



Ron Morrell leads a four-ship formation in his T-28A. Photo: Dan Shoemaker



❖ Cascade Warbirds Squadron Newsletter ❖

CO's COCKPIT

By Ron Morrell



BY NOW IT IS 2020. Congratulations for making it to the next decade. I considered going over 2019 and bringing out highlights and lessons learned, but I'm not. Since this is my last CO's Cockpit, I'd like to talk about the future. I'm sure I will drift a couple of times, like always, but here goes. Nothing is really going to change as I step down as the CO, just a transition to different leadership and newer ideas to keep the squadron moving forward. I want

to thank the new members of the Board of Directors and especially the new members of the Executive Board. You all have a tall order and a challenge to make things better that need it and to keep things that are working on the same path.

While you are all in these positions, keep in mind where we have been and how we have evolved, and keep looking to tomorrow for hints on how to keep the members motivated. It's all about teamwork and a common destination. We all know that the future of warbird flying and warbird organizations will have its challenges, some reasonable and some not so much. Keep informed and make your, and our organization's, opinions and solutions known to those who don't understand the work and dedication that is involved in doing what we do. It doesn't really need to be said by me, but: safety of our pilots and ground personnel should be the number one priority for our entire membership. It doesn't matter where you stand within our organization—you need to be vigilant and not shy about stepping up and saying something if it's needed.

In the same vein, nobody should take things personally if there are disagreements—just like all of the formation pilots understand, discussions in the briefing room and debriefing room are supposed to be honest and possibly brutal, but then it is left in the room! Don't take it outside, so that it can stay honest and productive. The biggest challenge for the new leadership is getting and keeping the help of all factions of our membership. We need everyone involved for the membership to feel good about coming to the meeting and supporting the venues that invite us to their shows and fly-ins. I hope we can continue to support the local venues and keep them all looking to us for some flying noise and smoke in the pattern.

I figure everyone is about to quit reading, so I'll make it short. There are some outstanding individuals in this squadron and others who don't make it to our meetings like they used to. I have to recognize a few of them or I would feel like I've neglected the whole "last

CO's Cockpit" duties. I think everyone knows how much support and backing this squadron still receives from Crash. If you don't, you should now. Obviously, Crash was instrumental in starting the whole flying club and led it for many years. I first met him in Michigan, at Thunder over Michigan, the first year I owned the Nanchang and before I was even thinking about moving to Washington. I had never met him or heard about him until someone introduced me to the pilot of the *Blue Lady*. I had no idea that I would be leading his squadron ten years later. We will always remember Crash and his contributions.

In my opinion, the second most influential and supportive member in this squadron over the last 15 years I've been here is Fred. Mr. CFO, Fred Smyth has always done what he does best to keep us on track. We don't always agree, but this organization could not possibly find someone who could have done a better job of doing all the backroom, green visor, chief accountant work as well as Fred has done. He deserves our heartfelt thanks and a continuous request for him to keep stepping forward.

This squadron has also had one of the best Executive Officers I can imagine since I have been the CO. Just like Fred, Dave is a stalwart and does what is needed to keep us moving. The disagreements may be many, but just as I mentioned earlier, the debrief stays in the debriefing room and we all move forward. I know Dave has had multiple roles in the years he has been in this organization and I commend him for all the efforts.

Since I have been around, I have always respected the background work that

WARBIRD FLYER

✪ Cascade Warbirds ✪

Squadron Commander Emeritus

R.D. "Crash" Williams

Commanding Officer

Ron Morrell

Executive Officer

Dave Desmon

Operations Officer

John "Smokey" Johnson

Adjutant

Fred C. Smyth

Finance Officer

Fred C. Smyth

Officer-at-Large

John Clark

Newsletter Editor

John Haug

This is the official publication of Cascade Warbirds. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual writers, and do not constitute the official position of Cascade Warbirds. Members are encouraged to contribute any matter related to warbirds, which the editor will gladly work with you to publish.

It is the goal of Cascade Warbirds to promote the restoration, preservation, operation and public display of historically significant military aircraft; to acquire and perpetuate the living history of those who served their country on these aircraft; and to inspire today's young people to become the aviation pioneers of tomorrow.

All correspondence to the squadron may be submitted via the e-mail or mailing addresses below.

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has been quietly (mostly) accomplished by Paul Youman and Peter Jackson. They are always there and always available to give their opinions and get the work done. Well played! There are so many others that I could mention, like our Newsletter Editor and PR expert and Veterans' Affairs Officer. I won't try to be

all-inclusive and if you didn't see your name, it is only because I'm writing this with a cold and the cough syrup is taking hold! I appreciate all the support and help that every single one of you in the Cascade Warbirds squadron has given me over the past eight years as your Squadron Commander. Keep 'em Flying! ✪

SQUADRON NEWS

IT WAS A PARTY

As only we know how to do, several dozen of us assembled at the Hilton Garden Inn in Bothell for a frivolity-filled evening. It was our annual holiday banquet and adult-beverage-consumption contest. We were honored to have in attendance B-17 pilot **Dick Nelms** and B-17 gunner **Art Unruh**. Also joining us was **Sharon Wheeler**, widow of B-17 navigator **Ken Wheeler**. Their presence made the evening even more meaningful. The highlight of the event was the awarding of our Volunteer of the Year, to **Victor Norris**. We thank Vic for all his efforts this past year that led to this award.

