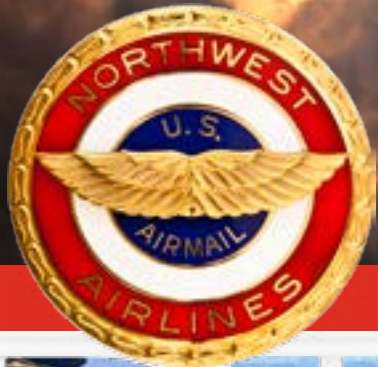
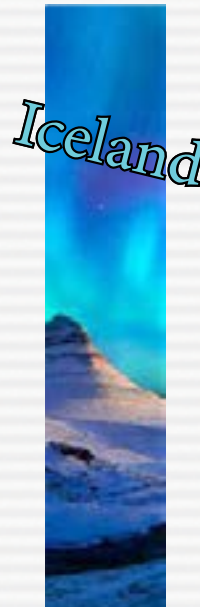
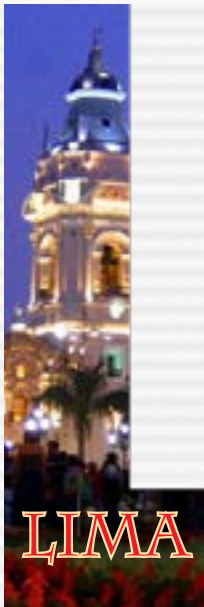
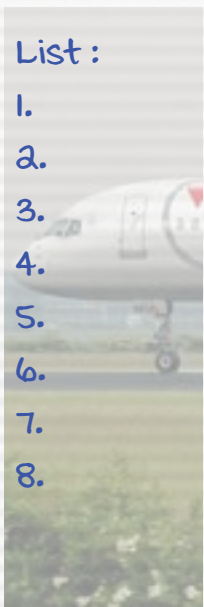


e CONTRAILS



ISSUE NO. 212

OCTOBER 2020



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NOTAMS



From here on out the most critical thing is *NOT* to

FLY THE AIRPLANE.

Instead, you *MUST*
KEEP YOUR EMAIL UP TO DATE.

The only way we will have to communicate directly with you as a group is through emails.

Change yours here ONLY:



RNPAnews@gmail.com



If you use and depend on the
RNPA Directory

you must keep your mailing address(es) up to date. The ONLY place that can be done is to send it to:

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PSSST...!

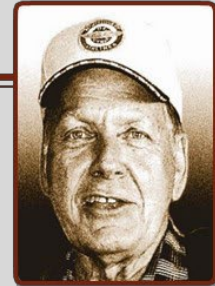


"Heard about the RNPA FORUM?"

Click the "NEWS" drop down menu,
then click "RNPA Forum":

Posted comments will go out to over
840 RNPA members the same day.

President Reports

*Gary Pisel*

E-CONTRAILS-OCTOBER 2020

Greetings Fellow Pilots and Members of RNPA

As you have read, E-CONTRAILS will not be in publication much longer. A great vote of THANKS to Jay and his efforts to keep all the members informed with interesting articles.

The functions of RNPA are decreasing far too fast. Members are not willing to travel like they once were. Part of this now is COVID19, but more so it is the age of the members. In the past we would have 100+ attendees at our reunions and other functions. Now we are lucky to have 40 or 50.

Our membership has stayed steady. We have gained a few new members that have retired from Delta and were Northwest in the beginning. The new members are only filling the slots of those that have Flown West. Dues have be waived so membership cost is not a factor.

We have lost the rapid communications of Phil Hallin and his RNPA News on the internet. We now have RNPA Forum which fills most but not all the needs.

Our next RNPA function is a cruise on Norwegian Cruise Lines

our of Cape Canaveral {fly into Orlando, take a shuttle} There is NO RNPA cost, only the cruise. Total cost approximates that of a land-based reunion. Full details are available in this E-CONTRAILS. The cruise leaves Florida on April 10, 2021.

A deposit of \$100 secures your cabin with final payment due on 5 Jan 2021. Hopefully, travel will be approaching normal by that time.

Currently there are no other RNPA functions planned.

In our downsizing and reorganizing we have donated RNPA funds to the Paul Soderlind Scholarship Fund and to the Northwest History Center.

Gary Pisel
President

RNPA Function



Bahamas

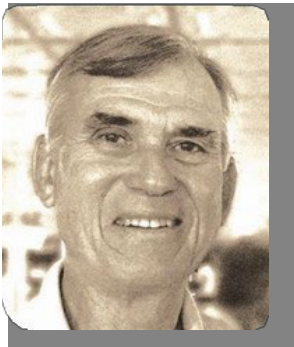
from Orlando & Beaches (Port Canaveral)

Hop from one paradise to another in the beautiful islands of the Bahamas. Lucayan National Park in Freeport is home to Gold

Rock Beach, a perfectly secluded oasis featured in the Pirates of The Caribbean movie. Play with stingrays, paddle board through Bertram's Cove and sip on a frozen cocktail in your private cabana – do all this and more on Great Stirrup Cay, our private island oasis. Back in Port Canaveral, take a private all-access tour of the Daytona International Speedway or experience the thrill of a shuttle launch at Kennedy Space Center.



e-CONTRAILS



Trea\$urer'\$ Report: *Howie* **LELAND**

Once again the good news is there will be no membership dues assessments for 2021. We continue to have adequate reserve funds to meet our expenses. Also, the board has voted to use some of our reserve funds for an additional Paul Soderlind Scholarship and to make a donation to the NWA History Museum.

Please notify me if you have a change of address or phone number so we can keep our data base up to date. You may do so by calling my home phone 239-768-3769 or cell 239-839-6198 or by email: howieleland@gmail.com as we want to stay in touch with everyone. I encourage you to plan on joining us on the 2021 RNPA Reunion Norwegian Cruise next April 10 – 14 leaving from Cape Canaveral. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to RNPA.

[Click here for mailing list](#)



Editor Jay Sakas

Suggestions, always welcome.....



Fellow Readers.....

A while ago, I put out a call for articles regarding the proverbial Bucket List. The response has been great. So great, some may not get into the October issue. There are three more issues to go before I retire, so we will get as many as we can published in eContraails.

The final edition will be a bound edition in commemoration of 50 yrs of RNPA. The good news is that Gary Ferguson has joined the fray by designing this issue's cover page. Thank You Gary.

This edition's topic is the Bucket list. We have some interesting bucket list items from Gary F, Gary P, Kathryn M, Darrel S and Me. A Touch of Africa flying, in the old days, by John Robertson and Nick Modder.

And the usual humor from a lot of you.

Notam....The final edition will include a directory...so update your info through Howie Leland.

Sit back and enjoy the read..... editor, in retirement???? J--



Preface

By Gary Ferguson September, 2020

You have seen one of my favorite quotes before. It is particularly apropos here.

“As soon as a man recognizes that he has drifted into age, he gets reminiscent. He wants to talk and talk; and not about the present or the future, but about his old times. For there is where the pathos of his life lies—and the charm of it. The pathos of it is there because it was opulent with treasures that are gone, and the charm of it is in casting them up from the musty ledgers and remembering how rich and gracious they were.” - Mark Twain

As I stiffly shuffle into the bathroom most mornings lately I routinely see this old man on the other side of the steamy mirror that I’ve been looking at for four score years plus one. He now looks a little like my grandfather, but with a beard. One particular day recently I stared at that face for some time wondering how I came to look like that so quickly. There’s no mystery. The fact is I’m deep into at least the mid-December of my life.

Realizing the obvious concerning longevity, I decided a few weeks ago to try writing a “mini memoir” for my family—partly for my sweet eight-year-old Daisy, our only grandchild. Then not long ago Jay Sakas asked us to submit our “bucket list” stories for *eContrails*. After thinking for a while I came to realize that my bucket list is about as complete as anyone has a right to expect or wish for.

Readers of *Contrails* magazine may recall that I suggested more than once that writing your own obituary, or at least the details, would be helpful to the Obituary Editor. The motivation for such a suggestion was simple: I suspect that many of you, like myself, only learned of many of our peers' accomplishments, interests, hobbies and contributions after they were gone, even though we may have worked closely with them. I frequently wished I had learned more earlier.

A year or more ago I decided to take my own advice and do just that—try to write my own obit. **Let me say this right up front and without equivocation: it ain't that easy!** Maybe it was a dumb suggestion after all. Perhaps the job should properly be left to others and hope that they say only nice things!

So this is not an obituary. Let's call what follows a mini memoir.

I harbor no illusions: The temerity of presenting a memoir as if to say, "Read this, see what a great guy I was," is likely pretentious in the extreme. But it is simply the very nature of memoirs. I have a great many flaws, as those who know me well can attest. I just won't emphasize the flaws! This is just a *small part* of my story, told by myself—trying to chronicle the richness of my life.

I have had more than a few failures, missed opportunities and not-so-great decisions that need not be dwelt upon herein—my choice. But overall I have tried to live a productive life by creating and caring for unique humans and unique inanimate things. The pathos, as Mr. Clemons alludes to, is that I am no longer very productive.

It's important to note here that I am typical of a great many NWA pilots of our era: a kid from a lower middle class, blue collar home that found something better to do with his/her life, whether by chance or design. I submit that we were the majority. And we were very lucky.

So from that premise alone you may find some similarity to my story. Or it may inspire you to write one of your own. If not, there are plenty of other things to read, and you won't be the poorer for skipping it.

P.S. Not long ago I was just about to scrap this whole thing because, a) It's about nothing but what I have done—too self-serving and, b) It's too long. But then Jay emailed us asking, "*Just write something or brag about something you did...*" Hello! That's what this is. Just plain bragging. I haven't mentioned much about my family life, or my volunteering efforts, which should have been more generous, or how others have shaped and molded me. Had I done so this would have been at least twice as long as it already is. This is just about me and a completed bucket list.

My Bucket List is Complete

Reflections on a Life Richly Lived

My life began in Seattle, Washington five weeks before Germany invaded Poland. I spent my early years there through the fourth grade. Don't remember much about the war years except for blacking out all the windows at night, taping the top halves of car headlights and saving tin foil and string balls. My only sibling, a brother, was born three years after me. In the summer of '49 we moved to the Spokane valley so my dad could work as a framing carpenter.

He was only one of several men in my extended family who had something to do with working wood. The primary influencer in one of my future avocations was my grandfather—a boatbuilder. I learned my life-long interest in wood and woodworking almost by osmosis.

My grandfather grew up on a farm on Yarrow Point in Lake Washington. He built his first boat there at age sixteen. It was seen sailing the lake fifty years later. I think those of you familiar with Seattle will appreciate that his father owned some part of Yarrow Point. How much is, I think, magnified by the family lore. I'm led to believe that he commuted to his job as a proofreader at the Seattle Times by sailing across the lake each day.

Boating was something my grandmother didn't care much for, so for a couple weeks each of the two summers before I finished high school my grandfather would enlist me as his first mate to cruise Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands in the sailboat he had just built for himself. One of my early dreams was to live in those islands one day. That never happened.



I graduated from Central Valley High in Greenacres, Washington in 1956, two months before turning 17. Without any guidance from anywhere, and since I had aspirations of becoming an architect, I was heavy into mechanical drawing, football, band and much too light on what I really needed: chemistry, biology and advanced math. I would pay the price for that the following fall at Washington State College majoring in architectural engineering, which was a five year degree.

I never found any guidance councilors at WSC either, but I suspect that may have been my fault. I only managed three years there, still very much a teenager, and spent too much time learning how to drink beer and party like the big boys in the fraternity. I had those three years credit when the entire faculty of the architecture department either abruptly left or were fired. I never learned why. It was probably a blessing. I had learned by then that I was, and am, too much of a “right-brainer” to have ever been an engineer. Had there been such a thing as a “graphic artist” degree back then you may have found me there.

For three summers beginning in '57 I had a great job in the mock-up department of Boeing in Renton (my parents had moved back to Seattle), where we proved engineering drawings by building full scale mock-ups, mostly of the 707. I used to eat lunch in the cockpits wondering what all those switches and buttons did. Not yet, though, did I imagine that I would ever find out.

For the last two of those summers I also worked running amusement park rides at Playland on Bitter Lake in North Seattle nights and weekends. I didn't get much sleep but managed to save desperately needed money to continue school.

Going back to school seemed pointless then, now that the architecture degree didn't seem possible. The University of Washington offered me only one year's credit for the three at WSC. Now what? I found a job in the display department and its shop at Frederick & Nelson department store in downtown Seattle until I could figure something out. My job was to help design, fabricate and install those wonderful display windows on three sides of the store, which sometimes included large live animals in the huge corner windows with the glass removed. “Christmas windows at Frederick's” was a long-standing tradition in Seattle. Turned out to be a great job and I stayed there for two and a half years.

At some point while working there I had gone to the University of Washington to investigate night courses. While walking down a hallway I was invited to a card table manned by a Navy recruiter. Little did I know how that chance encounter would define my working career for the rest of my life. There it was—my first “fork in the road.” He suggested that I apply to the Navy's NAVCAD program. Had I ever thought about being a pilot? Never. Ever.

That just seemed too far outside the realm of possibilities for a kid like me. But the draft possibility was loitering in the back of my mind. He convinced me to take an aptitude test and a physical exam. The test went fine, but there was a problem with the physical: one of the blood tests came back positive, which resulted in a rejection from BUMED (Bureau of Medicine). My doctor explained, and eventually proved, that it was a biologically false positive result and I resubmitted. Another rejection. He persisted and I did too. After an entire year of trying I was finally accepted. In May of '62 I was off to Pensacola.

