

USS Cumberland Sound Recollections 1944-1945

Ralph J. Ribble SKV/3c,2c ©2001 rjr

Upon completion of aviation storekeeper school at Jacksonville, I was sent to San Diego to board the Cumberland Sound – a seaplane tender. Our role in the Pacific was to support a squadron of PBMs. I spend 14 months aboard that floating gas tank of high-octane gasoline. If we had been torpedoed we would now be floating somewhere in outer space!

I never dwelled on the negative aspects of life in those days, but I well remember several amusing episodes.

Just minutes before we left the dock in Hawaii bound for the distant Pacific, a young officer drove up in a new jeep and entered a nearby building. Our alert crew wheeled the giant crane around and hauled that jeep aboard, then dropped it three decks down into one of my storerooms. Later that day the Capt. received a radio message asking if we had taken the jeep. He, not knowing anything about it, replied no, of course not.

It wasn't until many weeks later at one our stops among the remote islands that the Capt. remarked that it was unfortunate we didn't have a jeep to see the sights. He was overjoyed when told that we *did* have a jeep. He made good use of it several times thereafter.

While training at Hilo, I recall one incident involving the radioman assigned to our small amphibious plane – a Grumman J2F-6. In my opinion, the only reason we had it was to permit the Captain to get in his flight time and thus additional pay. I don't recall the radioman's name, but we called him 'Rabbit' because he was an avid Bugs Bunny fan. He was constantly reading Bugs Bunny comics. He was cruising around the island one day in one of the PBMs, lying on his parachute deep into a funny book when a buddy (falsely) yelled “Bailout! We're on fire!” Rabbit complied immediately and was seen floating down to one of the huge Dole pineapple plantations.

He was on his own for a few days, but when he finally rejoined us, I asked him what he did all of that time. His reply was “I et alotta pineapple!”

Later in the Western Pacific at Ulithi – our main base of operations – Capt. Grant with the Chief Warrant Officer (also a pilot) and Rabbit flew over to the island and dropped off the Capt. Upon returning from the island strip the Warrant Officer forgot to retract the wheels – so when they got back out to our ship to land on the sea strip, the tower began radioing frantically to retract the wheels so the pontoons could take over. Unfortunately, Rabbit had his headphones down around his neck and was deep into another Bugs Bunny episode. Obviously, the plane flopped upside down and it seemed an eternity before either occupant surfaced. Later when asked about the wreck, Rabbit said “all I remember was that all of a sudden, everything got real blurred!”

That J2F-6 also provided one of the most amusing inspections I ever participated in aboard ship. Inspections were usually held on Saturday mornings and everyone aboard and their quarters were inspected with close scrutiny. This particular day they were inspecting one of my storerooms. We were down in a lower hold and the Capt. along with his XO and others came upon this young deckhand re-stowing damaged propeller blades. The Capt. immediately jumped the young man and asked why he



wasn't dressed and at his post for inspection. He replied that he was ordered to get all these blades stored and he was doing it. He then volunteered that some jackass had tried to take the J2F-6 off the water with the wheels down and had ruined a prop. I don't think the kid knew that the Capt. was the culprit, but the scene changed instantly. Fully flushed and surprised, the Capt. stammered "carry on young man" and off we went. That was the laugh of the day for officers and crew!

We also had unpleasant moments that one would like to forget.

The aircraft carrier Randolph was a brand new ship when it arrived at Ulithi – the largest sea anchorage in the Pacific. She was anchored on our starboard side the night two Japanese Kamikazes coming low on the water evaded our radar screen and climbed directly overhead. One came down and hit the Randolph flight deck, blowing aircraft and men into the air. They were silhouetted in the night sky – truly a horrible sight! The other plane mistook a light along the trail to a latrine on nearby MogMog as a ship's running light and made a crater – a big one. I don't mind admitting that I was on my knees assuming that this was the end. I wasn't alone, either – so was the Captain. I was his "talker" on the bridge at General Quarters – the person who relays all of his instructions to the crew, *verbatim!*

We and others sent work parties to help in the clean up of the Randolph. One of my shipmates from Dallas went over by request because he had a brother-in-law on the Randolph. Unfortunately, the kamikaze hit the gun position where he was stationed and I don't believe he was ever seen again. I remember helping my shipmate prepare a letter to his sister trying to explain what happened. They had just married before he shipped out.

The Randolph survived and underwent repair. Unfortunately, she was a jinxed ship...the Randolph reached the Philippines later and a US pilot buzzing it managed to crash and kill some more guys.

We had a good go with the Japanese planes in Buckner Bay/Okinawa on our way to join Adm. Halsey's Task Force, but got through the encounter in good shape. Our Capt. was an Annapolis man – Etheridge Grant – and as I mentioned, I was his talker during combat conditions. I repeated his every word and was supposed to do the same for all incoming messages from the gun crews.

It got so bad at Buckner the gun crews paid no attention to the Captain's orders. In desperation, the Capt. finally ordered 'Condition Yellow' which meant fire at will. One of the gunners replied, "Tell that old bastard we have been firing at will for the past 15 minutes!" Obviously, I did not pass that message!



We were one of the first six or seven ships to enter Tokyo Bay. We were not far from the Missouri, so I watched Gen. MacArthur accept the Japanese surrender through my field glasses. The hundreds of hundreds of planes that flew overhead during the signing were a sight to behold. We never imagined that we had so many out there! We set up shop and started picking up prisoners of war up and down the coast.

After the first months of the occupation I had acquired enough points for discharge but had to wait until our ship was released and permitted to return to the US. We returned the northern route, skirting the Aleutians into Seattle. We then boarded a troop carrier for San Diego and finally a train to Norman,



Oklahoma, where I was discharged Dec. 19, 1945. It seemed like years lost in life, but I never regretted a moment of it. It was one war that had to be fought and the entire country was supportive. I am not at all certain that our participation in some since has been necessary...


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Rate/Rank
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DECEASED, OCTOBER 15, 2007

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