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U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

A Coast Guard Aviator in WWII:

The Oral History of Lieutenant Commander W. E. Prindle, Jr., USCGR CG Aviator # 144, CG Helicopter Pilot # 24

as told to his son,
Captain Peter E. Prindle, USCG (Ret.)
CG Aviator #1184, CG Helicopter Pilot #581

My father was born in New Haven, Connecticut on 13 March, 1917. He grew up along the Connecticut shore, working on and around boats. During the summer of 1937, while he was working in Essex Connecticut, he spent some of his earnings on flying lessons in a Taylor J-2 Cub at the local grass strip. After graduating from Haverford College in 1938, he worked for Seamless Rubber in New Haven until he joined the Coast Guard in September, 1941. While in New Haven, he earned his civilian pilot license by soloing (with the flight examiner watching) at Tweed Field, a grass strip cut so high as to require nearly full power from the J-2 to get airborne. He served in the Coast Guard until September 1946, with assignments in CGC *Unalga* (WPG-53) and CGC *Marion* (WSC-145) before leaving for Flight School in October 1942. (See his *Marion Journal* in the Coast Guard Oral History Web Site.)

He completed flight training in May 1943, and served at Coast Guard Air Stations St. Petersburg (June 1943 – November 1943), Elizabeth City (December 1943 – May 1944, and Brooklyn (June 1944 – July 1946). At Floyd Bennett, he became Coast Guard Helicopter Pilot #24.





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(My father is the third from the right of the front rank in this picture of Officers in formation on the ramp at CG Air Station Brooklyn in 1945.)

During nearly 1600 flying hours, he logged time in Navy Training aircraft, the N3N "Yellow Peril," the OS2U Kingfisher, the PH-2 Hall Flying Boat, the SO3C Curtis Seagull, the PBY Catalina, the PBM Mariner, the J4F Widgeon, the JRF Goose, the SNB Expediter, the SNJ Texan, and the R-4, the R-5, and the R-6 helicopters. His flight time is tabulated at the end of this article. His logbooks indicate that he flew with several notable figures in the early history of Coast Guard Aviation, including John D. McCubbin, Carl B. Olsen, Richard L. Burke, Frank Erickson, William Kossler, John Greathouse, and Stewart Graham. (RADM McCubbin was the 8th District Commander while I was at CGAS New Orleans in the early '70s, and ADCM John Greathouse was at ATC Mobile with me in 1970.) In addition, he provided flight instruction in the HNS helicopter to Wolfgang Langeweische, noted test pilot and aviation author, and Jim Palmer, his CO aboard *Marion* in 1942, among many others.

Coast Guard Aviation in the WW II era was somewhat less regimented than it is today. For example, upon reporting to CGAS St. Pete in 1943, he was declared safe for solo on 10 June in the "Yellow Peril" after 2 flights and a check ride, and found safe for solo in the "Kingfisher" on 15 June after a similar check out. His transition a month later to the twin engine "Widgeon" took slightly longer – 8 hops and a check ride. Learning to fly the HNS helicopter was apparently more challenging – 10 flights to solo, and 22 before a final check from CDR Erickson. At Floyd Bennett, he was designated a Patrol Plane Commander in the PBY-5A after 7 hops. A review of his Flight Log Books reveals that at one point he was similarly "qualified" in 8 different aircraft while at CGAS Elizabeth City, and that he accrued flight time at the rate of 35 hours/month throughout his CG career. He states that most of his time was spent flying routine patrols, with an occasional SAR case.

Just after 1700 on May 19, 1944, he was on a routine Anti-Submarine Patrol out of Elizabeth City when he received a blinking light from a Mexican merchant vessel requesting assistance. After jettisoning his depth charges, he executed an uneventful offshore landing parallel to the swells in his OS2U to investigate. One of the ship's crew had a ruptured appendix and needed evacuation, but the Kingfisher only had two seats, and my dad didn't think the patient would be able to negotiate the climb into the rear cockpit, nor did he want to leave his radioman behind, so he called CGAS Elizabeth City for a larger aircraft. A PBM with the unit Operations Officer at the controls was launched, and after an "eventful" night offshore landing in



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thunderstorms, the sick sailor was successfully evacuated. **The article at right from the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* describes the rescue.**

He notes that the SO3C-3 Curtis Seagulls were foisted upon CGAS Elizabeth City by the Navy for "testing," but proved so underpowered and unwieldy on the ground, that they were soon returned to Norfolk. The forward visibility while taxiing the Seagull was nil, and two of them collided on the ground. They also had leading edge slats for lift while operating from catapults, and on one of his "test" flights, my dad failed to brief the radioman on this difference from the OS2U, causing considerable consternation when the slats deployed during landing. He also recalls that one of the Aviation Pilots at CGAS Elizabeth City, Bill Solari, missed the seaplane ramp in a crosswind and grounded a Hall Flying Boat on the breakwater just outside the CO's office. CDR Burke, the CO, came out to investigate the commotion, and gave Solari a classic chewing out. When the CO had finished, Solari replied, "What do you expect for \$75/month Skipper, Lindbergh?" At Brooklyn, my dad confesses to practicing barrel rolls in an SNJ with the canopy open, resulting in the loss of his headset and a "no radio" return to base. He also admits that his checkout in the SNB was essentially non-existent. A weekend mission popped up, and he was asked to take it, having never flown the SNB before.

