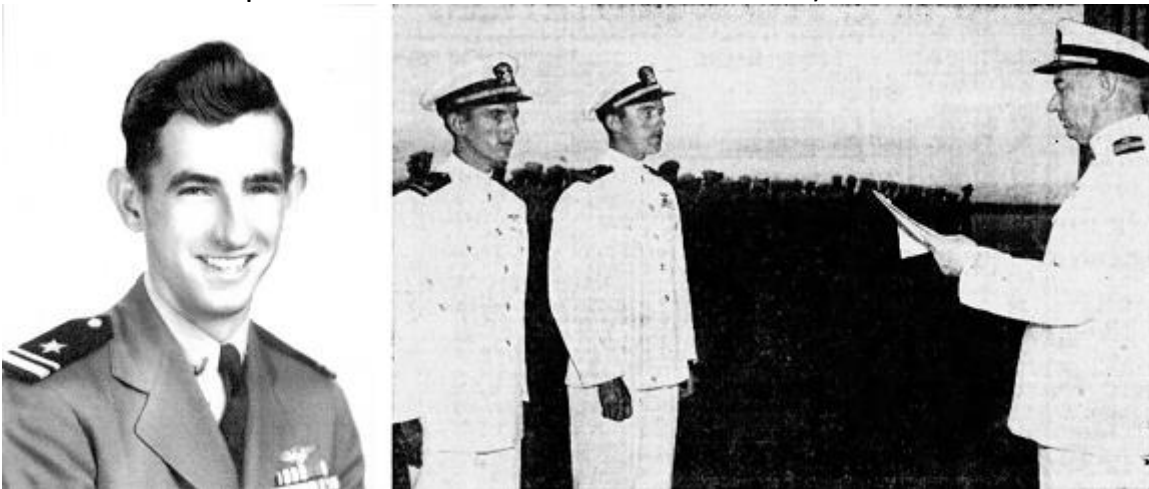


USS Bataan CVL-29 LSO “Iron Mike” Mikronis

Christos Edgar Mikronis (aka “C. Edgar” or “Iron Mike”) was born April 15, 1921 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, of Greek immigrant parents. Growing up in Baton Rouge he was enamored by flying, studied mechanical engineering at Louisiana State University, and joined the US Navy as an Aviation Cadet in July 1941. It was during his Naval Aviator training at the Naval Air Station (NAS) in Corpus Christi, TX that Ensign Mikronis learned of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. After completing his qualification for carrier landings, Mikronis was assigned to Fighting Squadron 41 aboard the USS Ranger CV-4 and began training for Operation Torch, the November 1942 Allied invasion of North Africa. North African countries such as Algeria had been colonies of France, and when Nazi Germany conquered France in 1940, they established a “puppet” government known as “Vichy France” to govern in France and its colonies areas not directly occupied by Germany. No one knew if French forces in Africa would fight the Allies, or join with them. For several days they did fight, until the pull of “Free French” leadership such as Charles de Gaulle convinced them to switch sides. Ensign Mikronis did his share in the fighting; let’s read the citation accompanying his Silver Star awarded in September 1943 (Mikronis had been promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade):



