

CHAPTER 8:

WILTON JAMES BESEMER

1928 TO WHENEVER



CONFIRMATION [JIM 2ND ON RIGHT]

Section A -The U.S.Navy Days

Section B - Elizabeth Marie Stewart Besemer

Section C- 42 Year Engineering Career

Section D - Lorraine Judith Fredenburg Besemer

CHAPTER 8

WILTON JAMES BESEMER

PREFACE

Jim's early life was covered in chapter 6 and he grew up with the normal interests and problems of any boy. He was baptized as a baby and confirmed at the age of 14 in Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church, which later became Zion United Church of Christ. He was deeply involved in the boy scouts and air scouts attaining the level of Eagle Scout with numerous palms and a sash full of merit badges. Jim became waterfront director at the Camp Brian Boy Scout Camp the summer of 1945 where he taught swimming, life saving, rowing, and canoeing. He graduated from Washington Clay high school in 1946 in a class of 51 students. One of his fellow graduates was his senior prom date Elizabeth Marie Stewart who would eventually become his loving wife and the mother of all three of his children. The high school located on Darden Road has since been leveled and replaced with a baseball diamond while a much larger and more modern structure was constructed a short distance south of the original structure.

Following high school graduation he and four of his classmates entered the U.S.Navy where he spent the majority of his two year enlistment in aviation training schools before assuming the rank of aviation radioman petty officer third class assigned to the aircraft carrier Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was the sister ship of the Midway and the Coral Sea, our largest straight deck carriers at the time. Since his ship was in dry dock undergoing repairs, Jim was stationed with the carrier's aircraft dive bomber squadron, VA-3B, on the Norfolk, Virginia Naval Air Base.

Upon his discharge on April 1948 he returned to reside in his parent's home for the summer and proceeded to increase in weight from a trim 169 to 196 pounds four months later when he entered Tri-State College in September solely due to his mothers delicious German cooking. His love for Betty grew and they were married August 5, 1950. He graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering at the end of August 1951. Jim immediately started to work at the Bendix Aviation Company in South Bend, Indiana initiating a 42 year engineering career working with and helping design hydraulic fuel controls for numerous jet engines. The most famous were the PWA engines powering the SR-71 Blackbird. It was a mach 3 aircraft capable of flying normally at an altitude of 80,000 feet. He worked for the same company under three different owners, Bendix, United Technologies, and Honeywell; using his first paycheck to bring his wife and first son, James Jonathan Besemer, home from the hospital. Betty had been and was the bookkeeper in the family. How she was able to make the \$225 per month starting salary take care of our family was a miracle.

The following four sections cover Wilton James Besemers' U.S.Navy career, his marriage to Elizabeth Marie Stewart, his career as an engineer, and his second marriage to Lorraine Judith Fredenburg

