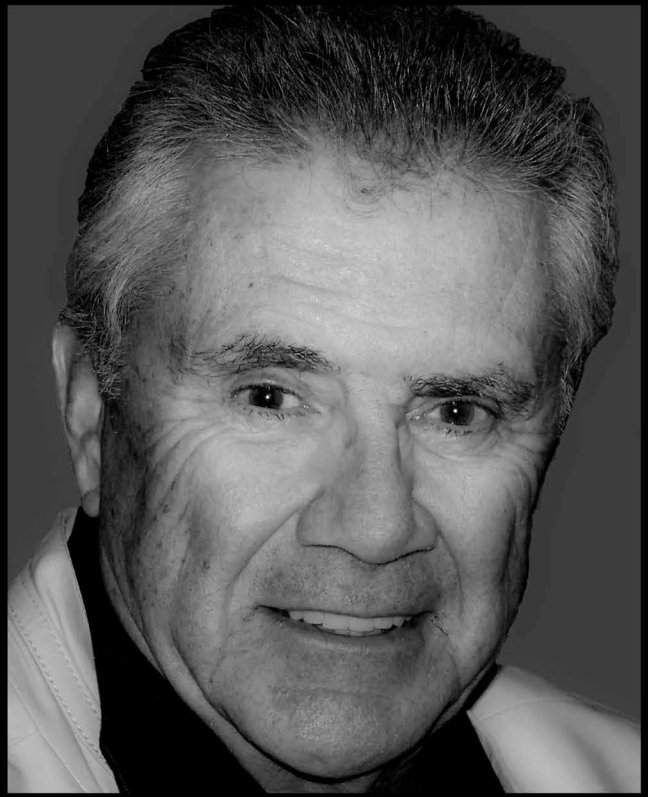

Aiming High

Memoirs of a Cold War Veteran

Hank Hoffman

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Pathways Press

Mesa, Arizona

This book is a private publication by Hank Hoffman. This book is intended to recognize family, friends and influential people in Hank Hoffman's life. It is available only by invitation, directly from either the author or publisher.

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Dedication

This memoir is dedicated to:

My seven flying squadron mates and eighteen Academy classmates who never returned from Vietnam.

My student, USAF Captain Lance Sijan, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

My Pilot training classmate Jurgen Schumann, who was the Lufthansa captain killed in his cockpit by a Palestinian terrorist in the Middle East in 1978.

My friend from Test Pilot School, El Onizuka, who went down with the Challenger in 1986.

All my other flying buddies who never made that last safe landing. This total number is over fifty as this writing.

And finally, to all the veterans who served their country so well, especially those members of the American Legion China Post 1.

Foreword

My first motivation toward aviation came not from my Father, a pilot for Eastern Airlines, but from my avid reading of Robert A. Heinlein, the father of the science fiction genre. I wanted to be the first man on the moon, before the word "astronaut" was even coined. But that happened before I had actually flown anything, so I raised my sights to become the first man on Mars. Well, I never accomplished that goal, so I am a failure in the first paragraph. I had no particular motivation toward the military at all. On the other hand, interesting things can happen when you get off the path…

In the end I flew in fighters, bombers, tankers, trainers, transports, gliders, helicopters, airliners, balloons and even the blimp. I flew jets and propellers in peace and war, over mountains and oceans, across borders and into challenging airfields with crews sometimes brilliant and sometimes a burden.

It was only en-route to space that I associated with the military. It was just serendipity.

Where to start? My roundabout road into the military really started in high school, but there was one earlier foray into uniform. My parents had divorced, but in the fourth grade my Dad's Father Henry decided to get involved with my education, and he paid my way to attend the Hall of the Divine Child in Monroe to follow in my Father's footsteps. It was a Catholic, military, boarding school for a quiet child who was barely eight years old. I hated it immediately. The nuns meted out punishment with a paddle on our naked fannies with holy vigor. I was a good boy, never flouting the rules, but was a daydreamer, and received more than my share of pre-bedtime chastisement. The education there was no more interesting than in Detroit, and I was a smaller boy without friends, subject to the normal hazing boys give each other when grouped together. Fortunately, I did not translate this dislike to the military itself, only to that institution. I managed to convince Mother to renounce Grandpa's largesse and return me to public school after one semester.

Forlorn little me in the driveway getting ready to drive to Monroe. I do not want to go. Does this look like a professional killer?

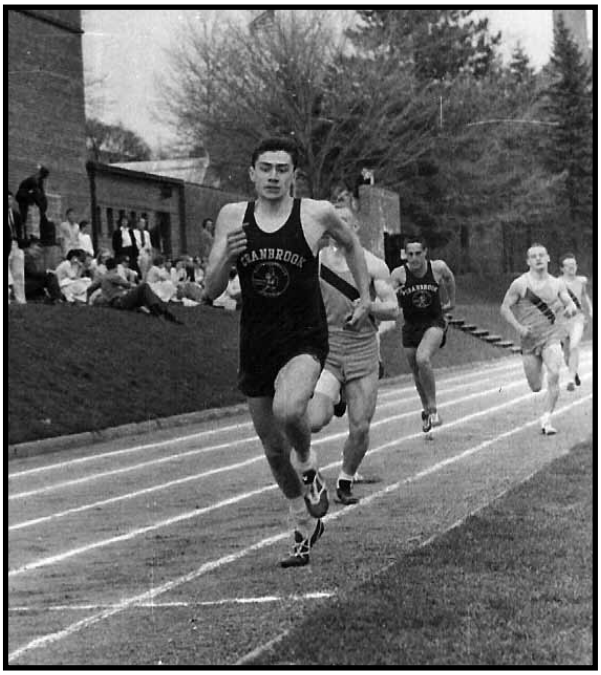
Cranbrook School
1953-1959

Historical note: *The Korean War was just ending; the Cold War was still going on from 1945. I thought war was a continuing condition of mankind. The first hydrogen bomb was exploded at Eniwietok Atoll in the Pacific. The US built the first nuclear powered submarine, and nuclear power was the ultimate in technology. On the 4th of October 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik 1 into earth orbit, and showed that they were ahead in the space race.*

So we begin the story at Cranbrook School, Bloomfield Hills Michigan in the seventh grade. I had won a scholarship to this high-class college preparatory school just north of where I lived in lower-middle class anonymity in Detroit. It was wonderful, and for the first time I actually enjoyed school. The place was beautiful, 400 students on 400 acres designed by Eero Saarinen and funded by newspaper tycoon George Booth, it had lots of trees and art and was just a wonderful place for an early teenage boy to grow up. I actually got an education, scoring 762 and 740 out of 800 on my college entrance board exams. On the other hand, I was really a poor student because I was reluctant to memorize anything I didn't see as useful.

I was an athlete, and I would far rather run than study. I was the Interstate League champion in the 440, now called the 400-meter dash and also lettered in soccer. But I had an attitude kind of thing that screwed up my life for years. I never looked back. I competed against myself more than the other guys, and I would win by twenty yards if I could, instead of just easing into the tape. I never lorded it over anyone, just did the best I could all the time. If I got a compliment, I figured I earned it. I never sucked up to anyone for anything, never said "thank you" for that scholarship because I figured I deserved it. So when it was withdrawn at the end of my sophomore year I didn't whine about it either.

Harry Hoey was the Head Master at school then, and he called me in to his office, said something about how he had hoped for more out of me and told me he was not renewing my scholarship. He said there had been some changes, and that I knew what he meant. Well, I thought he meant I wasn't good enough, and fifty years later I found out it meant that my Mother had gotten remarried and we now made too much money to be a charity case anymore. So I spent two semesters at two different schools in Detroit and begged Mother to let me return to Cranbrook by paying the full way. She agreed, and senior year was a joy!



440 Victory

Me winning the quarter mile on the Oval against a much bigger public school. The other Cranbrook runner is Governor Romney's son Scott.

But by missing my junior year, I missed any opportunity for any leadership position. I would have almost certainly been captain of the soccer

team. I didn't think much about it, but it removed me from a lot of opportunity to become more skilled dealing with people. Instead I became seen as kind of a rebel, but I was really just going my own way. There was nothing I wanted to rebel about.

I had always known that there was a very, very limited amount of money available to me. I had partial scholarships to the University of Michigan, and the University of North Carolina, and an offer of a Catholic seminary (that I never would have accepted) but what I really wanted was a full ride to West Point, following earlier Cranbrook graduate Pete Dawkins. Toward the end of high school I found myself like most teens, pretty much at sea about what I was going to do with my life, but I could see going to the Point, being a military hero, having a job when I graduated and especially saving all that money.

So the way to get there is to have a congressional appointment. I met with my Congresswoman, Martha W Griffiths, and she had no vacancies at West Point, but did have one at the brand new USAF Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which I had never even heard of. She had all of us candidates take the state civil service exam, with the best score to win. Not only did I win, I set a new state record. So she selected some other guy to go, and assured me that I would get picked up as an "alternate". It turned out she was right, I did go. But I can never forgive her for breaking her word either. Maybe that just goes with her position. Certainly there are a lot of campaign promises broken by politicians.

What I should have done was talk to my classmate Scott Romney, whose dad was Michigan Governor George Romney, to see if he could help me out, but it never even occurred to me. I also should have joined the Air Force Reserves the summer of my junior year. That would have started my AF pay date, taught me valuable lessons of military courtesy and how to shine my shoes. It would also have opened another door to the Academy from the service. I could have used my pay to take a few flying lessons at a discount on base too!

But I knew nothing of anything military. My Father had been in the Army Reserves in WWII, flying his airliner full of troops to Africa, and his brother was killed in action on Iwo Jima, but that military history was lost to me when Dad divorced Mom when I was about three. All I knew was that they were going to tell me what to do when I got there, and I knew that I could do it. Certainly I had no master plan. I didn't even end up at the Academy I had started for, and was fortunate to get into the one I did.

I did buy into the Cranbrook school motto: Aim High. As a dreamer, I was totally prepared to try for as high as I could go. This is the inspiration for the title of this work.

The Cranbrook logo "Aim High" depicts the Greek mortal Acestes. He competed in an archery contest at a funeral and he was the last to shoot at a dove tethered to a pole. The first man shot the tether and the next archer hit the dove in flight. With no target remaining, Acestes fired one up into the heavens. The gods rewarded his naked effort with a display of fire, and he was given the prize. Pretty sucky for the guy who hit the dove, and I suspect politics had more of a role in the award than divinity. But at the bottom line, it is his attitude that deserves praise and emulation.

The Air Force Academy
Basic Training 1959

We checked into USAFA on 26 June 1959, the fifth class to ever enter. 755 of America's best and brightest, of which 499 would survive to graduate four years later. The campus was pristine, and we were the first inhabitants in the dorms since the previous years had been at Stapleton Field in Denver. There were three small upper classes (Our class of 1963 doubled the cadet population when we arrived.) and lots of us "doolies" or basic cadets. Another all boys' school and this time the play would be much rougher. And while most of us had been BMOC (Big Men On Campus) in high school, we were now all reduced to identical uniforms and bad haircuts overnight. In spite of our uniform appearance, we were vastly different. My academic preparation was superior to most, but many others had better military knowledge than I had. However, the level playing field was an illusion I continued to maintain.

I arrived at the base of the battle ramp about ten in the morning, and spent the rest of the day running around, being yelled at, and drawing my equipment and uniforms from supply.

Moments after leaving the car I was learning how to stand at attention and run my chin in. I learned my service number, and that I was the first (alphabetically) of four Hoffman's in the class. That resulted in a piece of ridiculousness because I was required to state my name as, "Basic Cadet Hoffman, Henry D the third, number one,1673K".

It was said that the seventeen spires of the chapel (which leaked then and still leak now) were for the twelve disciples and the five chiefs of staff.

Notes on the Academy: It was all brand new and beautiful, and really still under construction. We used to refer to the workmen as "diggers and fillers" who followed each other around on the ramp for unknown purposes. The Battle Ramp to the parade ground said, "Bring Me Men". Women cadets were a long way from entering. (The Last Class with Balls would graduate in 1979.) The staff moved mountains to insure that the class of 1959 was accredited by the time they graduated. The location was strange for an Air Force facility. It was on the side of a mountain! For the runway to be level you had a permanent crosswind from the wind down the mountain. On the other hand, we weren't there to fly. And the property belonged to the window of Dwight Eisenhower. Maybe they got it cheap. Maybe not.

The next day we were supposed to get up at six to start training, but my flight got up at five to go for a run. Our first sergeant, Tony Bilello, was also captain of the cross country team, and he wanted to have the first flight to "run to the rock". This rock was a small picturesque mesa on the property of the Academy in Jack's Valley, a few miles north of the dorms. I was still in top shape from track since the summer had only been a few weeks long, and so I trotted along in the back with the short boys until people began to fall to the sides as we started the climb up the steep slope surrounding the rock. Bilello shouted, "Who's going to beat me to the top?" and took off like a gazelle. I had to go another hundred feet or so from my spot at the back of the back, but I took off after him, and arrived a few seconds behind him at the top. I tried to stand at attention and suck in as much of the thin air as I could in the 7,250 foot elevation. He said to stand at ease and admire the view, and I did so gratefully. He declared me the first member of the class of 1963 to Run to the Rock, and the first doolie to ever to do so, since we were the first doolies ever at the new campus. I was proud and exhausted. My first day, and already I was standing out.

At this point I am reminded of a T-shirt I have that says, "Pain is weakness leaving the body". We were all having a lot of weaknesses leaving us, and it was all very manly. There was no one to offer sympathy either.

It was a good thing I could run, because we spent the next nine weeks running everywhere, and since there were things to do when you got there, it was good not to be exhausted. We each had a book that would fit in your pocket titled "Contrails", and it was chock full of things that were to be memorized: The American Fighting Man's Code of Conduct, the Air Force Song, General Macarthur's quotation from the Far East, ("From the Far East I send you one single thought, one sole idea-written in red on every beach head from Australia to Tokyo-There is no substitute for victory!") and more trivia than could conceivably be memorized in nine weeks and do anything else. It makes me think of that old Paul Simon song about "When I look back on all the crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all…"

When not running, we marched. We learned to appreciate the freedom of the order to "proceed individually", because it almost never came. While marching, we sang. Favorite marching songs included, "Peanut Butter", "Poison Ivy", "Waltzing Matilda", and "Waltz Me Around Again Willie", which was, of course, usually sung with the alternate lyrics, "Waltz Me Around by My Willie".

And we had other things to do. Apart from physical education twice a day we had classes in the Honor Code, qualifying on the rifle range with the M-1 rifle, a week in the mountains for survival school, drill with the same rifle used on the range and lots of marching instruction.

Survival was pretty enjoyable in comparison with everything else. We spent a week in the mountains behind the Academy with only a single flight lunch for food. We were supposed to get two of them, but our element leader decided that one was enough and took one away. He had the power to do that in those days. We got hungry and tired and learned how to walk through the woods (step over the branches that cross the trail, not on them) and I ran down a rabbit that we cooked and ate with gusto. The rabbit jumped off a rock about six feet high with me right after him and when he hit the ground he lost his footing and immediately afterward, his life. But we learned that we could survive under all kinds of adversity. It was an important attitude, and a vital part of changing from boys to men.

Every three weeks the cadet leadership of our training was rotated, and for the final three weeks I had Sam "the Snake" Hardage as my element leader. He was tall, broad-shouldered, handsome, and the starting tight end on our last year's undefeated football team. When he introduced himself to us he said that he could do anything better than any of us, including rifle drill, pushups, and cadet (memorized) knowledge. He told us to challenge him, at anything at all, if we thought we could beat him. Well, being the dumb shit I then was, I thought he was trying to get us to perform at our best, not just broadcasting his vanity, so that afternoon at physical training I put my arm up in the air to ask a question.

He said, "What do you want, dumb squat?"

I said, "Sir, I would like to challenge you to a race!"

After a pause, he said, "How far?"

Unprepared for the question, I said, "Whatever you say, sir!"

He said, "OK, we'll race for a pint of ice cream." I didn't know we were betting either, and this was my first opportunity to learn the standard betting currency; a pint of ice cream available at the Cadet Store for about a quarter after basic training was over.

At this point he looked over my head and said, "What do you men want?"

Someone behind me said, "Sir, we want to bet on Mr. Hoffman."

Well, we raced forty yards and it was about like any wide receiver racing a tight end and he lost big time and paid out about twenty pints of ice cream. This event was the worst decision of my military career to that point. The man had no sense of humor, and he did a pretty good job of making my life miserable for the next three weeks. The other upperclassmen heard about it and I won a couple more pints of ice cream before they got smart and quit trying to run with me.

The whole incident just showed that I didn't understand the other boys' need to look good, even if they weren't. If I thought I was the best I was compelled to go for it, even when winning was the wrong thing to do. And I also didn't understand that the other boys thought I had incredible balls for challenging him. I wasn't brave, just stupid. And opening my mouth with that challenge was my worst military decision so far. But it's ok, many more would follow…

Sam the Snake managed to get even with me. He sent me out on "punishment detail" for not making my bed fast enough, which was not a real offense, and the detail was just about punishment. Many of the cadets there had been woefully out of shape when they entered, and this detail was the result of that for them. We formed up in the dark after supper on the terrazzo with our combat boots and rifles. We did pushups and things for a while and then double-timed down to the bottom of the parade ground, and did some more exercise. Rifle push-ups in the grass get your boots and your rifles dirty enough for a lot of cleaning. Then we ran back up the parade ground and under the arch that used to read "Bring Me Men" back when there were no female cadets.

Somewhere on the way up the hill I got to carry another cadet's rifle because he was having trouble. Some upperclassman just handed it to me. Then some other upperclassman hollered out, "Get those rifles to high port! (Rifle held only by the pistol grip with your arm extended straight over your head.) Who's going to beat me up the ramp?" As usual I was in the back with the little guys, and I had a little trouble getting both those rifles over my head, but I took off after him and passed him about forty yards from the finish, which was the same place we had started, puffing like a steam engine.

All alone at the top, I picked a spot on the ramp and came to attention, having the same trouble getting both rifles down as I had getting them up. It was a magnificent performance, but only the one upperclassman and I were there to see it. He showed up about twenty seconds later, also gasping for breath, and after a moment he said, "Who are you?"

I said, "Sir, I am Basic Cadet Henry D Hoffman III, number one, 1673K, sir!" This was followed by the usual question about the numbers at the end of my name, and then he said, "Why are you here?"

I said, "Sir, my bed was not made before breakfast this morning, sir!"

He looked at me for a long moment and then said, "Go home."

I just could not salute carrying two rifles, so

I said "Yes, sir!" and left with them both at trail arms position. I could hear the other basic cadets' boots slapping the terrazzo as they arrived and the yells of the upperclassmen and the return shouts of "Sir, yes sir!" as I left and they got to do some more exercises. I went to my room, cleaned my rifle and boots as well as I could, and tried to figure out what to do with the extra rifle. Pretty soon an enormous basic cadet classmate stuck his head into the room and asked if I had a spare and then he and the rifle were gone in an instant. Sam the Snake came by and asked what I was doing home so soon and I could only tell him that I was sent home. However much he was disappointed, he left me alone that night.

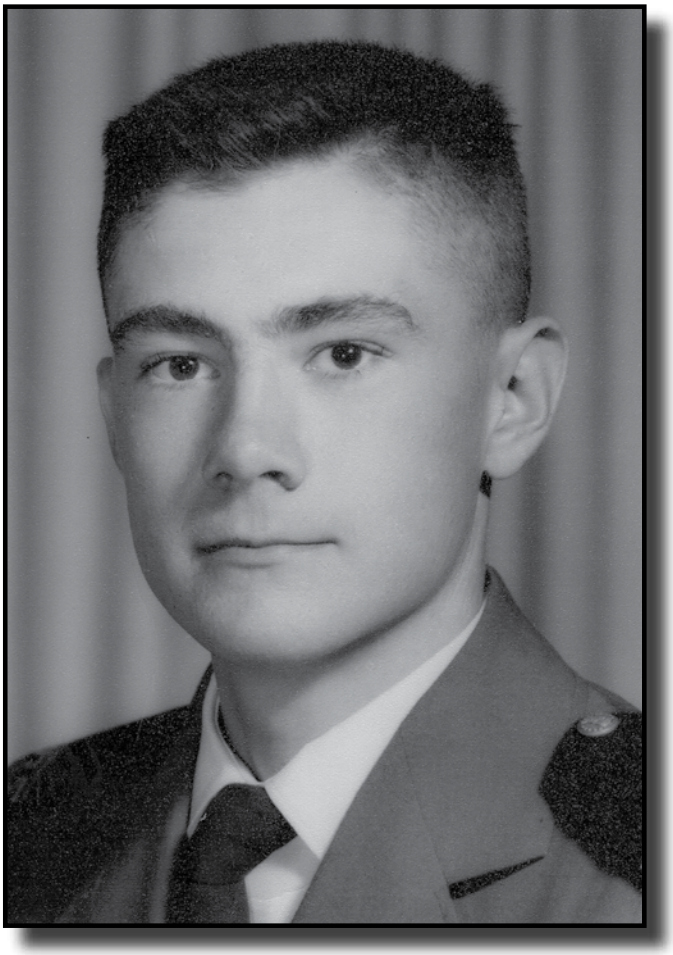
One major challenge was the obstacle course. This course was composed of all the things you have seen on TV about basic training for war. Climbing ropes, swinging, hand over hand, and running. It was an exercise for the whole body; arms, legs, stomach and courage. I did very well on natural ability, but I was not close to the best. The cargo net went up into the air three or four stories, the view from the top was dizzying, and I was kind of cautious and made sure I didn't fall. The men who did best climbed and descended with abandon! But in reality, the man who could stand the pain the most won. It was another of those wonderful things boys do to each other to prove their manhood. There were injuries, but not to me.

We were organized into four summer squadrons of four flights each. I was in 32nd Squadron, ("Thirty-two can do, Sir!") and all of the basic cadets in my flight would go to 4th Group, about a quarter of us to 16th Squadron.

At the very end of the summer we had a general competition between the different squadrons called Field Day. It included a lot of very physical things including trying to push an inflated ball about seven feet across over the goal lines on a football field. This always resulted in various injuries to the competitors (more of this manly stuff) but I was selected to compete on the track. The points for individual competition were about the size of the team points, so the load of points I scored in the 100 and 440 yard dashes made us look pretty good.

That night, the flight commander called me out of ranks and told me I was to march the flight to dinner that evening, an honor I would not have conceived of. Well, I was standing in front of the flight, and Sam the Snake came by and told me to get back into ranks, and I did, and then the flight commander told me to get back there and I did that too. There was a lot of ineffective communication when all you were permitted to say was, "Yes, sir; no sir; no excuse sir!" Eventually I got to give the commands to march to dinner. It would be the only time I ever marched more than ten men in my nearly thirty-year career.

Basic was finally over. The other guy that Congresswoman Griffiths appointed in my place resigned and went on to Harvard. I guess the summer was too tough on him. I was just beginning to find out how tough I really was.



C4C Hoffman and his cleared eyed innocence

Doolie Year
1959-1960

Well, they broke up the provisional training squadrons and sent us to our real cadet squadrons. Sixteenth Squadron, the very last one, was located on the west end of the inhabited rooms, on the sixth floor of the dorm, probably two hundred feet above the elevation of the gym. The run from the gym to the dorm after athletics and before dinner could be a killer. We looked at Arnold Hall outside our windows, and could actually see civilians at their ease. It made me wistful, made me want to join them, but I knew that if I did I would no longer have my identity simply because I was not a quitter. And I could not leave myself behind. No one should do that.

All our rooms were brand new again since they had not been used during Basic training. We actually tried to sweep off the ceilings so that the "popcorn" material up there would not fall on anything and get us demerits. This system didn't work too well; it just seemed to loosen up the next batch of debris.

My Serial Number was 1673K. That meant there were less than 1700 cadets ever registered before me, although it was done alphabetically by class. Our squadron commander was Cadet LTC Greg Boyington Jr, whose father was a Medal of Honor winner and the hero of Baa Baa Black Sheep, that wonderful story of WWII heroism by Marine aviators. Greg's serial number was 3K. That meant he had been in the first class, but had not graduated with them and was making up for his academic faults with another year of school. He was also the originator of "Boyington's Law of Minimum Pro Points". The idea behind this was that if you got a 71 on a test and you only need 70 to pass, you had wasted effort, and the idea was not to waste any extra effort. This was doubtless why he got to repeat a year. He also was awarded the first major punishment, a "class three" for having sex in the chapel on the base in Denver. He and his Dad were men's men!

We were no longer Basic Cadets; we had been promoted to Cadets Fourth Class, but we were derogatively still called Doolies. That wasn't much of a promotion since there still wasn't anyone junior to us, but the bullshit tapered off as the academics began in earnest.

To say that it tapered off did not mean that it took a back seat. I had a number of advanced placement courses, including math and something called Physical Chemistry, which was an advanced course for sophomores. I was totally lost in this one, mostly because there really wasn't much time to study and there was nowhere to go for help. Also I had to deal with some hazing right before an enormous test and in the end I think I finally got a C, (at the time they were using a numerical system, with 90-100 translating to an A, and my C was 70-80.) and I was most embarrassed.

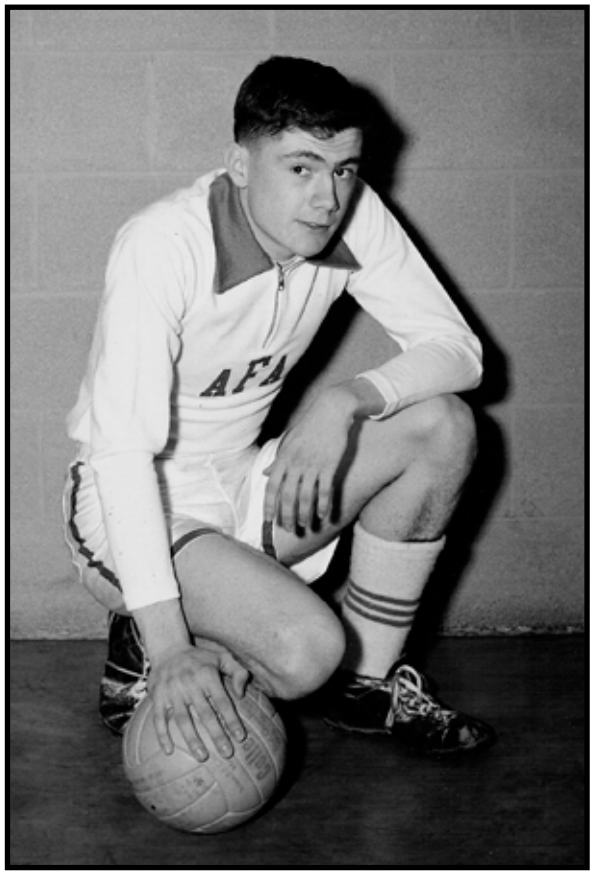
I guess that a few words on hazing are in order. Hazing was not illegal or immoral then. It was part of "toughening us up" and it was going to last all year. We did stupid, non-productive things that just tired us and didn't actually accomplish anything. All Doolies had to be in ranks five minutes before anyone else. If you were late, you had to be there ten minutes before, and etcetera. The only possible use you could make of this precious time was to read your Contrails in a position of attention. Time was so incredibly precious. I really don't remember the particular stupidity of the hazing I was dealing with when that P-Chem course went south. It was just the way it was.

I was not placed in advanced English, and I was embarrassed about this too, but they moved me up right after the first composition. Cranbrook did teach me to write well.

Since I was in the last Squadron, we got to spend more time marching than the others. Not only were we last, but we were on the top floor, as far from the parade ground as you could get.

By the time we got to the top of the ramp after a parade, the 1st Squadron upperclassmen were already in their civvies and halfway to the parking lot!

On the third day in 16th Squadron we fourth classmen were called together one evening and asked to elect a "social chairman". Perry Lash had been in my basic flight with me and he was in 16th now too. He was a prior enlisted guy who had spent a year at the Academy Preparatory School, and he was typical of that group. A little more mature, and knowledgeable about how to polish shoes and how to march, but a little behind in academics. I had impressed him with my assertive attitude and physical performance, and he nominated me. I should have declined, because I really knew nothing about social activities, but I got the job anyway. This is one of the really few times I kept my mouth shut when I should have opened it. Not that it was a disaster or anything, but I was a total misfit for the job. I just wasn't a social kind of guy.



The Academy sent this soccer photo back to Cranbrook for publicity reasons.

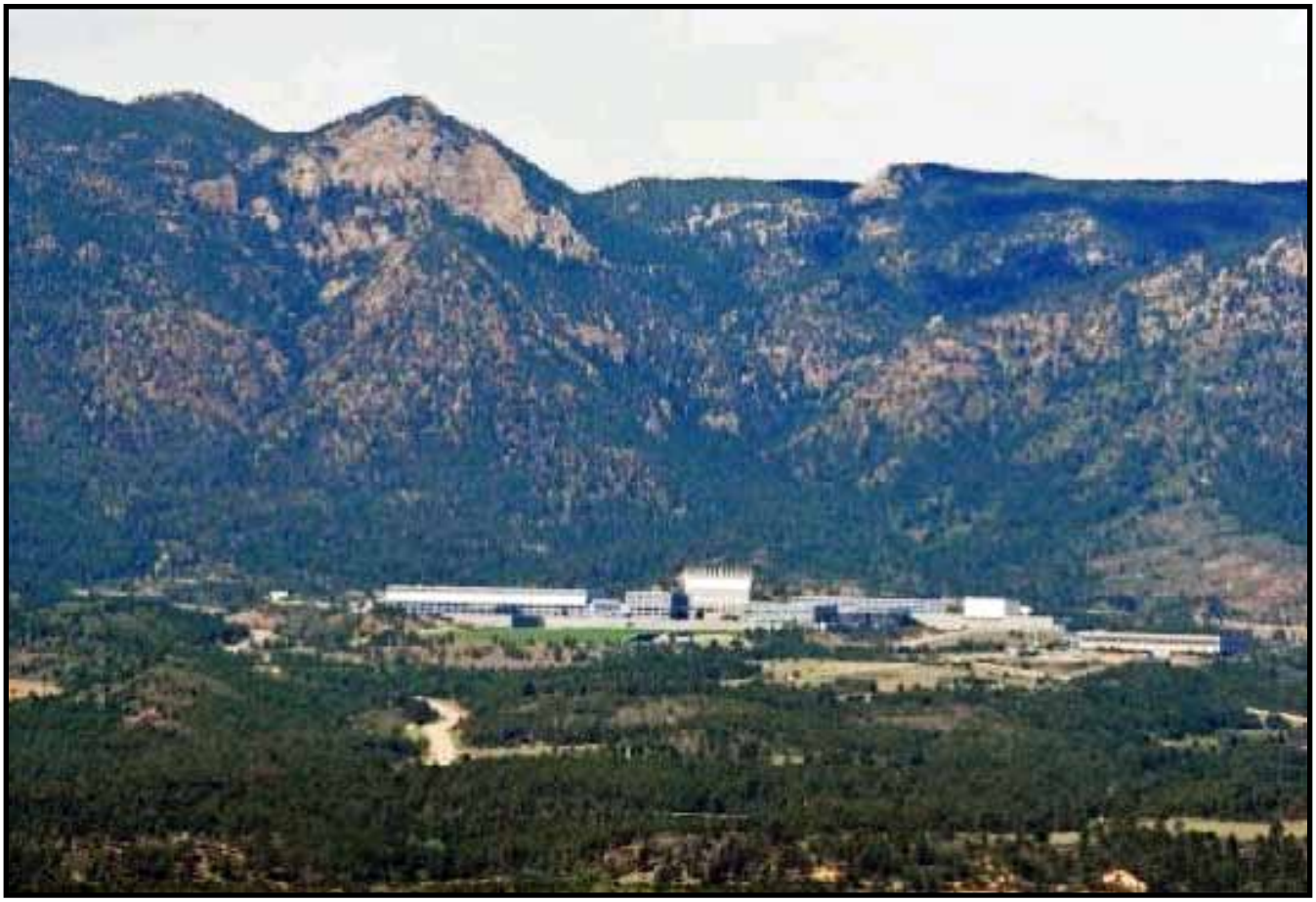
The good news was that it was soccer season, and I got out of Intramural competition to be on the team. I loved soccer, and it loved me. I ended up at center forward, mostly because I was so fast that the halfbacks could lob me a ball downfield and I could get to it first without being offside and then have a go at the goalie one-on-one. I actually scored six times in one game against Colorado College. Fun! Running! Playing with the boys and getting away from the crap in the dorm. We also got away from a lot of crap by sitting at special "training tables" in the dining hall for jocks. I got to indulge my itch to travel for the away games and I fit in beautifully. We were awarded "numerals" (the '63' of our class) instead of letters for participation in freshman athletics, and I had mine in soccer and soon in track too.

The Academy has a wonderful theory of education. First, tell them what you're going to tell them, second, teach the material, third, review the same material, and fourth, test them on what you taught them. Simplicity itself, and designed to produce results. Do you know that the USAF Academy has the highest Graduate Record Exams of any college just about every year? Well, thanks to that system and the very superior preparation I had at Cranbrook, I was soon among the academic leaders of the class.

Military training was another issue. The first performance reviews we had were peer reviews. This system was being used on a trial basis (as the first full class at the Academy, we found we were lab rats for lots of new programs) and it involved being rated by the other Fourth Classmen. They found that it gave probably the most honest performance rating of all because the guys working next to you know exactly how much you are accomplishing because they didn't have to deal with brown-nosing or anything else phony. I did very well on those first evaluations.

I well remember Bill Gabel and Jerry Sherrill. The three of us would go on to become test pilots. Others in the squadron were Jim Diffendorfer, who I vastly admired, John Helinski, John Haluska, Bill Berry, Bob Parlette, Bob MacFarlane, Tom Meier, Grant Callin, Bill Vincent, Fred Fiedler… Good men all!

I was initially assigned to room with Bill Olsen, a really nice kid who had been admitted before he



The brand new Academy with Mount Herman shown behind.

actually graduated from high school, and he was a year younger than most of us. One day I was called into the First Sergeant's room, and he told me he had a problem with one of my classmates. Apparently no one liked him and they wanted me to room with him using logic I didn't quite understand. I mean, would people like him better if he roomed with me? Anyway he said he'd move me out if I complained like the last guy and I said "Yes, sir" and gave it a try. It was difficult to refuse these upperclassmen in any case.

So I tried it, and he really was a dick just like everyone else thought. I stayed until this guy rated me as one of the two worst cadets in the squadron, and that just put me over the edge. The ratings were supposed to be anonymous, but I could tell easily. In any case I was gone in a couple of hours, and to my knowledge, he never made friends with anyone that year. In those days we had lots of empty rooms all over the place, and they just unlocked one and I was blissfully all alone in my very own never-before-occupied room with the popcorn ceiling raining slowly on everything.

After that, the senior cadets and the real officers handled the military rating thing, and I found myself firmly ensconced at the bottom. I did do what I was told, and stayed out of trouble too, but my thought at the time was the "attitude" thing I had at Cranbrook was somehow rearing its ugly head and dragging me down. At the end of four years my military ranking was more than 400 numbers lower than my overall rank of 39 out of 499, and that overall ranking included the damn military number. During this entire time I would lead nothing larger than an element of about ten cadets, and I felt bad about it because I thought I was a leader, or at least deserved a chance to try to be one. After long introspection, I suspect the reason was that I was a three-season jock, and didn't spend enough time in the squadron to be evaluated or considered. Strangely, it seemed my athletic excellence was actually limiting me in other areas.

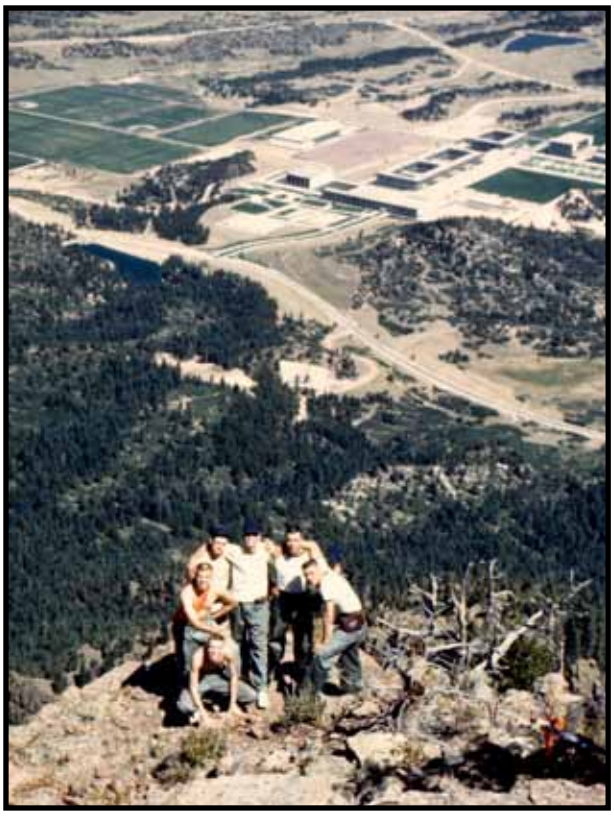
Back to the first year at the zoo. I think we called it that because of all the tourists looking in at us through the bars. Things kind of settled down during the winter. Once it snowed so hard they canceled classes and that gave us all a chance to catch up a little. On the other hand, we had mandatory study in our rooms every night, and we had no privileges to go anywhere on the weekends, so the work all got finished somehow. I didn't miss life, really. I had lots of boys to play with and lots of new games with more importance to succeeding in them. My contact with the girls had been pretty limited by being a boarding student at Cranbrook, so I just soldiered on without them… I did get off base once; by having an ODP (Off-base Dining Privilege) when Ben Snyder came to town since he was a Reserve USAF Lt. Colonel. Very nice, and thanks again Ben, for that totally wonderful first military boondoggle dinner at the Antlers Hotel!

Sometimes we could get away by going for a hike on the enormous campus. Climbing Mount Herman was a long day's exercise, and the view and the woods and the lack of upper classmen made it all worthwhile. (This mountain's conical shape and consequent resemblance to a breast would engender our rating women in terms of "Hermans". The more Hermans, the bigger and better, of course. It was kind of a Chauvinist in-joke for cadets.)

Humor became very important. We were never permitted to laugh in the presence of the upper classes, and the effort of not laughing at some pratfall kind of humor just made it so much funnier. Let me emphasize that there were lots of things to laugh at, even if I can't remember many of them. I found a spare fifth button for my blouse (this means uniform jacket in military-speak) and I pinned it onto my uniform above the other four since there was enough spacing for it, and no one ever noticed… All those inspections looking for mini-micro-mille-give-a-shit kinds of things like lint, and they all missed it. I thought that was very funny, but not a laugh-out-loud kind of thing.

Alex Hartwick, a third classman in our squadron, organized all of us doolies one evening and we moved the X-3 out of an air garden and onto the terrazzo. Since the tail was too tall to fit under a bridge, we pushed while many of us hung or sat on the tail, holding it down until it was out. The staff couldn't figure out how we did it and had to rent a crane to restore it, after which it was chained down.

The Christmas break was wonderful! We didn't have to call it Winter Break, or Kwanzaa, or any other damn thing either. The upper class all left and my sweetheart Cheryl came to visit me! I couldn't keep my hands off her and I know she doubtless wanted something else from me but I didn't have a clue. We learned that PDA (Public Display of Affection) was strictly prohibited with dire penalties (all the Academy penalties were pretty much dire) and she learned to hold my left elbow in public so that I could salute with my right arm if necessary.



Spence Allen, Bill Olson, Me, Tim Gallagher, John Phillips and John Helinski.
Photo Bob Parlette
Note:
No Chapel, No Visitors Center, No Sijan Hall, No Field House, and No Holaday Hall

Cheryl had driven all the way from Detroit with my mother and Leo. And all the way back, of course, and she got all kinds of credit for the effort in my book. Can you imagine? I would have been over the top driving even fifty miles with her parents. Her Father terrified me, probably because I thought he knew what I wanted to do with his daughter… Mother enjoyed the trip too. She became pregnant with my brother Andrew, named after her father.

Track season was not as much fun as it was at Cranbrook. Coach Arneson was kind of a sadist when it came to workouts, and it wasn't as if we didn't have to run everywhere all the time anyway. At the end of the season I turned in my first sub-fifty second 440 anchoring the mile relay and actually passed five guys doing it. Jeff Heal and Skip Lee and I would be part of the mile relay team for all four years, and Jeff and I became close friends, even fifty years later.

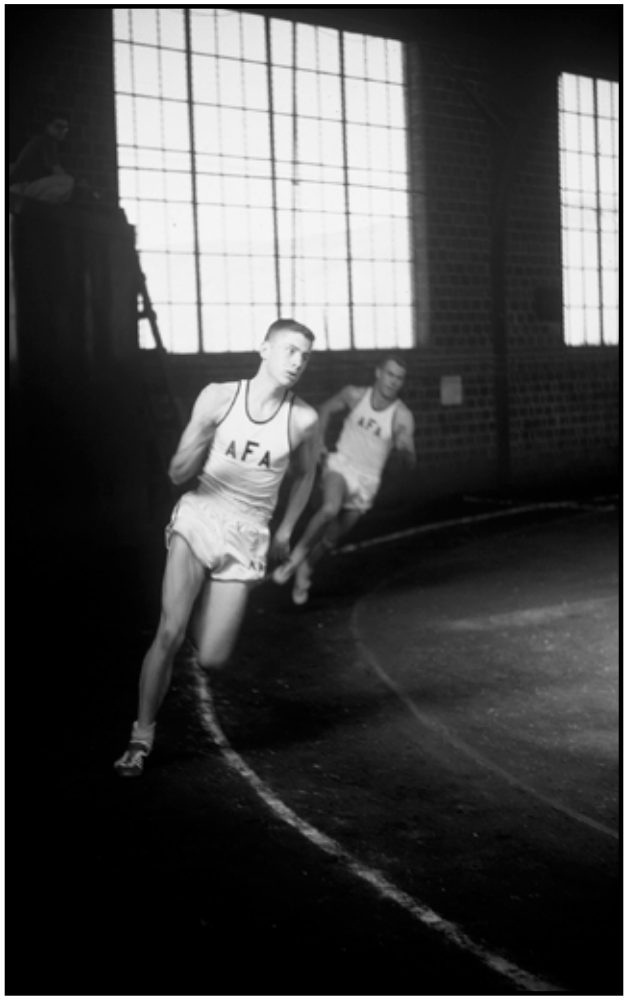
I beat Skip and everyone else in this quarter mile at Colorado School of Mines.

A word or two about competition: I never cared about beating the other guys; I cared about doing the best I could. I felt the competition was with myself more than anything else. So I was never a bad loser or an ego case winner either. I ran my race and accepted my results as deserving of my effort and ability. I think that's probably an unusual attitude.

About this time I came to the realization that I was really quick, rather than fast. My 440 time would never get any better, and part of it was the brutal workouts coach Arne gave us. An assistant coach who had actually been a runner in college (Arne was no jock) went to him and told him he was just beating me up and taking the spring out of my step with them, but he wouldn't listen. I just did as I was told and didn't complain.

At the end of the year the class was "recognized" by the other classes. Some of us got to use their first names, and the pressure was officially off. Actually, I had already been recognized by one RTB (Red Tag Bastard, the affectionate name for the members of the class of '62) named Dave Rowe. Dave was varsity center halfback, and he recognized me early for my efforts on the soccer field. The recognition was really pretty nice, but I found it awkward to just drop by and socialize, so I kind of soft-pedaled it.

Not counting the military courses, I had 45 ½ semester hours of academic credit, about half of what you needed to graduate from a civilian school. I am pretty sure we studied every engineering discipline.



Me beating Skip Lee indoors in the 440.

Third Class Year
The Dark Ages: 1960-1961

Historical notes: Gary Powers U-2 was shot down over Russia, the laser was invented, Yuri Gargarin became the first man in space, and the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba failed. The first advisors were sent to Vietnam.

This year was named the Dark Ages because as sophomores we had no authority, no privileges, and no command; we were just kind of ignored in the dark. Over the summer we had about six weeks of military training called the ZI (Zone of the Interior) Field Trip. We visited a lot of Air Force bases, tried to get drunk and/or laid, slept in the briefings, and actually learned a lot about the real Air Force. Some of us then went to jump school, and while I really wanted those jump wings, I had had enough, and I went home on leave to see Cheryl.

The class had lots of unifying experiences that summer, and we became the Golden Boys. This name, like the RTB's, came directly from the color of our nametags, blankets and bathrobes. The seniors were now gray, and the new fourth class, as well as the class that had just graduated, were blue, but they didn't have classy nicknames like the red and gold classes.

We had gone to Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio and had a demonstration of Low Light Television in one class. They turned out all the lights and panned around the class showing the excellent vision on a TV on the stage. Well, Jerry Sherrill, now deceased Colonel (RIP), was trying to sleep, and the camera stopped on him and got a small laugh. The guy next to him tried to wake him, and he hit his hand away and got another small laugh. The guy tried again and Jerry hit him again, and this time retaliated with the single digit salute. This got a big laugh, and Jerry, still not knowing he was live on TV, flashed that same salute to the guy on the other side of him and brought down the house.

We went to Hamilton AFB, now closed, near San Francisco and I got a ride in a T-33. Fun, but not as much fun as it would be. We went to March AFB near San Bernadino, CA and I got a ride in a KC-135. I went back to the boom pod to watch the air refueling and woke up freezing cold long after it was over since I had fallen asleep. Sleeping is kind of an art form for the military. You learn very soon that time for that purpose is limited, and often you will not be able to schedule it well. Sleeping in class was common, although we learned to doze lightly or otherwise hide it. Sleeping in the many busses we had to ride for various purposes was nearly instantaneous after you found a seat. This ability would also serve me well in my flying career. I had learned to sleep anywhere! We went to some other places too, but I don't remember much about them.

Back at the Academy, we reorganized into 20 Squadrons. I got to stay in 16th, but a bunch of my friends went to 20th. I was happy not to be last, and with the area we occupied on the 3rd floor instead of the 6th.

We got to list our preference for language training. I listed German, French, Spanish and Russian in that order, so naturally I got Russian. I learned later that was a result of my superior academic record. They figured you needed to be smart to take Russian, and that's not really true, since language proficiency is a skill all by itself. I figured they would have rewarded me for a good academic record by giving me my first choice. This would not be my last failure to understand the military logic. But I really loved the course, and I did very well. I would go on to take another elective Russian language course the following year.

I lettered in Soccer and Track as a sophomore. I guess I could have counted track twice because we had winter track, and I lettered indoors also. I wanted to try out for the Gymnastics team, but

the soccer and track coach were the same guy, and Arnie would not hear of it. Again, my abilities limited my options. Looking back on it, I would have been better off in Intramurals for the season, resting my body a little and becoming known in the Squadron. My 440 times never really improved. The assistant coach tried to convince Arnie that I was too slight for his killer work outs, and that I should be in the weight room working on my chest and arms but Arnie would have none of it. I was too well behaved to complain about hard work.

We also had regular PE classes in addition to varsity athletics, so I did get to try lots and lots of things like wrestling, boxing, hand-to-hand combat, and judo. Although I don't really remember what year I had them, it seems that the more violent sports were given in the first years, and things like tennis, handball, squash and racketball (the so-called "carryover" sports) were saved for later years. I discovered I still liked athletics better than academics, even when it was twice a day. The boxing instructor was a Lt. "Jab-Jab" Cruise, who I would later fly A-37s with in Vietnam. He would be more fun in Vietnam.

These days you seldom see multi-sport athletes in college. The conventional wisdom is that it is too tough on the students to have to perform all year, and sometimes the sport seasons overlap. We had no such limits in those days, and in fact we often had Phys Ed and varsity athletics on the same day, requiring two showers, two runs up and down the hill to the gym, and twice as much work on your muscles. I was one hard-worked guy, I can tell you. As a serviceman, I felt that I had the right to complain about literally anything, but nothing physical was too tough for us cadets.

At this time, Grant Callin took an interest in me. I'm not sure why he did, but he became my best friend, and he doubtless contributed to my weirdness. A short young man with unruly blonde hair and a large nose, he came to visit one day and suggested we room together. I barely knew him, but I was tired of Kent Harbaugh, who was kind of Mr. Perfect, and I stupidly figured I could be a good influence on Grant. The joke was on me! Grant had a great influence on me instead of vice-versa… He enlightened me to all kinds of things I had never considered, and pushed me further along the path of not fitting the mold for a military man.

Grant was there when I had my first experience with 3.2% beer, which was legal at our ages in Colorado. I got delightfully drunk, so much so that he was worried about me, (he was an experienced drinker) and we returned to the dorm skipping across the Terrazzo, hand in hand. We arrived just minutes before the deadline, a tradition that would endure for years.

He also taught me how to play "academic chicken". We had written papers due often, and the idea was to be the last one to start. It always went down to the night before, so the challenge kind of lost any great anticipation, and I quit doing it so that I could sleep.

Sophomore year I knocked off another 44 ½ hours of academic credit, so far about enough to graduate from most places. We were busy, busy, busy working, and I found I had little time to reflect on life as I am doing now. The good news is that if you don't take your nose from the grindstone, you don't notice what you are missing.

And of course, Grant wouldn't let me take myself too seriously.

At the end of the year we had the European Field Trip. This boondoggle was ostensibly to study force employment in NATO, but we thought it was to chase skirts and drink heavily in strange countries. I went to Spain, France, Germany and England, and even got into East Germany behind the Berlin Wall! I managed to return to the US without liver damage or a sexually transmitted disease. As President George W. Bush would say many years later, "Mission accomplished!"

On Parade
1961

I hate parades. As I walk toward the squadron forming up for this Saturday's parade, I think about what the civilian college students are doing with their weekend, and my guess is sobering up from Friday night right about now. I spent all morning cleaning my room for SAMI (Saturday AM Inspection). That includes about 45 minutes waiting in the room to be inspected, time filled with fixing a few last minute items, like my sock drawer, and worst of all the storage area over the closet. This moment would fill my nightmares for years afterward, the anxiety kind of dream where you know you are going to get caught. And who on God's earth really cares how neat your socks are?

Approaching the squadron, I can hear another squadron singing "I Love a Parade" a hundred yards away. We all despise parades, but singing and marching have gone together since before we had a country. Irony was always in vogue, and that's why we had to sing "I'll Be Home for Christmas" when we weren't going to be permitted to go home.

My squadron starts to sing, "And its whiskey, whiskey, whiskey, that makes you feel so frisky, in the Corps, in the Corps…"

As I get closer, I can hear a few of the more energetic upperclassmen dealing out grief to the doolies, accompanied by the usual shouts of "Sir, yes sir!" or "Sir, I do not know!" I have no interest in contributing to the unhappiness of my minor companions; I just stand in the back with my unmilitary roommate. Parades are enough trouble without going out of your way to bother people. We are wearing our parade dress uniforms, truly actually designed by Cecil B DeMille especially for the Academy. They have high collars that cut into your chin, but are otherwise OK. Our wheel hats are heavy, having vinyl bills, and you have to kind of wedge them onto your skull to prevent an errant breeze from taking them away. But carrying my rifle with slippery white gloves is probably the worst of the physical punishment. It is heavy, awkward, and it is easy to tell if it is not aligned properly with the rest of the squadron. We form into three flights of three columns, and the hundred-plus of us will march nine abreast to the parade ground and back.

"And it's beer, beer, beer, that makes you want to cheer, in the Corps, in the Corps!" But before we get within the hearing of the civilians we call "feather merchants" we will stop singing but until then, "it's rum, rum, rum, that makes you want to come, in the Corps, in the Corps…"

I hear the Wing Adjutant calling the Wing to attention. He is two hundred yards away, and he calls, "Wing…" and is echoed by the Group Adjutant saying "Group…" and finally the squadron commander adding "Squadron!" You need good lungs for the command jobs, because when Wing finishes with "Atten…hut!" more than two thousand of us click our heels together. As the last squadron, it is a few minutes more until we actually start to march.

There are half a dozen upper classmen positioned about to grade our marching, and the results will be computed into the honor squadron competition, so there is little slacking. We march in step, rifles on our right shoulders, down the ramp to the parade ground, picking up the beat of the drum as it becomes audible. When we get to the grass that eats off the polish on your shoes like Brillo, there are nine trenches through it for us to follow. We turn left at the appropriate spot for our squadron and stand facing the grandstand which contains less than a hundred spectators. Now the worst part begins.

We must stand at attention until the rest of the squadrons are stopped in position, and while the Adjutant shouts the day's orders ("Attention to Orders…" followed by nothing I really need to know, like the name of the Officer of the Day.) We

stand and flex our legs to keep the blood flowing and keep track of the sweat from our brows flowing unchecked down our faces. It itches, and my back protests its immobility. A few men in front of me, someone faints. I hear the men around him whispering to him to "Stay down!" We can't have groggy men wandering around in the ranks and perhaps falling again. The ambulance will clean up the detritus after we march off.

Perhaps what we are really learning here is patience. It is the best spin I can put on the activity. If you wait immobile long enough, the cloud of bullshit will pass over you and not touch you. And patience is truly important, especially to warriors who typically just want to kill something and get it over. You must learn to wait and kill the right thing. I wait; knowing it will end.

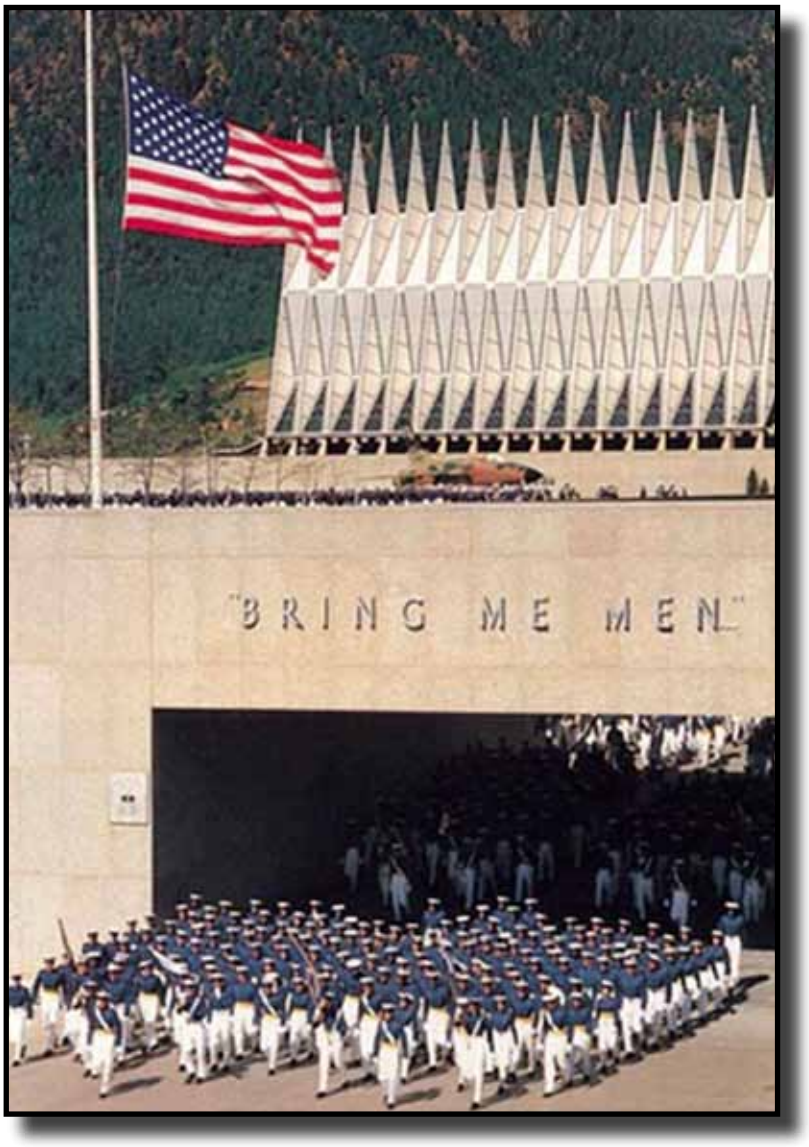
Finally, finally those words we love to hear. "Pass in review!" We often satirized them as "Piss in your shoe!", but we are delighted to know that soon we can move. Again we wait for the first fifteen squadrons to move off, and then we can get the blood flowing again, carefully stepping over our fallen comrade, who is now fully awake and taking various jabs about his manhood from his friends. I mean, what are friends for?

