

# PB4Y-2 Privateer



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**ON JUNE 12, 2018  
I RECEIVED AN E-MAIL  
FROM LARRY KEEFE,**

by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**  
and **Larry Keefe**

**Who**, like me, has had a lifelong interest in airplanes, and trained and flew as an Aviation Radioman from 1944 to 1946 as part of a 10-man crew in the USA and in the Pacific.

He flew in the PBY Catalina, the PB4Y-2 Privateer—the Navy version of the AAF's B-24 Liberator—and also mentioned the “PB4Y2-1” (I’ll explain this ‘un later). He flew 10-14 hour patrols, and approximately 700 hours total. He attached a link to some photos. Wow!!!

As I said in “I’ve Always Wanted To Fly A Flying Box Car” (*Boating on the Hudson and Beyond, June 2018, Pages 44-48*) “...fighter planes are glamorous, bombers do what has to be done to win wars, but if it wasn’t for the unsung workhorse transport planes, back there behind the scenes, none of the bullets, bombs, or beans get flown to where they have to be”.

World War II “flying boat” patrol planes and patrol bombers were also pretty much behind the scenes. But, these also not-so-glamorous, long-ranging planes saved thousands of downed aviators and thousands of sailors, and, sank a lot of enemy submarines and ships, both in the Atlantic and Pacific.



From the left, me - Larry Keefe, Jerry Kaiserman (my buddy, when we missed the train in Georgia and spent the long week end together in the brig.) Tom Gibbons (part of our air crew) Taken in Jacksonville fl after graduation from flight school and receiving our air crew wings.



For starters let's take a look at the planes Larry flew in: the Consolidated-Vultee PB4Y-2 Privateer, the PB4Y Catalina, and the "PB4Y2-1"??? I'm very familiar with the PB4Y Catalina and I know there was a Navy version of the B-24 with a (very) tall single tail (I always wondered why, and always felt the twin tails were much more aesthetically appealing), that had to be the PB4Y-2, but I really didn't know much about it. Let's do some poking around:

**PB4Y-2 Privateer**  
The Consolidated-Vultee PB4Y-2 Privateer was externally similar to the B-24 Liberator, but the fuselage was lengthened eight feet to accommodate a flight engineer's station—the Navy wanted a flight engineer to help reduce pilot fatigue on long over-water patrol flights—and it had a tall single vertical stabilizer to increase stability and aircraft handling at the low to medium altitudes of maritime patrol.

The PB4Y-2 had twelve .50-caliber Browning machine guns in six power-operated turrets: the B-24's ventral, retractable Sperry ball turret was omitted. Surprisingly, turbochargers were omitted from the Privateer's Pratt and Whitney engines as maritime patrol missions were not usually flown at high altitude. This improved performance and saved weight. The Privateer cruised at 175 m.p.h. and had a range of 2,820 miles.

739 Privateers were delivered to the Navy and several squadrons served in the Pacific through August 1945. Best info is that there are three airworthy survivors, all in the USA.

### PBY Catalina

Let's see what Jim Winchester's 2012 AIRCRAFT OF WORLD WAR II has to say about the PBY. For starters, the first prototype flew March 28, 1935, and in October made a non-stop 3,500-mile flight from Coco Solo (???) to San Francisco. "Here was aviation at its essence. The high-wing, twin engine Catalina was not speedy, not flashy, not graceful, but it was more practical than anyone realized". "It was old when World War II began. It was slow and could be uncomfortable, but...rarely has an aircraft proved so useful to so many people. A deadly adversary to an enemy submarine or warship...[and an] angel of mercy which achieved thousands of rescues... throughout the war." It "revolutionized long-range patrol in the US Navy".

With a basic crew of eight, a range of over 3,000 miles, and a maximum speed of 175 m.p.h., Catalinas could stay aloft for up to 24 hours!!! But, "The Catalina was so slow that critics joked its navigator needed a calendar rather than a stopwatch." Catalinas were either pure flying boats, or, amphibians, flying from land or sea. They were also produced in Canada and Russia, where over a 1000 were manufactured!!! "Black Cats" hunted Japanese ships at night, and a British Catalina spotted the German battleship Bismarck.

WOW!!!  
3,305 Catalinas were built, and there are (at this writing) 21 airworthy survivors: eight in the US, four in Canada, and one or two in New Zealand, the Netherlands, Australia, the UK, Chile, France, and Greece.

