



A Journal Too Late

Memoirs of a part of a part of my life.

by

Ed Olszewski

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It is probably never too late to start a journal but I wish that I had started this one fifty seven years ago. My adult children have been after me for years to make a record of my World War II experiences. I should have realized how much I enjoyed writing. I found out when I started and could not stop. I had a deadline of Christmas Eve imposed by a friend to whom I am grateful for giving me that deadline and causing me to stay up until midnight many times to meet that worthy deadline.

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By Ed Olszewski

I was born on April 15, 1922 in a house at 5343 Nottingham Ave. two doors away from the Presbyterian Church on the corner of Nottingham and Macklind Aves. in the area of St. Louis known as Southhampton. My earliest recollection was being in a high chair and my aunt Marie gave me an apple which I promptly threw at her...always hated apples although I eat them now, provided they are cooked. Another memory was my mother keeping me home from school in 1927 because of the weather. Tornadoes were hitting St. Louis and I remember looking out the window to see a yellow sky. Another memory was the day they paved Nottingham Avenue, a dirt street until that time.

In the 1920's aviation was still so much of a curiosity that my mother did not object when we children would run from the dinner table to see an airplane when we heard the one flying over. Curtiss Aviation made bi-planes, all of which were red and so we identified, rightly or wrongly, any red airplane as a Curtiss Robin.

My father used to take me to Lambert field to watch airplanes, especially if there was an air show. At one of these times the Air Corps and the Navy flew their bi-plane fighter aircraft and, even though I was a child, I got the impression that the Navy pilots were a notch above the Air Corps although I could not say why. One time there was a huge flooding of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers which inundated St. Charles County and there were sightseeing flights over the flooded area. Dad took me on my first flight in a Ford Tri-motor passenger plane. It was a high wing monoplane made of corrugated aluminum and I remember it had wicker seats. I am sure that the flight that day piqued my interest in flying which was dormant until 1941 when I began flying lessons while at Notre Dame University where I received my private pilot's license.

I signed up for the Navy's V-5 pilot training in the fall of 1941 and received orders to report to NAS Glenview, Illinois in June of 1942. Glenview was called an E-base. E stood for elimination because it was primary training where those who did not show aptitude or coordination were eliminated from the program. A few suffered from air sickness and had to be eliminated.

After three months of primary training flying open cockpit, two seater, fabric covered bi-planes called "yellow perils", I was sent to Corpus Christi, Texas for advanced training in the SNJ, a two seat all metal, low wing monoplane. Training consisted of formation flying and instrument flying where we flew under a hood with an instructor in the back seat. Training at Corpus also included rigorous physical training, swimming and a challenging obstacle course. At the end of this period we were given choices (theoretically) on the kind of flying duty we desired. I asked for patrol boat

training because I had an ultimate goal of becoming an airline pilot...I drew dive bomber training because assignments were actually given on the Navy's need rather than the cadets' wishes. I spent the winter of 1942 at Kingsville, Texas training in dive bombing and strafing. At this point we frequently flew solo as the instructor's role was teaching in the classroom but we were scored on accuracy by an observer.

On completion of dive bomber training at Kingsville, I moved back to the main station at Corpus Christi where I was commissioned an Ensign and received my wings on March 17, 1943.

The next step was operational training at Opa Locka, Florida where we flew real dive bombers (though obsolete) and trained against real targets, armored moving boats. We used miniature bombs that were armed with shotgun shells and white powder so we could see the results. The obsolete planes were BT-1's that were so decrepit that they came with a rag tied on a line so we could wipe the oil off the windshield after each dive. Training at Opa Locka also included navigation flights over open water, a new experience in the Bermuda Triangle...not a problem because we never heard of the Bermuda Triangle in those days.

Although I was an official Naval Aviator at this point, I was still in a training mode and was sent to Glenview for carrier landing qualification. We flew the SNJ again and practiced with a landing signal officer on land. This was called field carrier landing practice where a simulated deck was painted on a runway. Biggest problem was that we had to fly low, just over the tree tops. Requirement then and later was a pilot had to make four successful landings on a carrier in each type aircraft he flew. To provide the carrier, the Navy had acquired two Lake Michigan steamers the Wolverine and the Sable, and had them outfitted with carrier decks. They were so small that they could handle only one plane at a time and after landing it was necessary to push the plane back to the stern to have enough flight deck for take off.

From Glenview and carrier qualification I was sent to Wildwood, New Jersey where I joined VB-2, Bombing Squadron Two, a dive bombing squadron flying the Douglas Dauntless SBD-5. This was a new squadron which was just forming. Pilots were reporting in who had flown together at Guadalcanal, others who had gone through training together and others and others who had been instructors together. Unfortunately this resulted in cliques and I was not in one of the cliques. The commanding officer was rather cold and rigid, not on of the guys, and never did anything to engender camaraderie in this group of pilots. I never felt "at home" while I was in Bombing Two.

Bombing Two spent the summer at Wildwood, New Jersey, and moved to Quonset Point, Rhode Island in the fall of 1943. Here we held war games off Cape Cod and when I saw the way the Hellcats (in the enemy role) were flying through our formations, I wished I were flying fighters instead of dive bombers. I got my wish through lucky circumstances. See Side Story #1 in the Addendum.

When Bombing Two was ready to ship out to the west coast in the fall of 1943 we were over complemented by two pilots so the two junior ensigns were detached, a pilot named Peck and myself. We reported to the Admiral's office at Quonset Point and met with the flag lieutenant who was the nicest guy I ever met in the Navy because instead of telling us where we would be sent, he asked what we would like to do. When we told him we would like to fly fighters, he said: "Oh man" I can't send bomber pilot's to a fighter squadron but I'll send you on temporary duty for a couple of months to Atlantic City, where they form the fighter squadrons and you can see what you can come up with on your own".

At Atlantic City I started flying Hellcats with VF-7, a squadron that was not yet commissioned but pilots were reporting in for that squadron to-be. One day a Corsair showed up on the flight line. That evening I was sitting at the "O" club bar and chatting with a Lieutenant Commander. I mention that I thought that Corsair looked like a really hot airplane that I would really like to fly. He said: "If you mean that, that's my Corsair. My name is Bush Bringle and I'll get you orders to the squadron that I am forming". He did and the next day I moved across the hanger and became a Corsair pilot in squadron VOF-1. VOF stands for Observation Fighting Squadron and we were to be the first of its kind, specially trained to spot naval gunfire from fighters flying off carriers. This move turned out to be fortuitous because Bush Bringle was a superior leader and he brought together a highly diverse group of pilots and melded them into a squadron with an all for one and one for all culture. Admiral Cal Durgin years later said that VOF-1's accomplishments far exceeded the small size of the group. Bush Bringle ended his career as a four star Admiral and frequently said that he owed his success in the Navy to this squadron...not true because he had all the earmarks of a fine leader but he believed it was true.

See Side Story #2 in the Addendum.

