

WORLD WAR-II DIARY OF CHILE MCKINNEY

Lt.(j.g.) Murray Charlton “Chile” McKinney, U.S.N.R.

TBF-1 Avenger Torpedo Bomber Pilot, KIA 7 Jul. 1943 off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands
Describing Training and 68-days of Aerial Combat Flying from Henderson Field
From 1 Feb. to 7 Mar. 1943 with VGS-11 and from 7 Jun. to 6 Jul. 1943 with VT-21

May 8, 1941, Dallas, Texas

This is to be a brief history of my travels, just another country boy who joined the navy to see the world. Although this is supposed to be solely about places visited, I'll probably include all sorts of things, so that in the end this will probably be just another diary that wasn't well kept.

May 8, 1941, Dallas, Texas

Enlisted with J.B. Cason¹ in the U.S. Naval Air Corps and placed on inactive duty with the rate of Seaman 2nd Class, V-5², USNR.

June 3, 1941, U.S. Naval Reserve Air Base, Grand Prairie, Texas, Seaman 2nd Class, V-5, USNR

Reported for active duty involving heavier than air flight training at the U.S. Naval Reserve Air Base, Grand Prairie, Texas. (Reported a day late, with permission of proper authorities, in order that I could attend the graduating exercises of Texas Christian University's Class of '41, of which I was a member.³) The base was new – the first students having reported two weeks earlier.

July 3, 1941, U.S. Naval Reserve Air Base, Grand Prairie, Texas

Today I soloed! “A hell of a ride”, was the way it appeared to the instructor from the ground. The airplane was an N3N⁴.

July 4, 1941, U.S. Naval Reserve Air Base, Grand Prairie, Texas

Shore leave was granted over the 4th. Began at 1300 July 3rd and ended at 2000 July 6th. Remainder of 3rd & 4th spent in Ft. Worth with Ruth Priest⁵. 5th and morning of 6th at Sulphur Springs, Texas – Ruth and I visiting my parents⁶.

July 8, 1941, Ft. Worth, Texas

Checked out of the N.R.A.B. at Grand Prairie and ordered to report for further training at the Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida.

July 9, Sulphur Springs, Texas

in Sulphur Springs

July 10, Jasper, Texas

in Jasper, Texas visiting sister and Brother in Law, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Hardin⁷.

July 11, 1941, New Orleans, La.

Met around noon in Jasper by S.B. Oakes⁸, W. Freeman⁹, and T.Z. Evans¹⁰. Spent the night in New Orleans. No comment.

¹ John Byron “Case” Cason, Jr., (1919-1942). Chile's best friend and 1941 TCU classmate. Chile's roommate at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, FL (NASJ), and NAS Corpus Christi, TX (NASCC) and fellow V-5 Naval Aviation Cadet Class 8-B.

² V-5 Naval Aviation Cadet Program training stages: pre-flight, primary, basic, advanced, and aircraft carrier operations.

³ Chile graduated from Texas Christian University (TCU), Ft. Worth, TX in 1941 with a Bachelor of Science in Commerce.

⁴ Naval Aircraft Factory N3N. A small biplane with two open, tandem seats, a wooden frame and canvas covering.

⁵ Ruth Allen Priest (1922-2004). TCU class of '42, married Chile 31 Jul 1942. Married twice more, once more widowed, 2 sons.

⁶ Charles Pierce “Charlie” McKinney (1889-1960) and Octo Delia (Connor) McKinney (1893-1972).

⁷ Chile's only sibling, Martha McKinney (1917-2012) married C-47 US Army pilot John Paul Hardin (1917-2007) in 1940.

⁸ Sherrill Beard Oakes, USNR (1917-1981). NASJ muster roll.

⁹ William B. Freeman, Sr., USMCR (1917-2007). NASCC Class 8-B, F4F pilot, 6 victories at Guadalcanal, DFC, retired Lt. Col.

¹⁰ Thomas Zimmerman Evans (1916-1999). NASCC Class 8-B, washed-out, joined the US Army, survived the war.

July 12, Enroute

Traveled along the Gulf Coast all day drinking that terrible Louisiana coffee and eating Mississippi pralines, stayed the night in Tuscaloosa, FL.

July 13, 1942, Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida

Reported to the Naval Air Station to await appointment as an aviation cadet. Assigned quarters with T.Z. Evans. The time is spent learning radio code, Signal Flags, military drill and spending half of each day helping the mechanics service airplanes. We have liberty from 1200 Saturday until 2200 Sundays which my roommate, Cason, and I usually spend in Jacksonville or on the beach.

August 15, 1941, Enroute

Departed N.A.S. Jacksonville for Sulphur Springs, Texas enroute to the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, Texas. Drove from Jacksonville to Mineola, Texas where my Mother and Father met me, coming through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, in 19 hours. Not bad for a '39 Ford.

August 16, 1941, Sulphur Springs and Paris, Texas

Met Cason in Sulphur Springs from where we went to Paris to pick up Elizabeth Ann Fields¹¹ on the morning of the 17th.

August 17, 1941, Ft. Worth, Texas

We went to Ft. Worth and Elizabeth Ann stayed with Ruth and I with Cason.

