

Carl A Bufflap Jr.

Mr. Bufflap was a student at Shippensburg State Teachers College in Pennsylvania when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. After completing his sophomore year in the spring of 1942 he found a job at the Naval Ordnance Plant in his hometown of York, Pennsylvania making parts for 40-mm anti-aircraft guns. Soon after he took the job he slipped and cut this finger and had to place it in a splint. This was an important event in Mr. Bufflap's life because he had planned on going to play professional baseball for the summer and with his hand in a splint he could not. Instead he chose to join the Navy.

He continued to work at the factory during the summer and in fact once worked 21 straight days to match the number of days World War One ace Eddie Rickenbacker and others had been afloat in a raft after their plane went down in the Pacific.

He traveled back and forth from York to Philadelphia in a 1933 Ford to take his exams and get a physical for acceptance as a naval pilot trainee. In Philadelphia his future wife, Betty Bove, and her mother put him up in their house while he was being tested. He had met Ms. Bove at Shippensburg State and had fallen in love with her there. On July 24, 1942 Mr. Bufflap was inducted into the navy as a seamen second class in the aviation cadet program.

Mr. Bufflap's next destination was Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania where he underwent additional training. They had ground instruction at Bucknell but moved to an airport at Danville, Pennsylvania for flight instructions. It was here, on September 10, 1942, that he first soloed in a J-3 Piper Cub. He found that he loved the experience of flying.

After completing training in Bucknell he went home for a short time and then, in December 1942, reported to Chapel Hill, North Carolina for further training. There he underwent additional ground training, physical activities and military marching. He was supposed to stay for three months in pre-flight training in Chapel Hill but his class finished early and was given a weekend pass in honor of that. He traveled to Raleigh "to see the big city". Unfortunately that was also the weekend that his mom and aunt decided to surprise him with a visit! His roommate had entertained them in his absence and when he returned on Sunday afternoon he had only two hours to visit with them.

Next he traveled to Naval Air Station (NAS) Anacostia in Washington Dc for additional flight training. Here, in March 1943, he took his first flight in the N2S, affectionately known as the "Yellow Peril" (training aircraft were painted in a highly visible yellow scheme.)

After mastering the N2S Mr. Bufflap was transferred to NAS Pensacola to train on the SNV Vultee Valiant also known as the "Vultee Vibrator". While at Pensacola Mr. Bufflap learned more advanced flying skill such as formation flying, the use of flaps when landing and instrument. He was certified for instrument flight on June 30, 1943.

Mr. Bufflap was then selected for single engine aircraft training and sent to “Bloody” Barian Auxiliary Air Station in Foley, Alabama. There he flew the SNJ trainer equipped with retractable landing gear and flaps. His stay in Alabama was a fond experience for Mr. Bufflap, he was asked to play on the base’s baseball team and was not assigned any non-flying duties while there. They played other teams from military bases on the Gulf Coast in the Mobile City Baseball Park. As he puts it “that duty was a lot of fun.”

On September 10, 1943 Mr. Bufflap received his navy wings and was commissioned as an Ensign in the navy. He was assigned to NAS Jacksonville for training as a torpedo plane pilot flying the TBF-1 Avenger. Later he was transferred to NAS Glenview on Lake Michigan for carrier qualification. There he completed eight landings on the U.S.S. *Wolverine* to become qualified.

He was then given two weeks leave and was able to spend Christmas 1943 with his parents in York. He also made a trip to Philadelphia to see his true love Betty Bove before he shipped out to war.

Before he could get to the war though, Mr. Bufflap had to report to NAS North Island in San Diego, California. The first mission he had was to fly back to New York on a United Airlines flight with three other pilots to pick up new TBM Avengers from the Grumman factory and fly them back to NAS North Island. The flight took 16.4 hours. Upon arrival he was then transferred to NAS Sand Point in Seattle to commission his new squadron, VC-94. This was what the navy called a composite squadron, in that it was composed of both torpedo attack planes and fighter aircraft.

Mr. Bufflap had a very interesting experience while at Seattle. The squadron had taken over aircraft that another squadron had been using for training and they were in very poor shape. The pilots and mechanics worked hard to get them into flying condition but there were still problems. On a mission to fly an old Avenger to Seattle to exchange it for a new one, Mr. Bufflap’s initially flew into bad weather where he was forced to depend in his instruments to fly the aircraft because he could not see the horizon. They then reached clear skies where the engine proceeded to cut out. Mr. Bufflap tried various procedures like switching fuel tanks and trying to restart the engine but it refused to start. He decided to make a forced landing at a nearby airport, unfortunately, as he puts it, “that old TBF glided like a rock.” He was not able to make the airport and instead had to crash land in a field next to a road. As he approached the first field he realized he was too fast to safely land and pulled his nose up to get over a line of trees and into the next field. The tree scrapping along the bottom of the aircraft made a noise that Mr. Bufflap can still hear today! He put the aircraft down in the field and the next thing he remembered he was standing next it bleeding from a cut on his head. Of the four other people on board, one sustained a broken leg and the two other were unharmed. Mr. Bufflap spent two weeks in the hospital with a concussion.