At Atlantic City during the winter of 1943 we learned to fly the Corsair, learned gunnery on a towed target, practiced formation flying, aerobatics, navigation and defensive maneuvers. In March of '44 we moved to Norfolk and learned that, after qualifying in carrier landings aboard the U.S.S. Charger in Chesapeake Bay, we were to lose our beloved Corsairs and we would be flying the F6F-3 Hellcat. We had to re-qualify in carrier landings in the Hellcat. My log book shows that I had only 2.7 hours in the Hellcat when I made my first carrier landing in that plane. That shows the high level of expertise that the pilots of VOF-1 had achieved but we needed more training in the Hellcat, especially in gunnery and bombing. For this we were sent to Rockland, Maine to a small field which we had to ourselves. This allowed us to get in the maximum amount of training hours with minimum delays, a problem at the larger naval air stations.

Rockland was an experience all its own. The field consisted of three runways in a triangle with no place to park so we had to use one of the runways just to park. Night

flying was something else because it was so dark. One night after taking off I had a strange feeling that something was wrong. Our training insisted that a pilot trust his instruments, not his feelings. Doing so I immediately found that I was diving instead of climbing and I corrected post-haste. I had taken off over water on a moonless night and thought that I was climbing toward a star. In reality I was heading for a lone light on an island a couple of miles from the coast and I had erred in the transition from visual take off to instrument flying.

The facility was so new that carpenters were still working on our ready room when we moved in which was May 3rd, 1944 and it was snowing!. Runway lights had been strung on the ground with wires crossing the runways. One pilot, who had a propensity for screwing up, took off with his tail hook extended and he picked up the lights at night and went off to the wild blue yonder. Fortunately there was a moon that night and we all landed safely.

Rockland is reputed to be the lobster capital of Maine and we feasted on lobster or steak every other night. There I acquired my taste for Maine lobster and have never lost it.

From Rockland the squadron went to Quonset Point, Rhode Island and we were given leave to spend some time at home before shipping out. I left on leave on June 6, 1944, D-Day at Normandy.

On return from leave, we boarded the U.S.S. Tulagi at Quonset Point and left for the Mediterranean Sea, flying anti-submarine patrol on the way and combat air patrol when we got in range of hostile forces. The Tulagi was a small "Jeep" aircraft carrier known as a CVE which stood for escort class. We carried twenty four F6F-5 Hellcat fighter planes and three or four torpedo bombers, TBM Avengers, which were used primarily for anti sub patrol. We entered the Mediterranean with a close view of the rock of Gibraltar and proceeded to Oran, Algeria where we anchored for a few days. There had been attacks on the ships in the harbor by swimmers who, at night, would swim out and attach mines to the hull. To discourage this, our navy set off depth charges about every forty five minutes...very effective but made it difficult to get a good night's sleep.

From Oran we proceeded to Malta where we flew our planes to the island's airbase. For a few weeks we were billeted in an abandoned leper hospital. A picture in my WWII album shows a long room with cots covered by mosquito netting. That was our temporary home. We had liberty in the town of Valletta. Malta is a big limestone rock. We saw buildings being built or repaired with stone quarried from what would be the basement. One night a couple of us had steaks at a restaurant and noted a difference in flavor from what we were used to. Later we decided that we had been served horse meat and I remarked that I thought the proprietor had said he had some nice "filly mignons". At the base we were served British colonial enlisted men's rations...really bad. We had meals such as mashed sardines accompanied by unrecognizable vegetables but one really good thing was a crepe with sugar served as a dessert and the lemonade was good. Our

flight surgeon was concerned enough about our nutrition that he sent fresh fruits to supplement the rations. The Maltese had suffered a great deal of hardship from the Nazi bombings and the effects were very visible with shrapnel damage to many of the buildings but being built of stone they took a great deal of punishment without being destroyed.

Our ship, the CVE Tulagi sailed from Valletta Harbor and we flew our planes aboard. We then proceeded to Alexandria, Egypt which was a diversionary move so it would not be obvious to the Nazis that Southern France was our objective. I learned why we were required to wear helmets on deck during general quarters when a Nazi reconnaissance plane came over the harbor that first night. That plane did no damage but the shore and ship anti-aircraft batteries put up a barrage and some of the shrapnel fell on our ship, slightly damaging a couple of our planes. Liberty in Alexandria was interesting because we got to see another culture. I went to the horse races (won \$16, a large amount in those days) while on another day some of the fellows went to Cairo and got to see the pyramids. The ship provided liberty boats for those going ashore but if you missed the scheduled boat there were "bum boats" hanging around which would take you to shore for a small price. Three others and myself took a bum boat but when we got a little away from a dock the Egyptian demanded a bout twice what we had agreed on. We paid the extortion but when we were landed, we threw his oars as far as we could into the water. Moral: Don't mess with Navy fighter pilots.

On August 15, 1944 the war began in earnest for VOF-1. That was D-Day for the invasion of Southern France. All ships converged in the area off St. Tropez. Our first objective was to silence the large coastal defense batteries overlooking the landing site and one of our pilots, Dave Robinson, achieved spectacular results spotting gunfire for one of our battleships. This allowed the amphibious forces, our army, to land almost unimpeded. Dave Crockett, one of our pilots was shot down in the combat area and captured by the Germans but later recaptured by the Maquis, the French underground resistance forces. As he was the senior officer among the prisoners, the Germans surrendered to him and when he was returned to our ship he had a burlap sack with about twenty-five pistols that the German officers had handed over to him.

The invasion went so well that our army had moved inland out of range of our naval gunfire. VOF-1 then became a deep support fighter/bomber squadron. The Germans were in retreat and we attacked all methods of transportation, strafing, bombing and firing rockets, mostly at motorized convoys of a hundred or more military vehicles which were stopped on the roads because the Air Corps had bombed the bridges. These were low level attacks and it appeared that most or all of the damage we received to our planes was from rifle fire. We lost one pilot, Jack Coyne, who was seen to parachute from his plane at low level in the hot combat zone. Jim Alston was shot down and contacted by the French underground who feted him in a small town before taking him to an airfield in the still German occupied zone where a RAF plane picked up other surviving pilots and him and flew them to England, then ultimately back to the States.

In fourteen days of combat our squadron, VOF-1, recorded the destruction of 487 vehicles and six airborne aircraft by our twenty-four Hellcats and thirty-one pilots with the loss of one pilot and three aircraft, although most of our aircraft had sustained some damage from anti-aircraft fire. Later I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for shooting down two German JU-52's although my plane had been damaged by anti-aircraft fire and I had only one gun (out of six) firing properly. See Side Story #3 in the Addendum.

With a brief stop at Corsica for provisioning, we then sailed for Quonset Point, Rhode Island and were given leave. Most of us paid a visit to our families and home towns after which we returned to Norfolk and sailed for the Pacific via the Panama Canal.

OPERATION DRAGOON
The Invasion of Southern France

CASUALTIES

Lieutenant David Stanley Crockett, U.S.N.R. was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while spotting over Toulon Harbor on 20 August. He parachuted to safety, landing with minor bruises and was seized as a prisoner of war by the Germans. He was released during the night of 23 August when the fort in which he was held prisoner surrendered. He returned aboard ship on 26 August. As he was the senior officer present, the Germans surrendered to him, giving him their side arms, approximately 25 Luger pistols which he was able to keep as souvenirs..

Lieutenant James Willard Alston, U.S.N.R., was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while attacking a motor transport convoy five miles north of Carcassonne on 20 August. He was seen to make a successful parachute descent. Later a dispatch was received that he was safe and en route to the United States, He was aided by the Free French underground through France and met us on the docks at Quonset Point.

