

Fred Blechman
AvCad, NavCad
(Never a Flying Midshipman)
Retired as Captain, USN



Fred Blechman in front seat of an SNJ during flight training

Pensacola, Florida

early 1950



"Confessions of a Japanese Ace – How I Downed Five Corsairs!"
by Fred "Kamikaze" Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1993

Now that I have your attention from the title, "Confessions of a Japanese Ace – How I Downed Five Corsairs!" let me set a few facts straight before I get into the details ...

For one thing, I was not in the Japanese Navy or Japanese Air Force during World War II. So I never actually received recognition for downing five Corsairs. I never got a medal, commendation, hero's welcome, or even a higher rank. I never was invited to dinner by Emperor Hirohito.

Maybe that's because I was a U.S. Navy fighter pilot, and World War II was over! But, IF I had been a Japanese pilot, and IF the war was still underway, and IF the Japanese heard about it, I would probably have been considered a Japanese ace. After all, by the time I got finished with those five Corsairs, they couldn't fly again until they were repaired! And downing five "enemy" aircraft makes you an "ace," right?

Why am I telling you this, over 40 years later? Well, if you are a pilot, perhaps you can learn from my mistakes. If you're not a pilot, maybe I can impart some vicarious thrills!

One Down!

It was early in 1950, after World War II, but just before the Korean fracas. I was in the final stages of flight training in the U.S. Navy, soon to get my "Wings of Gold."

I had gone through "selective flight training" in Dallas, Texas, soloing in a Stearman N2S "Yellow Peril" biplane after only six dual hops, and hadn't hurt an airplane yet. The dark green grass stain on the bottom of the lower left wing from a near ground loop went unnoticed. So I was sent on to Basic Training at Pensacola, flying North American SNJs. For over flying 200 hours from solo through formation, cross-country navigation, gunnery, night flying, air combat, and even six arrested carrier landings, I scratched neither myself nor an airplane.

Then to Corpus Christi for Advanced Flight Training, flying F4U-4 Corsairs. In a Corsair, the first flight is solo. Then formation, cross-country, gunnery, dive bombing, night flying, and some air-to-air combat. I had no accidents, though accidents were common in this airplane, commonly called "The Ensign Eliminator." I was still a NavCad, with almost 20 months in flight training, now approaching the "final exam" of six arrested carrier landings in a Corsair. For this we were sent back to Pensacola.

As you can imagine, landing on a moving carrier deck requires special techniques. Flying tail-draggers, we had been trained from early on to make nice, stalled, 3-point landings. But the approach to a runway is quite different from the approach to a moving carrier. So you practice (and practice, and practice) by doing FCLP - Field Carrier Landing Practice. Using a marked field and an LSO (Landing Signal Officer) waving his "paddles," we would come around low and slow, follow the LSO's paddle signals, and get a cut or waveoff. While the field wasn't moving, and the landing was touch-and-go rather than arrested, this was reasonable practice.

Of course, we had done FCLP in SNJs before those six carrier landings that "graduated" us to Advanced Training. But the SNJ was relatively slow, with a short nose, good visibility, and only a few hundred horsepower swinging a two-bladed propeller. Low and slow was tricky, but controllable.

The F4U-4 Corsair was another story. Th F4U-4 used a 2000+ horsepower engine swinging a giant four-bladed prop, and a nose extending 15 feet in front of the pilot. Flying low and slow, necessary in a carrier approach with the old straight-deck carriers of the day, your nose was up 10 or 15 degrees, completely blocking your forward view through the windshield. The approach had to be in a constant left turn, looking out to the left of the windshield. There was practically no straightaway before the cut.

I don't recall if it was my first pass, but I know it was the first day of Corsair FCLP. I came around, fighting the sluggish controls, and the large amount of right rudder necessary at that low speed. To add to the fun, the ground we were flying over at this outlying FCLP field was marshy, making the air very bumpy with rising thermals on hot days – and it was a hot day. My approach was almost good enough for a cut, but as I got close to the LSO I was getting too low and began skidding to the right. I raised my nose a tad and lowered my left wing to correct, but got a waveoff at the last moment. Feeling I was too low and slow, I added power quickly. Too quickly. Ever hear of "torque roll?"

In most American aircraft, the propeller turns clockwise if you're looking from the cockpit. As the blades push against the air, the air pushes back, trying to twist the prop counter-clockwise. This twisting motion is transferred back through the prop shaft, then through the engine, then to the fuselage and entire airframe. The plane tries to roll to the left. If you are already low and slow, with the left wing down, and suddenly add a slug of power, right aileron and right rudder take time to counteract the torque roll. I was too low, and my left wing hit the runway!

I yanked off all power and got my left wheel on the deck, instantly followed by my right wheel, and rolled to a stop. About three feet of the outer left wing was bent upward. Other than my pride, I was not hurt – but I never torque-rolled again! Lesson #1: Don't add power too quickly if you're low and slow.

Two Down!

After a Review Board Hearing, the Navy decided to let me continue toward getting my wings. Accidents happen. So I went back to FCLP, making something over 100 passes before the big day – six arrested Corsair landings aboard the USS *Wright* (CVL-49), a light carrier used by the Training Command at that time. A small group of us took off from Pensacola early that morning to be over the *Wright*, leisurely cruising in the Gulf of Mexico, at 9AM. As our flight approached, the *Wright* turned into the wind with a ready deck.

We formed a right echelon, flew upwind along the starboard side of the ship, and broke to the left in intervals and headed downwind to make our landings. One by one we made our passes, and got cuts or waveoffs. When a plane made a landing, the hook caught one of the eight (as I recall) arresting wires and brought the plane to an abrupt stop. The barriers (cross-deck cables held up by stanchions) forward of the plane were quickly dropped, and the plane deck launched from where it was. Then the barriers went back up for the next landing.

I made four passes, and got a cut on each. Only two landings more to go and I'd have those coveted gold wings I'd been struggling to earn for 21 months.

My fifth pass was normal and I got a cut. I pulled off all power, lowered the nose, pulled back into a three-point position, and hit the deck. I could feel the hook catch a wire as I was thrown forward against the shoulder harness – but the plane's right wing suddenly dropped part way to the deck. The crash siren sounded as deck hands came running to the plane. My right wheel strut had broken!

The "crash" counted as an arrested landing. Of course, there was another Review Board Hearing. Was this pilot error, or had the wheel been weakened by so many Training Command carrier landings? This plane was regularly used (and abused) for FCLP and carrier qualification. I don't recall the final determination (probably pilot error), except that about two weeks later I got the go-ahead, made my sixth landing, and received my Naval Aviator wings and Ensign bars. I never broke another wheel. Lesson #2: Even a good landing can end up as an accident – sometimes for uncertain reasons.

Three Down!

I was assigned to Fighter Squadron Fourteen (VF-14), based at Cecil Field near Jacksonville, Florida, for my tour of duty in the fleet. As the Junior Ensign, I was always the last to take off and land. I also had to get familiar with the F4U-5 Corsair, a much-changed advanced model of the Corsair with many new features – and weighing an additional 2000 pounds. Some "engineering improvements" added to this model of the Corsair were unnecessary, others were dangerous. But that's another story ...

There was still the long nose, which required "S-turning" while taxiing to be able to see ahead of you. You would turn to the right so that you could see ahead by looking out to the left of the windshield, or turn left and look out the right. When making a runway landing approach, normally your nose was down in your descent, and you could see straight ahead, but as you pulled up your nose to flare out for a three-point landing, forward vision disappeared. As soon as the plane was rolling down the runway and under control you could begin S-turning.

One night we were practicing night landings at Cecil Field. As usual, I was the last plane to land. As I was making my approach to line up with the runway lights, I saw the Corsair ahead of me land and go rolling down the runway. As I pulled my nose up to flare out, I lost sight of the plane ahead. I was "hot" – coming in a little fast – so I touched down long on the runway, and immediately was concerned that I might be overrunning the Corsair ahead. As I looked to the left of my nose, watching for him to appear on the turn-off taxiway, I wondered if he had ground-looped ahead of me, and if I was about to crash into him. So, even though I was still rolling out pretty fast, I began applying alternate wheel brakes to S-turn so I could see ahead. First right brake to swing the nose to the right, then quickly left brake to keep from running off the right side of the runway, then right brake again.

Somewhere in that sequence I must have hit both brakes at once, or perhaps hit opposite brake while the plane was still turning, causing forward motion to suddenly decrease. For all intents and purposes, with the enormous inertia of the heavy plane, the center of gravity of the aircraft was now rotating around the wheels. My Corsair nosed down and the tail rose about 30 degrees! All four blades of the prop bent back, the engine ground to a stop, and the tail slammed back to the ground! Very embarrassing, since this was purely pilot error.

I never nosed-over again. Lesson #3: Don't S-turn at high speed!

Four Down!

During the two years I spent in VF-14, we went on about 12 carrier cruises. Two were six-month tours in the Mediterranean with the Sixth Fleet. But several cruises were Atlantic Fleet Exercises (LANTFLEX) usually held in Caribbean waters.

It was on one of those short cruises that we were flying off a small CVE "jeep" carrier, commonly called "escort" carriers. Considerably smaller than CVL or CV carriers, the jeeps had less landing area, less wires – but just as many barriers. On one flight I came back aboard normally enough, caught a wire, and watched the barriers in front of me drop.

Following normal procedure, I allowed the arresting wire to pull me back so a deckhand could release the hook. Now it was up to me to quickly get ahead of the barrier locations so the plane behind me would have a "clear deck." It was a matter of pride to make a snappy taxi forward to the parking area.

I raised the hook lever, hit the wing-folding control, and pushed the throttle forward briskly to get moving. As I rolled over the barriers, I cut the throttle and started applying brakes so as not to plow into the aircraft parked just ahead. The plane did not slow down. It appeared I had no brakes! Putting more and more pressure on the brake pedals until I was practically standing on them, and with the throttle completely off, I continued moving forward, as if I were on ice! The plane slowed down as I skidded forward, but didn't stop until the still-turning prop chewed off the sheet-metal tailcone of the plane parked ahead of me!

The propeller was not damaged. The Corsair ahead of me needed a new tail cone fairing before it flew again. Other than another blow to my pride, I was not hurt, but puzzled.

What caused the accident? Bad brakes? No! The brakes were fine. Too much throttle for too long? In a way, yes! You see, while our division had been out on patrol, the ship had gone through a rainstorm and the deck was wet. The

rain water, mixed with the typical oil and gas on the deck, made the deck very slippery. I should have been informed of this. I wasn't.

Still "pilot error." I didn't do that again. Lesson #4: Before adding power to taxi, make sure you can stop before hitting any obstructions ahead!

Five Down!

Some months later, on another LANTFLEX, and flying from another CVE, I had an early morning search flight. Hours later I was called on deck to taxi my Corsair out of the way for other planes making an unscheduled launch. But one of the planes intending to fly had engine trouble. I was the closest replacement airplane and pilot, so I was put on a catapult and shot off as part of the flight.

We flew around for several hours looking for an "enemy" patrol plane reported by radar, but never found it. The deck was spotted for launching a scheduled flight, so we had to tool around, tail-chasing, until the deck was clear for us to be recovered.