Beginning the best five years of my life

There I was, Preflight Class 19-62. On May 15th that year I reported to INDOC (Indoctrination Battalion) supervised, and hazed by, the salty old cadets who were completing their sixteenth and final week of Navy Preflight. On day two the Marine drill instructor (those DIs, of course, actually ran the whole shebang) had us all braced at attention. As we were standing there with our shaved heads and wearing ill-fitting olive drab flight suits, known far and wide as pooppy bags, I distinctly remember wondering where the Navy trained their carrier pilots. It was patently obvious that the thirty two of us sorry looking humans standing there couldn't possibly be one of those candidates. But we would soon learn that some of us might be!

After fifteen weeks of academics, marching, calisthenics, swimming, running and the obstacle course we were then the salty old cadets supervising INDOC. It was enlightening to learn how much one could accomplish in a single day.

From there it was another fourteen months to complete the same year and a half training syllabus the Navy had perfected years before. In my case it meant T34s at Saufley Field and basic jets in T2As at Meridian, Mississippi followed by basic carrier quals in the T2 on the Lexington with VT4 in Pensacola. Then on to advanced jet training at Kingsville, Texas flying the F9F Cougar and the F11 Tiger. Carrier quals were done in the F9 on the same Lexington that was then operating near Corpus Christi.

It was during those quals that I learned that you had to look out for yourself, because danger lurks when others may be training at their jobs too. We were expected to accomplish four traps. We each did two or three hook-up touch and goes. After my third trap I was directed onto an elevator, given chocks in and cut engine signals. The elevator lowered me into the hangar bay, a tug hooked me up and towed me to the aft part of the hangar where I had a great view of the whole thing—the first time I had ever seen a hangar bay. The director gave me a chocks in signal, unhooked the tug and left!

After some twenty minutes I managed to motion a sailor over to me to ask what was going on. "Sir," he said, "You have a hydraulic leak. We're going to pin the gear down and send you to the beach." I wondered if I'd have to come out the next time the Lex was there to get my fourth trap. Eventually I was back topside to get fueled and they filled it full.

The deck was still busy trapping and launching F9s. As they taxied me toward the cat I called the Air Boss; "Primary, this is so and so, just to confirm that I'm full fuel." "Roger, so and so." Got that covered, I thought. But then on the number one cat, with bridle tensioned and at full power a crewman showed me the chalkboard with my weight: It was *bounce weight!* I shook my head sideways as far as it would go each direction, afraid to show my hands which I thought may have been interpreted as a thumbs up or a salute. He took the board over to the cat officer, came back and showed me the same board. I continued shaking my head. They both went over to the catwalk for a discussion with someone and finally came back with the correct weight and I was launched. I don't recall now the actual numbers, but I do know that had I been launched at the lower weight I most likely would have wound up in the Gulf of Mexico with a huge ship about to drive over me. I never did get that fourth trap.

The final twenty five hours of training was in the F11: some dogfighting, formation flying (the best formation airplane ever) and supersonic gunnery. No one I ever heard about got a 20mm slug in the target banner. Returning from one of those gunnery flights my engine seized. I was at 25,000 feet with the field in sight. Every Naval Aviator knew that trying to dead stick an airplane would result in either not getting your wings or yanking them if you had them. The choice of whether or not to get out had been made for me.

"Controlled ejections" in that old Martin Baker seat had a slightly different procedure than the other kind and included a separate checklist on my kneepad, including the directive to plan to eject at or below 10,000 feet. I had been conversing with my instructor (he was leading the flight with us three students) for a few minutes but the battery soon gave up. He had lost a student the month before and was not anxious to see a repeat of that.

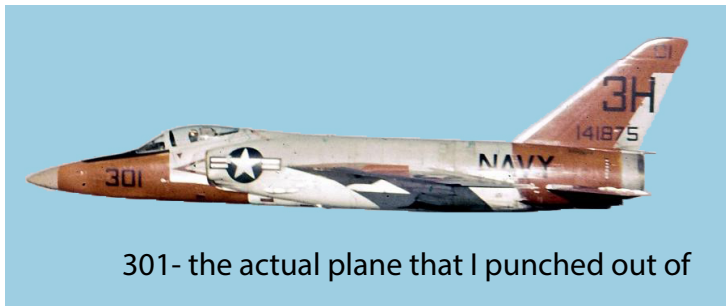


Front page the very same day as the Cuban Missile Crisis began, October 16, 1962! Apparently the crisis wasn't newsworthy yet.

(VT23 and VT24 combined had been losing an F11 a month for some time—much too often with the loss of the student.) I glided toward the field intending to turn toward the Gulf and get out at the prescribed 10,000 feet, aimed at uninhabited desert.

After reading the checklist for the second, or maybe the third, time I got out at 7,500 feet. That old seat had a single 18G projectile to instantly propel it and me out into the blue with a painful back and a very painful tailbone! A helo was waiting on the ground to pick me up. I remembered to do the Allen Roll as I was trained, gathered up the chute and promptly sat back onto a cactus!

The plane was trimmed at 195 kts when the battery quit. With my weight gone it re-trimmed itself to 145 kts and landed in the desert without touching a wingtip. They took me out to see it the next day and we found cartoon-like cutouts where my thighs had gone through the canopy.



301- the actual plane that I punched out of



By the 29th of the month I had completed my final six sorties and received my Wings of Gold and my USNR commission. No big ceremony. Just four of us standing in front of the flagpole after the CO pinned them on.

I would much later learn that October 16th, 1962, the day of my accident, was the first day of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I had known nothing about it. For the entire eighteen months of training we seemed to be absorbed in what we were doing to the exclusion of all external news.

After Kingsville I had some travel time before a few instrument hops in T33s at Oceana NAS. (I was in the riggers' loft when I learned that JFK had been killed.) Then off to the RAG (Replacement Air Group) at Key West NAS checking out in the F4. VF101 had 2 or 3 F4As with two sticks so new pilots got one ride with an instructor pilot in the back. From then on it was F4Bs with RIO instructors in the back. I can't imagine those RIOs considered it prime duty, but they did save more than a couple pilots' backsides.

Since the F4 was designed as an all-weather interceptor we practiced front quarter attacks with the Sparrow missile and immediate reversals for the Sidewinder follow-up. To keep the radar lock-on of the target after “firing” the Sparrow required a quick 90 degree bank away from the target followed immediately by flopping a quick 90 degree bank the other way and pulling necessary Gs to get onto the target’s “six” to “fire” the Sidewinder. We did these at fairly low altitudes—3000 ft if memory serves. Easy to do on a clear day with a visible horizon. But on a moonless night, or in the goo, it could produce the most intense vertigo imaginable. To further intensify things, on dark nights the mast-head lights on the fishing boats in the Gulf of Mexico looked just like the stars! I heard of two newly minted aviators that turned in their wings after apparently each having had a good scare.

Welcome to the Fleet, Ensign

I was assigned to Fighter Squadron VF31 stationed at Cecil Field NAS near Jacksonville Florida. The squadron had just transitioned from the F3H “Demon” to the F4B “Phantom II.” That meant that there were now RIOs (Radar Intercept Officers) for each aircraft instead of just the pilots. Of the thirty four officers I was the “junior puke” among the pilots but just happy as a clam to even be there, thank you very much.

I had a lot to learn. The Navy had taught me not much more than one thing so far—how to fly an airplane. Because of the limited space on ships everyone had collateral duties, unlike most other services which used contract civilians for many services. I always found it amusing that the Navy would make newbie USNR ensigns like myself squadron division officers—the ordinance division in my case. Just guess how much I knew about ordinance. It worked because, as everyone knew, the chiefs (Chief Petty Officers) did know what they were doing. If they didn’t actually run the Navy, as some were known to claim, they surely made it work.

We trained at Cecil for several months preparing for an upcoming eight month Sixth Fleet Mediterranean Cruise in mid November, ’64. The squadron LSO (Landing Signal Officer) was a short-timer and I was tapped to train as his replacement. That was to be my primary collateral duty for the rest of my time in the squadron! What could be better? No paper-pushing or admin drudgery for me! Any time shipboard flight ops were underway I would be either flying or on the LSO platform. Perfect.

My training as an LSO involved observing on the platform as much as possible. It wasn’t long before I was waving* under the watchful eyes of the air wing LSOs.

**Waving is a term derived from the days that LSOs had large paddles with which to guide the pilots by waving them. LSOs are addressed as “Paddles” to this day.*

My mentors were: LCDR Jim Flatley who, as a LT, was the pilot who landed a C130 (no hook) multiple times on a carrier as a test evaluation, and LCDR T.R. Swartz, the best natural aviator I ever knew. (He later got a MIG in Vietnam with a rocket off an A4!) I also logged time at LSO school at Patuxent River NAS learning the details of the shipboard gear. We continued flying from Cecil Field, practicing FCLP (Feld Carrier Landing Practice) at an outlying field and actual operations aboard the USS Saratoga. Although the F4 was not specifically designed for bombing it could carry them and we practiced with both bombs and two types of unguided rockets. No guns though. Yet.

We worked hard then and we played hard, too—very unlike the Navy of today. Sometime in early summer several of us from the squadron were socializing at someone's home near the base. Well into the evening the hostess excused herself explaining that she had to go to the airport to pick up a friend of a friend who was going to stay with them for a few days. When she and her new guest returned I was standing in the kitchen talking with the guys. I was one of the first of the single guys to see her. I think I knew right then! I was sufficiently lubricated to cast aside my normal inhibitions and instinctively guessed that I had better move quickly. We spoke for a while, exchanged introductions and I complimented her. It seemed a most natural thing to do: I kissed her lightly on the nose. She accepted my drunkenness graciously with a laugh. Her name was Ramona Thompson. Mona and I were married on October 10, '64. I can't imagine how much more wonderful life could have been than it was then. Next month she will have put up with me for fifty six years.

Six weeks later I left on an eight month Mediterranean cruise!



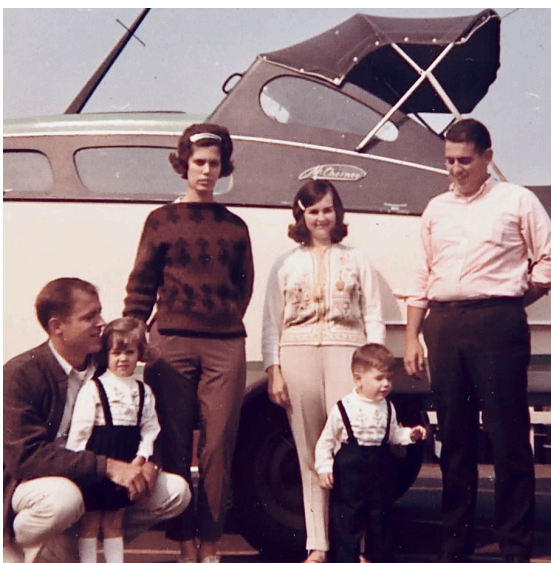
There must be something to the old adage that opposites attract. Mona was outgoing, full of laughter and good humor and made friends easily: a bit of an extrovert. Me: not so much. That must be one, but not the only reason I love her so much. She has been a wonderful wife and a dedicated and devoted mother to our two kids, Paige and Tim.

It takes a special woman to endure the absence as part of military life—a woman of independence. Mona made it work. I was away from home more than a total of two years of the three-plus I was in the squadron.

There was to be another cruise of the same length and there were several shorter deployments as well. We also spent a couple of two-week periods standing hot pad duty in Key West defending against supposed threats from the Cubans. We sat in a hut near the aircraft in full flight gear ready to be airborne in minutes after the klaxon sounded. As soon as they were detected headed our way we would scramble, but just as we showed up they would run for home. We never thought of them as a serious threat, but we had the missiles that could have done some real damage if needed.



"Loaded for Bear" pastel on paper 23" x 17" 1989



Mona and me, my brother Dick and his family

At some point between the two major cruises the Navy decided to move all the fighters to NAS Oceana, in Virginia Beach. I was due thirty days leave about then so we loaded up the Pontiac LeMans and drove from Cecil Field along the southern US and through California and Oregon for Mona to meet my family and friends in Seattle. I borrowed one of my grandfather's little outboard cruisers and we cruised up to the San Juans to show her the parts of the country that I loved so much. We drove back on a northerly route to Oceana. A most memorable trip.

What can be said about life aboard ship in the tailhook Navy that a very many of our NWA pilots don't already know: Exciting? Challenging? Dangerous? Rewarding? It was all of that and more. It was knowing that all the support guys (all male back then) were there to see that you survived—serious professionals. On a black night those yellow-shirt directors would have you taxi the main wheel four inches from the deck gutter and make you turn so the nose wheel took the cockpit out over the water on the bow. Scary stuff.

Safety is an ever-elusive goal aboard a carrier. My squadron didn't have a single fatality while at sea. Not to say that we didn't have some close calls. "Bunny" Brokaw, my regular RIO was with another pilot on the first launch out of port off the number one catapult. Just at the start of the stroke the starboard engine exploded through the entire side of the plane. Bunny was out half way down the track and the pilot got out after getting airborne. Both were rescued. After in-port maintenance one of the track bolts didn't get fastened and was ingested into the engine—a costly bolt. The only squadron pilot fatality happened on takeoff at Oceana without a RIO aboard. He had been in our wedding party.



