

Allan Christie “Ace” Edmands Sr.

Intrepid, rebellious, playful, outdoor-loving, quite tall for a man of that time (6 feet 2.5 inches) and slightly uncoordinated. During his early years, Allan lived with his parents and older sister, Jean, in this stone cabin his father built in North Reading, Massachusetts. Later they moved to Andover, a few miles to the west, where his mother was from.



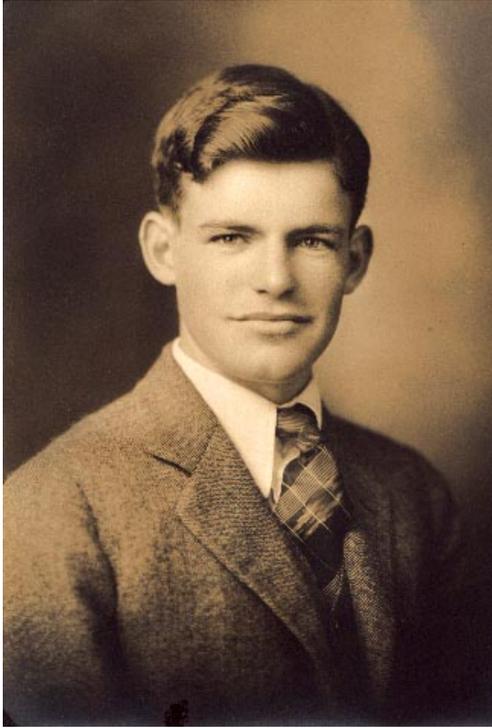
Here is a picture of little Allan with his sister before he became very tall.

According to Jean, Allan was very business-minded and enterprising. Even as a child, he took pawn pledges from his schoolmates.

Beginning when Allan was ten years old, his father deathly ill with kidney problems, he and his younger brother, John, lived for a couple of years with their Uncle Ellis and Aunt Annie in remote, rural Vermont. Probably from this experience, Allan developed a great love of the outdoors, especially long mountain hikes.

Allan attended Punchard High School in Andover, somehow earning the nickname “Dinkie” among his classmates. During the summer of 1928, between his junior and senior years, Allan received basic infantry training at Fort McKinley in Maine. Meanwhile, his father was very ill with his two-decade-long kidney ailment, a form of nephritis then termed Bright’s disease (and curable today). Here is a family picture with Allan in the upper left. In the autumn of Allan’s senior year, his father finally died.





Allan did not participate much in school activities at Punchard, but he was in the glee club and the senior class play. Here is his senior class picture.

Allan graduated from Punchard in 1929 and, through his late father's connections, obtained a job with the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad.

Unfortunately, the railroad went bankrupt with the onset of the Great Depression, and on March 1, 1930, Allan, a newly laid-off kid not quite nineteen years old, tried to enlist into the army. The army recruitment office in Lawrence, Massachusetts, was closed, however, so he walked across the street to the navy office, which was open, and enlisted.

(His mother at first refused to sign the permission slip.) Here is a picture of Allan as a seaman.



During his first year as a seaman, he became a candidate for officer's training at the U.S. Naval Academy Prep School in Hampton Roads, Virginia. President Herbert Hoover authorized Naval Academy appointments to all the students who graduated from the training. So, in June 1931, Allan became a midshipman at Annapolis.

As a middie, he was able to morph his high school nickname into "Deak" or "Deacon." He participated in winter afternoon football and lacrosse. He also became adept at billiards. He loved sailing and was fascinated with astronomy.

At the end of his junior year at the academy, he and another middie consented to take part in a blind double date, arranged by a graduating upperclassman, Fred Hawes, and Fred's girlfriend, Jane ("Janie") Doyle. As it turned out, Allan didn't seem to have much in common with his date and spent the entire time talking to the other middie's date, Fred's younger sister, Mary Anna Hawes, just barely seventeen years old. (Mary was visiting Annapolis all the way from her home in Centralia, Washington, with her mother and her brother Tom; they were

attending Fred's graduation ceremonies.) During the evening, there was a partner switching among the blind double-daters. Allan and Mary had a wonderful time, but much too quickly the evening was over – and soon thereafter, Mary was on her way back west.

Allan couldn't get Mary out of his mind, however, and during his senior year he sent her a Christmas card, inaugurating an ever-more-romantic correspondence. Allan graduated from the academy in June 1935, the same month Mary graduated from Centralia High School.



Somehow, when Allan found himself stationed at the Bremerton, Washington, naval base, Mary managed to enroll in a business school a ferry ride across Puget Sound in Seattle. Numerous ferry rides later, in June 1937, after Allan finished a cruise on the destroyer USS *Boggs* to Alaska and Hawaii, the two were married in San Diego, California. (They might have been married sooner were it not for a navy requirement that Annapolis graduates wait two years before getting hitched.)

They set up a home in San Diego, and their first child, Christine, was born there eleven months later.

Allan was noted for his mischievous sense of humor. For example, his sister-in-law (Mary's sister, Jane Hawes Foster) remembered an extended family dinner where she handed her plate to Allan and asked him for seconds on the mashed potatoes and gravy. "How much would you like?" asked Allan. "Just a little bit, please," was the response. Allan very delicately put about an eighth of a teaspoon of mashed potatoes topped with a tiny drop of gravy on her plate and handed it back.

Another sister-in-law (Janie Doyle Hawes) remembered the following anecdotes: They would all be sitting around, reading or chatting quietly, and suddenly out of the blue, Allan would roar out of the open window: "I don't care *WHAT* the neighbors think!" Or they would all be sitting around, bored, wondering what to do, and suddenly Allan would brighten: "I know what let's do!" Eager, they'd all look at him to share his inspiration. "Let's all go brush our teeth!"

One of Allan's favorite snack foods was dried prunes. Here is a picture of him eating prunes by the fountain at Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, just after his wedding, and in one of his last letters to his mother in 1945 he discussed getting a package of prunes on an excursion into the California Redwoods.



Allan also enjoyed smoking a pipe.



After his promotion to lieutenant junior grade and short spells of duty on the destroyer USS *Chandler*, including some time in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1940 Allan was assigned flight training at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. He graduated the following year, received his "wings," was stationed at the Naval Air Station in San Pedro, California, and was assigned duty on the cruiser USS *Astoria* (Cruiser Scouter Squadron 6 in the Twelfth Naval District).

As a flyer, Allan adopted the nickname "Ace," an acronym of his initials.

(The nickname had been used before, but now it became "official.")



In the summer of 1941, Ace was stationed at Pearl Harbor, and Mary and Christine were moved to Honolulu to join him. As Ace was away on duty so much, Mary was happy to have her friend and sister-in-law Janie Doyle Hawes move in. Here is a picture of Mary, Janie, and Christine, each with leis, walking on the sidewalk in Honolulu.

On December 7 of that year, while Ace was out at sea on the *Astoria*, Japanese bombers attacked. Mary, now three months pregnant with their second child, and Christine, just three and a half years old, were able to experience the “Day of Infamy” firsthand. In later years, Mary would often say that December 7 was the first day she felt her expected baby kick. She also jokingly referred to the growing baby inside her (who, she was sure, was male) as her “Rising Son,” a pun on the Japanese Rising Sun naval battle flag.

According to a commemorative issue of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*,¹ Christmas 1941 was not a time to rejoice. “Martial law was in effect, Army and Navy dependents were evacuated and some local Japanese were incarcerated. . . .”

The Christmas lights strung along Nuuanu Avenue, one of the main shopping districts, [had] all been torn down or turned off. The new bikes, wagons and dolls that would have been Christmas presents were still sitting on docks in San Francisco, shoved aside as the weapons and supplies of war were shipped to Honolulu. In San Francisco, the first shipload of evacuees from Hawaii landed on Christmas Day. Some of the women were new widows, others didn’t know what happened to their husbands. Each morning on the ship, they rolled bandages and dressings for the gravely wounded from Pearl Harbor who were aboard. For most on Oahu, Christmas was a military-ordered work day. It was a time of deep worry and fear. No one wanted to be the target of another Japanese attack. . . . First at Nuuanu Cemetery and then at other sites, the military buried more than 2,500 young men killed in [the attack]. Local gardens gave up their red poinsettias and hibiscus for small bouquets on each grave. Even as they grieved, civilians feared another invasion by Japan; indeed, enemy submarines were sporadically shelling island ports and harbors. Within a month of the attack, 20,000 Army and Navy dependents and 10,000 island women and children left Hawaii, fearing for their safety. The Matson freighter *Lahaina* was set ablaze by a submarine on Dec. 11 and its lifeboat did not reach Maui until Dec. 21. Another Matson freighter, the *Manini*, had been sunk by a torpedo. By Christmas, all islanders over age 6 were being fingerprinted. As early as 1:30 p.m. Dec. 7—a mere 5½ hours after the attack—printing presses had begun churning out military-issued civilian ID cards. It was a contingency the U.S. military had planned but feared: The cards were to be used to identify dead in case of another attack.

Americans in Hawaii expected the Japanese to land an occupying force on the islands any day. The word *HAWAII* in brown ink was printed on all the paper currency that banks on the islands issued; occupiers would not be able to spend American money.

Ace, newly promoted to lieutenant, was now fully a warrior and deeply involved in the desperate preparations for the American military response to the attack. He had scant leave to be with his anxious family. His wife, daughter, and unborn

¹ Richard Borreca in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 13 September 1999.

baby (due to arrive on Ace's thirty-first birthday) were among the thousands of civilians waiting anxiously for shipment back to the mainland.

Finally, in April 1942 – while Ace was sailing toward Australia – his family was on a ship to San Francisco. From there they went to Mary's parents' home, the chicken ranch on Waunch's Prairie, just north of Centralia, Washington.

Meanwhile, Ace was participating in the Battle of the Coral Sea to protect the Australian shipping lanes. Just a few weeks later, Ace was flying missions from the *Astoria* in the Battle of Midway.

His new son, Allan, nicknamed "Butch" rather than "Junior," was born in Centralia a couple of days after the successful end of this battle (and a day before Ace's birthday).

Ace's younger brother, John, was also at Midway, as a fresh Annapolis graduate aboard the USS *Hughes*. He later told the story of how Ace had signaled to him from his plane. Captain Donald Ramsey, skipper of the *Hughes*, got excited and ordered John to decode the message. The skipper was upset when he learned the text of the message: "Regards to Ensign Edmands."

Ace continued missions from the *Astoria* during the Battle of Guadalcanal that summer until it was sunk off Savo Island. Here is a personal report of the battle.

[*Note:* What follows is a transcription of the handwritten draft report that Ace made of the battle in August 1942. He put a cover page on the report, mistakenly dating it "9 Aug, 1941," a year earlier. The actual draft report has the correct date in the header, but the text has "1941" again. Punctuation and spelling are unaltered from the original. Remember, this was a draft.]

AC Edmands
Tuesday 11, August, 1942

Battle of the Solomons

7 August 1941

Entered channel between Guadalcanal Island and Savo Island about 0400. At 0600 they catapulted the first two planes. Edmands and Lucas in one plane (spotting) and Tunnell and Capt Campbell USMC in other). Ship began shelling and strafing KuKum on Guadalcanal and I tried to spot while dropping bomb on small boat. Missed boat but went ahead and spotted climbing up into the base of the clouds (about 5500'). Saw ship aflame which turned out to be a Jap schooner. Carrier planes bombed and strafed gun emplacements-- no opposition. Reported to ship that there was no apparent opposition and went ahead and directed fire at targets. Saw what I thot were troops moving across a field and directed ship to fire at them. The Ship fired 3 salvos of rapid fire before I saw that the target was cattle. Ship stopped when I told them that were not troops. Saw a grove near Kukum that was filled with trucks, tents,

barracks, supplies, etc. I told them the location of the stores by Msquare coordinates and told the ship to fire and they would certainly hit something. They shot and hit something and I gradually coached them into some trucks which they destroyed 2 of. All in all the shooting could have been better. We tried to wipe out Lunga and Tenara but they didn't do so good any where. Finally the troops started moving in and from 0920 till 0925 the ships fired at the beach and tore it up. At 0930 the first wave of troops hit the beach and scattered for the trees. Heard Willie Isham break in and told him the coast was clear. They launched another spotter plane and another liaison plane and I stayed up for awhile longer and looked through the woods and ravines pretty carefully but did not see any Japs. Landed about 1140 and was recovered B method. Went below to eat and about 1324 we had an air raid with some horizontal bombers. They didn't hit anything with their bombs but our fighters knocked down one and set one afire. About 1500 some dive bombers with wheels down attacked the Mugford and knocked out the after deck house gun (#3) Our own fighters knocked out a couple of them. I volunteered to go searching for a fighter pilot that went down off the Russell Islands. Foreman and I went. It was about 1/2 hr before sunset when we shoved off and I didn't have the recognition signals I was in such a hurry. Of course the destroyers at the entrance challenged us and altho we did not reply they didn't fire at us. Foreman could not get the radio to work well and the ship kept calling us. Reported on station to the ship (about sunset) but apparently they did not hear us. Searched for 15 minutes and then headed back to the ship. It was getting dark and I headed in the general direction of Savo Island. At last I found Savo Island and headed to pass it to the north. Passed about a mile and a half to the north of Savo and [illegible] communication with the ship. Put my running lights on and told others I was coming in because about 3 ships challenged me on the way in. Ship blinked a light in my direction and then turned on the bridge 12" search light and shined it right at me. Landed nearly on the stern before I realized that the light was not shining from the boat deck. Landed pretty roughly but got aboard, O.K. [The following sentence inserted later.] Captain Grunman told me I exhibited rare courage. The next day (8th August) I made up an ideal schedule for finding this fellow but the Aussies decided they would look for him. We flew inner air patrol. At 1200 [the following word erased but still legible] about 27 Jap 2 engine bombers rounded the south eastern tip of Florida Island at about 50 feet altitude. All our force was maneuvering together and the easternmost forces opened up on them. Planes hit the water in flames all around. Several made crash landings in the water only one or two got away. The transport Elliott was hit on the superstructure deck and the destroyer Jarvis got a hit below the waterline forward and had to be beached. Our own planes were [the following two words inserted as a correction to the crossed-out words "all in the water over at"] sent to beach had to land in the water to save gas. The Jap planes were almost all destroyed. Many of the planes were floating for some time and we could see men clinging to the wreckage. A destroyer went to pick some of the men but we heard later they took their own lives. Later we recovered all our planes two of them had expended depth charges when the attack hit. Ens. Bob Schiller tried dropping a bomb on one of the low flying bombers but the bomb overshot chiefly because they were flying in opposite directions.

Saw a message that evening saying 3 CAs 3 DDs and 2 AVs were on the way at 15 knots (Jap) we plotted their position and figured they would get there about 0612 in the morning of the 9th of August. Walked on the foc'sle with Capt Campbell and told him that I wondered how I would react at the sight of blood and gore. -- I found out before the night was over. I turned in on the foc'sle up by no1 turret about 2000 that evening. Just wrapped myself up in a blanket. At 1115 someone woke me up and told me to relieve the watch. I figured there wasn't much sense in arguing with him so I went below to write up the flight schedule for the next day. Stopped in Wakefield's

room and he was reading his bible. I wrote all the schedule in there and then went to my own room and turned in about 2 o'clock general quarters sounded and I dressed hurriedly. While general quarters were still sounding I heard a salvo go off. Hurried a little faster and put flight gear on and started up for the bridge. Saw a searchlight illuminating at us from about 2 pts abaft the port beam and saw some salvos landing in the water about 1000 yards over on our starboard bow. The next salvo was closer about 400 yds over and the next hit us in the hangar and in the WR country. I told everyone on the signal bridge to get down and noted the boats on the boat deck were all ablaze. The next salvo hit us hard and I think turret one was hit at this time. Shrapnel was flying all around and Ens. Schiller and I moved the people to the stbd side of the signal bridge. The next salvo hit on nav bridge and communication deck and a few people including myself were hit. I just got a scratch on my back. McKnight was hit in the groin, Mullen was hit in the forehead and several others had small wounds. We bandaged the people up as best we could and helped the wounded down from the nav bridge. We carried a few people down to the comm deck but the next to bottom step in the ladder was out. It was smoking pretty badly down there too we couldn't get the people through to the foc'sle at that time. Firing seemed to have ceased both by ourselves and by the enemy. I remember one of our other cruisers burning pretty badly. Sent the men forward to the foc'sle and helped hand wounded from the comm deck to the foc'sle deck. Helped bandage the wounded, give them smokes. One fellow I was going to give some morphine to I couldn't because what I thought was iodine turned out to be iodine. I found out at this time what I had always wondered. I was not afraid of blood and gore. I worked without qualms helping the wounded there was plenty too people with arms and legs blown off, one fellow had the side of his face torn off and he had difficulty breathing. There was no panic of any sort and no displaying of cowardice. Some people seemed to be awestruck and didn't know what to do among them one of my aviators. Went below between the two turrets to find some buckets, water, flashlights etc which might be needed topside. Went down to the second deck to look around and found some water in several of the faucets, some orange juice and ice water in the W.O. ice box, some waste baskets and flashlights in some of the rooms. Dragged a table out of the exec's room for floating purposes. The hole in the deck by No 2 turret kept being stepped through by people so we put a line over it and had a man stand by with a light.

[Note: The following was written with a thinner pen.]

Tuesday August 18 '42

Here we are on the President Jackson on our way to Noumea. We have stayed at Espirato Santo Island for 4 days unloading marines and stores and we had previously left Tulagi area on Monday August 10th. On the fateful day of the 9th we abandoned ship into the Bagley about 0400 in the morning and at daylight we went back and found people on the stern and removed some and put back others in order to try to get the ship underway. I stayed on the Bagley and about 7 of the wounded passed away on her. We could see a U.S. destroyer (Selfridge) pounding away at a Jap cruiser until the latter sunk. This cruiser had apparently been badly damaged and was about 5 miles north of where the Astoria was.

Later in the day we transferred all hands on the Bagley to the President Jackson and found that the Buchanan was transferring the rest of our personnel for the Astoria which sunk at 1229. (The Quincy sunk at 0217 and the Vincennes at 0218)

Sunday the 9th we saw no planes of any sort in the area except perhaps an SOC from the Chi. There was fighting going on Tanambogo and Florida Islands, however.

[*Note:* What follows is a story appearing several weeks later, on October 13, 1942 (when news of the battle became public, and when Ace would be allowed to mention it), in one of the newspapers from his hometown area, the *Tribune* from Lawrence, Massachusetts.]

Edmands Wounded

Lieut. Allan C. Edmands. U.S.N., in a letter to his mother, Mrs. Mary C. Edmands, 34 Chestnut street, just received, told a little of his part in the battle in the Solomon Islands last August when the ship he was on, the Cruiser Astoria, was bombarded and sunk with two others. Parts of the letter follow:

“Have not had anything in the way of flying since August 7 when I spotted for our ship’s bombardment of Guadalcanal.

“About half an hour before sunset I volunteered to go searching for a fighter pilot who was shot down and floating around 75 miles to the northwest, so took off but couldn’t find him. It was too dark when I got back and our own destroyers were challenging me and I had taken off without the reply so I prayed they wouldn’t fire on me. Turned my running lights on so the ship could see who I was. Landed O. K., side of the ship and was picked up. The ship had warned the other ships that I was out there. Captain said I showed rare courage but I was plenty scared. The night of the eighth was quite active. We went to G. Q. about 1:45 and the guns started shooting immediately. When I got up on the bridge I saw a searchlight shining at us and planes landing very near. Soon the shells started hitting the ship and really shook it. Helped bandage up a few persons and carry them to a safer place. Soon the firing ceased on both sides and we could take care of the wounded. I often wondered how I would react in battle and was amazed that I wasn’t more scared, but things happen so fast there isn’t time. Got a small piece of shell fragment in my shoulder, but couldn’t scarcely feel it, as it just burned a little and I had it taken out on the destroyer.

“The captain acted magnificently throughout and evacuated the wounded to a destroyer. He practically had to be dragged away from the ship as she rolled over and sank and although badly wounded himself, he insisted on being picked up last by the destroyer standing by.”

Lieutenant Edmands has been visiting his wife and family in Centralia, Washington. They are now on their way to San Diego, California, where he will report for duty November 4. His brother-in-law, Lieutenant F. W. Hawes Jr., has received the Navy Cross for gallantry in action in the Coral Sea battle and is now in command of a sub-chaser.

After this action, Ace was ordered to Fleet Air Commander West Coast in San Diego and soon after to Alameda Escort Scouting Squadron 23 (in 1943 the name was changed to Composite Squadron 19), which was assigned to the carrier USS *Croatan*, sailing out of San Diego, cruising through the Panama Canal to Norfolk, Virginia, and then hunting German U-boats in the Atlantic.

Before reporting for this new assignment, however, Ace went up to Centralia on leave to retrieve his family and to move them down to San Diego. (The mashed-potato business probably occurred during a family dinner on the chicken ranch.)

In 1943 Ace was promoted to lieutenant commander and became skipper of Composite Squadron 60. He was ordered to the Eleventh Naval District, San Diego, and saw combat in the Battle of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, flying off the converted aircraft carrier USS *Suwanee*. The following is Ace's personal report of a "hunter-killer operation.

Searching for "Koran"

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
AIR FORCE
COMPOSITE SQUADRON SIXTY

VC-60/A4-3(5)

otb

November 25, 1943.

From: Lieut. Comdr., A.C. EDMANDS, Pilot of plane O-24.
To: Air Officer, USS SUWANEE.

Subject: Hunter Killer Operations - 25 November 1943.

1. O-24, O-22 and O-29 were launched for hunter killer operations at 1500 November 25, 1943 (Z = +12) to report to destroyer "Koran" which was reported to be bearing 216° T distance 24 miles from "Helen".
2. Although the straight distance to the reported position of "Koran" was somewhat less than 70 miles, it required a total of about 2 hours to finally locate him.
3. To be sure of the best information regarding the position of "Koran" I called "Koran" while approaching "Helen" and asked him for his present position. He replied "Bearing 196° T distance 24 miles from "Helen"". Shortly thereafter (less than 15 minutes) he reported "Bearing 196° T distance 40 miles from "Helen"".
4. Both of these positions were somewhat close to Mariana Atoll and I covered the area thoroughly but no "Koran" was to be found.
5. At 1640 while searching this area I started to climb hoping "Koran" would pick us up on the radar. He apparently picked us up and vectored us to him. (He was 36 miles bearing 265° T from us at this time).
6. At 1702 we found "Koran" (He was bearing 240° T, distance 48 miles from "Helen". He was at least 34 miles from either of his reported positions).
7. This delay in finding "Koran" diminished somewhat our effectiveness for search since sunset was at 1815 and I thought it wise to start heading for our ship at 1715 to land aboard by sunset.

8. At 1715 while watching the end of an oil slick 16 miles bearing 260° T from "Koran" hoping to end some poor Jap Sub's misery, I called "Koran" and explained about the good judgement of landing aboard before dark.
9. "Koran" liked our company however, and requested we remain in the vicinity for a half an hour or so longer. I replied "Wilco" but decided "Lemon Base" should know the facts. Consequently "Lemon Base" was thus informed.
10. "Lemon Base" requested that we start back right away and "Orange Base" also made it known that that was the best thing to do.
11. We rendezvoused over "Koran", dropped a smoke light to show "Koran" the eastern edge of the oil slick and headed for home about 1740. "Koran" thanked us for our assistance.
12. No difficulty was experienced in finding home base because of the able assistance rendered by the ship's air and radar plot personnel.
13. Much valuable experience was gained in night carrier landings after locating the ship.
14. In conclusion it seems rather odd that a destroyer could be so far out of its reported position. The planes that we relieved experienced difficulty in finding "Helen" with the vectors that were received from "Koran". The Atoll of Tarawa is not small and the visibility was good, yet with the vector that was given them they would have missed Tarawa by 30 miles.
15. Perhaps I would have been wiser to climb above the 1500 feet we were flying in searching for "Koran". But it is easier to see ships at a distance from a lower altitude and I had reason to believe that we could be picked up by radar from at least 20 miles at 1500 feet.

A.C.Edmands [signed]

[The following is handwritten from a superior officer]

My only comment is-- It would have been best to tell "Koran" you had to leave and then come on home so you could be on board by sunset. Remember this in the future and always get back before sunset unless given direct orders otherwise. WC Jonson Jr [signed]



Ace's family was living in Coronado and San Diego, California, while he was off to sea, incommunicado for months at a time. Whenever he was home, however, a lot of pictures were taken. Here are Ace and Mary in Coronado in May.

On June 25, 1944, Ace was ordered to Fleet Air, West Coast, as skipper of Torpedo Squadron 5 (VT5, the Torpcats), stationed at Alameda and Santa Rosa Naval Air Stations and practicing maneuvers at Monterey (torpedo practice), Arcata (rocket practice), and Modesto (night flying). VT5 was part of Air Group 5 (which also consisted of the VB5 dive bomber squadron and the VF5 fighter squadron).



Here is a picture of the VT5 pilots, all of them officers:



Top row (l to r): Wheeler, Smith, Goudie, McInnes, Travis, Stroehrer, Self, McAllister, Tucker, Lacy, Druliner, Watson, Richardson

Bottom row (l to r): Young, Benson, Evans, Gibson, Leonard, Carr [executive officer], Edmands [skipper], Watkins, Laws, Viewig, Page, Mustard

Buck Milligan was absent from this picture.

Meanwhile, Ace's third child, daughter Janna, was born at the U.S. Navy hospital in La Jolla, California, just north of San Diego. Ace was able to join his family in San Diego, at the home they had purchased, for a short time during the autumn.

Here is a picture of Ace with his son, two-year-old Butch, on the trike he got for an early Christmas present. On the last day of November, Mary and Butch traveled to Santa Rosa and stayed with Ace for seven weeks (Christine and baby Janna were being looked after by sister-in-law Janie).



The demands of Ace's work, leading his squadron flying their new TBM Avenger torpedo planes in monotonous anti-submarine practice exercises and ensuring that they would be able to land safely on carriers at night, kept him very busy, though. Mary and Butch had to part from him in San Francisco on January 17, 1945, the last they saw of him.



Ace, according to a letter he sent his mother, "went aboard a carrier with the boys to qualify. . . am back in [Santa Rosa] now for a week or so. Getting ready to go out." Taking a day off at the end of the month, Ace relieved stress by walking several miles and hitchhiking to Guerneville and Rio Nido in the Redwoods.

On February 7, 1945, the Air Group 5 squadrons embarked from Alameda, California, on the Essex-class carrier USS *Franklin* (CV13), part of the Task Force 58 armada assaulting the Japanese home islands – all in preparation for the Battle of Okinawa and then the "final push" on Japan. The *Franklin*, under the command of Captain Leslie E. Gehres, was the flagship for the task force's subgroup, Task Group 58.2, and the group's commanding officer, Rear Admiral Ralph E. Davison, was on board.

En route, Ace's squadron was stationed for a week at Kaneohe Marine Air Station in Oahu, and there they continued night carrier landing practice. Captain Gehres had been displeased with the poor performance of the air group's

takeoffs and landings, and he continued to unleash his notoriously bad temper until the plane crews improved.

Here is a picture of Ace on the beach at Kaneohe, taken during a break from the intense practice.

During that week, on February 14, Ace was able to send another letter to his mother, in which he told her he would like to learn to play a musical instrument, such as a clarinet. His mother replied on February 28, the day she received his letter, that a co-worker of hers at the Andover Press would sell him a clarinet.



“I never knew you wanted to learn any musical instrument,” she wrote, “but couldn’t have bought you one anyway I guess when you were growing up. We sure had little enough to live on but you got by and I only wish now that Dad was here to see how well you are doing. . . . I wish Mary and the children were nearer so I could help them out now and then. Also wish I could have a snapshot of the baby. Hope you keep safe and well. Lots of love, Mother.” This letter was mailed on March 1 but was returned, unopened and undelivered, the first week of June.

The armada proceeded westward from Hawaii, across the International Date Line and beyond communication with loved ones. They continued to the Ulithi Atoll staging area in the western Pacific and then almost due northward to a position less than sixty miles east of the Japanese home islands (see the map on page 15).²

On March 18 Ace’s torpedo squadron made two successful raids against targets on the island of Kyushu, including the harbor at Kagoshima. Each of the two raids was made by a different half of the squadron, one-half led by Ace, the other by his executive officer (second in command), Lieutenant Charles Carr.

Early on the following morning, Monday, March 19 (it was Sunday the 18th in the U.S.), the pilots met in the ready room to learn the designated targets for the day. Lieutenant Carr’s half of the squadron was scheduled to fly the first raid, scheduled for about seven a.m., and Ace’s half the second, at noontime. When Ace discovered that the target of the morning raid was to be Kobe Harbor, where the remnants of the Japanese fleet, including the giant battleship *Yamato* and the

² Lieutenant Wallace Young (USN Ret.), who had been an ensign in VT5 and Ace’s wingman at the time of the attack on March 19, stated that the official position of the *Franklin* from the ship’s log at the memorial museum in Washington, DC, was 132° magnetic from Ashizuri Point on Shikoku Island at 59.5 miles and at 192° magnetic from Murotozaki Point on Kyushu Island at 72.5 miles—which was exactly 32°04’ N and 133°52.5’ E. The course was 070°, speed 24 knots.



carrier *Amagi*, were reported to be hiding, he bumped Lieutenant Carr to noon. Ace wanted to get first crack at the ships and subs there.

Before leaving the ready room, the pilots heard a prayer and received a blessing from Father Joseph T. O'Callahan.

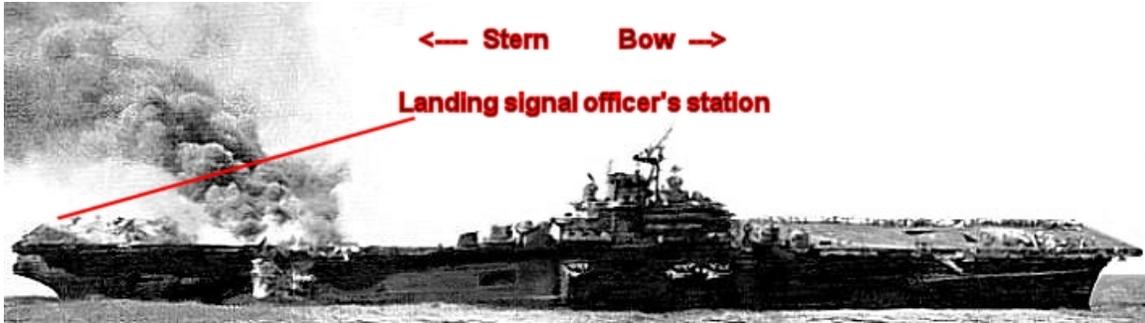
At seven a.m., Ace and his pilots were warming up their fully gassed and armed torpedo planes on the flight deck, Ace's plane in front, their wings having just unfolded, in position for takeoff. The fighters of the combat air patrol, whose mission was to protect the ships from enemy planes, had already launched. Now the thirty-one planes of Air Group 5—F4U Corsairs fighters each with a 1,100-pound ten-foot-long Tiny Tim rocket capable of splitting an enemy ship in half, SB2C Helldiver and TBF and TBM Avenger dive bombers each with four 500-pound bombs, and the Avenger torpedo bombers of VT5 in the rear—began to launch. Lieutenant Robert H. Frank, in charge of plane maintenance, was stationed midship behind the flight deck officer, approving (or sometimes disapproving) each plane's launch by the sound of its revving engine.

At 0707 disaster struck: A single Japanese radial-engine "Judy" bomber dropped two 500-pound armor-piercing bombs³ on the carrier flight deck, piercing it and exploding on the hangar deck below. Blast waves from underneath caused the planes to bounce and careen over the flight deck, their whirling propellers gruesomely killing some of the VT5 crew who were running for cover. Aviation fuel gushed out of the ruptured plane gas tanks. Thick, greasy smoke was everywhere; some of the men fell into the gaping holes caused by the bombs.

Already the bomb blasts had begun to ignite the 17,000 gallons of airplane fuel on the flight deck, the 9,000 gallons on the gassed planes on the hangar deck, and many of the American bombs, Tiny Tim rockets, and other ordnance on the ship. Huge fires raged, and blasts from some 200,000 pounds of explosive material rocked the *Franklin* for hours, causing it to list some 13 degrees to starboard and nearly finishing it off.

Some people reported seeing Ace leave his plane and jettison his bombs, pushing them off the ship before they had a chance to ignite.

