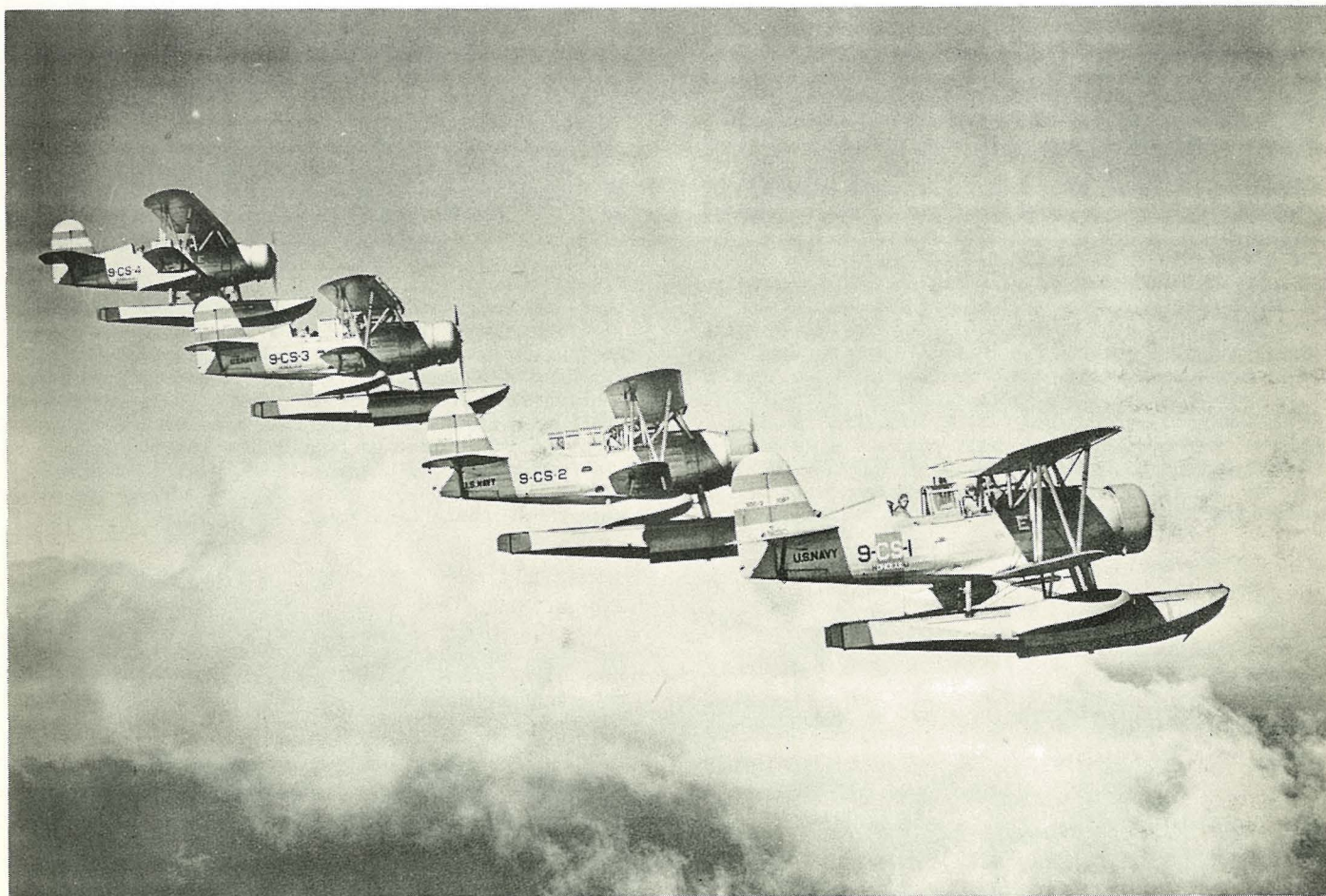


50th ANNIVERSARY OF NAVAL AVIATION

THE SLING-SHOT FLYERS

by FRED C. DICKEY, JR.



THE HEYDAY OF THE CATAPULT AIRPLANE

(Photo - See Page 148)

The advent of scouting and observation aircraft for battleships and cruisers can be traced to the 11th of February, 1911. It was on this date that Glenn Curtiss landed his seaplane in San Diego Bay, taxiing up alongside the U.S.S. PENNSYLVANIA and was hoisted aboard. (1) This type of operation was later to be known as a "Baker" recovery, but many years would pass before it would become standard practice.

On 7 September, 1911, Lt. Ellyson was launched from a cable at Hammondsport, New York. This cable was suspended from a platform 16 feet high. The cable was 250 feet long and was three-quarters of an inch thick, secured to a submerged piling in Lake Keuka. The float of the airplane had a metal-lined groove in which the cable fitted. The static lateral equilibrium was maintained by two wires, parallel to the main cable, on which the wing tip pontoons rode. The main wire inclined downward toward the shore. When the plane would

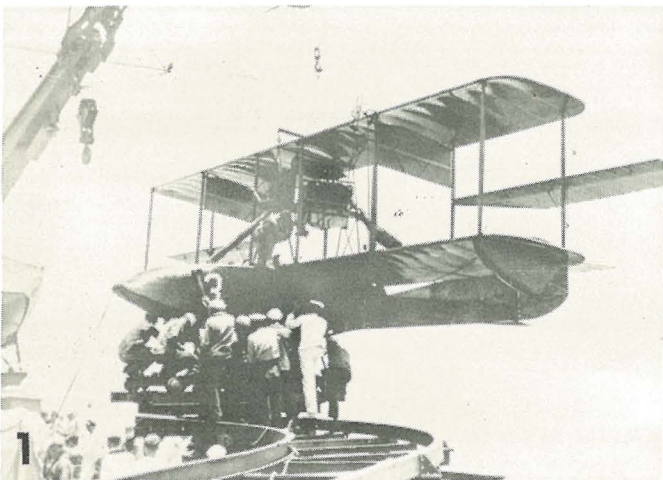
begin to move down the main cable, a man would run along each side of it to balance it until the speed was such that the two men could not keep up with it. Although several successful launchings were made by this method, it was decided that it was too hazardous to try aboard ship.

