

# PEOPLE and EVENTS

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**MAYBE BILLY MITCHELL WAS WRONG**



## **THE FIRST SKIPPER - FRANK M. WHITAKER**

Frank M. Whitaker was born in 1910 at Spokane, Washington. His family had settled there in 1876, his father a physician and grandfather a farmer. Frank was an accomplished artist and musician in high school, where he played football and turned out for track. In 1927, on the day Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, Frank won the state 220-yd low hurdles championship.

Frank attended Gonsaga University in Spokane before winning an appointment to the Naval Academy, where he continued to participate in sports, music and art.

After graduation in 1934, he served nine months aboard the *USS MARYLAND* (BB-46), followed by two years aboard *USS CROWNINSHIELD* (DD-134), an old four-pipe destroyer later turned over to Britain as part of the lend-lease program.

*MARYLAND* was commissioned in July 1921. She joined the Pacific Fleet in July 1923 and moved to Pearl Harbor in 1940. She was damaged at Pearl Harbor, but entered Puget Sound Naval Shipyard on 30 December and emerged repaired and modernized on 26 February 1942. Her four 16" guns were used in many pre-invasion bombardments during the War. She served in the Magic Carpet fleet after the war and decommissioned in April 1947 then scrapped in July 1959.

*CROWNINSHIELD* was originally commissioned in August 1919, but decommissioned in July 1922. She was recommissioned in April 1931 and served in the Pacific Fleet until decommissioned in April 1937.

Recommissioned again in September 1939, she was decommissioned a year later in Halifax, and the same day became *HMS CHELSEA*. In July 1944 she was transferred to the Russian Navy and renamed *DEFSKYI*.

The Class of 1934 was full of over-achievers. A congressional mandate limited a Navy Commission to the upper-half of each class, while the lower-half entered the Reserve and waited. President Roosevelt's expansion of the Navy created a new demand for officers, so all of the 1934 and subsequent classes were commissioned.

Frank applied for flight training and reported to Pensacola in January 1937. Fourteen months later, Frank was assigned to Torpedo Six (VT-6), LCDR W. B. Ault commanding. VT-6 received 18 new TBD Devastators between February and April 1938 and then deployed in *USS ENTERPRISE* (CV-6) for a shakedown cruise to Rio de Janeiro (18 July to 22 September 1938).

Frank had met Mary Lewellin during his tours in San Diego and they married in June 1937. The couple raised two children, Frank III and Margaret, who were 6 and 3 at the time of Frank's tragic death.

*ENTERPRISE* held winter maneuvers in the Caribbean before joining the Pacific Fleet in April 1939. President Roosevelt declared a state of national emergency on 8 September, and *ENTERPRISE* sailed for Pearl Harbor.

Frank was detailed to fly the cameraman and director of the MGM feature film "Flight Command." Following this 3-month stint, Frank reported for duty in Pensacola with Training Squadron 1-B. This was followed by a brief tour as XO of a squadron assigned to *USS Bogue*.

The film "Flight Command" was released in 1940, starring Robert Taylor as a new ensign, Walter Pidgeon as the skipper and Ruth Hussey as the skipper's wife. The aerial scenes were flown by real Navy pilots from a squadron based at San Diego.

Training Squadron VN-1B was based at Corry Field, one of 16 bases then flying the bi-wing N2S/N3N Yellow Peril. This was Primary flight training lasting about three months, beginning with taxiing the tail-dragger aircraft and ending with formation and night flying. Each student accumulated about 110-hours of flying, dual and solo, plus a couple hundred hours of class-room instruction. Frank probably instructed at Corry from the summer of 1940 until the summer of 1942.

VGS-9 was established on 6 August 1942 at NAS Seattle. In September, VGS-9 had 6 F4Fs and 4 TBFs. The squadron moved to San Pedro in October and then to San Diego in November, at which time the squadron had their full complement of 12 F4F and 9 TBF aircraft, commanded by LCDR William B. Drane, and Frank had a nickname of "Pop" and probably flew the TBF.

*USS BOGUE* (ACV-9 later *CVE-9*) arrived in San Diego near the end of November. By mid-December, the ship and squadron were reported "at sea" and arrived in Norfolk on New Year's Day. The exact dates of Frank's service with this squadron are uncertain.

VT-17 was officially commissioned on 1 January 1943, LCDR Frank M. Whitaker commanding. However, the squadron had only 13 aircraft by the end of February, with new pilots and aircraft dribbling in over the next few weeks.

The other skippers in Air Group Seventeen (CVG-17) were LCDR John Thomas Blackburn (NA 1933) the skipper of VF-17, LCDR Walter L. Blatchford (NA 1933) the skipper of VS-17, and LCDR James E. Vose (NA 1934) the skipper of VB-17.

In 1942, LCDR Blackburn was CO of VGF-29 aboard *USS SANTEE* (ACV-29 later *CVE-29*), flying the F4F-4 (Wildcat) in Operation Torch – the invasion of North Africa. *SANTEE* returned to Norfolk in early December 1942. At war's end he commanded CVG-74 and had command of *USS MIDWAY* in 1958/59.

In 1942, then LT Vose flew with VB-8 at the Battle of Midway. He assumed command of VB-8 in August after his squadron CO failed to return from a scouting mission. His tour ended with the sinking of *USS HORNET* on 26 October 1942 at the Battle of Santa Cruz. Vose introduced the problem-plagued Curtis SB2C Helldiver into the fleet and later commanded *USS BOXER*.

The Air Group Commander (CAG) was CDR Michael P. Bagdanovich (NA 1929). According to Blackburn, Frank was known as the Silver Fox in those days, because of his premature gray hair.

Air Group Seventeen boarded *BUNKER HILL* in July 1943. Frank and his 1<sup>st</sup> division became known as "Hobo." The 2<sup>nd</sup> division became "Boxcar"; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> division became "Caboose." Their ship became "Hobotown." "Roundhouse" was the call for pilots to rendezvous. "Chow Down" was the signal to prepare to attack and "Dinner is ready" signaled the target is sighted.

**Frank and his wingman had a mid-air collision on 2 February 1944, near Engebi Island in the Eniwetok Atoll. There are few details on exactly how the collision occurred, but witnesses saw both aircraft hit the water and the area was thoroughly searched for survivors without success.**

Frank was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (posthumously) for his action in the Kwajalein and Engebi campaigns.

## A TBM CREWMAN

*JAMES N. NICHOLSON was born on Christmas day 1921 in Harrison, Arkansas. This story is about his naval service as a radio/radar operator in the TBF/TBM AVENGER during WW-II. It is edited from "A Good Man's Story" on the Internet by his son. He served in a three-man team. There were 48 such enlisted men in the squadron, and 24 pilots flying eighteen aircraft (turkeys, they were called, the biggest birds then flying from a carrier).*

*The first part of his story includes his early life, family and schooling. He enlisted in the Navy in July 1942, and the narrative includes his Navy training. His combat service began aboard USS ENTERPRISE and then USS INTREPID with VT-6 in late 1943 and early 1944. These ships were in many of the same battles as USS BUNKER HILL. After INTREPID was torpedoed, she returned to the States for repairs whereupon NICHOLSON went on 30-days leave.*

In 1775, Benedict Arnold captured two British ships on Lake Champlain and then renamed them *ENTERPRISE* and *INTREPID*.

*USS BUNKER HILL* is named after the 17 June 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill. After learning the British intended to occupy the hills surrounding Boston, 1200 colonial troops occupied and fortified Breed's Hill (162') and Bunker Hill (110') on 16 June. The British landed near Moulton's Hill (35') and assaulted Breed's Hill and later Bunker Hill. Although the British finally captured the two hills, it cost them 226 dead and 800 wounded. It was the first major battle after the Lexington and Concord incidents in April.

### Regrouping in the States--1944--Air Group Seventeen

I had to return to Alameda after my 30 day leave and when I arrived they assigned me to VT-17, as Air Group Seventeen was just reforming. **James Berryhill ARM2C** and I were the only airmen from Air Group Six to be assigned to new squadrons, but eventually we drifted apart, because after they regrouped, VT-6 was sent up to Santa Rosa for training, and after VT-17 regrouped, we went down to Monterey for training.

**Berryhill** and I were both ARM2Cs and we immediately began studying for our ARM1C examinations. We passed them and were promoted before we left Alameda for Monterey for training. **Berryhill** was from Sheffield, Alabama and was probably the smallest air crewman in the entire fleet. His motto was "It isn't the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog." And what he lacked in stature, he made up for in fortitude. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Well, my new pilot was **Lt. George Hill** and he was from West Concord, Massachusetts and our turret gunner was **Norman Jensen** from Oak Park, Illinois. **Berryhill's** new pilot was **Lt. Charles Livengood** and their turret gunner was **Ted Keffer**. Before **Lt. Hill** arrived on the scene, I flew a training flight or two with **Lt. Steven Sullivan**. The Air Group Seventeen Commander was **Cmdr Edmond G. Konrad** and VT-17 Squadron Commander was **Lt. Cmdr. William M. Romberger**.



Port side of the gun turret, with escape hatch open.  
Machine gun is on starboard side.

**Cmdr. Romberger** allowed all flight personnel to maintain their own log books, so I have records of all my flights with VT-17. The only way I could ever determine my flight time in VT-6 would be to find **Lt. Larue G. Buchanan's** flight log and see what missions he flew from May 15, 1943 to March 3, 1944. I'm sure that it would show that we flew over 500 hours for both training and combat missions and that we probably made over 50 carrier launches and landings. The training missions for both squadrons would pretty well parallel each other.

Air Group Seventeen spent the month of May becoming organized at Alameda, and my flight log shows that I flew twenty two and one half hours on training flights that month. One of the flights was in an SNJ trainer and

**Lt. Hill** let me take the controls in the back seat, the first and only time that I had the controls of a plane while I was in the Navy.

You see, the TBF did not have any dual controls and there was no way that either the radioman or the gunner could get to the pilot's cockpit from the turret or the radio compartment, while the plane was in flight. Should anything have happened to the pilot, the only chance for survival for the radioman or gunner would have been to parachute to safety, if possible. It was always understood that if something should happen to the plane and if it were at all possible, the pilot would make the best water landing he could because everyone's chance for survival was better that way than trying to bail out because you had a chance of retrieving the life raft before the plane would sink.



TBM-3 Aft cabin. APS-4 radar is on the right, ART-13 HF transmitter left/center, with bomb-bay below. Armor plate above transmitter folds down for entrance to turret. Folding bench seat for crew is on the left side.

During the month of June, I logged 56.8 hours of training flights, and one of them I will never forget. One morning when it was too foggy for the squadron to fly simulated attack tactics, **Lt. Hill, Jensen** and I decided to make a radar navigation flight and we took off and headed down the coast, flying just over the overcast at about 3000 feet. I had my head buried in the radar, giving **Lt. Hill** distances to shore off our port wing (90 degrees port) and we were staying about a couple of miles offshore. When we were nearly to San Louis Obispo, **Lt. Hill** asked if there was any smoke in the radio compartment and when I pulled my head out of the radio visor (a rubber visor fitted over the radar screen to keep the light out) the plane was full of smoke. **Lt. Hill** turned around and headed for home and told Jensen to get into the radio compartment with me (one crawled into the turret from the radio compartment) and for us to put our parachutes on and be ready to bail out if he gave the order. He started gaining all the altitude that he could and said that he was slowly losing oil pressure. The first call I made to the control tower at the base, I could not get a response but I continued calling and finally the tower traffic controller answered me. **Lt. Hill** told him our situation and that we would be coming over Carmel Mountain and that we would make a down wind landing if we could make it. By the time we reached the Monterey Airfield, they had out the ambulance, the fire truck and the rescue squad all waiting for us. The visibility was still poor but better than it was when we took off and someone that lived on Carmel Mountain told **Lt. Hill** later that we barely cleared it. But we did make the down-wind landing all right and the mechanics found that we had returned with a cracked piston. They said that it was a wonder that the engine did not freeze up and that we were lucky to have made it back in with it. That was one time that I do not believe "that skill and science was prevailing over ignorance and superstition". Somebody upstairs was helping us!!

There were other non-flying events that I remember from Monterey. **Lt. Hill** had a girl friend that lived in Carmel and he spent a good part of his liberties there and the officers had their club on the base. The enlisted men had liberty every other night and it was customary for all the air crewmen to congregate at one local bar, since we had no club quarters on the base. In Monterey, we all started meeting at a place called "My Attic" and even if you had something else to do on liberty, you would usually check by the "Attic" before you headed back to the base. The base was about a mile inland from downtown Monterey and we usually walked to and from the base, if we couldn't hitch a ride.



