

Braxton G. "Brack" Harrell  
(Goodlivin' One-Four)  
VF-781  
1950-1951

LTJG Braxton G. "Brack" Harrell, an ex-member of L.A.'s finest, came out second best today when his progress over Wonsan was arrested by a well aimed "twelve point seven" that slammed through his canopy and lodged in his head rest. The shattered glass struck him about the right eye, and he came aboard with his vision impaired by the flowing blood. An LSO was heard to comment, "That was a better pass than some two eyed ones I've seen." The injury proved painful, but not too serious. Brack is now the first candidate qualified for the Purple Heart on this tour of duty, having fulfilled all of the requirements. The entire ship is thankful to have him back aboard.



left to right: Collie Oveland, Brack Harrell, and John Zimmermann, Corpsman,  
after Brack was hit by flak

USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31)  
Korea 1951

## Night Vision

Naval Air Station San Diego, at North Island, was great for training. All kinds – from instrument flying to high-altitude indoctrination to night vision instruction.

While VF-781 PACEMAKERS was based there - about the end of 1950 - small groups of pilots were herded into the unlit night vision training facility. It was blacker than the inside of a cow. The pilots sat on benches in a small amphitheater. Down below, on the stage, was a model harbor with all kinds of ships, vehicles, and installations. The entire room was painted black. A lighting system representing moon-light was controlled by the instructor.

The pilots entered and were seated in this unlit black environment while the instructor discussed the vagaries of night vision. The “moonlight” was then gradually increased while the instructor pointed out objects around the harbor that were, or should be, emerging with the increasing intensities of light.

When a pilot first saw an emerging object, he called out its identification and location, and the instructor gave out “ataboys.”

Brack Harrell was never first in identifying these objects.

In fact, Brack Harrell never identified any.

When the first object was identified, Brack said he didn't yet see it. When a few more were identified, he said, “Where the hell are they?” When the full moon was illuminated, he said, “Damn, I can't see anything yet.”

We were concerned about the boy's health. A few remarks were tossed in regarding the past evening's functions.

Then the overhead lights were turned on. Brack had turned about on entering the theater, and had been sitting backwards on his bench, staring at the black-painted wall of the room, two feet from his eyeballs, throughout the 45-minute drill.

(story from Lou Ives [VF-781] 8 January 1988)

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