

# THE VOICES OF BOMBING NINETEEN

This book was written by and for the men of VB-19. It covers, loosely chronologically, that special period of time from August 1943 to December 1944. The words are from the men themselves. Some come from log books or other papers written at that time. Other words were written recently - in letters sent to the editors. The "titles" listed in the Table of Contents should be considered more like "headlines" than titles. They serve as timelines which help put the stories into sequence. The underlined questions throughout the book were sent out by Stu Crapser in 1983-84. They are followed by the responses he received with some additions by the editors.

We are indebted to Stu Crapser and Tom Bratten, who got it all started.

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# CHAPTER 1

## N.A.S. LOS ALAMITOS, CA

### 15 AUG 1943 SQUADRON COMMISSIONED - N.A.S. LOS ALAMITOS, CA

WINTERS (CAG): We all (VB-19, VF-19, and VT-19) were commissioned 15 Aug. '43. Jung had not yet arrived, so I was acting CAG and read the orders to the three squadrons assembled.

STRADLEY: Lieutenant Commander Richard McGowan, USN, Commanding Officer, with about fifteen pilots and an equally small number of enlisted men, represented VB-19 at the ceremony.

McBRIDE: The first impression of VB-19 wouldn't be complete without a little previous background. After finishing cadet training, followed by instructor training, I went to instructor duty. We instructed in every phase of flight training. Every department head was a Naval Academy graduate. We had to walk a more narrow line than a cadet. Discipline, regulations and performance were stringent.

When I came to Squadron 19 I couldn't believe I was in the same navy -- the pomp and starch were gone. The facilities, including the skipper's office, were one big eyesore. There was no order, and everything seemed to be going in all directions. The dress code was shocking; however, everyone was quite friendly and helpful. This ole boy had to make some fast adjustments. The airmanship and airdiscipline made one's hair stand up. Tactics were appalling. After hearing lecture after lecture from such as Butch O'Hare, Thatch, and others on the latest fleet, here we were years behind.

Somehow things started coming together. The wild ass carefree Ensigns showed they could and did produce. Later I found this to be the best all around group that I have ever been associated with.

ENGEN: Jack Scott and I reported to the Squadron Duty Officer of VSB-19 located in Hangar Two, and found ourselves directed to the Squadron

Administrative Officer, Lt Ben Bittenweiser, USNR. The Commanding Officer was Lt. Com. Richard S. McGowan, USN, and the Executive Officer was Lt Billy Gates, on whom we made the obligatory office calls.

Each pilot had ground responsibilities in respective administrative areas, but these were relatively minimal. Flying was our primary role. I was assigned as Assistant Navigation Officer under Lt Joe Williams, Navigation Officer.

Scouting Bombing Squadron Nineteen was redesignated Bombing Squadron Nineteen in September. We had 36 SBD-5s, the latest model of SBD and top of the line at that time.

The mix of experience and inexperience in the squadron became a problem for our Skipper. Besides himself and three others there was no combat experience in the squadron. The Ensigns coming from operational training were the best trained dive bombers because of their recent intensive training. The remainder of the squadron pilots were former instructors who had finally "escaped" to fleet duty. Our radiomen gunners, except for one second class radioman who flew with the CO, came as recent graduates of the fleet gunnery school. I was assigned Radioman Gunner Theodore Stevenson, whom I was to fly with for the next fifteen months. Our tactical assignment was as the number two wingman on Lt Emil Stella, who in turn was the second section leader for Lt William McBride's six plane division.

I started flying on September 8th and flew a number of individual familiarization flights. These were an open invitation to revisiting old haunts in Southern California and to indulge in some time honored but strictly forbidden "flat hatting". After a few flights to get to know the airplane I headed for my home near the foothills of the Sierra Madre Range in Altadena. I dropped down to fly west to east along Crary Avenue, the site of my home there, and flew down the street at tree height to alert my younger childhood friends who still had not left home. The SBD had a very characteristic engine sound, and it alerted people to come out on the street. On the last pass down the street, I asked Stevenson to unlimber his twin .50 caliber gun mount to show my friends his guns, which he did. As we flew down the street now much lower, I saw my Mother in her apron waving, kids running around in the street waving, and the mailman riding "no hands" down the street on his bicycle waving both arms over his head. It was heady illegal stuff,

but we got away with it by not coming back again.

Flat hatting was definitely illegal, but the war and people's interest in the airplanes combined to permit some frequent digressions, until one day. That day was when Jack Scott and I were flying our SBDs and decided to go to Pasadena and say "hello" to Mary, who lived in a house overlooking the Arroyo Seco Canyon and the Rose Bowl. I was flying lead and Jack dropped back just a little to fly behind me as I dropped down over the Devil's Gate Dam to fly at tree top height through the Arroyo Seco, until we came to the Rose Bowl at which time I pulled up to clear the cliff and passed very low and fast over Mary's house. Jack did the same thing and we returned to Los Alamitos feeling that we had achieved our goal of giving Mary a loud "hello" and we would say nothing about it to anyone. Mary heard and knew right away who it was.

That evening I drove to Pasadena to see Mary and knocked on the door to be met by her father, for whom I had a great deal of respect. He was very somber faced and told me to come with him as he led me into the dining room. There he pointed to a large crack in one of the walls and admonished me to never do "that" again. I was suitably contrite and apologetic and allowed that I would not do "that" again. Mary and I departed the house shortly, and as we walked out, she started to laugh. She told me that the crack in the dining room wall had been there for ten years. But Mr. Baker made his point. This and the fact that Arnie Jancar's brother, who was an aircraft spotter on the Devil's Gate Dam, had reported two unidentified airplanes "dive bombing the Rose Bowl" caused me to think twice in the future. I confined my low flying to uninhabited areas and over the water after that. Some of my squadron mates were not quite as lucky and were caught flat hatting to receive the irate attention of the CO and restriction to the BOQ. Being placed in "hack" had different variations. The punishment was effective. We Ensigns stopped flat hatting.

One afternoon, while conducting Squadron dive bombing at Kearny Mesa, our flight leader, Lt Billy Gates, became furious with what he felt was the consistently slow rendezvous that our eighteen airplane flight was making after each dive, so he placed us into an eighteen plane right echelon in parade formation to have a chance to "chew" on us on the radio. The sun was setting in the West, and with the northbound direction of flight, that placed us all looking directly into the sun for the 45 minute flight to Los Alamitos. It made a lasting impression on all of us. Lt Gates was transferred later and given command of another bombing squadron where he was killed in combat. He was a hard taskmaster but deeply respected.

GRIFFIN, W: I reported for duty with VB-19 in Aug.'43. Stu Crapser, Johnny Cavanaugh and

I had all been together in operational training.

N.A.S. Los Alamitos, CA, was the home of the newly commissioned carrier Air Group 19 (CAG-19), consisting of VF-19, VB-19, and VT-19. Lt. (JG) Sobol gave me my check ride in the SBD-5 (Dauntless) and what a sweet dive-bomber she was! Training was fun in the squadron and we soon were feeling good about our cohesion into a smoothly coordinated fighting machine. All was not smooth and easy though--we lost our first pilot and crewmember, Ens. Leon Hart and ARM T. Scheck on a practice dive bombing mission, and a young ordnanceman who was caught in a target sleeve and dragged off the ground to his death.

On the lighter side, I remember the fun times at the Long Beach Pike Amusement Park--the Sunday afternoon Tea Dances at the Long Beach City Woman's Club--the piano player who always played "Anchors Aweigh" as we came down the steps of Eisenhower's cocktail lounge near the train stop in Long Beach, and last but not least, the many mornings we could sleep in a little later because there was almost always a thick fog each morning at Los Al, and we couldn't fly until about 10 or 11 A.M.

NEWMAN: Reporting to VB-19, after living around military bases most of my life, was unusual to say the least. The "laid back" approach to a war probably kept many more of us alive than we realize. Who else had a Chief Flight named "Whiskey Bill"? Fun things kept our minds off the dangers, but did not take away from what we knew to be the job at hand.

NIEMEYER: HIGHLIGHTS - LOS ALAMITOS:

The excitement of finally not being a flight instructor after two years and becoming part of a group that flew real aircraft and were really going to do something.

The pleasure of meeting a great group of men with whom I would be associated at work and play for the coming years.

The recreation time in Los Angeles.

The way we began flying together as a group.

Bob Hope and Frances Langford - particularly Frances Langford.

GRIFFIN, W: The Skipper Gives Me A Choice!!

Sometime in Sept/Oct 1943 while at NAS LOS ALAMITOS I was summoned into the C.O.'s office and as I stood at attention in front of his desk, he admonished me in very firm and precise terms: "Griffin," he said, "it has come to my attention that many enlisted men are in the habit of addressing you as 'GRIFF'. Is that correct?" This caught me completely off guard and I was hard pressed to give a rapid answer. After what seemed a long period of silence and our eyes locked on each other, I finally admitted that it was true that a few of the men did address me as "Griff", but I thought it was only at those times and places where other officers were not present. Evidently this was not the case or I would not now be standing before the C.O, red-faced, embarrassed, and a little angry. No one can really understand the feeling unless they had previously been an enlisted man for some years and were now newly commissioned as an officer. You never ever forget your status as an enlisted man and the importance you play on the "Navy Team". I was one "Helluva Good Sailor" and at the same time I was very proud to have been selected for flight training and eventually commissioned as an officer. In addition to this pride my shipmates, to a man, were as happy and proud that "one of their guys" made it!! It was no secret that I was a former aviation machinist mate and some of the men, as discreet as they could, thought they could address me as "Griff" without putting me on the spot. I knew the difference between an officer and an enlisted man, but on the occasions they addressed me as "Griff" I did not take offense and did not correct them.

The Skipper closed the conversation with these words: "Griffin, if you want that white hat back on your head again, I can see that it happens in a couple of weeks. Do you understand?" "Yes, sir," I said, did an about face, and left his office. Needless to say I was really shook-up and was in a quandary as to how I could remedy the situation. I knew I could not all of a sudden become a "Prussian-type" officer and ream out each man that called me "Griff", so after long deliberation that night I contacted our leading first class line petty officer, Joe Nance, the next day, and explained the whole situation to him. I'll never forget his words when I had finished - he just casually said, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of it." And take care of it he did. Within hours the entire VB-19 crew were addressing me as "Mr. Griffin" and emphasizing in strong and loud terms, "Yes, sir", "Aye, aye, sir," or "No, sir"!! I never heard the term "Griff" again from one single enlisted man. The loyalty and camaraderie that they felt for "one of their guys that made it" could never be breached or betrayed. Needless to say, I never heard another word from

the Skipper - or any other Skipper in my entire 25 years of active duty in my beloved Navy.

NICKENS: I was flying with Louis Heilmann when he made his famous wheels up landing at Los Alamitos. It came at the end of a night flight. The landing was actually smoother than many conventional landings. I was surprised by the sudden loud noise, and you would not believe the shower of sparks. When the plane came to a stop, we both made a hasty departure, because we didn't know if it was going to blow. When questioned by the Skipper, Louis maintained that the gear was down, and collapsed on landing. I backed him up on this. To this day I don't really know if the wheels were down or not, but suspect they were not. Louis was only 19 at the time, and not quite dry behind the ears. Not wanting to see him get into trouble, I corroborated his story.

NEWMAN: During one of our long weekends off, a group of us (8) went to Big Bear Lake. Arno Jancar had a friend who owned a house there. It was right on the lake and 2 stories tall. The lake and area were beautiful. Many people from Hollywood own homes there, and some people live there the year around. Mrs. Jancar (Arno's mother) fixed us a lot of food - ham and turkey and fixings. It was B.Y.O.B. and we did.

Late the first evening Squeaky Heilmann, who played a great cornet, played a number of songs from the 2nd floor balcony. The music bounced off the hills and around the lake. After several drinks and at about 2200, Squeaky decided the lake needed some military attention, so he blew Taps. I must admit it sounded beautiful. Lights came on all over the lake. The next morning at 0630 Squeaky played Reveille. I think we were the only ones he woke up. We just knew they would send the high Sheriff. That evening more music and at 2200 Taps. This time lights went off all over the lake. As we were packing to leave, several people came over to see us off. We just knew that we were going to get it. One older gent said, "Hate to see you boys leave. We have enjoyed seeing you here and having a good time. I don't know how we are going to know when to go to bed and when to get up after you're gone. You must be pilots. God go with you and return you safely."

We gave Mrs. Jancar a silver loving cup with our names on it, for being a great Navy Mom.

SADLER: Some firsts: (1) I was the only one who managed to put an SBD in an inverted spin at 5000' while trying to loop. Either Scotty or Don was with me at Los Alamitos. McGowan

wanted me to tell the squadron how to get out of the spin--I didn't know how I did it.

(2) I was also the only one to have my appendix out Christmas Day '43 and grounded for six weeks during which time I missed SBD carrier qualification at San Diego. My first day back I was flat hatting at Redondo Beach to impress my future mother-in-law and future wife, Betty. Result--ten days in hack, loss of pay, a marine guard at my door and finally six months delay in promotion (later rescinded). McGowan must have seen some potential as he took me to Maui.

EMERSON: Remember Peck and Duncan setting their rear ends on fire with 100 octane and running through the lounge of the mini-BOQ where some of us unmarried and lower ranking Ensigns lived at Los Alamitos? This action would hopefully scare out the newly assigned WAVE Officers that had been moved into that building, as we (VB-19 Ensigns) had been told we would have to move to the main BOQ. Needless to say, we eventually moved as directed, but not without a "flaming" protest. Male occupants of the mini-BOQ were, of course, Peck, Duncan, Crocker, Lewis, me, and what pictures I have indicate that Fisher lived there also.

LEWIS: You may remember at Los Alamitos when the bachelors' quarters got overloaded, they put about six of us lowly Ensigns in six separate rooms that had formerly been Chiefs' quarters in a separate building. Well, we had a ball with our separate lounge and pool table! Later, the Admiral at San Diego ordered that the WAVE officers be moved out of the BOQ and they doubled up the six of us and moved the WAVE officers in some of what we claimed were our rooms and were building a partition between them in the hallway. The first night they were there, Duncan and Peck (our original bad boys) got into one of their frequent altercations, and Duncan squirted lighter fluid across the seat of Peck's pants and threw a match at him. Peck came running through the lobby where the girls had gathered, flaming like a torch. I finally put him out with the Saturday Evening Post, and the poor gals looked as if they thought they had moved into an institution and that this was just the beginning.

BOWEN: Looking back at my Bombing 19 experience is mostly enjoyable, sometimes sad, occasionally outrageous and often embarrassing. The untested I was an argumentative, aggressive bundle of energy and noise, obsessed with the thesis that Franklin D., the communists and Eleanor were responsible for the mess we were in. I'm still a black fascist, right-wing reactionary, but have substantially modified my aggressiveness. In my four years as a line officer, I never fully embraced the niceties of "naval courtesy and etiquette" which probably

accounts for the number of scrapes that befell me.

On one memorable evening of drinking and bravado in the BOQ at Los Alamitos, I was involved in pinning CDR Jung's back to the floor in a virtually unbreakable wrestling hold. What made the situation so untenable was not the fact that he was the CAG, but that he was considerably bigger than I and was screaming about the mayhem he would inflict on me when he got loose. In the bedlam that followed, some brave souls helped me escape and like turbulent wind, the matter dissipated.

16 NOV 1943    ENS FRANKLIN P. HART AND THEODORE G. SCHECK, ARM3  
KILLED ON DIVE BOMBING RUN NEAR SEAL BEACH, CA

ENGEN: On November 16, 1943, while bombing a slick off Huntington Beach, Ens Frank Hart and his gunner Theodore Scheck were killed when they dove into the water after failing to pull out of their dive. Glassy water gave little indication of height and although we were all aware of this fact, and watched our altimeter with our left eye in the dive while our right eye was on the reticle sight, a mistake was fatal.

NEWMAN: Frank Hart's death was an eye opener. We had spent the prior two days in L.A. and made the most of it. I think most of us decided after this accident, that planes can kill, and you need to keep your mind on your business.

WARNKE: Fresh from Aviation Radioman and Free Gunnery schools, I checked in at Los Alamitos in August 1943 to become a member of the newly commissioned VB-19 - brought some friends of mine along, too -- Ted Scheck, Albini, Stankevich, et. al. I was assigned to LT(jg) Ray Wicklander for safekeeping, and we flew together for the remainder of the time I was in the squadron.

SBD-5 Dauntless dive bombers were provided free of charge by Uncle Sam, and we used them to tour the Long Beach/Los Angeles/coastal area. I must admit that I never knew where the hell we were, but my trusty chauffeur did, and that's what counted. Dive/glide bombing practice plus many opportunities for free-gunnery target practice on towed sleeves. My main claims to fame are that I never hit the tow plane, never put a round through our own tail

section, and occasionally put a few holes in the target. Bore-sighting and cleaning our "twin thirties" was practically a daily routine plus plenty of "aircraft recognition" training classes.

Liberty was plentiful - Long Beach, LA area, Santa Monica, and surrounding areas. A group of us spent an evening at a bar (name long forgotten) near the Douglas plant, and I'll always remember the bartender turning the bright lights on at closing time and shouting, "Take a look and see what ya' got!" We were often escorted by our squadron "mascot", a little white Spitz dog. Poor thing, we also taught him the evils of alcoholic drinks.

Never to be forgotten, on November 16th, was the loss of my good friend, Ted Scheck, and I must admit that I shed a lot of tears upon his demise. It was my first experience of losing a good buddy. Unfortunately, several more of my friends were to meet the same fate in months to come, but at least they were lost under combat conditions.

ENGEN: We lost an airplane when the engine quit on a navigation flight over water. The pilot landed in the water and the crew was rescued. Several other SBDs were lost by other squadrons at about the same time. One day in December 1943, my time for an engine failure came. I was flying between San Clemente and Catalina Islands when the engine abruptly quit. I can't describe how "loud" that the distinct lack of noise can be when you are over water out of sight of land. Determined to try everything before I hit the water, my third or fourth alternative of using the electric primer brought a surge of power and a smile on my face. But, I found that I had to hold the primer "ON" in order to keep the engine running. So, I devised a way to put the sole of my right shoe on the primer switch while I headed for Los Alamitos. Since I was the first to bring back an SBD-5 with this problem, Lt Don Banker and I flew to the Douglas aircraft plant in El Segundo to talk with the design engineer, Ed Heinemen. He determined that a fuel line passing through the firewall had been bent during the manufacturing process at more than the standard 45 degrees. Because of this, vapor lock could result. Douglas and the Navy made sure that all fuel lines were checked and fixed, and we lost no more SBDs for this reason.

SADLER: Los Alamitos, SBD:

(1) Right landing gear slowly collapsed resulting in a ground loop with lots of sparks and a wing tip ground off. I rapidly exited and Smolinski stayed in the aircraft turning off the radio. I remember shouting "Get the Hell out of there." Someone took me to the O Club and bought me

a drink. A Snyder by Doc Fox the next morning.

(2) Rolled over on a bombing run off the coast and was drowned in engine oil. Maydayed and returned to base for a straight in approach. Result--about 1/2 of the oil supply, about ten gallons, lost. The plane captain did not replace the oil filter cap--it was in his pocket.

(3) The fighters were parked in a row parallel and facing the runway. Upon landing I started to swerve to the right and the rudder couldn't straighten things out and lo and behold there was no brake. It soon became obvious that I was going to tangle with the row of fighters. I jammed the right brake causing a severe ground loop toward the fighter line. Severe damage to the right wing and wing tip. Further inspection revealed a crossed thread on the hydraulic line to the left brake. There evidently was enough pressure and fluid for us to taxi to takeoff--then none. I was reprimanded for not noticing a hydraulic leak during the walk-around pre-flight inspection.

#### DULONG: The Gunner Who Lost His Guns

Dec. 4, 1943 - The squadron was training in Los Alamitos - several flights each day. I was scheduled to go on a gunnery hop with Glumac at 11:00 AM. When a radioman became ill and couldn't make the 10:00 AM dive bombing hop, I volunteered to take his place.

When we returned from the bombing hop and taxied to the apron, another radioman ran over to the plane and told me that they were waiting for me for the gunnery hop and that he had put the guns in the plane for me. So off we went.

Flying away from the coast we made free gunnery passes at the tow sleeve until the ammo ran out, and then started the fixed gunnery passes. When the tow plane made a 180 degree turn to return to the coast, I unfastened my seat belt, bent under the scarf ring and began collecting the brass from the floor of the cockpit and putting the brass in the chute for removal on landing. `

That is when Glumac called me on the intercom and asked if I was still back there. I grabbed the mike - told him I was - and he told me to hang on. He then did two slow rolls.

Still without a seat belt, I hooked one arm under the scarf ring and pushed down with both feet to lock myself in, the brass and remaining ammo belts flying past my face. A few minutes later I

turned around and saw that the twin 30 machine guns were no longer there.

After Glumac finished his fixed gunnery passes on the way back, I told him the guns were missing. He then told me to say that the guns fell out during a fixed gunnery practice.

When we returned to the field, the gunnery officer was waiting for me as we taxied to the apron. He asked me what had happened, and I told him the guns fell out on a fixed gunnery run - a story I was to repeat many times. He then took me directly in to see the Skipper - who, as we all know was eight feet tall, had steely blue eyes, and never smiled. The Skipper asked me what happened, and I gave him the story. He told me to report for Capt's Mast the next day.

At the Capt's Mast he told me I would have to stand for a Deck Court-Martial since I was responsible for the loss of Title B equipment.

At the Deck Court, the Skipper was attended by Mr. Bittenweiser, Squadron Personnel Officer, and the Squadron Yeoman. The stage was set: a table with large blue covered book, a flag, and me in my best dress uniform.

The Skipper said, "I will now read the charge," and did so reading from a 3X5 card, accusing me of failing to lock the guns in the plane - causing their loss. He then asked "Do you agree to be tried on this charge?" and when I said, "No, sir," everything came to a screeching halt.

I explained that I had not failed to lock the guns in the plane, since I did not put the guns in the plane. I had only failed to make sure all was secure in the rear cockpit. Then all three were leafing through the blue covered books looking for a reference for failing to make sure something was done - without luck, of course.

After a while, the Skipper looked up at me and said that if I allowed them to go on with the proceedings, it wouldn't make any difference to me as long as I was with the squadron. He then gave me a long lecture on why I shouldn't lose my guns in combat, and fined me \$20 a month for two months.

Everybody should have known the guns couldn't have fallen out during fixed gunnery passes where all the G's are into the plane.

I never did get my Good Conduct Medal.

3-4 JAN 1944      CARRIER QUALIFICATIONS, USS ALTAMAHA, OFF SAN DIEGO, CA

ENGEN: In early January we flew our airplanes to North Island to conduct carrier qualifications in USS Altamaha. The night before we went to sea I was reminded of my age. I never really stopped to think about the fact that I was 19 and that most of my compatriots, except for Squeaky Heilmann, were a little older. Four of us had gone into San Diego to see the town. We entered a local bar. John Butts and two others were before me. As I went through the door last, a very buxom blonde bouncer leaned over and put her arm in the doorway blocking it and said to me, "Not you, honey." My compatriots laughed and went into the bar to leave me outside nursing my wounded pride. I returned to USS Altamaha thinking that life was not fair. I could fight for my country, but I could not have a drink.

Each of us pilots made the required number of carrier landings, but because of the long ocean swells off the coast of California and the proclivity of the CVE to roll, it took three days for all 50 of us to get our landings. By the time a few got airborne there were some sick pilots that looked forward to getting into the air to stop the rolling motion.

GOOD: I have mentioned this incident to a number of bombers and for the life of me, I can't figure out why no one of them remember it - especially Wally, who was one of the main characters involved.

The incident occurred when all of us were being transported by navy bus from Los Alamitos to North Island for additional carrier landing practice aboard the USS Altamaha. The bus driver was a young seaman. I don't remember his rate, but I do recall his slight build and nervous appearance.

Well, before we had travelled 20 miles a big political discussion surfaced. Ben and I were sitting in the rear of the bus, so we had good seats for the show. Opposing political views were being put forth by Wally and George Bowen in not a gentlemanly manner. Soon others joined (mainly Glumac), choosing sides. Before long most of the squadron was involved and emotions and

shouting were turned way up. The racket was awesome. Then, as usually happens, a few personal remarks were cast, leaving violence the last resort. Pure pandemonium took over.

Now, consider the little driver travelling down the highway at 50 miles per hour with a busload of crazy navy dive-bomber pilots of commission rank on the verge of killing one another and destroying his charge!

That terrified boy did the only thing he could do. He stopped the bus, opened the door, and ran for his life out into the middle of the adjoining pasture and absolutely refused to return.

As I recalled, Ben walked out to where the driver was and talked him into returning to his post upon the condition that peace and tranquillity would prevail thereafter.

The transport was resumed and all hands were refreshed by the experience just as all good dive bombers should be after a near miss. But, alas, the little seaman did not drive us back to Los Alamitos after our mission was over.

### ON DUTY LOS ALAMITOS

What single "on duty" event stands out in your memory of the squadron training period at Los Alamitos?

BOWEN: Ten (10) days in "Hack"!

BUTTENWEISER: During Carrier Quals (USS Altamaha) the sea got so rough that we had to secure from flying. One of our shipmates lying in his bunk moaning for some Oklahoma dust and one of the crap shooters in alarm yelled out "that wave shook the whole building"!

CHAPMAN: My making a wheels-up approach in the CO's airplane. I got a wave off.

CROCKER: Survival!

EMERSON: (1) The ordnance ground crewman being dragged to death, after being caught in

the gunnery target tow line as it was being lifted off by VF. I, and others, were doing FCLP on the parallel runway. (2) Our first casualties, Frank Hart and Scheck, 16 NOV 43.

ENGEN: Flying at the end of an 18 plane echelon led by Billy Gates.

GLASGOW: The plane following the one I was in on a bombing practice on a sled at sea failed to pull up as I watched. About a 75 degree crash.

GOOD: Out shooting Billy Gates with 50 cal fixed guns.

GRAY: Battenweiser got barracks exempt from inspection on Fridays.

GRIFFIN, W: The day the sun came out at 7 AM and no one ready to fly!!

GUNTER: (1) "Bounce" drill at night - HAIRY! (2) Carrier Qualifications on the ALTAMAHA.

HEILMANN: A night flight when I made a perfect wheels-up landing. I could swear they were down and locked.

HELM: Checkout in SBD-5.

LEAF: Flying at night with search lights trained on us.

LEWIS: Being commissioned official squadron bootlegger by CO McGowan to procure liquor taken to Maui and eventually aboard the Lexington.

McBRIDE: My birthday, Dec 16, 1943. Flew thru the trees on a pre-dawn mission, then in P.M. on practice bombing run - High speed stall, left wing streaks on water on recovery.

MEEKER: Carrier landing Qualifying on jeep carrier.

NICKENS: When the engine of the plane in which I was flying conked out, and we landed in the Pacific Ocean.

NIEMEYER: How good we got in hitting a 50' circle dive bombing. The day we peppered the sled towed at sea.

NEWMAN: Death of Frank Hart.

ROSS: Crash landing on the runway due to Stromberg carburetor cutting out on the SBD.

SADLER: Getting out of an inverted spin in SBD.

SCOTT: The pick up of our new SBD's at the Douglas El Segundo plant.

SIMMERMAN: Allowed to fly SBD-5 from the rear seat. What an experience.

STELLA: During new engine break-in fuel line parted and had to make a dead stick landing at an Army base in South L.A.

WICKLANDER: Don Banker leading division in formation practice over mountains near San Diego. Scared hell out of me.

WODELL: Gunnery practice at sea. Carrier landings on the ALTAMAHA.

### OFF DUTY LOS ALAMITOS

What single "off-duty", or liberty, happening do you remember best from the squadron's time at Los Alamitos?

BOWEN: The time Bill Good & I introduced Ralph Meeker to the "Ghost".

CROCKER: Making nightly muster at the Sky Room in the Hilton Hotel.

DUNCAN: Not reportable.

EMERSON: I can't possibly pick one! They were all so, shall we say educational! Best

remembered is the fact that whatever happened, it usually got its start at the top of the Wilton (Hilton?).

EMIG: Squadron Parties.

ENGEN: The Air Group party at the BOQ where the CAG's wife passed out on the steps to the dance floor, and the crap game in the bar where I lost all my money.

GLASGOW: The big sendoff party.

GLUMAC: Weekend at Arrowhead.

GOOD: Rose Bowl football game on New Years Day.

GRAY: Eno Leaf and I went out on last nite and I lost my I.D. card. Was checked coming in.

GRIFFIN, W: Liberty down on the Pike!!

GUNTER: When our car was stolen. A month later I recognized it at NOB San Pedro and we recovered it.

HEILMANN: (1) When a group, led by Jancar, went to Lake Arrowhead and I blew reveille at 6:00 AM and woke the whole place up. (2) Once in San Diego a group of us went to a burlyque show where the feature stripper always gave an autographed picture to a serviceman in the front row. I think we stayed for 2 or 3 shows to get these choice seats. We all decided that whoever got the picture it would say "All my love to Dunc". Anyway, we got it and then mailed it to Duncan's girl in Kansas. He really caught hell about that.

HELM: Attending Earl Carroll's.

LEAF: Met my wife on a liberty in L.A.

LEWIS: (1) My standing reservation at the Biltmore in Los Angeles which had five bars and was a town unto itself. (2) When one of our squadron enlisted men, with a bogus ID card was hitchhiking from Long Beach to Los Alamitos late one night and had the misfortune of flagging

down McGowan, I was assigned to look into the matter and defend him.

McBRIDE: Going to the "Black Outs" in L.A.

MEEKER: I'll take the fifth on this one.

NICKENS: L.H. Brown and I once hitchhiked to Phoenix and back one weekend.

NIEMEYER: Bob Hope and company visit - particularly Frances Langford.

NEWMAN: All trips to L.A. were great. My getting involved to get the name "Frosty".

ROSS: Visiting the various Hollywood shows.

SADLER: Xmas at Lake Arrowhead. Bill Good being sucker punched by Jung, the Air Group Commander.

SCOTT: The squadron dinner dance at the Lakewood Country Club.

SIMMERMAN: Playing golf in Long Beach.

STELLA: Squadron party and dance.

THURMON: Going up to the mountains to ski - and the lift was broken.

