

Full Power Run

Dick Remington, 1948-53/MMI

Perhaps my most memorable experience during my years aboard Midway (1948-1953) was on our return to Norfolk from Gibraltar (I don't recall which Mediterranean cruise). Normally a transit either to or from Gibraltar took 5 days. On this particular transit it took a bit longer. One warm, sunny Saturday morning with ideal seas, an engineering full power run was scheduled. The lone DMS – a high speed mine sweeper converted from a destroyer – that was with us was sent ahead; the plan was that upon completion of our full power run the DMS would come alongside for refueling. Bearing in mind that years ago weather-guessing was literally "guessing." When we met up with the DMS about 1600 in the afternoon, the seas had built to a point where we were unable to accomplish the fueling and plans were made to attempt doing it Sunday morning. Well, as things turned out, Sunday morning we were in the middle of a hurricane with mountainous seas and no hope of fueling that DMS. There were times that even though we were making turns ahead, we actually went backwards. During the storm the DMS was so close to our stern that one could almost reach out and touch it. Even aboard Midway the majority of the crew was sea sick; eating was out of the question. Tons of crackers were consumed. And believe it or not, though the DMS was so close to our stern, with the mountainous seas, from time to time when the DMS was atop the crest of a wave the blades of their screws actually came out of the water. By some miracle both Midway and the DMS made it back to Norfolk 26 days later. The damage to both vessels was incredible; everything topside on the DMS was missing, life lines, hand rails, antennas, boats, etc. One of Midway's anchors had been dislodged and ended up heavily beating the bow, all the gallery walkways and antennas on either side of the flight deck were gone, and there was major damage in the forecabin area including the quad 40mm guns that were up in the bow.

Wow! What a trip! And, by the way, we did have a successful full power run. All was not lost.

Pre-school Indoctrination

David Payson, 1963-64 / RDSA

It was a hot summer day on Treasure Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay under a cloudless cobalt-blue sky. What a view we had: sailboats tacking in a brisk wind on the bay, skyscrapers and bridges standing out in sharp relief, framing the scene. Nowadays a view like that would cost you a small fortune from your multimillion-dollar condo. But when I was attending radar school at "T.I.," as we called it, it was ours for the price of a Navy billet. On the day I'm recalling here – sometime in July of 1964, I think it was – several of us were sitting around a picnic table outside our barracks, too broke to hit the beach, even though most of us had weekend liberty. Being marooned on T.I., broke and without family or friends (girlfriends) in the "City by the Bay," which loomed large before us, magnified somehow by the atmospheric conditions, left us with little else to do but study our radar lessons, which none of us were too keen to do, as I recall. Because I'd already been out to the fleet as a crewman on the USS Midway, CVA-41, for 6 months, at the ripe old age of 19, I was a "salt" among these radar school "boots," which gave me some status, but not much. I had made the 1963-64 West-Pac cruise on Midway before coming to T.I. to attend radar school, under a program the Navy called "Pre-school Indoctrination," that is, they sent you straight out to the fleet after boot camp leave.

To this day, I remember how lousy I felt leaving Midway and my shipmates on the day we got back from that West-Pac cruise. Within hours after we pulled into the pier at Alameda, without time hardly to even pack my seabag or say good-bye to a few of the buddies I had made during the cruise, I had to report across town to radar school at T.I. I will never forget how glorious it had been "steaming" under the Golden Gate Bridge returning to the States with the ship's crew lining the flight deck in ceremonial fashion as we came under the bridge, effortlessly cruising across the Bay, and mooring at Alameda shipyard, Midway's homeport. How sad I felt coming down Midway's gangway for the last time, many of the welcoming wives and family members still gathered on the pier, seabag hoisted over my shoulder, looking back at Midway and thinking what a mighty and glorious ship she was. How unfair it seemed that I had to leave her and my shipmates behind, for she had been my only home in the Navy to that point, save for basic training, and no one counts boot camp as home.

But returning now to the present of this memory on that sun-struck afternoon in the early 60s on Treasure Island as we sat out around that military-style picnic table dreaming about liberty in San Francisco, the radio playing the hits of the time, I recall "Sugar Shack" being on. Then the D.J.—could it have been "Wolf Man Jack"?—broke in with a news bulletin hot off the wire. In a distant place called Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin,

North Vietnamese gunboats had attacked the U.S. Navy destroyers *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, “Wolf Man” said. We learned from him that our destroyers had returned fire and sunk two of the gunboats. We looked at each other silently, contemplating the news. “They better not mess with us,” I remember one of my radar-school mates saying finally. The rest of us nodded in agreement, pondering briefly what this naval skirmish in a distant country none of us had ever heard of might mean to us down the road. And then we put it out of our minds and resumed our lazy day, land-locked sailors on an island in the middle of San Francisco Bay.

A year later I was a Radarman on USS Wilhoite, DER-397, patrolling the coast of South Vietnam, usually 3 to 10 nautical miles out, on guard for weapons smugglers from the North. The Vietnam War had begun in earnest, and Midway was out there on Yankee Station, launching her “birds” around the clock.

USS Midway: 1971 and 1972 Cruises (Part 1)

by Michael Hayes, 1971-72 / ATN2

Disclaimer – *The following is based on my memory of events that happened over 35 years ago. They are from first-hand involvement, second-hand information, and other sources. Some of these events were during traumatic events and my memories may have been likewise affected. Please forgive me if their accuracy may be a bit blurred.*

1971 Quals. — The major event of my first qualifications cruise was the flight down from NAS Whidbey Island with the rest of VA-115. Our P3 Orion was attempting to come in for a landing at NAS Alameda through the infamous San Francisco Bay fog and we had an unexpected thrill. The fog broke just as I noticed that the runway we were supposed to be landing on was at my eye level and to our right. It was then that I noticed the Bay waters just below our plane and the pilot hit full throttle and pulled us up from a nasty crash. We went directly to an inland Air Force base and were bused in to the base from there. When the bus deposited us at the Midway it was bright and shiny out with no fog in site. My first impression of the USS Midway was of its size and how low it was to the water. Most of the newer carriers and particularly the USS Enterprise were quite a bit taller than the Midway. With the new angle flight deck on the Midway it looked more like a sports car when compared to the other carriers. Her new deck was, as told to me, larger square footage wise than the Enterprise’s. Later in the cruise I was standing on the flight deck as the Big “E” was going by us in the Gulf of Tonkin and we were level with her hangar deck. I had always liked boats/ships and this was to be the biggest that I had ever been or would be on. I felt at home almost immediately.

My initial berthing area was right under the flight deck forward and alongside the starboard-side catapult. In fact, the port wall of my bunking area was the catapult itself. I was made very aware of that on the first morning of flight operations when they test fired the cat. I was asleep in the top bunk when I was vaguely aware of a hissing/sliding metal noise whistling by my ears followed immediately by the loudest thump/crashing noise I had ever heard. The jolt was so loud/strong that it lifted me up out of my bunk and I fell to the deck (three bunks down). How I did not break anything is beyond me. I felt like someone should have popped in the hatch and said “Welcome to the Midway.” It was certainly a jarring start to my many months aboard the Midway and I guess you could say it felt like Magic! Most of the rest of Quals were spent getting used to where everything was onboard ship and watching Flight Ops from the crow’s nest behind the bridge.

1971 Cruise — The ’71 cruise started out rather rough as we ran into a major storm on the first night out at sea. The following morning we were advised that instead of playing war games off of Hawaii we would be spending the week in port while the damage to the starboard sponson was fixed. The storm had knocked a hole the size of a full-sized van underneath the 5-38 gun mount. Nobody complained very much about a week in Hawaii. They had to remove the gun from the sponson. It was one of the last vestiges from the original 1945 version of the Midway and it left us with only the two rear 5-38’s. When they practiced using the guns off of Taiwan the noise they made echoed all over the hangar deck. That was only one of the many rather loud noises we became used to as the cruise progressed. The

constant drone of the ship's engines, the jet engines whining through flight operations, the "crash" of the catapult at the front of the ship, and the "crash" of planes landing on the stern all soon became a normal routine for the crew. It was at least 3 years after I was separated from the Navy that these noises finally quit echoing in my head.

We visited Subic Bay, Philippines (many times); Yokosuka, Japan; Hong Kong; and Sasebo, Japan, on this cruise and for the most part enjoyed every one of them. The Japanese ports as well as Hong Kong were natural favorites with the crew as we must have made major contributions to their economies with our saved up paychecks. Stereo equipment, cameras, motorcycles, and much more were purchased at great savings. The motorcycles were not allowed on the ship until our last port (Sasebo, Japan) before heading home. That made a very interesting sightseeing hundreds of crated motorcycles being hoisted onboard the ship.

Naturally our real purpose was supporting the Vietnam War effort. We spent up to 60 days at a time off of South Vietnam running flight ops almost every day from morning till night. Our normal stay off of South Vietnam was 30-45 days, but due to an elevator problem on the Big "E" we were asked to stay out longer to cover their repair time. We were chased by water spouts during one storm, but for the most part the weather was fairly calm off of South Vietnam. We did have to sit out a hurricane off of Subic Bay and took many 15-degree rolls during that time. With our shop hanging out under the angle flight deck, watching these rolls was quite exciting, especially when we had our outer hatch open to watch.

One of the most exciting happenings was the accidental missile firing on the flight deck. As I heard the story, a miss-handled static electric charge check was being performed at the rear of the flight deck and set off the sidewinder accidentally. I was in the TV room in my quarters directly under an A7 Corsair being checked out on the flight deck. The crewman doing that check had just exited the cockpit of the plane and was on its side step when the missile hit the plane in the cockpit and shot straight up into the sky. I and all of the guys in the TV room with me knew almost immediately what had happened as the sound was unmistakable. What we did not know was where the missile had gone and we spent several long minutes wondering if we were going to be blown up or not. Captain Carroll came on over the intercom and advised us as to what had happened which relieved everyone. As it usually happens, the guy that was on the side of the plane that got hit was only a few days from getting out of the Navy (we always called that being short). The last that we heard was he was still having problems with being deaf.

(To be continued)

The Midway Mail Buoy Watch

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

The officers and men of Midway enjoyed a good prank even if it was executed at the expense of one of their shipmates. The prank usually targeted a crew member new to shipboard life and therefore vulnerable to being conned. One of the Navy's traditional pranks at sea was to set the mail buoy watch. The victim was told that the ship was expecting a new batch of mail for the crew in the next 24 hours and that a watch was being set to look out for the mail buoy. I was responsible for just this sort of prank to be played on Ltjg. Ivan Belyea, a VF-21 Demon pilot and my shipboard roommate.

Midway was in the mid-Pacific en route to duty in the Western Pacific in April 1962. I arranged for a group of squadron officers to talk up the pending setting of the mail buoy watch whenever Ivan was in earshot. A few days later, when all officers were assembled in ready room #1 to watch the evening movie, I arranged for Air Operations to call down on the 19 MC squawk box for VF-21 to assign an officer to the 2000-2400 mail buoy watch. Our senior watch officer responded by naming Ivan as the watch officer. In the meantime, I went to the ship's Bosun's Locker and asked the CPO in charge to provide me with a life jacket, binoculars, and (believe it or not) 100' feet of rope attached to a grappling hook. I will never forget

the look on that Chief's face after receiving my reply to his question of "what in the world for?" A big grin spread across his face as he replied, "Yes, sir!"

Fifteen minutes before the watch was to be set, the senior watch officer and I briefed Ivan on his duties. He was told to look for a lighted buoy floating in the sea and if the lights were red and blue it meant that it was an air mail buoy. Upon sighting the buoy he was to go to the catwalk, lower the grappling hook, and snag the buoy. After the briefing I escorted Ivan to the flight deck where a ship's bosun was waiting with the requested gear. After Ivan was decked out and fully in the mail buoy watch mode I proceeded to the bridge to get permission to allow a ship's photographer to take a photo of Ivan. Captain Roy Isamin was in his chair when I requested permission from the O.D. to take a flash photo on the flight deck. When I explained that one of our pilots was standing the mail buoy watch, Captain Isamin emitted a long sigh and then said, "An officer? Jeeze..." Permission was granted, and I escorted the photographer's mate to where Ivan was standing his watch and the photo below was taken.



Ltjg Ivan Belyea, caught red-handed standing mail buoy watch. Ivan was a good sport about the prank and never held a grudge over it, to his everlasting credit.

Soviet TU-16 Flyover

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

Midway departed Yokosuka the end of the 1962 WestPac deployment but instead of heading east for Hawaii, the ship turned north toward the Soviet occupied Kuril Islands. While in Yokosuka two of the VAH-8 A3s were taken off and replaced by two VAQ A3 Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) aircraft. When the ship turned north, complete emission control (EMCON) was imposed, which meant that all ship's radios and radars were shut down. We were headed for a point 100 miles east of the Kurils.

During the transit we were briefed on the operation to be conducted when we arrived at our Point of Intended Movement (PIM), about 450 miles north of Yokosuka. Two packages of 3 aircraft each were to be in alert 5 status on the two forward catapults - An EA3, F3H, and A4 tanker. Upon arrival at our PIM, the ship turned everything on and waited. The mission was to lure Soviet TU-16 Badger bomber/surveillance aircraft out to the ship and intercept them with the F3H and EA3. The tanker was along to refuel the F3 if necessary.

The rules of engagement were that we were to make an in-trail intercept and not to close on the TU-16 closer than 1.5 miles. The presence of the EA3 was to be kept secret and in that regard, the EA3 used the

VF-21 call sign and side numbers for all radio transmissions. Intercepts were to be made 50 miles from the ship and concluded when the Badgers passed 50 miles on the way out.

During the intercepts the EA3s gathered electronic intelligence on the TU-16 communications and radar systems. When the TU-16s flew out to surveil Midway they did not fly directly over the ship but instead flew a 50-mile circle around the ship. After the operation the EA3 crews were elated over the amount of information they gathered on the Badgers. That information contributed to the development of a system, code named Brigand, in the 70s that allowed the EA3 to electronically "steal" the TU-16 radar scope presentation. On one mission an EA3 displayed a TU-16 radar picture during a test firing of an air-to-surface guided missile.

Exploding Demon Wheels

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

As VF-21 line officer I was always between the forward catapults during squadron launches. One of our F3H Demons had experienced a wheel explosion during catapult launch, but we thought it to be an isolated incident. Unfortunately, that turned out to be not the case. A second explosion occurred a few days later. I was standing next to Chief Dunning, the squadron maintenance chief, during a normal day launch. I had my right hand on Dunning's shoulder when the port wheel of the Demon being launched on the starboard catapult exploded. I took a couple of steps forward while I peered at the departing port landing gear in order to assess any peripheral damage incurred from the blast. I heard a groan from behind me and when I turned around I saw Chief Dunning lying on the flight deck with a rapidly growing pool of blood flowing from his right leg.

A large chunk of the magnesium wheel had struck Dunning in the upper thigh of his leg and had opened his femoral artery. One of our maintenance guys and I immediately whipped off our belts in order to apply a tourniquet but we could not see the source of the bleeding. Fortunately a corpsman arrived, shoved us aside, and ripped Dunning's khaki trousers open. He then reached into the wound and pinched the artery closed with his fingers. The corpsman held onto the artery while the Chief was placed in a gurney and taken to sick bay.

When the artery was surgically closed and the wound dressed, the doctor's learned that the chunk of metal had taken a small amount of skin from Dunning's penis. They also learned that a number of smaller arteries were damaged, and they were concerned about the possible onset of gangrene. Sure enough, Chief Dunning's toes began to turn black, and as the tangerine moved up his foot, the doctors marked its progress by outlining the dead area with a ballpoint pen. When it reached his ankle, the decision was made to remove the leg just below the knee. That procedure was successful and later Dunning was flown from the ship back to San Diego.

Naval Air Systems Command engineers determined that the magnesium wheels on the Demon were suffering from long-term stress caused by the overpressure of the 400 psi tire during each catapult launch. Replacement wheels were x-rayed at Subic Bay before being flown to the ship, and we had no more wheel explosions. In both cases, the pilots made barricade landings.

Midway Wire Break

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

I was VF-21 Line Officer during the 1962 Midway WestPac deployment and thus I was on the flight deck during flight ops when I wasn't in the cockpit. One afternoon I was standing by a Demon just forward of the island watching an A-3 approach for an arrested landing. When the A-3 engaged the cross-

deck pendant, the cable below deck attached to the port arresting gear engine parted. The engagement slowed the A-3 to below flying speed and it went off the angle and pancaked into the water.

The broken wire whipped across the angled deck toward the island. Two personnel were in peril from that whipping wire, a Yellowshirt plane director and a Blueshirt whose job was to ensure the wire dropped clear of the arrested aircraft's hook when it was raised. All of what I observed happened in seconds but it seemed like I was watching it in slow motion.

The Yellowshirt turned and sprinted toward the island. The Blueshirt gathered himself and timed his leap perfectly - the wire passed safely underneath him. The wire caught the fleeing Yellowshirt just below the knees, slicing off both legs. The most horrific part of this tragedy was watching the stunned Yellowshirt attempt to get to his feet. He had not realized what had just happened to him.

The crew of the A-3 climbed out of the floating aircraft and were taken aboard the duty helicopter.

The reason the arresting cable parted was that the arresting gear engine was set to absorb the energy of the much lighter A-4 instead of the much heavier A-3.

“You’re Fired!”

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

VF-21 flew the McDonnell F3H Demon. The Demon, like all carrier aircraft, was equipped with wing-fold mechanisms but unlike others, the fold/spread cycle was not actuated from the cockpit. Instead each wing had a switch located in the underside of the inboard wing section and a method of manually locking the wing after spreading which was accomplished by maintenance personnel prior to launch. When the wing was spread but not locked a small red cylinder could be seen protruding from the top of the wing. Locking the wing mechanically lowered that cylinder, which we called the "beer can", so it was flush with the top wing surface and not visible.

I was in Primary Flight Control as the Squadron launch rep during a day launch cycle off the coast of San Francisco. Squadron mate Ltjg. Dick Anderson was being directed to the starboard catapult and on the way VF-21 personnel spread both wings. As Dick's Demon was positioned on the catapult I heard Capt. Dose notify PriFly that the starboard wing of the Demon on the starboard catapult was not locked. The bridge crew could clearly see the red "beer can" projecting above the surface of the starboard wing.

Immediately the Assistant Air Officer turned to the Air Officer and said, "Shall I suspend him?" For some totally incomprehensible reason the Air Boss thought his assistant said, "Shall I send him?" The Air Boss replied "No" and seconds later the catapult fired and the Demon became airborne. But the right wing did not fold and send the aircraft spiraling into the sea. It turned out that the wing lock indicator in that wing was broken so that even though the wing was actually locked and safe for flight, the indicator was still visible.

But immediately after that Demon got airborne Capt. Dose's voice came over the squawk box again. Calmly and coolly he informed the Air Officer that he was relieved of duty effective immediately and should proceed at once to his stateroom and prepare to leave the ship. The ship contacted ComFleetAir Alameda and arranged for a replacement Air Boss to be flown out on the ship's COD.

Two hours later the fired Air Boss was flown to Alameda and the new Air Boss was in the tower when night ops commenced. When you look at this incident from the modern perspective it kind of gives new meaning to the Donald Trump imperative, "You're fired!"

Near Miss

by John Newlin, 1960-62 / Ltjg/VF-21

Midway stopped in Hawaii on the way to a six month WestPac deployment in April 1962. On the next to the last day in Pearl Harbor, Captain Bob Dose was relieved by Capt. Roy Isaman while the ship was ported at Ford Island. The next day the ship got underway for WestPac.

As the ship moved away from Ford Island and into the Pearl Harbor channel I was walking down the hangar deck through bay three when I saw the Weapons Officer screaming at the operator of the starboard elevator to raise the elevator. Midway was making a port turn from Ford Island up the main channel and its path was close aboard to a group of nested destroyers. I watched in awe as the elevator operator finally responded and the elevator slowly ascended just in time to avoid collision with the outboard line of destroyers.

Capt. Isaman had just walked out onto the starboard wing of the bridge and witnessed the near miss. He later told me that his one thought during those brief but terrifying seconds was that his tour as the C.O. of an aircraft carrier would be the shortest on record.

As it was, the DesDiv Commander sent a rather nasty message to Midway complaining about the ship's bow waves that caused some minor damage as it passed close by on its way out of the harbor.

Faulty Radar

by Jim Daugherty, 1971-73 / YN/X-Division

During the 1972 Vietnam WESTPAC (can't remember the exact date), the ship was pulling out of Subic Bay, Philippines, heading back to Vietnam. Usually we got underway early in the morning, around 0800 and would be back dropping bombs the next afternoon. So we had a day and a half to recover from our liberty in Olongapo before going back on the line.

We had left the carrier pier in Cubi Point and were making our way through the bay and out to sea when suddenly the word came over the IMC that the ship was preparing to drop the anchor and soon we were at anchor about half way between the carrier pier and Grande Island.

The Captain got on the IMC and said that one of the radar antennas had fallen over at about a 45-degree angle and might drop down onto the flight deck. They had to move all the planes out of that area. The XO and I suppose an engineer type climbed up and looked at the radar. It was highest radar antenna, just above the island. I guess they decided that it had to be removed/fixed before we could go to sea.

So we sat there in the middle of Subic Bay. After a while the Captain got back on the IMC and informed us that we were going to wait in the middle of the bay while they moved all the ships off of the main pier (I believe Alpha pier) on the Subic side of the bay. It was the only pier with a crane that could reach that high. Well, there were a lot of ships moored at the pier, some 2-3 deep and it took most of the morning for the tug boats to move them.

Then they moved us up to the pier and the Captain said we might get one more night of liberty! Big cheer from the crew. But it was short lived. The shipyard did not take long to remove the antenna and soon after that the Captain announced that the high brass had decided we didn't really need that radar system, as the small boys around us could provide it for us. I believe it was air search and wasn't needed for flight operations. So the high brass told us to continue on our way and during our next inport in Subic Bay they would replace it. Big moan from the crew.

Our next inport visit was great. We spent the whole inport period at the pier in Subic; we could walk to the Main Gate and almost everywhere. No fighting/waiting for a taxis or bus to go to the Main Gate.

The snipes were happy as it was the only time during the 11 month WESTPAC that they got to go cold iron with shore power!

Crash Crew

by Stephen Douglas Hayes, 1954-55 / AB2/V-1

December 1954—USS Midway left Jacksonville, Florida, for Cape Town, South Africa. It was snowing when we left. We crossed the equator on 1/19, spent three lovely days in Cape Town, then deadheaded to Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and then Singapore. Before we could get there we were summoned to the Korean coast (The Princeton lost a screw).

One afternoon my buddy Red and I, both of us red shirts in the crash crew, were standing in front of the island waiting the return of a single plane that was towing an aerial target. Usually, to recover the target, it would be dropped over the bow of one of our destroyers. This day the air boss decided to have the target dropped onto the flight deck. Red and I were apprised of this event when this long nylon leader came floating down at our feet, then the air boss instructed Red and me to grab hold of that line, which we did. Almost immediately Red yelled at me to drop the line. He could see the target disappearing over the fantail into the Sea of Japan. Before I could let it go, the target hit the water (we were doing at least 30 knots), and the line tore out of my hands, ripping the skin off as it went.

I looked over to Red, who was standing next to the air boss, when, all of a sudden, he was launched twenty feet into the air, and then crashed down onto the deck. The buckle at the end of the line had hit him in the leg, shattering his tibia. The corpsmen tended to us, and the last I ever saw of Red was when they lowered him over the side to a destroyer to get him to the naval hospital on Japan. His name was Ernest T. Carey and he was from Tewksbury, Mass. If anyone has any information about him, please contact me at sandy.hayes@gmail.com.

After this cruise, the Midway went to Washington to be refitted with a cantilevered deck. Incidentally, Al Tschaeche was also on that cruise. I served on four carriers—Block Island, Leyte, Midway and Philippine Sea. Are those flight decks still as dangerous?

Jet Hit Radome

Al Tschaeche, 1954-55 ET/ OE Division

I was in CIC fixing a radar repeater. The radio reported one of our jets had lost most of its hydraulics and was trying to land. I wanted to watch so I went up to the platform aft of the stack on the 04 level. A telephone talker was there with about a mile of phone wire on the deck. He said the jet had lost *all* hydraulics. It was headed straight for us about 300 yards astern. There was nothing between us and the jet but the flight deck mobile crane.

The talker ran forward along the starboard catwalk. I started along the port side – got all tangled up in the cord – couldn't move.

The jet poured on the coal and roared up over the stack. Then everything was still. I saw parts of something floating down to the water and finally got to the port rail. There was nothing in the water but a big greenish-yellow stain. The jet had stalled and augered in. No sign of the pilot. I looked at the mast and saw the radome at the top of the mast was gone. The jet hit it before stalling. The pieces were what I saw floating down into the ocean.

Piping Aboard

William Michael McGee, 1958-59 BM3/1st Division

Tw was while standing a bridge watch, 1959, steaming in the Western Pacific. I was keeping an eye on the helmsman, phone talker and the rest of my space serving as the Bosn Mate of the watch. "The Captain ordered... "Bos'n, pass the word...China Arriving." I did.

It was a gray morning, and as I peered down on the flight deck, I observed Admiral Harry Hopwood and several other dignitaries greeting Chaing Kai Chek for important discussions.

Midway served.

That was one of my most vivid memories of the time I served in this crew. Over fifty years have passed and our Navy has had to learn a great deal about how to cope and deal with the results of insurgencies worldwide.

Have we?

Midway Veterans, send your Midway Memories to minandave@charter.net.

Coffee With Nimitz

By Rick Setlowe, 1957-59, Lt.jg, Ops, CIC Air Controller

In 1964 I had coffee with Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the man who had commanded all our Navy forces in the Pacific during World War II, at his mansion on Treasure Island.

My entree to Nimitz, in effect, was that I had served aboard Midway and specifically my c.o. had been the legendary Captain John T. Blackburn.

At the time I was a staff writer for the San Francisco Examiner, and the interview—if that's what it was—was “off the record.” But now that all the principals have passed away, I feel I have been released from that pledge.



The assignment began in my editor Bill Hall's office. “Our esteemed publisher is a Captain in the Navy Reserve, and at a Navy League dinner he met Admiral Nimitz,” Bill detailed. “He strongly suggested that we do a story and profile of Nimitz.”

Retired Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Supreme Commander of all Naval Forces During World War Two

A main attraction of the Examiner's Sunday magazine section was in-depth profiles of various San Francisco newsmakers and celebrities. “Your name came up as the writer.”

I had recently been nominated for a journalism award for one of my stories, and it was generally known that I had been an officer aboard the Midway.

