

I enlisted on August 26, 1958. I actually went down to the recruiting station to enlist in the Air Force because I wanted to work on aircraft, at least on their engines. However, the Air Force recruiter was at lunch and the Navy recruiter, BT1 Gene Willing, was holding down the office. So we sat and talked while we waited. He ended up convincing me that I could get a better deal from the Navy and signed me up. (Side note: Willing was later ticketed for DUI in Michigan while driving a Navy car with a woman not his wife and was sent back to the fleet.)

I left for Chicago that afternoon for more testing and a physical exam. I passed the tests and the physical and was told that if I wanted to go the Great Lakes for Boot Camp there would be a two week wait before I could start training. I planned to go to Great Lakes so Mom and Dad could come visit me. I was also told that there was no waiting to start training if I agreed to go to San Diego. I didn't want to wait, so I said yes and was on a plane to San Diego at midnight that night. I didn't have a chance to let Mom and Dad know about the change until after I arrived in San Diego. They were surprised to receive a post card from me telling them I was in San Diego. So they didn't get to come to graduation. That was why Grandma Bea was so pleased when you, Tom, asked her to come to your graduation at Great Lakes. I love that picture of you and her holding hands.



Boot Camp at RTC San Diego, CA - August, 1958 to October, 1958, Company 530,

I was the Right Guide and company Honor Man. I also rowed on the whale boat team for our company. During practice one day I was hit on the bridge of my nose by one of the oars. I was in the bow on the starboard side, so when we shipped oars the other rowers would pass their oars to me and I would stow them along the gunnel. Unfortunately, just as I looked up to get the next oar, the guy passing it to me hit me right in the nose with the end of the blade. That is probably why one of my sinus cavities is larger than the other. The cartilage must have been pushed to one side when I got hit. The swelling went down in a few days and I never thought much about it afterwards. Boot Camp was good for me physically. I toned up my muscles and put on 16 pounds of weight. The problem was that some of my uniform pants that I had received at the beginning of Boot Camp were a little tight and somewhat short when I graduated. I had to get them tailored in Memphis.

Home for 2 weeks leave after Boot Camp and then reported to Naval Air Technical Training Center (NATTC), Norman, OK for Aviation Fundamentals (P) School. I was in school for a couple of weeks and then came Christmas. I went home for 2 weeks Christmas leave from Norman. There were so many people wanting to go to the Chicago area, the school arranged for a train to come onto the base to pick up several hundred sailors going home for Christmas. It was about an 18 hour trip (overnight). The train cars were old Pullman coaches from the 1930-1940 era. The heat didn't work in some of the cars and it was really cold outside. Our car had heat. When it came time to

sleep, one of the sailors had bent a wire coat hanger so it would open the upper berths. There were blankets and pillows inside. For a dollar he would open the berth so you could sleep in comfort. Very enterprising. I think he made a lot of money that night.

I also remember having to stand guard duty at Norman. I'm not sure why. I guess they were still teaching us military discipline. The post I was assigned to was mostly in an open field behind some sort of building. Since it was December there was about two feet of snow in the field. I was really tempted to not go out there, but I did my duty and walked through the snow. The first time it was quite difficult. Once I had done it a few times, I had made a path to walk through. That is where my story came from about Oklahoma being the only place where I was waist deep in snow and had sand blow in my face.

After Christmas I was transferred to the Naval Air Technical Training Center (NATTC), Memphis, TN for Aviation Structural Mechanic (Structures) (AMS "A") school. We were fortunate that we were berthed in the brick barracks at the gate that went to the North side of the base. They were only a few years old at the time. Everyone else got stuck in the old wooden WWII barracks. The barracks Tom lived in when he was in school there hadn't been built yet. It was an empty field where we stood for command inspections.

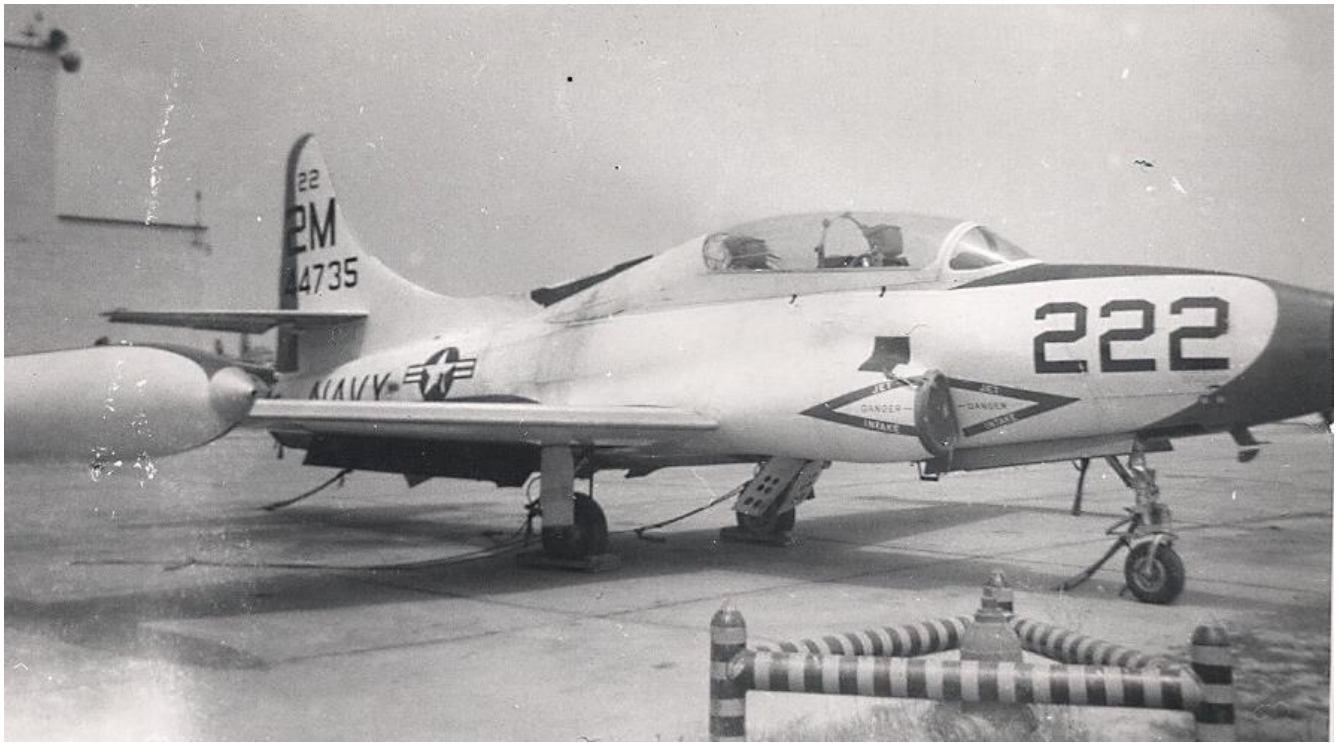
I finished "A" school and was transferred to my first real duty station. Basic Training Group (BTG-7), a navigation training squadron at NAS Memphis, the airfield on the North side of the base. Didn't even get travel pay. I just walked across the road to my new WWII wooden barracks. I was an AMSAN at the time. Fortunately, I was assigned directly to the Airframes shop and started working on airplanes. We had T-28Bs, T-2V-1s, and SNBs (Beech 18 twins).

I started out on T-28s. They were fairly easy to work on because they were simple aircraft. It had cable operated unassisted flight controls, no ejection seats, and a manually opened and closed canopy. Our B models didn't have tail hooks because we just did navigation training and didn't have to land on a carrier. Most of our work was hydraulic related because the aircraft was so simple. Unfortunately, we did a lot of periodic preventative maintenance based on the accumulated flight hours. I hated to replace the hydraulic reservoir filter which was required every 120 flight hours. It was on the firewall right behind the engine; a nine cylinder radial reciprocating engine (R1820) that leaked oil like crazy. To reach the filter you crawled up through the nose wheel well, squeezed in behind the engine, and reached up as far as you could to the bottom of the hydraulic reservoir to unscrew the filter. We would drain the reservoir first, but there was always some fluid left in the filter. So all of my dungarees and undershirts had dark brown oil spots and pink hydraulic fluid spots on them. Hydraulic fluid (Mil-H-5606A) is dyed red which turned to pink when you washed your clothes.



I was promoted to AMS3 in November 1959. Then I was reassigned to jets. Ah! Clean aircraft. So I worked on the T-2Vs until we began receiving the new North American T-2J-1s, later designated T-2As. It was a great little aircraft. It had Rocket Assisted Personnel Ejection Catapult (RAPEC) pilot seats. They were pretty new in the Navy. Other aircraft had the British Martin-Baker seats. The T-2Vs had the old cartridge ejection seats. BTG-7 was later re-designated VT-7 and moved to NAS Meridian, MS.

One event that sticks in my memory is when Dave Pullen and I were assigned to repair a hydraulic leak in the engine bay of a T-2V. The T-2V had a centrifugal flow engine, a J33 I believe. Also the air intakes on the aircraft were small so when it was on the ground it needed more air than they could provide. So Lockheed put "blow-in" doors on the top of the fuselage. These doors were spring loaded closed, but on the ground the doors would open and give the engine extra air. Dave was from Mississippi, about 6' 3" tall, and probably didn't weigh more than 150 pounds, soaking wet. In order to get to the leak, one of us had to go in through the air intake. Dave was the ideal person, so he did. I assisted from above through the starboard blow-in door. Since we were working in the engine bay, we didn't want anyone starting the engine. The procedure was to pull the engine ignition circuit breaker located just inside the starboard blow-in door. I pulled it. We repaired the leak and requested an engine turn-up so we could confirm the repair had worked. Dave got up on the port wing and I was on the starboard wing so we could look in the blow-in doors to check the repair. The engine mechanic got into the cockpit and tried to start the engine. But it wouldn't start. It kept turning until fuel began to run out of the tail pipe. It was then that I realized that I had not reset the ignition circuit breaker, so I reached in the blow-in door and popped in the breaker. Of course, the igniters lit the fuel. There was a loud "whoomp" and a huge ball of fire shot out of the tail pipe and the dripping fuel also ignited. It startled me, of course, and I looked over to see how Dave had reacted. He wasn't there. So I looked around to find him and saw him about 50 yards across the ramp looking like a giraffe at full gallop. Our repair worked and we learned a valuable lesson. Follow all the procedure steps and make sure you do them in the proper order.



It was also while in BTG-7 that I applied for the Naval Enlisted Scientific Education Program (NESEP). It sent enlisted personnel to four years of college for an engineering or science degree and a commission as an Ensign when they graduated. I was actually selected for the program and left for NESEP Prep School in June of 1960.

I attended six weeks of NESEP Prep School at the Naval Training Center (NTC) San Diego, CA. It was mainly

refresher training in mathematics, science, and English. We were allowed to select what university we wanted to attend. Since I wanted to major in aeronautical engineering, I chose the University of Kansas at Lawrence, KS. My second choice was the University of Louisville at Louisville, KY for a major in Aeronautical Engineering Mathematics. I was accepted at KU and arrived there in September of 1960 to start school.



While at KU I lived in a men's dormitory. There were four of us to a suite. Each suite had a living/study room and two man sleeping rooms off of each side with bunk beds and built-in closets. It was really nice. We had three freshmen and the floor counselor who was a junior. We were paid at our current pay grade and had scholarships for tuition and books through the NROTC unit. We were still on active duty and were assigned to the NROTC unit for administrative purposes. We just had to pay room and board out of our salary. We also received Basic Allowance for Quarters (BAQ) and Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) because we were living off base.

The ROTC units would get together each spring and have a Military Ball. Formal dress and a name band. The year I was there the band was Count Basie and he was great. I love the big band sound. I took my "sort of" girlfriend, Marilyn Howard, to the ball. That is her next to me in the picture. She was a Senior in Elementary Education and lived in the dorm next door to us. Very convenient, but distracting, and what probably caused me to not do well my second semester. The other sailor is Gary Weerts, IC3 (SS). We became friends in NESEP prep school and shared an apartment the summer after our Freshman year at KU.