Hot and tired after two long flights, I made a normal approach and was so relieved to get the cut that I relaxed and "dove for the deck" (let the nose drop too far before pulling back.) My Corsair main gear hit the deck and bounced the plane back into the air, flying over several arresting wires in the process. I instantly realized this, dropped my nose, then quickly pulled back, and caught the last arresting wire. Unfortunately, on this small ship the last arresting wire allowed the heavy Corsair to reach the first barrier cables, which bent two blades of my prop.

I never did that again, either. Lesson #5: Don't relax until you are in the chocks with your engine off and the prop stopped.

Epilogue

I wasn't hurt in any of these accidents – not a scratched finger – and never had another flying accident, although I got a Commercial Pilot's License after getting out of the Navy. Four of the five accidents were carrier related – an especially accident-prone environment in the days of the straight-deck carriers – and all were in Corsairs.

I learned something from each accident. Not a nice way to learn, but effective – if you survive.



Fred Blechman aboard his trusty VF-14 F4U-5 Corsair

(illustration by "Flying Faces" caricaturist Dan Nunez)

"Earning the Mudhole"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1995

A Dream is Born

I was nearly ten years old on Sunday, July 4, 1937 when my parents took me to an airshow at Floyd Bennett Field in New York City – a Naval Air Station at that time. My face was pressed right up against a chainlink fence when a small group of fat Navy silver and yellow fighter biplanes (now I know they were Grumman F3Fs) flew over the field in a right echelon, peeled off, landed, taxied up, and parked no more than 50 feet from me!

I watched wide-eyed as the pilots, with their cloth helmets and goggles and flowing white scarves, climbed out of the tiny cockpits and clambered down the sides of their chunky fighter planes. I saw them gather together, tall and handsome all, and was thrilled when they ambled over to the crowd at the fence. One of them even talked to me! "Wow," I thought, "I wanna be one of those guys. When I grow up I'm gonna be a Navy fighter pilot!" At that time it was just a dream ...

I read flying books, built solid balsa-wood models and stick-and-paper flying models, and devoured everything I could find about flying. Throughout World War II, I followed the exploits of the flyers, always planning that one day, when I was old enough, I'd join up to fly.

First Try

My chance came in 1945 when I graduated from High School in January and applied for the Navy V-5 program. If I passed the physical and written tests, the Navy would send me to two years of contract college training before any pilot training. I was 17 years old, and not exactly a tall, handsome, muscular poster-pilot type. I was only 5-feet 10-inches tall, weighed only 135 lbs with a slim 28-inch waist, was plagued with teen-age acne – and didn't even know how to drive a car!

Nevertheless, desire and determination overcame my shortcomings. I passed the physical, mental and psychological testing and I got orders to report to Bethany College in West Virginia as an Apprentice Seaman for my first V-5 semester in early July, 1945.

We were actually on active duty, always wearing our lowest-of-the-low apprentice seaman uniforms and marching to and from every activity. While I did not find the studies particularly hard, I found the physical activities difficult:

constant marching drills and considerable physical training, including swimming, calisthenics, and competitive sports. I wanted to fly, so I endured.

About a month after reporting to Bethany College, on August 6 the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. World War II quickly ended, and the Navy wondered what to do with those of us in the V-5 pilot pipeline – but still in the college training phase. By the time they figured it all out, I had completed the other three semesters at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and Columbia University in New York.

Selective Flight Training

It was now Spring 1946, and the Navy was downsizing its need for pilots and preparing to close down the V-5 program. It was decided that instead of the expense of sending all who completed two years of college to 16 weeks of pre-flight training, they would first select those who were at least capable of learning to fly. The weeding-out process took place in late 1946 and was called "Selective Flight Training."

In August 1946 I was made an AvCad (frequently incorrectly termed "NavCad") and sent to NAS Dallas (Hensley Field, Grand Prairie, Texas, halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth) in Class 13-46-C. The requirements were simple enough: solo after eight training flights and a check ride in tandem dual-control N2S-5 Stearman "Yellow Perils," or you wash out!

Finally we were out of our seaman uniforms and into officer-like khakis with distinctive collar anchors and a neat embroidered V-5 cap insignia. We were finally going to fly!

Earning the Mudhole

The eight flights were about an hour each, with instructors not particularly thrilled about their duty. The instructor sat in the front seat. The student in the rear seat wore a special helmet that had rubber tubes extending forward to a mouthpiece in the front cockpit that the instructor spoke (yelled) into; this was known as a "gosport." The student could hear, but not speak! The instructor had a mirror that allowed him to watch the reaction of the student behind him at all times.

It was in this intimidating environment that we went through the eight-hop syllabus: Controls, Climbs, Spins, Take-offs, Landings, Landings, Landings, Finishing Touches. I had no particular problems, as I recall, with the flying, but particularly enjoyed taxiing the plane around, since I didn't drive a car!

After the eight flights, it was time for a check ride by a different instructor. If you got an "up" you were cleared for a half-hour solo flight from the rear seat.

Edgar M. "Ed" Houseplan, now an M.D. and Professor of Clinical Neurological Surgery at a prestigious hospital in New York City, put it this way in a recent letter: "Soloing was a great experience. I'd never been able to get the plane on the deck through all of my practice hops with my instructor. Finally he said, 'You've tried to kill me enough times. Try it with your check pilot.' For some reason I greased in three perfect landings with the check pilot and was stunned to find myself going around by myself. About the third time I freaked thinking, 'What am I doing here? I don't know how to fly this plane!' but came down safely."

I started flying on September 3, 1946, and soloed on September 16 at Arlington Field, a Dallas outlying field where we did our practice and solos. My instructor was LT M.K. "Mel" Crawford, and my check pilot was ENS E.L. "Carp" Carpenter. I recall my first solo flight as one of the most thrilling times of my life up to that time. The freedom and exhilaration of being in total control (just push the stick to the side a bit and the whole world tilts!) and the great feeling of accomplishment on completing a worthwhile goal after – for me – considerable adversity. No one was telling me what to do through a one-way gosport, and I wasn't being constantly watched through a mirror. I was on my way to being a fighter pilot!

A common tradition when a pilot completes his first solo is to cut off his tie. But summer rainstorms are common in the Dallas area, and there were lots of muddy holes around the tarmac area. So, the first-solo indoctrination at NAS Hensley Field that summer (in addition to clipping the tie) was to tear off the AvCad's khaki shirt-tail and throw the cadet in a slimy worm-infested mudhole! When I stepped out of my plane at the main base I got my indoctrination. I had "earned the mudhole," and it took two long showers to remove the sticky mud and green worms. Yuk!

But I survived that, and like many of the others, decorated the shirt-tail with colored cartoons, and had the other guys sign it. I still have that shirt-tail. Of the 25 signatures, I have recently located and talked with eight of those "mudholers" – after almost 50 years!

The Holloway Plan

Those of us who soloed were sent, in late 1946, to Ottumwa, Iowa, in the cold, snowy dead of winter for pre-flight and primary flight training – except for a slight change. That's when the Holloway Plan hit us. The war was over, and too many cadets were in the pilot pipeline. We were told we would have to sign up as Midshipmen for FOUR MORE YEARS, with no Ensign commission for two years (even if we earned our pilot wings sooner!)

We were also told if we stayed at Ottumwa through the cold winter, we'd be pushing Stearmans around – tarmac duty – for at least 6 months before getting into actual flight training. Or, as an alternative and inducement to reduce the pool of flight trainees, we were allowed to keep all our neat officer-like uniforms and \$200 mustering out pay if we went back to civilian life. Considering my chances were poor of completing flight training with the radical downsizing, I accepted the alternative!

Second Try

However, I maintained contact with John Higson, who stayed, and heard about the "Ab Initio" (From the Beginning) program my former classmates were beginning at Cabaniss Field in Corpus Christi – starting out in SNJs as the primary trainer instead of the Stearman – and I would have been in the first class to do this! This drove me nuts. I haunted the Navy recruiting office trying to get back into Navy flight training. It took two years, but in November of 1948 I got back into flight training and headed to Pensacola for Pre-Flight. This time we were called "NavCads," a designation that officially began on June 22, 1948 with a new Navy flight training program.

I completed Pre-Flight at Pensacola, then basic flight training in SNJs at Pensacola (with six arrested carrier landings on the USS *Cabot* (CVL-28) on 23 March, 1950), advanced flight training in F4U-4 Corsairs at Cabannis Field in Corpus Christi, and Corsair carrier qualification on the USS *Wright* (CVL-49) on August 18, 1950.

On August 23, 1950 – 13 years after I saw the tiny F3Fs at Floyd Bennett Field – I got my Navy "Wings of Gold." I was Naval Aviator #T891. I was a Navy fighter pilot. My dream had come true ...

I joined the VF-14 "Tophatters" at Jacksonville, Florida (Cecil Field) in September 1950 as junior ensign, flying the latest model F4U-5 Corsair, and made two Med cruises until separation as LTjg in November of 1952 ... and after about 30 carrier landings in Corsairs, another dream came true – I finally learned to drive a car!

Shirt-tail signers and their comments, some of which make no sense at all after 50 years:

What's he better at, women or flying? Or are they both the same? – John Higson, White Plains, N.Y.

If you can handle a plane as smoothly as you can handle women, you'll make it! – Ed Pruett, Nyack, N.Y.

Dat's my boy. – George Schrauth, Richmond Hills, N.Y.

How's the English coming along? – Tom Wilbor, Noroton, Conn.
Dick Payne, Cadillac, Mich.
"Chuck" Svoboda (Lawrence, Kans.)
M. L. Harvell, Hattiesburg, Miss.
"Woody" Rupp, Saginaw, Michigan
Don't bounce your landings. – Jim Gillcrist
Glenn H. Morgan, Terry, Miss.
Warm Stone? – Martin Manasse, New York, New York
Doug Drake, The Lover From Troy, OHIO, that is.
FROM ONE HOT ROCK TO ANOTHER – NICK (Vagianos), N.Y., N.Y.
Happy Landings! – Art Young, N.Y.
Keep Em Frying – Joe Hogan
To the biggest lady killer in the unit. Lots of luck. –"Eggie" (Facioli),
Nyack, N.Y.
Nice Going – Sam Meredith, "Scarsdale" (N.Y.)
"LONG LIONA" – Russ Roberts
In Red No less – Congrats - Ed "Houseplan"
To the guy in the next sack who talks in his sleep. From Ken Horn,
Dayton, O.
John Greacen "Greek" Scarsdale, N.Y.
"Davey" Jones. Welcome to my locker. "Oatley"
From The BANZAI Kid – Bill Gillen, Brooklyn, N.Y.
To a guy who flies as fancy as he printed up this rag! – George Zaimes
Nice going! – "Bud" Hower, Scranton, Pa.

"WAR DOG - The Ten-Engine SNJ"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1996

It was just a hunch. I was watching a yellow-nosed SNJ doing an aerobatic performance at the Santa Barbara Airshow in 1993. Twisting and turning, yanking and banking, with popular West Coast airshow performer John Collver at the controls, this SNJ was pirouetting around the sky with the engine alternately growling, screaming, or completely silent! This plane was doing things I didn't recall ever learning when I was in Navy flight training flying SNJs over 40 years earlier. "HmMMM," I wondered, "is it possible that this is an SNJ I flew back in those days?"

So, when John finished his whirling-dervish performance, got his accolades from the crowd and taxied to his parking chocks, I sauntered over to this two-place tandem trainer with its multi-ribbed double sliding canopy.

