



RVator's Log

Newsletter of the Twin Cities RV Builder's Group

Shop Notes

- Doug

June 2020

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Upcoming Events

There will not be a summer meeting due to the COVID-19 threat. Hopefully we will meet again this fall

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**Minnesota Wing
Van's Air Force**

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Certainly there has never been a better time for some RV-related aviation therapy than the last 3 months. Like all of you, I have been overwhelmed by first Covid-19 and then an epidemic of social unrest. I seem to struggle to remember what month it is which gives you a good idea of my lock-down addled brain.

Could we have imagined in January that by June the most important phrase in our vocabulary would be "social-distancing?" (hmm.. I kind of like the military's term of "tactical dispersion.") Regardless, sneaking out to the hangar for some local aviating has been a Godsend to break out of the "safe-at-home" rut. Last week Jean and I finally felt safe enough to jump in the -7 for a long-sought trip to Sioux Falls and visit the South Dakota grandbabies. A short but welcome trip!!!

Thankfully as I write, restrictions are beginning to ease somewhat. Some airplane buddies and me have met out in front of my hangar for coffee and hangar flying on occasion and it has been great to trade airline lies six feet apart. Last month I motored down to Stein Air for my pitot-static check and was happy to see his hangar chock-full of airplanes. Business has not slowed down for them and we're all hoping it stays that way.

Our resident tech guru Tom Berge ferried Stephen Denmark's RV-9A out to Watsonville, California a couple weeks ago. Yes, you can fly an RV to California in one day (10 hours of motoring in the -9). But Tom reported an extreme case of tired-butt. Weather was good all the way other than bumping along over the Nevada desert in the afternoon.

When Air Venture was cancelled, I figured the summer of 2020 was going to be a lost cause. Most other aviation activities have been cancelled or postponed as well as just about any other event that

gathers a group of people. Consequently Peter and I decided that we would forgo any organized club activities at least through August. We'll wait and see how things shake out for a gathering in September. In the meantime, fly with caution and/or hunker down and disfigure as many rivets as possible.



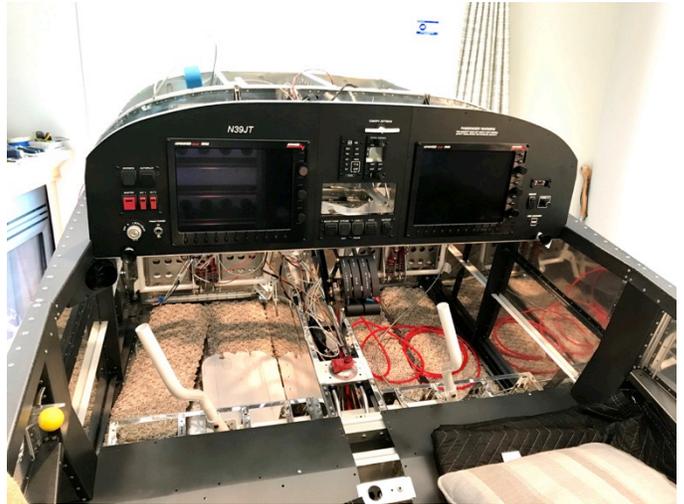
A little RV inspiration: Chris Stenstrom zooms off into the sunset at Sky Harbor airpark. Photo by Dave Schwartz.

A Fourteen in the Family Room

-Doug

I have run across very few RV builders with the “perfect” shop. We would all love to have a 40 by 50 foot shop out in the backyard with heated floors, air conditioning, running water, a bathroom, a 200 watt stereo system and every tool known to man. Usually reality might be one stall of a two car garage or a corner of the basement. Both my RV-4 and RV-7 started life crammed down in our half-basement between the furnace and the water heater.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting MN Wing member Jeff Turner to inspect his RV-14 project. Jeff welcomed me to his Woodbury home and I followed him downstairs to a large, well-appointed family room. When I say well appointed, the decor was the latest in RV chic. The -14 sat on its gear on one side of the room and the tail feathers on the other. Actually there was plenty of room and yes; he can roll the fuselage out the patio door without having to call in a demolition company.