³ Lieutenant Wallace Young (USN Ret.), Ace's wing man at the time (0707 local time) of the March 19 attack, has an alternate theory of the attack, disputing the official version. Young, considered a crackpot by other *Franklin* survivors, claims that there was only one 1000-lb. bomb, for example. (See "Wally Young's Story" on page 97.)



Amazingly, about forty minutes after the ship had first been hit, Ace, not wounded, made it to the landing signal officer's station at the port stern of the flight deck, and several of his squadron got there as well. Forward from there was an inferno of thick smoke, raging fire, and continuing explosions. Lieutenant Frank, after cutting off the engines of some abandoned planes, grabbed some life rafts and worked his way through the smoke back to the stern. He saw three officers there, including Ace, and gave them the rafts; he then went forward again to get more rafts.

A crew member (possibly Ensign Charles McAllister) asked Ace: "Skipper, what shall we do now?" Ace responded that since there was no way to go forward, they would probably have to go over the side.

Just then, as if to oblige, a huge explosion occurred at their position, blowing men off the ship. Ace was never seen alive again. When Lieutenant Frank returned with more life rafts, Ace and the other officers were gone.

Several weeks later, the Navy Department sent Mary a telegram stating that Ace was "missing"; Ace's mother received a similar telegram. (See "The Telegrams" on page 89.)

Lieutenant Carr, Ace's executive officer who now took over the VT5 squadron, wrote to Mary soon after she had received the telegram, informing her that Ace's Naval Academy ring had been "recovered from" his room and that his dog tags were "found" later – no doubt a fib to soften the gruesome facts: Ace had not been able to remove his ring from his finger, and no serviceman is ever without his dog tags, especially in a combat zone, especially when strapped in a plane ready to take off on a bombing mission. (See "Charles Carr to Mary Hawes Edmands" on page 94.)

So what must have happened?

We must presume that the terrific explosion near the port stern killed Ace as it blew him overboard and that his remains were discovered among the many bodies near the ship, floating in their "Mae West" life preservers. The ring and

dog tags must have been retrieved from the remains and served to identify Ace. The remains were then “buried at sea,” as were the bodies and body parts of all of the 835 men killed that day out of the approximately 3,000 men aboard.

Amazingly, the *Franklin* made it back on April 26 to the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York Harbor with a skeleton crew of 704, but bringing home the remains of the hundreds of men was out of the question.

In October, seven months after the attack and nearly two months after Japan’s surrender, the Navy Department sent Mary a second telegram presuming that Ace had been killed in action on March 19 as a result of enemy action (see “The Follow-up Telegram” on page 92); as before, Ace’s mother received a similar telegram. In contrast to what is portrayed in the movies, there was no personal visit by a superior officer.⁴

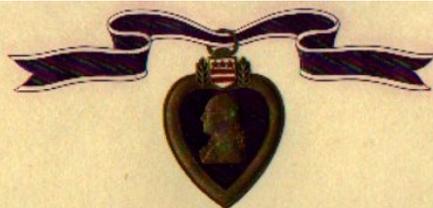
Ace’s death, like every death of a loved one, had a profound, long-lasting effect on all those who knew him. Because Ace never had a regular burial or funeral, a good deal of mystery surrounded his death, a mystery that for some of those left behind prolonged the stages of grief described by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and elaborated by others: Shock, denial, anger and anxiety, bargaining and guilt, letting go, and acceptance.

Ace was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart (see the next page), the American Defense Service Medal – Fleet Clasp, the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal with five bronze stars, the Philippine Liberation Campaign Ribbon, a Combat Action Ribbon, and a World War II Victory Medal. Mary received a letter “in grateful memory” of Ace “signed” by President Roosevelt (who had recently died); see page 20.

Every year for decades, Ace’s mother contributed money for Punchard High School in Andover to issue excellence-in-math awards in Ace’s name to graduating seniors.

In 2001 Ace’s first cousin, Nelson Wilfred “Sonny” Edmands (son of Ace’s Uncle Nelson Edmands) – himself a World War II veteran who had been in the army at Schofield Barracks during the Pearl Harbor attack and had participated in General MacArthur’s assault force on Leyte Gulf in the Philippines – donated an interment flag in honor of Ace at the “Avenue of Flags” wall in Hawaii’s Punchbowl Cemetery (see page 21).

⁴ Ace’s mother, Mary Caroline Findley Edmands (1887–1970), wrote inquiry letters to at least two *Franklin* survivors who had received a great deal of publicity after the ship had made it back to the Brooklyn, NY, navy shipyard. She received replies from Captain Leslie Gehres, skipper of the *Franklin* (see page 96), and from Father Joseph O’Callahan, Lieutenant Commander, who was decorated for his exceptional valor during the disaster.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PURSUANT TO AUTHORITY VESTED IN HIM BY CONGRESS
HAS AWARDED THE

PURPLE HEART

ESTABLISHED BY GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON
AT NEWBURGH, NEW YORK, AUGUST 7, 1782
TO

Lieutenant Commander Allan C. Edmonds, U. S. Navy

FOR MILITARY MERIT AND FOR WOUNDS RECEIVED
IN ACTION

resulting in his death

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS fourteenth DAY OF December 19 45

Samuel Benford

VICE ADMIRAL, UNITED STATES NAVY
CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL

James Forrestal

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY



IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF

Allen Christie Edmands

WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY AT

Kyushu, Japan, Attached to Torpedo Squadron Five, 19 March 1945

HE STANDS IN THE UNBROKEN LINE OF PATRIOTS WHO HAVE DARED TO DIE

THAT FREEDOM MIGHT LIVE, AND GROW, AND INCREASE ITS BLESSINGS.

FREEDOM LIVES, AND THROUGH IT, HE LIVES—

IN A WAY THAT HUMBLER THE UNDERTAKINGS OF MOST MEN

Franklin D. Roosevelt

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Department of Veterans Affairs

Certificate of Appreciation

A Grateful Nation Remembers

LCDR Allan Edmands, U.S. Navy

Presented to

Mr. Nelson W. Edmands

*Your generous contribution to the
Avenue of Flags Program symbolizes the spirit
of Patriotism and love of country that will preserve
America as a great nation and perpetuate
our cherished heritage.*



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. E. Castagnetti".

G. E. CASTAGNETTI
Director

National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific

In 2003 Jim Stuart, a *Franklin* survivor who had been helping Ace's son, Allan Christie Edmands Jr. (Butch), find surviving VT5 crew members to interview, asked his congressman to have a U.S. flag flown over the Capitol in Washington, DC, in honor of Ace. He then sent the three-by-five-foot embroidered flag with the following certificate to Allan Jr.:



Accompanying the certificate and flag was the following note from Jim and his wife: "Dear Allan, It is my honor and pleasure to present your 'Capitol-flown' flag to you and your family in the humble presence of your gallant, heroic, and outstanding father. He did help save our land, our country and generations of Americans. He gave everything so that all the rest of us could go on. I am humble in his continuing spirit. Our very best, Jim and Jan Stuart."

What Happened to Ace on That Day?

– by Allan C. Edmands Jr.

Because my father never had a regular burial or funeral, a good deal of mystery surrounded his death, a mystery that for some of those left behind prolonged the stages of grief described by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and elaborated by others: Shock, denial, anger and anxiety, bargaining and guilt, letting go, and acceptance.

This narrative explains how I discovered what happened to my father on March 19, 1945, as well as the long process of that discovery. It has the following sections:

- **Introduction:** Setting the scene (before March 19, 1945) ... page 24
- **Missing:** Wondering what happened (March through November 1945) ... page 27
- **Fantasy:** Dreaming of his return (December 1945 through the 1950s) ... page 32
- **Heritage:** Following in his footsteps (the 1950s) ... page 37
- **Anecdote and artifact:** Picking up bits and pieces (last half of the twentieth century) ... page 42
- **Squadron:** Meeting the men who served under him (summer and autumn 2002) ... page 47

I hope you find the narrative interesting.

Introduction

I never knew my father, Allan C. “Ace” Edmands Sr. To me as a child with the same name, he was a ghost hero, without whom, in my child mind, the U.S. possibly would not have won World War II. I heard how he had been a navy pilot in the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway and the Battle of Guadalcanal and the Battle of Tarawa in the Gilberts – and how, shortly before the war was over, he had been killed on the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin* right near Japan.

I heard how he had not regarded himself as a hero at all. He always said, I was told, “I’m just doing my job.” What a job! To me he was a hero all the same.

He was a hero, but he was gone. He had been killed in action during the terrible disaster on the *Franklin* on March 19, 1945. Killed in action. Must have been. But we never had a funeral, we never saw a body, we never had a gravestone⁵ – so how could we know for sure?

He must have been killed in action, but there was always some hope that somehow he hadn’t been killed, that somehow he was going to come home to us. We – Ace’s mother (my grandmother), Ace’s wife (my mother), Ace’s children (my sisters and I), Ace’s sister and brother and in-laws (my aunts and uncles) – we didn’t know what actually happened to him on that day.

My younger sister, Janna, was not even six months old when the *Franklin* was hit. I was only two years and nine months old. Maybe it’s understandable that we would have not the slightest memory of our father. But my older sister, Christine, was nearly seven years old, and she doesn’t remember him either.

He was off fighting a war – cruising to various archipelagoes in the South Pacific, training and leading his squadron, dropping torpedoes on Japanese targets, writing reports and dealing with the naval bureaucracy, doing his damndest to win the next stripe on his uniform – and was very rarely home.

My mother did not have fond memories of being a navy wife – moving from San Diego to Pensacola to San Diego to Honolulu to San Diego to Long Beach to San Diego, kowtowing to the wives of superior officers, struggling on a small budget, and raising very young children by herself.

There were many letters and telegrams between my mother and father, of course; one sweet telegram in my album says: “DARLING I LOVE YOU KEEP THE

⁵ Ace’s mother (my grandmother), Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, later installed a gravestone in the Spring Grove Cemetery, Andover, Essex County, Massachusetts.

HOME FIRES BURNING ILL BE SEEING YOU = ALLAN." For a while my Grandmother Edmands came to live with us to help, and for a long time my Aunt Janie, my mother's best friend, lived with us, too. But Ace was seldom home. There was a war going on.



When he *was* home, a lot of photographs were taken. That's fortunate, because without my seeing these photos, I would have had a hard time believing that Ace had ever existed. Here is a picture of Ace with his mother (my grandmother), my sister Christine, and me in front of our home in Long Beach, California, during the Christmas holiday in 1943. Everyone seems so happy in these photos that, as a growing child in the early 1950s, I sometimes entertained the weird notion that World War II was a jolly old time.

But the war was actually quite wretched, and it seemed that it might endure forever. For months at a time, my mother did not hear from my father and had not the slightest assurance that he was safe. Even as the enemy empire dwindled, its borders retracting closer and closer to the Japanese home islands, the prospect of the "final push," a coming invasion of those islands of determined resistance, was very frightening.

Taking advantage of whatever time Ace was available, my mother on November 30, 1944, decided to spend the holidays with him. She traveled over five hundred miles north to Santa Rosa, where he was training his squadron in night landing

and submarine fighting. She took me with her, leaving Christine and Janna home in San Diego with Aunt Janie. We were there with him for seven weeks.

But the interlude of togetherness had to end. On January 17, Ace took us into San Francisco and left us there to travel back home. He had to get back to leading and training his squadron in exercises out of the Santa Rosa Naval Air Station. (They were flying their TBM Avenger planes in torpedo practice at Monterey, rocket practice at Humboldt Bay [Arcata], and night flying exercises at Modesto.) Furthermore, my mother and I had to get back to the rest of the family in San Diego.

I try to imagine them kissing goodbye. That was the last time we saw him.

A few weeks later, Ace sailed with his squadron on the *Franklin* into the Pacific. In mid-February he was in Hawaii, spending a week practicing night carrier landings at Kanoeha Marine Air Station on Oahu. That week was the last time Ace was able to communicate with his family back home. It was during that week, perhaps on Valentine's Day, that he wrote my mother that the "final push" might take an entire year.

Then he and his shipmates cruised westward into the war zone, out of contact with loved ones, toward the Ulithi Atoll staging area and then northward toward Japan.

Missing

Meanwhile, Ace's wife (my mother) and his mother (my Grandmother Edmands) could continue to write to him at the following address:

Lt. Comdr. A. C. Edmands, U.S.N.
VT 5, c/o Fleet P.O.
San Francisco,
California

just as though he were residing in a safe and pleasant American city on the West Coast. They were used to him not answering his mail for a while. It might be weeks before he would even get their letters. Waging war as a job necessitated some stretched-out silences. The folks at home went on with their lives: buying groceries, making meals, changing diapers, doing the laundry, going to the movies.

Actually, there must have been a lot of anxiety in our home in San Diego. The U.S. was getting ready to invade the Japanese home islands in the "final push," and many American lives were expected to be lost.⁶ My mother wrote to Grandmother Edmands that, after returning home from the holidays with Ace, she had a lot of fun celebrating a belated Christmas with the children and Aunt Janie, but I have to imagine the stress was palpable.

My grandmother wrote in her diary on March 9: "Got letter from Mary and she let Janey [*sic*] take Janna with her up to San Francisco. I don't think Mary cares much about the baby, and she isn't well herself." My mother, suffering from pleurisy, was having a nervous breakdown; at that point, I'm sure she didn't want to be a mother to any of us.

On March 23 my grandmother received a letter from her, saying that Ace might be away for an entire year. No doubt this possibility had been inserted in Ace's last letter to her, in February, from Hawaii. The prospect of the bloody invasion of Japan loomed, and it was projected to last at least a year.

On April 12 President Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage, and all radio programs were canceled except for war news and tributes to the president. The "war news," of course, was censored and vague and not current. There was no

⁶ When in the later stages of World War II the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the prospect of an invasion of Kyushu, the southernmost of the major Japanese home islands, Admiral William Leahy projected 268,000 Americans would be killed or wounded out of an invasion force of 766,000. The invasion of the chief island of Honshu, tentatively planned for the spring of 1946, would have been significantly worse. From "The Jacksonian Tradition" by Walter Russell Mead, in *The National Interest*, no. 58, Winter 1999/2000.

news about what had been going on with Ace and the other men on the USS *Franklin*.

Then, on April 16, came the very unwelcome telegram from Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, Chief of Naval Personnel, informing my mother that her husband was missing and that she must not aid the enemy by divulging the name of his ship (see page 89). My grandmother received a similar telegram (see page 91). Admiral Jacobs said that the Navy Department appreciated my mother's great anxiety, "**BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED.**"

Those details have never become readily available. Whatever details we learned had to be dug for.

Apparently, the *Franklin* had seen some action, but the folks at home had no idea what the extent of that action was. There was a lot of speculation, though: Ace's cousin Minerva Ramsdell Russell assured my grandmother that Ace was "a good flyer and no one saw him go down so he may be OK." Ace's brother, John, suggested darkly that Ace might have gone down over the Japanese mainland.

During the third week of April, my mother received a letter from Ace's executive officer (second in command), Lieutenant Charles Carr, who wrote that "the squadron lost heavily in the situation which resulted in Ace being listed 'missing in action.'" Ace had been on the carrier deck waiting to be launched when an enemy bomb struck the ship. Ace and his crew "were forced to go over the side" to avoid the "subsequent fire. He was not seen after that." Ace's Naval Academy ring was "recovered from his room" and Lt. Carr "found his dog tags later."⁷ (See the letter on page 94.)

Further information on what happened to the *Franklin* was slow in coming. On April 19, my grandmother wrote: "The news tonight . . . over the radio isn't so good as the Okinawa battle is the worst yet and has cost the Navy more casualties than the Marines or Army. Jap. suicide planes are doing it." On April 21 she wrote: "Radio announcer said that 15 or 16 ships had been sunk in the Okinawa campaign. Just said 5 destroyers and lesser craft." But no more news about the *Franklin*.

⁷ My sister Christine helped me understand that Lt. Carr was fibbing, shielding our mother from some gruesome details about the condition of Ace's remains, which must have indeed been discovered: Ace had not been able to get that ring off his finger, and no serviceman is ever without his dog tags, especially in a combat zone, especially when strapped in a plane readying for takeoff on a bombing raid. The fact that Lt. Carr's words can be doubted makes all the official version of events—including what Captain Gehres, who received his information second or third hand, said in his letter (see page 96) as well as what was in the hastily edited *Lucky Bag* 20-year reunion book—seem possibly suspect.

On April 26, the battered *Franklin* reached Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York Harbor, but many details about what happened to it were still not released. On May 3 my cousin John Allan Weeks was born. On May 8 Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally.

On May 18 a detailed story on the *Franklin* became public. It was called “the worst naval disaster of the war,” with “nearly 1000 men killed, wounded or missing.” A thousand men were going to be needed in the repairs. On May 21 the men who brought the ship home received medals.

Cousin Minerva Russell, on June 3, phoned Lieutenant Carr’s mother, who lived nearby. According to the diary entry, “she was very pleasant. Said her son thought the world of Allan. Said Allan was heroic to the last – pushing a bomb off the ship.”

My grandmother, learning that the *Franklin*’s skipper, Captain Gehres, was visiting his sister nearby and that he answered letters, wrote to him. She received a reply on June 4. He stated that Ace “somehow, managed to get out of [his] plane and was seen at 0747 on the stern, hangar deck level. That, unfortunately was the last time he was reported as having been seen. For several hours thereafter explosions rent the ship. They were particularly severe in the area where Allan was last observed.”⁸ Though that part of the ship was thoroughly searched, and though rescuers were able to find many survivors in the sea, Ace was never found, he said. (See the letter on page 96.)

On June 4 my grandmother saw a newsreel of the *Franklin* disaster. In her diary she wrote: “I don’t see how anyone lived on that ship. Didn’t stay for other pictures as I felt too bad. Talked with Mrs. Nicoll after we came out. She hasn’t heard from her boy either.”

On June 6 my grandmother wrote: “10 years ago Allan graduated from Annapolis, and now I suppose he’s gone.” Letters and cards that she and my mother had sent to Ace began coming back, undelivered, unopened, and unread. June 8: “Another letter back from Navy sent to Allan – that makes 4.”

On June 10, Ace’s thirty-fourth birthday, my grandmother attended baby John Allan’s christening. She wrote in her diary that night: “Had a crying spell this morning as my first little boy was born 34 years ago and probably is dead.”

On June 22, just after my sister Christine had finished the first grade, my mother, suffering from “walking pneumonia,” gave away our pet cat, El Gato, and rented

⁸ Eye witness Ed McGuckin (see “Edward McGuckin” on page 72), an ordnance gunner in Torpedo Squadron 5, insists that Ace was last seen on the flight deck, not the hangar deck (which would have been just below the flight deck.)

out our San Diego house. She took Christine and me with her up the coast through to the chicken ranch on Waunch's Prairie, just north of Centralia, Washington, where she had grown up. Her sister, my Aunt Jane, lived there then with her husband and children. From the July 23 diary entry: "Mary is at Centralia and has been sleeping most of the time."

What about baby Janna? Inexplicably, my mother let Aunt Janie (different from Aunt Jane) take baby Janna to New Orleans, and then for an extended stay in Aunt Janie's hometown, Laramie, Wyoming. The two of them were away for months.

August 9 (Grandma's diary): "Looks as if Jap war might end soon. Too bad it didn't end a year ago or never begun, for so many fine boys might have been alive today."

August 14 (Grandma's diary): "Victory over Japan. War ends. Word came over the networks at 7 o'clock that Japan had surrendered. Gen MacArthur made supreme commander in Pacific. Lucy and I went downtown and the town went wild but no drunks so far as I could see. Seemed like an oldfashioned 4th of July."

September 1 (Grandma's diary): "Letter from Mary. . . . [She] is going to school⁹ there in Centralia with the kids. She felt pretty bad on VJ day but still hopes for Allan's return. I wonder if she really does. I don't see how she can. Listened to radio and heard the signing of the surrender of Japan. Adm. Halsey would have liked to have kicked their faces in. Heard President Truman too."

September 28 (Grandma's diary): "Letter from Mary giving me Janna's address with Janie."

October 10 (Grandma's diary): "Two years ago I was starting out for California thinking I was going to live there. I wonder if it would have made any difference about Allan if I had stayed."

On October 12, the other shoe finally dropped: the follow-up telegram, this one from Vice Admiral Louis Denfeld, Chief of Naval Personnel (see page 92). My mother received it when she got home from school.

With deep regrets and sincerest sympathy, Admiral Denfeld wrote: "**A CAREFUL REVIEW OF ALL FACTS AVAILABLE RELATING TO THE DISAPPEARANCE**

⁹ Christine wrote the following in 1997: "*Instant Poverty*: The government provided \$35 per month per minor child for support. In addition, there was a stipend for the widow until she remarried. Mother needed to go back to work. And soon. In Centralia she had a family. Her sister would care for Allan [Butch] and me while Mother finished the bookkeeping training that had been interrupted by marriage. And find work."

OF YOUR HUSBAND LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS USN PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NO HOPE FOR HIS SURVIVAL AND THAT HE LOST HIS LIFE AS RESULT OF ENEMY ACTION ON 19 MARCH 1945 WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY." He promised that if further details were received, they would be forwarded promptly. My mother never had access to **"ALL FACTS AVAILABLE,"** so if she didn't accept the admiral's conclusion, she could imagine all kinds of things.

Grandmother Edmands, who received a similar telegram, did accept this conclusion. After remarking in her diary on October 13, "I guess I haven't cried any more for years than I have this past 6 months," she reported that she got her son's death notice ready for the local papers. She also arranged the memorial service for him on November 18 at Andover Christ Episcopal Church, attended by all of Ace's New England kin.

My mother, though, fell apart with the second telegram. Aunt Jane asked my Grandma Hawes (my mother's mother) to come out to the ranch to stay with her. My Grandpa Hawes continued to insist that Ace would be found, and, in some part of her mind, my mother kept that hope alive as well.

Fantasy

On August 2, 1946, my mother, widowed for sixteen and a half months, married my stepfather, Harry Ashbrook, a local Centralia man she had known for years. Her late husband's mother, my Grandmother Edmands, wrote in her diary: "I'm glad in a way, for the children need a father. . . . Feel as if Allan were mine again."

My new stepfather rescued us — my mother, my sister Christine, and me — out of the turmoil we were living on the Waunch's Prairie chicken ranch and set us up in a home in town. Our lives settled into a safe normality, we found friends in the neighborhood, Christine attended third grade in an elementary school a block away. World War II was finally over for us — nearly a year after the official end of it.

My younger sister, Janna, did not grow up with us, however. Half a year after borrowing baby Janna for a trip to New Orleans and then an extended stay in Laramie, Wyoming, Aunt Janie returned her to Centralia at the end of 1945, staying with her once in a bedroom at the chicken ranch and later in a hotel room in the middle of town. My stepfather was not yet in the picture at that time, and my mother was not yet ready to be a mother to a baby. At three and a half years old, I was enough of a handful for her.

When Aunt Janie asked if she could take Janna with her back to Laramie, my mother acquiesced, presumably signing whatever papers were necessary. All Janna's bonding was with Aunt Janie, who effectively became her mother.¹⁰

My hardworking stepfather, whom I now refer to as Pop, was the only father I ever knew. Until I was ten, I thought he was my real father.

Yes, I could remember some of my life before he came into it. I was aware, of course, that my surname was Edmands and his Ashbrook. Yes, I realized I had three grandmothers (including his mother) and four grandfathers (if I included my father's father, dead for many years before my birth, my mother's father,

¹⁰ Once she was married again, my mother began to take an interest in reclaiming her youngest child, Janna. In the summer of 1948, when Janna was going on four years old—my stepfather, my mother, Christine, and I—took a trip that included an unannounced stop in Laramie. My mother intended to bond with Janna and bring her back with us to Centralia. Not surprisingly, the several-day visit was a stormy one. At departure time, Aunt Janie and Janna waved to us from the driveway as we drove off in our tightly packed 1942 Chevy. Janna stayed in Laramie with Aunt Janie, the mother she knew, the mother she had spent her entire life with. I saw her again for a few hours in 1950, for a few days in 1958, for another few days in 1960, off and on during the summer of 1963, and then as her "father" to give her away at her wedding in 1965. Before 1958, when I was sixteen and she not quite thirteen, I didn't really know her except in pictures; she seemed more a cousin than a sister. Beginning after our 1958 visit, we wrote extremely long letters to each other, and she seemed more like a sweetheart confidante than a sister.

dead when I was quite young, my pop's father, and my pop's stepfather). Even with all these incongruities – as innocent of critical analysis as a child who believes in Santa Claus yet is unconcerned with chimneyless houses – I thought my pop was my real father.

In 1952, when I was ten, my mother told me about Ace, my *real* father, whom I learned then to refer to as “Daddy Allan,” in contrast with Pop, whom I had up to that time referred to as “Daddy.”¹¹ She explained that I was Allan Christie Edmonds *Junior*, a name to be proud of, a name I would need to live up to. Daddy Allan was a hero, and he had sacrificed his life defending our flag and our freedoms.

From age ten on, then, I had a real father to live up to. Now, of course, I needed to put an enlarged photo of him on my wall, to make him real in my life. There were two photos to choose from, one for Christine and one for me. Since I was his namesake, the one who had to live up to him, I was allowed to choose. The picture of the dashing, smiling pilot in his cockpit? Or the picture of the sober officer in uniform looking at the viewer with apparent distrust or disapproval?



To Christine's amazed delight, I chose the serious picture. Why? I saw my name on his desk, preceded by that officer designation. I liked the uniform cap of the commissioned officer. I felt he must be doing something very important at that desk. Living up to this man was pretty serious business. And I saw my name on that desk.

¹¹ Now I wasn't sure what to call my stepfather, and from then on, I resisted calling him “Daddy” (as Christine continued doing). For years I didn't call him anything. Only in my adult years did I begin to call him “Pop,” which is how he had addressed his own father. By the way, when my mother was telling me about my *real* father, she further bewildered me by trying to explain my relationship to Janna. She couldn't deal with my questions, though, and dissolved into tears.

My mother explained that Daddy Allan wasn't buried in a cemetery as my Grandpa Hawes had been, because he had never really been found.

So mightn't he still be alive, then? I wanted to know. She acknowledged that this was a possibility.

What would you do if he came back? I asked. She told me that, of course, she would choose to resume her marriage with him. This statement made me feel very strange, indeed. It implied that somehow her first love, the dashing war hero, was without question preferable to the real flesh-and-blood hardworking husband, the anchor in all our lives. She told me that the possibility was very small, however, that it was almost certain that Daddy Allan was dead.

Each Memorial Day my mother took me to the Skookumchuck River, which flowed past Centralia, so that I could toss a wreath into it; I imagined the wreath making it all the way to the Pacific and then crossing the Pacific over to Japan, where Daddy Allan was.

In 1955 the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1935, which included Daddy Allan, published its twenty-year reunion book, *The Lucky Bag*, and we got a copy of it. Here was Daddy Allan in a published book, "ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy (deceased)," with a handsome picture of him.

There were also pictures of his three children—a fairly recent one of Christine and me together and a separate shot of Janna taken years before, when she was a toddler. Our names were there on the page, too, with our birth years, although Janna's birth year was incorrect. It was the first time I had ever seen my name and picture in a published book.



The text under the picture referred to Daddy Allan by his nickname "Ace." After reading this page over and over many times, I decided to refer to him as "my real father," and I adopted the name Ace for myself.¹² Here is the text:

¹² I had already shed the name Butch in 1948, upon entering first grade. The Butch nickname had been a convenient way to avoid calling me "Junior" when my father was alive. In 1948, though, my parents—mother and stepfather— anxious that the public schools might not accept the name Butch, informed me to my amazement that my name was really Allan.

Ace served two years in the WEST VIRGINIA and then went to the BOGGS. After a year he was shifted to the CHANDLER, stayed until July '40 when he went to Pensacola for his wings. His next assignment, to the ASTORIA Squadron, lasted from April '41 until she was sunk off Savo Island in August '42. Then Ace had various billets around San Diego, mostly training carrier pilots, until June '44, when he became the CO of Torpedo Squadron 5 in the FRANKLIN. He saw lots of action at Tarawa and Midway with only minor mishaps until the FRANKLIN was attacked by a kamikaze 55 miles from Kyushu, Japan on 19 March, 1945. Ace's plane was ready to take off when the kamikaze bombs commenced to explode on deck. He was seen leaving his plane and had managed to jettison some of his bombs. He was last seen on the hangar deck when the worst explosion of all occurred.¹³

Ace "was last seen" somewhere. What happened then? An explosion. But that doesn't necessarily mean he was killed in the explosion. Maybe he somehow lived. My mother entertained the remote possibility that he might still be alive. Maybe he will be coming back someday, somehow. Without a body and a proper burial, there is no closure. We can fantasize. All three of Ace's children fantasized.

Janna, growing up in Wyoming, would daydream that this business of being killed was somehow all a mistake. Ace would come and find her in Laramie. She'd be sitting in church, and suddenly this handsome man, having not aged a day since the early 1940s, would come down the aisle and say: "Janna, there you are!"

Christine, in her fantasy (possibly indulged in after a battle with our mother), would be in her bedroom in Centralia. The front doorbell would ring. Since family and close friends never used the front door, whoever was there had to be a stranger. The ghost stranger was a handsome man, having never aged, of course. The image faded as the ghost entered the house.

In my frequent fantasies, Ace had escaped the conflagration on the *Franklin* and had been captured by the Japanese. These enemy soldiers were not near Japan at all but in the South Pacific, on one of those jungle islands, and they had never surrendered nor did they know that the war was officially over. Somehow Ace

¹³ There are a number of inaccuracies in the *Lucky Bag* blurb besides the wrong birth year for Janna, many of them probably due to the rush job of putting the volume together. For example, my mother's name should be Mary Anna, not Mary Anne, and our address was one digit off. The foregoing inaccuracies do not appear in the selection cited in this volume, but the following inaccuracies do appear here: If the entire period between August '42 and June '44 was taken up with Ace having "various billets around San Diego, mostly training carrier pilots," how would he have seen "lots of action" at Tarawa (which he did), a battle that occurred in November '43? In June of '44 Ace became the CO of Torpedo Squadron 5, but the squadron was not assigned to the *Franklin* until February 1945. Referring to the Japanese pilot who bombed the *Franklin* as a kamikaze implies that this pilot was a suicide bomber, which might be true but he appears to have been attempting to survive that day. Finally, eye witness Ed McGuckin (see "Edward McGuckin" on page 72), an ordnance gunner in Torpedo Squadron 5, insists that Ace was last seen on the flight deck, not the hangar deck (which would be just below the flight deck).

had escaped from them, he was wearing his clean pressed navy blues, and he hadn't aged a day.

Once, during a preteen sulk about having been mistreated by my mom and pop, I squinted my eyes, looking toward the mailman two blocks away, in his official mailman uniform. He was walking our way. I imagined him a tall, gallant man wearing navy blues. He was going to set things right when he got to our house.

Heritage

I was groomed to follow in my father's footsteps, to become a navy officer like him – and like two uncles of mine: Ace's younger brother (Uncle John) and my mother's older brother (Uncle Fred). Like all of them, I needed to attend the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. We were a navy family.

Since my Annapolis graduate father had been killed in the war, I was in the "Sons of Deceased Veterans" category and would be given special consideration for an appointment to the academy. The special consideration was further enhanced by two of my uncles being Annapolis graduates as well.

My mother saw no other future for me, and, obsessed with keeping up the military traditions of our family, she was determined that I embrace this future as well. I did embrace it heartily, happy with the attention.

We got a television in 1954, when I was twelve. Except for *The Twilight Zone*, almost all of my TV viewing was about the navy: *Victory at Sea*, *Navy Log*, and, of course, *Men of Annapolis*. I didn't miss a single episode.

When I was fourteen, just into high school, I was required to take a strange one-semester course called "Orientation," taught by Mr. Leo Milanowski. At the end of the first week, he told us what the most important assignment of the semester would be: Write a detailed research paper about your chosen career. At fourteen, I decided on my life's direction: navy officer, like my father. I sent away for U.S. Navy catalogs and for brochures from Annapolis. I cut out pictures of warships and sea battles from the *National Geographic* and other periodicals, and I carefully pasted them into my illustrated opus. I made tables showing how I would climb the ladder, rating by rating, from ensign all the way up, and I imagined being an admiral one day, directing a fleet of awesome sea power. Mr. Milanowski gave me an A.

I did my best to identify with a father I never knew. I wanted everyone to call me Ace. All my friends and even some of my teachers complied.

