raids on Japanese installations on Maleolap Atoll, Taroa, and Reuters Islands.

Striking on February I, the carrier forces and bombardment groups completed their missions despite heavy aerial resistance and were back at Pearl Harbor on the 5th. On the 15th, the Task Force got underway for Wake and Marcus Islands against which they launched surprise attacks on February 24 and March 4, respectively, and returned to Oahu on March 10. There through April, the ship conducted antisubmarine and antiaircraft exercises and served with the offshore patrol.

On April 30, the Task Force, with the Maury in the screen of heavier ships, left from Pearl Harbor to aid Yorktown and Lexington in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Reaching the scene after the battle was over, the force returned Hawaii, arriving on May 26. Two days later they left again, this time for Midway to repulse an expected assault on that base. On June 2, having rendezvoused with the Task Force, they were in position 350 miles northeast of Midway. On the 4th the Battle of Midway commenced as Japanese carrier aircraft flew against installations on the island. (That is the day that Buster made almost minute-by-minute notes about the battle starting at 0800 and continuing until 1240 on June 5. (See Annex A)

By the 7th, the American forces had routed the Imperial Navy, sinking four Japanese carriers and one cruiser at the cost of our destroyer Hamman and carrier Yorktown. After Midway, the Task Force returned to Pearl Harbor and remained there for a month before departing once again for the South Pacific.

While the ship was in port, Buster was transferred to the U.S. Naval Hospital, Pearl Harbor, on July 10, 1942, for surgery on his cross-eye and remained there until August 1. In his letter he said that everyone at the hospital was very nice but it was boring, and he was ready to go back to sea to get the scum off the water. After leaving the hospital, he went back to the Maury. Eight days later, he was transferred to another ship for transportation to San Francisco. From there he went to Philadelphia and was assigned to the U.S.S. Denver.

Although Buster was no longer on the Maury, she participated in many more battles, such as the Battle of the Eastern Solomons which prevented Japanese reinforcements from reaching Guadalcanal; battle was engaged off Santa Cruz and once again Japanese reinforcements were turned back but the carrier Enterprise was damaged and the Hornet was lost; supported invasions of Tarawa and Makin in the Gilberts; screened the carriers as their planes raided Watje, Taros, Eniwetok (this is all French to me!!) and Palaus; guarded the carriers as they went against the Japanese on the Palaus, Yap Ulithi, and Woleai; supported operations in the Marianas; took part in the preinvasion bombardment of Saipan, raiding Guam and Rota; then north to strike at Iwo and Chichi Jimas.

By the end of the 2-day Battle of the Philippine Sea, the Japanese had lost three carriers, 92 percent of its carrier planes, and 72 percent of float planes, a toll which left the Imperial Fleet in poor condition to carry out a war based largely on naval airpower. The fast carriers again raided Iwo Jima, then they went to the Marianas where they supported the landings on Guam and Tinian. The Maury still in the carrier screen, the force struck again at Iwo Jima, and then moved on to support offensive operations against Peleliu, Ngesebu, Angaur, Yap, and Ulithi. They were later engaged in a Japanese Carrier force, now without planes due to losses sustained in the Battle of the Philippine Sea and off Formosa. The enemy was engaged off Cape Engano and two days later their losses were increased by three cruisers and several destroyers.

I had never heard of many of those places and it is very difficult to realize that so much action had taken place. After all those battles, the Maury arrived in New York in June 1945 where an inspection team recommended that she be disposed of. She received 16 battle stars for World War II service. She was decommissioned and struck from the Naval Register.

U.S.S. Denver

The U.S.S. Denver, a Cleveland class light cruiser, was launched February 12, 1942. She was commissioned at Philadelphia Navy Yard on October 15, 1942. Buster reported on board October 19. The ship was outfitted in November at Philadelphia and on December 1 proceeded to the Hampton Roads area for shakedown (adjusting mechanical parts of the ship) and indoctrinate training. The U.S.S. Buck was assigned as escort and directed to maintain appropriate antisubmarine patrol. After passing Cape Henry, Buck was released from escort duty. While anchored in Hampton Roads, the Denver took on aviation fuel and fuel for the ship, also received ammunition. On the 6th she anchored in the Chesapeake Bay, and scheduled exercises were started the next day. Ships present were the S.S. Alabama and H.M.S Newcastle. On the 17th, the ship was en route to Hampton Roads passed through the antisubmarine net. She took on more fuel and provisions the general mess, also received supplies for the ship's service store. The ship received fresh water from the Naval Operating Base, Norfolk and then returned to the Chesapeake Bay for more training. On December 26, the Bureau of Ships inspection party, consisting of 52 officers and men, came aboard while the ship was anchored in Annapolis bay. They all left the next day.

While the ship was in the Hampton Roads area Buster was able to come home on leave. He didn't talk about the battles he had been involved in. The only thing he would say was that it was too quiet at home, and he was ready to go back. Of course Mama was worried about him returning to the war area, but he told her that he could just as easily stump his toe in the yard and fall over dead. That was his attitude and the last time we saw him.

