

SOME WAR STORIES
AND OTHER LIES

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PAUL YELAVICH

A MEMOIR

Editor's Note

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The prose of this memoir is wholly my father's work, apart from the table of contents and subheads, which I added as a kind of instrument panel for the reader. I also took the license of illustrating the memoir with photographs from his album and the occasional public domain image when it seemed helpful. It seemed the logical thing to do. But I certainly did not 'do' this project alone.

My mother's unflagging dedication was, in fact, the catalyst for this latest incarnation of my father's recollections of the risks and joys of his time in the Navy. Marie Honora (Hare) Yelavich is a remarkable woman in her own right. Her story may not include glide-bombing runs or kamikaze sightings, but she had her own near-death experience giving birth to me. A valorous act she repeated four times more. No medals were given but if there were they would bear witness to the endless depth of her children's love and affection.

S.Y.

Book Design and Production: *Joan Ferrell*

Cover photograph: *Author in flight suit*

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Introduction

THIRTY YEARS have passed since my father Paul Yelavich began writing this memoir. That a three-year stint in the Navy—from January 13, 1943 to December 26, 1945—would grow into a project of such duration is telling of how such stories are shared and understood.

SHARING: Dad finished his handwritten manuscript in January of 1985. Over the course of the late '80s, it was typed on an electric typewriter (and retyped as per his frequent revisions) by my youngest sister Margaret. Satisfied that it was finished, Dad put his war stories away with his medals and wartime photo album. After lying dormant for a decade or so, his memoir was taken up again—this time by my mother Marie Yelavich, who began entering it on the computer in stages after my father's death in 1996. I took a hand in proofing for typos, on an admittedly sporadic basis. We'd become aware that his alma mater Brown University collected such memoirs, so we wanted to be sure that his prose didn't suffer in transposition from pen to keyboard, from 20th to the 21st century.

UNDERSTANDING: While the protracted process of realizing this book certainly had something to do with changes in technology and the advent of self-publishing software, it also reflects the vagaries of life. Various and sundry commitments to work and family intervened. More than that,

repeatedly scanning 99 single-spaced pages of text for errors had dulled me to my father's story. I also think that hearing him say his Navy years were his best may have instilled a subconscious resentment toward those reams of paper awaiting attention.

It was only this past year that I truly comprehended what he had written. His words came to me not as a daughter but as a reader. I realized this was a well-told, often entertaining, story of a teenager learning to land on a moving target (an escort carrier in the Pacific) who grew up during and in between flights over Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa hazed by kamikaze. The voice in the manuscript fluctuated from self-effacing truth telling to touching recollection to tongue-in-cheek straight man, each revealing a deeper truth of the "lies" of the title—a trope of so many wartime recollections as to make it a mark of veracity. What had begun as a project to honor my father became a literary proposition of moral significance—no matter how modest.

Susan Yelavich
January 2014



The author's Navy wings

SOME WAR STORIES
AND OTHER LIES



Author at 16, Rochelle Park, NJ.

1942

THIS RANDOM COLLECTION of memories is intended as an account of my three years of active service romanticized as unique; and what, in fact, was routine may become exaggerated heroics. With due allowance for such hazards, and with the acknowledgment that memories frequently are dreadfully boring, these recollections are recorded for whatever interest they may afford.

By way of background, we begin in 1942. Our Navy had been badly mauled at Pearl Harbor, the war in Europe was going just as badly for the Allies, and the U.S. was only beginning to seriously rearm for the battles yet to be fought. We had only begun to emerge from the Great Depression, and the country now was engaged in a total war effort.

AS THE FOURTH CHILD in a family of six, I, in 1940, was the first to graduate from high school. During the Depression, older children left school to take any sort of work to provide whatever financial help they could. My father was a building contractor, and when work was available, two of my brothers and I worked with him. After graduation from high school, I worked with my father for about 18 months. Then, as defense industries geared up, I took leave of the building business and became a defense worker. My departure from the building business turned out to be mutually beneficial. I never liked that sort of work, and I never became very adept at it. To this day, I still cannot make a square cut with a handsaw.

For all of 1942 I worked at Wright Aeronautical in Paterson, New Jersey. My job, calling for a concentrated training program of at least half an hour,

required that I pick up an aircraft engine cylinder and fit it into the jig of a drill press. I then had to activate the machine so that 18 holes were drilled into the base of the cylinder. For a forty-hour week, my base pay was about \$25.

The production line at Wright was staffed by men and women, and they all seemed to be infected with the concept that they merely had to produce the normal quota of work, and nobody had to sweat. As an unsophisticated 19 year old, I hadn't been previously exposed to the product-line work ethic. The daily quota of my particular job was to turn out 48 pieces. It was so easily reached that I often was told by my coworkers to take a walk to kill time.

One day I decided to try for a record. I didn't tell anyone of my intentions, but I scrounged work all day long from the several stations that supplied me and the other drill press operators. At the end of the day, I had processed 154 pieces—the equivalent of three days work. When I came to work the next day, I was met by several union types who made it very plain that my extra efforts were not appreciated and that I was expected to observe the regular production standards. The lecture wasn't lost on me as I decided the patriotic thing was to remain healthy.

By September 1942, my oldest brother, Peter, had been drafted in the Army, and my second brother, John, had joined the Coast Guard. Though I hadn't given serious thought to which service I might want to enter, it was understood that all able-bodied young men would either enlist or be drafted. I knew that before long Uncle Sam would point the finger at me.

In September 1942, a coworker at Wright who was my age showed up sporting a neat looking lapel pin. It was the size of a quarter in the shape of a shield with an overlay of a pair of wings. When I asked about the pin, he said, "I've enlisted in the Navy. They're going to send me to flight school. I'm going to be a Navy pilot." After questioning him about qualifications, examinations, and how to go about enlisting, I convinced myself that if he could do it, so could I. Thus, from such careful analysis and exhaustive research, my career was launched. There's a message in all of this for the Defense Department: If enlistments fall off, if brighter, enthusiastic, and heroic young men are needed, design an attractive lapel pin.

The enlistment process

THE ENLISTMENT PROCESS turned out to be more than I bargained for. On the first of quite a few subsequent trips to the Navy's selection headquarters at 120 Broadway in New York, I found myself in a madhouse of activity. Obviously, I wasn't the only one enamored with the Naval

Aviation Cadet Training Program. Prospective candidates were shuffled from one long line to another. Shouts of "Eye tests over here," "O.K., strip, cough," "Next," and "Room A for written exams," seemed to encourage organized confusion. After a preliminary interview I was told to return with my birth certificate and a consent form signed by my parents. Then I would be permitted to take the written exam.

The Navy's formal education requirements called for a high school diploma, and the written exam wasn't too difficult. However, I was thankful for having had the good luck at Paterson Eastside High School to have such fine teachers whose courses in physics, chemistry, math, English, and Latin were invaluable preparations.

The physical tests bring to mind two episodes that caused considerable discomfort. Just before I began the enlistment process, I had completed a full dental repair program that included at least six fillings. The dentist used some sort of plastic or porcelain type of material. When the Navy checked my teeth, I was told that all the fillings would have to be replaced—at my expense, of course. "We can't have a pilot getting a toothache at high altitude due to his non-regulation fillings. After you get your fillings replaced come back and finish your exam." This resulted in further dragging out the enlistment process.

My other physical hurdle involved getting past anything resembling a motion activity. From early childhood I had the unhappy knack of getting seasick after just few turns on a backyard swing. On reflection, I find it a bit puzzling to think I could safely pilot an airplane or that I would even ride in one as a passenger. During the physical tests, I had observed other guys ahead of me in the line. They were seated in a chair that was spun quite rapidly to the right and then stopped abruptly. A reading of sorts was taken to see how long it took your vision to clear. The same procedure was followed by rapid rotation to the left. When my turn came, I got into the chair and prayed that I wouldn't throw up right in front of everyone. Any such indication of motion sickness would have called for immediate disqualification. My prayers were answered, and I survived the test with only a bare, outward show of unsteadiness.

With all the return visits to the Navy's selection headquarters, the enlistment process stretched out for over six weeks. It wasn't until November 3, 1942, that I was found to be physically fit and psychologically qualified for admission into the Naval Aviation Cadet Training Program. By inference, it also was a tacit acknowledgement that I was potential officer material. The significance of the officer bit didn't have any particular meaning at

that time. I was sworn in and told to wait at home for a call to active duty. Shortly after I was sworn in, a member of the Hackensack Elks asked me to meet with a group of other Navy enlistees in the same program. We were all on standby status, awaiting a call to active duty. The group was sponsored by the Elks and was called the Jersey Skeeters, a name obviously intended to terrify Tojo. I met with the group several times. As I recall, our purpose was to become acquainted before our departure to wherever the Navy might send us. And, there was a possibility that we would be called as a unit. By the time our orders came to report on January 13, 1943, we had, in fact, made ourselves known to each other. Although few of us would admit it, those meetings eased the uncertainty and apprehension about leaving home.

Off to war

MY PERSONAL SITUATION at the time I left home, in January 1943, probably wasn't much different from that of most 19 year olds who went off to war. However, although my 20th birthday was just ahead, on February 5, I had no excess of self-confidence. It would have been quite appropriate to describe me as a babe in the woods. You'd have had to look hard to find anyone more unsophisticated and more innocent than I. The towns of Saddle River and Rochelle Park, where I grew up, were a cut or two above Stickville, U.S.A. I had never been more than 50 miles from home; the high water mark of being away from home was a two-night, supervised camping trip. I didn't drink or smoke or have any significant vices. My social graces were minimal. With girls I was an awkward bumbler. I had dated a girl from town about a half-dozen times, and the depth of our relationship once reached a brief and sweaty session of handholding. In short, by today's standards, I was culturally retarded.

After fighting back the tears and swallowing the lump in my throat, I kissed my mother good-bye and said my "so-longs" to my father and two remaining brothers at home. As I waited for the bus to New York, I realized how cold the weather was. Later that same night I was to experience weather that was even more chilling.

On reporting to the Navy in New York, I was glad to see so many familiar faces of the Jersey Skeeters. We had known that we were being sent to Texas, but we didn't know our specific destination. We then were told that our group of about 25—made up mostly of the Skeeters—was going to North Texas State College in Denton. Incidentally, the identification as

Jersey Skeeters passed into obscurity at about the same time we boarded the train out of New York. Some half dozen other groups, each slated for other campuses in Texas, were loaded aboard the same train.

Anyone who traveled by train during World War II can readily recall horror stories about the accommodations. Ours was a combination freight-passenger train with rather antiquated coach cars. We had reversible wicker seats, and their hardness gave testimony to their indestructibility. Heat was supplied by an exposed pipe running the length of the coach. On that first night out of New York, in the hills of West Virginia, the train made one of those seemingly mindless stops. Despite our loud grumbling, the train crew not only offered no explanation for the delay but they also disappeared so as to avoid our abuse. The outside temperature was well below zero, and to compound our misery, the heating pipe either froze or was incapable of providing heat. Few of us had any substantial, heavy winter wear. As we huddled together, those wicker seats seemed to become harder and colder as though designed to add to our discomfort. After the bitterly cold night and little sleep, the train slowly came to life to resume the journey. We never got any explanation for the delay. However, in the months ahead, when traveling to other bases, we were to learn that such delays were routine and just a fringe benefit.

I never knew whether any of the others in my group shared the "problem" that I had to resolve. My problem had its roots in my Mother's warnings about public toilets. Mom was a personal cleanliness bug, and her repeated warnings over the years about disease-laden toilet seats had been dutifully heeded. Supposedly, the train ride from New York to Denton would take about three days. I resolved that I'd hold out for the entire trip rather than risk acquiring some malady from that toilet on the train. For the first two days I had no pressing needs. However, on the morning of the third day, the situation became impossible. My resistance weakened to the point where I had no choice but to chance whatever plague might result. Considerably relieved in body, if not in mind, the rest of the train ride was uneventful.

Arrival at Denton

OUR ARRIVAL AT DENTON wasn't marked with any special reception. We were loaded aboard a bus and taken to our dormitory, which was converted from a private home. Above the entrance a sign read Corona 2—whatever that was supposed to indicate. At our dorm, we were met by a young man about 25 years old. He and his wife lived in our dorm, and he quite sternly



"Quite the drugstore cowboy," Denton, Texas, 1943

let us know he was to be responsible for our behavior and deportment. To those duties, we soon added that he was a general pain in the ass.

During the entire twelve weeks we were at Denton, we of course were in the Navy. But for all outward appearances we were civilians. No Navy personnel were on campus; the only time we saw a Navy uniform were the few instances when an officer would come up from Dallas to check on our progress. In addition to wearing our own civilian clothes, we also were outfitted with leftover uniforms from the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC outfit consisted of very heavy green flannel coats, pants, and overseas hats, plus khaki shirts and heavy-soled, black, high-top shoes. Those green uniforms gave every appearance of being bulletproof. And on those few occasions when we had to get into our uniforms could easily have been spotted as rejected candidates for the job of Jolly Green Giant helpers.

When we first arrived at our dorm, I made a dash for the bathroom. On

reflection, the situation should have called for amusement, if not derision, rather than any embarrassment. The Navy must have specified that we be housed in a facility with two toilet bowls, and indeed we were. A second bowl had been installed directly opposite what must have been the original throne. If both bowls were occupied at the same time, there was no avoiding interlocking legs. After an initial period of awkwardness, we soon took the situation in stride. Thus another chapter in my toilet training.

North Texas State College apparently had contracted with the Navy to handle this first phase of our training. It provided dormitory accommodations, meals, and classroom instruction for half a day, and made arrangements with the local airport to provide flight instruction the other half of the day. The college itself wasn't very large. As I recall, the student population probably didn't exceed 800. At the time, North Texas State's claim to fame arose from the Rideout twins, Wayne and Blayne, who had achieved national prominence as track men. They were both sprinters and had set a few records. Also of celebrity status—although not a student at the college—was Ann Sheridan. She was a Denton gal who made it big in Hollywood.

Our resident guardian fancied himself a budding military genius. He too was a civilian, but he must have had a least a semester of ROTC. He knew all the difficult military stuff like "Forward, MARCH," "To the rear, MARCH," etc. Given his way, he would have delighted in taking us on extended hikes. We suspected that he was too lazy to subject himself to having to join in on any such activity. After we had been in the dorm for about a week, our leader enlightened us on his dislike for Yankees and for us. We were from New Jersey, and by his way of thinking we couldn't possibly appreciate the fortune his grand-pappy lost when his slaves were freed during the Civil War. Such utter nonsense sounded unbelievable then as it does today. I don't recall that anyone in our group made any comment, but that one discussion was all the confirmation needed that he was a bona fide horse's ass.

Social skills

APART FROM THE PIPSQUEAK housekeeper of our dorm, who really had an insignificant role in the Denton experience, those 12 weeks were quite enjoyable. North Texas State was a small school, seemingly loaded with girls. Practically all the local men had gone into the service, so 25 new male arrivals weren't unwelcome. We probably were the first Yankees the girls had

met, just as they were the first Texans we got to know. Our first meeting occurred in the dining hall located in the girls' dorm. As we marched in and sat down, we were very much aware of their stares and giggles.

Curfew for the girls was 11:00 or 11:30 pm, so there was ample time after our first evening meal to get acquainted. The highly sophisticated conversation included such memorable lines as, "Where y'all from?" "How come y'all talk funny?" "Joisey??" Of course, we contributed equally stimulating comments. Nonetheless, it was a mutually pleasant encounter. As a generalization, it was fair to say that the girls were attractive, friendly, and they welcomed us to the school. Within three days, at least a dozen of us were paired off. You almost had the feeling that once a claim had been staked, you were off limits for any other girl. Awkward as I was, I found myself regularly dating a girl named Evelyn. She was about 5' 4", a blonde, cute, with a tendency toward plumpness. The other guys in my group referred to her as Butterball—quite unfairly as far as I was concerned. For a first girlfriend, I thought we got along quite well. Our dates involved going into town for a movie, sitting in the lounge of her dorm with other couples, or just outside the dorm. When we could get away from the crowd, we would sneak into the chapel to neck. Who says you can't have fun if you don't drink and smoke?

One of the indoctrination lectures we received was a reminder of our enlistment commitment. Naval Aviation cadets were not permitted to marry. After becoming a commissioned officer, you were free to marry whenever you chose. If a cadet married, he was dropped from the program immediately. And he was returned to his draft board, where he could expect immediate induction into the Army.

As we neared the date for completion of our stay in Denton, Evelyn began dropping hints about getting married. The hints escalated into direct suggestions to the point where I started to darn near panic. True, I liked her, but I also knew that I had no burning passion that could only be resolved by marriage. As a 20 year old, I had no intention of getting into a situation that was only for "old people." The difficulty of extricating myself was largely of my own making. I didn't have guts to say "No," and I didn't want to hurt Evelyn's feelings by telling her that marriage was out of the question. My escape hatch was the commitment to the Navy, and I resolutely reminded Evelyn that I would not and could not violate that commitment. Furthermore, I couldn't and wouldn't voluntarily opt out of the aviation cadet program. Evelyn backed away from the direct approach, but the last day I was in Denton she continued to hint at marriage.

Improvement of my social skills should be looked upon as a fringe benefit of North Texas State College. Flying and ground school did, in fact, demand most of our time and attention. Our group was divided so that one half went to ground school while the other half went to the airport.

The message about washing out

NOT ONE OF OUR entire group had any prior flight experience. We were equally ignorant and were starting from the same level of incompetence. Somewhere in those first lectures at the airport, we were given the message about washing out. If in the flight instructor's opinion, you couldn't acquire the needed skills in a given time period, you would be washed out. There was no appeal of the decision to remove a cadet from flight training. The threat of washing out followed a cadet in every flight and at every base right up to the day before being commissioned.

A modern day shrink would have a field day exploring the psychology of the hazards of washing out and the effect on individuals who had washed out. The goal of the Naval Aviation program was to produce individuals qualified and suitable to serve as officers and to command fleet aircraft. The total selection and training process culminated in earning a commission and earning those Navy wings. It was rigorous, but it was an attainable goal, provided you measured up. Thus, if you washed out, whether at Denton or at some other base, the blow was personally devastating, or to use the current expression, you were given to believe that you didn't have the "right stuff," you were deficient, and you were banished from the select company. Usually, a washed-out cadet was on his way to boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center within 48 hours. I never encountered any former cadets after they washed out, but I've often wondered how seriously their self-esteem was scarred.

If the fear of washing out was negative motivation, it was more than offset by the positive motivation to succeed. The goal of success obviously was attainable, and the knowledge that you could face all the challenges, just as others had done, was a genuine incentive. With success, the evidence was tangible and demanded acknowledgment from even a casual observer.

A very large grass field with two small hangars

THE AIRPORT AT DENTON was a few miles out of town. To call it an airport would be gilding the lily. In fact, it was a very large grass field with no



Piper Cub training plane

more than two small hangars. Three or four Piper Cubs were available for our group. The airfield operation was run by civilians, with civilian flight instructors. Our flight training was designed under the Civilian Pilot Training program (CPT) We were to receive approximately 40 hours flight time; solo flight was expected after eight hours of dual instruction.

I had never previously been up close to an airplane, so I was surprised at the apparent flimsiness of the Piper Cub. The fuselage consisted of a skeleton frame made of thin aluminum pipes or tubing covered with canvas. The wings, also canvas covered, looked to be of questionable strength. The plane was a front-to-rear two-seater with dual controls. The rear seat was occupied by the student. Instrumentation consisted of the bare bones minimum: a compass, altimeter, air speed indicator, needle ball directional turn indicator, and perhaps one or two others. For student pilots, those were more than enough instruments to monitor.

My instructor was a crusty, old (almost 40) Irishman. His brogue was largely an affectation which went into high gear whenever he wanted to chew me out. I promptly endeared myself on our very first flight. The Piper Cub isn't a particularly good plane for acrobatic stunting. But if you've never flown before, and if you're a bit apprehensive, a few stalls and wing-overs can do the job. In very short order I got sick. As I opened the door

to throw up, I missed clearing the plane. This resulted in a stinking mess in, out, and all over the plane and me. My instructor looked at me with disgust, contempt, and outraged dignity. He immediately returned to the field, parked the plane, and barked, "Clean it up! All of it!"

For several days, I was concerned that my bout of airsickness would cause me to be washed out. No mention was made of the episode, but my instructor didn't attempt to disguise his continued dislike of me. Thereafter, I had no further airsickness problems at Denton. The only reason I could see why I was spared was that the airfield management probably was paid on the basis of the number of hours we flew. Thus, they stood to lose money if they didn't give me the 40-hour treatment.

It would be nice to say that, from the very start, I was thrilled with flying. For me, flying was anything but a pleasure during the first nine months of training. I tended to be very mechanical all through those 40 hours at Denton. In ignorance, and due to instruction that was sketchy, I had only a scant understanding of how and why an airplane operated. Whether or not they would admit it, the experience of others in my group couldn't have differed from mine.

Chalk up another characteristic to youth, ignorance, or both. At no time did I or any of my close associates ever consider that flying was too dangerous or, worse yet, that we might be seriously injured or killed. We all had a great deal of respect for our aircraft and the hazards of military flying, but the thought never occurred nor was it ever entertained that we could or might be done in. Each of us witnessed or heard of aircraft fatalities, in the States and in combat areas. However, the unspoken sentiment shared by all of us was, "It can't happen to me."

After my first solo flight, I have only a dim recollection of further instruction and training from the Irishman. But I can still hear him shouting and swearing, "Goddammit, you're skidding! Can't you feel it by the seat of your pants? Look at the damn needle and ball! Keep the nose up!" He obviously had a finely attuned seat, whereas at that stage of the game, my seat senses were undeveloped. On my very last flight at Denton, the instructor asked me to fly what was known as a pylon eight pattern. When flown correctly, with allowance for wind drift, the flight path over two landmarks was intended to be a figure eight. After I flew over the course for about 20 minutes, he told me to return to the airfield. On landing and parking the plane, he proceeded to tell me what a lousy job I had done. As far as he was concerned I had learned nothing regarding wind drift corrections, smooth turns, maintaining altitude, and assorted other



Author at bat, Denton, Texas, 1943

Physical education

BEFORE SPLITTING into morning ground school and morning flight groups, we participated as a unit in an early morning physical education class at the campus gym. We didn't mind because the fringe benefit of a decent shower was most welcome. The jerry-builtw shower at our dorm, about the size of a small clothes closet, was almost as ingenious as the interlocking toilet bowls.

Our gym class was run by a Mr. Cooper. He must have been at least 50 years old and was in good physical condition. Mr. Cooper worked us very hard in calisthenics, running around the track, and the obstacle course. He was big on running. To his credit, he participated and kept pace with us in whatever activity we worked at. In contrast to our keeper back at the dorm, Mr. Cooper was truly a "good ol' boy." He genuinely liked us, and we appreciated the concern he expressed for us. On occasion, he would cut short the physical activity and sit us down for a bull session. One of these sessions stands out in that he let us know that when we left the sheltered life at Denton, we'd go into the real Navy with all its virtues and vices As a World War I Navy man, he had no doubt that some of us would whore around. Mr. Cooper said that if we wanted to avoid VD, the best advice he could give us was, "Don't!" The point is mentioned because his advice, limited as it was, contrasted so sharply with the ghastly films and lectures we were to see and hear at our next base.

Ground school

GROUND SCHOOL at North Texas State was a delight. Classes in aerial navigation, math, and physics were taught by the college faculty. Perhaps the most interesting class was taught by a prof who regularly taught psychology to the students on campus. He usually spent a respectable amount of time on physics-math types of problems, such as acceleration due to gravity, the effect of gravity on a fired bullet, and whether an aircraft theoretically could catch up with a bullet fired from its own guns. Frequently, the prof would find some reason to digress into possible psychological implications of the problem. Soon he was far afield of the subject matter, to our great delight. I am not at all sure that our ground school classes did much to enhance our skills as pilots, but it was time well spent as far as I was concerned.

In early April 1943, we were told that we were to leave Denton and to report to the Navy in Dallas. From Dallas we would go directly to Navy

things. If it had occurred to him, I'm sure he would have faulted the way I kicked tires. He concluded that I'd always be a mechanical, inflexible, unthinking flier. On a guess, he probably thought, "What the hell. I'm now rid of him. Let the damn fool kill himself somewhere else."

Much as I may not like to admit it, the instructor's assessment of my performance wasn't too far off the mark. In my defense, it could be said that his teaching, both on the ground and in the air, was practically nonexistent. He never was much for advance briefing of what we were to do on a scheduled flight, and when in the air with him, he offered no encouragement.

By the end of our flight training in Denton, our dislike was mutual. For my part, I still considered it a major accomplishment to have soloed, and I had acquired a feeling of familiarity in my 40 hours of flight time.

Pre-Flight School at the University of Georgia in Athens. We were excited about the move and at the same time saddened to leave Denton. The last few days were spent in lengthy farewells with all sorts of promises to write and to return again. The initial pairing off survived to the end and with hugs, kisses, a few tears, and good-byes; there was a bittersweet innocence in parting. Evelyn and I fervently promised to keep in touch and to meet again.

My innocence was shattered

ON ARRIVAL IN DALLAS, we learned that we would have to remain there for at least two days. We had to await the arrival of other groups of cadets who were coming from other college programs such as we had completed at Denton. Our group decided to seek out a bar in Dallas, and then obtained a separate room for a party. I am uncertain about the legal drinking age in Texas at that time. However, no questions were asked and a plentiful supply of beer was available. At that time, I still neither drank nor smoked. While we were in Denton, a few of the fellows had an occasional beer but never drank to excess. As for pleasures of the flesh, if anyone had bedded any of those girls it was a well-kept secret. The level of sexual braggadocio among us wouldn't excite the interest of a 14 year old today.

The party began with everyone but me drinking beer. I had taken sips of beer in the past and couldn't stand the taste of that awful stuff. To the dismay of all the others, I drank Coke. As the day wore on, the empties began piling up, and the beer was starting to take its toll. The empty cans were stacked in a sizeable pyramid. When my Coke cans were barred from the pyramid, I began to feel rejected and depressed. Some four hours after the party began, one of the guys got the idea: "Let's all go to a whorehouse." We had just been paid, so it was thought that money would be no problem. Pretty soon the whorehouse idea was met with hoots and shouts of "Let's go."

However I might describe my own feelings, it would be an understatement to say that I was disillusioned, and my innocence was shattered. Here were the guys I had lived with for three months. They were likable, generous, good-natured, pure of heart, wholesome all-American types. Any of them would have been a suitable model for a recruiting poster. Now some latent character defects surfaced. They drank! Drank to excess! And to descend to the depths, they now proposed to go whoring!! In my mawkish state, I couldn't control the tears of my despair. When questioned: "What the hell's bothering you?," I couldn't bring myself to explain my feelings. One of the guys came up with the thought that I was broken-hearted at leaving

Butterball back at Denton. Because that explanation seemed to satisfy their curiosity, I made no attempt to disabuse the diagnosis. I left the bar and went back to wherever the Navy had housed us. And I never asked nor found out whether the hookers of Dallas had entertained our group

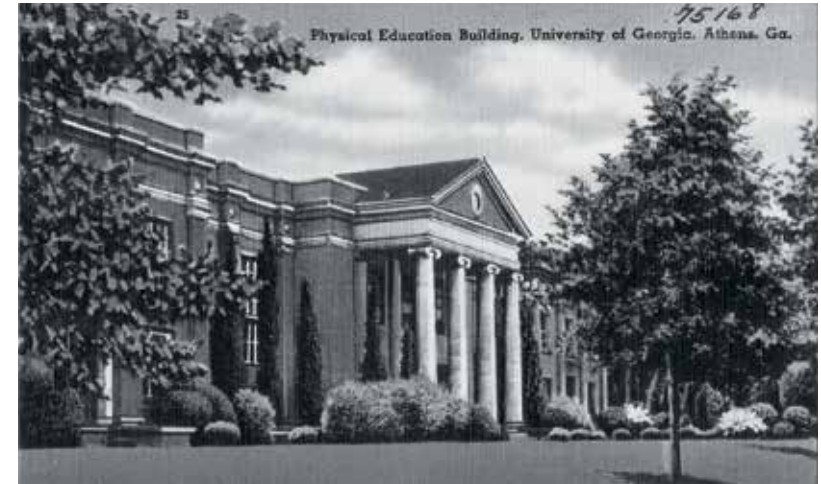
Before closing the book on Denton, Texas, I have tried to recall events that I might associate with members of our group. At best, I can remember the names of Eddie Folker, Dick Carmelich, Bob Wolpert, Bob Burr, Ted Schoonmaker, Dick Stewart, George Royal, Arthur Johns, and Eric Catwinkel. For the most part, those names are all that remain familiar.

We boarded the train together, but once we arrived in Athens, Georgia, our group ceased to stay together as a unit. After leaving Athens, I saw a few of the Denton group on brief meetings at duty stations on the West Coast or in the Pacific islands. The pattern of moving from base to base, making new acquaintances, then parting abruptly was to continue for the entire period of my active duty.

Pre-Flight School at the University of Georgia

ALTHOUGH WE KNEW that all aviation cadets had to go through pre-flight school, we had little specific knowledge of what to expect prior to our arrival at the University of Georgia. The pre-flight program was a combination boot camp-orientation, officer candidate school for Naval Aviation cadets. Emphasis was placed on classroom instruction, military science, and physical education. Part of the military science included a large slice of march, march, march, drill, drill, drill. Cadets did no flying while at pre-flight school. Our stay in Athens began shortly after April 1 and ended June 15, 1943.

After a dirty, two-and-a-half-day train ride—with all the usual delays en route—we arrived in Athens, Georgia, at 2:30 am. Someone must have had the good sense to time our arrival after the sidewalks had been taken in. Had we arrived in broad daylight, the townspeople would have despaired of winning the war. Here we were, America's cream of the crop, a messy and shabby bunch, and we wanted nothing more than a decent bunk to collapse into. Although we still were in civilian clothes, we very promptly learned that we were really in the Navy. The entire group that had been collected in Texas numbered about 240. Several chief petty officers brusquely told us to line up and get aboard the waiting buses to be taken to the campus. We got off the buses about 3:30 am and were directed to a building, which in fact was a gym. Again came the order: "Line up in columns." This was followed by "O. K. Drop your pants, short arm inspection." With snickering and



Postcard of the University of Georgia Physical Education Building, c. 1943.

groans, we did as we were told as we went through the absurdity and indignity of a corpsman's visual inspection of our parts. We were rewarded with the assurance that if any of us had VD, it hadn't yet become evident. Having been found to be in fit condition, we finally were directed to our dormitory rooms where we gratefully conked out.

"You're in the navy now"

WHAT SEEMED LIKE only moments after falling asleep, I was awakened by loud, insistent banging on the door. The banging was accompanied with shouts of "Reveille! Up and at 'em! Let's go!" My reaction was that it was all a mistake; we had only arrived a few hours ago. Our tormentor had proceeded down the hall and was making a return pass. As he arrived, I opened the door and found myself face to face with a lieutenant who said, "Let's get a move on. You're in the Navy now. Muster in the yard in ten minutes."

As we poured out of the dorm and lined up after a fashion, we got a first look at our surroundings in daylight. Our dorm was one of several in a complex with a broad open space in the center that was our mustering area. The trees and foliage were well along in the season as we appeared to be in a rural area. Off in the distance were other buildings which were part of the university. We lined up under the watchful eyes of several officers and

the commands of some Marine sergeants, all very crisp in freshly laundered khaki. We were to see a lot of those sergeants over the next 11 weeks.

The sequence of showering, shaving, bed making, and breakfast could not have taken much more than an hour. Then it was back again for another muster, and we were given over to the tender, loving hands of the drill sergeants. They were tough, demanding, and didn't hesitate to chew you out. At the same time, they also recognized that their task was to instill in us the competence and pride, not only in the discipline of marching and close order drill but also in the Navy itself. The first order of business was to organize our group into manageable units. Our entire group of 240 was considered a class, but using military lingo, we were a regiment. In turn, the regiment was divided into six companies of 40. As usual, everything was done alphabetically. Any personal preferences to be in some other company with other guys were given short shrift.

In the process of making Navy men of us, the next step was to be rid of our civilian clothes. Each company, under the direction of a sergeant, marched off to the supply area. The campus of the University of Georgia is both hilly and spread out. Many of the buildings and facilities had been completely taken over by the Navy. If I exaggerate, it isn't by much, but to reach most of the classrooms, supply area, athletic fields, and the gym, a march of close to half a mile was required.

Our introduction to Marine Corps marching cadence began with that first trip to supply. In comparison, the kind of marching we did back at Denton seemed like Cub Scout stuff. For starters, the Marine sergeants spoke a new language that defies written description: "ten-hut"; "hut, doop, tray"; "yer lef, yer lef, lef, ri, lef"; to the rear march sounded like "reep hotch." All those brisk commands were followed by confused bumping and stepping on each other. After castigating us as clumsy blockheads, our sergeant finally got us under way. Our incompetence was overcome in less than two weeks, which was more a testimony of the sergeant's persistence than our inherent military capabilities.

At supply, we were loaded down head to toe with clothing, then marched back to the dorm, where we were given 15 minutes to shed our civilian clothes for the duration of the war. Dressed in our khakis, we were again marched to the other end of the campus and lined up for the traditional first haircut. The haircut ritual, to my knowledge, was standard operating procedure for all branches of the service. Mothers would weep if they were to watch the shearing of their lambs. Our barbers—and it was highly suspect whether any of them ever cut anything other than their lawns—

must have been paid on a piecework scale. They literally could complete a "haircut" in less than three minutes. When all of us in my company had received the attention of our hair stylists, we looked like a bunch of cons headed for the hot seat.

Thump, thump, thump

PRE-FLIGHT SCHOOL, as at the various training bases we subsequently were assigned to, had staggered classes. Thus, every two or three weeks, one regiment or class departed, and was replaced by a regiment of new arrivals. The older classes enjoyed greeting the new arrivals with hints of tortures to come, such as physical exams with a battery of inoculations and the hooked needles that would be plunged into our arms and butts. Towards the end of the first day, we passed an upper class dorm, and from the cadets in the dorm we got the usual ribbing. Suddenly, they began a rhythmic chant of "thump, thump, thump." Other than some obscure dire warning, we were given no indication of what they were implying.

The next day we went through a thorough physical exam, including a series of shots, which caused a few of us to actually keel over. The mystery of the "thump, thump, thump" was soon resolved. We were herded into a room in which there was an exercise bar running along the walls at about eye level. Places were set up by means of a ten-inch-high step. The object of the test was to grasp the exercise bar with both hands, step up on the right foot, followed by the left foot. To maintain the rhythm, a recording played "thump, thump, etc." The exercise was to continue for five minutes. The crusher was that you had to do the exercise with a sandbag on your back of one-third your weight. After not more than two minutes, it became torture, and the "thump, thump" hit recording required that the pace be maintained. At the completion of the test, and completely exhausted, our pulse and blood pressure readings were taken. After five minutes of rest, the readings were taken again. We had no idea what the test was intended to discover, but we were certain that if it required hod carriers to defeat the Japs, the Navy had an ample supply of qualified candidates.

Our indoctrination into the Navy included a series of general information lectures in our first week in Athens. Of particular note were the lectures and films on personal health which were given by a Navy MD. He made quite an impression, and he put to rest any remaining concerns. His statements were unequivocal: "You don't get VD from a toilet seat. So don't come back from a liberty with that lame old excuse. Diseases aren't

spread by toilet seat contact unless you have an open sore.” So there it was! After all those warnings from my Mother, I now had the word of an honest-to-goodness doctor that I no longer need concern myself. At that same session we got the full treatment, including the horror films about VD. If intended as a deterrent, the session was a roaring success. The advice of Mr. Cooper, back in Denton, was emphatically reinforced. The VD films shown to us probably were the same ones shown to new recruits in all service branches. Ghastly, horrible, shocking, and other such adjectives were hardly suitable to describe the mutilations and diseased appearance of the individuals shown in the films. Though many of the guys made light of the lecture and film, I’d have to believe the Navy succeeded in getting across the intended message.

A \$27,000 education

OUR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION was provided by Navy officers and enlisted men. From day one through our entire stay at pre-flight school, we were repeatedly told that those of us who completed the program through to our commissioning would receive a \$27,000 education. And, we would be the best-trained pilots in the world. The message was intended to have us face up to the task of meeting the challenge, and it was an undisguised ego booster. At our impressionable ages we saw no reason to dispute the Navy’s judgment of our super-select status.

The subject matter of our classes included Navy protocol and procedures, aerial navigation, aerodynamics, meteorology, aircraft recognition, Morse code, military science, and other subjects which don’t readily come to mind. In a lighter vein, but nonetheless not to be ignored, were some of the do’s and don’ts. For example, a Navy officer never holds hands with a female companion in public, a Navy officer never pushes a baby carriage, a Navy officer must never pusillanimously cry for quarter in face of the enemy. Seriously, though, we received a solid and sound cramming of substantive material from our instructors. Examinations were frequent and were not pushovers. You couldn’t bluff your way through.

