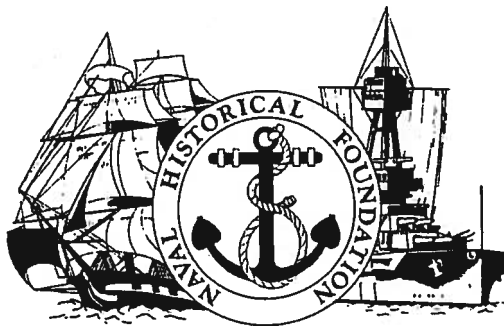


Oral History

**Lieut. (JG)
Joseph Sharp, USNR**

**Aviation Training During WWII
Patrol Bomber Squadron 22**



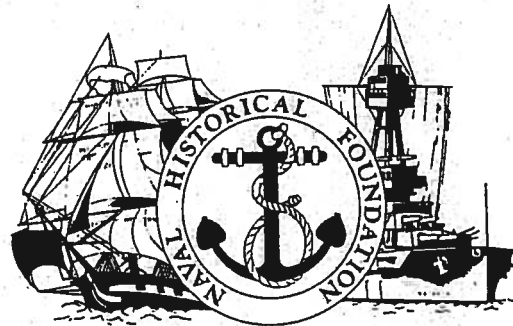
**Naval Historical Foundation
Oral History Program
2005**

Oral History

Lieutenant (Junior Grade)
Joseph Sharp, USNR

Oral History
Conducted By
Captain Peter Weed, USNR, (Ret.)

16 March and 27 April 2004



**Naval Historical Foundation
Oral History Program
2005**

Lieutenant (JG) Joseph Sharp, USNR

Joseph Sharp was born and raised in Woodbury, New Jersey in 1924. Graduating from Woodbury High School in the spring of 1942, Sharp was employed as Taker's Helper at a Camden, New Jersey shipyard constructing invasion barges.

In November 1942, Sharp was admitted to the Navy Cadet Aviation Program and started his flight training at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Sharp's initial flight training was completed at Williamsport, Pennsylvania, followed by ground training at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Primary flight training was completed at Peru, Indiana and intermediate flight training at Pensacola, Florida, where he trained in multi-engine aircraft. Finally, advanced flight training was completed with PBM's at Banana River, Florida.

In June 1944, Sharp was assigned to VPB-22 stationed at Norfolk, Virginia, flying Plane Number 8. Later that month, VPB-22 was assigned to the Pacific Theater and preceded to Eniwetok via NAS Oakland and Kane, Hawaii. The squadron was subsequently transferred to Ulithi where it flew anti-submarine patrols protecting the fleet anchorage. Shortly after the fleet departed Ulithi for the Okinawa invasion, Sharp returned to the United States. After 30 days of leave, he returned to Banana River, Florida for training as a PBM plane captain.

While Sharp was training at Banana River, atomic bombs were dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan surrendered. Sharp was released from Active Duty and affiliated with a Reserve Squadron at NAS Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. He studied Industrial Art in Philadelphia and then began his successful career with Bethlehem Steel in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Subjects Covered

16 March and 27 April 2004

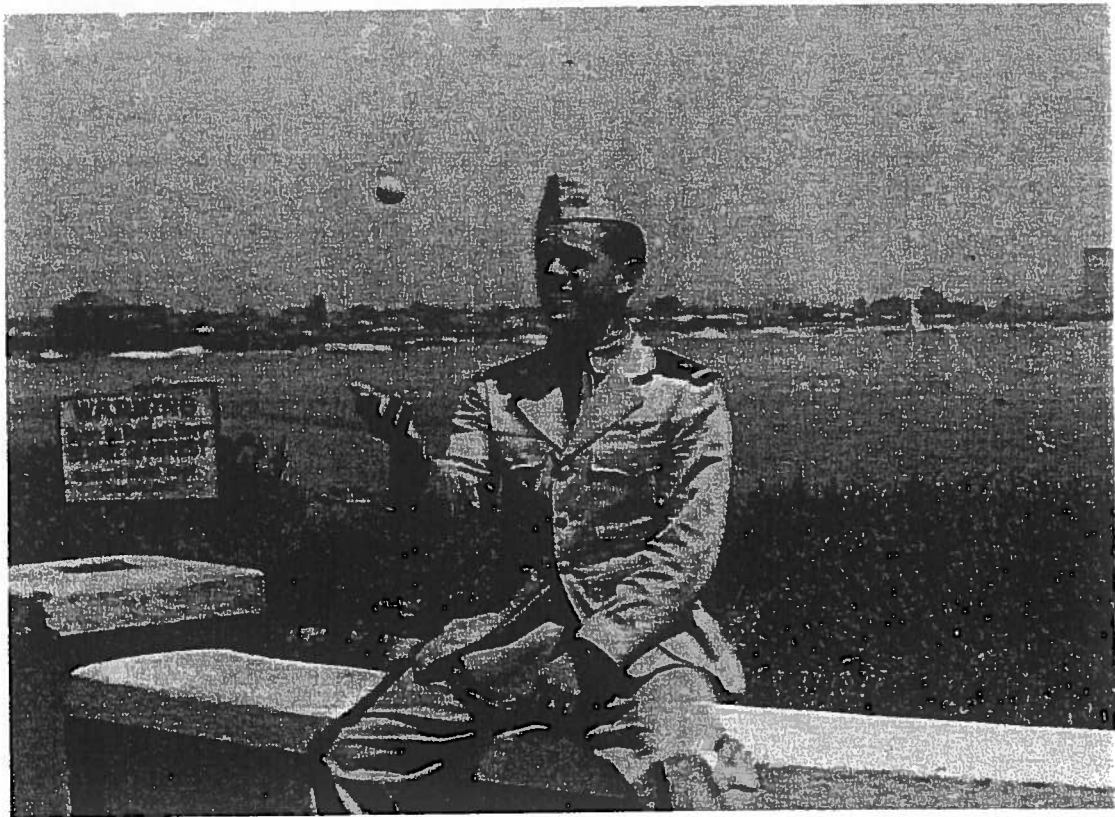
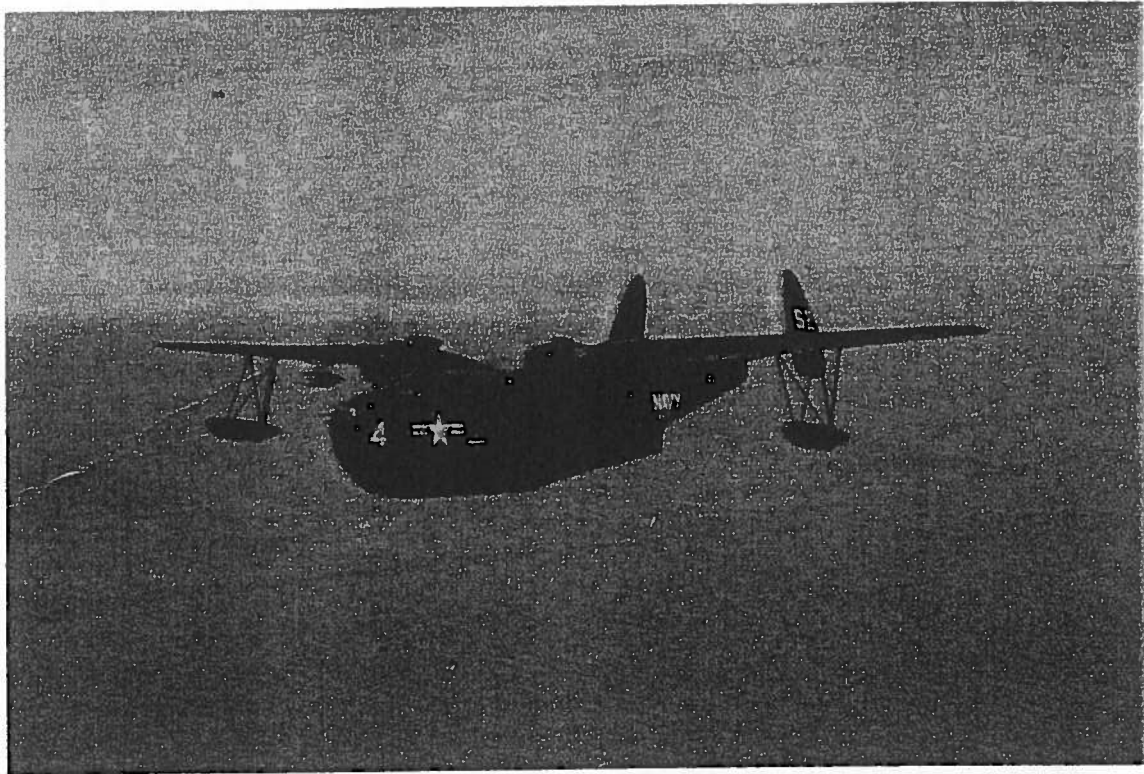
Growing up in Woodbury, New Jersey
Working in Camden, New Jersey Shipyard—Constructing Invasion Barges