But what about the flesh-and-blood father I had right at home, my stepfather, my pop? There had been some discussion a few years before about Pop adopting us. Though we loved him, Christine and I had concerns – hers that she and I would have a different legal status from Janna, mine that I might have to give up my Edmands surname. Our concerns were moot, however; there was a practical reason to stay unadopted: Adoption would have made us ineligible for the Veterans Administration benefits we were allotted because of our "war orphan"

status. So Harry and Mary Ashbrook's children were Christine and Allan Edmands.

Odious and cruel comparisons were inevitable between my two fathers: Ace had been an Annapolis graduate and a commissioned navy officer, my pop had finally graduated from high school three months before his twenty-first birthday. My real father had flown planes, my stepfather worked nights for Kraft Foods, stirring vats of cottage cheese. While gallant Ace had been risking his life continuously in combat, my pop had spent most of World War II in a TB sanitarium. The more I focused on Ace, the more distant I grew from the only father I ever really knew.

My mother had a loving, affectionate relationship with my pop. But with all her grooming of me for Annapolis—her exhortations about how a man's place was to defend his country, even her encouraging of my reading and scholarship to ensure an appointment—she was consciously or unconsciously participating in the comparison game. Such an impossible rivalry with a ghost hero must have deeply hurt my pop, but he never showed it.¹⁴

I, too, was measured up against Ace: Performing well, I was told: "Your father would have been proud of you." When I disappointed or aggravated, I was told: "Your father would have been ashamed of you." In perspective, from my current age of sixty,¹⁵ I attribute such domestic dysfunction as just one more example of how World War II impacted nearly every American family for years after the 1945 "peace."

During my junior year in high school—encouraged, directed, by my mother—I began writing letters, petitioning for an appointment to Annapolis. Letters to Congressman Russell V. Mack, to Senator Warren Magnuson, to Senator Henry Jackson—to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, for heaven's sake. A year in advance of any possible appointment, I needed to get their attention:

Dear Sir:

Each year I know that you receive many, many applications for appointments to the United States Naval Academy. May I add my name to the list for 1960?

Lieutenant Commander Allan C. Edmands, my father, was killed when he was the skipper of the torpedo squadron on the U.S.S. Franklin at the time when she was attacked by kamikaze planes off the coast of Japan in March, 1945. He was a graduate of Annapolis in 1935. Two of

¹⁴ My sister Christine insists that Pop was not that deep in his feelings. When he enrolled himself in our family—that is, "took on" my mother and us—he accepted the "whole package," she says, without reservation to his dying day. The ghost hero was just part of the package. I do agree with her that he never showed his hurt, but it's hard for me to believe that he might not have felt some hurt inside.

¹⁵ Written in 2002.

my uncles also graduated from the Academy and made a career of the Navy.

All my life I too have wanted to attend the Academy and make the Navy my life. With this aim in view, I planned my high school courses. This spring at the end of my Junior year, I will have completed three years of Mathematics, three years of English, two years of Latin, and a Physics course, as well as many other required subjects. I have played the flute in the band for three years, I am now in the Junior Class play, and manage to keep my grade point average high: 3.6.

Although I will not be eighteen until June 9, 1960, I am very much interested in knowing exactly what to do to apply for an appointment to Annapolis when the time does arrive. Also I must be sure that I will take the necessary subjects next year. Chemistry, English, Math Analysis, World History and Band are the subjects on my Senior schedule at this time.

I sincerely hope that you will write to me in regard to my hopes of a career in the Navy. Any information that you can give me would be very much appreciated.

Very truly yours,
Allan C. Edmands [signed]
Allan C. Edmands
831 South Silver Street
Centralia, Washington

I enclosed letters of recommendation from my mother's boss, our family's life insurance representative, and my Explorer post advisor. During the following year, I did well on the Civil Service exam (testing vocabulary and reading, ability to recognize three-dimensional figures from flat drawings, and algebra) as well as the College Entrance Examination Board test. For example, "Surveillance of enemy aliens is customary in time of war. SURVEILLANCE means most nearly (a) close supervision, (b) subversive activity, (c) constant protection, (d) unwarranted suspicion, or (e) continued confinement." "The value of y that satisfies the simultaneous equations $14x - 5y = 31$ and $4x + 8y = 56$ is (a) $\frac{1}{3}$, (b) 4, (c) 5, (d) $7\frac{4}{5}$, or (e) none of these."



On January 23, 1960, Senator Magnuson became the first of those I had petitioned to appoint me as his principal candidate for admission to Annapolis, solely contingent upon on my passing a physical examination. Here is the telegram I received: **“HAVE SELECTED YOU AS MY PRINCIPAL CANDIDATE FOR ANNAPOLIS. OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION AND INSTRUCTIONS WILL COME TO YOU FROM NAVY WARREN G MAGNUSON USS.”** Four other guys were listed as my “alternates”: The list was headed by William McNeely from the town of Opportunity, Washington.

Centralia’s newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*, sent a reporter to our home and made a story out of my being selected. (In the photo I’m holding the senator’s telegram. In the background is our already-obsolete forty-eight-star flag.) Now I was a celebrity at school; some classmates saluted when they saw me and addressed me as “Admiral.”

The only hurdle in front of me was the physical, scheduled for March. I had been practicing pushups and chinups, and I was certain I could satisfy the requirements for them and for the other tests of physical aptitude: I needed to be able to do a duck walk (hands on hips, squat deeply with knees spread, and walk ten paces) and arm hang (full length and relaxed, hang for three seconds with each hand on a bar). I also needed to do three of the following: (1) one pull-up from a full hang until my chin was over the bar, (2) fifteen situps in thirty seconds, touching elbow on alternate knee each time, (3) ten pushups with feet supported chair height, chin touching floor each time, and (4) six “burpee” movements in twenty seconds. (I did the first three of the preceding.)

What worried me—and worried my mother even more—was my vision. In those days incoming midshipmen were required to have 20/20 vision, and I was already nearsighted. Probably from all that reading and scholarship my mother had been encouraging.

Now she encouraged me to practice the “Bates method” of eyesight improvement: Hold my palms over my eyes for a minute, then take my hands away and stare wide-eyed. Gaze for several minutes at a remote horizon. Avoid reading as much as possible.

Unfortunately, the “Bates method” failed me during the physical. My uncorrected distant vision was not sharp enough for the academy: 20/30 in the right eye, 20/40 in the left. Apparently, William McNeely of Opportunity, Washington, now had his opportunity.

On the long drive back home, my mother was utterly silent, deeply disappointed. My feelings were mixed: some disappointment after all the effort, some embarrassment after all the “MAY BE MIDDIE” publicity, and some relief.

When autumn came, I entered a state-supported school, the University of Washington in Seattle, majoring in mathematics, minoring in history and drama. I had scholarships that my “war orphan” status had helped me qualify for, and I collected Veterans Administration payments every month.

But I no longer tried to be a copy of my deceased father. For my Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC) program at college, I wore an air force uniform for the required two years at the weekly drill sessions and the biweekly classes in “Air Science.” And, by the end of that time, I had dropped the nickname Ace.¹⁶

¹⁶ In summer 2002, at the age of sixty, I began calling myself Ace again.

Anecdote and Artifact

There were scores of pictures of Ace available for me to look at when I was a child. Pictures of him with my mother. Pictures of him in uniform with his brother, John, also a navy officer in uniform. Pictures of him with his squadron, one of them with him sitting on the plane cowling. Several pictures of him with people not identified. Quite a few of the pictures undated. Some of the pictures are tiny.



Here is an undated picture of him on the beach with several guys. Ace, taller than most of the others, is fourth from the right. I can't tell what they've been doing — a shovel, some kind of long oar or mast, one guy has a ball. Ace, holding a mug, stands nonchalantly with legs crossed. These guys were having fun.

There were pictures of him and me together, too. Here's one with me as a trike driver, dated October 1944, when I was two years and four months old and he was thirty-three. He seems to like his son in this picture. When I saw pictures like this, I would scrinch my brain tightly, trying to separate what I had been told from what I actually remembered, trying to ferret out a real memory of him. No luck.



In almost every picture Ace is smiling. Studying his features rigorously, I was sad that I didn't resemble him much. Christine didn't look much like him, either. Janna, however, resembles him a lot.

Everyone who knew him told me he had a great sense of humor. I was told he could wiggle his ears. He could make people roar with laughter by bobbing his hairline up and down on his forehead with just the muscles on his face.

When my mother would be storming in one of her dark moods, Ace would just laugh, I was told – by my mother herself. Her mood, unstoked by her spouse's indulgence, would dissipate. It's too bad my pop (my stepfather) didn't know this technique.

I so wish that I could have gotten to know this man Ace, but all I have are little tidbits of him – small anecdotes, pictures, and such artifacts as his engineering kit, calling cards with his (and my) name, gold leafs from his uniform. Not a single memory of my own. He was my real father and an utter stranger.

Once I left home for college and beyond, I stopped thinking about my father.

In 1975 my mom and pop, traveling full time with their trailer and calling themselves "Geritol Gypsies," visited me in my home in New York State. Now I was thirty-three years old, as my father had been when he posed with me driving my trike. I now had a wife and a child whom Mom and Pop had never seen. It had been more than a decade since they had seen me, or even received a reply to any of the letters my mother had sent me. With this unannounced visit, they had bridged the continent between us – and the gulf of estrangement between us, too.

Pop pulled a box out of the trailer and handed it to me. "Here is some stuff of your dad's," he said.

I looked him in the eye and said: "You're my dad."

In the box were Ace's flight helmet, several medals including the Purple Heart, various certificates, photos, the tidbits I mentioned earlier, odds and ends in a disarray. I felt somewhat repelled by this box of treasures. It represented a painful family emotional chasm from my teenage years: the split between the hero ghost "real father" and the hardworking flesh-and-blood stepfather. I accepted the box, but I stored it on a high closet shelf and didn't think about it again for another decade.

In the mid-1980s, after a divorce and a remarriage, I began to focus on my extended family again. In my late forties, I became interested in genealogy. The items in that box really were treasures now. I assembled photo albums.

I acquired a copy of *The Ship That Wouldn't Die*, a video documentary of the *Franklin* disaster produced by Robert Garthwaite, a colleague of my former mother-in-law. I watched it several times.

We started visiting Aunt Jean, Ace's older sister, in Connecticut; it was the first time I had seen her since 1950. She gave me Ace's sea chest, his tuxedo, lots more photos, his high school yearbook, letters he had written his mother (Grandmother Edmands), copies of the dire telegrams from the Navy Department. She gave me my grandmother's diaries, diligently kept from 1936 until her death in 1970; most of the entries were such humdrum items as "Had a perm today," but quite a few were fascinating – and many of them were about her son, my father.

Aunt Jean told me anecdotes from Ace's childhood, how he used to take pledges from his schoolmates, how he and his brother lived for a couple of years in Vermont, how he almost enlisted in the army rather than the navy (the army recruiting office was closed that day).

In 1995, during our short annual home leave back to the States from my five-year overseas assignment in Japan, a little more than three years after my mother had passed away, we attended a large family reunion in eastern Washington State. My Aunt Jane (my mother's older sister) told me how Ace had handed her the tiny portion of potatoes and gravy. Aunt Jane's old eyes crinkled merrily as she talked about her brother-in-law Ace. Later, on my sister Janna's website, "Fossil Freak's home page," I found the anecdote about Ace suggesting everyone brush their teeth or not caring about the neighbors.

While residing in Japan, I gained some insight into the culture and people that had been a formidable enemy, my father's enemy, in World War II. My mother had never forgiven the Japanese, but I felt not the slightest rancor toward these people, not even toward those who were old enough to have participated. I enjoy several fine friendships with native Japanese people.

Residing in a country where barely more than 1 percent of the population are Christians, we took our Christianity seriously and regularly attended services at the Yokohama Union Church.

On the morning of Sunday, March 19, 1995, Reverend Jim Girling delivered a sermon on two of the seven deadly sins: avarice and sloth. Avarice, he said, made us brittle and hard, less human: What do we cling to at the expense of decency? What can we let go of for the sake of the Kingdom? Sloth, he told us, is not mere laziness, it is a living death. Sloth is when we know we are set on a deadly course yet do nothing to change. It is sloth, he said, that is usually behind depression.

I was always inspired by Reverend Girling's sermons; I regularly took notes, and I pondered deeply his words. On that particular day, the fiftieth anniversary of the *Franklin* disaster, I wanted to soften the brittle hardness within me about the

single event that had made such an impact on my life. I resolved to make sure I had the best possible relationship with my eighty-two-year-old stepfather while he was still alive.

When Reverend Girling finished the sermon, I couldn't hold all this inside. I stood up and announced to the congregation that that very day was the fiftieth anniversary of my father's death, just off the eastern coast of Japan. I wanted to honor his memory in a prayer that we might find a course other than war to express our human avarice and sloth, as well as the other five deadly sins.

I hadn't prepared this short speech, and it wasn't terribly logical what I said. But I did say that I wanted to treasure my relationship with my stepfather during his final years. After the service several people came up to me to discuss the terrible war that had raged between the U.S. and Japan. A couple of people hugged me. When we got home, I called up my pop in Centralia, Washington, just to chat. I made these calls a weekly event.

We visited my pop in Centralia whenever we got the chance, choosing the West Coast for our home leaves instead of our East Coast home. During his last week of life in 2000, I was by his side, and I organized a memorial "celebration" of his life. I was grateful that I had been able to repair our difficult relationship somewhat.

After his death, I realized that I now basically belonged to the older generation. Oh, I still had a couple of aunts left – but otherwise, my sisters and I were in the vanguard of the march through life. Compiling everything I can of the family history has become an urgent obsession with me.

I gathered together all the facts about my father Ace that I could find, but the events of March 19, 1945, the last day he was seen alive, were still mysterious. Here's an example of the mysteriousness:

One of the letters I have a copy of, which had been in the box of treasures I had stored away in 1975, was from Lieutenant Carr, Ace's executive officer, explaining that the Ace's Naval Academy ring and his dog tags had been found even though Ace himself was still missing (see page 94). My sister Christine helped me understand that Lieutenant Carr was fibbing, shielding our mother from some gruesome details about the condition of Ace's remains, which must have indeed been discovered: Ace had not been able to get that ring off his finger, and no serviceman is ever without his dog tags, especially in a combat zone, especially when strapped into the cockpit of a plane warming up for takeoff on a bombing raid.

The fact that Lieutenant Carr's words can be doubted makes all of the official version of events – what Captain Gehres, who received his information second or

third hand, said in his letter (see page 96), what was in the hastily edited *Lucky Bag* twenty-year reunion book – seem possibly suspect.

I read what I could about the *Franklin* disaster and began to understand the scope of it. I looked at the video *The Ship That Wouldn't Die* again. As of summer 2002, however, I was resigned to never knowing much more about what happened to Ace on that day.

Squadron

On August 14, 2002, during an idle moment at the computer, I typed my name into a popular search engine just to see what I might find. This *ego search* yielded a number of sites displaying various publishing activities I've been involved with over the preceding three decades. There were even some Japanese sites, with all the information in Japanese. None of this particularly surprised me, but I felt flattered and a little embarrassed to learn that what I'd been up to, as well as much of what I had grown away from, was more public than I had realized.

The following search result puzzled me, however:

VA-55 WARHORSE

... Feb 1943 ----- LCDR Richard Upson; Apr 1944 ----- LT. Andrew C. Lett (acting); Jun 1944 ----- LCDR **Allan C. Edmands**; May 1945 ----- LT. ...
www.skyhawk.org/3E/va55.htm - 30k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

When I clicked it, I discovered that it was about my father, Ace, being the skipper of Torpedo Squadron 5 (VT5, the Torpcats) in 1944 and 1945. My father was on the World Wide Web! I was utterly fascinated. I knew that he had commanded Torpedo Squadron 5 before, but I had never heard its abbreviation *VT5* or its nickname *Torpcats*, and I had certainly never seen this insignia, a horned black cat, astride a torpedo, grasping a rat with a stereotypical Oriental face.



In a large list of commanders of VT5 (which eventually became VA-55) Ace's name was listed third, assuming command in June 1944 and replaced by Lieutenant Charles H. Carr (acting) in May 1945. A little further down was the following text:

March 19, 1945:

VT-5 was preparing to launch its aircraft for an attack against the city of Kobe, Japan, when the United States Ship Franklin CV 13, was hit by two enemy bombs from a Japanese aircraft. Fires were ignited on the second and third decks from the first bomb and the second triggered munitions on the carrier. All VT-5's aircraft on the flight and hangar deck were destroyed by the ensuing explosions and fire. The damage was one of the most extensive experienced by an Essex class

carrier during World War II. A total of 724 men were killed and 265 wounded. VT-5's commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Edmands, was lost in the action. All surviving VT-5 personnel were transferred from Franklin and returned to CONUS.

I printed out every page of this site, I followed all the links leading from it, and I printed every linked page. Lots and lots of information about planes and torpedoes, all the way forward to 1975, much of it irrelevant to me. I printed it anyway. Suddenly I was on a quest, no longer resigned to never knowing very much about what happened to Ace on March 19, 1945.

Before August 14, 2002, I had satisfied myself that I had uncovered everything available about Ace. For some silly reason. I hadn't considered putting his name into a Web search engine. And for some even sillier reason, I hadn't thought of seeing if there were *Franklin* survivors, still surviving in 2002, who might have known Ace and might be able to tell me details about him.

Duhh!

Only a few weeks before, I had heard a startling statistic: World War II veterans were now dying at the rate of 1,500 men per day. This number is more than twice the number of Americans who were killed *or wounded* per day, on average, in the war itself. If I were ever going to learn any more about what happened to my father, I had better stop procrastinating.

That very day I wrote the following to the contact address on the VA-55 Warhorse site:

Subject: Information on LCMDR Allan C Edmands (killed on CV13)

Dear sir,

My name is Allan Christie Edmands, junior, and I am the son of Lt.Cmdr. Allan Christie Edmands Sr., who was killed during the attack on the USS Franklin (CV13) on 19 March 1945. I have your address from the VA55 web site (www.skyhawk.org).

Can you tell me where I could find information on my father? I have very little.

Thank you very much.

Allan C. Edmands

The very next day I received a reply from David A. Weber at the Skyhawk Association, sponsor of the VA-55 site. He asked me for the exact page with my

father's name, and promised that Skyhawk's team of historians and researchers would do what they could.

I wrote back to Mr. Weber with the description of the page as well as some details about Ace, including a summary of Lieutenant Carr's letter to my mother, telling her about the dog tags and ring that had been "found" in Ace's room.

I have a few stories about him but not very much. I was not even 3 years old when he was killed, and I have no memories of him, since he was home from duty so seldom. I would very much appreciate it if you (or someone you can refer me to) can fill me in on some of the details of his naval career beyond the short service report the Navy Dept. sent my mom. Anecdotes would be treasured!

Mr. Weber forwarded my note to his researchers, who responded on August 17 with a number of suggested leads, including veterans' organizations, special USS *Franklin* groups and websites and reunion contacts and photo archives and rosters, all with associated URLs. I followed all the leads.

One of the researchers' leads surprised me: the URL to the USS *Franklin* group of contacts maintained by Classmates, that company that was always springing up popups in Yahoo! One persistent popup showed the pimply face of a teen over the caption "Is Dirk still a jerk?" Classmates wanted me and 50 million other Internet users to try to locate classmates from my high school days. I had always closed these popups with annoyance.

But Classmates was maintaining a group of *Franklin* survivors, apparently. What did I have to lose? I logged on to Classmates and filled out an online form with my name and some vital stats on myself. The only place I could put my name was in a field labeled "Shipmate." I sent the form in.

I was about to meet some heroes. My friend Kevin, a New York City fireman who was part of the rescue effort at the World Trade Center Ground Zero on September 11, 2001, scoffs when people call him a hero. Just as my father had said: "I was just doing my job." But I know Kevin is a hero, and I know my father was one too. And each one of the *Franklin* survivors I've met out of this single Classmates contact is a hero as well.

Here is a little table of contents, listing the *Franklin* survivors I've met and interviewed.

- Jim Stuart (page 51)
- Wally Young (page 58)
- Jack Hensel (page 67)

- Marion Gray (page 70)
- Edward McGuckin (page 72)
- Thomas Hagan (page 76)
- More heroes (page 79)
- Yorktown and after (page 82)

Jim Stuart

Within a couple of days of my posting, Classmates sent me an e-mail that someone had responded to it. I logged on to Classmates and found that a "Janet Stuart" had replied to my posting. Very excited, I opened the reply:

Subject: RE: James Stuart, Shipmate
Previous Email: Dear Allan, Thank you for finding us. Look fwd to talking with you. The website is in my wife's name. I was on Franklin Dec44 till we were hit, in April 45. Duty station was phone talker on bridge and yeoman in chaplain's station. Battle dressing station on hanger deck. Have attended several reunions, your name sounds familiar, do you belong to the Association? Regards, Jim

I read the note several times, devouring every word. Evidently, *Franklin* survivor Jim Stuart did not use computers, leaving online communication to his wife, Janet. Everything had to be in her name, but Jim himself must have typed in the words. By "April 45" I knew he meant March 19, 1945, the actual day of the hit. Just the fact that he had been on my father's ship on that day thrilled me.

I had no idea what the duty "phone talker on bridge" entailed, but I could imagine clearly what his duty must have been like at the "battle dressing station" on the hangar deck. I didn't know what a yeoman did for a chaplain, but I suspected that Jim must have known the celebrated hero, Father Joseph T. O'Callahan.

His question about my belonging to the Association and his reference to himself as a "shipmate" startled me: He must be assuming that I am my father, that I am Lieutenant Commander Allan C. Edmonds Sr. Some clearing up was necessary.

Right away I responded, still within Classmates:

Dear Jim, thank you for your response. Actually, I am Allan C. Edmonds . . . the son of Lt.Cmdr. Allan C. "Ace" Edmonds, commander of Torpedo Squadron 5 (assuming command in June 1944), who was killed (presumably-- his remains were never officially found) in the explosions on the deck on 19 March 1945. . . . [I told him about Lieutenant Carr's letter and my doubts about the Navy Academy ring and dog tags being found anywhere else but on his remains.] I have the ring and dog tags in my possession. I never knew my father, as I was not quite 3 years old when he was killed, and duty made it impossible for him to be home much. I'm sorry if my participation in Classmates made you think that I was my father; I didn't know how to make it clear in the Classmates form. I have exactly the same name as my father. I would be interested in attending a reunion sometime if I would be

welcome. I would be very interested in learning any information about my father, since all I have are the official telegrams and service record from the Navy Dept. Thank you for e-mailing me, Jim. For further correspondence, please write to me at allan@greatgrand.com. Regards, Allan

From then on, we corresponded the normal way, through our regular e-mail accounts. On August 21 Jim wrote me, thanking me for sharing my father's story, and telling me that he and Janet shared my loss. "There were nearly 1000 men killed that day, in different ways, and those of us that survived were most fortunate."

He suggested that I join the USS Franklin Association and attend the annual reunion. "Each year, upwards of a couple of hundred veterans attend, though this number is now rapidly declining" I recalled again that grim statistic.

"You might be able to discover someone who knew your father well, saw him in action, or knows more of the 19th," he said. He told me of one man whose late father had been in the Black Sheep Squadron, who through the Franklin Association had met his father's shipmate and best friend. "Since both your Dads were flyers, they probably even knew each other." He suggested that I meet this man, a Phil Gentry, and later on he arranged for us to communicate through e-mail.

I would be pleased to help you follow thru with joining the Association, and at the same time, would strongly suggest that you consider enrolling your father in the "Navy Log" sponsored by the Naval Heritage in Washington, an online website for all the men's pictures, stories, and information. Also, I hope you will consider applying for the newly-authorized Navy/Marine Corps Combat Action Award Ribbon. Your father is eligible. I would be honored if you would allow me to sponsor your Dad in the Navy Log. Let me know and I'll help you.

I responded that I wanted and appreciated his help very much in joining the Association, applying for the ribbon, and enrolling Ace in Navy Log – and that the honor would really be mine. I asked him about his association with Father O'Callahan. And:

I am very excited with this opportunity to communicate with one of my Dad's shipmates-- and very grateful for your generosity. I should have pursued this years ago, but I'm so happy to have made this contact with you.

Jim briefly told me the story of what happened to him, an eighteen-year-old kid, that day. He summarized the chaos of March 19 while explaining his association with O'Callahan:

I never made it to my battle station when we were hit, because of damage and fire. In fact, MOST never made it to their battle stations that day. It wasn't until late in the morning that general quarters were called, and MANY, to this day, say that it was never called. Father O'Callahan was my superior, along with Protestant Chaplain Harken, and a Jewish layperson who served as Rabbi. I helped them with typing their services, setting up equipment, burials at sea, etc. I did not see any of these men the day we were hit, for I had made my way with others who were trapped below, to the fantail and was trapped there, unable to do more than survive. [Then, in a subsequent e-mail:] On the 19th March, I was with a group of 15 to 20 men caught below decks, and we worked our way aft until we found a passageway that came out onto the fantail. We were not part of Lt. Gary's rescue. At the outset, there were about 30 men total on the fantail, and during the course of that day, all but 6 of us were either killed, or blown over the side, or jumped because we were trapped by fire. There was no other way out.

Jim sent me a copy of *Saving Seaman Stuart*,¹⁷ which his younger brother had written. I read it with great interest. I was enthralled with his story, and there were many parts of it that made me think of what kind of experiences my father must have had, as well as of what might have happened to my father:

Being connected with the Chaplain's office, I participated in the early burials at sea. . . . The first time I saw a flag-draped body in a sewed-up sea bag, weighted with a shell casing, and as the body was angled to the sea and the flag became limp, I had to choke down strong emotions.

When the *Franklin* was hit on March 19, Jim had been down below in the chaplain's office, resting. It took him and several other men over an hour to make it through the heat and thick smoke to the fantail deck at the stern of the ship.

The conditions here were unbelievably horrible. Smoke and fire were everywhere. Forty millimeter ammunition was exploding just above us on a gun mount and the oil-soaked tub winches were blazing away in fire. We could see the deadly events that had happened, and were still happening, right before our eyes. Men were on fire, others had limbs torn or shredded, and ghastly things like faces were gone or heads blown off. We crouched or stretched out in gun mounts or behind other gear heavy enough to protect us from the flying shrapnel and smaller explosions. An explosion ripped off one side of my life preserver and something creased my battle helmet and burned the right side of my face. A small piece of metal hit

¹⁷ Available at <https://ussfranklin.org/2012/08/28/saving-seaman-stuart/>

my hand. . . . The dead and wounded were all around us. Most of the wounded died in place, or later in the sea, and I remember one badly wounded man, who soon perished, asking the Chief for a smoke. We saw men caught in the oil-fed flames in the sea, while others struggled to reach debris, and others just slipped from sight. Scores died in our view.

Jim watched the rescue efforts of other ships, at first futile. He heard rumors that an abandon-ship order had been given.

The ship began settling, followed by a deathly shuddering and a serious starboard listing (later determined to be thirteen degrees), then secondary explosions slapped us again. Black smoke enveloped the fantail deck we were occupying. It was time to leave! By now, there were only six men left alive in our location. Three of us left the ship at 10:45 am by climbing down a rope and falling the remaining forty feet into the burning, turbulent ocean. The three sounds I remember at this time were the Japanese planes buzzing around eager to join in the finale, the plopping and splashing of shells and bullets in the sea, and the roar of gunfire. No one thought that we, or the ship, would survive the fall of night. . . . I had chosen between the dubious security that the ship offered and those perils that awaited in the burning-oil encrusted Pacific Ocean. . . . When I hit the water from that distance, my torn life preserver tangled in the battle helmet and was choking me. I nearly drowned right where I jumped. Underwater, I removed the steel helmet, kicked off my shoes and followed the torn preserver to the surface for a desperate breath. In a few moments, I was able to see my new dilemma. At that frightening moment, the ship was floating rapidly away, listing ominously and trailing smoke. It was like seeing my companion and my security moving quickly away. I wanted to reach out and pull her back to me like a toy sailboat.

He was in the water for hours “with ships passing by, oil fires blazing, bodies and body parts floating and debris of everything imaginable bobbing up and down,” until he was finally rescued by the destroyer USS *Hickox*. Jim later supplied me with the *Hickox*'s log of the day, a blow-by-blow description of the events of March 19, from the *Hickox*'s point of view (see page 129).

I was pulled aboard the *Hickox* at 12:35 pm, but was no help to my rescuers because there was no physical strength left. I could not have survived another thirty minutes in the water.

The story described how Jim returned to the States and was eventually discharged. I read his book three times before returning it to him.

Jim provided me contacts to officials in the Franklin Association, who, he said, "may be able to put you in touch with someone still alive who knew your Dad, was in his group, and the events of that day. Chances are, Allan, if you join soon, before all are gone, you will find someone who knew him." Again I was reminded of that grim statistic about World War II survivors.

He also suggested I visit the U.S.S. *Yorktown* in South Carolina:

Should you be able someday to visit Patriot's Point SC, our sister ship, EXACTLY like the Franklin, named the USS *Yorktown*, is moored there, purchased and owned by an Assoc. that was first made up of survivors. The room just like your Dad would have sat in to learn his flight lessons is just like it was, and real, restored planes like he flew are sitting on the decks below. I believe you would "feel" something of his life there. [Then, in a subsequent e-mail:] If you visit the USS *Yorktown*, not only will you be able to see the Franklin dedicated compartments, but also tour the hanger deck, flight deck, superstructure, flight ready room, bridge, crew compartments, mess galley, fantail, 40mm and 20mm gun tubs, etc. I think it would give you a real sense of shipboard life to see it all. You can smell the engine oil and how close the air is as you work your way down to the crews quarters.

Jim sent me applications to fill out, a fresh copy of the 1945 *Collier's* article "Chaplain Courageous," about Father O'Callahan, U.S. Navy war photographs of the Pacific War (Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Harbor), and copies of the *Nimitz News* newsletter of the National Museum of the Pacific War.

He appreciated the pictures of Ace that I sent him:

I can't remember whether I have seen him, although it is more than likely that I did. He is ruggedly handsome, with perhaps a glint of mischief and fun in his eyes. From my position as a phone talker on the bridge, I more than likely observed your father taking off or landing at different times, along with other members of the air groups. On the 19th, however, I was 1 deck below there.

I told the Stuarts about the gap in my knowledge about Ace:

My mother was not very communicative about my father, possibly because it remained too painful a subject for her to discuss and possibly because she felt it might be disloyal to my stepfather (a fine man and the only father I ever really knew). I suppose that now, with both of them having passed away, I feel an urgency to find out as much as I can about my father. Even his older sister, my 93-year-old Aunt Jean, remembers very little about him. I'm hoping that I might come

in contact with someone who knew him on the ship. I so much appreciate your helping me make these initial contacts.

On August 29, Jim's wife, Jan, wrote her own very sensitive and moving e-mail to me, encouraging me to get to know my father even after so much time had elapsed:

Your letter was so moving. I feel if you simply let go of your stepfather's good influence, your mother's too, and open yourself to the place in your heart that was meant for your real Dad to fill, the memories, the lives, you can learn of and the feelings you can have for and about him, will come and fill that space as naturally as if they were always meant to - and of course, they were. That place in our hearts is built into all of us, and once you know its there, its easy. It won't come in the way or time or place you think it will, and you can't "will it" to come to you, it will simply rush in one day in a moment, and you will feel something you know was "him," the essence of what he was, what he did, and felt. It will seem like a shock, but a wonderful one.

She told me about her father's long navy career before and during World War II.

When I was little, they used to give me his album of Navy photos he had taken on board different ships, and I looked at those photos over and over again. I saw so many pictures of men standing with their arms around each others shoulders, smiling, that I thought it was all a grand adventure. He didn't get killed, and he came home a hero, was all I knew.

She told me how she had read every entry in the logs of her father's ships.

I read about things he talked about, convoys they were in, sinkings, mines, submarines, and its been like a movie of my life before I was me. They say you can remember being in the womb, well I know part of Dad that became me, was passed on to me, went with him wherever he was during the war, too. I hope you will come to feel this as I do.

She told me how she felt her father's presence when she saw on a destroyer escort an electrician's desk just like his. "I felt he was there with me, enjoying the memory. I felt his presence."

She told me how Jim had conducted a memorial ceremony at her father's gravesite.

I felt his presence there too, and a kind of relief and thanks from him that we remembered his need. So, you see, we actually help complete our father's lives even when they are gone, by

our actions that say we care about those war days and what they did. They know.



