

SO MUCH FOR CAT SHOTS ¹

It appears that the standard signal when a pilot is ready for a catapult launch is the hand salute.

For the [1950-1953] VF-781 PACEMAKERS it was the finger salute.

The finger fired VF-781's 4,100 Korean combat hops and uncounted training hops during our tours from first [1951], USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31), and second [1952-1953], the USS *Oriskany* (CV-34) Korean tours in those three years from 1950 through 1953.

One memorable day on the *Oriskany* tour, a few imbedded arrowheads dictated that it was prudent for me to land aboard the Task Force ready deck – by chance the *Bon Homme*. 'Twas like old home week reminiscing with the deck crew and ship's company.

The following morning, patched and refueled with a minimum 1000 pounds – just enough to make the *Oriskany* and, without ordnance, about as light as the old F9 would ever get, I was trundled out and hooked to the port cat. Full bore, all set – and the cat officer got the finger.

LT R. L. (Bob) Giannini, USNR, forever permanent cat officer on the *Bon Homme*, was up to it – he had suffered through our antics on the prior cruise. I thought he was smilin' from friendship and nostalgia, and realized too late that he had cranked in a full cat shot. Things began to clear abeam of the fo'rrd can.

I haven't seen Bob Giannini since. If anyone bumps into him at a party, remind him that he was the perpetrator of one of the greatest coups ever pulled.

VF-781 *Pacemakers* became VF-121 *Pacemakers* during the *Oriskany* tour. I suspect the career Navy returned to the hand salute shortly thereafter.

In the history of the Navy, it must be recorded that the Pacemakers – for the years 1950-1953 – was the only squadron launched by the finger – the only squadron launched by giving the cat officer the bird in full view of the Captain, the Admiral, and the rest. Bless them all. Add throttle.

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¹ Lou Ives' narrative