On January 1, 1943, Buster was appointed Machinist Mate Second Class to fill a vacancy in the compliment.

In March 1943, Buster took a flight physical and mental examination for aviation cadet school. As far as he knew he passed it but it had to go to Washington for approval. Then hopefully he could receive a commission as a pilot. He later found out it had been approved, but he didn't know when he would be able to leave the ship.

I don't have the ship's log book from January 1943 through October 1943. I did find out that in January 1943 she had her Post-Shakedown Yard Period and transfer to the Pacific. In February 1943, the ship joined cruiser Division 10 and operated in the South Pacific with Task Force 68. However, his Service Record indicated that on March 6, 1943, the Denver, with the Task Force, was involved in the bombardment of Japanese military installations in the Kula Gulf, Solomon Islands Group, when the Task Force sank two enemy cruisers. His records stated "your active and efficient participation in this engagement reflect great credit upon yourself and the naval service."

Buster's enlistment expired on May 7, 1943, and he extended his enlistment for two more years. He was recommended for a Good Conduct Medal.

Starting on November 1, the Task Force, consisting of the Montpelier, Cleveland, Columbia, and Denver, was involved in several major engagements. They approached Buka, Northern Solomons, to bombard installations in that area. Montpelier and the Denver opened fire on shore objectives. A large explosion was observed in the target area, and a fire was visible for nearly two hours. The Denver opened fire at a Japanese snoop plane.

The ships left the Buka bombardment and prepared for bombardment of the Shortland area (Bougainville, Solomons Island Group). Observed shore batteries opening fire. Montpelier and Cleveland opened fire to port. The Denver commenced firing with secondary battery on coastal shore batteries. The ships were continually changing courses and zigzagging.

November 2- Steamed with the Task Force, which consisted of the U.S.S. Montpelier, Columbia, Cleveland, Denver, C. F. Ausburne, Dyson, Claxton, Thatcher, Foote, Spruce, Converse, and Stanley. Our destroyers launched torpedoes. The Denver commenced firing on enemy with all batteries, and she took a hit on the starboard bow. The Task Force was in combat with the Japanese Task Force. Our destroyers were working over two Japanese light groups. A very strong odor of fuel oil was noticed in the water. About two hours later they passed through a very heavy oil slick. The Thatcher was directed and began to take the Foote in tow. The Denver went to General Quarters to repel a Japanese air attack. A large group of enemy planes was sighted at about 10,000 feet. The Montpelier and Denver opened fire on the enemy aircraft. A downed plane was seen off the port bow. The pilot was in a parachute, someone shot him down. It was estimated that the Task Force was attacked by between 50 to 75 enemy planes. During the action, six enemy aircraft were observed to be destroyed. The Task Group received a signal to return to the vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville Island. The Commanding Officer of the Denver reported that after the battle an inspection showed the following hits:

An 8" shell entered second deck, starboard, stateroom 205, pierced watertight bulkhead No. 35, passed through 2nd deck in stateroom No. 203; entered 3rd deck stateroom 309, passed through Warrant Officer's Mess door and 3rd deck below door to Warrant Officer's Stores; passed through hull in Small Arms Issuing Room on first platform level.

An 8" shell entered starboard side of Paravane Stowage and passed out port side 18" above water line.

An 8" shell touched starboard aft rim and passed through port side of watch cap on forward stack.

Denver commenced firing with secondary battery on coastal shore batteries. The ships were continually changing course and zigzagging.

November 3 - Steamed with the Task Force, consisting of U.S.S. Montpelier, Cleveland, Columbia, and Denver, in cruising formation, with the U.S.S. Charles Ausburne, Dyson, and Stanley forming an antisubmarine screen. The force covered the withdrawal of four transports from Empress Augusta Bay.

Sighted Buraka Island at a distance of 33 miles; Russell Islands, distance 15 miles; and Guadalcanel Island, distance 35 miles. Slowed speed because of heavy strain on forward bulkhead.

The ship reduced speed from 22 knots to 5 knots and passed through torpedo nets. Then started pumping water out of one of the compartments. Proceeded on various courses at various speeds and entered Purvis Bay Anchorage, Florida Island, Solomon Island Groups, and anchored in Berth 9.

November 4 - Several other ships anchored in assigned berths. Divers commenced inspection for battle damage of hull, starboard, and port sides. ComSoPac and staff came aboard the Denver to inspect battle damage. She took on more ammunition.

November 5 - Still anchored as before, the ship is on one-half hour's notice. Made all preparations for getting underway, all stations were secured due to delay because of necessity to continue repair work on battle damage. Took on ammunition from the U.S.S. Pinkney and from the ammunition lighter for 5" and 6" and machine gun batteries. Left the berth to go alongside tanker to fuel. Completed taking on fuel, 320,264 gallons of bunker fuel oil. Returned to Berth 9.