WICKLANDER: Peck chasing Duncan through lobby of BOQ squirting lighter fluid on rear. Both in their shorts, then lighting it.

WODELL: Going into Long Beach with Jack Meeker & "Frosty" Newman.

ENGEN: 16 February we flew our airplanes to the Naval Air Station Alameda to be loaded in USS Lexington (CV16). I returned to Los Alamitos, and Mary and I drove our car north to Alameda. We had a great time in San Francisco even though the pall of departure hung over us. We said our goodbyes on the carrier pier at Alameda at 0900 on 24 February in the shadow of

the Lexington. Goodbyes are hard. Wartime goodbyes are even harder. Mary drove back to Pasadena to live by herself in her father's house and to have our baby alone. Wars and experience make strong people.

GOOD: Long ago I vowed to tell only anecdotal accounts of my service adventures. Since this one is now declassified, I feel safe because I suspect my costar in the story has gone over to the other side. The tale deals with an unfortunate incident at the Los Alamitos BOQ one libationary evening just the day before the squadron left for Maui. Because I played one of the leading parts, I tried to cover things up, so few knew of it. Remember Commander Carl Jung? Well, he and I, after much bourbon and water, severely disagreed on the merits of the soon to arrive SB2Cs versus those of our beloved SBD. The argument heated to a point where Ensign Good announced throughout the barroom that in his opinion Commander Jung was full of shit; whereupon the Commander demanded satisfaction at once, out in the parking lot. Now hear this! Incorrectly, I judged, with the help of a bellyfull of bourbon, that 150 pound Ensign Good could handle anything a pudgy 230 pound Commander could dish out.

To this day I do not know the answer to that speculation because while descending the steps, side by side, off the BOQ front porch, Crafty Carl blind-sided me with a roundhouse right fist which was as big as a Smithfield Ham. Thereafter, I slightly recall getting off my back from that cold concrete porch, though somebody later said the Commander unsuccessfully chased me around the parking lot. Luckily for both of us, the excitement of leaving the next day subdued any comments about the night before; either that, or because of the Commander's characteristic lack of recall ability - I felt I was home safe - and not to worry.

Enter non-combatant Benjamin J. Bittenweiser! Several weeks later on Maui, Lt. Commander Richard McGowan, having been told by Ben of the matter, drove me in his jeep to a private area, and after hearing from me what happened, further discussion obviously disclosed McGowan's veiled desire for little Ensign Good to bring some sort of charges against Jung which would possibly rid the Air Group of the colorful Commander whom he plainly felt too undignified to even wear the ring - let alone be CAG. Serving as such a pawn, I would face a rotten future in the Navy, so I declined to take action by stating that since we were both in the bag, the gentlemanly thing to do would be to forget it. McGowan showed his disappointment; I got off with a near miss except for the one-inch scar on my chin (which really did not disappear until around 1965, and unfortunately did not qualify me for a Purple Heart award). Alas, such is life!

## CHAPTER 2

### MAUI, T.H.

#### 21 FEB 1944    ENTRAINED TO ALAMEDA FOR FURTHER TRANSPORTATION WEST

WARNKE: And then there was "Murph" (Murphy), the Ordnance man. Just before we were to depart for Maui, a late-night crap game was being held in the head. I don't recall whether Murph rolled a few naturals in a row or crapped out (or maybe didn't want to go to Maui!), but he proceeded to have an epileptic fit, and the last we ever saw of him was when the medics hauled him away.

#### 24 FEB 1944    DEPARTED FOR PEARL HARBOR, T.H. ABOARD USS LEXINGTON

LEAF: Boarded Lex, had a high fever, and turned in at sick bay when we were at sea. Stayed there until we reached Oahu, and was sent to Base 8 Hospital there on Oahu. Stayed there for 6 weeks, and they were going to send me to a receiving station instead of back to VB-19. Made a few liberties to Honolulu, and one time I ran into one of our pilots and told him my troubles. Next day Griff and Peck flew over and bailed me out. I flew with Griff, and Peck had my gear. Took the scenic route along Molokai and took in all the waterfalls and rainbows - a great trip! Then I got back to my buddies at VB-19 on April 19.

#### 28 FEB 1944    ARRIVED PEARL HARBOR

ENGEN: We arrived in Pearl Harbor on February 28th and it was awesome to look at the still remaining carnage of December 7th 1941 as USS Lexington silently negotiated the channel to the carrier pier at Ford Island. Three of the battleships were still at their moorings but turned turtle. These ships were silent reminders of why we were fighting a war. Our attention was directed to each sunken ship as we passed when the ship's 1 MC annunciator system loudspeakers would sound "Attention to starboard." The entire crew topside would stop any activity, face starboard at attention, and render silent tribute to those who had died there in the ship. Then after we had passed each ship the 1 MC would intone "Carry on." These acts of respect were great motivators.

29 FEB 1944    TRANSFERRED TO N.A.S. KAHULUI, MAUI, T.H.

GRIFFIN, W: In Feb. '44 we were transported to N.A.S. Kahului, Maui, T.H. aboard the U.S.S. Lexington (CV-16) which then continued on to WESTPAC to pick up CAG-16 to finish their combat tour. Maui was to me mostly flying (day and night) the SBD and then the SB2C-3 (Helldiver), which we had to transition to in a hurry as Adm Marc A. Mitscher wouldn't take the SBD's in the future because they were too slow, and their wings wouldn't fold to allow more bombers on the carrier. It wasn't all work and no play, though, we had a beautiful private beach and club house at our disposal when we weren't flying, plus I met and had an occasional date with a cute Army nurse who only had a few hours off every other Sunday afternoon! We qualified aboard the U.S.S. Franklin on 17 June and were accepted to stay with the Air Group for our combat tour in Lexington.

EMERSON: Griff and I were assigned the dubious honor of being in charge of all the squadron and air group gear being sent from Ford Island to Maui via civilian freighter on an overnight trip after our arrival at Pearl in late FEB 44. This character building duty included riding the lighter, loaded with boxes of gear, IN A RAINSTORM, from LEXINGTON all over Pearl Harbor hunting for the civilian freighter and then, having no dry clothes with us, spending the next 12 hours in the engine room keeping warm and drying our clothes until arrival in Maui the next day. I think the Skipper wanted to know what kept us!

MEEKER: One morning soon after our Air Group arrived in Hawaii, I went to the head for my morning constitutional. The cans were in stalls without doors and there was very little privacy. I had just settled down on a stool and my mind was a thousand miles away, when in walked a woman smoking one of those crooked cigars and pushing a broom. Needless to say, there was some scrambling around to get covered. There wasn't any use in getting all excited because this woman didn't pay any attention to me at all. She knew what there was to see anyway, give or take an inch or two. She didn't come close to me or ask me to raise my feet so she could sweep around me.

NICKENS: One day some of the guys were having a poker game on one of the bunks in the barracks at Kahului NAS. Our parachute rigger, Edward Beisner, better known as "Stopper", decided to play a trick on one of the players. Unknown to him, Stopper sprinkled some lighter fluid on one of his shoes and lit it. Unfortunately, some of the lighter fluid had spilled on the

mattress, and it sprang to life and threatened to engulf the whole barracks in flames; but some urgent beating out of the fire by some instant firemen saved the barracks, not to mention Stopper's naval career.

SADLER: Maui, SBD: Returning from rear seat gunnery run on a sleeve, Smolinski was storing his guns when they fired. Result--about 30 holes in the fuselage but no serious damage. The safety was worn and had slipped off. Don't remember what happened to Smolinski.

EMERSON: Remember Peck and Duncan standing in the middle of the bombing target in Maui? They were supposed to be scoring hits from the range shacks. Their explanation later, when pressed by more senior types, was that "It was the safest place to be in consideration of the way the squadron was bombing."

ROSS: One night while we were night flying in Maui, Bob Parker and I had just finished flying and we were headed back to our barracks, when we spotted Captain McGowan's jeep sitting outside ready for him to attend an engagement in Kahului. We decided to borrow his jeep and go to town. We drove to Kahului to obtain a drink at the hotel. We observed the jeep from the bar and it wasn't long until the S.P.'s surrounded it. They started looking for servicemen in the area, and Bob and I were the only ones to be seen. The S.P.'s called the base and informed Captain McGowan they had two men there with his jeep. It wasn't long till he came after the jeep, and when he saw the two culprits, he informed the S.P.'s he would take care of them. He told us, "You damn fools get in the jeep," and he took us back to the base. It was a long silent ride. When he got to the gate he told us to go in and go to bed, and we never heard any more about it.

EMERSON: Roy "Gremlin" Majors, after drinking some type of alcoholic beverage to obvious excess, and getting very sleepy, was placed by his "friends" in the middle of the pool table in the BOQ lobby on Maui. After placing him there, his "friends" carefully folded his arms over his chest, in a manner that might be found in a funeral home, and very carefully covered him with any flowers that could be found at that time of night/morning. It was a very dignified and tasteful setting. It was absolutely hilarious when we all got up early and sat around him while someone gently awakened him in time for the morning flight schedule. The expression on his face - when he recognized his physical position (horizontal with arms across chest) and smelled all the pretty flowers stacked on him - cannot be described in these few words.

LOCHER: One dark, moonless night in Maui, Butts and Cravens were scheduled for night

flying. I was Butts's crewman. Walking out to the airplane, Butts asked me if I knew what vertigo was. I answered affirmative, and he said it was sure a good night for it because we had to take off on runway (?) which meant he would not have a horizon, because we'd be headed away from all land. He also said I wouldn't be bothered because as soon as he got airborne, I could turn my seat around and have the lights on shore to orient me.

We got airborne; I swung myself around and immediately told Butts his left (port) wing was down a little too much. Ha, he immediately called the tower and declared an emergency, and we got ready to land. A few seconds later, Cravens did the same radio bit. Vertigo. It seems there was a big party at the "O" club that evening. War is hell.

EMERSON: One live, small (250 lb?) bomb fell off the wing rack of my aircraft on our way back to NASKA from live drops on Kahoolawe. I had been unable to release it in any manner on the bombing runs, and everything was safe, (thank God), when it fell. The gestures and expressions that Burns (Banker's gunner) came up with were a sight to behold. I think he forgot that we had radios and tried to yell the information to me about what he had seen as I flew wing. It was best determined that it fell in a cane field which eventually had to be burned down, not in the usual harvesting, but in an effort to explode the damn bomb! I don't think it was ever found. Even when I was back out there in 1946 there were no reports that it ever had been located. Needless to say, I was grilled by all the experts, including the old man, as to how the hell I managed to do this dastardly deed.

NEWMAN: The Skipper took "Baby" Wodell and me in his jeep to go up to the top of Haleakala Volcano. "Baby" was in the back seat. We wore our guns because the Skipper was sure there were hostile Japs on the Island. As we drove up the incline, a flock of pheasants ran out in front and along the side of the jeep. "Baby" whipped out his pistol and started shooting. The Skipper whipped the jeep off the road looking for cover and nearly turned the jeep over. "Baby" kept shooting. When the jeep came to rest, Skipper yelled at "Baby", "What the hell are you shooting at?" "Baby" said, "Birds, and I think I got one." Skipper yelled, "You damn fool, you nearly got us killed. Besides, it's against the law to shoot those birds." We never made it to the top of Haleakala, and "Baby" and I weren't asked to ride with the Skipper again.

BOWEN: Richard McGowan nailed me on three occasions for a total of thirty days in hack. Although I cautiously derided him as an "academy boy", I had a deep respect for his values. Many of his decisions regarding my behavior (one involving my life) filled me with admiration for his canny assessments. I suspect his sense of justice would have been sorely tested had he

known Bill Good and I broke into the food locker on Maui and (to quote one of McGowan's memorable expressions) "caused considerable consternation" on the island.

EMERSON: Then there was the night after a few hours of "attitude adjustment" time at the O-Club on Maui that John Butts, being a senior type LT, suggested strongly to lowly Ensign Emerson that we escort two lovely Army nurses that he had cut out of the mob at the club that night, back to their quarters somewhere up the side of Haleakala.

Seemed like the only decent thing to do as well mannered Naval Officers, besides, who was I to argue with a senior LT. Our major problem in this operation, of course, was "wheels". John, as I prefer to recall, took care of that minor item by finding a very convenient jeep outside the club with a combat switch instead of a key.

Somehow I wound up driving, with my escortee sitting in a separate seat (jeep style). Poor John was forced to sit so close to his companion, in the rear seat, that they actually had to hold on to each other during the entire ride! John didn't complain a bit. This impromptu operation was going swimmingly well, until just before arriving at the mountainside quarters of the nurses, my lady happened to ask what the letters on the lower right side of the windshield meant. The letters carefully stenciled there were C.O. VB-19.

From that point on, John seemed to be preoccupied with some deep thoughts that, strangely enough, did NOT include the young lady that he had been forced to hang onto during the ride. This was particularly true after one of our female companions recalled that one of her friends had a scheduled date with the Commanding Officer of the Bombing Squadron from NASKA. That friend had also commented that her date had his own "wheels" and didn't have to be worried about transportation when he would bring her back to these mountainside nurses quarters.

If my memory serves me correctly, we did not linger long after taking the ladies home. We proceeded at "buster" plus "gate" power settings (Senior Officer Present LT John Butts now driving) to the BOQ at NASKA.

My short one-sided conversation with the Skipper the next morning was merely to confirm what he already knew. It seems to me that I was summarily dismissed from the inquisition with some comment about "damn Reserve Ensigns", etc,etc. John's conversation with the old man was much longer, and John's reluctance to discuss it anymore left me with the distinct impression that it was decidedly one-sided!

ENGEN: Our training accelerated and we began coordinated attacks. These Air Group attacks were called Group Gropes, because of the impression held by all who participated that no one was really leading. A well-coordinated attack of 24 fighters, 24 dive bombers and 18 torpedo bombers can be awesome to the participants as well as to the enemy. Some of our greatest thrills were in extricating ourselves from our near simultaneous arrival at the target. A good attack was over in 4 minutes.

A semi annual defense and attack drill was held at Pearl Harbor. In March we participated in such a drill and dove on Ford Island and the installations there. On the retirement while dodging P40s, I was flying down Kapiolani Blvd below tree height, when I looked up just in time to miss by inches the Dole Pineapple shaped water tower. That made a lasting impression on me to always place more attention on things ahead rather than behind.

All was not work. We Ensigns frequently drew the duty of flying an SBD when it came out of maintenance check. We looked forward to this because it gave us an opportunity to fly by ourselves and not in formation. Haleakala was a single extinct volcano that rose majestically to 12,000 feet and dominated the southwest end of Maui. I would fly up the slope until it rose faster than the airplane could climb and then circle to gain altitude to reach the peak. The top of the volcano had long ago blown off and the crater was a bowl that descended 1,000 feet inside the mountain. Flora and fauna inhabited this bowl and I would enjoy dropping down into the bowl to see if I could pick up goats to chase. The goats would run all over the bowl at the sound of an airplane. No harm was done them, but the National Park Rangers asked us to stop because the goats did trample the Silversword, a plant peculiar to only that volcano. So we stopped.

EMERSON: How about the night that George Lewis and friends managed to use a government vehicle (weapons carrier, command car, or whatever) to knock down a brick wall. Not being present, I'm not familiar with the details, but I do recall hearing about some of my fellow officers being trained to be apprentice bricklayers. Contact George Lewis for details.

George Lewis could again provide the details, but it seems to me that he, as a point of law, came to the defense, legally, that is, of one of our enlisted men who had some difference of opinion with the police on Maui. It seems that George's defense challenged the entire authority of the military/naval command of the Hawaiian Islands. Somehow, this was brought to the attention of the Commanding Officer of VB-19, and in turn was brought to the attention of a junior officer named George Lewis. Let George tell it from there.

PECK (from his log): 2 March 1944 - Today we were issued our .38 cal. pistols with shoulder

holster and hunting knife. You can sure as hell tell all the damn fools that haven't handled guns before - most of them think they're red hot now.

6 March 1944 - I was waylaid by Meeker and helped load Air Group whiskey into truck from warehouse. Liquor was brought to our BOQ and distributed at 1700.

7 March 1944 - I gave Wicklander a giant hotfoot with a generous application of lighter fluid and flame - a fire extinguisher was applied; a little got on the crowd. A battle royal (water fight) ensued.

18 March 1944 - Up at 0500 for a coordinated attack. Takeoff 0615, still dark. We were ordered to bomb following strafing run by fighters. Fine - only Cravens led us into a dive on the wrong beach (about 5 miles from where we should have been). Another dive, wrong beach again. Finally we were told to go home.

21 March 1944 - Wright and Evatt came into the room playing "flame throwers". They had a fly sprayer filled with flammable fly spray. Evatt held his lighter under the nozzle while Wright worked the pump. A solid sheet of flame would shoot out an amazing 4 feet. Just wait until Dunc and I get tight and try that.

26 March 1944 - Under new setup Sunday is a day of rest (only day off now). In the afternoon everyone adjourned to the beach for a beer bust. "Sweety" Wilson and her family (Ma, Pa, and Emma) were there and joined us at the beach. They are a typical Hawaiian family - they sang the island songs, hulas, and sang a few songs taught them by air groups before us. Sweety is a damn cute girl - she did all the hulas. I understand the dances of the islands are expressed mainly through the hands, but tell me - who in the hell is gonna watch Sweety's hands when she dances in a brief yellow sarong?

27 March 1944 - Ever since the whiskey has been doled out, there has been a lot of drinking to excess around here. These parties of course, were accompanied by horsing around such as knife throwing into the walls, fire hydrant water fights, bowling with ice in the halls, etc. The parties all culminated into a large one last night, though, when a lot of men got together in the room directly below mine. Cravens whipped out his .38, shot holes in the deck and bulkhead (Thank God missing the overhead). It seemed like a good idea, so a couple of other boys joined in. Lewis played William Tell - had a glass shot from his noggin. Somehow it was reported to the First Lieutenant and a report made to the Exec of the station. Our Skipper doesn't know about it

yet. We held a meeting at 2240-2350 trying to decide the best way out for the squadron and all concerned. It was finally decided that someone in the squadron (probably Niemeyer) go to see the Skipper of the station in the hope of getting him to tear up the report, promising from now on we'll be damned quiet. We then would tell our Skipper what happened and let nature take its course! If quieted, a General Court Martial will be avoided for Cravens, but if the affair goes through official channels, he'll sure as hell get one and quite a few of the fellows in the squadron would get a dressing down - fingers x'ed.

HEILMANN: In explanation of "moosemilk", it was one evening when we had booze but nothing to mix it with. So Wodell and a few of us went behind the Hana Hotel where a cow was tied up and Wodell milked it to mix it with the booze. The drink was christened "Moosemilk". Not too exciting but considering the fact that none of us were feeling any pain at the time, it was an unusual event.

NIEMEYER: HIGHLIGHTS - MAUI: We are flying together better and better - dropping bombs into a 100 foot circle from a dive, a piece of cake.

John Barleycorn and family.

Oski and Betty Rice and Liars Dice, etc. on their veranda.

Pineapple and Old Crow - not necessarily together.

#### APR 1944      RECEIVED FIRST SB2C-1'S FOR TRANSITION TRAINING

ENGEN: AIRPAC had informed us that we would transition into the new Curtis Helldiver, the SB2C, and in March we began the transition. We were to receive the first of the new SB2C-3s when they arrived, but would use the older SB2C-1s for the transition. These SB2C-1s had numbers like 00037 and 00039. Their physical condition reflected those numbers. The hydraulic system was a nightmare arrangement and did not enhance our opinion of the airplane one iota.

PECK: 4 April 1944 - Flew one hop and then at 0930 out to fly the "monster" for the first time. What a big, heavy, sluggish bastard it is.

7 April 1944 - The squadron insignia was chosen (but not my entry).

DULONG: NASKA, Maui - April 1944 - I was on a glide bombing hop with my regular pilot, Al Adlman. We were in the standard formation on the way to the target, Kahoolawe (a lunar-shaped island between Maui and Lanai), when we changed to the echelon formation in preparation for the glide attack from 3500 ft.

As usual, Adlman was last in the formation. The planes ahead of us peeled off one after the other on their glide runs. When it was our turn to go, we were not in good position to start a glide run on the target. We were over on our backs, pulling out low over the target and just over the water. It was a multi G pullout. I grayed out, and I swear I saw the tips of the wings roll into the cockpit.

When we pulled up and leveled off, there were wrinkles in the wings that weren't there when we took off. When the aileron on one side was level with the wing, the one on the other was one to two inches above the wing. We got permission to head back to NASKA.

When the Curtis rep looked at the plane, he said "Hell, that's nothing to worry about," and he walked away.

ENGEN: While slowly checking out in the SB2C, we continued our gunnery training in our SBDs. We Ensigns were always the ones scheduled for towing the sleeves. We reasoned that since we were the most junior that we should have the most gunnery practice, but the fact of life was that Lieutenants did not like to tow and neither did the Lieutenants Junior Grade, and so we Ensigns towed and we towed. This led us into devising improvements to towing procedures, and the repetitive nature of the flying led to boredom and me into trouble. On April 12th I was to tow and had offered Stopper Beisner, our first class parachute rigger a ride for flight pay purposes. I briefed him as we walked out to the SBD-5 in advance of the flight of six with Lt Bob Niemeyer as leader. I told Stopper that I had determined that I could fly the SBD inverted without losing fuel pressure by using the primer. I had also reasoned that by using a judicious amount of forward stick a pilot could roll the SBD inverted without entangling the tail wheel in the tow line. I asked him if he was up for some inverted flying for as long as I could keep the oil pressure within limits, and he allowed that he was.

We took off and climbed to 6,000 feet, the tow altitude, and headed out to the firing area as Lt

Niemeyer flew his division by to check the tow and to climb to the "perch" for his first firing pass. As Lt Niemeyer started his first firing run I told Beisner to tighten his seat belt, and I carefully rolled the airplane inverted and maintained level inverted flight. As the manifold pressure began to fall, because we did not have an upside down carburetor, I held the electric primer switch to provide fuel to the engine while keeping a watchful eye on the oil pressure. The tow streamed behind the SBD perfectly fine. The only thing different was that the tow plane was flying inverted. Lt Bob Niemeyer made his flying pass, and as he flew by my airplane he announced that the gunnery flight was over and told me to return to Kahului immediately. I suspected that he was mad.

All would not have been lost for this tow pilot, except that in rolling inverted, the ring of the tow line had become bound in the release mechanism such that I had to land with the tow attached to the airplane. We did this rather frequently, and I set up a landing pattern, but I failed to keep enough altitude so that the tow would first touch ground on the runway. The tow contacted the telephone lines, strung along a cane field road at the end of the runway. These parted as the tow bar neatly clipped them while I landed, and the Naval Air Station lost all phone service to the rest of the world. I think I could have weathered Lt Niemeyer's indignant report to the CO, but the CO had lost the use of his telephone, as well. As penance for my act I was given three days' restriction to the BOQ. Stopper Beisner went back to parachute packing after he and I convinced the CO that he had no part in the event other than being an innocent rider, and I did a lot of reading, learned a lesson and on the fourth day rejoined the squadron social structure.

PECK: 12 April 1944 - Kept things going as Duty Officer, and boy were there a lot of headaches. On the 1100 hop Engen took off with tow sleeve and almost collided with Niemeyer in the air. Coming back to the field his ship spun at 1000 feet, turned on its back, and started down. He managed to pull out in time. He couldn't drop sleeve, so had to land with it dragging across the cane fields, roads, and telephone wires on the approach - "this was his day off" - but also his lucky day having lived through it.

Fisher was notified he had become a papa 6 days ago, so I had one drink to help him celebrate.

23 April 1944 - Halfway up the group commander ordered us to return to base. The wind at all levels was never below 40 knots - damned gusty and bumpy! To hell with hanging in close. On the way back I stayed wide and listened to the radio. Just outside the harbor I could stand it no longer - tried to use the relief tube. Here the air was the roughest so it took me ten minutes to do the job.

25 April 1944 - On flight to Kaneohe to pick up more "monsters", Emerson was in my rear seat - amused himself on way over by shooting a Very pistol.

MAY 1944      RECEIVED SB2C-3's

SADLER: Night flying Maui, SB2C: While making touch and goes the generator went out and the electrical system died. On take off after a touchdown, the prop went into over speed. We were headed toward San Diego at about 100 feet altitude at 1:30 AM, wheels and flaps down. Got the wheels up but moving the flaps caused a loss of altitude--likewise with a throttle reduction. Smolinski had the life raft out as it looked like we were going in the drink.

By the time I was able to make a 180° turn and maintain altitude we were 20-30 miles at sea. Awoke the whole station by the time we touched down. McGowan immediately ordered us into another aircraft to finish the night's flying. The previous aircraft required an engine change.

WARNKE: Maui was pretty much boredom for me tho I enjoyed my travels around the island and consuming more than my share of the pineapple crop. My main thought was "How the hell do I get off this rock?" Now, if I had just gotten a real estate agent, . . .! Our new SB2Cs did provide a new toy for us to play with - radar! I wonder how many lead "bombs" we deposited on that big rock off the end of Molokai -- or into adjacent waters.

11-13 JUN 1944      REFRESHER CARRIER LANDING ABOARD USS FRANKLIN

SCOTT: SB2C-3 carrier qualifications aboard the Ben Franklin.

ENGEN: The SB2C-3 was a great improvement over the SB2C-1. It was a delight to fly. In mid June we flew to USS Franklin, which was deploying westward to the war, for carrier qualifications in the SB2C. Each pilot in Air Group Nineteen made four landings. On June 20, 1944 we were alerted that we would be moving out to go to the western Pacific as a 30 airplane squadron instead of our current 36. We would retain our current complement of pilots and air crew. At that time I had eighteen flights and 4 carrier landings in the SB2C-3 but really felt tactically ready.

CRAPSER: When it was Bob Niemeyer's division's time for a 3-day liberty to Hana, our AIC officer, George Lewis, came along. This was in June of 1944 just before we concluded our training at Kahului on Maui. We loaded our weapons carrier with beer cooled by shaved ice made by a machine on the air station and made the trip to Hana singing and slaking our thirsts. More than once there were stops necessitated by the combination of the rough road and the beer. We put up at the 4-room hotel and received our meals at the boarding house. One of the evenings after dinner and a fair number of drinks, it was decided that we should have a moonlight swim at Homoa Beach. I was handed the keys and told to drive, as I was considered the most nearly sober at the time. All climbed in with highballs in hand and off we started. The road to the beach was narrow and of gravel. As I drove down it, I thought I saw a pot hole and tried to avoid it. Suddenly the weapons carrier was stopped and tilted at about a 30° angle to the right. I got out and stood on the road. Bob Niemeyer who was riding behind me asked me to hold his drink, while he climbed out on the uphill (driver's) side. We remarked he never spilled a drop. Some of the others went out the right hand side and rolled down hill among the sugar cane. George Lewis was one, and he wasn't happy about it at all. As we were standing on the road surveying the situation he came crawling up with some sugar cane in his hand, cursing me and thrashing my legs with the cane. Boy, did I dance! That sugar cane was sharp. Later, we found we could not move the weapons carrier until morning, when an Army scout car played the part of a wrecker. The swim was delayed until the next morning. It was a skinny dip, as it was a lonely beach in those days. Today (1983) according to Travel Holiday magazine, that Homoa Beach "has become the private purview of the Hotel Hana Maui" (a very expensive place) and there are cabanas and other amenities there, including Friday luaus. No more swimming in the buff in the daylight. No more driving weapons carriers, either.

## OPS MAUI

What single operational event do you remember best from the squadron training on Maui in 1944?

BOWEN: Talking McGowan out of night flying.

BUTTENWEISER: Our final "simulated attack" on Oahu when all the Dive Bombers and Fighters from Maui - Kahalui & Puunene - were on the attack. VB-19 was led by Banker (as McGowan had bad indigestion) & I flew as Banker's Radioman/Rear Gunner. As I recall it was "wild"!

CHAPMAN: First combat range bombing flight & bombing the rock.

CROCKER: The stupidity of Banker.

EMERSON: The bomb falling off the wing of my aircraft, It was on "safe", but it never was found in the cane field even after they burned the cane at harvest.

EMIG: Carrier Qual on the Franklin.

ENGEN: The hours and hours of towing sleeves.

GLASGOW: My first carrier landing.

GOOD: USS Franklin landings.

GRAY: We got the SB2C. Cockpit checkout just before flight.

GRIFFIN, W: Flying an entire night hop with my wing fold lever in "unlocked" position--how lucky can you get?

GUNTER: Night bombing (radar assisted) on June 6, 1944 when I heard on radio that the European invasion was in progress.

HEILMANN: Most of it was routine, but I suppose it was the practice of coordinated attacks with the 4th Marine Division.

HELM: First nite bombing.

KOCH: Fam flights in SB2C-1.

LEWIS: Flying through the gorge in the west Maui range of mountains while returning from Oahu.

MEEKER: A night flying hop the CO took us on one dark & partly cloudy night. What a hairy hop that was.

NICKENS: Once when my pilot and I were taxiing down for a take off, another one of our planes that was landing touched one wing tip on the runway and made a semi-ground loop, cutting across in front of our plane, just missing it by a few feet.

McBRIDE: Night radar training hop. Radioman almost directed us into a mountain, having missed the target.

NEWMAN: When engine stuck at 3200 RPMs.

ROSS: Towing the tow target, failure to release upon landing, wiping out the main island telephone line.

SADLER: Smolinski putting 30 holes in our tail.

STELLA: Air Group Combined exercises.

WICKLANDER: Carrier Landing practice & Banker landing in sand short of runway at Ewa. (MCAS)

WODELL: Flying thru the crater of Haleakala.

#### OFF DUTY MAUI

What off-duty happening stands out most in your mind from the squadron time on Maui in 1944?

BOWEN: Raiding the refrigerator in the mess hall with Bill Good.

BUTTENWEISER: The night the Shore Patrol found Walters "resting" under a bed in an "off limits" establishment in Puunene. I nearly got into trouble because I went to Shore Patrol headquarters & told Walters he was within his rights in refusing to take a "Bogan" test. He got off, and the Shore Patrol Officer wanted to bring charges against me.

CHAPMAN: My getting chewed out by the CO because I argued with the umpire in a softball game.

CROCKER: Met my wife.

DUNCAN: Cravens and friends shooting incident in BOQ. Train theft (CAG?).

