



Fist of the Fleet Association

a non profit 501 (c) (19) military organization

NEWSLETTER

Jul 2022

Preserving the Past Providing for Today
Promoting the Future

SUMMER EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

There have been quite a few Doom and Gloomers out there since the start of the Ukrainian "special military operation". A retired Army colonel, who shall remain nameless, has predicted the end of armored warfare based on losses to Soviet-Russian forces. What this person refused to understand is that they violated every accepted tactical doctrine regarding the use of armor. I don't think I need to elucidate? Another "wag" indicated the death of the attack helicopter, again refusing to see the misapplication of those forces. Third, a so called "expert" is claiming the end of US Navy surface combatants after the loss of the *Moskva*. Let's be clear on this one. We accept and train against the threats that exist to all ships and vessels, whether at sea or in port. The problem with his statement is that the writer ignores the fact that *Moskva* was not at General Quarters, or Battle Stations, Action Stations, Defense Posture One or whatever the hell else you want to call it. The Captain of the *Moskva* sailed his ship into an active combat theater with his naked butt hanging out a porthole and the words "Spank Me" painted on his checks. So much for their Black Seas fleet *flagship*. And in a more bombastic tone, Soviet-Russian television recently claimed it could use a submarine-launched 100-megaton warhead that would "sink" Britain with a 1600ft tall radioactive tsunami. The problem here is that, upon detonation close ashore, the downward shockwave is immediately reflected upwards disrupting the dynamics required to form the base surge and ascending debris column. Whatever water is pushed ashore would immediately be subjected to friction from the ground and the effects of gravity. The 50-megaton Tsar Bomba, detonated in Oct '61 with a fireball radius of 5 miles, was theoretically a 100-megaton device but was tested without it's third-stage booster, giving it half-strength. Thankfully they have dialed back their nuclear rhetoric of late. For more on boosted nukes: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Teller%E2%80%93Ulam_design

Others are wondering why the Soviet-Russian Air Forces have not succeeded with establishing total air superiority over Ukraine. Strategic air superiority over a theater is not their doctrine. Their Air Forces are designed and trained for *local superiority* in a small corridor over the line of attack. Everything they have done flies in the face of western tactical and strategic military wisdom. They also have recently claimed that Ukraine is providing them with an opportunity to test NATO weapons and capabilities. Really? It doesn't appear they have learned a damn thing, and are continuing to reinforce failure by using the same strategy they began this mess with. One thing they have proved though, since pre-czarist times Russians have been really good at killing other Russians, mostly civilians. Oh, and by the way, those "secret military payloads" they keep putting into orbit? I don't believe for an instant they are spy satellites.

So now, all this begs the question: *Why* have we been so afraid of Soviet-Russian military strength these past 75 years? Their nuclear arsenal? They seem to have no sense of their capabilities, or lack thereof, and their equipment is becoming fast obsolete as the industrial oligarchs embezzled *billions* of dollars earmarked for defense upgrades and bought themselves super mega-yachts instead. "With friends like those ..." It was another pal from his KGB days, Nikolai Patrushev, number two man in the Kremlin and secretary of the Security Council, who claimed the Ukrainians would welcome them with open-arms and they could eliminate the *nazis* and occupy the country in three days. Remember the KGB? The Soviet intelligence-gathering/super-spy/domestic security/assassination bureau? Putin worked there as a *foreign intelligence officer* from 1975 to 1991. Good work dudes! Um, you might want to take a refresher course in intelligence gathering 101. Oh, and if you want to find "*nazis*" just look in the mirror.

Direct quote from Putin: "*Once a KGB agent, always a KGB agent.*"



~Ricochet~

www.fistofthefleet.org

Mission Statement

Perpetuate the history of Naval Aviation Squadrons VT-17, VA-6B, VA-65, VA-25 and VFA-25,

Remember deceased veterans and comfort their survivors,

Conduct charitable and educational programs,

Foster and participate in activities of patriotic nature,

Assist current active squadron members, and

Provide assistance to family members in times of emergency.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's turning out to be a hot summer, regardless of your vacation spot. But work goes forward as your Board of Directors plan for future events and follows up on past achievements. I'm happy to announce that the legacy plaques honoring our past squadron mates have been installed at the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. There was no formal ceremony and as most of you know, access to the museum for the general public has been severely restricted during the past two years since the shooting incident on base. Nonetheless, we are planning on hosting the next "Fist" reunion in Pensacola in early November, 2023 to coincide with the final Blue Angels Air Show of the season and to reunite with our sister fighter squadron, VF-154, from the Vietnam era. Hopefully, this location and timeframe will be convenient for many of you and economical as well.

