

Jack Randolph Cram Airport Manager to USMC General

by Cal Taylor



LtCol Jack Cram and copilot 2Lt Robert L. Paveligo preflight a PBJ in early 1945 for a mission against Japanese shipping north of Iwo Jima (USMC photo)

Introduction

Jack Randolph Cram was hired in 1935 by the city of Olympia, WA, to be the first manager of the 24 year-old Olympia Airport. He was already the first Washington State pilot, working for the Highway Department. Aviation activities on the field began with the first air show, in 1911 on the Bush Prairie Airfield Site, south of neighboring Tumwater, Washington. In 1928, the Aviation Committee of the Olympia Chamber of Commerce spent \$35,000 to buy 196 acres. Over time, the airport grew to three turf runways, typical of airports of the day. More land was purchased in 1929. With a manager in place, major improvements were made. In time, Cram went on to work with the federal Civil Aeronautics Administration before going on active duty in 1941. He became a heroic US Marine Corps aviator in the Pacific Theater. Later, he commanded Marine units in the Pacific and during the Korean War, eventually retiring as a brigadier general. Subsequent to retirement, Cram served as president of an aviation industry association

Background

Jack Cram was born in Berkeley, California on 25

February 1906. He had three older sisters and a younger brother. The family later moved to Washington, where Cram attended the University of Washington. There, he made a name for himself as a football player and track star. He graduated from the university in 1929.

In 1930, Cram enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve, which sent him to flight training at Naval Air Station (NAS) Sand Point, in Seattle, Washington and NAS Pensacola, Florida. During the next three years, he became friends with fellow pilot Gwin Hicks, who was working for the Washington State Highway Department. That connection resulted in Jack Cram's hiring in 1933 as the first state pilot for Washington, along with Byron Cooper, a lieutenant in the US Army Reserve.

Even as he was flying for the Washington State Highway Department, Cram was adding flying time to his logbook as a Marine Reserve pilot. In July 1934, then-Second Lt Jack R. Cram was one of the six pilots that flew a formation of six Marine Corps Curtiss SBC Helldivers from Seattle to Montana. They were assigned to Observation Squadron 8 (VMO-8), probably based at Sand Point Naval Air Station. The purpose of the flight was to fulfill training requirements, though a



Jack Cram with unidentified student at Olympia Airport about 1936. (Port of Olympia)

public affairs component was part of the mission. The aircraft made demonstration and photo flights in Butte and Helena, Montana.¹ The training for these aircraft fulfilled the early stages of the skills that Jack Cram demonstrated in World War II and the Korean War. Another connection to his wartime career was Capt Lofton Henderson, who was promoted to captain while assigned to Observation Squadron 8. Henderson was killed in the early days of the 1942 Solomons Campaign and his name was given to the airfield on Guadalcanal.²

In April 1935, Lacey Murrow decided to purchase an airplane for the state.³ It was a 1929 Buhl-Stearman Pup, a three-seat open cockpit biplane, located in California. Originally priced at \$18,000, Washington paid only \$2,150. Cram was tasked to drive to California and fly the airplane to Olympia. Murrow used the airplane to pioneer aerial surveys of road routes, saving a great deal of time over ground surveys. It was instrumental in helping Murrow develop Washington state's first comprehensive road plan.⁴

During this period, Jack Cram's flight activities included time in OX5-powered aircraft. That experience as an early aviator was recognized on 10 September 1983, when he was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame of the OX5 Society. He was thus in the select company of Wiley Post, Charles Lindberg and Bernt Balchen, to mention only a few so recognized.⁵

Cram becomes manager of the Olympia Airport

By the early 1930s, Olympia's airport had grown in size, facilities and activity from its first use in 1911. Aircraft had operated from the field and air shows occurred over the years since. Local aviation pioneer Ross Dye operated a Curtiss JN-4D Jenny there from 1927 and flew other aircraft from the airport until 1950.

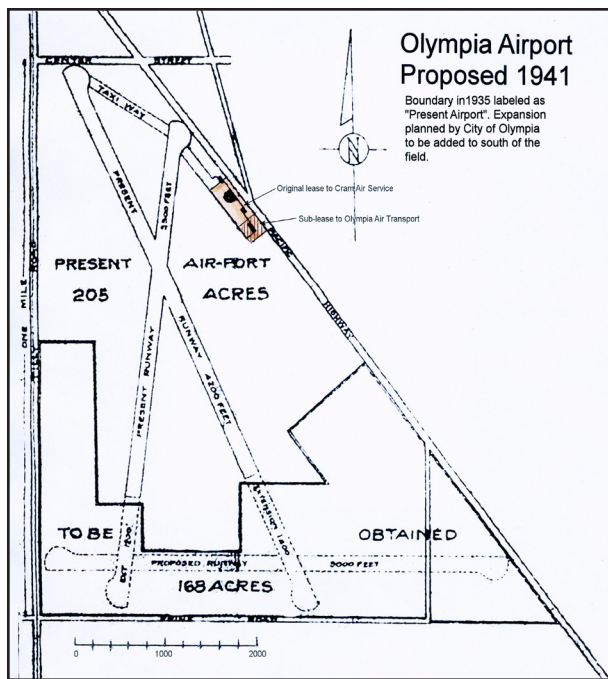
In 1927, the Aviation Committee of the Olympia Chamber of Commerce began development of the site. The next year, the City of Olympia passed a bond issue that raised \$35,000 to buy the airport property and to set up a beacon light. Further expansion occurred in 1929, though the airfield was still a grass strip, characteristic of most airports of the time.⁶