My correspondence with Jim and Jan Stuart has already evolved beyond their helping me with my search of Ace's final day. We've shared stories about our families, our hobbies, our hopes, our dreams. Even though we hadn't yet met in person, we had become friends. In June 2003 I did get a chance to meet them at the *Franklin* reunion in Pittsburgh. Here is a picture of the three of us together (I'm the one in the hat.)

But this narrative is about what happened to my father on that terrible day on the *Franklin*. Survivor hero Jim Stuart did not know Ace, but he did help me track down *Franklin* survivors who did know him. He and Jan take a deep interest in my findings, and their observations help me to keep the findings in perspective.

Wally Young

One of the first contacts Jim Stuart provided me was Ray Bailey of the USS Franklin CV-13 Museum Association. He suggested that Mr. Bailey might be able to put me in touch with a *Franklin* survivor who knew my father. I eagerly wrote to Mr. Bailey.

About a week later, on September 5, 2002, Mr. Bailey phoned me. We had a wonderful chat, during which he told me about his experiences as a seventeen-year-old gunner on the *Franklin* and about his rescue on the *Santa Fe*.

Mr. Bailey hadn't known Ace, but he did give me some names, one of which was Wallace ("Wally") Young, who had been, he said, either an ensign or a lieutenant junior grade in Ace's torpedo squadron. An actual pilot in the VT5 squadron!

Mr. Bailey cautioned me that Young contradicts everyone else about what happened, that he insists that the Japanese pilot dropped only one bomb instead of the two in the official version. I got the impression that Mr. Bailey regarded Wally Young as a crackpot, perhaps a little demented.

The very second that my phone call with Mr. Bailey was over, I called Mr. Young, who answered the phone himself. I told him I was Allan Edmands Jr., the son of Lieutenant Commander Allan C. Edmands, the skipper of Torpedo Squadron 5, and that I had been referred to him by Ray Bailey.

Almost immediately Mr. Young took my breath away with the following statement:

"I was right beside Commander Edmands when he was killed."

Mr. Young had my full attention.

He went on to tell me that Ace was going to be the first one of the squadron to take off in the run on Kobe. Ensign Young, as wing man, would take off as number two.

He went on to explain that the attack did not happen the way all the published stories said it did. He said he saw the Japanese plane coming from a great distance. He said that he saw the Japanese pilot (whose name, he said, was Ko Harada) drop a single "one-thousand-pound" bomb "from dead astern" and then fly on.

Mr. Young said Captain Gehres's stories — that the plane had suddenly appeared out of a cloud bank, that there were two "five-hundred-pound" bombs, and so on — were contradictory and blatant lies.

He promised to send me a "tape" he had prepared, explaining the details of his version of events (see page 97).

In his excitement about telling me all these things, he forgot more than once who precisely I was — was I a *cousin* of Commander Edmands? — even though I had clearly explained to him that I was Lieutenant Commander Edmands's son.

He knew right away how to spell my surname when I was trying to tell him my address. That he did not trip over that odd *a* in the middle of *Edmands* meant that he was familiar with the name. But since his hearing was poor and I was repeating the street and phone number several times, his wife came on the phone and took down the details and gave me their address.

In the midst of all this excitement and confusion, I did not get a clear picture from Mr. Young of what had happened to Ace that day. Clearly, his explanation about my father was sidetracked by his eagerness to tell me his version of the overall events.

That night I wrote a letter to him, quoting Lieutenant Carr's letter to my mother (see page 94) and Captain Gehres's letter to my grandmother (see page 96). I told him some of the anecdotes of Ace's sense of humor. "As you can imagine," I wrote, "I was quite startled when you said that you were beside him when he was killed."

I hope you don't mind my asking you to tell me as many details about this as you can, because I know very little about it. . . . After so much time has elapsed, I certainly do not need to be sheltered from the facts, no matter how gruesome they might be. I really wish to know the truth. You must have known my father quite well, so I hope you don't mind telling me whatever you can about him in life as well as the facts of his death. Did you see evidences of the type of humor I related to you [*at the beginning of the letter*]? I would really like to know whatever I can about this man--I so wish I would have gotten to know him as more than just a heroic ghost--and I don't mind it if some of your memories of him are not flattering. For heaven's sake, he was not even 34 years old yet, so he doesn't have to be perfect! (I'm very far from perfect at the age of 60.) . . . I very much appreciate your taking the time to share some memories of the remote past with me.

I enclosed a few digital copies of pictures of Ace, sealed the letter, and got it off in the morning's mail.

After fully quoting both Lieutenant Carr and Captain Gehres in the letter, I noticed that each had a slightly different version of events, which may or may not be contradictory. (I hadn't really paid attention to this before.) Lieutenant Carr had stated that Ace was "forced to go over the side" to avoid the fire. Captain Gehres had stated that Ace was in his plane on the flight deck at the time of the bombing (0707), that he somehow managed to get out of his plane and was seen on the stern, hangar deck level, at 0747—forty minutes later—and was not seen after that.

Of course, both Lieutenant Carr and Captain Gehres had been relaying hearsay; neither of them had been eye witnesses. In contrast, Ensign Wally Young had been on the scene, and he might be able to clear up all the apparent contradictions.

I realized, though, that I would have to sift through his epic of conspiracy to glean a few kernels of observations of my father, which was my real interest from the beginning. (Should I care whether it was one or two bombs that dropped on the *Franklin*?) I just hoped that some of his reflections on my father might help me fill in the missing pieces of the story.

On September 9 I received the "tape" that Mr. Young had referred to—a homemade videotape. On the following day, I received a letter from him. Both had been mailed the morning after my call—obviously before he had received my letter to him (or even knew that I would send one).

As soon as the video arrived, I put it into my VCR.

It was a patched-up piece, intended to prove his version of the events of March 19, 1945. Much of it was copied from *The Ship That Wouldn't Die*, the 1988 video produced by Bob Garthwaite (a colleague of my former mother-in-law), commemorating the attack on the occasion of the scrapping of the *Franklin* in the 1970s, a tape I had possessed for years.

Mr. Young patched in his own comments, an interview with a seaman from the destroyer *Hunt*, and another documentary I was not familiar with. Overall, the video quality was poor, but the audio was intelligible. (You can read a more detailed transcription beginning on page 97.)

[From the video narration :]

Here we are viewing two twin five-inch cannon mounts on the starboard edge of the flight deck. Above the forward cannon mount on the left, or port side, of the flight deck, you can

view the large chunk blown out of the flight deck. This is where I was sitting in the cockpit of my TBM Avenger. I was the next plane to take off, behind the TBM at the center line of the flight deck. He [Ace] was just spreading his wings prior to spooling up for takeoff.

Mr. Young then narrated how he saw the Japanese "Judy" bomber approach the ship. The plane's hatch was open, and Mr. Young and the pilot, named Ko Harada, looked each other in the eye. Then the pilot "yanked the Judy into a vertical position."

He rose about a hundred feet and then executed a vertical reverse and then came in at a shallow angle toward the forward aircraft [Ace's plane], the plane that was sitting right next to me, spreading his wings. I was the next plane to launch. At about 35 feet above my head, he released a 1000-pound bomb from his left wing, hanging up against the fuselage--from the left wing only. The bomb exploded. All of us in the planes jumped out. I went running back under the tail of my TBM, and all of a sudden just a BAAA!! and I went flat. And that propeller of the plane, this far [about two and a half feet] behind me, could have parted my hair. There were two pilots who did not duck and were ground into hamburger. One of them, I believe, was Commander Allan Edmands, our commanding officer of the torpedo squadron. The only thing the record said of it was "MIA--missing in action." They made no attempt to identify one of the two pilots that had been killed.

I shuddered when I heard these words, imagining my father "ground into hamburger."

In the letter that Mr. Young hadn't known I had sent I had told him to spare me no details, "no matter how gruesome they might be." The video had been made some years before, before Mr. Young knew of my existence. But even in real time, I was certain that Mr. Young would have none of the tact that Lieutenant Carr had shown my mother.

In Mr. Young's letter, which came the following day, he was responding to me in real time. He assumed that I, as well as my father, was a Lieutenant Commander. And he explained how he had confused me with my father's "cousin":

Dear Lt. Comdr. Allan Edmands

My first comment is what a thrill it was to receive your phone call. And secondly I had made a comment about your father's first cousin Sonny N. W. Edmands. His wife Rita had received from her brother . . . a copy of one of my reports on the Franklin of March 19, 1945. I mentioned your father Lt. Comdr ALLAN EDMANDS and how I was only 50 feet from him when

he was killed. I truly believe he was killed in the initial explosion. But the Avenger just behind him, the pilot Glen Druliner was killed also. But two other things that may have happened. ALLAN may have perished by falling in the huge hole the 1000lb Bomb made just behind the tail of his Avenger. Or the other possibility, he may have been one of the pilots who ran into a propeller and was ground to hamburger. I can say he never arrived at the fantail where 40 or 50 Airmen collected prior to grabing [sic] a rope and sliding down to the water. As Rita Edmands says "her husband was a survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack and fought all over the Pacific and returned to Massachusetts with the highest number of points." Her brother is a retired Lt COL US Army. . . .

The rest of the letter dealt with his apocryphal version of the overall events (you can see excerpts beginning on page 109).

Mr. Young enclosed in the letter an enlarged picture of the torpedo squadron (see page 110), on which he identified himself ("**Ensign Wally Young**") and my father ("**Lt Commander ALLAN EDMANDS our C.O. and a very good man**"). He also annotated the photo with a short harangue about Captain Gehres's damnable irresponsibility.

One result of this letter: I realized that "Sonny Edmands" was the same person as Nelson Wilfred Edmands Jr., my father's first cousin, the son of my grandfather's older brother, Nelson Wilfred Edmands Sr., 1875-1950. I had some data on Nelson Jr., in my genealogical records, but his nickname "Sonny" I had been unaware of. His parents, like mine, must have wanted to avoid calling him "Junior" and so had given him this nickname.

I searched my grandmother's diaries for references to Sonny, and I found many of them. I also entered his name in the Web and found an interview with him about his experiences as an army private at Schofield Barracks during the Pearl Harbor attack.¹⁸

Reading the interview, which included his picture, I discovered where Sonny and his wife, Rita, resided. I found their telephone number through directory assistance and called them up. We had a delightful chat, which inaugurated a continuing correspondence.

Sonny had always admired his older cousin Ace. During the phone call, Sonny, now eighty years old, asked me if I was as good-looking as my father had been (I told him I was not). Later Sonny sent me the certificate of how he had donated an

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the URL for that story no longer goes to this interview.

interment flag in honor of Ace at the “Avenue of Flags” wall in Hawaii’s Punchbowl Cemetery (see page 21).

The second result of Mr. Young’s letter: I realized that Ensign Young had had far too many things to think about and deal with when the bomb exploded to be a totally reliable eye witness of my father’s death. He “truly believed” Ace had been killed in the initial explosion. But he might have perished by falling in the hole. Or he may have been ground into hamburger, as some of the men were, by the whirling propellers of the bouncing, careening, burning, exploding planes. Mr. Young had to concentrate on his own survival, and there was confusion and thick, greasy smoke everywhere.

Gruesome as all of the foregoing possibilities that Mr. Young raised about Ace’s death, they seem to indicate that Ace was killed very quickly and that he probably felt little or no pain. In any event, I had been more or less prepared to hear something of the sort of Mr. Young’s crude “ground into hamburger” phrase. It only confirmed what my sister Christine and I already suspected.¹⁹

I was still in awe that I was communicating with my father’s wing man, with a man who served under my father, with a man who had seen my father warming up his plane. Mr. Young held my attention, and his report so far carried more weight than the secondhand reports of Captain Gehres and Lieutenant Carr. But I realized that I needed to corroborate his story with those of other squadron pilots.

Mr. Young sent me poorly reproduced diagrams of the *Franklin*, showing the positions of the VT5 planes. He sent me a several sketches of the “radial-engine” Judy he insisted was the Japanese plane that had dropped the single bomb. And he sent me a report (or unsigned affidavit) he had made some years before as his personal account. The following is an excerpt (but you can see the entire affidavit, beginning on page 107):

The plane beside me was just spreading his wings as I ducked down in the cockpit. The shock of the huge explosion under the flight deck was taken up by the hydraulic struts of my landing gear. The result was some bounces. The thick oily smoke that engulfed us was from the 115 octane gasoline from the aircraft on the hangar deck as they exploded. I never saw the Avenger again that was beside me, but it must have been our commanding

¹⁹ My sister Christine helped me understand that Lieutenant Carr was fibbing, shielding our mother from some gruesome details about the condition of Ace’s remains, which must have indeed been discovered: Ace had not been able to get that ring off his finger, and no serviceman is ever without his dog tags, especially in a combat zone, especially when strapped in a plane readying for takeoff on a bombing raid. The fact that Lieutenant Carr’s words can be doubted makes all the official version of events—including what Captain Gehres, who received his information second or third hand, said in his letter (see page 96) as well as what was in the hastily edited *Lucky Bag* twenty-year reunion book—seem possibly suspect.

officer Lt. Commander Allan Edmands. It is normal procedure that the C.O. is the first plane airborne. I was to be his wingman. I jumped from my plane and ran under the tail, at that moment some GOD given instinct caused me to drop flat on the deck just under the whirling propeller of the plane just behind mine. It could have parted my hair. I crawled all the way to the fantail under many propellers. A fellow pilot, Buck Milligan, told me years later that he had come across two pilots who had not ducked and had been ground into hamburger.

Mr. Young sent me another letter right away, probably before he had received my only letter to him. "Hello there ALLAN EDMANDS. I am still thrilled by your phone call the other day. Does your rank of Lieutenant Commander indicate you were a graduate of Annapolis like your father?" The rest of the letter (see page 109) was a request for me to dig up some information to help him prove his apocryphal version.

Before I had a chance to respond to that letter, he phoned me. I explained that I had never attended the Naval Academy.

The next letter from him was at last in response to my letter and the copies of digitized pictures I had enclosed, including the picture I thought was the last one taken of Ace. Mr. Young explained that he, as the photographic reconnaissance pilot for the carrier, had taken the picture himself and was positive that he had the original stored in a trunk someplace. The rest of the letter (page 109) was about proofs for his one-bomb theory as well as loving descriptions of ghastly carnage.



I began to realize that Mr. Young was so obsessively focused on proving his theory that he was not going to be able to give me very much reliable information on my father, not only on the circumstances of his death but also on some anecdotal observations of him as a living skipper.

Jim Stuart, continuing his interest in and support of my search for answers, provided some perspective on the search and offered some important help in furthering it:

Allan, March 19 was a bad day, and I am sure it will be difficult to uncover all the detail you seek. On the other hand, you probably will be able to know a lot more of what happened. [Then, in a subsequent e-mail:] I will review the roster book and determine if I can if there are any Squadron Five Members listed. If so, I will make copies of their names and addresses

to send to you, to contact them. It will take me a few days as there are several hundred names to go over.

Jim was obviously concerned that I expand my investigation beyond my father's wing man, whom he regarded as a crackpot.

I have not been able to respond to Mr. Young's letters, so he has stopped writing them. The last letter I have from him was after both of us had spoken with the daughter of Lieutenant Carr (who died a few years ago). It is a meandering ramble, and it contains the wild notion that Ace was a psychic.

Hello there ALLAN EDMANDS

I think I will have to establish a detective agency to compete with the famous Pinkerton agency that was so famous in the mid to late 1800's. In your last letter or was it phone call you posed what could have been an incredible problem when you mentioned that your fathers wedding ring and dog tags were in your possession. This really shook me up and posed a question that is almost unbelievable. Could your father had a premonition that he was to suffer his supreme sacrifice and cause him to take that ring off. This is exactly what happened. I started going through my suitcases full of correspondence and came across the "BIG BEN" directory which has the name of everyone that could be accounted for on that carrier. I found the name of Lt. Charles Carr and also Thomas King who is the vice president of the Franklin Association. I decided to call Lt. Carr to start with it was a stroke of incredible luck his widow still lives in their original house in Fremont California. And her daughter and husband live in an adjoining house and handle all of her mail. When I told her daughter what I was attempting to do "This part is as exciting as your first call to me" she said. My Goodness yes I have that original letter and it spoke of a man who searched Comdr Edmands quarters and found the wedding ring and dog tags that he surrendered to Lt. Carr. If you could study the pictures of the flight deck I'm sure you will agree with me. That huge hole in the flight deck just about 15 ft. in back of where he was sitting is what happened to your father. The huge fire and smoke that came out of that area. I know I lived through it. you could not see because 115 octain aviation gasoline was so thick I had to lie on the deck and shove my mouth in a hole in the grating to try to get air. had I remained in this position for another 30 seconds I would have perished. But someone on the bring [bridge?] had brought that huge ship crosswind and the 35 knots of wind cleared the deck of smoke. Mrs Anne Currier [Lieutenant Carr's daughter] is sending me a copy.

Sincerely
Wally Young

The idea of Ace having such a premonition of his death and therefore leaving his ring and dog tags in his room is so completely out of character that I did not entertain Mr. Young's theory for a minute.

Both Jim and Jan Stuart were shocked when I told them of the letters from Wally Young. Jan wrote:

I was terribly distressed to learn how cruel Young was in his assertions about your father, but I want to compliment you on weathering it so well, that you see thru to the bigger story underneath his demented condition, that your search had to lead thru this to something more. You are indeed a wonderful son. Perhaps you didn't set about on your search earlier in life because you needed the maturity and distance to handle this part. I have found that, in every serious search or endeavor of the heart, there are obstacles. Usually the meanest ones seem placed there to test how much you want to know, how far you will dare go to find truth, justice, or whatever.

At any rate, by the time Mr. Young's final letter arrived, I had already received the lists that Jim had prepared and had spoken with other VT5 crew members, including an eye witness who gave me a more reliable account of what must have happened to Ace.

As Mr. Young states in this letter, he could not see because of the thick smoke, and he had to lie on the deck and keep his face in a grating. He was not observing what Ace was doing. And now he can only speculate. Wildly.

Jack Hensel

My mentor in the search for my father among his *Franklin* shipmates, Jim Stuart, went through hundreds of names in the Franklin Association roster book to isolate those of Air Group 5 members. (Air Group 5 contained VF5, the fighter squadron, VB5, the dive bomber squadron, and VT5, the torpedo squadron that Ace had commanded.)

On September 15, 2002, Jim sent the lists he had compiled in regular mail.

Dear Allan, I'm enclosing 3 lists that may help you obtain additional information re. your Dad. I reviewed our roster of USS Franklin Association members and these lists of names, division, Rank-class, home town and telephone no. are reflected thereon. It appears there are several potential men or families that you may wish to contact. I regret it took me so long to get this info to you. My best wishes-- God speed, Jim

It did not take him long at all to get me this information. I had been searching for *Franklin* survivors for exactly one month and one day, and I felt I had made good progress already. The lists opened up new and promising possibilities, however, and gave me a chance to corroborate the information that Wally Young had given me – and to enlarge upon it.

Now that I had these lists in my hands, however, I put off doing anything about it. I was afraid to make the first call. I found the lists intimidating. After nearly a week, I got over my fear and decided which name on the three lists I would call first.

One list contained names of deceased members from Air Group 5, each name accompanied with a name of a surviving family member to contact. The second list contained names of living VF5 and VB5 members, with all their contact information. It was the third list that I went to first, though: the one containing the names of living VT5 men.

My priority was the commissioned officers, because they would have been most likely to know not only the circumstances of Ace's death but also telling anecdotes from his life. The non-coms were probably quite a bit younger and would not have had the chance to get to know my father personally.

On the VT5 list were three officers. One of them was Ensign Wallace Young, whom I had already contacted and from whom I had probably learned all I was ever going to learn. Unfortunately, calling the listed numbers of the two others –

Lieutenant William Rose and Lieutenant Morton Freeman — led nowhere: The roster book must have needed to be updated, because the numbers were no longer in service.

On to the enlisted men.

Each of the TBM Avenger planes in the squadron contained a three-man crew: the pilot, who was inevitably an officer, and two enlisted men: a turret gunner and a radio man. There might be a chance I could speak with either the gunner or the radio man on the plane that Ace piloted.

I called the number for John (“Jack”) Hensel, an ordnance gunner in the squadron. When I told him who I was, he was very happy to talk with me and told me to call him Jack.

Like the other survivors I had already spoken with and with whom I would be speaking with, Jack remembered sharply every detail of that day nearly six decades before, just as though it had been only yesterday. He had gotten up at three a.m. on March 19 and had had an early breakfast in order to be ready for takeoff at seven. He reported to the crew ready room. While he was there, he learned that there was a change in the crew assignments. He would have been in the turret of the plane piloted by Lieutenant Junior Grade David Gibson.

But the radio man wasn’t checked out on the new radar-interference equipment, so he had to be replaced. (Possibly Ace’s change of raid schedules caused some of this confusion.) Jack hung around in the crew ready room waiting for the fighter planes and dive bombers to take off. He planned to go out into the cold air to watch the torpedo planes (his squadron) take off. Thinking it had to be time for them, he went out on the catwalk next to the flight deck. Unfortunately, only half of the bombers had taken off.

Staying out on the catwalk watching a couple more planes take off probably saved his life. Finally, he decided to get out of the cold and go in to get some coffee, planning to return later when the VT5 planes would take off.

He was starting to descend from the catwalk toward the ready room when a huge explosion occurred and a wall of flames enveloped him. The smoke was so thick he couldn’t see his hands in front of his face. On both hands and face, he suffered second-degree burns. Jack felt that he was going to pass out. For a split second before a second explosion the air cleared and he got a clean breath. A series of explosions contaminated the air again.

To escape the inferno, Jack knew that he needed to go over the side. By leaning over the rail, rolled over the side of the ship, falling eighty or ninety feet into the water. From the depths he could see the glitter of the ocean surface.

Once he got to the surface, another sailor – Monte, in the bomber crew – yelled at him from a raft to ditch his steel helmet. Jack was also wearing a double pair of pants and heavy shoes, which he also ditched so that he could better stay afloat. With him in the water he saw several dead bodies with blank stares. The blood on his hands made him think that sharks might attack. He saw Gibson lying in the water half unconscious. Monte jumped off his raft and, with Jack’s help, pulled Gibson onto it. After a while, Jack was able to pull himself onto the donut-shaped cork raft.

In the confusion, the battleship USS *North Carolina* approached very close to the raft and almost swamped it. Another sailor had come onto the raft, but the wake of the big ship knocked him off. Finally, as with Jim Stuart, Jack and his raft companions were rescued by the destroyer USS *Hickox*. Jack remembers grabbing a rope from the destroyer and being pulled more than a hundred feet in the water before being hoisted aboard. The *Hickox* kept circling the *Franklin* all the rest of the day and all night. (See the *Hickox*’s log of the day on page 129.)

Jack was not aware of what had happened to his skipper, my father. But he did share his impression of Ace as a C.O. and as a man. After explaining to me that since enlisted men did not fraternize with officers, he had never gotten to know my father personally, he told me that Lieutenant Commander Edmands was a “jolly fellow, always with a smile.” He had always made the squadron feel like a family – for example, in volleyball competitions.



I met Jack at last at the *Franklin* reunion in Pittsburgh in June 2003. Here is a picture of him. Jack was, unfortunately, the only one of Ace’s squadron who was able to attend; at least his presence there ensured that VT5 was represented. I spent as much time with Jack as I could. He gave me a copy of his own memories as an air crewman (see page 113), including his detailed account of what happened to him on March 19, 1945, and a report on the rescue of the *Franklin* by a crew member of the cruiser USS *Pittsburgh*, which towed the *Franklin* out of the combat zone (see page 134).

Marion Gray

VT5 crew member Ordnance Gunner Third Class Marion “Shorty” Gray (also known as “Red” or “Tink”) was also happy to receive my call and to relate what had happened on March 19, 1945, from his point of view.

He had been awake almost the entire night with all the calls to General Quarters to deal with hostile aircraft that wanted to attack the Task Force. He was in Lieutenant Carr’s half of the squadron, which was not going to take off until noon, so he was finally given leave to get some sleep.

Mr. Gray was awakened by the *Franklin*’s being hit; he was tossed out of his top bunk.

I must confess that I do not recall the rest of Mr. Gray’s story about how he survived that day. I listened, but I did not take notes. The purpose of my calling was to learn about what happened to my father; after I knew that Mr. Gray had not seen his skipper the entire day, I listened politely to his story, but my pen was idle. I asked him questions about it, but I heard nothing very different from the stories of danger and survival that I’d already heard several times. Like all the other men on the *Franklin* that day, though, Mr. Gray is a hero.

In each interview I had with men on the lists that Jim Stuart had provided me, I first listened to the story of the terrible events of March 19, from the viewpoint of the survivor. If there was anything in the story about my father, I scribbled furiously and probed for further information. Also, if the story had unusual details, I took careful notes.

After hearing the survival story from each of the men, I would ask him if he could recall impressions of his skipper in life. Anecdotes about my father as a living person, as a real man, are very important to me, to balance the image I’ve always had of him as a heroic ghost.

Mr. Gray shared with me the following anecdote:

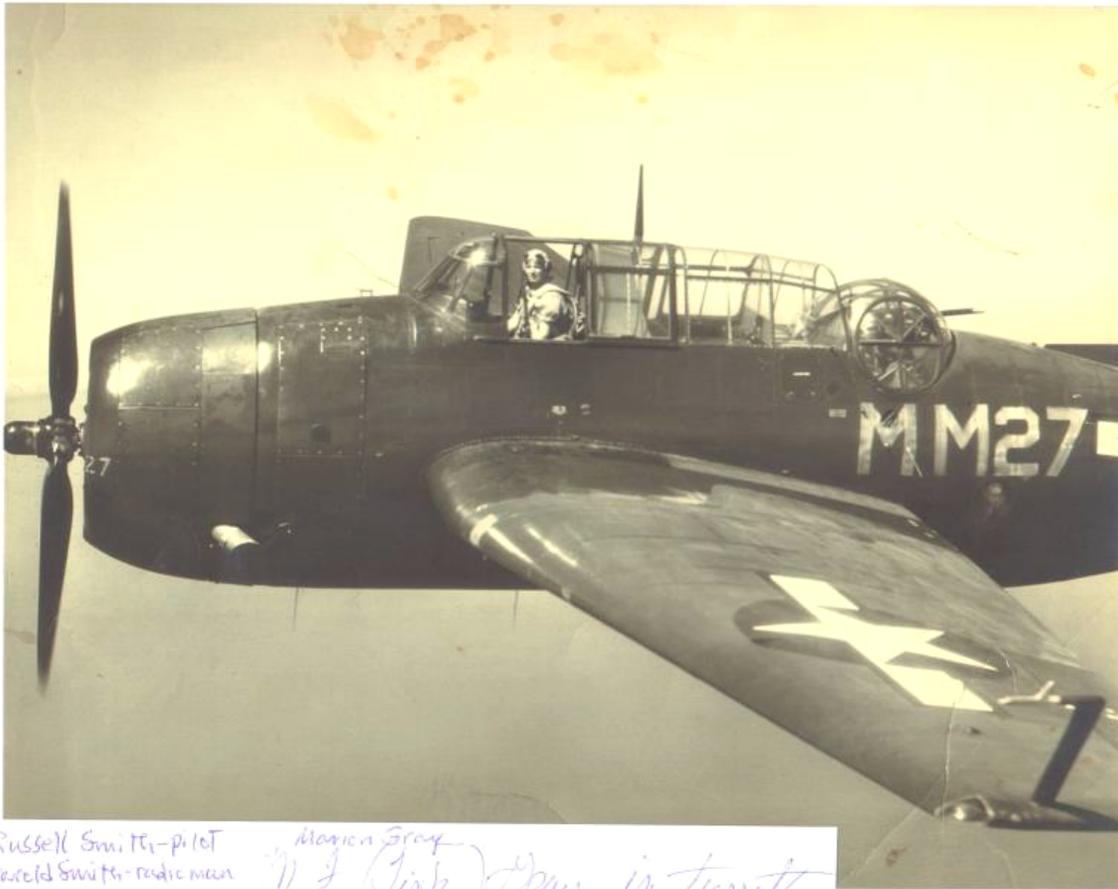
They had been on their way from Hawaii to Ulithi Atoll in late February. Artillery men were doing rocket practice against a sled being towed by the ship. Mr. Gray, a twenty-year-old green recruit, was completely frightened by all the rockets flying around.

On the following day, Lieutenant Commander Edmands addressed the non-coms: “You inexperienced lads – what did you think about what you saw yesterday?”

Mr. Gray stood forward and admitted that the exercise “scared the daylights out of me.”

His summary comment on Ace: “one of the best commanders I ever ran into.”

Later Mr. Gray sent me this picture of his Avenger torpedo plane, piloted by Russell Smith. Mr. Gray is facing the rear in the bubble turret. Not shown is the radio man, Harold Smith.



Russell Smith-pilot
Harold Smith-radio man

Mayen Gray
"I think Gray in turret"

Edward McGuckin

I continued my search for specifics on what happened to my father during the disaster on the USS *Franklin* on March 19, 1945. In my phone interview with Ordnance Gunner Third Class Edward McGuckin (hereafter referred to as “Ed”), on the list of living VT5 members that Jim Stuart had provided me, I hit the jackpot.

In a calm and lucid voice, Ed told me that Ace was definitely *not* killed in the initial explosion, or by falling in the gaping hole from that explosion, or in the whirling propellers of the bouncing TBM Avenger torpedo planes – all the speculations of wing man Ensign Wally Young.

I scribbled furiously on my notepad as Ed was talking, asking him to repeat some of his statements a number of times. I was trembling as I wrote.

After the initial explosion, Ed made it aft to just starboard of the landing signal officer’s station, which is on the port stern of the flight deck. That was the only logical place to go, since forward from there was an inferno of thick smoke, raging fire, and continuing explosions.

Ed was absolutely certain that he saw Ace, his commanding officer, among about twenty men there. Ace was not wounded.

Someone (Ed thinks it might have been Ensign McAlister) asked Ace: “What are we going to do now, skipper?”

Ace responded that since there was no way to go forward into the smoke, flames, and explosions, they would probably have to go over the side.

Just then there was a huge explosion, blowing Ed about ten to fifteen feet backward and stunning him. When he came to his senses, he could see only five men left of the original twenty or so. Ace was not among them.

Ed did not see Ace after that explosion. From that statement, I have made a number of conclusions:

I conclude that Ace was killed in that explosion, probably erupting from underneath the flight deck – in other words, on the terrible hangar deck. The explosion was violent enough to kill men on the flight deck at the landing signal officer’s station and to blow them overboard.

I conclude that Ace must have been blown overboard. (It is possible, I suppose, that his remains were still aboard the ship, unrecognizable to Ed, but I doubt it, because the intensity of the fires rendered most of the bodies unrecognizable, as Wally Young had said in one of his letters (see page 109). In a subsequent phone call, Ed told me, very tactfully I might add, that it was very unlikely that Ace's remains were discovered on board ship, considering the horrific explosions and fires that were raging on both the flight and hangar decks. He told me that very many remains were discovered in the water, however.

I had earlier shared my sister's conclusion that Ace's Academy ring and dog tags were recovered from his remains, not from his room, as Lieutenant Carr had told my mother in his letter (see page 94). Lieutenant Carr had wanted to shelter my mother from the gruesome details about Ace's remains.

I now conclude that what was left of Ace, floating in his "Mae West" life preserver (standard apparel for each man in a combat situation, certainly for a pilot warming up his plane), was retrieved from the water later, perhaps hours later. The dog tags served to identify Ace.

I conclude that later, sometime over the next few days as the *Franklin* made its sad way back to Ulithi Atoll, Ace was "buried at sea" with Taps playing (see Thomas Hagan's story on page 76).

Soon after that explosion, with the *Franklin* "out of control" with the explosions and fires and listing dangerously, Ed went over the side with the other men at that location. He was able to get onto a raft with several others. They were rescued by the destroyer USS *Marshall* some six hours later.



Ed later gave me the picture on the left of what was left of the VT5 crew, when it re-formed several weeks later in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

On the right is an enlargement of just Ed McGuckin in that picture.



Ed had quite a bit to say about his skipper. He told me that he had a great deal of respect for him; he had never heard anything bad ever said about him.

Oh yes, one thing: He was “not adroit.” I asked what he meant. My father, well over six feet tall, would lead the squadron in calisthenics during the morning muster, but apparently he was not well coordinated himself.

Ed said that my father was “too nice a guy” to be a commanding officer.