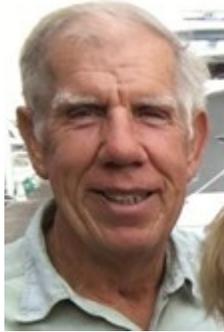


Jeff is a retired Army helicopter pilot with over 4000 hours of rotary wing time. Currently he holds a management position with the TSA and although he travels quite a bit, the project has moved along quite well and he is hoping it will be flying by next summer. I continue to marvel at the degree of sophistication of the new kits from Van's. No, not quite an Erector set, but close. Avionics is a pre-built panel from Advanced Flight Systems and Avidyne. He is waiting on a 210 hp. Lycoming Thunderbolt engine that should be delivered in September. He and his wife are planning to build a hangar at the New Richmond airport.

A TOM'S LIFE – part 2

- Tom Irbeck

Editor note: It's been almost two years since we lost our good friend Tom Irbeck in a sailplane accident in Florida. Last fall club member Dale Field had the pleasure of meeting Tom's sister Gloria and she gave him a copy of this narrative that Tom authored just a year before his death. It's story of a life full of adventure growing up in Minnesota and a life intertwined with aviation. It's a long but pleasant read so it will be divided into four installments. Kick back and enjoy....



Part Two

When I was 15, started working for Lieberg-Peterson in their yard, organizing equipment, wood, tools and supplies. I started out at 35 cent/hr., but they were so impressed with everything that I did, got a pay raise to 50 cents, then more pay raises. When I turned 16, got my driver's license and started driving truck with supplies to the jobs. I had saved up enough to buy my first car, a 1955 Oldsmobile 98, two door hardtop, with a 454 cubic engine, I think I paid around \$650 dollars cash for it. A pretty hot car... had to beat off the ladies. Shortly thereafter, I started working with my Dad on the jobs as a labor tender. I then I got union wages, \$2.25/hr. which was great. Some of the men were raising families on the same money that I was earning, but I saved it for cars, flying and school. My Dad and I got along very good, learned a lot from him, as he always paid attention to detail. His buildings were always square, and level. He didn't allow anyone to throw lunch papers or cans on the ground. I helped keep the job sites looking good, and it always impressed the bosses. Dad was the preferred foreman for many jobs. The next year I traded the Olds for a 1956 Chevy, two-door hardtop. I took the engine out and "souped it up", it would smoke the tires, converted it to 3 on the floor. Between flying and cars, I used most of my money, but still saved some for college fund.

I had a friend, Jim Revore who lived north on Edgerton St, and he had a Cushman Eagle, a nifty scooter, two speed transmission. I started looking at motorcycles and scooters. Mom was really resisting me getting either one. Dad was pretty neutral, as his brother Joe had an Indian Mo-



torcycle when he was growing up. So eventually I had softened Mom up and she let me get a 350cc Harley. I drove it for a summer, but it was too slow for me. As I had a good job, and some money burning a hole in my pocket, started looking for something bigger, faster. I eventually bought a 650 BSA, drove that for a year or so, and then got a good deal on a 650



Triumph, which was a great bike. My good buddy Dave Gray also got into bikes, and bought a quick little hot rod, a YDS250A Yamaha, only 250 cc, but

very light and quick. We were doing a few "wheelies" in the alley behind his house shortly after he got his bike. On his second wheelie, he lost control and crashed into his Dad's garage, bending the front fork, and picking up some road rash. That slowed up Dave for a month or so. My Mom actually enjoyed riding on the back of the motorcycle. She would ask me to take her up to the grocery store every now and then. But always felt funny and hoped no one saw me with my Mom hanging onto a cool kid like myself, on the back of my motorcycle. When my younger brothers wanted to get "bikes", Mom never objected, I had broken the path for them, how easy they had it!

I don't remember how I got the bug to go sky diving, but I needed my parent's signature, because I was under 21. Well, good old Mom thought it was too dangerous, so it took me a while to wear her down. Once again, good old Dad was neutral. I think he knew he didn't want to get Mom riled up, and she would soon or later agree to it. So one weekend we headed up to the jump area for the Minnesota Sky Divers. The morning was spent learning the ropes, how to control the chute, correct landing procedures. There were three "newbies", one was a girl a year older than myself, and a real cutie. Naturally, we got along well. The other one was an old guy, around 50 years old. Around 1300 we launched into the air in a C-182, up to 3,500' for the first of 5 static line jumps. We had drawn straws, and the cutie was first, then the old man, then me.