Lieutenant (jg) John Harding Coyne, U.S.N.R., was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while attacking a motorized transport convoy on 21 August, five mile west of Nimes. His parachute was seen to open at an extremely low altitude. He was listed as missing in action but it was later confirmed that he had not survived.

Ensign Richard van Buren Yentzer, U.S.N.R., suffered minor abrasions on forehead and scalp from anti-aircraft fire hits in the cockpit enclosure 21 August. His plane had twenty-three anti-aircraft holes.

Lieutenant Francis Raymond Roberts, U.S.N.R., suffered shrapnel wounds on arm and leg from detonation of a barrage balloon charge following collision.

APPENDICES TO OPERATION DRAGOON
The Invasion of Southern France

Damage Inflicted by Attacks of VOF-1 Aircraft

Planes destroyed (in air)	3 Me.111 3 Ju.52
Planes destroyed (on ground)	1 Ju.88
Railroad lines cut or blockades effected	17
Locomotives destroyed or damaged	23
Motor Vehicles destroyed or damaged	601
Bridges bombed and hit	7

Shipping attacked 16 barges damaged
 5 Boats damaged
 1 7000 ton freighter strafed

Coastal Defense Batteries attacked (primary mission on D-Day):
Battery on Fort Cree destroyed
Four (4) 500 lb. Bomb hits inside battery
overlooking Toulon Harbor
Four (4) gun emplacements destroyed
Three gun emplacements neutralized
Four near misses on emplacements.

Two (2) ammunition dumps destroyed.

Twenty-two (22) Fuel Tanks destroyed

One observation tower destroyed.

One railroad water tower damaged.

One lighthouse damaged.

Two roundhouses damaged.

One turntable damaged.

Two bomb hits on roads in use by enemy convoys.

One bomb hit on farm house occupied by enemy troops.

The foregoing recapitulation of damage inflicted by attacks does not take cognizance of the unquestionable greater damage wrought by Naval gunfire. The squadron in its principal function of spotting for Naval gunfire was instrumental in the effectiveness of the shore bombardment.

Likewise, incalculable in statistics is the tremendous demoralization of enemy forces accomplished by repeated and persistent attacks on enemy concentrations and movements. Thorough reconnaissance was maintained and little opportunity afforded for the same for transport of reinforcements or withdrawals. Unrelenting harassing of motorized columns turned the strategic withdrawal up the Rhone valley into a rout.

The calculable damage inflicted has been conservatively estimated. During the initial stages of the operations, pilots were reluctant to report as destroyed, vehicles which were not observed burning. Ground information has confirmed greater damage than claimed.

STATISTICS OF THE INVASION

	<u>Missions</u>	<u>Sorties</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Attack and recon	46	238	562
Spotting	48	96	242
Combat Air Patrol	28	74	176

ORDNANCE EXPENDED

.50 Caliber rounds	184,595
Rockets	382
1,000 lb. Bombs	11
500 lb. Bombs	91
350 lb. Bombs	57
250 lb. Bombs	24
100 lb. Bombs	20

VOF-1/VOC-1 In the Pacific

Pearl Harbor was the Tulagi's next stop. On 5 November 1944, the squadron flew its planes to Barber's Point, Oahu. We conducted gunnery and spotting exercises with the 3rd Marine Division. It was a delightful time until we learned that we were to lose our F6F-5 Hellcats, to be replaced with FM-s Wildcats. The FM was a souped up version of the pre-war F4F Wildcat fitted with a more powerful engine but still a slow "clunker" compared to the Hellcat (or the Japanese Zero). In addition, nine torpedo pilots and their six planes were added to VOF-1, Observation Fighting Squadron One, which changed our designation to VOC-1, Observation Composite Squadron One. This was another blow to our morale as fighter pilots have a certain ego which makes them think, erroneously, that they are a cut above everyone else. That ego serves a purpose in making fighter pilots think they are invincible and they relish contacting the enemy.

Changing aircraft type meant that we needed more training; so we were sent to Kahalui, Maui, where we practiced gunnery, bombing, night flying, field carrier landing practice and ultimately actual carrier landings on the USS Lexington. On Maui we had our own beach, beer and a hangout in the hills known as "Sweetie Wilson's". This was a legitimate party house where we brought our own refreshments and were expected to leave a tip... which everyone did. It was a rustic back in the hills cottage. Sweetie was an Hawaiian young woman who had a few other native girls who entertained with songs, dance and the ukulele. There were even some children there who entertained and as I said it was strictly legitimate. I think Sweetie did rather well with the tips.

The squadron was exactly one year old when we sailed from Pearl Harbor on 15 December 1944 aboard the CVE Wake Island, another "jeep" carrier. We crossed the equator on Christmas day and arrived at Manus Islands in the Palau Islands where we joined a task group and sailed the next day for the invasion of Luzon, the main island in the Philippines. On the way we studied maps, rescue, escape and survival, communications and other important data regarding what we might expect to encounter.

Encounter we did. Our fleet passed through the Surigao Straits near Leyte Island and into the Sulu Sea. On January 4th we were attacked by suicide "Kamikaze" planes, one of which hit the CVE Ommaney which was next to our ship. Fierce fires broke out and the ship had to be abandoned. We took aboard many of the survivors. The next day our task force suffered many torpedo attacks and suicide plane attacks with some damage but none were sunk. I was flying combat air patrol and directed toward two Zeros flying inbound at water top level. They were about a mile away and I had 1000 feet altitude advantage but I could not catch them. A fighter director called and said "Rebel 2 3 do you see them?" I answered yes and he said "shoot them down". I cursed the FM-2 that I was flying because they would have been easy prey for our former Hellcats. As the first Jap plane got in range, our fleet opened fire on it and then the same with the second Jap plane. I then came in range and our fleet started shooting at me so I made a prudent tactical withdrawal as I could not catch the Jap planes anyway. I do not know the outcome of that attack on our fleet.

The invasion of Luzon at Linguyen Gulf was virtually unopposed at the beachhead but not in the air. The rough China Sea made carrier operations dicey but our previous experiences paid off and we were able to supply daily support. Our first casualty came when Fred Fenzel crashed while strafing a convoy of trucks. This campaign lasted for twelve days for but this did not foretell what we were to face in the coming campaigns of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

We retired to Ulithi Lagoon, arriving there on 23 January 1945. Ulithi is a huge anchorage and was filled with so many ships they were hard to count. The island of Mogmog was set up for recreation and lots of beer, baseball, sunbathing or whatever one could dream up on an isolated island. There were thousands of navy men on the island and a large tent had been set up where we were given two cans of beer at a time but even at that we had to stand in line and while waiting I had a tap on my shoulder and turned to see a pal named Ralph Yaussi, one of the few friends I had made while in VB-2, the dive bombing squadron. What are the odds?

Iwo Jima: We sortied from Ulithi on 7 February to conduct communications drills for the upcoming campaign and to provide air cover for the invasion task group headed for Iwo Jima which was invaded on 19 February 1945.