Those of you who attended our reunion at Tailhook 2021 will recall that we distributed green nylon backpacks with a FOFA patch (see photo) to attendees. It turns out that these backpacks have become quite popular with current squadron pilots and we've sent them a batch to boost morale and show the FOFA flag.

We'll have more updates as the date approaches; meanwhile, sit back in your lounge chair with a cool gin and tonic and enjoy retirement.

John "Chalks" Chalker
FOFA, President



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Blue Angels Tour Dates

Jul 30/31 Dayton Air Show OH
Aug 6/7 Boeing SeaFair Air Show, Seattle WA
13/14 MCAS Kaneohe Bay Air Show HI
Sept 3/5 Cleveland National Air Show OH
10/11 Smoky Mountain Air Show Knoxville TN
17/18 NAS Oceana Air Show VA
24/25 MCAS Miramar Air Show CA
Oct 1/2 Aviation Roundup Air Show Minden NV
8/9 San Francisco Fleet Week CA
22/23 NAS JAX Air Show FL
29/30 Wings Over Houston Air Show TX

SKIPPERS CORNER

Greetings!

It has been a very exciting time here at VFA-25. The squadron had a successful detachment to Red Flag Alaska in June. We put our new aircraft to the test and significantly ramped up our operational tempo. While in Fairbanks, we had the privilege of working with our Air Force brethren and build relationships with our international partners from Singapore. With four new Junior Officer's joining the squadron, it was the first time some of our pilots had ever seen large force exercises consisting of over 40 airplanes. Although we put in some long hours at work, we thoroughly enjoyed the 24 hours of daylight, saw some moose, and took a quick trip to Denali!

There is no rest for the weary though! As I type this, the squadron is packing to go to Key West for some unit level training. This trip will allow us to focus on the basics and start building the foundation for our upcoming work up cycle. It will also be one of the first times we'll be able to work with our Air Wing as a whole, with one of our sister squadrons and our Hawkeye squadron joining in on the fun.

August will be a bit quieter for us, supporting operations from Lemoore. I personally will be preparing to hand over VFA-25 to CDR "IROC" Tedrow on September 15th. The squadron will be in phenomenal hands! I sincerely hope everyone is enjoying their summer and I hope to see some of you at Tailhook this year!



Very Respectfully,

CDR Kristen "Dragon" Hansen
Commanding Officer, VFA-25

\$\$\$\$ FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION FINANCIAL NEWS \$\$\$\$

2022 Summer Financial Report

The financial health of the Association is still on solid ground. As of 1 July 2022, the Association has a balance of \$9,701.74 in savings and \$7,363.77 in checking with the Navy Federal Credit Union for a total of \$17,065.51.

One of the main indicators of the Association's financial health and stability is the continued growth of its dues paying annual members and new life members. Kevin FitzGerald paid his Annual Membership and the Life Membership number increased with a new Life Member, William Youngblood..

During the first six months of 2022 the educational committee received one request for an Educational Grant from the squadron. The Association paid an Education Grant totaling \$91.89 to a squadron member. The Association also paid the 2021 Sailor of the Year AT1 Brandon Clyde. This award also included Life Membership in the Association. The Association is awaiting the names for the 2022 SOY and the 2022 Ltjg Harry Jones awardees.

The Fist Association collected generous donations from our membership to honor four past Fist Aviators with Legacy Wall Plaques at the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. We have just been informed that the four plaques have been installed on the Legacy Wall honoring these distinguished combat veterans. In addition the museum is forwarding commemorative plaques for each aviator to John Chalker to be presented to a surviving family member. We have found addresses for three family members but are missing any contacts for Captain Denis Weichman's family. If you any of you have information that would help us locate his relatives please contact us at fist@fistofthefleet.org.

Respectfully Submitted
Chuck "Pooh" Webster

Have you paid your 2022 Dues?