November 6 - Took on additional ammunition. The ammunition lighter rammed the side of the ship while coming alongside, putting a 16" tear in the side, 2 feet above the water line.

November 7 - Completed repairs to the hull, starboard side. One of Denver's planes struck the port side of the ship while taxiing, which necessitated putting the plane out of commission for 12 hours.

November 8 - Anchored in Berth No.9 sudden squall, wind 35 knots.

November 9 - Left Berth No.9, Port Purvis Anchorage, Florida Island, Solomon Island Group, to proceed to take position for and to cover the 3rd Echelon of the Empress of Augusta Bay occupation.

November 10 - Steamed with the Task Force and cruised in formation, with the destroyers forming antisubmarine screen. Sighted Simbo Island, distance 40 miles. U.S.S. Spence sighted a raft with four Japanese flyers aboard and reported that they had shot themselves. Went to flank speed which was necessary to get away from the U.S.S. Columbia who made a turn inside and came dangerously close to the Denver's stern. During the entire watch there were many unidentified planes in the area.

November 11 - Steamed with the Task Force and covered the third echelon to Empress Augusta Bay. U.S.S. Montpelier fired at an unidentified plane- results negative. Noticed a smell of heavy fuel oil slick. Unidentified aircraft at a distance of 32 miles. Sighted men parachuting from "Liberator" bomber. Five men parachuted from the bomber. Two were recovered by the U.S.S. Claxton, one by U.S.S. Stanley, one by U.S.S. Charles Ausbume, and one by U.S.S. Converse. Sounded air defense and manned all 5" and automatic weapon batteries. Secured from air defense call. Sighted Shortland Island at a distance of 40 miles. Task Force opened fire on an unidentified plane, distance 5 miles and on another "bogey," distance 6 miles. "Bogies," 3 miles, believed to be six planes. U.S.S. Claxton reported a torpedo heading toward U.S.S. Montpelier. Emergency signal and destroyers opened fire on various "bogies". Destroyers opened fire on Jap planes and drove them off without loss. Passed through heavy rain squall visibility 0. Japanese bombers would come in from the bad weather and visibility areas until driven off. The planes used were "Bettys" carrying torpedoes and it was known that they would break off the attack before they were in a proper firing position, as if they did not have the courage to press home the attack. No damage was inflicted on Task Force, but one destroyer knocked down a Jap.

November 12 - Steamed with the Task Force. The Task Force was covering another Task Group during landing operations and withdrawal from Empress Augusta Bay. Steamed as before; changed fleet course. Resumed zig-zagging. Manned 5" batteries and all automatic weapons to repel possible air attack. An unidentified aircraft was reported at a distance of 12 miles. Commenced maneuvering at various courses and speeds and formed special cruising formation. Sounded air defense call and manned all 5" batteries and automatic weapons. However, the unidentified aircraft was reported friendly. During the watch the formation had fighter coverage. U.S.S. Montpelier, Columbia, and Denver opened fire on enemy aircraft.

November 13 - Steamed with the Task Force, in Special Formation and escorted troopships to Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville Island in the Solomons Group. Observed night fighter shooting down enemy plane identified as "Betty," at a distance of 6 miles. The "Betty" went down in flames. Made contact on three or four enemy planes. The planes began coming in for torpedo attack. The Denver fired at enemy aircraft. U.S.S. Stanley reported that a torpedo was going by her side. Transmitted an emergency turn signal. Emergency ships left to change course but, before completion of the turn, the Denver was hit by an aerial torpedo at 0455 in the starboard side.

The conning tower lost steering control and all communication with steering aft. Gyro repeaters were out of commission. Observed two enemy aircraft shot down by the Denver at the start of the attack and one more after completion of the attack by the Task Force. Engine order telegraph was out of commission. Main engine control reported the No. 1 shaft was not turning over. Observed torpedoes, estimated three, pass close aboard and parallel to the ship. Central station reported damage in aft engine room.

Chart house reported the nearest point of land was 77 miles, Treasury Island. Central station reported a list of 7 degrees starboard and that all port tanks were already full. Ship's list was 9 degrees to starboard, all engines were stopped. Pumping of flooded compartments had begun without controlling the list. The ship's list was now 11 degrees to starboard. Made all preparations for lowering boats, life rafts, and life nets over the side. No. 1 whaleboat was badly damaged and unserviceable. U.S.S. Stanley and Eaton were ordered to stand by the Denver. Forward fire room was temporarily out of order. An enemy plane was driven off by fire from cruisers and destroyers. The ship's list is 7-1/2 degrees to starboard. Six feet of water and oil was reported in the aft mess hall. Still pumping. Sighted land, a distance of 20 miles, Bougainville Island. Pumping continuously. The ship's list was righted by pumping the starboard fuel and water tanks. The level of water in the aft mess hall was decreased to 18".

