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The Almanac

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USS SHANGHAI
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For 45 years,
retired admiral
and town character
Joe Quilter has
guarded Portola
Valley trails.

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Joe Quilter

Admiral Quilter

After 30 years in the Navy, Admiral Quilter helped forge Portola Valley and build its trails

STORY BY MARION SOFTKY

Without Joe Quilter, Portola Valley would be a much duller place.

Legend seems to cling to the retired rear admiral, who has helped shape the rural town of Portola Valley, and build and maintain its trail system, over the past 45 years.

Like the time the town took him to small claims court because he wouldn't pay the \$65 fee for a horse permit. It was a matter of principle, Admiral Quilter insisted. If the town wouldn't enforce the fee on everybody who had horses, he wasn't going to pay.

Former Mayor Eleanor Boushey, who took him to court 20 years ago, still remembers. "He's a very determined man," she says. "As we were leaving court, the bailiff said to me, 'I know that kind. The only way you'll get that money is to attach his bank account.'"

That's how the town got its money. The next year, after his horse tax became overdue again, the council finessed another confrontation by granting Admiral Quilter its sole honorary horse-keeping permit for as long as he lived in Portola Valley, in recognition of his long and dedicated service to the cause of trails in town.

Thirty years in the Navy forged the man who has had such an impact on Portola Valley. A product of Annapolis, he flew sea planes in the 1930s, supervised construction of aircraft carriers, and commanded ships, before retiring in 1954 as a rear admiral.

Since he moved to Portola Valley in 1955, Admiral Quilter has been involved in many facets of town life, but his main interest has been trails. He has planned them, built them, maintained them, and fought for them. At 92, he still serves on the Trails Committee, and goes out once a month — with clippers — to check the condition of trails and culverts. He often attends Town Council meetings to weigh in on trail issues.

"Trails are a real asset to the area," says Admiral Quilter.