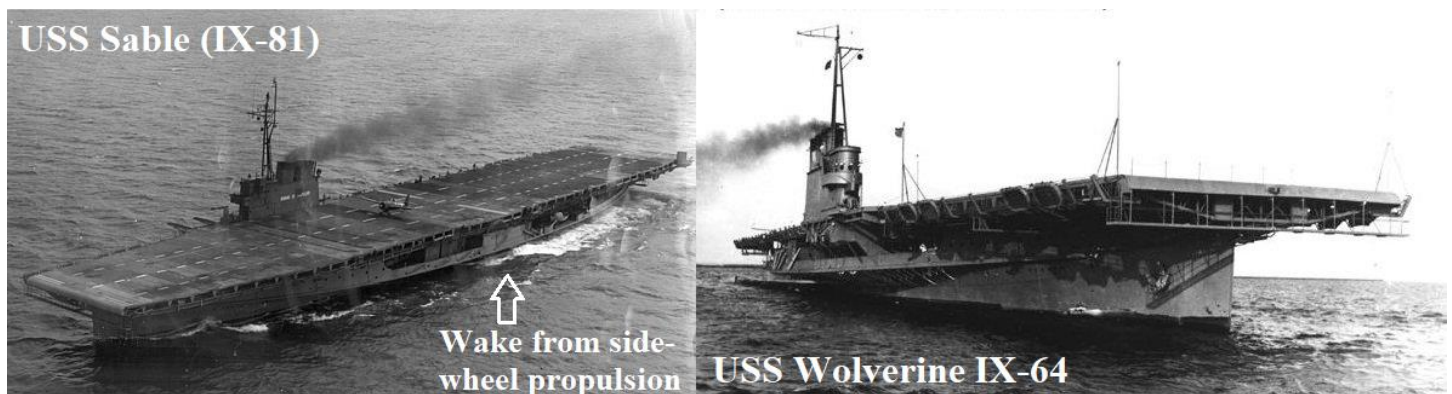
Award presented by Captain Arthur Gavin, USN, commanding officer of the Miami Naval Air Station.
The Miami News, Sunday, Apr 18, 1943

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Lieutenant, Junior Grade Christos E. Mikronis, United States Navy, for gallantry in action during the occupation of French Morocco, 8 to 11 November 1942. Vigorously attacking hostile machine gun emplacements and aircraft on the ground, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Mikronis inflicted heavy damage to weapons, and planes, during an attack on the Cazes Airdrome. When his engine was knocked out by a hostile shell, he succeeded in landing his plane, lapsing into unconsciousness as his plane touched the ground. His gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service.”

Downed VF-41 airmen who became POWs under the Vichy French included Ensign C. E. Mikronis. He was shot down while strafing a line of French and German aircraft at the Cazes Airdrome, from an altitude of only 35 feet! Mikronis was wounded in the attempt (Purple

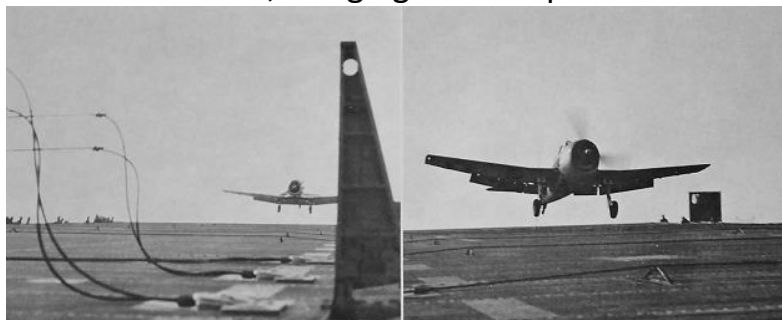
Heart Award), was rescued by Allied forces a few days later, and placed on a ship returning to the USA with other wounded from the invasion.

In his book "Their Life In My Hands", Mikronis introduces the next phase of his military career, that of a LSO (Landing Signal Officer). Mikronis quoted an Ernie Pyle column (reproduced in its entirety at the end of this article) "**Most important man on a carrier is the Landing Signal Officer**" aka "**Landing on carrier is tricky work**". In February 1943, Mikronis reported to Miami, FL, for basic LSO training, and continuing to Daytona, FL, then on to NAS Glenview, IL (north of Chicago) for advanced LSO training, carried out on the USS Sable ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Sable_\(IX-81\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Sable_(IX-81))) and USS Wolverine on Lake Michigan. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Wolverine_\(IX-64\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Wolverine_(IX-64))) Both were originally side wheel coal powered excursion steamers; the passenger areas were removed, and they were fitted with a 500' flight deck.



Despite disadvantages such as no hanger deck and being very slow (their coal propulsion didn't produce enough wind for training new aviators in carrier takeoffs & landings, so they had to find a breeze on Lake Michigan!), they could securely train Naval Aviators in the center of the United States without concern of enemy activity; no escort ships were needed. Over 17,000 aviators and LSOs trained on these ships, including Ensign George H.W. Bush (later the 41st President of the United States).