During the first week of general lectures, we were surprised to be told the Navy’s order of priorities was that we first demonstrate that we were actually qualified to be commissioned as Navy officers. Qualification as a competent aviator was secondary. It was a surprise because up to that time, we all were of the mind that flight training was our number one concern. As we progressed through our training at Athens and other bases, we began

to understand and accept the view that if you weren’t a good officer, you generally weren’t a good aviator.

After I had been at Athens for not much more than two weeks, I received a letter from Evelyn. In a brief but apologetic message, she told me that she had become engaged to a young man from her home area in Fort Worth. I hadn’t written to her because I was fearful that she would persist in the “marry me” routine. Never was a “Dear John” received with such welcome relief. There was no need for a reply from me, and I was content to let her assume any guilt she elected to bear. So much for true love.

Marching and drilling under the tutelage of our sergeant became an everyday part of our routine, along with an occasional parade in dress whites. We marched to classes, to the mess hall, to the athletic field, and just about anywhere on campus. On Sundays we mustered for church call: “Catholics over here, Protestants here.” We were not given a choice of going or not going to church. We went! The two groups were marched into town, filed into the respective churches, filed out, and marched back to our campus. At that time it never occurred to me to question what option or choice was given to Jewish cadets. I wonder whether the Navy at that time was aware that some cadets might have other religious preferences. Nobody said the military was democratic.

Muscle-bending

EQUAL EMPHASIS with classroom instruction was placed on the muscle-bending part of pre-flight school. Our physical education instructors, for the most part, were officers who in civilian life were professional athletes. The routine called for us to take various sports in two-week periods. In one period, we might be taking football and swimming, in another we’d take boxing and track, then perhaps basketball and obstacle course. Included with the physical training were several sessions at the firing range. Fortunately for me, the marksmanship scores were neither counted nor recorded. I was a lousy shot at the rifle range and wasn’t much with the machine gun. The gunnery sergeant at the machine gun range demonstrated firing a .30 caliber machine gun. He warned us to be alert to the recoil. “If you’re not careful, the recoil will smack you in the mouth and split your lip.” When it was my turn to fire, I was very careful. However, as promised, I got smacked in the mouth and split my lip.

Before we engaged in any of the sports, our instructors took special delight in putting us through a period of vigorous calisthenics. They, of

course, had us at a disadvantage. They were in excellent physical condition and could outperform most of us. Boasting about athletic accomplishment isn't exactly uncommon. Three episodes remain clear in my memory.

A boxing show

OUR GROUP had been at Athens all of three days when we were approached by an officer looking for volunteers. A boxing show was to be put on that night, and he asked if any of us would like to participate. I very quickly—much too quickly—volunteered. After all, my brothers John and Fred were professional boxers. I had seen them box many times in the gym and in the ring. I, by osmosis alone, knew a lot about boxing. The fact that I had never fought anyone and had done nothing by way of conditioning never occurred to me. My opponent was about my size and weight. His regiment had been at pre-flight school about six weeks, which meant that he had been through part of the program, putting him six weeks ahead of me. Our bout was scheduled for three rounds. It wasn't long after the opening bell that I found myself repeatedly taking solid jabs flush in my face. We wore headgear that fitted badly, and mine was constantly knocked askew, resulting in limited visibility. The best I could muster was some ungainly, awkward, and harmless punches in close. At the end of the first round, I was exhausted, gasping for air. All my grandiose plans to dazzle my opponent evaporated. For me, it became a matter of survival. In truth, I hadn't really been hurt, but I don't know how I found the stamina to remain on my feet for two more rounds. The judges unanimously awarded the bout to my opponent. Little did I realize that he would be the only man to hold a decision over me. I never lost another bout—and never fought another one either.

The football session

OUR TWO-WEEK SESSION of football had some interesting moments. Back home as kids, the only football equipment we ever had was a helmet which we took turns wearing. When I was in high school, I never weighed more than 135 pounds, and it would have been out of the question to even think of playing football with the big boys. The point to be made is that at pre-flight school, in any sport activities, we were outfitted with the best available equipment. As we dressed on the first day of the football session, I was very impressed with all the pads and protective gear. Actually, I got the

feeling that with all the equipment I was wearing, I now could take on the so-called big boys and might not be squashed.

Our football instructor, a lieutenant junior grade, was reputed to be a pro quarterback by the name of Bobby Malouf. Our company was matched against another company from some other regiment. Lt. (j.g.) Malouf played with us; he called our plays. On one series of downs, he looked to me in the huddle and said, "You get down field as fast and as deep as you can." To another two guys he said, "You go short right; you go short left." With the snap of the ball, I took off and must have gone 40 yards downfield with a defender right along side. Malouf threw a pass to one of the short men. We again huddled and the same play was called. Downfield I went with the defender close beside me. Again, the short pass. Back I went to the huddle, breathing heavily and with a touch of tiredness. For the third time the same play was called. As we lined up for the snap of the ball, I remember asking myself what kind of professional was this guy; didn't he have any imagination? On the snap of the ball, downfield I went just as determined as before. The defender, however, must have decided he had had enough of chasing after me. I was at least 15 yards beyond the defender, literally standing by my lonesome in the end zone.

Our quarterback Malouf let fly a high, beautiful forward pass. I stood there watching for what seemed like a long time as the perfectly thrown ball spiraled toward me as though radar guided. All I had to do was catch the ball; there was nothing to obstruct or interfere with the catch. The ball came down from its high arc toward my outstretched arms. With a clean swish, it went right between my arms to the ground. I doubt that I ever made contact with the ball. For months afterward I was haunted by the humiliation of that failure.

My humiliation was nothing compared to Malouf's anger. Though he controlled himself remarkably well, and although I do not remember the specifics of his verbal displeasure, there was no doubting that he thought I was first in line for klutz of the year award. I had no excuses, and wouldn't have dared to offer one, even if I had an ironclad alibi.

The half mile

ANOTHER EXAMPLE of my athletic prowess occurred during our two-week track session. I had done rather well up to the final events where we were matched against another regiment. As one of the four contenders in the half mile, I looked over the competition and saw two fellows I had

previously run with, and I was confident that they weren't going to run away from me. The fourth guy was a stranger. He was short, stubby, and bordered on being a fatso. I promptly dismissed him as any serious threat. We lined up and got off with the gun. To say I was flabbergasted would be a gross understatement. The little fat guy was off and ahead so fast, the rest of us seemed to be walking. As I trailed even farther behind, his legs literally churned like pistons as he beat the three of us quite convincingly. It could be said that it was a humbling experience.

Our cadet ranks contained many athletically talented people, but few super performers. Probably that was due to the fact that few professionals opted for aviation duty. The notable exception was Ted Williams, who attended pre-flight at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Our athletic program, however, was quite rigorous, and it was a gung-ho effort that demanded a go-go-go enthusiasm. Not surprisingly, goofing off was practically unheard of as well as not tolerated.

'The real war'

OUR CLASSROOM TRAINING at Athens did not reflect the pure military goals of the Navy. Throughout our stay at Athens, and at the duty stations that followed, we were attuned to "the real war," meaning the war with Japan. As far as we were concerned, the Army would take care of "the other war" in Europe; the Navy and Marines would settle things with the Japs.

On occasion we were treated to a first-hand account from a Navy or Marine aviator recently returned from the Pacific. One afternoon the entire cadet staff assembled to hear Joe Foss tell of his dogfights with Zeros. Joe was a Marine fighter squadron leader with more than 20 Jap planes to his credit. We were genuinely excited to hear him describe being on a head-on collision course with a Zero. He didn't change direction because to do so would give the advantage to the pilot of the Zero. When the Zero got into range, Foss fired several long bursts, and it disintegrated in front of him; he flew through a shower of debris. On another flight, the planes were in such close quarters that to allow a proper deflection shot, he had to put his gun-sight squarely on one of his own planes. This, of course, gave him a sufficient lead on the Jap pilot who was pursuing Foss' teammate. The telling of those adventures may sound shallow some forty years later, but it was heady stuff to us and provided the kind of inspiration that was intended. Several years after the war, Joe Foss was elected governor of South Dakota.

Athens, Georgia, is apparently 325 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean.



Pacific Theater Map

Essentially, we were in rural surroundings. Other than we aviation cadets and the other Navy staff on campus, nothing resembling a military target was near us. Therefore, we were quite surprised to be awakened at about 2:30 a.m. with banging on our doors and shouts of "Air raid drill!" As we staggered from our rooms in various stages of dress, or undress, we were advised to disperse in a wooded area several hundred yards from our dorm. This was followed by repeated calls of "All clear" which brought us back to the muster area just outside the dorm. Having successfully outwitted any would-be attacking enemy forces, we were permitted to go back to bed. Strangely enough, at all of our subsequent bases, which did in fact constitute bona fide targets, we never had an air raid drill, and we didn't need any.

My recollections of liberties, associates, and any social activities at Athens are almost a complete blank. Pre-flight school was intended as a concentrated program of classroom and athletic activities. It was not a fun place, but I have no negative feelings about that phase of our training. Actually, to have the concern of washing out temporarily put aside did much to make the stay tolerable. We completed our requirements at Athens in early June 1943 and made ready to move on to what was considered basic training. With that move, the Denton gang was again scattered. Some were sent to Olathe, Kansas; some to Norman, Oklahoma; and I and some others went to Glenview, Illinois.



N3N aircraft

Naval Air Station Glenview: Base Training—E Base

NAVAL AIR STATION Glenview, Illinois, was located in what seemed to be farm country, about 25 miles north of Chicago. My stay at Glenview ran from June 15 to September 5, 1943. Properly described, we were given our basic flight training at Glenview. However, euphemistically and quite accurately, this stage of the training program was known as E Base; the E stood for Elimination. On arrival we were given to understand that 40 to 50% of us would be eliminated, washed out, at this stage of the training. I don't know who kept score or whether my class achieved that level of inglorious failure. But our wash-out rate was substantial. The guys who didn't make it weren't permitted to linger. They were promptly shipped out to the Navy's boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

Flying and related instruction were given top priority to the tune of some 70% of our time. Classroom work and organized physical programs made up the rest of the schedule. Using the Navy's mode of aircraft identification, we flew N3Ns. The first N meant that it was a trainer aircraft, the 3 signified that it was the third model modification, and the final N signified the manufacturer. In this instance, the N stood for Navy inasmuch as the plane had been made at the Naval Aircraft Factory.

In appearance, the N3N looked much like what we today think of when someone mentions a barnstormer's stunt plane of the '20's and '30's. It was a biplane with two cockpits, dual controls, canvas-covered but very sturdy. The wheels did not retract, and to start the engine, a hand crank was used

by someone standing beside the plane, just to the rear of the engine. To warn other aircraft that our planes were used by student pilots, the N3N was painted bright yellow.

There was no radio equipment in our trainer. Communication between the instructor and the student was a bit primitive, but effective. The student's helmet was rigged with a rubber hose attachment whereby the instructor spoke to the student from the other end of the hose, which was in his cockpit. The hose arrangement was a one-way street; the student could only respond or get the instructor's attention by hand signals or through appropriate movement of the control stick. It should be noted that the term control stick was not used, nor did anyone ever use the comic strip term joy stick. Properly, it was the stick. Nothing else.

"My students don't fail!"

COMPARED WITH my flight instructor at Denton, Texas, my instructor at NAS Glenview was a delight and an inspiration. He was a fully qualified Naval Aviator, Lieutenant Martin. Civilian instructors were a thing of the past. In our first meeting, Lt. Martin asked about my background and the flight training I had received at Denton. Although he didn't badmouth it, I got the impression that the Navy didn't think much of that experience. That feeling was reinforced when I discovered that my 40 hours in the Piper Cub were not entered and would not be entered in my Navy Flight Log. However, I was especially encouraged to hear Lt. Martin say that he took a personal interest in his charges. His attitude was, "My students don't fail! If you want to get through this program, and if you seriously apply yourself, you can count on me for all the help I can give you." That

promise was later put to the test, and I was to find that he meant every word.

My first flight with Lt. Martin was intended as a familiarization flight to get the feel of handling the N3N and to take a look at the area I'd be flying over for the next several months. As we returned to the base at Glenview, Lt. Martin asked me to take a close look at the terrain below and to pick out some good landmarks. As he put it, "Whether you're flying with me, another instructor or alone, I don't want you to get lost." I looked around and saw what impressed me as a unique and readily distinguishable landmark. Just a few miles northeast of the base, I spotted a large rectangular field with three distinct green stripes separated by two equally distinct black stripes. Each stripe looked to be at least 100-feet wide.

Late in the afternoon of the next day, Lt. Martin and I took off on my second familiarization flight. As we completed the flight and headed back to the base, Lt. Martin signaled that I was to take the controls and to bring us into the landing pattern. Without hesitation I took the controls and began looking for my striped landmark. It was not to be found. Lt. Martin patiently waited in the front cockpit until he was satisfied that my further efforts would be nothing more than a bluff. He resumed control of the plane and brought it in for a landing.

After we had parked the plane and were walking back to the ready room, Lt. Martin let it be known that he was surprised to find that I was unable to find our base. He asked whether I had heeded his suggestion about selecting a landmark. When I told him of my green and black field and my lack of understanding how it could have disappeared, he thought it was quite humorous. He reminded me we were in farm country and the answer to my puzzle was that the farmer had been plowing the field when I first saw it. The two black spaces represented the plowing that was done on that day. As we had taken off in the late afternoon of the second day, the farmer had a whole day to finish his plowing, which obviously was what he did. With the field fully plowed, the striped appearance was fully gone. My landmark had become a large black rectangle, like so many others in the area.

After our third or fourth dual flights, Lt. Martin said that he was going to go through some acrobatics with me. He wanted to familiarize me not only with the acrobatics themselves, but also with the experience of flying the aircraft in various attitudes. He explained that as the pilot of the plane, you've got to maintain control without regard to the plane's position, whether in a steep dive, a loop, a stall, or whatever situation may arise. And with the right amount of training, you should be able to take any necessary corrective action almost automatically. His advice, of course,



Mothersill's Advertisement

was quite sound. However, the prospect of acrobatics raised the specter of airsickness, and I saw no escaping what was in store.

As we climbed to 5,000 feet, Lt. Martin gave me a rundown on what he proposed to do. He intended to start with some inverted flying, and he asked me to be doubly sure my seat belt was properly fastened. That was to be followed by a spin to the left and to the right, then a snap roll right and left, slow rolls right and left, and finish with a loop. From the very start, with the upside-down flying in an open cockpit, it was ill-concealed terror. The seemingly rapid sequence of rolls, spins, and loop did the trick. I threw up over the side of the plane and slouched down in the cockpit disgusted with myself.

Mothersill's seasick pills

I FULLY EXPECTED Lt. Martin to lower the boom. However, he surprised me with a discussion of motion sickness, and how it frequently was due to inner ear fluids. He promised to try to get some medication, which might be helpful. The next day, Lt. Martin handed me a box of Mothersill's seasick pills, an over-the-counter medication. According to the label on the

box, they were effective in combating seasickness. Lt. Martin suggested that I try using the pills when we got into the program's acrobatic requirements. For the rest of my stay at Glenview, I had no further airsickness problems. To Lt. Martin and to Mothersills, I owed much.

Not more than three weeks after I arrived at Glenview, I began to have serious doubts about my ability to complete the program. Fellows were already washing out who I thought would be among the survivors. Any lack of self-confidence would become evident, and despite my good fortune in having Lt. Martin as my instructor, I welcomed more support. I as well as several other cadets sought that support in attending daily Mass. For the rest of my stay at Glenview, about two months, every 6:00 a.m. would find me at Mass, praying as I never had before that I successfully complete the program.

Lt. Martin had given me eight hours of dual instruction when he determined that I was ready to solo in the N3N. After each phase of our basic training program, we had to demonstrate our competence in a check ride with a pilot other than our own instructor. The check pilot directed me to fly to an outlying field where I made several touch-and-go landings. While at the outlying field, he got out of the plane, and I made several more landings—as a solo pilot. He signaled me to pick him up and then return to the main base. After landing, I walked with the check pilot to the ready room and awaited his decision. The check pilot, if he chose, could discuss the flight with the student, or merely walk up to the schedule on a blackboard and chalk an up arrow or down arrow beside your name. In this case, I got an up arrow, which meant I could proceed with the next phase of instruction.

Allowance for Wind Drift

THE SECOND PHASE was intended, among other goals, to deal with control of a plane while making allowance for wind drift. The exercise was called "S turns to a landing." We went to a practice field that contained an outline of a circle reportedly 300 feet in diameter. The object was to approach the field as if to make a regular landing. But at 800-foot altitude, on the downwind leg of the landing pattern and abeam of the circle, the throttle was pulled back. This put the engine in an idling position; it was still turning over, but it wasn't delivering any power. With the engine idling, you were expected to approach the field, touch down in the circle, then add power to take off for another go around.

The exercise doesn't sound too difficult, and it wasn't when I tried my hand on it several months later. The first attempts were anything but easy. I

don't ever recall undershooting the target, but I do remember the repeated frustration of overshooting. At first I felt pretty embarrassed sitting in the cockpit and watching the plane maddeningly floating over and beyond the circle. And that was where Lt. Martin's instruction solved my clumsiness. He showed me how, by making small S turns in the final approach, I could intentionally dissipate airspeed and altitude. Or by raising and lowering the nose, lift could be dumped from the wings. Those and other techniques were, of course, what Lt. Martin was supposed to teach me, and as my proficiency improved, I got the impression he was beginning to recognize his efforts were not in vain.

The flight instructors at Glenview regularly reminded students at whatever stage of their training, to be constantly aware of the territory over which they were flying. We were expected to be on the alert for a suitable landing place if any trouble developed while in flight. For instance, if your engine were to fail, you were expected to be able to make a safe landing. Ideally, a good landing site would not be bounded by electrical wires or other obstructions, the terrain would be reasonably level, and the site ought to be big enough to permit a safe landing. As a part of my training, Lt. Martin would unexpectedly chop the throttle back to idle and then say, "Emergency." I was expected to control and guide the aircraft toward a good field for an emergency landing. If all went well, I would practically bring the plane to the ground. Before we touched down, Lt. Martin would apply full throttle as we climbed back to our altitude.

With some solo practice, along with several dual flights with Lt. Martin, I felt that I was ready for my check ride. The check pilot had me go through my paces, and at the end of the flight, I was rewarded with an up arrow beside my name on the flight schedule.

Acrobatic Flying

THE NEXT STAGE was uneventful, and I progressed to the big crunch: the acrobatics segment of the program. As he had mentioned previously, Lt. Martin stressed that the drills in acrobatic flying were not intended to make stunt pilots of us. Rather, they were intended to teach us how to control a plane, no matter what attitude it may be in, how to recognize certain hazards in flying, and how to cope with them. True, acrobatic flying requires certain precision maneuvers, and if a pilot has a liking for that kind of flying, there's an excitement and thrill in it.

Apart from concerns about airsickness, which were pretty much put

to rest by Mother Sills, I had quite a bit of difficulty with many of the maneuvers. Through all the dual instruction flights with Lt. Martin, he was most encouraging. He often would talk me through a particular maneuver such as a slow roll: "O.K., get the nose down; pick up about 20 knots. Now put the nose just above the horizon, then firmly add full left rudder and stick. Hold the stick on the left, now shift pressure to the right rudder. Keep her coming around. Now pop the stick to the right, and you're back in straight and level flight when you put the rudder and stick in neutral."

After each dual instruction session, I'd go back up on a solo flight to practice those maneuvers over and over. In all, I must have had at least six dual flights and six solo flights in preparation for my check flight. My acrobatic instruction included an alert to the special hazards of an inverted spin. In normal flight, a plane will spin when it is in a stalled altitude. The nose falls and a wing goes down and the plane seems to spin around the wing that has fallen. Recovery from a spin in normal flight, assuming you have sufficient altitude, calls for popping the stick forward very smartly, neutralizing the ailerons, and as the plane stops spinning, gently applying backward pressure on the stick. Inverted spins were particularly dangerous because the pilot might more readily become disoriented in an inverted position, and he might not immediately appreciate that the corrective action to be taken would be just the opposite of that taken on a "routine" spin. Also, inverted spins reportedly resulted in a very rapid loss of altitude, which by itself would have hazardous consequences.

Night Flying

BEFORE TAKING my acrobatic check ride, I was introduced to night flying. Up to that point, all my flying was done in full daylight and in good weather. In other words, I was a fair weather pilot. We were required to complete one dual night flight in which an instructor certified that you could safely solo at night, then we had to complete three solo flights. In total, we had to log six hours of night flying. All the flying was done in a pattern circling the main field. After takeoff, you climbed to 1,000 feet, circling to the left, then come around for a touch-and-go landing. In the absence of radio contact, we relied on signal lights. A green light meant it was ok to make a touch-and-go landing. A red light meant take a wave-off, usually because the plane ahead of you hadn't cleared the runway. Our solo night flights lasted an hour and a half. At any one time, there were at least 25 planes circling the field in a left-hand traffic pattern. Supposedly, the interval

between planes was big enough to avoid collisions or even near misses. Our planes had wing and tail running lights, and the engine exhaust vents gave off a bluish flame which provided some feeble illumination.

We cadets very soon realized that the instructors who drew the night flying duty did not look forward to going up in a sky full of green pilots. Lt. Martin, because of his rank, had no regrets about allowing the ensign instructors that privilege. It was apparent to me and to other cadets I spoke with that the instructors never relinquished the controls. Instead, they flew the plane around the field, made the required minimum three touch-and-go landings, then brought the plane in. The only instruction I received was some stout words of encouragement, "O.K., it's all yours. Just handle it the way I told you, and you'll do fine. Keep alert." With that, the instructor hastily disappeared, and I was off on my own. Surprisingly, with but one exception, no problem arose during any of my solo night flights.

The one exception involved a cadet who achieved instant infamy, along with the nickname of Wings. I happened to be standing along with several other cadets observing the night flying from the edge of the landing field, when Wings put on his performance. As mentioned earlier, the traffic pattern called for left turns around the field. Keeping in mind the general apprehension we all had about night flying, we concentrated on the lights of the plane ahead or near our own. From our vantage point at the edge of the field, we were unable to distinguish who was flying in any of the planes. The activity was proceeding normally when one of the planes came in for a touch-and-go landing, but on taking off for another turn around the field, the pilot made a right turn. He was in a head-on course with all the other planes in the air. Those of us watching from the ground were stunned. The guys in the air scattered in wild pandemonium; wing lights could be seen going up, down, and any other imaginable direction. As the wrong-way plane came around and approached for a landing, he was signaled to land and park the plane. The review board mercifully washed him out and sent him packing before the rest of us could kill him. It wasn't until several hours after the episode that we were told the culprit's identity. Sad to say not one of us lamented Wing's departure.

Moment of Truth

MY ACROBATIC CHECK ride was scheduled for an afternoon flight. The moment of truth had to be faced, and I had all the in-flight preparation I was supposed to get. Before the check flight, I must have sat in the cockpit

of a plane for at least an hour going through the motion for each of the maneuvers. When I came into the ready room and looked at the schedule board, I saw that I had drawn a check pilot reputed to be a tough taskmaster. He walked to the flight line with me and rather starchily rattled off what he wanted me to do. We took off, with the controls under my direction, and climbed to our designated altitude. He gave me a hand signal to get on with it. My slow rolls and snap rolls were a bit ragged in that I didn't come around very smartly to the right direction. The next item was to be a loop. I nosed the plane over to pick up additional airspeed and then began to firmly pull the stick to my gut. As we nosed upward and reached the point where I thought we had passed the top of the loop, I began to relax the pressure on the stick. I expected that I would be coming around in the downward sweep of the maneuver. Without warning, the check pilot grabbed the stick, took over the controls, and brought the plane around into level flight. He indignantly roared over the speaking tube that I had damn near put the plane into an inverted spin. We landed the plane, and he marched to the ready room to post a very large down arrow beside my name.

The standard procedure on failing to pass a flight check was to take two more check rides, each with a different instructor. On each of those additional checks, you had to receive an up arrow. Another failure, whether on the first or the second of those flights meant sudden death: a wash out. The situation was perilous. My first recheck went rather well. The check pilot was aware of my predicament and did his best to put me at ease. On landing and returning to the ready room, I was relieved to see his up arrow chalked on the board.

The next day, for my second re-check, a look at the schedule board revealed that I had drawn another reported tough guy for my flight. We took off, climbed to a safe altitude, and I went through the loop, spins, rolls routine in what I thought was a reasonably good performance. The instructor then told me to return to the main base, and I was beginning to feel a bit relaxed. Suddenly and completely unexpectedly, the check pilot pulled back on the throttle and shouted, "Emergency." As I tried to collect my wits, I hurriedly looked over the terrain and picked my proposed emergency landing site. We were down to an altitude of 300 feet, headed for my field, when the check pilot took over the controls, applied full throttle and began a sharp climb. He shouted, "Didn't you see that tree? You were headed right for it!" In truth, I didn't see any tree, and further, I couldn't see any tree even as he took the controls. The end result was a down check. I figured the game was over; I was as good as on my way to Great Lakes.

Still Reason for Some Hope

AFTER THE BLOW of the second down check had fallen, Lt. Martin took me aside. He told me that all wasn't yet lost; there was still reason for some hope. He would arrange for me to be interviewed by a review board of senior officers. If in that review I convinced the board that some additional instruction and practice would enable me to meet the requirements, I'd be given a second chance. With considerable nervousness, I met with the review board (Lt. Martin wasn't permitted to sit in), and although I have no recollection of anything I may have said, I was given a reprieve. The review board decided that I was to take two dual flights for additional instruction with Lt. Martin and one solo practice flight to prepare for a recheck. I then would be required to pass two check flights. If I failed even one of those re-checks, I'd be eliminated from the program.

All this while I had been attending daily Mass, and for the ten days of agony on this particular part of my training, I'd have gone to two Masses a day if they were available. The knowledge that I was on the brink of disaster was adequate reason for my anxiety and misery. However, the support and encouragement given me by Lt. Martin was invaluable. I had the feeling that if I failed to survive, I'd be letting him down. He undoubtedly intervened and persuaded the review board to consider giving me the second chance. Many cadets were washed out, and their instructors felt no sense of obligation.

One Re-Check Still to Go

THE FIRST OF MY TWO re-checks went off satisfactorily, but with one re-check still to go, there was no reason to relax. When I arrived at the ready room at noon of the day for my scheduled check flight, I noted that I was entered for a 4:00 p.m. takeoff. The name of my check pilot hadn't been entered, which didn't help much toward relieving my anxiety. Rather than sitting around stewing, I was able to get in a solo practice flight and returned in plenty of time for the check ride. As I returned to the ready room, many of the cadets and instructors were leaving the area; they had finished their flights for the day. The flight schedule for the few of us still there had been posted. I saw that I had drawn a check pilot unknown to me. I was unable to find any cadets around who could tell me whether he was a toughie or a soft touch.

If the check pilot was aware of my make-or-break situation, he gave no

hint. But he did give the impression that he wasn't too happy about being assigned a flight at the end of the day. He would much rather be going on liberty. He also was of a mind to get our flight completed as soon as possible. I had mixed feelings about what lay in store for me as we climbed to our altitude. The check pilot told me the sequence of maneuvers he wanted me to follow and said, "Let's go. It's all yours."

As I began the entry into a slow roll, I realized that he hadn't released his grip on the controls. I held the stick very lightly and barely touched the rudder pedals; however, they were moving without any direction from me. As we came around on the slow roll to the left, we went directly into a right slow roll, again without any input from me. I gave no indication of anything unusual happening as the check pilot went from one maneuver to the next with no hesitation. He, in fact, flew the entire hop, including the return to the main field, landing and parking the plane. We walked back to the ready room and didn't exchange any conversation. Besides, I was too puzzled to dare ask any questions. When I saw him place an up arrow beside my name, my purgatory ended. I tried to figure out why the check pilot had acted as he had. The best guess I could make was that he was miffed (thankfully, not with me) about getting a flight at the end of the day when he had a hot date waiting. If so, I am grateful to her, whoever she was.

After the agony of the acrobatic check rides, the remainder of flight training at Glenview was comparatively easy. In the final segment of our training, we were introduced to formation flying. I readily grasped the techniques of joining up, flying in a V formation, or in echelon and three-plane takeoffs. As I was later to learn, formation flying in heavier and more powerful planes required considerably improved skills. Nonetheless, any performance was more than adequate for basic training, and the check ride for formation flying was passed with no difficulty. With that final check, I had completed the program at Glenview and was ready to continue the training at the next base.

To the 40 hours of flight time logged in Denton, I added 117 at Glenview. Although flying continued to be more work than pleasure, I was much more confident that I would go on to earn those Navy wings.

Unsophisticated Needs

SOCIAL ACTIVITY at Glenview was much improved over the limited choices available at Athens, Georgia. The close proximity to Chicago and train connections direct to the Loop enabled us to go downtown with very little

inconvenience. Because I was 20 years old and below the legal drinking age, I was turned away from just about every watering hole in town. It was no great deprivation inasmuch as I hadn't yet begun to drink. An evening in Chicago and dinner at a good restaurant was, of itself, a big treat. Cadet pay was \$75 per month and with overnight liberty every ten days, I always had ample money for my unsophisticated needs. If you didn't drink, smoke, gamble, or womanize, there was no reason to be broke.

As on most bases, there was a large contingent of civilian workers. The one date I had at Glenview was with a girl who worked as a sort of Traveler's Aid representative. We went to a movie and then to a local ice cream parlor. As far as I was concerned, it was a pleasant evening. When I returned to my quarters, my fellow cadets asked where I had gone with my date. The news that we had gone to a movie brought on a contemptuous chorus of "To a movie? How exciting." The expected ritualistic question that all he-men ask was then directed to me: "Where did you go after the movie? Did you get laid?" My answers resulted in hoots and howls of derision, which might as well have been broadcast to the whole base. "Ice cream parlor? A soda? Unbelievable!!" I thought I'd be drummed out of the Navy.

One other episode I recall involved a night baseball game between Navy teams from Great Lakes and Glenview. It was not unusual for service teams to have one or more professionals on their rosters. At Great Lakes, the professional was Johnny Mize. He was every bit as huge and as solid as he appeared when he resumed playing with the New York Giants after the war. In the first inning, the Glenview pitcher looked terrific. He was about 21 years old, and he obviously was pleased with himself as he struck out the side, including Johnny Mize. The Glenview rooters became quite excited, and a few even made some catcalls at Mize. At his next at bat, Mize demolished any myth that was aborning. He hit the first pitch far beyond the lighted area; it simply disappeared into the darkness of the night. The story is mentioned only because I've long imagined that the pitcher's war stories probably have included, with much embellishment, his strike out of Johnny Mize. And I've also imagined that he no longer has any recollection of that super tape measure home run.

Naval Air Training Center at Corpus Christi, Texas

AFTER COMPLETION of basic training, cadets were sent either to Pensacola, Florida, or to Corpus Christi, Texas, for the next stage, known as Advanced Training. Actually, the next stage involved two distinct phases: instrument flight and flight training in a more advanced training plane. I was ticketed for Corpus Christi and arrived in mid-September 1943, after the usual uncomfortable train ride from Chicago. Although I was back in Texas, it could hardly be considered a return to the scene of the crime. Corpus was more than 375 miles from Denton, and it was a totally different world. The base was immense. With an admiral in command and large numbers of officers, cadets, and enlisted men, the place was buzzing with activity. Planes seemed to be constantly taking off, circling the field, or landing, whether in daylight or after darkness had fallen.

The assignment at Corpus represented the last steps of our training as cadets. If we successfully finished the program at Corpus, we would be commissioned as ensigns in the Navy or as second lieutenants in the Marines. The individual was given the option of staying in the Navy or becoming a Marine. When commissioned, we also would have earned the designation as Naval Aviators along with the right to wear our Navy wings.

I had the impression that Corpus was more by-the-book, regulation-minded than Glenview or pre-flight school. Saluting, proper attire, more demanding inspections, and attention to the Navy way of doing things



Author in dress blues, Dallas, Texas

were the order of the day. In part, this may have been the Navy's last effort to shape us up as qualified officer candidates. And along those lines, we received a stepped-up level of inspirational and motivational guidance. Here again, we were reminded of our \$27,000 education and that we were the best-trained pilots in the world. Those of us who would go on to become carrier-qualified pilots would become part of a unique and select breed. We believed every word, and we also accepted the conventional wisdom that the ultimate goal and crowning success for a Naval Aviator was to be assigned to an aircraft carrier in a combat operation. The worst fate that could happen after graduation was to get stateside duty as an instructor. For those of us who achieved the goals, not one of us would trade or regret having had that experience.

Aircraft Recognition

FLIGHT ACTIVITY took precedence over other duties, but not to the neglect of ground school and physical exercise. In a sense, ground school was a repeat and reinforcement of much of what was taught at the previous bases. By



Aircraft Recognition Poster

sheer repetition of such things as aircraft recognition and taking Morse code, we developed almost automatic responses. At that time, I literally could copy, quite accurately, the dit-dahs of Morse code while my mind wandered afield.

One episode concerning aircraft recognition illustrates the fruits of drumming in all those classroom sessions. At the start of our training, we were shown large photos and slide projections of Navy, Army, British, German, and Japanese aircraft. Initially, the slides were shown for about 30 seconds. The plane would be presented in silhouette at various angles: head-on, side, above, below, etc. Any unusual feature, such as high tail, stubby nose, non-retractable landing gear, or other distinguishing characteristics, was called to our attention. Gradually, the exposure time during which we were expected to identify the airplane was shortened to a fraction of a second. The routine followed by the instructor was to alert the class with the comment, "Ready—Now!" At "Now," he would flash the slide on the screen, and we had to write our answer down identifying the plane: Hellcat, Zebra, P-51, ME 109, Lancaster, etc. The ability to make a rapid and correct identification, considering all the time spent in practice, was mastered rather easily.

In July 1944, while indulging ourselves at the swimming pool of the

officers club at San Diego, a plane buzzed across the area at much too low an altitude. It quickly disappeared beyond our line of sight. I was with Jack Crimmins, with whom I had gone through the previous three months of training. Jack wasn't top-of-the-class material, but he was quite good at aircraft identification. Sitting nearby were two non-aviator officers who were astounded at Jack's casual comment: "That damn Helldiver was just too low." One of the two asked Jack, "How could you tell what kind of plane that was? You hardly had a chance to see it." With an air of superiority befitting one of the best-trained pilots in the world, Jack explained that as an aviator he had to make a prompt and accurate identification of friend or foe if he expected to survive.

Aviation Cadets

ALTHOUGH WE WERE required to toe the mark in terms of discipline and protocol, there were lighter and enjoyable moments in our stay at Corpus. In a sense, aviation cadets were neither fish nor fowl. We weren't permitted to partake of officers' activities, and we weren't expected to get involved with the activities and facilities of the enlisted men. The middle ground wasn't at all unsatisfactory. We had our own mess. Our quarters as well as our meals had to be rated as from good to excellent.

The main station, as it was known, was at Corpus Christi. It could not and did not accommodate all the flight activity that was conducted. Two outlying fields, each of which was large enough to be considered a major facility, were used on a full-time basis. Fifty miles northwest of Corpus, there was a base at Beeville, and 40 miles southwest was the other base at Kingsville. I was to go to Kingsville as soon as I completed instrument flight training at the main base in Corpus.

Other than the few hours of night flying at Glenview, all of my flight time had been logged in clear weather. I soon was to learn that not only was there a need to be prepared to deal with unexpected adverse weather conditions but also that a very demanding and strict mental discipline was required for instrument flight. From late September to mid-December 1943, I received 50 hours of instrument flying.

Under the Hood

THE PLANE used for our training, the SNV, manufactured by Vultee Aircraft, was more modern and more powerful than the N3N. Because



Author in cockpit, Corpus Christie, Texas, September 22, 1943

the wings and fuselage were covered with what looked like a composition substance, the plane was also known as the Cardboard Corsair. It was a low wing, dual cockpit plane, with an enclosure hatch over the cockpits. The SNV was fully equipped with flight instruments and a radio. The rear cockpit, occupied by the student, was rigged with a cloth hood which, when pulled forward, cut off visual contact with the outside world.

Prior to my first under-the-hood flight, my instructor briefed me on what he wanted to cover when in flight. He also made what I thought was overkill in his dissertation on the need to “fly your instruments, don’t fly your senses.” After we had taken off and climbed to about 4,000 feet, the instructor told me to close the hood and to cage (de-activate) my artificial horizon. He said that he was going to put our plane through some abrupt changes in attitude and airspeed. He then would let me take the controls to bring the plane back to straight and level flight.

When I was satisfied that I had done as he asked, I was to shake the stick back and forth. I made what I thought were the appropriate adjustments

and gave the stick a shake. The instructor released the hood, and as I looked outside I saw we were in a steep descending turn to the left. I needed no further convincing that my senses were not to be trusted during instrument flight.