August 19th Ft. Worth, Texas

C. Alford¹² met Case and I, and we shoved off for Corpus Christi.

August 20th Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas [NASCC]

Reported aboard at 0800. Assigned quarters in Building 24-9 with Cason, Evans and F.L. Christien¹³ [sic, Christen] as roommates.

August 21st Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Appointed Aviation Cadet and began two weeks indoctrination followed by 4 weeks of ground school.

October 9, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Began flying again today. Ensign Tom Bush is my instructor. Half of each day is spent in ground school "mastering" Seamanship, Radio, Aerodynamics, Structures, Engines, Oxygen, parachute, navigation, Aerology and a score of other allied subjects. I am flying an N2S3. A small bi-wing ship of 275 horse power. (The same ship I soloed in only made by Stearman)

November 4, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Flew my first 'down check'¹⁴ today. (quite a rude awakening for a young pilot with 36 hours in the air and enough confidence to fly the wings off of anything that flies).

15 November 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Came through the crisis on the 15th of November after checking six times! Evans washed out today.

17 November 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Began acrobatics today and became air sick.

29 November 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Today is Saturday. This morning I flew a 'down' on my acrobatics check. Have liberty from 1200 today until 2200 Sunday. Am leaving now with Cason for Ft. Worth.

¹¹ Elizabeth Ann Fields (1920-1997) was John Cason's girlfriend from Paris, TX and a TCU Class of 1941 graduate.

¹² Colin Wilson Alford, USNR (1917-2008). NASCC Class 8-B, seaplane pilot, Commendation Medal for air-sea rescue.

¹³ Lt. Frank Leonard Christen, USMCR (1919-1943), NASCC Class 8-B. Also named as roommate and KIA in a 30 Mar 1943 letter home. SBD pilot with VMSB-132 at Henderson Field. Shot down and POW on 16 Dec 1942, Munda Bay, New Georgia 2105-2400 and died or murdered while in captivity. Gunner, Pvt. Glenn N. Shattuck, USMCR, KIA in crash.

¹⁴ Pilot instructor's gave cadets "down checks" for poor performance and "up checks" for satisfactory performance.

30 November 1941, Ft. Worth, Texas

Arrived here last night. Case and I had dates and went to the Den at the Texas Hotel. My Mother and Father met me at Ruth's this morning early¹⁵, and at 0930 Case and I left for Corpus Christi.

December 3, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed my acrobatics checks today and began formation flying.

December 7, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

The Japs attacked Pearl Harbor and other objectives in the Pacific without warning.

December 8, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

War is declared. All shore leave and liberties cancelled. We now fly seven days a week.

December 23, 1942 Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed Primary Training. Flew four 'downs' but came through in good shape. Reported to my basic squadron for further training. I now stay at the squadron the entire day, having completed all of ground school with the exception of Radio.

December 25, 1941, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

We were granted 30 hours liberty so Cason and I made a mad rush to Ft. Worth. Left Ft. Worth for Corpus Christi about 1000 and barely made it back in time due to car trouble.

January 18, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed Basic training without any 'down checks'! During Basic training I flew SNV's and OS2U's which are low wing monoplanes of metal construction. The SNV develops 450 horsepower and the OS2U about 600. Entered instrument squadron today and am beginning to feel like a pilot.

January 29, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed course in link trainers¹⁶ and began instrument flying in an SNV.

February 12, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Flew two 'down checks' today for good measure.

February 19, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed training in instrument squadron and ordered to report to the Dive Bombing squadron for advanced training.

February 25, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Took my first flight today in an SNC, a Curtis Scout plane which develops about 500 horse power.

February 27, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Took my first passenger for a ride today. It's a good feeling when the Navy says you know enough that it's not dangerous for someone else to go along.

March 24, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Began flying SBC-4s today. They are Curtis Dive Bombers, which have 1,000 horsepower. These planes are the ships we are to get our dive bomber training in. They are good planes, but old and have all seen several years service with the fleet.

March 26, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Began night flying in SNC's

April 3, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

¹⁵ Ruth lived with her widowed mother, Jessie Bridget (Patton) Priest (1897-1978), in Ft. Worth at 2500 Primrose Ave.

¹⁶ Link trainers were WW2 era flight simulators also known as a "blue box" or simply "pilot trainer".

Cason died in the crash of an SNC of which he was pilot on a night cross country flight.¹⁷

April 4, 1942, Ft. Worth, Texas

Left for Ft. Worth.

April 8, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Arrived back in Corpus Christi.

April 15, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Completed training!

April 17, 1942, Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas

Received my commission as an Ensign today and the gold wings of a Naval Aviator. Ordered to report to Escort Scouting Squadron Twelve [VGS-12] at Seattle Washington on the 10th of May 1942.

April 18, 1942, Ft. Worth, Texas

Spent the night in Ft. Worth. The next two weeks are spent in Sulphur Springs and Ft. Worth. I gave Ruth an engagement ring on the 24th which was Saturday and we went to Sulphur Springs over the week-end.

