

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

June 16, 2001.....Interview with Raymond Samuel Pugh to discuss his military experiences during World War II.

Q - When did you enter Military Service?

A - I joined the U.S. Navy in August 1941

Q - Why did you choose the Navy?

A - Because some buddies of mine, Gene and Bud Shelton along with Carl Arbuthnot were in the Navy and they all talked it up about how great it was.

Q - How old were you when you went into the Navy?

A - Seventeen.

Q - When you went into the service, where did you go to enlist?

A - I went to a recruiting station in Evansville.

Q - Where were you sent for your first duty?

A - Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago.

Q - When you finished your training at Great Lakes, where did you go from there?

A- I was ordered to Norfolk Virginia and was assigned to the *USS Hornet*, CV-8, an aircraft carrier whose skipper was Mark Mitcher. In fact, I was in Norfolk in the Navy Yard, inside the recreation hall on December 7, 1941 when someone came in and announced that everyone was to return to their ships immediately. One of the fellows I ran into going back to my ship was a guy from Washington, Indiana named Hand who was married and living over at Virginia Beach. We asked him if he knew what was going on and he said that he had heard that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor that morning. Well, as we all now know, that Sunday morning sneak attack was the beginning of World War II for the United States and a lifetime of experiences for young men like me that we will never, ever forget the events of the next four years. Soon after December 7, in

this OH text received from Raymond Pugh May 2012
in conjunction with his interview of Mar 14 2012. (#3466)

early February of 1942, we sailed from Norfolk carrying two Mitchell B-25 bombers, one of which was piloted by Lt. Colonel Jimmy Doolittle, who performed practice runs off the deck of the *Hornet* to determine if it was possible to launch planes that size from the 450 foot deck of an aircraft carrier rather than the 1200 feet normally used for takeoff. Colonel Doolittle was able to do just that. This convinced high U.S. military officials that it would be possible to bomb Tokyo from carrier based bombers. After the secret practice runs, we then sailed south to Central America, through the Panama Canal, and up to Alameda in San Francisco where 16 B-25 bombers were hoisted aboard the *Hornet's* aft deck in two parallel rows. We were there only two days before sailing toward Japan on April 2. We were escorted by a cruiser and a destroyer screen. Ten days later on April 12 we were joined by the carrier *USS Enterprise*, CV-6, and its task force which consisted of the cruisers *Salt Lake City* and *Northampton*, four destroyers and a tanker. Vice Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey was the task force commander. The plan was to get the *Hornet* within 400 miles of Tokyo so that the bombers would have enough fuel to continue on to China and land at some friendly airfields there. Well, everything went according to plan until the early morning of April 18, when a couple of Jap picket ships were spotted near our task force and our radio operators intercepted broadcasts from the pickets reporting our presence and position. A couple of days earlier we had ran into a real nasty storm which stayed with us for several days. The storm was so bad that several of our escort ships had to fall back leaving the carriers unprotected. However, because of the contact with the Jap picket ships, Admiral Halsey ordered the bombers into the air even though we were still 700 miles from Japan instead of the planned 400. And, in spite of the terrible weather conditions with the ship being tossed around and some of the waves breaking over the *Hornet's* deck, Colonel Doolittle and his squadron of B-25's

took off from the deck of the *Hornet* at 8:20 a.m. with the mission to bomb Tokyo, something the Japanese never dreamed could happen. All 80 of those fliers had volunteered for the mission and they must have had nerves of steel because they knew that they would not be coming back to our carrier. As history now shows, the raid was a huge success as they bombed four major Jap cities before turning toward China. We later learned that of the 16 bombers that took off, 15 crashed or ditched at sea and one managed to land at a field in Russia. Most of the crews were rescued but some were killed either when they crash landed or after being captured by the Japs.