With increased activity and facilities, the airport was ready for a full time fixed base operator and manager. In October, 1935, the City of Olympia advertised for applicants. Jack Cram was successful

and executed a twenty-year lease from the city on 15 October 1935.⁷

The leased property was an area of approximately 3.2 acres adjacent to the highway on the east side of the airport near the north end of the runway. Dimensions were 700' along the highway by 200' deep. The terms of the lease were comprehensive and designed to accomplish significant improvements of the airport. Fees were waived for the first two years of the lease. For years three, four and five, rent was \$50, a substantial amount in the mid-1930s. In Year Five, the rent amount would be renegotiated for the remainder of the lease. The rent could be paid in cash or in services of benefit to the City of Olympia, such as improvements, supervising or other actions that were of value to the city.

The lease required that Jack Cram build and maintain a hangar large enough to house, maintain and repair at least one airplane and an office and living quarters seen necessary for the lessee. The city reserved the right to build other



Olympia Airport with 1935 boundary and proposed expansion for 1941 with area leased to Cram Air Service and sub-lease to Olympia Air Transport.

hangars on the leased property in areas not occupied by Cram's facilities. Any structures that Cram built would be considered his personal property.

At the end of the lease, he could either remove them or they could be rented, sold or otherwise conveyed to the city. He could also sub-lease parts of the property with the city's approval. The last was soon accomplished. In December 1935, Cram sub-let property to the Standard Oil Company of California where they set up fueling and storage facilities.⁸

In his facilities, Cram was obligated to operate a flight instruction school and to offer a commercial flying service to and from Olympia and anywhere in the United States. Further, Cram agreed to install and maintain aircraft servicing facilities, to provide fuel, oil and other items necessary for aircraft operation. During the term of the lease, Cram would have an exclusive concession to provide such affairs.

Jack Cram complied with the lease terms by building a hangar, operating a flying school, offering charter services and selling aviation gasoline. He personally conducted flight training for many students from the Olympia area. At least once, during his tenure at Olympia Airport, Cram had to make an emergency landing at the golf course⁹ bordered by University Street in Lacey, WA.

The Cram Flying Service was soon joined by another operator, Olympia Air Transport Company (OAT), which began offering flight services in 1936. In February 1936, OAT president Fred Chitty asked the Olympia Board of Commissioners for a lease on the southern 200³ of Cram's leasehold on which to build a hangar, office and classrooms

as well as fueling facilities.¹⁰ The city determined that the property would be a ten-year sub-lease from Jack Cram, to which he agreed in May 1936.¹¹

In October 1936, construction began on a hangar 80' by 100' in size, paid for by the federal Works Projects Administration. The building was large enough to house twelve airplanes. A large expanse of the field was graded, eliminating the then-existing runways but allowing landings in all directions. The airport was thus similar to many fields of the time, an expanse of grass allowing flight operations in whatever direction the prevailing wind dictated. Cram sent a letter to the Olympia Chamber of Commerce with a check for \$31.10, in partial payment on behalf of the city of a \$200 loan that helped pay for the plans for the hangar.¹²

That same year, the federal Public Works Administration paid for construction of a public terminal building and more than \$100,000 in other improvements. The work came under a program known as "Development of Landing Areas National Defense."¹³ In 1937, the State Highway Department paved the grass runways and federal funds paid for construction of a municipal hangar. The runway pattern was thus fixed in place and remained unchanged until the US Army took over the airport during World War II.

There was great interest in improving the Olympia Airport to serve aviation on the West Coast. Of particular concern were better weather services at the field. In 1937, the city asked Cram to provide materials to help build a good case for a local weather bureau. The city sent its request to the entire Washington State congressional delegation as well as key government officials. Essential points in Cram's memorandum included:¹⁴

1. As a capital city, many officials travel in and out by air.
2. The State of Washington operated an airplane based at the Olympia Airport.
3. More than \$100,000 had been spent on airport improvements including lights and hangar facilities that had space available for a weather operation.