CHAPTER 8

SECTION A

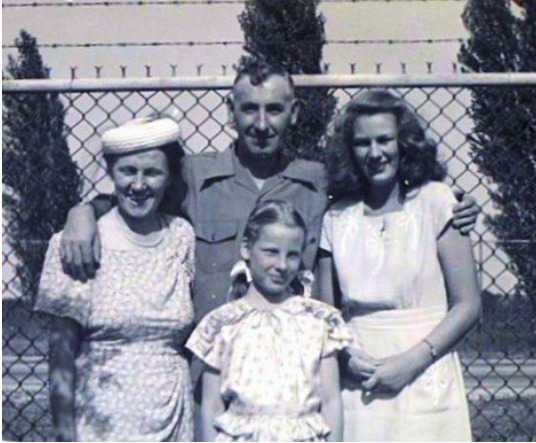
THE U.S.NAVY YEARS
1946 to 1948



Jim Besemer on the Flight Line at
NAS Corpus Christi, Texas

THE UNITED STATES NAVY YEARS

While still in high school in April of 1946, Jim Besemer and 3 of his high school friends [fellow members of the Rascals Club] signed up to serve a 2 year hitch in the U.S.Navy. Even though the World War II combat was over, the possibility of being drafted into the Army still existed. Jim wanted to be a pilot but pilot training was closed off so he signed up for the regular Navy. Soon after arriving at the Great Lakes Boot Camp we all were given a GCT type test that I apparently did quite well on and was asked to take an electronic test which I failed miserably not knowing an ohm from a mho. I was asked if I would like to go to the Air Crewman School to which I of course emphatically said yes for there was a very good chance that I would get to fly. Boot camp was 6 weeks long with passable food and on the Sunday afternoon of the fourth weekend; I got a visit from my parents, sister, and Betty, my high school girl friend and future wife.



Mom, Dad, Rosemarie, & Betty



Dad, Rosemarie, Betty, & Jim

At Great Lakes Boot Camp

I was very lonesome when they left but was informed I'd been selected to be battalion master at arms [MAA] which required only that I march the duty group from our barracks to the chow hall for early meals. I had a private room in a different building, but was still required to attend classes with my battalion, and make up the duty Lieutenants bed in which he never slept. On graduation day, as a Seaman 1st Class, I asked an apprentice seaman to carry my sea bag over to the central disbursement area for processing into O.G.U. [out going unit] My buddies saw this and carried my sea bag back to my quarters laughing and telling me to carry it myself. Thus ended my short lived authority.

On completion of our boot camp training we were given 12 days leave and we went home via North & South Shore Railways where I spent as much time with my girl friend Betty as I could.



Betty in the meadow @ Uncle Christ's



Our family at Christ & Selma's Farm

After what seemed like just a few days we were back in OGU and 3 days later we were on a troop train on our way to 11 weeks of Aircraft Fundamentals School at NATTC, Jacksonville, Florida. My worst recollection of this training period was standing inspection in the hot sun for over an hour till some commander found time to inspect us. We had guys falling over in their tracks from standing at parade rest in the sun and heat. It was really stupid. We watched a demonstration of how to swim out and mount landing gear on the side of PBY's without retractable gear so they could taxi up the ramp onto shore. PBY-5A's had retractable landing gear.



PBY-5A

We also learned that those small black things in the spaghetti were really little bugs but they were cooked and not poisonous. I stood midnight watch one night over about 10 different functional airplanes on static display and crawled into the cockpit of a F7F Grumman twin engine Tigercat fighter and was surprised to see that all the instruments were glowing luminously so that you could see everything in the cockpit. I would have loved to fly in it. This aircraft was developed too late to see any World War II action



GRUMMAN F7F FIGHTER

When we got liberty I headed out to Jax beach and swam in a rented bathing suit. I got jock itch and had to be painted with gensen violet in sick bay for a week to get rid of it. I also remember at the beach they had a 4 passenger whirly ride, with bullet shaped ends that rotated as it went around vertically on the end of an arm. I watched as someone shouted stop this damn thing. This sailor got out and carried the lady he was with out onto the ground and was looking for help. To this day I don't know why I came forward, grabbed her legs and held them higher than her head, and after a few moments she came to. I left her with the sailor and walked away.

While I was out at the beach, unbeknownst to me, they had a Navy Blue Angels air show over JAXX airport. They were flying the then brand new powerful Grumman F8F Bearcats. Sadly, one plane crashed and the pilot was killed when his wing panel folded in flight during maneuvers.



GRUMMAN F8F BEARCAT

In one of the courses we had to make our own signal devices but our instructor proved to be stupid and was very dangerous. If he liked you he deliberately failed you and kept you over till the next class or longer. As an instructor he was pretty bad. He told all of us the answers to tests and then randomly held back certain individuals because he had to fail a couple to make it look like he was really teaching. You had no recourse and luckily he didn't pick me. After we completed 11 weeks of the aviation basic fundamentals course we were then transferred to Yellow Water, for several weeks of gunnery school, learning to shoot various types of handguns and rifles. You learned to squeeze off no more than 3 shots with the 45 caliber Tommy gun otherwise you would be shooting straight up. You aimed low and came up through your target. I loved to shoot the marine carbine. Some of the guys had to stand watch armed with a loaded 45 automatic pistol at the gunnery range which was way out in the boonies. I lucked out and didn't get that assignment but one guy killed a white locker he thought was going to attack him. They also arrested one of our disgruntled cooks for peeing in the soup but they didn't tell us which night he did it. Luckily, I didn't care much for navy soup because it was usually over seasoned [salt peter?] to the point that I totally disliked it.

