

*Missions for America
Semper vigilans!
Semper volans!*



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CURRENT, MORE OR LESS, EVENTS

Unending Houthi Mischief

Since November, the Houthis have attacked over 90 ships off the coast of Yemen. This week, they disabled the tanker *Sounion* and set it ablaze. It is carrying 150,000 tons of crude oil and if it spills, it will rank as the fifth largest tanker spill in history and create a major environmental disaster in the Red Sea.



Sounion ablaze

Previously, they sank the *MV Rubymar*, *MV Tutor* and hijacked the toll-on, roll-off ship *Galaxy Leader*, holding the 25 man crew hostage for the last nine months. Three merchant mariners have also been killed by these attacks.

MV Tutor sinking.

Credit: X | warintel4u



The United States is maintaining two carrier strike groups in the region and ships for the navies of Great Britain, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the Seychelles are also present but their reactions have been desultory at best. The cost is tremendous. One estimate claims that the U.S. Navy has expended over one billion dollars of weapons to counter the Houthi missiles and drones.



But that is a minor cost. The disruption of maritime trade routes had caused supply chain problems and the cost of war insurance to the shipping industry has driven costs sky high contributing to record inflation. The attacks

The plans are to return the Starliner, sans crew, to White Sands Space Harbor this month.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Malta Misfits!

The Stories of Two Extraordinary Pilots, Adrian Warburton and George Beurling, Both of Whom Flew From Malta During the Island's WWII Siege

Part One

Adrian Warburton Reconnaissance Pilot

Due to a strategic location, there are places on the earth that have achieved significance because they are what are called “choke points” the holding of which allow inferior forces to control movements of commercial or military forces attempting to reach some desired objective.

In what is known as the Battle of the Bulge, the convergence of seven roads at the town of Bastogne in Belgium was one such choke point which the Germans needed to seize in order to drive northwest and capture the allied port of Antwerp. The Spartan defense of the pass at Thermopylae and The Kyber Pass controlling the Silk Road and travel between the British Raj and Afghanistan is another example of a topographic features which control movement over the terrain. And on April 19, 1775, British regulars marched from Boston to seize or destroy the colonial arms stockpiled in Concord the were met by Minutemen at the Old North Bridge. Ralph Waldo Emerson memorialized the fight as “the shot heard round the world.”

*By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.*

Many maritime choke points are located at straits, Gibraltar being most well know, but recently the entrance to the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz which connects the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb, a passage between

the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea have captured recent news. Both Iran and the Houthi rebels of Yemen have violated the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea by attacking or seizing commercial vessels in these international waters at enormous cost to world commerce.

In World War II, the waters around Malta were one of these choke points. The archipelago of Malta is located in the central Mediterranean Sea lies about 50 miles south of Sicily and near equidistant, about 200 miles, east of Tunisia and north of Libya. Given these relatively short distances and the strength of the Royal Navy, the French Navy and the Italian *Regia Marina*, the limited sea space between Malta and the Strait of Sicily was a choke point, the control of which was paramount to both the Axis and the British causes.

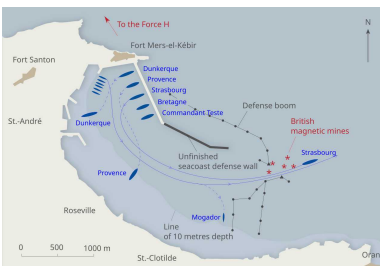


Malta was a British Crown Colony. It was not only an important base to protect the British supply lines to its armies in North Africa and to the Suez Canal but was also in a dominant position to attack the German and Italian shipping to the Italian Army, Afrika Corps and Vichy French in North Africa. But Malta was within easy reach of Axis airpower based in Italy and became one of the heaviest bombed places on earth during the siege which took place between June, 1940 and November 1942.

British naval operations in the Mediterranean were under constant threat because both France and Italy maintained a fleet in being consisting of more than twice as many battleships as in the Royal Navy's Mediterranean fleet. Unwilling to risk these ships in open battle, Vichy France, officially neutral, and Italy chose to keep them in port which

forced the British to maintain sufficient forces to counter them should they sortie. An attack against a fleet in being, protected in a harbor with shore defenses, would require superior forces which the hard-pressed Royal Navy could not muster.

