



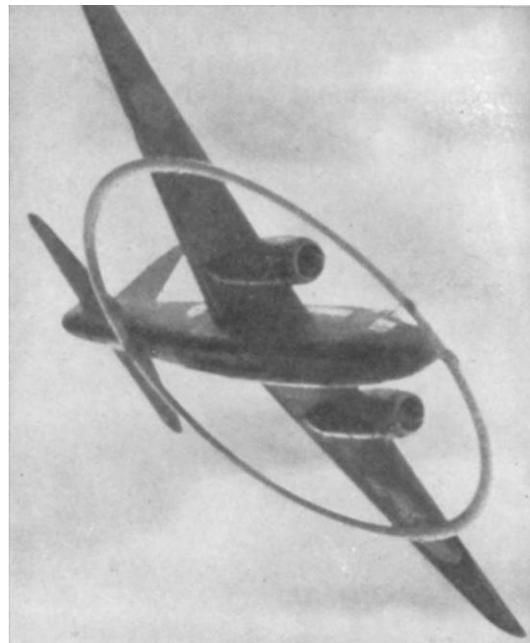
American Military Heritage Foundation  
Dedicated to preserving, in flying  
condition, a Vintage PV-2 Harpoon in memory of all who fought on behalf of the  
United States of America

### September 2017 Newsletter

Well needless to say I am not doing so well at getting the newsletter out for this month. However, I think I will succeed by the end of the week if everything goes ok. Naturally, in the world of the Harpoon that never happens and if so, it is a rare occasion. The good news is we have all of the squawks worked off and everything was in the green on the last engine run. We are currently waiting for George to come out and give his blessing then we will be ready to fly.

It has been a long hard struggle to get all of the fuel tanks removed and new ones installed. We had many glitches and most were not caused by us. However, the tanks are all in place and we should be ready to train a crew if we can locate any place we might be able to raise some much needed funds.

The mystery plane this month was submitted by one of our members. Mr. Starkey sent this and wanted me to take a crack at it and let the members see if they knew what it was. The best I can do is it is British; past that I have nothing to say. Maybe next month Mr. Starkey will tell us what it is if none of our members lets us in on what it is?



**“Humor has a tremendous place in this sordid world. ... If you can see things out of whack, then you can see how things can be in whack. “**

*Theodor Seuss Geisel,  
Writer and illustrator*

The article below was sent to me by Jennifer Thompson and is reprinted here by permission of the author JaLeen Bultman Deardurff. The author’s grandfather was a PV pilot during WWII. I believe you will find the story very interesting. Be sure to read the intro below.

I ran into this woman at a fly-in up at Rensselaer. I was letting her kids get a good look at my plane, and was helping them into the cockpit when I overheard her saying that her grandpa learned to fly in little airplanes at this airport, before he went off to the Navy. I asked if he was a pilot in the Navy, and she said yep, he flew planes called PV’s ... well, that was a jaw-dropper, as you might suppose. We had a very nice conversation about patrol-bombing squadrons and high-quality Lockheed’s of yore (and also of one high-quality Lockheed of nowadays), and that is what led to this article being sent to us. I have laid it out and threw in some VPB-128 pictures, too—there’s one of a flight crew with the dog that includes the author’s grandfather: that pic was supplied by the author. The others I collected from various sources.

***Have a great month and watch for updates and or request.***

Gaylon



# Gremlin

## *Dog First Class*

*By JaLeen Bultman-Deardurff*

In the spring of 1943, a detachment of seven planes from the VPB-128 U.S. Navy Bombing Squadron was sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba where a German submarine had been sighted. The weather was hot and humid. Most of the men were young and away from home for the first time, many were homesick, all were afraid. Just a few months earlier they had all been civilians coming from different walks of life. Now they were sailors struggling to survive war.

One day, around lunch time, one of the aircraft crews were seeking the shelter of shade underneath the wing of their plane when they spotted what appeared to be a half-starved rat trotting in their direction. As the animal neared them, they saw that it was a small dog. The dog was so undernourished that his ribs were clearly defined through his thin brown and white fur.

"Come here, boy," one of the sailors called.

The dog stopped in his tracks and stared.

Eyeing the protruding ribs, the young sailor was filled with compassion and offered the dog his sandwich.

At first the dog seemed reluctant, his brown eyes reflected fear, but he was so hungry he couldn't resist. With his head down and tail between his legs, the little dog inched forward and gobbled down the sandwich.

It took several days and a lot of sandwiches before the dog trusted the men enough to follow them into the mess hall where he indulged in military chow -- fresh oranges, boiled eggs, and spam.

