

# FIST OF THE FLEET SEA STORIES

Updated 02/22/2011



**Elaborating on the truth is like adding hot-sauce to Chili!**

## THE STOLEN TROPHY

By Scott Smith

VA-25 was the first SPAD squadron to leave Moffett Field for Lemoore. Before we left, some unnamed persons stole the Acey-Ducey trophy from VA-122. It was a nice trophy of polished mahogany, with a brass nameplate and a real-leather dice-cup.

Nobody had any doubt that VA-25 committed the deed. Doug Clarke and a couple of other ex-Fist pilots then assigned to VA-122 were naturally accused of complicity.

A few weeks later, VA-122 moved to Lemoore, and our skipper, CDR JOHN OVERN, agreed to return the trophy. We had a joint happy hour at the O'Club for the event. Our skipper got up and apologized on behalf of his command. His speech lasted for several minutes. Meanwhile, the trophy sat shrouded on the table.

Near the end of his speech he apologized again, this time for misplacing the original trophy. He explained how the squadron had gone to great lengths to find a suitable replacement. At this point, he lifted the shroud from the trophy.

The replacement trophy was a few pieces of bare 4"x4" crudely nailed together with an empty can of refried beans for a dice cup. The VA-122 pilots got a tad indignant and we nearly came to blows. Before anybody got hurt, our skipper brought in the real trophy and everybody had a good laugh.

Someone else must have taken the trophy because it was gone when I later reported to VA-122. That was too bad. I dearly loved to play Acey-Ducey and I'm sure I could have been the squadron champ.



## FIND THAT PICTURE

By Scott Smith

Nobody was happy about our move to NAS Lemoore. Since we were the first and, for a while, the only SPAD squadron there, we made a point of being obnoxious.

The original painting by R.G. Smith of an A-4 screaming across the desert hangs in the Lemoore O'Club. One dark and foggy night, after a mid-January happy hour, a couple of unnamed VA-25 junior officers stole the painting. They intended to take it to the hangar, drill a tiny hole in the A-4's nose, and mount a small propeller. Unfortunately, they were driving a sports car and carrying the painting on the roof. In the wind, the painting got away from them. The frame shattered but the painting itself was undamaged.

You might think that people would notice a car with a painting on the roof. However, you have to see the Lemoore fog to believe they might not.

It was seven miles between the Admin area of the base and the Operations section. We often drove to work in the morning with our heads out the window following the yellow line. If another car came the other way, we swerved to the right. Then, it was easy to get lost and drive off the road. Coming home in the afternoon, there might be two or three cars still in the ditch.

The squadron deployed to Fallon for 2-weeks of weapons training on that following Monday. While we were gone, the Base CO had every car leaving the base searched. This resulted in long lines at the gate every evening. It didn't take any brains to figure out who stole the painting, but nobody squealed. I guess everyone was waiting to see how we wiggled out of this one.

We left our spook (air intelligence officer), Denny Metzler behind to take care of mail and things. I also left him instructions to get a duplicate frame made while we were gone.

We returned to Lemoore two weeks later as if nothing had happened. Denny had a new frame and two very sober junior officers smuggled the painting back into the O'Club on the next foggy night. However, if you look real close, you might still see the pin-prick on the A-4 nose where the propeller was intended.



## **FIND THE KITTY HAWK**

By Scott Smith

I found a way to use my previous ECM experience from VC-33. Part of CVW-2 from Lemoore was sent to San Diego for an exercise while the USS Kitty Hawk steamed somewhere off the coast.

The routine was for the SPADs to launch each morning to search for the carrier. When and if, we found her we reported her position so the A-4 squadrons could attack. With the thick morning fog off San Diego, we might fly most of the day and not find her. Meanwhile, the A-4 pilots enjoyed the warming sun outside the hangar.

The Kitty Hawk maintained radio silence and turned off her TACAN. However, I knew that they knew only a bunch of ill-equipped SPADs were looking for them. Thus, they could use their radar without fear of giving away their position. At least they thought they could.

One of the air search radars installed on carriers in those days operated near 225 megahertz. This frequency was within the tuning range of our UHF communications equipment (ARC-27). After two hours of fruitless visual search on the first day, I signaled my wingman that I would be off frequency for a few minutes. I tuned to 225 MHz. There was the Buzz – Buzz – Buzz of the P-band radar. I took a few cuts with the UHF direction-finder to determine the ship's position. To make sure, we followed the signal to the carrier and transmitted her position. Then we returned to North Island to enjoy the afternoon sun.

The next day, the same thing, only this time I didn't waste time thinking about it. We found the carrier and were back at San Diego in just a couple of hours. The third day was essentially a repeat of the second day.