Captain Chambers and his small band of Naval Aviators (2) were determined to develop a system so that an airplane could be launched from a ship without the ship having to come to a stop and hoist the aircraft over the side. At this time it was realized that, in order to develop a catapult, it would be necessary to use compressed air. Even though there were no funds for this type of project, they were able to salvage a scrapped cylindrical air tank and some hoisting gear from the U.S.S. OREGON. This project was undertaken at the Washington Navy Yard. On the 31st of July, 1912, after the catapult had been installed on the San-

tee Dock at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, everything was ready for the first attempt to launch an aircraft by compressed air. Ellyson climbed into the AH-3, turned up to full power and gave the signal to fire. The next thing that Ellyson knew, he was in the river. What had happened was that no one had thought to secure the nose of the float down. When the catapult was fired, the bow of the plane rose up, and as the plane left the catapult, it was in a nose high attitude and stalled out. The plane was a wreck, but Ellyson was uninjured.

The catapult was returned to the Navy Yard at Washington, D.C. for the necessary alterations. It was then installed on an old coal barge with a deck about two feet above the water. On the 12th of November, 1912, Ellyson once again climbed into the plane for another try. With full power turned up, the signal to fire was given and "wamb", the next thing that Ellyson knew, he was flying. A means had now been found for getting an aircraft into the air in a short distance at sea without having to stop the ship. It would be another 21 years before a way would be found for such a ship to recover its aircraft while underway.

On 15 April, 1915, the first successful catapult launching was made at Pensacola, Florida. This catapult, designed by Naval Constructor H. C. Richardson, (who would later gain fame for his part in the design of the NC boats), was also built at the Washington Navy Yard, then sent to Pensacola for the tests. The pilot this time was Lt. P.H.L. Bellinger, and the AB-2 airplane was used. As a result of the success of this test, the Navy Department ordered that the U.S.S. NORTH CAROLINA be equipped with a catapult. On the 15th of November, 1915 the first successful underway launching was made from the NORTH CAROLINA. The pilot was Lt. Comdr. H. Mustin. Later that day, another launch was made with Richardson at the controls.



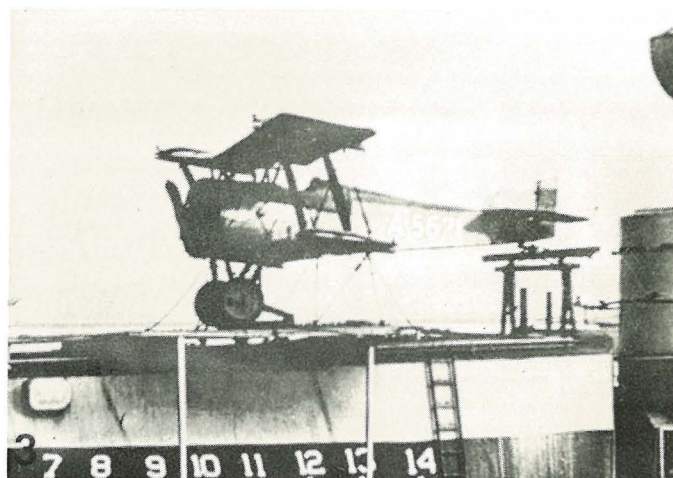
(Photo - U.S. Navy No. 426917)

Next, orders were issued by the Navy Department to develop an operational type of catapult. On the 13th of July, 1916, the first operational catapult was tried out aboard the NORTH CAROLINA. After the tests of this catapult, it was decided to equip the cruisers HELENA, HUNTINGTON and SEATTLE with catapults and aircraft to operate with the fleet. Photo No. 2 shows the U.S.S. SEATTLE with Curtiss N-9 seaplanes. Because the catapults on these ships were such cumbersome affairs, they were removed shortly after the United States entered World War I.

During World War I, the British Navy erected platforms over gun turrets on several of their ships. In order to launch the aircraft, the gun turret was trained into the wind, the ship went to full speed, the pilot turned up full power, the chocks were pulled,



and the plane would roll down the platform. The pilot prayed that he would have flying speed by the time he reached the end of the platform, or he was in for a swim. It wasn't until 9 March, 1919, that the U.S. Navy tried this method. A platform was erected on the U.S.S. TEXAS. The aircraft was a Sopwith "Camel", flown by Lt. Comdr. E. O. McDonnell. As a result of this test, eight battleships were to be equipped with platforms for flying off aircraft. (Before this could be done, a successful catapult had been developed.) The biggest disadvantage to this method of launch was that, if the ship was out of range of land for the aircraft when it returned from its "mission", it was necessary for the plane to land in the water. Further, the platform restricted the use of the guns. Photo No. 3 shows a Hanriot HD-1 on the platform. Other types used were the Sopwith "Camel" and "1½ Strutter".



(U.S. Navy photo)

On the 26th of October, 1921, a catapult was tested that was to become the basic design for the next 28 years. This was the turntable compressed air type, and Commander Richardson also had a hand in this design. Before a plane was launched by this catapult, it was tested with a "dead-load". As soon as the mechanism was functioning satisfactorily, tests were made by launching an N-9 seaplane with Commander Richardson as the pilot. The catapult was next installed on board the U.S.S. MARYLAND and the first type of aircraft to be fired off this type catapult aboard ship was the VE-7. (See photo No. 4). The Secretary of the Navy approved, on the 22 April, 1922, a recommendation of the General Board that each Fleet battleship and cruiser be assigned one spotting aircraft, and that the feasibility of operating more aircraft from these ships