The Midway was then a big deal in San Francisco. If you commuted across the Golden Gate Bridge, the Oakland Bay Bridge, or up the Bayshore Freeway, the

sight of the giant majestic warship loaded with jet aircraft sailing into port or out to sea across the Bay and under the Golden Gate was as stirring as your morning Irish coffee or afternoon martini.

“Nimitz' mansion is on Yerba Buena Island,” I noted. Yerba Buena was the rocky scenic anchor of the Oakland Bridge to which the flat landfill of the Treasure Island Navy base was attached. When Midway was worked on at the Hunters Point Shipyard, I had been assigned temporary duty on Shore Patrol at T.I. Each evening, on our way to check out various off-limits dens-of-iniquity in Oakland and San Francisco, I and the burly Marine sergeant who was my partner did a drive-by of the senior officers' residences.

“Terrific!” Bill exclaimed. “We have an inside man.”

I promptly made contact through official Navy PIO channels. Two days later I was informed, Adm. Nimitz did not give personal interviews.

Midway Memories - Stories of the Men from the USS Midway Veterans Association

“You’re a reporter,” Bill declared. “Are you going to take that as an answer?” In WWII Bill had been an Army captain on Omaha Beach at Normandy. He honored his service, but had little patience for military protocol.

The next morning I drove up to the gate at Treasure Island, presented my officer’s ID, and was smartly saluted through by the Marine guard.

I drove straight to Nimitz’s home and knocked on the door. A Filipino attendant in white livery opened it. I presented my press card and briefly explained that I was there at the request of my publisher who was an acquaintance of Admiral Nimitz.

The attendant took my card and closed the door. When it opened again after a few minutes, there was Nimitz.

In the recent Hollywood epic “Midway” Woody Harrelson plays Nimitz. In the 1976 blockbuster Henry Fonda portrayed him. Neither quite captured the gravitas of the man who had taken command of the Pacific fleet the day after the flaming disaster of Pearl Harbor and orchestrated the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay four years later.

The man at the door, dressed in civilian clothes, was white-hair, tall, handsome—more striking than the movie stars that had created his imitations. “I sent word to your publisher I don’t give personal interviews. How’d you get on base?”

“I used my officer I.D. I served aboard the Midway...” Then I added the magic password...”under Tom Blackburn.”

Tom Blackburn, legendary leader of WWII’s Jolly Rogers squadron, shown here on the bridge of Midway. He was Midway’s C.O. from 1958-59

That definitely caught Nimitz’ interest. He looked me over, then in a friendly voice, “Come in. Have some coffee, but this is all off the record. No interview.”

I was thrilled. “Yes sir!”

“So you served with Tom Blackburn?”

Blackburn had commanded the Navy’s first Corsair fighter squadron, the legendary Jolly Rogers with the pirates’ skull and crossbones insignia emblazoned on their planes. In the battle for the Solomon Islands, they shot down more enemy aircraft than any other squadron in the war.

Blackburn was awarded the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Air Medal with 2 gold stars. A multi-ace himself, he had trained and commanded a squadron of aces.



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After the war he was one of the Navy's first jet pilots, the Midway's first air group commander, and the very first pilot to land aboard the newly launched carrier, then the largest ship in the world.

When I served under him in 1958-59, Captain Blackburn was the c .o. of Midway—the flagship during the brink-of-nuclear-war crisis in the Taiwan Straits.

“Yes sir. He's now growing wine grapes and breeding Golden Retrievers up in Napa Valley.”

Nimitz seemed surprised. “Are you in touch with him?”

“I had lunch with his son Mark recently.” Mark had not followed his father and grandfather to Annapolis, but had attended Yale and had writing ambitions, which had brought him to the Examiner, then the Monarch of the Dailies in a literary San Francisco.

Looking back, I had had perhaps more contact with Blackburn than most junior officers aboard. As an operations officer and air controller who worked around the clock when at sea, my collateral duty in port was Public Information Officer. On occasion I conferred directly with the c.o. And I had doubled-dated with his pretty daughter Pattie and been a guest for cocktails at his home.

But there were officers aboard whose careers had been terminated by run-ins with him, and others simply terrified of him.

Still, he treated me with a certain tolerance, even humor, perhaps because I was closer to his son's age, and did not plan to make the Navy my career, yet did my job with a certain diligence.

I briefly sketched this, then noted, “He retired when he was passed over for admiral...They didn't trust him.” It was a phrase too much. But perhaps the brash young reporter was trying to stir Nimitz.

“And you would know that how?” There was a sharp edge to his voice that even a half century later I still hear.

“A friend of mine's father was on the selection board.”

Now things really got tense. Nimitz might have ordered me to reveal who that was. And I would have respectfully declined. I was no longer in the Navy and now a reporter. And I didn't want Nimitz calling the father to tell him to silence his son, an Annapolis grad and career officer.

But now, as noted, everyone has heard Taps, and for the record my source was George Anderson III. His father George Anderson Jr. was then the Chief of Naval Operations, and his son—my confidant--was a FJ-4 Fury pilot who had carrier qualified aboard Midway. His two closest friends had been buddies of mine in flight school, and they had both been killed in mishaps. In that tragedy, George III and I had bonded.

Blackburn's being passed over for admiral at the time had been a matter of great curiosity. And George had discussed it with his own father. Not only was Blackburn awesomely decorated and experienced, both his father and brother were admirals. But his intemperate drinking and recklessness were not secret.

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One time aboard Midway, Blackburn had insisted on flying an F8 Crusader—then the hottest plane in the fleet—in which he was not qualified. He essentially lost control, and almost consciousness, but landed, visibly beaten up, black-eyed, and face bloodied by the violent G-forces his heavy hand had unleashed.

And he had angrily and publicly berated another officer on the flight desk and ordered him off the ship for an entirely personal matter. Senior officers aboard felt compelled to intervene.

In the age of the Cuban Missile Crisis and nuclear MADness—Mutually Assured Destruction—the top gun of Guadalcanal was not trusted.

Years later it was all a matter of record. In his autobiographical “The Jolly Rogers,” published in 1989, Tom Blackburn admitted, “By mid-1962, the Navy sensibly decided that it didn’t need an Admiral who could not handle his booze.”

In his excellent and authoritative “Midway Magic,” published in 2004, military historian Scott McGaugh, a founding director of the Midway Museum, described Blackburn as a “hard-charging, risk-taking invincible aviator who lived for today and spit on tomorrow, often with a drink in his hand at sunset.”



But in 1964, my comment to Admiral Nimitz was, well, indiscreet. I attempted to change the subject. “What do you do to occupy yourself now?”

Nimitz practicing with his .45

As a five star Fleet Admiral, Nimitz officially remained on active duty for the rest of his life, with full pay and benefits. “I have a shooting range out back, and I practice with a .45.”

The .45 had been my sidearm aboard Midway on foreign in-port officer-of-the-desk watches, security, and Shore Party training. But I had difficulty hitting a barn door. Historically, the pistol was designed for blunt, brutal stopping power against sword-wielding Moro tribesmen in 1900 in hand-to-hand Philippine jungle combat.

Nimitz was amused by my trivia about the .45, imparted to me by Marine 1st Lt. Jim Sheehan, my Midway small arms trainer.

“Yes, it takes some practice as a target pistol,” Nimitz agreed.

It struck me as curious that the admiral who had commanded the greatest flotilla of firepower the world had ever seen and no doubt had a direct hand in the atomic attacks on the Japanese ports of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was now practicing to master a .45.

“Here, I don’t want you to go away empty handed.” He disappeared into another room for a few moments and came back with a large photo. It was the official photo of his signing the surrender of Japan aboard the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945.

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He inscribed it--

**“To Rick Setlowe
With whom I had coffee
Off the record.”**

“There! That’ll show your publisher you were at least here and did your job.”

I showed it to my editor Bill Hall. He took it down to show to the publisher.

“He said, ‘Congratulations. You’ve got a helluva collector’s item, even if you didn’t get the interview.’”

I mounted the photo above my desk with scotch tape. My fellow ink-stained wretches on the Examiner came by my office, admired the inscribed photo, and speculated what was “off the record.” It hinted of dark secrets of Pearl Harbor, the epic Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, the surrender of Japan.

But we hadn’t talked about any of that epic history. But about a hero who was reckless and drank too much and the kick and inaccuracy of the obsolete .45 pistol.

When I left the Examiner a year later, I cleared out most of my files on a Friday afternoon, and came back on Monday to pick up odds and ends and the inscribed photo. Someone had swiped it off the wall...and off the record.



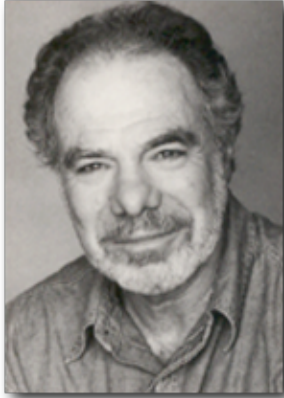
Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, signs the Instrument of Surrender as United States Representative, on board USS Missouri (BB 63), Sep. 2, 1945.

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Love at First Sight

By Rick Setlowe, 1957-59, Ltjg, Ops, C.I.C. Air Controller

I fell in love at first sight twice in my life. The first time was in December, 1957, when the USS Midway sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge for the first time into San Francisco Bay.



My job on the Special Sea Detail whenever we entered or left port was on the bridge, manning a set of phones as the Navigator's liaison to the radar navigation team in a dark compartment several decks below in C.I.C.

I first reported aboard Midway in the shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, just after she had been reconstructed, recommissioned, and launched with a new angled flight deck and steam catapults that made her the most advanced warship in the fleet.

The Midway worked out the kinks on shakedown cruises through foggy Puget Sound, the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and along the northwest coast.

Then we sailed to our new homeport in Alameda.

Outside the Golden Gate an experienced ship's pilot boarded to steer us through the treacherous Bay currents and traffic, and there was really nothing for me to do except enjoy the view. Approached from the sea, I didn't really see San Francisco at first. The green headlands of the peninsula were to the south and the hills of Marin to the north with the orange span of the bridge between. Then we sailed under that span.

San Francisco Bay and the city breathtakingly unfolded before me. It was a fog-free, crisp, bright sunlit morning, and ahead to the east the sun had just cleared the Sierras, illuminating the City. Pacific Palisades, Russian Hill, and Nob Hill rose up like a display of cakes, the buildings perched like pastel sugar lumps.

To my left, the north, the verdant hills of Marin rolled away, and gritty oil tankers wallowed outbound from Richmond. Sailboats with white billowing sheets to the wind crisscrossed the Bay on their own free tacks.

By the time we passed Telegraph Hill with its ivory spire of Coit Tower thrusting to heaven and Midway wheeled south under the Oakland bridge to our new homeport in Alameda, I was hopelessly in love.

That spring we worked along the West Coast—San Diego, Long Beach, and back to Bremerton and Seattle, shaking down the ship and training air groups for our first WestPac deployment. Pearl Harbor, Tokyo Bay, Subic Bay, Hong Kong and Kowloon, Manila, The Straits of Taiwan, the South China Sea—but nothing stirred me like that first sight of San Francisco.

A few months later, I stood on the dock as Midway pulled away for its next WestPac deployment. My service was completed, and I had been discharged that day rather than fly me back from halfway around the world. I watched Midway disappear under the Golden Gate. Then I loaded everything into my car and headed home to New York, a newly minted civilian.

There's a pop ballad by Tony Bennett about leaving your heart in San Francisco --

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“I’ve been terribly alone and forgotten in Manhattan...

*My love waits there in San Francisco
Above the blue and windy sea.”*

I loaded everything back into my car, and drove back across country—with no job prospect, just a few acquaintances, nothing but this strange, romantic compulsion. And there...

“High on a hill... where little cable cars

Climb halfway to the stars!”

... I fell in love at first sight for the second time in my life.

Beverly and I moved into an apartment—believe it, with a Bay view for only \$125 a month in 1963. And in an extraordinary coincidence, it was just below that ivory tower on Telegraph Hill. And from it I watched Midway sail in and out of San Francisco.

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The Admiral and the Poet¹

“Light My Fire”

By Rick Setlowe, 1957-59, Lt.jg, Ops, CIC Air Controller

It is strange. But Jim Morrison, the archetype outrageous stoned-out rebellious rock ‘n roller and lead singer of The Doors—the proclaimed Lizard King—was once a member of the Midway family.

When I first reported aboard in the fall of ’57 assigned to CIC, my immediate boss the Operations Officer was Commander George Stephen Morrison. One evening at a dependent’s dinner in the wardroom while we were home ported in Alameda, Commander Morrison introduced me to his son Jim, then a freshman or sophomore in high school. “Mr. Setlowe here, one of our promising young officers, went to the University of Southern California.” The introduction made an impression because of its awkwardness.



Rear Adm. George Stephen Morrison was Midway’s Operations Officer in 1957-58, later becoming Captain and then Flag Officer of the carrier Bon Homme Richard while commanding U.S. forces in the South Pacific during the Vietnam War. After a long and distinguished Navy career, Morrison died in 2008, thirty-nine years after his son Jim, lead singer for The Doors, died in Paris, France. The “Admiral and the Poet” never resolved their conflicted relationship.

For one thing, even the senior officers called me “Rick,” as we had “salted down” together taking the newly converted and recommissioned Midway on its shakedown trials and first air ops. But Morrison, in memory, was a formal, aloof man—on his rapid

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climb up the ladder to eventually become the Rear Adm. commanding U.S. forces in the South Pacific during the Vietnam War. But that evening he was apparently trying to convince his son of something. As a teenager, Jim Morrison's interests were literary, artistic. The precocious high schooler was already devouring the French surrealist poets Antonin Artaud, Charles Baudelaire, and the English mystic William Blake, who inspired the name of The Doors. A few years later, the kid graduated in filmmaking from UCLA—my alma mater's archrival—and perhaps that night the father was saying to his son, See, you can study what and where you want and “He liked all the classics and read everything he could get his hands on. An intelligent, bright young man who liked to write and draw pictures,” the retired Rear Adm. later recalled.

“He went on all the ships that I served in. While he had some admiration for the Navy and the fact that I was in it, it's clear that he didn't have any interest in it himself

Not that the senior Morrison did not make special efforts to pique his son's interest in a military career. On the internet there are photos of a young Morrison with his father on the bridge of the USS Bon Homme Richard, when the latter was captain of that carrier, and of the adolescent firing what I identify as a Thompson submachine gun from the fantail.

While aboard Midway I had a collateral duty as a Shore Party officer—roughly a platoon of sailors trained to go ashore with our Marine detachment in the event of an emergency. At sea, we trained with small arms—including the Thompson—firing from the fantail at floating targets. But in my two years aboard I don't remember anyone other than the designated Shore Party and Marines allowed to do this.

Rank has its privileges, but allowing a teenage civilian to fire a submachine gun seems to me a stretch.

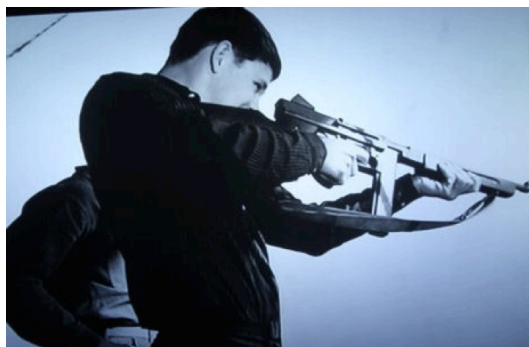
And when his son came aboard to visit his father, reportedly one of the first things the senior Morrison did was ordered him below to the ship's barber to get a regulation haircut.

But it did not influence the young would-be poet. “When he graduated from high school he asked for the complete works of Nietzsche. Most kids want a car.” Rear Adm. Morrison laughed heartily at the memory.

For those interested, there is a long, face-to-face interview with Rear Adm. Morrison and his daughter, Jim's younger sister Anne Morrison-Chewning, easily accessible on YouTube, which is quoted in this article.

“I didn't know Jim very well after he left home. We didn't see him much. I didn't have a chance to really appraise his mental attitude in his last years.”

After graduating from UCLA young Morrison hung out in Venice Beach in Los Angeles with the budding poets, musicians, and filmmakers he had known in college. “I was looking forward to his... going to Hollywood,” his father noted. “When he ended up in rock music, I was absolutely flabbergasted. His father was in command.



Jim Morrison fires a machine gun off the fantail of the USS Bon Homme Richard

He called me on the phone and said he was going on the road with a rock band. And it took me a little bit to hear what he was really saying... I told him that was ridiculous. You're not a singer. You can't sing. And I told him you are on your own track. Get yourself a job. That to me was not a job.” In retrospect, the senior Morrison laughs at the memory of the phone conversation.

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Nor did his son Jim have a whit of musical training. Yet for background, let me make a personal detour. While we were stationed in Alameda, on weekend evenings—when things were uninteresting at the O Club—I would jump into my convertible and venture across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco and the funky clubs in North Beach. There a generation of poets like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsburg, and Michael McClure were reading their work to improvised jazz arrangement. Kerouac and Ginsburg were acknowledged influences on young Morrison, and McClure became a mentor.

Captain George Morrison and son Jim on the bridge of the Bon Homme Richard, circa 1964

Morrison's entry into music was accidental, but perhaps fateful. Strolling through the surf at Venice, he ran into a UCLA film school acquaintance Ray Manzarek. Manzarek, older, a grad student, was also a pianist and keyboardist already jamming jazz, rock, blues and folk in a group with his brothers. He encouraged Jim to recite the lyrics to "a fantastic rock 'n roll concert going on in my (Morrison's) head." To quote the line from Blake's poem, "the doors of perception were cleansed," and the group was launched.



The Doors' first album featuring lead vocalist Jim Morrison and the classic "Light My Fire" was released in 1967.

His sister Anne recalls, "It all happened rather quickly. My mom sent me the first album. No note. Just the album in a package. I was just astounded, because that was my brother on the cover."

Rear Adm. Morrison later commented, "Okay, that was a little rock band there and making some headway. And that's fine. But when he turned up on the national TV, why I was amazed. I didn't have any idea the talent he had as an entertainer. I still feel his talent was NOT vocal in the classic term. But he was an entertainer."

By then the senior Morrison, who had attained flag rank at age 47, had commanded the American naval forces during the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to an escalation of the Vietnam War from his flagship carrier Bon Homme Richard.

The fires of rebellion were lit. It was the Sixties—Make Love, Not War. "We were the undeclared Vietnam War," The Door's drummer John Densmore explains. But "Rebellion met blank incomprehension," as the New York Times noted in its obituary of Rear Adm. Morrison's death at 89 on Nov. 17, 2008, in Coronado, California.

Even a novelist cannot create a father and son as dramatically in conflict.

The father had graduated from Annapolis with the encouragement and help of a relative—who had been an admiral—just in time to be aboard the minelayer Pruitt in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. The Pruitt fought in operations in the Aleutians and the central Pacific, then Morrison volunteered for flight training in Pensacola, Fla. He won his wings in time to fly Hellcat fighters in combat missions over Wake Island in the Marianas and Honshu, Japan, in the last year of World War II.

During the Korean War, at the joint operations center in Seoul, he earned a Bronze Star with V for Valor for combat operations against North Korean and Chinese forces. He then served aboard USS Midway as its Operations Officer as she was being rebuilt, recommissioned, launched, and shook down as the then most advanced carrier in the fleet.

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In the San Diego Union-Tribune, staff writer Steve Liewer reported, "After earning flag rank...Rear Adm. Morrison weathered his son's very public rebellion, stardom and death while serving in high-profile Navy posts in the Pentagon and the Pacific. He never mentioned Jim publicly, but he found it strange to visit friends' homes and see posters of his son on the bedroom walls of their teenage children. 'He never told people (in the Navy),' his younger son Andy Morrison said. 'But the young guys all knew.'"

His sister Anne comments, "My dad was in the Navy. He was still an admiral, and he had his own life. And I think Jim knew this would be an issue with my parents, and I think he just separated himself completely."



On occasion Jim even told friends that he was an orphan. Rear Adm. Morrison is later quoted, "I had the feeling that he felt we'd just as soon not be associated with his career. He knew I didn't think rock music was the best goal for him. Maybe he was trying to protect us."

Jim Morrison, approximately one year before his death in Paris in 1971

At the height of his success, Jim Morrison declared, "The most loving parents and relatives commit murder with smiles on their faces. They force us to destroy the person we really are: a subtle kind of murder."

Epic on-stage drunks made national headlines, as alcohol now augmented the LSD and hallucinogens that had supposedly cleansed the doors of perception. Even The Doors drummer Densmore declared, "I'd never take acid with that guy. He's crazy. And I never did."

In March 1971, The Doors recorded their last album "L.A. Woman."

Then Morrison took a leave of absence from The Doors to move to Paris with his girlfriend Pamela Courson.

"I think Jim went to Paris to escape what he had in the United States," his sister Anne reasons. "To gain his own freedom. To do his own writing. Experience something new."

Pamela found Morrison dead in his bathtub on July 3, 1971, at age 27.

"We were notified by the naval attache at the embassy in Paris," the Admiral recalls. "He sent me a message that Jim had died of a heart attack in a Paris hospital."

The medical examiner found no evidence of foul play. Morrison was buried in the "Poet's Corner" of Pere Lachaise Cemetery. His father felt it was "quite an honor . . . for the family" to have his son buried near cultural giants like Oscar Wilde, Edith Piaf and Frederic Chopin. "I was impressed with the fact that here was my son being interred really quite honorably in the great cemetery in Paris and realized how well liked he was.

"I haven't really heard the lyrics. I've heard the titles like 'Light My Fire.' I've got to buy it. But what goes on after that, I could not tell you. I'm afraid I'm a very poor interpreter of his talents . . . We never had the occasion to see him."

After his retirement the rear admiral took classes in ancient Greek, so that he could read the Bible as it was originally translated. In 1990 he and his wife finally traveled to Paris to visit their son's grave. There Morrison installed a plaque he had personally crafted and ambiguously worded in Greek, a phrase usually interpreted as "True to his own spirit."

In the interview on YouTube, he explains the epitaph, "He went his own way. And he was true to his own ambitions, his own aspirations. And that was his goal in life. And he made it. . . . Well, basically, he was a good man. He was a good solid citizen. He had moral and ethical standards that were very high. He was just somebody you'd like to know."

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The interview with Morrison concludes with a silent close-up on the admiral's face, an old man's face, blue eyes tearful, regretting the son whom he did not really know.

Jim Morrison's gravesite in the "Poet's Corner" of Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France

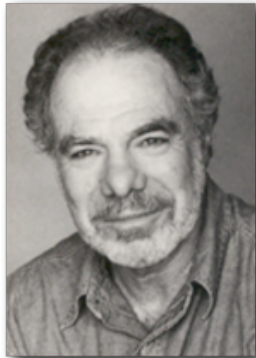


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Fact and Fiction Aboard Midway

by Rick Setlowe, 1957-59, Lt.jg, Ops, CIC Air Controller

In the spring of 1976 I published my first novel *The Brink*, which drew on my experiences aboard Midway in the Straits of Taiwan in 1958. In the novel I never named the ship or any of my shipmates, although they had inspired certain characters.



But shortly after publication I received a handwritten letter via my New York publisher from a Captain John Tallman in Virginia. Tallman basically wanted to know who the hell I was and why I had given his name to a pilot who dies in a freak landing accident aboard. The incident in the novel, Tallman wrote me, described in accurate detail the death of his wingman Joe Brender one night in the Taiwan Straits, right down to Brender's last radio transmission to the landing signal officer.

I was stunned. I had no memory of Tallman, but Joe Brender had been my oldest friend aboard Midway.

I had originally met Joe in college on a weekend visit to Cornell, then renewed acquaintance in flight school in Pensacola, and again in Alameda when Joe's Fighter Squadron 64 flying F3H Demons was assigned to Midway for our routine WestPac deployment. The night before anchors away, there was a party at the O Club, and Joe made a point of introducing me as an old friend to his recent fiancée, a very pretty dark-haired girl.

Our deployment exploded into anything but routine. Halfway through our operational readiness exercises in Hawaii we were ordered back to Pearl Harbor, loaded with weapons, and took off at flank speed for Taiwan. The Chinese were massing to invade Taiwan and its offshore islands, and they had launched the

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heaviest artillery bombardment in history. Our treaty with Taiwan obligated the United States to defend it. We were at the brink of war, and Midway was the flagship of the carrier strike force.

We ran patrols and exercises day and night with every plane aboard up and down the Straits, often in terrible weather. The strategy, as this Lt.jg understood it, was to pop a gaggle of blips on the Chinese radar to convince their high command that any invasion would be fought by United States Navy planes and warships that were already out there.



I was then a CIC watch officer and air controller, and I worked those patrol and exercises. FS 64 Demons were the first squadron in the fleet equipped with the Sparrow radar guided missiles, and I was one of the handful of controllers newly trained to work them.

In CIC the pilots' names of each flight were posted in grease pencil on a large Plexiglas board. In the wardroom I ribbed Joe, "Hey, that was me making you look good in the intercept this morning."

Rick Setlowe on flight deck of USS Midway, circa 1958

"Thought I recognized that Long Island accent." He mangled it, "Long-guy-land," as a joke. Joe was from upstate New York.

To get our minds off the menacing war, we talked hopefully about what would be our first liberty in Tokyo and the chance that our mutual friend from Cornell, who was now in the Air Force in Korea, might join us.

But the brink of war can be as grueling and deadly on an aircraft carrier as combat ops.

The memorial page of the "Midway Western Pacific Cruise Book 1958-1959" lists 11 names in alphabetical order. Joe Brender is the third.

I controlled Joe's last flight, a midnight patrol in the Strait. It was uneventful, until I turned control over to PriFly for the landing.

A carrier landing is a controlled crash. And the grueling day-and-night operations were taking their toll on the aircraft. Joe landed precisely... three times. But his tail hook did not engage. The Landing Signal Officer noted it hit and bounce over the wire; apparently the mechanism was damaged. Joe was low on fuel, and we were too far from any friendly airfield for Joe to divert. He was ordered to climb to 10,000 feet and eject.

The spot was marked on radar, and a destroyer immediately dispatched to it. They found no sign of Joe or the Demon aircraft. At first light our helos took off to search. Unsuccessfully.

I conferred at length with the LSO and Joe's squadron mates about what had happened. There are many terrible ways to die ejecting from a jet at night over water, and there is no point in speculating on them.

In *The Brink* the fictional narrator has to eject at night, but he survives. But in a separate incident in the book the "real" event is also detailed. And there are other very specific incidents recorded by which Captain Tallman identified the fictionalized carrier as actually Midway.