EMERSON: (1) R and R in Hana (steaks and warm beer). (2) Roy Majors having a "little nap" on the pool table in BOQ. (3) Pistol Packin' Senior LTs !

EMIG: Weekend at Rices. Week at Hana.

ENGEN: The visit to Hana with McBride and Stella.

GLASGOW: Napili Beach with the gang and plenty of beer, etc.

GLUMAC: The availability of the weapons carrier for liberty.

GOOD: Trip to Hana.

GRAY: Griffin and I went to Oahu to see Eno Leaf.

GRIFFIN, W: (1) Dating nurses from Army Hospital. (2) Ben selling his personal things on a pool table. (3) My gaining weight to 205 lbs!

GUNTER: Squadron dance at Maui CC toward the end of our stay.

HEILMANN: (1) Playing trumpet with Navalaires at a country club party. (2) The trip to Hana Hotel with McGowan's Division including "Shanghai Lil" and "Moose-milk".

HELM: Party at Cook's.

KOCH: R & R at Hana.

LEAF: Coming over on LEX I got a fever. Was turned in at Base Hospital at Pearl Harbor. Orders were lost and almost didn't get back to Maui.

LEWIS: One of our enlisted men had a wreck with an army man and they threw the book at

him. I was assigned to defend him before the Provost Court on Maui, presided over by an army Major. Since both the code of professional ethics and naval regs provide that a lawyer should defend a client to the best of his ability, I made a motion to dismiss the case a few days after the Federal court had decided the proclamation for martial law on Maui was invalid. The next day, the Maui News and the Honolulu Star Bulletin carried front page stories of the LTJG George Lewis who questioned the authority of General Richardson and Admiral Ballentine. A dispatch followed to our Air Group Commander, the Maui Island Commander (no lesser person such as the squadron commander) and LTJG George T. Lewis to appear the following day. Although I knew my position was legally correct, I was fearful they would transfer me to some God forsaken place like Wake Island.

MEEKER: Bill McBride and I had a party in our room one night. Along towards the end of it, I picked up a dish pan of ice water and threw it in the middle of a crap game going on in the hall just outside our door. I don't think any of the fellows in the game were from our squadron, but I'm not sure about that. One thing for sure, they were mad. Bill stood in the door with a coke bottle and kept them from coming in after me.

NICKENS: Pushing boulders down the slopes of Haleakala in the general direction of some of my buddies who had climbed down inside the crater. All I got were some near misses.

McBRIDE: (1) CAG Jung, drunk and trying to run a small railroad engine used for sugarcane hauling. (2) Being a guest at the Country Club Dance.

NIEMEYER: Visiting John Barleycorn and his family into the small hours of the morning.

NEWMAN: Repairing the busted post that George Lewis defended (?).

ROSS: Attending the LUAU with CDR McGowan and LT Bob Parker.

SADLER: R & R at Hana - First Group.

SCOTT: Roundup and breakfast at the Rice's and R & R at Hana.

STELLA: Trek into Haleakala crater.

THURMON: The CAG stealing a train.

WICKLANDER: Trip to Hana & weekend at Countess Sobritski's.

WODELL: (1) Playing squash at Chew Baldwin's with G. Gliden. (2) Spending weekends with Oski & Betty Rice on their ranch.

## CHAPTER 3

### OFF TO THE WARS

21 JUN 1944      DEPARTED MAUI AND BOARDED USS INTREPID FOR  
TRANSPORTATION TO ENIWETOK

ENGEN: On June 21st, we flew to Ford Island and loaded ourselves, our squadron gear and our airplanes in USS Intrepid for transportation westward. We would be moved to another carrier after we arrived at Eniwetok.

Unknown to me at the time, on June 24th Mary was admitted to the US Army Hospital in Pasadena, because she was about to have our baby. The hospital was in what had been the Vista Arroyo Hotel, and some “smiling” architect had placed the maternity ward in what had been the Bridal Suite. Our son was born on June 27, 1944, one month prematurely. The ironical part of this is that in moving west by ship the ship's clocks are set back one hour each day to keep the daylight hours reasonable. Eventually, at the international date line or the 180 meridian, the ship had to accommodate to this clock change. Moving west this is done by skipping one calendar day. The day that was skipped for USS Intrepid on our trip west was June 27th, the day that our son Travis was born.

STELLA: Crossed International Date Line - Lost this day.

30 JUN 1944      ARRIVED ENIWETOK

SCOTT: 6/30 - Catapulted from the Intrepid, landed on beach at Eniwetok.

ENGEN: On arrival at Eniwetok on June 30, Air Group Nineteen was to replace Air Group Sixteen in Lexington. On July 1, we began the checkers game of moving airplanes around for resupply.

## LIBERTY ENIWETOK

What is your best memory of liberty at Eniwetok? (either time.)

BOWEN: Take off at anchor (cat shot) when a TBF loaded with booze mused into the lagoon.

BUTTENWEISER: The wonderful CB's bakery we "invaded" one night & gorged ourselves on some of the best cinnamon cake, etc, & darn good coffee.

CHAPMAN: Sitting in the sand alongside a quonset hut with Peck & drinking beer.

CROCKER: Green beer.

DUNCAN: Getting drunk at "O" Club.

EMERSON: The crap game in a cement building (head?).

ENGEN: Drinking "Green" beer.

GOOD: Bad beer.

GRIFFIN, W: Ran into old "white hat" shipmates.

LEAF: Guarding planes. Sunburn and rain.

LEWIS: We were issued new light weight plastic helmets. Duncan and Peck took a tub of beer to the coral beach and tested the helmets by breaking the beer bottles over each other's head. The helmets performed superbly, but both of them had to be grounded for three days with sore necks.

McBRIDE: After spending time on beach, Japs captured that night stealing garbage.

MEEKER: I remember going over there and drinking a lot of beer. My memory is a little fuzzy on the trip back.

NICKENS: I saw a sign on a Marine Corps tent that said, "Genuine Japanese war souvenirs made to order."

NIEMEYER: Sand, sand, sand, and the "O" Club.

SADLER: No liberty. "Bounce Drill" and swinging compasses.

SCOTT: Flat and dull. TBF going in at launch with that squadron's booze on board. B-24 crashing into parked aircraft.

STELLA: It was HOT!! Got sunburned.

THURMON: Drinking beer.

WICKLANDER: Cold beer.

WODELL: Not much of a place.

1-10 JUL 1944      MOVED TO USS BUNKER HILL

STELLA: July 1 - Catapulted off Intrepid, landed at Eniwetok. Went aboard Bunker Hill for the night.

7 JUL 1944      REFRESHER CARRIER LANDINGS ABOARD USS BUNKER HILL

ENGEN: The squadron flew to Bunker Hill on July 7 for refresher landings and remained on

board while Bunker Hill returned to Eniwetok lagoon. We lived in Bunker Hill until Lexington came into Eniwetok.

DULONG: July 7, 1944 - Bunker Hill - The squadron was aboard for refresher landing. One of the gunners was not feeling well, and I was told to go out and fill his seat. The planes were aft on the flight deck, ready for the takeoff. The engines were started. There I was, on all fours, crawling across the flight deck in front of turning propellers.

Later I was told that pilots up on the island were laying bets that I wouldn't make it!

Gevelinger pulled me aside the next day and told me I should have crawled behind the props, not in front!

SADLER: I spent 3.8 hours in the air attempting to C.Q. in SB2C off Hawaii. Oil on windshield--no landings. McGowan again took me along, and while the group was at the O Club on Eniwetok, I was doing bounce drill on Engebi. My first C.L. in the SB2C was on the Bunker Hill 7/7/44.

STELLA: July 7 - Flew from Eniwetok to Bunker Hill. Scott went into the drink. Squadron wrecked 3 planes.

SCOTT: On 7 July 44 while making my approach to the Bunker Hill, my engine failed. I had to make a forced landing. Simmerman and I were picked up by the destroyer USS Bancroft (Capt Rice).



## CHAPTER 4

### USS LEXINGTON JULY, AUGUST 1944

#### 9-10 JULY 1944 PERMANENTLY BASED ABOARD USS LEXINGTON

STELLA: Flew off B.H. to Lexington. Swanson wrecked No. 50.

ENGEN: On Sunday, July 9th Lexington got underway, and Air Group Nineteen was catapulted from Bunker Hill at anchor in the lagoon to fly on board Lexington.

Many Ensigns from the three squadrons of Air Group Nineteen lived in the Junior Officers Bunk Room, commonly referred to as "Boys Town". It was togetherness at its best and caused us to spend most of our time in one of the three Ready Rooms on the ship. The Ready Rooms were the only spaces on board Lexington that were air conditioned.

DUNCAN: My most memorable experience in VB-19 started on July 9, 1944, and ended Thursday, November 23, 1944. Those dates signify when we boarded the Lex at Eniwetok and disembarked at Ulithi. In this relatively short time all of us came of age, entered manhood, and for some "it was all she wrote."

Remembering those times I always think of how invincible we felt. Everyone knew there would be casualties, but it was that poor old kid sitting across the aisle in the Ready Room who was "going to buy the crop." I doubt that very few of us asked God to protect us during these times. I know I didn't, because I felt absolutely invincible and very well able to take care of myself. Of course, I had Ernest Elias protecting my tail which saved me over Luzon Tuesday, October 24, 1944. He bagged two planes that morning.

Memories of our whale boat trips to the beach when we were in port at Eniwetok and Mog Mog conjure up many pleasant memories. I celebrated my twenty-fourth birthday at the luxurious and well-appointed "O" Club on Mog Mog.

Memories of sad times also crowd into my consciousness: when the Task Force would turn down wind so it would be deadly quiet for burial at sea ceremonies.

NICKENS: When Air Group Nineteen first went aboard the Lady Lex, the torpedo squadron was short some aircrewmembers, so the bombing squadron agreed to loan them a few men temporarily. I was one of the "favored few", along with Dwight Woolhouse and L.H. Brown. My job in the torpedo plane was to operate the radio gear and man the single 30 millimeter gun under the tail. This was really just a "peashooter". I was on 6 or 8 strikes in the TBM - not the most enjoyable time of my life.

One day when we came back from a strike, the pilot landed as usual, taxied to the forward end of the flight deck on the port side next to the catwalk, parked, opened the bomb-bay doors, and a 500 pound bomb hit the deck with a loud "clunk". There was a number of sailors in the catwalk alongside, and I have never seen such scurrying as they did to get away. But one of them, probably an ordnanceman, ran over and quickly unscrewed the fuse from the errant bomb. They all reacted quickly, but their concern was unnecessary, as the bomb was not armed.

Before making a bombing run, it was the responsibility of the pilot to make sure the bomb-bay doors were open, and it was my responsibility to remind the pilot to arm the bomb. In this particular instance the pilot forgot to open the bomb-bay doors, and we would have brought back a live bomb, with disastrous results, had I not forgotten to remind him to arm the bomb. My mistake canceled out his mistake, or I would not be here today. Surely, there must have been a guardian angel watching over us that day!!! The pilot was invited to come up and discuss the incident with the Skipper, and I expected to be called also, but I never was. I don't know if the pilot was disciplined.

EMERSON: For those of us that witnessed it, who can forget "Swede" Swanson bouncing off the flat side of the same F6F prop, in the same place on the hangar deck, in the dark, two nights in a row! It seems that as we all raced for the Ready Room during GQ, from the forward area where "Swede" had his room and "Boys Town" was situated, as we entered the hangar deck somebody, somewhere opened an outside hatch (The F6F was parked just outside the hatch we were using.) - the lights went out, "Swede" bounced off the prop and landed on the deck - the lights came on - off we all went to the Ready Room. Next night - same action - GQ - people in forward area head for the Ready Room - exit through hatch to hangar deck - lights go out - large

thumping sound -

lights come on - "Swede" is on the deck - we all head for the Ready Room.

Speaking of Ready Room and GQ - Who was it that, as he tried to enter the Ready Room in response to GQ, didn't duck his head enough and bounced back into the passage way, landed on his butt, put a good dent in his skull, and wound up slightly dazed by the mishap - and horizontal in the passage way? Whoever he was, he was the last one to try to get into the Ready Room, and someone closed the hatch to the Ready Room while he was "resting". Nobody missed him until a muster was called, and he turned up missing. Somebody then remembered seeing him just outside the hatch. The Ready Room hatch was then opened, and there he was! My memory keeps telling me it was Tom Bratten. (Editorial comment: "It was not me." Signed: T.O. Bratten)

McBRIDE: (1) Early on one of our strikes, some got shot down and were in a life raft. My group went back with strike unit, and I stayed to fly cover on the downed pilot. When I turned over the cover to others I started back with Dresendorfer and the torpedo group. After a couple of minutes, I asked him to check his heading. I was told to get off the air. I asked him the second time, and he really blew his cork. I told him I was sorry and would see them at the ship. I changed course and after a while spotted the fleet. I radioed that I was in trouble and was told to come straight in. I landed and started to taxi from the wire, my engine died--no gas. The torpedo group came in 20 minutes later. (2) Had the hydraulic system shot out and made a no flap landing.

SADLER: I roomed on the Lex with Bill Good, Arnie Jancar, and Jerry Wilton. It was a large room next to the head. We soon discovered that the water shutoff valves were on our overhead. We had a good time controlling the flow of hot and cold water while someone was in the shower. We got caught when one valve dripped on the deck from overuse.

Jerry Wilton would use anyone's toothpaste when his ran out. Jancar had enough of this and stuffed part of a tube with soft soap. Needless to say, Jerry soon bought his own.

WICKLANDER: The one thing I will always remember is that I didn't find out until our first reunion what a lousy bunch of roommates that I had on the Lex. Fellows who would manipulate the hot and cold water in the shower from valves in the bunk room while one is taking a shower,

then turn the water off after you get all soaped down. It's no wonder I have never cared for showers.

#### 10-14 JUL 1944    PROVISIONING AND REARMING AT ENIWETOK ATOLL

STELLA: July 11 - New Lts- Newman, Thurmon, Wright. Walters to J.G.

SCOTT: 15 July - First operational hop off the Lex. A great hop.

#### 18-21 JUL 1944    FIRST COMBAT MISSIONS - AGAINST GUAM

GRIFFIN, W: We picked up the Lex near Ulithi on our way to the "real war"--no more practice dives or mock attacks, from here on out it was for real! My first combat strike against the Japanese was on 18 July, bombing a large airport on Guam. Needless to say, it was quite a thrill, until I saw one of our fighter pilots in an F6F get blown up into a huge ball of fire off to my left as I pulled out of my dive. The real impact came when I returned to the ship and found out it was "Redbird" Burnette, a handsome Lt. with whom I had played poker the night before. Since it was our first combat mission, the ship's doctor authorized issue of a 2 oz. bottle of whiskey (Old Overholt Rye) to each person who had gone off on a strike. I thought that was great until I belted it down in two gulps and a minute later lost the whole thing! That was the last time I drank any Old Overholt Rye--I offered my future shares to my gunner, Eno Leaf--he refused to drink it also, so I gave them to our Ready Room pantry cook, "Buck", who was delighted. Buck, of course made sure I received special treatment in regard to food preparation thereafter.

After that first baptism of fire, we settled down to our regular routine of hitting the Japanese wherever we could: places like Palau, Iwo Jima, Peleliu, Mindanao, Cebu, Negros, Manila, Okinawa, Formosa, and others.

LOCHER: What a piece of cake my first combat mission started out to be - normal take off, join up, and approach. Half the Pacific Fleet was there. Normal dive and pull out - just like all the training flights. The bomb even exploded.

Then all hell seemed to break out. LT Butts is yelling in the ICS wanting to know if I'm OK. He was really excited, I felt forward and when I reached for my hand mike to answer him, it was lying on the floor boards, smashed beyond use. I had failed to secure it properly during the dive and pull out. There was no way I could communicate with him to find out what was wrong. I ran the message carrier up to him, but he never noticed it. I was pretty shook up about this time, not knowing what was wrong. After about five minutes of being really worried, Butts finally joined up with another SB2C and asked them to check his radioman. Seems that Butts's canopy had blown off during the dive, and he was afraid it had whipped back into the rear seat and hit me. I signaled the other aircraft my mike was bad and that I was OK. Until I heard all the above on the radio, I was probably the most scared first combat mission survivor in VB-19. I thought all kinds of things had happened to that SB2C. I couldn't see or feel anything wrong, but Butts was sure shook up.

They never did find the hatch.

SCOTT: 18 July - My first strike. Bombed Orote Peninsula, Guam. Strike on coastal defense guns. Intelligence reported target achievement.

19 July 1944 - Lt. Stradley (with rearseatman Droske) was shot down today. They were picked up by destroyer and returned aboard on 7/22.

DROSKE: My most memorable flight occurred on July 19, 1944. It was VB-19's fourth attack on Guam on that day. As our plane (SB2C-3 #18862) began the pull out, after dropping the bomb, there was an explosion and pieces flew past my position (rear seat). The next instant someone called on the radio that a plane was going down smoking. I heard nothing from my pilot (Price Roe Stradley, Galena Park, Maryland); however, I did feel him putting the plane in a glide toward the ocean and changed my mind about bailing out. Lt. Stradley and I had flown together for over 250 hours by this time, and I had great confidence in him. We glided into the water and came to an abrupt stop to say the least. The plane started going down - engine first - and I noted that Lt. Stradley was out and then proceeded to remove the rubber raft and my chute and raft but didn't have time for the canteen. Lt. Stradley was yelling at me to get away from the plane. I inflated the raft, pulled the strings on my Mae West and pushed away from the elevator as the plane sank out from under me. The water was warm and waves were small, so Lt. Stradley got in the raft and helped me in also. We were safe and alive but a little bloody with

minor head injuries. Having heard the radio we knew help was on the way. It was only a short time and a boat from the USS Guest picked us up. The next day we were taken to the USS Colorado. The Colorado then proceeded to shell Guam. Then on the 22nd of July we were taken to Isley Field Saipan. I had lunch with the Marines who loaned me a mess kit. Later that day a TBM-1C 45836 picked us up and returned us to the Lexington. The TBM was piloted by Gregg, radioman Haas and as passengers Lt. Stradley and myself. Our next flight was on July 31 for anti sub patrol.

SCOTT: 20 July - Gevelinger (with crewman Nitchman) was lost today. He went over the port side on take off. He was a good man.

DULONG: July 20, 1944 - Aboard the Lexington - When Gevelinger and Nitchman went into the sea on takeoff, I was watching from the portside catwalk. I was able to see the plane from about 50 ft. away, as the ship passed close by as the plane was sinking.

The pilot was slumped forward in the cockpit. Nitchman, in the rear, was struggling to get out. He appeared to have a large aerial camera on his lap and was trying to disentangle himself when the plane went down. We lost two good men.

In our tour of duty at that time, we flew with full equipment - skivvies, flight suit, high shoes, flight jacket, gun in holster with ammo, knife, Mae West, parachute harness and tools in pocket.

I immediately wrote home and asked them to send me a pair of Indian-type moccasins. From that time on, I flew with minimum clothing!

LEAF: July 20, 1944 - Raided Guam, in the dive we were on our back for a while, and one canister of ammo started to play out. Before I could stop it, the ammo caught in the slipstream and I lost all 1,500 rounds. Always hoped it landed on some Jap. After that Ordnance put stops on each ammo can to prevent that from happening.

25-27 JUL 1944      STRIKES ON PALAU GROUP

ENGEN: It was at Palau that I noticed that Admiral Mitscher was always on the inboard side of his open Flag Bridge while we were launching or recovering. He had obviously done this before for a long time, but it was my first realization that he was always there. He sat in a pedestal chair always facing aft and observing, as we took off or landed. His expression and position never changed. He was always just there.

SCHOENER: I still get pleasure out of remembering seeing, many times, the great Admiral Mitscher in his familiar place up there on the flag bridge ----looking aft.

REISCHMAN: I remember the day (26 July) our bomb in the bomb bay of the SB2C would not release, and we had to land on the carrier with it still up in its rack. We blew out both tires when we landed, but that bomb still stayed hung up, thank God.

Also I remember one landing we made in heavy seas and one arresting wire was missing and I didn't know that. Our tail hook was down, and as we landed, the carrier rolled starboard. With that split second delay when we didn't catch the cable that should have been there, my heart was in my mouth. That starboard roll almost let our right wheel go over the side. We were about one foot from going down into a gun turret. Walt Walters was a very good pilot, and I understood his every move while flying with him.

SCOTT: 26 July - Bad accident aboard. A TBM floated over the barrier and destroyed 8 of our SB2C's.

SADLER: We had four of us in our room aboard the Lex: Bill Good, Arnie Jancar, Jerry Wilton and myself. Our room was on the port side in the bow at the water line. Jancar's and Good's bunks were welded to the angled hull. During the typhoon off Saipan the bow would rise to its peak, shake violently then come down and smack the water. This occurred on a very regular frequency. Jancar finally put his mattress on the deck but with the roll of the ship he would roll off onto the deck. He spent the night God damning Roosevelt and Churchill for his discomfort--no mention of Stalin or Hirohito. He almost sounded like George Bowen.

4-5 AUG 1944      STRIKES ON BONINS - KAZANS - IWO JIMA

SCOTT: 4 August - Bill Emerson was shot down and picked up by a standby submarine. Roy Majors and his gunner Albini were lost to enemy gun fire. Two VF (Red Bird Burnette and Bob Wakefield) were shot down and lost.

EMERSON: 4 August 1944 - At 0845 I was awakened gently but firmly out of my "sack", and was told that I was going on the first strike. This was a change from the planning of the day before, as I was not to take off until the second strike, which was at about 1400. After a quick briefing and a damn small breakfast (coffee and one piece of toast), we manned our planes. Proceeding to kill some more time sitting in the cockpit, we finally took off at 1000. Getting on course and starting to climb steadily, we were off in a cloud of mouse milk. The weather wasn't exactly CAVU, but it could have been worse. After about an hour and twenty minutes, the target came into view. It was a very innocent looking little island "somewhere west of Hawaii."

We started in to attack. The ack-ack wasn't too bad to start with, but as we got closer, it got thicker, and I mean thick! It was a hell of a time to be thinking of a song, but that verse of "I Want To Go Home" that goes:

"Time says that ack-ack's a beautiful sight,  
Life paints a picture of tracers at night,  
But this stuff we see here is real,  
Up close it loses appeal" -

kept running through my mind. Well, about the time I got to that line, it was pushover point. Banker broke off to the left, and I thought he was diving on the field, but right about then he turned right. Damned if I know what he was after. I saw what looked like a "Betty" below me on the edge of the runway, so I aimed my bomb at it.

Right about then things started happening pretty fast. At about 6500 feet, a nice big black puff of smoke appeared right in front of me. I don't know whether it was 40 mm or bigger, but I didn't feel anything hit the plane. I released at about 2500 feet and started to get the hell out of the local area, which about that time was getting rather crowded, especially with those nice black puffs.

All this time Harvey, who is my rear seat man and is the best as far as I'm concerned, was getting a rear view of this whole action. From his comments later, it was interesting, to say the least - especially because we could hear that stuff go off.

Quickly I started hunting for Banker. He was right off my starboard wing about 2 miles, so I started toward him to join up. Just about then Harvey said he was going to take some pictures of the damage we had done. (I think I hit something that burned, because there was quite a column of smoke when I glanced back.)

Harvey had no sooner mentioned the camera than all hell broke loose in the engine. Smoke started pouring from under the cowl, and the engine started running very rough. I eased the throttle back to 30 inches and cut the RPMs down to 2100. Up to then I had been carrying about "40 to 45" and 2400 RPMs after coming out of my dive. My cylinder head temperature had jumped to 290 degrees. About this time I noticed my windshield was well covered with oil, and my oil pressure had dropped to about 15 to 20 lbs. It suddenly dawned on me that we had been hit, and that our chances of ending up in the briny deep were damn good. Just as I was telling Harvey to prepare for a water landing and to get the raft out, I saw one of our SB2Cs go in. When I saw him he was at about 1000 feet and going straight down. There was nothing but a big splash and explosion. Nothing else. (When I returned to Pearl Harbor I found out that it was Majors and Albini that I had seen.)

By this time we were still losing power and altitude. At about 300 feet, she began to hold her own at 110 knots. This was when I found time enough to call Banker and tell him what was the matter. He said for me to join up on him, and me barely making 110 knots! I also noticed that two fighters were covering me by this time - mighty nice of them. I had had hopes she would keep flying, but just as I came into what I thought was the wind, she started to freeze up for good, so down we went. While all this was going on, I had managed to get out of my parachute harness and tighten my shoulder straps good. There was quite a splash when we hit, but not too much of a bump. I had also managed to get my flaps down.

By the time I got out, Harvey had the raft out and was starting to inflate it - a damn good job on his part. Harvey was yelling at me to get in the raft by then, but I was trying to get the small raft in the front seat out. I finally gave that up as a bad job and dove off the trailing edge of the port

wing. By this time the raft had drifted 30 or 40 feet from the plane, and was moving fast. I reached it easily by swimming, but was rather worn out. That gear we wear weighs plenty - too much in fact.

With Harvey's help I got my gear off and into the raft, and managed to drag myself in, too. Along about then both of us were pretty well worn out, and the nervous reaction was beginning to take effect on us. This consisted mostly of what is commonly known as the "dry heaves".

We put a dye marker in the water immediately and waved at the planes circling us to let them know we were OK. We then settled down to the routine of bailing water out of the raft and getting sick. This routine went on until we were picked up at about 1445. We had been in the water about three hours then. Harvey and I both must have dozed off, as the time seemed to pass very quickly. Our chances of getting picked up were almost 100%, so I guess we didn't worry too much, or maybe we were too tired to give a damn.

Our first sign that we were about to be picked up came when some fighters started buzzing us. They dropped a couple of smoke lights to mark us, and we threw dye marker around like mad, me getting most of it on myself. The sub finally came into view, and what a beautiful sight it was! Harvey and I almost fell overboard trying to wave at it. After a little trouble we got aboard OK, and what a comfortable feeling that is!

So help me, these sub boys are the tops. Nothing is too good for you when you come aboard under our circumstances. We got a hot shower, clean dry clothes, cigarettes, coffee, hot soup, etc. All we had to do was name it, and we could have it. After being introduced all around and trying to put something in my stomach (which wouldn't stay), I hit the sack. Harvey did the same aft in the men's quarters. When I woke up it was time for chow, so I tried it again, and it stayed down this time. By the way, their food is the tops. After having a little more bull session, the topics being planes and subs, I hit the sack for good that night, winding up what I would call a "rather full day".

5 August 1944 - I wandered around the ship wondering what all the gadgets were. I got the word on the general run of the ship from one of the officers who took me on a sightseeing tour. We had to make several dives that day and night, just because some "fly-fly boy" (the sub boys' pet name for us) forgot his "trigger". We were still playing lifeguard and went hunting for one of

our planes that was forced down - no luck, though.

The chow on these boats amazed me more every time we ate. I was up on the bridge for a few minutes and later had my first look through a periscope. We had to make a couple of fast dives that night - bogies, I guess. I hit the sack about 10 PM to wind up my first full day aboard one of Uncle Sam's subs on patrol.

6 August 1944 - I woke up about 0700, just in time to have breakfast with the Skipper, who, by the way, is one hell of a swell guy. After that I went up in the conning tower to see what was going on. They let me take the helm for about a half hour, but that's enough said about that, because the wake, after I got through, looked like the trail of a snake with a broken back. I then had a long look through the periscope at "my island". For some reason, it still looked rather innocent. My thoughts about its innocence had another rough jolt when right in the middle of lunch a couple of Hamps or Zeros slipped up close on us before we saw them. Our lookouts saw them in time, however, for us to get pretty well below the surface with a fast dive before they could drop their depth charges. They dropped them just the same, though. Three of them went off - WHAM! (pause) WHAM! WHAM! It happened so fast it was over before I realized what had happened. There was no damage, however, and it didn't seem to impress anybody very much. I don't mean that these guys like to get dropped on, but I guess one can get accustomed to most anything. Not five minutes after this happened, somebody suggested a poker game, so I joined all the officers who were not on duty and got wound up in the pasteboards. I proceeded, as per my usual game, to lose \$6.50. This broke up before chow, so this gave me time to wash up and shave (?) I shaved for my first beard that day. It was only a few days gone, but it promised to look pretty sharp in about a month.

Back to this subject of chow - that word "chow" is a masterpiece of understatement. It's like eating at your favorite restaurant every meal.

That night we had roast chicken, mashed potatoes, carrots and peas, gravy, olives, coffee, and, last but not least, the best ice cream I'd had since I left the states. Pineapple was the flavor, and was it good! After dinner we went to "darken ship". That means that all white lights are turned out and there is nothing but red ones on. This is done so they won't be blind when they go up on the bridge for their watch.

I've noticed a few little things. First, the uniform - it's great - shorts and a "T" shirt. That's it for everybody, from the Skipper to the lowest rated man in the crew. Second, sleeping - there doesn't seem to be any regular hours for it. Everybody seems to sleep when there isn't anything else to do or when they are not on watch.

7 August 1944 - I woke up about 0700 to start a very quiet day. It was getting so that I woke up automatically at this time every morning, just in time for breakfast. I sort of had to get up, though, because my sack was just about one-half of all the seats in the wardroom. After breakfast the Skipper and I played a game of Gin Rummy. I managed to win from him, too. I had a very close look at one of the Japs' "unsinkable" aircraft carriers through the periscope. If there had been any Jap wahinies on the beach we would have been able to see them. We sure as hell were close enough. This was the first day since I had been aboard that they hadn't been looking for some more "zooms" like me to fish aboard. We were strictly on the hunt that day. After noon chow (which was good as usual), I hit the sack for a couple of hours since there was nothing much else to do. We submerged about 0230, and at about 1900 we surfaced. At 2230 I was up on the bridge. I noted: "There is almost a full moon and the sky is as clear as a bell. Our course right this minute is right up the moon path. There's a slight breeze which makes it just about perfect. (Perfect is right, just about right for one of those little bastards to slip up on us.) I think the general opinion is that it's a hell of a night to fight a war. It's about time I hit the hay for a little shuteye."

