

HOLLOWAY'S HOOLIGANS'

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(see *W. Thomas, pp. 154-156, April 1984, "Proceedings"*)

Captain [Walter "R"] Thomas writes with affection of the Holloway Aviation Midshipmen, who met the need of their time and, in due course, took their places in active commissioned service, although with bastard dates of rank.

The days of the Holloway Midshipmen overlapped those of another, even more ephemeral naval institution of which little memory remains, because its last members flitted off the active duty list more than 35 years ago – the Option Baker Aviation Cadets.

Toward the end of World War II, the Bureau of Personnel (BuPers) expected a need for huge quantities of replacement officers, but it was not so apparent to those of us in the V-5 program. We were given every inducement to get out and go home.

Shortly after V-J Day, cadets were offered these choices:

- Able - to complete original active duty commitment
- Baker - to get your wings and go home
- Charlie - to go home immediately.

When the Holloway Program was introduced, the opportunity to switch to it was offered to qualified cadets. For most of us, the opportunity for two or three extra years at Midshipman's pay did not seem much of an inducement, even though the prospect was held out for receiving a Navy instead of a Naval Reserve commission at the end.

With our Option Charlie friends out of the way, the number of student aviators was reduced but was still not commensurate with the instructor and ground crew ranks at Corpus Christi and Pensacola. Because of the point system in effect in late 1945 and 1946, almost all the instructors at both places were eligible for early discharge, as were most of the experienced petty officers on the flight lines.

There were plenty of delays in the training syllabus. My log book shows seven weeks between my last primary flight and my first flight in intermediate, and another five weeks between intermediate and advanced.

Flight instructors, although highly skilled and dedicated, were mostly Ensigns and Lieutenants, junior grade. Ground School was comprehensive. We compared notes with what we knew of the Air Corps syllabus and were convinced that we were getting the better of what we knew of the Air Corps syllabus and were convinced that we were getting the better of the two. In fact, at least part of the time we were getting the only training, because the Air Corps shut down its primary and basic flying schools at the end of 1945 and for most of 1946.

Besides the V-5 Cadets, there were two other kinds of flight students taking the same instruction syllabus: student officers and enlisted aviation pilot candidates. Cadets mostly flew with other Cadets, but occasionally we would pick up a straggler from another category. In that era, the real bargain for the taxpayer was the Aviation Cadet at \$75 per month, the Cadets made little more than half the Midshipman's pay.

Among Cadets, there was no distinction or segregation between the two option groups during training. The only difference was a piece of paper in the record, which could be changed until the orders were cut for graduation.

We started seeing Holloway Midshipmen on liberty in Pensacola toward the end of 1946. I remember meeting one in the bar of the San Carlos Hotel after Christmas. If they were not allowed to drink hard liquor, they were not saying so. In fact, with their hats off, it was hard to tell Midshipmen in uniform from Cadets. (Cadets in that era were not issued visor caps. Of course, every girl in Pensacola knew exactly which was which.)

Three weeks and six landings on the USS *Saipan* (CVL-48) later, I was standing in the sun at a commissioning ceremony. We did not receive a commission in one hand and orders to inactive duty in the other. Instead came a set of temporary additional duty orders to the Naval Air Training Base Pensacola. For the next few days, I made a daily run from Chevalier Field to Naval Air Station Brunswick with a freshly overhauled SNJ scheduled for mothballing in the huge lighter-than air hangar. A couple of times, there was time for a spin at a lush watering hole on Sea Island. In due course, that life of ease ended with another set of orders, this time reading, "Released from all active duty."

I don't know how many Cadets chose the Baker option. The total must be less than the 2,000 Aviation Midshipmen of 1946-50. I also do not know how many of my fellow Bakers became active in the Naval Reserve after returning to civilian life. Two of my wing-mates joined the active program at Memphis. Others were called back to active duty in the Korean War. I was able to keep flying for

more than 11 years in New York reserve squadrons. By then, any limitations implied by an original A3L designator had blended into the universal aviator's 1315.

Later, on annual training duty periods, I was able to make contributions to an A4 Type Board, a sea-air search for a downed Saudi aircraft, a supply mission for a lost nuclear weapon search in the Mediterranean, and to compile for Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, the official record of the attack on the USS *Liberty* (AGTR-5).

Many former Option Baker cadets went on to distinguished civilian aviation. One of my classmates became a fine designer of fighter aircraft; another, chief test pilot for a major helicopter company; and I went back to work for Pan Am, my pre-war employer, to complete a 40-year career in engineering and management.

From this tale, one can see that the return on the taxpayers' investment in the clipped wings of the 1945-47 Option Baker cadets is not to be measured only terms of active duty service performed. Yet, it is startling to realize the number of days of commissioned active service (exclusive of annual duty for training) - 27 days in my case.

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