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"My Impressions of World War II" - Life Magazine 8/89 [2]

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MY IMPRESSIONS -- WORLD WAR II

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years old. I wanted to fly in combat. All my classmates wanted 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. [The Grumman Avenger] carried 2,000 lbs. of bombs, the biggest single engine aircraft in the fleet. It had a crew of 3. I went off to Fort Lauderdale to learn to fly. 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 abroad 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.

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

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. No-one saw me -- that wouldn't do.

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Over Chi Chi Jima, my plane was hit 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.

September 1944 -- aboard the Finback in Japanese waters

The Submarine stayed on its war patrol. [And I spent 30 days (?) as an amateur submariner.] 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 ships.

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Bull Halsey off the Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous 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 badly to rejoin my squadron -- to fly more, to do my part.

November 1944

I flew my final combat mission over Luzon Bay, November 19, 1944. Puffs of antiaircraft fire, black and 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 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 our fallen comrades. 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.

Christmas Eve 1944

I arrive home. I stop at the Rye Station on the way to Greenwich. There my fiancée, 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 the others 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 -- too 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

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~~ ⁽²⁾ we knew we were right and that we would win, and ~~that we were the best.~~ ⁽¹⁾ 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 hated Hirohito. Evil, he was the epitome of all evil. He started this. He and Hitler.~~

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Barbara and I were married January 6th. We had time for a honeymoon, then 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 East Coast in VT 153, a new torpedo squadron manned by some of my

pals from VT 51. I checked out in the F4U, the hot-shot gull wing Corsair fighter. . .and for a moment I wondered if "low and slow" was good enough for me anymore. A fleeting thought only, since by now the feel of the TBF was a part of my very existence. The TBF was a forgiving airplane -- and though I was a pretty good pilot, I'd still make some pilot's errors that needed forgiveness.

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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

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It was 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.

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WORKING DRAFT

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7.
No. delete
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8. delete
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substitute
language

WORKING DRAFT

9. delete yellow
 9. ⁽⁹⁾
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10. substitute language
 11. addition
 12. CAPS
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28. delete yellow
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WORKING DRAFT

June, 1948

27.
30. delete
yellow

A brand new college grad, my first job ahead, I drive to Odessa, Texas. The war seems ~~28.~~ long ago, far behind -- ahead lies a whole new exciting life.

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1/4
1. caps

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what did you do right or wrong before?

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*room?
other
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*W. had felt
forgot, look at movie
when someone hit,
who would,
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i paralytic*

what # of mission when hit

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

100 JUL 27 1989

July 26, 1989

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: CHRISS WINSTON *W*
FROM: DANIEL MCGROARTY *DM*
SUBJECT: ESSAY ON WAR EXPERIENCES FOR LIFE MAGAZINE

We have discussed your "war journal" with Life magazine, which is interested in publishing your draft in its entirety. Life will need a working draft as soon as possible.

This draft includes minor grammatical edits, as well as two sentences added to clarify the passages in which they appear. (These additions are bracketted on pages 5 and 10.)

Your draft has been reviewed by General Scowcroft, who suggested toning down references to Emperor Hirohito, which we have done. The General agrees with the Speechwriting Office that your draft will be of great interest to Life's readership, and should be published in its entirety.

If you are comfortable with these changes, we will submit the text to Life as a working draft. You will of course have an opportunity to approve the final, published version.

Chriss / Dan
Be sure
they know
a) I wrote it, so
b) we should approve
any edits on changes.
CPB
advise

WORKING DRAFT

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 *season just finis basketball - baseball coming up.* undefeated soccer ~~team~~ *couple of weeks.* Christmas vacation only a ~~month~~ away, graduation, then college. Things changed instantly. I knew right then that I wanted to go into the service.