But I didn't remember Tallman. I dusted off my old copy of the cruise book in my bookshelves. The tall handsome, then Lt.jg J. M. Tallman who stared back at me from the squadron group photo was not

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familiar. But apparently in this novelist's subconscious memory the name of Joe's wingman that night written in grease pencil up on the CIC board had been indelibly burned. I had not made it up, "imagined" it.

In *The Brink* the line between fiction and straight reporting often becomes hazy, a trick of the subconscious mind.

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Operation Rolling Thunder

"Mid-Air" VA-22 Fighting Redcocks

By Doug Bohs, AQF2/VF-21, 1963-65

The USS Midway arrived on Yankee Station on or around the last week of March 1965. As part of Operation Rolling Thunder, Midway had just completed approximately 45 days of airops. On May 11th I heard the IMC announcement to ready the flight deck for an emergency landing. After a few more announcements signaling the successful recovery of an aircraft I went up to the flight deck and took the color photo (Fig. 1) you see below. For almost 55 years the slide was in my possession without the full story behind it and almost forgotten.



Fig. 1 Close-up of stabilizer sticking into the fuel tank of Lt. Ilg's A4-C Skyhawk after it made an emergency landing on Midway. Also see Fig. 2 (below) of his Skyhawk.

Late last year I contacted Dave Batson, a fellow VF-21 squadron mate and F4 pilot. I sent him the picture and asked if he knew any of the story behind it. As luck would have it Dave knew the name of the pilot. A little research found him: retired Admiral Raymond (Paul) Ilg. After a brief phone call, a copy of the same picture was sent to him and we started corresponding to complete the story. This picture was also sent to Mark Aldridge of the Tailhook Association. They had been keeping the black and white photo of the same incident (Fig. 2) on file without any information on the surrounding circumstances.

Lt. Raymond (Paul) Ilg was flying an A4-C Skyhawk bound for Cubi Point, the Philippines. Air Wing 2, USS Midway, was at the end of a Yankee Station line period. The date was Tuesday, May 11, 1965. The complete story follows in his words:

"VA-22 (Fighting Redcocks) had 12 aircraft airborne and joining over the carrier. I was number 11 joined waiting for number 12 before the flight headed for Cubi Point. Number 12 joined "hot" and ran into the underside of my aircraft sticking his vertical fin into my main fuel tank. The pilot in number 12 was forced to eject and was subsequently picked up by a plane guard helo.

"My fuel state was near maximum when I joined the formation but I could see the fuel gauge dropping rapidly and I was streaming a great deal of fuel. Two of the 12 A4-Cs were tanker configured. Lt. Bill Newman ⁽¹⁾ was flying one of the tankers and we joined as soon as possible. My fuel gauge indicated 200 p [pounds] of fuel as I plugged into the tanker and did not increase as I was accepting fuel.

"At 2.5 miles out from Midway Lt. Newman dropped me off on the ball and I was all elbows getting gear and flaps down and maintaining the ball as I slowed to approach speed.

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“The aircraft burst into flames on arrestment due to the streaming fuel, the engine flamed out and the fire stopped. Obviously I was relegated to riding the ship into port.”



Fig. 2 Lt. Ilg's A4 on Midway's flight deck showing the vertical stabilizer of the other A4 embedded in the underside of his plane (look directly below the intake). This photo was probably taken from Pri-Fly.

Author's Note: Recapping the fuel issue: Admiral Ilg stated his fuel level was at 200 pounds and never went above that as he was accepting fuel. His fuel level never changed as he flew back to the Midway. Obviously Paul was burning fuel as fast as he was receiving it. He also stated his engine flamed out just as he landed and the fire stopped. The significance of his fuel level cannot be overstated. Obviously he was out of fuel when he landed. Separation at the stated 2.5 miles was just enough to get him back aboard. Separation any further from Midway could have been disastrous, especially if he would have run out of fuel close to the ship without time to safely eject. Closer separation might not have given him time to get the feel of the plane with the extra drag from the stabilizer embedded in the underside of his plane. Additionally, having excess fuel at landing could have increased the potential for a very dangerous fire. As witnessed by (then) Lt. Clint Johnson of VA-25, sparks were flying from the embedded stabilizer as it made contact with the flight deck. That is what caused the fire that could have been an explosion. Everything worked. For some, restating the fuel issue is stating the obvious, but I felt it was worth making the point.

For his actions that led to saving himself and his plane, Lt. Raymond Ilg was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Just over three weeks later he was shot down while on an armed reconnaissance mission and was rescued 47 hours later. He went on to have a very distinguished career in the Navy, retiring as a 3 Star Admiral in 1991.

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- (1) Lt. Newman, pilot of the A4-C tanker, retired as a 2 Star Admiral in 1996. His duty assignments included Commanding Officer and Flight Leader of the Blue Angels. A profile of his career is planned for an upcoming issue of this newsletter.

USS Midway Veteran . . . And More

By Doug Bohs, AQF2/VF-21, 1963-65

Capt. Fred A.W. Franke, Jr. (Ret.), or “Bill” as he prefers to be called, not only flew off of all three of the Sister Ships, but he initially flew off of them while they were still straight deck carriers! He has also flown off of the USS Cabot CVL-28 (F4U), the USS Tarawa CV-40 (F4U), the USS Wright CVL-49 (F4U), the USS Saratoga CVA-60 (F3H), the USS Forrestal CV-59 (F3H-2M), and the USS Ranger CVA-61 (F4B).

Bill Franke was born in 1926 in Brooklyn, New York. He entered the Navy V-5 Program at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in Ruston, Louisiana, in January 1944, and served with the Navy ROTC Unit at Rice Institute in Houston, Texas, from November 1945 to February 1946, entering the Naval Aviation Cadet Program in March 1946. He received an honorable discharge from the Aviation Cadet Program on December 6, 1946, but reentered the program on August 27, 1948, receiving his commission as an Ensign in the Navy on the same day. Ensign Franke completed the Aviation Cadet Program and was designated a Naval Aviator at NAS Pensacola, Florida, on March 30, 1950, and then served as an F4U-4 Corsair and F9F-5 Panther pilot with VF-73 at NAS Quonset Point, Rhode Island, from April 1950 to August 1953. LtJg Franke next completed U.S. Naval Test Pilot School at NATC Patuxent River, Maryland, in January 1954, followed by service as a Project Test Pilot at Pax River from January to June 1954. Lt Franke served as an Instructor with the Test Pilot School at Pax River from June 1954 to October 1956, and then served as an F3H-2M Demon pilot with VF-61 at NAS Norfolk, Virginia, from November 1956 to April 1959.



His next assignment was as a Training and Tactics Officer with Commander Operational Test and Evaluation Force at NAS Norfolk, Virginia, from May 1959 to July 1960, followed by Naval War College at NS Newport, Rhode Island, from August 1960 to June 1961. LCDR Franke then returned to the Test Pilot School at NATC Patuxent River, serving as an Instructor and Project Test Pilot from July 1961 to July 1963. He attended F-4 Phantom II Replacement Air Group training with VF-121 at NAS Miramar, California, from July to November 1963, and then served as Executive Officer of VF-21 at NAS Miramar and aboard the USS Midway from December 1963 to November 1964. He became the commanding officer of VF-21 in 1964.

Midway was deployed to Vietnam in March of 1965. On August 24, 1965, Bill and LCDR Rob Doremus² (who was Bill’s backseat radar intercept officer [RIO]), were forced to eject over North Vietnam when their F-4 Phantom was hit by a SAM missile. They were taken as prisoners of war and spent 2,730 days in captivity.

In the photo below, Rob is third from front on near column. Bill is second from front on far column. You can just see a bit of his face. They are shown here as they are released from the “Hanoi Hilton” (Hoa Lo prison) after 7.5 years in captivity.

² Rob was recognized and honored as a POW at MVA’s 2013 reunion in San Diego, in a ceremony on the flight deck of the USS Midway Museum. In 2017, we made Rob an Honorary Lifetime Member of the MVA. This year, we also awarded Bill Honorary Lifetime Membership in the MVA, a recognition that was long overdue. See an electronic replica of his membership card on page 7 of this newsletter.

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When asked to relate some of their experiences as POWs, both Bill and Rob mentioned the Son Tay Raid as an important milestone during their captivity. The raid, known as “Operation Ivory Coast,” was held November 21, 1970. It was intended to rescue 65 prisoners being held at Son Tay. The raid was executed almost flawlessly but the prisoners were moved before the raid due to flooding concerns. When the NVA learned of the raid they put prisoners together from other locations. Many of these prisoners had been held in solitary confinement (some for years). This raid was, as you can imagine, a huge morale booster and provided a solid sense of joy and hope they had never had. The raid may not have freed our POWs but it did, in a sense, free the spirits of those being held.

Bill and Rob were two of three Naval Aviators who were initially listed as Killed In Action and years later were reclassified as Prisoners-of-War. The third was Porter Halyburton (VF-84, USS Independence).

Capt. Franke and LCDR Doremus were released during Operation Homecoming on February 12, 1973. Bill was briefly hospitalized to recover from his injuries at Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. Rob was hospitalized in Naval Hospital Philadelphia for a short time.

The photo below shows Bill (on right) being released during Operation Homecoming. He is being escorted to the "Hanoi Taxi," a C141 Starlifter. The second POW (far left) is USAF Col. Robert B. "Percy" Purcell, who was shot down about one month before Bill and Rob (not pictured).

Capt. Franke then served on the Staff of the Commander, Fighter Airborne Early Warning Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet, from October 1973 to February 1974, during which time he also completed refresher pilot training. His next assignment was as Commanding Officer of VX-4 at NAS Point Mugu, California, from March 1974 to July 1976, followed by service as Chief of Staff for the Commander, Fighter Airborne Early Warning Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet, in San Diego from July 1976 until his retirement from the Navy on August 1, 1977.

Bill and his wife Jackie now live in Pensacola, Florida. Bill is still flying at the age of 93!³



³ For those of you whose interest in the POW experience has been piqued by this article, both Bill and Rob highly recommend *Honor Bound*, by Rochester and Kylie.

VF-21 MiG Kills June 17, 1965

By Doug Bohs, AQF2/VF-21, 1963-65

President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the start of the bombing campaign of North Vietnam on February 13, 1965. The code name for the operation was "Rolling Thunder." The operation was delayed for both weather-related and political issues until March 2nd. The USS Midway departed Alameda California, on March 6, 1965, bound for the South China Sea. The mission was to defend the Republic of South Vietnam from the Viet Cong and the communist state of North Vietnam.

After stops in Hawaii and the Philippine Islands, Midway arrived on "Yankee Station" in early April with combat operations beginning on April 10th.

Once in operation in the South China Sea, Midway hosted a number of high-ranking officials including Secretary of the Navy P.H. Nitze, Commander-Pacific Seventh Fleet Vice Admiral P. Blackburn, and Commander MACV W. Westmoreland. The captain of the Midway was James O'Brien. Also onboard at various times were many reporters representing a large number of news outlets including radio, television, newspapers and magazines. Combat operations had begun and there were many eyes on the Midway's pilots and crews. There were no confirmed air-to-air victories for U.S. aircrews during the first two months following Midway's arrival on station but that changed on Thursday, June 17, 1965.

One of the roles of the pilots and radar intercept officers of VF-21, flying the McDonnell F-4 Phantom, was to provide Target Combat Air Patrol (TARCAP) for the strike forces. Today's mission was to provide cover for the Douglas A-4 Skyhawk strike force which would be conducting bombing runs on the Thanh Hoa Bridge (a target that was not completely destroyed until 1971). About two hours before launch a briefing for the mission was held in the Air Intelligence Center. Secretary Nitze was present for that briefing as well as an individual squadron brief in "Ready 2" with VF-21. During the briefing in Ready Room 2 CDR Lou Page, squadron X.O. of VF-21 informed Secretary Nitze of the strategy they had developed to down MiGs.

There were strict VID (visual identification) guidelines instituted at the beginning of the conflict which required our aircrews to positively identify a target as an enemy plane before making any attempt to shoot it down. During Midway's voyage to Yankee Station CDR Lou Page and LT J.C. Smith developed a set of tactics to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft. If there was a head-on engagement the lead plane would bank and make a slight turn away from the suspected incoming enemy planes. If the enemy banked and turned in an attempt to get behind the lead plane they would at least display a partial profile of the flying surfaces. That should provide a positive ID.

The six F-4 and eight A-4 strike package was comprised of planes from Midway and the Bon Homme Richard. The Midway F-4 portion of the strike force launched at approximately 0900 hours on June 17, 1965. The flight leader was CDR Lou Page with LT J.C. Smith as his RIO. LT Dave Batson was flying wing on CDR Page with LCDR Rob Doremus as RIO. Both planes were armed with two Sidewinder heat-seeking and three Sparrow radar-guided missiles. After launch they rendezvoused with the KA-3 Skywarrior tankers about 75 miles from Midway. After topping off their fuel tanks they then proceeded to their search area northwest of the Thanh Hoa Bridge. At 10,000 feet they patrolled in a north-south pattern a mile abeam of each other. They listened to the strike group as they made their patrol, and watched their APQ-72 radar sets for enemy planes.

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Soon they heard the strike group go “feet wet” (over water). This was a signal to leave the search area and return to Midway. Before leaving Lou Page called for one more sweep and they turned north. As they leveled out J.C. and Rob each picked up two radar contacts about 40 miles out. At about 25 miles the two contacts turned into four. Lou called for Dave to move from search to attack position. Dave performed a large slow barrel roll and moved into trail position about 3 miles back and slightly below. Both F-4s accelerated to 500 knots to provide better maneuverability. Both pilots turned on their CW (Doppler-missile guiding) option on the radar and prepared the AIM-7 Sparrow missiles. They now had a 900 knot closing speed with the radar contacts.

J.C. being in the lead plane, locked onto the trailing target and told Rob to take the leading target. Following the plan they had worked out earlier in the cruise, J.C. led the formation slightly east of the oncoming targets. As planned, this caused the contacts to turn and show a partial profile of their wing and tail surfaces. Their radar contacts were now identified as MiGs.

When identification was made, Lou shouted “It’s MiGs!” and fired. Dave Batson saw Lou’s missile fire. At first he thought it was a miss but then saw the outer portion of the MiG’s right wing break away and the MiG rolled out of control. Seconds later while keeping the steering dot on his pilot’s ‘scope centered, Dave fired the Sparrow mounted on his right wing. As it steered under the nose of his plane he lost sight of it, but Rob watched it make a direct hit. Almost immediately after the hit a third MiG flashed right by Dave and Rob.

According to Lou’s plan both F-4s disengaged. Not wanting to risk a dogfight with the smaller and more agile MiG they lit afterburners, climbed through the overcast, reversed direction to clear the air space behind them and re-formed into their search formation. They went back through the area of the engagement looking for any MiGs that may have stayed in the area. They did not see any but did see one parachute and the smoke trails of their missiles. They headed back to the Midway with just enough fuel to land. VF-21 CO Bill Franke greeted them excitedly as they climbed from their planes. Rob is famously quoted as saying “four more to go.”

CDR Page was escorted to the Flag Bridge and congratulated by Secretary Nietze. Remember his meeting with the Secretary just before the flight? It couldn’t have been scripted any better. From there they went to Air Intelligence. After the debrief they were told by Admiral Blackburn they were to head to Saigon.

Saigon

The next day Page, Smith, Batson and Doremus were flown to Saigon. They met with military reporters only. On June 19th their pictures were above the fold of *Stars and Stripes Magazine*. News of their MiG kills was not initially given to the general press. It was later rumored that the Secretary of the Navy was withholding the news until he could meet with Congress to secure additional funding for the F-4 Phantom. The following MiG kill story that will appear in the next MVA newsletter explains why that news was made public before it was intended.

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CDR Lou Page being congratulated by Secretary of the Navy P.H. Nitze.
Behind Page is RADM William Bringle, Commander Task Force 77



Left to Right: LT Dave Batson, CDR Lou Page, LCDR Rob Doremus, LT J.C. Smith during an informal debrief in the Air Intelligence spaces on Midway after the mission.

Author's Note:

These air-to-air victories are a tribute to the skill and courage of Midway Naval Aviators. They are also a tribute to the hard work and dedication of ship's company of the USS Midway who made air operations possible.

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MiGs!

radar VA-25 MiG Kill June 20, 1965

By Doug Bohs, AQF2/VF-21, 1963-65

It was almost 1800 hours as LT Clinton (Clint) Johnson spread and locked the wings of his AD-1 Skyraider while preparing for launch on the starboard cat of the Midway. After three previous calls to suit up only to stand down each time, this mission was a go. The Midway was 30 days into its 3rd at sea period since arriving on Yankee Station in March. VA-25 had flown several rescue cover and reconnaissance missions while on Yankee Station. This mission was a RESCAP. The four-plane flight was led by LCDR Ed Greathouse. LT Johnson was flying his starboard wing and LTJG Jim Lynne flying port wing. LT Charlie Hartman was flying LT Johnson's starboard wing.

As the second element flight leader LT Johnson's plane was set up as the "Middleman Aircraft" with two radios and a control box. The control box allows the "Middleman" to act as an antenna relay. The pilot covering the downed flier (low altitude) transmits through the "Middleman's" aircraft (higher altitude) to the ship. The number-two radio picks up the signal from the covering aircraft and relays it to the number-one radio for transmission to the ship. Unknown to him the cat shot had killed LT Johnson's number one radio.

At 12,000 feet and feet dry, they were passing north of Thanh Hoa. They were at least 80 miles short of their RESCAP point when Ed Greathouse suddenly rolled inverted and went into a near vertical dive. LT Johnson immediately followed. A quick radio check confirmed his radio was dead, killed by the catapult shot. Johnson had missed the MiG alert from the USS Strauss (DE-408). The MiGs were spotted on an intercept course of two Skyriders which were south of Johnson's group. The MiGs had apparently missed their intercept, and were coming around for another attempt. Before spotting their initial targets the MiGs saw the Midway flight.

The Strauss was keeping Greathouse updated and informed him his flight was now the target. Their split-S had increased their speed and reversed their course. Their hope was to get down low where the Skyriders might have a turning advantage over the MiGs. After arming his guns and setting up his rockets Johnson saw an unguided rocket pass near his plane going downward. He then saw a second rocket hit the ground near Greathouse and Lynne. There was no doubt they were under attack. A silver MiG-17 with red markings on the wing and tail streaked by Hartman and Johnson headed for Greathouse. Tracers coming from behind his plane and an intake growing larger in his mirror served as a signal for Johnson to start pulling and turning. He immediately saw two distinct sizes of tracers falling away. The MiG had two 23mm and one 37mm cannon in the nose. This second MiG stayed with Johnson and Hartman throughout the turn but was unable to get inside and overshot. The MiG pilot made seven passes but each time was unable to get inside. As the MiG pulled up Hartman was able to get off a quick shot but with no apparent damage. The MiG climbed and stayed there.

Their evasive maneuvers had separated Johnson and Hartman from Greathouse and his wingman. No longer under attack their objective was to rejoin the flight leader and his wingman. Johnson soon caught a glimpse of them and flew to join. Since they had been flying at treetop level and in and out of small valleys they had to fly around a small hill to get to them. Coming around the hill they spotted Greathouse and Lynne with a MiG lined up behind them. A short burst from Johnson's 20mm missed but got the MiG pilot's attention. The MiG turned hard into Johnson and Hartman, making a head-on pass. They fired simultaneously. Hartman's rounds appeared to go down the intake and into the wing root. Johnson's rounds hit along the top of the fuselage and into the canopy. The MiG never returned fire, rolled inverted

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and hit a small hill. It then exploded and burned. While they circled the wreckage Johnson switched to his number two radio. Johnson and Hartman considered an attempt to cut off the other MiG but were persuaded to rejoin by the voice of Greathouse. The USS Strauss had reported numerous bogeys inbound to their position. They headed out at low level and joined Greathouse and his wingman and headed back to the Midway.

By now they were looking at a night landing, but the adrenaline from the MiG kill made it seem routine.

Saigon

Ngyuen Cao Key, the new Premier of South Vietnam (and Skyraider pilot) had indirectly heard of the Skyraider kill. He also recognized LCDR Ed Greathouse's name as a Skyraider instructor from the RAG (Replacement Air Group) and demanded an appearance by all four pilots for a Vietnamese award ceremony.

They were flown to Saigon the next day and were instant celebrities. They met with Premier Key at the palace and were awarded the Air Force Gallantry Medal and honorary commissions in the South Vietnamese Air Force. They also met with a bevy of reporters from U.S. newspapers during a press conference called by Premier Key. News of their MiG kill made headlines in almost every major U.S. newspaper. This briefing was given and the reports written before the U.S. newspapers were made aware of the MiG kills of VF-21 by the military.

Photo # USN 1113736-A Pilots describe air-to-air combat over Vietnam, aboard USS Midway, June 1965



From left to right: unknown officer, LTJG Charlie Hartman (Johnson wingman #4), LCDR Ed Greathouse (#1 Flight leader), unknown officer, LT Clint Johnson (2nd section leader #3), LTJG Jim Lynne (#2 Greathouse wingman), CDR Harry Ettinger CO VA-25. RADM Bill Bringle CARDIV Commander is seated.

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Awards Ceremony VF-21 and VA-25

Back aboard the USS Midway the awards ceremony for VF-21 and VA-25 was held jointly. VF-21 pilots Lou Page and Dave Batson and RIOs (radar intercept officers) J.C. Smith and Rob Doremus were each awarded the Silver Star. VA-25 pilots Clint Johnson and Charles Hartman received the Silver Star and pilots Ed Greathouse and Jim Lynne received the Distinguished Flying Cross.



Left to Right: CDR Page, LT Batson, LCDR Doremus, LT Smith, LCDR Greathouse, LT Johnson, LTJG Hartman, LTJG Lynne

Author's Note

These air-to-air victories are a tribute to the skill and courage of Midway Naval Aviators. They are also a tribute to the hard work and dedication of ship's company of the USS Midway who made air operations possible.

Operation Frequent Wind: Escape From Vietnam

By Mark Nojiri, AT1, IM-3, 74-76; 78-81

During Thanksgiving of 1974, as a member of the USS Midway's crew, I visited Hong Kong (then a British Crown Colony), and met a woman who had just retired from embassy duty in Saigon, South Vietnam.



When she found out I was in the US Navy, she told me that my ship would probably hear more about the Vietnam War, as "Charlie" was building up a big offensive just north of the city of Da Nang. After we parted ways, I forgot our conversation.

Around mid-April of 1975, the Midway was making a port visit for a few days in Subic Bay, Philippines, and I went off the ship for three days, then returned for work. The day I returned to the ship, I told one of my buddies, "I am going to church on Sunday" This was April 18th. He said, "No you are not, we are going to Vietnam!" A few minutes later, the commanding officer, Captain Lawrence C. Chambers, announced that we were going to Vietnam to possibly be involved in an evacuation of South Vietnam. Some of the guys in my shop were told they would be going ashore and remain behind to support aircraft from the ship that were remaining behind, while others would be staying with the ship.

Those of us who did remain on the ship were told to evacuate our berthing area to make room for refugees. Several of us went to our berthing area to collect our bed sheets and pack important objects from our lockers, as we were being moved for the refugees. We went to another sleeping area, then we all decided that we would rather sleep in the shop.

On about April 20th, we were all told that, as we were in a war zone, we were now eligible for postage-free mail service for all personal mail. All we had to do was to write "Free" where the stamp is supposed to go. One day, I went up to the flight deck and saw a bunch of Air Force helicopters, maybe about ten of them. They were the United States Air Force Rescue and Recovery squadron, two squadrons. According to one of the crewmembers, whom I befriended, said that one squadron would fly in about 1,000 feet, while the other one would fly in at tree-level. The helicopters included CH-46 and H-53 Air Force helicopters. One afternoon, on a small cabinet on one of the helicopters, I saw a bunch of bullets for their machine guns and tapped my finger on the tip. It was sharp! The crewmember told me that the machine gun would shoot out about 6,000 rounds a minute. Considering how sharp the bullet was, I definitely did not want one of those bullets to hit me! Now, normally, each helicopter carried a crew of about six members, two waist gunners, one tail gunner, one specialist, the pilot, and the co-pilot. However, for this mission, only five members would be on these flights. The helicopters could carry a maximum safe capacity of 44 passengers, counting the flight crew.

On or about the 17th of April, we were told that the nation of Cambodia had been taken over by this group called the Khmer Rouge. At the end of this story, you will hear about that.

For the next few days, whenever I had a chance, I would leave my shop and go to the flight deck to pick up on any available rumors I could get. Also, in my shop, which was right below the flight deck and just about the front-end of the landing area of the ship, some of the guys who had been to Vietnam, would

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gather around and tell some of their stories. I found out that, out of maybe about twenty of us, having never been to Vietnam, I was in the minority. I saw such baseball caps as “Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club” and “Tom from Nam.” Each day, I wrote a letter home to my parents. As for what we did in my shop, which was an aviation electronics shop, other than work on equipment that we had received before this operation, there was not much work, as our normal aircraft were not being worked on at this time and we had not received any equipment from the Air Force aircraft.



I found out, through rumors, that there were approximately 45 ships assigned to this operation and most of the crewmembers who were Vietnam War veterans were not very happy about being here and wanted nothing to do with it. From what I understood, the USS Midway, and the USS Hancock were supposed to handle any refugees and the USS Coral Sea and the USS Enterprise would provide us with any air cover, if we would be subject to any attack from the air.

We sat there, mostly circling around, waiting, for about eight days. Then, on or about April 29th, Captain Chambers announced something to the effect of, “You men of the United States Air Force are about to embark on a very dangerous mission. May God help you all,” or words to that effect. From my shop, we could hear the helicopters taking off and, soon, virtual silence. A while later, one of the guys from my shop, and I went up to the O-11 level, the topmost observation level of the ship, and looked around. We saw one huey land, and out stepped a man in a business suit. According to the guy, it was now former Vice President Kei. Soon after we left the O-11 level, that level was closed to all spectators. I heard a rumor that, soon after, an Air Force MP, with a loaded rifle, stood guard and that some junior officer demanded access to the level, and the MP pointed the barrel of the rifle and said, “No Way!” Or words to that effect.

In Saigon, over the radio station, there was a “supposed-to-be” secret code for all embassy officials and other affected officials, which was “White Christmas.” The announcer said, “Well, I guess we will not have a white Christmas this year!” I was told this by a US embassy official as we transited to the Gulf of Thailand a few days later. As it turned out, it was not much of a secret code. Everybody knew it.