"Dusk Trap" pastel on paper 22.5" x 17.5" 1989

I was on the platform one night off Mayport getting RA5Cs night qualified when one struck the round-down breaking the fuel cells. It continued sliding down the deck and got airborne in a huge fifteen hundred foot chandelle, flaming all the way. The pilot went in with the plane. The backseater's inflated chute pulled him by the platform face down. We learned later that the plane guard destroyer wound everything onto its prop trying to rescue him. We assured each other that he was dead before that.

We acquired pressure suits prior to the second cruise and got to do some amazing sorties with them. On our way to that cruise we had an ORI (Operational Readiness Inspection) while near "Rosy Roads" (Roosevelt Roads NAS) where I got to shoot down a supersonic drone flying at 80,000 ft. While shore based at Oceana I completed a ballistic climb to 76,000 feet. Where else could any young man get to do things in airplanes like that?

When the war in Vietnam started to heat up some more around '65, the Navy began replacing individuals rather than entire units. On two occasions I had orders cut to join the war, only to have them rescinded each time by the Air Wing when it was decided that there weren't enough LSOs without me. I was mildly disappointed the first time but changed my mind after learning about the screwed up rules of engagement they were operating under.



Decision time, Lieutenant

Soon another fork in the road was looming. A big decision. My commitment was due to expire in a few months. I was formally offered a Regular Commission if I would stay and my skipper verbally promised to get me into test pilot school at PAX River. His next assignment was to be CO of the school, but not in time for my next assignment. Enticing for sure, and the decision wasn't that easy even though I said otherwise at the time. Normal progression would have put me stateside for the next tour—possibly a desk job. But I learned that LSOs didn't seem to follow normal progression. Meaning that I would more than likely be spending much more time at sea than the typical aviator's career.

As much as I loved doing what I was doing I wasn't sure that matched my plans. I observed some of the senior officers who had teenagers at home whom they hardly knew. And I wasn't sure that Mona was all that thrilled about that aspect of Navy life. We both felt that we could do a better job of parenting than the examples we had grown up with. She was pregnant at the time, which also influenced the decision. We left the Navy with five week old Paige on our way to Minneapolis in that same Pontiac.

I never looked back on that decision until much, much later at Northwest Airlines and only then as, "I wonder if..."

It was a great five years! It was as exciting and challenging the day I left the Navy as it was the day I got there. I had to look up my stats: In five years I had 757 flights, 1027 total hours and 302 arrested landings; 232 day and 70 night.

My level of ignorance concerning airlines was astonishing!



I knew absolutely nothing about any of them. I did know that Northwest had a base in Seattle. That seemed appealing. Eastern said they would talk to me later. (A little stroke of luck there.) But Northwest said, “Come talk to us.” I stayed at the Thunderbird Motel for my interview in the late winter of ’67. You may recall that the room doors were on the exterior walkways. I woke up the next morning to find a six inch snowdrift *inside* the bottom of the door. Was Minnesota trying to tell me something?

Strangely, I never did have an interview. Instead I wound up talking with Randall Briezy (sp) while he explained the details for new hires. “Wait a minute,” I said.

“You’re making it sound like I’ve been hired.”

“Yes, you’re hired, assuming you can make the May 15th class date.” None of that is verbatim, but you get the idea. Thirty two years later I retired five months before Y2K. I flew sideways on the 707 (I did get to find out “*what all those switches and buttons did*” after all), and I flew every seat on all the other Boeings and the DC10, retiring on the 747-400.

Yes, I was chasing the flying. Yes, I spent a lot of time commuting. And I covered most of the bases: MSP-SEA-MSP-DTW-NYC-BOS-LAX-DTW. After the first three years in MSP I bid 707 S/O in SEA—six from the bottom on reserve. After almost three years there, guess where I was—six from the bottom on reserve.



Back to Minneapolis. It was then a continuation of buying and selling houses. A total of ten if I counted right. Of those ten, I can think of only two that didn’t involve some degree of remodeling. I took this 1886 post-civil-war large old farmhouse in rural Georgia with twelve foot ceilings down to the bones and rebuilt it.

buck·et list

noun *informal*

a number of experiences or achievements that a person hopes to have or accomplish during their lifetime

Since this was initially intended for my family, I have removed much of the details of my career with Northwest Airlines in this version of this missive. We most likely probably share a lot of those remembrances. Conversely, this RNPA version includes some details that my family is already familiar with.

So I continue with my completed bucket list.

The material things that have enriched my life

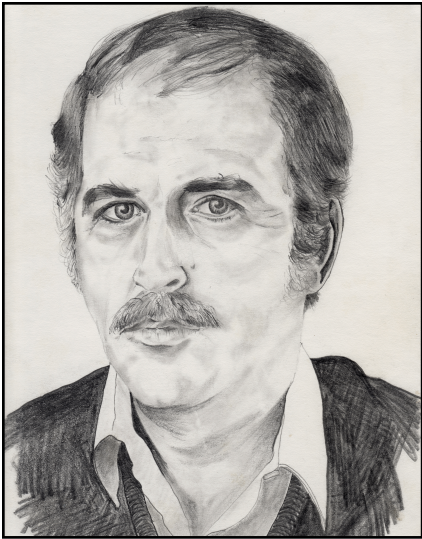
While in Seattle, Edmonds specifically, the lure of Puget Sound got to me and I bought a lovely old-timer—36 feet by 8' 2" beam built in 1925 by the commodore of the Seattle Yacht Club. It had been in the water continuously since then. She came with a slip right there in the Edmonds Marina. One author was to later write: "*Kay Dee II* is arguably the best traditional express cruiser



"Kay Dee II" pastel on paper 23.5" x 17.5" 1989

ever built." I really enjoyed her and had big plans for restoration, but it wouldn't work from Minneapolis. She was very sound but the brightwork needed attention and she needed a diesel to replace the gas engine. I learned a master boatbuilder in Canada did a wonderful total restoration ten years or so later. It was then advertised for sale at \$250,000. I paid \$12,000 and sold it for \$13,000.

Until around the late '70s my time had been spent mostly on remodeling or adding to the homes we inhabited, and restoring furniture. It dawned on me that I was the happiest when I was creating something—making things instead of altering someone else's things. I got a bug to try painting. I had dabbled before without much success and was terrible with water colors. And I wasn't even mediocre at drawing. That changed.



When headed to work one day I grabbed the book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* by Betty Edwards from our bookshelf on the way out the door. I had intended to read it well before that but never got around to it. I finished it at the hotel in Narita, sat down with hotel paper and pencil in front of the desk mirror and drew this in maybe an hour and a half. I very honestly surprised myself. If you or yours are aspiring artists I highly recommend it and consider it one of the most influential books of my lifetime. It's still in print—for a reason. It energized me to try doing something I never imagined I could do.

I had a photo of two of my squadron Phantoms that I really liked but it had a huge yellow streak through the middle. Before the days of Photoshop the only way I could think to display it was as a painting. Why I decided to try pastels for the first time is lost to memory. Happily, we got along quite well.



Tim, age 8 "Self Applied 'Kiss' Paint" pastel on paper 15.25" x 11.5" 1989



"Mona on an English Train" pastel on paper 17.5" x 20.5"

That painting of the two Phantoms (back five pages) is the result of that first effort. It was encouraging enough that I did some twenty five pastel paintings in the next two years—some for friends and some commissions but most for myself and our family. Being able to do this at all satisfied a long-repressed need.

After 1990 I got busy with other things and didn't try painting again until thirty years later. It didn't go all that well and was not my best effort. I soon learned that fine motor skills deteriorate just like the rest of my body. It was a struggle, but I wanted Daisy to have something personal from her "Papa" for her 8th birthday, August 9th, 2020. She loved it. "I can't believe I have my very own portrait," she told her mom. That alone made it well worth the effort.



"Daisy's Playdough Nose"
pastel on paper 12" x 15" 2020

Sometime in the early '90s I began itching for a real woodworking shop to allow me to get serious about making furniture in retirement. I had access to a federal government surplus warehouse where I found wonderful old rusty cast iron wood working machines for a pittance, which I restored to like new.

Later in the '90s I could finally put them to some use. A couple years before I retired we found a property in Franklin, Tennessee to build a house on—a five acre piece which, unknown to me, adjoined a bed and breakfast owned by NWA's Glenn and Ursula Houghton. Small world! I designed a house and a separate shop building to enable me to work on details of the house as it was being built. The influence of the Houghton's B&B stayed in the back of my mind as the design evolved, such that each of the three upstairs bedrooms had their own en suite bathrooms. The frustrated architect in me came out. I even learned how to draw floor plans on my new computer.

This house was the best non-human thing I ever created! All 4500 square feet of it. The shop building is visible in the background.



We began construction in the first part of '99 and moved in just before Y2K. I got the shop going just enough ahead of everything else to allow me to fabricate some the details, both exterior and interior. The shop daylight basement garage door allowed me to load and store lumber. The shop itself allowed me to make things like this 2-1/4" thick black walnut island top, as an example, from a tree that had fallen on the property. I had it cut and dried. I did the same with two red oak trees that had recently died when the previous owners created a pond on the property. I had them cut, dried and milled to make 6" planks for the entire first floor except the kitchen.



Once the house was finished I was finally able to start building furniture of my own design. All the exterior trim on the house was cypress and I had some left over. I made several things from it, including a king size bed and the display hutch for our new house.



Commission work came along before long. One of the most interesting was this very large bookcase that had to be constructed of six separate pieces and later fastened together to enable getting it where it was to go. It was constructed of Honduras mahogany and tiger maple accents.

The doctor who ordered the bookcase later asked me to try something a little different by adding some "sophistication" to his plain aluminum two-story front entrance windows.





Cypress display hutch
Cypress king size bed
Fun little elm table for our screened porch.

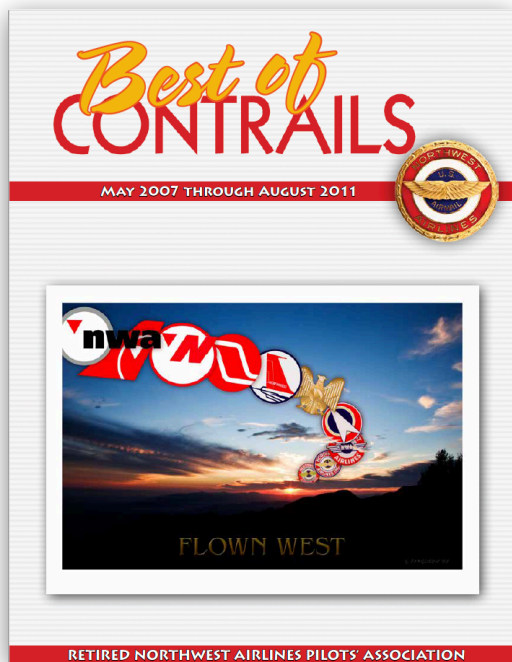
A new challenge. I did not design this 15 ft rowboat. It was a kit of very thin okoume plywood held together with, and encased in, epoxy that I assembled and finished. Without the oars it weighed only 100 pounds! Easy to look at. Fun to row.



At retirement I still had five months before the house would be completed.

I had been able to have so many avocations only because I didn't need any of those interests to provide income. Thankfully, that has continued to be true. I got seriously interested in digital photography now that I no longer had to waste so much film. Of course that meant that I needed to get conversant with computers. And I stayed busy in the shop happily building things again.

Until... four years later I developed a pronounced skin allergy to some species of wood dust—primarily my favorite, mahogany. Otherwise I am allergy free. With the slightest moisture on my skin the dust would cause large blisters. One can't have a wood shop without having dust. Although I had never heard of this before, it turns out to be not uncommon. I seldom even wore a mask! That seriously dampened my enthusiasm. I did manage that little kit rowboat since no wood dust was involved.



This was taken at the Nashville Convention, possibly at the picnic with entertainment the Jack Daniel Distillery provided. Jack and lemonade. Yum! They couldn't sell it to you but they could give it away.

In 2002 we attended our first RNPA Convention in Nashville, only seventeen miles from Franklin. It would prove to be the beginning of a lengthy involvement with the RNPA Newsletter, as it was then called. I proposed to the editor, Dick Schlader, that it could look better. He responded with, "Show me!" For a couple of years we were on the phone together several times a day most days. As you know, I finally gave it up after fifteen years in 2017.

That newsletter, later a magazine, satisfied my need to create and was enjoyable almost to the end. When it stopped being fun, and we couldn't find another volunteer with a similar weird hobby, I had to quit. The most recent forty four issues live on though, and can be found at this live link: issuu.com/contrails (Note the spelling of issuu.)

Side story: Some ten months after the house was built these people showed up to share our home for a few days. Some stayed with us and some with the Houghtons. While BOS based, five of us rented a nice two bedroom crash pad on the 18th floor of the Devonshire Apartments, just steps from Faneuil Hall. Boston hotels were so expensive we decided to buy a futon for the living room and rent it out to overnight commuters. I think we charged 20 or 25 bucks a night. We called it "The Generator," since it generated cash to help defray the cost of the place. Pat Donlan and



BOSTON GANG REUNION - OCT. 25-29, '00

L-R: The Fergusons, Ron Vandervort, the Freeses, the Donlans, the Stinnetts, Pete Anderson and the Houghtons

Another big decision

In the Fall of 2005 we decided to sell our wonderful home. It was, a) way too big for two people, and b) my wood allergy was too serious to ignore, and c) we wanted to be closer to Paige and Tim who had both graduated from USC and apparently were anchored to LA.

