

My Navy Story-CAB

It was the spring of 1942. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and America was at war. I had completed my sophomore year at Shippensburg State Teachers College and was home in York PA. for the summer. When I got home I got a job at the Naval Ordnance Plant working the night shift from 6 PM to 6 AM in the morning. I was operating a large slab-milling machine on breach blocks for 40 m/m anti-aircraft guns. About the fifth night I was dead tired, not being use to sleeping in the daytime. About 4 AM I was replacing a large milling cutter when it slipped and cut my index finger on my left hand. I went to the company nurse and she put a splint and bandaged it. I had played 3rd base for SSTC that spring and professional baseball players were getting hard to find. Dutch Dorman, a family friend managed Hagerstown in the Interstate League, had asked when SSTC played Hagerstown a couple of practice games if I was interested in playing pro ball. I had said yes. Darn if the day after I cut my finger, I got a telegram from Norfolk in the Piedmont League to play 3rd base. With my finger in a splint I couldn't accept so I went to join the navy.

I continued to work at the Naval Ordnance Plant that summer. I worked 21 straight nights to match what Capt Eddie Rickenbacker and several others did by surviving 21 days on a raft in The Pacific after their plane went down.

I had to go to Philadelphia to take the exams and physicals for acceptance into the Naval Aviation pilot training. That was where Betty Bove' who I had been in love with at SSTC, lived She and her mother were so kind as to put me up for the nights when I had to stay over for my interviews and physical exams. I had a 1933 Ford to get back and forth from York. On July 24, 1942 I was inducted in the navy as a seaman second class in the aviation cadet program.

The day after Labor Day 1942 I received orders to report to Bucknell University at Lewisburg, Pa. for CPT training. We lived in the dorm at Bucknell and took our ground school courses there. We took our flight instructions at the airport at Danville, Pa. We were to fly Piper J3 Cubs. I had never been up in an airplane so on my first ride with the instructor I was all eyes. After we got up about 7 or 800 feet I felt the control stick shake and my instructor, Bob Jones, said take over and fly around awhile. I loved it. I soloed the Cub on September 10, 1942.

After completing the CPT training I went back to York to await further orders. I was told to report to the Navy Preflight School at Chapel Hill, N.C. the day before Christmas, December 24th 1942. I was in the 16th battalion. We learned military marching, physical activities and ground school subjects. Normally the stay at preflight school was 3 months but I was assigned to ship out with the 15th battalion. In honor of completing our training we were given a weekend pass for liberty wherever we choose. Most of us went over to Raleigh, NC to see the big city. That was the weekend my Mother and Aunt Muriel decided to come to Chapel Hill to see me. They were going to surprise me only they were the ones surprised. When I got back Sunday afternoon I found them in my dorm room talking to my roommate. He had shown them around the campus and tried to entertain them while I was gone. I only had about 2 hours to visit with them before my liberty was up.

My orders were for E base training at Anacostia Naval Air Station, Washington DC. My first flight in the N2S "Yellow Peril" was on March 16. I soloed the N2S on March 21, 1943. After 83.6 hours in the N2S I was assigned to NAS Pensacola, Sulfey Field to fly the SNV "Valtee Vibrator". In this phase we practiced formation flying and the use of flaps for landing. I

soloed the SNV on June 10. During this same period we took instrument training with the Link Trainer and flights under the hood in SNJ's. I was certified for instrument flight on June 30^A1943.

I was selected for single engine training and was assigned to "Bloody" Barian Auxiliary Air Station at Foley, A1. We flew the SKJ that had retractable landing gear and flaps. I soloed the SNJ on July 2, 1943. At Barian they had a baseball team in the Mobile Bay Military League. I was selected to play short stop on the Barian team so all my flight training had to be scheduled in the mornings. I got out of any non-flying duties and physical training. We played our games at the Mobile City Baseball Park that was used by their pro team before the war. This duty was a lot of fun.

I received my Navy Wings of Gold and a commission as an Ensign on September 10, 1943.

I was assigned for training as a VT pilot at NAS Jacksonville. I soloed the TBF-1 BU#06299 on a 1.5 hour flight on October 3rd. On November 1st we moved the training squadron from Jax to NAS Opa Locka near Miami. We did our FCL practice at an outlying field of NAS Ft. Lauderdale. On December 9th I was transferred to NAS Glenview for carrier qualification on the USS Wolverine in Lake Michigan. I made 8 traps on December 17th and qualified.

