



RVator's Log

Newsletter of the Twin Cities RV Builder's Group

September 2020

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Upcoming Events

There will not be fall meeting due to the COVID-19 threat. Hopefully we will meet again soon!

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Van's Air Force**

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Shop Notes

- Doug



"It's much better to be down here wishing you were up there, then to be up there wishing you were down here..."

It was the spring of 1974 and I was three years into my Air Force commitment stationed at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. I had a great side job flight instructing and teaching ground school at Moraine Airpark south of downtown. Aviation was booming and I had all the students I could handle. Every evening and every

weekend was spent in the back hole of a Citabria, doling out high-decibel advice to my eager students.

On this particular Wednesday in April my Air Force workday wrapped up at 4:30. I headed west on the Route 4 expressway, which merged into southbound I-75 for the 20-minute drive to Moraine. The afternoon had been warm and humid and it had that "ripe" feeling that was common during spring in "tornado alley." To the south a nasty looking thunderstorm was working its way east but it was clear to the southwest. I had a 5:00 pm student and I thought we might be OK. I really hadn't checked the weather yet and would do so when I got to the airport.

Walking into our flight school office things were buzzing. A cameraman from WDTN Channel 2 news had just rushed in the door and said a tornado had just hit the town of Xenia and he wanted to hire a plane and pilot and get some video. Obviously my student and me weren't going anywhere. Our chief instructor Bobby Wagner was already rushing out to our school's Cessna 182 and of course he needed a copilot. I was young and stupid so let's go!!!

The TV guy climbed in the back seat with a seriously big camera and we taxied out. The weather at the moment seemed fine and I was having problems getting my mind around the fact that a tornado had just passed 10 miles from the airport. Scattered clouds passed overhead and the wind was nearly calm. Bobby did a quick run-up and opened up the throttle on our school's flagship 182. He was a legend around southern Ohio flying airshows in a Waco UPF-7. In my mind he was a super pilot and I paled in comparison to his



THE F5 TORNADO THAT DEVASTATED XENIA, OHIO, ON APRIL 3, 1974

stuck and rudder skills. We broke ground on runway 26 with a left turn to the east taking up a heading towards Xenia. We leveled off about a thousand feet above the ground as Bobby throttled back over the southeast suburbs of Dayton. The air was fairly smooth but as we flew further east I found it odd that all of this "stuff" was falling from the sky. It looked like papers or pieces of cloth and other assorted stuff drifting down all around us. As we flew over the farmland just outside of town I looked down and saw dead cows lying out in a fields. Up ahead was a high-tension power line with several of the big towers twisted up and lying on the ground.

Now about 5 miles southwest of Xenia I looked ahead to the northeast and was astonished to see a clear pathway essentially right through the center of town. It looked like a monstrous bulldozer had scrapped away a half the city. A large housing development was nothing but bare foundations. There was not even any debris there.... just slabs of empty concrete. My mind raced thinking of the people who lived below. A freight train had been traveling through town and about a half dozen railcars had been tossed aside. The tornado had gone right through the business district and then through Wilberforce University's campus on the north side. The school's water tower was knocked down and the roof of the library was gone. Our cameraman was shooting video from both sides of the airplane and after a few minutes of circling, he was anxious to get back to get his film on the 6 o'clock news.

I was so preoccupied with the carnage below that I lost track of the weather. The scattered clouds were rapidly building to more monster towering cumulus and it was starting to get bumpy... really bumpy! More severe thunderstorms were on the way and now the surface wind was starting to REALLY pickup. It was getting rough and I had cinched by seatbelt as tight as I could get it and was hanging on to the bottom of my seat to keep from smacking my head on the roof.

I was beginning to think maybe this was not a good place to be but I trusted Bobby 100%. But as we rocked and rolled our way back to Moraine I was wondering if he could land this thing. The wind, which I would guess, was by now around 30 knots was right out of the south. We would have about a 90-degree crosswind. It occurred to me that maybe we would have to land at Montgomery County airport about 8 miles south of us which had a north-south runway. But Bobby was PIC and I was just a dumb co-pilot so I kept my mouth shut. As the turbulence increased I was really beginning to wonder what possessed me to so readily to jump on board. Bobby got established on a long final with an unbelievable crab angle and he was using two hands to keep us right side up.

As we crossed over the Miami River on short final, Bobby was wrestling the Cessna with full left aileron as I hung on for dear life. And of course, he squeaked it on the left wheel and with brakes chirping to keep us on the pavement we made the midfield turnoff and taxied up to the office. I had forgot all about the cameraman in the back. As we shut down and I opened my door, he leaped out and ran to his car (probably never to fly again!). Getting back on terra firma felt pretty good!

Everyone in the office was gathered around the TV and the magnitude of the destruction in Xenia began to sink in. The newscaster announced that all Air Force personnel were to return to the base for possible rescue duties so I jumped in my car and headed back to Wright-Pat. I hung around all night with the rest of my co-workers but was never called out.

The Xenia tornado killed 32 people and injured 1150. The F5 tornado was one of 148 recorded that afternoon during what came to be known as the 1974 Super Outbreak and later determined to be the most destructive.

A week later I drove down to Montgomery County airport to snoop around. The massive thunderstorm that spawned the Xenia tornado had passed directly over the airport and dumped baseball size hail on every airplane tied down outside. I recall a Cessna 172 with the windows smashed and flaps and ailerons bent down about 45 degrees. The photo on the right is a wood-winged Bellanca Viking with holes that went through the top and bottom of the wings.