The actual review is kind of anticlimactic, a few seconds of "Eyes right!" which does not mean eyes, but really heads right, because you still have to keep in line. A glance at the colonel reviewing the parade is about all I get, and who cares because we don't know him anyway.

Marching up the parade ground, back to the dorm, is a relief. Getting back on the concrete by the parade ramp is an even bigger relief in spite of seeing the upper classmen from the first squadrons, already in their civilian clothing, laughing and running for their cars on the way into town.

At long last we return to our starting position, and hear the commands "Halt" and "Fall out!" Our weekend finally begins as we sloppily sling our rifles over a shoulder and trudge back to the dorm to get out of the damn parade uniform and stow the useless, outdated rifles. Lunch is next, and "it's hot roast duck, that makes you want a sandwich, in the Corps, in the Corps!"

And what have I learned this morning? Walking through grass ruins your spit-shined shoes, the nine and a half pound rifle gets heavy if you carry it long enough, not moving your legs can cause you to pass out, and anyone with an IQ of 70 could have done it as well as I did, if not better. There must have been an important point of it somewhere, but it eludes me like a lot of other obsessive-compulsive things we did. It must be that bad attitude of mine showing through again. Notwithstanding the exercise of patience, the whole thing is an incredible waste of time. Over three thousand man-hours spent on accomplishing nothing when so many other fires were burning in our incredibly busy schedule. God, I hate parades



Down the ramp toward the parade ground. This is the same ramp I ran up holding two rifles over my head. The sign "Bring Me Men" no longer hangs above the battle ramp. With the addition of women to the Wing the title has been changed to something wussy.

Junior Year
1961-1962

Historical notes: John Glenn is the first American to orbit the earth. The Mariner 2 spacecraft is sent to explore Venus. There is no crew onboard; I still want to be the first man on Mars! The Berlin wall is constructed to keep unhappy Communists from escaping to a better system of government.

I was in the brand new Twenty-first Squadron now; 24th was last, and some of my buddies moved there. Every year we got bigger classes and more Squadrons and filled up more of the still largely empty dormitory. 21st was still located on the floor under the terrazzo, roughly where 16th had been during my first two years. Grant and I had a nice room looking north over the gym and the athletic fields.

During junior year we began to gain just the slightest amount of respect. I took 51 ½ semester hours of academics that year, so there was no let up in that area. We began to get a little bit of command experience, and I rose all the way to element leader, in charge of about ten cadets. It consisted mainly of taking roll and maybe a little counseling thrown in. This was as many men as I would ever lead, even twenty-five years later as a full Colonel. I also rose to my full growth of five feet ten and a half inches, no longer with the little guys in the back.

One of my men was Alva Bart Holaday, known for having perfect 800 SAT scores. Another was Judd Iversen, the holder of the obstacle course record. He would grow to become a good friend and a defense attorney in San Francisco. He is another weird guy, marching to his own drum, and a special person.

I also led Lance P Sijan, the first USAF Academy graduate who would go on to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. It was awarded posthumously, unfortunately, although most of them are. Lance would be shot down in North Vietnam and tortured to death because he just refused to give in. He was that way as a cadet too. I remember him trying to get over the small wall preparing for the obstacle course. He was a big guy, a high school football player, out of shape, and he could not pull himself over the top of it after jumping to grab the top. He tried about four times with me watching and trying to "motivate" him, until he ran faster toward the wall, intending to jump higher, and instead slipped and crashed into it. The wooden wall actually rocked back and forth after emitting a very loud, hollow kind of noise. Dizzy, he went back to try again, but seemed to be having trouble seeing it. I took his arm and led him around it; a one-time free pass. He staggered on after his classmates.

Lance and Bart actually roomed together. They would become the only two cadets to have buildings named for them, after the Holaday Athletic Center was completed in 2011.

Years after graduation, after my time in Vietnam, I toured the new dorm at the Academy, erected across the terrazzo from the old one. It is named "Sijan Hall", and contains a display of some of his things in a trophy case. I tried to tell the others in the tour that I had known him, and I discovered that I just couldn't talk. I was also afraid that I was going to cry in front of everyone, so I turned away and said nothing more.

This might be an appropriate time to reflect on the very tough training we had. One cadet saying went something like, "I've been hazed by experts, and you aren't going to bother me!" That was pretty accurate, to my mind. Years later, when people yelled at me or tried to break my composure, I would think of that and say to myself, "You pussy, you don't know shit about being tough." So all of that super manly training we had did have results, good results, unless you let the North Vietnamese kill you because of it.

I lettered in Soccer and Track again. I scored

four goals against the Canadian Air Force Academy. I loved to travel with the teams! We went to the local spots, Denver University, Colorado College, Colorado State, Colorado University, University of Wyoming, nearby trips in the ubiquitous busses with the Falcon on the sides. We also got into T-29 aircraft that were used for navigator training for the long rides to Kansas University, University of Miami, Missouri, Michigan State and Canada. I probably forgot a few places, but they were all chances to get away, and see something new. At that age, they were all great boondoggles!

I made friends that would last. Bob Parlette lived across the hall and he and I would take a couple of weeks out of the summer and travel military space-available to France. Gentle Bob McFarlane was across the hall also, and he was another misfit in the military organization. Bobby Mac giggled at the evidences of military foolishness abounding there and drank himself to freedom. All of us were victim to Grant's skewed, but somehow correct, sense of what was important and what was not. The word among the underclassmen was that we "weren't buying the whole package" of military stuff.

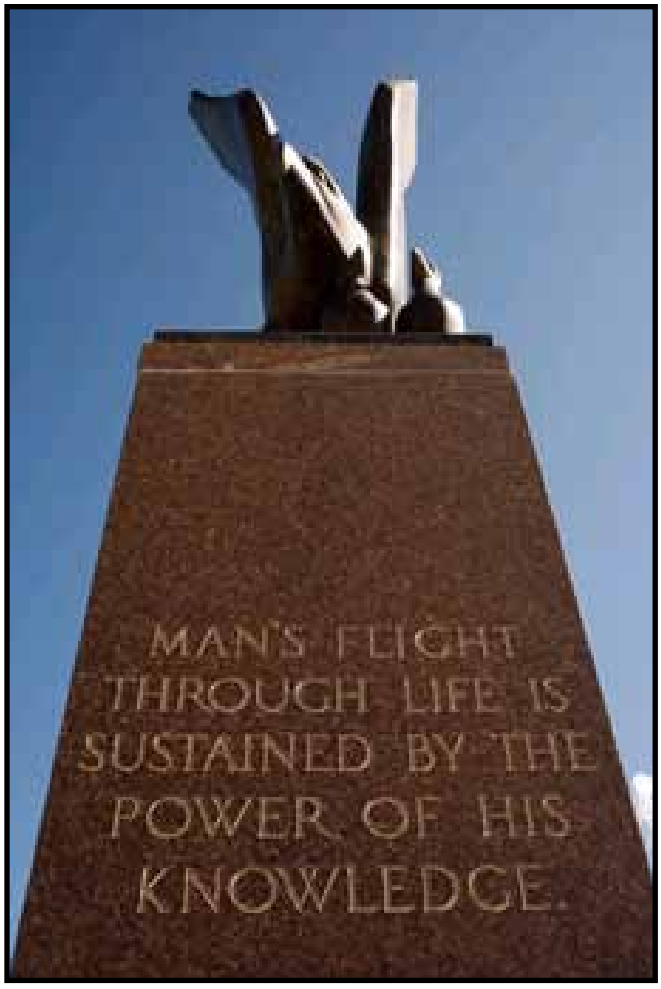
At the end of the year we got our rings with the class motto on them. Ad Novos Mundos was right on track for me, toward new worlds! The five pointed star on the crest was to signify that we were the fifth class to graduate.

Military training that summer was an excellent boondoggle called "Operation 3rd Lieutenant", and we were all sent to different operational units all over the US as interns. Most of the guys wanted to go to fighter units and get a ride in an airplane, but I wanted to be an astronaut, and since we picked our assignments by class standing, I picked Patrick AFB in Florida, the home of our fledgling space program. It was also kind of near to my father, and I would get to see him and my two very young half brothers too.

I had a great time, staying in my single room in the BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters), playing in the sandy beach right outside the Officers' Club and meeting lots of cute girls. Of course, I did not get to go on a rocket ride. I did find out how complicated it was, and how attention to detail was absolutely required. This was one profession where being obsessive-compulsive was a good thing.

The Latin means: Toward New Worlds. This was right up my alley!

Senior Year
1962-1963



I totally believe in the words on this monument.

Historical notes: The Missiles of October incident occurred in Cuba, and President Kennedy stood up to the Russians. The USSR put the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova, a real hot number with lots of talent, into space. The "Space Race" was the most evident conflict in the Cold War.

Well, I figured that it was about time for me to have a chance to command something after all this time, and I was very disappointed to find myself as C Flight Information Officer. I had no rank at all (Cadet 2LT) and I complained to Major Lawrence J Rooney. Now his main claim to fame was having the fastest salute on campus. It was actually kind of rude, because the junior man saluting was supposed to drop his salute first, and there was no possible way to beat Major Rooney's hand down. Someone said it looked like he was trying to throw shit off his hand.

Well, Major Rooney told me that if I had as much initiative as others said that I would make something of it and move forward. So with Grant's complicity, I started the C Flight Public Information Bulletin Board out of pure rebellion. It was located in front of our dorm room door, and it contained all kinds of incredible bullshit and people actually stopped to read it. I put up biographies of the underclassmen under "Know Your Doolies!" and I put up the sexiest women's pictures I could get away with. I compared the Grade Point Averages of the seniors that were getting married against those who weren't and concluded, "If you are getting married, you are probably stupid!" Then I compared the Catholics, Protestants and Agnostics on the same scale and got counseled since "If you got religion, you are probably stupid" was not PC (Politically Correct) even then.

Old LJ (Major Rooney) was impressed enough to promote me all the way to squadron information officer for the spring semester. It was another bullshit job, and I was totally underwhelmed, but at least I got to wear a cadet lieutenant's shoulder boards. It did mean that I could throw away the flight bulletin board and quit pretending to care. LJ and I had our moments together.

Every year there was a competition to see which squadron was the best in academics, intramurals,

marching, and everything else you could compete in. This was the Honor Squadron competition, and it was a very big deal. In junior year we were sixteenth out of twenty-four squadrons and LJ's "dog shit" speech.

He called us together and said that he had tried as hard as he could last year and it hadn't made any difference at all, and this year he hadn't

This photo shows Grant in motion to give the bird to the photographer, and Bobby Mac revealing only an eye behind him. The face between the two is that of future Medal of Honor winner Lance Sijan.

boss told him that unless he moved the squadron up big time, he was going out with a bad rating, and that scared the piss out of him. Now LJ was kind of a short chubby little transport pilot who really didn't belong in the fray with all the military heroes, but he and all of us in Twenty-first were the benefit of a change in the scoring system for our senior year. For the first time they started counting varsity athletes in the competition, and we had always had so many we had trouble manning the intramural teams. In any case, after the first grading we were in the top quarter instead of the bottom third, and Major Rooney made the famous done anything and it was working. He basically told us that he wasn't going to try to fix something that was working, but what he actually said was, "Don't kick the dog shit, or it will start to smell!" I guess that equated us to dog shit, but we didn't mind at all since he wasn't kicking us.

He began to consider me the leader of loyal opposition, and asked me if I thought we should get up an hour or two early to drill before parades. Do I have to tell you my recommendation? I don't know if the squadron ever knew they had me to thank. He came by before a Wing inspection and pulled Grant's and my name tags off the door

and then locked it so that it looked like an empty room and we wouldn't incur any demerits. He caught me sleeping through breakfast and gave me a weekend as squadron duty officer instead of busting me and confining me for the rest of the year.

LJ's unusual management style began to pay off. We got closer and closer to the top, and he got more and more nervous. It came down to the final graded parade, and we won! We got a nice dinner with General LeMay and a set of cufflinks to prove it. LJ got a great rating, got promoted to LTC, and got to go back to the cockpit where he belonged. No one but Grant and I knew where he got his inspiration, and we received no special recognition either! What fun!

LJ's assistant AOC was a Captain Griggs. He was a West Pointer, and he attempted to take up a more hard line than LJ, perhaps for balance. But he lost all claim to being a hardass when he made a bet with someone, that if we won the Honor Squadron, he would march in the last parade of the year. He excused John Helinski from the parade, stuffed himself into John's uniform with his captain's shoulder boards from his mess dress, and actually marched with us! Very cool!

Grant was just not like the rest of the boys. His parents were not wealthy, and I think the only reason he was there was because of the excellent scholarship money. That was a primary reason that I was there too, but I kind of wanted to be a military hero too. Grant was extremely intelligent, and he did not like to study during the evening study hours. Shortly before taps he would blow into the room with his face smeared with blue chalk from the pool table at Arnold Hall and begin to study. We had words about it only about twice, and after that he would go down to the latrine to study and I would turn the light out. I found I needed my beauty sleep with all the P.E. and varsity athletics too.

He went on two hours of sleep a day the entire senior year except for Sundays, and he would sleep about twelve hours then. He carried a straight A average too.

LJ actually kind of babied us because we were both tremendous sources of points for the Honor Squadron competition. He gave Grant unlimited weekend passes because of his straight A's the first semester, and Grant promptly quit studying for the rest of the year. Grant convinced me that I was studying too hard in Political Science, a fuzzy "science" that I had trouble getting my arms around, and I quit studying poli-sci and improved my grade from a low B to an A. He said, and he was right, that the real trick was to pay lots of attention in class and don't get distracted by all the reading.

That winter it went down to minus 26 degrees Fahrenheit for a couple of days. I'm telling you, boys and girls, that really is cold. None of the cars would start, and classes were canceled. The big picture windows in the rooms just seemed to suck the heat out through the thermal glass, and we closed the flimsy drapes to try to keep it in. The heating plant kept up with the demand in any case, and we were soon back to normal.

During this sub-zero time, we were driving back from Denver to the zoo, hurrying to make it before the deadline which would involve harsh punishment relative to the seriousness of the offense. Bob Parlette was driving my car (I was too inebriated to drive, but had claimed the "shotgun" position) and there were four underclassmen stuffed in with us. Between Bob and I in "suicide center" was Tom "Whiskey" Webster, and he announced that he had to throw up. Well, we were running late and couldn't stop, and we couldn't open the window lest we freeze to death in the wind, and I finally opened the wing vent and he bent over my lap and blew it all out that little window with my heartfelt encouragement and vigorous vocal support. All worked out well, except that Whiskey had to clean up the side of my car the next day since it had frozen solid.

I wanted to try for a Rhodes scholarship, and some Lieutenant from '59 would not let me submit the application. He was right, I was not nearly qualified, mostly because I had not shown any leadership! Did you notice that I left the adverb off "leadership"?

After my interview with the unknown Lieutenant, I pretty much quit studying. There was kind of no point to it. My military ranking was going to keep me from being a distinguished graduate, so it just didn't make any difference. I added it up at one point, and I had a grand total of ten hours of study time going for the last three

months there. That was for all courses combined. I wanted to take a course or two less than I had been doing, but that was not possible. I had already completed my major in Engineering, so I added a major in Humanities. I took Fine Arts and did some painting and listened to music, and picked up Spanish with the 3rd classmen. Dead easy. You know what a Fine Arts major says? "You want fries with that?" But I was already an engineer. On the positive side, the classes did improve my GRE score in humanities, and I did enjoy them.

The academic department had a motivational trick going and if you had a solid A going into the finals you did not have to take the test. That was great for me and it made finals week a real relaxation, but I discovered a few days before the English final that I would have to take it. It would be on Crime and Punishment and Madame Bovary, neither of which I had bothered to read, so the night before the exam I set out to do this. I had seen a briefing on speed-reading, so I gave it a try and averaged over 800 words per minute for the two books and got some sleep beside. Dostoeveski was a terrific read, and it kind of slowed me down because I enjoyed it, but the Madam tended to put me to sleep. In any case, I got an A on the final exam.

This patch was designed by Grant Callin at my suggestion. The rules for design said no gambling themes. We blew them off and won and the squadron still uses it today.

Since we went to school basically eleven months a year, I graduated with 215 semester hours of credit, including all the military stuff in the summer. That is more than twice what it takes to graduate from your average civilian university. We took electrical engineering, aerodynamics, astronautics, calculus, statistics, survival, qualification on the rifle range, and fifty other things the civilians didn't do. It was good for those of us who survived, but three of every eight entrants did not.

I passed on an opportunity to go straight to graduate school that I really should have taken, but I was tired of being a student and wanted to do something else. Grad school could wait. We picked our pilot training assignment by order of rank. I chose 26th of those that were going to fly, and I picked the second class at Williams AFB, AZ not too far from Phoenix, starting in August 1963. I was convinced that I was going to turn it all around in pilot training and really excel there!

President John F Kennedy spoke at graduation. I heard his back wouldn't take the weight of five hundred metal diplomas. He would only shake the hands of the distinguished graduates and the last guy. That meant the rest of us had to form up about two hours early and get our diplomas from General LeMay and then sit around for an hour in the sun waiting for the Chief to arrive and our hangovers to go away. I was so annoyed, I promised to never vote for him, ever! The Big Guys can be really thoughtless of the Little Guys. It also meant that mine was about the fifth name called.

I actually graduated 41st of 497, (counting two guys ahead of me who were expelled for cheating just before graduation) with more than 400 numbers between my overall order of merit and my military order of merit. It was an omen, and my role as an anti-hero began to coalesce. My Air Force records said I had a major in military science, and my Academy records say major in

humanities. Since I was really an engineer, I didn't know what to do with that piece of paperwork. On the other hand, who cared? The real purpose of a degree is to get the job you want, and I had the one I wanted - flying!

I had two months vacation, had just doubled my monthly pay from $111.15 to $222.30, and had a new Ford Galaxy. Life was better than it ever had been! I drove to Michigan to see Cheryl and then drove to Arizona to start Undergraduate Pilot Training with class 65B at Williams AFB. I did a lot of cross-country driving over the years.

I would start pilot training with the same general ignorance and misplaced confidence I had when I entered the Academy, never dreaming that a little preparation would go such an incredibly long way…

But the real bottom line here is that the Academy gave me a wonderful foundation for meeting any challenge life could provide. I left with a 3.62 GPA in spite of putting more effort in athletics than academics. I was now a 2nd Lieutenant with possibly less status than I had as a cadet, but I was on my way into space and the future was there for me to seize!

Mother and Me at graduation
I am clearly in some pain.

Pilot Training
T-37B 1963

Statistical note: In 2006, the three professions with the highest fatality rates are 1) fisherman, 2) lumberjack, and 3) pilot. In 1963 our chances of dying were even higher, but we never really considered it. We were going to live forever!

I drove on base early the first morning that we could report, eager to get settled and get started. My BOQ room was right next to the Officers' Club on the second floor, (and there it is still, fifty-some years later) and I found that I would be rooming with a German officer, 2LT Dietrich Seeck. We shared a living room, tiny kitchen area and bathroom but had our own tiny bedrooms. I was aware of the upgrade in quarters from the Academy. We weren't subject to room inspections and we could have booze in the rooms too! Dietrich turned out to be a hell of an athlete, better than I was, and we got along well, but were not really close.

German Studs
Dietrich is at the top of the photo, Bob Parlette at the left, then Willi Goebel, Achim Sedler, Uve Fokke and Volker Hausbeck.

These German students were the first ones to be trained by the USAF as a group. Earlier student pilots had trained all over the US and gone on to the F-84. Our guys would go from here directly to Luke AFB across town to check out in the F-104. I am still green with envy. Some of them had actually witnessed our US fighters shooting up their country during WWII when they were children. In spite of this inauspicious history, we bonded quickly and still hold reunions with these friends forty years later.

Notes on Phoenix: The Valley of the Sun is really a desert with irrigation. It was very dry, and often very hot, although a 35-degree temperature spread from day to night was not unusual. We learned about the cacti in case we had to bail out. Avoid the jumping Cholla and look for the water barrel to survive. The base was only about 25 miles from Phoenix, but the roads through the cotton fields had a stop sign every mile, and it took about an hour to go there, depending on exactly where you were headed. The aerial visibility was regularly reported over 100 miles!

We started out with a month of academics including the Altitude Chamber (again, having done so already at the Academy), the Ejection Seat trainer, instrumentation, radio procedures, and finally, basic aircraft systems for the T-37B. This aircraft was made by Cessna and had two seats, side by side so that the instructor could keep an eye on you. It was just barely a jet, small and underpowered, and we were all eager to get into it, especially since our flight pay of an additional $100 a month didn't start until we got four hours of flying time in a month. I believe all of us qualified for pay in September, and I worried about each month thereafter, but I would never miss a month of flight pay in the twenty-five years that followed.

But I was still a student. In fact, this was even worse than the Academy as far as studying went, a drastic miscalculation on my part. UPT was all about memorizing and completing training requirements, and flying is really all about doing six things at the same time. You had to develop a "cross check" of looking from one instrument to the next to outside the aircraft and back around again and all the while you had to talk on the radio and perform maneuvers and not lose the "big picture" of what you were trying to do. It's all about multi-tasking in a huge way.

I was, and not for the first time, not on the right track for what we were doing. I thought we were learning to fly, and we were really memorizing stuff that did not need to be memorized and generally filling squares in the training manual. I despise memorizing things. It takes me back to

Snoopy from "Peanuts" is riding a T-37. I have no idea of the copyright issues here.

spelling in the third grade. I figured if it was worth knowing, it should make enough sense that you wouldn't have to memorize it. Start with F=ma and derive everything else. Trust me, that was the wrong answer. Years later, aircraft would come with red and yellow arcs on the gages so that you didn't have to memorize how many mille-micro-give-a-shits was normal range of operation, and you could use your limited number of brain cells to learn something important. But that was thirty years away.

We did not have a level playing field either. My good friend Tim Gallagher had his FAA pilot's license and instrument flying ticket. One of the Germans, Uwe Folke, actually had about fifty hours of T-33 time, and that was an enormous head start compared to my zero hours. Capping it off, many of the instructors, including the captain in charge of our entire class, did not like Academy graduates and our class in particular. I guess it doesn't matter why. Captain Don "Moon" Mullins' instruction to me in flight actually included the words, "Watch your altitude; all you Academy grads want to be Chief of Staff; watch your airspeed!" I was bewildered by this instructional technique and it was just not productive for me.

Some of the instructors attempted to put artificial stresses on us by yelling at us or demeaning us. It was fairly easy to shake the confidence of someone with no experience, and this was done with the justification of "seeing if he can perform in the crunch".

So instead of being a model student, I was again the leader of the opposition. I was difficult to shake up, but I wasn't really learning much while I was being hazed either. The instructors were also vastly different in their abilities, and there was little standardization of techniques.

Our class was composed of the very best from the Academy and the best students Germany could find too. The Academy guys all knew each other, and we were difficult from day one because we expected respect. Sergeant Krimsky was supposed to baby-sit us for Physical Training, which none of us really needed, and he wanted us all in tan athletic shorts. We told him we all had blue ones (even the Germans), and he was not happy about having to let us be different from the other boys. He took offense at Dietrich's being able to do about twenty-five pull-ups and at me using my feet at volleyball (a legal move) and was generally a pain in the ass.

Even with Krimsky in the mix, athletics was still more fun than academics, and the instructors took a lot of fun out of the flying unless you were solo! We had lots of jocks in the class and we won many of the intramural competitions, gaining more enmity from the staff in general. We formed a soccer team and competed in a semi-pro league in town and did pretty well too. The Germans

formed a team too, and we had a wonderful party after our competition. (The US lost and the Germans won the entire Phoenix Soccer League competition. There were a bunch of Mexican teams too.)

About this time, Uwe Focke became my class hero. He too took exception to being treated like a moron, especially during the "walk around" inspection performed on the aircraft before every flight. The IP would follow each student around as he did a rigorous check of everything that the crew chief had already checked, then he would get in and we would start the engines. Well, Uwe checked everything with the IP watching, got strapped into the aircraft ready to start, and then said, "Ve can't go". His IP wanted to know why. "De pins are still in de landing gear". The IP pointed to the Remove Before Flight flags visible in his flight suit pocket. Uve said, "Dese are just de flags. De pins are in de gear. I just vanted to see if you were really vatching!" His confidence and sense of humor were just what we needed in the obsessive-compulsive environment.

I started flying with Captain Bob Hicks, call sign Good Grief 10, an incredibly nice man who had come to Air Training Command from the F-101 and so he actually knew something about real flying, unlike the "plowbacks" who came straight from pilot training as students to the instructor corp. They were some of the best student pilots, but they knew nothing more than the syllabus training they had received; very damn little more than the men they were training.

At the same training table with me were Tim Gallagher, Lucky Ekman, and Volker Hausbeck. Tim and Lucky graduated near the top of the class and went on to fighter assignments. Lucky was the first guy to get 200 missions in the F-105. You should know that he was called "Lucky" before he finished that tour. Volker would be eliminated in the T-38 phase. Bob soloed me out, but then transferred me to captain Ole "Grim" Johnson. Ole pretty much described everything I did as "grim" and that was not encouraging for any student pilot.

We flew in Good Grief flight, commanded by Captain Woody, the "Big Indian", affectionately so called because of his real American Indian heritage and tall stature. We would spend six months with the T-37, and then move on to the T-38 aircraft.

There was a change in policy somewhere about having every German room with an American, and Dietrich wanted to room with one of his buddies. This guy lived in the newer BOQs with Larry Thompson. (These newer apartments have now been leveled while retaining the older ones. Go figure.) I volunteered to move because I liked the other place better, and Larry and I rapidly became good friends. This room was next door to my good friend Bob Parlette, and directly on top of prince Fahad bin Abdullah bin Saud, of Saudi Arabia. He was actually a pretty nice kid for being incredibly wealthy. He had his own personal IP, a Major who wasn't the best instructor, and he wasn't supposed to solo, but he talked his father into it, and he ended up running Saudia Airlines and being Deputy Minister of Defense and Aviation.

The group went tubing. We rented inner tubes, one for each of us and his date and one for every cooler full of beer and sandwiches. We launched them into the Salt River and drifted downstream in the 100 degree plus heat with our asses suitably cooled in the icy water. This would take about four hours, and at the end it was difficult to stand upright enough to get up the bank to the cars, probably mostly because of the beer. The trip was full of hazards with the rocks and swiftly flowing current, but at least you didn't have to get up to relieve yourself, and we had no losses.

We drove to Tucson to see some female friends of one of the guys and continued on to Nogales, Mexico, where you could buy booze incredibly cheaply and bring back a gallon at a time! The party was on! (Please remember that we had been practically confined for four years, and were just naturally trying to catch up.)

We had the great Fogcutter party. Larry had purchased Mr. Boston's Guide to Mixed Drinks, and he decided to make Fogcutters. We had all the ingredients, and the party in our room just kind of grew to about forty of us. Larry dropped Parlette's barbells on the floor in the way of an invitation to Prince Fahad, living immediately below us, who attended but seemed bemused by our conduct. He does drink, however. We ran out of Triple Sec (who knew we would need more than one bottle?), and we substituted scotch, since we had plenty of that.

We ran out of orange juice and so we just raped the small grapefruit trees between the buildings for their juice. Larry would mix the drinks by breaking a grapefruit in each hand, kind of like cracking eggs, squeezing them into the blender, and then he would call, "Door!" This meant that he was throwing the rinds out the front door and on to the lawn below, whether or not the door was open, or if anyone was standing in the way. His left hand was not too accurate either. In a few minutes we had a full-blown fruit fight in progress, and they made an incredible sticky mess. We finally ran out of juice altogether, so we substituted scotch for that too. Don't try this at home!

Toward the end of the T-37 phase we had the "Boner" party. This politically incorrect event was occasioned by the spending of the money collected by the IPs as fines for "pulling a boner", (read: "doing something stupid") and it was a lot of money since every screw-up cost a quarter. Willi Goebel was the boner champion because he posted a fictitious student pilot on the board, one Nino Baldachi, whose name is still infamous with our class. This meant that the squadron's flying time didn't add up correctly and the IPs did not find the humor in it since it took them a lot of hours to find the problem. They gave him an enormous fine even though he confessed to the deed immediately. At the party we were all wasted in a hurry. Bob next door blew lunch all over his room, but there was a more significant casualty.

I was standing at the top of the stairs with my friend James Nezbert "Nez" Allburn and he sat upon the railing as if to slide down the banister, and instead just kind of stepped over the edge and fell like a sack of flour to the hard dirt below and hit with an a loud, sickening thump. I was close enough to touch him when he fell, and he must have just passed out when he sat down, because he wouldn't remember anything. He woke up in the infirmary with a broken wrist and so got washed back a class and graduated six weeks later than we did. I was pretty shaken because he just looked dead, lying on the ground.

Moon Mullins drove by this debacle about the time the ambulance showed up and asked my buddy Bob Parlette for his "name, rank, and source of commission". Moon had issues. It turned out that we hadn't broken any regulations or actually destroyed anything, so he couldn't punish us any more than with the presence of his personality.

On November 22nd 1963, entering the squadron from a flight, Dietrich met me at the door of the squadron and said that President Kennedy had just been assassinated. I was pretty shocked, but I could prove that I didn't do it, and I didn't have to worry about voting against him either. People say that everyone can remember where they were when JFK was assassinated and the same for when the twin towers fell. I know I can; I was in the air in a T-37 east of Phoenix.

More bad news was the death of classmate Tom Pierson, killed flying a T-37 over his family's farm. Ours was a dangerous profession, and we could not afford lapses in discipline or judgment.

T-37 with new paint job. The ones I flew were mostly unpainted or metalic in color.

T-38A
1964

The shortage will be divided among the peasants. (Old Russian proverb)

Historical note: *First bombing of North Vietnam by US aircraft.*

This patch was stolen from Playboy Magazine.

The T-38s we flew next were only about a year old. Most of the other bases were flying the old T-33A. The T-38 was a fine bird, powerful and supersonic. Our new flight was named Tipper, and my new radio call sign was "Tipper two-niner". After more academics about aircraft systems, we started flying again. My instructor was Lieutenant O'Neill, a plowback primarily interested in his own ego. He farmed me out to Captain Don "Moon" Mullins to solo, and while neither of my instructors was strong, I held in.

Moon briefed me about flying a no-flap approach, and said to make a low, very flat approach. So I did what he told me on my first attempt and actually flew the thing through a fence on the end of the auxiliary runway before the mobile tower told us to go around. We continued the flight and made several more landings. Later the two gaps where the landing gear took the top six inches of board fence off were discovered. He wanted to blame me, but I know who was in charge of that aircraft, and it damn sure wasn't me! This incident did not improve my standing among the other IPs, or his status either...

My classmate Mike Christy had had enough of being hazed and ridiculed and he just quit. He went SIE, or Self Initiated Elimination, and went to become an intelligence officer and retired as a Colonel. Rich O'Lear also went to intelligence and ended up a two-star general. I didn't have that kind of courage. I never wanted to fail at anything. At a glance, leaving the bullshit was good for your career.

About this time, I met Teresa Marie Conner. She showed up at a dance at the base with one of the Germans who had met her in the German-American Club. It took me a long time to track her down, especially since in my drunken haze I thought her name was "Collins", but I did. She was slender, intelligent, from a good family, and she had a bubbly, infectious, personality. I was totally infatuated.

I just could not do anything right in training. Moon had cast an evil aura over me, and even when I did well, I got no praise. I was ready to get out of there and join the real Air Force.

One beautiful morning I was scheduled with two T-38 formation flights; one solo and one with Lieutenant O'Neill. The first one was with O'Neill, and the second solo flight was on his wing. The first one went OK, but when we returned to the field after the second with me in the lead, he shook off my speed brake signal, and finally broke off my wing with the parting words,

"You're pink (unsatisfactory) Hoffman! See you on the ground!" This transmission promised an ass-chewing to come for something and was pretty upsetting. Well, I just didn't understand what the problem was, but I had to go ahead and land, so I entered the traffic pattern. At that point someone said on the radio, "Someone's in the pattern the wrong way!" Well, I was in the pattern, and I figured it would be good to get out of the pattern until things settled down. As I pulled up, tower transmitted runway data, and I discovered that I was the one going the wrong way. That explained why O'Neill was upset, but not why he abandoned me.

Well, I landed the right way and got chewed out by O'Neill, two instructors who happened to see me, and the flight commander. At this point it was time for me to go to class, but flight commander Captain Darryl Lemon sent me back down the line to be chewed out some more. I told him I had to go to class, and he said, "Didn't anyone tell you? You've got a Progression Check in less than an hour."

I did know it was against regulations to fly a student three times in one day but I kept my mouth shut. I was desperately hungry, not having had breakfast or lunch, so I convinced him to delay any further ass-chewing until I had eaten something. I went to the snack bar in the building being run by an underclassman I didn't recognize for a coke and some crackers. "I hear you're in trouble", he said. I figured the entire base must know by now. As it happened, almost none of my own classmates ever found out anything. "Just don't make the same mistake you made last time", he said, "Screw up anything else, but not the same thing".

This would be the only advice, instruction or encouragement I would receive before this flight. A Prog Check was very serious; the next flight would be an Elimination Check, and there was nothing after that. I figured they had the Elim ride scheduled for late afternoon. The examiner pilot made Ole "Grim" Johnson look like Little Mary Sunshine when he arrived. I was scared and I should have been.

My mission was to lead the entire flight with a German (Chris Bretschneider, a very nice, jolly man) who was very, very bad at flying formation, on my wing. He would not graduate. The only thing the examiner said to me was to say "hold it steady", as if I could improve my wingman's performance. I was flying the gentlest turns and g loads I could imagine and holding on to the stick with both hands to ensure that there were no extraneous movements… When we returned to base I discovered that the runway, or direction of landing, had changed (again), but I was very sure to enter the correct direction. The examiner sent me on my way with some more negative comments, but I was satisfactory.

I had missed the navigation review class while flying, and I should have just gone home and taken a shower and a nap, but I went to class to take the final exam and did poorly. When the instructors were through telling me how dangerous and stupid I was, I was restricted to base for a week, to "study my formation procedures". I didn't care. They had taken their best shot at me and missed.

This whole episode just should not have happened. Lack of supervision was the root cause of the incident, and good supervision would not have had me flying three times in a day without meaningful instruction and a relaxation of tension. I felt that I owed my continuation in training to the unidentified hero in the snack bar. I still do, although I will give myself some credit for being mentally tough.

At about the same time, they eliminated my good friend Roger Zoeller. He had trouble setting half flaps in the T-38 for a single engine approach, and I guess no one told him to make sure he didn't make that mistake again. Interestingly enough, the T-38 would later be modified to where he probably could not have made that error. As produced, the flap lever had three positions, UP, OFF and DOWN. To get half flaps you had to hold the lever in the down position and turn it off at the right time, and it was kind of easy to let the lever go all the way to up or down, instead of into the off detent. It was really very easy to screw up if you were nervous. Now the aircraft flap lever positions are: UP, ½, and DOWN, making for much less possibility of error.

Worse than eliminated was classmate Dave Leveritt, who was killed during a formation weather landing in a T-38 at another base. Aviation was too often a serious business.

Terri was my only source of happiness at the time, my sole refuge of comfort, and I could not wait to see her. I asked her to marry, and she agreed. In retrospect, it was far too early for such a commitment, but I would be leaving soon, and I wanted to take her with me. There was a whole world of possibilities available! I could be in Europe flying fighters! In reality, there was really a zero chance of that.

Unbeknown to us, forces beyond our reach were going to change the possibilities of my assignment. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) wanted the presumably more dedicated Academy graduates (I guess Moon hadn't told them how bad we were; if so, they must have been the only ones), and they had hoarded their pilot requirements for the A and B classes and took most of us. Instead of the diverse assignments the Air Force had proffered, we had about three fighter assignments, a couple of piston-powered transports, a couple of plowbacks to Air Training Command, and about sixty percent to SAC in the KC-135 and B-52.

I wasn't really aware of it, but it was supposed to be a life sentence. SAC would be happy if I never flew anything but the B-52 or left the organization. ATC had decided that I was simply too bad to fly anything else, and my fate was sealed.

Interestingly, at this time SAC was still top dog in the operational commands. General Curtis Lemay diverted as much of the Air Force budget as he needed to keep his nuclear deterrent forces running. They even had "spot promotions" for crew members who sucked up well and could perform adequately. At least that is how I would describe the guy with the only spot in our small Wing. In my mind, SAC stopped taking care of its crews and put the emphasis on the staffs. Most of the really select crews would end up in the supersonic B-58, or later, in the FB-111. This would not include me.

We got married in a big hurry without even having sex together for practice. I do not recommend this honorable idea to anyone. Try it, try it often and make sure it's right for you. But make sure that it is the person, and not the sex that is right for you. In my case, I knew so little about how to express my genuine love for her that I doubt it would have made any difference.

To top it off, Moon had us all fill out our preferences in pencil and sign the sheet in ink. What the hell was that about? I didn't even bother to complain since I wasn't going to have much choice anyway.

My summary record of training included grades of Fair in academics, Good in military training (including my best grade of Superior in physical conditioning), and Weak in flying. Somehow every copy of this document ended up in my possession, and none of them ever got into my records anywhere. I left with 259.7 hours of flying time and no distinction whatever.

I now know that my performance was really a function of the attitude they engendered in me. The instructors thought that I was supposed to be sucking up and grateful for the pearls they cast before me, whereas I figured it was their damn job. They wanted to continue the 90-day wonder Officer Training School course that most of their other students had come from by hazing us mentally and physically, and I for one was not going to put up with it. My life and career would have been very different if I had only learned to suck up. But I don't really regret that lack for a minute! I passed through pilot training on raw ability alone. I refused to fail, but I admit I had a little luck going for me too. (My unknown snack bar hero, for example.)

So Lieutenant O'Neill snickered when my B-52 assignment to Sheppard AFB TX was announced, proving my assessment of him was correct. Terri and I packed up for the trip to Castle AFB near Merced CA where all the B-52 (and KC-135) training was done. We stopped by Las Vegas on the way, but I nixed a detour to Disneyland. I mean, we were adults, weren't we?

Our plans were to get to Texas, get Terri a job, and then start thinking about a family. Pretty sensible thinking, I thought. She was in charge of birth control. By the time we got to Las Vegas she was already noticeably pregnant. Like my Father, I never had any thoughts but to have the child and we moved on to plan B.

Let me mention that flying the B-52 did not carry status. The fighter pilot assignments were thought of best by the majority of pilots, then maybe training command, then transports and tankers, then the bombers, ahead of only helicopter assignments. We had all been equal

just a year ago, and now I was stained with a stigma that would last for my career. On the other hand, if you drank with the Army, they just loved B-52 pilots and could care less for an F-4 guy! Of course, that was after Vietnam got started good, and the Army knew very well who could deliver the ordnance on target and who was going to spray the bombs around the countryside.

The very bottom line was that the school was not well run and there seemed to be only sporadic interest in producing a good pilot. In spite of this, they graduated forty-five of us and we eventually became some very fine pilots including some heroic combat pilots and five test pilots. Ike Payne, Dietrich Seeck, Uve Fokke, Charlie Gebhardt and I would all become that combination of engineer and pilot designated a test pilot. We also had three classmates graduate who would make General officer, Steve Dotson, Frank Cardile and Dieter Reindl. Interestingly, there are more Generals than test pilots in the USAF. The friendships I made, forged through our shared difficulties, would last a lifetime!

UPT Stud

My official UPT photo in front of the T-38A. I am wearing a g-suit and have someone else's helmet.

The B-52 Years
1964-1969

B-52G taking off from Okinawa showing 24 external 750 pound bombs. You can also see the black smoke from the water injection system and the landing gear beginning to retract.

B-52B/F training at Castle AFB near Merced CA starting in October was actually pretty good. The hazing was over. My instructor was a major, as was the student aircraft commander I was paired with, and we were all treated with respect like real people. I did well. I could land that 452,000 pound (takeoff weight limit) bomber pretty well and actually got a Highly Qualified grade in air refueling, most unusual for a co-pilot. I should point out that it is really a handful of airplane, and you had to think way ahead of what you did to have good results because of the lag in the response of the flight controls. This is when I really began to learn how to fly, and it was simply because of the way I was treated.

I had been paired with a Major who was having a lot of trouble refueling, and as a result, I had not gotten to touch the controls during refueling until my check ride on our 11th flight. Because of all the careful watching I had done, I managed a contact the very first time I tried. I had seen that you had to watch very closely for movement of the tanker and make small corrections with the flight controls, and I would be very good at this very difficult task throughout my career. You can really learn a lot by watching someone else make mistakes!

It didn't hurt that I was promoted to First Lieutenant while I was there either. The brown bars on your collar just shouted out how raw you were, and the silver bars were twice as good, not to mention the significant pay raise! I was proud

of that and proud to be flying something that actually did more than go from place to place.

I left Terri in Phoenix on the way to my assignment in Texas, planning to get quarters arranged for us before she arrived.

We had no sooner moved into those quarters than I was sent TDY (Temporary DutY) to Stead AFB NV near Reno for survival training. All the Academy guys had already passed survival in the mountains of Colorado, but like a lot of things in the military, it didn't count. The only differences in the two courses were that Nevada would be in the winter, done on snowshoes, and that the course also included escape, evasion, and resistance training.

I was doing very well on this school, and my reward for good performance was to be paired with a lame partner who had nearly washed out of the class ahead of us for the final three-day evasion part of the course. He was a navigator, something I could live with, but he was also a captain, and that kind of made him in charge. We were to spend a week in the cold, and he showed up the afternoon of day four, freshly rested and fed and ready to run all night. The exercise was to proceed to various checkpoints marked on a map and to not get caught by the "Red Hats", instructors playing as enemy soldiers.

When it got good and dark, they took groups of about six of us and put us in the back of a snow cat with the windows blacked out and drove around in circles in the woods a little so that we did not know exactly where we were and then let us out, two at a time. Captain Lame-o wanted to hike all night. I had already hiked all day, so I was not enthusiastic, but I was in terrific physical shape and I figured I could hack it for a while. I agreed, but I told him he had to break trail.

This meant he had to lead, and it also meant he had to pick those snowshoes up and down and flatten almost two feet of snow for me. There was a little moon, but no shadows on the snow that would clue you when the terrain went up or down. Lame-o fell full length at least three times in twenty minutes before deciding to wait for morning. I would stand quietly while he picked himself up, and easily agreed to get some rest. I found us a large pine tree with lots of pine needles and no snow under its branches. After breaking off a couple of the lowest branches we had a comfortable place on top of the soft, dry needles to throw our sleeping bags.

In the morning he was subdued, but I broke trail for him and he recovered his spirits a little. There was a small mountain with over a thousand-foot climb right in the way of our path, and I convinced him to go over it, although I had to give him some of my very depleted food to do so. On the way up I met Tom Snow, another buddy who I had planned to pair with before being made into a baby sitter. Tom was also saddled with a youngster who was doing poorly. The two lame-os settled into line and we made good time up the south side of the mountain. The north side, unfortunately, was more than ten feet deep in snow.

We could actually see our destination down a little ravine, so there was no talk of turning around. Tom and I took off, using the snowshoes like skis, picking up our feet rapidly and covering the downhill in no time. When we arrived we saw that both lame-os were still at the top. We couldn't yell at them lest the bad guys hear us, so we waved our arms and sat down to wait. They finally got their courage up, started down, and ended up head first in the snow. They were pretty sorry campers when they arrived, dripping wet with snow in every crevice. We tried to look sympathetic.

During our POW camp training, I managed to escape within minutes of the beginning of the "eligible to escape" window. It was a game for big boys, and I was keyed up for it.

I enjoyed these games with the boys more than I should have. It was obvious (at least to me) that I was a fine leader in a survival situation, if not in an administrative situation. Strong leaders are not necessarily assets unless they led exactly where the boss wanted to go. I was judged kind of likely to use too much initiative to be trusted.

The bottom line at survival school was that if you didn't eat you got hungry, and if you ran all night you got tired. I think we really all knew this, but we left that school with an enhanced appreciation for our own abilities to take it when it got tough, and that is an important thing to know.

When I returned to Sheppard AFB, I was assigned to a crew with Captain Bill Lemon, another very nice guy. There was a lot more to flying the B-52

POW Training and Survival School
I am in the front row on the left, next to Alec Hartwick who moved the X-3 at the Academy.

than learning to take off, air refuel and land. After being assigned to a crew, I would spend about a third of my life on alert. We studied, ate, slept and baby-sat those bombers full of nuclear bombs ready to go blow up vast stretches of Russia. We played a lot of poker in the evenings. No women, just games with the boys.

As an aside, the makeup of the armed forces was changing from 19% married then to 75% married currently. The end of the male-only society was coming, but it wouldn't come soon.

Notes on Sheppard AFB TX: We arrived in the midst of an economic downturn. Houses were cheap; just take over the payments. The area was full of cowboys that liked to fight and fields of oilrigs. It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. Wichita Falls is the nearest town and it had almost nothing I wanted or needed. Looking back on it, it was kind of depressing.

Our gunner had been on the famous Ploesti oil fields raid during WWII and his B-24 had been so shot up that they had to divert into Turkey, where he was interned for the rest of the war. They had $51.30 in cash between them when they sent the navigator out with a white handkerchief to surrender. (The Turks somehow thought they were enemies, and had actually shot at them on approach. The rest of the crew thought the navigator had gotten them lost, so it was his job to surrender.) They played poker with that money over and over until someone won it all, and then they divided it all up again and played some more. This went on for more than a year.

This wonderful Chief Master Sergeant was assigned to keep me out of trouble by Captain Lemon. I wish I could remember his name, because he did a terrific job of it. He showed me what it meant to have friends in low places, because he could get just anything at all out of his friends in Supply, or Maintenance, or somewhere else if it really wasn't to be found. I learned who really made the Air Force run. While my training at the USAF Academy had been very thorough, we never really had any interaction with real enlisted men. This Chief gently led me though those hoops, always calling me "sir", and taught me by example how to deal with men without trying to use my tiny rank.

The 864th Bomb Squadron of the 494th Bomb Wing had converted from B-36 Peacemakers. Most of the people there had been flying those antique 6-prop, 4-jet engined hybrid aircraft for years. Before that, the unit had flown B-24s in the Pacific during WWII. My revered high school teacher, Ben Snyder, was in the same outfit!

The B-52, while it had only eight engines, flew faster and higher, and was designed to be refueled in the air, giving it a virtually unlimited range. Our unit flew the B-52C and D, made in 1955 and 1956. The US had manufactured hundreds of them. Actually, they made 170 D models, and 35 C models. Only the G had more aircraft produced with 193. There were 744 B-52s total at about $14 million a copy, and SAC watched closely over each one like the national resource it was. Note that if the AGM-28 Hound Dog missile was installed (our unit did not have them) we had ten jet engines available for takeoff.

During this time in the Cold War, the US strategy was of Mutually Assured Destruction. This was supposed to insure that since the US and the USSR could destroy each other in case of war,

it would guarantee that we would not actually go to war. I thought the concept was MAD, like it's unfortunate acronym. The president carried around a red telephone connected directly to the Kremlin so that no one would "accidentally" launch. This war and the Vietnam War were the only ones I would see, and this one really had more stress. I had contact with nuclear bombs every month, and sometimes flew with them, and we knew that a nuclear war would damage the entire planet if it happened.

It was a time of tension, especially for those of us waiting for the klaxons to sound.

And sound they did! At any time of day or night they were loud enough to seemingly motorize your muscles without conscious thought. I would find myself out of bed, half into my flight suit, before actually realizing what I was doing. There were six men on a crew and we had an extended cab pickup truck that would hold us, three in front and three in back. I (as C/P, Co-Pilot) was always to drive, with the A/C (Aircraft Commander) riding shotgun. We would speed as fast as conditions would allow, our own siren blaring, pull up to the front of the BBUF (Big Black Ugly Aircraft), and the A/C and I would dash for the entry door while the R/N (Radar Navigator) and EWO (Electronic Warfare Officer) would show identification to the armed guard that was there 24 hours a day in all weather. The Gunner would then jump into the still running pickup and move it out of the way so that the aircraft could move.

I was always first up the ladder into my seat, then battery switch on, and fire the two gas cartridges in engines two and eight that spun them rapidly up past 50%. As the A/C got into his seat he would advance the throttles on those two engines to about the 90% position and they would go from off to enough power to start all the other engines in less than 20 seconds. I would hit the start switches for the other six, and as they come up to about 15% we put the throttles in the idle detent. Generators and hydraulics on, and we were ready to taxi. Time from sound asleep to airborne - less than five minutes!

The radios were always in the on position, and the command post could be heard repeating over and over the coded message that would define our next actions. A Red Dot One message meant you were going to war to strike your target (we would authenticate this message in flight, but our immediate course of action was to get airborne before the base was turned into radioactive ash by the Russians). A Red Dot Eight was the notice of the ORI (Operational Readiness Inspection message). Most messages were Green Dots, and you would taxi or not as they directed, but would not get to fly. The EWO and the R/N would authenticate those messages with the Top Secret materials stored in the guarded aircraft and locked in a box with a telltale tag that showed every time it was opened. My Top-Secret Crypto clearance got a lot of use in those days. It was all very serious stuff that the civilians just could not appreciate.

One day I was mission planning for the next day's flight while on alert with a different crew when the klaxon sounded. I ran outside, only to find that my crew had left me and there was no ride for me! I looked around desperately, because not responding was a very, very serious matter, and saw only the Wing Commander's staff car. I looked in the window, saw the keys were in it, and I was gone! He was not at all upset by my quick solution to the problem, and the next day when I arrived to fly I saw a new sign on his parking spot that said, "Reserved for 1LT Hoffman".

Apart from the heart-stopping exercises, we flew an eight-hour mission about three times a month. We would take off, air refuel, do a celestial navigation leg, multiple low level bomb runs, and then multiple instrument approaches and multiple landings, if the A/C was an IP. Long and hard, boring, usually in the dark, and full of a thousand things that had to be done exactly correctly, but flying was still far better than sitting alert!

The majority of time, about a third of my life, was spent on alert, and during that time we had classes of some kind almost all day every day except weekends. There were so many, many regulations and procedures to learn and relearn and be tested on. We actually had crew knowledge "competitions" to see who could find the most obscure answers the quickest. During these contests, the R/N did the FLFIS (Free Launch/Free Impact Schedule) calculations, and I became the expert in all the other manuals. It was funny; the monitor would read the question and the other five sets of eyes on the crew would look at me

and the A/C would say, "Copilot!" and I would dig out the answer from the appropriate manual. This was easy: no memorization required.

A word about acronyms - SAC was full of them, and we often abused them for our own amusement. A "FSAGA" was the First Sortie After Ground Alert for an aircraft, and it received special attention at headquarters for statistical purposes. The crews had FBAGA, or the First Beer After Ground Alert, something far more meaningful. We also had FBOD, or First Beer Of the Day, after flying. This was usually foreshadowed by a call of, "Beer low level light on!" either steady or flashing, depending on the urgency thereof.

Terri and I lived in a pretty nice little duplex house on the base at 4B Faulk. She was busy being pregnant while I was learning to be a qualified Combat Crew member. I had managed to avoid flying the entire month of May 1965 because of her eminent due date, and on the 24th I figured it was time to earn my monthly flight pay and went off into the blue. I returned home fairly tired, and pretty soon she declared that it was "time", and I took her to the Base Hospital and returned to get a little sleep before the event.

I had just gotten to sleep when the phone rang, and a nurse told me to "come get my wife". I was still befuddled, but went to pick her up, still childless, and took her back home with a stern lecture from the nurse about how she was not going to deliver any time soon and she was driving them all crazy. Well, I was genuinely sorry about Terri's condition, but I was also falling asleep sitting up talking to her, and I finally just had to close my eyes. She woke me up every eight minutes or so to share her contractions. Sometime after dawn I just had to take her back to the hospital, and in the fullness of time she delivered my darling Heidi Christa on May 25th 1965.

In October of 1965, the squadron was given an airborne alert requirement. These were called Chrome Dome missions. We would load two bombers with nuclear weapons, take off and orbit the North Pole in formation monitoring the radios for a Red Dot message. These missions usually lasted about 22 hours with two air refuelings. Since we were over the pole in winter when it is always dark, about twenty hours of the total was in darkness. I'm telling you, that is a lot of dark. We usually went with a crew of seven, including a reluctant KC-135 pilot. He knew nothing about the aircraft, but was considered competent to monitor the autopilot while the other pilots got a little rest. If we actually had to go to war, the poor bastard was coming along, like it or not, and he would not be sitting in an ejection seat if the Russians fired on us. The "rest" was taken on a flat piece of aluminum floor just behind the pilots and almost six feet in length.

Note that if we had been a civilian flight subject to FAA regulations, we would have needed three qualified pilots for flights over eight hours, and four qualified pilots for flights this long. The reason for that was safety. I guess SAC pilots were just safer and tougher than those wussy civilians.

I actually flew two of these in a three-day period, and the autopilot did not work either time. It was the same damn airplane too, and I was just furious. Talk about a long workday, holding heading, altitude and airspeed for hours in the dark with no visible horizon while trying to stay awake was agony. We could sometimes see the northern lights (south of us) and since that beautiful flaming curtain was not level, it gave us a terrible case of the "leans", where you are certain that the aircraft is not in straight and level flight. In revenge, we wrote up 94 separate maintenance items on the bird, looking into every tiny discrepancy. We figured it would be a few days before it could inflict itself on another crew.

