

Plank owners: LT Eldon Grimm, Aerms 2/c John K. Akers and Kenneth M. Slocum; Aerms 3/c Richard J. Kalish, William J. Rathell and Harold V. Thompson and S 2/c Bruce N. Brown. USS Bennington, CV-20, on 6 Aug. Plank owners were: LCDR Ralph E. Frank, Caerm Roger M. Lyons; Aerms 2/c Vincent D. Clark, Eugene K. Dillon and Basil J. Neptune and Aerm 3/c Tinsley A. Lee. USS Randolph, CV-15, on P Oct. Plank Owners were LCDR Bernie Crawford, Aerm 3/c Walter L. Timmons, Phil Kanofsky, L.J. Flaherty, B.E. McCutcheon and W.T. O'Connor.

**Blimps on the Northwest Coast** - In Nov 1943 AG1 Joe Zaffino's name was on the flight schedule for Squadron ZP-33's aerial coverage of the Northwestern corner of the U.S. He made and issued the morning forecast for an approaching storm which would bring increasing southerly winds. Having briefed the crew he slept for 3 pre-watch hours as K-71 flew toward their patrol area (expecting that a patrol area consistent with his forecast would be chosen). He would regret not having asked where their patrol area was located.

On waking he asked the Navigator where they were and when shown he groaned, asking, "How the hell do we get back?" After a brief discussion with the airship commander they turned for home facing a very strong southeast wind for a return to Tillamook OR, their home station. They made poor headway but did manage to move eastward toward the coast. As they neared the coast their radar went down and since it was wartime the coast was blacked out.

At about 9PM they were challenged by blinker from a ship. The blimp signalman responded and found their challenger to be the Columbia River light ship. They were well off course and far north of Tillamook. They turned nearly due south but winds had increased to fifty knots which put them at a near stand still. To compound their problems the star board engine caught fire but they could not afford to shut it down and lose the power it represented.

K-71 turned north hoping to make the auxiliary field at Astoria, OR on the south coast of the Columbia River. It was fogged in despite the high winds. (not an uncommon thing in the northwest or in Alaska) They passed over a light which was determined to be the North Head lighthouse on the north side of the river. Fuel supply had become critical when they spotted a small beach area and they decided to land at the next suitable sandy beach sighted.

The Coast Guard had been alerted and a landing party was arranged by blinker messages thru a signalman in a jeep. They put full power on their engines and headed at the beach but a heavy gust caused a starboard roll and one propeller dug into the sand. Aerm 1/c Zaffino was aft at the "rip cord" when the pilot cut power. He ordered Zaffino to

"rip the bag" and for all hands to jump. The crew escaped uninjured as the bag collapsed around them after an 18 hour and 30 minute flight.

**Deja Vu for X-Wasp Aerms** - On 24 Nov 1943 USS Liscombe Bay is torpedoed and sunk by IJN submarine I-175 during the invasion of the Gilbert Islands. All weather personnel survive. X-Wasp sailors Cruse, Fairbrother and Morgan have their second ship "shot out from under them". Ironically the second USS Wasp, CV-18, is commissioned on this date. Crew member Don Cruse will later become the first Limited Duty Officer of the Weather Service to attain the rank of Commander.

**Guadalcanal Gets a Prize** - On 4 June 1944 USS Guadalcanal, CVE-60, Captain Dan Gallery and a Hunter-Killer group of and five destroyer escorts attacked and forced the Nazi submarine U-549 to the surface where it was boarded, captured and towed to port as a "prize of war".

**D-Day, the 6th of June** - Allied forces carry out the massive 1944 invasion of Europe at the Normandy beachheads. Aerm 1/c Floyd West is a crew member of USS Arkansas, BB-33, which is part of the bombardment group.

**The Thousand Mile War** - Weather was the dominating force in the Aleutian campaign of WW2. This placed the Aerms in vulnerable positions at the forefront of all operations. They experienced combat on land, in the air, at sea and under the sea. Many Aerms "flew the weather" much the same as the more recent day "hurricane hunters". A handful in PatWing 4 were the first men in the Navy to receive pre war training as aerial gunners. As in other theaters of the Pacific, Aleutian Aerms took part in battles. They fought in a savage climate over 1000 miles of scattered islands with steaming volcanos, snow capped peaks, innumerable fiords and tortuously rugged terrain. The names were Dutch Harbor, the Komandorskis and Attu. Early days of this campaign marked the only capture of US soil within the continental limits. Japanese troops had landed on the doorstep of the Pacific Northwest.

Navy weathermen flew thru heavy "flak" on bombing missions, tangled with fighters, flying boats and "Bettys", exchanged fire with land and sea targets, survived crash landings, were bombed, strafed on land and at sea, depth charged and torpedoed.