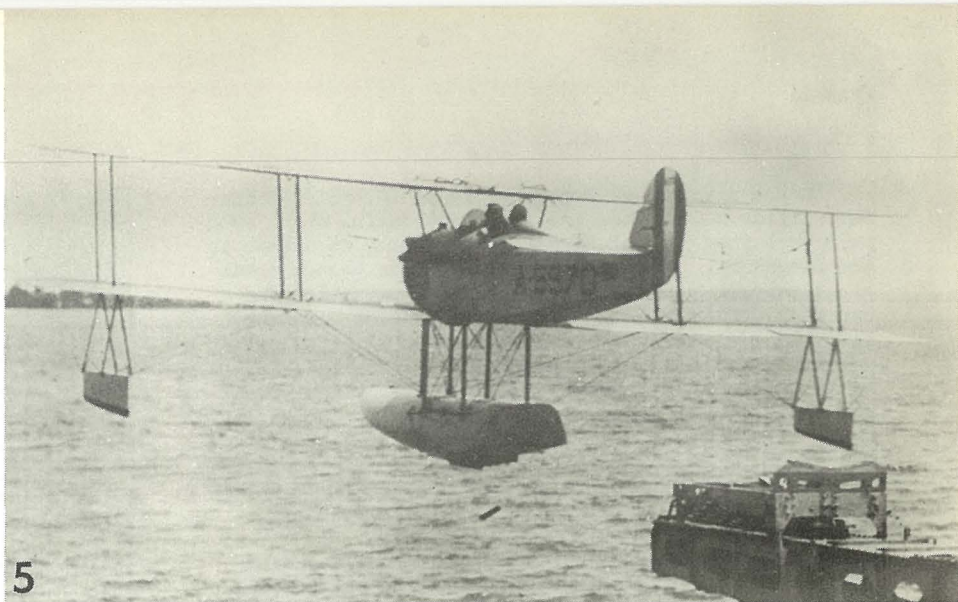
be tested. Catapult operations soon became routine.

In the beginning, the battleships each had but a single catapult, mounted on the stern of the ship. It wasn't long before another was mounted over the No. 4 gun turret. Light cruisers of the MARBLEHEAD class had catapults on both port and starboard sides just aft of the No. 4 stack. Each had two airplanes to start with. While compressed air was used as the energy device efforts were soon being made to develop a gunpowder operated catapult and it took another two years to accomplish this. At the same time, the Mk. 2 catapult, similar to the Mk. 1, was under development, and was intended to be powerful enough to launch a much heavier airplane than heretofore used. The Mk. 2 was to be installed as the battleships came into the yards for overhaul.

In September, 1922, an officer, a Navy Aviation pilot, and six aviation ratings were sent to the U.S.S. OKLAHOMA as one unit of the Aircraft Squadrons, Battle Fleet, to form an aviation section on that ship. During maneuvers, their single Vought VE-7 took active part in scouting and radioing observations back to the fleet. Later, another plane was added, thus giving double coverage.

Until July, 1922, the Navy had been using the VE-7s and the VE-9s (see Photo No. 5) aboard ship. At this time, Chance Vought Aircraft Co. delivered a plane that was to become the standard VO-VS aircraft for several years. (3) This was the UO-1. It could be operated as a land plane or seaplane, was a two-seater and could remain airborne for four hours. A contract was placed for the UO, with the first one being delivered to the U.S.S. TENNESSEE on 14 June, 1924. Photo No. 6 shows A-6613 of the Battleship NEVADA. Before the Battle Fleet left the West Coast for the annual Southern cruise in 1924, six of its battleships were equipped with two aircraft each, plus the necessary man-power to operate them. These 12 planes, UO-1s, were in operation a good deal of the time; the experience gained by these men laid the groundwork for years to come in VO-VS operations. Each of the ships had one catapult, a Naval Aviator, one Naval Aviation pilot, and four aviation ratings. Up until this time, all men and planes had come from VO-1 which was a landplane squadron based at North Island. But with the return of the Fleet from this cruise, VO-1 was decommissioned as a landplane squadron, all personnel were placed aboard the ships and the squadron was recommissioned as VO-1 (Seaplanes). Also during 1924, the light cruiser OMAHA was added to the Battle

(U.S. Navy photo)



(U.S. Navy photo)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

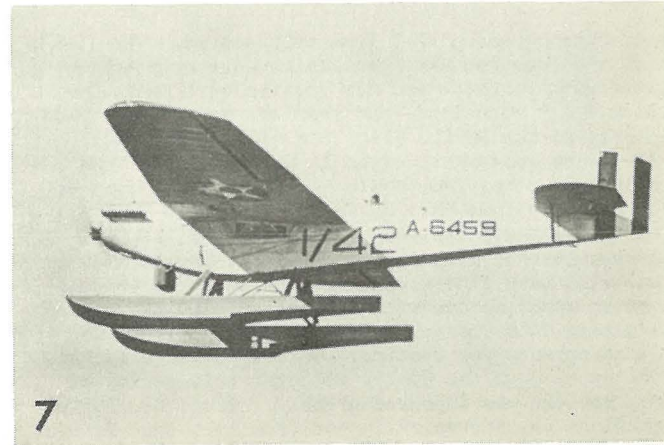
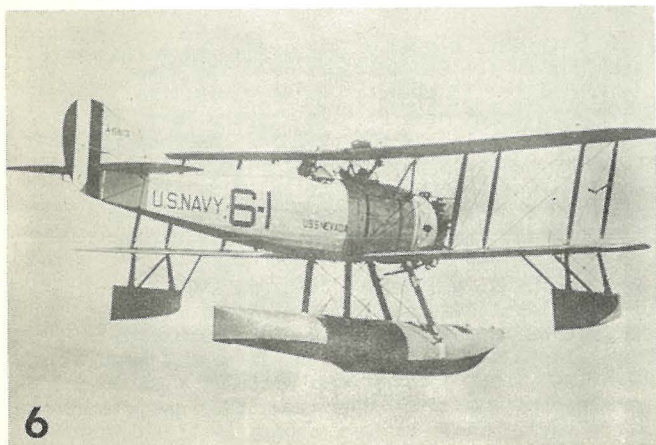
A.A.H.S. Member Fred C. Dickey, Jr. writes from a depth of first-hand experience in VS/VO aviation. His father spent 3 years in the U.S.S. MARBLEHEAD as Senior Naval Aviator and 3 years as C.O. of VS-10 aboard the U.S.S. CHICAGO. Fred had 2 years experience as SNO on the U.S.S. TOPEKA flying SC-1's, and knows whereof he speaks about catapult shots and recoveries at sea.

Fred grew up with Naval Aviation, living with his dad at Pensacola (1922-25), Hampton Roads, Va. (1925-29), back to Pensacola, and at Coco Solo, Panama Canal Zone from 1932-37. He had his first flight in 1929 in an NY-1 seaplane, entered the Navy Flight Training Program in 1942 and received his wings in 1943. During the War he flew PBV's and PEM's in the South Pacific, remained on active duty two years after the War and later in the Naval Reserve. He has flown, beside the SC's, the SOC-1's and OS2U-1's.

Fleet. She carried two aircraft and her squadron number was VO-4.