He said Ace was a “very efficient leader.” The reputation of VT5 among the other squadrons in Air Group 5 had suffered, he told me, from their poor practice performances “stateside” (California): From their Santa Rosa home base, the squadron did torpedo practice in Monterey, rocket practice in Humboldt Bay (Arcata), and night flying in Modesto. In the months leading up to their shipping out on the *Franklin*, Ace had worked hard to improve his squadron’s reputation.

Just the day before the Japanese bomber struck the carrier, the squadron had flown two missions against Kagoshima and other ports in Kyushu, doing quite a bit of damage to Japanese shipping there. Ed attributed the success of the missions to Ace’s fine leadership. The squadron’s reputation had been salvaged in actual combat performance, and they were looking to enhance it further during the scheduled raids on March 19.

Ed told me that, as a seventeen-year-old enlisted man, he had not socialized with the officers, so he really did not get to know his skipper very well as a person. He did say, however, that he preferred him as a commanding officer over any other officer he had observed or experienced.

He said he always gave good information, “words of wisdom,” during squadron briefings.

He related one anecdote, further illustrating Ace as an “efficient leader”: Apparently there had been one instance stateside of an enlisted man making a homosexual pass at other men in the squadron. Ed and five other sailors reported the incident to my father, and by the next day this individual was no longer with them.

Ed remembered my father as a “regular guy” at a squadron party in Santa Rosa; he didn’t keep himself aloof and holy from the non-coms.

As with the other men I contacted from Jim Stuart’s list, I wrote Ed a letter, enclosing copies of some of the digitized pictures of Ace. I told him that he had filled in a large gap in my knowledge and that I greatly appreciated it.

I spoke with Ed several times after that initial interview, and I made sure that I understand the details of his story clearly. I began to feel confident that I wouldn’t learn information more precise than his report.

It was comforting to realize that my father probably felt no pain at all in his death.

Thomas Hagan

On the list of living VT5 members that Jim Stuart had provided me was the name of another turret gunner, Thomas Hagan, AMM 2/c (aviation machinist's mate second class). I tried to call the number written by his name and was told by a computer voice that the number had been disconnected. I put an "X" beside the name and went on to the next one.

On September 22, Jack Hensel, one of the first crewmen I had interviewed, wrote to me:

Dear Allan, Just a note to give you some information that might be of some help to you. Several years ago at a Franklin reunion I met a member of our squadron (VT5): Thomas J. Hagan [followed by Mr. Hagan's address]. At the time he was having some health problems. I am almost sure he was the turret gunner that flew with your father. There was also a radio man in the three man crew. Tom had a large family. You might be able to get more information out of them. . . . Hope to converse again. If I think of anything else I'll inform you. Very truly yours, Jack Hensel

The address that Mr. Hensel provided was different from the one on the list. I tried directory assistance for that town and learned that Thomas Hagan now had an unlisted number; the information operator would not tell me what it was.

I wrote a letter to Thomas Hagan at the address Mr. Hensel provided, but the letter came back undelivered. Somehow, Mr. Hagan resided in the vicinity of that town (otherwise, the directory assistance operator wouldn't have understood whom I was trying to contact) but not precisely *in* that town.

Years ago, in the days before zip codes, postal workers would have been more helpful: For example, my family, residing in Centralia, Washington, once received a letter addressed to them in Centerville, Oregon. It was delivered only a day or so late too. Those days are over. Even if Mr. Hagan was in a town a couple of miles away from the one I had included in the address, the letter would be rejected.

I tried a new tactic. I called directory assistance on successive days, asking each time for the number for Thomas J. Hagan, but each day saying he resided in a different town in that region. I was waiting to hear the operator (apparently a different operator each day) tell me right away that the number was unlisted without first telling me that she had a Thomas Hagan but not in that town.

On the day the operator didn't give me the disclaimer before telling me the number was unlisted, I was sure I must have found the right town. I enclosed the first, returned letter in another envelope, addressed it without a street number to Thomas J. Hagan in that town, and mailed it. I mailed it Priority, which was expensive, because I thought that the postal workers might stretch a little bit for me and supply the missing address.

Wrong! The Priority letter came back to me again, after quite a few days had elapsed, as undeliverable.

I told my frustration to my friends, Jim and Jan Stuart. A few days later they told me a new address for Thomas Hagan, which they found on a brand-new roster they had just received. It was a complete street address in a town I hadn't yet tried.

I enclosed the returned Priority envelope (which contained the original, returned letter) in a new Priority envelope – like nested Russian *matryoshka* dolls. On each of the two interior envelopes I attached an explanatory note with my phone number. I mailed the entire business the next day.

About a week later, Thomas Hagan called me.

He told me he had been the gunner in the plane of Lieutenant Charles Carr, my father's executive officer (second in command). He explained that the March 18 missions he had been on had targeted the cities of Nagasaki and Usa on the island of Kyushu. Usa was a particularly attractive target, because Japanese industrialists had set up factories in that city and labeled the poorly manufactured products they had exported to America: "MADE IN USA." (Apparently, they tried this tactic after the war as well.)

Mr. Hagan explained that Ace and Lieutenant Carr each led separate halves of the torpedo squadron. While one-half went on a bombing raid, the other stayed back on the ship, resting up. He said that Ace had been scheduled to command the noon attack on March 19 and Lieutenant Carr the morning attack. But when he learned that the morning target included Kobe Harbor, where the giant battleship *Yamato* and the carrier *Amagi* were anchored, Ace couldn't resist the chance to get the "first crack" at them. His half of the squadron took the morning slot; Lieutenant Carr's half was bumped to noon.

When the planes were ready to take off that morning, Seaman Hagan, then twenty-two years old, was on the catwalk. He and his buddy decided to go belowdecks to get an apple in the chow hall. He was down there when the first bomb struck; had he remained on the catwalk, he surely would have been killed.

When Mr. Hagan finally made it out of the smoke belowdecks, he was recruited by Father O'Callahan to help roll hot bombs off the deck.

Eventually, because he was nonessential personnel (since he was part of the Air Group), he was ordered off the ship and over to the *Santa Fe*. During the cruise back to Ulithi Atoll and Pearl Harbor, the *Santa Fe* stayed alongside the *Franklin*. Every day Mr. Hagan saw bodies buried at sea off the *Franklin*, with gun salutes and Taps played.

I assume that Ace's remains must have been among those so buried. I began to conclude that I wouldn't get much closer to the facts about Ace's death than I now was.

The facts of his death are important to me, especially since there had been so much confusion about it. But what really interests me more are anecdotes about him in life.

Mr. Hagan told me that he had great admiration for my father. "I never saw him get mad."

All during the monotonous anti-sub training from the Santa Rosa base, my father never lost his temper with the "Airedales" (as the non-com turret gunners were called).

"If he didn't have his uniform on, you'd swear he wasn't an officer. He always talked to us like a regular guy."

When they sailed into the combat zone, Ace would come into the radar room, where radar technicians were reporting such things as "Bogies three miles out."

Ace would inquire, as though the radar receivers were some kind of television (not available to the general public at that time): "What's going on in the show tonight?"

Mr. Hagan and I were on the phone for over an hour, and I hope to meet him at a *Franklin* reunion.

I told both the Stuarts and Jack Hensel of my successful interview with him.

More Heroes

Eventually I called every phone number on the list of living crew members of my father's squadron, Torpedo Squadron 5 (VT5). Unfortunately, quite a few of the numbers did not work.

Ed McGuckin helped me get in contact with a VT5 radio man whose address and phone number were not on the list: Marion "Mars" Dringman. Mr. Dringman, who was eighteen when the *Franklin* was hit, did not remember his skipper, my father, but he did tell me his own experiences on that day. He was strapped into the plane piloted by Lieutenant Viewig when the first bomb hit. He scrambled out of the plane and somehow made it to the starboard stern, where he and a number of other men were trapped by the conflagrations on the rest of the flight deck. Eventually he went over the side into the water, whose temperature, he told me, was fifty-two degrees. After three hours he was rescued by the destroyer USS *Hunt*, the same vessel that rescued Wally Young.

I spoke to Lieutenant Bob Frank, who had been in charge of bomber maintenance on the *Franklin*. He would stand midship behind the flight deck officer who would wave the planes off the deck. Lieutenant Frank would listen to the sound of the plane's engine; only if the engine sounded OK to him would he approve the takeoff. He told me that he did not even hear the bombs explode from the initial attack (perhaps the concussion affected his hearing); he realized a disaster had occurred when he saw pieces of deck planking flying in the air. When the dense smoke cleared somewhat, he went out to several abandoned planes on the deck and turned their engines off. Then he fetched some life rafts and made it back to the stern, where he saw my father along with two other officers. He told me that he gave them the rafts and then went forward again to get some more life rafts. He was able to return some twenty minutes later, but the officers were no longer there. He had theorized all these years that the three officers had gone off in the rafts but had been missed by the rescue ships – in other words, that they had been lost at sea. When I told Mr. Frank that I had Ace's dog tags and ring, confirming that he had been found, he suggested that the raft must have presented a fine target for enemy planes and that the officers had been killed by strafing. I give more credence to the version from Ed McGuckin, however.

I also called some of the names listed as contacts on the list of deceased members and had a few interesting conversations. And I called some of the names on the list of VF5 (the fighter squadron) and VB5 (the dive bomber squadron) members. Again, I had some interesting conversations, but none of the crew members had known Ace.

One of these, William McClellan, a VB5 ensign, had gone for coffee and was several decks down when the bombs struck the ship. He found his way to the flight deck and fought fires for hours. He was never even wounded, and he stayed with the ship all the way to New York.

Mr. McClellan disputed the supposedly official fact that the *Franklin* had really been named not for Benjamin Franklin, as the popular myth would have it, but for the little-known Civil War battle in Franklin, Tennessee. He said he had been aware of the official story before he had come aboard "Big Ben" for the first time. He had begun correcting some of his crewmates who attributed the name to Mr. Franklin, and they laughed at him. They were certain it really had been named after Benjamin Franklin, just as the USS *Hancock* had been named after John Hancock. Mr. McClellan's shipmates convinced him.

To my mind, the argument resembles the one between those who insist that the actual beginning of the millennium was January 1, 2001, on the one hand, and those who say it was a year earlier, on the other hand. There are just too many important controversies to get riled up about, and these arguments are not among them.

Another non-VT5 non-com, Henry Ashbrook, now residing in Kentucky, had been an aviation ordnance man and machinist's mate on the *Franklin*. He had been trapped below decks during the catastrophe, and he was one of the men rescued from suffocation by joining the human chain led by the celebrated Lieutenant Junior Grade Donald A. Gary.

After we had thoroughly discussed all the details of March 19, I just had to tell him that my stepfather was an Ashbrook, whose family had come from the Appalachian back country of western Virginia, bordering Kentucky. Unfortunately, Mr. Ashbrook did not know of any possible family connection.

A couple of the conversations I had with survivors were difficult. One of the flight crew members was trembling and weeping as he told me his story. Even though I suggested we could talk later or just communicate in the mail, he insisted on going on. He was still living with the horrible carnage of March 19, 1945. He was usually able to cope by stilling his feelings, but my call stirred them up into a seething tumult. The next day he wrote to me:

I'm sorry for the emotions yesterday. I've been holding it in too long. I am getting VA therapy for it. It helps to talk like we did. . . .

Lois Ann Watt, the widow of VT5 turret gunner Thomas Watt (who passed away a couple of years ago), called me in response to the message I had left. We

chatted for a while, and she told me her husband had talked about the events of March 19 for the rest of his life.

I had also left a message on the answering machine of Lieutenant Carr's widow (Lieutenant Carr died in 1984). Weeks later I received a letter from his daughter, Ann Currier Carr. My message had been corrupted, and she hadn't been able to discern my number from it, but she was told my address by Wally Young (who was calling her on his own quest to prove his version of events).

I called her and we had a long conversation about Lieutenant Carr's letter to my mother, in which he stated that Ace's ring and dog tags had been "found" in his stateroom on the ship (see page 94). Ms. Carr was not born until the 1950s and she knew of these stories only secondhand, but she believes that her father had been telling the truth. She promised she would send me copies of other pertinent correspondence her father had made.

While pursuing these stories during the autumn of 2002, I decided to join the American WWII Orphans Network (AWON), a broker of resources for researching family members killed in the war.

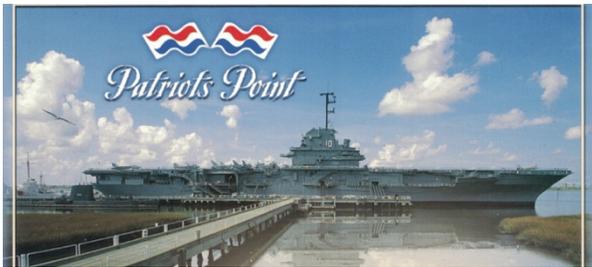
Through Jim Stuart I became acquainted with Phil Gentry, whose father had been a Marine ordnance specialist in the Black Sheep Squadron assigned to the *Franklin*. Phil has asked me to put Ace's story on his website (www.ussfranklin.org).

Yorktown and After

At the end of December, Ina, my wife, Max, my son, and I journeyed to South Carolina, where we became acquainted in person with my cousin Sonny Edmands and his wife, Rita. We had already been writing back and forth for a couple of months, ever since my communication with Wally Young had alerted me to their existence. Sonny, now eighty years old, had been a nineteen-year-old army private at Schofield Barracks when Hawaii was attacked by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. He had been with General MacArthur's forces in the retaking of the Philippines, and he can talk for hours about the combat at Leyte Gulf.



Sonny remembered Ace, his first cousin, very well. A few years before, he had arranged for a flag commemoration of him at the Punchbowl Cemetery on Oahu (see page 21).



Sonny and Rita went with us on our tour of the Essex-class aircraft carrier USS *Yorktown* (CV-10), the "Fighting Lady," at Patriot's Point – sister ship of the *Franklin* (CV-13), which decades ago had been sliced up with a cutting torch and sold as scrap metal – to Japan.

On this massive warship, we lingered in the room dedicated to the *Franklin*. Here is a painting in that room of the *Franklin* catastrophe.



Sonny, wearing his "Pearl Harbor Survivor" hat, was approached by strangers who asked him about his experiences. He gladly told his war stories. I could tell that the strangers assumed that I was Sonny's son. Most of the time, I, a tourist like them, a civilian for my entire life, did nothing to correct the assumption, proud to be associated with Sonny.



On one occasion, however, I did correct it. I explained that I was actually Sonny's cousin, that I was the son of a pilot who had been killed in combat on a ship just like the *Yorktown*.

I was able to get a close-up look at a real TBM Avenger, the plane that Ace flew. We toured the flight crew's ready room. And I found out exactly what a fantail is on a carrier.

We followed the tour along narrow corridors, and I imagined them filled with thick smoke. I felt the steel walls and imagined how they could be too hot to touch. We wound around belowdecks, and I stepped into compartments, imagining how it would feel if the breathable air were giving out in them. I closed my eyes and imagined hearing terrifying explosions and screams.

On the flight deck, I stood in an aft area, approximately corresponding to where Ace's torpedo squadron, the VT5 Torpcats, must have been revving up the engines of their Avengers, pointing forward, readying for takeoff from the *Franklin* nearly fifty-eight years before. The aircraft now displayed on the *Yorktown*'s flight deck are much more modern, but I squinted my eyes and imagined them as Avengers.

Then I imagined chaos in that area after the ship was hit, the pandemonium of the planes bouncing, careening, tipping over, burning, exploding, their propellers whirling, gnashing, chopping, shredding.

As I walked aft, a tourist in the last week of 2002, I imagined myself crawling in March 1945 along a deck slick with oil and blood, choking in thick, greasy, black smoke, hearing shrieks, more explosions, and the awful clangs of hot shrapnel striking metal surfaces.

When I reached what would have been the landing signal officer's station at the port stern of the flight deck, I stood for a while at the safety fence and looked out into Charleston Harbor, where the terrible American Civil War had begun. The fence had been installed by the Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum to protect tourists like me from falling off the side of the deck. On a working carrier, as the *Franklin* was, there would have been no fence interrupting this landing strip for incoming aircraft.

I leaned against the fence and turned around, looking forward toward the bow. I imagined being with men trapped where I was, an unstable perch on a March morning long ago, nothing but hell forward from them. And under them, too—I imagined the hot fury raging on the hangar deck right below, a ghastly giant fireworks show of rockets, bombs, and aviation gasoline, and the terrible danger of more explosions impending.

The men trapped there were tiny on the gigantic, shuddering, and listing ship that had been home to three thousand of them. The distressed ship was tiny on the surface of the cold North Pacific Ocean, which was temporarily disturbed by a flaming oil slick and the flotsam of human warfare. The ocean, here at the edge of its Nankai Trench, was nearly a mile deep.

It would have been obvious that the only course was to go over the side.

I'm not a particularly spiritual person, and I don't pretend to know a lot about souls. But at that place, what would have been the *Yorktown's* landing signal officer's station, I made a silent prayer for the repose of the soul of the skipper of the *Torpcats*, Ace, Lieutenant Commander Allan C. Edmands, Daddy Allan, my father.

After months of communicating with *Franklin* survivors, all heroes, especially after talking with VT5 gunners McGuckin and Hagan, after touring the *Yorktown*, after writing this long narrative as part of my overall family history project, I feel I have perspective on what happened to my father on March 19, 1945, and on the prodigious and awful impact that day had on my life.

I have made some friends among the survivors, and I met several of them at the *Franklin* reunion in Pittsburgh in June 2003. My sisters attended with me. Here are a few of the pictures.



Ace's children in Pittsburgh: Christine Barrett, Allan Edmands, Janna Yarnot





Jim Stuart and Jack Hensel



Richard Simms on the banjo (he was the only other “war orphan” at the reunion).



Allan Edmands, Christine Barrett, Janna Yarnot, Jan Stuart, Jim Stuart

On the dinner cruise on Pittsburgh’s three rivers, we shared our table with three *Franklin* survivors and their wives, people I’ve come to regard as friends. At one point after dinner, a couple of the guys were sharing memories of the ship and stories of what they’ve been doing in the decades since. They remarked on how at each reunion the contingent of *Franklin* survivors grows ever smaller, on how so many of their shipmates are passing on. One of them said, “Well, I’m happy that I’m still on this side of the grass!” and the other guy, a wide smile on his face, heartily agreed.

Then suddenly they became quiet, and I was aware that they were embarrassed that I had overheard this declaration. I realized that I represented to them the shipmates they had known who were now dead – in fact, the shipmates who had been killed as young men on the ship.

One of them started to explain to me that he had meant no harm, but I immediately reassured them both. I told them how happy I was that they were on this side of the grass, how much it has meant to me to talk to them about what it was like on the ship, about what kind of a man my father was.

I was struck by the fact that attendees at the reunions consist almost entirely of survivors and their families. Other than my sisters and I, there was only one other attendee whose father had been killed on the *Franklin*. This is a shame. I now appreciate how much we “war orphans” can benefit from meeting and talking with survivors of the disaster. Also, as one of the wives of the regular attendees confided to me, getting to know people like us can help the *Franklin* shipmates still on this side of the grass deal with lingering “survivor’s guilt.”

What happened to Ace on that day? I will never know the complete story, but I know so much more than I used to. I’ve come to understand how the mystery of his disappearance from my life affected my childhood, and even the years beyond.

Such an impact this mystery had! — as though my father’s soul had been restless, groping for some kind of resolution. As I said, I don’t know a lot about souls, but I pray that his soul can now find peace.

I think I know my father.

Appendixes

Here is a small table of contents to the following Appendixes:

- Vital statistics for Allan Christie “Ace” Edmands (page 88)
- The telegrams (page 89)
- Charles Carr to Mary Hawes Edmands (page 94)
- Leslie Gehres to Mary Findley Edmands (page 96)
- Wally Young’s story (page 97)
- Jack Hensel, “My Experiences As an Air Crewman” (page 113)
- Log of the USS *Hickox* (page 129)
- Rescue of the USS *Franklin* by the USS *Pittsburgh* (page 134)
- Sources on Allan Christie “Ace” Edmands I (page 137)

Vital Statistics for Allan Christie “Ace” Edmands

Birth of Allan Christie Edmands I

Born: 11 June 1911

Birthplace: Cliftondale, Saugus, Essex County, Massachusetts

Parents

Father: Ernest Carl Edmands, 1884–1928, from Saugus, Essex County, Massachusetts

Mother: Mary Caroline Findley, 1887–1970, from Andover, Essex County, Massachusetts

Siblings

Sister: (Ethel) Jean Edmands, 1909–2005

Brother: Ernest John Edmands, 1917–1996

Sister: Frances Caroline Edmands, 1919–1919

Spouse and children

Wife: Mary Anna Hawes, 1917–1992 (daughter of Frederick Wilson Hawes and Anna Martha Franz Hawes, from Centralia, Lewis County, Washington); Married 21 June 1937 in San Diego, San Diego County, California

Daughter: (Mary) Christine Edmands, b. 1938

Son: Allan Christie “Butch” Edmands II, b. 1942

Daughter: Anna Jane “Janna” Edmands Hawes, b. 1944

Other information

Occupation: Aviator in the U.S. Navy

Religion: Episcopalian

Death of Allan Christie Edmands I

Died: 19 March 1945 (from combat in World War II)
(age 33 years 9 months 8 days)

Deathplace: Very near Japan, just east of Kyushu and south of Shikoku

Burial: At sea, off the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin* (CV13).
Allan’s mother, Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, installed a gravestone in the Spring Grove Cemetery, Andover, Essex County, Massachusetts

The Telegrams

What follows is the telegram the Navy Department sent to Mary, informing her that Ace was "missing." You can read a transcription of the telegram after it.

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1220

SYMBOLS	
DL	Day Letter
NL	Night Letter
LC	Deferred Cable
NLT	Cable Night Letter
	Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

. . DA15
1945 APR 16 PM 6 01

D. WB330 66 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 16 811P
 MRS MARY ANNE HAWES EDMANDS=
 4056 1 AVE SANDIEGO CALIF=

THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS USNR IS MISSING FOLLOWING ACTION WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED. TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION. VICE ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.

.USNR.

No.		To	
By	At	To Be	

DO 11ND, San Diego, California - June 22, 1945 - Furnished Transportation for dependent wife and ~~son~~ and son, T/R N-6, 828, 523 - San Diego, Calif. to Centralia, Wash. via AT&SF (Los Angeles) SP (Portland) NP - 1 Rail fare and 1 Half Fare. T/R N-6, 828, 524 Los Angeles, Calif. to San Francisco, Calif. 1 UTB and 1 LTB. T/R N-6, 828, 525 San Francisco, Calif. to Centralia, Wash. - 1 USB and 1 LSB.

J. E. BOLT, Lt. Comdr. SC USN

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

1945 APR 16 PM 6

..DA15
D.WB330 66 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 16 811P
MRS MARY ANNE HAWES EDMANDS=
4056 1 AVE SANDIEGO CALIF=

THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS USNR IS MISSING FOLLOWING ACTION WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED, TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR ENEMIES PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION VICE ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.

.USNR.

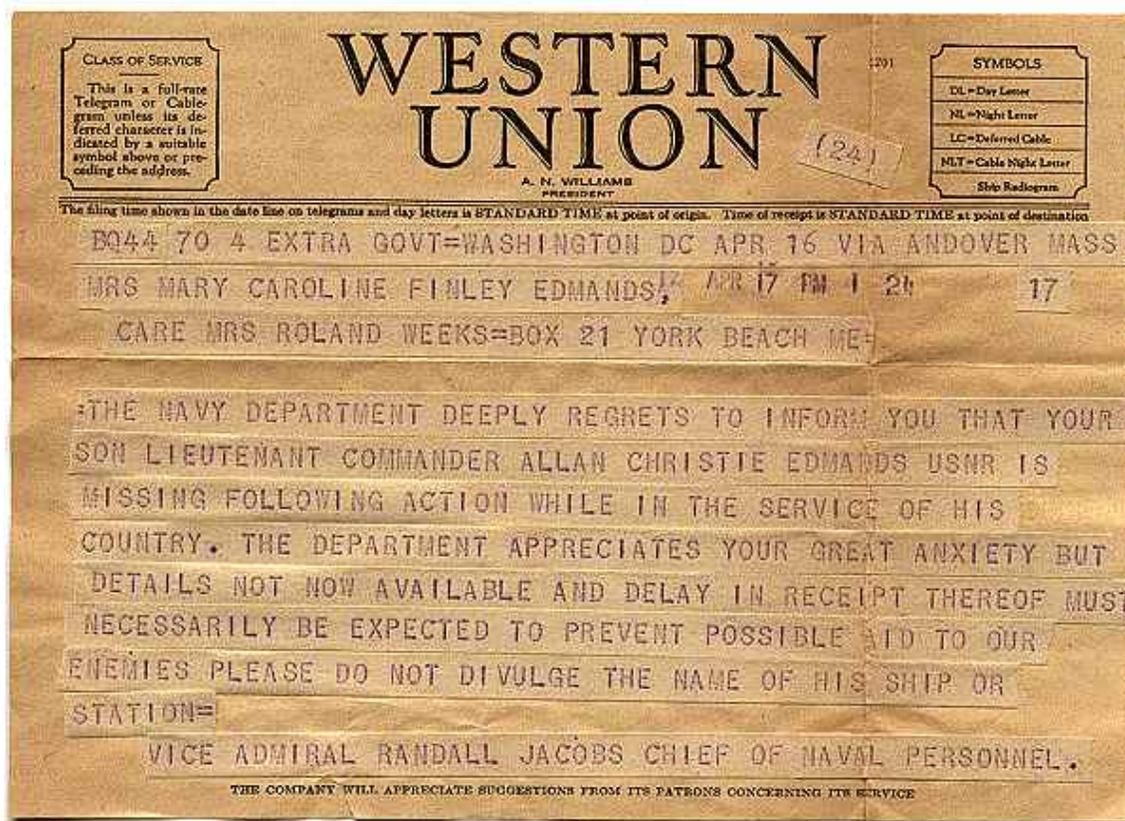
DO 11ND, San Diego, California -- June 22, 1945 -- Furnished Transportation for dependent wife and son. T/R N-6, 828, 523 - San Diego, Calif. to Centralia, Wash. via AT&SF(Los Angeles)SP(Portland)NP - 1 Rail fare and 1 Half Fare. T/R N_6, 828.524 Los Angeles, Calif. to San Francisco, Calif. 1 UTB and 1 LTB. T/R N-6, 828,525 San Francisco, Calif. to Centralia, Wash. - 1 USB and 1 LSB.

[signed]
J. E. HOLT, Lt. Comdr. SC USN²⁰

²⁰ The material at the bottom (beginning with "DO 11ND") was typed two months later, authorizing rail fares for Mary and her son, Butch (Allan Jr.), from San Diego, California, to Centralia, Washington. (Mary paid herself for the fare of her older daughter, Christine, and made another arrangement for her baby daughter, Janna.)

Similar Telegram to Mary Caroline Findley Edmands

What follows is the telegram the Navy Department sent to Ace's mother, Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, informing her that Ace was "missing." You can read a transcription of the telegram below it.

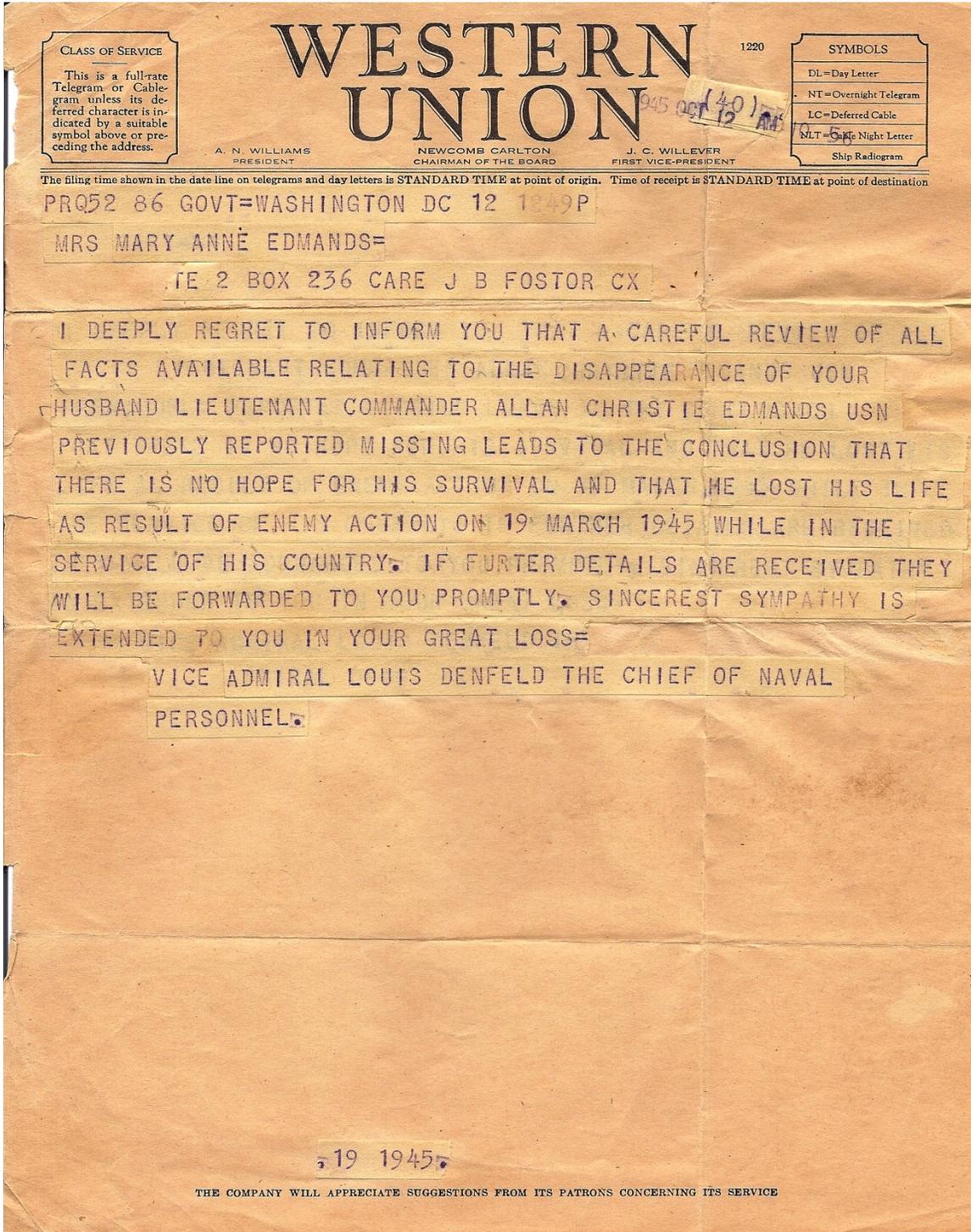


BQ44 70 4 EXTRA GOV'T=WASHINGTON DC APR 16 VIA ANDOVER MASS
MRS MARY CAROLINE FINDLEY EDMANDS, APR 17 PM 1 24 17
CARE MRS ROLAND WEEKS=BOX 21 YORK BEACH ME=

=THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS USNR IS MISSING FOLLOWING
ACTION WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES
YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT
THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED, TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR
ENEIES PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF HIS SHIP OR STATION=
VICE ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.

The Follow-up Telegram

What follows is the telegram the Navy Department sent to Mary, informing her that Ace was presumed dead. You can read a transcription of the telegram after it.



PRQ52 86 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 12 1249P
MRS MARY ANNE HAWES EDMANDS=
ROUTE 2 BOX 236 CARE J B FOSTER CX

I DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT A CAREFUL REVIEW OF ALL FACTS
AVAILABLE RELATING TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF YOUR HUSBAND LIEUTENANT
COMMANDER ALLAN CHRISTIE EDMANDS USN PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING
LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NO HOPE FOR HIS SURVIVAL AND THAT
HE LOST HIS LIFE AS RESULT OF ENEMY ACTION ON 19 MARCH 1945 WHILE IN THE
SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. IF FURTHER DETAILS ARE RECEIVED THEY WILL BE
FORWARDED TO YOU PROMPTLY. SINCEREST SYMPATHY IS EXTENDED TO YOU IN
YOUR GREAT LOSS=
VICE ADMIRAL LOUIS DENFELD THE CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.