Following the launching of the Doolittle Raiders, we turned and sailed to Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had taken place only about four months before we sailed in there and what a mess it was. Those big battleships were sitting on the bottom including the battleship *Arizona* whose tripod mast was leaning at a weird angle. The battleship *Oklahoma* was capsized and laying over on its top. It was a mess. So we stayed at Pearl Harbor for just a short while and then sailed, joining up with the *Wasp*, another carrier. The *Wasp* was later sunk on this patrol by a Jap sub. We did some patrol duty and then returned to Pearl Harbor where we took on some stores. From there we headed into what some regard as the pivotal battle of the Pacific, the Battle of Midway.

Q - What kind of planes was the *Hornet* carrying when it left Pearl Harbor?

A - We were carrying F4F Wildcats and later carried F6F Hellcats. We also had a squadron of the old Douglas Bombers where the torpedo hung out in the open beneath the plane. That was torpedo squadron 8. Every one of those planes was shot down during the battle of Midway with only one man surviving. That was a navy flier named Ensign Gay. The *Yorktown* and the

Enterprise had been in another battle in the South Pacific and the *Yorktown* suffered some damage. However, all three carriers, the *Hornet*, the *Yorktown* and the *Enterprise*, were all in the battle of Midway. During that battle the *Yorktown* was hit again with severe damage and was later sunk. Following Midway we returned to Pearl Harbor. That's when we learned that the carrier *Wasp* with whom we had done patrol duty earlier had gone down after being hit by six Japanese torpedoes. After our skipper, Captain Mitcher, as promoted to Admiral, the new skipper of the *Hornet* was Captain Mason. We left Pearl and went down into the Santa Cruz Islands group. There was a Jap task force there not too far from us and we hit them and they hit us. That day, October 26, 1942, I was in the engine room on the *Hornet* and we took a torpedo just below the engine room. The ship had taken direct hits from two or three torpedoes and a couple of bombs and we were dead in the water. Efforts were made to get the ship under way and we were moving about three knots at about 4:00 in the afternoon when the Jap planes came and hit us again. That's when we took another torpedo which hit just a few feet from me while I was on watch on the lube oil pumps. When the explosion occurred I was thrown down on the deck and a Chief helped me up and we escaped up through the escape trunk which was a spiral ladder leading all the way up to the hangar deck which was about six decks above where we were working. There were twelve of us in the engine room when the torpedo hit and 10 of us escaped. The two who did not make it were named Morgan and Miller.

Q - Do you remember your thoughts when the torpedo hit and you were thrown to the deck

A - Well, the water was rushing in from the previous hits and the ship was listing to starboard. In that sense I suppose you can say that we were lucky because that caused the torpedo to hit the

ship's armor belt and explode rather than enter the ship and then explode. Even at that it was flooding the engine room very fast and when we got into the escape trunk the water had already risen high enough to enter it also. There was no waiting for any orders to leave that area because it was most obvious that any delay on our part would have meant certain death by drowning. When the Japs first hit us about 10 00 that morning, a lot of the *Hornet's* crew were killed and they were buried off of the fantail. This meant that there were lots of sharks swimming around the fantail. The order to abandon ship was given while we were standing on the hanger deck. I remember at that time seeing Captain Mason walking down through the hanger deck and there was blood on his face which was obviously the result of the kamikaze planes that had hit the ship near where the Captain was standing. I distinctly recall him saying "all hands abandon ship off the bow". So, that's what we did. We left the ship off the bow so we wouldn't end up as shark bait.

Q- When you abandoned ship, did you go down rope ladders, use lifeboats, or slide down ropes?