This silver SNJ-5 was in mint condition, with a custom huge, shiny, silver dome-shaped propeller spinner in front of the yellow cowling. It was painted in the colors of VMT-2, a Marine training squadron that flew out of the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, California, during World War II. The markings were black with green trim and yellow wheel hubs, with the number 17 and a big WD on the vertical fin and rudder. Right behind the cowling were the words "WAR DOG." The airframe serial number, 90917, was clearly marked under the empennage. I wrote the serial number down to check later.

I approached John Collver, the pilot-owner of WAR DOG, who looks the part of one of "those magnificent men and their flying machines," sporting a large flowing mustache with a big smile, and wearing a green flight suit. I asked him about the history of this particular airframe, wondering if it had ever been a Navy trainer at Pensacola.

He told me he had all the airframe logs, and that WAR DOG had, indeed, at one time been stationed at Pensacola. He also pointed out that it was (at the Santa Barbara airshow) on its NINTH engine, having worn out the eight previous engines!

HmMMM. So it HAD at one point been based in Pensacola as part of its colored past. After the airshow, I hunted down my Navy Pilot's Log Book, which included flight training in SNJs and F4U-4 Corsairs, as well as my fleet squadron time flying F4U-5 Corsairs with the VF-14 "Tophatters." Looking down the log of training flights while in Pensacola – sometimes several in one day – I checked each serial number of the aircraft flown. HmMMM. Lots of serial numbers around 90917, but no 90917 so far ...

There it is! On February 5, 1950, I flew this exact airplane from Pensacola to New Orleans on a cross-country solo flight! This was not just *deja vu* – I flew this plane over 46 years ago, before the present pilot-owner was born!

Well, of course, now my goal was to fly in this airplane again. It took over a year until John Collver was performing at an airshow I attended – Torrance Air Fair '94. He told me the plane recently had another new engine – the TENTH on this airframe – because of some contaminated gas at the Watsonville Fly-In earlier in the year. That gas wrecked his Engine #9 – and many others!

I made arrangements with John on Air Show Preview Day, and he graciously took me up in the back seat for a 25-minute flight around Long Beach, Palos Verdes and the Southern Los Angeles area – with a slow-roll thrown in – while I snapped photos and swiveled around in my shoulder straps trying to take in everything with my camcorder. There's the Queen Mary and the dome where the Spruce Goose used to be! Look at Long Beach, and downtown Los Angeles, and Century City's towers in the background! There's the Goodyear Blimp flying nearby – but John would only get within about 1000-feet of it.

It was like I'd never flown around Los Angeles before. Somehow it was different looking through the bird-cage canopy cruising at about 145 knots and 1500 feet altitude, compared to peering out a small airliner window while zipping over the landscape at hundreds of miles an hour.

I'm 69 years old now, and have flown many different airplanes, from prop-driven fighters to ultralights to canards, but I guess I'll never outgrow my fascination with watching the ground scroll by from an airplane, zipping right above a cottonfield of clouds, dodging between cumulus cloud puffs – or making the whole world tilt by just pushing the stick to one side...

***** Sidebar *****

Well, I thought that coincidence of finding and flying in WAR DOG after 44 years was great – but this turned out to be just the beginning of a whole series of "throwbacks!"

While at the November 1994 AvCad/NavCad Reunion in Pensacola and touring the National Museum of Naval Aviation, I photographed an N2S Stearman "Yellow Peril" with a side number of "41," identical to the side number "42" I flew on my first solo flight. Later on the museum tour, we found ourselves on a replica of the deck and island of the USS *Cabot* (CVL-48), the carrier on which I made six arrested landings in an SNJ-5C on March 23, 1950 while in basic flight training to qualify for advanced training. At the Reunion Airshow, one of the "performers" was an F4U-4 Corsair, the type I flew in advanced flight

training, and in which I had to make six arrested carrier landings to earn my "wings of gold."

On the way back to California from Pensacola, we stopped in New Orleans and took a short river cruise. I couldn't believe it! Moored on the Mississippi River, being prepared as a museum attraction, is the actual USS *Cabot* on which I had made those six qualifying SNJ landings in 1950!

When I got home in the waiting mail was a copy of AVIATION History Magazine. On Page 4 there was a picture of "WAR DOG," #90917, which began this whole series of flashbacks. Weird, eh?

But that didn't end the series of coincidences. Around Christmas of '94, through a real odd set of circumstances, I found myself talking to a fellow I knew in 1946, but with whom I'd had no contact since. It turns out that he owns an SNJ based at Van Nuys Airport – 8 miles from me – as one of the well-known "Condor Squadron" of AT-6s and SNJs. The serial number of his plane is 90918 – which my logbook shows I flew on a solo air-to-air gunnery hop on 25 February 1950!

Very soon thereafter I received a catalog from a small mail-order company that was selling off some miscellaneous airplane-related items. One of the items was a signed limited edition painting of the USS *Cabot*, mentioned earlier. Of course, I bought it. When it came, a flyer was enclosed offering various military patches – including a rare USS CVL-48 *Cabot* patch. Naturally, I bought that, too.

As Yogi Berra, the famous former baseball player supposedly said, "It's *deja vu* all over again!"

The Pilot and the Plane

John Collver, 43, is now the pilot-owner of WAR DOG, together with his wife, Donna, their three small children, and Donna's parents, Ron and Joanie Custer. It is normally based at Zamperini Field in Torrance, California. John has been flying this plane for 18 years.

Like many airshow pilots, John has a "regular job" as a corporate pilot for the Northrop Corporation, with over 13,000 hours of logged flight time in over 50 types of aircraft, including the Goodyear Blimp. He began flying in 1968 at age 13 by washing airplanes in exchange for flight time and had soloed five different airplanes by the time he was 16 – before he learned to drive a car. After instructing and flying charters, he entered aerobatic competition, and performed in a Super Decathlon and a Great Lakes biplane before WAR DOG.

Oddly enough, WAR DOG was not always an SNJ-5. It first flew on November 6, 1944 as an AT-6D, built at North American Aircraft's Dallas, Texas, plant. It was later transferred to the Navy and was stationed at bases such as El

Toro, Miramar, Pensacola, and others until it was retired in 1956. While facing the scrap pile at Arizona's Litchfield Park, it was rescued in 1952 as part of the Japanese Defense Force until 1972 when it was returned to civilian registry in the U.S.A. Later it was sold in scrap condition for \$500 and restored at Warbirds West in Compton, California.

The airframe logbooks indicate WAR DOG has flown over 10,000 hours. The engine, a 600 horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1340 Wasp, is the tenth engine this airframe has used. WAR DOG weighs about 5800 pounds, cruises at 170 mph, with a top speed of 240 mph and a full-flap stall speed of 57 mph. It uses fuel at the rate of 80 gallons an hour on takeoff, but only 35 gallons per hour in cruise. Collver estimates the total cost of operation is \$200 an hour.

For further information on John Collver's performances, call (310) 539-3640, or write Warbird Air Shows, 2456 West 247th St., Lomita, CA 90717.

"The Great Gum Mystery"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1996

I wonder if something like this has ever happened to you when you were flying?

This mysterious incident took place in 1951, while I was flying with VF-14 at Cecil Field in Florida. I was flying the last F4U-5 Corsair in a flight of eight on a practice dive-bombing mission.

As usual, I was chewing gum – Dentyne, my favorite. As I recall, up to that time I just about always chewed gum when I was flying. This, apparently, was not uncommon among pilots, and it has become well known that the famous WW II and test pilot, Chuck Yeager, often could be found bumming a stick of Beeman's Chewing Gum when he ran out.

We climbed to about 15,000 feet above the practice area at an outlying field, preparing to dive-bomb our target with small smoke bombs. The scenario was to be in a loose right echelon above and to the right of the target area. We would drop the wheels to act as dive brakes and preset the electric elevator tab for a dive. (NOTE: We didn't dare touch the nose-down tab switch in an F4U-5 during a dive, since some switches had been known to weld shut and put the tab in FULL nose down, from which it was virtually impossible to recover when in a dive!)

We would then peel off to the left for about a 180-degree change of heading as we spotted the target, dropped our nose and set up about a 60-degree dive for the bulls-eye markings. Another Corsair, orbiting the target at about 1500 feet was acting as a spotter. After we dropped our bomb and pulled up in a 6G pullout, straining us even in our G-suits, we could check our accuracy by looking directly behind us with three rear-view mirrors mounted at the very top of the cockpit canopy.

It was beautiful to watch as each plane peeled off in five second intervals and aimed back and down – just like the WW II flying movies. As my turn to peel off approached, in my eagerness I began to chomp on the gum more furiously – when suddenly it DISSOLVED! It just simply turned into a sand-like texture and slipped down my throat in a granular stream! Gulp! (Got milk?)

I was so distracted I missed the target by more than my usual distance ... and thereafter stopped chewing gum while flying. Is it possible that I plain pulverized the gum by chewing it at such a pace? Does it have something to do with altitude? Has it ever happened to you? Any explanation?

"Terror at 100 Feet!"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1996

It was May 8, 1950, and I was scheduled for my first flight in an inverted gull-wing F4U-4 Corsair, commonly known as the "Ensign Eliminator." Although I was not yet an Ensign, but just a lowly NavCad, this was still quite a jump from the SNJ trainer I had flown for over 200 hours in Navy basic flight training. I had "graduated" by making the required six arrested landings in the SNJ at Pensacola aboard the USS *Cabot* light carrier (CVL-28), and was now at Corpus Christi, Texas, for "advanced" training in Corsairs.

All our flight training up to that point had been in the two-seat 600-horsepower SNJ. We had an instructor on the dual controls for the first 20 flights before solo, and on all new types of flying – aerobatics, gunnery, formation, night flying, air combat maneuvering, cross-country navigation, and so forth.

Although I had many solo flights in the SNJ, flying the single-seat 2100-horsepower F4U-4 Corsair was going to be a strictly new experience – no instructor on dual controls. I read the manual and went through a blindfold cockpit check to be sure I knew where the various controls were located, and how to operate them; some went up and down, others forward and aft, and many rotated.

Now was the time. I climbed into the cockpit of F4U-4 Serial #81728 through the use of a wing walkway, steps, and handgrip on the right side of the airplane. Settling into the bucket seat where the parachute had been already put in place by the plane captain, I snapped the shoulder straps, seat belt, and parachute harness into the complex single-release restraint system.

Following a 19-step procedure, I started the 18-cylinder twin-row Pratt & Whitney R-2800-18W air-cooled engine and watched the giant four-bladed propeller churning in front of a nose that extended more than 15 feet ahead of the cockpit. The deep-throated harumph-harumph sound and vibration of the huge engine permeated the ground, air, and airframe. This was power!

After checking the instruments for normal readings, I gave the plane captain a "thumbs up" to remove the wheel chocks and I carefully taxied to the runup area near the runway as the engine was warming up. With the huge nose blocking out all forward vision (remember, this was a taildragger), I had to alternately turn left and right about 30 degrees, "S-turning," to see what was directly ahead.

