TO SPEAK OF MANY THINGS....(Draft 6)

by Bob Bublitz

In October of 1951, the Korean War was still on. Tens and tens of

thousands of Americans, Koreans and Chinese were yet to die in the

nearly two years before the fighting would stop while the talking,

talking, talking continued even as it does today over 40 years later.

The disintegration of the US 25th(?) Division, thrown piecemeal from its

comfortable occupation billets in defeated Japan into the path of the

tough, well-led, well-trained, Soviet-equipped North Korean Army was

clearly remembered in the strains of the "Bugout Boogie" (When that old

four deuce begins to chug, the Twenty-Fifth begins to bug, bug-out

boogie...."). The battle of the Pusan perimeter was a year earlier, the

US Army's Tenth Corps remembered all too vividly the mauling it received

from the Chinese People's Liberation Army as it neared the Manchurian

border and the First Marine Division, proud conqueror of Guadalcanal and

innumerable Pacific Islands, was still adjusting to the lessons

administered to it by the Chinese on its chilly "advance to the rear"

from the deep freeze of the Chosin Reservoir to the icy beach at Wonsan.

The aircraft carrier Valley Forge, completing a peaceful six-month

Far East tour in June of 1950, was held on station off Korea until late

fall, her pilots and aircrews constituting a major portion of the scanty

US airpower available to stem the rising North Korean tide. As other

carriers arrived to take up the load, the "Happy Valley" finally made it

back to Pearl Harbor en route to her home port,San Diego. Before she

made it to the West Coast, the Chinese stormed across the Yalu and the

Happy Valley and her weary warriors were again thrown back into their

'tide-stemming' work. Late in the spring of '51, after nearly 18 months

in the Far East and a year of continuous fighting, Valley Forge and her

crew arrived back in San Diego(?). Some of the officers and crew found –

to their surprise – that they were still married. Many, many more found

that while they had been married, they weren't any more. Eighteen

months is a long, long time.

On October 5 of that year, four Martin-built Mercator-type

aircraft (Navy designation P4M-1Q), constituting the Special Projects

Division of VC-11's Miramar Detachment, lifted off from NAS Miramar

bound for NAS Whidbey Island. Airborne for six hours, they were on the

first leg of a deployment that would take them nearly half way around the

world and last for nearly a half a century.

The fact that until June of 1951, all officers were required to be

(a) volunteers and (b) bachelors also added some glamour to the legend.

You know, the old 'eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow....' Initially,

efforts had been made to recruit only unmarried aircrews but it quickly

became apparent that if the enlisted aircrews were to be all volunteers,

it was going to be a very small unit. The unwed volunteer requirement

was quickly dropped for enlisted personnel. The apparent reason behind

the requirement was that ComAirPac, anticipating high attrition among

our crews, reasoned that there would be less fuss if the casualties had

no wives and children. Also, initially, we were told that the tour of

duty would be two years without dependents, not a cheerful prospect, but

one which vanished when the decision was made to base us in the

Philippines, outside of the Korean combat support area from which

dependents were excluded.

ComAirPac's expectation of high attrition was not unreasonable,

for at that time the Air Force's 91st Strategic reconnaissance Squadron

was operating on similar missions in the Far East and encountering

considerable testiness on the part of the Soviets, North Koreans and

others, leading to the loss of several of their aircraft. Over the next

few years, the 91st (whose members proudly boasted that their squadron

had not gone one year without being under fire since their founding as an

observation squadron in 1917) would lose some more. The Navy also had

lost some none-specialized VP aircraft doing SigInt work. Indeed, we

were told that at one point in time, 25% of the crews and 50% of the

aircraft engaged in SigInt operations had been lost.

Be that as it may, in June of 1951 the bachelor/volunteer business

was dropped and LTJG John "Red" Farrell and I were unceremoniously

assigned to the Special Projects Division of VC-11's Miramar Detachment.

Red and I were fresh out of flight training after several years of

shipboard service. Our only special distinction, apparently, was that

we had previously held security clearances.

Our grandparent, VC-11 (with which we had no contact whatsoever)

flew "guppy" ADs out of NAS San Diego, deploying detachments of early

warning and ECM aircraft with carrier air groups. The Miramar

Detachment, our parent, flew Boeing B-17s, designated PB1Ws(?) which had

been outfitted as airborne CICs, predecessors to the WV-1 Constellations.

A couple of months earlier, the Special Project Division's

original 12 pilots had flown over to NAS Patuxent River on the Chesapeake

Bay, to transition into the P4M-1Qs. Originally, we were to get BUNOs

121451–4,but BUNO 121452 apparently threw several turbine blades from

one of its jet engines while on a high speed low altitude test flight and

crashed in the Chesapeake killing its three man crew. BUNO 124369 was

assigned to us in lieu of the crashed aircraft.

At Miramar, nobody bothered us, everybody ignored us and we went

our merry way, making our own rules and figuring out what we were doing

all by our selves. VC-11 Miramar was most generous with time and

talent, but that was about all the support we got.

Life at Miramar was pleasant as we became acquainted with our new

aircraft and fellow fliers. The two of us that were married found

housing and enjoyed the little time we could spend with out families,

while flying day and night radar and celestial navigation flights and

gunnery hops. Maybe sometime I'll tell you about the time that two of

us intrepid navigators managed to miss the West Coast of the US while

flying eastbound. Or maybe that's a tale best left untold.

