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Life Magazine 9/89 [OA 6267]

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MY IMPRESSIONS -- WORLD WAR II

December 7, 1941

I was walking across the campus at Andover when I heard the news. I was 17. It came as a shock -- a jolt -- an awakening. I did not fully comprehend World Affairs. My interests were our undefeated soccer team, Christmas vacation only a month away, and graduation then college. Things changed instantly. I knew right then that I wanted to go into the service.

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Andover Library

X

Andover Library

12/12  
Early June 1942

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X  
Book of Stimson

education before serving. I was determined, not to go on to college, but to become a Navy pilot. Secretary Stimson was a towering world figure but I wondered about this call of his.

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Active duty at last. I climb on a southbound train at Penn Station. My dad was a big, strong guy. He put his arm around me and said goodbye. I'd never seen my dad shed a tear before.

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Having been stationed at Chapel Hill for preflight, Minneapolis for Primary Training, and Corpus Christi for Advance, I received my Navy wings and Ensign's Commission June 4. I was still 18 years old. I wanted to fly in combat. All my classmates wanted

*Don Rhodes*

*Don Rhodes*

*Don Rhodes  
Diploma  
Cert*

*M  
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*X*

*X*

to fly in combat. Our country was at war -- united. I selected Torpedo Bombers. . . I fell in love early on with the 'low and slow' TBF. It carried 2,000 lbs. of bombs, it was the biggest single engine aircraft in the fleet. It had a crew of 3. I went off to Fort Lauderdale to learn to fly this, the Grumman Avenger. Training up and down the East coast, dropping torpedoes off Cape Cod, bombs and torpedoes in Lake Okechobee, Florida, Chincoteague, Virginia, Charleston Rhode Island, Miami. . . I saw 'em all. I had an Ensign's stripe and an Admiral's confidence. I was a Navy pilot.

Spring - Summer 1944

I was assigned to Air Group 51, the first air group to be aboard the new fast Carrier San Jacinto, CVL 30. We went on a "shake down cruise" to Trinidad: put San Jac into Commission at Philadelphia: headed for the Pacific via the Panama Canal, touched the USA one last time at San Diego and then went West.

One roommate, subsequently killed, Tom Waters had a red face, but the seas were so bad that his face turned green. Many of the Air Group and ship's company had spent no time at sea.

We struck Wake Island on May 23, 1944. My close friend and roommate, Jim Wykes went off on a search mission and never came

back. I lay in my upper bunk and cried for my friend, but no-one saw me -- that wouldn't do.

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dict.

September 2, 1944

Over Chi Chi Jima, my plane was hit <sup>USSO</sup> by anti-aircraft fire at about 8:30 a.m. The submarine Finback picked me out of the water close to the Japanese held island of Chi Chi. I learned later that my crewmen were killed. In that life raft for about 2 hours, wondering if my life would be spared, I prayed, and I vomited, and again I shed a tear. I was a scared kid, just 20, away from his mother and dad.

Don Rhodes

X

SP 2  
X

September 1944 -- aboard the Finback in Japanese waters

The Submarine Finback stayed on its war patrol. We got depth charged by Japanese ships. The submariners in Finback didn't seem too concerned about that, but Jim Beckman, Tom Keene and I, the 3 rescued pilots, didn't like that a bit. Finback's skipper won a silver star for sinking Japanese shippers.

(Robert Williams)

October 1944

of RAR  
(another term)

Back in Pearl Harbor for a week at a rest home -- some flying, then hitch hiked back to the fleet -- Task Force 38 under Admiral Bull Halsey off the Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous

Don Rhodes

Don Rhodes

X

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(Lisbandu)  
in Pacific  
SP  
X  
M. J. C.

Don Rhodes  
p. 15

Naval power I saw in and around Pearl Harbor and at Ulithe Atoll. You could feel things moving our way. We were still shown the pictures of Japanese atrocities. It was Hirohito's fault. Hitler was beginning to get kicked hard in Europe but for us there was one unifying symbol -- Hirohito and the evil he represented. I wanted ~~bandy~~ to rejoin my squadron -- to fly more, to do my part.

X

November 1944

I fly final combat mission over Luzon Bay, November 19, 1944. Puffs of anti-aircraft fire, black menacing, but nothing like the concentrated fire over Chi Chi Jima. Still you wonder. There was a sense of exhilaration in our ready room. We were going home. We'd probably make it in time for Christmas. Several of our VT ~~61~~ <sup>51</sup> squadron mates had been killed, but that was accepted. The war had us together on one track. In a sense, the ferocity of the battle helped heal the hurt for the fallen comrade. It was our duty, our honor. We were fighting for the USA against tyranny. The Country was united. We, on a carrier, were a part of something great and good. At times we were scared, but there were never any doubts.

Don Rhodes

X

Christmas Eve 1944

I arrive home. I stopped at the Rye Station on the way to Greenwich. There my Fiancee, Barbara, climbs on the train. We go the 10 minutes to Greenwich. My mother and dad meet us. I was glad to be home for Christmas. I was glad to be surrounded by love. At church the next day, Christmas Day, I counted my blessings. I thanked God I was home -- and in the quiet of our church I thought about Jim Wykes, Dick Houle, Ted White, John Delaney and other who would never come home for Christmas. I think I asked "Why," but there was not any agony about the cause. There were no divisions about the War. We were right, God was on our side. We had suffered a surprise attack and, now three years later we were winning; and I, a 20 year old Lt. (j.g.) was part of the greatest fighting force in the world. I had grown up. I had flown with the best off a great carrier that flew the Texas flag into battle. I was part of a team. We cared about each other in our squadron. We understood each other's fears and loves. We played together, sang together, flew together. We bitched about our Squadron Commander -- to tough, too demanding, too serious, but we loved to fly on his wing -- we respected Don Melvin.

If we hot dogged it or risked the lives of the ship's crew by some careless maneuver, Captain Beauty Martin would kick some serious butt, but he was our Captain and we bragged about him. He didn't know me from Adam's off Ox. But why should he -- I had

*Don Rhodes*

*Don Rhodes*

*Don Rhodes*

*(Cromwell)*

*Pilot*

*(Cromwell)*

*Tom Waters (Pilot)*

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X

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X

X

one stripe, finally 1 1/2, and he had 4. We gave him a lot of room. We gave him a lot of respect.

We saw the pictures of Japanese soldiers executing kneeling captives and we knew the Emperor was to blame. We saw the executioners swords held high and as we passed the pictures around we knew we were right and that we would win, and that we were the best. We were the best. . .cocky devils, sure of our ability, sure of our mission, 20 years old and we knew exactly what had to done.

We were the best pilots. When we ground looped on land, it was that damned gust of wind, or it was low hydraulics in the left brake. When we missed the proper wire landing on the carrier, it was that crazy landing signal officer. . ."Damn fool, had me too high all the way in, or too fast, or too slow"; but we never told him. He held our lives in his hands and besides, the skipper always thought he was right. We hated Hirohito. Evil, he was the epitome of all evil. He started this. He and Hitler.

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Barbara and I <sup>e</sup>wre married January 6th. We had time for a honeymoon, they off we went to carrier re-qualification in the Great Lakes. We bought our first car -- a 1941 Plymouth -- price \$350. Joining our squadron in Lewiston, Maine, up and down the

Mr. Rhodes

(1945)

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I'm 21 now. We are based in Virginia. Barbara and I are having more time together as our new squadron, with orders in hand to go back to the Pacific, starts our final training. . .the war ends. I'll never forget the screaming and the cheering and the dancing in the street and the praying. Bar and I went to church. The War's end meant we would not have to be separated, and that I would not have to cover any more landings of marines on beaches - seeing them get slaughtered as the Japanese dug in to defend their homeland.

September 18, 1945

I am discharged from the Navy on "points" and now I go to college. The togetherness of it all disperses. We all re-focus. It's soccer, baseball -- it's our first baby and Economic classes. Barbara and I know family joy and the happiness of being at school and looking forward shortly thereafter to a new

*in Rhodes*

*Info Almond  
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*14 Japan Surrenders*

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time and  
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(for completion  
of duty & financial  
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*John St. M. beam  
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*X  
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X*

life in our west. We have lots of new friends. The letters from the shipmates slow down. They are finding their new way too.

January 20, 1989

I am sworn in as President of the United States. A TBF on a float goes by in our Inaugural parade. On it are some squadron mates from VT 51 and a couple of old submariners who were aboard Finback when she picked me out of the drink off Chi Chi Jima. They are smiling and waving and no-one knows who they are. But I knew.

(115)  
pilot's turret  
radio man  
man who downed  
airplane

X  
Inaugural  
Medital of  
Honor  
Best

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X

right that I went back to Japan to the Emperor's funeral. I didn't see the raised swords. I saw a new Emperor -- a respected figure in a country that is our friend.

# # #

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

DATE: 7-20-89

FROM THE PRESIDENT

To: Dave

*Chris*

~~Before~~

I'm not sure  
what Life really  
wants.

If this is right  
double check the  
Hirohito parts  
with Brent.  
Let me see Loral

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<sup>5</sup>  
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- 10/28/42 completed

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Back in Pearl Harbor for a week at a rest home - some flying, then hitch hiked back to the fleet - Task Force 38 under <sup>Admiral Bull</sup> Halsey off the Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous Naval power I saw in and around Pearl Harbor <sup>and at Ulithi Atoll</sup>. You could feel things moving our way. We were still shown the pictures of Japanese atrocities. It was Hirohito's fault. Hitler was beginning to get kicked hard in Europe but for us there was one unifying symbol - Hirohito and the evil he represented. I wanted badly to rejoin my squadron - to fly more, to do my part.