I checked the engine oil and fuel pressures and magnetos at 2000 rpm and the supercharger at 1300 rpm, all with the propeller control set at "Take-off Rpm." Everything looked OK, so I completed the 25-step takeoff check-off list – things like making sure the prop pitch was set to full rpm, mixture full rich, flaps 20-degrees down, rudder tab 6-degrees right, aileron tab 6-degrees, right wing down, elevator tab 1-degree nose up, tail wheel locked, etc. This done, I taxied to the beginning of the runway and when I got my takeoff clearance on the radio, I slowly pushed the throttle all the way forward, keeping the tail down with full back stick.

It was immediately obvious that I needed right rudder to counter the left-pulling torque of this huge engine. As I quickly speeded up, I let the nose lower to a slightly-up position and the Corsair simply flew off the ground. Now it was wheels up, milk up the flaps 10-degrees at a time, reduce power, and crank the fishbowl canopy closed. I was in the process of doing all this at about 100 feet above the ground in a slow climb with the canopy closed, when it happened!

I must interrupt at this point to relate an earlier life experience. I have an unexplained fear of things that crawl, slither and flutter around, such as spiders, moths, lizards, snakes and creepy-crawly things that seem to pervade the hot, moist climates of Corpus Christi and Pensacola, where Navy flight training was conducted in the early 1950s.

I recall a time in my youth one night when I got into a phone booth, closed the accordion doors, and the light automatically came on. Inside that phone booth, apparently laying in wait for a wimp like me was a rather large tan, powdery moth, with long antennae. It immediately proceeded to flutter around

inside that phone booth. For some reason, the thought of that thing touching me, or LANDING ON ME, threw all my alarm systems to full blast! I was out of there in a flash (even though I had not completed taking off my outer garments to reveal my true identity as Superman).

Now that I've destroyed my macho image, let me get back to the story. So there I was at 100 feet on my first flight in this 2100 horsepower fighter plane, climbing out with my canopy closed, when, all of a sudden, from the innermost black depths of the Corsair's fuselage, a big, tan, powdery moth with long antennae (obviously a direct descendant of my phone booth companion) jumped into view and started fluttering around the tiny constraints of the cockpit! I was terrified. Just me and this giant moth inches away from my tender psyche while locked in a glass bowl traveling through space at a speed well over 100 miles an hour, and only about 100 feet over trees and swamps. Yech!

I had to make an immediate decision. There was no room for both of us in that cramped cockpit. I was certainly not supposed to have an uninvited copilot. Jump or stay? Of course, how could I possibly explain bailing out because I was attacked by a moth? I quickly found an alternative. I cranked open the canopy enough for a giant sucking sound, and created a vacuum that pulled that critter up and away!!

I don't remember anything else about that flight, but I must have survived. I had 250 more flights in Corsairs in flight training and the Fleet and that never happened again.

"Paddle Paradox" or "Paddle Panic!"

by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1996

This may seem absurd or unbelievable, but it's a true story – although I know of no documentation to back it up, and the details are from my recollection of a peculiar event over 45 years ago ...

Fighting Fourteen (VF-14) with our F4U-5 Corsairs was on a short LANTFLEX (Atlantic Fleet Exercise) cruise in the Caribbean. We were the only full squadron aboard the USS *Kula Gulf* (CVE-108), a jeep carrier that was one of several carriers participating in this annual wargame exercise. One of the other carriers was a British carrier with several squadrons aboard, including a Corsair squadron.

The *Kula Gulf* was cruising along that afternoon with a ready deck, flight operations on standby, trying to keep ahead of an approaching storm. I was one of the standby pilots in the ready room when the Duty Officer got a phone call that a flight of eight errant Corsairs – not from our carrier – were requesting permission to land. According to their radio transmissions, these were Royal Navy Corsairs whose ship was in the storm, and they needed to land somewhere, and they found us!

Since all our planes were parked forward on the straight-deck *Kula Gulf*, there was no reason we could not take them aboard. The LSO (Landing Signal Officer) hustled to his aft port station with his two landing signal flags ("paddles") while many of us went up to the "Vulture's Nest" observation platform on the ship's island near the bridge. We wanted to watch the Brits land those F4U-4 Corsairs, earlier lighter Corsairs than the -5 models we flew.

The British Corsairs, in two divisions of four each, made the standard upwind peel-off on the starboard side of the ship. Each established an interval as the pilot reduced rpm and manifold pressure, dropped the wheels and flaps, made a 180-degree turn to the downwind leg while losing some altitude, and then turned toward the ship while adjusting the nose attitude, airspeed, altitude, and bank to position the Corsair over the ramp with little or no straightaway.

This lack of straightaway was a necessary evil in a Corsair with a long tilted-up nose during the final approach. If you wanted to keep the LSO in sight, you had to watch him from the left side of the Corsair's nose.

The LSO's signals, except for the "cut" or "waveoff" were advisory, not commands. If you were OK, the paddles were held straight out for a "roger." If he held his paddles ABOVE the horizontal, he was advising that "you are high" and therefore should go lower. If the paddles were held BELOW the horizontal it meant "you are low" and should get higher.

There were also advisory paddle signals for approach speed and lineup with the center of the deck. Based on the LSO's paddle signals, you adjusted your flight path accordingly. You had to trust his signals since he was on the ship and could best judge the roll and pitch of the landing area as the carrier plowed through uneven seas.

However, as we watched the British Corsairs approach, something was wrong. Starting with the first one, they all were turning okay, but their altitude control was a paradox. When they were getting a "you are low" signal, they went lower, and when they were getting a "you are high" signal, they went higher! They all got waveoffs their first time around. Some got aboard on their second try, but most took three tries. Eventually they all got aboard. "Wow," we thought, "these guys must have had very little carrier landing practice."

We were wrong. Actually, these pilots were excellent carrier pilots – if they were following their own English "Batman" (their name for the LSO) signals. It turns out, from conversations with them after they landed (and after they stopped cussing "that bloody crazy Batman!") that British paddle signals for altitude were exactly the OPPOSITE of ours. To them the arms-up paddles signal meant "go higher" and arms-down paddles meant "go lower"! No wonder they were all over the sky until they figured it out.

"Flying the Hayrake"

by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1997

For many years, in the early days of flying, pilots "flew the airways," which consisted of low-frequency radio signals sent out into four quadrants roughly 90-degrees apart. Adjoining quadrants each had a Morse code A (dot-dash) or N (dash-dot) signal, and where the quadrants joined the A and N signals combined to create a solid tone. The pilot simply found the solid tone – the "beam" – and then flew inbound to the "cone of silence," where the beams converged at a specified fixed location from the airport.

But how could a pilot during World War II or the Korean "police action" find his moving carrier from many miles away? Of course, if the plane had a working radar, it was relatively straightforward. But most carrier planes at that time did not have radar, and those that did frequently had their radar fail.

The solution was ZB/YE, also known by some as "The Hayrake" because of the shape of the transmitting antenna on the ship. As I recall, ZB was the receiver in the airplane, and YE was the low-frequency over-the-horizon ship's transmitter.

Harold L. Buell, in his excellent book, *Dauntless Helldivers* (Orion books), described it this way: "Each U.S. carrier had an electronic marvel on board to help the scout teams return safely. Known as the YE or ZB, it was a rotating radio signal-sending device mounted high on the carrier mainmast above the island. This device broadcast a different letter of the (Morse code) alphabet every thirty degrees as it rotated. These letters could be picked up by a receiver in a plane as it moved into the radio signal range of the carrier; from the letter heard the pilot could determine a bearing to the ship. In the corner of each pilot's [plotting] board was a compass rose. When preparing flight data before starting a search, the pilot filled in each slice of the pie with letters designated for the YE that day."

I recently found an Air Operation Memorandum from the USS *Fanshaw Bay* (CVE-70) dated 29 July, 1945. Among other things, it showed the YE Frequency as 672 kilocycles, with sector letters U G D K S W R M L F A N.

When I was flying F4U-5 Corsairs from carriers in the Sixth Fleet in the early 1950s, we made several cruises around the Caribbean and the Mediterranean Sea. We frequently flew over 200 miles from the carrier, with nothing but water between us, and it was certainly a welcome sound (especially in bad weather) to hear the Hayrake signal coming in. The Morse code letter received would tell us which of the twelve quadrants we were in, and we simply flew the reciprocal heading until we spotted the ship visually. If the letter received changed, we knew we had drifted from the proper heading, and adjusted accordingly. It was a great system.

When on maneuvers, the code was changed daily – and sometimes several times a day. Normally, we just used a "standard" code starting at north and moving clockwise every thirty degrees. The letters were DWRKANUGMLFS. We committed this to memory with these mnemonics: "Did Willy Really Kill A Nasty Ugly German Man Last Friday Saturday." I remember it to this day!

But Owen Dykema (CAPT USNR Ret.) remembers it differently. He flew 47 Korean combat missions in Corsairs from the carrier *Princeton*. In his new self-published book *Letters From the Bird-Barge*, Owen recalls a different set of mnemonics for the same default code: "Did Willy Run Kate Around Naked Until George Made Love For Sheckles." Those Korean guys!

The Hayrake is now a part of history, replaced by several advances in electronic navigation aids, with GPS (Global Positioning System) today pinpointing your position in real time, and ship's radar able to vector you in from over the horizon. But those of us who flew the Hayrake (although many simply referred to it as YE or ZB) have fond memories of a simple system that worked – unless the ship's Hayrake antenna was damaged in battle, or your receiver quit!

"F4U-5 Corsair Fallacies – Some Engineering Improvements That Weren't!"

by Fred Blechman
© Copyright Fred Blechman 1997

I've flown the F4U-4 Corsair. It was a good airplane. I've also flown the later model F4U-5 – and it was no F4U-4!

I flew the F4U-4 in flight training, and when I received my "Wings of Gold" in August of 1950 I was immediately assigned to the VF-14 "Tophatters" home-based in Jacksonville, Florida, flying the F4U-5. I found the F4U-5 to be heavier

and more dangerous than the F4U-4, primarily because of several "improvements" that were either dangerous or ineffective.

The F4U-5, a 1945 design modification of the F4U-4, was intended to increase the F4U-4 Corsair's overall performance, and incorporate many earlier Corsair pilots' suggestions. It featured a more powerful 2,300 horsepower engine with a fully automatic two-stage supercharger. Other "improvements" were electrical trim control, automatic cowl flaps, a gyroscopic lead-computing gunsight, and other automatic functions. These and other changes made the F4U-5 500 pounds heavier than the F4U-4.

Some improvements were worthwhile. Spring trim tabs on the elevator and rudder reduced the formerly-heavy control forces about 40%. The seat was adjustable with padded armrests that would swing down, and the metal rudder pedals could swing back to expose some padding. You would stick your legs through the rudder pedal supports, rest your arms on the armrests, and light up a cigar (yes, even a cigarette lighter was added), for relative comfort on long flights.

Electrical Trim Control

However, there were some other features about the plane that weren't so wonderful. For example, electrical trim control. Two trim tab setting switches were used. Rudder trim was accomplished with a center-off LEFT/RIGHT toggle switch. Elevator and aileron trim used a five-position center-off "joystick" switch for NOSE UP/DOWN or WING LEFT DOWN/RIGHT DOWN.

This was easy enough to use in place of the typical mechanical rotating-knob trim controls, but you had no trim knob "feel" at all compared to the mechanical method. You had to get all the feel from the stick. When the stick required no pressure, you were trimmed.

But there was always a certain amount of inertia overrun using electrical trim control. When you released the trim tab switch the trim tab wouldn't stop right at that point. So you were constantly fiddling around, back and forth, until you got the "neutral" position.