Joining the Navy
Naval Aviation Cadet Program
Muhlenberg College Flight Training
Civilian Pilot Training Course at Williamsport, Pennsylvania
Navy Pre-flight Training at UNC Chapel Hill
Primary Flight Training at Peru, Indiana
Intermediate Flight Training at Pensacola, Florida—Sofley Air Field
Advanced Flight Training at Pensacola Florida—PBM Training

Commissioned Ensign December 1943
VPB-22 formed at Norfolk, Virginia
Squadron Organization and Training
Sonar Training at Key West, Florida

Cross-Country Flight to NAS Oakland—Flight to Kaneohe Field, Hawaii
Cross Ocean Flight to Eniwetok, Marshall Islands—Eniwetok Operations
Anti-Submarine Patrols at Ulithi—Okinawa Invasion Fleet Departs Ulithi
Return to States—Leave—Training for Return to the Pacific

V-J Day—Release from Active Duty
Reserve Training at NAS Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
Reflections



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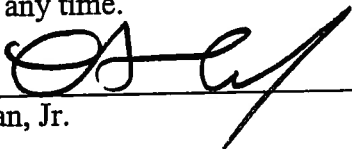
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Joseph W. Sharp
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28 May 2002

16 March 2004 and 27 April 2004

Joe Sharp, Naval Aviator World War Two

CAPT. Peter Weed, USNR Ret.
Interviewer

WEED: Joe, Good evening. I thought we would start out by your description about where you were born and raised and your experiences prior to joining the Navy.

SHARP: Well, I was born in Woodbury, New Jersey, which is across the Delaware River from Philadelphia and inland about three or four miles. I was born in 1924, went to school in Woodbury. I graduated from Woodbury High School in the spring 1942. The United States got involved in World War II about six months earlier, on December the 7th, 1941 of course, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. There was a lot of excitement and many high school kids actually quit school to enlist in the military. At that time, because of the war excitement and the government's need, the high school declared that anyone who wanted to join the military in any way would be given a diploma without finishing high school if their grades were passing.

I did not elect to do that, I stayed in school and graduated. I, no doubt, would have soon been drafted, because I was eighteen at that time. Just north of Woodbury, ten miles or so at Camden, New Jersey, there was a big shipyard along the river. There they were building invasion barges and all kinds of other ships. They were hiring everybody that came along. So, the day after graduation, I went up to Camden and applied at the shipyard for a job. I was hired. I worked 4:00pm to 12:00pm, which gave me time off in the daytime.

WEED: What did you do at the shipyard?

SHARP: I was given the job as a tacker's helper. A tacker is a man who did preliminary welding. The steel plates that make-up the invasion barges were put into position by another crew. When the plates were all in position, the tacker would tack them into position with his welding rod. Once the plates were all tacked together, we would move out and the welders came in. They literally welded every plate.

WEED: Was any training required?

SHARP: I do not remember that we received much training. I worked with this guy who was the tacker, and I quickly learned how to wedge the plates and bang them into position.

There was one incident I remember while working on a barge. Each barge was made-up of several large sections, and each section was divided into small rooms, maybe 4 or 5 feet square. A manhole in each of the plates that made-up the walls of a room allowed passage from one room to another. When all of the sections were finished, they were assembled together to form the completed barge.

For some reason, one night as I went through one of the holes and came on a welder who was in trouble. He wore heavy canvas gloves and was sweating. He had attempted to take a used welding rod out of his electric holder, and because his gloves were wet with sweat, it shorted out. He was being electrocuted. I saw him in there; he was rigid. I realized right away what was happening. I grabbed hold of the cable that went from the welder to the welding machine, and yanked the whole thing out of his hands. He recovered himself and was terrified. We came out of there like wild men and he was taken off to the hospital. I never saw him after that.

WEED: You saved his life.

SHARP: Yes, had I, or somebody else, not come along, he would have been electrocuted.

WEED: Did you have to join a union?

SHARP: Yes, I had to join the union.

WEED: Do you recall what the wage rates were?

SHARP: I was making \$64.00 a week. It was the summer time, and school was closed. I went back to my school one day and was talking to one of my schoolteachers. He was making \$44 dollars a week, and I was making \$64.00, just out of high school.

WEED: Was there rationing at that time?

SHARP: I do not remember that it was. This was early in the war, and everything was just getting in motion.

WEED: How long did you stay at the shipyard?

SHARP: Until I went in the Navy in the autumn of 1942. I had always wanted to learn to fly, and the local airfield was still in operation. I was suddenly making good money for a high school kid. I went out to the local airfield and began to take flying lessons. Up until that point, in order to get in the Army or the Navy aviation cadet program, you had to be 20 years of age and have at least two years of college. That summer, the summer of 1942, they reduced the requirements to 18 of age and a high school education.

I went to Philadelphia; there was a particular office in the center of the city that the Navy was using to recruit cadets for the aviation program. So, I went up there and took the tests and got in. I did not find it particularly difficult as I was right out of high school and there were some questions on trigonometry and such subjects that were fresh in my mind. I did not have any trouble with the test.