Then there was the time a middle-aged first class Aviation Radioman

came to me and asked for permission to marry. I knew he was going with

a woman with three children and as a 24 year old fatherly type, I read

him a little lecture about the responsibility of taking on a wife just

prior to a deployment which we knew would be dangerous and last for two

years without families (as we thought at that time). He said he had

thought about that. I then asked him if he had considered what it meant

to become responsible for three children, to which he replied, "I don't

know why I shouldn't, Lieutenant, they're all my kids." Public mores

were a little different then, and I hastily dropped the counseling

session and granted the necessary permission.

Late in August, I was summoned to an obscure corner of ComAirPac's

offices at NAS San Diego. An emaciated Lieutenant who looked like he

hadn't seen the sun for months was sitting in front of a massive vault.

Upon establishng my identity, he handed me a sealed envelope containing

our operations order. Back at Miramar, I read it several times, then

took it to John Douglas, who also read it, shaking his head. He asked

me what I thought of the two-part operations and communications

document. I said I thought it was pretty confusing and that the only

explanation I could think of was that the operations part was written by

the communicators and the communications part was written by the

operators.

The bad news was that the so-called OpOrder didn't give us much

guidance. The good news was that it only contained one clear

prohibition, under no circumstances to come closer than 20 miles to

communist-held territory, so we had lots of room to work out our own

doctrines.

Since that October day, the unit has been called by many names:

Special Projects Division, VC-11, Miramar; Special Projects Division,

NavSta Sangley Point; VW-1 Detachment A; VW-3 Detachment A; and ECMRon

One and finally, Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One (VQ-1). Needless

to say, the personnel of the unit have changed many times over.

As a Lieutenant, Junior Grade, and freshly designated Naval

Aviator, I was one of the participants in that flight, serving as

Navigator on BUNO 121453, one of 19 operational P4Ms procured by the

Navy a few years earlier. It was also one of the last times she would

fly under her true number. Once we arrived in the Philippines, she and

her three companion aircraft got new – and false – tail numbers every

month for the rest of their lives.

A few years ago, I searched the Naval Air Museum in Pensacola for

the P4M, but it has almost disappeared from the history of Naval

Aviation. Maybe, just maybe, that's appropriate, considering the fact

that for the decade they were the Navy's front line SigInt aircraft, the

last thing that the Navy wanted was for P4Ms to be ogled by the public.

I finally found a black and white photo of a P4M – I think it was 121453

because '453 couldn't retract her tail skag and the P4M in the photo was

dragging her skag – in the display of the Pratt and Whitney R4360

engine. It's a sad note that a plane that did so much for the Navy and

in which so many officers and bluejackets fought and died should end its

days as a mere footnote to the biggest reciprocating aircraft engine

ever built.

Where did this P4M come from? The stories vary. One has it that

the plane was designed during World War II to serve as an aerial

minelayer , to bottle up the Japanese ports in preparation for the US

invasion of Japan. There is some credibility to that, since the

diagrams of the P4M offer six different bomb bay loadings, three of

which are mine loads. And, on its first and only overseas deployment

with a patrol squadron (VP-21), the squadron's mission was minelaying.

An element of doubt arises, however, since crewmen who served with VP-21

report that mines were rarely carried.

Another theory holds that the plane was designed by Martin to

compete with Lockheed's P2V for the role of the Navy's post WW II patrol

bomber, but lost the contest due to the P4M's greater cost. That theory

stands up fairly well. The Navy was able to equip about 50% more VP

squadrons with P2Vs than would have been the case with the P4M. Also

lending credence to that theory is the fact that as the P2V went through

a long series of modifications and upgrades, it ultimately acquired many

of the characteristics of the P4M, jet engines, etc., etc. One thing

the P2V could never replicate was the P4M's enormous internal space,

room for the large amounts of electronic equipment P4ms carried when

they were converted into the P4M-1Q reconnaissance version.

The P4M, a cantilever shoulder-winged monoplane boasted two Pratt

& Whitney R4360 4-row/28 cylinder/56 spark plug engines generating some

3,250 BHP driving 4-bladed Hamilton Standard props. Aided and abetted

by the two Allison J-33 3,800 pound thrust turbojets, one slung under

each R4360, the old Mercator was an awesome package of power for its

day. With two churnin' and two burnin' it was the biggest fuel hog

flying as well as the nosiest blasted airplane in the Fleet, as borne out

by the following tale:

The P4M, in its "Q" version lugged twin 20mm cannons in an Emerson

bow turret and a Martin tail turret and a pair of .50 cal. machine guns

in a dorsal turret aft of the wing. The tail turret had a disconcerting

habit of 'dumping', losing hydraulic power and frustrating the gunner

with two guns pointed permanently downward until repairs could be made

on the ground. The bomb bay was home to four 400 gallon fuel tanks.

Sprightly on take-off, the Mercator could climb over 2,000' per

minute with its inconspicuous – but noisy – jets on. In those days,

500' feet/minute was the standard rate of climb for multi-engine

aircraft and only the hottest prop fighters boasted 1,000 fpm climb

capability.

One night in the Kadena O-club, LT John Douglas, our skipper, ran

into a newly arrived Commander, CO of the first VP squadron to deploy to

Okinawa with an early (no jets) version of the P2V. Pleased with his

new toy, ignorant of the publicity-shy P4M and inordinately proud of the

rate of climb the R3350 compound engines could deliver, the CO offered

to bet John $100 he could beat him to 1,000' from a standing start.