Our mission at Iwo Jima was spotting naval gunfire in support of our troops. In twenty one days, our squadron flew 892 spotting missions, totaling 2,375.5 hours. This was in addition to our combat air patrol and anti-sub flights. It was not uncommon for a pilot to fly two missions per day in which we spent two hours over the target area. A lift to my morale and many others, came when I was flying over the island and all at once I saw the Stars and Stripes raised at the top of Mount Suribachi.

During the campaign, there were numerous days when low cloud cover made air strikes impossible for all or part of the day but on those days the spotting planes of our squadron, VOC-1, were out there flying low level spotting for battleships, cruisers and destroyers. At these times we were within rifle range of the enemy but fortunately the enemy troops were usually pinned down by our Marines. Unfortunately, I had been over the island for about two hours when I was relieved by another pilot, Tom Murphy, who took over spotting for a battleship, the USS Idaho. A short time later, the Wake Island called me and asked if I was in contact with Murphy. I answered "Affirmative" as I had talked to him about five minutes before so they asked me to give him a call. I got no answer and Murphy was never heard from again.

While I have fewer stories about the Iwo Jima campaign, the intensity of the fighting could be seen at every moment while flying over the island. From the air we could see everything that was going on at one time. The Marines had Day-Glo panel which were displayed as a bomb safety line and it was always heartfelt to see these panels moved forward even when it was only a few yards.

See Side Stories 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The Okinawa Campaign

We arrived six days earlier in order to support the invasion of Kerama Retto, a group of small islands southwest of Okinawa, which provided a harbor for our sea planes and supply ships as well as any ships which had been damaged in air attacks. We were unaware, of course, that we would soon be using this anchorage ourselves. On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945 at 0830 hours the first wave of landing forces hit the beaches of Okinawa and met surprisingly low resistance. Not so for VOC-1, the Okinawa campaign was not typical of our past missions. For one thing, the campaign lasted from April until well into June and we had arrived six days before the landing in order to provide naval bombardment which was intended to soften up the landing sites. The other aspects were that we had more ground support missions compared to Luzon and Iwo Jima. Our ships were under attack almost daily from the desperate Japanese suicide "Kamikaze" planes whose pilots' motto was "One plane lost for one ship sunk"! This suicide plan might have worked except for the overwhelming force and skill of our fighter pilots and the intense anti-aircraft barrage that was thrown against them from our ships, especially the destroyers on picket duty north of Okinawa and which took the deadly casualties from the Japanese air offensive. Even so, we took the heaviest casualties of any campaign in naval history.

On April 3rd, frenzied events happened which have as many versions as there were witnesses. I can tell only mine but I believe it to be the most accurate so here is the version I will tell. Earlier that day, the ship had de-ballasted (emptied sea water from the fuel tanks) in preparation for refueling while underway from a fleet tanker. De-ballasting makes the ship less stable but the seas were relatively calm. In the afternoon we had just landed our airborne divisions, thus all of our planes were parked forward on the flight deck and it was necessary to re-spot (push the planes aft) Normally the planes are secured to the deck but it is obvious that is not so while re-spotting. During the re-spot, the ship rolled heavily to starboard, so much so that about four planes rolled onto their side and two planes went overboard along with a deck hand (See Side Story #8, Point that gun the other way) I had been on ready stand-by and had been alerted to man a plane as there were bogies (unknown but probably enemy) planes in the area and so I had witnessed the entire episode. One theory was that an unexpected big wave had hit the ship and caused the disaster but the ship's logs showed no such wave, nor any other explanation. My theory is that the ship sails into the wind while recovering aircraft. The whole task force then turns out of the wind to resume its normal course. During that turn, it is highly possible that we crossed another ship's wake which would cause the ship to roll and the de-ballasting exacerbated the effect. I was still standing on the deck with a view of all that was going on when I saw an injured sailor being carried in a stretcher point to the sky, get up from the stretch and run for cover. He, and then I, saw two Japanese planes in a steep dive directly toward our ship. The first plane missed us but it was so close that I could see the pilot's face (and remember it until today) and I could see the number 65 on its side, oddly 65 was the number of our ship. Pictures show a plume of water from the bomb that plane carried. My theory: the Wake Island might have still been turning to starboard. It was known that the Japanese Zeros were not able to turn to the right in a high speed dive, thus the pilot was not able to correct to the right during his

dive, resulting in a very close miss. The second plane had pulled out of his dive but when he saw the first plane miss he turned and struck us at the water line. When I saw that he was going to hit the ship, I was still in the open so I dived for the deck which came up, literally picked me up and I didn't so much as skin my hands or knees. Pictures show a plume of water hundreds of feet high from the bomb he was carrying. A large slanting hole crossed the water line and flooded the first third of the ship but no one was in that space and injuries from the bomb were miraculously minor. I watched as the bow of the ship began to go down and I thought the ship was sinking but then we stabilized, some what down by the bow.

In spite of the damage, we were able to launch and recover aircraft and I flew a combat air patrol the next day but then we proceeded to Kerama Retto where VOC-1 was transferred to another escort carrier, the Marcus Island, replacing the fighter squadron the Marcus had on board, because our specialized skills in naval gunfire spotting were so essential to the overall battle plan for taking Okinawa. We resumed those duties on April 6, less than seventy-two hours after taking major damage. The Wake Island was sent to Guam for repairs. A picture in my album of the Wake Island in dry-dock shows a gaping hole which I estimate over ten feet vertically and forty feet horizontally plus many buckled ribs in the hull.

No combat flight can be described as monotonous but we were flying daily spotting missions, from the Marcus Island, for the battleships, cruisers and destroyers cruising a few miles off shore and providing a constant barrage against the Japanese troops who had set up a line of defense across the southern third of the island. They were so dug in that it was difficult to see the results but the barrages had to be taking a toll.

In the early days of the campaign, our forces had taken Yontan Airfield. Each time the Marcus Island had to retire for re-fueling we sent a group of our pilots to Yontan, operating out of that field so that we could continue our spotting services. The Japanese attacked the field regularly at night, sometimes even landing a plane full of suicide troops who would pour out of the plane and throw hand grenades at our aircraft. One Marine erected a sign that said "Welcome to Yontan where every night is the Fourth of July."

While our primary mission was spotting naval gunfire, we were able to perform numerous air-to-ground strikes to support our troops and to neutralize other islands which were in range of Okinawa and our fleet by Japanese aircraft. One of these missions I consider my most important flight of all, not because of what I did but because of what the Japanese could have done had they gotten through to our fleet. On April 16, 1945 my division of four planes was given the assignment of strafing the beach and dropping napalm just ahead of the Marines landing on Ie Shima, a small island with an airfield, located just west of the northern half of Okinawa. We completed our assignment and were told to return to the Marcus Island which was operating sixty miles southeast of Okinawa. An excited call came over the radio: "There are sixty Jap planes coming in from the north?". Immediately we saw all the Hellcats and Corsairs in the area heading north at high speed. I looked at my wingmen and pointed South or North? They all pointed North. A key factor in a difficult decision was fuel. When we carried Napalm