The British government decided to seize the initiative. In July of 1940, the Royal Navy attacked the French fleet anchorage at Meers-el-Kébir in French Algeria. The attack was controversial since Vichy France was officially neutral and had pledged to not allow their ships to fall in the hands Germany's *Kriegsmarine*. One battleship was sunk, two severely damaged and many ships fled north finding refuge in Toulon, the main French naval base in the Mediterranean.



The Meers-el-Kébir harbor and a painting of the attack.



Over 3,000 Frenchmen were killed at the cost to the British of two aircrew members. French rage was such that diplomatic relations were severed and Vichyites raised armed resistance when the Allies invaded North Africa in November of 1942. The French did honor their pledge in September of 1942. When the Germans attempted to seize the ships in Toulon, the French scuttled or sabotaged 77 vessels.

This left the Italian Navy as the barnacles on the hulls of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean fleet. Again, the British decided to seize the initiative and eliminate the threat of the Italian fleet. The

main Italian naval base was at Taranto located on Italy's southeast coast. An aphorism attributed to the Duke of Wellington is that *"All the business of war, indeed all the business of life, is to endeavour to find out what you don't know from what you do: that is what is called "guessing what's on the other side of the hill."*

431 Flight based at Malta was the RAF unit charged with reconnaissance, finding what was "on the other side of the hill. The unit consisted of three Martin Maryland bombers and aircrews, one of whom was a most remarkable character, Pilot Officer Adrian Warburton. Some of the character evaluations by those who knew him included: loner, misfit, charismatic, fearless and unorthodox.



Warby's association with Malta started early. He was the son of a Royal Navy submariner, born in 1918 and was christened aboard a submarine in the Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta! He earned his wings in 1939 with the lowest evaluation possible, below average. He blotted, as the British say, his copy book, and in 1940 and just ahead of a failing marriage, debts and bounced check was transferred to Malta, the way lubricated by an empathetic commanding officer.

He was employed as a navigator because of his demonstrated lack of ability to perform take-offs and landings in twin engine aircraft, a requisite of every flight. His first solo landing in the Martin Maryland took down a section of the airfield's fence and terminated in a ground loop. Do not pass Go. Do not collect £200.

His piloting ability on the ground was characterized as ham-fisted but one friend said:

His take-offs and landings...were the clumsiest I had by then experienced. He jerked the aircraft off the ground...not for him the niceties of a three point landing. He drove it on to the wheels at what seemed to me a suicidal rate...but in the air what a difference from other pilots totally and completely at one with the aircraft...a total symphony in flight.

He had got off to a poor start on Malta. But "Malta Dog," a dysentery-like affliction left Flight 431 short of pilots and he was given another chance in which he tore a wheel of the aircraft on take-off and had to make an emergency landing.

Sessions of high speed taxi practice followed and two brave non-coms, observer Sergeant Frank Bastard and wireless operator/gunner Sergeant Paddy Moren volunteered to fly with him, They were to accompany Warby on many of his most dangerous missions over the North African battlegrounds and the Mediterranean countries of Europe under Axis control.



Martin Baltimore. Note the machine gun ports in the wings.

The Glenn Martin Company in Maryland had a long standing reputation for building well received bombers starting in 1918 and continuing to WWII with the B-26 Marauder. The Maryland, company Model 167, was entered into an attack bomber competition with the planned Bell Model 9, Douglas DB-7 (A-20 Havoc), Stearman XA-21 and the North American NA-40 (B-25 Mitchell). Douglas won the contract but Martin received foreign orders for around 450 aircraft, primarily from the French and British. After the surrender,

the Vichy French assumed control of as many of the Marylands as they could grab. The British accepted all of the embargoed Marylands that had not been delivered.

Operated by a crew of three in separate compartments not accessible to each other, the Maryland, was a capable attack bomber but found its glory in the reconnaissance role. A gunner had control of a single dorsal and ventral position equipped with a single Vickers K gun but the pilot controlled four wing mounted Browning .303 machine guns, an unusual feature for a bomber type aircraft and one which Warby would put to good use.