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contrasted with the pictures we saw 45 years ago . . . I thought of Japan. <sup>They are now ~~democrats~~ a duress</sup> Our alliance is strong, our friendship is genuine, <sup>How</sup> remarkable

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die in vain. It was right that I went back to Japan to the Emperor's funeral. *I didn't see the raised swords.*

*I saw ~~Japan~~ a new Emperor - a respected <sup>fig</sup> me symbol ~~of~~ a country that is our friend.*

# LOOKING FORWARD

George Bush  
*with Victor Gold*



BANTAM BOOKS

TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, there wasn't any doubt which branch of the service I'd join. My thoughts immediately turned to naval aviation. College was coming up the following fall, but that would have to wait. The sooner I could enlist, the better.

Six months later I got my diploma from Phillips Academy Andover. Secretary of War Henry Stimson came from Washington to deliver the commencement address. He told members of our graduating class the war would be a long one, and even though America needed fighting men, we'd serve our country better by getting more education before getting into uniform.

After the ceremony, in a crowded hallway outside the auditorium, my father had one last question about my future plans. Dad was an imposing presence, six feet four, with deep-set blue-gray eyes and a resonant voice.

"George," he said, "did the Secretary say anything to change your mind?"

"No, sir," I replied. "I'm going in."

Dad nodded and shook my hand.

On my eighteenth birthday, I went to Boston and was sworn into the Navy as a Seaman Second Class. Not long thereafter, I was on a railway coach headed south for Navy preflight training in North Carolina.

I'd joined up to fly, and like the piano student who didn't see why he couldn't begin his lessons playing *Rhapsody in Blue*, I was gung ho to strap on the leather helmet and goggles the day I arrived at Chapel Hill. Because of the pilot shortage, the Navy had trimmed its aviator training course to ten months, but there weren't any shortcuts. It would be months before I'd finally climb into a Stearman N-2S trainer—the Navy's "Yellow Peril," a two-cockpit, open-air special. Even then I got the impression that my instructor thought I was still too fuzz-faced to trust with an expensive piece of Navy equipment.

Looking through old scrapbooks at photos taken at the time, I can't say I blame him. I was younger than the other

trainees—the youngest aviator in the Navy when I got my wings. To make matters worse, I looked younger than I actually was—enough to make me self-conscious. When Barbara came to visit—she was on her way to school in South Carolina—I even asked her to stretch the calendar, add a few months to her age, and tell anybody who asked that she was eighteen, not seventeen.

We'd met six months before, at a Christmas dance. I'm not much at recalling what people wear, but that particular occasion stands out in my memory. The band was playing Glenn Miller tunes when I approached a friend from Rye, New York, Jack Wozencraft, to ask if he knew a girl across the dance floor, the one wearing the green-and-red holiday dress. He said she was Barbara Pierce, that she lived in Rye and went to school in South Carolina. Would I like an introduction? I told him that was the general idea, and he introduced us, just about the time the bandleader decided to change tempos, from fox trot to waltz. Since I didn't waltz, we sat the dance out. And several more after that, talking and getting to know each other.

It was a storybook meeting, though most couples that got serious about each other in those days could say the same about the first time they met. Young people in the late 1930s and early '40s were living with what modern psychologists call heightened awareness, on the edge. It was a time of uncertainty, when every evening brought dramatic radio newscasts—Edward R. Murrow from London, William L. Shirer from Berlin—reporting a war we knew was headed our way.

In the eight months that passed from that first meeting until her visit to Chapel Hill, Barbara and I had progressed from simply being "serious," to meeting and spending time with each other's families—a fairly important step for teenagers in those days. After I got my wings and went into advanced flight training, we took the next important step. In August of 1943, she joined the Bush summer convocation in Maine where, between boating and fishing excursions, we were secretly engaged. Secret, to the extent that the German and Japanese high commands weren't aware of it. That December we went public with our engagement, though we

knew that marriage was years away. My training days were drawing to a close at the Naval Air Station in Charlestown, Rhode Island. In the fall of 1943 I was assigned to VT-51, a torpedo squadron being readied for active duty in the Pacific.

Eight months after V-J Day, *Life* magazine ran a story, "Home to Chichi Jima," telling of the war-crimes trial of two Japanese officers charged with executing American fliers shot down over the Bonin Islands and "even more revolting, of practicing cannibalism on them."

I read the piece as a Yale freshman, not long out of the Navy. It brought back memories of the worst hours I spent during the war.

The date was September 2, 1944. It was the second day of concentrated air strikes on the Bonins by our squadron, VT-51, operating off the *San Jacinto*, one of eight fast carriers in Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58. My aviator's log book for that day reads: *Crash Landing in Sea—Near Bonin Is.—Enemy action.*

Under the column for *Passengers* were the names *Delaney* and *Lt. (jg) White*. Jack Delaney was the young radioman/tail gunner on my Grumman Avenger torpedo bomber. William G. (Ted) White was the squadron's gunnery officer, filling in that day for Leo Nadeau, our regular turret gunner.

VT-51 had an air complement of twenty-six F6F Hellcats and nine TBM Avengers. The quick, mobile Hellcat fighter kept the skies clear of enemy aircraft. The Avenger had earned a reputation as the biggest, best single-engine bomber around, used for torpedo runs, glide bombing, antisub patrols, and providing air cover during amphibious landings. The TBM carried a three-man crew—aviator, turret gunner, and radioman/tail gunner, or "stinger," along with a 2,000-pound bomb payload.

The target for that day was a radio communications center on Chichi Jima, one of three islands in the Bonin chain. The others were Haha Jima and the best-remembered

Pacific island of World War Two, Iwo Jima. The day before, Delaney, Nadeau, and I had flown a mission targeting gun emplacements on Chichi. We knocked some out, but not enough. The Japanese who were dug in on the island still had a potent anti-aircraft reserve.

Delaney, Nadeau, and I had been together since VT-51 was first attached to the *San Jacinto*, back in the States.

We'd flown missions over Wake Island, Palau, Guam, and Saipan, and survived a fair number of close calls, including a ditching operation when our plane sprang a leak while still carrying four depth charges intended for enemy subs. How do you put a TBM Avenger into the water with four 500-pound bombs in its belly? Very carefully, with adrenaline running, a prayer on your lips, and your fingers crossed.

In flight training at Corpus Christi and along the East Coast, we were taught to gauge wind velocity and the height of waves. Given winds at about fifteen knots and a fair chop on the sea, I trimmed the nose of the plane as high as possible without risking a stall. We landed tailfirst and were able to scramble onto the wing, inflate our safety raft, and start paddling, just as the plane went down.

We felt lucky. Within seconds we felt even luckier, when the plane's torpedoes detonated after their safety devices gave way to undersea pressure. Then, about thirty minutes later, came a happy ending: the destroyer U.S.S. *Bronson* sighted our raft and picked us up.

Like most TBM Avenger pilots, I liked the teamwork and camaraderie that went with being part of a three-man crew. I became attached to my plane, nicknaming it "Barbara."

The TBM Avenger wasn't fast—the unofficial Navy line described it as "low and slow." As Leo Nadeau once put it, the TBM "could fall faster than it could fly." Cruising speed was about 140 knots, brought down to less than 95 knots for a carrier landing. But it was sturdy and stable. Sturdy and stable enough to allow for pilot error on even a

bad landing. From the start, back during flight training, I liked the challenge the TBM offered, the sensation of diving, getting close down to the water, going full bore.

There's nothing quite like putting a plane down on a carrier. While it was intimidating at first, you quickly got used to it. The *San Jacinto* was a new-model light carrier with a very narrow flight deck on a converted cruiser hull. It took total concentration to make the tight turn coming into the ship's stern, then follow through on your pattern, watching the signal officer as he waved his paddles to let you know whether you were too high or too low. Screw up the plane's "attitude" and you crashed into the sea or the deck—like the Hellcat pilot I once saw miss the arresting wires on a return flight from Guam.

Our squadron was coming in after a strike, the Avengers first, then the fighter planes. I'd already landed and was standing on deck, watching as the pilot jammed his throttles forward trying to get airborne again, but lost air speed. His plane spun in, ending up by a gun mount. The gun crew was wiped out. Just a few yards away was a crewman's leg, severed and quivering. The shoe was still on. More than forty years later I can still see it.

Two other members of the squadron were alongside me when the accident happened. We were all familiar with combat risks and at one time or another had lost close friends: my first roommate, Jim Wykes, flew out on a routine antisub patrol one day and just disappeared. But none of us had ever seen death come that close, that suddenly. Four seamen who'd been with us seconds before were dead because of a random accident, for no logical reason.

Then, breaking the tension, the chief petty officer in charge of the deck crew moved in, shouting orders. "All right, you bastards," he yelled. "Let's get to work. We still have planes up there and they can't land in this goddamn mess." War, it seemed, has a perverse logic all its own.

A little after 6 A.M., the morning of September 2, I was in the ready room getting briefed for our second day of air strikes against Chichi Jima. Word came that Task Force 58

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was heading south to become Task Force 38, under Admiral "Bull" Halsey. The move was scheduled to take place immediately after the Chichi Jima raid. That meant if we were going to knock out the enemy airstrips and communications on the Bonins, today would be the day.

