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AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER

Winter 2020

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Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

January 2020

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL GALA



WITH FEATURED SPEAKER, HUBIE TOLSON



Daredevils In the Sky

PRESENTED BY:

**EASTERN CAROLINA
AVIATION HERITAGE FOUNDATION**

**FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 21, 2020
5:30PM**

HAVELOCK TOURIST & EVENT CENTER

TICKETS: \$60 EACH • 2 FOR \$110

Business Casual Attire

*Spend an Evening
with Hubie Tolson*

Our featured speaker, Hubie Tolson, an award-winning Aerobatic Pilot, will share his death-defying experiences. The evening promises to be a night of great food and fun entertainment.

Sponsorship opportunities are also available. Proceeds from the event benefit Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation in our efforts to inspire young learners to pursue new and exciting career pathways through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education.



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11th Annual ECAHF Gala

Mark your calendar for Friday, February 21, 2020. The Gala is the only yearly fundraiser for ECAHF and every dollar raised is used to support the foundation goals. The goals of ECAHF are to preserve the history of aviation and add interactive Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) related exhibits as well as to provide programming to educate students both in their schools and in our exhibit center. ECAHF offers an Elementary School Summer Engineering Camp for rising 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students. Also in May, ECAHF will offer a family fun night filled with various types of STEM activities which are designed to pique the interest of our children so they will pursue educational avenues for STEM careers. Field trips are planned throughout the year for students in the area to visit the exhibits and become engaged in the history of flight and aviation. These goals cannot be achieved with the support of our members, businesses, and communities.

Sponsorship levels are available for the Gala. In addition, individual tickets will be sold. Dinner and entertainment are included.

Title Sponsor: \$2,500 Contribution

- Mention in all event advertising as presenting sponsor
- Three tables at the event with company name, 24 seats for guests
- Company logo as presenting sponsor on event program and audio visual slide show
- Minimum of five live mentions at event
- Hyperlinked logo on ECAHF website for one year
- Three naming opportunities for our "Aces" Honor Roll of civilian and military aviators

Platinum Sponsor: \$2,000 Contribution

- Two tables at the event with company name, 16 seats for guests
- Company logo printed on event program and audio visual slide show
- Minimum of three live mentions at event
- Hyperlinked logo on ECAHF website for one year
- Two naming opportunities for our "Aces" Honor Roll of civilian and military aviators

Gold Sponsor: \$1,500 Contribution

- One table at event with company name, 8 seats for guests
- Company logo printed on event program and audio visual slide show
- Two live mentions at event
- Hyperlinked logo on ECAHF website for one year

Silver Sponsor: \$1,000 Contribution

- One table at event with company name, 8 seats for guests
- Company name on event program and audio visual slideshow
- At least one live mention at event
- Company name on ECAHF website for one year

Bronze Sponsor: \$750 Contribution

- One table at event with company name, 8 seats for guests
- Company name on event program and audio visual slideshow
- Company name on ECAHF website for one year

Table Sponsor: \$500 Contribution

- One table provided with company name, 8 seats for guests
- Company name on event program and audio visual slideshow

"Aces" Honor Roll Sponsor: \$100 Contribution

- Name listed on audio visual slideshow. If an individual pilot is chosen to honor, that name will be listed also.

Name of Pilot being Honored: _____

Feature Story:

First with the Most

(*“the rest of the story”*)

By Barry R. Fetzer
ECAHF Historian

I mentioned in my last column in this newsletter that I had failed, as a nephew and a Marine, to get the fine details I now wish I had regarding my Uncle Bill Hay’s service in the US Marine Corps during WWII. I recommended that others pursue that kind of information from their family members and friends before it’s too late. As a consequence of my failure, my Uncle Bill passed away taking many of those details with him to his grave.

This column, following up on my last with apologies again to radio personality Paul Harvey, is “the rest of the story” regarding what we know about William B. Hay’s service in the Marines.

But there’s more history to be discovered...and some likely never to be. Some history, maybe most of it, is forever lost. And it isn’t just death of family members and friends that leads to the loss of history. There are events beyond death, more tragic in their immensity, which eradicate history too. The National WWII Museum website includes the following information, “On July 12, 1973, a fire at the St. Louis National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) facility destroyed approximately 16–18 million official military personnel files. US Navy and Marine Corps files were minimally affected by the fire. However, 80 percent of Army records for personnel discharged from November 1, 1912, to January 1, 1960, were destroyed or damaged. Air Force records for those discharged from September 25, 1947, to January 1, 1964, suffered a 75 percent loss. What does this mean for those filing record requests? Sometimes there will be no record available. In other cases, information can be pieced together from damaged or auxiliary records, reconstructing some service information. Preservationists in St. Louis are still working to recover information from damaged records.”¹



NPRC fire aftermath, July 1973. (Photo credit: National Archives)

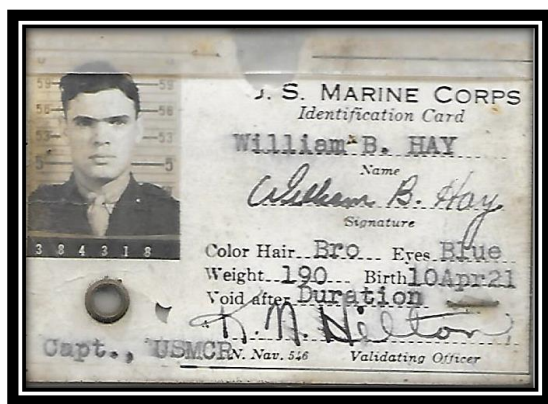
¹ The National WWII Museum website https://www.nationalww2museum.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/17-0167_Family_Research_Packet_8.5x11_r22.pdf

Of course, the fire at the NPRC is done. One of my father's favorite sayings was, "Nothing lasts forever" and nothing will recover those NPRC records lost to fire. When will the next disaster erase history? The NPRC fire is another reason that time is of the essence. **Now** is the time to talk to your relatives and friends and record their wartime experiences.