I went up in the morning and they gave me a preliminary eye test. They told me to come back around 1:00, after lunch, to take the written test. As I went out of the office and down the hallway toward the elevator, I found myself walking alongside of a Yeoman. That is a Navy term, as you know, for an office worker. He was going to lunch. I began to talk to him. "Can a high school kid pass this test?" I asked. He said yes, it was written for high school students. I wound up eating lunch with him at a five and ten cent store: Woolworth's. I told him what I was doing, that I was taking flying lessons and so forth. I must have made a favorable impression on

him. I was so naïve that was the last thing on my mind to snow him. I was just telling him what I was doing.

He had to go back to work, and I came back a little later to take the test. I went in a classroom and there were a bunch of other men; all sitting at desks. They were there also to take the test. Another Yeoman passed out the papers, and when he got to me he said: "Is your name Sharp?" I said, "Yeah." "Whether you take this test or not," he said, "you're in."

WEED: Were you a licensed pilot at that time?

SHARP: No, I had not even soloed. I had just started flying lessons. When I figured I was going to get paid by the Navy to do it, I decided to discontinue the flying lessons, so I never did solo at that time. Finally, I was called-up by the Navy and sent to Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Previous to the United States being involved in the war, Civilian Pilot Training course was started in a number of colleges throughout the United States. College students in this program could take flying lessons at government expense. The program was established before the United States entered the war.

The government sponsored the program for the purpose of training people to fly. If the United States were to get involved in the war, the government could draw on this pool of young men who had some preliminary flight training. When I was sworn in the Navy in Philadelphia, they told me they had such a back log of men waiting to get in the regular cadet program, that, if I chose to - it was purely voluntary - I could start my flight training at a college. The government would pay for it, and rather than sit at home I could start my flight training earlier. So, I agreed to do this, I was anxious to get started learning to fly.

WEED: Could you also take college courses?

SHARP: No, just courses related to flying. We spent everyday in class and flying at the Allentown/Bethlehem Airport. When I was sworn in, I did not know where they were going to send me. There were a number of colleges throughout the United States where these programs were in progress. I was sent to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Muhlenberg College. I began my flight training at what was called the ABE Airport. This was in the fall of 1942. When I finished the flight training, I was awarded a private pilot's license.

WEED: One thing, if we may backtrack a little bit. You entered the Navy because you were motivated to fly. What other things motivated you?

SHARP: Well, I knew that I would have been drafted if I had not joined-up, but that was minor. The main reason was that I wanted to learn to fly. My father had been in the Navy, during World War I, and I had an inclination to follow in the Navy. The flying instructor that I had that summer when I started civilian flying lessons thought the Navy would be the best service in which to learn to fly. So, that is why I chose the Navy Cadet Program.

WEED: Where did your father serve during the First World War?

SHARP: I don't know. He was on a ship, but I don't really know too much about his time in the Navy. I wish, now that it is all too late, that I had asked him more about it. There are so many things I wish I would have asked my parents.

WEED: How many were in your class at Muhlenberg? How long did you stay in the training?

SHARP: Actually, I entered the program in November of 1942, and I stayed there through December. Oh, I know what I was going to say. I started to take the flying lessons, and in order to solo you had to have minimum of eight hours of indoctrination. That is what the law required. If at the end of eight hours you were not ready to solo, you could go to ten hours. If at the end of ten hours the instructor felt you were not ready to solo, your name went before a board where a judgment was made as to whether you should continue or discontinue.

One or two guys had gotten their eight hours in and had soloed. I did not have my eighth hour of instruction in yet. I was making what I thought were terrible landings. Finally, the end of the eighth hour, I was continuing to make what I thought were terrible landing. As we taxied back to the hanger, I was disgusted with myself. Here I am, I have eight hours in, and I am not ready to solo. We got back to where the hangers were and as the instructor got out he said; "Now the airplane is going to be lighter without me in it."

Suddenly, it dawned on me that he was going to let me fly by myself. I thought, "Oh, I am going to kill myself!" I felt like I ought to climb out with him, but I didn't. Pride will kill you. So, I stayed in the airplane and he got out. I taxied out and took off. The instructor said, "Go around three times." So, I went around once and I made a beautiful landing, I was amazed at myself. I went around two more times. I could not believe it. I was doing better than I thought I was doing. Anyway, I stayed there and finished the program.

While I was learning to fly, the Navy was continuing to recruit new guys for its cadet program. The established cadet program was simply not big enough to handle all the men who had been sworn in. When I went to take the Civilian Pilot Training course it was optional. You could choose it if you wanted to, but you did not have to. The Navy wound up with so many guys sworn in who could then not be drafted because they were in the Navy, that the program was changed and it became a requirement that each man had to take this Civilian Pilot Training Course. Meanwhile, so many cadets were being sworn into the Navy that a second course, an intermediate course, was added at another college. A lot of us were sent to take this secondary course.

I was sent up to where the Piper Cubs are built, Williamsport, Pennsylvania. After I finished that intermediate course I was sent to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for the Navy pre-flight program. From that point on, I was in the regular Navy training program.

WEED: What did you do during at the intermediate course?

SHARP: I wanted to see what it was like to do a loop. I had never done one so, I did a loop.

At Chapel Hill, I would say about two-thirds of the program was devoted to physical activity. A lot of hiking and sports, we had to play football and various other sports. About a third of the day, or perhaps a little more was devoted to classes, were we were given some

preliminary instructions in navigation and aeronautics. We were paid \$50 a month plus room and board there at the university.

At the end of the three months we were given the opportunity to choose one of the primary flight training bases. There were a number of places in the United States where the Navy had established primary flight training bases. I picked Peru, Indiana. I think that was the one that was called the Bunker Hill Base.

I was in Chapel Hill from March through May 1943. Then in June, we left Chapel Hill and headed by train for Peru, Indiana. The train companies had brought back into service a lot of old passenger cars that were on the obsolete list. We cadets were on these cars. There was an emergency cord on each side of the car over the seats. If the train was in trouble, you could pull that cord and it would stop the train. Well, here we were, all cadets with our dress uniforms on. We decided to take off our blues and put on kakis. We were going to sleep all night on the train in these old cars, so we took off our blues and hung them on the hooks that held the emergency cords. We managed to get the seats apart by taking the backs off. Somehow, using the seat-backs, we made a big bed that reached from one end of the car to the other, where we could all stretch out and sleep.

Well, we all went to sleep. In the middle of the night we woke up. The train was stopped and the car was filled with smoke. The weight of the hanging uniforms had pulled the hooks out of the old wood and activated the emergency cord. The train had stopped in a tunnel.

WEED: What was a typical day at Peru?

SHARP: At Peru, Indiana, I went to the primary flight training base, which is one of the largest the Navy had. We flew the Steerman Bi-Plane. Flight training was divided into five sections. First section was to solo. Another section involved S-turns to a circle. There was a big circle painted on the ground in the middle of a field. We had to land in the circle using an S-turn to control descent so that we literally stalled out and dropped within the bounds of this circle. It was required to get three out of five attempts. As I recall, the first time I overshot, and the second time I went short, and the last three I plopped right in middle. I managed to pass that section.