I watched the cutie go out, then the pilot made a tight turn and set up over drop zone, out went the old man, and I was pretty fast so followed him out around 5 seconds later. Everything went normal, and I naturally looked around for the cutie to see how she was doing. She seemed a little off course heading for some trees to the south. I compensated for the winds, and headed for the target, the old man wasn't too far away from me. I watched as the cutie landed in the woods, and saw a bunch of guys headed for her. The old guy and myself landed fairly close, and when he landed I heard a yell, which didn't sound like a yell of joy. Some guys then started running toward him, Mom and Dad came toward me. Well, Ms. Cutie got cut up and was bleeding from her tree landing. The old guy had a compound fracture in his leg, and they were putting

him on a stretcher. I felt great because everything still worked. Unfortunately I never saw the Cutie again. I went on to get around 15 jumps in before heading into the Navy. It was an interesting ride home, and Mom wanted to know if I was going to jump again, and of course I did. Once again, I had opened the door for my brothers Bob and Paul, who would both go on to become very proficient jumpers, with hundreds of jumps.

High school was at Alexander Ramsey, now called Roseville, on Hwy 36, and went smoothly. Sports weren't too high on my list, but I did get involved with track and cross country. Also went out for wrestling as a freshman, but switched to gymnastics, as a friend, Dave Gray was a good gymnast. I wasn't tall as a freshman; 5'3" and around 115 lbs. I also ran track, the pole vault was my specialty, and cross-country. The second year in gymnastics I lettered, and the third year in track I lettered. The "horse" was my specialty, and was pretty good on the "rings". Was getting pretty good at pole vaulting, but broke my ankle when I was a senior, and that put me out for the season. By the time I was a senior, I was 6'1" and around 175, too big for gymnastics, but good for vaulting. My girlfriend Sharon dropped me like a hot rock when I told her I was not going to get married after high school, but I found a nice girl, Doni Quesnell from Our Lady of Peace. It was an all-girls school, so had a lot to pick from. Girls were fun, but was also busy with flying, cars and hunting. Mom had mentioned more than once, the only time she saw me was for dinner and breakfast during the week. Weekends were always busy.

Dad and Uncle Mart bought an aircraft project, a Cessna 190 that needed to be assembled. They built a hangar at Anoka County Airport. It was a block hangar, and is still standing on the south side of the airport when I was out there in 2016. While we were building the hangar, a frontal system and a tornado passed by the airport. It blew the east wall of the hangar over, and we watched around 6 aircraft get torn from their tie downs and blow across the field, an exciting 15 minutes.

The hangar was finished, and the guys realized the Cessna project was going to take too long to finish, so they traded it for a Republic Seabee, an amphibious aircraft, which had a



hull like a boat.

We had some fun flights in the old Seabee. Dad and Uncle Mart, plus a friend from work took a trip up into Canada, and on the return flight, ran out of gas and crash landed in the woods. The fuel indication system was at fault, and not accurate, as it had been modified, so they had 15 gallons less fuel than indicated, without their knowledge. It was a somewhat tense 10 hrs. as they were overdue and missing, and no one had heard anything from them. Lucky for them, there was a farmhouse a couple of miles from the crash site; they had seen the lights as they were going down. After the crash, they walked toward where they had seen the lights and could call home and update everyone.

Uncle Mart got a broken arm, my Dad got a nasty cut on his forehead, and the guy in the back was unharmed. The strength of the water-landing hull is what saved them. The trees sheared off both wings, and they came to rest in just the hull. We went back into the woods in the wintertime, with a small cat and pulled the wreckage out to part out and sell. They then bought a Cessna 180, which was a great aircraft. We used to



fly out

for lunch, Mom Dad, me Gloria, Bob and Paul in the 180. I would later buy and own a couple of C-180's, one of my favorite aircraft. Where I was taking flight lessons, and renting an aircraft from Aero Flight Services, there were two instructors, Jerry and Al who was the owner. Mom decided that she should learn to fly, and at least be able to land the C-180, just in case anything happened to Dad. She started taking some lessons. I can remember what Al told Dad after Mom had taken 4 or 5 lessons. He took Dad off to the side and said, "Hank, you're wasting your money, Gladys will never be able to land an airplane." I almost split a gut, Dad smiled and said, "I understand". Mom was not good at flying lessons. Years later when Mom was 85, we were trying to get her license taken away, and she had to take a driver's test. Brother Paul had been a driving instructor, so was trying to see how she drove, and give her some tips. We chuckled when Paul told us when he would correct her, she would say, I wouldn't do that in a test. She didn't listen well.