A few hours later, the Air Force helicopters began to return. It was amazing. We watched helicopters loaded way passed their safe limit. Refugees had crammed onto the helicopters like crazy, easily filling each helicopter past its safe limit. Many of these refugees carried weapons with them. One small joke, on one trip, as the helicopter landed in Saigon, the tail gunner forgot to set the safety on his machine gun. As he stood a few feet away, he happened to turn around and remember it. Then a refugee grabbed the handle of the machine gun and pushed the trigger. The crewmember could almost feel the bullets ripping his body apart! Surprisingly, he felt nothing. When the helicopter returned to the ship, dropping off all the refugees, one of the waist gunners told me, “Next time, make sure to set your safety BEFORE leaving the helicopter!” The commanding officer of this Air Force squadron ordered his crews to fly three missions into Saigon and land at various locations.

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As the Viet Cong started heavily firing at all aircraft, after the third round, he told the crews that, if they wanted to continue, they were on their own.



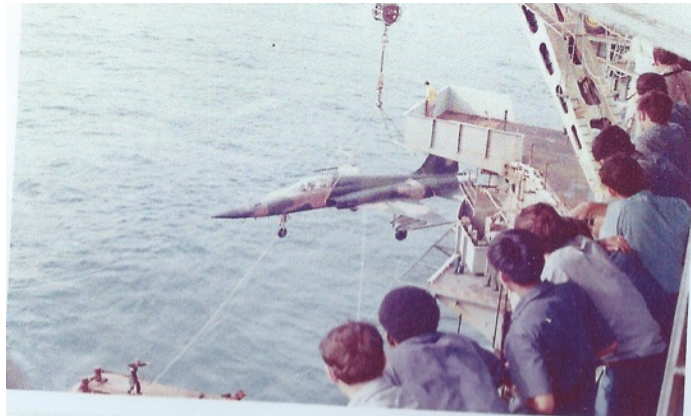
On the ship, we saw all sorts of refugees on the flight deck as they made their way to a temporary customs section. My supervisor was placed in charge of one section. He told me later that he hated the Vietnamese, but as he went through all their belongings, it got too rough on him and he had to go off to a corner and have a good cry. These people were carrying everything they could put in one or two suitcases, to start a new life, wherever.

Our forward mess decks were set up for meals the refugees and, of course, my berthing space was made available for them. Some crewmembers had

to teach the refugees how to take a "Navy shower." Some of them joked about it to me. The overflow of refugees slept under combat aircraft for the night. What was going on was, while we processed these people as quickly as we could, then our own helicopters, from the ship, flew them to other ships for transportation to Guam, for those who had to stay overnight, that was why our berthing space was made available.

That night, in which a couple of us made it to the O-10 level, we watched, off in the distance, as "Charlie" had arrived at an ammo dump, just north of Saigon, and were blowing up all the munitions. For some reason, and we heard about it later, somehow we were both able to recognize it as just that, and not fireworks. Being in an all-male society, where one is not supposed to cry, I did cry a little.

Now, throughout the night, we were able to see lights all over the place, as ships maneuvered to avoid colliding with each other. The next day, April 30th, became very interesting, as I watched as hueys and CH-47 helicopters buzzed around the ship, like so many mad hornets, looking for a landing spot. Now, a huey is supposed to have a maximum safe capacity for twelve passengers. We saw them landing with in excess of thirty passengers. We watched as the CH-47s landed, and sometimes as many as one hundred refugees came out. Then came the big story



Amidst all this confusion, here comes a Cessna O-1 Birddog, piloted by South Vietnamese Air Force Major Bung-Lyon (we learned later). He aimed right for the flight deck and, one of the flight deck crew who happened to see one of the guys from my shop happened to be standing outside one of our watertight doors, pushed him inside the space, as he had no idea what the small plane was doing! The pilot attempted to drop a note onto the flight deck but it fell off into the water below. Over the radio we heard the air boss tell him, "Just go ahead

and land in the ocean. We will be glad to pick you up!" We found out that his radio receiver worked, but his transmitter did not. Finally, he dropped a third note and it fell on the flight deck. A crewmember grabbed it and took it inside.

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Finally, the flight deck was clear for Major Bung-Lyon to land the Cessna O-1 Bird Dog, and, in my shop, we watched it on TV. When the plane came to a stop, everybody in the shop cheered.



Bird Dog comes in for a smooth landing on Midway

Later, I went down to the hangar bay and met the South Vietnamese major and his family. It'd been an impressive piece of piloting, an iconic moment in Midway's history and, heroically, he had saved his family.

I think the evacuation lasted well into the night. We heard, later that evening, that South Vietnam had finally surrendered to North Vietnam.

On the morning of May 1st, 1975, around 1:00 a.m., suddenly, the entire task force departed the Vietnamese waters. The Midway started to head West, towards Thailand. What happened was, pilots

fleeing Vietnam, had flown a bunch of combat aircraft to Thailand and the Vietnamese government demanded their return. The Thai government argued with them until they heard we were coming, then finally "gave up."

For me, this was a little historic. I turned 26 on May 2nd, and here I was, for all practical purpose, in a war zone. It's a birthday that I will remember for a long time.

We arrived off the coast of Thailand on May 3rd and started loading these combat aircraft onboard.

Helicopters being pushed off Midway by crewmen to make room for Bird Dog's landing.

When they were all on-loaded, we departed Thailand and headed east. On May 6th, we steamed past Vietnam and were officially back in a war zone for a day.

While the story should end here, once we arrived in Guam to drop off all these aircraft, including the O-1 Bird Dog, we heard that a merchant vessel, the Mayaguez, was hijacked by the nation of Cambodia.



Now, we were told to possibly conduct rescue operations of that ship. I happened to be on the O-11 level one evening, and I was talking to one of our signalmen and he told me of an interesting conversation with another ship, "Well, where are we going now? Are we going to Cambodia or the Philippines?!" "I have no idea." If I recall correctly, for a day or two, we were zigzagging, one minute towards Cambodia, then, next, the Philippines. Finally it was decided to head to the Philippines.

Now THAT is the end of the story!

(Photos used with permission of LTJG Fred Lydic [72-75])

Collision

By Mark Nojiri, AT1, IM-3, 74-76; 78-81

It was the evening of July 29, 1980, one day after I sort of celebrated my eight-year anniversary in the



United States Navy and it was just around 8:00 pm, for civilians. The USS Midway had just departed Subic Bay, Philippines, and was headed to a port visit to Singapore, then to the Indian Ocean. My shop was on the port side of the ship and, from where my shop was situated, I could hear the ship's whistle. I had learned that, one blast of the whistle meant a right or starboard turn, two meant a left, or port turn, three blasts meant reverse, and, anything more than that meant . . . well, you did not want to hear more than that. Also, each day, both in port and at sea, the man at the PA system, which we called the 1-MC, would announce the test of the general, chemical, and collision alarm. He would announce, "The following is a test of the general, chemical, and collision alarm, disregard" Then we would hear, "Bong, bong, bong, bong." Next was a whistling sound. That was followed by a "dit-dit-dit" a quick pause, then "dit-dit-dit" another quick pause, then "dit-dit-dit," then, "Regard all further alarms."

That night, the Midway was operating at darken ship, meaning all exterior lights were off and at income Alfa, meaning all electronic transmitters were off. There was a cloudy storm that night. One of our escort ships radioed to us that there was something out there and to be cautious.

Suddenly, in the darkness, all the lights of a ship were turned on and the ship was headed right at our port side, and, just so happened, it was headed right below my shop. At that moment, the air boss, in the island, ordered the flight deck crew to bring out the fire hoses and get them charged up. The ship turned out to be the Panamanian-registered merchant vessel *Cactus*.

That night, at about 8:00 pm, I heard, one blast, meaning a starboard turn, then another blast, meaning a port turn, then another blast, meaning reverse, then another blast, meaning to me, "Oh, oh, something is not right." Then I heard that horrible sound, "dit-dit-dit," then "dit-dit-dit" and "dit-dit-dit," then I heard a scraping sound like a canoe scraping on sand, then I felt the ship listing inward, as the *Cactus* struck the Midway, then the ship started listing to port, meaning now the *Cactus* was penetrating the skin of the Midway. As the *Cactus* penetrated our hull, the flight deck crew began hosing down the flight deck, as JP-5 jet fuel was pouring all over the deck. Next, we heard, "Bong, bong, bong, bong, general quarters, general quarters."

Suddenly, I heard a pounding on the door to my shop, and the Chief of the office right below us came running in. I asked him, "What is going on, Chief?!" He said, "The bow of a ship is in my office!" A minute later, I heard another pounding on my door. I opened it and this guy stuck his head in the doorway and yelled, "LOX leak!" My shop was immediately evacuated.

As the result of the collision, Midway suffered severe damage to her port side. On the flight deck six aircraft were almost totally destroyed and, more tragically, two Midway sailors lost their lives in the port O2N2 plant, which was destroyed.

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In the meantime, in the hangar bay, the damage control officer met with the repair party officer of that area and told him, “Evacuate this whole area. If there is an explosion, we are going to lose an entire division and a lot of men!”

At that, my entire division, of about two hundred men, quickly evacuated the area, heading towards the after portion of the ship.

Without further incident, we arrived back in Subic Bay about two days later and, within the next two weeks, after a monumental effort to repair the ship, we received a new liquid oxygen plant and, along with the other needed repairs, we were able to get underway to meet our commitments in the Indian Ocean.

Remembering Captain Foley

By Doug Kenyon, QM3/Navigation, 1971-73

There’s no argument that while underway flight operations are the most dynamic and stressful times aboard an aircraft carrier, and during these operations the Captain is on the Bridge . . . after all, the C.O. is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the ship’s operation and safety.



January 1973 — Midway Captain Sylvester “Bob” Foley congratulates Doug Kenyon on his promotion to QM3

During flight operations the Bridge can also be as intense as the flight deck operations. There is a lot going on up there. The Bridge Team can include the C.O., the Navigator (and at times Asst. Navigation Officer or lead QM or Chief). The Officer of the Deck, Junior Officer of the Deck (and sometimes a Watch Officer Trainee). Standard Watch Crew included the Quartermaster of the Watch, Chart House QM of the Watch, Bos’n Mate of the Watch, CIC Plot, Helmsman, Lee Helmsman and Messenger. All members of the Bridge Crew and Watch had the opportunity to experience first-hand the leadership and management style of the Commanding Officer while on the Bridge.

I served on the Bridge Watch team in 1971 after Midway’s conversion at Hunter’s Point Naval Shipyard and as a Quartermaster of the Watch and Chart House Watch during our extended deployment to Vietnam in 1972, and then for part of the year in 1973. During these times I had the rare opportunity to compare and contrast the leadership styles and personalities of the Midway’s Commanding Officers I served under and their interaction with the Bridge Watch Teams.

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While every C. O. has their particular “style” of leadership, it was my personal observation that Captain Foley, Midway’s 27th commanding officer, truly displayed the characteristics of what I would call a “Sailor’s Sailor.” He maintained a professional demeanor even under the stressful conditions of commanding an aircraft carrier in a war zone, with air ops going on seemingly around the clock. (The fact that he had two previous combat deployments in Vietnam before taking the helm of Midway contributed to his cool demeanor, I’m sure.) I will always remember Captain Foley as a pleasant and professional gentleman and was honored to receive his congratulations when I made rate in January of 1973.

It came as no surprise to me that Captain Foley ultimately achieved the rank of Four-Star Admiral. Testament to what I remember from Jard DeVille in his book “Nice Guys Finish First.” Captain Foley spent his 35 years in the Navy consistently finishing first.

Captain Foley and the Playboy Pinups

By Jim Daugherty, YN3, X-Division, 1971-73

During the 1972/1973 Westpac I worked in the Captain’s Office, which was in X Division. We had a good relationship with the Post Clerks and they always ensured we got a copy of the Playboy magazine every month. We would put the centerfold picture up on the walls of the Captain’s Office. Once a month Captain Foley would come down to the Captain’s Office and after we yelled attention-on-deck he would go over and see Mac for the latest Playboy. He would stand by our file cabinets with the magazine on top of them and browse through it. Then he would tell us to keep up the good work and off he went.

One day myself and one other guy were in the Captain’s Office when the door opened and in walked the Executive Officer. He looked around and said that all pinups had to be taken down prior to returning to homeport.

Well, that didn’t sit well with us, and on the Captain’s next visit to read the latest Playboy I asked him about it. He looked around the office and said that it looks good. He said to tell the XO we didn’t have to take them down.

So, a few days go by and the XO returns, just me and the same other guy in the office again. He asks why we haven’t taken down the pinups. I informed him that the Captain likes them and said we didn’t have to take them down. He didn’t say anything, just left.

Before the ship left for change of homeport to Japan, we had a dependents-day cruise. Captain Foley came down to the Captain’s Office and said that he might want to show his wife the office and maybe we better take the pinups down, but then put them back up the next day. The day after the dependents-day cruise, the Captain did stop by the office to see if we put them all back up.

All of us in the Captain’s Office enjoyed working for Captain Foley. It was sad to hear of his passing (see his notice in the “In Memoriam,” this newsletter), he had a great career in the Navy.

Several months later I decided to reenlist. Captain Foley had left and I didn’t really know the new CO. The Ship’s Secretary was only a W-1 and couldn’t reenlist me. He suggested I ask the XO to do it. I was a little nervous the XO would remember me from the pinups, but I guess not, because when I stopped by his office and told him my problem, he said he’d be happy to reenlist me. In fact, I still have a picture of the Midway in my office that he signed for me.

Chaplain Says a Prayer for X-Division

By Jim Daugherty, YN3, X-Division, 1971-73

I was on the Midway from late December 1971 to October 1973. It seemed like most of that time we were on our very long WestPac from April 1972 to March 1973. I served in X-Division my entire tour. We had 80-100 personnel, consisting of mostly Yeoman, Personnelmen and Postal Clerks. We had two berthing compartments, and I was assigned to the forward one on the starboard side, 3rd deck. I had transferred from a small gasoline tanker that was being decommissioned and the Midway was a maze to me at first. Luckily the ladder going down into my berthing compartment had a battle lantern with a red lens, the only one in the long passageway. If they would have changed that lens out in my first month it would have taken me a long time to find my bunk. Everything was to my satisfaction, had a top bunk for a while, but made YN3 shortly after reporting aboard and got a middle rack. Then, when we went on the WestPac cruise, the closer we got to the Philippines and then Vietnam, the hotter it got in our berthing compartment. While on the line in Vietnam I slept on my sheets, with no cover at all. In the morning I would be covered with sweat! The other berthing compartment we had was cold, but was just forward of the aft starboard plane elevator, and was it ever noisy when it was in use! So, I stayed where I was. One of the other bad things was below our berthing compartment was a storage room for the ship's stores. The ship's store personnel would take things out of that compartment all hours of the day. It was a non-ventilated space and when they opened that hatch, which was right next to my rack, the heat just rolled out!



Every night when the ship was underway one of the two Chaplains would say a prayer at taps (2200), which really didn't mean that most people went to sleep as the ship was still active 24 hours a day. (an aircraft carrier never goes to sleep.) The Chaplain's Office had a couple of Yeoman assigned to it and one or both of them slept in the HOT berthing compartment. One day, one of the Chaplains overheard them talking about the conditions of the berthing compartment and he discussed it with them. Then a day or two later, during the nightly prayer, X-Division was mentioned for suffering through the heat of their berthing compartment.

I was watching TV in the Captain's Office during the prayer and just groaned. X-Division became the laughing stock of the ship for at least a week. Engineering, including the Chief Engineer, came down to our berthing compartment to check out the heat and of course nothing came of it. It was explained to us that our ventilation pipes came through the smoke stack and probably most of the insulation had come off, and there was nothing that could be done about it.

I made it through the WestPac and shortly after returning to Alameda, one of the postal clerks was promoted to Chief Petty Officer and he had a choice rack in the COLD berthing compartment. I gave him a padlock to put on the rack when he moved to the Chief's Quarters and I moved to the COLD berthing compartment. Boy was it COLD!

I was on the ship for a while longer, and was onboard for the trip to Japan for change of homeport. Didn't stay long, though. The next day I was transferred to Subic Bay. I was stationed there for a 1-½ years and lived in Olongapo, with no air-con the whole time. I always felt my time on the Midway prepared me for hot nights in the PI!

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My Last Day on Midway

David Payson, 1963-64/RDSN, OI Division

My last active-duty day on Midway was May 26, 1964, the day we pulled into Midway's home port at Alameda, California, back from the 1963-64 West-Pac cruise. Although I had my orders to radar school at nearby Treasure Island and my seabag was packed, I was in no hurry to leave the ship, I remember. I was having a hard time coming to terms with the fact that I had to say goodbye to the life of adventure I had experienced on Midway, to the new friends I had made on the cruise, and to Midway herself.

I hung around CIC on that last day for as long as I dared, experiencing what I could for the last time, soaking it all in. Finally, it was time to leave, and, reluctantly, I made my way down the gangplank. Looking back at the ship from the pier, my feelings were mixed, somewhere between sadness and awe. But I knew I had to get on with the next chapter in my life, I suppose, and I found a taxi to take me to T.I.



Fast forward a few months to the fall of 1964. I was halfway through radar school, and several of us were sitting around the barracks, too broke to go into the City By the Bay, listening on the radio to the number-one pop hit in the country "Sugar Shack," when the song was suddenly interrupted by a news bulletin. In a distant country called Vietnam, the announcer said, in a place called the Gulf of Tonkin, North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked the destroyers USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy, and our destroyers had sunk two of the torpedo boats in retaliation. "They better not mess with us," I remember one of the men saying, breaking the silence that had fallen over us as we digested the news (which eventually was revealed to be false, or at best, inaccurate). The rest of us nodded in agreement, pondering what this incident, which became known as the "Gulf of

Tonkin Incident," might mean to us down the road. We had no clue, and put it out of our minds. We were struggling to unravel the complex theory of Ohm's Law, after all.

A year later, the impact of that radio broadcast really hit home for me. For by then, I was in Vietnam, *in* the Gulf of Tonkin, a radarman on the USS Wilhoite, DE/DER-397, a radar picket ship converted from a WWII DE. We were at war with North Vietnam, and, patrolling the coastal waters off South Vietnam, our job was to stop weapon's smuggling by sea. They called it Operation Market Time. We carried out this mission with few complaints, and a whole lot of Navy Pride. There was no "Hell no, we won't go." We were already there.

In 1965, the Midway was operating in the Gulf of Tonkin, waging war on North Vietnam from Yankee Station, a couple hundred miles off the coast, at the same time I was there on the Wilhoite. I remember from my duty station in Wilhoite's CIC, listening to her exchanging radio messages with the other U.S. ships in her Task Group. "School Boy" was her radio call sign. Wilhoite's was "Smokey Hill."

That '65 Vietnam patrol was the last time I crossed paths with Midway in Vietnam, for she "retired" from the active fleet for the next several years to undergo decommissioning/recommissioning at the San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard, Hunter's Point, California.

Although I returned to Vietnam waters in '66 and '67 on Wilhoite (we were home ported out of Pearl Harbor), I took great comfort in Midway's presence there in 1965.

Now, all these years later, I still take great comfort in her presence as she serves her country as a world-class ship museum in San Diego.

Operation Frostbite II

By Dave Payson, RDSN, 1963-64

In mid-July of this year, some two and a half months after we held the 3 Sisters reunion in San Diego, my wife and I, along with several thousand other tourists, including a contingency of about 50 Midway Museum members, many of them Midway veterans, and a few MVA members, headed north to Alaska from Seattle, Washington, on the Holland liner *Eurodam*.

The mission of our Midway group on *Eurodam* was to participate in Operation Frostbite II, as the museum dubbed it, and to help the Midway Museum celebrate its 15th anniversary of very successful operation in San Diego.

Nine years ago, in 2010, my wife and I attended a similar Midway Museum-hosted cruise to Alaska. That one was on the Royal Caribbean liner *Rhapsody of the Seas*, and we were part of the group to helping the Museum celebrate its fifth anniversary in San Diego.

Excuse my stern look in this picture, but my lovely wife, Mina Jo, had a big enough smile for both of us.

That one, also out of Seattle, was called –you guessed it – Operation Frostbite I. So when it comes to Operation Frostbite cruises to Alaska, my wife and I are iceberg solid, with maybe a tinge of climate-change melting around the edges.

These “Frostbite” cruises bore little resemblance to my real-life experience as a sailor aboard Midway in the early sixties. In those days, we all had our jobs to do and the ship had a specific mission. Apparently, on a civilian cruise ship, the one and only mission is to have fun. And there was plenty of fun to be had on this cruise – everything from eating and more eating to attending shows in the ship’s theater to seeing the sights in the Alaskan cities/towns we visited to watching a glacier melt at Glacier Bay. On a cruise liner, the fun only ends when the cruise does and reality sets in.



When the Midway group gathered for activities during this cruise, Mac, never one to shy away from a mic, was the obvious ringleader. There’s little doubt that it was Mac who came up with the idea of having the museum’s leadership team show up in bathrobes at our final group gathering. It was no “Animal House,” as the bathrobes called to mind, but it was plenty of fun!

Mac leads the “toga party” that took place at the closing reception prior to our arrival in Victoria B.C.

In conclusion, Operation Frostbite II was another winning idea for the Midway Museum, and my wife and I were glad that we had a chance to be part of the Midway group. The ports we visited – Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, Glacier Bay and Victoria – were “rustically fun,” the weather was decent (maybe too warm), the people were friendly, and the bears kept their distance.



Will there be another Operation Frostbite cruise in the future to commemorate, say, the 20th anniversary of the Midway Museum? If so, my wife and I hope to be on it. It’s the next best thing to shipping over!

“W” Division on USS Midway Was the Keeper of “Special Weapons”

By Lt J.G. Hines S. Vaughan, “W” Division, 1959-62

I graduated in August of 1959 with an engineering degree, and was commissioned into the U. S. Navy as an Ensign, awaiting orders to active duty. I began working as a pipeline engineer, but within one month, I received orders to proceed to my first assignment – Sandia Base, New Mexico.



I had never heard of Sandia Base and was surprised that my first Navy assignment was in the desert near Albuquerque, NM. I assumed they were looking for engineers.

Sandia Base was the headquarters of Field Command, Defense Atomic Support Agency (DASA) and was responsible for training members of the Navy, Army, and Marines in the assembly, testing, maintenance and inspection of nuclear weapons. The Air Force had its own school. I attended classes that prepared me for my new duties that awaited me on the USS Midway, which was on a WestPac cruise.

After graduation from Sandia in December 1959, my orders were to join the “W” Division on the USS Midway. I flew from Travis Air Force Base in California to Tachakawa Air Base in Japan, then went by ground to Yokosuka Naval Station, where the Midway was docked.

By the mid-50s, one of a 25-man special weapons team was being deployed to an *Essex-class* CVA, two to a *Midway-class*, the larger carriers by then having duplicate SASS (special aircraft service stores) spaces fore and aft. The team became W Division in the Gunnery Department.

According to Scott McGaugh in his book *Midway Magic*, Midway had had a serious fire on board when it was in the Philippines on November 9, 1959. He stated that the special weapons magazines were flooded. When I arrived on Midway in December 1959, there was no trace of the fire or damage, so I rather doubt those spaces were flooded. Others may have been, however.

As noted above, the Midway’s nuclear weapons organization was called the W Division. It reported to the Gunnery Department. W Division was manned by 8 officers and approximately 40 enlisted personnel. The division head was a Lt. Commander.

There were two spaces occupied by the W Division – one forward and one aft. My billet was entitled Electrical Officer, and I was assigned the post of officer-in-charge of the aft spaces, just aft and below, the mess deck.

Due to the sensitive subject of our work, secrecy was a necessary part of the job. An armed marine guard was posted 24/7 in front of the entry to each space, and only authorized personnel were allowed inside. All division personnel had Top Secret clearances. At least two men were required to be in the space at a time, and sometimes more, depending on the operation being performed.

The spaces were two of only a few on the ship that were air conditioned. The rest of the ship got very hot in the South China Sea in summertime. We often felt how nice it would be to sleep where we worked.

Beyond their special work, the members of the division also performed other shipboard duties, such as Officers of the Deck, special sea detail, underway replenishment, shore patrol, etc.

The weapons carried by the carriers of that day included fission and fusion bombs of several designs. The older designs required constant maintenance, including disassembly, where the newer models were moving toward the “wooden bomb” design which required little maintenance.

All members of W Division were required to wear dosimeters to ensure that they were not exposed to excess radiation. These badges were read one each month.

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Members of W Division were also required to attend regularly scheduled TDY refresher courses regarding new weapons and techniques. These courses were taught at North Island Naval Base in San Diego, and we attended annually. Midway's home port then was Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay.

I served aboard Midway until July 1962, three months longer than planned, because of the Cuban missile crisis. All personnel with separation papers were frozen until that crisis was over.

An article on The American Scientist website brings us up-to-date about the fate of the W Division on U.S. carriers.

“During the naval deployments in support of Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in early 1991, the aircraft carrier USS America (CV-66) deployed with its nuclear weapons division (W Division) and B61 nuclear strike bombs and B57 nuclear depth bombs. The W Division was still onboard when America deployed to Northern Europe and the Mediterranean in 1992.



B61 and B57 nuclear weapons are displayed on board the USS America (CV-66) during its deployment to Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

As ships offloaded their weapons, the on-board nuclear divisions gradually were disbanded in anticipation of the upcoming denuclearization of the surface fleet. One of the last carriers to deploy with a W Division was the USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67), which upon its return to the United States from a Mediterranean deployment in 1992-1993 ceremoniously photographed the W crew with the sign: “USS John F. Kennedy, CV 67, last W-Division, 17 Feb. 93.” The following year, the Clinton administration publicly announced that all carriers and surface ships would be denuclearized.”

High Rollin' in Las Vegas with "Uncle Sid"

Sid Friedlander (aka "Uncle Sid") at age 99 sporting his Midway T-shirt and enjoying a lobster tail dinner at the Rio Las Vegas Hotel (Sid is a 1945 MVA plankowner & WWII veteran)

As a child I remember my Uncle Sid always touting Los Angeles as the best place to live because of the weather, weather and the weather. His argument would also talk about the opportunities in a large city. I was sold, so after graduating college in the mid-70's, I packed up my car and made the road trip to LA from cold Long Island, NY. When I arrived in LA I went straight to my Uncle Sid's house where he made his home mine until I could find an apartment a couple of weeks later. Soon thereafter, I found a job for an accounting firm running their Long Beach Naval Station accountant and tax office. After discovering I was working on at the Naval Station my Uncle proudly told me the stories of him being on the USS Midway. Back then, my uncle was the maître d at both the Santa Anita & Hollywood Park racetracks (when one track closed the other would open). From his position at those racetracks, he cultivated close friendships with many well-known

patrons such as George Steinbrenner (NY Yankees owner), General Bradley, Hollywood celebrities, and many Las Vegas casino "big wigs." Those Las Vegas friends would treat my uncle like royalty when he came to their town. Sid would fly out to Vegas every Monday with his gambling buddies. They sure knew how to gamble and eat. Sid and his friends never risked too much but played for the love of the game and the royal treatment they were given. My Uncle is a craps player. To this day, he loves the dice.