NEW MEMBER

We welcome aboard **Joshua Weinstein** of Mercer Island. He's the proud owner of a T-34A; we hope to see both of them at our events this coming season. There's plenty of flying to go around.

SPECIAL INVITATION

Just trying to get your attention. We'd like to urge you to pay your 2020 dues sooner rather than later. Still only US\$20 and you're well aware of the good that comes from your continued membership; much of the money goes directly into our scholarship program. Remittance address is still CWB, 1066 Yates Rd, Oak Harbor, WA 98277. If you wish to pay via another medium, contact you-know-who.

GENEROUS DONATION

We want to express our deep appreciation for the continued support by one special **Anonymous Donor**. This year our very popular and successful scholarship program received \$2,000 to further our efforts inspiring our area youth.

2020 SCHOLARSHIPS

Which leads us to remind all that the 2020 program is in full swing. The initial awards, comprising Private Pilot ground school and two instructional flights, will go to five or six lucky area youth. A subsequent award of \$2,500 to aid in further flight training will be granted to a single student who successfully completes the initial phase. Applications can be found on our web page:

www.cascadewarbirds.org/youth/. Deadline this year is 31 January; don't be late.

RENO AIR RACES

September is the month for the National Air Races. We've got our front-row-and-center Moya Lear A-41 reserved box again. Same price as last year, just \$392 for the full week. That gets you reserved parking, box seat access, and pit passes. Add \$5 if you want your tix sent Certified Mail. Full payment is due NLT 1 March 2020.

SPECIAL PRICING

Last issue, we introduced you to **Joang Shaeffer** of **Aviation Covers Inc.** at the Arlington Airport. She has just alerted us that she offers a very nice discount to CWB members. Contact her at joang@aviationcovers.com or 800-940-0342. You'll likely not be sorry.

BIENNIAL ELECTION

January's Annual Meeting included the election of your officers and board members. Notable changes include John "Smokey" Johnson as the new CO and Stan "Sundance" Kasprzyk as the new Ops O. For the complete roster for the 2020-2021 biennium, have a look at www.cascadewarbirds.org/about-cwb/. ✪

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS WINDING DOWN and we are edging closer to the new year and a new decade. 2020 is already shaping up to be a great year filled numerous airshows, events, and other activities. During the winter months, the board tries to organize and prioritize those upcoming events and activities to optimize our participation in support of our mission, which is to honor our veterans, educate the public during our airshow static and flying displays, and promote continued aviation education for young men and women in our area.

During the "after Christmas party," several members of the Board had an impromptu year-in-review debrief. We went through each event that CWB participated in and tried to objectively evaluate every phase from planning to cleanup and see if we could do a better job in the upcoming year.

There were several new twists to the standard events, and the loss of one event which set the stage for new issues we experienced. The implementation of the new FAA 8900 required each owner, pilot, and air boss to become familiar with a whole new set of rules and regulations to comply with during an airshow while flying in waived airspace. These new rules included who, how, when, and which type of format aviators wishing to participate had to submit their pilot and aircraft documents. As we subsequently discovered, even the FAA had difficulty establishing all the links and procedures to receive the data. Fortunately, once we arrived at each airshow, the old method of compliance seemed to work out just fine.

The initiation of Part 121 airline operations at Paine Field put the kibosh on GA Day, so we essentially lost our CWB "knock off the rust" exercise in 2019. This meant our first live airshow was in June during Father's Day weekend at Olympia. During the weekend, it became painfully apparent that we were not operating as smoothly and efficiently as we normally do. We had some personnel and operations glitches. Enough about that, as I think we have debriefed it ad nauseam and will schedule a practice event before the Olympia airshow to ensure we are ready and up to speed before being in front of the FAA and public eye.

One of the other issues that came up during the debrief was how do we, Cascade Warbirds, want to be perceived by the airshow producers and sponsors. On numerous occasions last year, I heard CWB referred to as a bunch of hobbyists flying airplanes?! I understand

that we are all volunteers and have jobs, families, and other time commitments, but if you elect to sign up and fly in an event, we need to strive to be every bit as professional as any other airshow performer. That professionalism starts long before the season starts by making sure your aircraft is mechanically sound, all the paperwork is onboard and currently legal. You have completed your legal requirements to be current for take offs, landings, and formation flying, if you plan to do so during the event. This includes currency within your FAST signatory and possessing a current and valid formation card for the type of formation you plan to participate in during the airshow.

I would encourage each of you to participate in the FAA Wings program, complete some of the online courses offered, and schedule three hours with a CFI in your aircraft. Basic stuff, counts as a BFR, and this will also help in receiving an insurance discount with many brokers. You also need to stay fit and maintain an exercise routine. You can also attend seminars and events prior to the airshow season to assist in preparing you mentally to become more of a professional aviator.

Individual pilot liability insurance and airshow insurance requirements need to be spelled out well in advance so we never have a situation similar to that which occurred at Arlington this year. That incident didn't work out well for any of the parties involved.

It is difficult to request more gas, cars, food, and other goodies from the airshow producers and sponsors when we can't make a commitment to provide a professional, well thought out, and meaningful static and/or flight demonstration.

We also discussed issuing a pilot survey to ask what was important to each aircraft owner and pilot. That survey was sent out to every pilot on the Cascade Warbirds roster. If you don't tell us what is important to you and what we can do to make it better, then we can't work towards correcting it and achieving that end goal. Or, as they say, "We can't fix it if we don't know what's broken!" Hopefully, everyone will respond and we will be able to analyze the collected data in January or February, which will be extremely helpful to guide the Board during the 2020 season.