we used our external droppable fuel tanks so we had no fuel to spare. As we proceeded northward we could hear the fast fighter pilots shooting down the Japs with cries of "Splash one Zero" or "Splash one Val". We could even see splashes in the water but there was a haze on the horizon and we could not see the planes. Because of low fuel, we could go no farther north so we turned eastward to go around the northern tip of Okinawa. At that point, I saw specks moving southward. We turned north and intercepted two Japanese "Kates", torpedo bombers, each with a torpedo. They had already penetrated our fighter screen and were headed toward our fleet. I was in a position to make the first run and as soon as the Kate on the right was in range, I opened fire. I had one short burst and my guns quit firing...completely out of ammunition due to the previous strafing at Ie Shima. I thought that I had missed but as I passed under the Kate a small flame came from underneath and the whole plane erupted in a ball of fire. I pulled aside to watch my two wingmen attack the second Kate. They hit it many times and I could see pieces flying off the Kate. Finally the Kate jettisoned his torpedo and shortly afterward he rolled over and dove into the water from about a thousand feet. We regrouped and took stock. We were about a hundred miles from our ship, very low on fuel and out of ammunition. We set our engines at maximum range and minimum fuel consumption, headed south at about 120 knots air speed. This took us about fifty minutes to reach our task force. Knowing we had to be low on fuel, the task force had already turned into the wind (for landing) and we were taken aboard without delay. We found that the plane that had the most gas had eight gallons, maybe enough for one more pass if not successful on the first approach, and Dan Bock, piloting the last plane to come aboard, actually ran out of gas while taxiing forward after his landing! Because of the enormous death and destruction that these planes could have caused on our fleet or the ships supporting our troops, I consider this the most significant of my 109 combat missions.

On one mission, I was flying alone, proceeding to the combat area where I was to look for ground targets and call for naval gunfire. I was flying at about 1000 feet, generally southward, when I looked to my left and saw four artillery shells in perfect formation, passing me up on their way to whatever target was their destination. The relative speed difference was not great as we were on a parallel course and I was astounded that I could see them so clearly. Seldom can you see shells, friendly or enemy, in flight except for tracers. Our spotting missions generally were for two hours over the target and I wondered how much of that stuff my squadron buddies and I had been flying through every day without realizing the threat of so much artillery heading for the same targets that we were hunting and destroying.

In addition to our missions at Okinawa, we had numerous strikes at other islands from which the enemy could launch air strikes against our fleet. One of these was Ishigaki. Each time we struck these other islands, we had a designated rescue area where a shot down pilot from force would land in the water if he could make it to that area. We also had a seaplane in the area and sometimes a submarine. On one such strike, my assignment was to escort and protect the rescue seaplane. One of our new replacement pilot's plane was hit during the attack and he called, saying that he would be going down in the rescue area. The seaplane and I as escort, headed for the area and saw him landing.

in the water. We were close behind and the seaplane was able to land near him within minutes. His plane was still afloat when a rescue submarine surfaced along side and offered him a ride to Tokyo Bay but the seaplane pilot said his next stop was Guam. Needless to say, our man opted for Guam.

Minami Daito Shima was an island east of Okinawa and lay in the path of our B-29 bombers from Saipan on their way to Tokyo. Some will remember that President George Bush was shot down at Minami Daito Shima. The primary targets on this island were the radio towers and communications buildings rather than its airstrip. The Japanese knew this and heavily defended that area with anti-aircraft fire...and they were good at it. I was not on this mission but I heard plenty about it. We had eight planes that made one pass at the target. Five of the eight were hit, two went down with one pilot being killed, one pilot survived and was picked up by a seaplane and another was wounded but was able to return and land aboard. A remarkable feat of flying was by our Skipper, Bush Bringle. His plane had damage to the engine controls. The throttle went full forward and his prop went into full high pitch (fastest mode). None of our guys could stay with him as he flew back to the Marcus Island and when he approached for landing he slowed down by turning his ignition switch off-and-on to control his speed and then landed successfully by switching off his engine completely.

At Minami Daito Shima, a pilot who crash landed in the water got into his one man raft and waited to be rescued. This was John Denison, one of the closer friends of mine. John was always kind of scrawny and he had lost weight after being at sea for five months. When the seaplane approached him and saw this emaciated figure in the life raft, they took him aboard and started breaking out chocolates and other food first and then asked him how long he had been in that raft. He answered by saying "What time is it"? When they told him he said, "About forty-five minutes"!

One of our planes returned to the fleet with so much damage he was directed to ditch the plane next to a destroyer for fear of a crash on deck which could endanger our other planes, personnel and the ship. He followed orders and I watched him settle toward the water by the destroyer. When he realized he had perfect control he gave it the gun and took off after actually touching his tail wheel and splashing water. He told the ship he thought he could land aboard but they said "Negative. Put it in the water". He did, was picked up by the destroyer, returned to our ship and went on another mission that afternoon. His shoes were still wet!

Another of our planes returned from Okinawa with large holes in both wings. The ammunition cases in both wings were gone and the structural members in the wings could be seen. The plane had flown more than sixty miles in that condition and made an uneventful landing aboard.

A plane captain (deck hand who serviced planes between flights) reached into a wheel well and felt something strange. It turned out to be an owl who had taken up residence in the wheel well. That plane had been at Yontan field a few days before. We believe that the only way an owl could have gotten in a wheel well was during the night at Yontan.

In checking the logs we determined that the owl had been on three combat missions so he was given appropriate credit for those flights. My wingman, Bub Yentzer was a naturalist from Wyoming so he cared for the owl. The not-so-wise old owl was released when we got in owl range of land.

An aircraft carrier deck, during flight operations, was always a dangerous place to be. On one occasion, we had started engines and the aircraft in front of me revved up his engine as he started taxiing into take-off position. A deck hand who had just removed the chocks from that plane was caught by the prop blast and blown backward with his arms outstretched toward my plane. I saw the disaster shaping up but could do nothing about it. The man was blown backward with his stretched out arms through the arc of my propeller. Miraculously, he was untouched and got up unscathed!

Although we were not qualified for night landings aboard, combat conditions sometimes resulted in our planes landing after dark. I was not one of these and though I felt that I could do whatever any other of my squadron mates could do, I was happy never to be tested in a night landing.

Pre-dawn take offs were another matter. Dawn and dusk were favorite times for the enemy to attack so we frequently had planes in the air on combat air patrol before dawn. Sometimes if we were on high cover we would be up in the sun while the task force was still in the dark on the surface.

Many times, weather conditions precluded the possibility of strafing or bombing due to low clouds but the spotting planes flew in almost any weather because we could spot naval gunfire from below one thousand feet. On one occasion, on a pre-dawn take-off, there were layers of clouds five hundred to one thousand feet apart vertically. The problem was that planes between these layers could not see each other for join-up. It seems like humor always popped up when things were not going well. In this case, one pilot called, "I'm on floor two, "Men's suits, ties and shoes". An answer came back "I'm on floor three, "Ladies Underwear". Another called, "Join up on me on floor four, "Optical Shop. I can see fine up here".

The fast Marine Corsairs operating from Yontan at Okinawa ranged far and wide. Occasionally, especially when they were chasing enemy aircraft, they would get lost or low on fuel. We had so many flights going to or from Okinawa that if a pilot was lost he could follow one of our flights and end up on the island or with our task force. One Corsair pilot had done exactly this and had to make a carrier landing on our ship. After all planes were in, the landing signal officer would come to our ready room to critique our landings. He found the Corsair pilot and said "That was the worst approach and landing I have ever seen. How many times have you landed on a carrier"? The Marine unabashedly looked him in the eye and said "Once"!