8 August 1944 - One of the Japs' fly-boys pulled a very dirty and unethical trick. It was strictly not according to Hoyle. The Japs, being very cagey and observing, noticed that when one of our flyers is floating in his little rubber boat in this big ocean at night, he proceeds to let anybody know where he is by shooting a certain color flare. Well, the slant-eyes figured this was a good chance to get a shot at one of our subs or anybody who came around hoping he can do his good deed for the day by dragging some poor devil out of the drink. So they dropped a few flares from a plane every now and then and then moved off a little way and waited developments. This is just what happened. Naturally, when our lookouts spotted the flare, we started towards it, knowing full well it could be a trick, but that didn't seem to bother these sub-boys. I guess they figured there just as well could be somebody out there, and they were going to find out if there was - and if not, who in hell was yelling "wolf"? Well, a Jap plane jumped us, but we dove away from him with no trouble, except that the diving horn woke me up. "Tsk, tsk - no manners, these Japs". The Skipper also has his own name for them. To quote, "(censored)", unquote!

NOTE: The above was written aboard the USS Shark. After spending a month aboard, plus a wonderful two weeks leave with the crew of the U.S.S. Shark at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, arranged by the Skipper, I never saw them again. The U.S.S. Shark II (SS-314) was reported overdue and presumed lost with all hands as of 24 October 1944.

ENGEN: We had all seen Bill and his gunner go into the water with a great crash, and none of us saw the submarine or the rescue. We returned to the ship sadly thinking that we had lost two airplanes and our close friends (Majors and Emerson). None of us had much in the way of belongings beyond a few needed uniforms, and so we parcelled out the uniforms and other belongings of those that we had lost to others in the squadron that the clothes would fit. The very personal belongings were inventoried to be sent home. We did this in both the cases of Roy Majors and Bill Emerson. Imagine our chagrin and happiness when we learned several days later when the submarine could transmit a message that Bill Emerson and his gunner had been picked up. We Junior Officers had to run around and reassemble all his clothes and shaving equipment before he came back. Emerson and Harvey were returned to Lexington in early October at Ulithi. The US Submarines did a wonderful thing for pilot's morale in WWII. The saga of these type rescues would fill a separate book.

REISCHMAN: I have a story to tell about a very brave man that I now believe to have been a true disciple of God.

This story starts on August 4, 1944. We were on a strike to Iwo Jima. I flew with Walt Walters, and that day we were tail end Charlie, last to dive. We had to wait our turn to dive, of course, and when it was time to go, we were starting to go past our target which was some shipping in the bay. Walt made a high bank to the right and it was at that point that I was hit by antiaircraft fire. I was hit in my head (right side), right shoulder, and my right leg, thigh, and foot. My right shoe was nearly taken off.

When we pulled out I told Walt I was hit, and I didn't feel too bad. My face was burned, but as we started down the flames were pulled away from me. This occurred at 2:10 PM, and we arrived back at the carrier at 4:00.

This action kept me in sick bay for 89 days to remove what metal they could and get a skin graft

to cover the badly burned areas. I still have 6 pieces of metal in my right leg yet. Going through the security gates at the airport is still a problem - I almost have to undress in order to get through without ringing the bell.

While in sick bay, our Protestant Chaplain, Rev. Robinson, came to visit me every day. I am Catholic. In the evening when we had General Quarters, he, one of the hospital corpsman, and a Mr. Wells who had a battle station down there, would come in and play cards with me. What a welcome time that was for me after lying in bed all day because I was unable to get up and walk around.

Then one night, possibly in late October, we were under heavy Japanese attack and there were many near misses near the Lex and all of us just knew one of those bombs would get us. All of a sudden, the sick bay door came open, and in came Rev. Robinson. He came straight to my bed and gave me his waterproof flashlight, saying "Here, you may need this." I said, "But what will you use?" He answered, "Don't worry about me. I'll be OK", and with that he left. Well, we didn't get hit, and fortunately for me, I didn't have to use it.

Rev. Robinson gave to me his only flashlight that could have been his only salvation if he ended up in the water. I now know that this man was willing to lay down his life for mine. To me, he was a true disciple of God.

This man died in 1981, and I surely feel that God has welcomed him home. In the Bible, John 15:13 says the greatest love is shown when a person lays down his life for his friends. I will never forget this man.

SCOTT: 5 August - Cavanaugh and his gunner Blazeovich were lost to AA. Don Helm and Smitty were shot down. Both were able to land their aircraft in the water and were picked up by our submarine.

ENGEN: Ens Cavanaugh's SB2C-3 was hit and either he or ARM1C Michael Blazeovich was seen to bail out. There was only one chute. As the chute came down in the harbor of Chichi Jima, every Japanese gun seemed to concentrate its fire on the chute and the person in it until the chute collapsed from AA fire damage, and the person fell into the water. Whoever it was was dead long before he hit the water. No one was ever recovered.

Lt Don Helm's SB2C was also shot down at Chichi Jima. He crashed into the water near a US submarine that was patrolling to pick up pilots and crewmen shot down. Lt Helm was rescued to be returned to Lexington later in Eniwetok, but unfortunately ARM2C Russell Snow was injured in the crash and died before he could be rescued.

That same afternoon LT(jg) Robert Smith's airplane was so damaged by AA fire that he was forced to make a water landing alongside a destroyer after returning to the Task group. He and his rearseat man were returned to Lexington by Bos'ns chair the next day. In accordance with the accepted procedure, ten gallons of ice cream was sent back to the destroyer in exchange for the rescued crew.

DROSKE: I am sure you all remember Chichi Jima (8/5/44). We came out of there with wrinkles in the wings.

ROSS: One of the most interesting days of my life in combat was when Bob Parker and I drew 4 flights over Chi Chi Jima. That was the hottest anti-aircraft that I had ever encountered. On the last flight, as we winged over to go into the dive, we had already armed the bomb and kicked the bombing door open, the Japs hit us with a shell which jammed the bombay door. After we completed the dive, I told Bob I didn't see the bomb drop, so we asked Duncan to fly under us, and he confirmed that we still had the bomb in the bombay. It was then that we realized we were sitting on a live bomb and no alternative but to fly back to the carrier. Seas were extremely rough, and we begged them to let us land on the carrier. Finally after all planes had landed, they cleared the planes to the hangar deck, then they gave us permission to land very carefully. After landing we pulled guns, radio, radar, etc. from the plane. The carrier was put at full speed ahead and the plane was shoved backward off the tail of the ship where it exploded in the water immediately.

10-29 AUG 1944 REARM - PROVISION - ENIWETOK

SCHOENER: Remembrances:

Although I was not a member of the original group which trained so long and hard before going

aboard the Lexington, I have always been proud of being a member of VB-19. I was a rear-seat radio-gunner who joined the group at the end of August 1944. The memories which are strongest after these many years:

Fresh out of aerial gunnery school at Kaneohe Bay, with some bombing squadron training at Barbers Point, and then aboard the U.S.S. Nassau, a light carrier, for transport to the fleet, "somewhere in the Pacific". Then waking up one morning and going up on Nassau's flight-deck to find that we were steaming along in the midst of the great Task Force 38, with ships surrounding us as far as my eyes could see. This was a thrill I never forgot.

Riding in a bosun's chair from a destroyer's deck up to the Lexington's fantail and being welcomed aboard as a member of Bombing 19; acceptance by, and being made comfortable by the veteran rear-seat gunners, a couple of whom I still correspond with.

And the laughs and stares I received from the ship's company as I went through the chow line with my hair still showing the remnants of my Shellback initiation "haircut", an initiation aboard the Nassau which left a certain part of my anatomy black and blue for several weeks.

My first strike against shipping in Cebu Harbor in the Philippines with Mr. Jancar. (I was a spare gunner and flew when a rear seat was empty.)

Seeing the upraised middle finger of some of the not-too-friendly ship's company as I went by them on takeoff, and the half-inch deep grooves in my wrists made by the gunners armorplate as I overzealously braced myself, head-down on my first experience in being catapulted from the flightdeck for an ASP flight; wondering what it was going to be like. I had received lots of advice - "Put your head down, and put your arms around the gunners ring and armor plate, and hold on tight 'til you're in the air."

Wondering how in the world those twin .30 cal. gun barrels could get so rusty, so fast - just overnight, it seemed.

Sleeping in the Ready Room seats because it was so hot below decks; sometimes taking a mattress onto the flight deck to sleep until one of the ever-present rain squalls drove us inside; Dr. Fox's "medicine"; a special "party" treat given the gunners by the pilots one day.

These are some of the things that stick out in my mind.

## CHAPTER 5

### USS LEXINGTON SEPTEMBER 1944

STELLA: Good made water landing on the 3rd.

STANKEVICH: It was about the first week of September 1944, and Bill Good and I had taken off the Lex on a training hop. We were in or joining up with the formation when Bill or I first noticed a miss in the motor. It kept getting worse, and we were going to make a decision to jump or ditch. I asked Bill what he was planning, and he replied "ditch". I replied that I was with him and anything he wanted to do was o.k. by me.

I got prepared for setting the plane down in the water. What came next was a big surprise. The plane hit the water and the sun went out. That is the only way I can describe it. I knew we were on the way to the ocean floor. But just as suddenly it was over.

The sun came out again, and the plane was afloat in the ocean. I pulled the raft off its rack and climbed out on the wing with the raft. I got hold of the line attached to the raft and inflated it. By that time Bill Good (in case you forgot) was on the wing with me. I asked that he get in the raft but he motioned me aboard, and I was holding the raft line. Of course when I stepped into the raft, still holding the line, the inflated thing took off. There was nothing for Bill to do but dive in and swim to the raft. He climbed into the raft, and he and I frantically, with our hands, tried to row as far away as we could from the sinking plane. It must have taken 3 to 5 minutes for her to go down.

About 15 minutes later we were picked up by the destroyer Ingersoll, fondly referred to as "The Dollar Watch". They gave us dry clothes for what we were wearing and received 10 gallons of ice cream when they turned us over to the carrier. I don't know if it was 10 gallons per person-- at any rate it was a cheap price for a couple of trained fighting men.

NICKENS: Upon landing one day on the Lex, the plane in which L.H. Brown was the crewman - I don't recall who the pilot was - instead of going straight forward, veered off at an angle to the port side of the ship. At the last second, thinking the plane was going over the side,

L.H. bailed out, and landed on the teakwood deck on his head. Actually the plane came to rest with one wheel in a 40 mm gun mount. L.H. was out cold, and they hauled him off to sick bay. A few hours later, several of us went down to check on him. He had regained consciousness and was in a jovial mood. He asked "What happened?", and when somebody told him that he dived out of the plane and landed on his head, he said, "that was a hell of a thing to do, wasn't it?", and laughed and laughed. About two minutes later he asked the same question, and gave the same response. This was repeated a number of times, and we figured that he was playing it cozy, that he wanted to go home and was angling for a M.D. However, a couple of days later he was back to normal - or whatever was normal for him.

#### 6-8 SEP 1944      STRIKES ON PELELIU ISLAND

DULONG: September 8, 1944 - Over Peleliu Island - On one bombing mission with my pilot, Adlman, we were directed to hit targets of opportunity, since all the good stuff had been wiped out.

The pickings were poor, so Adlman dove on what appeared to be a large amount of lumber or timber on a large stone pier. That bomb hit resulted in a tremendous explosion. The target he picked was an ammo dump.

ENGEN: Lt W.H. Cravens, Jr was shot down, and he and his crewman, ARM3c Ira Gray were rescued by the submarine USS Grouper off the Island of Peleliu to be returned a month later.

GRAY: In August 1943 I had a regular pilot named Delliquadri, flying the SBD-5. In February 1944, he got sick and was left behind as we shipped out to Maui, T.H. January through July 8 flew with different pilots. July 9, 1944, started flying with Mr. William H. Cravens. I liked that very much as he was a very good pilot and a very good man. I flew with him until the squadron broke up in December 1944.

On September 8, 1944, flying our SB2C-3 loaded with bombs, we left the great ship USS Lexington. We led our group of planes over the island of Peleliu. We made our dive, and the bomb did not release. We made our rendezvous with the other planes, and someone said our bombs did not release, so we went back over the island and dropped the bombs. The bombs did

release, but the anti-aircraft fire hit our starboard wing and caught it on fire. Mr. Cravens decided to make a water landing as the submarine Grouper was there to pick up anyone who got wet. Thought he was going to land on the sub! I threw out the life raft, got on the wing, and Mr. Cravens was tangled up in the antenna wire, but we got in the water as the plane went down. I passed out, and Mr. Cravens saved my life. We got aboard the Grouper, and it was reported back to the ship that I was dead. Not so, thank God for my life. I was OK in 24 hours.

After the submarine picked up 15 or 20 people, it still carried out its mission. I know it was pretty crowded, as I slept in the night cook's bunk. As we were going through the Formosa Strait, very close to Japan, an airplane spotted us, and ships were over us real soon dropping depth charges. The sub went down as far as it could go, as the water was not real deep. It was a scary situation for several hours. At times everything shook in the sub. They finally gave up, and we continued into the China Sea.

We arrived at Saipan October 8, 1944. That was one month aboard the sub. We flew back to Pearl Harbor and spent some time there waiting our orders - then back to Guam and to Ulithi. We joined all the good guys October 30, 1944.

#### 9-10 SEP 1944      STRIKES ON MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

NICKENS: On one strike in the Philippines, the engine of our plane did not develop full power on the takeoff. Immediately on clearing the flight deck, the plane dipped down near the water, with the engine running very roughly. We were low enough that I felt as if I could reach down and touch the tops of the waves. This went on for a while, but my pilot, John Kantjas, finally was able to gain enough altitude to join our group. All the time we were over Mindanao, the engine continued to run very badly. The plane should never have been allowed to fly in that condition. Mindanao appeared to be one big jungle, and there would have been no place to land, if it had become necessary to land. If we bailed out, we would probably land in unfriendly territory. Finally, we finished our attack and headed home to the ship. Upon reaching the ocean, I breathed a sigh of relief because I knew that if we had to land in the water, there was a good chance that we would be picked up by one of our own subs or destroyers. But we did not have to face that situation as we soon landed safely on the Lex. I was never so happy to be "home".

#### 12-14 SEP 1944      STRIKES ON VISAYANS - CEBU - MACTAN

SCOTT: 12 September - The fighters shot down 16 planes today and Parker of VB shot down 1.

ROSS: On a flight over Peleliu, Bob Parker and I were in a dive when a Jap plane came up behind us in the sun and strafed across our port wing. Bob asked, "Where are those bullets coming from?", because neither of us could see as we were looking back into the sun. About that time the Jap plane came underneath us and as he pulled up, Bob shot down his first Jap plane. As we swung south after our dive, we went around the island, and as Bob and I had the camera that day, he requested I aim over the side and take pictures of the shoreline, although it looked like nothing but trees.

After returning to the ship, about an hour later they called me to the photo lab, where they had blown up the shoreline pictures, and it disclosed 3 Jap cruisers lined up and all camouflaged like trees. Shortly after, needless to say, the squadron was called to go on another raid to bomb those cruisers right out of the water.

ENGEN: Lt R.B. Parker, flying his SB2C, engaged a Zero and shot it down. He became our instant hero and provided much material with which to rib our sister fighter squadron.

NEWMAN: Fun times didn't stay with me like tragedy. I must admit, however, that putting on the "Zeke Parker Show" with George Bowen was enjoyable. It kept us loose to say the least.

LEWIS: I remember interrupting my ACI briefings for the Zeke Parker broadcasts, which were a daily occurrence until we lost Zeke. I cannot remember the details, but think I remember he got his Zero when he opened his flaps and the Zero overran him.

LEAF: Sept. 13, 1944 - That morning before dawn, while we were waiting to turn-up was one of the most frightening moments to remember. The loud speaker said that a Bogie was in our formation, and the next thing I saw him bearing down on us. Don't know how he missed us with that bomb. Had trouble getting it out of my mind for several nights.

GRIFFIN, W: Talk About a "Hairy" Few Moments!!

Somewhere off Luzon, P.I. just before dawn, Leaf and I were sitting in our plane on the extreme portside of the flight deck along with all of the other aircraft assigned to the first strike. We all had full loads of ammo, bombs, and fuel. It was pitch black except for the bow wake streaming under my port wing. Over the bullhorn came the command to "START ENGINES". We fired up our engines and within a minute or two we received the command to "STOP ALL ENGINES". After the last engine was stopped there was no further explanation why, only an eerie silence with the soft swish of the wake. No one moved, and after a few more moments I could hear the low distant sound of an aircraft engine coming from my left side. I knew instantly why we had shut down all engines - there was an enemy aircraft approaching our task force - low and fast!! He was bearing down directly on the Lex, and as he got closer I could tell it was an in-line engine, humming like a P-51. We sat there in our cockpits, motionless, hoping he would not see us. As the noise got louder and louder I knew - he was heading right at me - and when I was sure he was going to crash into the port side of the ship and even maybe right into our whole deckload of aircraft, sitting like dead ducks on the flight deck ready to go up into a ball of flame, he zoomed up into a steep climb almost directly over my aircraft - so close, in fact, that I saw the flames coming out of his exhaust stack and the red "meatball" under his right wing!! He must have seen the white bow wake and knew he was going to crash into a large ship so he pulled up and at the same time released his single bomb which was tossed over our ship and landed on the starboard side in the water as it exploded. They don't come any closer than that!! He, of course, got away in the darkness and his bomb did no damage to any ships in the formation.

An aftermath of the incident a few moments later as we prepared to start engines again and get ready for our assigned strike - was that the CVL USS Princeton on our starboard quarter launched their aircraft. In the dim morning light of sunrise, and as the first aircraft took off, our 20mm gunners on the starboard side aft opened fire on them. Fortunately the Princeton was out of range for the 20mm guns, and the shells fell harmlessly into water until we could get the gunners to cease fire. The incident of the attack on our ship made those boys real "trigger happy". We found out later they were mostly cooks and stewards and they were going to fire at anything that moved!! This was awhile before we had the Kamikaze attack on 5 Nov and had not even heard of such a thing as a Kamikaze attack. Thank the good Lord that particular pilot was not a KAMIKAZE CORPS member!!

THORNGREN: When I've swapped sea stories in the past, I've generally started with . . . "We got shot down during the second battle of the Philippine Sea" . . . or . . . "We lost our right wing

this far from the fuselage in Fallon, Nevada," and so on, but I think that someone upstairs was really watching over us, and the Lexington, the morning that the Bogie delayed our strike.

We were scheduled for a dawn takeoff, and the engines were warming up when the bridge announced "We have a Bogie on the screen at 100 (?) miles." This was followed by periodic reports as the Bogie closed; when it was about 50 miles out, two night fighters were scrambled from one of the escort carriers, and, as an additional precaution, all planes were told to cut their engines.

Further reports, the Bogie was at 40 miles, 30 miles, and then the Bogie has disappeared from the screen. Off to port I spotted a plane low on the water headed for the Lex (biggest target out there). When he was about 100 feet away he dropped his bomb, a nice piece of work, and it would have rattled a few dishes in the galleys if the bomb had exploded, but it didn't, Dud?

Well, a bomb that didn't go off shouldn't have been all that exciting, but the "what if" is. What if the pilot had not made a good drop and the bomb, dud or not, had landed on the flightdeck amongst all the fully fueled and armed planes? Because, as I remember it, he passed directly over us. It would have been bye-bye to quite a few intrepid bombers. Although the gunners on the Lex starboard cut loose with a barrage of good ammunition, as did some of the other ships, when last seen the Bogie was heading home. I wonder if anyone in his squadron believed how close he came to putting the Lex out of commission. Anyway, whenever I hear the word "bogie", and that's not very often since I gave up golf, I remember the one who got away.

ENGEN: It was on a strike to attack Japanese facilities on the Island of Panay on September 14 that I added full power during the pullout to increase my airspeed and became aware that those that had dived behind me were passing me at a great clip. My airspeed was decaying rapidly, and the group was going off and leaving me. I advised Lt Banker, and he assigned one of his wingmen, Ens Bill Good, to come back to stay with me, and by the time that we had sorted this out I found that the maximum airspeed that I could maintain was 95 knots, and I could just barely maintain 400 feet altitude. Good and I were left to navigate through and around, not over, the central Philippine Islands much like Magellan did hundreds of years ago. We kept vigilant watch, expecting some Zeros to come out to get the easy target, but none showed. It was the propeller governor that had failed. Suffice it to say, Bill Good and I made it back to the ship for me to face another problem. I could not stay in the air when I put both flaps and landing gear

down. My gunner, Ted Stevenson, and I talked the situation over. Since his life hung in the same balance I wanted to give him his vote in what we would do. He threw his lot with me and I then convinced the LSO on VHF radio with great brevity that I could get the airplane on board if he would "wave me" with my landing gear down and flaps up. Which he did.

SCOTT: 14 September - Our strike hit Tabrica on Negros Island. We bombed the air field, then came back with a low level strafing run. On the pull out from the strafing run we spotted a Jap ship in the middle of the channel. Five of us sank it with our 20mm guns. Got hell from the Skipper for not expediting the rendezvous. How was I to know that he was going to pull out over the cloud cover when the target was below it. It was really a lecture to me on self survival. The real problem was that the rest of the group joined up on me rather than the Skipper.

18 September - The Zeke Parker hour gets bigger every night. We are now having Parkies for breakfast each morning.

LEWIS: During the initial assaults on the central Philippines when we were bombing Cagayan, McGowan took the bomber flight in and pretty well gutted the shipping and harbor facilities, and another squadron picked out the two most beautiful buildings in the little city, bombed them and brought back some beautiful pictures where they had leveled them almost to the ground. Admiral Halsey and Admiral Mitscher were beside themselves because the buildings turned out to be the Bishop's Palace and the Roman Catholic Cathedral on a predominately Catholic island where we had been trying to build goodwill for years. A few days later, the intelligence came through that Japs had taken them and stocked them with ammunition which helped account for the tremendously effective bombing job.

WICKLANDER: Another incident I remember is when we bombed Cebu City in the Philippines. I had a plane that the wing had been changed on the night before. The left wing was heavy and I corrected with the tab until I didn't have any left. After pushing over in my dive I ended up in a spin, pulled out and tried it again, only to end up in another spin, then dropped my bomb in a glide. After pulling out it dawned on me that the cables had been crossed and the tab was working opposite. I mentioned it to Tom when I got back and he said yes, they got the cables on the wing tab crossed and I guess someone forgot to put it on the yellow sheet.

PECK: 19 September 1944 - GQ 0455 - All afternoon was devoted to transcribing another

"Zeke Parker" program.

21-22 SEP 1944     STRIKES ON LUZON - MANILA

LEAF: Sept. 22, 1944 - First strikes on Manila area we dove on an airfield, and they were waiting for us. After pulling out of dive, our plane caught several bursts. Saw the hydraulic fluid in the right wing vaporize, it looked like smoke. Griff and I couldn't communicate as our intercom had pulled out. We kept going lower and lower, so I turned around and watched the front cockpit in case he bailed out. Actually we were too low to bail out. Got plugged in again, and checked up on the damage! Noted one thing as we flew along at about 150 feet, I waved at two guys on horseback as they were standing by a stream. We joined up with some other stragglers and made it back to the formation and our ship. Griff with his skills and knowledge brought us back in one piece. Of course he always went to mass before any flights, so that might have helped. After landing with only one tire and not much hydraulic fluid, we noticed a bullet hole in the pilot's canopy. One had passed through it and sliced a hole in his back pack, which was one inch from his spine. We have a picture.

GRIFFIN, W: Several highlights toward the end of our tour stand out in my mind as rather "hairy". On 22 Sept. '44 we had just finished an attack on Nielson Field in Manila and were strung out heading for Laguna De Bay, a large lake south of Manila, to rendezvous with all other Lex aircraft for the return to the ship. Just as I settled down straight and level at about 500' altitude, my plane was peppered by heavy anti-aircraft fire. I had run into an ambush and my plane was being riddled with bullets! I zigzagged like crazy and prayed they wouldn't hit my engine. George Peck was flying about 1000 yds. to my left and he told me later that he saw my plane completely enmeshed in tracer fire and thought I was a "goner" for sure. When I finally reached the rendezvous area I joined some torpedo planes and flew back with them. As I prepared for the landing, I discovered there was no hydraulic pressure, which meant I had no flaps but could drop my landing gear and the tailhook by gravity. After a straight in landing and stop in the gear, I couldn't taxi forward because both tires were in shreds! As my plane captain came up beside the cockpit to unhook my parachute harness he exclaimed "My God, sir, look at this!!" He held up the harness, which is fastened snugly across your back while flying--we could see where a large caliber machine gun bullet had torn a groove completely across the padding and under the riser straps. As the bullet passed across my back it hit the edge of my open

cockpit sliding hatch and knocked out the entire right side of the plexiglass panel. Later on I had to take the harness with me to show to Adm. Mitscher up on his Flag Bridge, and he said with a twinkle in his eye "Well, son, I'd say you were pretty lucky today, weren't you?" I answered, "Yes, sir, Admiral, I sure was." Our maintenance Chief, Joe Nance, later said my plane was so shot up that they took off the engine, guns, and other good parts and then dumped the whole airplane over the side into the sea.

CRAPSER: I guess I might entitle one episode "When The Pucker String Was Real Tight". When airborne it seemed to me that fear was something one could handle because there was plenty to do to control the aircraft and try to accomplish the mission. But back aboard ship, when an attack came, we pilots couldn't grab a gun and shoot back when the Japanese had at us.

We were east of the Philippines, preparing for a launch, sitting in our aircraft on the LEX, when our task group came under attack. We had not received the command to "START ENGINES" when the big 5-inch turret guns began going off. The target was aft of the ship. After a time, I discerned the sound of the 40mm quads on the fantail join the firing. Then some seconds later the deck edge single 20mm began firing aft also. The enemy was getting closer. I made myself as small as possible in front of the armor plate. Suddenly, I heard the very rapid fire of Burns's twin 30 calibers from the rear of our plane. In a few seconds all firing stopped. I stuck my head out of the cockpit and looked aft. There was an aircraft wing rolling over like a falling leaf with a big red ball on it, just off the LEX's stern. What a relief!

PECK: 22 September 1944 - 0525 GQ (not routine) - Bogies were all over the sky. We manned our planes at 0620 - dark as hell. As soon as we got in our planes, the bastards came in from dead astern. All hell broke loose. Every gun aft opened up. A 5" just to the left of my plane almost deafened me. I struggled to get out of my gear and on the deck - I got fouled up (again) and

said "To hell with it." We left for Manila at 0645. We (our squadron) hit Nielson Field at Manila. The AA was a repeat of the Bonins - thick as hell. "Windows" did wonders. A lot of our planes came back with freak holes in them. Griff (back pack) - Glumac (radio). Just one minute after we manned the planes for another flight, we were told to secure - a typhoon was on the way.

24 SEP 1944     STRIKES ON VISAYANS - CEBU - NEGROS

DROSKE: Another memorable incident occurred Sept. 24, 1944. If I remember correctly it was to get a convoy in the South China Sea. We had to use auxiliary gas tanks. We couldn't get suction on our tanks and had to turn back alone. Boy, was that a big ocean! In my mind I wondered where was the ship and what kind of reception we would receive when we got near the Task Force flying alone. We climbed until we intercepted the homing beacon, found the ship, and our IFF worked, and we were taken aboard.

BOWEN: On two occasions when we were forming the squadron, I had to ride rear seat facing backwards during a dive (combat was a cake walk compared to this). To volunteer to do that, you either have to be psycho or have lots of guts. When I think of combat, I generally think of my very gutsy radio man and rear gunner, Luther Simmons. We rode through a lot of flack together - which brings some hairy experiences immediately to mind. When landing aboard the Lex after scoring a hit on the Zuikaku, I jumped out on the wing and in my excitement asked Simmons if he wanted to go back to the Jap fleet that afternoon. He replied, "No, sir." Feeling somewhat miffed, I icily inquired if he was ready to go back, and without hesitation he replied "yes, sir." You've really got to like a guy like that.

Another time, Simmons was in the sick bay with a hernia or something and some new guy from the replacement pool rode with me to the far side of Mindanao where part of the engine blew out during my attack. McGowan ordered the group and fighter cover to slow down and not leave me alone over that immense jungle. Each time the Beast wheezed and dropped a few hundred feet, the new rear seat man would ask if he should jump and was given a negative. I finally told the poor guy that if he jumped and if the Japs didn't cut off his head or if the headhunters didn't shrink it or if the snakes or whatever didn't swallow him headfirst, then maybe he might get lucky and walk out of there in a couple of years. The next time he asked, I suggested he do nothing until he saw a body whipping past, which would be the pilot clutching his rip cord! On returning to the dear old Blue Ghost of the Pacific, I headed straight for the sick bay where I informed the doctors that the war effort was beginning to stall without my gunner. Simmons agreed to have his insides taped up and was returned to combat forthwith. This information probably fell into the hands of Jap intelligence which informed the Swiss that if the Americans would give them a face-saving device, the Japs would immediately sue for peace. So now dear friends, you know the untold story behind the historic story of the

"Bomb".

One of the mechanical troubles which I occasionally encountered with the Beast was my bomb "hanging up" during a dive. Because I mostly flew Tail-End Charlie, this often had a plus side. If an assigned ship was fatally damaged before I reached my release point, I could pull out and seek and destroy targets of opportunity. On one of these occasions, I really was having mechanical troubles, and by the time I got my bomb bay doors open and my bomb armed, my flight had completed its run. To my surprise, the enemy ship was still laying down a long wake and racing for safety. I immediately attacked and released at a point considerably below recommended procedure, in order to thwart the Jap skipper from sliding away at the last moment. It was an ammo ship, causing a gigantic concussion ring which raced past the plane on its way to the horizon, leaving me confused and disoriented. At that moment, from out of some nether space, I heard Simmons quietly suggesting that we must be flying upside down, or something to that effect. His unruffled voice had a calming, therapeutic effect.

It was that same dry voice I heard on a god-awful weary trip of ten million miles to Cebu with wing tanks which we had been ordered to bring home with us. I dived on a ship in the harbor and just as I pushed the release button, one wing tank blew off, sending my bomb to an ignominious end. The intercom came on and that voice said, "You missed." I never spoke a word to Simmons on the long, long, long, long trip back. Hey, I'm not perfect.