Annual Dues: \$25/YR

Life Time Dues \$200

Mail dues to Financial Officer:

Chuck Webster 2441 Lock B Road North Clarksville TN 37043

Only Voting Members have access to the Directory

Become a Voting Member!
Visit the Base Exchange at
www.fistofthefleet.org

The Fist of the Fleet Association Proudly Honors
Captain Edwin "Ed" Greathouse, USN
1929-2021



Ed served as an enlisted Electronics Technician prior to becoming a Naval Aviator. He later joined VA-25 flying A-1H Skyraiders for the 1963-64 cruise aboard USS Midway and again in 1965. On 20 June 1965, Ed was the flight leader of four A-1s deep in North Vietnam when they were attacked by two MIG-17's. After effective defensive maneuvering, his wingmen LT Clint Johnson and LTJG Charles Hartman, engaged the MIGs head on, scoring a confirmed kill with their 20 MM cannon.

The entire flight was decorated for their superb airmanship. Ed flew many combat missions with VA-25 including a 10.7 hour mission that rescued a downed USAF pilot.

Ed transitioned to the A-7E and returned to VA-25 in 1971 as XO/CO. Under his leadership the squadron performed superbly in numerous missions over North Vietnam from USS Ranger during Operation Linebacker II in December 1972. Ed completed his exemplary service as the CNATRA Chief of Training.

In Recognition of His Devoted Service to Our Country and the United States Navy



The Fist of the Fleet Association Proudly Honors
Captain Denis "Denny" Weichman, USN
1935-1995



Denis Weichman served with VA-25 on three cruises 1959-61 aboard Midway CVA-41 flying the AD Skyraider. He then served in the A-4 with VA-164 aboard Oriskany (CVA-34) on two combat cruises in 1966-67, participating in numerous strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong. He received the Silver Star for a successful SAM suppression mission on which his A-4E was severely damaged. He later commanded VA-153 in the A-7. By 1973 CDR Weichman had flown 625 combat sorties, the highest in the Navy, and received 5 DFC's, a Purple Heart and 50 Air Medals along with the Silver Star. He retired as a Captain with 1,040 carrier landings and over 8,200 flight hours.

In Recognition of His Devoted Service to Our Country and the United States Navy



The Fist of the Fleet Association Proudly Honors
Captain Harry E. Ettinger, USN
1926-2020



Harry Ettinger earned his wings in July 1947. In March, 1951, while providing air support in his AD Skyraider for United Nations forces under attack by North Korean troops, he was shot down and captured. He survived twenty months of captivity, having been recaptured after one escape. Harry later served as Commanding Officer of VA-25, the "Fist of the Fleet," during a combat deployment to Viet Nam in 1965 on USS Midway (CV 41). His squadron flew 1850 close air support and rescue combat air support sorties and shot down a North Vietnamese MIG-17. Harry was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for coordinating and supporting the successful rescue of pilots shot down in heavily defended areas of North Vietnam. Harry's career epitomized the courage, superb airmanship, and dedication demanded of Naval Aviators.



In Recognition of His Devoted Service to Our Country and the United States Navy



The Fist of the Fleet Association Proudly Honors
Captain Rosario "Zip" Rausa, USN
1937-2018



Zip Rausa was a Naval Aviator extraordinaire by virtue of his heroic performance in the cockpit and unique contributions to Naval Aviation with his pen. During the Viet Nam war, Zip and several VA-25 "Fist of the Fleet" squadron mates flying A-1H Skyraiders saved the lives of seven Green Berets at the Battle of Lang Vei in February 1968 by providing highly effective Close Air Support to Special Operations soldiers threatened by a ferocious North Vietnamese attack.

Given the mountainous terrain and low clouds at that location, Zip displayed enormous courage and superb airmanship. After retirement from the Navy, Zip was instrumental in telling the story of Naval Aviation past and present as long-standing editor of the quarterly Wings of Gold magazine. He also wrote several books including an autobiography of his Navy life, "Gold Wings, Blue Sea."

In Recognition of His Devoted Service to Our Country and the United States Navy

FISTORY THE HORNET'S STING: IRAQI FREEDOM, TARGET FOR TONIGHT PART TWO

By: G. Fritze and CDR K. Hansen

In the following account only the weather data, Lincoln's call sign and the aircraft bureau number mentioned on page 8 are factual. Certain procedures are condensed from NATOPS A1-F18AC-NFM-0001 AUG 06 Changed 15 JUN 07 NB: If over water distance is given in nautical miles (nm). If over land distance is given in kilometers (km).