Another section involved side slips to a circle. We cut the engine and had to use a side slip to lose altitude. By using what is called "crossing controls," we lost altitude without picking up speed, and then stalling out and dropping the plane right into the circle.

I use the term stall. Most people think of a stall as the engine quitting, but that is not what it means in aviation. In aviation a stall is when the wings lose their lift. A wing has to move through the air at a certain speed in order to produce lift. If you reduce power without letting the nose drop, you slow it down. You can slow down to the point where the wings will lose their lift. When that happens, that is called a stall.

With these S turns and side slips to the circle, the idea was to stall the plane in the circle; to slow it down so you lost your lift in the middle of the circle. At that point, you were supposed to be in what was called a three-point position. These were the old airplanes with the little tail wheel on the back. The idea was to stall out in that position so it stayed on the ground. If you tried to land an airplane and you had too much speed and you were not stalled, you would simply bounce because the wings were still producing lift.

The last stage was formation flying. We became very proficient; so proficient that we even occasionally touched wings while we were flying. We were not supposed to do that, but nevertheless the guys did. All of them were there because they liked to fly.

We were allowed go get a plane and fly on our own anytime as much as we wanted. Particularly, when we got into the final stage of primary flight training the guys would do that. Two or three of us would get together - usually three - we would go check out airplanes and fly in formation just for the enjoyment of it.

WEED: How long was flight training?

SHARP: By the time we finished primary flight training we had about a hundred hours flying time. In the fall of 1943, I went to Pensacola where we took the intermediate course. There we flew a low winged airplane with a fixed landing gear that was not retractable. We nicknamed it the Vaultee vibrator; I forget the official name of the airplane. It was almost a repeat of the thing we had done in primary, except we were doing it with bigger and heavier and higher horsepower airplanes.

WEED: How long was intermediate training and what was the course of instruction?

SHARP: I went to Florida somewhere around the beginning of September and finally graduated from Pensacola around January 1. We also had night flying. Ground school instructions involved aerodynamics, why airplanes fly and that kind of thing, and then we had navigation. We also had aircraft and ship identification; we were supposed to be able to tell if an airplane was a German, Japanese, or an American. Intermediate also included instrument flying.

The first field we went to was named Sofley, which is still there. I visited there a year or so ago. You can still see the old macadam, we called it a mat. It was big area; we did not have runways. They had a whole field covered with macadam, asphalt they would call it here. It was a big area, so big that several planes could take off side by side. You did not have to, as on a runway, take off one after another. You could take off and land anyplace across the mat.

We took instrument training in the SNJ. That was a low wing airplane with retractable gear. They made thousands of them. If you watch any of the WWII movies you will see them camouflaged to look like Japanese airplanes. If you know what to look for you can spot them, even though they changed the tail configuration and wing. The SNJ had a squared-off wing on it.

WEED: You refer to low wing aircraft, what does that mean?

SHARP: With a low wing airplane the wing is fastened to the bottom of the fuselage, the body of the airplane. With a high wing airplane, the wing is up across the top and the body hangs underneath it. Then there are also some mid-wing airplanes where the wing is fastened to the middle of the plane.

In the peacetime Navy, my understanding was that you have to learn to fly all type of airplanes. This was wartime. When you finished intermediate flight training to go on to advanced, you had to make a decision as to what kind of airplanes you wanted to fly. My ultimate aim was to be an airline pilot, so I picked multi-engine. I actually wanted to get multi-engine land planes with wheels, but the number they could take was limited. So, I wound up in

multi-engine seaplanes. For that we trained in what was called the PBY. The PBY is a high wing twin engine seaplane. You will see the PBY on any kind of Navy movie where there are airplanes. If you see the movie called "The Battle of Midway," the PBY is featured in it many times, because there were PBYs on patrol searching for the Japanese.

I, however, wound up in a PBM. PB stands for Patrol Plane, M for Martin, because it was built by Martin aircraft here in Baltimore. With the PBY, the Y stood for Consolidated Aircraft.

The PBM was a high wing seaplane. It had a gull wing instead of a straight wing like the PBY. It was a very nice looking seaplane, and was twin engine also. The PBY had a single vertical tail, while the PBM had a double tail. The vertical stabilizers were canted inward toward the top.

The idea with the seaplanes was to keep the engines as high as possible to keep them away from the water. Water striking a fast moving propeller could bend them, but they would get splashed with water many times anyway.

I was sent on advanced training in the PBM to Banana River, Florida. The Banana River Naval Air Station was located between Cocoa on the North and Melbourne on the South. Cocoa is just inland from what is now Cape Kennedy, or Cape Canaveral. There is a strip of land that runs from Cape Canaveral south to Melbourne. There is big bay area between the mainland and this narrow strip of land. During World War Two, Cape Canaveral was nothing; it was just a beach where people went to fish.