Charles Carr to Mary Hawes Edmands

What follows is a transcription of the letter that Lieutenant Charles Carr wrote to Mary Anna Hawes Edmands, wife of Lieutenant Commander Allan C. "Ace" Edmands, soon after she had received the Navy Department telegram stating that Ace was "missing." The letter informs her that the Ace's ring had been "recovered from" his room and that the dog tags were "found" later – no doubt a fib to soften the gruesome facts: Ace had not been able to remove his ring from his finger, and no serviceman is ever without his dog tags. Lieutenant Carr is tactfully avoiding telling Mary the gruesome facts: The ring and dog tags had served to identify a body or body parts recovered from the sea near the ship – remains belonging to Ace – and there had been no possibility of bringing those remains home for a regular burial. Like the nearly one thousand other men killed that day, Ace was "buried at sea."

TORPEDO SQUADRON FIVE
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

April 18, 1945

My Dear Mary:

In some way I hope, and I speak for the entire squadron, that this letter can help you bear the news of Ace. We extend heartfelt sympathy in your grief and anxiety and want you to feel that we are sharing it with you. I personally feel lost without him and write this with a heavy heart because I counted Ace as one of my dearest friends and finest shipmates as well as a grand Commanding Officer.

The squadron lost heavily in personnel in the situation which resulted in Ace being listed "missing in action." Here are the circumstances, so far as I am permitted to tell. We had been in action against the Japanese mainland. Ace had led us so well that we had no losses and had made the enemy suffer heavily. Again leading the squadron he was on the carrier deck waiting to be launched when an enemy bomb struck the ship. Ace and his crew were forced to go over the side along with others to avoid the subsequent fire. He was not seen after that though many were rescued. I hesitate to offer any opinion as to what happened and must declare myself a failure in advising you as to what hopes there are, Mary. The situation is in the hands of God.

Ace's ring was recovered from his room and delivered to me and I found his dog tags later. He was not wearing them at the time. I shall send them to you as soon as I can. His other belongings will also be sent to you but you should know that, because of the particular position of his stateroom on the ship, the greater part of his clothing was used as emergency covering to warm people who were wet and cold or to cover wounded and was therefore lost in the shuffle. I found no money in his effects but the possibility has been mentioned that money orders on their way to you may have been lost. We have no detailed information, however, and if you know anything of that matter, please ask for any help that I could give. Would suggest you contact Fleet Post Office, Navy Department, Washington, D.C.

If any further information becomes available, I'll send it to you immediately. Also, please feel free to write and ask for or about anything. I'd appreciate it if you would ask brother Ernest John to write to me about this - I don't have his address.

Each of us in the squadron feels a sense of loss and I know, if they could, each would like to write and say so. We can only imagine the magnitude of your own feeling - but Mary, they should include much pride in a truly brave and gallant husband. The squadron, and I am sure, the service, is very proud of him, and we are humbled in the tremendous obligation we feel in living up to and carrying on his splendid spirit and example.

Very truly yours,
C. H. Carr [*signed*]
Commanding Officer

Mrs. Allan C. Edmands
4056 First Avenue
San Diego, California

Leslie Gehres to Mary Findley Edmands

Note: What follows is a transcription of the letter that Captain Leslie E. Gehres, skipper of the USS *Franklin*, wrote to Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, mother of Lieutenant Commander Allan C. "Ace" Edmands, about two months after the attack. Captain Gehres has Ace on the hangar deck level when he was last seen, but Edward McGuckin, ordnance gunner third class in Ace's torpedo squadron, states that Ace was on the flight deck level, at the landing signal officer's station at the port stern when the explosion occurred that killed him.

Captain Leslie E. Gehres
United States Navy

31 May 1945

My dear Mrs. Edmands:

I have your recent letter concerning your son, Allan.

Investigation has revealed that Allan was in a torpedo plane on the flight deck at the time of the bombing (0707). He, somehow, managed to get out of the plane and was seen at 0747 on the stern, hangar deck level. That, unfortunately was the last time he was reported as having been seen. For several hours thereafter explosions rent the ship. They were particularly severe in the area where Allan was last observed. That part of the ship was thoroughly searched. A number of ships, planes and small boats patrolled the area of the disaster rescuing survivors from the sea but he was not among those who were found.

I regret that I am unable to give you any further information. Perhaps Commander E.B. Parker, Jr., Commander Air Group Five, care Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif., will be able to add to what facts I send you herewith.

I knew Allan and was deeply impressed by his sincerity and excellent leadership. Your son's devotion to duty and his splendid service to his country were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Navy.

With sincerest sympathy,
L E Gehres [signed]
L. E. GEHRES

Mrs. E.C. Edmands
Box 21, York Beach
Maine

Wally Young's Story

Note: Lieutenant Wallace Young (USN Ret.), who had been an ensign in VT5 (Torpedo Squadron 5) and Ace's wingman at the time (0707 local time) of the March 19 attack on the USS *Franklin*, has an alternate theory of what actually happened, disputing the official version.²¹

The Official Version



According to the official version, publicly available, a Japanese dive bomber, a twin-engine D4Y "Judy," flying over the *Franklin* from bow to stern, dropped two armor-piercing 500-pound bombs on the ship (see the picture). The first (1) struck the flight deck centerline and penetrated to the hangar deck, setting off fires and explosions through to the third deck and demolishing the combat information center. The second (2) hit aft, where the VT5 planes were warming up, tearing through two decks and triggering ammunition, bombs, and rockets. The Japanese plane was subsequently shot down by Marine pilots of the "Black Sheep" squadron, who had earlier taken off from the *Franklin*.

Mr. Young adamantly disagrees with the foregoing account. Claiming in a homemade, patched-together videotape he sent me in September 2002, to be "the only living person on the *Franklin* to view the entire attack," he insists that the plane was a "radial-engine" Yokosuka D4Y3 Suisei Model 33, a new and much faster enemy plane that the U.S. Navy had no information on at that time. He has determined that the pilot's name was Ko Harada, a kamikaze pilot who had taken off from a base in Shikoku and who returned there unharmed that day and was interviewed by a Lieutenant Yonokawa about the attack. Ko Harada, approaching the *Franklin* from stern to bow, dropped only one bomb on the ship, a 1,000-pound bomb, probably a "Mark 83." Mr. Young blames Ko Harada's apparent easy success on the lack of readiness of Captain Gehres and the fact that the American pilots were not briefed properly on identifying marks on the planes from the other carriers in the Task Group (the *Hancock*, the *Bataan*, and the *San Jacinto*).

What follows is a synopsis of what Mr. Young said on the videotape, mostly in his own words. In the video he repeated his story three times, interspersing it with pieces of documentary films of the disaster and other interviews. I have tried to organize his material into a coherent narrative, still doing justice to his words.

I am Wally Young, the only living person on the *Franklin* to view the entire attack. Here I am slowing the tape to show the incredible damage on the flight

²¹ This summary of the official version is from Phil Gentry's U.S.S. *Franklin* site (www.ussfranklin.org).

deck. Every hole you are viewing is where four 500-pound armor-piercing bombs exploded [*the implication is that these were the U.S. bombs that were arming the U.S. planes*].

Here we are viewing two twin five-inch cannon mounts on the starboard edge of the flight deck. Above the forward cannon mount on the left, or port side, of the flight deck, you can view the large chunk blown out of the flight deck. This is where I was sitting in the cockpit of my TBM Avenger. I was the next plane to take off, behind the TBM at the center line of the flight deck. He [*Allan Edmands, the C.O.*] was just spreading his wings prior to spooling up for takeoff.

I turned to the left in my cockpit to see a single-engine, radial-engine aircraft at one to one and one-half miles, nearly dead astern, slightly above the flight deck in altitude. As he approached, I noted that he had no white diamond on the tail [*the identifying mark for planes from the Franklin*] and that his hatch was open. He was flying at a moderate rate of speed. I thought it was an SB2C [*Hell Diver*] from another carrier approaching to make a message drop.

As he approached my position, the pilot turned to his right and looked directly at me – smooth shaven, no moustache, teardrop-shaped goggles – then sank rapidly below the flight deck, so close aboard the port side of the *Franklin* that the deck covered up the red ball on his right wing. He jammed full power, and six black jets of smoke came from either side of his engine as he yanked the Judy into a vertical position. He rose about one hundred feet, then executed a vertical reverse, then came in at a shallow angle toward the forward aircraft.

At about thirty-five feet above my head, he released a 1,000-pound bomb from his left wing, hanging up against the fuselage – from the left wing only. The bomb exploded. All of us in the planes jumped out.

I went running back under the tail of my TBM, and all of a sudden just a *BAAA!!* and I went flat. And that propeller of the plane, this far [*about two and a half feet*] behind me, could have parted my hair. There were two pilots who did not duck and were ground into hamburger. One of them, I believe, was Commander Allan Edmands, our commanding officer of the torpedo squadron.²² The only thing the record said of it was “MIA – missing in action.” They made no attempt to identify one of the two pilots that had been killed.

We all went back to the fantail and were milling around back there as the people went down to the water. Another ensign, Ensign Russell Tucker, and myself

²² There is trustworthy testimony (see “Edward McGuckin” on page 72) that Allan Edmands survived this first hit. Mr. Young is speculating here without firm evidence. No doubt he was too busy concentrating on his own survival to observe, through the thick smoke and pandemonium, what was happening with the squadron’s skipper.

were the last two in the water from a sixty-five-foot drop-off. The biggest explosion of all blew me right off the rope. My Mae West was punctured by shrapnel, but I grabbed some floating balsa with seventeen others.

[*Picture of Japanese aircraft*] Here is the radial-engine Judy that nineteen-year-old Ko Harada flew. It took me almost fifty-two years to identify this aircraft – a very exciting moment.

[*From a documentary*] At 0557 the predawn fighter sweep began. There were now forty-five planes aloft, fifty-three on board, thirty-one spotted on the flight deck, all fully gassed and armed with a total of sixty-six 500-pound bombs, twelve 11.75-inch Tiny Tim rockets, and machine gun ammunition. There were seventeen thousand gallons of gas on the flight deck. On the hangar deck were twenty-two planes, five of them gassed and each armed with one Tiny Tim, eleven fully gassed and not armed, and six defueled and not armed. There were nine thousand gallons of gasoline in gassed planes on the hangar deck.

At 0617 the Task Group commander aboard the *Franklin* ordered Condition 3 set on all aircraft batteries and Material Condition Yoke set on all ships. On the *Franklin*, instead of Material Condition Yoke, a modified Condition Zebra actually was set, which provided for one-sixth of the crew to be relieved for breakfast and for one designated hatch from the hangar to the second deck to be opened. The engineering plant was split. The fire main system was divided into eight sections. . . .

The sky was overcast with occasional breaks in low scattered clouds. Horizontal visibility was good. Although the *Franklin's* radar screen was clear, the *Hancock* reported that a twin-engine enemy plane had been sighted.

At 0649 the ship was brought into the wind and its speed increased to twenty-four knots to launch the day's first heavy strike. The forward gasoline system was severed and purged with inert gas. The after system was in operation. Topping off had just been completed on the flight deck. Three planes were being topped off in the after part of the hangar deck.

[*See my personal reactions to this videotape at "Wally Young" on page 58.*]

My Personal Account of the Attack on the Carrier USS Franklin CV 13 March 19, 1945

Note: Mr. Young is considered a crackpot by other *Franklin* survivors, and he is not invited to speak at the annual *Franklin* reunions because of his heretical views. I was led to Mr. Young by Ray Bailey of the Franklin Museum Association, who told me that Mr. Young might well have known my father, since he had been an officer in the VT5 torpedo squadron. He warned me, however, when he gave me Mr. Young's phone number, that he had unorthodox notions about the events of March 19, 1945.

My interest in all this is more to discover the specifics of what happened to my father than to take sides in a controversy. As a result, I will pass no judgment on the opposing stories. I am posting Mr. Young's version of events out of fairness to him, because I feel that otherwise his story may never survive him. I even suspect that there might be a way to square some of the apparently opposite interpretations: For example, the official version has the *Judy* approaching from bow toward stern, whereas Mr. Young has the *Judy* approaching from stern toward bow. But Mr. Young also has supporting evidence from Seaman Howard Skates, who had been on the destroyer USS *Hunt* and who reported seeing the *Judy* approach the *Franklin* from the front, pass out of his view as it flew low behind the hull of the *Franklin*, and then turn 180 degrees when far astern of the ship and approach again from there.

The following is an unsigned affidavit Mr. Young sent me. In a couple of places, he has inserted corrections either with strips pasted over in a different typeface or with handwritten insertions. I have identified these where they occur. I have also preserved Mr. Young's spelling, capitalization, and unedited phrasing (there are only three instances of the disclaimer *sic*).

I start this testimony by questioning the credibility of any writer who ever wrote about the attack on the Carrier USS *Franklin* CV 13, that occurred on March 19, 1945. The attack that day, an action in World War II that has received more publicity than has any action of any ship, of any war in the history of the United States Navy. As the pilot, who sat in the cockpit of my TBM Torpedo Bomber at the edge of the flight deck, I have come to realize over the years after reading and viewing so many accounts of this attack, I was the only eye witness to the entire action.

At this point, I offer an apology to the men of the USS *Arizona* December 7, 1941 over 100 July 1945 over 830 and the USS *Indianapolis*, but the USS *Franklin* CV 13 should rank for all time as the number three loss of life. Nearly 800²³ were killed and several hundred wounded, with close to 80 planes lost and a capitol ship put out of action. All this destruction was the result of one enemy bomb hit, as you shall read. Sitting at my desk in my home in Kamuela, Hawaii, on the Big Island, I am holding in my hand a Bible that was in my pocket that day when I

²³ [*Young's handwritten correction:*] *Nearly* crossed out, "Over" inserted before 800, then 800 changed to 802.

was blown off the vicinity of the flight deck of the Franklin. And, I swear on this Bible before God, that every word I have written is the true story of the attack on the Franklin on March 19, 1945. This is my upgraded account. One other was done in the form of a tape recording. I made it several years ago after becoming good friends with Colonel Frank Walton, US Marine Corp., retired in Honolulu. He was the combat intelligence office (non-flyer) of VMF214, Major Pappy Boyington's famous Black Sheep Marine Fighter Squadron of earlier W.W. II action. That reformed group came aboard the Franklin in Oakland, in February 1945, and flew fighter cover for me, a torpedo bomber pilot of VT 5, on combat strikes on Kyushu. We also had on board another marine Fighter Squadron VMF 452 under command of LT. Col Pat Wieland. When Colonel Walton learned of my account, he insisted on a tape recording and sent it to the Historical Museum of the Marine Corp., in Washington, DC.

On the morning of March 19, 1945, our position was 59.5 miles from Ashizuri Zaki Point, on a bearing of 132 degrees from the Island of Shikoku and 72.5 miles from Murotozaki Point, bearing of 192 degrees from the island of Shikoku.²⁴ Although I did not know it at this time, we were in "Condition Three," which has been confirmed verbally by two ship's company personnel. This meant there was not one gunner, one lookout, one fireman, nor anyone on that entire ship at their General Quarters Duty Station, which is mandatory when launching airplanes. I will leave this damning statement for history to handle.

We boarded our planes shortly before 0700 hours. Our target was Kobe Harbor, where it was reported that the major remnants of the Japanese fleet were anchored, including the Yamato Battleship, by far the largest battleship in the world, although I do not believe we were aware of its size at this time.

We had 16 TBM's on the flight deck with four 500 lb. Armor piercing bombs on board each plane. Plus, numerous SB2C "Helldiver" dive bombers with similar loads, a few F4U Corsairs of VMF 214, with "Tiny Tims" on board; an incredible 11.75 inch diameter rocket over nine feet long with a 16 inch armor piercing navy warshell at the business end. Air Group 13 was first ahead of us on the Franklin with this weapon.

²⁴ [*Young's handwritten insertion:*] "Other reports says we were 40 miles from Shikoku Island and turned to heading 070° to launch planes. Ended up at 59.5 miles when the bomb hit us." [*See the map on page 15.*]

[This paragraph is an insert covering inaccessible text below it]

We had launched several of the F4U corsair fighters and some of the SB2C dive bombers. the number one TBM avenger was just beside me spreading his wings I was to be number two from the flight deck from the left side of the deck as I looked around at the many planes from the four carriers in our task force that were in the air I swiveled and looked nearly in back of me to see a single engine aircraft at the seven o'clock position relative to the FRANKLIN. it was from a quadrant where there were no other aircraft: at about 1 1/2 miles distance and low on the water. I estimated his altitude at just slightly higher than where I was sitting at about 80 feet above the water. his course nearly paralleling ours; but slightly converging toward the flight deck.

On September 2, 1998 in Portland, Oregon at the reunion of the USS Hunt DD674, I discovered a man, a Mr. Howard Scates, who was on duty on the fantail of the Hunt. He saw a single engine radial engine aircraft from the port bow area on a reciprocal course from the carrier that ended up pointing toward the fantail of the Franklin. As he approached the area of the Destroyer which was about two miles astern the Franklin it started a left turn during which it almost touched the water. As he said, "I thought it was an F4F wildcat going to land on the Franklin. It took me 52 years to identify this Yokosuka D4Y3 suisei model 33 that we called the radial engine Judy. His estimate was 2 miles from the Franklin.²⁵ I saw it just a few seconds later when it was aiming at me and had just completed its left turn.

As he approached closer, several things crossed my mind in rapid order. First, I noticed that he did not have the big white diamond on the vertical tail that identified all planes from the Franklin. . . .

At this point, I will explain two of the monstrous mistakes that were made that contributed to the Holocaust that occurred. We had four carriers in Task Force 58.2: two smaller carriers, the Bataan and the San Jacinto, and two large CV class carriers, the Hancock and the Franklin. A few minutes prior to this point, at 0703, the Hancock had called the Franklin and reported a Bogie (enemy plane) at twelve o'clock, and 13 miles, closing on the Franklin. This was on a discreet short range radio frequency that no aircraft was guarding. No radar tracked him in. And, even worse, in the Ready Room, prior to boarding our aircraft, our white diamond on the tail was explained; but, not one word was said about any identification marks on any of the other carriers' aircraft. The trap was so

²⁵ *[Young's handwritten insertion:]* "This was a model 43 Judy—a Kamikazi Suicide Airplane painted black with no rear gunner."

beautifully set that I walked in with my eyes wide open and missed my chance to have saved the carrier.

Next, I noted that he was flying slow at reduced throttle and that his cockpit hatch was open. The explanation was simple: We had been trained with a technique of a low, slow approach, bisecting the flight deck with hatch open to drop a leaded pouch on the deck under conditions of absolute radio silence. He was obviously from another carrier, no white diamond, and making a message drop.

By this time, he was approaching abeam my position from only about 150 feet away, where I noted that his silhouette was definitely not an F4U or an F6F, or a TBM. That left the SB2C, and this aircraft did have a slightly rounded tail, the elongated cockpit and the radial engine. The Japanese had a brand new aircraft we called radial engine Judy, that I had never seen. The aircraft approaching may have been one. It took me over 52 years to identify this aircraft a radial engine Judy that had no information on at this time. See enclosed statement from Lt. Comdr. John Sheridan CO of VB5 (Bombing 5) who was air born with his wingman Lt. JG7.5 Jones.²⁶

As he passed my position he turned to the right and, I truly believe, looked directly at me. I could see he was wearing teardrop-shaped goggles and was clean shaven. He had straightened his approach and was now paralleling our course. When he was about 100 feet ahead of my position he depressed the nose of his aircraft and went below the level of the hangar deck. His position was approaching abeam the island of the carrier on the left side. Then several things occurred almost simultaneously, including my own horrible realization as to what was happening. At this point I will mention a question that was directed at me from friends of friends who have seen this report. The question what the H--- was that red hot pilot doing when that Jap plane flew right along side of him. Didn't he see the big red ball on the side of the fuselage. I could not answer because I did not remember a Red Ball. Recent information I have received straightened this question out. I have the combat reports from several of the squadron commanders. Lt. Comdr. John Sheridan, Commanding Officer of VB5 dive bombing 5, had just taken off and his wingman a LT (VE) T.S. Jones had joined up to him. They both saw the Japanese plane and were able to identify it as a radial engine Judy. They had a good long look at it. It was painted a dull black the wings were light gray and the red balls were outstanding. But almost unseen on the black fuselage. I have just learned that the Japanese were converting all their single engine aircraft to night fighters painted a dull black for the impending invasion of the U.S. fleets. The end of that report says the radial engine Judy flew away from the fleet without a shot being fired at it.

²⁶ This statement is not available.

The pilot yanked the aircraft into a nearly vertical position as he shoved the throttle all the way forward, then kicked hard right rudder to execute a vertical reverse, or very rapid wing-over. First, a big burst of black smoke from all the exhausts on either side of the engine, then the big red balls of the wings as the aircraft rose. He completed this maneuver in a few seconds and ended up in a position slightly ahead of the island of the Franklin at about 75 feet above the carrier deck. He was at maximum power and accelerating rapidly in his shallow dive angle from bow to stern, into the forward row of the aircraft. I was by myself on the left.

In those few moments my eyes grew wide as I half rose from my seat and uttered a long drawn out "No-o-o-o". When he was only 30 feet above the flight deck, the bomb from the left wing detached and flashed into the flight deck. This was a 1000 lb bomb identified by a ships company officer standing at the entrance to the bridge area from the flight deck. He saw the bomb come from the left wing and enter the flight deck 25 feet from where I was sitting in the cockpit of my TBM. As he pulled out of his shallow-angle dive, fortunately for me, the bomb had a slight delayed action fuse and went through the flight deck just behind the plane in beside of me, adjacent and slightly ahead of my position before exploding in the hangar deck area.

A more complete explanation of this 1000 lb. Bomb is necessary. I attended the 1989 Franklin reunion in San Diego. I presented myself to Mr. Bailey the convention chairman, and told him I was going to destroy all of the official versions of a twin engined airplane zipping from the overcast 1000 yard ahead of the carrier and dropping two bombs. His reply was Oh No there will be too many people that will have to change their story. He instructed that I not be allowed at a microphone I have continued to accumulate information. I was standing at the entrance to the auditorium, talking to some fellows about Ko Harada's attack. I had just described how big the 1 bomb looked when it flashed from the left wing. At this point a gentleman who was standing near by approached and said I can confirm that, he described standing on the flight deck at the entrance to the bridge area. He saw it flash from the left wing and called it a mark 83 1000lb Bomb. He had the bearing of an officer and sounded like he knew what he was talking about. I cannot swear to the mark 83 comment but the marine corp has confirmed it as a 1000 lb bomb.

[This paragraph is an insert covering inaccessible text below it]

the plane beside me was just spreading his wings as I ducked down in the cockpit the shock of the huge explosion under the flight deck was taken up by the hydraulic struts of my landing gear the result was some bounces; the black oily smoke that engulfed us was from the 115 octane gasolene from the aircraft on the hanger deck as they exploded. I never saw the avenger again

that was beside me; but it must have been our commanding officer LT. COMMANDER ALLAN EDMANDS it is normal procedure that the C,O, [sic] is the first plane airborne, I was to be his wingman I jumped from my plane and ran under the tail, at that moment some GOD given instint [sic] caused me to drop flat on the deck just under the Whirling propeller of the plane just behind mine it could have parted my hair. I crawled all the way to the fantail under the many propellers [sic] a fellow pilot buck milligan told me years later that he had come across two pilots who had not ducked and had been ground into hamburger.

For my part, an explanation of the comment I have made to many friends about being "blown off the flight deck of the Franklin" is 99.5% correct. After milling around with the other pilots at the extreme end of the flight deck, we ended up with just two of us left, Ensign Russell Tucker and myself. He had grabbed a rope and was almost to the water while I grabbed another and swung one leg over the steel grating that was a forty millimeter guard gun mount. I had just swung the other leg over and was momentarily free of the ship when there was a horrendous explosion in my vicinity. I was hit by a piece of shrapnel in the back of my survival back pack. It had a large machete with a huge blade. The shrapnel pranged against that blade and must have hit my Mae West when I came to the surface and yanked the toggles to the Mae West it just went PRRR. But my friend God had huge piece of balsa just 5 feet from me. There were 18 men hanging onto the piece of balsa when the USS Hunt came along side. I was told later that it was probably the oxygen shop with all the high pressure cylinders that exploded. It yanked the rope completely away from me, and I fell into the ocean. God bless the Destroyer USS Hunt 674, captained by Commander Halfo "A" Knoertzer, that picked me and 428 men from the water that day.

[The following phrase is an insert typed in later]

we buried seven men at sea that terrible day.

When I next came aboard the Franklin at Ulithi Atoll, over one week later, I examined the area and estimated the only bomb that struck the Franklin hit about 25 feet from where I was sitting. The ensuing holocaust has been filmed, written about, or personal interviews given during the past fifty years. Permit me to add just a bit more.

One well known incident happened to 2nd Lt. Buddy Faught, pilot with VMF 214, who was standing just outside the door to the Ready Room under the flight deck level when the bomb exploded. He was partially shielded but suffered massive injury to his left leg and was subsequently transferred to Cruiser St.

Paul. His entire leg was amputated that same day. He passed away a few years ago. But, what is not known is that there was another 2nd Lt. Marine Pilot John Van de Grift, standing five feet from Buddy Faught, who sustained injuries to one of his legs.²⁷ It was amputated as well, but not until several years after W.W. II, when all attempts to save it were given up.

As I read over this account, it reminds me of something enhanced, to read like a Hollywood script. . . . All I can say to anyone is that I still have that Bible in my hand and every scene, every thought, every comment happened just exactly as I wrote it and I will not change one word.

One of the biggest Mis-conceptions of this attack is the “two bombs” theory that Capt Gehres first interview after the attack painted the picture of two bombs. The first through the forward elevator and the second among the planes aft on the flight deck. The last interview when this tape was made 23 years after the attack. Enough of the ships company had explained to him exactly what they were doing when the bomb exploded. But to this day many of the crew believe there were two bombs.

Capt. Wally Young [*signed*]
Captain Wally L. Young
Hawaiian Airlines (Retired)
Box 430
Kamuela, Hawaii 96743
LT USN (ret)

²⁷ [*Young's handwritten correction:*] *One of his* crossed out, “HIS RIGHT” inserted before it; the *s* in *legs* crossed out; the result then is “sustained injuries to his right leg.”

Undated Affidavit

Note: In the following undated affidavit, which Mr. Young sent to me along with his videotape, he disputes, among other things, the official version of what happened to the Japanese plane that hit the *Franklin*. According to the official version, Marine First Lieutenant Ken Linder of Arcadia, CA, of the "Black Sheep" squadron and navy Commander Edwin B. Parker Jr. of San Francisco bagged the Japanese bomber that had hit the *Franklin*. Linder got to the enemy bomber first with several bursts. He was followed by Parker, who finished it off.

Mr. Young contends, in contrast, that Linder shot down a different Japanese plane – a MYRT, not a Judy – that neither Parker nor another pilot who claimed the kill, Locke Trigg, shot down anyone, and that the pilot of the Judy – Ko Harada – made it back to his base unharmed, only to be killed on a different mission the following day.

As before, I have preserved Mr. Young's spelling, capitalization, and unedited phrasing.

This will be the final report on the attack on the carrier Franklin, hopefully, on March 19, 1945. I have been compiling information for nearly 18 years, and I have never appeared before Ships Company personnel. The day commenced at 0545 am when the Japanese started sending out airplanes. By 0845 am, they had sorted out 31 aircraft, including Judy's, Frances's and 1 Betty from 2 airfields in the southeast quadrant of Shikoku Island, number 1 Kokubu and number 2 Kokubu. The first plane was an incredible scout airplane, the Nakajima C6N Saiun (SIGH YOON) (painted cloud in Japanese) with a 3-man crew and a speed of 365 M.P.H., only the F4U Corsair could catch it. It also had a range with drop tank that is almost unbelievable, 3306 miles, which is over twice as far as anything we had. It was also heavily armed with 2 20 MM cannons fixed and 1 20-MM cannon or 7.9 MM swiveling for the rear gunner. Their squadron record shows they knew they were giving up their lives to radio back the SOS with our position. They arrived first in the vicinity of 58.2 and the first pilot who saw them was Locke Trigg, who gave chase and started firing. A senior pilot, the commanding officer of VB5, Lt. Commander John Sheridan, who had just taken off his wingman Lt. T's. Jones saw this chase and Sheridan's statement, "I saw an F6 F5 chasing a Judy (the Judy and the MYRT look almost exactly the same). He fired all of his ammunition while way out of range." Locke Trigg said he chased it 20 miles, and called to other fighters for help. He was from the Bataan. During this time First Lt. Ken Linder, from the Blacksheep marine fighter squadron VMF214, was the last F4U to launch from the Franklin CV13. He was Commander Parker's (the air group commander) wingman and was a few minutes late with engine trouble. He said, "I saw the red balls of the Japanese plane, so I closed in and started firing. The first thing I saw was the rear gunner who was not firing. I thought he was dead." This kills Locke Trigg's story who said the MYRT entered a small cloud then came out and hit the water and exploded. Ken Linder said he could see his bullets hitting the cockpit area. Commander Parker flew in under Ken and fired a burst. Ken flew along side the "Judy" as he said, until it entered the small cloud. Ken rolled out and the

Japanese plane dove out of the cloud and into the water, but did not explode. Commander Parker claimed the kill, but I give Ken Linder 95% of that kill, but his name is not mentioned even once in any official report of the kill. Locke Trigg was decorated with the DFC for “getting the plane that got the Franklin,” by Admiral Michner himself. The next statement will enflame a couple of pilots, namely Ken Linder and Locke Trigg. I say that neither pilots ever saw the Judy that destroyed the Franklin as a fighting ship. Before anyone reacts, allow me to tell you about the proof of any statements I have ever made about the action of March 19, 1945. I have developed a string of informants that have been so valuable to my long project. The first is Mr. Henry Sakaida, a Japanese man who owns a large nursery in Temple City, California. He is in his forties and was not born until around 1955. He has an incredible collection of data on the Japanese and American Navies during the World War II in the Pacific. He started when he was 13 years old. His chief informant in Japan, who can write in English, Mr. Kazuhiko Osuo, has access to the official Japanese Imperial Navy files, and also all the squadrons and their airfields. And the information I received a short time ago says a MYRT was shot down that morning at 7:00 am, but no Judy. This means that Ken Linder shot down the MYRT that Locke Trigg claimed. But this plane had nothing to do with the Franklin, and was several miles away when it went into the ocean. I have many other informants, but these two were the principals while this was happening. Ko Harada, a 19 years old lead pilot arrived in his Yokosuka D4Y model L43 we call Judy. This was a Kamikaze suicide plane with no rear gunner painted dull black. There were about 2250 Judy's built. The first 2000 had an inline engine and were very under powered. The last 250 were converted to a radial engine, a much better aircraft, and were being converted to suicide planes for the coming invasion. I have another statement from Lt. Commander John Sheridan, in which he says he saw a Judy drop 3 bombs on the Franklin and then depart with not a shot fired at him. I have to disregard the first part of his report. Ko Harada's attack after his long approach (see my sworn testimony of the attack) took less than 8 seconds. He was not seen by any of the fighters and flew back to his airfield, where he was interviewed by Lt. Yonokawa about the attack. He led a flight of 7 Kamikaze airplanes the next day, March 20, 1945, and only 3 returned to base. Ko Harada was killed. The imperial Japanese records credited his incredible feat. And at a squadron reunion, several years later (I have a picture of this group), his attack was the subject of discussion.

Wallace Young [*typed*] Wallace Young [*signed*]
LT. USN, Retired

Excerpts from Letters

Note: The following are excerpts from letters that Mr. Young sent to me in autumn 2002, in which he requests help in proving his heretical version of the events of March 19, 1945. On the phone I politely demurred, telling him that I did not have access to the kind of information he was seeking and that I didn't know how to get that information. Excerpts from his letters to me that are more pertinent to my search of the facts of my father's death are at "Wally Young" on page 58. As before, I have preserved Mr. Young's spelling, capitalization, and unedited phrasing.