Nobody had to remind us that the going would be rough. The day before, we'd run into strong enemy anti-aircraft fire and lost a plane. The Bonins were six hundred miles from Tokyo, a key supply and communications center, and the Japanese had dug in for a protracted fight. We were learning that the closer we got to the enemy's homeland, the fiercer the resistance.

Ted White knew this when he approached me to ask if he could fill in as turret gunner during the raid. Ted was a personal friend. Our families knew each other back home. As gunnery officer, he wanted to check the equipment out under actual combat conditions.

We were due to take off at 0715. "You'll have to hurry it." I told him, looking at my watch. "But if it's okay with the skipper, and Nadeau doesn't mind, it's okay with me."

The skipper in this case was Lieutenant Commander D. J. Melvin, who had headed VT-51 since it was formed. In his early thirties, Don Melvin was a seasoned flier who knew everything there was to know about naval aircraft—a cool, collected leader who inspired confidence in younger members of his squadron. Before the war was over, he'd earned the Navy Cross not once, but twice. That morning, September 2, he cleared Ted White for the Chichi Jima mission. Leo Nadeau also signed off on the request.

We took off on schedule, first the TBMs, then the fighters, some catapulted, others making a full-deck takeoff. After I was harnessed in, my plane was hooked onto the catapult. I ran it up full-throttle, gave the catapult officer my arm-across-the-chest signal, and was launched skyward.

The sky was clear, broken only by a few clouds, not enough to provide cover for an incoming flight. Though it was still early morning, the weather was like every other day in that part of the Pacific, warm and humid. It took us about

an hour to reach the island; climbing along the way to our attack height of 12,000 feet.

Our squadron attack plan called for three groups of three torpedo bombers apiece, flying first in V formations then shifting to echelons as we prepared to dive. We were joined by planes from other carriers as we closed in.

The flak was the heaviest I'd ever flown into. The Japanese were ready and waiting; their antiaircraft guns were set up to nail us as we pushed into our dives. By the time VT-51 was ready to go in, the sky was thick with angry black clouds of exploding antiaircraft fire.

Don Melvin led the way, scoring direct hits on a radio tower. I followed, going into a thirty-five-degree dive, an angle of attack that sounds shallow but in an Avenger felt as if you were headed straight down. The target map was strapped to my knee, and as I started into my dive, I'd already spotted the target area. Coming in, I was aware of black splotches of gunfire all around.

Suddenly there was a jolt, as if a massive fist had crunched into the belly of the plane. Smoke poured into the cockpit, and I could see flames rippling across the crease of the wing, edging toward the fuel tanks. I stayed with the dive, homed in on the target, unloaded our four 500-pound bombs, and pulled away, heading for the sea. Once over water, I leveled off and told Delaney and White to bail out, turning the plane starboard to take the slipstream off the door near Delaney's station.

Up to that point, except for the sting of dense smoke blurring my vision, I was in fair shape. But when I went to make my jump, trouble came in pairs.

According to the book, you dive onto the wing; then the wind pulls you away from the plane. But something went wrong. The wind was playing tricks, or more likely, I pulled the rip cord too soon. First my head, then my parachute canopy collided with the tail of the plane. It was a close one. A fraction of an inch closer, and I'd have been snagged on the tail assembly. As it was, the only damage that came out of the collision was a gashed forehead and a partially torn canopy.

I came down fast—because of the torn canopy, faster than I wanted. That was when all those tedious hours of emergency training paid off. Rule No. 1 in bailing out at sea: Don't get tangled up in your parachute after landing. Still dazed, I instinctively started unbuckling on the way down and easily slipped out of my harness when I hit the water.

I looked around for Delaney and White, but the only thing in sight was my parachute drifting away. My seatback rubber raft was somewhere in the area, but if it hadn't been for Don Melvin swooping down, then up, to signal its location, I'd never have seen, much less swum to it. And while I didn't know it at the time, if it hadn't been for Doug West in his Avenger and a few of our Hellcat escorts, the raft wouldn't have done much good even when I reached it. A couple of Japanese boats had left the island, headed out to pick me up. Doug and the fighter planes drove them back while I swam toward the raft, hoping that it hadn't been damaged by the fall and would inflate. Good news, it did. I scrambled aboard. Bad news, the fall had broken the emergency container and I had no fresh water. Doug didn't know that, but coming in low he'd seen that my head was bleeding and dropped a medical kit. I retrieved it and hand-swabbed my forehead with Mercurochrome.

Then I checked out my regulation .38-caliber pistol to see if it was in working order. It was, for all the good it would do me; I would have traded it and fifty more like it for one small paddle. The wind was playing tricks again. Alone in my raft, my squadron headed back to the carrier, I was slowly drifting toward Chichi Jima.

Where were Delaney and White? There was no sign of other yellow rafts on the horizon. Just cloudless blue sky and choppy green water rolling toward the shoreline. I was hand-paddling furiously just to stay put.

My head still ached. My arm was burning from the sting of an angry Portuguese man-of-war. And to compli-

cate matters, I'd swallowed a few pints of brackish water along the way, which meant I'd occasionally have to stop paddling to lean over the side.

Still, I was alive and had a chance. The question was whether my crew members had survived. Neither had responded after the order to bail out. Struggling against the tide, I remembered something else: Task Force 58 was pulling out of the area to rendezvous with Halsey's fleet after the raid on Chichi Jima. Don Melvin had probably radioed my position to friendly ships in the area; but realistically, if nothing showed up that day, my luck might have run out.

A half hour passed. An hour. An hour and a half. There was no sign of activity from the island, no Japanese headed my way. But nothing else was headed my way either. As it turned out, when my prayers were answered, it didn't come in the form of a large ship's outline on the horizon, but what appeared to be a small black dot, only one hundred yards away. The dot grew larger. First a periscope, then the conning tower, then the hull of a submarine emerged from the depths.

Was it an enemy sub or one of ours? It didn't take long to find out. A large bearded figure was standing on the bridge of the conning tower, holding a black metal object in his hand. As the sub drew closer, the object took form as a small motion-picture camera.

My rescue ship was the U.S.S. *Finback*. The camera buff turned out to be Ensign Bill Edwards. He stood there, filming away, while the sub continued to surface and half a dozen seamen came scurrying out to the forward deck. "Welcome aboard!" said one, who hauled me out of my bobbing craft. "Let's get below. The skipper wants to get the hell out of here." On shaky legs I climbed down the conning tower into the hold of the *Finback*. The hatches slammed shut, the horns sounded, and the sub's skipper gave the order to "Take her down."

In the sub's cramped wardroom, I was given a second welcome aboard by three other Navy airmen, rescued by the *Finback* a short while before. Silently I thanked God for having saved my life and said a silent prayer for the safety of

my fellow crew members. Later I learned that neither Jack Delaney nor Ted White had survived. One went down with the plane; the other was seen jumping, but his parachute failed to open.

As a member of VT-51, I thrived on the feeling of freedom that came with flying an airplane. I was part of a team, yet on my own. But living with the officers and crew of the *Finback*, I learned about a different kind of teamwork, as well as danger.

Whatever the aviators on board might have thought originally, the *Finback* wasn't a rescue vessel but a combat ship on patrol. Much as we wanted to get back to our squadrons, we'd have to bide our time until the sub put in at Midway at the end of its war patrol.

Among other things, biding time on a submarine meant looking at the war inside out, being on the receiving rather than the delivery end of an air bombing. People talk about the risk of combat flying, but in a plane you can fire back and maneuver; on a sub you breathe stale air and sweat in the belly of a metal tube under fire.

The *Finback* sank enough enemy tonnage on that patrol to earn its skipper, Commander R. R. Williams, the Silver Star. He and his crew deserved it. Running on the surface, we were attacked by a Japanese Nell bomber. Below the surface, we were depth-charged: the sub would shudder, and the visiting airmen would give anxious looks at members of the crew. They'd reassure us, "Not even close."

It was close enough. The Navy awarded me a Distinguished Flying Cross for completing the mission on Chichi Jima, but what happened at the island was over in a hurry. Taking depth charges in a sub—even for ten minutes—could seem like an eternity.

But my month aboard the *Finback* had its better moments. There was the human element: I made friendships that have lasted a lifetime. I had a chance to reflect on the greater loss suffered at Chichi Jima. Six days after my res-

cue, I wrote a letter, later mailed to my parents, that described my feelings at the time:

"I try to think about it as little as possible," I said, "yet I cannot get the thought of those two out of my mind. Oh, I'm O.K.—I want to fly again and I won't be scared of it, but I know I won't be able to shake the memory of this incident and I don't believe I want to completely."

Then there were the better moments spent standing watch on the tower during the midnight to four A.M. shift, when the *Finback* ran on the surface to recharge its batteries. The sub moved like a porpoise, water lapping over its bow, the sea changing colors, first jet black, then sparkling white. It reminded me of home and our family vacations in Maine. The nights were clear and the stars so bright you felt you could touch them. It was hypnotic. There was peace, calm, beauty—God's therapy.

I still don't understand the "logic" of war—why some survive and others are lost in their prime. But that month on the *Finback* gave me time to reflect, to go deep inside myself and search for answers. As you grow older and try to retrace the steps that made you the person you are, the signposts to look for are those special times of insight, even awakening. I remember my days and nights aboard the U.S.S. *Finback* as one of those times—maybe the most important of them all.

