

HISTORY OF *THE BROWN SHOES*® PROJECT

The germ of The Brown Shoes Project began when Lou Ives was in Navy fighter squadron VF-781 during the Korean War and noticed squadron mate Ed Fitch was corresponding with his own WWII squadron buddies, "To keep everyone in touch."

Lou thought this was a great idea, and after the Korean War, started corresponding with the VF-781 troops. Later he made copies of their Christmas cards and sent them to other VF-781 buddies for whom he had addresses. A card from Bob Smyth at British Test Pilot School gave Lou the idea of sending a card each Christmas with a photo of one of the aircraft we flew to all Flying Midshipmen whom he had current addresses. All this time, he was collecting more stories and photos.

At an annual convention of the Flying Midshipman Association (FMA), Lou mentioned the association should have a historian. At the next board meeting, Lou was elected as historian and a director. This enabled him to gather more historical material, including some oral interviews. At one board meeting, Jim Morin had his 180-page biography--from toddler to rear admiral. Lou swiped it for inclusion in *The Brown Shoes*--it set the format for the future.

By the late 1980s, to add to the stories and photos, lists of Flying Midshipmen KIA-MIA in Korea and 'Nam, AvMidn who made flag rank, types of aircraft flown, some oral interviews and transcriptions, and more personal histories were included. [Later studies of Naval Aviators flying combat as Aviation Midshipmen, former AvMid'n KIA-MIA are being done by Former AvMid'n Bill Campbell, Waldo Born, and Ed Phillips. We hope to include this study when completed. Former AvMid'n Jerry Bell, and Hank Stanley and Bill Busse are compiling stories and photos of former AvMid'n. We also hope to obtain and include these stories.]

All this time Lou was seeking help in compiling and transcribing this information. Several qualified individuals were found, but all required remuneration. Resources at this time were nil.

In 1992, Lou met Pat Francis at an Albemarle County property tax meeting and Pat became interested in the Flying Midshipman history project. Her professional experience in editing and graphic arts complemented Lou's experience in organization, control, and resource management. She volunteered to assist, and the project took off.

Although Lou had expertise in his discipline and Pat expertise in hers, they needed technical assistance in the computer entry and graphic areas, and qualification as a §501(c)(3) organization to receive tax-deductible contributions. In 1998, Lou approached his friend, Martin Havran, Ph.D., University of Virginia (UVA) History Department, for suggestions. Martin suggested they see Gene Block, Ph.D., Vice President for Research, UVA [he is now Chancellor of U.C.L.A.]; David Hudson, Ph.D., Assistant Vice President for Research, UVA; and Michael F. Holt, Ph.D., Professor of American History, UVA. These individuals were impressed with the progress and potential of the project and suggested they get the approval of the UVA Office of the President. After a time, approval was received to include the project under the §501(c)(3) aegis of the UVA Alumni Association (Lou is a UVA alumnus--MBA 1967),

allowing them to receive their first tax-deductible donation in January, 1999. Bonnie Ford, Director, UVA Alumni Fund, helped establish the Brown Shoes Fund.

The above individuals suggested they approach the UVA Naval Officers' Training Program (NROTC). CAPT Dan Gabriel, USN, Commanding, UVA NROTC, Professor of Naval Science willingly volunteered. At this time the project acquired the name "The Brown Shoes," as Naval Aviators wore brown shoes while surface sailors wore black shoes.

All at the NROTC pitched in--CAPT Dan; his executive officer, CDR Joel Swanson, USN; and Master Chief Yeoman Tom Brinski, USN. In addition to giving hands-on instruction in state-of-the-art hardware and software, they offered access to their current computer systems, and we (mostly Pat) had day-long access (for the final 4 years of her 11-year labors) to NROTC computer systems and copy machines, and later, the loan of a late date computer that was set up in Pat's studio saved her many of her 40 - 50 hours per week and freed her from time restrictions.

Pat solicited more narratives and photos by corresponding with additional pilots and made many fast friends in the dozen years she was editing text and enhancing old photos. Lou planned, organized, and set up spreadsheets to record donations and expenses; located addresses; and compiled formal requests sent to several hundred potential donors--individual, corporate, and foundation; sent thank-you notes and topical seasons' greeting cards.

Initially, after Homer Davis contributed his VF-781 diary, the VF-781 history was used as a "pilot operation" to gain experience for the Brown Shoes Project, where collections, photos, procedures and errors could be standardized and corrected. This squadron history eventually resulted in 3 hard-copy file folders and a CD. They were donated to the NAS Pensacola Emil Buehler Naval Aviation Library.

Using this learning curve, the current narratives, papers and photos of the Brown Shoes Project were then compiled, resulting in 24 hard-copy volumes. These were also donated to the Emil Buehler Library.

During the later stages of the project Pat's progressive muscular sclerosis reached a point that she could no longer continue. She made a heroic 2-year effort to get what we had developed to the stage it could be set up on a double-CD set.

The *Brown Shoes History Project* was too extensive to reproduce in hard-copy (the 24 volumes comprised some 3,000 pages of narratives, color, and black-and-white photographs), so the completed first edition (December 2002) was installed on a double-CD set. We contracted for the manufacture of 350 sets of *The Brown Shoes* CDs, and mailed them to all contributors, donors, libraries and other repositories for which we had addresses. The next phase—the website phase is now taking place with more stories and photos, and a new team and equipment. Work continues!

We are now seeking individuals to continue The Brown Shoes Project. These individuals must have editing, graphic, and computer skills; have website experience; and have access to state-of-the-art hardware and software (possibly a son or daughter of a Brown Shoe). At present, Lou Ives will continue as administrator and compiler.

Will Thomas, Ph.D., UVA, Director of the Virginia Center for Digital History (VCDH) at UVA, confirmed that the Brown Shoes Project, due to its historical significance, qualified for inclusion on the VCDH nationally recognized website (www.vcdh.virginia.edu) This would require a grant for the variable costs while UVA would absorb the fixed costs. We determined, however, with UVA research priorities and procedural constraints, it would be better to develop and manage our own website.

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During the compilation of these personal histories, Turner Publishing Company requested our permission and assistance to include several of these histories in one of their outstanding 9¼ x 12¼ coffee-table books. After some discussion and legal advice, a contract was signed to include some 34 of the stories in a publication titled *The Brown Shoes - Personal Histories of the Flying Midshipmen and Other Naval Aviators of the Korean War Era*©. All of the stories are included in The Brown Shoes website. Some of the supporting material is not.

This book is available for about \$45 on line. It is a keeper.

Pat and I will receive neither remuneration nor royalties. Royalties, if any, will accrue to The Brown Shoes Fund to continue the histories.

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