TBM-3 .30-caliber stinger gun with retractable tail-wheel on the right.

Fort Ord was on the coast close by and there was always lots of soldiers on liberty in town, The Coast Guard operated a couple of PC boats around in the bay and they would pull the sleds with the PC boats that we used for targets in our simulated torpedo runs and bombing attacks. We would carry hundred pound water filled bombs for both those training tactics and the planes were equipped with gun cameras to show the effectiveness of the training attacks

One afternoon, **Berryhill** and I had liberty and we ended up being the only two air crewmen in the "Attic" along with several soldiers from Fort Ord and four or five Coast Guardsmen off the PC boats, I tried to strike up a conversation with the Coast Guard boys and was talking about our training tactics on the sleds that they were pulling in the bay for us. **Berryhill** said something to one of them, and I really think that he meant it in jest, about their service in "Hooligan's Navy." The Coast Guardsman took his remark to heart and I had to do a lot of fast talking to convince them that I was a lover and not a fighter. And we were finally able to get out of there without having a gang fight. **Berryhill** was so small that most soldiers and marines would just ignore him, but he seemed to carry a chip on his shoulder and often did not use discretion as the better part of valor when shooting off his mouth.

Oh yes! Our quarters at NAAS Monterey were temporary army barracks and we had double-decker bunks on either side, with a big aisle down the middle. One night about midnight, the entire barracks was awakened to the loud cry of "Hi Ho, Silver - Away!" and to our amazement, here are two sailors riding down the aisle on a snow white mule, The sailors were in their dress blues, and to top things off, the mule decided to make a deposit on the wooden floor in the center of the barracks, when **Keffer** and **Colombini** dismounted, it looked as if all of the hair off the mule's back was deposited on their blue uniforms. The mule was shedding, to say the least. The boys were walking home from the "Attic" and there was a ten acre tract just between the base and Monterey that housed a veterinarian's clinic, so the boys had led the mule out of this pasture and proceeded to ride him to the base. When the security guard stopped them at the gate and told them that they could not bring the donkey on the base, they asked him "Why not? You let the officers drive their vehicles on and off the base and this happens to be our mode of transportation". They persuaded him to let them ride through and that was so good, they proceeded to ride right on into the barracks. I thought the Skipper would call them to "Captain's Mast" the next day but he apparently got a charge out of it, for all the boys had to do was return the mule.

By the middle of July, 1944, we had finished our gunnery, glide bombing and torpedo run tactics at Monterey and we were moved on up to NAAS Vernalis, an auxiliary Air Station near Modesto for our training in night flying, Between the 15th of July and August 31st, I flew 37 hours of night time flying, All with **Lt. Hill** and **Jensen**. We went into Modesto for liberty a few times, but since we were flying at night and it was so hot in the daytime, we didn't spend much time on liberty. We had to get our sleep in the mornings, as the barracks were cooled by fans and humidifiers only.

There are a few things that I remember from Vernalis. We lost a fighter plane and pilot one night when we were making night field carrier landing practices. The pilot came in too low and hit a power line at the end of the landing strip. Another night when we were aloft, there was a terrific explosion on the horizon toward San Francisco. We were several miles inland from San Francisco, but we learned on the news that there had been an accident at an ammunition depot at Port Chicago, near San Francisco.

We spent the month of September, 1944 at NAS Alameda, mostly for the purpose of having rocket launchers mounted under the wings of our planes and flying rocket training missions. Of the 27 hours that I flew in September about 6 hours was for rocket training. We spent most of October at NAAS Arcata, California, up near the Oregon border, for the purpose of rocket training but the weather was so bad most of the time that we didn't get in too much flying time. It was extremely foggy and we spent a lot of time in the local pubs drinking beer with the loggers. The timber and lumber industries are the big thing in that part of the state.

On the 27th of the month, we had returned to Alameda and were making landings and launches off the *USS Ranger*, which had just come from the Atlantic to California. The **Watkins brothers** were no longer aboard her, and my concept of her size had changed dramatically, since I had landed on much larger carriers. She looked mighty small when you were coming in for a landing aboard her. It was amazing what a difference the approach made, in just two short years. After three days aboard the *Ranger*, all our squadron had made enough launches and landings to make the squadron fully qualified for carrier duty,

### **Back to Sea--Guam--To Pearl on the Hollandia--Nov. Dec, 1944**

We spent the first twelve days of November en route to Pearl Harbor on the *Hollandia*. The *Hollandia* was a jeep carrier (a flight deck on a cargo hull) that was used to transport air groups. When we arrived at Honolulu, they sent the air group to NAS Hilo, where we spent a month in operational training. On December 10th, the entire air group was flying off the *USS Saratoga* in training flights around Hawaii. We left Hilo and went aboard the *USS Nassau* at Ford Island to be transported to Guam.

We spent Christmas aboard the *Nassau* and were entertained, among others, by one of our pilots, **Ens. Hooton**, who had played with **Harry James** band before entering the service, Our MC for the Christmas; program was **Charlie Farrell**, an old movie actor who was a personnel officer in the air group. It seemed that we always had plenty of talent willing to perform, who would put on a good show for any occasion. I think I forgot to mention

that when I was in VT-6, we had an air crewman by the name of **Richard Boone AOM2C**, who was **Commander Phillips** turret gunner that I flew a couple of missions with, to deliver the aerial photographs to the Pensy, the flagship of the 7th Fleet. He later became the renowned actor of screen and television, playing the role of "Paladin" [*Have Gun Will Travel*]. At any rate, we always had some characters that could put on a show and would entertain in their spare time.

We dropped anchor off Guam on December 28th and were taken to the Air Field at Agana. Guam had been invaded months earlier, but there were still many Japs that had not surrendered, camping out in the woods on the north and south end of the island. Some of our Airdales would go in bunches into the woods and scare the Japs out of their camps in order to raid the camps for souvenirs. I may have lacked "guts" but the only souvenir wanted to take home was - me.

One day, when I was eating in the chow hall, I looked across the table, and there sat **Eugene "Pinhead" Arnold** from Harrison, Arkansas. He was in the Army Signal Corps and was temporarily stationed on Guam. It was a rare occasion to run into anyone from home and we got to visit each other for about a month. I forgot to mention that another time when I was with VT-6 and we were at Ford Island, I had heard that **Travis Reddoch** was with the Red Cross at Hickham Field, so I went over and visited with her once. She was meeting the planes that were bringing back the wounded soldiers and marines from Guadalcanal, at the time; The Red Cross nurses would take the wounded men off the planes and transport them to the hospitals. Another person from home that I saw later was **Tommy Gray**, who was a member of the band aboard the Battleship USS Indiana. When we were in Ulithi, I went aboard his ship and visited with him. The only other people that I ever saw from home were in places within the states.

During the time that we were on Guam, we would have occasional air raids. I say, air raids, although we never did actually have any enemy planes to come within sight. Two or three times there would be an enemy plane (probably a patrol plane) that would appear on radar, and the air raid alarm would sound. When this happened, everyone at Agana Air Field would go to a strip about 15 feet wide, located on the edge of a bluff overlooking the ocean, a sheer drop of over a hundred feet. This strip of land was at the edge of the air field and a huge windrow of trees and rocks that had been cleared away with bulldozers by the CB's, when the air strip was made, left protection if a bomb were to hit the air strip.

Also, if a bomb fell short of the air strip, it would have fallen in the ocean, or exploded somewhere down the bluff, so a bomb would have had to make a direct hit on the narrow strip of land, between the air strip and the bluff, to have done any damage to personnel. I know it would have been the safest place on the island, if it were ever under actual attack.

### **Jan.-March, 1945--The Hornet--Attacking the Japanese Mainland**

My flight log shows that our crew flew 6 flights between the 13th and 26th of January, while we were on Guam. Two of these flights were landings and launches on the *Kasaan Bay* and on the 26th we went aboard the *Kasaan Bay* to be transported to the fleet anchorage at Ulithi, where we were to go aboard the *USS Hornet* (CV-12). We boarded the *Hornet* February 1st, 1945 and spent ten days around Ulithi in practice operations

On February 10th, 1945, Task Force 58.1 with Air Group Seventeen aboard the *Hornet*, set sail for the Japanese Homeland. We reached striking distance of Tokyo on February 16, 1945, a year to the day from my last combat mission at Truk, where the *Intrepid* had been torpedoed.

This was the first full carrier aircraft attack on the Japanese Mainland, although General Doolittle had led an attack of Army B-25 planes that were launched from carriers prior to this. Those planes could not land back aboard and had to land somewhere in the China-Burma-India territory.

During the year's time that I had been away from, combat, there had been a lot of hard fighting in the Pacific. I was glad that I had missed the invasions of Saipan and Tinian, Guam, and the first and second battles of the Philippine Sea. I had tasted enough of combat during the invasions of the Gilberts and the Marshalls to know that we still had plenty of hard fighting ahead of us in the months ahead.

Our first target over the Japanese homeland was to be Yokosuka Naval Base in Tokyo Harbor and some of the Air Group was to hit Hammamatsu Air Field on Hachijo Shima. When we approached Yokosuka, there was a heavy overcast and since our targets were obscured, we were diverted in flight to Toyohashi Air Field. The anti-aircraft fire over Toyohashi was relatively light and all our planes returned to the ship from the target. The only mishap of the day was that **LT. McCubbins** spun in on the take-off and although we lost the torpedo plane, all the crew were picked up safely by one of our destroyers.

From February 18th to the 22nd, we were flying air support for the invasion of Iwo Jima in the Bonins. My log book shows that I flew nearly five hours and that we made three strikes on February 20th **Lt. Traxler** and his crewmen, **Colp** and **Klunder** were shot down over Iwo but were able to make a water landing and were picked up by one of our destroyers. During the month of February, I logged 24 hours flight time, with nearly ten hours on two combat missions.



TBM over Iwo Jima

On March 1, 1945, our Task Group encountered some enemy shipping at Miyako Shima in the Nansie Shots, and we flew our first torpedo mission for VT-17. There were only three cargo ships and one destroyer and our squadron was credited with two of the cargo ships and the destroyer. **Lt. Durkin, Lt. Sullivan** and **Lt. Nielson** were all credited with torpedo hits. My pilot, **Lt. Hill**, didn't get a hit on this one, but not every torpedo that is dropped hits a target, though every plane in the attack diverts its portion of anti-aircraft fire.

I don't know what we were doing between March 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, unless we were refueling and taking on supplies. I logged a bombing flight on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but it isn't marked a combat mission so apparently it was a practice mission.

The next combat mission that I logged was March, 18, and we hit Kanoya Air Field on the southern tip of Kyushu. The Task Force was in General Quarters all day and as we were getting ready to launch for Kanoya, with all planes fully loaded with bombs and fuel, two **Kamikazes** dropped out of a cloud and were shot down by our twenty and forty millimeter guns. Even though they burst into flames, they kept coming at us and barely missed our carrier. One of them hit so close that the fantail of the ship swept through the flames the enemy plane left on the water.

We heard later that day that all of our ships were not so lucky. The *USS Franklin*, in another Task Group of the Task Force, was hit under similar circumstances. The loss of planes, personnel and the damage to the ship was extremely great. They estimated that about 40% of the Air Group and Ships Company personnel were wiped out by that one Kamikaze hit. The Kamikazes liked to die for their country and we liked to make them happy, but those one-way missions that they flew, could be quite devastating. The *Franklin* was able to make it back to Pearl Harbor but it's a wonder she didn't sink.

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, our Squadron and Air Group made a strike on Kure Naval Base, and some shipping in the East China Sea. My crew did not fly on this mission, but it was undoubtedly one of the hottest missions flown by the Task Force. We lost **Lt (J.G.) Westmoreland**, his gunner **Harold West** and his Radioman, **Fred Cropp. Lt. Tew's** plane was badly hit by a five inch shell that demolished his windshield and canopy. His face was badly lacerated, but he was able to return to the ship and land aboard. The attack on Kure inflicted severe damage on three battleships, four light cruisers and a destroyer. Also, several cargo ships and freighters were heavily damaged.

My log book showed that we flew a four hour search mission, looking for Lt. Westmoreland but we found no trace of them.

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, we flew a three hour mission, a bombing strike, on Tokashiki Shima and the next day a five and one half hour torpedo run on a Japanese convoy in the East China Sea. The convoy consisted of nine ships and we sunk all of them. Lt. Hill was credited with a torpedo hit on the largest cargo ship and Lt. Livengood was credited with sinking the destroyer. We weren't without loss, however, as **Ens. Hooten**, his gunner, **Frank Keener**, and his radioman, **Robert Warren** failed to return.