I rejoined the *San Jacinto* and VT-51 exactly eight weeks after being shot down, in time to take part in strikes against enemy positions and shipping in the Philippines. In October 1944 American troops had landed at Leyte; in November our squadron was in action at Manila Bay and in the Luzon area. We also got news that over one hundred B-29s, taking off from Saipan, had bombed Tokyo. Three years after it had begun, the war in the Pacific was coming full circle, a noose tightening around the Japanese home islands.

In December VT-51 was replaced by a new squadron, and after flying fifty-eight combat missions I was ordered home. No reunion could have been scripted more perfectly.

I arrived Christmas Eve. There were tears, laughs, hugs, joy, the love and warmth of family in a holiday setting.

Barbara and I were married two weeks later, January 6, 1945, at the First Presbyterian Church in her hometown, Rye, New York, with a close friend from VT-51, Milt Moore, as a member of the wedding party.

A few months later I was reassigned to VT-153, a Navy torpedo bomber group being readied for the invasion of Japan. Everything I'd experienced in my year and a half of combat in the Pacific told me it was going to be the bloodiest, most prolonged battle of the war. Japan's war leaders were unfazed by massive raids on Tokyo. They seemed bent on national suicide, regardless of the cost in human life.

Now, years later, whenever I hear anyone criticize President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I wonder whether the critic remembers those days and has really considered the alternative: millions of fighting men killed on both sides, possibly tens of millions of Japanese civilians. Harry Truman's decision wasn't just courageous, it was far-sighted. He spared the world and the Japanese people an unimaginable holocaust.

I was stationed at Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia, on the mid-August day when the President announced that the Japanese had sued for peace. Barbara and I were living in Virginia Beach. The announcement came at seven P.M. Within minutes our neighborhood streets were filled with sailors, aviators, their wives and families celebrating late into the night. We joined in the celebration, then, before going home, went to a nearby church filled with others giving thanks and remembering those lost in the war. After four years it was finally over.

We were still young, life lay ahead of us, and the world was at peace. It was the best of times.

### **YALE'S HITTING BIG FACTOR IN TEAM'S DIAMOND SUCCESS**

*The ability of the Yale Baseball team to back up some mighty impressive pitching on the part of*

June 12, 1942

*Don Rhodes*  
1. A. This event occurred at the Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Board on the sixth floor at 150 Causeway Boulevard. Facing Lt. Levering to take the oath in the presence of a few Naval personnel, I was a scared, nervous kid wondering what was in store for me. This took only a few minutes but it seemed like an hour to me. When I departed Lt. Levering's office exuberance had replaced my nervousness. I had become an aviation cadet and would go on active duty August 6, 1942. Lt. Levering later wrote me a letter saying I had made a wise decision to join the best program in any of the armed services.

1. B. August 6, 1942

The evening of August 3, my last at home, I had dinner with my family. The next day I climb on a southbound train at Penn Station. My dad was a big, strong guy. He put his arm around me and said goodbye. I'd never seen my dad shed a tear before. Arriving in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on August 5, preflight training would begin bright and early the next morning. It was here that I met my great friend, Ted Williams, "The Splendid Splinter" of the Boston Red Sox. We all stood in awe in the presence of the famous hitter who was in the same program.

3. A. September 2

*ok. for 7.35*  
*Don Rhodes*  
On this day at 0715, a division of VT-51, composed of Commander Don Melvin, Doug West, Milt Moore and myself, took off from the San Jacinto (my 50th combat mission) flying about seventy miles

*(41 miles)*

*LT. Comm. (S)*

85.8 x 50.6 } hit  
85.6 x 50.8 }  
Reports  
PH-105

Don Rhodes

radio-communications center

Chichi

2

Look For  
p. 32

to destroy two radio stations at Chi Chi Jima in the Bonin Islands. Upon reaching the target area, the sky was thick with black clouds of exploding enemy antiaircraft fire. Don Melvin led the attack on the target, followed by Doug West and then me. At about 0830 and moments after pushing over into my dive at 8000 feet, I felt a jolt like a giant fist had rammed into the belly of the plane. My plane had been hit in the engine area. Smoke poured into the cockpit and flames were spreading aft toward the fuel tanks in the wings. Navy training had taught us to complete the mission. I instinctively continued in the dive, homed in on the target, unloaded our four 500 hundred pound bombs, pulled away heading East toward the sea. A few miles from shore, I told my crewmen, Ted White and John Delaney, to bail out. When bailing out my head struck a glancing blow on the tail of the plane momentarily knocking me out. As I was landing in the water, the Japanese sent two boats out after me. Melvin, West and Moore along with our Hellcat fighter escorts drove the boats away. I was in the life raft about two hours, wondering if my life would be spared, I prayed to God, I was sick to my stomach and again I cried. I was a very scared kid, just 20, away from his mother and dad, paddling against the wind trying to get farther away from the Japanese held island. I later learned that my crewmen were killed. Observers said that two persons were seen leaving the plane. The parachute of the other person never opened, but mine did. God had spared me from that fate for whatever reason. Hellcat fighter pilots flew over my raft until

Don Rhodes  
looking for

Look For  
p. 36

(once over)  
Look For

Look For  
p. 37

I was rescued by the American submarine, U.S.S. Finback around noon.

**Winter - Spring, 1945**

Having been engaged since the Fall of 1943 while training up and down the East Coast, on January 6, 1945, Barbara Pierce and I exchanged wedding vows at the Presbyterian Church in Rye, New York, proudly wearing my Navy uniform. My VT-51 squadron mate, Richard B. Playstead, <sup>and Milton Morse</sup> <sub>etc</sub> was in attendance. We had time for a honeymoon at Sea Isle, Georgia.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

At quick glance -  
1<sup>st</sup> couple pages they missed  
2 dates and  
added Brooklyn.  
See you at 2.

Stephanie -

←

Here are your copies -  
one for you, and, one for Don.  
Hopefully, their ~~last~~ two  
questions are stuck on the  
front, see if Don knows these.

I'll be back at 2pm  
We'll huddle ~~at~~ then.

Thank you

LG

Stephanie

GEORGE BUSH  
WASHINGTON

Naval Aviation Cadet Selection  
First Naval District Board  
North Station Office Building  
150 Causeway Street  
Boston, Mass

Sixth Floor

Showed no room number

Claude M Fress

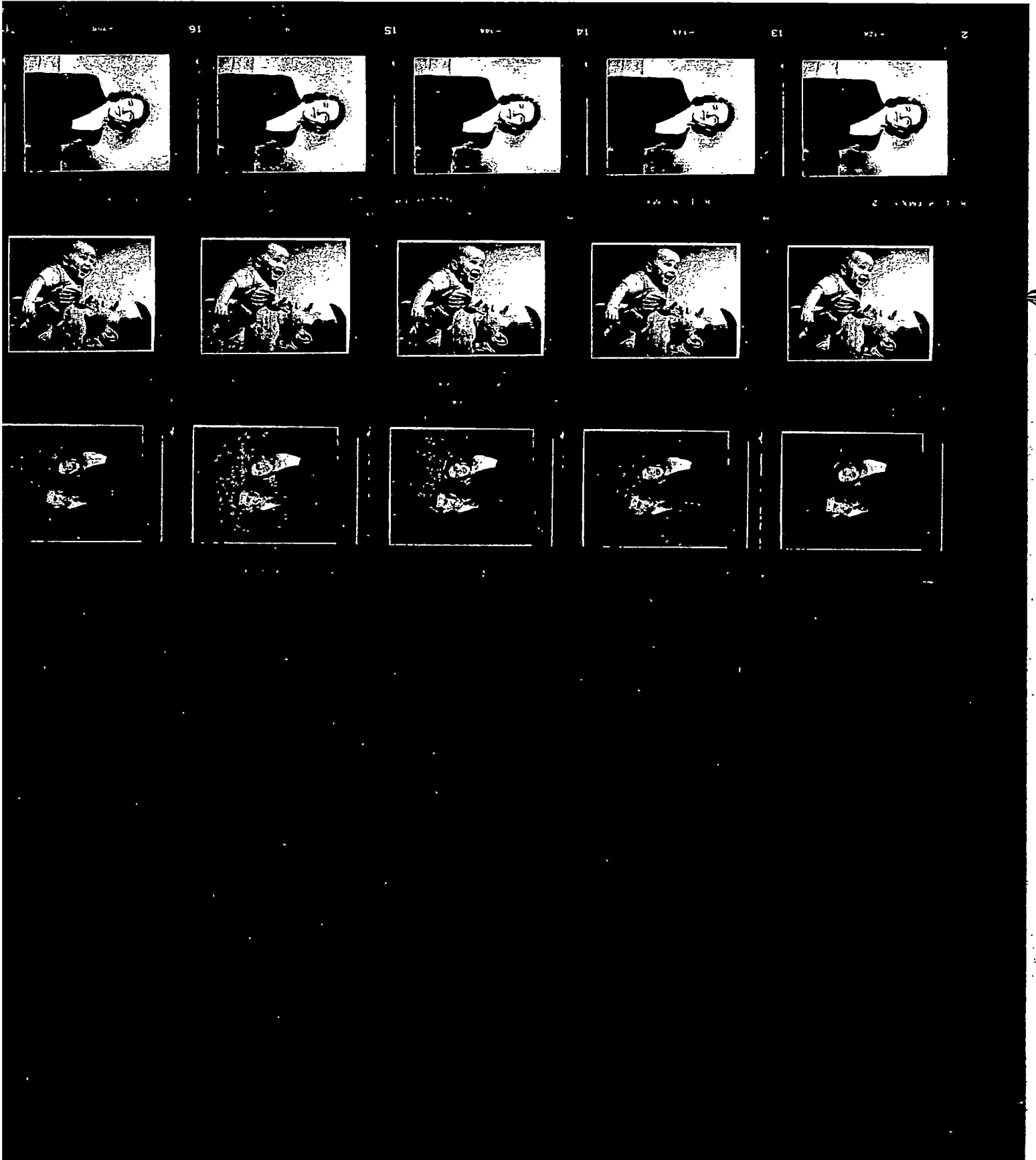
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Don R

25 Apr 88

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620462



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

July 28, 1989

*Chichi - look in R4/105*

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DAVID DEMAREST  
FROM: CHRISS WINSTON  
SUBJECT: LIFE MAGAZINE ARTICLE

I. SUMMARY

LIFE Magazine is very excited with the article you wrote recounting your remembrances of World War II. But, they have a few minor changes to request, and questions they would like you to review.

