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Arlington, TX 76016
10 July 2009

Richard Hoffman, Capt., USN, (ret.)
c/o Mr. Steve Ginter
1754 Warfield Circle
Simi Valley, CA 93603

Dear Captain Hoffman:

I was a proud member of Patrol Squadron Forty-Four, from 1959-1962, at which time I left the Navy and went into teaching. I was a PPC of both the P2V Neptune, and the P5M Marlin. Most recently I returned from our 5th official squadron reunion, this one in Tucson, AZ. Most of the returning squadron members are of the P3 and P2V eras. Not many of us seaplane drivers around. Knowing that, one of my crew members and now very close friend on the P2V Pelican 4 sent me a copy of your book "The Martin P5M: Patrol Seaplane."

I must admit, your book transported me back to a time in my life that I cherish and keep referring to as my "defining years." The lessons I learned while a member of a squadron helped me to understand the true meaning of *team, loyalty, discipline, and leadership*, values I attempted to integrate into my service as teacher, coach, and eventually headmaster of two very fine private schools. It also created a desire to learn more about several incidents that occurred while I was flying and wondered if you could help me in my search for some of the answers to my questions. Or at the very least, point me in the right direction to resources to help in my search.

Your book provides an unending source of technical data, which fascinated me. I have forgotten so much about the P5M that I wonder if I ever really knew all of that, or that as a young pilot I even considered it essential to my flying. The stories of the loss of personnel, the accidents, the conditions that led to the accidents reminded me that I am damned lucky to be writing you today. That was a part of flying. But I break into a sweat when I read of events that parallel my own experiences. I am unaware that my most hairy story is even recorded anywhere even though the events came to the attention, in dramatic fashion, of the skipper, the operations officer, the C.O. of N.A.S. Norfolk, and FAW-5, and the civilian service rep from Martin.

As best I can determine, I was flying P5M-2, Bu. #140146, on the afternoon of December 28, 1960. My co-pilot was Lt.(jg). Pat O'Leary, since deceased. I cannot remember the names of any of the crew, for it consisted of several who needed some flight time. It was to be a short training flight, practicing MAD patterns for part of the time. Without going into too much detail, some of which is a bit hazy, much is seared into my mind. Basically I started down the sea-lane, put the plane up on the step, and as I did, the plane took an abrupt turn left, about 35-45 degrees. There were several boats filled with sailors who were working on the sea lane lights. Not knowing what caused the problem, I did not think I had any options but to get the aircraft airborne, so I broke from the water, and intentionally "skipped" the plane over the work crew and boats. Did not think I had enough room to put it back down again without running into the beach and houses, elected to try to clear the houses on Willoughby Spit, which we did without much clearance, carrying full military power on the engines to maintain altitude and airspeed. Declared an emergency because of control problems, and thought I might try to drop it down into the Harbor on the other side of the Spit. Too much shipping, and I did not want to test controls. Headed downwind, took a very soft, large, and almost level turn back to the seadrome. As I was checking out traffic, etc. I had a sickening sight - a red spoiler board on the port wing. We landed with the most gentle landing I have ever greased on in my life, using power differential in the approach to keep us going straight and wings level. After we took the spoiler board off, and embarrassingly told the world what had happened, we took off and finished the flight. Upon our return, I had to meet with almost everybody to explain what happened. Basically the Martin rep said it was thought that the P5 could not fly with a spoiler board attached. I have no incident/accident notation in my log book, but I am sure there must be a report someplace, although I do not remember filing a written report. I do remember meeting with a committee, not a

pilot disposition board, to describe the flight. Years later, I think I remember the details, but not actual numbers, and so I am on a quest to reconstruct the flight, which would require finding people who were with me on that day and are still alive. I also would like to find out the dimensions of the sea-drome, the take-off direction, wind speed, distance of houses and beach from the sea lane, how high the houses were. I also could find no mention of a spoiler board in your description of the P5M. It seems you have such extraordinary detail that something like a spoiler board would not be omitted from those details. Was that an authorized attachment, or a local brainstorm? And finally, I want to reconcile what actually occurred with my own recollection of the incident. Does that sound like a reasonable quest? Not so grand a scale as your projects, but challenging, anyway.

The second question I had was whether all open sea landings would include those in the training command, or were simply part of fleet stats. While on a P5M training flight out of Corpus Christi, the sea-drome fogged in and our instructor put the plane into the Corpus Christi Bay, using the bridge to Corpus as his reference point. Is it possible that the incident was not reported, or was not considered hazardous enough to be included in your narrative?

And finally, with all the research you have done into Navy aircraft, would you consider speaking at a reunion scheduled some time next year for VP-44 members and spouses? I sure would love to hear you. To do so, I would like to have your permission to present your name to the Reunion Committee.

Respectfully,

Robert W. Minnerly
Lt. VP-44, 1959-1962