On graduation, if your grades were good, you were given a choice of assignments becoming either: a radioman, [earning an ARM-3 rating if you successfully completed the program,] a gunner's mate, a machinist mate, or an aerial photographer. Only the radioman school gave you a rating on graduation with a high chance of getting to fly as a crewman. So of course, I picked radio school even though I still didn't know an ohm from a mho. I was put in charge of 9 guys [I really just

simply carried everybody's paperwork and our orders.] most likely because my last name began with B and there were no A's.

We got on the train sleeper car equipped with bunks and headed out for Corpus Christi, Texas and the Ward Island Training Center to become radiomen. We had an 8 hour lay over in New Orleans and when we returned that evening from downtown we were put back on a regular Pullman car with freedom to move around on the train. [Club car, dining car, etc] We got to the Arkansas-Texas border and they left our car isolated on a siding for several hours until they finally connected us to another train that took us on to Houston. The next morning we then transferred to a local train that took over 12 hours to go the last 125 miles to Corpus Christi with stops at farms to pick up milk along the way. No regular food service but we could buy sandwiches if we wanted. We finally arrived at midnight and were met by an MAA with an open air bus that took us to NATTC Ward Island, our electronic training center, where we finally got to bed about 2 am.



THE MOTLEY TEN

I can't remember all their names but Ron is seated beside me with Paul Cressey in front of him and Klosterman has a guy's arms around his neck. In the middle of our training they opened up pilot training and the fellow beside Klosterman and the guy behind him signed up for flight school. Incidentally, in all U.S.Navy training schools you had to quite often stand fire watches of 4 hour duration [8 pm to 12, 12 to 4, and 4 to 7] guarding our own barracks or the training center inner compound buildings and aircraft.



CONSOLIDATED PBY4-2 PRIVATEER

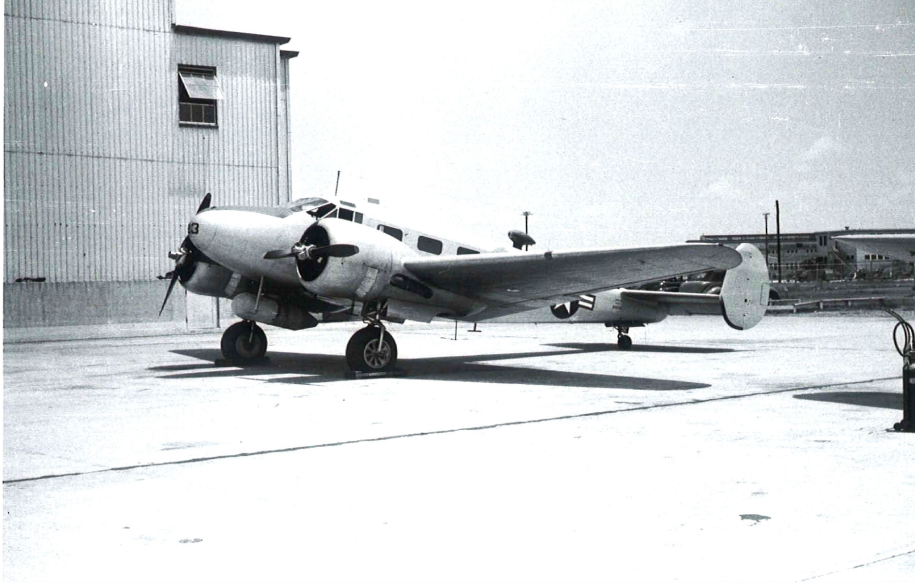
On rainy nights since there was no shelter we, I think there were at least 5 of us on fire watch inside the 8 foot high fenced in compound, would climb into the bomb bay and cockpit of the PBY4 Privateer, a Navy B-24 bomber type except with a single vertical tail instead of the twin tail, where it at least was dry. If caught, we would be in deep trouble but since the MAA didn't want to get wet either, he stayed in the entrance guard shack. Since in the entire cockpit instruments glow in the dark there was always enough light to see where you were going. When we were real gutsy we could turn on some of the interior lighting and play cards because all the planes in the compound were in flight worthy condition but on static display. They had a nice outdoor theatre and if the movie was good we would sit and watch it with ponchos on if it rained.

