



Welcome to

# FLIGHTLINE

Newsletter of the American Aviation Historical Society

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As you'll see, this issue of *FlightLine* is somewhat less diverse than the one previous. But we figure more frequent communication is more important than the variety of content. The idea is to keep members up to date on what's going on at AAHS and hopefully convince readers who aren't members to come aboard.

Until the interactive online version can be rolled out, *FlightLine* will continue to appear in this abbreviated pdf format. For the moment, our intent is to publish around the first and fifteenth of each month. An email heads up may or may not be sent, so check the AAHS website <https://www.aahs-online.org/> regularly.

Some *FlightLine* numbers are going to be heftier than others. As always, what appears will depend to some degree on what finds its way into the editorial hangar, or what your editor comes across as he meanders down various historical paths. →

One of those frequently trod paths, really more like the LA freeway system than a path, is the National Archives website. *FlightLine* No. 204 (2nd Quarter 2022), included a short primer (p.9) on how to navigate the site's search engine. That was followed up in No. 206 (p.11) by using the 1942 Doolittle Raid to illustrate what NARA can offer to the aviation history researcher.

An article on PBY operations in the South Pacific in the *Summer 2024 Journal*, with a little editing, was lifted directly the Archives. In this issue of *FlightLine*, we present another NARA find; an exploration into the mass ditching of a squadron of Marine Corsairs during WWII. (See p.3) →

Is there a serious military aviation enthusiast who hasn't used the late Joe Baugher's online compendium of U.S. Air Force (and its antecedents) and Navy (including Marine Corps) aircraft serial numbers? I've probably gone to it at least a hundred times since I discovered it years ago.

I knew Joe had passed on a while back, but the website stayed right where it always was—until it wasn't. The other day I went to check on some serials that were relevant to an article that will appear in the Summer *AAHS Journal*. I click on my trusty bookmark—**This site can't be reached.**

What! How can this be ? ? ? Ah, but surely somebody saved this irreplaceable database. As it turns out, someone has. Joe's old site, slightly revised, is now at <https://www.crouze.com/baugher/>. The footer on the homepage is dated December 2023, but this was the first time I'd seen it.

There are slight differences from the original; some might say improvements. The individual responsible for this save is one Marco Dirkx, from the Netherlands, who is obviously quite the aviation enthusiast himself. Thanks, Marco! →

Our pal Norm Camou doesn't get his kicks on Route 66, although there's a stretch of what's left of it not too far away from us here in Prescott. Instead, he gets his aviation history kicks from YouTube. Norm recently passed along a very interesting link which, even if you're not a propliner geek, should be of interest.

It's actually a video triple-header. The first segment, entitled *Song of the Clouds*, is a short 1956 film produced by Shell Oil. It's a combination aviation advertisement/travelogue in high resolution color, but there are snippets of multiple airliner types, many in company liveries that disappeared long ago. It's worth a look just for that.

The other films are more historical in nature, but the video quality is not nearly as good. The second, beginning at about the 34:40 mark, has no opening scene title but is focused mainly on the Lockheed Constellation. The last, starting at 57:38, is also a Connie tribute, and seems to have duplicated some of the scenes in the preceding film.

Both present good discussions about the rise of commercial aviation during the 1930s and the rivalries among the airlines and airframers that influenced the development of the modern airliner. The video is infested throughout with those pesky YouTube ads that interrupt every few minutes, but those presumably make the useful parts possible. →

We'd like to close with *Keep those card & letters comin' . . . but we don't get any to begin with !*



Questions ?

Comments ?

Squawks ?

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Joe Martin  
AAHS *FlightLine* Editor

# More from the SoCal Airshow

March Air Reserve Base, April 12-13

(Clockwise, from top left) USAF Thunderbirds in close trail formation; F-35A (09-5006), 56th Fighter Wing, Luke AFB, Ariz.; Two-ship, F-5E of the Air Force Heritage Flight and the Luke F-35; E-3B AWACS (76-1607), 552nd Air Control Wing, Tinker AFB. Okla.; KC-135R (61-0290), 912th Air Refueling Sqn, March ARB, Calif.; F-35C, serial unknown, of Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 502, from MCAS Miramar. Judging from the position of the dorsal intake and the exhaust nozzle, the aircraft is transitioning in a vertical takeoff or landing.

Thanks to John Martin, AAHS #20410, for sharing. If you snap some pix at the next airshow you attend or at an aviation museum you visit, or even at your local airport, send us a few of your choice shots to post in *FlightLine*.