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What Our Member are Building and Flying

- Frank Huber

Like many of us, Donaven Chase was hooked on flying after his first airplane ride at age 12 in a Globe Swift. Although wanting to become a pilot, life intervened until he was forty years old. At that point, he talked a friend, who flies for Delta and owned a Cessna 172, into teaching him to fly. After successfully completing his Private Pilot check ride, Chase continued to fly his friend's 172.



Three years ago he decided it was time to purchase his own aircraft with more performance than the Cessna. After researching the available experimental aircraft, he decided to purchase or perhaps build a RV-9A. He made two unsuccessful bids on aircraft on the west coast and was preparing to order a kit from Vans. But a RV-9A, located in Glencoe, Minnesota, became available before he placed his order. The aircraft had been built by an older gentleman, who had previously built another RV. Because of his age, he had stopped flying and had Tom Berge flying it regularly to keep it in good working order. Tom advised Donaven that it was a well-built airplane and that he should make an offer. So he purchased the aircraft and Tom gave him a thorough checkout.

Initially, he kept the aircraft at Fleming Field until he was able to purchase a hangar in partnership with. Donaven truly loves to fly and has flown his RV 477 hours since he purchased it three years ago. He tries to fly every day when the weather allows. During the two months he was laid off from work because of Covid-19, he flew every morning to catch the sunrise and often in the evening as well to watch the sunset. He has flown to Georgia, to visit a friend, to Michigan with his son during the winter to snowboard and regularly flies to Grand Rapids, Minnesota to visit a sick friend. His children all enjoy flying and his daughter has announced she wants to become an airline pilot in the future.



Donaven's RV-9A has a Lycoming O-320 engine powering a Sensenich fixed pitch prop. The aircraft has round gauge instruments along with two Garmin G-5s. He has made several improvements and upgrades to the aircraft since he purchased it. He has changed out two cylinders and replaced a troublesome carb with a new one. He redid his instrument panel, to include a mount for his tablet on the right side. He also redid the exterior of the plane with a vinyl orange and black design. His gear legs and wheel fairings are painted black after being inspired by a Cirrus. This winter he plans to add a Garmin GPS navigator and autopilot, so he can begin training for an instrument rating. Donaven rightly believes we should all fly more often. He has set a high bar for the rest of us.



Restarting a Stalled Project – Part II

- Bob Collins



As I mentioned in a previous newsletter, I've been delaying ordering the engine for the RV-12iS project. The first year of retirement took a little getting used to; the tax implications weren't entirely clear so I decided to wait a year. And then

there were two aging mothers to look after, both of whom passed on within weeks of each other last fall.

When I was looking at last year's building log, I was pretty shocked by how little I actually worked on the project; some wheel pants and swapping out an old nosegear leg design for a new one and fitting the wings to the fuselage to drill a couple of holes and that was about it.

It wasn't until the engine arrived a couple of months ago that I realized how much I missed building. Last summer, at least, was taken up by a lot of ushering at Target Field. But even though I went to the hangar every day, I wasn't really doing

much of anything.

The engine kit is probably the most expensive part of the RV-12iS (about \$36,000) and it is also probably the smallest. One crate. About 400 pounds total.

Van's does some weird things with the RV-12iS instructions. They're not particularly linear and several sections supplied with the finishing kit you can't do because the parts (the fuel pump, for example) are included in the power plant kit.

The cowling is included in the finishing kit, too, but you can't do anything with it until you have a propeller hub and spinner plate installed and you can't do that because – guess what? – they come with the power plant kit.



The propeller, displayed by my son, Sean, is so light he had to keep ahold of it so it wouldn't float away.

The canopy also comes with the finishing kit. Mine is still sitting in the crate because Van's doesn't want you to work on the canopy until the rear window is installed. And it doesn't want the rear window installed until the tail cone assembly has been permanently attached to the fuselage. But if you do that, you lose all access to the area behind the bulkhead, which is where the fuel pump assembly goes, which – you may have heard – is included in the powerplant kit.

It is a maze of dead-ends at this point in the build. So there was really no good reason not to order the engine kit, except for the money, of course.

Anyway, it arrived June 16th and after some inventorying, I was hanging stuff on the firewall, and bending tubing for a fuel pump assembly that looks like it should be on the space shuttle. On a Rotax 912iS, the boost pump is always on.



I counted something like 15 different potential points of failure on the fuel boost pump.



The moment of truth. Lifting a very expensive engine out of the crate.

Installing the engine is about as simple as it gets. I have an engine hoist (it's available to borrow if you ever need it) so I just lifted it out of the crate and put it on a table to make some minor modifications before lifting it into place.

When I built the RV-7A, about six guys came by to help me install the IO-360M1B. It still took us about four or five hours to get the four bolts to line up properly through the Lord mounts.

But I decided to just hang the engine myself this time. It took about 45 minutes, the bulk of which was torquing the bolts down to the proper specifications. At one point, I wasn't getting one bolt to line up, so I just lifted the engine by hand for a moment. Try that with an IO-360!

The Van's product is truly an incredible feat of engineering. We're not really building anymore; we're just assembling. I

swear that one of these days I'll stop by the hangar, and the RV-12iS will have built the rest of it itself.



Safely attached. For good.

If only! Now it's time to order the avionics kit. Someone has to keep Stein rolling in dough!

Unfortunately, while working on the cowling installation, my Meniere's Disease flared up again. I had hoped to fly LSA with this plane, but I'm coming to the realization that my flying days are likely over, at least with flying that involves the legal technicalities of disqualifying condition.

Unless something changes (not likely; Meniere's is a progressive disease with no cure), my plan now is to find someone who can do the first flight and the required five hours of Phase I, then get it up to Midwest in Hibbing for paint and find someone who wants to own a truly well-built airplane that, I hear, is a lot of fun to fly.