The Scouting Fleet was made up at this time of the light cruisers plus several battleships. As these light cruisers came into commission, they were issued UO-1's which formed Squadron VO-3S; the battleship complements formed Squadron VO-6S and were issued MO-1's. (Photo No. 7). Later in December, 1924, the MO-1's were replaced by VE-7's and UO-1's. In August, 1924, the light cruiser RALEIGH was sent north to the Arctic Circle to establish emergency landing areas along the coast of Greenland for the Army flyers who were making the first round-the-world flight. The two UO-1's assigned to the RALEIGH were used in locating these emergency fields.

(U.S. Navy photo)

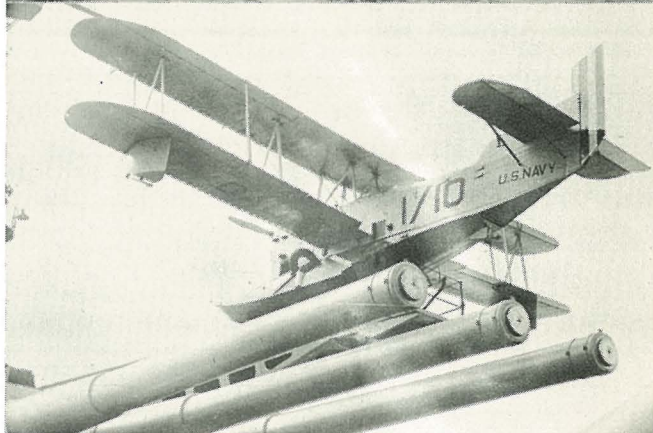


On the night of 11 November, 1924, Lt. "Dixie" Kiefer, flying a UO-1 made the first successful night catapult shot from the U.S.S. CALIFORNIA while at anchor in San Diego Bay. By the end of 1924, there were a total of 15 ships in the Fleet equipped with catapults and carrying aircraft -- seven battleships each with one catapult and eight light cruisers, each with two catapults. Arrangements had been made to install catapults on five more battleships and two more light cruisers when they went in for their next overhauls. Arrangements had also been made to install aircraft aboard the six older battleships but no satisfactory catapult installation had been developed because of lack of space; it would have been necessary to hoist these planes out.

During this time a turret catapult for launching heavier three-seater spotting planes from battleships was developed. This first catapult was installed aboard the MISSISSIPPI for tests. It was designed for the MO's and the OL's. Two OL-1's were purchased to test this catapult. In January, 1925, it was decided



to operate Squadron VF-1 from battleships. The TS-1's which the Squadron was then flying were overhauled, fitted with pontoons and new engines were installed. Photos 8 & 9 show land- and seaplane versions. VF-1 reported to the Battle Fleet for duty on March 31, 1925. They were assigned to 11 battleships. This squadron operated from the battleships until June of 1926 at which time they converted back to a land plane squadron and were assigned to the carrier LANGLEY. It had been learned with these twin-float TS-1's that a plane with twin floats could not be operated as well in rough water as one with a single float. An order was placed with Chance Vought (June, 1926) for two O2U-1 airplanes for testing. This type was a marked improvement over the UO-1's and over this period of time, the O2U was improved greatly. Photo No. 10 is typical of the "Corsair" in use from 1926 on. Before the last O3U-3 would be delivered, every VO-VS squadron in the Fleet would, at one time or another, be



(U.S. Navy photos)

equipped with this series of aircraft. As a result of the test run on the O2U-1, a contract was given to Chance Vought for 53 planes. At the same time, Chance had 20 FU-1's under construction for the Navy, (a single-seater version of the UO-1) (4). Another aircraft under construction at the time for use aboard battleships, was the OL-6 (Photo No. 11). The Navy purchased 27 OL-6's to be operated off turret catapults then being installed on battleships. (Photo No. 12).

Squadron VF-2B was formed January, 1927, consisting of four Naval Aviators and ten aviation Pilots. It was ordered to the Battle Fleet and issued the new FU-1's. (Photo No. 13). However, it wasn't until October, 1927, that these planes actually went aboard the battleships; up until they time, they had operated as land planes. They remained aboard battleships until June, 1928, at which time they once again became a land plane squadron. (This squadron remained an "en-

listed" pilots squadron until 1941).

When the revolution in Nicaragua came, several light cruisers of the Scouting Fleet were ordered to this area. One was the U.S.S. MARBLEHEAD, aboard which my father was Senior Naval Aviator and executive officer of VO-3S. At this time they were flying UO-1's. On the 25th of February, 1927, VO-3S began to fly patrols along the west coast of Nicaragua five days a week, patrols that were continued until 8 June, 1927. During this entire time, there was only one engine change accomplished because that particular engine had a total of 205 hours on it. One plane nosed over on take-off due to heavy ground swells, but was recovered and repaired.

A new system of squadron designations became effective on 1 July, 1927. It was ordered that each squadron should carry a letter after the last number indicating to what fleet the squadron was assigned. For example VO-1B indicated that this was Observation Squadron No. 1, Battle Force, and VO-5S designated the 5th Observation Squadron of the Scouting Force; VS-5S indicated that this was the 5th Scouting Squadron of the Scouting Force. This squadron was later split to form two scouting squadrons -- VS-5S and VS-6S. As new cruisers came into service, more VS squadrons were formed -- VS-9S followed by VS-10S, VS-11S and VS-12S. These were all later renumbered.