The narration of instrument flight training doesn’t make for stimulating reading, and it can only inadequately describe the intense and single-minded attention that it required. The uninitiated may very well wonder why you merely can’t read your instruments and simply make any required adjustments. However, it isn’t quite so simple. Start with making a routine 360-degree turn while under the hood. Suddenly the nose is going down, and airspeed is falling. The tendency is to over-control; just as suddenly, the airspeed falls too low as you raise the nose, now you’ve unintentionally come out of the turn. In short order, you find that you are chasing instruments and, your flight path is quite erratic. With practice, you acquire the competence and confidence while flying under the hood so that it becomes a much more manageable exercise.

In addition to various climbs, turns, and descents on instruments, we also were required to fly radio ranges. Radio range flying was especially troublesome for me because when you flew the beam to a center point, the constant radio hum would go silent. At the cone of silence, you were supposed to be able to go a specific distance, which would put you in the immediate area of an airfield. All too often, I seemed to miss the cone, and as I proceeded on course, the hum of the beam would again become audible. My instructor then would remind me, “How about it? We’ve passed the cone. When do you think you ought to start a let down?”

Although we all had to take refresher flights to maintain our instrument proficiency, most of us were happy to complete that part of our program. Undoubtedly, it was an essential part of our training, and it must have represented a respectable piece of our \$27,000 education. My last instrument check flight was completed in mid-December. I was packed and ready for the move to Kingsville. However, it wasn’t until after Christmas before I checked out of the main base at Corpus.

Two Episodes at Corpus

TWO EPISODES occurred while I was at Corpus which are still quite vivid. At that time, I neither drank nor smoked. The regular meeting place on base was the cadet recreational hall. Beer was available (and I don’t recall that anyone questioned your age), and many evenings were spent in bull sessions amidst pitchers of beer and clouds of cigarette smoke. I had just

begun experimenting with smoking and decided to try my wings at beer drinking. As I walked across the hall toward the group I was with, one of my friends rather discreetly said, "Paul, you shouldn't smoke. You look like a jerk with a cigarette in your mouth." His well-meaning, brotherly advice was taken to heart. The cigarette was snuffed out, and the rest of the pack was discarded. Later that same evening, after I had finished a second glass of beer and after sitting with the same group of guys, I felt a belch working its way up. Quite uncontrolled, I didn't belch but regurgitated the beer over my shirt and pants. Needless to say, I was a sloppy mess as well as mortified as I hastily ran for the shower. My first pursuit of the vices of drink and tobacco resulted in swearing them off forever. Forever lasted for six months.

The other episode involved our periodic room inspections. We were housed in a large building partitioned off into two-man rooms. About every two weeks, our rooms were inspected for neatness and cleanliness by two officers. The officers, usually a lieutenant (j.g.) and an ensign who were not aviators, gave us the white-glove-over-the-surface treatment. They took delight in finding anything at all amiss so that we could be socked with demerits and extra duty. To a degree, the non-aviator officers and cadets weren't on especially friendly terms. They looked upon us as pampered hot shots, and we purposely did nothing to disabuse them. During inspections, we stood at attention, eyes front, beside our beds. We spoke only when asked a question or to respond to a comment.

When I first arrived in the room, I had to wade through a pile of junk left by the previous tenant. Included in the pile was a real find: a framed photo of perhaps the homeliest, ugliest girl I'd ever seen. It would have been flattering to describe her as a dog. I took the photo from the frame, inscribed it with, "To Paul dearest, my love forever." I then put the photo back in the frame and hid it, awaiting the proper time for a display.

After I had gone through two inspections with those nitpickers at Corpus, I decided to unveil my true love at the next inspection. I placed the photo on my bureau and stood smartly at attention as the inspection party entered our room. They worked their way around to my bed and bureau. From the corner of my eye, I noticed the ensign did a hard double take. With a nod of his head, he made sure that the j.g. with him saw the photo. My roommate and I suppressed our smirks as they quickly left our room. In only a short time we could hear both of them roaring with laughter. "Did you see the picture of that beastie? What a dog! Somebody better check that cadet's eyesight." To the unknown successor who occupied the

room after I left, I bequeathed the photo with a request that it always be given tender, loving care.

NAS Kingsville

The town of Kingsville, from what we could see, didn't have much to recommend it. If the intent was to focus cadet minds on flying, the Navy had no fears. Kingsville offered no distractions. On my one social visit to town, I discovered there was a café that served good food, big steaks, and if you were a drinker, booze and beer were not in short supply.

Kingsville, I was told, was the headquarters town of the famous King Ranch that encompassed a huge territory. I used to marvel at mile after mile of three-strand barbed wire fence. A fortune was invested in wire alone. NAS Kingsville was a few miles from town, surrounded by endless open range and dotted with oil wells. At night those wells looked like a field of candles with their ignited gas burning off. To the east was the Gulf of Mexico, over which our aerial gunnery flights and navigation flights were conducted.

For the first time in our training, we were organized in flights of four cadets with an instructor-flight leader. Our instructor, Lieutenant (j.g.) Lonnevik, was a serious, no-nonsense type. By way of background, in civilian life he was a Montana cowboy. Perhaps because we were soon to complete our training, he demanded top-notch performance. The members of my flight were Bobby Porter, from upstate New York; Howard Soester, from Nebraska; and Bobby Powell, from Philadelphia. I roomed with Howard and Bobby Powell.

The SNJ

The last leg of our training involved the use of another training plane, the SNJ, manufactured by North American Aviation. Our syllabus at Kingsville called for familiarization, solo flight, acrobatics, formation flying and tactics, simulated dogfight combat, navigation, aerial gunnery, and glide-bombing. The ever-present threat of washing out, though diminished, persisted through all the time spent in Kingsville. Between January 4 and March 31, 1944, I logged 100 hours of flight time. Ordinarily, that wasn't very much, however, we were plagued by repeated three- and four-day stretches of impossible flying weather.

The SNJ was widely used as a training plane by the Navy and Army, but also by the Canadians, the British, and our other Allies. In addition



SNJ Aircraft

to dual cockpits with full instrumentation, the SNJ came as close to an operational, fleet-type plane as was possible for a trainer. The wheels retracted by hydraulic power, a machine gun was mounted on the cowlings to fire through the propeller space (timed not to hit the prop), and the plane could be fitted with practice bombs.

In preparation for our first SNJ flight, we were lectured on the dos, don'ts, and other cautions. We had to thoroughly review the SNJ Pilot's Handbook and then spend several hours in the cockpit to become familiar with the location of all instruments and controls. This was followed by a blindfold check whereby the instructor, standing outside the cockpit, would call out an instrument. The goal was to reach out and touch it while blindfolded and without hesitation. By itself, this was a valuable exercise, repeated anytime thereafter before taking up a new aircraft. When in a tight spot, you don't have to search or grope for a control or switch, you can't afford a wrong guess.

Powell, Porter, Soester, and I were scheduled for a first SNJ flight on the same day. I read the takeoff checklist aloud over the intercom to my instructor and awaited clearance for takeoff from the tower. When we were cleared, the instructor insisted he would handle the controls as we climbed to 5,000 feet. At that altitude, he demonstrated a few turns, climbs, and stalls which he asked me to duplicate. Next, we shot several touch-and-go landings with the controls turned over to me. The instructor obviously was satisfied; when we returned to the field, he gave me the go-ahead to take

the SNJ for a solo flight. At the end of that first day, each of us in our flight had successfully soloed.

Our next task was to complete a series of acrobatic flights. By way of preparation, each of us was scheduled for a dual flight with Lt. (j.g.) Lonnevik. I, along with the others, got a good workout, and although I handled the flying reasonably well, my airsickness returned to haunt me. Lonnevik was no soft touch as he felt obliged to report the incident. I had to see a senior officer on the base who told me I'd better cope with the problem, or else. On my next dual flight, with a different instructor, we got right to the standard routine, climbed to 8,000 feet and started with a loop, on coming around do a left slow roll, followed with a right slow roll. After recovering any lost altitude, do a two-turn spin to the left, then a spin to the right. I was given to understand back at E base that they weren't sticklers for precision, but just the opposite here. A two-turn spin was just that, not one-and-a-half or two-and-a-half. If you started heading due north, you were expected to end up on a due north heading.

A Suitable Introduction to G Affects

MY EARLIER FLIGHT EXPERIENCE didn't prepare me for the sensation of a four- to five-G pull on my body. The SNJ was considerably more powerful than the planes flown previously; it was heavier and it was faster. My acrobatic sessions in the SNJ provided a suitable introduction to G effects. It was explained to us that we all are in a one-G situation as we go about our daily activities. Gravity imposes a force on us equal to our own weight. When we ride a rapidly descending elevator, we get a sensation of heaviness in our feet as the elevator comes to a stop. We experience perhaps a one-and-a-half-G effect due to the changing direction and the speed of an elevator that stops somewhat abruptly.

Our acrobatic maneuvers included steep accelerating dives, such as when the plane came through on the downward sweep at the completion of a loop with a firm and steady pullout. Similar pullouts, or high speed turns, were later to become routine as we practiced aerial gunnery and glide-bombing. That first experience and reaction to a sharp pullout was bewildering. It was one of those things you couldn't adequately prepare for or anticipate. Consider a five-G pullout. If you weigh 160 pounds, a five-G pullout has the effect of 800 pounds of pressure starting at your skull and following down to the soles of your shoes. The pressure literally forces the blood from your brain: you can't see as your vision goes from gray to

black, but you are fully conscious. The flesh on your skull and face seems to be drawn downward, heading for your feet. Your arms and your feet can hardly move. But you continue to apply pressure on the stick, as you are acutely aware that to let up means that you may get splashed across the landscape. As you recover from the dive, the pressure eases on your body, and your vision clears. The whole process takes but a few seconds.

After a few of those episodes, I learned to anticipate and to accommodate G effects with no serious discomfort. During World War II, pilots didn't have pressurized suits, such as became standard equipment only a short time later.

A Juicy Lemon

AFTER THREE SOLO FLIGHTS that were intended to provide sufficient acrobatic practice, we were scheduled for a check ride. The big difference was that the check pilot didn't fly with the student. Rather, he stationed himself at a location on the ground where he observed the cadet as he went through the routine over the field. The check pilot was in radio contact with the cadet and could readily communicate with him. Before taking my check ride, I would much preferred to have a supply of Mother Sills' Pills. No pills were available, so I decided to invent my own remedy. I obtained a juicy lemon from the commissary with the thought that, when I began my maneuvers, I'd take a bite into the lemon and keep it in my mouth. It was my thought that the lemon would cause me to pucker up. I wouldn't have time to be sick.

On reflection, I should have patented the idea; it worked wonders. My maneuvers went beautifully, right on the nose. The check pilot radioed me as I finished the last spin that I had done a 4.0 job. The lemon was flipped over the side, and I was almost smugly self-satisfied. I do not recall ever having any further motion sickness problems, whether in the air or at sea aboard a carrier.

Next in the training schedule was tactical training, which included two- or three-plane formation takeoffs, climbs, break ups and re-join ups of formations, and other routines that were the forerunner of combat training with fairly large numbers of planes acting in unison. Up to this point, I found flying to be demanding work, more a task than a pleasure. If anything, the incentive to succeed was more negatively than positively motivated. I didn't want to experience the devastation of failure, and I very much wanted to prove to myself that I was as good as all the other guys. The SNJ itself, as well as being part of a team of pretty decent guys, changed my outlook.

Pretty Hot Stuff

THE SWITCH IN OUTLOOK was remarkable in that it was quite sudden. I found each flight enjoyable and, at times, exciting. When taking off in a three-plane formation, we would try to one-up each other by seeing which of us could get his wheels retracted first. The element of risk arose if the plane didn't have sufficient airspeed. Then, you would settle back on the runway. And if your wheels had been raised, you could count on badly damaging the plane. The four of us in our flight were very supportive of each other, but we made no effort to disguise a healthy competition to outdo each other, whether on gunnery hits, bombing scores, or any other measurable result. The self-assurance and confidence in my abilities wasn't unique. The Navy's none-too-subtle psyching-up program had sunk in.

Possibly, the Navy recognized that cadets at this stage of their training began to believe they were pretty hot stuff. The warnings and admonitions about flight were given increased prominence. For instance, the bulletin boards contained slogans such as:

"There are old pilots and bold pilots. But there are no old, bold pilots."

"Flying is not inherently dangerous. But, like the sea, it is unrelentingly unforgiving of carelessness."

The slogans probably had been around for a long time, but I surely never noticed them before.

Wheels-up landings, surprisingly, didn't call for an immediate wash out. Although I never came close to landing wheels-up, it was not an uncommon occurrence. In just about 100% of cases, the cause was pilot error: the pilot forgot to lower the wheels for the landing. To be said for a wheels-up landing, the initial contact with the runway looks smooth as silk. With the plane in a slight nose-up position, the tail touches first, and then a shower of sparks and concrete as the belly of the plane and the prop dig in. At Kingsville, the penalty for a wheels-up landing was to wear a sandwich board sign which told everyone how dumb the culprit was, and he had to roll a tire wherever he went.

A much more serious infraction was to get caught flat-hatting, also known as hedge-hopping. The SNJ was the fastest plane we had flown; it cruised at about 125 knots. To get the sensation of speed in flight, you flew at as low an altitude as you could to safely clear any obstruction. Flat-hatting was dangerous, and it frequently outraged the civilian population in the area. At one time or another, everyone indulged in the exhilaration of flat-hatting. If we happened to be on a flight and an instructor wasn't with us, those were the times we were most apt to go astray. In our perversity, we got pleasure from



“A Redhot Outfit” (Barney Cunningham, Bobby Porter, Bobby Powell, author, Howard Soester, Corpus Christie, Texas, February 1944)

chasing cattle over the King Ranch. The guys who were caught usually were done in when someone on the ground phoned in a complaint and reported the large number painted on the wings of the plane.

Our days at Kingsville were marked with so much bad weather that we found our schedule stretching well beyond our expected completion date. With so many flights cancelled, we were sent back to ground school for refresher courses, which made for a second turn at material previously covered. Just to remind us that we still had to toe the line, there was a momentary period of tough discipline. On two consecutive days, I picked up 30 demerits and ten hours of marching duty. I didn't have my hat on as I walked from the hangar to the mess hall, and I put on a sweatshirt over my regular shirt on a chilly morning. On both counts, I was considered to be out of uniform. The marching duty called for pacing back and forth over a fifty-foot walk, in a smartly military manner, with a shouldered rifle. Until all hours were marched off, you were not permitted to go on liberty.

Downtown Corpus Christi

AS CADETS, we were given liberty every eight days. From the end of activity on the first day, we were allowed to be away overnight until 5:00 p.m. the

next day. Most cadets, including those in my flight, would catch a bus to downtown Corpus Christi, stay overnight at the main base at Corpus, then head back to Kingsville at the close of the day.

Our liberty experience, while limited, ranged from the commonplace to somewhat interesting. Of note was one liberty in which Bobby Powell and I decided to try to discover the facts of living it up through drinking. We both were a few weeks from reaching age 21, and we knew that we were closed out of the public drinking places. The customary approach for under-agers was to hunt up a porter in the main hotel in Corpus. He reportedly could get you a bottle at a price. Sure enough, the porter we contacted sold us a pint of Schenley's Black Label, better known as Black Death, for \$15.

Bobby and I took discreet swigs as we walked down the main street. Before long we got the giggles and the staggers. The world was just rosy, and it was all ours. We actually ended up sitting on a curb in our dress blues. I don't recall that anyone took particular note of us as we wobbled back to the main base and fell over into the first available empty bunks. The next morning we awoke with only a slight buzz and headed back to Kingsville. Bobby and I were determined to have another go at a bottle on our next liberty. It was to no avail. The spontaneity and the novelty just weren't there. Furthermore, when I tasted the booze, it once again was awful, and I was sort of pleased to find that I hadn't become addicted.

On other liberties, we rented a car and toured civilian neighborhoods. I don't recall anything that made a lasting impression. We also hitchhiked to Matamoros, just over the border, in Mexico. The big deal in going to Matamoros was the opportunity to buy good-quality shoes, over-the-ankle high-tops, that were considered a must purchase as flyer's boots after becoming commissioned. For the U.S. equivalent of \$4, I bought a pair of boots that lived up to their billing.

For several of our liberties, Howard let it be known that he was dating a teacher. He was invited to spend several of his liberties with the teacher and her family. On these occasions, we didn't see Howard until it was time to check in on return from liberty. On the day we were packing to leave Corpus, Howard volunteered that the teacher lived alone. He had been shacking up with her on all those liberties. The age of innocence received a cruel blow. Not only did we never suspect that Howard was sleeping with his friend but we also felt that he now was headed dangerously down the road to ruin.

Frequently, the activities on the main base were more appealing than the trip into town. We had the usual USO shows with entertainers, we were shown the newest movies, and some of the people assigned at Corpus were

celebrities of sorts in civilian life. Although he didn't do any entertaining, Tyrone Power was at Corpus going through flight training. He did it the hard way: he first was commissioned, then began flight training. We cadets saw him infrequently because the admiral constantly requested his presence at dinners and public functions.

Realities and Perils

THROUGH FEBRUARY and March 1944, we chipped away at the number of required flights, squeezing them in whenever we got a break in the weather. It was at Corpus that we got first-hand exposure to some of the realities and perils. The weather reports seemed to be unduly pessimistic and, in fact, inaccurate on several days. If we awoke to a gray sky, thick with clouds and a forecast of continued poor weather, we would be sent back to our ground school classes or off on some make-work chore. On a few of those early dismissals, the weather cleared and stayed clear for almost six hours. When flight operations tried to round us up and call us back to the hangars, it was found that many of the guys had scattered and couldn't be contacted. As a remedy to cope with the weather forecasts, a pilot-instructor was sent up if there was even a slim chance of clearing. If the pilot reported probable clearing, we were held at the ready room. We were turned loose only if the weather pilot gave a negative report.

One morning the weather pilot went up at about 7:30 a.m. Usually, they returned in an hour. When he didn't return in over two hours, everyone knew he had run into trouble. It wasn't until three days later that his plane was located, half submerged, practically on the edge of the Gulf Coast. The pilot hadn't gotten out before the crash. He had to bail out and he fell through his chute harness. The inquiry board said that he hadn't fastened the clasps that went around each leg. After that incident, those of us who had been careless about the fit of our parachute straps didn't need any further instructions. The other accident that I recall was something of a freak. A cadet, C.P. Meyers, was on a gunnery run and flew too close to the sleeve tow line. The line was severed, but it wrapped around the tail surface of his plane. C.P. found his controls jammed and forced his plane into a steep downward dive. By the time he had the sense to realize, his only chance was to bail out, the plane was heading down at excessive speed. He jumped, cleared the plane, and with his arms across his chest, he pulled the ripcord. The chute popped so swiftly that the riser straps, which went overhead, snapped upward with such force that both of C.P.'s arms were

broken. I visited him in the sick bay and, though he was in casts and full of bruises, he considered himself lucky to have gotten off so easily.

As we progressed through aerial gunnery—shooting at a towed target sleeve—and strafing, glide-bombing, over-water navigation, and simulated dogfights, I see how Lt. Martin's advice made such good sense. He had told me that with further training I soon would be piloting a plane on a somewhat semi-automatic or intuitive basis. Thus, whether in a routine landing approach or in a gunnery run, you respond to what the situation requires. And your response, just as in driving a car, is made without the mental process of weighing alternatives or questioning whether you ought, or ought not, to steepen a turn, etc. You just do what's called for.

I doubt whether any of my teammates was more surprised or more pleased than I was with the results of our simulated dogfights. For these exercises, we were paired one-on-one with a flight instructor. The object was to start from a distance of about a mile apart, in a head-on approach. The winner was determined to be the pilot who maneuvered himself to a position directly behind the other plane, within firing range, and who remained camped on the other plane's tail—through whatever maneuvering the other pilot may attempt—for about ten seconds or longer. It was assumed that if you had a plane in your sights for up to ten seconds on a no-deflection shot, you should have done him in.

In those dogfights, the instructor was expected to, and did, whip the cadet. Due to the instructor's considerably greater experience in flight time, in familiarity with the SNJ, and familiarity with the strategy and tactics of aerial combat exercises, he had all the advantages. To compensate for the cadet's handicap, the instructor began the exercise at an altitude of 1,000 feet below the cadet. Ordinarily, in a match of equals, the plane with the edge in altitude had a much better chance of winning.

My match-up went much better than I had hoped. The instructor had polished off Powell and Soester in jig time, and he obviously expected to do the same with me. I made up my mind that I would go on the attack rather than, as he expected, going into evasive, defensive action. As it turned out, he did beat me, but not before he found I was chasing him for several minutes. And when he worked his way toward getting on my tail, I turned, dove, climbed, and gave him a good run for his money. Despite anything I did, once he got himself in position behind me, I couldn't shake him. He followed me through about 30 seconds of turns and evasive action, then radioed me that the game was up. We were evaluated by the instructor in terms of our aggressiveness and the degree of difficulty we presented before he had us in

his sights for a sufficient time. On both counts the instructor gave me high marks. In addition to being pleased with myself about the dogfight, I also took comfort in the knowledge that throughout all the many wild turns, climbs, pullouts, etc., I didn't have even a hint of airsickness.

Through most of February and into March 1944, the weather was constantly running into binges of three to four days of rain and overcast, and a day of clear skies. We nibbled away at the syllabus of six flights of gunnery, six flights of bombing, along with over-water navigation. Considering that we had to meet certain objective scores, i.e., a specified number of hits on target, the drawn-out interval between flights wasn't much help in acquiring and maintaining proficiency. Toward the end of March, we had a break in the weather and were able to cram in seven flights in two days to complete our training. Including the time at Denton, after 345 hours of flight time, I had done it!! All that remained was to return to the main base at Corpus Christi for the swearing in ceremony and commissioning as an ensign in the U.S. Navy.

Preference for Torpedo Bombers

PRIOR TO COMPLETION of training, we had been asked to state our preference for the kind of operational aircraft we wanted to fly. Choices included fighters, dive-bombers, torpedo bombers, multi-engine land or sea planes. Powell, Porter, and Soester opted for fighters. They were taken aback when I told them I wanted torpedo bombers. Fighter pilots were the hot shots in all the services, whereas torpedo pilots were considered candidates for a suicide squad.

Torpedo pilots had acquired a bloody fame at the Battle of Midway. An entire squadron, Torpedo Eight, had been shot down, and only one pilot survived. He managed to get into his life raft and was rescued after the battle. I couldn't explain my preference for torpedo bombers; it certainly wasn't due to any death wish. Perhaps there was still a residue of concern about coping with the acrobatic gyrations of fighter tactics; I don't think that was a factor. Perhaps it was some sort of tough guy heroics, but that would have been out of character. I had seen pictures of the TBF Grumman Avenger, and I had good reports of it. Simply stated, I very much wanted to fly it.

We checked in at the main base and prepared not only for our commissioning ceremony but also for our departure to the next base. Our orders would be given to us immediately after the ceremony. A month or two before graduation, we and the other prospective graduates had gone



Napkin from The Glass Hat Cocktail Lounge, Shreveport, Louisiana, 1944

into town to order our officer's uniforms. Those uniforms were picked up by us, along with the wings, bars, and other hardware for new ensigns. As qualified Naval Aviators, we now could wear aviation greens in addition to the traditional whites, blues, and khakis. We also could wear brown shoes, which went along with the youthful smugness, letting the world know we were "brown shoe Navy" and not like those mere mortal, "black shoe Navy" guys, who weren't aviators.

Newly Commissioned Officers

APRIL 5, 1944, the long awaited day, was bathed in sunlight, which reflected the happy mood of all. The number of newly commissioned officers escapes me, although it seemed to be a very large group. Quite a few of our

classmates had brides-to-be awaiting the completion of the ceremonies. They quickly raced to the chapel and a mini-production line of weddings was performed by the chaplains.

Of note was the customary sequence of doing things alphabetically. With our commissioning, we were given new officer's identification numbers. The numbers were assigned alphabetically. Just two places ahead of me was a fellow named Harry Wood. I had seen him before, but we really didn't know each other. Harry's service number was 364058; mine was 364060. In the months ahead, Harry would remind me many times that he outranked me inasmuch as he had a lower service number than I.

Our orders for future training were cause for satisfaction in that Powell, Porter, and Soester were to get their operational training in fighters, and I was assigned to torpedo bombers. In classic Navy fashion, we were assigned to four different bases in Florida. Again, the familiar situation arose whereby roommates and friends were sent their separate ways. We realized it was unlikely that we would see much of each other after we arrived at our next duty station. As it turned out, Howard Soester was the only one I saw after we parted, and after an interval of 11 years. We were practically strangers.

Our orders were drawn so that we had five days between departure from Corpus and check-in time at the next base. It wasn't enough time for a visit home so we decided to make a two-day stop at the French Quarter in New Orleans. Four spanking new ensigns hardly made a dent on Bourbon Street, but as a last fling for us as a group, it was two full days and nights of what we thought was high living. We weren't any of us much on drinking. However, we nursed the few drinks we had until they almost evaporated. As I remember, I didn't know one drink from another, and I played it safe with a tall Tom Collins. I suspect the drink contained more Collins, because it had no effect on me. In truth, the treat for us was to go to some of the better—and expensive—restaurants. After all, we now were officers and deserved kinder treatment. Or so we told ourselves. The party was over when we awoke on the third day, boarded the train and each went our separate ways.

Naval Air Station [NAS] Miami Opa Locka, Florida

NAS MIAMI, the base to which I was assigned, was located in Opa Locka, about 25 miles north of Miami. I stepped from the train on April 12, 1944, and was greeted by the roar overhead of at least ten TBMs as they took off, one after the other. This was my first eye-on view of the plane, and it looked enormous. A Navy bus pulled into the train station parking area; it already was well packed with passengers. I squeezed aboard, and as I looked around, there wasn't a single recognizable face. As the bus neared the base, I had the feeling, "This is it. This is the real Navy." Several flights were returning to the field in what gave the appearance of a constant flow of planes. As each group came over the field, they gracefully broke formation and came into the landing approach. I was impressed with the precision of the pilots. Whether on land or aboard ship, I never tired of watching landings.

For the first few days I was free to come and go as I wanted. When I reported to the base, I was told that additional new ensigns were to arrive. We would form a flight at that time and thereafter train together. Checking in at a new base as an officer proved to be a considerable improvement over cadet days. Bachelor Officers' Quarters (BOQ) were spacious: two to a room. We had a nicely furnished lounge, civilized plumbing, and the area was nicely maintained. As an officer, I no longer had to make the bed or do

any cleaning. But my cadet training, plus habits acquired at home, didn't permit any toleration of sloppiness.

Officers were required to pay for the lodging and meals. The amounts charged were modest and unquestionably were far less than the cost of the benefits received. As a new ensign, I was especially appreciative of the free access to the Officers (O) Club and its facilities.

The pay for an ensign, if I remember correctly, was \$150 per month, plus \$75 flight pay. It was a substantial amount over the \$75 per month I received as a cadet. In April 1944, pay of \$225 per month was especially good for a 21 year old. Just two years earlier I had been reasonably satisfied to earn \$25 a week. Considering we were only a few years out of the Depression, I felt rather well off. For the remainder of my Navy days I never wanted for money; there was nothing I wanted that I couldn't afford. Admittedly, my wants were simple, and the Depression may very well have instilled a sense of frugality in money matters. Nonetheless, I did not consciously pass up any pleasurable activities.

Ten New Ensigns

THREE DAYS AFTER checking in at NAS Miami, our flight was organized. Ten new ensigns with a full lieutenant, a D. L. Cooper, our instructor-leader, met and introduced ourselves to each other. Lt. Cooper was practically an old-timer at age 30, inasmuch as the rest of us were clustered around age 21. He was an Annapolis graduate, which properly impressed us, and he proved to be a really fine person.

Sid O'Neil, from St. Louis, was of momentary fame in that he once had been engaged to Branch Rickey's daughter. Unknown to Sid, I had signed him up for some AA literature, which was mailed to him. Sid wasn't a drinker, and he not only was annoyed to receive the AA pamphlets but he was doubly annoyed that if he got no other mail, there was always a new AA tract awaiting him.

Dick Phipps was from upstate New York. He had completed his freshman year at Syracuse University, and he worked at presenting himself as an intellectual snob. Dick frequently would bemoan: "I'm tired of dating these dumb women. I want to date women on my intellectual level." We good-naturedly needled Dick as he continued to date those "dumb dames." Once you got past his line of bull, Dick was good company.

John Papadakis was from Richmond, California. He was a serious fellow and my roommate in Miami. John Piersol hardly rings a bell with me after all these years. He was something of a wise guy, but inoffensive. Andy



Jack Crimmins and author

Pomerico was another of our flight that I find a blank in my memory. As I recall, Andy was a big, good-natured guy, someone you could always count on. Chief Nick Redeye was an honest-to-goodness chief of the Senecas. Frank Dolinich came from Carteret, New Jersey. He was a serious, steady-Eddie type who gave the impression of being older than his years. Jack Crimmins from Brooklyn and Harry Wood from Essex, Massachusetts, were the other two members of the flight. As we became better acquainted over the succeeding months, the three of us became as close as brothers. *16*

The ten of us were a flight of strangers. Harry and I acknowledged that we had seen each other while at Corpus, but none of us otherwise had ever seen the others. In very short order we not only became acquainted, we worked together quite easily, and we also became pretty good social companions.

Piloting an Operational Aircraft

THE TRANSITION from piloting a training plane such as the SNJ to piloting an operational aircraft such as the TBF/TBM was substantial. The previous planes I had flown were equipped with dual controls and dual cockpits. The first flights in those planes were made under the direct guidance and control of the instructor. From the very first flight in a TBF, the pilot was on his own. There was nobody along to hold his hand; there was no second cockpit or second system of controls. Therefore, before

taking that first flight, we were given lectures and cockpit checkouts for a period of five days.

To clarify any possible confusion about the TBF or TBM designation, a few comments may be helpful. The Avenger was designed and manufactured by Grumman Aircraft. The designation TB defines the plane as a torpedo bomber, the F in TBF is the Navy's identification for Grumman. As demands for more and newer planes grew, General Motors was licensed to build the Avenger. Those Avengers built by General Motors were designated TBMs; the M referred to General Motors. Much the same happened with the Grumman Wildcat, the F4F. It, too, was built by General Motors, and those planes were designated as FM's. By early 1944, if not sooner, all Avengers in the fleet were TBMs. Although modifications and improvements were made in TBMs, their handling characteristics were essentially the same. Practically all my flying, especially after leaving Miami, was done in TBMs.

The Good Life

DURING OUR ORIENTATION PERIOD, with no flights scheduled, and thus not under any constraints of being bright-eyed and ready to win the war, we were quite willing to explore Miami. Jack Crimmins suggested that he and I grab a bus and take in the nightlife. We weren't yet too well acquainted. But I got the impression that this guy from Brooklyn was pretty sophisticated. Jack was a black Irishman, good-looking (in truth, he resembled Clark Gable) about five feet nine, and as I was soon to learn, he was indeed sophisticated, especially compared to me. Jack was absolutely delightful company, a charmer of women, an excellent storyteller, a mimic, and an outrageously likeable show-off.

Jack wasted no time in introducing me to the good life on that first night in town. He explained that his family owned a bar and restaurant in New York City, and as a result of the education acquired in the business, he could direct me to the right choices.

One of his entertaining stories went back to Prohibition days. If he was to be believed, his father and brother bottled the illicit booze, and he proudly glued Old Crow labels to the bottles.

On discovering that I wasn't a drinker, Jack volunteered to assist in my development. He suggested I try a concoction that included Myer's Rum. It went down nicely, and so did several others. He then offered me a cigarette, and because nobody was so unkind as to tell me I looked like a jerk, I helped myself to Jack's cigarettes for the rest of the evening. I



Wings of TBF Avenger aircraft

apparently absorbed Jack's coaching in a satisfactory fashion, as I thought I had capably demonstrated that I truly was officer material.

Several nights later, a few of us decided to eat at a seafood place near the base. I hadn't ever eaten shrimp, and it was a big item on the menu. My Mother hadn't issued a ban on shrimp, but neither had she endorsed them. With some coaxing from the guys and with a bit of apprehension, I decided to give it a try. To my surprise it was a new and very agreeable taste sensation. Shrimp were terrific. The incident is mentioned to show that my newly acquired ways-of-the-world know-how were still only a veneer. But I was learning.

The Wings of the Avenger

THE BIG DAY for our first flight in the TBF was scheduled after a week of classroom lectures and repeated cockpit checkouts. The plane was almost overwhelming in size. It was the largest carrier-based aircraft in the fleet, and it was the largest single-engine plane in service. With a wingspan of 54 feet, a length of 40 feet, and 39 feet high in a three-point position, it made for an impressive aircraft. The plane accommodated a pilot, a rear turret gunner, and a radioman in the rear belly. In terms of armament, the TBF had two .50 caliber machine guns in the wings, a .50 caliber in the turret, and a .30 caliber in the radioman's compartment. The Avenger could carry

a 2,000-pound aerial torpedo or an equivalent weight in bombs, plus eight rockets mounted on the wings.

The wings of the Avenger folded for ease of parking aboard ship to conserve space. Cruising speed was about 150 to 165 knots. (A knot, or nautical mile per hour, equals 1.15 statute miles per hour. Thus, 150 knots equals 172.5 miles per hour.) In a glide-bombing run, we frequently exceeded 350 knots. Of particular interest to me was the discovery that the TBM was equipped with a Wright engine, just like those I helped to make less than two years ago. Another feature of the plane was its gun-sight. On the nose of the plane, there was an inexpensive simple ring and post which was suitable inasmuch as torpedo pilots weren't expected to become too involved in head-to-head aerial combat. But in a box on the floor of the cockpit, we had a fancy sight which could be illuminated electrically. The box was a cube of about ten inches; it had to be opened after reaching to the floor, then fitted to a mounting over the pilot's instrument panel. When finally connected, the various lenses lit up and a nice looking sight was prettily aglow. The only problem was that we never used it. It was clumsy to remove from the box, awkward and time consuming to install, and it gave no promise of improved accuracy. I never knew anyone who used it, other than to experiment a few times while we were being trained. Cynics that some of us were, we wondered who or why anyone could get the contract to supply what had to be expensive, but unnecessary, equipment

Each of our first TBF flights was for two hours, during which we were to familiarize ourselves with the plane's handling characteristics. Compared with the SNJ, the TBF required considerably more positive control; it was a very different experience from flying the SNJ. If for no other reason, the power of the TBF engine was sufficient to convince you that you weren't flying a trainer. In that first flight, I had the feeling that I was in a wrestling match with the stick. After only a few more flights, the required pressure and movements of the controls became routine.

On the following day, we were scheduled to practice touch-and-go landings at an auxiliary field. All ten of us were to take off from our home base and then report to Lt. Cooper, who would park his plane at our practice field where he could observe from the ground and critique our landings. We realized that the one flight of the day before had hardly made expert TBF pilots of us. We needed to accumulate much more flight time before we could feel comfortable with the plane.

Going back to the first days of flight instruction at Denton and every place I had been since, it was emphasized that the pilot was to make a

personal external check of his plane before taking off. Obviously, it was your neck potentially at stake, and you wanted to make a good pre-flight inspection which went beyond kicking the tires. Among other things, a visual inspection might show a pool of fluid under the plane indicating a possible leak, external control locks not removed, cowling not secure, gasoline cap missing, etc. Another piece of information that had a bearing on my second flight was the admonition about allowing the engine to idle for any prolonged length of time while awaiting takeoff clearance. We were told that under such condition, there is a tendency for carbon deposits to build up, making it difficult for the spark plugs to operate efficiently.

My Good Luck Allotment

AS I PREPARED for my first flight, I mentally reviewed what I had done the day before, ran through the advice given us about touch-and-go landings, and the procedures to be followed at the auxiliary field. We went to the flight line and climbed into our planes. Climbed is appropriately descriptive. You had to reach overhead to a handhold, pull yourself upward to a foothold, and then step to the wing stub next to the fuselage. From there, you came up to and stepped into the cockpit. After buckling up the seatbelt and shoulder harness, I taxied out to the runway. We were delayed a short time to wait for incoming planes to land and clear the way. Before taking the runway, I went through the takeoff checklist and then was on my way.

My plane was airborne not more than 25 feet above the runway when my engine began to misfire badly. As I worked the throttle back and forth, the engine alternated between cutting out and firing cleanly. Meanwhile, I was rapidly running out of runway, and I wasn't gaining any altitude. The choice for me was either to cut my engine and hope I could bring the plane down safely before using all the runway, or continue my efforts to takeoff and hope to clear the area. If I continued the takeoff and lost power completely, I'd end up in the marshes. If I didn't lose power and if got enough altitude, the engine temperature would burn off the carbon deposits so that I could continue on a normal flight. (I correctly concluded that I hadn't properly revved up and cleared the engine before takeoff.) All these thoughts ran through my head in what must have been all of three seconds. I opted to continue the takeoff and successfully coaxed the plane into the air. After I climbed to a comfortable altitude, I resumed breathing and acknowledged to myself that my survival of that episode was attributable to 100% sheer luck.