I never told anyone how I found the Kitty Hawk so easily. The exercise might have been rescheduled, but without the benefit of any radar signals. I didn't feel I was cheating. After all, Soviet aircraft had the necessary ECM gear to home on the radar.

I didn't want the other pilots in the squadron to know either because, sometimes, a little knowledge can be dangerous. Other ships carried the same radar, but it is hard to land on a cruiser.



## **THE SOFTBALL GAMES**

By Scott Smith

CDR JOHN OVERN was a fine skipper and really proud of his squadron. However, he did tend get us in over our heads. During one beer muster, he challenged one of the A-4 squadrons to a softball game. The only problem was nobody laid down any rules.

The following weekend, we played softball. It wasn't much fun. Each team had so many ringers playing that most of us just stood around and watched them play. Anyway, the A-4 squadron had more ringers than we did so they won.

After we paid for the beer, the skipper challenged them to a rematch, but this time with no ringers. Everyone on the team had to be on the existing squadron officer roster. They were getting used to drinking free beer and accepted.

A few minutes later, the skipper came over and put me in charge of training our guys for the following week's game. I played a few jungle-rule games against the enlisted men during the previous cruise, but we didn't really try to win. Other than that, I hadn't played softball since Pre-Flight.

Monday morning, I got all the officers together and we had a strategy session. We also marked off a ball field in the weeds north of our hangar, carefully positioned to keep our A-4 opponents from watching us. I told them we would practice every noon hour and after work. There were a few complaints, but everyone agreed it was only for a week and the squadron's honor was at stake.

The main problem was that we didn't have a pitcher. I decided to give it a try. After pitching a ball at a target on the cinder-block wall at my Capehart quarters for a few hours, I was getting pretty good.

Our daily practice sessions had given us just enough skill that we avoided the more serious mistakes. Anyway, we took the field the next Saturday with a little better idea how to play the game.

I didn't pitch a no-hitter, but it was close. The A-4 team didn't score a run. I even struck out all three batters in a couple of innings. We played a very safe game. Corral the ball and keep the runners from advancing around the bases. In short, we won and the beer was cold and free. It was the only softball game I ever pitched.



## **MIDWAY VS KITTY HAWK**

By Scott Smith

Occasionally, before Vietnam, two aircraft carriers got together for a major exercise. During one such period, the Admiral scheduled a couple days for competition between the two ships.

The Air Wings were about equal. *KITTY HAWK*, with four catapults, won the launching competition, but shorter deck *MIDWAY* won the recovery competition by a few seconds. Both events counted the number of aircraft launched or recovered in a given period.

Each of the attack squadrons competed in bombing and rockets against a sled towed behind *KITTY HAWK*. I suppose the fighter squadrons also had some form of competition, but I can't remember what it was. Anyway, each of the jet squadrons won one and lost one and the score was tied. It was now up to the SPAD squadrons.

The competition was for the best score by a division (four planes) dropping three bombs and firing three rockets. At that time, we were still using the WW-II HVAR rockets fired from the zero-length launchers on the wings. They had a very poor fire rate because time and salt air had corroded the electrical pigtails. This was a little hairy, because unfired rockets often came off their launchers during recover. Then they went skipping up the deck and, hopefully, over the side.

I figured we could get 100% firing only by loading each aircraft with six rockets. Sure enough, the Arabs flight (VA-115) had several misfires. Our guys got off three rockets from each plane.

We won the bombing competition by a few feet and won the rocket competition by default. My hedge against misfired rockets brought the trophy to *MIDWAY*. However, we might have won anyway! See the Admiral SNOW's message below:

"ANOTHER THRILLING CHAPTER IN TASK FORCE 77 SIDE BY SIDE OPS AND COMPETITION IS IN THE RECORD BOOK. COMPLETE RESULTS NOT YET RECEIVED. HOWEVER, ON STRENGTH OF BOMBING SCORES, AND AT RISK OF COMPLETELY WRECKING HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ME AND MY STAFF AND JACK GAMBRILLI AERIAL CIRCUS, THE FLORAL HORSEHOE MUST GO TO CHARLIE DEMMLERS ACES. WELL DONE. REQUEST CAPTAIN WRIGHT PROCURE AND PRESENT HORSESHOE AT APPROPRIATE CEREMONY. FIRST OPPORTUNITY SEND BILL TO ME, I HAVE AN IDEA WHO WILL PAY FOR IT. KITTY HAWK & CAW -11 ARE CONVINCED THAT MIDWAY AND CAW-2 ARE RESORTING TO ALL SORTS OF RIVALRY, SKULL DUGGERY, RULE STRETCHING, OUTRIGHT CHEATING, SHIFTY TACTICS, ETC. BUT ARE OTHERWISE ACTING LIKE GOOD SPORTS. FINAL COMPETITION RESULTS LATER. IN ALL SERIOUSNESS HATS OFF TO TWO GREAT SHIPS AND THEIR GREAT AIR WINGS. IT IS A UNIQUE HONOR AND TREMENDOUS PRIVILEGE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH YOU."