Another one of our pilots, **Russell Miller** had to make a water landing, due to engine failure on the way to the target. They made their life raft, but our search for them the next day failed to find them. They spent 11 days on the raft and were finally located and picked up by one of the Navy's Patrol Planes (PBY) and flown to the hospital at Guam. **Nielson** and **Young** returned to the *Hornet* to fly again but **Miller** had died on the raft.

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, we were making strikes on Okinawa. The first strike was a daylight attack on Naha, the Capital of Okinawa, It was the one and only high level bombing mission that we ever flew. The Skipper's plane was equipped with a Norden Bombsight and we all flew a tight wing on him, with orders to drop at the same time that he made his drop. We flew at about 20,000 feet and were carrying 2000 pound bombs. The antiaircraft fire was the heaviest that I had seen since Truk when I was with VT-6. Unlike our glide bombing attacks, where our pilots could fly evasive tactics, we had to fly the same altitude and direction and at constant speed. This permitted the ground gunners to effectively track us.

We were lucky that we did not lose any planes on this strike. We did lose a plane on the way to the target, however. **Lt. Livengood** and **James Berryhill**, his radioman and **Ted Keffer** his gunner had to make a water landing due to engine failure. They were able to make their raft and were picked up by one of our destroyers with no injury to any of the crew.

On March 28<sup>th</sup> we were still flying bombing strikes on Okinawa. I flew one 4 hour mission that morning and when we landed back aboard, the *Hornet* had received word from reconnaissance that the Japanese Fleet had

been sighted in the East China Sea. So, we loaded with torpedoes, and our Air Group started searching in the East China Sea, around Kyushu and Amani O Shima.

All we could find were some Sampans and one Jap destroyer escort, all of which were sunk. We went loaded for bear but only found a sparrow. A 600 mile search and five hours of flying time. Oh well! You can't win them all. Nine hours of flying time and two combat missions in one day made for the longest day of flying that I had ever experienced.

### April, 1945--Okinawa--Sinking the Yamato--Kikai Shima

Although the squadron continued glide bombing attacks on Okinawa prior to the invasion and support attacks after the invasion of April 1, 1945, I did not fly another mission until April 2nd. On that date, we flew three and one half hours on a strike against Japanese shipping that was anchored in Kakeroma Shima and Amami O Shima in the Nansie Shotos. All ships in the harbors were hit. The anti-aircraft fire was relatively light, and all planes returned to the ship safely.

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, we were making bombing attacks against Miyako Shima, Nansie Shotos. The Task Force was under attack from Kamikazes most of the afternoon and evening. Most of these suicide planes were being launched from Kanoya Air Field on the southern tip of Kyushu and we seemed to make more attacks there than anywhere else, in order to keep the air strip torn up to prevent their launchings. We were refueling and taking on mail and supplies on April 4th, so there was no flying activity.

My log book shows that we flew a three hour bombing mission against shore installations on Kikai Shima on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945. The anti-aircraft fire was moderate to heavy. Two fighter planes were shot down but the pilots made water landings and were picked up by our destroyers. It was always our destroyer's missions to pick up any survivors from downed planes, as they were faster and could get to the scene so much more quickly. Water landings were much more preferable to bailing out in a parachute, because your chances of survival were so much greater if you could retrieve the life raft which was stored in a compartment just above the wing of the plane.

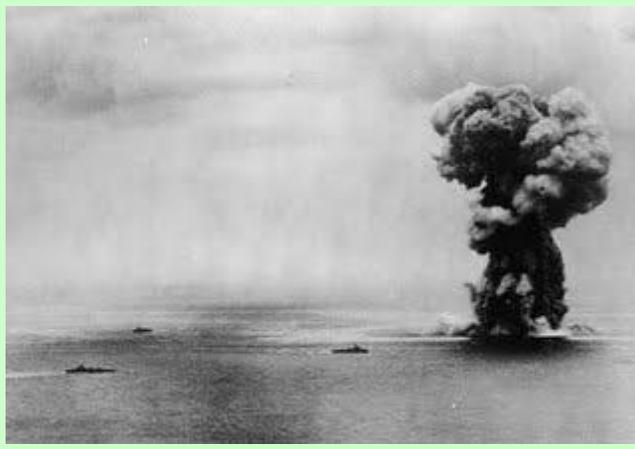


The Hornet Under Attack--April 1945

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, there were only interception flights by the fighter planes to pick up the hacki-sacki drivers who were flying their one way missions to Okinawa. The Task Force sat between Okinawa and the Japanese Mainland for the sole purpose of intercepting any forces that the Japanese might send down. Of course, they were sending down everything that they could muster. Our fighter planes alone (VF-17 and VBF-17) were knocking out from 25 to 50 enemy planes a day but invariably some of them would filter through the fighter screen and would have to be shot down by the shipboard gunners. On this date, the shipboard gunners were credited with 5 Kamikazes and as usual, our squadron bagged their share.

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945 was the date we finished off most of what was left of the Japanese Fleet, At 9:50 A.M., we received word from recon that their fleet was spotted at 123.10 Long., and 30-40 Lat., in the East China Sea headed for Okinawa. So, we loaded our fish (torpedoes) and took off on a five hour mission to engage the enemy. **Commander Konrad's** Air Group Seventeen, off the *USS Hornet*, was the first to arrive on the scene. There was one battleship (later confirmed to be the *Yamato*), one heavy cruiser, two light cruisers, and seven destroyers.

We peeled off into our attack from 20,000 feet, and, in no other attack had I seen the likes of the antiaircraft fire that we encountered on this mission. Our coordinated attacks had the torpedo planes converging from all angles at 100 feet altitudes, the bombers (SB2C's) diving in from 60 to 80 degrees from all angles and the fighters (F6F's) coming in strafing from all directions and all degrees of descent. The torpedo planes would release the fish at about 2000 yards from the target and the bombers would release their two thousand pound Armor Piercing Bombs from 2000 feet altitude and, of course, the fighters would strafe at any distance they deemed effective.



The *Yamato* exploding

Of course, every air crewman was firing his guns all of the time they were in range of the target. Our Air Group was credited with 3 torpedo hits and three bomb hits on the *Yamato* alone and there was one Terutsuki class destroyer that was credited to one of VT-17 pilots, so, out of 8 torpedo hits and eleven bomb hits on the *Yamato*, Air Group Seventeen had scored a good percentage of what it took to sink her. After we were out of shipboard gun range and were rendezvousing, to fly back to the *Hornet*, we noticed that the *Yamato* was firing her 18.1 inch guns into the water, trying to knock out the oncoming torpedo planes that were attacking her, by putting up a wall of water from the explosions of the projectiles.

The *Yamato* was the largest battleship afloat up until that time but that attack marked her last day afloat. When we landed back aboard the *Hornet*, 8 of our 13 torpedo planes had been hit by enemy gunfire. We had a hole in the starboard wing of our plane just outside the tire well, that was large enough to stuff a football through. It was probably caused by a 20 MM projectile. I've forgotten whose plane it was, but one of the 8 planes that was hit nearly lost its horizontal tail plane. The hole in it was so large that someone took a picture of all three crewmen standing inside the hole. It was a wonder they could have even landed it back aboard.

Shortly after we landed back aboard, our shipboard gunners knocked down two twin-engine enemy bombers that dropped down on us from out of the clouds. They came so close to us that **Admiral Jocko Clark**, the Task Group Commander, cited the shipboard gunners on the spot for their marksmanship and bravery. As usual, we had to pay the price for success on our sinking of the *Yamato*. **Ens. Leo O'Brien**, his radioman, **Opheim** and his gunner, **Ricketson** failed to return from the mission.

My notes show that on April 12<sup>th</sup>, our Fighter Squadrons alone shot down 32 enemy planes and that the task force had shot down 3 that filtered through the fighter screen. We were in General Quarters for four days aboard ship and the Japs were sending out everything they could get airborne and our fighter planes were knocking them down like flies. We had to have the hottest fighter squadron in the fleet because they had bagged 271 enemy planes in the two and one half months. When you consider that there were at least eight other air groups operating in the-task force, there would have to have been over 1000 enemy planes shot down by the entire group.

My flight log shows that we continued to fly air support missions for the invasion forces on Okinawa. I flew a two and one half hour mission on the 19<sup>th</sup> as our ground forces were-making a big push on the southern end of Okinawa and a new landing was in progress. We were dropping 2000 pound Armor Piercing (Daisy Cutters) and I had made a notation that the anti-aircraft fire had diminished to the extent that it felt like we were flying "milk runs" as compared to hitting the Jap Fleet.

On April 20<sup>th</sup>, we flew a three hour combat mission against shore installations on Kikai Shima. All planes returned safely but the Task Force was in General Quarters all day, although the Japanese never came on in for an attack. We did not fly any bombing attacks on the 21<sup>st</sup> but our fighter planes (F6F's) were flying patrols and the task force was sitting only eight miles off shore at Minavri Diato and our destroyers were shelling the beach with their five inch turrets.

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, we were refueling and taking on mail and on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, we started flying air support missions again to the forces on Okinawa. These were low level runs and we were releasing our bombs around 600 feet. My log book shows that I flew 2 of these low level missions, one on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and one on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, we set sail for Ulithi to the fleet anchorage. While en route, our crew and our wingman, **Lt. Cooke** flew a tow sleeve mission for the shipboard gunners target practice. We pulled the sleeves attached to the end of a 500 foot cable, which was reeled out through the flare tube, from the tail section of the radio compartment. This target practicing was limited to the 20mm and 40mm guns, but you still had to have lots of faith in the shipboard gunners, even though the target was 500 feet aft.

This was the second time we had pulled target for the task force, but what made this flight different was the fact that after the firing was over and we had reeled in our target, we started to rendezvous with **Lt. Cooke** in order to land back aboard. What we did not know was that **Lt. Cooke's** target had been shot away and that the radioman, **Robert Frieze** had not yet finished reeling in his tow cable. **Lt. Hill** caught the cable with his

starboard wing, and had **Frieze** not have seen what was happening, and had not severed the cable with a pair of cutters; the cable would have cut the wing of the plane off entirely. When we landed back aboard, examination showed that the cable had cut within six inches of the main spar of the wing. Had the main spar been severed, we would have been another casualty. This happened to be one of the many incidents that proved to me that you did not have to be on a combat mission to get killed out there, as many of our casualties were not combat related and we lost some of the most experienced and best trained Airmen in the outfit for reasons that could not be explained.

### May, 1945--Okinawa, Kyushu, Shikoku, Tokuno Shima,

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, we flew a four hour practice gunnery mission, (our aerial gunners shooting at tow sleeves). And on May 12<sup>th</sup>, I logged a three and one half hour support mission to the ground forces on Okinawa.

May 13<sup>th</sup>, we flew a four hour bombing mission on Kanoya Air Field at Kyushu and part of our Air Group hit Izumi and Saeki sea plane bases at the same time we were hitting Kanoya. On this mission, we lost our Executive Officer, Lt. Durkin and his Radioman, T. J. Tindall and his turret gunner, Cecil Stewart. They were forced to land at Kanoya, because their engine had been hit.

I did learn after the war was over and when I was in college at the University that this crew was in a prison camp with **Bill Dean Holt**, a boy from home, who had been an Army Air Corps pilot and was also shot down and taken prisoner by the Japanese.

The Task Force was always in General Quarters and we could not tear up the Japanese Air Strips fast enough to keep them from launching their suicide planes. We kept most of them from filtering through to the landing fleet but I am sure a few of them filtered through to them as they did to us. Those boys (Kamikazes) that don't have any regard for their own lives make about as formidable opponents as you could ever run up against.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, we flew two four hour bombing missions. Our first target was Kumamoto, an industrial center on Kyushu; and the, second target was Matsuyama Air field on, Shikoku. I had made a notation, that we had flown over the Inland Sea and that it had given me the impression of what I had always pictured the Fjords of Norway to look like.

Eight hours of flying in one day would have been enough had we not made two bombing attacks. When we returned, the Task Force had shot down 3 enemy planes and our fighter squadron had bagged a few over Kanoya. It seemed that we were never without losses. **Lt. Comdr. Hugh W. Nicholson** (no relation), who was the Skipper of Fighter Squadron (VBF-17), was shot down on the last hop over Kanoya Air Field.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, we were refueling, and the Task Force was conducting gunnery practices. We resumed Air Support Missions to Okinawa and I flew a three and one half hour mission over Okinawa on the 17<sup>th</sup>. On the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, we were refueling again and the Task Force was having gunnery practice.