When we drew main entrance guard duty we were armed with empty 45 caliber pistols since only the marines on duty with us were armed. I guess if something came up we were supposed to throw our guns at the intruders. While at the Ward Island training center I built several model airplanes including a large 7 foot wingspan Condor glider. You towed it up like a kite or normal sailplane with kite string and when it got overhead the string would release and it would glide around. I took pictures of it but it was up so high that you can hardly see it. I don't know what I would have done if it didn't circle right overhead and flew off the island. Unfortunately, after a few flights it eventually came down too steeply and crashed. In the middle of our training we were given our choice of 6 days leave at Christmas time or 7 days over New Years and I chose the latter.



Minimum radioman requirements were that you had to be able to take code at the rate of 14 words per minute. Some of our guys were taking it on a typewriter at 30 words per minute after just a few weeks. I was almost set back a week and went till the last class on the last day before I passed 14 words per minute. The secret to taking code is to listen to the total sound and not count the dots and dashes and I just couldn't get with it. We also had to learn semaphore, blinker, and wig wag in order to pass the course. During the last weeks of our course we then were given radar flight

training in a twin Beech SNB-1 aircraft where 5 of us sat in a row in the plane, each with a radar scope in front of us and took turns directing the pilot in making simulated perpendicular bombing runs on bridges in the area.



BEEHCRAFT SNB-1

The navy was saved from catastrophe when, on graduation with my ARM3 rating, I was assigned to the carrier F.D.R. [Franklin D. Roosevelt] that was in dry dock in Norfolk, VA for retrofit. Ron Favorit, a radioman classmate of mine from Fargo, North Dakota, and I were given 12 days travel time in route to arrive on station and I invited him to come home with me.



BETTY AND JIM



BETTY AND RON

We spent most of the time with Betty and her sister Norma. I never did see my ship and ended up stationed at the Norfolk Naval Airbase where the F.D.R. aircraft squadrons were sequestered. The sister ships to the FDR were the Coral Sea and the Midway and these 3 were the largest straight deck ships at the time. Our squadron, VA-3B, had just replaced the Curtis SBD-2C, with the new single seat dive bomber aircraft, the Douglas AD-1



CURTIS SBD-2C



DOUGLAS AD-1

I had to put my flying time in PBV-5A's to get my flight pay. At first I would ride in the blister without a seat belt and sit on a spring loaded seat that folded down off the wall. One day the pilot unexpectedly decided to do some stalls resulting in me rising from the seat and when it folded up I came crashing to the deck. From then on I used the seat belt whenever they did stalls.

We didn't have a full complement of radiomen so some of us became plane captains [in charge of a particular aircraft] or, like me, were assigned as technicians to take care of any radio/radar

squawks the pilots reported. My good friend Ron Favorite was assigned to the other F.D.R. bomber squadron VA-4B. {There were two bomber squadrons and two fighter squadrons on our carrier] Incidentally, Ron was my best man when I married Betty on August 5th of 1950.

We had one fellow in our training class that had to carry a bucket with him every time he flew. He ended up in a twin engine Lockheed P2V patrol squadron with long flights over water.