About this time I had started taking fly lessons at the Anoka Airport at Aero Flight Service. Gene and Al were my instructors in an Aeronca 7AC Champ. I really enjoyed the flying, which came easy to me, as I had done a lot of flying with Dad and Uncle Mart. (They both had flown B-17's in WWII, Dad never flew any combat missions, but Uncle Mart had flown some relief missions with food.) In 1959 at the age of 16, I soloed, with around 6 hrs. of dual instruction. The Champ rented for \$7/hr., plus \$2/hr. for the instructor. For the next couple of years, I hopped around Minnesota and Wisconsin and had some great flying trips.

I had decided to go to the University of Minnesota. It was close and not too expensive. I saved enough money to pay for everything. Mom and Dad said, as long as I went to college, I could live at home free, but bought most of my clothes and naturally paid for car and expenses, as I always had a good job. I was not a dedicated student. Call myself a "C" student. I ran across a good deal on a 1958 Corvette, fuel injected for \$2,500 dollars. I didn't have enough saved up, so our local bank let me take out a loan for \$1,000 dollars to cover the rest. Dad had to cosign for me. The engine needed some work, during assembly, they hadn't cleaned out the oil lines, and it ruined the main bearings. I pulled the engine and had an expert rework it, high performance shop. It was a hot car.

Now I had to pick up some extra work on weekends to stay ahead of my bills. Paid off the loan ahead of schedule. I remember a fun ride in the 58 Corvette. My Uncle Joe was a Nash car fan, he had two of them. I mentioned that they looked like an upside down bathtub, and he should take a ride in a real car, my Corvette. He agreed to take a ride, so we headed out to the SE of Hinckley on a newly paved road, straight for around 5 miles and little traffic. Well, naturally, I put the pedal to the metal, and it hopped up to over 130 mph. With the top down, a lot of fresh air. Uncle Joe was holding tight to the passenger assist bar, hair straight back, and a little white. I don't think he ever drove his Nash over 60 mph. When we got back, he said "remind me to never get in a car with you", always had to ask him if he wanted to go for a ride, when I saw him. Uncle Joe also had a reputation for making good whiskey, as he had a still in his basement. Son Jon and I stopped in there one day on a flight back from northern Minnesota, and Jon can finish the story about trying some of Uncle Joe's fine whiskey.

The next summer took a trip to California to visit an old friend Don Brannon on a train, a 3-day fun trip. I spent a week with him, then a 3-day train trip back to MN.

I never took the time to take the Private Pilot test, just flew on my solo endorsement. Also around this time, on Rice Lake, Surf Side Seaplane Base opened up, and was giving float plane check outs. I was their first student, flying their Piper J-3 on floats, and got my float rating. Also, good old John Benson added a J-3 on Floats to his rental fleet, so I got checked out with him too. One winter flying trip, I took John's J-3 on skis north to Hinckley and landed at the Henry Hickie Farm, west of Hinckley. Jim, the second son and I had become friends, as Hank and Myrtle Hickie were my godparents, and good friends of Mom and Dad. Jim asked for a ride in the J-3,

but I told him, I only had a solo endorsement. He said so what, you flew up here, and I trust you. Well, you can probably guess that we went flying, and Jim loved it. He was the only person I ever took up, before I got my pilot's license. He would later join the Army and settle in Anchorage Alaska, and yes, became a very good "Bush Pilot". Too this day, he has thousands of hours in his Alaska Super Cub, a very good hunter and pilot.

