
SCENE

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CGAS ST. PETERSBURG—1944-46 (ANTI-SUBMARINE PATROLS / MARRIAGE)

It is no surprise that seniority plays an important role in military life, both personal and professional, but the unique role it plays in aviation is surprising. For example, in Primary Flight Training we Coast Guard students were senior to our flight instructors by two or three ranks, but the instructor was held responsible for accepting the aircraft (pre-flight), considering the weather safe for the mission, taking command in flight, and safe return of the aircraft at the end of the flight.

When I qualified to fly the **Martin PBM Mariner**, I was assigned a flight crew. My copilots were all experienced pilots whom I could rely on, but I, a greenhorn, was senior in rank and in command by tradition. However, if one of the enlisted pilots was designated by the Air Station Commanding Officer to perform a mission, he would be in Command. This does not designate which pilot takes the pilot's control seat and which the copilot's seat, or such situations as, "Do we try for a landing or shall we take a 'wave off'?" That is when the question must be answered, "Who is in command?" Of course, there usually is agreement and any disagreement can be discussed later in the Ready Room or at the O-Club bar!

I will have more on military protocol in a subsequent Scene.

The Air Station had two primary missions: Search-and-Rescue, and Anti-Sub Coastal Patrols.

Search-and-Rescue (SAR) was mostly searching for aircraft of other commands that were lost or ditched. We would locate them, drop message blocks about rescue procedures, and drop lifesaving equipment as indicated.

Anti-Sub Patrols covered the entire coastline of Florida searching for German U-boats that were there to attack merchant shipping. Our station was assigned the west coast from Pensacola to Key West. One of our planes made a confirmed hit and sinking. By the time I arrived, World War II was winding down along our coasts and there were no new sightings.

Seaplanes that we used on the Anti-Sub Patrols were **Vought OS2U Kingfishers**, a single-engine observation plane carried on battleships. It had a single float under the fuselage which could be replaced with fixed landing gear. It carried one 500-pound depth-charge bomb and fired a machine gun through the propeller.

To qualify for the Anti-Sub Patrols, I had to qualify in the OS2U. The Air Station had a Yellow Peril (N2S) aircraft just like we had flown in Basic Training except the landing gear had been replaced with a single float. This plane facilitated the transition from a land plane to a seaplane. A qualified pilot took me for a training flight. In the air, the flight characteristics were similar to our training planes, but takeoffs and landings were something else.

Taxiing was weird with one wingtip float dragging, then the other. When the power is applied for takeoff into the wind, engine torque initially takes over and turns the craft to port until rudder control can be gained as the plane accelerates.

A major concern on landing is to keep the wings level to avoid "catching a crab" with a wingtip float and water-looping. We shot several touch-and-goes and I felt confident.

The next day, I took off on a scheduled solo flight. I took along an aviation mechanic, but I don't remember why. (The OS2U had radio and the passenger was taught to signal the Air Station using Morse code every thirty minutes. But the Yellow Peril had no radio.)

It was a beautiful cloudless day...until I got airborne. Then a fog bank rolled in and completely covered the Air Station. My only thought was how to get down. I noticed that just inside the outer keys was a nice clear straight boat channel. I hurried and beat the fog to it and landed. I taxied to a little beach and ran the bow up on it. I shut down the engine, left my passenger in charge, went to the nearest house, and notified the Air Station I was down and alright.

Back to the plane, the fog was dissipating rapidly. I turned the plane around to start the engine and get out of there. The engine has an inertia starter. That means turning a crank to get the flywheel spinning then engaging to pull the engine through. That is done standing on a re-enforced spot on the wing (remember this N2S plane is fabric over wood frame). When the engine starts you leap into the cockpit and take control (kind of like the Model-T Ford!). Everything clicked except, on my rush to the cockpit, I

stepped where there was no re-enforced spot and I stepped through the wing! The rest of the flight was uneventful. I was now ready for the OS2U.

The qualifying check-out was much like in the Yellow Peril but with more controls and instruments. On the Anti-Sub Patrols, we trainees flew in the copilot position and maintained radio contact with the Air Station. The flight maneuvers were extended to include dive bombing, dog fighting, and firing at a towed target.

The latter was scary because you had to duck under the sleeve or risk crashing, and the firing approach always closed much faster than expected.

Due to the absence of U-boats, the Coastal Patrols were ended. That gave us time to learn to fly other types of aircraft based in St. Pete—the amphibis: **Grumman JRF Goose**, **Consolidated PBY-5A Catalina**, **Grumman J4F Widgeon**, and **North American SNJ Texan**. Cross-country training flights were encouraged to keep our skills sharp and to involve some instrument flying and airways procedures. That gave me the



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opportunity to court Mary and **rescue Mary from the Navy**. I usually went by JRF Goose because it was a little seaplane with a comfortable enclosed cabin for pilots and passengers. Mary was in the Navy and therefore could be flown as a passenger. We "courted" by means of these flights across a corner of the Gulf of Mexico.