Since most of his time in the Coast Guard was spent at Floyd Bennett, many of my dad's anecdotal recollections are from there. On 24 November, 1945, he was tasked to deliver Santa from an HNS to a Ford GPA Amphibious Jeep (**left**) in the



Hudson River so that photographers could get pictures of the helicopter in action. He arrived on scene and promptly lowered

Santa, a CG enlisted man, to the jeep, but not without difficulty due to the size of the jeep and the freezing spray from the river. The photographers





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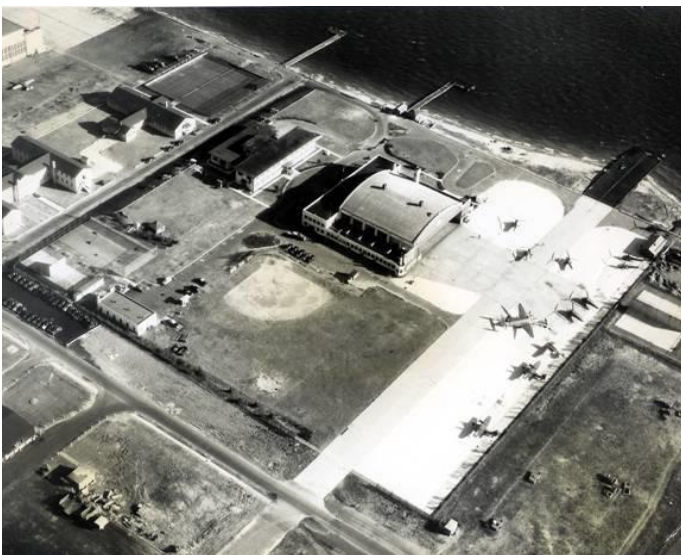
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were not quite as prompt at getting set up, however, and missed most of the operation. When they asked for a retake, my dad politely declined, thus saving Santa from a second soaking.

On another occasion, he was asked to land the HNS on a new escort carrier, or "baby flat top," anchored in the Hudson. He did so with ease, since the carrier's deck was clear, but was soon summoned to the CO's cabin. There he was confronted by the CO, "mad as a wet hen," because a Coast Guard helicopter had made the first landing on his new ship, thus throwing a monkey wrench into the festivities he had been planning for the first Navy fixed wing aircraft to come aboard. Apparently the powers that be had failed to coordinate the mission as well as they might have.

Just south of Floyd Bennett there were some apartment houses with flat roofs upon which young ladies liked to sunbathe in various stages of dishabille. One day he happened to over fly the area while enroute to the station, causing considerable consternation among the sunbathers. He arrived just in time to field a call from one of the discommoded "tanners" who registered a vigorous complaint. My dad assured her that the errant pilot would be disciplined forthwith.

In October, 1944, my dad had occasion to ferry helicopters to and from the Army Air Force Depot in Newark, NJ at what is now Newark International Airport. On one of these flights, the weather was somewhat foggy, and by the time he was ready to depart Newark, the visibility was down to about 50 yards. After filing a flight plan listing "anywhere" as the alternate airport, the AAF Colonel who served as clearing authority asked my dad to explain. After a lengthy briefing on the capabilities of the helicopter, the Colonel approved the flight plan, which today would constitute a Special VFR Clearance. My dad describes the flight back to Floyd Bennett as follows: "I took off, picked up the Hudson River and flew east until I picked up the NY shore and the Belt Parkway. Followed that eastward until I picked up the fence on the west side of Floyd Bennett.



(Out of sight to the left in this picture of the Coast Guard hangar taken on 18 November 1944 with 8 HNS, 2 J4F, an SNJ, and a C-50 on the ramp.)



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Landed at the CG hangar and reported my arrival to the tower. The tower operator responded, 'you must be mistaken sir, because there have been no landings here in the past hour.' After some further explanation on the capabilities of the helicopter, the tower personnel were satisfied that I had in fact arrived, and closed my flight plan."



On December 2, 1944 my dad was co-pilot of XHOS-1 #447 from CGAS Brooklyn, pictured below, which crashed on Jones Beach, NY. Gus Kleisch was the pilot, and Stewart Graham was the passenger. My father recalled this event following the crash of an airliner in the same area in 2001:

"With all the news about the airliner crash on Rockaway Island, I was reminded that in 1944 I was in a helicopter that crashed in the same area. Three experienced CG pilots were returning for lunch at Floyd Bennett

from our practice field. I was not the one at the controls. Over a beach near Rockaway the machine tilted sharply to the right (I was on the right side) and came down on a beach. The blades of the copter crumpled and softened the landing, so we were all able to walk away. Only about 12 people showed up, no fire engines or ambulances, perhaps because there was no fire and we didn't destroy anything on the ground. They later found out that a main bearing in the control system had failed, though the copter had only 10 hours of flight time. It was the first of a brand new design, and they had specified the wrong type bearing." Stewart Graham's account is similar: "I was checking out a group of advanced students at our auxiliary airport when one of our experimental XHOS-1 type helicopters (number 46447) arrived from Floyd Bennett Field, piloted by Lieutenant Gus Kleisch. He had been told to return me to Floyd Bennett to demonstrate our hoist-equipped helicopter for a group of VIPs. I strapped myself into a small jump seat behind the pilot. About halfway across Jamaica Bay, Kleisch yelled out that the controls were stuck. We crashed. The pilot[s] got out safely, but I was rushed to a hospital with back injuries, requiring a month to recuperate, the result of a





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frozen main carrier bearing in the rotor head.” (Graham’s account is from the CG Aviation History Website.)

In March of 1945, my dad (**pictured below in the center of a photo apparently taken at Kansas City on 7 March**) was dispatched from Floyd Bennett Field with AMM2 Sam King and ARM2 John Serafin for Midwest flood duty in J4F-1 V205. Twenty five of these aircraft were purchased by the Coast Guard at a unit cost of \$75,526. Powered by 2 Ranger L-440-2 in-line engines with Sensenich wooden, fixed pitch propellers, they performed well on a variety of missions. My dad flew the J4F-1 at all three Coast Guard Air Stations to which he was assigned.