May 1, 1942, Sulphur Spring, Texas

Left Sulphur Springs for Seattle Washington on train via Ft. Worth, Kansas City, to Sioux City. Spent the night in Ft. Worth and left Sunday night May 2, 1942 for Sioux City. Arrived Sioux City, Iowa the night of the 4th. Met at noon of the 5th by Ensigns Malcolm Miller¹⁸ and Frank Savage¹⁹. Left immediately for Seattle where they too are reporting to VGS-12. Late in the afternoon we ran into a snow storm and could go no further. Spent the night in Kimball, South Dakota.

May 6, 1942

Spent night in Sheridan Wyo.

May 7, 1942

Spent night in Missoula, Montana.

May 8, 1942, Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington

Arrived in Seattle and reported to the Naval Air Station at Sand Point. Assigned quarters with Ensign F.W.M. Janney²⁰

May 12, 1942, Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington

Flew an SV-4 for the first time.

June 19, 1942, Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington

Ground looped²¹ an SNS on landing. Sheared away landing gear and did considerable damage to port wing and prop. McReynolds, Y2/c, passenger. No injuries.

July 31, 1942, Seattle, Washington

Ruth and I were married at 2000 in the University Christian Church in Seattle, Washington. Malcolm Miller was best man, and Jenny Clark was brides maid. Lt. Dreith²², Chaplain, US navy performed the ceremony.

August 1, 1942, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Honeymooned to Victoria, B.C. Canada.

August 13 1942, Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington

¹⁷ Ens. John Byron Cason, USNR, 22 years old, collided with an electrical powerline near Skidmore, TX about 35-mi NW of NASCC. Chile accompanied his best friend's body to Ft. Worth for the funeral and burial over the next four days.

¹⁸ Lt.(jg) Malcolm Johnstone Miller, USNR (1918-2005). VT-21 TBF pilot and Chile's best man. Sank the destroyer IJN *Yūgure* 20 Jul 1943 at 2:30am 16-mi NE of Vella Lavella. IJN *Kiyonami* rescued 20 *Yūgure* survivors. IJN *Kiyonami* was sunk later that day by 8 US Army B-25 bombers from Henderson Field, 42BG, 390BS, killing all but 1 aboard *Kiyonami*: 468 enemy killed.

¹⁹ Frank Joseph Savage, USNR (1918-2001). NASCC Class 9-A, Birmingham, MI.

²⁰ Lt.(jg) Frederick Wistar Morris "Jug" Janney, USNR (1919-1979). VT-21 TBF pilot, 2 DFCs, Director of Personnel at CIA.

²¹ An uncontrolled spinning of the aircraft on the ground, usually on landing and usually due to pilot error.

²² US Navy Chaplain Joseph Floyd Dreith, USN became a Rear Admiral and the Chief of Navy Chaplains.

Flew TBF today. This is the first-line fleet aircraft for me to fly. It's a torpedo bomber made by Grumman. The engine develops 1,750 'horses'.

August 30, 1942, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Copahoe [CVE-12]

Sailed on the U.S.S. Copahoe for 'we knew not where'. Assigned quarters with Ensign "Buddy" Chaplin²³ [sic], who had married Jenny Clark the night before we sailed.

September 3, 1942, Alameda, California

Flew to Alameda California from the Copahoe. There the squadron was put ashore and parts of the squadron detached and ordered here and yonder! On September 6, I was ordered to report to Escort Scouting Squadron Eleven [VGS-11] at Seattle by the 10th of September.

September 20, 1942, Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington

Reported back at Seattle to VGS-11

September 23, 1942, Alameda and San Francisco, California

Ordered to report to San Diego, California for temporary duty aboard the U.S.S. Long Island. Departed Seattle and arrived Alameda by Naval Air transport. We had a two day lay over which Ensign L.B. Sanders²⁴ and I spent in San Francisco.

September 25, 1942, San Diego, California

Departed Alameda for San Diego, arriving there and being assigned quarters in the Hotel Del Coronado with Sanders.

September 28, 1942, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Long Island [ACV-1]

Reported aboard the Long Island and after a couple of days with no wind we ceased to try and have qualifications²⁵, and put back into San Diego on October 1, 1942.

October 2, 1942, San Pedro and Long Beach, California

On October 2, 1942 ordered back to duty with VGS-11 which had been transferred by then to Terminal Island, San Pedro, California. Ruth came down from Seattle and we lived in Long Beach at the Blackstone Hotel.

October 24, 1942, Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, California

Squadron ordered to move to the Naval Air Station on North Island, San Diego, California.

November 3, 1942, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha [CVE-18]

Sailed aboard the U.S.S. Altamaha for the South Pacific War Zone in a convoy of nine ships.

November 19, 1942, Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides

Dropped anchor in Pekoa Channel, between the island of Espiritu Santo and Aore. These islands are located in the New Hebrides group, and lie to the north of New Caledonia, to the west of the Fiji Islands, and to the South East of the Solomons. We went ashore at Espiritu Santo where the natives are friendly. They are of Polynesian stock, small in stature, light colored, dirty, wear practically nothing, and live in grass huts. To the South of the island Espiritu Santo, is the island of Malekula where the natives may yet be cannibals. Needless to say, we don't go ashore to see. Crossed Equator on November 12, 1942.

26 November, 1942, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

Today is Thanksgiving! Quite different from others I've spent. Had a big dinner. Ship got underway.