The last thing I want to bring up is the need for some new faces to come forward and assist or fill important vacant positions. We are an aging group of aviation enthusiasts, but we all need to be mindful that we have the responsibility to recruit new members and gently nudge (push) some of our current members into leadership positions. Confucius said that "many hands make for light work" and that applies to our organization as well. Get involved and ask what you can do to make Cascade Warbirds a better and safer organization while helping increase the enjoyment and fun to all our members. ☺

Want to Join the Flight?

See which warbirds are for sale from fellow CWB members at cascadewarbirds.org/for-sale/.

HOW TO CELEBRATE YOUR 95TH BIRTHDAY IN STYLE

By Karyn F. King and Roger Collins

ROGER COLLINS' GENEROSITY took his friend, Bob Meyer, up to new heights with a ride over Bremerton in his extraordinary and rare warbird, a North American AT-28D-10. More about the airplane below.

Robert Meyer, born 95 years ago in Olympia, has had an illustrious career serving our country. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943 but lost his spot in pilot training in Florida in May of '44 and instead was sent to infantry training in Georgia. After learning how to carry a gun instead of fly a plane, he was sent to England in September on a converted ocean liner. After further training in southeast England, he was shipped across the Channel and disembarked on Omaha Beach on the 1st of October, only four months after the famous landings in June. After spending a short time at a "repo depot" in France, he was assigned to the 112th Infantry Regiment of the famous 28th "Keystone" Division. The 112th had landed on D-Day with over 200 men but, after the landings and further fighting in the Hurtgen Forest, the unit was down to 25 men from the original group. Bob was then transferred to the 109th Infantry Regiment in Diekirch, Luxembourg, and assigned to a five-man machine gun squad.

Bob was on patrol and hunkered down in a foxhole the night that the Battle of the Bulge began. His emplacement was overrun and he lost track of his squad. He tried to return to his unit but was subsequently captured on December 18, 1944. Bob was gathered with other POWs and marched at night in the bitter cold to a small village outside Bitburg, Germany. While making

cakes for his captors on Christmas Eve, a group of US Martin B-26s dropped their bomb load on the village and blew the small building Bob was working in to dust. All the people working in the hut, including a fellow POW, were killed or wounded, except for

Bob. He managed to deliver his wounded compatriot to a German medical aid center at the church in town but was recaptured trying to make his escape.

Private Meyer was included in a group that was marched at night for 150 kilometers to Stalag XII-A near Limburg. In mid-January, he was packed into a box car with over 40 other POWs and, while travelling at night to avoid bombings, was transferred to Stalag II-A northeast of Berlin. He found himself in a wood cutting work party on May 2nd when they heard Russian artillery coming from the east and noticed their guards had vanished, not wanting to be captured by the Sovi-



Robert Meyer with his birthday (cup)cake.



Roger Collins and Robert Meyer pose in front of Lumpy.

ets. With 12 in their group and one horse, the ragtag party headed west until they arrived at the American lines at the Elbe River on May 6th. After the war, Bob continued to serve our country in the Air Force. During the Korean War, he was stationed in Alaska as a meteorologist (figure that out?) and he finally retired as a Major in the USAF Reserve in 1984 at 60 years old, having spent 40 years in the military.

In 1953, Bob was hired by the Bremerton shipyard, where he worked for 26 years as a mechanical engineer, retiring from this “second job” in 1980. Roger met Bob when he stopped to admire Bob’s restored WWII Jeep parked along the Hood Canal south shore road on Labor Day 2014. Their friendship and camaraderie have been a gift to both. Their common interest at the time was military vehicles—Roger, a collector of rare military equipment, and Bob with his military jeep and trailer in his fully equipped shop. Bob and Roger share another passion, however: airplanes. That brings us to Bob’s 95th birthday, when we gathered at the Bremerton airport for the annual Fly-In and Car Show, the perfect opportunity to fly Bob and photograph this rare moment. Roger and John “Smokey” Johnson coordinated the effort, with Smokey in his North American T-6 Texan flying yours truly, Karyn King, for the photo opportunity.

As Bob and I sat on the sidelines in Roger’s hangar preparing for the flight, we had a chance to talk. He was energetic and all smiles and I asked if he was ready to pull some *g*. His response was a delightful “bring it on, give it your best shot!” Bob was assisted into the rear cockpit of *Lumpy*, Roger’s radial engine beast. Bob looked right at home in the warbird. I could see the smile on his face the moment he strapped in and it stayed the entire day. Major Bob had the same broad smile before takeoff and after landing!

With birthday cake and refreshments shared afterward with his flying and military vehicle friends, it was a fine day to celebrate and appreciate the lives we live. We are all privileged to be a part of the aviation community and for the extraordinary generosity of Roger sharing his enthusiasm for flight.



Roger and Bob sharing a flight in *Lumpy*.

Roger Collins' *Lumpy* has a truly extraordinary history. Built in 1954 by North American Aircraft in Ohio, the AT-28D-10 is a derivative of the original Navy trainer called the Trojan. The then T-28B was based at Whiting Field training Navy and Marine Corps aviators until the mid-60s. Sent to Fairchild Aircraft and modified to an attack version by installing a new -10 wing with internal ammo bays for .50 caliber machine guns, the airplane was transformed from trainer to attacker. A bomb sight, hardpoints, armor, and ejection seats rounded out the transformation. Flown to Alameda and then loaded into a Navy freighter, *Lumpy* was shipped to Southeast Asia, where it mysteriously wound up in Laos.