I finished the first semester with a C- average and went on academic probation. If I didn't bring my grades up in the second semester and get off of probation, I was headed back to the fleet. For my first semester, I had not brought my car (1957 Chevy 150, two door sedan, six cylinder, stick shift) with me, but when I went home for Christmas I brought it back with me.

My trip home for Christmas was interesting. Since I didn't have my car, I made arrangements with someone I knew in NESEP at the University of Missouri at Columbia. He lived in Michigan and would go right through Goshen. I bummed a ride to Columbia with someone from KU. Unfortunately, I was late arriving and the guy left without me. So one of the other NESEP students took me to the nearest train station and I got a ticket to St. Louis. Once I got to St. Louis I found out that there were no trains to Indiana until the next day. So, I called the airport and got a flight to Indianapolis. Once there I found out there were no flights to South Bend until the next day. So I went to the bus station and got a ticket to Elkhart, where Mom picked me up, finally. That convinced me I should take my car back to school with me. My trip back went just fine.

While at KU I took the advancement exam for AMS2 in November of 1960, passed, and was advanced in January of 1961. To make a long story short, I didn't make it off of probation because I flunked Chemistry and was dropped from the program. Evidently I had spent too much time chasing the girls and driving around in my car and not enough time studying. I received orders to report to Light Attack Squadron 72 (VA-72) at NAS Oceana, VA in July of 1961. So off I went.

After a few weeks of leave, I reported to VA-72 in June of 1961 as an AMS2 and was assigned to the Airframes shop. We were part of Carrier Air Group Seven (CVG-7) assigned to the U.S.S. Independence (CVA-62). The tail letters for the air wing were AG. It was the beginning of a great assignment. The guys in the shop were really good AMs. We were flying A4D-2Ns when I got there. They were later designated A-4Cs. They were the first model with a radar in the nose. It was a horrible piece of vacuum tube junk that failed after every carrier landing. The pilots hardly ever used them because they were never operational. They served as ballast for the nose of the aircraft. The A-4 was a great aircraft that was relatively easy to work on. It didn't need folding wings so that reduced the complexity of the hydraulics we had to work on. I worked on aircraft, but on my first deployment my primary job was parts runner. Any time we needed a part I was given the paperwork and had to go to our supply folks to get a requisition, then I went to ship's supply to get the part. By the end of that six-month Mediterranean cruise I knew where all of our parts were stored and frequently had to correct the supply folks when they said they didn't have what I needed. I would take them to the storage compartment and show them they had one. They didn't like me to do that. It was fun.



The rest of the air-wing was VA-75 flying AD-6s, VAH-1 flying A-3Bs, VF-41 flying F3H-2s, VA-86 flying A-4Bs, VF-84 flying F8U-2s, VFP-62 Det. flying F8U-1Ps, VAW-33 Det. 41 flying AD-5Ns, and VAW-12 Det. 41 flying E-1Bs ("Stoof with a roof", S-2 with a radome.), and HU-2 Det. 62 with HUP-1 helicopters.



We left Norfolk for the Mediterranean on 4 August 1961. We relieved the U.S.S. Forrestal (CVA-59) at Pollensa Bay, Mallorca on 16 August. We visited the ports of Cannes France (twice), Athens Greece, Istanbul Turkey, the island of Rhodes (Greece), Genoa Italy, Naples Italy, Livorno Italy, and were relieved by the U.S.S. Saratoga (CVA-60) on 9 December 1961 at Porto Conte, Sardinia.

The AD-6s came in handy when we went into Istanbul. We had to anchor in the Bosphorus Straits, which has a current out of the Black Sea into the Med. There weren't any tug boats available, so the Captain used the ADs tied down on the flight deck with engines running to maneuver the ship into its anchorage. It was called "pin wheeling." Pretty impressive considering the size of the ship. The CO of VA-75 wasn't too happy though. There is always a chance of burning up an engine. But those big old R3350s did the trick. We returned to Norfolk on 19 December 1961.

Mom and Dad met me at the pier when the ship pulled in. It was great to see them. That was when I discovered that Dad had traded my 1957 Chevy for a 1962 Plymouth Valiant, slant six, push button automatic, 4-door. At first, I was pretty pleased because it was brand new. But once I got it on the freeway headed home, I realized that it was not properly geared for those speeds. It really struggled to maintain 65 MPH. But I kept it for a couple of years. I later traded it for a new 1964 Rambler American, four-door, straight six, and automatic transmission (not push button). Nice car.

My next cruise was from February of 1962 to the end of August 1962. Most of the same squadrons were embarked except for VF-41, they stayed home to transition to the F-4. So Marine All Weather Fighter Squadron 115

(VMF(AW)-115) came with us flying F4D-2s (Sky Rays). Interesting airplane. It held the world record for climb from takeoff to 10,000 feet for about 10 years. It had a huge engine with afterburner. The problem with it was sometimes the aft fuselage with the vertical stabilizer would come off when the tail-hook caught the wire. One of theirs did lose its tail, but the pilot got out okay.

This cruise I was assigned as flight deck troubleshooter and catapult final checker. I didn't think I would like it, but it turned out to be fun. Had to watch myself so I wouldn't get hurt. One of the guys on the waist cat crew that retrieved the launch bridles was killed when he jumped out of the catwalk too soon on a launch and the wing of the aircraft took off the top of his head.

This was also the cruise that I became a Catholic. My good friend ADJ3 Paul Sherbino was married to a Catholic woman who had been asking him to convert to Catholicism and he finally agreed to take instruction during our 6 month Med. cruise. I had been doing some soul searching and was looking for some religious system that would help me draw closer to God. So, I agreed to take instruction with Paul. Reverend Cdr. Shiavone was the Catholic chaplain on the Independence. He was a Franciscan priest and very personable, for an officer. We contacted him at the beginning of the cruise and commenced instruction upon leaving Norfolk. We attended mass during the cruise and I became very comfortable with my decision. When we got back to Norfolk after the cruise, we were baptized by the Bishop of Richmond, VA. There were actually quite a few adults being baptized that day. I would say probably about 100.

We were only back in Norfolk for about a month when we were sent back aboard for carrier qualifications. We spent about four days at sea operating and pulled in to Jacksonville, FL for the weekend. On Monday we pulled out and headed South. It seems the Cubans and the Russians were acting up. The intelligence community had discovered that there were Russian short and medium range ballistic missiles on the island and President Kennedy wanted them to be removed. So, he chose to implement a naval blockade of the island to prevent any more missiles from arriving. The Independence and its escorts were the first ships to arrive for the blockade. We actually had one of the A-4 squadrons from Jacksonville with us. The Enterprise (CVAN-65) showed up a few days later and that squadron transferred over to them. On scene from 24 Oct - 20 Nov 62. [With aviation squadrons VF-13, VF-84, VA-64 (Shifted to Enterprise 19 Nov), VA-72, VA-75 (Shifted to Guantanamo 22 Nov), VAH-11 Det 8, HU-2 Det 62, VAW-33 Det 62.

It was sort of scary to start with. When we implemented the blockade our pilots were on five minute alert. They had to sit in their aircraft so they could launch quickly. Every aircraft we had was fully loaded with bombs and rockets. VFP-62 was flying reconnaissance missions over Cuba every day. When the alert started, I was up to my elbows in main landing gear parts on one of our aircraft. The strut had developed a leak and we had to jack it up and disassemble the strut to repack the seals. The thing that really brought home how serious things were, was when I went to get some parts from supply and they didn't require a requisition. We could get anything we needed just by asking. Wow! As soon as we got the strut repaired the ordnance men loaded it with bombs and it went on alert. We just sat around in the shop from then on. We never launched any strike aircraft, just the recon birds.

After about four or five days they lowered the alert status to 15 minutes. Then the pilots could relax and wait in the Ready Room. That lasted for about a week and then they gave us a stand-down, but we still had to be ready. It think we ended up on station 90 miles South of Kingston, Jamaica for about a month. All total I believe we were gone about 53 days before we got back to Norfolk. We were awarded the Armed Forces and Navy Expeditionary Medals for the blockade. Quite an adventure.

[**Side note:** I found out some interesting information about the blockade while watching a PBS program. It was called "The Man Who Saved the World" from their "Secrets of the Dead" series. It is from the perspective of the captain and crew of the Soviet submarine B-59. It was one of four submarines sent to the Caribbean to offset the American blockade. The submarine was a diesel electric model designed for use in the arctic region. That turned out to be a problem for them. Their air conditioning unit failed shortly after they arrived and they suffered miserably in the heat. The DVD describes the situation in this way: "In October 1962, the world held its breath. On the edge of the Caribbean Sea, just a few miles from the Florida coast, the two great superpowers were at a stand-off. Surrounded by twelve US destroyers, which were depth-charging his submarine to drive it to the surface, Captain Vitali Grigorievitch Savitsky panicked. Unable to contact Moscow and fearing war had begun, he ordered the launch of his submarine's nuclear torpedo. As the two sides inched perilously close to nuclear war - far closer than we ever knew before - just one man stood between Captain Savitsky's order and mutually assured destruction." In the video, when Captain

Savitsky orders the firing of the torpedo, Captain Vasili Arkhipov the fleet commander refuses to give his permission to fire. So the torpedo was never fired, even though Captain Savitsky & his Executive Officer had inserted their keys & the system was ready to fire. Wow! Just seconds away from starting a nuclear war. As far as I know, the video doesn't say, the Independence or the Enterprise were probably the targets for the torpedo. Just think, if they had fired, none of us would be here today. It is a great video.]

One of the guys in the shop was about three months from being discharged when the Missile Crisis happened. Of course, all discharges were frozen for the duration. So, we had to listen to him gripe and moan for the whole time we were down there. When we got back to Norfolk they removed the freeze and he got out when he was supposed to. I don't remember his name, just that he was from Wilkes-Barre, PA. I would think about him when I'd send my student loan payment to Sallie Mae in Wilkes-Barre. Funny what you remember.

My practicing my faith by attending mass and having studied the Bible during our instruction period produced a spiritual crisis in me during Easter mass on the forecastle of the Independence during an at sea period in the Med. Listening to Cdr. Shiavone describe the events of Good Friday, Jesus' trial, and eventual crucifixion made me realize that I needed to confess my sins and ask Jesus to take control of my life. I asked Him to do so and promised to live my life for Him. Interestingly, at the time I didn't clearly understand what I had done. It was only later when we were attending Chula Vista Alliance Church that I came to fully understand salvation and the giving of one's life to Christ. That was when I finally began to live for Christ.

During our workup period prior to our 1963 Med cruise our air wing participated in a trial for a new maintenance system. It was the U.S. Air Force Aircraft Maintenance and Material Management System called Air Force Manual 66-1 (AFM 66-1). We spent several weeks being trained by Air Force maintainers on how to use the new Maintenance Action Form (MAF), Support Action Form (SAF), and the Technical Data Compliance (TDC) form. The system also completely revised how Maintenance Control tracked work and how we in the shops reported what we had done to correct discrepancies. It was a pretty drastic change for all of us, particularly just before a cruise. The proposed benefits were better data collection so the squadron, the air wing, and the Navy could better understand what was going on in aircraft maintenance. They could more accurately predict when to replace an aircraft type that was consuming more than its fair share of the budget to keep it flying. It also gave the manufacturers more accurate data on the reliability of their products. It turned out to be a pretty good system overall. Even the surface Navy eventually adopted it after the Navy tailored it to our operating environment. They had to simplify it because the Air Force had built in so much infrastructure equipment that we didn't have that the Navy couldn't afford to use it the same way. It became the Navy Maintenance & Material Management (3M) system.

My third Med. cruise with VA-72 was in 1963. I think it was from June to December. Most of the same squadrons were embarked, except for VA-75 which was transitioning to the A-6A. So, they were replaced by Marine Light Attack Squadron 324 (VMA-324) flying A-4Bs. That gave us three A-4 squadrons aboard. Also, Heavy Attack Squadron One (VAH-1) had transitioned to the "new and wonderful" North American A-5A Vigilante. It was huge and weird looking. It was very long and slim, twin engines with a bomb bay that ran the full length of the fuselage between the engines. The bombs were ejected rearward out the tail. Needless to say, it didn't last long in the fleet as a bomber. It was eventually converted to the RA-5C and used strictly as a reconnaissance and tanker aircraft. Then before you knew it, it was gone completely. The A-6 replaced the A-5 as the medium attack aircraft. It wasn't supersonic, but it carried a larger payload.