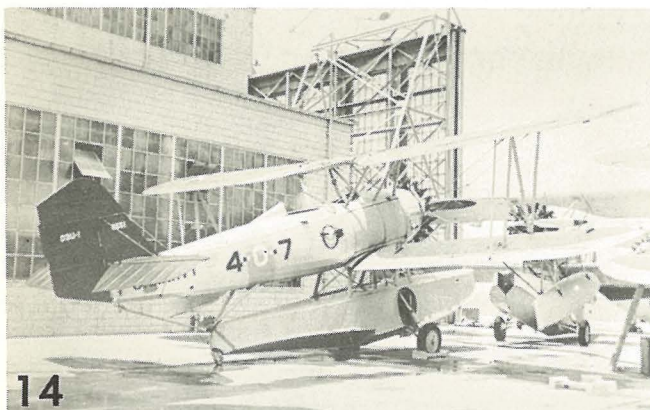
During the years that VO-VS aviation had been under development, everyone felt that it would be very advantageous if at least one amphibian were assigned to each battleship. The Navy tried the OL-6's on the battleships and while this was an excellent all-around aircraft, it had some drawbacks, one of these being that it was not a good rough-water plane. Also, the two different airplanes on the same ship required spare parts for two types of planes. Efforts were made to develop a seaplane float with amphibious gear that could be fitted to an O2U. In 1928 the first

float of this type was built and, while it did the job, it was not too satisfactory. The landing gear did not retract into the float, (it would describe an arc of 180° upward and there was a lot of drag). When the plane landed on the water, the wheel caused quite a bit of spray. What was needed was a float into which the wheels would retract flush. In 1930, Grumman Aircraft Corp. turned over to the Navy a float of this type. Following tests, Grumman received a contract from the Navy to build many of these floats. It is not certain that all VO squadrons used this type; however it is known that VO-3B and VO-4B used it. It is also known that not every plane in these two squadrons were equipped with the Grumman float. The Grumman float was used on the O3U-1's, which both of these squadrons were flying in 1930. (Photo No. 14). The O2U-1 was improved by incorporating dihedral in the wings, which model became the O2U-2. It was followed by the O2U-3 with an improved center-section wing, and then the O2U-4, the O3U-1 (Photos 15 & 16), the O3U-2 and O3U-3 (Photo No. 17).

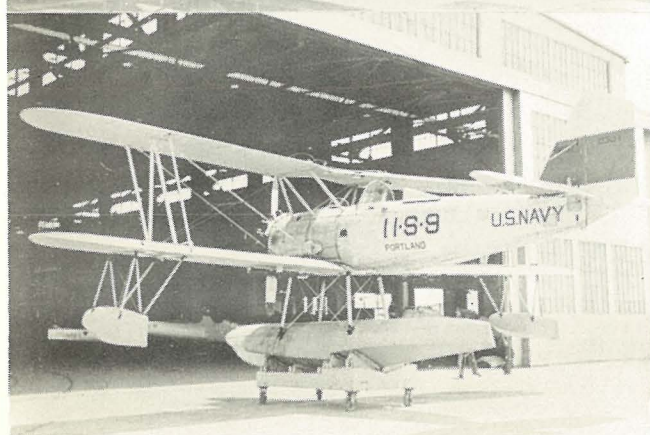
In 1929, a contract was given to the Berliner-Joyce Aircraft Co. to develop a lightweight VS aircraft, ultimately to be the OJ-2 when supplied to the Fleet. There were 39 OJ-2's purchased which were issued to two light cruiser squadrons -- VS-5S and VS-6S. The type was not too successful and after a short time in the Fleet, they were sent to the Reserve Air Stations. Photo No. 18 shows the lead plane of VS-6S assigned to the CONCORD.

To sum up, by the 1st of January, 1930, we find the following: four battleships equipped with two catapults, twelve with one each; all ten light cruisers, each with two catapults, and two of the new heavy cruisers with two catapults each. The Battle Force was composed of twelve battleships, (each carrying three airplanes), plus one light cruiser with two airplanes, making a total of 38 airplanes in the Battle Force for scouting and observation duty. In the Scouting Force, there were

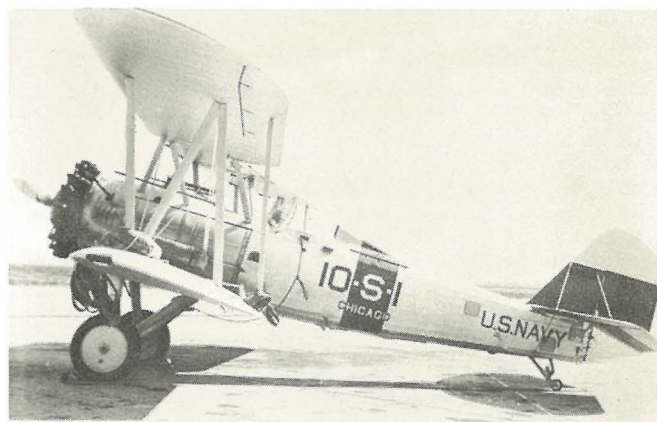
(Photos below - source unknown)

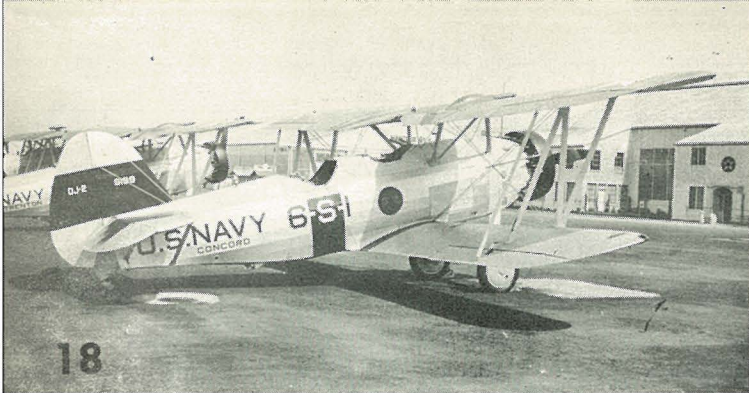


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(Below - William T. Larkins photos)



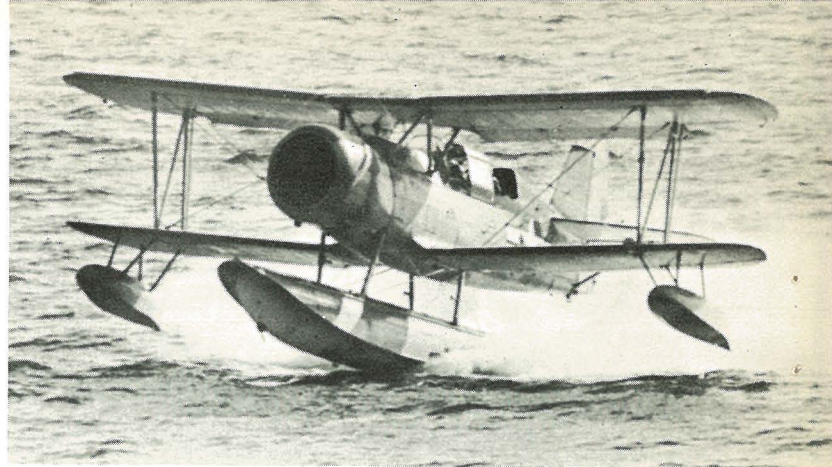


(Photo - William T. Larkins)

four battleships with ten aircraft between them, nine light cruisers each carrying two planes, and two of the new heavy cruisers, each with four planes; thus giving the Scouting Force a total of 36 aircraft. With the new heavy cruisers under construction, this total would increase as they came into service.