The Commanding Officer of the Denver reported that when attack by enemy low-flying planes was first detected one group of at least four were sighted on starboard quarter in vicinity of a rain squall. Fire was opened with 5" and one plane was seen to crash immediately. Observed two torpedoes dropped, estimated 1500 yards, ordered hard left rudder just before U.S.S. Stanley reported torpedoes. Fourth plane swung wide around squall and headed towards the Denver. The plane dropped torpedo at 750 yards and turned across Denver's bow and crashed 1000 yards to port. Third plane was seen to crash after heavy automatic fire from U.S.S. Stanley.

November 14 - The U.S.S. Sioux came alongside and took the Denver in tow. U.S.S. Eaton and Stanley accompanied the Denver. One catalina furnished antisubmarine coverage for the formation. Main engine control reported that all holes in the aft fire room were plugged and that pumping of that compartment had been completed. Twenty men were reported missing in action, including Buster, as a result of the torpedo explosion on November 13 during an enemy torpedo plane attack and 15 were wounded in the same action. For a long time I could not believe what had happened. I kept thinking that he would walk through my door at any time.

November 15 – Anchored in Berth No. 10, Port Purvis Anchorage, Florida Island, Soloman Island Group.

November 16 - The remains of two unidentified enlisted men were recovered from the ship and transferred to Base Hospital No.7 for interment.

November 17 - Anchored as before. The unidentified remains of one man was taken from the damaged portion of the ship and removed to Base Hospital No.7 for interment.

November 18 through November 20 - Still anchored in Berth No. 10.

November 21 - U.S.S. Pawnee attached tow line to the Denver to proceed to Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides Group, to repair battle damage. Central station reported 3-1/2" of water in compartment 407L.

November 22 - Compartment C-407-L was taking water through ruptured bulkhead, caused by battle damage, depth of water 8". Flooding was controlled by pumping.

November 23 - Sighted Great Summit Peak (Espiritu Santo Island), distance 42 miles.

November 24 - Still steamed under tow by U.S.S. Pawnee.

November 25 and 26 - Moored to a buoy in Second Channel, Espiritu Island, Hebrides Group, and discharged fuel oil.

November 27 – With tugs alongside, proceeded. As the ship entered drydock, the tugs cast off. Commenced pumping the ship, and divers went down to check centering of ship on keel blocks. Transferred the remains of one man from the damaged area to the Military Cemetery for burial.

Started pumping drydock.

November 28- The drydock is free of water. Transferred eight bodies (battle casualties) to the Military Cemetery for burial. Two of the bodies were unidentified and six were identified.

Removed one unidentified body and two other bodies to the Military Cemetery for burial.

November 29- Three bodies were recovered and sent ashore for burial in the Military Cemetery, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides. Buster was one of those recovered and his remains were definitely identified. That was 16 days after the aerial torpedo attack. His status was changed from "missing in action" to "killed in action." He was buried in Grave 14, Row 2, Plot 45, Military Cemetery, U.S. Naval Advanced Base No. 140. A copy of the announcement concerning his death, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, is attached at Annex B.

For a while Daddy thought about leaving his body on the island, but we talked him into having him brought back home. When his body was returned to Petersburg, I desperately wanted the casket opened so I could see him. I talked to the funeral director, but he told me the casket was sealed and there was no way he could open it. Now, after reading all the above information, it was probably for the best that I couldn't see him. Too much time had elapsed before being removed from the ship and then being buried on the island. He was buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery with full military honors on March 13, 1948.

Buster's final average in all marks was 3,502 and his conduct rating throughout his military career was 4.0. His 23rd birthday was on October 25, 1943, and he was killed in action 19 days later. Although he is gone, he lives in my memories. I will never forget him. May he rest in peace. Hopefully, I will see him again someday.

The name New Hebrides was later changed to Republic of Vanuatu.

Mr. Bravo also obtained additional information pertaining to the U.S.S. Denver. The data was acquired from the "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships" and is included herein.

Emergency repairs were made to the Denver in December 1943 and she returned to the United States. The ship was placed out of commission, in reserve on February 7, 1947, and stricken from the Naval Vessels Register on March 1, 1959.

From the "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships," (1963)Vol. 2, pp.264-265.

DENVER

CL-58
Displacement: 10,000 *t*.
Length: 610' 1"
Beam: 66' 6"
Draft: 20'
Speed: 33 k.
Complement: 992
Armament: 12 6"; 12 5"
Class: CLEVELAND

The second DENVER (CL-58) was launched 4 April 1942 by New York Shipbuilding Corp., Camden, N.J.; sponsored by Miss L. J. Stapleton, daughter of the Mayor of Denver; and commissioned 15 October 1942, Captain R. B. Carney in command.