Then what? I'll either build another 12 or explore some ultra lights. I had always wanted to try powered parachutes but, inexplicably, they're in the same class as the LSA, while ultra lights are not.

Building isn't flying. But it's the next best thing.

A TOM'S LIFE – part 3

- 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....

Beeville was out in the middle of nowhere. It was around 90 miles, NW of Kingsville, TX. The town of Beeville was a little old western Texas town, good Mex food. The month of January 1966 was a dreary month, a lot of



low rainy clouds. It slowed up the initial flying, as we need VFR weather for check out first. February got busy. The F-9 was a Korean vintage swept wing fighter, a little underpowered, but built strong. We did instrument flying, gunnery, simulation dog fighting, aerial refueling and then once again carrier qualifications.

On one of the flights, we took the F-9 supersonic. We took her up to 30,000', full power, pushed the nose over, and it would go a little over Mach 1, so you could get your Mach 1 pin and certificate. We dropped a MK-24, which simulated the trajectory of a 500# bomb, and I had the best record of hits on the target. We were required to pick up a squadron billet, set up like the active squadrons. Lucky for me, there was an opening as assistant to the Weapons Officer, right up my alley. I don't remember the percentage, but I was high enough in class standing to go on to the F-11 flight training. This was pure excitement, as there were no 2-seat trainers for the F-11, so your first flight was solo, with an instructor in an aircraft next to you. The F-11 could go supersonic straight and level.

All of the flights were high action flights, simulated dog fighting, and air-to-air gunnery. A banner was towed through the air, and we had 4- 20mm cannons, and a good lead computing gun sight. I was getting pretty good, had a great instructor, and he challenged me with a 6 pac of beer, who could get the most hits, as I was getting quite a few hits. The way they keep track of hits, the tip of the bullets are painted with different color of a waxy paint, my color was black, the instructor had a different color. When the bullet goes through the banner, some of the color is wiped off on the banner. There were usually 3 student pilots and 1 instructor in the pattern. When the banner came back, everyone was looking for their colors. Well, wouldn't you know it; I didn't have any "hits", so had to buy him a 6 beers at the club that night. The next day, another gun hop, and he challenged me, but on a \$55 dollar a month pay scale, I declined. As I was strapping in, the guns were armed and the arming man came up to me and let me know that the instructor had my bullets painted the same color as the instructors the day before, on our bet. When we got back, I mentioned that a "little bird" had said they ran out of black, and my bullets had another color on them. He admitted to the paint change, and bought me 6 beers that night. It wasn't all fun and games for everyone. We lost a couple of friends in training accidents. We were getting pretty close to getting our wings, but things could still go wrong. My roommate Tom Early, a really nice kid had some mental, stress problems,

and decided to DOR, (drop on request). He left and only had to complete another 3 months, for his 2-year commitment for the flight-training portion. We wrote for a while, and he was hired to fly at Eastern Airlines, shortly after leaving the Navy.

My social life was pretty limited, as I devoted most of it to flying and doing the best that I could, it did pay off. On June 6th, 1966 I had my last training flight, and the next day, got my Navy Wings of Gold. Some of the guys had their wives, girlfriends or parents pin on their wings. I had the instructor,



who had painted my bullets his color, pin them on, and unfortunately have forgotten his name.

I was 2nd in our graduating class, and that gave me the second selection for my next duty station. Lucky for me, the top guy was getting married, and he didn't want the West Coast, which was the Vietnam Tour, or called the "Combat Coast". There were two F-4 slots open, he took the east coast, and I took the west coast F-4 slot. Just a few months before this, all the first tour F-4 pilots had to have been on at least one two year cruise and 500 or so hours in fighters. My good buddy Bill Bertch, who was 3rd in our class had to take an F-8 slot, and older fighter. One of the first things I did the next day, went Corvette shopping, and bought a 1962 Silver Corvette. The trip home, in my new Corvette was much fun, and drove it in two days. When I got home, we had a fun picture taken of Mom, Dad in his 8th Air Corps uniform and myself with new Navy Wings. Dad had to take a big breath and hold it in so his buttons would stay buttoned, not bad for a 48 yr. old ex-bomber pilot; I had just turned 23 yrs. old.

A couple of weeks off went fast, and before I knew it, I was headed for NAS Miramar, San Diego California. Miramar Naval Air Station was a great base. It was the place to be, and was known as "Fighter Town". All the Navy's fighter squadrons were based here for the West Coast, and it was a busy place.



I'm guessing now, but there were probably over 125 F-8 Crusaders, and some 8 different F-8 squadrons. The F-4 community was growing fast, and we had around 100 F-4 Phantoms,

and 6 or more squadrons. VF-121 was the RAG (Ready Air Group) training squadron for the F-4's, plus there were another 25 to 30 support aircraft, and helicopters on the field. Almost everyone training here would be headed for combat duty, and Vietnam. The first couple of weeks, I lived on base, but we got off base allowance, so found a nice apartment, on the NE side of San Diego. There was a lot to do to prepare for the F-4, such as High Altitude Training. Going up in a pressure chamber to 43,000' and seeing how you tolerate hypoxia. Then there was the G-tolerance sling, taking us up to 8 g's. The OMAS (Oh My Ass) simulated ejection, shot up a rail, as if in an ejection, only it had half the g's so as not to screw up your back, 6 g's.

We had to go through Top Secret Clearance status checks. Survival Training, dumped off in the water, rubber raft survival, then an escape and evasion, ending up in a POW camp for 6 days. I lost 15 lbs. during this, because you didn't have anything to eat.