Squadron formation of Curtiss SBC-3 Helldivers (USN)



Grumman TBF Avengers as equipped VMSB-131 (USN)

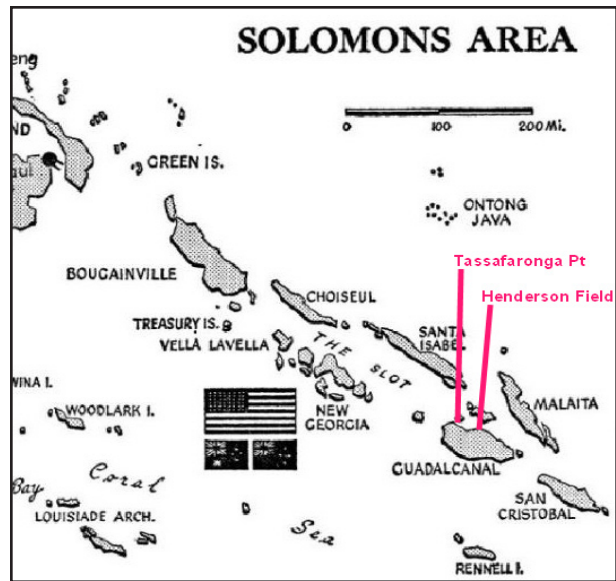
4. Because Olympia's weather system was different from Seattle and Tacoma, it offered an alternate landing field when the other two were fogged in.

5. Transfer of a Tacoma airport to the Army would make weather equipment available for transfer to Olympia. The transfer would also make Olympia the only field between Seattle and Portland of adequate size for emergency landings, with 3,000' available in any direction plus a mile-long runway.

The Seattle weather bureau had recommended that Olympia request a "first-order weather station." It would have a five-man staff and cost approximately \$5,000 per year. The request was turned down, despite these efforts.

Cram was not alone in the operation of his air service. Another Highway Department employee, Gwin Hicks, was involved with Cram from the start. Eventually, Hicks took over Cram's lease. The change came about as the result of Cram's prolonged absences beginning probably in 1938. At some point in late 1938 or early 1939, the Marine Corps sent Cram to Pensacola, Florida, for further flight training. In addition, Cram began work in Washington, DC, with the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA).¹⁵ He was engaged in this work until going on active duty with the USMC, in 1941.

Because of these absences, Olympia wrote to Cram on 29 Mar 1939 to complain about his prolonged absences, which the city saw as contrary to the lease terms. In a lengthy response,¹⁶ Cram detailed his side of the situation. In particular, he pointed out that he had set up his business and provided flight instruction, charter service and other activities in accordance with the 1935 lease. He stated that he was still interested in promoting the Olympia Airport to the fullest extent. To provide service, even in his absence, he had advised the city that he had turned over his interest in the airport to Gwin Hicks and offered his resignation as airport manager. He further offered to turn over the lease to a suitable person.



The Solomons campaign saw intense aerial, naval and ground combat from August 1942 to February 1943.

In June 1939, Gwin Hicks wrote to the city, stating that Jack Cram had turned over to him all of his interests at the airport. Hicks requested that the city approve this transaction and assign the 1935 lease to him, which was done as of 1 July 1939.¹⁷ With Cram's departure, Jack Mifflin was hired as Olympia's airport manager.¹⁸ At this point, Jack Cram was free to move on to other fields, which proved to be more than a little exciting.

When not involved in Navy flight training, Jack Cram worked at the CAA until 1941.¹⁹ His now-substantial aviation experience was valuable in developing the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), which was the brainchild of Army Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Hap Arnold. He saw the pilot training programs of many European countries, especially Italy and Nazi Germany, which were producing thousands of young pilots. A similar necessity in the United States was probable.

Arnold first asked three leading civilian aviation schools to start an unfunded program to train pilots at their own risk. Then, Congress passed the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938. President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced, when he signed the bill, that the program would provide pilot training to 20,000 pilots annually. It began in 1939, with the government paying for a 72-hour ground school and 35 to 50 hours of flight training. Though a civilian program, its national defense potential was quite clear.

Jack Cram helped to write documents to implement the program. He was co-author with Daniel Brimm, Jr. of at least two CAA Bulletins. Bulletin No. 5, the Flight Instructor's Manual, was issued in October 1940, a month after Bulletin No. 23, the Civil Pilot Training Manual. These documents were essential in promulgating national standardized syllabi for both instructors and students.

Cram goes to war



On 14 October 1943, Maj Jack Cram launches two torpedoes from PB4Y-1A 08030 against Japanese transports landing troops at Tassafaronga Point, Guadalcanal, sinking the Sasago Maru. (Painting courtesy of Jack Fellows)



Lt Roger Haberman of VF-21 shoots down a Zero pursuing the Blue Goose on final for landing at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, for his first victory. (Painting courtesy of Jack Fellows)



Maj Jack Cram beside a Grumman TBF Avenger (USN)

In 1941, the US Marine Corps called Jack Cram to active duty. Thus began a military career that he followed for the next eighteen years. Details of his early active duty are lacking. He probably went through flight re-qualification courses necessary to get him signed off for military operations. This aircraft qualification may have been at NAS Miami, FL, which was commissioned in 1940 and which had specialty courses on the Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bomber.²⁰

Cram was then assigned to Marine Scout Bomber Squadron 131 (VMSB-131), equipped with TBFs. The unit flew to NAS Coronado, California for final preparations to deploy to Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands. Cram was the squadron engineering officer. It was at this point that he became the designated pilot and junior aide to Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger. Geiger had been appointed commander of what was known as CACTUS Air Force (ComAirCACTUS) at Henderson Field, on the north shore of Guadalcanal. From August 1942 to February 1943, American forces were engaged in a desperate, brutal contest with the Japanese, to prevent them from retaking Guadalcanal.