Almanac photos by
Carol Ivie;
others, courtesy of
Admiral Joe Quilter

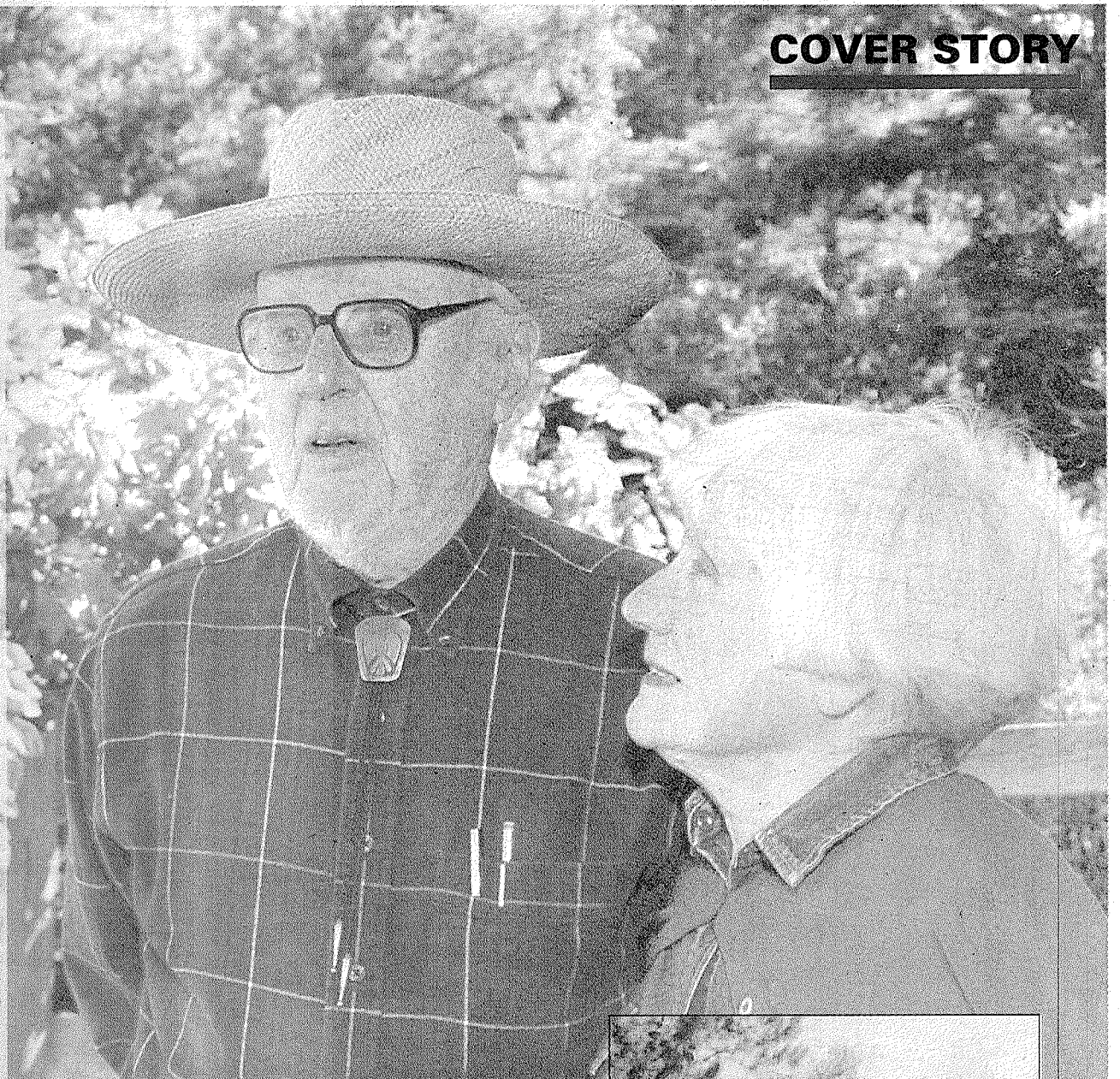
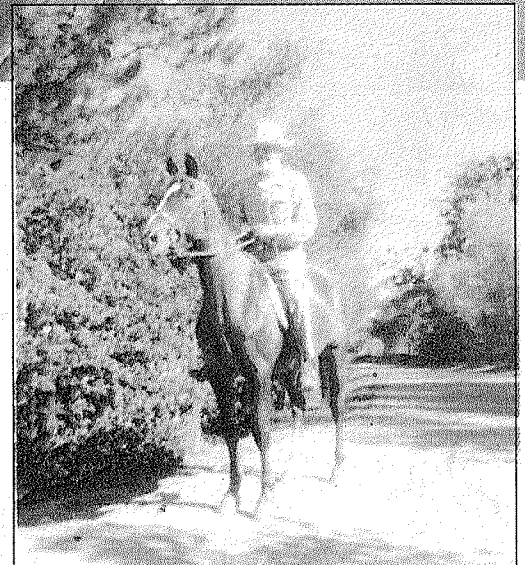


Photo by Carol Ivie

Admiral Joe Quilter, now 92, and his wife Phyllis, are still energetic members of the Portola Valley community. He keeps an eye on trails, while "pinging" the post office over pet peeves, and he serves as a computer mentor once a week at Little House.

"In the old parts of town, they're a way of getting around without being on the pavement. In the newer areas which have open space, they are a way to see open spaces."

The man who ran the aircraft carrier Shangri-La as executive officer at the end of World War II is very definite and efficient. He also has stepped on quite a few toes in Portola Valley in defense of trails. Since most of the town's trails run in the street right-of-way, in front of people's houses, there are perennial conflicts. People who planted fences, mail-boxes or trees where trails are supposed to go



For years Admiral Joe Quilter and a succession of horses were a familiar sight on Portola Valley's 40 miles of trails, until he gave up riding a few years ago.

often objected when they found Admiral Quilter trimming their petunias or clipping their juniper. And no one ever forgets crossing swords with Admiral Quilter.

In fact, most people who have worked with Admiral Quilter over the years start a conversation by saying, "I don't always agree with him, but we are still friends."

Bill Lane, a town founder and still a major influence in Portola Valley, says, "He is guardian of our trails; he's on top of every trail issue. He comes with the discipline of the military, and is very persistent — and that's mild."

"He has remained a major positive influence on not just the town, but the whole community."

In an interview in the home he built in 1955, Admiral Quilter answers questions briefly, cogently — and sometimes with a twinkle. As he reflects on 92 years of experience, he admits, "I guess I have mellowed."