Through 1975, Air America secretly taught Royal Lao Air Force pilots, including the famous Hmong villagers, how to fly and operate the hand-me-down aircraft. With the fall of the royal government, it was confiscated by the communist Pathet Lao and it stayed dormant and neglected in the jungle. Miraculously, an entrepreneur from Australia saw the T-28s rotting in the jungle and offered the Laotian government enough money that he was allowed to remove six hulks from the jungle and ship them to Australia. Subsequently, they were resold and *Lumpy* was sent to Weaver Aircraft in Carson City, Nevada, where it was fully restored. *Lumpy* flew at Oshkosh, where it was an award winner. Sold to an airline pilot, *Lumpy* found a new home in Utah.

Upon the previous owner’s death, Roger discovered *Lumpy* for sale and decided he wanted it for parts for his T-28C. After making a stop in Grangeville, Idaho, on his delivery flight home, Roger met an ex-USAF mechanic who had worked on AT-28Ds in Laos during the Air America campaign. Roger quickly concluded that a masterpiece like *Lumpy* could never be used for parts! Roger remains the owner and keeps it in flying condition for all to view. Seeing it up close will take your breath away. My photos can never show the grand scale and heart-pounding excitement in *Lumpy*’s presence. ✪



Roger and Bob pull *g*!

All photos by Karyn F. King/PhotosHappen.com

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: RON MORRELL

By Ron Morrell

[In honor of his retirement as CO, I planned to write a member spotlight about Ron. Because he was away flying and we were unable to meet, I sent him some questions I use to jog the interviews. Ron responded with a full bio! "George" must have been flying.—Ed.]

I HOPE IT ISN'T TOO OBVIOUS to those who know me, but I wasn't one of those 8-year olds who hung out at airports and waxed airplanes for rides. I stumbled into aviation through necessity. I grew up on the edge of a swamp and massive wooded area in Muskegon, Michigan and spent all of my public school years walking to school and home every day while attending a township school system. I did actually like school, mostly due to the fact that there were always chores waiting for me when I got home every day. My chores tended to be a little different than most; I got to tend to the half-acre of lawn between our house and my grandfather's, as well as the occasional trip to gramp's gas station to pull out the trusty scythe and mow down the acre of tall grass behind it. It is pretty interesting to think about the day gramps got all angry when he had to raise the price of his gasoline (leaded only and no other blends) to 25 cents per gallon! All these normal chores were broken up by getting to hand dig a new dry well for our tiny ranch house as well as expanding gramp's farmhouse's root cellar into a full basement with a shovel and wheelbarrow.

This is probably why I decided to study hard and get into sports every season possible. The after-school sports programs at my school were pretty robust and I started picking a sport almost every season in middle school and kept it up into high school. My father was never too happy with my after school activities, but at least I could walk the mile back and forth so that he didn't need to take time for transportation. The first inkling I had that aviation may be something interesting was during my junior year of high school. I always planned to get most of my homework done while at school before sports practice, so I spent all of my daily free time in our school library. I didn't really know any of my cousins who were in college and was sure that I needed to get out of town soon after my graduation if I ever wanted to make something of myself. So, one day while I was hanging out in the library, I ran across some college catalogues and brochures. The second I saw was one with a picture of a four-ship of F-16s flying over the United States Air Force Academy (probably photoshopped due to the fact that the F-16 was not even fully operational in 1977) and I was hooked. I went to my school counselor with the catalogue and told him that was my plan. He wasn't overly supportive, but I ignored his lack of enthusiasm and started my trek by reading the entire set of required qualifications and steps needed to become a contender.

The following January, on my 18th birthday, step

one was complete when my congressman's office called and informed my mother that I had been nominated and would now be required to accomplish the next steps to be considered. Sometime in late March, after traveling to an interview and taking sports, physical, and mental tests, it was official. I was invited into the class of 1982 and was fully qualified to become an Air Force officer *but* not qualified to fly airplanes due to my eyesight. The doctor who gave me my physical had stated that I had an astigmatism which disqualified me for flight school. As usual, I ignored that part, because I didn't believe I had any sight problems and I couldn't turn down a full college education on Uncle Sam, even if I couldn't fly.

My very first time in an airplane was the one that took me from Michigan to Colorado. I had spent the past four months in high school working third shift at my older cousin's metal plating shop after my tennis practices and tournament so that I could pay for my airline ticket and the small stipend the Academy required for our initial uniform issue. I guess if you spend some money, you won't quit too quickly. The real awakening was the night before we all reported in to become members of the military. A group of us were staying at a suggested hotel in Colorado Springs and got together by the pool to get acquainted over a couple of adult beverages (the drinking age was still 18). While I was a three-season athlete and had a fairly respectable grade point average, I was a tadpole in a pool of carp! Most of my classmates kicked my butt in sports awards as well as grades.

Fortunately, the first three months were made up of basic training, athletics, and military training, which played pretty well to my self-motivating attitude. Plus, the Academy program really supports the teamwork and supporting each other discipline that makes the whole process work. The rest of the first year was just as eye opening as the first day, but I managed to make it to hell week and become a recognized member of the cadet corps by the spring of 1979. The real prize was that, the week after hell week, I made an appointment with the optometrist to find out what issue was keeping me from becoming a pilot. After 30 minutes of eye tests and questions, I received an official letter signed by the doctor that stated I was fully pilot qualified. Now I just had to make the grades to get through three more years! During that next three years at the "Blue Zoo," I had plenty of outstanding experiences as well as many long nights of homework and praying for the endurance



Photo: John Clark

to keep grinding out the grades I needed to make it to flight school.