Once made, the decision was softened by having taken a pile of money with us from the house. It affirmed my long held assertion that special details, good proportions, top quality and good design have real value. We may have made more: It sold the day after it was listed and had a very generous back-up offer a day later. We moved on.



I said I wasn't going to mention the poor decisions, but...

Just to add a little balance let me mention just three, all having to do with California:

- Buying a house at the peak of price right before the big '08 recession.
- A business failure involving a food truck in LA. An expensive lesson.
- Declining a government offer to buy a home we were renting for \$270K in '96 and is now worth \$2.2M. Mona wanted to buy it. I didn't. Worst ever decision on my part.



So many chances to take the wrong fork in the road

Most of my life I think can be attributed to nothing more than GOOD LUCK!

I was lucky to have found the Navy that provided a skill. I was lucky to have found Northwest, although I might not have said so sometimes. We were all lucky to have worked in what many of us called the Golden Age of Aviation. I was lucky to have had the resources and time to indulge in my avocations, hobbies and interests.

Most of all, I was lucky to have married a wonderful woman and especially lucky to have two great children. And lucky to have my sweet Daisy!

I simply can't imagine how I could have wanted or expected more.

buck·et list

noun *informal*

a number of experiences or achievements that a person hopes to have or accomplish during their lifetime

COMPLETED

I encourage you to write your own memoir. This may be a way to continue *eContrails* for a while. This was created on an Apple app called "Pages" which comes with all Macs. Also available on PCs too somehow. It is not as sophisticated as what I used for *Contrails* but for this purpose it's probably better. A much easier learning curve and an easy to use help section.

BUCKET LISTS, by Gary Pisel



One thing I would really like to do {I am too old} is to be the Captain on the 747 used to curtain the forest fires. I think that would be interesting and challenging.

Another, more realistic, is to take a cruise around the world. An ocean cruise would take well over 120 days.



If I Had a Bucket List

Kathryn McCullough



“You’re going where?”

“Laos.”

It is April, 2017. My friends are concerned. “Why would anyone want to go to Louse?” “Where is it?” “Be careful.” “Don’t get sick.” “I’m worried about you coming home alive.”

I’m excited. My Laotian girlfriend, Nok, invited me to go with her years ago. Her husband is Mike “Snuffy” Smith, an NWA/Delta pilot.

Laos is landlocked, so I wouldn’t be spending time at a beach. I wasn’t even taking a bathing suit. I couldn’t take a hairdryer because I wouldn’t have room in my one carry on suitcase, but I was sure Nok would have one. I just hoped they had air conditioning.

“Bring long dresses for the temples,” Nok told me. “You have to cover up for the male monks. My mom’s a white monk.”

I didn’t own any temple dresses. A what? A white monk? There is so much I don’t know about this world!





“Don’t forget your passport picture for the visa,” Mike told me with less than a week to go. Nowhere had I seen the visa information mentioned.

“Don’t worry. I’ve forgotten mine before, and customs charges a little extra to copy your passport photo,” Mike said.

“What about our tickets home?” I asked.

“We’ll get them from a friend of ours who is a travel agent in Bangkok. Don’t worry; we aren’t going to leave you alone in a communist country, Kath.”

Now that’s a relief. Wait, Laos is communist?

I opened a book on my shelf: *501 Must-visit Destinations*. Everywhere we are going is in the book: Vientiane, the Plain of Jars, and Luang Prabang—the best-preserved city in Southeast Asia.

Nok had everything booked, including a guesthouse in Luang Prabang for \$35 a night. “I

don’t want to spend a \$100 a night for a hotel,” she said. “That’s just too much.”

My husband, Kevin, rolled his eyes. “You need to tell her you don’t want cheap. That you’re a princess.”

“Nok used to be a travel agent, so she knows what a good hotel is. I trust her,” I told Kevin.

I was meeting Nok and Mike in the capital of Laos, Vientiane. Looking at the loads for the flights I wanted to take, I was getting nervous. Should I leave Monday if I couldn’t get business class on Sunday? Would their plans be ruined if I were late? I talked myself into relaxing. What fun is a vacation if you are stressed out? Then again, I never thought of this trip as a vacation. It would be an education.

“I’m sure glad I’m not going,” Kevin said. So was I. My husband is not an adventurous traveler, and this was going to be an adventure.

I decided to leave on the Sunday flight.

Walking to my gate at the airport, I wondered if I would even get on. I was number twenty-two out of twenty-eight non-revenue passengers. The next day looked just as bad. Since all the travel sites like Cheapo Air, Expedia, and Hotwire started selling online tickets, it’s much harder to go standby as an airline employee. The good news was that it would only cost me \$46 in taxes if I got on.



I was nicely dressed, and I approached the gate agent to ask how it looked. “Oh, you’ll get on—you’re number eleven out of twelve seats.” How did I move up to eleven? There were that many no-shows? “But it looks like you’ll be in coach,” she continued. Crap. Should I wait until tomorrow? I had two more flights after Narita, and being stuck in coach on this long flight would be horrible.

I waited patiently, plotting my journey from Narita to Bangkok. The standby flight on ANA that I had purchased for \$82 had a smiley face emoji, meaning I would probably get on. The next leg to Vientiane, Laos had a noncommittal emoji face instead of the number of seats. At least it wasn’t a sad face. What to do? I decided to take a full-fare flight out of Bangkok to Vientiane. I bought a \$100 ticket on Thai. And quickly realized the Thai flight was out of Don Mueang, another airport in Bangkok over an hour and a half away.

I’m always doing crap like this—getting in a hurry and screwing up. I email to cancel it, but my flight was boarding. I would take my chances of going standby and eat the \$100 I had just wasted. The agent called my name. “We had a business passenger cancel,” she said. “Your seat is 1A.” I practically skipped down the jet bridge and onto the plane.

Arriving in Narita eleven hours later, I run for the Bangkok flight. Narita was the hub of my wheel, and I had “spoked” out of here for years. It was like a second home, and it had been twelve years since my last trip. Why have I waited so long to come back? Honestly, Fukushima had me spooked about going here, and the North Korea situation wasn’t great, either.

Dragging my bags through the terminal, I looked out the windows at my former haunt with longing. My girlfriend Akiko still lives in Narita, and I would visit her on my way home.

The next leg on ANA wasn’t so great, but I got on. As an “offline” standby, we are only allowed to go coach. I was by a door, and I could put my foot up on the slide, but it was also near the bathroom and galley. Despite my great sleep on the way to Narita, it was nighttime at home, and I was exhausted. My mood became darker and darker as the hours ticked by. I was dying when we reached Bangkok. There was a hotel on the top floor of the airport, and even though it was expensive, it was comfortable, quiet, and included a shower and breakfast. Little did I know that it was my last warm shower for a week.

I sleep the sleep of the dead in my private little room.



The next morning I check into Bangkok Airways. Despite the noncommittal emoji 😐 face, I get on standby, with plenty of room. (A “neutral face” is all they ever show to non-revenue passengers unless it is a full flight, and then it is a sad face 😞.) I eat a second free breakfast in Bangkok Airways’ amazing lounge before boarding. I am in the

last row, but it is a short flight. The city of Bangkok gives way to rice fields as we fly north. I've always wanted to see more of Thailand, and this is my chance! Laos is just across the Mekong River, and the two cultures are joined in history.

When we land in Vientiane, I can barely control myself. I'm here! I am the last one off the plane, but most of the passengers are Laotian. Customs should be a breeze.

Wrong. There are thirty of us are waiting in the visa line. I'm not last because some people had checked luggage. An Australian lady is in front of me, and a mother and her beautiful daughter, from the U.K., are behind. We start chatting and realize we don't have the necessary forms. We take turns holding each other's place in line as we go and get them. The mother didn't know you needed money for the passport photo, so she went to the cash machine. Every single guy in line hits on her daughter while she is gone. It is funny and fun, and even though we are in line for an hour, the time passes fast.

Nok and Mike are waiting for me outside the terminal. I slept five hours on the flight over, six hours in the hotel, and I've eaten two breakfasts. I actually feel human! Nok is driving because she claims Mike is much too aggressive a driver for Laos, and she is afraid he would end up in jail. Laos' communism isn't as serious as North Korea's, but that doesn't mean an American should do anything stupid.

We find a little restaurant, and Mike orders a banana shake. That sounds good to me, but Nok says no. Mike has an iron stomach, but Mike's mom had ended up in a Laotian hospital on an IV a few years back with uncontrollable diarrhea, so now Nok is extra cautious.

Nok didn't like the shape of the ice cubes (!) in this restaurant, so I order a Beerlao. She is also an excellent chef, so she knows what I will like in terms of Lao food. I let her order for me.

Electrical wiring is going every which way, with tangles on every street corner. The typical Laotian lives on \$1.25 a day. Yet the gilded temple across the street is plated in real gold, I learn, as we walk around it. Nok suggests that Mike and I get a massage while she has her hair done and runs some errands. So much for my plan to borrow a hairdryer from Nok—she doesn't have one! My hair will look like crap my entire stay.

The massage felt heavenly, and two hours goes by way too fast. This will be Mike's and my daily routine—massages under a fan. Mike and I drink our delicious bael stone apple tea, pay our \$15 apiece, and follow Nok back to the van. This time our destination is a Laotian funeral wake, where I try traditional Lao food and drink that is "safe." Nok knows everyone, of course.



Back in the van, we head to the Mekong River. Nok points out a new hotel complex where nests of cobras were unearthed during construction. Living near a river was never considered premium land in Vientiane, so it remained wild and undeveloped until now. Nok says her dad was dumbfounded to learn that land in the country or near water in the United States was more expensive and desirable than being in the city.

There is a market set up on the bank, so we pay an entrepreneur who guides us into a parking spot for three thousand Kip: about thirty-six cents. We pass vendors selling snacks, fish, fruits and vegetables, quail eggs, and cooked Lao food that was foreign to me. “You don’t want to eat any of this,” Nok informs me—as if I were tempted. The most interesting thing for sale, to me, is morning glory. Laotians love it! On the ranch, back home in Oregon, it is our most noxious weed.

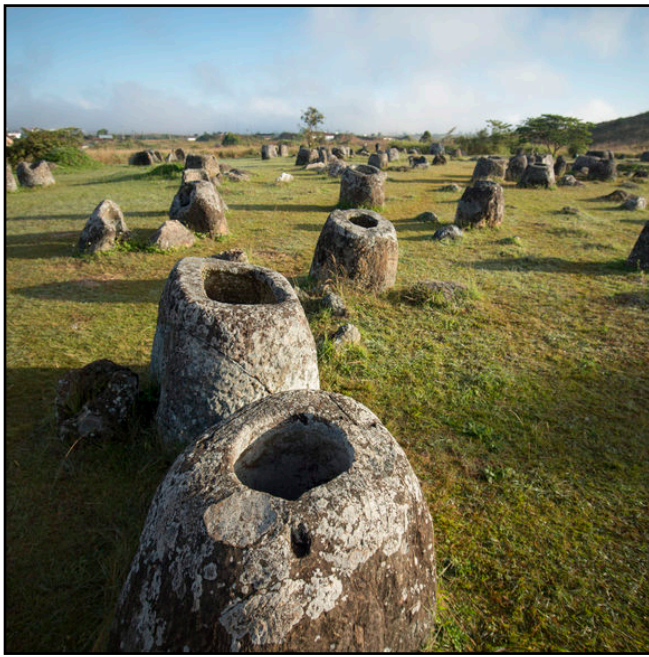
She points at the statue in the distance. “That’s Chao Anouvong, our king in 1828.” The sun is setting across the river on the Thailand shore of the Mekong. Families are playing and listening to music in the nearby park, and Laos’ “White House” was in the distance. I almost pinch myself because the scene is so surreal. I can’t believe I made it to Laos without a hitch.

There’s a drinking party at a restaurant later that evening. I cannot keep up with the Laotians. Every two seconds, someone is toasting, and I am supposed to drink. It reminded me of playing the drinking game ‘Quarters’ back home (which I always lost), or the German celebration of Oktoberfest. Hoy, hoy, hoy!

We are in Vientiane for five days. Every day we go to see “Mom,” and she now calls me “her other daughter.” After Nok’s dad died, her mother retired to the monastery. Mike and I follow Nok as she buys purses and clothing for friends in the U.S. One night we go to a barbecue restaurant owned by Nok’s friend for a classmate’s birthday party. Nok takes me to see temples, markets, and even a theme park with statues of stone depicting Laotian fairy tale stories. Temperatures are in the high nineties, without a breath of wind. My face is beet red most of the time, from the heat and humidity. But I am fascinated, and I love the Lao people—all childhood friends of Nok.

At least there is air conditioning in my room at night. The house is in a neighborhood in the country, and the rooms are enormous. The living room is furnished with chairs set around the perimeter, almost like a dance hall. There is a fan by the entry door, and I dry my hair there each morning after a cold shower out of a plastic garbage can. I won’t lie: the shower is refreshing, and I don’t miss hot water at all!





Our next stop is Phonsavan, near the Plain of Jars. Jim Stuart and his wife, Keak, met us at the airport. Jim was the ALPA representative who helped me out years before when Northwest Airlines was trying to fire me for turning down an airplane in Hong Kong, so I was already indebted to him. Keak is Thai and was a stockbroker in Bangkok. Within seconds I knew why he married her. She's a sweetheart and very intelligent. Being with Keak and Nok make the next week so much fun.