As Cram described it, VMSB-131 commander LtCol Paul Moret asked pilots gathered around the swimming pool if anyone had multi-engine time. After no response, Moret commented to Cram that he knew he had flown twin engine Beechcraft aircraft while working with the CAA. Despite Cram's response that he had less than 50 hours, Moret told

him to report to General Woods, the Chief of Staff at Coronado.²¹ Gen Woods told Maj Cram that Gen Geiger was looking for an aircraft and pilot to fly to Guadalcanal.

Cram reported to Gen Geiger, who asked him what he thought of using a Douglas DC-3 for the mission. Recalling squadron discussions of the rugged, scattered Solomon Islands, Cram stated that an amphibian aircraft would be a better choice, in case runways were bombed out. The general asked if the Consolidated PBV-5A Catalina was what he meant. With Cram's assent, the general instructed him to go immediately to the San Diego Consolidated factory and pick up a PBV. Thus, Cram became Geiger's pilot in PBV-5A 08030, later named *Blue Goose*. Geiger always sat in the copilot's seat but soon proved his expertise, especially during instrument flight, in which he was a Marine Corps pioneer. Cram and *Blue Goose* were later to make a unique mark on air combat records on Guadalcanal.

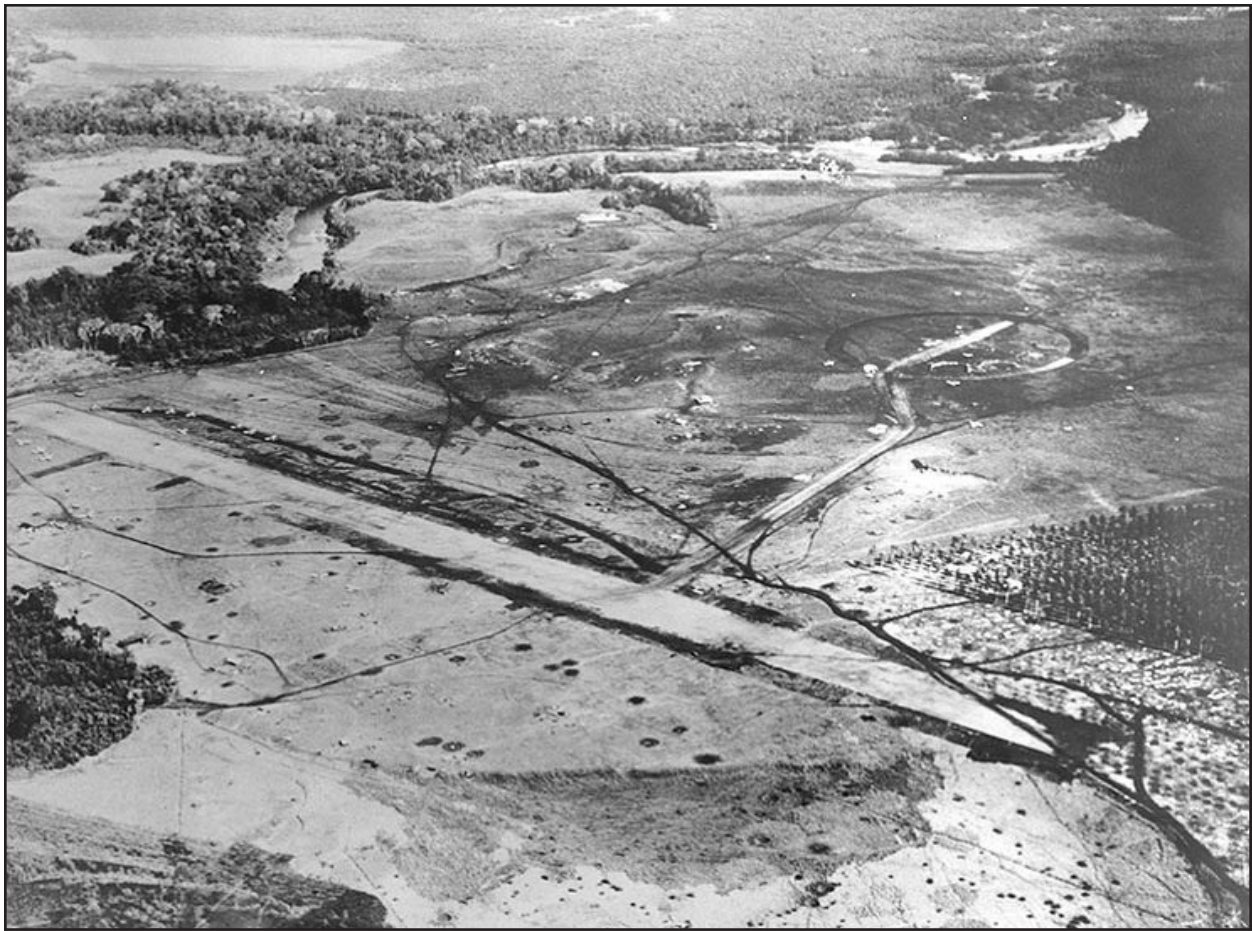
Combat in the Solomons

The Solomons Islands campaign was the Allied response to intelligence in July 1942 that the Japanese were building an airfield in the former Lever Brothers palm plantation, seven miles east of Honiara on Guadalcanal. If they succeeded, they would have extended their control more than 600 miles farther to the southeast, threatening the northeastern approaches to Australia and New Guinea. The first American landings by the First Marine Division were on 7 August 1942 and the battle for Henderson Field began the next day. American control, difficult as it was to maintain, was achieved by 12 August.