The following is a verbatim transcription of the journal he kept during this trip. His flight logs show that the adventure started on 4 March and ended on 5 May, during which time he logged over 170 flying hours, or about 3 hours per day. The mission apparently occurred on short notice, as he notes that a CG Morale Fund Loan of \$80 was initially provided to finance the flight. That it was a good trip is witnessed by the inscription on the back of original photo, “To a good skipper. Signed, AMM2 Sam King and ARM2 John Serafin, March 7, 1942.”



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Sunday, 4 March:

0915 - Took off from Floyd Bennett

1215 – Landed Pittsburgh (317 miles, average speed 106 mph)

1300 – Took off

1545 – Landed Indianapolis (330 miles, average speed 119 mph)

1640 – Took off

1850 – Landed St. Louis (230 miles, average speed 106 mph)

Good weather all the way. Flight Time 7.9 hours. Expenses: Crackers, \$.10, Coke, \$.05, Room \$3.00, Dinner, \$.65, tip, \$.10.

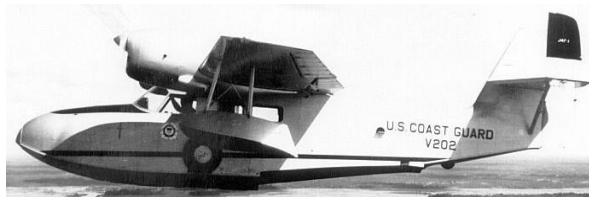
Monday, 5 March:

Went down to DCGO (Director of Coast Guard Operations) office in morning to check in and find out about things. Found the Disbursing Officer to be LT J. Tormos. (LT Tormos had been the Pay & Supply Officer in San Juan when I was in Marion before Flight Training) Decided to go to Kansas City tomorrow. Went to airport in the afternoon to get the plane ready to go to K.C. Supper with Hammond & Merritt (CG Buddies) and movie – “Thin Man Comes Home,” and “Blondie.” Expenses: Room, \$3.00, Breakfast, \$.62, Shoe Shine, \$.15, Supper, \$.73, Drinks, \$1.75. Per Diem – \$7.00/day

Tuesday, 6 March:

Rain & Snow today, so could not fly. Hung around DCGO office in the morning, went through the Anheuser Busch brewery in PM with ENS Nesmith. Went out and did the town with LT Tormos in the (sic) PM. Expenses: Room, \$3.00, Breakfast, \$.40, Hair Cut, \$.95, Taxi, \$1.50, Food, \$.40, Drinks, \$3.00

Wednesday, 7 March:



Flew from St. Louis to Kansas City, arriving about 1400. Landed at Fairfax Airport, met by all sorts of news reporters and photographers. Refueled plane and then went into town & got settled. Rooms are hard to get, but finally got one at the oldest good hotel – Muehlblock – not as nice as Statler in St.

Louis. Saw “Hollywood Canteen” in the evening. Expenses: Room, \$3.25, Breakfast, \$.46, Lunch, \$.85, Taxi, \$.45, Supper, \$.45, Movie, \$.70, Tip, \$.15



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Thursday, 8 March:

Moved to the Pickford Hotel, which is cheaper and nearer the Recruiting Office which we are using for a headquarters. Went out to the field in the afternoon & flew to Omaha and back. In evening, supper alone at the Continental Hotel, which seems nice and new and modern. Saw a couple of silly movies after supper and then went to bed. Expenses: Room, \$2.55, Breakfast, \$.46, Lunch, \$.30, Taxi, \$.50, Supper, \$.92, Movie, \$.35, Tip, \$.10.



Friday, 9 March:

Got a call from Hammond (Robert E., CG Aviator # 148) to go to New Orleans and pick up a CDR Bresnan, USCGR, and fly him to New Madrid on the Mississippi just below Cairo. Took off about 1300 and arrived at 1930 just after dark, having stopped at Little Rock, AR. Flight Time 5.8 hours. Stayed over night at CDR Bresnan's house. It was good to be in a house for a change from hotels. They have a little boy, Jody, age 4, and also a nice Capehart Radio Victrola. Slept in a bed with 3 mattresses – good sleeping. Expenses: Carfare, \$.35, Breakfast, \$.22, Stamps, \$.05, Paper, \$.03, Taxi, \$1.60, Map, \$.50, Teledex, \$2.50, Cokes, \$.20.

Saturday, 10 March:



Departed from New Orleans at 0830. Flew up the Mississippi observing the flood conditions, which are not serious yet on this river. Landed at Greenville, MS for gas, then on to Malden, MO. Dropped CDR Bresnan off, and come on to St. Louis, where I met Art McCrate (LT USCGR, CG Aviator #174, who had flown an R-4 Helo out to St. Louis for flood duty. He was the son of a wealthy oil man and unmarried.

One evening they went to a diner in a small town for supper. The bill for both came to around \$5.00. McCrate always carried a \$100.00 bill with him for emergencies, so he said: "Let me pay the bill," thinking it would embarrass the cashier. He gave her the \$100, but she just counted out the change!) Flight Time 7.1 hours. Got a room at the Lennox Hotel for the night – nice comfortable room in a corner. Went to bed early because I was really tired Expenses: Room, \$3.32, Milk, \$.21, Supper, \$.46.