First, attached are a series of additional questions LIFE would like you to consider answering. Some are explanations of terms, and others are additional personal memories you may or may not feel comfortable providing. Again, they will only edit the text to add the answers you provide.

Second, attached are some minor grammatical and clarification changes LIFE would like you to consider. They understand no changes are to be made without your approval. If you would simply mark "ok" next to the ones you feel are appropriate, we will relay your changes to them.

II. DISCUSSION

**LIFE MAGAZINE QUESTIONS:**

1. JUNE 12, 1942

- A. First, they would like you to provide some details on the room in Boston where your swearing - in took place. They are looking for a sense of the atmosphere in the room. For example, (and you need not stick to these questions) Were

*POTOS  
DR.*

POTUS  
↓

there other people present? How many? How long was the ceremony? What was the room like?

B. Second, what did you do the night or week before you went on active duty August 6, 1942.

2. JUNE, 1943

DR

A. When you refer to training up and down the East coast, you mention dropping bombs in Lake Okechobee, and other locations, can you describe the kind of bombs and torpedoes you were dropping?

iron bomb  
RI (blew up in or on contact)

B. In the same sentence as above, you refer to Charleston - is that Charleston, South Carolina? And, where in Rhode Island did you fly?

3. SEPTEMBER 2, 1944

A. Please recreate the moment your plane was hit. What did you feel when you were hit? What was your target that day? When did you know you were hit? Just a few more details.

B. Also, what was the number of your mission that day? 50

4. NOVEMBER 1944

JA

A. What was the number of your mission over Luzon Bay, November 19, 1944, the day of your final combat flight?

Don Ribbles

4. CHRISTMAS EVE 1944

P. UD  
Looking To

A. At the beginning of the third paragraph you refer to a "ground-loop". LIFE would like to know for background purposes what is a "ground-loop"?

When a plane spins around on the ground like a car on ice

5. WINTER - SPRING 1945

A. If you feel comfortable, LIFE would like you to write a couple sentences about your wedding day.



Photocopy-Preservation

## TBF (TBM) "Avenger"

The Avenger first became operational on 4 June 1942 in the midst of the Battle of Midway. The first six TBF Avenger aircraft built were sent to Pearl Harbor, destined for VT-8 on Hornet. The ship was already at sea, so they flew across the Pacific to Midway Island, then being hurriedly fortified. The planes were immediately launched into battle. Five failed to return and the sixth returned with only its trim tab for longitudinal control, one wheel, and the torpedo bay doors hanging open — one gunner dead and the other wounded. Despite its inauspicious beginning, the Avenger became the Navy's standard and most effective torpedo-bomber throughout World War II. The Avenger was also manufactured by General Motors (designated TBM).

Teamed with the dive bombers, the Avengers destroyed both of the world's largest battleships, the Musashi and the Yamato. And, operating from jeep carriers, they soon became the most important force against the U-boats in the Mid-Atlantic.

The Museum has 3 TBM's. They were donated by Dennis G. Buehn, T.B.M., Inc. of Tulare, California and the US Naval Air Station of Jacksonville, Florida. One of them arrived in excellent condition.

Bureau Numbers: 53403, 53454, 53593

### SPECIFICATIONS

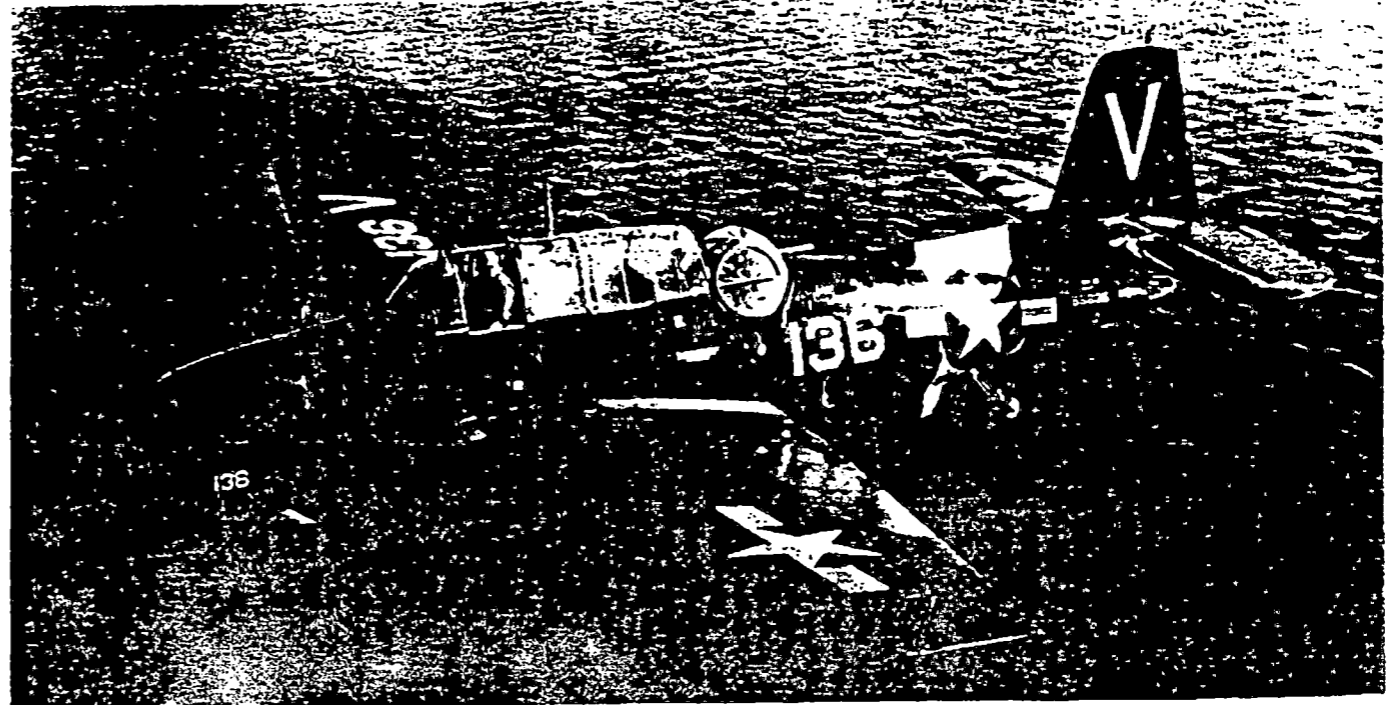
Wingspan: 54' 2"  
Length: 40' 11 1/2"  
Height: 16' 5"  
Gross Weight: 17,895 lbs.  
Armament: (2) .50in guns, (1) dorsal .50in gun,  
(1) ventral .30in gun, torpedo bombs  
Power Plant: One 1,900 HP Wright  
R-2600-20

### PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed: 276 mph  
Cruise Speed: 147 mph  
Range: 1,010 miles  
Service Ceiling: 30,100 ft.

### MANUFACTURER:

Grumman Corporation.



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**INFORMATION**

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**PLEASE**

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**ALMANAC®**

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**ATLAS & YEARBOOK**

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**1989**

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**42ND EDITION**

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**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON**

**1989**

- Roosevelt in which Chicago Mayor Cermak is fatally shot. Roosevelt inaugurated ("the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"); launches New Deal. Prohibition repealed. U.S.S.R. recognized by U.S.
- 1934 Chancellor Dollfuss of Austria assassinated by Nazis. Hitler becomes Führer. U.S.S.R. admitted to League of Nations. Dionne sisters, first quintuplets to survive beyond infancy, born in Canada.
- 1935 Saar incorporated into Germany after plebiscite. Nazis repudiate Versailles Treaty, introduce compulsory military service. Mussolini invades Ethiopia; League of Nations invokes sanctions. Roosevelt opens second phase of New Deal in U.S., calling for social security, better housing, equitable taxation, and farm assistance. Huey Long assassinated in Louisiana.
- 1936 Germans occupy Rhineland. Italy annexes Ethiopia. Rome-Berlin Axis proclaimed (Japan to join in 1940). Trotsky exiled to Mexico. King George V dies; succeeded by son, Edward VIII, who soon abdicated to marry American-born divorcée, and is succeeded by brother, George VI. Spanish civil war begins. (Franco's fascist forces defeat Loyalist forces by 1939, when Madrid falls.) War between China and Japan begins, to continue through World War II. Japan and Germany sign anti-Comintern pact; joined by Italy in 1937.
- 1937 Hitler repudiates war guilt clause of Versailles Treaty; continues to build German power. Italy withdraws from League of Nations. U.S. gunboat *Priny* sunk by Japanese in Yangtze River. Japan invades China, conquers most of coastal area. Amelia Earhart lost somewhere in Pacific on round-the-world flight.
- 1938 Hitler marches into Austria; political and geographical union of Germany and Austria proclaimed. Munich Pact—Britain, France, and Italy agree to let Germany partition Czechoslovakia. Douglas "Wrong-Way" Corrigan flies from New York to Dublin.
- 1939 Germany occupies Bohemia and Moravia; renounces pacts with Poland and England and concludes 10-year non-aggression pact with U.S.S.R. Russo-Finnish War begins; Finns to lose one-tenth of territory in 1940 peace treaty. World War II begins (see special material on "World War II"). In U.S., Roosevelt submits \$1,319-million defense budget, proclaims U.S. neutrality, and declares limited emergency. Einstein writes FDR about feasibility of atomic bomb. New York World's Fair opens.
- 1940 Trotsky assassinated in Mexico. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania annexed by U.S.S.R. U.S. trades 50 destroyers for leases on British bases in Western Hemisphere. Selective Service Act signed.