Another story he recalled from that time was flying to Lewiston, Idaho for an airshow in July 1944. He and the other members of the squadron buzzed Lewiston’s downtown area, Mr. Bufflap remembered “looking UP to see girls waving at us from the second story

windows!” After the airshow as one of his fellow pilots, Harold Fox, was taxiing to take off he accidentally nosed his fighter plane over and bent the top 8-10 inches of his propeller blades back. Mr. Bufflap told him to wait there while he flew back and retrieved some new blades and a mechanic to replace them. He had been airborne for a few minutes when his gunner called back to him “Will you look at that!” Mr. Bufflap looked over to see Fox in his fighter plane right next to him “flying along as if nothing had happened.” On return to their airfield everyone who saw the bent propellers “marveled as to how he got the plane to fly.”

In August Mr. Bufflap and members of his squadron were tasked with testing out a newly installed deck catapult on the aircraft carrier *Saratoga*. The *Saratoga* was an older ship that had been retrofitted with catapults to launch the newer, heavier generation of aircraft then being produced. This was Mr. Bufflap’s first experience on a carrier since his carrier qualification almost a year before. After having landing aboard and getting lunch Mr. Bufflap was getting ready to launch his Avenger on the catapult when a plane captain had a discouraging story for him. He explained that the day before the catapult had been tested with a concrete block and had not been able to even shoot the block off the end of the deck! Mr. Bufflap remembered that the “plane captain’s words did not make me very comfortable.” However the catapult worked correctly and Mr. Bufflap and the *Saratoga* both experienced their first catapult launch.

During his training time on the West Coast Mr. Bufflap and a friend had a Ford Model A car that they used to get around in their off hours. Their gas ration was not very much and the gas in use for cars was of poor quality. They decided to work out a deal with the squadron mechanics to have them save the high octane aviation gas that they would drain from the aircraft gas lines as part of routine maintenance. Using the aviation gas the Model A “ran like a top.”

Mr. Bufflap trained to carry out a variety of missions as part of VC-94. They practiced providing close support for marine landings and in fact during one exercise some aircraft accidentally released a smokescreen over San Diego harbor! The squadron also trained to hunt and sink submarines. They were undergoing anti-submarine training at a field away from their home airbase when they received orders to ship out overseas the next day. Obviously the squadron wanted to return to their airbase to pick up their personnel items so they all risked a flight in poor weather to get back. They were forced to drop down to 100 feet altitude and fly through rain and cloud while dodging oilrigs to get back. Fortunately they all made it back though “it was a scary experience.”

In December 1944 the squadron was assigned to the escort carrier *Shamrock Bay*. The *Shamrock Bay* was an escort carrier, a smaller version of the fleet carriers such as the *Saratoga*. The role of the escort carriers was to provide aerial and anti-submarine protection for convoys and amphibious landings and to provide aerial support for marine landings. This is why Mr. Bufflap’s squadron had undergone such a wide variety of training and why they flew more than one type of aircraft.

On the 21st the *Shamrock Bay* crossed the equator and there was a great ceremony as King Neptune and his shellbacks (men who had previously crossed the equator) initiated the pollywogs (those that had not crossed the equator before). The *Shamrock Bay* spent Christmas 1944 in the Admiralty Islands where Mr. Bufflap another interesting experience. He was assigned to fly to a nearby island and retrieve some new radio equipment for his squadron and fly it back to an island they were on. He arrived at the airbase and after the wooden crate containing the equipment was hoisted into his bomb bay he discovered that the crate was so large that the bomb bay doors would not close. After quick discussion about whether the aircraft would fly in this condition Mr. Bufflap and his crew decided to give it a try. He flew the Avenger over to his island with a wooden crate sticking out of the underside! He recalls that the plane flew normally, the only difference was this it landed a little faster than normal. Mr. Bufflap had great appreciation for the Avenger and its flying qualities.