DENVER sailed from Philadelphia 23 January 1943, and arrived at Efate, New Hebrides, 14 February. The new cruiser first saw combat in the bombardment of Vila, Solomon Islands, on 6 March. During this action her force engaged and sank two Japanese destroyers, MINEGUMO and MURASAME. Continuing her operations in the Solomons, DENVER joined the bombardment of Ballale Island on 29 and 30 June in conjunction with the invasion landings on New Georgia, then remained in the area on patrol.

On the last day of October 1943, DENVER sortied from Port Purvis with TF 39 to intercept an enemy force attempting to disrupt the landings at Cape Torokina, Bougainville. In the resulting Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, on the night of 1-2 November, the American ships sank one enemy light cruiser and a destroyer and damaged two heavy cruisers and two destroyers, while the four other enemy ships broke off the action and retired. During the firing DENVER was hit by three 8-inch shells, which fortunately did not explode. She shared in the Navy Unit Commendation awarded her division for its outstanding performance in this battle.

DENVER covered the support landings on Cape Torokina on 10 and 11 November 1943, and 2 days later, during a heavy air attack, was hit by an aerial torpedo which knocked out all power and communications and killed 20 of her men. She was towed by SIOUX (AT-75) to Port Purvis and by PAWNEE (AT-74) to

Espiritu Santo for temporary repairs, then sailed to Mare Island for permanent repairs, arriving 2 January 1944.

DENVER returned to the forward area at Eniwetok, arriving 22 June 1944. Eight days later, she put to sea to screen carriers as they launched strikes to neutralize Japanese bases in the Bonins and Marianas during the invasion of the Marianas. She bombarded Iwo Jima 4 July, and after screening continued air assaults, returned to Eniwetok 5 August.

DENVER sailed from Port Purvis 6 September 1944 for the invasion of the Palaus. She bombarded Angaur Island from 12 to 18 September, then covered a task unit engaged in minesweeping/ reconnaissance and underwater demolition operations before the landings on Ulithi 23 September. She returned to Manus 28 September to prepare for the return to the Philippines.

DENVER departed 12 October 1944 for the landings on Leyte, bombarding Suluan Island and Dulag to open the vast invasion fleet's way into Leyte Gulf, then sailed on to bombard the southern landing beaches. As the Japanese sent the major portion of their remaining combatant fleet south in a desperate attempt to break up the landings, DENVER's group took station in Surigao Strait on 24 October to prevent the passage of the Japanese Southern Force into Leyte Gulf. Gallant attacks were made by motor torpedo boats and destroyers stationed in advance of the battle line, and battleship YAMASHIRO, heavy cruiser MOGAMI, and destroyer SHIGURE were all that remained of the Japanese ships when DENVER and the others of the battle line opened fire at 0351. With three other cruisers, she made a material contribution to the cumulative gunfire which sank YAMASHIRO. MOGAMI was later sunk by aircraft, and SHIGURE was the sole survivor of the mighty fleet which had sailed forth for this phase of the decisive Battle for Leyte Gulf. After this action, DENVER sailed to aid in polishing off enemy cripples, aiding in sinking destroyer ASAGUMO early in the day on 25 October.

Continuing her service in Leyte Gulf, she fought off numerous attacks; during the one of 28 October, a bomb released from one of the planes she shot down exploded nearby causing minor damage and slight flooding. She screened reinforcement landings in November and fought off a suicide attack on 27 November, suffering four men wounded from fragments of a bomb which exploded 200 yards off the starboard quarter.

She joined the heavy covering group, for the Mindoro landings of 13 to 16 December, then returned to Manus 24 December.

Returning to San Pedro Bay 3 January 1945, DENVER sortied the next day to cover the landings at Lingayen Gulf. She remained in the Philippines to join in the consolidation of those islands. She covered the landings on Zambales on 29 and 30 January, supported minesweeping near and landings on Grande Island; provided fire support at Nasugbu on 31 January; escorted a replenishment convoy to Mindoro between 1 and 7 February, covered the Army landings around Mariveles 13 to 16 February, rescuing the survivors of mined LA VALLENTE (DD-44); and

supported the operations on Palawan and Mindanao Islands from February to May.

On 7 June 1945, DENVER sailed from Subic Bay for amphibious assaults on Brunei Bay, Boreno, and later at Balikpapan. She covered the preinvasion work of minesweeping units and underwater demolition teams, and provided fire support for the invading troops until returning to San Pedro Bay, Leyte, 4 July for brief overhaul.

DENVER got underway for Okinawa 13 July 1945 to hunt Japanese shipping off the China coast until 7 August. She sailed from Okinawa 9 September to cover the evacuation of men of the Allied forces rescued from prison camps in the Wakayama area and covered the landing of occupation troops at Wakanoura Wan from 25 September to 20 October, when she sailed for home.

DENVER arrived at Norfolk 21 November 1945 and after overhaul, reported to Newport, R.I., in January 1946 for duty training men of the Naval Reserve, and a good-will visit to Quebec, Canada. In April, she arrived at Philadelphia Naval Shipyard where she was placed out of commission in reserve, 7 February 1947. She was sold 29 February 1960.