We were given a two-week leave before reporting for duty at NAS North Island, San Diego Ca. I was able to celebrate Christmas 1943 with my Mom and Dad in York, Pa. I went down to Philly a few times to see my love, Betty Bove'. We said our goodbye and I was off to the war. Didn't know when I would return.

I met my roommate during flight training, James Joseph Murphy of Hartford, CT on the train at Harrisburg Pa. We rode the train to Calif. After reporting in the office at NAS North Island we were given orders to report to NAS Seattle. We rode the train to Seattle. On January 18th we boarded a United Airlines DC 3 for a flight to New York City. Our orders were to ferry new TBM Avengers from the GM factory in Trenton, NJ to San Diego.

On January 23rd we left Trenton, three new Ensigns and an experienced Navy ferry pilot. My plane was a new TBM-1C Bu # 16813. It took us 16.4 hours to make the trip across the country. We were weathered in at Midland TX for 2 days. After arriving at NAS North Island on January 28th we boarded a Naval Air Transport for the flight to Seattle. During the month of February 1944 we were stationed at NAS Widby Island waiting for our squadron VC 94 to be commissioned.

On February 29th (leap year) our squadron VC94 was commissioned at NAS Sand Point, Seattle, Washington with Lt. John W. George commanding.

Crash Landing at Tacoma, Washington

After Composite Squadron VC 94 was commissioned at NAS Sand Point, Seattle, Washington on February 29 (leap year) 1944, we were transferred to NAS Pasco, Washington for training. At Pasco, the squadron was assigned to a hanger and planes that had been used by Squadron VC 85 for training. The planes and equipment were in terrible shape. VC 94 mechanics, ordinance men and other ground crew members had a real challenge to get the planes flyable.

On March 24th 1944 I was assigned to fly an old TBF-1 Bu. # 24093 to Seattle to exchange it for a newer model. Carl Rieman was a passenger to pick up a new FM-2 Wildcat at Seattle. Ed Bryan was also a passenger going over to Seattle to procure various much needed spare parts. Another passenger from Air Group 9 based at Pasco rode with us.

Flying down the Columbia River gorge to Portland, OR the engine on the old TBF-1 cutout several times but it caught on and we kept going to Portland. Why we landed at Portland I don't remember but I do recall that the engine cutout as we were taxing up to the ramp. The weather forecast for our route to Seattle called for a front with snow squalls. We took off from Portland and headed for Seattle.

We were flying at about 6 to 8,000 feet and we did enter some snow squalls. Carl Rieman kept reminding me on the intercom to keep the ball centered, the wings level and maintain air speed.

When we passed Tacoma, Washington, the weather was clear and we were flying along at 6000 feet when the engine quit. I switched tanks, hit the booster pump but nothing worked to get the engine going again. I could see the Tacoma airport and turned to make an emergency landing there. But that old TBF glided like a rock. There were several open fields alongside the road that I selected to land in. I came across one field, wheels up, flaps down but was still too fast to land. I pulled up to go over a row of trees at the end of the field. To this day I can still hear the tree branches scrapping the underside of the wings and fuselage. We sat down in the next field that had been recently plowed.

I came to, standing outside the cockpit with blood coming from a cut on my forehead. Carl Rieman was helping Ed Bryan and the boy from Air Group 9 out of the bilge. Ed seemed OK but the Air Group 9 sailor was in serious pain from a leg injury. The wheelsup landing had forced dirt through the bomb bay and into the radioman's compartment, causing injury to him.

A Washington State Highway Patrolman was traveling on the road and saw the crash landing. He radioed for an ambulance. The ambulance people treated us and took us to a Catholic Hospital to wait for medical assistance from NAS Sand Point. I spent two weeks in the Naval Hospital at Seattle with a minor concussion. The Air Group 9 sailor had a broken leg and I have no record as to what happened to him. Carl and Ed returned to Pasco.

In July 1944 Composite Squadron VC 94 was in training at NAS Pasco, Washington. The squadron was invited to perform at an air show to dedicate a new airport at Lewiston ID on July 29th, 1944. Lewiston is about 100 miles east of Pasco up the Snake River, our favorite playground. If I remember correctly we did a great job of buzzing downtown Lewiston. Looking UP to see the girls waving to us from second story windows! I don't believe we had any formal procedures or maneuvers to follow. After the flyover we landed at a small grass strip at the edge of town. Why we didn't land at the new airport I

don't know.