Merele Pinkipank, a friend from my previous tour aboard *USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN (CVS-39)*, was CO of VA-115. He was later CO of VA-122 while I was there. Pinky was really upset when he found out how we won the rocket completion, but he admitted there was nothing illegal. He was mostly unhappy that he hadn't thought of it himself.



## **BAGGING LANDINGS**

By Scott Smith

The *MIDWAY* had a bad accident rate, putting a lot of pressure on everyone and causing low morale within the Air Wing.

VA-25 also bailed out the Air Wing from their poor accident rate. A carrier accident rate is measured against the number of landings. Thus, you can have fewer accidents or more landings and get the same accident rate.

We did it the latter way by using the SPAD's unique capability. We could recover; raise the hook, and deck launch from the middle of the angled deck. The ship would launch aircraft, and then recovered the fighters (who were always *short* of fuel). Then the SPAD's ran the deck for ten minutes or so before recovering the rest of the jets. We always recovered last so this meant three and sometimes five landings on every flight. I bagged six landings on a couple of flights.

By doubling the number of landings, we cut the accident rate in half. We made the Air Wing look good and I made double centurion (200 landings) aboard *MIDWAY*. I had previously made 53 landings aboard the straight-deck *MIDWAY* during her 1952/53 deployment to the Mediterranean.



## **THE SKIPPER'S ACCIDENT**

By Scott Smith

One SPAD accident added to the ship's accident rate. The CO busted his tail-wheel during a night landing. I was the Safety Officer at the time and knew he wore glasses while flying and guessed it might be a contributing factor.

One day, we had launched just at sunset. The skipper got to the rendezvous circle first. I joined and moved into position on his right wing, but he hadn't seen me. When he turned in my direction, I saw his glasses for just an instant before he slammed down his tinted visor. It was too dark for the visor.

After his accident, I privately asked the skipper about his eyesight. He said there was no problem with his depth perception and I took his word for it. This was a critical issue because a CO could get relieved at the slightest hint of physical impairment.

We came up with a highly unlikely cause for the accident, but the chain-of-command accepted the reason. The real reason was probably a combination of things. A night landing with a maximum weight aircraft, compounded by an airframe that was a little tired (read getting old).

It all started with a pump failure in the ship's aviation gasoline system. Thus, we had to get our fuel ashore. The routine was to launch and fly directly to the nearest military base (NAS Cubi Point) and load up on fuel (including two 300-gallon external tanks). Then we flew a long training mission, before returning to the ship at maximum landing weight (full internal fuel).

We operated this way for a couple of weeks before the ship went into port and finally got the fuel pump repaired. The skipper's accident occurred in the middle of this operating period.

Afterwards, most of us decided to land with something less than maximum landing weight. After all, the weird explanation we gave for the skipper's accident would only sneak past the experts once and I was running out of imagination.



## **COLD BEER**

By Scott Smith

Six of us flew to NAS Cubi Point to make room on the flight deck for some sort of air defense exercise, and I was Officer in Charge (OinC). Since one bird was in check, we scheduled four-planes in the cool of the morning for a training flight, and then hit the beach in the afternoon.

However, by the time we got to the beach all the cold beer on the base was gone. The base was having maintenance problems with their ice machine. Anyway, there is almost nothing worse than warm beer on a hot muggy day.

My solution was to buy our supply of beer the day before. We loaded it into the back end (in the hell-hole) of the four scheduled airplanes. Then we flew well above the freezing level (about 15,000 feet or so) for most of the morning. We then made a rapid decent to landing. By the time we got back, the beer was really cold and everybody was happy.

I often wondered what an accident board would say if, in a wrecked plane, they found an unopened case of beer. I later learned that this was not a new procedure. Tommy Blackburn's VF-17 had used a similar method to cool beer while they operated in the South Pacific during WW-II.



## **MISSING A-3**

By Scott Smith

I was OinC of VA-25's detachment at NAS Cubi Point. Early in the morning of 13 December 1963, I got a call from Cubi operations. An A-3 Skywarrior from *MIDWAY* had disappeared from radar while making a GCA approach the previous night. They wanted my planes to search the nearby waters.