That was bad enough, but the potentially deadly problem was switch contact welding. Every time you open and close an electrical switch there is some sort of arc. It might be too small to be noticeable, but eventually the arc can cause the contacts to wear, and unfortunately sometimes weld together! This is the same as leaving the switch ON.

Several F4U-5 pilots were lost in dive-bombing practice. When you push over into a dive and the speed increases, the airplane nose wants to come up. So you are constantly feeding in NOSE DOWN trim to relieve the increasing

forward stick pressure. As these guys were feeding in down trim, they would release the switch ... but it didn't turn off! They would get full nose down trim and go right into the ground. No time or enough strength to pull out ... although I heard of one pilot (a big, strong guy) who put his feet up on the instrument panel and pulled back on the stick with all his strength, and made it!

We were then told, "Well, we have this little problem with the trim tabs. When you are up at 10,000 or 20,000 feet, before you start your dive, feed in NOSE DOWN tab to where you think it SHOULD be, so you don't have to touch it on the way down."

The rule was "don't touch the trim tab on the way down in a dive." We would have to hold a lot of back stick pressure before pushing over into the dive, releasing the back pressure slowly all the way down. This made for a lot of "porpoising," and a terrible gun or bombing platform. The stick was rarely neutral-force at the bottom of the dive, and then we had to fight the stick force back up to altitude as our speed decreased in the zoom. Needless to say, I did not like those early electrical trim tab switches!

Automatic Cowl Flaps

The F4U-5 was the first Corsair with automatic cowl flaps. The cowl flaps were tied in with the engine temperature and would open to cool the engine when necessary. This was fine unless you were in close formation and the cowl flaps suddenly opened, adding drag, dropping you behind. Worse was when you were flying on somebody's wing and the cowl flaps were partly open and decided to close! Now you would have to reduce throttle quickly to keep from overrunning your lead!

Fortunately, the cowl flaps did not HAVE to be on automatic in the air, and could be controlled with an OPEN/CLOSE toggle switch. This, of course, meant watching the engine cylinder head temperature. So, except on formation flights, we used automatic cowl flaps.

There was another automatic cowl flap switch on the airplane, located on the left landing gear scissors. Whenever the wheel strut was depressed because of the weight of the aircraft, the automatic cowl flaps would open fully for adequate engine cooling when the airplane was on the ground. That was a nice feature, since if you didn't open your cowl flaps when you were on the ground, you would burn up your engine taxiing back to the ramp!

However, because of the landing gear switch, which ALWAYS seemed to work, it was easy to overlook closed cowl flaps while taxiing. If the switch didn't work (which rarely, but sometimes happened), the cowl flaps didn't open, and the engine burned up.

Automatic Power Unit

Another well-meant improvement to the F4U-5 was the automatic power unit (APU), an "automatic blower control." On the F4U-4 and earlier Corsairs a manually-operated supercharger control would allow you to get an extra ten inches of manifold pressure on takeoff, and essentially maintain power at altitude. On the F4U-5 this was all done automatically, WITH NO MANUAL OVERRIDE!

The APU monitored manifold pressure, air temperature, atmospheric pressure, prop rpm, and a number of other parameters. These readings were fed into the APU's computer, which decided when it needed the extra power. We could not make formation takeoffs in the F4U-5 because nobody knew when his APU would cut in. When making a carrier deck-run takeoff, we could get off the end of the deck and be halfway down to the water before the APU would decide to cut in. On catapult shots, we didn't give our "Ready" salute to the Launch Officer until the engine manifold pressure gauge showed the extra ten inches!

If we were in formation, we would have to split up at about 19,000 feet going up, since the APU would activate our second-stage supercharger somewhere between 20,000 and 22,000 feet. We could not control when our blower would cut in, so we had to separate a good distance apart. When all the blowers had engaged, each pilot would report in and then rejoin in formation. When descending from altitude we did the reverse, breaking formation at 23,000 feet and reforming at 19,000 feet.

Gyroscopic Gun Sight

The F4U-5 also introduced the Mark 8 gyroscopic lead-computing gun sight. This gyro gun sight was created to simplify the lead "deflection" shot. When attacking a target that is moving across your flight path, you have to "lead" the target so that the bullets leaving your guns will follow a path that intercepts the moving target.

The Mark 8 gun sight projected an image onto the windscreen. The image had six diamond-shaped "pips" that formed an imaginary circle. Twisting the throttle handle's knob clockwise made the circle smaller, and twisting it counterclockwise made the imaginary circle larger. The object was to encircle the wingspan of the target within the imaginary circle. As you flew closer to the target and it got bigger, the idea was to turn the throttle handle slowly and steadily counterclockwise to keep the target tightly encircled.

You were also flying the airplane, moving the throttle forward and backward as necessary, as well as operating the rudders while moving the stick all over the place. After all, you were trying to home in on the target. At the same time you were supposed to be feeding in this information to the computer by

turning the knob, telling it how close you were to the target aircraft and your rate of closure. With this information, the Mark 8 "calculated" the deflection angle needed and MOVED THE CIRCULAR IMAGE TO A NEW POSITION on the windscreen!

So, as you are flying the aircraft, this thing is floating around the screen. You are constantly adjusting and trying to hold your target in the center. If you jerked the throttle a little bit, the whole thing would suddenly move up, down or to the side. You would try and be as smooth as you could, but there is no way a human is going to be smooth enough to do this!

Actually, the idea was good, but putting a human in the control loop was not working. In the F-86 Sabre jets used in Korea they let a small radar set in the nose determine the range and closure rate to the target. All the pilot had to do was keep the target inside the slowly floating imaginary circle, and fire when within range. This was highly successful.

Other "Improvements"

There were other changes that were surprising. Why did they go from a retractable tailhook to one that had to be manually raised after a carrier landing? Why did they put the plotting board into the instrument panel with such a weak clip? Sometimes it would pop back into the pilot's chest on a carrier catapult shot. And those nice soft-backed rudder pedals would sometimes snap back on a catapult shot and the front metal part would smash onto the pilot's ankle.

All in all, as you might gather, I preferred the F4U-4 and so did the Navy. During the Korean action, only some F4U-5N night fighters, and some F4U-5P photo reconnaissance versions were used. Plain-vanilla F4U-5s were pulled back from the front lines and replaced with – you guessed it – F4U-4s!

"F4U Corsair Carrier Qualification" by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1997

Finally, after 13 years of dreaming about becoming a Naval Aviator and earning my "Wings of Gold," this was my "final exam." Making six arrested carrier landings in an F4U-4 Corsair would earn me my gold wings and Ensign's commission. I had no idea I was about to crash.

It had been almost 21 arduous months since I had entered flight training. I had over 200 hours in SNJs, six arrested carrier landings in an SNJ, then over 200 hours in Corsairs. Now, getting ready for Corsair carrier qualification, I had

made 91 field carrier landing practice (FCLP) approaches and landings at Bronson Field near Pensacola. Just six carrier landings in a Corsair and I would "graduate."

So here I was, at about 9AM on August 10, 1950, flying F4U-4 Corsair #80893, together with five other students and our instructor, heading out to our carrier in the Gulf of Mexico off Pensacola. We rendezvoused with the light carrier USS *Wright* (CVL-49) as it churned at approximately 25 knots through the waters near Pensacola, Florida. The sea was calm with only occasional whitecaps from the gentle breeze. The azure sky was punctuated with random cotton balls. All was serene. Life was good. This was the day I'd been waiting for through so many episodes of "trial and terror."

Our flight received a "Charlie" landing clearance, formed a right echelon, and streaked upwind by the starboard side of the ship at about 800 feet as we peeled off to establish our landing intervals.

This was busy-time. Wheels, hook, flaps, power settings, trim, setting the beam position and interval while headed downwind, turning toward the carrier at the proper position, losing altitude, losing airspeed, spotting the landing signal officer (LSO), responding to LSO signals, adjusting bank and nose attitude ... busy, busy time.

This was the real thing. There was no way we could accurately simulate landing on a moving carrier with those FCLP hops at Bronson Field – but they were the best means available to practice flying low and slow, follow the LSO's signals, and set the proper speed and attitude for a carrier approach in the "Hose Nose" Corsair.

My first four landings were normal, with no waveoffs, as we each in turn made our landings and takeoffs. After catching a wire, the barriers were dropped, and we made a deck-launched takeoff. But I was getting tired, and my light summer flight suit was drenched with sweat. I had no way of knowing that the next landing, #5, was going to be very different ...

"Only two more landings to go," I thought as I prepared for my deck launch. With a ten-knot surface wind and the carrier's forward speed, the wind over the deck was approximately 35 knots. The takeoff should be easy. I checked various settings. Full flaps. Cowl flaps open. Hook up. Trim 6 degrees nose right, 1 degree nose up, 6 degrees right wing down. Tailwheel locked. Cockpit canopy open and locked. Shoulder straps and seat belt tight. Prop control full forward for maximum revolutions per minute (rpm). Mixture auto rich. Supercharger neutral. Wings locked. Controls move freely.

I watched the Launch Control Officer to my right give me the windup signal with his right arm as he pointed to my engine with his left arm. I advanced the

throttle to 42 inches of manifold pressure and applied full toe brakes by pressing down the tops of the rudder pedals. At above 44 inches the wheels would start slipping on the deck, so full power could not yet be used. I held the joystick all the way back to keep the tail from lifting up and possibly digging the tips of the 13-foot four-bladed propeller into the wooden flight deck.

The 2100 horsepower Pratt and Whitney R-2800-18W(C) Double-Wasp 18-cylinder radial engine roared and the whole airplane shook with anticipation as I verified proper engine readings and signaled I was ready with a head nod. (I dared not let go of the stick for a right hand salute, or the tail could come up!) The Launch Control Officer threw his arm forward with two fingers extended, the signal for me to release the brakes and take off.

Surging forward, the Corsair picked up speed and rumbled down the deck. I added throttle to full power – approximately 54 inches of manifold pressure – and held a lot of right rudder to counter the torque of the huge engine and propeller sticking out 15 feet ahead of me. Releasing back stick pressure, the tail lifted and I could finally see where I was headed. I aimed for the right side of the deck, lifting off easily before the ship slipped behind, with nothing but rippling water beneath me. A slight right turn cleared my slipstream from the plane landing behind me, as I climbed ahead of the ship at 125 knots to the 800-foot pattern altitude. Since I was just going around to make another landing, I left the flaps and wheels down. At pattern altitude I reduced the throttle setting to 34 inches of manifold pressure, set the propeller to 2300 rpm, and reset the trim tabs for neutral stick pressure.

About a mile ahead of the ship I made a 180-degree left turn, descending to 200 feet for the downwind leg. I dropped my tailhook, unlocked my tailwheel, and set myself up approximately 3000 feet abeam of the ship, fast approaching on my port side as it steamed upwind.

Landing #5

The plane was flying smoothly with the canopy open and locked. The hot Gulf air and the roar of the engine blustered in from both sides of the windshield. Everything in the cockpit seemed A-okay, warm and comfortable as an old shoe as I watched the ship slip past my nose and toward my left wing.