John, a big, slow talking Oklahoma boy, looked at the CO for a bit, and

then said, "Tell you what, Captain, for $200, I'll feather one right

after take-off and still beat you to 1,000'." Suspicious, the CO

declined the wager and embarked on less confrontational aircraft

characteristic research.

Range, according to the handbook, was 2,400 nautical miles with

bomb bay tanks, which we never flew without. 2,400 miles though, was

stretching things a bit. We regarded anything more than about 2,200

miles as "Get there and fall out of the sky with empty tanks" range.

Endurance was rated at 14 hours at most economical cruise, around 170

knots. We normally flew at 180 knots indicated, which gave us a total

endurance of about 13 hours to dry tanks. Our normal patrols were

9.5–10.5 hours, with an occasional stretch to nearly 12 hours.

When converted to the "Q" version, the Mercator carried a crew of

14–16 men, in what for those days was regarded as real comfort. We even

had a galley and I have fond memories of watching the sunrise over the

East China Sea while eating freshly prepared bacon and eggs with toast.

The permanent flight crews were composed of three pilots, one of

whom navigated; a pair of Aviation Radiomen, an Aviation Electronicsman

(radar operator), two Aviation Machinists Mates and an Aviation

Ordinanceman; plus an officer SigInt Evaluator and four enlisted SigInt

operators drawn from any of the electronics oriented ratings, mostly

aviation but including an occasional Communications Technician or

Radioman. Each crew was assigned its own airplane, which it flew pretty

much exclusively. When operating away from home base, the permanent

crew was supplemented with an Aviation Electrician or Aviation

Metalsmith or both, depending upon the ailments and peculiarities of the

particular airplane deploying.

The SigInt folk, a clannish though not unpleasant lot, all hung

out in the after fuselage doing their exotic thing in the dark. The

rest of us drove, navigated, manned turrets, radios, radars and the

spark plug analyzer. With 56 spark plugs on each engine, it was an

occasion to be noted and cause for celebration when all 112 spark plugs

worked at the same time.

All of the flight crewmen except the SigInt operators were qualified

gunners and rotated through the turrets while we were in combat areas,

which averaged six or more hours each flight. The radar operator, the

navigator's right hand, usually stayed with his set although out of

boredom he sometimes swapped turret tours with a radioman, who would

then fill in on the radar.

Navigation was important and exacting but for reasons of security,

radar emissions were kept to a minimum. The navigator had the set

turned on about once every 20 minutes, counting each turn-on as not less

than one minute. After months of practice by the navigators and the

radar operators, radar usage during a 1,000 mile long patrol in a combat

area, obtaining a fix every 20 minutes required 30 seconds or less of

actual "stop-watch" radar "on" time.

The APS33 radar installed in the P4M was excellent at detecting

thunderstorms, a useful characteristic if one was inclined to avoid

them, a luxury we seldom had since our results depended heavily on

maintaining a steady course for lengthy stretches. The bad news was

that when thunderstorms were about, echoes from them, coastal land

masses and off-shore islands became indistiguishable, leading to

occasional navigational uncertainty and significantly elevated levels of

anxiety. And as we tried to fly just before, just after and often

through typhoons (which come liberally equipped with thunderstorms) in

order to to determine what effect bad weather had on other folks'

electronic emissions, interesting experiences were frequent.

Getting back to that initial deployment overseas: After a couple

of days spent checking everything out at Whidbey Island for the long,

mostly overwater trip ahead, we left for Kodiak and a 48 hour layover.

Upon arrival in Kodiak, BUNO 124369, LTJG Alex Dunn's plane went on the

sick list. The crew and plane were left behind for repair work.

Following the Kodiak stopover, we flew out to Shemya at the western

end of the Aleutians for an overnight stay. It was only October 10, but

Shemya was experiencing normal Aleutian weather, freezing temperatures,

snow showers, low visibility and lower ceilings. The living quarters

were a series in interconnected, heavily insulated quonset huts. Local

Air Force officers assured us that the quonsets were often completely

buried under snow in the winter. They also assured us that it was

necessary to get on the Air Force's high intensity s... list in order to

win a 13-month unaccompanied tour in this garden spot of the North

Pacific. We had no trouble believing them.

Next came the long (nearly 12 hours) jump to Atsugi, outside of

Tokyo, where we had several of days of conferences with Commmander Naval

Forces Japan and Naval Communications Unit 38, the parent unit of our

SigInt personnel, who were designated NavCommUnit 38C.

The question may arise, why didn't we fly the more direct and

certainly more appealing route through Hawaii and the atolls out to the

Philippines? The answer was simple – if we lost an engine in the middle

two or three hours of the San Francisco/Hawaii leg, our single-engine

performance would neither get us back to the one nor out to the other.

And at the then-enormous cost of $3,500,000 a copy, nobody looked

forward to explaining to a bunch of annoyed admirals why we had dropped

one of the Navy's high-dollar birds in the drink. Also, engine failure

was not an uncommon event in those days. Of the 80 or so combat patrols

I flew, several were aborted for engine problems and I would guess that

 we encountered some less serious form of engine trouble on 15–20% of

them.