### PB4Y2-1

The PB4Y-1 was the Navy's version of the B-24 Liberator ("Let's Talk About the B-24 Liberator", (Boating on the Hudson and Beyond, Holiday issue, 2017)), and the PB4Y-2 was the Navy Privateer. When Larry said "PB4Y2-1" he meant BOTH the -1 and the -2...

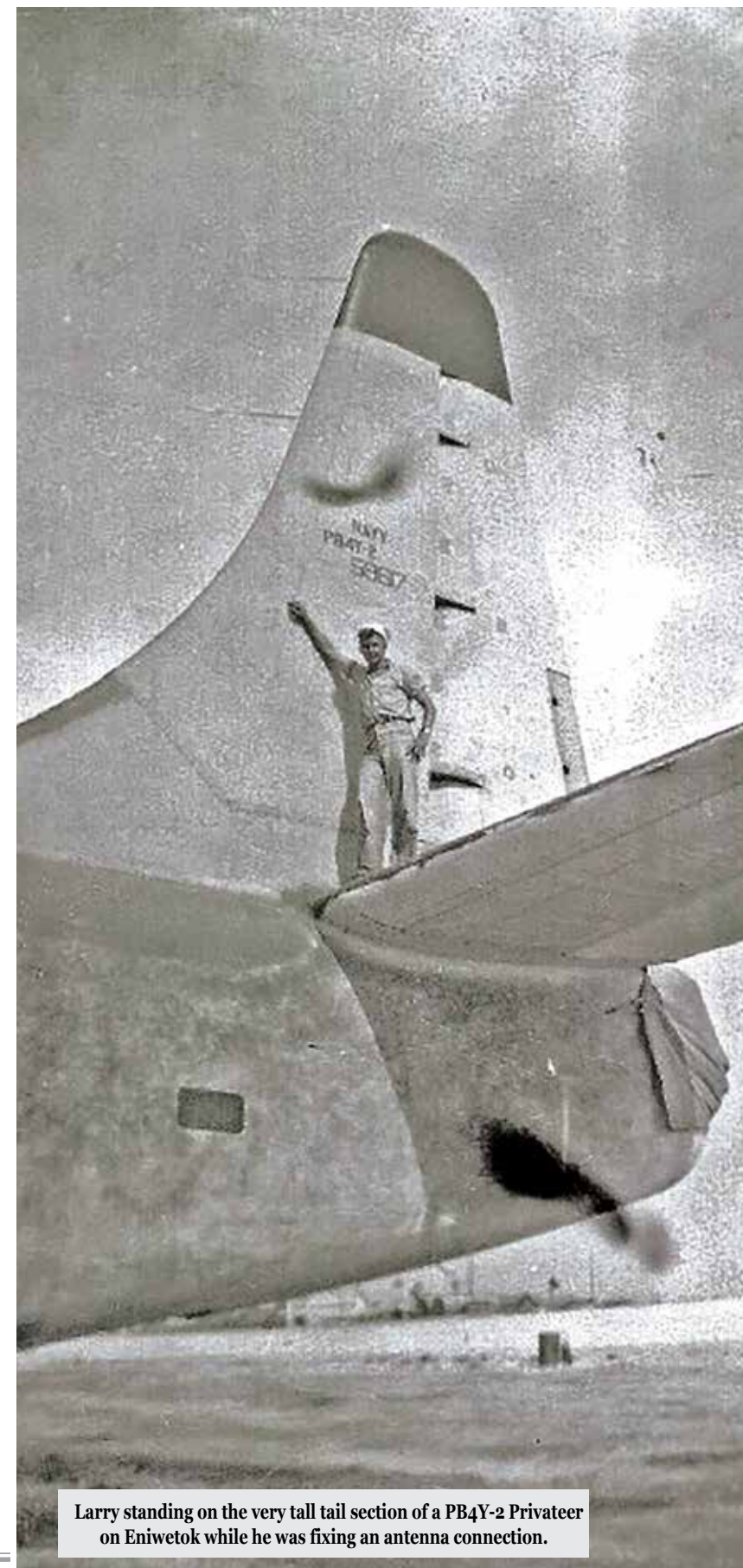
### Larry

I visited Larry on July 29th, and we talked airplanes, World War II, and, Verplanck for two hours or so. I'd made a short list of WW II questions, but Larry had already written much of his life's story, and, an amazing one-page-plus document summarizing his WW II military experience.