Next stop for Mikronis was Chesapeake Bay, and training Air Group 50 for the USS Bataan CVL-29. Here are some photos from the WW2 Cruise Book of USS Bataan CVL-29, of "Iron Mike" Mikronis, USS Bataan's Landing Signal Officer (LSO) conducting the FIRST of thousands of aircraft landings on USS Bataan CVL-29, bringing Air Group 50 aboard on February 28, 1944.





[USS Bataan CVL-29 WW2 Cruise Book](#)

With Air Group 50 aboard, USS Bataan departed Pearl Harbor on April 4, 1944 (accompanied by her destroyers) and steamed to the Marshall Islands. She arrived at [Majuro Atoll](#) on the 9th and reported for duty with the fast carriers of [Task Force 58](#) (TF 58). On April 13th, she sailed with the carriers [Hornet](#), [Belleau Wood](#), [Cowpens](#) and the rest of Task Group (TG) 58.1. LSO Mikronis was kept busy landing aircraft from operations against [Hollandia, New Guinea](#) (now known as Jayapura).

The Task Group then headed north and struck the Japanese base at [Truk Lagoon](#) on April 29th with both fighter sweeps and bombing raids. On April 30th, *Bataan's* task group turned toward Ponape (now [Pohnpei](#)), [Caroline Islands](#); and flew CAP (Combat Air Patrol) and Anti-Submarine Patrol (ASP) missions over the battleships bombarding that island. The warships then steamed to the [Marshall Islands](#), arriving at [Kwajalein](#) lagoon on May 4th. Continuing on with lots of action in the Pacific, *Bataan* and her task group rendezvoused with the other three fast carrier groups about noon on 18 June, approximately 150 miles west of [Saipan](#). In June 1944 (2.5 years after Pearl Harbor), Task Force 58 had four Task Groups with a total of 6 CV (large carriers, 90 aircraft each) and 8 CVL (light carriers, 33 aircraft each) with a total of over 700 aircraft (more than 2x aircraft which attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941). TF58 included the following CVs: *Hornet II*, *Yorktown II*, *Bunker Hill*, *Lexington II*, *Enterprise*, *Essex*, and CVLs: *Belleau Wood*, *Bataan*, *Monterey*, *Cabot*, *San Jacinto*, *Princeton*, *Langley II*, *Cowpens*.

New Essex-class carriers were still being launched approximately one per month, and dozens of CVE (escort carriers) were also being built (CVE-60 *USS Guadalcanal* had just captured U-505 on June 4th, *Rome* was captured on June 4th, and D-Day in France was June 6th).

On the morning of 19 June, while waiting to hear from dawn search missions, *Bataan* launched CAP and ASP aircraft to guard TG 58.1. During the first day of the **Battle of the Philippine Sea**

(June 19, 1944), *Bataan's* aircraft claimed 10 Japanese planes out of the approximately 300 enemy aircraft shot down during the "**Great Marianas Turkey Shoot**".

Late in the day on June 20th, *Bataan* launched 10 fighters to accompany a massive 206-plane strike. The raid caught the retreating Japanese at dusk, sank [Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiyō*](#) and damaged another.

LSO Mikronis wasn't worried about "his boys" from Air Group 50, as they'd all had night training, but this wasn't true of all the aircraft attempting to land that night. After one aircraft crashed into the side of a fleet carrier (while attempting to land), Admiral Mitscher gave his famous order to "[Turn on the Lights](#)". Even so, the (low on fuel) returning aircraft didn't follow landing pattern procedures, and both carrier identification and night landings (for untrained squadrons) were difficult, and (according to Mikronis) "chaos reigned, as the planes were not following normal flight patterns for coming aboard, but were instead going from one carrier to the next in a straight line desperately trying to get aboard". Two *Yorktown* planes landed on *Bataan*, the second of which crashed and fouled the deck. With many aircraft still in the air, and fearing further damage to his ship (which might put it out of action), Captain Schaeffer of *USS Bataan CVL-29* ordered Mikronis not to land additional aircraft. LSO "Iron Mike", worried about "his boys" (aviators of Air Group 50), and ran to the bridge to plead with the Captain, who threatened Mikronis with court martial if Mikronis didn't follow the captain's orders. So *Bataan's* deck crew had to keep waving off dead tired pilots who were low on fuel. LSO Mikronis could only watch aircraft land in the water and some colliding with each other.