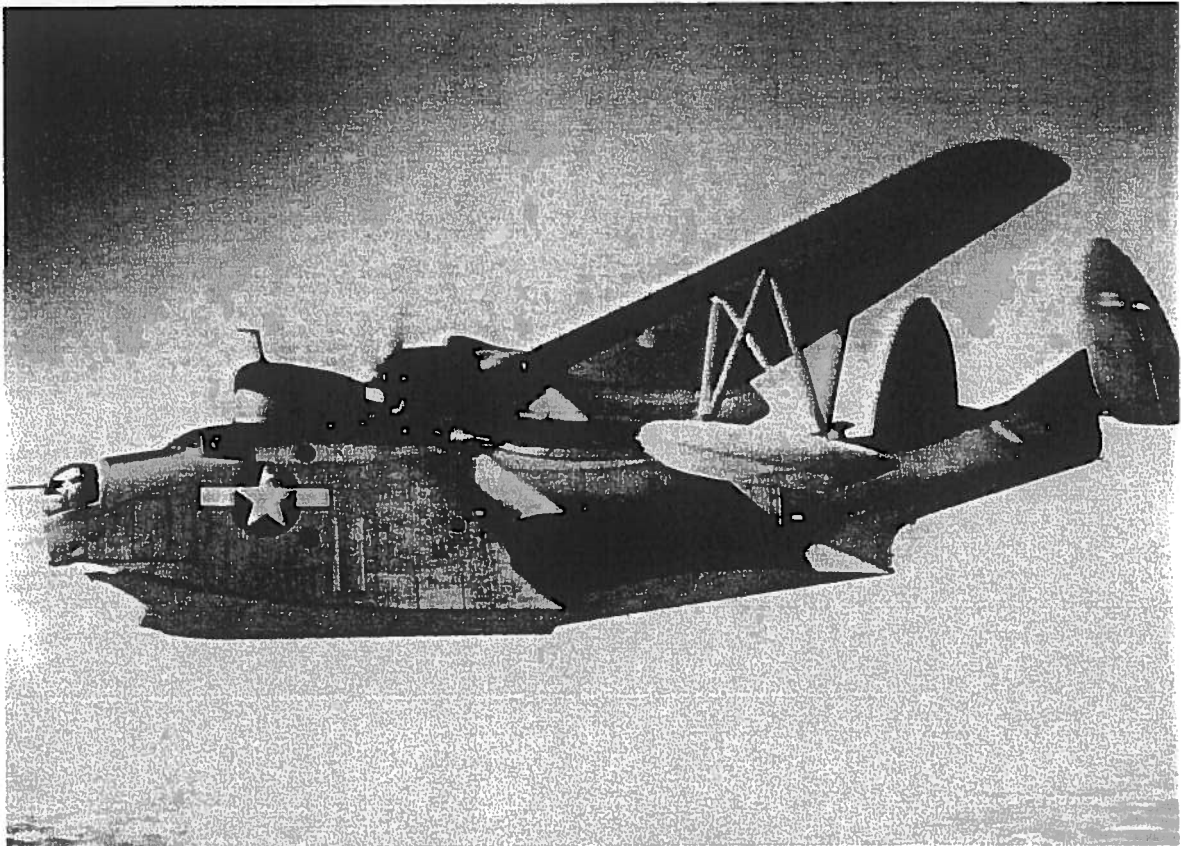
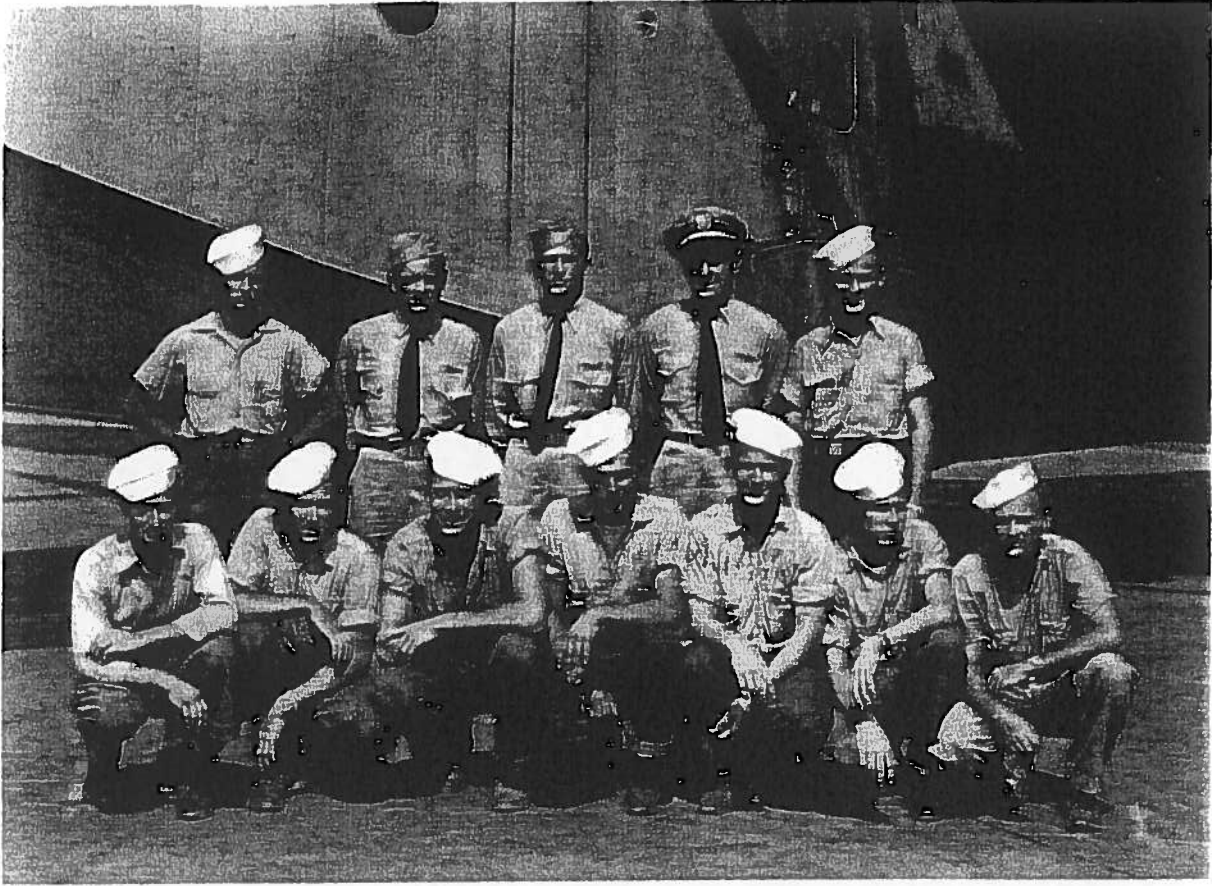
We took off and landed in the bay area, not from the ocean. We never deliberately landed in the ocean. The only time we ever landed in the ocean would be in an emergency. It was too hard to take off from the ocean because of swells. We operated out of lagoons in the Pacific. The lagoons were so big that they had swells. The swells were so bad that it was exhausting to take off. We would get up enough speed to fly but not quite. A swell would toss us up in the air before the plane was ready to fly, then the plane would stall and drop back in the water. We would finally, by riding the swells and stalling, get up enough speed so that we could skip from one swell to another. It was so exhausting for one of the pilots, that by the time he got the plane off the water he would just about collapse and the other pilot would take the controls.

WEED: When did you go to advanced flight school?

SHARP: January of 1944. If I could live one year of my life over just the way it was, it would be 1943 because I was doing the thing I liked to do, which is fly. We aviation cadets were flying continually. I graduated from the cadet program and was commissioned Ensign in December 1943. During the first few months of 1944, I was stationed at the Naval Training Base Banana River where I learned to fly the PBM.

In June 1944, I was assigned to a newly formed squadron stationed at Norfolk, Virginia. There the squadron, VPB-22, trained together. The V stood for aviation, P for patrol, and B for bombing; Patrol Bombing Squadron 22. We actually trained out of the Albemarle Sound. Hertford was the name of a nearby town. I was assigned to a crew of three pilots and nine enlisted men who were gunners and flight engineers. They also did some maintenance on the engines although they did not do extensive maintenance.

VP 22 CREW. JOSEPH SHARP, GERARD PROSSER, HARVEY COMFORT



P 38

WEED: That would be your crew going into each flight?

SHARP: Yes. Our crew was crew number eight. The number 8 was painted on the side of our plane. We trained together and we had one first class flight engineer. He had a separate bank of instruments for the engines and fuel tank capacities. His job was to constantly monitor the instruments, to make sure the engines operated correctly, and to keep track of fuel consumption.

Our crew also had a first-class radioman and a first-class ordnanceman who was in charge of all the guns. There were maybe three men assigned to be flight engineers. One radioman was on duty full-time, always monitoring the radio. The ordnanceman had two assistants; a second and a third-class radioman. Theoretically, as they learned the job they would move up to be first-class.

At one point, we went to Florida to do some training in anti-submarine patrol. In order to do that we used a sonic buoy. We would drop it in the water and if there was a sub in the area, it would pick up the engine noise of the sub and then radio it back to our plane.