I know it seems like we spent a lot of time refueling but you have to understand, the Task Force was split into 4 different Task Groups. Each group consisted of 2 Aircraft Carriers, 2 Battleships, 2 heavy cruisers and 4 Fletcher Class Destroyers. Our group, for instance, (Task Group 58.0) included our ship *the Hornet*, another Essex Class Carrier the *USS Bennington*, the *USS Indiana*, two battleships and the Cruisers, *Pittsburg* and *Birmingham* and I don't know the specific names of the Fletcher Class Destroyers. But in addition to these ships, each Carrier had to take on enough aviation fuel for supplying over 100 airplanes. So the tankers had to be alongside once and maybe twice a week. We didn't mind taking on fuel because if we ever received any mail, it came with the tankers.



Preparing to deck launch a TBM.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, we flew another tow target mission for the Task Group and on the 20<sup>th</sup>; we logged a four hour bombing mission on Tokuno Shima. The weather was so bad that we had to release our bombs on Tokuno Shima by radar. I doubt if the damage from the bombing was very successful, but it was better than either jettisoning them at sea or carrying them back aboard ship. At least they fell on enemy soil.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, our crew did not fly the mission but our Squadron encountered and sunk three light cargo ships in the same area (Tokuno Shima).

From May 23<sup>rd</sup> until the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, we flew Air Support missions for the invasion forces on Okinawa. Our Fighter and Bomber planes were actually doing more flying during this time than we were; because more strafing sweeps and intercepting flights were needed, most of the time.

But on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, the heavy rains had bogged down our ground forces that were fighting around Suri Castle and Yonabaru and our forces were running out of food, ammunition and water. So we flew to Kadena Air Field near Naha, which had already been secured by our forces and loaded our bomb-bays with food, water and ammunition which were rigged to parachutes. The parachutes were color coded with red for ammunition, yellow for food and blue for water. We would fly low level over the front lines (about 500 feet) and drop these supplies to them. So when the trucks couldn't get the supplies to them by land, we were able to fly them in. We were flying so low that one of our planes was shot down by mortar fire. However, they were able to land behind our lines and were returned to the squadron later. It took about an hour to make a round trip to the front line from Kadena and we (our crew) made six trips. On each load, we would carry from 1200 to 2000 pounds of supplies.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, we refueled and started running from the bad weather that had been forecast. Although we traveled at full speed on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> to try to escape the bad weather, we ended up right in the middle of the typhoon on June 6, 1945. The Destroyers could travel so much faster than we could, so they had pulled away from us to calmer seas, but the rest of the Task Group was intact.

*Hornet* was tossing and pitching so violently that we could not set our breakfast trays on the table because they would have slid off before you could have grabbed it. All of the planes possible had been moved down to the hangar deck and the few that had to be left topside had been lashed to the deck with steel cables.

Our squadron's ready room was just under the flight deck, on the port side about amidships. And there was a catwalk leading to the flight deck, just outside our ready room door. We could stand on the catwalk which was about 50 feet above the water line normally and on this morning the waves were so high that you had to look up to see the tops of them part of the time. The battleships and the cruisers alongside looked as if they were under water at least half the time, as the waves were sweeping over their decks completely.

All ships had reduced speeds to 6 knots and all were headed directly into the wind. I do believe those sailors aboard the battleships and cruisers should have received submarine pay for the month of June, because on this day, they were spending as much time submerged as they were above water.

At times, only the super structure of the ships could be seen. It was reported that the winds were 138 miles per hour at their peak. All I can say is that I would hate to ever see higher winds, even on land.

On the bow of the hangar deck, there were some new air craft engines stored. These engines came in large crates of plywood, similar to the way refrigerators and heavy appliances were normally packed and they had never been taken out of the crates. The crates were lashed to the bulkhead (wall) with heavy 2 inch ropes but the pitching and tossing of the ship had broken them loose from their moorings and they were sliding to and fro, all over the front of the hangar deck, smashing into the aircraft and banging them up beyond repair. The deck hands were literally lariatting the crates, as cowhand would lariat a calf, and as the ship rolled, they would take up the slack and cinch off to prevent further damages to the planes. They finally corralled all four of the loose crates and secured them against further damages.

It was nearly noon before the winds began to subside, and we had been in very turbulent waters since 4:00 a.m.

### **After the Storm--The End of the War**



The bow of the *Hornet* after the typhoon

When it calmed enough to go topside, about 40 to 50 feet of the leading edge of the flight deck had collapsed. The 18 inch steel I-beams that held the flight deck above the bow of the ship were twisted and bent to the extent that they allowed the collapsed portion of the flight deck to drape perpendicularly over the bow of the ship.

The *Bennington*, along side of us, had experienced the same damages as had the *Hornet*. The bow of the *Pittsburg*, which was along side was clipped completely off, although she was afloat and able to navigate.

Two or three of the planes that had been lashed down with the steel cables on the flight deck were flipped completely upside down. The next three days kept all hands busy repairing damage from the storm. The various departments, from both ships' company and the Air Group, were all working together to salvage all workable and usable parts of the dozen or so planes that were damaged beyond repair. When all parts had been salvaged, the hulls of the planes were pushed overboard to a watery grave.

On June 9<sup>th</sup>, my notes show that we flew to Kadena to pick up passengers and while I made no notation of who the passengers were, I think that they were probably the crew that had been shot down by mortar fire when we were making supply drops. I do remember that we launched by taking off the fan tail of the ship instead of the bow, because we lost the first two fighter planes that attempted take-off, due to the up-draft caused by the collapsed portion of the flight deck. After that, all planes were launched by catapult, or the ship would simply shift in reverse to full speed and we would take off the fan tail.

Our Fighter Squadron was still making sweeps on Kanoya Air Field and they flew their last mission June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>, we were en route to the Philippines: where we dropped anchor at Leyte and Samar. We were in port at Leyete until the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. Some of the crew made liberty ashore but most of them came back to the ship disappointed as there was nothing to do. I didn't leave the ship.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, we got underway to points east, and Pearl Harbor was our next port of call. We thought that the *Hornet* would probably go into dry dock at Pearl, but they decided to send her back to the states for overhaul and we got to stay aboard and return home with her.

So, after taking on supplies, she headed for San Francisco Bay but it was sometime about the middle of July, though I didn't record the date, that we pulled into San Francisco Bay. You can rest assured that the sight of the Golden Gate Bridge and our disembarkment to Alameda Air Station was one of the happiest times of our lives.

Every member of the Air Group received a 30 day leave of absence, and I had requested and received permission to transfer from carrier aircraft to patrol planes (from tail hooks to flying coffee shops). I received 30 days delayed orders to Wold-Chamberlain Field, the PB4Y School in Minneapolis, Minnesota and when I left Alameda for Harrison, Arkansas, I had seen all of my old buddies in Torpedo Squadron Seventeen for the last time.

While I was home on leave, the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Japanese capitulated to General McArthur aboard the USS Missouri. VJ Day was a happy time in Harrison, as I'm sure it was all over America. I remember riding around the square in Dad's T-Model Ford, the only car he had learned to drive at the time. Everyone was driving around honking their horns and having a good time. I had been dating **Virginia Holmes**, and that night we attended a community service at the Methodist Church to give thanks for the war's termination.

*Nicholson was discharged on 12 October 1945. Like thousands of other Vets, he enrolled in college and graduated in June 1949 with a BA degree. He married **Fern Raulston** on Christmas day 1949 and, of course, lived happily ever after.*

*Nicholson's story could be replicated hundreds of times during WW-II, with minor alterations, for all the enlisted crewmen that flew the cheap-seats of the *Devastator*, *Avenger*, *Dauntless*, and *Hell Diver*. Two such crewmen flew in the *Avengers*, one manning the .50-cal gun in the ball turret, while the other operated the radio and radar equipment below the turret and otherwise manned the .30-cal gun near the tail-wheel.*

*Besides the hazards of war, these young men operated complex equipment in conditions that can only be classified as difficult. They were the best the Navy could find and describing their combat performance as merely extraordinary would be a gross understatement.*

## SKYRAIDER VS MIG-17

By Capt Clinton B. Johnson, USNR (Ret.)

It was **20 June 1965**, a date that will live famously in squadron history. The pilots were flying SPADs, which were designed for World War Two, yet was still in the thick of things two decades later.

What is even more remarkable, is that this event was repeated 15-months later by a VA-176 pilot, Tom Patton on 9 October 1966.

Frustration and fatigue were starting to simultaneously set in on me on 20 June 1965. We were 30 days into our third at-sea period, and the ops tempo was intense. Ten days prior we had our first loss, one of our nuggets, CARL DOUGHTIE. The last four days we had not been especially successful. During those four days I had flown 21 hours on an Alfa strike, two road reces and a seven and one half hour RESCAP. The strike was marginally successful with 40 percent BDA, the RESCAP was not. We had to leave the downed pilot when it got dark. One

road recce was nothing more than harassment. The other I scored one truck, but someone almost scored me while I was executing a life-saving pullout just short of bending the prop. I logged two nice round holes in the aft fuselage.

The day began normally with the starboard catapult crashing into the water-brake outside my door acting as my alarm clock. It was supposed to be a stand-down day, but by noon we were suiting up for an emergency RESCAP. An Air Force photo-recon pilot had been shot down very deep into the northwest corner of North Vietnam. There were already RESCAP aircraft over the downed pilot, but they were running low on fuel. We were needed for backup coverage.

We manned up, started and were told to shut down. Someone else had covered the pilot, and they did not need us. We unmanned and returned to the ready room and waited. Two hours later we got the call again. We manned up, but did not get started again before we were again put on hold. By the time we got to the ready room we were told to man up again. By now we were fast becoming the leaders in the squadron sweat stain contest. The sweat stain contest was unique to Skyraider squadrons. The winner was the pilot who could merge the salty white left and right armpit stains in the center of his flight suit first. This contest was made possible by the *USS MIDWAY (CVA-41)* laundry and morale officer who would accept only one flight suit per week per pilot from us. At any rate we were hot, sweaty and beginning to worry that this man up was going to mean no dinner. This time, however, we started, were told that we were a go mission and began our taxi forward to the catapults. At the last minute my Plane Captain, AN HALCOMB, gave me a slush filled thermos and a hopeful look (hopeful that he would not have to do a fourth preflight on old 577). I gave him thumbs up and taxied forward to the starboard catapult. It was almost 1800. I spread and locked the wings, got thumbs up from the final checker and agreed with the flight deck officer on a 21,300 pound launch weight. As I felt the Skyraider settle into the catapult holdback, I release the brakes, added full power and scanned the engine instruments. Everything looked good and with the canopy open everything sounded good -- well at least loud. I returned the cat officer's salute and waited. I saw my flight leader go off the port cat and turn right for our standard starboard side rendezvous. The humidity was so high that his flap tips left contrails and my prop was making corkscrew contrails as the carrier moved through the sultry gulf air.

The cat shot killed my radio. We rendezvoused 1,000 feet on the starboard side of *MIDWAY* and headed west. After reforming in a finger four formation I tried to get my radio working. As the second element leader I had a "Middleman" aircraft. My airplane had two radios with a relay control box that could be switched so that the low aircraft covering the downed pilot could transmit through my aircraft to the ship using my aircraft at a higher altitude as an antenna relay. I was able to get the number two radio working, but continued to fiddle with number one so that I could act as relay. I got it working and checked in on tactical frequency as we went feet dry. Then it failed again.

Feet dry at 12,000 feet heading northwest we were passing north of Thanh Hoa. LCDR Ed GREATHOUSE was in the lead. On his port wing was LTJG JIM LYNNE. I was on his starboard wing with CHARLI HARTMANN on my starboard. We all had the standard RESCAP load: two 150 gallon drop-tanks on the stub racks, four LAU-3 pods with 19-2.75 inch rockets apiece and 800 rounds of 20mm for the four wing cannons. We were flying steadily toward the downed pilot while I navigated, searched for active low frequency ADF stations (Until September 1965 the North Vietnamese MiGs used the ADFs listed in our 1964 navigation supplements) and considered what the situation ahead might be.