While I'm talking about Jim Hickie, I will relate a fun overnight he and I had when we were 14. Had rode with good old Aunt Mary up to Hinckley, as I did not have my driver's license yet. Jim had a trap line, and was a good mink trapper. Mink prices were very good back in 50's. Jim didn't have his license yet, but had a car, a 1949 Ford, and just drove it in the country. We had driven out a couple of miles and had around a 5-mile run through the woods and swamps checking traps. We hadn't checked the weather, and a fast moving cold front was barreling down on us. About half way through our route, it started sleeting, and then the wind picked up and started snowing hard. We continued, in the woods it didn't feel as bad as out in the open. The temperatures dropped from 30 degree down to close to 0 degrees. By the time we got back to the car, there was a good foot of snow, and we got the car stuck trying to get to the county road. We went back in the woods, found a good spot to build a lean too, got a fire going and spent the night in the woods. We took turns sleeping, and kept the fire going. Our lean-too was made out of pine boughs and corn stalks, and was actually a nice little warm spot in a howling storm. By morning, it had stopped snowing and the wind had died down. There was around 18" of snow, with a lot of drifts 3 or more feet high. We headed out to the county road and started walking to his home, when his dad came along in his truck looking for us. We were glad to see him, as he was glad to see us.

When I was going to the U of M, I decided to take the winter semester off in 1964, and go skiing. We had a great year for snow, and had the skiing bug. Dave Gray, one of my best friends was also going to take the time off too. We wanted to ski all the hills in MN and WI. About this time, the Vietnam War was heating up a little, and the draft was active. My number was in the lower 1/4 of the draft numbers, but I didn't think it would be called for the short time that my college deferment wasn't active. Boy was I wrong. A couple of weeks later while we were in northern Wisconsin skiing, I had called home for some unknown reason, and Mom mentioned that I had a just gotten a letter from the Selective Service. I told her to open it to see what it said. It notified me that I had to report for induction. Well, that started an interesting trip into the Navy, of which I am most grateful. Dave and I headed home to see what was going to happen with my call up notice. A couple of days later, I reported to the Army Station. The Sergeant there was very helpful. When he noticed that I was a pilot, tried to get me into helicopters. I kept asking questions and he informed me that the Air Force required 4 years of college for their pilot program, but the Navy only two. He gave me the Navy address, and I headed out to Wold Chamberlain Airport, where there was a Navy Reserve Squadron stationed. I found the recruitment office, and Lcdr Kolach was their head recruiter, a very personable officer. We started talking about

flying as he was a Navy Pilot and informed me the Navy had recently opened up their program, NAVCAD (Naval Aviation Cadet) which only required 2 yr. degree. I was short 10 credits. He then gave me some tests to see if I would qualify, and I passed with flying colors. He really talked up the program, we hit it off, and he was very inspirational. I had to sign up with one of the services within the allotted time, so joined the Naval Reserve Squadron, so I could go back to school and get the credits. He had gone to Mankato, and suggested that I would like the school better than the big University of Minnesota. I started the enrollment for Mankato, and was accepted for spring quarter.

I took a calculus and physics class, plus thought it would be fun to take a German course, but that one was too time consuming so I dropped it after a week or two. Dave also enrolled at Mankato, and we roomed together in the dorm. Mankato was fun, I passed the two classes, and went back to visit with Lcdr. Kolach. He made a few calls, and found I had a class date of Sept 9th, 1964 to start Naval Pre Flight Training at Pensacola, Florida. He recommended that I get into running shape, because it would be easier, and he was right.

The summer went by fast as I was also a Seaman, lowest rank in the Naval Reserve, and had to go through their induction program. That summer, I ran across a cute girl somewhere, Janie Hudoba, and we started dating. Along the way, I set up Sister Gloria with her twin brother on a double date, and that was all she wrote for the two of them. Janie and I parted; don't remember why, probably because I wasn't paying enough attention to her, as it was a busy time. A few weeks before my reporting date, Lcdr. Kolach, asked to see me, so we had a good talk. He stressed, this is a great opportunity, so make sure I take advantage of it. It really got me to thinking, I had been spinning my wheels, and I was going to put some real effort into this. So, I decided to sell my Corvette, and just think everything NAVY. Sold the Corvette to a young kid that was working with me at Lieberg-Peterson, Joe Carlson, and he later sold it to his brother, who still has it, and it is worth a lot of BUCKS!!