Here's a summary of the one-pager, pretty much exactly as written:

Larry graduated from Hendrick Hudson High School, Class of 1943, then went to work in a defense factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut. When he turned 17 in October 1943 he enlisted in the Navy in New Haven, then took a train home to Verplanck to get permission from his father.

He went to Sampson, New York for boot training and "5 weeks and 3 haircuts" later was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, where he trained as an Aviation Radioman, Air Gunner, and

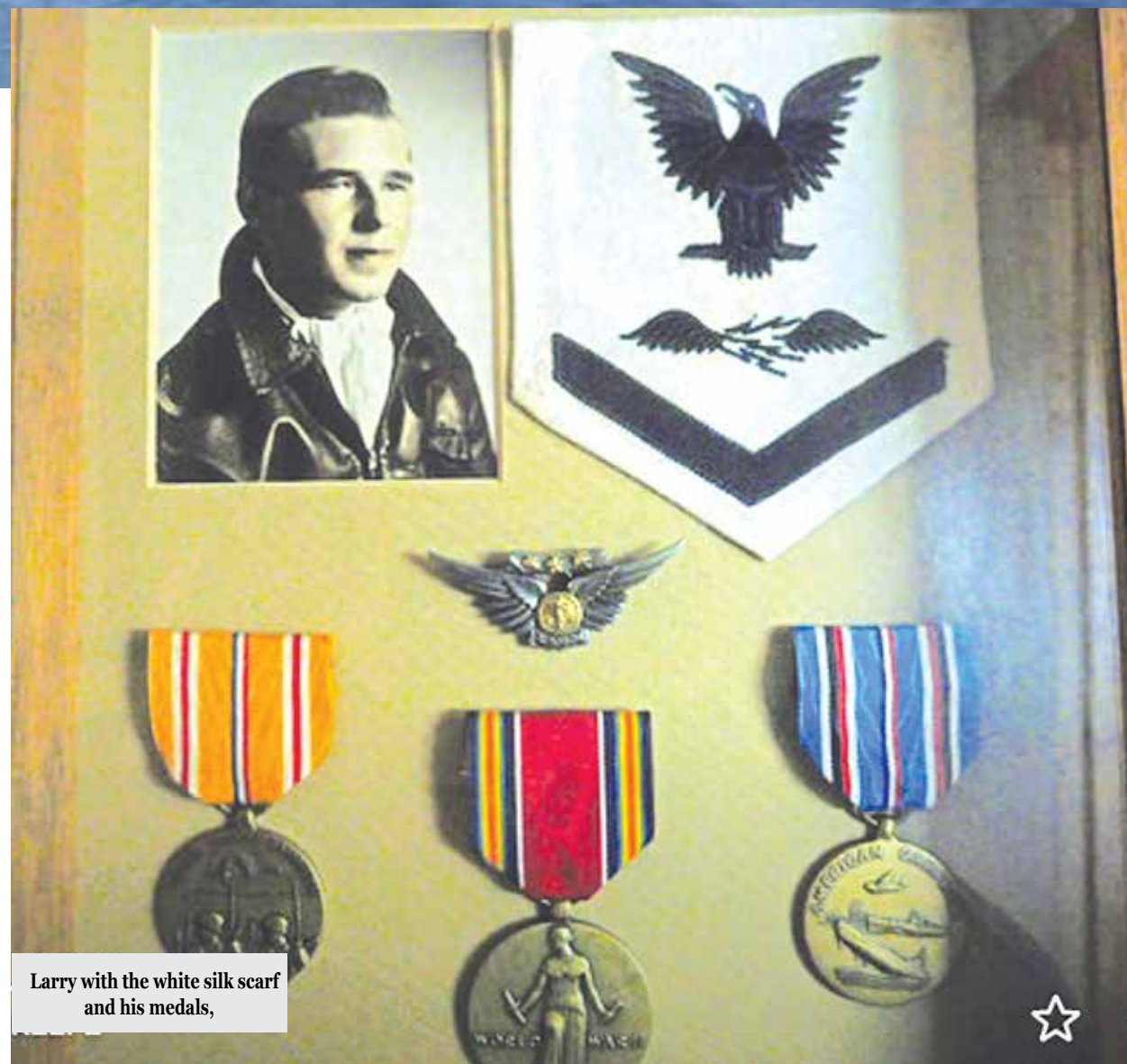


Larry at the Naval Aviation Monument in Virginia Beach in 2015.

Larry standing on the very tall tail section of a PB4Y-2 Privateer on Eniwetok while he was fixing an antenna connection.