03078 2315 Zulu Persian Gulf

Sitrep: USS Abraham Lincoln CVN-72, Call Sign: "Union." Coordinates: 27.19.34 N 50.40.24 E Course: SSE Speed: 25kts Winds: SE 14kts Sea State: Calm Conditions: Fair Full Moon: set 5:51pm Sunset: 6:57pm local (Doha, Qatar)

Batt: On. Preflight was routine, except that the plane captain was so excited he couldn't stand still, and it was infectious. Fire Test: A, Test: B. Once the walk-around was finished he was like a mother hen until satisfied you were properly "nested" in the cockpit. APU ACC Caution Light: Off. APU Switch: On. Then he patted you on the shoulder: "All set, sir?" "Ready to rock!" "Well, alright then!" ENG Crank Switch: R. Right Throttle: Idle = 15%. He stuck his hand out and you shook it, saying with a big smile: "Isn't there something you should be doing right now?" "Yes sir!" "Okay, let's button her up." HUD, UFC*, Avionics, and Radar Altimeter: On. He closed the canopy and stowed the ladder. Bleed Air Knob: Cycle Thru Off To Norm. ENG Crank Switch: L. Left Throttle: Idle = 15%. ENG Crank Switch: Check Off. EMI/IFEI**: Check. 404 was alive.



Note: At the extreme right a deckhand is holding up the weight board.

He's standing now just off the nose to the right, with the plane director waiting patiently, as the ground checks are completed: launch bar, fuel probe, speed brake, stabs and rudder, hook, ailerons and steering. Then a last check of navs, weapons and systems as the plane guard helo lifts off. A few moments later the MIGCAP fighters, positioned on the bow cats, are ready to launch as the Hawkeye "Warhorse Two", and the Prowler "Merlin Four" armed with 4 AGM-88 HARM, are readied on the waist. The eeriness of a flight deck bathed in red light is briefly accentuated by the Hornets' afterburners as first one and then the other is swallowed by the night. The plane captain disappears under the aircraft and soon returns with all the chains draped over his shoulders. Two blue-shirt Aviation Boatswain's Mates now wait for the signal to pull the chocks. The Hawkeye turns up to full military power and his props are surrounded with ghostly static discharge as he's thrown off the number four cat. 404's chocks are pulled and you throttle up to 74% to begin the taxi to cat

one, stopping just short of the JBD. Wing Fold: Spread and Lock. The Ordies rush in to pull the pins from the weapons stations, running out to the left and holding them up for confirmation. Flaps: Full. As the Prowler leaves cat three you are slowly moved on to number one. Launch Bar: Extend. With a slight thunk the launch bar drops into the shuttle. One green-shirt dives under the nose to install the holdback, another shows a back-lit weight board at 45600. Then the squadrons Troubleshooters, in white shirts, give the aircraft a final once-over. If anything they see or you notice indicates an issue they will have moments to decide whether you go or not. If its thumbs down, well, not even God is going to fly this plane; and the timing of the entire flight plan and launch cycle will go straight to hell. Another scan of the cockpit as Hobo One leaves the deck; then Hobo Two kicks in AB. In a moment, he too, is airborne. The Launch Officer for the bow cats commits Hobo Three and then turns to cat one. He raises his wand over his head and rapidly circles it. Throttles to MIL and friction locked, cycle the stick one last time, lights on. A quick salute, stick back – head back and hit the burners. The wand touches the deck and two seconds later you are shot into the black cats' ass at midnight.

03078 2345 Zulu

A few seconds of AB is enough as the flaps and gear are retracted. "Departure, Hobo 4, 7 miles, heading 157." "Radar contact, 4. Copy your Squawk 1462. Your signal is marshal, cleared to climb. Switch to button 11." Completing a left-hand departure profile and climbing to catch the flight, you form-up at the marshal point, ten miles to the NE of the ship in a loose, right echelon. Instead of just sitting there like some smug FNG you cycle through systems to see if 404 is healthy, and reconfirm navigation way points and weapons targeting data for the four MK 84 2000lb JDAMs she's carrying. With radar range rates at 150nm it scans two aircraft ahead and slightly north. The Mode 3 IFF codes them as the Hawkeye and Prowler. But soon Warhorse Two has peeled off to the northeast to establish a wide circuit around the northern end of the Gulf. Merlin Four, now on a parallel course to the strike, and with its longer loiter time will remain in-theater to provide ECM and suppression fire during both strikes. Ahead some 300nm is Al Amarah and the KC-135. This will be the easiest leg of the flight so it's time for a deep breath to release a little tension, while making a few notes on the kneeboard for possible log book entry later on. Then it's time to pick up visual scanning: left to right across the cockpit, right to left through the canopy; "Head up and on a swivel", and all the while maintaining your position in the formation as you think: "Man, what a beautiful night to be up here."