I have detailed records of my father's service during WWII largely because I made the time to talk with him about his service before his death, but I have not requested his veteran records from the NPRC. His US Army Air Forces service records could very well be amongst those lost to the NPRC fire. Thankfully, through our conversations, I have information about his service from him personally and also through written records and photographs he left behind.

But because Uncle Bill was a Marine and the NPRC fire minimally affected Marine Corps veteran records, his son and daughter and I successfully collaborated to get his veteran records. These records contain a wealth of information. Plus I have a letter from him and another letter from his half sister with a few details of his service. I have some documents (like his military ID) my cousins sent me, and I have recollections of several conversations with him from which I scribbled a few notes. Collectively, this information has begun to piece together some of Uncle Bill's service in Marine Aviation during WWII.

In response to a letter I wrote him asking questions about his Marine Corps service, Uncle Bill wrote in his 1999 reply to me, *"I'll try to recall, but that was long ago and much I've forgotten."* He went on, *"I enlisted in March of 1942. Went to Parris Island. Tents and sand fleas. But it made me a man."*



William Hay's Marine Corps ID, 1942. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)

That letter from Uncle Bill provided details that his veteran records did not include. Along with some research done on line, reading several books on USMC PBJ (B-25) operations during WWII, rediscovering those scribbled notes from conversations I had with Uncle Bill before he died, and some details my cousins had...all this information helped plug in some of the missing pieces. Still, as I mentioned in my last column, there will always be missing pieces. But persistence has filled in some of the blanks.

Following recruit training, assignment to the engine shop at Aircraft Engineering Squadron (AES)-14 at *"Marine Heaven"* (as he called it in his letter), Marine Corps Air

Station Quantico, VA and then Aviation Supplyman School in Toledo, OH, he was ordered to the west coast to serve at Marine Air Group (MAG) 15. He wrote he was ordered, while serving with MAG-15 at Camp Kearny, San Diego (now MCAS Miramar), to “*carrier duty for one trip to Alaska*”. The dates of his service record while at MAG-15 correspond with the Aleutians Campaign. His veteran records confirm this, a notation in his discharge paperwork included in his “battles, engagements, skirmishes and expeditions” record the words, “Participation in the Aleutians Operation”.

And his discharge record indicates his “Service (sea and foreign)” as “Pacific area” from 28 August 1942 to 31 October 1943 and then again 9 May 1945 to 30 November 1945, the earlier dates corresponding with the Aleutians Campaign, the later dates corresponding with his service with MAG-61 crewing PBJ’s at Emirau and then in the Philippines and possibly on Iwo Jima. More about his PBJ service in a moment.

As for his assignment to carrier duty in Alaska, according to a study entitled, The Aleutians Campaign, World War II: Historical Study and Current Perspectives ², the only carrier deployed in the Aleutians Campaign was an escort carrier, the USS Nassau (ACV-16), because fleet carriers were needed for other, higher battle priorities at the time and it was determined by military planners that there was acceptable risk in using land-based aviation to dislodge the Japanese from American soil in Alaska vice aircraft flown from the vital fleet carriers.



**USS Nassau (ACV-16) in 1943 off the coast of Attu Island in the Aleutians chain.
If we could see inside this carrier, Uncle Bill might be in the photo. (Photo credit: US Navy)**

So while Uncle Bill certainly participated in the Aleutians Operation in some way or another and was likely assigned to the USS Nassau, exactly what Uncle Bill’s duties and responsibilities were during this part of his service with the Marines, for now at least, remains hidden. This early in his service, he very likely could have been performing some role aboard the USS Nassau as an aviation supplyman, his assigned military occupational

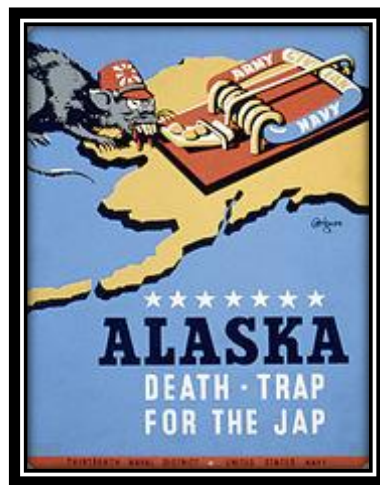
² Major Robert L. Johnson, Jr., USA, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the US Army cCommand and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1977)

specialty. Or he could have been assigned, instead, to ship's company as a "Sea-going Marine", one of the USS Nassau's Marine guards. He was a big man, so Sea-going Marine guard duty was a distinct possibility.

One of the many fun things about doing research like this on Uncle Bill is that serendipity is often discovered. Interestingly (for me, at least) during my Marine Corps career I deployed on a USS Nassau myself (40-some years after Uncle Bill's deployment on his USS Nassau), the USS Nassau (LHA-4), a ship not unlike the escort carrier on which Uncle Bill likely deployed to Alaska. My USS Nassau was an escort carrier-looking "landing helicopter-assault" ship or LHA. Of course, Uncle Bill's USS Nassau was decommissioned, scrapped and converted into razor blades long before I boarded my USS Nassau. And as time awaits no man (or woman), my USS Nassau, too, is decommissioned. She, though, is moored in Texas as part of our reserve fleet and could herself also be scrapped and converted to razor blades at any time. Also, I crewed the CH-46 *Sea Knight* (helicopter) during my career in the Marines—he the C-46 *Commando* early in his time in the Marines. More serendipity.

But I digress. Uncle Bill's carrier duty in Alaska was a footnote in his 1999 letter to me but he couldn't have known at the time of his service that the Aleutians Campaign—as vital it was—would also be a footnote in WWII history. Still, it is important for every American to recall the Aleutians Campaign because it was the only time that ground warfare occurred on American soil during WWII, in fact it was the first time since the War of 1812.