Gen Geiger deplaned at Henderson Field on 3 September 1942. As well as being ComAirCACTUS, he was commander of the 1st Marine Air Wing (1 MAW), with most of the wing headquarters actually located at Espiritu Santo. Maj Cram was not far behind him in the Catalina. He promptly settled into a routine of missions hauling a variety of cargo between various islands in the Solomons. These included Espiritu Santo, nearly 600 miles southeast, a four-hour flight in the Catalina.

By this time, the campaign on Guadalcanal had settled into a brutal fight under awful conditions. Despite heavy Japanese sea and air attacks, the Allied forces had kept control of Henderson Field. By late September, the Japanese were attempting to land reinforcements on Guadalcanal. In the Allied response, Maj Jack Cram set a unique combat record with his lumbering PBV.

By 14 October, the Japanese were well under way to land more troops on Guadalcanal. Gen Geiger's forces opposing them faced incredible difficulties in keeping aircraft fueled, serviced and armed. Jack Cram had just landed at the end of a flight from Noumea, New Caledonia. He was transporting two torpedoes under the *Blue Goose's* wings, just outboard of the large struts extending from the hull to the middle of each wing. The torpedoes were for Torpedo Squadron 8 (VT-8), but the unit's airplanes had been destroyed



Henderson Field as seen from an aircraft based on the USS Saratoga (CV-3) in August 1942 (USN)

by Japanese bombing and naval gunfire.

As Cram reported events,²² he spent the night of 14 October in a foxhole with operations officer Joe Renner. During the night, he had an idea that might at least help reduce the Japanese threat. Taking his idea to Gen Geiger's senior aid, Toby Munn, he requested permission to rig a manual release for the two torpedoes and to launch them against troop transports. Gen Geiger approved and ordered as much air cover as possible to support the mission.

The PBV torpedo bomber

On 14 October, scouting aircraft from Henderson observed six Japanese transports putting troops ashore near Tassafaronga Point, 13 air miles northwest of Henderson Field. The occasional F4F Wildcat or P-39 Airacobra fighter penetrated the heavy defensive fire from Japanese destroyers of Rear Admiral Tomotsu Takama's 4th Destroyer Squadron. At Henderson, valiant ground crews struggled with damaged fighters to get a few more tattered Wildcats and Airacobras flyable as air cover. A half-dozen SBD Dauntless dive-bombers prepared to stage an attack simultaneously with Cram's run. His airplane had been fitted with a manual torpedo release and he had gotten some basic instruction in torpedo bombing, airspeed and release altitude.

All was ready by 1000, when Cram and his crew took

off in *Blue Goose*. They flew first 26 miles northwest to Savo Island and then turned southeast toward the troop landing area, 16 miles away. The attack began with a long dive from 6,000 feet altitude, over water toward the sterns of the troop transports. Cram lined up between two of the troop ships and was so intent upon the targets that he did not notice that the Catalina's airspeed was 240 knots, or 60 knots above safe air speed.

He eased up to lose some air speed but was still so fast that *Blue Goose* passed over the destroyer screen before it was noticed. Cram released the two torpedoes in succession before turning left toward Henderson Field. One torpedo struck the *Sasago Maru* and exploded, sinking it. The second was a miss.

Japanese Zero fighters suddenly swarmed upon the PBV, which suffered a heavy pounding from their gunfire. Navy Wildcat fighters barely succeeded in keeping the enemy fighters off Cram's tail. Even as the PBV was preparing to land, one persistent Japanese was closing in. Fortunately, Lt Roger Haberman of VF-21 was on final approach, wheels down. He pulled up and shot the offending Japanese fighter, then landed, saving *Blue Goose* and notching his first kill.

A post-mission inspection of the PBV showed more than fifty bullet holes. Gen Geiger expressed his severe displeasure at the extent of the damage but, then, wrote up



A North American PBJ of VMB-612 armed with Tiny Tim 11.75" rockets for night radar-assisted antishipping operations from Okinawa into the Japanese main islands and the Korean west coast (USMC)

Maj Cram for the Navy Cross, which was awarded on 11 August 1943. This was just the first of three major awards that Cram earned in two wars.