About this time I was assigned to another crew, actually to another A/C. This guy was fresh from transports via a staff job. He didn't want to be there, (he had been sent solely because he would retire when the Wing was changed over to F-111s, part of the "no new copilots" master plan) but he needed a "strong" copilot who could refuel if necessary and I was it. Lieutenant Colonel Myrle Perry had a typical small man's complex. After spending about an hour and a half on preflight paperwork (the general rule was you couldn't go until the weight of the paperwork equaled that of the aircraft) he "corrected" it with a grease pencil. It turned out that all of his corrections were in error. I had to copy it over and never even got an apology. Nobody had copying machines then, it was all done by hand with carbon paper copies underneath.

He had flown a C-46 in the Berlin Airlift in 1947. He got so mad at his copilot then that he locked him in the toilet in the very aft of the aircraft and landed it solo. This was against all kinds of regulations but he apparently got away with "firing" him. He was obsessive-compulsive about all kinds of things, and I learned that I had to be too. This was actually a pretty good lesson to learn about flying. Do it exactly right the first time, and you will have smaller problems. Amen.

Myrle distinguished himself on a Chrome Dome by picking on a KC-135 copilot. Myrle had told him to wake him if he had to use the bathroom. This was located downstairs next to the navigators (who sometimes called their job "working in the latrine") and you had to pass the bunk to get there. The C/P decided not to wake him, and just went past. Myrle woke anyway, zipped back into the left seat, and called to the R/N. "Let me know when he gets it out!" As soon as he replied he said, "OK, hold on!" Then he pushed the wheel down, losing a couple of hundred feet and plastering the C/P against the roof. As soon as he recovered, he pulled back, making it really hard to climb the ladder to return to the cockpit. And when he finally got there, wet and shaken, he got a tongue lashing, and Myrle was pretty good at that.

In the B-52, the copilot and the navigator did all the work. The A/C and the R/N got all the pay, and the EWO (Electronic Warfare Officer) and the gunner did the errands. The whole damn command was obsessive-compulsive to the point of being anal-retentive. But it wasn't long before this little LTC prick trusted me, and he wrote me a totally superior performance rating. I knew I could take the pressure by now.

494th Bomb Wing

864th Bomb Squadron

Pease AFB NH
1966

Historical note: *The first Super Bowl was played. I watched the NFL Green Bay Packers beat the AFL Kansas City Chiefs severely while on alert. The US became involved in combat on the ground in Vietnam.*

On 19 March 1966, we flew a B-52 full of nuclear bombs (totally safetied, of course; there had been an incident just this year where a B-52 with four nuclear bombs on board crashed off the coast of Spain, and nothing ever happened to set those bombs off) to Pease AFB in New Hampshire. The B-47 unit there had been decommissioned, and the 864th Bomb Wing would become the 509th Bomb Wing. This was the historic unit that dropped the A bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end WWII. We were now the 393rd Bomb Squadron, part of the 509th, and those two units are still the only ones to have a mushroom cloud on their unit insigne because they are the only units to have actually dropped a nuclear bomb.

This was a temporary measure. This famous unit would soon fly the FB-111 and all our crew members would be moving on again. Of course, SAC didn't tell us that.

I had to deadhead back to TX in a tanker to move the family to NH. The three of us drove my '65 mustang there by way of Detroit, stopping to see my family. Terri stayed there for a few weeks while I went ahead to get quarters arranged. I was lucky enough to get a three bedroom house on base and was already pulling alert when Terri and Heidi arrived.

The Vietnam conflict was heating up. I was very jealous of my fighter pilot friends who were actually flying combat, but our turn came in February of 1967 when the crew was sent to Anderson AFB Guam for two months of Arc Light combat missions. I was excited! I wanted to be a hero! I really did. Honest

Notes on Pease AFB NH: Pease is located very near to New Hampshire's only little piece of seashore. The closest towns were Kittery in Maine and Portsmouth NH. The closest big city is Boston, and the newspapers were so in love with their sports teams that you could barely find the other scores from other teams. Some of the women from Texas actually took translators to town with them to try to understand the twangy accents. Our Navigator's wife just could not understand "stach" in her shirts at the cleaners. The summers were nice, if brief, the autumns were beautiful, and winters were cold and dark and long.

The arrow meant we (or at least the B-47 crews before us) had a one way mission. Drop bombs and bail out because there wasn't enough fuel to return.

The Latin means Defender/Avenger. We told the civilians it meant "Hide the Windex". These two patches are the only ones in the USAF with mushroom clouds on them since these are the only units to have dropped nuclear bombs.

Andersen AFB Guam
1967-1969

Historical note: *Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969. The whole world held its' breath while we finally surpassed the Russians. The Vietcong Tet offensive was in 1968 and the Israeli six day war in 1967. This war proved very helpful to us in the B-52s, because the Israelis sent us a captured Russian SAM site (Surface to Air Missile) that we installed on the east coast of FL and practiced our tactics against. The computed kill statistics went from 94% to 4% with the new tactics, and we would need them soon in North Vietnam!*

I want to mention at this point that the B-52s were all unpainted on top and thermal white on the bottom (to reflect that nuclear flash) when I started flying them. They only gradually became camouflaged on top and black on the bottom (harder to see at night) as we started using them in Vietnam. All the birds at Anderson AFB were D models with the "Big Belly" modification that allowed them to carry 84 five hundred pound bombs internally, plus another 24 seven hundred and fifty pound bombs on pylons under the wings inboard of the inboard engines, instead of the mere 37 bombs the unmodified birds could carry. It was a grand total of 108 bombs weighing about 63,000 pounds, and they could hurt those on the receiving end very, very badly.

In Guam they actually operated the BBUF (Big Black Ugly Aircraft) like heavy bombers in WWII, even including the same call signs. The first mission of the day was Red flight, always followed by Blue and White, one, two and three. We could and did put over a hundred of them into the air on the same mission. Three would launch a minute apart, then we waited two minutes and then another three-ship cell went. It took nearly three hours to get them all airborne and the field was closed to all other traffic during a launch. The flights were done radio silence. (Like they didn't know we were coming. There was a Vietnamese trawler just off the island of Guam radioing notification of all the launches to someone anyway.) No taxi clearance from ground, no take off clearance from the tower, no radio calls during air refueling, nothing until after the bombs were released and then only a four letter strike report was sent on the HF radio. Then radio silence continued until talking to the tower for landing. What a pounding we gave the jungle! I just wish we had real targets like buildings, or ships, or airfields. Or Hanoi!

On this first combat tour, Major Thomas D Bass ("Sam" to all) was my new aircraft commander. He was an IP, and it was a great opportunity for me to hone my skills. He was a fine pilot, and also a very nice man. We were actually a highly qualified crew, with the exception of me.

A/C Sam Bass, EWO Bob Hayes, R/N Bruce Smith, N Pat Murphy, G Joe Martel and I are posed in front of one of the many revetments around the parked bombers.

Here I had an opportunity to fly a local mission in the gunner's seat. I sure wish I had done that, but I had so little time to think about it that I blew it. Can you conceive how rare it was for a pilot to ride back there?

Notes on Anderson AFB Guam: Anderson sits at the northwest corner of the island on a cliff 600 feet above the ocean. It was pretty cool having 600 feet below you as soon as you left the runway. The base had one of the most beautiful beaches in the world full of nothing but men. The capital city of Agana was only a few miles away and it was kind of a non-event. Full of round brown natives that didn't care for GIs, there were only a couple of places to eat or drink. The whole island was boring unless they were having a typhoon. The power generating station on base had a sign saying "Last Power Outage ___ Days". This did not inspire confidence, whatever the intent was. It was hot and wet all the time and it seemed to rain for a while every day. The place was full of about 600 officers TDY there for the war, and we lived mostly five in a room designed for two. Most of the construction was massive concrete designed to stay in place during the typhoons.

"Peace is Our Profession" was the official motto of SAC. While bombing in Vietnam, the crews added, "War is Just Our Hobby".

When we got there the staff treated us like we didn't know anything at all and seemed to be afraid to let us fly without instructors, but they finally did and we got fifteen combat missions in sixty days. I later learned that that was far less than average, and we spent a lot more time than average with ground duties because we were new. Duty crew was spent coloring taxi plans. (Honest to God! Something a grade-schooler could have done.) Taxi crew required the A/C and I to move the big birds around the ramp while the rest of the crew had time off. These duties went a long way to firm up my low opinion of staff officers since they had us doing things they should have been able to do for themselves.

Please refer to "The Eleven Days of Christmas" by Marshall L. Michel III to see what the staff and SAC HQ did during the war. Although the book is really about a time period when I had left SAC, the procedures, attitudes, and stresses on the crews still apply.

We actually wasted a lot of time on foolishness, but in the end we got three months of combat pay and an Air Medal! That was pretty cool! We also got the Vietnam Service Medal and the National Defense Medal, so I actually had enough ribbons on my uniform that I didn't look like the new guy. I previously earned the Longevity ribbon and the Expert Pistol ribbon so I had two rows of ribbons! I was almost a hero.

The combat pay was $45 a month. Pretty puny for letting people shoot at you, but you also got a $200 a month tax deduction, which just about doubled it. The missions themselves ran about twelve hours, but we often had four hours of briefings, preflight and other preparation to do beforehand, so a sixteen-hour day was common. After landing we would de-brief for an hour or so and then go to "Gilligan's Island" for a second de-brief, sometimes called a "safety meeting".

Gilligan's Island was a small area in a nearby parking lot that had a native selling hot dogs and beer from a van. We sat in a shaded area among some palm trees and drank away the accumulated tension and ate hot dogs. After that it was easy to fall into bed. I think this was when I picked up the habit of liking to have a beer after flying.

While I'm telling war stories, we flew two missions out of Guam where we lost an engine immediately after takeoff. We were under radio

B-52

I flew BBUF 083 into North Vietnam and now it sits on display at the Air Force Academy.

silence, so we didn't say anything, but just pressed on. It usually took about 45 minutes to climb to 35,000 feet, but with an engine out, it takes about an hour and a half. We declared an emergency when we talked to the tower for a safe landing more than eleven hours later. This is when I started saying, "Cheated Death again!" after flying, a sense of humor my later flight attendant friends would not share.

My first flight over North Vietnam on May 8th 1968 in aircraft 6616 was memorable. Instead of survival vests, SAC crews wore "chaps" containing the same vital stuff you would need if you had to eject. In my opinion, the chaps would be stripped off during the opening shock of the parachute, and I scrounged my own vest and stocked it with extra personal stuff too.

The chaps were a pain in the ass to put on, and after our training was over, none of my crew ever wore one again unless we were going North! (I always wore mine, not wanting to be floating down thinking, "Gee, I sure wish I had all that good stuff…") So on this day after flying four hours to the air refueling area and spending about an hour refueling, we all had our survival gear on. We drove another hour or so to the target and the EWO called for silence on the interphone so that he could better hear the enemy radar that would announce the launch of a SAM, Surface to Air Missile. This was about the only time the EWO had any real respect. He and the EWOs in the other two bombers in our cell were doing random jamming of the frequencies used by the SAMs, causing the radar screens below to blossom off and on uncontrollably. The tension was palpable throughout the entire aircraft.

We dropped our bombs from about 30,000 feet, rippling them off in about two seconds and then executing a smart two g left turn, feeling the unusual heavy weight and never actually flying over North Vietnam. The fifty-degree bank turn was a procedure left over from outdated high altitude nuclear delivery, designed to have us tail-on to the ensuing very large shock wave from the bomb. Unfortunately, it also increased our radar profile and dimmed our radar jammers because

of the geometry of the antenna locations, but SAC did not change their procedures easily. The staff always knew best. Basically we threw the bombs about four miles and ran. I was happy with the concept at the time. A single BUF is no real match for a SAM, and they were there! After that we climbed to 45,000 feet and flew another six hours home. We landed without incident, cheating Death again.

This is a good time to talk about the way all the forces worked together to get the job done. We were hauling the bombs, but other "Wild Weasel" aircraft were ready to launch a missile at any radar antenna that powered up. Fighters were available if they launched an enemy fighter. Tankers got us the gas to get to the target and would be available if further need arose on the way back to Guam. Helicopters would be scrambled if we had to bail out and the Navy had surface ships that would speed to the rescue too. All the components danced together to make it work to deliver bombs on target, usually for the benefit of the Army's ground forces.

While flying out of Guam, I met CA Smith, Bill Records' Aircraft Commander. Bill had been at UPT with me, and CA was just larger than life. He would arm wrestle anyone, and win. He was an Aggie, a Texas A & M graduate and a hell of a pilot. His co-pilot Bill would go on to be the First Officer surviving the United DC-10 crash in Souix City. That aircraft had complete flight control failure, and the crew managed a controlled crash using only the throttles for controls. It was a heroic effort that saved most of the passenger's lives and cost Bill painful burns. CA would go on to fly a very battle damaged B-52 out of a forward Marine base in Thailand. It is much too long to go into detail about here and is covered later in the chapter on Bien Hoa.

One time we had the temperature control fail to the full hot position. We basically sat in a sauna for about eleven hours with the temperature estimated at about 120 degrees. We stripped down to underwear, helmets, boots and gloves (because the switches were too hot to touch). The boomer in the KC-135 may have commented to his own crew about our uniform during refueling since he could see us in our cockpit, but we never heard anything about it on the radio or afterward. During descent, it rained the sweat we lost in the cockpit as the warmer air outside melted the ice against the aircraft skin. We landed safely and cheated Death again.

Terri was due with our second child about a month after I was to return, so we had packed up the house (we didn't have a lot of stuff) and sent her and Heidi home to Phoenix to deliver. I moved into the BOQ, and the whole thing was a cost cutting move. After Henry IV was born on the 20th of May 1967, I very proudly gave out cigars to everyone on alert with me. Then I managed to get some leave and went to Phoenix to retrieve my family.

While in Phoenix I went out to Luke AFB to see if I could scrounge a ride in a fighter and I managed to score an F-100F and an F-104G. Wonderful! It was so easy, and so much fun! Afterward I went to the Friday night Happy Hour that seemed to be universal at all AFB bases and got even happier.

CA Smith's Crew
Second from left is Bill Records then CA. Note the menacing look of the 750 pound bombs above them.

Return to New Hampshire
1968

Then it was back to NH. My father-in-law, Harold Conner, had decided to give us his wife's old T-Bird. It would be nice to have a second car for Terri to drive anytime she wanted, but he "gave" it with the condition that we had to give it back if we decided to sell it. Her family was weird that way. In any case, we drove all the way to NH by way of Detroit, again.

This time we decided to rent a place off base, and it was a nice little New England style home. The bad news was that our Wing fell into the rhythm of spending the winter in NH and the summers in Guam. It was nasty cold in NH in the winter. One year we had four feet of snow followed by two feet more later in the same week. I shoveled and the kids bundled up to where you didn't think they could bend over.

Terri and I had never really discussed the roles we would play in our marriage, but what we ended up with was this: I worked outside the home, and she worked inside it. She took care of the kids, and I went to war. I'm not saying it was right or wrong; it was just the way it was. It was just the way it was for my father and grandfathers too. I didn't have time to think of anything different in any case.

I'd like to point out that about this time women started burning their bras. "Free love" was happening in the universities and especially in San Francisco. None of this was doing me any good. The Women's Lib movement actually had kind of a negative effect on many women. Sure, it got you a more equal salary, but men didn't know whether to open the door for them or offer to split the dinner bill. We were flat confused about what women wanted. And it would never get much better for me, although my guessing percentages steadily improved over the years.

Women's Lib did have kind of an unintended effect on men. It eventually made it OK for men to stay home with the kids and led to it being OK to cry in movies too. It was gradually becoming possible for men to be sensitive and caring without being gay. It was still too late for me, however, and I don't mean about being gay either. It was too late for me to be able to show my sensitive side.

Deploying home, loading our bags on one of our KC-135s

The B-52A through G models were water injected. (The H model has turbo fan engines with lots of thrust and increased range too.) The older birds had 2000 pounds of demineralized water injected into the engines to increase the thrust for takeoff. It was kind of a Rube Goldberg system, but it worked almost all the time. But if the temperature went below 34 degrees, we had to go out to the bird and drain the water out so that it didn't freeze the pipes and break them. Then when it went above 34 degrees the next morning, you went back to the airplane to reload the water. (Take off performance when it was freezing was OK without the water because the engines produce more thrust when it's cold.) Anyway, the birds would all have two patches of very slippery ice under the wings where the water drained, and it always seemed to happen at dinner, or during

a poker game, or some other inconvenient time, never during class. Two of us crewmembers had to go because of the No Lone Zone around the weapons, an extension of the two-man policy in use with all nuclear devices, so instead of being a pain in the ass to do, it was a pain in two men's asses.

In December, our crew had the "best bombs" in the ORI inspection, and everyone was thrilled with us. Our RN, Bruce Smith, had beaten everyone, not only in our wing, but in all the other wings too. The rest of us just helped, but we got credit too. Flying is a team sport in heavy aircraft.

How about a flying story or two? The B-52 had a lot of engines, but they didn't produce a lot of thrust. This meant that you could lose one and still press on with the mission, and it seemed that we often lost one fairly often. Actually, if we lost one on a training mission, we landed as soon as possible, but in combat, we pressed on. Altogether, I have over fifty hours of flying time with at least one engine shut down.

This is the SAC patch. It has a mailed fist holding lightening and an olive branch to symbolize war and peace. Not shown is the crew scrotum which should be dangling from it.

A long day in the BBUF
24 August 1967

We had to get up entirely too early to take off at dawn, but taking off in a B-52 is enough to insure that you are alert. Sam pushes the throttles up to just below take off power, and I turn on the water injection. This squirts demineralized water into the engines and that cools the turbine inlet temperatures (the most critical area) and increases the mass outflow at the same time. If it malfunctions it may blow the engine out, but that is fairly rare.

All eight take the water OK, Sam pushes up more throttle, I call out "Eighty knots!", and the R/N starts the acceleration check time. He will call us about ten seconds later and we check our airspeed to make sure we have enough power to take off. If the speed is good, we are committed to take off even if we lose an engine. Even if we don't lose an engine, we will use more than 10,000 feet of our 12,000 foot runway. We rotate at 148 knots and ease it off the ground. I pull the landing gear up and we retract the flaps in a long level acceleration at 1000 feet altitude. Flap retraction is tricky, because there are airspeed limits that change as the flaps move, and you must accelerate without over speeding the flaps or stalling.

Having achieved the air, we head west from Pease to air refuel just south of Lake Erie.

Let's talk about air refueling. The KC-135 and the B-52 are both very large aircraft, and they are not nimble like smaller birds. We would execute a "rejoin" about 25,000 feet altitude by heading toward each other with an offset of about four miles, and then the tanker would start his turn. If the navigators did it correctly, the tanker would roll out in front of us, about a thousand feet above and two to three miles ahead. We would catch it and climb at the same time and eventually be about thirty feet behind and below it with airspeeds matched at about 280 knots.

The tanker's boom operator would fly the boom into our waiting receptacle, but he would not do it if you were not stable in the envelope. After contact, the director lights on the bottom of the KC-135 would light up to show your position within the refueling envelope, and it got a little easier. The trick was to make small corrections as soon as you saw the aircraft starting to move out of position, otherwise it was very difficult. This meant you had to watch the tanker very, very closely for the smallest of movements the entire time you were in contact. It requires intense concentration for about 45 minutes to get your offload on one of these missions.

We hook up, both Sam and I get a little contact time, and I pass control back over to him just as we are finishing so that I can check the fuel totalizer and insure that we have all the fuel we are supposed to have. Suddenly, we feel violent vibrations in the aircraft. "Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam!" It compares to the noise and violence one might expect if the boomer was beating our aircraft with his boom, and almost immediately we get a radio call from him, "Breakaway, breakaway, breakaway! Your number three engine is shooting fire from both ends!"

This is pretty exciting information, and we pull the throttles to idle and drop away from the tanker. Sure enough, number three had seized, showing zero rpm and the big red FIRE light is on, and we swiftly shut it down. The noise was caused by the engine going from thousands of rpm to zero in a second or so. The gunner tells us (he has a great view of it) that it is still burning, so we shut down number four engine along with number three in accordance with procedure. A few minutes later this causes a momentary loss of pressurization as well until I switch to an alternate bleed air source, an easy procedure not even requiring a checklist.

We went to recurrent training every three years to experience insidious loss of pressurization so that we could recognize the symptoms. I knew it right away, but I was also surprised to find that

The tanker as seen from the pre contact position.

it made me angry, and very swiftly too. Maybe it was low blood sugar in with the loss of oxygen to the brain; anyway, I was furious that the aircraft would betray me like that.

In spite of this, I discover that I am calm during emergencies at that moment, and would remain so during my career. I switch the primary radio back to the Air Traffic Control frequency and say, "Cleveland Center, do you still read Tango 21?" wondering if I am still within his range. When he replies "Affirmative", I say, "This is Tango 21. We're on fire, and have two engines shut down. We'd like to descend to try to blow the fire out."

The controller was on top of things. He says, "Roger, Tango 21 cleared to descend and maneuver as necessary. All other aircraft this frequency change to (another frequency), I have an emergency field ten miles from your position heading 240 degrees, 4000 feet of reinforced asphalt." Well, we couldn't use that puny field for sure, and it turned out that what we had was the oil in that engine continuing to burn for about twenty minutes. We wouldn't know that until after landing, so we were pretty worried about it burning into the wing and either blowing us up or having to eject or both. The fire was on Sam's side of the aircraft, and he and the gunner couldn't take their eyes off of it. Sam would push the nose down, build up some speed, take his eyes off the instruments to look over his shoulder and out the window and the pitch trim would catch up with the bird and we would go back up. This happened repeatedly, and I wanted to tell Sam to just watch the damn thing and let me fly but I didn't.

Eventually we get things sorted out and return to Pease and hold in the local area for about four hours to burn fuel down to landing weight. There is no fuel dump capability on the B-52. We could have jettisoned the two tip tanks, each of which holds about 20,000 pounds of fuel, but that would have been kind of expensive. In the long run, we push the six good engines up as high as we could and pulled on partial spoilers to keep the airspeed within limits. We lost that engine right at 450,000 pounds gross weight, and believe me, it takes a long time to burn off 100,000 pounds of JP-4,

especially if you only have six engines running…

We run checklists and talk with everyone on the radio. Maintenance, SAC Headquarters, command post, everyone has an interest in our safety. Well, maybe not our safety, but the safety of the aircraft. We finally land uneventfully with the crash trucks rushing after us just as it is getting dark. Just another lousy day at work, but cheated Death again…

An emergency is supposed to be a few moments of terror followed by resolution of some kind. What hellish kind of emergency lasts four hours fifty-five minutes and still results in you being physically and emotionally drained? The B-52 is an incredible amount of work and a pain in the ass as well.

Much of this travail was caused by SAC itself. The B-52 is designated a "strategic resource", a very expensive piece of hardware with a specific place in the arsenal. We built 744 of them, and the staff worried about each one like it was an only son. The typical way to get into the staff is to screw up as a crew member, so you have a bunch of guys who couldn't cut it telling guys who can what to do. The best spin I can put on this is that we were still deeply involved in cold war thinking and had to be ready to launch as many nuclear loaded bombers as we could to ensure the uneasy peace.

As long as I'm ranting, SAC's idea of career progression for crewmembers involved spending your entire career as a "combat crew" I actually have a silver nametag and a medal I received for that! We had Lieutenant Colonels with no other job than to sit alert and drive airplanes around. It was just sad, and there seemed to be no way out. Maybe I'm still mad about the treacherous aircraft depressurizing on me.

On the very next flight, four days later while flying low level navigation (done at about 1000 feet above the ground), I noticed that the right tip tank fuel read zero, and glanced out the window to discover that the whole tank was gone, all 20,000 pounds of it! I guess it just fell off somewhere over New York state, but no one ever complained or reported it. I fed the fuel from the remaining drop tank to all engines to balance the airplane and hours later we finally landed safely. Sometimes flying was just a series of strange things happening.

U Tapao AB Thailand
1968-1969

Historical note: *Khe Sahn was under attack in early 1969. The Marines at this forward base in the northwest corner of South Vietnam were under attack for 77 days. I flew missions in relief of their siege and I understand they stood on the bunkers and cheered as the BBUFs chewed up the nearby landscape and the enemy at the same time. We killed an awful lot of the enemy at this location, but it was viewed as a defeat since we later abandoned the site.*

The navigator is pulling safety pins from the external bombs while the gunner pushes him around. It gives you an idea of the size of the aircraft and of the bombs.

I liked the summers better even though it meant I was away from my children. And I loved the children even though I had trouble expressing it. They were both bright and affectionate, and little Hank was a total lover. Being away from Terri allowed me to avoid having to deal with the fact that our marriage was falling apart. After the first tour, we found that the B-52 also deployed to Kadena AB Okinawa and to U Tapao Thailand. We flew six days and then rested one while we were in Thailand because the missions were about four hours instead of twelve. I loved to fly, and I loved the feeling that I was making a difference. I loved drinking with the boys afterward too. We drank a lot.

Notes on Thailand: Hot and wet. We lived four to a trailer designed for one person, but they had air conditioning. Not far away was Pattiya Beach, a resort area with good food and scuba diving and real civilians on vacation. Central Jewelers would pick us up and take us to Bangkok if we had a few days off. They seemed to know when it would happen before we did. More good news was that the missions out of U Tapao were only four hours long, and you didn't need to air refuel at all.

After our 100th mission, the Wing Commander met our aircraft and gave out 100 mission certificates to the gunner and me. By this time (surprise!) I had another A/C, Major Paul Hennings. He had just returned from an F-4 tour in Vietnam and was none too happy to be back in combat. He was new in the B-52, and like the last guy, needed a copilot who could air refuel. Paul had been in a B-47 fire many years ago, and his left arm was still scarred by it. It was smaller and weaker than the other, and he found it physically difficult to refuel with the high stick forces necessary for the 45-minute contact it took to offload about 105,000 pounds of gas. I was the man for the job

again. I never had an inadvertent disconnect from the tanker, never ever in my career.

I didn't know it, none of us did, but SAC (Strategic Air Command. Motto: If you got 'em by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow.) had decided to close the 509th Bomb Wing again and refit it with the newer swing-wing supersonic FB-111. They were also taking the B-58 Hustler out of service, and the idea was to keep their supersonic force crewed by the elite. To save some nickels and dimes, they sent only men who were on their way out of the Air Force to Pease because they had no intention of retraining us peons as select FB-111 pilots. This meant no new copilots again, since all the junior guys would owe the AF years of service for their training. We got more senior officers, about to retire or likely to leave the AF, and they were to be Aircraft Commanders. So I got to stay a copilot forever, always training a new boss. Some of my classmates from other Wings were already instructor pilots in the BBUF. I was behind and I hadn't even had a chance. That sucked the big one.

100th Mission

Sergeant Martell and I are shown with the Wing Commander, still wet from our dousing with the fire hose.

The Secretary of Defense, Robert F. MacNamara, was very proud of the F-111. It was designed to be a fighter and a bomber, and as a result, it did not do either very well. What else would you expect from the guy that tried to build a wall to keep the North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam and produced the Ford Edsel when he was a civilian?

Anyway, Paul Hennings, another of the good guys, was the A/C when we went over 100 missions on 30 March 1969 in ship 5064. The Wing CO presented us with a piece of paper. Along with that certificate was a chit for a bottle of champagne at the Officers' Club. We landed just after dawn, and went straight there for breakfast with champagne. Some staff weenie officer had also been onboard with us, getting his monthly combat pay, and he and the A/C and the navigators bought bottles too. Six bottles of champagne later, it was time for lunch. We stayed at the same table, in the same sweaty flight suits, and switched to beer and burgers. Before we knew it, it was happy hour, and so we started to drink for real.

Well, about eight pm someone told us that we had a midnight briefing for a flight. I went straight to my trailer and flopped into bed for three hours of sleep. Paul and I were just starting to feel hung over during the briefing, and the other four crewmembers (who had not lasted as long at the bar as we had) were eyeing us suspiciously, but they decided that they trusted us (making me proud!) and we went ahead and flew uneventfully. After this mission I went straight to bed until the next briefing. I need to clarify that I was proud that they trusted us, not of being drunk. Only once in my life did something good happen from my drinking too much. All the other times were a waste of time, money, and brain cells.

Paul and I were together one night over Laos, the second of May 1969 in5063, headed east to bomb the Mhu Ghia pass in North Vietnam at 40,000 feet when we noticed antiaircraft (AA) fire at altitude near us. It looked like black flowers against the partially moonlit haze. The EWO assured us they were firing without guidance, just trying to pot something they knew was coming, I guess. We pressed on and dropped our bombs in North Vietnam, and then reported it after we landed.

The intelligence officer didn't believe us because the altitude was very high for AA fire. However, their 100mm system would throw it that high, if it went nearly straight up, and the mountains around the pass gave them another

several thousand feet of altitude to launch from. Anyway, he looked at the record of our combat missions and disdainfully asked how many combat flights we had. Well, I had over a hundred, and Paul had about three hundred counting his F-4 tour, but our crew records only said thirty or so. In any case, he didn't believe us and didn't report it as credible. You see why I despised staff weenies? Fortunately, we never lost an airplane from that kind of antiaircraft fire. Again, please refer to "The Eleven Days of Christmas". The staff always felt they knew more than the crews even though they didn't fly as much, and yet we knew how they got their jobs. By screwing up!

Underneath the bomb bay during one of *the frequent rains.*

Kadena AB Okinawa
1968-1969

Historical note: *Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong walk on the moon in 1969!*

Okinawa was about an eight-hour mission, a distinct relief from the twelve hours on Guam. They were also air refueled, and once I made the suggestion to change the bomb load out of Okinawa (removing the external bombs) and to fly the missions unrefueled, saving an equal number of tanker sorties as well as some fuel for us. It was denied, and I don't know why. Some kind of reverse logic, I'm sure, like keeping the sortie rate up.

Paul and I were returning to Okinawa when he told me of a hydraulic failure on the number one pack (the left seat pilot has all the hydraulic system controls and the anti-ice, while the right seat has control of all the rest of the systems), and also of the failure of the related standby pump. I had been sleeping, and I just told him to run the checklist. When he again told me there was no pressure there, I woke up for sure and ran both checklists with him. It looked like we were going to land with the left front gear in the up position since there was no hydraulic power to it.

We went over the situation again, since such a landing is pretty chancy. Both pump failure checklists ended with "pull the applicable circuit breaker" to avoid loss of hydraulic fluid to the other system. I told Paul to push them back in, because the gear surely would not come down with both systems disabled, and there was no point in saving hydraulic fluid for the brakes if the wheel wasn't going to extend anyway. Checklists are not generally designed for multiple failures, and if you have them, you have to use your judgment. Well, Paul pushed them back in, and when it came time to put the gear down, they all showed safe except for that one. I declared an emergency and proceeded to try to stare the gear down. The R/N downstairs did the same with his optical bombsight. A long few minutes later it went straight from "up" to "down and locked" with a thump. You could feel the relief in the crew as I cancelled the emergency, and we landed safely. I think one of the systems generated just enough pressure to open the up locks and then it just fell down hard enough to engage the down locks. I know it would not have descended if we had followed the checklists.

I had radioed "Charlie", a supposedly highly qualified IP, with the news of our impending gear up landing and gotten no sympathy or wisdom from him. After it was over, he didn't even ask how we got the gear down, he just said "roger", as if he had known all along that it was no real problem. I was going to find him and kill him for his casual treatment of our emergency, but the A/C talked me out of it. After all, Charlie himself was perfectly safe the whole time in the tower. F-word staff weenie!

Notes on Okinawa: Wet, but not too hot. Once when positioning for take off, it rained so hard that we began to slide sideways off the crowned runway toward the edge. Now that was really scary: we were sliding out of control with a bomber full of fuel and bombs. Wow. We finally got it slowed enough to stop the hydroplaning and continued on with the mission. Kadena AB had the best quarters of all the places we went, with only four men in places designed for two. Also the best shopping! Seiko watches for twenty bucks. Kobi beef dinners for about five bucks. It must have been left over from WWII, because you can't approach those prices in Japan now.

A Japanese "hotsi" bath and massage was cheap too. It was most pleasant to get a steam bath and have the girl soap you up and massage you nearly to sleep. It was not a sexual thing, although you could get the "happy ending" at some of the places. One of my buddies once told

This B-52D is raining its 108 bombs on the jungle.

me that he had been here for months before he knew that "Hai, dozo" meant anything besides "wash your own dick"! It really means "yes, please", but "hai" also is an attention getting word, and the massage girl usually said that when she wanted you to wash your own genitals.

A new EW asked me to teach him some Japanese before we deployed, and I gave him a word a day for a few days. The first was "haiyako", meaning "faster", and he went off repeating haiyako over and over to himself. The next was "tak sahn", meaning "more", and he went off saying "haiyako tak sahn". The third was "konichiwa", meaning "good afternoon", and he again retreated singing "haiyako tak sahn konichiwa!" On day four I was busy and kind of out of words, so I told him a word that is the same in Japanese as English. "F-word", I said. I will never forget him chanting, "haiyako-tak-sahn-konichiwa-f-word!", and I just can't imagine what a Japanese speaker would think of it.

I always flew extra sorties when I had the opportunity. On 29 July I flew with a Major Green. He was a stan-eval IP (almost a staff weenie) and was from a G model wing, getting his first combat experience. His copilot was sick (maybe he was just sick of Major Green) and I was the man for the job. He briefed me: don't touch the throttles, don't talk on the radio, and don't talk on the interphone. I didn't get it. HE was the new guy, not me. I said, "Look, I don't have to go at all if you don't want me", and watched him backpedal. We delivered the bombs, and on the way home I showed him how to run the fuel panel (different from the G model) and pretty much ignored him. I was doing him a favor and he treats me like that? Some people.

Sometimes we had "hung" bombs that had not released. This was always kind of scary, because I wasn't sure that they would malfunction again and drop off or even become armed and blow up. In fact, one day I reported a hung bomb on the right pylon, right up front where I could see it, but when I looked at it later, it was gone, somewhere over Thailand. We never heard anything about it, and I guess some monkey had a 750-pound surprise; hopefully it had not armed and exploded.

That kind of bomb arms mechanically. If

dropped live, the arming wires are retained in the aircraft, and a wire pulls out of two fuses in the front and rear of the bomb. That permits a little propeller to turn in the wind, and after so many rotations the fuses and thus the bomb are "armed" to explode on contact, or sometimes after a short delay.

Another time the navigator reported three hung bombs lying on the bomb bay doors after landing in Okinawa. They might have been hung at one time, but they had clearly dropped onto the doors after we had shut them and could very well have been armed! We shut it down right there at the end of the runway in the disarm area and left it for maintenance and ordnance to take care of. It had been my landing, and I was really glad it had been one of those beauties that you could hardly feel! My expression is "just painted it on the runway". We never did hear whether those bombs on the doors were armed or not; they certainly could have been, as drafty as the bomb bay is.

My last and favorite A/C, was Major Bill Martin. He had been an enlisted man, gone through the "Boot Strap" program to become an officer, and was due to retire after our return from my last six month tour flying Arc Light. His son was just graduating from high school and would go on to attend the Air Force Academy and pilot training and would later be Killed In Action in Vietnam. At least Bill had five other children to ease the sting of his mourning.

Our crew was Crew of the Quarter sometime in 1969, and as a reward we all got to boondoggle to the Academy to see the cadet squadron we sponsored (courtesy of some high initiative work I had done to get us a squadron in the first place). Shortly after that, the Wing started to disband.

I can't end my story of flying combat in the B-52 without mentioning Captain Ed Wyatt's crew. The only other name of the six that I can remember is that of the co-pilot, John Albasio. They were part of the 509th Bomb Wing, deployed with us the summer of 1969, and they launched on a night mission and just disappeared from radar shortly after takeoff. The General at Andersen AFB briefed us the next morning with his suspicion that Ed had become disoriented and flown the aircraft into the water. Pilot error. A few weeks later the accident investigation board agreed with the General, (No surprise there, the F-word staff agreeing with their

Major Bill Martin's hard working crew of the Quarter and a bunch of staff weenies that did not do anything.

boss) and we in the 509th were all offended. Ed had just passed his instrument check as highly qualified, and it seemed most unlikely to us troops.

Just days after that "pilot error" decision, my friend and 21st squadron classmate Tom Meier was sitting on the end of the runway as "hot spare" in case one of the strike birds had to cancel for some kind of maintenance. He watched an aircraft take off, and then saw the right wing come off right at the joint with the fuselage in a great spray of fuel. It went down with all hands in an instant; just too similar to what probably happened to Ed Wyatt and crew.

Think about these poor bastards for a moment. They have just taken off, flown over the edge of the cliff and got another 600 feet of altitude underneath them, giving them maybe 700 feet above the water, and bam! The wing tears off! I don't know how much noise that made in the cockpit, certainly more than the noises my engine made when it seized, years earlier, but it must have gotten the crew's attention. The nose falls immediately because you have lost half your lift, and the cockpit rotates to the right, faster than any B-52 has ever rolled. The aircraft enters a spin with unknown g forces throwing the crew around. The ejection seat systems need 500 feet of altitude to work safely, so any delay at all will result in certain death. If the pilot flying had instinctively tried to fly the bird instead of instantly ejecting, it was too late. None of them reacted swiftly enough, and they all died in less time than it takes to tell it.

We never heard if they even attempted to eject. The Air Force should have sent divers down to investigate the wreck, maybe salvage the bombs and extract the bodies, but I never heard about it. Maybe the water was too deep (unlikely, I think, so near the island), and they are still strapped in their seats almost forty years later as the fuel tanks slowly pollute the Pacific. Almost certainly Ed Wyatt and his crew remain on the sea bottom not far away.

Moments later, Tom was directed to launch to take the downed aircraft's place in the stream as if nothing had happened. After the flight they tried to get him to change his story of what he saw because it wasn't something they wanted to hear, and he was the sole witness, but he stood firm. I already generally despised staff officers, and this event just put me over the top.

A couple of weeks after that, we were told of an inspection of the aircraft wings and a subsequent replacement of some I-beams inside them, but the aircraft were never grounded while this took place. I flew only two more heavy weight takeoffs from Guam after that, and I can tell you I was ready to eject in both cases. The results of Wyatt's "pilot error" accident board were never changed. I wish I could remember his crew's names to memorialize them here for you. I vividly remember the padlock they put on the crew's trailer, and the chill it gave me. (MIA/KIAs always had their quarters padlocked, not just locked. They would drill new holes in the door for the padlock, and it would stay until the man's possessions were inventoried and sent home. They were also quietly censored to remove things like girlie magazines or letters from the wrong woman.)

Combat flying in the B-52 was hard work, long hours and little reward. And there was that very real chance of dying too. With typical dark humor, we said, "hundreds of long hours of boredom relieved by moments of stark terror".

If you read Catch 22, and I recommend it to you, it is very like real war, except that the incredulity is taken up a notch. I have found that in many cases the truth is stranger than fiction. So having read it, you will know that every time Yosarrian's crew got close to completing their tour and going home, the Army raised the number of missions required to do that. We had something pretty similar. Most of the combat I flew in the B-52 didn't count as a "combat tour". This meant that I wasn't eligible to go to any of the schools I needed in order to advance my career. The Air Force had new personnel policies that tried to direct all pilots to Vietnam and not letting anyone without a combat tour go to school was seen as motivating those hiding from combat into action. This was clearly not my case, but SAC did not agree with the AF policy and did not mind screwing their crew members even a little. SAC had me by the balls again!

I wanted to go to grad school and get on with my life. I had volunteered for Vietnam duty (for a "real" combat tour) ever since I was stationed

in Texas, but SAC kept me because they were closing the unit, and it would be inconvenient for them to move a replacement here only to have to move him again. It was just impossible to have anything resembling a career while being caged up as copilot. So I quit. I put in my papers to become a civilian, and I was just marking time, waiting for the day with general plans of returning to Phoenix to work for Garret Aircraft there.

One day the Wing Commander tracked me down, and offered me a fighter assignment to Vietnam. He promised me an F-4 if I pulled my resignation paperwork. After only a small amount of thinking and discussion with my wife, I agreed. I really did want to be a hero, and about a month later I received my assignment to the A-37. It wasn't the promised F-4, but I didn't even bother to complain. I was going to be a fighter pilot! I should not have complained either. The F-4 tour would probably have been as a "GIB", the Guy In Back, sort of another co-pilot tour, and I would have hated it.

In the end, SAC would leave its curse upon me anyway. I had lost three or four years of my productive career as a junior officer in the black hole of the 509th Bomb Wing and I would now forever be competing with my classmates who had actually accomplished things while I had marked time as a co-pilot. And I would be directed back to SAC sometime after I finished with the A-37. While the future was grim, I was still excited about flying my fighter!

Fighter Pilot! Flying the A-37
1970-1971

Historical note: *In 1970 we started bombing in Cambodia. It was about time, that's where the enemy was. I was surprised, just as I was when I learned we were bombing Laos in the B-52, and we were asked to keep the information to ourselves. The world would find out soon enough, and the VC couldn't complain, or they would have to admit to being there. I didn't understand the wisdom of not telling, but I obeyed.*

So I left SAC with 172 combat missions over three tours in South East Asia in a three-year period. I had over 3000 hours in the B-52 including over 1300 in combat, but had never even gotten close to being senior enough to be an aircraft commander. I had earned ten Air Medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross. I was so glad to go I'm not sure I can tell you. SAC sucked, but I was free! "Free at last, free at last, great God in heaven, free at last!" (Martin Luther King Jr.)

Of course, I wasn't really free. My assignments would go from A-37s to graduate school in Phoenix to teaching at the Academy, and after that, I would be recycled to SAC. But that was years in the future, and I wouldn't dwell on it now. I was free!

Terri and the kids again went to Phoenix. I would be TDY to Myrtle AFB SC to fly the AT-33 in lead-in fighter training, and then to England AFB LA to check out in the A-37. Then I would be headed for Vietnam, pretty much assured of a follow-on assignment to grad school at Arizona State University, also in Phoenix, so things would be as easy on her as possible.

So I was still playing with the boys even though I was married. I was alone except for other men during my combat tours and during alert (about 30% of the time we were not in combat), making me solo about eight months a year. I would also be stag during these three TDYs.

The fighter check out actually started with a quick TDY to Homestead AFB FL for five days of water survival school with a return to Pease. Among other things, we parasailed in a parachute off the only boat in the Air Force into Biscayne Bay south of Miami and paddled around in the ocean for a few hours before being plucked out of the water by a helicopter. Fun with the big boys!

It was while boarding the airliner in the Boston airport enroute to Miami that I ran into my first war protester. At least I think that would have been how she would have identified herself. It was 1970. Future President Bill Clinton was in England studying and avoiding combat and future Presidential candidate John Kerry was in front of Congress calling us "war criminals", based on his four months of experience in Vietnam. I was wearing my uniform with three rows of ribbons showing my service to our country. It was required to travel in uniform in those days, a regulation left over from WWII. During WWII they still had signs that said "White Only" and "No Military", and wearing the uniform enabled them to discriminate. On board the airplane some hippy looking college coed type confronted me and called me a "baby killer" and then spit on me.

I have always been slow to anger; a good thing, I think. I was more mystified than irate to begin with, and I was still trying to understand what had happened when two stewardesses grabbed each of us and turned us around. They put me up in first class, and that was enough to satisfy me. The bimbo went to the back somewhere, and I never saw her again, but I suspect she still thinks she is a hero, instead of being lucky to have her very own original teeth.

Forty some years later I discovered that Terri had also experienced anti-military bias. She never told me that she had asked some kids with a snow blower to clear her driveway in Exeter, NH after our four-foot snow fall while I was on alert. They had refused to take her money because

"your husband is in the Air Force". I guess it was good that she hadn't told me, because I would have been at them and their fathers in a heartbeat. They should have been doing it for free! F-word-commie-pinko-liberal-NewEngland-draft dodging-expletive deleted-little pricks! I am still irate about the disrespect shown to the wife of a combat veteran. Who taught them their manners? In the heart of politically correct New England, they treated black people better than servicemen.

I started my fighter refresher at Myrtle AFB SC in January of 1970 with seven flights in the T-33A and six flights in the AT-33A. This last model could shoot a 50 cal machine gun as well as drop practice bombs. It was lots of fun compared to the BBUF, even though it was slow and underpowered and was nearly as difficult to start as a piston engine. But it was just great fun to fly formation again and drop ordnance and strafe on the range. Real flying!

A37 Stud

Real Fighter Pilot. Note how small the aircraft is, especially compared to the B-52.

At the end of February I started with the A-37B. This was the newest aircraft I had ever flown since they were built just for close air support in Vietnam. Some of them actually had that "new car" smell. It was really a remake of the T-37B, outfitted with more powerful engines from the T-38, reinforced wings, tip tanks, a 7.62 mm mini-gun, and eight under-wing ordnance pylons. The A-37A had actually been converted from old T-37s. It was wonderful for the purpose. It carried as much ordnance (or more) than the F-100, was only about 1/3 the target cross-section size of it, used less gas, and was more accurate. It had two engines and only needed one, it had hydraulic, electric and oxygen systems but it didn't need anything but that one engine to make a safe landing. We took about a third as much combat damage as the F-100 and all their pilots despised it because it wasn't a real fighter. They must have used their egos for brains: a poor substitute. Working from their cue, we despised them too.

This was when I began to notice that I wasn't a Real Fighter Pilot. The kids fresh out of UPT who had never flown anything else almost were, or at least had the possibility of becoming one, and even though I was a much better pilot, I wasn't a Real Fighter Pilot because I had flown heavies. I was discriminated against in subtle ways, but I pretty much ignored it. I had enough ability and experience to get me through however they wanted to treat me. But you really had to fly a century series fighter (this is a fighter from the F-100 to the F-106 range) or the F-4 to be a Real Fighter Pilot. Even the A-1 and A-7 guys were out in the cold with me. But I had been hazed by experts, and I wouldn't let this bother me.

The A-37 and the OV-10 were both treated like unwanted stepchildren. Since they did not advance new technology but instead used existing technology to create safe and efficient military platforms, the USAF did not want to invest much pride or money in them or their pilots, in spite of the terrific job they did in Vietnam. It was better for your career to fly the antique F-100 even if it lessened your chances of survival and did a less efficient job of close air support. The A-37 also cost only $400,000 and was capable of about twice the number of sorties per month. But the US did build 577 A37Bs, of which about half were given to the Vietnamese. Of the total, only 92

were recovered by the US after the fall of Saigon.

This basic school lasted until the end of May. I had about a week in Phoenix with my family and then I was on the way to Vietnam via Clark AFB and another survival school. This one was in the jungle in the Philippines and was cheerfully referred to as "Snake School". It terminated with an exercise where we hid from the native Negritos for an afternoon. This was easy; just get into the darkest, buggiest, wettest, snakiest hole you can find and they will never find you. Just plan on being the nastiest guy in the hole, and give yourself the right attitude. I excelled at all the survival schools. Maybe it was because I took these schools very seriously, and I didn't have to suck up to anyone to pass. Maybe it was because there was little subjective grading, or maybe it was my never-give-up attitude.

Less than five hours later, without even a last night's sleep, I was on my way to Tan Son Nhut AB outside Saigon in the back of a C-130 with a hangover. I complained, but some transportation jackass told me my unit really wanted me. In those days I never flew in a transport aircraft without a hangover. I hitch-hiked a ride to Bien Hoa AB in a jeep and surprised my new unit with my presence. They had no idea I was coming nor did they have any great need for me. (I knew the transportation guy was lying!) They didn't even have a room for me, so I got to stay temporarily in the empty bed of young 1LT Tom Browning who had been shot and was in Hawaii Recovering and Recuperating. He had managed to execute an emergency landing while going in and out of consciousness. His bloody parachute harness with a bullet hole in it hung on the back of the door. I saw it as an omen to get my mind right: you are really not paranoid if they are trying to kill you! I would meet Tom again, 33 years later, when he was a Brigadier General and the military liaison officer from the Governor of Arizona to the Reserve Forces.

I had been assigned to the 604th SOS (Special Operating Squadron) and was kind of surprised to find that by the time I arrived the unit designation had changed to the 8th Attack. This unit had been a B-57 unit, and had a continuous history back to WWI, unlike the 604th, which was brand new, so we changed numbers for historical purposes, but not aircraft or location. Actually, there were three original squadrons, the 604th, the 90th and the 8th, but by 30 September, there was only one, the 8th, and it was again an SOS. Confused? I was. The good news was that we didn't wear patches on our flight suits, so there was no sewing requirement. All of these squadrons were part of the 3rd TFW.

Notes on Vietnam: *It was hot and wet pretty much all the time. The vegetation was mostly jungle, just like the Philippines. After the harvest they tended to clear the fields by burning them, and it made for extra low visibility at times. The aircraft and most of the buildings had revetments around them to limit the damage done by enemy mortar attacks. We had Vietnamese women doing the cleaning and the laundry for a very low wage. We did not use the greenback money from the states. We used military scrip, printed just for Vietnam and not good anywhere else for security reasons that I don't fully remember or understand.*

I had seven flights in nine days and I was cleared solo on the 8th of July, dropping bombs as a wingman. The first two flights were in the right seat "observing". WTF was that for? Hadn't I just passed their school? A week later I was fully qualified. I flew solo most of the time, my bombs were accurate, and life was good. I still wanted to be a hero, and I figured the way to do that was just keep doing your duty.

I dropped bombs, napalm and CBU. Cluster Bomb Units acted like a collection of hand grenades, and they were particularly effective on troops. Napalm worked on almost anything, and it was really easy to score with. Napalm and CBU aren't used by the US any longer. I think the liberals are afraid we will actually kill people. Seriously, I don't get it. Is it more humane to kill them with a big bomb than a little one? Is splattering the enemy with jellied gasoline less painful than blowing an arm off?

The bombs were the most difficult to drop accurately, and the most likely to blow something up into the air where you could fly through it and hurt yourself. The high drag bombs had large clam shell doors that opened upon release and slowed it down so that you could be gone by the time the shrapnel rose up to meet you. They also allowed you to work under a lower ceiling since you dropped at a lower altitude.

We strafed with that .762 mm minigun, but it wasn't very effective on anything at all. It was kind of like using a big shotgun, and it was really easy to hit the target, especially with every fifth round being a tracer bullet, but it needed to be bigger

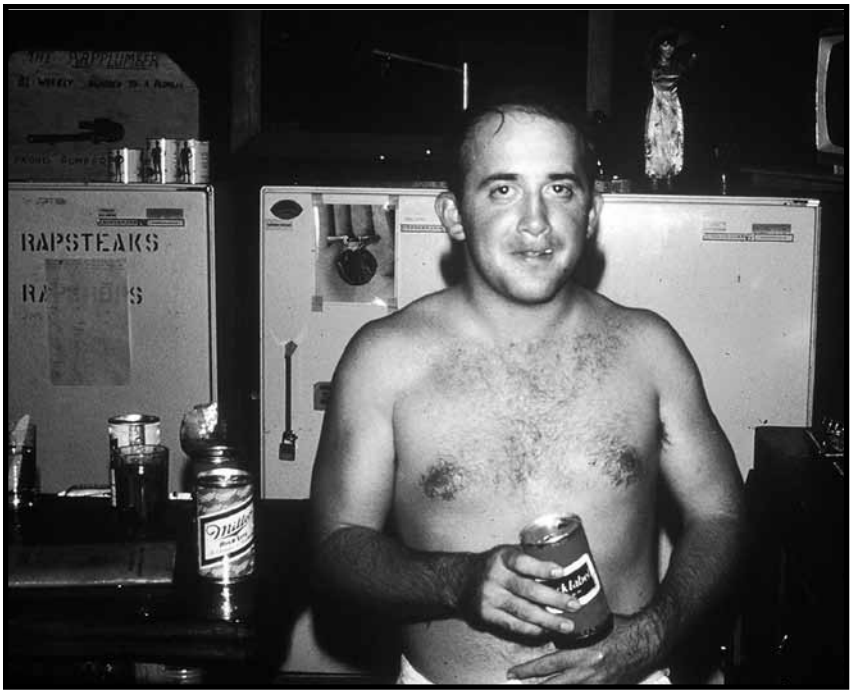
This is where the A-37 and OV-10 pilots lived, with a revetment around the sides and a bomb shelter in the middle. The windows stayed closed and covered all the time to minimize the possible damage from shattered glass from a nearby mortar. Pretty humble quarters.

to annoy anything but people or the occasional boat. The view from the F-100 guys was that you had to put enough lead in them to make them too heavy in order to sink one, but I did see them develop leaks and sink fairly rapidly.

Tom Browning returned from R&R in Hawaii about the same time Doc Montimeyer went back to the states, and I moved across the hall into a single room befitting my status as a fairly senior captain. These were the best quarters I had while flying combat. The toilet and bath were down the hall and the squadron bar was next door behind the wall, but I was all alone, and the air conditioning worked. The Army can have the rape and pillage; give me clean sheets and air conditioning every time!

Next door were two young men I would know the rest of my life. Cort Durocher and John Lamb were both hell-raisers and John ran the bar. John was on his second Vietnam tour, having flown the AC-47 gunship the year before. We met in unfortunate circumstances when he was holding court at the bar, declaiming that he had more combat time than anyone in the unit. I was new and ready to be impressed, so I asked him how much he had. The answer was 500 plus hours, and I nodded and thought and told him I had just over three hundred hours more than twice that.

Well, I got to hear more about Real Fighter



Lambo running the bar during the great Black Label party.

Pilot and B-52s don't count, but the bottom line is to be careful about shooting off your mouth in public. You just don't know who is listening, and you may have to embarrass yourself with a retraction.

The squadron scheduler was a Captain named Jim Dozier. He was very nearly God, because he could give you duty officer or Rap 01. ("Rap" was the call sign of our birds, starting with the first flight of the day and numbered as the day progressed, and duty officer was ground duty and it sucked. We also flew as "Hawk" call sign when we were scrambled from the alert pad.)

I pretty much did as I was told, but after flying all week as Rap 02, I asked him what was going on. Rap 01 all week had been the Wing Commander, Colonel Laliberte, who had just completed an in-country checkout in the A-37. He had been flying the F-100, but those birds were all going home, and A-37s were all there was to fly. Since he was the 800-pound gorilla, he flew what he wanted to, and he wanted to be first up every day. My considered opinion is that he was an asshole, but I didn't care what he flew, I just didn't particularly want to be in the same sky with him all the time. (If I had been a real smart go-getter, I should have been telling him what a wonderful pilot he was and generally sucking up, instead of trying to avoid him.) He told me early on that I wasn't a Real Fighter Pilot, and that all he wanted to hear from me on the radio was "Two" (The response I would make when I understood) or "Lead, you're on fire". This was a standard way to make the new guy feel useless. I had heard it before, and I just considered it an ego statement, making him feel big by making me feel small. I still regret that I didn't get the opportunity to make that second transmission to him. And I'm certainly not sorry about not sucking up.