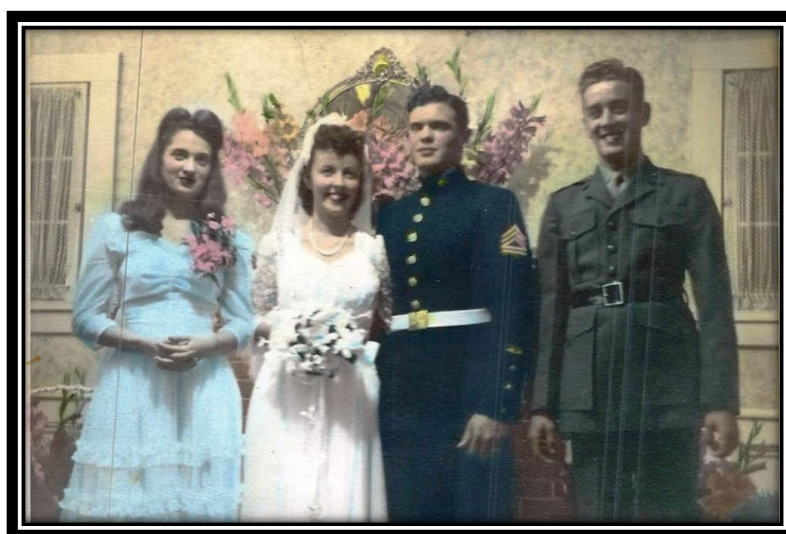
According to Wikipedia, "The [Aleutians] campaign is known as the 'Forgotten Battle', due to its being overshadowed by the simultaneous Guadalcanal Campaign. [Some] military historians believe the Aleutians Campaign was a diversionary or feint attack meant to draw the US Pacific Fleet away from Midway Atoll, as it was launched simultaneously under the same Japanese commander, Isoroku Yamamoto. Some historians have argued against this interpretation, believing that the Japanese invaded the Aleutians to protect their northern flank, and did not intend it as a diversion."



US Alaska Campaign Propaganda Poster, circa 1942. (Image credit: Wikipedia)

And the Aleutians Campaign included, according to Wikipedia, “one of the largest banzai charges of the Pacific campaign. On May 29, 1943, without warning, Japanese forces attacked near (appropriately named) Massacre Bay on Attu Island. The banzai charges penetrated so deep into US lines that Japanese soldiers encountered rear-echelon units of the Americans. After furious, brutal, often hand-to-hand combat, the Japanese force was virtually exterminated. Only 28 Japanese soldiers were taken prisoner, none of them officers. American burial teams counted 2,351 Japanese dead, but it was thought that hundreds more Japanese bodies had been buried by bombardment during the battle.”

That massive banzai charge was then, and is today, largely unknown to the American public at large. But it forecasted to war planners the great difficulties the allies would have in future ground battles with the Japanese, especially those anticipated against the Japanese home islands, should it—God forbid—had come to that.



Center right and left, Technical Sergeant Bill and Mrs. Peggy Hay at Peggy’s parent’s home near MCAF Corvallis, Oregon, August 24, 1944. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)

Not too long after returning from serving in the Aleutians Campaign and transferred to Oregon from San Diego, Uncle Bill met his wife Peggy at Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) Corvallis, Oregon. She was a pretty secretary on the base, and by this time he had been promoted to a dashing Marine Corps Technical Sergeant. A wedding photo (colorized by Peggy herself) shows the happy couple at a reception at Peggy’s mom and dad’s home following their wedding ceremony.

MCAF Corvallis isn’t well documented in USMC aviation history. The airfield still exists...but as a municipal airport now and Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_Corps_Air_Facility_Corvallis) writes, “The site was built during World War II by the United States Army Air Forces for bomber training. The original hangar is still being used today.” There’s some information online about VMJ-953, that “First with the Most” C-46 *Commando* transport squadron to which Uncle Bill was assigned I mentioned in my last column, being moved to MCAF Corvallis in May 1944, a date that corresponds with Uncle Bill’s veteran records.

In his 1999 letter to me, Uncle Bill didn’t mention MCAF Corvallis or his assignment there, likely because his reassignment to Oregon from California was merely a part of massive

wartime logistics efforts, the death and birth of new command echelons and organizations, and relocation efficiencies gained as room was made in southern California for the massive bulk of men and materiel being moved to the south Pacific from the west coast. But his lack of mentioning Corvallis doesn't mean his transfer to Oregon wasn't a key event in his life.

Like most of us who find love while serving in the military (including me), Uncle Bill's marriage to Peggy changed the course of his Marine Corps career. In Uncle Bill's case, Peggy became the center of his universe. He had already been promoted very quickly as I mentioned in my last column in less than two years from PFC to Technical Sergeant (E-7)...with promotion to Master Technical Sergeant (E-8) shortly to come...and had a bright future in the Marines. But his future in the Marines was indelibly changed by his marriage.

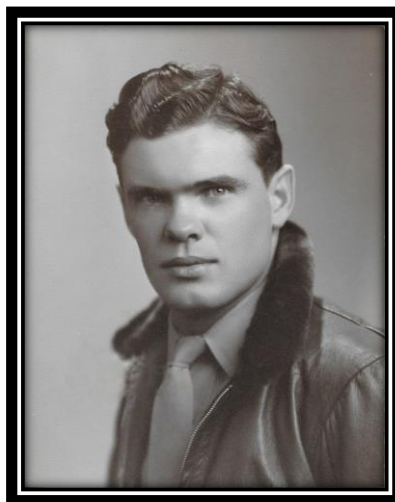
His 1999 letter to me mentioned he refused a commission to 2nd Lieutenant and his veteran records indicate he was "selected in January 1944 by the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics for flight training". The next entry listed those orders to flight school as "obsolete" as they were orders he must have also refused because of his marriage. Uncle Bill continued in his letter to me, *"I turned down the 2nd Lieutenant commission because I was married and was going to leave the Marines."* He went on, *"I had flight pay, longevity pay, and marriage allowance—was a MTSgt—but still felt I was better off leaving the Marine Corps. I was wrong."*