"He learned to love the enlisted personnel who gave him their undivided attention," remembers Harold "Hal" Forrest, Lt. (jg). "He tolerated the officers and had *no love* for civilians!"

JaLeen Bultman-Deardurff's is the granddaughter of a WWII PV pilot of VPB-128. This story of her grandfather's squadron was previously published in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. It is reprinted here with her permission.

The dog would study civilians from a distance, but closely monitor them if they approached him.

"If they got too close he would bare his teeth and growl," Forrest said.

It was assumed that the dog had been so abused by the Cuban civilians that he would never forget it, and after investigating to make sure he was a stray, the men decided to keep him.

When the detachment was ordered back to the squadron, the sailors couldn't stand the thought of leaving the dog behind, so they smuggled him aboard an aircraft.

Shortly after take-off the dog barked as the men began playing with him. The pilot asked, "What is that noise?"

The radioman replied, "It must be a gremlin, Sir."

According to the dictionary, gremlin means "a mischievous, invisible imp said to ride airplanes and cause mechanical trouble."

The dog barked again and the men had to come clean. They took him into the cockpit where he was enthusiastically welcomed by the rest of the crew.

"This must be our gremlin, Sir," the radioman said, and the name stuck.

Gremlin was indoctrinated into the U.S. Navy when the squadron returned to New York.

"Induction papers were signed with a paw print," Forrest said. "And he was issued an I.D. card and dog tag."

A crew member donated a dress blue uniform jacket from which a cape was cut and attached onto a harness. The uniform bore the insignia "Dog First Class" and Gremlin seemed very proud to wear his uniform. He was also issued Air Combat Crew Wings and eventually earned several Campaign ribbons, all attached to the uniform. Gremlin seemed to sense that his uniform was special and would stand at attention during the squadron's infrequent personnel inspections, and would only move when the unit was dismissed.

He usually slept with the enlisted personnel and was completely house and plane broken, never relieving himself while in quarters or in flight. However, immediately upon landing, like all crew members, he searched for a place of privacy.

Gremlin soon became the most popular member of the VPB-128 and often flew on non-contact missions with his human counterparts.

"Sometimes we would try pass Gremlin on to a green crew [replacement crew]," said enlisted man John Kelly. "As the plane would gain altitude he would break wind and stink up the plane."

Kelly also remembered a time when the squadron was sent to Hawaii by way of an aircraft carrier (USS Bataan, CV-20).

"The captain said no pets were allowed so the sailors smuggled Gremlin into one of the planes. However, the weather was rough, rocking the ship to and fro, and the men were afraid he would get sick. Since the planes were closely watched around the clock, the enlisted men would sneak out to check on him often.

"The captain caught us and we thought we would catch hell," said Kelly. "But nothing more was said and he let it pass."

Gremlin's Navy career took him to five of the world's seven continents, North America, Europe, Africa, South America and Asia, in that order.

"That dog had more frequent flyer hours than any other dog in existence," Howard Gustafson Lt. (jg) laughs.

While dogs are enthusiastic automobile riders, Gremlin, on the other hand, became very excited at the first turn of the prop of the PV-1 bomber. He would spin in circles, bark loudly, wag his tail furiously, and strain against the wind of the prop, his ears and cape flapping in the wind, reminding the men that he wanted to go too.

Although he quickly adapted to the life of a sailor, Gremlin's canine instincts often took over. During a stint in Iceland, he discovered a litter of kittens. The new playmates were getting along nicely when Mama cat returned from a mouse hunt and descended unmercifully on the unsuspecting dog. Gremlin ran, without looking back, and was afraid of cats ever since.

Shortly after the cat incident Gremlin met a female dog whom he was quite fond of, and the dogs "courted" on a regular basis, but somebody poisoned the girlfriend and it took a long time for him to get over the loss. In fact, it wasn't until the squadron returned to his native Caribbean before Gremlin resumed interest in the opposite sex.



**Gremlin and crew: (Rear) Albert Sleight, Howard Gustafson (author's grandfather); (Front) Kelly, Ridgeway, Laramie, and Gremlin**

Gremlin disappeared during a short stay on the Midway Islands. Rumor had it that one of the submarine crew members had picked up the dog and took him to their base on a neighboring island.

"This was all we had to go on," said George "Moe" Sathre. "The skipper, Lt. Cdr. Jay B. Yakely, realized this would be a great loss and morale would no doubt suffer. He sent three squadron aircraft crews over to find him. I remember the feeling of hopelessness. The submarine had left -- probably with Gremlin aboard."

But the men kept searching and calling for their beloved friend. Hope dwindled with each passing moment.