We knew most of the pilots from the A-3 squadron because we had adjoining ready rooms. We had ready room 5 on the starboard side under the flight deck. The A-3 squadron had ready room 6, on the port side. The pilot

of this aircraft, CDR CHARLES GUTHERIE, was the CO of the squadron. His crewmembers were Lt. Roy G. ENGLISH and ATCS Russell J. MARSHALL.

I briefed my pilots for the search. We would fly several miles north up the coast while searching along the beach. Then make a scouting line and search the offshore waters heading south. We completed the flight, but no luck.

Everyone was certain the plane had flown into Mount Silanguin, a small island off the entrance to Subic Bay. However, clouds enshrouded the mountain and had prevented a search. The next morning, I took off by myself and flew around the island. The course and altitude the A-3 must have been flying would put the plane about halfway up the south side of the mountain.

I started flying partly in the clouds on the south side and near the probable altitude. Each pass 'killed' some of the clouds. I made a half-dozen passes and the clouds were starting to breakup. As soon as the sun got through and heated the ground the breakup accelerated. Then, after nearly an hour, I spotted the wreckage between some breaks in the clouds.

On the next pass it became clear why other search aircraft had difficulty even without the clouds. The plane had hit the side of a cliff. The impact had caused a huge chunk of the cliff to cleave off and bury the wreckage. The A-3 was one of the largest (73.5' long and 72.5' wingspan) aircraft ever to operate from a carrier. Yet, only a small portion of the tail and a few feet of the wings extended beyond the rock.

I landed while the helicopter was getting ready for takeoff. I gave the crew the plane's exact location. We flew back to the ship the next day, so I never found out how or if they were able to reach the bodies trapped under that rock.

Besides three people in the A-3, the Air Wing lost four other fight crewmembers during that cruise. VA-25 had no losses. Yet, this was a peacetime cruise and combat in Vietnam was only a year away. VA-25 would be in the thick of it.



## **WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A WEATHER BALLOON**

By Scott Smith

During visits to Subic Bay, each squadron usually off-loaded a few planes. On one visit, VA-25 was scheduled to participate in an air defense exercise with the Philippine Air Force, along with a few of our own fighters. I was scheduled as flight leader.

I said, "Piece of cake, we'll go out to sea and hide in the waves coming back." However, the briefing officer nixed that idea. We had to stay above 10,000 feet. That meant we would be sitting ducks for anything they put in the air. I thought, "What the hell, these people are our friends, so why not give them a little fun."

I took my division south and out over the water for a couple hours before turning around. Instead of holding altitude, we climbed, shifted to high blower and climbed some more. Finally, at 33,000 feet, my division of SPADs staggered along at nearly full throttle (2600 RPM). The indicated airspeed read about 120 knots, but our true airspeed was nearly 250 knots (at that altitude and temperature). Not another airplane in sight for more than an hour as we droned along. I doubt any of the other pilots had been this high before and maybe they didn't know the SPAD could do it.

I could see Subic Bay in the distance when I also spotted a speck at about 7 o'clock in my rear-view mirror. The speck grew larger. Pretty soon one of the VF-21's F-4s came screaming past with flaps down and speed brakes out. There was no way they could slow down to match our speed (or lack thereof).

They had picked us up on radar, but at our speed and altitude, they thought we must be a weather balloon. How's that for camouflage!



## **INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH**

By Scott Smith

Just before the Vietnam War, VA-25 learned we would be giving our SPADs to the South Vietnamese at the end of the cruise. This required that each aircraft go through the Atsugi (Japan) Overhaul facility for some minor changes to the communications system.

Two by two, the planes cycled through Atsugi. I was scheduled to lead a section (two aircraft) to Atsugi, and then pick up two aircraft that had already completed the installation.

We launched from the ship in clear weather and flew for some time over water. We finally crossed the Japanese coastline about 80 miles south of Atsugi and promptly became engulfed in broken clouds. We were flying above all the local mountains, except Mount Fuji. About 50 miles out, I contacted Atsugi Approach Control. They located us on radar and cleared us to descend in preparation for landing. At about 8,000 feet, we broke out into a small hole in the clouds. I could see the ground straight down, but only clouds ahead.

I cannot explain what happened or why. Up to this point everything had gone like a textbook instrument approach. For some unexplained reason I got a very uncomfortable feeling. Sweaty palms, perspiration, and an upset stomach. I looked over at my wingman, JACK FELDHAUS, but he didn't seem bothered by anything. Anyway, I decided to make a descending 360° turn.

We completed the turn as we broke out below the clouds. There were still mountains between us and Atsugi. On our previous course, we might have collided with the mountains while still in the clouds.

