

aboard (1X). The word around ship was that the skipper Mitscher was so mad at the AGC's poor leadership and lack of success that he was persona non grata on the bridge. Later in the war, this same officer had reason to inspect us at Iryokern and he was wearing a Navy Cross. I was so surprised at that, that I looked up the records and found he was awarded it for... "At Midway"! I don't know how he wrangled it. Widhelm was awarded a Navy Cross—it's next to the top: he wanted a DFC (it's junior to the Navy Cross). Later in the war, Gus led a squadron in a number of desperate night-flying situations in the Guadalcanal area. Despite some rugged flying in horrible night weather, they finally put Gus up for an Air Medal (quite low). Gus' retort was "...and you can pin it on my butt"—refusing to take the Air Medal. Somewhere along the line Gus was given a much-deserved DFC for his night-fighter efforts.

While the Battle of Midway itself was over, we turned northeast at high speed and for a day headed for Alaska. From the code breaking, the U.S. knew that there would be a Japanese feint or attack on Alaska. We knew though that the main thrust was to be Midway and that the Alaska operation was truly diversionary. We did run north for a day but it was determined that the Jap carriers there had left for home so our heading was altered to one pointed back to Hawaii. Before putting in there, we rendezvoused with sister carrier Saratoga and received a transfusion of torpedo planes—new TBFs from the states. These pilots were part an old VT-8 who were transitioning into the new plane in the states and who could not get to the Midway fracas soon enough. Little known, and sometimes reported as "Marines from Midway", 6 TBFs of this Torpedo 8 spin-off had been launched from Midway in their new TBFs for an attack on the Japanese carriers; of that group only one plane got back to Midway, the others all shot down. Bud Earnst of this group got back to Midway with his plane completely shot up, one crewman badly wounded and the other dead. Bud got a double Navy Cross for this—the only double award I've heard of. On board ship, before we docked at Pearl, we bomber pilots did the gear survey of the lost VT personnel; I helped for two of the deceased pilots.

In the papers back at Hawaii, Walter Winchell and the press ballyhooed the victory on the front pages—but proclaimed it an "Army victory—Where was the Navy?" A few of the B-17 and B-26 pilots who were involved had returned first and told of their exploits. When the truth came out, not one Army plane had made a bomb hit on any ship (one B-17 group bombed a U.S. sub) and had been 100% ineffective. We had talked to several of the B-26 pilots at Midway before they flew back to Oahu. The pilots at first said that they had done nothing; in Hawaii they had other stories. As for us in the Navy, we burned. After Winchell's headline, I never had a good word or any use for him as a newsman.

#### POST MIDWAY—PRE SANTA CRUZ

During July and August of 1942, the Hornet and its squadrons regrouped. We had lost most or all of our VF and VT squadrons so two new VF and VT squadrons joined our ship and our mediocre (or less) Air Group Commander was moved to Washington or somewhere. Our VS skipper Rodee was made group commander and the inimitable Gus Widhelm was now our VS-8 honcho. Gus still flew Kirkpatrick's flag and I always close-by to him wherever he went. Gus was probably the best combat pilot I ever flew with; he was Naval Academy, but bragged of being next to the bottom of the class of '32. Out of the plane, he was a loud-mouthed reprobate and gambler par excellence, and became a role model for the pilot (B-17) for John Hersey in his book 'War Lover'. One noon at wardroom lunch while the ship was tied up at Pearl Harbor, two newsmen sat across the table from my wingman and me. Gus usually cornered every media man who came around and regaled him with exploits and stories; this time my wingman and I concocted a plan to beat Gus to these guys, whoever they were. The two turned out to be John Hersey, well-known writer, and Tom Lea, writer and painter; both had been placed aboard by Life Magazine to depict life and operations of a large aircraft carrier. The two of us struck up conversation with the two of them, escorted them around the whole ship and generally became contacts for them while on the Hornet. Hersey took copious notes to use later and Lea did drawings of shipboard life from bilge to island, including all phases of flight operations. Tommy's drawings were the basis for his personnel series he did for Life with full pages that showed Gus as the typical skipper and Kirkpatrick as the typical dive bomber ( March 1943 ).