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Sunday, 11 March:

Hung around DCGO office in the morning waiting for orders. Then went to the field in the afternoon and pulled an "A" check on the left engine of 205. Went over to E. St. Louis in the evening with the boys, Sam and John. Expenses: Room, \$2.55, Breakfast, \$.65, Taxi, \$1.50, Supper, \$.66, Beer, \$3.00.



Monday, 12 March:

Went out to Lambert Field, St. Louis and did an "A" check on the right engine. I helped and learned how it is done. Saw movie in the evening called "Guest in the House," and a Laurel & Hardy comedy. Both good in different ways. Expenses: Room, \$2.55, Breakfast, \$.42, Telephone, \$.22, Lunch, \$.85, Shirt, \$1.50, Supper, \$1.00, Movie, \$.30, Red Cross, \$.50, Laundry, \$1.10

Tuesday, 13 March:

Took off at 1025 from St. Louis for Malden, MO AAF. Flew down the Mississippi River and saw flooding at Cairo. Landed Malden at 1215, refueled and took off for Greenville, MS at 1305. Landed Greenville 1535 and departed 1620 for New Orleans. Landed at NAS New Orleans at 1815. Spent the night at CDR Bresnan's house. Went out to eat with the family and had a wonderful steak. Got a nice Eversharp pencil from Kitch (Spouse) for my birthday – 28 today. Expenses: Breakfast, \$.40, Lunch, \$.45, Supper, \$1.60.

Wednesday, 14 March:

Went down town in New Orleans with CDR Bresnan and walked around the French Quarter, looking in windows of antique shops. Bought Kitch a little silver thing to hang on whiskey decanter. Went out to the field at 1200 and took off for patrol of river & swamps to the west of the Mississippi. Landed for gas at NAS Houma, LA, (Lighter than Air field) then flew down to the mouth of the river. Went into New Orleans in the evening, and called on Mrs. Laurens, mother of the Laurens twins. Expenses: Present for Kitch, \$7.26, Toilet Bag, \$1.67, Trolley, \$.15, Soda, \$.15, Sandwiches, \$.60.



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Thursday, 15 March:



Looked around some more in New Orleans – saw Olde Absinthe House, Jean Lafitte's Bar, and several interesting places. Took off at 1100 for Kansas City. Landed for gas at Little Rock, AR. Got to K. C. at 1730. Stayed at the Pickwick Hotel in PM, very poor rooms, dirty and poorly equipped. Had a good supper at Weiss Café. Expenses: Telephone, \$.05, Coke, \$.05, Room, \$2.40, Supper, \$1.35, Pressing, \$.75.

Friday, 16 March:

Finally got our mail. Had lots of birthday cards & a present from Mother, \$28.00. Found a good place for all three of us (Sam, John, & me) to stay in a private home in the suburbs. Very nice, and quite reasonable - \$70.00/month for all three, two rooms and a bath. Had supper at a nice place where they had a cocktail bar – very modern and air conditioned. Wrote letters in the evening. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.25, Supper, \$.90, Carfare, \$.40, Drinks, \$1.50.

Saturday, 17 March:

Quiet day. Met LCDR Malsie at the airport and had dinner with him and his 3 daughters & his wife at the Officer's Club. Deanna Durbin movie in the evening and wrote letters. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.25, Supper, \$1.00, Thread, \$.10, Cards, \$.45, Key Case, \$.10, Food, \$.47, Shoe Repair, \$1.50.

Sunday, 18 March:

Slept late. Went to church at Country Club Congregational. Had light lunch. At 1530 went over and picked up LCDR Malsie with office car. Got to the airport about 1700. Took off for St. Louis at 1730 and landed 1930 – quite dark. Stayed at Jefferson Hotel. Went over to East St. Louis to see the sights. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Hotel, \$2.60, Lunch, \$.30, Supper, \$.60, Bus, \$.25, Beer, \$1.50.



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Monday, 19 March:

Flew back to K.C. from St. Louis this morning in bad weather, low ceilings & rain. Arrived about noon. Went to concert in the evening – Paul Draper & Larry Adler – very good. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.40, Lunch, \$.45, Supper, \$1.30, Shirt, \$1.40, Cigarettes, \$1.30, Drinks, \$4.00



Tuesday, 20 March:

Overslept (\$4.00 in drinks the night before?) Flew river patrol to north, stopping at St. Joseph, MO for publicity to spur recruiting. ENS Reece went along to provide the publicity. Saw “Roughly Speaking” in the evening. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Lunch, \$.50, Supper, \$1.50, Movie, \$.35, Bus, \$.40.

Wednesday, 21 March:

Made River Patrol to St. Louis and return. A little flooding in spots but nothing serious yet. Took Chief Abernathy along as an observer. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.27, Lunch \$1.30, Supper, \$1.20, Laundry \$.25, Shoe Shine, \$.20.

Thursday, 22 March:

Flew up Kansas River past Topeka for two hours or so. Saw “Hotel Berlin” in the evening. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.35, Lunch, \$.50, Supper, \$1.00, Drinks, \$1.00, Swim, \$.40, Movie, \$.35.

Friday, 23 March:

Did not fly today – started “B” Check on plane. Played 9 holes of golf in afternoon at Old Mission Golf Course, did not play very well. Ate supper in town and came home early. Sent some records to Kitch. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.50, Lunch, \$1.45, Supper, \$1.15, Drinks, \$1.20, Golf, \$1.50, Haircut, \$.85, Records \$2.70, Postage, \$.45.

Saturday, 24 March:

Did not fly today. Continued “B” Check on plane. In evening went to basketball game at Municipal Arena – NCAA championships – with two SPAR officers. Oklahoma won. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Supper, \$1.50, Drinks, \$1.50, Shoe Shine, \$.20, Flask, \$4.10.