When Uncle Sid found out I was off Monday's, he invited me to join him on a Las Vegas trip. We shared some great rolls of the dice that day. My Uncle and I both won, and I was hooked. My Aunt Scotty (Sid's wife) jokingly said, "you corrupted your nephew." I would join Sid often on those trips until I moved back to NY. Since those days my Uncle Sid and I always spoke on a regular basis. When Sid would visit NY, I would set up a trip for us to fly to Atlantic City and we would always talk about our old days in Vegas. Years later I moved to Florida and Sid and Scotty came and visited me and my family at our home. Six years ago, Sid and I planned a trip where we met in Las Vegas with our families for a few days. At the time Sid was 93, able to drive to Vegas, and took charge, running around the casinos better than someone half his age. Then we all went back to Los Angeles and visited with them a few more days before returning home to Florida.

My Uncle Sid, who is 99, has plenty of life ahead of him now, but that's not what the doctors told him last year. His heart specialists told him he had a bad heart valve. They told Sid he would be a bad candidate for the valve replacement and would only survive another six months. This was not an acceptable prognosis for my Uncle, so Sid went to the VA hospital for a consultation. They agreed to do the surgery and after a rough recovery, Sid is now back to his old self.

In late October, on one of our regular phone calls, Sid asked me if I would like to come and visit him, telling me there was something he wanted to do with me. He wanted to go to Vegas for a few days. How could my 99-year-old uncle who just had heart surgery, go to Vegas, play craps, and enjoy himself? I



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called my Aunt Sondra, (Sid's baby sister) for her opinion. Sondra's thoughts were after you fly out decide when you see him.

Within moments of seeing Sid walking on his own and talking as well as anyone I know, I knew our road trip to Vegas was on. Upon arrival in the Rio Las Vegas Hotel we immediately hit the crap tables after putting our luggage in our individual suites. Sid still knows the game as well as the dealers at the tables, making the proper place bets to get the best odds and pressing up his bets in the same way he did over 40 years ago. His enthusiasm for the game was contagious with the other players at the crap table and intensified as he called out for the point number at the roll of the dice. Sid is just a fun person to have at the crap table! My Uncle's gambling attire always included his Midway hat and Midway reunion t-shirt. Every table we played at someone would ask about the Midway and Sid would enthusiastically explain the history of the ship. I'm proud to say many people thanked Sid for his service. When we got to a new table, occasionally I would get people to try to guess Sid's age. The numbers thrown at us were generally in the low to mid 80's. Because of Sid's sharpness there were no guess in the 90's. When I told people Sid was 99, they weren't satisfied with just what vitamins Sid was taking, they wanted to know specifically how many milligrams of each one he took. That night for dinner Sid had a nice Lobster tail with his dinner. (See photo leading off this story.) We went back to the tables after we ate and by 11PM, my East Coast time zone caught up with me. I mentioned to Sid we should go up to our rooms. Sid told me that he wasn't tired and wanted to play on. I knew by his tone that there was no way I was going to persuade him differently, so I went up to my room after giving my phone number to the pit bosses, believing Sid would be close behind me.

The next morning at breakfast Sid told me he finished up at 2:30 AM. We spent that day casino hopping on the strip and finished the night back at the Rio casino. By 11:30 PM, I again was tired. When I was making my exit without Sid to my room, the pit boss yelled to me, "what's the matter you can't keep up?" We all laughed. Sid stayed up until 5:30 AM.

On the final day, we had a great time at the casino. Then at night, Sid again outlasted me. In the morning Sid showed me a card he had received from someone at the Rio. He had made friends with the Casino Manager.



Dan Friedlander, nephew of "Uncle Sid" and author of this article, has spent his share of time trying to keep up with his high-rolling Uncle in Vegas casinos.

For several reasons, Sid had been away from the casinos for about four years so his connections to get everything "comped" (for free) was over. Early in the morning, in a quest to see if I could get a break on our room & food charges, I spoke to a casino host. I was able to get my room and all our food that I had charged to my room comped. The host could not take care of Sid's room unless Sid came to the office.

When I took Sid to the Host's office, they looked up Sid's play. He had gambled 26 ½ hours (three times my time at the tables). The host immediately comped Sid's room then winked at me and said, "next time you could put the food on his room too."

SID STILL HAS IT! I am looking forward to accompanying my Uncle to the Midway reunion this year and on the way back to Los Angeles we will be hitting the Casinos. You can bet on that!

Member of Midway's 1945 Crew Joins MVA

"You can't have a better duty station than the signal bridge!"

by **Bill Lovejoy, S1c (SM)**



Life aboard the Midway in 1945-46 was much like it is on any carrier – dull routine one minute, excitement and danger the next.

Bill Lovejoy, right, stands with his Midway shipmates on the flight deck amidst a flood of memories and Dauntless Dive Bombers.

The best part: you can't have a better duty station than the signal bridge! You knew what was happening every minute, day and night. Liberty in NYC wasn't hard to take either. Les Brown and his orchestra with a pretty blonde singer named Doris Day. Vaughan Monroe

bought a round of drinks for our table at the Commodore Hotel. Ed Sullivan brought his show on board one night for those who didn't have liberty. The best thing that happened to me, though, was being given a ticket to the Broadway show Oklahoma by a black custodian who wouldn't accept payment. I never forgot that. High living for an 18 year-old kid from a small coal town in eastern Ohio.

Operation "Frostbite" took us to the subarctic in March of 1946. The announced purpose of the trip was to test cold weather gear and flight operations under extreme conditions. But the real reason was to get ice for Rear Admiral Cassady's highballs!

The Monument Man



**From USS Midway Cook to
Historical Memorial Preservationist**

By **MSCS(AW) Marion (Mick) Hersey, USN Ret.**

When I was on the USS Midway as a 2nd class, and then after I made 1st class, I worked in the Forward Bakeshop as the Cake Decorator and then Bakeshop Supervisor. Little did I realize that my attention to detail that I was perfecting decorating cakes would eventually turn into a hobby more than 30 years later. I practiced over and over designs for cakes, coming up with a different design each day to

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place on the mess decks for the crew to enjoy. I was honoring my fellow sailors' departments and did so by a different design each day. I did old ships, new ships, squadron emblems and jets.

You may ask what this has to do with a hobby I started 30 years later. Well, I'm now preserving memorials and markers that honor our veterans and historical events. Emblems that were designed for cakes I have now cleaned on memorial markers around Bremerton, Washington, and up and down western Washington. To date I have restored over 300 granite markers and almost 100 brass memorials. I even restored the USS Midway plaque on Bremerton's boardwalk.



After preserving and refurbishing most of the memorials around the Bremerton area and our county, I was asked to expand my horizon. In response, I looked at a listing of veterans and historical artifacts in our area. There were anchors, guns off of WWII ships and even a jet fighter from the Vietnam era here in our local area.

I asked local veterans' organizations how many memorials were in our area and was told 27. Well, after restoring all the plaques on Bremerton's boardwalk (over 300), I knew the number was much higher, and so I went throughout our county driving from the northernmost city to the farthest south and have discovered almost 100 memorials. Since restoring them, I have now documented over 100. I get the local stores to donate materials and sailors volunteer off of the ships in port to assist in refurbishing the memorials.

Last year I finished refurbishing all the memorials in Kitsap County and was then asked assist the Ladies of the Daughters of the American Revolution in restoring and refurbishing historical plaques. I agreed and have gone as far as Deception Pass (by Whidbey Island Naval Air Station) in the northern area of western Washington to the southern part of the state, Vancouver, following the Oregon Trail in Washington. It is a set of 11 markers from Vancouver to Olympia that were placed in 1916 by the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution. My tie to this group is that I have proven that through Genealogical evidence that my 4th Great Grandfather served in the Revolutionary War.



Another aspect of restoring and refurbishing memorials is working in and around some of the older cemeteries in our area. Through the course of this work, I have discovered that we have a Medal of Honor recipient buried in three of our local cemeteries and a least four Bronze Star recipients. Their memorial tombstones are cleaned and restored with honor and dignity, something that has been lost over the years as family members move away from the areas that their loved ones grew up in.

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You never know when the experience and knowledge you gained on the USS Midway will assist in a project 30 years later.

Having Some “Extra” Fun

By Ronald E. Pope, SK1, USNR (Ret.)

From 1958 to 1960, I served as an Electricians Mate (EM) aboard the mighty USS Midway, traveling the world over and visiting many exotic ports. When I left active duty, I went from an EM to a Storekeeper in the Naval Reserve and was assigned to the Seabees. All the while I worked at various grocery store businesses. You might say I led two, maybe three, lives as a civilian during this period.



Then, in 2005, after I retired from my career as a Grocery Sales Manager, I looked for a part-time job doing something interesting. My son was a stage actor doing “Background / Extra” work on various TV shows being filmed in the area the Dallas area. I was asked to join him on the set during filming of the TV show “Dallas.” I became a “Preferred Background / Extra” as a result and was in several episodes. I became hooked and started to work on several shows being filmed in the area. While most of the work has been for TV, some has also been on documentaries, such as “Hillary’s America - The Movie,” which recently ran in theaters across the country. I was a 2015 Senator in a Senate scene where the Slavery issue was being fought over passionately, which was a lot of fun, and took over a full day of shooting to create a 15-minute scene. During the past few years as I became older, “Background Actor” work has become more of a hobby than anything, and I enjoy the



work, and mostly enjoy the various costumes, and roles I get to play. Most recently I have worked in the Austin, Texas, area with a casting agency for various TV shows being filmed there. Being a “Background Actor – Extra” is fun, and we get to meet many of the big-time TV actors we work with. While there is not supposed to be any contact, and some are not approachable, there are many who are just regular people. The best part of the “job” is learning how these shows are made, and that sometimes a simple “take” may take a few hours to film a 30 second shot, and sometimes a set will take

several days to get the correct scene shot due to weather, and many, many factors as everything has to be perfect for the director to accept the scene, and wrap the shot. A couple of photos were shot of different roles I have worked on, on sets where cellphone photos were allowed. On most sets, however, there are strict rules that no photos are allowed.

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The best part about this hobby is that I get paid for doing it, and most of the time we are just sitting around waiting for the scene to be shot and/or for the professional actors to get their lines correct. Also, it's fun watching a show on TV where we are working in the background, while the (front) actors are doing their thing professionally.



Could This Be the Birth of “Midway Magic”?

Martin FitzGerald/AN, V-4 Division, 1957-60

As I see it, the term "Midway Magic" was born during the period leading up to the Battle of Midway, when in a meeting at Naval headquarters in Pearl Harbor, Admiral Chester Nimitz asked for a name for the rendezvous point for our fleet to intercept the Japanese fleet, and “Point Luck” was chosen. Or so at least it was depicted in the movie “Battle of Midway,” and I believe it is true. Could it be, then, that this was when Midway Magic was born? I believe so. Thinking back to when we broke the Japanese code and learned that Midway Island was the target that Admiral Yamamoto picked for his next attack on U.S. forces, it makes sense.

As the battle began, a certain bit of luck came into play with the splitting of Torpedo Squadron Eight, with some of the planes in that squadron coming from the USS Hornet and some coming from Midway Island. It is a small thing, but there were many small things that added up to a huge success in our favor. With the inferior number of ships we had in the battle, we should have lost but, of course, we did not, and the tides of war in the Pacific turned in our favor with the victory in the ocean off of Midway. That in itself is enough to make me think the details I describe above led to the birth of Midway Magic. And that Magic carries on to this day on board the USS MIDWAY CV-41 and with any individual or group still connected to the Midway.



My Affinity with the USS Midway

Ed Carr, RD1/OI, 1952-54

I served on the USS Midway from 1952 to 1954, transferred to the USS Randolph and was discharged in January 1956.

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I made two Med cruises on Midway, one 6 months in duration, the other 7. Before the Navy, I lived in New York City, in a lower income area. We were poor but I didn't know it because everyone around us was also poor. I didn't know a different life.

On the Midway, in the Med, we spent a lot of time on and around the French Riviera. That gave me the first glimpse of a possible different life. I was then determined to change my future.

I made my third Med cruise on the USS Randolph, CV-15, saved all my money for a stop in Cannes. I was then an RD1, so I had accumulated some pretty good funds. In Cannes, with the cooperation of an officer on the Randolph, I got civilian clothes and took leave. I had several hundred dollars and lots of American cigarettes, as good as cash.

I went ashore, changed out of my uniform in a bar and got a room in the Carlton Hotel, the top hotel in Cannes. Then I lived like I thought rich people lived.

Men in uniform could not get into the casinos, enlisted men were barred from the best night clubs, etc. At the outside patio of the Carlton, I ran into the Randolph officer that helped me. He was with a Canadian girl staying at a hostel. He bought me a drink. The girl asked if she could use my hotel room to shower. I spent most of the day with them, not as just another enlisted man.

That night, I went to the top night club in Cannes, restricted to enlisted men. There I ran into the Ops Officer of the Randolph. I thought I was busted. He asked me why I was there and in civvies. I told him the truth and he bought me a drink. I felt empowered and reciprocated. We never spoke about it again.

The next day, I was in the Carlton bar. Next to me was an older English gentleman. He saw my Lucky Strikes cigarettes and bummed one. He bought me a drink so I gave him the whole pack (worth 9 cents back then).

After a while, the bartender told him that, "Lady so-and-so was waiting for him." He was an English Lord.

Lots of other things to write about but I won't. Months later back on the Randolph, I got my "shipping over" talk from the Executive Officer. I told him "no thank you, I was going to be discharged." He said that no slick arm first-class P.O. would leave the Navy. I told him then that I would be the first.

I got discharged in January 1956, enrolled in college, met my soon-to-be wife, graduated, got married in 1959. After a series of different jobs, I retired in 2000 as the Executive Officer of a major corporation. We raised our family, gave them a college education and now at age 85 live the retired life in Palm Desert, CA.

All of this came about because of my experiences on the Midway. I owe the Midway my life.

CVA-41 Ball Cap

Mike Levin, ACAN/V-2, 1952-54

Recently, two things happened to me related to the USS Midway within a 24-hour period that I'd like to share.

My bride for the last 60 years and I are planning to relocate to the Phoenix AZ area and were driving from LA to Phoenix to do some house hunting. We started out late afternoon on Halloween and at dinner time stopped in a family restaurant we enjoy that is located on the edge of the Cabazon Tribe Reservation. I was wearing my Midway CVA-41 baseball cap (that Ron Pope was nice enough to pick up for me at the last reunion).

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There was a family of six Native Americans seated at a table across from our booth, all four kids dressed in their Halloween costumes. One of the little boys at the family table kept peeking at me and I simply smiled back at him. In a few minutes after about a dozen peeks that I noticed he got up from his table and walked directly to me. He stood at attention and informed me he was a “Cub Scout” and he and his entire Den and his Dad had spent two nights aboard the Midway – slept and ate their meals onboard and enjoyed every minute of it and continued standing at attention and then saluted me and held the salute until I returned it. Guys, it brought tears to both my wife Phyllis and my eyes. That moment was very special!

We are really doing something correctly in supporting the educational programs aboard Midway with a portion of our dues.

The second evening Phyllis and I went to dinner at a casual Bar-B.Q. and Steak House in Goodyear, AZ, known for ribs and beer so cold it hurts your teeth, and I was still wearing my CVA-41 ball cap. We had a great dinner and were hanging loose watching my Cubs (I’m originally a Chicago kid) beat Cleveland in the World Series. It came time for the check and the server said “No Check” for you. A gentleman sitting a few tables away who had already left the place, and never had spoken a word to us, had picked up our entire check including the tip and left us a message. “It was his pleasure and he wanted me to know an ex-Marine had just bought dinner for an ex-Sailor and his Lady.” I was speechless—never had anything like this ever happened to me before.

I think this coming weekend I’ll wear my CVA-41 ball cap to either Ruth’s Chris or Morton’s Steak House and see what is going to happen next.

Thank you all for listening!

Many Midway veterans crossed the Equator over the years. Brendan Denihan, AT2/ VF-161 (78-80) did so twice. Here’s how he remembers it: “On August 22, 1980, **the USS Midway crossed the Equator at Latitude 0000, Longitude 084 Degrees 34 Minutes East.** As this was my second crossing aboard Midway, I participated in the ceremonies as a full-fledge Shellback. We had two Marine Detachment Pollywogs in our section, which we Shellbacks brought in front of our illustrious Leader, King Neptunus Rex, King of the Deep. Our Marine Pollywogs stood there not bowing nor showing any fear, which totally enraged our King. ‘Off with their Heads!’ he shouted. So we escorted these Wogs to the guillotine, face up, mouths open so they could see their fate coming at them when the rope was pulled. The end was swift.”

Did You Cross the Line?

By Bob Srabian, 1963-66, Ens.-Lt., USNR, Ops

During her time of active service, the USS Midway crossed the line. Which one did you cross? The International Dateline? The Equator? What was the celebration you encountered? These questions surfaced an inquiry from myself. Not all crew members accomplished this feat. Depending on when and where you served on Midway, you were lucky to become a member of the Golden Dragon (crossing the International Dateline). Or to become a Shellback (crossing the Equator). Or possibly both.

During her time of active service, Midway was homeported in Norfolk, VA (1945-1954), Alameda, CA (1958-1966, 1970-1972) and Yokosuka, Japan (1973-1992).

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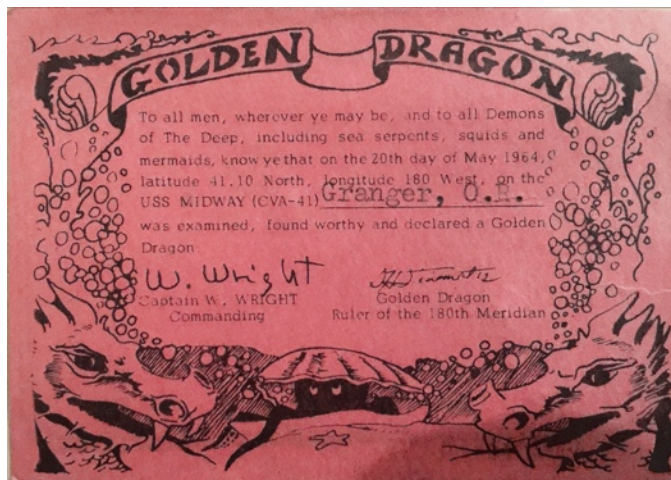


While in transit to her new homeport from Norfolk to Alameda, Midway crossed the equator twice. Once in the Atlantic Ocean and crossing back in the Pacific Ocean. The Shellback ceremony was conducted on 6 January 1955.

While homeported in Alameda, Midway crossed the International Dateline twenty times (counting return trips). There were no Equator crossings during this time. One was scheduled in 1965, but Sec. McNamara sent Midway to Vietnam. A ceremony for crossing the Dateline has never been known to be conducted aboard Midway. Apparently the Navy does not consider this to be a celebratory event.

While Midway was homeported in Yokosuka, she crossed the Equator twenty-four times and the crew became Shellbacks after the fraternity style initiation from King Neptune (His Majesty Neptunus Rex). The Shellback initiation was conducted eleven times. Being homeported in Japan, Midway had no opportunity to cross the International Dateline.

To memorialize the crossings, the crew would receive a card or certificate signed by the ship's captain noting the exact point of crossing and date of crossing. This custom began with the British Navy and has also been celebrated by the Japanese. While serving as our Commander in Chief, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was initiated by King Neptune aboard the USS Indianapolis, in late November 1936. No one was exempt from initiation.



The Tale of the Missing Tape

By Tim Miller, ABE3 USN (Ret.)

Many years ago a young man reported aboard the USS Midway, CV-41, with an old-school cassette tape of C.W. McCall's greatest hits. Over the years the owner and the tape went their separate ways. Deep down in the owner's heart, he wondered, though, about that tape. Especially during those long, long 100-plus days at sea on Gonzo Station. Well, fast forward to 2016 to an awesome event that this not-so-young man was part of. I'm talking about the V-2 Cats and Arresting Gear reunion held in Sept 2016 on the Midway. Of course, all of those who attended were treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of the cat spaces, arresting gear spaces and our sleeping quarters. As you would expect, when you get about 30 ABE's

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together, the stories flowed like the never-ending Snake River at the reunion.

As it happened, while our group toured through our old berthing quarters, a daughter of one of the guys found a cassette tape. Of course, we all played Sherlock Holmes and tried to deduce who the tape's owner might be. Once we got into the light, I shouted, "Holy Cow! I can't believe it"! That stopped them in their tracks. That's my tape, I said, the one I've been searching over 30 years for. That's my handwriting on the tape! I exclaimed. It just blew my mind to think that my C.W. McCall cassette tape would still be in the area where I slept while haze gray and underway. So that's my story, and I'm sticking to it. After all these years, going back to 1984, it had been right there, stuck under some cranny in our berthing compartment, for

over 30 years. Just waiting for me to come back and stumble upon it. "May the forces of 'Midway Magic' be there for me!" I uttered. And they were! Life is an amazing journey, and each day there are surprises waiting for us. That's the magic of it all.

Special Achievement: Marion ("Mick") Hersey

Editor's note: Marion "Mick" Hersey served on Midway from 1982-86 as a baker and a cake decorator. Doing this job he learned how to pay attention to detail, a lesson he now, some 30-plus years later, applies to being a "preservationist" of memorials. On May 30, 2017, he received a Special Achievement Award in Historic Preservation at a ceremony in Seattle. Last year, in this newsletter, we featured a story on Mick titled "The Monument Man." It described how Mick has unselfishly given his time and effort to preserving historical and cultural memorials (such as grave markers and plaques) up and down Washington's Olympic Peninsula and beyond, including the USS Midway plaque on Bremerton's waterfront. The Special Achievement Award described here recognizes Mick's relentless efforts in preserving and refurbishing these memorials, so many of which have been long neglected, and while he may garner more of these awards in the future, winning them isn't what drives him. Not by a long shot. He is totally motivated and committed to restoring the memorials of those who have come before, and he works at it almost every day and with some "special sense," it seems. His accomplishments, recognized by this award, are truly remarkable, and we salute him for it!

The following is the narrative that was read when Mick was presented the 2017 Special Achievement in Historic Preservation Award . . .

"The first award for outstanding achievement in historic preservation is made in the Special Achievement category. Awards given in this category recognize individuals, organizations, programs, or special efforts that do not quite fit into the other award categories but have made a significant impact toward the preservation of cultural or historic properties. This year, the recipient in this category is Marion (better known as "Mick") Hersey (HER SEE) from Bremerton [Washington State]. Mick is recognized in special achievement for his countless volunteer hours devoted to preserving and restoring historical markers, military markers, cemeteries, grave stones, and historic military artifacts located not only in Kitsap but in counties up and down the I-5 corridor and Olympic Peninsula. This is a timely honor in view of the Memorial Day holiday we observed yesterday as well as 2017 marks the centennial observance of the United States' entry into the World War I conflict.

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Mick Hersey accepts his Special Achievement Award at May 30 ceremony in Seattle. At left is Dr. Allyson Brooks, Director, Washington State Archeology and Historical Preservation Department.

“Mick got started in his mission to preserve historic markers in 2010 after noticing neglected memorials along the boardwalk in downtown Bremerton. On his own volition, he repainted over 300 of these plaques at no cost to the public.

“Himself retired from the Navy, Mick is motivated by his patriotism and love of history. He believes that the restoration work he does brings honor and dignity to the persons, actions, and events in history that the memorials were created to commemorate.

“ . . . To help on his projects, Mick enlists his own family members, many friends, active-duty military personnel, historical and veterans groups, and all levels of government entities. His many accomplishments include the restoration of over 400 grave stones, memorials, and historical markers in addition to 100 bronze markers. Mick has cleared many overgrown cemeteries, restored 4 gun placements, 5 anchors, and 12 flagpoles. Amongst his most ambitious project was repainting a F-8 Crusader fighter jet at Bremerton’s NAD Sorooptimist Park.



“What we have described here barely scratches the surface of all that Mick has accomplished to preserve these symbols of our heritage and the sacrifices of others. But as the Daughters of the American Revolution wrote to us in their nomination of Mick, “He gives totally of himself for his love of preservation.” Mick, at this time, it is truly an honor to present you with this award.”



Mick working to restore plaques and monuments along Bremerton’s waterfront, including one we all recognize.

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NEY AWARD 1976

by Steve Palka, MS1/MSC, S-2 Division, 1974 -1977

The Captain Edward F. Ney Award was instituted in 1958 to recognize the best small, medium and large afloat and ashore Navy Food Service Operations. While many people say the way to win the Ney Award is with "Good Chow," this award and winning it encompasses so much more.

In 1976, Midway was a participant in the award, and as both the Food Service Division and the rest of the ship found out, it was more than just "Good Chow." It wasn't until the competition was well underway that we found out that Midway was one of the three ships in the Large Mess Afloat Category that was in the running for the NEY Award.

As with all inspections there is a checklist that everyone must follow and points are awarded in each category. The categories of the NEY Award checklist included such areas as: Food Preparation and Service, Sanitation, and Training.

From the outset we knew that winning this award was going to require assistance from other departments within Midway. It was going to have to be a team effort, including the personnel from the Wardroom, CPO Mess, the Captain and Admiral's Galley, as well both the Forward and Aft Galley, Bake Shops, Vegetable Preparation Rooms and the stores conveyors. In short, it was going to require just about everything having to do with food preparation aboard Midway to win this award competition.

Our first inspection was by the Type Commander, COMNAV AIRPAC, while in homeport Yokosuka, and we had no problem passing this inspection. The second inspection was conducted by the Officer-in-Charge of the Navy Food Management Team Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. For this inspection we were underway from Singapore on our way to the Indian Ocean. The inspector was onboard for about 2-3 days and this allowed him more than enough time to check all the food service spaces.

Our final inspection was conducted in Hong Kong. When the final inspection party came on board Monday morning they were met on the quarterdeck by Captain Chambers, the XO, the Supply Officer, and the Food Service Officer. Captain Chambers had them come up to his in port cabin for a Welcome Aboard cup of coffee and then the inspection party commenced their inspection of Midway's Food Service Spaces. The inspection party consisted of the XO of the Navy Food Service Systems Office in Washington D.C, the Training Officer from the Navy Food Service Systems Office, a Medical Service Corps Officer and a civilian from the International Food Service Executives Association.

