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"My Impressions of World War II" - Life Magazine 8/89 [3]

Stack:	Row:	Section:	Shelf:	Position:
G	25	6	4	5

WORKING DRAFT

MY IMPRESSIONS -- WORLD WAR II

89 JUL 28 P2:03

December 7, 1941

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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.

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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.

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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.

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, I was sick to my stomach 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 along with 2 other rescued pilots and 2 crewmen spent the next 30 days 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.

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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 Admiral Bull Halsey off the Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous Naval power I saw in and around Pearl Harbor and at Ulihe 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.

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.

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

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 and drive across Canada to join 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**

I'm just 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 our west. We have lots of new friends. The letters from the shipmates slow down. They are finding their new way too.

WORKING DRAFT**June, 1948**

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

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. No-one knows who they are. But I know.

February, 1989

I am in Japan for the funeral of Emperor Hirohito. It is an icy cold day and the long ceremony is beautifully done. Sitting there in the cold, surrounded by World leaders, I had time to think. Yes, I thought about the burst of anti-aircraft fire from Chi Chi Jima that killed my friends, but that thought did not dominate. I thought about Hirohito going to call on MacArthur, about Japan's remarkable recovery and about her democracy. I thought about the quiet little man and his love of nature and how that contrasted with the horrible pictures we saw 45 years ago. . .I thought of Japan. And I thought of forgiveness.

Our alliance is strong, our friendship is genuine. They are now a democracy. How remarkable that is. Maybe Ted White, Jack Delaney, and Jim Wykes did not die in vain. It was right that I went back to Japan to the Emperor's funeral.

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delete
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3. delete yellow substitute language

4. delete yellow substitute language

5. delete yellow

6. delete yellow

→ Search San Jacinto all CAPS

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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.

September 2, 1944 Mission number 50

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7.delete yellow substitute language

8.delete yellow substitute language

V/10

5

5

→ Search Finback all CAPS → FINBACK

WORKING DRAFT

OK

September 1944 -- ~~aboard the FINBACK in Japanese waters~~
⑨
⑩ FINBACK
⑪ (in Japanese waters)

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Luzon Area - Provence in Philippines

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mission in combat zone

58th

9. delete yellow
10. substitute language?

11. addition

12. CAPS

13. CAPS

14. delete yellow

15. delete yellow

16. delete yellow

17. delete yellow

essential refresher flying

9B. there are 6

29 17

S

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18. delete yellow

19. delete yellow

20. addition

21. delete yellow

22. delete yellow

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23. delete
yellow

We were the best. . . cocky devils, sure of our ability, sure of
our mission. ⁽²³⁾ ~~20 years old, and~~ we knew exactly what had to ⁽²⁴⁾ ~~be~~ done. ✓

24. addition

We knew ⁽²⁵⁾ ~~we were right and that~~ we would win.

26. delete
yellow

Winter - Spring 1945

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 and drive across Canada to join 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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14 ? optional Japan sur. date
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26 substitute language

For time spent in service & service you rendered

(26) is gone

WORKING DRAFT

June, 194827. delete
yellow

A brand new college grad, my first job ahead, I drive to Odessa, Texas. The war seems ⁽²⁷⁾ ~~long ago~~ ² far behind -- ahead lies a whole new exciting life.

January 20, 1989

28. CAPS

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.]]

S/B
✓

They are smiling and waving. No-one knows who they are. But I know.

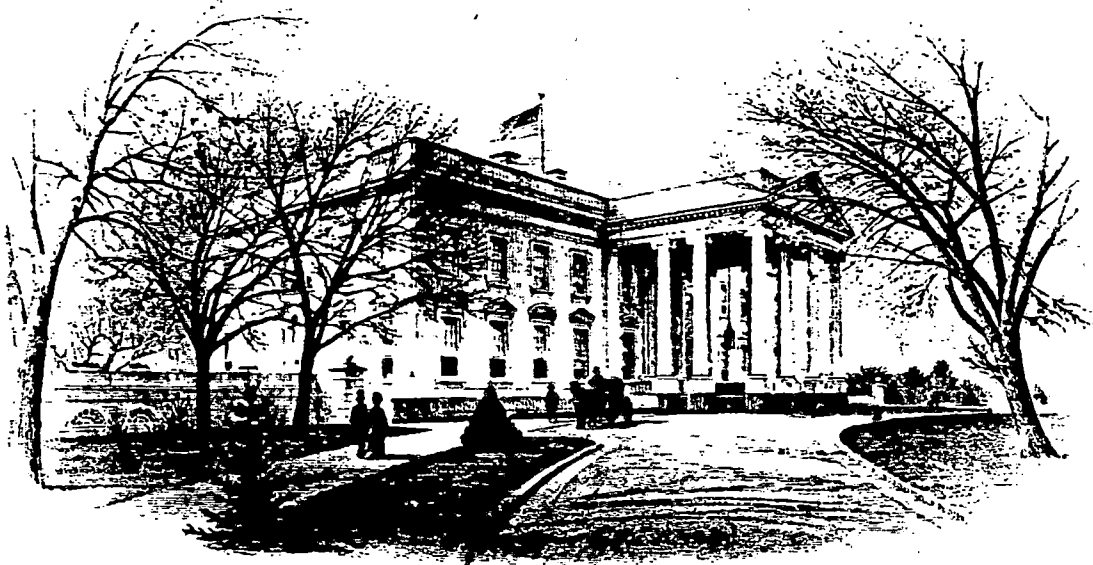
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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

NUMBER OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER 4

DATE 8/1

TO Mary SIMONS

FAX NUMBER (212) 522-0908

OFFICE NUMBER _____

COMMENTS _____

FROM Kristin Gear

FAX NUMBER (202) 456-6218

OFFICE NUMBER 456-2930

June 12, 1942

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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.

September 2

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

to destroy two radio stations at Chichi 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

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 mates, Richard B. Playstead and Milton Moore were in attendance. We had time for a honeymoon at Sea Isle, Georgia.

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June 12, 1942

Insert after "Boston.":

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.

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.



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FINAL

WORKING DRAFT

MY IMPRESSIONS -- WORLD WAR II

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Back in Pearl Harbor for a week at a "rest home" -- then after some essential refresher flying, I hitchhiked back to the fleet - - Task Force 38 under Admiral William "Bull" Halsey off the Philippines. I wondered at the tremendous Naval power in and around Pearl Harbor and at Ulithi 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.

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I flew my final mission, the 58th, over Luzon area, November 29. Puffs of antiaircraft fire, black and menacing, were nothing like the concentrated fire over Chichi Jima. Still you wonder. There was a sense of exhilaration in our ready room. We were going home. We'd probably make it for Christmas. Several of our VT-51 squadron mates had been killed, but that was accepted. In a sense, the ferocity of the battle helped heal the hurt. 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, N.Y. 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 Day. I counted my blessings. I was glad to be surrounded by love. At church the next day, Christmas, I thanked God I was home -- and in the quiet of our church I thought about Jim Wykes, Dick Houle, Tom Waters, Ted White, John Delaney, and the others who would never come home for Christmas.

WORKING DRAFT

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.

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WORKING DRAFT**June, 1948**

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

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. They are smiling and waving. No one knows who they are. But I know.

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Our alliance is strong, our friendship is genuine. They are now a democracy. How remarkable that is. Maybe Ted White, Jack Delaney, Jim Wykes, Dick Houle and Tom Waters did not die in vain. It was right that I went back to Japan to the Emperor's funeral.

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