A - We went down on ropes that were hanging down the side of the ship and which had knots tied in them about every three feet that allowed you to get a hold with your feet as well as your hands. Since the ship was listing to starboard, we went down the port side where we were able to get better footing on the side of the ship as we slid down the ropes. However, the ropes did not go all the way to the water so we were forced to jump into the water when the line ran out. The wounded were put into rafts and lowered into the water in those rafts. Those of us that were not wounded had kapok life jackets on and we would push the rafts in the water. While we were in the water, some high altitude Jap bombers came over and they were aiming at the *Hornet* to finish her off. Because of this we were trying to get as far away as possible from the already badly damaged ship. A few of the bombs hit the ship and several hit the water. I was certain that one

of those bombs was going to hit me square in the head. I remember the sensation I felt in my legs from the underwater concussion every time one of those bombs exploded in the water. The *Enterprise* had left and there were several destroyers and a couple of cruisers still around. After being in the water for about two or three hours, I was picked up by the destroyer *Barton*. The crew of that destroyer was so good to us. You have to remember that this was a major naval battle where ships were hit and planes were downed in the water, all of which created a massive oil slick in which we were forced to endure for those two or three hours. Therefore, we were totally covered by oil and the only thing white about us was our teeth and eyeballs. Words cannot adequately express the treatment we received from the *Barton's* crew. They let us sleep in their bunks, gave us showers and clean clothes and good chow. Just after our rescue, the *Barton* was ordered to go to an isolated reef somewhere off of New Caledonia to rescue two downed US fliers. We picked up the fliers and then went on to Noumea, New Caledonia, an island off of Australia. There we were given physical examinations and I was told that the ringing in my ears would eventually go away. Those of us from the *Hornet* were hoping to be sent back to the states for assignment on a new ship. But it seemed that there was a need for some engineers on the island Tulagi which is just across from Guadalcanal. The marines had landed on Guadalcanal on August 7. So we left New Caledonia around the 3rd or 4th of November 7, 1942 which means we were there with the *Barton* for approximately two weeks. We were all put aboard four troop transports, the *Hayes*, the *Jackson*, the *Adams*, and the *Crescent City*. For reasons that I never did learn, these ships were called the unholy four. These ships were taking army reinforcements to Guadalcanal where the Marines were having a very rough time of it and were about to lose Guadalcanal. The night that we arrived at Guadalcanal, November 12, there was a large sea battle

off of Savo Island, between Savo Island and Guadalcanal that lasted two nights. It was like watching a giant fireworks display. A lot of ships were sunk, both US and Japanese. Unfortunately, as I later learned, the *Barton* was one of the US casualties and only about 35 of the crew survived. We stayed on Guadalcanal for about 10 days before being taken over to the island of Tulagi. I remember when we pulled into Tulagi harbor, there was a large sign like a huge billboard up on a hill that read "Kill Japs. Kill More Japs. You Will Help Kill The Yellow Bastards If You Do Your Job Well." Under that quote was the name of Admiral "Bull" Halsey. Tulagi was an island about 20 miles across the strait called "the slot" from Guadalcanal where the US had a motorboat torpedo base. These are more commonly known as PT boats and in "the slot" is where PT 109 and President John F. Kennedy performed their wartime heroics. Some of the guys were assigned to PT boats and the rest of us were assigned to run diesel generators which furnished power to everything requiring electricity including radios, the mess hall, billets, and the 90 millimeter anti-aircraft batteries on the island. I was also assigned as a spotter/pointer to a 40 millimeter gun crew which included Mark Swatta as a trainer and Harold McClong and Ernie Johnson were loaders. We practiced quite a bit with that gun and on April 7, 1943, the Japanese sent a lot of planes down, about 200 in their continuing effort to take Guadalcanal. Our crew shot down one Japanese plane that day and hit another one which went on down to the torpedo base where it was finished off by another of our anti-aircraft crews. It was a disastrous day for the Japanese who I believe lost 197 planes. Of course, we had a lot of air aces on Guadalcanal at that time. Guys like Marion Carl and Joe Foss lead the charge for us from the air and a lot of the Jap planes were not only downed by ground units but were shot down by our fliers in air to air combat. Our fliers were good, damned good. These guys were not only good

they were real heroes as well, seemingly afraid of nothing. Sometimes, I would watch them take off from Henderson field and would wonder how the planes could stay in the air with so many patches on the fuselages and wings. I believe it was the 2nd Marine Division who had engaged the Japs in months of fighting on Guadalcanal. So the army was sent in to relieve the marines but because they were not seasoned combatants, the Japs knew it and took full advantage of it. We almost lost it. The army lost ground and the marines were called back up to the front to retake the lost ground. After that, the army took over and did one hell of a job.