28 November, 1942, Noumea, New Caledonia (French)

²³ Norman David "Buddy" Champlin, USNR (1919-2008). NASCC Class 9-A, Plainwell, MI. Married Ruth's bridesmaid, Geraldine "Jenny" Clark in Seattle 29 Aug 1942. Best man Ens. Joseph Riddle, Jr., USNR, Chaplain Joseph Floyd Dreith, USN.

²⁴ Lewis Ben Sanders, USNR (1917-1963). NASCC Class 8-A, Merriman, NE. Carrier squadron leader. Navy Cross, DFC.

²⁵ Aircraft Carrier takeoff and landing qualification.

Dropped anchor at Noumea, which is on the island of New Caledonia (Free French). It is located roughly 500 miles from Espiritu Santo and some 80 miles East from Australia. It is Summer here now and the mosquitos puts anything but a Bomber to shame, although the island is absolutely free of Malaria fevers, which the natives claim is due to the Niaouli tree. (Espiritu Santo was a hot-bed of Malaria). The natives are of Melanesian stock and there are several thousand Frenchmen here. The autos are right-hand drive and in general most things appear awkward to an American. There is nothing to buy in the City as the shops are almost empty and many of them are closed. We flew the planes ashore and conducted operations from an abandoned race track.

17 December 1942, Tontouta, Noumea, New Caledonia

The air group is temporarily based ashore at Tontouta. An Army field some 15 miles up the Island from Noumea. The mosquitos are terrible, and all but eat you alive.

23 December 1942, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

We returned to the U.S.S. Altamaha today. A ship never looked so good before. We are all affected with Dysentery and it really ran amok when it took me on.

24 December 1942, Noumea, New Caledonia

I spent the night over on the Island at the rest home for Marine Aviators, who have just returned from Guadalcanal. A good many of them had been shipmates with me at Corpus Christi, but I enjoyed seeing W.B. Freeman more than any other as his home is in Bonham, Texas, and I had gone through training with him in the same classes at Dallas and Jacksonville as well as Corpus. He has been awarded the D.F.C.. They had several gallons of native wine which added to the discomfort of my dysentery beyond words.

Christmas Day 1942, Noumea, New Caledonia

Causes one to have thoughts of home...A hell of a way to spend Christmas! At 1130 I went to Sick Bay and the doctor put me to bed in the hospital. I have a case of dysentery, running about 2-1/2 degrees of fever.

27 December, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

I was discharged from the hospital. The ship pulled in her mud hook and we got underway. Tis a good feeling after being at Noumea for so long.

30 December 1942, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

Dropped anchor in Pekoa Channel between the Islands of Aore and Espiritu Santo. (New Hebrides)

January 1, 1943, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

A great way to start the new year, at anchor! Why don't we get in the fight? Bert Sperry, Pete Kornicki, Sanders and I tried to ring in the new last night. Needless to say we didn't do much ringing, but we gave Auld Lang Syne a mighty salvo.

6 January 1943, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

Pulled anchor and put to sea on an easterly course.

10 January 1943, Aboard Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Altamaha

Joined a task force today composed of, including us, two Carriers, four Battleships, two Heavy Cruisers, and seven destroyers.²⁶ Woh!

12 January 1943, Nandi [Nadi], Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

Passed through Navula Passage, which is just a big gap in the coral, and dropped anchor off of Lautoka point which is on the western coast of Viti Levu, the largest island of the Fiji group (British).

13 January 1943, Nandi Air Base, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

²⁶ Carriers: USS *Altamaha* (CVE-18), *Nassau* (CVE-16); Battleships: USS *New Mexico* (BB-40), *Mississippi* (BB-41), *Colorado* (BB-45), *Maryland* (BB-46); Cruisers: USS *Pensacola* (CA-24), *Minneapolis* (CA-36); Destroyers: USS *McKean* (DD-90), *Farragut* (DD-348), *Hull* (DD-350), *Monaghan* (DD-354), *Stack* (DD-406), *Buchanan* (DD-484), *McCalla* (DD-488).

We were catapulted and landed at the Army Air Base near Nandi, a small village of Indian silver merchants. This is indeed a wonderful Island. The natives are very friendly, dark and speak English! Tropical fruits of all kinds are to be had for the gathering. We live in grass huts called Bure's underneath coconut trees and generally speaking, taking life easy. We fly a little during the day and amuse ourselves at night by going to the movies or playing poker.

24 January 1943, Nandi Air Base, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

The ship put to sea and we all flew back aboard for one days operations. Ship returned to her anchorage and we flew back to the Nandi Army Base. The other night we went to a native Tra-La. We all had lots of fun and joined in the dances. The mosquitos are not near so bad here as they were in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, but we slept under nets as they can be quite obnoxious.

January 31, 1943, Efate Island, Vanuatu

Left the carrier and the Fijis and flew to Efate which is south of Espiritu Santo. Left 1400 arrived 1900! 5 hours! Slept on a cane cot – no blankets, linen or mosquito nets.

February 1, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Left for Espiritu Santo at 0715 – arriving at 0910. Left for Guadalcanal at 1300: arrived 1800. I am really exhausted. Twelve hours in the air out of the last 28!