In the agreement reached concerning the London Naval Treaty, the United States could build 18 heavy cruisers. The first of these, the U.S.S. SALT LAKE CITY, was placed in commission on 11 December, 1929, followed by the U.S.S. PENSACOLA on 6 February, 1930. Both ships had flush-deck catapults. There were no hangars; each ship carried four aircraft tied down in the open with cowlings and cockpits covered. The NORTH-HAMPTON class (there were six of these), PORTLAND class (two vessels), and the MINNEAPOLIS class (seven of this class cruiser), all had hangars and their catapults were mounted high above the deck-line. A single ship in this group, the U.S.S. WICHITA, which had her catapults mounted on the stern of the ship and at deck level. Her hangar was on the stern with an elevator for taking the planes below decks. This was by far a much better arrangement than on any of the other heavy cruisers. Although normally assigned four aircraft, the WICHITA operated six SOC-3's for a short time.

During the years VO-VS aviation had been developing, no satisfactory way was found to recover aircraft while the battleship or cruiser was under way; that is, without the ship having to come to a halt to hoist its planes aboard when the mission was completed. When a ship was ready to recover its aircraft, a temporary slick would be made on the surface of the sea. This was done by making a turn, the tops of the waves would be stilled thereby creating a calm area for the plane to land upon. Smoke lights were thrown over the side of the ship so the pilot would know the direction of the wind and once he was down, he would taxi alongside the ship. A block and tackle would be lowered and the

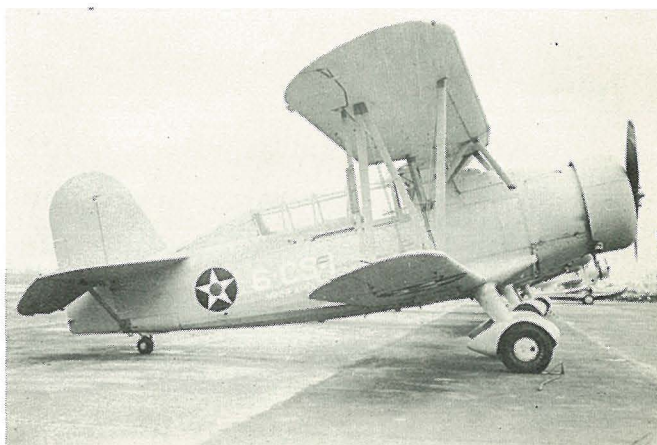
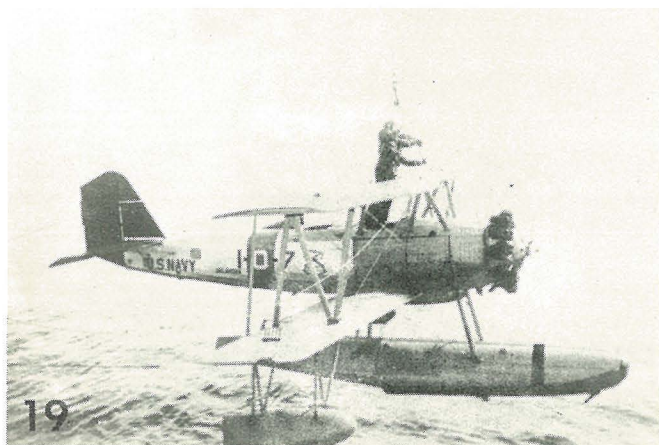


(Photo - U.S. Navy)

rear seat man would stand and place the hook in the upper wing sling. The plane would then be hoisted aboard. All this time the pilot would be trying to stay under the hook. If the rear seat man did not get his fingers out of the sling fast enough, he would be minus some fingers. Many methods were tried to recover planes while the ship was under way, but it wasn't until 18 April, 1933 that the first successful operational under-way recovery was made with the plane trap, (later known as "the sled"). An O2U flown by Lt. G. A. Ott was landed alongside the MARYLAND while she was under-way and was recovered. The plane had a hook on the bow of the float. (See photo No. 19). It taxied up on the "sled", which looked very much like a cargo net and the hook engaged in the webbing when the pilot cut the power and drifted back. Once the hook was firmly engaged, the pilot cut his engine, the hoisting gear was lowered and the plane hoisted aboard the MARYLAND. This sounds an easy procedure, however, this author spent two years as Senior Aviator aboard a cruiser and can assure one and all that it was a very tricky situation.

Up until 15 December, 1934, Chance Vought Aircraft Corp. was the chief supplier to the Navy of VO-VS type aircraft. On this date, however, a new plane made its appearance and the type remained in service until after World War II. This was the XO3C-1, which became the XSOC-1. It was a biplane, but it had a big advantage over previous types of VO-VS aircraft in that it had folding wings. Those ships without hangars were not able to adequately store their planes because of the wing span. The SOC-1 could be operated on floats or on wheels, (Photos 20 & 21), and was by far the best all-around VO-VS plane ever developed. It had good endurance, was easy to maintain and had a low landing speed. While later types would have more speed and better fighting qualities, they would not be able to land as slowly as the SOC, a factor of prime importance in operating

(Photos by William T. Larkins)



at sea. The first ship to receive the SOC was the U.S.S. MARBLEHEAD, which was part of VS-5S. Even after the Curtiss Airplane & Motor Co. completed all deliveries of the SOC type, the Naval Aircraft Factory built 41 SON-1's which were the same design as the SOC-3. At the end of World War II, there were still about 70 SOC-SON's flying. In April of 1946, this author started flying SOC #0402 and built up many hours in it. At the time Reserve Unit SOSU-3, to which the author was assigned, had a total of seven SOC's, the oldest of which was #0402 then just out of overhaul.