With the breaking of dawn in Atsugi on October 16, it was apparent

we would enjoy a lovely Japanese fall day. As the breeze freshened, the

outlines of the three dark blue Martin P4M-1Q Mercators squatting on the

concrete parking pads off the taxiway at the US Naval Air Station sorted

themselves out from the patrol squadron's Lockheed P2V Neptunes parked

nearby. In the pinkish-grey light of morning, the hump-backed

Mercators, their bellies bumpy with radomes, sword-shaped antennae

protruding from their bodies at odd and frequent intervals, plexi-glass

turrets shrouded from both the warm autumn suns and the cool, dewy

evening mists, began to look both homely and vaguely menacing. As the

sky grew brighter, their bumps and projections seemed less comical, more

business-like, and the Mercators loomed even more ominous for the

absence of letters, numbers and symbols denoting their military

parentage.

Not unlike Los Angeles gang kids, the wearing of their colors by

military aircraft is de rigueur, and for very much the same reason –

they don't want to get shot at by their friends. In stark contrast to

the Neptunes, however, the Mercators' towering vertical stabilizers

were devoid of squadron markings. Nor was any arrogant, blazing white

"NAVY" to be found on their slab-sided fuselages. (While in 1951, the U

S Air Force modestly qualified its national origins with a "USAF" on the

sides of its aircraft, the American "NAVY" thought it redundant to

explain whose navy was meant; after all, what other navy was there? No

American flag marred the serene blue of nose or tail, although the twin

20 mm cannons in the turrets of those extremities were faultlessly

clean, freshly oiled and ready to speak. A lone, dungaree-clad

bluejacket, round white hat cocked saltily over his right eyebrow

marking him as Regular Navy, shifted his loaded carbine from his right

shoulder to his left as he slowly circled the signs around the aircraft

which proclaimed in brilliant red and stark black on white, "KEEP OUT –

RESTRICTED AREA, Authorized Personnel Only".

At dawn, a Neptune chattered and hummed down the runway – her

turbo-compound reciprocating engines giving her voice a purring note

quite different from the rattle and bang of the older pure reciprocating

engined patrol bombers – off for the morning Sea of Japan patrol of the

east coast of Korea and the Maritime Provinces of the USSR. Other than

common sense and a desire to return to base in one piece, there was no

Navy-imposed limit on how closely the shores of North Korean-held

territory might be approached, or indeed, how far inland the patrol

might penetrate. The sensitivities of the USSR to its borders dictated

an entirely different approach, however. Airborne patrols were under

strict instructions to remain a minimum of 40 miles off-shore, a

precaution soon to be proved inadequate as a Neptune of Patrol Squadron

Six engaged in electronic reconnaissance was downed by Soviet MiGs the

following month with the loss of all ten men aboard.

Soon Mercator crewmen appeared and began to ready the aircraft for

flight. This was to be the last leg of a deployment that would last for

well over 40 years as the Navy established its first specialized multi-

engine electronic reconnaissance unit onto Pacific bases since World War

II. In the Atlantic, Q-version (for Electronic Countermeasures – ECM)

Mercators had been deployed several months earlier, replacing unarmed

WWII vintage Privateers which had been at the Naval Air Station at Port

Lyautey, French Morocco, since 1948.

To the Port Lyautey Privateer unit (ostensibly a detachment of

Patrol Squadron 26) had gone the unhappy distinction of losing the first

Navy aircraft of the Cold War as Russian fighters rose from their base

near Riga, Latvia, in April of 1950 and shot down the unarmed Privateer.

Although steadfastly denied by the Soviets and their CIS successors,

there exists persuasive evidence that eight or nine crewmen from that

aircraft survived the shoot-down and were taken into the Soviet prison

camp system. Indeed, the wife of one of the officers, LTJG Robert

Reynolds, continues her efforts today to learn what finally happened to

him. Devoid of hope that he is alive, but aching to know what his fate,

she has made several trips to the USSR, appeared on television, been

interviewed in the press and news magazines and made innumerable

inquiries of the US and Russian governments. She even has been able to

interview the retired Russian general who commanded the Soviet fighter

squadron which shot down the Privateer in 1950, but as yet, the mystery

remains.

The Privateer from the Port Lyautey patrol detachment was but the

first specialized Navy Electronic Reconnaissance to be lost. The records

are not clear, but it appears that at least three more were victims of

Cold War clashes with Soviet Bloc fighters. Operational accidents and

Viet Cong rockets claimed another 25 aircraft. All told, 158 officers

and men have been declared dead by the Navy as a result of these losses

although credible intelligence reports indicate that ten or eleven

crewmen survived two of the shoot-downs, one by Russian, the other by

Chinese, fighters.

As the morning warmed in Atsugi, activity increased. Fueling

completed, baggage loaded, the crews boarded their aircraft through the

belly hatch located precisely on the line between the the arcs of the

whirling four-bladed propellers. All hatches secured, the Mercators

taxied one by one to the edge of the duty runway, where each stopped

briefly and started the two J-33 jet engines slung beneath the massive

R-4360 radial 'corncob' engines. After clearance from the tower to take

the runway, all four engines were run up to maximum power. A final

clearance from the tower, "Navy 451, you're cleared for take-off," and

the first Mercator started to roll.