So I asked Captain Jim what was going on, and he told me that Colonel Asshole had declared the first three wingmen he had flown with as "unqualified", and sent them back for retraining. Laliberte liked his wingman to fly enroute formation where he could easily see them. This meant practically flying in front of him, and not only was it a pain in the ass, it was one of lots of things that could make you unqualified. Jim said that he did not have an unlimited supply of wingmen or instructors to re-qualify them, and since I was cutting it, he had given me a semi-permanent job.

Mai-thuyen in bar.

I was flattered, I guess, and I don't really know if Laliberte got tired of flying Rap 01 every morning or he found another wingman, but I finally got to go to the alert pad anyway and to relax a little.

Alert was a much better deal in Vietnam than in the BBUFs. We got to fly nearly every day, sometimes three times a day, and it was usually the more exciting missions, like Troops In Contact with the enemy. Now this was really flying!

And we did the really drinking thing too. Every month there was a hail and farewell "Rap Fest" during which we ate, drank, gave awards, said welcome and farewell, and got really disgustingly drunk.

At the time, I think it is fair to say that I did not notice being stressed. But looking back, I can assure you that there is stress, a hell of a lot of it, in any combat zone. Drinking relieved some of that stress. I understand the enlisted men used drugs for the same purpose; I did not. While I will concede the point that there is only a qualitative difference between using caffeine and using amphetamines, the very important difference is that one is legal and the other is not. Alcohol can kill you and maybe even get you sent to jail, but using coke can do both of those more easily, and it can kill your future too. It is just very difficult to get a superior job with a record of drug abuse. I didn't say it was fair; it just is. In any case, I drank too much.

The roommates planning a strike into enemy territory. This photo was staged for some obscure publicity purpose. I never used the compass shown in the picture after UPT.

With no women to temper our judgment, our parties were outrageous. We gave the "Plumber" award, a wrench mounted on a piece of plywood, to the guy who was the worst pilot. Doubtless this was an insult to plumbers everywhere, but it was meant to show that the guy did not have the wonderful mental and manual skills it took to be a fighter pilot. We gave the "Friendship Beads" (a set of phony shark's teeth) to the guy who did the best job of screwing his buddies. We gave out the "Top Glass" award to the guy with the biggest bar bill each month. (Prize: a free drink)

Mixed drinks were 25 cents; beer was a dime a can. To win Top Glass, your bill had to be over $100 to even compete. Do the math. That's a thousand beers or more than thirty every day. I never won, but Bob McConnell, a friend from my B-52 squadron, won repeatedly; the man could drink. Of course, technically you didn't have to drink it all to win, you just had to pay for it all, and we had games which could rapidly run up your bill. If you entered the bar with your hat on, you bought everyone present a drink, and that could very swiftly put 20 beers on your tab. Ditto if you spoke the "Word of the Day" in the bar, and some other oddities.

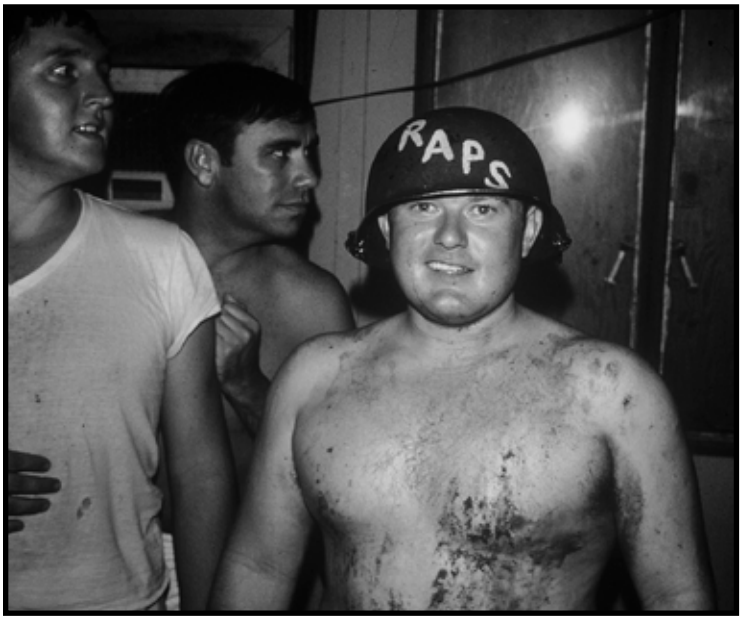
As I said, my next-door neighbor, John Lamb, ran the bar as an extra duty, and he said the revenue from it would have made a small Fortune 500 company. There wasn't actually much profit because we bought the beer for a dime too, but there was enough profit from the mixed drinks to pay Miss Mai, a good-looking native who tended bar for us. She was almost always the only woman there. We always respected her, (we did!) but she had to have seen a lot of naked drunks in her long career there even though she disappeared when it got late and rowdy. Miss Mai kept score with a pencil, and her count was law. I have no idea how accurate it was; I was usually too drunk to care, and so was nearly everyone else not flying, not to mention that the booze was incredibly cheap.

In retrospect, some will say that we drank to drown our fear. That is possible, but I feel that I drank to relax from the stress of combat.

The great Black Label party arose because we had been required to buy a case of Black Label for every case of any other beer for weeks. The Base Exchange simply had too much of the stuff,

and that was their way of dealing with it. It was stacked to the ceiling in three tall piles and we were running out of storage space. Carling Black Label wasn't really bad beer, but it came in the old tin cans, not the new aluminum ones, and after six months in the hold of a ship enroute, it was all skunky and tasted like tin. Lambo decided to give it away, but even that didn't work until we started burying people at the same time. We probably spilled more than we drank since the beer was more fit to bathe in than drink, but it was another successful Rap party anyway. We were not a gourmet organization.

All the new guys had to be buried. Late at night after a Rap Fest, half a dozen or more old guys would drag some poor bastard from his bed and throw him into a shallow muddy hole. I forget the rationale for this action. Afterward, we would buy him a drink and officially welcome him into the squadron. I was buried when I was new and it wasn't really that obnoxious. It was just playing rough with the boys.



"Fixit" Ron Shoulars, Ken "Freeze" Frizard, and unidentified nudist during the great Black Label party.

The parties tended to nudity. A tradition had arisen such that if an officer was seen with a hole in his T-shirt, it was considered an unfit uniform, and the first to see such hole would put his finger into it and make it into a large hole. Most of the T-shirts had holes. We laughingly suspected the maids of running the T-shirts through the device used to break the buttons on our other shirts, but they might have come just from the strong detergent they used. In any case, a lot of perfectly good T-shirts were ruined in retaliation, and once the mud and the beer was started in earnest, the prudent tended to wear nothing but combat boots. I mean, who cared?

One man who cared was a staff LTC who got into the wrong party. Or maybe we got into his. The building next door, called a hootch, was occupied by the Rustic Forward Air Controllers, flying the OV-10s. They were good buddies of ours, and we all had credit accounts at their bar too. Anyway, Kent Fister, Ken Frizard and I wandered next door to have a quiet drink. Mr. Fixit, so called for his abilities as a handyman, was a captain named Ron Shoulars, and he had made a cannon of old coke cans soldered together. He squirted lighter fluid into the end and torched it off with a cigarette lighter and it would fire a tennis ball harder than you could throw it. He injected one ball with water, and it went through a wooden door; truly a fearsome weapon. That night he was firing small (unshelled) shrimp out of it like buckshot, and we three were too mature to stay and risk punctures.

So we went next door, naked, except for combat boots. This caused no commotion whatsoever, even from the girl tending the bar. Ken sat on their bar, a piece of a large helicopter blade, peacefully dangling his equipment over the edge. The aforementioned LTC took umbrage at this innocent act and came over to tighten us up. Well, he was wearing a T-shirt with his blue uniform (he wasn't even in a flight suit!), and things almost got very ugly. The Rustics gathered up their staff weenie, and I led my two nudists back into the flying shrimp zone and the possibility of a Purple Heart. (The bar smelled obscenely for weeks afterward.) The next morning I was questioned by our squadron commander (who knew enough to stay out of our bar), about homosexual tendencies in the squadron, and then he forgot the whole thing. It was funny and stupid all at the same time. See what I mean about staff weenies?

Playing with the boys was nearly the only activity available in Vietnam, and we acted like

fraternity boys (an opportunity I had never had) or maniacs or idiots (pick your favorite simile) at nearly every chance.

Another thing that happened at night that was not so much fun was the mortar attacks. The Viet Cong never did any real damage to us that I recall, but the sirens and the "whump, whump" of the explosives certainly got your attention. The concussion against the wall, if it was not too close, sounds a lot like someone throwing a football against it. I don't believe we had any fatalities from these while I was there, but it was certainly a reminder that you were in a combat zone and could get killed accidentally.

The closest I came to real trouble also came at night only a few days after I arrived. I was at the Rap bar, peacefully drinking, when a couple of New Zealand nurses entered. This was rare, but not unheard of, and we also had the occasional Red Cross Worker (yclept "Doughnut Dolly") stop by too. One of them was going to spend the night with some forgotten member of the squadron, and the other one asked me to drive her home! I said, "Sure! Where's your car?" and she explained to me that they "usually" stole the operations officer's jeep for the purpose. (Danger, Will Robinson, danger!) I was high enough to be up for it, and we started driving. It turns out she didn't know the way back home, and pretty soon I drove under all these bright lights that turned out to be the main gate.

Well, I did know that downtown was off limits at night. I had no ID card, no money, no weapon, a blood alcohol level that was impressive for someone actually able to see, and we were lost in a combat zone. We drove around until she finally got her bearings and we found the Kiwi hospital. She invited me in for a drink, which was just what I needed, and then pointed the way back to the base. "Go this way for a while and then turn right." That is exactly what she said. The street signs did not use our alphabet, and I couldn't tell one squiggle from another. I drove slowly and noticed the little men guarding the more affluent houses. They wore black pajamas and carried rifles of some kind. God must have helped me decide when to turn right, because a mile or so after I did I again saw the bright lights of the base. I turned into it and a US guard stopped me. I fully expected to be arrested, but I smiled at him and said, "Hi!" He looked at me for a long moment with barely disguised disgust, and then motioned me through. I guess he didn't feel like doing the paperwork.

I never went into town again; day or night, and I swear my virtue was intact too, in spite of being easily led astray. As Bill Clinton said, "I did not have sex with that woman!" except I'm not lying.

I am an aficionado of T-shirt art. Sometimes a great piece of philosophy can be emblazoned in a few words of wisdom for all to see on a T-shirt. For example: "Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder". Not only does it express the fundamental truth that the more you drink, the prettier she gets, but it is almost poetic. Returning to that dreadful night, I should have been wearing the shirt that says, "I'm with stupid" and has an arrow pointing down below my belt. That adventure was clearly stupid, and when you let your dick lead you around it is always stupid. Combining alcohol with penile leadership could have been fatal in this case.

I was made a flight commander after about two months (only because I outranked the other guys) and I discovered that didn't mean that I really commanded anything, but was required to write OER's (Officer Evaluation Reports) for young men I didn't know anything about. Well, everyone in the combat zone got a 9 on his OER, but you had to say something too and I hated to just make stuff up, so I went to the scheduler and "helped" him.

I drew up a plan where each of the five flights would rotate through the duties together, giving me ample opportunity to reasonably evaluate my men, and it also ensured a roughly equal distribution of nasty jobs. We changed from days, to day alert, to nights, then night alert, and finally ground duties every six days, and you got at least an extra half a day off between shifts. This eliminated the need to suck up to Captain Jim, and he liked it too because it made things easier for him to organize, and he put it into effect immediately. I just love things that work efficiently!

We did some flying too. I checked out as flight lead on September 19th of 1970 and as instructor pilot on November 7th in spite of not being a Real Fighter Pilot. 1LT Steve Mish also checked out as IP the same day and was pretty vocal about my not being deserving since I had only been there

five months, whereas he had been there for twelve and was going home in the morning. I didn't ruin his farewell party, even though he was and remains an idiot. He went on to be a Thunderbird and a pilot for Delta. It was all about Steve and his ego. I was actually going to work as an IP, and he was just going home with the title, but then, he was almost a Real Fighter Pilot, and he eventually talked his way into becoming one.

I had only been a flight lead for two more missions before I very nearly killed myself. On the22nd of September 1970, I was in aircraft 69-6348 as Hawk 7. We were on alert, scrambled on a "Troops in the Open" call by a FAC out of Than Sohn Nuit, but when we got to the target area, the FAC asked us to hold. He said he had a bunch of boats, but they had all run for the shore during the last set of fighters he had put in, and now he could not see them. We could hold for a surprisingly long time by shutting down one engine and cruising at low speed. This gave you a kind of sideways vector because the rudder trim was not enough to cover the generated yaw, and your leg got too tired trying to hold it straight for thirty minutes at a time. On February 14th I would log 2.9 hours, the longest A-37 combat mission I ever heard of, by doing just that.

The VC kept their heads down for about 25 minutes. They knew that the FACs got new air every 20 minutes or so, and when we didn't show (they couldn't see or hear us at 12,000 feet; the bottoms of our birds were painted an off-white), and the guys supposedly behind us didn't show twenty minutes later, they assumed no air was coming and launched their little armada. They might also have known that the FAC was running low on fuel, since he was only good for a couple of hours on station in that O-1 Bird Dog. We never saw him again after he marked the target, but he did call "Cleared hot!" on our every pass. I think he was in the traffic pattern back at Tan Sohn Nuit, taking care of number one.

Our load was napalm and CBU. CBU is cluster bombs, kind of like hand grenades that would scatter all over and were very effective against troops. The FAC had already briefed us to do napalm, CBU and strafe in that order, but as I was rolling in from 12,000 feet (I would normally have been at 3,500 feet, except that we had been holding high to save fuel and stay out of sight and hearing), he asked if we could strafe first, with the bombs still on. Neither my wingman, Fixit Shoulars, or I had heard of such a thing, but we were pretty sure it was not illegal, so the answer came up yes, and we got very busy resetting switches and gun sight settings and, oh yes, starting that other engine.

I finally rolled out on the first boat and squeezed the trigger only to find that I had forgotten the Master Arm switch. At this point I should have pulled off dry, but I was so excited to actually see the enemy, I just pulled up to the last boat in line and slapped the Master Arm on and fired a burst right into the middle of the little thing, opening fire at an altitude that was far below the minimum permitted. I remember a vision of a man in the back of the boat steering, apparently unaffected by my holing the center of his craft.

Then I pulled the stick smartly aft and pushed the throttles full forward expecting the usual quick performance climb of the bird, and the nose did go up, but the aircraft continued to sink. The A-37 maximum weight is about 14,000 pounds, and I had about an extra 4,000 pounds of ordnance on board, or about 29 percent more than usual. As it still continued to sink, I thought I was going to hit the small mast of the boat, was relieved to pass over it, only to find that I was still descending and was about to hit the water! Well, the thing finally bit, not really higher than the onset of aerodynamic ground effect, (that would be about twelve feet above the water) and up I went into a clover leaf strafe pattern. Later I remembered that I could have cleaned the wings of those heavy bombs with a push of my finger on the Jettison button. I had been frozen like a deer in the headlights. We put in the rest of the strike and landed safely with about a dozen boats sunk. I guess sometimes it is better to be lucky than good, and I was definitely lucky, especially considering that I managed to hit myself with my own ricochet. But the moral of the story is that if I had been smart, I would not have needed to be lucky. I didn't really get scared until all that sank in after I landed because I didn't have time to think about it, but I came damn close to running that airplane into the water at 300 knots

and making myself very dead. The accident board probably would have called it "target fixation", or might have been generous to call it enemy fire, but it was really an aircraft performance problem, aggravated by me being stupid in a public place. Whew! Praise Jesus and amen, and landed without incident while cheating Death again. Well, maybe not totally without incident, because I hit myself with a ricochet from that strafe pass… The good news is that would be the total damage to my aircraft during all my combat tours, and I persuaded the crew chief to bump it out without reporting it.

My wingman, Fixit, took this shot of me on this mission delivering napalm on the bank of the Mekong. You have to look hard to see the aircraft pulling off the target over the water. Please note the napalm is in the trees on the shoreline where the boats were hidden, not on the nearby homes.

Two A-37s as seen by Jim Seibold.

Hawk 1
11 December 1970

My favorite flying story from the A37 was kind of a non-event.

I am on the alert pad as Hawk 1 in aircraft 340, wearing my Captain America T-shirt under my flight suit and wondering if I will get the chance to be a hero today. The klaxon here is not a siren like the B-52 system was, but an extra loud telephone bell with a continuous ring. Of all things, it is connected to a telephone. When it rings, the closest guy answers and calls out the number of the guys being scrambled. We all hope for a "TIC" mission, with Troops In Contact with the enemy. This is the best chance we have to hurt the enemy and save our own boys at the same time.

On alert we mainly sleep (catching up on the sleep we don't get in the hootches) and eat. The food is excellent, available 24 hours. I always have a paperback novel in my flight suit pocket, but it doesn't get much use. Here we are only a phone call away from going to war, only minutes away from enemy fire!

It rings! I grab it from the wall and say, "Yeah!"

The voice from the command post says, "Scramble Hawk One!"

I say, "Yeah." And then I yell, "Scramble Hawk One! Come on Chuck, that's us!" slamming the phone back onto the wall.

Chuck Purcell, Plumber Purcell, is my wingman, and he is ahead of me as we run for the first revetments to the left of the entry door to the alert facility. We don't know where we are going, but we're going to get there quick!

The A-37 looks tiny in its concrete nest designed for a much bigger fighter. I take one step over the side of my bird onto the survival cushion that we sit on and plop my ass down on it, while turning on the battery switch. The crew chief is holding the shoulder straps of the parachute and seat harness over my shoulders and I slip into them. Just three buckles secure me, parachute, and survival kit, since we had it all hooked up ready to go. Push one button to start number one engine even before the chief is gone from in front of it. At 15%, it gets gas from the throttle, and at 45% I start the other engine. As soon as number two comes up to idle I pull forward outside the revetment and look for the Plumber, who is only instants behind me.

I speak rapidly on the radio, "Bien Hoa ground, Hawk One scramble two!"

Bien Hoa says, "Hawk One clear to taxi. Taxi runway two-seven." Plumber says, "Two!" and we are on our way, not forgetting to salute the crew chief. He will worry about us while we are gone. We don't know the combat situation; we have only a FAC call sign, a frequency to join him on, and a radial/DME location from Bien Hoa. We will get the details when we get into the combat area.

I scan the engine start, before taxi, taxi, and before takeoff checklists as we taxi to the end of the runway. No stop today for armament, our safety pins are already pulled for quicker response. There is a delay at the runway end, however. There is a crowd of aircraft ready to go, but we have priority and I taxi past all of them on the very edge of the cement to a position just behind a C-130 who fills the entire entry to the runway. There is also a delay for a Vietnamese A-1 that has an emergency landing in progress with a hung bomb.

The Plumber and I pull to a halt just behind the C-130 wing on the very edge of the tarmac to wait for the emergency bird. In less than a minute, he touches down right in front of us, about a hundred and fifty feet away, and as he does, his "hung" Mark 82 five-hundred pound bomb releases and drops the five feet from the wing to the runway! Clearly, it is no longer hung!

It is very loud in my cockpit, parked as I am very close to the C-130's much larger turbo-prop engine, but I can still hear the bomb hit the runway with a clang. Not a ringing clang, like a piece of pipe, but a dull clang. After all, it is not empty, but full of high explosive. It has fuses on the nose and the tail, and it should have been dropped "safe", without pulling the fuse wires, but

A-37 ready for war at a moment's notice after the yellow power cart is removed. It was never near a truly ready bird as we used the battery to start the engines. The F-100s needed such assistance, but not us. The aircraft is loaded with 4 500 pound bombs, 2 250 pound bombs, and 2 external fuel tanks.

then it should have been dropped on the enemy an hour ago and not fallen here in front of us. It is also moving about a hundred miles an hour down the runway, sliding and picking up heat from the friction. How hot will it get? Will the fuses arm? They shouldn't, but I don't know; no one knows. I do know that I am in a vulnerable position on the ground, surrounded by fuel and more explosives in my own aircraft. I don't want to wait to find out.

Into the breathless silence generated by the bomb's fall in front of all eyes, I push the mike switch and say, "Hawk One, scramble, we want to take off now!"

The tower says, "Can you get around the C-130?"

I say, "Roger. Clear to go?"

He says, "Hawk One flight, cleared for takeoff. C-130, hold your position."

We taxi under his wing onto the runway. This is a clear safety violation in the States, and looking back on it, a fairly bad idea too. I am using the best judgment I can swiftly come up with to get out of the area of the bomb, now well down the runway and already heated up too hot to touch. I pull into position, give the Plumber the run-up signal, push the throttles to 100% and check the gages. I look back at Chuck who is showing me "thumbs up", tap my head, and as I move it forward to signal the action, release the brakes. Three seconds later Chuck is on the roll too.

There is no sign of the bomb, but lots of flashing lights from ground vehicles alongside the runway. I take off, clean up the aircraft, start a left turn for my wingman to join on me, reduce to 98% power, and we are on our way to work. I am running the after takeoff check when I hear an alarming "Mayday" transmission on Guard radio frequency from Jim Seibold, call sign "Rustic 13", living next door. His OV-10 has been hit and he is going down. He gives his location, and I do a little mental navigation and figure he is only about fifty miles away, and I decided that taking care of him could be more important than blowing up some trees.

I transmit, "Hawk One, go 3-2-7 point 9." Chuck answers, "Two!" and we are on our combat frequency. I call for our own FAC and explain the situation. I ask him, "How critical is the time on your target?"

He says, "Why don't you check on the Rustic with the Mayday and get back to me later." Roger that, no troops in contact today, no critical timing. Our hurry has been for nothing significant, but now we are available to help our buddy.

Chuck and I go to Guard frequency, get the Rustic's frequency and get his updated location from him. I compute a course to intercept him in my head, based on my radial/DME from Bien Hoa and his. He is still airborne, but has taken three rounds between his legs into his instrument panel and does not know how long he can remain so. I compute a rendezvous with him and soon see him headed almost right at us, trying to get back to Bien Hoa. We do a rejoin on him, kind of an interesting maneuver since he is underneath us and headed directly at us. He is doing about 200 knots and we are doing about 300, but the join-up works out just fine. I used the TLAR system, (That Looks About Right) a sort of educated guess for pilots. It at least sounds more precise than a WAG (Wild Ass Guess), which is another way of saying the same thing. I visually check him over for leaks or obvious damage and find none. I have never flown formation with an OV-10, and I keep my distance from those barely visible propellers.

He thought he was going to have to parachute down on top of the very bad guys he'd been getting ready to put a load or two of bombs on. In any case, he found that the engines still worked, and

we escorted him to high key over the base (really all we could do)

And so we needed to change frequencies again, go to the original FAC, and bomb the original target of GBTs (Great Big Trees), which we did without incident.

The everyday details of bombing the enemy included things like calculations of drop altitudes and wind corrections. Random headings on the dive pass attacks were standard parts of staying alive. On the way home, during the first even slightly quiet moment we have enjoyed, I run the after action checklist and I discover that I had not turned on the gun sight. This is not the first time either. I'm not so sure how I can keep such accuracy without the illuminated pipper to mark the target, but I can. We bomb so often that it is kind of like learning to throw rocks. It is second nature.

I guess this is my secret "Zen" method of flying. You get yourself "in the zone" and concentrate on all those little tiny movements and changes and try to make sure only the thing you want to change moves. Cleanse your mind and throw fire at the enemy, Grasshopper!

This is not the way to be a good captain, however. That involves monitoring the details of flying and concentrating on the big picture. Being aware of your position in the traffic pattern has very little to do with flying a good approach, but it is the kind of thing that can keep you alive, and most any autopilot can fly a good approach. Not that we had autopilots.

The scientific explanation of my Zen theory is probably something more like being able to feel the vector of the aircraft (and the attached bomb) and project it onto the ground. The very precise mil setting we set in the gun sight really just computes the amount the ordnance will fall below that aircraft vector, and looking very carefully at the ground for minute movements can show that same flight path vector. Your vector is the spot in your vision that does not move; all other points you can see move outward away from this central point that simply gets closer and does not move either left or right or up or down. The new avionics systems will show that spot with a green triangle through the "heads up" display, and you don't have to look so hard, but it's the same spot anyway. I say, just "be the bomb" and you'll get close!

Whatever it is, it is. We fly back to Bien Hoa, and seeing no bomb crater near the runway, we land without incident, rearm, and wait for the phone to ring again. Maybe this afternoon I'll get that great TIC target and have the opportunity to be a hero. With the availability of an adrenalin high like this, who needs drugs? Well, maybe that's why we drank every day after flying; we needed the alcohol to calm down.

Later that night over a beer Jim told me that he had never seen anything so beautiful in all his life as the sight of our two aircraft, belly up to him during the rejoin and showing him all those wonderful bombs under the wings. He felt saved

Jim Seibold in his OV-10.

right then, and I couldn't buy a beer for some time afterward. I guess the point is that we took care of each other in war. The president and the pentagon were just concepts; your buddies kept you alive. This is why our wartime comrades are so important to us veterans. This is why young men want to leave the hospital to get back to their units. This was why the unsung real heroes bandaged their own wounds and did not report them instead of collecting that third Purple Heart and the free pass home.

Anyway, this story was really about things that didn't happen.

Bien Hoa
1971

Chuck Purcell is behind Lambo, and his plumber's award is on the refrigerator just over his head.

To return to the subject of bombing accuracy, there are a couple of reasons for the A-37's accuracy. First, it is a stable platform, not subject to the nose making uncommanded movements. Second, we worked in the 300 knot speed range instead of the 400 knot range that the aircraft not limited to .7 Mach did. That meant we could work at lower altitudes, closer to the target and still not get hit because of the tiny size of the aircraft. Bombing is really easy now in the days of on-board computers. But in these days, you had to deal with the six variables.

They are:

1) Airspeed. (Usually 320 knots)
2) Dive angle. (Usually 30 or 60 degrees unless it was strafe or napalm)
3) Release altitude above target. (Varied by dive angle)
4) Wind. (Always different every day, but generally not really large in South Vietnam)
5) Yaw angle. (Needed to be zero)
6) g forces. (Needed to be zero relative to the flight path)

There was also the type of ordnance being carried but this was computed before takeoff and the proper mil setting put in the gun sight during the briefing from the FAC, so that all you had to do was dive down (while jinking to avoid enemy fire) and align the pickle with those exact preset parameters and the bomb would fall exactly where the gun sight pipper was aimed. The theory is simpler than the practice. In practice, if you are shallow, it will hit short, and to correct you delay release an instant. Likewise you can correct for most errors to those precise parameters just like learning to throw rocks. We practiced a "curvilinear" approach, where you did not spend a lot of time aiming straight at the target, but maneuvered to the release point and made a "snap" shot. Yes, it is complicated, but possible, and I got to be really good at it.

I have a couple of examples. Early on in my

tour on August 23rd, I was Hawk 2 carrying napalm. Hawk 1 had 500 pound MK-82 bombs, so together we became the so called "shake and bake" load. We arrived over the target just after some F-4s had finished scattering their bombs in the area. A contemporary cartoon in the Stars and Stripes showed a coolie wearing "Charlie" looking up and exclaiming "Look! Is F-4 strike! Quick, run for the smoke!" A very frustrated FAC told us that he had a bulldozer under a tree and he wanted someone to hit the damn thing because the F-4s hadn't been even close. Lead told me to give it a shot with the nape. The FAC described the exact way to fly to see the target, then marked it. I did as I was told, but didn't see it until the last second and just center aimed it. The FAC was ecstatic! "You put it in the front windshield! On the first pass! I don't ever want to see an F-4 again!" The reputation for bombing accuracy in the A-37 was secure. Later that night in the bar the FAC just would not let me be humble about not running it up under the truck like I should have. "Man, you put it in the windshield!!!" I was proud.

On another mission toward the end of my time in country, some distance northwest of the field almost in Laos, the FAC had a cave mouth for a target, and it was only about ten feet across. He described the run in heading and marked the target. I thought my first pass looked pretty good, but when I looked over my shoulder for the dust cloud the bombs always kicked up, I thought I had a dud. A 500 pound bomb will leave a shallow crater about 500 feet across on typical terrain, and send up a cloud of brown dust at least that high in the air. But I didn't think "dud" for long. "You put it right in the hole!" the FAC said. Then he described a bunch of secondary explosions that must have been kind of small because I still couldn't see much, although I was busy trying not to be a target in this very active enemy area. Later we got BDA (Bomb Damage Assessment) of 100 troops and some other stuff. I suspect he exaggerated to compensate me for some very fine bombing, but I have no way of knowing. This FAC was based in Thailand, and we never met. It is perhaps a good comment on the BDA that passed for "intelligence" in those days. But I know for sure that an exploding MK-82 bomb is not a good companion in a cave, and some bad guys had a really tough day. Before you say I am just polishing my little soldier's helmet with these stories, I'd like to say that I'm still very proud of my obsolete skills!

Re-reading these memoirs has caused me to notice that I only obeyed the regulations some of the time. My very good friend and B-52 hero COL CA Smith says, "rules are for people with no common sense". I would add trainees and people with little experience to that, but I firmly believe that good judgment will cause you to disregard rules from time to time, and you should! But if you do, you must be prepared to pay the consequences. Good judgment is the single most important characteristic a leader needs.

Perhaps this is the best time to tell why CA is a hero. During Operation Linebacker's bombing of Hanoi, on December 18th 1972, B-52D 56-0592 made an emergency landing at Nam Phong Thailand with four engines inoperative and a twenty one inch diameter hole in the wing where a SAM had gone through it without exploding. This base was so close to the enemy in Laos that it was never used except as an emergency landing field, and a Marine Major was changed with its defense. The presence of the enormous BBUF motivated every bad guy in the area to mortar it. The BUFF's tail, at forty-eight feet three inches above the concrete, was the tallest thing on the base and was visible for miles. Please refer to "The Eleven Days of Christmas" for the surrounding story.

CA was then chief of maintenance at Kadena AB, and he put together a RAM (Rapid Area Maintenance) team and was on the ground in Thailand within ten hours. Thirty-five hours after the phone call, the BUFF is ready to ferry back to U Tapao even though only six of the eight engines are operative. CA calls for a ferry crew and can't get one. (It turns out SAC had marked the bird as shot down and the staff weenies weren't sending anyone after a phantom.) CA is tired and pissed off, so he decides to ferry it home himself, even though he is not current or qualified in the aircraft. To add to CA's decision criteria, the Marine major is raging because of the already increasing enemy attacks and threatens to mortar it himself if CA doesn't move it.

His senior chief maintainer, a non-flying rated guy, decides he will go along as copilot. They take off without a qualified flight crew and with two engines out and no flight orders, no maps

or approach charts, no clearance or safe passage codes, or even a helmet. He flies south at about three thousand feet with the gear and flaps down and does not talk to anyone on the radio until he gets to U Tapao, at which time he uses his old UPT call sign, "Blackjack 57", and calls for landing. He has trouble getting clearance to land because there are no missing BBUFs, and SAC believes they know where all of their high value resources are in spite of the evidence of their eyes showing what must be a BBUF on downwind. Finally he says, "Either shoot me down, or I am gonna land this broke dick pig. Can I get the fire trucks?!"

The commanding general meets his aircraft and is surprised to find only two men on board, neither one in a flight suit. He says he can't decide whether to court martial CA or give him a medal. Ultimately he did neither one. But CA is a ball-bearing hero in my book! He violated any number of rules and still succeeded with the mission. You can see why the SAC staff wouldn't give him a medal though. I mean, he had done it all without their invaluable guidance and against their specific orders! However he did get his maintainer awarded a Bronze Star with Valor.

After Vietnam, I would attend a lecture about combat stress fatigue and was told that nearly everyone who had spent any appreciable time in combat (by this time I had about two years of it) would have a clearly identifiable symptom appropriately dubbed "a general inability to deal with bullshit!"

This is me. I have trouble seeing the reason for stopping at red traffic lights in the middle of the night when there is no other traffic. If stopped by the police for such an offense, I make no excuses. I have not been ticketed yet. Cops use judgment too, and as long as you are sober and not obnoxious, you will probably be OK, unless you run into a cop with a rule fetish, a staff weenie, non-combat kind of guy. Then you are screwed, and you must pay the piper without further complaint.

In the B-52 we had bombed targets in North and South Vietnam, and also in Laos. This last was apparently a secret for some time, although how you could hide the enormous scars the B-52s made in the earth was beyond me. Sometime after my A-37 tour started we received permission to bomb targets in Cambodia. This initially resulted in a great number of sorties (and new, rich targets!) for

A-37 Shooting Rockets.

us, and we were happy. So were the Cambodians. A large group of their military ended up at Bien Hoa in our bar, telling us about it. They were wonderful patriots, and I hope they are OK today, but I doubt it. We used the opportunity to give them a large store of captured weapons that we could not take home with us because they were not "legal". This included anything capable of full automatic fire, but not the Chinese made copy of a Russian SKS rifle over my desk.

The new target area also resulted in Captain Vern "Stumpy" Bowen, another England AFB buddy, having to divert into Phnom Penh after losing an engine. Well, the Cambodians bought him whiskey and offered him women and generally made a great fuss over him (as a representative of the US helping them out), and the end result was that we all wanted to spend the night in Phnom Penh too!

A few days later I was totally bored, on duty as SOF (Supervisor Of Flying), chatting with 1LT Earl Combs, who was also screwed to the ground as Squadron Duty Officer. We were talking about going to Cambodia, and I was making the point that there was nothing else to talk about. I suggested that he pick up the phone, call the alert pad, and ask if anyone spoke French. I told him if they asked why, to tell them that I was talking to Saigon and that's all he knew.

Well, 30 seconds later the phone rang, and my buddy Cort's wingman, 2LT John Bradley had taken French in high school and the Great Secret Mission caper was on. I wrote some coordinates from the far side of Cambodia down from a chart along with a "secret word" and wandered over to

the alert pad. It was usually pretty sleepy there until after nine or so, but everyone was up and positively salivating when I walked in shortly after seven. John, who would become the Major General in charge of all Reserve Forces, had somehow found a French-English dictionary and was trying "hit my smoke" in French. I told him he should probably practice "good evening Mr. Ambassador" and gave Cort the "secrets" I had supposedly gotten from MACV.

I stepped back to avoid the crush as the entire room rushed to the map to locate the target, and they immediately noticed that it was too far away to hit without stopping somewhere to refuel. (Phnom Penh? Oh boy, oh boy!) The hook was in solid. I went back to the squadron to laugh with Earl, but the hook was in too deep. They called us every twenty minutes or so to see how it was going, and tell me that they were planning the mission. I finally told Earl to tell them that the squadron would fill the mission with two staff LTCs and an enlisted guy from finance who happened to speak French. You already know that everyone despised the staff, and as pilots, these two were fine plumbers. We also hated the finance office because our pay was screwed up from the day we arrived until the day we left, one way or another.

In a few minutes I drove to the alert pad to see the result of my bombshell. Cort was enraged. He railed against staff weenies and finance by turns and then he turned to me and said, "Say it isn't true, Hank! Say it isn't true!"

Now I had my cue on how to end the prank, and I said, "Well, OK, it isn't true."

Cort looked at me strangely and said more slowly, "What isn't true?"

I said, "None of it. I made it all up because I wanted to see how badly you guys wanted to go to Phnom Penh."

Cort grabbed for me but I was ready, and faster than he was. We went around the entire alert facility, upwards of a quarter mile, and he tired but showed no sign of stopping. We had just started a second lap in the ninety-degree heat and ninety percent humidity when the alert horn ended the chase with him having to figure out whether he wanted to kill me more than fly, and flying winning out.

He eventually cooled off in the air, and did not do violence to me. And that was the story of the Great Secret Mission and how I won the Friendship Beads (a set of phony shark's teeth awarded to the guy who does the best job of screwing his buddies) at the next Rap Fest. I guess the point of that story was that if people want to believe what you have to say, they will suspend their suspicions. You might want to remember this if you ever decide to become a con man or a politician.

After all the drinking stories, you might expect that we did some flying while intoxicated. In my opinion, that was generally just not the case, but I will confess to at least flying while hung over.

We had a Rap Fest, a monthly hail and farewell party, and I was scheduled to go on alert the next

The eight cement reinforced shelters held our eight alert birds, and the two Quonset huts in between held our bunks and chow hall. The whole thing was located between the taxiway and the runway.

morning as Hawk 03 at 0800 on February 4th 1971. I wasn't worried about flying the next day because the load on Hawk 03 was "slick" (low drag) bombs that required a higher cloud ceiling to work under safely, and the weather had been pretty low for weeks. Those airplanes weren't going anywhere. At about 2300, the phone rang and the command post reported that Hawk 03 had just had their second flight of the young evening. They had been called out on "Sky Spot" missions, dropping their loads under the direction of ground controllers into the clouds from altitude, just like the B-52s often did. Two night flights were all you got, so we were to report to the alert facility

ASAP and take over nine hours early. Well, my wingman and I were both pretty loaded, but we hadn't actually been asked to fly, so we went down the hill to the alert pad, blew off the briefing and preflight, and went to bed.

At 0730 we were scrambled from our beds, and without thinking about it at all, found ourselves in the air. The FAC was a friend of mine, and he had called the strike in early as a favor to me, knowing I loved to fly but not knowing my physical condition. I always say that it is good to have friends in low places, but this time it didn't work out so well. At 0800, the crews for Hawk 7 and 8 would report, and they would have been given the flight instead of us. In fact, we were in their airplanes, loaded with napalm instead of the slick Mark 82 bombs on Hawk 3 and 4.

The FAC had eight structures for us as targets, and when I rolled in on the first one, I discovered that I could not make my eyes change focus quickly enough between the distant target and the near instruments. I missed completely, the first time ever. On the second pass, I discovered that if I just waited until the target filled the gun sight, I couldn't miss. Of course, that was far too low a release for regulations, but the napalm wouldn't hit you with a fragment like a bomb would, and no supervisors were present to disapprove. I got three of four targets. My wingman was oh for four.

By the time we returned to base, we were well into the hangover phase. The smell of breakfast cooking was simply nauseating, and we returned to bed.

About 1000 we were called again, again on different aircraft. Hawk 03 would not leave the alert pad that day, just as I had suspected. We drove to the squadron and took a pair of birds with no bombs whatsoever (armed only with strafe, our .762 mm minigun) and flew that 2.9 hour mission I mentioned in aircraft 342, escorting a ground convoy of frightened Cambodians without expending on a target. Upon return from that awful, mostly sideways, nauseating, hung-over flight, we were released from the alert pad and went home to bed again for the third time that day. I vowed not to drink for at least the next four hours, and to never again fly in such physical condition. I kept those promises, too. Now there was a lot of drinking done when I was young, and I want you to know that I really drank too much. Drinking and flying together is just being stupid in a public place, and this is one time I screwed up. If I could do it over again, I swear I would have spent this particular day as sober as judgment.

It occurs to me that a lot of my story could be shown with a beer in my hand. After the anguish of my Grandfather's alcoholism, I never thought I would ever have a drink. Well, Grandpa was one-quarter Cherokee, and the drinking just took him away. It didn't affect me so severely that I couldn't function, but it just wasn't good for me either. But I promise I won't go on with this theme like Pappy Boyington's book does.

I was not drinking when I flew Cort Durocher's last mission as his wingman. Lambo had already gone home, so I was his designated pal in spite of the great secret mission caper. It went smoothly until he did something that he didn't brief. (Pay careful attention, Grasshopper!) Instead of just pitching out to land, he streaked toward the runway at about 200 feet and then pitched up to

downwind to land. I was totally confused, and tried to keep our formation for too long and ended up too close to him on final, eventually passing him on the runway. I was hoping for "no harm, no foul" but ended up on the carpet in front of the squadron CO. I told him I had nothing to do with it, but ended up not being an IP for a week. (Which wasn't much of a punishment. Reminded

me of LJ Rooney grounding me for a weekend.) Cort escaped punishment totally since he was on the Freedom bird in the morning. It was OK, I missed being punished for lots of things I had done, so it was just kismet. Or maybe it was Cort getting even for the great secret mission caper.

As far as being an IP went, I'm not sure I actually taught anyone anything. I was new enough that I probably just filled the squares in the training manual like almost everyone else. I do have a story about flying as IP with a new Lieutenant. The FAC had briefed us to "ripple" the bombs, meaning pickle twice (in this case) to spread them around a little on an area target. My stud forgot and only pickled once. He also forgot to disarm the Master Arm switch, and as he pulled up to downwind, I disarmed it for him and talked about ripple for a couple of seconds. On the second pass he also forgot to pickle twice, and as I reached for the Master Arm switch which he had also forgotten again, he panicked and pickled off an armed 500 pound bomb in about a forty-five degree climb on a heading away from the target area. I have tried to compute just how far he threw that bomb past the target and I can't do it, but I know he missed it by miles. We were doing about 300 knots and must have been at least 3000 feet above the target too, not to mention the distance past it that we had already covered. Neither the FAC nor the wingman saw it hit, and I surely hope it did not damage anything that wasn't enemy. At least we were solidly in enemy territory, near the Cambodian border. Somehow we didn't get in trouble for it, certainly I didn't advertise it. That bomb was the worst one I ever saw, and it surely did nothing to enhance the reputation of the A-37s bombing ability.

Another young Lieutenant achieved distinction and the plumber award by missing the entire country and throwing his first bomb of his tour into Cambodia. He got sent back to base unexpended, in total disgrace.

I continued to bird-dog flying time in odd aircraft whenever I could. I flew a five hour combat mission with the Rustic FACs next door on 30 January in the OV-10A, and even logged a little time in an Australian PC-6A Porter. This is a STOL (Short Takeoff and Landing) bird used generally to resupply their troops in the field.

I notice that I haven't mentioned enemy ground fire. In South Vietnam we rarely dealt with anything larger than small arms fire; rifles and machine guns being fired at us any time we got below 5000 feet or so. Their effective limit was under 6000 feet, but that didn't keep them from firing wildly at anything they could see or hear. On every bombing pass we were below 2000 feet and easily in range, and I believe they fired at us on every mission they got a glimpse of us.

On 10 January 1971 I was putting in a night strike deep in Cambodia in aircraft 360 when I heard my wingman say those dreaded words, "Lead, you're on fire!" I actually already knew that since the light was so bright in the cockpit that I could not see the ground. For night strikes the lead aircraft brought our own flares out on outboard stations numbers one and eight, and the lead pilot had to put out a new flare every couple of passes to keep the target illuminated, not to mention the ground. What had happened was that a magnesium flare had managed to light inside the flare pod (whether from accident or ground fire I don't know), and those fires just do not go out. Soon it would light the other flares and maybe burn into the wing, and in the meantime it was making me into a wonderful target for the enemy. I furiously flipped switches on the armament panel and jettisoned the whole flaming flare pod without regard to what might be below and went back to work bombing. I would worry about replacing the foam rubber sucked out of my seat cushion later.

Night flying has special hazards. Without the actual horizon it is pretty easy to get disoriented, particularly if the only light is a flare in a hazy atmosphere. Sometimes one side of the flare looks as much "down" as any other side of the flare. One night, I pulled off the target heading for downwind and another pass, when I noticed that my attitude indicator was some 45 degrees in error in bank. When I moved the control stick to see if the indicator was stuck, I discovered that it was correct, and I would have been in grave danger very shortly. Anyway, I went back to work and might have mentioned it at the bar, but certainly didn't think of mentioning it at a safety meeting or anything. I very much regret this omission, especially if I could have told Jim Harris.

A Dedication to a Friend
And Combat Summary

My A-37 class at England AFB LA. Jim Harris is the center man in the first row, the only one who would not return. Plumber Purcell is on his left, and the Top Glass, Bob McConnell is behind him. Jab-Jab Cruse is in the front row to the right.

I was due to go home toward the end of February, and my classmate from England AFB, 1LT Jim Harris, was to rotate back to the land of the big BX about a week before me. In the argot of the day, he was a "short-timer", or the "shortest man in the unit", and I was the second shortest. But Jim went to fly one night on the 1st of February, just about ten days before he was due to leave, and his aircraft number 69-6356 impacted the ground on the downwind leg in the target area. No ground fire was reported, and we all suspected disorientation caused his death, and I continue to wish that I had shared my experience with him, and with all the other pilots. Sometimes a word at the bar about an actual experience can be a far more effective learning experience than an hour in class.

What were his last seconds like? Did he discover something was wrong and try to determine which way was up, which way was safety? Or did he crash blissfully unaware that he was going to hit the ground at 300 miles per hour? Did he even know his time had come?

Jim Harris was an awfully nice young man, a bachelor, and not half the drunk that the rest of us were. He did not deserve it, but war is a dangerous business, and Death does not choose us based on merit. I know that I felt less worthy to live than Jim, and if God had chosen him instead of me, I just did not understand. Jim did not deserve to

die. War takes the innocent and the guilty without regard, but I do believe that those with a "refuse to lose" attitude are taken later.

I was on alert for his memorial service, and so I was wearing a loaded pistol in a church. It took me most of the service to realize it, and this was the only time this would ever happen. The unit did a "missing man" flyby for him immediately afterward, and I was unable to speak or make eye contact with my buddies for some time. We also did not speak in the corridor when we passed his padlocked room. That simple object was again an ominous reminder of our mortality, and I tried to keep my eyes away from it. But as men, we could not openly show our emotions. I had that ability at my grandmother's funeral, but I was now too manly. Sometimes being manly is not such a good thing, but I no longer had the choice.

Jim's demise convinced me of a couple of things. First, I was not as bulletproof as I thought I was when I drank, and second my death in Vietnam would make no difference to the war or its outcome, only to my friends and relatives (Oh, and to me, of course)

To resolve the first point, I resolved to take more care of my safety the remaining week of my assignment. Regarding the second point, it was apparent that we had the military ability to win the war, but that the politicians and the populace at home would not let us do it. We were shackled with very restrictive "Rules of Engagement" that really kept us from hurting them badly. No bombing Haiphong Harbor or the electric generating plants, or the dams, for example. I was burned out, and ready to go home.

I had 195 combat missions in the A-37 for a grand total of 377 missions and 1605 combat flying hours spread out over a four-year period. I had never been a hero in spite of my growing collection of medals including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, nineteen Air Medals, and eight stars on my Vietnam Service Medal.

So during the ides of February I flew three missions as an IP in the right seat and then returned to the left seat for my 377th and otherwise unmemorable last combat sortie on 17 February 1971 in aircraft 353. My former student Froggy Gledhill was my wingman and took a couple of photos of the event. It included taxiing under an arch of water provided by the fire trucks and another total soaking such as I took after my 100th mission in the BBUF. Afterward was a lot of beer drinking, but nothing unusual. In the morning I was gone.

Me retuning to base on my last mission.

My memories of combat are these:

Sweaty: Unless fresh from the shower or air-conditioning, your flight suit hung heavy upon you.

Intense: We were more alive living so close to Death. Even brushing your teeth was memorable if punctuated by the concussion of a mortar round outside the hootch. This game was played for the highest of stakes, and to even think of losing might become a fatal weakness. Personally, I never thought of dying until Jim Harris didn't come home

A man's game: This was not for boys. Crowded with men torn from their homes and feminine influences, the aura of testosterone was palpable.

It was also an incredible waste of resources, both material and human. I wonder how even the winners can prosper afterward.

You will notice that I have not used the word "courage" anywhere in my narrative on Vietnam, in spite of having a bunch of medals that attest to my having it. I admit instead to a firm concept of duty, which served in place of courage for me. I did my duty as I saw it and did not even consider courage. And for me, courage was not so much a positive thing as a refusal to admit to

the possibility of loss; an irreversible concept of duty which proved to be a very positive force for me. I was bulletproof, and when I drank enough, invisible too!

Yet Jim's loss left me feeling exposed and unable to express my emotions properly about it. James Harris, even today I grieve for you. You gave everything for your country, and we unworthy (or at least more sinful) ones survive.

So I never managed to be a hero. Years later when discussing this with my policeman brother Joe, we are calling each other heroes while denying it of ourselves and it occurs to me that maybe part of being a real hero is denying it. Interviews with many Medal of Honor winners often contain phrases like "I was just doing my duty" or "I just did what I had to do". Even having said that, I still see it as something more than what I did.

I do want to commend some unsung heroes for their genuine courage: First, my wife, whose only reminders of her husband were photos and a music box (given by her father) that played Over There, a song popular during WWII. She raised our children alone most of the time, under the pervasive fear that a car full of officers including a chaplain would knock at her door with the always bad news. Second, my Mother, who once said, "I don't worry about him. Henry always comes home". And finally, my children, who learned to point at the aircraft in the sky and cry out, "Daddy!" The point is that those who stay at home also bear the stresses of war in a different way, and they are arguably as powerful as the stress of combat.

In a related issue, conscientious objectors have courage. In my mind, that does not include anyone who fled to Canada, but that does include those who enlisted as unarmed medics or served their country in other fashions. A man of courage will stand and state his position and face the consequences.

Seven of the men in my combat squadrons faced other consequences and did not return with me, nor did eighteen of my Academy classmates, nearly four percent of the class. This statistic does not reflect any other losses from men flying my same aircraft but not in my immediate organizations.

And finally, two words of advice if you should ever go to war:

First, the time to decide if war is ever right or if this particular war is justified is not on the battlefield. Make your decisions early, pack your sense of duty and believe in what you are doing or you will subtly weaken yourself and this is the time you can least afford to be weak. Being a conscientious objector is a very honorable thing. Being a deserter is not.

Second, and most important of all, go to war feeling like you are the toughest, meanest, smartest, best trained and equipped dog in the fight. Gird yourself in this concept like armor, and never lose faith in yourself or your countrymen or your own ability to survive! Come home to those who love you.

I took a "Freedom Flight", a chartered commercial aircraft from Saigon that ended at Travis AFB in CA after a couple of stops. I reported drunk for the flight and tried to stay that way the whole way home; a difficult process since they weren't serving alcohol. I remember two things about the trip. The stewardesses smelled really good, and another captain standing up and pressing his bare cheeks to the window as we left the country over the protests of the same stewardesses. The boys were still playing even through the stress of combat.

Cheated Death Again! Celebrating my 377th and final mission 17 FEB 1971. Note the Captain American T shirt and that they put my name on the aircraft.

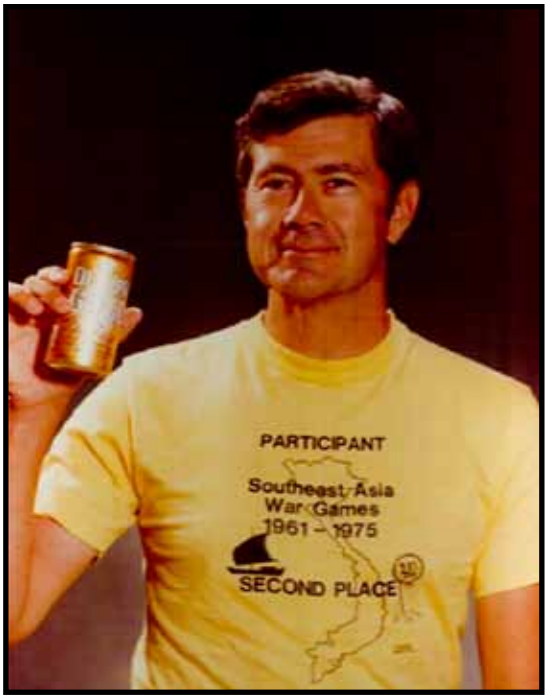
Graduate School
Arizona State University 1971-1972

Historical note: *Operation Linebacker was going on in Vietnam. The BBUFs were finally pounding downtown Hanoi and would bring the North back to the negotiating table and secure the release of the POWs.*

So I arrived back in AZ in February, and school didn't start until June. My tour had been shortened by about three months because of the B-52 time in Thailand, which did count toward a combat tour while the other B-52 missions did not. Who could figure? This gave me almost four months of vacation that did not come out of my annual leave, and I was ready to enjoy it. We bought our first house in Tempe. $18,000 with a 3% mortgage, as I recall, and it was all that we could afford. It was really very nice, and it was located in what had been a large cotton field not too far from the Dew Drop Inn when I had been there for pilot training. We got a black cat named Spot and a black Labrador named Beauregard and tried to fit into the civilian community.

Grad school itself wasn't too hard. It started with a couple of review courses during the summer, and only then turned into the Mechanical Engineering discipline. It was low stress, not nearly as overloaded as the Academy had been, and it was all done wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt. The bad news (there always has to be bad news) was that ASU was not supervised as well as USAFA, and some professors would give homework from one source, class work from another, and then test you on something else altogether. I thought it was silly, and I didn't work any harder than I wanted to, relying on my superior college background and intellect to carry me through.

In the meantime, I enjoyed the sunny weather, the co-eds in tight T-shirts, and just plain being at home. Again, I was not a very good student, but I passed with As and Bs. The war protesters were on campus and I took delight in wearing my



T shirt that said, "Participant, Southeast Asia War Games, Second Place" just to annoy people.

In 1971, computers were beginning to be the thing to know. They had one at ASU, and I took classes in FORTRAN and how to program the things. We had to use stacks of punch cards that we punched ourselves, and then we could make simple programs iterate themselves successfully. I was actually pretty good at it, but I am really impressed at how obsolete the knowledge is now that every college student has his or her own laptop, hand-held, desk-top, or maybe all of the above.

I wrote my thesis on a minimized cost process for inventory using a combination of processes that we had studied and the computer. It was required to be bound and placed in the ASU library, and there is still a copy there if you ever want to read something pretty dull.

After being at home every day for about six months, the fact that my marriage was not working was fully driven into me. In those days we didn't

talk about counseling or anything and… This is suddenly very hard for me. This is the part where I deserted my wife and children. I simply could not stand to be with Terri anymore. Enumerating my problems with her is just not productive here. They were significant, and I was not able to deal with them. My own issues with intimacy kept me from understanding her and kept me from being able to explain to her how unhappy I was. Looking back on it, I was unable to open myself up, to admit my failures and to ask for her help. I was still doing the things that I thought my father would have done. Being sensitive was years in the future. The marriage wasn't "we" so much as me towing her along. And I did not realize any of this at the time. I say, let our marital problems rest in peace.

One Friday as Happy Hour was winding down at Williams AFB, I discovered that I didn't want to go home. As I sat looking at the remainder of my beer, I discovered that I didn't ever want to go home. I decided to sleep on it, and if I felt the same way when I was sober again, I was going to leave.

The next afternoon I moved out.