We continued with our A-4Cs, as did VA-86, and VF-84 was still flying their F-8Cs. HU-2 Det. 62 had transitioned to the H-2 aircraft and VF-41 was now flying the F-4B. It was a pretty routine cruise. I had made AMS1 in April and was Airframes Shop supervisor at the ripe old age of 22. It was interesting because there was another first class in the shop at the same time who was senior to me in time in service and grade. He was an AME1. It may have been because he came into the squadron after I had been made supervisor. Or maybe it was because the maintenance chief liked me. He was a neat guy. His name was Elton Wood. He was an AMC and had spent a large part of his career in lighter-than-air ships during World War II and for a little while after the war. He could tell some great sea stories.

An interesting side note; before we left for the Med. we received some new pilots fresh out of flight training. One of them was a Ltjg. Robert Crippen. I think he ended up assigned as the Personnel Division Officer. He was a very pleasant person that got along well with we enlisted people. He was a good pilot and did well during the cruise. I left the squadron in July of 1964, so I lost track of him until the 1980's. He showed up as one of the astronauts. I think he was a LCDR then and ended up retiring as a Captain. He made several shuttle flights and was the command pilot of one of them. When he retired he worked for NASA in charge of astronauts. He is retired now. You never know who you will meet.

One of my favorite port calls, that cruise, was when we pulled into Naples, Italy. Most of the time when we were in port there were various guided tours we could take to see the sights. This time I signed up for a three-day tour of Rome. We were supposed to arrive in Rome before noon on Sunday so we could be there for the Pope's blessing of the crowd in St. Peter's square. For some reason, we were delayed and didn't arrive until after the blessing, so we just wandered around in the square for a while and then we went on a guided tour of St. Peter's Cathedral and Vatican City. I had just finished reading "The Agony & The Ecstasy," about the life of Michelangelo, so I was really interested in seeing some of his sculptures and, of course, the Sistine Chapel ceiling. I was not disappointed. In St. Peter's I got to touch the foot of Jesus in Michelangelo's "Pieta at St. Peter's" sculpture. It was just sitting in a niche in the wall like all the other statues. There were places where it had been repaired over the years when it had been damaged by someone. There wasn't any protection around it at all. This priceless work of art was there for all to see and touch. I was privileged to see it again in New York when the ship went to the 1964 World's Fair. There it was behind bullet proof glass and you couldn't get near it. It is such a beautiful work of art. He was only 22 years old when he sculpted it.

When we toured Vatican City there were all these wonderful works of art sitting around everywhere. They were even on the staircases we walked up. Of course, the Sistine Chapel was just beautiful. The ceiling is really high and had posed a particularly troublesome problem for Michelangelo on how to create a platform from which to paint the

ceiling. But he did it. In 1963 the ceiling had not been cleaned in 200 years, but the artwork was still amazing. Many years later they cleaned it and were surprised to discover that Michelangelo had used very vivid colors that were eventually hidden by the candle soot that had accumulated over the years. That is why we have the picture of "The Creation of Man" on our living room wall. It is my favorite panel from the ceiling. Unfortunately, it is a print of the picture before it was cleaned, so it doesn't reflect the vivid colors.

Our hotel was actually about 20 miles outside of Rome in a small village. But that made it even better. One afternoon we had some free time so our tour guide, who was a young man in his 20's, arranged for us to play soccer against some of the village youth. Needless to say, we were beaten very badly, but we had a great time. Later that evening I, Bill Dammert, & Paul Sherbino went into the village. We saw that there was a small carnival in town, but it had already shut down for the night. It was about 10:00 PM and we were feeling hungry, so we went to a cafe just off the piazza. When we went in they told us using gestures that they were closed. Evidently it was family run, because an older gentleman came out and, in Italian, told the others to bring us some food & wine. We sat down and had a great time visiting with the family. They didn't speak any English & none of us spoke Italian, but it didn't matter. We just used sign language & a few mutually understood words. I think we must have been there for several hours. It seemed like we parted friends. I think we left them quite a bit of money because we were leaving in the morning and didn't really need it anymore. It was a very pleasant memory of Italy.

A significant event happened later during the cruise. It was the second day after we left a port call in Beirut, Lebanon, November 22, 1963. The captain came on the IMC about 2145 and announced that President Kennedy had been assassinated. It was a great shock to everyone. A few days later we pulled into Genoa, Italy and the reaction of the Italians was amazing. Most of the people we talked to were heartbroken about Kennedy's death. For some reason the Italians really liked Kennedy. Many of the taxi drivers had pictures of him on the dashboards of their cabs. One man we talked to broke down in tears as he spoke about it.

Our last port call before heading home was Barcelona, Spain. I took the day tour of Barcelona which included a visit to the Church of the Holy Family in downtown. It is an amazing church that has been under construction for over 100 years. And that was in 1963. I think they are still working on it today. We also were taken to the Church of the Black Virgin outside of the city. It is up in the mountains near a cave where tradition says someone discovered a statue of the Virgin Mary carved out of black rock. Near the cave they built a church, which also had a monastery and a school. When we visited the church, they put on a presentation by the school's boys choir in the sanctuary. Wow, could they sing. It was beautiful.

When we went to lunch, I couldn't really tell what the menu said because it was all in Spanish. So, I ordered Spanish rice, thinking it would be safe & familiar. Well, it was, partially. It was rice, but on top of the rice was a huge complete shrimp. I wasn't sure how to eat the shrimp, or even if I should, so I pushed it aside and ate the rice. All in all, a very nice tour.

The ship provided a space off of the mess deck for first class petty officers to have a lounge for relaxing, drinking coffee, playing acey-ducey (a Navy variation of Backgammon), and getting to know each other. As a group, we decided to have a party for all of the first class at a hotel in Barcelona. It was arranged to have a private room in the hotel, an open bar, and entertainment. We all gathered at the hotel on the appointed day and began to party. Someone had arranged for a local flamenco dancing school to put on a floor show for us. They performed for about an hour and it was a great success with everyone enjoying it very much. I have always liked flamenco dancing. Anyway, as the evening wore on, most of us were getting pretty drunk, since the spirits were flowing uninterrupted. We were supposed to be back aboard ship by midnight, but the ship's Executive Officer showed up and extended our liberty until 1:00 AM. By midnight, I and my friends from the squadron were pretty drunk and needed to head back to the fleet landing to catch a boat out to the ship anchored in the harbor. Unfortunately, we couldn't see very well and didn't really know how to get back to the fleet landing. We were lucky that a Philippino shipmate was more sober than we were and knew the way back to the ship. He got us aboard okay.

The next morning was a normal work day. Neither I nor my fellow first class in the shop were really sober when we woke up, so we agreed to split the day. He would work that morning while I slept in. Then I would relieve him at noon and he would go back to bed. I guess it worked out okay, no one said anything to either of us about it.

I had been in the squadron for three years so I was due for orders. I don't remember what I requested, but what I got

were orders to instructor duty at NATTC Memphis and arrived there in July of 1964. I thought maybe I would get AM "A" or "B" school. After 4 weeks of instructor training I ended up in the second week of the two-week Aviation Fundamentals, Preparatory (AFUN "P") school. We taught basic aviation material; terminology, aerodynamics, carrier operations, and flight line safety and how to direct a taxiing aircraft. We took the students to a flight line and they directed an AD-6 that one of we instructors were taxiing. Later we received some T-34s that were much easier to taxi and more fuel efficient. They didn't scare the students as much either. It was like going from a Cadillac to a Volkswagen Bug. But it was fun.

Our school had a coffee mess where we sold coffee, hot chocolate, and doughnuts to the students on their breaks. We weren't allowed to make a profit, so any money we made over expenses we used to throw a graduation party for the students at the Enlisted Club. It was at one of those parties that I met Mom. It was at the Christmas party in December, 1964. She was in Avionics Fundamentals school at the time training to be a Trademan (TD). Eventually she would have operated and maintained training devices; Link trainers, etc.. She had not been in any of the classes I had taught while she was in AFUN "P" school.



I lived in the single first class petty officer's barracks and she lived in the student WAVES barracks. They just happened to be next door to each other, so it was very convenient for dating. Except when they marched to the chow hall at 6:00 AM singing songs as they passed our barracks. DKC Green, the student WAVES barracks supervisor, lived in the barracks as a kind of "house mother." In order to see Mom, I had to sign in at the barracks front desk, wait for someone to tell her I was there, and then wait in the entry lounge for her. I found out later from Mom that Chief Green had gone to personnel to check my service record to ensure that I was not married. She was quite the mother hen. It seemed like she was always hovering around watching us. I think she was even at my initiation to Chief Petty Officer at the CPO club.

As you know, we were married Saturday, May 29, 1965 in the base chapel by one of the Catholic chaplains. David Busby, a friend and coworker from VA-72 was my best man. A friend of Mom's, Martha ?, was her Maid of Honor.

We had a wedding lunch after the service at Forgione's Italian restaurant near Millington, where we liked to go when we were dating. The people at the restaurant were very nice to us, they even provided a cake for us. It was just the wedding party, my Mom and Dad, Aunt Jeri, and Dawn. Grandma Bucy was in California and not able to attend. We spent our one night honeymoon in a hotel in Memphis.

Sunday we came home to our rented house just north of Millington next to a cotton gin and across the street from a general store.



Then it was back to school for both of us on Tuesday. Our real honeymoon was later in August when Mom had gotten out of the Navy for being pregnant and I took 30 days leave. We went to California to see Grandma Bucy and some of Mom's friends in Pismo Beach. Oh yes, Tai Li our Siamese kitten was with us. Mom had given her to me as a wedding present. She loved to ride in the car. We had her leash trained so she could get out of the car and walk with us when we stopped to sight see. Great cat. She was clever, too. As we were driving,



we would have a bag of pretzels on the seat between us and Tai Li would reach over the back of the seat and grab a pretzel with her claw and take it into the back seat with her. The back seat was her domain. I had made a platform that fit all the way across the back seat and went from the back of the front seat to the front of the back seat. It was padded and had a hole behind the passenger seat so she could get to her litter box on the floor. It worked wonderfully for her and eventually for Laurie. Except the time that Laurie fell through the hole into the litter box.

In 1966 I applied for the Warrant Officer program, but was not selected. I started taking the Chief's test in September of 1966 and passed the test three times but wasn't advanced because there weren't enough openings. I finally made Chief on my fourth try. I was promoted in April of 1968. And Chief Green was at my initiation at the Chief's Club. I think she even congratulated me. Quite a day.





NAVAL AIR TECHNICAL TRAINING CENTER

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38115

IN REPLY REFER TO

16 April 1968

AMSI John A. BEMENDERFER, USN
Naval Air Technical Training Center
Naval Air Station (85)
Memphis, Tennessee 38115

Dear Petty Officer BEMENDERFER:

I noted with pleasure your recent advancement to the grade of chief petty officer. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that your efforts and dedication in the service of your country are greatly appreciated.

This advancement is one practical way of rewarding such faithful and effective service. I want you to know that your service at this command is also acknowledged. It is obvious to us all that your country has never needed you more. Keep up the good work and accept my warm congratulations on the performance which earned you this advancement. Well done.

Sincerely,

H. F. LLOYD
Captain, U.S. Navy

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER'S MESS (OPEN)
U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38115

15 Apr 1968

From: Chairman, Initiating Committee, of the Chief
Petty Officer's Mess (Open)

To: **AMSC BEMENDERFER, John A., 530 88 90, USN**

Subj: Chief Petty Officer's Initiation; orders to attend

1. Upon receipt of these orders, you are hereby directed to proceed and report to the Chief Petty Officer's Mess (Open), Building S-191, for muster, instruction, inculcation of inculcation, and authorization to face the paymaster. Dates and times follow forthwith:

1230, 16 Apr 1968 for instruction by the Exalted High Sheriff.

2. At 1300, 16 Apr 1968 you will present yourself at the Chief Petty Officer's Mess (Open) for muster, chow, inspection, orientation, and a modicum of merriment.


3. No proceed time, dislocation allowance, family separation allowance, dead horses or travel time is authorized in the execution of these orders. SECNAVFIND not required.