Suddenly Ed GREATHOUSE rolled inverted into a near vertical dive with JIM LYNNE following. I rolled and followed him down. I was concerned that I had not heard anything and that we were only 70 miles inland, at least 80 miles from our RESCAP point. A quick radio check confirmed that my radio was dead. I had missed the buildup to the run-in with the *USS STRAUSS (DE-408)* alerting us to MiGs in the area. The MiG pilots were on an intercept for two Skyraiders south of us, but missed and were coming around for another intercept when they spotted us. STRAUSS was keeping Ed GREATHOUSE updated, and when it was apparent that we were the target, Ed took us down. At 12,000 feet and 170 knots we looked like Tweetybird to Sylvester the Cat. Our only hope was to get down low and try to out turn the MiGs. Ed was doing just that. Our split-S got us some speed and reversed our course toward the ship. I figured that any time my nose was pointed at the ground my ordnance should be armed. I armed the guns and set up the rockets. About that time I saw a large unguided rocket go past downward. My first inclination was that it was a SAM, but SAMs generally go up. A second rocket hit the ground near Ed and Jim. There was no doubt we were under attack by MiGs. This was confirmed when a silver MiG-17 with red marking on wings and tail streaked by Charlie and me heading for Ed. Tracers from behind and a jet intake growing larger in my mirror were a signal to start pulling and turning. As I put g's on the Skyraider I could see the two distinct sizes of tracers falling away (The MiG-17 had two 23mm and one 37mm cannon in the nose.) He stayed with us throughout the turn firing all the way. Fortunately, he was unable to stay inside our turn and overshot. As he pulled up Charlie got a quick shot at him but caused no apparent damage. He climbed to a perch position and stayed there.



MiG-17 Fresco

Our turning had separated us from Ed and Jim. Now that we were no longer under attack my main concern was to rejoin the flight. I caught a glimpse of the leader and his wingman and headed for them. As we had been flying at treetop level in and out of small valleys, we had to fly around a small hill to get to them. Coming around the hill we saw ED GREATHOUSE and JIM LYNNE low with the MiG lined up behind them. I fired a short burst and missed, but got his attention. He turned hard into us to make a head-on pass. Charlie and I fired simultaneously as he passed so close that Charlie thought that I had hit his vertical stabilizer with the tip of my tail hook and Charlie flew through his wake. Both of us fired all four guns. Charlie's rounds appeared to go down the intake and into the wing root and mine along the top of the fuselage and through the canopy. He never returned our fire, rolled inverted and hit a small hill exploding and burning in a farm field. Charlie and I circled the wreckage while I switched back to number two radio. We briefly considered trying to cut off the other MiG, but were dissuaded by the voice of ED GREATHOUSE asking what we thought we were doing staying in the area when STRAUSS was reporting numerous bogeys inbound to our position. We took the hint and headed out low level to the Tonkin Gulf where we rejoined with our flight leader.

By now the sun was setting guaranteeing a night arrested landing back at *MIDWAY*. Our radio report was misunderstood by *MIDWAY* CIC which believed that one of us had been shot down. It took some effort for ED GREATHOUSE to convince them that we were OK and the North Vietnamese were minus one. Rarely does a night carrier landing evoke as little response from a pilot as ours did. We were so pumped up that we hardly noticed it.

After debriefs all around the politics started. Charlie and I were informed that we would get no recognition or awards for our MiG kill. SECNAV had been aboard three days earlier when VF-21 F-4 pilots had bagged the first (two) kills of the war. Their awards were being held until SECNAV could get to Washington, announce it to the President and present it to Congress with the plea for more funds for F-4 Phantoms to fight the air war.

Obviously, the success of primitive Skyraiders would undermine his plans. Unfortunately, someone had included our kill in the daily action report to MACV where it was read by COMSEVENFLT DET "C" who thought that it would be an excellent opportunity for Navy public relations. Indirectly Ngyuen Cao Ky, the new Premier of South Vietnam, and a Skyraider pilot, heard of it and recognized ED GREATHOUSE's name as one of the Skyraider instructors from the RAG. He then demanded our appearance for Vietnamese awards.

The next day we flew to Saigon for the Five O'clock Follies and were instant celebrities, since the news media did not yet know about the F-4 kills. They assumed that we were the first which made an even better story. We stayed at the Majestic Hotel in Saigon where we thoroughly enjoyed the lack of water hours and the availability of our favorite beverages. The next day we were guests of Premier Ky at the palace where we were awarded Air Gallantry Medals and honorary commissions in the South Vietnamese Air Force. After the awards ceremony we sat down to tea with Premier Ky and some of his young hot pilots and traded war stories. He told us that the Skyraider MiG kill had boosted morale tremendously in the VNAF Skyraider squadrons.

Upon arrival back at *MIDWAY* we were surprised to learn that there had been a change of heart and we would to be recognized at the same ceremony as the F-4 pilots. Since they had already been recommended for Silver Stars, Charlie and I got the same while Ed and Jim got Distinguished Flying Crosses. Due to slow processing of earlier awards Charlie and I wore the Silver Star and one foreign decoration for about a month as our only medals. Nothing like starting from the top.

A few days later the carrier went to Yokosuka where Japanese reporters were very interested. We even became the subject of an article in a boy's adventure comic book. There was a lot of hometown interest also with reporters looking up our wives and parents for comments. This caused me a problem because I had not told my mother that I was flying combat to avoid worrying her.

Needless to say, the VA-25 pilots were not about to let the slack-jawed beady-eyed jet pilots (ED GREATHOUSE's description) forget our success. The squawk box in the fighter ready rooms got plenty of incoming from our ready room. There was much frustration in the swept wing tail hook community as the next two kills went to the Air Force in July. Then the North Vietnamese pulled the MiGs for more pilot training. The only kill between July 1965 and April 1966 was a single Navy kill in October 1965. We maintained that we embarrassed them into pulling the MiGs.

A combat action happens fast and it is difficult to include all the influences that affect the outcome, but some sidelights are of interest. The day of the shoot down was the first that gun camera film was not loaded in our planes. Charlie fired 75 rounds and I fired 52. We both thought we had fired more. I had considered firing rockets to ensure a kill, but was afraid that the widespread pattern of the LAU-3s would also hit Ed or Jim. Three of our aircraft suffered engine failures in the near future. There were no fighters airborne at the time and they missed a great opportunity for the bogeys launched after the shoot down. Two years later I was invited to Miramar to brief the people setting up "TOP GUN." My briefer said, "Well, you were flying the F-4?" "No." "Oh, the F-8?" "No." "The A-4?" "No." "A-7?" "No." "Well, what the hell were you flying?" "The Skyraider." Then his jaw went slack and his eyes got beady. They're all the same. (See editorial comments below.)

Our squadron, VA-25, "The Fist of the Fleet," was the last operational Skyraider attack squadron in the Navy. We were flying a 20-year-old design that had been perfected about as far as the engineers could take it. Everyone thought that our time was over as front-line attack. What everyone forgot was that ED HEINEMANN had mandated that the SKYRAIDER not only had to be able to carry that 2,000 pound bomb a thousand miles to Tokyo and return to the ship, but that it also had to be able to defend itself against air attack. We never forgot. Unfortunately, even ED HEINEMANN could not foresee SAMs. The Skyraider just did not have the top end speed to evade them. In April 1968 VA-25 retired the Skyraider in favor of the A-7 Corsair II. The aircraft and pilot, TED HILL, that made the last combat carrier landing led four A-7s in a flyby, broke off to the east and disappeared out of our sight, but not our hearts. Ted flew it to Pensacola where it resides in the National Museum of Naval Aviation in our squadron colors. I flew six combat missions in that aircraft.

I flew as many hours in the A-4 Skyhawk as I did in the Skyraider and later flew the A-7. I truly enjoyed my A-4 time and it became my favorite. However, the Skyraider was something special. Even through my right leg has shrunken to the same size as my left leg, the carbon monoxide is cleared from my blood and the stack gas from my lungs, there is still that feeling that the Skyraider was where I was meant to be.

One final note. The first flight of the Skyraider was on 18 March 1945, my eighth birthday.

**Editor:** *When news of the MiG shoot down arrived in VA-122, where I was then Training Officer, we fired off a message to our sister training squadrons at Miramar — offering "our assistance in improving their air-combat training." Another MiG kill by VA-176 on 9 October 1966 proved the ACM skill of SPAD pilots was not a fluke (Tom Patton went through VA-122). Shortly thereafter, we heard that Miramar would be the home of the new TOP GUN School. What SPAD pilots had known and practiced all along really was important in combat.*

## USS BOXER (CV-21) 1952 FIRE

### Sea of Japan off the Coast of Korea

**Editor:** *The following text is from the declassified USS BOXER Action Report for 1 August through 11 August 1952. Most of the text on the fire was in one long paragraph, which has been broken into shorter paragraphs for easier reading. Some comments have been added in parenthesis.*

The fire started about 0530 as **BOXER** began launching the morning strike. Ten prop-aircraft (F4U-5N – AD-4N – AD-4W) were airborne from the 0300 launch. All the scheduled prop-aircraft were on the flight deck, while the jets on the hangar deck were being prepared for a later launch – all aircraft arriving over the target at the same time.

“Eight combat sorties had been launched when the outbreak of a fire on the hangar deck precluded fight operations. In a matter of seconds the hangar deck was a raging inferno as the result of an explosion of a gasoline tank on one airplane which quickly set off others. On deck there were some 58 aircraft loaded with ammunition including high explosive, fragmentation, incendiaries, and 50 Cal., and 20mm ammunition. The ship was making 30 knots at the time.

The decision to be made was “whether to launch what was on deck with a view of saving planes or to take a chance and taxi the planes forward, jettison the bombs and ammunition, reduce the ship’s speed and fight the fire.” The latter, of course, was chosen. Word was soon received that entry to the hangar deck could not be made on the starboard side and that the flames would have to be attacked from the Number Two elevator (*deck edge – port side amidships*), which was in the raised position.

Accordingly, a turn was made to starboard so that the fire fighting crews could enter the hangar deck from up wind. There followed a grim fight on the part of the crew to control the fire in spite of 50 Cal. and 20mm shells exploding all over the hangar deck. The holocaust was added to by the exploding of a 500 pound bomb. Sixty-three men, who were trapped, jumped over the side and were quickly rescued by attending helicopters, destroyers and cruisers.

The smoke was terrific and enveloped the entire ship. Engineering spaces were almost untenable and two fire rooms had to be abandoned. It was at this point that considerable doubt existed as to our ability to control the fire. A further loss of power would have left us dead in the water and without water pressure for the fire hoses. Fortunately, tenacious men in the engineering department hung on to the point of exhaustion until the flames

could be controlled. The Damage Control Central Station functioned throughout and was in constant communications with its four repair parties.

Every man not trapped below unhesitatingly entered the inferno without regard to personal danger from exploding ammunition and bombs. The performance of the crew was magnificent and was a most impressive demonstration of a selflessness, determination and teamwork.



Fire-fighters slish through the blackened hangar deck as the fire is brought under control. The nose of a damaged F9F Panther is visible right of center. A fire-crew on the left is cooling the overhead.

While the fire fighting was progressing on the hangar deck, crews on the flight deck removed bombs and ammunition from aircraft and ready service lockers thus eliminating a terrible threat against the life of the ship. After having accomplished this Herculean task in a matter of minutes, these men turned to the business of fighting the fire.

It was from 4 to 5 hours later before we could be sure that there was no additional threat of fire, enter spaces, and determine who of those who had been trapped were safe and who of those who had been driven over the side had been rescued by accompanying ships. The final total was determined to be: 8 dead, 1 missing, 1 critically injured, 1 seriously burned and some 70 overcome by smoke. Of the 63 who had gone over the side, all were rescued and returned to the ship. (*The Sea of Japan water is cold even in summer.*)

Work was immediately started to make repairs and restore the ship to operating condition after assessing the damage. By dint of whole hearted effort on the part of the crew, the ship was restored to a condition in which it could operate its aircraft. 18 aircraft (*mostly F9F-2 Panthers*) were damaged (*fire and salt water*) or destroyed. It was decided by higher authority that the ship was to return to the Repair Base at Yokosuka to get rid of its duds (*damaged aircraft*), receive replacement aircraft, make minimum repairs and return to the operating line.”

*The ship arrived in Yokosuka on the morning of 11 August and departed on the afternoon of 23 August. The following is a list of the dead, listed elsewhere in the report:*

- \* Lt. James E. Shropshire, CVG-2 Flight Surgeon
- \* **AA I. Caneles, VA-65**
- \* PN3 V.L. Cowger, VF-24
- AT3 W.B. Burdette, VC-35
- PFC Arthur M. Kosuki, USMC
- CPL Terrell R. Roulston, USMC
- AT2 D.G. Seden, VC-35
- HN R.S. Taylor, VF-24
- HM3 J.R. Wark, VF-64

\* Died while trying to rescue those trapped in the Flight Surgeon’s Office.