As the straight deck of the light carrier *Wright* steamed upwind and its wake appeared ahead of my left wingtip, I banked sharply toward the ship's stern and began slowing the airplane down to an approach speed of 90 knots. Check flaps down, wheels down, hook down, tail wheel unlocked. I shoved the prop control forward for full rpm and reset the trim tabs to takeoff settings in case of a waveoff. I set my rate of descent to about 150 feet per minute, maintaining just enough throttle to hold the nose up approximately 15 degrees, hanging on the prop.

I checked my altitude by seeing where the clear, flat horizon crossed the ship's mast above the bridge, since that indicated exactly how high I was above the deck. At approximately the 90 degree position on the base leg I picked up the LSO with his colored paddles on the port fantail. Now the challenge was to keep the ship from getting ahead of me, since it was churning away from me at roughly 60 feet per second (including the surface wind that was trying to drag me even further behind). I watched the horizon crossing the bridge for altitude, and carefully controlled the power and nose attitude for holding around 90 knots – just a few knots above stalling!

I used a simple technique to properly intercept the ship. I put the left side of the Corsair's nose on the center of the deck at the aft end – and held it there! If I tried to judge my turn any other way I would invariably get sucked back behind the ship with a straightaway to catch up – but then I'd lose sight of the LSO under the Corsair's long nose.

There was no luxury of any significant straightaway in landing on those old straight-deck carriers when you were flying a long-nose Corsair in a nose-up attitude. You just couldn't see ahead of you – only off to the side. We essentially pyloned counter-clockwise around the LSO in order to keep him in sight!

As I got close in, I tried to keep the nose aimed toward the ship's centerline. This was not only affected by the ship's forward motion, but also by the wind over the deck. This wind was seldom straight down the deck, but approximately 15-degrees to port so the turbulence from the ship's stacks and bridge did not appear in the flight path of the landing planes. This made for a very tricky approach and last few seconds.

At this slow speed, just a few knots above stalling, it took a lot of right rudder, even though in a left turn. And you didn't dare add power quickly since the powerful engine turning that large prop could make the aircraft roll uncontrollably to the left – the dreaded "torque roll."

It took a lot of back stick, considerable power, and right rudder to hang in there. As I approached the ramp in a left turn, the LSO's paddles and my own perception was that I was drifting to the right of the deck centerline. Too much right rudder. I cross-controlled a bit and slipped to the left just as I approached the ramp, and got a "cut," the mandatory command to cut my power and land.

"Ah, landing number 5," I thought as I relaxed, dropped the nose, and pulled back to drop the tail so my hook would catch an early wire. But I relaxed too soon! Perhaps I was more tired than I realized, but my wings were not level, and I didn't pull back soon enough. The left main gear hit first, blowing the tire, and the plane bounced back in the air. At this point the tailhook caught the #3

wire and slammed the Corsair back on to the deck. On this second impact the left wheel strut broke and the right tire blew out!

I was thrown with more force than usual against my shoulder harness as the plane tilted to the left and settled on the deck. The carrier crash horn blew. Deck hands, some carrying fire extinguishers, came scampering up from the catwalks and surrounded the airplane. Controlled pandemonium reigned as I was quickly unbuckled and helped out of the cockpit, since fire after a crash was always a danger.

A Corsair zoomed overhead taking a "fouled deck" waveoff. It was Midshipman John A. "Jack" Eckstein, my roommate and good friend through most of flight training. He told me later he was so shaken by my accident right in front of him as he was making his approach for his fifth landing that it took him several more passes to get in his last two landings. (He got his wings, stayed in the Navy, and retired as a Captain.)

I was not injured at all – except for my pride. But I was very concerned about being washed out of flight training, shattering a 13 year dream – and with only one landing to go! I had special reason to be concerned since I had my only previous accident just three weeks before when I torque-rolled a Corsair on a waveoff during my first field carrier landing practice flight at Bronson Field, and crumpled the left wing. No personal injury there, either, and a Student Pilot Disposition Board allowed me to continue training.

Disposition Board – Again!

Now I had to appear a second time before the Student Pilot Disposition Board to determine if I would get washed-out, or would get the chance to make that one remaining landing (the crash counted as #5) to get my wings. Was it my unblemished record prior to three weeks earlier, was it my sincerity and obvious strong desire to become a Naval Aviator, or was it the fact that North Korea had invaded South Korea a month or so before, and the Navy was calling up the Reserves and anticipated the need for more pilots? Whatever the reason, I was awarded some additional field carrier landing practice and another try for that last carrier landing!

Five days after the crash I climbed aboard the same Corsair, #80893, now with new tires and a new port landing gear strut, and made five field carrier practice landings at Bronson Field, and was considered qualified to make that last arrested landing needed to get my wings. Three days later, on August 18, I walked aboard the USS *Wright* in port at 6 AM. The carrier steamed out into the Gulf of Mexico for that day's carrier qualifications.

Landing #6

The first flight of Corsairs appeared at 9AM and began their qualification landings. The first to complete his six landings was NavCad Vince "Rick" Ricciardi, whom I'd known since pre-flight. I congratulated him as he climbed down from his Corsair, #97168, and I clambered aboard. I strapped myself in with the help of a plane captain, checked all the power and control settings, and deck launched. One landing to go.

This was it! If I had too much trouble getting aboard, or crashed again, it was certain I would be washed out. The takeoff and downwind leg were normal, but as I made the approach I got more tense than usual as I considered the consequences of failing. This probably made me concentrate more than in previous landings, since I got a "Roger" flag signal from the LSO all the way into the cut, and caught the #3 wire. I did it! I had qualified to be a Naval Aviator!

The ceremony for commissioning as Ensign, and receiving the "Wings of Gold," was held at Pensacola on August 23, 1950. My mother flew in from New York to pin on my wings and bars. I've never done anything more difficult – or of which I'm more proud – than earning those gold wings! And after over thirty arrested carrier landings, I learned to drive a car...

***** SIDEBAR *****

Flashback - First Try

I was six years old in 1933 when I went up for my first \$5 plane ride over New York City. It left me with an indelible impression of all those little houses, little cars, little roads, plowed fields, and tiny, tiny people – and how the whole world twisted and turned as the pilot maneuvered the airplane. I loved it! However, it wasn't until 1937, at age ten, at a Navy airshow with fat, gray-and-yellow Navy biplanes, that I decided I was going to be a Navy pilot!

After eight years of building model airplanes and devouring flying magazines, my chance came in July of 1945 when I joined the Navy V-5 program as an Apprentice Seaman for four semesters of college training in uniform before entering flight training. Finally, in August of 1946 I became an "AvCad," the term used at that time for Aviation Cadets. After eight flights in an N2S Stearman "Yellow Peril" in Dallas, Texas, I successfully soloed on September 16. Then it was on to Pre-Flight training at Ottumwa, Iowa.

But World War II was over, downsizing was in place, and we were given the option to sign up as Midshipmen for four more years under the Holloway Plan, or go back to civilian life and complete our college education under the G.I. Bill. I got out.

Second Try

However, I maintained contact with John Higson, who had stayed in the program, and heard about the "Ab Initio" (From the Beginning) program my former classmates were beginning at Cabaniss Field in Corpus Christi. They were starting out in SNJs as the primary trainer instead of the Stearman – and I would have been in the first class to do this! This drove me nuts. I haunted the Navy recruiting office trying to get back into Navy flight training. It took two years, but in November of 1948 I got back into flight training and headed to Pensacola for pre-flight. This time we were called "NavCads," a new designation that officially began on June 22, 1948 with a new Navy flight training program.

I completed Pre-Flight at Pensacola, then basic flight training in SNJs at Pensacola (with six arrested carrier landings on the USS *Cabot* (CVL-28) on 23 March, 1950), advanced flight training in F4U-4 Corsairs at Cabannis Field in Corpus Christi, and then back to Pensacola for Corsair carrier qualification. Oh, by the way, being a city-boy, I had never learned to drive a car, but I was flying Corsairs!

"Finding Your Lost Flying Buddies" by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1998

Donald J. Flynn, where are you? Remember me? We were carrier pilots back in the early 1950s, flying F4U-5 Corsairs with Navy Fighter Squadron Fourteen (VF-14). I recall times we went out on the carrier catwalks at night in the middle of some ocean, looking at the millions of stars swaying in a jet-black sky as the carrier pitched and rolled – and remember the one night we thought we saw a UFO? I've been looking for you the last few years, Don. I've found – and written – 28 different Don, Don J., Donald, Donald J. and D. J. Flynn's all over the USA – but I'm still looking for the Ensign Don Flynn from VF-14.

And "Doc" Mossburg? Where are you? I was your wingman in VF-14. I've checked with Mossburgs all over the country, but can't find you, Doc. You were a LTjg in 1951, so you must be about 69 years old – if you're still alive.

Those were the "no shows." That's the bad news. But the good news is that I HAVE found almost 20 of the "old flying buddies" that I've been looking for! If you'd like to find some of YOUR old friends, schoolmates, flying buddies, shipmates, or military associates, I'm going to describe the methods I've used.

Making and Using a List

Before you can start to use your computer – or any other method – to find someone, you must first make a "target" list with as much information as you can find. Certainly, right off the top of your head you'll remember some guys (or gals) you'd like to locate. Start with those, then add to your list – and perhaps even find the last-known addresses and phone numbers - from class yearbooks, reunion lists, Navy cruise books, old address books – and referrals from those you do find.

If you are computer literate, and have the equipment , once you've made the list, you can use the Internet or computer CD-ROM discs to "home in" on likely prospects. It will take some persistence, phone calls, and post cards to "pin down" the latest location of these people. Then you'll call or write them and perhaps get together. Some will be very responsive, some not. Some will remember you clearly, some won't remember you at all!

I'm no professional tracer of lost persons, so I'm sure there are additional methods, but these are the ways I used my computer to find some "lost" flying buddies.

Class Books

Certainly, your high school and college yearbooks are a source for names and faces, since most have photos and home addresses. Even if you haven't personally saved them, you'll find some classmates that have – and that leads to reunions, and reunion rosters.

Some individuals take it upon themselves to become historians. When I was in the V-5 Naval Aviation College Program at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania in 1946, the school yearbook, "HALCYON," included the names and addresses of all the V-5ers (and V-12ers) in attendance. Many of these guys went on with me to Dallas for Selective Flight Training in late 1946.

Bob Voiland, one of the V-5ers, sent letters to all on the roster and has compiled a 4-page single-spaced list showing locations and phone numbers for about 70% of them – an amazing feat when you consider that this is a list from 1946! Through this list I found Ara Martin Boyajian, former Swarthmore V-5er who made it through flight training, flew F8F Bearcats in the fleet, and now lives only an hour away from me!

Cruise Books

It's common in the Navy for "cruise books" to be produced on extended cruises. I was on two Mediterranean carrier cruises with VF-14 (USS *Wright* in 1951 and USS *Wasp* in 1952) and each had a cruise book. Typically, aside from

the many pictures and stories about ports visited, there will also be a roster of personnel.

I still have those cruise books. They are a great resource for recalling old buddies, and provide a starting point for finding them. Of course, some have died, and most have moved. But many, after their military service, return to their home town, or nearby. Even if they don't, there are frequently relatives who are still in their home town that can lead you to the one you're seeking.

Some military units keep a history, and some individuals do it on their own. Former VF-14 "Tophatter" Robert Holmbeck has compiled a list of Senior Tophatters. Although this list included VF-14 pilots going back for many years before I joined the squadron, I located several of my old flying mates, among them "Cookie" Cleland, Jesse Hopkins, Don Ross, and Dale Fisher (Dale since deceased.)