The PB4Y Catalina



Larry with the white silk scarf and his medals,

Flight Crew in PB4Y (Catalina) sea planes, and earned his wings as an Air Crew ARM 3/C (CAC). He flew patrols over the Atlantic out of JAX Naval Air Station, from Charleston, North Carolina to Miami, Florida and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and never spotted "anything except big turtles, which look like subs from the air".

The Navy changed its mind, deciding to put him in land-based patrol bombers and he was sent by train—the train car was the last car attached to a civilian train—to Hutchinson, Kansas for training in Army-type B-24's. The train stopped in Tifton, Georgia for coal and water and his crew got off and ran to a local bar. He was too young to drink, so he and a buddy went to an ice cream parlor down the street. The train pulled out and the bar gang got on, but he and his buddy couldn't catch it, and they were marooned in Georgia. They somehow made their way to Atlanta and turned themselves in to the Navy Shore Patrol, that didn't know what to do with them so put them in the City Jail for the night. Next day they were sent to the Naval Air Station outside Atlanta, but being a weekend, they also did not know what to do with them, so they were put in the brig and treated as prisoners until Monday when the Commander arranged a trip to Kansas.

In Kansas they trained in PB4Y-1 Liberators, the Navy version of the B-24, and were then sent to San Diego, to Kanehoe in the Hawaiian Islands, and finally to Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands where they joined the VBP 121 Squadron for a short while, patrolling 9- 12 hours looking for Japanese radar, then jamming it. When the war ended—they didn't know it had—they were training to shoot up Japanese rail yards: IN JAPAN.

Their squadron was broken up, and "there was mass confusion". They were sent to Tanapag Harbor on Saipan in the Marianas, and were assigned to sea planes as part of a test crew. On weekends they would fly to Guam in their Captain's white PB4Y-5A (that could land on land or water) to pick up fruit and vegetables. They'd land on a land base on Tinian to drop off supplies, then fly back to Saipan and land on water.

The only Japanese Larry saw were prisoner-of-war work parties guarded by Marines. He always had to wear a white hat as there were some Japanese that would not surrender and the natives and Marines were still hunting them. Once he was stopped by Marine sentries and a voice called out "Is that you

Keefe?": it was Robert "Buddy" Rushnak from Peekskill, a 1944 Hendrick Hudson graduate...

Eventually it became time to return to the States, and he boarded a captured Italian liner anchored in Tanapag Harbor. After he arrived on deck, he saw Frank "Sailor" Bleakly— another "Pointer"—who turned out to have been in the control tower on Tinian, and who remembered the white PB4Y ID Larry used when asking for landing instructions.

After two weeks at sea Larry landed in San Francisco, and after a train ride to Lido Beach, Long Island, he was discharged and went home to Verplanck.

Here's some interesting WWII excerpts from his longer "life story":

*Had the chance to bail out once and declined...another PB4Y...[tail] gunner decided to shoot off a few rounds of the 30 cal. His shots struck an oil line in our plane and shut our engines down. Our pilot offered us the chance to jump and everyone said we would rather ride it down. Landed in the St John river and a launch towed us in.*

*Completed...training, had graduation ceremony on the air strip while navy corsairs flew over. After boot camp never did get home for 16 months.*

*The [Privateer] was very different from the B-24. It had more gun turrets and electronic gear, also a single tail and about 7 feet longer. There were three radiomen in the plane. One would be on the radio, Number 2 would operate the radar and jamming gear, the third would man the twin 50's over our head. On long flights we would rotate positions. Some times we were flying as long as 14 hours.*

*Flying out of Kanehoe was dangerous. There was a high peak right in our flight path and we always had to veer to avoid it. I was finding out the Pacific is huge.*

*Eventually the war ended...the squadron broke up and people started to go home on a point basis. I was young, single, and had a rating the navy wanted to keep, so I was at the bottom.*

*It took 10 days to get back to the USA. The seas were rough and the bunks were 5 high below deck. The navy wanted me to re enlist but from what I saw how enlisted men were treated compared to officers, no way.*

*I'm home now but don't feel it. The birds are noisy and I can't stand the noise. Have to get used to the cold again, even in the summer.*

*The GI benefits kick in. Join the 52-20 club with the rest of the guys. For 52 weeks you get \$20 every time you report to the unemployment office in Peekskill. Some of us report that they are deep sea divers looking for work. Sparky Crawford thought that one up.*

**GREAT stories, Larry!!!**