Eventually nine of *Bataan's* own fighters landed on other carriers, and the tenth was lost. About 100 aircraft were lost in the raid, and no fewer than 80 of those losses took place during the landing. But with a group of destroyers left behind to search the area in daylight, only 16 pilots and 33 crewmen were lost.

A few days later, *USS Bataan* and TG 58.1 turned northwest toward the Bonin Islands (Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima). *Bataan* launched 17 fighters for the attack on Iwo Jima, but these, and the 34 Hellcats from *Yorktown* and *Hornet*, met a Japanese incoming strike about halfway to the target. A second melee developed near the carriers when another Japanese raid met with task force's CAP. *Bataan's* air group lost three planes in these battles but claimed 25 in return. The task group then retired toward the Marshalls, anchoring at Eniwetok on 27 June.

Unable to repair her forward elevator, *USS Bataan* received orders to head home for repairs. She steamed by way of Eniwetok and Oahu before arriving in San Francisco on July 30th, 1944, and over the next two months, the yard workers repaired her elevator, painted the hull, installed a second catapult, an air-search radar, deck lighting, rocket stowage, and a second aircraft landing barrier. She got underway for Hawaii, arriving at Pearl Harbor on October 13, 1944.

Air Group 50's record while aboard USS Bataan CVL-29 in 1944: 38 bombing missions (multiple aircraft each), 61 Japanese planes shot down, and two Japanese ships sunk.



[USS Bataan CVL-29 WW2 Cruise Book](#)

Bataan spent most of November and December conducting pilot training exercises and night-fighter operations in Hawaiian waters. During this time, *USS Bataan* completed 7,474 carrier landings. Seven planes were lost in accidents, including one Wildcat that crashed into her number 2 stack but only two pilots were injured. In January and February 1945, the focus of training operations shifted to night-fighter direction and ground-attack exercises. Accidents claimed another five planes, including a [Vought F4U Corsair](#) fighter that burned on the flight deck on January 28, 1945, but again no pilots were lost. The carrier entered the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard on February 16, 1945, undergoing repairs to her flight deck and receiving three new 40-millimeter antiaircraft guns.

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Late February 1945 *USS Bataan* CVL-29 finished carrier qualifications at Pearl Harbor, LSO Mikronis brought aboard Air Group 47. Before the *Bataan* and *Franklin* sailed for Ulithi Atoll (with other fleet ships), *USS Bataan's* Captain Heath told Mikronis that the *USS Franklin's* current LSO had become severely ill. As Mikronis was the only LSO replacement available, he (Mikronis) was re-assigned as LSO to the *USS Franklin* CV-13. Mikronis' place on *USS Bataan* was taken by his assistant LSO Lt. Victor Strub (author of unpublished ["Thunder on the Flight Deck"](#)). As he boarded *USS Franklin*, Mikronis noticed several old friends were also coming aboard, including [Chaplain Father O'Callahan](#) who had reported him missing from the *USS Ranger* off North Africa in November 1942.