LOCKHEED P2V

To our knowledge he still carried a bucket when flying. [He is center front in the motley ten] Life at the Norfolk Naval Airbase was not nearly as hectic and all the class room work was finally over. Locker inspections were reduced to barrack inspections and no squadron type inspections at all. The mess hall food was good and I developed a liking for a breakfast of s--t on a shingle. [Tomato and meat sauce on toast] The Norfolk Air Base also had a very nice indoor movie theatre with different recent movies 2 or 3 times per week and a NCO Club that had great hamburgers. I had several leaves where I came home and in March I went to visit the Kufers, my Aunt Julia's family, in Peekskill, N.Y. They had a birthday party for me at Julia's in laws: the Constants, who owned a restaurant in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Julia also took me to see the Rockets in New York City.

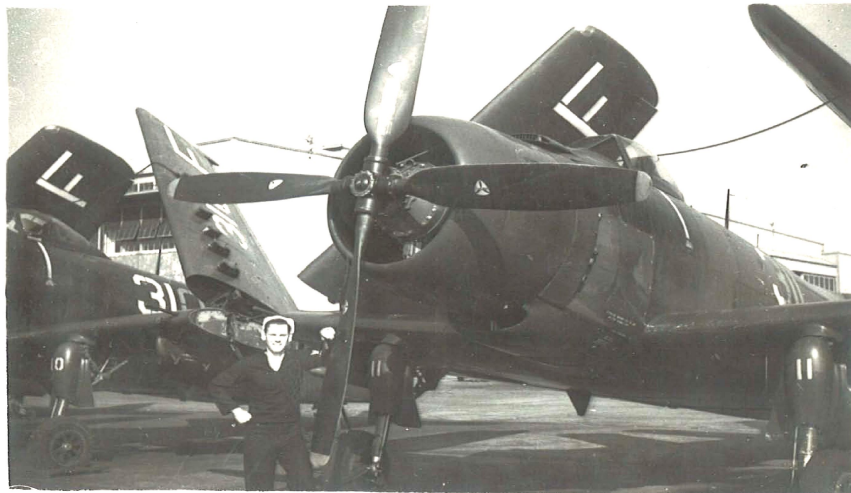


Mr. & Mrs. Constant, Rich, Me, James, Julia, & Doris Ann

On another occasion several of us took a trip to Washington DC. I got so I could sleep on a bus or train anytime. During the winter of 1947/1948 we got a great deal of unexpected snow in our Norfolk, Va. area. It looked like they were not really prepared for it since they didn't have snow plows so they were forced to use road graders to do the job. We had to do a little bit of shoveling ourselves. Our squadron didn't fly much after one of our pilots tried to start his cold engine and when it backfired flames he leaped out of the cockpit like he was on fire.

The train I took to come home [Norfolk and Western] that left Norfolk in the late evening was really nice for it had four reserved reclining seat coaches with a club car and diner. Unfortunately, I had to change trains the next morning to the New York Central in Cincinnati with just regular coach cars to get to Chicago and then the South Shore to get home in late afternoon.

With fleet duty I still had to stand watch on our planes but not nearly as often as when on a training base so I could go on liberty almost every night if I wanted. I didn't take liberty that often since everything I needed was on the base. One day our squadron radio technician, [AETM-2] and I drove to the aircraft junk yard with the bomb truck, [I had a Navy driver's license] and we found a junked plane with a complete set of radios in it and also a one man life raft. He kept the radios and I kept the life raft. I mailed it home. After I was discharged I removed the air cylinder and then vulcanized an inner tube stem on it. Betty and I took it to the beach a lot. It ideally held two people very snugly. Sadly, one day I loaned it to a very close friend and it was never returned. He said it was damaged beyond repair and refused to offer any further explanation which really irritated me.