I proposed to Mary that we marry on the condition that she get released from the Navy. I would take leave and we would fly commercially to California to meet my family and be married there. She asked her Commanding Officer for leave and he disapproved. He didn't want *his* "girls running off with the first fly-boy to come along." Mary heard that *marriage* was cause for release. *Not so! Pregnancy, yes, but only when three-months along.* Well, our long-distance commuting by cross-country training flights continued between Pensacola and St. Petersburg until we were married and Mary got pregnant and we waited three months.

Mary arranged for a long weekend off (Friday noon to Monday noon). She would fly down on Continental Airlines, using the priority granted those on military leave. I arranged for a service at **Saint Peters Church** for Friday, and then worried Mary might get bumped off the airline for someone with higher priority. I mentioned this to my Commanding Officer and he said, "Well, if that happens, grab the JRF, get a copilot, and go get her!"

By taking the duty Thursday night, I also would have a long weekend. But on Friday morning at 6 a.m., I received a telephone call. Mary was weeping and announced she had just been bumped from the airline. I asked where she was, and she said still in the barracks. To which I said, "Stay where you are. I am flying up to get you!" And that I did!

The wedding went off as planned. Mary wore a lovely blue mid-length dress and a corsage I gave her. Her brother, a commercial aviator stationed in Miami, drove up with his wife, Mary J, a favorite relative who stood up for Mary.

My best man, Ercell Hart, a friend of many years, was a naval aviator stationed in Jacksonville. He borrowed a Navy plane and flew in for the occasion. He and I wore Service Dress White uniforms. The Air Station officers attending wore Service Dress Khaki.

After the ceremony, we went to the St. Petersburg Yacht Club for a reception. Mary cut the wedding cake with my sword, a service tradition. The date was October 27, 1944.

David William Sinclair	b. August 20, 1915, Redlands, California
Mary Evelyn Bond	b. March 25, 1923, Hamilton, Illinois

We ducked out and went to Silver Springs, Florida, for our honeymoon.

Back early Monday morning, we carried out a contingency plan which was in place. Since Mary was bumped coming down, we decided we couldn't rely on the airline to get her back before her liberty expired. So the same copilot and I manned the same JRF and flew Mary back to Pensacola.



Mary and I were married at Saint Peter's Church in St. Petersburg, Florida, on October 27, 1944



It didn't take long for Mary to get pregnant, and when the three-month waiting period was up, she came to St. Petersburg to live with me. We rented the downstairs of a large house. Our first born was a boy we named **Terry** (b. September 22, 1945). We were now a *family!* A family that would travel station to station with me for the next twenty-five years.

I was sent to the Naval Air Facility at Banana River, Florida, for transitional training in the PBM-3 Mariner seaplane. I was assigned a permanent crew. CGAS St. Petersburg was our home base, but we made many long-distant flights to points south and west. I would fly the PBM again out of Port Angeles, Elizabeth City, and San Diego.

St. Petersburg was a busy time with lots of flying, a variety of aircraft, and the beginning of a wonderful family. But it wasn't an easy start. When Terry was about three months old, I received orders to Oklahoma for an intensive course in instrument flying. Mary didn't want to be left alone with a little baby so we took Terry with us in our little two-door "double-date" Studebaker coupe. We made the rear seat into an improvised play pen and bassinet. We stayed in an auto court near the airport which previous students

had found. It was pretty bad. And poor Mary had to wash all the diapers by hand (disposables unknown). It was a tough introduction for inexperienced Mary with no support on hand. But she did *fine!*

The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) flight instructors were a crafty bunch. We trained in twin-engine Beachcraft airplanes which had a switch for selecting the fuel tanks. The instructor could throw the switch without being seen. This they did without warning and one engine would shut down. The poor student would have to handle this situation remaining under the "hood" which restricted vision to just the cockpit. The solution, of course, was to find the switch and shift to another fuel tank while still dependent on the flight instruments.

On return to St. Petersburg, I found **PCS Orders** assigning me to **CGAS Port Angeles**, Washington, diagonally across the United States. Mary and Terry went by air to my brother Porter's home in Newport Beach, California, to wait there for me. Through a newspaper ad I found a man to share driving with me, and we drove my little car day and night, crossing the United States coast to coast in eighty-seven hours including one stop for repairs while he and I shared a bed in a flea bitten hotel for eight hours of needed sleep.

After a few days of R&R in Newport Beach, Mary, Terry, and I drove to Port Angeles. The weather conditions in which I would fly looked scary. For over a week we didn't see above the foothills of the Olympic Mountains. Locals said we would get used to it...and *love it!* We will see?



My beautiful bride