After some activities we manned the planes to fly back to Pasco. Joe Smith was riding with me in the Avenger's gun turret. As the planes were taxiing out to take off we noticed that one of the FM-2 Wildcats had hit a chuck hole and nosed up on its prop. Howard Fox was flying the FM-2. Joe and I went over to check out the damage and saw that about 8 to 10 inches of each prop blade was bent back at a 90-degree angle from hitting the ground.

We told Howard we would go back to Pasco, get a new prop, a maintenance mechanic and come back to repair the plane.

Joe and I took off and headed down the Snake River for Pasco. About 5 minutes after we were airborne, Joe explained over the intercom, "Will you look at that".

There off to our portside was Howard Fox and the FM-2 with the bent propeller blades, flying along as if nothing had happened. We just could not believe what we were seeing.

Howard landed the Wildcat back at Pasco and everyone who saw the damaged prop marveled as to how he got the plane to fly.

The Ford Model A

In September 1944 the squadron VC94 was transferred from NAS Pasco, Washington to NAS Los Alamitos, Calif. The Engineering Officer Lt. Walker had a car that he wanted moved to southern Calif. But he was going on leave and was unable to drive it. Carl Rieman and I volunteered to drive the car to LA. We had a great trip, seeing some of the most beautiful country in the USA. We drove through the big red wood trees on our way to San Francisco. We had a great time in San Francisco. We drove down the ocean highway to LA and NAS Los Alamitos.

Later we were assigned to NAS Brown Field at Otay Mesa above National City CA. In order to get around Carl Rieman and I bought a 1930 Ford model A coupe. I think we paid \$75.00 for it. We got our war time gas stamps but it wasn't very much. Brown Field on Otay Mesa is about 1,000 feet above sea level. The road up the bluff is almost straight up. On wartime gas the old Model A would just about make it in the lowest gear. Each morning the plane captains would drain the gas line filters on the planes to remove any water that may have collected in the gas lines. Normally this drainage is discarded. Since we always needed more gas for the Model A than our gas stamps would allow we talked the mechanics into saving the 100-octane gas from the filters for us. Using that airplane gas the old Model A ran like a top. In fact it would almost get to the top of Otay Mesa before you had to shift gears. We had a great time with that Model A. When we got our orders to shipout we sold the model A for what we paid for it.

It was at Brown Field that the VT planes provided close air support for several mock landings by the marines. It was on one of these flights that a smoke screen was accidentally released over San Diego Harbor. This was very embarrassing to the navy and VC94.

The VT pilots were on temporary assignment at NAS North Island going through ASW training when orders were received to leave the states the next day. Since all our clothing and belongings were at NAS Los Alamitos we had to get the planes back there. The weather was below minimums but our VT leader Windy George got permission to fly up the coast over the water until we were opposite Los Alamitos. Then the plan was to turn inland and land. When we got to the intersection the ceiling was about 100 feet. We dodged oilrigs and somehow through all the rain and mist all the planes landed safely. It was a scary experience.

Flying Air Cargo

On December 21, 1944 the USS Shamrock Bay CVE 84 with Composite Squadron VC 94 aboard crossed the equator at 153 degrees 21 east latitude. While the majority of the ships company were Pollywogs (never been across the line) a wonderful ceremony was held by King Neptune and his court initiating all as Shellbacks. We were on our way to the Admiralty Islands where we spent Christmas 1944 at anchor in Manus harbor.

Before the Shamrock Bay arrived at Manus Island on December 24 VC 94 flew our planes off the carrier and landed at Pitylue airstrip on Manus Island. On Christmas Day we conducted glide bombing and gunnery exercises.

On December 26, Lt(jg). Pete Reed our radio and radar maintenance officer of VC 94 wanted to get some new radio equipment for our planes. These spare parts and new models were warehoused at the airstrip on Los Negros Island, which was about 10 miles east of Manus Island.

Lt(jg) Reed, my radioman Neil Pruden and I flew over to Los Negros in an Avenger, TBM-3 Bu.#68217 on December 26 to bring the new radio models back to Manus. The spare parts and the new models were in a large wooden crate that was to be hoisted up into the bomb bay of the TBM. When the crate was hoisted up into the bomb bay we found that it was so large that the bomb bay doors would not close. Now we had a problem! Could we fly the TBM back to Pitylue, only about 10 miles away with this big wooden crate sticking out the underside of the TBM? We agreed to give it a try.

The takeoff was normal and on the short flight back to Manus everything was fine. The plane flew fairly normal. We made the landing a little faster than normal with that big wooden crate sticking out the bomb bay of the TBM.

That TBM Avenger was a great flying machine.