After this event, Cram returned to more mundane flying, including search and rescue. One of the flyers he picked up was Capt Joe Foss, USMC, commander of Marine Fighter Squadron 121 (VMF-121), who was to be awarded the Medal of Honor for downing 26 Japanese aircraft in the Guadalcanal campaign. On 7 November, Foss had to ditch near Malaita Island, Guadalcanal's mirror image 35 miles northeast. Foss was pulled from the water by searchers from a Catholic mission, who cared for him overnight. The next day, Cram flew the *Blue Goose* to Malaita to pick up Foss and return him to Henderson. On 9 November, Admiral Bull Halsey pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on Foss, who had nineteen kills at the time, and two other pilots.

Cram continued to be Geiger's pilot after BG Louis Woods replaced Geiger as ComAirCACTUS. Following the change of command, Geiger, Cram and his crew flew *Blue Goose* to Espiritu Santo via Noumea, where Geiger rejoined 1 MAW headquarters. Among his most critical tasks was to coordinate 1 MAW activities on Guadalcanal, the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Jack Cram and crew were always called upon when the destination was Guadalcanal.

One of the final missions for Cram and *Blue Goose* took

place on 4 December 1942, when Geiger was visiting Guadalcanal.²³ Intelligence reports told of a Japanese convoy transiting "the Slot," the long waterway between Guadalcanal and Bougainville through the center of the Solomons. Geiger told Cram to ready *Blue Goose* but not to tell anyone. Taking off after dark, Cram flew the PBJ back and forth over the nearly two hundred miles between Guadalcanal and New Georgia for seven and a half hours. At 0200 on 5 December, using radar, they located and reported four Japanese destroyers. Three hours later, seven more destroyers and transports were spotted and reported to Henderson Field. Such activity foreshadowed Jack Cram's subsequent assignment as commander of Marine Bombing Squadron 612 (VMB-612).

The Japanese evacuated their forces from Guadalcanal on the night of 7-8 February 1943, acknowledging their defeat in the Solomons campaign. Jack Cram was still flying Gen Geiger to areas of his responsibility as commander of 1 MAW. The campaign continued, however, to move northwest along the Slot, to eliminate Japanese forces by taking New Georgia and Bougainville. By early March, operations were well underway to take Munda, the next large island northwest of Guadalcanal.

Jack Cram had flown Gen Geiger from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal so that the general could get a closer look at



Col Jack Cram, commander of MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, presents a 1957 award to SSgt Garry Cameron (USMC)

progress.²⁴ During conference with BG Francis Mulcahy, commander of 2 MAW and BG Field Harris, on the staff of ComAirSols (Air Commander Solomons), the general decided to fly to Munda to observe a scheduled joint aerial bombardment and naval shelling. He instructed Cram to get information about allied forces, their location and safe altitudes above ground fire and invited the other generals to ride along. After dark, *Blue Goose* with Cram and three generals aboard flew to the objective area. There, they observed the shelling and bombing. Things got exciting when American ships fired upon them. Cram dove from 8,000' to 1,500' in a tight spiral, leaving the anti-aircraft fire behind them. Their landing at Henderson was delayed until after dawn on 6 March because the field was out of commission temporarily. After discharging the two generals, Cram flew the PBY to Espiritu Santo, another four hours in the air.

In mid-March, Gen Geiger was reassigned to Washington, DC, as Director, Marine Corps Aviation. When Geiger headed east on 9 April, *Blue Goose* had a new pilot. Jack Cram had already received orders to an operational unit and was in Honolulu, Hawaii by 29 March. There, he was evaluating the Lockheed PV-1 Ventura light bomber, quite a change from the stately PBY. As interesting as was the Ventura, Cram's future held another twin-engine bomber. It would not be surprising to be able to confirm the Gen Geiger had given

Headquarters USMC his strongest recommendation that Maj Cram be promoted promptly and made commander of a combat squadron.

Jack Cram moves on to combat command

This first command was not a Ventura squadron but Marine medium bomber squadron 612 (VMB-612). VMB-612 was one of six USMC squadrons equipped with radar-equipped North American PBJ aircraft (the B-25 Mitchell in USAAF service). The Marine Corps began to receive PBJs in February 1943, first assigned to VMB-413, which served as the training unit for aircrews and maintenance personnel. Ultimately, seven squadrons saw service in the Pacific; VMB-423, -433, -443, -611, -612, -613 and -614.²⁵ Then-LtCol Cram took command of VMB-612 on 16 November 1943. He held the position until 31 May 1945, except for the period 14 February to 1 May 1945, when he was in Washington, DC, discussing PBJ missions and equipment.²⁶

VMB-612 was commissioned on 1 October 1943 at Cherry Point, NC. The squadron eventually operated from Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, until it was deactivated at Miramar Naval Air Station, California on 15 March 1946. During the first half of 1944, the squadron alternated between Boca Chica, Florida and New River, North Carolina to accomplish tactical training. In August, the squadron departed

for Saipan with its aircraft transported to Hawaii aboard the escort carrier USS Natoma Bay (CVE-62). The aircraft departed Hawaii on 29 September and island-hopped to Saipan, arriving on 28 October. From November until February 1945, *Cram's Rams*, as they were known, conducted night anti-shipping missions near Chichi Jima (630 miles north) and Iwo Jima, 750 miles north. Once Iwo Jima was secured, VMB-612 moved to South Field on Iwo, in April 1945, assigned to VII Fighter Command. From there, the PBJs could reach the Japanese home islands.²⁷

Operating from Saipan and Iwo Jima, VMB-612 claimed seven ships sunk and 80 damaged from night anti-shipping missions. The unit was specially trained for night missions using radar. Besides conventional bombs and torpedoes, new 5-inch HVAR (high-velocity aircraft rocket) were used. Typical tactics were to fly at only 300 feet above the water for an accuracy of 56%. The PBJs were also stripped of excess weight, including the upper gun turret and cheek guns. With 1,520 gallons of fuel, the PBJs flew missions of ten to twelve hours.

