

REAR ADMIRAL FRED EDWARD BAKUTIS U. S. NAVY

By Henry L. Gaidis



Rear Admiral Frederick Edward Bakutis
U. S. Navy

The passage of time is daily taking aware from us the great heroes of World War II. Frequently referred to in the press as our finest generation the soldiers who fight to make America what it is today are answering the call to post everlasting. Our nation recently dedicated a long overdue National Memorial in Washington, D.C., to these heroes. Each and every one have a unique and valuable story to tell of his or her service in World War II. The Balzekas Museum for some time has been engaged in documenting the contribution of our Lithuanian American veterans and every family have one of the living heroes is requested to conduct a tape recorded interview or to document their love ones' war story for preservation in our archives. The author now takes the opportunity to present the story of one such outstanding Lithuanian American World War II hero's contribution to his nation.

Frederick Edward Bakutis would rise in rank from an Ensign to a Rear Admiral and during his years of service, would take part in the rise of the infant naval aviation service flying antiquated double wing aircraft, which would grow to be the dominant military force in the Pacific. During his years of service to the nation, Edward would become a naval combat pilot and "Air Ace", be among the earliest American jet pilots, take part in the exploration of Antarctica, and contribute to the nation's space program. For his heroic and distinguished military service, Edward would rise to the rank of Rear Admiral and receive countless awards and decorations including the Navy Cross, Legion of Merit, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Exceptional Service Medal.

Fred, as he preferred to be called, was born to Lithuanian immigrant parents on November 4, 1912 at Brockton, Massachusetts. As was typical of such immigrants, he grew up loving the country, which had so freely given his parents a new home in a search for a better life. He attended the Brockton public school system and being an outstanding student, Edward was given an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. An excellent athlete, Frederick who was known to his classmates as Fred, Bunky, Bak, became the Captain of the U.S. Naval Academy's track team and an outstanding javelin thrower. In addition, he was fondly recalled as having had an inherent sense of rhythm and love of music and delighted in getting down his own guitar and playing along with the popular songs of the time. He graduated from the Naval Academy, on June 16, 1931, and was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy.



Navy Cross presented to Frederick Edward Bakutis, Commander, U.S. Navy for extraordinary heroism

Upon graduation, Fred served as a junior officer aboard the USS Chester and was then assigned to flight training at the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida. On January 10, 1939, Fred graduated from the program and was officially designated as a Naval Aviator. Upon pinning on his coveted Gold Wings, Fred was assigned to Scouting Squadron 3 aboard the USS Saratoga. After proving himself to be an outstanding flyer, Fred was selected to be an Aeronautical Engineering instructor at the Naval Postgraduate School. With the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor starting World War II, Fred was ordered to the Naval Aircraft Factor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he served as inspector from March to September 1942. After months on administrative duties, Fred was finally assigned to combat duties. For the remainder of the war, he would serve as combat pilot with the Naval Fight Squadrons 16 and 20 and in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Bureau of Aeronautics.

As a naval aviator, Fred took an active part in the battles of Bonis, Yap, Palau, the Philippines, Formosa and Okinawa. On one occasion while strafing a Japanese destroyer, Fred was shot down and found him self-adrift on a raft in the Pacific for seven days before being recovered by the Submarine Hardhead. Fred was among the thousands of Americans who made the Japanese regret their attack on Pearl Harbor. He routinely took part in attacks on enemy shipping, ground installations, and in support of advancing allied invasions. For shooting down eleven enemy aircraft, Fred earned the much-honored title "Air Ace".

For his honored service, Fred received numerous decorations including the Navy Cross, which is the second highest decoration that the U.S. Navy awards for bravery in combat. His Navy Cross citation gives ample testimony to his service. "The Navy Cross is presented to Frederick Edward Bakutis, Commander, U.S. Navy, for extraordinary heroism in operations against the enemy while serving as a pilot of a carrier-based aircraft. On 24 October 1944, in the vicinity of the Philippine Islands, Commander Bakutis led a small search attach group whose objective was to locate and attack an enemy task force. He located this force and reported its location to his base. The force consisted of two battleships, one heavy cruiser, and four destroyers and the attack he led was so skillfully executed that two of the battleships and one cruiser were damaged. The attack was made in the face of gunfire from the main batteries of the enemy and intense anti-aircraft fire. Commander Bakutis personally scored direct hits with his rockets on a battleship. His courage, aggressiveness, inspiring leadership and complete disregard for his own personal safety were at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Fred remained in the service at the end of the war and was promoted to Admiral. He continued to serve his country in the post war at the Commanding Officer of the USS Gardiner Bay (AVP-39), USS Hancock (CVA-19), Alaskan Sear Frontier, Fleet Air Alaska, Anti-Submarine Warfare Group One, Naval Support Force Antarctica, and Fleet Air Alameda. During his participation in Antarctica research, from 1965 to 1967, a section of the coastline extending from a point opposite eastern Dean Island to Cape Herlacher was officially designated on official international maps as the Bakutis Coast in his honor.

While serving as the Commandant Fourteenth Naval District, Commander Hawaiian Sea Frontier, Commander Naval Base Pearl Harbor, and Commander Fleet Air Hawaii, Admiral Bakutis took an active part in four Apollo Space missions and was personally commended for his contribution to the successful recovery of the Apollo 10 astronauts, on May 26, 1969, in the South Pacific. Upon his retirement from active duty in June 1969, Admiral Bakutis was awarded the Exceptional Service Medal from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Though his service to his country was outstanding by every measure possible, the bravery he demonstrated during World War II is typical of thousands of Lithuanian Americans. It is estimated that some 100,000 Lithuanian Americans served their nation during the war. Each of their stories should be preserved within their respective families and shared with all American as a whole. For this reason, the Balzekas Museum highly encourages each and every family to take the time and sit down and talk to their veteran. If possible, prepare a tape cassette of the interview or just take notes if nothing else is available. The museum would greatly appreciate receipt of such stories.

Ancestry.com puts 90M war records online

Ancestry.com unveiled more than 90 million U.S. war records from the first English settlement at Jamestown in 1607 through the Vietnam War's end in 1975. The site also has the names of 3.5 million U.S. soldiers killed in action, including 2,000 who died in Iraq. The records came from the National Archives and Records Administration and include 37 million images, draft registration cards from both world wars, military yearbooks, prisoner-of-war records from four wars, unit rosters from the Marine Corps from 1893 through 1958, and Civil War pension records, among others. The popularity of genealogy in the U.S. has increased steadily alongside the Internet's growth. Specialized search engines on sites like Ancestry.com, Genealogy.com and FamilySearch.com, along with general search portals like Yahoo Inc. (Nasdaq:YHOO - news) and Google Inc., have helped fuel interest. Ancestry.com, which is owned by Generations Network, spent \$3 million to digitize the military records. It took nearly a year, including some 1,500 handwriting specialists racking up 270,000 hours to review the oldest records. The 10-year-old Provo, Utah-based company doesn't have every U.S. military record. Over the past four centuries, some have been lost or destroyed. Some records remain classified. However, this is the first time a for-profit Web site is featuring this many military records as part of a \$100 million investment in what is the largest genealogy Web site with 900,000 paying subscribers. Users can pay \$155.40 a year for unlimited access to thousands of U.S. record databases.

Dear Readers,

We would appreciate if you collect and send obituaries for the Obituary File of the Museum's Genealogy Department. We have over 150,000 death notices in our file.

The Museum's Address is:

*6500 S. Pulaski Rd.,
Chicago, IL 60629.*

Thank you.