In addition to the Navy Unit Commendation, DENVER received 11 battle stars for World War II service.

Transcribed by Michael Hansen mhansen2@home.com

ANNEX A

Battle of Midway Notes by William "Buster" Horak June 4 & 5, 1942

- 0830 - sighted 2 Jap carriers and 1 battleship
- 0831- 2nd generator on the line
- 0834-sending signalbookto2nd Con also vocabulary book
- 0835 – all's quiet -speed 27knots
- 0840 – opened drains and steam to galley
- 0841 – plane coming in at 090 deg position angle 5
- 0842 – 2 Jap battle wagons and 2 carriers
- 0844 – stand easy
- 0845 – 2 generators on the line and parallel
- 0847 – stand by for Jap planes
- 0848 – plane 050 deg lull–no phone conversation
- 0855 – making 270 turns
- 0856 – 150 miles west lies Japs
- 0857 – stand by for 30 knots looks like hunting going for us – I hope
- 0859 – speed 30 knots
- 0901 – watch smoke
- 0903 – course is 165 deg (ships course)
- 0904 - carriers launching planes
- 0905 – still in formation
- 0909- launching bombers
- 0913 – looks like smoke bearing 300 deg
- 0914 – Yorktown on port quarter
- 0916 – take down mast on secondary con? No
- 0920 – dive bomber look like carrying 1,000 pounder (ours)
- 0921 – looks like whale 300 deg (spouting water)
- 0925 – 350 deg water spout 4,000 yards
- 0926 – 225 deg plane circling over it
 this is all taken down from battleship circuit coming from bridge, secondary con, aft steering room, repair parties, forward
 and aft engine room – this is being taken down in aft engine room – also I.C room
- 0930- Japs have already launched their planes – going for Midway - we're going for their ships & get them
 - I hope
- 0936 – something bearing 200 deg
- 0937 – torpedo planes are taking off the carrier. Looks like hell is breaking loose in a while – speed 32 knots
- 0940 – watch smoke
- 0941 – watch smoke – get hot
- 0954 – sick bay
- 0955 – something wrong with phone in diesel room
- 0960 – some planes returning to carrier from first raid – all planes we get went over
- 1001 – 143 bombs on parallel course (I don't know)
- 1002- whole squad returning to carrier
- 1006 – stand by for 35 knots

1009 – more water spouts 035 deg
1030 – repel air attack
1035 – secure seam and water to galley
1043- speed 26 knots
1047 – 3 planes 345 deg
1049 – 090 deg planes (all ours) 18,000 yards
1059 – task force 17 up ahead
1101 – speed 29 knots
1102 – planes directly overhead
1104 – 130 deg our fighters
1110 – planes everywhere (all ours) returning from raid
1112- no dope on our attack
1120- plane got hit on battle wagon – sunk tanker – no dope on carriers can't get to their carrier yet, they're among the Aleutian Islands
1126 – galley with sandwiches and coffee. Will be at C.G. all day
1127 – 180 deg plane isn't ours (don't know)
1129 – will pass word when to draw chow
1132 – watch smoke – 1 & 2 boilers
1135 – chief engineer gone to his room to figure out oil
1136 – no dope on their carriers
1137 – all planes left our carriers again but the fighters
1140 – fighters start coming back torpedo will soon start coming back
1204 – planes over head
1250 – bomber planes coming back (Goss get phones)
1335 – 24 miles away bearing 324 deg (Jap ships)
1337 – 142 deg position angle 4 planes (3000 yd range)
1343 – Midway has not been attacked. These butterflies are coming back in my belly again – its this waiting that does it – just like a June bride; going to get something but don't know how big or long its going to be.
1345 – plane cracked up in the water – can picked up pilot (plane cracked before getting to carrier)
1355 – we are going to try and pick up the Japs in that plane
1356 – speed 32 knots
1357 – stand by to slow down to 20 knots – 15 knots
1405 – stand by for attack
1410 – 250 deg course 20 planes enemy app 30 miles picked up by task force 17
1411 – formation of planes coming on 270 deg
1414 – 300 deg squad coming in still
1415 – 350 deg plane bearing
1419- port beam 045 deg planes
1420 – secure steam and water
1421 – heading in direction of smoke on 30 deg 4 or 5 miles high
1422 – planes coming in over us in formation our own fighters
1423 – 365 deg angle 2 deg planes, 330 deg our fighters about 8 very low, 000 deg angle 2 planes, our own