Crossing the coast of Iraq just to the west of Al Faw Lead makes the call "Feet Dry" a couple of minutes ahead of schedule. The desert is relatively dark but there are lights to the northeast in Iran, and ahead at Al Basrah and some of the smaller villages and towns. Now, why does that seem odd? Northwest of Al Basrah radar picks up another contact. The IFF ping 4454 indicates the KC-135 tanker, and she is at 22000 and relatively dead ahead. A few minutes later Lead jumps on the squadron net: "Hobos, 254.6 Pri." As the flight closes to within 60km he reaches out: "Skipjack, Hobo Lead. Four chicks; 60 klicks, 20000 at 450 awaiting clearance, over." "Hobo Flight: cleared to join." "Copy cleared to join." As the range closes you begin to reduce speed to match the tanker at 250kts, and the formation climbs to 21000 and slides left. Finally, Lead is cleared to refuel. The mission profile allots a total of 20 minutes for the whole evolution, which may be a bit optimistic as there are just too many variables. This is borne out when



Two, in MODEX 407, misses the drogue and overshoots it, and has to back off and start again. It's funny, but from the beginning you've never missed the basket on the first try, and this has led to more than a few extremely crude comments and jokes at your expense, of which you are secretly proud. Three moves off to starboard and now it's your turn. "Skipjack, Hobo Four. VFA Two Five, MODEX Four Oh Four, nose cold, switches safe." "404 you are cleared astern." "Skipjack, Hobo Four, pre-contact." Fuel Probe - Extend. It's feels like standing in the batter's box again, staring down the pitcher. "Hobo Four: cleared." But really, you're concentrating on his hands. "Fifty feet." He goes into his delivery. "Twenty-five feet." The motion of his arm says something about what's coming. "Fifteen feet." As the ball comes out there is barely a second to see the spin of the laces and react. "Ten feet." The bat is just an extension of your arms. Rocking back you then step forward and swing with the sole

intent of making "Contact. Good morning Sir. What are you requesting?" Pushing up a bit the tanker transfer lights go from amber to green. "8200lbs should top it off" "Roger, 8200." "Hey, how's the coffee in there tonight?" "Just instant, Sir; but at least it's hot. "Copy that, have one for me." "Will do, Sir. At 6000lbs per minute it takes a bit less than 90 seconds to complete the refuel. At "Transfer complete." the tanker light switches to amber as you back your speed down to separate, and the hose goes taut as the probe pops out. Fuel Probe - Retract. Moving off to starboard and rejoining the formation the big tanker moves off to the left and heads down-country. Hopefully she'll be picking up India flight in about 5 minutes. "Hobos, resume base course, maintain 450, and descend to angels 20." Radar is now showing multiple friendlies in and around the Baghdad area.

03079 0110 Zulu



Lead contacts the Airborne Command and Control E-8C JStars, which is somewhere over northern Iraq: "Paladin Twelve, Hobo Lead. We are 15 minutes from the IP, what is our status, over?" "Hobo Lead, Paladin Twelve. All Alpha Foxtrot assets in your target area are in egress. The sky is clean and you are cleared in hot." "Roger, copy Twelve, cleared in hot." "Merlin Four, Hobo Lead. Sitrep, over." "Hobo Lead, Merlin Four. Tracking minimal radar signatures in the target area, over." "Copy Merlin Four." "Hobo Flight, we are cleared in



to target, weapons hot; arm at your discretion. On my mark execute 180 degree turn to port and establish attack formation; Lead out." Passing just to the east of Baghdad it is shocking to see the city fully illuminated. Where's the blacked-out country everyone was expecting? You yell into the cockpit: "What the hell is wrong with you people?"