*Before and during the Korean War, jets operating from unmodified WW-II carriers, such as **BOXER**, used the same aviation gasoline (AvGas) as prop-aircraft. The three hangar bays had overhead sprinklers, but only a heavy canvas fire-curtain separating the bays. Later in the War, the 27A modified carriers had 50% more gasoline storage capacity. However, there was no pressure fueling system.*

*The straight-wing F9F Panther had wing-tip fuel tanks that were manually filled. With wings folded, crews had to use a special ladder to reach the tip-tanks. Not a fun thing to do on the flight deck with high winds or with the ship pitching and rolling.*

*After the Korean War, the 27C modified carriers had some ship’s tanks dedicated to kerosene-based jet fuel. The Navy’s JP-5 was similar to USAF JP-4, but less flammable. Pressure fueling was finally installed in aircraft and ships. These ships had separate fueling stations for gasoline and JP-5. Gasoline capacity, and its fire hazard, was gradually reduced and eventually eliminated in new construction.*



Refueling a F9F Panther wing-tip tank.  
Note the special ladder and fuel hose.

## RESCAP 101

*Editor: This story is condensed from an article by Robert A. Hansen. On July 27, 1965, USAF Captain Frank Tullo's call-sign was Dogwood Two, with an F-105 flight led by Major Bill Hosmer. The mission launched mid-afternoon from Korat, Thailand to attack SAM sites in the no-fly zone near Hanoi. The original story described all events from launch. Instead, we will pickup the story just prior to Tullo ejecting.*

The ridge was still well ahead of the aircraft. The flight had climbed some but was still very low (and traveling very fast) and being shot at from all quarters. Tullo's aircraft dropped its nose slightly. He pulled back on the stick. No response. He pulled harder. Still nothing. When he heard muffled explosions in the rear of the aircraft, Tullo hit the mike button: "I've gotta go, Lead. I'm losing control. It's not responding." At 200 feet, there was no time to wait.

The ejection process that followed was so violent that today Tullo's memory is blank of everything that happened immediately after he squeezed the (ejection) trigger. He doesn't remember leaving the cockpit, the seat separating, or the chute opening. He had the low-level lanyard hooked, which attached the parachute directly to the seat and caused it to deploy almost immediately.

After tumbling violently, whomp!, he was swinging in the chute.

A little battered by the violent ejection, Tullo prepared for the landing. Floating down in the chute was serene and the soft rush of air soothed him. He did not see his aircraft crash. During his descent, he eyed the city of Hanoi about 25 miles away. A small U-shaped farmhouse sat near a clearing, just to the west. He passed below the 100-foot treetops and landed in an area of 10-foot elephant grass.

At that moment, listening to the sound of his flight disappearing to the southwest, the only thing in his mind was that he was on the ground in North Vietnam, armed only with a .38 Special. His first concern was to hide the billowing white parachute. Working hard to control his breathing, he stuffed the parachute under the matted grass and covered it up with dirt. After shedding his harness and survival kit, he removed the emergency radio from his vest, extended the antenna, and prepared to contact Dogwood flight. He could hear them returning, and he had to let them know he was all right.

As the flight drew closer, Tullo turned on the survival radio. Cupping his hand around the mouth piece, he whispered: "Dogwood Lead, this is Dogwood Two." Hosmer responded immediately: "Roger Two, Lead is reading you. We're going to get a fix on your position."

The flight turned toward Tullo, who had landed on a hillside west of Hanoi. He could hear heavy anti-aircraft fire to the east and see puffs of flak dancing around the flight. Within seconds, hot shrapnel began to fall around him.

"Frank, we gotta go. Fuel is getting low, and we've been ordered out of the area. We're gonna get you a chopper." Hosmer's voice dropped: "And, Frank," he said, "this may be an all-nighter."

Tullo rogered Hosmer's message and told him he was going to try to work his way higher up the slope to make the pickup easier. He had no doubt that he would be rescued.

As the sound of Dogwood flight faded to the southwest, Tullo prepared to move up the hill to a better vantage point. He decided to open the survival kit and remove useful equipment. In a normal ejection, once stabilized in the chute and prior to landing, a pilot would reach down and pull a handle on the kit's box to deploy it. It was advisable to deploy the kit prior to landing to avoid possible leg injuries, since the case was hard and fairly heavy. Tullo hadn't had this option because he had ejected at such a low level. He rotated the kit's red handle, and with a great whooshing roar, a dinghy began to inflate.

The dinghy! He had forgotten all about that! And it was bright yellow! He had to stop the noise. Tullo drew a large survival knife he wore trapped to the leg of his G-suit, threw himself on the dinghy, and began stabbing it. The first two blows merely rebounded. With a final mighty effort, he plunged the knife into the rubber and cut a large hole so the air could escape. With that emergency solved, Tullo lay back to catch his breath and got a drink of water. Then he started up the hill.

The elephant grass was so dense that at times he couldn't separate it with his hands and had to climb over the tough, wide blades. After climbing about 50 to 75 feet, he realized he wasn't going to make it to the top. His flight-suit was soaked, and his hands were cut by the sharp edges of the grass.

Rather than waste more energy, he flattened out a small space in the grass and faced southeast to have a good view of any threat coming up the slope. Time to set up housekeeping. Tullo's survival vest and kit included a spare battery for the radio, emergency beeper, day and night flares, pen flares, six rounds of tracer ammo, a "blood chit" printed in several languages that promised rewards for assisting downed American airmen, gold bars for buying freedom, maps, a first aid kit, water purification tablets, two tins of water, two packets of high-energy food, tape, string, 250 feet of rappelling line, a saw, knife, compass, shark repellent, fishing kit, whistle, signaling mirror, sewing kit, and two prophylactics for keeping ammunition or other equipment clean and dry.

He extracted the ball ammo from his .38, loaded the tracers, and stuffed everything not immediately useful into the knapsack-type pouch. Then he sat back, tried to relax, and waited for the rescuers he knew would come. Tullo heard the sound of prop-driven aircraft approaching from the north. He correctly assumed they were Douglas A-1s, or "Spads," as they were called. He stood up and keyed his radio. "This is Dogwood Two, do you read me?"

"Dogwood Two, this is Canasta, and we read you loud and clear. Transmit for bearing." Tullo warned Canasta of the flak to the east, and as advertised, the guns opened up as the aircraft approached Tullo's position. As soon as Tullo could see the aircraft, he began giving vectors. On the second circle, Tullo was looking right up the wing of Canasta, a flight of two Navy A1-Hs. He called, "Canasta, I'm right off your wingtip now." Canasta Lead said, "Gotcha! Don't worry; we're going for a chopper." As the Spads droned out of the area, Tullo felt sure he would be picked up.

Within a few minutes, he heard the unmistakable sound of Thuds. Thinking it could be Hosmer again; he turned on the survival radio and called, "Any F-105 over Vietnam, this is Dogwood Two." An answer came from a flight of two Thuds, which approached his position in a wide sweeping turn from the north. The flight Lead, whose voice Tullo recognized, asked Tullo to pop a smoke flare for location.

"Smoke?" Tullo replied. "Are you out of your mind? There's no way I'm going to pop smoke here!"

The pilot told Tullo to calm down. He had just spotted trucks unloading troops to the south of Tullo's position. He also reassured Tullo that they were working on getting a helicopter to him.

Tullo heard shots. They built to a crescendo, and then stopped. The shooting had started at some distance but had grown closer. Soon he was able to hear voices as the troops worked their way up the hillside. He burrowed into the dense grass and waited, his heart pounding. He raised his head and saw an older man about 150 to 175 feet away wearing a cone-shaped straw hat. It was all Tullo could do not to make a run for it, but that was exactly what they wanted him to do. He forced himself to sit quietly. The troops made a lot of noise but they kept moving to the east, down the hill. Silence returned and Tullo continued to wait.

George Martin was flying his Sikorsky CH-3C helicopter to Lima 36, a remote staging area in Laos about 120 miles from Hanoi, to prepare for another day of rescue alert duty. Only a few weeks before he had been flying cargo support at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. Today, he was commanding a small detachment of men and helicopters on a 120-day assignment in Vietnam. He and his crew had been tasked to learn a new mission for which they had little preparation.



The second CH-3C Jolly Green Giant (later painted black) is on display at the USAF Wright-Patterson Museum.

In 1965, as the number of US air strikes and reconnaissance missions in Vietnam multiplied, pilots faced the increasing possibility of being downed deep inside Laos or North Vietnam. Crews flying the small and slow Kaman HH-43 Huskie, originally designed as an air-base firefighting and rescue helicopter, were already pushing the aircraft to its limits. There was clearly a need for a faster rescue helicopter with longer legs. The

cargo-carrying CH-3C fit the bill, and the Air Force began sending crews from Eglin for specialized training. The crews practiced mountain flying, ground survival, and rescue operations, which involved coordination with controller and escort aircraft. The training was projected to last several months, but the escalating conflict wouldn't wait.

Martin, who was too close to retirement to be selected for the additional training and the accompanying extended tour, was ordered to fill-in with 21 men and two CH-3s until the fully trained crews arrived. "I found out Friday afternoon and was gone Sunday evening," Martin says. "It was just like in the movies – I said, 'When do I leave?' They said, 'How fast can you pack?'"

Martin was about to land at an intermediate refueling base when he was asked by radio to divert and try to rescue a downed F-105 pilot. Martin still needed to proceed to Lima 36 to drop off cargo and extra crew. He had to lighten his aircraft to take on as much fuel as possible and still be able to pick up the pilot. "The big consideration in helicopter pickup is gross weight," Martin says. "If you're too heavy to hover, all you can do is fly around and wave at him."

Upon landing at 36, Martin's number two engine warning lights indicated an "over-temp" condition, which meant significant problems, possibly foreign object damage or a compressor stall from air starvation, and under normal circumstances would have grounded the aircraft. The crew looked to Martin for a decision. "Everybody was pretty apprehensive. I told them, 'We're his only hope. If the engine will start again after cool-down, we'll go.'" His crew reluctantly agreed.

The engine restarted without incident and Martin's CH-3, call sign "Jolly Green One," took off for Hanoi. Martin had no idea where to locate the downed pilot. He was unescorted until he was about 50 miles from Hanoi, at which point he was joined by Canasta flight, flown by Ed Greathouse and Holt Livesay from *USS MIDWAY's* Attack Squadron 25.

The oppressive heat of the afternoon wore on. Finally, Tullo heard the sound of prop-driven aircraft again. Darkness was about 40 minutes away as he turned on his radio. The aircraft responded immediately. "Dogwood Two, this is Canasta. I have a chopper for you." Seconds later, Canasta flight flew directly over Tullo's position, and there, not far behind, came a helicopter. Tullo was expecting a small chopper, but this one was a big green monster, Martin's Jolly Green, the first in the theater and headed for its first combat recovery – Frank Tullo. "Dogwood Two, this is Jolly Green. How'm I doing?" Martin said to the man on the ground. He was coming right up the valley from the south-southwest. Tullo said, "You're doing great!" and popped his pen and smoke flares. The chopper's blades made the smoke swirl as Tullo aimed his .38 straight-up and fired all six tracer rounds. Crew chief Curtis Pert spotted the pilot through the thick ground cover as soon as the smoke made its way above the trees.

As Martin hovered, Pert lowered a "horse collar" sling. Later, better equipped rescue crews would have a specialized hoist attached to a jungle penetrator" designed to pierce thick tree canopies. "We just had a jury-rigged cargo winch that you could turn into a 10-cent, Mickey Mouse rescue hoist," Martin says.

On the ground, the down-blast was tremendous. Debris flew everywhere, and the trees and grass were whipping and bending wildly. Tullo holstered his pistol, slung the survival kit over his shoulder, and slipped the horse collar over his head. He gave the crew chief in the door a thumbs-up.

The cable became taut and Tullo began to rise off the ground. After being lifted about 10 feet, the hoist jammed and the cable stopped. The crew chief was giving hand signals Tullo did not understand. Tullo looked up. Pert and para-rescueman George Thayer were in the door lowering a rope. The horse collar was cutting off the circulation in Tullo's arms and he was tiring, but he grabbed the rope and tied it around the top of the horse collar.

Finally the chopper began to move and dragged Tullo through some bushes. Everybody's trying to kill me, he thought. The Jolly climbed and circled as Pert and Thayer struggled with the hoist. The overworked number two engine had begun to overheat and a fire light came on in the Jolly's cockpit. As they circled, Martin hoped that the air flowing through the engine would cool it down and the light might extinguish.