Looking back on it, there is simply no excuse for leaving those beautiful, sweet children. I had signed on for the obligation, and I should have met it. I couldn't do it. It was more stress than combat. Could I have lasted longer? I suppose so, but it had been bad for years, and my absence in the war made it bearable only because I wasn't there. I am so sorry, my children, for failing you when you needed me. I just could not do it. I failed my duty; being sorry is a lame excuse, but I have no more to offer you.

I believe that every person in the middle of the stress of a divorce is a little crazy. Certainly I was. I could not seem to be able to stay home at night or stay sober very long either.

Rewording Paul Simon's lyrics "when I look back on all the crap I didn't learn in high school..." I find that I missed a wonderful opportunity to actually learn some things. Not only in grad school, but all the way back to high school. My mind just wasn't right to learn anything. In high school I could blame pheromones and quickening hormones, but now I was a shell of a man going through the motions and hoping something would stick to my memory. I was getting paid to go to school, and I wasted a wonderful opportunity.

I roomed with a short list of friends from the Academy, including Scott Sudmalis and Dana Drenkowski (who is mentioned as a source in The Eleven Days), but I started with Mike Lambert, the –ex of one of Terri's friends. He and his two little girls and I made an unusual group, but it worked. It's all kind of a blur now, but Mike and I did all the partying that I missed at the Academy while continuing to drink like I'd never left Vietnam. I also tried to make up for all the "free love" that I had missed in the '60s without a lot of success. Actually, dating immediately after a divorce is just asking for trouble and, since you are not really yourself, you never will find the right girl. My advice is to take a year off dating and work on your career, education, golf game, or whatever.

I did enjoy that year and a half at ASU. The Academy came to town for a football game and my buddies and I put an "F" after the "A" on the mountain next to the stadium the night before. Note that the "F" stands for "Force" here, not the usual F-word thing. We stole their "A" and made it work for our own "Air Force" sign. We were, of course, drunk at the time and nearly wrecked Scott's jeep in the process, but it was grand to see the next morning, and it even made the paper, although the cadets got credit for it. That afternoon I attended the game in the ASU student section, in my USAF uniform, risking life and limb by cheering for the Falcons, who amazingly won.

I continued to play with the boys athletically, competing and breaking my finger in a handball tournament at Williams AFB. The Air Force always had a gym everywhere I was stationed, and I always enjoyed using it, although I got more into racquetball after the finger thing.

After another Friday night, while driving home from Williams in the rain in my '65 Mustang, I managed to have a head-on accident with someone who turned left in front of me. I was not wearing a seat belt (not installed or required in those days) and my death grip on the steering wheel broke it off, and while dazed, I hurriedly crawled from the wreckage thinking only of getting out of a potential firetrap. I had been drinking, naturally, but was not charged with a DUI somehow. Mike drove me home from the hospital with minor damage later

that evening. I could not afford to buy another car with my alimony and child support payments, but I had to anyway. I possibly came closer to dying that night than I ever had in Vietnam.

One semester I only had four classes and they ran from 2pm to 6pm, Tuesday through Thursday. That gave me a four-day weekend every week, and I took a job as a substitute teacher on Mondays. It didn't pay much, but I enjoyed and still enjoy teaching. I filled in for a woman who was taking professional classes at ASU every Monday, so we kind of traded places for that day. My favorite class was in Remedial Math. The first day when I showed up and asked them what class it was, several responded with "Dumb Math!" On the instant and unrehearsed I told them that they were not dumb, and I went out of my way to keep their attention in class. I already knew that the best thing a teacher could do was interest his or her pupils and they would soak up the material in spite of themselves.

Since the material was not fascinating in and of itself, I made sure no one slept or talked by walking through the classroom and varying the volume of my voice so that they sometimes thought I was shouting. I know they were trying to figure out if I was nuts or what. "I don't know" was not an acceptable answer in my classroom. When I heard that, I'd stop, spend additional time with the pupil, and drag the answer out of him a step at a time. They soon found out that it was easier to try to answer the question than feign ignorance, and I did not hear that answer very much after that.

At the end of the semester I had a different schedule and never saw them again, but I did get a call from their teacher telling me that they were asking for me, and could I come back? Of course I couldn't, but I felt pretty good about being tough on them, and still do.

The Academy called and invited me to spend a few days and meet the department chief and get a little orientation. I cheerfully jumped on a plane, and when I got off in Colorado Springs, a flight attendant came along. Who was I to say no? She said that she was checking seat belts and admired my package. I had dinner with my good friend Al Adams, a classmate who was already there teaching, and took the tour and went back to Phoenix without anything unusual happening, but a couple of days later I got a call from the Colonel in charge, and he said that he had canceled my assignment because I was "morally unsuitable."

I was pretty devastated. I was still married, but separated, and hadn't done anything outrageous, or hardly even noticeable, but I was busted. Morally unsuitable was worse than not a Real Fighter Pilot, or not living up to your potential. What a crock! I think Al Adams ratted me out. I looked on the good side and figured I would not have enjoyed such an environment anyway. In a few more days, my assignment to SAC avionics maintenance at Wright-Patterson AFB came down. SAC would just not go away.

Mike married Irene, a girl we met the same night about two days after Minderbinder's bar in Tempe opened, and I moved in with Scott Sudmalis, a '64 grad who was flying the F-5 at Willy. I desperately wanted his assignment.

About this time I got a call from the Air Force Military Personnel Center, (the organization that controlled all assignments) and they had found my old application to Test Pilot School at Edwards AFB. I had applied for everything to get out of SAC, and I really wanted to be an astronaut too, and that was the route. They wanted to know if I could go over there for a week TDY in the middle of school and take a "five flight eval" to see if I could become a student there. Of course I was off like a shot! Flying again! And in the fun T-38! I went as soon as I could even though I still had that broken right little finger, and had kind of an awkward support around it. I wanted to fly, especially to fly that F-104!

At Edwards I passed their test, and met a couple of old friends on the staff that I knew from soccer at the Academy: John Blaha, who would become an astronaut, and Tuck McAtee, who would become THE pro in the F-16. I think they put in the good word for me; they knew I was bright, courageous, coordinated, better at soccer than they were, and that was about as much or more than they knew about any other candidate.

I still had to convince the Air Force to send me from one training assignment directly to another, something they never did, but since the Academy had said it didn't need me, and Wright-Patterson hadn't asked for me, and qualified multi-engine test pilots were hard to find, (Six of us had reported

for the five flight evals, and only five had passed.) they went ahead and changed my end assignment to Air Research Pilot School at Edwards AFB. It didn't hurt that my former squadron commander Greg Boyington from 16th Squadron at the Academy was working the assignment at Military Personnel Center either. Anyway, I guess the bottom line of all that moral stuff was that I had just screwed myself into the best flying job in the Air Force! Better to be lucky than good! I should put that on a T shirt! And SAC was now fading in my rear view mirror because I was headed for Air Force Systems Command, and I knew I would be able to stay there as a test pilot.

I changed my courses around to go with the new Industrial Engineering degree I was shooting for and when I had room at the end of school for another course I took Aerodynamic Engineering to prep for Edwards. I graduated with As and Bs and no particular distinction and actually reported to Edwards AFB before my graduation ceremony in January of 1973.

The Industrial Engineering degree is far more useful than the Mechanical Engineering degree I had planned for. It was the full-on version of what used to be an "efficiency expert", including lots of math and management. I discovered a genuine affinity for the program because I just naturally love to see things operated smoothly and efficiently. It was a beautiful fit for me. Lucky again!

Test Pilot School
1973

Historical note: *The Watergate scandal rocked the Nixon White House.*

We were actually the last class of Aerospace Research Pilot School. ARPS would become TPS after we graduated and they converted the school from F-104 to F-4 equipment. I was delighted to be the last class with the F-104, but it had to go for maintainability problems. It was getting old. And as I grew older too, I was no longer burdened with the idea that we started even. The multi-engine, or heavy, test pilots were clearly second class citizens.

Before we go any further, you should know that test pilots do not jump in a bird and try to tear the wings off them as the old movies would have you believe. Howard Hughes was a terrible example of a test pilot, and he only got to do it because he owned the birds. They are trained as engineers and pilots, often acting as interpreters between the user pilot and the design engineer. You had to be able to speak both languages, and you needed to be an objective observer of what happened in flight. It was a vastly interesting profession.

I had a BOQ room with a kitchenette area and a small living room and I was delighted to be living alone for the first time since 1959. I was the old man in the class and would have been class commander except that my classmate Bill Gabel had been promoted to Major below the zone and now out ranked me. Bill did a much better job at this than I would have, and he actually kept a lot of shit from becoming larger problems than they already were. David Milam had also been class of '63, and he rapidly became my best buddy at school. The three of us were bachelors.

Also in the class was John Hoffman from '64, Patrick Experton from France, Giovanni Sciandra from Italy, Aad Rotteveel from the Netherlands, Bill Hayden from the Navy, Bill Wright from the Marines, and the first eight Flight Test Engineer students ever admitted including my buddy Mark Miller. That was a grand total of twenty-five, of which seventeen were pilots, and only five were saddled with the dreaded "multi-engine" designation. It seems that I would never be a Real Fighter Pilot. You can see the international, multi-force nature of the school, and I was vastly proud to be one of those selected to attend in 1973. This is the Air Force's only school that does not require an FEB (Flight Evaluation Board) for those that flunk out, I guess because they fully expected to lose some since the program was so difficult.

TPS Class 73A
The boys and I in front of the school with the rocket equipped NF-104 that went to 125,000 feet.

Notes on Edwards AFB: *Edwards is located in the Mojave Desert about an hour and a half north of Los Angeles. It was hot and dry most of the time and the base was flanked by two dry lake beds that were usually hard enough to land a B-52 on.*

When it rained, the lakes filled with a few inches of water and spawned brine shrimp. Rosamond is the nearest town, but Lancaster was really the only thing similar to a city. There seemed to be a lot more coyotes than eligible women.

School was divided into three sections: Performance, Handling Qualities, and Systems. It got more interesting and more fun as the year went on.

The first two or three weeks we had classes all day, but then settled down to a schedule of two flying periods in the morning and classes in the afternoon. The course was often described as like trying to drink from a fire hose; it was hard, continuous, and difficult to digest fully before the next bit of information came along.

I did very well the first few days of academic review. We then started to check out in the T-38, which wasn't hard either. Some of the multi-engine students had trouble with maneuvering the nose in the vertical, or with the higher speeds on approach; I had neither problem.

But after checking out solo in the T-38, our first graded ride was the tower flyby data flight. The rules said you had to give your data card to your examiner when you started the briefing. I got there early and found that all the cards were locked up until someone on the staff showed. Mike Butchko was my IP, and he was the first guy to show. I asked him to open up so that I could write out his data card, a task that would take less than a minute. Well, he said no, I had already failed. So I figured out early on that this was not going to be a school I would do well in, but I was used to chicken shit and pressed on. John Schoeppner gave me the recheck and seemed furious when he found out why we were doing it over, but I still got the bad grade. Both of these guys went on to make General officer. Both also retired in controversial circumstances. Go figure.

After taking the data on the flyby tower, we had to write a report. This was basically to show the correction needed by the pitot-static system to correct for errors. The rest of the class just took a plastic "French" curve and drew a line through the data. I went farther and reduced the data to show it was actually a function of the cube of the airspeed, and proved it with math I had learned in grad school. Well, that was beyond the scope of the course, and Mike Butchko graded my paper and failed me again, for mis-copying a couple of numbers this time. He went so far as to question my integrity, asking if I had made them up. I began to see that I was on his list. I didn't know why, and it didn't matter why. I would fight through this like a man, just as I would deal with each new adversity: outwardly unflinching. Most odious, to my mind, was that Mike had totally missed the significance of the real engineering I had done. We could now mechanize altimeters digitally instead of with a physical cam and thus reduce errors. I had just learned the hard way to make my reports look (exactly) like the other boys' and forget learning anything more.

I was also on "Bullet Bob" Barlow's list. Bullet Bob was so named because of the shape of his head and his buzz cut hair cut. He indiscriminately despised all the heavy test pilots (which attitude was returned by all the students, heavy or not) and I took my Performance final test with him in the T-38. I was very good at doing "stable points" or "trim shots". The object of these was to trim the aircraft hands off on an altitude and airspeed, plus or minus 50 feet or two knots, and then read the engine instruments and fuel gages. I think I did these well because of my experience with air refueling, watching for the tiniest movement. Anyway, when I swiftly did the point and read the engine instruments as 1 tenth of a percent different from each other, something I had been doing during all the other instruction I had received, he failed me.

I went on to check out solo in the T-33 and did pretty well in the W/delta check with LTC Stroup in that aircraft, in spite of being so keyed up that I excited the lateral PIO (Pilot Induced Oscillation) mode of the flight control system during the entire check climb. We rocked back and forth for long minutes while I cursed steadily and with fervor. It was to my credit that I did not let this incredible distraction influence my performance in the check climb. This was a maneuver in which the indicated airspeed would bleed off at a specified rate during a climb from 4,000 feet to 35,000 feet, and you wanted to be within a knot or so on every thousand foot mark. It took a long time to climb that high in the old bird.

I did pretty well on the Flight Test Techniques final flight exam with Major Schoeppner. I had a review with the TPS commander, and Colonel Guthrie said I was above average in academics, last in reports, and last in flying. My work was cut out for me just to survive. I put academics as last priority because we didn't know anyone who had been flunked out for just academics, although it was theoretically possible.

By this time, I had figured out that the finest flying school the Air Force had was not being run very well as a school any more than UPT had been. The teachers were test pilots, some of whom had no real test experience, most of whom had no teaching experience, and all of whom wanted to be somewhere else testing instead of teaching. The academic courses were handed down, year after year (as were the tests) with the instructor being only a little ahead of his students, and not usually more qualified to teach his course vis-à-vis any other course. The only qualification you needed to teach was to be a graduate of TPS. There was little standardization with the examiners, and your flying grades reflected your instructor more than they did your performance. I was not motivated to succeed, only to graduate.

We had one civilian instructor, and he actually knew what he was teaching. Ray Jones had been a Major the day he ejected, years before, and broken his back. He had already been a respected test pilot, and the school created a job teaching for him when he was medically retired, and he wheeled his chair around the school with authority. Ray served as a living example of what can happen to you, not merely if you screw up, but if things just don't work right. We were in a hazardous profession, not for the weak.

To me, Ray symbolized what could happen on any day to any of us, much as the bloody parachute harness on the door of my room in Vietnam had been. I remember drinking at the O Club one Friday night and was in the Men's room doing what you have to do when you drink, when Ray rolled in with his chair. All the stalls were full, and so he pulled up to the drain in the middle of the floor and emptied his bag into it with a small smile.

I had the feeling that he was angry with the world and had lost the will or the heart to fight to stay alive, although perhaps I shouldn't say it, because I certainly don't know for sure. But I will always remember him in the Men's room, showing us that he was still a boy at heart, and that he could still do things that we couldn't.

Being a man in this profession was sometimes a very serious business, and it was not for the faint of heart.

We got to fly gliders as a warm up for handling qualities and spins. On the first day I soloed in a Schweizer 2-33. The instructor was a civilian at a local glider port in nearby Tehachapi, and he was very low key. I suddenly found myself alone in the aircraft, no radio or data points, remembering the absolute joy of flying! I was in love again! I actually added to my workload by getting my FAA commercial glider rating added to my license on my seventeenth flight with FAA examiner Mike Zering so that I could go soaring anytime I wanted to, with or without the Air Force. It involved driving into Los Angeles and taking a written test on material I hadn't studied, but I was totally unafraid of failing anything the FAA could bring by this time. I also flew the Schweizer 2-32, 1-34 and 1-26, and spent my own money to check out in the Blanik L-13. In all, I had 24 glider flights when I left Edwards.

TPS Student 1973. The F-104C is behind the stallion.

Earth from 80,000 feet.

The big flight to separate the men from the boys and to see who would get to graduate was the first flight in the F-104. The scenario was that it was supposed to be a captured Russian aircraft, and we had a very limited amount of flying time to take data on it to see how our own aircraft could find an advantage. The staff gave us lots and lots of data points, both performance and handling qualities, that we were to take with just an hour of fuel on board. There were more of them than we had fuel to perform and it was a classic definition of a blivit, described in my Air Force dictionary as ten pounds of shit in a five-pound bag. It just wouldn't fit. The IP did not give any instruction in the aircraft at all, he was just there to evaluate your data collection techniques and make sure you didn't crash. It was my responsibility to know all the systems and procedures before we started. It was the most demanding check ride I had ever seen, before or since, and everything rode on doing it well. I studied hard for this one, probably harder than I ever had in my life.

I flew with LTC McClain on the 26th of August, and he is a very reasonable guy, and I pretty much aced it including two sweet, roll-on landings, so I got to stay.

Flying the F-104 was a joy. It was a single-engine, sexy looking, very powerful, Mach 2 fighter and I totally loved it. The flight controls were kind of heavy, but with my experience in the B-52 I hardly noticed. It was a handful in the traffic pattern too, most of which was flown at 300 knots, and you couldn't put the landing gear down until below 205 knots, so this typically happened on short final. Fortunately, the gear extended quickly.

On the 11th of September, I had just finished my solo check out in the F-104 when the scheduler asked me to fly the T-33 spin check on the same day without notice. I complained briefly about not being prepared for a check, and he said he really needed to do it. I thought about my poor flying record, and it occurred to me that I probably would not get flunked under the circumstances and said OK. Exactly as I expected, I passed, and did not get a good grade. I had no complaints, no wasted effort and no lost sleep.

The last big check ride we had was also in the F-104, and this one involved donning a pressure suit and flying to the edge of space! On 3 December 1973 I flew the very last "Zoom" mission that ARPS would ever fly to 78,705 feet. I took off solo, wearing a full pressure "space suit" in a clean aircraft (without the tip fuel tanks), climbed at .9 Mach to 45,000 feet in military power, then turned around and headed back to Edwards. I checked with ground radar to make sure I had good data, lit the four-stage afterburner, pushed the nose over and accelerated. I leveled off at 30,000 feet and about Mach 1.5 and just let it cook, glimpsing the earth speeding by below. At Mach 2.0 and with the red Turbine Inlet Temperature warning light flashing in my face, I pulled the nose up to 60 degrees and started the wildest ride of my life! Passing through 65,000 feet only seconds later, I shut off the afterburner and let it continue to hurtle upward, holding an angle of attack to avoid a potentially disastrous stall at that altitude. Chuck Yeager had spun one from over 120,000 feet and had to eject because he could not get out of the spin.

As the nose passed below the horizon I took a moment to admire the scene. The curvature of the earth was plainly visible, as were a bright blue band of atmosphere and the darkness of space above me. It was an incredibly beautiful sight

still only seen live by less than a few hundred men in the history of the planet. This list includes only astronauts, some high altitude reconnaissance pilots, and graduates of the Aerospace Research Pilot School during the few years the F-104 was used at there. It lasted only a moment before I had to get back to work flying, but I will never forget it.

After that I pulled the throttle to idle and aimed for the base, crossing over the runway at 25,000 feet and starting a swiftly falling pattern with speed brakes out full and half flaps. I did a 270-degree turn at 300 knots, simulating a space shuttle pattern, and got the gear down only about 50 feet above the runway as I slowed for touchdown. The whole thing took only about twenty heart-pounding minutes, and I was down to minimum fuel at touchdown.

Me dismounting the F-104 after the final Zoom mission.

A note about aircraft limits. Over speeding an aircraft will not get you a traffic ticket in the air; it usually gets you dead, although it can be for different reasons. The turbine over temperature meant that the engine was beginning to melt down, and if unchecked, it would blow up and I would become a supersonic ball of debris. Most often an over speed meant that you had exceeded the flutter speed for the aircraft, and any turbulence would probably rip the wings off. You can tell that these are bad things. In the A-37 for example, the only thing that happened above the Mach limit of the aircraft is that you could not pull the nose up to slow down and regain control. If you were too steep or too close to the ground, you were going to hit it hard!

Most aircraft have another pointer on the airspeed gauge that shows the limit speed of the aircraft to compare with the current speed, and when you go too fast the needles first coincide, then cross over. "Crossing the needles" was often catastrophic, and always a bad idea.

Toward the end of 1973 there was the first nation-wide gasoline shortage, and the military had to do its part to save fuel. They cancelled some F-104 flying, although I got to deliver one of the F-104s to the military aircraft boneyard at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, and, worst of all, changed our European field trip to one in the US. I really wanted that excellent boondoggle to the British and French flight test schools, but it was not to be. We went to the Navy TPS, Wright-Patterson AFB and Dallas instead. Congress also lowered the speed limit on the highways to 55 mph. In my opinion, this is a truly minor fuel savings and an incredibly stupid idea. Instead of dealing with the problem, Congress just passed it on to the citizens.

We did have a little time to ourselves too, but not much. I went to Phoenix to visit the kids, and stopped by ASU for something and witnessed an event I will never forget. Just as I walked by, some young man lit himself on fire! I guess he was protesting the war or something, I never found out, but he changed his mind rapidly and rolled in the grass to extinguish himself. When I looked at him again his face was already ashy gray from the burns. Remember this one well. Setting yourself on fire hurts a lot and does nothing whatever positive. I guess maybe it does help prove Darwin's theory of evolution; the kid was too stupid to live, but I am not sure that he died, I never heard.

I got to know the route to Phoenix well. I started driving it before I-10 was completed, and you had to take US 60 through Wickenburg. Later, the brand new and largely empty pavement went as far as Tonopah, and then as far as Buckeye, and

finally, after what seemed like years, all the way to I-17. My little Pinto would not get me there on a single tank of gas, and I always stopped at Chiriaco Summit for more. It is more efficient to fill up at higher elevations, giving better gas mileage.

It was difficult to be a part of my children's lives from so far away, but I tried. I had visitation rights, but these got eroded by distance and later by the kid's growing interests. Their Mother would tell me that they couldn't visit because of Heidi's ice skating competitions (she was very good, and I was proud of her!), but they still made summer visits to me in Ohio, Michigan and at Edwards AFB very difficult. I missed a lot of their youth, even more than I had when flying combat and it saddened me more than I can say. I did not dwell on it because it was unpleasant and unproductive. Amazingly, even as our relationships drifted farther apart, they seemed to continue to like me. I will always love them.

Mark Miller and I were drinking at the Officer's Club one Friday night and decided to go to town for some more drinking. I made him drive because I was already hammered. As soon as we got there, he got pulled over by the police and got to do all those silly balance exercises while the deputy and I chatted and laughed. Finally the sheriff got mad. He said something about "I can never get you test pilot guys on the vestibular tests, but I know you won't pass the blood test! I'm going to give you a deal. Let the other guy drive (meaning me) and I won't take you in."

Mark thought about this for some time, too long actually. He had a brand new Lotus sports car that no one but him had ever driven, and he knew I was pretty much a total loss for sobriety, even looking pretty ragged in my T-shirt saying "Morning Wood Riding Academy". Finally he agreed, and we turned around to go straight back to the base without having that drink. Unfortunately, the headlights chose this moment to fail, as did the interior lighting. After some experimentation, I got the headlights to work in the "bright" position only by holding the switch back continuously, and we headed home with him shifting and me running the lights and the brakes and the gas and guessing at our speed. In the end, we had cheated Death again.

We did group projects similar to master's degree theses, and Milo (Dave Milam) and I ran one involving predicting how high an F-104 would go on a Zoom. He did the math and I programmed the computer, and then we compared our data with the actual data from the class. Our success was only so-so.

One thing I did learn was that once an aircraft is higher than a couple of hundred feet, there is no way to precisely describe its altitude or airspeed. We had all kinds of radar, but it was all susceptible to errors of various magnitude and you ended up dealing with averages, or probabilities, and you had to smooth the digital data yourself to make it make sense. Satellite navigation systems can do a much better, if still limited, job of reporting position, but these were years in the future.

Toward the end of the course, Pete Larkin and I were supposed to evaluate the C-130 and present a report on it. Well, we never got to fly the damn thing because it was out for extended maintenance, and the base only had one. Pete managed to convince the Army to let us evaluate the P-51 Mustang, that wonderful old fighter from WWII, but we were denied the opportunity by our own staff. But remember that neither Pete nor I were Real Fighter Pilots, and that was why we had been given the C-130 in the first place. We objected strenuously to this to LTC Stroup, our staff monitor who was also not a Real Fighter Pilot, and managed to get away with an oral report to him about the bird, most of which we had gleaned from an old loadmaster.

Some classes became unified best of friends and had lots of reunions. Unlike my class at UPT, our class at TPS pretty much hated each other. One classmate had been cheating. He had the old exams and reports from one of his '64 classmates and they were exactly the same tests. Naturally, he became a top grad in the class. David Milam would report me for cheating on academics for no discernable reason. By this time I was nearly last in academics, and if I had been cheating, I should have been able to do a better job, at least as well as the cheater. I still have no idea what Dave's problem was, but we were no longer really best buddies in spite of dating twin sisters from Lancaster.

Roland Stanley proved to be an ass of the first water and once I actually thought I was going to

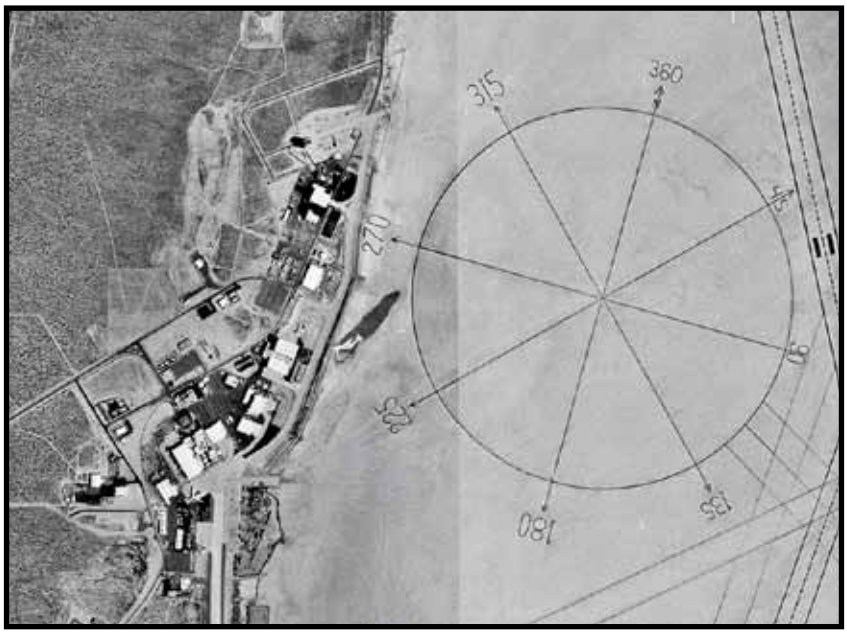
have to physically fight with him, something I have never done as an adult. He was in love with himself and cared for nothing else. He managed to kill himself in a flying accident at Navy TPS a few years later; I am certain that he felt he knew everything he needed to even though it was officially "pilot error". He was a clear example of the trouble you can get into with a balls-to-brains ratio greater than 1.0.

Pete Hartwick, whose only claim to fame was that he thought he was the greatest T-38 pilot ever, was sleeping with Jim Dowdy's wife. John Hoffman was caught with Bob Keith's wife, and Bob was just devastated. Bob went to Kelly AFB TX after graduation and was never heard from again. Remember, I was the one with the "moral" problem? Bill Gabel went back to Eglin AFB FL and also never returned to Edwards. Pete Larkin was a mediocre tanker pilot with a great line of baloney who wanted to fly the SR-71 and was the only guy to graduate below me. But the guys I had the least respect for was the staff. They could have done better, and they blamed their poor performance on us. I was happy to go to the test wing at Wright-Patterson AFB OH and hopefully never see those egomaniacs again. There's my bad attitude again.

As test pilots we had sayings and humor that were sometimes obscure to the non-engineering community, such as that last one, or the abbreviation "TLA". That stands for Three Letter Acronym. I invented a saying myself that never came into general usage but I called the pilots' blessing: may your kinetic energy always be gradually dissipated. We all know that it's not the long fall that hurts, but the sudden stop at the end.

I know for sure that things are much, much better at TPS now, and I am still proud to have graduated, even if I did have to crawl my way through. I can forgive my classmates for being human, too. The school did not live up to a lot of our expectations, but the flying was simply magnificent!

I had flown the T-38A, T-33A, F-104C and D, the NU-1B, the X-26B, the B-26H, the side stick modified NC-141A, the Bonanza-35, the A-7D (first ride solo!), the variable stability NT-33A, the UH-1H (Huey helicopter), the C-130A and four different gliders. I logged 142.5 hours of the most challenging and interesting flying done anywhere! On the 26th of October I did something any heavy pilot anywhere would envy. I flew the A-7D and the F-104D as pilot in command with an engineer in the back seat. Same day, two different single engine fighters: over the top for cool. Not a Real Fighter Pilot my ass!



Aerial view of Edwards AFB and the lakebed runways.

The A-7D has only one cockpit. You have to love going solo on your first filght.

The Calspan B-26H was modified for variable stability and was a learning experience.

The NT-33A was likewise modified for variable stability and we flew unmodified T-33s as well. I had already flown the AT-33A at Myrtle Beach as a lead-in to the A-37.

Castle AFB CA and UFOs
1974

Before actually reporting to Wright-Patt, I had to return to Castle AFB CA to go through ten flights of KC-135 school. Boeing built 732 of these from the same frame as the B-707 airliner. It had a flight director system, state of the art making it easier to fly instruments than the old BBUF. The airliner had a much better "series" yaw damper installed as well as more powerful and more efficient engines. It was an incredibly useful aircraft for the USAF since it could be used to haul troops or freight along with air refueling all sorts of our birds. It greatly increased the reach of our air forces.

I wasn't really excited about flying an old four-engine tanker, but the school was a piece of cake compared to Edwards. Here I noticed for the first time the opposite of the discrimination I had felt as a "multi-engine guy, not a Real Fighter Pilot." I now had an official "golden arm", and people tended to grade me higher for the same work. This was not nearly as annoying as the other way around, but they were both inaccurate, and I tried to soft-pedal it.

Here I also noted that some people felt the need to prove themselves in front of me by showing me things not in the curriculum or other foolishness. I tried to look duly impressed. If your teacher is performing for his own ego, let him do it as long as he isn't downgrading you. I say as long as you are passing, keep your mouth shut.

While attending Castle I was delighted to pin on my Major's leaves. The extra pay was very nice too. I was quite unaware that I would spend the next eleven years as a Major. I also saw my old friend John Harrison from grade school, who was now flying for Western Airlines. He is also a pilot, and he told me that I had inspired him to fly with the Air Force. He went to Vietnam in the F-100 and then on to fly the heavies for Western/Delta. I flew the AT-6A he had restored himself to become the Warbirds' organization grand national champion, and one of his friend's antique PT-22. Flying lots of different birds was really neat!

I went soaring in Vacaville at Vaca Valley airport and gave John and lots of friends a ride, including his aunt Evelyn. I also went soaring at Tehachapi and Phoenix. I would not find out until much later, but they were looking for me at Edwards to change my assignment from Wright-Patterson to Edwards. I guess they didn't look too hard, like by asking any of my friends, because I was right under their noses. That would have made a vast difference in my career.

Over the years, lots of people have asked me about UFOs, and I think this is the place to tell you everything I know. First of all, I never saw one. I do believe in them however. It seems entirely logical that a superior intelligence not interested in conquest would just study us and pretty much leave us alone, just as we did to a population in the remote Philippines that we discovered basically still in the Stone Age. But I was totally caught off guard when one of our teachers at KC-135 school interjected his story into our class on aircraft performance.

He had been a B-47 aircraft commander, and he and his co-pilot had seen one at night on the beach in San Juan near Ramey AFB (now closed). He had been afraid to admit it because of SAC's strict Human Reliability program administered to all nuclear qualified crewmembers, but had finally done so and sent in a report. After a couple of months without an answer, he happened to be in Washington DC on leave and decided to look into it himself in the Pentagon. After wandering around for a long time in the maze of offices there, he found himself talking to a non-rated (read, "non-flying") major without any staff who told him frankly that his job, specifically directed to him, was to explain all UFOs as swamp gas or other natural phenomena, and to do no investigation into discovering the actual truth whatsoever.

Our instructor had then gone to New Hampshire to meet his navigator's parents. Betty and Barney Hill had been in Life Magazine after reporting being taken on board a UFO for examination on September 19th 1961. He said they were genuine people, with nothing phony or publicity seeking anywhere about them, living simply in a very small home. Their story was much the same as the instructor's; they felt they had to tell someone regardless of the ridicule it might bring. After all, the cold war was going on.

Finally, our instructor wrote something on the blackboard and covered it with his hand. He asked us, with assurances of confidentiality, how many of us had seen a UFO. There were 22 of us in class; eight raised their hands including my own co-pilot. The writing under his hand on the board was the number seven. He reported that about a third of the population had seen such phenomena, and went on to tell them pretty much what they had seen - lights in the sky moving too fast, beams of colored light coming down to the ground, etc. All eight then told their stories, and all agreed with him. My co-pilot was Lieutenant Ashley, a nice young man who had been a high school teacher until he fell in love with one of his students and got married to her, a situation obviously not acceptable to his employer, said that hundreds of his schoolmates had seen it during an all night graduation party. I did not ask if this was when he got lucky and had to join the Air Force. I guess he screwed himself into a pretty good job too.

All of this was convincing to me, so I am a believer. There have been fewer sightings in recent history and I think that means the aliens either got bored with us or got better at not being seen. That or the press is tired of the story or the government is pressuring them to not report such sightings. I don't know, but I am not a conspiracy theory kind of guy. Believer or not, I have no action plan to present for the possible truth of UFOs, so like everything else I believe but cannot prove, like the existence of God, I will just continue to deal with the things I can have an effect on and move on.

KC-135A

Wright Patterson AFB OH
1974-1976

Historical Notes: *1974 brought the Watergate Hotel scandal, and President Nixon resigned. 1975 brought the fall of Saigon, and the Khmer Rouge massacres in Cambodia. Many of our faithful allies were left to die, and it would not be the last time.*

I finished the KC-135 checkout on 8 April 1974. By May, I was flying the KC-135A and C-135B, with the much more powerful turbo fan engines, in Ohio. My first real test program was pretty typical for a new guy, I guess. I got to taxi a KC-135 around the field while some engineer monitored how the bumps differed from a 3000 psi hydraulic system to 4000 psi. This same 4000 pound system would later be used on the B-1. My job was to taxi, flying formation with a truck doing various speeds. Simple, and requiring no pilot skills whatsoever.

At the halfway point, I asked the engineer how it was going, and he said "poorly". It seems the taxiways were too smooth, and he only got data taxiing over a lip between the runway and the taxiway. I asked if he wanted to do the next half back and forth across the lip and he was delighted. I checked with the squadron commander, LTC Howard Bradley, and he said "Absolutely not! Tell him to go change the test plan." Well, that was not practical because the report was due too soon. We went back out and taxied around for an hour for two more data points; a waste of time, fuel and money.

So my first encounter with Howard went badly, as would all subsequent interactions. He must have had some career catastrophe somewhere, (I later learned that he had been passed over for Major, unheard of for a test pilot in those days) and the end result was that he would not vary from the exact directives he had no matter how stupid. This contrasted sharply with my own personality.

Howard Bradley triggered my "general inability to deal with bullshit" to an incredible degree. Of course, he would not suffer because of it. In the service, "it all flows downhill" and I was immediately downhill from him. He made life miserable for me.

To be fair, he was generally miserable to everyone. He had all the pleasant ambiance of a speed bump, and another of the squadron wits said that he acted like "a prophylactic upon the prick of progress".

Notes on Wright-Patterson AFB OH: *This is an enormous base, the center of logistics for the Air Force, and the location of the Air Force Museum. The 4950th Test Wing was not its primary mission by a long shot. We had a bunch of tankers modified with a "droop snoop" for a larger radar antenna, and our mission included looking for returning space capsules as well as some secret stuff. We were tucked away in a corner of Patterson field, and it seemed like a long time before I made any unmarried friends. The weather is mostly nasty, too cold or too hot. It was close enough to Detroit to make visiting fairly easy, and once I rented a little prop plane and flew there; an adventure in itself, considering the little knowledge I had about small prop aircraft. There are actually two fields. Wright was the original base, and it had three closed runways, the Fly Wright Officers' Club (the place the younger officers went to) and the AF museum. Patterson had all the real runways, operational aircraft and flight operations.*

I was part of Aeronautical Systems Division, which owned the 4950th Test Wing, and what we did almost exclusively was "development test". Scientists would dream up an idea, and we would try to fit it into one of our birds to look at it in flight; it was upstream of operational testing, and while it was interesting, it did not involve a lot of flying skills for the test pilots. Basically we just

drove the engineers around. It was still light years better than sitting alert on a bomber.

All the test pilots were supposed to be dual qualified in two aircraft, and I wanted to get started on my second bird. I actually flew a few T-37 flights with a Major Gordon before Howard found out about it and put a stop to it, I guess because I was enjoying it. Instead, I flew as additional pilot on odd programs including the ILM (Instrument Landing Monitor), which took the radar picture and converted it electronically to look like you were looking out a small window at the runway. It was really pretty slick, and you could land using only it for visual references after you practiced a little. It was made more difficult by being a small screen located just over the pilot's right knee, making it a very tricky instrument cross check.

We had lots of "systems projects". That meant I would take an aircraft up and do orbits while the engineers in the back clustered around a display of some kind and hollered "look at that!" while we ate lunch in the front, totally out of the loop. Once when I asked an engineer where he wanted his orbit, he actually produced a street map of St. Louis and pointed to a four-block area near his laboratory. He also wanted it at 30,000 feet altitude. After I explained what I could and could not do, he accepted an orbit of 20 mile legs at 31,000 feet. I had been too astonished by the request to even laugh at it.

We went TDY a lot. Eglin AFB in FL was a favorite, but my own favorite was Nellis AFB NV, right outside Las Vegas. We flew into Area 51, a place so secret as to be almost mythical, and flew formation with a Mig-15. I wanted to fly that bird so badly I could taste it, but I remembered I wasn't a Real Fighter Pilot.

Pete Larkin was my co-pilot on that trip, and like Real Fighter Pilots, we called for an overhead pattern to land. It was pretty much unheard of for a big aircraft to pitch out over the end of the runway like the fighters did, but we test pilots figured we could do anything. We managed to piss off some F-111 pilot in the process because he had to alter his own pattern to accommodate us, and when he complained over the radio on the tower's frequency, Pete answered him with, "I figure if those multi-engine bombers can do it, so can we!" Well, we had one angry, pumped up, little Captain on the ramp when we finally finished taxiing, but he went away without further trouble when he found he was facing two Majors who weren't in the mood for his baloney.

Another boondoggle I liked was Trinidad. We went to Piarco on August 18th to orbit over the Caribbean and let the engineers exclaim over OMEGA navigation squiggles during some of the first satellite navigation testing. Air Traffic Control had a lot of trouble understanding why we just wanted to orbit in the way of their other traffic, and they had even more trouble understanding my Texas co-pilot's pronunciation of "Barranquilla"… But we persevered, logged a lot of flying time, and drank a lot of that wonderful Mount Gay Barbados rum at the pool. The six-pack of coke we drank with it was actually more expensive than the rum.

Howard came along, I guess to see what kind of a job I did as mission commander. I made a letter-perfect approach with the weather at minimums, descending in the NDB holding pattern to an ILS in mountainous terrain to a strange field. No one spoke in the cockpit during the approach lest they disturb my concentration. He said nothing at all about it, positive or negative.

As soon as we returned, he sent me to IPIS

(Instrument Pilot Instructor School) at Randolph AFB TX. This was more than a month TDY, and I was still trying to catch up with my mail and was not eager to go. I pointed out that I wasn't an instructor, but he sent me anyway. Now I enjoyed the month flying the T-38 at Randolph very much; it just didn't make a lot of sense why I was going.

As a graduate of this school, I would be qualified to teach the annual instrument refresher course given at each base throughout the Air Force, and that was something you would not normally waste a test pilot's time and training on. I hoped desperately that I would never have to actually do this, because it was really dull material.

The first day of school, during a tour of the facilities, I again encountered the phenomenon of performance equaling expectations. We stopped at a T-39 simulator, and, as the test pilot pro, I was invited to demonstrate my skills in it. I noticed right away that it tended to be very stable, and consequently much easier to fly, and the instructor shortly failed my attitude indicator, so I continued using the turn needle and vertical velocity indicator. He directed me to hold on an NDB (Non-Directional Beacon) and then do a precision approach, all of which I could do handily, having just done a such an approach in real weather. This would have been a genuine emergency if it had really happened, and would have been very, very difficult for an average pilot. I had just given myself an aura, a halo that would last during the entirety of this school and would color my performance whatever I did. This halo effect is very nice if it's on your side, but really difficult to bear if you wear a negative halo. Perhaps "target" is a better word than "negative halo", because that's what it amounts to.

Notes on instrument flying: *This is a difficult thing to master, but if you keep your eyes moving in a cross check of the instruments, and keep the bird trimmed up so that it doesn't move by itself, you can concentrate on moving just one thing, while keeping the other things constant. Like refueling or bombing, you have to watch for the first tiny movements and make small corrections. If you can do that, you will make it look very easy, but you have to concentrate hard and keep those eyes moving! Zen instruments!*

A brief history of instrument flying is presented here, at least enough to help you understand what I was doing: Test pilot and WWII hero General Jimmy Doolittle did the first flying without reference to the ground at Wright-Patterson AFB. I actually met him and instructed his grandson at TPS. The first instruments were pitot-static airspeed and altitude. Direction was indicated by a "whiskey compass", a magnet floating in alcohol with the compass marked on it. This instrument was not a precision instrument, and it moved contra-intuitively when you banked the aircraft. These instruments were followed by a gyro-stabilized compass, a vertical velocity indicator and a gyro-stabilized attitude indicator. This last is very, very important to flying precise instruments. An autopilot can also make it much easier to fly precisely, because humans just do not want to concentrate that hard for that long a period. A flight director system was considered very modern, and was only installed in the T-38 and KC-135 as far as the aircraft I had flown so far.

Navigation is not included in the above instrumentation, although you need all of them to navigate without looking at the ground. Navigation started with the very primitive A-N beacon and the marker beacon, neither of which has the capability to point a needle at them in the cockpit, went to the NDB, the VOR and TACAN, and the ILS for a precision approach. All of these aids have ground stations that transmit their location, in one form or another, to your aircraft. Over water, we had LORAN and celestial navigation, the latter done by shooting the stars just like Columbus did in 1492, and that is how we flew that B-52 to and from Guam.

Modern systems include inertial navigation and satellite navigation, either of which is more accurate than most of what we had, not to mention hybrid forms combining inertial, TACAN and computer mixes. And the new displays in the cockpit on TV tubes of one kind or another make it incredibly easier to process the information you need to fly good instruments. Progress in aviation in my lifetime has been truly incredible!

Back in school, and a few weeks later while giving my graded impromptu speech, I had to speak on the "most important characteristic for an officer" for ten minutes. I didn't have a clue even after having five minutes to think about it, but I got the class talking about the various things that we are rated on with the OER system, and the answer just grew before us. It has to be judgment. You don't need to be smart, or skillful, or even obey the rules as long as your judgment is sound.

After it was over, and it was a beautiful job, some accused me of collaborating with the instructor (as usual, I was the most senior guy in the class), but by now my halo was just screwed on tight, and they were really just kidding anyway. The reason I tell that story is to emphasize how important good judgment is. It may not get you promoted like brown-nosing will, but it is vitally important to the men who serve under you. It can keep them alive, and they will love you for it and do amazing things for you in return.

I really had a very pleasant time there, even getting in seven glider flights with various friends at nearby San Marcos TX, and afterward I visited my kids in Phoenix.

Me in front of the "droop snoop" NC-135B in the snow. The coat I'm wearing is a uniform left over from my days in SAC and is noticeably different from the belt length jackets the other pilots wore. People often asked if I was cold and my usual humor led me to just say, "No" without amplification.

My first flight back at Wright-Patt after a month of flying the T-38 was a proficiency check in the C-135B. I passed it easily, but suspected that Howard was trying to get me into trouble. I also found that we had reorganized the 4950th Test Wing. The ARIA aircraft had been integrated, and we now had three flights, two of C-135s and one of everything else. I was B Flight commander, meaning I had to write OER's again, and there were a bunch of non-test pilots within the units too. We all found it kind of strange, but it certainly made sense because we sure didn't need test qualified co-pilots. The new guys put up with us prima donnas, and I for one did not treat them like second-class citizens. In my book, you just have to be fair to your subordinates. I expected it from my superiors and was often disappointed, but that's no excuse to pass it on. It is, quite simply, the Golden Rule, and if you do not follow it yourself, you cannot reasonably expect your boss to either. Nor can you reasonably expect your subordinates to respect you.

The second flight was in the C-141, not for purposes of checkout, but for a proximity test with the KC-135 to see how feasible it would be to air refuel. Plans were in the works for the C-141B, which would be 30% larger in cargo space and be air refuelable. We were to check for surprises, like wake turbulence in the wrong place. The test was just to fly in the air refuel position, and the C-141 guys were doing a terrible job. Refueling a heavy just isn't easy the first time you try it. Fortunately, they had Ad Thompson and me along, and we had actually refueled bombers. We made it look easy, and they decided it was OK to proceed. It was a really interesting flight, with me discovering the poor control harmony of the C-141 in the pre-contact position. It was quick to respond in the pitch axis and slow in the roll axis, causing me to jerk the aircraft around for a second. No damage reported, but some eyebrows were raised.

I continued soaring at Lebanon, OH and got to fly a lesser-known Schweizer 2-22C, kind of an even poorer performer than the SGS-2-33. With Schweizer's nomenclature, the first number is the

number of seats, and the second is the glide ratio; thus the 1-34 I flew at Tehachapi was solo your first flight, always a fun thing, and it had a nice glide ratio of 34 feet forward for every one foot of altitude drop.

In November, Pete Larkin and I took aircraft 55-3124 to Bermuda for some OMEGA navigation testing. This was a great boondoggle, staying on the beach and flying in the Bermuda triangle.

At the end of January 1975, more than a year after my graduation from TPS, I finally got to start my checkout in my second aircraft, the C-141A. Naturally I had to go TDY to Altus AFB OK for two months in the middle of winter. This TDY was not a boondoggle. The C-141 was the most modern aircraft I had yet flown, and it was easy, but the course was awful. It was run by MAC, Military Airlift Command, and it graduated only co-pilots. They had no curriculum for anyone but second lieutenants on their first bird out of pilot training, and they made me (and Ad Thompson, my buddy from Wright-Patterson who actually walked out of the simulator once because of bullshit overload!) absolutely crazy at regular intervals. Talk about being taught down to! I finally graduated in late February and drove to Ohio just slightly in front of an awful ice storm.

The first thing Howard wanted me to do upon return was take a check ride in the KC-135, but he had made my classmate Pete Larkin an examiner while I wasn't even an instructor, and Pete would probably have passed me whatever I did, and he did. Pete and I were now getting along very well without the ultra competitive atmosphere of TPS. Unfortunately, Pete would succumb to cancer before even being reassigned.

It is difficult to jump from one aircraft to another, particularly when you are new to both of them, but I had the hang of flying by now, and I could fly instruments in anything, and as long as I didn't get tripped up with something I was supposed to memorize, I was just fine. Flying good instruments is the key to checking out in a new aircraft, period.

I did not see the C-141 again until April, when we flew up to Goose Bay Labrador to fly a SATCOM test under the northern lights. Now this was really pretty cool, but it was all night flying, and it turns out you can't see them very well if you are actually over them. When we weren't flying, there wasn't a lot of fun at the base in the daytime, but we found that the RAF (Royal Air Force) bar was open 24 hours a day and we were welcome to go there and sing strange and wonderful songs with the British boys. There was one old sergeant there who looked like he was sleeping, but he would break into song, seemingly at random intervals. We taught them a couple from Vietnam, but they were insignificant compared to the volumes the Brits knew.

Three flights later I got an aircraft commander's check ride on the way back to Ohio, having never before flown the bird from the left seat, meaning with the left hand. Piece of cake! I could take a check ride in my sleep by now.

One of our own wierd modified NC-141As. Note the probe nose used to test radar systems. This was the fourth C-141 built and was never in service with MAC, used only by AFSC.

In May I took the C-141 to Holloman AFB NM to do navigation system testing on several experimental systems at the same time. They included the B-1 system, the LTN-72, CIRIS, HSDN-1020, and LINS. I only remember what the B-1 was now, the other abbreviations are lost, but they loaded them all onto different pallets in the back of that C-141, and we flew the damn thing on preset routes and checked our position visually with an old Norden bombsight every ten minutes or so. Very, very dull.

Notes on Holloman AFB: *Holloman is located just north of White Sands National Park, which is full of gypsum sand, not silicone sand like the beach. Very interesting, but the town was almost as dull as Altus OK, and they only had two bars that were fit for an officer to enter, even for an officer that was slumming.*

In June of 1975, we were supposed to return to Bermuda for another three days of testing. These trips were pure boondoggle material; the location was wonderful, and the work was minimal. Adding to the boondoggle, we broke a starter after two flights and had to sit on the ground for another four days waiting for the part to arrive from home. I had invited a young lady from the Eglin area with a large appetite for fun to join me, and I was having a great time, but everyone else was out of money, doubling up in the rooms, and really wanting to go home. My lady left after extending a day, and then I too was ready to go. The broken part was a gear about the size of my finger, and I used to have it among my treasures somewhere, but I think it may have been lost. When the part finally arrived in the hands of one of our co-pilots, we installed it, tested the engine, and departed in about an hour. The poor delivery pilot didn't get to see much of Bermuda.

In June, my kids came to visit me in Ohio! I had a condo with a community pool, and we had a great time. My brother Andy came down from Detroit at the same time, and I found out how much trouble it is to have kids and no partner. I had to go to the grocery store every day! Heidi was ten, Hank IV was eight, and Andy about thirteen and they all ate like there was no tomorrow. I took them all soaring at Lebanon on the 13th of July.

My old roommate, Grant Callin, was also stationed at Wright-Patt as a scientist. He had three little girls, and we often got together with the kids. Grant was as unconventional as ever and had a parrot named "Gandolph" that he shut in a room with a tape recording that repeated "I want a woman!" To me, he was a surprisingly great father. Somehow he had managed to learn more about expressing his love than I had. He taught his kids to sing, and play guitar and obviously loved them greatly. They were just barely older than mine, and his twin girls were born with hare lips that required extensive surgery. They are fine, very bright and attractive adults now.

Grant also had a wonderful job in the AF as a research scientist. He was doing a test program to see how pilots could survive the high temperatures in an SR-71 at high mach speeds. If the air conditioning system failed, the skin temperature of the bird was hundreds of degrees in spite of the cold at altitude, and would make it hot in the cockpit. He cooked people in an oven, measuring their internal temperature and sweat rate and made some fascinating discoveries like sinusoidal sweat curves. He even had a poster made by the AF of him in the oven: I wish I could show it here. Sometimes they would watch cookies bake as they took data. I was jealous and figured him for a below the zone promotion.

Another boondoggle trip we had was a KC-135 trip to England, and after an extensive briefing on the North Atlantic Airway system at Griffiss AFB, the base near Rome, NY, we were on the way. On the 18th of August, about an hour before landing, some three hours before sunrise, number one engine's fire light went on. It seems that this happens more often over an ocean and in the dark, and it always increases your heart rate and blood pressure. I pulled the throttle to idle, monitoring the other instruments, and the fire light went out. The co-pilot reached for the fire handle, but I told him to wait. The engine looked just fine at idle, and I didn't want to shut something off that I might actually need later, and pulling that handle shuts other things down too, like a hydraulic system and a generator. We declared an emergency, continued to the UK and landed without further incident. After landing, when the engineers opened the cowling, the starter/generator unit fell

out on the ramp. Maybe I should have pulled that fire handle after all, but it worked out well.

About this time, Saigon fell. It was depressing, and I was depressed. It seemed that all the effort we had made, all my dead friends, was all for nothing. I reacted typically by getting really, really drunk. I woke up the next morning in the bed of one of my female friends, needing water, aspirin, and a hurl, but she would not let me into the toilet because her daughters were getting ready for school. She had three truly beautiful teen-age daughters, the main reason I had never dated her; it was just not acceptable even to my documented lack of morals to date someone while the possibility existed of lusting for her daughters. One of them actually went on to a fine modeling career.

Nugyen dam Thuyen and his F-5 ready for war.

While I was attempting to destroy my liver, my Vietnamese buddy Captain Nguyen Thuyen was walking around the ramp at Bien Hoa during a mortar attack looking for a flyable F-5 to escape the base. He found one with a half tank of fuel and a fist-sized hole in the wing. It was a single seat aircraft, so his two friends tossed a coin to see who would squeeze in with him, basically sitting on his right shoulder. The other guy started the aircraft (later escaping on a C-119) and they taxied out under fire, avoiding all kinds of things on the taxiways. They took off and headed toward Thailand, but got only a half hour or so before they ran out of gas and dead sticked it into Can Tho. There they managed to find some A-1 pilots who ferried them safely to U Tapo in a utility configured A-1. He watched sadly as the aircraft they flew in were immediately repainted in US markings, and then he was interned, later to be sent to the US with only his flight suit and his family. It was certainly a more emotional day for him than for me. Today he is a proud US citizen, and like me, he is bitter that we chose to lose that war. Also like me, he remembers his combat buddies dearly.

Finally, on October 8th, a year after my vital (to Howard) trip to IPIS, I got my instructor check. Two days later I got a check in the C-141. Five days after that I got another no-notice IP check in the C-135. There was nothing wrong with the first check ride, it was just Howard trying to screw with me. On the 10th of December, I got an IP check in the KC-135 with AFSC (Air Force Systems Command, the parent command of all the test pilots) checking our own examiner and the Air Force Inspector General watching all three of us. I have never heard of so many examiners in one aircraft, before or since, and I passed with no discrepancies noted by any of them! Bring it on, Howard! On the 17th of December he did exactly that, with a no-notice check in the C-141, which I passed, no discrepancies noted. My last flight at Wright-Patt was another no-notice check in the KC-135 on January 23rd of 1976.

Howard was not to be denied. He did bring it on in my OER. I was shocked to read what a bad pilot I was, and an inferior officer to boot. I had spent all of January at Holloman AFB testing with the C-141, and when I returned I managed to get assigned to a ground job across the base at Wright field. I was now the B-1 Avionics Flight Test Manager in the B-1 SPO (System Program Office). By this time, I understood that who you worked for was often more important than the job you did, at least as far as your promotability was concerned. I worked for Colonel Duke Fredericks, a great guy, and I could walk to the Fly-Wright club from my office. Life was better.