For the next many hours this inspection team was everywhere to be found in Midway's Food Service Spaces, going over every possible detail pertaining to food preparation, sanitation and messing and berthing, and many more details. The Inspection Party did not leave the ship until after 1700. When they left they told Captain Chambers the results would be out in about 2 - 3 weeks.

When the results did come out, the U.S.S. Midway was the winner of the NEY Award for the best large mess afloat in 1976. We had beaten out the U.S.S. Prairie (AD-15), which was homeported in San Diego and some Amphib ship that was homeported in Norfolk.

Captain Chambers was very pleased with the outcome and when the Midway got back to homeport Yokosuka he proceeded to throw a party for everyone involved in the NEY Award. This winning of the NEY Award in 1976 is just another instance of "Midway Magic."

The plaque for this award can be seen on the Midway museum even today. It is on the aft mess decks port side adjacent to the Unrep exhibit.

The Birth of “Midway Magic”

Martin FitzGerald/AN, V-4 Division, 1957-60

As I see it, the term "Midway Magic" was born during the period leading up to the Battle of Midway, when in a meeting at Naval headquarters in Pearl Harbor, Admiral Chester Nimitz asked for a name for the rendezvous point for our fleet to intercept the Japanese fleet, and “Point Luck” was chosen. Or so it was depicted in the movie “Battle of Midway,” and I believe it is true. Could it be, then, that this was when Midway Magic was born? I believe so. Thinking back to when we broke the Japanese code and learned that Midway Island was the target that Admiral Yamamoto picked for his next attack on U.S. forces, it makes sense. As the battle began, a certain bit of luck came into play with the splitting of Torpedo Squadron Eight, with some of the planes in that squadron coming from the USS Hornet and some coming from Midway Island. It is a small thing, but there were many small things that added up to a huge success in our favor. With the inferior number of ships we had in the battle, we should have lost but, of course, we did not, and the tides of war in the Pacific turned in our favor with the victory in the ocean off of Midway. That in itself is enough to make me think the details I describe above led to the birth of Midway Magic. And that Magic carries on to this day on board the USS MIDWAY CV-41 and with any individual or group still connected to the Midway.

A Day in a Young Sailor’s Life

President Truman’s Visit Aboard USS Missouri (BB-63)

Richard Remington, FA MM1/M Div., 1948-53

Early on a Saturday morning (December 4, 1948), the Engineering Department aboard the Midway was awakened and ordered to light off the main engines (no easy task aboard an aircraft carrier) in preparations for getting under way. After lighting fires in the designated boilers, raising vacuum on the main condenser, and warming up the main turbines, we were ready to answer all bells. We were ready to go, but had nowhere to go. As it turned out, the harbor tugs moved the Midway 300 feet forward on pier #7 to allow the USS Williamsburg (the President’s yacht) to get behind us. Once moved, we then had to go through the motions of shutting down the engineering plant. Again, shutting down an engineering plant isn’t like parking your automobile and turning off the engine. Once the engineering plant was shut down and the in-port watch was set, we all thought that was it. Seems that was only the beginning. A good many of the sailors aboard Midway had no idea what was happening at the time; it didn’t take too long to find out. One problem, every day (including weekends) there’s a “Plan of the Day” posted letting everyone know what was happening on a particular day. There was nothing in the POD for 4 December 1948 that mentioned what was happening this morning. At about 0900 we were all told to get into our dress blue uniforms and go to assigned stations on the flight deck to man the rail. Keep in mind that this was the 4th of December; the weather was what you might expect in December – cold, drizzly and breezy. And, oh yes, we found out why we were up there; the USS Williamsburg pulled in behind Midway with the President and his party aboard. Seems that someone with an extra \$10,000.00 was giving a silver service set to the “Mighty Mo” and President Truman was doing the honors. Thus we were manning the rail to render honors to the President of the United States. And, sure enough, soon after the Williamsburg tied up, the President, typically waving his Stenson, was walking down the pier on his way to board the Missouri. What a day! To say the least, December 4, 1948, was a day to remember; getting **Richard Remington (right), aboard Midway ’48-’53, was a machinist mate first class** to see the President, his yacht, and to listen to his speech (mostly about the Mighty Mo). As might be expected, the President didn’t stay too long and by noontime we were back to our normal routine. For a young sailor, it was good getting to see the President up close.



My Memories of Frequent Wind

Steve Palka, 1974-77/CS1, S-2 Division

When Midway left Yokosuka in late March of 1975 for a routine underway period, with port calls scheduled for both Subic Bay and Hong Kong, we had no idea of how that would change for all of us. On the way to Subic Bay, Midway picked up two squadrons of Marine helicopters off the coast of Okinawa. We carried these helos to the Subic Op area where they then flew off to other carriers.

Midway arrived in Subic Bay on 15 April 1975, for a 10-day upkeep and resupply port call. This time in port was cut short, because on 18 April 1975, Midway got underway about 1600. Prior to getting underway we offloaded about half of the air wing personnel and most of the aircraft that were on board. The only aircraft left on the ship were the ones that required maintenance or were "hard down" in the hangar bay. This left some of the air wing berthing spaces open for future use. No one knew where we were going, we only knew we were going someplace. We received 10 Air Force Jolly Green Giant helos and their crews on 20 April 1975, and then "rumor control" on the mess decks started to talk about what was going to occur, but no one knew for sure. The Air Force helo crews spent a few days practicing take-offs and landings on the flight deck for whatever operation they were supposed to embark on. We also got back a lot of personnel who were left on the beach when Midway had to get underway early. Some of the amphibious vessels brought these personnel back to us.

On 29 April 1975, we finally learned what Midway's mission was. Midway, along with the 10 Air Force Jolly Green Giants, was to assist in the evacuation of personnel from the Embassy in Saigon. This became known as "Operation Frequent Wind." Almost all of the action that occurred happened on the flight deck during this operation, with the Air Force helos bringing in the evacuees. The Air Force helos would bring the evacuees onboard and then they were taken down below where, I believe, a census, or record, of who came aboard was being maintained. After this was done the helos from HC-1 Det-2 would begin to shuttle the evacuees to the amphibious ships that were part of the task force. Below decks, on both the hangar deck and the second deck, we were kept busy. The Storekeepers were breaking out rolls of bubble wrap that served as mattresses for the evacuees, a little over 1,000, who were to remain onboard overnight and did not want to go to an empty berthing compartment but just sleep in the hangar deck. As we walked through the hangar we would give them a comforting smile and this seemed to put them at ease.



In both the forward and aft galleys we were open around the clock feeding Midway crew, Air Force personnel, as well as the evacuees who came through, especially the 1,000-plus evacuees who remained overnight on the first night. Our mess cooks on the mess decks went out of their way to ensure the evacuees were made to feel comfortable in an environment that they had never experienced before. You could tell by the evacuees' smiles that they appreciated everything we did for them. For the personnel on the flight deck who could not get down to the mess decks, we sent up over 25 cases of C-rations. While this was not as good as a hot meal, this is what they wanted so the Supply Officer said send them up.

On 30 April 1975, after the last of the evacuees were taken from the embassy, which included Air America personnel, we continued to bring evacuees on board. When the Air America personnel came onboard they had to check their weapons into the armory, which was just forward of the aft galley. A couple of hours after these they checked their weapons in, one of the mess cooks who was assigned to the armory came running into the galley with his eyes as big as silver dollars. He was yelling, "They got the

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big ones, they got the big ones in the armory!" What he meant was that the Air America personnel had checked in their 357s and no one in the armory had seen this type of weapon in real life before. The only time anyone had seen these was in the Clint Eastwood "Dirty Harry" movies, so that was all this mess cook could talk about. Around noon on April 30th we were breaking out potatoes and onions from the potato sponson, starboard side aft, when we looked up at what appeared to be a swarm or locust coming towards Midway and the rest of the ships in the task force. They turned out to be numerous Vietnamese Huey gun ships and CH-47 Chinook helicopters that were loaded with evacuees fleeing Saigon. The normal crew of a Huey gun ship is at most four but these had people hanging off the outside, and there must have been at 35-40 on each Huey. The Hueys were brought aboard as safely as possible and the evacuees were taken care of in the same manner as the those that came onboard the day before. The flight deck was beginning to get quite crowded as these helos had to be re-spotted. The HTs in the machine shop manufactured some dollies so the Hueys could be moved a little easier as they only had skids and no wheels. In the midst of all this activity on the flight deck, suddenly an O-1 Vietnamese "Bird Dog" spotter plane started to circle Midway. Captain Chambers made the decision to get rid of some of the aircraft on the flight deck to make room for the Bird Dog to land. As the pilot of the plane, Major Bung Ly and his wife and five children, emerged from the aircraft after landing safely they were greeted with applause and congratulations by everyone on the flight deck.

The last U.S. Forces to come out of Vietnam was the Marine detachment from the USS Blue Ridge. They were brought aboard Midway by the last Air Force Jolly Green Giant leaving Saigon. One item that they brought with them was the Seal that was on the wall at the embassy. These Marines remained aboard Midway for 1 or 2 days and then they were shuttled back to the Blue Ridge. When the Marines left they took the Seal from the embassy with them.

When Midway left the coast of Vietnam we were directed to go to Sattahip, Thailand, to pick up aircraft that had been flown out of Saigon, and the U.S. did not want these aircraft to get into the wrong hands. On the way to Thailand, Midway came across a Vietnamese fishing boat carrying about 84 evacuees that were trying to get away from Vietnam. The boat was slowly sinking so Captain Chambers brought them aboard and they stayed with us until we arrived in Guam. When Midway arrived in the Gulf of Siam at Sattahip, we on-loaded 27 A-37 strike aircraft, and 25 F-5 Freedom Fighters that had been flown out of Saigon. These aircraft, along with the 3 Vietnamese Chinook helicopters, 40 Vietnamese and 5 Air America Huey gun ships as well as the 1 O-1 Bird Dog spotter plane brought the total to 101 aircraft on the flight deck. Midway's flight deck looked like a graveyard of forgotten aircraft.

During the transit time to Guam, the 84 evacuees onboard were berthed in one of the empty air wing berthing compartments. They would be escorted down to the forward galley where our food service personnel prepared 3 meals a day for them. Their meals consisted of mostly the items that they had eaten almost all the time, usually some type of seafood, grilled or steamed vegetables and rice. With the XO's and Chaplain's approval we set up some donation cans at the end of the chow lines and Midway personnel would put any loose change they had in their pockets as they came through the chow line. When Midway finally arrived in Guam on 11 May 1975, the Chaplain presented the evacuees with a nice check. All of the children that came on board left wearing Midway T-shirts and had good memories of their trip on board. Arriving in Guam we were met by news reporters who broadcast the ship's arrival and showed the aircraft being off loaded. The off-loading took about 1 full day, and we were back underway for Subic Bay to pick up the air wing the next day. We arrived at Subic Bay on 20 May and brought air wing back on board. One thing everyone noticed when we arrived at Subic was a large amount of Vietnamese watercraft tied to the piers in and around Subic Bay. These were the Vietnamese Swift Boats and PBRs that had come out of Saigon and the surrounding areas of Vietnam. Grande Island where we usually had

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some ship's picnic's was off limits to all personnel. This was being used as a staging point for all the Vietnamese evacuees.

During the entire operation, Capt. Chambers kept everyone informed on what was happening, especially when the Bird Dog was getting ready to land, and what to expect next. His calm demeanor when speaking to the crew kept everyone at ease. The Air Boss, Cdr. Jumper, kept everything on the flight deck running smoothly and safely during the entire Operation Frequent Wind evolution.

Every crewmember on Midway during this time played an important part in the operation, and we all can look back at this with a sense of pride knowing we did one hell of a job.

Hurricane Alice Greet the USS Midway

Martin J. McCormick Jr., 1954-55/AEM3/VF-12

It is usually around this time of year, when reports of Hurricanes begin to surface in the media and on TV that the topic becomes fodder for social gatherings and the like. Also, if friends are getting ready to go on a cruise, the potential for storms along the way are always an attention getter. Such palaver would get me recalling one of my favorite sea stories, which over the years never had to be embellished, because the facts were enough to give my listeners a real sense of what happens when you encounter a major storm at sea.

Having said that, what I knew of this unique event in my young life, at the time I was 19, was my own experience as I went to sea for the first time on a trip around the world as a PO 3/C with VF-12 aboard the USS Midway.

The Midway had left Mayport, Florida, on December 28th bound for Cape Town, South Africa, as our first port of call on the way to join the 7th Fleet in the far East. As the new year was ringing in most sea legs were still kind of rubbery. In addition, it was New Years day, 1955 and the ship's cooks had prepared a special meal with all the trimmings to help us ring in the New Year away from home.

Before continuing my tale of this adventure of almost 60 years ago, I want to bring you back to modern times with tools like Google available to take a different look at various events. So, being the newly minted computer geek that I am, I used my new found skills to Google "Hurricanes 1955." What a thrill! It worked and there it was in all its meteorological detail. It even had a name: "Hurricane Alice," which I had never known. As an adjunct my sister's name is Alice and the Hurricane connection fitted perfectly providing a whole new range of ways to needle her.

After reading through the various accounts of "MY" Hurricane, I found the best reference to be from a Monthly Weather Review article entitled "Weather Note - Hurricane Alice 1954-1955" by Cdr. Thomas O'Neill and C. L. Jordan (April 11, 1962). Knowing most of you don't have the time nor energy to go researching, I do want to mention some of the features of this storm that are special to Midway lore from the O'Neill/Jordan manuscript.

Selected Details from the Cdr. O'Neill/C.L. Jordan Manuscript (4/11/1962)

1. This storm was probably the first winter storm in that area in 100 years.
2. It became a Hurricane on New Year's Eve 1954 but was not recognized as such until January 3, 1955.
3. The Midway crossed the path the storm within 28 miles of its eye (see fig 1).

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4. The first-ever photograph of a Hurricane's profile (see fig 2) was taken from the step 6 air search scan screen as the Midway plowed through the rolling sea into the path of the storm. (There were no satellite images in those days and no one had ever seen this image)
5. The first images of the storm's intensity began to appear on radar when the ship was within 80 miles of the storm, setting the stage for what we would battle through for the next 8 hours.
6. The first swells from the Hurricane were being felt about 100 miles out, but only light rain with no middle or high clouds preceded it until moderate rains were encountered 40 miles from the center.
7. When conditions got bad, swells from 4 different directions hit the ship, maneuverability was most difficult and on one occasion there was a roll of 22 degrees with strong northeast winds creating swells and waves off the port bow.
8. The storm had sustained winds of 80 mph and the barometer dropped to 29.15 in Hg at its lowest. Peak winds were about 55 mph when the Midway crossed its path within 28 miles of its center.

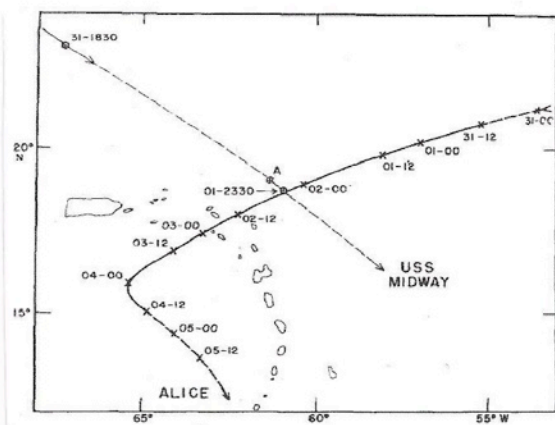


FIGURE 1.—The track of hurricane Alice of December 1954–January 1955 (from [3]) and the track of the USS *Midway*. During the portion of the track shown by the dashed line, Alice was not considered of hurricane intensity. In the date-time data, Greenwich Meridian Time has been used.

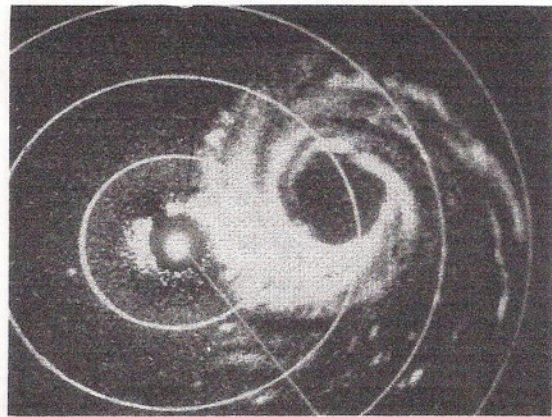


FIGURE 2.—A photograph of the PPI scope of a SPS-6 radar taken from the USS *Midway* at approximately 2330 GMT, January 1, 1955. Range markers are at 20-n. mi. intervals. The ship heading, as shown by the line originating at the center of the scope, was toward 140°. (Official photograph, U.S. Navy.)

The preceding details were fascinating to me, finding them almost 60 years after the event was special. Being the fearless, albeit clueless airdale sailor I was at the time, my one goal throughout was to not get seasick. What could go wrong otherwise, we were on this huge carrier that would surely defeat and get through any storm. Although my naïveté was never challenged, as the ship began to really rock and roll my stomach followed suit from time to time. But we both made it through. The Midway was always skittish in "weather" and in those days she was a straight deck with 2 starboard side 5" gun mounts missing due to damage sustained on the previous Med Cruise from a collision with a refueling ship. This weight loss sure didn't help her stability in that rolling sea. We had a Destroyer escort until we hit the weather. During the time they were tracking with us there were occasions when I was sure we would lose them as it seemed waves were breaking over the stacks. I could hardly imagine how their crews were faring given the banging around we were taking. They made it through OK although there was a report of a crewmember being washed overboard although I cannot verify its accuracy. Eventually as conditions worsened they had to leave us and fend for themselves. In fact I do not remember sighting them again until after we reached Cape Town.

Also, we were unable to get all of our aircraft on the hangar deck so there were a number, (8-10 as I remember it), left on the flight deck up forward with double tie downs where possible. Those planes got a real dousing, including waves breaking over the flight deck. It really happened, I was there.

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Below decks was a total mess, the special New Years Day meal was mostly undigested for those that tried to eat, if you get my drift. I had to get some air and went up to the Island and wedged myself into a hatchway to the flight deck aft of the gas shack and watched in awe of Mother Nature on a rampage. I can remember looking up at the Radar Dome as the ship rolled and seeing its arc across the sky as we rolled and righted. The scene remains vivid in my mind's eye.

I thought about the aircraft hanging on their tie-downs, what would happen if they began to break loose? Thank God none did. The sea was seemingly trying to flip us end to end at times and the screws were coming partially out of the water sending a shudder through the hull similar to flank speed runs. There was a driving rain, not in volumes but mixed with sea spray and a driving wind that created a kind of howl through the folded wings of the planes on deck. It was truly an awesome spectacle.

Our Squadron's quarters were hangar deck level all the way forward, below the anchor locker. I tried to get to my bunk a couple of times but the decks were all messed up and the booming of the waves against the bow was too worrisome to put up with so I rode it out at various locations between the hangar deck and above until the situation calmed down.

Once things settled down we were no worse for the wear. I did hear some Bridge sailors saying we came close to rolling over a couple of times. Probably just sea stories to scare the airdales like me who didn't know any better. However, the sweep of that radar dome across the sky and the vision of all sea and a shuddering ship switching the vision to all sky would not cause me to challenge their version. It was quite an experience to say the least and an awesome start to the 1955 New Year.

Well, bringing things back to today and our 8 children with our 24 grandchildren it is great to have a sea story or two to talk about when the opportunity presents itself. Best of all. Now this sea story had a name, "Hurricane Alice"!

What I did in Air Group Coffee Lockers

Martin FitzGerald, 1957-60/AN, V-4 Division

Sometime after Midway received the air group and when I was off duty with nothing to do I would check on the first-class petty officers squadron coffee locker to see what was happening. I was granted permission to enter and meet the guys that were there at the time. Keeping in mind that I am just an E-3 (airman) with brass balls and not too bashful, I became friends with this group of men and started to clean and organize the compartment to make it more comfortable for off-duty time. I would only be there for about an hour. I could talk with these guys and learn what they did on the Midway with their aircraft. I did this for about two weeks and then had to work at flight deck control during air ops.

Before flight ops started I also visited VAH-8's coffee locker and did much the same thing I did at VF-21's locker. This activity was a benefit to all hands involved. There was one time I was mess cooking and had finished work, so I went up to the flight deck. Air ops was finished for the day and I went over to one of the A3Ds on the flight deck with some of the flight crew around it. I was invited to climb into the aircraft and look around, which I did. WOW! What a lesson in how to fly a Whale, the guys treated me like one of their own and even asked if I would like to go up with them on the next flight. Not knowing what or where I might be I declined. But what an opportunity! Shortly after that I was released from mess cooking and returned to V-4 division and resumed working at flight deck control. For the rest of the cruise I was not able to make it back to those coffee lockers again. Good times and for me a lot of fun.

Eventually I heard that those men at those coffee lockers had asked around as to what happened to me.

That was a nice touch.

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Going in Harm's Way, USS Midway

Martin J. McCormick Jr., 1954-55/AEM3/VF-12

The year was coming up on 1955, the USS Midway had turned nine years old six months earlier on September 12, 1954, and on December, 1954, she embarked from Mayport, Florida, on a World Cruise under the Command of Captain Reynold D. Hagle, USN. This cruise would take her and her air group, to ports from Cape town, South Africa throughout the Far East and back to the West Coast of the United States where she would be decommissioned, undergo an extensive overhaul and major modifications including getting a canted deck for the first time. Along the way she and her Air Group (CAG 1) had orders to undertake extensive operations with the 7th fleet in the Far East, and as it turned out, unforeseen operations that would place the Midway and her crew in "Harms Way," facing the first real combat conditions since her commissioning. Her previous seven cruises out of Norfolk, Virginia, had been to the Mediterranean, where she was renowned as a diplomatic ship and a major contributor to the defensive posture of NATO [source: USS Midway World Cruise Book, Christmas Story]. Maneuvers such as Operation Frostbite and others were now behind her; this time it was to be more than flag-waving, it was to be as the Flagship of the battle ready Task Force 77.

They say never volunteer, but living and learning was in progress for me and it was that process that had brought me to VF-12, a "Banshee" squadron that was readying for sea duty out of Cecil Field in Florida, the home base of Carrier Air Group 1. To get here I had twisted my mother's arm in 1953 to sign for me to get into a Naval Air Reserve squadron (VF-935 - Corsairs) at Willow Grove Naval Air Station in Pennsylvania. I had then volunteered for Basic Training followed by Aviation Electrician School, all as a reservist and then had my draft pushed up in order to go on active duty, choosing sea duty as my billet.

On December 28, 1954, as we put to sea I was a 19-year-old Aviation Electrician Petty Officer, 3rd Class, and it was my first time at sea other than during the shakedown cruise to qualify the air group on carrier operations. I had volunteered for and was accepted as one of our squadron's flight deck troubleshooters, and as a kid that grew up during World war II and had spent the active fighting years of the Korean conflict in high school, it was finally my turn and I was eager and ready to experience the action I thought I had missed.

I'll pick up my recollections from when we were in the town of Colombo, a creepy place, on the Island of Ceylon off the coast of India. It was our second port of call since leaving the States. The date was January 27, 1955, we had our sea legs by then, but we had not gone to flight quarters once since we left Mayport. The salt and heavy seas that we had encountered along the way were of moderate concern to Plane Captains, but we had no indication that we wouldn't have time to prepare the aircraft for operations, removing greases and cosmoline from exposed parts before launching aircraft. I remember being on liberty in the town after just going ashore by motor launch when the word was passed that all liberty was cancelled and all hands were ordered back to the ship.....what was going on? It was like a war movie, no one seemed to know why, except for the citizens of the town (naturally). The word was passed from them to us, "we were going to fight the Chinese," they said. "Maybe war"!

I can remember the situation changing for everyone aboard as we put to sea from Ceylon. All aircraft were to be readied for combat, live ammunition, no more training equipment, this was to be for real. We were going in "Harm's Way" as they say, and, if necessary, were expected to be ready to do something when we got there. I had seen the movies growing up, read the stories of heroism and death of brave men

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on aircraft carriers in war. If it came to it, would I be able to do my duty, would I be up to it? I think everyone from the ship's Captain on down had similar thoughts as we steamed to join the 7th Fleet's Carrier Division 3 as the Flagship of Task Force 77 and the unknown.

On February 6, 1955, our first call to flight quarters in over a month sounded early on a gray, gusty morning. With a thudding heart I raced from our squadron's forward compartment to the flight deck, and as I climbed out on the starboard catwalk I stood stunned at the sight of the U.S. Navy ready for war. It was like a "Victory at Sea" film. As far as I could see there were ships of every size across the horizon.

The Midway, as it turned out, was in the middle of a flotilla of over 40 ships that included 4 other storied World War II carriers, the USS Boxer (CV-21), the USS Essex (CV-9), the USS Wasp (CV-19), and the USS Yorktown (CV-10), along with cruisers, destroyers, amphibious ships, transports and at least one submarine that I saw surface briefly. I can remember being awed, proud and scared at the same time. I thought whoever would mess with the United States, would think again if they saw this array of might. And that is the way it turned out.

On February 7, Rear Admiral Richard W Ruble USN and his Staff were transferred aboard by highline from the destroyer USS Stoddard and the Midway officially became the Flagship of Carrier Division Three. The mission, ordered by President Eisenhower, was to protect the evacuation of over 40,000 civilians and Nationalist Chinese military from the Islands of Quemoy and Matsu off the Coast of Formosa [source: Historical Center, Quemoy-Matsu Crisis Veterans, Dr. William S. Dudley, Director, Naval Historical Center].

The fleet performed its assignment as ordered and flew over 400 sorties in defense of the evacuation. The dangers, close calls and courage of flight operations were many and varied, too numerous to mention but well known by those that have been there before me and since. I was proud to have been a part of it and did my duty.

In conclusion, the Plan of the Day on February 14, 1955, included congratulations to the ships company and air group from the Naval Chain of Command and including these words from: "COMMANDER IN CHIEF..... OFFICERS AND MEN WHO HAVE ASSISTED IN CMM AND PROTECTED THE EVACUATION OF THE TACHEN ILANDS, YOURS WAS A DIFFICULT AND DELICATE ASSIGNMENT. ON BEHALF OF A GRATEFUL AMERICAN PEOPLE, WELL DONE."

Signed: DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Enough said . . .