My Tail Shot Up

At the end of December 1944 our carrier the USS Shamrock Bay CVE 84 along with the USS Kitkum Bay CVE 71 was assigned the mission of escorting and protecting the troop and supply ships from the anchor at Manus harbor in the Admiralty Islands for the invasion of Linghyen Gulf at Luzon in the Philippines.

One of our assignments was to tow a target sleeve for the gunners on the troop ships to practice firing their 5" guns. We had a TBM Avenger equipped with a drum to hold the cable that had the target sleeve attached. These flights could get hairy, especially when you would see the black bursts from the 5" shells in front of you. Then you would get on the radio to the air target controller and tell him to notify the 5" gunners that the target is behind the tow plan, not in front of it!

It was on one of these tow target flights that a very sad incident occurred. G.E.Lott AOMI/c was manning the tow target in 'Windy' George's plane. When Lott was reeling in the cable the propeller that supplied the energy to drive the drum shattered and several pieces pierced the fuselage of the TBM and wounded Lott. He had presence of mind to cut the cable so "Windy" could land back aboard the carrier. But unfortunately Lott died before "Windy" could land back aboard.

On our way to Luzon we had to pass through the Surigao Strait. This is a very narrow passage from the Pacific side to the South China Sea side of the Philippines. We went through at night but the land was so close you could make it out even in the dark. This strait was made famous by the action of Vice Adm. T.C.Kinkaid's old 7th fleet battle ships crossing the T on the Japanese navy in the battle of Leyte Gulf.

As the convoy headed north along Mindoro Island we were constantly under pressure from Japanese planes. About sunset on the evening of January 8th the task group experienced a heavy attack by about 8 enemy suicide planes. Six were shot down by VC91 CAP and one by the Shamrock Bay's 5" gun crew. One of the suicide planes avoided the CAP and AA fire and crashed dived on the Kitkum Bay putting her out of action. I was standing on the flight deck trying to dig a fox hole in the wooden flight deck with my pen knife when this suicide plane just passed in front of the Shamrock Bay. It was a very scary night.

On the morning of January 9th the Shamrock Bay reached the objective area. Lt. 'Windy' George was leading a flight of TBM Avengers over the target area. I was leading the second section flying TBM-3 Bu.#68212 with Neil Pruden as my radioman and Kyle Scates my gunner. We sighted about 45-50 camouflaged Japanese luggers in coves along the shore of Cape Bolino just west of Lingayen Beach. We made rocket and bombing attacks on the luggers. As I was pushing over for a glide bombing run, I got hit by A A fire. The control stick was knocked out of my hand and I heard Kyle Scates my gunner yell into the intercom "We lost our tail, welost our tail". I aborted the bomb run and slowed the plane down and got it flying straight and level. Phil Buker was my wingman and I asked him to assess the damage. He flew up alongside and reported that about half the left horizontal stabilizer and about half the left elevator was gone. As we were flying along he would say "there goes another piece of the elevator*!". The elevator is covered with fabric.

I called the ship requesting an emergency landing priority. They cleared me for a straight in approach

but Ward Henry cut me off saying he was out of gas and had to land. This meant I had to go around and make a normal carrier approach to land aboard. I was kinda worried about making the tight left hand turns so close to the water. But everything worked out OK, we got back aboard. In checking out Ward Henry's plane he had about 15 gallons of gas left which would have been good for 10 to 15 minutes of flying time.

A picture of my damaged tail section is attached.

Anti Snooper Flight, Philippines

During the Lingayen Gulf campaign, the Escort Carrier task force, which the USS Shamrock Bay, CVE 84, was attached to, was west of Luzon in the South China Sea. The seas were very rough most of the time and many of the planes suffered extensive damage when landing on the pitching deck. Rivets popped out of the backs of the fuselages and the wheel struts were driven up through the wings of the TBM Avengers.

The operating plan called for a morning and an evening anti-snooper flight. A TBM Avenger and a FM-2 Wildcat would fly a sector out 250 nautical miles, 50 miles across and hopefully back to the carrier.

At the briefing, the ships position would be given as somewhere in an area about 30 nautical miles, more or less, by about 20 miles wide depending on the direction of the wind and how long the task force had to sail into the wind to launch and or recover planes.

The TBM's carried enough gas for the 4 1/2 to 5 hour flight but the FM-2's had to use external drop tanks to fly that long,

On January 16, 1945 I was assigned as the TBM pilot on the evening anti-snooper flight with Neil Pruden as my radioman and Kyle Scates as gunner. The FM-2 was piloted by Howard Fox. Our sector was due north towards Formosa, Then 50 miles west and return to the ship.