Our squad had 7 guys, three years later, Mike Brown and Jim Roberts would be dead, Doug Clower a POW in Hanoi, Raines shot up in F-4, Pete Pettigrew downs a Mig, on his way to admiral, Ernie Christensen a Blue Angel, and myself, a Top Gun Instructor. We had to learn systems, hydraulics, electrical and performance parameters for the F-4. We were expected to know a lot about the missile systems, limitations, foreign aircraft recognition, and rules of engagement. We also had 10 flights training in instrument conditions, from the back seat of the TF-9J, to become familiar with all the approaches in the San Diego area.



Then we started flying the F-4, and it was truly a kick in the ass. It would be going 400 knots at the end of 12,000' runway, which is 460 mph. Its climb rate was around

30,000²/minute, with a World speed record of over 1,600 mph, truly a HOT ROD. Training was busy. We got checked out in air-to-air refueling. The refueling probe came out the right side of the fuselage, behind the pilots view, much fun trying to stuff a probe, into a conical basket without seeing the probe. We would do this hundreds of time while flying missions. Shooting live missiles above the speed of sound, much fun. We dropped a lot of practice bombs, this came easy for me for some reason, and won a lot of beer bets, who could get closest to the target.

During training, I had an instructor who I really liked, Lcdr Schenck Remsen, would forever be part of my life. He was a great pilot and instructor, a true gentleman, and he was a bachelor. Schenck and I had a number of simulated dogfights, that taught me a lot about the F-4. When it came to getting carrier qualified in the F-4, there were no carriers on the West Coast available. So, everyone who was ready to quall, flew across the US to the East Coast to qualify on the newly commissioned USS America, CVA-66 out of Norfolk, VA.

There were around 8 of us, and was a great bonding trip, Schenck was leading this gaggle. Our first day out to land on the carrier, we had BIG waves, and the deck was pitching 30 feet. I got a couple of landings in, but they stopped quals because so many were getting "Wave Off", due to the pitching deck. Eventually after about 5 days we all got qualified, and flew back to the West Coast. Schenck and I had formed an interesting friendship, an Ensign and an experienced Fighter Pilot Bond. Little did I know, he would be my Skipper on the USS Enterprise, we would fly over 150 combat missions together, and remain friends for over 50 years until he died in summer of 2016. I spoke at his memorial in McCall Idaho about one of the greatest American Heroes I had ever known and respected.

As I was finishing up our training schedule, you are asked to fill out your "Dream" sheet, where and what squadron you would like to be assigned too. Normally, a newbie would be assigned to a squadron that was coming in from a cruise, to gain more experience, and get to know your squadron mates before heading into a combat zone. Well, I had a sister, Gloria who was an Army Nurse in South Vietnam, and stated, "I want to get into the combat zone ASAP, because I had a sister there too". They gave me my wish. I finished F-4 Training around December 18th, on the 19th I was on a flight home to see Mom and Dad. On the 22nd back to San Diego, the 23rd to San Francisco to catch a flight out on the 24th. I arrived, at Clark Air Force Base, Philippines the afternoon of the 24th, with orders to report to VF-92, on station in the Bay of Tonkin, off North Vietnam. A pilot had "turned in his wings" from VF-92 due to combat related stress, so the squadron was short a pilot. Another Air Force Pilot was on this flight, he and I went to the Officer's Club for dinner and a drink or two. Christmas Eve at the Club was rather quiet, but we did meet two young ladies, and took them under our wings, and of course to dinner. On December 29st, the Enterprise sent in a COD (carrier on deck delivery aircraft, mainly carrying mail) to pick up mail at the Subic Bay Naval Air Station, and orders for me to hop on this, back to the Enterprise.

A couple of junior pilots met me when I got off the COD, to show me to the squadron ready room and meet the skipper and XO. It was a pleasant surprise to see Howie Nichol in the squadron ready room. He and I had been friends going through flight training. He was a little ahead of me, and hadn't realized that he had been stationed with VF-92. This would be my home for the next 7 months. It is hard to explain, but I was ordered to a squadron that was far superior to our other fighter squadron on the Big E. VF-96 had a skipper that, let's just say, was not a good leader, or someone that would lead you in a real battle. He took the easy flights, and treated his JO's (junior officers, Ensigns and LtJg's) with all the lousy duties. Which didn't help the overall moral of the squadron. Little did I know, that very shortly after I arrived, Lcdr Schenck Remsen was coming to the squadron, to take over the XO position as the present skipper was due for rotation out.

About a week later Schenck arrived, and there was a change of command. After he took over the XO's position, he asked me if I wanted to be his wingman, which I was hoping would happen. This was standard procedure, as the XO usually flew with a more junior pilot, and the skipper, a more senior wingman. Actually, I was the youngest in age, and the most junior in rank of all pilots flying the F-4 in the Pacific Fleet. About this time, I was assigned my RIO (Radar Intercept Officer), LTJG Dan Duffy. For the next 6 months we would fly 95% of our missions together. Dan and I made friends quickly. We were very much alike, in more ways than we even realized. Dan was from a middle class family in Michigan. Dan was 6'4" tall, and I was 6'3", we may not have been the smartest, but we were the largest. We bonded, and Dan and I became very efficient as a combat crew. There was never any wasted words or movement, we clicked as a crew, and enjoyed flying with each other. Dan was a very intelligent, but quiet individual. As a wingman of Schenck, the same thing happened. Schenck told me what he expected of me, as his wingman, and I was there.