My Special Time Aboard MIDWAY CVA-41

Martin FitzGerald V-4, Division, 57-60

After I was discharged from the Midway in 1960, I went about life like anyone would, getting a job to provide for my family.

Many years later I was driving truck for Safeway Stores and delivering groceries to their stores all over the state of Washington. Then, in 1992, I learned that Midway was in Seattle. I drove over to see her (I live nearby, in Renton, Wa.) To my delight, she was open for visitors, and I got to go onboard. There, I heard that she was going to San Diego to be decommissioned and put into the mothball fleet in Bremerton Washington Navy Yard. I found this news depressing, for she still was a fine fighting ship and in great

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shape.

Time had passed and I had not been to the Bremerton area for several years. Then one day I was dispatched to Bremerton to make a delivery to a Safeway store there, and coming into town I saw Midway in the distance and found a safe place to park for a few minutes, just to look at her one more time. I wanted to go aboard her and walk her sturdy decks again, but there was no way to do that. I did not know at the time there was a group of people that were trying to save her from the scrap heap. It was sometime in 2004 that I heard that she had been moved to San Diego and made into a museum, and anyone could go see her. This was the best news I had ever heard except, perhaps, for the birth of my son. Now I could visit the ship I became a man on and stand on her sturdy decks again. All I can say to the group of people who saved her is THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.

Since that time I have joined the USS Midway Veterans Association Membership Committee and enjoy meeting and seeing old shipmates of mine and many new crew mates who served before and after me.

LIFE IS WONDERFUL if you let it be.

FREQUENT WIND...39 years later

Fred Lydic, 1972-75/Ltjg B Division

Memories fade as time passes but memories of refugee faces during the evacuation of Saigon will last forever. The anxiety of the unknown, relief of being safe, promise of things to come...all were in their eyes.

Midway got underway in mid-January 75. The fall of South Vietnam was just a matter of time. We cut circles in the water waiting for the evacuation of Phnom Penh. Our role did not materialize and we finally managed a short liberty in Subic. The evacuations out of South Vietnam began via airlifts out of Tan Son Nhut in March...the end was visible. We had about 2 days in port and got underway again. The Air Wing departed for Cubi Point and, I believe for the first time, Midway sailed into harm's way without its offensive capability...although we did have three five-inch guns!

I had finished watch as EOOW and was having dinner in the Dirty Shirt Locker when the USAF CH-53 Jolly Green drivers arrived from their base in Thailand. Leading the cadre through the door was a hometown friend (then Capt. Ron Vickroy)...10,000 miles from home...his father and mine were partners on the local police department.

It all began on April 29th. We were off the coast of Vung Tau, close enough to see the beach through the bridge wing big eyes. When the Viet Cong rolled in, we moved out to sea.

When the evac began, the parade of Jolly Greens, Huey's, Chinooks and the famous RVN Scout Plane followed ... one after another after another. Not every aircraft that left RVN made it. Some flew blindly out to sea hoping to find us and never did. Not knowing who they were, their radio chatter would not be answered lest our position be revealed. I remember seeing at least 15 helos waiting to land and disembark their loads. Many, stripped of all "unnecessary gear," were packed with people like sardines in a can. Some famous, most not, they came aboard, stood in line, ate, slept and waited.

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Most of the ship's officers had some collateral function. Mine was to serve as a liaison to about fifteen US Embassy staffers. The Wardroom Lounge became their bunkroom. That evening, I spent more than two hours trying to answer questions. They knew where they were relocating to and who their sponsors were but not much else. "What's it like in Ft. Leavenworth, KS?"... "Tell me about Virginia Beach"... "Will I like Minneapolis?" How do you describe snow to someone who has spent their entire life in tropical heat? The next morning I went to the lounge and found them all huddled in a mass. I learned that none of them had ever spent a night in air-conditioned comfort. They had shivered through the night...not wanting to disturb me or be a problem.

The photos of Chinooks being pushed over the side are real. I saw the splash. I guy I knew in V-1 exclaimed that he had wanted to do something like that ever since he joined the Navy. When Nguyen Cao Ky came aboard, the first task was to relieve him of his two pearl-handled pistols.

When the evac parade finally stopped, we got underway for Sattahip, Thailand, where the Jolly Green helos became sky cranes and on-loaded a bunch of RVN F-105 aircraft that had been flown out of RVN. (The above photo shows one of the USAF Jolly Greens on-loading an F-105 just off the coast of Sattahip.) When they finished, they headed back to their base and we set sail for Guam. We spent about 2 days in Guam off-loading all of the planes and helos and then went back to Subic to regain the Air Wing. It was early June before we saw Yokosuka again.

The Day Midway Made Japan Our Home

Ken Prater, 1972-75/Ltjg/Air Department

October 5, 1973, was an historic day for the USS Midway. Even though it was not Midway's first visit to Yokosuka, Japan, that was the day we made it our new home port. We traveled over 5,000 miles across the Pacific, pausing all-too-briefly in Hawaii to swap bays – San Francisco for Tokyo. For the crew the terms were questionable, but that was not up to us.

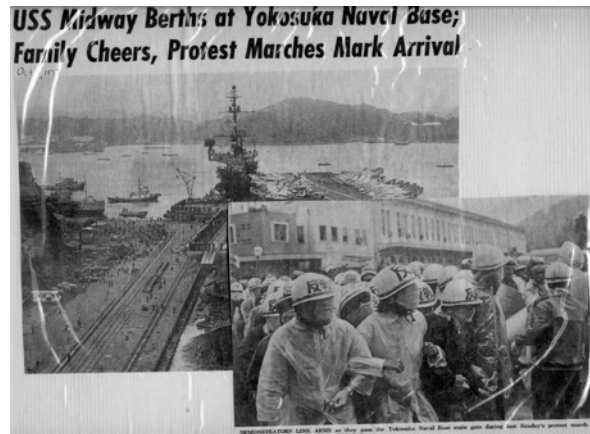
Our move was strategically and boldly planned. The Vietnam War was in full swing with no indication that it would be over in just two more years. A reliable carrier was needed in a port where it could and come and go without requiring a stateside crossing. Reliability was replete in Midway's resume – practically a middle name. And since Japan was not in a position to say no, the decision was made. But that didn't mean that the Japanese liked it.

The Japanese media forewarned the nation of our impending arrival, heating public opinion to a rolling boil. The possibility that nuclear weapons might be onboard was ground zero for the press. Anything with the word "nuclear" in it set off a chain reaction of nerves in Japan, and understandably so. Just as Pearl Harbor was branded into U.S. history, so Hiroshima and Nagasaki were into Japan's.

In retrospect, coming into a foreign port for the first time I doubt that we had any nuclear weapons aboard. But that was not the point – the Japanese believed that we did and wanted no part of it. We anticipated that our welcome wouldn't include a cordial *konichiwa* and a cup of tea. We weren't disappointed.

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The day was gray and overcast as Midway made her turn into Tokyo Bay. We were first greeted by a fleet of small boats that served as a floating Welcome Wagon. These ambassadors of public sentiment were armed with signs that collectively urged, "I'd turn back if I were you...". While these words broke no bones, close attention was paid to the armada's proximity to the ship. If any of them attempted to cross our path and came too close, they would be squashed like a Japanese beetle playing chicken with a Mack truck. Luckily this minefield of bad press kept their distance, but the helicopters were much more bothersome.



Swarming like bees, these tiny, brightly colored civilian helicopters carrying TV film crews brazenly buzzed the ship in the finest *kamikaze* tradition. Coming just short of crashing, they strafed the flight deck with their cameras, searching for radioactive bulges. All they found were alien sailors snapping pictures of them with Japanese-made cameras. Still, it was material for the six o'clock news. No U.S. warship this size had ever come this close to home with the intent of staying.

The shipyard at Yokosuka was a former Imperial Japanese naval base left largely intact and graying since the end of the Second World War. It offered a spectacular view of Mount Fujiyama, some vacated bomb shelters and several giant cranes, each large enough to lift an entire destroyer out of the water. While there was plenty of pier space to park an aircraft carrier, parking it was another matter.

The last few miles of our journey were commanded by a Japanese Harbor Master who arrived by helicopter. While under his control even the Captain could only watch as he skillfully maneuvered the ship through the harbor's tricky and congested corridor. An aircraft carrier is not designed to start, stop or turn on a dime, but the Harbor Master seemed to be able to do just that. As we closed in on the pier, two tugboats waited nearby and pushed Midway sideways the last few feet until we were tucked into our berth. After the mooring lines were secured – all squared away – we were almost home.

Almost, I say, because just outside the base thousands of protesters were restrained by squads of no-nonsense riot police armed with crowd-flushing water cannons that resembled tanks. Eventually they were dismissed in an orderly fashion, but that didn't feel like home. And for those of us not living on base home consisted of a bunk, a locker and a thousand foot floating hunk of steel whose amenities included freezing cold showers in winter and steaming hot bunkrooms in summer. It was habitable but definitely not the Love Boat.

After the gangway was put in place, the sun seemed to break through the barrier of discontent. The wives and families of married crewmembers came aboard smiling, hugging and kissing – happy to be reunited with their husband, their daddy. Those who had no one to greet us felt a little left out, but were warmed to see friendly faces that were actually *glad* to see us. We were five thousand miles from our home country, but we were home at last.

The Call of Nature

Ken Prater, 1972-75/Ltjg/Air Department

The USS Midway could never be confused with a luxury liner. Underway, the floating airbase with a postage stamp sized runway and no-frills amenities was a no-nonsense, business-as-usual workplace – not a shuffleboard court or margarita in sight.

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Topside, all eyes were focused solely on the flames and the roar of the steady stream of winged and wingless machines taking off and landing on a non-skid dance floor that did all the swaying and bobbing. Inside the fortress and its seventeen decks below a sunless week would pass unnoticed –with no weekend in sight. The continuous loop of work-eat-sleep merged into one never ending day; it was more like an ant colony. The outside world seemed to be a fantasy; it just didn't exist.

Mother Nature, however, had her own agenda and occasionally entertained us with troupes of seafaring company. The cast of characters showed up unannounced but right on schedule – their own – and declared that we were not alone. More importantly, they reminded us that there was life beyond the duties of war.

Sorties of seagulls were our most frequent visitors. They flew many miles from who-knows-where just looking for chow anytime and anywhere they could find it. Consummate opportunists, they appeared with precision timing and dive-bombed everything dumped over the stern. What they found worth eating was unclear because the better part of it had already been eaten by an equally consummate crew. For these squawking rapsallions everything other than World War Two sea rations was fair game. Everyone – including rapsallions – knew not to touch that stuff.

Flying fish also checked in from time to time. As intriguing as their oxymoronic name, the ship's wake was their playground; they glided just inches above the water. Despite their lack of feathers, they mastered aerodynamic lift long before Orville & Wilbur tinkered with the notion. These low-riders of the air kept pace with the ship for miles as if pulled by an invisible tow line. It was fishy business watching them as they catapulted in and out of the water, but that's how they stayed alive and had fun doing it. They toyed with the laws of physics as if they were guidelines – not unlike Midway pilots.

But the rarest of sights was also the most glorious. Hundreds of blunt-headed blue-green mahi-mahi would suddenly surface from the deep and join us for a romp. Just at sunrise or sunset, they waited for their sixty-thousand-ton playmate to arrive or depart from port. The school appeared in chorus, leaping in unison, mirroring the precision of a highly disciplined military unit. They assumed station alongside the ship and imprinted an unforgettable memory for all those privileged to witness the show. Even if it wasn't ordered by the Captain, this performance was just for us – our luxury liner moment.

July 4, 1974: Old Blue Eyes, Arriving

Ken Prater, 1972-75/Ltjg/Air Department

The Fourth of July is supposed to be a glorious, steamy summer day with all kinds of American festivities to celebrate. I think it's written in the Declaration of Independence, sandwiched somewhere in the Hot Dog and Fireworks section. But even though we were tied to the pier in Yokosuka, the USS Midway was at General Quarters.

Frank Sinatra – Old Blue Eyes himself – was scheduled to perform for the crew. But the weather was absolutely miserable: overcast and gloomy, locked in rain that was both cold and penetrating. It was a preemptive strike targeted at the throat of the sixty-year-old master of the standards. Staging the concert on the flight deck as originally planned was out of the question. Cancellation was a real concern.

Sinatra, however, was a strong man who lived a rough and tumble life and came out on top – his way. He was also patriotic to the core. There was no way a little rain was going to prevent him from serving some home-baked entertainment to four thousand sailors stationed far from home.

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A backup plan was quickly created. The concert would take place in the hangar bay, an area that was both covered and large enough to seat all hands. The stage was set, complete with his fondly bestowed title emblazoned in huge letters across the backdrop. The band arrived, warmed up and was ready to go. The only thing missing was the man whose voice had mellowed just as much as he had with time. That's where this story becomes personal.



Just as the moon schedules the tides, so I was scheduled for duty as the in-port Officer of the Deck on the quarterdeck. As fate, luck or life would have it, I was destined to greet Frank Sinatra. At the appointed time, his limousine and entourage arrived and walked up the gangway. He was accompanied by Barbara Marx, a stunning blond recently divorced from Marx brother Zeppo. Two years later she became the fourth and final Mrs. Sinatra. Some things never change...

Sinatra was ready to perform, dressed in a pale blue jumpsuit-style jacket and pants adorned with what looked like upholstery tacks. It was an outfit only an entertainer could love, but to us he would have looked good in just about *anything* that day.

His arrival was announced over the loudspeaker in traditional Navy fashion: "Sinatra, arriving" along with the number of clangs on the ship's bell used for dignitaries. He stopped and stood in front of me, face to face – blue eyes authenticated. In the brief time that he waited for permission to come aboard, my perception of the identity behind his persona changed.

What I expected was a quick smile and a slap on the shoulder – superficial showbiz showmanship. What I received was a connection with a man who was clearly much deeper, more spiritual than his reputation led me to believe. Staring intently, he firmly grasped my hand and shook it with respect. We participated in a war that no one respected, so that simple yet profound gesture meant a lot to me. It still does...

I'm not exactly sure how I responded – probably with something superficial like, "Welcome aboard the USS Midway, Mr. Sinatra." Without a word, he acknowledged my greeting and made his way to the stage. It was our first meeting, but not our last.

Without delay he launched into his performance, quickly captivating everyone with his special brand of magic. It was a solo concert that included only nine songs. Many of them came from the Sinatra hymn book – songs so identified with him that he practically owned them. Perhaps as a nod to the weather (or thumbing his nose at it), he opened with "You are the Sunshine of My Life," followed by familiar classics such as "I Get a Kick Out of You," "I've Got You Under My Skin" and "The Lady is a Tramp." Interspersed between numbers were jokes specially formulated for a naval crew and received with the expected hilarity. Nobody remembered what they were, but they seemed funny at the time.

Then it was over. After the last bars of "My Way" – his signature showpiece – echoed through the hangar bay, thunderous, enthusiastic rounds of applause erupted from a most grateful audience. The man who sang for many of our fathers (including mine) was paid in full with heartfelt satisfaction. He did not linger on stage, but was in no particular rush to leave.

As he made his way to the quarterdeck preparing to depart, he paused in front of me once again. He shook my hand firmly with his eyes fixed on mine. His farewell was a simple blessing. "Godspeed!" he said as

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the universe paused for a moment. Then it was "Sinatra, departing," more bell clanging and he was gone. Gone, but never forgotten.

It was much later that I learned that this well-wisher's expression meant "(wishing you) a prosperous journey." Midway had travelled well over five thousand miles by the time we rendezvoused with Old Blue Eyes, but never did we prosper more than that Independence Day.

The Story of George H. Gay Jr., Ensign U.S. Navy

Martin FitzGerald, 1957-60/AN V-4 Div.; Dave Payson, 1963-64/RDSN OI Div.

"What makes men go down to the sea in ships? Whatever the reason, be thankful, for they become heroes . . ."

This story begins in 1943 when the keel was laid for a new battleship but was changed to become a new class of aircraft carrier that was needed more than a battleship. Let's go back in time to May 1942 during the Battle of Midway. Torpedo Squadron 8, operating from the U.S. aircraft carrier Hornet, engaged the Japanese Imperial Navy that was about to attack Midway Island. A young naval officer by the name of George H. Gay, a new Ensign, was to make his first combat flight against an enemy he had just learned about in his pre-flight briefing. His squadron was to have fighter cover, which didn't show, so the pilots of Torpedo Squadron 8 attacked the enemy fleet anyway, and were annihilated by Japanese Zeros and anti-aircraft fire. Wounded, Ensign Gay was the only survivor out of twenty some pilots and radiomen in Torpedo Squadron 8. After his TVB Devastator dive bomber was shot down, he clung to life



for 30 hours floating on his destroyed plane's seat cushion, the "best seat in the house," albeit a wet one, that unfolded before his eyes. From this amazing vantage point, he witnessed the Japanese fleet decimated – three Japanese carriers sent to the bottom of the ocean – by U.S. carrier planes, in the battle that turned the tide of the War in the Pacific in the U.S.'s favor. Somehow, miraculously, Ensign Gay survived and was rescued by a U.S. destroyer and returned to the Hornet. Now go forward in time to 1945 – the war had just ended – to the commissioning of the brand-new aircraft carrier built on a battleship hull, the USS Midway. LT George H. Gay was at this event by invitation of the Navy to honor him and the legacy of the Battle of Midway, the new carrier's namesake. The greatest thing demonstrated by this story is that the Navy never forgets its heroes. For 47 years later, at Midway's decommissioning ceremony, there he was again to be honored, an aging George Gay, the Navy's guest. That was in 1992. This story ends in 1994 when LCDR

George H. Gay (Ret.), age 77, passed away. His ashes were scattered over the waters near Midway Island, the site of the famous WWII battle that turned the tide of the War in the Pacific in the U.S.'s favor. Midway veterans will always remember LCDR George H. Gay (Ret.) for his role in that battle, for his fighting spirit and for his ability to survive. He was there at the beginning for the USS Midway, and he was there at the end. In between, he was a great American hero.

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My Experience Aboard the USS Midway, CVA-41

Martin FitzGerald, 1957-60/AN, V-4 Division

I woke up one morning in the month of August. The year was 1957. I was on a troopship bound for the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, a short distance from Seattle, Washington, coming from San Diego, California. It was a cool day when the World War II troopship cruised through Puget Sound on its way to Bremerton, Washington. We finally tied up at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and across the dock was the biggest ship I had ever seen in my life.

We were ordered to board this big ship. I got down to the dock and I looked at this big gray ship from stem to stern, from waterline to the top of its mast. I thought, "What in the world am I getting into?" I said a little prayer to the ship, *"If you take care of me, I will take care of you."*

I then went aboard the aircraft carrier USS Midway for the first time, and was taken to a compartment somewhere on this ship. Somehow I learned I was to work in the SPUD LOCKER. This is where the vegetables and salad fixings are cleaned and prepared for cooking in the galley. I worked there in the early mornings from 0400 till 1200. When I got off work and got cleaned up, I could go and explore the ship and learn where everything was that I might need to know. Or I could go on liberty. All during this time the YARD WORKERS were still finishing the refit of the ship so it could be recommissioned. There were hoses and wires hanging from the overhead and on the deck, so you had to watch where you stepped.

Sometime in early September I was assigned to the Air Dept. and into V-4 Division. I moved to a new compartment on the O-2 level and my bunk was on top. The bunks were staked three high and my top bunk was next to a steam catapult. The first time the catapult was fired it scared the hell out of me. It was so loud and the vibration could be felt everywhere on the ship. The Midway went to sea for sea trials to find out what she could do, to test her sea worthiness. Finally the Navy Dept. accepted the ship and it was commissioned. I remember all the cars being loaded on to the ship, both on the flight deck and the hangar deck, so that you could not walk a straight line. We were headed for Alameda, California. This was going to be our homeport for the next several years. One of the guys in the division smuggled aboard a girl and hid her in an empty compartment and took her food. When the ship docked, this man took the girl to the afterbrow and the girl thanked the officer for the ride. Then all hell broke out.

When Midway arrived in Alameda, the ship's crane loaded on to the flight deck some AD-5s, WWII- type aircraft. I think it was the next day or so that we set sail for open sea to land aircraft onboard the ship. A lot of the crew knew what to do and the new guys learned from them (on the job training).

This is when I learned how to fuel a plane at sea with more planes landing. We were refueling planes that had already been spotted on the bow of the flight deck. I developed eyes in the back of my head to be aware of what was going on behind and all about me. It was wild and crazy, but we did our jobs without getting hurt. That may have been my first awareness of MIDWAY MAGIC. It seemed that everything we had to accomplish was done and done quickly.

After about a month, the division first-class petty officer called me to the flight deck and informed me that I would be working in flight deck control. I had no idea of what my job was to be. I was told to report here for all general quarters drills and all flight quarters immediately and to stay and work there until relieved. I found out what I was to do very quickly from the two other men working beside me. The three of us worked very well together with no disagreements that I can recall. There were suggestions but no fights.

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The job called for me to inform V-4 Division people to refuel which plane and where to find it. When it was fueled they let me know it was done so I could make the proper notations. In flight deck control there was a stainless-steel, two-level table. The top level had the flight deck and on the lower level was the hangar deck. Both were etched to scale of both decks. On the bulkhead boards hung different aircraft silhouettes that we marked with grease pencil with the proper aircraft number. I would move them to the location that they would be on the flight deck or hangar deck. Behind me on the bulkhead was a clear plastic board that had rectangles marked on it. On this board, I would mark squadron number and plane number for fuel status and armament. The officers would check this board to be sure those aircraft were ready to fly safely without having to ask anybody about their status.

The three of us worked so well together the officers in charge of us hardly came in to see how everything was going. This I am sure was my introduction to my first MIDWAY MAGIC experience.

Before we were sent out to sea while at Alameda, my division would have duty on the quarterdeck and I would have a four-hour watch as ship's messenger. Rarely would I have a message to deliver. The occasional visitor would come aboard and I would show them around and take them where they wanted to go. One of my duties was to keep an eye out for the captain and admiral that might be making a visit to Midway. If this happened, I had to tell the O.D. and he would tell the Boatswain and he would announce over the 1-MC Midway Arriving! Or whoever it might be. The Officer of the Deck could be a Lt. Jg to a Lt. Commander. I did not care because then I could speak to these officers one on one and learn a thing or two. I really liked these watches.

There were times I had my turn mess cooking as most sailors did at one time or another. I remember working in the scullery. That is where the trays and flatware were washed and put back on the line. There was another sailor in the scullery with me and the two of us would sing the Winston cigarette commercials while working to help make the job more fun. And it worked ... good times.

In 1959 I was discharged from the Naval Reserve with an Honorable Discharge and went home to my wife and five children to make a life for them. But that only lasted for nine years. I remarried to my second wife and that one went for four years. Then I met my present wife and we have been together for forty years. We had one child.

Many years passed and in 1992 the Midway came to Seattle for SEAFAIR. I took the opportunity to take my son aboard and show him where I worked and what I did when I was on Midway. We got up to the flight deck and into flight deck control, and the V-4 division officer was there. I introduced myself to him and he said, "Wait just a moment. I think there is something you might like to see." He showed me a letter written to me from the Navy Department. It was a Letter of Commendation for suggesting the color change of V-4 shirts from red to purple. He went on to explain that this was in use throughout the fleet. At this my eyes teared up. I was filled with emotion over this and very very proud of this letter. I saw it and I failed to get a copy of it, but I'm still trying. It's something I will never forget.

Five Days in Yokosuka

Jim Wheeler, 1959-63 / MM1

It was during the Midway's 1962 WESTPAC cruise that Mr. Brocken called me up to the M Division office and asked me if I'd like to fly into Yokosuka with engineering work orders for the

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shipyard. I would be flying in 5 days early before the ship docked in Yokosuka. I could see that he was being very serious about this so I didn't ask anything about bears being out in the woods nor did I inquire about the Pope and his religious beliefs. I looked at him and answered just as serious "that I would be more than happy to undertake this mission." Heck I thought Christmas was coming twice that year.

I was in charge of # 1 engine room so I arranged for my watches to be split and made ready to take flight. The day they called and told me to report to the flight deck did not give me warm fuzzy feelings about flying that day. As most of you are aware it takes 32 knots of wind to get an aircraft off the deck and up in the air. That's the speed of the ship plus the speed of the wind you're taking off into. When they called me and I left # 1 engine room to head up to the flight deck we were pounding along at 28 knots, seemed to me we were heading off into a puppy's breath of a breeze. To make a long story short the Air Boss said, "Send 'em off."

If memory serves they staged us as far aft on the flight deck as possible, since this was going to be a deck launch, to give us as much of a run as possible. We've all seen gooney birds taking off, flapping their wings and pumping their legs, that's kinda what this take off felt like to me. The COD aircraft, the one used for the delivery of mail and spare parts, did not instill in me a huge amount of confidence as to its air worthiness, but I was willing to give it a try just for 5 free days in Yokosuka. As an addendum to this sea story I can honestly say I have a great deal of respect for the pilots who man those aircraft and fly off and back onto a ship at sea.

We peddled our way down the flight deck and as most of us are aware an aircraft will sink slightly as it leaves the flight deck. Not to get too technical but the ground effects changes on the wings which causes the wing load to change. Well, we made it past the end of the flight deck and we started to sink, and we kept sinking, and that's when I started praying!! I told the Lord that if he would get me out of this tight spot that I currently found myself in that I would never do some of those sinful things that I had done on rare occasions. As we sank I was getting very specific as to what I was willing to give up until I noticed we were finally gaining air speed and altitude then I thought there was really no reason to go overboard with these promises. And as it turned out I had to rescind some of the promises I made that day. Oh well!! I wish I had gotten the name of our pilot that day as I know he would like to thank me for all the help I afforded him and his feeble attempts to get us airborne.

We made it into Atsugi air base and I taxied down to Yokosuka and reported to the Honcho at the shipyard. Spent some time with him and his planning committee going over the work orders especially for M Division and # 1 engine room. Then had 5 days basket leave waiting for Midway to steam into port.

When I told my wife of my adventure flying off an aircraft carrier, she asked me what I did for those 5 days in port alone. I looked her right in the eye and said, "I went to all the churches and museums in the area." Unfortunately I can't repeat her response, as there are still some things that will make a sailor blush.

The Engine Room

Jim Wheeler, 1959-63 / MM1

My name is Jim Wheeler and I spent almost 8 years on active duty with the US Navy, leaving in 1963 as a First Class Machinist Mate. After boot camp and A school I served 3 years aboard the light cruiser USS Worcester (CL-144) and 4 years aboard the USS Midway. Being a Machinist Mate I worked in the engine rooms aboard both ships. For the past decade or so I've had a recurring dream that comes on me three or four times a year. It's a very pleasant dream, no stress or anything unpleasant about it, but I am down in the engine room aboard one of those ships lighting off the engine room and making ready to get underway.