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Sunday, 25 March:

Slept till 1000. Went to Country Club Congregational Church with Sam King. We were invited home for lunch by Mr. & Mrs. Paul Johnson. Had a wonderful steak dinner and listened to Handel's Messiah on the radio. Very nice people. He is a petroleum engineer, and they're both good singers. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.30, Church, \$.50, Supper, \$.35, Paper, \$.20, Cokes, \$.10.

Monday, 26 March:

We found that Omaha had a fine canteen where food was free for service men. Their chocolate layer cake was especially good. We planned to arrive at Omaha whenever we patrolled that river. Patrolled river to Omaha and landed. Had nice lunch at the Red Cross Canteen. Movie in evening, "Belle of the Yukon." Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.33, Supper, \$1.15, Bus, \$.10.

Tuesday 27 March:

Flew to Sioux City and landed today. Flew about 30 miles west of the river on the way back – saw no floods. Saw "Kismet" in the evening. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.30, Lunch, \$.50, Supper, \$1.10, Bus, \$.10, Movie, \$.35, Coke, \$.05.



Wednesday, 28 March:

Went to luncheon at K. C. Officer's Club – Col Roberts, USMC, spoke about the Pacific Theater. Flew to St. Louis in the afternoon, arriving about 1800. Stayed at the Lennox.

Expenses: Room, \$.85, Hotel, \$2.55, Lunch, \$1.30, Laundry, \$.30, Shoe Shine, \$.20, Supper, \$1.70, Drinks, \$.50.

Thursday, 29 March:

Collected Per Diem and did errands at DCGO in the morning. Flew back to Kansas City in the afternoon. Went to bed early. Bought 3 pearl handled knives to augment our flat silver.

Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.45, Lunch, \$.85, Supper, \$1.00, Knives, \$8.10, Flowers, \$6.60, Clothes, \$7.55, Cigarettes, \$1.30, Liquor, \$5.00, Bus, \$.10.

Friday, 30 March:

Made patrol to Omaha, landed, and flew back. Missouri River is below its banks all the way. Had supper at the Plaza, and watched bowling afterwards. Wrote letters and early to bed.

Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.30, Lunch, \$.45, Supper, \$.85, Bus, \$.10.



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Saturday, 31 March:

Patrolled Missouri River to Osage River, up the Osage to Lake of the Ozarks, and back to Kansas City. Made Full Stop water landing on Lake of the Ozarks, and took off successfully, although not easily. Received call from LCDR Hammond to come to St. Louis, so took off about 1815 and arrived in St. Louis after dark. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.40, Lunch, \$.45, Supper, \$.50, Buses, \$.30, Hotel, \$2.50.



Sunday, 1 April:

Flew down to Chester on the Mississippi. Considerable flooding. Went out with Art McCrate in the evening and danced with a party of 11 girls at the Club Continental. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.50, Supper, \$.90, Drinks, \$1.00.

Monday, 2 April:

Flew from St. Louis to K. C. Took off on instruments and flew for 15 minutes in rough cloud. Then climbed to 500 feet on top [of cloud] and it was beautiful. Went to see "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" in evening. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.75, Lunch, \$.25, Supper, \$.85, Bus, \$.10, Movie, \$.35

Tuesday, 3 April:

Bad weather. Pulled check on plane. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.35, Lunch, \$.25, Supper, \$.80, Bus, \$.10, Dry Clean Pants \$.40, Registered Letter, \$.23, Cigarette Case, \$1.00.

Wednesday, 4 April:

Cold, windy, and rainy weather. Did not fly. Went to Nelson Art Gallery in the afternoon, then swam in the Kansas City Athletic Club pool and went to Opera "La Traviata" with free tickets given to us by Mrs. DeYoung at the Canteen. Opera very good – done by San Carlos Company. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.35, Lunch, \$.35, Supper, \$2.00, Drinks, \$3.00, Swim, \$.40, Buses, \$.20

Thursday, 5 April:

Flew down Missouri to the Gasconade River, up that river about 40 miles and back to Kansas City. Went to supper at Mrs. John Foster's house in Kansas City, KS. Very nice house, southern colonial. Expenses: Room, \$.85, Breakfast, \$.30, Lunch, \$.25, Laundry, \$1.00, Bus, \$.10.



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The journal ends here, but a telephonic interview and some e-mail with my father, now 88, provides some of the rest of the story. It's interesting to note that despite several personal expenses, by 5 April he was \$12.97 to the good on a per diem of \$7.00/day

From Kansas City, V205 and crew patrolled the rivers from Omaha to Little Rock until they were re-based in Natchoches, LA on 10 April. While much of the remaining mission was routine, a couple of events warrant mention.

On 12 April, the day that FDR died, V205 experienced its only significant mechanical failure of the trip, an engine failure during take off on the 4th sortie of the day. After a single engine landing, arrangements were made with Coast Guard Air Station Biloxi to have another engine delivered to Natchoches, where the maintenance facilities were sparse, but German POWs were quartered in the hanger where they kept the plane. As the Coast Guard crew grappled with the installation of the new engine, they realized that they would need more manpower to hoist it into place. When my dad asked the Army Sgt in charge for help, he said the POWs would be overjoyed - much more fun than filling sandbags. Using his High School German, my dad was able to provide enough guidance that the new engine was soon in place, and V205 was back on patrol by 16 April. Perhaps anticipating further downtime, however, my dad's log book also notes that he got checked out in a J3 Cub on the 15th, before test flying V205 – he doesn't recall why.

On 19 April, my dad landed at an AAF Alexandria, LA which was used for B-17 training, and had a runway about 7000' long. He landed on the first 300' and turned off on the first taxiway.