In later December the *Shamrock Bay* and another escort carrier, the *Kitkun Bay* left the Admiralties to escort an invasion force headed for Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines. On January 8th, during the transit, the convoy was attacked by kamikazes. In one attack eight Japanese aircraft went after the two carriers, six were shot down by US fighters and one by the 5-inch anti-aircraft gun on the *Shamrock Bay*. Unfortunately one got through and crashed into the *Kitkun Bay* putting her out of action. Mr. Bufflap was on the flight deck of the *Shamrock Bay* “trying to dig a foxhole in the wooden flight deck with my pen knife” when a kamikaze passed right in front of the ship. It made for “a very scary night.”

The next day the squadron began flying missions in support of the Lingayen Gulf landings. Mr. Bufflap was leading a section (two aircraft) over the target area when he located 45-50 camouflaged Japanese barges. He and his section then made rocket and bomb attacks on the barges. During one bombing run he was hit by anti-aircraft fire that knocked the control stick out of his hands. At the same time his tail gunner was yelling “we lost out tail!” He aborted the bomb run and requested his wingman to assess the damage to his aircraft. He reported that half of the left tail stabilizer and elevator were gone and more was falling off! Mr. Bufflap requested an emergency landing on the carrier and made a straight in approach to land. At the last minute he was cut off by another pilot who claimed to be out of gas. Mr. Bufflap circled around and the successfully landed after an exciting mission. He later found out that the pilot that cut him off actually had 15 minutes worth of gas still in his gas tanks!

As part of their mission covering the Lingayen Gulf landings the escort carrier had to provide morning and evening anti-snooper flights to prevent Japanese reconnaissance aircraft from getting a look at the fleet. On January 16, 1945 Mr. Bufflap took off in an Avenger accompanied by Harold Fox in his single seat fighter for an evening anti-snooper flight. When they left the ship the weather was fine but the farther they flew on their patrol the worse it got. Suddenly Kyle Scates, Mr. Bufflap’s gunner, calls over the intercom “there goes Mr. Fox in.” Mr. Bufflap looked over his shoulder and saw Fox’s FM-2 Wildcat fighter plane flying dangerously close to the water emitting black puffs of smoke from the engine. Since they were maintaining radio silence he could not ask Fox what the problem was. Fox’s aircraft did not crash but the same thing happened about 4-5

more time during the patrol, each time scaring Mr. Bufflap and his crew as they thought Fox was going in. After this experience they then had to find the ship in the growing darkness. Fortunately Mr. Bufflap's Avenger was equipped with a ZB radio homing device. This allowed his radar operator, Neil Pruden, to home in on the *Shamrock Bay*'s radio signal. When they landed back on the carrier Mr. Bufflap found out that the external long range fuel tanks on Fox's fighter plane were malfunctioning and causing the engine to quit. He had to constantly switch fuel tanks to keep it running. It had made for a "very tiring and exhausting flight."

In March 1945 the *Shamrock Bay* was escorting the supply ships of the Fifth Fleet as it was engaged in attacking the Japanese home islands. The Fifth Fleet ended up having to ride out a typhoon for three days. The storm was so bad that flight operations could not be carried out. In fact most of the aircraft were stored in the hanger decks or secured to the centerline of the flightdeck so they wouldn't wash overboard. Mr. Bufflap's squadron tied a piece of chalk to a rope that was hung from the top of their ready room blackboard. They used this to measure how far the ship was rolling. Each time it rolled to one side it would shudder as it tried to right itself. Fortunately it did not capsize but the chalk on the blackboard device recorded a roll of 30-35 degrees on each side which meant the ship had traveled through a total of 60-70 degrees of roll! The ships were rolling so much that you could see the large ships identification numbers painted on the flight deck of the other carriers in the fleet. Once the storm had passed Mr. Bufflap was assigned to fly over to another carrier for a movie exchange. The storm had prevented any type of exchange for 3-4 days and crews on all the ships were desperate for new movies!

The *Shamrock Bay*'s next mission was to provide close air support for the invasion of Okinawa. Mr. Bufflap flew his first combat strike mission over Okinawa on April 8, 1945. He flew strikes almost every day until May 13. On April 24 he flew a passenger over to an airfield on Okinawa that had been captured by the marines. While there he collected some souvenirs, these included a piece of aluminum with the red rising emblem from a wrecked Japanese plane, a cup and saucer, books in Japanese and a wooden sandal. His crewman picked up a large basket that they filled with dirt. When they returned to the ship they spilled the dirt on the flightdeck so the sailors, who hadn't been ashore in awhile, could finally see dirt!

That was the end of Mr. Bufflap's adventures in World War Two. He left the regular navy but joined the naval reserves and stayed there until 1955. Upon his return from combat in June 1945 he married Betty Bove in Landsdowne, Pennsylvania. He graduated Drexel and went to work for SKF. In 1960 he moved to Asheville to open a new SKF plant. He is now retired and enjoys traveling, gardening, golf and tending to his honeybees.