
SCENE

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ADVANCED FLIGHT TRAINING—1943-1944 NAS PENSACOLA

There were two parts to the **Advanced Flight Training**. The first was transition from the Yellow Peril to a *real* aircraft. From the fragile fabric-over-wood frame biplane to the all-metal, low-wing monoplane with retractable landing gear, wing flaps, cockpit canopy, and voice radio.

We sometimes flew a Ryan aircraft or the Vultee “Vibrator,” but mostly the famous **North American SNJ Texan**. It closely resembled the Japanese Zero and could serve as a dive bomber. We learned the basic flight maneuvers and did a little formation flying in the SNJ. This training took place at Whiting Field, a satellite airport in the Pensacola complex.

During this time we had to select the second and last part of Advanced Flight Training—a choice between seaplanes and fighter planes (including a catapult experience). We in the Coast Guard had seaplanes chosen for us. We used the seadrome around which the Navy training facilities were built.

The **PBY Catalinas** were used in this training. They were the seaplane-only version known as PBY-5, and not the PBY-5A amphibious version with retractable landing gear, which we would fly in our Coast Guard operations. Without the landing gear and all that goes with it, and the absence of machine guns and bombs, these training model were very light and easy to handle. In contrast, when heavily laden they were very heavy on the controls and the high parasol wing added a pendulum motion sometimes requiring cross controls to dampen.

I enjoyed this course with its “boating aspect,” and passed.

Navy Aviator Wings. I have found among my souvenirs a little folder containing two certificates. One states that, on 7 December 1943, I was appointed **Coast Guard Aviator No. 179!** Signed by Coast Guard Commandant Admiral R.R. Waesche.

The other certificate, dated 25 January 1944, signed by the Commander of the Navy Aviator Training Command, says I “passed the test in Instrument Flying Prescribed for pilots of THE UNITED STATES NAVY and is qualified to proceed on Instruments in Single Engine Type of Plane.”



We were introduced to formation flying (two and three aircraft), instrument flying (“under the hood”), simulated dive bombing, and strafing with the thirty-caliber machine gun firing through the propeller!

That is enough about my flight training, but I am not through with Pensacola because that is where I met **Mary**, my true love and wife-to-be.

We were in the middle of World War II and both in military service. I was a full Lieutenant in the Coast Guard and Mary a Dental Assistant Corpsman in the Navy Waves. There were certain restrictions and some privileges that went with being in the military. One restriction was that officers and enlisted personnel were not to date. This was ignored, but we couldn’t use either the Officers’ Club or the Enlisted Club. Consequently, several little night clubs sprung up just off base. One privilege was that military personnel could fly in military aircraft as passengers.

Some of the more daring members of my flight class arranged for a few Waves from Mary’s barracks to join us for an evening “ashore.” Mary and I, not yet met, joined the group. We rode in a couple of cars, with girls sitting on boys’ laps. We breezed through the gate with no questions asked.

The little club had a small dance floor and a jukebox. That made for easy mixing. I had spotted Mary in the car, and liked what I saw, except for the guy on whose lap she was seated. I singled her out for dancing and “rescued her.”

We repeated this performance a couple of more times and soon we were a pair. I could see she was smitten by me!

One enterprising member of my group organized a beach party. He “conned” some steaks out of the galley. We brought blankets to lay on the sand around the fire after dinner. I had my arm around Mary and noticed we were fanny-to-fanny against the next couple. My hand was touching the girl. I whispered to Mary, “I’m going to have some fun.” I then gently caressed the girl’s bottom with a couple of strokes. She cuddled up closer to her date!!

My transfer orders, effective upon completion of Flight Training, assigned me to my first Coast Guard Air Station—St. Petersburg, Florida, thus opening a whole new life for me to pursue. But those orders also meant leaving Mary behind. What could we do about that? You will see.