The AAF pilots were very interested in the Widgeon, and after chatting for a while, an AAF pilot (1Lt Childs, USAAF) said he had an engineering test flight in a B-17F and would my dad like to ride along. He accepted and they took off, my dad in the co-pilot's seat with an AAF flight engineer standing behind calling out air speeds. He recalls that they became airborne at 160 to 170 mph. At cruising altitude Lt Childs asked me if my dad wanted to fly the plane. He of course said yes and took the controls, noting that the Flying Fortress flew very easily straight and level.



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To make conversation my dad asked him what would happen if both engines should fail on the same side. Childs didn't say a word, but pulled back both throttles on the left side, causing a severe yaw to the left. My dad didn't know where the rudder trim tab was and tried to correct using the rudder pedal, without much success. After watching for a while Lt Childs pointed out the rudder tab and cranked in enough tab to correct the yaw and it handled very nicely on two engines. Total B-17 Flight time – 1.1 hours!



The crew of V 205 was also stationed for a while in Alexandria, LA and stayed in a rather nice hotel next to the Red River, where the water level was about second floor level, but held back by a levee. The hotel was built by a wealthy oil man named Hogg. He was a rough and tough old guy and when he went to check in at the old Hotel in Alexandria they turned him away. He got mad and built the newer hotel where they stayed. He had two daughters, whom he had named Ura and Ima Hogg!



LCDR D.L Simon, the Navy Officer in charge of operations at Natchoches had some civilian flying experience, and often accompanied my father on the patrols. 2 May found them in the vicinity of the Louisiana State Prison at Angola. LCDR Simon volunteered that since he knew the Warden at Angola, and since most of the prison was deeply flooded, they should stop for lunch. The dauntless Widgeon was equal to the task, and as the CG crew anchored inside the prison's fences, a rowboat

manned by prisoners came out to meet them. They were soon in the Warden's offices, where a sumptuous feast awaited them, with a prisoner behind every seat to refill beverages, replace the bread after each bite, and generally serve as would a proper household staff for British nobility.

On the last leg of the return flight to Floyd Bennett on 5 May, my dad relates that the station called to request an estimated time of arrival. He deftly plucked a number from his mental dead reckoning - The Widgeon did not have a glass cockpit, as shown in the picture at **right** - and he claims that his guess was accurate to within a minute!



After the trip, V205 was overhauled, and my dad was selected to test fly it on 14 May. The engines fired up without flaw and he taxied out for takeoff, performing



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the usual control and mag checks. Upon advancing the throttles and applying the normal right aileron correction for propeller torque, however, V205 continued to turn left. After a little more right aileron and even more left drift, my dad realized that during the control check, he had failed to ascertain that the controls were responding properly to his inputs. The take off was aborted, he taxied back to the hangar, and the overhaul crew quickly reconnected the crossed aileron cables in the proper configuration.

The helicopter proved to be a good target for calibrating shipboard radars because of its slow speed and maneuverability, so the CG often flew around New York Harbor and its approaches providing radar targets for Navy Ships. The Navy was using fixed wing aircraft for photos of the same ships, however, and eventually complained that every time they took a picture, a Coast Guard helicopter was



in it. My dad remembers “posing” in an HNS for the shot at **right** which makes his helicopter appear to be cupped in the up stretched hand of the Statue of Liberty. That the helicopter was also good for other photo missions is attested to by this picture he took of our house at 30 Melvin Avenue, Hempstead, LI, (**left**) where as a four year old, I recall CG helos occasionally flying over head.

In March 1946, the Civil Aeronautics Agency began to take notice of the helicopter as a bona fide aircraft, and a CAA inspector came to Floyd Bennett for some instruction. In the course of his training, he asked the Coast Guard pilots if they would like to get their civilian licenses. They of course did, and in a scenario reminiscent of the manner in which I passed the written for my helicopter ATP in 1992, the CAA examiner held a weekend cram course to get them through the written. Since the Coast Guard pilots were instructing the CAA examiner in the helicopter, he wisely waived the flight portion of their checks. My dad's CAA license from that course is pictured at **left**.



In the months following V-J Day, my dad's log books reveal a mix of ferry flights in various types of aircraft as the nation demobilized, as well as helicopter flights for photography, Santa Claus deliveries, and Search & Rescue cases as the helicopter began to earn recognition as a versatile machine for a variety of missions.

In 1946, the Coast Guard decided to move its helicopter operations from Brooklyn to Elizabeth City. My dad recalls a ferry flight transferring some of the R-6 helicopters:



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“Shortly after World War II ended the Coast Guard decided to move the Coast Guard Helicopter Squadron from Floyd Bennett Field, New York, to Elizabeth City, North Carolina. This necessitated ferrying several helicopters down the coast to the new station. So early one spring morning at Floyd Bennett (May 14, 1946 – my Dad flew HOS #75622, and on 24 June, he ferried HO2S-1 #75689 to Elizabeth City), six Sikorsky



R-6 helicopters were pushed out and warmed up. There were six pilots, including two full Commanders, and four mechanics. The two ships which carried no passengers took along rubber life rafts in case a helicopter dropped in the water while crossing the numerous bays between New York and Elizabeth City. As the engines in the R-6s were a little unreliable, this was a very sensible precaution.”

“By 0900 flight plans were filed, all engines were running, and the flight got under way. We did not attempt to fly in formation, a rather difficult stunt in a helicopter, but strung out in a line and fluttered across lower New York Bay to Sandy Hook and followed the shore line down the coast. Flying at 200 to 400 feet over the beach we were able to observe activities on the ground and also were safe enough, as the beach offered an ideal place for autorotative landing in case of engine trouble.”



