

Paul John Bergdahl's Navy Story

In 1945, I was going to be drafted out of high school. I was going to be drafted in the Army, so I enlisted in the Navy. I went down to the Great Lakes Training Center in Illinois. I had always been interested in aviation and they came up with a program called "V-5" which focused in aviation and allowed you to attend college. I went down to Pensacola, Florida for basic training where I flew SNJ's. From there, I went to Rensselaer Polytechnic College in Troy, New York to study engineering. I became more interested in aviation and the Navy had the advanced training in Corpus Christi, Texas. So, I went there to train. In Corpus Christi, I was able to fly the Corsair, a regular fighter, the AD Sky Raider, a single engine attack bomber, and occasionally the TBM, a torpedo bomber.

After Texas, I was assigned to the Air Group 2 Squadron in Oceana, Virginia where they put our whole air group on aircraft carriers such as the USS Valley Forge, the USS Boxer, and the USS Philippine Sea. We would practice "catapult" take-offs on Douglas AD Sky Raider's. Then, we would practice landing back on the carrier.

The Korean War broke out in 1950. They took our air group and flew us across the United States down through Texas and up to San Francisco. In San Francisco, we were stationed on the USS Boxer and powered to Korea. In Korea, we were based off the coast. We flew off the carrier carrying out "Close Air Support" missions to drive the communists that were in the south, back up to the north. "Close Air Support" is when you fly 20 feet from the ground. We would shoot our 20 millimeter machine guns at communist ground troops to drive them out of South Korea and back up to North Korea. We were told the South Korean's could be identified by wearing white. These were dangerous missions as the North Korean would shoot back at us. One of my fellow squadron members got shot down. When he pulled his parachute, it got caught on the plane and he went down with it.

Our mission lasted a little more than a year. During my tenure, I was awarded air medals for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flights over Korea. I was presented one Air Medal in January 1951 while aboard the USS Valley Forge in the Japanese Sea off the coast of Korea. A third Air Medal was presented in November 1951 while in route from Korea to the United States while aboard the USS Philippine Sea.

When the mission was completed, I decided to leave the Navy. I applied with Trans World Airlines (TWA) and other airlines in 1952. I was accepted by TWA but decided to go to college first. I went back to Michigan and attended college at Michigan State University. I was going to study dentistry but I missed flying airplanes. So, in May 1953, I called the TWA recruit and ask him if I could go to work. He said that I could. That was beginning of my 40 year career with TWA though I stayed in the reserves with the Navy for more than 20 years as a Lt. Commander. Originally, I was based at the Glenview Air Station in Glenview, Illinois. In 1961, I was recalled to active duty so took a leave from TWA. I spent a year with my family in Seattle, Washington. In 1963, I transferred to Los Angeles with TWA. I continued in the Navy reserves based at the Los Alamitos Air Station in Los Alamitos, California.