I continued on my flight and just about finished my prayerful thanks when I had to face up to my second boner of the day. Although I couldn't buy my own excuse that the excitement and preparation for the flight was the cause, I became painfully aware that my pre-flight inspection of the plane had been superficial. As I approached the touch-and-go field, I noted that my airspeed indicator and several other instruments weren't working. The airspeed indicator was especially important since I had so little feel for the TBF. When making landings in a strange aircraft, it's advisable to keep a watch on the airspeed to avoid a stall.

As I circled the auxiliary field, I looked up at the pitot tube, which ordinarily looks like a spear on the leading edge of the port wing. The pitot tube is an air pressure device from which the airspeed indicator and other instruments operate. To my dismay, if not horror, I saw that the pitot tube cover had not been removed prior to my leaving the flight line. A cover is placed over the tube at the end of the day's flight activity to prevent the collection of condensation in the tube. If condensation accumulated, it might freeze when the plane was in flight, which would distort the instrument readings. Initially, the responsibility for removing the cover fell to the ground crew. However, the ultimate responsibility was the pilot's. It would have been inexcusable to shift that responsibility from the pilot. The pitot tube cover wasn't obscure or hidden; actually, a long flowing red tail was attached so that even the dumbest pilot could see it. My bonehead carelessness couldn't be hidden, so I had to face up to the situation.

As I approached the field, I saw Lt. Cooper standing beside the runway as he said he would. Without an airspeed indicator, I decided I could make a safe landing with full RPM and lots of power. My landing was on the side of being too high speed, but it wasn't too much out of the ordinary. Instead of taking off again, as I was supposed to, I taxied back to where Lt. Cooper had stationed himself. By hand motions, I conveyed the idea that I wanted him to come to my plane. With my engine still turning over, it was impossible to be heard unless he came up to the cockpit. As Lt. Cooper started to climb onto the wing root, I realized that the pitot tube couldn't be reached; it was too high. The solution was to fold the wings to bring them closer to the ground. Just as Lt. Cooper was working his way along the wing root next to the fuselage, I activated the wing folding mechanism. As the wing folded, they were designed to sweep in and up so as to clear the fuselage by not more than 12 inches. The folding wing almost knocked Lt. Cooper to the ground, to say nothing of the scare it gave him. When he finally leaned into the cockpit to ask what I wanted, I sheepishly asked him

to remove the pitot tube cover. He looked at me with disbelief and outrage. However, he said not a word. He got down, removed the cover and waved me back into the air. The rest of the flight was uneventful; it would have been difficult to withstand any further excitement in one day. I used up much of my good luck allotment.

Maneuvering in Formation

AFTER ANOTHER DAY of bounce drills, which thankfully went without incident, our flight settled down to the more serious business of sectional and squadron tactics. For starters, we worked at join ups into formation and maneuvering in formation. Such practice was needed if we were to work as a unit, rather than six to ten airplanes randomly chasing each other and wasting valuable fuel. Other than searches or patrols, just about all our activities were conducted in formation with other aircraft. As we became more familiar with the TBM and more confident in our abilities, we frequently would indulge in some tight flying. A touch of the show-off, or just plain ham, would prompt you to bring your wing almost within spitting distance of whoever was leading the flight.

One facet of our training was its basic uniformity in procedures, discipline, and expectations. By the time any of us had gone the route from cadet training through operational training, we had no reservations about flying wing on someone or, if leading a flight, have someone fly wing on you. The fact that you joined up with someone you didn't know or had never flown with made no difference. The universal language of hand signals and wing movements, at least among Naval aviators, was well understood, and it facilitated flight operations. If, when out on a training flight or in a combat area, a plane from another base or squadron joined up on you, you never questioned the other pilot's ability to coordinate his actions with yours. In like manner, the plane joining on you, regardless of rank difference, acknowledged that you were leading the flight. The mutuality of confidence was never verbalized, it was a given. However, should any pilot demonstrate a lack of judgment or dangerous practices, he soon found that other pilots gave him a wide berth.

One of the basic rules when joining up, either on a single plane or on a formation of several planes, was that if you approached the other plane too fast, you were to slip under the formation and go outside. From that position you could slide back in after excess speed was dissipated. The tactic you NEVER were to use was to attempt to join up by throwing your wing

up in the face of those in formation. To do so meant that the pilot who was joining up was unable to see the formation, creating a high probability of a mid-air collision. For the pilot in the formation, such a tactic would be so completely unexpected that he would have a difficult time in escaping the collision.

While aboard our carrier, nine months after I finished my Miami tour, I encountered one of those wild joiner-up types. I hadn't previously flown with George H. and I was returning to the carrier from a patrol; no other planes were with me. As I turned to depart the area, not far from the Iwo beachhead, George came hustling along with the intention of flying on my wing. The usual procedure to facilitate a join-up was for me in the lead plane to make a gradual turn toward the other plane. The plane joining up cut across the circle as if to head you off. When he neared the lead plane, he would ease into position on the lead plane's wing. Both planes would then proceed on the desired course. George was approaching me at what I could see was a good head of steam. I fully expected that he would go under me to the outside. Suddenly, he threw up his wing; I could see the underbelly of his plane coming directly toward me. With a yank on the stick and full throttle, I pulled up sharply and luckily avoided any contact.

As I headed back to the carrier, I radioed George in my choicest French and let him know if he stayed a half-mile away from me, he was too damn close. When we landed, George couldn't understand why I was angry. He stubbornly—and stupidly, as far as I was concerned—insisted there was nothing wrong in his actions. I flatly refused to fly with him again. A few weeks later, another of our squadron got the same treatment from George. He soon found that other pilots gave him a wide berth.

After we accumulated about 20 hours of TBM time in Miami, we each were assigned a turret gunner. Our gunners flew with us on just about all the remaining flights at Miami, and they remained with us through our carrier duty. My gunner, Bob Brown, was a Californian; he was capable, conscientious, and reliable. Brown was gifted with exceptionally good vision. At sea, he frequently spotted our carrier well before I could see it.

Jack's Personal Indoctrination Program

EVERY SIXTH DAY while at Miami, we were on liberty. Jack and I, for a second time headed downtown with Harry Wood and Dick Phipps. Part of Jack's personal indoctrination program was to explain that when going into a strange town, the most likely places to find the girls were at church or

the library. However, as an exception, he thought we might do better if we went to a bar. I don't recall that Harry or Dick met anyone, but Jack met a girl named Rita, and I met a girl named Margie. Rita was a tiny, attractive blond. Margie was a redhead and probably a bit flashy. Both girls were about the same ages as we.

Jack, who was to be married to a girl back in Brooklyn in a few months, became fond of Rita. He saw quite a lot of her, causing him to tell me of his concern and doubts about whether he ought to marry. Fortunately for those of us who enjoyed his company, Jack's interest in Rita and his coming marriage didn't inhibit his good nature. He could be counted on to join us whenever we went off on a new adventure.

My dates with the redhead included a trip to the beach with the other guys in our flight, a couple of O Club dinners, and a few visits to her home, which was within walking distance of the base. She was good company, but I was having a very enjoyable time in other activities. Nothing ever developed from that acquaintance, and I assumed it was mutually agreeable.

Before my assignment to NAS Miami, I hadn't ever played tennis. Frank Dolinich, who was pretty good at it, as was Nick Redeye, was Mr. Patience with me. We had good courts adjacent to the O Club and a pool. Many were the hours that Frank tolerated my clumsiness. But it was usually always a pleasure to then hustle to the pool for a swim, plus some cool drinks.

A Modified Form of Dive-Bombing

ALTHOUGH WE HAD RECEIVED some glide-bombing training back at Corpus, it was another matter at Miami. In addition to a more sophisticated approach to glide-bombing, we also were introduced to masthead and anti-submarine bombing. Glide-bombing was a modified form of dive-bombing. Rather than an almost 90-degree angle of attack, as in dive-bombing, we usually did not exceed 30 degrees. An excessively steep dive in an Avenger could result in structural failure. Even at 30 degrees, the pullout caused a high G load with accompanying black out. From the very start, we ignored that expensive bomb-sight. Rather, we learned to gauge our bomb aiming by the nose of the plane. It may sound like a by-guess-and-by-gosh method, but with practice we became quite proficient. To my knowledge, just about all the TBM pilots used the eyeball technique.

We must have gone through at least half a dozen glide-bombing flights in which we used practice bombs. The practice bombs were either of a kind filled with dye marker or smoke bombs. The dye or the smoke indicated

the point of impact, but neither bomb contained any real explosive force. As training progressed, we began using live 500 pounders on targets in the Atlantic. Before making the first live drops, we were cautioned on several points. Of itself, the bomb load was more than we had carried previously on takeoff, so we were to expect a longer takeoff run and a slower climb to the join-up altitude. We were to be especially alert to the altitude at which we released the bombs. The explosive force of a bomb travels upward as well as in other directions after impact. Therefore, if the plane was low when the bomb exploded, the force of the blast could seriously damage the plane. We were told to release our bombs at not less than 1,500 feet. After the release, we were to act just as if we were in combat zone by clearing out of the target area with rapid changes of direction to evade anti-aircraft fire. Our first live drops went much the way they were supposed to go. I don't recall what our target was, but I do remember the upward explosive force. It was quite mild, as it should have been, but it was enough to convince me.

Better than Glide-Bombing

ANTI-SUBMARINE WARFARE required a different technique. When attacking, we used depth charges which worked on a hydrostatic pressured fuse. The depth charges were pre-set before being loaded into the plane to detonate at a given water depth. Our planes could carry four depth charges. For a submarine about to surface or dive, the conventional tactic was to drop two charges on a diagonal across the expected path of the sub, then two more on the next pass. Presumably, a sub would be crushed by the force of the exploding depth charge, or it would be obliged to surface. Apart from depth charging, just the presence of a plane in an area would cause a submarine to be hesitant about raising a periscope for fear of being detected. If a submarine was forced to stay below periscope depth, a potential target was less likely to be attacked.

From a thrills and excitement standpoint, masthead bombing was a fun exercise. Admittedly, in a live combat situation, the fun part would turn deadly serious. It may be a heresy, but I understand that masthead bombing was introduced by Army Air Corps pilots. In masthead bombing, the target was a ship (but not limited to ships). Delayed-action fuses were placed in the bombs, and as the plane approached the target, it pushed over in a steep glide, still some distance from the target. With the built-up airspeed, the plane came in low on the water, taking appropriate evasive action. When the plane neared the target, it would release its bomb immediately after a slight

downward and upward motion of the plane. The bomb was supposed to hit the water a short distance before the target and then skip into it—much like the action of scaling a stone across a pond. The delayed-action fuse permitted the low-level release and gave sufficient time for the pilot to get out of the area. Preferably when clearing the area, you were to stay low on the water to make it more difficult for the anti-aircraft gunners. Due to the speed of the attack and the difficulty of hitting a low flying aircraft, the tactic met with the enthusiastic approval of most pilots. And we were in general agreement that the probability of getting hit was as good or better than glide-bombing.

Our masthead bombing target, for which we used only smoke bombs, was a rusted merchant ship aground on a reef in the Bahamas. It had been torpedoed by a German sub a year earlier, and only a shell was left. Of themselves, masthead runs were legalized flat-hatting. We enjoyed every minute and were smugly pleased with ourselves as we figuratively re-sunk the ship with repeated hits.

Flat-Hatting in the Bahamas

SEVERAL OF US got a dressing down from Lt. Cooper for some flat-hatting in the Bahamas area. There were quite a few pleasure sailing vessels in the Bahamas, and it was something of a wise guy stunt to approach them at a low altitude, then leap frog over the boat. The prop wash practically put the sail over and into the water. As Lt. Cooper put it, low-level flying over open water wasn't the problem, but when you get civilians angry, the Navy gets the heat. So don't be a bunch of damn fools.

Most Navy aviators I knew preferred flying over water to flying over land. One potential hazard of low-level flying over water was that your depth perception might not be sufficiently reliable. Without reference objects, such as trees or buildings, and especially in hazy weather where the horizon is unclear, it's easy to misjudge your altitude. As an aside, we were cautioned that if we had to bail out over water, we were to avoid unbuckling the parachute harness too soon. If you thought incorrectly that you were about to enter the water, and you actually were 100 feet above the surface, the free fall could be a problem. The TBM was equipped with a pressure altimeter which, while reliable, was not as precise as the radio altimeter, especially at low levels. In straight and level flight, the radio altimeter was accurate within three feet. On a few occasions, when returning from an overwater flight and when Lt. Cooper wasn't with us, we would follow whoever was leading down to 50 feet above the water.



Harry Wood, Dick Phipps, author, Frank Dolinich in Miami, 1944

The leader would signal the wingman to move to a stepped-up formation. Then the leader ever so gently would move lower to the water until prop wash sent a spray of water up and around the formation. The flight would then climb to a more comfortable altitude and head home. Silly stuff, but it tested your mettle.

While at Miami as well as at bases where I was subsequently assigned, we had to take periodic instrument hops to maintain our proficiency. It was something of a surprise for me, after several checks on my instrument flying, to be designated a check pilot for others who were being put through refresher training. It also gave me my first opportunity to pilot a two-engine plane, a Beechcraft. It was a steady-Eddie workhorse type of plane that was used for light transport duty, instrument training, and other general utility purposes.

Night flying wasn't neglected, and we had to complete eight flights over a period of six weeks. I recall one of the nights—it was moonless and especially dark to the west, over the Everglades. One of the pilots on permanent duty advised us that it was "black as Chloe's ass at midnight over the 'Glades. If you go down out there, it's a tough place to get a rescue party to you." On the brighter side, I still can see one night flight when a huge full moon was coming up and thinking that "Moon Over Miami" didn't do justice to the beauty of that view from an airplane's vantage point.

Song and Drink Fests

WHEN WE WEREN'T night flying, at the end of the day we were free to do as we pleased.. Liberty every sixth day was frequent enough that we put off any big partying in the interval. Most evenings were spent at the O Club, where food and drink were delightfully inexpensive. The band played at the club at least three nights a week, and there always were women at the club on band nights. Just about all O clubs had a bank of one-armed bandits; Miami was no exception. The income from the slots was reported to be substantial. At any rate, we participated in the profits via the greatly reduced prices charged at the club. Harry Wood used to despair at my repeated playing, and losing, efforts at the slot machines. Although I seldom gambled, I was a pushover for those machines. It was something of a consolation to know that my investments were going to a good cause.

In any of our for-men-only gatherings after a few drinks, someone would start a sing along in which everyone joined. I don't recall any group, at any of my duty stations, that was particularly gifted. However, the lack of talent was compensated by the enjoyment of a night of loud, if not too melodious, singing. Our repertoire of songs could correctly be called eclectic, with such oldies as: "Moonlight Bay," "In the Evening by the Moonlight," "Sixpence," "Tipperary," "Shanty Town," "I Will L-O-V-E Love You All the T-I-M-E Time," and "Daisy, Daisy."

To these we added: "I Wanted Wings till I Got the Goddam Things, Now I Don't Want Them Anymore," and "Bell Bottom Trousers."

We gratefully accepted Jack Crimmins's contribution of: "Josephine," "Charlotte the Harlot, Queen of the Whores," and "My Gal Sal, Queen of All the Acrobats."

Given a little incentive, each of us could contribute at least five more ballads to the list. The song fests may sound sophomoric today, but in those days they provided a cement of togetherness and concern for each other. It's easy to dismiss as childish such sentiments. And, it's equally foolish to persuade the skeptic of the value of the fellowship which was enhanced by those song and drink fests.

If my recollections of the days at Miami are heavily larded with tales of wine, women, and song, and other recreations, it isn't because we didn't do much flying. Quite the opposite. Our flight duties were more demanding than in the past. We took our responsibilities seriously. And, we still looked forward to a tour in the Pacific as carrier pilots. But, we were fully aware that Miami Beach was very much America's playground. The row on row of luxury



Harry Wood and author

hotels, the fashionably chic little shoppes, the bright lights, and the evidence of personal wellbeing of vacationers would have impressed most observers. In truth, while taking in the sights with Jack, Harry, and Dick, I was somewhat hesitant about going into the bar of one of the posher hotels. Man about town Crimmins encouraged us to walk in as though we owned the place.

As the weeks went by, I realized that Harry Wood was a guy of some substance. Harry used to make quite a thing of “I’m from Boston,” along with his Yankee accent. In the ’40s, many people in other parts of the country equated Boston with culture, and to Harry’s credit he faithfully enhanced the image. He was a thoroughly likeable guy; with dark hair, about five foot ten, handsome good looks. He turned many a girl’s eye. In addition to being very quick intellectually, Harry was excellent company as well as a first rate pilot. He, Jack, and I would become as close as three guys who were genuinely concerned for each other could.

By way of a tale, which I assume was reasonably factual, Jack told us how he had gate-crashed quite a few debutante balls in New York. Shortly after graduation from high school, Jack bought a tuxedo. In the early 1940’s, Notre Dame had a football player named Bernie Crimmins of some well-earned fame. If anything, Notre Dame’s “subway alumni” were more numerous and



TBM with bomb in release

more enthusiastic in the ’40s than today. Garbed in his tux, and without any sort of invitation, Jack would show up at the deb’s ball and announce that he was Crimmins from Notre Dame. Jack insisted he was more successful than not. With the example of his kind of social self-confidence, we quickly shed any reservations about entering any public place.

Making a Proper Torpedo Run

OUR FLYING had progressed satisfactorily, to the stage where but two major pieces of work remained to be done. We had to complete our training in torpedo tactics and in what we called field carrier landing practice. The Avenger was originally intended as the fleet’s replacement of the outmoded Douglas torpedo bomber. However, modification in tactical torpedo bombing required an improved plane, plus some considerable improvements in aerial torpedoes themselves.

The torpedo tactics we were taught, in May 1944, were modified by the time we headed into the Pacific in October that same year. This is not to say that Lt. Cooper’s instruction was scratched. It provided the foundation from which we could quickly adapt to changes. The use of aerial torpedoes required that we understand the workings and limitations of the torpedoes and that we acquire skills in making a proper torpedo run.

Some of the more significant details about aerial torpedoes required that we recognize that they were pre-set when loaded into a plane to run at a certain depth below the surface; they also had to run a predetermined distance in the water to become armed. To cite the possibilities, if the target

was a ship that rode high in the water, or if the hull wasn't far below the surface, a perfectly aimed torpedo could pass harmlessly beneath the hull. Or if you dropped a torpedo too close to the target, it could run smack against the target, but it wouldn't detonate because it hadn't run far enough to become armed. If the pilot played it too safe, by dropping the torpedo at too great a distance, either the target ship would outrun it or rather easily destroy it. Other considerations called for a drop from the plane going straight and level at a moderate speed. Even then, the torpedo might "porpoise," run erratically, or just plain sink.

The torpedo bomber pilot's concerns, over and above the torpedo itself, were numerous. The tactics at the time of our training called for an approach to the target at about 5,000 feet. As we neared the target, we began a let down at about 200 knots. When perhaps two miles distant and still descending, we began defensive action, known as jinking, because we could be absolutely certain that any real target would send up a hail of anti-aircraft fire. Continuing to close in on the target, at not more than 3,000 yards, with airspeed of not more than 160 knots and altitude of 300 feet, we began our eyeball sighting of the target. Using the cowl of the plane, the rule of thumb was to aim the torpedo one apparent ship length ahead of the target for a 90-degree deflection shot. With the plane steadied on a straight and level course, the torpedo was released, and we then were to get clear of the area as promptly as possible. Getting clear meant that you couldn't escape passing directly over the target. From the initial point of let-down to clearing the target area probably took less than 20 seconds.

It was easy to understand how these tactics caused Torpedo Eight to get wiped out at Midway. The final run put the attacking plane in a sitting duck position (low speed, straight and level flight, with no maneuvering) especially if the attack was poorly coordinated.

Emphasis in our training was placed on coordinated attacks, rather than one- or two-plane sorties. The recommended action called for at least six planes to approach the target, spread in a fan or semicircular pattern focusing on the bow of the ship. When in range, the planes were to simultaneously drop their torpedoes. We practiced these tactics through eight flights of one and a half hours. The practice included dry runs on the Navy patrol vessel, Absecon.

Lt. Cooper must have been satisfied with our progress; he gave us his approval for two more flights in which we were to use live torpedoes. They, of course, didn't have warheads. Instead, the torpedo heads were filled with a dye marker which would be released as the torpedo traveled through the water.

An observer could readily track the torpedo to score a hit or miss. So as not to damage either the target ship or the torpedo, the torpedo was set to pass under the hull of the Absecon, our target ship. When the torpedo spent itself, it would float for about an hour. Navy crews made every effort to recover the torpedoes, which, when successful, represented a sizeable cost saving.

Our live drops were very successful; the Absecon was "hit" by almost all of our torpedoes. Although Harry and I took some pride in getting two-for-two hits, we were fully aware there was a world of difference between a run on the Absecon and a run on a hostile target. At the same time, there was a special excitement in participating in a coordinated attack, clearing the target, and looking back to see the dye marker streaks intercept the ship's path.

Necessary if We Ever Were to Land Aboard a Carrier

THE FINAL NEW PIECE of training involved field carrier practice. As the words imply, we were to practice making carrier landings at a field on dry land. For starters, we had to take our TBMs up to 5,000 feet to practice slow flight. Under ordinary flight conditions, we had been trained to avoid low airspeeds and potential stalls. If the aircraft stalls, and a wing goes down, you can't expect to make a safe recovery at low altitude. Thus, we did our initial practice at a sufficiently high altitude to avoid getting spread over the landscape. Slow flight as intended meant that we were to become accustomed to flying in level flight and in turns, with wheels and flaps down at airspeeds just a few knots above stalling. Flight controls were mushier and less responsive at those speeds, and pilot uneasiness increased. These practice sessions were most necessary if we ever were to land aboard a carrier. Had anyone attempted to bring a plane aboard under "conventional" airspeed, it surely would have wiped out the barrier and everything in front of the barrier.

As for the carrier landing pattern, we practiced at an auxiliary field on which an area representing the arresting wires of a flight deck were painted on the runway. Further down, another area was painted which represented the barrier. If you touched down in the barrier, you were assumed to have screwed up one of Uncle Sam's expensive aircraft. Control of the landings was vested in the man with the paddles, the Landing Signal Officer (LSO).

In preparation for our landings, the LSO lectured us on the approach to be followed around the field and acquainted us with the signals he would relay by means of his paddles. Once we entered the final leg of the pattern, his signals would let us know if we were too high, too low, too fast or

slow, in or out of the groove, or that we were right on the money. Two mandatory signals were ignored at your peril; if he gave you a wave-off, you had to go around again; if he gave you a cut, you had to bring the plane in for a landing. Failure to observe either signal could endanger not only the pilot and his crew but also the deck crew and other aircraft on a carrier.

Our routine in field carrier landings began after a formation approach to the field. When we received clearance to land, each plane, after an appropriate interval, broke from the formation and individually entered the landing pattern. At an altitude of 250 feet, the pilot began his first leg in something of a racetrack pattern. The first leg ran to the right of and parallel to the landing runway. The landing checklist was run through—wheels down, flaps down, auto rich fuel mixture, increased RPM, throttle applied as necessary—and the airspeed was reduced. After clearing the end of the runway, a crosswind turn was taken, and the plane then headed downwind parallel to the runway and opposite the direction from that in which you intended to land. On the downwind leg, after a fast review of the checklist, and with airspeed at about 105 knots, you waited until you were abeam of the landing area. At that point, you entered the crosswind leg followed by a turn into the landing groove. Once in the final approach, the pilot concentrated almost solely on the LSO. Changes were made as signaled by the LSO when he gave you a cut or a wave-off. Assuming you got the cut, you immediately switched your attention to landing the plane in a proper position and location on the runway.

If any one spot was especially hazardous in the landing pattern, my vote would have gone to the turn from the downwind leg toward the groove for the final approach. At that point, too sharp a turn was apt to occur, and with even a small loss of airspeed it would very easily result in a stall.

Following a heavy concentration of field carrier landing practice, all that remained to complete our specified tasks were a few aerial gunnery and over-water navigation flights. All of us had some navigation experience during our cadet training, so we weren't unfamiliar with what was to be done. The difference here was that Lt. Cooper drilled us and wasn't satisfied with missing a checkpoint by ten or so miles, as was frequently the case at Corpus. For one thing, most of us became much more proficient at estimating wind force and direction by the waves and whitecaps on the ocean surface. Our navigation was done by dead reckoning, and any misreading of wind velocity and direction could easily put you off target by some distance.

Our last two weeks in Miami were crammed with flying and social

activities. Lt. Cooper very generously threw a party at his home. He and his wife were thoughtful enough to invite a Wave contingent. As befitting officers and gentlemen, we behaved charmingly and admirably. A few nights later we reverted to type with a raucous beach party. On another evening, Harry Wood and I volunteered a few tunes at the Officers Club, and we surrendered the mike in exchange for a bribe. On our promise to behave, we were awarded a fifth of booze.

In mid-June 1944, we checked out from NAS Miami, bound for Glenview, Illinois. It was the same Glenview where I had gone through the trials of E Base. But it also was the base to which Naval Aviators were sent for the purpose of qualifying in making carrier landings—the real thing.

NAS Glenview, Illinois: Carrier Qualification



USS Sable

AS A CADET at Glenview, all my flying had been done over land, even though Lake Michigan was but a short distance from the base. The situation was very different on this return visit. The Navy had two merchant ships converted to flattops operating on Lake Michigan. In the early '40s, just about all carrier pilots did their qualification landings on these ships, one of which was the Sable, the other the Wolverine.

The carrier qualification procedure at Glenview was very much a swinging door. We were in and gone within five days. The brief stay was all to our liking because as soon as we finished, we were scheduled to go home on leave. The only unexpected event was the finding by an eager personnel officer that we had not taken certain swim tests. By the book, we were supposed to swim underwater across the width of the pool and swim free-style several lengths of the pool. Our grumbling was to no avail, so into the pool we went, thrashing furiously through the water. I have no idea whether we completed those tests in the required time, and I doubt whether anyone else knew or cared.

Our qualification landings were to be made in an SNJ rather than a TBM. The reason for using SNJs apparently was because neither the Sable nor the Wolverine could make more than ten knots. On a low wind day, it would be much easier to bring an SNJ aboard rather than the much bigger and heavier TBM.

One of the Best Trained Pilots in the World

ALTHOUGH WE HAD practiced field carrier landings for many hours at Miami and went through additional practice at Glenview, we hadn't yet seen an aircraft carrier. We still had to experience approaching a carrier and looking down at a flight deck with the prospect of landing on it. When the big day arrived, we were told that we would be led out to the Sable, and we were to begin our landings as soon as Sable signaled it was ready to land aircraft.

The whole exercise went as though we had a script; nobody blew any lines, and everything went as it should. The size of the flight deck, whether it might be too small, didn't register in my mind. The intense concentration, from the time of entering the landing pattern to the LSO's cut, permitted no distracting thoughts. In all, I made eight landings. After each landing, the deck crew released my tail hook from the arresting gear and cleared me to take off for another go at landing. Our entire Miami gang qualified that same day. We happily checked out of Glenview on June 22, with orders to report to the Naval Air Station in San Diego on July 15. After allowing for travel time, it meant that we could expect to be home for 18 or so days.

"21 June 1944 Qualified..."

MY AVIATOR'S FLIGHT LOG was stamped, "21 June 1944. Qualified this date in carrier landings aboard the USS Sable in SNJ airplane." Had I given the matter some in-depth thought (and who went in for heavy thinking at

age 21?), it might have occurred to me that I had completed my \$27,000 education. It also might have occurred to me that I was fully ready to join the fleet, with 440 hours of flight time, as one of the best-trained pilots in the world. In a sense, we were cocky about our abilities, mostly because we were encouraged to view ourselves so positively. Perhaps our attitude was much like that which in later years we were to hear about truckers.

Reportedly, the drivers of huge trailer trucks, with their on-high view of the road ahead, their CB radios with their special jargon, get the feeling of being kings of the road as they tool across the country. The rigs they drive often are meticulously cared for, and truckers take pride in competition among themselves. While I can appreciate the feeling, in my prejudiced opinion, it can't compare with the thrill of being 21 years old, sitting high above the ground in a TBM cockpit and the realization that I'm the guy in charge of and responsible for this plane.

Prior to getting into the plane, it had the appearance of an ungainly beast with its folded wings. You climbed up, got into the cockpit, and strapped yourself in. After checking controls and switches, you signaled the ground crew that you were ready to start the engine—then it roared to life. This followed a chorus of hand signals between the pilot and ground crew; remove the chocks, close bomb bay doors, taxi from the line after radio with the tower to determine the runway in use. When the plane was taxied to a clear area, the pilot activated the wing mechanism. Behold! The ugly duckling became a swan as the folded wings spread into place. From the cockpit, those huge wings looked ever so graceful. You proceeded taxiing to the duty runway, ran through the takeoff checklist, and awaited clearance from the tower. With a go from the tower, you released the brakes and poured on the coal. Using full takeoff power, as you become airborne, rather than a gradual climb, you raised the wheels but held the plane just a few feet above the runway. By the time you reached the end of the runway, you'd have built up a good head of steam. If you were willing to risk getting chewed out, the plane could be wrapped in a sharp turning climb from the field. The experience beats driving even the classiest rig.

On Leave in Rochelle Park, New Jersey

I RETURNED HOME was to a somewhat strange situation in that only my brother Lou, age 12, was there with my parents. I was still used to a whole houseful, as when we were kids. It must have been difficult for my parents, who had four sons in the service. The changes in our habits also must have been hard for my Mother to accept. Before I arrived home, I gave

some thought as to how to let it be known that I now drank and smoked.

This particular episode can best be understood with some background information. For the uninformed, it needs to be stated that during the '30s and '40s, very few people were neutral or even unemotional about Franklin Roosevelt. He was considered by many to be a saint, by others he was looked upon as a devil. In our household, we were with the devils. FDR, in our view, had failed measurably to bring about a recovery from the Depression; he was a showboat egomaniac determined to get the country into the war, not only to cover up his domestic failures but also to enhance his grandiose scheme to play world power broker. And, he lied; the most infamous was his blatant and most outrageous promise: "Your sons will not be sent to fight in a foreign war." To sum it up, our family didn't like Franklin Roosevelt.

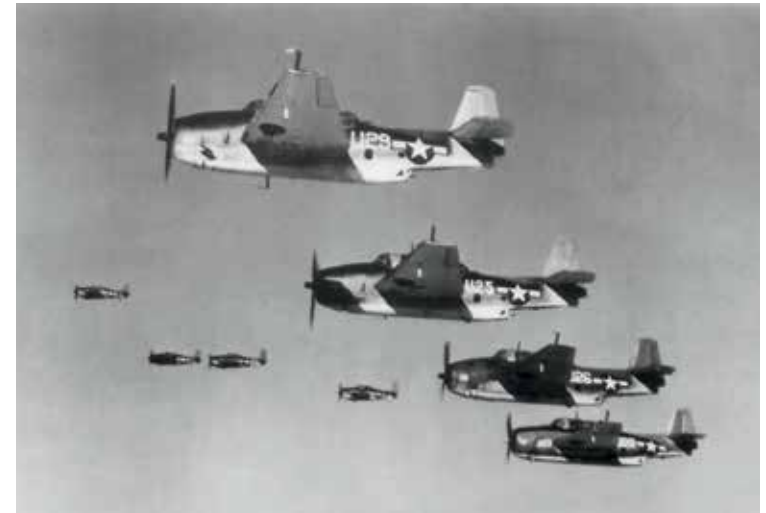
The attack on Pearl Harbor didn't change any of our opinions about him. We had no reservations about military service, and my brothers and I were willing to serve whenever and however we were asked.

With that background, the episode continues. My Father always had liquor in the house. We were neither encouraged nor discouraged regarding the use of alcohol. Nor did my parents ever say we couldn't or shouldn't smoke. However, my Father was not a smoker. A few days after my leave began, while at home with my parents, I helped myself to some of my Father's booze. Along with a couple of cigarettes, I had another drink. Neither parent commented. When I repeated the routine the next evening, my Mother spilled out her pent-up anger and hurt. "I sent my boys away from home as good clean kids. Look what that Roosevelt has done to them! He's turned them into monsters that drink and smoke and Lord knows what else." I later learned my brothers had been home earlier on leaves, and they too had become smokers and drinkers.

Harry Wood took great delight in the story when I told him of my Mother's anger. His Yankee parents weren't FDR fans, so he was a sympathetic listener. Many were the occasions thereafter when Harry saw fit to remind me I was an uncouth monster.

Jack Crimmins was married during the leave, and while I went to his wedding in Brooklyn, my memory for any details is a blank. On my last day at home, I went on a picnic with Sis Morris, a girl I had dated a few times before entering the Navy, and Tess from across the street and her boyfriend. Other than the fact that our picnic lasted to late evening, it was not a memorable occasion. However, by the time I returned home, my Mother's last-day-at-home dinner was ruined. I think the family was almost relieved to see me on my way.

San Diego Naval Air Station at North Island



U29 D.C.White, U25 H.B. Wood, U26 G.B.Hannover,
U28 author on training flight, Holtsville, California.

NORMALLY, TRAVEL during the war for any significant distance was done by train. Commercial air flights were on a priority basis as well as expensive. If you had orders to report by a certain date, you were required to allow sufficient travel time so as to arrive on schedule. I thought that five days would be an adequate allowance, with a bit to spare, for a New York to San Diego train ride. It turned out that I cut it closer than I thought. From New York to St. Louis, everything went as scheduled. The rest of the trip—all in coach accommodations—was marked by hot, dirty, and totally uncomfortable surroundings. We were repeatedly shunted off to a siding to clear the ways for trains presumably of a higher priority. I recall a stop at Needles, California, a town that made Nowheresville look like a metropolis, at which we waited literally for hours.

The only incident of interest during the trip was a chance meeting with three Marine fighter pilots who had recently returned from the Pacific area. At that time, it wasn't much publicized, but Charles Lindberg had been flying combat missions with their squadrons. They were land based at one of the forward islands. Lindberg flew as a civilian, I believe, under the guise of an advisor-observer for Chance Vought Co., the manufacturer of the Corsair. The Corsair was the fighter plane flown by the Marines I met. As they told me, Lindberg's most valuable contribution to them—and to the rest

of us—was to challenge the conventional power settings for aircraft engine operations. He clearly demonstrated that lower RPM settings could safely be maintained at higher throttle settings, resulting in a substantial reduction in fuel consumption. We couldn't help but appreciate his efforts inasmuch as we all were concerned about maximizing the fuel we carried.

On the morning of July 15, 1944, the train arrived in San Diego. As I got off, I must have looked as though I had shoveled coal all the way from New York. The Naval Air Station was on North Island, just off the mainland. A launch ran a regular schedule to and from the island, and there was a commercial ferry that also served the island. My first chore was to get respectably cleaned up and officially report my arrival to the duty officer. Once those chores were done, I set about trying to locate our Miami group.

The real navy...only more so

IN THE PAST, as I moved from one base to another, each succeeding base impressed me as "the real Navy." At San Diego, it was the same story, only more so. The other bases had been built or expanded in response to war needs. Buildings on those bases, for the most part, were of frame

construction, easily and quickly erected. In contrast, the accommodations at North Island were of a permanent nature—masonry and Spanish-style architecture—and the grounds were beautifully landscaped. Our dining areas were especially attractive, in keeping with the excellent food service, and the O Club and swimming pool complex were equally interesting.

The real Navy at San Diego was evidenced by the sight of aircraft carriers tied up for provisioning and by other warships nearby. In regard to flight activity, the airfield contained just about every model of the Navy's fleet aircraft. There was constant takeoff and landing activity.

Within a few days, all of our Miami group had arrived. We were assigned to a carrier air service unit along with a fairly large number of other pilots. Translated, air service unit meant that we were placed in a pool and were awaiting a more permanent assignment. As it later developed, the pool was formed so that existing squadrons could beef up their staffs by drawing from the pool. Until we received further orders, we had but to show up each morning for a roster check.

In truth, we were charged up and itching to be on our way to our ultimate destination. Each morning we would nag the duty officer with "Where are my orders? When am I going to sea?" To get us off his back, the duty officer told us to report to the fighter flight line. He had arranged for us to check out in the F6F Hellcat. We jumped at the chance. As torpedo pilots, we wanted to satisfy ourselves that if we chose to, we could handle a fighter plane as well as any of the hot dog fighter pilots. After a reading of the F6F handbook and the customary cockpit check, off we went. Flying the plane was no problem, but it took some getting used to the considerably increased speed and maneuverability. And there was the rewarding self-satisfaction with the knowledge that if I ever had to fly an F6F, I could readily do so. None of us liked the idea of long intervals between flights. To maintain our proficiency, we were able to squeeze in flights in the TBM and the F6F—about ten hours.

Composite squadron 88, VC-88

CLOSE TO THREE WEEKS after our arrival in San Diego, the duty officer handed us our orders. Jack, Harry, and I were assigned to squadron VC-88; Dick, Frank, and Sid were assigned to another VC squadron, as were John Papadakis, John Piersol, and Andy Pomerico. I cannot remember where Nick Redeye was sent. None of us had any idea what a VC squadron was or did. As for Jack, Harry, and me, we were to report to VC-88 in Klamath Falls, Oregon, a place we had never heard of before.

