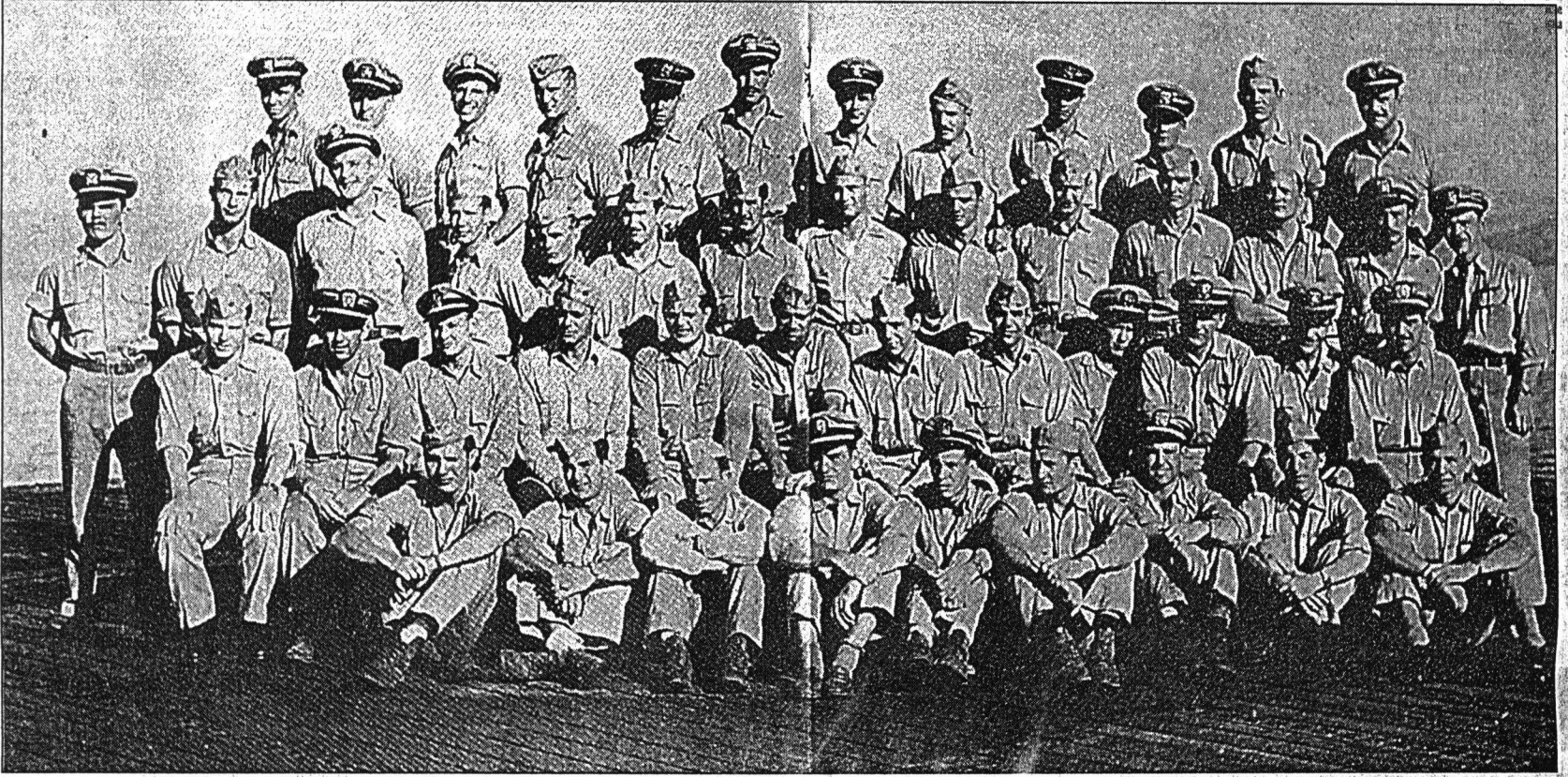


War and remembrance



Contributed photo

Squadron VC-33 fliers during World War II. James Carroll is in the second row, third from left.

World War II Navy pilots honored in Watsonville

By KATE RAMSAYER
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Skies over the Monterey Bay were once a little noisier than they are today.

During World War II, Navy pilots and ground support trained at what is now Watsonville Municipal Airport, conducting practice missions over the ocean.

WATSONVILLE "We flew over the bay with night runs on targets," said James Carroll, a one-time Navy pilot who trained in Watsonville in 1944 and 1945. "Whatever we would have to do (in combat), that's what (we) would practice."

Carroll, a Watsonville resident, will be on hand Sunday, when a memorial plaque honoring the Squadron VC-33 fliers of World War II is unveiled at the airport.

"I think it's great," said Carroll, a retired credit manager. "Our wars are important events. I think it's a good idea to have a remembrance of them so we don't forget."

Also participating in the ceremony will be Richard Ouellette, president of the Squadrons 33 Association, and family members of the late Dale Barrow, who founded the association with Carroll and Edward Tools.

The squadron was commissioned in Alameda in 1943 to participate in anti-submarine warfare and support amphibious landings. Carroll remembers the trip to Watsonville in October 1944.

"We came down in a Navy bus from Alameda over Hecker Pass, and looked down on this beautiful valley with the

ocean beyond," he said. "After two weeks I decided this was where I wanted to live."

Both Carroll and Charles Fox, who was a machinist with Squadron VC-33, remember the warm welcome they received.

People would invite the fliers over for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, Carroll said. Residents would greet members of the squadron on the street, and go out of their way to take the hitchhiking soldiers wherever they were headed.

The fliers trained in Watsonville until April 1945, when they started making their way across the Pacific. They did "island hops," riding on aircraft carriers from island to island, where they would continue training and wait for assignment to a combat ship.

"We were promised ships on every island we came across, but another squadron always got the assignment," Carroll said. The squadron ended up on the Philippine island of Samar, and was there when the war ended. From Samar, the fliers conducted missions over the jungle to contain guerrilla activity.

"We couldn't see anything," Carroll said. "There were no guns firing at us, so it was just like another training flight."

The pilots flew TBM Avenger torpedo bombers and F4F fighter planes.

The squadron was decommissioned after World War II, but a new Squadron VC-33 was established in Virginia. Over the years, the squadron has flown different planes out of dif-



Contributed photo

Carroll's Avenger torpedo bomber in action.

ferent locations. All incarnations are included in the Squadrons 33 Association.

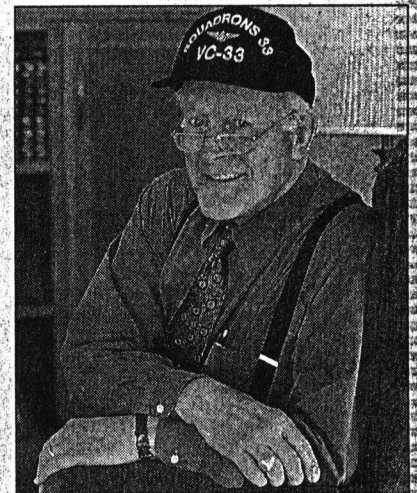
Squadron VS-33 is now a sea-control squadron based in San Diego.

"We've been represented on every carrier this country has had, and in every conflict since World War II," except the current war, said association president Ouellette.

The airport plaque is inscribed "Squadrons 33 — In remembrance of our absent squadrons mates. Peace be with them."

Sunday's ceremony will be at 1 p.m. in the main lobby at Watsonville Municipal Airport.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

World War II Navy pilot James Carroll trained in Watsonville during 1944 and 1945. A plaque to his squadron will be dedicated on Sunday.