

Henriques "Rick" Cotton ¹
Ottumwa, Iowa, Preflight Class 6-47

Hello ... Hello ... This is Rick Cotton. And I went through flight school way back with all these other neat guys here. I was in Preflight Class 6-47, Ottumwa, Iowa; and joined the Navy from Evanston, Illinois, back when Naval aviation was the thing to do. After Ottumwa, we went right to Pensacola, of course, like the rest of the troops, and we were the first class to graduate from there. And, after Pensacola, they split this flight school a bit, and some of us went to Corpus, and then back to Pensacola for formation, gunnery, FCLP. And some of us went down at the World's-Lowest-Priority, and flew PBMs in HU-10 (sic), NAS Corpus Christi. Got our wings in October of 1948.

Deployed to squadron VP-33, NAS Norfolk. That squadron decommissioned after only about a year or two. They didn't know what the hell to do with us ... like the Holloway Plan guys were orphans. So went to squadron VR-31, a ferry squadron, and for the next 42 (sic) months, happily bent throttles flying 20 or 30 different kinds of wind machines. It was the best, happiest, flying I ever did. Averaged something close to 100 hours a month for all that time.

And, then, like other guys of that vintage, I went with American Airlines in 1953, when I was separated—inactive duty; and was in co-pilot school with Jack Pederson, for example (also of the same preflight class), than got laid off, not once, not twice, but three times, and in 1955 did not go back to American, but rather stayed with the job that I had picked up in a year or so earlier as a test pilot with Martin Company, in Baltimore, Maryland. Flying P5Ms—boats, of course—and the P6M Seamaster—jet seaplane; but mostly the production B-57s, which Martin, at that time, was building for the Air Force. All that good stuff lasted until about 1960, when I went down to the Orlando Division, just newly formed. Eight hundred of us went down from Baltimore, and started the Orlando Division.

Then, followed my trusty leader down there, Ed Ewell, out to the West Coast when he went over to Ryan Aeronautical, thinking he was going to be the next president. But that didn't work out. So, he shoved off in a year or so and left the rest of us kind of high and dry. But I went back to flight testing there and flew many of those crazy VSTOL Ryan airplanes.

And [I] left there in 1964 to go up to North American Aviation, where I found a home ever since. North American merged with Rockwell in the late '60s, and it's Rockwell International now. [I've been] located for the last 2-½ years—here it is 1988—down in northwest Florida working as a field rep for Rockwell International—best job in the world—big toad in a little pond.

So, that brings us up to date: pretty boring, and probably pretty typical, as far as memories are concerned. This meeting, of course, brings them flooding back. And I love the air shows. The trip on the carrier was super. I especially liked to see the old wind machines that we all flew so long ago—the F4U Corsair, the F6F Hellcat, all the rest. You almost have to go to Pensacola to see all those good things. O.K., that's all for me. Over and Out. --- ☆☆☆ ---

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