

NAVAL FIGHTERS NUMBER ONE HUNDRED

"BLUE GOOSE"

COMMAND AIRCRAFT

OF THE USN, USMC, AND USCG 1911 TO 1961



BY WILLIAM A. RILEY AND THOMAS E. DOLL

as co-pilot and ENS A.J. Reynolds as flight engineer. Operation Highjump completed its mission on 4 March 1947. During this expedition, the Western Group (TG-68.2) made 36 flights totaling 248.3 hours, while the Eastern Group (TG-68.3) logged 22 flights totaling 145 hours. Five of the Eastern Group's flights were for search-and-rescue of a missing Pine Island PBM-5, "George One" (BuNo 59098). On 30 December 1946, this Mariner was enveloped in a fierce snow storm and heavy fog while on a routine observation flight. They were to chart and photograph Cape Dart, which is on the north coast of Siple Island in West Antarctica. LTJG Ralph P. LeBlanc, one of the Navy's best PPCs, flew "George One" under a low ceiling and highly limited visibility. He decided that conditions were bad enough to abort the mission and return to the ship. Just as LeBlanc prepared to make a 180° turn and return to his ship, the PBM hit something. He applied full power while pulling up and turning. Six crew members survived the crash, but three did not. Two of the latter — LTJG Maxwell A. Lopez, navigator, and Wendall K. Henderson, ARM1C — were instantly killed. The third, Frederick W. Williams, AMM1C, died of his injuries approximately two-and-one half hours after the accident.

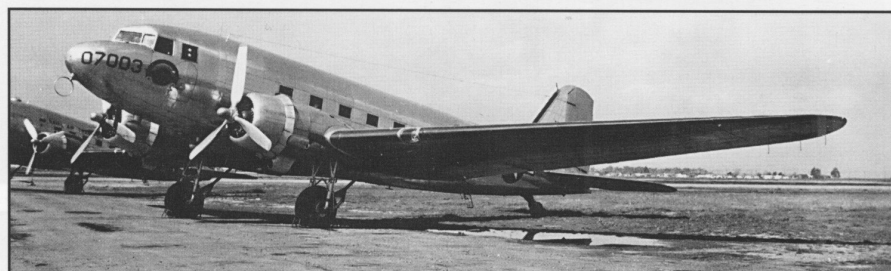
The survivors were: LeBlanc; LTJG William M. Kearns, co-pilot; Owen McCarty, CPH; William G.H. Warr, AMM2C; James H. Robbins, AR2C; and, CAPT H.H. Caldwell, CO AV-7, who was an observer on this mission. Throughout the 13 days following the crash, the surviving crew of "George One" pulled together to help each other survive their precarious position on the Antarctic snow and ice. The most seriously injured survivor was LeBlanc, who had been burned almost beyond recognition. His crew's care and his outstanding outlook enabled LeBlanc to survive; however, both his legs were amputated due to his injuries. Caldwell, Robbins, and Parr were the least injured of the crew. They did all they could to ease the problems of the other three survivors, who handled their injuries as best they could. The

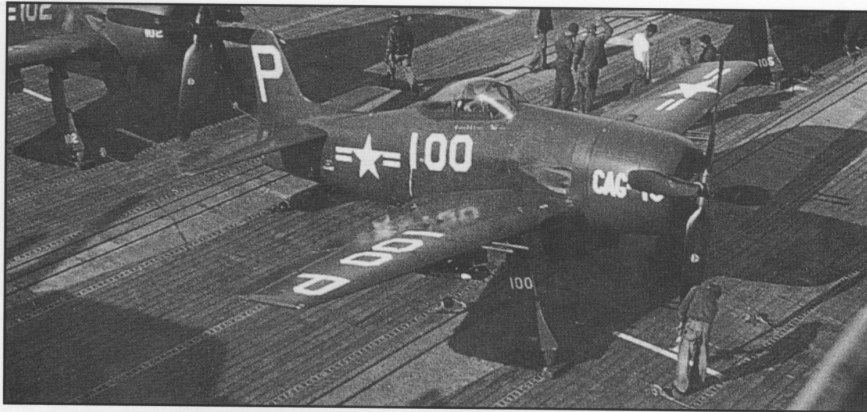


general consensus of the surviving crewmen was that Robbins performed "above and beyond" the call-of-duty for their well being during the 13-day ordeal.