"Then I saw a small mass huddled under a park-like bench," remembers Sathre. "I yelled 'Gremlin, come here boy!' but he didn't come and was shaking as if he were scared. I quickly gathered him up and yelled to the rest of the searchers, 'I found him! I found him!'"

The men came running. It seemed too good to be true, but there he was, in Sathre's arms. They stroked the frightened dog and spoke softly to him, and finally Gremlin began wagging his tail. He was back where he belonged -- with the VPB-128.

In addition to loving female companionship, Gremlin also discovered the wonderful world of beer drinking at picnics and parties. The men were very generous, offering a nip or two of drink to the dog which often resulted in a hangover.

"This was about the only time he avoided companionship and loud noises, and searched for a quiet place to sleep it off," said Forrest with a chuckle.

Gremlin's extra curricular activities earned him an official court martial. The reasons were listed as:

- A. *Neglect of duty*
- B. *Absent for muster*
- C. *A.W.O.L.*
- D. *Affairs with lady dogs not on Approved list*
- E. *Frequenting Marine beer halls*
- F. *Failing to report to "pro station" after spending night on adjoining island*
- G. *Out of uniform*

The court martial was signed by Lt. (jg) H.E. Hilton and Lt. V.H. Larson. But Gremlin didn't seem to mind the court martial, nor the threat of demoting him by a rank, so long as he got an occasional beer, a good scratching, and a chance to fly on another mission.

Gremlin had several primary caretakers, some of whom lost their lives, but another sailor was always ready to take over tending the dog.

When the squadron was sent to Samar, a hot spot in the war zone, the Navy had to spend more time concentrating on the enemy, but Gremlin didn't seem to mind. It was almost as if he understood their purpose for being there, and he was content so long as he was with the sailors. It was here where an enlisted

man by the name of McKirdy assumed primary care of Gremlin. McKirdy was in Lt. Cdr. Bill Tepuni's crew. Tepuni was ordered on a follow-up attack on a Japanese submarine tied up to the dock at Cebu City. The plane was shot down.

"Tepuni's plane went down in flames," Gustafson remembers, shaking his head. The pain and horror of the war still shows in his tired blue eyes.

PV-1 bombers carried so much gasoline that even a slight crash or hit would cause the plane to burst into flames. Several planes went down and members of the VPB-128 lost their lives. There was a lot of confusion in the days that followed the loss of Tepuni and his crew, but someone finally noticed that Gremlin hadn't been seen for awhile. They finally realized that Gremlin was on that plane and had gone out on his last mission.

The squadron members hold a reunion about once a year. Those who returned home still remember the horror fifty some years later, but they have lived a lifetime since the war, married, had families, retired from careers. When these men get together they can still recall the good and bad times they had during World War II. Members of the VPB-128 are not just old Navy buddies - they are a family, and they all remember Gremlin with gratitude, fondness, and love.

"He was rescued from a life of hunger and abuse in the slums of Cuba," says Forrest. "and brought into a world filled with love, unending attention and adventure."

The young men who had been called to duty during World War II came from different walks of life, and they needed a common denominator. The old saying "dog is a man's best friend" goes a long way for the members of the VPB-128. Gremlin provided that friendship and common demoninator with his love and devotion to the squadron.

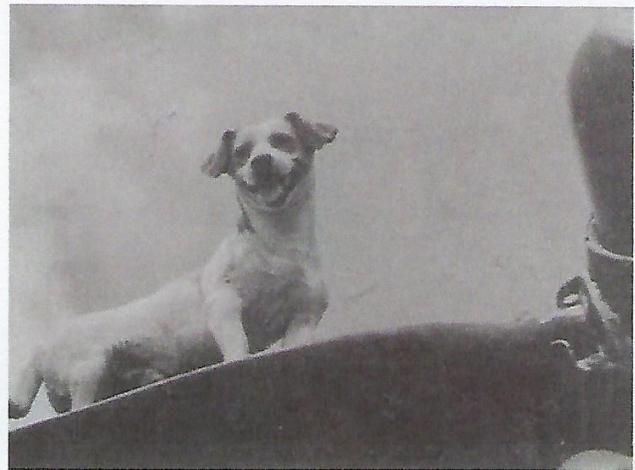
"He may not have been aware of his sacrifice, but with the devotion, loyalty, and love he gave, I am sure he would have gladly given his life for any member of the VPB-128," says Forrest.

Gremlin, Dog First Class, died for his country and the men he loved on March 21, 1944. He accomplished his mission with the highest degree of loyalty, compassion, and love.



VPB-128 flight line,  
circa 1944

Gremlin, Dog 1<sup>st</sup> Class: happy to  
be up on a PV



A PV-1 of VPB-128, on short  
final

VPB-128 PV's in formation