Just a few days after Mikronis' transfer, Task Group 58.3 with *USS Franklin* and *USS Bataan* was about 60 miles off the coast of Japan. Early on March 19, 1945, the *USS Franklin CV-13* was hit by two Japanese bombs, one of which penetrated the teak flight deck and exploded among armed and fueled aircraft on the hanger deck. Over 700 of the Franklin's crew were killed, and additional explosions continued to shake the ship. Mikronis was on the Franklin's LSO platform, and was blown off the *Franklin* by one of the blasts. Due to Franklin's maneuvering to manage smoke from the fires (so that firefighters weren't blinded by smoke), *USS Bataan* had to swerve hard to starboard (right) at flank (full) speed to avoid a collision with the wounded *USS Franklin*! Mikronis was able to rejoin *USS Franklin* after she returned to Ulithi Atoll, and upon seeing him, Father O'Callahan ([only chaplain ever awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor](#) for his work during *USS Franklin's* crisis) exclaimed "Mikronis, this is the SECOND time I've had to report you missing and here again you have made a liar out of me. I'm never going to ship out with you again!". Mikronis went back to the States with *USS Franklin*, and started a LSO school in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. During this time, Japan surrendered, and Iron Mike returned to civilian life.



SCAN WITH SMARTPHONE CAMERA
FOR ONLINE NEWSLETTERS



[USS Sante Fe CL-60 Cruise Book](#)

USS Ranger CV-4: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Ranger_\(CV-4\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Ranger_(CV-4))

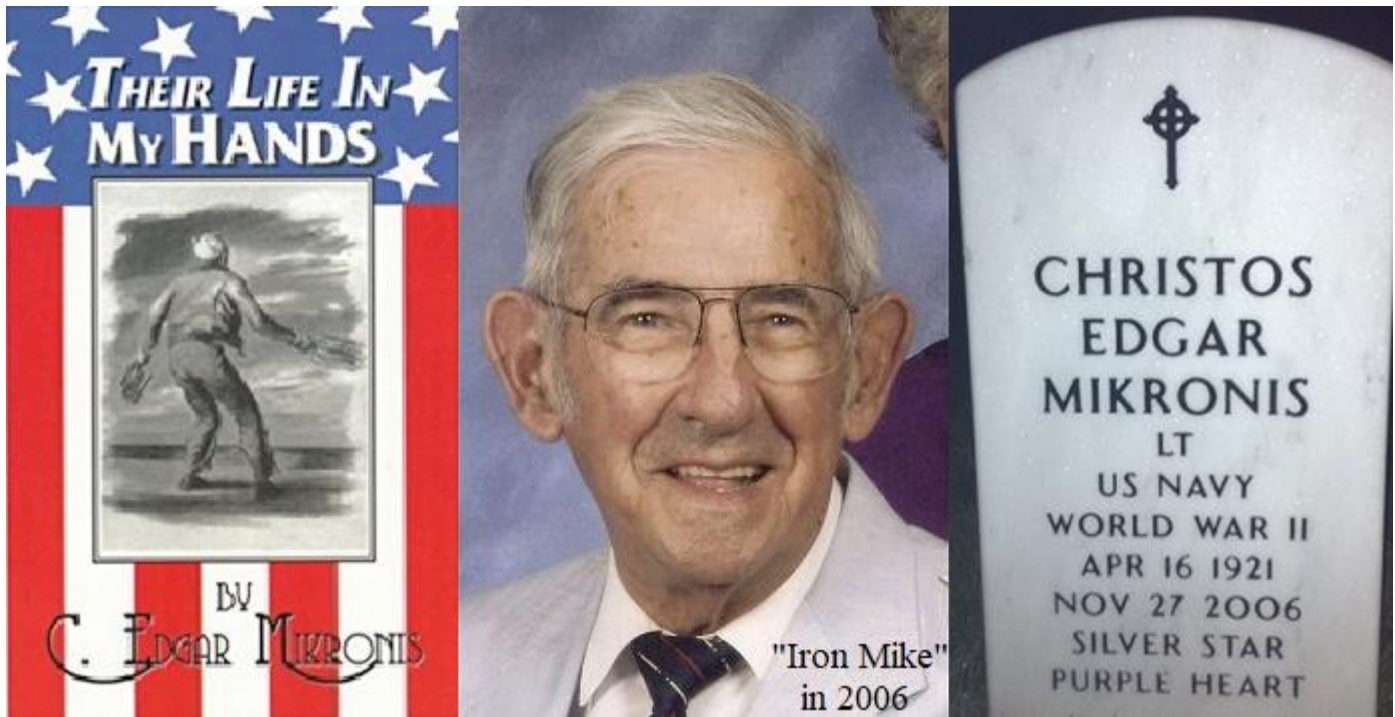
VF-41 and Operation Torch: <http://www.airgroup4.com/operation-torch.htm>