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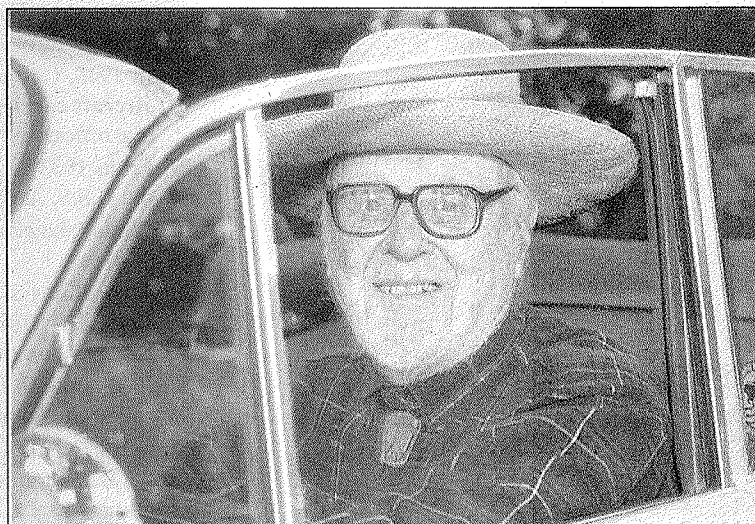


Photo by Carol Ivie

Admiral Quilter is still a familiar sight tooling around Portola Valley in his 1960 Morris Minor convertible. "It's a great conversation piece," he says. "Two kinds of people love it: teenagers and over-60s."

Admiral Quilter

(Continued from Page 15)

Anchors aweigh

Maybe it was an omen. Joseph F. Quilter was born on Good Friday in 1907 in Binghamton, New York. He was the oldest of eight children, and his parents' "pride and joy."

Young Joe, who developed a passion for airplanes as a teenager, signed up for the Naval Academy because it was free. "I thought it was a pretty good deal," Admiral Quilter chuckles in his Westridge living room overlooking San Francisco Bay. "Then the Naval Academy did what it was supposed to do, and imbued me with a love of the sea."

Ensign Quilter went to flight school and got his wings in 1929. As a pilot, he mostly flew open-cockpit sea planes. They were catapulted from a ship, then landed in the water, where you hoped that the wind and the waves were friendly. "It was pretty exciting," he says. "I was fortunate. I made all my landings successfully."

"Slim" Quilter spent five years from 1931 to 1936 on the cruiser Augusta, well known as a ship favored by President Roosevelt. For two and a half years, from 1933 to 1936, he served on the China Station, touring the Orient. They wintered in the Philippines and spent summers cruising the eastern seas from China to Australia, the Dutch East Indies, India and Burma.

"We were mostly showing the flag," he says.

"Slim" was a very good correspondent. He frequently wrote long letters home describing where he went and what he did in colorful detail, with lots of anecdotes.

At the suggestion of his second wife, Phyllis, formerly Phyllis Blum, Admiral Quilter compiled these letters dating from 1924 to 1951 in a volume, "Some Life and Letters of J.F. Quilter," January 1979.

The world was still more or less at peace in 1934 when the Augusta visited Japan to represent the United States at the funeral of Admiral Togo, known as the John Paul Jones of the Japanese Navy. Detecting a general "air of suspicion and secrecy," Lt. Quilter also found the Japanese courteous and businesslike.

Adventures

His favorite experience in Japan came when he and a friend were looking for a real Japanese restaurant in Tokyo, and by mistake were admitted to a geisha house. They got a sumptuous reception, including a 10-course dinner, with music and dancing by the geisha girls before the mistake was discovered.

Another notable exploit occurred in Sidney Harbor, which the Augusta visited to help celebrate the finish of the London-Melbourne air race in 1934. Lt. Quilter couldn't resist the temptation to fly under the superb new arch bridge, a definite no-no; in fact, he even did it a second time leading a formation, with great excitement by the news hawks, he wrote. Sixty-five years later, he recalls, "Then I was hoisted aboard, and got on the hot seat with the captain, who was Chester Nimitz."

Mr. Lane learned of the episode when he was ambassador to Australia. "They are still talking about it," he says.

In January 1936, Lt. Quilter married Adrienne Balch in the walled city of Manila. They returned to the United States the other way around the world.

Most of World War II he spent in Washington helping design and supervise construction of aircraft carriers. Since there were no shipyards available, they initially converted conventional cruisers to carriers, Admiral Quilter recalls.

"We even made a paddle-wheel passenger steamer on the Great Lakes into a carrier. It was used to train pilots."

In 1944 Commander Quilter was called secretly to the White House to be interviewed by President Roosevelt in the Oval Office about future needs for aircraft carriers. President Roosevelt impressed him by asking where he was from, and knowing someone — a politician — from Binghamton. "He looked like his photographs. He was affable and not overbearing," Admiral Quilter remembers.