When I called Don, whom I'd had no contact with in 42 years, I simply said, "Is this retired Navy Captain Don Ross, the world's best Corsair pilot?" His immediate reply, with no hesitation, was "Freddie Blechman!" He recognized my voice! Eerie!

Using Holmbeck's list and squadron history information, LT Paul McSweeney, at the time a rear-seater in F-14 Tomcats with VF-14 at Oceana, Virginia, coordinated a VF-14 75th Anniversary Squadron Reunion. I was there! Wow!

Referrals

Once you find one "buddy," they may still be in touch with others. All you have to do is ask. That's how I found Carl and Merle Hilscher; I was in flight training with Carl, and used to date Merle before he married her!

I found Jim Gillcrist (pre-flight at Ottumwa, Iowa in 1946) through his brother, retired Rear Admiral Paul T. Gillcrist, who wrote a GREAT book, *Feet Wet* (perhaps the best flying book I've ever read!) Recognizing the last name, I wrote Paul and he put me in touch with his older brother, Jim.

I found my old VF-14 skipper, retired Captain Robert C. Coats (Navy WW II 10-plane ace) by contacting Tommy Blackburn (former WW II VF-17 Navy Captain, now deceased) after reading his exciting *The Jolly Rogers* book. Skipper Coats put me in touch with A. G. Wellons, who retired as a Navy Captain.

Computer Searching

I knew that my roommate throughout most of flight training, John "Jack" Eckstein, was from Massillon, Ohio. I kept meaning to try to find him (our last contact was over 20 years ago, when he was still a Commander in the Navy), but I kept putting it off. Finally, one evening about seven years ago, on a whim, I decided to give try to find Jack using my computer.

I dialed up CompuServe, typed my password, accessed PHONEFILE, and requested all ECKSTEINS in Ohio. 153 of them! Scrolling through, I found a John Eckstein in Massillon, Ohio – where Jack lived over 40 years ago. Worth a try. I called. The woman who answered turned out to be Jack's mother!

"Where does Jack live now," I asked. "Oh, he lives in Virginia. Has a vineyard," was the reply. "Can I have his number?" I asked. "Well," Jack's mother replied, "I can give you his number, but he's not there now. He's on a trip to Chicago.

But it just so happens that he stopped by this evening to visit, and right now he's across the street visiting his sister – my daughter."

I got the number "across the street" and called. Can you imagine Jack's surprise? It was priceless! Jack retired from the Navy as a Captain and now raises grapes for local wineries. We've gotten together twice, with a third time coming up soon.

Another contact through CompuServe's PHONEFILE was Ed Balocco. I went through flight training with Ed, who became a Marine fighter pilot, and I lost track of him. I knew he was from Antioch, California. Through PHONEFILE I found a sister, who directed me to Ed, now a lawyer in nearby Walnut Creek, not far from Antioch. When I called Ed and said, "Hi, Ed! This is Fred Blechman. Remember me?"

He hesitated for a moment then blurted out, "Freddie Blechman! Sure I remember you. I talk about you all the time!"

I was shocked. Talks about me all the time? Huh? I hadn't had contact with Ed in 42 years. Why would he talk about me? I asked him why. "Oh," he replied, "I tell people about the skinny kid from New York who went through flight training with me, then went on to fly Corsairs off carriers - and didn't know how to drive a car!"

It was true. Funny what people remember. I learned to drive a car after about 30 carrier landings ... I flew up to Oakland to see Ed, and showed him pictures I took of him in flight gear 48 years ago. We had a fabulous personal reunion – and I got a fantastic personally-guided tour of the San Francisco area.

PHONEFILE found me another old friend. He and I used to go flying in rented planes when we went to school at Cal-Aero Technical Institute in Glendale, California in the 1940s. I found Ugo Sbaraglia in Santa Barbara. It was easy. He was the only SBARAGLIA in all of California! We've gotten together twice since – once at the annual Santa Barbara Airshow.

In more recent years, the Internet and CD-ROM "phone disks" provide access even more extensively. For example, without going into details, www.yahoo.com has a "people search" function that is fast and easy to use.

Homing Into Target – Follow-up

Once you think you've found someone on your list, you can call or write. Calling can be expensive, especially if you have a long list of "possibles." In that case, I send inquiry postcards, like "Are you the Don Flynn I flew with in VF-14 in 1950/51?" If I'm pretty sure I've got a "hit," I call and surprise them with a blast from the past!

Sometimes a phone call can be embarrassing. I found a former petty officer who was my right hand man when I was Education and Training Officer in VF-14. We worked closely together for two years. I called him. He didn't remember me. I wrote him. He never answered.

So be ready for some disappointments. Some you contact will not care at all. Others will be excited to get together and hash over old stories.

***** SIDEBAR *****

If you want to learn about more conventional ways – with and without a computer – to find someone, check out "FIND THEM FAST! A Guide to Finding Anyone Quickly, Cheaply and Easily," a self-help search book written by award-winning investigative reporter Dave Farrell.

During nearly 18 years working his investigative beat, Farrell picked up scores of search tips and techniques used by professional investigators, police officers and reporters. He has included many of them in this 114-page soft-cover book.

Twelve chapters discuss the details of tracing through credit reports, vehicles, voter registrations, corporate records, marriage and divorce records, land and tax records, and other means. Nine detailed appendixes list the actual addresses to contact for this information.

Use a nationally recognized non-profit organization to search the entire country for your subject for \$10. Get the U.S. Postal Service to help you locate your subject for \$5. Find anyone in any branch of the armed services. This book even tells you how to find people using hunting, fishing and other licenses.

Farrell also discusses the use of the Social Security Number for tracing an individual using an inexpensive computer data base – or to access the Master Death File with the names of 43 million deceased Americans, and using death records to find living persons!

If you are at all serious about finding someone, FIND THEM FAST! can be ordered for \$9.95, postage included, from Dave Farrell, P.O. Box 252511, West Bloomfield, MI 48325.

"Movie Malignancy"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1998

Chalk it up to my age (70) and the "good old days," but I'm personally ready to boycott most movies. I've had it with the gratuitous vulgar language, sex, and violence (although as an old Navy fighter pilot, the violence doesn't bother me as much!).

I planned to see several newly-released movies this week. I had seen previews of several, and they looked good. Then I looked at last Friday's Daily News reviews: "Twilight" – R, violence, sex, nudity, language; "Moon Over Broadway" – NR, language; "The Only Thrill" – R, language; "The Big Lebowski" – R, pervasive strong language, drug content, sexuality, brief violence; "U.S. Marshals" – PG-13, violence, language. In Saturday's paper "Hush" was reviewed: PG-13, vulgar language, adult themes.

They are ALL now OFF my "must see" list. Every one of them lists "language" content, and I've learned this means words that offend and disgust me – usually used in place of perfectly "good" words. I won't go to see those movies. Why should I PAY to be offended? I'll wait until they clean them up for network television. (Not that TV standards haven't also gone down the tubes – just not as far.)

And look at Friday's "Quick Flicks" of 40 movie reviews. Twenty-eight listed "language" or "strong profanity." But I've seen some of the movies where language is NOT mentioned, but IS used in the film!

I consider this decay in Hollywood standards as a "movie malignancy," becoming progressively worse and tending to do great harm. What harm? How about the decline of the language, which has many colorful words and phrases that are more expressive than four-letter words? How about the young people who hear this language and accept it as normal, and pollute the air with their vulgarities? Monkey hear, monkey say.

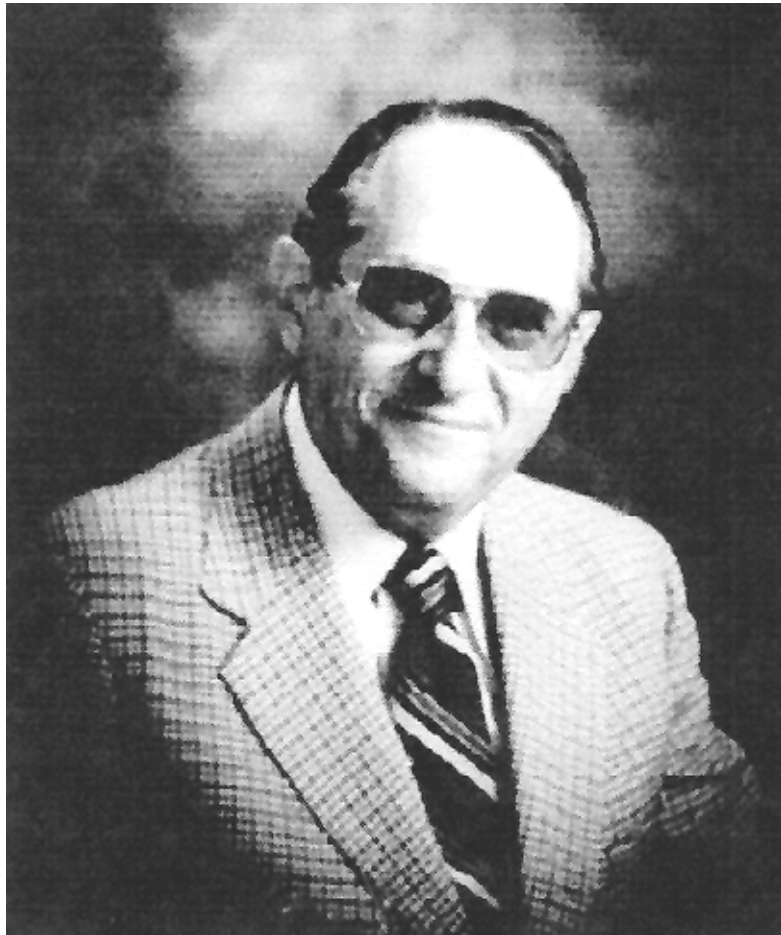
I know it is difficult for younger generations and my children and grandchildren to understand how I, and most others my age, are repelled by this malignant growth of four-letter words, bathroom humor, sexual insinuation, and drug use in movies, thus making all this seem "normal." It apparently IS normal for the cretins commanding the entertainment industry today – and, sadly, it sells. Movies are the worst, cable TV is just as bad, and network television is not far behind, and slipping into the morass of vulgarity at an alarming pace.

I don't use filthy language in conversation, and avoid those who do. That is my choice. But when I'm lured into a movie theater with an enticing trailer, pay my 4-6 bucks, and am then besieged with language I detest – in surround sound, no less – I feel cheated and frustrated. Cheated because I paid good money for what I looked forward to as an exciting, pleasant experience, and offended that actors and actresses I previously admired would lower themselves to this level of indecency. They pull-down millions of dollars while they pull-down the moral fiber of millions of people.

Even "Titanic," an otherwise excellent movie, found it necessary to use some completely unnecessary profanity in a few places. It will be easy to "clean up" for network TV. However, most movies will require extensive dubbing, cutting, and splicing to be acceptable for network TV – but will play "as is" on some cable and satellite TV. How sad ... I'll stick with AMC, A&E, and TCM on cable, where the movies were clean, and GREAT!

Oprah didn't stop people from eating hamburgers when there was a "Mad Cow disease" scare, and she said she wouldn't eat beef anymore. I don't think my objection to language, sex, and drug use in movies will stem the growing tide, but I CAN say I'm going to avoid movies with that content – and encourage other people to do the same.