Our orders called for us to report to the squadron in five days, which meant that we had at least two days to spare. Harry suggested that we visit an aunt of his who he hadn't seen in years. She lived in Salem, Oregon. The train ride from San Diego to Klamath Falls was about 800 miles, but we continued on to Salem. En route, the trip through northern California took us along a beautifully scenic area. Particularly impressive were the tall, tall trees plus spectacular views of Mt. Shasta. Shasta is over 14,000 feet high, and with its snowcapped peak on a clear full moon night, it was unforgettably beautiful.

A pullman sleeper

MOST OF OUR PREVIOUS train trips had been in coach accommodations. By chance or by someone's mistake, we lucked out and were given a Pullman sleeper. Harry and Jack were in one car, I was in another. My car was filled with a preponderance of elderly people. As was the custom in a Pullman car, two passengers shared a seat, and when the car converted to a sleeper one of the passengers got the lower berth, the other got the upper berth. My seat companion was a woman about 25 years old. She was en route to Seattle to visit her husband. When the berths were made up, she had the lower. During the day, Jack and Harry visited with me in my car. Those nice old ladies thought that we ensigns were America's finest. My seat companion proved to be friendly, conversed easily, and went to dinner with us in the dining car.

Jack had packed a pint of whisky in his bag. On the second night, after the berths had been made, he and Harry came calling for me. With bottle in hand and a supply of the train's paper cups, they suggested a drink on the platform between cars. As we were about to head for the platform, the woman in the lower berth popped her head out from behind the curtains. She was still dressed and asked if she could join us. Jack poured a snort in each of our cups, then a second. Just at that time, two Shore Patrol types came along. They confiscated our bottle, threw it from the train, and suggested we turn in. Our lady friend beat a retreat, while we grumbled to ourselves about the lousy S.O.B. Shore Patrol. We then headed for our bunks.

All was quiet in my Pullman car. Both sides of the aisle were curtained and closed off the made-up berths. Just as I was about to hoist myself into my upper, my lady friend opened the curtain in front of her berth and whispered, "I saved my drink. Do you want it?" Sure enough, her paper cup runneth over. At her invitation, I ducked into her berth and had barely swigged down the whisky when I heard the loud voice of the Shore Patrol: "Come out of

there ensign!!” If ever life had a most embarrassing moment in store for me, that had to be it. As I came out from behind the lower berth curtain, the Shore Patrol guy practically ordered me to get in my bunk and stay there.

Such a commotion had been created that I was certain the passengers must have decided that I was a rapist, seducer, or a sex fiend. I didn’t bother to undress. Rather, I sat up in my berth until the early morning hours. I collected my luggage and went to the car where Jack and Harry were still asleep. It took a bit of nagging, but I asked them to prepare to get off as soon as the train pulled into Salem. I had no intention or desire to go back to my own car where I risked the accusatory faces of my former fellow passengers. When we got off the train, Jack and Harry demanded to know what the fuss was all about. In addition to thinking the episode was hilarious, Harry noted that such conduct was typical of a Roosevelt monster.

We realized on visiting the home of Harry’s aunt in Salem that even a brief stay would be an imposition. After a visit of half the day, we begged off with the explanation that we were due to report to our squadron. We boarded the first available train to Klamath Falls and checked in on August 7. Our squadron, VC-88, was to be our home for the next nine months.

We had traveled 800 miles from San Diego to Klamath Falls and were told not to unpack. The squadron, in two days, was moving to the Holtville-Salton Sea area; a trip of about 1,000 miles. Had we gone directly from San Diego to Holtville, the distance would have been 100 miles.

We learned that a VC squadron was a composite squadron which was outfitted with FM fighters and TBM torpedo bombers. The FM Wildcat was the predecessor of the F6F. As a fighter, it was very maneuverable, armed with four .50 caliber wing guns, and it was ideally suited for jeep carrier operations. We were told that our VC squadron very likely would be assigned to operate from “jeep” carriers, otherwise known as baby flattops. At the time we joined the squadron, its role hadn’t yet been formally developed. Nonetheless, the primary purposes were to provide close support for invading landing forces, anti-sub patrols, and the protection of ships and personnel in landing operations.

Our squadron was fairly self-sufficient. With 22 fighter pilots, 18 torpedo pilots, an MD flight surgeon, an intelligence officer, ordnance officer, personnel officer, aircrew men, and a few others, we could take care of most of the squadron’s flight activities. In addition to Brown, I also acquired Rich Palmere as a radioman.

Our assignment to the Holtville-Salton Sea area was intended to provide training in rocket firing, a heavy dose of night flying, and refresher training

in bombing and torpedo tactics. The area was in California desert country, and when we stepped from the train, you would have been forgiven if you thought: “Welcome to Hell.” A wall of heat smacked you in the face and enveloped you. The temperature must have been close to 120 degrees. As we hastened to our quarters, which were unpretentious, but air-conditioned, we wondered how anyone could be expected to do much of anything. I tried to assure myself that this was desert country, and everyone knows that the desert turns cold at night. Whoever fabricated that story hadn’t been to Holtville. If it cooled off on any of the nights we were there, I was never aware of it.

When the “older” squadron members found that Jack, Harry, and I were junior to all of them, we were made noticeably more welcome. I, of course, was the most junior ensign in the squadron at that time. Theoretically, as boot ensign, I got last pickings at room choice and other perks. In practice, it was nothing more serious than being the butt of someone’s jokes.

Our Skipper, Lieutenant Commander Gene Webb, was a serious, almost humorless man in his early 30s. He was a TBM pilot, and to the best of my knowledge he had no previous combat experience. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Gene Kemp, also was a TBM pilot. He was much closer to and much friendlier with the other pilots. Lt. Andy Kamp was senior FM pilot, a rotund and sort of pompous man in his 30s. It was Andy who greeted Jack, Harry, and me with an armload of pamphlets and directives. He said that our first order of business was to “get caught up on the reading.” We promptly allowed the material to gather dust.

A snug formation

THE OTHER MEMBERS of the squadron included a few full lieutenants, perhaps a half dozen lieutenants junior grade, and at least 24 ensigns. We were very quickly assimilated, especially after a couple of dual rides in an SNJ and after a few cross-country hops in TBMs. Perhaps because we had only recently completed the rigors and discipline of cadet days, it was apparent that the older members (older only in terms of longer attachment to VC-88) were somewhat careless and even sloppy in their aircraft handling. For example, as wingman on separate cross-country flights, we noted that their formations were loosely spread out, and thus they were not immediately responsive to the flight leader’s changes in direction or altitude. In contrast, we flew a snug formation, just as we were taught. The flight leader never had to stretch his neck looking for us.

In those first flights with various members of the squadron, we

apparently relieved the older hands of any concern about the rookies. I was assigned to the skipper as a wingman; Harry became wingman on Lt. Kemp, the Executive; and Jack was assigned to Lt. Joe Mitchell. Joe was the only member of the squadron with previous combat experience.

Through that first month in VC-88, we received a concentration of tactical flying with emphasis on coordinated glide-bombing and torpedo attacks. To our delight, the change in torpedo tactics called for a high-speed approach and much more maneuverability. The sitting duck torpedo run of old was made obsolete with the development of much improved and more sophisticated aerial torpedoes.

Experience in rocket firing

AT THE END of four weeks, we began a five-day session at the Navy's rocket-firing facility at Salton Sea. We still were very much in the desert, but we knew it would be but a short time before we cleared out for more comfortable surroundings. Neither we new recruits nor the older guys had any experience in rocket firing. And none of us had any information about rockets, other than they supposedly had terrific penetrating force. The lectures and training films at Salton Sea were indeed impressive. All that remained was the opportunity to complete several flights, during which we would fire live rockets.

Our TBMs and FMs were loaded, four rockets under each wing, and we reported to the range officer when we arrived at the target area. The range officer, safely distanced from the target, kept score for each pilot. I don't think any of us distinguished ourselves the first day. However, after four more flights, most of us developed a reasonably good proficiency as we gave the targets a good pounding. The Skipper was so satisfied with our performance, he decided to depart a day early. We had one more day of rocket firing to be completed at Salton Sea. As soon as that was done, we were to move to Naval Air Station Los Alamitos, which was but a short distance from Long Beach, California. Our desert tour was nearly at an end.

Our rocket-firing runs called for releasing two rockets at a time. With eight rockets, that meant we made four separate passes. Depending on the mode of firing selected by the pilot, rockets could be fired in pairs or in salvo. Salvo firing meant that all eight rockets were released simultaneously with one squeeze of the trigger. The skipper having left a day earlier, we decided that we'd like to spend the last night in the desert at Palm Springs. However, if we completed the rocket-firing exercise at the two-at-a-time pace, we probably would finish the day pretty late.

We decided that the late afternoon flight of six TBMs and six FMs would make one pass at the target, firing all our rockets in salvo. The range officer cleared us for the first pass when we reported to him. It wasn't long after the first two or three planes made their runs that the range officer discovered what we were doing. He radioed to the planes overhead and angrily told us to follow his instructions. All our receivers somehow were unable to pick up his message. Just as planned, we completed the flight, returned to the base and quickly boarded a Navy truck for the trip to Palm Springs.

Contrasted to the surrounding desert, Palm Springs was a fantasy land oasis. Bright lights, beautiful people, beautiful architecture, bars, nightclubs, and practically no uniforms in sight. August 1944 was still very much a war year, but you wouldn't have known it in Palm Springs. Those of us who made the trip thought it was a terrific evening despite the dressing down we got from the Skipper a few days later.

Every bit as competent

OUR TOUR through Holtville and Salton Sea convinced Jack, Harry, and me that although we were new recruits, we were every bit as competent as the older hands. We saw no reason to offer any alibis or excuses, and we recognized the unspoken acknowledgement that we were full-fledged members of the squadron. Our bombing and rocket scores were as good or better than most of the pilots; we were better disciplined in our flying, and we had an unabashed eagerness to take any available flights.

At least a third of our pilots were married. While they never shirked their responsibilities, they didn't look for any additional tasks. Most of the married pilots arranged to have their wives join them. In some cases, they trailed through several of the places the squadron was based while on the West Coast. Even Jack Crimmins, married for all of two months, was able to have his bride come to California for a short stay. Housing was a problem under the best of circumstances. Many's the shack that overnight became a high-rent accommodation. Jack's wife Loretta found what literally had to have been a whitewashed former chicken coop. It took true love to survive that kind of trial.

Between September 6 and October 15, 1944, our squadron shuttled between Los Alamitos and San Diego for cram sessions in anti-sub warfare, field carrier work, and actual carrier landings. Anti-sub warfare training was in greater depth than what we had received back in Miami. Along with lectures on tactics used by sub skippers, the effect of depth charges, and the



Author and future brother-in-law Robert Hare,
Los Alamitos, California, September 1944

effective range of depth charges, we also went aboard a submarine. Just as submariners have said, “A guy has to be crazy to fly a plane,” we also concluded, “Anyone who goes into submarines is a nut.” My impression of the sub was that it was terribly confining, with clammy dampness, probably got very smelly and most uncomfortable. Besides, it looked like lousy work.

We made our anti-sub attacks with live depth charges. Our target was a huge log, towed about 3,000 feet behind a surface ship. The technique generally used was to anticipate the target’s direction and release your depth charges sufficiently ahead of the expected target path to allow for the delayed action of the depth charge fuse. If you did a good job, the depth charges should detonate as the target passed just overhead. And if the charges were dropped diagonally across the target path, you would have bracketed the target—a very effective drop. It doesn’t sound very difficult, but it took a bit of practicing.

We would soon be shipping out

OTHER THAN Joe Mitchell, I don’t believe any of us had landed a TBM or FM aboard a carrier. Our only experience had been the Sable and

Wolverine landings in an SNJ at Glenview. Just as the anti-sub work had been concentrated in less than a week, we got an accelerated refresher course in field carrier landings. With the rush to complete certain tasks, it was obvious we soon would be shipping out. Our squadron returned to Los Alamitos from the anti-sub training at San Diego and immediately began field carrier landing practice. Five days later, it was back again to San Diego, where we went aboard Makin Island, CVE 93, and set out for carrier landing qualification off the coast of California.

The Makin Island was an escort carrier, otherwise known as a jeep carrier or baby flattop. It was a replica of the carrier we subsequently would call our home base. Escort carriers in the early stages of the war had been used in the North Atlantic to combat U-boats. They were converted merchant ships, and as carriers they were successful in helping to curtail U-boat activity. The Makin Island and other jeeps of the same class were made at Kaiser shipyards. We affectionately called them Kaiser Coffins, and it was an in-house joke to ask, “How good are those escort carriers?” The standard response was, “Good? Boy, are they good. The first 50 went like hotcakes. We ordered 50 more!” Our CVEs had a flight deck of approximately 525 feet. If that sounds like a lot, it should be noted that for a deck run takeoff, you seldom had more than 400 feet available. With landing, the barrier was raised, leaving not much more than 300 feet within which to safely bring in your plane.

As a war ship, the CVE had no armor to speak of. In rough weather the ship’s sides gave off loud tin-canning sounds as pressure was applied by the sea and then relaxed. Along the catwalks on both sides of the flight deck, there were batteries of 20 mm and 40 mm anti-aircraft guns. On the stern was a single five-inch gun. When the five-incher was fired, the whole ship vibrated. At flank speed, an escort carrier might make 18 knots, tops, provided it had a good tail wind. Those of us on escort carriers never traveled with the fast carrier task forces. Although we spoofed about the shortcomings of the jeep carriers, we were fiercely proud of them and would never concede anything to those guys on the big carriers.

It was intended that we would remain on board the Makin Island for a week. In that time each of our pilots should have made a sufficient number of landings. I suspect that the Makin’s crew also needed that week to familiarize or improve their functions, not only as the deck crew but also in other shipboard duties. Our first day of operation demonstrated the need for closer attention and concentration. Three of our fighters caught the barrier. Fortunately, they were just shaken up and were able to resume their activities. However, their three FMs were badly damaged.

The barrier cables

THE BARRIER consisted of three or four strands of heavy-duty cable. Ordinarily, the barrier was folded flat on the deck. In that position it presented no impediment to traffic; planes could taxi forward over it, or on a deck run takeoff go over it with no difficulty. However, when planes were being landed, the barrier was raised. Cables spaced to a height of perhaps six feet were stretched across the deck. If the landing plane didn't catch an arresting wire with its tail hook, it would end up in the barrier. The barrier cables would wrap around the plane's propeller causing a seizure of the engine. Depending on the speed of the plane when it caught the barrier, it could flip over or cause other damage. The first concern on barrier crashes always was to get the pilot out, then clear the deck. If the pilot had locked his shoulder harness and seat belt, he stood a very good chance on coming out of the crash in good condition. The major purpose of the barrier was to prevent a landing plane from crashing into planes parked on the flight deck forward of the barrier and to protect the deck crew working on those planes. When recovering planes returning to the carrier, as soon as one plane landed its hook would be freed from the arresting wire. The barrier would be lowered, and the pilot would taxi forward, fold the wings, and park the plane as directed by the deck crew. As soon as the plane went past the barrier, it would be raised so that the next plane could be brought aboard.

Our second day at sea was scheduled for TBM pilots to begin qualifying. I was surprised, uncomfortably so, to find that although I had previously landed an SNJ on the *Sable*, it was another matter to consider taking a huge TBM from the deck of a jeep carrier. Just sitting on deck in the cockpit, with the wings spread, I had the uncomfortable—and incorrect—feeling that the wingspan of the TBM was greater than the width of the flight deck. And, with a deck run takeoff, I became aware of the limited space available.

For my first takeoff from the Makin Island, I pushed the throttle full forward, practically stood up on the brakes and pulled the stick firmly back in my gut as I awaited the "go" signal from the flight deck officer. As the plane lumbered down the deck, I accepted as a matter of faith that it would become airborne when I ran out of flight deck. Sure enough, it performed as it was supposed to. Once airborne, I climbed above the landing pattern, joined up on the planes launched ahead of me to await the signal for landing operations. On receipt of the "land aircraft signal," we broke up and set an interval between planes as we came around for our

landings. After each landing, we were pushed back as needed and made a deck runoff. In all, I made six landings the first day.

It would be nice to say that I was an immediate whiz. Actually, my first approach on the last two or three landings was much too extended. I took at least six wave-offs on the last two landings. At the end of the day, the LSO critiqued each of our performances. My main area for correction was in the need to come closer to the carrier on the downwind leg and to turn sooner from that leg toward the carrier. With those corrections, I ought to avoid getting in a position of coming up the groove in an extended tail chase of the carrier.

The LSO emphasized that in a combat area, it was essential to recover planes as promptly as possible. The carrier had to head into the wind when recovering aircraft. If that heading put the ship on a dangerous course, it could be hazardous to a task force. And the sooner the planes were recovered, the sooner they could be refueled and rearmed for a return to action. After the LSO's lecture, we TBM pilots were scheduled for further landings the next day.

While aboard the *Makin*, it was obvious that the ship's regular crew of officers and men had a great many duties to perform. They, of course, had duties directly related to flight operations and duties involving the running of the ship itself. I was rooming with Jack in steamy quarters well down in the ship's hull. Due to the heat and the unfamiliar surroundings, I awoke early each morning. There wasn't much activity at that hour so I decided it would be a heck of a lot more convenient if I showered and shaved before the morning rush.

For the first three days I found myself either in the midst of a shower or half shaved when a call to General Quarters, accompanied by a clanging bell and sounds of much commotion came over the loud speaker. We had previously been told that because we were only going to be aboard for a short time, flight personnel didn't have to participate in the General Quarters call. The purpose of the drill was to put the ship in a battle-ready position whereby watertight hatches were closed, water lines secured, crews were at their gun mounts, and dozens of other stations were manned. Ordinarily, pilots, crewmen, and deck crews would be ready to launch the aircraft. Through daily repetition of these drills, everyone on board could respond to the needs and demands that might arise in an emergency.

Shortly after the General Quarters call, a sailor would come into the "head" (bathroom, to civilians) and very rapidly turn two gate valves in the overhead pipes. He then hastened out to perform some other task. With the gate valves closed, there I was all soaped up with no water. I



USS Makin Island

mumbled to myself: “that damn fool turned off the water and didn’t even ask me about it.” I stepped from the shower, turned the water back on, and finished my shower. The routine continued for about three days until I casually mentioned it to one of our pilots. He looked at me in disbelief and said, “You jerk, the water is supposed to remain shut down during General Quarters!” The significance of the drills and the various actions taken finally dawned on me. After my properly earned chastising, I decided to give up those early morning showers.

Aboard the Makin Island

OUR THIRD DAY of flight activity aboard the Makin Island started out uneventfully. I was launched with the first group of planes and made two satisfactory landings. However, a hydraulic leak caused me to stay on deck after the second landing. This meant I was able to stand in the catwalk for

the rest of the day watching other guy’s landings. Harry Wood completed his qualifying landings, so he and I were providing encouragement to Jack. On his first and only takeoff of the day, Jack scared us and everyone else on the flight deck.

When taking off, especially on a carrier deck run, full engine power is applied before releasing the brakes. The tendency of the plane at that power setting is to pull to the left; however, the pilot could and should compensate by adjusting his rudder tabs and by applying pressure on the right rudder by foot. To all of us watching Jack on that first takeoff, he obviously let the plane get away from him. He literally hadn’t moved 50 feet toward the bow, when the plane veered sharply to port (left). He went over the side of the flight deck, hit and broke off a 20 mm gun mount, and looked to be headed into the drink. How he managed to remain airborne, after coming dangerously close to the water, mystified all of us. He hadn’t even had time to raise his wheels. Jack came around on his first pass at a landing and got a cut from the LSO. As he hit the deck, it was apparent that he had punctured a tire, but neither he nor the plane showed any other signs of damage. Without a doubt, Jack to this day must hold the record for the shortest deck launch in Navy history.

One last piece of bad luck had yet to occur that day. As we were boarding the Makin Island at San Diego, just before putting out to sea, a new TBM pilot was added to our roster. The pilot, only slightly newer than I, was named Winston. Harry had run into Winston at a base he had earlier been assigned to, but he was only a passing acquaintance from cadet days. Winston didn’t have any refresher field carrier landing practice such as the rest of us had just before boarding the Makin Island. Nonetheless, he was expected to do his qualifying landings along with the rest of us.

As Winston came around for his first landing, he began to turn from the downwind leg toward the carrier. At that moment, the plane stalled and dropped into the ocean, in full view of everyone on the flight deck. His plane was afloat for what seemed like a long time. It probably was on the surface for close to two minutes, which was ample time to unbuckle and step out into the ocean. We anxiously looked for some indication that Winston had gotten out until the plane finally plunged below the surface, leaving no traces. The logical assumption, with which nobody disagreed, was that Winston hadn’t locked his shoulder harness and seat belt. On impact with the water, he must have struck his head against the instrument panel and probably been knocked unconscious. For those of us who may have been careless about our shoulder harness, we needed no further advice to buckle up.

A powerful slingshot

A FEW DAYS LATER, after we had all qualified, we were introduced to catapult takeoffs from the Makin. The catapult run was comparatively short, about 1,250 feet. After taxiing the plane to the catapult, it was hooked up with cables to what might be called a powerful slingshot. After the pilot went through his takeoff checklist, the flight deck officer signaled the pilot to apply full power. When the pilot was ready, he sat fully upright with his head tilted slightly back against a headrest, then gave a hand signal to fire away. The first few catapult shots were something of a jolt, but we soon became used to them. And it didn't take very long to realize that catapult shots were much preferred over deck runs.

With the catapult shot, for the first time my crewmen, Brown and Palmere, were in the back end of the plane. At about that time a Dana Andrews movie, "A Wing and a Prayer," was making the rounds. Andrews was a TBM pilot with a faithful crew. In one scene, he was getting repeated wave-offs from the LSO. However, his brave radioman's encouraging words of advice finally enabled him to make a successful landing aboard his carrier.

On this, their first flight from the Makin, and actually their first carrier landing, Palmere and Brown sweated through three consecutive wave-offs. As I came around for the fourth try, Palmere began giving his words of encouragement, in the best Hollywood tradition, over the intercom. To respond to Palmere meant that I had to pick up the hand mike and shift my attention to him. After three wave-offs, I had been giving my intense concentration to the LSO's signals. I neither wanted nor appreciated any distraction, and surer than hell I didn't want a cheering section. I aborted my approach and pulled up to go around well before closing in on the flight deck. What I didn't realize at the time was that, although I may have been frustrated and annoyed with myself over three wave-offs, Palmere and Brown were more than a little frightened. When I pulled up out of the landing pattern, I chewed out my crewmen and told them that they were never to distract me or give me a pep talk when I was on a final approach to a landing. That Hollywood baloney may look great on film, but there was no place for it in our plane.

We continued our training exercises with a serious recognition of fleet requirements. For example, much emphasis was placed on fuel consumption, a factor of considerably less importance when operating over land. Joining up in formation after takeoff had to be done as expeditiously as possible. The alternative of needlessly running down the tanks while wasting fuel in long join ups wasn't attractive. When over-water operations

were conducted, a sensible pilot always recognized that it was wise to hoard fuel so that you'd have it available for any emergency—whether enemy action, bad weather, or anything that may prolong a flight.

On our last day aboard the Makin, we were involved in a search for a missing pilot and plane. The plane wasn't one of ours; it was from a shore base. After a full day of scouring the area, with no success, we put in at San Diego. Six hours later, we were 100 miles up the coast at Los Alamitos and ready for liberty.

Long Beach

JACK TOLD US he intended to spend as much time as he could with Loretta, which meant Harry and I were forced to make the most of about five days of free time. Long Beach was the nearest big town in our area, with Hollywood not too distant. We made a tourist-style visit to Hollywood, but found Long Beach more to our liking. Earlier in the month, Harry had met an attractive woman in Long Beach. She reportedly was married to a lieutenant commander who was out to sea. When Harry first met her, I was with Jack. We went our own way and, Harry disappeared with his friend.

During that final stay at Los Alamitos, after we had been back a few days, Harry phoned his friend and arranged a date. His friend agreed to get a date for me, and off we went to meet them. Harry and I had our own private joke, which we frequently used. If he and I were walking down a street, and if two girls approached heading our way, Harry invariably would beat me to the punch by saying, "Your date doesn't look so good." Just as invariably, if we actually met two girls, Harry usually got the looker.

When we met our dates for the evening, there was the lieutenant's wife, a walking sensual piece of machinery. My date didn't look so good. She wasn't a beastie, but she was old. For a 21-year-old guy, I thought she must have been at least 35 and a bit much for my tender years. After a few hours of carousing in Long Beach, Harry's friend suggested that we go to her home. I wasn't enthused, but Harry was very much for the idea.

At his friend's home, Harry and she went into what I assume was the living room. No lights were turned on. My date and I sat on a front porch-type glider and made pleasant conversation. From inside came sounds of murmurs and whispers. All went very quiet for a short time only to be shattered by a loud fart of at least five on the Richter scale. This was followed by gales of laughter from Harry and his date. A few minutes later they both came out to the porch, still chuckling and with no indication



Distances from Hawaii from around the world

Harry, Jack, and I met with Dick Phipps and Frank Dolinich, who were shipping out with their squadrons. The favorite watering hole in San Diego was a place known as Paul's, but more affectionately called Paul's Passion Pit. Noisy, crowded, six deep at the bar, a bawdy singer who encouraged everyone to join in; a real class operation. Bars in California were required to close at 12:00 midnight. Starting about 11:15, a midget dressed in formal attire would stand on top of the bar and shout "Twelve o'clock closing." The stampede then began where those of us still standing would fight our way to the bar and order at least two drinks. About every 15 minutes the midget would repeat his "twelve o'clock closing" message, and the next assault on the bar would begin. Informal rules were observed whereby you couldn't buy a drink after midnight, but you were permitted to finish whatever you had on hand. Thus, the actual closing usually stretched out till 1:00 a.m. We finally headed back to our ship and thankfully stumbled to our bunks. So much for an inglorious last night ashore.

of embarrassment. I wasn't sure what to make of the situation, and no explanations were offered. It was approaching the time for us to catch a bus back to the base, so we said our good-byes and made our exit. On the way back, Harry explained that he had been sacking in with the women his last few liberties. The loud fart had escaped in the midst of their lovemaking; they both thought it was hilarious. His brief affair was one of those no-strings situations. Apparently neither he nor his friend had any difficulty in walking away from it. He had fooled me completely. I had never suspected he had a romance cooking.

It was back to San Diego on October 14. Our squadron, along with several others, was ordered to go aboard the USS Long Island to be transported to Hawaii. The Long Island was one of the Navy's first baby flattops. When we boarded, it no longer conducted flight operations. Rather, it was doing transport duty, carrying men and supplies wherever they were needed. Earlier in the war, the Long Island operated as a carrier providing escort and doing anti-sub work in the North Atlantic.

Our last night in the States was a big blast after a super expensive dinner.

Headed out to Sea for Hawaii

THE NEXT MORNING we up-anchored and headed out to sea for Hawaii. I don't know how many of us were aboard the Long Island, but it was a tightly packed crowd, and by the time we landed, seven days later, in Hawaii we all had a few cramps and kinks. If you were a card player and wanted to risk your money, the card games seemed to go on without interruption. I hadn't been bitten by the gambling bug, so it was no sacrifice to pass those card games by.

The trip to Hawaii happened to be made at a time when there was no moonlight. However, the nights were clear and the sky was filled with bright stars. Regular wartime conditions were observed whereby no light was permitted on the exterior of the ship. To go on deck, you went through a series of hatches, the last of which was darkened before you went out to the ship's exterior. It was especially interesting to look down on the ship's wake on a dark night. The luminous plankton created an impression of thousands of fireflies winking furiously in the water. The calmness of the ocean and the steady throbbing of the ship's engines made for a romantic setting. It was paradoxical that the atmosphere of "all's well" was accompanied by the knowledge that we all were aboard the ship primarily for the purpose of combat involvement.

We docked at Pearl Harbor to the welcome of a local band that greeted us with native Hawaiian chants. They obviously were determined to maintain the prewar tradition of greeting new arrivals. Our personal belongings,

along with the squadron members, were loaded on trucks and buses for transport to the air station at Kaneohe. Kaneohe was on the northeastern shore of Oahu, on the opposite side of the island from Pearl Harbor.

Our quarters at Kaneohe were quite nice; they looked to have been built since the start of the war. However, the base itself had been a permanent air station for many years. The permanent buildings, such as hangars, dining areas, administration, and the individual residences for senior officers, were architecturally attractive and beautifully maintained. If the prewar Navy officers didn't make a lot of money (and they didn't), their perks must have made their existence more tolerable.

Inasmuch as it was mid-October, and I was 21, I was eligible to vote in the November presidential election. I had written to the county election board in New Jersey and requested an absentee ballot. Shortly after, our personnel officer announced that we could request a federal ballot of some sort. Even though I had requested a ballot from New Jersey, I also asked for the federal ballot. As it turned out, I received two ballots, and I voted twice—both times for Tom Dewey. To no avail, the good guy lost.

Roosevelt turned me into a monster

AS WE BECAME better acquainted with our squadron, we quite naturally learned a bit about each other's likes, dislikes, prejudices, and favorite people. Harry and I discovered that Lt. Kemp, our exec at that time, had an almost childlike willingness to believe any anti-Eleanor Roosevelt stories he heard. Gene Kemp was no fool; he really was a very sound and likeable man. During the war years, Eleanor was doing her bit by spreading cheer among the more advanced hospital facilities. Wild and totally baseless rumors would occasionally surface about her behavior. It should be noted that she was no looker. It's hard to imagine that she could excite anyone's sexual appetite.

When Harry and I learned of Lt. Kemp's interest in Eleanor stories, we would deliberately begin a fabricated story, loud enough so that he could hear us, while we pretended we were unaware of his presence. Our conversation might go as follows: "Hey Harry, I heard from Sid O'Neil last week. He's returning to Pearl." "He is? I thought he was going to Australia for some R & R. And isn't Sid supposed to see his brother, the Lt. Commander down there?" "He sure is. And that's why Sid is going to Pearl. You know the brother's reputation with women. Well, if you can believe Sid, his brother is now in the big leagues." "Come on Paul. What

are you trying to tell me?” “I find it hard to believe, but it must be strictly in the line of duty. Sid tells me his brother shacked up with Eleanor when she visited the troops Down Under.”

Kemp, at the mention of Eleanor, couldn't restrain himself. He pressed us for the details, and we really embroidered the story. If he asked to read Sid's letter, we'd tell him we had sent it along to some friends who were interested in his exploits. I have the feeling that Lt. Kemp saw through our stories, and he enjoyed playing the straight man just to see what outrageous stories we could dream up about Eleanor. And he took special delight in Harry telling him how Roosevelt had turned me into a monster.

Our stay at Kaneohe lasted just one month. During that time, I got quite a few hours as wingman on our skipper. For vague reasons, the more I flew with him, the less confidence I had in his abilities and judgment. Although I had no specific reasons for my doubts, I sensed some indecisiveness in him. It would be a mistake, as well as unfair, to question his courage, but it was obvious to me that the skipper was an overly cautious and conservative pilot. When circling a landing field, the position of inside wingman could become quite uncomfortable if the lead plane didn't maintain a reasonably good airspeed. At slower airspeeds, the inside plane, in order to maintain position, went at even slower speed than the leader. In those circling patterns, the skipper invariably slowed down to the point where the inside wingman felt uncomfortably close to a stall. The only recourse was to slip under and to the outside of the formation, which displeased the skipper. The point is that he was completely insensitive to the attitudes, feelings, or interests of his pilots, but he was demanding in seeing that his preferences and likes were heeded. Other than to Jack and Harry, I never mentioned my reservations to anyone else.

A rash of wheel collapses

SOME MONTHS before we left the States, we heard of pilots having problems after landing their TBMs. We were told that after making a routine landing and while taxiing to the flight line, the landing gear had collapsed. The collapse just about ruined the engine as the prop chewed into the concrete, and the engine seized. We hadn't paid much attention to those reports before reaching Kaneohe. Of a sudden, we had a rash of wheel collapses on the runway. Investigation revealed that the so-called collapse was due to pilot error, which in turn was due to poor cockpit engineering design by the manufacturer.

In a routine landing, both the wheels and the flaps had been lowered

in preparation for a touchdown on the runway. After the landing, as the plane rolled down the runway, the practice was to raise the wing flaps. The control lever for the flaps was not more than one inch from the wheel control lever. Both levers protruded the same distance; one had a round knob, the other a square one. If the pilot was even a little bit careless, it was quite easy to raise the wrong lever. This, of course, was exactly what caused the wheels to collapse. They didn't really collapse, they just retracted because the control was activated. A makeshift safety device was installed on all TBMs, and we were repeatedly reminded to be alert to the possible hazard. As newer model TBMs were turned out, a better safety device was installed before delivery of the planes.

Because it was no secret that we soon would be leaving Kaneohe and heading into active combat areas, we were issued .38 caliber pistols. Presumably, we had to be prepared to take on the Japanese Army if we were shot down over enemy territory. I had never fired a pistol, and we were encouraged to go to the firing range supervised by the Marines. I and several of our squadron showed up at the range, and we were told that we could use it for several hours. I used at least 150 rounds of ammunition and made several discoveries. At a distance of not more than 50 feet, and firing at an oil drum, I was able to hit the drum with a first shot about 80% of the time. If I tried to rapid fire two or three shots, I hit the drum not more than 10% of the time. And, if I tried to be a real hot shot and rapid fire all chambers, after the first round I usually ended up with not more than a 2% hit rate. All of which demonstrated to me that I not only was a lousy shot but the Japanese probably wouldn't fear a confrontation with me.

While at the range, I was not aware of a need to wear earplugs or some other device. As a result, when we left the range area, my ears literally were ringing so that it was impossible to hear. My temporary deafness lasted almost three days. I and my crewmen wore our .38s throughout the tour in the Pacific, and I believe I never fired my pistol again after that session on the firing range in Kaneohe.

The TBM pilots in our squadron luckily escaped the embarrassment of collapsed landing gear; however, Andy Kemp treated us to a show in a FM takeoff at Kaneohe. Fighter pilots did their best to live up to the Hollywood version of devil-may-care hot dogs. Of itself, a bit of showing off was a plus, provided it was properly done. The FM did not have powered landing gear. To raise or lower the wheels the pilot gave a hand crank about 28 turns. On the day in question, Harry and I were watching a group of our squadron's FMs and TBMs take off for a joint exercise. Andy's plane began its run

down the long runway, and when he was just a few feet off the ground, we could see that he had begun to retract his wheels. Andy couldn't have realized how close he still was to the deck, and before he fully retracted the wheels, he ever so gradually started to lose what little altitude he had. We stood by helplessly as we saw Andy's plane ease down to the runway and skid sideways for quite a distance before coming to a stop. Andy was unhurt as he scrambled out of the cockpit and away from the plane. The plane was beyond repair and had to be scrapped.

Harry and I speculated that Andy hadn't tightened the tension on his throttle quadrant. With the vibration of a full takeoff power setting, the throttle has a tendency to ease off if the quadrant wasn't tightened. Easing off the throttle caused a loss of power, and that was as logical an explanation as any. Andy heard of our analysis, with its implied judgment of pilot error, and he was incensed that mere ensigns were evaluating lieutenants. He insisted the plane's landing gear collapsed due to mechanical failure.

While at Kaneohe I had ample opportunity to fly from Oahu to most of the other islands. The travel brochures hadn't overstated the beauty of the islands and the very pleasant temperature. Whether flying around Oahu or viewing the hills from the ground, they were blanketed with lush greens and vivid lavender and pink floral cover. We went into Honolulu a few times, and it was something of a disappointment in the downtown area, as was Waikiki Beach. The impression I got was that it was in something of a shabby state of neglect, in part no doubt to the tide of servicemen that overwhelmed every facility.

My popularity rating with Lt. Cmdr. Webb slipped after I missed a scheduled flight. When he wanted to know why I hadn't shown for the flight, I could offer no alibi. I had completely forgotten the flight schedule. His punishment was meted out promptly; the skipper put me in hack for three days, which meant I was confined to my room. It just so happened that my room in the BOQ was directly below the skipper's. Although I was house confined, it didn't mean that I couldn't have visitors. My visitors brought the beer, and for those three nights our beer parties lasted for long, noisy durations. To his credit, the skipper took it all in stride and never complained about my rehabilitation program.

We wanted to be ready

WE MANAGED TO LOG a variety of flights in the month spent at Kaneohe. The exercises we worked at didn't always go flawlessly, but we went about

them in a serious vein. The big leagues awaited us in the near future, and we wanted to be ready. Our glide-bombing, rocket firing, and torpedo runs were made in coordination with our fighters. Using torpedoes, without warheads, we practiced high-speed approaches with our fighters, which were quite impressive when properly executed. In a flight of 18 planes, we formed three sections of six—three FMs and three TMs. When we neared our target, the flight leader would signal the leaders of two sections to move ahead, one to the right and the other to the left. The flight leader with his three TBMs and three FMs would remain in the center. At a signal from the leader, the two sections would turn to the center, and with the formation poised to hit the target from three sides, the fighters were signaled to begin the attack. Close on the heels went the bombers, staying with the leader of each section. As the bomb bays opened (following the flight leader), and the planes sped toward the target at high speed, you then directed your attention from the leader to taking aim at the target, dropping the torpedoes and making as hasty a departure as possible.