Because the Mercator did not have a steerable nose-wheel, it took

a couple of taps on the brakes held the nose pointed firmly down the

runway. The rudder became effective as the jets' thrust took hold and

as the plane came alive, the acceleration forced the crew against their

seat backs. Lumbering for the first hundred yards, the Mercator rapidly

gained airspeed, and surprisingly agile for the clumsey giant it

resembled when at rest, it left the runway a scant 2,500 feet from where

it started. Almost leaping into the air, it slipped into a nose-high

2,000' per minute rate of climb and less than five minutes after being

cleared for take-off, Navy 451 reported settling into its assigned

altitude of 8,000' cruising at 180 knots. Taking up a heading for Ie

Shima, a small islet just south of Tokyo Bay, Navy 451 bade Atsugi Tower

farewell and checked into the Air Traffic Control network. At the Ie

Shima marker beacon, 451 slipped into a graceful right turn and took up

a heading a little west of due south for the East Coast of Luzon,

Republic of the Philippines. The remaining Mercators followed at

intervals of a few minutes. Aboard 451, the crewmen checked fore and aft for any sign of

gasoline fumes. Once assured that the plane was clear of fumes, the

pilot ordered the smoking lamp lit. In the navigation compartment in

the nose, forward of and below the pilots, the navigator peered through

his drift site to determine if the winds predicted by the aerology

officer were indeed what the plane was encountering. Surprisingly, they

were and the flight proceeded as planned.

Honshu receded along the starboard side, Kyushu slid by in the

distance, the Fukuoka radio beacon giving a last opportunity to check

progress. The crew settled down and the smell of frying bacon and

scrambled eggs drifted through the cabin as the Ordnanceman –

traditionally the cook on Navy patrol planes because, other than taking

his turn in a turret, he didn't have other airborne responsibiilities as

did the radiomen, mechanics and radar operator – fired up his hotplate

and toaster to make breakfast.

Voice radio contact with Tokyo Air Control was lost and the

Radioman, reeling out a wire antenna from beneath the tail, banged out

the hourly position reports on his telegraphers key, first to Tokyo

Control, then Okinawa Control and as the Babuyan(?) islands and the

shore of Luzon appeared, to Manila Control. Finally, due east of

Manila, voice contact was established with Manila (Mahneela, as it came

over the earphones) Control and a ninety degree right turn headed the

plane toward the Manila radio range at Nichols Field on the southeast

shore of Manila Bay.

Flying over a hundred miles of jungle, give or take a few miles,

the city of Manila and glorious Manila Bay itself spread out before us.

"Manila Control, this is Navy 451. Cancel my IFR (Instrument

Flight Rules) flight plan. I am proceeding VFR (Visual Flight Rules) to

Sangley Point." "Roger Navy 451. You are cleared VFR to Sangley (Sahnglee,

it sounded like) Point. Have a good day." The final leg took us

to NavSta Sangley Point and its airstrip which had recently been

lengthened and hard surfaced, just for us. The Captain of the station

welcomed us to our luxurious new home, a parking ramp and two WW II

vintage quonset huts for office and shop space.

Alex Dunn and his crew showed up a few days later slightly the

worse for wear after a somewhat boisterous RON in Tokyo. We then pulled

checks on all the airplanes (we were on a 30/60/120/240 hour check

schedule in those days) and began flying area familiarization, navigation

and gunnery flights preparatory to commencing operations.

Repair and maintenance was all done out in the weather, which, in

the Philippines means rain much of the time and humidity the rest. In

the rainy season, engine work was frustrating in the extreme as the

exposure to the weather created problems nearly as fast as they could be

fixed, sometimes faster. The mechanics estimated that the planes picked

up somewhere between 500 and 1,000 pounds of moisture just in the

internal insulation and wiring.

We were, I can say with some modesty, quite an event for the

little Navy backwater that Sangley Point had been. We had what some

have described as an aura. Our planes were painted Navy blue and bore

no markings except for four standard – a white star on a red and white

bar – national markings, one on either side of the fuselage aft and one

each on the upper left and lower right wing. Persons not attached to

the Special Projects Division were prohibited from approaching the

aircraft any closer than 50'. Armed sentries with live ammunition were

instructed to call out, "Halt...Halt...Halt..." and then shoot,

patrolled the perimeter of the parking area. We were quickly designated the "50-footers" by Sangley's personnel. Our quickly adopted informal insignia, sported on locally

made belt buckles, was the outline of a P4M with the midships section

obscured by a cloud and bearing the legend, "50-Footers".

Other bits of the aura came from the fact that we were the only

division (with a small "d") in the Navy to be transferred intact from

one station to another. Nobody outside of the unit was cleared for our

operations although the Captain of the Station and the Admiral

(Commander Naval Forces, Philippines) were briefed in general about our

work. For that matter, the aircrews, excepting the SigInt folk, did not

know what went on in the back of the plane. I once said to an old Air

Force friend that it seemed strange to have flown for two years without

knowing what I was doing. To which he responded, that he thought that

was about average for a Navy Pilot.

After arriving at the Sangley Point Naval Station, a sand spit

protruding into Manila Bay from Cavite, we began flying four-hour

training and area familiarization flights prior to commencing

reconnaissance operations. Each morning at 0600 we would launch two

P4Ms from Sangley's 8,500' air strip which was longer than the Station

itself and only 100 yards or so from the dependent housing areas. After

about ten days of early morning blast-offs, the wife of that august

personage, the Station Air Operations Officer, cornered two of our plane

commanders in the Officer's Club bar.

You guys, she said peevishly, are going to be held responsible for

a population explosion around here. Possibly thinking of transgressions

in Cavite and anticipating a lecture on conduct and decorum, our two

Lieutenants hastily began looking for a way to retreat in good order.

You know, continued the Air Boss's wife, you've got to do something

about these 6:00 AM take-offs. Failing to see the connection between

her comments on early take-offs and population explosions but happy to

see the conversation veering away from Cavite's temptations, our

intrepid birdmen launched into a learned discourse on the virtues of

early take-offs – cooler, less strain on the engines, more daylight

hours left at the end of the flight for maintenance and repairs, etc.,

etc., etc. Aforesaid wife waited until the defense died down and then

snapped, "I know all that but the problem is that 6:00 is too early to

get up and just too damned late to go back to sleep!"