Nok's dad used to own Laos Air, and Phonh, another friend of Nok's, upgrades us. To our surprise, first class is in the back of the plane! When we land in Phonsavon, there is

a crosswind, and the pilot swerves all over the runway, bouncing from wheel to wheel. Jim, Mike, and I all look at each other and then at the closest exits. We think the plane is going to flip. Our hearts are still pounding as we cross the ramp to the terminal building. Nok has a van waiting to drive us to our hotel.

The next day we head for two of the jar sites. There are so many unexploded bombs from the Vietnam War in this part of Laos that only three sites have been cleared. Many of the jars are broken into pieces from the bombs that landed nearby. Mike explains how cluster bombs work as we walk around, and he tells us why the small bombs were so effective and still so dangerous. Eastern Laos was the dumping grounds for unused bombs on the way back from North Vietnam. Three hundred adults and children are killed or maimed each year in Laos by unearthing unexploded ordnance. Mike said that if he had been one of the pilots who dropped the bombs, he would not be allowed in Laos, even as Nok's husband.

I thought I would get tired of looking at jars for hours, but it is fascinating. The most massive jar on the plain weighs six tons, and they are all different shapes and sizes. No one knows when the pots were made because you can't date stone, but best guesses put them at 2000 years old. The locals think the jars were for rice wine, to celebrate a victory over a cruel chieftain, but other guesses are burial or water collection.

We found a hotel high above the city, and it is crazy-fun to be the only patrons. Nok ordered from town—rice and stir-fry. The meat



was a little tough, like jerky, but with a good flavor. The fish soup was spicy and just okay, but we are all starving. We goof around after dinner, posing on the deck and watching the moon rise. We head back to our rooms, where my roommate is watching Thailand Has Talent. I am cracking up. I've never been anywhere like this in my life.

Nok has each day planned, and today we are headed to a silk farm. First, we stop for breakfast, and Nok says, "Pilots sit here." I think the girls wanted to speak Thai at the next table without being rude to me or having to translate every word. Jim, Mike, and I talk airplanes over our coffee, eggs, and toast. After our tour, we head for some hot pools that take hours to get to on a very bumpy, rutty road. There seems to be a new gas station on every corner, and our driver says they are all Chinese-owned, and that big companies are moving in. The sky opens up while we are at lunch. Shop owners run their wares inside as the streets flood with water and herds of cows.

The next morning, I'm sitting outside on my deck high above the city in my pajamas. I drink my "three in one" instant coffee while roosters crow and dogs bark. It is smoggy, but the temperature is perfect. The red sun is rising when a very loud communist announcement blasts out of a speaker. I can hear it echo all over the town, but I can't understand a word of it.

It is April 2017, and we are en route from Phonsavon to Luang Prabang for the annual Buddhist New Year's celebration. The roads through the mountains are winding and narrow with no shoulder. It's a six-hour trip, and the guys need to go to the bathroom. Nok tells them, no, but our driver stops when they insist. Nok yells at them to hurry—that there are bandits everywhere. The guys laugh, but she's not joking. Mike says that next time he will take his chances flying.

Some of the towns are more dangerous than others, and the driver tells us to duck down when we come to them. It isn't safe for a non-Laotian to sit in the passenger seat, so Nok sits beside him. No one had been killed lately, but the unrest usually rises up every six months. "When was the last murder?" I ask Nok. "Six months ago," she admits. There is no point worrying. We are committed.

The scenery is beautiful, and the culture of the villages are fascinating. Small children are everywhere, playing and walking along this hazardous road. Older people are sitting outside their doorways, trying to stay cool. Later in the morning, we see children in school uniforms heading home. Nok says they get a three-hour lunch breaks! A few hours later, we arrive in a town with a safe place to eat lunch. We buy some snacks, and the mushroom chips are delicious. Halfway through the bag, Nok tells us not to eat too many—they contain psilocybin! After lunch, which I learn was venison, I sit up front and take pictures, as the next towns aren't as dangerous.

We have close calls with huge trucks and motorcycles as the road is full of hairpin curves. There is a lot of construction as we get closer to our destination. There are groups of people on the side of the road throwing water at each other and at us as we enter Luang Prabang. This is how the Buddhist New Year celebration begins! The streets are fascinating, and the French culture is evident in the houses and shops along the road. We reach our \$35 a night hotel, and it is clean and comfortable. I shower and change to meet the others downstairs for dinner. We head down the main street of Luang Prabang, and Nok immediately runs into high school friends. Now I'm more relaxed, and everything seems safe again.

The next few days are a whirlwind. We participate in the water fights, eat meals on the Phraya River, and shop. One night we go to Nok's aunt's and uncle's house for a House Blessing. It was memorable because the living room was packed with people, and fun to talk to the kids who speak French, Lao, and English. The head monk was stuck in traffic, so we sat for quite a while before the ceremony began. It was fascinating, at first. We listened to the monks chanting for an hour and a half as the temperature in the room rose. Jim and Mike had sweat pouring off of them, and I wasn't just glowing. I thought the guys were going to pass out. I don't know how Laotians do it. It was hot outside, too, when at last, it was over, but having a beer in our hands helped!



The next day, seven of us head for an elephant preserve and some waterfalls. We don't ride them because there is a storm approaching, and elephants get skittish with thunder and lightning. The workers have been teaching the baby elephant tricks, and they give us bamboo to feed him and his "aunties." The baby wants bananas instead, so I buy ALL the bananas they have, and we take turns feeding him.

Reluctantly we leave the elephants and head to the Kuang Si waterfalls. They are like no waterfalls I have ever seen. Now I know I'm not in Kansas anymore. Think Yellowstone, but not. Each waterfall more beautiful than the last as we climb up the walkways—limestone formations and aqua blue water. Then we go off-road. It gets steeper and steeper, and I slip and slide in my sandals. I am ready to go back before I fall, but Nok's friend, Tony, takes my camera so that I have two hands.

When we reach the summit, it is surreal, like something out of a movie. The tree-covered pool of still water has a swing over it, and there is a boat ride into the jungle. We can see a guest house across the way, owned by Tony's in-laws, where we will eat lunch. I breathe in the fresh, clean air and can barely hold in my excitement.



Lunch is delicious, with Beerlao and my favorite Lao dish so far—blackened chicken. Kids are swimming in the waterfall as we eat, and Keak, Nok, Tony’s wife Vonny, and we go swimming after lunch in our Lao bathing costumes while the guys drink beer. This trip is crazy-fun. On the way back, we stop at a roadside store to use the bathroom. Shockingly (!), the place is owned by more of Nok’s high school friends. They offer us coconuts to eat and drink, and, after checking the knife, Nok lets me have some.



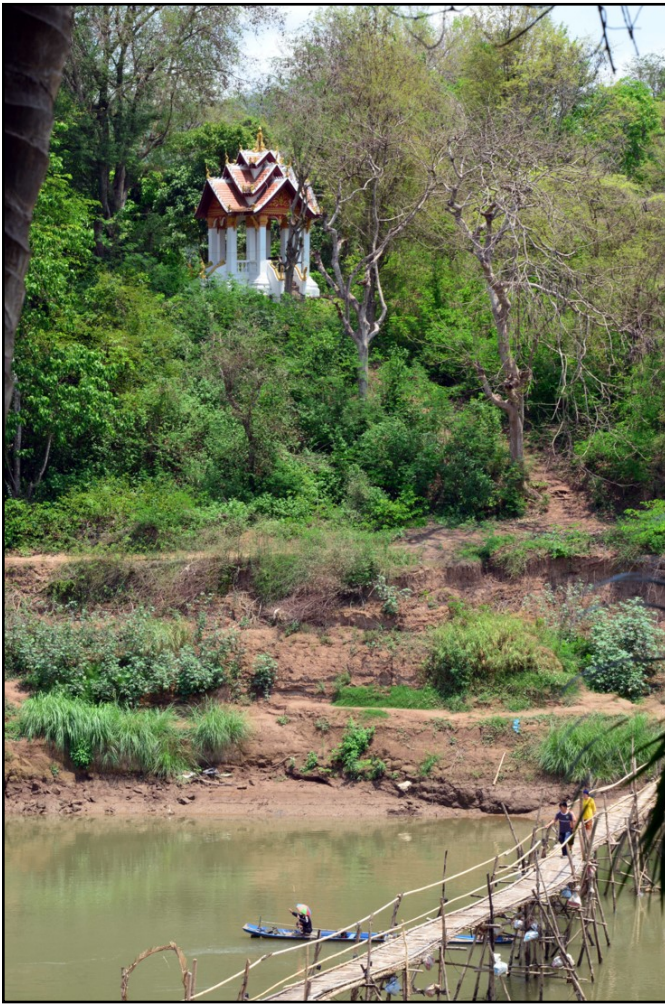
On our last day in Luang Prabang, we rise early to “feed” the monks. Nok has dressed me in a Laotian dress, and I feel a little silly safety-pinned into my skirt, especially since Nok and Keak look so beautiful in theirs. We kneel by the side of the road with our purchased bowls of food, waiting. The long line of orange-robed monks appears. This is just symbolic since the monks have enough to eat. We see them giving the food away to needy children a little later.

Keak, Nok, and I shop while the guys wander. Nok decides to visit yet more friends, with Mike in tow. Keak, Jim, and I choose to take a longboat ride up the Mekong River to the Pak Ou Caves. The king once owned the caves, but he bequeathed them to the people, Keak tells me.

The boat ride is a step back in time. Water buffalo graze on the banks. Kids play in the river. We pass another boat filled with monks. Keak says, “Lucky monks.” I ask her why. She says that in Thailand, monks can’t even drive a car. Shacks and mansions line the banks, as well as an elephant preserve, a weaving town, and lots of construction. It is sobering. The Chinese are building a railroad, our boat driver tells us. There are strip mines and slash burns everywhere. I fear Laos will never be the same.

When we reach the caves, where the Mekong joins the Nam Ou, there are many boats filled with tourists. Jim decides to nap in the boat. Keak and I head up the cliff and enjoy the view. The caves are crowded, but worth the climb. There are thousands of Buddhist statues inside, in all different poses. The trip back down the Mekong goes much too fast.





It is our last night here, and I decide to stay at the river as we disembark our longboat. Jim and Keak are heading to their room to shower. Then they are all meeting me here for Nok's birthday party and our last dinner in Laos. I drink fruit smoothies and wait for them. For the first time in two weeks, I get diarrhea. Nok would have checked the knife, or maybe the ice cubes were the wrong shape. At least I am only sick for a few hours. I feel great the next day as we head to the airport, except that I'm not ready to leave. I haven't been to southern Laos, and I will miss all my new friends.



If I had a bucket list, Laos would be on it.
But only with Nok there to keep me safe.



Stories from Pack's Peak

Terra Moto

July 16, 1990. I'm in an upper floor of the Philippine Plaza when a 7.7 "Terra Moto" decides to move Luzon Island around. Power is out...so am I..out the door. Good news, free beer at the poolside bar until somebody worries about a Tsunami...sob sob...no more beer. Power comes back on.....

.mostly all is well except up in Baguio. As we had a several days layover, we had already set up a tour of Corregidor.

We met our boat the next morning. Good news, ice chest full of San Miguel. Save it for on the way back.Our guide was the Chief guide and instructor of all others. We listened intently as it is a long boat ride out to the entrance of Manila Bay.

Inside the tunnels and everywhere. We end up just above the memorial



cemetery. Guide has us stop, turn and look back.....Rows of white crosses with Old Glory flying in the middle. All three of us lost it...

Moving experiences in more ways than one.

Fred Pack
Pack's Peak Stables
Wilkeson, WA



Dragon Lady

I was a Marine pilot, but on Ramey USAF base. Puerto Rico. I was flying transports then...1958 I had to go file our DD175 (flight plan) for our return to MCAS Cherry Point, NC. as I am walking the ramp to Ops, a hanger door, next door, was open.

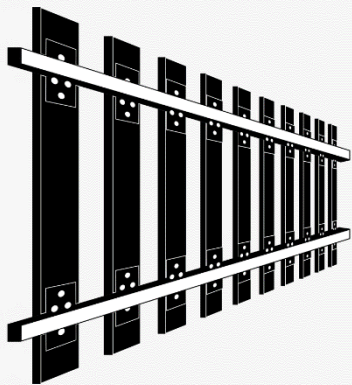
Inside is a bird with " loong wings" that looked a lot like the Lockheed TV-2 (T33 USAF usage) that I flew in advanced training.

In walking around this strange bird, looking up the tailpipe, looking in the cockpit when RACK RACK FREEZE comes behind me. I am ordered to the ground. BTW, I am in a Naval flight suit wearing a Marine "piss cutter" with my cute little silver bar.

WHOA, I realize that something is highly restricted here and this guard had left his post. I tell this Airmen; I was never here and you never left your post...OK? He nods and I walk away.

I found out just a little later that I had had my hands all over a U2.





Nick Molders - Bucket List

I no longer have a list in my bucket because I'm using the bucket to bail me out of this miserable excuse of a year numbered 2020.

The list, now on post it notes, has several adventures that I hope to enjoy. Just about all of them involve an AMTRAK trip of long distance.