1425 – directly astern planes, 225 deg our planes – raising hell (two groups) about report our planes so much
1427 – our fighters are coming in
1430 – smoke on port quarter in a plane
1434 – 190 deg, 2 deg plane ours and directly overhead
1436 – 3 planes 100 deg – speed 30 knots, 075 deg planes
1442 – our torpedo planes coming back
1443 – 040 deg plane behind clouds
1445 – plane crashed on port side – our own plane
1449 – 055 deg angle 1 deg plane
1455 – 260 deg going in opposite direction
1458 – 195 deg – 2 deg plane
1501 – our course is 100 deg
1510 – 180 deg angle 8 deg plane
1512 – 7 planes 135 deg, all's quiet – no one saying much
1535 – Jap plane crashed on deck of Yorktown (suicide)
1539 – stronger fighter opposition – 10 miles – form Jap fleet (the dope is just coming in)
1540 – speed 30 knots
1544 – another batch of fighters came in for landing
1546 – stop smoke - #4 boiler
1547 – several formations of planes 245 deg think they are Enterprize planes, 25 knots
1610 – 22 knots
1612 – 1 plane (ours) shot down, pilot bailed out O.K.
1614 – 25 knots set condition Baker in galley
1617 – 2 hits on Jap carrier & 1 hit on Jap oil tanker (bombs), Repair party flush head and deck
1628 – 30 knots – 210 RPM
1637 – stand by for air attack
1640 – 26,000 ft high, 195 deg – angle 55 deg, shape like our fighters but different color – 2 planes making a circle – gone in a cloud up high
1645 – planes 180 deg – 50 deg, planes 350 deg – 110 deg angle 50 deg, Enterprize planes up high – aft
1648 – stand by to repel aircraft
1650 – sending up our fighters
1655 – speed 25 knots
1658 – all heads have been flushed and condition Avis again set – 20 knots
1701 – 30 knots
1705 – 230 deg plane in clouds
1708 – 350 RPM highest of day
1709 – over bridge up high
1714 – aft engineer sent for electrician – light went out, Wilson came down acting as plane guard (stand by 25 knots)
1718 – two fighters came by with holes in their wings
1719 – have planes wave off but he landed anyway
1720 – plane bearing 300 deg heading this way – enemy plane, in comes two fighters (ours)

1723 – flight of bombes coming back – has bombs with them, planes 225 deg – 30 deg
1725 – bridge can't reach repair by phone
1731 – spotted PBY 040 deg patrol from Midway
1732 – speed 30 kots
1732 – 315 deg – 80 deg plane
1734 – bridge said there are 6 Jap carriers out, plane diving on to carrier out of clouds – Hornet
1742 – prepare for firing – own plane coming in
1742 – planes 350 deg
1752 – planes 170 deg – 3 deg
1801 – 030 deg angle 6 deg plane
1825 – 25 knots 248 RPM
1831 - 30 knots 310 RPM, damaged 4 Jap carriers
1844 – 25 knots 248 RPM, 215 deg plane bearing 250
1900 – 2 planes, bearing 275 deg
2009 – night patrol coming in, our fighter patrol
2010 –fighter lights are two white till 2200
2018 – still got planes in the air, (dope) Yorktown badly damaged; 68 bombers 0800 to bomb enemy ship, Midway sent 6 flying sorties – say they are going to beach the Yorktown and cruiser also has something wrong
2045 – 14 of these planes just came back out
2054 – bring down the last of our fighters now, that AM cruiser is beach at Midway (torpedo planes)
2105 – secure from G.Q. This battle will be about 5 times as big as the Coral Sea battle, one of our planes shot down 3 Jap planes.
June 5 – Got 6 of their transports. (latest dope) our Yorktown is heading for Pearl Harbor, no dope on cruiser. The Army and Navy attack last night was good. Also subs sunk, 1 on fire, 1 to get, 4 cans sunk, 1 tanker sunk, 1 tanker on fire. We lost a number of planes.
Dope 1240 June 5, 1942 Friday. Jap losses – 3 carriers sunk, 1 on fire, 6 cans sunk, 6 transports sunk, 1 battle wagon hit with a fish, 1 with bomb, 1 cruiser slowed down, 2 tankers sunk. We are still after them, may make torpedo run on them if we catch them. Our speed 25 knots.

ANNEX B

Commendation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt



IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF

William Horak

WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY AT

Sea, Pacific Area, U.S.S. Denver, 13 November 1943

HE STANDS IN THE UNBROKEN LINE OF PATRIOTS WHO HAVE DARED TO DIE

THAT FREEDOM MIGHT LIVE, AND GROW, AND INCREASE ITS BLESSINGS.

FREEDOM LIVES, AND THROUGH IT, HE LIVES—

IN A WAY THAT HUMBLER THE UNDERTAKINGS OF MOST MEN

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Buster's Medals



Flag used on Buster's Coffin



The Progress Index
November 23, 1943

County Sailor Missing; Soldier Prisoner Of Nazis

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Horak of Prince George County have been notified that their son William Horak, 23, is missing in the Southwest Pacific area. Machinist's Mate in the Navy, he has been stationed in the South Pacific. He has been in the Navy five years. No details were given by the Navy Department.

At the same time Sgt. John W. Cabaniss, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Cabaniss of Prince George County, has written his parents that he is safe in a German prison camp. He was taken prisoner June 22, when he was reported missing in action. At that time he was wounded in the leg.