In the spring of 1945, Commander Quilter commissioned the new aircraft carrier, Shangri-La. Then he served as executive officer — running the ship — and saw his only action off the coast of Japan as the war was winding down.

The Shangri-La was one of four or five carriers under attack by increasingly desperate Japanese, who were flying kamikaze suicide bombers. "Unless you shot them down, they were going to get you," he says. "We were fortunate."

After the war was over, the Shangri-La picked up service men in Okinawa and brought them back home, racing a typhoon across the Pacific. "There were no complaints whatever," he says. "We ran out of candy bars and everything. They were so happy to be somewhere besides a mudhole."

During this cruise, Commander Quilter had another encounter that has come to haunt him in Portola Valley. A young flyer named Bob Anderson and some friends took advantage



Little Joe Quilter has an early equine experience through an itinerant photographer and donkey.

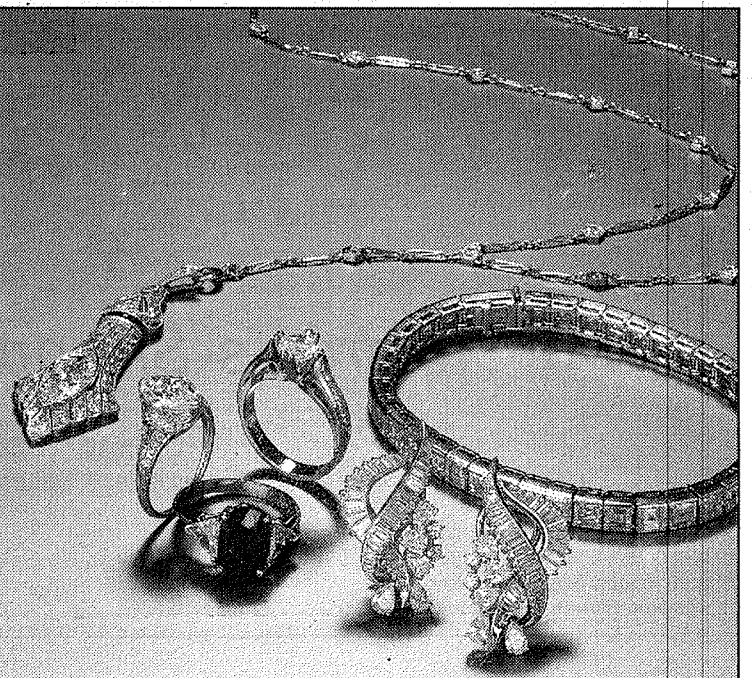
of the first sunny day since Okinawa to sun themselves just off the flight deck. Unfortunately for them, they were in view of the executive officer.

"We were soaking up the sun and looking at the coast of California," says Mr. Anderson, a longtime councilman, mayor and volunteer for Portola Valley, who now lives at The Sequoias and is still the town's police commissioner. A Marine corporal came up and told them Commander Quilter was putting them on report for being out of uniform. "When he moved to Portola Valley, I thought, there can't be two Joe Quilters," Mr. Anderson says. "But we're good friends. He's done a lot for the town."

Admiral Quilter, who admittedly ran a taut ship, responds, "I pinged him. If you're Number 2 on a carrier with 3,500 people aboard, there has to be some order."

Later, then-Captain Quilter received the Bronze Star medal for his combat service running

(Continued on next page)



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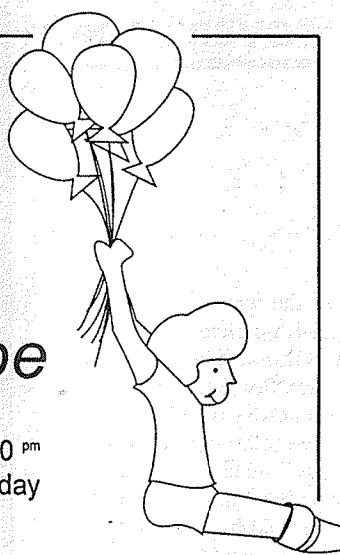
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COVER STORY

Admiral Quilter

(Continued from previous page)

the Shangri-La.

Back in Washington, Capt. Quilter served on the carrier desk in the Office of Naval Operations. He was sent to witness the atomic bomb test at Bikini. "It was a very impressive bomb, 20 miles away. We wore special goggles, but we didn't wear radiation badges," he recalls. "I didn't realize the power of the thing."