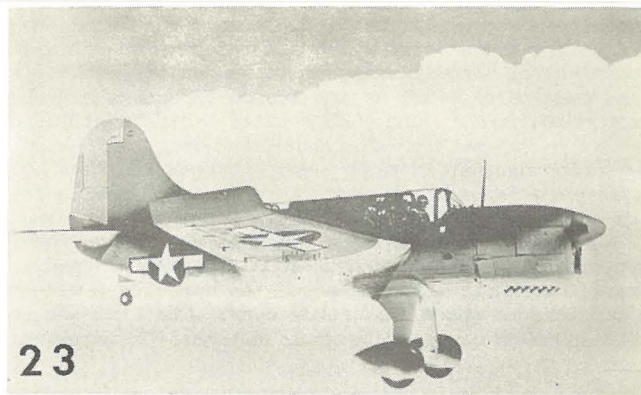
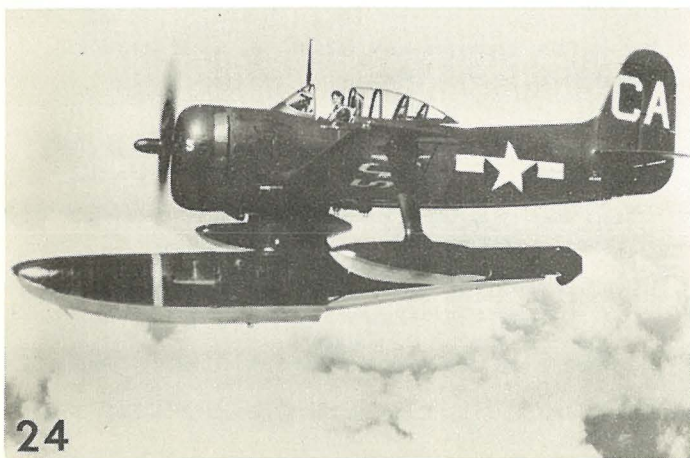
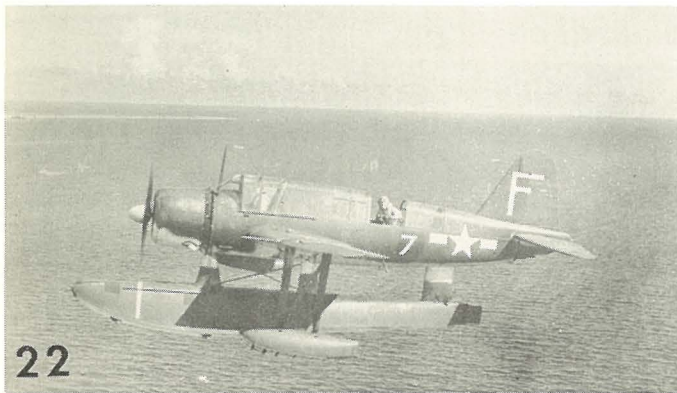
On 1 July, 1937, it was ordered that all cruiser squadrons would take the division number of the ships they were assigned to. As a result, the squadrons were renumbered as follows:

VS-5B	became	VCS-2F
VS-6B	"	VCS-3B
VS-9S	"	VCS-4S
VS-10S	"	VCS-5S
VS-12S	"	VCS-6S
VS-11S	"	VCS-7S
	and	VCS-8S

There were no changes in the battleship squadrons; they remained as follows:

VO-1B
VO-2B
VO-3B
VO-4B

By 1930, all VO-VS squadrons were using the SOC/SON type of aircraft, although in late 1936 it was decided that the Battle Force would require a different type aircraft than the Scouting Force. In July, 1938, Chance Vought turned over to the Navy its XOS2U-1, an all-metal, single-float, two-seater that could also be used as a landplane or seaplane (Photo No. 22). The first battleship aviation unit to receive the OS2U was the COLORADO unit, a part of VO-4. As rapidly as pos-



(Photo - U.S. Navy)

sible, the VO squadrons turned in their SOC airplanes for the OS2U's, and as after all battleship units had replaced their SOC's, the light cruisers (OMAHA class) were re-equipped with OS2U's.

Also in 1938, another plane was tested, the SO3C-1, a plane designed by Curtiss Company to replace the SOC's. (See Photo No. 23). It had an in-line Ranger engine, folding wings and was a two-seater. When operated on floats, the main float was supported by a single large center strut. It started as a good airplane, but because so much extra weight was added, it became much under-powered. The first aviation unit to receive operational SO3C-1's was the U.S.S. CLEVELAND. How many ships operated the SO3C is undetermined, but it is known that the cruisers WICHITA and DENVER both carried them. As a result of the failure of the SO3C, it was necessary for most of the cruisers to continue operation of the SOC's until the later Curtiss SC-1 could be built.

When World War II started, the Navy had 27 cruisers each carrying four aircraft, ten light cruisers with two aircraft each which made up the VCS squadrons -- VCS-3 through VCS-9. There were 18 battleships in commission on the morning of 7 December, 1941. The various aviation units aboard 15 of them made up Squadrons VO-1 through VO-5. The aircraft on the battleships NORTH CAROLINA and WASHINGTON were not assigned to any squadron, while the U.S.S. WYOMING was being used as an AA Training Ship and did not carry any planes.

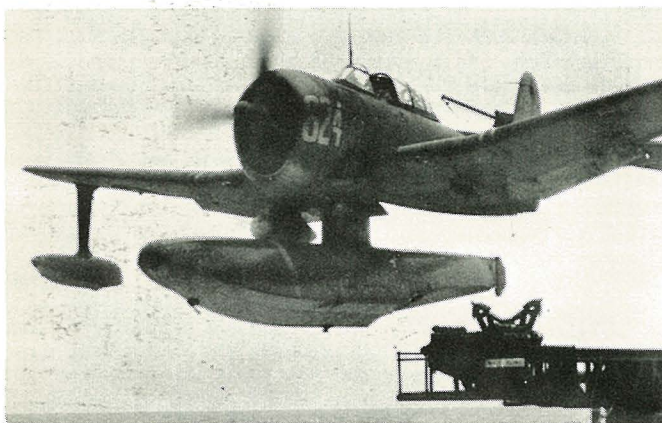
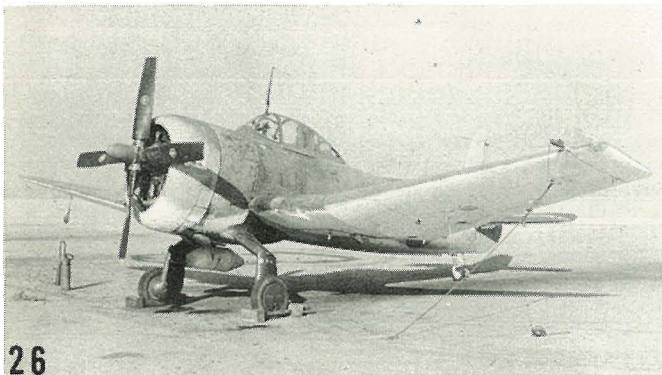
After Pearl Harbor, the VO-VCS squadrons became a thing of the past; planes and men became part of the ship's companies and replacements were assigned to the ships as needed. The ships each continued to carry aircraft, but each operated as a unit of airplane and ship. In a sense, the VO-VCS pilots and men became the "lost men" in Naval Aviation. Even when ships put into port