It is hard to explain to people who have not been in a combat environment, that when you work as a team, rely on each other to be protecting, looking and being together when your being shot at, a special bond develops, that can't be duplicated in a bar over beers. One of the conversations we had in our early days, flying a mission, heading for Mig country, Schenck said, "If we run across some Migs, I will give you the first shot, my time is past, but you better get him, or I will." There are not one in a thousand flight leaders that would give a junior wingman the opportunity to bag a Mig, or take the first shot. For a fighter pilot, bagging an enemy fighter is what it is all about. That says more about Schenck's character, than a thousand words of explanation. When many years later, I asked Schenck if he had anything to do with getting me assigned to this squadron, he smiled and said, "I might have had something to do with that". The other thing that fell in my lap, was my squadron job. All pilots have another position in the squadron, such as maintenance, administration, safety, education, etc. The Weapons Officer position was open, and this was right down my alley. I had worked with the Weapons Officer when I was at Beeville as a cadet, and really like to shoot and blow things up. My Chief Warrant Officer, who

really ran the shop and staff was a great guy. We ended up good friends, and did some pistol shooting in our spare time together. My quarters were very interesting, as the JO bunkroom was right under the No. 1 catapult. Really noisy during flight Ops, but we usually were not in the room then. There were 6 of us in the room, and got along great.



The Big E was a great ship, probably the best duty in the world. It was the first nuclear power aircraft carrier, was only 6 yrs. old, and was the Command Ship for the 7th Fleet. Well air-conditioned, plenty of water, very fast, over 50 kts, latest defense system. We got spoiled with good food, lobster and steak once a week. It was virtually a little city on the water, with a little over 5,000 men, who all had an important job, this was a true war ship in every sense. The Vietnam war was starting to heat up. We were on a rotating shift, one week 0600 to 1800 flight duty for 6 days, one day off, then rotate to 1200 to 2400, 6 day then 1 day off, then 1800 to 0600, 6 days on then 1 day off. If the weather was good, missions over the beach each day, and we had F-4's in the air always to protect the ship, no matter what the weather was. Very interesting and demanding flight conditions.

It was interesting when I would walk up on the flight deck, because sometimes the sun would be up when you thought it was night, or night when you thought it was day. The F-4 was a great carrier bird, nice and stable on the approach and landing. It was a little more sensitive on the catapult launches, especially when carrying 12 five hundred bombs, two Sidewinders (heat seeking air to air) and 2 Sparrow (radar guided), plus a 600 gallon center tank, the center of gravity was aft, and pitch was sensitive. The end speed on the cat would be over 200kts, a real kick, around 12 G's on the launch. The carrier would usually spend 30 days at sea, then to Subic Bay, Philippines, was our home base for 7 to 10 days to relax and play.

During the 7 to 8 month cruise, we would also visit Japan or Hong Kong at least once.

1967 was starting to expand the bombing of North Vietnam, and I would fly 96 combat missions from January through June of 67. January to April is the Monsoon Season, meaning a lot of clouds and rain, so our strike, bombing, missions were limited. In April, we had some great weather, and the action and flying really took off. Schenck was a great leader. On one of the days, he walked in a little early for our daily strike briefing, up to the briefer, a young Lt, and asked him in a very low voice so as not to draw any attention, "What is your toughest mission today?". The Lt pointed to a new found Sam sight surrounded by a bunch of flack guns, and said, "We want to take this out!". He looked over at me, as I was always around when he was in the briefing room, and said, "Tom we're going to Thanh Hoa and have some fun".

This area of North Vietnam was well defended, and a hot spot for SAM action. Now there are not many pilots that ask for the hardest target, it was usually assigned to a squadron, then the skipper would make the selection, depending on many options and requirements. On this mission, we also took 4 A-4 Skyhawk's with us, Schenck and I went in first and took out some of the flack sites, then the A-4 came in and took out the Sam site, plus a couple of gun sights. We had around 4 or 5 SAM's fired at us, but they were not tracking. We had a lot of flak coming at us, and as I rolled in right behind Schenck, you're looking down the barrels of gun flashes, then as you continue down the 45 degree bomb run from 12,000, you would see the guns stop shooting, and the gunners running away from the guns. They were headed for 55-gallon drums dug into the ground, pull a lid over their heads as they knew we were going to hit their guns with a string of bombs. The F-4's would lay in 12-500lb bombs each, and the A-4's carried 6-500lb bombs, so they would be hit with 48 500lb bombs in about a 15 second time period. I would not have liked to be on that end of the bomb run.

1967 was the hardest, most aircraft lost for the US during the war. 655 aircraft were shot down, 584 fatalities, 163 POW's taken. The Navy lost 185 aircraft, 124 fatalities and 55 POW's. The Enterprise only lost 14 aircraft in 67, and the next year, 1968 we lost 15 aircraft. 1968 was also a tough year. The Navy lost 113 aircraft 101 fatalities, and 17 POW's. In 1967, the North Vietnam were getting a lot of SAM's, mostly from Russia. Russia had also sent a lot of advisors to help with the SAM sites, because they wanted to see how successful their missiles were against the US. 1967 was the worst year for SAM kills. They shot down 62 aircraft with their SAM's.

May 19th, 1967 was probably one of the hardest missions that we flew. It was an "Alpha Strike", which meant a big strike. We were going to Hanoi



to knock out the power plant in downtown Hanoi. There were around 26 aircraft, 4 F-4's from VF-92, and 4 F-4's from VF-96, 6 A-6's from VA-35 and 10 A-4 from VA-56 and VA-113. There were around 24 SAM's fired at us, some were guiding and we had to shake them off, with SAM maneuver, which was, 1. Roll over onto you back, keeping an eye on the SAM. 2. Pull hard toward the ground, then roll back upright. 3. When the nose of the SAM comes down, it accelerates. 4. When it is about ½ mile away, a hard 6 G pull up with the entire ordinance still hanging on. If it got too tight, you could "pickle" everything, which would release all ordinance. I never used the pickle button. The SAM is going so fast that it cannot pull up fast enough to track you and fly's under you. Fun, as long as you can keep track of the SAM.