The aerial reconnaissance effort based on Malta was crucial for British intelligence collection. Warby and his associates participated in missions on a daily basis but the fruits of the flights over Taranto, the major Italian naval base in southern Italy, enabled the Royal Navy to plan the attack which crippled the Italian battle fleet. Successive flights marked the positions of each of the Regia Marina's capital ships, and information about the use of defensive torpedo nets, barrage balloons and anti-aircraft batteries. The other Italian naval bases along the Adriatic and Mediterranean coast were also surveyed.

FEBRUARY 1941				This month total - 326.78 11 05	
Date	Hour	Altitude Type and No.	Place	Day	Remarks (including number of landing, ground, mission, etc.)
1 2 41	0645	A4 202 A-20	TO MALTA	NOV 8 1941	Recon. Taranto without 720 A.C.R. 10000 A.A. A 30
20 2 41	0655	FR 773 A-20	TO MALTA	NOV 12 1941	Recon. Taranto without 500 A.C.R. 10000 A.A. A 30
TOTAL FLYING HOURS FEB. 1941.					
GLENN MARTIN 477.7 (D.A.V.) 9 30					
<i>Martin Baltimore, s.c. 69 1000.</i>					
				Total Time - 326.78 11 05	

Log Book Entry-Taranto Flight

Warby flew at least two of the missions immediately before the attack on Taranto. On November 7th, he and his crew flew a photo-reconnaissance mission and on their way back to Malta were attacked by four Macchi C200 Saettas,

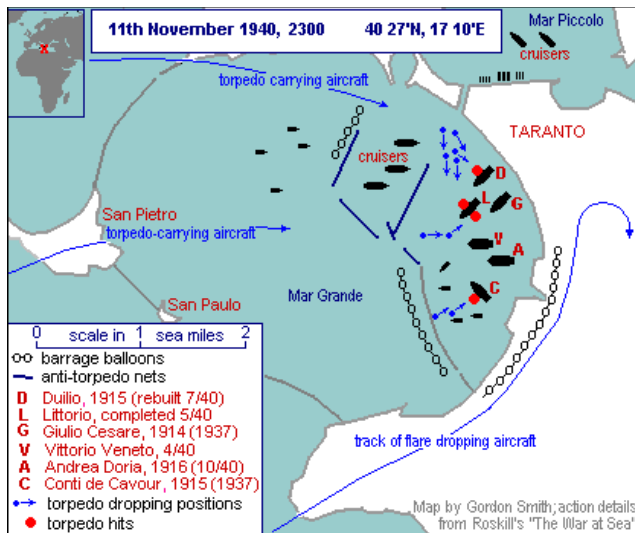
a plane comparable to a Grumman F4F Wildcat. Superb airmanship allowed the Maryland to shoot down one of the attackers and evade the others. Before leaving the Med, he was attributed with shooting down 5-9 aircraft, accounts vary, possibly the only bomber pilot reaching "ace" status.!

The British raid on Taranto was made on the night of 11-12 November. Twenty-nine Fairey Swordfish, an open cockpit biplane torpedo bomber were launched from *HMS Illustrious* in the very first all-aircraft, ship-to-ship battle in history. Attacking in multiple waves, using flares to illuminate the targets, the Swordfish put three Italian capital ships out action and forced the Regia Marina to abandon Taranto and move their remaining ships far north to Naples where they were a far less threat to the Royal Navy.

The attack had been complicated by the shallow water of the harbor. Aerial torpedoes required a hundred feet of depth when dropped which gave them time to stabilize. The harbor was only 39 feet deep but the British devised a method which entailed attaching a wire to the nose of the torpedo with the other end made fast to the aircraft. This prevented the torpedo from entering the water at too steep an angle and diving too deep.



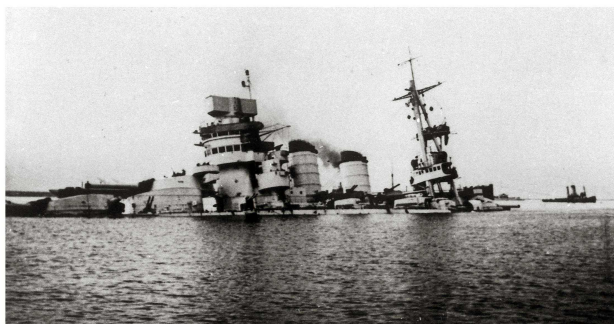
Torpedo Armed Swordfish



Immediately after the attack, a Japanese naval attaché from Berlin, Lieutenant Commander Takeshi Naito visited Taranto and six months later, in May of 1941, a delegation of Japanese naval officers conferred with the Italians about details of the raid. Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, the officer who would lead the Pearl Harbor attack was privy to the information gathered.

