



## The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JIM PINKERTON



Written by JP (c. 2003); Transcribed and edited by JS (12/2007), Reformatted by JS (01/2010)

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*The following portion of an autobiography was in the publication "Who's Who in AMA, 2003, District V"*

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I was born and raised in the small town of Sebring in Northeast Ohio, with a population of about three-thousand-five-hundred, one high school, two grade schools, one middle school, and five potteries.

We were still emerging from the Depression in 1929 when I turned seven. Money was tight. I began building ten- and twenty-five cent models. They were rubber-powered one-sixteenth square balsa models for the most part, covered with Japanese paper. The paper was shrunk by moisture; I blew into a tin siphon that siphoned water from a drinking glass and misted the paper.

To support my hobby, I toured the alleys with my beat-up wagon gathering junk, mostly discarded tires, inner tubes, and auto batteries, which I sold to Mr. Journey, the junk man.

In my youth, I had but one dream, and that was to become a pilot. College was out of the question, so I continued working for my father who had started a camera shop and photofinishing plant in Alliance, Ohio, about four miles west of my hometown. As I was counting the money in the cash register prior to opening the store one morning in 1942, I noticed a person replacing the ad on the sign standing at the front of the post office across the street. It read something like, "Join the Navy. Be a Naval Aviator. High school education." Just about every day, a fellow a little older than I who worked at Victor Adding Machine Company would come into the store and spend his lunchtime talking about photography. He came in that day quite agitated. When I inquired, he stated he had just received his draft notice and did not know what to do. I suggested he look across the street. He read the sign and said, "Nuts to you. I can't swim a stroke." I pointed out it was the flying Navy, not the swimming Navy. He replied, "I'd go if I had someone to go with me." I locked up the camera shop and we joined.

I took my commission as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps at Corpus Christi, Texas on November 6, 1943. Bill struggled somewhat but graduated about a year later, taking his commission in the Navy. I became a fighter pilot; Bill flew *PBYs*.

In World War II, I was aboard the *LST 599* in Karama Rhetto off Okinawa the morning of D-Day with a contingent of *VMF-322* enlisted men, pilots and all the squadron gear. Captain John Rolfes and I were standing on the deck, enjoying the sunrise and the multitude of ships anchored, awaiting the signal to begin the landing. Suddenly, a single Japanese airplane flew over and passed out of sight over the rim of the volcano in which we were anchored. I told John he would be back. Sure enough, he came back going the opposite direction. By this time, crews on the ships began firing at him, but he was at about fifteen hundred feet, too high for thirty and fifty caliber guns. Again, he flew out of sight over the rim of the volcano.

A few minutes later, he came back headed east at a much lower altitude. We could see that he was being hit by fire from the ships crews who were wide-awake by now. As he came abreast of our ship, the pilot began a nose down left turn toward us and I told John, "We had better get out of here." We stepped through the door into the passageway and dodged the door. About that time, he crashed into us with a 250 kg bomb that did not explode. He went through the deck and into the tank deck, starting a fire we fought until the order was given to abandon ship at about five that evening. We figured he picked us because all our airplane's belly tanks were in crates on the bow and they looked like bombs from the air. This event is documented in the book *History of Marine Aviation in World War II*.

I returned to civilian life in January of 1946, but was called back for Korean duty and became a photoreconnaissance pilot. Upon returning from Korea, I entered helicopter flight training and graduated from Pensacola.

As Officer of the Day for VMJ-1 one day, as the Wing Photo Squadron, I had to take some documents to Wing headquarters. Driving a jeep there, I came upon a wide field on my right. There were three pilots from the squadron, so I stopped. Chauncey Forward had recently returned from R&R in Japan where he had purchased a jet model airplane. Jim Bathrick, a very physical person, and Stan Lipovsky were going to assist Chauncey in flying the jet. I asked the fellows if any of them had ever heard a model jet engine. None had, so I informed them that the noise would be at least one-hundred times louder than our twin jet engine *Banshees*, so "don't panic when it starts!" I explained where each should position themselves and that Chauncey should keep the stainless steel control lines fairly tight. Bathrick was to pump and Lipovsky handled the ignition and held the airplane – both stayed out of the circle. After several short burps, the engine fired. Bathrick released the pump without disconnecting and Lipovsky released the airplane without disconnecting the ignition. There went the airplane, chasing Chauncey while dragging the pump and battery.

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