At Sangley Point, life loped along. We commenced operations in

November, 1951 and gradually settled into a routine. Missions were

launched at any minute of any hour of any day of the week in order to

avoid establishing a predictable pattern. A typical mission would take

off at 0242, heading for the coastal area to be patrolled. Using a call

sign "Navy" and the last four digits of the false Bureau Number painted

on the tail, 100 miles out of Sangley we would check out of the radio

net with "Manila Control, this is Navy 1234 100 miles out."

At that time, all navigation lights were extinguished and radio

silence set until, 100 miles out of our destination, we would check into

the radio net again. About half an hour from the point where we would

turn to patrol parallel to the coast all turrets were manned.

Occasionally, test bursts were fired, but we later dispensed with that

procedure as the test firing blew the plastic tampions from the gun

barrels, leaving them vulnerable to ice accumulation. If then you

needed to fire, the guns could burst from the accumulated ice in the

barrels.

Then followed five, six or seven hours of quiet droning along on

autopilot, holding altitude, making gentle turns to remain 20, 25 or 30

miles off shore and watching for aircraft which might resent the

presence of our blue monster. No reports from the men in the after

fuselage, just little flurries of activity as the gunners relieve each

other in the turrets. Down in the Navigation compartment, sometimes we

could pick up commercial radio broadcasts, sometimes at remarkable

distances. We learned to appreciate the symphonies of Shostakovitch,

Rimsky-Koraskov, Beethoven and the drill-sergeant sound of Radio

Shanghai's "Ee, er, san, szu!" as the morning exercise program roused

12,000,000 Shanghaiese for the morning jerks. Interestingly enough, we

could also pick up the Chinese Communist radio aids to navigation, which

were still broadcasting on the same frequencies and with the same call

signs as they had had under the Nationalist regime. We never used them

for navigation purposes, though, because of the possibility of deception

and the danger of being led into forbidden areas by relying on them.

The radioman always had the current code groups for various

contingencies, "Attacked by aircraft," "Tracked by aircraft," and "Fired

on by surface craft" taped up over his transmitter key. If any of those

event transpired, the navigator immediately handed the radioman the

current position, which he then transmitted to the Navy shore stations

on the radio net.

I remember one time when two MiG-15s made firing passes at us. The

tail gunner, presiding over a "dumped" and useless tail turret, called

out over the intercom, I've got two MiGs back here at 5 o'clock and

they're firing. I responded, "Roger, all turrets, fire back; Radio, send

your message." With no break whatsoever, the radioman said, "I've got a

'Roger'". Amazing, how fast you can send radiotelegraphy with a hand

key when properly motivated.

On that particular occasion, the MiGs missed as we rolled into a

90 degree right bank and dove for the deck. Flipping the jet throttles

to the air-start position, we hit 395 knots (a bit over the red line)

before settling down about 350 feet above the water. The 3–400 foot

zone was a good place to be. If we flew higher, the MiGs could make

gunnery runs on us; lower and they could resort to strafing tactics.

Running under a thin cloud deck at about 1,000' a few minutes

later, we were called by a Navy cruiser en route back to Korea from R&R.

When we confirmed that we were a ferret aircraft, the cruiser asked us if

we had brought any of our playmates with us.

Not that we know of, we replied. Well, said the cruiser, I have three

contacts on my scope, two of them a mile or so behind the first. If you

like, make a low pass and we'll clean them off for you. Roger and appreciate that, we responded, give us a steer and we'll be right along. But please tell the gun-boss that we're the big blue one

in front! In the event, the MiGs broke off and returned to their base

and we proceeded somewhat more sedately to ours.

On a number of occasions at night, we would see the exhaust from

jets which were obviously out hunting us, but without A/I radar, they

had little success in finding us. The patrol vessels did somewhat better

at finding us, but were such poor marksmen that we never even bothered to

report the occasions when they opened fire on us. Because we flew at

relatively low altitudes and on a steady course, they frequently popped

away at us with their 3" guns. We assumed they always hid in amongst a

bunch of fishing vessels when they fired because they had respect for our

20mm and didn't want to make us really mad.

Although the SigInt guys were very security conscious, on one

occasion I learned a little bit about what they did. One day, the

skipper of the NavCommUnit detachment called me into their end of the

quonset hut they shared with us and said they had a problem. They were

picking up signals from a radar of US origin which appeared to be in

downtown Shanghai – a strange place for a radar. He knew I had been in

and out of Shanghai aboard ship a few years before the Communists took

over and asked if I had any idea of what was going on. After WW II, I

told him, the Air Force had taken over a hotel, the Broadway Mansions,

right by the Garden Bridge over Soochow Creek in downtown Shanghai.