I flew to Pensacola on the 8th of September, where I met another guy, Howard Gulley, who also had the same class date. We were, and still are close friends. I adapted well to the military life, there were 59 cadets in our Class 35-64, about half pilots, and the other half Flight Officers. Preflight was intense, up at 0530, inspection 0600, eat, class at 0730 to 1200, lunch, class 1300-1600, PT to 1700, dinner 1730-1830, study to lights out 2130. The first month, no off base time, after 2nd month, if you didn't have any demerits, weekends off. I only got 5 demerits during the 4 months. I was also on the boxing team, we ran 2 miles every morning, and boxed in the afternoon. Did pretty good, only one guy better boxer than me, in my weight class, heavy weight. On the obstacle course, really tough but fun, one guy faster than me. Swimming was a little tough for me, spent some extra time at it. We had to swim a mile with our cloths on, and to keep my score up, I had a tighter time period, just made it. The "Dilbert Dunker" was a challenge for most, but I truly enjoyed it. They put a simulat-

ed cockpit, with us strapped in just like an aircraft, oxygen mask, helmet on, on a 45 degree rail going down, going into a pool, on a track that would turn upside down, ending in about 8 feet of water. You hit the water at about 10 mph, a big splash. You are supposed to wait and see where the bubbles are going, unstrap, pull yourself out and follow bubbles to the surface. I could hold my breath for longer than most, so no big deal. There were water guards in the water with masks and oxygen, to help anyone that panicked.

I made extra runs with some of the guys that were having problems, as they always wanted two in the cockpit, to help each other too. I usually took my time. At first the water guards would start to head to me, thinking I had frozen, but I would wave them off. After a while, they knew me, and would just smile at me, sitting in the cockpit.

At the end of 4 months I had the highest score in Physical Fitness. Academically did very well, except for Naval History. It was right after lunch, and had a hard time staying awake. I ended up flunking it. I had to see the Academic Officer-in-charge. I opened my mouth when I should have kept it shut. I thought my good record would get me through this, as I was ranked 3rd in our class, so I "asked why I had to know all the history, when I was going to be a pilot". He held me back a class, and made me take the test over, and said I better pass. I really studied, and passed with flying colors.

Now we were off to Saufley Field, for basic flight training in the T-34. I didn't have any wheels, so Howard and I went car shopping. He bought a Ford Bronco, and I bought a nice used 1957 4 dr Ford station wagon, which would serve me well for almost 2 years until I finished flight training and got my wings. A special note about our two gunny sergeants who harassed us, pushed, inspired, guided and helped us become good Naval Officer's. They were unfortunately both killed in combat, while serving their country in South Vietnam. GYSGT Billy Howard killed on March 22, 1966, GYSGT Michael Allen Mikitis killed on Jan 27, 1968.

We got some time off to go home for Christmas. It was a special homecoming, as my family had moved from our home on County Road A2, to 2700 N. Edgerton Street, in Little Canada. It was great to be home. Dad had a lot of questions about the Navy. All too fast, I was headed back to Florida, to jump in my old station wagon, and head for flight training, Saufley Airfield in Florida.

Saufley Airfield was great, although we had a bad spell of weather, and it slowed up our training. This was in January and the Florida spring weather was unusually overcast and wet this year. It gave us extra time to study. After the first flight my instructor put me in the accelerated program because I had flight experience. Also at Saufley they had a sky diving club, and most of the guys were ex Shooting Stars, the Navy Jump Exhibition team. I started jumping with them on weekends. A great group, they took me under their wing, and I got into free fall fast. Most of our jumps were out of a DC-3 from 12,500', 60 sec free falls, and it didn't cost me a dime, as the Navy

donated the plane and pilots. Had around 35 jumps with this group, before leaving for Meridan, MS.

I did have one jump that didn't go to well. The night before, I had forgotten to close the back window on my station wagon, it rained and got my chute wet. I didn't notice it the next morning before the jump. When a wet chute comes out, it doesn't like being wet. I knew something was wrong when it opened, it didn't feel right, I looked up, and it looked like Mom had hung out her laundry. I was still falling fast, pulled the reserve, but it got tangled in the main, had to pull it back down and rethrow it. By this time was getting low, so gave it one hard throw, it popped, and I hit the ground. We had a few extra beers that night!!