Amelia Earhart (1898-1937)

A U S T R A L I A

**WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)**

Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) vs. Allies (U.S., Britain, France, U.S.S.R., Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Greece, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Yugoslavia).

1939 Germany invades Poland and annexes Danzig; Britain and France give Hitler ultimatum (Sept. 1), declare war (Sept. 3). Disabled German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* blown up off Montevideo, Uruguay, on Hitler's orders (Dec. 17). Limited activity ("Sitzkrieg") on Western Front.

1940 Nazis invade Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg (May 10). Chamberlain resigns as Prime Minister; Churchill takes over (May 10). Germans cross French frontier (May 12) using air/tank/infantry "Blitzkrieg" tactics. Dunkerque evacuation—about 335,000 out of 400,000 Allied soldiers rescued from Belgium by British civilian and naval craft (May 26-June 3). Italy declares war on France and Britain; invades France (June 10). Germans enter Paris; city undefended (June 14). France and Germany sign armistice at Compiègne (June 22). Nazis bomb Coventry, England (Nov. 14).

1941 Germans launch attacks in Balkans. Yugoslavia surrenders—General Mihajlovic continues guerrilla warfare; Tito leads left-wing guerrillas (April 17). Nazi tanks enter Athens; remnants of British Army quit Greece (April 27). Hitler attacks Russia (June 22). Atlantic Charter—FDR and Churchill agree on war aims (Aug. 14). Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, Philippines, Guam force U.S. into war; U.S. Pacific fleet crippled (Dec. 7). U.S. and Britain declare war on Japan. Germany and Italy declare war on U.S.; Congress declares war on those countries (Dec. 11).

1942 British surrender Singapore to Japanese (Feb. 15). U.S. forces on Bataan peninsula in Philippines surrender (April 9). U.S. and Filipino troops on Corregidor island in Manila Bay surrender to Japanese (May 6). Village of Lidice in Czechoslovakia razed by Nazis (June 10). U.S. and Britain

land in French North Africa (Nov. 8).

1943 Casablanca Conference—Churchill and FDR agree on unconditional surrender goal (Jan. 14-24). German 6th Army surrenders at Stalingrad—turning point of war in Russia (Feb. 1-2). Remnants of Nazis trapped on Cape Bon, ending war in Africa (May 12). Mussolini deposed; Badoglio named premier (July 25). Allied troops land on Italian mainland after conquest of Sicily (Sept. 3). Italy surrenders (Sept. 8). Nazis seize Rome (Sept. 10). Cairo Conference: FDR, Churchill, Chiang Kai-shek pledge defeat of Japan, free Korea (Nov. 22-26). Teheran Conference: FDR, Churchill, Stalin agree on invasion plans (Nov. 28-Dec. 1).

1944 U.S. and British troops land at Anzio on west Italian coast and hold beachhead (Jan. 22). U.S. and British troops enter Rome (June 4). D-Day—Allies launch Normandy invasion (June 6). Hitler wounded in bomb plot (July 20). Paris liberated (Aug. 25). Athens freed by Allies (Oct. 13). Americans invade Philippines (Oct. 20). Germans launch counter-offensive in Belgium—Battle of Bulge (Dec. 16).

1945 Yalta Agreement signed by FDR, Churchill, Stalin—establishes basis for occupation of Germany; returns to Soviet Union lands taken by Germany and Japan; U.S.S.R. agrees to friendship pact with China (Feb. 11). Mussolini killed at Lake Como (April 28). Admiral Doenitz takes command in Germany; suicide of Hitler announced (May 1). Berlin falls (May 2). V-E Day—Germany signs unconditional surrender terms at Rheims (May 7). Potsdam Conference—Truman, Churchill, Atlee (after July 28), Stalin establish council of foreign ministers to prepare peace treaties; plan German postwar government and reparations (July 17-Aug. 2). A-bomb blasts Hiroshima (Aug. 6). U.S.S.R. declares war on Japan (Aug. 8). Nagasaki hit by A-bomb (Aug. 9). Japan surrenders (Aug. 14). V-J Day—Japanese sign surrender terms aboard battleship *Missouri* (Sept. 2).

Area reconquered after World War II  
Allied drives, 1942-45

# Lifeline

4/25/89

Anderson - (508) 475-3400

Miss Democrat

Miss Simpson Colwell 42 Sunday

Henry Stinson gave out diplomas  
Pres. of Bd of Trustees

Pres. Charles Seymour → Pres. Vole  
address same holder

Elliott Vose Sr Class Pres  
Richard Duden Upper Middle Class Pres

Charles Finney  
VA  
Another King  
reserved p/ly

Welfare Society

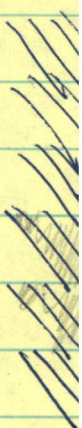
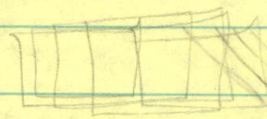
Urban Fabric - H.D.D. ~~scorot's~~  
Fair Housing

CSCE

2/1/89  
1/1/89

9 June '43

repted. Naval Aviator



## PHOTO CAPTIONS:

- H44 1. Left Leo Nadeau } TITLE  
Center President } Last Combat Crew  
Right Joe Richert }

X2 stands  
for the #2  
plane in Vt-51

Nov(?) '44 Jon Jacinto  
x2 are the numbers on the plane in  
the background of the three people

? - Where taken, when-year

Nov. 4 4/4 Jon Jacinto

2. Picture of the President at Phillips  
Academy Andover in 1942 standing  
in front of bleachers next to his coach  
George Follansbee (The President is  
in his baseball uniform). 1942

? - What was the occasion, after a certain  
game? On a particular field?

Don't know Day day  
Probably senior yr.

3. The President picking up George W. 4/8

? - When taken - year?  
Where?

at their house  
37 Hillthorne Ave.  
West Haven

4. Do we know how many people  
attended their wedding?

400 people

5. Pres. in Avenger airplane?  
*Barbara Bush*

Was it taken aboard a carrier?

When?

a certain battle?

Please FAX to

AUG 1 6 01 PM '89

Christine Gear  
202-456-6218

from MARY SIMONS  
212 522 0908 (FAX)

Pat @ Anderson  
212  
Basel

SEPWWII V:07 HJ:Y 00323 01-AUG-89 17:49 PAGE: 1  
OP:PERICH;08/01,17:40 OR:FGAN FR:PERICH-LFE FMT:26 FG:LFE  
MS: OK: RP:8 NO:e8 ID:09-01-89 PF:g \*\*\*

- L 0001 LIFE SEPTEMBER WORLD WAR II Pps 70-78
- L 0002 Bush/simons/bentkowski/
- L 0003 goldberg/kinney/Geeslin
- L 0004 GHC PR NOT CG
- L 0005
- L 0006 Caps 3, 4, 5 (DEPT SLUG)
- L 0007
- L 0008 ANNIVERSARY
- L 0009
- L 0010 Cap 7 (ART)
- L 0011
- LN0012 A BOY
- LN0013 GOES TO
- LN0014 WAR
- L 0015

June 1943

Training up and down the East Coast - were they dropping real torpedoes? I know they were only dummy bombs.

«  
5

0015

(uflhed)

June 1943

Also, can we find out where in Chincoteague they were flying? U.S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station, 5th Naval District very small ferry station

L 0016 Cap 2

L 0017

LN0018 by GEORGE BUSH

L 0019

« « «

0019 (cp28,30,16p6)(xh)(rr)

L 0020 Cap 8

5

L 0021

LN0022 THE PRESIDENT RECALLS

LN0023 HIS THREE-YEAR TOUR

LN0024 OF DUTY AS A

LN0025 NAVY PILOT IN THE

LN0026 PACIFIC

L 0027

L 0028

«

0028

(st)

0

L 0029

4

L 0030 Cap 1 PRECEDE TK

L 0031

L 0032

(cbp71,c1,l51)

0

PAGE 71 COLUMN 1 51 LINES DEFINED

(cbp72,c1,l29,c2,l29)

(cbp74,c1,l34,c2,l34)

(cbp75,c1,l34,c2,l34)

(cbp76,c1,l24)

L 0033 « « December 7, 1941

0033

(lr58l,6p,17l,10p,33l,

0 0034

1

I was walking across the campus at Andover when I

0033

6p,1l,7p9,3l,6p,25l,

0

heard the

1 0035 news. I was 17. It came as a shock<-->a jolt<-->  
 an awakening. I  
 0 0036 did not fully comprehend world affairs. My  
 interests were our  
 1 0037 undefeated soccer season just finished,  
 basketball<-->baseball  
 0 0038 coming up. Christmas vacation only a couple of  
 weeks away,  
 1 0039 graduation, then college. Things changed  
 instantly. I knew  
 L 0040 right then that I wanted to go into the service.  
 L 0041  
 L 0042 December 8, 1941  
 1 0043 Our headmaster, a great historian and tough  
 0 disciplinarian,  
 1 0044 summoned us all into George Washington Hall, the  
 school's  
 0 0045 assembly place. There was the normal joking,  
 kidding, sloppy  
 0 0046 posture. Dr. Claude M. Fuess called to order the  
 800 students  
 1 0047 by saying something like this: "Your country is  
 at war. We  
 0 0048 have just played the *Star-Spangled Banner*. From  
 4 0  
 now on when  
 0 0049 the *Star-Spangled Banner* is played you will stand  
 4 0  
 at attention,  
 0 0050 hands at your sides and you will show respect."  
 From that day

0 0051 on, without fail, I have stood at attention when

the national

L 0052 anthem was played.