The summer programs really helped make the daily school stress worth it. Survival school in the Rocky Mountains, Escape and Evasion training, spending three weeks at an operational fighter squadron, becoming the new cadets training cadre...all were fulfilling and engaging programs that kept the enthusiasm at the levels needed to get through the school year. The final and best summer program was, of course, flight training. This was the first look at how we would be trained when we went to our 11-month long pilot training programs after graduation. It was tough and rewarding! It is amazing in retrospect that we spent a mere three weeks in class every morning, one or two dual flights per day, more homework for the evenings, then had a full check ride and add-on solo flight to round out our qualification training for full AF flight school. Nine months later, I took my oath of office as an Air Force officer, had my 2nd Lieutenant bars pinned on my shoulders and headed out for two weeks of leave before reporting to Columbus AFB in Mississippi for my next eleven months of training in jet aircraft.

The time spent in Columbus was busy, stressful, and outstanding. To be worked hard, expected to perform every day, and be handed a jet aircraft on a daily basis is a full plate that leaves you tired and smiling on most days. The day I was doing duty in the runway supervisory unit (think mini airport tower) as I watched one of my classmates lose the T-38 in the final turn and hit the ground was not one of those days. Will Stern and I spent many a weekend day on our motorcycles, yanking and banking while attached to the ground to loosen up the kinks and mind before getting back to work. He was a good pilot who just got behind the jet at the worst possible time. Little did I know that it wouldn't be my first memorial service that was closed coffin and close to home over my military days.

We all recovered, carried on, and made it to the last weeks of UPT—undergraduate pilot training—and the time came to find out what the next years would have in store for us. Assignments night has many iterations and takes on the personality of the graduating class. Ours was no exception. We had a small carnival and invited all the families to attend and watch us all find out where we were going and what we would be flying.

The beer was flowing and everyone was tense, until about the third beer. Each one of our class got to take a turn sitting on the seat of the dunk tank and have a friend, special friend, or just the classmate who sat next to you most of the year and complained about his test scores, throw a softball at the target after your class commander shouted out the name of one of the aircraft you had put on your “wish list”. Of course, the machine was rigged, and it didn't matter if the ball contacted the bullseye; you only went down when the correct aircraft assignment was called out before the pitch. The real gotcha was when the announcer decided to mess with you and called out an aircraft for a second time after not getting wet the first time it was called out. I almost drowned when I hit the water. I had to cough up some water before I could ask if I really heard A-10 before I went under! Flying a single seat fighter was all I was looking for over the entire eleven months in Mississippi. I was assigned to Myrtle Beach AFB in South Carolina as a bonus.

The next few months were made up of a roundabout path to get to the front door of the 353rd Tactical Fighter Squadron. The Panthers were one of three 24-aircraft squadrons that made up the 356th Tactical Fighter Wing. The six month path to Myrtle Beach included getting married and traveling to Alamogordo, New Mexico to get beat up some more in the Lead-In Fighter version of the T-38. I also traveled to Florida to do water survival training in the Gulf of Mexico. The AT-38 was equipped with weapons stations under the wings that could hold BDUs—25-pound practice bombs—and a gun pod. We spent four weeks doing Basic Fighter Maneuvers, dropping BDUs at the air-to-ground range, and many, many classes. Even though the AT-38 could carry the gun pods, they didn't let the A-10 pilots shoot it. They explained to us that the GAU-8 on the Warthog was such a different animal, it would be negative training for us to gain any bad habits with the pea-shooter.

When this was finished, I headed to New Mexico and the A-10 RTU (replacement training unit). A week of classes, two simulator sessions to learn switchology and emergency procedures, and basic panel recognition. The first flight is solo, single seat, alone, and unafraid. The scared one was the instructor who was in his own aircraft chasing you and hoping you didn't hit him or do something really stupid. The following weeks consisted

of studying and classes to learn the tactical nuts and bolts, as well as all of the basic weapons systems we could deploy from the Warthog. It was busy and rewarding and tiring! By the time I left for the Beach, I was fully qualified on the range—not a single BDU missed the ground!—and in tactical formation, as well as qualified to fly down to 500 feet off the deck.

Active duty as a fighter pilot in the 80s was a great time. Ronald Reagan consistently showed his respect and support for the military, we were pretty free to train



Ron flies past in his Nanchang CJ-6A. Photo: John Clark

like we would fight, and we were given the bombs and bullets to do it. But, it wasn't all fun. Two weeks into my duty at the Beach, I experienced my first squadron lock-down. That is how units attempt to squelch the rumor mill when a pilot doesn't make it back to the house. In this case, one of our captains got a case of target fixation and hit the water doing 300 knots about 200 yards long of the target he was dropping his practice bomb on. About ten days later was number two! One of the senior lieutenants was on his first flight lead training flights and he pulled off a tactical target with too many *gs* and didn't recover before his jet hit the ground. Things finally calmed down, then my daughter was born! I was given the unusual chance to stay in the A-10 for a second tour if I was willing to head to South Korea for a year on an unaccompanied assignment. My wife would stay at Myrtle Beach in base housing amongst the friends and other spouses she had met in the 18 months we were there, so off I went. Before I left the Beach, I was qualified as a flight lead and in every mission the A-10 flew, including high threat tactics, low threat, search and rescue, and mobility duties.