JIM & DOUGLAS AD-1 SKY RAIDER #311

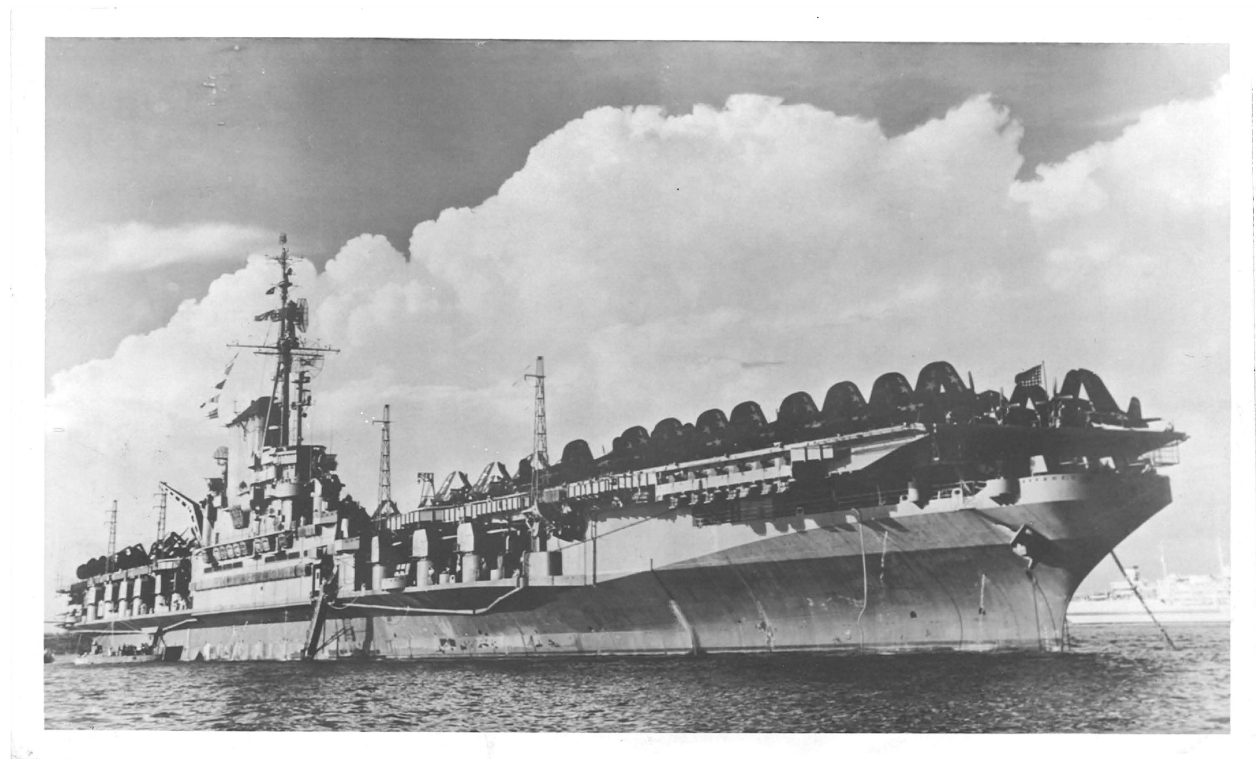
In the early spring of 1948, our squadron was sent to Pensacola, Florida for a two week training exercise. I became a temporary plane captain for aircraft #311. This large aircraft was utilized as a dive-bomber as well as a torpedo bomber and was capable of carrying a bomb load greater than that of a Douglas B-17. Regrettably this particular aircraft was later lost on a practice dive bombing mission some time after we got back to our base at the NAS in Norfolk. The pilot lost it in a dive when the aircraft went into flat stall and as a last ditch effort he was observed to nose it over to try to gain control but was too low to pull out and crashed right into a swamp.

For the joint Army/Navy exercise in Pensacola, Florida and we flew down with all of our equipment on a Curtiss twin engine Commando cargo plane. This aircraft was a little underpowered and it was a very rough 4 1/2 hour flight with the result that a lot of our guys were not feeling well. When we attempted to land at the Pensacola NAS we were forced to take a wave off on final and go around again with over half the guys having to vomit into their caps. That was one of the roughest and worst flights I had ever been on. Luckily I didn't have to use my cap but it was close.



