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Tulane NROTC Class of 1955

After graduation I reported directly to Pensacola and preflight training. We had a good crowd from Tulane in the class. Preflight training went OK and it was then off to Whiting Field in Milton, FL for basic flight training. The flight program went well and I finished up with 6 carrier landings. I flew the SNJ and the T-28 during basic training. I was next transferred to Corpus Christi, Texas for advanced training. While there I flew the TV-2, F9F-2 and F9F-5. After winging I received orders to VF-152, an F2H-3 Banshee night fighter squadron at Moffett Field, CA. While there I made two deployments to the Far East. One was in USS Hornet and the other in USS Bennington. Upon our return the Banshees were retired from service so I moved to VF-124 the F-8 training squadron and instructed in instrument flying. While at VF-124 I flew the F-8 and the F9F-8T aircraft. Shore Duty time came around and I was transferred to the Pentagon and the Chief of Navy Information for a 3-year tour. It was a great job for a LTJG. I learned a lot about how things got done in the puzzle palace. I was fortunate to have worked for two Naval Aviators. One was a WWII ace (with 13 kills) and another who had been shot down next to a Japanese held island but who had evaded for several months before rescue. I had a second junior officer type job as flight scheduler for about 40 aviators stationed in DC. I had plenty of flying time available. I usually flew the SNB and T2V. I regularly called my detailer and reminded him how an F-4 squadron would be nice "next job" for me. He remembered my name and sure enough, when my DC time expired, it was off to Oceana Naval Air Station, Virginia Beach, VA and VF-41, an F4 Phantom squadron.

I found enough good jobs at sea and on shore in the Norfolk area to remain there from 1963 until retirement in 1978. During my flying career I flew many types of aircraft but only two types on/off carriers, the F2H-3 Banshee in West Pac and the F4 models A, B and J. I had two sea duty tours in VF-41 and one in VF-11, "The Red Rippers," flying F4s. VF-11 was also my XO/CO tour. My last few carrier landings on USS Forrestal were hands-off until touch down. The automatic carrier landing system had arrived. I made 650 carrier landings of which 200 were night. I served two tours with SAFLANT, a NATO Command. While there I traveled frequently to Belgium, England, Norway and Denmark. My first tour was as a Commander and my second as a Captain. I also did a tour as an Asst. Inspector General for the Atlantic Fleet and one as Operations Officer in USS Kennedy.

Flying excitement: My first incident was at an outlying field named Whitehouse OLF near Jacksonville, FL. At the time this field was in the middle of nowhere and used for night carrier landing practice. The only light showing on the field was a small lighted rectangle similar in size to a carrier's landing area. You can Google Earth "Whitehouse OLF" and see the landing area at each end and tire marks in the carrier outline. It was about 2AM and I was flying an older F4-A. On the 2nd or 3rd landing my nose wheel simply collapsed and I slid 3-4000 feet down the runway trailing flames. The centerline tank ruptured during the slide and a small amount of residual fuel sparked off. After the aircraft came to a stop, my NFO (back seater) and I simply climbed down and waited for a ride. The fire had gone out on its own. The safety review determined that there was an old crack in the nose wheel strut. The aircraft, an "A" model, had been flying a long time so no telling how long the strut had been cracked.

My second incident was in Viet Nam. I was flying a late night mission from the USS Independence in the Gulf of Tonkin. On return, I had a hydraulic pump failure and couldn't lower my landing gear. Since it was night, the ship diverted me to Da Nang which had a Marine F4 squadron. I activated my emergency air system to lower the landing gear but only the left main and the nose wheel came down. So now I was faced with a one wheel up landing. I flew out over the water and dumped my ordinance, returned to Da Nang and asked for landing. My instructions were that I could not land on the duty end of the runway because there was a RA5-C crashed there but I could land on the other end. It so happened that they had an emergency arresting gear rigged 300 feet from

the over run. This gear is designed for aircraft to hook a wire coming from the other direction but they can be used from either direction. The only problem is the short, 300 feet, available to me before the wire. I burned my fuel down to a low state, made the approach, caught the wire and slid out on two landing gear and an empty bomb rack. My NFO and I opened our canopies as if we did this stuff every day. Everything was cool and there was no fire but, the AF fire department sprayed us with foam, lots of foam. . It almost filled our cockpits. For info, foam's basic chemical is blood. Cleanup was a mess. The Marines lifted the wing with an air bag, lowered the left main gear and towed the aircraft to a hanger. They replaced the hydraulic pump and repaired the air tubing. The air leak was caused by a missing rubber grommet that allowed a vibration to wear a hole in the tubing. The next day I flew back to the carrier. Of course I had another hydraulic failure but it was daylight and the emergency air extension worked fine. This pump was a frequent problem during the early years of the F4.

Finally: A week or so later my wingman and I were assigned to interdict the Ho Chi Mien Trail in southern North Viet Nam. We were each given four 250 Lb. fragmentation bombs from WWII. The trail is easily seen from the air as a white, sand colored, highway running through the jungle. We dropped our bombs and as we were climbing out my aircraft was hit and decided not to cooperate any longer. The cockpits began filling with smoke so my NFO jettisoned his canopy. With it gone, suction pulled flames from under his seat so he ejected. Now it gets heavy. The flames came around me and burned my face and hands. I pulled my seat's face curtain to eject but nothing happened. The ejection sequence requires that the canopy leave first, which it had not. I then pulled the seat's secondary firing handle without results. I next pulled the canopy jettison handle but it wouldn't move. I was not too functional at this time and I thought about the end. But, the canopy left and the seat operated normally, my chute opened and I could see the trees getting closer. I crossed my legs (I don't need to explain this) and down I went into the foliage. My chute caught up in the top of a tree and my feet landed on a limb next to the main trunk. I disconnected from my chute and sat down on the limb. I was 80 feet up. I clearly remember the thought, as I looked down, "this is no time to screw up." I disconnected and dropped my seat survival pack to the ground, put my gloves on over my burns and skinned down the tree. The limb I had sat on was the lowest limb on the tree. An hour or so later the Air Force sent two Kaman H34 helos from Thailand. Their names were Pedro 1 and Pedro 2. I learned later that it was their first rescue flight. The helicopter pilots called the area we were in "the land of the 100 foot trees." We were plucked out of the jungle and taken to a refurbished WWII Japanese hospital being used by the USAF. In addition to our burns and compressed vertebrae I had an ileus where peristaltic action had stopped. This is not uncommon with back injuries. They inserted an NG tube down my nose to extract the liquids and gas from my stomach. After my plumbing started functioning, we flew to Da Nang and were picked up by the ship's helicopter. The incident happened on October 25th 1965 and we returned to flight duty the next January. The reason my canopy didn't separate was investigated and it was found that another aviator had been lost because of suction caused from the back canopy being gone. The fix was installation of small charges under the front canopy rail to give the canopy a lift into the airstream.

I have been awarded two Navy Distinguished Flying Crosses, six strike flight Air Medals, Purple Heart, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V", Joint Services Commendation Medal, Secretary of the Navy Achievement Medal and a number of other unit and foreign awards.

Written in October 2012 at age 81