B-1 SPO
1976

The SPO was concerned with the procurement of the B-1 weapons system and this was a very interesting business to be in. We watched as they took the ejection capsule out of the aircraft in a cost saving measure and changed it from the A to the B model. There were only four A models made, and they were all test birds. My bird was number four, the only one with all the avionics in it. I also watched as they took what was to be a Mach 2 bird and made it into one barely supersonic, also as cost saving. I had become a staff weenie, and I needed to hide my face among better men.

About this time I started dating Shirley Darlene Stuck, a secretary in one of the flight test offices. She was crying when I met her, and my protective instincts kicked in, and before I knew it, we were living together. She was fourteen years younger, good looking and sexy, and we were fairly happy.

She was from bucolic North Star, Ohio. Her parents were wonderful hard-working people who were awake every morning, every day, before dawn milking the cows. They had finally installed one indoor toilet a couple of years before, and they were truly the salt of the earth. At Thanksgiving, all the men would sleep in the living room in about six recliners and watch football while the women worked in the kitchen. I got hooked on real milk, un-pasteurized, from only the sweetest tasting cows they had. It turns out each cow has a different taste! Who knew? It's really pretty amazing how much better it tastes than the stuff you can buy in stores.

I spent the rest of 1976 there, deeply concerned with the possibility of not being promoted to LTC. I worked to have Howard's OER removed and succeeded because I was able to show that several things he had attested to simply were not true. It is very difficult to have an OER removed, but I did it! I had never worried about promotion before, but now I talked to MPC (Military Personnel Command) in Randolph AFB TX and listened to their opinion on my chances for promotion.

They said they were not good. I had spent too much time in flying assignments. They wanted to see staff experience. I had no PME (Professional Military Education - training schools on how to be an officer and the status of forces in the services). I had been selected to go to Squadron Officers' School while I was in SAC, but SAC "needed" me on a crew desperately and would not let me go. Actually, back then SAC thought that anything they didn't give their pilots was not needed, and to be fair, I don't think they let anyone go. So what I was supposed to do is take these courses by correspondence in my "free" time, showing how motivated I was to work for free. Now I still consider this a load of crap. If your employer wants you to have some training, he should schedule time for it and pay you while you do it! And as far as staff experience in SAC went, they took the poor pilots off the crews and made them serve in the staff. The end result was that the weaker pilots got promoted.

So now I was a staff weenie. I started wearing all my ribbons on my khaki uniform so that maybe people wouldn't notice that I wasn't wearing a flight suit. I stood quietly while my betters talked about their day in air and bought a round for the working troops when I should. At least the staff thing should be helping my career.

My good friend CA Smith was in the SPO as the SAC representative and was now a full Colonel. I told him I had gotten in trouble with my mouth, and he later wrote these words about the situation to someone else. "Hank's trouble with his mouth was because he's pretty damned smart and doesn't suffer fools lightly. He was the only guy in the B-1 test division that ever had his stuff straight." CA and I always agreed because we were both interested in getting the best product possible to the crews who were going to fly the bird. I was certainly staff, but maybe not a weenie.

I went ahead and started Command and Staff school by correspondence because I thought I really needed it. The course was dead easy. It was about the Air Force, stuff I already really knew or had learned at the Academy, and when I received the books I would schedule an exam, take it and pass it, and throw the unopened books away. I had just completed it when another deal I had been working on panned out. I had volunteered to go to Armed Forces Staff School at Norfolk AFB VA on short notice. What happened was that someone scheduled to go was promoted to LTC early, "below the zone", and that meant he couldn't go, because the course was for Majors. So in January of 1977, I drove to Norfolk Virginia. Shirley stayed in Ohio; the course was only six months long. AFSC was really a good deal; I got the same credit as a course that lasted a year in Alabama, and I got credit for a "purple suit" course, one designed to integrate the forces of the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force.

Production model B-1B

Armed Forces Staff College
Norfolk VA 1977

AFSC was a very positive experience. The teachers taught, the exercises were well constructed and generally worthwhile, the student body was select officers from the various forces and the civilian staff as well. This was a prestigious school designed for the "fast-burners", people on the fast track for promotion. Since the school was only six months long, I would recover half a year of the time lost in SAC, and we had lots of athletic programs for the old jock to participate in. I was now 36. I had been feeling older than the other guys since graduate school at ASU. I was one of the oldest at TPS, and here at AFSC as well. Looking back at it, how on earth could I feel old at 36?

I went to the gym and ran into Dave Milam again, and he and I and another student from Dave's seminar named Rich Rollins, a non-rated guy who would go on to be a general officer, arranged to rent a house on the beach for the term of the school. It was right at the foot of the bridge across the Chesapeake and next door to the Marine Amphibious Base Little Creek. Norfolk is just full of military people and bases. Oceana NAS, Norfolk Navy yards and NAS, Fort Monroe, Fort Henry, and Langley AFB were all in the area, and I'm sure I missed some others. It was a comfortable place to work and live.

I never mentioned to Dave that I knew he had tried to turn me in for cheating at TPS. I guess the incident was just over for me. Dave said something interesting once, that I was the "mentally healthiest guy he knew". To me, that meant that he was spending way too much time worrying about himself, but I guess it also meant that I was pretty satisfied with myself, certainly enough to not put any extra worry into his past conduct, and consequently "sane". I did deal well with stress, and one good way to do that is to not worry about things you can't do anything about.

I met Rich at the gym too, and he seemed like an easy-going bald guy. When I met him in uniform, I didn't recognize him because he was wearing a toupee! It changed his personality too, and made him into a very proper, upstanding, politically correct, perfect kind of guy. I say never trust a guy too far who needs a wig to cover his own self-perceived faults. His ego will be too large to have room for yours to function naturally.

I had managed a follow-on assignment to Edwards AFB to fly the B-1. I was very excited about the whole thing, since I already knew a lot about the aircraft, especially the navigation system, which I had first seen on the C-141. There was finally a need for a bomber test pilot, and I was one of the very few with actual bomber experience!

I was in Seminar 15, and we all became pretty close before it was over. I managed to get elected athletic director and from that spot selected myself as coach of the volleyball team. We went undefeated and won little leaky glass-bottomed mug trophies, which could possibly be found among my souvenirs. We competed in the "Long Haul", which was a jogging thing, and took second place there. I played racquetball and handball with the boys and totally enjoyed myself. We actually learned some interesting things too. I forget just what they were.

While a student there, I found a group of instructors who were taking ICAF (Industrial College of the Air Force), an intermediate level PMS course, by correspondence and sharing their work. Since I had just now completed ACSC, I was eligible to join them while most of my classmates weren't. The basic material of ACSC, AFSC and ICAF was pretty much the same, but they had added some engineering course material that I had studied at ASU, with my master's degree in Industrial Engineering, so I completed that the same way I had finished off ACSC, by taking the tests as soon as I got the books and then throwing

the books away still in their packaging.

In the end I had two intermediate professional schools and one senior school under my belt in about a six-month period. I was beginning to feel promotable again.

There were lots of PME schools, and they were vital to your promotion chances. No PME, no promotion. Lots of PME, good possibility of promotion; it was that simple, but of course there were lots of other things on your OER that influenced your promotability.

After school was over I drove to Ohio and married Shirley on July 4th, 1977. I promised her fireworks; it was easy to deliver on that one. We married in her tiny hometown of Northstar Ohio and then drove on to California. About this time I learned that President Carter had canceled the B-1 program. It was just one disaster after another.

Shirley and I drove my mini motor home to Edwards, towing my little convertible, and when I arrived I found I was assigned to be the chief of the "bomber branch" section of Test Operations. This was only because I was the senior officer in the group (read: oldest guy again), and someone had to write the OERs; in reality I was an unassigned test pilot, like a raw new TPS graduate, a man with no mission.

More champion boys. Look at the size of that Vollyball trophy!
That's former POW Admiral Jeremiah Denton, school commandant, second from left.

Edwards AFB CA
1977

Historical note: *This year marked the first flight of the shuttle Enterprise. We watched it land from the roof of the Test Ops building. Very exciting!*

Upon arrival at Edwards, Shirley and I were assigned a nice three-bedroom house in the Capehart area of the field-grade officers' section. This was named after Senator Capehart, who managed to get a bill passed with appropriations for better housing for the military services, bless him. It was next door to John Hoffman, so we got our mail screwed up right away, and I was soon reminded of why I didn't like him. He and his wife fought constantly, and he was still trying to screw the other wives in the area, including mine. His kids, however, were terrific. He has two boys, Larry and David, and they grew up just fine with values learned from their mother.

Shirley soon got a job as a secretary for the B-1commander in what should have been my unit. She was an excellent secretary and got a promotion to GS-5. She was as popular at Edwards as she had been at Wright-Patt with the test pilots. I was the bomber section chief at Test Ops, which was part of the 6512th Test Wing. Not for anything I deserved, but I was again the most senior guy, and I had to write OERs.

As soon as I arrived, I started to check out in the A-37 again. I was just delighted with this, making up for some of my disappointment at not flying the F-111 and B-1, which should have been my assignment. They say that your first fighter aircraft is a love affair that you never get over, and I was happy and at home in it.

My instructor was an exchange pilot from England named Peter Tait, and he was not prepared for how knowledgeable and proficient I was in the aircraft, and he wanted to over-instruct a little. It was, after all, an aircraft that had not seen wide service, and I had not flown anything but gliders in a year and a half; he always seemed surprised at how well I did even though I had more time in the aircraft than he did. I even knew the books better than he did. In less than a month, I was fully qualified again. On the 13th of August I started re-qualifying on the B-52, this time on the G model that we would be using for testing several upgrades to the old bomber. I was fully

qualified as aircraft commander only four flights and six days later. I didn't bother to tell them I had never been an A/C in SAC before.

On 24 August I started to re-qualify on the KC-135 and finished on the 1st of September, eight days later. This was real flying! Usually test pilots were only qualified in two aircraft, but already I was current in three; eat my shorts, Howard Bradley! My year and a half on the ground had not taken away from my ability to fly even a little. I started to upgrade to instructor in the A-37 and the KC-135 at the same time, with the KC winning the race. I also checked out as an air-refueling instructor in the KC-135. Systems Command had one NKC-135, number 53-3120, which had an air-refueling receptacle in the fuselage behind the cockpit, similar to the location in the B-52, and I was an automatic pro at that too. The KC-135 refueled similarly to the B-52 in that they were both heavy aircraft, but the KC was easier to control in the roll axis, and more difficult in the yaw axis. Refueling with the yaw damper off was very difficult for most pilots, but not for me because I made small, smooth corrections that didn't excite the yaw coupling that the yaw damper corrected for.

Checkrides are a way of life for a pilot. You are required to take two, often three a year in each different type of aircraft you were qualified in. Sometimes they were administered in flight simulators, sometimes they happened without notice on an operational mission, but they happened with frequency and you had to pass them all or you were in trouble. None of them were particularly easy, and they all came with written tests too. Some might see this as stress, but it rolled right off me and I never, ever, failed a military checkride after TPS.

Strangely enough, Edwards had only one assigned tanker, aircraft number 533-135 built in 1953, and it refueled all the test program birds. It was an NKC-135, having lots and lots of data monitoring systems installed that were used for test purposes. You could see the orange colored test wires all over the aircraft. Wright-Patt had lots of tankers, including the only one that could be used as a receiver, and none of which were actually used to refuel anything. The crew of a tanker in SAC had two pilots, a navigator and a boom operator. At Wright-Patt we used two pilots and an engineer. At Edwards there were no flight engineers or navigators. We learned to get along without them. There were three boom operators assigned to the base, very sharp sergeants, and they flew quite a bit, taking the place of the engineers, but we often flew with just two pilots on board. Sometimes when we went cross country, the ground handling people would look up at the hatch waiting for the rest of the passengers and crew to get out, and it just wasn't going to happen. Eventually all those tankers at Wright-Patt would move to Edwards, but not until after I had retired.

Somehow this "weak" pilot at UPT had become very proficient in a lot of different skills and aircraft. I think it shows that many of us learn better under different conditions, and that we should never, ever, quit learning.

This was what I had been hoping for all along. I was doing some real flying, respected by my peers, getting to do some very interesting things, and having a ball all at the same time! Life was good!

I want to mention that the vast majority of test flying was really test support. Safety chase was flown with another different type of aircraft that went on the wing of every test mission for safety support. These were vital missions, and the test mission would cancel for lack of safety chase.

We also flew photo chase, taking lots of photographers with lots of cameras. High-speed movies of weapons separation from a new bird could be crucial data needed before the next test. I learned that "prime time" was the time just after sunrise or before sunset, and that because of the sun angle, photos taken during those windows were just the best. This resulted in a lot of early wake-ups and after dark landings. Actually, night landings were sometimes hard to come by at Edwards, and you needed them every so often to remain current.

Real test flying in a new bird was harder to come by. At that time at Edwards we were testing the A-10 and F-16. The B-1 was still flying too, in spite of being cancelled, as a "development program" instead of pre-production testing. There was still no room for me in that test force because it had been cut back severely.

I had applied to be an astronaut, along with

every other test pilot on the base, and the list of people accepted to the space shuttle program was due out in the summer of '77. NASA had been sending letters to people when they determined that the applicant wasn't what they wanted, and suddenly I was one of a very few people on base who did not have a letter of rejection. I noticed the sudden respect of my peers! I had a lot of glider time, and a lot of heavy time (the shuttle was about the size of a C-135) and I was somehow competitive.

Do not be confused here; there was no real possibility that I would have been selected to such a high post, not because of my skills, but because of my lack of influential friends in high places, and my rudimentary ability at sucking up. You can only go so far with ability, and then politics always gets into the process.

Two days before the list was to be released, NASA made an announcement that "all selections were being put on hold pending a review for ethnic diversity." I knew at once what that meant; no marginal white boys without high sponsorship were going. A few weeks later they selected two (of the four existing) black test pilots and a Hawaiian friend, Ellison Onizuka. El would later go down on the Challenger, so maybe I was lucky again, but it sure didn't feel like it at the time. Onizuka Air Force Station in Hawaii is named after him.

The Affirmative Action programs were now going on all over the country. It was a disadvantage to be a white male in a lot of ways, and still is, and I had been threatening (usually while drinking) to change my name to "Magnolia Gonzales-Wong", and as a female, cross-dressing lesbian black-latino-asian person I could take advantage of every possibility, and now I was sorry that I hadn't actually done so. While I think about it, I had also threatened to change my last name to "Bloodlust" while I was trying to get a fighter assignment to Vietnam. Who could have refused the combat application of such a man?

In September, Tom LeBeau and I flew A-37 790 to Mather AFB near Sacramento to keep current in the B-52. This was really cool, flying cross-country in an airplane just to fly another airplane! On the return trip, we discovered we had blown a fuse in the bird, and we couldn't get the radios to work. After a long time with maintenance, we discovered that they just didn't have that old fashioned fuse on base, and we were going to have to abort on the ground and probably spend a couple of days waiting for a part to be flown in from Edwards. Well, we didn't want to do that at all because we were busy. I had already noticed a decommissioned T-37 on a pole displayed near the flight line, and I got an old sergeant interested in the idea that there might still be some fuses in there. He got a ladder, opened it up, pulled a fuse out, put it in our bird and we were on our way! Pretty damn resourceful, even if I have to say so myself, and lots of our sergeants are just terrific too. The fuse failed on the way home, and we landed without a radio or IFF, the only noticeable losses. We were prohibited from taking off without radios, but could easily continue enroute if the failure occurred after airborne. Flying without a radio is kind of fun because you just do what you have to and hope the ground people can keep up.

I also flew safety chase for the new A-10. Safety chase of a new airplane with an old airplane is always a challenge because the new bird is always able to outperform the old one, and that was always the case because we just weren't building new aircraft to do less. Tom LeBeau and I were doing such a chase one day, inverted, nose down, trying hard to catch up with the faster A-10, when I exceeded the speed limit for the A-37. It is limited to 0.7 Mach, because at that speed the wings blank out the horizontal tail and you lose control in pitch. This is pretty unnerving when you are upside down, hurtling at the earth a few thousand feet below, and you can't pull the nose up! This would be the second time I almost killed myself by running into the ground at high speed in the A-37.

I rolled the aircraft upright, extended the speed brakes and pulled the throttles to idle while pulling back as hard as I could with both hands on the stick. It eventually slowed down and started controlled flight again, and we went back to work chasing that A-10 a little more cautiously. There are two other things I could have done. The first was cross-control the aircraft with rudder one way and opposite aileron, thus increasing the drag. I didn't really get into that habit until I started flying more advanced gliders, such as the SGS-36, which

Harrison's T-6 and my A-37.

has no dive brakes. It is quite startling to the passengers and crew if done on a large aircraft, but it works just the same. The second was to open, not jettison the canopy, which also increases drag, and would have helped our ejection if necessary. That would have meant coming home without the canopy, since it would have been torn off, and would have been embarrassing, but far better than not coming home.

Just like the first time I almost killed myself, I didn't think of these things until later, but I did learn something from the event. And while chasing an A-10 on a test flight certainly wasn't boring, it does show how quickly you can go from routine to heart-hammering panic in the air. Our seat cushions were undamaged by emissions, and we landed safely. Death would have to wait.

You know, I had pretty much forgotten the previous story. I think that if you dwell too personally about your odds in the air, you begin to fear, and when that happens, not only will your performance and judgment suffer, but you won't be having fun flying anymore either. I had learned from Mr. Waha in high school, "Don't think, Hoffman, you weaken the team!" This is not quite what he meant, but it fits anyway.

I passed my IP check ride with Bruce Hinds on 2 November in the KC-135, and was instructing Bob Behler in it the next day.

On November 11th, Tom and I flew up to Mather AFB in the A-37 to be in a static display in an air show there. My buddy John Harrison was there, displaying his antique bird, and after the show we joined up over the nuclear power plant to fly a little dissimilar formation: my A-37 and his AT-6! Our radios were incompatible, so we couldn't talk to each other, but we had visual signals. It was great fun, he had his canopy open, and I had to use half flaps to keep from stalling. I have a photo of this strictly illegal formation taken by one of his three wingmen.

Still very much into athletics, I played on the base soccer team and the base volleyball team and started a real tradition of running an intramural volleyball team that always won the base championship. I dearly loved playing with the boys.

And speaking of having fun, I got to be an extra in a couple of films being made at Edwards. The first was The Right Stuff, about BG Chuck Yeager, and the second was a TV series, Call to Glory, starring Craig T. Nelson as the Wing Commander at Edwards. The first was kind of hokey, and the second was just baloney, with Nelson acting about as responsibly as Captain Kirk on Star Trek.

The fun part wasn't the immortality in film, but the fact that we got more than a day's pay for hanging around for a couple of hours just looking like pilots and that we got to eat with the film crew! Great food, and pretty girls too.

Heavy Test Pilot
1978

AARB Testing
Me making the first contact with the new refueling boom.

In October of 1977, we started getting heavily involved in the AARB project. The Advanced Air Refueling Boom was a fly-by-wire boom that would be installed in the KC-10 when it arrived. It was currently installed in the back end of a KC-135 and it would undergo the full range of tests that a new aircraft would, including flutter testing. Captain Bob Behler became the project officer and he flew almost all the tanker sorties. I was happy to fly safety chase and photo chase in the A-37.

On December 19th, Tom LeBeau and I made the trip to Mather once again to borrow B-52H 60054. Nick Stevens was the SAC pilot in command, and he did a wonderful job of staying out of the way and not acting like a commander. He was a good man, and we let him share in the refueling task too. On the 22nd, I made the very first contact with the AARB in B-52G 589. The B-52 was chosen to be the first aircraft to make contact because it was sort of heavily protected if something went wrong with the AARB itself and it might possibly hit us. I suspect the test boom operators we had were responsible for that decision. Tom LeBeau and I were the only real bomber pilots at Edwards at the time. (Except for the B-1 test pilots, and most of them had not flown bombers operationally either. SAC really didn't like to lose their bomber pilots.)

We often took the boomers as right seat passengers in the A-37, and sometimes while the engineers were trying to get things working right with the boom, we would play a little. One day during such a lull, I put both hands on the glare

shield, holding the stick with my knees and staying in what would have been the contact position nicely, and making it look like the boomer in the right seat was flying. Then I had him put his hands up too, giving his buddies in the tanker a good laugh. Staying in position in a fighter was just so much easier than in a heavy.

In January of 1978 we started the AARB program in earnest. We had to accomplish hundreds of "precision disconnect" data points to insure that the new boom would not do something unpredicted in such an unusual attitude. Well, this was made more difficult by the fact that the director lights on the KC-135 used to show you the extension and elevation of the boom were inoperative and would be for months to come. (They were actually stuck somehow in the "dim" position, used for night refueling, and totally invisible in the daytime.) This meant we had to fly ourselves into these odd locations solely directed by voice commands from the boomer above, stabilize, and after the disconnect, find our way back to the contact position in the middle of the boom envelope and do it over again at some other strange point that you would not want to actually fly in. It was really a pain in the ass.

Naturally the program was far behind the projected completion curve, and on 26 January we spent over five continuous hours in position to refuel. It was an amazing effort, and just writing about it makes my arm sore. I wrote Tom and I up for a Commendation Medal for this, trying to insure my promotion.

I got one of my favorite compliments ever at this time. The boomers can tell who is flying by watching your hands, and they also evaluated the refueling pilots. They told me I was by far the best and smoothest. When I asked how they knew, they said that when everyone else refueled they could see the BUF's wings flutter and bounce and watch the little vibrations move back and forth across them. I was inordinately pleased, but I had to agree with them too. Well, if not the best, certainly the smoothest, making the smallest corrections.

In February I was involved with the ALL, Airborne Laser Lab and Pete Larkin again. It was a tanker equipped with a laser designed to shoot down other airplanes as a mature system. By now you know that it didn't work very well, (since it is not in use today) but it was sure interesting flying. It was an NKC-135 aircraft, later upgraded to an E model with new engines, and finally mounted on a B-747-400.

On the 1st of March, Tom and I flew the NB-52B belonging to NASA with the legendary "Fitz" Fulton. This aircraft was one of the first B models, and was affectionately called by its serial number 0008 or "Balls eight". The flaps had literally been welded in the up position to avoid interference with anything that might be carried under its' wings to be dropped, and the no flap takeoffs and landings were most interesting. These were strictly prohibited maneuvers for the operational bombers in SAC. The thing was that the rear trucks touched down when the front trucks were about ten feet in the air, and if you dropped the nose wheel in, you were going to damage the aircraft!

Balls 8 with X-15 attached.

I found a tiny bit of free time and started flying helicopters. I flew the UH-1N, a Navy version of the UH-1H, or "Huey" on loan to us at Edwards. Hovering is kind of a challenge, but I learned very swiftly (it is not nearly as difficult as air refueling in a heavy aircraft) and sometimes accompanied them as copilot on test missions. For fun we would fly formation with trains, or chase coyotes in the desert, an extremely bumpy kind of ride.

I was designated a pilot examiner in the KC-135 and continued very frequent flying with all the other aircraft too. Life was just terrific if you loved to fly as much as I do!

On May 4th of 1978 I drove into Van Nuys and passed the written test for CFI (Certified Flight Instructor) and then took my FAA instructor check in gliders at nearby Crystalaire field. CFI means IP in civilian talk. I was intent on getting a civilian license so that I could easily get a job when I left the service. The written exam was kind of fun; I hadn't studied anything, of course, and when they asked what ice fog was, I had to really scratch my head. The thing that really confused me was when they asked if flaps gave lift or drag. Any fool knows that they do both! (Drag is the answer for little airplanes) I passed the thing anyway.

I started instructing in my "spare time" at Rosamond, flying gliders with civilians and making about fifteen dollars an hour. Obviously, it wasn't the money; it was the fun of flying and gliders! It was the first money I had made outside my military paycheck since high school. It also occasioned my first and only off-field landing.

One hot Saturday I had a civilian student in the Blanik who had less than ten hours of total flying time. On takeoff, all went well until the tow plane did not perform his usual climb profile and continued to hold about twenty feet of altitude across the desert. I wondered if he was having power problems, but wasn't worried yet. When he flew underneath the power lines about a half-mile off the end of the runway, that was enough for me, and I pulled the release handle and decided to land in the junkyard on the other side of the power lines.

That's when I found that our spoilers were fully extended, keeping the tow plane from climbing. They will slowly and smoothly ease out on takeoff roll unless they are locked. I didn't notice that my student hadn't locked them (it is kind of done with feel) or have his hand guarding them and I didn't see them sliding back on takeoff. His mistake was my fault since I'm in charge, and I have to fix it by landing in a tiny pathway in the junkyard. I do this without incident, and then the work starts. We have to carry the aircraft over a fence out of the junkyard onto a dirt road, land a tow plane on that same road, hook them up and fly home. On takeoff, the tow plane stirs up so much dust I can't see to fly and I pull the release handle and stop the aircraft. After some thinking I suggest using a double length of tow rope so that I can be airborne when I get into the dust. We tie a big square knot in the ropes and pretty soon I'm airborne returning solo to the field. When I get there, I see the other tow plane that went under the wires upside down on the runway. It seems that pilot was pretty excited about flying under the wires and losing his glider to an off field landing and he hit the brakes too hard when he landed and flipped his bird into a forward somersault.

This tough day at work was all a result of my not paying careful attention. Of course, the inexperience of my student and the tow pilot were large contributing factors. The tow pilot should have pulled his release handle and left me on the runway as soon as he saw my spoilers extend, and he is supposed to be watching for that in his rear view mirrors. It all goes to show you that aviation is a dangerous business that can hurt you in an instant. Only a few weeks later I watched a solo student there spin his glider into the ground, fortunately just breaking both legs. I ran over to the crash site and was most upset to see his obvious pain while we waited for the fire department's "Jaws of Life" to free him from the wreckage of his SGS-1-26.

I also took the written exam for Flight Engineer with the FAA, not that I ever intended to use it, but because you had to have it to even talk to a lot of flying agencies, including all the airlines. The exam was on the B-727, mostly, and I hadn't studied it either and I still passed! It had questions about the MEL (Minimum Equipment List) and I didn't even know what it was. You see, all the flying tests were pretty much the same material, just like all the military PME tests, and if all you needed was 70%, any higher score was just wasted effort. Refer to Boyington's law at the Academy.

Right in the middle of June 1978, into my sweet punchbowl of life, plopped an enormous turd. The selection list for LTC was due out on a certain day, and when I arrived at work I found my classmate Ike Payne jumping about, happy as a lark about an envelope he had found on his desk announcing his promotion. I looked carefully, and could find no such envelope on my desk. I asked my boss, who denied any knowledge of an envelope. Classmate Dave Milam was likewise delighted. So was classmate Charlie Gebhardt. Charlie had put in his papers to leave active duty

and was headed for Boeing to be a civilian test pilot, and he later told me with feeling that he would have given me his slot if he could. With a sinking heart, I went to personnel to see the list for myself. When I got there some Lieutenant told me the list could not be viewed until later that afternoon, but when he looked into my face he decided to let me look at it anyway. Sure enough, everyone eligible was on it but me.

I look at this example of management as one of the least sensitive imaginable, right up there with "Everyone with living grandparents step forward. Not so fast, Hoffman." It would not have hurt Colonel Twinting to consider the winners and the losers with his management skills.

I was publicly humiliated, officially declared the least of my classmates. Following tradition, they all went to the Officers' Club to buy drinks and be congratulated. I went for a long run through the desert. No tears for a real man, but I was even more miserable than I had been while getting divorced.

I had seen the possibility of it coming. The cancellation of the B-1 program had left me in a very distinguished unit without much of a job. As it worked out, with the 3 the wing commander had given me, my chances of promotion would actually be less than 4%. I had really been DOA as soon as I had arrived at Edwards. I sure wished they had gone to a little trouble and found me on my way to Wright-Patt in 1974; it would have changed everything if I had not worked for Howard.

The 1-2-3 OER system had a good idea at its' heart. The OERs had gradually become inflated over the years so that it was difficult for the promotion boards to discern which candidates were the best ones to select. Forcing the Commander to choose which of his people was best by only permitting him to give a 1 or a 2 (the best ratings) to half his people would ideally sort out the best performers.

It did not. In most cases it really just sorted out the people the Commander like the best, even if the boss was trying to be fair. The Air Force had just institutionalized the principle of sucking up, something I had been very bad at since I was four years old, and it would finally screw me.

The system made no allowance for distinguished units, (for example a unit composed of test pilots might logically be supposed to have more 1s and 2s than a unit of bomber pilots). Grant Callin in his scientific position was screwed too. The Air Force had only a few genuine scientists, and Grant was one of the best, but his OER was written by a civilian in Washington that he had never even met. This civilian gave the 1s and 2s that Grant needed to be promoted to someone else nearby that he actually knew and Grant was out. Two of the Air Force's most capable (if unconventional) people had just been assigned to the trash heap because of the "up or out" policy. This policy stated that if you didn't get promoted, you were going to be a civilian (sooner or later. At 21 years, in this case).

In reality, my career had really been over when I was assigned to a B-52 unit that was going to move to a new base and convert to F-111's. That means that basically it was over when I graduated from UPT. With no possibility of advancing to Aircraft Commander or of going to any school for so many years, I was just too far behind the time line to catch up with my contemporaries. Even in Systems Command, I was older than the other new test pilots and competing with guys who were doing more significant work. I had been screwed since 1964, but it had taken until 1978 for me to realize it.

In the next few days there was a KC-135 being flown back to Wright-Patt for some maintenance activity there, and the return trip was to be via airlines. I volunteered to take it so that I could drop by Detroit and tell mother how bad I felt. That should tell you how miserable I was; going home like a ten-year-old to have mommy kiss it and make it better. This was the lowest I had ever been, before or since too. Shirley mocked me for it. I was gone only for a weekend and then it was back to work.

I don't want to underemphasize this in any fashion. The gods at MPC (Military Personnel Center) had spoken, and my career was officially in the toilet. Worse than that was the stigma that went with it. The good news, well there was no good news, but I still had the world's greatest flying job, and I got to fly a lot because I would do whatever needed to be done even if it didn't have a lot of status to go with it!

Parts pick-up in the KC-135 was one of those jobs, and I was training Brent Hedgepeth on his first flight in the aircraft one morning when I got a call from the command post asking us to go to McClellan AFB CA to get a part for some other aircraft. We were already airborne, but I couldn't think of a reason not to go quick enough, and we pointed it north. I actually had most of the publications needed on board, and we got an ATC clearance in a few minutes and that was when I noticed the first problem. We had no engineer or boomer on board, and the transponder was located at the navigator's table. To set it, or squawk ID, I had to leave my seat and adjust it while letting my student fly solo.

At McClellan, I also found that I had to leave the seat to open the ground access door and extend the ladder, something I had never actually done before, but I figured it out OK. On the ground there we were given directions to go to Reno for another part, and after an agony of clearance delivery and guesses as to whether we had enough fuel, we were off.

We did not shut the engines down in Reno either, but got our part and headed for Edwards. Normally we would have spent over an hour on the ground flight planning this mission, and I was very busy trying to figure out the take off data for Reno at 4,400 feet elevation and in the mountains too, but we had so little fuel that it wasn't a real problem. We returned to Edwards just before dark, after a long hard day and as usual, no thanks. I had been expecting something large to go into that KC-135, but I could have put either one of those tiny parts in my shorts. Don't worry, I didn't.

A few days later I had a left hydraulic system failure in the KC-135 while training Brent and Ad Thompson, but we managed to get the landing gear down without having to crank it down manually, something I really didn't want to do while a student was driving me around, and I was pretty sure that I was the only one that actually knew how to do it.

PA-38 Tomahawk

On the 21st of June 1978, I took my single-engine instructor check with the FAA. This was a pretty interesting piece of flying. We were in the PA-38, Piper Tomahawk number N9905T. I had flown a grand total of 0.8 hours in it when we started. The owner of the FBO had asked me to do this, so that he could make more money; I didn't care much, and I was collecting all the licenses I could, so I said "sure". I mean, it was free, and I wanted every qualification I could for my potential civilian job.

Well the Fed had 0.8 less hours in the bird than I did. It seems that I was doing things out of order. You needed a "complex aircraft" to get your initial CFI rating, and that meant having a retractable landing gear. The Tomahawk didn't have that, but I already had an instructor rating in a complex aircraft, the B-707, and so I could use the little PA-38.

Well, we taxied out to fly, and the first thing he asked me to do was a soft field takeoff. Now, I had never even heard of such a thing, but I held the brakes and unashamedly opened the flight manual and I looked it up. It said, "run up full power and hold the stick all the way back" until it flies. I gave it a try, and damn if it didn't try to do a loop right at rotation. I gave the controls a brisk wiggle and fixed it, but he wanted to see it again. We did it again, this time with me ready for the abrupt rotation, and it was OK. Then he wanted to try it, and he did about what I did the first time.

Up in the air, he wanted to see a power-on turning stall. Well, I'd never done one of those in this bird either, and it turns out that the nose slices before the pitch breaks. It's a stall all the same, defined as loss of control about one or more axis. He accused me of pushing the rudder, and tried it himself with the same result. Basically, neither one of us knew what it would do, and it wasn't in the flight manual, but I could fly it whatever it did.

In the end, he said he was sure I didn't know much about propeller aircraft, which was true, but

PC-3 Orion
Note the long antenna sticking out the back used to communicate with the sonic buoys used to chase submarines.

he couldn't find any reason to bust me, and I had another rating without studying for it, but done in my own, inimitable way, the hard way.

In June I got to fly the P-3C Orion. They were doing a handling qualities test in the envelope behind the tanker and asked the refueling pro for his opinion. It was pretty easy to do, but you had to use the rudders more than the ailerons for reasons not clear to me. The P-3 was already good for a 14-hour mission, and I guess someone decided that was long enough, because it was never modified to air refuel.

In July, I got my ATP (Airline Transport Pilot rating) while taking a checkride in the KC-135 and letting the FAA watch, something we could do in AFSC, but not in SAC. I was preparing for a career as a civilian. A few weeks later I got the multi-engine rating added to my glider CFI license while administering a similar check to Brent Hedgepeth with the FAA watching.

In September I was sent to Wright-Patt as an attached IG (Inspector General) examiner to give checkrides in the KC-135 to a bunch of their pilots. It was a job no one else wanted to do, because you kind of got examined by the IG too, but I went and passed everyone and had a pretty good time too. I got to fly the T-39 for the first and only time on this trip too. Brian Roberts was the IP on that flight; he was an old friend of mine.

In the fall I was again passed over for promotion to LTC. It wasn't any easier this time; now the guys in the class below me were passing me by, including my good friend Dave Bittenbinder. In September I was given the rating of Command Pilot. You made Senior Pilot, with a star over your wings at seven years, and Command Pilot with star and wreath around it at 15 years of rated service. I discovered that if you saw a major with Command Pilot wings showing the wreath around the star, it meant he had been passed over for promotion. It was kind of a badge of shame for a major, but I wore them anyway.

I went to see the Wing Commander to see if there was anything I could do to get promoted. He said no, rather abruptly. There was a way, of course. He needed to get my OER to the general for his signature, and he had to give me a 1 on the OER. He meant he wasn't going to do it. He effectively slammed the door in my face. This was Colonel Ted Twinting, an old fighter guy who made no bones about not liking bomber pilots.

I decided to go straight to General Phil Conley, and see if he would ask for my OER. He was a good friend of my wife's, and a pretty nice guy too. An hour after I made the appointment to see the General, Ted was on the phone. "What are you doing talking to the General?" he asked, and not nicely either. I told him I wanted to get promoted, and he told me to forget it. I decided correctly that I had already shot myself in the foot, so I went to see the General anyway, and he told me he could not ask for my OER. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. And no real harm done either. Ted had pretty much already done all he could to me. I did learn an interesting lesson about how Ted managed by having a mole in the General's office. He must have either been pretty paranoid, or politics at that level was really cutthroat. Whichever it was, it was clearly not part of any future of mine.

I played OTL (Over The Line) with the boys when I could get a weekend free in LA. This is basically three-man softball in the sand, played without gloves. Cort Durocher was my connection in the LA area, and without going into

the details of the game (other than to say you had to be manly to grab that speeding ball with bare hands) perhaps the most notable thing about the very large tournaments were the names of the teams. We competed as "Six Pounds of Swinging Meat". One of the girls' teams was called "Not the Cherries but the Box They Came In". "The Announcer's Queer" was another one. After my encounter with Ted, I changed the name of our team to "Ted Twinting Sucks". It wasn't much, but it sure felt good to hear that on the PA system. I know my sense of humor is challenged.

Speaking of which, OTL inspired the OTLP. The venue was kind of far from any bathroom, or even the icy ocean water, so the tradition was to go into the outfield, far from the spectators, squat down and free your equipment to lie directly on the sand, and relieve yourself while enduring jibes from your teammates. The significant amount of beer consumed at these events helped with both the jibes and the elimination. When complete, all you had to do was stand up and kick the sand over it and no one could actually prove what transpired. At least that was the theory.

I found that people treated me differently as a passed-over Major. They knew I wasn't going to command anything, wasn't going to get any of the good programs, and there was really no need to be especially nice to me. Courteous, sure, but giving me a perk like a nice boondoggle was a waste of their ability to work the system when they could give it to someone who might be able to help them sometime in the future. I was down, and everyone knew it.

I lost a few "friends", but quickly realized that anyone who was concerned with my status as a condition of friendship was not a friend at all.

On October 13th 1977, the first of my pilot training classmates died. Jurgen Schumann had left the German Air Force and was the captain of a Lufthansa B-737 that was taken over by Palestinian terrorists and he was shot in the head by them in Mogadishu, Somalia. Lufthansa has named their pilot training facility after him. How ironic it is that the first casualty from UPT at Williams AFB would be to a terrorist, not to the Vietnam War.

F-4 used to chase the cruise missiles.

ALCM Testing
1979

In 1979 it was pretty much more of the same with nothing too new. On April 7th, Tom LeBeau and I gave each other IP checks in the B-52 on the same flight. Well, we were the only two BBUF pilots on the base, and bomber sorties were difficult to generate. And we both passed. Can you imagine? We had to pass or the program was AFU. It reminded me of the time two T-33 IPs went up to make each other current on the same flight at TPS. Well, the T-33 thing was definitely illegal while ours was not precisely so, but it was certainly questionable ethically.

In June the cruise missile testing program began in earnest, and I was very busy with the B-52. The ALCM (Air Launched Cruise Missile) Test Team was formed and I was a key guy. Ike Payne was sort of my boss, but I was the only IP on the team. (Tom LeBeau had been selected to fly the B-1, which program had been resurrected, and as a passed-over guy I wasn't going to get a good deal in any real test program like the B-1, so I remained chained to the B-52. I think the original decision to cancel the B-1 was wrong, and so was Reagan's decision to restart. New hardware needs to be produced in a timely fashion or it is no longer state of the art. The B-1 was never a real threat to anyone, nor was it ever any real use to our forces. It had been designed as a supersonic bomber, but its capability in this area had been severely curtailed in a cost savings effort, and the enemy had lots of missiles that could catch it anyway.)

Furthermore, we had lots of bomber pilots since SAC had sent us a bunch of non test pilots (Operational Test Evaluation pilots) to participate in the concurrent operational evaluation of the systems. The-AGM 86 made by Boeing was in a fly off competition against the AGM-109 made by General Dynamics. I was, and had been for some time, the test director of the OAS (Offensive Avionics System) that was being upgraded in the B-52s. It was essentially the B-1 inertial navigation package with some other things, and without this system, the cruise missiles simply would not work.

Since the cancellation of the B-1, the cruise missile had been the number one DOD priority for testing, and they had a passed-over Major (me) running the very heart of the program, the OAS upgrade. And doing the majority of the flying as well. The combination of aircraft and missile had to be tested for performance, flutter and handling qualities, just like a brand new aircraft and I was in the middle of it. It was challenging flying!

On July 6th, B-52 247 that I was flying developed a massive fuel leak in the left wing. The tank feeding the number 3 and 4 engines was leaking faster than we could fill it from other tanks. In the "wet wing" system of the B-52, a leak such as this could actually overstress the wing itself and cause it to flex too high and perhaps break off! Not to mention the real possibility of losing the two engines due to fuel starvation. After visual confirmation of "sheets of liquid coming off the left wing" I decided to make an emergency heavy weight landing at just over 400,000 pounds. This landing had to be very gentle, or we would break something at such a heavy weight. Can you imagine dropping 400,000 pounds from even two feet?

I kissed it on, as smooth a landing as I ever made, and called for full spoilers. I had to wait what seemed like a long time before deploying the drag chute at the limit speed of 125 knots. We rolled all the way to the end of Edwards' 15,000 feet long runway, shutting down all four engines on the left side while the wings were still flying (but the gear was on the ground). The fire trucks followed us on the runway and clustered around as we turned off. I shut off the other engines and we swiftly got out. Outside, the smell of fuel was overpowering, the wing was just raining fuel onto

the ramp, and you could still hear the "ting" of the engines spooling down and cooling right under the wings wet with fuel. The brakes were hot enough that you could feel the heat radiating from them as you walked past. It looked, sounded and smelled like an explosion ready to happen, and I jumped into a truck with the supervisor of flying and got the hell away from it ASAP.

It felt so good to be able to land the bird and not have to burn off fuel for four hours! We logged only 1.8 hours, and we had taken off right at the max gross weight of 488,000 pounds. That means we had leaked out about 50,000 pounds of fuel in less than two hours. I was pleased that the heavy landing went flawlessly too, and decided that "overweight" landings were no big deal. At least, not for me.

First Flight of the AGM-109
1979

Me dropping the first ALCM cruise missile from the bomb bay of a B-52G.

On July 17th, I launched the first AGM-109 ever from a B-52, and the second one on August 1st. The AGM-109 would go on to be the eventual winner of the competition, and was used extensively in the Middle East.

All these missions launched about 0200 and briefed the day before. The launch time was driven by wanting the missile to fly only during the daytime, so that we could chase it more easily. We started preflight about midnight and started the engines about 0100 so that we had lots of time to look for problems with the old BBUFs. On July 17th, the number three generator just would not start, no matter what maintenance did, and I always liked to give them their best shot. You can't fix much of anything after takeoff. There is no possibility of a spare aircraft to replace this one, 58-0247, because it is the only one instrumented to do the complex testing. The other B-52s we use are instrumented for other types of tests.

I look over my shoulder and am surprised to find the Colonel in charge of maintenance, a wonderful gentleman named Ben Knowland, in the jump seat. He was under pressure. The program was behind, and Edwards just was not equipped to maintain B-52s. I could tell from the look in his eyes that he was seeing a career disaster. "What are you gonna do?" he asks me.

"We're going." I say.

"You are?" He sounds like he doesn't believe his ears.

"I will if you'll get out of my airplane. You all right with that co-?" The co-pilot nods up and down and Ben's eyes open even wider, and

he disappears down the hatch without further comment. I really don't need four generators with no ECM equipment to run; no thank you was necessary.

We taxi out with no tower to talk to and no ATC to contact either. Apart from the maintenance crew and the staff weenies, the flight line is dark and totally deserted. It seems strange to take off without telling anyone at all or seeing any other aircraft activity. Edwards is a graveyard at 2 am.

This aircraft and crew is the heart of the test today. After we get airborne, hours afterward, a KC-135 will launch from a SAC base in CA. Then three chase F-4s, a photo chase F-4, and another KC-135 will launch from Edwards and rendezvous with us. When we get ready to launch the missile, a C-130 with security forces on board will launch from Mountain Home AFB UT. Then about three helicopters will start their engines in readiness to pick up the pieces of a possible missile crash. It comes to a total of 30 engines running to support our test. It is incredibly detailed, with back up plans for failures of various aircraft or systems. It is choreographed as exactly as a dance, but using big boys flying heavy war birds as the performers. And it all starts with us.

Most of my crew is from AFTEC, Air Force Test and Evaluation Command based in Albuquerque NM. They are more familiar with this newer B-52G than I am, but less familiar with how to run a test. I am in command.

We take off with the new OAS powered, but not aligned, as if scramble launching in response to an Emergency War Order. The Offensive Avionics System is aligned while airborne, and our precise position entered into the system with a series of updates. The R/N, Major Freeman, one of the very first navigator graduates of Test Pilot School, is earning his pay. This takes two hours or more while we drill holes in the night sky with the autopilot on.

Note that the OAS system does not use existing satellite navigation systems because of the possibility that satellites could be damaged during a full out war with another superpower. The navigation system must be self-contained. The missile had inertial guidance with updates provided by flying through surveyed terrain before the target (we had the capability to do this even in Russia because of our satellites) using data from the radar altimeter.

It is still dark while we rendezvous with the tanker. We don't really need the gas, but it is a required part of the test, to insure that no operational requirements interfere with the operation of the missile. I refuel as always, in one long contact.

At sunrise, we are flying east into the Utah test range, and the light in my eyes reminds me of how early I had to get up; it would be so easy to close my eyes... Our F-4 chase birds rendezvous with us, the data and range radar instrumentation is rechecked, and we are ready to launch on schedule.

At this point, all I have to do is mind the autopilot and listen to the countdown. At zero, you can't even feel the missile leave the aircraft. The radio confirms engine start, and I lean forward in the seat and look down to see a white finger of exhaust descending in front of us onto the Utah low level range. Our part is done, and we can go home, logging a mere 7.2 hours of flying time and about a twelve-hour duty day.

I can see two of the F-4s as well, falling away to shepherd the AGM-109. The third chase bird will stay up with the tanker, and the photo chase will return home, faster than we will. After landing, I have a bite of lunch, and then go home for a nap. Mission accomplished; landed without incident.

The F-4s will log over six hours of time, alternating between chasing the missile and air refueling. It is a long demanding mission for a mere fighter pilot. My sympathy for them is very limited; I had to get up at midnight, long before they did, and I'm dead tired. Besides, I fly their mission as well, from time to time.

More ALCM Testing
1979

Historical note: *The US Embassy in Iran is held hostage by their rogue government. Saddam Hussein takes over in Iraq and Idi Amin is deposed.*

August was a big month. On the 26th, we lost number three engine with a bang right after rotation at maximum gross weight of 488,000 pounds. It was aircraft 247, the same one with the fuel leak a month earlier. One of the OT&E (Operational Test and Evaluation) pilots, a Captain Walker, was flying from the left seat, and he handled the emergency beautifully, right through flap retraction, which we completed over downtown Lancaster, making lots of noise at two AM. After that we had to burn off fuel to land, and I elected another heavy weight landing and kissed that one on too. (Good judgment does not provide for letting a student make a landing in an actual emergency in my book; you do training on other, more appropriate flights.) I was getting used to the sight of the fire trucks following us.

Also in August was the completion of my checkout in the F-4E. I was now qualified in the B-52, F-4, and KC-135 and an examiner IP in the two heavies, but I had to lose my A-37 currency to keep within AFSC guidelines. This was real flying!

I was still trying to get promoted, however unreal my chances, so I went to my classmate Jerry Sherrill (the same guy with the finger in the LLTV demonstration back in 1960). He was now the full Colonel chief of safety at Edwards and I convinced him to give me the AFSC safety award for making those two over-weight landings.

I managed to get Ike Payne and myself Missileman Badges by researching the regulations a little. It turns out that we were commander and vice-commander of a missile unit (cruise missile test force) and so we qualified for the award. It looked nice on my uniform, but it didn't help. The same could be said of the Commendation Medal I received earlier, but I was looking pretty well decorated.

We were only allowed to accumulate sixty days of leave, and I had been working so hard that every year at the end of September they would trim my total back to sixty. Since working hard was not going to result in any reward other than to my own pride, I decided to take a vacation and take Shirley to Hawaii. I was off for about two weeks, and we stayed on a military facility on the north shore with the surf right outside the door to our own little cottage. It was really very nice except for a palmetto bug about the size of the heel of my shoe that she found when we arrived. Word of advice: don't hit one that big too hard or they will splatter all over your shoes and the walls too.

It was clear that my military career was toast. I was planning ahead, and here's how it went. I could not afford to throw away the investment I had in my military retirement. In less than four years I would get about $2000 a month for life. But if I quit and joined the Reserves and got that amount of active duty while working for them, I would also get my retirement, before age 60 if I worked a lot. It was called a "Title Ten" retirement. It was rare, but I worked those regulations hard to figure out how to get out of the hole I was in, and I found it.

My plan was to get off active duty while young enough to get a good job, and stay with the Reserves long enough to get a full retirement at the grade of LTC. A key to this plan was to get into the Reserves flying the C-141 at Norton, and they didn't often take senior people.

The plan started by pressing hard to get into the C-141 Test Team so that I could be current in the B model if I was accepted by the Reserves. They were just finishing the air refueling testing portion and having trouble with it when I finally got my

Me in front of the YC-141B

chance to fly. Captain Ken Sasine was my buddy, and I know he was a big factor in my acceptance to the team, and later on in my acceptance to the 728th Military Airlift Squadron at Norton AFB near San Bernardino CA too. A heartfelt "thank you" for helping a brother when he was down, Ken!

I requalified in the C-141 in October, and got my first chance to air refuel a few days later. The autopilot wasn't working on the tanker, making it more difficult for the receiver pilot, and the tanker director lights still weren't working either. The team had been having a lot of trouble with their final data point at high gross weight and aft center of gravity. This was the first chance I would get to refuel the bird, under the most difficult circumstances imaginable without adding weather to the equation.

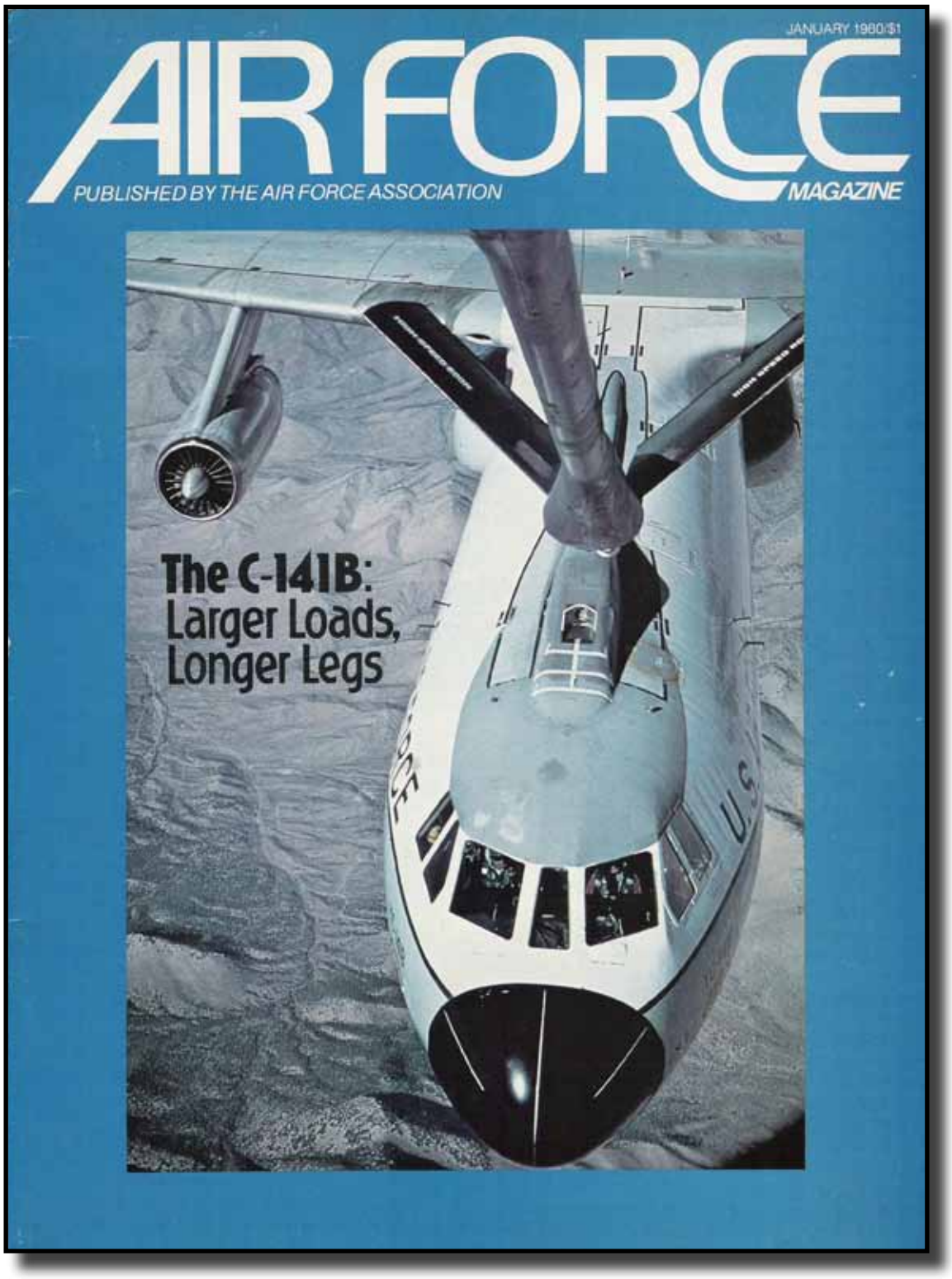
I totally nailed the point! I pulled into contact, stabilized in moments, took my hands off the throttles to demonstrate that the performance data was solid, and then took my hand off the wheel too! Absolute perfection in stability! I was the king of air refueling heavies! My head and ugly camouflaged helmet made the cover of Air Force Magazine on that flight, and the picture still hangs in my study.

And speaking of refueling, we sometimes ran the "fighter pilot short course in humility" by letting them try to refuel KC-135 number 120 behind KC-135 number 135. They usually over controlled something fierce, and let the yaw get out of hand too. I'd have to take the aircraft away and let the vibrations die down to avoid scaring the boomer. I've seen them turn their flight suits wet to the waist in less than fifteen minutes. One day I took Bob Harper, one of the authors of the Cooper-Harper rating scale for difficulty of handling quality flying tasks up for a ride to get the "real number" from the pro on how hard it was.

After it was over he said, "I was going to give it a nine, (just short of the "uncontrollable" ten, and requiring a mandatory fix before production. The scale was one to ten, with one being very easy.) but I saw how easy you guys could make it look, and I'm going to go with a six." A six is the most difficult condition allowed for manufacture. And I was the best, whatever my promotability! Weak pilot, my ass!

On 21 November I was flying safety chase on the AGM-86 in the F-4E when its' engine stopped and I had to hit the safety switch in our bird that caused the missile's wings to jettison and its' parachute to deploy resulting in a "soft" landing instead of a crash. (Can I get credit for shooting

I flew these F-4Es at Edwards Air Force Base. They had lots of thrust and a poor flight control system.



My first and only magazine cover!
That's me on the left.

down a missile?) It settled gently near the Great Salt Lake dry lakebed and we circled for an hour or so until the helicopters from Mountain Home AFB arrived, hoping a couple of yahoos in a truck that arrived to rubberneck weren't going to damage anything worse than it already was.