# Ditching a Squadron of Corsairs

## Researching a World War II Tragedy

In one of his late-night forays in the National Archives website, your editor came across a story, or rather the hint of a story, that he didn't recall seeing before, even though it was obviously an event of considerable magnitude.

It started with a three-page blurb in a Navy information publication from World War II which was itself buried deep within a massive pdf file of materials from the Library and Target Data Section, Intelligence Branch, Pacific Division, U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. (More about that rabbit hole another time!)

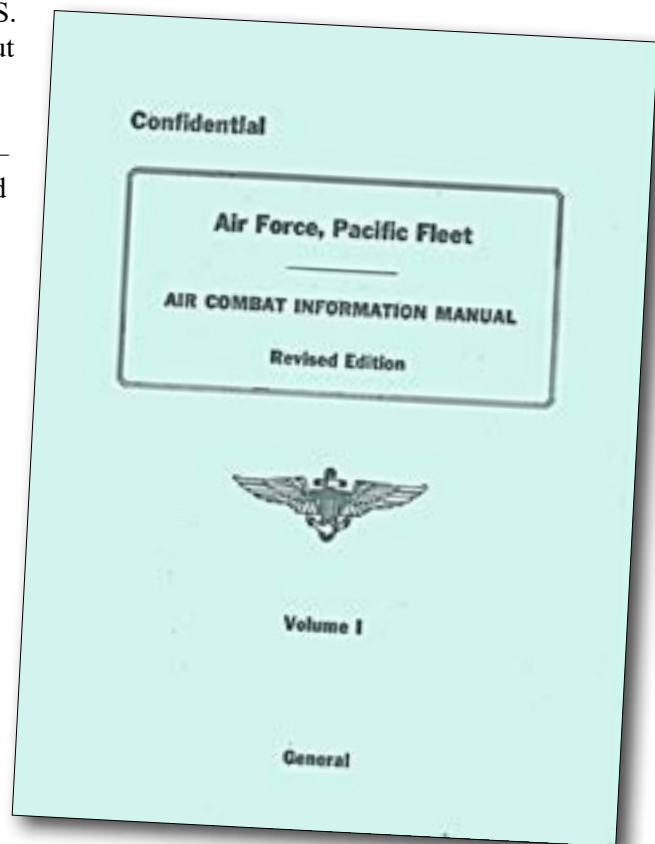
Turns out there was more to the story—way more, and it wasn't as straightforward as it might've been.

The date of the incident wasn't stated, but the handwritten note on the first page indicated that it happened in early 1944 or possibly late 1943. The unit involved was noted as VMF-222.

During that time the squadron was based on Bougainville or nearby islands, although in January '44 it was withdrawn to the New Hebrides for a rest.

But Bougainville and the Northern Solomons could hardly be considered the Central Pacific.

***So somethin' ain't right here . . . .***



A little AI assist (yes, it can be helpful) revealed the disconnect. The outfit in question was actually VMF-422, not VMF-222 as stated. Google quickly located all kinds of info about the incident, but we were on a roll and decided to get the story as it was recorded at the time it happened. So follow along as we unravel an aviation history tale by researching original documents, beginning with the brief report that started us in an errant direction.

The images on the next three pages were extracted from "Intelligence Library Documents, 1932-47: XIIIb. 50 - XIIIc. 4," frames 431-433, from NARA microfilm publication M1652, *Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific): Intelligence Library, 1932-1947*, Roll 63 (of 116).

Those images are individual microfilm frames digitized and reproduced in pdf format. End results range from very good to essentially unusable, depending on the quality of the original document and the care taken in microfilming. The pages shown here were extracted, cropped, straightened, generally cleaned up, then exported as jpg images.

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AIR OP-MEMO #23

29 FEB 44.

SURVIVAL INTELLIGENCE

WATER LANDING - EN PASSE

One of the most unique and valuable documents in the history of survival intelligence in this war is the story of a fighter squadron which, blown off its course by storms, was forced to make a group water landing in the Central Pacific area. Most of the pilots of VTF-222 succeeded in sticking together and were subsequently rescued. Their recommendations on the basis of their experiences, presented below, form a worthwhile addition to our backlog of knowledge of the means of survival.

