

*The Flying Escapades of
Ensign Arthur D. Thomas*

Officer # 402 902 Cadet # 412 8353

or

Sea Duty, My Way

Ensigns Burnap, Weitzel and I were skeet shooting at the naval aviation sub patrol base in Alameda, California when we received a call to take an anti-sub patrol beyond the Golden Gate. We sped to the flight line and the ready OS2U's. We were launched into the bay and found the area around the bay completely covered with heavy fog. After taking our positions for take off from very smooth water, we discovered water fowl by the thousands in our flight path.. We all immediately decided to scare them. They would fly a short distance and then land again. I was flying at about 200 ft above the water. It was lots of fun and I thought it would be great if I could scare them with my Very Pistol signal gun which was located under the dash. As I leaned over for the gun I must have inadvertently leaned on the stick as I heard a very loud sound. My first thought was that I must be crashing but how could that be ...an ace pilot crashing into San Francisco Bay? But the heavy seat had detached from the plane and was still attached to me. I had to release it to swim to the top. I saw light green waters and automatically knew that I had to start swimming toward that. As I reached the surface I immediately thought, "My God, I've killed Harper!" (my rear seat gunner) But immediately a head popped the surface and said, "Oh Boy, I'm a veteran now!"

Ens. Bob Burnap landed and rescued both of us. As it turned out, I was slightly skinned on the shins and eye brow but was taken to the hospital by a crash boat for three days for observation. On the fourth day in the hospital, I was visited by

the squadron commander who had two announcements: No. 1 : The safety board that investigates all crashes was to meet in ten days. No. 2 : He had orders to send three pilots to the fleet as replacement scout pilots for those lost in action in the South Pacific Third Fleet and did I want to be one of them?.

For some reason I chose the second option. I immediately rose from the bed, went to BOQ (Bachelor Officer's Quarters) and got my bags and sped across the Bay to the embarkation point. Before I could leave I had to be checked out on two different planes. The first, the SPD dive bomber went fine except that I forgot to switch to my second fuel tank routinely until the engine began to sputter and die. I quickly figured out that I needed to switch over and all else went well. The second plane was the SC1 Seahawk, the last plane built for WW2. It had a reputation for having a lot of power. They warned me as I boarded that its torque would pull the plane to the left. But I thought I could handle it. My plane was pushed into the water and I gave it the gun for take off. It pulled sharply to the left so that I made a 90 degree turn and was headed straight for a docked carrier! I had no choice but to gun it again and lifted into the air barely making it over the carrier as I took off. Luckily, I left for my duty station in Hawaii shortly thereafter!

Upon arriving at Ford Island in the Hawaiian Islands I was assigned to training flights over Kowolowie, an uninhabited island and the smallest of the Hawaiian chain, to spot gunfire for cruisers practicing for fleet duty. After three weeks, the three of us went to the South Pacific supply base on Olithji. After three days we were each assigned to different battleships for scout, rescue, and gunfire spotting. I became the fourth pilot on board the USS INDIANA replacing a pilot who was lost during a rescue mission.

The first combat fire that I saw was over Hammamatsu where a munitions factory was leveled. We flew at 200 feet to get close observation of the hits of the sixteen inch naval guns. Later the INDIANA was assigned as support in Iwo Jima to

watch for and suppress any enemy air support that might show up, but we were not involved in the landings.

One memorable day, Lt. Everet Bachman woke me up and said, "Let's go on a scout (mission)." We were to catapult a few minutes later. On the way to our planes, anchored on the catapults, he told me that the communications officer had told him a really big bomb had been exploded over Japan and it had atoms in it.