**Master Technical Sergeant William B. Hay, USMC, circa 1945.
(Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)**

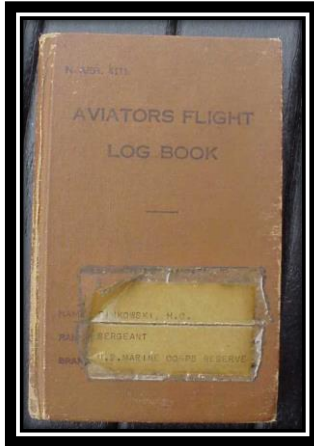
It's prudent for historians to be cautious with information, especially second-hand information. Information can be and is often "flavored" by emotions, innuendo, embellishment, and, frankly, misstated facts. A family member offered that Uncle Bill had been a pilot. A letter from Uncle Bill's half sister, "Aunt Carol", states that Bill Hay didn't like to talk about his service in WWII and only *"talked once about it"* but she went on that he, *"...saw a lot of action and saw some Marine [sic] buddies killed and served on Iwo Jima (island in the Philippines) where the American flag was raised by Marines—famous photo."*

All of those “facts” are possible (except that of Iwo Jima being in the Philippines), but neither Uncle Bill’s veteran records nor his 1999 letter to me corroborate that he was a pilot or that he served on Iwo Jima. But what I do have is those few discussions on his service in the Marines (those from which I scribbled a few notes) in which Uncle Bill told me he crewed B-25’s. And we do have his 1999 letter that states he served on Emirau and in the Philippines. And we have his veteran records that confirm he was assigned to MAG-61, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, South Pacific, the PBJ Mitchell MAG that was hop-scotched around the Bismarck Archipelago ultimately landing at the Island of Emirau.



Uncle Bill in flight jacket, circa 1943. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)

So I’m beginning to put Uncle Bill’s story together best I can with the available information. In his 1999 letter he mentioned he used his “flight log books” to help him remember some of the details of his service. He also mentioned in his letter that he was drawing flight pay. We have a picture of him in a flight jacket. We have his veteran records confirming he was assigned to MAG-61. He is pictured standing in front of a PBJ in the Philippines, and also mentioned in that 1999 letter that after returning from the Aleutians Campaign he “took care of the Colonel’s aircraft”, which translated could very well have meant he was the aircraft’s crew chief. While his veteran records do not corroborate that he crewed any aircraft, they do indicate his assignment to VMJ-953 (which flew the C-46 *Commando* as mentioned in my previous column) and ultimately to the PBJ MAG as mentioned above. He also wrote that he “requested overseas duty and was assigned to B-25’s”.



Flight log book like that Uncle Bill's flight hours logged on PBJ's might have been recorded. Though mentioned in his 1999 letter, his log books have not been located since his death. (Photo credit: MAG-61 website)

Today, there is a specific Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) for aircraft crew chief. In the PBJ community—in the 1940's—that MOS area of expertise procedure was not as sharply honed...not as developed...as it is today. The system of primary and secondary MOS's we have today in the Marines did not exist at that time.

Uncle Bill's MOS was listed in his veteran records as an aviation supplyman. In order to draw flight pay and get into "the action", an aviation supplyman like Uncle Bill could very well have started out serving additional duties as a basic aircrewman and through performance and skills, could very well have been "promoted"—along with his rapid rise in military rank—from aircrewman on a transport aircraft to aircrewman on a combat bomber like the PBJ Mitchell B-25 aircraft. It appears to me through reviewing his service records and assignments, his letters, and through my own experience commanding crewed aircraft in the Marines, that Uncle Bill started out crewing C-46 *Commandos* while assigned to VMJ-953/MAG-15.

I agree with Robert M. Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values* who wrote, "For every fact there is an infinity of hypotheses." There are many facts available in Uncle Bill's records that **could** lead to many hypotheses. But I believe the facts of Uncle Bill's record clearly lead to one hypothesis. Fact: he served in the engine shop of AES-14 at MCAS Quantico. Fact: He successfully completed aviation supplyman school. Fact: He "*took care of the colonel's aircraft*" at VMJ-953, MAG-15 and after requesting overseas combat duty, he...Fact: was assigned to the PBJ Mitchell MAG-61 in Emirau, Bismarck Archipelago. Fact: he told me he crewed B-25's during the War.

Is there a B-25 pilot worth his weight in salt who wouldn't want an experienced Marine Master Technical Sergeant with aircraft engine experience, aviation supply experience, and large aircraft crewman experience crewing their PBJ? I doubt it.



**USMC PBJ Mitchell bomber over the northwest tip of Emirau Island, circa 1943.
(Photo credits: Bill Parks and Leatherneck Bombers³)**

In the book PBJ Mitchell Units of the Pacific War ⁴, author Jerry Scutts writes, “Personnel volunteering for transfer to a Marine bomber squadron encountered unique procedures. Anticipating that forward area servicing might be adversely affected by lack of ground crews, loss of equipment and scant facilities, each of the six man PBJ crew was trained not only to fly their aircraft in combat, but to service it as well.”

So with his training on engines and in aviation supply and his experience in crewing C-46 *Commandos*, Uncle Bill was the perfect PBJ crewman!

Uncle Bill wrote a letter to his wife, Peggy, six days after the official surrender of Japan that occurred aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945 while he was serving in the Philippines at the end of the War. That letter further substantiates Uncle Bill’s service with PBJ’s. It also shows with the War’s end that censoring of personal letters home was curtailed. And it also illustrates that even with the War’s end, the risks and dangers of aviation duty persisted. But more than that, it’s amazing the letter ultimately made it to Peggy in Oregon, which it did, but in very bad shape as the below photographs show.