The Imperial Navy had been experimenting with shallow water torpedo attack methods for some time but used a wooden nose cap and tail fins on their torpedoes.

The Taranto Attack Plan and the battleship RM Conte Di Cavour awash in the shallow harbor.



R.N. "CONTE DI CAVOUR" - DICEMBRE 1940 - TARANTO



Japanese ordnance used at Pearl Harbor. Note the fins and nose cap on the torpedo.

On November 19th, Warby and his crew returned to assess the damages and flew in at masthead height, taking photographs with a hand held camera and frantically making notes. But the crew disagreed as to how many battle ships were in the harbor so they flew back and recounted them. The navigator, Sgt. Johnny Spires reported that their “wing tips were cutting furrows in the calm water. Upon landing in Malta, the discovered a length of an aerial from one of the ships had been hooked by the tail wheel.



Painting of Warby on the low level photo mission.

After Taranto, Warby continued operating in the Mediterranean Theatre supporting the Allied campaign in North Africa and the invasion of Sicily. Injured in a auto accident, he was evacuated to England and hospitalized but he bolted from the hospital, had some friends cut off his cast, and resumed flying.

Appointed as RAF liaison to the American photo-reconnaissance effort in England, Warby sought out Lt. Col. Elliot Roosevelt, son of the President and a friend from the Mediterranean. Roosevelt commanded the U.S. photo-reconnaissance group. Although he was not on flying status, Warby arranged to fly a bomb damage assessment mission into Germany. Dressed in a USAAF uniform and flying a Lockheed F-5B, a version of the P-38 Lightning, he departed Mount Farm, Oxfordshire and disappeared.



Lockheed F-5B in photo-reconnaissance camouflage.

In 2002, a search initiated by Frank Dorber, a Welsh aviation historian, who painstakingly researched German anti-aircraft records located the wreckage near Egling, a town near Munich. An investigation determined that the aircraft and human remains were those of Warby and his aircraft. A funeral was held in 2003 and he was buried with full military honors.

Part Two, featuring George Beurling, Canada's top WW II ace will follow in a subsequent edition.

AEROSPACE HISTORY AND CHRONOLOGY

Aug 29, 1944 – Goodwood IV, a Royal Navy airstrike against the battleship *Tirpitz* fails due to an effective German smoke screen and fog which shields the ship from the attacking bombers.

The Royal Navy employed 34 bombers and 25 fighter escorts launched from *HMS Formidable* and *HMS Indefatigable*. The aircraft were a mixed bag consisting of Grumman Hellcats, Vought Corsairs, Supermarine Seafires and Fairey Barracudas and Fireflies.



Readying aircraft on the deck of the Formidable.
(Credit: Davies, F A (Lt), Royal Navy)

The *Tirpitz* was the second Bismarck-class battleship and the largest capital ship in European waters. She served as a force in being, threatening the Russia-bound convoys and forcing the Royal Navy to station a sizable force of warships in case she sortied.



Between 1940 and 1944, the British made around 25 attempts to sink the Tirpitz, mostly air raids but two attacks used midget submarines and manned torpedoes. The final attack, November 12, 1944, was carried out by the Royal Air Force dropping the 12,000 pound Tallboy. Two direct hits and a near miss causing the ship to capsize in the shallow waters of Tromsø Fjord, Norway.



An earlier photo of the Tirpitz partly covered by a smoke screen in Kaaffjord. (Credit: Imperial War Museum.)



Lancaster releasing a Tallboy from its modified bomb bay.

Tirpitz being salvaged after the war.



Aug 30, 1913 – Lt. Patrick N. L. Bellinger flies a Curtiss C-2 flying boat equipped with Lawrence Sperry's automatic stabilizing device, the first autopilot.



Bellinger on far right and two C-2 flying boats during the 1914 occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico.

Aug. 31, 1940 – Polish 303 Squadron join the Battle of Britain. The Poles fly the Hawker Hurricane and score 126 kills, the most of any squadron in the battle.