*February 2, 1943, **Hell!***

Japs began shelling this place and kept it up most of the night, only stopping long enough for their Bombers to come in and Bomb us good. Spent most of night in a dug-out: slept about 1-1/2 hours with my clothes on in the bottom of a damp ditch with shells and Bombs going Boom Boom in my ear. Manned planes at 0430 and attacked 16 Jap destroyers north west of Santa Isabel Island (Feb 2) Returned at 0845.²⁷

February 2, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Launched again at 1600 – made a bombing attack on the Jap air field at Munda point on the island of New Georgia, 180 miles WNW of Cactus. Returned at 1800 (about dark) just as the Japs were bombing our airfield. Lt. Brady²⁸ and Lt. (j.g.) Brannen²⁹ are missing!

February 3, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Attacked Munda airport again – Japs bombed again during the night.

February 4, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Attacked Munda early this morning. Anti-Aircraft fire heavy. All planes returned safely.

Feb 10, '43, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

All quiet. The Japs have not attacked the past 6 days. We attacked only once. Ensign Joe Riddle³⁰ was killed in action, but his crew were picked up. Larkin³¹ has Malaria Fever. I'm taking Atabrine daily!

Feb 11, '43, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

All quiet.

Feb 13, '43, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

²⁷ First Operation Ke "Tokyo Express" destroyer convoy, sent to remove Japanese forces from Guadalcanal. The convoy was outbound carrying 4,935 Japanese soldiers rescued from Cape Esperance and Kamimbo Bay at the northern tip of Guadalcanal. No mention of VGS-11 participating in this attack (and many other attacks) has been found in books and public domain, except a mention in the book "Operation Ke" (2012) that names Lt. Keighly as flight leader of 7 USN TBFs. Lt. William Harold Keighly, USNR (1909-1989) VGS-11, VT-21 TBF pilot. Retired a Captain with 2 DFCs, Navy Cross and Air Medal.

²⁸ Lt. William Harlan Simpson "Simp" Brady, USN (1915-1943). Annapolis graduate, 1938. VGS-11 F4F pilot KIA 2 Feb 1943.

²⁹ Lt.(jg) Murray Stanislaus Brannen, Jr., USN (1919-1943). VGS-11 F4F pilot KIA 2 Feb 1943.

³⁰ Ens. Joseph Riddle, Jr., USNR (1918-1943). NASCC Class 9-A, VGS-12 TBF pilot KIA 4 Feb 1943, DFC. Destroyer USS *Riddle* (DE-185) named in his honor. Surviving crew: ARM2c William Murrel Owen and AMM3c Herbert Albert Hopp.

³¹ Edward William "Eddie" Larkin, Jr., USNR (1919-1944). VGS-11 TBF pilot, KIA 19 Oct 1944 near Manila Bay flying with VT-13 off USS *Franklin* (CV-13). Turret gunner AMM1c James Derick Whittinghill also KIA.

Took off to search channel as far NW as Choiseul Island. Engine cut out on take off. Managed to get into the air by scraping the tree tops. Engine kept cutting out and the prop governor was slipping some 250 Revs so I turned to Field. Barely made it and thought several times my number had turned up. By using all the Power I had I barely stayed out of the coconut trees and my engine quit deader than hell just as I reached the run-way. I was really glad when I crawled out of the Cockpit, and my crew were quite happy.

February 19, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Things are very quiet. We fly about four to six hours each day doing anti-Sub patrols. Very dull. Larkin is out of the Hospital. My gunner, Durner³² is in the Hospital with Malaria.

Feb. 24. Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Things aren't as quiet as they have been. On the 20th we covered the landing of Army troops on the Russell Islands. That night we were landed again and had a slight earth-quake. Ensign Junk³³ got a submarine the 21st. Ensign Woodcock³⁴ is missing. Several of us have volunteered to attack Kahili Bomber Field on Bougainville Island which bears 295° true. 300 miles. That is stretching our range to the breaking point. The last little thing could go wrong and we wouldn't have enough fuel to return. Some of us may carry torpedoes and attack the ships there. Can't miss if we have a full moon then and catch the ships at anchor. Should prove interesting!

February 27, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

We have been getting up at midnight for the past few nights and standing by to go to Bougainville Island, but each time the attack has been called off due to weather, etc. Looks like we will go tonight. This is probably the most dangerous mission I've had so far, but we are in a position to do a lot of damage to the Japs if everything goes off as planned.

Feb 28, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Took off this morning at 0115 to Bomb the shipping off Bougainville Island. To make a long story short, Sanders and I got lost and had to return. We felt extremely stupid!

March 1, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Another attack group left this morning at 0220 for Bougainville and Sanders and I insisted that we be allowed to go. The weather up was fair. As we were about ten miles away, the PB4Y's dropped their flares which lighted the harbor for us. The Japs were too smart, for after last night's attack they had moved their ships out of the harbor after dark. Therefore we dropped our bombs on Kahili Bomber field. The flares, searchlights, and Anti-Aircraft fire really makes a spectacle. And in a sense is quite beautiful until you realize that that isn't just a display of fireworks but that they are trying to kill you. So you drop your bombs where they will do the most damage and get the hell out of there. Weather on way back was excellent – landed at 0720.