The flying environment in Suwon, Korea was much different than the tactical air forces back home. Korea was still on the edge of hostilities and we were treated like we could be heading north with wall-to-wall Maverick missiles and full GAU-8 loads at any time. During my time with the Assam Dragons, I didn't spend as much time down in the dirt because the radar controllers would get all excited if they couldn't see where we were (an excited Korean controller is very hard to understand on the radio). We carried wartime authenticators for every flight, which were changed six times a day and required to authenticate to radar control every time we took off. We also used them to ensure the forward air controller we talked to on the radio was the real deal. We were the only fighter unit on the peninsula that was qualified to fly in the prohibited area called P518 which butted right up against the actual demilitarized zone. There was no lack of the North trying to pull us across the border or into the no-fly zone by sneaking into the conversation and giving us bad coordinates. We were trained well and never blindly took a heading and distance to a target without plotting it on our charts.

The years in Korea were some outstanding flying and well worth the experience. While I was there, I talked with the manpower experts back in the States and worked out a deal to get a "consecutive overseas assignment," which got me to Eielson AFB in Fairbanks, Alaska as my follow-on assignment. I was very fortunate, as very few A-10 pilots at that time were able to get three consecutive assignments to Warthog squadrons. Most of us would get experienced much faster

than the air-to-air guys due to the fact that we flew an average of two-hour missions while they ran out of gas at about an hour. Once you are an experienced fighter pilot (over 500 hours), you are eligible to be pulled out of the fighter cockpit and put in a trainer, FAC, or Humvee. I was in the right place at the right time to take the Suwon assignment, which put me in position to get the third fighter billet in a row.

Alaska is another great place to fly as a ground attack pilot. I have personally seen 400 knots in the A-10 at 100 feet off the tundra in straight and level flight—it was 30 degrees below zero at the time! We had three air-to-ground ranges that all had live fire capability and were within 30 minutes of the base. A typical mission was to carry bombs and 100 rounds of 30-millimeter to the conventional range and use them up, then do a low-level navigation run to one of the tactical ranges and do



Ron flies past in his T-28A Trojan at the Olympic Airshow. Photo: Dan Shoemaker

some tactical air-to-ground before heading back to the pattern. Unfortunately, this is where I attended the memorial service for my third squadron-mate.

The arctic mission was a challenging one. Our squadron had periodic mobility exercises and had to be ready to head to northern Europe or Asia within 24 hours of a tasking order. That was a sore point with the spouse now that we also had a son. The fact that we had an active duty as well as a reserve duty KC-135 tanker unit with us at Eielson was a big plus. We all got lots of air-to-air refueling time, even when we didn't want it. One of the most challenging nights I ever had was hanging on as number three in a four-ship over the Alaskan mountain range with a cloud deck and very bright northern lights. In other words, as a wingman, you can't figure out where the horizon is and your internal gyros are worthless. At the end of the night, even the tanker pilot called the squadron and complimented us on hanging in there.

Toward the end of my three years in Alaska, I got to

deploy to Nellis AFB for a Red Flag exercise. A-10 units didn't go to Red Flag very often, which is a shame because getting integrated into an attack package is great training. Thanks to my experience, I was asked to be the first mission commander for the attack part of the first mission. It was disappointing because they had no integration at all. The planners sent everyone one direction and the eight Warthogs somewhere else to hit some ground targets. In other words, we were tasked to do exactly what we did every day at our own ranges. I decided to take the bullet and explain exactly that during my very short "attack package" briefing! The colonel in charge was not too happy, but the next day we were integrated into the full exercise! We had a good time, but I wasn't going to be a mission commander again during the exercise. So, instead, I spent my time just leading flights and telling anyone who wanted to know how my interview with Northwest Airlines went.

Off to the airlines. I did make an effort to find an A-10 unit in the guard or reserve but they all had waiting lists and I started to enjoy my time off, so it didn't happen. Just a synopsis of the aircraft will suffice to ex-

to fly it out to the Pacific Northwest. I bought the Nanchang in 2003 during my last year flying the DC-10 and had a great time with it in Michigan. I routinely flew it back and forth between New Hudson airport just outside Detroit to a small airport near Traverse City to spend time at our lake cabin. Flying aerobatics and taking friends for rides were the other fun times I used the airplane for. In the spring, I flew the CJ down to Florida to attend Sun-n-Fun and attend the NATA formation clinic. At the end of the clinic, and with my wing card in hand, I arrived at Sun-n-Fun at the rear of an 18-ship T-6 formation with the two other "communists" in tow. A couple days later, I started out for Seattle. No hurry and no reason to fly high. It was a great sightseeing trip.

Soon after getting to Paine Field, I attended GA Day and learned about the Cascade Warbirds. I am pretty sure I met a couple of marshallers, then some guy named Desmon. The fact that I showed up with a new wing card and that there were a couple of guys who wanted to do a formation flyby cemented my relationship with the premier warbird squadron in the EAA.