I stayed on Tulagi for one year and I remember when ships that had been in sea battles like the *New Orleans* and the *Minneapolis*, both heavy cruisers, came into port with their bows blown off. Both of these ships had taken heavy casualties and we were sent down to them to help unload the dead who were put on 6x6 trucks and stacked like cordwood. It was as horrible as anything I had seen. The dead was then loaded on a large truck that took them across the island to a place called White Beach where they were buried in a mass grave dug by bulldozers. It was a horrible experience for me. Even though there was plenty of action on Tulagi, there were also times when we looked for almost anything to break up the boredom and homesickness. One of those activities was drinking torpedo juice which was actually a red alcohol that was used as a propellant in the torpedoes. It was stored in 55 gallon drums. We would take a coffee pot, set a stainless steel pot in it, which was obtained from the sick bay, and we would pour the red alcohol in the coffee pot, then put it on a hot plate with the coffee pot's lid upside down with a string tied to it. Then we would heat the alcohol on the lid and then pour cold water on it. This would cause condensation which would run down the string into a container and, lo and behold, we had 195 proof alcohol as clear as water. We would drink it with orange or grapefruit juice or anything else we could find

After a year on Tulagi, I was ordered back to the United States to Treasurer Island near San Francisco where I stayed for 10 days before receiving a 30 day leave to go home in Francisco, Indiana. My orders after that was to report to the Fargo Building in Boston for reassignment to the *USS Hancock*, a new aircraft carrier which was in its final stages of construction at the Quincy Shipyards in South Boston. I was there for four months at which time the crew reported for duty each day while the ship was being finished. At that time I was a second class machinist and I became a throttle man on the *Hancock* and that four months was learning the ins and outs of the engine room of a new ship. From there we put the *Hancock* into commission and went back down through the Panama Canal and up the West Coast to San Francisco again where we stayed for just a few days before sailing for Pearl Harbor. By that time we had F6F's and PBF's, new dive bombers. They were much better planes than what we had on the *Hornet*. We left Pearl Harbor and began making raids on Japanese bases throughout the Pacific. The *Hancock*, the *Enterprise*, the new *Wasp*, and several other carriers and escort ships participated in these operations. After Midway, the tide began to change and the US Navy was definitely on the offensive. The marines had taken Tarawa and Cradulin and we were slowly taking Japanese held islands one by one. The Japs had a big naval base north of Guadalcanal called Raboul and we had sunk a lot of their ships up there and definitely had them on the run. About that time a decision was made to land US marines on Okinawa. This was a very risky assignment for our carrier based planes because Okinawa was just about the last step before Japan and the Japs were going all out to hold it. They would send planes in from other islands to battle our carrier based planes who were trying to soften up the island for a marine invasion. I suppose because out of desperation, the Japanese significantly stepped up their use of Kamikazes, the

suicide planes. They would come in and use themselves as a missile and dive on your ship. While I was on the *Hancock* we engaged in a lot of combat and during one big battle we took three hits from suicide planes into our flight deck and the superstructure, or the "island" as it is otherwise called. These Kamikazes were so successful in damaging the *Hancock* that we couldn't have flight operations. During one of these battles, some of our planes were out on a bombing run and one of them, a PBF, had opened both of its bomb bays but one of its torpedo bombs had failed to release and it was hanging in the bomb bay. To add to the problem, the bomb had managed to arm itself. In other words, the propeller on the torpedo bomb was spinning yet still hanging in the bomb bay. The pilot radioed that his plane had been hit, that he was shot up, and his gunner was dead. He tried to land but as soon as he hit the flight deck the bomb exploded killing the pilot along with 72 of our ship's crew. I remember the next day, we buried our own people off of the deck edge elevator five at a time. They were all lined up on deck draped in American flags. Each body was in a canvas bag with weights at the bottom and as they slid from the platform five at a time you could hear them hit the water. Those are the things that really get to you.