CURTIS COMMANDO R5C

Our carrier was built in the New York Navy yard as one of the three Midway class carriers. It was originally called the Coral Sea CVB-42 and was launched on 29 April 1945. It was renamed the Franklin D Roosevelt on 8 May 1945 following the death of our president.



THE FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT CV-42 IN 1946

It was reclassified as CVA-42 on 1 October 1952. The three Midway class aircraft carriers were named the Midway, the Coral Sea, and the aforementioned Franklin D Roosevelt. The three varied no more than nine feet in their total length. The FDR received several configuration updates over its service life including the incorporation of the canted deck. The first jet aircraft that were tested for carrier adaptability on its deck, the McDonald Banshee and the new Lockheed P-80, made successful demonstration test takeoffs and landings from this ship. It was decommissioned on 30 September 1977 after 35 years of service and sold for scrap on 1 April of 1978. My greatest regret was that I never set foot on her deck and never even saw my ship. The picture above was given to me while on the air base at Norfolk and to this day I can't recall the person from whom it was received. The Midway became a museum. The following picture shows the FDR'S configuration after the updated canted deck retrofit was completed. If you look closely you will also note the change in the aircraft to jets although I'm sure that they still carried some AD's which by then were modified to carry a 3 man crew.

Photo # NH 97636 USS Franklin D. Roosevelt at sea, circa 1970-1973



UPDATED USS FDR

The Navy discharged me in the early summer of 1948. I had never been on a United States Navy ship. I really had no regrets on having been in the Navy and even signed up for the inactive reserves to keep my ARM-3 rating, which was foolish for I had no intention of returning to duty.

What proved to be even more foolish was the dropping of my inexpensive \$10,000 G.I. life insurance policy. I had concluded that a Navy career was not the life for me since I wanted to get into college thinking that I could make use of my new radio background experience in the electronics field as an Electrical Engineer. The failure of that thought is another story for after a week or two in an electronics class, I transferred to Mechanical Engineering obtaining a BSME in that field. The U.S. government paid for my entire college education thanks to the G.I. Bill with the total benefit based on the time I was in service.

I will always be grateful for my Navy experience as I would not have been able to afford go to college without their financial help. When I left for college my father, who was a good man and an excellent tool and die maker, gave me \$20 and said I should reconsider and learn some trade so that I would have a good income. He just didn't realize the value of a good college education until I was in industry and we discussed my salary level.

The sympathy switched to Rick as my sister Rose initially supported both of them on her nurse's salary and the "Poor Rosie" syndrome began. This lament continued well past Rick's graduation and subsequent employment at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts which coincided in time with my work assignment to East Hartford, Connecticut as the engineering representative for the Bendix Corporation at the Pratt & Whitney jet engine plant. We socialized and visited each other since we were just a couple hours drive apart. Rick, by this time, had become a full professor and my father was known to remark to Rick "They pay that much just to hear you talk?" We both then would laugh and remind the folks about the "Poor Rosie" bit in a sing song manner till they begged us to quit.

As you view the pictures in this epistle note the difference in barracks construction in the southern climates particularly the no basement stilt base as compared to the Norfolk more permanent solid brick construction. You will also note that just a few buildings for officers were double story while most of the Ward Island barracks were predominately wooden single story as compared to those at Yellow Water and Jacksonville that are multiple story wooden buildings.

ADDITIONAL PICTURES & COMMENTS



GREAT LAKES NAVAL TRAINING CENTER



JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA NAS & NATTC



OUR BARRACKS AT JAX

YELLOW WATER GUNNERY SCHOOL



ENTRANCE TO YELLOW WATER



DEPARTING Y.W.