My time as part of CWB has been fun, fast, and busy. I think that I've attended nearly every airshow that has had the CWB squadron as a premier guest. Kelso, Olympia, Arlington, McChord, Fairchild are the most attended. I enjoyed the camaraderie enough that I made the command decision to step up to a leadership position about eight years ago. The time I had the Nanchang included a lot of formation time and many attempts to get training

events ironed out to give our members the opportunity to learn and polish their skills. I even tried to get the Redstar Pilots Association involved by becoming their Northwest Sector Leader. We have lots of obstacles way out here in the Pacific Northwest for consistent formation training and flying but it looks to be turning around. I commend our members who are stepping up to make more opportunities for formation flying. The final year of my tour as the commanding officer found me without an airplane of my own. I will miss the Trojan but it seemed to be time to part with it and move on. I hope to keep involved and help the squadron with their goals. There were some obvious growing/transition pains this past summer when I wasn't in attendance at a few of the activities. This squadron has all the tools it needs to keep moving forward and I won't be a ghost when my tour of duty is over.

Epilogue: I have been a fighter pilot and warbird pilot since the first time I "slipped the surly bonds." I plan to continue in that same vein as long as possible through the CWB squadron and the Rainier squadron. I hope you all have the same drive and dedication to keeping these birds in the air for everyone to enjoy... especially the pilots! ☺



Ron in his T-28A at Gig Harbor Wings and Wheels in 2016. Photo: Dan Shoemaker

plain my commercial career; it's just flying point-to-point. I started out based in Detroit flying the B-727 as a flight engineer, then upgraded to first officer in about 14 months. I got caught in the 1991 slight drawdown in the airlines and was displaced out of my position to Guam as a first officer. After about 20 months commuting to Guam, I returned to Detroit as a B-727 first officer for only a couple of months before I went to the A-320 for the next five years. I got the international bug and headed to the DC-10 for five years and spent a lot of time in Europe. When NWA bought the A-330, I had to switch. A year later, in 2005, NWA put half of the A-330s flying in Seattle and I jumped on it to get out of Detroit. To round out the airline career: I finally decided that no matter how much I liked the 330 and the international flying, it was time to be a captain. Three and a half years of commuting to Atlanta and Salt Lake before momma Delta put the B-737 in Seattle. I did my two years of penance on the guppy before I could move to the B-757/767. That's where I'll be until DAL opens up some more positions on the A-330 or A-350.

Let's back things up a little. When I landed in Seattle in February of 2005, I had left the Nanchang CJ-6 back in Michigan until I had the time and the weather

L-17: MYTHS AND LEGENDS

By Bill Lattimer

MARK TWAIN WROTE, “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.” The modern version of this becomes, “You can’t make this stuff up,” which describes the myths and legends of the L-17 surprisingly well. A bit player on the world stage for a relatively short period of time, the L-17 still pops up in some surprising ways during the Korean War.

The first myth is that of the armed L-17. Over the years, many reports of armed L-17s have surfaced, from bazookas wired under the wings to rockets and bombs mounted on hard points. There’s no shortage of Navions today flying with gun port decals and, in some cases, fake rockets and bombs mounted under the wings, but the hard truth is that *it didn’t happen*. The creativity of L-bird pilots and ground crew are legendary, and we have aircraft like “Bazooka Charlie” Carpenter’s Piper L-4H to show that truth can be stranger than fiction.

But having run all these reports to ground, talked extensively to Korean War L-17 ground crew and pilots, and done archive research, I can say confidently that no evidence exists to support armed L-17s and there is hard evidence to the contrary. The USAF went so far as to ask Ryan in 1950 if there was any means to mount a standard T-6-type hard point on the L-17, and Ryan responded that an entirely new wing would be needed. The USAF declined and that chapter was well and finally closed.

Another myth is L-17s flying off aircraft carriers, but this turns out to be true! Navions have outstanding short- and rough-field capabilities, and after the initial crated deliveries of L-17s to Korea, it was determined they could easily fly off the decks of the escort carriers (CVE) *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait* for delivery. Operation OPEX was initiated in early 1950 to determine if loaded L-17s could both fly off and land and, while it was determined that they could, the margin of error was too low for regular operations, leaving only ranking personnel flights for operations.

During active duty, L-17s served with the US Air Force and Army, the Hellenic (Greek) Air Force and the Republic of Korea Air Force. There’s no evidence of any active duty L-17 serving with any other branch, although we see them (and Navions) today with all service

and all country markings on them as an homage to the owner’s service or their interests. A single air-

craft, the Ryan Model 72, was built for testing against the Temco Plebe and the aircraft that would become the T-34 Mentor in a trainer

competition. But it was never accepted by the military, having lost the competition, and it soldiered on as a Ryan testbed for several years.

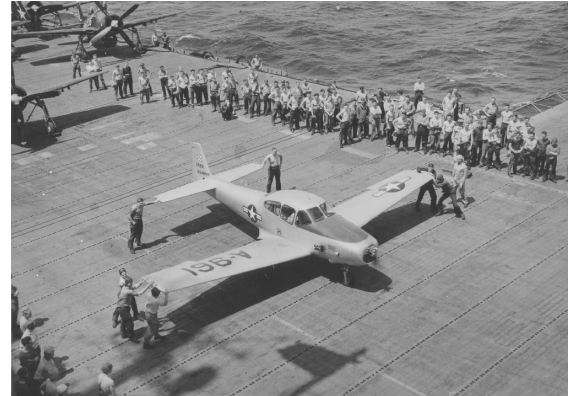
The final myth is using JATO packs for takeoff and, again, this was tested! The Navion has a very beefy center attach point for the wings, and this was deemed enough for a JATO mount. Aside from what appears to be three test flights, it was never used operationally.