4. Uniform until 1230, 16 Apr 1968 will be **Service Dress Khaki**. The Uniform at 1300, 16 Apr 1968 for the shambles prescribed for acting type rubber socks is WORKING Khaki, as set forth in the U.S. Naval Uniform Regulations, as amended. Upon completion of the initiation the uniform will be Service Dress ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Khaki.

5. Insuperb initiatory inductees who wish to take the initiative by quaffing large draughts of the art of zymurgy will be ingrained by insidious inquisition. IN MEDIAS RES.

6. Failure to comply with these orders for reasons other than being xanthous will incur the incredible incurable incubuses. (No cotton pickin' excuses accepted.)

7. If this inscription is inscrutable, the addressee may seek clarification from the intelligensia (any GPO) or by submitting a request for consultation with Webster.


R. J. ABBEY
BMCM USA

Chairman, Initiation Committee
Chief Petty Officer's Mess (Open)

Pers-B643/gv
530 88 90
21 May 1968

From: Chief of Naval Personnel

To: Commanding Officer
Naval Air Technical Training Center (85)
Naval Air Station
Memphis, Tennessee 38115

Subj: AMS1 John A. BEMENDERFER, USN; appointment as Warrant Officer
W-1, (Temporary), U. S. Navy

Ref: (a) BUPERSNOTE 1120 of 24 Apr 1968

1. Reference (a) announced the selection of enlisted personnel for temporary appointment to the grade of Warrant Officer, W-1, by the selection board which met on 13 February 1968.
2. Since it was anticipated that some of the personnel listed in reference (a) might decline the appointment or be found not qualified, a small number of alternates was selected. Petty Officer BEMENDERFER was selected as an alternate and due to a disqualification as mentioned above, it is the intention of the Chief of Naval Personnel to appoint him as Warrant Officer, W-1, 7412, during the month of June 1968 with an expected date of rank of 15 June 1968.
3. If he desires consideration for this appointment comply with reference (a). In the event he does not desire the appointment, he shall forward a letter of declination, via official channels, to the Chief of Naval Personnel (Pers-B643).
4. Information regarding permanent change of duty orders and officer indoctrination training will be promulgated by separate correspondence.
5. In the event subject man has been transferred, it is requested that this letter be promptly forwarded to his new duty station. Provide this Bureau (Attn: Pers B643) with a copy of the forwarding endorsement.
6. This letter is not to be construed as authority to effect appointment.

K. C. WALSER
By direction

I also applied for Warrant Officer in 1967, but wasn't on the selection list that was published in Navy Times in May of 1968. I figured that I hadn't been selected this time either. Then a couple of weeks later I received a letter from the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BuPers) saying I had been promoted to Warrant as an alternate. One of the primary selectees was disqualified and I got in. The promotion to W-1 was effective 15 June 1968. Fortunately, I already had most of my chief uniforms so all I had to do was pick up the appropriate shoulder boards and collar devices. I received two uniform allowances which covered most of the cost for the new uniforms. So after only two months as a chief I was now an officer. Wow!





THE COMMANDING OFFICER
NAVAL AIR TECHNICAL TRAINING CENTER (85)
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38115

24 May 1968

Chief Petty Officer John A. BEMENDERFER, USN
Naval Air Technical Training Center
Naval Air Station (85)
Memphis, Tennessee 38115

Dear Chief Petty Officer Bemenderfer:

I noted with pleasure your recent selection for appointment to the grade of Warrant Officer, W-1. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that your efforts and dedication in the service of your country are greatly appreciated.

This selection is one practical way of rewarding such faithful and effective service. It is obvious to us all that your country has never needed you more. Keep up the good work and accept my warm congratulations on the performance which earned you this selection.

Sincerely,

H. F. LLOYD
Captain, U. S. Navy

It also created a problem in my school. Two of us had been selected for Warrant. The other one was an ADJ1. They weren't sure what to do with us. Our Warrant Officer Indoctrination Class didn't start until November and we couldn't continue to work as classroom instructors. I was transferred to Public Works. They didn't know what to do with me either. So, they gave me a clip board with some paper on it and told me to go around and inspect the exterior of all the barracks and classroom buildings and write down what needed to be fixed. That's what I did for the next three months until I left for school in Pensacola. Wasn't the most exciting job I ever had. They probably never used the list I made either.

We were living in a trailer (50' by 10', two bedroom) in a park in Millington. It was just after I made Chief that a tornado hit the park. Those are the newspaper articles in the scrapbook. Our trailer had only minor damage, but we couldn't live in it for about two weeks. The base opened up an old Bachelor Officer's Quarters (BOQ) that wasn't being used, to house the families that needed some place to stay. Then just a couple of days after the tornado, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis and the sheriff imposed a county wide curfew for 7:00 PM. I would get off work at 4:30 PM, rush to the BOQ, pick up Mom, Laurie and Mark, run into Millington to a restaurant for dinner and then rush back to the base before curfew. It was crazy. I think it lasted about two weeks until the sheriff felt he could remove the curfew. By then we were back in our trailer and it wasn't as much of a problem.

When I made Warrant Officer, I was also given orders for a new duty station after "Charm School," Warrant Officer Indoctrination School. Originally, I was assigned to a fighter squadron out of NAS Oceana, VA. The other Warrant Officer from my school was given orders to an A-4 squadron out of NAS Alameda, CA. I wanted to go to the West coast and the other guy wanted to go to the East coast, so we called the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BuPers) and asked if we could exchange orders. They said okay and they would issue new ones. When we got our new orders, the other guy was assigned to an A-4 squadron out of Jacksonville, FL and I was assigned to VA-144 at NAS Lemoore, CA. We were both delighted. His family was from Jacksonville and Lemoore was a much better duty station than Alameda.

We both went to four weeks of "Charm School" in Pensacola in November. Mom, Laurie and Mark (Butch and the cat, too) went to Cloverdale in October and stayed with Grandma Bucy and Great Grandma Hartley. Our school was part of the Aviation Officer Candidate Training School that trained college graduates prior to entering flight training to become pilots. They were NavCads, Naval Aviation Cadets, not officers yet. What was funny was that they couldn't figure out what we Warrant Officers were. So frequently they would approach us and ask what Navy we were from. Depending on who they asked, they would get an extensive variety of answers other than the truth. It was fun to tease them. We all would get a good laugh out of it. The school was informative and fun. The CO was a passed-over LCDR who was just waiting to retire. In his introduction speech the first day, he told all of us "not to let this school interfere with our liberty." So we didn't. :-)

We lived in a BOQ at NAS Ellison Field and our classes were at NAS Pensacola. The group of guys I hung out with ate evening meals at the Ellison Field Chief's Club. We were all ex-Chiefs. The cook at the club was a PO3 who was earning extra money working there. We became regulars and he would give us special deals and special meals the other patrons didn't get. We always tipped generously. He was glad to have us.

We graduated in December and I came to Cloverdale where we spent Christmas. I think we got to Lemoore in January of 1969 and moved right into base housing. I went through A-4 maintenance training at VA-125 and reported to VA-144 a few weeks later. The squadron was flying A-4Fs with the hump back. The hump was added so they could install more avionics, since there wasn't any space left in the fuselage. The squadron was in workups for deployment and we did a few short cruises before leaving in March for WestPac embarked in the USS Bon Homme Richard (CVA-31). Our sister A-4 squadrons were VA-22 and VA-86. We came home in October. When I got home there was this new little baby boy at our house. I think his name was Tom, and he really needed a haircut.



We spent most of our cruising time on Yankee Station, East of North Vietnam and South of Hainan Island in the Tonkin Gulf. It was called Yankee Station because it was off of North Vietnam. The southern station was off of South Vietnam so it was called Dixie Station. We hardly ever went there. There were always two carriers on Yankee Station flying either the noon to midnight shift or the midnight to noon shift. The other carrier was usually a Forrestal or Constellation class ship. Sometimes we would be operating within sight of each other and we could watch them launch their aircraft. Most of the time we could beat their launch times with our three catapults versus their four. I think we would spend two weeks on station and then make a port call somewhere. We were home ported out of Subic Bay, Philippines at the Cubi Point NAS. When the ship was in port we were at the NAS so we could still fly. We also made port calls at Hawaii; Hong Kong; Yokosuka, Japan and Pattia Beach, Thailand. The war was still going on, but we were not flying into North Vietnam. Most of our missions were to bomb the Ho Chi Min trail in Cambodia. Our planes had to fly South to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), cross South Vietnam into Cambodia, and go North to their targets. Then they flew the reverse course back to the ship.

The squadron lost two pilots that cruise. LTJG. L. C. (Lee) Sage, flew into the ground on a night bombing mission. The accident board wasn't able to determine the cause. Either he was hit by ground fire or he got target fixation and didn't pull out of his dive. The other pilot, LT. W. E. Mickelsen, Jr. came in too low during a night landing and crashed into the round-down of the flight deck breaking his aircraft in two. He was probably dead on impact. The cockpit section with him in it went over the side off the angled deck and wasn't recovered. Unfortunately, I was watching the recovery on the PLATT TV from the ready room. I was Maintenance Administration Division Officer so I had to quarantine the aircraft log book and discrepancy sheets for the accident board. I ended up being a member of the accident board which decided that it was pilot error that caused the crash. He had transitioned to A-4s from S-2s, a twin engine propeller antisubmarine aircraft that had been phased out of the inventory, and the board surmised that he may have cut power to land the way you do in a prop plane and that caused him to be too low when he reached the flight deck. There was no way to really know what happened.

After losing the second aircraft, ComFairWestPac gave us another aircraft from a squadron leaving for home. The squadron left the aircraft at NAS Cubi Point for us to inspect and inventory it. I was chosen to go along with two enlisted guys. We were scheduled to fly in by Carrier On-board Delivery (COD) aircraft, but one of the C-2 CODs had crashed and they grounded all of them until they could find out what happened. The only way we could get to

Cubi Point was to ride one of the supply ships back to port. It happened to be the USS Camden (AOE-2) which had an HC-3 H-46 helicopter detachment aboard. We flew in one of their helicopters the 300 feet from the flight deck of the Bonnie Dick to the flight deck of the Camden, which was alongside doing an underway replenishment. That was when I discovered helicopter detachment cruising. It looked like a really cushy way to cruise. However, at that time they didn't have Warrant Officer maintenance officers assigned. One of the pilots filled that position. The Camden was also taking a lot of other people back to Naval Station Subic Bay, Philippines. All of the extra officers hot-bunked in sickbay and the extra enlisted men slept where ever they could. It took us three days to get to Subic Bay, with nothing to do on board the Camden. We did get the new aircraft checked out and ready for the squadron when the Bonnie Dick pulled in a week later.

When we got back to San Diego in October, our wives met us at the pier and we spent a night or two there before driving back to Lemoore. There were some nice benefits for deploying. Since the war was still on, Disney would give returning ships \$1.00 passes to Disneyland for everyone coming back. We went after both of my cruises. You may have been too young to remember or we didn't take you kids with us. Terri Rothchild probably baby sat with you while we were gone.



I was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal (NAM) for the 1969 Vietnam cruise. The guy next to me in the picture is Pat Rose our Aviation Ordnance Warrant Officer. He received the NAM also. He was an interesting guy. He had been an aircrewman in a P-2 Patrol Squadron and had spent a tour in-country in Vietnam during the war. He had some good stories to tell. It was quite a change for him to be on a carrier. He was married to a British woman whom he had met while he was stationed in England. She was a delightful lady. They had six children.