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In naval engineering terminology you don't start a piece of machinery, you light it off. This comes from actually lighting off the boilers with a torch soaked in oil. You light off the first burner with the torch and the other burners from that one. So you light off a boiler, you light off a main generator or you light off a main engine, whatever you start you light it off.

Midway has four main engines, Westinghouse high pressure steam turbines, and twelve boilers, three for each engine. They are M type express boilers capable of putting out steam at 600 pounds pressure at 850 degrees super heat. Work is accomplished with steam by making it expand and drive either a piston or a turbine. The boilers and main engines are in what they called GROUPS. One group in B division had 1 Able, Baker & Charlie boilers while one group in M division had two Westinghouse 1250 KW main generators, a main pump room, and a main engine room. Aboard Midway I was in one group, in one engine room.

In February of this year my wife and myself plus my daughter and son-in-law were in San Diego and went aboard Midway. At first I was told that # 1 engine room was not open to the general public, but a very kind docent by the name of Mr. Len Gray, when finding out I was a Midway veteran and that I had left the ship 50 years ago made things happen. He contacted the head of the safety team, a Mr. Joe V. and a safety team member Mr. John S. and away we went down to # 1 engine room. I was quite pleased to be able to show my family MY engine room and just how an engine room worked. The high pressure and low pressure steam turbines which comprise the main engine, the pumps and reduction gear and the myriad of steam lines. Yet all the while I was explaining to my family how the engine room worked I was ticking off in the back of my mind the steps I would take to light it off again and make it ready to get underway. I also have to mention that the engine room wasn't as clean as it was when I left it 50 years ago.

In closing, I'd like to say to Admiral McLaughlin that if BUSHIPS ever contacts him stating that Midway must be made ready to put to sea and go in harms way, the first move he should make is to call me, I'll get One Group and # 1 engine room ready. And I firmly believe that with all the former crew-members out there, officer and enlisted, we could man this ship, make it ready and take that Lady back to sea and let her Rock & Roll one more time.

Raise your hand.

Midway's # 1 Wives

By LCDR (LDO) Rodric G. Hammond USN Ret.

Dave, reading the latest issue of *Midway Currents* I had a memory recalled when I read the article saying that USS Ranger Lives Aboard Midway. The memory was not a pleasant one, I fear. My most vivid memory of that ship was in 1986 when I had just completed my fourth Indian Ocean cruise on Midway and we had returned home when Ranger collided with a freighter in the Straits of Malacca and we had to turn around and go back to sea while Ranger went to Yokosuka for repairs. The kicker was that Ranger's crew placed a banner across the stern when they finally left the repair facility at Yoko., that read "Midway Wives are #1, and the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper printed a picture of it. We were supposed to do a passex with Ranger as we were returning home, but it was cancelled after the picture was published. A little history!

Close Encounters of the Midway Kind

USS Midway, circa early 2004, docked in Oakland, Ca., rusted and weathered after a decade in the mothball fleet at Bremerton, WA. She was on her way to San Diego to become a museum ship when Oscar Granger ran across her (photo courtesy of Oscar Granger).

In early 2004, while on a business trip to Oakland, Ca., Oscar Granger, who is now MVA President, came upon an amazing sight as he was driving through town to another destination. There, docked at the Charles P. Howard Terminal, looming before him like, well, like a mighty aircraft carrier, was the USS Midway, the very ship Oscar had served on as a young sailor in the early 1960s. Quite by coincidence, he had come across his old ship in Oakland. It was a serendipitous moment for him, to say the least.



“When I got close,” Oscar remembered, “I was dumb-founded to see the Midway as she was being refurbished before being towed to San Diego. She was on her way from the mothball fleet in Bremerton to her Museum destiny in San Diego. I talked to the engineer at the site and he allowed me to go aboard, and that’s when I snapped these pictures.”

Prior to Oscar’s surprising encounter with Midway in Oakland, she had spent the past decade rusting away in the cold, saline waters of Puget Sound, at the Inactive Naval Ship Maintenance Facility in Bremerton, Wa. Going back even further in the ship’s timeline, Midway wouldn’t even have been in Oakland for Oscar to run across if a San Diego-based group that included many loyal Midway veterans hadn’t won a 10-year battle to save her from the “mothball fleet” where she had languished all those years in Bremerton. But there she was in Oakland – “tugged” (towed) from Bremerton and undergoing “external refurbishment” while waiting to be towed the rest of the way down the coast to San Diego, where they were working on Navy Pier, getting it ready for her. Oscar, not one to miss this chance opportunity to visit his old ship in this unlikely context, found the responsible site engineer, talked his way aboard, and took the rare photos of Midway you see here and on our website.



The rest of the story, as they say, is history. Following Oscar’s visit, Midway completed her journey to San Diego, arriving on the morning of Jan. 4, 2004. As we all know, she has gone on to become a world-class museum ship there, attracting a million-plus visitors a year. Visitors keep coming, and they consistently give the highest praise for their Midway experience:

Spectacular! Once given up for dead, the Midway has made an amazing comeback. And to say that we, her veterans, are a vital part of her story is as true as true can be.

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In the above photo, Oscar Granger stands in Midway's Combat Information Center amid a collection of vintage radar equipment in Oakland, CA, in 2004, when Midway was en route to San Diego from the mothball fleet in Bremerton, Wa., to become a museum ship. As a radarman aboard Midway in the early 60s, this was familiar turf for Oscar, although this radar room was considerably different than the one he worked in (photo courtesy of Oscar Granger).

Digital Military Newspaper Library Links MVA Newsletters

In 2017, the MVA was contacted by a representative of the University of Florida (UoF) requesting permission to publish our newsletter *Station Ship News* in UoF's Digital Military Newspaper Library. In part, UoF defines its digital library as "a project to house, organize and preserve contemporary and historic newspapers and periodicals . . ."

So, yes, the MVA is flattered to have its newsletter selected to be part of this comprehensive collection of military publications. To view these publications, including our own, select pulldown menu **View Items** at top of main page and follow the links. URL: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/dmnl>.

The Spirit of "Nick Danger" Lives On

An important piece of USS Midway history

Editor's Note: In 1979-1980, as the Iran Hostage Crisis unfolded in slow motion before the world's eyes, it wasn't unusual for USS *Midway* to be at sea for a hundred days or more on GONZO Station, at a strategic location in the Indian Ocean, where she could show the flag and demonstrate her might. Something needed to be done to help the crew endure the boredom of the seemingly endless patrols, so **Ensign J.R. Reddig ("J.R.")** (below, 1982) wrote and published a daily parody about a character he called "Nick Danger, Private Dick" in the *Midway Multiplex*, the ship's newspaper. Nick Danger's exploits soon became a hit with the crew, as he fumbled and bumbled his way through cases, capers, or whatever they were. But was Nick Danger really an "oblivious bungler" as some have described him, or was that part of his cover? Whatever you think of him, the lame sleuth provided comic relief and a different (if not skewered) perspective on things. He helped boost crew morale on GONZO Station, and was a welcome breath of wind on a becalmed sea, you might say. The mundane days at sea became a little more bearable because of him. Below, J.R. Reddig, who retired from the Navy as a Captain in 2003, after 28 years in Naval Intelligence, gives us some insight into his Nick Danger character. (He doesn't pull any punches, as you'll see.) Here, then, is the inside skinny on Nick Danger, how he came about, lo those many years ago as *Midway* spent long days and nights on GONZO Station in the Indian Ocean. Plus, as an added bonus, you'll get to enjoy one thrilling episode of Nick Danger, free of charge. In addition, we have the book for sale, in Electronic PDF Format; the cost is \$20.00 each. All proceeds going to the USS Midway Museum. See more details following J.R. Reddig's Introduction and the free episode of Nick Danger and his Australian Gal Friday, Matilda. Okay, I know what you're thinking . . . Naval Intelligence, isn't that an oxymoron?



Dave Payson, ed

The Misadventures of "Nick Danger" on GONZO Station

By CAPT J.R. Reddig USN (Ret.) (USS *Midway*, 1979-80)

Introduction. OK- so out of left field comes this request to talk about the whole Nick Danger thing. It was the first book I ever inadvertently wrote, and it was a long time ago, more than 35 years as the crew

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flies. The original publication was in the stapled pages of the influential *Midway Multiplex*, which arguably was the best newsletter ever published in the general vicinity of 20° N latitude and 65° E longitude, a location better known as GONZO Station.

You can look that up on Wiki if you want. They claim the acronym stands for "*Gulf of Oman Naval Zone of Operations*." That is complete horseshit. I was there and I know. It stood for high-octane cocktails and the freedom we didn't have and Dr. Hunter S. Thompson's school of journalism. Dean and I thought it up. There is another citation, this one from the prestigious Proceedings of the Naval Institute in the 1980s: "The term GONZO station was thought up by a bored LTJG who didn't want to be there." Screw them, was my response, and I have had a prickly relationship with Proceedings ever since.



Here is the general situation report, and how it came to become the first *cinema noir* detective novel created on a moving warship, and some other interesting and dubious 'firsts' of Naval Aviation:

"USS Midway (CV-41) relieved USS Constellation, CV-64 as the Indian Ocean contingency carrier on April 16, 1979. Midway and her escort ships continued a significant American naval presence in the oil-producing region of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. She conducted naval exercises with the RAN off Perth, and made a port visit there and later in Mombasa, Kenya. On November 18, she arrived in the northern part of the Arabian Sea in connection with the continuing hostage crisis in Iran. Militant followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who had come to power following the overthrow of the Shah, seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4 and held 63 U.S. citizens hostage."

Here is how it all came to happen. On 21 February 1979, USS *Ranger* (CV-61) deployed for her 14th WestPac cruise, tentatively scheduled to cross the Indian Ocean to present a show of force during the pissing contest between North and South Yemen, which also was associated with the heebie-jeebies being felt in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, over the unsettling matter of the fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran, and the rise of the Shia theocracy. Ma *Midway* had just returned from that ambiguous mission, and we were still working on our third or fourth hangover back in our Overseas Family Residence Program (OFRP) homeport of Yokosuka, Japan.

Ranger never made it to the I.O. On 5 April 1979, she collided with the Liberian-flagged tanker MV *Fortune* just southeast of Singapore while entering the Straits of Malacca. While the large oil tanker was severely damaged, *Ranger* endured a significant gash in her bow, rendering two fuel tanks unusable. For safety of navigation issues, she turned back to Subic Bay, for temporary repairs and then to Yokosuka, for full repair.



This gaping hole in *Ranger's* bow from a collision with an oil tanker rendered her inoperative and sent *Midway* right back to GONZO Station for another long patrol.

Midway was the only 'spare' carrier laying around the western Pacific, and despite our recent return from the Indian Ocean, the National Command Authority ordered us back to sea to meet the naval presence mission.

You can imagine the general state of morale. It was a mixture of profound depression for the married folks, and exasperation among the bachelor sailors. But we considered ourselves to be the U.S.

Navy's Foreign Legion, and inconvenience comes with that territory. We got underway, and proceeded south along the coast of the PC and turned west for the long turquoise swells of the Indian Ocean. We were in a hurry, since we were late.

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I went up to the signal bridge when we went abeam Singapore and tried to see the Raffles Hotel's Long Bar, but no dice. We kept moving.

Now, the thing to remember about ships at sea in the old days is that you are completely out of touch except for the rare mail call provided by the Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD) airplanes. No TV, no radio, no nothing. The *Midway Multiplex* contained a couple pages of Xeroxed AP newswire headers copied down in Main Communications. They were combined with thrilling notes about the Plan of the Day (POD) by one of the Journalism Mates (JOs) in the Public Affairs shop. The paper was kind of thin gruel, but that is why a lot of us digested a paperback book a day as brain candy.

We had a marvelous port visit in Perth, West Australia, the consequences of which were probably as destructive to many relationships as having the Ranger crew and Air Wing making an extended port visit with the OFRP families back in Yoko. We departed to transit north and west toward Mombasa, Kenya, a port we had visited just a few months before. That would have been the second or third of November. On the 4th of November, 1979, the world changed and we have not worked its way through the full consequences of that event yet.

Midway altered course and made flank speed toward the Northern Arabian Sea on the Admiral's initiative. CINCPAC conferred with the Joint Staff back in Washington, and we were directed to return to a bearing that would take us to Africa while the grown-ups figured out what we were going to do. This was the Carter Administration, after all.

So after a very bizarre port call – very subdued, for a change – we got underway to do just what we had been planning on doing. Going to north to get close and personal with the hostage takers.

I would characterize the mood as being one of apprehension, braggadocio, resentment and excitement. I knew that the *Multiplex* was not going to get us very far in answering questions or providing diversion on what was likely to be either a war cruise, or more likely, a very long and very boring exercise in drilling holes in the North Arabian Sea.

There was only one thing to do, and I decided I was just the boy to do it. I would write a daily story tinged with irony, sort of in the tone pioneered by the comedy group The Firesign Theater, whose surreal humor had fueled many nights running amok in college. They had created a character named "Nick Danger," a lummock version of a noir private eye. I decided to appropriate him for the protagonist of the daily episode. I was going to regret that, once I realized what I had gotten myself into, but you don't know what you don't know when you get into these sorts of things.

The recent events in Iran caused a brief surge of interest in how this all came to be. I rooted around in the garage down at the farm and discovered the original manuscript of the book had survived all the moves and the mice that actually own the farm. It was fascinating to read it all again as it happened, the first crude episodes evolving into something complex and nuanced. "Back In the Saddle Again" represents the mature Nick, and is a personal favorite, as I took IBM Selectric typewriter in hand, and typed as we headed across the greasy swell of the Indian Ocean toward the North Arabian Sea. The extraterrestrial angle was derived from the ship's sensation of the day, the crude video game "Space Invaders." Hey, it was something to do, besides plan the hostage rescue!

"BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN"

I was experiencing the same Post-Christmas letdown I always get. You know all the caroling and big parties, the drunken driving, the festive barroom brawls, and the rosy cheeks from the impact of holiday ham-sized fists. It just wasn't the same this time. Oh sure, I enjoyed the traveling carolers down in the big

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airplane parking area, and the way everybody wore different colored holiday jerseys. I even liked the special effort by the cooks to put out a real home-cooked meal. Thing was, I just couldn't get into it.

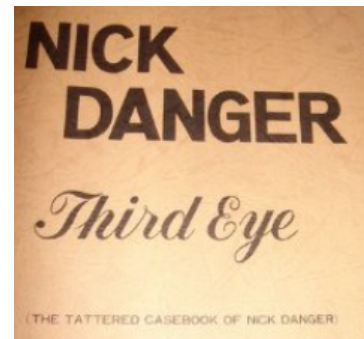
I mean, the big case was wrapped up and, still, there seemed to be something left in the way of loose ends. I had to find Matilda, for one thing. I had been getting strange phone calls from her, saying she had made the rounds of places I had never heard of before: S-6, after steering, the big party down on some little street called Shaft Alley. She said everyone had been just wonderful to her, had even employed one of the huge elevators to get the enormous piles of quarters up to the flight deck to load on the constantly shuttling Gonzo Lines Aircraft that were flying non-stop through the Arabian Skies. I heard one guy say that when the Wabash pulled away with a partial load of the round silver things it was five feet lower in the water than it had been when it pulled alongside.

I had to get to the bottom of this thing, and it still was as far away as ever. The Aliens were still in orbit, waiting for us. The Fat Man was scheduled to get out of the pen on a technicality in just a few days. I could feel that he would hook up with these slimy extra-terrestrials. The fate of the world rested on my shoulders, and I had to get back on the step.

When I get a little down, I always feel that a drive in the country is just the thing to get me moving again. I climbed into one of the little yellow convertibles and went for a spin. I drove way out in the suburbs, where they hadn't put up many Christmas Lights. It was very refreshing, what with the cool sea breeze blowing through my hair and the guys in the festive, colored jerseys jumping out of the way and waving their fists and shouting curses. It was almost like being home again. I could feel my spirits lifting. I was just about ready to deal with things again as a big tough son-of-a-gun.

I sideswiped a big station wagon airplane and knocked the long pointy thing off another. I had to work on my driving skills again, I could see. Normally, a holiday drive in the country was good for about two- or three-dozen mailboxes, at least. There just didn't seem to be anything around here but airplanes. I drove towards the big high-rise condominium in the middle of the big dancing area and did a precision doughnut turn into a rack of bombs or something. It was a fancy piece of driving, I'll tell you. I flipped the keys to the parking attendant in the yellow shirt. I would have tipped him a quarter but, due to Matilda, there seemed to be a shortage of those things around. I gave him a tip, anyway, and told him not to play in traffic.

I straightened my tie and hitched up my trousers. I was going to get hold of Matilda and tell her what was next on the agenda. It wasn't as tough a chore as you might imagine. I just looked around for the longest line on the hangar bay and got in it. I received a little plastic card that had the numbers "2,678" on it, along with the admonition that Kangaroo Enterprises thanked me for my patience. On the other side, it said, "Please have your quarters ready."



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Born to Fly

Taken together with his famous namesake (he's a distant relative of *the* Charles Lindbergh) and his long and illustrious career (1942-1976) as a naval aviator, it's easy to conclude that retired US Navy Captain Charles ("Charlie") Lindberg, age 91, was "born to fly."



Charlie with his son-in-law and granddaughter. His granddaughter was a naval aviator and flew off carriers in the Mediterranean.

And for the better part of his 34 years in the Navy, fly he did – mostly from the flight decks of aircraft carriers. One carrier in particular – the USS Midway – is of chief interest to us here, and Charlie knows CV-41 well, as you'll read about below. But Midway is only part of the amazing story of this man who was born to fly.

Here are some of Charlie's accomplishments during his Navy career. ♦ He served as a member of the Navy's "night-attack squadron" that pioneered night flying from carriers (up to that point thought to be too dangerous). ♦ Flying off the USS Coral Sea (CV-43), he participated in the first air strikes into North Vietnam. ♦ He served as navigator and as executive officer of the USS Constellation (CV-64). ♦ He served as the captain of the USS Paul Revere (APA-248). ♦ He served as Commodore of the Pacific Fleet Training Group.

Born in landlocked Iowa, perhaps tantalized by its wide-open skies, Charlie enlisted in the Naval Aviation Cadet Program at Valparaiso University in 1942 to serve his country in WWII. But by the time he received his commission in 1945, the war was over. Among other things, this meant he would live to fly another day.

"Learning to fly, we flew biplanes with flying wires called 'two holers' (for the 2 pilots)," he remembered. "We used a 'gosport' for the instructor to communicate to his student. My instructor took me aside and said I was getting too dangerous for him and he had 2 kids at home. It was his way of telling me that it was time for my first solo."

After operational training in torpedo bombers and carrier qualification on a CVE jeep carrier, he received orders to the SB2C dive bomber squadron. He served in various carrier attack squadrons until 1950 when he was ordered to VC-33, a night-attack carrier squadron. It was with this squadron that he first flew

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from Midway, a straight-deck carrier in the Atlantic Fleet. VC-33 was instrumental in developing night flying technologies and techniques that all carrier pilots employed in the future.

Next came a challenging and rewarding two-year tour at the Naval Air Test Center, where he graduated from test-pilot school and tested the newest combat planes of the era, the first of the jet planes. Among these were the Grumman Panther, the Grumman Cougar, the McDonnell Demon, and the F86 Sabre Jet.

By 1958-59, Charlie was back on Midway, this time with the VAH-8 squadron, flying the A3D Skywarrior, or “Whale” as it was so aptly nicknamed. Midway now ruled a new ocean, the Pacific, and Charlie was on board for her first West-Pac cruise (Tokyo, Hong Kong and the Philippines). “The Whale was a demanding plane to fly because it was the largest plane to ever launch off an aircraft carrier and come back aboard,” he said. Also significant on this cruise was the fact that it was the first time the huge Whales were launched from steam catapults. What a ride that must have been for Charlie and his fellow Skywarrior pilots!

Charlie also relished flying off Midway’s new angle deck, for it was a joyride compared to her original straight deck that he had to handle in the early 50s with night-attack squadron. “We flew prop planes on the straight deck, which is much less forgiving if your hook misses the wires,” he explained. “When that happens you have little choice but to crash the plane.” The angle deck eliminated that danger, he said, allowing a pilot to take off again if he missed the wires.

In 1965, flying from Midway’s sister ship Coral Sea, as commanding officer of VAH-2, he participated in the first airstrikes into North Vietnam, piloting an A3D Whale with a nuclear payload, the very mission A3Ds were designed for. (That worst-case scenario never happened, of course.) “This [being a C.O. of a squadron] is the best of all commands since one of the primary responsibilities is to be the best aviator possible,” he said. “It encompasses the education of other aviators in the squadron to instill the loyalty and ability to do the job.”

Charlie had many memorable experiences as a carrier pilot over the years, but one in particular stands out. “One of the most exciting launches I ever did was in Pearl Harbor, in port,” he recalled. “The Coral Sea was in for repairs and our three remaining A3D Whales were stuck on board. After much calculation, I flew the first one off the Coral Sea at dusk while she was aside the dock. At the time, we discussed whether this would be a feasible operation, and it seemed most appropriate that I (as squadron leader) be the first to attempt such a launch.”

It worked! While the nearly thousand-foot-long Coral Sea was tied up alongside the pier in Pearl, Charlie put his pedal to the metal and in a cloud of steam catapulted off the flight deck in the 70,000-pound A3D Whale, shades of “Hi-Yo, Silver! Away!” *Again, the man was born to fly.*

His next tour was on the Constellation, first as navigator and then as her executive officer. As navigator he knew how to find Yankee Station, important because this was during the height of the Vietnam War; though he didn’t get to fly as X.O., his experience flying off carriers proved invaluable to the captain and the other pilots in helping keep air ops running smoothly around the clock.

Following duty on the Constellation, he served three years at the Pentagon. As a carrier pilot, this wasn’t Charlie’s favorite stop along his career path. His responsibilities included purchasing weapons systems and delivery tactics for the Navy. Definitely not Charlie.

When the Pentagon was done with him and vice versa, it was back to sea for Charlie, and this time it was as captain of his own ship, the Paul Revere, the flagship for the admiral in charge of Pacific amphibious forces. The Paul Revere came equipped with a flight deck all right, but it wasn’t much of one compared to an aircraft carrier’s – a good-sized helo pad, is all. Charlie’s primary job as C.O. of the Paul Revere, as

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he put it, was to drive the admiral around the seas of Southeast Asia. “It was fun driving that ship, but there was a lot of pressure on me as captain not to mess up. You feel the pressure.”

He didn't fly as skipper of the Paul Revere. Nor did he fly during in his final tour of duty as Commodore of Fleet Training Group in San Diego, but he found the assignment enjoyable. One of his final jobs as commodore was to visit the Midway in Yokosuka, Japan, with his team and give his old ship an operational readiness inspection (ORI). “They passed,” he revealed.



Finally, after 34 years as a Navy pilot, Charlie retired in July of 1976. His truly remarkable career was over. In addition to piling up 12,000+ hours in all types of aircraft, he'd been an LSO, a test pilot, a squadron C.O., and a C.O. of a ship. “I feel honored to have served in the Navy all those years,” he said.

As it turned out, Charlie's flying days weren't over. As a “civilian,” his life's passion for flying came to the fore once again, and he founded and operated Lindy's Aero Center at Palomar Airport in Carlsbad, California. For the next decade, he taught others to fly before finally parking his plane on the tarmac for the last time.

Captain Charles Lindberg, USN (Ret.)

Then Charlie and his late wife Norma got busy on their bucket lists and traveled the world. She passed away in 2008, after 60 years of marriage. Nowadays, he's an active participant in his church activities and looks forward to visits from his 5 children, 13 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren.

Charlie, do you still keep your eyes to the sky? You're truly an amazing guy, and we're looking forward to meeting you at the reunion. We'll see you on the flight deck next to the A3D Whale parked up there. Now there would be a photo for the next newsletter!

MVA's First “All-Ship” Reunion (Nov. 2010)

. . . After coffee and the tables were cleared, it was Mac's turn to address us. He was introduced by Andy Perez, Captain, USN, Ret.

For the next half hour, Rear Admiral Mac McLaughlin, USN, Ret., President and CEO of the USS Midway Museum, brought us up to speed on our ship, what the Midway Museum has been doing to preserve her for us, both physically and metaphorically speaking, *about her legacy*. As we listened, transfixed, it grew so quiet you could've heard a barnacle grow. He talked about our “gritty ship,” as he called it, and what it means to the city of San Diego, the country and the US Navy – and, of course, what it means to us – her veterans. He told us about the extensive and expensive hull preservation program the Museum has underway to protect Midway's hull from the eroding effects of saltwater, and described all of the great educational programs the Museum is conducting for the school children of San Diego and beyond. The Midway Museum, he explained, is much more than its artifacts, its planes and all the rest. All of that is important, he conceded, holding up Ben Gaines' 40mm shell casing for us to see, but it doesn't add up to his vision. For Mac's vision goes far beyond that. He's looking forty years down the road, after we're gone; in his mind's eye, the Midway Museum will one day be the West Coast's Statue of Liberty, a symbol of this nation's freedom. Then he concluded his speech by inviting us to return to San Diego in 2014. “Let's hold the banquet on the flight deck of Midway,” he said. For several seconds

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after he was done we sat there at our tables, speechless, taking in what he had said. *Let's hold the banquet on the flight deck of Midway.*

. . . Admiral McLaughlin speaks to his vision and the legacy of the Midway Museum

Then we stood as one and cheered the man, the guardian of our legacy. For all practical purposes, the first reunion of the USS Midway Reunion Group [later to be named the "USS Midway Veterans Association"] had come to an end.

Later, many of the attendees found their way back to the Hospitality Room to say their good-byes. They were tired and had early morning flights to catch, but soon the HR was again abuzz with sea stories, and the keg was drained down to the foam, bringing the total number of kegs consumed over the three days of the reunion to 3, just as planned. Though who was that guy who predicted we'd need 9? Eventually on this last night of the reunion, the HR emptied and the lights dimmed. We didn't sing "Turn Out the Lights the Party's Over," which is just as well because this party, which was a roaring success, isn't over. This party, shipmates, is just beginning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, family and friends of the USS Midway Reunion Group, it was a spectacular reunion. Thank you for making it that way!



USS Midway - San Diego 2010



Midway Veteran's first banner design



1945 commissioning crew plankowners at first reunion from left – Bob Butler, Gene Slingerland, and George Fowler