March 3, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Heard that we might leave for the States in a few weeks, but it sounds too good to be true. Shaved my goatee off today after growing it for four months. Received a Christmas package from Ruth today!

March 7, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Leave tomorrow morning for Nandi (Fiji) via Espiritu Santo. We are to return here (Guadalcanal) April 10th. I've been promoted to Lt. (j.g.) effective March 1, 1943.

March 8 – Left Guadalcanal by TBF-1

³² ARM3c Jacob Casper "Jack" Durner, Jr., USNR was Chile's turret gunner who was KIA 7 Jul 1943 with Chile.

³³ Ens. Winfield Higdon Junk, USN (1920-1977). VGS-11, VT-21 TBF pilot. On 28 Feb 1943 sank a cargo ship off Kahili. Served with VT-21 on the USS *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24). Career navy, retired LCDR, Navy Cross.

³⁴ Ens. Maurice Edward Woodcock, USNR (1919-1943). VGS-12 F4F pilot KIA 4 Feb 1943.

March 8 – Arrived Espiritu Santo by TBF-1

March 9 – Left Espiritu Santo by TBF-1

March 9 – Arrived Nandi, Viti Levu by TBF-1

March 10 – Left Nandi by TBF-1

March 10 – Arrived Suna for a few days rehabilitation and rest.

March 14, Suna, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

We are staying at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suna. Quite a dull place after being at Guadalcanal with so much excitement. Suna is the best locale we have been in since we left the States but it's not much! The rates at the hotel are L1 per day (one pound, or about 3.75 in U.S. money). That includes your meals.

March 16, Nandi, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

Arrived back in Nandi. Name of Squadron changed from VGS-11 to VC-11 effective March 1, 1943.

April 8, 1943, Nandi, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

We were originally scheduled to return to Guadalcanal today. Looks like it will be sometime in May before we go back. Still "resting".

April 13 1943, Nandi, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

Lt.(j.g.) F.R. Sanborn³⁵ returned to the squadron today. He has been in the Hospital over at Noumea since his plane crashed and burned on a night take off at Guadalcanal. He was burned quite severely while rescuing his crew. Shortly thereafter his bombs exploded.

April 16, 1943, Nandi, Viti Levu, Fiji Islands

I am 23 today.

April 19, 1943, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

Left Nandi Army Air Base for the Island of Espiritu Santo on our way back to Guadalcanal. Arrived here at 1405 after being in the air for four hours +. We will be here for a couple of weeks or longer while we have some engine changes made.

April 25, 1943, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

Easter Sunday. Today I went to Church, then in the afternoon I went over to the officers club at Cub One³⁶ Landing where I ran into Capt. Cleland Early³⁷, USMC (TCU '41), Ensign Bob Glaze³⁸, USNR (TCU '41), and 1st Lt. Bob Milling³⁹, USMCR (TCU ex43). Did we have a time. We had a few beers and talked for hours. Then I went aboard the SS Del Brazil with Early and spent the night. Some of the Squadron are still in the Fiji's. One of our new fighter pilots was killed the 22nd in a crash. Only eleven of the original thirty two officers who left the States are still with us. We have ten new fighter pilots and five new torpedo pilots.

May 3, 1943, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

We have been out of the States six Months today.

May 15, 1943, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

Today VC-11 and VC-12 were merged together and two new squadrons formed. Fighting Squadron Twenty one and Torpedo Squadron Twenty one. I am in VT-21.

May 26 1943, Efate Island, Vanuatu

³⁵ Lt.(jg) Francis Reo Sanborn, USNR (1918-1996). VGS-11, VT-21 TBF pilot.

³⁶ Advanced Naval Base unit (called CUBs) were created to establish front-line support to navy land-based aircraft units. CUB One served on Guadalcanal from 15 Aug 1942 through 8 Jan 1943 and received the first US aircraft at Henderson Field.

³⁷ Col. Cleland Edward Early, Sr., USMC (1919-2004). 2nd Marine Raider Bn, Carlson's Raider, platoon leader on the Guadalcanal "Long Patrol", 26-year career Marine, Silver Star, Purple Heart.

³⁸ Lt. Robert Emerson Glaze, USNR (1919-2009). Chief Engineering Officer USS *Pathfinder* (AGS-1) survey ship for the 'Guadalcanal Anchorage BC' map and maintained Guadalcanal shore beacons.

³⁹ 1st Lt. Robert Lee Milling, USMC (1919-1988). March 1943 passenger aboard USS *Altamaha* with unknown Marine unit.

Flew to Efate, an island south of here a hundred or so miles to see if we could find some needed equipment. Had fried chicken for supper and fresh eggs for breakfast! The first of either in months. Saw several people I was in training with.

May 27 1942, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides

Back to Espiritu Santo again. Had hash for dinner. Lieut. Rowbotham⁴⁰ has Malaria and both my gunner and radioman⁴¹ are in the hospital with dengue fever.

June 5, 1943 Aboard Destroyer / Seaplane Tender U.S.S. Thornton [DD-270, AVD-11]

Boarded USS Thornton for transportation to Guadalcanal. Laid over at Santa Cruz eight hours. Arrived Henderson Field 0700, June 7, 1945. Had a bombing raid before lunch.⁴²

June 13, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Made night attack on Kahili bomber field on the Island of Bougainville. In the air 5.7 hours. Lt(j.g.) Slyster⁴³, Lt(j.g.) Sprague⁴⁴, and Ensign Andrews⁴⁵ are missing in action.