We had a lot of flak shooting at us, as it was a large flight. The XO of our sister squadron, CDR Rich's aircraft was hit on the way in, but he kept on flying the mission. He was the good guy in that squadron, highly decorated pilot and thought very well of. But on the way out, when a SAM locked on him, he couldn't out maneuver it due to damaged aircraft, got hit and it blew up. I had a tape recorder with me, and got his last words "Oh my God the blood", then the aircraft blew up. He was killed, but his RIO, LtcdR Stark was blown clear of the aircraft and taken as a POW.

Another aircraft, a friend of mine was shot down in an A-6, Lt McDaniel and his BN Lt Paterson was taken POW, Paterson didn't make it out of the POW camp, as he died there. On that same day, a pilot that I knew, but was not a close friend and was ahead of me in flight training, LTJG Charlie Plumb and his RIO LTJG Anderson were shot down in an F-4 from the USS Kitty Hawk. Charlie Plumb would become a motivational speaker and write a very good book about his POW life called "I am No Hero", a great book about POW life. We also had some aircraft that had battle damage. One of our A-4's was hit in the wing, and you could stand up in it, blew a hole about 3 feet round through the wing. In 67, we had a rather crude SAM detection instrument, which gave us a heads up when a SAM was painting you with the radar, then if it was launched and locked on. On our second cruise in 68, it would give us more info, and give us direction. Also our tech guys developed tracking bombs that followed the signals to their transmitters, so we could bomb the shit out of the SAM sites.

I've got to back up a month, because in April, we were scheduled for a 10-day period, back at Subic Bay the Philippines. I had decided I would try and get into South Vietnam to see my sister Gloria, the nurse. We had been writing back and forth, but mail going from S. Vietnam, back to the US, then out to the carrier, would sometimes take over a month, so hard to

figure out my sisters time left in country. But, I decided would try to see her, before she left, so I went to our CO, Cdr Rough, and asked if I could get orders to go to Pleiku, S. Vietnam. He thought I was "nuts" to go there, but said he would write up orders that would let me do anything that I wanted, called "Exchange Duty", which meant anything I wanted to do would be good experience to know what the other guys do.

I packed up a small duffel bag with a flight suit, one khaki uniform, some underwear, socks, shaver and toothbrush, and was ready. I left on the first COD to DaNang on the 18th of April. Went to Base Ops at the DaNang Airfield, where they have the schedules coming and going of all flights. There was a C-130 heading for Pleiku, in a few hours, perfect. I got in Pleiku late that afternoon, hopped a ride to the hospital, only to find out my sister had left a week or two earlier. Her roommate, Judy, a good looking blond had fallen in love with an Air Force man, so I had to fend for myself. Headed over to the O'Club for a beer. To make a long story, short, ran into a bunch of local bad guys. They were pilots from the "Ivy FACS" flying O1-G's, which looked like a Cessna 170. We hit it off good, and they took me under their wings, put me up in their quarters.

The next day, I was checked out in the "Bird Dog", the next day scheduled for combat FAC duty. I had no problem flying the Bird Dog, as it was a tail dragger, and I had been flying them since I was 16. I had to show off a little, and would land the bird on one wheel, then hop it over to the other one, before completing the landing. It was fun hearing the guys talk about transitioning into that after having flown the F-100. A lot of ground loops and bouncy landings. One of the guys and I hit it off good, 1stLt Dave Dreifus. On our first flight out, we took a hit in the wing from a 30 cal. It didn't do any damage, but got our attention. I ended up flying 5 missions with them as a fac pilot. Dave and I stayed in contact, but our friendship ended with a sad note. Dave was on his way to becoming a general, and on his way assigned as a flight instructor. Got a letter from him announcing his wedding date in for the fall of 68, asking if I could be an usher at his wedding. We were due to be back in the states, and told him yes. The week before his wedding, got a call from his fiancé, informing me that Dave was killed in a tactics hop, midair a couple of days before the call. I did fly out after the funeral to meet his fiancé, to give her my condolences. Another great friend that I will miss.



Well, when still in Pleiku, I ran across some helicopter pilots from 281st HAS (helo attack squadron). They invited me to

come and fly with them, which I promised to do next cruise. One of the evenings at the O'Club, some pilots came in that were flying late, their bird was "Puff the Magic Dragon", or more commonly known as a DC-3, but listed as AC-47 Gunship I, with a row of 5 Gatling guns. Well, you can probably guess what happened, the next night went out on a night mission with them. Got to fly the bird and do some shooting, really a weird gun sight set up, looking sideways, many tracers, a real hoot. Later I found out 19 of these were shot down during this war. I was due back on the carrier on April 28th, so started back on the 25th. Everything worked out good, got a ride back to the "E" on the 27th, back in the air in my trust-worthy F-4 on the 30th.

Was trying to remember the date, Schenck got hit when we were out Mig hunting, took a 30 cal through both legs, didn't hit any serious bones. His #1 fuel tank, right behind the RIO seat had a big hole in it too, losing fuel. Had to call up the tanker, plug him in, bring him back to the ship. Schenck also got hit by 30mm flak, in the right wing missile station. He got shot up twice, but I never got hit, some unknown dents, most likely shrapnel, but not big enough to puncture the wing. Usually, the wingman will get hit more often, due to the ground gunners not leading enough, but that was not the case for me. I got the one bullet hole while in the Birddog. Also the second year, 1968 hopping a flight to Nha Trang in an Army Caribou, we took 3 hits through the tail, and with the 281st HAS, 5 or so hits picking up a couple of wounded guys.

