

## The Enola Gay and I

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While I am going to tell you about my experience as a navy pilot in the air/sea rescue plane that accompanied the Enola Gay on its historic flight to Hiroshima and the dropping of the first atomic bomb, there is some background information that I think might be helpful in making your understanding of what our plane and crew did on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the day that Hiroshima was obliterated.

We flew PBY 5 Catalinas. Our crew consisted of three pilots, one a senior pilot and two second pilots, of which I was one. The enlisted personnel were two mechanics; two radio men and one gunner's mate. The Navy letter and number system – PBY 5 – tells the plane's primary function and secondary function, the manufacturer and the model number. In Navy parlance P stands for patrol, which was our primary mission and B stands for bombing, *our secondary function*. The Y is the Navy's code for the Consolidated Aircraft Company. The model was the 5<sup>th</sup> in the line. We flew a PBY 5 A, at Iwo Jima, *the PBY 5A* the amphibious version of the PBY Catalina. This model had retractable wheels (as pictured in the photos.)

The photo shows a plane as painted in the traditional Navy colors of blue/grey. I call your attention to the wheels which are mounted in the

fuselage. That makes the plane in the photo a PB5Y-5A – A for amphibious. The model, here on the table is painted a dull black and is without wheels – a PB5Y-5.

The PB5Y, in either version, was a real workhorse, capable of long flights. Our crew's longest flight took 19 ½ hours.

The air/sea rescue function of a PB5Y was nicknamed, "Dumbo," a name that was taken from a Walt Disney character from the late 1930's, a film that some of you may remember. "Dumbo" was smiling a young elephant that was capable of flying by flapping his huge ears and our large wing structure made the plane reminiscent of the Disney character. The plane's wing span was a 104 feet. The length of the plane was 63 ½ feet. It is still the largest plane the Navy has ever used under combat conditions.

In early summer of 1945, our crew flew from Iwo Jima, where we had spent almost three months of patrolling and air/sea rescue work (Dumbo) to Saipan where we were assigned a squadron VH-2. We did routine work: some air/sea work, which became a priority job because there were hundreds of B-29's flying each day in and out of the Marianas. For example, one of my flight log entries indicates that we accompanied 600 B-29's to mainland Japan.

Added to the many B 29's were many Army Air Corp's P 51's and P 47's that were fighter escorts for the B 29's. Our taking of Iwo Jima in early 1945 and Okinawa in April of 1945 made the fighter escorts feasible, but they added considerably to our "Dumbo" duties.

A word about the Black PBY model. We called them Black Cats. The Japs did not have effective radar, so a nighttime harassment flight over a bypassed Jap island was easier with a Black Cat, as were a couple of nighttime air/sea rescues <sup>that we did</sup> ~~done~~ in the shadow of a Jap held island.

At the end of the war we over flew these same Jap held islands, dropping leaf lets that told the Japs that the war was over and that we were really nice guys.

Sometime in mid July of 1945, the Navy put all hands in the central Pacific area on high alert. Enlisted personnel were restricted to their barracks immediately after dinner, movies were cancelled all over the Marianas. Enlisted men's clubs and officer clubs were shuttered. All officers were required to carry side arms. In our case, we each carried a 38 caliber six shooter, a terrible weapon. Island-wide, all officers were restricted to their BOQ's after 7 or 8 PM.

Why all the fuss? The war was pretty well contained by then and we were hundreds of miles from any activity. A rumor went around that the

Japs had a national empire day coming up and the Pacific command feared an all out land-based bonzai attack and a kamikaze air attack on the Marianas that day. The truth was that the Japs didn't have enough aircraft left to mount any sort of an attack anywhere, but we remained on high alert for several days, for the reasons that bring us here today.

On the evening of August 5<sup>th</sup>, the skipper of our squadron called our crew into the squadron's quonset hut office, a very unusual occurrence.

"Our crew," he said, "was scheduled for an early morning flight."

All our flights were early morning take offs, usually leaving Tanapag Harbor on Saipan around 0530 or 0600. "Tomorrow's flight," the skipper said, "would involve our taking off around 0300 or 0400." We were flying PBY's, not the amphibious A model, so it meant a nighttime water take off from Tanapag Harbor, <sup>which is</sup> a virtual open sea body on the windward side of Saipan.

A night-time take off in choppy waters and 0400 departure was really an open sea operation that could become a dangerous undertaking.

As a cadet, I had flown PBY 4's from the safe shelter of Corpus Christi Bay. A stripped down PBY 4, with a light load of fuel and no armament weighed about 23,000 pounds. Each of the Pratt-Whitney engines in that version had a horse power rating of 900.

After I was commissioned, I was sent to the Naval Air Station at Jacksonville where I flew my first PBY 5. Now we had engines, again Pratt-Whitneys, that were rated at 1050 horse power <sup>each</sup> up about 150 hp for an increase of 300 hp total. We were flying anti-submarine flights.

We flew from the St. John's River in Jacksonville eastward to Nassau, where the Duke of Windsor, the former King of England, was the wartime governor.

From over Nassau, our checkpoint, we would fly in a zig zag pattern to Guatomo Bay. After an overnight in Gitmo, we would fly back up the Florida coast to our Jacksonville base.