*Sept. 8, 1945
Saturday*

My Darling Peggy:

Hello honey, today I have a few free moments so I will start my letter.

Our boats came in last night and everyone is busy unloading. This will really be a crowded place when all the men get up here. As yet I haven't seen any of my boys. We have to unload as fast

³ Alan C. Carey, Leatherneck Bombers, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., Atglen, PA., 2003

⁴ PBJ Mitchell Units of the Pacific War by Jerry Scutts, Osprey Publishing, Ltd., Oxford, UK, 2003

as possible because MAG-24 is going to load for China. They are sending most of the marines out here into China. I don't think that we will. We hear we are going to Hawaii in 2 months to decommission PBJ's since they are too costly to operate for patrol duty. If we do that I might be home in January or February. Don't count on it though.

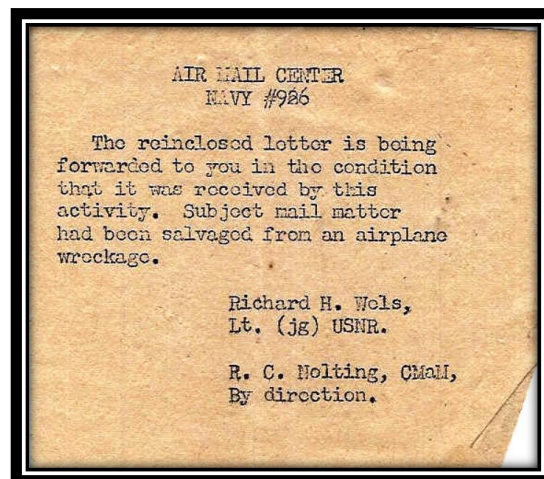
Darling I am so lonesome for you. Each night I think and think about everything we have done and plan to do. I am sure tired of this {Marine Corps} life. It is OK for a single fellow but not for me. I just want to be with the one I love and that's with you. In a year I should be a civilian. If I was home now we could start buying me my clothes. You are allowed to wear them in the states when not on duty.

We have a little monkey in our tent we sure like. He doesn't like me anymore though. We got him drunk on beer and it really was a picnic.

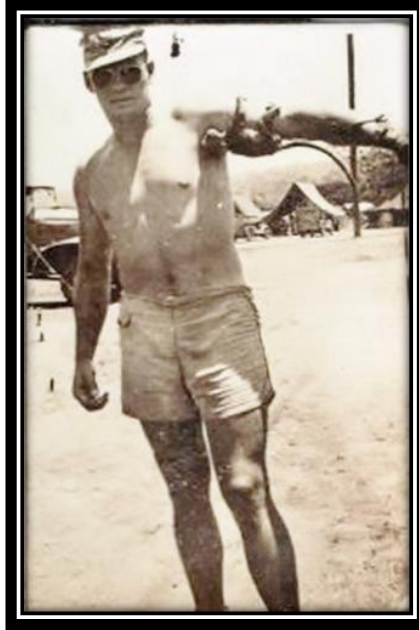
I love you.
Bill



The damaged envelope containing Uncle Bill's letter to Aunt Peggy. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)



The Air Mail Center note explaining the damaged letter. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)



Uncle Bill with the “drunk monkey” that “doesn’t like him anymore” mentioned in his letter to Aunt Peggy. Circa 1945. (Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)

So as pieces of Uncle Bill’s puzzle fell into place, it became clearer that less than three years from completing recruit training at Parris Island, Master Technical Sergeant William B. Hay, USMC crewed PBJ’s in the Southwest Pacific Theater in combat.

And, of course, his crewmates and pilots in MAG-61 based in the Bismarck Archipelago were those men who trained in PBJ Mitchell bombers in eastern NC. A 1944 newspaper column illustrated some of this NC training.

MARINE AIRMEN ARE ADEPT WITH CANNON PLANES

By Robert Manning

Cherry Point, N.C., July 27, 1944--(UP)--Marine Corps fliers, who'll bet they can slap a 75-millimeter shell into the doorway of a Japanese pillbox from a speeding plane, are being groomed here to fight, with modified versions of the Army's artillery-packing Mitchell bombers.

The Marine Corps lifted censorship to reveal to a dozen new correspondents who toured this largest of the Marines' air stations, how the Leathernecks are using cannon planes. The PBJs--as the Navy calls the B-25s--are considered to be especially adaptable to knocking out well-emplaced strongpoints, like pillboxes.

The visiting newsmen were taken on a two-hour lesson in low-level cannonading and strafing. Their host for the flight were eager-for-combat airmen of a PBJ squadron--experienced pilots like Squadron Leader Lieut. W.R. "Bodda" Hancock of Aucilla, Fla., who piloted "Pregnant Annie."

Like the rest of the PBJs mounting 75-MM cannon, "Annie" differs from earlier models of the two-motored B-25. The gun muzzle nestles inconspicuously in a hole in the lower left of the nose, its barrel extending backwards.

Co-Pilot Milton Schatan of Catalina Island, Calif., shared his seat with this correspondent. After 15 minutes of cruising, the squadron leader pointed with a smile to a yellow speck on a strip of sandy beach paralleling the water.



Lieutenant W. R. "Bodda" Hancock points out the 75MM cannon on a Marine *Mitchell* bomber.

"We gotta knock the eye out of that." he said on the interphone. "Get the baby primed, Bohannon!"

Sgt. T.T. Bohannon of Orlando, Fla., slapped a 75MM shell into the breach and snapped: "Cannon loaded, sir."

"Annie" peeled off with an earth-revolving jerk. Hancock caressed the twin throttles and then felt with his right thumb for a red button on the wheel marked "Cannon." He aimed through his machine gun ring sights. "Annie" screamed in at 250 miles an hour and suddenly: "Pow!!" The plane shuddered an instant, shook it off and spit lead from the eight forward-firing machine guns. Again: "Pow!" If the target area had been a pillbox, it would have been a mighty sick one.