The only planes in the combat zone that had non-retractable landing gear were Japanese "Val" dive bombers. One day an F4U Corsair took off from Yontan Airfield and was unable to retract his gear. The ground forces began shooting at him. Dave Robinson and Walt Foley saw what was happening and thought that if they would join up on the Corsair, the ground gunners would see that it was a friendly plane and stop shooting. Both Robinson and Foley were hit and Robinson's plane went down on fire near the front lines. Robinson's plane crashed between two trees which left the on fire portion behind. Front line Marines got him out of the plaries and took him to a field hospital tent where bullets were actually flying through the canvas. Dave's forehead was cut up so they washed the wound with green soap, put in a few stitches, then got him to the rear and ultimately to a hospital ship where they gave him proper treatment. The doctor aboard the hospital ship was going to keep Dave for a week for observation but the next day a boat from a destroyer in our task group came along side the hospital ship and when Dave found out they were going back to our task group, he literally "jumped ship", got a ride back and was able to return to our squadron.

Allan Corbin had taken off on a mission when the Plexiglas in the canopy failed and hit him above the eyes causing copious bleeding, covering his goggles with blood but when he tried raising the goggles the blood got in his eyes. Virtually blind, he made an approach and landed safely with the landing signal officer talking him down on the radio. This was an exceptional demand on his skills and although he made a safe landing, I kid him to this day by reminding him that he landed on the wrong ship (by orders, of course).

Near the end of April, 1945, the Wake Island repairs at Guam were nearing completion and the Marcus Island had been at sea for many months. Our squadron was taken to Guam where we were sent to a rest camp. The camp was a new facility made up of Quonset huts on a very nice beach. We had an Officer's Club, fully stocked, snorkeling equipment and, most importantly, we had a number of Jeeps at our disposal so we were not confined. Our stay was to be short as the Wake Island had been repaired but when the ship was taken out for sea trials, it sprung a leak and had to return to dry dock. It had been found that the bow was eighteen inches out of line to port with the stern. If the helmsman let go of the wheel, the ship would go in circles to port. Nothing could be done to fix the alignment but the other repairs meant that our stay at the rest camp was extended to three weeks. During this time, if we left the camp we were required to be armed because there were still Japanese holdouts hiding on the island.

Nearing the End

Every air squadron had flight surgeon. Ours was named Doc Reider and I used to kid about our squadron was so small that our flight surgeon was a pediatrician...true because that was his specialty as a civilian. Doc was one of the guys and resourceful too. He went to the Agana Air Station where they flew in the wounded from Okinawa, contacted one of the flight nurses stationed there and had her put a notice on their bulletin board: "Anyone interested in going to a cocktail party be at the main gate on Saturday at 1600 (4 PM): He got an open stake truck and picked up a whole load of the girls on Saturday and brought them to our rest camp. All the pilots lined up and as the nurses got off the truck, each claimed his date for the evening. It was luck of the draw and I got a good one, Mary Virginia Smith, a cousin of Tom Hennigan from St. Louis, whom I knew well from Notre Dame.. Mary Virginia and I saw each other frequently during the next three weeks but she had flying duty to Okinawa for two days and then a duty day at the evacuation hospital at Agana Air Station. On her duty days, I would go to the hospital and try to make myself useful in little ways, such as getting water, cigarettes, chewing gum or what ever the wounded guys wanted. These Marines were on stretchers and still had mud on them from Okinawa. It was here that I learned a lesson I have never forgotten. That lesson was that every individual has his own perspective on life and situations. That Marine had lost part of one leg and the other was not in very good shape. When he saw my Navy wings he said "Oh, you're a flier". When I said yes he responded "Boy, you would never get me up in one of those things"!

Mary Virginia and I had some good times at a beautiful beach called Touman. Pictures in my album show it as pristine with cocoanut palms leaning toward the shore as far as could be seen. I understand that it is now high rise condos as far as can be seen. We also had evenings at the rest camp, some of them moonlit and others moonless at which time very, very dark with millions of stars. There was spit of land, beach really, jutting out from the camp. We were there enjoying the beauty of the night and, due a few Japanese still on the loose, they had a beach patrol. An MP heard some sounds from that dark spit of land and he yelled "Halt"! I could think only of one response "I don't want to"! You may decide whether you think this is a true story or part of what is called "The Fog of War".

We also met some Army Air Force nurses and they came to the rest camp. All the nurses had a ten o'clock curfew. One night we tried to take the girls back to their base on time. Our intelligence officer, Jack O'Day, drove the Jeep and there were three of us riding with three nurses on our laps. No street signs in the back country of Guam and we got lost. We drove around until about a quarter to eleven when an MP in a Jeep spotted us with the nurses out well past curfew. He hauled us over and then decided he would take us into the town of Agana. As we were following him we realized were going to pass the nurses' base. One girl said she was on stand-by duty and had to get back so we turned into the base which made the MP very made. He came screeching toward us, passed us and skidded his Jeep across the road. The girls disappeared into the night but the MP

made a big mistake by using foul language toward Jack O'DaY, an officer. We were all given summons to appear at the provost marshal's office the next day. We cooled our heels at that office for about forty five minutes but when we were shown in Jack O'Day noticed a Phi Beta Kappa key on the provost's desk...they were fraternity brothers. The charges were dropped and the last we heard of the MP is that he was directing traffic in Agana...had lost his Jeep. Having wheels was a great status symbol. As I said, the MP made a big mistake.

I mentioned that we were bunked in a Quonset hut at the rest camp.. Our guys had been at sea and in harms way for five months. Of course, they were edgier than they suspected but one night when a coconut dropped from a tree in the middle of the night and hit the Quonset hut...you should have seen them running out of that hut.

Okinawa awaited us and we departed Guam on May 26th. I flew seven more missions in the next five days and then it was over for us on May 31st. Another gut wrenching tragedy occurred on May 30th, the second to last day of the campaign: Willie McKeever, the skipper's wingman failed to return from a mission. His plane was later found crashed on Okinawa, positively identified by the bureau numbers on the plane, but his body was never recovered.

We returned to Guam on the Wake Island and flew our planes into one of the airfields. By that time I had landed aboard so often that I felt uneasy about landing on a field again but it went well for all of us.

In the harbor at Guam we boarded a jeep carrier, the Bougainville, sans aircraft. This ship was being used to transport personnel back to the States. It was so crowded that we had cots so close to each other on the hangar deck that we had to get in from the end and there were so many aboard that they could not feed us three times a day so we ate twice a day at whatever times were designated but we were heading home and there was not a gripe in the group. It took about ten days or so to get to Hawaii where we were given leave for a few days before heading for San Diego.