Somewhere along the line, the USAF had installed an air traffic control

center on the upper floor of the hotel and a surveillance radar on the

roof. The ChiComs obviously had put it back in operation. Sighs of

relief from the SigInt folks, at least they knew that their bearings

were right

As far as I can recall, very few men ever flew with us who were not

attached to the Special Projects division. I believe the Captain of the

Station and the Air Operations Officer, both pilots, were each given a

short orientation flight in a P4M, more for local political reasons than

anything else. One of the Station medical officers, a Flight Surgeon,

was invited along on local training flights a number of times to get his

flight time in. And, of course, we had the occasonal VIP from Pearl

Harbor to contend with. One tale I still enjoy: We occasionally were

visited by officers from CinCPacFleet staff who had the requisite

security clearances to fly with us as observers. And, for their benefit,

we created the 'Instant Hero' patrol route. While I cannot offer the

exact route, suffice it to say that it ran through the Formosa Straits

and nicked the Korean Combat Zone before retiring to Okinawa. Thus, an

intrepid observer (REMFs, they called them in Viet Nam) in one ten-hour

flight could acquire a China Service Medal, a Korean Service Medal with a

battle star, a United Nations Service Medal, a Korean Presidential Unit

Citation (that's one medal every two hours and thirty minutes) and a

$200 deduction on their income tax. They also qualified for 1/10th or

1/20th of an Air Medal depending upon whether we encountered enemy fire

or not. They loved us for our thoughtfulness.

We managed to scrape up a number of E&E and survival items from

various sources. Scrounged, is the operative word. Included were a

small compass; the cloth maps; a spherical compass about the size of a

small marble, meant to be swallowed just before capture and retrieved

after a trip through the intestinal canal; a Japanese watch (derisively

referred to as a 'one-time-wind' watch on the grounds that it would

probably only work once – don't wind it up to test it); a serialized

gold bar – 1/2 ounce, as I recall, although it might have been an ounce

but I don't think we were able to persuade Uncle Sam that we were worth

an ounce apiece; a small plastic case for carrying the gold bar, which

had two compartments but only one bar; and whatever else we thought

would be useful. All crewmen carried some 'green' US dollars, special

permission for which we were able to obtain through the Paymaster.

'Green' was illegal for US personnel to hold in the WestPac area at that

time; only MPCs were legal. Most of us carried waterproofed matches and

some silver coins as well. The logic for the silver coins was that you

could carry a bunch and negotiate a price, whereas with only one gold

bar, whatever you were negotiating for was going to cost one gold bar.

If you needed two whatevers, you were in trouble. In that sense, the

gold bar was also a one-time-use item.

We were issued the blood chits before each flight Each chit bore a

serial number, an American flag and a message in a number of Oriental

languages, "I am an American airman. return me to my people and you

will be rewarded." In order to avoid the time-consuming chore of

checking out serialized chits, gold bars and .38s before each flight,

each crewman was permanently issued a chit, gold bar, .38 and other

survival and E&E gear. However, except when actually on a flight, each

crewman's survival and E&E gear was kept in the custody of the Division

Intelligence Officer.

Knowing the importance of opium in the peasant economy of the Far

East, we asked if it could be provided as an E&E item. We had no great

hope of an affirmative answer, and we didn't get one. Given the

attitudes of those times, our request was neither stupid nor

unrealistic, but I can appreciate the possible political blow-back had a

crew been captured with opium in their pockets. Our concern, however,

was not possible political storms; it was in acquiring anything that

would enhance our chances of survival, which we had been told were not

particularly good.

It is typical of the times that we had to scrounge for and compile

our survival and E&E equipment. And, having done that, we found that we

had no way to carry the stuff. We finally had our parachute rigger run

up 75 light canvas bags about 8" X 8" equipped with a snap so that they

could be hooked onto the parachute harness where the right leg strap

snapped on. The bags solved the problem of keeping everything under

custody – we just collected the bags after each flight and held them

until the owner was briefed for another flight.

When loading out for a flight the officers wore khaki-colored cotton

flight suits, sometimes over their uniforms, usually wash khakis, but in

the winter, greens if heading for cold weather. The enlisted men wore

dungarees. I don't remember if they wore flight suits or not, but I seem

to remember that they didn't. In really cold weather, we all wore

leather flight jackets. Regardless of the weather, we each donned a .38

revolver in a shoulder holster with six tracer rounds in the cylinder

and 12 more rounds of ball and tracer on the strap, followed by a life

jacket and a parachute harness but no chutes. The chutes were chest

packs and kept stowed in the aircraft by the exits and work stations.

The gunners had to shed much of their equipment in order to get into the

turrets, but redressed when they got out. We were in the Philippines,

you know, and during the hot and rainy seasons, we were pretty sweaty

and soggy getting into the plane. Took a couple hours at altitude to

dry out, and while we never smelled very good, at least we all smelled

alike.

It is interesting to note that of 19 operational P4Ms, seven were

lost in action or in operational accidents. VQ-1 had one shot down and

another stricken because of damage received from hostile aircraft. One

crashed on a test flight and VQ-2 managed to crash four of them. VQ-2

also lost the PB4Y-2 to the Russians in 1950 and a WV-2 to weather in

the mid-60s.

A P2V from VP-22 was doing some passive ECM work off Swatow, and

having intercepted signals from a radar station on Kinmen Island, moved

in closer to try to obtain photography of the antenna. There was always

some confusion in determining where those lines actually ran. AA guns

on the island shot down the P2V. The Coast Guardsmen at Sangley Point,

who had SAR responsibility for the area, launched a SAR PBM. The pilot,

a mustang LCDR named Vukic, who had made beaucoup open sea landings,

elected to land alongside the men in the water to pick them up. The

landing was successful and I believe that 9 of the P2V crew of 10 were

picked up, some injured. On take-off, Vukic fired the JATO bottles

(actually, small solid fuel rockets), which malfunctioned on one side,

driving the aircraft into a pinwheel crash. About 10 men of the

combined crews made it into the water, including Vukic, who was in a

raft with two enlisted men. The tide and current were setting the raft

toward the island, and when the men tried to paddle away, they drew

small arms fire from the beach. The two enlisted men stopped paddling

and drifted in to the beach where they were taken prisoner. Vukic left

the raft and started swimming. As he later said, "My wife was due in to

Sangley Point on the next dependent transport, and I was damned well

going to be there to meet her." Vukic's determination is best

appreciated when one notes than Kinmen is some 600 sea miles from

Sangley Point!