Top Marine Air Force officers indicated the PBJs have been given--tentatively at least--a big part to play in future Marine operations in the island-hopping war of the Pacific.⁵



PBJ Mitchell Bombers pictured (upper left just below the hangar) at MCAS Cherry Point, circa 1943. (Photo credit: Bill Parks and Leatherneck Bombers⁶ by Alan C. Cary)

Uncle Bill's discharge paperwork lists his "rank and type of warrant at time of discharge" as Master Technical Sergeant Avn Duty (TW)". I have been unable so far to determine what the abbreviation '(TW)' means, but Uncle Bill's warranted duties were recorded as expanding from being an aviation supplyman to "aviation duty" at the end of his career, validating the development of his aviation responsibilities beyond aviation supply.

And by the way, it is not my intent to imply above that aviation supply is unimportant. In fact, it's vital to success. The old adage that "military amateurs focus on operations, military professionals on logistics" rings true in the history of warfare as well as in my own military experiences. But Uncle Bill's aviation duties swelled beyond just aviation supply along with his rank and experiences during WWII, to the point he was offered a slot at flight school, which he must have turned down—for Peggy—as recorded in his veteran records and in his 1999 letter to me as mentioned above.

⁵ United Press International/http://www.vmb-613.com/pbj-1_links.html

⁶ Leatherneck Bombers by Alan C. Carey, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., Atglen, PA., 2003

MAG-61 ultimately left Emirau for the Philippines where the below photo of Uncle Bill was shot two-some months after Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, with him posing in front of a PBJ located on a Malabang, Philippines airbase recently liberated from the Japanese.

In his 1999 letter, Uncle Bill wrote, “...from Emirau Island we were transferred to the Philippines. We were getting ready for (attacking the main islands of) Japan—putting *Tiny Tim* rockets on the B-25.” This where one of the “facts” written in Aunt Carol’s letter about Bill being assigned to Iwo Jima, “...island in the Philippines” as she incorrectly wrote, could be a fact...or it could be “fake news” to use the current vernacular.

Uncle Bill wrote in his 1999 letter that he was assigned to (and he was photographed in) the Philippines. In this letter he also listed all the places he had been. This list did not include Iwo Jima. One could argue—I would—that a US Marine like Uncle Bill, likely knowing of the iconic Joe Rosenthal photo of the Iwo Jima flag raising on February 23, 1945...that he would have mentioned in his letter being on that island, its hard fought attack and capture by Marines signifying the beginning of the end of the Japanese Empire.

So even though Uncle Bill’s sister Carol wrote that Uncle Bill had been on Iwo Jima and even though it was Marine Bomber Squadron (VMB)-612 stationed on Iwo Jima that was testing *Tiny Tim* rockets (and the only unit known to employ them in combat) on their PBJs, it’s likely that Uncle Bill actually never made it to Iwo Jima to support VMB-612’s testing and employment of *Tiny Tims* and instead was ordered to prep MAG-61’s PBJs now stationed at Malabang, Philippines for employing *Tiny Tim* rockets.

While it’s possible, we may never know for certain whether Uncle Bill deployed to Iwo Jima. That’s one of those inevitable missing pieces of information lost to the dust bin of history.

Until Japan capitulated after the second atomic bomb *Fat Man* nearly blasted Nagasaki off the map on August 9th and Japan’s Emperor Hirohito announced his country’s unconditional surrender over the radio a week later on August 15, 1945, the Allies were preparing (with many prayers and hopes it would never happen) for the final assault on the Japanese main islands to end WWII. Part of this preparation was to arm some PBJs with *Tiny Tim* rockets.

According to author Jerry Scutts in his book, PBJ Mitchell Units of the Pacific War, “Generally speaking, the US Navy’s aerial ordnance in WWII was based on a series of standard weapons ranging from the .50cal machine gun through a variety of bombs and depth charges, to the high velocity rocket. It was left to the versatile PBJ (and Marines) to deploy more exotic weaponry in combat, including the 75mm cannon (highlighted in the newspaper article above), and finally the *Tiny Tim* air-to-surface rocket. This 11.75 inch weapon was a standard 500 lb semi-armor piercing M58A1 bomb filled with TNT and attached to a steel tube, the latter being fitted with a motor and cruciform fins. The majority of these weapons were issued to VMB-612 while it was on Iwo Jima.”⁷

⁷ PBJ Mitchell Units of the Pacific War by Jerry Scutts, Osprey Publishing, Ltd., Oxford, UK, 2003, p.76

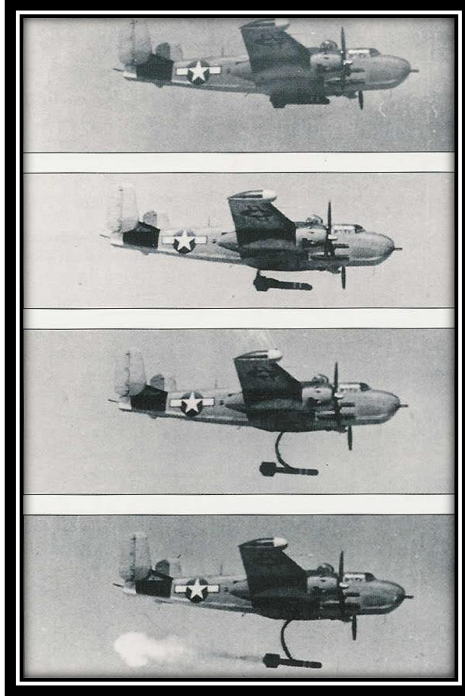


**Uncle Bill posing with a PBJ at a Malabang, Philippines airbase, Oct 1945.
(Photo credit: Hay Family photograph)**

While the above photo of Uncle Bill in the Philippines doesn't appear to show the PBJ fitted with the *Tiny Tim* rocket racks necessary to employ this weapon system, the *Tiny Tim* was tested and employed (with little success) on Iwo Jima by VMB-612, its lack of success mostly attributed to a lack of suitable targets available against which *Tiny Tim*-loaded PBJs could attack by this time at the War's near end. But there would be plenty of targets to attack should the dreaded final assault of the Japanese main islands occur, hence Uncle Bill's likely mission to prep MAG-61 PBJs on the Philippines to carry this weapon system.