Fourteen of the pilots made successful water landings in the open sea in their F4U-1 aircraft. Wind velocity was approximately 15 knots and waves about 20 feet high. Landings were made wheels up with flap settings varying from zero to 50 degrees. One pilot suffered a contusion of the left foot in the only injury resulting from any of the landings. The only pilot who did not get his life raft out had failed to fasten his shoulder harness and was momentarily stunned. Of the two pilots of the squadron who are known to have bailed out in preference to making a water landing, one was drowned and the other got into his boat and was recovered.

It is the unanimous opinion of all the pilots concerned that the F4U-1 is a safe plane in which to make a water landing. An F4U-1 will stay afloat approximately 30 to 40 seconds after landing which affords the pilot ample time to get himself and his boat out of the plane. If time is available, it is suggested that rehearsal of the actions to be taken upon landing is a wise procedure. A 50° flap setting is recommended for the landing.

In effecting the landing 13 planes of the squadron formed a traffic circle to the left and kept one plane landing at all times so as not to lose sight of the landing area. All planes but one landed into the wind and each plane landed slightly windward from the previous plane in order to facilitate the problem of getting the life rafts together once the landings had been effected.

The pilots believed that their successful efforts to stick together were in large measure responsible for their ultimate rescue. Lashing rafts and locking arms were recommended procedures for the all-important factor of sticking together. Specific recommendations of the pilots follow:

Suggested Landing Procedure

1. Jettison the hood of the plane.
2. Undo all radio and oxygen connections.
3. Before landing, cut the leg straps of the parachute.

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4. Pull the parachute straps off the shoulders.
5. Take off parachute or at least unbuckle chest straps. Hang on to the parachute, if possible.
6. Tighten shoulder straps and safety belt as much as possible.
7. Lock shoulder straps.
8. Fasten tow-line from the boat to the life-jacket, but don't depend on that to pull the boat out of the plane. This will merely keep the boat with you after you get into the water.
9. Pull the boat out of the plane by hand.
10. Conventional method of inflating the raft is satisfactory.
11. Conventional method of entering the boat also is satisfactory.

### Comments on the Raft

1. Rafts should have six loops for lashing purposes - one on each end, two on each side.
2. A cord should be run around the outside of the boat in the middle of the bulge. This would enable the pilot to secure the sail cloth in such a manner that water would not spill into the raft so easily.
3. The tane which holds the raft to the "Ice Test" should be looped and tacked with a weak stitch or safety pin. (See suggestion in Air Operations Memorandum number 22).
4. When paddling the raft, paddle backwards as in rowing.

### Comments on Raft Equipment

1. In packing a raft, all gear should be lashed to the boat or casing to eliminate the possibility of losing any part of it.
2. The sail should be about one foot longer and wider for greater protection against sun, water and cold.
3. Grommets should be added to the center of each edge of the sail.
4. Chocolate should be packed in smaller units, each water-proofed. When the present rather large size package is opened, it is difficult to keep the chocolate dry.
5. Flashlights did not work at all after once immersed in water.



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6. It is very important that more sea markers should be carried tied to the life jacket. One is definitely not sufficient.

7. There should be more smoke flares for day-time use.

8. A black balloon should be supplied with a small bottle of hydrogen with which to fill it and 150 feet of small line. This would enable a ship or plane to more easily spot life rafts on the horizon.



An F4U-1 Corsair of VMF-422 awaits catapult launch from USS *Kalinin Bay* (CVE-68)

Once the correct squadron was determined, it was back to the NARA website to look for VMF-422's war diaries, with the search narrowed to Record Group 38, *Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations*, which we happened to know is where such documents are archived.

The first item to show up was the squadron's "War History," from 1 January 1943 to 31 December 1944. The relevant pages were extracted and pasted into the pages that follow. These images of are considerably higher quality than the first ones. The edges have been cropped to remove extraneous "borders" in the original scans, but otherwise the images are as they were typed in 1944. They are typical of what might be found in hundreds of similar documents in the USN/USMC WWII War Diaries available on the National Archives website.

## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

This is the flight echelon narrative of Marine Fighting Squadron 422, commanded by Major John S. MacLaughlin, Jr., from the time of departure out of Pearl Harbor until its ultimate destination in the Marshall Islands.