UNITED STATES SEVENTH FLEET



The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting
the Navy Achievement Medal to

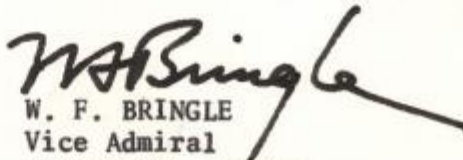
Warrant Officer John Alan BEMENDERFER
United States Navy

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION

"For meritorious achievement while attached to Attack Squadron ONE HUNDRED FORTY FOUR embarked in USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31) as Maintenance/Material Control Officer from 18 April to 8 October 1969 during combat operations. Warrant Officer BEMENDERFER promoted and maintained a high state of combat readiness within his department. His rapid response to changing conditions on Yankee Station contributed significantly to the overall effort of the maintenance department in meeting and exceeding assigned commitments. During the fast operating pace of the long at-sea periods, he demonstrated exceptional foresight and resourcefulness in the allocation of manpower and material assets to enable the squadron to meet its scheduled combat missions. Warrant Officer BEMENDERFER's leadership and devotion to duty reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the Secretary


W. F. BRINGLE
Vice Admiral
United States Navy



FRONT ROW (L TO R):

TOM HANNON, JACK CIBELLI, MICK TEMPLE, CO CDR G. D. ALLEN, CAG CDR D. J. ELLISON,
XO CDR W. D. ZIRBEL, KEVIN MCGILLIVRAY, TOM SCHEBER, DON SIMMONS

BACK ROW (L TO R):

DON CARVER, JIM SPEED, PAUL CAMPBELL, DAVE BROWNING, DENNIS WOOTER,
ERIC MCCLLENATHEN, CHUCK ROUSSEAU, LARRY TWEEDY, GARY ROSS, BOB HOUSER,
SERGEI KOWALCHIK, ME

USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31)
FPO SAN FRANCISCO 96601

GROUP SHOT OF VA-144 PILOTS TAKEN ON
BOARD THE USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31)
ON 21 OCTOBER 1970.

OFFICIAL US NAVY PHOTOGRAPH
BY PH2 B.A. LASSITER

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

For some reason Pat Rose isn't in this picture. I don't remember where he was at the time, since it was taken aboard the Bonnie Dick.

November of 1969 was our stand down month after the cruise. The Vietnam war was still going on, but we weren't flying into North Vietnam. However, we were still doing the Ho Chi Min trail bombing. Since they couldn't tell what they were bombing from the air, our pilots called their missions, "bombing leaf storage bunkers." Meaning that all they could tell was they were bombing trees. It was only if they got a secondary explosion that they could tell if they hit anything.

We started workups in January preparing for our next cruise. We did short carrier qualifications cruises off the coast and then our Operational Readiness Inspection cruise to prove we were ready to deploy. We left San Diego on the Bonnie Dick in April 1970. We had the same squadrons and most of the same people. The one thing that was different was how we got to Subic Bay. Instead of the normal way of going around the North end of the island of Luzon, the Captain decided to play a game with the Russians who sent their Bear reconnaissance aircraft to over-fly us as we entered WestPac. He chose to go through the San Bernadino Strait, the Sibuyan Sea, and the Mindoro Strait so we would come into Subic Bay from the South. We maintained radio silence during the transit and we didn't see a single Bear. It made for an interesting start for the cruise.

This is a picture of the tail section of a Russian Bear aircraft that over-flew us on April 5, 1969 during our in-chop to WestPac. It was taken by LCDR J. E. Taylor of VF-53, one of the fighter pilots escorting the aircraft. There would have been a fighter on each side of the Bear.



The routine, once we got back on the firing line at Yankee Station, was pretty much the same as the previous year. We paired up with another carrier and did 12 hour-on and 12 hour-off duty cycles. It was either noon to midnight or midnight to noon. Then we would switch. Your biological clock really didn't know what was happening.

When we had to stand Squadron Duty Officer (SDO) we ended up being awake for 24 hours straight. We came on at 0800 to begin our SDO duties preparing for flight ops that started at noon. We flew for 12 hours, they respotted the flight deck for the next day and then secured from flight quarters about 0130. Next, the SDO would stand the Integrity Watch (4 hours) assigned to the squadron. If it was the mid to 0400 watch you made out because it was only 2 hours long. We usually got relieved about 15-20 minutes before the hour. If you got the 0400-0800 watch you usually had to stand the full four hours. Then you came back to the Ready Room and briefed your relief for the next day's action. Finally, you got to go to bed and usually slept for at least 10-12 hours. But no one really cared when you got up. It would be about 10-12 days until your next SDO watch. It was just regular work in between.

I was promoted to CWO-2 in June of 1970 during the deployment. The Navy sent the following press release to the Goshen News. Grandma Bea was working there at the time as a proof reader.

Service Notes —

Bemenderfer Given Navy Promotion

John A. Bemenderfer, formerly of Goshen, has been promoted to the rank of CWO2.

The 29-year-old naval officer is presently serving with Attack Squadron 144, a light jet attack squadron deployed in Southeast Asia aboard the U.S.S. Bon Homme Richard.

Bemenderfer graduated from Goshen High School in 1953 and enlisted in the Navy in August of that year. He attended recruit training at the Naval Training Center, San Diego, Calif.

Schools he then attended were Airman School, Norman, Okla.; Aviation Structural Mechanic School, Memphis, Tenn.; Naval Enlisted Scientific Education Program Prep School, San Diego; and the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan.

In July, 1961, Bemenderfer joined Attack Squadron 72, Oceana, Va., which he served with until September, 1964. He then returned to school, this time as an instructor. He taught Airman "fundamentals" at Memphis.

Chief Warrant Officer Bemenderfer reported to Attack Squadron 144 in March, 1969. Since that time he has made one full deployment to Southeast Asia



John A. Bemenderfer

and is currently on his second combat cruise.

Bemenderfer is the son of Mrs. Beatrice Bemenderfer, 1508 South Fourteenth Street, and the late John K. Bemenderfer. His wife, the former Nancy Bucy of Cloverdale, Calif., and their three children reside aboard the Naval Air Station, Lemoore, Calif.

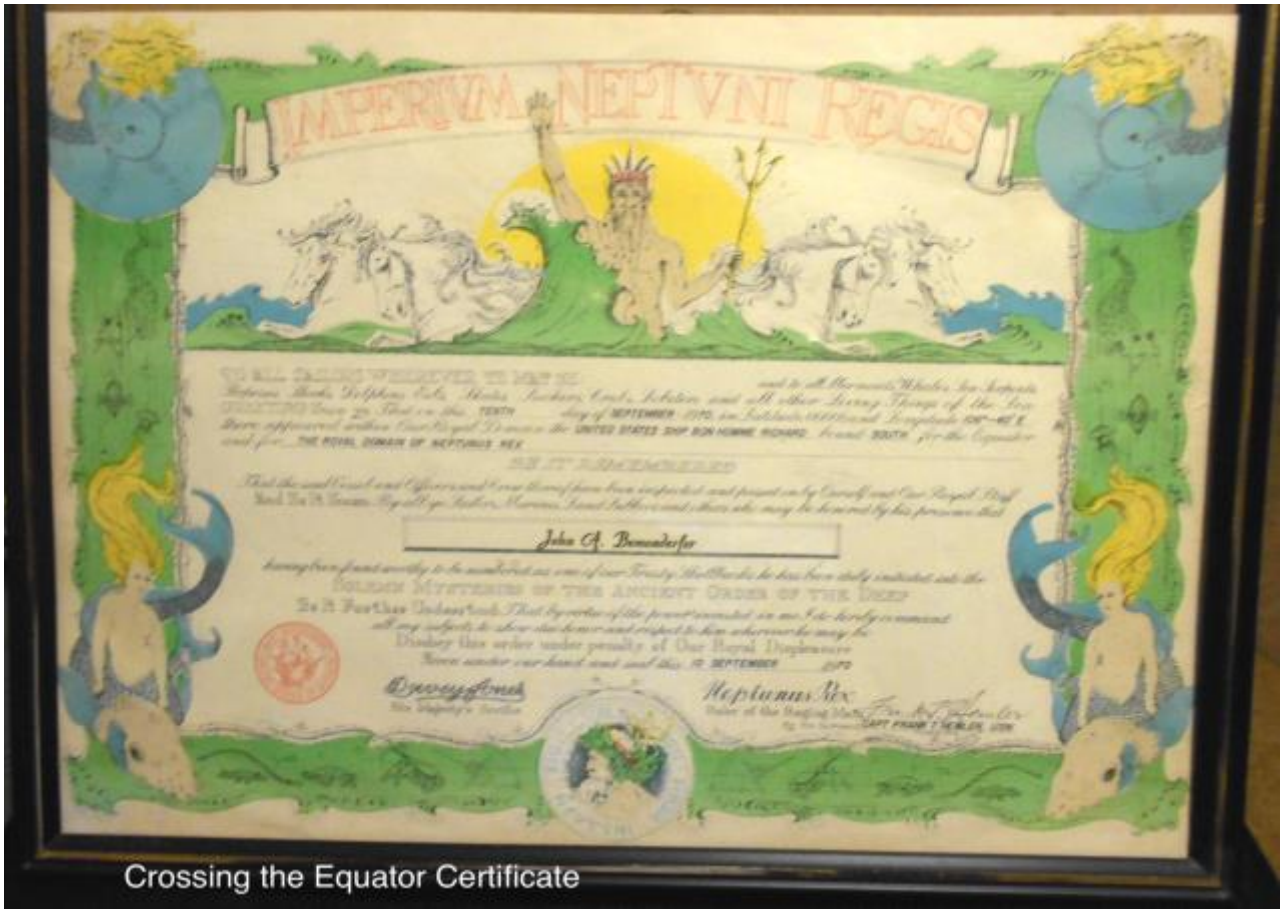


This cruise was better than the one in 1969; we didn't lose any pilots or aircraft. The liberty in Subic Bay at the Cubi Point Naval Air Station was always good. We discovered that the manager of the Officer's Club had learned his lesson from the first few ships that pulled into port from Vietnam. Originally, they just let the pilots come to the regular bar and restaurant. After a few days, they realized they couldn't continue to pay for the damages the pilot's escapades caused. Glasses got thrown after toasts, they would practice carrier landings on the bar, and a lot of furniture got broken. So, the manager wised up and created a special bar in a different building with only plastic cups and paper plates; nothing that could hurt anyone.

There was a shuffle board table and a cool catapult with an aircraft looking dolly. The metalsmiths at NAS had taken an old 300-gallon aircraft drop tank, shortened it, installed a seat and made it look like an airplane. They built tracks into the cement floor that went out a double door and down into a pool of water. The air intake at the front of the aircraft made certain that if you missed the wire and went into the water, you got really wet. It was powered by a large tank of nitrogen that extended a piston and pushed the "plane" down the track. The cockpit had a stick in the center, which did nothing, and on the left side a lever you pulled to drop the tail hook. There was only one wire before the water and a movable ramp in front of the wire that could be adjusted to increase or decrease the difficulty of catching the wire with the hook. Of course, for women the ramp was set waaaaay back so they wouldn't go into the water. The ramp was set very close for fighter pilots because they brag so much they deserved to get wet. Attack pilots had a better chance of catching a wire, but not by much. Just about everyone got wet eventually. It was such a rowdy place that there was no furniture except the bar and the shuffle board table. And everyone loved it. It was the most popular place on the base for officers. Every once in a while, a "black-shoe" would dare to come and try the catapult. They always got wet because they didn't know the hook ramp was adjustable.

The rest of the cruise was pretty routine, if fighting war can be routine. We were still dropping bombs, just not up north. We came home to San Diego in November of 1970, just in time for Thanksgiving and Christmas. What we didn't know at that time was that we had just completed the Bon Homme Richard's last deployment. It turned out to be the squadron's last also. The ship was decommissioned in April of 1971 and placed in mothballs at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, WA. I went by to see it several times after we moved up to Washington. It was eventually scrapped and now it is razor blades and automobiles. The squadron was decommissioned in May or June of 1971 after they transferred all of the aircraft.

One of the ports we visited was Singapore. It is a beautiful city that had once been an English colony. One of the historic places was the colonial hotel that was still operating. When we left port, the captain went South for about 30 miles to the Equator. We spent most of the day initiating pollywogs into shellbacks. I was one of the pollywogs. It actually was a lot of fun. We were required to wear our clothes backward and to crawl around the flight deck on our hands and knees. As we crawled, people were spraying the deck with water and we were required to blow the water out of the tie down holes in the deck. Of course, we never got the water out. Then there was the garbage chute you had to crawl through. And the shellbacks were wandering around the flight deck with pieces of fire hose that they would "encourage" you to crawl by swatting you on the behind. King Neptune presided over the ceremony. You may have even gotten to kiss the belly of the King's "baby." The baby was the guy with the largest belly that had been smeared with grease. Once you completed crawling through all of the obstacles you were designated a newly minted shellback. I have the certificate to prove it.



