

Alameda

Those of us from the class of 42H Williams Field U.S.A.A.C. ^{who} that were assigned to the 41st Bomb Group, 48th squadron, were extremely fortunate. Our newly assigned squadron was short of pilots and crews, so the 6 of us were carefully checked out as pilots in the A-29 Hudson patrol bomber and given crews and were assigned to duty with the active flights. I must emphasize what a fantastic stroke of luck this was for us, the new-comers, as in most air corps groups we would have been assigned as co-pilots to established pilots and flown untold hours until that blessed day we could be elevated to first pilots and move to that coveted left-hand seat.

Our squadron duty was flying offshore patrol for the Navy from the Alameda Naval Air Station, the North Island Naval Air Station (San Diego) and the Humboldt County Airport far north nearly to the Oregon border. My first assignment was to Alameda, a beautiful, established Naval Air Station in the Bay at San Francisco, flying anti-submarine patrol out through the spectacular Golden Gate and covering an area from north of Los Angeles to Northern California. We flew a prescribed area north or south of San Francisco from dawn to sundown and tried our utmost to keep the ocean free of marauding Japanese submarines. Our patrols ran from 6-8 hours, and we flew a set pattern to cover a grid supplied each flight by the U.S. Navy showing all known shipping in the area and we were given the days signal code to be flown by all friendly craft. ^{del} As we appeared out of the sky at low threatening altitude all ships immediately ran up the proper signal flags, we wagged our wings and went on our way, marking on our grid chart the location of the vessel in question. ^{space} The iron-clad rule covering a submarine sighting was to make a depth charge attack at once - all U.S. subs would be escorted by a destroyer and would be indicated on our charts for the day. The long flights over the lonely ocean sound dull, but somehow they were not. The ship sightings were fun; we always hoped to catch an enemy sub surfaced and somehow the hours passed rapidly. The passage of time was aided greatly by the comradeship of our of our fine crews. We teased, cracked jokes, sang songs at the top of our lungs as we had to be heard over the constant roar of our twin engines. Our wonderful Lockheed Hudson A-29 aircraft, though rather difficult to land, were thoroughly reliable, and we logged hundreds of hours of offshore patrol with virtually no problems. We flew in all kinds of weather, often quite marginal, so much so that we had permission to fly under the Golden Gate Bridge as it was often obscured in low cloud cover, and our antisub coverage was essential. We had two planes in the air, one north, the other south, of San Francisco from dawn til dark and kept one crew on alert for special assignments- the pilot of the alert crew sitting in the Navy control tower the entire patrol time. One rather nasty afternoon I was on alert in the Navy tower when a submarine sighting was reported, and I was dispatched immediately to check it out. I took off in a very few minutes, vectored directly toward the sighting which took me right over Palo Alto and Stanford University.

Shortly thereafter my left engine started to misfire and soon was completely useless. I had no choice but to return immediately to Alameda NAS, struggling along with our one good engine. I was getting enough power from my good engine that I chose not to feather the prop, but its intermittent weak bursts of power were of little help. I radioed the Alameda Tower as I closed in and asked for a straight in approach, which was immediately granted, and we were soon on the ground with no difficulty. Naval Operations had alerted my squadron, of course, and I was greeted by my commanding officer who congratulated me on a safe return, asked if I was OK, and with no further delay put me and my crew in a replacement aircraft and sent us back on our mission. I regret to report that the sighting proved to be a false alarm, and we had no further excitement for the day. I do think I did make a good impression on my crew, "the new pilot handled the loss of an engine and got us home safely" sort of thinking.

The Alameda NAS was a truly deluxe assignment for lowly air corps men for it was a permanent base, with lovely comfortable rooms with private bath, an excellent cafeteria and an officers' mess and dining room that was quite plush. There was also a fine gym in which I enjoyed many an enthusiastic pickup basketball game. The location right on the Bay was lovely, if sometimes rather closed in by fog, but the constant differently tuned fog horns in the Bay were a strange and mystic sound in the night to an Iowa boy far from home.

Not long before leaving Alameda I had another exceptional experience as the alert pilot wating in the control tower. A large convoy was coming in from the South Pacific including one of our big carriers, and they wanted anti-sub coverage as they approached the Golden Gate. They would be increasingly vulnerable to sub attack since they could not maintain top speed and take evasive action. I was dispatched in haste - my crew was already at the aircraft and the plane pre-flight completed and ready to go. For such missions we carried four 500# depth charges to drop on any suspicious sub. The weather was ghastly - rain, low clouds and poor visibility - so we roared off the runway staying very low, scooted over the Oakland Bay Bridge (no doubt giving a cheap thrill to its busy auto traffic), past Alcatraz and under the Golden Gate Bridge as its lofty towers were completely obscured by the overcast. Leaving the Bay we could navigate straight out to the Farallon Islands, flying from buoy to buoy that marked the passage and were most welcome in the murky weather. We burst out of the clouds and rain upon the vast convoy, led by destroyers guarding the mammoth carriers, and started our circle of surveillance. Although the convoy knew we were coming, the sudden appearance of a combat patrol bomber, to jumpy crews just away from the South Pacific War, got immediate attention and the anti-aircraft guns of the ships followed us in a very scary manner. The giant searchlight on the carrier - fitted with shuttered signaling device - blinked out a signal to us, and my radio man signaled back immediately with our small portable Aldis Lamp. After our identity was satisfactorily established, we continued our wide circuits of the entire convoy which, of course,, covered

several miles and all crew members peered through the mist watching for the enemy subs which mercifully failed to appear. The convoy, destroyers, support vessels, a cruiser, a "battle wagon", plus the carrier was a new and very impressive sight, looking fierce and capable in their wartime grey. As the ships entered the protection of the Golden Gate and the beautiful big Bay of San Francisco our duties were at end, and we wagged our wings and returned to Alameda happy that the weather had not worsened and thrilled by our unique experience.