Number one on my list would be AMTRAK #5 / #6, the California Zephyr,



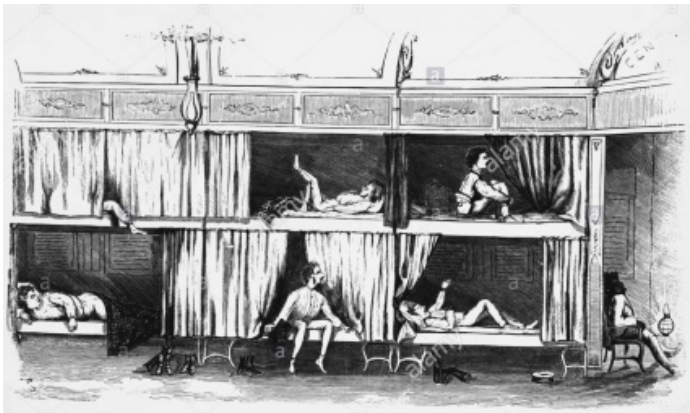
Chicago to San Francisco. with emphasis on west of Denver. Good news, west of Denver is done during daylight. The scenery is spectacular, both directions. To enjoy the full trip, one could stay on to San Francisco, enjoy the City by the Bay. Winding through the mountains takes one

through spectacular canyons as the railroad follows rivers. After Glenwood Springs the mountains become less tall and you can enjoy broad valleys as you head for the Great Salt Lake.

AMTRAK #6 (westbound), approaching Denver in the evening treats you to a spectacular view of the metropolitan area as the train descends through the area called "Ten Curves" as it comes down the mountain.

You can enjoy all of this in the comfort of your own sleeping car roomette. Close the door and keep the COVID out.

Since trains are suffering from a low load factor it might be safe for you to venture to the Superliner Lounge and really enjoy the scenery from the car with the glass ceiling.



If this interests you think about acting quickly. AMTRAK is going to go to three days a week on many trains and the California Zephyr is one of them. Seems AMTRAK has some cost cutting attempts starting in mid-October. AMTRAK has been trying to cut costs for several years on the trains that make money.

Richard Anderson (yes, that Richard Anderson) thought that taking trains off saved money. All it does is reduce revenue opportunities.

With the three day a week frequency, AMTRAK has crews getting long layovers in exotic places like Minot and Cut Bank. Anyway, plan and catch the train on an operating day.



Richard also came up with a savings feature of cutting out meal service on trains from New York to Florida. They could not understand why the load factor dropped precipitously when the word got out that it was box lunches of dried bread and shoe leather.



Another scenic route is the “Cardinal” from Chicago to the east coast via Huntington, WV and the New River Gorge. This time of year the colors will be spectacular. The Cardinal has been three days a week for a long time. Leave Chicago in the late afternoon and be in the New River Gorge at 8 AM.

Other notes from the “Bucket List” have something about the steam train museum just east of Amsterdam. Something about river cruises in Europe and other adventures. Hopefully this COVID nightmare will get over and we can get back to serious retirement and recreational travel.

Nick Modders



Flying over Africa

In requesting stories from the members, I received these two similar stories. Flying over Africa can be deadly, then and now. How deadly? The following stories by Capt. Erickson and Capt. Robertson will explain.

The best depiction of flying in Africa can be found in the movie “Out of Africa” with John Barry’s theme music. The link will take you there.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I7UJXOWo6E>

Mogadishu by Tom Erickson

From December 1992 to July, 1993 I flew 19 trips to Mogadishu. For nearly 7 months my "home away from home" was the Sonesta Hotel in Cairo. I thought many of you might be interested the flights between Cairo and Mogadishu and especially what happened during our first-round trip. Cairo layovers were also interesting. It was a memorable experience.

A Little History

First some background on what was going on in Somalia: The colonial powers who controlled Somalia were Britain and Italy. Somalia became an independent country in 1960. Somalia's government formed by the Supreme Revolutionary Council collapsed in 1991 with the onset of the Somali Civil War. This caused anarchy and a massive famine which became a worldwide headline.

The UN passed a resolution in early December, 1992 to restore order with a coalition of United Nations peace keepers led by the U.S. The outgoing President Bush labeled the U.S. contribution Operation Restore Hope. Five months later in May, 1993 President Clinton declared "the mission was complete" and the last NW flight departed Mogadishu in July.

After the U.S. left Somalia, without American presence, the warlords began fighting again. President Clinton reentered Somalia in August with less force than the Army requested. This led to the "Blackhawk Down" defeat and the final withdrawal from Somalia a short time later.

The USAF plan for logistical air support for the Somalia operation was that the USAF and civilian charters would share the airlift burden. The civilian charters were to fly the troops through Cairo International Airport with B-747's. Cairo International is the civilian airport located on the east outskirts of Cairo. The cargo destined for Somalia was scheduled to transit via Cairo West, a huge Egyptian military base west of Cairo, with C-5's, C-130's and KC-10's.

Thus in December 1992 the USAF had an immediate need for B-747's to haul troops. In 1992 Northwest happened to have some unused B-747-100's which were waiting to be flown to the boneyard.

Our First Flight

Because of Northwest's 1992 slowdown I was demoted to reserve captain in MSP. In early December crew schedules called me to deadhead to AMS, then Cairo on KLM. After arriving in Cairo our augmented crew of five pilots were to wait for the inbound B-747 loaded with Marines to fly them to Mogadishu. This was the second Northwest B-747 flight to Mogadishu. I believe Terry Marsh flew the first.

Our first flight back and forth from Mogadishu was a dandy. For outbound flights to Mogadishu, two USAF intelligence officers in civilian clothes would always give us a briefing on what to expect. For the early flights, they didn't know much. The old Somalia government was supplied by the Soviets with all types of anti-aircraft guns plus SA-2's but it was believed they were no longer functional.....but no one knew for sure.

When flying in the area of the Mogadishu airport they recommended that low altitude maneuvering always be done over the water. The single runway at the Mogadishu airport (MGQ) paralleled the beach. Another thing they emphasized was NEVER fly over the city of Mogadishu under 10,000' because of small arms fire. The south edge of the city of Mogadishu came up to the north edge of the airport so it was recommended to always land to the north and takeoff to the south, regardless of the wind. We were given a "Reach" callsign which was used by the USAF

Air Mobility Command (AMC). Our flight was also given a diplomatic clearance number (DIP) which is required to fly over countries which do not like USAF aircraft flying in their airspace without prior permission. Because of frequent gunfire around the perimeter of the Mogadishu airport during the night, all flights were scheduled to operate in daylight. Because the

center field ramp was relatively small, it could handle only three wide bodies at one time. Therefore, the USAF had a daily schedule to prevent congestion. Forklifts can drive into the C-5's so they turned around quickly. B-747's caused problems because the USAF did not have the lifts to handle LD-3 containers. Thus, the belly was hand unloaded and loaded by troops onto a single flatbed truck. Therefore, our time on the ground at the Mogadishu Airport was usually about 2 hours. The C-130's and Russian AN-12's used the north ramp which could not support the weight of a wide body. The north ramp was originally built to handle Somalia's MiG's.

Our first flight to Mogadishu seemed easy. We would fly south to Luxor on the Nile River, then cross the Red Sea heading to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, continuing south to Aden, Yemen, then out over the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea to Mogadishu. We would lose radar control at Luxor and not regain it until about 180 miles from Mogadishu where we would be picked up by "Cowboy" which was the call sign of a U.S. Navy ship anchored several miles off the coast from the Mogadishu Airport. In between Luxor and Cowboy, it would be normal HF position reports.

It seemed routine and we were looking forward to the adventure of seeing lots of new territory.

Everything was going fine until we were transferred to Aden Control. The controller asked our aircraft type, registration number plus our departure and destination airports. We volunteered our DIP number thinking that would be our pass to fly over Yemen.

Aden Control was not impressed with our DIP number. After a delay the controller told us we had illegally entered Yemen's airspace and he just ordered his air force to intercept us.

I asked what kind of airplane his air force flies and he said MiG-21. I then asked where is his MiG-21 coming from and he said, Aden. We were cruising at something like FL350 and were just passing over Aden. I could see the



Aden airport north of the city. We discussed the situation and optimistically determined there is no way the MiG-21 can take off, climb and catch us if he is just scrambling now because MiG-21 has notoriously short range in afterburner which would be needed to climb and catch us. On the other hand, we thought it wouldn't hurt to see how fast the old -100 could go before reaching mach buffet. We discovered it was a little less than .91. We backed off to normal cruise when we were 100% sure we could never be caught.

We had an open cockpit for our Marine passengers so they knew what was going on. I told them to look behind us out the upper deck windows. They saw nothing.

We finally contacted Cowboy and everything was back to normal. We flew a tight right base over the water to avoid a long final over land and the possible small arms fire.

About 45 minutes after we landed a C-5 landed and parked next to us. The C-



5 aircraft commander came over and asked what our routing was to Mogadishu and if we had any problems. I told him our MiG story and he then told me about their encounter on the same route with the "friendly" Yemenese. The C-5 did not get threatened with a MiG intercept. Instead after being questioned by Aden Control, the C-5's radar warning system indicated a SA-2 radar had them locked up for a launch. That warning scared 'the you know what out of them'. We had some discussion about what happened and some unanswered questions. Did Yemen's MiG's on alert run out of gas chasing us down thus locking up the C-5 was all that was left in their toolbox to scare people? Or was this standard procedure by the Yemenese thus we were locked onto also and just didn't know it because we didn't have the technology to detect it?

In any case, the C-5 aircraft commander said he was going to write the incident up when returning to Cairo West with the recommendation to discontinue flying over Yemen.

You would think we had enough excitement for one day. Not true.

Mogadishu did not have a lot of extra jet fuel so we always “tankered” and landed with about 90,000 pounds. That was enough to get up to Djibouti to load enough fuel to return to Cairo.

Bob Terry, the other captain took the leg to Djibouti while I relaxed in the upper deck. While at cruise altitude, our airplane suddenly made a violent maneuver. I hustled to the cockpit to see what was going on and was told we had a near head-on with a KC-10. The previously mentioned violent maneuver apparently saved our butts. What happened? We were at FL330 and were cleared to climb to FL350 by Mogadishu Control. The KC-10 was level at FL350 and was coming down the same airway the opposite direction.

The rest of our first trip to Mogadishu was normal.

We were scheduled to have two more trips to Mogadishu on our pattern before deadheading back to MSP. I did not want to fly over Yemen again. I asked the other pilots if they had similar feelings? They were unanimous. I then asked if their feelings were strong enough to refuse to accept a flight plan which goes over Yemen. They were also unanimous. I decided it would be best to inform the Company as far in advance as possible about our refusal to fly again over Yemen. To ensure Minneapolis got the word on our Yemen boycott, I sent faxes to three recipients, MSP Chief Pilot, the head of the B-747 program and the SOC.

After arriving at the Cairo Sonesta Hotel, I had a cold one with couple KLM pilots (Egyptian beer is very good) and told them about our near miss. They were surprised we were flying at the assigned altitude in the center of any airway over Africa. They claimed it was a KLM procedure along with most European airlines to fly both airway and altitude offset when flying over Africa. That seemed like a good idea to me so I included the KLM procedure

in my faxes describing the day's events to the three recipients in MSP.

Because of some of the early problems with the Mogadishu flying, the Company decided to attempt to schedule Mogadishu flights with one captain who had previously been there, if possible. That put me in a vulnerable position for I was the first line pilot to go there. Bob Terry, the other captain, disappeared forever back into training. I was on reserve and crew schedules assigned only Mogadishu trips to me for the next 6 months.

After the round first trip to Mogadishu, the remaining 18 went very smooth. There were no more flight plans over Yemen and I always stayed safely a couple of miles away from the airway centerline plus a few hundred feet high or low.

There is one more sidebar to this story. While doing ALPA work, I became good friends with Dan Berg, the head of the dispatchers union. He informed me that Sally Makut, the head of the SOC, was trying to fire the dispatcher of our flight over Yemen. The reason for the attempted firing was when the flight plan was inserted into Worldflight a warning came up never to go over Yemen thus in Sally's opinion the dispatcher should never sent us over this country.

I asked Dan who made the original flight plan? He said the flight plan and the DIP clearances both originated at Scott AFB. I told Dan that someone at Scott AFB screwed up. We and the C-5 pilot thought it was safe to fly over Yemen because we both had diplomatic clearances. The dispatcher got caught in the same trap because he assumed Scott AFB knew what they were doing. I told Dan I would be happy to testify at any hearing and explain how the dispatcher was not at fault. It turned out well and the dispatcher got his desk back with no bad write-ups in his file.

One More Mogadishu "Story"

I previously mentioned the "unwritten rule" followed by "everyone" was always to take off to the south at the Mogadishu Airport to avoid ground fire, even if it meant taking off with a tailwind component slightly over 10 knots.

A C-5 wing commander decided he wanted a Mogadishu trip. He insisted he could never break the 10 knot tailwind restriction, even if it was only a couple of knots over thus he took off to the north....over the city. The word from the Air Force guys was when he returned to Cairo West, small arms damage was discovered in the bottom of his C-5.

Another Mogadishu Story

While on the ground in Mogadishu some U.S. Army guys asked if we had some spare soft drinks in our galley. We had several extra cases. I noticed they had a few Humvees. I said we would trade our soft drinks for a tour around the base for our entire crew. They agreed. It looked funny to see a string of camouflage Humvees filled with uniformed flight attendants and pilots.

I asked for a Humvee base tour trade for soft drinks every trip after that. The base tours were interesting. The ramp at the north end of the airport had about 20 assorted Migs which were in terrible shape. We saw a MiG-21 in a hanger with a ladder to the cockpit. I couldn't resist and scrambled into the cockpit. While staring at the Russian instruments one of the other pilots asked, is the pin in the ejection seat? I looked around and saw nothing, then VERY CAREFULLY got out of cockpit. I had a bad vision of getting splattered into the ceiling of the hanger.