**A radar-equipped PBJ, likely of VMB-612 on Iwo Jima, fitted with *Tiny Tim* rockets, circa 1945.
(Photo credit: Alan Carey)**



A sequential series of photographs showing a PBJ launch of a *Tiny Tim* rocket secured to a lanyard to drop the weapon far enough below the fuselage before firing it so as to not scorch the undercarriage of the aircraft. (Photo credit: North American Aviation)

From the Philippines, many of Uncle Bill's PBJs unceremoniously dumped at sea rather than expending time and money to scrap them, he made his way back home to Ohio and rarely talked about his wartime experiences like so many other WWII veterans. Uncle Bill became immersed in the peacetime nirvana he had helped create. He purchased a cute, little home in the GI Bill-built suburbs of the west side of Cleveland, raised a son and daughter, and became a general manager of a Buick car dealer in Lorain. We saw each other a couple of times a year at holidays and summer picnics as I grew up.

As a self-absorbed high school sophomore I bought my first car from Uncle Bill for \$50.00, a rusty, white 1963 Chevrolet much like the one pictured below, probably a trade-in destined for the junk heap that meant it was also a great first car for a 16 year-old boy. So knowing nothing of Uncle Bill's experiences in the Marines (and even if I had known, most likely...selfishly, not caring too much), I focused on the car, high school, girls, sports, after school work, and friends, and...well...I focused on me. A few years later the car was gone and so was I—to college and ROTC, graduation, commissioning as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Marines, marriage, basic officer training, flight school, having children, my own service in the Marines, divorce, single parenthood, remarriage, blah, blah, blah. I focused on life.



Rusty 1963 Chevy Impala that looks better than mine did. (Photo credit: Classicvehicleslist.com)

Just like that car, my relationship with Uncle Bill also rusted—as any neglected relationship will—and we saw each other only a couple of times during that quarter century that so quickly flew by once I left home into adulthood. Finally in 1999 I wrote Uncle Bill, sending him a picture of my son who was going to enter recruit training himself, soon to stand on the same yellow footprints at Parris Island on which his great Uncle Bill had once stood. In that letter I asked for details of his service in the Marines. Without that letter and his response, many of the pieces of the Uncle Bill puzzle mentioned in this column would not have popped into place.

Several years after that 1999 letter, I saw Uncle Bill for the last time at a family reunion that included my son who had recently graduated from Infantry Training School (ITS) at Marine Corps Base Camp Geiger in eastern NC. We were able to snap a “three generations of Marines” photograph in front of my sister’s house in Hudson, Ohio. Thirty years separated each of our service in the Marine Corps, Uncle Bill an 80 year-old Marine, me to his right a 49 year-old Marine, and my 18 year-old Marine son to my right.

We reminisced a bit about Uncle Bill’s time in the Marines comparing his experiences to my son’s own at recruit training and ITS, rightfully focusing on my son and his experiences and not on the older Marines. But there were lots of people to see and catch up with and food and drink to consume and we were lucky to get this photograph, let alone sneak away from the hustle and bustle typical of these kinds of gatherings and make the time to discuss the fine details of his WWII Marine Corps aviation service. Uncle Bill didn’t stay long at these occasions. He was not much into small talk...a quiet, “come and go” kind of guy he was. Still, it was a lost opportunity to learn more about him and his service in the Marines.



Right to left: MTSgt Bill Hay, USMC, LtCol Barry Fetzer, USMC, PFC Nick Fetzer, USMC. Three generations of Marines in Ohio, July 2001. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family photograph)

Seven years later, Uncle Bill passed on to, as I wrote in my last column, that “great aviation depot in the sky” leaving me with memories of his humble, good-humored, cigar chomping self, but also leaving me with a bit of regret for not showing more interest in *his* service in the Marines during the almost 30 years of my own.

So now we come not to the end but to a wayside...a resting point...in the Uncle and WWII Marine Master Technical Sergeant Bill Hay story. For my kids, Uncle Bill’s history is two generations in the past. For my grandkids, it’s three. And history keeps being made, piling onto older history, often burying it with newer, more relevant (some would argue) stories.

That's sad, but it's also reality. As I mentioned earlier, one of my Dad's favorite sayings was, "Nothing lasts forever" and that includes history as well. Nonetheless I hope that, in a small way, this little investigation into Uncle Bill's contributions to Marine Corps aviation during WWII makes up for some of my younger disinterest and will save his contributions from being smothered. It's a story that, with time and effort and hopefully continued interest in his experiences by later generations of his kin, is worth kicking the rust off...and building upon.