June 16, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Made early morning attack on Sangigai, on the Island of Choiseul. I dropped 4-500# personnel bombs in target area. All planes returned safely. A good raid from all angles! In the afternoon the Japs came down in the biggest force in several months (it is estimated 120-140 Jap planes)⁴⁶. We live about 60 yards from the beach and had a 'grand-stand seat'. When the alarm sounded we put on our tin hats and stood beside our fox-holes watching our fighters take off. In just a few minutes all hell broke loose, but it was such a sight we stayed on the outside and watched. The zeros and the wildcats and other U.S. fighters (F4U's - P38's - P39's⁴⁷) tangled above us about 15000ft. What a sight. Burning planes all over the sky, others spinning down with the wings tearing off and our planes racing across the sky hell bent for election, shooting all their guns – well there was just so much going on that we couldn't see it all. Then the Jap dive bombers dove on the ships in the harbor, with the zeros coming down with them for protection and our fighters right in the middle shooting and being shot at. All this time the ships were shooting back, the ak ak around the field was shooting everything they had, and the stuff was falling all around us and going through our huts. Only once did we hit the fox holes, and that was when one Jap decided to strafe us. I must have seen ten planes on fire and that many more breaking up in the air or spinning into the sea.

Jap losses: 84 planes!

Our losses: 6 planes

2 Ships

1 ship damaged

⁴⁰ Lt. William Everitt Rowbotham, USNR (1918-1944). VT-21 C.O. on USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), shot down 12 Jun 1944, POW, killed by Japanese 14 Jun 1944 during air transport to Japan. He attacked his captors in flight and was killed with samurai swords.

⁴¹ ARM3c Richard Thomas Dole, USNR (1922-1993) is not named in Chile's diary. He was Chile's radioman on 7 Jul 1943 and survived the water crash with a broken arm. Rescued by the minesweeper USS *Skylark* (AM-63) off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal.

⁴² Japanese First Operation SO on 7 Jun 1945 was a fighter attack on Guadalcanal and nearby Allied held islands and included 81 Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters. Second Operation SO (not mentioned) was on June 12, 1943 and included 77 Zero fighters.

⁴³ Lt.(jg) Frederic Burton Sleyster, USNR (1919-1943). VT-21 TBF pilot KIA 19 May 1943.

⁴⁴ Ens. James Reneau Sprague, USNR (1920-1982). Enlisted Gross Ile, MI. VT-21 TBF pilot, shot down 13 Jun 1943, radioman ARM3c Charles Dobbryn Christensen went down with the TBF and KIA. Sprague and gunner, AOM3c Charles Alexander Stranahan, Jr., wounded, evaded for 13 days, returned. Navy Cross, 1944.

⁴⁵ Ens. Milner Lauzer "Andy" Andrews (1918-2004). VT-21 TBF pilot, engine failure on 10 Jun 1943 after bomb run on Kahili, ditched in enemy waters, Andrews and crew evaded for 47 days, returned. Retired as CDR.

⁴⁶ Japanese Operation SE included 24 dive bombers (13 lost) and 70 Zero fighters (15 lost) with 6 US fighters lost and 2 US Navy ships severely damaged, the cargo ship USS *Celene* (AK-76) and USS *LST-340*.

⁴⁷ US Marine Vought F4U Corsairs, US Army Air Force Lockheed P-38 Lightnings and Bell P-39 Airacobras fighter aircraft. Not mentioned are the US Navy Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters that also participated.

And if that wasn't enough for one day, we sent five of our pilots on a prowl to Bougainville, taking off at sundown and returning about midnight. Lt.(j.g.) E.M. Peck⁴⁸ did not return from this mission.

June 19, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Went on a night prowl to Bougainville. Take off time 2200. Arrival time (Guadalcanal) 0300. All pilots returned safely which makes me very happy as the other times my flight has gone we have always lost a plane.

June 23, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Went on morning attack on Vila airfield on Kolombangara Island. Couldn't get close enough to see the Island due to the weather, so we attacked Rekata Bay on Santa Isabel Island. All planes returned safely.

June 25, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Take off at 0265. Bombed bivouac area at Munda Airfield on New Georgia Island. All planes returned safely on ground at 0955. The Japs came down this way to bomb us every few days. They usually bomb the Russell Islands, where we have an airfield, or the Naval Base at Tulagi as they do not have as much Anti-Aircraft protection as we have on Guadalcanal. Four airfields are now on the northern coast of Guadalcanal. We are operating from Henderson Field. Our living conditions are much better here this time than they were in February and March.

June 27, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Made morning bombing attack on Munda Airfield. All planes returned safely. I dropped one 2000 lb. 'block buster'.

June 28, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Made afternoon attack on Vila Airfield on Kolombangara Island. Each plane dropped four 500 lb. bombs. All planes returned.