Crossing the Equator Certificate



I was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for my work during this cruise in my assignment as Quality Assurance Division Officer. I appreciated getting the awards, but didn't really earn them until my duty with ComFairLemoore. This is Capt. M. E. Stuart, ComFairLemoore Executive Officer, presenting the award to me.

UNITED STATES SEVENTH FLEET



The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting

the Navy Commendation Medal to

Chief Warrant Officer John A. BEMENDERFER
United States Navy

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION

"For meritorious achievement while attached to Attack Squadron ONE FORTY-FOUR embarked in USS BON HOMME RICHARD (CVA-31) as Quality Assurance Division Officer from 2 May to 19 October 1970 during combat operations. Chief Warrant Officer BEMENDERFER effectively supervised all levels of squadron maintenance, directly contributing to the high level of aircraft availability. His profound knowledge of administrative reports and technical publications made him the key man in the squadron Maintenance Administration Division. Chief Warrant Officer BEMENDERFER's leadership and devotion to duty reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the Secretary

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "M. F. Weisner".

M. F. WEISNER
Vice Admiral
United States Navy



This is to certify that
Chief Marrant Officer, W-2, John A. BEMENDERFER
U.S. Navy

was a **READY, RESOLUTE, RELENTLESS**



ROADRUNNER

from 10 March 1969 to 16 December 1970

certified:

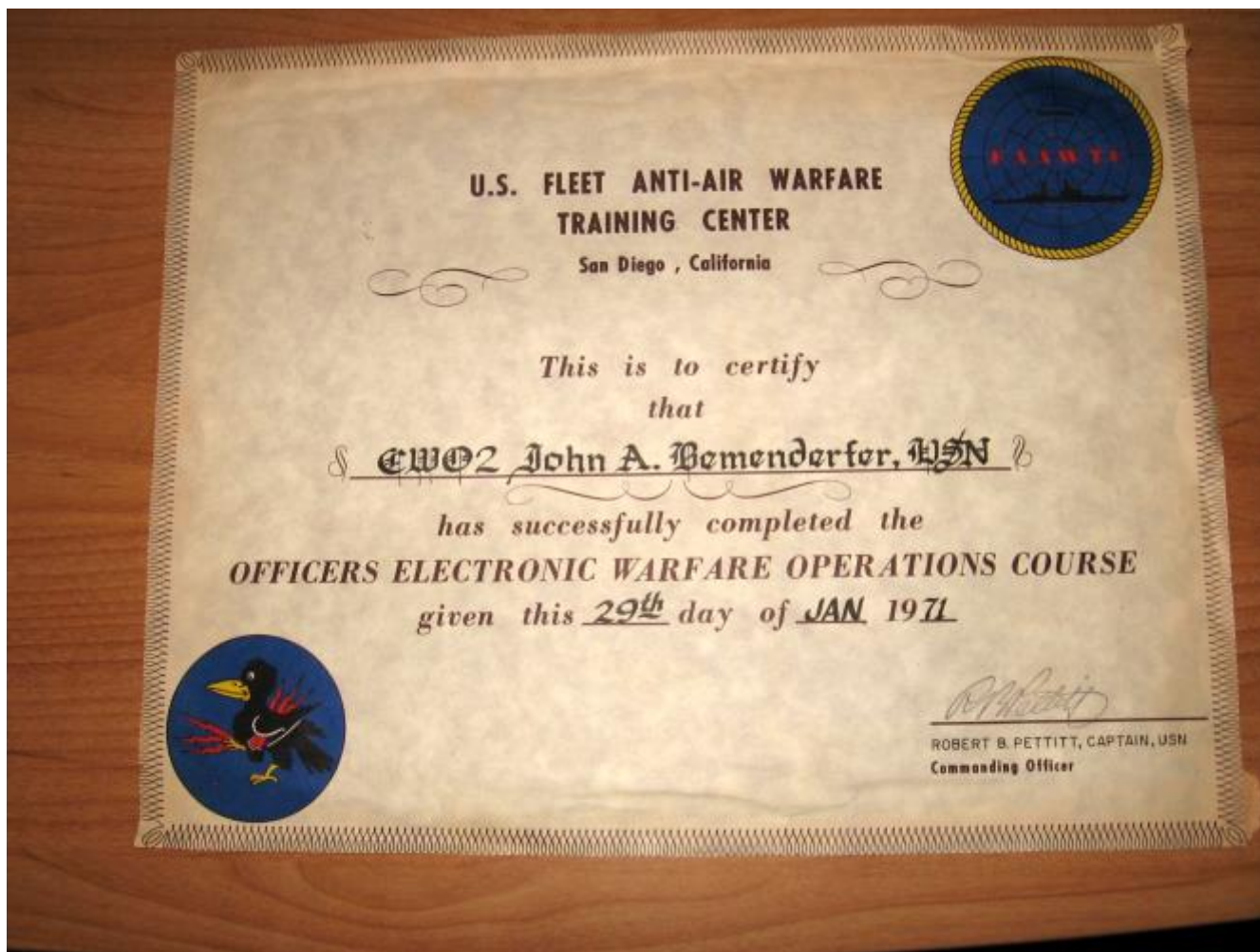


ROSCOE
the ready, resolute
relentless, Roadrunner

signed:

G.B. ALLEN
Roadrunner One

I left the squadron in December for my next duty station. It turned out to be on the staff of Commander Fleet Air Lemoore (ComFairLemoore), at NAS Lemoore, CA. So, all I did was move to a different hangar and we stayed in the same house for another two years. I did have a three-week school for Electronic Warfare Officer down in San Diego before I reported to ComFairLemoore.



My first job was as Assistant Avionics Officer and Electronic Warfare (EW) Maintenance Officer. That lasted a couple of months until the person who was filling my primary billet was transferred. I was the staff Airframes Maintenance Officer with Electronic Warfare Maintenance as my secondary duty. I had an Avionics Chief Petty Officer assigned to me as assistant. We had control of all of the EW equipment assigned to us to support all of the light attack squadrons on the West coast. We took in all the equipment from returning squadrons, repaired what needed repairing, and put it in stock to issue to the next deploying squadrons.

Because all of the EW equipment was highly classified, I had to go through a background check to increase my Secret clearance to Top Secret. Then I had to keep my mouth shut. I was allowed to attend periodic briefings on intelligence data that was being gathered on the radar and missile equipment the North Vietnamese were using against us. It was all very interesting. I also attended meetings back in Washington D.C. at Naval Air Systems Command (NavAirSysCom) so I would know about new equipment that was coming and how we would have to prepare our aircraft to receive it. The avionics modifications fit right in to my airframes maintenance job, since I was the staff liaison for the civilian modification teams that were sent down from the Naval Air Rework Facility at NAS Alameda, CA. I got to know quite a few of the civilian workers because of the various teams we had going all of the time.

As the Airframes and EW officer I was also in charge of squadron readiness in terms of updates to their aircraft and outfitting them with all of the EW equipment they would need for deployment. I would attend monthly meetings in San Diego at Commander Naval Air Pacific (ComNavAirPac) to report on the status of the deploying light attack squadrons under ComFairLemoore's command. If I was having any problems outside of my authority I could draw upon my counterparts at AirPac and many civilians that I got to know who supported our squadrons. It was a very interesting and fulfilling job that I enjoyed very much. The people on the staff were great to work with. The Avionics Officer I first worked for was a Limited Duty Officer (LDO) Lieutenant Commander who had been an enlisted Avionics Technician. Our staff Aircraft Maintenance Officer, was also an LDO. He had been a LCDR when I arrived

and was eventually promoted to full Commander and became the staff Maintenance Officer. I believe he had been an Aviation Structural Mechanic as I was. He had also been stationed on Guam and was the one who told me he had hated it. But he was a very good boss. He pretty much gave me my head to handle my department and was always there to back me up when I needed it. All in all, it was a very good tour.

I forgot to mention that during my tour the light attack community switched from the McDonnell-Douglas A-4 to the LingTemcoVought (LTV) A-7. As squadrons came back from WestPac, they would get the word to transition. They usually had one year to complete the transition training before they would deploy with the new aircraft. The A-7 was a very good aircraft. It carried a substantially larger ordnance load than the A-4, had a greater range, and a lot more avionics that actually worked. So that was part of my duty, too. I would attend meetings in Washington D.C. at the Naval Air Systems Command (NavAirSysCom) to get info about upcoming modification programs and updates to the aircraft. Of course, I had to tell them that their sometime screwy schedules would impact our readiness and the deployability of our squadrons. It usually didn't make any difference to their planning and we just had to toe the line according to their schedules. Most of the time it worked out okay, but it sure angered a lot of squadron skippers who were trying to train their people for deployment.

Uncle Tom Bucy was still on active duty while we were at Lemoore. He was flying with Aircraft Ferry Squadron 31 (VRF-31) stationed at NAS North Island in San Diego, CA. We got to see a lot of him because one of his duties was to pick up the new A-7s in Dallas, TX and fly them to Lemoore. When he got to Lemoore he would come and spend time with us. When I would go down to San Diego to attend one of my meetings, occasionally I would fly down in one of our aircraft. Then I could go to Uncle Tom's office, pull off my flight suit and gear, and go to my meeting. We got to see a lot of each other. I usually didn't see Aunt Eleanor because I would just be there for the day and then fly back to Lemoore in the afternoon.



An interesting incident occurred one time when I went up to NAF Fallon, NV to the Naval Weapons Training Center. One of our squadrons was doing some training on the Electronic Warfare (EW) range prior to their deployment. As observers, we were located in the Control Center listening to the aircraft and range observers on the radio. The aircraft would pass over the bombing range, the pilot would drop his weapons, and then exit out through the EW range. While in the range the pilot would receive all sorts of threat warnings on his various warning receivers and he would have to turn on his deception repeater, deploy chaff, and maneuver to defeat the threats. If he didn't do it correctly, the range people would tell him he had been shot down. It was very realistic for the pilots.

On one pass, the pilot dropped his bombs, ran the EW range successfully, and then we heard one of the range observers report over the radio that he saw a parachute coming down. The pilot had reached up to stow his flash protection hood and had inadvertently pulled the face curtain handle on the ejection seat. He was ejected over the EW range and the plane flew on by itself. He had evidently done an excellent job of trimming the aircraft for straight and level flight, because the aircraft continued to fly for another hour and a half. Eventually it ran out of fuel and crashed somewhere in the wastelands of Utah. The FAA tracked it on radar until it crashed and reported the approximate position where it went down. However, the Navy search aircraft never found any wreckage. Somewhere in Utah is the wreckage of a fully equipped A-7 aircraft.

My tour of duty at ComFairLemoore was only two years of shore duty and then I would be sent back to sea duty. In March or April of 1973 I called my Detailing Officer at BuPers to find out where he was going to send me. He had my "Dream Sheet" which listed my preferred choices for my next duty. Of course, NAS Whidbey Island, WA was my number one choice. He told me that he had not identified an assignment for me yet.

Finally, in May I called him again and he told me where I would be going; NAS Agana, Guam! Well, I thought, it wasn't a ship, but it was in the middle of the ocean. I wasn't sure how Mother was going to take the news. So, with trepidation, I called her at home. I said, "I have my new orders." She said, "Where are we going?" I said, "Guam," and there was this long silence on the other end of the line. She finally came back and said, "Okay, I'll see what I can find out about it."

She went to the base library and found the only book on Guam. It was written in the late 40's and had nothing good to say about the island. It was covered in jungle, had many poisonous snakes, shrews, rats, etc. Mother was not happy at all. I went to talk to my department head who had been stationed on Guam. He couldn't say anything good about his time there. His family hated it and he was never so glad as when he got to come back to the U.S. Bummer!

Mother and I both started asking around if anyone else had ever been stationed on Guam. Surprisingly, we found many other couples that had been there and had loved it. They told us about the beautiful beaches, the warm 80-degree weather, being able to wear shorts year round, etc. It began to sound better than at first. We decided that our attitude would be to enjoy it as much as possible and that made all of the difference in how much we enjoyed being there. I think you kids enjoyed our time there, too.