By mid 1944, when I was attached to the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, the German wolf pack submarine operations were pretty well over. America had constructed the Inland Waterway that made the oil tanker's trips to the east coast much safer.

Sighting a whale and reporting it as a submarine sighting was not an uncommon occurrence, much to the embarrassment of several overly eager ensigns.

I left Jacksonville with orders to the Pacific Fleet. I went to the Naval Air Station at Oak Harbor on Whitbey Island where I joined the crew with which I would complete my active duty tour a little over a year later.

In the fleet, we flew both PBY's and PBY's 5 A's. We used PBY 5's<sup>A</sup> in the Iwo Jima operation, flying from airstrip number 1 at the foot of Mt. Suribachi.

The plane used in the fleet was much heavier and the engine power was rated at 1200 hp in each of the Pratt-Whitney engines, a considerable jump from the 900 hp we had in Corpus Christi. Our plane, fully loaded with fuel and armor weighed over 30,000 pounds.

In addition to the elevated horse power in the engines, the plane that we used in the Enola Gay flight was equipped with a JATO tank. JATO stands for jet assisted take off. The tanks, or bottles, as we called them, looked like an elongated butane tanks and they were mounted on the fuselage, just aft of the blisters. As the plane plowed through the water on it's take off run, the PBY became buoyant – “on the step.” As the plane reached the moment of buoyancy, one of the pilots would hit the JATO button in the cockpit. The JATO would go off with enough force to literally blow the plane off the water and into the air. A JATO tank gave us an additional 4,000 pounds of thrust. It was a dangerous maneuver, but in our case it worked. The expired JATO bottles were then jettisoned. (pause)

On August 6 around 0200 we were awakened by fully-armed Marines, who insisted on our standing up before they would leave. A personnel truck

took us to the flight line where we were taken, not to our squadron's hut, but to a large tent that had been erected near the flight line. Inside the tent we were told that we would be the air/sea rescue plane for a single B 29 that would be carrying a new weapon. We were to maintain radio silence and we were to stay 10 miles away from the B 29 unless we were ordered otherwise.

That was the extent of our briefing for the day's flight. We were not told the B 29's name or number. We took off in a fully loaded plane, using JATO to take us off the water. As the sun rose, the gunner's mate, who was stationed in the blister noted that we were all alone in the air, a noticeable difference.

Normally the Marianas: Guam, Tinian and Saipan, were very busy with air traffic, both inbound and outbound. There were thousands of aircraft of all types in the islands, but ours was the only one flying at that early hour on August 6<sup>th</sup>. It was something that our senior pilot also noted as we climbed to our assigned altitude and station.

When we were safely away from our base on Tanabag Harbor, the gunner's mate cleared our two 50 caliber machine guns, one in each blister. The radio man cleared us from the Marianna's radio net. The crew settled in for our long flight to our station to wait for the single B 29.

The B 29 appeared within minutes after we had arrived on our station. It was headed north toward its target of Hiroshima.

We used three navigation methods in flight and on our station. The Voice of America station on Saipan - KSAI - was very powerful, so we employed our planes radio's compass. We used celestial navigation and we drew a sun line on our navigation charts. Finally, we employed a new device: LORAN-LONG-RANGE-ARIAL-NAVIGATION, <sup>then</sup> a recent British development. Using all of these methods or techniques, we were right where we were supposed to be.

We violated the ten mile rule. The Enola Gay, gleaming in the morning sunlight, flew within a mile of us on its way to its target as we stood by on our assigned station.

I am vague about <sup>the</sup> our exact position of our station, but my flight log indicates that we were in the air for over 12 hours, with about 30 minutes on station waiting for the Enola Gay's return from the target. We were pretty close to the target area.

When the Enola Gay did fly past us on its return from the target, we followed, heading south to our base on Saipan. Our radio man turned on the voice of America station on Saipan and we used the radio's compass to direct us back to our base. We listened in, not to the usual Benny



Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Glen Miller music, but to Japanese, Korean and English speaking announcers who told us that America had just used a new and powerful weapon against Hiroshima, a city on mainland Japan. We listened, but we didn't comprehend that our crew had just participated in an event that would change the course of history. We didn't have a clue.

I've been asked if we saw the mushroom cloud. We did not. We didn't know enough to look in the direction of the bombing, what with the large number of cumulous clouds that gather in the Pacific. The news from the Voice of America radio did not penetrate our conscience. Back at our base, we faced no questions from our squadron members. It was just another day at the office.

Over these past 63 years since the experience of that day, I have reviewed them in my mind. There we were, eight of us in a PBY, 9,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean, unwitting participants and observers of an enormous event, with no idea of what had happened or of the event's importance. Indeed, the second bomb had to be dropped before it all sank in and registered.

All of our crew members were 22-25 years of age. Perhaps our youth could be blamed for our failure to grasp the staggering implications of that

day and the event. But, <sup>our</sup> failure to sense the importance of an event has precedence.

For example, did the ancient Chinese who witnessed the first gun powder explosion realize how that event would change history? I don't think so. Did the people who witness the crucifixion of Jesus realize how that event would change history? No. Did the men standing on the deck of the Santa Maria realize how Columbus and his venture to the new world would change history? I doubt it.

Perhaps stumbling naively into each new chapter of history is the way we are intended to progress.

PBY 5. CATALINAS