June 30, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

The push is on! Our forces have landed on New Georgia and Rendova. Looks like I'll be landing on Munda Airfield in a week or so, and then I guess real hell will break there, as we will be going to Ballale, Kahili, Kieta, and Buka around the clock. In short, things are looking good.

July 1, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Attacked Villa Airfield (about 15 miles from Munda Airfield, which we are in the process of taking away from the Japs like we did Guadalcanal) with one 2000 lb. block buster. We lost no planes or pilots on this attack. As a whole, there has been an air battle going on ever couple of hours up around New Georgia for the past two days (our troops landed on June 30). The incomplete returns are 102 Jap planes shot down – us 17 planes with 5 pilots recovered already. VF-21 claims 33 Japs with the loss of only three planes and 2 pilots still missing. The pilots are Lt. Cmdr. ~~Oster~~ Henry⁴⁹, and Lt(j.g.) Ruth⁵⁰. Lt. Torklenson⁵¹ [sic] got three planes today as did Lt(j.g.) W.C. Smith⁵². It's quite a show. Wish I was a fighter pilot so I'd see more and be in more.

July 5, 1943, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

⁴⁸ Lt.(jg) Edward Melville Peck, USN (1917-1994). VT-21 TBF pilot and crew, AOM2c Stanley William Tefft and Ens. Jesse Scott, Jr., were shot down after bombing Kahili and ditched SE of Shortland Island. They were picked-up in their raft by natives, evaded capture for 3 months, returned. All believed KIA when VT-21 left Guadalcanal 3 Aug 1943. Peck retired as Navy CDR.

⁴⁹ Lt. Cdr. George Robert Henry, USN (1910-1943). VF-12 F4F flight leader and pilot KIA over Rendova 30 Jun 1943. DFC.

⁵⁰ Lt.(jg) Lloyd Dee Ruth (1917-1993). NASCC Class 6-B, VF-21 F4F pilot, returned.

⁵¹ Lt. Cdr. Ross Edwin Torkelson (1913-1943) X.O. VF-21 F4F pilot KIA 22 Jul 43 Solomon Islands, DFC.

⁵² Lt.(jg) William Carmack Smith (1919-1978) VF-21 F4F pilot, 4.5 victories, WIA 30 Oct 1944, from Sulphur Springs, TX, a high school classmate and close friend of Chile's.

Things are still working smoothly up around Munda. So far we have lost only 100⁵³ and 1 a.k.⁵⁴ and about 31 airplanes with one half of the pilots recovered. VF-21 is doing swell. Lt.(j.g.) Roach⁵⁵ (Bogata, Texas) got 3 Jap planes yesterday. Ensign Heard⁵⁶ is missing. All total the Japs have lost about 300 aircraft in this area in the last 30 days. The Japs get very few of their pilots back, while we usually get about half of ours back. Had the first "condition red" (air raid) here since May 28.

July 6, 1943, Same Place, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

Went on an attack this morning that was bitched up like Hogan's Goat. A Jap D.D. was beached off Kolombangara. To make a long story short – only one hit was scored and you should have seen the rendezvous. We were all over the sky for fifteen minutes. Only by the grace of God and excellent fighter coverage did we manage to stagger home. P.S. I had to make three dives on the target before I could get my bombs to release. I missed 37 miles – well, they weren't very close anyway. The scuttle-but has it that we lost a cruiser (Helena)⁵⁷ last night N.E. of Vella Lavella.

July 6, 1943 is the last entry Chile made. The next night, Lt.(jg) Murray Charlton "Chile" McKinney and gunner ARM3c Jacob Casper "Jack" Durner were killed after probably sinking a Japanese Destroyer off Kahili. Jack was killed in his turret by a Japanese night fighter after the bomb run. Chile nursed the badly crippled TBF #250 300-miles back to Guadalcanal. He crash-landed off the north coast of Guadalcanal 1-mile from the USS *Skylark*, a minesweeper on anti-submarine patrol. Radioman ARM3c Richard Thomas Dole was thrown clear, suffering a broken arm, and was rescued by *Skylark*.

⁵³ A reference to 100 US Army KIA since the 2 Jul 1943 assault on Munda, New Georgia.

⁵⁴ AK is the abbreviation for a cargo vessel.

⁵⁵ Lt.(jg) Thomas Donald Roach, USNR (1918-1944). VF-21 F4F pilot KIA 26 Jul 1944, Papua, New Guinea.

⁵⁶ Lt.(jg) Travis Hartin Heard, USNR (1920-1943). VF-21 F4F pilot KIA over Rendova 4 Jul 1943. His brother, 1st Lt. Willie Stokes Heard, Jr., US Army, was captured at Bataan, imprisoned at Camp Cabanatuan, Philippines and perished on the Japanese POW hell ship, *Arisan Maru* on 24 Oct 1944, when it was torpedoed by the submarine USS *Shark* (SS-314) or USS *Snook* (SS-279). All 1,783 POWs went into the water. Two Japanese escort destroyers rescued the *Arisa Maru* crew, but refused to rescue the POWs leaving them to drown. Only 9 survived. The *Shark* and *Snook* were both lost during this war patrol to unknown causes.

⁵⁷ USS *Helena* (CL-50) was sunk at the Battle of Kula Gulf north of Munda at about 3-a.m. with a loss of 168 sailors.