25 SEP - 7 OCT 1944 REARM - PROVISION - PALAU AND ULITHI

WARNKE: We spent many long and boring days anchored in Eniwetok and Ulithi atolls as the ship underwent reprovisioning and waiting for the next assignment. Our R&R turned out to be a visit to the great Mog Mog island where we would be deposited on a barren beach, handed two cans of lukewarm beer, and instructed to "have a good time." Most of us preferred to catch the next boat back to the ship and our air conditioned Ready Room. So much for life in the fast lane.

SCOTT: 2 October - Arrived at Ulithi at 1400. Bill Emerson returned aboard.

PECK: 2 October 1944 - Up at 0500, wrote a letter or two - volleyball in the afternoon then another "Zeke Parker Show". Movies "Spitfire" (3.5) - poker til 0600 - won \$15. Emerson came

back today. We moved to Ulithi anchorage.

3 October 1944 - We moved from the anchorage to move out of the path of the typhoon, but it seemed to me we steamed into the face of it. Plenty rough sea all night. Got up to keep from being tossed from the bunk to the deck. Went to the WR to play poker. At 0415 the Exec put us on report for the all nite game.

4 October 1944 - To GQ from WR at 0430. The exec had said to stay out of the sack, so at secure I tried to sleep in the RR. The Skipper was called in (McG) he told me to stay out of my sack and the RR all day. The sea was rough and we took water over the bow in the morning.

## CHAPTER 6

### USS LEXINGTON OCTOBER 1944

#### 10 OCT 1944      STRIKES ON OKINAWA

PECK: 11 October 1944 - Tonight at GQ we each were given an American flag, a talkie-pointie sheet, and 162 yen.

#### 12-14 OCT 1944      STRIKES ON FORMOSA - PESCADORES

LEAF: Oct. 12, 1944 - On a strike on Formosa today we made a dive on an airfield, and as we pulled out, a Jap Tony was on our tail. I gave him a few bursts, and he pulled away as some of our fighter pilots had spotted him. All that while Griff was hollering to me about the SOB Jap, but when you have your hands on the guns you can't use the mike. Next time we will have throat mikes so can keep the pilot informed.

#### EMIG: October 13, 1944 - Target - Power Plant on Formosa

I was next to last in the dive. Everything was normal until just a few seconds prior to my intended release altitude. At that point a moving object caught my attention. I looked up and there was a free falling bomb right on top of me and on the same flight path.

It was so close that I felt I could reach out and touch it. The bomb was overtaking me, so I decided my only alternative was to maintain my dive and release my bomb after the free falling bomb had passed me up. That delay caused me to go uncomfortably low on my pull out. I continued to the rendezvous point, and, as I neared my section leader, a plane appeared from underneath the left side of my plane. I could see it edging up toward me over the leading edge of my wing and fuselage. It appeared that its propeller was about to strike the bottom of my fuselage. I instinctively and abruptly pulled back on the control stick, and as I did I could feel my tail wheel assembly strike the other plane.

When I felt I was clear of the plane, I banked to see what was happening to the other plane. The pilot evidently had taken evasive action as he was flying off in a different direction. Not only was the pilot of that plane unsuccessful in hitting me with his bomb, but he also failed in getting me with the mid air collision. I joined my section leader and returned to the carrier. The other plane arrived later and was able to land aboard with the vertical stabilizer damaged and about one-half of the rudder missing.

PECK: 13 October 1944 - Landed aboard and found that Glaser has filled our tail with holes. More Bogies tonight - the Canberra (CL) hit. GQ all nite.

14 October 1944 - Wick pulled his hook out and tore down 2 barriers. Bogies all nite. Domei reports 3 American CV's sunk.

NICKENS: I remember a young black crewman named Hank on the Lex who was a mess steward. He was a happy-go-lucky person, and was well liked by everybody. A lot of the men going on beach liberty at Ulithi, would smuggle back on board a bottle of beer strapped to their leg for Hank. Unfortunately, his taste for alcohol was not restricted to beer. He began stealing and drinking torpedo juice, which was powerful stuff, but not deadly. Not being satisfied with this, he began drinking water injection fluid, which was both powerful and deadly. Before he died, he became stark raving mad. An autopsy on his brain revealed that it had been eaten up by the water injection fluid. This resulted in a bunch of men revising their drinking habits.

PECK: 15 October 1944 - I attended a sea burial service for Hank and another seaman who drank water-injection alcohol. He died (Hank) last night.

21 OCT 1944 STRIKES ON CORON - ROMBLON

24 OCT 1944 STRIKES ON JAPANESE BATTLE FLEET, SIBUYAN SEA AND ON LUZON

ENGEN: The invasion of Leyte was in the offing to place General Mac Arthur's forces back on Philippine soil. We dive bomber pilots were deployed into searches for any Japanese shipping

that might challenge the impending landing.

McGOWAN, P: Don't remember the date, (editor's note: It was 24 Oct) we made a group grope west of Manila, ran into a parcel of Japanese student pilots. A Betty pulled up on our left wing, which I fully intended to shoot full of holes, but old greedy Gloomy had other plans. He shot the Betty full of holes and got credit for it. Just after that, I spotted a Tony, going same direction as us about 3000' below at 1100. I'd estimate we were about 6000'. Gloomy pushed over, shoved the throttle through the firewall and that old Curtis screamed for mercy. The Tony pushed over at the same time; I watched the vapor trail from his wing tips. I don't remember if Gloomy fired a round, but he didn't have to. The Tony was a little late pulling out. He hit the water in level pitch attitude and literally exploded. That Jap joined his ancestors in tiny pieces. I saw Gloomy at San Diego in '93. He doesn't remember the incident. I'm not surprised. Gloomy spent most of his time practicing his singing.

He was actually a wanabe opera star. Like the time he pulled out the wrong direction after missing Manila with a 1000 #. Then to catch the rest of you guys, he turned back over town. There was a gun of some type on every building, all shooting at us. One large round went through my canopy and a radio box and dropped in my lap. All this time Gloomy is singing like an opera star. Then he came on the horn and asked "How do you like my tremolo?" My response is censored. Come to think of it, that Tony driver may have heard Gloomy singing and simply committed suicide.

ROSS: Four planes of us were hunting the Jap fleet, and we were flying over the northern part of Luzon, when down through the clouds I spotted 2 red balls. I told Bob Parker, my pilot, that there were 2 Jap planes below us. He radioed Bob Niemeyer, and he said "Let's go get them." So down through the clouds we dove. Surprise! Surprise! There were several Jap planes and the battle was on. In 10 minutes all Jap planes were shot down except one. Our guns were burnt out and we were out of ammunition, so Bob Parker and Bob Duncan hovered over the Jap plane and ran him into the side of the mountain. Needless to say, when we got back aboard, I was razzed about the 2 Jap planes I saw.

WARNKE: Late in our tour, I recall standing in the catwalk outside our Ready Room as LT Parker explained to this awed listener how he (Parker, of course!) had shot down an enemy plane or two that morning. Catching all the details was very difficult because every damn 20mm,

40mm quad, and those damn 5-inch cannons were blasting away at Japanese planes trying to sink the Blue Ghost. I think we were both a bit shocked to note one bogie "splash" not much more than a hundred yards away, but the tale was quickly resumed after we watched him sink.

SCOTT: 24 October - Of the 61 planes downed by Air Group 19 today, 21 were gotten by a search team of 4 VB and 4 VF planes led by Niemeyer.

As our division was awaiting launch this afternoon, a single Jap plane came out of the low ceiling overcast and hit the carrier Princeton which was on our port quarter. The Princeton had just recovered its aircraft when it was hit. The damage from the hit resulted in the loss of the Princeton.

ENGEN: I had flown in the morning and had come up on the flight deck for a breath of fresh air, and as I looked out over the starboard side I saw a lone airplane come out from the overcast skies in a dive on USS Princeton. Not one gun fired. The Japanese Val dive bomber dropped a single bomb, then flew down to the water and escaped without a shot being fired by the Task Group.

As I watched, the bomb exploded on what looked to be the hangar deck. A secondary explosion then lifted the entire aft elevator of Princeton up where it slowly rotated and fell back into the ship. Princeton slowly lost way and dark smoke billowed from her. What followed was an epic fight to save her. The cruiser USS Birmingham took many personnel losses as she was alongside to fight the fires when ammunition exploded on Princeton's hangar deck. Finally, all survivors were taken from Princeton and she was abandoned. Eventually, Princeton could not be saved and was sunk by "Reno", thus becoming the first aircraft carrier to be lost since Hornet in Oct of 1942.

EMERSON: The day of 24 October began innocently enough with a number of searches being scheduled, all of which were to the west and beyond the inner shore of Luzon. As Don Banker's number two wingman, off I went with him, Wicklander, and Evatt on one of those searches with our VF escorts. Our sector was relatively quiet except when we started to tangle with the heavy cruiser Nachi in Manila Bay while we were still westbound. As we were armed with a four second delay fuse, Don elected to have us make a glide bombing or low level attack. His discretion overcame his valor when the Nachi put up a very impressive curtain of fire, and we

broke off the attack and proceeded with our search mission. (Unfortunately, Don was destined to take on the Nachi again on 5 November when he was lost.) The only casualty during this flight, on our side, was a 58-gallon external tank on my wing that managed to detach itself during our high speed approach on the Nachi. That little item made the last few minutes of the flight very interesting. The mighty SB2C was a fine aircraft, but mine was being challenged after 5 1/2 hours in the air - fuel consumption being what it was. However, all ended well. The LSO felt sorry for me and gave me a cut.

During our search the only action we found was with two small freighters anchored near Mariveles at Bataan. We managed to sink one with a low level attack and drew a little fire from Corregidor, but that was about it. We returned to the task force just about the time the Skipper (McGowan) was leading the bombers on his last flight. We could see the Princeton burning as we approached the fleet.

LOCHER: I was LT Butts's radioman-gunner, and we flew on the port wing position of CDR McGowan.

On 24 Oct. 1944 the Skipper's division, 12 SB2C-3's, was launched to find and attack a Jap Battle Force somewhere in the Philippine Islands. All the aircraft were equipped with dropable wing tanks. To my knowledge, we had never used these drop tanks before, but, because the location of the Japs was vague, the planners must have figured we needed the extra gas.

We headed for the middle of the islands and on the way encountered some real bad weather. McGowan decided he could get over the clouds and up we went. I got so cold in the back of that SB2C that I used the Addis Lamp as a heat lamp to keep my feet warm. Anyway, McGowan decided we couldn't get over the clouds and started a real steep descent. After a few minutes the speed really built up and the wing tanks started being ripped off the bomb racks. What happened next was really wild, and being in the first section and facing backwards, I really had a good view of gas tanks being ripped off and free falling through a close formation of SB2C's. It was a miracle nobody was hit.

We finally got through the weather and were about to find the Jap force when McGowan had electrical problems. LT Scott, his other wingman, was to escort him back to the Lex, and Butts was told to join up with the tail end of the division, which would make us the last aircraft to dive

bomb the Jap force.

This didn't cause us to win the war, but it helped. Read on.

Just prior to the attack by the Air Group (VB, VF, VT), the CAG got on the air and instructed "anybody who didn't release their ordnance to rendezvous over (?) island at (?)000 feet and make another attack on the Jap force."

The coordinated attack started, the Jap ships started their tight circle air defense tactic and shooting everything they could at us. The AA was really thick and contained all the colors of the rainbow. Anyway, Butts couldn't get on target, because of the intense AA and didn't drop his bomb. So we went to the rendezvous point, and Butts got on the radio and let the world know we were orbiting waiting for any other straggler to join up. You wouldn't believe the cat calls, advice, etc. that came over the radio. We waited, nobody showed up, and CAG told Butts to do whatever he wanted to - he was going back to the Lex.

Butts called me on ICS, and said he had made up his mind but would abide with my wishes if they differed from his idea. We agreed to try a sneak attack. Back in Maui we practiced low altitude radar bombing; however, we were briefed and given an information handout which gave push over distances at certain altitude versus range. The cloud tops were around 6 to 8 thousand feet, and Butts felt we could sneak in on them and push over about 2 1/2 miles from the force. Piece of cake. They'd never see us till we were in our dive and through the clouds. Were we wrong! They had radar controlled AA on those ships. Anyway, somehow or other, we got to the push over distance, made our dive, and Butts's GP bomb hit about 10 yds on the port quarter of a heavy cruiser (?). In all our dive bombing, Butts had never pulled out that low. The Jap CA was left dead in the water. I heard later that a US sub had sunk it later that day.

The long flight back to the Lex was uneventful until we were in the recognition approach heading and altitude, then the whole task force opened up on us. Butts turned away and radioed the Lex that we were friendly, and they informed us that a Jap plane was trying to sneak in under us. We looked under us, and sure as heck there was a Jap Judy directly under us. Butts did some VF tactics and got on his tail and was trying to shoot him down with his 20 mm, when a VF (F6F) made one pass, and the Judy went in. Butts got the Navy Cross, and I got the DFC. Just a routine day.

SCOTT: 24 October - When launched, our Division, led by Commander McGowan, headed for the San Bernardino Strait to hit the Jap fleet. The group was made up of VB, VF, and VT. Just before reaching the target area, the Skipper's plane developed problems which I believe to have been electrical. The Skipper was directed to return to the fleet, and I was assigned to take him back. Shortly after we broke away for the formation, I received a call from Jancar saying that he was having problems and requesting to return to the ship with the Skipper and me. He joined up on us. At the time we were letting down through the weather and were over what I believed to be the San Bernardino Strait. The Skipper's plane had problems maintaining a low air speed, while Jancar's, with whatever his problem was, had difficulty maintaining a fast cruising speed. Whatever our problems, we leveled out at about 500 feet with the ceiling at about 800 feet. At this point we had mountains on both sides of us, with their tops obscured by the low ceiling. I estimated that we were in the straits and proceeded down the channel which I assumed would lead to open sea. At about that time I spotted a single Jap fighter at two o'clock and slightly above us. I turned our crippled group into him for a gunnery run. Fortunately he ran. We continued on at 110 knots, came out into open sea and proceeded on a course back to the task group. The weather continued to be very bad and when I thought we were near the Lex, I called and asked for permission to come aboard. The return reply was negative, orbit where you are, the ship is under attack. After circling for about ten minutes, I called again and got no answer. I then decided to go on in. As we approached the Lex, I received clearance to come aboard. Jancar went aboard first with the Skipper going next on a very long straight approach. Just before he reached the ship, his plane crashed into the sea. I flew over him and saw that he and his gunner were in the water. I came around again and dropped a smoke flare, then landed aboard. Admiral Mitscher called me up to flag plot and asked me what I had seen. After I reported what had happened, he thanked me and let me get back to the Ready Room, where I learned that the Skipper had been lost and that his gunner, E.A. Brown, had been picked up.

EMERSON: It is difficult to understand just what happened to Dick McGowan that day. I personally know he was a very fine athlete. He beat my butt enough times at handball at Los Alamitos that I finally gave up playing him.

WINTERS: About an hour out (enroute to Sibuyan Sea), in between storms, Dick McGowan, our bomber skipper, signalled me he had engine trouble. . . I visually signalled to take a wingman back with him to the ship. I never saw this longtime friend again. Admiral Mitscher

told me what happened. It was a mystery, for Dick had been on the Navy varsity water polo team and was a tough swimmer.

SCOTT: Those that continued on to the target dove on a division of Jap battleships. On returning to the fleet, Earl Newman was shot down by a Jap fighter just outside of the task force formation. He was picked up by a destroyer.

THURMON: The incident that I think about most and is most interesting to me occurred in Oct. 1944, the day before our attack on the Japanese carriers. I was scheduled to go on a single plane search due north. I took off and noticed that on take off I was headed due north, so I settled back to endure a 4 hour flight, and I noticed that the sun was right in my eyes. That gave me pause for thought. I was going north in a late afternoon, and the sun was directly ahead! I checked my standby compass, and, sure enough, I was going due west. I called Stamm in the rear seat and told him that I would take a course that would intercept our intended track. I started a turn to the right, when Stamm said "Look down there at 2 o'clock." I looked, and saw enough green dye to dye the entire ocean, and at the head of the green streak was a yellow raft with two persons in it. We flew back to the carrier and dropped a note on deck (We were in radio silence.) telling them of the raft and bearing 270 degrees - 20 miles. They dispatched a destroyer to the spot and picked up LT E.E. Newman and his gunner, Robert S. Stanley. They had been shot down when returning from a flight to hit the battleships going down the "gut" west of the P.I.

The Lord had a lot to do with this, I am convinced. The compass stuck on due north was no accident.

NEWMAN: In my Navy flying while in combat, coming close to 100 flights, I only once drew a plane that couldn't stay in the air. Of all times, it happened when we were going to bomb big naval vessels that we were trained to hit - then to get shot down in sight of our carriers was a real downer.

Best happening was being pulled out of the sea by the USS Darth - Bob Stanley and I both with only minor damage.

SCOTT: Stu Crapser, who was among a number of search flights out today, spotted the Jap

carrier forces, and reported back to the fleet.

BURNS: (From his log)- Oct. 24, 1944 - They found a unit of their fleet west of the Philippines near Mindoro and strike was launched to hit them. A group of ships were discovered on the east side of Luzon consisting of Cruisers and Battlewagon. Pilot (Stu Crapser) and I were sent out on a search hop. Our ship was attacked by Jap fighter planes as we manned our planes. I opened up on them when they got too damn close. We took off and searching the area we discovered nothing. On the return leg, I picked up an indication on my radar screen and reported it to pilot. We immediately changed course to investigate and through a hole in the clouds discovered a medium size Jap carrier. A bit farther on we found two more larger carriers and quite a few cruisers and destroyers - God was I scared! My pilot gave me the location and breaking radio silence I reported a "contact report" to our carrier base. I didn't hear any receipt for our message so I repeated it over and over. We climbed like bats out of hell to gain altitude and my pilot said he saw some enemy fighters hiding in the clouds - I felt twice as scared. The whole task force opened up a full barrage of ack-ack and it appeared to be a sky of solid flak - a ghastly sight. We got into position and nosed over. We were hit by some ack-ack jarring the whole plane and putting us into an uncontrollable spin. I was hit by some of the stuff above my right eye. We were out of control and I felt sure we were "going in". My pilot by using all his strength pulled the plane out in about a 12 or 13 "G" pullout, wrinkling the wings and tail and the ailerons were warped out of gear. The ack-ack was terrible and it's a miracle that we came out of that alive. Six zekes (zeros) jumped us when we cleared the formation and made individual runs on us. I called my pilot and yelled that there were fighters on our tail. As each plane came in I opened fire. I set one of them afire but did not see him crash, but I officially got credit for a "plane". My pilot had lost his helmet in that crazy dive and he didn't hear me telling him about the fighters - Thank God. I can safely say that this was the most exciting experience I've ever had.

P.S. On the strike they actually found 4 carriers - one was obscured by a cloud when we went over the group.

CRAPSER: (The following story is my recollection based upon notes made the next day, Flight Log Book entry, and memory as of March 1980.)

On the afternoon of 24 October 1944 I was assigned to fly a sector search from the Lexington in

a VB-19 SB2C. My assigned sector was slightly east of due north of the task force and the distance outbound was approximately 300 nautical miles. The aircraft assigned was equipped with wing tanks; and because it had been prepared for a bombing mission earlier, had a 1,000-lb armor-piercing bomb in the bomb bay. James F. Burns, ARM1/c, my regularly assigned crewman, was aboard.

We left the ship and task group without fighter escort as none were available. The outbound and cross legs of the flight were uneventful. They were flown in fine weather at an altitude of 1,500 or 2,000 feet.

Twenty minutes into the return leg Burns made a radar contact with ships bearing 45° from the plane at a distance of seven miles. Shortly thereafter, I saw what appeared to be a barge and a small escorting ship. I plotted the geographic position of the contact, saw more ships, and realized that there were carriers, at least one cruiser, and several destroyers in the group. I started to climb into a circle outside of anti-aircraft range, and composed a contact message. Burns copied the text of the message and sent it out three times over the Medium High Frequency radio and twice over VHF. At this point I decided that it was too late in the day for Admiral Marc A. Mitscher to send out a strike and recover it before dark, so I should use the bomb which was aboard the plane to damage one of the carriers. I dropped the empty wing tanks and positioned the bomb/gun sight. The climb was made to 14,000 feet during which time some anti-aircraft shells were sent in our direction. When this happened, Burns threw out some of the aluminum strips called "window" which was supposed to confuse gunfire radar. I observed one carrier head into the wind and launch some aircraft. I saw them climb up.

By this time I was positioned for dive "out of the sun". I pushed over at a 60° angle and dived without flaps. My helmet fell off in the dive. I had not fastened the chin strap. I "pickled off" the bomb and then felt the aircraft knocked into a spin to the right. I contemplated leaving the aircraft but was able to stop the spin, pull out of the dive, and head for some clouds below. The anti-aircraft was heavy and I saw tracers pass us from above. I reached the clouds, leveled off in them, and flew for some time southward in and out of them.

I noted that the upper surface of the wings was wrinkled and both ailerons were pointing up.

Burns was able to communicate with me by writing notes which he put in a message carrier on a

clothesline reel-type unit. I could talk to him by using the microphone on intercom.

He reported the plane to be "shot up," that some Zekes had made runs on us, that he had a slight nick over one eye, that there were two Shokaku carriers, one CVL, and one light cruiser in the group of ships which we had contacted and had dived on, and that he had shot down one Zeke. We were not pursued (apparently) once we flew into the clouds.

At about 35 miles from the task group Burns picked up the Lexington and gave me direction to it. We approached from the stern and were given the "Charlie" by blinker, for immediate landing. I let down and did a dog leg to pick up the Landing Signal Officer. Despite poor aileron control, we landed uneventfully, and I was ordered to report to the Flag Bridge (Admiral Mitscher) as I stepped from the aircraft.

Once the confirmation of the contact location and its composition was given to the Admiral, I was able to return to the squadron ready-room where I learned from Maintenance that there was a large hole in the underside of the left wing of the aircraft (from an anti-aircraft burst which had put us into the spin), and that the BOMB HAD NEVER LEFT THE PLANE! IT WAS STILL IN THE BOMB BAY!

DULONG: October 24, 1994 - I was waiting for Plane No. 47 to return in order to perform some duty I had been assigned. The plane came straight in for a landing without circling. When I went out to it, I saw a clean, round 5" hole through the wing stub on the port side, right next to the gunner.

J.F. Burns, who was the gunner on that plane and also my closest friend in the squadron, told me later that, for some reason, after the skirmish with the Japanese fleet, Crapser was lost. They were unable to communicate by intercom, but Burns was able to direct Crapser back to the Lexington by using his radar and sending course directions with written notes by wire trolley to the front cockpit.

SCHOENER: On the return of Mr. Crapser and Jim Burns after locating part of the Jap fleet and making a one-plane attack, Jim came into the ready-room, still pumped up and full of excitement after the experience. The first words I heard Jim say were "The bastards almost killed us!" I think that's the only time I ever heard Jim use an "off-colored" word.

WICKLANDER: After Crapser spotted the Jap fleet, he attacked them single handed. On his pullout he was jumped by 6 fighters, one of which his gunner (Burns) shot down. His plane was shot up considerably, but he returned safely. He lost his helmet and earphones in his dive, so he could not use his radio or ZB which made it all the more difficult to find his way back. Walters spotted a number of BBs, CAs, and CLs, distance 200 miles and to the north of us. Thurmon sighted 2 DDs in the same general vicinity, and attacked them. A strike was sent out to attack the force near Mindoro, but the results were not too good. GP bombs were loaded on the planes, and there wasn't time to change them, so they didn't do much damage to the heavy ships. Cmdr McGowan made a water landing and was lost. Brown, EE, his gunner, got out all right. Newman was shot down by a Zeke, but both he and his gunner were rescued by a DD. Hubbard of VF was lost and also one VT pilot was shot down over the Jap fleet. Our air group shot down a total of 61 enemy planes today.

Tonight we rendezvous with 38.2 and 38.4. Tomorrow should be a big day.

#### 25 OCT 1944     STRIKES ON JAPANESE CARRIER FORCE - PHILIPPINE SEA

DUNCAN:    My Recollection of the Battle of the Philippine Sea

Stu Crapser discovered the Japanese fleet on the evening of Oct. 24, 1944. They were a hundred or so miles north of us.

On Oct. 25, we launched planes about 6:30 a.m. When we all rendezvoused and headed north, it looked like we had about 150 to 200 planes. About 8:00 a.m., we spotted our quarry. They started shooting at us with their larger guns when we were quite distant from them. I remember seeing a 6 plane division of dive bombers up ahead suddenly go all over the sky. Apparently, one of their 16" shells went right through the formation, but didn't hit anyone.

Bob Parker and I were flying wing on Bob Niemeyer. When we went into our dive, I saw that their carriers were being hammered, so I decided to hit a "virgin". A huge Ise class battleship was emerging from under a cloud. Luckily, I was in a perfect position for a dive. The battleship and I were exactly on the same course, so I had a 'no relative motion' problem to overcome. The

ship took no evasive action. I was in about a 70 degree dive and in perfect position. About 3000 feet, I closed my dive flaps and released a 1000 pound A.P. bomb at about 2000 feet, then pulled out about 100 feet over the water. Directly ahead was another huge battleship. We went by him about 200 feet to his portside. My rear seat gunner, Earnest Elias, dueled with their 20 and 40 mm. A.A, with his twin 30 caliber machine guns. We were so close, Elias said he saw the whites of their eyes. Looking back, it seemed impossible for their A.A. to miss us, as several of their guns had a no-deflection target. We joined up and headed home. I asked Elias if I got a hit and he said I did.

John Hutto, the Air Group photo pilot flew by my target and got a vivid picture of the explosion and fire. I have a copy of the picture on my office wall.

After things settled down, I looked at my "G" meter on the dash. It recorded 10 "G"s.

Our division went back about 4:30 p.m., for another strike. We got to our target about 5:30 p.m. I wasn't so lucky this time, as my bomb missed by about 20 or 30 feet, midship. All I did this time was give their A.A. gunners a bath. Niemeyer took a 40 mm. in his engine and had to ditch alongside one of our destroyers. By now, it was getting pretty dark. I joined up on Bob Parker and we headed home. The fleet was blacked out, so we dropped our wheels and flaps and started looking for a landing signal officer, in his phosphorescent suit, on a carrier fantail. I finally spotted one and he gave me a cut. When I killed the engine, I asked a ship crewman what ship I was on. Unbelievably, it was the Lex. Needless to say, Doc Fox broke out several rations of booze and a good time was had by all.

With the new Navy technology and tactics, I feel it is sage to say there will never be another great naval sea and air battle of this magnitude. I have a feeling of great sadness and humbleness, remembering our fallen fellow airmen of this epic sea battle. It is probably the last time that men, planes and ships will ever be pitted against each other in such close, personal combat. No more fitting epitaph can be accorded them than to say, "This was their finest hour."

SCOTT: Bob Niemeyer was hit by AA and made a water landing on the way home. He was picked up by a DD.

ENGEN: The sighting by Lt(jg) Crapser and his gunner, Burns, led to Admiral Halsey making

his choice to send his carriers north to pursue the attacking Japanese carrier force,

On the deck run for that launch to attack the Japanese carrier force, I looked up at Admiral Mitscher as I went down the deck and impulsively quickly changed hands on the stick and gave him a smile and a quick salute. To my great surprise, he raised his head from his cupped hand that had been supporting his chin, smiled back and returned my "unauthorized" salute.

That afternoon we attacked the battleship Hyuga. On that strike Lt R. D. Niemeyer's SB2C was hit by anti aircraft fire and he and his gunner, ARM2c A.D. Thorngren, were forced to land in the water near the remnants of the Japanese fleet. The destroyer USS Bronson came along and rescued them to return them to Lexington later.

BURNS: Oct. 25, 1944 - Squadron struck task group we found - the largest fleet battle in history ensued. All Jap carriers were sunk (4 of them), plus numerous cruisers.

MEEKER: October 25, 1944 was a day to remember for the rest of the lives of those of us who flew that date. Nothing is more exciting, apprehensive, memorable and rewarding for the victor of a battle between two carrier forces on the high seas. Such action leaves an indelible picture in ones mind.

When morning came on October 25, 1944, I'm sure most of us thought this was going to be the day we were waiting for. The Japanese carrier force was sighted the day before and we were going to attack them.

I felt lucky to be part of the first flight to take off that morning. We were instructed to fly due north fifty miles and orbit until the location of the Japanese fleet had been pinpointed. We hadn't completed one circle of our orbit when word came over the radio that the Japanese fleet was 100 miles due north. The weather was perfect, clear, sunshiny and not a cloud in the sky. There wasn't any way the Japanese could escape; they were in deep trouble. Air Group 19 was part of the first task group to make the attack; we followed the Essex group. As we were flying north, I looked around at the rest of the planes in the whole force and estimated that there were probably 300 or so. What a sight this must have been to the Japanese. When we were about 15 miles from the Japanese fleet, the fireworks started and as we proceeded on our course the anti-aircraft fire became extremely intense and continuous.

I felt fortunate to be leading the last section in our bombing squadron, because this gave me a ringside seat for the whole attack. Peck and Sadler flew wing on me. Our task group had first choice of carriers to attack and took one that was out of formation.

When the dive bombing started, it was really a sight to watch from above. The carrier was going full speed and was in a tight turn to the starboard. The number of hits we were getting was almost unbelievable. The Essex Bombers probably hit 50%, but our Bombers did much better. I said at that time and I still contend that we had from 12-15 hits with the 18 planes. (This is counting the hit an Okie got on the carrier with those big guns.) When I pushed over at the top and started my dive, I was looking down on a spiral of 8 or 10 planes. I saw strings of 3 to 4 hits in a row without a miss. There were two large fires on the deck and it had taken a terrible pounding. Shortly after we returned to the Lex, word was received that the carrier sank within the hour.

Lt Black from the Torpedo Squadron reported that the last three dive bombers to dive all got hits. This really pleased the three of us in my section.

That evening we went on another strike, and since none of the Jap carriers were afloat, we had to attack a battleship. We did get some hits, but that never slowed it down. The anti-aircraft fire was so intense I could never understand how so many planes could fly through it and never get shot down.

We returned to the Lex before dark.