We had another man who was always on the radar. The pilots had radar, too. On patrol in the Pacific and in practice, when we picked up a ship on radar, we would fly over to the ship. We would check it out and see if it was an allied ship or whether it was not. There were certain code flags that were strung up across the ship. The code changed from day to day. If we picked up a ship we would go check it out and make sure it was flying the right flags for that day.

WEED: When did you complete your training and receive your Pacific assignment.

SHARP: I completed training in June 1944. One thing I did start to mention and I forgot. At one point, early in June 1944, we went to Key West, Florida. The whole squadron went down there, and there we trained using the sonar buoys. We trained with an actual submarine. We were there June 6, 1944, D-day in Europe. I remember we all got the news that the invasion of Europe had begun.

After our training, the squadron transferred from Norfolk to the West Coast. Flying from Norfolk, we landed in a place in Texas called Eagle Mountain Lake, which is near Dallas and Forth Worth. There was some kind of a Navy instillation there and we landed on the lake. The next day we continued on over the Rockies to the Naval Air Station in Oakland, California across from San Francisco. We did some training there, but not a lot. That was where we were finally getting organized and ready to go to the Pacific.

Finally, we flew out to Hawaii, operating from Kaneohe Bay on the opposite side of Oahu from Honolulu.

There was one little interesting thing, not important I guess to the story, but in those days if you went from Honolulu across the island to Kaneohe Bay you had to go down a steep cliff called the Pali. There was a roadway that "S"- turned all the way down. I understand there now is a tunnel that goes from the top of the cliff to the bottom that you do not have wind your way down on a twisting road.

WEED: Where did you go from Kaneohe?

SHARP: The squadron fully formed there and we went to an island called Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands.

WEED: How many planes were in your squadron?

SHARP: There were fifteen planes, and ours was number eight.

WEED: You had nine enlisted men, and a total of twelve personnel per plane. What was the ground crew?

SHARP: We did not have a lot of ground crew. The squadron depended on ground crews at the Naval Air Stations for major maintenance on the airplane. There were ground crews that were assigned to Eniwetok, and when eventually we got on a seaplane tender which had maintenance personnel. We lived on the ship. The ship had a crane that lifted the planes out of the water and set them on the deck. There they could do major maintenance, including engine changes. There was also a ramp on the island where we could pull the planes up to work on them.

Eniwetok is an atoll, a coral ring with some islands. Our tents, which are what we lived in, were on one of the islands in the atoll. Near us was another island where there was a dive-bomber squadron with the planes we called SBDs. There was also a fighter squadron on that island. There were two fighter planes, Grumman F6Fs, and a couple dive-bombers, SBDs, which were not a part of the squadrons. They were based on the islands so the personnel there could fly them if they wanted to.

Our PBM was totaled one day by another crew that was flying it at the time. If a plane happened to be down for maintenance, and it was that crew's day to fly, the crew would have to take one of the other 15 planes in the squadron.

One day, one of the other crews was using our plane. They got about 500 miles out and an engine quit. Our PBMs had Curtis Wright engines in them, 1200 horsepower in each one. The planes would not stay in the air on one engine. The only way they stayed in the air on one engine was to throw everything out of the airplane. They threw out machine guns, decking on the floor, anything they could. They got back on one engine, but the plane was just a skeleton. I mean parachutes, everything they threw out to lighten it.

Right after this happened, our squadron moved out to Palau. Since our plane was not flyable, our crew had to wait for another plane to be sent out to us. We had to wait there several weeks at Eniwetok before the new plane finally arrived.

Each PBM had three pilots. The first pilot was called the PPC (Patrol Plane Commander). Our PPC was a full lieutenant; he had been on tour of duty before. He had come back, joined the squadron, and was given a crew. He was assigned two junior pilots, two Ensigns just out of flight training from Banana River.

Since our plane was totaled and we had to wait for a new one to come, the other Ensign and I went over to the other island where they had the fighter planes and the dive-bomber squadron. Attached to the island itself were two F6-Fs, fighter planes, and two SBDs, dive bombers. Neither one of us had flown those before, but we talked to the Commanding Officer

on the island and asked if he would let us fly them. He said that we could if got checked out to fly them.

We decided to fly the dive-bombers first because they were two-seaters; you could have someone else go with you, but with a fighter plane you could not. We went to SBD squadron and asked if we could get somebody to check us out; and one pilot said that he would. He went over the instruments with us, which we knew anyway, and gave us the appropriate air speeds. Each type of airplane has its own climbing speed and gliding speed. We went over all of these things, and we asked, "Which one do you want to fly with first?" He said, "I am not flying with either one of you." So, we started the two planes and off we went ourselves. We flew a number of flights in the SBDs.

After we got comfortable in the SBDs, we decided to try the fighters. So, we did the same thing. We went over to the fighter squadron. The Executive Officer of the island did not want to give us permission to fly the fighters, but the Skipper, the Commander, did. The Exec was really upset with us for going over his head.

We got one of fighter pilots to come over and we did the same thing. We climbed up on the airplane, and looked over cockpit and he told us this and that about it. We started them up and off we went. We flew a number of flights in the fighters. We were kind of the envy of the rest of the pilots our squadron who had never gotten to fly one.

WEED: What were they doing in Palau while you were back at Eniwotok?

SHARP: They were flying patrols. My crew and I never did get to Palau. We met with our squadron at Ulithi. Ulithi is 800 miles or so from the Philippines. North of Ulithi is a string of islands that includes Guam, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. If you look on a map you will see they are in a line that heads north in the direction of Japan. Then off to the west, closer to Japan, is the bigger island of Okinawa.

The plan for invading Japan was to take each of those islands step by step toward Japan. Iwo Jima, which was next to the last battle, is where that famous picture of the flag raising was taken. The plan was that Okinawa would be taken and from there, the invasion of Japan would take place. Again, if you look on a map you will see that Okinawa a big island South of Japan.

Ulithi is a very large atoll and there is a lagoon in the middle, which is about 60 miles across. Ships mustered there for what turned out to be the final battle of WWII. Everyday, ships kept coming into the atoll. There were battleships, cruisers, and supply ships, everything needed for an invasion. It took weeks for them all to get there.

Meanwhile, our job, VBP 22 and another squadron, VBP 25, was to fly anti-submarine patrol out from that atoll continually, watching for enemy ships or submarines. That is what we did, everyday we would fly patrols.

WEED: What was the routine on patrol?

SHARP: It was boring, we hated to do it.

WEED: You had three pilots.

SHARP: Yes, one pilot acted as navigator. But it was boring because it was an all day thing. We would take off early in the morning, and fly about 500 mile sectors every day. A sector was pie-shaped and extended 500-miles away from the atoll, 200-miles across, then 500-miles back to the atoll. We would take one sector and other crews would take other sectors. We would fly these sectors looking for the enemy, checking for shipping and submarines.