I was initially assigned as Maintenance Control Division Officer in the Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD) of the Naval Air Station. We were assigned a sponsor to help us get all of our arrangements made for when we arrived. It was another Warrant Officer (Lyndel Evans) who had been there for a while. (I recently made contact with Lynn through the "Together We Served" web site. He is retired and living in Illinois.) He sent us materials about the NAS and Guam. It actually sounded pretty good. We would be assigned base housing when we got there. Unfortunately, Lynn told us it could take up to three months to get into housing. That meant we would be living in an apartment in town for that time. Fortunately, it was during summer when we moved so you kids wouldn't be in school. We hoped we could get into permanent housing before you had to start school.

When we got to Guam and into temporary housing, Lynn took me to the Base Housing Office to sign up for housing. The lady we talked to said that since I had three children, we qualified for a four-bedroom house and that the wait time would be three months. However, she said, if I was willing to accept a three-bedroom house in senior officer quarters then we could move in next week. Lynn was flabbergasted that we would get into housing so soon. Of course, I said we would take it. Our new home was one side of a duplex. It was a reinforced concrete structure with concrete block walls strong enough to withstand typhoon winds. There were no glass windows, just metal louvers with screens on the inside. Most people had put plastic film over the screens and installed an air conditioner in one of the windows on the front porch. We were fortunate that the previous tenant was willing to sell us their air conditioner

already installed and operating. We bought it and moved in with temporary furniture, because our household goods had not yet arrived from the 'states. Once our household goods arrived we were all settled in and began enjoying our time there.

We had brought our brand new 1973 AMC Javelin AMX from the 'states. And we found out one of the problems of living on an island in the middle of the Pacific ocean. There were no repair parts available on the island. When we needed a part for the car, I had to call a friend of mine stationed in Hawaii who went to the local AMC dealer and got the part for me. He mailed it to me and I had a Hyundai construction equipment dealer install it for me. When I took the car in to be fixed, all of the workers stopped what they were doing and gathered around the car to check it out. They had never seen anything like it. The "Wow" factor was amazing and fun. They fixed the car and we were on our way again.

You probably remember the Volkswagen Beetle I drove to work. You kids called it the "Easter Egg" because it was purple. It was a good car. It had an automatic stick shift, but no air conditioning. I usually just drove it back and forth to work, so it was fine. A lot of the time I would ride my bike to work. It was only a mile or so. Our house was just off the end of the runway and I would ride up the access road next to the runway. It was up-hill going in the morning, but that made it down-hill in the evening coming home.

I was still working on completing my bachelor degree from Chapman College and was attending classes at the University of Guam in the evening. A couple of the classes I took were at the university. The last class I needed was a statistics class which was taught at Andersen Air Force base. I needed to pick up a textbook from the university book store. So, one evening after work I drove over to the bookstore. It was already dark as I drove up the road to the parking lot. As my headlights lit up the parking lot it looked like it was flooded with water, because it was shimmering like waves. I stopped to get a better look since I didn't want to drive into water that was too deep for the car. Suddenly I realized it wasn't water. The parking lot was covered in snakes. It was their moving around that made it look like waves of water. I don't have to tell you that it didn't take me long to turn the car around and beat a hasty retreat. Evidently the snakes would come out at night and congregate on the warm asphalt. That explained why the bookstore closed before dark. I went back during the day to get the textbook.

That statistics class finished the requirements for my BA degree in Economics and Business Administration which I was awarded in 1975. It only took me 13 years to get all of the classes I needed to get my degree. After I flunked out of the University of Kansas, I started my work again by taking a class in logic in 1963 at Old Dominion College in Norfolk, VA, when actually my true intent was to meet girls. And I did. I started dating a girl I met in class. Unfortunately, I don't remember her name. We dated for quite a few months and actually got engaged. Then I got transferred to NATTC Memphis for instructor duty. While I was home on leave, I received a letter from her with the engagement ring inside. She had changed her mind and didn't want to get married. My second "dear John" letter. I went on to Memphis as a single person. Then I met mother in December of 1964 and you know the rest of the story.

My time on Guam was an interesting time. A lot of things happened, some of which I wish I hadn't experienced. One event with a female sailor was the result of a program the Navy implemented to bring 100,000 people into the Navy that were below the normally accepted qualification requirements. We brought this female sailor into Maintenance Control to work because she expressed an interest in becoming a Aviation Maintenance Administration striker (AZ). My chief and the other AZs worked with her to teach her how to do the job we did in Maintenance Control. She was interested in the work for about the first month, then she got bored and requested to be transferred to the base dispensary so she could become a Hospital Corpsman. Since she hadn't really given the job a fair chance, we disapproved her request because she had volunteered for aviation duty, not medical. Well, that stirred up a hornet's nest of trouble. Since she was African American, she claimed we were discriminating against her and went to the race relations counselor to plead her case against us. Unfortunately, she didn't go to the NAS counselor, she went to the VQ-1 counselor, an African American PO1. He came to talk to me and my chief and we explained the situation to him. He also shared with us that this was not the first time she had come to him. Evidently, she had complained about other places she had worked when she hadn't gotten her way. He sympathized with us and told us he would not be recommending any action against us.

Meanwhile, she submitted another request for transfer to the dispensary. This time we approved it all the way up to the CO. He disapproved it. A few weeks later she submitted another request for transfer. We again approved it all the way up to the CO. As it turned out, the CO was on leave and the XO was in charge. He knew all about the situation

and approved the transfer. She was gone in a matter of days. The last I heard, the dispensary had her swabbing decks and emptying garbage cans because she had absolutely no medical training. But she got her way and she wasn't my problem anymore.

The other big thing that happened was the end of the Vietnam War and the exodus of the Vietnamese refugees. In April of 1975 we began receiving refugees at the Air Station. They were also being housed at the Naval Station at Apra harbor. The Air Station opened up some unused barracks to house the refugees. They pulled several of our AIMD division officers to run the facilities, so I had to pick up their duties for their divisions. Mom volunteered to help out at the hangar that was being used to receive and process the people as they came off of the aircraft. She described the first refugees as coming into the hangar wearing nice suits, dresses and carrying matched sets of luggage. When the customs people opened the suitcases they were full of money, no clothes. As the weeks wore on the people coming off of the aircraft got poorer and poorer. Most came with just the clothing on their backs. They were housed in the barracks, fed, given clothing and medical care while they were processed for entry into the U.S.

When the process was finally completed in July, Guam had processed over 110,000 people. Many chose to stay on the island. Most had been fisherman in Vietnam and began to fish from Guam in Zodiac inflatable boats. The fish they caught they sold through their co-op to the general population and to the hotels on the island. When we left in January of 1976, the co-op had ordered several larger metal hulled fishing boats from a local shipyard. The co-op was a huge success. The refugee processing was quite successful and we received a commendation from the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet.

I also remember a business venture that Jones and Guarerro, the largest construction company on the island, started to provide fresh milk to Guam and Saipan. They started a dairy on Tinian, which is uninhabited and covered in grass. The milk we normally bought was "filled" milk. It was powdered milk that was reconstituted with water and coconut oil. You kids hated it when we first got there. Eventually we all got used to it and that was all we drank. The dairy venture only lasted about two months. I guess most people had gotten so used to the filled milk that they didn't want the real milk. We had to go through the same adjustment period of getting used to whole real milk when we got back to the 'states.

I think we all had a good time while we were on Guam. I know I enjoyed the golf. I would play with three other guys from AIMD. We always teed off just before the first tee time on Saturdays at the Navy golf course in Barrigada. It was an okay course. During the dry-season they didn't water the fairways, so they got quite hard and compacted. One chief I played with only carried two clubs when it was dry; a driver and a putter. He teed off with the driver and used the putter on the fairway from 150 yards or closer to the green. Since the fairway was so hard, he would just hit the ball hard enough with his putter to roll it up onto the green, then put it into the hole. It was really funny to watch.

Every once in a while, we would get the privilege of playing at the Japanese private golf course. They really took care of their course. Their fairways were well watered and the greens were soft. When you got up to the 13th hole, you were on top of a high ridge. From the tee you could see both ends of the island. It was a wonderful view.

The other time I got a great view of the island was when our QA chief took me up in the NAS flying club T-34 aircraft. He had taken lessons and gotten his license and offered me a ride. I took lots of pictures and had a great time.

I was Maintenance Control Division Officer for the first two years we were on Guam. But our Department Head, Cdr. Keyes, wanted to give an LDO Ltjg some experience as Maintenance Control Officer. I was going to leave in six months so he needed someone to relieve me that would be there for a while. I moved to Ground Support Equipment Division Officer. I had 10-12 sailors and four civilian Guamanians working for me. We maintained all of the ground support equipment for the Air Station and the tenant squadrons. The Guamanians would always invite us to village festivals on the weekends. When they had Navy people as their guests their esteem increased in the eyes of their neighbors. To increase it even more, they would inflate the rank of the guest. If you were a second-class petty officer, they would introduce you as a chief petty officer. If they managed to get an officer to attend, they would end up being a Commander or a Captain. It was all fun and games.

One day a Guamanian was sharing about how he fed the avocados he grew to his pigs. I asked him why he didn't eat them and he replied that he didn't like them. I said I liked them and he told me he would bring me some. He brought

me two paper grocery bags full of avocados. We managed to eat a few, but had to throw most of them out because there were too many to eat before they rotted. Of course, I never told the Guamanian we threw them out.

Then there was our cat, the neighborhood Romeo. I don't remember his name, but I think he impregnated most of the female cats in our neighborhood. His "love nest" was in a bush behind our house. He was scared of the chameleons, but his best buddy was a huge toad. They would sit next to each other on the concrete slab outside our lanai and watch the sun set over the Philippine Sea.

Near the end of 1975 I received orders to HC-3, NAS North Island, San Diego, CA. We left Guam in January of 1976 and spent four days in Honolulu, Hawaii at the newly opened Hale Koa Hotel at Fort DeRussy on Waikiki beach. We even took an all-day tour of Honolulu and Oahu.

We continued on to San Francisco, CA to pick up our car that had been shipped ahead of us. Once we got the car we went to visit Grandma Bucy and Great Grandma Hartley in Cloverdale. I remember having to get gas for the car, so I went to a station in Cloverdale. The attendant noticed our Guam license plate and asked me if we had driven all the way from there. I was too surprised to answer him.

You kids stayed with Grandma while Mom and I went to San Diego to find a house. We found one and while we waited to take possession you and Mom stayed in Cloverdale while I went through some training on H-46 helicopters at MCAS Santa Anna near Los Angeles. I think we moved into the house in February or March of 1976 and in June I left on a WestPac cruise with HC-3, Det. 105 aboard the USS Flint (AE-32).



It was an interesting cruise. Our transit of the Pacific to the Philippines was in company with the USS Wabash (AOR-5). As part of our enroute training, we practiced towing another ship with the Wabash. The Wabash first acted as the ship needing a tow. The Flint would slowly come down the starboard side of the Wabash while they threw lines across to Flint. They would pull the towing cable over to their bow and attach it to a bullock. Then Flint would

slowly take up the slack and begin the tow. It all went well. Then it became Flint's turn to be towed. We stopped dead in the water and Wabash approached along our starboard side. Unfortunately, they came too close and sideswiped us. The safety nets along the starboard side of our flight deck were crushed and there were large scrapes all along the side of the ship. All the officers of our detachment were having a meeting in the library on the 03 level of the aft superstructure just forward of the hangers. We heard the scraping and looked out a porthole just in time to see the superstructure of the Wabash go by. We spent a few extra days in Yokosuka, Japan having repairs made. It meant a few extra days of liberty, which was okay with us.

It was during that port stay that I saw the most unusual TV show I had ever seen. It was on Japanese TV late at night. It was a talent show where amateurs showcased their talent. As we watched, an older man came out on an empty stage with a folding chair. He set up the chair facing the audience, then he got up on the chair with his back to the audience, bent over, spread his butt cheeks and farted a song. We all rolled on the carpet with laughter. It really was an amazing performance.