Every subsequent trip we nearly always traded cases of soft drinks for a "base tour" while we were waiting for our B-747 belly to be hand loaded and unloaded.

Tom's Life on a Cairo Layover

Because it was the first time in Cairo for most pilots and flight attendants, they were always excited to see the sights, eat and shop. They hit the ground running to see the pyramids, sphinx, mosques, museums, bazaar, ride on a camel and watch belly dancers while on the night time dinner cruise on the Nile River. Initially I had the same enthusiasm but that wore off after a few "incidents." One was several days after our crew went on the Nile River dinner cruise and the same boat we were on was hit by small arms fire from shore. There were injuries. There was another incident where one of our second officers was having lunch downtown at a restaurant frequented by foreign tourists. While he was there another nearby restaurant which was popular with tourists was bombed. There were many dead and injured.

What was causing this? The consensus of the Egyptians I talked to said Egypt's political situation changed dramatically as a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The success of the Iranian Revolution convinced many of Egypt's more radical clerics and other fundamentalists that if the Iranians could do it....so could they. This led to the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981. Sadat's replacement as Egypt's president was Hosni Mubarak. The radical clerics and Muslim Brotherhood were determined to upset the Mubarak government in 1993. One of their tactics was to destabilize the economy by attacking tourists. Tourism is very important for the Egyptian economy. Egypt was a popular tourist destination, particularly for Europeans.

After figuring out the situation after a few Cairo layovers, I decided to stay close to the Sonesta Hotel. The Sonesta Hotel was owned by Coptic Christians. The security was very tight around the Sonesta Hotel with armed guards everywhere. The Coptic's were not constrained by many of the Muslim rules, so the Sonesta Hotel was a very popular place in Cairo. It was mostly frequented by Coptics, expats and airline crews. It was quite an interesting and lively place. I really enjoyed going to one of the Sonesta's

several bars, talking to expats or airline crews and hearing stories about the Middle East. It was remarkably interesting. I learned a lot.

PS. I tried to contact Bob Terry to get his recollection of the first Mogadishu trip but was unable to find him. My apologies to the other crew members on the first round trip to Mogadishu for not mentioning your names. I've forgotten the names. I might have other parts of the "story" screwed up too. I would be happy to hear from you with your memories of our first trip to Mogadishu.

Off the Charts.....by John Robertson



In 1994, NWA didn't serve the African continent. I was on reserve when a friendly scheduler, aware of my affinity for military charters, called and asked, "How does a flight to Mombasa sound?"

Ashamedly, this geography and atlas nut responded with, "Sure. But where is it?"

"It's in Kenya, Africa," she replied.

Why NWA was flying a charter to Kenya wasn't answered until I got a call from the director of flight ops. "The airfield in Mogadishu is unusable. So, the last of the U.S. Marine contingency will leave Somalia's coast, then take amphibs to a Navy ship that'll drop them down the coast at Mombasa. From there, you'll fly them to Stansted, UK, via Cairo. Another crew will bring them stateside. Any questions?"

At the time, I didn't know enough to ask anything sensible. Fortunately, he was ready to fill in some of the blanks.

"I've gathered as much info I could get my hands on about flying in Africa. Just a heads up—it sounds sketchy. I've left a pouch in your mailbox with the scoop. The flight engineer will carry a comms box that'll relay with Dispatch."

The pouch contained discouraging news: Africa's less-than-reliable radio network; its vast areas of non-radar coverage; frequent power outages; lack of viable alternates in case of deteriorating weather, emergencies, etc. Another

topic dealt with a directive to change our call sign once we crossed into Egyptian air space. At that point, we were to substitute our Northwest call sign (which included a reference to a military charter) with the ship's registration number. There was no explanation as to why, but I surmised that keeping the controllers in the dark about our destination and mission was in our best interest.

Our morning launch from Amsterdam would put us on the ground in Mombasa just after sunset. With clear skies forecast en route, I envisioned nine hours of a sightseer's feast.

My only previous trip to Africa had come some 30 years earlier when my family flew a similar route. In the early 1960s, we'd left Orly Field in Paris on board an Ethiopian Airlines DC-6, and after a stop in Addis Ababa, continued to Nairobi, Kenya. Back then I enjoyed the view looking out a side window and was unaware of the continent's growing shift from colonial rule. In fact, less than a year later, Kenya broke ties with Great Britain, and declared itself independent.

Our ferry flight to Mombasa flew over the French Riviera, near the Principality of Monte Carlo, took a slight jog to the left, and picked up a heading that paralleled Italy's western coast. Elba, Napoleon's isle of exile, came into view, followed by Sicily's Mt. Etna. With Italy's heel behind us, we'd soon cross the Mediterranean's azure seas and greet the Egyptian controllers.

I picked up the pouch for a final review. None of us had ever used a registration number as a call sign. Did the directive come from the State Department? The Department of Defense? Was there more to our assignment than they were telling us? In any event, we agreed to follow orders, thinking someone, somewhere, knew what they were doing.

The initial call to Egypt's Air Traffic Control went something like this: "Registration number 19741029, checking in at Flight level 350."

Their response: "Who is this?"

"I repeat. Registration number 19741029. Level 350."

"I don't understand. Who are you, and where are you going?"

I never answered the second part of his question but kept repeating the registration number. Back and forth it went for nearly an hour—though it seemed more like days. Occasionally, I could hear background mumblings. Were they looking up registration numbers? Alerting their Air Force?

There were times they'd call, and I'd start the clock and wait five minutes before responding. Approaching the Sudan border—and afraid we'd never get a proper hand-off from Egypt—I searched the nav chart for a Sudanese frequency, and tried checking in. There was no response. So, I tried another frequency, and another, until there were none left. All were met with silence. For some reason, I preferred the silence over the Egyptian's displeasure with our choice of call signs.

Without the radio chatter, the 747's hums, churns, and rattles were the same, yet decidedly more pronounced. (I'd received the silent treatment previously in Southeast Asia with Laos and the Philippines. And when a healthy solar flare played interference, nearly an entire east to west Atlantic crossing was absent of any high-frequency radio contact.) But communications ranked #3 of a pilot's cardinal rules, and as long as we were aviating (#1) and navigating (#2), the situation was manageable. At that point, I made reports on a frequency that nearby airliners could use to spatially orient themselves with our position.



Overhead Khartoum, Sudan's capital and largest city, I could see where the Blue and White Niles converged into the main Nile and began its flow north to Egypt before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. The city looked to be made up of mostly low-rise buildings. Several of the arterial roads weren't paved, and the traffic's dust, stirred by a strong surface wind, billowed through lanes and alleyways.

Finally, after experiencing radio silence from Sudan's northern to southern borders, I felt relief when Nairobi's Air Traffic Controller acknowledged our position. In a British accent, he said, "Radar contact. Cleared to Mombasa by filed flight plan."

About halfway between Nairobi and Mombasa, out the right window, Mt. Kilimanjaro's peak jutted through a thin layer of cotton ball-shaped clouds. (In Ernest Hemingway's short story, a delusional and dying hunter sees himself flying to, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*.)

The Indian Ocean was off our nose when Mombasa approach cleared us to the airport. Their radar was on the fritz, meaning we'd have to make a series of timed turns to align with the runway. We flew above a sandy coastline and were over the Indian Ocean turning inbound when the runway and taxi lights went dark. A call to the tower was returned with a harried, "Stand by! Stand by!"

The sun was setting, and the shadows lengthening. We continued toward the field in agreement that we could fly a safe approach to landing. Our lights were turned on, flaps lowered, and the speed slowed. Just as the gear dropped, the airport's white, red, and green lights sparkled at our 12 o'clock.

"Cleared to land," the tower called.

That night, we were held captive at an oceanside resort. Uniformed guards toting Uzi machine guns told us to stay on the premises. "There are bad people out there," we were told.

The next day's flight was delayed when communication with dispatch broke down. The portable radio provided nothing but static, so a landline was required. In the meantime, the plane was topped off with Marine personnel, their gear, and fuel. The added weight coupled with London's foggy forecast necessitated a fuel stop in Cairo. An already long day (mostly night flying) just got longer.

Somehow, the previous day's interrogation about our registration number was forgotten, and our comms with Egypt went unquestioned. Nearing Egypt's southern border, the low-level cloud layer cleared. I couldn't see the Nile, but I knew exactly where it was. Under a crescent moon, I saw white lights outline its banks. They stretched maybe 20 miles on either side, and then abruptly stopped.

Beyond was a vast darkness, where no sign of civilization existed. It's a view I've etched into my memory's scrapbook.

On the ground in Cairo, we were instructed to park as far from the terminal as possible. Only the flight engineer was allowed to exit the aircraft (to complete the required walk-around), and we were told to lower all window shades. This fuel stop obviously came with restrictions: we were granted clearance to land and refuel, but our presence was not to be advertised.

The Marine Major General approached and asked, "What are the chances of having beer delivered?"

"Not good," I answered plainly. "Pretty sure once fueling is complete we'll be instructed to depart. But I can call ahead to Stansted and arrange it for your flight home."

"Do it."

On our final leg, the sun made a faint appearance over London's ground fog and required an approach flown to near minimums. None of us had ever been to Stansted, so our progress on the ground, hampered by unfamiliarity and the fog, was at a snail's pace. At the gate, we were greeted by the relief crew that would fly the Marines home. As I left the jetway, I looked back at the tarmac and saw the catering truck loading several cases of beer.



Tower Talk.....



Tower: **"Delta 351, you have traffic at 10 o'clock, 6 miles!"**

Delta 351: **"Give us another hint! We have digital watches!"**

A Cessna inbound at the reporting point over Manly Beach -
Tower (Female voice): **"Cessna WYXD, congestion at airport approach. I'm going to have to hold you over the Manly area."**

Cessna WYXD: **"I love it when you talk dirty to me."**

Tower: **"TWA 2341, for noise abatement turn right 45 Degrees."**

TWA 2341: **"Center, we are at 35,000 feet.. How much noise can we make up here?"**

Tower: **"Sir, have you ever heard the noise a 747 makes when it hits a 727?"**

From an unknown aircraft waiting in a very long takeoff queue: **"I'm f...ing bored!"**

Ground Traffic Control: **"Last aircraft transmitting, identify yourself immediately!"**

Unknown aircraft: **"I said I was f...ing bored, not f...ing stupid!"**

O'Hare Approach Control to a 747: **"United 329 heavy, your traffic is a Fokker, one o'clock, three miles, Eastbound."**

United 329: **"Approach, I've always wanted to say this ... I've got the little Fokker in sight."**

A student pilot became lost during a solo cross-country flight. While attempting to locate the aircraft on radar, ATC asked,

"What was your last known position?"

Student: **"When I was number one for takeoff."**

A DC-10 had come in a little hot and thus had an exceedingly long roll out after touching down -

San Jose Tower Noted: **"American 751, make a hard right turn at the end of the runway, if you are able.. If you are not able, take the Guadalupe exit off Highway 101, make a right at the lights and return to the airport."**

A Pan Am 727 flight, waiting for start clearance in Munich , overheard the following -

Lufthansa (in German): **"Ground, what is our start clearance time?"**

Ground (in English): **"If you want an answer you must speak in English."**

Lufthansa (in English): **"I am a German, flying a German airplane, in Germany . Why must I speak English?"**

Unknown voice from another plane (in a beautiful

British accent): **"Because you lost the bloody war!"**

Tower: **"Eastern 702, cleared for takeoff, contact Departure on frequency 124..7"**

Eastern 702: **"Tower, Eastern 702 switching to Departure. By the way, after we lifted off we saw some kind of dead animal on the far end of the runway."**

Tower: **"Continental 635, cleared for takeoff behind Eastern 702, contact Departure on frequency 124.7. Did you copy that report from Eastern 702?"**

Continental 635: **"Continental 635, cleared for takeoff, roger; and yes, we copied Eastern. We've already notified our caterers."**

One day the pilot of a Cherokee 180 was told by the tower to hold short of the active runway while a DC-8 landed. The DC-8 landed, rolled out, turned around, and taxied back past the Cherokee. Some quick-witted comedian in the DC-8 crew got on the radio and said, **"What a cute little plane. Did you make it all by yourself?"**

The Cherokee pilot, not about to let the insult go by, came back with a real zinger: **"I made it out of DC-8 parts Another landing like yours and I'll have enough parts for another one."**

The German air controllers at Frankfurt Airport are renowned as a short-tempered lot. They not only expect one to know one's gate parking location, but how to get there without any assistance from them. So it was with some amusement that we (a Pan Am 747) listened to the following exchange between Frankfurt ground control and a British Airways 747, call sign Speedbird 206.

Speedbird 206: **"Frankfurt , Speedbird 206! Clear of active runway."**

Ground: **"Speedbird 206. Taxi to gate Alpha One-Seven."**

The BA 747 pulled onto the main taxiway and slowed to a stop.

Ground: **"Speedbird, do you not know where you are going?"**

Speedbird 206: **"Stand by, Ground, I'm looking up our gate location now."**

Ground (with quite arrogant impatience): **"Speedbird 206, have you not been to Frankfurt before?"**

Speedbird 206 (coolly): **"Yes, twice in 1944, but it was dark - and I didn't land."**

While taxiing at London 's Airport, the crew of a US Air flight departing for Ft. Lauderdale made a wrong turn and came nose to nose with a United 727.. An irate female ground controller lashed out at the US Air crew, screaming:

"US Air 2771, where the hell are you going? I told you to turn right onto Charlie taxiway! You turned right on

Delta! Stop right there. I know it's difficult for you to tell the difference between C and D, but get it right!"