EMIG: October 25, 1944 - Target - Japanese Carrier Fleet

I was on the third strike of the day. As we approached the Japanese Carrier Fleet, I could see a line of destroyers, cruisers and carriers dead in the water. They were burning out and sinking from the hits sustained from the earlier strikes. Our target was a carrier which had not yet been hit. I pressed my attack lower than normal as I wanted to get a direct hit. I released my bomb electrically and for some unknown reason it didn't release. On pullout I experienced a couple of tense moments and ended up extremely close to the water. This was due to a combination of my lower release altitude and the extra weight of my bomb.

I reported to my flight leader that I still had my bomb. He ordered me to make a glide bombing attack on a cruiser which still had way-on. I was assigned four fighters to precede me with a strafing run. In my dive, I was exposed to heavy AA fire. I could see red tracers that appeared to be the size of baseballs flying by me on both sides of my plane. I thought to myself--let's get this over with and get the (blank) out of here before my luck runs out. The result was a near miss.

SADLER: I had one hole put in my rudder (30 cal.). Had two flights on the Jap fleet on October 25, '44, carrier in the morning (next to last man down), and a battleship in the afternoon (last man down). Two hits, confirmed AM by torpedo pilot, PM by fighter pilot.

McBRIDE: In my dive on a Jap carrier, I got knocked off twice by AA, pulled out less than a hundred feet and flew the length of the Jap fleet at deck level.

WICKLANDER: This morning at dawn we launched a strike at the Jap fleet which was approximately 100 miles to the north of us. Counting the planes from all the carriers in our three task groups, there were over 300 planes on this first strike.

The JAP fleet consisted of 15 ships including 4 CVs and CVLs, 2 BBs, and the remainder cruisers and destroyers.

Our air group attacked a large carrier of the Shokaku class, scoring numerous bomb hits and several torpedo hits. When we left it was burning, and engulfed in smoke and appeared to be dead in the water. The other squadrons attacked the remaining capital ships inflicting serious damage to all of them. The AA was very intense, but all our planes returned safely, although some were shot up quite badly. Only a few enemy fighters were in the air, and they did not offer any opposition. Our VF skipper shot down one Zeke.

A total of five strikes were sent out during the day. By the time we went out on the last strike, only two BBs and 2 or 3 cruisers and 3 destroyers were left afloat. Both BBs were damaged by numerous bombs and torpedo hits as were the cruisers. One of our cruiser divisions attacked the remaining Jap ships during the night and sank at least one cruiser. A sub also put 5 torpedoes into one of the damaged BBs, but the results were not observed.

In the meantime, the Jap battle force which was spotted west of the Philippines yesterday, split up and came through the San Bernardino Straits and the other passage south of Leyte.

It was engaged by our 7th Fleet which consisted of 20 CVEs and 6 old BBs. 2 Jap BBs were reported sunk as well as several cruisers and destroyers. We lost 2 CVEs which resulted from the shelling of the enemy battleships.

At noon the BBs that were with us broke off and headed for Leyte to try to intercept the enemy forces there. This morning we launched 4 300-mile searches. Swanson contacted 13 large enemy troop transports proceeding down the east coast of Luzon. John Butts sighted 2 enemy DDs northeast of Luzon. The other 2 searches were negative.

EMERSON: Today we hit the Jap fleet! On my first strike we sank 1 CV (Shokaku), damaged 1 BB (ISE), sank or damaged many other combat ships.

On the following strikes, which lasted all day, we ran the total to 4 carriers sunk or badly damaged, 2 BBs very badly damaged, many cruisers and destroyers sunk or damaged.

I was on the last strike of the day, which was my second, in which we badly damaged a BB (Fuso). On this hop I saw the most concentrated antiaircraft fire I have ever seen or hope to see. It was a day I'll never forget as long as I live, and I really believe it when I say, "History was made today!".

#### 26 OCT - 1 NOV 1944      STANDBY AT LEYTE AND PROVISION AT ULITHI ATOLL

WICKLANDER: Oct. 26: Spent the day refueling. One of our fighters shot down a Jap snooper.

Oct. 27: We were standing by off Leyte to give support if needed, to General MacArthur.

Oct. 28: This morning at 0730 Meeker, Gunter, Evatt, and I went out to search for survivors of a

PBY. It landed to pick up some other survivors yesterday afternoon, and apparently sank because of the rough sea.

Their position was supposed to be approximately 150 miles NE off the ship. Just as we arrived and were about to begin our search, we spotted a Jap plane which we chased for about 40 miles, but could not catch it.

SADLER: In the Pacific aboard the Lex: Returning from an ASP. Instead of landing flaps, the dive brakes jammed about four inches in the open position. We flew down the deck and Smolinski Aldis-lamped "no flaps" to the bridge. We swung around and were brought aboard high and fast.

PECK: 27 October 1944 - Newman and gunner, Stanley, came back today on a can. McGowan's gunner, Brown, returned. "Dog" Niemeyer was shot down the evening of the 25th - came back yesterday. We have 152 Princeton survivors aboard.

30 October 1944 - Cravens came back today.

31 October 1944 - Marc Mitscher left us today 0400 - whole Air Group stood at attention silently on the 1/4 deck as he departed.

## CHAPTER 7

### USS LEXINGTON

NOVEMBER 1944

#### 5-6 NOV 1944     STRIKES ON LUZON

SCOTT: Evatt was lost over Manila today as well as our new Skipper, LT Banker. LT Stradley is now the Skipper of VB-19.

ENGEN: On the morning of November 5, 1944, on the approach to attack Nielson Field, in my line of vision was another division of our flight. As I was concentrating on maintaining position in what was very heavy 5" anti aircraft fire, I saw one of the airplanes in the other division abruptly disappear. Lt(jg) John Evatt and his gunner ARM3c R.E. Hansen were flying in their airplane one minute and the next minute they were gone. They just disappeared.

That afternoon, Lt Don Banker, now our Commanding Officer, led his two divisions of six SB2Cs as part of about a 30 airplane group toward Manila Bay and the heavy cruiser Nachi. We found the ship, and our twelve SB2Cs dove while six TBFs fanned out to make torpedo attacks. I was next to last as bombs began hitting the cruiser. As I dove, I saw Lt Banker's airplane start its pullout with white streamers coming from each wingtip indicating a heavy pull, and then he began a series of snap rolls until his airplane hit the water inverted several hundred yards from the cruiser. We completed our dives, got our hits, and the cruiser broke into three pieces and sank in a matter of minutes. I pulled out over the spot where Banker had hit and there was nothing but boiling water and some shark chaser dye to mark the spot.

#### EMIG: November 5, 1944 - Target - Cruiser in Manila Bay

I was on the last flight of the day. Our target was a heavy cruiser which was underway in the middle of Manila Bay, heading for the open sea. Upon reaching the cruiser, we executed a coordinated attack and I was last to make my dive. I entered my dive and had just gotten the

cruiser in sight when I noticed our flight leader starting his pull out. Suddenly he started a rapid snap roll. After a couple of rolls, it appeared he had recovered and was in level flight again when his plane hit the water and sank. I continued my dive, dropped my bomb and was credited with a direct hit.

On the way to our rendezvous point, my gunner said "There she goes." I banked the plane to look back at the cruiser to see what he meant. All I could see was a tremendous amount of black smoke and flying debris filling the sky. When that all cleared, the cruiser was gone.

LOCHER: On my first combat mission Butts's hatch came off during our dive, and he thought it might have whipped back into the rear seat and hit me. My mike was broken and I couldn't tell him I was OK. Until he found out I was OK, Butts scared the heck out of me. (See related story in Chapter 4.)

Our last mission was over Manila Bay against a Jap cruiser. Prior to take off we were given a pack of "window", because the Japs were reported to have radar controlled AA in Manila Bay. "Window" is a lot of aluminum strips, very thin and cut in 3 foot lengths. I'm sure it comes in other sizes, but the "window" given us was about 3 feet long. I was given a carton of 24 packs that probably contained 1000 strips of aluminum. When you throw it out of the aircraft, the airstream disperses the strips, and it shows up as a large target on radar to confuse the radar operators.

Everything went as planned, and as we approached the target the Jap AA commenced, and word was passed to disperse the "window". Everybody that had some threw theirs out, and it wasn't easy. As soon as the pack got in the air stream it went everywhere. It took about a minute to throw it all out, and when I got a chance to look aft, all or most of the AA bursts were well behind us. Great!!! But I noticed and informed Butts that there were great quantities of the foil on the leading edge of the rudder and starboard elevator. All I heard from Butts was "Oh, s\_\_t!", and he pulled away from the formation and started down - all kinds of sideslips, sharp ups and downs, etc. I couldn't do anything but hold on until he stopped his crazy flying, and he yelled, "Is it gone? Is it gone?". I asked him, "Is what gone?", and he said "The 'window'". He actually thought that "window" on our tail would show us up as a big target on the Jap radar.

I got the heck scared out of me on my first combat hop and also during my last hop. I can't describe what was going through my mind while Butts was trying to shake that "window" off the tail. I really thought for a few seconds (or minutes) he had lost control of the aircraft.

5 NOV 1944      HIT BY KAMIKAZE PLANE OFF LUZON

WARNKE: Our last flight was made November 5th, bombing Nielson Field, and it must have taken place in the morning hours, because before the day was over my trusty pilot became a victim of the kamikaze plane which struck the Lexington. Thankfully, he survived. LT Parker and several other squadron pilots did not.

I have vivid memories of that day since "Stopper" Beisner, the parachute rigger ('cumshaw and con man extraordinaire!), and I "reported" to the flight deck to see what GQ was all about. We were near the bow when we spotted a lone plane ahead of the TG, flying a clockwise pattern around the fleet. Every ship must have been blasting away at that dude, and we walked aft for a better view. He was eventually knocked down off our starboard quarter. CIC alerted us about another bogie, again ahead of the TG, so we hustled up toward the bow for a closer look. He flew the same pattern as the first one, so we ambled aft as he passed abeam, but this time we were to be denied the pleasure of watching an enemy plane shot down. I'm not sure just what went thru our feeble brains or what persuaded us to take cover, but "Stopper" and I both dove into the port-side catwalk moments before he flew into the island structure. Debris filled the air - - and I still have a piece of that kamikaze plane amongst my relics from days past. Long past! It was some hours later when I learned that my Intrepid Leader had been put out of action and we had flown our last flight together.

SCHOENER: Remembrances: Going out onto the catwalk to watch the action as bogies came in, or going up onto the island structure to watch recovery of aircraft; seeing the kamikaze come in on Nov. 5 and thinking it was going to hit near where we were standing on the catwalk. I still have to smile a bit when I think about our dive for the hatch when it looked like the plane was going to hit where we were. Such pushing and shoving and squeezing to get through that "little" hatch and to apparent safety you never did see in your life. I didn't make it, but one of the guys

who did had a pipe in his pocket which was no longer in one piece when the owner finally squirmed through the hatch and made his way to the ready room.

Finally being assigned to a pilot, Mr. Doyle, but never getting to fly with Mr. Doyle, who was killed when that kamikaze hit the Lex; going to the carpenter shop to pick up a box to hold his personal belongings for shipping home.

GRIFFIN, W: 5 Nov. 1944 - A Day I'll Never Forget

My division of Helldivers had just returned from our early morning attack on shipping in Manila Harbor. During our de-briefing by George Lewis, the squadron intelligence officer, the ship's announcement system broadcast that "Enemy Bogies" were picked up by radar and were approaching the task force. This meant, of course, that they were going to head for the aircraft carriers as their primary target. Since our task force at that time consisted of 3 or 4 battleships, several large/light cruisers, many destroyers and our sister carrier USS Essex (CV-9), we all knew that there was going to be quite a show of defensive anti-aircraft fire. Air group personnel did not have a specific "battle station" per se, so we were pretty much free to go topside and watch the show.

During previous attacks on the task force and when we weren't getting ready to fly, many of the pilots would climb up into the island structure and seek out a good vantage point to watch our airborne CAP (Combat Air Patrol) fighters and the ship's guns shoot down attacking Japanese aircraft. I had witnessed several of these attacks, and to say it was a spectacular sight would be a gross understatement.

A group of my fellow pilots, sitting in the squadron ready-room, upon hearing the announcement that "bogies" were approaching rapidly jumped up and headed out the hatch toward the starboard side of the ship and the rather long climb up several levels to get a good view of what was sure to happen within a few moments. They yelled at me to follow them since I had just about completed my report to George Lewis on target damage.

Heading into the passageway I faced our squadron's small pantry area where our assigned ship's

steward, a cheerful black by the name of "Buck", stopped me to inform me that he had just about finished making the ham sandwich I had requested on my way into the ready-room for my debrief, as I hadn't anything to eat since about 3 in the morning prior to my flight. As I stopped at the pantry the last of my shipmates yelled at me to "hurry-up or you'll miss the show" as they climbed the ladder up to the island structure. I knew the attacking aircraft were fairly close to have our own 5" guns commence firing. I said to Buck, "Hurry-up Buck, I don't want to miss the show," and he answered, "O.K. Mr. Griffin, I just have to toast the bread, 'cause I know you like your sandwich toasted." The toast popped up just as our 40mm guns started firing, POM-POM-POM-POM. I started to tell Buck to forget the sandwich, I'd pick it up later, when he finished up and handed me my sandwich saying, "I put some fresh tomato in there also, Mr. Griff, I pinched it from the galley." I thanked him and started for the starboard side to climb up to the island when I heard our 20mm guns open up. I knew instantly I couldn't get up the several levels in time to see anything; 20mm guns are only used when the enemy planes were right on top of you. I turned immediately to the port side of the ship where I could stand on the catwalk right next to the flight deck and could see almost as well as being on the island.

Just as I reached the catwalk I looked up to where the tracers from our guns were streaming and I saw a fighter plane coming through broken clouds diving straight for our ship. An instant later I saw his right wing explode from a direct hit and he flipped over and plunged straight down and crashed into our ship's wake.

The personnel on the decks and island areas shouted and jumped for joy upon seeing the plane splash into the sea. Not 10 seconds later through the same break in the clouds came the second fighter plane, diving straight for the "Lady Lex." As I stood there, munching on my sandwich, I looked up at the thousands of rounds being fired at the diving plane and knew that he too would explode any second now, because no plane could go through that wall of fire and survive. I also checked his wing roots for signs of any machine gun fire coming from them, at the same time I saw a black bomb attached under the center of his fuselage. Orange flashes were coming from his guns as he was strafing the ship as he dove on us. I yelled to those 5 or 6 men standing around me that he was strafing and to take cover under the edge of the flight deck. A young sailor was standing directly in front of the opening under the flight deck with his arms up on the

deck, and he was frozen in awe at the sight of this plane coming down on us. I could see that he never did hear my warning shout, so I hit him on the back of his neck with the heel of my palm, and he dropped to his knees as the rest of us ran over him getting under the protection of the flight deck. Almost immediately we heard a huge explosion and the whole ship shook and shuddered as it was hit by the aircraft. The carrier then sounded its collision horn, a mournful "mooring" sound like a dying cow.

I went back up to the catwalk to see what damage we had suffered, and it was incredible. The after part of the island was in flames, and huge billows of black smoke were pouring out of the island structure. Several bodies were lying on the flight deck very still. Several others were staggering around wounded and bleeding. The enemy plane had hit the ship just aft of the ship's smokestack and directly into the ship's secondary control station. When the bomb exploded, it sent its force and flames all the way up the starboard side of the ship killing almost all personnel exposed on that side forward of the center of the explosion.

Of the 9 or 10 pilots that left the ready-room in front of me and climbed up to the island, 5 of them were standing on the platform adjacent to secondary control and were killed instantly. One other was so severely injured he died that evening. Three more suffered major burns and were later transferred to a hospital ship. The total number of casualties lost in this new form of attack by the Japanese, called "Kamikaze" (Divine Wind), was 47 killed and 127 injured. Our squadron took the heaviest losses with Bob Parker, Chuck Fisher, Bob Smith, Bob Doyle, John Gilchrist, Francis Jackson killed; and Bill Emerson, Joe Williams, and Ray Wicklander injured.

We had not heard of the Kamikaze Corps prior to this attack and believe the Lexington was one of the first ships involved in the desperate attempt of the Japanese to halt the American advance toward final victory in the Pacific.

I often think of that fateful day when my waiting for a ham sandwich probably saved my life. However, being a man of faith, I will in no way discount the presence of a beautiful Guardian Angel and maybe a bit of Irish luck!

DROSKE: At the time the Lex was hit by the Kamikaze, we were hitting Manila Bay. On our

return to the Task Force, there was a question whether we could land on the Lex. Ship's company did a good job of cleaning the deck, and we did land on the Lex. On my way down to my quarters I encountered the dead and the body of our Air Group photographer, Burkhardt, whose last words were: "The dead are lucky." Burkhardt was at fire control #2 when the Jap hit.

ENGEN: Following the sinking of the Nachi we returned to Lexington and I happened to be one of the first dive bombers to land on board. I was directed to report to the Flag Bridge to tell Admiral Mitscher what had happened to Lt Banker. As I ducked into the Island just aft of the medical station I was struck by the sight of wire basket Stokes litters with bodies in them. They were stacked one on top of the other to about six feet high. Not knowing what had happened, I asked a sailor and he replied that Lexington had been struck by a kamikaze airplane about an hour before. I made my report to Vice Admiral Mitscher and proceeded to our Ready Room where there was an awesome silence. VB-19 had taken heavy losses in the kamikaze attack.

Lt R.B. Parker, Lt(jg) R.G. Smith, Ensigns J.W. Gilchrist, R.W. Doyle, and F.O. Jackson were missing and presumed blown over the side. Lt(jg) C.F. Fisher was burned and succumbed. Lt J.W. Williams, Lt(jg)s R.G. Wicklander, H.N. Walters, W.S. Emerson, and Ens R.S. Griffin were burned about the hands and face but survived. All had been standing in the catwalk aft of Secondary Conn to observe the now routine afternoon attacks. On that day we had lost two airplanes, along with eight officers and two enlisted men killed, and we had lost the services of another five officers who were wounded. In total Lexington had had 46 killed and 147 wounded by one kamikaze dive bomber.

Now, Lt Price Stradley became Commanding Officer. Over the next two days we held somber burial at sea services for the dead. As each body was consigned to the deep from the Number Two Elevator in a white canvas bag weighted down with brass shell casings, taps and three volleys from the Marine Guard marked each departure. As at every funeral, we sang the Navy Hymn which by now I had memorized. The burned needed attention and better hospital care. On Wednesday, November 8, the Task Group headed for Ulithi. There the wounded were sent to a hospital ship and we took tactical stock.

LEAF: Nov. 5, 1944 - When Lex was hit, I was on the flight deck watching another Jap plane go in on the starboard side, when the big guns began to fire. Looked up and saw the Jap diving on us. Took refuge in a compartment under the turrets when we were hit. After the hit, figured had better go to the ready room to muster in. Going across the flight deck do remember turning sharply and saw the Ticonderoga dead ahead and was a bit shook up. It was a sad day working down in sick bay doing what we could.

LEWIS: The day the Lexington was hit by the Kamikaze plane was particularly sad, as I suppose our losses were the greatest that day of any single day. I only missed it by seconds as I had left the bridge near the place where the Kamikaze hit only a few seconds before going down to our ready room to interrogate the personnel of the first bomber to return aboard. Our Yeoman and I were quickly turned into doctors to treat cuts and burns, mostly from medications found in the jungle packs.

NEWMAN: When the "Divine Wind" hit the ship and wiped out so many of our pilots, someone was telling us "It's time to go home." For me, not a day too soon.

PECK: 5 November 1944 - 1430 GQ sounded. Instead of doing as we normally do (go to the bridge to watch the show) we stayed in our room. More firing then came an explosion that rocked the ship. We'd been hit. Some crazy yellow son of a bitch made a suicide dive and hit the island. Dugan and I couldn't go through the watertight doors due to the fire near Frame 110 which followed the crash.

#### FAVORITE COMBAT TALE - LEX

What is your favorite tale of combat from the squadron's tour on the Lex?

BOWEN: Listening to CDR Winters request permission to return to base, since the enemy carrier had rolled over, and he being told by Mitscher to stay there until it sank.

CHAPMAN: Second Battle of the Philippine Sea.

CROCKER: I enjoyed it all. A little nervous at times though!

DUNCAN: "Old Zeke" Parker shooting down Jap plane.

EMERSON: So many good and bad ones. (1) Harvey and myself on our 30 day trip on USS SHARK II (SS-314). (2) The 24th and 25th of October 44 (Fleet Battle-Skipper lost-PRINCETON lost-First almost night carrier landing, etc.) (3) 5 November 44-Kamikaze.

EMIG: Second Battle of Philippine Sea (24/25 Oct 44) and getting a direct hit on Nachi class cruiser in Manila Bay (5 Nov 44)

GLASGOW: I was on the flight deck heading for the after bridge when the Zeros were on their run that got us.

GLUMAC: Crapser's lone bombing of a Jap carrier.

GOOD: 2nd Battle of Philippines.

GRAY: The mission on Iwo Jima.

GRIFFIN, W: There were several exciting things that happened during the last few weeks of combat: the attack on the Japanese large carrier force in which all four of their carriers were sunk in one day, the story of how Stu Crapser found the entire force--and what he did about it, the day we got hit by the kamikaze plane and the terrible damage it did not only to the Lex but to our squadron.

GUNTER: Pre-dawn catapult launches, attack on Jap carriers, attack on Ise when my bomb would not release and landing with bomb.

HEILMANN: The strike on a Jap cruiser in Manila Bay on 5 Nov 1944. All dive bombers had a direct hit and the torpedo bombers finished her off. It made Life Magazine but we lost Don

Banker. His own bomb got him.

HELM: Attack on the Japanese Carrier Shokaku.

KOCH: Strike on Jap Carrier and being hit by Kamikaze.

LEAF: SEPT 22, 1944 - Dive on Clark Field, Plane hit 5 times - Griff's parachute harness cut by bullet - lost most Hydraulics - barely got gear down by hand. OCT 12, 1944 - "Tony" made a pass on us after dive - shot at him & fighters got him later. Fleet engagement. Lost 1500 rounds in a dive at Guam.

LEWIS: We like to forget the sad things such as the days in operation when we lost people, the day the ship was hit resulting in over 400 casualties, and remember the humorous things such as the Parkie program starring Zeke Parker, etc. One tragedy that turned out humorous was when our mess boy across from our ready room and about fifteen of his buddies drank the poisoned alcohol for the fighter injection engines. A bunch of them were sick in the dispensary aboard ship, and Doctor Fox told them what he thought had happened and if they were telling the truth within fifteen minutes he thought he could save them. He got confessions at an all-time record time.

McBRIDE: (1) Crapser's single plane attack on Jap Fleet. (2) Being chewed out by Skipper for countermanding his orders on tactics which I called a parade formation.

MEEKER: The attack on the Jap fleet.

NICKENS: Witnessing a near-collision between the LEX and another carrier when the other carrier made a wrong turn.

NIEMEYER: Our scouting mission over the Philippines and Leyte Gulf. Four Bombers and four fighters shot down 20 Japanese planes. That was the day Parker became "Zeke". Parker and I were chewed out by Admiral Halsey for shooting down planes when we were assigned to

look for the Japanese fleet.

NEWMAN: Being shot down, picked up & returned to LEX.

ROSS: The Kamikaze attack hitting the Lexington, November 5, 1944, and four flights over Chi Chi Jima in one day.

SADLER: Two hits on Jap Fleet, Oct. 25, '44, 1 carrier, 1 battleship.

SCOTT: The Zeke Parker Hour and response by VF.

SIMMERMAN: The morning we hit the Jap Fleet. I lost most of my ammunition that came out of the canister. I bailed most of the ammo out on the Jap Fleet. What a surprise to the enemy.

STELLA: Oct. 25, 1944 attacks on Jap Fleet. 1st attack on Shokaku Carrier - 2nd attack on BB.

THURMON: When we hit the ammo ship at Okinawa, and Walters was injured, and I brought him home to the "cut" on board.

WARNKE: My memories of our tour of combat operations on the Lexington are probably unremarkable from most everyone else. I don't believe I was ever really terrified of anything that happened (stupidity? naivete? ignorance? probably some of all three.) but am also sure that my blood pressure and pulse rates rose a bit when somebody told me what all those "black puffs" were! However, I was also informed not to worry about those "explosions" you can see, so I sat back and enjoyed the fireworks -- knowing my fearless pilot would dodge all that crap they were throwing up to greet us! The old BP & pulse rate did elevate to record heights at Iwo Jima and over the Japanese fleet! Multicolored bursts all around us, and I swear I saw a kitchen sink go by close abeam! But the Mighty Wicklander never let them "lay a glove on us"! As a matter of fact, we came thru it all "untouched" except for a small dent in the middle of a prop blade. (Probably hit by musket fire from a rice farmer.)

WICKLANDER: Bratten gave me plane that had wing changed & trim tab cables were crossed. Left wing heavy with full tab. Used my belt to help hold stick. Dove on oil tanks at Cebu, would go into spin, pull out try again, Hell of a time.

WODELL: 2nd Battle of the Philippine Sea (Oct. 23 & 24th 1944)

NIEMEYER: HIGHLIGHTS - SOUTH PACIFIC:

Each mission we flew, our success in carrying out those missions, and the pride of being good at what we did.

Zeke Parker and the day he got the name.

The day the ship was hit by the Kamikaze and the personal and total tragedy that followed.

The day the TBF missed the barrier just after our flight had finished landing.

Admiral Mitscher.

Mog Mog Island.

We really get to know each other.

10-22 NOV 1944 REPAIRS AT ULITHI ATOLL

SCHOENER: I remember the feeling of pride to be part of the squadron and the ship as we sailed into Ulithi after the Kamikaze hit, and the Lexington receiving the salutes of the various ships as we entered the harbor and proceeded to our anchorage.

PECK: 20 November 1944 - 5 midget subs somehow sneaked thru the sub-net - one sank a

tanker. Intermittently throughout the day the ship would rock from the depth charges dropped by nearby cans

### LIBERTY AT ULITHI

What is your best memory of liberty at Ulithi?

BOWEN: Raiding the beer compound one night with Bill Good and the CBs.

CHAPMAN: Swimming along the reefs & drinking rum & coke.

CROCKER: Green Beer.

DUNCAN: Getting drunk at "O" Club.

EMERSON: Sorry to miss this one, but Joe Williams and I were visiting the hospital facilities farther south.

EMIG: Green Beer.

ENGEN: Seeing the Ensign from the New Jersey being thrown into the water to swim for ship.

GLUMAC: Skin Diving.

GOOD: Overnite stay with CB Battalion.

GRIFFIN, W: That damn shaved ice in the drinks and trying to catch a launch back to the LEX.

GUNTER: Stumbling upon Eddie Outlaw and his Hornet fighting squadron - having unanticipated drinks with them - falling into the drink as I tried to get the whaleboat back to the LEX.

HEILMANN: Using chits to buy drinks on Mog-Mog, really tying one on and staggering into the landing craft. Some didn't make it and ended up in the water.

LEWIS: (1) When we first got ashore they issued us engraved or an embossed membership card of which the fanciest private club in New York would be proud. When we reached the club it was a thatched roof only with booze and water and no ice. After a few of these, we proceeded to choose up and play football with an unhusked coconut. (2) Another interesting thing I recall about Ulithi was that an enterprising young marine had made a washing machine out of a 50-gallon oil drum on top of which he had a windmill and in which he had an agitator similar to the ones on old-fashioned milk churns.

McBRIDE: Beer Parties on Mog-Mog. Fights.

MEEKER: I don't remember.

NIEMEYER: Mog-Mog island - 10 AM to 6 PM daily.

SADLER: Good and I living with the Seabees for 3 days.

SCOTT: Long day, lots of beer, war stories and long trip back to ship.

STELLA: I won TWO World Series baseball pools.

THURMON: Drinking beer.

WODELL: One palm tree with 500 sailors, full of beer, trying to climb it.

## CHAPTER 8

### GOING HOME

PECK: 22 November 1944 - I assumed the duty after dinner - then it happened. The word was passed we were returning to the states!!!

WARNKE: Then came the day when somebody stuck his head into the Ready Room and announced that we had thirty minutes to pack our personal belongings and report to the quarterdeck to be transferred to the Enterprise for the start of our journey back to the USA. Hell, I had twenty minutes to kill before our transportation arrived!

ENGEN: We did not have much left in the way of pilots. It was decided that reconstituting with so many new pilots would be more difficult than bringing out a new air group from Honolulu, and the plans were made to do that in some complicated logistic maneuvers.

#### 23 NOV 1944 RELIEVED BY AIR GROUP 20 - TRANSFERRED TO USS ENTERPRISE FOR TRANSPORTATION TO PEARL HARBOR

SCHOENER: Remembrances - November 23, 1944 - and spending my 20th birthday helping to transfer squadron baggage and equipment from the U.S.S. LEXINGTON to the U.S.S. ENTERPRISE.

#### ABOARD THE ENTERPRISE

What is your best memory of returning to "Pearl" on the "Big E"?

BOWEN: Getting a sore butt flying anti-sub searches.

CHAPMAN: ASW patrols. The LSO with the one landing I made and Griff's reaction to the LSO.

CROCKER: Anti-sub hops and the friction between the married and non-married pilots.

DUNCAN: "Exciting" Anti-Sub patrols.

EMERSON: Joe and I still vacationing in South Pacific.

ENGEN: Norm Walters being decked by Frank Albert, the OD, in port Honolulu.

GLUMAC: Circling the ocean on anti-sub patrol while everyone else was in the harbor.

GOOD: ASPs.

GRIFFIN, W: Basketball games with Tommy Hamilton (XO) and his dirty players.

GUNTER: Being told I didn't have to fly ASP since I had completed two tours at sea and I'd be getting shore duty.

HEILMANN: Two Thanksgiving feasts - one on the LEX before the transfer, then one on the "Big E" afterwards. Playing cards and losing a lot.

LEAF: Some enjoyable moments were playing cards in the ready room, and at times we would go on the catwalk at the bow right under the flight deck and tell sea stories. Also enjoyed watching the flying fish and porpoises swim alongside the ship.

A few nicknames: Milton J. Harvey-----Speedie

Albert E. Madrid-----Alsab

Eno H. Leaf-----Hijemo

Paul L. Reischman-----Shortie

Paul F. Roundy-----Peefur

Neil S. Reid-----N.S.

Richard C. Smolinski----Smo

Ira G. Gray-----I.G.

McBRIDE: Dinner with Whizzer White - Basketball games. SB2C's only aircraft available for ASP.

