

George Herbert Walker Bush in WW II

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the American naval base of Pearl Harbor, marking the start of US participation in World War II. On his 18th birthday, immediately after graduating from Phillips Academy, George Herbert Walker Bush enlisted in the Navy as a naval aviator. After a period of training, he was commissioned as an ensign in the Naval Reserve at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi on June 9, 1943, becoming one of the youngest aviators in the Navy.

In 1944, Bush served in the Pacific theater of World War II, where he flew a Grumman TBF Avenger, a torpedo bomber capable of taking off from aircraft carriers. His squadron was assigned to the USS San Jacinto as a member of Air Group 51, where his lanky physique earned him the nickname "Skin."

Bush flew his first combat mission in May 1944 and was promoted to lieutenant (junior grade) on August 1, 1944. During an attack on a Japanese installation in Chichijima, Bush's aircraft successfully attacked several targets, but was downed by enemy fire. Though both of Bush's fellow crew members died, Bush successfully bailed out from the aircraft and was rescued by the USS Finback. Several of the aviators shot down during the attack were captured and executed, and their livers were eaten by their captors. Bush's near-death experience shaped him profoundly, leading him to ask, "Why had I been spared and what did God have for me?" He was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his role in the mission.

Source: Wikipedia