The L-17 earned its place in history with a single event: calling down the very first airborne Forward Air Control (FAC) strike on 9 July 1950. Standing in for two L-5G Sentinels with failed radios, two 24th Division L-17s called down about ten flights of F-80s very effectively, supporting “the best day in Fifth Air Force history.” The L-17 was quickly withdrawn from this duty, replaced by the more capable T-6 Texan, but it was there and it did the job.

The L-17 then settled down into standard L-bird work, transporting light cargo and personnel. General MacArthur had a personal L-17, as did Major General Matthew Ridgway (1948 Ryan L-17B 48-1042)—his carrying nose art of a Conestoga wagon wheel and the words “The Big Wheel”. Marilyn Monroe flew around for her USO tour in Ryan L-17B 48-944, piloted by Lt. Jack Plumly; aircraft and pilot were reunited at KOSH in 2000. 26 aircraft have been verified with Korean War service and six were lost to enemy air action. They also served in Japan and Germany as general unit “hacks” or light transports.

After the Korean War, L-17s went to military flying clubs and many were transferred to the Civil Air Patrol. CAP service was a mixed bag; there were plenty of spare parts but, as in their military service, they were considered difficult to service and soon were released. The last L-17s left military service in the late 60s.

Of the 246 L-17s built, about 75 survive today and about 30 of those are flying, often in civilian markings. And many civilian Navions fly in military colors to honor veterans. While a small footnote in any history of military aviation, the L-17 played its part and still soldiers on today. ✪



L-17 48-961 on board USS Leyte, 1950. Photo: San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive



General Ridgway’s L-17 in Japan. Photo: Fred LePage

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY

By Dan Shoemaker



All photos by Dan Shoemaker



Thank You, CWB

I missed thanking Cascade Warbirds at the end of the dinner.

Thank you for the invitation to the parties through the years—I remember those years when he came with Margaret, Rosie the Riveter—and for all the opportunities you gave Ken to share his stories. He had not done that until he started working as a docent with you guys and having such an interested group of folks as his audience.

Then there was way back when you folks arranged for him to talk with Bill Holloman. Those two really thought that Bill might very well have flown cover for Ken's B-17!

Anyway, I know it was a two-way street and you all enriched each other's lives, but it would not have happened without you and Dave in his cheering section.

Sharon Wheeler

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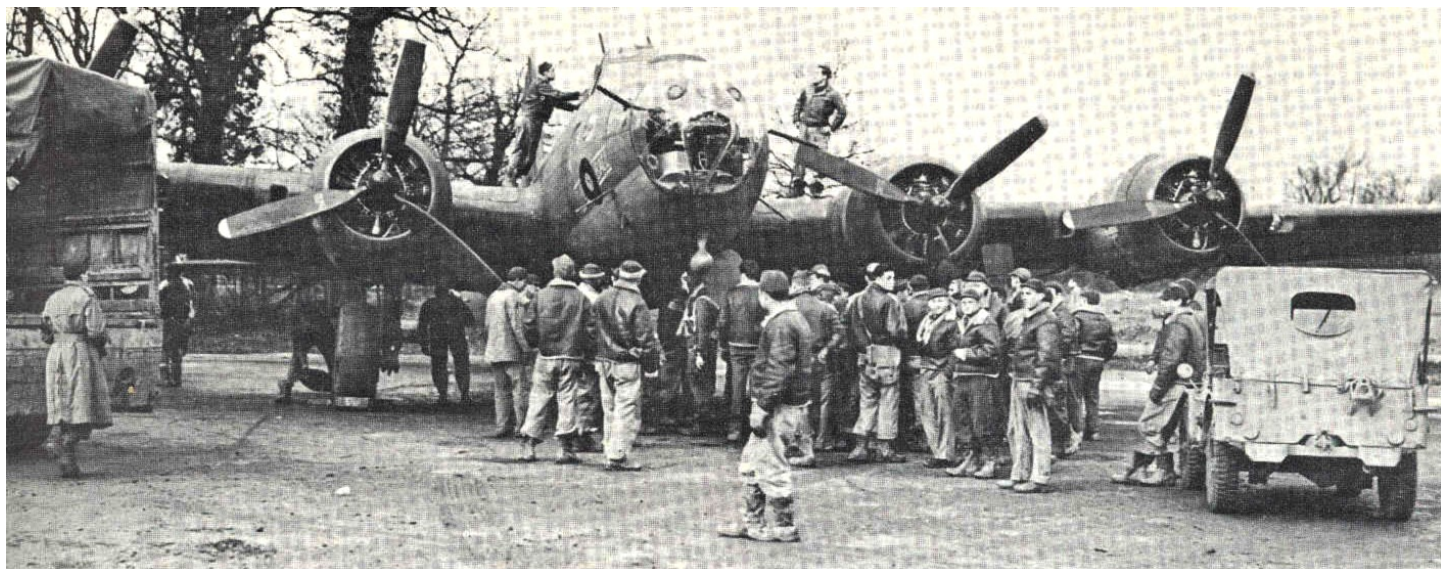
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CHECK SIX



This month in history... On January 27, 1943, 8th Air Force B-24 and B-17 bombers, including the one pictured above, launched the USAAF's first air strike against Nazi Germany. The attack on the port of Wilhelmshaven was the first in America's campaign of daytime bombing raids against German targets.

Photo: US Air Force, <https://www.8af.af.mil/News/Photos/igphoto/2000400024/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

February

8 Member meeting, 10 AM
Board meeting, 1 PM
Museum of Flight (Seattle, WA)

March

14 Member meeting, 10 AM
Board meeting, 1 PM
Museum of Flight (Seattle, WA)