When executed correctly, the attack looked as though 18 planes were headed down a funnel on a collision course. Timing was essential so that the bombers came in immediately after the fighters had worked over the target and before the enemy could return effective fire. When the attack was poorly coordinated, you ended up with planes scattered all over the air and in a difficult position to cause significant damage.

Before we left Kaneohe, several of us decided to check out in flying the FM, just in case it became necessary once we were at sea. My only recollections of the FM is that it was much more maneuverable than the TB, as it should have been, with those 28 or 29 hand turns to raise and lower the wheels. Even in 1944, the manual raising and lowering of the landing gear was an anachronism.

Two opportunities arose whereby we were able to get in some practice carrier landings in Hawaiian waters. An escort carrier, the Makassar Strait, was available for a night exercise, which proved to be something of a disaster. After we had made two landings, we returned to Kaneohe about 1600. Six hours later, on a dark night, we took off and headed out to locate the carrier. This exercise called for flare droops to provide illumination and for the TBMs to come in on a practice bombing run. Only half the flares ignited, the carrier was but a poorly illuminated blob, the flight was scattered and disorganized. Nobody had reason to take a bow for our sorry performance.



Luzon, Philippines, January 12, 1945

Night landings

A NEW CHALLENGE was handed to us when we had to practice field carrier landings at night. The daylight routine was demanding of itself, so we weren't enthused about night landings. We, of course, had enough sense to admit that not only was there no point in grumbling, but we also had to be prepared to make night landings when at sea. To put things in perspective, night carrier operations were still in their infancy in 1944. A few night fighter squadrons had been trained especially for the job, and they were just beginning to become combat ready. As for the pilots in our squadron, given our druthers, we would opt for night flying only on a must basis. When aboard our carrier, I had to make dusk, rather than dark, landings on two occasions. However, all of us got an adequate exposure to those predawn hops with black-of-night takeoffs at about 0400. I for one never objected to the predawn flights. There was a certain pleasure and excitement in being airborne as the sun came up for a new day.

Our second opportunity to practice carrier landings off Oahu involved

the Bataan, a light carrier of what was known as the Independence Class. Our previous landings had been made on escort carriers with a flight deck shorter than the Bataan's. We looked forward to the treat of landing on a larger carrier. As we approached the Bataan, it was disappointing to see that while it was bigger than an escort carrier, the difference wasn't all that much. We went from Kaneohe in nine FMs and nine TBMs, with each TBM carrying a pilot in the back end as a passenger. The intent was for the passenger to be set down on the flight deck awaiting the first pilot to complete his landings. Then the passenger would take over to make his landings. When the session was completed, we were to fly back to Kaneohe.

"Spare Parts Crimmins"

HARRY AND I, along with several others, had made our landings, and we waited in the catwalk while other guys prepared to begin their round of three landings. Jack was in the second group, and he was about to make his first deck run off. As a standard procedure before a first takeoff, the pilot checked his instrument readings. Included in the check were a full power run-up and a cut-off, one at a time, of the magnetos. If, with one magneto cut off, the RPM fell to less than 100, you could be assured that the engine was firing properly. The full power check required that the pilot stand on the brakes and hold the stick back firmly in his gut. As Jack was running up the engine, with all the associated engine roar, his head bent forward as he studiously watched the tachometer. Unknowingly, he had relaxed his backward pressure on the stick. Everyone on board saw what was going to happen. With the relaxed stick pressure, the tail of Jack's plane lifted ever so slowly and gracefully from the deck. Our shouts and waving of hands weren't heard or seen by Jack as the tail continued to rise. And, just as slowly the nose of the plane with the propeller turning over at full power setting came closer and closer to the deck. It was over in less time than it takes to describe; the huge buzz of a prop chewing into the flight deck and sending a shower of wood chips a-flying. The wooden flight deck of the Bataan continued to get chewed until, with a final cough, the engine of Jack's plane seized.

As soon as he realized what had happened, Jack came down from the plane. He very wisely made no attempt at an alibi. And he good-naturedly took the barbs that were tossed at him. However, he didn't appreciate the nickname that he carried for a brief time. One of the reasons for our delay in departing from Kaneohe was the need to await delivery of spare parts for

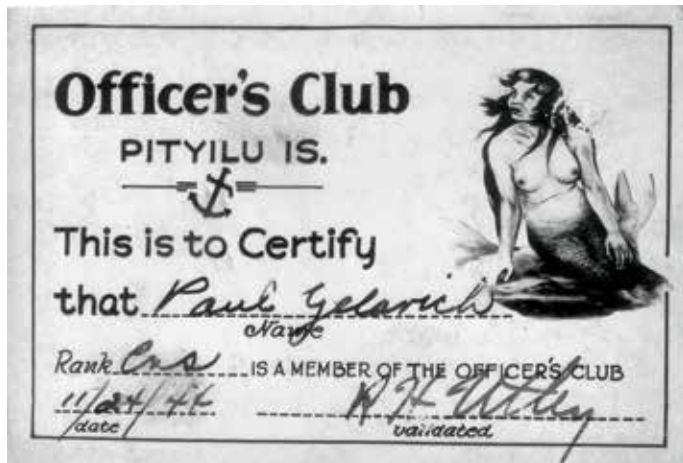
our planes. When we returned from the Bataan, we were told we would be leaving in a few days for an island off New Guinea where we would board a carrier. Someone then made the connection that we obviously didn't have to wait for the spare parts. We could count on Jack Crimmins, who already had two planes to his credit. One plane from the Makin Island and one from the Bataan could be used for salvage. And, if that wasn't enough, Jack could be counted on to scrap another one. Thus the label was hung on Jack as "Spare Parts Crimmins."

Invasion of Luzon

IT TOOK LESS THAN two days for the squadron to pack and be ready to move. We boarded transport planes on November 21, and after stops at Johnston Island and Kwajelein, we arrived at our destination, the Admiralty Islands, off the northern coast of New Guinea. Specifically, we were located on Pitylu Island, which was one of several small sand bar islands in close proximity to each other. Pitylu was just about big enough to accommodate a runway, some Quonset huts for our quarters, and the ever-necessary O Club, which was quite primitive. The most that could be said for the place was that it was tolerable. It, of course, was hot, inasmuch as we were but a few degrees south of the equator. The heat and tropical rains went with the territory.

The islands became a staging area for quite a few VC squadrons which were part of a task force that was to participate in the invasion of Luzon in the Philippines. Of itself, it was exciting to hear that we would be directly involved in the operation, but an entirely new element had been added, which was quite sobering.

A month earlier, during the invasion of Leyte, on the east coast of the Philippines, Japan had begun the kamikaze attacks on our ships. Initially, we were inclined to doubt that the Japanese had sent their planes out with the intent of crashing into a ship. We could accept the thought that a pilot who had been hit by anti-aircraft fire and knowing he was a goner, might take the plunge. But it made no sense to set out with the sole purpose of



Pitylu Island Officer Club i.d., issued November 24, 1944

blowing yourself to bits. As reports came back from the Leyte operation, all doubts disappeared. The kamikaze attacks were the real thing, and they were expected to continue at a stepped-up pace. Each of us knew that a pilot determined to crash into a ship had the odds all in his favor.

At day's end on Pitylu, the O Club was the social center at which all the best, worst, and in-between people gathered. Lots of old acquaintances made an appearance as the task force was being put together. Other than Nick Redeye, all of our Miami group had been assigned to carriers in the same task force. Sid O'Neil, Frank Dolinich, and Dick Phipps were with VC-85 aboard the Lunga Point; Andy Pomerico, John Papadakis, and John Piersol were with VC-86; Jack, Harry, and I with VC-88, and we were assigned to the Hoggatt Bay.

We were at Pitylu for about five weeks, during which time we practiced day and night field carrier landings and glide-bombing attacks on a daily basis. Those training sessions were interspersed with regular anti-sub patrols to deter any Japanese subs from getting a reading on the preparations for the Luzon landings. In mid-December, the Hoggatt Bay, with our squadron aboard, put out to sea for a practice exercise. Our first two days were spent almost entirely on refresher carrier landings. The LSO aboard the Hoggatt Bay had some ideas of his own about the way he wanted us to fly our landing pattern. It took a bit of practice; to be exact it took ten landings in two days, before the LSO was satisfied with my approach.

Something of a mixed blessing

THE NEXT TWO DAYS of our mini-shakedown were spent in a training exercise at Lae, New Guinea. Earlier in the war, Lae had been a Japanese strong point that was taken after a tough struggle. I was assigned the job of taking an Army observer over the area where he was supposed to get a view of the practice exercise. As I recall, the weather was abominable. We not only didn't do much observing but I, for the first and only time, came very close to getting lost. On return to the carrier from Lae, about 60 miles, I realized I had made a mess of my navigation. For a few minutes I pondered going into a tedious square search, which would have consumed fuel in perhaps a futile effort. To compound the error of my ways, I hadn't copied the homing signals before taking off. As I continued on what I thought was a reasonably close-to-correct course, my gunner, Brown, called on the intercom to tell me he had spotted the carrier. It was some distance away, about 90 degrees off my port wing. As I turned to the left, I still didn't spot the carrier. It must have been 30 seconds before it came into view. When we and the other planes landed, the Hoggatt Bay returned to our staging area off Pitylu to replenish our supplies.

My navigational mistakes proved to be something of a mixed blessing. True, we were expected to navigate correctly, but we also had some aids, which were very effective. Prior to the episode at Lae, I hadn't bothered to rely on our search radar, which was operated by Palmere. Nor had I paid much attention to the radio homing device, called YE. Both these aids were more accurate when returning to the carrier than my navigational calculations. After Lae, I continued to do the regular navigation, but I also made full use of the equipment on board the plane. Frequently, it developed into a game between Palmere and me. When heading back to our carrier, I would tell Palmere the course I intended to steer and the appropriate distance. He then would check his radar screen, which wasn't available in the pilot's cockpit, and "correct" my course heading when he thought I would miss the mark.

Quarters on the Hoggatt Bay

OUR LAST FEW DAYS at Pitylu were occupied with the squadron and ship's company personnel busily preparing for our coming invasion at Luzon. At long last, our planes, all spanking new, were delivered and loaded on the



Pitylu Island Officer Club i.d., issued November 24, 1944

Hoggatt Bay. Christmas 1944 was, in a sense, our last day of peace. We were to head to Luzon the following day. As a treat for the enlisted men of the ship's crew and our squadron, the officers were required to do the extra-duty heavy work. It was no treat for us because the ship was taking on a load of bombs and other heavy supplies. We acquitted ourselves reasonably well and hauled, sweated, and groaned for the best part of the day. At the end of the day, the entire crew had a very tasty Christmas dinner on the hangar deck.

Our quarters on the Hoggatt Bay, as officers, were adequate in terms of space, and they afforded a pretty good degree of comfort. We were provided two-man rooms, which created a touchy situation among Jack, Harry, and me. It was a question of which of us was to be orphaned. After some deliberating, Harry and I decided we wanted to room together. We approached Jack and told him of our decision. Jack had become friendly with our flight surgeon, Doc. Hope, and said he wanted to room with him. Neither Harry nor I ever was certain that we had done right by Jack. However, he never gave a hint of any resentment.

Navy tradition called for an initiation ceremony when personnel—whether officer or enlisted man—sailed across the equator for the first time. Our crossing in the transport plane from Oahu to Pitylou didn't count. However, when we boarded the Hoggatt Bay and headed for Luzon, we would cross the equator again. The ship's company, which had made several

crossings before we were assigned to it, eagerly looked forward to rubbing the noses of those smart aleck fly-boys. Based on what we heard, we were expecting a thorough going-over, much like a spirited college fraternity hazing. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that the ship's captain came to our rescue. He announced there would be no initiation. Because the pilots and crewmen were going into a combat area, the Navy could not permit any of us to become unnecessarily impaired or injured. We, quite naturally, were impressed with the captain's military genius, which was exceeded only by his wisdom. And, quite naturally, the ship's crew was sorely disappointed.

I don't recall how many escort carriers joined us as we departed from the anchorage at

Pitylu. But after we had been underway four days, we rendezvoused at Palau, an island anchorage 600 miles east of the Philippines, with the entire invasion force. We remained at Palau through the last day of 1944. In sort of a "what the hell" attitude, we welcomed the New Year by finishing off the small personal supplies of booze that most of us had

Shipboard life

ALTHOUGH WE HAD previously been aboard the Makin Island for a brief stay and also had been aboard other carriers, we didn't look upon those assignments as anything more than guest visits. The Hoggatt Bay was a different matter; we were at home and settled in for the long haul. Shipboard life was a pleasant and unique experience. Our meals, served in the wardroom, were quite good for about three weeks. It seemed that after the third week at sea, the supplies of good stuff dwindled to the point where spam, beans, powdered eggs, and powdered potatoes were the main fare. The wardroom was open 'round the clock to all officers, and the ever-present coffee urn was in perpetual use. As officers and gentlemen, we were expected to observe wardroom protocol whereby we were told that discussion of women, politics, and religion was taboo in conversation. We promptly realized that any observance of that restriction would require a company of monastic monks. In any event, we felt little need to obey all the rules.

More than half our time aboard ship was spent in the pilots' ready room. It was located at mid-ship just below the flight deck. Our crewmen were in a ready room, just off the pilots' ready room. Our ready room was the only air-conditioned space aboard ship, which we especially welcomed in the tropical climate. We also had a small galley where coffee and sandwiches



Harry Wood in #30, author in #32 offshore from N.A.S. San Diego

were always available. Many were the times that I and other pilots slept in the air-conditioned ready room rather than our regular bunks, which were much too hot.

The ready room was equipped with comfortable lounge-type chairs, a movie projector, and a contemporary record player. We had a variety of records, and we had Jack Crimmins. Jack would put on a show of accompanying the records by strutting around the room and going through the motions of mimicking trombone, sax, and clarinet players. He was especially good at his boogie-woogie piano accompaniment. Just before he put the record on the player, Jack would take a piece of chalk and stroke a series of lines, about one inch apart and six inches long, on the edge of the table. The first time we saw this performance, we wondered, "Now what's he up to?" We saw soon enough. As the record began, it was apparent that Jack had made a piano keyboard. With appropriate gestures and noises, he accompanied all the best pianists. He really outdid himself when Doc Hope told us that Jack, while sleeping, had gotten up and did his trombone strut.

Movies aboard ship were a special treat. Each ship usually had one full-length film, and when opportunity arose, we would swap our film with another ship. The game of film swapping called for close bargaining. If you had a stinker of a film, unless the other guy wasn't very alert, you couldn't expect to trade your film for a first-rater. Somewhere along the

line, we swindled another squadron out of Casablanca. In the 1940s, Ingrid Bergman was everybody's sweetheart. We weren't about to trade Casablanca for Gene Autry or any other hay-burner of which there was a plentiful supply. Instead, we contented ourselves with repeated reruns. After a time, we could speak the lines of all the actors in unison with the film, and we would hiss and boo and cheer on cue.

Our invasion force left Palau and headed for Leyte Gulf on January 1, 1945. The intended course was to enter the Philippines at Leyte Gulf, then proceed through Surigao Straits, through the Mindinao Sea, to the west coast of the Philippines. We then would proceed north, beyond Manila to Lingayen Gulf, the invasion site. Once beyond Leyte, our route was within areas held by the Japanese and well within range of any land-based aircraft. Along with the threat of kamikaze attacks, we could reasonably expect the reality of actual combat experience.

First kamikaze attack

THE FIRST KAMIKAZE attack wasn't long in coming. Several planes made a disorganized attack as our ships entered Surigao. We had all been at general quarters most of the day, and the gunners were itching to send up a healthy barrage of fire. I don't recall that any damage was inflicted. From our vantage point we weren't able to see or know about all the action that took place.

The following day, as we cleared through the islands to the open sea, I had a search flight. While airborne, my radio buzzed with reports of a lively attack on our invasion ships. On my return to the Hoggatt Bay, I saw a ship burning off in the distance. When I landed, I was told that the burning ship was one of our carriers, Ommaney Bay. It had been hit by kamikazes and was severely damaged. Shortly after, the abandon ship command was given, and one of our destroyers had to be called in to sink the Ommaney Bay so that it wouldn't become a hazard to other ships in our invasion forces.

With the passing of each day, kamikaze attacks became more numerous and more persistent. On January 5, I counted five separate hits on cruisers and battleships in our immediate area. The closest our carrier came to taking a hit was just before we reached Lingayen Gulf. A Zero scooted toward us, low on the water, and unscathed through a barrage of 20mm and 40mm fire. It very swiftly pulled up with the clear intent of diving for our deck. At that instant, our five-inch gun on the fantail got off just one round. For a brief moment, the Zero was nosed over in its dive and then was literally blasted apart not 2,000 feet overhead. There was some dispute whether our

five-inch crew had scored the hit. Other ships close by insisted their gunners had brought the plane down. We were quite willing to allow any and all gun crews to take full credit for saving us from an almost sure hit from the Zero.

Japanese destroyers

LATER THAT SAME DAY, a search plane reported that two Japanese destroyers were coming out from Manila. The news caused a good deal of excitement because we hadn't expected to encounter any Japanese warships. Practically all the remaining Japanese warships had been pulled back to the home islands by January 1945. Therefore, the spotting of two destroyers in our area was something of a surprise. Our squadron was selected to send six FMs and six TBMs loaded with 500 pound bombs. I wasn't on the flight, so I am uncertain whether other planes were added to the strike force.

Each of our escort carriers was stocked with about 12 aerial torpedoes. It wasn't expected that we would encounter much enemy shipping. Therefore, we had no need for too many torpedoes, so it became a question of which TBM pilots would get the opportunity to use them. In his wisdom, the skipper took the easy way out. He decided that torpedoes would be assigned on the basis of rank. This meant that we new guys probably would never get the chance to drop a torpedo on a live target. The fact that in our practice drills we were as good or better than more senior pilots just didn't count.

Harry and I asked each of our selected six TBM pilots if we could take their place in the attack on the Japanese destroyers. At least two of the guys going on the hop would have made the switch, but they couldn't bug out without losing the respect of the squadron. If the skipper had asked for volunteers, it would have been a different story.

Our strike force, led by the skipper, was launched and joined up with planes from the other carrier to seek out the destroyers. What follows is a second-hand account relayed to Harry and me by one of the fighter pilots who had made the trip. Shortly after the strike force joined up, a minor squabble arose between our skipper, Lt. Cdr. Webb, and the skipper of the other squadron. The two of them were haggling as to who would lead the whole show. Our skipper determined that he had seniority over the other skipper. Thus, in keeping with Navy custom and practice, our skipper was to rule the roost.

When our strike force spotted and approached the destroyers, a badly directed and poorly coordinated attack was made. The fighters dribbled in on the targets, followed by a scattering of bomb drops from the TBMs



TBM of VC-88, CVE75, USS Hoggatt Bay, photo by author

and a raggedy uncoordinated torpedo attack. Fighters broke off their runs much too soon, the bombers should have—but didn't—follow right on the heels of the fighters. Instead, the bombs were released at much too high an altitude, with the resulting poor aim. Anti-aircraft fire from the destroyers was a factor, but it should have been expected. When our pilots returned, they had nothing to say. Those of us who sat it out on board the carrier were of the opinion that it was an embarrassing experience for those involved. In later unofficial reports, the results of that encounter were described as, “—the destroyers were left dead in the water.”

My first bona fide strike

THE FOLLOWING DAY, January 6, 1945, our task force arrived off Lingayen Gulf, the invasion area. The Army was scheduled to go ashore on January 9, so for three days battleships and cruisers bombarded specific targets. And from the escort carriers, our fighters and bombers were sent farther inland to hit selected targets.

Our squadron was assigned one of the early morning flights on January 6. As the skipper's wingman, I was launched along with four other TBM pilots just before daybreak. For this, my first bona fide strike, I carried four 500-pound bombs. Our flight of six TBMs carried twenty-four 500-pound bombs, fused to go off on contact. As we joined up on the skipper and headed toward the shore, we passed over our bombardment ships. They

were putting out heavy barrages and we could see the impact of their projectiles on buildings in the target area.

As a VC squadron, our primary function was to supply close support to the landing parties. Although the troops hadn't yet come ashore, the routine followed a fairly standardized pattern. A major concern in close support work was to be doubly careful that we didn't bomb or shoot up our own troops. Each pilot was furnished a set of grid maps with prominent landscape features, if any, shown on the map. On arrival in the target area from the carrier, the flight leader would make contact with a ground coordinator. He would report the number and kind of aircraft in the flight, the armament carried, and the approximate time available before the flight had to return to the carrier. The ground coordinator would identify a target by reference to a specific map and grid quadrants. Thus, the flight might be told, "Map A-22, grid sector 14C. There's a gun emplacement behind the rise of trees. Give it two 500 pounders." If the coordinator has a view of the site, he would let the flight leader know whether the emplacement had been cleared out or whether a second shot should be taken.

When our flight of six TBMs neared the shore, the skipper contacted the ground coordinator. A target had been picked for us some distance inland. We were directed to the village of Baguio, which was in a mountainous area. The view below us was a lush tropical green with a few buildings clearly visible. More clear was the huge red cross painted on the roof of a rather large building. Our target was a mountain road not more than ten miles from Baguio. The road was readily visible. It ran along the face of a mountain creating the impression that it was carved, much like a step, into the mountain slope.

The skipper signaled us to drop two bombs each on our first pass. We then would assess the damage and, if necessary, drop the remaining two bombs. We planned to drop our bombs on a diagonal run across the road. Of itself, that made sense. If our bombs landed on the down side, below the road, we figured they would produce a washout effect. If they landed above the road, we could hope for a landslide, which ought to block the road. And if we hit the road on the nose, better yet.

The flight in and over the target area was uneventful in that we saw no enemy aircraft, and we did not draw any anti-aircraft fire. Our first pass at the road was led by the skipper, as it should have been. I followed the skipper in the run, opened my bomb bays on cue from him, and when I saw his bombs release, I checked my own aiming point and hit the release switch. Almost instantly, a series of solid jolts were felt. My first reaction was that I had been hit by enemy fire. As each of us pulled out of the

bomb run and climbed to reform for a second pass, I looked out at the wings and saw no damage. My crewmen, who also were questioning me, reported no visible damage. Then it dawned on me; we were much too low. The concussion of the exploding bombs had given us the banging around. We had gone in at too low an altitude because the skipper hadn't made adequate allowance for the height of the mountains.

The mountains in the Baguio area were at least 9,000 feet above sea level. Our altimeters, set at zero when we took off, read 10,000 feet when we released our bombs. We had just about 1,000 feet of clearance which was a bit too close with six planes in close succession dropping twelve 500 pounders. Our second pass, with bombs released at a safer altitude, produced a huge cloud of dust and smoke. At first glance, it looked as though we had done a good job of taking out the mountain road. We were over the target area a total of less than ten minutes and saw no enemy activity. After the second pass, we joined up in formation and then followed the skipper as he wanted to take a closer look at the results of our 24 bombs. We could see very clearly that the bombs had hit in, on, and around the mountain road. But to our dismay, when the dust and smoke cleared away, the damage was hardly noticeable. The road hadn't been taken out, and it appeared that it could be reopened in less than a day. It was obvious to me that the mountain was solid granite or some indestructible matter. With our bomb bays emptied, there was no further reason to remain over Luzon. The skipper turned to the sea and headed for our carrier.

Our best bet looked like a high speed let down

WHILE WE HAD BEEN on our glide-bombing task, our heavy warships in Lingayen Gulf had continued their bombardment of selected targets, and they suddenly came under heavy attack by kamikazes. The gunners on those ships made no attempt to distinguish friendly or enemy aircraft, they blasted away at anything in the sky. As we were about to pass over the warships en route to our carrier, they opened up on us. Tracers came up by the dozens in graceful arcs. As more of our warships spotted us, they joined in with full intensity. Our skipper had the good sense to make an abrupt turn, with the rest of us right along with him, back to the comparative safety of the beach. We circled over the beach out of range of our ship's guns and passed over a point known as San Fabian. It just so happened that San Fabian was a strong point where the Japanese had a solid battery of guns. Huge black puffs filled the air, and they seemed to be marching toward us as the Japanese gunners corrected their aim.



C.E. "Preacher" Minick, Attack on arsenal, near Masinloc, Luzon, Philippines, January 14, 1945

Again the skipper turned toward the sea, away from San Fabian, but on a course directly over our warships. At this point we were becoming concerned about our fuel consumption, about getting our butts shot off, and about getting the hell out of the area. I closed in on the skipper til I was practically abreast of him, rather than stepped back a bit, as in the usual formation. He looked over and I pointed to a course that would place us between the warships and San Fabian. With the altitude we had, our best bet looked like a high speed let down, between the sources of the firing and then out to sea. The sipper didn't indicate yea or nay, so I pushed over and everyone else came along. We literally clocked airspeeds of close to 400 knots as we safely headed to the open sea.

I fully expected to get chewed out by the skipper when we got back to the carrier. However, he made no mention of the flight and neither did any of us who had been with him. About an hour after landing, my crewmen asked me to look at our plane. I had picked up about a dozen small caliber bullet holes and was unaware of taking any hits. To sum up that first strike for freedom and justice, it hardly rated any special notice.

Five gallons of ice cream

DUE LARGELY to the absence of any significant concentration of Japanese defenders in the Gulf area, the TBM pilots did very little flying over the next few days. Our fighters were much busier, either as protective cover over the invasion fleet or in actual pursuit of kamikazes. Three of our FM pilots were fished out of the water. Two of them went in on their landing approaches, the third was shot down. All were returned unharmed and were back at work in a day. The return of a pilot usually was the scene of some good-natured spoofing, especially if the pilot hadn't been injured. A destroyer would come alongside the carrier and toss a line to us. The line was then replaced by a more substantial one to which a chair lift, known as a bosun's chair, would be strung. The transfer of the pilot from the destroyer to the carrier was made while the ships were underway. If the sea was rough, the guy in the bosun's chair could count on getting a dunking while we on the carrier cheered him on. In exchange for our pilot, the customary ransom was five gallons of ice cream, which we cheerfully paid.

One of my flights over the beach required that I carry an Army observer so that he could check the progress of some units on the ground. The observer was cramped in a small space behind the pilot's cockpit. In truth, I wonder how much observing anyone could do from that part of the plane. Prior to taking off, and at the suggestion of some of our fighter pilots who had been over land the past two days, I filled a pillowcase with soap, toothpaste, chocolate, cigarettes, and other stuff. With my observer aboard, we were supposed to do a lot of low, slow flying. As we passed over the fields below, we saw groups of natives who waved and indicated their pleasure just to see us. I dropped the pillowcase, which set off quite a scramble. As various items were picked up, the waves and indications of thanks became quite vigorous. I rocked my wings back and forth as we went ahead with our observing. If my Army passenger observed anything more than natives and water buffalo, I missed it.

Our carrier task force continued to operate in the Lingayen Gulf area, providing support as requested. Many of our TBM flights were in the nature of patrols and searches at sea. Rumor had it that there was a possibility of a major attack by Japanese surface ships. Our patrols were intended to provide an early warning alert if those ships came into our range. We didn't appreciate it at the time, but the Japanese Navy had pretty much been reduced to but a few capital ships in the home waters.

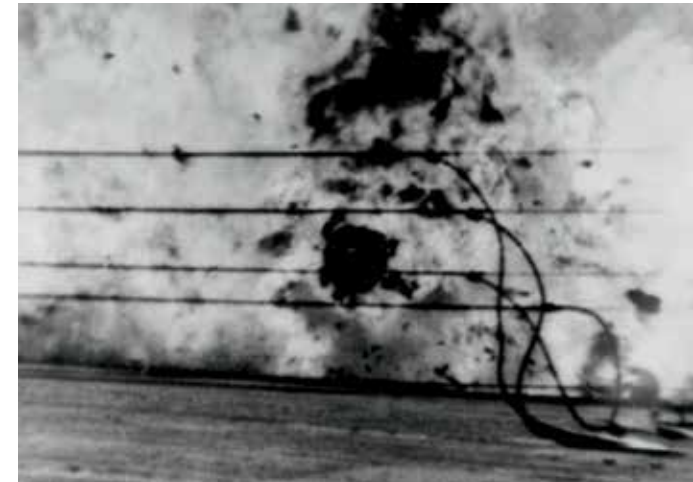
The disaster that was to occur

JANUARY 15, 1945, started out no differently than any other day of the preceding few weeks. We had no reason to suspect the disaster that was to occur. I had been out since early morning on a 100-mile search and returned to the Hoggatt Bay after a routine hop. The next flight, led by the skipper with five other TBMs, took off and headed for the beach. Those of us not flying were in the ready room when a radio report was relayed to us. One of the TBM pilots in the flight with the skipper had crashed. C.E. "Preacher" Minick had been making a glide-bombing run on an ammunition dump. He was seen to push over in an extremely steep glide path. As he headed toward his target, the tail assembly sheered away from his plane, causing it to tumble end over end to the ground. When the plane struck the ground, his bomb load detonated. No parachutes were seen, and it was a certainty that Preacher, his radioman, and his gunner did not survive.

The news of the loss of Preacher and his crew was very sobering. They were our first combat losses, and although we had previously lost Winston, we hardly knew him. The fellows who had been in the squadron since it first was organized knew Preacher best, and it was a jolt for them. The same situation prevailed with the crewmen at the news of the loss of their associates. We sat in the ready room awaiting the return of the skipper and the other pilots for a fuller explanation of what had happened.

As the skipper's flight neared the carrier, we remained in the ready room. Of itself, that was a bit unusual in that several of us ordinarily would be in the catwalk watching the planes come aboard. Customarily, the skipper, as flight leader, was the first to land. As we sat in the ready room, a tremendous blast and concussion shook the entire ship. My immediate reaction was that we had taken a torpedo from a submarine. For perhaps two seconds we were about to scramble through the passageway. Over the din of bells, sirens, and loudspeaker calls, one of our group—and I don't know who it was—shouted, "Hold it. Take it easy! Let's walk out on deck and see what happened." Sanity and order were restored at once.

As we emerged from the ready room to the catwalk, our first glimpse of the flight deck left no doubt as to the cause of the explosion. Amidst still flickering fires and much smoke, what remained of the skipper's plane was in a three point landing position. All the covering of the cockpit, fuselage, and wings had been blown away. The plane looked as though it was a skeleton. More devastating was the sight of the skipper. He was in an upright sitting position, one hand on the stick, the other on the



Plane crash of Lt. Col. Webb

throttle as in a normal landing posture—except there was nothing left but his skeleton, with no flesh or bodily material whatsoever. His two crewmen also were devoid of all flesh. Death had to have been instantaneous with the plane's impact on the flight deck.

The plane had landed on the first third of the flight deck, over the deck crew's ready room. A sizeable hole had been made in the flight deck and the crew's ready room was badly damaged. I don't recall how many of the deck crew were killed, but a total of nine, including the skipper and his crew, seems to strike a chord of memory.

All those drills by the ship's company paid off in handling the fire, the damage, and the injured. Hoses were immediately strung out, rescue parties went to the aid of the injured, deck crewmen took up their duty stations, and damage repair crews began work. Genuine heroism was displayed by the ship's photographer who caught the explosion just as it occurred. We later were to receive a copy of one of the shots, which shows a mass of flames surrounding the plane's engine. Our squadron Ordnance Officer, Tom Doughman, in the midst of all the turmoil, picked a live 100-pound bomb from the deck and threw it overboard. The bomb could only have come from the skipper's plane.

One last cruel turn was yet to come. The ship's mobile motorized crane moved toward the wreckage of Lt. Cdr. Webb's plane. After the remains of the skipper and his crew were removed, the crane was to hoist what was left

of the plane and drop it over the side. At the time, the sea was not especially rough, and the roll of the ship wasn't especially unusual. Nonetheless, as the crane lifted the plane, the ship rolled, causing the crane to flip over and crush a nearby crewman, killing him instantly.

In one day, we lost two pilots, four air crewmen, and six of the ship's company. And strangely enough, none of those deaths was the direct result of enemy action. The squadron and ship had ample reason to look upon January 15 as a bad luck day.

The cause of the skipper's explosion was no mystery, but it had to be considered a freak occurrence. His plane and the others in his flight had been loaded with ten bombs—100 pounders. After Preacher Minick went in, the flight was curtailed. No other targets had been identified, so the skipper turned back to the carrier, even though he hadn't released all his bombs. This wasn't unusual; on occasion all of us had returned aboard ship with unexpended bombs, and we never gave the matter any thought.

The bombs contained a high explosive fuse. When the fuse, of itself only a small charge, detonated, it triggered off the much bigger explosive in the bomb. If the fuse didn't detonate, the bomb in most instances would turn out to be a dud. Bombs loaded aboard our planes were placed in bomb racks. The fuse had a small nose propeller that turned over in the downward fall by the action of the air against the prop blades. After the propeller had rotated a given number of turns, it brought a firing pin to the point where, on the bomb's impact, the pin would strike the primer explosive in the fuse. The resulting explosion, in turn, triggered the explosion of the bomb itself. As a safety measure, and perhaps for other reasons, when bombs were loaded on a plane, a restraining wire was run through the fuse propeller. With the wire in place, the propeller couldn't rotate, and the bombs couldn't be armed. On a bombing run, the pilot first had to "arm" his bombs. Then, with the bomb bay open as the pilot made his run, he squeezed the bomb release. This caused the bomb to fall free of the rack while the restraining wire parted from the fuse blades. The blades were permitted to rotate as the bomb fell.

For reasons unknown

OUR BEST GUESS was that, for reasons unknown to anyone, the restraining wire on one or more of the skipper's bombs had failed and inadvertently become detached. When he opened his bomb bay over the target, the air flow caused the bomb fuse blades to rotate and set the fuse in position for

detonation. To compound his bad luck, the bomb broke free of the bomb rack when the skipper landed on the flight deck, and the resulting impact did him in. Under normal conditions, the bomb should not have been jarred from the bomb rack, and if it hadn't, it very likely would not have exploded. After a further discussion among all members of the squadron and interested officers of the ship's company, we agreed that henceforth, if a pilot has armed his bombs, and if the bombs had not and could not be released, the plane could not be permitted to come aboard the carrier. The pilot and his crew were to bail out as reasonably close to the carrier as possible. Before bailing out, the pilot was to set the plane's controls so that it would crash in the open sea. If the bombs had not been armed, they were to be dumped at sea. But if the unarmed bombs couldn't be released, the pilot was permitted to come aboard with them.

We also reviewed the circumstances of Preacher Minick's loss. We agreed that each TBM pilot would have to be alert to excessively steep bombing runs and to avoid the stress of high-speed pullouts. We should have been aware of the plane's limits. However, until the loss of Preacher, we hadn't given serious thought to the hazards of excessive stress on the plane. As a matter of fact, Harry had made such a steep run only a day earlier. When he released a 500 pounder, it struck the front end of the bomb bay and put a sizeable dent in the belly.

Throughout the night, the ship's crew worked at temporary repairs to the damaged flight deck. A gaping hole of at least 30 feet had been made by the explosion. By the next morning, the hole was covered with large steel plates and shored up with heavy support timbers. We were able to launch planes at daybreak, as in the past.

For the next two days, I had a search and anti-sub patrol. On each landing back aboard the Hoggatt Bay, the LSO was quite skillful in giving a late cut so that I landed farther up the deck. The ship's crew did an outstanding job of keeping us in action with a minimum of inconvenience. As temporary measures, their repairs were exceptionally good, but a more complete going over was necessary. Fortunately, the Army had made good progress on Luzon and had taken several airfields. The Air Corps took over the job we were doing, which allowed the escort carriers to withdraw. We headed out of the area on January 18 and retraced our course through the Philippines—with not a single encounter with the Japanese. Our destination was the anchorage at Ulithi atoll, the largest fleet anchorage in the Pacific. Ulithi was about 900 miles east of the Philippines. We were to go there for a brief R and R period and to prepare for the next invasion.



USS Saginaw Bay (CVE 82)

Itching to earn a 'meatball'

SOME MORE PLEASANT and humorous events of the Lingayen Gulf operation included the ribbing we gave one of our fighter pilots, Red McDonald. Red was a feisty guy, short of stature, but itching to earn a “meatball” on his cockpit by shooting down a Jap plane. He returned with his wing mates after a flight over Luzon and was questioned, “Hey Red. What in hell were you strafing? We saw only a few old water buffalo.” Red replied, “If you guys didn’t see it, there was a horse down there.” “A horse? You shot a horse?” “Well a horse could be used for military purposes.” With that exchange, the rest of us pitched in with roars of laughter. “You bastard. You probably killed off some poor old native’s only worthwhile possession.” “How about it Red, you want a horse painted on your cockpit?”