Thankfully, since I'm 70 years old, I probably won't be around long enough to see where all this seems to be headed – linguistic and personal conduct chaos. In "my day" the only four letter words used in company were "hell" and "damn," and they were frowned upon by many. Well, I say now, "To hell with today's damn movies!"



(Jeffrey Alan Photography)

Fred Blechman
1998

e-mail to Lou Ives

1 January 2001

"The Fred Baron's 73rd Birthday Biplane Flight"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 2000

It was a few minutes before 11 AM on my 73rd birthday. There I was in the front seat of a taildragger Stearman biplane, with cloth helmet, goggles, white scarf, and my Naval Aviator leather flight jacket – my Fred Baron garb – reliving the short but memorable experience of soloing a Navy "Yellow Peril" N2S Stearman on September 16, 1946 at Hensley Field, near Dallas, Texas.

Flashing back, that took place at an outlying grass field near Grand Prairie. I was in the back seat – the location for a solo pilot. I could look in front of me at the back of the head of the instructor, and listen to his comments through a rubber acoustic tube, called a "gosport." The instructor spoke into the gosport, with the sound ending up at earpads in my helmet. I could listen, but had no way to reply. Also, the instructor had two rear-view mirrors to watch my face; I could only see his eyes. Pretty intimidating.

After only eight one-hour instructional flights in the Stearman, my instructor, LT M. K. "Mel" Crawford, got out of the front seat and wished me good luck. "Make three landings, and then I'll get back in and we'll fly back to Hensley."

I gunned the engine, took off and climbed to pattern altitude (right rudder in a climb!), and leveled off as I made the 180-degree turn to downwind. What a thrill! What freedom! What a view! Hey, there's no one in the front seat!!

This was the culmination of about 15 years of dreaming of becoming a pilot. It took two years in the Navy V-5 program as an Apprentice Seaman and several months as an Aviation Cadet (AvCad) to get to this point. I was flying solo! Alone!

I completed three solo landings successfully (whew!), and went on to get my "Wings of Gold," flying F4U Corsairs off aircraft carriers in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Mediterranean.

But after leaving the Navy in 1954, while raising a family, I had little involvement with airplanes – until my retirement about eight years ago. Since then I've flown SNJs (former Navy advanced trainers), Cessnas and Pipers (including twin-engines), ultralights, homebuilts, and even twice as a passenger in the Goodyear Blimp!

But I had never flown a Stearman – or any open-cockpit biplane – since that solo flight in 1946, when I met "Barnstormin' Bertie" at an airshow at Van Nuys Airport some years ago. Bertie Duffy was there with her white and red 220-horsepower 1941 Stearman biplane that she bought in 1980 as a crated-up basketcase.

Bertie, who already had pilot's and mechanic's licenses, spent many nights and weekends to restore the Stearman to mint condition by 1982. Now here she was, offering half-hour rides for \$90, and one-hour rides for \$150. Hmmmmm. Tempting. But too expensive for me at that time.

But the desire lingered on. "Westways Magazine" profiled Barnstormin' Bertie in June, 1994, with a picture of her beautiful Stearman. I still have that article. And I kept seeing Bertie and her Stearman at the annual Van Nuys Airshows.

One day recently, talking with a friend, Lee Auger, I discovered he had actually flown with Bertie. His daughter, Cherie, had paid for his ride as a Fathers Day gift. Lee loved it!

The hook was in! I called Bertie and decided I would raid my piggy bank to go up on my 73rd birthday. Lee came along to video the landing and takeoff from near the runway.

Bertie, in the back seat, taxied out to the end of the runway at Whiteman Airport in Pacoima. She ran up the engine, checked the magnetos, lined up on the runway, and off we went, headed almost directly south.

The video shows that at exactly 11 AM we were off the ground in only about 500 feet of runway. Slowly (very slowly!) the ground dropped away as the houses, cars, and roads kept shrinking while the horizon kept moving further away into the slight haze. The engine roared as sound and air poured over the small windshield. Open cockpit flying. There's nothing like it!

Unlike the simple one-way gosport of the Navy Stearmans, Bertie has installed a two-way intercom in her plane, and soon after take-off she told me I could take over the controls. Stick and rudder, the good old-fashioned way to fly an airplane. I've never quite liked a wheel ("yoke") instead of a joystick!

After a few miles heading south we made a 180-degree turn and flew over the 210 Freeway heading northwest until intercepting the 118 Freeway. An easy left bank had us heading west toward Chatsworth, where I located and circled my daughter's house a couple of times. We were a bit too high to see my two granddaughters down there, but I knew they were waiting and watching, and probably jumping up and down shouting "There's Grandpa!" After all, how many white and red biplanes do you see circling your house these days?

"You're slipping," noted Bertie, "Too much right rudder." That's when I noticed that the front cockpit did not have a turn-bank indicator with a ball to indicate slipping or skidding. Oh, well, it had been over 50 years ... The seat of my pants isn't what it used to be!

Next I flew south and slightly west to circle my home in West Hills as my wife, Ev, waved towels to let me know she spotted me, then south to circle Lee Auger's home at the 101 Freeway. From there I turned west, following the freeway to the Las Virgenes Pass. We flew through the pass, between mountain tops, to the Pacific Ocean at Malibu.

Turning east we flew over the water following the coast ("Look at all those boats!"), crossing land at Santa Monica ("look at all those big buildings!"). We flew south of the new Getty Museum ("Wow!"), then along the mountains, over the HOLLYWOOD sign, and over the convolution of freeways "(what a maze – and all those cars!").

I banked left (I love watching the whole world tilt when I bank an airplane!) and headed northwest and then northeast over Glendale, Flintridge, La Canada, La Crescenta, Tujunga, and Sunland. Bertie took over the controls, entering the traffic pattern, then base leg, final, and a perfect three-point landing back at Whiteman Airpark at exactly 12 noon. A wonderful one-hour flight. The best \$150 I ever spent!

\\\\\\!/////

(o o)

-o00o-U-o00o-

The Fred Baron

"Air Combat U.S.A - Fighter-Pilot for a Day!"
by Fred Blechman

© Copyright Fred Blechman 1991

Air Combat U.S.A., Inc., P.O. Box 2726, Fullerton Airport, CA 92633, telephone
(800) 522-7590

"Tally! Tally! He's low, he's low!" crackled in my headphones just as I spotted the bogey closing rapidly from the opposite direction and below my 5500 foot altitude. "Fight's on! Fight's on!" someone shouted as the red-trimmed silver Marchetti streaked by about 500 feet off my left wing and immediately rolled into a tight turn toward my tail. I was going too fast so I pulled the nose up sharply to drop my speed for better cornering. Banking to the left I struggled to keep the bandit in sight through the top of the bubble canopy. As fighter pilots say, "Lose sight, lose the fight!"

The stall warning buzzer blasted as I shoved the stick further to the left and forward. We rolled and the nose dropped, with Lake Mathews and its surrounding mountains twisting and turning as we approached the 3000-foot "hard deck" minimum altitude. The buzzer quit, and was replaced by an increasingly loud whistling noise as the plane raced earthward at high speed. I partially leveled my wings to keep the bogey in sight, then yanked back on the joystick. The G-force made me grunt and jammed me down into my seat at over four times my regular weight, making it difficult to keep my head up. The aircraft nose rose and the plane started to buffet as the buzzer screeched again.

Never losing sight of the "enemy," I could see I was closing in, but at a poor deflection angle, so I pulled the plane around and down into a "low yo-yo" to get into a better position behind his beam. I was approaching a firing solution. This guy was dead meat! Again the buzzer sounded as I pulled up (more Gs!) and let the bogey drift down dead center into my 100-mil gunsight. Tracking him in my sight as he turned, I squeezed the joystick trigger. A steady tone, a red panel light, and smoke streaming from the bogey confirmed my kill! "Yee-haw, Jester is dead! Knock it off, knock it off."

This whole sequence took 55 seconds, and was the first of my six dogfights that afternoon with Air Combat U.S.A. I wish I could say I nailed the other guy all six times, but it was three and three. The embarrassing part is that my adversary had never flown as a pilot before!

Air Combat U.S.A is not a simulator - you actually fly, even if you don't have a pilot's license. The planes are two-seat Italian SIAI-Marchetti SF-260W "Warriors," with the "guest pilot" in the left-side pilot's seat and an instructor safety pilot in the right-side seat. The SF-260W is a light attack and tactical support aircraft used by over twenty countries, including several in NATO. It uses

a 260-horsepower Lycoming piston engine, and has a 27-foot wingspan with a top speed over 200 mph. It is fully acrobatic and built to handle over 6 Gs.

I was reliving my Navy fighter pilot days of the early 1950s when I flew F4U-5 Corsairs in Fighter Squadron Fourteen (VF-14 "Tophatters.") The SF-260W is a nimble machine compared to the 2000-plus horsepower Corsair. You hardly need to touch the rudder, even in formation, and the stick forces are relatively light compared to a Corsair. Also, most importantly, although the stall buzzer screeches a lot, the plane mushes instead of stalling, and has no spinning tendency. The Corsair, on the other hand, could easily stall and spin, with difficult recovery.

But I found the Gs were more oppressive than in the Corsair, since we wore no G-suits in the SF-260W. This is tough if you haven't pulled any Gs in almost forty years, and you're 64 years old!

Air Combat U.S.A., based near Los Angeles, has put over 3500 guest pilots through their ACM (Air Combat Maneuvering) course in the last two years, with no accidents or near misses (although a few guest pilots have blacked-out for a minute or so during high-G maneuvers.) Pilots and non-pilots are treated essentially alike, and sometimes non-pilots (who follow instructor-pilot prompting without question) "wax" fighter jocks who are used to doing things their way. A patented electronic tracking system is used to confirm the "kill" and turn on the smoke. Also, the entire flight is recorded in the cockpit, switching between two camera angles and the gunsight, and you get to take the VHS video tape home!

Most guest pilots only go through Phase I training, one-versus-one (\$400 for four dogfights, \$500 for six.) This includes fitting you with a freshly-laundered flight suit, a hard-hat helmet and a parachute. Then you have a one-hour briefing from one of the instructors, most of whom are former military combat pilots. The briefing includes gunsight tracking, high and low yo-yos, pursuit angles, lag rolls, flat and rolling scissors, and energy management. Three other ACM advanced phases are also available, with one flight for each.

The instructors take off and land, but on the way to and from the "combat" area you get to fly formation – something most civilian pilots never have an opportunity to do. Each flight runs about an hour, including practice, instructor demonstrations and dogfights. Then there's a debriefing where both cockpit video tapes are shown together, on two monitors, with a discussion of who did what to whom!

This is great stuff. While you may not have the horses of the Mustangs, Thunderbolts, or Corsairs and Hellcats of WWII, you have a lot more than the Red Baron ever had – and the twisting, rolling, yanking, banking and Gs are all real!

Air Combat U.S.A is one of only two such "fighter-pilot for a day" opportunities for civilians. The other one, "Sky Warriors," flies tandem-seating Beech T-34A Mentors from Atlanta, Georgia, and can be reached at (404) 699-7000.

Fred Blechman is a former Navy fighter-pilot who now writes extensively for computer magazines, but would rather be dogfighting.