At San Diego we were processed through a facility where we got new orders. VOF-1/ VOC-1 was being disbanded but it took a couple of days. A bus was provided to take us into town, Coronado. We asked the driver to stop wherever he saw a beer sign. He obliged. *Flashback:* While at Atlantic City in the fall of 1943, I spent many weekends in Philadelphia. There I met beautiful red haired girl named Rosa de Lima Murphy. Her father was Irish and her mother was Spanish and she had the best genes of both heritages. I really liked her but she was so flamboyant that I thought to myself "I could never bring this one home to mother". Just before shipping out, the squadron had a "wave-off" banquet at Atlantic City and Rosie came from Philly for the weekend. I put her on the train to return to Philly on Sunday and the squadron left on Monday so she was the last woman I was with in the States. *Point of the flashback:* We got off the bus at the first bar we saw in Coronado and went in for a beer. I got mine at the bar and turned around to

find a seat and there was Rosa de Lima Murphy, the first woman I saw in the States eighteen months and three thousand miles away! Rosie had married a Navy pilot (he was there with her) and had been transferred to the west coast.

Mary Virginia had been transferred to the San Francisco area so I thought I would visit her as long as I was in California but when I looked at a map and realized how far San Francisco was from San Diego (train or bus, yet) I decided to come home to St. Louis where I was when the war ended in August, 1945.

My sister, Jane, had fixed me up with a blind date with Mary Ellen. I suppose I should say the rest is history but there is more to come as I stayed in the Navy Reserve.

So I end the too long narrative of "A Journal Too Late" by saying that for those of us who survived, flying as a Naval Aviator during WW11 was the most adventurous part of our lives. There is something about being in combat with buddies engenders a spirit of camaraderie which can be found in no other situation. It is eternal, deep and emotional.

I don't remember the author but years ago I read a quote that went like this: "There is nothing as exhilarating as being shot at while in the air in an airplane". I am glad that I read this after, and not before, I was in that situation.

I have been asked many times about being afraid. Usually bad things happen so fast that the fear factor doesn't have a chance to kick in but I remember two times when I felt fear that I can still remember. The first time was making my first carrier landing and the second time was my first combat mission as I crossed the coastline into southern France as I had no idea of what was about to happen

Finis
(High School French)

Addendum to A Journal Too Late

Side Story #1, Too Close. Bombing Two spent the summer training at Wildwood. Here I had a hairy experience which could have been a disaster. I was flying alone in a Douglas Dauntless dive bomber and my radio went out so I returned to base. There was no activity in the air or on the ground at the time so I thought I had no problem approaching or landing. I did not know that a pilot in an F6F Hellcat, a much faster plane, had passed me in the landing approach downwind, a violation of traffic rules. As he was below me, I could not see him and I was slightly behind him so he could not see me. The runway was clear so I continued although the tower operators said they were giving me a red light all the way in but at that point I was lining up with the runway and never saw it. Just as I landed, my plane lurched due to slipstream from the Hellcat which was landing about ten feet ahead of me. I was down on the runway looking at the tail of the Hellcat, both of us going down the runway at sixty to seventy knots. The Hellcat's landing speed was a little faster than my dive bomber so the distanced opened as we went rolled out. I was reprimanded for not checking the tower for a green or red light but the Hellcat pilot was severely reprimanded for violating the traffic circle rules.

Side Story #2, Casey and the Lighthouse. In December of 1943, before VOF-1 was commissioned, Ensign Case arrived at Atlantic City. Being married, he sought out a real estate agent and told him he was looking for an apartment. The agent told him that things were tight but to leave his phone number and he would call when he had something. Case (called Casey) told the agent that he would be living in the BOQ (bachelor officers quarters) and he didn't have a phone but he was joining a new squadron and there was always a duty officer in the ready room so he could be reached there. About a week later, Casey was flying a Corsair over the ocean when he had an engine failure. He called the air station and told them his engine quit but he was at 10,000 feet and he thought he could make it to the beach. The tide was out and he landed wheels up off Cape May. The light house keeper at Cape May saw him go down and called the air station. He was told that would be Ensign Case and asked how it looked. The light house keeper said "Fine and that the pilot was walking toward the light house". Just after that, the real estate agent called the ready room and asked for Ensign Case. The duty officer said that Casey wasn't there but knew where he could be reached so he told him to call the Cape May light house. Casey then arrived at the light house, knocked on the door and told the light house keeper "I'm Ensign Case and I just crash landed a little way up the beach" The light house keeper said "I know. Come in. There's a phone call for you!"

Side Story #3, Nazi Transports. On the twenty-first of August, I was part of a flight of eight Hellcats attacking a large concentration of motor vehicles near Orange, France. On one pass, I felt a thud and saw a hole in my right wing. My wingman, Bub Yentzer, said his plane had been hit so we pulled away to inspect our damage. I had one hole but Bub had been hit twenty-three times, three in the self-sealing fuel tanks. Suddenly, the sky turned black with flak above our heads and we went into a violent turn to avoid it. This put us looking down and we saw three German JU-52's at treetop level heading south. I made the first run and shot down the plane on the right but I had only one gun firing due to the damage in my right wing and also out of ammunition in four other guns. The remaining two planes split up and Bub chased and shot down the second while I went after the third which crashed in an open field and I saw the pilot get out and

run to a ditch. I then climbed up to look for Bub but I encountered strong anti-aircraft fire so I dived for the treetops when my plane was hit again. This time most of my instruments went to zero and I had oil coming into the cockpit so I knew I had a serious problem. I headed south to find the Mediterranean. I preferred to go down over water rather than land. When I reached the sea and was able to gain altitude, the ship broke radio silence to give me a heading. I told them I had a fire hazard due to the oil in the cockpit and they had a man in an asbestos suit on deck ready to get me out but the landing was uneventful except that my plane had been hit in the oil tank and I had flown twenty-three minutes with no oil and the engine was ready to seize. Bub came back about forty-five minutes later and, as I said, he had twenty-three holes in his plane including having the cockpit canopy shot away. He had minor wounds in the forehead for which he received the Purple Heart.

Side Story #4, Over Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima had two airfields but was small enough for naval gunfire to reach all parts of the island. Thus, VOC-1, with its primary mission of spotting naval gunfire had aircraft over the island every day, all day long. Our problem was that after the main large gun emplacements were destroyed it was difficult to find targets because the Japanese were underground with a system of interlocking tunnels and caves. One day, while flying low, I spotted a movement of Japanese troops running from one area, down a short road and into a grove of trees. I was spotting for a destroyer and called for a single five inch gun shot which landed right on target. I called for the destroyer to raise the burst (which meant that the shells would explode thirty feet above the target) and commence full broadside rapid fire and the grove was obliterated with black smoke from bursting shells within minutes. Aboard the Wake Island, we had an Army artillery intelligence officer who estimated the casualties would be expected at 80% under those circumstances although, with so many caves and tunnels, this was probably optimistic.

Side Story #5, Missing, don't know why. Ignore. Too much work to do over.

Side Story #6, Embarrassing Mission at Iwo. As previously mentioned, targets were hard to find from the air at Iwo Jima because the Japanese were so dug in. Never the less, there was constant fire between our troops and the enemy on the ground. At times we could see the source of the enemy fire but we had to be extremely careful in bombing, strafing or calling for ship's fire because our Marines were so close to the enemy. Thinking that I might have spotted a target, I dived very low, probably one hundred feet, over the position to get a good look. I tipped my plane on its side and just when I did, the Plexiglas side panel of my cockpit cover crashed in and hit me on the head. Thinking that I had been hit, I called the destroyer with which I had been working and told them I had been hit and was flying toward them, asking them to keep an eye on me while I checked out my plane. All seemed OK so I tried to return over the island to continue spotting but the noise in the cockpit was so loud that I could not communicate. Upon returning to the Wake Island, I found that I had not been hit by enemy fire but the Plexiglas had failed due to the strain of my dive and pull out. That was not so bad, it had happened before, but the destroyer sent a message to my C.O. commending me on my courage of wanting to go back over the island after being hit. THAT was embarrassing!