L 0053

L 0054 ~~Early June 1942~~ *June 12*

2 0055 Secretary of War Henry Stimson, an alumnus of

*spoke at Andover*

1 0056 ~~gave the commencement address.~~ He encouraged the gradu-

0 0057 ating class to get some college education before serving. I was

0 0058 determined not to go on to college but to become a Navy pilot.

2 0059 Secretary Stimson was a towering world figure but I won-

L 0060 dered about this call of his.

L 0061

L 0062 ~~June 12, 1942~~ *the same day*

0 0063 On my 18th birthday, I was sworn into the Navy as a Seaman

1 0064 Second Class in ~~Boston~~ *Boston*, the first step towards becoming a

0064 (co CHK brooklyn)

1 0065 Navy pilot. I was a scared nervous kid. The Navy had just

1 0066 changed the rules. It no longer required two years of college

1 0067 before becoming a Navy pilot; pilots were urgently needed.

0 0068 Walter Levering, Lt. USNR, swore me in at Boston. I went on

- L 0069 active duty as an aviation cadet August 6, 1942.
- L 0070
- L 0071 August 6, 1942
- 0 0072 I climbed on a southbound train at Penn Station.  
 0  
 My dad was
- 0 0073 a big, strong guy. He put his arm around me and  
 said goodbye.
- 0 0074 I'd never seen my dad shed a tear before. We  
 arrived in Chapel
- 0 0075 Hill, N.C. and I met my great friend "The  
 Splendid Splinter"
- 1 0076 Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox. We all stood  
 in awe of
- L 0077 the famous hitter who was in the same program.
- L 0078
- L 0079 June, 1943
- 1 0080 Having been stationed at Chapel Hill for  
 0  
 preflight, Minne-
- 0 0081 apolis for primary training, and Corpus Christi  
 for Advanced,
- 0 0082 I received my Navy wings and Ensign's commission  
 June 4,
- 0 0083 was still 18 years old. I wanted to fly in  
 combat. All my class-

END OF BLOCK PAGE 71 COLUMN 1

PAGE 72 COLUMN 1 29 LINES DEFINED

1 N0084 mates wanted to as well. I fell in love early on

with the 'low

1 N0085 and slow' torpedo bombers. The Grumman Avenger  
carried

1 0086 2,000 pounds of bombs, the biggest single-engine  
aircraft in

0 0087 the fleet. It had a crew of three. I went off to  
Fort Lauderdale

0 0088 to learn to fly it. Training up and down the East  
coast, drop-

0 0089 ping torpedoes off Cape Cod, dummy bombs and  
torpedoes in

4 0090 Lake Okeechobee, Fla., Chincoteague, Va.,  
Charlestown,

1 0091 Rhode Island, Miami . . . I saw 'em all. I had an

0 0092 ensign's stripe and an admiral's confidence. I was

L 0093 a Navy pilot.

L 0094

L 0095 Spring-Summer 1944

1

2 0096 I was assigned to Air Group 51, the first to be

0

0 0097 aboard the new fast carrier *San Jacinto*, CVL 30.

4

0

0 0098 We went on a shakedown cruise to Trinidad, put

0 0099 *San Jac* into commission at Philadelphia, headed

4

0

2 0100 for the Pacific via the Panama Canal, touched

0 N0101 the U.S. one last time at San Diego and then went

L 0102 West.

2 0103 Many of the air group and ship's company

1 0104 had ~~spend~~ no time at sea. One roommate, subse-

1 0105 quently killed, Tom Waters had a red face, but

0 0106 the seas were so bad that his face literally




L 0107 green.  
0 0108 We struck Wake Island on May 23, 1944. My  
close friend  
0 0109 and roommate, Jim Wykes went off on a search  
mission, and  
1 0110 never came back. I lay in my upper bunk and cried  
for my  
L 0111 friend. No one saw me<-->that wouldn't do.  
L 0112

END OF BLOCK PAGE 72 COLUMN 1

PAGE 72 COLUMN 2 29 LINES DEFINED

L 0113 September 2, 1944  
1 0114 On this day at 07:15, a division of VT-51,  
0 composed of Com-  
2 0115 mander Don Melvin, Doug West, Milt Moore and  
myself,  
1 0116 took off from the San Jacinto (my 50th combat  
mission) fly-  
2 N0117 ing about 70 miles to destroy two radio stations  
at Chichi  
1 N0118 Jima in the Bonin Islands. At reaching the target  
area, the  
1 0119 sky was thick with black clouds of exploding  
enemy anti-air-



1 0120 craft fire. Don Melvin led the attack on the tar-  
L 0121 get, followed by Doug West and then me.  
2 0122 At about 08:30, and moments after pushing  
0 0123 over into my dive at 8,000 feet, I felt a jolt  
as if a  
0 0124 giant fist had rammed into the belly of the  
plane.  
0 0125 My plane had been hit in the engine area. Smoke  
1 0126 poured into the cockpit and flames were spread-  
0 0127 ing aft toward the fuel tanks in the wings. Navy  
0 0128 training had taught us to complete the mission. I  
1 0129 instinctively continued in the dive, homed in on  
0 0130 the target, unloaded our four 500 hundred pound  
0 0131 bombs, pulled away heading East toward the sea.  
1 0132 A few miles from shore, I told my crewmen, Ted  
0 N0133 White and John Delaney, to bail out. As I bailed  
0 N0134 out, my head struck the tail of the plane momen-  
1 N0135 tarily knocking me out. I was landing in the wa-  
1 N0136 ter when the Japanese sent two boats out after  
1 0137 me. Melvin, West and Moore along with our Hellcat  
fighter  
L 0138 escorts drove the boats away.  
0 0139 I was in the life raft about two hours,  
wondering if my life  
1 N0140 would be spared. I prayed to God, I was sick to  
my stomach  
0 N0141 and again I cried. I was a very scared kid, just  
20, away

PAGE 74 COLUMN 1 34 LINES DEFINED

0 0142 from his mother and dad, paddling against the  
wind trying to

0 N0143 get farther away from the Japanese held island. I  
later learned

1 N0144 that my crewmen had been killed. Observers said  
that two

2 0145 persons were seen leaving the plane. The para-  
0 N0146 chute of the other person never opened, but mine  
0 0147 did. God had spared me from that fate for what-  
1 0148 ever reason. Hellcat fighter pilots flew over my  
0 0149 raft until I was rescued by the American subma-  
L 0150 rine U.S.S. *Finback* around noon.  
4 0

L 0151

L 0152 September 1944

0 0153 <sup>1</sup>The *Finback* stayed on its war patrol in Japanese  
0 4 0 waters, and I along with two other rescued pilots

0 N0154 and two crewmen spent the next 30 days standing  
0 N0155 watch and counting my blessings. We got depth  
1 0156 charged by Japanese ships. The submariners in  
1 0157 *Finback* didn't seem too concerned about that,  
2 0158 <sup>4</sup> <sup>0</sup> but Jim ~~Backman~~, Tom Keene and I, the three  
1 N0159 rescued pilots, didn't like that a bit. *Finback's*  
2 0160 skipper won a Silver Star for sinking Japanese  
2 0161 ships.  
4 0

L 0162

L 0163

L 0164 October 1944  
 3 0165 1 Back in Pearl Harbor for a week at a "rest  
 0 home" <--> then after some essential refresher fly-  
 2 N0166 ing, I hitchhiked back to the fleet <--> Task Force  
 1 N0167 38 under Admiral William "Bull" Halsey off the  
 1 0168 Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous Naval  
 0 N0169 power in and around Pearl Harbor and at Ulithi  
 1 0170 Atoll. You  
 0 N0171 could feel things moving our way. We were shown  
 pictures of  
 0 0172 Japanese atrocities. It was Hirohito's fault.  
 Hitler was begin-  
 0 0173 ning to get kicked hard in Europe but for us  
 there was one uni-  
 0 0174 fying symbol <--> Hirohito and the evil he  
 represented. I wanted  
 L 0175 badly to rejoin my squadron <--> to fly more, to do  
 my part.

0169

(co William(?))