“These R-6s had been modified to carry three persons and were also equipped with the latest type 10 channel VHF radio. This made it possible for us to contact control towers when landing at strange fields and also talk from ship to ship in flight, which later in the trip proved quite valuable, although most of the time the radio was used for idle chatter. The R-6 helicopter was rather hard on the pilot, as there was a good deal of blade force and vibration transmitted back to the control stick. Sometimes this couldn't be trimmed out with the crude bungee trim tab that was provided, and it meant that the pilot had to hold with considerable force against the stick. I

used to hold my left knee against the stick and that made it a little less tiring. However, we were usually ready to land after two hours or so of flying.”



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“The first leg of the trip took us to Cape May, NJ where we landed at the Navy Field for gas and a rest. After sending an arrival message back to the base and filing the required flight plan we took off again for Chincoteague, VA. This leg involved crossing Delaware Bay, ten miles of very cold salt water, and I was glad to have a life raft instead of a passenger. Since a helicopter's gliding angle is at best only about 2 to 1, any engine trouble over a large expanse of water means ditching. They are quite easy to ditch, as you can land without forward speed, but they sink very rapidly, and I am not keen on swimming around with only a 'Mae West.' However, we made the crossing safely.”

“While flying along the beach south of Cape Henlopen, the skipper spotted a jeep stuck in the sand, so in true Coast Guard tradition he landed to see if they wanted help. One of the other ships stopped also but the rest of us kept on. We landed at Chincoteague just as a rain squall hit the field and blotted out everything. We were a bit worried about the two ships which had stayed behind, but soon we heard the familiar 'flap, flap' of helicopter blades in flight and they came skimming across the airport at about 20 feet altitude. Although the visibility was no more than 100 yards, it hadn't put them in any real danger. By simply slowing down they could feel their way, and could have landed if necessary.”

“After lunch we checked the weather—rain squalls and low visibility all along Cape Charles, and no promise of improvement the rest of the day. On the other hand, the prospect of wasting the rest of the day didn't appeal to us either. The operations officers at Chincoteague would not clear us at first, but our two commanders exerted a little pressure and we were finally cleared “at our own discretion.”



“We were soon skimming along again at 200 to 300 feet over the series of marshy islands that forms the eastern side of Cape Charles. The weather report proved accurate for we soon ran into heavy rain squalls. A quick consultation was held over the VHF and it was decided to turn

back and land at a Coast Guard beach station we had passed a short distance back. The reason for landing was not the lowered visibility but the fear of damaging the helicopter blades. At that time blades were built up of a spar and ribs covered with fabric. They did have a steel cap on the outer half of the leading edge, but it was still possible in a very heavy rain to lose some fabric, resulting in severe roughness and loss of lift.”

“We returned to the isolated beach station and landed on the surrounding sand dunes, expecting to cause the usual minor sensation among those stationed there. When no one appeared, we shut off our machines and headed for the main building. It developed that there was only one man at the station since demobilization had set in. He had seen us land, but his curiosity was not enough to bring him out in the rain to meet us.”



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"We phoned back to Operations at Chincoteague to report landing short of our destination and then passed the time inspecting the equipment at the station while waiting out the weather. In spite of the fact that there should have been about thirty men attached to the station instead of two (one was away with a boat, servicing lights), everything was in perfect condition and ready for any emergency. The rain let up after an hour or so and we decided to push on and see how it looked further down the coast."

"Soon we were all airborne again and flapping south along the beaches at about 200 feet altitude. This section of Cape Charles consists of a series of sandy islands with inlets between which give access to the sheltered bays in back of them. The weather gradually thickened, with the ceiling down to about 200 feet and visibility about a half a mile. Soon when we approached the end of one island, it was so thick we couldn't see the next one, so the lead helicopter started to circle and there ensued a general rat race with six helicopters milling around in and out of the fog. Finally over the VHF came, "I can see the next one," and we were off again. I was flying in third position and could just see number two ship, while the lead ship was lost in the mist. Suddenly number two cut in on the radio, "Look out, Commander, there's a tower dead ahead." The leader had been a little too high and could not see this lookout tower with its tip lost in the mist. The second ship, flying a few feet lower, could see the foot of the tower and warned the skipper just in time."



"Shortly after that close one, we came to the end of another island and could see nothing but water. We weren't sure whether or not it was the end of Cape Charles, but we were sure we didn't want to attempt crossing 15 miles of Chesapeake Bay on instruments in machines not equipped for instrument flight. After another radio conference we turned back to the Hog Island Coast Guard Surf Station. This one was in the middle of a marsh, built on a mound of oyster shells. There was one building which occupied most of the mound, leaving about a 40 foot border on two sides. When the six

helicopters had all come to rest, not even a seagull could have crowded in. This station was also manned by only two men, one of whom was off on business. Even so, the Chief in charge didn't seem too perturbed to have ten unexpected guests drop in, even when he learned we would have to spend the night there. We were a little worried about how provisions for two men could be stretched to feed twelve, but the Chief took that in his stride by digging a bushel of clams a few yards from the station. By the time the other man had returned and had overcome his shock at finding his station overrun with six helicopters, and probably more rank than had ever been there at one time, we were ready to dig into a good supper of clam chowder."