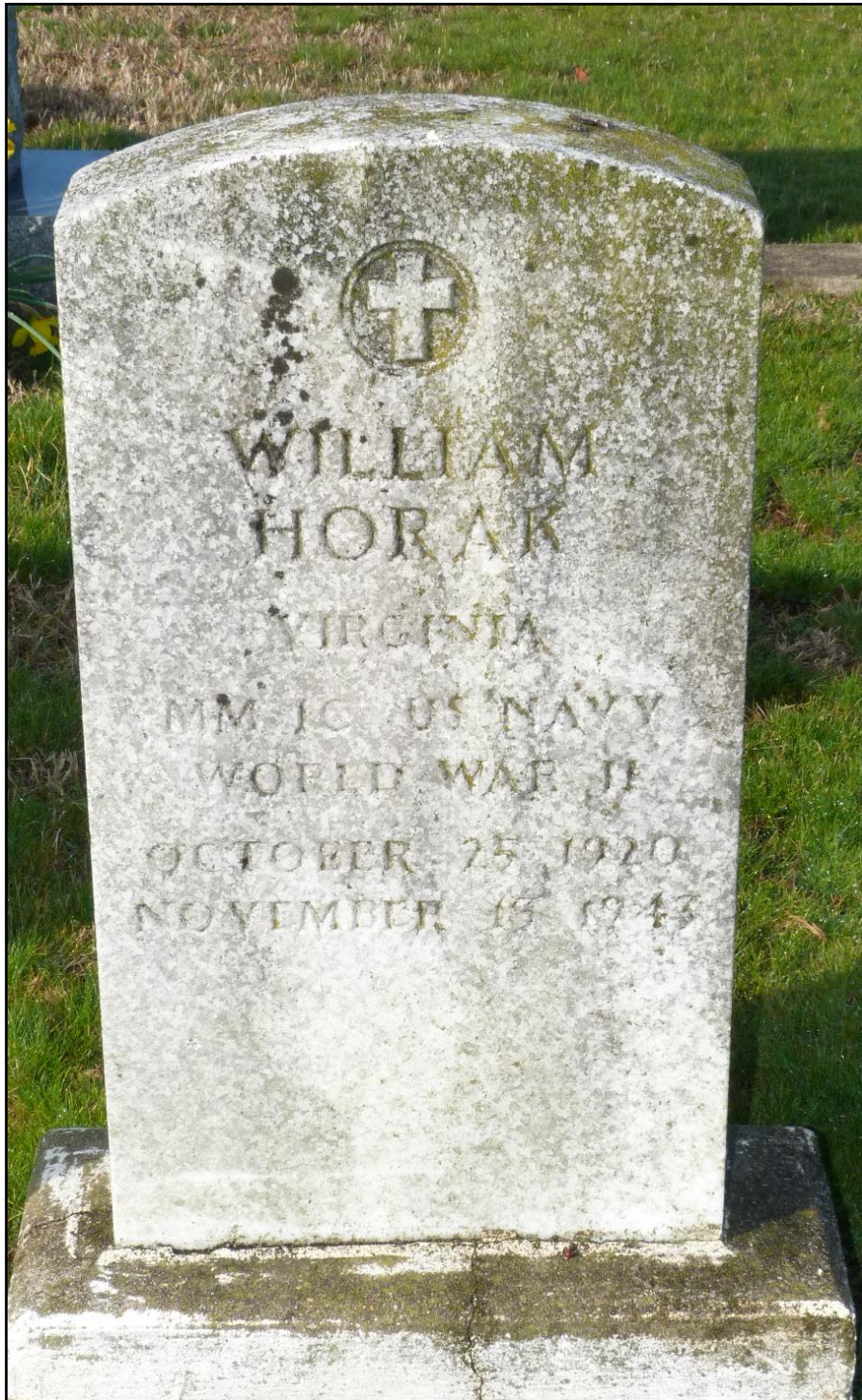
The Progress Index
January 18, 1944

Word Received William Horak Killed In Action

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Horak of Prince George County have received word from the Navy Department that their son, William Horak, 22, U. S. Navy, was killed in action in the South Pacific area. They had received word on November 19 that he was reported "missing" in that area. The latest word from the Navy Department stated he had been buried in the South Pacific pending the end of the war.

He had been in the Navy for five years and was a Machinists Mate, Second Class. He was on one of the ships bombed by the Japs at Pearl Harbor and saw much action in the Pacific. A little over a year ago he was home on furlough, returning to duty in the South Pacific just after Christmas, 1942.

The last letter from him was received by his parents about a month before he was reported missing.



*Final Resting Place
St. Joseph's Cemetery, Petersburg, VA*

May 2014

This memorial tribute can be obtained by contacting:

The Prince George Regional Heritage Center

P.O. Box 452

Prince George, VA 23875

804-863-0212

pghistory@aol.com