(Photos - Fred C. Dickey, Jr.)



where there was an air station, the air unit would report to the air station which did not have an organization plan for the air unit, so it was on its own. If it needed spare parts, no one seemed to know where they were; consequently, the VO/VCS units became adept at obtaining "midnight stores". In other words, if the unit saw something that it might need, it took it. The author recalls one case where a unit wound up with enough spare parts to build a complete plane.

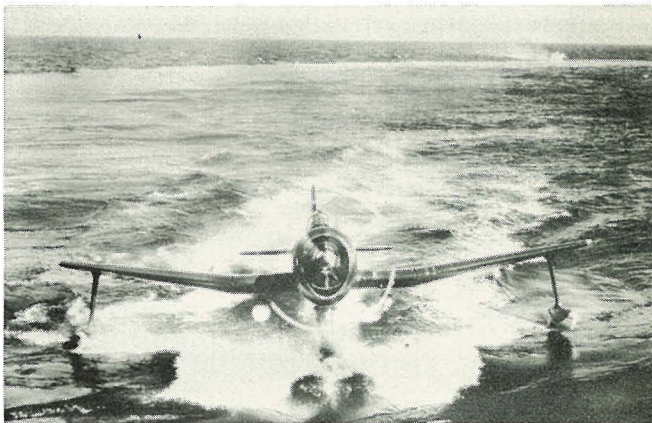
When the battleships and cruisers were on convoy duty, the air units flew anti-submarine warfare patrols. During the first year of the war, there were no carriers to spare for convoy duty. The cruisers or battleships on convoy duty would catapult their planes



at dawn to fly ahead to search for submarines. The aircraft would return and fly around the convoy, several planes being kept in the air all day. Most planes carried a depth charge under each wing; if a sub were spotted, the airplane made a pass at it, dropping depth charges and the destroyers would then close in for the kill. The aircraft were flown in all kinds of weather. A plane might be catapulted in good weather, only to return several hours later to find a heavy sea running and have to land in it. If the pilot didn't land just right, he and his rear seat man were in for a ducking. VO/VCS aviators also faced the situation wherein the launching ships might not be where they were supposed to be when they returned. The pilot then flew a "square search pattern" and hoped that he would find the ship. More than one VO/VCS pilot was lost because of poor navigation. Only sometimes would it be possible for the ship to send out radio signals to "home" in on; if there was radio silence, the pilot had to do the best he could.

Another very important function of the VO/VCS aircraft was that of air-sea rescue. Many a carrier airplane pilot owes his life to the men who flew the SOC's and the OS2U's. For example, during the second carrier raid on Truk on 30 April, 1944, an OS2U flown by Lt. (jg) J.A. Burns, picked up seven downed carrier men. He was unable to take off because of the weight and because his plane was damaged. The submarine TANG was in the area picking up downed pilots. When the

(Text continued on Page 148)



(Photos - Fred C. Dickey, Jr.)

FOOTNOTES:

- ① "The Birth of Naval Aviation" - George Hardie, Jr., J-AAHS, Volume 6, No. 1 (Spring 1961) p. 6.
- ② Ibid. See Page 5 for Capt. Washington Irving Chambers' part.
- ③ J-AAHS, Volume 5, No. 4 (Winter 1960) p. 275.
- ④ "The Vought Fighters" - Robert W. Krauskopf, J-AAHS, Volume 5, No. 4 (Winter 1960).

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AAHS LAPEL PINS

NOW AVAILABLE

See Page 135

SLING - SHOT FLYERS

(Continued from Page 90)

TANG found Burns with his load of men, she came alongside the OS2U and took them off, then sank the airplane by gun-fire. The story of VO-VCS aviation during World War II is much too long to include in this article; it will be covered at a later date.

There is one further airplane type to be covered here: the last VO/VCS plane to be used by the cruiser-battleship aviation units. When the SO3C did not meet all requirements, it became necessary to obtain a replacement for SOC's and OS2U's. On 31 March, 1943, Curtiss was given a contract for a new experimental VO/VCS aircraft, the SC-1. The first SC was delivered to the U.S.S. GUAM aviation unit on October 22, 1944. It was a single seater, carried two 50-caliber machine guns, had radar, an automatic pilot, carried 200 gallons of gas and could do close to 300 M.P.H. (Photo Nos. 24, 25 & 26). It was nice to fly after one got used to it, an excellent catapult airplane partly due to the fact that it had so much horsepower (1350). On a catapult launching, the pilot had complete stick control when only half-way down the track; very seldom would the plane drop away at the end of the catapult,

an unpleasant feature of the SOC and OS2U. On recovery operations, it handled very well. Once it was on the water, it stayed. (Photos Nos. 27 & 28). However, one had to watch in a water landing that he didn't stub the nose of the wing tip float. If this happened, on occasion the airplane lost its float. There were only four bolts holding the floats and they were not strong enough.

With the development of the helicopter, it was but a matter of time before the catapult and VO/VCS airplanes became a thing of the past, just as the battleship has been replaced by the aircraft carrier. In June, 1949, the last cruiser/battleship aviation unit was decommissioned. Many are the sighs of the old-timers who spent time as "orphans" in VO/VCS when they gather to tell tales of what it was like to be a VO/VCS pilot. Only those who flew over the briny deep in a VO/VCS airplane know how much resourcefulness was necessary to keep the planes flying and to bring them home safely. A VO/VCS pilot was a "Jack of all trades" -- he had to be in order to survive.