Mikronis Silver Star citation: <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/309075>

USS Bataan CVL-29: <http://www.bataancvl29.org/>

USS Franklin CV-13: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Franklin_\(CV-13\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Franklin_(CV-13))
and: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V13Mj0N4ucc>

Landing on a small carrier isn't easy, as you can see from these video clips.
<https://youtu.be/Bh1vYh-3VFE>



Before he passed away at age 85 in November 2006, “Iron Mike” wrote an autobiography “Their Life In My Hands”. Christos Edgar Mikronis is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Sec 64, Site 2959.

Arlington Explorer: <https://ancexplorer.army.mil/publicwmv/>

Find a Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18902175>

(as referenced by “Iron Mike” Mikronis in his book “Their Life In My Hands”)

Famed WW2 correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote about his experiences with the LSO of CVL-28, USS Cabot. This column was published April 1945, just before Ernie was killed near Okinawa.

ERNIE PYLE'S WAR: “Most important man on a carrier is the Landing Signal Officer”
(aka) “Landing on carrier is tricky work”

IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC: When our planes come back from a strike they circle the ship until they get the signal to land; then they break out of formation one at a time into what is called the "landing circle." They try to space it so that one plane will be landed and clear of "the barrier" just as the next one approaches.

When the approaching pilot is about half a mile out the landing signal officer begins giving him sign language instructions. The landing signal officer is known as the LSO, and he is one of the most important men on the ship. He is a flier himself, but his is no part-time job that is traded around among pilots. He has been especially trained, and that is his sole job.

The LSO stands on a platform just off the stern. Behind him is a large square canvas to make a background for signals, underneath the platform is a heavy rope netting to catch him if he should fall off. He wears a yellow

sweater and yellow helmet, so that incoming pilots can easily spot him, and in each hand is a paddle about twice the size of a ping pong paddle. They are either yellow or bright orange. These are his signal paddles.

From the moment the LSO starts his signals the incoming pilot never takes his eyes off him from that point on. The LSO actually flies the plane by remote control, and the pilot is only a robot who does what the LSO tells him. By sign language the LSO tells him he is too high, low, fast, or slow, that his tail hook is not down, or a dozen different things. The pilot corrects these mistakes as he approaches. If the correction is perfect, the LSO gives him a "cut" sign just before he reaches the flight deck. Instantly he takes his eyes off the LSO and once more begins flying his own plane. Only half a dozen seconds are left. He has to act fast and get that plane down. But if the approach is not quite right, then the LSO at the very last second gives him a frantic wave off signal, and the pilot "pours on the coal," misses the deck by a scant few feet, and goes around for another try. The LSO must decide at the last moment, actually in a fraction of a second, whether to let the pilot try it or not. I don't know of any situation that requires faster making up of the mind. You sure can't go into conference with anybody on that one.

The LSO of our ship is a fine man. His name is Lieutenant Bill Green. Bill knows the flying traits of each pilot so well that he can identify everyone just by the movements of his plane when he is still a mile from the ship. I saw one pilot waved off seven times in one day before he got in, so I asked Bill if that was a record. He said certainly it was not. A few months ago he had to wave off a pilot 21 times before he finally got aboard, which meant that the pilot was trying to land for almost two hours. The landing signal officer's job is a precarious one. Many times Bill has had to duck, jump, or even run. The ship's photo lab' has a marvelous picture of Bill actually being chased across the deck by a plane making a near crash-landing. One day I got up my nerve and went back and stood with the LSO while he landed a whole flight of planes. You would swear every plane was going to land right on top of you. Before it was over I decided that if I were running the Navy I'd let them all land in the water.

Original newspaper image (April 2, 1945):

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/1108598>



Forty of Ernie's wartime columns are online at Indiana University:

<http://mediaschool.indiana.edu/erniepyle/wartime-columns/>