These F-4 safety chase missions were every bit as much a pain in the ass as the B-52 launch missions. They were all very workload-intensive and resulted in about a six to seven hour mission and two very tired crewmembers. The bomber missions took about the same amount of flying hours, but at least you could get up and pee.

And I was the heaviest pilot in the Air Force. My qualifications in the B-52, C-141, F-4 and KC-135 total gross weights beat out Ken Staley's B-747, C-141, and T-38 even though that 747 is much heavier than the B-52. He was testing the new Air Force One with that 747 qualification, and I had a rare special permission to qualify in a fourth aircraft as well as to be an examiner in both the B-52 and the KC-135. You'd think little things like that might mean you were useful enough to get promoted…

In December I used my GI bill and my "spare" time to get my ATP rating in the Learjet, in the LR-24 model at Clay Lacy's school in Van Nuys. It was pretty simple flying actually, and I used some of it to take Shirley cross-country to Cabo San Lucas in Mexico for an overnight on the beach.

I also talked with Colonel Norm Suits one night at the bar. He told me they were short of instructors at TPS, and promised to treat me like a real test pilot with career potential if I would come fly for him. The thought of regaining my respect was too much of an inducement, and I agreed. I would fly the A-37 and T-38 for TPS and the long working hours of the ALCM test force would be gone in 1980.

LR-24
I flew N464CL to Cabo. The CL on all his birds was for Clay Lacy.

Return to TPS
1980

In less than a month I was an instructor in both aircraft and I went to work instructing the classes of 1980 A and B. I also became the chief glider instructor very quickly. Not only was I the most experienced glider pilot on the base, but most of the other guys couldn't see it as helping their careers. My career was shot, and soaring in a glider is just a lot of fun.

We flew the Blanik L-13 glider a lot at TPS, including the spin data practice. The idea was to take data during the spin, not just try to get out of it. You had to count the turns, describe the attitude, describe any oscillations, and exit with one of three specified procedures: NASA standard, NASA modified, or flight manual. It was a very productive exercise to prepare the students for spinning the A-37 they now used in place of the T-33.

And I was having a lot of fun flying the odd airplanes the school brought through for the students to evaluate. I flew the F-101F, the F-106B and the T-43. The T-43 had replaced the old T-29 prop aircraft used to train navigators and was really a Boeing 737. The F-101 was a twin engine interceptor and was kind of unremarkable. The F-106 was single engine and both were supersonic interceptors. You had to be kind of gentle with the delta wing at slow speeds or you could get into an insidious stall. As a heavy pilot, I had no problem with that because I just didn't yank on the controls. I also flew the UV-18B, also known as the Twin Otter in civilian life. TPS was using it and its twin turbo prop engines as the new engine out performance trainer. I flew the F-15B and hooked up with the tanker on the climb out; doubtless that is a record of some kind. Later I flew the F-16B with Dave Milam. It was wonderful!

We speak of flying as being hours of boredom punctuated by moments of stark terror. I wasn't really getting much if any boredom with the flying we did at Edwards, but I did get a moment of terror one day with a student with a routine no-flap touch and go landing in April. He landed, put the throttles up to military power, and then put the gear up – while still on the runway! It was coming up, and we were only a couple of feet away from the concrete speeding by below at about 100 knots. I took command of the aircraft and put the throttles into full afterburner position and tried not to let it sink very far. It did not contact the runway, but we were both scared, and we got out of the traffic pattern to let our breathing return to normal. The student went on to be a distinguished graduate, and I guess it shows we can all have a brain fart once in a while, and you just have to double-check things in the air. It is amazing how quickly you can come to dying in the air environment.

I flew the tanker a lot with my good friend Guy Thiel, and we laughed a lot together. I also continued instructing at the local FBO (Fixed Base Operator) in Rosamond, the town closest to the base. I worked on weekends, getting paid to fly, and I can remember being just delighted with the twenty dollars cash I took home from working the entire first day.

I flew an antique WWII glider called the TG-3, and the new Pilatus B-4 at Rosamond. I just loved to try a new aircraft!

I signed papers asking for my release from active duty. My friends all thought I was crazy. "You can do two years of this standing on your head!" they said. "Don't give up your retirement!" I had no plans on giving up my retirement. I had been accepted by the C-141 unit at Norton AFB, and I would get a military retirement later, at a higher, more respectable pay grade. I told them I didn't need a retirement check, I needed a job. And I had one lined up with McDonnell-Douglas, testing the KC-10, as the world's greatest air refuel pilot! It was a very gutsy plan, but well thought out, and best of all I felt I could hold my head up high again.

I was still friendly with Colonel Norm

Suits, but Colonel Don Madonna was now the Commandant at TPS. I told him sincerely, with all the respect I could muster, that I didn't really want to leave, but that I needed a future more than the security of retirement. He understood; we parted friends. My immediate boss, the LTC in charge of the operations section, said that he had been surprised at the level of my work. I guess he expected me to just take up space until I retired, but you should know by now that I just couldn't do that. It wouldn't have been fair.

I had made friends with General Bob Dwyer, Commander of the Nevada ANG. He told me that he wasn't sure what my plans as a civilian were, but that he knew that I would do very well. When I asked him why he felt like that, he said, "the civilians aren't used to working hard, and you are used to it." These were prophetic words.

I scammed a check out in the UH-1H before leaving active duty. This Edwards bird is one of the Army helicopters I flew up to Tehachapi with my glider students.

McDonnell-Douglas
1980

I went on terminal leave in August 1980, and spent the next ninety days on full pay from the Air Force while getting paid by McDonnell-Douglas too, who gave me a significant raise, although not without my forcing it. I knew my value to them. I also knew that two years from now, with that program finished, my commercial value would be much less.

Shirley and I moved into a small house in Fountain Valley. The weather in the LA area was so refreshing after years in the desert, and the new home was much nicer than those on the base too. I wasn't used to not wearing a uniform, or a lot of other civilian stuff, but things were finally looking up after a long time of looking down.

There were no classes starting in the DC-10. The master plan was for me to first qualify in the DC-10, followed by the DC-9. I went to the training area, read the books, and watched the training slides until I was numb with boredom. I took a couple of simulator rides and called for the FAA examiner. The simulator check was kind of interesting, like many of my checkrides. As soon as we entered the unpowered simulator, the examiner asked me what systems were available at that time with the battery switch off. That translated to "what's on the hot battery bus?".) In Douglas products, the circuit breakers for a bus are all located together, so I found the bus panel and just read them to him. Dead easy. (Boeing doesn't have this system organization.) Later he asked me about how the cargo doors operated, and I had no idea, never having seen the actual airplane. But my flying was superior, and in less than three weeks of totally unsupervised and self-motivated study, I had my DC-10 ATP rating!

I enjoyed the DC-10, which flew very well for such a heavy airplane. It has three powerful jet engines, a wonderful view from the cockpit (unlike the DC-9), and the first inertial navigation system I would fly. These systems are really pretty cool, and although this one was kind of primitive and not particularly user friendly, it eliminated the need for a navigator completely.

KC-10A with boom extended.

Then I noticed things were getting strange. On the 25th of August, I went for my first flight in the aircraft with another test pilot named Bill Casey. He was the heir apparent to the title of chief test pilot, and he didn't let me touch the controls in more than two hours of flying. I never said anything, but I heard the scheduler asking him what the hell he was doing. What was he doing?

Using rare tact, I kept my mouth shut and later found out from another old test pilot that Casey was just jealous. I guess no one had ever checked

out in such a complex heavy aircraft so easily before, and he knew I had more flying time and more education than he did, and he didn't want to get me started. I marked him down as a weak dick. It looked like General Dwyer was right on the money. The civilians weren't used to working hard.

I went up with Phil Battaglia on 6 September and got five landings and completed my FAA checkride all at the same time. Who needs to practice before taking a check? I guess the weak dicks did, and I was feeling pretty damn strong at that point. I flew in the DC-10-30, the KC-10A and the DC-9-10 in September and October, but I was already hearing that they didn't want me to fly the C-141 for the Reserves. They said I might have to be out of the country, training some foreign pilots or flying the Hadj or something. My plans included a lot of Reserve service.

Notes on the Hadj: This involved flying DC-10s very full of people in a religious fervor to Mecca for the holy pilgrimage, and these flights were known for such remarkable things as people trying to start a fire in an aisle to cook a live chicken. At least it was alive when it was carried on board. I was not eager to gain this experience.

I started productive work by instructing in the DC-10 simulator to some foreign pilots from Africa and then to the first KC-10 AF Reserve guys. I was surprised at how quick and easy it was to go from new guy to instructor. I wanted to get into that reserve unit, but it was not to be. I didn't know the right people. The students from Africa did not impress me as being very capable. If it was something that they had worked on for a while, they were OK, but something unusual just totally blew their circuits. If you want to fly on a foreign airline, don't take one with a crew from a third world country. If you do, good luck.

At the same time this was going on, I also finished getting my FAA helicopter license in the Hughes H-269 at Long Beach, paid for by the GI bill. This was fun, and it was part of my general goal to be able to fly anything.

September was the annual SETP (Society of Experimental Test Pilots) symposium and convention at the Beverly Hilton. Although on leave, I was still on active duty, and I was still technically assigned to TPS. I asked them to get me some free tickets to the awards banquet, a freebie courtesy often given to the military guys who couldn't afford a lot of the Beverly Hilton. When the SETP got the request from TPS, they already knew I worked for Douglas, so they forwarded my name to them for seats. This request ultimately arrived on the desk of the guy who tries to insure that the pilots don't have too much fun (every unit has one), and he called me into his office. I have long forgotten his name, but he was a retired Navy Captain who did not fly anymore, and I think he thought he was going to stand me up and put me right. Well, I have been hazed by experts, and his shit just rolled right off me.

I told him to send the request back to the Society and let them sit me somewhere else. Well, we both knew that it really wouldn't do to have a Douglas pilot at a competitor's table, and he wasn't going to get me to offer to pay for the tickets, so he took his best shot. He told me that they had two tables, the main one up front with the Douglas' chief pilot and the big wheels, and another table in the back with some minor customers like Air California. I couldn't have cared less, and I went to sit with Air California chief pilot Tom McBroom and his teen-age date in the back.

Hu-269B
Note there really isn't very much of it.

The night of the banquet I was feeling no pain. I had my pride back, I knew lots of the boys here at this annual drunken blast, and by the time to go down to the party, I was loaded. Shirley was mad. I'm not too sure why; maybe it was because

I was happy. Usually she would move the name tags around at the table so that she would sit next to me, but tonight she decided to sit with Captain McBroom and left me all alone across the table with his cute Peruvian girlfriend with the overstuffed gown front. After dinner, Shirley had charmed Tom, probably to see if she could annoy me, but I was still drunk and still didn't care, so I invited them to cruise the hospitality suites with us and drink some more.

Tom was totally unable to speak after a few hours of this, but before he went totally numb, I told him that if he ever needed any good pilots, he should just give me a call, doubtlessly slurring my words badly.

Strangely enough, a few weeks later he called and asked if I wanted a job. Now sober, I wasn't so sure, but I went in to talk to him about it. He later would say that I was the only guy he ever had to talk into the job. I did my homework, and found that almost every one of the Douglas pilots would rather have been airline pilots. They got paid more, worked less, and were protected by a union, not to mention that flying a certified airliner was less dangerous than certifying it. Add to that the pressure to quit the Reserves (that hadn't come up at all during the hiring process), and I was gone.

Douglas was mad. Apparently they felt "used". My exit briefing was kind of interesting though. It went from sweet requests to see reason, to anger when I didn't respond, to pleasant when they realized that suddenly I was now a customer. I have no sympathy for them; I offered to work until class started, but they released me immediately. If you want to keep your test pilots, you must pay them better than the First Officers in the airlines, and treat them better too.

Most of their pilots stayed for the prestige. I already had a wall full of prestige (just look at the trophies in my den), and the pride had kind of been beaten out of me by being passed over for promotion three times, so I found it easy to go for the money. And the four-day workweek fit right in to my plans to retire with the Reserves.

Now my buddies at Edwards were certain that I was crazy. To give up a test flying job with a real manufacturer and take a job as a co-pilot for an airline no one had ever heard of was just insane, not even counting the 75% pay cut I would take for the first year.

Air California on Probation
1980-1981

I spent most of November and December in ground school in Newport Beach, CA, only a short drive from our new home. The Boeing 737 was easy to learn, and this time I had classmates and teachers and everything. It was pretty dull too, but I already knew that the systems pretty much worked the same on all the birds. Actually, they had to; it was a design requirement to minimize loss in the event of a failure, and the FAA mandated it to all manufacturers.

I couldn't start at Norton until I was off active duty pay, so in December I went and did lots of things on the ground necessary to transfer into not only a new unit, but a new command: MAC. (Military Airlift Command) I got to fly for the first time on Christmas Eve, and I learned that MAC was just obsessive-compulsive compared to Edwards about driving the airplane just exactly the way the book said.

For example, the checklist had two responses, almost next to each other, and one was "Set and checked", while the other was "Checked and set". MAC actually thought it was important to say it exactly as written. I tried to conform, but I had actually written the book on the C-141B in some cases, and I knew how precise that reference wasn't. It was important to me to understand how the system worked, not memorize the words. It was just like grade school. Actually, it was just like UPT, but I was no longer "weak". When it came time to do a checklist, I took mine out and just read off the answers. This was acceptable, if kind of ridiculous.

Just before Christmas, Air California furloughed our entire class while keeping the class behind us. They had figured they didn't need any of us until some more aircraft were delivered, and they didn't want to pay us that whopping $400 a month each to train slowly when they could force-feed us in January. They say that to be a real airline pilot you have to be furloughed, suspended, merged, out on strike and divorced during your career. Eventually I would meet and struggle with all those dire events, and this was just the first hurdle.

Money was an immediate problem. Shirley had gotten a raise to be a secretary for Douglas, and she still had her job, but our new house payment

F/O Hoffman with civilian haircut.

was twice my salary (if I had been working), and I still had alimony and child support payments too. I worked hard at the Reserves, following the advice of the guys there and first checking out as co-pilot, and then as "first pilot", whatever that was, saving the man-days for aircraft commander for later. After that, I flew a trip with layovers at Honolulu and Wake Island.

I enjoyed the trip a lot. Wake is an interesting place that was once a vital air link during the

time of the Pan Am flying boats and still has cement ramps into the water. It was also the site of a major WWII victory. The small number of troops stationed there were always glad to see us, and especially our female crewmembers, for some diversion from their own small group. Wake currently supports an emergency runway, a TACAN, and a LORAN station. Almost no one goes there. The aircraft commander, a Captain Ralph Acone, tried unsuccessfully to give me a little of the hazing that usually accompanies a new co-pilot's first trip on the line. It was insignificant, and I didn't even bother trying to shake it off.

I also called Colonel Don Madonna, the Commandant at TPS, and asked him if he could use me back part-time, using the "man days" they used to pay the Reserve and Guard guys that brought in the qual-eval birds for the students to run projects on. Since we had parted on good terms (unlike my departure from Douglas) he said he would look into it. As soon as he discovered he could get almost any number of man days, I was the first ever Reserve instructor attached to TPS, and I got to keep my C-141 job too.

Aircraft N466AC was one of our first aircraft, and I flew this particular B-737 a lot.

In February we started flying the 737 at Air California. I was the oldest guy in the class, (nothing unusual there), and I was paired with the next oldest, Dorn Porter. He had lots and lots of flying time, and we didn't have any problems, even when the instructor didn't show. We were scheduled in Western Airline's simulator one late night in Los Angeles, and since I knew how to run simulators, I just did it, expecting that he would show any minute and take over. Well, he didn't, no one ever told, and we graduated as scheduled.

The poverty plan was in effect. It was absolutely vital that I work at Norton AFB to pay the bills. Two days of work there was the same as a month at Air California. It was a good thing that I was used to working hard, because now it was necessary. My schedule rapidly turned into about three days off a month and the rest full of strange hours and long days.

Shirley was not happy. She wanted more of my attention, and we had what would be a recurring talk about our life. Should I work long hours away from home? No. Should I quit the Reserves and live on her salary? Impossible. There were no good answers, but I was used to hard work, so I pressed on. What else could I have done? In the end, there was even less time for her, and we began to drift apart.

TPS came to the rescue financially. They wanted me to teach the glider program and had some ground projects for me too. I made instructional videos that TPS classes would watch for many years afterward on A-37 ground school, T-38 ground school, and the glider program. The students now watched these videos at their own convenience and had only a one-hour classroom presentation for questions with an instructor, saving the instructors a lot of man-hours. I rewrote the glider program and also the five flight eval program for multi-engine candidates in the T-38. These curriculum improvements had been needed for years, and there just hadn't been time for anyone to do them. I didn't mind the crappy ground jobs; I was happy just to be working and getting paid.

Airline flying is not so challenging - takeoff, turn on the autopilot, eat peanuts, land. My father had offered to get me into Eastern Air Lines at one point, but it didn't seem like a lot of good flying. He didn't tell me about the great pay and time off,

and I was sorry I hadn't done it more than once. Then Eastern folded, and I still had a job with Air California. Better to be lucky than smart!

Air California gave me three flights in the B-737 and then a checkride on number four, all on four days in a row ending 14 December 1980. On the 16th I had to watch a qualified crew work all day. This was called IOE, (Initial Operating Experience) and was FAA mandated baloney. I made my first real revenue flight on January 12th with Captain Stu Moore, from KSNA (Orange County airport, our home base) to Portland, OR. After landing in Portland in the dark and in heavy rain, two United F/As (Flight Attendants) stopped by the cockpit to say that was the smoothest landing they had ever experienced in all their years of flying. I was pretty pleased, I can tell you, and I should have told them it was only my second landing with passengers on board. I was helped a lot by the water on the runway, making it smoother, and by the fact that we were exiting at the end of the runway, minimizing the use of the thrust reversers and brakes. Planning where you are going to exit the runway needs to be part of your before-landing thinking, but it usually isn't in inexperienced pilots.

I bought a pager and carried it religiously with me, keeping it on even in the movies. I was on reserve, on probation, and at the whim of the schedulers. It was not like American Airlines, where you could have some control over which flight you took. Our schedulers picked it for you, and if they didn't like you they could subtly screw you time after time. And I was on probation, and didn't want to get into trouble anyway, so I was a good boy. In any case it was pretty simple. I kept a bag packed in the car and tried to get my errands done while I was on call. When I wasn't on call, about twelve days a month, I went to the Air Force to work and so to get enough money to live. It was a very busy time, but the system seemed to work OK. At least it did for me, because I enjoyed working hard.

It is only while reading my own words that I notice that I must have been really stressed. Working three jobs to provide for my family, added to the insecurity of leaving active duty with the Air Force and an excellent job as a test pilot, must have been very hard on me. I was working usually 27 days a month, sometimes for two employers in the same day, and I avoided drinking with the airline guys because I didn't have enough money to buy a round of beer in a civilian bar for the group. I learned why all the Flight Attendants thought the pilots were cheap. We got used to having no money during that first year, and it took years to get over it. I pretty much ignored the stress and just kept doing what men were supposed to do: work hard and not complain.

My wife noticed, and complained frequently.

Years later I would take a test we called the "red-blue-green" test at Air War College. It is really the Strength Deployment Inventory created by Elias H. Porter, Ph.D. This was kind of a simple test to demonstrate your personality change under stress. After taking a test, your scores were plotted on a three axis chart where red is assertive, blue is nurturing, and green is analytical. Most Air Force officers, including myself, were charted centrally in the red-blue-green diagram, shading toward the red axis. Under stress, many officers tend to become more red, or more aggressive. I charted toward the green area under stress, toward the analytical axis, without losing anything on the aggressive axis. This is kind of unusual, but I thought it was a good thing. It turns out that it makes me very difficult to argue with. If you want to fight and yell, I answer with sweet reason yet without giving in. This can be frustrating for my opponent.

It was certainly frustrating for Shirley. She responded with what I called the "circular argument". She would start with criticizing my mother, continue with my children, move on to my ex-girlfriends, and then go back to my mother and begin again. This was incredibly frustrating for me.

In June I flew my first 807 mission with the Reserves. It turns out that this week long flight around the north Pacific Ocean was the bread-and-butter mission of the unit, and one left every morning, 364 days a year (minus Christmas day). On this one, I went with Jack Fotheringham as IP to Hawaii and spent a 24 hour layover. This kind of layover is actually a little fatiguing because you have to rest both after and before your flights, and you end up sleeping in the daytime and going to work at odd hours too. The reason for it was

that the crews were "staged" so that the aircraft kept moving around the Pacific, stopping only for 3 hours at every station. After Hawaii we went to Guam, Kadena AB on Okinawa, Clark AFB in the Philippines, and then back to Anderson AFB Guam and Hickam AFB Hawaii. I thought it was just fun!

After a few months of ground duty, TPS wanted me to requalify as instructor in the T-38 in July and come to Edwards for a full month in August to check out the incoming class. Actually, they wanted this twice a year. It was perfect for the money and the man-days. I got to come home on the weekends and work only one job at a time. I took military leave from Air California, and I just put off Norton until the month was over. So I was triple qualified again, in the T-38, C-141 and B-737, not to mention the gliders. Flying was good!

The Reserves schedulers at Norton had told me that the number of days I could work there was limited, and TPS had a virtually unlimited number of man-days (a day of work/pay for a Reservist) so I figured I was doing the 728th MAS a favor by minimizing my time there and taking money from TPS. You see, most airlines had people on furlough during this time period, and all the airline guys who weren't working wanted to get paid too. I usually flew once a month in the C-141 and did the required ground training, but little else; pretty much the minimum to be fully qualified. I did complete my check as First Pilot in December, allowing me to sit in the left seat of the C-141 where I had already been qualified twice before. It doesn't count with MAC unless you did it with MAC. All during this period we were seeing more C-141B model aircraft in the inventory, although we still flew the A model a lot. The stretched B model seemed more stable to fly to me.

Flying with Air Cal was dead easy, but I almost didn't make it through probation because of my "attitude". Tom McBroom's girlfriend, the same one from the SETP party, told me to be "very careful" because they were thinking of firing me after working practically for free for a year. It seems that I wasn't being humble enough. Also I wasn't kissing Tom's ass, and I was pretty sure that Shirley hadn't given him anything either. Somehow I skated through that possible disaster. Are you paranoid if they really are trying to get you?

Even as a Reservist, I found time to participate athletically and win the base championship for a second time. The guy immediately in front of me is John Croll, Canadian pilot and vollyball player of excellence.

Air California After Probation
1982-1983

My probation was actually fifteen months, counting a month on furlough and two months on military leave, but it finally ended and I was making $40 an hour instead of $400 a month! Sweet relief! I was now making more than my classmates who had been promoted, and when I added the money I continued to make at the Reserves, about as much as anyone on the base at Edwards. It began to look like my decisions to leave active duty and to leave McDonnell-Douglas had been very good ones.

I spent most of January and February at Edwards, doing a lot of T-38 flying.

In March I flew another 807 mission with the Reserves, and on April 1st I completed my ATP check with the FAA in the 737 at Edwards in T-43A 72-0283. I began to get a lot of helicopter time by flying my glider students to Tehachapi in one of the Army's choppers. I often flew three different categories of aircraft in the same day! I would fly helicopter, glider, and multi-engine jet. The flying was terrific! It was just tits.

N478AC was one of our first MD-80s. The pilots called it the "Stupid 80", not "Super 80" that Douglas preferred. It did make those that did not understand the FGS system look stupid...

The MD-80s that the airline had been purchasing when I met Tom McBroom began to arrive, and after probation was over, my entire class bid to upgrade to it. It meant an increase in pay, and we were no longer under any particular scrutiny or fear of being fired without cause, as was possible while on probation. Now that probation was over, the Union would protect us.

When I started at Air California, our union was the Teamsters, and I belonged to that organization for about year until we made the switch to ALPA, Air Line Pilots' Association. This was better, more appropriate to what we were doing.

The classes we took in the new airplane were pretty interesting. I had never actually been to a class with McDonnell-Douglas, and it was nice to have someone to talk to, but our staff just had no idea of what to make of the advanced avionics in the bird. Since I understood the very similar DC-10 system, I ended up teaching the avionics section, or at least how it was to be operated in flight. And I have to admit that the system was not very intuitive; you had to see it used for a while to understand it. Anyway, new aircraft checkouts were duck soup for me. In May of 1982 I passed my F/O checkride in the MD-80.

I was still treated differently from the other pilots because I was a test pilot. While taking my simulator training in Miami on one of Eastern Airline's simulators, the instructor gave me a total electrical failure, and I had to land on battery power only, using alternate trim. This was not in the syllabus anywhere, and not even the captains had to do it. But I just shut up and did it because I knew that when the examiner starts to screw around, it means that you have passed, and passing is just the highest grade you are going to get. I am not reversing my stand against Boyington's law of minimum pro points here either. The

learning is more important than the grade, but in this case there is no grade higher than passing.

We were again junior co-pilots on reserve. We started flying the MD-80 into Lake Tahoe. KTVL is at 6264 feet elevation and has 8500 feet of runway. It was kind of a short field surrounded by mountains over 10,000 feet and has a very difficult approach, especially when you had to circle to land. The MD-80 was and still is the largest aircraft to operate there. Management decided to check me out and then let me give "route checks" to the captains I flew with, probably for economic reasons since it was cheaper to pay me than to pay a check airman to do the same job. It was fun, but I sure didn't feel much like an IP in that situation.

I encouraged Shirley to quit her job with McDonnell-Douglas and become a Flight Attendant for Jet America, a start up airline based in nearby Long Beach. I thought she would have more free time and be able to travel with me a little, and our marriage would be better. Big mistake.

About this time, Air California changed its name to Air Cal with new paint on the aircraft and new uniforms on the Flight Attendants. Big deal. In fact, BFD. A few months later we were reportedly going out of business. This would be a pattern that repeated itself about every two years at Air Cal. They furloughed all the way back to my class, meaning I was a very junior co-pilot again. There were only five guys below me on the seniority list. My beeper was a permanent part of my anatomy, rather like a cell phone is for people now.

My security was nearly gone again, and after long talks with Shirley, we knew that I had to continue my pace with the Reserves. I might need a job with them if Air Cal folded, and that was certainly possible. It was just what I needed: more stress.

Shirley somehow decided that I had a girlfriend somewhere on the Air Cal system. Not only was this untrue, it was simply impossible. A wife or a girlfriend just takes up too much of your time. Working the three jobs and attempting to please two women? Impossible. Ridiculous. Ridiculously impossible. She had learned a new set of morals from her new Flight Attendant friends and was applying them to me. Everyone she knew was screwing around, therefore I must be too. She was herself in fact cheating with one of her co-pilots, although I wouldn't find out for some time. I guess she thought she could cover it up by blaming me. My life at home was just more and more stress and that interminable circular argument she abused me with.

June brought another 839 trip with the Reserves. This was the Wake Island trip, and it was just easy. These trips were very relaxing for me, and they were the times that I got most of my mental recharging done.

I spent most of July and August at Edwards, instructing in the T-38, and working on my Air Force retirement at a rapid rate. I knew that as soon as I got 7305 days of active duty, I could just tell them to send the money to my bank! Due to increasing pressure from my C-141 unit at Norton AFB, I decided to cut back on my participation at Edwards and had my last flight in a T-38 on August 19th 1982. The scheduler gave me a nice young lady who was on her way to becoming a flight surgeon and told me to give to her a memorable first ride in a jet. I did just that! We took off and immediately went into the tower fly-by pattern at 600 knots, nearly the speed of sound. As we passed the tower, 50 feet above the dry lakebed and really hauling ass, I pulled the nose straight up and lit both afterburners. As we rose upward from 2300 feet to more than 26,000 feet, I rolled the jet continuously, and finished with an inverted pull out at nearly zero g, just above stall speed, giving a spectacular view of the base directly below us through the top of the canopy. Fun! I had been worrying about her getting airsick, but she said, "Wahoo!" and I quit worrying. Then we started the acrobatics.

Without the T-38 to compete for my time, I started to work for the C-141 unit in earnest. This was really their idea. We had a lot of trips that I knew nothing at all about, and in November of 1982 I flew my first Australia trip. I had seen the number "827" on the schedule board, but didn't know that it went to Sydney. I got one scheduled as soon as I could and was soon leaving Hickam AFB for Pango Pango with Marty Mazik, who was both an IP and an ART. An ART is an Air Reserve Technician, also called Federal Air Reserve Technician, and they were full time government

employees working with the Reserves. It was a pretty good job, but not as good as that of an airline pilot. After flying 12.4 hours from Hickam to Sydney on the second day, we flew across the continent and back on day three, logging another 10.9 hours to AAWR, APLM and return. This trip involved a lot of work to make up for the great layovers in Sydney.

It was my landing when we returned to ASRI, or Richmond AAF, the military field outside Sydney, only to find that wildfires were burning in the area, fanned by 45 knot winds. These winds were 70 degrees off the runway heading, producing the greatest crosswind I would ever see. The crew thought we would have to divert after a very long day, but I asked if the winds were within the limits in the flight manual. They were by a small margin, and we decided to give it a try. I made my usual approach flap landing and totally greased it on the runway. Getting out of the aircraft was another experience entirely because of the wind, but we all made it to the bus without injury.

On the bus into town, I rediscovered that MAC had a crosswind limit of 15 knots, and I had just landed in more than twice that. The other pilots had clearly been cowed by my qualifications and demonstrated skill, and they had not pointed out the more restrictive MAC limit. This was more of that halo effect stuff, and a case in point that it could have been dangerous. If I had scraped up the aircraft, we would have all been in trouble. But I didn't, and my halo was just screwed on tighter. This was pretty impressive for a mere co-pilot, and my status as co-pilot would have to change.

The next day we flew back to Hickam via Christchurch New Zealand for another 13.3 hours, diverting around some weather. It was a long trip and a good time. While I am remembering Christchurch, I want to credit some WWII veterans. Leaving the hotel there (on a later trip) an older woman spoke to me, the obvious commander of that mission. She said how happy she was to see the American flag on our uniforms, because it reminded her of seeing it when the Americans liberated her home in Belgium from the Germans. It felt really good to be appreciated for the good guys we are, and I immediately ripped the velcro flag from my uniform and gave it to her. We appreciated her too.

Norton was kind of a paradox. They didn't want me to use too many man-days, yet they didn't want me to spend too much time at Edwards, where the man-days were plentiful either. After much thinking, I came to the conclusion that someone in management there was jealous. It was all I could come up with. I probably should have been complaining about working so hard and not mentioning all the fun flying I did. Sometimes, it is just best to keep your mouth shut about how happy you are, lest some troll decide to see if they can limit it. Everyone seemed to be happier as long as I wasn't maintaining my currency as an IP in the T-38, so I just went to Edwards to instruct in the gliders and keep my man-day fix primed.

I should point out that the airlines, all of them, began to recall their pilots about this time, and we actually had a shortage of volunteer pilots in the Reserves. Norton began to call me to take trips without my asking.

The strange state of affairs continued with me just kind of doing minimum what they told me at Norton until 1983, when I was told in no uncertain terms to check out as aircraft commander, like it was a big deal or something. On 16 March 1983, I completed the AC check with the squadron commander, LTC Lou Aaronson. Eight days later I got another one from a MAJ Logan, another one of the "in crowd", and I began to think that they didn't trust me. Well, they didn't. I was unconventional. I was the best stick and rudder man they had, but I didn't spend a lot of time studying, and I hadn't been through the MAC system.

I also needed a route check to be completely checked out, and I flew it with Jack Fotheringham, my old friend from the Reserves now on active duty again because his job at TWA was so iffy. Jack and I had actually done my very first 807 together in 1981. We flew another 807, and afterward Jack reported to the Wing Commander that I had flown the finest A/C check he had ever seen, and he probably didn't even have to exaggerate much.

I was coming up on the promotion point for LTC with the Reserves. I figured I was a lock for promotion, and I really was. I pinned on my silver oak leaves in January of 1984, and there wasn't a happier guy anywhere. I felt totally redeemed, my judgment vindicated, and if I hadn't been such a tight-ass, I would have been slamming the football into the end zone and picking up an "un-sportsmanlike conduct and delay of game" foul. Life was good! Oh, and in your face, Howard Bradley!

A word about the Reserve promotion system - the active duty did "best qualified" and we did "fully qualified". As long as I took my PME and had a current picture and good years of participation, I was in. This was not true of promotion to full Colonel, where they took 19%, just like the active duty. But I did spend over eleven years as a Major, over a third of my career, and I was really happy to wear another insignia.

I became very comfortable in the C-141, usually just smoothly painting the aircraft on the runway so that the only way you could tell we were down was when I called for "Spoilers". This procedure increases the drag on the wings and allows you to save the wheel brakes a lot. I was also known for using approach flaps for landing. This gave you a faster, safer approach speed and used less fuel. I only used full flaps on a short runway.

I got to know the enlisted men pretty well too. I would take them, and anyone else who wanted to go, soaring in Hawaii on the north shore, from Dillingham AAF, an old Army field, when we had the usual 24-hour layover. I used to brief that we could cross the Pacific with only two rules: One, stay out of trouble, and Two, have a good time. I became pretty popular with the enlisted crew, I think largely by treating them with respect. The Squadron Commander once called me into his office to ask why I was the only A/C in the squadron who he had to settle disputes for as to which enlisted men got to fly trips with me. It was a pretty nice compliment, I think, and I had no idea that I was so popular.

It led to my Flight Engineer's rating. I had taken the written test in the 1970's, passing without really having studied, and I found that R.C. Grant, one of our very senior super-sergeants was an FAA designee, so I asked him if we could go for a ride in the simulator and get the license. He said OK, and I met him at the designated time, and he started the debriefing. It took me a minute or two to figure it out, but I said, "You mean we aren't going to the simulator?" The answer was no, and he paper-whipped the whole thing for me, and I'm sure he wouldn't have done it if he hadn't seen that my halo was for real.

We used to fly practice Medivac missions for the nurses stationed at Norton. These were usually kind of fun, with an overnight somewhere with a crew that was generally a lot prettier and much more educated than my usual bunch of roughnecks. One day while returning from the East Coast with such a mission, I turned around to find a very angry Major nurse confronting me in the cockpit. It seems she heard a strange noise in the aircraft, and one of the loadmasters had told her in so many words to sit down and shut up. I sent one of my engineers back to look into it, and he found a serious hydraulic problem.

We were steadily losing hydraulic fluid from the main system, the big one that ran the landing gear and half the flaps and flight controls. If it failed, we would have to manually crank down the landing gear, and this was both time consuming and a lot of work for my boys. The good news was that we had more hydraulic fluid and could add it to the system while inflight. The bad news was that it continued to leak. I turned the system off, hoping to keep what little hydraulic fluid we had left for the landing and diverted into Kelly AFB in San Antonio TX where they had C-141 maintenance. On the approach I turned the system on long enough to lower the gear and my usual approach flaps for the landing, and after we taxied in, we found the entire aircraft was coated with hydraulic fluid from the landing gear door aft and up over the tail section. What a sticky mess, and who knew the airflow would have taken it so high? It turned out that a faulty valve was porting the fluid overboard, and we repaired that, loaded up more hydraulic fluid, and headed home without further incident.

Now the lesson here, is to listen to people long enough to see if they have something to tell that you need to know, regardless of their surface qualifications. And from the nurse's point of view, if you know something is wrong, stick to your guns until you get someone to take action! You don't want to be dead right, or in this case, right and part of an aircraft incident, if you don't have to be. When I flew photographers around in the T-38, I always told them that if they saw something they didn't like the look of to tell me, and if I told them not to worry about it, they could still worry, but not to talk about it anymore. You don't want to prevent anyone from helping you because of your ego.

I learned my way around the Pacific, flying to Johnson Island, Wake, Kwajalein, Pago Pago and Tahiti, with Hawaii and Guam in the middle of it. We flew to Kunsan, Osan, Suwon and Daegu in Korea, Yokota, Okinawa and Iwakuni MCAS in Japan, and Clark and Cubi Point NAS in the Philippines. It was all fun, and much of it was challenging too. It was challenging just taxing that big C-141 around at Cubi Point NAS where the entire field wasn't much bigger than an aircraft carrier, not to mention that the entire place was surrounded by high terrain. All in all, I loved the big, slow transport and the lifestyle.

We still had a lot of fun drinking with the boys in the military while away from home, and there was an unofficial tradition of not wearing your own nametag when drinking. The reasons for this were survival from the brass or local authorities in case of too much fun happening, and just plain humor. I drank with Pat MaGroin, Holden Mysac, Hugh Jardon, Jack Mehoff, Jack Acid, Joe Momma, Mike Hunt (who was frequently paged), the unstoppable Nino Baldachi from the Academy, and a copilot whose real name I can't remember, but I can never forget some nameless whore screaming "Steve! I coming!" at him in the wee hours of the morning in the Philippines. I usually wore "Amin de Reserves" when I drank, but best was wearing a stolen nametag from some despised staff weenie. In the topless bars all over the world we had stage names, just like the dancers, and Gail Jackson was "Big Dick" and I was "Dirty Dick". I don't know, maybe you just had to be there.

C-141B in flight.

More Flying Stuff
1984

I was violated by the FAA for flying too low into San Jose one night. I was paired with idiot captain Deiter Kaldschmidt, who had called for a visual approach when we were way too far above the glide slope and too far away from the field. I was flying, and I told him, "I don't see the airport". He said to keep on going, and was actually talking to the flight attendants through the door with his head turned about 2000 feet above the ground while I again said, "I don't see it!" Completely unable to see the field, I did a go-around, and that finally got his attention. Shortly afterward we picked up the airport and landed.

We made too much noise on the approach monitors. During the investigation I tried to protect him as best I could, and as a result, we were both suspended for a week, possibly the smallest penalty ever issued by the Feds, but I was publicly humiliated, and Deiter had no clue that he was responsible. Maybe he forgot that he was the Captain.

About this time, chief pilot McBroom asked me to check if one of the other F/Os was getting paid at Norton while calling in sick at Air Cal. He gave me a name and a date, and feeling kind of funny, I snooped around a little. It turned out that the guy was clean. I told McBroom that, and I also told him that I wasn't going to do that anymore. It was just wrong. It was against my ethics, foreign to my integrity, and I wasn't going to spy on my buddies for the Man. McBroom said that he understood, but he didn't, because he stopped being my friend at that moment. A man who would demand that kind of behavior could never be a true friend to anyone anyway.

Maybe he was trying to send a warning to me, that he could find out if I was cheating the company. If so, it went over my head because I would never cheat like that; my integrity would not permit that either. And I was almost never sick, in spite of the accumulating stress.

I was flying into Oakland one day, and after cleaning up all my co-pilot stuff in the cockpit, I went out to the ramp and found a bunch of maintenance guys looking at the number one engine. They were taking fresh parts of a fish out of it. Honest to God, they were. Now we fairly often had bird strikes, killing a bird in flight, but I had never heard of a fish strike. Finally some bright guy figured out that we must have scared some fisher-type bird on the approach and caused him to drop his catch, and it ended up into the engine. It sounds good to me; certainly we weren't low enough to the water for him to jump into the air and get sucked up by the engine. I never heard of anyone else who had a "fish strike" while flying a jet aircraft.

I had met a wonderful guy at the '82 SETP convention named Bill Rauch. He had gone through TPS courtesy of Pan Am, who was about to buy the Concorde and wanted a high tech guy of their own to oversee it. Well, after spending a year at school, Pan Am decided not to buy it, but Bill was still a genuine Associate Member of the Association. It turned out that he ran an ALPA (AirLine Pilots' Association.) committee called the New Equipment Certification Committee, and they did lots of interesting things. He told me that ALPA would pay Air Cal for the time I missed to work with him, and they did, but he didn't tell me that Air Cal would be jealous or upset that a co-pilot would get so much respect from a national organization. I guess they just wanted me to suffer like the other new boys.

Bill recommended me to a fellow at Singer in the simulator division. He had asked ALPA to recommend someone to him to make an interactive video on training in the MD-80. I told him I would work for $300 a day, and we had a deal. I had to fly to New York a couple of times, but most of the work was done on an excellent boondoggle in Zurich, Switzerland. I brought Shirley along, and

she seemed to have a good time, but it was still more work to fit into my already busy life.

Life at Air Cal was fun, but not that much fun. Airline flying is pretty simple really. You get used to the airports and the rhythm of operations, and it was just basic flying after that. I liked it less than the Reserves because I never really got to rest. We often spent only twenty minutes on the ground for a stop, barely enough time to do the paper work for the next leg. Air Cal didn't feed the pilots, so I would have to run around the terminal for a hot dog and a bag of chips for dinner. The overnights were often only twelve hours, just enough time to sleep and get into a clean shirt. There wasn't much rest involved anywhere.

The staff at Air Cal, including my former friend Tom McBroom, seemed to think that I was having too much fun, and they fretted about my military leave. They also whined about the time I gave to ALPA, the Air Line Pilots' Association.

I guess the bottom line was that I had managed to annoy the management everywhere. Norton was peeved about my participation at Edwards, but couldn't find anyone to complain to without looking ridiculous. Air Cal was miffed about my participation with the Reserves but could not legally complain, and by the fact that ALPA was taking me away from flying the line too. Edwards (not TPS, but guys like John Hoffman) was unhappy that their passed-over Major had been promoted and was taking home more money than anyone on the base. Jealousy abounded. But nobody anywhere complained about the quality of my work! I should have noticed that those organizations were made of people, and people have emotions. I should have tried to smooth things out, but I couldn't logically make sense of it. I was an asset to all the organizations. Why they couldn't just enjoy it was beyond my ability to analyze. And I had pretty much gotten over being sensitive to other's needs while I was being passed-over for promotion as a test pilot.

The fun part about working for ALPA was that I got another excellent boondoggle to France to talk with Air Bus about the new fly-by-wire A320 they were building. I also hosted them at Edwards to talk with the pros about the existing fly-by-wire systems and fly demonstrations in the simulators. Edwards pointed out that the control law system they had chosen A*, (spoken as "A star") had been already evaluated as mediocre at best by everyone, just as I had known they would.

I was keynote speaker in the FAA conference on fly-by-wire in Washington, DC, and got the Feds to focus on the user pilot as well as the electronic systems and really did some good for the industry. Finally, I got them to change the landing logic of the flight control system, adding pitch rate feedback to the flare portion, so that it felt like a real airplane. It seems that the civilians respected the opinion of a man who was both a test pilot and an airline pilot, and an official union representative.

On August 29th 1984, one of our B-1s was doing an aft cg (center of gravity) test point when they had a fuel malfunction, causing the cg to go further aft, and they lost control of the aircraft. They used the ejection capsule for the first and only time and got mixed results. My former student and future General, Dick Reynolds and the test engineer had damage to their backs, but my friend Doug Benefield was killed. He was a well-respected test pilot, and Edwards and the SETP sent him off with honors.

1984 was also the year I checked out as Captain with Air Cal. All my buddies from ALPA made a big deal of congratulating me, and I just didn't get it. I mean, I already had my ATP rating in the B-737, I had been a captain lots of times, and it was solely caused by my being senior enough to bid it. It only meant that I had risen to the halfway point on the Air Cal seniority list. That's all it meant to me, but everyone else seemed to think it was a big deal. I did like the pay raise: I was now making $80 an hour!

Training for it had been kind of a big deal. I guess this was the final hurdle to determine if a guy was good enough to be captain, and the instructors put a lot of extra crap into the checkout. For example, flying an ILS was done to 200 feet minimums unless you had a category II or III certified bird, and we did not. But our instructor made us fly the approaches to 100 feet minimum, just to give us a little extra stress. This is more work than you would think, because the ILS cone gets very narrow the closer you get to the transmitter, and you had to make little tiny corrections and keep the flight director bars exactly in the center.

I was used to looking for tiny movements from air refueling and bombing tasks, and I had no trouble with that at all, except to be mildly annoyed, but my flying partner had fits with it. I again looked very good next to the other boys.

I also learned the simple way to handle an engine failure on takeoff, courtesy of Captain Bob Brown, in Dallas TX, using someone's rented simulator. If an engine failed below V1 speed on takeoff, you abort the takeoff. That is the easy case. If it fails between V1 and V2, you have to continue and it gets very busy with pushing the rudder and rotating more slowly than usual. Bob showed me that you did not need the aileron controls at all if you put the rudder in properly. I learned to rotate gripping the post that held the wheel, not using the aileron (and concomitant spoilers that increase your drag) at all, and to put the rudder in slowly, correcting the yaw as it increased from the engine winding down, and doing it while I could still see the runway to more easily keep the nose straight. After you slowed the maneuver down to the essentials, it was easy, but I know that not all the airline pilots learned this way. I think Bob did it to show the test pilot that he knew something extra, and I'm glad he did.

Of course, I did have to go back on reserve schedule, and that was kind of a pain. Now that I think about it, I spent most of my airline career on reserve.

Me in a pressure suit, checking the fit into the Blanik L-13 preparatory to an attempt to break the world altitude record for gliders.

Captain Hank at Air Cal
1984-1987

Life had not changed much. I still got the worst trips with the airline, and I still worked too much with the Reserves. I did succumb to pressure and quit working at Edwards. Norton said that they expected more from their LTCs, and so I gave it to them. I also worked out a deal to go to Altus AFB OK to go through their air refuel school and then the instructor school. Now Altus is still a place you don't want to be, but I was on active duty getting retirement credit and only working one job while I was there, so I pretty much had a good time.

When I showed up at Altus in September of 1986 for their two-week refuel school, I was a LTC and had just put on my 10,000 hour patch. I was the only pilot on the base with that much flying time, and when they saw how I could refuel (I had offered to demonstrate the boom limits, a most difficult maneuver, on my first flight), the IP knew I was better than he was, and my halo was screwed on tight to stay.

The next month, when I arrived back at Altus for IP School, I could still do no wrong and they pretty much let me slide on memorizing things, a process I still tried to avoid. Life was good.

I enjoyed instructing in the C-141. The airlines were hiring again, so I got to do it a lot, since many other IPs were unavailable with their airlines. I had a reputation for excellence and a reputation as a rebel, and they just wouldn't go away.

I was asked to take a young active duty captain on an 807 mission. He was having trouble upgrading to A/C, and I was to be his last chance. They were looking for someone who might reach him, and I was the unconventional guy for the job. His commander told me to dump him at any time. He was an Academy grad who had first been a navigator, then gone to UPT a couple of years later. This put him behind his contemporaries for promotion to Major, since most of them were IPs already, much as I had been at a disadvantage attempting to get promoted to LTC on active duty.

Well, he fired out of Norton at warp factor six, a veritable dynamo of efficiency and proficiency, but with his hair on fire. I watched until we got to Japan, and then we had a come to Jesus meeting over a couple of beers.

I told him he was riding his enlisted men way too hard. They did all the work while he got as much pay as all of them together. I told him that they were about to revolt and put his luggage on another flight to anywhere, and he'd be lucky to ever see it again. I told him to let them do their jobs: keep an eye on them, but don't micro-manage. I told him about the two rules I used: 1) Keep out of trouble (which covered a lot of ground) and 2) Have a good time. What he needed to be doing was supervising the big picture, not checking the loadmaster's weight and balance form. I told him mistakes are just mistakes, and as long as the big picture is OK, they will not be disasters.

He bought it all. I guess my recommendations, coming from a LTC test pilot with lots of flying time, and a man out of his chain of command, were too powerful to reject.

We finished the trip in a much more relaxed atmosphere, and he went on and passed his checkride and was promoted to major on time too. I love teaching when the student actually listens!

One of my first trips as an airline captain was kind of fun. I was a "high minimum" captain, which lasted until I had 200 hours of flying time as captain, and that meant that I could not take an ILS approach down to 200 feet in spite of proving my proficiency down to 100 feet. It was kind of stupid, but it was an FAA regulation. Go figure.

Anyway, it was almost Christmas Eve, and I was going to Sacramento, but the weather was down and I had to divert to Oakland. This means more work for the new guy, not less, and in the middle of it all, Jeff Davis called me from the back. He was a Flight Attendant with a memorable personality, and he says, "I got something for you, Hank!"

I said, "Not now Jeff, I'm kind of busy. After

landing, OK?" and I kind of forgot about it while I did an instrument approach to Oakland.

At the gate there, I set the parking brake, turned off the engines and the seat belt sign and I was done while the co-pilot has to take care of the rest of the work. I was just getting out of my seat when the cockpit door opened and Jeff says "This is Chenille" and he pushed this tall, pretty girl into the cockpit, slamming the door behind her.

She said, "Hi! Merry Christmas!" and pulled up her sweater to show me two of the finest, just inches from my nose! What could I do? I gave her a Christmas Birinski and sat down in the sidesaddle seat behind the pilots, kind of stunned. She still stood with her sweater up around her neck and a big smile, so I said, "Be sure to say Merry Christmas to the co-pilot too!"

Well, he hadn't been paying any attention, because he had nineteen things to do, and she bends down and polishes his bald little head with those beauties, and I get to see the expression on his face when he turned around. Now this is some fun flying! Unfortunately, it was the only time anything like that happened.

Jeff later told us that she was drunk, which I already knew, and kept groping him under his apron. She told us that she was going to Sacramento to make a porno movie, God bless her.

We started a new route to Anchorage AK, flown in a Rube Goldberg half-cargo B-737-200. The front half of the bird was cargo, using a door just like that on the KC-135, and the back end held about fifty passengers. I had been to the military field, Elmendorf AFB, many times with MAC, but these first times in a B-737 to the civilian field were kind of interesting. There was an enroute leg that was actually done with NDB as the primary means of navigation and no ground radar available either. It was very primitive. I flew several of these flights with Fidel Sanchez, who had been in B-52s with me. He had gotten out in 1970 and worked for Continental Airlines and then gone on strike. He went to work for Air Cal and ended up an F/O for us for a while until they got it sorted out.

Shortly afterward Air Cal started to buy the B-737-300 from Boeing, and to sell the MD-80s. I guess the company got a better deal, but as far as I was concerned, the B737-300 was a much better aircraft. It had a real FMS (Flight Management System) system.

About this time I started taking my airline crews soaring. There was a place near our hotel in San Jose that would rent me a glider, and I would take interested F/Os from Air Cal for a ride in a glider, just like I did with the military on Oahu. I would just divide the total cost among the people flying, including myself, and we all had a great time. It gave us something to do on long layovers that didn't involve alcohol, and it was pretty popular with flight attendants as well as pilots.

Many years later, while dead-heading home after the "Storm of the Century" in New York City, a young American Airlines captain approached me and said, "Hi Hank, I've been meaning to tell you something for a long time."

I didn't recognize him, and have now totally forgotten his name, but he was obviously one of my F/Os from this period. He said, "You saved my life. You taught me about high-energy approaches at San Jose in that glider. I was returning to Anchorage in a ski plane, running out of gas due to un-forecast headwinds. I declared an emergency and diverted into Elmendorf AFB (only about five miles closer to his position, and both were excellent decisions) and I was making my pattern out over the broken ice patches in the bay and I remembered flying with you. I had to turn almost 180 degrees to land on the active runway, and instead of making a normal pattern with flaps out, high drag and high engine power setting, I just turned in tight and pulled the throttle to idle and glided in. As I turned off the runway, the engine ran out of gas. The investigators could find no usable fuel in the aircraft. I would have crashed in the ice short of the runway and frozen to death or drowned before help could arrive. I just wanted to say, 'thank you'."

Well, I was pretty pleased to have made a difference and to know that someone actually listened to my sometimes-verbose instruction too. This was very rewarding for me, and the finest kind of tribute that can be given to a teacher.

During this period I saw something from the aircraft that I doubt anyone has ever seen before. During flap retraction after takeoff from LAX on runway 27L, I happened to be looking ahead at the setting sun. Just as it disappeared under

the water of the Pacific, there was a bright green flash, a natural effect I had heard of, but never witnessed. I called to the F/O to look, but he was too late. Fortunately, we were just starting our climb at 250 knots, and we caught the sun and got to see the green flash again as it rose in the west! The only way to see the sun rise in the west is, of course, from an air vehicle in a rapid climb. The flash did not repeat a third time as the sun again set. I think too much altitude spoils the refraction effect, because I never saw it at cruise altitude, even though I have closely watched many sunsets and sunrises there too.

Not too many people have ever seen the green flash even once, although they gather to watch for it every night in Key West. And to see it twice the same evening was incredible! And I could be the only person on the planet to have ever seen this. Beauty can strike suddenly, and you have to be prepared to take the time for it. It is, of course, a joy forever.

An actual photo of the green flash.

Shirley began to behave strangely. She borrowed money so that her girlfriend could have an abortion. The child would not have been her husband's. It seemed foreign to her values as I knew them. She still complained about my having a lover, an impossibility as far as I was concerned. She flew extra trips, forgetting about our idea of spending more time together. She would sleep in front of the TV instead of going to bed when I did.

I found her love letters under the bed as I was looking for a different bag to take my class A dress uniforms on a military trip to a two-week school at Maxwell AFB AL. I was frozen inside as I read them. She was having an affair with Don Kingery, a Naval Reservist and co-pilot at Jet America. She was having an affair and trying to accuse me of her own crime to make herself feel better. I was a broken man, I couldn't think of what to do. Finally I went ahead and packed for my trip to Maxwell AFB AL. I had two weeks of school at the Air War College there to think about it before I needed to take any action.

My buddy Gail Jackson had started taking these mini-PME (Professional Military Education) trips with me. He did this not because he wanted the man-days, but because he had no PME and needed to show something to the next promotion board. We would both meet the Colonels' board together. These mini-schools for the Reserve forces were really pretty well run, and we had a good time except for me trying to figure out what to do with my life and marriage.

When I returned, I confronted her. It was, of course, my fault for not being home much. She wanted to try counseling, and I agreed. It was my overactive ethics at work again. I just could not bear being portrayed as unfair. We went to counseling, and I should have just walked out after hearing the answer to the counselor's attempt to get us to remember why we had gotten married in the first place. The counselor said, "Say something nice about your spouse." I said a bunch of things. She was smart, good looking, a good cook, just whatever bubbled up in my brain. All she could come up with was, "His hands are always warm." 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit was the best she could do. It was time

to quit, but like an idiot, I didn't. I just continued to work hard to take away from the sting of the hurt she had given me.

I just kind of cut her out of my life, even though she continued to live with me. It was a very costly decision. She was trying to extend our marriage to the ten-year point, so that she could collect the maximum money from me in California. I let her do it. She finally moved out, two days after our tenth anniversary, on 6 July 1987.

I'm going to stop writing about this. Dwelling on bad memories isn't healthy, and there isn't anything positive to be said here. The bottom line is that if there's no love left and you have to go, the sooner you go the better it will be. One thing I will mention is that I continued to hurt for a long time. My confidence was severely shaken, and would not recover for years. I didn't even have a date for more than a year.