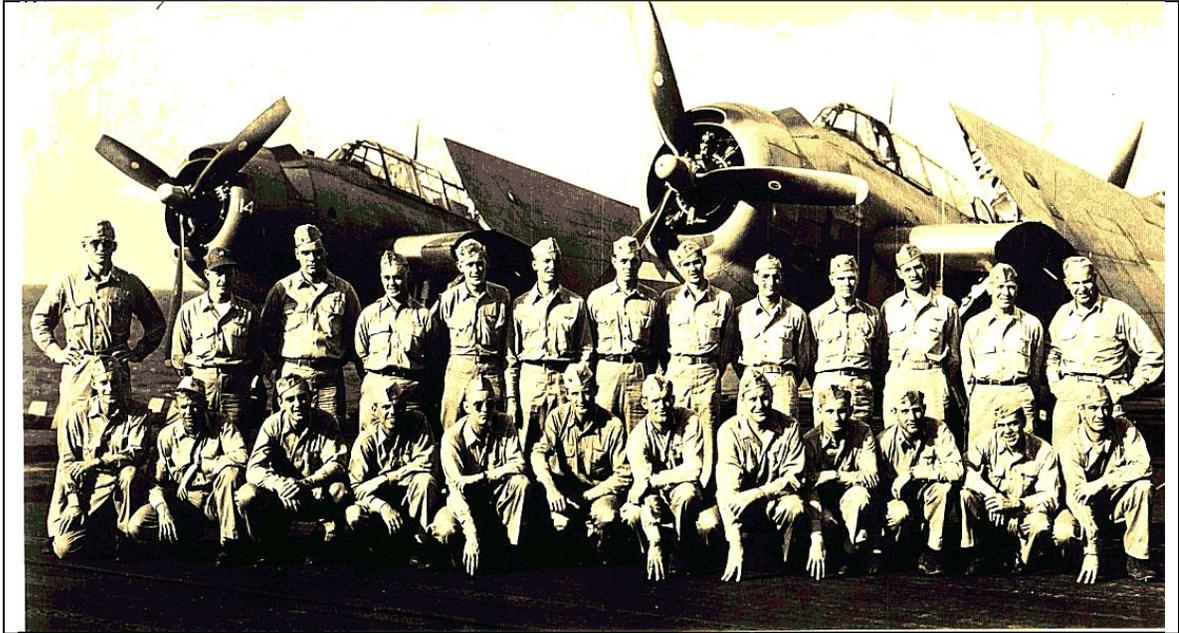
[L]et me pose a couple questions. I would Love to get info on a Lt T.S. Jones who was Lt Comd, Sheridan's wing man and had a good Look at the they called it JUDY but it was a Mert that was chased by an F6F and fired all his Amunition while way out of range. Do you have a copy of the BIG BEN DIRECTORY. A later version names the 921 men who were killed on the Franklin. Many of these were from previous actions I use the number 802. That Died on Mar 19 1945. I'll close this up now did you attend Annapolis. I would give anything for a current mailing List to find the gentleman who walked up to me and knew all about that Bomb

Sincerely
Lt WALLY Young USN Ret.
Capt WALLY Young Hawaiian AirLines Ret

I have sent you two packages of info you will of course realize that my knowledge of VCRs is very amateur This just a short note to enlist your help if you would care to. One of the final proofs I need is to make contact with the gentleman who walked up to me in 1989 and described the bomb exactly as I saw it. I have never been able to obtain a copy of the mailing List that I presume Ray Bailey . . . has access to. If I can locate that fellow. Last year I attended the Franklin re-union in San Diego I was to be a keynote speaker and have it out with ships company. But also in attendance was Ken Linder the Boyington Black Sheep squadron SMF214 whom I had given credit for the kill on the myrt. But I Left the reunion when I talked to Ken and discovered it was just two officers calling each other a Liar before a bunch of enlisted men. If you have any Luck with Ray Bailey I will be grateful for the info.

Sincerely
Wally Young
Lt USN Ret.

The mailing list becomes more important from some of the questions that you rose. Im including a photo that I made a lot of marks on.



[In the top margin Mr. Young wrote the following.]

The last picture taken of VT5. We were on the way North from ULITHI ATOLL at 58.2. I have the statement from Admiral Davison whose flag was on the FRANKLIN, who condemed Capt GEHRES LACK of preparation to withstand an attack. He had set condition 3 at 28 minutes until 7:00 AM. Then I believe went to his quarters to have his breakfast. I have the statement of an enlisted man who was on the bridge and said Capt Gehres was not on the bridge. There was no one on that bridge ordering general quarters when the handcock [sic] reported a bogie at 12 oclock and closing. The exec & Capt were both down below we were an absolute sitting Duck.

In the bottom margin of the picture, Mr. Young indicates himself in the lower left by an arrow and the text "ENSIGN WALLY YOUNG." Under the image of Ace in the middle of the front row is an arrow with the text "Lt Commander ALLAN EDMANDS our C.O. and a very good MAN." At the right of the bottom margin is the following: "12 of these gentlemen were not scheduled

to fly and were setting in the ready room. they were killed instantly by the Bomb that exploded just outside the door."

[Y]ou quoted Lt. Carr's Letter which stated "an enemy bomb struck the ship." That is a very facinating statement No where in the official documentation of that attack is there a mention of a bomb. That S.O.B. Capt Gehres on his first interview on film described a twin engined airplane coming straight down from 30,000 (that is the reason our radar did not see him. He was a total Liar from A to Z. it dropped two bombs the first went through the forward elevator. But he changed that Lie when so many ships company told him exactly where they were and what they were doing when the bomb exploded. The last official Lie was about a twinengined airplane that came out of the overcast 1000 yds ahead so fast we could not bring a gun to bear and then dropped 2 bombs the first blew that forward elevator high in the air. He finally got it right when he got to the bridge from his quarters where he was having his breakfast. He turned to his Nav officer Comdr Jurikas and asked him what hit us and Jarikas right it correctly-- A bomb it just flew across the flight deck. At that moment a huge explosion forward blew the elevator high in the air. Remember he had set condition 3 at 28 minutes until 7 o clock, I have Letters from some of the people whose general quarters was at those 57 quad 20 & 40 mm. gunmounts they were down in the crews mess where they were handing out apples. Another item Lt Carr said the ring was delivered to him and he found the dog tags Later. Do you know if they were ever delivered to your mother. Lt Carr said he had both items. This would be a valuable item to pose to all those Living. At 40 minutes after the bomb exploded it would be impossible that any person would have seen anyone at the stern on the hangar deck level. there was 40,000 gallons of 115 octane aviation gasoline released as our gas lines were all open. There was officially 100 men and pilots getting ready to send I believe there were 5 Corsairs with tiny tim rockets ready to go. There was only 2 people who got out of the hangar deck alive. These rockets were 9 1/2 feet Long 12.75 inch diameter and armed with 1500 Lbs of armement. When I got back on the Franklin 1 week Later at ULIHI ATOLL I examined a huge hole in the 3 1/2 to 4" armor plate steel, about 8 ft across and the armor plate was peeled back like the peeling of an orange. One of the explosions on the

hanger deck had knocked a Corsair up on its nose. and I presume the steel was red hot. There are some scenes that are almost beyond description that were told to me many of the men of the 98 who were killed on the hangar deck were blown by the many of our bombs that exploded, up against the steel gratings that were the walkways then pour flaming aviation gas over them for several hours. The stern had been destroyed so they were just piled up in the bow area. No body bags no flag no ceremony. I was told there were 367 bodies the first burial. Nothing that resembled a human being. They just resembled big pieces of cork coal black with a Leg or an arm or a skull or just pieces. This part I saw from the destroyer that picked me up. We had 429 people and buried 7 that day, and not too far away the carrier with big pieces of black cork floating for at least 1 mile astern. I still believe your father was killed almost instantly.

Sincerely
Wally Young

Note: More excerpts from these letters, more pertinent to my search of the facts of my father's death, are at "Wally Young" on page 58.

My Experiences As an Air Crewman

—by Jack Hensel



On March 19, 1945, I was aboard the USS *Franklin*. The events of that day led me to a prolonged stay on a medical ship. I had plenty of time to think about the circumstances which brought me to this unexpected place. In my own words, this is my story.

I was inducted into the United States Navy on June 22, 1943. I received my high school diploma on June 23, 1943. So, you see, they didn't give me much time after my high school graduation. The navy wanted us badly! My first duty was the naval station for boot camp at Sampson, New York. There I went through marching, swimming, discipline, calisthenics, medical physicals, shots, aptitude test, and interviews. It was also here that I volunteered to fly as an air crewman and given a flight physical, which I passed.

I remember going to the chapel one week before graduation from boot camp. There they announced that all leaves were canceled; usually we got a week's leave after boot camp. I saw men coming out of the chapel crying. I started thinking there was a big sea draft coming, and it surely was upsetting. We did get our leaves but after an extra week's training.

I was sent to aviation ordnance school at Memphis, Tennessee. I graduated in January 1944 and went to airborne radar operations school at the same base. The school lasted about two weeks. I could have stayed on as an instructor, but I did not want to. Our instructor wanted to give it up at that time, and he had to look for someone to take his place.

I finished radar school and was sent to Hollywood, Florida, for aerial gunnery school, where we learned all about the 50-caliber machine gun, trap shooting for learning how to lead the targets, and operating the gun with the ball turret firing both at range targets and at targets being towed by planes.

After about six weeks of aerial gunnery school, I was sent to what they called operational training at Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This is where I started flying in TBF Avenger torpedo bombers and also where a lot of interesting things started happening. We were taken to a TBF that had crashed in the Everglades. The plane didn't burn but did sink nose-first into the mud up to its wings. This sight was very scary.

At this point I was assigned to a crew – a pilot, Ensign Fuller from Boston, Massachusetts; a radioman, Robert Jensen from Salt Lake City, Utah; and myself, a turret gunner from Utica, New York. We would supposedly stay together through combat.

The first time in the TBF plane, at my position in the turret, I could observe the tail section very well. The engine was started and smoke poured down the side of the plane from the exhaust. The engine ran very rough on starting, and I could see the tail section shake and vibrate because of the engine running unevenly. I wondered, "What did I get myself into?" Once the engine warmed up, it ran smoothly. We took off, and it was excitingly pleasant.

We had many interesting flights practicing torpedo runs, gunnery firing at slicks in the sea and at targets being towed by another plane, navigation flights and glide bombing. Glide bombing was quite exciting. We would rise to about 10,000 feet, and the plane would nose over. So help me, we would dive at a vertical angle 90 degrees to the sea for quite a length of time, and then pull out of the glide at about 1,000 feet. We practiced this quite often.

On one of the torpedo run flights, I asked the pilot for permission to operate the ball turret. I was just able to get into it because it's like getting inside of a large ball. With the turret down and the 50-caliber machine gun pointing to the rear of the plane, I could easily get out of it by letting down an armor plate and dropping down into the radioman's compartment. I turned on the turret, and it malfunctioned. The gun pointed straight up into the air perpendicular to the body of the plane, and it wouldn't come down with the control. Here I was in the ball turret on my back with no way to get out. Only possibly through the side panel. I reported to the pilot, Fuller, and he asked if I wanted to go back to the base. I replied, "No, go on with the flight." After about one and a half hours, we landed back at Fort Lauderdale Naval Air Station. The ground crew observed us landing with me in this position and came right out to the plane. They took off the side panel of the turret and were able to wiggle me out of the turret. At my age then (19) it did not bother me. Since I would get into the turret from the radioman's compartment, my radioman, Robert Jensen, said, "Jack, if this same thing happens in the plane, don't expect me to ride the plane down with you. I'm jumping." Whew. I could never do this today, because I couldn't even fit into the

turret. I don't even think if I could fit into the side opening of the plane into the radioman's compartment.

On returning to the airfield and entering the landing circle, there is a point where the pilot puts down the retractable wheels and lowers the flaps to lower the speed and get additional lift. These are operated hydraulically. We had an exciting experience returning from a night flight. On entering the landing circle my pilot, Ensign Fuller, tried to lower the landing gear and flaps. There was a hydraulic leak; the wheels appeared to come partially down and one of the flaps came partially down. The flap acted as an aileron, causing the plane to lurch to the side. My pilot was able to adjust with the regular ailerons. He stated later that he never takes his hands off the flap-operating lever until they are completely down. Feeling the jolt of the plane, he quickly returned the lever to the flaps-up position, and the plane resumed normal flight. If he hadn't done this, the plane would have banked, lost speed, and dove to the ground. At this point I remember flying over the Fort Lauderdale water tower. (You are that low when in the landing circle.) There was hydraulic fluid all over the plane. The pilot was instructed to gain altitude, dive the plane, and try to snap down the landing gear. He also had a hand pump in the cockpit to force the wheels down. He did this, and he made the same low passes over the Fort Lauderdale control tower. They observed this and instructed him to make a flaps-up landing, which meant landing at a higher speed. We held our breath and made the landing safely as we passed the rescue squad on the runway waiting for us. This was exciting, especially at night.

We graduated from operational training toward the end of May 1944. At graduation the crewmen proudly accepted their air crewman wings. Our crew was assigned to Torpedo Squadron 5 (VT5), a part of Air Group 5.



Enlisted men of VT5 Torpedo Squadron.
Photo courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

We were also given delayed orders for San Diego, California, which meant we had about thirty days at home. During this time, the pilots were sent to the Great Lakes to practice carrier landings on a small carrier there. I arrived home for my leave on D-Day, the beginning of June, the day of the invasion of Europe. After my leave, I went by train to San Diego, where I met several crewmen, including my radioman, Bob Jensen. We stayed at San Diego Naval Air Station for one or two nights, then received our orders to go to Alameda, California, Naval Air Station, where we would join our pilots and the rest of VT5 Torpedo Squadron.

At the chow hall I had my tray and food. I walked to a table, sat down, and looked across the table. Getting ready to sit opposite me was an old family friend and a good friend of my brother, Pete. We caught each other's eye, and hands came across the table. It was Alfred Camhella. He said, "Jackie Hensel, what are you doing here?" I told him, and he seemed sorry to hear that I was an air crewman and would eventually be on an aircraft carrier. He had just come off the carrier USS *Intrepid*, which was torpedoed by the enemy in the South Pacific. I went out that night with Al and a friend of mine, Drew Hontz. We had a few beers, talked about home, and returned to base in fairly good condition.

The VT5 squadron stayed at Alameda for a short period of time and was sent to Monterey, California, Naval Air Station to begin our training as a group. When

there was no fog, we would do a lot of flying. We stayed here for several weeks and then transferred to Santa Rosa, California, Naval Air Station, where we remained for our duration before boarding the carrier. We did go off to different bases: Eureka, California, for rocket training and Modesto, California, for night flying. We flew many navigator flights out to sea. One time we thought we saw the image of a submarine below the surface of the sea. I'm sure my pilot reported this, and it was investigated by surface craft. Another time we were far out to sea on a navigation flight and we spotted a freighter headed toward San Francisco. My pilot passed over it, but we didn't have our IFF (which was a signal identifying you as a friend or foe). There were a couple of tracer shells fired in front of us as a warning. The crew on the freighter probably had a chuckle or may have been jumpy just coming from a combat zone. The squadron did a lot of flying out of Santa Rosa practicing night flying, air group hops, navigation flights, etc. Ensign Fuller, my assigned pilot, developed knee problems and was transferred out of the squadron for other duty.

While waiting for my new pilot, I made a few flights with some new pilots whose crewmen had not yet arrived. On one of these flights, we were the last to land with this particular plane. We landed in the morning, and there was a flight scheduled with this plane in the afternoon with another crew. When they returned to the airfield and got into the landing circle, the plane suddenly dove from this low altitude and crashed between two homes. The plane burned, killing the crew. The aircrew names were Klingman and Allman. The report says it was mechanical trouble. It occurred at the point you would put the wheels and flaps down. I felt there may have been a hydraulic leak in one of the flaps that didn't function. This acted as an aileron, causing the plane to flop on its side, lose speed, and dive into the ground. I think of this frequently, as a similar incident happened to me in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Lieutenant Junior Grade David Gibson, my new pilot, arrived, and I began flying steady with him. Also a new radioman, Louis Lyndenmeyer was assigned. We had a lot of thrilling flights with him, hedge-hopping at treetop level, flying along the sea wall. I remember looking up at it and flying low over San Francisco Bay, seeing a man in a fishing boat standing up looking at us. We were that low. Some farmers called in, complaining about the hedge-hopping because we were disturbing their cows. On one occasion, we took off and gained just a few feet of altitude, and the engine started skipping as we skimmed over the top of a chicken farm. I remember the chickens fluttering inside their coops. We were able to make it to an auxiliary airfield not far from the main field. It was found that the gasoline tank was partially filled with water because of condensation. It was cleared, and we flew back to the main base. We went to Modesto, California, for night flying training, practicing group flights on imaginary targets. The pilots, less the air crew, practiced night touch-and-go landings. On one warm night, we were standing as a group in front of the barracks when we heard the

sound of a crash. We rushed to the runway and watched the plane burn, the pilot being killed. This left a terrifying impression on our minds. When we went to Modesto, we did realize that night flying was quite dangerous. Soon after, we were ordered to Eureka, California, for firing five-inch rockets from the plane. We were there about two weeks and then returned to Santa Rosa.

I realized the time was approaching when we would be assigned to an aircraft carrier. In December 1944, I received a week's leave just before Christmas. I did not have enough time to go home. My squadron yeoman friend, Gerald Nold, invited me to come home with him to Arkansas City, Kansas. To get there and return, we rode the train and hitchhiked, often getting rides with truckers. I had a fine time meeting his family and girlfriend. (Nold was later killed at his station in the pilot's ready room when we were hit by Japanese bombs March 19, 1945.)

I spent New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in San Francisco with another friend, Elmer Lowry, from Covington, Kentucky. (He was also killed on March 19, 1945.) We spent New Year's Eve having dinner, visiting nightclubs, and mixing with the crowds on Market Street there. On New Year's Day, we went to the East-West Shriner football game at Kesar Stadium in San Francisco. It was quite a sight with the crowd and the excitement of the game. I remember the streetcars and people hanging onto the side and back of them to get to and from the game.

We spent most of January getting ready to go overseas, getting new planes, and other necessary gear. We went aboard an old carrier, the USS *Ranger*, out of San Francisco. We traveled out to sea, getting used to carrier operations and life aboard a carrier.

We returned to Santa Rosa, continuing air group flights and getting ready to board our aircraft carrier. We boarded the USS *Franklin* the first week of February 1945 at Alameda, California. I remember the feeling of pulling away from the dock and feeling the waving of the ship on the bay. We proceeded under the Golden Gate Bridge, and a sailor's girlfriend tossing part of her clothing to land on the flight deck of the carrier. On leaving the Golden Gate, there were swells in the ocean, causing sea sickness to many sailors until everyone got to the swells. I remember myself having to lie on my bunk for a time on the bow end of the ship. Lying down seemed to help the sickish feeling.

We got to Hawaii and docked at Ford Island and could see the hull of the sunken USS *Arizona*, which had sunk because of the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack. We went to Kaneohe Naval Air Station for continued training while the USS *Franklin* was being fitted for combat. We had several flights over the islands, and the pilots practiced touch-and-go landings. This was also a Seabee base, and we

had tremendous meals and spent time playing volleyball and softball and entertaining ourselves.

We boarded the USS *Franklin* around the first of March with a full complement of Air Group 5. The fighter squadron, F4U Corsair fighter planes, and some Marine squadrons – one was reminiscent of Poppy Boynton’s Black Sheep group. The bomber squadron VB5 was made up of Sb2C Helldivers, and my squadron VT5, the torpedo bomber squadron TB5 Avengers. We performed many air group training missions and navigation flights on the way to Ulithi, an anchorage where task groups assembled.

We arrived at Ulithi early in March, the morning after a suicide plane struck a carrier, either the USS *Randolph* or the USS *Hancock*. We stayed at Ulithi one night, and as far as I could see, there were ships of all categories: troop ships, supply ships, tankers, battleships, carriers, destroyers, etc.



Torpedo bomber Avenger pilots on the deck of the *Franklin* a few weeks before the Japanese hit.

Photo courtesy of National Archives.

We left Ulithi with carrier group 58.2 on our way to Japan to raid the main islands. We were the first ship to carry the new rocket called the “Tiny Tim.” They were equivalent to the shell of a 16-inch gun fired from a battleship. On one of the first times I took off from the *Franklin*, I was catapulted. Our crew was not given any prewarning. We were ordered from the ready room to report for a flight with our pilot and to be catapulted. There was no time to think about it. We boarded the plane and proceeded to the catapult position. There were crewmen from the old VT5 squadron. These were men who had already been in

combat duty. They were there to give us instructions on how to hold our heads at the moment of takeoff. It was such a sudden jolt that your head would jar if you didn't hold it in a special position. The pilot had to hold his head back against the head rest as he was looking forward. The radioman, also looking forward, had to put his head down between his legs. I, the turret gunner, who was riding backwards, had to hold my head and bend forward under the gunsight. The pilot would rev up the engine to flying speed, and all of a sudden you would go from 0 mph to 85 mph in about a hundred feet. You would gain altitude quickly, and I would be looking down at the end of the flight deck.

Landing on the carrier was quite an experience. We had a dive bomber (SB2C) miss the arresting gear and go off the side into the sea. The radioman gunner was killed, but the pilot survived. We also had a torpedo bomber (TBM) go into the sea attempting to land. The pilot survived; there were no crewmen aboard.

I had some exciting landings. One time we landed and were off at an angle, but the landing hook caught the arresting cable and stopped us just before going into the sea. I looked to my right out of the turret and could see some members of my squadron on the catwalk holding their heads and could look down and see the water. Another time we landed straight but very hard. The hook caught the arresting gear cable, the plane bounced high and came down hard, blowing a landing gear tire. My head jarred and my nose hit the gunsight, cutting it slightly.

On landing I could look over my right shoulder and see the direction of our flight toward the carrier. We would be flying directly over the churned wake of the *Franklin* about 100 feet above the ocean. As we approached the rear of the flight deck, you could see the landing signal officer giving my pilot instructions by the way he waved his flags. Signaling whether you were going too low, too fast, too high, bear left or right and the timing with the up and down movement of the flight deck. If all indications were not right, you would get a wave off. The landing signal officer had a net off the side of his position on the flight deck. He could jump into the net if a plane got misdirected, coming too close to him.

On one attempt at landing we took six wave-offs for various reasons. I remember going alongside of the carrier after one of the wave-offs, looking up at the signal officer with his hands on his hips seeing if we would go into the ocean. So you see, there were all kinds of risks even before combat.

The planes are spotted very close together on the flight deck before a mission takes place. On one occasion I was late in getting to the plane on one of the surprise flights. I was in the middle of the flight deck on my way to our plane, and they announced for the pilots to start their engines. Here I was just a few feet

from spinning propellers. One of the plane captains spotted me and expertly guided me to our plane.

While on our way to Japan we still were training with air group and navigation flights. On one occasion when our crew was out on an antisubmarine flight and had an escort of one of the F4U fighter planes, we flew in very close formation. I felt I could almost reach out and touch a fighter plane's wing tip. I was amazed that the fighter planes traveled in such close proximity. I could see that one of the fighter pilots was laughing. We waved and showed gestures to one another.

In the nighttime as we neared Japan, there was a lot of suspense with General Quarters signals and orders coming over the loudspeakers and lights going on and off as hatches were opened and closed. The enemy were dropping flares to silhouette against the sky so they could find us and attack. The night fighters must have taken care of them, as we were not attacked at this point.

Our first bombing raid was on March 17, 1945. Our crew was not assigned to this mission. I remember the pilots singing Happy Birthday to Lieutenant Carr, our executive officer. He was also the leader of this first flight.

The next morning, March 18, 1945, my twentieth birthday, our crew was assigned to this day's mission. Many of the other crewmen sang Happy Birthday to me. We took off and had to fly through heavy thick clouds. When we finally got above the clouds, the three-plane group we were with were miles behind the main air group. We caught up to them just about the time Japan came into sight. We were at 25,000 feet and were on oxygen. We were raiding an airfield at Kagoshima Igumi, the southernmost island of the mainland of Japan. We flew across the middle of the island at 25,000 feet on oxygen. I could see cities to the north and south of us. We started our glide bombing run. I could feel the ice on the inside of my oxygen mask. I could feel the change in temperature as we dove. My radioman was dropping reflective confetti as well as the plane in front of us to deter the enemy's radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns. As we dove, I would see clumps of this confetti from other planes. Soon I observed tracer and explosive shells off our port wingtip. I reported this to my pilot. As we drew closer to the ground, he fired his wing machine guns. Looking over my right shoulder, I could see where we were headed. He dropped the bombs, and they appeared to hit an airfield hangar. I saw much debris like clipboards and parts of the building exploding into the air along with the flames and the smoke.

We pulled out of our dive, and we were only about 150 feet above the Japanese airfield. We came out over the China Sea, and there was one of our submarines a few hundred yards offshore surfaced, moving and ready to pick up any survivors from planes that were hit and had to ditch into the ocean.

We regrouped and started back just south of Kyushu island. I observed many Japanese freighters sinking and on fire. Fighter planes were strafing the many ships at this point. The splashes from the guns of the diving fighters completely hid some of the smaller ships.

We got back to our carrier and my pilot made a perfect smooth landing with no wave-offs. We got out of our planes after they were spotted and headed for our ready room. We were instructed over the loudspeaker to hurry off the flight deck as there were enemy planes in the area. We got back to our ready room and then realized the stress of the flight, the anxiety and nervousness and the relief of getting back safely. I remember describing our mission and getting a shot of whiskey.

I was scheduled to fly a combat mission the next morning, March 19, 1945. I was awakened at 3:00 a.m. for an early breakfast. I reported to our ready room to get briefed and ready for the 6:00–7:00 a.m. flight. I was all ready to fly. I had on two or three pairs of pants, two or three layers of shirts, my leather flight jacket, heavy shoes, and my “Mae West” life jacket. Just before boarding the plane, our crew was canceled because they needed a radioman with electronic radar interference experience. Since I was all dressed to fly and had eaten breakfast, I decided to go out to the flight deck catwalk and watch the planes take off. All the fighter planes were airborne, and about half of the VB5 bombers were off. The torpedo planes were behind the bombers and were the last to take off. Since it was cold, the carrier going into the wind at top speed for takeoff operations. I was thinking of going into a coffee station we had in our ready room to warm up. I came back out in time to see the torpedo bombers take off. I waited and watched a couple of bombers take off.

I just started leaving the catwalk to head under the flight deck to our ready room when there was a terrific blast. I put my hands to my face at this sudden blast; flames came and then the dense smoke. I could not see my hands in front of me. I backed off and felt myself passing out from the heat of the flames, the concussion from the explosions, and being unable to breathe because of the dense smoke. Then came a split second when the air cleared, and I caught my breath. Then there was another explosion; again I was enveloped in flames, the dense smoke, and the awful concussion. I went to the top cable guard of the catwalk. Then there was a series of explosions with no letup of the smoke. I had my stomach up against the top cable, and as another explosion came, I rolled over the cable and dropped into the ocean ninety feet below.

I must have been knocked out. When I came to, I was deep in the ocean as I could see nothing but darkness. I looked up and could see the glitter on the surface of the ocean. I thought afterwards the carrier going at top speed, and

with me dropping close to the hull of the carrier, the ship's propellers could have drowned me so deep into the sea.

This all happened without any warning. We were not yet General Quarters. I did hear some gunfire a second before the initial explosion. I did not get an explanation about the Jap plane, a Judy bomber, coming in low out of the low-hanging clouds, too low for radar to pick up, until later, when I was on the destroyer. It dropped two 500-pound bombs on us. This acted as a fuse to ignite the gasoline lines that were lying on the decks, the remaining planes that were loaded with gasoline, bombs, and rockets. The Judy was shot down by our air group commander, Cameron Parker, who was aloft and flying an F4U fighter plane.

After coming to in the ocean, I kicked and swam to the surface. Here I was with all of this heavy clothing and shoes on and still with my steel helmet strapped under my chin. My first thought was that I was alive and survived. I immediately thought of my nephew Peter John Hensel, who was born January 28, 1945, and whom I had never seen. This seemed to put some survival fight into me. I struggled and stayed afloat. I remember seeing the burning carrier going away from me. I remember several sailors popping to the surface with me. They had a strange stare with no expression, and in my struggle they just seemed to disappear. I thought afterwards they must have been killed. For a few moments I felt all alone in the wide ocean and scared.

The ocean was very rough that morning. I remember seeing the bows of ships coming completely out of the water. I reached the peak of a wave, and there about a hundred feet from me was a raft. It must have been blown off from the explosions. As I got near the raft I recognized a sailor from the bomber squadron (VB5) whose name was Mike Monte. Then a ways off the raft was my pilot Lieutenant Junior Grade Gibson. He was on his back and appeared to be semiconscious with some blood from his mouth. I observed as crewman Monte dove off the raft and pulled Gibson to the raft. I got to the raft about the same time as they did and helped Monte get Gibson onto the raft. About this time the bow of a battleship appeared, *USS North Carolina #55 (BB55)*. It was so close that someone from the bow dropped more life preservers for us.

I visited the battleship BB55 that is on display in Wilmington, North Carolina. In the battleship's trophy compartment, there is a picture and a note telling how they were in the same group as the *Franklin* on March 19, 1945. The note explained how the BB55 captain ordered a sharp turn to avoid survivors of the *Franklin*. Thank God someone observed us, enabling the captain to give the order!

Monte had hollered to me to pull the cord to inflate my “Mae West” and to throw off my steel helmet as it was coming down over my eyes. This ended my struggle to stay afloat. He hollered before I had gotten to the raft. The wake from the battleship made it difficult to hang onto the raft. It finally settled down. It was then that I noticed the burns on my hands. The shock of the event must have dulled the pain of the burns. I saw a small amount of blood coming from the back of my hands. I then thought of sharks, which gave me the strength to push up onto the raft.

After I had gotten in to the raft, Gibson, semiconscious, was on the edge of the donut-shaped raft. He slipped into the center and disappeared under the water. We were able to grab him and bring him back on the raft. In the center of this donut-shaped raft was a rope net that hung below it. I wonder what would have happened if Gibson got tangled up in it, but this might have kept him from going under. In the meantime another survivor got on the raft, making four of us. I did not know him.

Soon I saw the bow of a destroyer, the USS *Hickox* (DD673), heading toward us. The bow was coming completely out of the water. I remember saying if I see the bottom of that bow, I’m jumping, feeling the bottom of the bow would come over the raft and take it under the ocean. As the destroyer approached us, the captain must have ordered the ship into reverse, as this held the bow down as it hit the raft. The fourth man on the raft fell off and was picked up. A line was thrown, and I caught it. The ship must have been moving forward as I hung onto the line and pulled the raft along with the ship. The sailor on the other end of the line kept letting line out, and we ended up a ways from the ship as it stopped. We were pulled up to the port side of the destroyer, where there was a cargo net, and sailors aided in pulling us off the raft and onto the destroyer. [See the *Hickox*’s log of the day on page 129.]

They took us to a central compartment on the main deck, and there was a doctor on board: Lieutenant R. K. Williams. A sailor from the destroyer dove into the ocean and pulled in a survivor that was severely burnt. The doctor was working on him and directing corpsmen that were working on Monte and myself. Gibson must have been taken to another compartment.

Corpsmen took off our wet clothes and put us in clothes from some of the ship’s company or what they called small stores. They cut off my high school ring. We started to shake, either from coming out of the shock or from the cold. I remember holding my hands down, and fluid kept coming out of them. I could not stop from shaking. The corpsmen sprinkled sulfur powder on my hands and face. They bandaged my hands with Vaseline gauze, and I had several patches on my face. I don’t remember any pain until after I stopped shaking and being bandaged. It must have been because of the trauma and shock of the incident.

My eyelashes and eyebrow hairs were all burnt off. There were other blisters and crusty areas to my face besides the deep burns. After a while, they sent Monte and me to an officer's compartment to recover from the shock. The man the doctor was working on died the next day and was buried at sea.

The *Hickox* pulled up to the fantail of the *Franklin*. There were many sailors trapped on the fantail from the fire and explosions. The sea was still rough, and as the bow of the destroyer rose up near the fantail, the men trapped there were jumping off onto the bow of the *Hickox*. One missed the bow and fell into the sea and was rescued. While this was taking place, there were still explosions and rockets taking off from the *Franklin*.

The cruiser *Santa Fe* pulled along the starboard side of the *Franklin*, and I understood they took on the remainder of Air Group 5 and personnel that were wounded.

I observed the cruiser *Pittsburgh* take the *Franklin* in tow. The *Hickox* was firing at Japanese planes that were trying to finish off the *Franklin*. I was disappointed when I woke up the morning of March 20, 1945, and found that we had not proceeded very far, as the *Franklin* was almost dead in the water. The *Hickox* just circled the *Franklin* all night.

After many hours of continuous duty, the officers wanted their compartments for sleep, so we were assigned bunks in a compartment in the bow of the ship. I could stretch my arms and touch both bulkheads. The sea was still rough, and the greatest movement is at the bow end of the ship. So help me, with the vast up and down movement I would lift up off the bunk as the bow dropped. I had to balance myself with my elbows as my hands were bandaged.