WARD ISLAND ELECTRONICS SCHOOL CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS
[FALL OF 1946]



AIR VIEW WARD ISLAND



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



MAIN STREET SOUTH



MAIN STREET NORTH & MESS HALL

NATTC WARD ISLAND

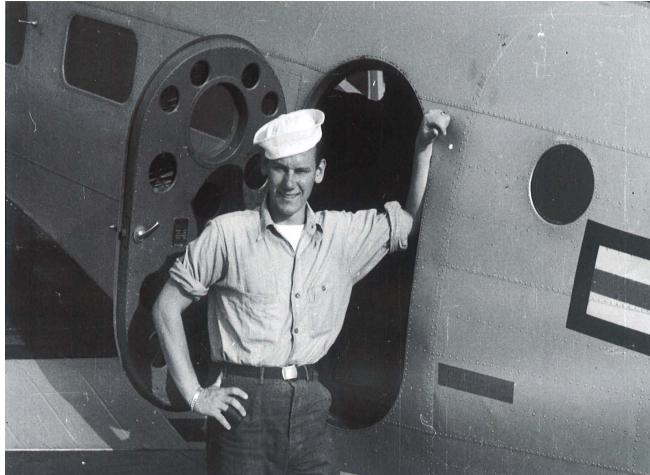


NATTC WARD ISLAND CHAPEL AND OUTDOOR THEATRE

BRIEF HISTORY OF WARD ISLAND

Ward Island was originally a hush hush secret Navy radar training center just off shore from Corpus Christi, Texas. It was about midway between the city and the Navy Air Station [NAS Corpus Christi]. During World War II this base provided highly classified advanced airborne electronics maintenance training for many thousands of Navy, Marine, Coast Guard, and Royal Air Force personnel. The Navy acquired Ward Island in February 1942, facility construction started in May, and the school was commissioned on July 1 becoming a Secondary School of the Electronics Training Program. An Administration Building, two instructional buildings, five barracks, two mess halls were ready, but only a part of the 240 acre site had been cleared and most of the streets were unpaved. In September the school was officially designated the Naval Air Technical Training Center [NATTC] Ward Island. By mid-1943, most of the island had been cleared and grass planted, the streets and sidewalks were paved, and 77 buildings were in use. Beginning in mid 1944, a new class started every week, and the number of students peaked at about 3,100. Eventually there were 87 buildings, including a dispensary with 34 beds, a 4000 volume library, a 350 seat chapel, an even larger auditorium [destroyed by fire in early 1946] and a well stocked ships store. A gymnasium and a reception center for visitors. There were 17 barracks, several Bachelor Officer Quarters, and 6 mess halls. Outside there were a number of athletic fields and courts, two swimming pools, [every student had to pass a swimming test] and a cross country track that circled most of the island. The secure compound had 16 instructional buildings, a number of static aircraft, [Where we found shelter from the rain] and was closed to students at night. For training in flight, there was a hanger and a small fleet of airplanes at the nearby Naval Air Station where we learned radar navigation by directing the pilot perpendicular over the center of a target.

NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS



WAITING FOR RADAR NAVIGATION FLIGHT TRAINING



FLIGHT OPERATIONS AT NAS [MY 4 RADAR FLIGHT MATES]

NATTC Ward Island continued for some time after the end of WWII. In mid-1946, a Primary School was added which I believe was the radio course that we attended. The entire operation at Ward Island closed down in the early fall of 1947 several months after we had graduated as ARM3'S. [Aviation Radioman Third Class] With closure the instructional program was transferred to NATTC Memphis AT Millington, Tennessee and in 1957 it was relocated to Pensacola, Florida. In November 1947, Ward Island became the site of the University of Corpus Christi, which later eventually developed into Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

ACTIVE AIRCRAFT AT NAS CORPUS CHRISTI



ACTIVE PBY-4 PATROL BOMBERS THAT WERE NOT PART OF NATTC WARD ISLAND TRAINING FLEET



WASH DAY AT WARD ISLAND



BARRACKS AT WARD ISLAND



MY LOCKER AT WARD ISLAND
[Similar on all naval bases]

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA NAVAL AIR STATION



NAS ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



OUR BARRACKS

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA NAVAL AIR STATION



NAS PENSACOLA, FL. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



JIM ON FLIGHT LINE AT NAS PENSACOLA

KEIN MEHR

Note: Jim died May 4, 2017