My brother Andrew came and lived with me in Corona del Mar for a while. It was really nice having him around, and Mother had sent him to me to get him a job and get started on a responsible life. He had spent five or six years in college, but had finally graduated before she ran out of money, and I was in charge of shaping him up. At least, that's the way I remember it. He was not the motivated self-starter that I was, and I'm afraid a lot of the motivation I gave him might have been the same kind of negative stuff my father espoused. But he sure came around anyway and is a heck of a computer/systems engineer today.

Living together was the only way I could have gotten to know him, since he was so much younger. We chased skirts together and drank our fair share of beer too. I can remember looking for a bar with him on Christmas Eve so that we could eat dinner. It was not a happy day for either of us. I found that Andrew was sensitive and caring and could show it much better than I could. Basically, he was just a nicer guy, and I am richer for the experience.

Things were going pretty well at Air Cal, and in the summer of 1987, I was astonished when we heard that American Airlines was going to buy us! It meant all kinds of things: more destinations to fly to, better passes for personal travel, higher pay, and most of all, genuine security from bankruptcy! And on the balance, they had just doubled my retirement pay too.

The reality, of course, wasn't quite so good. One of my buddies told me that a merger would be just like a nasty divorce, except that when it was over, you would still be married. He was right. I ended up having to take a pay cut (for two years) and having to commute to San Francisco to fly. It was just miserable in the beginning. I soldiered on.

At least I got my date of hire for a new seniority number. The F/Os got really screwed to where American actually had to hire some new guys to put in front of our most junior people. It is all about seniority in an airline. Actually, we used to say that it's all about money and schedule, and both of those depend on your seniority.

Meanwhile, back at the Reserves at Norton, Colonel Jim Sehorn and I had more combat medals than anyone else did by a long shot. Jim had been a POW for six years and pretty much had one of everything. In fact, he got the Silver Star and Purple Heart just for getting shot down and captured. We now have a POW medal, but we didn't then, and we made up for it by watering down our other decorations. One day at a dress function, I noticed that he did not have an Air Medal. I asked about it, and it turned out that he had been shot down on his sixth mission, and you needed to complete twenty missions for this medal. Digesting this information turned into an epiphany about why we always disagreed on practically everything. Without disrespect, he hadn't been in combat, he'd just been in captivity!

In combat you get things done with the resources available, and if you have to break a regulation to do it, so be it. In captivity you have no time deadline for your actions, and you have lots of time to ensure that you are doing things the way that Jesus would or any other criteria you want to debate. I was an action man, and he a thoughtful man. In my opinion, he couldn't make up his mind in a timely fashion, and he didn't mind imposing his own eternal time reference on the rest of us. It conflicted sharply with my own inability to deal with bullshit. You would have thought that our similar combat backgrounds would have insured a similar viewpoint, but in

fact, he and I disagreed on almost everything.

On January 26th 1986, the space shuttle Challenger went down with all hands. I was watching it on TV along with the rest of the world while attending a short PME course at Maxwell AFB AL. My friend and flying buddy El Onizuka from TPS was on board. He was selected on the list that was reviewed for "ethnic diversity". The USAF later named an Air Force Station after him in Hawaii.

For aviators, dying is like that. One day you're having lunch, talking about nothing important, and the next day he's just not there. No illness, no retirement dinner, no suspicions, no foreshadowing whatsoever. No good-byes; just gone. Many times, like this time, you don't even have anything to put in a casket. It is abrupt, shocking and most unsettling for the survivors. It's the way it is for career flyers.

This is the uniform with lots of decorations that I wore on my last day.

Looking good in my AA Captain's uniform.

Life at American Airlines
1987-1988

Commuting to SFO sucked, and management didn't have to do it to me. I was the last guy sent up there, and I know they had a late volunteer to go up but sent me anyway in addition to their quota. I had to either go up a day early and stay in a hotel or stay in a hotel after my trip. I tried to drop everything I could and work with the reserves. This did not go unnoticed by the management, and I was labeled as "not a company man". That was true. I didn't do anything I didn't have to. It was mutual; I gave them the respect they gave me. There is a lesson here: your employees will treat you like you treat them.

While flying out of SFO, I took a simulator check with one of the guys in my class. Rich Pehoviak had taken the option of staying in LAX and being demoted to F/O, something I probably should have done. But since he was a check airman, he actually got paid for DC-10 F/O, making more money than anyone in the old Air Cal system had ever made, and more than any former Air Cal captain was making now! What a sweet deal, and the union seemed to think it was OK that junior guys, junior F/Os at that, got paid more than senior guys flying captain. We now had a new union. APA, Allied Pilots' Association, had split from ALPA many years ago over a dispute on whether or not you needed a third pilot in the cockpit. I thought these guys were nuts after witnessing their denunciation of the airline. AA and the union seemed truly to be locked in a struggle for dominance, and it was hard to be part of.

So we went to Seattle to use the simulator there, and near the end of the check I found that the thing just wouldn't fly right. After a certain amount of attempting to trim up the aircraft, I turned off the yaw damper, and the problem went away. He had failed the yaw damper in the hard over position. There is no procedure for this anywhere in our books, or anyone else's either, but he had found a switch for it in the simulator and was busy trying to screw me up. I went ahead and finished the ADF approach I was flying and landed and he busted me for landing on the wrong runway. In the confusion of trying to fly with an untrimmable aircraft, he had cleared us to land on the smaller unlit runway instead of the one he had turned the lights on. I guess if you really want to bust someone you can, and I put him on my steadily growing list of assholes.

Scheduling took me off my next two trips because they didn't have simulator time available, and the third trip as well so that I could go to retraining and get re-checked, so I stayed home with pay and didn't have to commute either! The joke was on him after all! I have been hazed by pros, and this guy wasn't even in the league.

I was getting the picture though. Ever since I had refused to spy for Tom McBroom, I was on the list of guys who need a little humility. Maybe I was just on the shit list with the company, but no one on the staff in California would ever do me any favors.

I was no stranger to the concept of being the Captain in the aircraft. In the air, the buck stopped at my seat, and I was ultimately responsible for the safety of the aircraft and crew. I always asked how the others felt about an issue that would arise, but I understood that the responsibility was mine alone. One morning in Japan, when we went to work to fly a shuttle through Korea, I saw no less than three typhoon markers surrounding our destination of Okinawa. When I asked about them, the weather briefer and then the command post both said that they felt they would be no factor except for a little wind. I went on record then and there: "I'm not going to Okinawa if the weather doesn't improve!" I was adamant; my crew was shocked and pretty pleased with me. Apparently they had never seen anyone talk that way to the staff weenies in the command post. In the end, we spent the night at Osan AB Korea,

which was a pretty good deal, and we got to do lots more shopping than we usually did there. I saw no urgency worth risking my health for, and I still don't. Many of my decisions were not all that popular with the bosses, but were usually very popular with the people that worked for me, and this was one of them. The best leader takes care of his troops as first priority, even before himself!

Toward the end of 1987, Gail Jackson and I came up for promotion to full Colonel. He was the commander of the 729th Squadron, and I was executive officer in the 728th. I was senior to my own squadron commander, but he and the Wing commander were both navigators, and he had some serious suck up going for him there, so I was the number two guy. My boss, the navigator, was also a lawyer, and he just didn't have time for the Reserves so I took up the slack. It worked out very well. We had an ORI (Operational Readiness Inspection), and our squadron got an Outstanding in every area. Every damn last one, and I was the guy that nosed through everything and fixed it. This was a really rare occurrence, and one I had never even heard of before or since.

So my OER going into the promotion board had this information, but at the bottom, where the Wing commander, Colonel Fortson, puts in his two cents, was "This is one of my better LTCs. Promote." Talk about damned with faint praise! I was furious, and I was going to kill him, but his Vice Commander talked me out of it. Gail's OER said, "This is my finest Squadron Commander. Promote immediately!" I was convinced that I was screwed, but with some help, made a rare decision to keep my mouth shut until the results were published.

Sure enough, I got promoted and Gail didn't. I got to sit as an evaluator on the next promotion board only a few months later, and I found out why. The commander's words didn't count as much with the Reserves as they had on active duty. The big swingers on the board were the number of days worked and your PME schools. Well, I had lots of PME from trying to get promoted while on active duty. Gail had none. I also had been averaging over 200 days a year for the last eight years: a just incredible total for a guy who also has a job. I was in! They only promoted 19% of the eligible LTCs, and I was in!

I believe this was my proudest moment. Other things I have done will mean more to humanity than this (like my two children) but this accomplishment was the most difficult for me and I am the most proud of it. Wahoo and kiss my hairy ass all you doubters and deniers!

I felt totally vindicated in my choice to leave active duty, and able to hold my chin up in the company of my academy classmates too. I had been rewarded only for my performance, not for sucking up! Life had never been better! The day the promotions were announced, I went to the Officers' Club with a big smile and bought a drink for everyone and anyone, and I went by the Wing Commander to let him say congratulations too. When I got there, he said, and I quote, "Don't think it means anything, because it doesn't." That transmission didn't really mean anything to me at the time, but I could tell it was negative. He was pissed because Gail, his boy, didn't make it, not by anything I had done, but I guess that made it my fault anyway. Even that couldn't spoil the elation I felt! Oh, and Gene Fortson can rot in the same hell with Howard Bradley and Ted Twinting. I beat the three of them, and I did it without friends in high places! I didn't cheat to do it, even though I feel they had been unfair; I beat the system the hard way. I was promoted because of my many accomplishments, and not because of the important people I knew and kissed up to. And I think that was what Fortson was mad about. He wanted to select who was promoted, not have some board of impartial judges do it. I mean, how could they tell who was sucking up to him the best?

Months later I figured out what Colonel Fortson meant. There would be no Colonel's job for me in his Wing. There was such a job, but he begged someone else to do it, a guy who wanted to retire. He gave me six months to get off the base. I had to find a Colonel's position somewhere else in the Reserves, and there weren't very many of them. There was a similar position opening at Edwards, and I thought I could step right into it. I was perfect for it, but John Hoffman was making the selection and he told me I had "too much baggage" and wouldn't select me. Was it another case of jealousy? Sure, I hadn't sucked up to John, but was I supposed to? Or maybe he was just

supporting Ted Twinting's policy of not giving me a chance.

It wasn't all jealousy. I discovered that I was leading a steady parade of test pilots from Edwards to the Reserves at Norton AFB and the airlines. Dave Bittenbinder and Dave Barnes both took civilian jobs as test pilots and continued their military careers in Reserve C-141s in my unit. To American Airlines went two other Daves, retired as LTCs and now flying as very junior F/Os. I had also started the reserve forces contributing to the flying effort at Edwards, and they now have several real flying slots in Systems Command there and make significant contributions to the mission. Did I get any recognition for this? No way. It was well known that Hank has a bad attitude.

About this time, fellow test pilot and Reservist Dave Barnes was flying his Northrop Tiger II, an advanced F-5 design that was never put into production, at an air show when he crashed and died, leaving a pretty young widow. The cause was eventually placed to (high g) physiological factors, but it was still ultimately listed as "pilot error", and he was another flying casualty in my unit.

On the 7th of August 1988, flying aircraft 70005 from Elmendorf AFB AK to Japan, we shut down the number one engine for corruption in the oil filter shown by the chip indicator. Shut it down or risk ruining the engine. We were over Shemya at the time, and the weather was crap there. It was about the same amount of distance back as forward to the destination, and we voted to press on to Japan. When you shut down an engine at altitude, you have to descend and also slow down to best cruise speed, much less than the normal slow .74 Mach the C-141 usually flew. We were in the weather but out of the jet stream, and really tired when we finally arrived after an 8.3 hour flight. When we called approach, they told us to take a heading for separation from a VIP KC-135 aircraft. I asked them if they knew that we were an emergency bird, and I claimed and received priority for landing. The guy in the tower was in no danger, and you know how I felt about the staff weenies in the other aircraft!

I wrote the crew a recommendation for their perfect performance, and we were made crew of the month. It was the second time for me. Sometimes, you have to know your rights and stick up for them. We were all pretty tired of the tension of flying around with an engine shut down and had already added more than another hour to our flight time, and so my crew was pretty pleased with their obnoxious commander. My reputation as a leader in the unit was totally secure. This is a good time to point out that those people on the ground really work for you, not the other way around, in spite of the fact that they tell you what to do most of the time.

I managed to finish those 7305 days of active duty later that summer, and I decided to just retire with half pay right then instead of making myself any crazier. I probably should not have retired, but taken a job I had at Wright-Patt, in Logistics Command, but I was just too tired of the uphill battle. On Halloween, 1988, I put my uniform on for the last time and went to work. There was a UTA, (Unit Training Assembly) on that day, kind of an all day retraining session, and the Squadron Commander interrupted it to announce my retirement. He covered the high points of my career, mentioning that I had been passed over three times as a Major, but had ultimately been promoted to full Colonel, and he called me forward to say a few words.

The auditorium, which had been buzzing all day with whispered conversation, suddenly became totally silent as the men and women of the 728th Military Airlift Squadron came to attention. I was totally surprised by the respect that they showed me. I sat them down, made a short speech giving a lot of credit to the schedulers, and left to a large round of applause.

OK, it wasn't the parade that Colonel Fortson could have scheduled for me. I never got one after returning from Vietnam either, and I still think we deserve one. Colonel Fortson also failed to give me the customary medal for retiring Colonels, and my guess is that he was just jealous because I already had twice the decorations that he had. I did have the solid respect of my fellows, and that is a feeling that many men never get. I retired feeling good about myself and about my service, having fulfilled my expectations, if not my potential. Life was very, very good.

I'm going to leave out a lot of airline flying

here. I flew as captain in the MD-80 out of Dallas, and the check out was kind of interesting. AA knew me only as an Air Cal pilot, subject to suspicion since I hadn't been trained by AA, and I was checking out as captain, subject to close scrutiny. But I had several hundred hours of flying in the bird already, and they could find no fault with my performance.

I do have just one flying story I want to include with the MD-80, flying into Cleveland during a snowstorm one night. the company sent us an ACARS message without amplification that we were to continue on to Chicago, even though we were supposed to overnight in KCLE. The ACARS (Aircraft Communications and Addressing Reporting System), was a slick little machine that printed out radio messages, usually from operations. Next the tower reported "fair" braking at touchdown and "minimal" braking on the roll out end of the runway. They were using the short runway because the longer one was closed for unknown reasons. So we were using 6017 feet on runway 28 instead of the 9000 feet on runway 24. The copilot was doing "business as usual" for an attitude, but alarm bells were ringing for me.

I watched his eyes get wide as I told him it sounded like a set-up for an accident to me. I couldn't think of a reason for not landing after checking that the landing distance was OK in the performance manual, so I told him we would land with full flaps (I usually used flaps 30, but flaps 40 would slow us faster) and plant it on the very first brick of the runway, no floating looking for that smooth touchdown. We would use maximum reverse thrust and the seldom-used autobrakes, also set at maximum. I told him that planning for the worst was the best thing to do.

I have already told you of the old aphorism for pilots that the three things of no use to you in flight are the altitude above you, the gas out the tailpipe, and the runway behind you. I have wished for all three more than once, but tonight we would not waste a foot of runway, and it would not be a lack of planning that would cause problems. On the approach I "ducked under" the glide slope to hit that first brick (not a recommended technique for the inexperienced), and we had an uneventful landing, not even going half the way to end of the runway to taxi back to the terminal. It wasn't even as hard as I had expected because the snow cushioned the impact of my attempt at a "firm" touchdown, but it was slippery all the way down to about 20 knots. The biggest adventure was trying to find the taxiway under all that snow at a field we were not familiar with. The trick is to stay between the blue lights marking the edge of the taxiway, but which blue lights do you turn between?

In operations I met another young AA crew that was going to deadhead to Chicago. I asked what equipment they were flying, and when the answer was MD-80, I asked why they weren't flying and we weren't going to the hotel. The answer was the same as why the long runway was closed. They had run off that runway during landing an hour earlier and closed it for the night. They had also made themselves unqualified to fly, so they had to dead head. I did not ask them if they had done all the things we had done to prepare for the icy runway, because I was sure they hadn't. The staff weenies were going to ask them all those things and more at the accident investigation, and they had already had a tough day.

By being paranoid (or obsessive-compulsive take your pick), I had saved a lot of trouble for myself and money for the company. But I shouldn't have had to search for something suspicious. The company could have told me that the last flight had slid off the runway, and so could the tower. Didn't they think that was of interest to me? Or were they afraid it would frighten me? I still don't know, but this is another example of why I don't like staff weenies. Staff weenies are like flies. There are way too many of them, and all they do is eat shit and bother people.

And so like most of my favorite flying stories, it ended with "landed without incident".

I then bid the B-747 as F/O. I was awarded this bid, but not selected for training because AA didn't have to because of a glitch in the contract with the pilots. All they had to do was pay me for B-747 F/O, and I already made more as an MD-80 captain. I wanted to fly that queen of the skies, the really heavy iron! It was not to be.

I ended up bidding for and flying the A-300 out of Miami. I did not care for the Airbus very much, mostly because of their design philosophy.

That is: keep the pilots from hurting anything. They noticed so many cases of pilot error in accident reports they try to keep them out of the loop. The reason the pilot error statistic is so high is that he is always the last guy with the opportunity to fix the problem, and sometimes he doesn't. On the other hand, their avionics were excellent. My first flight was to Bogota Colombia. Bogota is in the mountains at 8361 feet elevation and the final approach fix is at about 14,000 feet right next to a peak. This was interesting flying!

I got a fine boondoggle in the A-300 when Hurricane Andrew came through Miami. I was called at the last moment to ferry an empty A-300 to LAX. It was kind of eerie, having only two people and no food or drink on board that enormous aircraft with about 260 passenger seats, not to mention the empty F/A seats. The checklist called for a takeoff PA, and I said, "Sit down, shut up, and don't put your feet on the seats!" to no one, but it was good to get that subconscious urge out of my system. When we got to LAX, the whole system was out of whack, and so I spent three days shacked up with my girlfriend Patty on company expenses.

A300-600

While flying the A-300 from New York to Miami, I had President Nixon on board in first class, and I actually went back and asked him for his autograph. He was the only celebrity that I ever imposed on. He was willing, and while he was signing the flight plan I blurted out, "I used to work for you." He asked where, and I told him, "Vietnam, mostly". He then gave the best summary of that conflict that I've heard. He said, "It ended poorly, but we needed to be there." He took my address and sent me an autographed copy of his latest book, "No More Vietnams". That was incredibly gracious. I really wanted to ask him why it took him so long to bomb Hanoi, but somehow I was being gracious too. I'm sure it was only momentary on my part. And in the end, we took all those bombers off nuclear alert, and the chances of the race reducing itself to radioactive ash were reduced a hundred fold. Good job, tricky Dick! I am personally very happy that no crews are spending a third of their lives waiting to spread nuclear destruction.

Having thought about it for a long time, it seems to me that we lost the battle, but won the war. The war was really against the USSR, and we bankrupted them into defeat.

I also flew the B-757 and B-767 internationally to Europe, but mostly to South America. South America had lots of interesting flying including my first trip to Quito Ecuador. At 9228 feet elevation it had more elevation than runway length. We flew in there only at night, and with a very high 600 foot minimum on the approach. The visual approach to Tegucigalpa Honduras was very challenging, landing over a hill onto a short 6000 foot runway, and landing at La Paz Bolivia (called "El Alto") required us to be on oxygen because of the runway elevation of 13,325 feet.

In general, the bigger aircraft were easier to fly, and the arrivals into larger airports safer. We got paid more to fly the bigger aircraft. This was great duty and good money. I liked the B-767 and I grew really comfortable in it, but in April of 2001 I flew my last mission to Rio de Janeiro Brazil, my favorite layover for lots of reasons including the beach, beautiful women and cheap booze. The government had decided I was too old to work at 60 and I was mandatorily retired. Funny how it's against the law to discriminate by age unless you are a government agency. Not funny to me, of course. I guess they just wanted more guys drawing unemployment.

Historical note: *The symbolic Berlin Wall fell at the end of 1989, just about a year after I retired. Communism faltered in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the USSR began to fall apart beginning with Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. We*

finally won the Cold War and Vietnam had been just one battle in it.

I should probably quit my story right here, but I've got some ink and a couple of military-related stories remaining, so I am going to tell them anyway. The first story is about flying and instructing in the Colombian Air Force OV-10. I wore my USAF flight suit while doing this, and just could not bear to remove my silver eagles from it. Report me if you want to; I've been hazed by experts.

Thumbs up from the captain in front of the heavy iron at Miami.

The Last Boondoggle
December 2004

Note the four bladed props in the OV-10M

Like many great adventures, this one started while drinking. Bill Walker is a long-time friend, and he is chief pilot at Marsh Aviation in Mesa, Arizona. He was complaining about having to ferry eight OV-10s down to Colombia. Basically, it would take a lot of time, and he had other things to do, like deliver modified S-2s to the California Fire Dept.

Well, it sounded like fun to me. I had always liked to fly to South America. As a test pilot, I had pretty much always thought I could fly anything, and pretty much could, too. These aircraft had been modified with new engines, propellers and avionics. My checkout consisted of a few flights in the back seat, acting mostly like the flight test engineer, and one in the front seat. This was the first time I had tried to checkout in a new aircraft without a flight manual or checklist. We had the old flight manual, which obviously didn't help much because of the extensive changes made to the bird, but I could make my own pen and ink changes to the manual as we went along. I made my own checklist on 4 by 6 cards, just like we used to do at USAF Test Pilot School when I was a student.

I also had to take a biannual flight review for the FAA, administered on that same front seat flight by Bill, and I had to get my FAA physical back. As usual, I filled all the squares in timely fashion, if not exactly as the FAA would have preferred.

This OV-10A is unlike any other. It has upgraded engines providing the old horsepower, 715 hp, over a much wider range of temperatures and altitudes, and they have been flat rated from a maximum of about 900 hp. Right now you get about 840 hp at 100% torque. This increases the

engine out capability from about 5000 feet to above 10000 feet. It has four-bladed props that are somewhat quieter and more efficient at low speeds. It also has the Chelton avionics package. This was designed for smaller aircraft owned by people with too much money and to be used in conjunction with an autopilot. The final package was a 40-year-old aircraft with lots of power and avionics so new that there was not yet even a training program on how to use them. This was not a mature weapon system by any concept. It would eventually be redesignated the OV-10M.

Lots of things had to be done just to begin flying. I had to have my helmet updated with new padding, since the old was pretty rotten after a twenty-year span of non-use, and the mike was incompatible with the new avionics, and it had to be replaced too. The rest of my flight equipment was pretty usable, in spite of my flight suit fitting more like a sausage skin than a uniform, since I was nearly thirty pounds heavier.

This gross (very gross) weight change made it difficult to enter the aircraft's back seat. After at least five minutes of clinging to the very hot (air temperature above 105) side of the aircraft trying to figure out which extremity to put in first, I finally concluded that it could only be done by starting with the left foot. Exit had to be done by starting with the right foot. Bill encouraged me during this period by periodically crying out, "Don't fall out of my airplane!"

After this inauspicious beginning, the aircraft was impounded for six months until we generated a small mountain of paperwork for the government that approached the maximum gross weight of the aircraft at 14,500 pounds, verifying things like the engines were installed. This would include my own training records, an interesting work of fiction in itself.

We were finally cleared to go again on Monday the 1st of March 2004. Bill and I flew a functional check flight in a cold rain on the Friday before, during which I did not make a landing and we discarded many of the requirements as either boring or unnecessary. We spent most of the time trying to stay out of icing conditions, since there are no anti-ice systems on the aircraft.

Bill flew the first day, and we had barely gotten into Mexico before all the terrain data in the artificial vision system disappeared, and Edith, the female voice that announced all kinds of warnings, complained continuously. (Edith was

Note the fat guy in the old experimental flight suit. Bill Walker has his harness straps hitched too tight. We are two old guys headed for trouble!

named after Archie's wife in "All in the Family". Archie was always telling her to "stifle yourself!") After landing, we replaced a couple of chips in the Chelton boxes just like we knew what we were doing, to insert the South American terrain instead of the US terrain and fixed the problem.

We made two stops for fuel at Hermosillo and Mazatlan and got into Acapulco after logging 6.7 hours of flight time in about a twelve-hour crew day. Somewhere along the line, Bill actually repaired the fuel drop tank with a piece of plastic tape. I wish it had been duct tape, it makes a better story, but it fixed the problem. We were beat, but we were back at the aircraft early in morning to fly two legs to Tapachula and San Jose, Costa Rica. I had not made a landing in any aircraft for six months and had only made three landings in almost three years, and I was hoping to relearn quickly. It was my turn to fly in the front seat.

The first thing that happened was that the nose wheel steering failed. You could hear the hydraulic pump working, but the nose would not move a millimeter, and I swiftly but clumsily learned to taxi with asymmetric thrust, including reverse, while trying to use the brakes sparingly, because they tended to overheat with too much use.

Well, we got it airborne and soon learned that I was much better in the back seat with the avionics than Bill was. He was, of course, far, far better in the front seat, but I needed to be proficient to solo from Bogotá to Apiay AB in two days, so we mucked about with me asking about the location of switches and Bill yelling, "shit" every fifteen minutes or so as he tried to learn the Chelton avionics system. This habit was, in fact, quite disconcerting to me since I was never sure if it was me he was cursing. As it happened, my performance was adequate even though the landings were only so-so, and the landing in a twenty-knot crosswind in San Jose was definitely interesting. He also had a disconcerting habit of saying, "hold on" when he either wanted me to quit talking or when he was going to pull three g's, which sort of left it to me to figure out which one it was. We laughed about our similarities to the movie "Space Cowboys", since we are both over sixty, and test pilots, if not astronauts.

Now the real trick to getting to be an old test pilot is to keep your balls to brains ratio to a number less than one. That means you can do some very interesting things as long as you really know what you are doing. In our case, that ratio was getting very close indeed to one point oh. Incidentally, the "brains" part of that ratio was divided in two parts since neither one of us really had the complete package, and that includes giving Bill credit for a lot more smarts than I knew I had.

We flew 6.1 hours that second day and stayed in a hotel recommended by my pilots' union at American Airlines. The San Jose hotel was very nice, but I seemed to be building up a fatigue debt and didn't really get enough rest. I asked to fly the next leg to Panama City, Panama in the morning to see if I could manage a landing that was not quite so exciting as the last one and managed to make a pretty good landing there. The plan now became to get into Colombia in the best shape we could with Bill in front and me in back. This plan was slowed by Panama being unable to refuel us because the excellent support we had enjoyed earlier had just evaporated for unknown reasons. I spent about three hours on the ramp, trying to sleep in the shadow under the wing, just as I had done 40 years earlier flying B-52s out of Guam, while Bill negotiated for fuel.

Our plans of smooth arrival were dashed early when we lost radio contact with Panama long before entering Colombian airspace, and we were unable to contact anyone in the country until I finally raised Bogotá approach. We had to fly at low altitude over the territory controlled by the Medallin drug cartel since we had been unable to resupply the oxygen system at any stop and had basically used it all the first day. Bogotá has an elevation of 8360 feet, and we had to climb to 12,000 feet to get to the initial approach fix. The artificial vision showed the mountains beautifully. When we finally taxied into the military ramp at Bogotá, we had a large crowd of officers greet us, some people from the US embassy, and our Marsh representatives in Colombia were there too.

We had to turn on the avionics and show off the system for lots of people. The Immigration people were kind of late arriving, the aircraft had to be moved because it could be seen from off base, (a potential rocket target?), and it was one thing after another until we got to the hotel, which had to be a 45-minute drive. I was ready to drop

then, but Mauricio, our contract rep, was taking us to dinner with some Colombian Colonel, and Bill and I were celebrities and had to appear.

Somewhere during the evening the idea to stay another day in Bogotá came up and was approved rapidly. Tomorrow would be Thursday, and while I had planned to get up early and get my mandatory briefing at the State Department and fly to Apiay that afternoon, a little extra rest sounded wonderful.

I had asked if the FAC (Colombian Air Force) wanted to let someone sit in the back seat while I delivered the bird, and a very eager Capt. Javier Cabra (Call sign "Boggie" or Goat, since cabra and boge both mean "goat" in Spanish) appeared to join us for dinner. He was to be the new squadron commander, and he was delighted to see his new hardware. He was put off a little by the one-day delay since he had few warm clothes, but we used it to talk of many things that needed to be done. He totally delighted me by asking if they could move some of the panels in the cockpit! Bill and I had both been upset that the cockpit was not designed optimally, had tried to change it, and had met unflinching resistance from the contract administration people, people who do NOT actually fly airplanes! Staff weenies!

At that time I told him that I would do the best I could to see that Colombia got the best aircraft it could, in spite of the contract. I told him I did not need the job working for Marsh, and I would not stain my professional ethics as an Associate Fellow of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots by concealing anything.

After another far too brief sleep, I spent Friday morning at the US Embassy receiving the "Force" briefing, which mostly consisted of learning that riding in taxis could be hazardous to your health and finances. I met some very sharp military people there, and I learned that the "war" in Colombia was really about money, not politics. The drug lords were basically conducting terrorism; there was no real political unrest and no masses of unhappy citizens. The citizens, in fact, appear more prosperous than most third-world countries in South America, based on my travels there as a pilot for American Airlines.

Friday evening was another mandatory dinner with another Colonel and another late night. You know, it really wasn't the flying that was tiring; it was the delays for gas, the taxis to the airport, and the long business dinners that were getting to me.

We filed for Apiay AB, only about 40 miles downhill, south and east of Bogotá, loaded the flight plan into the aircraft system and discovered that the FAC had not received the message that their microphones would not operate with the new system. We left with Boge using my mask and me using my boom mike.

We finally got airborne and I gave the aircraft to him as we left Bogotá's airspace, and he headed for Apiay via VFR (Visual Flight Rules). It had to be VFR, because the IFR route took us up to 17,000 feet, and there was only one mask and no oxygen on board. The no oxygen limit is 14.000 feet. The Andes extend far above 14,000 feet in that area, and we flew at 14,500 feet between the peaks, enjoying the mountain scenery and almost fulfilling the legal oxygen requirement.

When we arrived in the vicinity of Apiay, he started to orbit, and my language skills were inadequate to find out why. We had lots of fuel, so I tried to relax. After about 15 minutes, two Brazilian manufactured Toucana aircraft appeared on our wing, and we started our arrival airshow. These Toucanas are fighter-type aircraft with turboprop engines and armaments used against the drug lords. I had been sort of briefed by Bogge that this would occur, but had no real idea of what was going on. I relaxed and enjoyed the best seat in the house as we made three passes directly over the base in three directions and then pitched up to downwind. He relinquished control, and I took over for what was to be a very nice landing. My initial solo in the aircraft had landed without incident!

We taxied onto the ramp under an arch of water provided by two fire trucks and proceeded in front of about two hundred people to parking. After shut down, there was this racket from the aircraft that sounded like an APU (Auxiliary Power Unit) running under the canopy, and it took me several seconds to figure out that it was the newly installed air conditioning system. I also discovered out that this system had not been added to the new checklist we had created.

I asked Capt. Cabra to dismount first, in what

This shows the open cargo compartment that Boggie had filled to overflowing!

I thought was the position of honor, and followed him to the ramp without falling out of the aircraft, hoping that everyone was watching him, although the front seat is much easier to negotiate than the rear seat. The Commanding General of the base greeted and welcomed us and the local Padre blessed the aircraft and Cabra and me into the bargain. I am sure some of us really needed it; myself for sure.

Afterward there was champagne and hors d'ouvers; I met everyone in the squadron and in OV-10 maintenance as well. It was a long time until we could unload our baggage. My luggage was in a lot of pieces since I had flight gear and instructional materials as well as my own socks and underwear. My new squadron mates helped me carry it all the way to the BOQ (Bachelor Officer's Quarters) room on foot since there was no vehicle available that could travel on the flight line.

This "BOQ" turned out to be air conditioned, but that was about all. It had two very small beds, an incredible number of ants, some of which I thought were cockroaches before I put my glasses on, and no hot water or door key. It also had the capability of giving you a 110-volt shock if you tried to adjust the showerhead while standing in the water. At least I was told this; I did not attempt to verify the truth of the statement.

Somewhat daunted, I showered and went to the Officers' Club for dinner. This was located about 200 yards away and was a very pleasant walk with a view of the runway and a children's play area that always seemed to have a few less-than-five-year-olds playing. There is also a sand volleyball court that is not used at all, as far as I can tell. At the Club, I used my rudimentary Spanish to take the buffet for about three dollars. I would learn that there was always chicken and rice available at every meal. It was never very good, but then it wasn't very bad either.

Since I found myself without an escort of FAC officers for the first time in Colombia, I had my first opportunity to spend my own Colombian pesos, their currency. I heard some men speaking English, and I asked to join them. They turned out to be

US Army sergeants, and they quickly took me into their care. They had been in the process of diss'ing officers in general, and the FAC in particular when I arrived. It seems one of the FAC had complained about the enlisted men at the O Club. I'm not sure why; it was always underutilized. After finding out that I was a retired Colonel, most of them opted to leave. Remaining was Sgt Moises Mendoza, a very gregarious twenty year-old, who volunteered to take me on a (walking) tour of the base. I accepted, and we walked past my quarters by about fifty feet to the Army area.

Mo said that maybe a man named Tony could get me a better room. During the tour of the Army facilities, including a computer room, satellite TV area, telephone with a direct line to Georgia (so you could make a collect call anywhere in the US much cheaper than international rates), we ran into Tony in the kitchen. I had barely started to try to snivel a better room as a retired US serviceman, when he interrupted me to offer me one. "Do you want to move in now? I got the key right here." I had half of the trailer closest to my old BOQ, and I didn't even have to kiss him!

I was onto that like white on rice and ten minutes later was set for the rest of my stay. Tony said he was unable to bill me for the room since I wasn't really eligible to occupy it, and that was OK too. I was very pleased to be so dramatically reminded that servicemen take care of their own when they can. Mo continued the tour, and I saw the commissary, the "North Forty" (forty more trailers set up a block away to the north), the NCO Club, and that is all there is. I bought him a beer at the NCO Club, and then he gave me a flashlight to find my way home. It is dark as the inside of a cow there, even in a full moon, which we had. I guess they turn out all the lights so that the rebels can't find them. It took me a little while to realize it, but the facilities had to be primitive for me to think that living like an Army enlisted man was the best it was going to get!

I fell into bed exhausted again, and my new students picked me up at 0930 after breakfast on Saturday morning for a little preschool before Monday's formal training. We spent about four hours setting up the desktop trainer, among other things. As near as I could tell, we had stolen this thing from Chelton. We had visited them to attempt to learn how to use the system and left with a copy of the chip. I credit avionics genius Tom McNamara with this success.

Chelton's lack of a training program directly affected my ability to teach. Someone at the University of Alaska in Anchorage was "working on it", but there had been nothing come of it in the six months I had been on the project. Chelton had designed it so that the only controls were eight buttons and a twist/push knob to save space in the cockpit. It was not particularly user friendly, and the best, perhaps the only, way to learn to use it was to spend time pushing buttons on this trainer. This tool would be invaluable to all of us.

Saturday night was peaceful, as were all the nights. In fact, this is the most bucolic, pastoral, peaceful combat base I can imagine. There is nothing to do any night, in spite of having a unit full of Army guys getting combat pay for flying a four engine prop DHC-7 listening to enemy communications, not to mention the Colombian fighter pilots. I went to the Club for dinner. You can cook your own, eat at the NCO Club, the O Club, or starve. I met Capt. Cabra there and ate with him and his wife. He would not let me pay for anything. I am embarrassed, but I will make up for it when he comes to Arizona. I apologized to his wife for working him on the weekend, but she said it happened often, and she understood. Everyone I met had such a wonderful attitude.

Sunday we went to the aircraft to talk about where the instruments should be moved. The bottom line was that the secure FM radio panel must be moved to the right side panel, and the RTU (Radio Transfer Unit) panel moved from behind the pilot's left elbow into the vacated place on the dash in front of the pilot so that you can actually see the RTU in a usable fashion. We talked about other options and elected to wait for Tom's arrival the next week before actually moving anything, so that we could utilize his understanding of the wiring to these panels.

While talking about the rear cockpit instruments, I noticed Lt. Vikingo's (Viking in English) knees' proximity to the instrument panel in the back seat. It looked very much like using the ejection seat would leave his knee caps in the aircraft; not an optimum configuration. The Viking was my other student IP. His English was better than the Goat's,

but we had been doing fine anyway thanks in part to my limited Spanish. His name is actually Juan Carlos, but I missed the last name since everyone calls him "Vikingo", his radio call sign.

Subsequent investigation would verify the knee problem. Floyd Stillwell, the owner and chief engineer at Marsh, was enraged that "someone" had moved this panel aft about two inches, and he promised to fix it immediately. The error was Floyd's personal fault, since he had kept the pilots at bay during modification. It had not bothered me during flying since the ejection seats were not armed, and I was not wearing the parachute that would have moved my knees forward into the instrument panel. I told the Colombians not to mention who had discovered this problem. I did not need the job at Marsh, and had thought about telling them to stick it more than once during the long delay before delivery. I had not done so primarily because I wanted to help Bill and did not think he could easily find a replacement for me, but I did not want them to think I was sending the finger salute either.

I need to soften my depiction of Marsh Aviation. I know that Bill tried very hard to do the right thing with the aircraft and that somehow we had been prohibited from contacting the using pilots directly. I know Ed Allen, who signs my paycheck, has been very frustrated by this, and he tires of explaining why he can't do things. Sometimes the contract administrators actually inhibit progress. Our own USAF has been as useful as a speed bump during this effort, actually succeeding in closing the doors at Marsh for over two months while they justified on paper the things they had already accomplished. Marsh has really done the best they could under the circumstances.

Monday morning at 0745 the Viking picked me up. I had not slept well because I was nervous about ad lib teaching. We went to the equivalent of Pass and ID and got a flight line pass for me, and then on to the flight line to start class. Pass and ID needed to have my actual ID card to keep while I had their flightline pass. Boggie said not to give them something I could afford to lose, since they lost things. I gave them my library card (which I ultimately got back). They had a projector that would connect to my laptop computer, and I had a few hours of slides for them. I actually had three CD's full of slides, but they are mostly advertisement for Chelton and not suitable for class. I had made my own course syllabus, and I hoped desperately that it would work for them.

I started by telling them the two most important things. 1) The map is not the road. All of that data input into the computer's memory to reflect the terrain around them was input by humans and may be subject to error. 2) The GPS approaches in the computer are very seductive, but will not include NOTAMs or changes since the last update, and the pilot in command is still responsible for his own and his aircraft's safety.

After that, I went through the slides I thought were relevant, showing the displays in different modes, and then we started using the table top trainer right away. I had a translator assigned to me that I had actually flown with before at American Airlines. Efraim Otero had been a F/A for AA. He is very good with English, and he is also a licensed pilot, so he understands things a little better to begin with. Things proceeded smoothly with the course I invented.

Monday night I met the local Army commander for the first time. Capt. Amy Emanuel is the daughter of Roy Emanuel, who went to the USAF Academy with me in the class of 1962. She too is intelligent and motivated and had lots of questions for the old pilot she is harboring. I learn that her troops are prohibited from drinking on base. This may be the strangest thing I have learned all trip. What kind of a sadist makes men go into combat totally sober? I'd say that maybe that's why this place is so peaceful, but the regulation doesn't seem to stop anyone from actually drinking.

I was required by our Air Force to administer an examination as part of my instruction. There was no such test in existence, and my students included both the pilots and also the maintenance officers, and none of this last group understands the basic usage of the system. I gave them a group test, open book, with the final question an exercise of programming the system to fly a visual approach to Apiay, something they might actually have a use for. To no one's surprise, they all pass.

On Thursday, I got my first "day off" in ten days. That too was filled with discussions and odds and ends. There was simply nothing to do there except work and type this story, so I did not object

to advising their checklist revisions or whatever they wanted to talk about. I felt really useful for the first time in a long time, and I was filled with enthusiasm at being able to really help.

Friday was more of the same. This place was really boring. I was really looking forward to seeing Bill and Tom; they finally arrived Friday afternoon, and moved into those charming FAC quarters with the ants and the cold water. I had done some groundwork to attempt to get them over there with me, but it was not to be. Bill was not a happy camper.

Friday night we met the US Special Forces for the first time. They were freshly arrived from the field, and, naturally, were drinking hard. They had no regulation against drinking. Can you imagine such a waste of paper? They were complaining about not being in the field and generally acting the alpha male. All of them managed to look something like a tattooed Silvester Stallone. Their chief was a man named David. He introduced himself as General David, but I knew he was some kind of Sergeant. He was due to retire in a few months at age thirty-seven and he wondered what he will do as a civilian. So did I, God bless him. The smell of testosterone was truly overpowering there, and I was glad to know they are on my side.

Capt. Amy was there, not drinking of course, and the men were gently teasing her. Somehow she had admitted that she thinks her ass is too large, and so it was now the general topic of conversation. Bill and I conferred, and I offered her the solace that all the men there over sixty think her ass is just fine. She blushed and hid her face like a schoolgirl.

Saturday was back to work, but Saturday night Capt. Cabra had invited us to his home. His home was off-base, and we were somewhat concerned since we had been told specifically to not go off-base. The off-base area he lived in turns out to be just delightful. It was undeniably prosperous, with trees and farms and ranches, dogs and children, peace and good will everywhere. It reminded me of Quaker country in Pennsylvania. The barbeque we attended was delicious, had the mandatory FAC Colonel in attendance, and lots of very nice young people. A little girl about five asked me in Spanish if I was a gringo. I answered "yes". The Colonel seemed to think that the name came from the Revolutionary War. I politely told him that I think it came from the Texas war to secede from Mexico, but I have no real idea of the origin of the term. They did not seem to have any negative connotations to the word, and I did not mention any.

Sunday evening brought another lackluster dinner at the O Club. The music was always too loud there, and the service was kind of slow for the ten people attending. Bill and I ate outside by the pool for a change, sharing hot dogs with the bugs. I was totally ready to return to the Land of the Big BX.

Monday came, and the FAC did not seem to have a flight schedule to Bogotá. I packed and went to my room to await notice from the Goat. During lunch a Beech Super King-Air landed, and the Goat hurried me out to the ramp to see where it was going and if there was room. It was going to Bogotá; there was room. It seemed to be operated by a classified agency that had no problem taking a strange American for a ride. I had already done some checking, and found that I was prohibited from US Army aircraft as well as the US Embassy aircraft. As a retired serviceman, I was entitled to ride "space available", but the Army would not allow that in a combat zone, even though I was leaving the zone. The Embassy was supposed to be supporting Marsh's efforts, but I guess their definition of support didn't include a ride. I can only suppose that they wanted me to take a taxi into town to the civilian airport at Villavincensio. It was just another example of government regulations that contradict each other and make it hard to get the job done.

The pilot was an American, a former 747 pilot who probably has a history that would scare me. I didn't ask. The aircraft was beautiful, brand new, and had all the toys including TCAS and GPS navigation. I collected my gear and in about half an hour I found myself at Fast Eddie's Air Service in Bogotá. No kidding, that is the name. I can't imagine the history. I remembered my Force briefing, but they called a forbidden taxi for me anyway and I went to the Sheraton near the airport to wait for tomorrow's flight home.

Tuesday morning at 0500 I was ready for the van ride to the airport. Everything thing I have was x-rayed twice, and after about an hour I am back waiting to board good old American Airlines

non-stop to Miami. Best of all, one of my former co-pilots was the captain, and he moved me into first class! In Miami I got through Immigration and Customs fairly quickly and had time for lunch. My usual spot there has always been La Carreta for Cuban food, but I spotted a Burger King and had the first good burger available in two weeks. It was decadent, and I didn't even feel guilty about the fast food.

Mission accomplished. Everyone was pleased with the changes being made, and I feel like I have made a difference. Ed gave me a genuine compliment; the first time he had not treated me with the suspicion that I was just another expense. Floyd stopped in and he too showed some respect for me. This has been far more rewarding than staying home watching TV and puttering around the house. Perhaps best of all, the mediocre food I had been eating encouraged me to lose ten pounds!

When Bill returned from Colombia a week or two later, he had learned from the CIA pilot who airlifted him out that there is a two million dollar bounty on the heads of OV-10 pilots. It is clear to me that I was not being paid nearly enough to do this. In spite of that, I will make the flight down there twice more before getting Boggie checked out for the route and making my job superfluous.

We changed the route a little to go through San Andres Island, the northernmost part of Colombia and spend the night there. There is a CAF facility there and they took good care of the aircraft. Boggie had the bird so full of things he had purchased in the land of the big BX that there was very little room left on board, so when he bought a bunch of perfume and cosmetics in San Andres, he ended up squeezing them into the gun pods.

I made a little money for beer, met some wonderful people and had a marvelous adventure, feeling young and useful again. Life is good, very, very good. The squadron motto there is "Oculii Mortis," Latin for "eyes of Death," and they have an honor roll of pilots that flew with them, name and call sign. I am so very pleased that they added my name and call sign "Cobra" (from Test Pilot School). Who could have suspected such an honor?

So my story is coming to an end, and perhaps you deserve some comments on flying from a guy who flew more different aircraft than most. How many? I'm not so sure, but I can tell you that I instructed in the A-37, B-52, KC-135, KC-10, C-141, T-38, OV-10, and lots of gliders. I also checked out in the T-37, T-33, A-7, F-104, F-4, and UH-1H. As a civilian, I checked out in the B-737 (T-143), MD-80 (C-9), L-300 (C-130), LR-JET (C-21), DC-10, A-300, B-767, B-757, and HU-269. I logged stick time in lots of other birds, and I logged just over 18,000 hours altogether. For you civilians, that's over two years in the air. Some of which I was asleep. And 1,605 of which was combat. I was asleep some of that time too. I flew over 60 different jets and I still have less than 100 hours of single engine propeller, but I did check out in a few of these little birds. As far as props go, I've always felt that if someone else would start it for me, I could fly it. And since flying is better than actually working, I had more fun than most.

How to summarize this? Rule one: flying is better than actually working. Sure, I scared myself once in a while, but I never bent any iron (except for hitting myself with a ricochet) and I always landed in the aircraft I took off in. Rule two: only the airlines pay real money to pilots, and they pay more than they should. That's entirely because of the unions, but I never failed to cash my paycheck.

A flying career such as I had is nearly impossible today. The Air Force does not want to retrain its pilots in lots of different equipment because it's not cost efficient. My secret was in being a test pilot and being passed over for promotion. The first got me into lots of birds and the second kept me flying when I should have been a staff weenie in the Pentagon. I do not recommend being passed over as a career path.

I have become an anachronism. Modern flying is not nearly so dangerous, and seat of the pants, stick and rudder skills are no longer as necessary as they were. The F-22 is nearly impossible to screw up with your airmanship. Today's pilots spend more time with systems management and glass cockpits take all the work out of navigation and instrument flying. These are good things. But my time has passed.

The bottom line is that I had more fun than most, doing what I loved.

The Last Parade
2008

Finally, I have to tell you about my last parade, the one I never got after Vietnam. Two years ago I had joined China Post 1 of the American Legion. This distinguished post has had fourteen Medal of Honor winners in it at one time or another, and my escaped POW buddy and Raven FAC H. Ownby had stood up for my admission to this august group. During his escape from the Laotian VC he killed two of them with his bare hands. My kind of guy. H also convinced me to march in the annual parade, this year in Phoenix. It wasn't an easy thing to do; you know how I hate parades. But this one was just wear the Legion hat and walk through the Phoenix Sun's arena waving to the crowd. It was far too hot to walk down the streets.

Naturally he forgot to mention that we had to mill around for an hour or two beforehand, like any parade, but we finally wound through the tunnels beneath the arena and emerged into the bright lights and very loud twenty-piece-plus band music. I went from bored to sobbing in about ten seconds. I could barely see for the tears, and suddenly I understood. I finally got my parade! The people cheered and I tried to wave and not cry, but it was just such an unexpected and totally cathartic emotional release that I failed completely. After we were in the stands I stammered out my confusion to our unit Chaplin, Ron Moore, and he simply said, "Welcome home, brother, welcome home." and gave me a hug. It was closure after thirty seven years and permission to enjoy my tears all at the same time.

So now how can I summarize thirty years of service into a paragraph? I can't, but I'm going to try. The experience made me a man. The camaraderie was incredible. There is nothing like going to war with a man to make you both realize the effort you will put in for your brother. The mistake I regret the most is not staying on with the Reserves. I miss not putting on my uniform more than you can know, and if they'd let me, I would return to service today. The airline was just a job, serving my country was an honor. I just wish politicians understood that the way I do.

I am the only guy in shorts. Ron Moore is the black guy with the cane. H Ownby is next to me, and only his eye and beard are visible. Post Captain Fred Platt, aka "Magnet Ass" is second from the right. His nickname comes from being shot down ten times. Can you see the lump in my throat?

Fifty Years On
2013

I just returned from our class' 50th reunion at the Air Force Academy. I thought the last parade had gotten all the emotion out of me, but I have to mention this last three day event. Two thirds of the survivors of the class of 1963 showed up; roughly 260 of us, and an impressive number of men over seventy.

On Thursday we honored our eighteen Killed In Action and our two returned Prisoners Of War. The ceremony was beautifully done and included a movie named "I Had Such Friends" produced by classmate Jim Gaston. I learned that our class had received two Air Force Crosses, 35 Silver Stars, 361 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 34 Purple Hearts and 2,805 Air Medals in Vietnam. I am very impressed by these numbers. We were addressed by KIA classmate Pat Wynne's brother Michael, a former Secretary of the Air Force. He concluded his remarks by choking out the words, "Welcome home". My own eyes were filled with tears as I recognized the traditional veteran's greeting, the one I had first heard from San Francisco Center when I checked in headed east non-stop from Guam to New Hampshire in a B-52. As Kaye Ekman said, "These men are giants!" I was honored that they printed my poem, "Requiem for a Pilot" on the last page of the program. It is also on the last page of this book.

On Friday we honored the rest of the 110 deceased in a moving ceremony in the chapel. I was personally distressed because my friend Tom Meier was really looking forward to the reunion; he missed it by only two months. We also stopped by 21st Squadron and chatted with the Air Officer Commanding and many of the cadets. They had our names on a plaque, and there is now some real history in the place. It was surprising since we had zero history when they opened the Squadron in 1961. Lance Sijan is, of course, the star alumnus. Six old Black Jacks attended, and more than one of us was moved to tears. Again. It was getting old.

But Saturday was the day for me! Lucky Ekman, my table mate from UPT was determined to have a flyby. All such aerial activity had been canceled with the sequester budget cuts, so he arranged to fly recently deceased classmate Bob Mazet's Spanish fighter/trainer, a SAETA HA-200B over the football game with Notre Dame. He even paid for the gas. My own lucky star was shining bright, and Lucky selected me to fly in his back seat! If I had a motto, it would be "Better to be lucky than good!" I had done a flyby or two, but never over the Academy or a football game. I was totally stoked to be a part of the Academy's first septuagenarian acrobatics team!

I had considered that it could well be my last flight in a military fighter, but not that it could be my last flight, period. All the same, two weeks later I had a triple bypass heart operation, and I'm sure glad we didn't find that out while airborne over the Academy in front of just everyone. Cheated Death again!!!

As a test pilot, I just have to comment on the back seat in the bird. You either had to be five foot two or double jointed to get in there. I succeeded only with an excess of motivation; the opportunity for my last flight in a fighter to be in front of my classmates and the Academy was too great. Not to mention the chance to fly a new (to me) aircraft with one of my heroes!

Lucky had directed Doug Hardgrave, a good friend and one of '63's three Mig killers, on what to read over the PA as we flew past. Now, Lucky is one of my personal heroes. He has more combat missions and combat flying time in the F-105 than anyone that ever lived. I really wanted his career. But he told Doug to read our total combat hours and not mention the names. Doug made up his own mind and added our names and changed the aircraft call sign to "Geezer 63" as well. He said, "The two pilots have 23,000 flying hours in 35 different types including 2700 hours of combat…" Boys and girls, that is a lot of combat missions. (About 800)

So Doug was part of the flyby team, and his initiative led me to the reflection that flying, like sand volleyball and marriage, is a team sport. In sand volleyball, you don't need to be able to block if your partner can. In marriage, you should choose a partner to complement those skills you do not have so that the partnership is more complete. Flying, even in a single seat aircraft, is a team sport too. You must work with ground control, the FAC, others in the formation, and the crew chief to get the job done in the best way. And life itself is a team sport. Where would we be without our friends, our support, our families?

My flight through life as a serviceman and a veteran has been improved by my classmates and copilots and teammates, and I'll give them credit for much of everything I've accomplished. Thank you, gentlemen, it has been a pleasure to serve with you.

The camaraderie I enjoyed in the service made the low pay worthwhile. I am so sorry I retired before I absolutely had to, and if I could, I'd put my eagles back on today. I hope you enjoyed my flying stories; I flew more than most. Even though my career was not heroic, it was certainly different, and while I write from the only perspective I know, the story is really about us all. I started out "Aiming High", and I did my best. But in the end I look back and reflect on William Butler Yeat's quotation from "The Municipal Gallery Revisited":

"Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends".

Lucky Ekman and I on the wing of the HA-200B, triumphant upon our return.

Awards and Decorations

To be read at my funeral. There is no composed music to go with it, but it seems to me to have its own music within the words. And after it has been read, I'd like to hear Garth Brooks' "Friends in Low Places" played to remember all my wonderful buddies.

REQUIEM FOR A PILOT

HE FLEW

He flew. In his younger times he tried to match the grace of the sparrow, darting and flashing, breathlessly and skillfully using the air as a palette to show his joy at performing with such precision. Striving for perfection, he flew.

He flew sometimes as the hawk, soaring and riding the wind, effortlessly scaling the thermals, climbing at will to heights that could only be passion; there, the naked world lay exposed to his marveling eyes. And as the hawk he struck from the sky, casting fire in his righteous anger. Daring his very life, he flew.

He flew as no creature has flown since the beginning of time. He flew with such power that the gentle winds tore apart before the fury of his transit. The pressure of his full-grown wings squeezed moisture from the humid air and left its own white finger of cloud to mark his path. The air itself shattered before him and screamed in pain. The sound of his passage was more than thunder, and it caused the earth and us upon it to tremble. The thrill of his flight filled his very soul with life. Supremely, he flew.

And after he passed, the birds and the jealous planet below paused a long moment in silence, left with only an echo and a memory, before resuming their leaden existence. He flew as none other before; he flew as none to follow. He will fly no more.

Yet still he flies! Look there in the heavens! Just out of sight in the clouds right before you, he dwells now in the glorious prismatic sunrises and rainbows, in the mysterious beauty of the northern lights and the breathless green flash at sunset, making his home in the sky he loved so well. Mourn not: the aviator is home! He flies now with God.

Hank Hoffman
2001
Published in Checkpoints in 2005