Master Mode: "Air to Ground"

"Hobo Flight, standby" Excitement can breed its own brand of tension. You wonder how your father felt as he armed those early Sidewinders ready to engage MiG-17s. From out of nowhere: a flashback. One fine, hot summer day you were mowing the lawn, and never felt it land on your back. Suddenly it struck right between the shoulder blades; and you're quite sure no one



on the street ever heard anyone swear-up such a salty blue-streak like that before. But hey, that was something else you learned from your father. After some ice and a couple of antihistamines you walked back outside with your wife and across the street. There it was: halfway up the big tree, larger than a basketball; medium gray, and exquisitely beautiful in its symmetry. It felt really bad to have it removed, but a bald-faced hornets' nest isn't something to just leave there. You've been stung before: bees, wasps, yellow jackets; but the hornet's sting? That was a whole new level of pain. But he was only doing his job as a sentry, and the lawnmower pissed him off. They



say that sometimes what goes around comes around. Well, who's the hornet now; *bitch*.

Master Arm: "Arm."

"Hobo Flight, Lead. Tac Channel Nine, Lights out. Wait one." Killing the external lights and securing the IFF your stomach tightens into a knot. "Execute." Standing 404 on her left wing she's hauled around to the attack heading of 140. Pulling back on the throttles just a bit to get the correct separation from the formation Lead calls one last time: "Push to 570, maintain angels 20. Drop point four minutes." A quick glance around the cockpit: radar is picking up India flight as it streaks over open desert some 25km SE of Baghdad heading for the IP; and on time. But one other aircraft is also coming in on a convergent heading. "Hobo Flight, Paladin Twelve. Merlin Four is inbound to the target area, tracking from the northeast at 5000." Lead responds with a strident: "ROGER!" as you think: "What the fuck?"



Somewhere, down on the ground, the Iraqis aren't exactly napping anymore. During the Air Force strikes in and around the capital and at Doha Farms isolated desert radar sites and listening posts began streaming reports back to Baghdad, and the formation was picked up and tracked. Ahead over the city the sky comes alive while the ground sparkles with the muzzle flashes of triple-A, which seems to be everywhere. "Jesus! It looks like

Manhattan on New Years' Eve!" You remember hearing somewhere that *only one in five rounds is a tracer*; and imagine the air is screaming in agony as it's torn to shreds by tons on hot metal as you are heading straight for it. Less than a minute from the release point, and just over 22km from the airport, radar warning comes alive with the warbling tone of Fan Song scanning for a target. The RWR screen shows 404 clearly entering the kill zone. Mashing the pickle button and holding it down the MK 84s soon come off in their pre-designated order. Suddenly the strike net barks out "Magnum" as the Prowler, now only 15km east and below, fires a single HARM at his target. Half a minute later as you cross over Saddam International Airport and head over Baghdad proper the calm but tensed voice of your section leader says: "He has a lock on me." And then his voice pitches up: "SAM launch! SAM launch!" He lights his ABs and breaks right and down, releasing a stream of chaff as he does, and you copy his actions. A bright streak of light is quickly rising towards him and your only visual reference on your leader is his afterburners. Seconds later, and passing 12000ft, he suddenly cuts his burners, and violently breaks back to the left, releases more chaff and completes a snap-roll to the right. You break hard to the right on a slightly opposite course as the SA-2 passes between the two aircraft to detonate some 2000ft above and behind. Still in burners you level out at 8000ft, reverse course and tear across the sky towards Three, now climbing back in AB to altitude. Another voice comes alive with: "SAM launch, SAM launch. No tone." A second missile, now behind the flight, heads skyward. "Hobo Flight, threats eliminated. Merlin Four out." You don't recall hearing a second HARM called as you come out of burners, pull back the throttles and catch the



other section. "Hobo Flight, Lead. Lights up, form up; angels 20 at 450, heading 140. We are 10 minutes from Al Kut and our tanker Bluefin." His steady voice has a calming effect, but only slightly. "Switch to 263.3. Lead out." You had to really concentrate on the tanker. Some quick scribbles on the kneeboard for distance, speed and fuel flow left a requirement of roughly 6000lbs, and with that you should enter the break with 3100lbs left.

Sitrep: USS Abraham Lincoln CVN-72, Call Sign: "Union" Coordinates: 26.9.49 N 50.25.40 E Course: SSE Speed: 25kts Winds: ESE 7kts Sea State: Calm Conditions: Fair Sunrise: 0539 local (Doha, Qatar)

The sky in the east was flushed with red and gold as Lead reached out: "Hobo Flight, Feet Wet. No strike info." "Warhorse Two copies Hobo Flight, four aircraft feet wet, no strike info."