If I had not gone to early breakfast, I might have been in the chow line where all were killed. If I had gotten back into our ready room for coffee, I would have been there when the first bomb dropped. There was only one that escaped alive from there. I am glad I did not go when I first thought of doing it.

The *Franklin* along with the destroyer group arrived at Ulithi anchorage on March 24, 1945. I was put over the side of the *Hickox* in a basket to a motor launch and transferred to the USS *Relief* AH1, a hospital ship. It was either Palm Sunday or Easter, as I remember going to a church service. I spent one night on the USS *Relief* and was transferred to the USS *Bountiful* AH9, another hospital ship. The USS *Relief* was ordered to proceed to Iwo Jima to care for the wounded there, as the island had just been secured.

It was a great feeling to get aboard the hospital ship. On the *Bountiful* I met two friends from my squadron: Drew Hontz from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Knudson from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Knudson had eardrums injured from

the concussions of the explosions. Drew Hontz had an odd bone broken under his collar bone and was transferred after a two-day stay. I remember Drew Hontz going over the side of the hospital ship in a basket. I can still see his smile and the wave he gave me. The great feeling of survival!

Knudson said he would give me a shower but would not clean my crotch, as if I would let him. I held my bandaged hands over my head, and he soaped about 90 percent of my body, and rinsed myself. It sure felt good to get the shower. Knudson also wrote a letter I dictated to him for my parents, explaining my wounds and telling them that I was safe. Since the tip of some of my fingers extended through the bandages, I was able to put a mark on the letter.

The USS *Bountiful* was anchored close to the *Franklin*. I could see the blackened area and massive hole on the port side about where I had been standing.

Our air group flight surgeon examined me, leaving me aboard the hospital ship as the rest of the air group went on. He informed us of the many that were killed from our squadron. I lost two close friends: Elmer Lowery and Gerald Nold.

After about two weeks, I was released from the hospital ship and sent to a transfer ship, the USS *General Bundy* APA93. I was put in a launch as we pulled up alongside the *General Bundy*. I had to climb a cargo net, which looked to be about forty feet high, to get aboard. It was a touch experience trying to pull myself up with my yet-tender hands. I spent about three nights on the *General Bundy* and slept in a compartment about six decks below the main deck. I was then transferred to a CVL, an aircraft carrier just a bit smaller than the *Franklin* class, either the USS *Princeton* or the USS *Cabot*. I was headed back to the USA.

We stopped at Pearl Harbor for a day or two. I had no clothes and no money. My gear was an extra shirt, pants, and underwear that a crewman gave me somewhere along the line. I had no identification with me. I went to the officer of the deck and explained my situation and asked if I could go ashore at Ford Island for a while. He let me go but warned me to get back in a short time, as his watch would be ending and the next officer of the deck would not recognize me.

We left Pearl Harbor and proceeded to San Francisco Bay under the Golden Gate Bridge. What a welcome sight it was! We docked at Treasure Island in the bay. I was immediately transferred to the Alameda Naval Air Station.

I originally wanted to get back to my squadron, but my orders came through for a thirty-day survivor's leave, then on to Naval Air Technical Training Command Norman, Oklahoma, for a refresher course. I received completely new clothing and my back pay. I was happy and looking forward to my trip back home.

While at Alameda I met a former member of our squadron, Smith, a radioman who was quite heavy. He was being transferred to go to Rhode Island to train for night fighter duty with radar and then overseas. He spotted me, and I gave him the details of my experience, giving him the names of the men that I knew at that time who had been killed.

After my leave, I arrived at Norman, Oklahoma, in June 1945. I asked and received a weekend leave and was able to visit the family and friends of my friend Gerald Mold in nearby Arkansas City, Kansas.

I was accepted for pilot training, but the atomic bomb was dropped, and the war ended. I elected to leave flight school as we had just begun the refresher course. I was transferred to several bases, ending up at Floyd Bennet Field in Brooklyn and was discharged from Lido Beach, Long Island, in April 1946.

Here are some afterthoughts:

The sound of the initial explosion was unexpected and a devastating experience. It came so sudden with the flames, smoke, and heat. The second surely changed my life and attitude. It is just hard to explain the effect and the shock it put me into. The one second that the air cleared before the second bomb exploded gave me breath and probably saved my life, as I was feeling faint.

Ardell Lietzke broke his leg and was in a cast. He broke it playing softball sliding into second base. I was the one who threw the ball to try to get him out. He begged the doctor to let him stay with the squadron. The doctor did so against his better judgment because he had to put a cast on Lietzke's leg. Later, on that fateful date, Lietzke went into the ocean. He was unable to stay afloat with the cast on his leg and was drowned. The doctor stated when he examined me that the decision he made about Lietzke was something he would regret the rest of his life.

I regret that I was only able to be overseas for just a short period. Yet, when I look back, the events of March 19, 1945, were so traumatic that it gave me the feeling of contributing to the war effort.

I regret now that I put this experience of being wounded and getting split up from the remaining squadron in the back of my mind. I didn't express this experience throughout the years and did not keep in contact with these men. I also regret not maintaining contact with Gerald Nold's family and friends. After being discharged and returning home, this experience was set into the back of my mind, socializing with my family and friends, but it has never been forgotten.

A final thought:

I came into my kitchen about 9:00 a.m. on September 11, 2001, and the television was on. It showed the World Trade Center, North Tower, burning; an airplane had just run into it. I kept watching the television and saw the second plane hit the South Tower. I observed the flames and smoke as it hit. I could imagine the people in the building at that second going through quite the same of what I went through only having nowhere to escape.

Here is a list of the men killed from my squadron VT5 whose faces I'll always remember:

- Ens. Glenn Drulinger
- LCDR Allan Edmands
- Ens. Patrick Lacey
- Lt. George Watkins
- Ens. Charles McAllister
- Ens. Julius Watson
- LtJG. David Evans
- Ens. Wilmon Wheeler
- ARM1c Lloyd Fairbrother
- ARM2c Ardell Leitzke
- AOM3c Elmer Lowry
- ARM3c Roy Hute
- ARM3c Robert Wakefield
- ARM1c Theodore Dorak
- PR1c Gene Smith
- ACMM Gordon Lyons
- Y1c Donald Kenfield
- AOM1c John Natysyn
- Y3c Gerald Nold
- ACRT Raymond Pagel
- ACRM Charles Jenkins
- ARM3c Robert Baucum
- AOM1c James Hobbs
- AOM1c Howard Stone (Little Beaver, I think his name was)
- AOM3c David Macleod

Log of the USS *Hickox* (DD673)

Monday 19 March 1945 0 to 2

Steaming in company with Task Group 58.2 on course 005°T, 002°psc, speed 22 knots, zigzagging in accordance with plan 6 USF10A, in Kyushu Area Japan. Task Group 58.2 in company with Task Force 58 station #2 of fleet formation 5W with Task Group 58.3 guide at station #1. Task Group 58.2 in night anti-aircraft disposition 5VN. HICKOX in station with guide bearing 020°T-3600 yards. FRANKLIN guide at station 2280. Commander Task Group 58.2 in FRANKLIN, Commander Screen is ComDesRon 62 in OWEN. THE SULLIVANS and HUNT in picket stations 3 and 11 respectively. Military condition of readiness IIM, material condition modified A firm is set. Steaming on boilers 1 and 4, boilers 2 and 3 on 20 minutes standby. 0007-- Ceased zigzagging, changed course to 045°pgc 035°psc. 0043-- Changed course to 345°pgc 340°psc. 0047-- Changed speed to 21 knots. 0050-- Unidentified aircraft reported bearing 260°T-29 miles. 0055-- Changed course to 270°pgc, 280°psc, changed speed to 15 knots. 0103-- Changed course to 345°pgc, 340°psc, changed speed to 21 knots. 0106-- Commenced zigzagging according to plan 6, USF10A. 0120-- Unidentified aircraft reported bearing 149°T-23 miles, being intercepted by night fighter. 0137-- Went to General Quarters. 0150-- Secured from General Quarters. S. S. DORNER, Lieut., U.S. Naval Reserve.

Monday March 19 1945 2 to 6

Steaming as before. 0216-- Ceased zigzagging on zig leg 005°pgc, 001°psc. 0222-- Changed speed to 23 knots. 0255-- Resumed zigzagging in accordance with plan #6 (USF10A) base course 345°T. 0302-- Changed speed to 21 knots. 0302--Bogie reported in vicinity Task Group 58.2. Commander Task Group 58.2 directed all ships to set condition I on AA batteries; sent the ship to General Quarters. 0340-- Resumed zigzagging in accordance with plan #6 (USF10A). 0500-- Ceased zigzagging, changed course to 270°pgc, 265°psc. 0516-- Changed course to 330°pgc, 325°psc. 0530-- Changed course to 045°pgc, 040°psc; carriers commenced flight operations. 0535-- Changed course to 055°pgc, 050°psc. 0541-- Changed course to 065°pgc, 060°psc. 0543-- Changed speed to 23 knots. 0556-- Carriers completed flight operations. 0557-- Changed course to 250°pgs, 247°psc, changed speed to 17 knots. R. F. STARZ, Lieut. (jg), U.S. Naval Reserve.

Monday March 19 1945 6 to 8

Steaming as before. 0602-- Formed cruising disposition 5VD. HICKOX taking station with guide FRANKLIN bearing 015°T-3200 yards. 0605-- LEWIS HANCOCK taking linking vessel between Task Groups 58.2 and 58.3. HICKOX equalizing station between heavy units. Guide now bearing 025°T-2800 yards distant. 0615-- Secured from General Quarters. 0634-- Changed speed to 18 knots,

commenced zigzagging in accordance with plan #6 of USF10A. 0634-- Shifted steering motor and cable to port motor, starboard cable. 0648-- Changed course to 060°pgc, 055°psc, changed speed to 24 knots. 0653-- Carriers commenced flight operations. 0700-- Changed course to 070°pgc, 065°psc. Bogie reported bearing 350°T-10 miles distant. 0704-- FRANKLIN dive bombed by single enemy plane. Entire flight deck in flames. 0705-- Sounded General Quarters. FRANKLIN turning to the right. 0710-- HANCOCK assumed guide. 0715-- HICKOX proceeding to pick up survivors from FRANKLIN reported in the water. 0719-- HUNT and THE SULLIVANS rejoining formation from picket stations. 0720-- ComCruDiv 10 assumed tactical command of Task Group 58.2. 0722-- Task Group 58.2 Changed course to 345°T. 0730-- Heavy explosions observed aft of FRANKLIN. 0731-- Fire forward on FRANKLIN apparently under control. 0735-- Sighted number of men in the water on port beam. 0740-- Commenced recovery of FRANKLIN survivors from water. Gig lowered away to assist in rescue. 0747-- MILLER directed to go alongside FRANKLIN to render assistance.
W. F. JACOBS, Lieut., U.S. Navy.

Monday March 19 1945 8 to 12

Steaming as before on various courses and speeds in rescuing FRANKLIN survivors. 0810-- MILLER alongside FRANKLIN to remove personnel. 0843-- Moved ready ammunition in 5" guns #1 and #2 to handling rooms and ready ammunition from port 40mm guns to starboard 40mm guns in preparation to go alongside FRANKLIN. 0857-- MILLER away from alongside FRANKLIN. 0904-- HICKOX directed to continue rescue operations close astern of FRANKLIN. 1017-- SANTA FE alongside FRANKLIN fighting fires and removing personnel. 1020-- HICKOX proceeding to go close aboard FRANKLIN. 1040-- PITTSBURGH close aboard FRANKLIN port bow to commence towing operation. 1135-- HICKOX bow close aboard FRANKLIN stern, first line over to rig whip to remove wounded men. Number one mooring line over to FRANKLIN to stern for steadying line. 1140-- First man aboard in stretcher. 1146-- Second man aboard in stretcher. 1159-- Parted mooring line. Bull nose crushed into main deck, splitting main deck seam to frame #1 and opening a hole in stem about 8" long by 4", two feet below main deck.
W. W. POTTS, Lieut., U.S. Naval Reserve.

Monday March 19 1945 12 to 16

Steaming as before. 1202-- All lines cleared of FRANKLIN. 1205-- Placed bow alongside of after 40mm mounts of FRANKLIN, 3 men jumped aboard. 1207-- 3 men jumped aboard from FRANKLIN. 1210-- 7 men jumped aboard from FRANKLIN. 1212-- 2 men jumped from fantail of FRANKLIN to water, line secured to their waists, then they were hauled aboard. 1215-- Recovered last man from fantail of FRANKLIN. 1220-- SANTA FE leaving from alongside FRANKLIN. 1233-- HICOX, HUNT, TINGEY, and MARSHALL formed a rotating circular patrol screen on FRANKLIN, distance 3000 yards. Ship's boat

alongside with 13 additional survivors. 1240-- Boat clear of water, survivors on board. 1257-- HICKOX opened fire on diving Japanese plane. 1258-- Japanese plane dropped one bomb, near miss, starboard side of FRANKLIN. 1259-- HICKOX lost suction on main line. 1301-- Ceased firing. 1303-- Combat air patrol destroyed attacking plane. 1305-- Unloaded three guns through muzzle on safe bearing. Ammunition expended 40 rounds 40mm, 51 rounds 20mm HET, 103 rounds 20mm HEI. 1401-- Secured forward plant to clean debris out of main condenser. 1408-- MILLER directed to go astern of FRANKLIN to put out fire. 1415-- Unidentified aircraft reported bearing 205°T-20 miles. 1435-- Opened fire on enemy plane. 1437-- Ceased fire. Expended 47 rounds 40mm, 64 rounds 20mm HET, 139 rounds 20mm HEI. 1453-- TINGEY directed to investigate object in water being circled by plane. 1503-- PITTSBURGH reports she has commenced towing FRANKLIN at 3 knots, building up speed slowly. 1512-- MILLER directed to furnish FRANKLIN with two rescue breathing masks. 1520-- TINGEY rejoined screen, reported unable to locate any survivors in investigated area. 1540-- Condensers repair completed, starboard engine operative. 1549-- PITTSBURGH reports she is making 6 1/4 knots through the water. Survivors rescued from water and FRANKLIN are listed as follows: Lieut. (jg) David L. GIBSON, 321122, USNR; Lieut. Peter Lawrence SHAEFER, 023724 USMC; 2nd Lieut. Ramson Ricoli TILTON, USMCR o28764; 2nd Lieut. Arthur O. SCHMAGEL, 031298 USMC; M/T/Sgt Melvin Robert BRYAN, 326738 USMC; T/Sgt. Erwin Robert Schwartz, 280265 USMC; Sgt. James Francis Hermann, 439774 USMC; Cpl. Eugene Joseph CAREY, 886204 USMCR; Pfc Henry J. DEMARAIS, 891531 USMCR; Pfc Gebhard John Appel, 531472 USMCR; Pfc Joseph J. Kane, 900815 USMC; AUSTIN, William P. 201 50 65 CEM, USN; GREGG, Robert Charles, 409 28 91 CBM, USNR; McGONICLE, Joseph James 650 10 07 07 CY(AA), USNR; WRIGHT, Harold Bell, 406 79 28, ACMM USNR; CARTWRIGHT, Lowery C., 266 07 07, EM1c USN; ANTON, Joe (n), 886 34 87, S1c USNR; BRETZ, Albert Charles, 611 90 58, WT3c USNR; BYESS, William David, 783 79 82 S2c USNR; BAGANAS, Nicholas George, 400 82 78AMM1c USN; BELANGER, George Henry, 607 45 79 RM2c USNR; COLE, Albert Richard, 386 87 94 F1c USN; COOPER, Leonard William Jr., 603 27 67 EM2c USNR; CODDINGTON, Paul Archer, 815 18 64 S1c USNR; BERLUCCHI, Gerald Louis, 209 09 58 S2c USN; DICKMAN, James Franklin, 612 44 96 S1c USNR; DAHADIE, John Gerald, 274 84 98 CM3c USN; DOLL, Wendel (n) 809 84 13 MM3c USNR; FANNELLI, Daniel Anthony, 807 42 70 MM3c USNR; FENTON, John Frederick, 808 16 77 S2c USNR; FOWLER, M. R., 577 22 23 S2c USNR; FREGIATO, Thomas (n) 941 75 53 S2c USNR; EASLEY, John William Jr. 671 46 81 S1c(AMM) USNR; FLINTGER, L. D., MM2c 234 25 79 USN; FADEBC, Frank Anthony, 614 33 25 EM2c USNR; HOATH, William Charles, 920 89 30 F1c USNR; HAUK, Chester Lawrence, 316 70 16 SF2c USNR; HOUSE, William Rex, 896 62 53 S1c USNR; GABLE, William Claude, 934 71 88 S2c USNR; GARRETT, Niles Donald, 556 88 66 F1c USNR; GERRITT, John Wegter, 863 12 75 F1c USNR; HRON, Elbert Richard, Jr., 726 78 96 S1c USNR; GAST, Thomas Richard, 250 81 62 AM2c USNR;

KARPIK, Frank Edward 608 51 75 S2c USNR; LARSON, Raymond Ernest 643 12 48 AOM3c USNR; ISBELL, Bert Archie, 860 79 75 RM3c USNR; KOON, Willie Dawson, 552 29 59 S1c USNR; KEANE, James Patrick, 708 31 69 S1c USNR; JONES, Richard Fred, 784 31 69 S2c USNR; JENNINGS, Thomas Early, 753 59 84 S2c USNR; LEE, J. C., 305 88 83 AEM2c USN; KIRKMAN, Robert Joseph, SF3c, 813 67 24 USNR; KIRKPATRICK, James Glen 832 04 54 F1c USNR; INGRAM, James Russell, 829 04 54 S1c USNR; **HENSEL, John Clifford, 800 52 22 AOM3c USN**; MICHELSON, Edward (n) MC NUTT, Walter Scott, 653 41 17; [illegible]SON, William Francis, 801 63 74 S1c V-6; AOLSON, George W., 386 60 81 F1c USNR; [illegible]HIAS, Donald Ernest, 753 47 56, F1c USN; McKENNA, John Patrick, 822 97 83 GM3c USNR; MONYI, Michael Anthony, ARM3c 817 71 48 USNR. PHILLIPS, George Edward, 312 70 57, MM3c USNR; PAULSON, Vincent Robert, 883 74 36, S1c USNR; PERIVOLARIS, M., 895 06 73 S2c USNR; REID, Edwin L., 635 08 85 MM2c USNR; SMEATON, Ernest Hayes, 898 56 75 S1c USNR; SOLTAN, Edward Alfred, 709 52 88 Cox. USNR; SMITH, Leonard Clarence, 556 72 98 MM2c USNR; SPITZER, J. D., 782 87 39, USNR; SHEPHERD, "A" "D", 783 80 95 S2c USNR; ROSE, Andrew Natalie, 726 48 40, EM2c USNR; REECE, Russell Francis, 376 47 12 WT1c USN; RAPOSA, Eugene William, 887 71 46, USNR; (S1c) **STUART, James Merton, 941 80 57, S2c USNR**; RYAN, William Joseph, 818 24 44 S2c USNR; RUX, Arthur Cara, 305 39 86 S1c USN; HANCOCK, Roy James, 557 45 72 S2c USNR; SMITH, Clarence W., 895 40 20 F1c USNR; RUSSELL, Charles Mason, 603 66 27 USNR; REID, Alfred Elvin, 650 45 48 EM2c USNR; RITTER, Harold, 802 64 45 S2c USNR; RODDA, Kenneth Fred, 300 33 25, SSML3c USNR; RUGGABER, Harry, 826 29 59 S1c USNR; VARRACHIO, Gerald Paul, 815 77 98 USNR S1c; VENTRIGLIA, Joseph Louis, 711 87 27 S2c USNR; TIDWELL, Luther Raymond, 975 88 24 S2c USNR; WOLOSHUN, John, 653 87 56 S1c USNR; WILSON, Llewellyn, 964 38 12 F2c USNR; WOJICK, Anthony J., SC1c; KRENSKE, James H., ACM.
S. S. DORNER, Lieut., U.S. Naval Reserve.

Monday March 19 1945 16 to 18

Steaming as before. 1645-- Commenced closing screen to circle 2.5, patrolling counter-clockwise. 1735-- Commenced closing screen in to circle 2. 1740-- MARSHALL leaving screening station and proceeding to investigate dye marker bearing 1 80°T distant 10 miles.
R. F. STARZ, Lieut. (jg), U.S. Naval Reserve.

Monday March 19 1945 18 to 22

Steaming as before. 1800-- Half masted colors following movements of MARSHALL and MILLER. 1803-- MARSHALL recovered one man, is rejoining formation. 1805-- MILLER proceeding under stern of FRANKLIN to play water on small fire on after part of FRANKLIN. 1830-- Two-blocked colors. 1928-- Completed ballasting C-8 and C-9. 2001-- KIDD and BULLARD joining Task Unit 58.2.9. 2003-- MILLER rejoining screen. 2018-- Opened screen to circle 2.5. 2107--

TINGEY designated to assist PITTSBURGH in towing operations. 2110-- Secured from General Quarters. 2145-- KRENSKE, James Herbert, 639 88 84, GAM, USNR died of internal abdominal wounds. 2155-- STOCKHAM directed to take picket station when screen 56 is formed.
W. F. JACOBS, Lieut., U.S. Navy.

Monday March 19 1945 22 to 24

Steaming as before. 2210-- GUAM, ALASKA, DesDiv 96 minus KIDD and BULLARD plus TWINING and STOCKHAM joined formation. Forming Task Unit 58.2.9 composed of GUAM, ALASKA, FRANKLIN, SANTA FE, PITTSBURGH, DesDiv 104 less LEWIS HANCOCK plus TINGEY and MILLER, DesDiv 96, TWINING and STOCKHAM. O.T.C. is C.T.U. 58.2.9 (ComCruDiv 16) in GUAM. Commander Screen is ComDesDiv 96 in BLACK. Formed Anti-Submarine screen #59, HICKOX proceeding to screen station #1. PITTSBURGH is guide bearing 000°T-6000 yards from screen station #1. 2235-- HUNT leaving formation to take picket station bearing 310°T-10 miles from formation. 2239-- HICKOX at screen station #1. 2255-- BULLARD leaving screen to assist FRANKLIN in fighting fires. 2300-- GUAM, ALASKA, and SANTA FE taking assigned stations within screen. 2345-- BULLARD returning to screen, changed course and formation axis to 155°T. 2353-- Screen started rectangular anti-submarine patrol in clockwise direction on square, tangent to circle 6 with axis parallel and normal to formation axis and course.
W. W. POTTS, Lieut., U.S. Naval Reserve.

Approved: J. H. WESSON, Commander, U.S.N., Commanding

Examined: A. H. ANDERSON, Lieut., U.S.N.R., Navigator

Rescue of the USS *Franklin* by the USS *Pittsburgh*

--- by *Glen W. Hicks*
Former crew member
"H" Div.
U.S.S. Pittsburgh CA72

It was 18 March 1945 and we were participating in first air strikes on Kyushu as a unit of carrier task group: Task Group 58. We aboard the heavy cruiser Pittsburgh were assigned to unit 58.2. It was just a month ago, 19 Feb. 1945 we were supporting the Invasion of Iwo Jima and also two air strikes on Tokyo.

Today is 19 March and most of us had returned to our "Battle Stations" after having breakfast. It was a brisk, cool morning with a low cloud overcast. At 0535 Carriers launched their planes for a strike on Kyushu. All of a sudden a Jap plane dropped out of a low overcast and dropped two 500 lb. bombs on the Carrier U.S.S. Franklin which was a few hundred yards on our port sides. All hell broke loose, within seconds she was a raging inferno. The pilots were in their planes waiting their turns to take off and there were explosions everywhere, mixing gasoline and ammunition together. Only 45 aircraft got aloft safely out of 98 planes. The time of the attack was 0707 and I just happened to have a front row view of this holocaust.

The Pittsburgh, light cruiser Santa Fe and 4 destroyers were ordered to stand by Franklin. Many Bogies now reported in vicinity. 0840 Task Commander ordered U.S.S. Pittsburgh to proceed vicinity U.S.S. Franklin and render all possible aid. 0855 arrived vicinity of U.S.S. Franklin, many men in water. As we pulled up along the port side of the Franklin, she was still ablaze and still exploding. Fire was still coming out of the barrels of her 5-inch mounts, the heat was terrific. The cruiser Santa Fe and destroyer Hunt went along Franklin's port side to assist in fire fighting and disembark personnel. Pittsburgh lowered both motor whaleboats to pick up survivors. Being a Navy Corpsman, I was assigned to boat #2. We picked up 34 to 40 men and 1 body. Some men slipped beneath the waves before we could get to them. The men were burned and covered with oil, how sad. While we were rescuing the survivors, at 0904 a Jap "Judy" made a glide bombing attack, bomb missing starboard side of Franklin and hit near the Pittsburgh's fantail (stern) lifting the cruiser's aft section out of the water.

The Franklin is now dead in the water with about a 15 deg. list to starboard. At 1101 Pittsburgh started approach on portside of Franklin to take her in tow. Fires now almost under control. U.S.S. Hunt along starboard quarter assisting in firefighting. 1135 passed Manila line to U.S.S. Franklin. No power on deck or

sufficient manpower to hauling towing wire. Line led to Santa Fe through fair leads who pulled wire aboard about 1235. 1250 Bogie reported 012 deg., 17 miles. 1334 U.S.S. Franklin hooked up ready for towing. 1354 started towing operations--ships at nearly right angles to each other-- towing shackle caught in bull nose preventing chain from coming out. Hauled out Franklin chain where it was secured by stoppers at 1402. 1436 opened fire at plane attacking Franklin, plane chased by fighters. 1500 gradually getting underway on U.S.S. Franklin. Have drifted since 0930 within 40 miles of Kyushu in the Bungo Straits. Was originally 50 miles away at the time of the attack. Speed through the water 5 knots. 1519 changed course to 180 deg. Ship yaws badly-- course being steered varies from 170 deg. - 215 deg. 2115 Destroyer Div. 106 and 96, U.S.S. Guam and U.S.S. Alaska (Battle Cruisers) joined group. Tow commenced yawing wildly tending to turn to port, pulling the U.S.S. Pittsburgh stern with it as much as 120 deg.. Course made good at 2300, speed 2 knots. Also at 2300 list corrected on Franklin and towing thereafter proceeded more satisfactorily, able to maintain a course about 150 deg. -- speed 4 knots. Also at 2300 survivor from U.S.S. Franklin died aboard from pneumonia.

20 March 1945: Towing Franklin on course 155 deg., speed 4 knots. Guam, Alaska, Santa Fe and Destroyer Div. 96, 106 and 110 in special screening disposition, guide in U.S.S. Pittsburgh. 0245 U.S.S. Franklin now making 2 knots on her engines, towing speed increased. 0830 changed course to 180 deg., 0930 Franklin gained steering control in Pilot House, now in column astern of Pittsburgh, 1116 Bogie bearing 32 miles. 1140 Franklin increased speed to 8 knots at 1150 increased speed to 12 knots and slowly to 15 knots. U.S.S. Franklin reports she is able to steam singly. 1218 slowed to cast off tow. 1233 cast off towline, having towed U.S.S. Franklin 120 miles. Guide now in Franklin in column 1500 yards astern of U.S.S. Pittsburgh. 1430 two Bogies in area. 1445 set condition #1, 1448 opened fire on diving plane attacking U.S.S. Franklin, bomb missed astern of U.S.S. Pittsburgh. Many Bogies reported on various bearings. 1622 (C.A.P.) Combat Air Patrol shot down 1 "Judy." 1730 set condition #1E. Continued retirement to southward toward area fueling and rendezvous. Night fighters supplied by T.G. 58.2. 2231 Set condition #1 in A.A. Battery, Bogies bearing 290 deg. 25 miles.

21 March 1945: En route to fueling rendezvous. Set condition #1 in A.A. Batteries a number of times this day due to Bogies (enemy aircraft), reported as close as 6 miles.

22 March 1945: 1406 U.S.S. Pittsburgh detached from T.G. 58.2 and ordered to proceed and report to C.O.M.T.G. 58.1. 1500 reported to C.O.M.T.G. 58.1 for duty. 1716 changed course to 290 deg. en route launching position for strike against Okinawa.

NOTE:

The U.S.S. Franklin was the first seriously damaged major vessel to be successfully towed to safety from enemy waters by another major vessel under enemy air attack.

The casualties were heavy with 724 crew members killed and 262 injured.

The crew of the U.S.S. Franklin became the most decorated crew in U.S. Naval history. Everyone a true hero. 2 Medals of Honor, 19 Navy Crosses, 22 Silver Stars, 114 Bronze Stars, 234 Special Letters of Commendation.

Sources on Allan Christie “Ace” Edmands I

- This entire document is a printout of the information available on the family history website www.milkcanpapers.com -> **Veterans** -> **World War II (1939-1945)** -> **Allan Christie Edmands I (1911-1945)**.
- (Ethel) Jean Edmands Weeks, 1909–2005, in an interview with Allan Christie “Butch” Edmands II, b. 1942.
- The diaries (1936–1970) and several of the letters of Ace’s mother, Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, 1887–1970, which are now in the possession of Ace’s son, Allan Christie “Butch” Edmands II, b. 1942.
- A compilation of letters written by Ethel Jean Weeks and Mary Caroline Findley Edmands, assembled with pictures by (Mary) Christine Edmands Barrett, b. 1938, in 1985.
- Yearbooks, such as the *Punchard High School Class Book* (1929), the Annapolis Class of 1935 *Lucky Bag* yearbook, and the *20-Year Rendez-vous Lucky Bag 1935* (published in 1955).
- *Our Baby Book Step by Step: The First Six Years*, designed by Janet Laura Scott (Whitman Publishing, 1938), with facts filled in by Mary Anna Hawes Edmands Ashbrook, 1917–1992, for her son, Allan Christie “Butch” Edmands II, b. 1942.
- For the facts of Ace’s death, I am very much indebted to *Franklin* survivor Jim Stuart. Although he did not know Ace, he helped me track down people who did know him – including VT5 ordnance gunners Edward McGuckin, Jack Hensel, Marion Gray, and Thomas Hagan – whose stories cleared up the mysteries around the events of 19 March 1945. A summary of my findings from interviewing these sources is at “Squadron” (page 47), which is the last part of a larger narrative that describes the effects that unanswered questions have on family members: “What happened to Ace on that day?” (page 23). Jim Stuart also sponsored my entrance into the Franklin Association and ensured that Ace was listed with the Navy Memorial Foundation’s **Navy Log** (<https://navylog.navymemorial.org/edmands-allan>) and that he posthumously received the Combat Action Award for Naval World War II veterans. For a description of Mr. Stuart’s own experiences on 19 March 1945, see “Saving Seaman Stuart” (<https://ussfranklin.org/2012/08/28/saving-seaman-stuart/>), written as a tribute by his younger brother.

- Books covering the *Franklin* disaster include:
 - *Lucky Lady: The World War II Heroics of the USS Santa Fe and Franklin* by Steve Jackson (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003)
 - *USS Franklin (CV-13): The Ship That Wouldn't Die* by James R. Nilo and Robert St. Peters, eds. (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Co., 1989, 1996)
 - *The Franklin Comes Home* by A. A. Hoehling (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, Bluejacket Books, 1974)
 - *I Was Chaplain on the Franklin* by Father Joseph T. O'Callahan (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956)
 - *Big Ben the Flat Top: The Story of the USS Franklin* by Lt. Marvin K. Bowman, USN (Atlanta, GA: Albert Love Enterprises, 1946)
- Here is a website that covers the events of the *Franklin* disaster: Phil Gentry's site (<https://ussfranklin.org/>).
- An excellent video is *The Ship That Wouldn't Die*, produced by Robert L. Garthwaite (Phoenix, AZ: Timberline Productions, Inc., 1988).
- General information on the Torpcats is at <https://www.skyhawk.org/article-unit/va55>.
- You can get a background on Ace's plane in *TBF & TBM Avenger* by Bert Kinzey (Carrollton, TX: Squadron/Signal Publications, Detail and Scale Aviation Series, 1997).
- For what it was like to lose a father, see "What happened to Ace on that day?" (on page 23). For other perspectives of children growing up without a father, see American World War II Orphans Network (<https://www.awon.org/>) and Dad's War: Finding and Telling Your Father's World War II Story (<https://www.amazon.com/Dads-War-Finding-Telling-Workshop/dp/1495384926>) by Wesley Johnston.