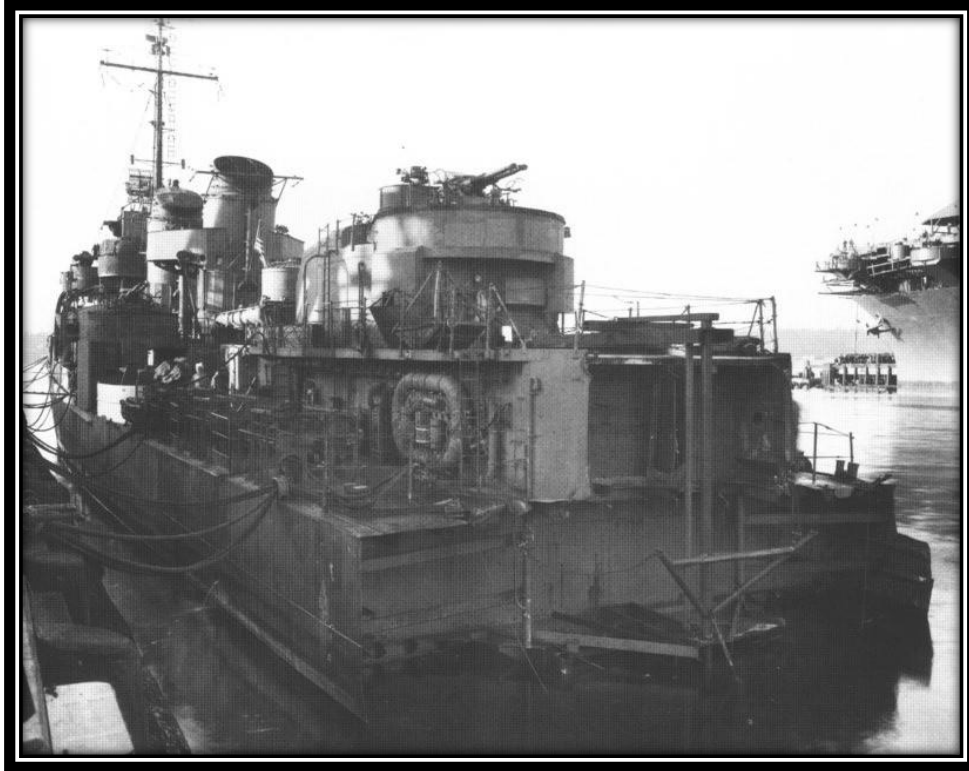
**A 1st Marine Amphibious Corps/Aviation Engineers (IMAC) shoulder patch my mom said her brother, Bill Hay, wore on his uniform. More research is needed to understand how Uncle Bill's assignment to MAG-61, 1st MAW authorized him to wear this patch if he, indeed, did.
(Photo credit: Fetzer Family photograph)**

Postscript

An interesting side note to the Aleutians Campaign and another aspect of this forgotten battle in US waters during WWII is the saga of the US destroyer, the *USS Abner Read* (DD-526), a Fletcher-class destroyer named after Lieutenant Commander Abner Read (1821 – 1863), who fought in the American Civil War. As reported by Military Officer Magazine and author Laura Edwards in November 2019, "The ship was sunk by kamikazes in the Leyte Gulf near the Philippines Islands on November 1, 1944 with the loss of 22 sailors. But this was not the ship's first brush with the enemy."

Ms. Edwards continued, "On August 18, 1943, *Abner Read* was near Kiska Island off Alaska when it struck a mine. Seventy-one sailors died, 47 were injured, and the ship lost its entire stern section. But the remaining sailors aboard managed to save the destroyer, and within months it was back in action."

According to his service records that show he fought in the "Pacific area" from August 28, 1943 through October 31, 1944, Uncle Bill missed this drama—the heroics of just a few remaining living and uninjured crewmen aboard DD-526 being able to save the ship—play out by only 10 days. Still, from his berth on the *USS Nassau*, he might have even seen the damaged *Abner Read* limping back to dry dock at Puget Sound to be repaired...only to ultimately be sunk just a little over a year later.



**DD-526 at the Puget Sound Shipyard in 1943, her blown off stern in full display
(Photo credit: US Navy)**

Finally, my cousin Bill Hay Jr.—Uncle Bill’s son—wrote me when I asked him to review this column prior to it being published in this newsletter. He wrote, *“I am greatly moved to read about all the things my father never spoke to us about. He used to talk some of the Philippines (and the monkey) but that was all—except for one time when I was a teenager and had done something wrong (I don’t remember what), he told me I still had a lot to learn about life and how he had seen men bayoneted, something I’m sure he hoped I’d never have to witness. I figure that must have been in the Aleutians Campaign.”*

We will probably never know where and in what context Uncle Bill saw men bayoneted, but it could have been in the Aleutians Campaign as my cousin suggested, possibly even during the massive Banzai charge mentioned in the article above, when troops might have been ordered ashore to Attu Island from their vessels afloat as reinforcements needed to counter the Japanese attack that had penetrated so deeply into rear areas before finally being repelled. Or it could have been in the Bismarck Archipelago where bypassed Japanese soldiers might have been bayoneted attempting to pass through or harass American security lines around MAG-61 airfields.

Either way, those of us (including me) fortunate enough to not have witnessed a man being bayoneted can only imagine how that experience changes one and, if one did witness such an act, how that event would be good reason to not want to talk about one’s wartime experiences, instead hoping to forget about them. BRF

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2020 Eastern Carolina Summer Elementary Engineering Camp

July 20-24, 2020

The Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation will offer an exciting, aviation-themed week long summer day camp July 20th-24th, 2020, for elementary school students (rising fourth, fifth and sixth-graders) at the Havelock Tourist & Event Center. Applications will be on the website beginning February 24, 2020. For more details look online at

<https://ecaviationheritage.com/elementary-engineering-summer-camp/>

The camp will provide students a fun and positive glimpse into various fields of engineering by using hands-on, creative investigations and real-world building activities. Throughout the week, students will be divided into design teams led by local elementary school teachers, engineers, and volunteers. In their teams, students will be given the challenge to individually design and build various devices related to aviation and engineering. Students will learn engineering fundamentals by exploring various experiments related to aviation.

On the final day of camp, students will demonstrate their work in a public forum that incorporates many of the concepts from the camp's weekly activities. Families and the community are invited to attend this final celebration on Friday.

The camp is from 8:30am - 12:00noon Monday through Friday and a snack is provided. No lunch is provided. Cost for the camp is \$125 per student. Scholarships may be available for students with demonstrated financial need.

If you are interested in sponsoring a camper, please contact Pam Holder at pholder@havelocknc.us.





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- Summer Engineering Camp – July 20-24, 2020
- Fall Partnership and Member Appreciation Night - TBD
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