Twenty-four (24) Corsairs were ferried to Ford Island from MCAS, Ewa, on 16 January and put aboard CVE USS KALININ BAY. It was planned to fly them from the CVE to Tarawa, Gilbert Islands on approaching within fifty miles of that base and from there to a newly won airstrip in the Marshalls. On 17 January twenty seven pilots and three enlisted men boarded the Kalinin Bay, sailing the following day. On the morning of 24 January the aircraft were catapulted as planned almost within sight of Tarawa and landed shortly after on Hawkins Field. The three spare pilots, plus three enlisted men, who were along to service the planes, came ashore by boat.

In the meantime, the ground echelon was proceeding with a task force destined to attack and seize enemy bases in the Marshalls.

On 25 January at 0945, twenty-three (23) of the Corsairs took off for Nanumea, the first of a two phase flight to Funafuti, Ellice Islands. One Corsair was left behind when it developed starter trouble. The planes took off in good weather with cumulus clouds at 1500 feet, 3/10 overcast,

## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

without a navigational escort.

Major MacLaughlin led a standard fighter formation with three flights wide spread. The ETA at Nanumea was 1225 and all check points were hit. An R4D heading in the opposite direction, was sighted by several pilots. At 1210 the squadron then at an altitude of 2,000 feet, encountered a severe weather front, the first of two.

The front rapidly developed into a violent tropical hurricane, reaching from sea level to over 13,000 feet. Due to the torrential downpour, only observations from side cockpit panels were possible. A water-level course was taken and maintained throughout this disturbance. On emerging from this front, it was discovered that Captain J. F. Rogers, Lts. E. C. Thompson, R. P. Moran, W. A. Wilson, and J. E. Hansen had lost formation and disappeared from sight. Radio contact was maintained with three of the above pilots--but they had been hopelessly separated.

About seven minutes from its ETA, the flight encountered another front, a possible continuation of the first. In an effort to avoid it, the pilots became confused as to their position. It was presumed that this second front was over Nanumea.

Some elements of the formation were compelled to fly



## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

full throttle to maintain contact with the flight leaders, as the latter maintained normal cruising speed. However, the density and violence of the storm prevented flying a standard formation, resulting in maneuvers at full throttle one instant and retarded throttle the next. Several pilots soon reported being low on fuel. Those who maintained good formation had sufficient gas to have possibly reached Funafuti.

At 1235 Lt. C. F. Lauesen reported engine trouble and shortly after made a water landing. The flight made one circle over him and observed that he was afloat by means of his "Mae West" with the life raft nowhere in sight. All but Lt. R. C. Lehnert<sup>1</sup> continued the flight. The latter with no regard for his own safety, circled the cast-away pilot until he ran out of gas. He then bailed out nearby and futilely searched, intending to share his life raft with Lt. Lauesen, but he was never seen again.

At 1245 Major MacLaughlin radioed to the remainder of the flight that he had made contact with the Funafuti beam and that they would proceed there. He also informed the pilots that they were between Nanumea and Funafuti. As the storm increased in violence the flight again reported

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1. Recommended for Letter of Commendation, VMF-422, CO,  
Ltr 0018-44 dated 14Dec44.

## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

navigational difficulty. Failing to contact the Commanding Officer by radio, Captain C. R. Jeans flew across his bow and secured the Major's attention. In the ensuing transmission it was decided that Captain Jeans would lead the flight back to Nui, which had been previously sighted. At this time the flight was on a heading of 180 degrees and indicating 180 knots.

Shortly after, as the flight circled in and out of rain squalls, Major MacLaughlin was observed to fly a course tangent to the rest of the flight. Lts. J. C. Flood and J. W. Lincoln, who had been flying wing on him, climbed to 16,000 feet in an effort to keep both the Major and the flight in view but he disappeared in the thick overcast and was not sighted again.

Led by Captain Jeans<sup>1</sup>, the flight made a 45 degree turn off its original heading of 180 degrees, indicating 180 knots at an altitude of 500 feet. The flight now numbered fifteen planes of the original twenty three. At 1500 Captain Jeans was contacted by Lt. R. P. Moran who had disappeared in the first front. Lt. Moran was in contact with Nanumea and was able to relay messages for Captain Jeans to that base, the latter being unable to make transmissions directly.

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1. Recommended for Navy Cross, VNF-422, CO Ltr 0012-44, dated 12Dec44.

## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

At 1505 Lt. Moran informed Captain Jeans that he was out of gas and was about to bail out over Nui. Captain Jeans advised him to make a water landing, but he elected to do the alternative. Apparently he made a safe landing off the reef but became entangled in his shroud lines. This caused him to drown in the heavy surf. He was buried by the natives on that island the next day.