After that we headed back to Pearl Harbor, where unknown to me at the time, my oldest brother Claude was stationed after serving a tour on Kwajalein, an atoll in the Marshall Islands. Claude was stationed at a place on Oahu called Barber's Point. That's the point you pass when coming into Pearl Harbor. They had lookouts at Barber's Point and when my ship came in one of Claude's buddies saw it was the *Hancock* and he went to Claude and asked if he had a brother on the *Hancock*. Claude said he did and his buddy said that he should come and have a look because the *Hancock* was shot all to hell. It looked real bad because all of the damage was on the top side with little or no damage below decks. I remember that I was on watch when we entered Pearl and

when I got off watch, I went to my bunk and was told that Lt. Foster wanted to see me in his stateroom. It seems that Lt. Foster had been the officer of the watch when we docked and brother Claude came aboard and told Lt. Foster that he would like to see me. So Lt. Foster took Claude and his buddy down to his stateroom and that's where he was when I entered. You can imagine how shocked I was to see my brother Claude standing there whom I had not seen in three years. We were given overnight liberty that night in Honolulu and I don't have to tell you what a time we had. A couple of days later, Lt. Foster came to me and all the other guys that had been on the *Hancock* and had gone through Tulagi and Guadalcanal at that time and said "You guys have had enough and we're going to send you back to the States for shore duty". So back to the good old US I went back to Boston to the Fargo Building. From there I was given orders to report to Little Creek, Virginia, near Norfolk. This was a place where they repaired landing craft. I remember very distinctly that there was a group of German prisoners there working on those boats. I hated Norfolk so I put in for sea duty and I had orders to go to Bath, Maine where I was to be assigned to a new destroyer that had just come out of the Bath Iron Shipyard. Before, I was able to leave for Bath, the war ended and my orders were canceled. I then received new orders to report to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center where I was discharged in November of 1945.

Q - Have you seen any of your shipmates since the war or do you maintain any relationship with any of them?

A - I had a good buddy from Princeton, IN, Jimmy "Cheesy" Herron, and we ran around a lot together when we first got out of the Navy. Soon after that he got married, then I got married and we sort of drifted apart by seeing each other only occasionally.

I remember one time while I was aboard ship somewhere in the Pacific and after I had seen a lot

of action out there and been through a lot of hell, I wrote a letter to my Mom and I told her that I didn't know if I would come through the war or not. I felt that I had been very lucky up to that point but, with each passing day and each battle engagement with the Japs, I thought that my luck was going to run out at any minute.

Q - How was it that you were able to send home thousands of dollars to your sister LaVerne for safekeeping on a Machinist Mate's pay?

A - Well, it was result of handling those little ivory things with black dots on them called dice. You know, that was one of the great things about Admiral McCain, Senator John McCain's grandfather. I saw him and the ship's skipper walk through the mess hall at times when there were crap games and poker games going on with money laying around everywhere. But he did not attempt to stop it because he felt that what we were doing was a morale booster. His philosophy was that a happy ship is a fighting ship. There was also the thought in everyone's mind that we might not be around the next day to spend our money. So, it was sort of easy come, easy go. At one point the navy gave me \$300 shipping over money. Now, that was a lot of money back then. Soon after that one of my buddies named Dorman, who was in charge of machinery that raised and lowered planes on huge elevators between the hanger deck and the flight deck, used his creative abilities to build a little entertainment center for us. His work room was quite large so he and another sailor built a big crap table in it and that is where I invested my 300 dollars. And it was a good investment because I think I sent home \$1,900. Even though that was a lot of money back then, it still didn't take me very long to go through it when I got back home. And let me tell you, it was good to be home.