Continuing her rage to the embarrassed crew, she was now shouting hysterically

:"God! Now you've screwed everything up! It'll take forever to sort this out! You stay right there and don't move till I tell you to! You can expect progressive taxi instructions in about half an hour, and I want you to go exactly where I tell you, when I tell you, and how I tell you! You got that, US Air 2771?"

"Yes, ma'am," the humbled crew responded.

Naturally, the ground control communications frequency fell terribly silent after the verbal bashing of US Air 2771.. Nobody wanted to chance engaging the irate ground controller in her current state of mind. Tension in every cockpit out around Gatwick was definitely running high. Just then an unknown pilot broke the silence and keyed his microphone, asking:

"Wasn't I married to you once?"

Covid 19 is not a Joke.....One of many airports Delta has parked 100 aircraft





One Hundred Miles on A Bicycle

All in a single day..... by Darrel Smith

Oh, I had heard of people who rode their bicycles as much as 100 miles in one day but never considered doing it myself. How and why would anyone put their body through such an ordeal? It was slow in coming but eventually the thought of riding that distance crept into my mind.

I studied maps of the local area, carefully measured distances, and made several "sort of long" practice runs. My legs and will were strong and I needed an adventure. A plan was made to ride 100 miles in one day--no big deal--check that "box."

Just after daylight I departed Northfield, Minnesota heading eastward on secondary roads. There was just enough light to enable me to stay between the ditches. I was feeling strong and the sounds of the tires on the pavement and the slight chatter of the chain made me smile. What fun! After a glorious sunrise, the smell of freshly cut hay and the sight of cows waiting for the morning milking made me think of the family farm of my youth. A beautiful day, an adventure underway--I was exactly where I should be.

My planned route took me along paved roads from Northfield eastward toward the Mississippi River. This was farm country! The emigrants from several European countries had secured their land and gone to work. These folks had one thing in common--they were willing to work. They prospered! I passed many, many farmsteads with several tall silos and beautiful crops in the field and took courage in the accomplishments of these strong people.

The sun began to warm the air and somehow the hills seemed to get a bit steeper. Oh, what a great adventure! I had 30 miles under my belt. What's the big deal? I had finished nearly a third of my trip and felt pretty good. I rested a bit, drank some water, and thought of lunch that was a couple of hours away. A small muscle in my left calf had developed a slight twitch but didn't seem to be much of a problem. Things were going as planned.

Hampton, Coates, The Black Stallion Restaurant, New Trier, Vermillion, The Black Stallion (again), Sogn, Cannon Falls, Randolph, Stanton---I could not remember if I had just passed through these places or if they were just ahead. The pain and fatigue came in waves and hung around way too long.

A country store--lunch time! A cold sandwich, a can of Diet Pepsi, and a bit of rest would put me back on track. It only got worse. My body was feeling the pain.

I would get a small feeling of relief as a hill was conquered after a long period of heavy pedaling. This feeling would soon disappear as coasting down the other side took only a few minutes. It seemed that 90 percent of the time was spent laboring up never-ending hills.

The farmers in the fields smiled and waved their greetings. I began to hate them! They were enjoying my torment! Why didn't they just remain behind their damned silos? My body had pain in places that, until that day, I was not even aware existed. Bend over and place both hands on the seat of a chair. Now raise your head so that you can look straight ahead and hold that position for 10 hours. Find an object that is about 10 inches long, pointed on one end, and about three or four inches wide at the other (very similar to a bicycle seat). Sit on that sucker for 10 hours. Maybe you will get an idea as to the most painful aspect of the day.

Wind! When riding a bike there is a rule that the wind will always be in your face. Approaching home with my goal in sight, I topped a hill and took great pleasure in what promised to be a long downhill ride. A vicious four mile per hour headwind took away my last glimmer of hope. My legs were crying for relief but were required to work extremely hard to keep the bike moving forward. The road appeared to run downhill but in fact seemed to be uphill.



I somehow made it! There was a moment of pride in that I had actually accomplished my goal for the day. I could hardly walk, my butt was raw, and I swore to never again attempt such a feat. It's a character flaw--I have a short memory. An even more difficult ride on a two-wheeled torture machine was in my future.

My One Big Bucket List Item.....by Jay Sakas



I was born in Lithuania and immigrated to the United States. It was in the summer of 1956, I was participating in a Lithuanian scout camp in my hometown, when I heard the story. It was July 13th and the scout master told the following story.



Two Lithuanian Aviators from Chicago, attempted on July 13th, 1933 to fly from New York to the capital of Lithuania; Kaunas. They crashed 300 miles from their destination. By this time, I was enamored with aviation and had the desire to be a pilot.

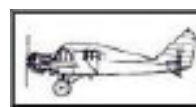
The story intrigued me, and I researched all the information I could get.

I will not bore you with the story, but it became almost an obsession with me. I thought of recreating the flight and just using whatever aircraft I could find to do the flight. In about 1995, I decided to do the flight in the same type aircraft, a Bellanca Pacemaker.

This became the main item on my bucket list. I searched for the aircraft in South America and into Canada and Alaska. There was one in Canada, but in a museum. Two in the lower US and one in the tundra in Alaska.



I found a third. 15 miles South of Portland. It belonged to an old aircraft restorer and he did not want to sell. Using my outstanding negotiating skills, it took me a year before I convinced him to sell at a premium.



Moving the airplane to Kingston, WA., was the start of a long process. Because I needed funding, I made many trips back to my home country of Lithuania, Due to the fact Lithuania had just gained its re-independence from Russia in 1992, not much interest or financial aid was available.

Unfortunately, the aircraft was in many pieces, as it was taken apart for restoration, but never completed. It would require much work to get it ready to fly. An interesting fact emerged during the purchase process. The purchased airplane is a sistership to the original Lituania, their serial numbers are only four numbers apart. Upon registering the aircraft with the FAA, we found that the original registration number of the Lituania was available. The sistership is registered as N688E. The R in the original registration was due to the fact that the Lituania was modified in such a manner as to make it experimental or in those days a restricted category aircraft. We will attempt to keep the sistership in Normal category to make it easier to get permission to overfly European countries. The original Lituania departed without permission because the restricted classification caused problems for overflight.

Later in the process, I concluded that the attempt to recreate their flight was not possible. Instead, I thought I would finish their flight to Lithuania. I was given permission from the Lithuanian government to use a part of the wreckage and insert it in the rebuilding process. Under restoration rules, if you have a part of the original airplane, you may rebuild the aircraft around that part. In essence you would have rebuilt the original aircraft.

In 1999 work was started on the bringing the wings into compliance with current regulations. The wings were completely taken apart and rebuilt, as well as the other flying surfaces. In 2005 the wings were modified to add additional fuel tanks as per the original specifications. We are awaiting the completion of the new fuel tanks. One of the largest problems was that the landing gear of the sistership had been modified from the original. We finally were able to find a person familiar with the construction of the gear as well as the plans for the construction of the original gear.

In 2000 the project slowed down to a crawl as my original funds began to run out. With retirement looming and turmoil in the industry, the project

be mothballed. Some minor work was done but nothing of consequence. In 2005, with some additional funding from my family, the project was restarted. The gear modifications have been made and the wings are awaiting the fuel tanks and will be ready for cover.

The plan was to make the flight for the 75th anniversary flight in 2008. It can be accomplished if we get substantial funding for the project. Estimates were that between 250k to 500k will not only complete the project but will fund the necessary costs for accomplishing the flight. The motor needed a complete overhaul and we were in search of a ground adjustable propeller. We had the airplane and people willing to help. The hard part was getting the funding.

In time, I came to the realization, the project would not be finished. I started to look for a buyer. In December of 2011 along came a buyer from Norman Wells, NW territories, Canada. As a twist of fate, Warren Wright had been interested on buying the aircraft, and I had out bid him. The bill of sale was submitted November 2012 and a dream died.



Warren spent the next four years restoring the Lituanica back to the basic Pacemaker. In July of 2016 he flew the completed aircraft to Oshkosh. The article on the airplane is in EAA Sport Aviation December 2016 issue. I did get honorable mention.

In restoration“When you have the money, not the time; when you have time, not the money.....

PS.....In June of 2020, I got a call from Lithuania. Some friends of the President wanted to resurrect my project. Warren Wright has said he would sell the airplane for the right price.....

Maybe my dream will come true.....

The Gospel according to St. Fresnel..... by Hal Hockett

Chapter One, Verses One through Six

1. In the Beginning, God created the heavens, and the Aircraft Carrier, and the seas upon which to float it; and yet there was complete Darkness upon the face of the earth. And, as I traveled, there came to me, as a voice out of the darkness, an angel of the Lord, saying, "On centerline, on glideslope, three quarters of a mile, call the ball." I reflected upon these words, for I was still yet engulfed in complete darkness.

With deep feeling and doubt overwhelming my countenance, I stareth into the darkness and again asketh myself, "Where is the guiding light!" but the darkness prevailed over me ... Gazing in a searching manner and seeing naught, I raised my voice saying, "Clara....."

2. And God spoke to me, and He said, "You're low power". As the Lord saith, so shall it be, and I added power; and lo, the ball riseth up onto the bottom of the mirror. But it was a tainted red glow, and surely indicateth Satan's own influence. And God spoke to me again saying, "Power ... Power ... Power!!!! ... fly the ball." And lo, the ball riseth up and off the top of the lens, and the great darkness was upon me.

3. And the voice of the Angel came to me again, saying, "When comfortable, twelve hundred feet, turn downwind." Whereupon I wandered in the darkness, without direction, for surely the ships radar was beset by demons, and there was great confusion cast upon CATCC, and there was a great silence in which there was no comfort to be found. Even my TACAN needle spinneth ... and lo, there was chaos in my mind. An Angel from the past, the trusted RAG LSO weepeth quietly unto himself in the memories of my training.

There was a great turmoil within my cockpit for a multitude of serpents had crept therein.

4. And though I wandered, as if by Providence I found myself within that Holy Corridor, and at twelve hundred feet, among my brethren seeking refuge; and the voice of the Angel of the Lord came to me again, asking of me my needles, and I raised my voice saying, "Up and centered", and the voice answered, "Roger, fly your needles ..." I reflected upon these words, and I raised my voice in prayer, for though my gyro indicateth it not so, surely my aircraft hath been turned upside down. Verily, as Beelzebub surely wrestled with me, a voice from within, saith to me calmly, "Friend ... fly thy needles, and find comfort in the Lord." And lo, with deep trembling in my heart, I did, and He guideth me to centered glideslope and centerline, though I know not how it came to be.

5. And out of the great darkness, God spoke to me again saying, "Roger Ball"



for now I had faith. And though the ball began to rise at the in close position, my left hand was full of the Spirit, and it squeeketh off power and as in a great miracle my plane stoppeth upon the flight deck, for it hath caught the three wire which God in his infinite wisdom hath placed thirty feet further down the flight deck than the two wire.

6. And thus bathed in a golden radiance from above, my pilgrimage was at an end, and my spirit was truly reborn. And as I basked in the rapture, God spoketh to me one final time, and He saith, "Lights out on deck ..."

I was pleased to receive an email from one of my best friends, one of the RIOs who suffered (though not always in silence!) five feet behind me.

As I flip through the pages of my tattered logbooks and read the RIO names - Errickson, Smith, Crenshaw, Southgate, Driscoll, Enschede, Roy, Bouck and more - I think of their skill, skill that boggles the mind even now, and the teamwork between cockpits that made flying the F-4 so rewarding.

From: Wayne Erickson

Re: A reading from Navy Scripture!

I have had read this many times and each time it causes me to ponder what it was like to drive an F-4 on to the deck time after time knowing that you had a real chance of making the angels roll call if you f—ed up, and it was all on you.

I ain't talking about the Blue Angels either. I never had a desire to drive the F-4. Although I started out in pilot training (and switched over to NFO) I was always happy, and humbled to ride back seat in the coolest plane there was and trust the lord and the skill of my 'stick" to get me back safe. In my wildest imaginings I can't picture myself with the skills and composure to drive that beast.

Just glad I had had the chance to catch some rides with some of the best pilots and people I've ever met and meet others RIOs like myself who obviously harbored a suppressed death wish.

Fife

The F-4's time is over.....



Emotions stir in the face of this reality. Thousands of hours of my youth were spent strapped into the front seat of the "Big Ugly Fighter." It was there that challenges were met, friendships were forged, and the nation's will was carried out. From that lofty perch I

looked up at the heavens and down on hostile lands. I didn't always realize it then - youth, of course, is lost on the young - but each sortie was a gift.

So, too, was the time spent in the company of greats. I think back on chain-laden plane captains who loved the airplanes as much as we did, those like Ed Oaden and Terry McGinnis who kept aviators going with their enthusiasm in the face of long days that promised nothing but more hard work. I remember the maintenance chiefs who taught me not just how the Phantom works but how to be an officer and a man. And for their caring they asked for nothing in return.

In their countenances, I saw my responsibilities.

So goodbye, Big Fighter, blessed protector of the American way and our hides. We who knew you well miss your class, your swagger, your raw power. Even in the face of technological advances you bowed to no other. The greatest way ever devised to turn high grade kerosene into noise and smoke.

Thanks for the memories. They are indeed the stuff of novels.