Pert and Thayer were joined by copilot Orville Keese, and the three men strained to pull the dangling man aboard. The pain was becoming so great that Tullo was thinking about dropping from the sling. Martin spotted a rice paddy next to a house and lowered Tullo to the ground. The exhausted pilot rolled out of the sling as the chopper swung away and landed 50 or 60 feet away from him. Pert and Thayer frantically shouted to Tullo, who sprinted and dove through the door. He could hear an automatic weapon firing and saw both pilots in the helo ducking their heads.

The Jolly had problems: low fuel, a sick engine, darkness, and clouds at altitude. Martin and his crew had been in the war zone slightly more than two weeks and did not even have maps of the area. The crew relied on flares lit inside 55-gallon drums at Lima 36 and the landing lights of hovering helos to find a place to land. "We held only about a quarter of the area around the site," Martin says. "That was the only corridor you could fly

through without getting shot at, because the Pathet Lao held the other three-quarters.” Martin finally landed with a shaken pilot (Tullo) and just 750 pounds of fuel aboard.

Tullo’s rescue was the farthest north that a successful pickup had been made, thanks to the determination of Martin and his crew and the long range of their CH-3C. It was the first of 1,490 recoveries that Jolly Green Giants would make in Southeast Asia.

*After seeing Martin safely land his helo, Greathouse and Livesay droned on through the darkness, finally landing at Danang for some sleep and maybe something cold to drink.*

On 31 October 1965, Frank Tullo was on another flight into North Vietnam, again to bomb SA-2 missile sites. This particular flight was briefed and lead by LCDR Richard (Dick) Trent Powers from VA-164, aboard *ORISKANY*.

LCDR Powers was flying an A-4E equipped with SAM homing equipment. He was to find a SAM radar and mark the site with a Mk-82 bomb. The USAF F-105s would then roll-in to destroy the entire site. Powers found a site and was flying just above the trees to mark it for the Thuds. However, his A-4E was hit by AAA or the blast from his own bomb. Powers ejected, but was captured and then events turned into a mystery. His remains were returned in 1988. He was awarded the Navy Cross (posthumously) for his actions that day.

*Editor: Dick and I were roomies in Pre-flight (1950), where he taught me to play chess, and then again at Key West (1952). We were then assigned squadrons in adjacent hangars at NAS Atlantic City. I last saw him at NAS Lemoore early in 1965.*

## FROM SPADS TO CORSAIRS

By Scott Smith

My tour with **VA-122** ended in mid-1967 with orders to the **Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (JSTPS)** at Offutt AFB, working in the bottom basement of Strategic Air Command (SAC) Headquarters. I relieved CDR Ralph Smith, a previous VA-25 skipper, who happily greeted me as I walked into a room filled with desk-sized computer terminals and floor-to-ceiling charts. By the time my up-graded security clearance was approved, I had figured out the octal computer system that had only recently replaced the previous manual record-keeping system. The computer itself occupied another large room, with a dozen or so USAF blue-suits in attendance. Getting flight time in the USAF U-3 (Cessna 310) meant lots of visits to obscure SAC bases, but it was better than being in the bottom basement.

Early in 1968, I received a delayed Christmas present from a friend in BUPERS calling with news that I’d been selected to command **VA-25**. My tour with JSTPS was cut to only nine-months and I planned my trip back to Lemoore with snow still on the ground in Nebraska. I arrived at Lemoore in time to attend CDR Tex Birdwell’s VA-122 change of command party. The next day, a Saturday, I flew a short flight in a T-28 – mostly inverted.

Note: Security regulations at JSTPS would have prevented me from serving in combat, but a waiver avoided another Med cruise. I guess they figured nobody would believe what I had to say about that bottom basement..

The last **VA-25 SPAD** deployment had been extended, but the squadron finally returned to Lemoore in early April 1968. The SPAD retirement ceremony was already scheduled for 10 April (a Friday) and Cliff and I decided to piggy-back our change of command ceremony immediately following.

The next morning, I flew **NL 405** (BuNo 135300). It was an emotional good-bye flight of an airplane that I began flying in 1951. I flew a wide circle around Lemoore, executed a couple of aileron rolls and made a couple of touch-and-go landings, just to prove I hadn’t lost my touch in ten months since my last SPAD flight. Later that day, Ltjg Ted Hill ferried this bird to the Naval Air Museum in Pensacola.

In August 1951, when I first flew the Skyraider, it was known as the Able Dog. I accumulated nearly 2,000-hours over the years in all the various versions except the AEW Guppy. My maternal grandfather had been a cattle rancher and also dabbled in race horses. More than once he told me stories about horses that had “heart.” He meant that a horse with heart exceeded expectations compared to other horses with the same bone, muscle, and breeding. In that sense, the SPAD had heart to spare.

Come Monday morning, reality sunk in. Previously, I had visions of a seamless transition. New pilots would complete VA-122 training and we would begin pre-

deployment training. Instead, I found myself the skipper of a paper squadron without people or aircraft. In short, for the next six months I became a VA-122 instructor again. With a little over 100-hours in jets, I flew my first A-7 flight in August 1966 at the LTV plant in Dallas, Texas. My job as VA-122 Operation Officer kept me close to a desk, but I did manage to accumulate a little over 100-hours in the A-7, mostly chase flights for VA-147 pilots and instructor transition flights. I was comfortable in the A-7, much like the A-1, and it had air conditioning.

Of all the Navy's SPAD squadrons, only VA-25 transitioned directly to the A-7s. VA-215 had made three SPAD deployments to Vietnam before being disestablished in August 1967. A second VA-215 was established a year later and trained in A-7s. These pilots preceded VA-25 pilots through VA-122 training. Most of the other SPAD squadrons eventually transitioned to A-6s.

In May, I went to VA-127 for instrument training, flying the TA-4F, which was much nicer than the TF-9J that I flew earlier. However, I preferred the A-7 for instruments since you could let go of the stick the plane would hold that attitude.

In June, I flew a few A-7 training flights and took each of my ten prospective nuggets for a ride in the T-28 to get acquainted. Tex Birdwell asked me about one particular officer for my XO. Tex seemed surprised when I rejected him as being unsuitable, but seemed satisfied with my reasons.

One A-7 flight was with Ross Underhill, one of the instructors that came from VA-125. This was an ACM flight with a Sidewinder. That day, I was mentally behind the aircraft and Ross slipped into my six. I turned as tight as I could and felt the nibble of a stall. I got ready, and then pulled a little harder. The plane departed into the turn and I promptly disabled the AFCS and jammed the controls for recovery. The plane stopped after 360°, then I neutralized controls with a little nose down stick. Ross was then at my 12 O'clock and a couple seconds later I had a missile tone. Ross asked how I did that and I replied "that is a SPAD driver's secret."

I later flew another ACM with my prospective XO, Fred Orrick. Fred had flown Crusaders and briefed me on all sorts of fighter tactics. I just nodded and we went flying. As soon as we got to our operating area, I got on Fred's six, and stayed there.

In August, Tex Birdwell tapped me to lead a four-plane ferry flight of A-7As to Cubi Point. While flying across the Pacific I had time to think about combat readiness considering the squadron's February deployment date and our snail-like progress through VA-122. VA-87, our sister A-7 squadron from the East Coast had already completed training and had over six months for pre-deployment training. It looked like VA-25 pilots might complete VA-122 training in November with only foggy weather for pre-deployment training. Not a pleasant thought!

Apparently, I got the hangar-queen for the ferry flight. One external tank wouldn't transfer and the radar didn't work, so we took a higher altitude and I hit the tanker north of Oahu, but landed with an overload on the starboard side. The next morning, the starter turbine shaft broke at Barbers Point, so the other guys left without me. The next morning I flew solo to Johnson Island to rendezvous with the EKA-3 tanker for the flight to Wake Island. After landing at Wake, I refueled and was getting ready to leave with my waiting wingmen when a hydraulic leak sprouted in the wheel well. They left without me again. The next morning I tagged along with some A-4s headed for Guam. After landing, there was a serious bald-spot on the right wheel, but no spare tires. I taxied out very carefully, but it blew while making a shallow turn. A new tire arrived after three days of sight-seeing at Guam. I flew wing on an EA-3 headed for Vietnam, then broke off when I sighted Subic Bay.

When I returned to Lemoore, **CDR Charlie Cates**, as CAW-16, moved into our squadron spaces at Lemoore and joined our training group in VA-122. I approached CAG regarding my readiness problem. I proposed a plan to fly 1,000-hours during our November Air Wing deployment to Fallon.

The plan required the loan of three aircraft from VA-122, flying a sixteen-hour flight schedule with 2.5 flights per pilot each day. Pilots would fly segments of the training syllabus before and after each target time. With the usual flight briefings and turn-around times for aircraft, it was a tight schedule and only provided about 50-hours per pilot. Our planes would be the first to launch in the morning and the tower would turn-out the runway lights as the last plane taxied to the ramp.

In September we got down to some serious flying and spent two-weeks at Yuma. We were back at Lemoore in October for day and night FCLP and we carrier qualified aboard *KITTYHAWK* near the end of the month. I made all 16 landings on that first day, and it felt a little odd not getting the cut-lights. I flew out to the boat with 440 previous carrier landings, all in piston-engine aircraft.

Eventually, CAG and Tex Birdwell agreed to my plan, but nobody voiced much hope for success. To provide some incentive, LTV offered to pay for a squadron party if we succeeded. Ready or not, everybody left VA-122 and we began flying our thirteen new A7Bs parked in front of our squadron spaces on 1 November. We had one week to get ready for Fallon.

Note I flew my last Fat-SPAD flight on 2 November, transporting CAG and two other skippers to Miramar for a meeting with the fighter squadrons in preparation for the Fallon deployment.

The Navy had contracted with LTV for parts support based on a mere 20-hours per month. I knew the A-7 could easily fly twice that and even more during a 16-hour day. As it turned out, the 16 birds averaged over 60-hours in 17-days without a hangar queen and only one engine change.

At Fallon, we posted a How-Goes-It chart outside of the line-shack. We were below the line on the first day when afternoon flights were cancelled after fuel samples showed contamination. Later we learned it was just some wax from the lids of new fuel-sample jars. From then on, we stayed above the line and ended the deployment with over 1100-hours, flying back to Lemoore the afternoon before Thanksgiving.

Medal of Honor recipient General Bob Galer (USMC retired), then a senior official at LTV, attended the party. However, combat readiness is more than just flight time. A lot of learning takes place informally on the ground. In my opinion, this stunted training cycle cost the squadron one pilot (Ltjg Mike Coinman) off San Diego, busted two airplanes at Miramar, and left two perfectly good airplanes on the bottom of the Tonkin Gulf.

Note General Galer and I had graduated the same high school in Seattle, although many years apart.

In January, we went to Miramar for some night FCLP without fog. Instead, a low pea-soup fog bank slithered over the field while aircraft were still taxiing back to the line. One plane rolling out collided with the plane ahead that was almost stopped for lack of visibility. Later in January, Mike had launched from TICO at night, but pulled-up almost vertically, flew through the overcast and came down almost vertically into the water. No specific cause was determined, but fog from the full-cold air conditioning was suspect.

In broad day-light on Yankee station, Jim Scoggin, who was in VA-25 during my previous tour with VA-25, had problems with the auto-throttle and ejected just before the plane hit the water. He would have needed at least another 1000-feet to save the plane. Later, Chuck Antonio, our only ensign, had an unsafe nose-gear indication after a night tanker mission. Then his bleed-air switch caused some bolters and Chuck ran out of fuel before he could get plugged-in to the tanker. Slow response from the ship and bad-advice from the LSO compounded Chuck's problems.

VA-146 and VA-215 both departed with A7Bs aboard *ENTERPRISE* on 6 January 1969. VA-25 and VA-87, aboard USS *TICONDEROGA*, departed on 1 February 1969 for the first small-deck deployment of the Corsair II. The Big-E should have arrived at Yankee station before TICO, but a major flight deck disaster off Hawaii kept *ENTERPRISE* in Pearl Harbor for repairs of a large bomb-hole in the flight deck

Note: Catapult weight limitations and magazine space reduced our bomb loads to eight MK-82s, while VA-112 (A-4C) only carried four bombs. The Big-Es accident banned Zuni rockets from the flight deck. A few weeks later, our bombs had a new kind of paint – it bubbled when heated to provide a few extra minutes for the fire crews to get water on the bomb. Meanwhile, the two A-7 squadrons alternated flying tanker missions for the fighters.

President Johnson had declared a North Vietnam bombing halt before the November 1968 election. Thus, most of our combat flights were over Laos. Our only combat casualty was when John McMahan vacuumed a 23mm slug through his engine, but John nursed his sick engine to a safe landing at Danang.