The six remaining crewmen never gave up hope. They managed to stash a rather large supply of emergency food rations before the flight. They stretched these rations out over the time of their ordeal, which carried them through until they were rescued

At top, Operation Highjump Consolidated OY-1 takes off from a snow runway in Antarctica in January 1947. (USN) Above, USCG Lockheed R5O-4, BuNo 12447, Command Plane in 1947 after the red bar was added to the national insignia per the 14 January 1947 directive. Note rank placard frame attached to the engine cowl. (USCG via Mark Aldrich) Below, NATS R4D-4, BuNo 07003, on 14 February 1947 with 2-star RADM's placard aft of the pilot's window. (Henry Clark) Bottom, Air Group Nineteen's F8F-1 Bearcat, BuNo 95320, was assigned to CDR Albert P. "Scooter" Coffin in 1947. Note the white stripe has a red stripe at its center. (William T. Larkins)





Above, a variation of the CAG theme is seen on this F8F-2 assigned to CDR John J. Lynch aboard the USS Tarawa (CV-40) on 23 October 1947. It used the aircraft number 100 and had a large CAG-13 painted on the engine cowl. (USN) Below, NATS R5D-1, BuNo 87754, in flight over San Francisco, CA, on 12 September 1947. On 1 June 1948, the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) replaced the Air Forces' Air Transport Command (ATC) and the Navy's Naval Air Transport Service (NATS). (USN) Bottom, VR-8 Douglas R5D-2, BuNo 90394, unloading cargo at Tempelhof during the Berlin Airlift in November 1948. Note lack of tail code and removal of Naval Air Transport Service lettering above the cabin windows. (USN)



1948 and 1949

on 12 January 1947 — 13-days after the crash. A PBM flown by LCDR John Howell located the crash site, returned to AV-12, and set out with PHM Richard Conger by sled to reach the survivors. The crew was picked up and taken to CV-47 for urgent medical treatment.

BERLIN AIRLIFT

24 JUNE 1948 to 11 MAY 1949

When Berlin was cut off from the rest of West Germany by Russian controlled East Germany, the Berlin Airlift was initiated on 24 June 1948. Navy squadrons VR-6 and VR-8 began supporting this mission in October. VR-8's first sortie was on the 27th and VR-6's was on the 30th. VR-8 was stationed in Hawaii and VR-6 was on Guam when ordered to Germany. Both squadrons operated from Rhein Main near Frankfurt during the airlift. On the way to Germany, VR-8 turned over four of their plush "Blue Goose" R5Ds to the Marine Corps for four low-time cargo R5Ds. The final VR-8 R5D arrived at Rhein Main on 15 November and VR-6's final R5D arrived on 22 November. VR-8 was assigned to the 61st Troop Carrier Group and VR-6 to the 1422nd Air Transport Group, soon to become the 513th Troop Carrier Group.

In February 1949, VR-8 and VR-6 led all Air Force and Navy units in average efficiency per aircraft with 120% (VR-8) and 117% (VR-6). On 16 December 1948, VR-8 flew 51 sorties in 24 hours. A virtually unknown side item took place on 22 December when WAVE LT Margaret Carver reported to VR-8 to function as the squadron's personnel officer. She was, at the time, the only WAVE to serve East of the Azores. She was also the first WAVE to see duty in Germany at the time.

Even though the Airlift ended on 11 May 1949 when the Soviet block-aid was lifted, a reduced number of flights continued until 30 September to build up reserve supplies. 1,783,573 tons of cargo were deliv-