Don't want to bore you with war stories. Life on the carrier was good. We always had a chow hall open 24 hrs. a day. Our laundry was done once a week, and returned to the room. Our rooms were air-conditioned and clean, no bugs or snakes, and most of all nice and dry. Technically there wasn't supposed to be any alcohol on a ship, but we would usually sneak some on, so once in a while we had a beer, or for a special occasion we would have a little party for someone's birthday. Discretion was the order of the day. On the second cruise, one of the senior pilots did have a drinking problem, and the skipper, Schenck sent him packing. His Navy career was going to come to a halt. Sometime after a few months on the first cruise, I picked up the nickname, "Baby Bear". My call sign if I was leading a flight would then become "Bear". We had a weight room up toward the front of the ship, which was a great place to get some real exercise. Would usually hit it every other day. Got my bench press up to 300 lbs. too. We did some arm wrestling, and I got pretty good. On the second cruise, there was only one guy, a good-sized black boy that could beat me. We had started the competition amongst the weight room guys. I heard that on the next cruise, they had more competitions for arm wrestling champions.

Schenck took over CO position of the squadron in the spring of 68, he relieved Cdr Jim Rough who was a very good example of the Naval Academy, very polished and a gentleman, he would move up the ranks of the Navy, and support the Navy in every way. Schenck was more of the "Fighter Pilot Ranks", more interested in fighters, tactics, and the everyday battles of pilots flying missions. Hard to explain, but at Schenck's me-

morial service, pilots came from all over the US. I helped raise money for scholarships that is distributed by The Tailhook Association, many of his friends donated to this to recognize his service, called "The Spirit of Carrier Aviation". The Skipper of the Enterprise, Captain Holloway was a friend of Schenck's, and would stop by the ready room often, a really sharp guy. Our squadron had around 36 officers, of those, around 25 were bachelors, an unusually high number of bachelors. Naturally, our squadron had a reputation for having the most fun in port. We usually would send someone ahead of the ship, fly off an aircraft that needed some maintenance or any reason to get it off early, and arrange a squadron party room. If there were teachers or nurses, ladies in the area, we would figure out a way to invite them to our squadron party room. Schenck, our XO on the first cruise, and CO on the second was also a bachelor, and he was a smooth ladies man, always a gentleman. Captain Holloway often attended our squadron party room, as he said we all seemed to have much more fun than the other squadrons.

We got back the end of June from my first cruise. Roby Marshall, nick named "Boy Wonder" one of our RIO's and I decided to get an apartment together. Roby was a great roomie, and we had much fun chasing the girls in San Diego. Our flight schedules were light the first couple of months back. We got in some new pilots and RIO's. Bob Ellis, a really sharp kid, and I wanted to pair up for the next cruise, and presented our case to Schenck. BUT it didn't work out the way we wanted. Schenck said I was getting one of the "newbies", Kit Coyle, to straighten out. Kit came from a well to do family. When he graduated from college, his parents bought him a brand new Shelby "Cobra", at that time a hot sports car. Also Kit's military presentation was bugging Schenck, long hair and sloppy uniform. So Schenck let me know, it was my job to work on him!!!!

On our first tactics hop, dog fighting, he got sick. He wanted me to break it off, and take it easy, he had filled his barf bag. Ha, all the more reason to pull some more G's, his bag broke, and the back cockpit was a mess. It is standard operation, you have to clean up your barf. He later said, if he had a gun, he would have shot me! Believe it or not, we ended up becoming the best of friends. Kit, nicknamed "Stash", was a very smart kid, and adapted well to the operations involved in being a good RIO. He was fearless, and a little reckless, which makes a good combination. I did bug him now and then to get a haircut, and trim his mustache. He would do it, but in another couple of weeks, he would look like he lost his trimmer. It was a losing battle for me. I used to kid him, that I was trying to make him look good for the ladies, but he always said it was too dark in most of our lady joints, and a \$5 dollar bill on his ear, is all he needed. To this day, I get emails from him and we keep track of each other. He got married for a short time, then divorced, and now just has girlfriends.

We weren't leaving for our second cruise until January. I had accumulated some leave, so in December 67, I headed home for a couple of weeks, over Christmas and New Year's. It was fun being home with my brothers and sister. I think Gloria

was in Germany. I could tell Mom was having a little bit of a hard time, knowing I was going back into combat. A friend of the family, said Mom fainted, when I got back on the airplane to leave for San Diego. Dad and I had a big goodbye hug.

The weather was bad in the later part of January, and the first part of Feb. We didn't get any combat operations until 22 February, 1968. There had also been a halt of bombing the North, due to some crazy negotiations in Paris, which turned out to be a farce. We had really hit the north hard in the spring of 67, but now they had time to reload and rebuild.

When we went back in, it was like starting all over again, not a good deal for us. I would fly another 85 missions, and would drop around 200,000 lbs. of bombs. We had a lot of SAM site to hit again, plenty of flack. It was noted in one of our briefings, there were more flak sites in North Vietnam, than there had been in Germany during WWII. Schenck and I tried a couple of times to sneak up on some Migs, but it never worked out for us. He was trying to get me a Mig, and I admired him for his efforts. One of the times, we were closing in on two Mig-17's, they had turned and run, no dummies, they brought us over a "flak trap", one 37 mm hit Schenck's right wing, but lucky for him it had hit the missile station, a beefed up area where we carried the sidewinders. It cleaned off the missiles, but saved the aircraft, just a bunch of holes. If it had not hit the station, would have blown the wing off. I was just seconds away from launching a heat seeker, when Schenck called, "I'm hit!!!!". We broke it off and headed for the water in case he had to eject. Over the water, were our best chances for getting picked up by the helos. He made it back with minor problems, no blood dripping.