On another assignment, the Quilters first became involved with horses. When Capt. Quilter commanded the first Master Jet Field, under construction on 1,000 acres at Oceana, Virginia, Mrs. Quilter was able to indulge her love of horses. They bought a five-gaited mare called Miss Manners.

In 1952, they trailered Miss Manners to Atherton, where Capt. Quilter was to take command of the seaplane tender Salisbury Sound at Hunter's Point. "That's an entirely different book," he says. "The longer you are on the road, the less willing the horse is to go into the trailer in the morning."

For the year Capt. Quilter commanded the Salisbury Sound, based in Okinawa, the family was planning to settle in the Bay Area. They bought a lot in the developing subdivision of Westridge in the foothill area that eventually became Portola Valley.

Admiral Quilter retired in November 1954, and started what has turned out to be an even longer career as community leader. "The Navy was slowing down," he says. "The prospect of a career in the Navy didn't look promising."

Forging community

When he moved to Portola Valley in 1956, Admiral Quilter gave up his nomadic existence and plunged into community life. "This is the 26th house in which I've lived," he says 43 years later.

In 1955 the Quilters built one of the early homes in Westridge; the post-war building boom was bringing hosts of newcomers to the Peninsula and the foothill community they called Portola.

Admiral Quilter built the barn for Miss Manners himself, with the help of a Jehovah's Witness who drove by and offered to help.

Not long after, he got tired of building fences and hiking Jasper Ridge while Adrienne was riding. So he took up riding, got a horse — and got hooked on trails. "In the horse business I began to realize the importance of trails," he says.

Meanwhile, Admiral Quilter went to Stanford Business School for an MBA, then worked for Lockheed for 11 years before retiring again in

1969. At Lockheed he worked in business planning and — sound familiar? — mergers and acquisitions.

During the Quilters' early years in Portola Valley, the growing community was in ferment. New residents wanted more control over their destiny than the erratic oversight provided by San Mateo County. Admiral Quilter joined the Portola Valley Association, which eventually led the drive for incorporation.

He was particularly opposed to annexing to Woodside. "We'd have been the dumping ground for what Woodside didn't want," he says.

"I'm kind of a list guy. I like making lists," Admiral Quilter says. "When we first started the Portola Valley Association, I started making mailing lists."

On the map

"He's the man who put Portola Valley on the map," adds former mayor, councilman, and super-volunteer Bob Brown. He was referring to Admiral Quilter's role in finding a name for the aspiring community. Since "Portola" was already taken by a town in Plumas County, "Portola Valley" emerged as a way to keep the familiar name of Don Gaspar de Portola, who traversed the area on his way to and from discovering San Francisco Bay in 1769.

Admiral Quilter generated the first map of Portola Valley, and sent it to everyone on his list — post office, express companies, newspapers, Rand McNally, and so on. "You have to identify something so people know what you're talking about," he says.

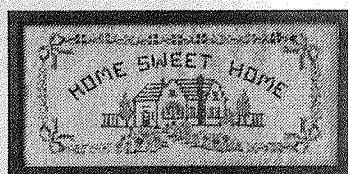
When Portola Valley finally incorporated in 1964, Admiral Quilter ran unsuccessfully for the first Town Council. He also served a term on the Portola Valley school board. Later his dedication to trails earned him the title of trail commissioner.

In 1974, Adrienne Quilter died; the following year Admiral Quilter married neighbor Phyllis Blum, widow of the late Frank Blum, also of Portola Valley, in a ceremony in Grace Cathedral. For his second honeymoon, he went around the world the way he'd wanted to on the first one — across the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

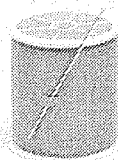
Mrs. Quilter has been very active in many charities, including being the first woman president of the Sequoia YMCA. Between them, they have four children, one grandchild and two great-grandchildren.

The Quilters still keep tremendously busy. They travel a lot, and are both mentors at the Little House Computer Club in Menlo Park every Thursday.

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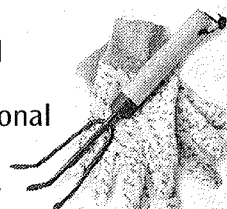


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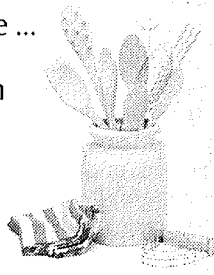
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