The day after our return from the fiasco of bombing the mountain road near Baguio, our fighters were sent to the same area. They reported that, while we may have seen one building with a red cross on the roof, when they got there, just about every building was marked with a red cross. Furthermore, there was an airfield nearby that we hadn’t seen, and it was loaded with anti-aircraft guns. One of our fighters, Lyndon Denny (“Bird”) Harris decided to give the Japanese a treat. Keeping in mind that the wheels of the FM had to be cranked down as well as up, Bird broke from the formation and began a landing approach to the well-armed Japanese airfield. Our pilots thought he had been hit and was making a forced landing. Very likely the Japanese must have had the same thought as Bird approached the runway with wheels down. In anticipation of his landing, the firing from the ground stopped. However, no sooner had his plane touched down than Bird added full power and took off. He hadn’t any trouble; he merely wanted to one-up the other guys in his flight.

For his damn fool stunt, he was handsomely chewed out by the skipper.

The Hoggatt Bay arrived at Ulithi on January 23, and we were told that it could not return to active duty until it was given a thorough repair job. Two days later, our squadron transferred to the Saginaw Bay, an escort carrier in the same class as the Hoggatt Bay. At the same time, Lt. Gene Kemp was formally designated skipper of VC-88, and Andy Camp moved up to the executive officer slot. We also received a replacement TBM pilot, Jimmy Hitt.

Iwo Jima

OUR STAY AT ULITHI stretched out for almost three weeks as we awaited the assembling of the invasion force for our next target, Iwo Jima. During our so-called rest and recreation period, our squadron was permitted to go ashore at a nearby sand bar island just once. With so many men and ships at Ulithi, we probably were lucky to get even one trip ashore. We were given a ration of about three cans of beer, which was sufficient after our prolonged dry spell to make most of us tipsy.

In our briefing on the Iwo invasion, we were told of the repeated air attacks by the Air Corps and by the Navy's fast carrier planes, and the almost constant shelling of the island by our warships. We were assured that the Japanese defenses had been severely damaged, and their ability to resist was considerably diminished. The Marines who were to make the landings were led to believe, just as we were, that the island could be taken in a matter of days.

By the time we moved out of Ulithi, on February 10, we welcomed the prospect of the assault on Iwo. The boredom of the extended rest period, with no flight activity, was beginning to weigh on all of us. En route to Iwo, we stopped at Saipan and took two Marine artillery spotters aboard, along with their Piper Cub airplanes. From Saipan, the escort carriers provided protective cover and anti-sub patrols over and around the Marine troop transports and supply ships.

The only incident of any significance to me en route to Iwo was the wild



Iwo Jima, February 20, 1945

goose chase I made at the far end of one of my patrols. I had noted a speck in the distance and chased it for at least five minutes before I realized that it was no closer than when I first started my chase. Suddenly, I remembered the stories about guys who had chased distant objects only to discover that the object was nothing more than a speck of dirt on the windshield. I also remembered that when I heard those stories, I thought you'd have to be pretty dumb to make such a mistake. I worked my way back on course, and when I came back aboard the ship, I saw no reason to confess my fallibility.

D Day

FEBRUARY 19, D DAY, brought together a massive strike force from the fast fleet carrier group, including the newer heavy-hitting cruisers and battleships, plus the invasion forces and our own escort carrier support group. I was assigned a target anti-sub patrol, which meant I was to cover a segment much like a slab of pie with Mt. Siribachi as the center point. I was

hardly off the deck, carrying a full load of depth charges, when I noticed a dark mass near the surface. It was less than a mile from our carriers. I called to Palmere and Brown and asked them to keep alert as I made a return pass. Neither of my crewmen saw anything; however, I caught a quick second look. All of this took two or three minutes, when I got the chilling realization that it could be a submarine stalking our carriers. I immediately radioed our ship and made ready to drop depth charges on my next pass. As I came around the third time there was nothing in sight. My carrier radioed that I was to remain in the area for a few more minutes until another plane with sound detection gear could take over. After the plane arrived, I completed my original sub assignment. When I returned to our carrier I was questioned closely; my sighting was labeled as “doubtful.” But more than a few of the guys wanted to give me credit for sighting a whale.

For the rest of my D day flight, I had a pretty good ringside seat to observe the pounding given the beach area in advance of the Marine landings. The heavy bombardment by our warships was curtailed while wave after wave of fighters and bombers strafed, rocketed, and bombed the beach at the landing area. With so heavy and concentrated an attack, it was expected that few survivors would be left to repel the landing. However, as everyone very shortly discovered, the defenders not only survived, but they extracted a terrible price for every inch given up.

For several days after the Marines went ashore, the weather took a turn for the worse. We were well aware of the situation on Iwo, and we attempted to provide air support despite very heavy, overcast skies. A strike scheduled for D day plus one ended up as a disorderly scattering of planes unable to maintain a semblance of a formation due to weather conditions. After an unduly prolonged chase through heavy clouds, I gave up trying to join my flight and returned to the carrier.

The marginal weather continued, which meant very few planes got to Iwo to assist the Marines. On the evening of February 21, radar reported a flight of enemy planes was approaching the area. The Saratoga, classified as a large fast carrier, was operating in the Iwo area with a squadron of night fighters—apart from our escort carrier group. We couldn't see the Saratoga from our ship, but we could hear radio reports that it was under attack. It took four hits from kamikazes and was severely damaged, so it was forced to leave the area. As an aside, I was told several months later that Bobby Powell, of my Kingsville, Texas days, had been badly burned. He was supposed to have been in the cockpit of an F6F, about to take off, when one of the kamikazes crashed on deck. A fire started, and Bobby was rescued from almost certain frying.

As darkness rolled in, the kamikazes came upon our units. In rapid order they attacked the Lunga Point and another carrier, Bismark Sea. Several near misses on the Lunga Point were followed by a Japanese plane which hit the flight deck and skidded over the side, into the ocean. A fire was started but extinguished after a short struggle. Repairs were made overnight by the crew, and the Lunga Point was back in action the next morning.

No “safe” place to duck into

BISMARK SEA had no luck at all. At least one kamikaze scored a serious hit in the stern. Fire broke out and rapidly got out of control. Explosions followed one after the other as fires reached ammunition and aviation fuel stored on board. After an agonizingly unsuccessful fight to control the fire, an order to abandon ship was given. The realization that the crew aboard the Bismark Sea had to go into the ocean in the dark of night was very depressing as we watched from our carrier. Although it may sound of misplaced sentiment to deplore the loss of a ship while its crew struggled for survival, nonetheless, I was deeply moved as I watched the burning ship gradually disappear into the blackness of the sea.

During the attack on our ships, our carrier was standing close by. We, along with several destroyers, moved in once the abandon ship order was given to provide whatever help we could. Actually it was the destroyer crews that picked up the Bismark crew; I don't recall that we did any of the rescue work. It was obvious to all on board our carrier that we must have been clearly silhouetted as the flames lit up the dark night. It would be totally dishonest if I were to say that I wasn't just plain scared. There was no “safe” place to duck into, and the only choice we had was to tough it out as best we could. I never could understand how or why any kamikaze pilot could fail to make a pass at us. However, when the Bismark Sea went under, the attacks petered out. For the rest of our stay at Iwo, we had a few alerts but no further attacks by Japanese planes.

Our glide-bombing and rocket-firing flights always were in the company of other planes. Navigation was an important part of every flight, but with up to a dozen planes in a flight, you always felt more comfortable about courses, airspeeds, and fuel consumption. For one, if your radio and other homing gear should fail, it was almost a certainty that others in the flight would be able to get a fix on the right course. Anti-sub patrols were another matter. You flew a sector on your lonesome. Thus, you were especially concerned with your navigation, and you constantly checked your position on the navigation chart board.

A bit uneasy

WHILE IN THE Iwo Jima area, Harry and I suddenly became aware that Jack was becoming careless or showed a lack of confidence in his navigation. On several occasions, Jack asked Harry or me to look over the work he had done on his chart board. And on a few of those times, we hurriedly reworked what he had done so that he was properly set up before being launched. We didn't make a big deal of it, but one or the other of us tried to check his navigation before he left the ready room.

The morning after the Bismark Sea was sunk found everyone on board our ship still a bit uneasy. As I was to find out, that same uneasy feeling must have prevailed with the other ships in our unit. Our squadron had the predawn launch for the early morning patrol, which covered a distance of about 50 miles around the unit. I and five other TBM pilots were scheduled to take off, and a seventh pilot had standby. The standby was supposed to be ready to fill in for any of the six whose plane might be inoperable—a not uncommon situation. Jack Crimmins had the standby, which meant that he should have worked out the navigation for all six sectors of the patrol. If he had to be launched, he could set right out on the correct course of the replaced plane. Jack lucked out. He didn't do anybody's navigation, and all six of us got off as scheduled.

After I was catapulted, I set out on the first swing of my patrol. Outbound, the first leg went 50 miles, a second leg on the outer perimeter was about 40 miles, and the third leg was to bring me back to the task unit. The same pattern would be repeated for about three to four hours, and we then would come back aboard the carrier. On the inbound leg of the first sweep of my patrol, I could faintly see the outlines of several of our ships. It was not yet full daylight. I approached our task unit with the intention of passing overhead and then turned back to begin my second swing around the circuit. Without warning, just about every ship in our unit started blasting at me with anti-aircraft fire. To say that the ships' crews were uneasy badly understated the matter. But, my anger and outrage wasn't muted in the least. At only 1,500 feet and traveling at a slow cruise, we made an easy target. I made a sharp turn away from the ships and nosed over to pick up airspeed as I headed for the open sea. After some choice communications with our carrier, I let it be known that my patrol for the rest of my flight wouldn't bring me closer than five miles to our ship. And when I came in for my landing, they damn well better recognize who was coming aboard. After I landed, I got a razzing from the other pilots who thought the incident was very funny.

Glide-bombing, rocket firing, and strafing at Iwo called for special tactics. Because the island was so small, and because the distance between the Marines and the Japs was so close, we had to take care that we didn't fire on our own troops. When we approached the island from the carrier with our bomb and rocket load, we would contact the ground coordinator who would give us a target, including the map and grid quadrants of the target location. Whoever led the flight would make a dummy run at the target, followed by the rest of the flight—usually in close, single file. The flight path taken was always parallel to the Marines' front lines; you never were to pass overhead on a course perpendicular to the front. If the ground coordinator was satisfied with the dummy run, he then gave a go ahead for a live drop of bombs or rocket fire.

Apart from the patrols, I flew over Iwo on at least a dozen flights. At no time did I see a Japanese soldier. Their strategy called for fighting from their caves and tunnels. Any large-scale, anti-aircraft fire was avoided by the Japanese so their positions wouldn't be detected by a sighting of gunfire flares.

Our procedure of making dry runs at a target couldn't be expected to fool the Japanese for very long. The giveaway was obvious when we didn't open the bomb bay. On a live run, our open bomb bays indicated that the bombs would be released. Although an area was repeatedly bombed for several days, and there was a complete absence of any anti-aircraft fire, it didn't mean that we could fly over that area with no concern about protective fire from below. Not infrequently, the Japanese would wait out a string of attacking planes, then suddenly throw up a barrage as the last plane was clearing the area. The first planes would have moved out over the sea to regroup, but the last plane couldn't see where the gunfire at his rear came from. As a result of that piece of Japanese strategy, Ensign Provost of our squadron took a hit in the belly of his TBM, which wiped out his radioman. Provost and his gunner survived a forced landing and were returned to our carrier by a destroyer. We gladly paid the ice cream ransom for their return.

The spookiest flights

TWO OF THE spookiest flights I had over Iwo required that I carry a Marine artillery spotter. The spotter flew as a passenger with us until an airfield was secured by the invasion forces. Both spotter flights were much the same. My job was like a cab driver's; I went wherever my passenger wanted to go. When we neared the island, the spotter radioed his arrival to the field artillery. After he was updated on the ground activity, the spotter

directed me to make several runs back and forth the length of the island—at a fairly slow speed and at low altitude so that he got a clear view of what was happening. We then narrowed the area we covered as he would direct artillery fire toward a target fairly close below us. As artillery shells blanketed the area, sending clouds of smoke and dust, the spotter would radio corrections in range and bearing. Our flight, back and forth, low and slow, with effort at evasive action, made us an excellent anti-aircraft target. Even spookier was the need for constant vigilance of other aircraft in the crowded airspace over the island. Those other aircraft zoomed around and past us with wing guns firing and rockets zipping down at various targets. To be said for the Marine spotters, they ignored the distractions and put in a concentrated effort. I consoled myself with the thought, “If he can take it, I’ll keep him here as long as he wants. Unless I have a problem or get low on fuel, I’ll tough it out with him.”

It wasn’t too long after D day that the ground forces progressed to the point where they had occupied an airfield. Our spotters’ Piper Cubs were brought up from the hangar deck. The spotters loaded their belongings and took off for a more permanent base on Iwo Jima. To see the Cubs make a deck run and takeoff was ludicrous. By the time they reached the ship’s bridge, they were at least 50 feet in the air. We couldn’t help but compare the takeoff to flying a kite. Those of us who had taxied the spotters over the island didn’t regret losing those choice hops, but we also admired the guts of the spotters whose Piper Cubs were much more vulnerable than our TBMs.

On an especially bright morning, in a cloudless blue sky, I along with five other TBMs joined up and headed toward Iwo. We each carried four 500-pound bombs and expected to report in at the target area in about 45 minutes. We had just set on course toward the beach, and I congratulated myself on catching such a beautiful day—after so long a spell of lousy weather—when my prop began to surge. Try as I would, I couldn’t control the prop. The fluctuating engine performance made it impossible to maintain my formation position. At one moment, I’d be lagging the pack, then I’d find myself scooting ahead of the other planes. The only thing to do was tell the flight leader I was returning to our carrier.

As I turned back, I told my crew what had happened and let them know I was going to release our bomb load into the ocean. The bomb bay opened after I activated the switch. However, when I hit the bomb release, I did not feel the expected surge of a plane lightened by shedding 2,000 pounds. From his seat in the rear belly of the plane, Palmere could look into the bomb bay through a small window. He assured me that the bombs hadn’t released in

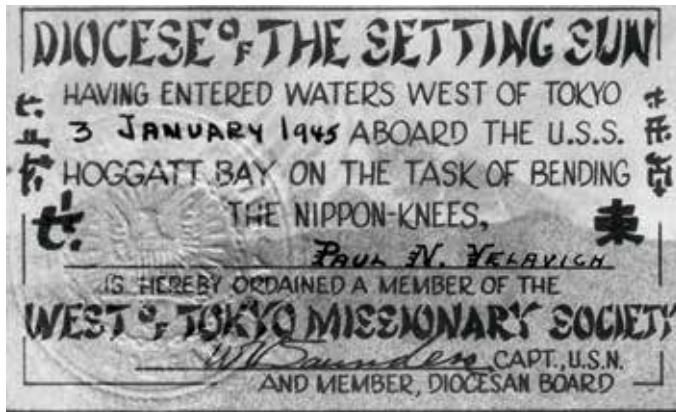
spite of my repeated efforts. Thoughts of the Hoggatt Bay ran through our minds. We didn’t welcome the possibility of having to bail out and then be fished from the ocean. I assured Brown and Palmere that I hadn’t tripped the bomb arming switch. They knew the rule as well as I that if I had armed the bombs, we didn’t have a choice; we would have to bail out.

As we neared the carrier, I radioed our expected arrival time and reviewed the bomb load situation. On my statement that the bombs hadn’t been armed, I was cleared to come aboard. Even though I hadn’t armed my bombs, I still had reservations. After all, we had agreed on the cause of Lt. Cdr. Webb’s accident, but that was only our best guess. It could have been caused by some other malfunction we had overlooked. The thought flashed through my mind that if those four bombs were to detonate, I’d never know it. But the blast would surely do in the Saginaw Bay and wipe out almost the entire crew. As I came around in my landing pattern I convinced myself that my fears were groundless. Prior to Lt. Cdr. Webb’s accident, I and others had routinely returned with a partial bomb load. As I came up the groove and was picked up by the LSO, I said to myself, “This could be a lousy way to end such a beautiful day.” If anything, my landing was as smooth as any I had made. In short, a routine ending to a worrisome experience. After the bombs were removed, the ordinance men told me they discovered a faulty circuit in the bomb release mechanism.

On March 11, our escort carrier taskforce withdrew from Iwo Jima and headed back to Ulithi. The Marines on Iwo still were meeting inch-by-inch resistance on the northern end, but the airfields were firmly in our hands. Army Air Force fighters moved in, and the first Superfort emergency landing had been made. The main purpose in taking Iwo Jima was to acquire a forward fighter base to provide protection to the Superfortresses in their attacks on the Japanese home islands. And if the Superforts were damaged, the airfields at Iwo were intended as emergency landing sites, thus avoiding the extended return flights to their home base in the Marianas.

A delightful sandbar known as Mog Mog

THE JOURNEY from Iwo to Ulithi took three days, and on arrival it was evident that we were to be refurbished and resupplied very promptly. A new operation awaited us. We were at Ulithi one week, and our squadron generously was allowed two beer parties on a delightful sand bar known as Mog Mog. At that time, Ulithi anchorage had more ships, more different kinds of ships, and more personnel awaiting the next engagement than at



Pitylu Island Officer Club West of Tokyo Missionary Society ID, January 3, 1945

any other place in the Pacific. Although it was a surprise, it shouldn't have been unexpected, to see Navy nurses at the beer parties. With a cluster of males around each nurse, the most that could be said was, "I saw a nurse. A female. Wow!"

It was at one of the beer parties that I ran into Eric Catwinkle—from back in those Denton, Texas days. Both of us were quite pleased to meet again after what seemed so long an interval. We swapped stories about what we were doing. Eric won, hands down.

I wasn't aware of it at the time, but Eric was an FM pilot aboard the Makin Island—practically a neighbor—during the invasion at Lingayen Gulf. He acquired fame and admiration for his participation in the Philippine conquest. When we flew over the Philippines, our survival packs always included 100 gold pesos. We were expected to turn in the pesos each time we came back aboard the carrier. The thought was that if we were shot down or had to make a forced landing, those gold pesos would help us to escape with the aid of the native population.

On a flight over the Lingayen beach area, Eric was shot down. He wasn't heard from and was considered missing in action. Two months later, Eric turned up at American-held Leyte, all the way across the width of the Philippine Islands. He wasn't too much the worse for his experience. Eric was returned to his squadron just before I met him at Ulithi. He told me the natives hid him from the Japanese and assisted him in the long journey from Luzon to Leyte. He laughingly told me that when he returned to his

carrier, he was asked to account for the 100 gold pesos. According to Eric, he explained that he used the pesos as escape money for the benefit of the natives. The truth of the matter was that he screwed his way across the Philippines and rewarded or paid the providers of his pleasures with the pesos.

Those beer parties at Mog Mog were a much-needed change of pace. If anything, most of us were pretty cheap dates. Our diminished capacity for any alcoholic refreshments was soon evident. In his best form, Jack Crimmins entertained and gave a classical recital of every bawdy ditty he, or the rest of us, could recall. At the end of the day, we were fashionably crooked as we wandered to the beach. We looked for a small boat which was to take us out in the anchorage, back to our carrier. I, along with a dozen of our pilots, was offered a ride by a captain from another ship who had his own boat. It was motorized and open, much like a lifeboat, with a coxswain at the controls. As we bounced along over the low waves we soon became drenched with the spray. Before very long we began offering expert advice to the coxswain on boat handling. The bouncing around, plus the amount of beer that we had recently consumed, prompted about six of us to stand up with the intention of urinating over the side. The risk of several drunks falling overboard was too much for the coxswain. He demanded that everyone be seated and looked to the captain for support. A few of us began to let the coxswain know that we took no orders from the likes of him. At that point, the captain obviously had his fill of us. In unmistakable language, he ordered us to sit down and shut up or get the hell out right where we were. Such is the power of command of senior Navy officers that we obeyed promptly. As we got out of his boat and went up the ladder of our carrier, there were a few mumbled protests. Fortunately, the digs were ignored. The captain apparently was well rid of us and saw no point questioning our ingratitude.

Okinawa

IN JUST ONE WEEK, our squadron, as well as the ship, was resupplied with food, fuel, ammunition, and other stuff necessary for the next operation. We then joined a huge task force of carriers, troop ships, and various warships as we set out for Okinawa. The preceding day we were given a briefing that Okinawa was the site of our next invasion. It, of course, was practically at the doorstep of the Japanese home islands. With the realization of the vigorous defense the Japanese had mounted at Iwo, there was no talk of an abbreviated struggle. We all were fully aware that the proximity of Okinawa to the home islands meant that kamikaze attacks would be both more numerous and more aggressively pressed. Although the Japanese fleet had been seriously depleted, their super battleship, Yamato, was still operational. To our knowledge, the Yamato was in tip-top condition, and it was reportedly the most powerful ship in the world's navies. If it should slip away from its home base and appear in the midst of the invasion task force, the fox might cause considerable damage in that chicken coop.

Invasion plans called for Army and Marine forces to land on the western shore of Okinawa. Once on the beach, the Marine forces were to move north, and the Army was to take the southern end of the island. Before assaulting the beach, as scheduled for April 1, 1945—Easter Sunday—we expected to arrive a week earlier and capture a small group of islands, Kerama Retto, about 15 miles west of the main target. It wasn't heavily



Official Navy press photograph caption: Ens. Paul Yelavich, Jr., 333 Rochelle Ave., Rochelle Park, N.J., readies his plane for another strike against the Japs. He is attached to a fighter and bomber squadron aboard an escort carrier in the Pacific. He has seen action at Luzon, Lingayen Gulf, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

defended, and our planners considered it would provide a natural sheltered anchorage for use as a supply base for the invasion forces.

Other than a very rough sea, the trip from Ulithi to Okinawa was uneventful. Our ship, as well as the other escort carriers, pitched and rolled so severely that it was hazardous to attempt to walk on the flight deck. On those days, flight operations were impossible.

My first flight was a patrol along the western shore. Evidence of earlier bombardments and strikes by the fast carrier units were barely visible. Those pre-invasion, softening-up strikes, which proved to be of minimum impact on Iwo, didn't lead us to think that Okinawa would be easily overrun. As I passed

over the island, I noted that it was well landscaped, particularly in areas under cultivation, and healthily wooded. It looked much too peaceful to be a military target. Throughout that day and the entire week, the bombardment ships hammered the island almost without let up. Planes from our escort carrier group made repeated bombing runs on selected target areas. Occasionally, a hit would be scored on an ammunition dump or fuel supply, which resulted in towering explosions which could be seen for miles around.

Simultaneously with the strikes on Okinawa, a force of warships moved into Kerama Retto to bombard selected targets. Even though pockets of resistance still remained, the Navy began to set up shop that very day in the Kerama islands. For the next few days, flights of TBMs and FMs worked over anything that even gave the appearance of a target. By the end of the week, Kerama Retto was a full-scale supply base ready to support the move to the beach of Okinawa.

Several months earlier, I and two other TBM pilots had received some brief training in laying down smoke screens. At the time, we took the training half seriously; we never expected to use it. To my surprise, I was scheduled to put down a smoke screen on the day before the invasion. I don't recall why a smoke screen was needed a day in advance of the actual invasion, but off I went. The objective of the screen was to get the smoke on the surface, close to the site where the water and beachfront met in sufficient density to mask the view of observers on land. This meant a low-level flight and not too high an airspeed, at fairly straight and level flight. In other words, an inviting target. I checked in at the target area and was put on hold. As I circled off shore, I planned at least a half dozen approaches. My concerns were relieved when the ground coordinator decided he didn't need a smoke screen. I don't know which part of my \$27,000 education was aborted, but that was the only opportunity I had to deliver a return on the smoke screen investment.

The invasion on Easter Sunday went better than expected, as the Army and the Marines met surprisingly little resistance. Lest we got careless about restrained opposition, we were rudely reminded that anti-aircraft fire could very suddenly become accurate and deadly. Ensign Bill Nance, one of our fighter pilots was shot down and lost over Okinawa. Nine days later, his body was recovered by our advancing Marines.

Kamikaze Gulch

KAMIKAZE ACTIVITY during our first week of the operation was rather light. Our escort carrier unit took up station some 60 miles southeast of

Okinawa. However, a large number of ships were close in to the island and in Kerama Retto. The Navy deployed destroyers on picket duty at a perimeter of up to 100 miles from Okinawa. The picket ships were intended to sound early warning of in-coming kamikazes. Actually, the pickets turned out to be the first targets, and they took the brunt of most kamikaze attacks. The frequency and the intensity of the attacks became progressively more severe as our stay at Okinawa was extended. The Saginaw Bay, like most other escorts, had just about depleted its supply of armaments in the first week of operation. Our planes were in full use each day, and we emptied the ship's ammo bins in an inordinate hurry. To rearm and take on more supplies, we were sent to Kerama Retto. In the short time that it had been occupied by the Navy, the anchorage had acquired, or earned, the name of Kamikaze Gulch. At any one time, there must have been a minimum of two dozen ships anchored at Kerama Retto, just as we were. Ordinarily, carrier planes would be launched with the carrier underway and headed into the wind. Suddenly we came under attack. There was no time for niceties; our fighters were catapulted from our anchored ship and were airborne in short order. Meanwhile, our ship's guns and the guns of other ships in the anchorage were blasting away. Bombs from the Japanese planes were dropping nearby, and inasmuch as our ship had just completed reprovisioning before the attack, we up-anchored and headed for open sea. Our fighters shot down three planes, and our ship escaped unharmed. Kamikaze Gulch didn't impress us as much of an R & R area.

The morning after our carrier rejoined our escort carrier group, we had our first visit in our area by kamikazes. They were driven off or shot down, but not before a near miss damaged the Wake Island and not before making several unsuccessful passes at our ship. Compared to the devastating experience of so many ships during the Okinawa campaign, our exposure was negligible. Nonetheless, the limited exposure made believers of us.

Conscience or chicken

SEVERAL OF MY FLIGHTS stand out in that they were a bit out of the ordinary. On a patrol off the western coast of Okinawa, I came across a small fishing boat. It was about 20-feet long, with two occupants. Identification of friend or foe from airplane was established by a coded flashing of signal lights. The other party was supposed to respond with a correct answering code. As I circled overhead, flashing a series of red and green lights, I got no response. I knew my crewmen were waiting for my next move. Brown, in his turret,

could easily have wiped out the boat with his .50 caliber machine guns. I, just as easily, could do the boat in with my two wing guns. Technically, the boat should have been destroyed; for all I knew, it could have been Tojo himself escaping our clutches. Call it conscience or chicken, I decided that the war wouldn't be lost if I ignored the boat. And I did just that.

Much the same thing happened as I scouted the northern end of Okinawa. The natives and enemy troops usually went into hiding if they heard an approaching airplane. Consequently, I seldom saw anyone on the ground in enemy-held territory. Therefore, I was quite surprised to see what looked like an elderly man plodding a dirt road with a bucket dangling from each end of a shoulder yolk. As I swooped over him, he didn't even look up. After a brief debate of "should I or shouldn't I," I turned away and continued my flight. When I mentioned it to Harry, he recommended that I consult with Red McDonald, mighty slayer of horses.

Unidentified plane

ALTHOUGH I SAW quite a few Japanese planes while standing on the deck of the carrier, I never encountered any while in the air. Our fighters were much busier; they shot down at least ten planes. One of our TBM pilots came on a single engine bomber while on patrol. He succeeded in sending the plane into the ocean. The possibility of encountering a Japanese plane had to be considered on every flight—particularly on extended patrols, when you were out on your lonesome. The patrols were covered by TBM pilots and were searching for any possible enemy action, such as submarines, aircraft, or shipping. As I was making my first sweep of my search, at least 75 miles from the carrier, I noted a single plane, high above me, and moving along at a fast clip. The plane turned toward me and was approaching with the sun at his back. His position and distance made it impossible to identify the plane.

In a few seconds, I mentally noted that it had to be a fighter. At the same time, I reasoned that our fighters always flew in pairs or in four-plane sections. Thus, it was unlikely that the yet unidentified plane was one of ours. As I figured it, the odds were strongly in favor of the plane being Japanese. So what to do? Realistically, a TBM was no match for a fighter, and we could very well be in trouble. Neither Palmere nor Brown had noted the plane. I called their attention to it and told Brown to start tracking it from his turret.

While we were trained in quite a variety of tactics, we had never been given any instructions on how to defend ourselves if attacked by a fighter.

Back at Corpus Christi, we had some limited exercise in dogfights, but that was in an SNJ, where each plane was on a par. In a slow and less maneuverable TBM, the best defense obviously was to avoid engagement with a fighter. Nonetheless, we knew, or should have known, that the possibility of meeting an enemy fighter was not all that remote. From want of a better choice, I had mentally designed my own strategy. However, I hadn't sought anyone's opinion, and I hadn't even given it a practice run. My plan, if attacked, was to drop down as low to the water as possible, with considerably reduced speed. Then I would keep turning into the direction of the attacking plane. At the same time, my turret gunner would fire his .50 caliber at the approaching plane. I was of the opinion that my low, slow turn might cause the other guy to so tighten his own turn that he just might put himself in the drink. Also, to disabuse the attacker that he had a soft touch, sitting duck, my turret gunner's fire would offer as much discomfort as possible.

As I eased back my throttle and began a tentative letdown, the other plane appeared to be in an ideal—from his point of view—position for a high-side gunnery run. As absurd as it may seem, in the next few seconds, I reminded myself that I was the best-trained pilot in the world, and my \$27,000 education made me more than a match for an enemy fighter pilot. Back in the days of ground school at Athens, Georgia, we were given a lot of purportedly psychological tests in which we were asked questions such as: "If you were shot down over a Jap-held island, do you think you could outfight and outthink three Japanese soldiers?" The expected answer, apparently, was an unequivocal "yes." The Navy, in a far more sophisticated manner, had done a persistent job of convincing us that we were as good as they said we were. The psyching-up job done by the Navy paid off in bolstering my courage. Up to that point, I hadn't expressed my concern to Palmere and Brown. If things heated up they could be ready in short order.

As the unidentified plane approached, I finally got a clear glimpse of it and was greatly relieved to see that it was an FM, a fighter from one of our neighboring escort carriers. Planes from the squadrons in our carrier group (as were planes from all fleet squadrons) had distinctive tail markings. Our marking was two lightning bolts; other squadrons had a diamond marking, stripes, etc. The pilot of the FM gave hand signals to indicate that his radio was out, and he was separated from his flight. He wanted me to lead him back to our carriers. I gladly obliged, and I was not disappointed about not having to test my grand defense strategy.



Lightning bolts on VC-88 TBM tail fin

Souvenirs

ANDY KAMP, our blustery, pompous executive officer was shot down over Okinawa a few days after the invasion was launched. He managed to make an emergency landing behind our own lines. Several days later, he returned to our carrier; he had no serious injuries. While on the beach, Andy scrounged around for souvenirs with little success. The best he could do was pick up a battered door from a downed Japanese bomber, known as a “Betty.” The door was on the small side, about three feet by four feet, and it was scuffed and dented—hardly much of a trophy.

Andy made a show of being almost smugly pleased about his souvenir. Most of us, and I more outspoken than the others, thought it was a trash collector’s reject. Andy’s door was moved from corner to corner of the ready room for several weeks. For whatever reason, Andy ignored all suggestions that he take it to his room. One day I was duty officer—an assignment each of us had on a rotating basis—and, among other things, I let it be known that it was my intention to clean up the ready room and to give it a much-needed airing. I asked Andy to take his door because we intended to do a thorough cleaning job. He almost deliberately ignored me, with the contempt that only an executive officer of Andy’s stature and rank could have for a mere ensign. My clean-up crew went to work as soon as the first flight was launched. Andy was on that flight, so he wasn’t around to give us

any heat. I spotted Andy’s door and without a word to anyone, I went out to the catwalk and heaved it overboard.

Several days later, Andy noticed his door was missing. The word had gone out that I had gotten rid of it. When Andy asked me what had become of his door, I told him I gave it the deep six. Everyone within earshot thought it was hilarious. Their roars of laughter must have convinced Andy that he should forget about any reprisal. I must admit, my popularity with him never recovered.

One other Andy Kamp story is deserving of mention. Among the not too many absolute *MUST* rules of Naval aviation was the requirement that your wing guns had to be on safety when landing a plane. It was doubly important in carrier landings because the jolt of landing and catching a wire could inadvertently cause a pilot to squeeze the trigger on his stick. It was solely the pilot’s responsibility to activate the safety switch before landing. Several of us were standing in the catwalk as a flight of fighters approached the carrier. Just before the FMs entered the traffic pattern, some TBMs had landed and were parked ahead of the barrier along with other planes which had been moved forward to clear the landing area. As was customary, many of the deck crew were busy tying down, parking, and beginning to service the planes ahead of the barrier. The returning fighters were cleared to land, and the first plane in the groove was Andy’s. He took a routine cut from the LSO, and his tail hook properly caught an arresting wire. The jolt of the landing was instantly accompanied by his four wing guns blasting away for what seemed like ten seconds. Everyone on the topside of the carrier was instantly aware of what was happening. Ahead of the barrier, pilots who still were with their planes and the deck crew, scrambled madly to get clear of the line of fire. If it hadn’t been so potentially dangerous, it would have resembled a comedy scene worthy of the Marx brothers to see the bodies diving into the catwalk or clawing to get flat against the flight deck.

The gunfire ceased as abruptly as it started, and Andy stepped from his plane, making a fuss about the defective safety control. If any of us had pulled that bonehead stunt, we’d have been thrown overboard. However, because nobody was injured and because none of the planes ahead of the barrier had been hit, Andy’s alibi was officially accepted. He very obviously hadn’t put his guns on safety, and there was no excuse for the endangerment to which he had exposed the crew. I doubt a single pilot in the squadron believed Andy, and none of us offered any support. We used to sing a ditty to the tune of Casey Jones, which was appropriate to Andy:

He was coming round the groove, doing 90 knots an hour
When his Wildcat came unglued.
Oh, the tower shouted "Stop," but he spun in like a top,
And o'er the ground the Grumman was strewed.
Now the Pratt Whitney man said,
"It couldn't be the engine for that would never stop.
So nothing could be fairer than to call it pilot error
'Cause it couldn't be the foolproof prop.

Flight activity at Okinawa

GLIDE-BOMBING in support of the ground forces and patrols made up most of our TBM flight activity at Okinawa. It got so that we became pretty adept at locating the targets on grid maps and even had a discretionary "unloading" area. Thus, if our time to return to the carriers found us with bombs not yet dropped, we frequently unloaded them well ahead of the front lines and in enemy territory. Occasionally, we got a change of pace. For instance, Harry had the unenviable luck to draw an assignment involving a drop of propaganda leaflets over areas held by the Japanese. We weren't fond of these hops because the feeling was that the Japanese couldn't and didn't distinguish between planes carrying bombs and planes carrying leaflets urging surrender. I'm sure that Harry did much the same as other pilots who were selected to bring good news to the enemy; they unloaded the mess in one pass. Instead of a drop in which the leaflets spread out like a snowfall, the whole bundle, or bundles, were dropped as a package with the grace of a falling rock. In any case, we were never aware of any wholesale surrender of Japanese that was attributed to the persuasive leaflets.

Harry and I continued to check Jack's navigation prior to any patrols he was assigned to. It wasn't that he didn't work out his course and times correctly. Rather, it was more a need for our confirmation of the work he had done. On one of the predawn takeoffs for a patrol, six of our TBMs were scheduled. I was one of the six, and Jack was our standby. I had no idea on that flight whether Jack had done his navigation. If anything, he probably figured that he wouldn't get the call—just as so often happened for standby pilots. The call came over the squawk box to the ready room to "Man your planes," and out we went. I strapped myself into the cockpit and began to run through my takeoff checklist. It was still dark—daybreak was at least an hour away—but I had gone through the checklist often enough that I could sing-song to myself: strap in, connect radio, rudder

and elevator tabs, full rich mixture, full RPM, etc. We then heard the air officer's command, "Start engines." I must have repeated the starting procedure at least half a dozen times. The engine sputtered a few times, then died. It wouldn't start. The deck officer had the crew push my plane to the side and moved the standby plane into the catapult. In short order, Jack was off and on his way to cover my sector.

I remained in the plane awaiting the completion of the launch of the rest of the planes on that flight. As I sat there, I puzzled about the plane acting up; it didn't make sense, especially since no problems had been reported after its last flight. As I looked and felt around the cockpit (it was still quite dark), I discovered to my shame and embarrassment that the fuel selection valve was in the off position. I had gone through my takeoff checklist too carelessly; I hadn't turned on the gas. Obviously the plane couldn't start with no fuel flow from the gas tanks. I was too mortified to admit my stupidity, so I put all the switches in the off position and got out of the plane. To my great relief Jack returned from the patrol, and he hadn't had any difficulties. When he asked me why I hadn't gotten off for the flight, I gave him an excuse, which must have sounded plausible. He never questioned my alibi, and he never did learn how I had screwed up.