Our six months in WestPac ended up being mostly shore based at NAS Cubi Point in the Philippines. There wasn't much work for an ammunition ship. We weren't assigned to any task force so we operated independently. We did get to take a special trip down to Cebu, Philippines. Not many Navy ships went there. Cebu is a beautiful place. The ocean is deep blue and clear as crystal. We went snorkeling, visited a guitar factory where they manufactured hand-made guitars, and had a great time. The unfortunate event that occurred was as we were leaving Cebu. The mayor of Cebu City and dignitaries had left the ship, we were manning the rail, the anchor was pulled up, and we got under way to leave the harbor. The problem developed as we entered the channel to the sea. The buoys that marked the channel were very rusty and evidently no one could tell what color they were so we ended up on the wrong side and outside of the channel. All of a sudden, we came to a stop and the ship began to list to port. We had struck a mud bar with the starboard side of the hull and stuck fast. So there we were waving goodbye to the mayor and dignitaries in their boat and we were going nowhere. We lucked out because the tide was coming in. We stayed stuck for about an hour. Finally, the tide lifted us off of the bar and we sailed off into the sunset, somewhat embarrassed, but at least under way. For the rest of the cruise our motto became "Struck and Stuck." We never heard if the captain ever suffered any negative results because of the grounding. The sideswipe during the towing exercise wasn't our fault. We were dead in the water, so the captain of the Wabash had to take the blame on that one.

Because there wasn't much for us to do, the maintenance guys decided to get creative. They decided we needed to name our two helos. They ended up being Pebbles and Bam Bam. Someone must have liked the Flintstones. They painted pictures of each character on the front panel of the forward rotor pylon. When you saw either one of them flying toward you, there were the characters staring down at you.

The last trip we made before coming home was to Hong Kong, then to Okinawa to pick up outdated ammunition which we took to Sasebo, Japan. Made you feel real safe knowing that your hold was full of outdated and possibly unstable ammunition. Such was the life aboard an ammunition ship.

It was during this cruise that I acquired something of a reputation. You know my love of puns. Well, evidently the pilots of my detachment didn't share my love. Every once in a while, I would drop one on them and their reaction was to say, "Go wait in the truck, Jack." I guess they must have passed the story around in the squadron because on my next detachment they did the same thing. Some people just don't have the appropriate appreciation of puns.

We returned to San Francisco on December 21, 1976. Most of our detachment flew home to San Diego on a Navy transport jet while the pilots and aircrewmen flew the helos back to North Island.

All of you picked me up at North Island and during the drive home Mom asked me if I would like to attend a Christmas show you kids were in at the church. Of course, I said I would. Attending that show was my introduction to Chula Vista Alliance Church. Unknown to me, while I was gone Mom and you kids had started attending the church. Mom never said anything about it in her letters to me while I was deployed. It was something of a surprise for me, but one I would come to really enjoy. I had not really grown in my Christian faith up to then. We had attended several Bible studies at the Catholic church we attended right after we got married. But at Lemoore and on Guam we never really pursued our faith through the Catholic church. I think we had both become disenchanted with it. Mom was very happy to be back in an Alliance church like the one she had grown up in. It was there that I really began to grow in my faith. The teaching was great and I learned a lot about being a Christian and living my faith. Most of the families in the church were Navy families and at least a third of the men were deployed at any time. The church had a really good ministry to the families when the husband was gone. I think you kids enjoyed the church, too.

A ministry the church had to the deployed men was sending a cassette tape of the Sunday service. Then the person who received the tape from the church would pass them along to other deployed members of the church. When I deployed on the USS Sacramento (AOE-1) in 1977, we were part of the USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63) carrier task force. Other men from the church were in squadrons aboard the carrier. When I would receive tapes in the mail, I would listen to them and then send them via our helos over to the guys in the antisubmarine helicopter squadron on the carrier. When they received tapes, they would send them over to me via their SH-3 helos. Since we spent all of our time operating with the carrier, the system worked great. We all got to be at Sunday service via tape.

We also enjoyed good fellowship with members of the church. After the Sunday evening service, small groups would go to homes and hang out and enjoy each other's company. We often had people in our home. I think it

prepared Mom and me for the Corvallis church experience. It was small enough that we could get to know everyone. We maintained contact with some of the families we met there.

On the professional front, I was assigned as Maintenance Training Division Officer. HC-3 was the replacement training squadron for H-46 helicopters on the West coast. We coordinated the training of all aircraft maintenance people assigned to HC-3. The students received their initial training at MCAS Santa Anna near Los Angeles. That was because the Marine Corp was the owner of the H-46 aircraft. All of HC-3s helos were basically configured for use by Marines. The Navy took some of them to use for at sea vertical replenishment operations.



When I took over the division, we were not getting good support from the Marines in getting our people into their classes. What I discovered was that the problem was on our end. The Marines would ask us to estimate how many students we would need during the year for each job category, but they never received an answer from our squadron. We just asked for seats in classes as people arrived for duty. The Marines couldn't plan for our needs so they would fill their classes with Marines & we would have to wait for unscheduled openings. We would have people waiting weeks for a class.

So, I sat down with a pencil, graph paper, a calendar, and the Marine class schedule. I brought in my instructors and asked them how many students we typically received in each job category and when we usually received them. I also asked them to plan when they wanted to take leave so I wouldn't schedule classes for them during that time. Then I put together a schedule for the next year that laid out exactly how many quotas we needed and when we needed them for each class we used. Once my instructors reviewed it and approved it, I forwarded it to my Marine contact at Santa Anna. He was so pleased with it that he couldn't say enough nice things. For the next year we never experienced any delays in getting our people into classes.

I also had the opportunity to work with a Navy organization, I don't remember what group it was, that was developing a computer based training records system. In HC-3, we would use it to record the training our maintenance people received in preparing to go on detachment. It was my first opportunity to work with a team developing a computer system. Unfortunately, the system didn't come on line until after I deployed on my next detachment.

Early in 1977, we in HC-3 were told that the Navy was going to split the squadron and form a new squadron. HC-3 would continue to provide detachments for the ammunition ships (AEs) and smaller supply ships (AFSs). The new squadron, HC-11, would supply detachments to the larger ships (the AOE and AORs). About half of HC-3 people were transferred to HC-11, including me. We didn't really go anywhere because both squadrons occupied the same hangar. So, I became a "Plank Owner" of HC-11. We stood the squadron up on 1 October 1977.



HC-11 Plank Owner Certificate

I was assigned to Detachment 1 as the Maintenance Officer. We were to deploy aboard the USS Sacramento (AOE-1) on 25 October 1977. Fortunately, we knew months before that we would be leaving right after the squadron was commissioned, so we were fully trained and ready to go.



We boarded the Sacramento and left for WestPac on 25 October 1977. Our transit was pretty routine for the most part. We flew training missions for the pilots and worked with ship's company people to practice vertical replenishments. Unfortunately, about a week out of Japan during a night practice mission, one of our helos was damaged. When they returned to the ship, we noticed that they had lost their nose landing gear and there was a hole in the bottom of the helo. They stayed airborne while we tried to figure out how to get them down without causing more damage to the aircraft. One of our maintenance guys came up with the solution. He got one of the pallets of practice 5" shells, which has a steel cage that holds the shells, put several mattresses on top of the cage and, using a pallet jack, rolled the contraption out on to the flight deck. Then the director guided the helo over the flight deck until the nose of the helo was over the pallet and mattresses. They settled the helo down onto the pallet and landed safely. Having the pallet jack attached allowed us to steer the aircraft when we pushed it into the hangar without causing more damage to the fuselage.



The best we could figure out was the aircraft must have hit the top of a wave that took off the nose gear. The flight crew didn't even feel it when it happened. Unfortunately, at that time our helos didn't have radar altimeters, so the crew had to visually judge its height above the water. Since it was a night flight in the rain, the visibility was terrible. We never figured out why there was no other damage. Evidently the wave missed the main landing gear. We sent a message to the squadron and Commander Fleet Air Western Pacific (COMFAIRWESTPAC) with a detailed description of the damage. COMFAIRWESTPAC notified us that they would arrange repair in Japan when we arrived at Yokosuka. We gave them the aircraft and they gave us one from a detachment that was going home.



When the ship arrived in WestPac it was assigned to Task Group 77.5 operating with the USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63). Where ever the carrier went we went, too. During our time in WestPac the ship completed 222 underway replenishments, cruised over 33,000 nautical miles while participating in seven major operations with Task Group 77.5. We made port calls in Yokosuka, Japan; Subic Bay, Philippines; Kagoshima, Japan; Hong Kong; Singapore, and Pattia Beach, Thailand. The Sacramento was the first U.S. ship to visit Kagoshima in over seven years.

Kagoshima was an interesting port. It has a very large harbor with an active volcano on the East side on a peninsula. You could see smoke coming from the top during the day. One day I was on the ship standing just inside the hangar bay because it was raining. All of a sudden there was a loud bang that shook the bulkheads of the hangar. We found out later that it happens a lot. The rain falls into the volcano and cools the lava so it forms a plug. When the pressure under the plug builds up sufficiently, it blows the plug out with a boom. Quite the surprising thing if you aren't expecting it.

For most of the cruise, we would send our helos over to the carrier in the morning and they would operate off of the carrier until that evening. We would recover them and do what maintenance was required so they would be ready to go the next morning. Our two helos flew more than 1100 flight hours during the deployment. I think it was a record for any two H-46 detachment up to that time. It was nice for us on the Sacramento because once we launched the aircraft to the carrier our work was done until they returned. I think the flight crews really appreciated the opportunity to get some real work and to see what they accomplished.

A favorite memory of mine is the last meal we had in the wardroom before we arrived in the 'States. All ships normally have some kind of special meal. We were fortunate to have a First Class Petty Officer in charge of the wardroom mess. He had been an Admiral's chef for seven years and had some terrific recipes. Our special meal was steak and lobster with baked Alaska for desert. It was delicious.

We returned to the U.S. on May 15, 1978 after seven months in WestPac. The ship went to its home port at Bremerton, WA and we flew the helos, with our personal gear, down to San Diego. The remainder of our equipment had been packed into a shipping container that was transported by truck to San Diego after the ship docked.

It was good to be home again. After some welcome leave, Mom and I had a major decision to make about whether or not I would continue in the Navy. I was due for orders to shore duty and was fairly convinced that I would have to stay in the San Diego area. I had been selected for promotion to W-4 and if I accepted the promotion I would have to remain on active duty for at least the next two years. We had been talking to neighborhood parents who had children in Middle School and discovered that there was gang activity in the school. We weren't pleased with that discovery and it played a big part in our final decision. We decided that I would retire and we would move to Oregon, probably Corvallis so I could go to graduate school at Oregon State. I would use school as a transition from the military to civilian life. I would have my retirement pay to support us and my VA benefits to use for school. Mom thought she would probably get a job to help financially. That would have to wait until we got to Corvallis to see if she could find work.

I went to the squadron personnel office and spoke to the Personnel Officer about what I needed to do to retire. I would have to submit a letter declining the promotion to W-4 and a letter of intent to retire. The Navy had to agree that I could retire. It would be effective September 1st of 1978.

When my promotion letter arrived, I declined the promotion and sent my reply to the Navy Department. When I got my first pay check after my scheduled promotion date, I had been paid for W-4. I went to the Disbursing Office to find out what had happened and discovered that the Disbursing Clerk had misread my promotion letter where I had declined the promotion. He apologized and said he had never had anyone decline a promotion before and had assumed that I was being promoted. He corrected the error and issued me a new check with the correct amount.

We put the house on the market with one of the men I knew in the Training Division who worked as a part time real estate agent. He ended up selling the house in about six weeks. We packed up our stuff and shipped it to Corvallis. You kids and Mom left for Cloverdale in July to stay with Grandmother and Great Grandmother while Mom went to Corvallis to find us a house to live in and rented the house on Green Circle. I moved into the BOQ at North Island for the three or four weeks left until I could retire.

Because I was retiring, the squadron didn't assign me to any particular position for duty. I just hung around the Maintenance Control office with the other Warrant Officers working there. I had also accumulated about a month's leave which I could use as terminal leave before my actual retirement date. On the day I was leaving in August, the squadron CO gave me a squadron plaque and farewell at morning quarters. I gave a little speech thanking everyone and that was it.



I packed up what belongings I had with me and headed for Cloverdale. We arrived in Corvallis a week or two before school started, I enrolled at Oregon State and you kids enrolled in your schools.

Thus, ended the Naval career of CWO-3 USN John A. Bemenderfer. And that is how I became a civilian. And we all lived happily ever after. 😊