Captain Jeans then climbed to 12,000 feet making square searches and sending MOs. Two pilots were instructed to climb to 17,000 and do the same but no bearing could be had.

At 1530 Lt. W. (A) Ayerig, one of the pilots still in formation, ran out of fuel. He set his plane down in the water and was seen to be riding in his life raft. The flight then formed a traffic circle about him and made water landings. Several pilots reported having enough fuel to remain airborne another hour, however, it was wisely decided to remain together.

Lts. Thurnau and Ayerig, the first to land, were about seven miles apart. Thirteen other pilots made water landing between the two. These officers were: Captains C. R. Jeans, and C. S. Hughes, Lts. R. K. Wilson, R. Whalen, J. C. Flood, J. W. Lincoln, K. E. Gunderson, S. F. Price, R. W. Watson, M. W. Syrkin, D. W. Walker, C. W. Smick, and W. T. Reardon. Lt. Thurnau was rescued by a DD on January 28 but



## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

Lt. Ayerigg, though known to be in the same area, was never sighted.

The thirteen who had made water landings between Lts. Tournau and Ayerigg were with one exception able to get their life rafts and survival equipment out of the planes. They inflated their rafts and joined up.

All the raft equipment was pooled and shared equally by those who were able to join up. The rafts were secured together by the cord hand holds but due to extremely heavy seas some of these were torn off. Contact was thus maintained by holding the rafts together by hand. One pilot, who had lost all of his clothing and equipment extricating himself from his plane, was taken into one of the other rafts. He suffered considerably from exposure but was covered by one of the sail cloths and cared for insofar as was possible by the other pilots.

A number of sharks were observed, some making passes at the sea anchor or scraping against the boats--which added nothing to the peace of mind of the occupants. Facetious names were given to the most persistent of these animals, one being readily identifiable by a notched dorsal fin. Their persistence in scraping against the boats grew to such an extent that one of them was finally shot, whereupon all dispersed.



## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

To the now familiar statement, "There are no atheists in foxholes", may it also be added that there are no atheists in rubber boats! Frequent "prayer meetings" and songfests helped to bolster morale.

At 1600 on 27 January, a PBX5A was sighted. Violent efforts made by the entire group to attract the attention of the search plane were successful. Risking the lives of himself and crew, the pilot made a landing in the heavy seas but his plane was damaged in taxiing to pick up the survivors. The rescue pilot radioed for aid and about two hours later the group was transferred to the DD USS HOBBI. Due to its damaged condition it was impossible to take off in the PBX. It was destroyed by naval gunfire the next morning.

The castaways were welcomed aboard the HOBBI by Lt. W. A. Wilson who had been previously picked up by that craft from the island of Nui tao. He left rather reluctantly because of his royal treatment by the natives on that tiny isle.

The USS Hobby and several sister ships thoroughly searched the nearby area. Lt. Ayerigg and Thurnau were known to be there, since flares had been seen on the horizon just prior to the rescue, but the search proved fruitless. Lt. Thurnau had been rescued by another DD but Lt. Ayerigg was never found.

## (B) FLIGHT ECHELON

All suffered from nausea, immersion and a general lessening of physical strength and although badly burned by the sun and suffering from lacerations and blistered hands, only the pilot who lost his clothing was later hospitalized and he only briefly.

On January 29 the fourteen castaways were placed ashore at Funafuti. There they were met by Lt. Lehnert who had been rescued on January 27 and Lt. Hansen, the only one to safely make port. Of a total of twenty-three (23) Corsairs and pilots leaving Tarawa, only one was able to navigate the course to Funafuti. Six pilots were lost and perished at sea, while sixteen were miraculously rescued. (For complete casualty list see appendix C).

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For Sources of the above narrative see Interviews Appendix B, Survival Notes.

Appendix B is the combined personal accounts of four of the surviving pilots. It's another seven pages, so we'll save that for next time.

Meanwhile, we put this spoiler at the end so (hopefully) readers wouldn't take a detour before they even got started. Wikipedia, of course, has pretty thorough coverage of the squadron's history from beginning to end. [Pacific Wrecks](#) even lists the BuNos of the aircraft involved, and there are many other online mentions.

There's also a full-length book about the incident: *The Marines' Lost Squadron: The Odyssey of VMF-422*, by Mark Carlson. In cooperation with the Military Aviation Museum, Mr. Carlson also recorded a well illustrated [video talk](#) about the episode.