Then at nighttime, we had two planes in the air. We would fly a box shaped sector around the island, continually, all night long. We would take off in the evening, just before sunset, and stay in air all night long. Then we would land early in the morning.

WEED: What was the length of the shift that you three pilots had on board?

SHARP: The night was divided it into three sections. Sometimes there was only one pilot in the cockpit; the other two guys would sleep. Of course everybody wanted to fly the first shift, the early evening, rather than three or four o'clock in the morning. We had bunks on each plane.

Finally, after many days, the lagoon was filled with ships. Then the day came when all the ships left the lagoon and headed north. We did not know where they were going, no one told us. It turned out to be the Battle for Okinawa, which was the final battle of WWII. We had no idea it would be. On the day the ships left, somebody gave me an official camera and told me to take pictures of the ships as they went out. I went up and took pictures; the other two pilots were flying. I was in the back taking pictures.

I never did see any of the pictures. I was strictly an amateur as a photographer.

WEED: It must have been quite a site.

SHARP: Yes, it was. The ships left the atoll single file, headed north, and disappeared over the horizon.

WEED: When you were flying night patrols, what would you do the day after you returned?

SHARP: If we flew all night, we would be off for a couple of days. Our routine, was one patrol every third day. I said it was boring because even the day patrols would last maybe eight hours. We would just fly out in the sector and then come back; most of the time we did not see anything.

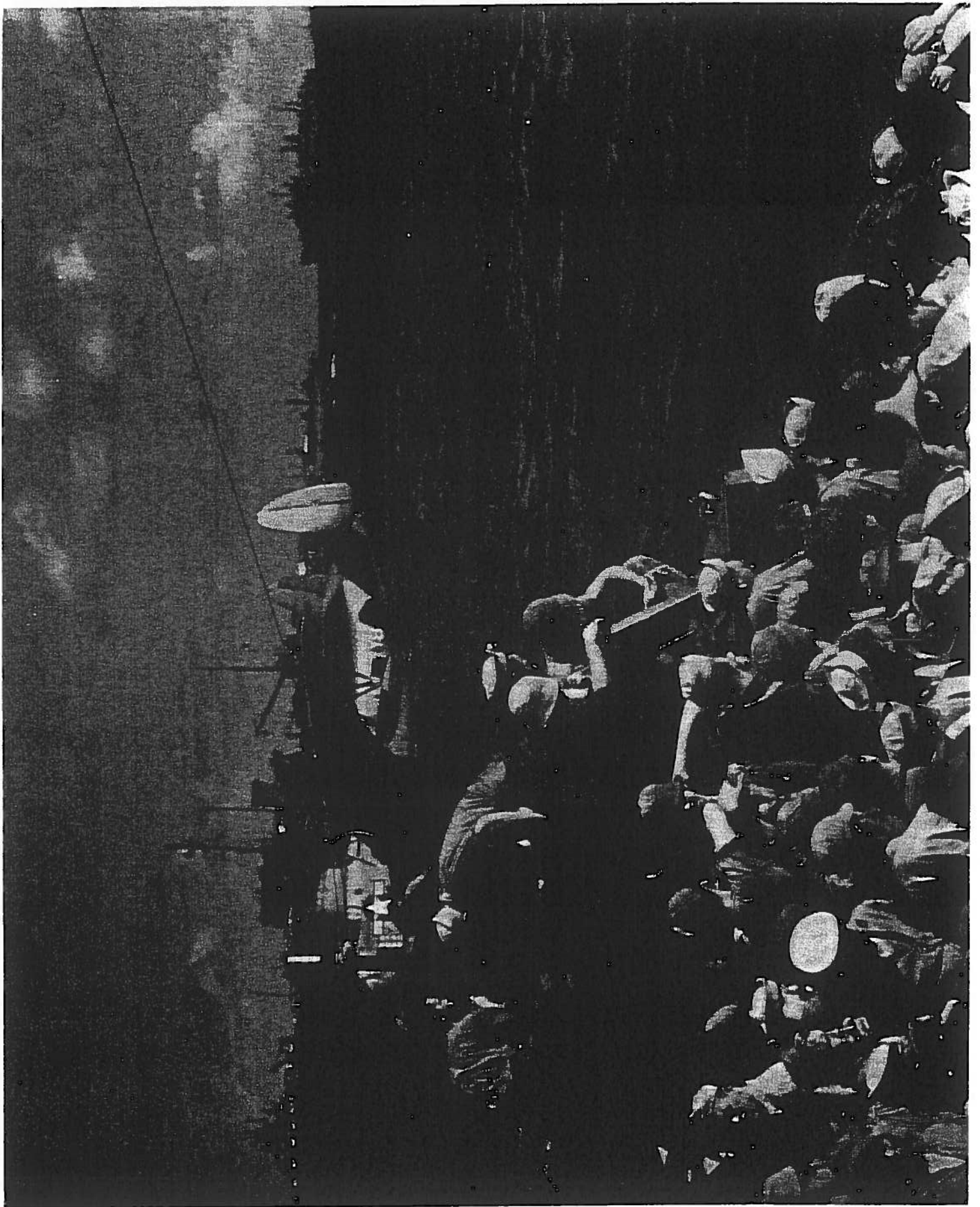
WEED: Did you ever see anything?

SHARP: We would check a ship once in awhile. At that point in the war, it turned out to be an Allied ship not Japanese.

WEED: Were you advised to expect to see a ship?