December 8, 1941

Our headmaster, a great historian and tough disciplinarian, summoned us all into George Washington Hall, the school's assembly place. There was the normal joking, kidding, sloppy posture. Dr. Fuess called to order the 800 students by saying something like this: "your country is at war. We have just played the Star Spangled Banner. From now on when the Star Spangled Banner is played you will stand at attention, hands at your sides and you will show respect." From that day on, without fail, I have stood at attention when the Star Spangled Banner was played.

WORKING DRAFT**Early June 1942**

Secretary [of War Henry] Stimson, an alumnus of Andover, gave the commencement address. He encouraged the graduating class to get some college 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.

June 12, 1942

On my 18th birthday I was sworn into the Navy as a Seaman 2nd Class, the first step towards becoming a Navy pilot. The Navy had just changed the rules. It no longer required two years of college before becoming a Navy pilot; pilots were urgently needed. The Navy moved to accept High School graduates for pilot training. Walter Levering, LT USNR, swore me in at Boston. I went on active duty as an Aviation Cadet August 6, 1942.

August 6, 1942

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.

WORKING DRAFT

June, 1943

Having been stationed at Chapel Hill for preflight, Minneapolis for Primary Training, and Corpus Christi for Advanced, 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 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. [The Grumman Avenger] carried 2,000 lbs. of bombs, the biggest single engine aircraft in the fleet. It had a crew of 3. I went off to Fort Lauderdale to learn to fly^{it} 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.

WORKING DRAFT

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

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. No-one saw me -- that wouldn't do. ~~when he did cry out I was almost 20~~

September 2, 1944

Over Chi Chi Jima, my plane was hit 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 ^{Jima.} 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 ^{to God} and I ^{was sick to my stomach} vomited, and again I shed a tear. I was a ^{very} scared kid, just 20, away from his mother and dad, paddling against the wind trying to get further away from the Japanese held Island.

WORKING DRAFT

September 1944 -- aboard the Finback in Japanese waters

The Submarine stayed on its war patrol, and I spent the next 30 days ~~as an amateur submariner~~ ^{standing watch and counting my blessings} 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 ships.

October 1944

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 Naval power I saw in and around Pearl Harbor and at Ulithe Atoll. You could feel things moving our way. We were 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.

November 1944

I flew my final combat mission over Luzon Bay, November 19, 1944. Puffs of antiaircraft fire, black and menacing, but nothing like the concentrated fire over Chi Chi Jima. Still you wonder.

of mission

51
WORKING DRAFT

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 ~~51~~ 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 our fallen comrades. 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.

Christmas Eve 1944

I arrive home. I stop at the Rye Station on the way to Greenwich. There my fiancée, 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 the others 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.

WORKING DRAFT

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

*What does
this mean?
can be in brackets*

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.

WORKING DRAFT

And besides, the skipper always thought he was right.

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 knew we were right and that we would win.

Winter - Spring 1945

*couple personnel
sentenced?*

Barbara and I were married January 6th. We had time for a honeymoon, then off we went to carrier re-qualification in the Great Lakes. We bought our first car -- a 1941 Plymouth -- price *and drove across Canada to* \$350. ~~Joining~~ our squadron in Lewiston, Maine. Up and down the East Coast in VT 153, a new torpedo squadron manned by some of my pals from VT 51. I checked out in the F4U, the hot-shot gull wing Corsair fighter. . .and for a moment I wondered if "low and slow" was good enough for me anymore. A fleeting thought only, since by now the feel of the TBF was a part of my very existence. The TBF was a forgiving airplane -- and though I was a pretty good pilot, I'd still make some pilot's errors that needed forgiveness.

WORKING DRAFT

August 1945

^{just}
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 ^{and} ~~we said Thanks,~~
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 life ~~in~~ out west. We have lots of new friends. The letters from the shipmates slow down. They are finding their new way too.

June 1948

my first job ahead

A brand new college grad ~~we~~ I ~~have~~ drive to Odessa, Texas. ^{The worst} ~~that~~ seems ~~very~~ long back behind me. ago, far behind - ahead lies a whole new exciting life.

WORKING DRAFT

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