

Edward McKellar  
Pensacola Preflight, NavCad Class June 1949

(from pp. 75-78 of Doug Siegfried's Flight Training monograph):

Ed retired as CAPT (USN). His first duty station was in VC-61, a composite photo squadron. McKellar's 4-plane F2H-2P detachment was deployed to the Korean War attached to Carrier Air Group 102 aboard the USS Oriskany. He was a member of the Blue Angel flight demonstration team 1954-1956, and was Commander (CAG), Air Wing Eight. He related his experiences going through flight training during the tight budget year of FY 1950:

I joined the Naval Reserve in 1946 at NAS Atlanta while I was attending Georgia Tech. A lot of my fraternity brothers were ex-wartime pilots who joined the Reserves and flew out of Atlanta. Once I joined the Reserves I was taken along as the duty plane captain on my friends' SNB flights. In my junior year of college I realized I was spinning my wheels so I figured I would look into flying for the Navy.

The atmosphere in 1949 for the Navy and Naval Air was terrible because Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson was downsizing the military in general and the Navy in particular. More a friend of the new Air Force he was cutting the heart out of the Navy.

I signed up for the NavCad program and reported to Pensacola in June 1949. By this time the Midshipman program was essentially dead. My NavCad class was 50 percent civilian and the rest were from the fleet and Marine Corps. During our first week of pre-flight in July, our class was told that upon graduation we would get our wings, a commission and a discharge. This did not sit well with any of us, particularly the Marines. Many of them quit right there because they wanted to remain Marines and not be commissioned in the Navy and then discharged. I stayed because I wanted to fly to gain a skill.

I was not the best student in college and fooled around a lot. I learned quickly that pre-flight and flight training was not college and the training command could care less whether I stayed or went. The first test I took in pre-flight was in meteorology and I did not crack a book. I got a 1.2 on a 4.0 scale and immediately met the captain in charge of pre-flight because he never heard of anyone scoring so low. I knew I was in trouble and did a song and dance on why I didn't study. I got chewed up one side and down the other and told I was to take the same test the next day and I had better pass or I was gone. I hit the books and spent the whole night in the head studying because that was the only place in the cadet barracks with lights on after taps. I think I memorized the material and got a 4.0 on the test the next day. I had to take a different test the day after because the instructor thought I had gotten the gouge. I passed the second test with flying colors and very quickly matured in those few days. I never took Pensacola or my Navy training for granted again.

When we got to BTU-1 [Basic Training Squadron One] at [NAAS] Whiting we really felt the effects of the downsizing. Most of the instructors were Reserves and these guys had no future under Louie Johnson. I had four different flight instructors before I soloed. It took almost three months to get the 18 pre-solo flights in because I would fly a hop or two and then get a new instructor and sit for 10 days before I would fly again. My fourth

instructor was from the Academy and stayed with me until I soloed. I loved flying right off and never got a down. All my basic training was done in the SNJ, finishing with the greatest feeling on earth of carrier qualifying on [USS] Wright [CVL-49].

I went to Corpus and was sent to Cabaniss to fly Corsairs. I was sure happy because I did not want to fly PB4Ys or PBMs at Corpus. Cabaniss was a busy place with Ads, Corsairs, Hellcats, and Bearcats. In the summer of 1950 the Korean War began and the whole attitude at Cabaniss changed. I had a Marine instructor and he was great. I CQ'd on Cabot and about half my class survived the training. We all got our wings and commissions [as ensigns] in December 1950, but no discharges as that was a dead issue when Korea started. Actually the two cadet classes prior to ours had received their discharges with their wings but received immediate recall letters to active duty. I got orders to North Island [NAS San Diego] and got into jets through the FASRon at Miramar.

[Ed then was assigned to VC-61 at Miramar. VC-61 was a composite photo squadron with PB4Ys, SNBs, F8Fs, F6Fs, F9Fs, and F2Hs. Detachments (usually three aircraft and four pilots) were then attached to Carrier Air Groups and Fleet Air Wings and deployed world wide. Ed was with the VC-61 F2H detachment assigned to CVG-102 on the USS Oriskany (CV-34) on its 1951-1952 Korean Tour.]

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