MEEKER: Being catapulted off to fly an ASP. What a short catapult! It was like being shot out of a cannon.

NIEMEYER: The day I got in a heated debate with the Air Officer because he wanted to use the "standard" takeoff run for SB2Cs (about mid-deck). I won and no one went in the water.

SADLER: They tried to schedule the junior single officers for ALL ASPs on the way to Pearl.

SCHOENER: Being assigned by Chief "Smitty", as the new kid on the block, to several anti-sub patrols off the Big "E" on our way back to Pearl. After a couple of wave-offs on one flight, wondering if we were going to have to be shot down to satisfy the LSO.

SCOTT: Meeting CDR Tom Hamilton, flying Anti sub patrol, blowing tire on last carrier landing of cruise, flying ashore to Ford Island.

STELLA: Flew two ASP flights. Had a hot hand in fantail dice games!

LEAF: December 5, 1944 - Enterprise - LSO not good - Gave us a cut & then a wave off. Flew below the flight deck but didn't go in. Griff had a hard time with him & after we finally made it, after 3 passes, we had to restrain Griff from going after the LSO. (It turned out he was a novice and shouldn't have been there.) This was my last carrier landing - went into PB4Y-2s when we were back in states.

GRIFFIN, W: You Never Take a "Wave-off" After Receiving a "Cut" From the LSO - Except When the LSO Is Not Really an LSO!!

After being relieved by Air Group 20 in Ulithi Atoll we boarded the USS Enterprise (CV-6) and headed for Hawaii and the good old USA and HOME!! While enroute, the bombers had to perform ASP searches daily. On my last ASP flight it almost became my last flight!!

Leaf and I returned to the ship and entered the landing pattern for our final landing aboard. As I came into the groove and picked up the LSO, he gave me some radical signals - too high, too

fast, too slow, too low, etc. and finally a "wave-off". I couldn't figure this out because our regular air group LSO, Schultz, who knew every pilot and who swung the paddles smooth and easy, never gave me signals like this. Then I remembered that some of the squadron pilots in the previous day or two complained about the new guy swinging the paddles, so I decided to watch him real close. As I came back around on my second pass, he again gave very abrupt and radical changes in my final leg with a frantic low followed by a frantic "come-on" (meaning give it full power) which I did at once. Just as I came up over the fantail he gave me a "cut"!! I instinctively chopped the power off and shoved the nose of the plane over to line up with the center of the deck for a landing. Instead of being near the center of the deck, I was far to the left of center, too high, and could never get back for a landing where I would catch a wire and stop before either crashing into the barrier or overshoot the barrier and land on top of the planes parked forward on the deck. Instantly I made my decision to take my own wave-off and gave the engine full power. The torque of that big 4-bladed prop twisted the plane to the left, and I found myself diving toward the water alongside the ship, and I was sure we would crash straight into the sea. I was standing on the right rudder pedal with all my might and at the same time pulled back on the stick to at least try to pancake into the water. The plane's left wing rapidly came up to a level position, and I ended up in a level flying condition with the wheels almost touching the water and the prop making a wake behind us. Leaf later told me that as we flew - alongside the carrier's portside, he could actually look UP and see the crew looking DOWN on us!! Again my "Guardian Angel" was right there. After gaining altitude and coming around to make another landing, I made up my mind to ignore that damn LSO and land the plane myself, which I did without incident. Since I was now the last plane to land, and I was fuming mad, I didn't even taxi out of the arresting gear, but cut the engine where I had stopped. I climbed out of the cockpit and headed aft toward the area where the LSO was headed up the deck toward me. Just before we got close to each other, he shouted, "Don't you know how to fly that damn airplane?" My answer was, "You rotten SOB, I'll kill you," and I cocked my right arm to punch him in the face. Several sailors were close to me and grabbed my arm and prevented me from tearing him apart. I was so mad to think I had come through the whole damn combat tour and now on my last flight before reaching Hawaii this little jerk almost killed me. The ship's bullhorn was shouting, "The pilot of that last plane report to the Captain's Bridge at once." When I got to the bridge the Captain said he had never seen a plane take a "wave-off" after a "cut" and make it. He also said that the final decision was mine to make, right or wrong. He then told me that he apologized for having to use that LSO as he was a passenger on the ship and was not a Naval Aviator. It seems the Navy was so short of LSO's in 1944 that they tried an experiment to make

50 non-flying officers into LSO's and this man was one of them. He has never sat in a cockpit to make a landing on a carrier!! No wonder he didn't know how to bring us in. The Captain said he was going to recommend that they cancel all 50 of them as LSO's, and I said I totally agreed.

### LIBERTY AT PEARL

What is your best memory of liberty at "Pearl"?

BOWEN: Putting my footprint on Waikiki Beach only to get it wet because the water was right up to the hotel steps.

EMERSON: Joe Williams and I still vacationing in the South Pacific.

GOOD: Bad night.

GUNTER: Only that Big E's ship's company was laying for Norm Walters.

HELM: Fresh milk and hamburgers.

MEEKER: Guess I found the bar too soon to remember much about Pearl.

NIEMEYER: "O" Club and Trader Vic's.

SADLER: One inebriated night.

### 8 DEC 1944 ABOARD USS LONG ISLAND FOR TRANSPORTATION TO SAN DIEGO FROM PEARL HARBOR

WARNKE: We arrived in Pearl Harbor and immediately boarded a "Kaiser Coffin" bound for San Diego. That was our second trip through Pearl Harbor, and we never so much as had a chance to set foot in downtown Honolulu. Oh well, 20-25 years later I made it back to Hawaii and Maui. I found that the old NAS Kahului was now the main commercial airport on the island

of Maui, NAS Puunene no longer existed, the road to the top of Mt. Haleakala had been paved, and the islands were overrun with tourists and hotels. I'm sure that the "natives" would probably rather have their homeland back the way it was prior to WWII. Such is "progress".

SCHOENER: Remembrances: Can't forget the very rough pickup basketball games between the pilots' teams at the Ulithi anchorage and our gunners vs. the Long Island crew game on the way back to the states. Never have forgotten the helpless feeling of going up for a shot at the basket and the ship's rising on the waves at the same time, making you feel like you were glued to the deck. That's stuck with me these 50 years (and the thought of "How many people have ever played in a basketball game, aboard a navy ship, on the high seas, during wartime?")

On the trip back to the States, from Hawaii aboard the Long Island, the ship's company had us squadron gunners carting supplies fore and aft and up and down ladders, using a little harassment and foul language along the way. I can't forget one of them grabbing me as I started down a ladder and barking, "Roll your sleeves down, sailor. Don't you know that you're in a war zone!!"

Satisfaction, as we entered the harbor at San Diego and were greeted by banners and a band and many welcomers at the dock, was made even greater for me when some of us were on the catwalk with many of that same Long Island bunch standing on the flightdeck behind us, full of puzzlement at all the celebrating, and asking each other what it was for.

It was a great feeling to see their jaws drop when we turned around and informed them that it was for us!!

#### ABOARD USS LONG ISLAND

What is your best memory of the ride on the LONG ISLAND to San Diego?

BOWEN: Endless crap games.

DUNCAN: Seeing the movie "Constant Nymph" with George Brent & Joan Fontaine every night for the entire trip.

EMERSON: Same old story for Joe Williams and me.

EMIG: Sea Sick.

ENGEN: The four-deep bunks, the long trip and the fact that no cigarettes would be sold to "passengers".

GOOD: Long trip.

GRAY: About seven wound up in the brig the first nite - Neil Reid for one.

GRIFFIN, W: Had my wallet stolen - lost all my family's photos.

GUNTER: Arriving to find that Jane had discovered we were coming in at San Diego and was there. The only squadron wife to ferret out the secret - Not through me.

HEILMANN: I remember going to sickbay for APCs to cure a cold. I guess I wasn't used to the colder climate.

HELM: The monotonous chug-chug of the ship's diesels.

LEWIS: One esthetic and superbly happy group.

McBRIDE: Bread & butter that didn't have fuel oil flavor - Sub contact with no planes or escort.

MEEKER: It was a long foul-weather trip, but getting back to the good old U.S.A. was wonderful.

NIEMEYER: How can it take this long to get from Pearl Harbor to San Diego?

SADLER: Seven days of monotony of forward & backwards - all day & night gambling.

SCOTT: Ten cramped days. Griffin losing his wallet and the parties at the officers' quarters in

the Del Coronado Hotel.

THURMON: The 24 hour crap game.

WODELL: "Torpedo Junction" where we all lived. (Holes cut out of the internal structure to keep her from rolling over.)

14 DEC 1944    ARRIVED SAN DIEGO

NIEMEYER: HIGHLIGHTS - SAN DIEGO:

The strange trip on Enterprise.

Back again to the Del Coronado.

Looking forward to Christmas at home.

PECK: 14 December 1944 - Home B'God!

## CHAPTER 9

### MORE SEA STORIES

LOCHER: It's Dec. 7th, 1941, and my mother and I are living in government quarters at Albuquerque Air Corps Base (later Kirkland AFB), New Mexico, the home base of the 19th Bomb Group, a B-17 outfit. I'm 16 years old.

It's Dec. 15th, 1941, and my mother received a letter dated 30 Nov, 1941, postmarked Manila, P.I. It's from my father, Master Sgt. Joseph H. Locher, U.S. Army Air Corps. He said all hell was breaking loose, everything is on a war footing. That's the last we ever heard from him. I'm still 16 years old and can hardly wait until I'm 17.

It's May 17th, 1942. General Eubank, the CO of the 19th Bomb Group, calls on my mother and informs us that Sgt. Locher was a POW. He asked me, I'm 17 now, what my plans were. I told him I intended to finish high school (June 1943) and hopefully join up as a cadet and become a pilot. He suggested I go to summer school, graduate, and under his direct supervision, join the Air Corps, and when I was 18 he would see to it that I went to pilot training. However, all this depends on my passing a flight physical. He told me to report to Major (?), a flight surgeon at (Kirkland) the Air Base. I'm 17, be 18 in April 1943. What more could I ask for?

Guess what? I got a minus 8 on my flight physical. You need a +6 or better to pass. Over a period of three months I was checked 6 times. The same old answer. I have HIGH blood pressure. The Major informed General Eubank and me that I could never be a pilot in the Army.

It's August 10th, 1942, I'm 17, a high school graduate, stripped to my shorts in the physical exam room at the Navy Recruit Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I had just been informed by a nice old doctor that I could qualify for 4F but not as a sailor. I HAD HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.

It's August 20th, 1942, I'm 17, a high school graduate, stripped to my shorts in the physical exam room at the Navy Recruit Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The O in C and the nice old doctor want to know why I've been back 10 times in

10 days. I told them about my father. The doctor said my blood pressure just dropped, and the O in C said I will leave for San Diego tomorrow morning at 0800. I DIDN'T HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE for one day.

It's Sept. 20th, 1942 and I'm at the NTC in San Diego. My scores are high enough to qualify to a number of service schools. I chose ARM (Aviation Radioman) but the doctor that checked my physical condition said "HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, disqualified!" My second choice was RM (Fleet Radioman) school.

It's Jan. 1943, and I'm 17, an RM3, a volunteer for ARM school and in sick bay with the measles. I'm due to be discharged from sick bay the day the draft is leaving for ARM school in Memphis. The HM said he couldn't give me a physical while I was in isolation! I said "Hell I'm healthy, fake it!" I didn't have HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE on that day either.

It's Jan. 1943, 3 AM and about 100 of us are getting physicals for ARM training in NATTC, Memphis, Tennessee. Guess what? The HM2 said I've got HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, handed me a chit and said he'd be right back. After about twenty minutes, my friend Wallace Clift came into the exam room and asked me what was holding me up. The rest of the group were ready to go to the barracks. I told him what the HM2 said and showed the chit. He said that was the chit they gave you when you pass the physical. Come on, I'll show you where to go. I PASSED ANOTHER PHYSICAL.

It's Nov. 1943, I'm an ARM3, graduate of aerial gunnery school, operational training (SB2A's, Brewster Buccaneers), in VB-19 and flying with LT Butts. I'm in Dr. Fox's (Flight Surgeon AG-19) office and being questioned about a thing called HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. Do you ever black out? Sure. Often? No. So he called LT Butts in and asked him about my reaction to pull outs. Butts told him he wasn't aware of any problem - Locher always told him how far off his bomb was from the target. Anyway, Dr. Fox had LT Butts report to him for a month as to my black outs on pull outs. His report must have been OK, because Dr. Fox didn't ground me. He suggested I come in 30 minutes early on scheduled physicals and lie down and relax. It worked for the rest of my navy career.

I controlled my HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE DURING PHYSICALS. I lied, cheated, etc, whatever you want to call it, but I was flying in the rear seat of a dive bomber and when we dropped our first bomb on the Japs at Guam, I felt I had done the best I could do to make up for what happened to my father. VB-19 was my vehicle.

In May 1943, we got word thru the Red Cross, that my father had died in a POW camp in the P.I. He actually died in May 1942 and is buried in the Cemetery of the Pacific, Manila. P.I.

I remained in VB-19 until April 1947, and in the Navy until Sept. 1972, retiring as a LCDR, and approximately 15,000 flight hours.

In 1985 I had a heart attack and my blood pressure is now a constant 126/76. The doctors don't know why, but I DON'T HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE anymore.

GRIFFIN, W: "Dead Silence" - The Loudest Sound in the World!!

On one of our routine long and boring ASP flights at 1,000 feet over the Pacific Ocean, on a bright, hot day - completely out of sight of ship, land, rock, or even a bird, Leaf and I were so bored with the drone of the engine and the aircraft trimmed up to fly almost "hands off", we both dozed off. I don't know how long we were in this mesmerized state of being, but it was long enough to run a fuel tank dry!! The engine died quietly without even a cough. The silence that ensued finally penetrated my brain, and when I opened my eyes and "heard the silence", my heart thumped so loudly I thought I was having a heart attack. Automatically I knew what had happened, and my hand instantly went to the fuel tank control valve and switched it to another tank while simultaneously turning on the booster fuel pump. I looked at the altimeter, and the plane had descended down to almost 500 feet!! With what seemed an hour nothing happened, and the aircraft kept going down - when all of a sudden the engine roared to life!! The prop went to max RPM (I forgot to pull the throttle and prop control back) and the engine sounded like takeoff power was on. Over the intercom Leaf's voice sleepily asked "What the Hell happened?" The altimeter now read about 300 feet, so I re-set the power controls and climbed back up to 1,000 feet to continue the search pattern. Needless to say, both Leaf and I were wide awake for the rest of the flight and for all future ASP flights. If that engine had not started or if I had not

"heard" that "dead silence" we would have landed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean a hundred or more miles from the Lex. Even if we survived the crash landing and got into our life raft, the chances that we would ever be found were a million

to one - in wartime the task force cannot afford to send out search planes or ships to look for one life raft, or even no life raft if we did not survive the crash. Again my "Guardian Angel" was right there!!

BOWEN: As a frustrated fighter pilot, my big opportunity for fame occurred when we were returning from a strike. A straight line of five-inch bursts coming towards us from fleet AA suggested a bogie running for home. I peeled off from my flight and made a run on the puffs of flack until I spotted a Judy escaping. I opened up with my 20 mm cannons and saw the cowl blow off just before they jammed. No amount of coaxing reactivated them. I ordered Simmons to bring his guns to bear on the port side so he could shoot down the Judy when I pulled up alongside. In all the excitement, I had failed to change my throttle setting from cruise to full power, so we were closing very slowly. CDR Winters was observing all this and I suppose, finally determined that I was putting my plane and two lives in jeopardy (which was probably true). He pulled up in front of me and a moment later, I was flying through a flaming cloud of smoke and debris. Right then, if I could have, I would have shot down that rigidly-correct academy guy! And he was correct, of course and my chance to be a dashing hero was dashed.

LEWIS: Earl Newman, George Bowen and I were stateroommates, and a number of us had brought booze aboard in parachute bags hidden in the bomb bays of the SB2Cs. George Bowen's booze had been stolen, so Newman and I kept him quite subservient by rationing him portions of our booze. You may also remember that a number of us made wills, the most important bequest in which at that time was our booze. I recall Ensign Smith of Indianapolis, a hell of a fine guy whom we lost and with whom I roomed at Los Alamitos, left me his.

Years later, Newman wrote me that a Navy chief came into his office to finance a car at Associates Discounts and was bragging about swiping a case of whiskey from one of the Bombing 19 planes, and Newman claimed he simply added the price of the booze to his finance charges. Whether George Bowen ever got it I do not know.

LOCHER: This is a story about one of our pilots. It struck me as funny.

We were aboard ship and were doing practice dives. This pilot chewed tobacco, and when he had to spit, he used his relief tube. He was chewing and spitting, and we made our first dive, and this is the conversation following the dive:

Pilot: Locher, did you get sick?

Locher: No, sir.

Pilot: Are you sure?

Locher: Yes, sir.

Pilot: I'm going to kill some SOB !!!

End of that conversation.

It seems that this unidentified pilot had been told not to spit tobacco juice in the relief tube, because the tube would get plugged, and someone (maintenance people) had to clean up the mess. The maintenance people were ignored, so someone went out to the aircraft and turned the output end of the relief tube 180 degrees, so that when the aircraft reached enough speed in a dive, the air pressure forced the stopped-up liquid in the relief tube out. The relief tube was stored under the pilot's seat, and when enough pressure was reached during a dive, the tobacco juice discharged into said pilot's face. I guess you know the practice of spitting tobacco juice in the relief tube stopped, and every discharge tube was checked by a certain pilot. (You pilots probably did that a lot - first time I had a part in it.)

LEWIS: Admiral Halsey was, of course, colorful, and I thought he and his staff were great dispatch writers. One I particularly remember being flashed on our screen in the Bombing 19 ready room aboard the Lexington during the great push West, was when a PT boat with its lonesome twin 50 caliber machine gun shot down a Jap fighter plane when the overwhelming odds would have been that the reverse would have happened, and Halsey sent the Ensign skipper of the PT boat the following dispatch: "Congratulations. Well done. Hydrant leaks on dog."

ENGEN: On returning to the force a multi airplane formation could be easily identified by the constant vigilant aircraft lookouts in our ships, but woe be it to the single airplane returning, because the rather doubtful recognition skill of the lookouts and the quick triggers on the guns

frequently provided the unwary returnee with a 4th of July welcome with him the principal celebratee. On one such occasion, Ensign Wesley Koch returning singly because of engine problems, was fired on by the entire force. He sought the safety of a large cloud nearby and the firing stopped - until he popped out the other side of the cloud when even more guns opened up on his airplane. This went on for 5 to 10 minutes while Koch tried to convince the force air defense officer that he was indeed one of ours, and all he was trying to do was land on his carrier. He seemed to have a lose-lose situation. He could be shot down by his own force or land in the water because his engine would fail. Eventually he sorted it all out and did land on Lexington, sadder but wiser.

DROSKE: I remember another incident that was embarrassing. I won't give the time and place. We went through the antiaircraft fire and didn't drop our bomb. I questioned the pilot why? He had neglected to throw the selector switch. It was really my fault. I'm sure you all remember Nov. 16, 1943 dive bombing practice when we lost a plane that never pulled out of the dive. After that time Stradley told me to check altitude and call him the armament check off list like bomb bay door, selector, arming, etc. On this dive I didn't do it, and we had to jettison the bomb on the way back.

LEWIS: When Commander Flatley reported aboard as the Admiral's Operations Officer, he flew from a jeep carrier where he had duty. I do not remember the exact dimensions of the Lexington flight deck, but it was approximately 110 feet wide and 960 feet long. I do remember they had to remove the side antiaircraft guns to get it through the Panama Canal, but this is unimportant. When Commander Flatley was cleared for landing aboard the Lexington he yapped back, "Which runway?"

GRIFFIN, W: (or as Stu Crapser called me on Maui - "Wrinkle Belly"):

Then there was the time Al Adlman was right about his plane "running rough"; the CARQUALS on the "mighty Altamaha"; liberty time in San Diego at the "Hollywood Burlesque". . . These stories would take up far too many pages in our book, so I won't go into detail here, but if any of you might like to hear more, I'll be delighted to sit down and bend your ear--these happenings and many more are still fresh in my memory; as fresh as if it were yesterday.

EMERSON: "WILLIE AND JOE"

With apologies to Bill Mauldin, the month and a half unplanned odyssey of "Willie and Joe" (in this case LTJG William S. Emerson and Lt Joe W. Williams) actually started about 1330 5 NOV 44 aboard USS LEXINGTON (CV-16). It was sometimes hilarious and sometimes confusing, but never dull. Despite the laughs and wonderful memories of our jaunt, it all started on a very deadly and costly note. Wars are like that.

At 1325 on 5 NOV 44, LEXINGTON went to general quarters and came under attack. In lieu of sitting in the Ready Room, we two, among other VB types not at the moment engaged in flying off to the wars, elected to observe the action from elsewhere vice the Ready Room. This move, which we thought was discretion overcoming valor, came about because we had heard that the FRANKLIN had taken a hit through the flight deck and into the Bomber Ready Room in October.

Ironically, I had been scheduled to be gone from the ship at this time on my regular assignment of flying #2 man on LT Don Banker, CO of VB-19. Our division had been to Manila that morning, and we had lost one aircraft while hitting Nielson Field. LTJG Johnny Evatt and R.E. Hansen ARM3 were the crew of that aircraft and were seen to crash in flames near the target. During lunch, and for reasons known only to him, Banker scratched me and his other regular wingman, Ray Wicklander, from the division's afternoon strike. We were scheduled to go back to Manila Harbor and the NACHI class cruiser living there. In view of the morning's activities at Manila, we sure didn't argue with him, and proceeded to enjoy a now leisurely lunch and an extra cup of coffee. Don Banker, and his gunner J.J. Burns, did not return from that strike. They were seen to crash in Manila Harbor after getting a direct hit on the cruiser. He was awarded his second Navy Cross posthumously for the sinking of the NACHI. As fate would dictate, this was the only combat strike Don Banker ever went on without Wick and me, if we were available, in our usual slots.

Simultaneously with our decision to vacate the Ready Room, we grabbed our issued "tin hats" and only some of us took our "flash-gear". About ten (10) of us dashed across the flight deck and up into the island. We managed to get front row seats to the action by occupying the area just outside, and aft, of the Secondary Conn (Batt Two).

At 1336 LEXINGTON opened fire with 5" 38s, 40mm, and 20mm, and splashed a "Zeke" about 1000 yards astern. Almost immediately all batteries opened up on the starboard side on a second "Zeke" on the beam at about 4000 yards heading aft. This "Zeke" was eventually hit after it turned in for a dive on the ship. The "Zeke" was on fire but continued in from the stern and crashed into the ship directly aft and slightly outboard of Secondary Conn.

As this second "Zeke" was turning in for his dive, it became quite apparent to me, Joe Williams, and several others in our questionable "front row seats", just what this guy's intentions were. Joe and I moved quickly inboard from our perch, and ducked into Secondary Conn to what we felt was a safe haven. Much to our chagrin we were to find out this was not so! Of the large group of VB pilots in the immediate area, only a couple besides Joe and myself vacated the preferred seats. Unlike Joe and myself, those few proceeded quickly forward on the inboard side of the island without stopping at Secondary Conn, thus taking themselves out of harm's way and saving a lot of wear and tear on their skin.

Immediately following Joe and my entering Secondary Conn, the crescendo of 5" 38s, 40mms, and 20mms ceased for a split second. This moment of silence was short lived. The Kamikaze hit us. I later learned, that of the approximately 15 people inside Secondary Conn, only Joe, myself, and about three others survived. We apparently were protected from the flying pieces of steel inside Secondary Conn by the large stanchion in the middle of the room, but we did get singed quite well by the fire that accompanied the explosion. The two people on either side of me died as did all of the remaining VB pilots still outside on the catwalk aft of Secondary Conn. A total of 47 officers and men were killed on LEXINGTON. One Hundred Twenty-Seven more were injured. One of those who escaped with minor but grounding damage to himself was Wick, the other wingman of Don Banker. The first section of the third division of VB-19 ceased to being operational on that day. This was a bad day all around for Bombing Nineteen. Two pilots and two gunners were lost over the targets. Six pilots were killed in the Kamikaze attack, and at least six more pilots couldn't pass a flight physical, including Joe Williams and me. The following morning (6 November 1944) found Bombing Squadron Nineteen with more SB2C-3s able to fly than pilots able to fly them. LEXINGTON retired from the fleet on 7 November 1944. Enroute to Ulithi she licked her wounds, patched up her wounded, Joe and I included, and buried her dead.

Because Joe and I were ambulatory, despite our head and hand burns being wrapped in

bandages, and because the medics needed the room, they put us out of sick bay about 24 hours after the incident. This led to some lighter moments during the trip to Ulithi. Among them was the continuing hilarious scene in the Ready Room featuring "Willie and Joe". Of course, as I remember it, the star was Joe trying to smoke a cigarette that our friends had attached to a paperclip which had been secured to the burn bandages around his hands. A similar jury-rig had been devised for my nicotine fits. What a picture we were, sitting there swathed in bandages, head and hands, like a couple of mummies. With nothing visible except eyeballs peeking out, cigarette hooked on paperclips, we looked like two escapees from the old movie, "The Invisible Man". It is a wonder that we didn't further increase the severity of our second and third degree burns by setting fire to our dressings.

During the few days' trip to Ulithi, it became noticeable that the physical distance between Joe and myself, on one hand, and the rest of the squadron, on the other hand, became farther and farther. About the second day enroute I put two and two together. I had been distancing myself from Joe intentionally because, as I told him in a kindly manner, "Joe, you are beginning to stink!". Joe returned the compliment in a tender manner with, "What the Hell do you think you are! A ROSE?" The several days without baths plus the unfortunate aroma of well-done human skin had challenged the closeness of friends and their civility.

Arrival in Ulithi was highlighted by the view of the good ship USS SOLACE (Big Red Crosses, painted white and NO GUNS) swinging on the hook and waiting with open arms for us purple heart candidates. The thought that we were going to a place with people who had the time, and the qualifications, to give us retiring Naval Aviators a bath, had now assumed an extremely high priority. The hell with treatment for the burns! We were even beginning to smell ourselves!

With her color and markings, the hospital ship USS SOLACE was an oasis of peace and tranquility there in the middle of Ulithi harbor among the array of combat gray and camouflage. If from a distance SOLACE was attractive, she was absolutely beautiful from the perspective of being on board her. The years have not dimmed the perception of white. Everything was white and clean and quiet: officers and crew in white, corpsmen and doctors in white, and in particular nurses in white, pretty female nurses in white! But aren't all females pretty? Remember this was November and we had left Maui in June. Time being the factor that it was, all the nurses were beautiful for at least the first 24 hours aboard SOLACE.

During our great few days aboard SOLACE, two incidents stand out in this mind's eye. First there was the mighty attractive nurse whom I drafted (after using the highly complex Emerson selection system - she was a female) to write down my dictated words explaining to the home folks why my handwriting was so much improved and actually legible - fortunes of war and all of that. The second is much more vivid as one man expressed his feelings under adverse conditions.

The day after our arrival on SOLACE, 10 to 15 of us were ensconced in a cozy little officers' sick bay, basically doing nothing more than comparing notes on where we were on LEX when it hit the fan. All of a sudden much hustle and bustle in the passageway, and through the hatch to our little convention pops the Bull himself. Halsey, that is! The next few minutes were a blur of him whipping around the room speaking to each of us occupants about our general health and welfare. As he was about to depart, he turned in the hatch and declared to all us has-been warriors, "OK men, thirty days leave and back at 'em, Right?" With that he was gone! One of his aides had not quite left the room when a response to the Bull's declaration was forthcoming from a very seriously wounded Commander. The Commander may have been hurt, but I assure you his vocal cords were not impaired. The Admiral's aide froze on the spot, but thought better of saying anything when he saw the fire on the eyes of the wounded Commander. The three striper verbalized his thoughts with the following immortal words. "That crazy son-of-a-bitch must be out of his Goddamned mind!" We never did find out if the Admiral heard the rebuttal to his broad plan for our immediate future. I don't think the Commander really cared if he did. The Admiral's aide, without comment, jammed on his hat and departed the area with the irreverent howls and roaring laughter beating on his ears.

As Joe and I had temporarily retired from the fighting-a-war business, we were hustled off SOLACE on 11 NOV and spent 6.8 hours in the luxurious confines of a PB2Y-3 enroute to Manus in the Admiralty Islands. This was a unique experience in itself. Flying FROM a "boat" was one thing - Flying IN a "boat" was an entirely different thing! No envy on our part - just some convenient transportation headed our way - out of the shooting war! However, one particular admonition by a PB2Y crewman as we boarded her damn near ended any craving for nicotine I might have had. Casually he said, "We think we have a fuel leak, so don't light up or we might blow up!" Even at five cents a pack we decided to conserve our money, save our lungs, and who knows what else.

The evening of 11 November (how appropriate that it was called Armistice Day then) found Willie and Joe, still wrapped like two mummies, trapped inside a small Navy Medical unit hospital on Manus, two degrees below the Equator. The thought of acquiring a cold beer, or two, had started to assume extremely high priority and was fast becoming an obsession. I, having passed through this charming back water hole of the Pacific while returning to the squadron after being shot down three months before, knew exactly where the so-called O-Club was. Within walking distance! Next problem: Despite the fact that we were ambulatory, the Navy nurse in charge of the ward made it very clear to us that we should not entertain any thoughts of bellying up to the bar. Besides, she indicated, we would probably not be very welcome in view of our generally invalid appearance, bandages, and aroma! Good old American ingenuity solved the problem. Tried and true bribery did the trick. Each of us had rat-holed a few greenbacks when leaving the LEX. The pay scale of corpsman strikers being what it was, there was a quick meeting of the minds and money, which produced at least four COLD ACME BEERS for dehydrated Willie and Joe. Now Acme beer, at its best, was far below Naval Aviators' well-known high standards, but we all had to make sacrifices during the war. Thank God it was cold, because we had tried WARM ACME during several days on Eniwetok the previous July. I don't think we could have handled it the way the preservative became too noticeable when Acme was anything but cold. That corpsman striker should have been given a life saving award. So much for unsung heroes.