My 14-months as CO (including six months in training with VA-122) left some painful scars, but I wasn't ready to leave or stop flying at age 38. I was really proud of the

extraordinary performance of the officers and enlisted men during our extremely short training cycle, but BUPERS had the last word. I turned over command to Fred Orrick and caught the COD for Atsuigi and home. The stubby little A-7 became the second best of the fifteen different aircraft I piloted while in the Navy. I also enjoyed flying the F4U, but it had some troubling quirks. There were a couple more aircraft I flew in as an enlisted air-crewman before the Korean War.

My orders sent me to USS *CORAL SEA* as Air Ops Officer, but that ship was also on a very short-turn-around to Yankee Station for an eleven month deployment. The wife and kids went home to Seattle. However, I later took leave during the last month of the deployment to get my family settled in Alameda. Once home, it was obvious that my family needed me more than the Navy. When the ship returned, I put in my papers to retire and I finished my tour aboard *CORAL SEA* as Operations Officer and sometime COD pilot. I left the Navy with 5,500 hours, and haven't flown since.

## MAYBE BILLY MITCHELL WAS WRONG

By Scott Smith

Billy Mitchell (1879 – 1936) was an early advocate for aviation and is regarded as the “father of the U.S. Air Force.” Mitchell attended Columbian College before enlisting in the Army in 1897. His father, Senator Alexander Mitchell of Wisconsin, intervened to get him an Army commission and he served in the Signal Corps. After watching Orville Wrights flying demonstration, he took flying lessons at the Curtiss Aviation School at Newport News, Virginia. In 1916 (age 38), Mitchell took private flying lessons because the Army considered him too old for flight training.

The United States declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917. LtCol Mitchell immediately deployed to France. Promoted to Brigadier General, Mitchell commanded all American air combat units in France. In September 1918, he planned and led a joint air offensive during the Battle of Saint-Mihiel. He also managed to alienate most of his superiors during his 18 months in France.



Mitchell returned to the United States in 1919, but did not share the common belief that World War I was the war to end all wars. Thus, his relations with superiors continued to sour as he pressed the War Department and Navy Department for their sluggish attitude towards military aviation. Mitchell was anxious to test his theories on destruction of ships by aerial bombing, and got his chance in 1921.

Mitchell resented tax-dollars being spent building ships instead of aircraft. He was convinced aircraft could defend the coastline more economically than with coast guns and naval vessels. In fact, the Navy had already claimed to have sunk the old battleship *Indiana* in November 1920, but had hit the ship with practice bombs and actually used internal explosives to sink the ship. At any rate, Secretary of War John W. Weeks wanted to have Mitchell dismissed from service based on complaints from the Navy.

On 21 May 1921, Mitchell assembled 125 aircraft and 1,000 men, formed into six squadrons, at Langley and began training. The Navy would have the target ships 50 miles off the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, in 100-fathoms of water, making it more difficult for Mitchell's primitive aircraft. Furthermore, the Navy wanted to perform a damage assessment after each hit. The tests on 21 June, 13 July, and 18 July successfully sank a captured German destroyer and cruiser.

On 20 July, the Navy brought out the German battleship. After attacking the ship with 230, 550, and 600-lb bombs from Navy, Marine, and Army aircraft, the battleship was down 3-feet by the stern and a five-degree port list. Rough seas prevented the Navy's observers from getting aboard the battleship.

The next day, the Army managed three direct hits with 1,100-lb bombs. The Navy stopped the attacks to access the damage as the battleship settled another two-feet by the stern and a foot by the bow. Shortly after noon, three near misses with 2,000-lb bombs ripped off hull plates and the battleship sank 22 minutes later.



Mitchell stressed war-time conditions, but the ships were actually unmanned and stationary. Navy divers showed the battleship suffered little topside damage and sank from progressive flooding that could have been corrected by damage-control personnel. There was no anti-aircraft fire and the bombers released at altitudes that barely avoided damage to their own aircraft.

Mitchell's official report included the statement: "... sea craft of all kinds, up to and including the most modern battleships, can be destroyed easily by bombs dropped from aircraft, and further, the most effective means of destruction are bombs. [They] demonstrated beyond any doubt that, given sufficient bombing planes – in short an adequate air force – aircraft constitute a positive defense of our country against hostile invasion."

In 1922, Mitchell met the Italian air power theorist Giulio Douhet and a translation of Douhet's book *The Command of the Air* began to circulate in the Air Service. In 1924, Mitchell was sent to Hawaii and then Asia. He came back with a 324-page report that predicted Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor with land-based aircraft and discounted the value of aircraft carriers (*USS Langley* was commissioned 6 April 1922). His report was published in 1925 as *Winged Defense*. In 1925, Mitchell reverted to his permanent rank of Colonel and transferred to San Antonio, Texas.

The crash of the dirigible *Shenandoah* (3 September 1925) and the loss of three seaplanes flying to Hawaii caused Mitchell to issue a statement charging senior leaders in the Army and Navy of incompetence and "almost treasonable administration of the national defense." In November 1925, Mitchell was court-martialed by order of President Calvin Coolidge.

The court found Mitchell guilty of insubordination and suspended him from active duty without pay for five years. Instead, Mitchell resigned on 1 February 1926. He spent the rest of his life preaching air power to all who would listen. He died 19 February 1936, never to learn the truth of his life's ambition. Many of his followers remained in what was then called the Army Air Corps and became known as the Bomber Cult.

Before Pearl Harbor, the Bomber Cult advocated sending B-17s to the Philippine Islands to stop the Japanese Fleet from pushing further south. The first nine departed Hawaii on 26 August and arrived at Clark Field on 12 September. These Flying Fortress bombers were supposed to be invincible to fighters and able to drop a bomb in a pickle barrel from 20,000-feet.

The Japanese were unimpressed and General MacArthur was caught by surprise. Most of these bombers were destroyed on the ground along with three-quarters of the fighters at Clark Field about noon on 8 December 1942 (7 December in Hawaii). Only seventeen bombers survived – those that have been flown south to Mindanao the previous day.

During the Battle of Midway (4 June 1942) and the days that followed, B-17 bombers from Midway Island dropped a lot of bombs in the water and made wildly exaggerated claims about sinking Japanese carriers. The official score was actually Army zero and Navy four – confirmed after the war when Japanese officers told of easily out-maneuvering the falling bombs.

Note: Japanese maneuvering to avoid bombs did cause consternation for Admiral Nagumo and helped delay Japanese carrier preparations for launching an air strike against the American carriers.

Seventeen battleships (all nations) were severely damaged or sunk during WW-II, mostly by carrier based aircraft. The Army Air Corps bombers finally hit a ship in August 1942, when B-17 bombers badly damaged a Japanese transport unloading (stationary) at Milne Bay, New Guinea.

The first actual sinking was on 25 August 1942 near Guadalcanal, when a flight of B-17s found a lone Japanese destroyer collecting survivors (nearly stationary) and let loose a flurry of bombs.

The first hits on a moving ship came on 13 November 1942, when the Japanese battleship *Hiei* was found steaming in a slow circle near Savo Island off Guadalcanal, with damaged steering. She was hit repeatedly by bombs from B-17s and SBDs, plus a couple TBF torpedoes. However, she was finally shuttled by her crew during the night.

By the fall of 1942, the most ardent members of the Bomber Cult had to admit that the Mitchell's idea of a multi-engine bomber sinking a ship from high or medium altitude was gravely flawed. The flaw in his theory was not the fault of the crew or even the aircraft. It was Mitchell's lack of understanding of naval maneuvering, damage control, and anti-aircraft fire.

Of course, the Navy did listen to some of Mitchell's bluster. They added armor to the upper decks and positioned dozens of anti-aircraft guns around the ship. Eventually, the Navy developed the proximity fuse for those guns. It was not that his theory was wrong, but that his timing was off. It would take 50-years, not ten, before any high altitude aircraft could expect to reliably sink maneuvering ships at sea – using guided missiles and smart bombs.

Escort fighters were the second flaw in Mitchell's theory. The Bomber Cult had no problem with fighters, but they claimed only interceptors were needed. They believed heavily armed and armored bombers didn't need escort fighters. Before Pearl Harbor, Army fighters were purposely built without provisions for external fuel tanks. It didn't take long before the Bomber Cult realized they really did need escort fighters.

The third part of Mitchell's theory was also flawed. The idea that aircraft could bomb ships with impunity. Anti-aircraft fire forced bombers to fly ever higher. Enemy interceptors forced them to fly ever faster. Each step pushed the bomber crews to trading less bombing accuracy for fewer casualties. In Germany, that situation forced the Bomber Cult to target civilians because the few military targets were too heavily defended. Only with the atomic bomb was the Bomber Cult finally satisfied – one plane + one atomic bomb = one target destroyed. It didn't matter about the extent of collateral damage.

Saipan fell in July 1944, Tinian followed in early August, and the Stars and Stripes flew again over Guam a week later. On 18 June, the Marines took Aslito airfield field on Saipan. It was renamed Isely Field for a Navy pilot killed a week earlier. On 22 June an Army P-47 fighter squadron arrived and then a squadron of P-61 night fighters came to protect the construction crews still working on the runways. Four months later, the B-29 bombers came and began serious bombing of Japan.

The B-29s flew much higher and faster than the B-17, and had the range to fly from Saipan to Japan and back. But these bombers often had serious difficulty hitting their targets. The B-29 crews had never heard of the jet stream – high altitude winds that often exceeded 100-knots. Their ability to hit even a stationary target on land was so poor they were forced to resort to night bombing from much lower altitudes. Since the bombardier couldn't see most military targets at night, the B-29s began fire-bombing cities.

The Marines turned their focus on Iwo Jima the following February, about the same time American carrier pilots were looking over the coastal regions of Japan. Iwo Jima had little military value, but the Army wanted the island – not so much for its shiny black sand, but for its paved runways. The Marines came ashore on 19 February and captured the airfields in short order. A C-47 transport plane landed on 3 March and a B-29 made an emergency landing the next day. Army fighters arrived on 6 March to provide air cover. The island was declared secure on 26 March, but the Army spent the next couple of weeks mopping up. Finally, on 7 April, 1945, P-51 fighters took off from Iwo Jima to escort a flight of B-29s to Japan and back.

On 18 March 1945, the Navy turned its eyes towards Okinawa, needed as an assembly area for the proposed invasion of the main islands of Japan later that year. However, the Japanese had some new ideas about air power, something used a few months earlier in the Philippines – the Kamikaze. This was a use of air power never envisioned by Mitchell. It was a hellish nightmare in the daytime with hundreds of planes trying to play aerial tag with ships. Into this fight, the Americans had several advantages. One was highly skilled carrier pilots (Navy and Marine) flying F6F Hellcats and F4U Corsairs (or FG-1D Corsairs). Another was the widespread use of proximity fuses from every big anti-aircraft gun in the fleet. Of course, the skill of the long practiced gunners was also vitally important. Probably the most important was the ring of radar picket ship that gave the timely warning of inbound bogies. Many of these thin-skin picket ships were sunk or damaged, but only two aircraft carriers were seriously damaged, but both managed to limp home under their own power – thanks to effective damage control efforts.

On 7 April, in the middle of this great battle came the world's largest battleship. An *ESSEX* aircraft spotted her at 0823 local time. A seaplane reached the area and shadowed the Japanese ships for the next five hours. The

main aerial strikes from Navy Task Groups launched at 1000 local, and sighted *Yamato* at 1232 local. The Japanese force was under almost continuous attack by a total of 348 aircraft until the ship started to list heavily at 1420, then a series in internal explosions and she slid underwater at 1423. Four destroyers returned to Japan with some survivors. American seaplanes picked up a few more. About a half-dozen American airplanes failed to return.

Since 1945, the Bomber Cult has built and scrapped hundreds of very expensive nuclear-armed bombers, including the B-36, B-47, B-50, B-52 and B-58. Fortunately, no nuclear war broke out and the B-52 was the only nuclear bomber used to drop conventional bombs in combat. The last major air-war ended over 37-years ago. What is now left of the Bomber Cult ponders their future with twenty-one B-2 bombers that can only bomb a heavily defended target at night. Ironically, the first question the President of the United States asks when there is trouble somewhere in the world is “Where are the carriers.”

Also ironic is that the two-engine B-25, named for Billy Mitchell, was the first bomber to strike at the heart of Japan in April 1942. More symbolic than damaging, this strike induced Japanese leaders to push ahead with their invasion of Midway Island. The Japanese Navy never fully recovered from their losses at Midway.

Billy Mitchell got some things right and a lot of things wrong about WW-II. He left a strange legacy that we have to live with to this day. At least the Bomber Cult is gone.

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