LtCol Cram flew as much as other squadron members. On the night of 16/17 November, he made three hits on a group of Japanese freighters. A month later, on 13 December, Cram's mission was a long one! During a strike on Chichi Jima, one engine failed. He nursed the crippled airplane over 650 long miles to Saipan, requiring eleven hours to do so.

On 16 February, Cram flew to Washington, DC to successfully press for the unit to move to Iwo Jima. The forward echelon made the move on 6 April. Movie actor Tyrone Power's cargo squadron, VMR-353, transported some of the equipment. From the new location on South Field, Japan's central east coast from Kyushu to Tokyo Bay was within range. On regular flights to the Japanese coast, VMB-612 attacked harbors, sinking or damaging ships.

While stateside, LtCol Jack Cram stopped in Salt Lake City, where he married USMC Lt Zua Neff. It was an all-military wedding. Maj James Adam gave the bride away, Lt Carmen Fraide was maid of honor and Cram's best man was Col Thomas G. Ennis. The couple flew together to the West Coast, whence Cram departed for Saipan.²⁸

Larger rockets, the 11.75-inch Tiny Tim, were used against both shipping and land targets after the squadron moved to Okinawa. Operational testing took place on Iwo Jima, where a rocky area on the north end of the island was the target. Testing showed the optimum tactic was to launch at 1,350 yards range and 700 feet altitude.²⁹ When VMB-612 departed Okinawa, it had flown 251 sorties, locating targets on eighty-three of them. They claimed five ships sunk and fifty-three damaged.³⁰

Operations from Okinawa to war's end

The squadron flew its 500th combat mission on 1 July 1945. On 13 July, LtCol Cram flew to Okinawa to prepare for the first Tiny Tim mission and the unit's transfer to Okinawa. Some aircraft made the move beginning the same

day and all were in place by 28 July. Subordinate to Fleet Air Wing 1, VMB-612 operated from Chimu Airfield, on Okinawa's east coast, until the war ended on 15 August.

Cram's Rams flew missions with Tiny Tim rockets until nearly the last day of the war. LtCol Cram took the first night anti-shipping mission, on 21/22 July. He flew across the South China Sea and north along the coast of Korea. Only a few small fishing boats were seen, however.

The major effort with Tiny Tim rockets began on 11 August, with another flight commanded by LtCol Cram. Though his flight saw nothing of consequence, one of three sorties on 14 August fired at a 200-foot ship, which was reported sunk while the other two attacked ships using 5-inch HVAR and Tiny Tims. The same night, on what turned out to be the squadron's final wartime mission, six PBJs flew to the Tsushima Straits where they fired at several ships, damaging at least two. These were the last of a total of ten combat missions with the large rockets.

With the 15 August cessation of hostilities, VMB-612 aircraft flew utility missions in Japan and as far afield as Tsingtao and Shanghai, China. Finally, on 8 November, the aircraft flew to Guam for disposal. All personnel returned to the United States and the squadron was decommissioned at NAS Miramar, California on 15 March 1946.³¹ For ten of its eighteen months of operation, LtCol Jack Cram commanded VMB-612 while conducting very challenging and dangerous missions using several new types of equipment. This record was certainly important in his subsequent promotion to full colonel, with which rank he commanded another Marine unit during the Korean War.

Cram in Korea and service until retirement

Shortly after war's end, LtCol Cram became the 137th naval aviator to pilot a jet. He flew a Bell P-59B, at NS Patuxent River, MD, on 19 August 1946.³²

Six years after VMB-612 was deactivated, now-Colonel Jack Cram took command of Marine Aircraft Control Group 2 (MACG-2) at Pohang, Korea (K-3), on 11 January 1952. Prior to this assignment, Cram may have flown combat with another unit, in late 1952. He commanded MACG-2 until relieved by Col Kenneth O. Derby on 16 Feb 1953.

MACG-2 was the command and control element of the 1 MAW, which controlled all shore-based USMC aviation in Korea. Within the group were air traffic control, air support, communications and anti-aircraft elements. In February 1952, the 1 MAW electronic countermeasures (ECM) section was transferred to the MACG-2 Headquarters Squadron (HEDRON), collocating ECM capabilities with the airborne early warning (AEW) section in the group.³³ Col Cram was thus responsible for a wide variety of USMC aviation functions in Korea, with air and ground crew assigned to the group. The ECM activity employed several variants of the Douglas AD Skyraider aircraft assigned to HEDRON-33 of Marine Aircraft Group 33 (MAG-33) at Pohang.