The weather wasn't bad when we took off around 1600hours, but the further we went towards Formosa the worse it got. When we got near the Formosa coast, the ceiling was about 500 feet and the seas were running very rough. The tops were being blown off the waves, the wind was that strong.

After we were out about 2 hours or so, Kyle Scates came over the intercom, "there goes Mr. Fox in". I looked over to where he was flying and saw puffs of black smoke coming from his engine exhaust stacks. He was dangerously close to the water. Since we were maintaining radio silence, I could not find out what his problem was. This happened about four or five times during the flight when we thought Fox was going to ditch, giving us a scare each time. When we got back aboard the Shamrock Bay, Fox said the engine would develop an airlock from the external gas tanks and he would have to quickly switch to his main tank to keep the engine running. This sure gave us a few anxious moments.

Finding the task force after a long flight was always an experience, especially early in the evening when darkness was closing in. We used our ZB radio signal to find the task force and Neil Pruden would pick it up on his radar screen when we got within about 50 miles or so. The Shamrock Bay was always at the same compass point in the task force, which helped to locate it. It was good to land back aboard.

This was a very tiring and exhausting flight.

Movie Exchange and Flight Operations

Following the Iwo Jima operation, in March 1945, the USS Shamrock Bay CVE 84 along with the USS Makassar Strait CVE 91, was assigned escort duties with the supply task force of the fifth fleet for the fast carriers first raids on Japan. Composite Squadron VC 94 assignment was to provide antisubmarine surveillance by the TBM Avengers and combat air patrol by the FM 2 Wildcats. During this assignment no enemy action was encountered. However on a routine antisub patrol we did see the USS Franklin's burned out ship from the kamikaze attack a few days earlier.

Later the supply task force rode out a violent typhoon at the end of March 1945. For three days high winds and huge waves pounded the ships. The carriers had as many planes as possible stored below on the hanger deck. But a number of the planes had to be tied down on the centerline of the flight deck. In the pilots ready room we had a string with a weight on one end attached to the top of the black board. As the ship rolled from side to side the amount of the roll would be recorded with a mark on the black board. As the ship would roll she would shutter as she tried to right herself. If I remember we recorded at least a 30 to 35 degree roll from the centerline or a total of 60 to 70 degrees. The two baby flat tops were rolling to such a degree that from the deck of the USS Shamrock Bay we could read the number 91 on the flight deck of the USS Makassar Strait as she rolled in the heavy seas.

Finally after about 3 or 4 days the seas calmed down to allow flight operations to begin. Since no contact between the ships had been made for 4 or 5 days, on April 4 I was assigned the duty to fly over to the USS Makassar Strait and exchange the movies. The moral of the Ships Company was low having seen the same movie 3 or 4 times. I think it was a Diana Durbin movie at that. They were about the only type movie they showed.

Early the morning of April 4, 1945 in TBM-3 Bu # 233601 was shot off the USS Shamrock Bay for a 1.5 hour test flight then landed on the USS Makassar Strait. After an exchange of the movies and some messages I was catapulted off the USS Makassar Strait for the 10 minute flight back to the USS Shamrock Bay.

On April 7, 1945 I flew the TBM-3 Bu# 22463 with Ray Keys and Walt Glista as passengers over to the USS Attu CVE 102 for them to pick up new replacement FM 2's. I returned to the USS Shamrock Bay the same day.

Such was the necessities of naval operations.

Around this time, the USS Shamrock Bay was detached from the escort duty to join the operating CVE carriers on the invasion of Okinawa. My first combat strike was on April 8, 1945 with Neil Pruden as my radioman and Kyle Scates, the gunner. It was a four-hour mission in TBM-3 Bu# 68512. We flew strikes almost daily against Okinawa up to May 13, 1945.

On April 24> 1945 we were assigned to take a passenger by the name of Lt. Man to Catina airfield on Okinawa. We flew TBM-3 Bu# 23540 with Neil Pruden and Kyle Scates. While at Catina we hunted around for some souvenirs. I cut a hunk of aluminum from the red rising sun symbol on a wrecked Jap plane. Also picked up a cup and sauce, a wooden sandal and several books written in Japanese. Pruden and Scates found a big basket that they filled with dirt. When we got back aboard the USS Shamrock Bay, they dumped the dirt on the flight deck so the sailors that have been restricted to the ship when we had a little liberty could see what dirt looked like.

A little humor never hurt anybody.