"Red Crown, Hobo Lead." "Hobo Lead, Red Crown" "Hobo Flight inbound to Union. Angels 20, fuel state 8.6." "Roger, Hobo Lead." 20 minutes later, and 50nm from "home" you were passed over to the ship. "Hobo Flight, Union. You are cleared for approach, switch to Approach Channel One." "Copy One, Union." "Hobo Flight, Approach Control. Descend to angels 10 at 25, Case 1, CV-1, altimeter 2979. Expected final is 110 degrees." More notes on the kneeboard. You had slammed your



visor down as the sun vaulted into the sky and now a few minutes later, flashing by the carrier hook down, 800ft above and slightly off the port beam, you prepare to enter the break. A quick glance at the fuel state: 3196.

Dropping the gear and setting flaps you begin the turn for the downwind leg, then complete the landing checklist and descend to 600ft; throttling back



to 80% to start the turn for final

approach. "Hobo 4, three-quarter mile, call the ball." "404, Hornet ball, 3.1." "Roger ball, Hornet. Winds are 15 slightly port." With one eye on the AOA Indexer, the other on the meat ball the LSO calls: "Power. You are right of center, slightly low." You adjust alignment but the green upper arrow on the indexer winks on and off:



"Power, on center." Advancing the throttles gets a steady doughnut on the Indexer, but once again his calm voice: "A little low, power." Just as she crosses the rounddown the green arrow comes



on steady. 404 slams down on the deck and you firewall the engines, but she snagged the cable and rapidly comes to a halt. Raising the hook when advised, and passed over to a director, you fold her wings, kill the lights and throttle up. Handed-off once across the foul line, and brought



near the number two elevator, where the plane captain is waiting, as directed you stand on the left brake until her nose is approximately forty-five degrees to left of the centerline, and the yellow-shirt gives you the "cut engines" sign. *Parking Brake: Set.* Two blue-shirts rush under 404 with chocks as the plane captain begins the task of chaining her to the deck. *INS: Post Flight Update. Standby Attitude: Cage Lock. Sensors, Radars, Comms: Off.* Entering several more notes on the kneeboard and taking a final look around the cockpit, the plane director is repeatedly giving you the "cut" sign; finally acknowledged with a hasty thumbs-up. *INS Knob***: Off. Brake Gauge: 3000psi. Nose Wheel Steering: Disengage. Flaps: Full. HUD: Off. Throttles: Off.* As the engines begin to wind down the yellow-shirt walks away with a look of disgust on his face, and you silently tell him to piss off. *Batt: Off.* 404 goes to sleep, and for her it is well



deserved. But your day isn't over yet.

Disconnecting the oxygen mask from one side and lifting the visor, its time for a few deep breathes and stare out to sea: your first combat mission. After a few minutes the canopy suddenly pops open and a voice asks: "Sir, are you alright?" For a few seconds you stare at him without any comprehension, suddenly blurting out: "What? Yeah! Yes. I'm fine." "Well, alright then! Let's get you out of here. She's scheduled to go out again tonight and day check will be up here shortly to start turning her around." "What, tonight?" "Yeah, somethin' big." Climbing down to the deck and taking off the helmet, it's then you notice how soaking wet you are from your head to the seat of your pants. The cool morning breeze sends a shiver down your neck and right away your body decides it's time to release some of the stress and tension it's been put under, pitching over with the dry heaves. The spasms pass not quite as quickly as they came on, and the plane captain is genuinely concerned: "L-T, would you like me to carry something for you?" "No, I'm okay. Besides, you have enough to do. But thanks." He nods his head and with a grin turns back to 404 to install wing locks and safety pins. After a few more moments you take the first hatch off the catwalk and head to maintenance. A familiar thought crosses your mind: "Why is it, every time you need to go somewhere, it's always on the other end of this damn boat?" Pulling a fresh MAF upon arrival and entering the Julian date, Buno 164642 and MODEX 404 you look at your watch: 0637. Slashing "NNG" in the description field and signing off you hand it to a kid you've never seen before. With a puzzled look on his face he asks: "Sir?" "No nose gear." Turning back out the hatch and down the passage you hear him ask the Chief: "Does he mean nose gear steering?" Grabbing the form the Chief looks up and says: "No, cherry; it means "No New Gripes." You have a lot to learn." The chief's laughter follows you on up the ladder as the arresting gear screams out that India flight is coming aboard.

