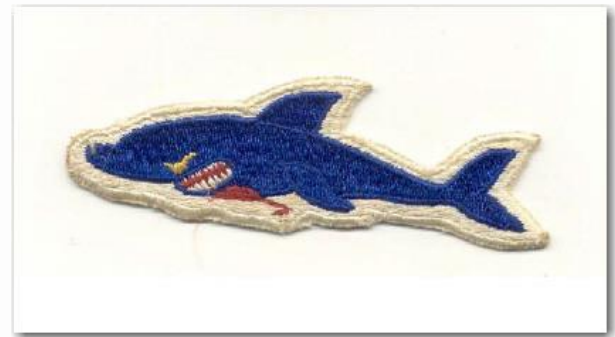


THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MY AIRCRAFT

P2V-3 NEPTUNE BUNR 122934

ASSIGNED TO PATROL SQUADRON SIX

“THE BLUE SHARKS”



P2V NEPTUNE "TRUCULENT TURTLE"



The P2V Neptune was a long range maritime patrol aircraft developed during World War II and operated by Navy patrol squadrons across the world throughout the Cold War and Vietnam. Its first milestone came as a modified P2V-1 dubbed the "Truculent Turtle". It made a record breaking endurance flight in September 1946. The Turtle flew nonstop without refueling from Perth, Australia, to Columbus, Ohio, a distance of 11,235 miles, in 55 hours and 17 minutes, a record it held until 1962. The aircraft is now on display at the National Naval Aviation Museum.

THE LIFE OF NEPTUNE BUNR 122934

On 3 June 1950 I met and flew for the first time the aircraft that would be assigned to crew 12 in 1952. It was a P2V-3 Neptune, Bureau Number 122934 and one of 9 Neptune's assigned to the Navy Patrol Squadron Six (VP-6) homeported at NAS Barbers Point, Hawaii. The number of aircraft in the squadron was later increased to 12. In 1950 I was a brand new pilot with the rank of Midshipman. I would remain assigned to this squadron until January 1953. My first crew assignment was as the Navigator of Crew 6 with Lt Joe Bacak as the Plane Commander. My second crew assignment was as the Co-Pilot of Crew 2 with CDR Perkinson as the Plane Commander. My third and last crew assignment was as the Plane Commander of Crew 12. The aircraft assigned to Crew 12 was the P2V-3, Neptune I first met on 3 June 1950.



During my assignment to VP-6, the squadron made three deployments. Two were for six months each to Japan during 1950 & 1951. We were the first Navy aircraft squadron to fly combat missions in the Korean War during 1950. Many of us received Air Medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). My last deployment was to Kodiak, Alaska for six months, July - December 1952.



Following our deployment to Alaska, I flew BUNR 122934 back to NAS Barbers Point via NAS Whidbey Island WA and NAS Alameda, CA. My Co-Pilot was Scott Carpenter, one of the original seven Astronauts. Since I was scheduled to be detached from the squadron following the deployment to Alaska, I arranged for my wife and son (1 year old) to fly to California on the Martin Mars, the largest flying boat in the world. Below is a picture of the actual Mars (Hawaii Mars) that my family flew as a passenger to California. This Mars had been purchased from the Navy by Coulson Flying Tankers.



Upon my arrival at NAS Barbers Point I was assigned to fly my aircraft back to NAS Alameda for overhaul. The flight was uneventful and I was on my way to my next duty assignment as an instructor at the Advanced Multi-Engine Training Command located at NAS Hutchinson, Kansas. Yes, Hutchinson, Kansas. It is hard to believe that a US Navy flight facility would be located in the middle of the United States. I have 4000 hours in the P2V and flew this aircraft for 252 of those hours.

Following overhaul of Neptune BuNr 122934 it was returned to VP-6 and renumbered #7



THE GREAT CREW 12
WHO KEPT NEPTUNE 12 BUNR 122934
ALIVE AND HEALTHY



**Front Row L to R - LT Smith (Co-Pilot), ENS Combs (Navigator) and
LTJG Pickering (Patrol Plane Commander)**

**Back Row L to R - ALAN Locke, AOAN Cumberland, ADAN Neely, AD3 Henry
and AL3 Allen**

THE DEATH OF NEPTUNE BUNR 122934

One year after I left Patrol Squadron Six, the aircraft had a problem on takeoff while VP-6 was deployed to NAS Sangley Pt, Philippines in December 1953. The aircraft did not complete the takeoff and ended up off the end of the runway with its back broken and both engines ruined plus many more problems - my best information tells me the aircraft never flew again. My aircraft was dead.



Richard Charles Pickering

Commander United States Navy (Retired)