In the meantime, a destroyer from the Formosa Straits patrol had

been ordered to the scene and as it maneuvered to pick up survivors,

began to take fire. The destroyer radioed (in plain language) Commander,

Formosa Straits Patrol for permission to return fire, which was granted,

also in plain language. Whereupon the Chinese ceased fire. Three men,

including LCDR Vukic, were picked up from the sea. I seem to remember

that Vukic received a DFC, and I know I read several low grade

intelligence reports about US sailors being marched through the streets

of Swatow. To the best of my knowledge, nothing has ever been heard of

those men, nor has the US Government ever made any inquiries about them.

I believe the P2V was in violation of CinCPacFlt's standing orders

to all patrol aircraft to remain 20 miles offshore. This incident would

have been embarrassing to the US because the P2V violated standing

instructions about flights close to Chinese airspace, which may account

for the fact that little or no effort has been made to ascertain what

happened to the men who were taken prisoner by the Chinese. The legends

surrounding the incident also record that the skipper of the VP squadron

involved was looking for a way to distinguish himself and his squadron

and decided that conducting passive ECM was the way to do it. Passive

ECM (SigInt) at that time was not encouraged in the Fleet VP squadrons.

While VP aircraft carried some intercept gear, little training was

provided.

I joined the Navy in 1944 at 16, was commissioned in '46, served

on amphibs, then got my wings in '51. Following the Sangley tour, I

taught primary flight and pre-flight, attended the Intelligence Post

Graduate School, qualified as an interpreter/translator in Arabic, and

later in German. I served in Baghdad, Washington and Munich as an

Intelligence Specialist and retired in '68. Went to work for Chase

Manhattan in International, became assistant to the President in '72 and

to the Chairman in 1981, retiring in 1991. I wrote articles starting

back in the late '50s on naval matters, dog training and intelligence.

ECM Aircraft losses

Date Unit Type Location Due To Pers

4/50 VP-26Det PB4Y-2 Latvia/Baltic Shootdown 1–2D,

8–9Cap

8/51 NATC P4M-1Q? Chesapeake Crash 4 D

11/51 VP-6 P2V Sea of Japan Migs 10 D (?)

51/52 NAF PL P4M-1Q ?? Attacked 1 D ?W

2/52 VQ-2 P4M-1Q E. Med. Ditched

1/53 VP-22 P2V Kinmen Is. Flak 5 D, 2 Cap

1/53 SP SAR PBM Kinmen Is. Crash 3 D, 1 Cap?

9/54 VP-19 P2V-5 Sea of Japan MiGs/Ditch 1 D

6/55 VP-9 P2V-5 Bering Sea MiGs/Crash 7 W

8/56 VQ-1 P4M-1Q Chushan Is. MiGs 14 D,2 Cap?

11/57–7/58VQ-2 P4M-1Q ? Strike

1/58 VQ-2 P4M-1Q Ocean View, VA Crash 4D, 2 I

1/58 VQ-2 P4M-1Q? Incirlik Crash??

10/58 VQ-2 A3D-1Q Incirlik Crash 4 D

5/59 VQ-1 A3D-1Q Iwakuni Crash 3 D

6/59 VQ-1 P4M-1Q Sea of Japan MiG/striken 1 W

10/59 VQ-1 P2V-5F Shemya Wind/Strike None

11/59 VQ-1 A3D-2Q Near Wake Crash 4 D

1/61 VQ-1 A3D-2Q Atsugi Crash 4 D

5/62 VQ-2 WV-2Q Fuerstenf'bruekCrash 26 D

?/66 VQ-2 EA-3B S. China Sea Bailout 4 D

11/66 VQ-2 EA-3B CVA-62/Med Crash 6 DMid68 3/68 VQ-2

EA-3B Ramstein Bailout 1 I

6/68 VQ-2 EA-3B Rota Crash 4 D 2 I

Mid68 VQ-2 EA-3B Danang VC Rocket None

Mid68 VQ-1 EA-3B Danang VC Damage None

Mid68 VQ-1 EC-121M Danang VC Damage None

4/69 VQ-1 EC-121M SE of Chingjin MiGs 30 D

2/70 VQ-2 EA-3B CVA-42/Med Crash 4 D3/70 3/70

VQ-1 EC-121M Danang Crash 23 D

?/73 VQ-1 EA-3B Guam/PI NavError Crash None

3/74 VQ-2 EA-3B CVA-66/Med Crash None

7/74 VQ-2 TA-3B Naples Crash 8 D

6/75 VQ-2 EA-3B Rota Damage None

8/80 VQ-2 ? ? Ground Acc 1 D

4/82 VQ-1 EA-3B Indian Ocean Crash 5 D

1/85 VQ-1 VA-3B Near Guam Crash 9 D

1/87 VQ-2 EA-3B CVN-68/Med Crash 7 D

"Ferreting Mercators," Robert F. Door and Richard R. Burgess, Air

International, October 1993, p. 220.

Ibid., p 217.