Making the Ready Room there's time to grab a couple of waters and take a seat. By the time you drained both bottles the other pilots had entered, and debrief was underway when one of the LSOs arrived to hand out grades on the greenie board. Lead in 400 was in the green with an "okay." That figures, he was cool and unruffled the whole way. 407 took a wave-off then got a "fair-3." He turned to the pilot and asked what happened: "You started high?" "Yeah, I was all assholes and elbows coming on to final and



figured, better safe than stupid, so I elected the go-around." "Well, you weren't that high, but you might have done the right thing. Then it was your turn. "Yellow, fair-2; started right, low, slow." "Well?" "I'll buy that. She just felt heavy, like she wanted to sink on me." "Power is everything. If she feels heavy she's slow. Don't be hesitant on the throttles. Next time push it up." And so it went. After all the grades were logged and the LSO had left Lead said: "After chow and before you hit the rack I want each of you to come back in here for an hour or two and clean up the mess you call your inbox. By the way, in case you haven't heard, its official, we're at war with Iraq. There will be an "all-up" strike tonight, so try to get some rest." Fresh excitement filled the room, and as the pilots started back to the PR shack you let out an audible sigh as you stared at the stack of paperwork you needed to dive into. "Problems?" "No Sir." "Then get the fuck out of here." As you headed out the door he shouted: "Hey!" You turned around, and with a nod he says: "Good work.

Now go eat." Smiling you head out to the wardroom as the speakers call out: "All hands, secure from Flight Quarters. The smoking lamp is lit throughout the ship." Your only thought is: "Man, I hope there's cheeseburgers."

No luck, they were serving breakfast. Oh well. Somewhere around 0900, after finishing up most of the paperwork, you got back to your stateroom, stripped down, and grabbed your flip-flops and a towel. No one else was in the showers. "Fine, suits me." Getting wet and turning off the water you soaped up. The 1MC came alive: "All hands, now water hours. The heads are secured." Frantically you opened the valves. There was a hiss of pressure, a dribble of water, and then....nothing.

"SON of a BITCH!"

*UFC = Upfront Control **EMI/IFEI = Engine Monitor Indicator/Integrated Fuel/Engine Indicator

***INS = Inertial Navigation System



Editorial notes and personal insights on the narrative.

The call signs: I found out through several sources that squadrons do not always use their "official" call signs, and that did happen on several occasions on the run-up to, and during, *Operation Desert Storm* in 1990-1991. So it was a natural fit to use the original VT-17 call sign Hobo, and back it alphabetically with India for our fictional *Operation Iraqi Freedom* story. The tankers are all game fish, the support aircraft all from early medieval lore.

I was a Troubleshooter: Down means *Down*, and you *BETTER* be right about it! My last boat det in May-June of '78 was RefTra, Refresher Training, and besides all of the endlessly exhausting and innumerable drills there was some limited flying, it might have been for CQ. An A-7E Corsair II pulled on to the number one cat and I believe it was the XO CDR D.J. Wright, As he was prepping for launch he suddenly made a circular motion with his fist: AFCS. I climbed up the side and found his Yaw Stab would not stay engaged. It takes a lot of balls to down the XO on the cat but that was a NATOPS Safety of Flight issue, so we had the plane pulled off and eventually sent down to the hanger deck where I believe it remained for the rest of the det. He may have bumped another pilot and pulled a hot seat but I don't recall.

The baseball analogy: I started playing when I was 14 and I was an extremely competent catcher and hitter as a *park league* ball player. Between the Fall of '78 and Fall of '81 I was on 2 championship teams, won two batting titles and one MVP. In '85 I switched to softball and continued to play until I was 52, rarely missing a season. I had three simple rules: *Everything* in the game is about hand-eye coordination, it's better to make contact than whiff, it's always better to go down swinging than looking.

The hornet's sting: Yes, that happened, about 6 years ago, and it hurt like hell. But I came up with the title for the series when I did my original outlines 12 years ago. Thus: *Karma*.

Getting from one place to the next: Whoever assigns squadron spaces on the boat derives a very sadistic pleasure from it!

The MAF form: In April of '75 I was the FNG AEAN in the night check AE shop; having reported to the *Fist* scant days before. That conversation is verbatim. I'm not quite sure now but I think the pilot might have been Nick "Beef" Johnson.

Water Hours: I was caught during outchop on the '76 Westpac, somewhere around the International Dateline. A dry towel does not get everything off your body. So, if you haven't spent a day with in a fine soapy residue in certain places you don't understand what chafing is all about.