12 November found us again winging our way southward to Guadalcanal. This was a very uneventful trip in an Army Air Force C-47. By this time I think Joe and I were the only VB-19 evacuees still being moved along the pipeline to the back area. Still, plenty of LEXINGTON ship's company people were moving along with us, some still in very serious condition.

Arrival on Guadalcanal brought us back on trail to the "good" hospital life. Everything was white again, and, because Joe and I still qualified, they checked us into the "Burn Hotel". The food was good and served at bedside. As we were still mastering the technique of using a knife and fork with bandaged hands and singed lips, and were a little (?) messy, I guess they figured it was better for local morale and appetites to keep us in the ward. There we joined a rather diverse, but well cooked group: people from a carrier that had had a bad deck fire, other survivors of a hangar deck fire, some Marines from Peleliu, and assorted smelly people from big and small fires. It was during this period that the distinctive aroma of badly burned human flesh became embedded in the memory bank of Willie. He has never forgotten that unique smell and

the pain and suffering he witnessed in that ward. Boys became young men and young men became much older men, all within a few days.

Five days on Guadalcanal had its compensations. We, in collaboration with some ambulatory "medium rare" marines, established a pipeline to a source of cool (sometimes cold) beer. We did not ask for the source of said beer. I have forgotten just what the tariff was for enough beer to satisfy our beer cartel, but its arrival was always after lights-out on the underside of a very mobile and swift wheelchair, with a disabled speed demon at the throttle. By unspoken agreement, absolute silence on the deck was the rule in force at delivery time. If "Operation Beer for the Burned" was exposed we figured Miss LT Hard-Nose-No-Nonsense Night Head Nurse would have our heads sitting as trophies on her desk at the end of the ward.

Each night's beer supply operation had gone as planned. Willie and Joe were scheduled to depart for the sunny climes of Espiritu Santo (Base Hospital Three) with the dawn. The war was going one way and we were going the other! Hooray! Heroes we were not.

It was well after lights out. Delivery of the cherished brew had taken place and all was quiet at our end of the burn ward. The exception to absolute silence was the subdued gurgling of hops, malt, and etcetera sliding by four or five sets of tonsils silently saluting the trip south. The silence was golden.

The silence was shattered with the softly spoken words - "Is it cold?" The words had a definite chill to them. Quietly standing on the perimeter of our little group, in the dark, was a crisp white uniform containing the body of a Navy Nurse LT type! Our Navy Nurse LT type! Our Hardnose-No-Nonsense Navy Nurse LT type! Willie and Joe, among others headed south the next day, had immediate visions of suddenly being declared unburned, and being flown north to LEX the next day! From a bunch of Naval and Marine officers who could probably expound at length on numerous subjects, you never heard so much silence in response to the query. It was repeated. "Is it cold?" If possible there were more icicles hanging on the words. At this moment, critical to the health, welfare, and future of our little group, a stalwart member of the Corps rose to the occasion and threw his body, figuratively speaking, into the breach. Semper Fidelis! In a voice closer in pitch to that of a small boy with hand in cookie jar, the one-armed Marine LT challenged the fates and said the unthinkable! "Mam, would you like to have one?"

The answer from our Hardnose-No-Nonsense Navy Nurse LT type was also unthinkable! "I thought you would never ask me." For the next few minutes, between quiet sips on a cold one, we found that "Operation Beer" had been compromised at about the time it was organized some days before. It seems that our pipeline had a leak. Only through the goodness of her heart, and whatever other reasons she had, did our name-forgotten, but forever remembered nurse, look and listen the other way during our clumsy and noisy (her words) nightly gatherings. Although it won't be anywhere in the official record, all of us present at the moment found one more reason to salute Navy Nurses.

On 17 NOV, four hours after departing Guadalcanal we arrived, compliments of an AAF C-47, in Espiritu Santo, home of U.S. Navy Base Hospital Three. This was to be our home-away-from-home until Willie and Joe were declared "fit to fight again". This was to last for the next twelve days.

Espiritu Santo remains a sort of blur of quonset hut hospital wards, truck trips to the beach with cold beer available, good food, clean white sheets, pretty nurses, a drunken Marine Captain about to shoot the lights out in the ward with his 45 caliber pistol (he got one), and other tender moments. While Willie and Joe were still patients there, memorable incidents stand out.

A week or so after their arrival, Willie and Joe were wandering about the hospital compound discussing important things, like a 30 day leave, when they noticed a crowd gathering in front of the Administration Building. It was obvious that some sort of ceremony was about to take place. A small band was present, and a podium and covered table were nearby. The hospital personnel present were in their dress uniforms for the area. This was quite a contrast to Willie and Joe who were still getting by with two LTJG collar bars, one LT bar, one Navy Officer Shield for an overseas cap, and one small pair of wings for an overseas cap. Our total wardrobe consisted of an extra shirt each, an extra pair of pants each, an extra set of socks each, and an extra set of skivvies each. All the aforementioned was stored in one small cardboard box which we took turns carrying while traveling - questionable attire for our official trip, but we didn't take inventory when leaving LEX.

We continued to observe the activities from the fringe of the crowd. It was apparent that something was amiss as there was much looking around by those in charge of whatever was going to happen. Just as the small band finished playing a martial tune for an umpteenth encore,

our eyes were caught by a young doctor who had been seeing us on rounds. As he charged through the crowd towards us, he verbally greeted us with "(expletive deleted), Where in hell have you two been? They have been hunting all over for you. You were supposed to be here 15 minutes ago!" As we were being hustled toward the center stage of this delayed production, it was pointed out that we were the "stars" and about to have Purple Hearts pinned on our untidy shirts while wearing our "partial uniforms". Looking back, it appeared that the CO of the hospital almost called off the show when he got a good look at us and our general appearance. We were not sure, but he probably thought "what the hell - I've got them here and the crowd is here." It was quite a delightful occasion and enjoyed by all. The slip-up in getting the word to us to show up for this event seemed to hinge on the fact that the messenger, sent to tell us why, where, and when to be, was misdirected. It seems he was told by one of our ward-mates (a Marine with a flaky sense of humor - but don't they all?) that we had been transferred to who-knows-where that morning. As could best be determined, the messenger was still looking for us when we wandered into the gathering crowd.

Other than our personal little purple mementos of the war, there was an immediate byproduct that developed from the festive event. After many glad hands from the locals, we decided that the event should be celebrated by better than a beer at the beach. How about an honest Scotch, Bourbon, or you name it? We voted, and it was agreed that was the answer. Next question, how to accomplish this as hospital patients? Patients were not allowed to escape the compound and attend the O-Club close by. By this time our physical appearance was almost normal. Joe's hand was still bandaged but hideable if he kept his hand in his pocket. If Willie would handle any required saluting and take position between any sentry's eyeballs and ambulatory Joe, while hiding his own bandaged left hand, our two itinerant Naval Aviators could, and did, sortie to the O-Club with impunity. However, a few days later they miscalculated the eagle eye of some unidentified spoil sport from the hospital who was attending the O-Club. Of course, our medical eagle eye would have to have been blind not to notice the confusion that reigned when Little Joe decided that friend Willie needed assistance and should not be forced to walk back to the hospital. Joe therefore called an ambulance to the O-Club in order to assist his "sick" friend Willie back to the hospital! Willie wasn't sick, he was just taking a little nap on the floor of a shower room adjacent to the club.

The next morning, 29 November 1944, is memorable if for nothing else than the speed with which Willie's and Joe's physical conditions were reevaluated and they became "fit to fight

again" and were handed a set of orders to report to the CO of Bombing Squadron Nineteen (VB-19), where and whoever the hell he was! We were no longer welcomed at U.S. Naval Base Hospital #3, Navy 140!

Twenty-four hours later, after whistling through the local receiving ship, Willie and Joe reported aboard U.S.S. LST 594 for transportation to wherever VB-19 was hiding. As we were to be unescorted by any additional ships on our cruise, there was some consolation, though limited, in that we were told we didn't have to worry about being torpedoed - any torpedo would pass under us as we didn't draw enough water for their minimum depth setting!

As the only passengers aboard, for the next nine days and while speeding through the western Pacific at nine (9) knots, Willie and Joe busied themselves between meals. There they were with a strenuous schedule of Acey-Deucey and Gin Rummy. With a new non-aviation audience fresh from the states, they felt compelled to regale the hosts with how it really was in the war with stories of Naval Aviators' deeds of daring and other untruths about their squadron.

Willie's and Joe's cool images suffered one minor setback while aboard U.S.S. LST 594. That occurred when somebody, unheard by us, ordered all the ship's guns to commence firing on a tow overhead during Air Defense drill. When the noise ceased, or they ran out of ammo, whichever came first, Willie and Joe found themselves, after bumping heads sharply, under the table in the wardroom with the stewardmate leaning down and asking if we wanted more hot coffee. He only asked us because he noticed that our just-moments-before-filled cups were now broken and empty and under the table with us. Also in the pile of broken cups, spilled coffee, and edgy young naval aviators, was the remnants of an Acey-Deucey game that had been in progress at the moment somebody pulled the first trigger on the 40mms and the 20mms.

Joe and his junior officer traveling buddy were beginning to feel like tourists. We were back in Manus, Admiralty Islands. At least we knew where the O-Club was, but we found out nobody seemed to know anything about U.S.S. Lexington or our dear friends in Bombing Nineteen. Before we actually departed L.S.T. 594 for the island, our arrival in Manus was punctuated by the distinctive sounds of U.S.S. LST 594 putting dents in the side of the LST Flotilla Commander's ship while trying to come alongside of U.S.S. Something-Or-Other. Willie and Joe often wondered if the LST 594 Skipper ever managed to sink the boss's ship. The last we saw of him we think he was considering sinking himself before having to report aboard the "big"

ship.

Manus was as lovely as ever. All the heat and humidity you could handle plus the mob of armed forces types coming and going in all directions. For the next week Willie and Joe didn't go anywhere, except to the mess hall, the head, the bar, and the fleet post office in our futile search for the location of our assigned destination - Bombing Nineteen! One exception to going nowhere, was our overnight visit, or was it two nights, to another close-by island with an airstrip and an RAAF Fighter Squadron in residence. We lucky two arrived in time to help our comrades-in-arms christen their new bar! We assured the fighter types that we were highly qualified at christening bars, and they concurred after we explained our backgrounds, so we joined the festivities. Festive is an understatement. Among other highlights of the evening, or was it two, was their tradition of "walking the bar", or words to that effect. It seems that during the highpoint of the night someone, preferably somebody very lightweight and at least slightly drunk, is chosen as the "walker". The chosen lightweight is bodily turned upside-down while the bottoms of his shoes are blackened with any substance that will leave a footprint. Once that occurs the procedure must be completed by stalwart others literally walking the chosen drunk up the wall, across the ceiling, and down the other wall! Now the bar is properly opened! To add to our enjoyment of the event, Joe being the "heavyweight" (120 lbs-fully dressed) that he was at the time, was among the finalists to be considered for the honor of being the "walker". It seems however, that national pride prevailed and an Aussie was given the honor.

While on Manus, among other things accomplished, the members of this daring twosome each acquired a temporary pay account (half pay available) and each a personal carbine rifle - with two clips of ammo each - no new or extra clothes, just money and a weapon. I'm not sure how or why the carbine. Perhaps we figured we would have to threaten somebody to find out the whereabouts of VB-19! We also, between arrival and departure Manus about a week later, acquired an occasional hangover during the short hours (two hours) the club was open. The bar had its own rationing and control system in addition to the hours. The only containers customers could use for booze were little paper cups with points on the bottom. With only two hands available the logistics of drinking became a major project, not to mention the local laws of supply and demand. Willie and Joe survived to find out that our home-away-from-home, the big Blue Ghost, was scheduled to arrive in Ulithi soon. With that we were off to intercept her with a set of orders to board an ancient bucket of rust called U.S.S. Castor (AKS-1) on 15 Dec 44.

Willie and Joe's four days and nights on the mighty Castor were mighty forgettable except for the night we were both selected for consecutive 4 hour watches to be the ship's Air Defense/Fire Control Officer! We were to be prepared to recommend to the Captain action in case of Japanese air attack! This selection was obviously based on our extensive knowledge of airplanes, guns, and primarily because we were available as freeloading passengers! I recall there was some rehearsing between us of the proper wording of any recommendation. It came out something like "SHOOT, GOD DAMN IT - SHOOT!". Fortunately for the war effort, this sterling duo was never called on for their recommendation to the Captain.

Arrival at Ulithi on 19 DEC 44 was without either fanfare or LEXINGTON in sight. Some higher authority decided that our home-away-from-home, for the next few days, was to be U.S.S. GENERAL S.D.STURGIS (AP-137). Upon seeing us in person, the XO of AP-137 made it quite clear that they were not necessarily overjoyed to receive two slightly out of uniform Naval Aviators as itinerant boarders. Apparently living out of our cardboard portable cruise box for the last month had done very little for our image as sparkling young naval officers. They had a lot of sparkling young naval officers on the U.S.S. STURGIS. All wore black shoes, and they planned to keep it that way. With that resounding welcome, Willie and Joe caught a small boat and headed for Mog-Mog, before they found something for us to do.

Ah, Mog-Mog - down among the sheltering palms, and sand, and liquid refreshment. It wasn't the Top of the Mark Hopkins, but we were working on that. Little did we know as we sat in the balmy breezes of the Pacific, that our shipmates, our buddies, the Bombers of VB-19 were already back in the land of the round-eye and fair skinned females. Unfortunately, they had some rules at the club on Mog-Mog which closed the bar at an indecent hour. Willie and Joe found the small boat landing without much trouble and even found a boat belonging to, and returning to, the U.S.S. STURGIS. Better we had found somebody else's boat and gone to another ship. The conversation got off to a bad start when Willie and Joe responded to an aside, but snide, comment about the two something-less-than-neat Naval Aviators that had reported aboard the U.S.S. STURGIS. This comment was made by a sparkling young naval officer, a LT, from the ship's company of the U.S.S. STURGIS. With a little help from the afternoon libations, LT Little Joe became a Texas tornado with his pointed verbal responses to the LT from the STURGIS. He was ably assisted by Willie with encouraging remarks like "Sic 'em, Joe", "You tell him, Joe," and attention grabbers like "Joe, who the hell does that Blackshoe think he is?"

As the STURGIS boat arrived at the foot of the gangway the Blackshoe ship's company LT bounded up the ladder to the OOD and arranged for several MAA to accompany Willie and Joe to their room with instructions to remain there until sent for by the XO of said STURGIS. With great agitation showing in his voice, the Blackshoe LT also informed Joe that charges of "disrespect to superior officer" would be filed immediately, and Willie was also advised he would be charged with aiding and abetting the whole action. Shortly thereafter a very short meeting with the XO of the STURGIS reaffirmed the points emphasized by the agitated Blackshoe LT. Admittedly, for a little while anyway, visions of VB-19 and/or San Francisco became a little hazy in the immediate future until a friendly transit MD rooming with us asked Joe, after hearing our tale, what was Joe's date of rank? Bingo! A quick check of the appropriate records and official papers, the next morning, brought forth the welcome news that one Blackshoe LT, ship's company, very sparkling young naval officer WAS NOT quite as senior as one Naval Aviator LT named Joe! Willie's thought at the time was how much fun it was to travel with "senior" officers!

This information, documenting the seniority of the transit Naval Aviator LT named Joe over Blackshoe ship's company LT, apparently found its way to the XO of the STURGIS rather quickly. A very short-and-to-the-point meeting was called in the XO's office with required attendance by Willie and Joe. The XO had a clear and concise message for Willie and Joe! "Get off the U.S.S STURGIS! Stay off the U.S.S STURGIS!" No delay was authorized enroute to the quarterdeck. We did deviate from our orders to pick up our cardboard cruise box and say good-by to the friendly MD who had been our roomie. Our persona non grata status on board the U.S.S. STURGIS was further emphasized when we found out that the OOD had specific orders not to offer any assistance to us in our quest for transportation by hailing any small boat that might be passing by. Fortune smiled on our two young Naval Aviators when a small boat heard our plaintive cries for a ride and took us away from the unfriendly folks of the STURGIS. Fortune continued to laugh heartily when we found out from the coxswain of the small boat that it was headed for Mog-Mog. Fortune came up with a real belly laugh when he told us that he had been ship's company on LEXINGTON when Air Group 20 replaced Air Group 19 back in November!

With our now priceless orders in hand, we confirmed this scuttlebutt intelligence on the whereabouts of our friends in Bombing 19 while living it up in the spacious living quarters on Mog-Mog. San Francisco, or any other place in the 48, here we come! We also spent the next

couple of days practically in the lap of the person controlling air transportation from Ulithi to points East.

During one of their free periods of time in this interlude on Mog-Mog, Willie and Joe were watching the airplanes come and go. The sirens of the crash truck interrupted their thoughts about catching up with their now stateside friends from VB-19. The word was passed that an AAF type C-47 was going to land with one wheel up and the other one down. This looked like it would liven up the whole day as the "bar" didn't open for many hours. Willie and Joe looked around for a good perch from which to watch the action. A large mound of broken up coral was nearby. It looked like the highest point they could find, so with their recently acquired Marine field shoes absorbing the sharpness of the coral, they scrambled to the top of the mound. The view was great, and the pilot of the troubled C-47 was kind enough to choose his touchdown spot directly in front of our grandstand seats. When the crunching, sliding, and crash truck noises finally ceased, Willie turned to Joe to comment on the whole proceedings. NO JOE! Further inspection of the general area showed LT Joe, Naval Aviator, was lying in a heap at the bottom of the coral pile! Various expletives were forthcoming from Joe as he attempted to get on his feet. The most eye-catching result of the event was the many little patches of Joe's blood that were beginning to appear on his clothing - and particularly on one of his hands. It seems that as Joe tumbled ass-over-teakettle down the mound, the broken up coral was taking little razor cuts at his fair skin and getting a fair percentage of hits. During the patch-up period at the Mog-Mog equivalent of sickbay there was some serious discussion of how Joe could receive another Purple Heart. The biggest problem was figuring out who the enemy was that was providing the opposition to Joe. When Joe kept qualifying as the "enemy" in the enemy action requirement of a Purple Heart, the thoughts of a gold star for Joe's PH were abandoned.

Our vigilance in keeping an eye on the person controlling the air transportation from Ulithi eastbound finally paid off. On 23 DEC 44 (or very late on the 22nd) Willie and Joe boarded the scheduled flight of SCAT airline for Guam. The SCAT acronym was never fully explained, but some reference was made to Some-Unidentified Commander Air Transport system. Whatever the truth was, when we saw the crew and the passenger list, we should have recognized that this was going to be an unusual flight.

The airplane was a very tired and scroungy looking AAF C-47. It sort of matched the general appearance of its only two passengers. The entire crew consisted of one baby-faced Marine

second lieutenant as pilot, one even younger-looking Army Air Force second lieutenant as co-pilot, and one childlike Navy Airman 1st class (E-3, that is), plane captain. When the crew addressed both Willie and Joe as "Sir", we were tempted to cash in our tickets. But, being intrepid Naval Aviators with CONUS on our minds, we said, with bravado not felt, something stupid like "Let us go flying." In addition to the super-cargo of Willie and Joe, there was one very large aircraft engine that didn't appear to be well tied down. Willie and Joe later discussed this flight over a martini or three. Their collective recollection of the almost 3 hours enroute to Guam consisted of a very dark night, a very bumpy ride, lots of intermittent lightning, no heat, cold coffee, and three non-communicative crew. We never did figure out if they were afraid of us, or just plain lost for a while. Despite whatever went on in the front end of the C-47, the back end of the aircraft with Willie, Joe, and one engine, arrived on Guam in one piece.

The Rover Boys' next project was to find a pair of seats on a bigger airplane going east. This appeared to be a larger problem than getting our fun-filled ride on SCAT from Ulithi. It seems there were such things as priorities assigned to passengers and long lines of passengers with priorities. The

prognosis of New Years in the good old 48 was getting dimmer by the hour. LT Joe's leadership came to the fore at this time. He just happened to find one very old friend, buddy type Joe said, who was responsible for seats on airplanes going east. This name-forgotten old friend was such a close buddy of Joe's that it was only going to cost us two, not four, bottles of whatever booze we could lay our hands on, in the next two hours, as that was the ETD of a big C-54. Joe and I agreed that it is a good thing his old "friend" wasn't more of a buddy, it probably would have cost us at least a case of some rot-gut. Joe allowed as how he would get even with his friend sometime in the future. Joe's friend's ticket negotiations had depleted our ready cash somewhat but who cared. It was either the 23rd or 24th of DEC 44 (give or take a dateline) and we were eastbound to Pearl Harbor via Kawajelein and Johnston Islands in a big, big airplane with lots of engines.

The time between arrival in Pearl and departure for Oakland CA on the 28th of DEC 44 in another big, big airplane with lots of engines, was taken up with small boat rides from/to Ford Island, scrounging for wheels, stops at the O-Club, more scrounging for wheels, more stops at the O-Club, more small boat rides to/from Ford Island, etc. Interspersed in this social whirl of Willie and Joe was one diamond buying trip by Joe, with him carrying the unset diamond, wrapped in toilet paper, in his pocket at all times. The Willie and Joe system of necessary

security for this diamond consisted of a visual check at any or all hours that either of them thought it necessary. Day or dark, drunk or sober, awake or asleep, it worked. Neither of us were sure why, but it worked. The system was challenged by several incidents. One such was in the wee hours of one morning during the waiting time in Pearl Harbor. Willie and Joe were returning to Ford Island but had managed to lose their way near the Sub Base while searching for the small boat going to Ford Island. Somewhere, during the walking search for the small boat, Joe became extremely weary and decided to have a little nap in the middle of the base. Willie decided (right or wrong) that Joe had best come along with him. Joe had not put on any weight, probably due to the current liquid diet, and Willie, being the helpful type, placed Joe over his shoulder, somewhat like a sack of meal, and away they went on their search for the Ford Island small boat. They eventually found the small boat and the only thing that interrupted their precise navigation during the wee hours was Joe's periodic insistence that we do a diamond check - not once but several times. Our stroll was interspersed with comments that he was "tired and teepy and wanted to go to bed." He will never know how close he came to going swimming unexpectedly once we found the boat to Ford Island.

The over 11 hour trip, 28 DEC 44, on a big, big airplane with lots of engines to Oakland CA was almost anti-climactic. It landed on schedule. Despite the fact that we had to walk from the plane to the terminal in a driving rain, and despite the fact that our cardboard cruise box was getting soggy and falling apart, Willie and Joe were two very happy young Naval Aviators. Looking back we probably didn't look to be in much better shape than the cardboard cruise box. Thus ended the unplanned odyssey of Willie and Joe - Boy Aviators.

The next 4, 5, or 6 days (whatever) are really sort of an addendum to the period of 5 NOV through 28 DEC 44. There will be no effort to relate with any accuracy the activities of Willie and Joe during their required stay in San Francisco while waiting for orders to somewhere. This time period was very trying. It was almost too much to ask of two such as Willie and Joe to keep themselves entertained for several days before New Years to several days after New Years in a place like San Francisco. However, they did their best. These few days are best remembered as a blur of such things as a taxi cab ride to the other side of the street, Joe on the phone to Helen in Texas, an elevator stuck between floors at the Sir Francis Drake, Joe on the phone with Helen, The Top of the Mark Hopkins, Joe on the phone etc, the O-Club in the lower level of the Fairmount, Joe - telephone - Texas, Willie telling sea stories to all the pretty young things who listened so well, a drink or six at the St. Francis, Joe on phone again, Willie and Joe explaining

to the Shore Patrol why they were wearing Flight Jackets and marine field shoes and the SP's not quite believing their unbelievable reason, Willie finding out that the sight of the cartons of cigarettes he was holding had the effect of catnip on young ladies that smoked, Joe still on the phone to Helen, and the grand final foul-up when Willie and Joe swapped orders, unintentionally, and took off for places like Texas and Charlotte NC. Fortunately for Willie and Joe, they were both to report to the same duty station 30 days later. Just like old times.

## CHAPTER 10

### SOME LAST WORDS

SIMMERMAN: My long association with Lt. Jack Scott was from the beginning of the squadron until Dec. 3, 1944. Other aviators I had the pleasure of flying with are: Gevelinger, Meeker, Helm, Crocker, Good, Koch, Emig, Emerson, Duncan, Chapman, Cornelius, Fisher, and Peck. If I have left anyone out please pardon the writer. My only excuse was that I didn't get the opportunity to fly with all the VB pilots. The navy was good to me because of so many nice relationships - both officers and enlisted men. I had the pleasure of playing golf with a former test pilot. He said and I quote: "You flew with the greatest pilots."

BOWEN: The regular navy and the reserves are a twain that never shall meet. But since both are inseparably entwined (as are heaven and hell) in God's never ending war games, so be it. When reporting to a new commanding officer, I was usually amused and always irritated by his disciplined glance at my left hand, as he looked for that damned academy ring. My defiant response to this challenge was to emphasize the "R" in USNR when stating my rank and putting him on notice I was ready to take him or any other academy boy on anytime anywhere.

In retrospect, as a lifelong civilian, I have discovered that naval academy men and men from all the other academies are a superior bunch of fellows, even though they still grovel at senior rank. Joined with the dedicated personnel of the regular armed forces, they comprise the only power group of people in the entire world who understand their mission in life...the application of FORCE. FORCE is the universal language, understood since time began, by men of all creeds, colors and races and by all the lesser creatures over which man has domain. If you want to keep an enemy from taking what you have, it takes FORCE. If you want to take something from (or are threatened by) your enemy, it takes FORCE. If you want to be good or evil, it takes FORCE.

When you plan to intimidate a super enemy, your will power alone cannot dominate the enemy's will unless you have ready power. Thus, the scorned reserves are brought in when you need additional manpower to produce sufficient firepower. And these reservists never fully understand how they ever got entangled in a crazy game where nobody seems to play by the rules.

If I ever come around this way again I'll join the regular navy and maybe even earn an academy

ring and avoid "talks" with my skipper (which usually ended with 10 days in hack). I don't know why, but I always thought McGowan was out to get me most of the time, when all along it was I, trying to con him all of the time. This is the same guy who slowed down a hefty flight of fighters, torpedoes and dive bombers so that my sputtering plane could keep up with the formation and not chance the fate of a straggler. Wow!

One time he had me nailed on a charge (which eludes me at the moment but is not important because he usually had enough on me to convoke, or whatever, a court-martial if he had wanted). Our "talk" included a lesson regarding the SYSTEM I kept bucking which was started four thousand years ago by the Phoenicians. Over thousands of years, better men than I had tried to beat it without success. And the likes of me breaching it were too preposterous to contemplate, so 10 days hack, whambo! After being transferred to the "savage" Sangamon (nee ESSO TRENTON) I still didn't believe him, because I was in hack when bogies appeared on the screen minutes before a couple of kamikazes ended "Miss Trenton's" vendetta against the Pacific palm trees.

Now, in 1995 the SYSTEM is under attack by a virulent enemy known as "political correctness". (I wonder what is the politically correct way to kill your mortal enemy.) And the SYSTEM is now fighting the most important battle ever mounted against it. If this battle is lost, all is lost. But if we can keep replacing good men with good men like LCDR RICHARD S. MCGOWAN, USN, then maybe...just maybe, we can hang on to our heritage for a couple or more hundred years. Respectfully submitted, LCDR GEORGE H. BOWEN, USNR (Ret)

LEWIS: While I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experiences I had with Bombing 19, I would not want to go through with them again for ten times that amount if I could. I feel I met some of the greatest friends I have ever had, and after forty years it seems a bit like a dream with a few nightmares interrupting it at times.

DUNCAN: All of us crowded a whole lifetime of living into a few short months. We all treasure the memories and friendships that have endured and deepened over the years.

SCHOENER: My fondest memory is of the great group of officers and men who made up Bombing 19 and the rest of the Air Group. I always counted myself lucky to have been a part of the BEST!

SADLER: All I can say to Smolinski -- "We are still here and not a scratch" during combat.

BOWEN: By today's standards, the George I was as a carrier pilot would be labeled an old-fashioned, production-line dinosaur, with outdated notions of loyalty and honor, who incredibly considered it a privilege to serve his country in time of war...a zealous patriot and an intense idealist who felt blessed to be in the right place at the right time. I'm older now and hopefully wiser, with a bloodied but unbowed head who, except for the horrendous loss of so many shipmates, loved every fantastic moment of it.

McBRIDE: The respect for one another made VB-19 a really close knit squadron. Before and to this day I have not known a group that I respected more.

EMERSON: The art of dive bombing may be passe', but the type of Naval Aviator and Aircrew that manned the aircraft of VB-19 will never go out of style. Thank God we had the honor to be part of that elite and classy group.

## USUAL ASSIGNMENTS

PILOTS	GUNNERS	PILOTS	GUNNERS
Adlman	Dulong	Jackson	
Banker	Burns, JJ	Jancar	
Bowen	Simmons	Kantjas	Nickens
Butts	Locher	Kinard	
Cavanaugh	Johns	Koch	Madrid
Chapman	Birmingham	Majors	Albini
Cornelius	Blazevich	McBride	Brotten
Crapser	Burns, JF	McGowan	Brown, EE
Cravens	Gray	Meeker	Schram
Crocker	Aleridge	Newman	Stanley
Doyle	Schoener	Niemeyer	Thorngren
Duncan	Elias	Parker	Ross
Emerson	Harvey	Peck	Glaser
Emig	Johnson	Sadler	Smolinski
Engen	Stevenson	Scott	Simmerman
Evatt	Hansen	Smith	Ortiz
Fisher	Hendrick	Stella	Roundy
Gevelinger	Nitchman	Stradley	Droske
Gilchrist		Swanson	
Glumac	West, McGowan	Thurmon	Stamm
Good	Stankevich	Wagner	
Griffin, R	Hess	Walters	Reischman
Griffin, W	Leaf	Wicklander	Warnke
Gunter	Plant	Williams	
Hart	Scheck	Wilton	Reid, J
Heilmann	Woolhouse	Wodell	Reid, N
Helm	Snow, Meany	Wright	

Bratten: Squadron Engineering Officer.

Buttenweiser: Administrative Officer.

Glasgow: Aviation Radio Tech.

At one time or another flew with most pilots in the squadron.

Lewis: Air Combat Intelligence Officer. Had one flight in combat with Cravens.

Was accused of burning up the barrels of the twin 30 cal. guns.