MACG-2 accomplished a special project in April 1953



Brigadier General Jack Cram, USMC (Ret) at his 1983 induction into the OX5 Society Hall of Fame, flanked by two Society members (Alaska State Library, Lloyd Jarman Photograph Collection, 6-160, PCA 337)

to evaluate use of large searchlights to pin point targets for close air support. The basic employment pattern was to set searchlights on two or three high points with their beams crossing at the target location. An airborne tactical controller could then direct air attacks with reference to the light beams. The project showed that the system worked well, was uncomplicated and not subject to enemy attack. The final recommendation was that Marine Corps air-ground teams in Korea adopt the searchlight system with suitable augmentation of personnel and aircraft.³⁴ The system was implemented with the 7th Marine Division.

With Marine aviation concentrated at Pohang, Col Cram had plenty of opportunity to fly. Among the available aircraft were the new jets, including the Douglas F3D Skyknight, Grumman F9F Panther and the McDonnell F2H Banshee—plus a single F4U Corsair. He probably took advantage of the situation to fly one or more of these aircraft.

He was quoted in a December 1951 article in the Marine Corps Gazette that going from the Corsair to jets was “like going from a Model-T to a Cadillac.”³⁵ Cram said he could attack targets at Corsair speeds if he used the jet’s dive brakes. Missions could be flown at twice Corsair speed and greater accuracy was possible without the propeller vibration and torque.

For his service in Korea from 11 July 1952 to 7 January

1953, Col Cram was awarded the Legion of Merit medal. This award was probably presented while Col Cram was a student at the Naval War College, Portsmouth, Rhode Island. He graduated from the one-year course on 16 June 1954.

Two years later, on 30 October 1956, Cram took command of Kaneohe Bay MCAS, Hawaii. Until 20 August 1958, he was responsible for Marine activities in Hawaii and relations of the base to local communities. Among the activities foreshadowing his post-retirement occupation, he was a participant in meetings of the Airport Zoning Board, which was attempting to establish appropriate zoning around the Navy and Marine Corps airfields on Oahu. Noise was a particular concern and the 14th Naval District wanted zoning protection that civilian airfields already enjoyed.³⁶ An interesting diversion in late 1957 came with a Hollywood crew and cast to film the movie, South Pacific.

From Kaneohe Bay, Cram went to Washington, DC. For a while, at least, he was Deputy Chief, Airport Utilization Division, Air Traffic Enforcement Branch of the Federal Aviation Administration. Given his previous experience with the CAA, he would have been a good fit for the position.³⁷

His promotion to brigadier general probably came early in 1958. He would have been required to serve at least one year at the new rank, which may have been at Marine Corps Headquarters, until he retired in 1959.

Post-retirement occupation

Once retired, General Cram did not remain unemployed for long. In July 1960, the new National Aircraft Noise Abatement Council (NANAC) installed him as its president with its headquarters located in Washington, DC. For some nine years, NANAC worked with the aviation industry, manufacturers, the pilots' association and local governments to minimize or eliminate aircraft noise. With expansion of jet airliners equipped with the noisy engines of the day and encroachment by housing around airports, noise was a huge issue across the country.

The three founding organizations of NANAC were the Air Transport Association, the Aerospace Industries Association and the Airline Pilots Association. NANAC's principal objectives were: 1. Encourage the development of techniques, research and improvement of aircraft operation that would affect aircraft noise abatement; 2. Provide information on noise abatement activities to industry, management and other interested agencies.³⁸

During his service with NANAC, Cram made many trips across the United States to meet with local airport commissions, municipalities and other organizations dealing with aviation noise. This continued until NANAC ceased operation in 1969. Little information is available about his occupation and residence after that date.

In 1983, the OX5 Society recognized Jack Cram's early aviation experience. The Society added his name its Hall of Fame as a pilot who flew early aircraft powered by the OX5 engine. He thus joined the company of aviation pioneers that flew aircraft powered by the OX5 that included such notables as Jimmie Doolittle, Wilbur and Orville Wright and Wiley Post.

Summing up

Jack Randolph Cram died at the age of 92 in Oak Harbor, WA. He was a little-known aviation pioneer who made a substantial mark on Washington State, the city of Olympia, Marine Corps aviation and several levels of national aviation. His aviation career spanned at least thirty-nine years, during which he made key accomplishments at every stage. Doing double duty as a state pilot and Olympia Airport manager, he promoted the value of aviation in the 1930s. CAA curricula for the CPTP helped insure that the United States had an adequate pool of pilots when WWII started. During two wars, Jack Cram's skill, dedication and leadership were essential to successful Marine Corps air operations. Finally, as president of NANAC, he worked productively to mitigate the effects of jet aircraft operations on areas surrounding airports across the country.

(Endnotes)

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²⁵ Carey, Alan C. "Marine Corps B-25 Squadrons of World War II." Leatherneck Magazine. May 2002.

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