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"There were adequate sleeping accommodations, as the station had been designed for about 30 men. With entertainment facilities nil on an island 1500 feet square, we turned in early praying for a break in the weather by daybreak. We must have had some influence with the weather gods, for it did clear up next morning about 1000. We were eager to be off, but unfortunately only two machines would start. Starting helicopter engines has always been a problem, as there is no prop or flywheel to help the starter motor keep turning over. Because of the free wheeling clutch necessary for autorotation, the engine cannot be pulled through by rotating the blades. If the electric starter balks, you are licked unless 24 volts of external power is available. There was neither portable power nor batteries available at Hog Island, but they did have about 100 feet of heavy electric cable. We ran this cable from a running machine to a stalled one and thus supplied the boost necessary for starting same. Then hover over to another stalled helicopter and repeat the process. This worked for all but one machine, in which the battery was so dead that even the extra boost through the cable didn't help. Finally we transferred the battery from my ship to the last dead machine, and vice versa. Installing the dead battery in the running machine soon charged it up from the ship's generator. This procedure had consumed so much time and gasoline that we had to refuel the first two ships with 100 octane gas, luckily on hand for the boats at the station."

"While the first attempts were being made at starting, I had flown one of the Chiefs over to the mainland to replace the food we had eaten. It took us only 8 minutes in the helicopter for a trip that took two hours by boat. When we landed at the little hamlet of Oyster, Va., we caused a major sensation. The storekeeper was so pleased to have a helicopter-borne customer that he presented the Chief with two cigars."

"When all machines were finally gassed and running, we took off and fluttered on towards Elizabeth City. By now the weather was fine and we had a pleasant and uneventful trip the rest of the way. At Elizabeth City we were met by a PBY-5A from New York which had also been delayed by the weather."

"The trip home was relatively quick, but also dull in comparison to the trip down, flying at 4 or 5000 feet, often over the clouds and unable to enjoy the details of the country slashing quickly beneath the wings. Although not the most efficient aircraft for long cross country flights, helicopters offer a variety of experiences impossible in fixed-wing craft. It is a pleasant sensation to skim along safely at low altitudes, taking in all the sights en route, hovering over anything that warrants further investigation, and better still, one is happy to know that one can land in almost any terrain if the going gets rough or the weather





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closes in.” (Two months later, LCDR Stewart Graham was giving the now traditional Coast Guard Day rescue demonstration in the R-6 pictured above at Elizabeth City.)



After the war, my dad, pictured here at the controls of NC10H (**left**), flew the Bell Model 47, the first commercially certified helicopter, with New England Helicopter for more than 700 hours before getting his Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering, and going to work for the Schlumberger Oil Well Surveying Company in Connecticut. He was one of the early commercial helicopter instructors, as shown in his CAA license (**below, right**) from October 1946. I still cherish the memory of him giving me a ride in the Bell when I was about 6. The Model 47 was essentially the same helicopter as the TH-13M I flew at Ellyson Field during flight training in the sixties, and subsequent

models of this versatile helicopter are still flying across the world today.

Sometime in the fifties, my dad was asked to give a talk on helicopters at a local gathering. In the notes he prepared for his presentation, he observes the usefulness of helicopters in rescue, giving airborne access to otherwise inaccessible areas, pipe line patrols, and oil field transport. He describes the future of helicopters, however, as “hazy,” and “probably not to be in common use.” Little did he know how much he had contributed to the future of both Coast Guard and civil aviation.



Influenced primarily by my dad’s pioneering roles in the early development of the helicopter, I joined the Coast Guard in 1965. I got my wings of gold in October 1966 and retired in March 1994 with more than 5,300 hours, 4,000 of that in Coast Guard helicopters. (About 17.5 hours/month over 27 years, or half the operational tempo for WWII Coast Guard Pilots) During that time I was fortunate to be able to take my dad for orientation flights in the HH-3F Pelican and the HU-25A Falcon, both of which represented quantum leaps in aeronautical technology from the Coast Guard aircraft he flew during WWII.

CAPT Peter E. Prindle, USCG, Ret.
(CG Aviator # 1184, CG Helicopter Pilot #581)



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LCDR W. E. Prindle, Jr., USCGR - WWII Flight Time

Designation	Mfg. Co.	Name	Hours	Unit flown at
NP-1	Spartan	Spartan	14.3	NAS Grosse Isle
NS-1	Stearman	Navy Kaydet	65.6	NAS Grosse Isle
SNV-1	Vultee	Vibrator	41.6	NAS Pensacola
PBY-1, 2, 3	Consolidated	Catalina	130.7	NAS Pensacola
N3N-1	Stearman	Yellow Peril	12.7	CGAS SPG
J4F-1	Grumman	Widgeon	345.7	CGAS SPG, ECG, BKLYN
OS2U-3	Vought-Sikorsky	Kingfisher	415.2	CGAS SPG, ECG
JRF-2, 5	Grumman	Goose	99.1	CGAS ECG, BKLYN
PH-3	Hall Aluminum	Hall Flying Boat	6.4	CGAS ECG, BKLYN
SO3C-3	Curtis	Seagull	3.3	CGAS ECG
PBM	Martin	Mariner	23.3	CGAS ECG
SNJ-5	North American	Texan	6.4	CGAS ECG, BKLYN
PBY-5A	Consolidated	Catalina	137.4	CGAS EGC, BKLYN
HNS	Sikorsky	R-4 Hover Fly	182.8	CGAS BKLYN
HOS	Sikorsky	R-6 Hover Fly II	60.8	CGAS BKLYN
HO2S	Sikorsky	R-5 Dragonfly	7.9	CGAS BKLYN
B-17F	Boeing	Flying Fortress	1.1	AAF Alexandria, LA
J2F-6	Gurmmann	Duck	0.8	CGAS BKLYN
SNB / JRB	Beech	Expeditior	33.5	CGAS BKLYN
		Total Time	1588.6	Total Helicopter - 251.5