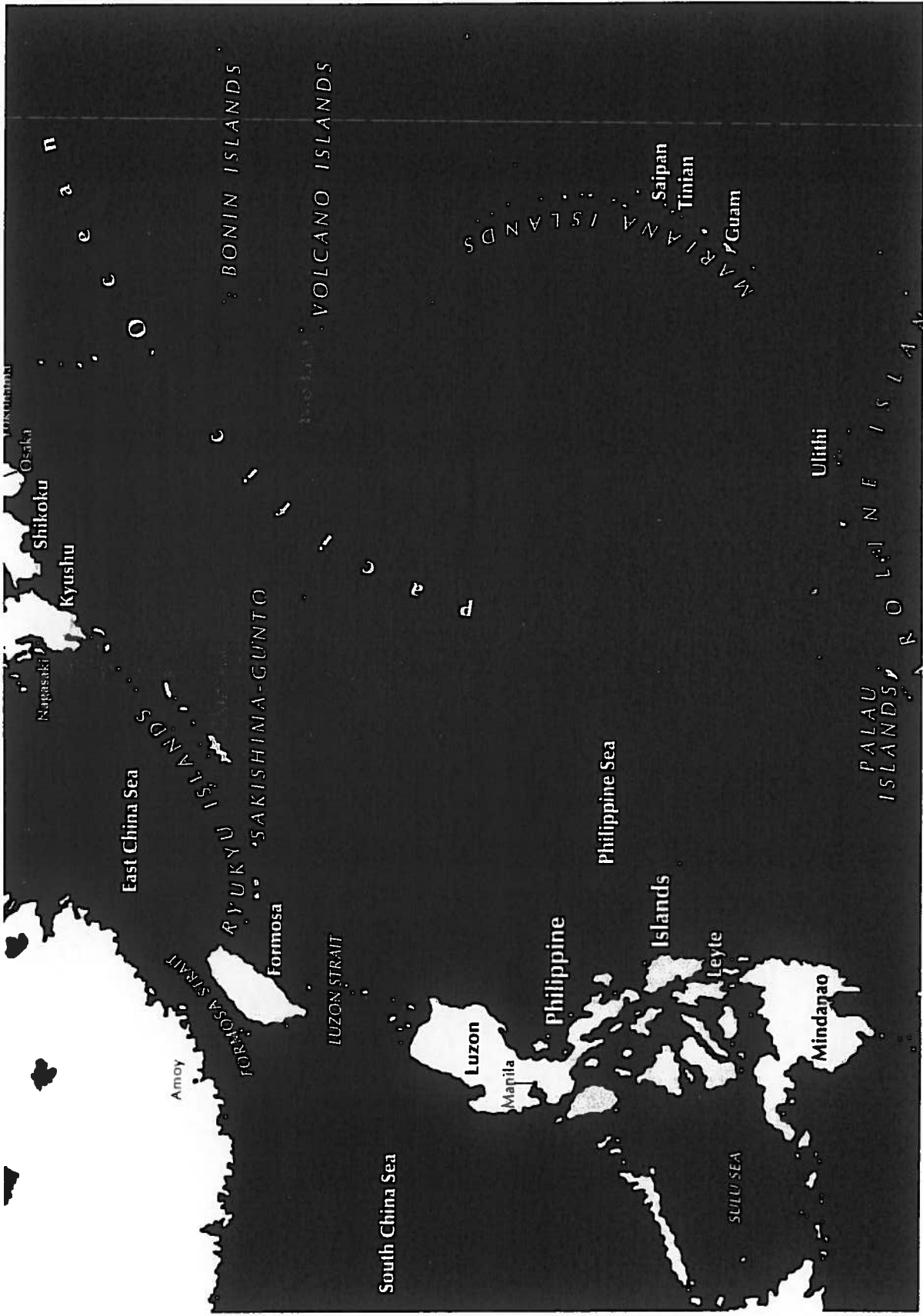
SHARP: If there were ships in the area, we would be advised of it.

WEED: At the point Okinawa occurred, the ships are all out, what were you doing?



WITH PRIOR TO OKINAWA INVASION, OUR PLANE - CREW 8 - ANCHORED WITH OTHER
PLANES AT SAIGON

JAPAN



MINA

OSAKA
SHIKOKU
KYUSHU
NAGASAKI

AMOY
FORMOSA STRAIT
FORMOSA

RYUKYU ISLANDS
SAKISHIMA-GUNTO

EAST CHINA SEA

LUZON STRAIT

SOUTH CHINA SEA

BONIN ISLANDS
VOLCANO ISLANDS

LUZON
MANILA

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
LEYTE
MINDANAO

MARIANA ISLANDS
SAIPAN
TINIAN
GUAM

ULITHI
PALAU ISLANDS
ROLINE ISLANDS

PHILIPPINE SEA

SULU SEA

SHARP: Ulithi was empty and our job was done. We had been out in the Pacific, by that time, about a year and we were relieved. A new crew would come out and take the place of one of our crews, which was sent back. We had to leave our planes there, the new crews continued to use our planes.

Our original planes had Curtis Wright engines which were noisy and it was difficult (unless you threw everything out) to stay in the air on one engine. Then we got new planes that had Pratt Whitney engines. The Pratt Whitney's were so quite, compared to the Curtis Wright and they had enough horsepower to stay in the air with one engine.

We went home around July 1945 as I recall. We did not get to fly back; we had to go back on whatever transportation we could get. We returned from Ulithi to Hawaii on a LST (Landing Ship Tank). It took us two weeks to go from Ulithi to Hawaii. There were 12 LSTs that were left over from the invasion. Everyday or so one of them would conk out with engine trouble. The whole group had to stop and wait, and just drift until they got the LST going again.

Finally, we got back to Hawaii. Then from Hawaii, we went to the States in August 1945. Just as we got back, the news came out about this atomic bomb being dropped. The Japanese did surrender, as a result of the atomic bombs being dropped. Fortunately, the invasion never took place.

WEED: How did you get from Hawaii to Oakland?

SHARP: On a regular troop transport. That took about a week to get back. A distance of 2100 miles as I recall.

WEED: Before you knew the war was over, were you scheduled to go back for the invasion of Japan?

SHARP: Yes, we got back to Oakland and we were there for a few days. Then we were given thirty days leave. I came to the East Coast because my home was in New Jersey. While I was on leave, the Japanese surrendered. But, the training program was in motion and nobody knew how to stop it.

I was scheduled to have thirty days leave, and then to go back to Banana River, Florida. By this time, I was a Lieutenant (jg). I was to pick up two Ensigns, train together and then we were to go out to the Pacific, which I was not looking forward to doing.

While we were there they introduced a point system, if you had enough points you could get out of the Navy. I was assigned two Ensigns and we began to train together. We only trained a couple of weeks, and they had enough points to get out and I did not. So, they got out, and I was assigned two other Ensigns. Next thing I know they had enough points to get out and I did not.

WEED: That is strange.

SHARP: Yes, well I do not know how they judged that, but they did not want to let everybody with any experience go. Finally, I had enough points to get out at the end of the fall of 1945. I



TRAINING CREW AT BAYANA RIVER, NKS, FLORIDA. OFFICERS: CLAMBUCK, CMDR, RE
ROGER SHARP, REZ SHIPLEY, DECEASED.

could have elected to stay in, but if I elected to stay in, I would go out to the Pacific again. One of the guys that I flew with, and was in training with, did stay. He was really gung ho. He became a full Commander, and a patrol plane squadron commander. I kept in touch with him. In fact, he has been on the East Coast a couple of times. He and I met together here in Washington a few years ago. The other Ensign in my crew came to visit me a few years ago.

I saw in a World War II book I got from Time Life Magazine a picture taken at Ulithi of our plane. Not one just like it, but our plane. I could tell by the Y8 on its side. I got in touch with the other junior pilot of our crew, whom I had not seen for 40-years. He and his wife came to visit us in Pennsylvania.

WEED: Where did you go after your discharge? Were you discharged in Florida, or did you go somewhere to be discharged?

SHARP: I was not really discharged; I was only released to inactive duty. I was still in the Reserves. So, I went up to Pennsylvania and I was able to join a squadron that was operating out of Willow Grove. We flew mainly twin Beach Crafts out of Willow Grove, land-based twin Beach Craft.

WEED: When you were in your civilian career, what things did your Navy experience do to prepare you for that experience?

SHARP: I completely changed careers after the war. I had thought about flying, but there were so many pilots that I decided to do something else. I went to an art school, studying industrial art in Philadelphia and wound up doing industrial type art in civilian life.

WEED: Well, thank you very much for doing this. I enjoyed learning about your experience. I hope you enjoyed, I hope you enjoyed telling it.

SHARP: My pleasure.