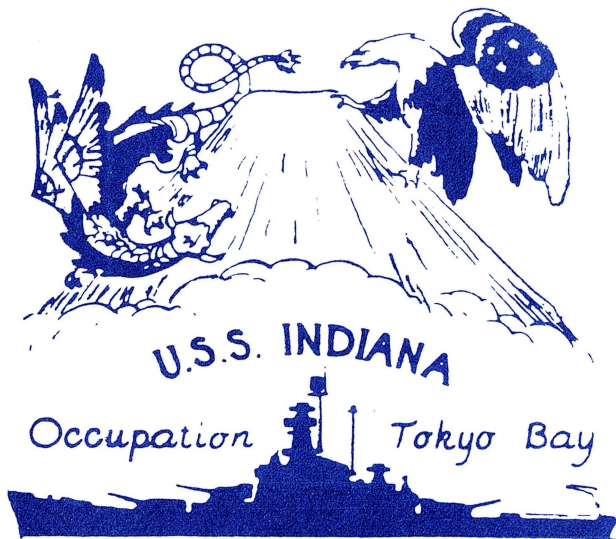
We catapulted in a routine manner and began to join up but as Backman flew out of sight under my wing his nose tipped forward and dove into the Pacific much like mine had back in Alameda. I landed downwind to save time on rescue but I found only a canteen bobbing on the surface. After screaming, "Mayday!" into the radio silence, I was joined by a destroyer who had orders from the admiral to take my gunner and me on board and destroy the plane because the seas were too high for a water take off. But before the ship could maneuver into position, another command came from Admiral Halsey that the USS INDIANA was to return to take my plane aboard. The big ship detached itself from the Third Fleet and we made Charlie recovery (recovery while the ship is in motion).

A few days later we arrived in Tokyo Bay with Third Fleet and anchored there while General McArthur accepted Japan's surrender on the deck of the USS Missouri. While there, we seaplane pilots provided sight seeing flights over Tokyo and Yokohama. This picture was taken by a wingman during one of those flights over Tokyo. According to a shipmate, one of our OS2U's is on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.

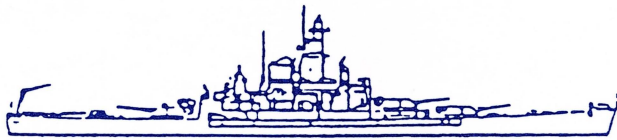
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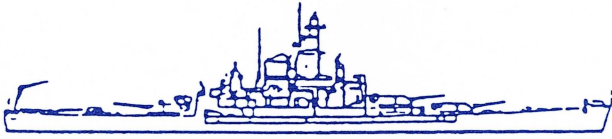
U.S.S. INDIANA (BB-58)

Hi Bert,
Hope your all well, I was one of the guys that gave you the green flag on the Cat shots, I was a Signalman on the Bridge, your probably aware of the fact our 0520 is on Display at the Smithsonian Institute in Wash. DC. I kept in touch with Bill Boyd Ens. He lived in Deep River Ct. which was right across Long Is sound from me. I live on the North Fork of T.I. almost to Orient Pt, I wrote Bill one day and invited him over to a gathering I had for for Indiana Crew Members (about 16 couples attended) didn't hear from Bill till a couple weeks later his son called me from France.

NEXT PORT OF CALL - TWIN CITIES

1999 REUNION SEPTEMBER 15-19

BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA



U.S.S. INDIANA (BB-58)

If I told me Bill had a heart attack and passed on, I tried numerous times to locate you, Stanley and some of the others, It's hard tracking a Guy from Colorado to Texas, Stanley from Georgia to San Francisco, In any case I've enclosed a picture of one of our planes at one time or another, thought you'd like it. I've been membership chairman 25 years, so that's kept me going. If you know of any former crew-members, let me know, if you need info on any let me know, I'm leaving San for a Wine Seminar in Germany. It'll be gone 3 weeks. I will. Agricultural Time to our 18 Vineyards. out here -

NEXT PORT OF CALL - TWIN CITIES

1999 REUNION SEPTEMBER 15-19

BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA

(over)

OK. Art. Keep in touch. Next time
I'm in Dallas (Wilmington) the Women's
Line with son in Law is head of Hwy
Dept for the State there so I come down
occasionally. also one of the Kuts I grew
up lives in Middleton runs the airport
there has a couple planes. retired Capt.
American Airlines if you have time call
him nice guy his name is Ken Drusch
he lives right on the airport (Private)

OK. Art I said enough -

take care - God Bless,
your Shipmate
Al Verrilli S.M.K.

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