Daito Jima

EVERY 10 TO 14 DAYS, we moved out of the operating area to refuel. The Navy's floating gas stations carried thousands of gallons of aviation fuel and fuel for the ships. We were fueled from tankers, then we in turn would fuel our escorting destroyers. All of the fueling was done in open sea while ships were underway. The passing of lines and hoses between ships took expert seamanship, especially when the seas were rough.

On one of those refueling jaunts, our carrier was in the vicinity of a small by-passed island still held by the Japanese. Throughout the Pacific, there were many such islands that were in effect neutralized. They couldn't be supplied, other than perhaps by submarine, and the troops on those islands were unable to mount an attack. The island in our refueling area was Daito Jima. Our skipper had six FMs launched with the intention of giving Daito Jima some grief. The flight was supposed to be a milk run. When our pilots returned to ship, they were incensed. Daito Jima may have been bypassed, and the troops probably were on short rations. But, they not only were well stocked with ammo, they also must have been spoiling for a fight. Our fighters took as heavy a concentration of fire as any they

had run into. Although none of them sustained serious damage, they were angry at the needless exposure. It was one thing to run into that kind of opposition over a legitimate target in support of invasion troops. However, a nuisance attack could more easily have been carried out by our escorting destroyers with an offshore bombardment and at minimal risk. So much for “keeping them honest.”

Some target practice

WHILE ON STATION in the operating area, the gun crews on our carrier, the other carriers in our group, and our escorting destroyers had few opportunities to fire at targets. Kamikaze attacks on ships in our unit were not too numerous—but more than enough for any of us. On the occasion when our gunners were firing at incoming planes, their marksmanship wasn't too impressive. During one of our refueling pauses, we had withdrawn well out of our operating area with two other carriers and three destroyers. The admiral in command decided it was timely to give ship's gunners some target practice.

I was elected to carry a tow sleeve for the target practice. To do a good job of towing a target sleeve, the most important ingredient was to have a crewman who actually operated the towing mechanism from the rear of the plane. The crewman assigned to me brought in a reel of fine cable, about an eighth of an inch in diameter. The cable extended at least 5,000 feet. He also packed in a good supply of target sleeves. There was a knack to attaching sleeves to the cable and then stringing out at least 3,000 feet of cable. Neither Brown nor Palmere had any training, so my expert crewman was a guy I hadn't previously flown with.

For my part as tow pilot, I was to fly a steady course parallel to all the carriers and destroyers that had formed into a long straight line. At an altitude of about 2,000 feet and a reasonably steady airspeed, the ships were given a pretty good target. Whenever the sleeve was shot off, I could immediately feel a forward surge of the plane as it shed the drag of the sleeve. The idea was to string a new sleeve as soon as possible, when one was shot off, so the gunners could get a full practice session. All went well for the first hour. I couldn't see the barrage of 20 mm and 40 mm fire because it was well to my rear. My crewman did an excellent job of replacing the sleeves as they were needed.

The purpose of stringing a target sleeve at least 3,000 feet behind the tow plane was first and foremost to protect the tow plane from being shot down. And with a 3,000-foot gap, the gunners could lead the target

sufficiently in their point of aim without fear of hitting the plane. We had hardly gone half way down the line of ships with a new sleeve, when my crewman shouted over the intercom, “The sonuva bitches just shot off the tow line not more than 75 feet behind us.” With that, I made a sharp descending turn to get out of range. I radioed our carrier and said that was it, no more target practice with me as pigeon.

After I landed back aboard ship and stomped into the ready room, I was about to let off some steam, berating the stupid gunners. Just then I was called to the squawk box. The admiral gave me a “well done” for the efficient way I had provided the gunners a good opportunity to practice their marksmanship. He obviously hadn't been aware of my close call, and I thought it was best left unmentioned. I did have the good sense to tell him that any credit due should be directed toward my crewman. He did all the work in handling the tow equipment. That incident was the only time I was singled out for an admiral's attention, and I damn near got shot down for my efforts.

My first genuine strike

WHILE AMERICAN FORCES were conducting the Okinawa operation, a British unit was assigned the job of neutralizing several smaller islands about 200 miles southwest of Okinawa. The islands, Ishigaki and Miyako, had airstrips, and they were less than 100 miles from Japanese-held Formosa. It was believed that planes were being flown in from Formosa, then taking off for the kamikaze attacks on our ships in the Okinawa area. The primary job of the British naval unit was to send its carrier-based planes over those islands on bombing runs. Presumably, if the airstrips were plastered with bombs, they couldn't be used until the bomb craters were filled in.

In mid-April, the British had to withdraw for three days to refuel. Our carrier unit was shifted south to continue the attacks on the airstrips until the British returned. We were given a briefing about the islands before taking off. At Okinawa, we had become accustomed to a pattern of sporadic anti-aircraft fire that would cease after a few minutes. At Miyako and Ishigaki, we were told that the British were getting concentrated and fairly continuous fire.

I was scheduled to go with a group that was to hit Miyako. If anything, it was scary as well as exciting. Scary because we were expecting the anti-aircraft gun crews on the island to be ready for us, and they had plenty of practice with the repeated British raids. The exciting part was that it



was to be my first genuine strike. Those fights at Okinawa, Iwo, and the Philippines all involved arriving on station, having a ground coordinator designate a target, then go through maps and grids to make sure of the target's location. Before leaving the carrier deck for the Miyako, we knew what the target was and what we were going to do.

Our flight consisted of nine TBMs armed with 500-pound bombs and five-inch rockets, plus our wing guns. We were accompanied by 16 FMs, which were to lead the attack. The main target was the airstrip, which we were expected to hit with our bombs and hopefully put out of order. Rockets and wing guns were to be used on anything worth hitting—so-called targets of opportunity. As we approached Miyako, at about 8,000 feet, about twice the cruising altitude that we TBM pilots normally flew at, an observer from the ground might have thought we were going right past. At the flight leader's signal, we split into three sections of TBMs. One section maintained the same course. Each of the other sections split right and left as they moved a bit ahead of the center. Our FMs were close inside. As soon as we were positioned—three units of fighters and bombers

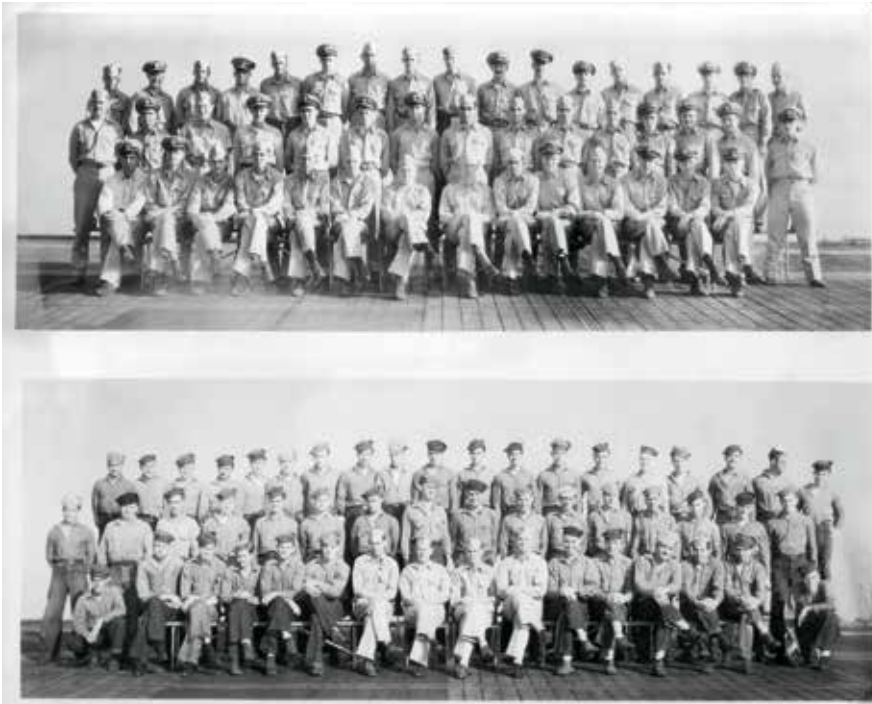
in something of a semicircle—the flight leader gave the signal. Our fighters pushed over, down toward the runway, and began firing as they closed in toward the field. Immediately behind came the TBMs, bomb bays opened. It was as though we all were headed down a funnel spout as the runway took bomb after bomb. Just as I was beginning to feel pretty good about the effectiveness of our flight the anti-aircraft fire began in earnest.

Gun emplacements below became readily visible as they continued to fire. In keeping with our plans, we moved a short distance out to sea to regroup. We hadn't yet fired our rockets, and the fighters still had plenty of ammo. Back we went for a second sweep. I spotted what looked like a radio tower and fired all my rockets in one pass. The island was so small that a pass at perhaps 250 knots meant that I actually was over the target area only a few seconds. The anti-aircraft fire was lessened, possibly our planes had knocked out some of their guns on the first pass. We joined up a short distance from the island and could see several fires burning and a deeply pitted airstrip. We didn't get off without losses; a fighter pilot from one of the other carriers in our unit was shot down.

Another strike was made by our pilots the following day, again at Miyako. As was so often the case, the pilots who made the flight reported that when they arrived over the island, the airstrip had been repaired and was operational. Again it was bombed; again, whatever bore a semblance of a military target was hit upon. And again, a pilot was lost. The downed pilot was Lt. P.V. Mott, a fighter pilot from our squadron. He was seen to have crashed in flames. There was no chance of survival.

I wasn't scheduled on the second day but did draw an assignment on the third day. For the first time since reaching the combat area, I found that I had some ambivalent feelings. As we approached the target, I said a silent prayer that my crew and I would come through the flight with a whole hide. It dawned on me that I was asking the Lord to give me protection so that I could wipe out some Japanese guy below who felt as strongly as I that he was doing the right thing. My inner doubts caused me to reason that I had no business asking for God's help in those circumstances. He might decide the other guy was more deserving than I. The only thing that made sense was to put the thought out of mind and get on with the job.

On that second hop, we had more bombers than on the previous flight and fewer fighters. We realized that we couldn't knock out the airstrips for more than a few days, but we wanted to make the repair job as onerous as possible. With 12 TBMs, each with three 500-pound bombs and four rockets, along with just four fighters, we hoped to make a goodly number



USS Saginaw Bay, VC-88, January 29, 1945,
Paul Yelavich, top, back row, fifth from the right.

of potholes in the runways. Because we had lost two fighters in earlier strikes, we had a firm determination to press the attack. In two swift passes we doused the airstrip with 36 bombs and then made a pass as we fired salvos of rockets. Circling off shore, we saw the airstrip had taken at least 12 hits, and there were a number of bomb craters in and around the airstrip. We returned to our carriers with no losses. The British resumed the job of neutralizing those islands; we turned back to the battle for Okinawa.

Homeward bound

THE GROUND FIGHTING on Okinawa was becoming an increasingly difficult struggle, particularly at the southern end of the island. On return to the area, we resumed our regular support missions and patrols. Rumors began making the rounds aboard ship that we were soon to be returned to the States. Those

rumors became a reality on April 29. We were told that the Saginaw Bay, with our squadron aboard, was homeward bound. On that same day we learned that the “other war” in Europe had ended. While we welcomed the news, we quite selfishly were whooping up our own good tidings. As most of us saw it, we would be back again. The conventional wisdom was that Japan would surrender only after the home islands were invaded. Expected losses were estimated to be far in excess of those thus far sustained in the invasions to date.

The Saginaw Bay departed from Okinawa to our first stopping point at Guam. Flight activity was limited to anti-sub patrols, even though Japanese submarine action was practically nonexistent. On May 2, one day out of Guam, I had an anti-sub patrol which was noteworthy in that my landing was the last landing aboard the Saginaw Bay for our squadron. Other pilots from our squadron were launched later in the day to fly our planes to Guam, where they were officially transferred to the staff at an airfield. When our carrier reached Guam the next day, those of us who hadn’t flown in didn’t have to search very hard for the earlier arrivals. As expected, we joined up at what passed for an O Club and made heroic efforts to catch up on their beer consumption. After two days at Guam, we got underway to our next destination, Pearl Harbor. My only recollection of Guam is that it was richly overgrown in green forests, hilly, with a few dirt roads.

The war was behind us

AS WE TRAVELED eastward, it was evident not only in the absence of flying but also in the lifestyles of everyone aboard that, for the moment, the war was behind us. We had no destroyer escort, as was customary in war zones, and we were alone on the water. An air of relaxation pervaded the bull sessions, card games, acey-deucey games, and coffee musters at early morning or late night hours in the wardroom. The nine days en route from Guam to Pearl Harbor were a special R & R period, which gave everyone a much-needed chance to unwind.

As we continued from Pearl Harbor to San Diego, our Intelligence Officer, Don Schwab, told us we all were to become bemedalled heroes. For some time the Navy had been carping about the number and frequency of promotions in the Army Air Corps. Many a Navy man could point to someone he knew in the Air Corps with no more service time, flight time, or combat time who was one or even two grades above the Navy man. The Navy had its share of 90-day wonders, but they weren’t Naval aviators. The Air Corps had its boy majors and lieutenant colonels, and that was the basic cause for the gripes.

The other Navy gripe about the Air Force was that their pilots always had a chest full of ribbons. Purportedly, they were for feats of exceptional heroism. In the Navy we had been reared to understand that medals were awarded for major accomplishments, such as participating in the sinking of enemy warships, shooting down a significant number of planes, etc. As one pilot put it, we didn't expect to get a medal for flying through a cloud. Don Schwab's message to us was that for five combat missions flown, we would be awarded an Air Medal; for every twenty missions flown, we would get a Distinguished Flying Cross. But because there was so much paper work to be processed, it would be several months before our awards would be presented to us. There we were, returning heroes with awards aplenty to come, but no chest full of ribbons to display. We really hadn't expected any of those ribbons, so we weren't disappointed. Our main interest was to just get home. As for Naval Aviation morale, we didn't object to the awards, but neither were we enthused. Some of us were of the opinion that our "automatic" awards had cheapened those previously earned by bona fide heroes.

Next duty assignment

THREE WEEKS after our departure from Okinawa, we arrived at San Diego. Although we had been out of the States only seven months, it seemed ever so much longer. Our carrier docked without fuss and fanfare. We were merely another of many ships constantly arriving and departing. Before any of us could go on leave, we had to await our orders for our next duty assignment. However, while waiting, we could and did go ashore.

Jack Crimmins and I decided that when we set foot on shore, we were going to gorge ourselves on fresh food. My only recollection of that first meal was that we ordered a fresh head of lettuce, which we split down the middle, added whatever dressing was available, and thoroughly enjoyed it and the rest of the meal. We then returned to our old haunt, Paul's Passion Pit. Most of the squadron had already staked out a corner, and we claimed our reserved seats. Four days of liberty in San Diego were a happy blur along with some sadness. After almost ten months in the squadron, and for the older hands it was an even longer association, we had gotten to know each other so that there was truly a sharing of each other's joys and sorrows. We knew that the squadron soon would be broken up, in keeping with customary Navy procedures, and that we all would go off to various separate assignments. For many of us, it meant that we wouldn't be seeing each other again. And that's exactly what happened. Harry Wood and I, along with another of our TBM

pilots, Fred Herfurth, received orders to report to Jacksonville, Florida, to be further assigned on arrival there. Jack was ordered to return to the West Coast for an assignment at Los Alamitos Naval Air Station. Harry and I were pleased to get the same orders, but we were disappointed to be separated from Jack. I don't believe anyone from the squadron was given the same assignment as Jack. He would have preferred to remain with us, but as we all knew, there was no arguing with the Navy.

On Leave

JACK AND I were able to get a commercial flight from San Diego to New York on a Stratoliner. It beat the daylight out of those cross-country train rides. We arrived May 27 for the start of an extended leave. The leave was noteworthy in that I began dating Marie Hare, who lived up the street from my home. Marie had regularly sent letters, cookies, and packages while I was out to sea. On coming home, we really got to know each other much better. Better enough so that three years later, we got married. Jack and I had agreed to do at least one night on the town in New York: he with his wife Loretta, and I with Marie. I don't know how much money Jack had socked away, but I came home with \$1,000 and a determination to live it up.

Exciting holiday with Marie

BEFORE OUR DATE with Jack, I had mentioned to Marie some of our squadron experiences. When we sat down with Jack and Loretta, after some small talk, Jack described a foul-up by one of our pilots. Marie was quite attentive and suddenly asked, "Was that the fellow you called Spare Parts?" Jack did a double take and looked at me as if to say, "You bastard." Marie caught the exchange as well as the silence. She realized she had contracted a case of foot-in-mouth disease. After another round, the incident was forgotten.

Jack, the suave city kid, lived up to his reputation as man about town. From our first stop, we moved on to El Morocco, a posh dinner club whose likes I had never seen. The fare must have been pretty good because dinner for the four of us cost \$200. In 1945, a dinner check of \$200 was substantial, a level of conspicuous consumption matched only infrequently since that time. The rest of the evening was spent in a skyroom café overlooking Central Park. We drank, smoked up a storm, and gabbed till the early morning hours. It was a thoroughly delightful, romantic evening, and it easily won honors for my apprentice training in the Crimmins Man About Town School.



Marie Hare



Author in dress whites

My youngest brother Lou, the only one still at home, was graduating from grammar school. He asked me why I didn't have any medals, and was told that they were yet to come. I intended to wear my dress blues to his graduation. Back in the '30s, my brother Fred had been New Jersey Marble Champion, and he had two medals for his accomplishments. As I put on my uniform coat, I felt an unfamiliar rustling of the material. I discovered that Lou had pinned Fred's marble medals to my coat. He dared me to wear them. As he saw it, the medals were suspended from red, white, and blue ribbon, and nobody would give them a look. He was more concerned that I give the appearance of a returning war hero. I decided the medals, which depicted a kneeling boy shooting marbles, weren't very fit and with some reluctance removed them.

The rest of the leave was an exciting holiday with Marie. Several times I called for her at work in New York, and from there we went out for the evening. I recall that her Mother once cautioned me about those Broadway plays: "Some of the language they use can be quite risqué."

The Final Chapter: NAS Miami

AT THE END of the leave, I boarded a train for Jacksonville, Florida, where Harry and I reported in as ordered. Almost before we had a chance to change our socks, we were handed new orders to report to NAS Miami—the same base where we had done our initial TBM training. The plans called for us to become instructors of newly commissioned TBM pilots. We would then go back to sea as their flight leaders. It was expected that the assignment would require a four-month period.

It was a bit strange to find ourselves back at Miami as ensigns, who on the surface looked just like those brand new ensigns arriving fresh out of Corpus Christi and Pensacola. We quite naturally believed that any discerning observer would surely be able to differentiate us as battle-scarred warriors. As a practical matter, our previous experience at Miami translated into an easy familiarity with the base itself and in town haunts. During our first tour, Lt. Cooper, our instructor, had introduced us to identical twin Waves, Julie and Ann. They were quite attractive, and although enlisted personnel, they managed to date officers only. The first day back at the base brought us face to face with the twins. Despite the gap of a year since we last spoke with them, we renewed friendships almost immediately. For once, it would have done Harry no good to spout his favorite line: "Your date doesn't look so good." The twins were equally attractive; there was no winner or loser.

We dated the twins about half a dozen times; they were fun company. By



Author at Miami Officers Club

today's standards they might be considered "teeny boppers" (they probably were all of 25 years old). In their fashion, they were outrageous name-droppers of Tommy, Jimmy, Helen, and other big band names. We would deliberately ask, "Tommy who? Jimmy who? Helen who?" even though we knew they referred to the Dorseys, Helen O'Connell, and other show biz types. Other than that quirk, we got along quite well. Invariably, on dates they wore smart civilian dress, even though Navy regs required that all service personnel be in uniform. It didn't bother us one bit to be in the company of attractive enlisted personnel in attractive civilian garb.

Our first three weeks at Miami—in late July 1945—were something of an extended vacation. We were awaiting the arrival of newly commissioned ensigns to form our training units. Our duties consisted of logging in each morning; we were free to do as we pleased for the rest of the day. To avoid becoming stale as pilots and to be sure to log enough flight time, we managed to do enough flying to qualify for our flight pay. On one weekend, we decided that we would live it up, just like the civilians who vacationed at Miami Beach. We took a large room at one of the posher hotels and treated ourselves to the evening and dining services of the hotel.

After a dip in the ocean, we retreated to the lounge chairs at the hotel's pool and were served the drinks of our choice. Both Harry and I were surprised to see one of the Wave twins at the pool. She was very attentive to a lieutenant commander from the base and hardly acknowledged us. Our broken hearts were promptly healed as we headed out for a night on the Beach. (Besides, the lieutenant commander was a black shoe officer, thus not to be taken seriously by real Naval Aviators.)

Within walking distance of our hotel was a group of apartments that catered to vacationers. Harry and I remembered having attended parties in those apartments on our first tour at Miami. They were open-door affairs: you walked in, were welcomed, and were offered whatever beverage was available. It must have been close to midnight when Harry and I reached the apartment complex. We had stopped at a few watering holes beforehand, but were reasonably sober. We learned that the family giving the party was on its last day of vacation. Mommy and Daddy and two pretty good-looking daughters were going to pack up and depart early the next morning. I don't remember Daddy, but Mommy was well on her way to getting crocked. After we had a few drinks, the daughters suggested to Harry and me that we go to another party at some of their friends. We agreed, and as we were going out the door Mommy called out, "Don't be too late. You've got to pack, and we want to leave early."

Harry and I traipsed off with the daughters—four somewhat tipsy and silly fun seekers. The new party was even more crowded and noisy than the one we left. We must have enjoyed ourselves because at every mention of the time, we assured the girls it was early. As the party wound down we realized it was 4:00 a.m., and we headed back to the girl's apartment. I was the first one to approach the door with a daughter beside me. And there was Mommy!!! Like the wrath of hell she shouted, "There you are, you dirty sonuva bitch." For an instant I thought her greeting was directed to me. But she angrily grabbed her daughter and began berating her for her late return. Harry was beside himself with laughter. He quickly said good-bye to the other daughter and waited on the side as I humbly backed away from the shrew. For years after, Harry would greet me with, "There you are, you dirty son of a bitch."

We returned to our base and were pleasantly surprised to discover that Dick Phipps and Frank Dolinich had been assigned to the same type of duty as Harry and I. We four had been among the original ten who trained together under Lt. Cooper. To celebrate the occasion of our reunion, we made a start at the O Club and then headed back to Miami Beach for more serious recreation.

At long last, on August 1, our flight of new ensigns was assembled. For

the first several days, we attended ground school with our charges as they prepared for their first TBM flights.

So abrupt an end to the war

IT WASN'T MANY days later that the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Everyone suddenly realized that the end of the war was at hand. When the war officially ended on August 14, in truth, it was something of an anticlimax. We had anticipated it by a few days and started celebrating a bit early. However, we had no difficulty shifting into high gear with everyone else for the next two days.

The Navy, at least the part I was familiar with, was unprepared for so abrupt an end to the war. With Japan's surrender, the clamoring for discharge was very intense. We pilots were reminded that the country would continue to need a Navy and that there would be a need for many of us if we opted to become careerists. Initially, the official posture was that we were to perform our duties as before. When a rational discharge policy was devised, we would get the details as they became available.

Harry and I found ourselves having to give serious thought to our future. The war's end had come, and I had no idea of what I wanted to do. I knew I didn't want to return to Wright Aeronautical, even if a job could be had there, and I knew that I did not want to work in my father's business. Harry had completed his freshman year at Brown University, but he was undecided about returning. Our concern was temporarily relieved when we were told (erroneously, as later events proved) that we would be retained at NAS Miami for the next 12 to 18 months.

With what we thought was a reprieve of the problem about our future, we made the best of the good life. Although our flight activity was scaled down, we worked with our ensign trainees in the routines of glide-bombing, rocket firing, torpedo runs, and other tactics. The intensity and sense of urgency was noticeably absent, but there was no relaxation of flight discipline. The trainees were serious and quick to acquire competence; they were willing to do what was asked of them. However, by mid-September flight activity began to slacken. Perhaps it was in part due to hurricane season, which called for special preparations and precautions.

On the first hurricane alert, Harry and I along with 50 pilots were told to fly the TBMs to Birmingham, out of the path of the storm. In units of six plane flights, we vacated NAS Miami and were gone for five days. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, we didn't see much or do



Charles, Wombacher, Krueger, Wasko, Williams, Freeland, Nelson, Kynoe, Spicer, Bertoglio, Hicks, Wood, myself, Miami, Fla. Sept. 1945

much in Birmingham. We had to leave Miami on very short notice; many of us were still in our flight suits, and we had only a few dollars on us.

The first stage of demilitarization

THE RETURN from Birmingham seemed to mark the first stage of demilitarization. Our training flights were sharply reduced, although Harry and I were encouraged to take TBM flights as often as we chose. If anything, the decreased flight activity left too much time for leisure. One of our after workday spots was just outside the base—within walking distance. It had been there for years, but we discovered it in September 1945. The décor of the place wasn't pretentious, but it could be described as comfortably casual. Cadet hats almost completely covered the walls and ceiling, obviously a carryover from the past, when cadets donated their hats after they were commissioned.

On our first visit, we noted the bartender mixed and served a generous drink. In answer to our question, he said it was a Sidecar and offered to make us one. We accepted. And we accepted three more. They were great, but they sneaked up on us as subtly as a sledgehammer. We walked and staggered back to our room and congratulated ourselves for safely coming



Captain Morehouse pinning bar on officers:
Author (left), and Harry Wood, December 3, 1945

through such dangerous territory. Try as we might, on repeat visits to that bar, we never were able to get past the fourth Sidecar and generally with the same results on each attempt.

Lieutenant Junior Grade

PROMOTION AT junior ranks in the Navy was done by the class you were considered to be in. When commissioned as an officer, you were slotted with a class of sorts. Thus, on October 1, 1945, all ensigns with a certain date of rank were advanced to Lieutenant Junior Grade. Harry, Frank, Dick, and I became J.G.s on the same date. At long last we could look upon ensigns as beneath contempt. A modest raise in pay went with the promotion, but I have no recollection of the amount.

Harry and I were scheduled for a flight in mid-October that left no

doubt that the Navy was going on short rations. Each of us was to fly a TBM to Clinton, Oklahoma, where our planes would be turned over to the base commander. We had heard that Clinton was a storage depot for planes of all kinds. We also had heard that Oklahoma was a dry state. One of our acquaintances suggested that we could make a buck if we brought some booze with us and then make a profit selling it. As amateur bootleggers, we figured we'd give it a try. We each packed three quarts of bourbon.

When we arrived at Clinton, we got a severe jolt. The field, a tremendous expanse of open range, contained literally hundreds of planes. They were of all kinds and were stacked close up against one another. As soon as we landed, we were taxied right to the receiving line. The ground crew hustled us out of our planes before we could even get a glimmer of an idea to swipe a clock or other instrument for a keepsake. Clinton wasn't a storage area; it was a graveyard. Perfectly good aircraft, fully operational, were steadily coming in. All were destined for the same fate—scrap metal.

The only victory remaining to be salvaged was our bootlegging venture. We toted our travel bags with their precious contents to the BOQ, where a base officer invited us to the O Club for a drink. Once in the door, we knew we were out of business. Oklahoma may have been a dry state, but the shortage must have been in water, not whisky. A look around the O Club showed us that whisky was abundantly available at absurdly low prices. Harry and I silently acknowledged that we had suffered a temporary setback.

The return flight to Miami was aboard a Navy transport with stops in New Orleans and Jacksonville. We had decided that it would be unpardonable to bring the bourbon back to Miami. Furthermore, we had no intention of admitting failure to the guys back there. After the stop in New Orleans, we had hardly dented our supply. At Jacksonville our pride was salvaged. The pilot of our transport had found it necessary to layover for two days, which meant we awaited his pleasure for our return to Miami. With three years in the Navy, a Naval Aviator could go to just about any air station in the country and count on recognizing familiar faces and acquaintances from previous assignments. Harry and I ran into five guys who one or both of us had met in training. They willingly let us host a party with our booze, thus relieving us of carrying excess baggage to Miami.

Just one more TBM flight

TOWARD THE END of October, our training of the new pilots came to a halt. Harry and I were still encouraged to get in our flight time, but through



Navy identification card:
Author, Lieutenant Junior Grade, US Navy

all of November I had a grand total of half a dozen short flights. Inasmuch as it was obvious that our flying days were winding down, I had an itch for just one TBM flight in which I wanted to attempt a slow roll. The TBM pilot's handbook emphatically stated that acrobatic flight was prohibited. In bull sessions with Joe Mitchell, probably the most experienced TBM pilot when we were aboard the Saginaw Bay, he told of doing rolls and loops in a TBM with no difficulty. At that time, the memory of Preacher Minick pulling the tail off his TBM was fresh in our minds. I wasn't about to try anything foolish while carrier based. In those twilight days at Miami, I psyched myself by reasoning I wouldn't get too many chances to give it a try. Even though no one would know whether I had slow rolled a TBM, the challenge was personal, and I at least wanted to have tried. Perhaps I was overly cautious. In preparation, I went to an altitude of 10,000 feet and opened the cockpit hatch with the determination to bailout if I got into trouble. I nosed over slightly to pick up some airspeed, and the rest was almost intuitively automatic: raise the nose slightly above the horizon, firmly apply full left rudder and aileron, then shift to the right rudder with enough pressure to keep the nose from falling. As the plane completed the roll to a normal flight position, neutralize aileron and rudder. For what it was worth, I had completed a routine slow roll. There was no reason for bragging about so ordinary an accomplishment.

The usual thing about Navy associations and friendships was that we could be very close, concerned, and genuinely interested in each other while we were in the same unit or at the same base. We moved about so frequently

that we seemingly were regularly saying good-bye. And as so often happened, those relationships sort of evaporated or were replaced by new associates at the next base. In large measure it was the lifestyle of men in all services during the war. But, when good or bad news involved a former associate, it was quickly relayed among the people who knew that person, even though a considerable interval of time and distance separated us.

Harry, Fred Herfurth, and I were at NAS Miami as the only VC-88 pilots in the area. We neither saw nor heard of our former squadron members. One evening a flight of fighters from a base near Jacksonville came through our area. Two planes collided in mid-air. We were stunned to learn both pilots had been in VC-88: Dave Sims and Jimmy O'Connor. Two highly competent pilots had come back from carrier duty without a scratch and were killed in a routine training flight. I don't think any former VC-88 pilots, wherever stationed, didn't hear of the accident within 48 hours.

Shortly before our squadron had gone to the South Pacific, we had a first taste of carrier life aboard the Makin Island. After the new pilot, Winston, crashed while making a carrier landing, Harry had written a condolence letter to Winston's mother. We both had put the incident behind us and were quite surprised when Harry received a letter in late October 1945 from Winston's mother. We didn't learn how she knew Harry was at Miami, but her purpose in writing was to express her appreciation for his letter to her. Mrs. Winston lived nearby our base and, among other things, she suggested to Harry that she knew a lovely young lady who would make a fine date for so nice a person as he. Harry indeed was a nice guy, and after making a call on Mrs. Winston, he felt obliged to contact the girl. Back in Massachusetts, he had a girl, and he wasn't looking for any serious romance.

When he returned from his date, Harry described her as attractive, likeable, and very definitely a "nice girl." Nice girls in Navy parlance were those you wouldn't mind having your mother and hometown people see you dating. The girl, Kate, had offered to arrange a date for me with a friend of hers if Harry and I were agreeable. Following a discussion between Harry and me, Harry called Kate and set up a double date in about a week. Harry had arranged for us to meet the girls in town. As we approached them, I recognized Kate from Harry's description. With a glance at the other girl, I realized that for looks, figure, and style, I had finally won from Harry. I couldn't resist the opportunity to whisper to him, "Your date doesn't look so good." My date, Jeanne Sherouse, was about five-foot-six, with dark hair, a trim figure, and a sparkling personality. We hit it off immediately as we shared an exceptionally comfortable first date.

Jeanne worked in downtown Miami and lived in nearby Coral Gables. Within a week, the four of us had another date. Jeanne insisted that her mother preferred that she be called for at home. Harry and I weren't impoverished, so it was no problem for us to rent a car. When we called for Jeanne, after having first picked up Kate, we must have passed inspection because a few weeks later her parents allowed Jeanne to invite us and several other couples to a beer and hot dog party in her backyard.

From early November till late December, I had six—maybe even more—dates with Jeanne, and it was apparent that a mutual fondness was developing. We never got “serious,” perhaps because both knew the immediate future was so uncertain. The services were releasing men as fast as the discharge centers could process them, and our release orders could come through at any time.

My dating Jeanne presented a problem in that my interest in Marie at home wasn't any the lesser. It was almost ludicrous to find that less than three years ago, I hardly dared to approach a girl. Now I found myself interested in two girls at the same time. My conscience nagged me as I avoided the candor of mentioning to Jeanne that I was interested in a girl back home. It may very well have been a two-way street in that neither of us questioned the other about any of our relationships.

An amusing aspect of my dates with Jeanne was the fact that on at least four occasions I called for her in a rented car. Each car was different, and her mother commented that she never knew anyone with so many cars. I wondered if she thought I was a car thief. Jeanne, of course, knew the cars were rented, and she asked me not to spoil her game. She apparently had told her mother I had lots of cars and probably would use a different one whenever I called for her.

Harry and I continued to date Kate and Jeanne until mid-December when our orders releasing us from active duty were received. We said our good-byes with more than a little sadness. For my part, meeting and getting to know Jeanne was one of the special events of my Navy days.

The return to civilian life

During those last weeks at Miami, Harry and I realized we had to face up to the return to civilian life. Harry had decided to return to Brown University, and he urged me to go with him. Both of us had the good sense to realize that the G.I. Bill provided an excellent financial incentive to go to college. So, although Brown wasn't consulted, Harry and I decided to select it,

rather than the other way around. I had socked away \$3,000—a fairly tidy sum for a guy who had all of \$50 to his name three years earlier. With the G.I. Bill and my savings, I had no financial restraints keeping me from attending college.

I arrived home just before Christmas 1945. Several days later I went through the routines at Naval headquarters in New York. My official release from active duty on January 3, 1946, was just ten days short of three years after I left home.

Those three years could be summed up in various ways, such as the accumulation of more than 900 hours of flight time with 82 carrier landings or participation in a \$27,000 educational program. Although flight activity cannot and should not be minimized, of equal or greater importance was the maturing experience of all facets of my active duty. Perhaps it is a bias, but I believe that only rarely can anyone encounter the happiness, the sadness, the joy, the sorrow, the fearlessness, the terrible fright, the awareness, and the ignorance of experiences in so limited a period of time. Memories of those Navy years may dim, but they continue to shine through as pure gold.

*Paul Yelavich
January 1985*

Family Recollections

“At first, the war was remote. Soon local men (boys!) were leaving for the different branches of service. My brother, Robert, to the Navy. Life at home in Rochelle Park and work in New York City seemed the same. We began to notice men in uniforms. There were care packages to be sent, letters to write. Suddenly the war was very much with us. Cliff Mueller and Bobby Martin were now Gold Stars in their mother’s windows. There were scrap drives, volunteering. Rationing was yet to come. My friend and I joined the Civil Air Patrol, which eventually led to flight instruction in a Piper Cub at Teterboro Airport. My brother suggested I write to his friend, Paul—and the rest is history.”

Marie Yelavich

“I always thought my father should be a historian. Meeting him again across the decades, not as my father but as a young man, I’m even more convinced.”

Susan Yelavich

“Dad passed on his love of learning and placed a great premium on higher education. Indeed, some of our best conversations were discussing and debating historical and current issues in my college years. This quest for knowledge was his great gift to me and has remained a guiding challenge in my life.”

Christine (Yelavich) Miers

“In the process of moving from child adoration to teenage rebellion to the realization that my father was far too human, I have been given the gift of unconditional forgiveness and love. I am, in part, as we all are, my father, and I am proud of all that he taught me.”

Patricia Yelavich

“I always idolized my father’s service in the Navy—perhaps because he spoke so fondly of those years, perhaps because such an experience was so foreign to me. As I got older, my appreciation of his achievements—his courage, discipline (and a little good luck) has only grown. I still miss him to this day.”

Paul H. Yelavich

“My father always spoke of his Navy days with a tremendous sense of pride; something I discounted as long as days passed. It was only when I typed the original manuscript that I came to fully appreciate the courage, skill and confidence he most certainly had to possess to serve his country with such valor.”

Margaret (Yelavich) Stone

The Author



PAUL YELAVICH was born on February 5, 1923. For his valorous service in the Navy in the Pacific theater of World War II, he was awarded the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross. He graduated from Brown University in 1949 and was a Senior Vice President at Prudential Insurance Company in Newark, NJ. He died on August 22, 1996 and was buried at sea by the USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70). He was survived by his wife Marie Honora (Hare) Yelavich (1926-), his children Susan Yelavich (1950-), Christine Miers (1952-), Patricia Yelavich (1957-), Paul Yelavich (1959-), and Margaret Stone (1962-), and his grandchildren Henry Casey (1984-), Grace Emelia Giles (1987-), Mia Giles (1990-), and Henrietta Miers (1992-).