Side Story #7. Sunk aboard another ship. While at Iwo Jima, Art Curtis, a TBM (torpedo/bomber plane) was sent from the Wake Island to the carrier Bismark Sea on a courier mission. He was told that the next take-off would not be for another forty-five minutes so he went to the wardroom for a cup of coffee. The Bismark Sea was hit and sunk by a Japanese suicide plane while Art was having his coffee. He survived and was plucked out of the sea by another ship. Navy tradition is that a survivor of a sinking gets thirty days leave. Art went to Hawaii for a month. We all had a lot of envy but definitely mixed emotions about him being in Hawaii. He did not return to our squadron so we don't know if it was as idyllic as it was fanaticized by us.

Side Story #8 Point that Gun the Other Way. When our ship rolled (theories and cause are in the main story) a plane and a deck hand went over the side, the deck hand's name was Lee Guardipee, a full blooded Indian. A Destroyer, called the plane guard, always followed the carriers during flight operations to rescue any pilots or crewmen overboard for any reason. The plane guard picked up Lee but this was after the suicide plane had hit. Lee was typically dark skinned with black crew cut hair and, of course, he was very wet. A Marine aboard the destroyer, thinking he was the Japanese suicide pilot who some how survived, pointed a carbine at Lee as he was being hauled from the water. When Lee saw this he yelled "Point that gun the other way, you s.o.b., I'm from Wyoming"!

Side Story #9 Tragedy. All casualties are tragedies but some are particularly gut-wrenching. Larry Thompson had an engine failure while taking off and hit the water directly forward of the ship. The helmsman spun the wheel to starboard which caused the stern of the ship to swing to port and toward Thompson but this is standard procedure. A hard turn to port then causes the stern to swing to starboard thus causing the ship to make an arc around the downed pilot. Larry survived the crash and as the ship passed him, he waved although he did have a cut on his forehead. As explained in Story #8, each carrier, during flight operations, was followed by a destroyer (the plane guard) whose duty was to pick up pilots or crewmen in case of mishaps. The plane guard pulled along side Thompson but, unknown to either, Larry's parachute had streamed under water and was caught in the ship's screws, pulling him under, causing his drowning.

Side Story #10. Not my fault. I landed aboard a carrier 159 times and never had an accident...save one. Landing planes which failed to pick up an arresting wire were stopped by a cable barrier. If not too fast nor too high, the result usually was the plane nosed up causing damage to the propeller and engine cowling. This is always recorded as pilot error but the Marcus Island had been having some problems with their arresting gear and they were taking pictures to find out what was happening. The arresting gear cables were held off the deck by hydraulic brackets which receded when not in use. The pictures showed that as I landed, the brackets went down leaving the arresting wires on the deck. They also showed that my hook was down, dragging on the deck but bouncing over the wires and subsequently my plane hit the barrier. As I said "Not my fault".

Side Story #11 Rescue. A TBM is a single engine carrier based bomber or torpedo plane. Apparently there was a mid-air collision by two TBM's over the southern portion of Okinawa. A surviving pilot awoke to find himself on the edge of a ravine with his parachute streamed around him. With a broken ankle and other injuries he began to make his way westward toward the sea. At one point he heard Japanese approaching and he crouched in a cane field and the Japanese soldiers passed within a few feet of where he was hiding. Farther down the path, he came across a couple of civilians one of which had a bicycle. They fled when they saw him but they abandoned the bicycle which he used to help get himself to the coast. He was undetected and reached the cliffs on the west coast. By this time he was exhausted, in pain and night was falling so he took refuge in a cave only to be awakened the next morning by our ships bombarding the area. He got to the beach and took refuge under a wooden boat which had been purposely overturned and left on the beach. All seemed well temporarily under he saw the feet and legs of a man approaching the boat. He drew his Smith & Wesson revolver and when the man up righted the boat. He shot and killed the man. With strength garnered from fear and adrenaline, he managed to get the boat into the water where a slight breeze carried him away from the shore. At this point, I enter the story. I had been on a spotting mission but it was a day in which radio communications were unbelievably bad. Radios in those days were subject to atmospheric conditions which made them unreliable with static being the only sound. I was attempting to establish communication with my assigned ship when I saw a boat about a half mile off shore. It appeared to be abandoned but when I circled low I could see a man lying in the boat. For reasons unknown, Navy pilots liked to wear nylon scarves and when he waved a white scarf I knew he was one of our pilots. Radio communication was still impossible but I saw a small ship, possibly a mine sweep, nearby and signaled "Rescue" and then dived over the boat and waggled my wings. They signaled back "Negative" and I could not understand why but they must have been in communication with a battleship a few miles farther out to sea because shortly thereafter an old bi-wing pontoon plane appeared and landed near the boat. The rear seat crewman got out on the wing and helped the pilot from the boat into the rear seat while he (the crewman) laid on the wing holding onto a strut. The plane could not take off with this overload so began taxiing our toward our ships but it hit a coral head and punched a hole in its pontoon. It was also heading toward a minefield which I could see and apparently, in spite of the radio difficulties, that pilot could hear me and I steered him right and left through the minefield. The battleship must have had communication with the seaplane as they sent out a boat which met the plane about a mile away and they were able to take the injured pilot, seaplane pilot and crewman aboard. The seaplane continued taking on water and had sunken to its lower wings by the time the battleship came along side and lifted it out of the water with its crane.

EPILOGUE OF A JOURNAL TOO LATE

At this point I have become aware that statistics are meaningless to the casual reader. I prefer to mention a few facts about Squadron VOF-1, later VOC-1.

Of a total of 39 pilots, our losses were 13, or one-third, plus a few injuries. I had 109 combat missions and I was about average. Our pilots shot down 27 enemy aircraft although our primary mission was always ground support. None of our planes were shot down by enemy aircraft.

I have been unable to locate the source but somewhere in the official records I read that VOF-1/VOC-1 pilots had accumulated more hours in combat zones than any other Navy Squadron at that time, the end of WWII. Barrett Tillman, a noted author and naval historian, said this squadron had a reputation and accomplishments which far exceeded its size (all of our duty was confined to operating from small "jeep" carriers).

Many years later, four star Admiral "Bush" Bringle, our squadron commander, commented that his success in the Navy was due to the performance of this squadron... not true, because he was a superb leader, but he believed it.

Most of us were in our twenties and thought that we were invincible. The facts belied that belief. At Okinawa alone, in addition to those lost, we had twenty-five planes hit by anti-aircraft fire.

I was home on leave in August, 1945 when the war ended and I remember well my first thought: "I survived"!

*There is no glory in war but men
and women do glorious things in
wartime.*

*Ed Olszewski
December 2009*

SUICIDE PLANE STRIKING THE WAKE ISLAND,
CVE-65 3 APRIL 1945 OFF OKINAWA.

I WAS STANDING ON THE FLIGHT DECK
AT THIS INSTANT.