The 303 insignia seen on the Hawker Hurricane was originally the emblem of the Kosciuszko Squadron, a group of Americans who fought in the Russian Polish War, 1919-1920. The hat was that worn by Tadeusz Kosciuszko when he fought as a volunteer during the U.S. Revolutionary War. The crossed scythes represent the 100 or so Polish peasants who fought with him. The colors and 13 stars honor our national ensign.

Despite Polish participation with the Allied Army, in the Battle of Britain, North African, Italian and European campaigns, the Poles were denied the honor of marching in the Victory Parade in London so as not to offend Stalin who was in the process of seizing control of Poland. One would have thought that the results of the appeasement of Adolph Hitler by Neville Chamberlain in 1938 and 1939 would have been lesson enough!

Sept. 1, 1943– The Civil Air Patrol is relieved of maritime patrol duties of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. At the same time, the US Army Air Force stands down the Army Air Forces Antisubmarine Command.

The Army's anti-sub force was formed in the fall of 1942 because the Navy lacked long range maritime patrol aircraft. The Army inventory included the Douglas B-18 Bolo, the Boeing B-17 and the Lockheed A-28 Hudson, all suitable for long range overwater searches. but not available in large quantities.



Lockheed Hudson (Credit:USAF)

Starting on March 8, 1942, the Civil Air Patrol started to fill in the defensive gap with light aircraft, such as the Stinson 10s and Fairchild 24s. for 18 months.



Their primary usefulness was in forcing the German U-boats to stay submerged in daytime, seriously reducing their offensive ability. CAP crews also spotted survivors from torpedoed ships and floating mines.



Ground crew working on an F-24 engine.

The Army and the Navy had had a long-time squabble over the best methods of coastal defense. By late 1943, the United States industrial might was ramping up to full strength and suitable aircraft became available

Eventually, Army coastal defense artillery

batteries and Navy ships and aircraft, especially the convoy system and Navy Consolidated PB4Y-1 Liberators (the B-24D) assumed defensive roles. The Army concentrated on offensive operations overseas.

Sept. 2, 1988 – First flight of the Boeing 717, originally designed and marketed by McDonnell Douglas as the MD-95, a distant ancestor of the 1960's Douglas DC-9.



For purposes of comparison here are two of the 717 predecessors.

Aero Mexico Douglas DC-9-32



Delta McDonnell-Douglas MD-88

Boeing acquired McDonnell Douglas and decided to rebrand the aircraft. Traditionally, all Boeing passenger jets receive a name using the style 7X7. The first of these was the 707. The originally designation for the C-135 Stratolifter and the KC-135 Stratotanker was 717 but the number was abandoned in favor of the military choices. Over time, Boeing produced the 727, 737, 747, 757, 767, and the anomalous 720. Boeing's rebranding filling in the sequence.

The 720 was a shortened 707 designed for medium range. It would have been marketed as a version of the 707, the 707-020 but William Patterson,

president of United Airlines had a commitment to purchase DC-8s. He wanted the new Boeing but did not want the impression that he was continuing to buy 707s so he requested a name change and the 720 entered the pool of Boeing numbers.

Sept. 3, 1989 – Varig Flight 254, a Boeing 737-241, ran out of fuel and crashed in the Brazilian jungle killing 13 of the 54 people on board. The crash was attributed to pilot negligence and was a chain of mistakes which commenced with misreading a flight plan.



PP-VMK, the aircraft involved in the incident.
(Credit: Clint Groves)

The captain entered the course on the horizontal situation indicator (HSI) as 270 degrees. But while he had been off flying duty for two weeks, Varig had changed the notation on their flight plans. The Captain read 0270 as a westward course but it should have been 027.0 degrees, basically north north east. For some reason Varig had adopted the decimal notation but did not print the decimal point, a questionable decision since flying a heading to a tenth of a degree is not possible. The captain should have also noted that the course entered was not consistent with the planned flight.

The first officer entered the cockpit after completing the walk-around inspections and instead of reading the flight plan as a cross check, glanced at the captain's HSI and also entered the erroneous course.

The flight over the Amazon rain forest had very few easily identifiable checkpoints. In those days charts, even USAF Operational Navigation Charts, has large sections marked "river course variable," relief data unreliable" and "village position uncertain!" There is also some evidence, not necessarily reliable, that the pilots were listening to the World Cup Match between Chile and Brazil.