About half way through the program, I got a new instructor who was an ex-fighter pilot, he had flown the F-8 Crusader, and we hit it off well. I was ahead of schedule so we did more aerobatics and just plain fun flying. He asked me what I wanted to fly, and I told him patrol, would get me more time, and be ready for the airlines when and if I got out. He looked at me and said "Irlbeck you have got to be shitting me, you're going to be a fighter pilot". Then he talked about how much fun it was, and how boring the patrols were, so I decided to be a fighter pilot. Don't remember where my ranking was, but I was in the top and could pick where I would go, and that was to jet training at Meridian, Mississippi. Howard, my best buddy didn't make the cut and had to go proops.

Meridian MS, NAS McCain Field was a relatively new training base, and the North American T-2A Buckeye, a fun basic jet trainer would be our home for 6 months of training. I had to give up sky diving as this had to be approved by the squadron CO. He thought the Navy had too much invested in me, to risk hurting myself sky diving. There were two training squadrons there, VT-7 and VT-9. Lucky for me, I was assigned to VT-9. It turned out for a number of reasons, the better of the two. With my room assignment, I had a new roomie, Cadet Bill Bertch and I would hit it off well, as he liked the outdoors, was a well-known handball champion, and had just bought a 63 Corvette. And he was a good pilot. We would stand for daily inspection in the morning, 4 hrs. of classroom, then if the weather was good, flying the other half of the day, or night. The course was high paced, pretty intense as we got our instrument ticket, formation card, aerobatics, aerial gunnery, and best of all, carrier qualifications. The dropout rate was around 20%, as they didn't slow up the program if you had a hard time.

A couple of friends were in VT-7, which had a couple of flight instructors that were known as "Screamers". They were very intimidating and downright mean if things weren't going as planned. One of them was a young Lt. John McCain, who would become a POW in North Vietnam, then become a well-known Senator. We now had two days a week off, so our status and social lives' were allowed to expand a little. One of my friends was in a bad car accident, and while at the hospital I met a young nurse's assistant, Ms. Marie Hagan. We did some dating, and she came from a very nice family, they sort of adopted me. Her Dad, Jim liked to hunt. He had two daughters and one son. None of them like to hunt, but I did,

so he and I did some dove and quail hunting, quit often. Marie had a younger sister, and one of my buddies from Minnesota, John Malecki started dating her also. John was a Marine, and would go on to being a decorated A-6 pilot in South Vietnam. We stayed friends, he married a different girl years later, had two boys also. Unfortunately, around the year 2000 he was killed in a light plane accident.

The highlight of the training was getting ready to "hit the deck", or more conventionally called, getting carrier qualified. Every landing we did was flown on a "meatball", glide slope guidance, but there were 10 flights designated as carrier simulation, where we did 57 simulated carrier landings, with a LSO (landing signal officer) grading us on our approaches and landings. Then we headed out to the carrier USS Lexington CV-16, which operated out of Pensacola, FL. There we did two touch and goes on the carrier deck, then on the 3rd pass, we put the tail hook down for a "trap". After the trap, we taxied for our first catapult launch, which "was better than sex",... at least more exciting for a few seconds. We did 4 traps, and 4 catapults, and then we were official carrier pilots.

That night was a big night for all who made it. I completed this phase of basic jet, in the top 10%, so had my choice of advanced training bases. Beeville, Texas was the preferred base as it had the Grumman F-9 Cougar, plus the more high performance F-11 Grumman Tiger, a single seat supersonic fighter. The other base, Kingsville, TX, only had the F-9 Cougars. I had built up some leave time, finished training on December 3rd, and headed home a few days later, to spend Christmas of 1965 at home. Time went by fast; remember fun seeing how my brothers had grown up, Angela too. Marie Hagen came up with me, as we were somewhat serious, and she wanted to meet the family. Everyone loved her, and she enjoyed the snow. Mom was quieter, she asked if Marie and I had made any "plans", and I said no. Dad and I talked a lot. Was busy getting together with old friends. Right after New Year's, Marie and I flew back to Meridian, and I said goodbye, and left for Texas in the old station wagon.

To be continued.....