END OF BLOCK PAGE 74 COLUMN 1

PAGE 74 COLUMN 2 34 LINES DEFINED

L 0176

L 0177 November 1944

0 N0178 1 I flew my final combat mission, the 58th, over  
 0 Luzon Bay, No-

2 0179 vember 19. Puffs of antiaircraft fire, black and

0 N0180 menacing were nothing like the concentrated fire  
 1 0181 over Chichi Jima. Still you wonder. There was a  
 0 0182 sense of exhilaration in our ready room. We were  
 1 0183 going home. We'd probably make it for Christ-  
 1 0184 mas. Several of our VT 51 squadron mates had  
 0 0185 been killed, but that was accepted. In a sense,

the

0 0186 ferocity of the battle helped heal the hurt for  
 our

1 0187 fallen comrades. It was our duty, our honor. We

1 0188 were fighting for the USA against tyranny. The

0 0189 country was united. We, on a carrier, were a

part

1 0190 of something great and good. At times we were

L 0191 scared, but there were never any doubts.

L 0192

L 0193 Christmas Eve 1944

0 0194 I arrive home. I stop at the Rye (N.Y.) Station

0

on

0 0195 the the way to Greenwich. There my fiancée, Bar-

0 0196 bara, climbs on the train. We go the 10 minutes

to

1 0197 Greenwich. My mother and dad meet us. I was

0 0198 glad to be home for Christmas Day, I counted my

0 0199 blessings. I was glad to be surrounded by love.

At

0 0200 church the next day, Christmas, I thanked God I

3 N0201 was home<-->and in the quiet of our church I

3 0202 thought about Jim Wykes, Dick Houle, Tom

0 N0203 Waters, Ted White, John Delaney and the others

L 0204 who would never come home for Christmas.  
 1 N0205 I asked "Why?" but there was not any agony  
 about the  
 0 0206 cause. There were no divisions about the war. We  
 were right.  
 1 N0207 God was on our side. We had suffered a surprise  
 attack and  
 1 N0208 now, three years later, we were winning; and I, a  
 20 year old  
 0 0209 Lt. (j.g.) was part of the greatest fighting  
 force in the world. I

LT

END OF BLOCK PAGE 74 COLUMN 2

PAGE 75 COLUMN 1 34 LINES DEFINED

1 0210 had grown up. I had flown with the best off a  
 great carrier  
 0 0211 that flew the Texas flag into battle. I was part  
 of a team. We  
 0 0212 cared about each other in our squadron. We  
 understood each  
 0 0213 other's fears and loves. We played together, sang  
 2 0214 together, flew together. We bitched about our  
 1 0215 Squadron Commander<-->too tough, too demand-  
 0 0216 ing, too serious. But we loved to fly on his wing<  
 -->  
 L 0217 we respected Don Melvin.

X  
 Srijan

1 0218 If we hot dogged it or risked the lives of the  
 1 0219 ship's crew by some careless maneuver, Captain  
 0 0220 Harold M. "Beauty" Martin would ~~kick some se-~~  
 1 0221 ~~rious butt~~, but we bragged about him. He didn't  
 2 0222 know me from ~~Adam's Off-Or~~. But why should  
 1 N0223 he?-->I had one stripe, finally 1<1/2>, and he  
 had 4.

L 0224 We gave him a lot of room, a lot of respect.

2 0225 We were the best pilots. When we ground-  
 0 0226 looped on land, it was that damned gust of wind,  
 1 0227 or it was low hydraulics in the left brake. When  
 0 0228 we missed the proper wire landing on the carrier,  
 0 0229 it was that crazy landing signal officer . . .

Damn

0 0230 fool, had me too high all the way in, or too  
 fast, or

2 0231 too slow"; but we never told him. He held our  
 2 0232 lives in his hands. And besides, the skipper al-  
 L 0233 ways thought he was right.

0 0234 We were the best . . . cocky devils, sure of  
 our

3 0235 ability, sure of our mission. We knew exactly  
 L 0236 what had to <sup>be</sup> done. We knew we would win.

L 0237

L 0238 Winter - Spring 1945

0 0239 <sup>1</sup> Having been engaged since the Fall of 1943 while  
 0 I was train-

0 N0240 ing up and down the East Coast, on January 6,  
 1945, Barbara

2 0241 Pierce and I exchanged wedding vows at the

X  
 X  
 77

X  
 (5)  
 1200  
 10/1/45

Presbyterian

1 0242 Church in Rye, N.Y. I was ~~probably~~ wearing my  
Navy uni-  
1 N0243 form. My VT-51 squadron mates, Richard B.  
Playstead and

END OF BLOCK PAGE 75 COLUMN 1

PAGE 75 COLUMN 2 34 LINES DEFINED

0 N0244 Milton Moore were in attendance. Barbara and I  
had time for  
L 0245 a honeymoon at Sea Isle, Georgia.  
1 0246 Then off we went to carrier re-qualification in  
the Great  
2 0247 Lakes. We bought our first car<-->a 1941 Plym-  
0 0248 outh<-->price \$350 and drove across Canada to  
Join  
1 0249 our squadron in Lewiston, Maine. Up and down  
1 0250 the East Coast in VT 153, a new torpedo squad-  
1 0251 ron manned by some of my pals from VT 51. I  
1 0252 checked out in the F4U, the hot-shot gull wing  
0 0253 Corsair fighter . . . and for a moment I  
wondered if  
0 0254 low and slow was good enough for me  
anymore.  
1 0255 A fleeting thought only, since by now the feel of  
1 0256 the TBF was a part of my very existence. The

0 0257 TBF was a forgiving airplane<-->and though I  
 was  
 0 0258 a pretty good pilot, I'd still make some pilot's  
 er-  
 L 0259 rors that needed forgiveness.

L 0260

L 0261 August 14, 1945

1

0 0262 I'm just 21 now. We are based in Virginia. Barba-  
 0  
 1 0263 ra and I are having more time together. As our  
 0 0264 new squadron, with orders in hand to go back to  
 3 0265 the Pacific, starts our final training, the war  
 3 0266 ends. I'll never forget the screaming and the  
 2 0267 cheering and the dancing in the street and the  
 1 0268 praying. Bar and I went to church and we said  
 0 0269 thanks. The war's end meant we would not have  
 0 0270 to be separated, and that I would not have to

cov-

0 0271 er any more landings of marines on beaches<-->

see-

1 0272 ing them get slaughtered as the Japanese dug in  
 to defend

L 0273 their homeland.

L 0274

L 0275 September 18, 1945

1

1 0276 I am discharged from the Navy on "points" and  
 0  
 now I go to

1 0277 college. The togetherness of it all is gone. We  
 re-focus.

*by sent*

PAGE 76 COLUMN 1 24 LINES DEFINED

1 0278 It's soccer, baseball<-->it's our first baby, and  
 economics classes. Barbara and I

0 0279 know family joy, and the happiness of being at  
 school and looking forward short-

1 0280 ly thereafter to a new life in our west. We have  
 lots of new friends. The letters

L 0281 from the shipmates slow down. They are finding  
 their new way, too.

L 0282

L 0283 June 1948

0 0284 <sup>1</sup>  
<sub>0</sub> A brand new college grad, my first job ahead, I  
 drive to Odessa, Texas. The war

L 0285 seems, far behind<-->ahead lies a whole new  
 exciting life.

L 0286

L 0287 January 20, 1989

0 0288 <sup>1</sup>  
<sub>0</sub> I am sworn in as President of the United States.  
 A TBF on a float goes by in our

0 0289 Inaugural parade. On it are some squadron mates  
 from VT 51. They are smiling

L 0290 and waving. No one knows who they are. But I  
 know.

L 0291

L 0292 February, 1989

0 0293 <sup>1</sup>  
<sub>0</sub> I am in Japan for the funeral of Emperor

Hirohito. It is an icy cold day and the

0 0294 long ceremony is beautifully done. Sitting there  
 in the cold, surrounded by world  
 0 0295 leaders, I had time to think. Yes, I thought  
 about the burst of anti-aircraft fire  
 1 0296 from Chichi Jima that killed my friends, but that  
 thought did not dominate. I  
 0 0297 thought about Hirohito going to call on  
 MacArthur, about Japan's remarkable  
 0 0298 recovery and about her democracy. I thought about  
 the quiet little man and his  
 1 0299 love of nature and how that contrasted with the  
 horrible pictures we saw 45  
 1 0300 years ago . . . I thought of Japan. And I thought  
 of forgiveness. Our alliance is  
 1 0301 strong, our friendship is genuine. They are now a  
 democracy. How remarkable

END OF BLOCK PAGE 76 COLUMN 1

WARNING: NO MORE BLOCKS DEFINED

0 0302 that is. Maybe Ted White, Jack Delaney, Jim  
 Wykes, Dick Houle and Tom Wa-  
 0 0303 ters did not die in vain. It was right that I  
 went back to Japan to the Emperor's  
 L 0304 funeral. «|ā  
 1

0304

(ufbox)

(END)

Charles  
Fisher  
916 571-1828

Training

13 Dec '43

Dunsmuir, R.I.

carrying 600 lbs bombs  
dropped on ship & barge

Shooting guns  
too far out

too?

point to identify  
bullets

cluster bombs  
improving bombs

War

for photos - were real  
didn't get to practice  
- very short  
much - supply

~~most bombs~~

~~Training~~

bombs had water in them  
- were dropped on land  
600 lbs

explosive - in water

TBF - 4 500 lbs bombs

Training  
off of RI

back } Navy Bombers in Action  
Aircraft # 82 Squadron Publications  
Signal Rbt  
1115 Crowley Dr.  
Carrollton, TX  
78011-5010

"XX" on tail means San Jacinto