In the later part of April, we were due for a 10-day rest in the Philippines, so I asked Schenck if he could cut me some orders to head for South Vietnam again. Naturally, he said I had gone off the deep end, and was going to commit me to the "Funny Farm", which was the jail on the carrier. Told him I wanted to fly helicopters, he just shook his head and cut some order for "Exchange" duty, which once again would let me do anything I wanted. I jumped on the COD to DaNang, hit the Ops office and we took off for Nha Trang, with one stop in a little outpost, dropping off some supplies at Montezuma. We were in a Caribou, twin-engine transport, and good for smaller fields. On approach I heard the aircraft taking some hits, as I didn't have on a headset. The Load Master, had seen my head twitch when I heard the hits, and I pointed toward the tail. When we landed, there were three bullet holes up through the tail area. Within seconds, we had some incoming mortars hitting the field. Boy, did we unload fast, fired up the engines and took off. After landing in Nha Trang and headed for their base ops, HA-281st. One of the guys had remembered me from last year, a great bunch. We hit the O'Club, and WO (Warrant Officer) Chuck Young and I hit it off. He had been shot down three times, a bachelor and a lot like me. They assigned me their check out guy, a savvy Warrant Officer, to see if I could learn to fly a Huey UH-1H. After the first day, he said I'd make it in a day or so. If I was going to fly up front, had to be able to take off, land, and auto rotate down to a safe landing in case the Army guy got shot up.

The second day started getting the hang of running the collective, rotor speed and rudder to keep it straight. On the third day, we worked on emergencies, and auto rotation landings.



It glides like a brick, worse than the F-4, but was a lot of fun. He said I just completed 6 months of training in 3 days. On the 4th day, we had some supply missions, always had our two M-60 gunners on when on a mission. On the 3rd or 4th day, we had dropped off some troops, and were just sightseeing when we got a call from base. They had a pickup mission for us, two guys wounded and under fire. I plotted the position, no GPS, just plain old maps, and we took off for the area, only around 30 miles away, contacted their radio man, they popped a bunch of smoke for us. Chuck took us in low and fast, we dropped in behind a tree, and they carried out the two wounded guys. About this time the dirt was kicking up around us, bullets hitting the ground, and one of the gunners yelled, "We're taking hits", the gunners were firing, Chuck took off, spun us around and we got out of there in one piece. Back at base, we counted holes, I've forgotten the number, but was 4-5 holes in the bird. They sent the paperwork for a DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) to the carrier, but I never did get the award.

Nha Trang was a beautiful little spot just off the Gulf of Tonkin. The living quarters for the pilots had been a resort hotel for the French back in the 50's, marble floors, and very comfortable. Almost forgot the story about "duck" hunting. We had seen some ducks while flying around, and asked Chuck if he had ever done any duck hunting. Well, we decided to give it a try, from the Huey. We went to Cameron Bay to check out a 12ga shot gun, got a couple of boxes of ammo, and went hunting. When we were in the air, found some ducks, herded them over a swampy area, and opened up. We got 8 or nine Mallard looking ducks, brought them back to the cook, he made us pluck them, then he cooked them up. Everyone had to try duck that evening, and it was good. We talked about going Tiger hunting, as one of the guys had seen some spores of a tiger, but didn't have the time. On one of the nights at the O'Club, some Navy Swift Boat guys came in. They recognized my Navy Flight Suit, and we started talking. They invited me to make a run with them the next day, so off I went the next morning. It is rather hard to explain the friendships that develop in a short amount of time, but combat does many things in a very short time.



We didn't have a hard mission, as we were in the Gulf, and not working some of the more dangerous rivers inland. We interdicted a suspicious boat, it was OK. Got to fire the 50 cal machine gun, and we shot some flares. Also got a little sunburned, which a few beers that night, made me forget about.

Flew 4 combat missions in the Huey, then was time to head back to the carrier. Got a hop back to DaNang, and stayed overnight. Ran into some Air Force F-4 drivers, and had a good time. May 2nd, back over North Vietnam. That spring, our Carrier was due to make a stop between at sea time, going to Sasebo, Japan. The great part about the Big E, it had a high cruising speed. For a carrier, weighing in with all birds on, fuel, bombs, and missiles was around 100,000 tons, but could cruise over 35 kts forever, that is 40 mph. The 8 reactors, powering the turbines that powered the 4 props, put out 250,000 hp each, that's 1 million horse power!

Our trip to Japan didn't take long, so we had over a week to have fun. Stash and I usually hit the beach together, but for some reason, Roby and I were cruising together, stopped off at a nice little bar, and struck up a conversation with the server, cute little Japanese girl. She found out we were pilots from the Big E, and said we had to meet the owner, a former Kamikaze Pilot. She called him at home and he came down, had a great time with him, almost too much fun. Naturally we wanted to find out how he survived the war. He related his story, explaining how he was a lousy pilot and had crashed while learning to fly the Zero. He lost both legs above the knees, had wooden legs now. He said he would still like to learn how to fly, we naturally offered our F-4's, many laughs. He invited us over to his house that night, and we had made a great friend. His English was very good, but his wife wasn't as good with English, but very gracious.

To be continued.....