As they thought they were approaching Belem, their destination, they had difficulty raising the tower and asked another aircraft to relay their request. The weak VHF signal was another clue that something was wrong. Belem had no radar and could not locate Flight 254 but they gave clearance to descend. The sun was setting and haze made visibility difficult but the flight crew could not identify any recognizable landmarks.

Recognizing that a problem existed, they tried to follow a river which they believed was the Amazon. Belem is located at the mouth of the Amazon and all they had to do was follow it but it turned out to be the Xingu and ran at an approximately 90 degree angle to the Amazon. Another failure in situational awareness and misjudgment known as assessment confirmation bias.

The flight was a local and had already made five stop-overs during the last six hours. The crew was undoubtedly tired. They tuned in an automatic direction finder stations but two stations shared the same frequency! The one they wished to track was off the air and the aircrew failed to recognize that the three letter morse code identifier was that of the other station. This was another failure to follow procedure and another confirmation bias trap. Another link in the causal chain had been fashioned and they elected to chance a crash landing.

A decision was made to exhaust most of the fuel to avoid fire and land at just above stalling speed. They were handicapped by the loss of most of their instruments and did not have enough hydraulic power left to fully lower the flaps. Nonetheless, most of the passengers survived and were rescued two days later.

After the accident, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots tested 21 pilots of major airlines to read the Varig flight plan. Fifteen made the same mistake. Varig changed its policies and installed Omega navigation systems to reduce the reliance on short range VHF Omnidirectional Radio Ranges and non-directional beacons. The pilots were sentenced to four years in prison later

reduced to community service.

One is reminded, in Shakespeare's eponymous play, of Richard the Third's cry, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse." But the accident chain is better described by Ben Franklin in *The Way to Wealth*.

*For want of a nail the shoe was lost,
for want of a shoe the horse was lost;
and for want of a horse the rider was lost;
being overtaken and slain by the enemy,
all for want of care about a horse-shoe nail.*

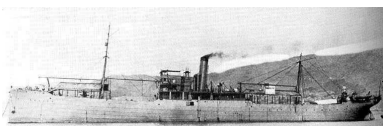
Sept. 4-5, 1936 – Beryl Markham makes the first east-to-west solo crossing of the Atlantic by a woman flying a Percival Vega Gull named *The Messenger*. Twenty hours after departure from Abington, the fuel tank vents iced up and caused a forced landing at Beleine Cove, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.



Markham and The Messenger

Markham learned to fly in Kenya under the tutelage of Tom Campbell Black whose story deserves a full article. Both Markham and Black hobnobbed with Kenya's Happy Valley Set, an aristocratic clique of high living sybarites whose antics are not fit for the pages of *The Coastwatcher*.

Sept. 5, 1914– The Imperial Japanese Navy carries out its first air combat mission. A Farman MF.11 seaplane launched from the seaplane carrier *IJN Wakamiya* bombed German fortifications at Tsingtao, China and reconnoitered Kiachow Bay.



The IJN Wakamiya and a Farman MF.11.



Sept. 6, 1965 – The first air to air missile kill by a Mach 2 aircraft is registered when Ft. Lt. Afatab Alam Khan, Pakistani Air Force launches an AIM-9 Sidewinder from his Lockheed F-104 and shoots down an Indian Dassault Mystère IV.

CAP ART

Maj. Ron Finger is a freelance illustrator and member of Civil Air Patrol's Minnesota Wing. He is CAP's national artist and one of his goals is to create a painting of every plane flown by CAP.

Among his duties as Civil Air Patrol's national artist, Finger researches and creates art that portrays their historic service. Here are three aircraft used on the anti-sub patrols in WWII.



CAP TIMELINE FLIGHT

Waco YKS-6 NC16598

c1942 Coastal Patrol Base No.9, Grande Isle, Louisiana © 2021 Ron Finger, ronfinger.com



CAP SILVERED WINGS

Monocoupe 9DA "Baker Fox 15" NC15431

c1942 Coastal Patrol Base No. 5, Flagler Beach, Florida By Ron Finger, Civil Air Patrol National Artist



CAP SILVERED WINGS

Fleetwings Sea Bird F-401 NC16793

c1942 Coastal Patrol Base No.10, Beaufort, North Carolina By Ron Finger, CAP National Artist