I've always harbored a deep distrust for ground control instructions since a night flight from *MIDWAY* in 1953. The vector took me towards the Black Sea. I had flown outside of communications range before anyone in CIC noticed. My controller had gone out for coffee or something. His voice sounded a little panicky after I turned around and flew back into communications range.

Anyway, Jack and I zigged and zagged our way through a mountain pass and landed safely at Atsugi. We picked up the other two aircraft the next day and had an uneventful flight back to the ship.

Jack probably never realized how close we came to having permanent wings. It made very little difference to the aircraft. They were probably trashed by the South Vietnamese within a year. Jack did get a couple more years before he was killed 8 October 1966 while flying with VA-152 in Vietnam.



## **OUR SAFETY OFFICER**

By Scott Smith

I always thought a Safety Officer should be serious, sedate, and very careful about his actions in and out of the airplane. I also thought LT JOHN BULLARD exhibited those traits – at least until I saw the car he drove.

It was one of those tiny European cars. I don't remember the brand. Alongside a 1960 Cadillac, it made the Cadillac look like a Greyhound bus. I didn't notice his car until one afternoon after Happy Hour at the O'CLUB.

Typically, when we arrived at the O'CLUB, the long tables were set up in the ballroom. Later, as most officers had left for home, the few remaining drinkers moved into the bar while the staff folded up the long tables and prepared for the evening dining and dancing crowd.

Just as the last long tables disappeared, the double front doors opened and in drove John in his tiny car, through the hall and into the ballroom. Around and around he drove, until the air was thick with exhaust gases. One sniff and it was obvious John's car needed a ring-job.

Before anyone could call Security, John drove back through the hall, out the doors and was gone. The staff then brought in the small tables and set up for the evening festivities like nothing had happened.

Shortly, the Base Commanding Officer and his wife came in and settled in at a front row table. You could see him sniffing the air and looking at the tire tracks on the highly waxed floor, yet he didn't seem to make any connection.

This was the same Commanding Officer that installed a chain-link fence around the BOQ to keep the local ladies out.



## **AERIAL RESPOT**

By Scott Smith

During the early 1960s, before the Navy became involved in Vietnam, the biggest worry was the Soviet cruise missiles. These were air launched from long-range bombers, hence the development of the F-14 Tomcat and its Phoenix missile.

Considerable time was devoted to improving fighter intercepts of cruise missiles during those years. These tactics hinged on getting fighters airborne quickly, and that involved the aerial respot of SPADs to get more room on the flight deck.

The aerial respot was a morning launch of eight SPADs, each with 600-gallons of external fuel and a box-lunch. Our instructions were to stay at least 100-miles from the ship and come back for dinner. Meanwhile, the A-4s were launched to simulate a cruise missile while fighters were launched to intercept.

It is difficult to come up with meaningful training for eight aircraft flying for at-least eight hours, especially when the aircraft is loaded with fuel. Anyway, we tried. First we split into sections for a couple hours of simulated instruments. Then we joined into divisions for a couple hours of formation work. We took a break to eat our box lunch, then back to work.

In the afternoon, we joined the two divisions and dived on puffy clouds for a couple hours. Each time we flew through a cloud some moisture collected on the aircraft and the cloud got smaller. After three or four passes the cloud disappeared.

On one such at-sea period, the ship operated northwest of Subic Bay and our SPADs were operating even further west. In fact, some days you could imagine seeing the coast of China in the distance, more precisely the smog that hung over the coast of China.

On these flights, our last exercise of the day was to form a scouting line at 10,000-feet while heading west. Each aircraft flew about one thousand-yards from the adjacent planes. I figured we were on the extreme edge of the Chinese air-defense radar range. At that distance, a scouting line of eight SPADs would look more like a hundred aircraft.

After flying towards China for a few minutes, we would Split-S to the surface and head for home at low altitude. In doing so, we suddenly disappeared from Chinese radar contact.

On the third day of this routine, I was met by the Skipper while heading for the ready room. He said, "Whatever it is you're doing out there, STOP! We received a message directly from the State Department – the Chinese have launched fighters every afternoon and State is afraid the Chinese might make a preemptive strike."

The reason for a preemptive strike seemed a little extreme, but each day's scramble used a lot of fuel. If the Chinese got too low on fuel, they would have to strike before it was all gone. OK, so the next day we did our thing to the south.



## **FIND the MIDWAY**

By Scott Smith

It was November 11<sup>th</sup>, Veteran's day. We were undergoing an Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI) off Hawaii, prior to our 1963/64 deployment to WestPac. We were scheduled for an eight plane strike to the Big Island. Of course, for SPADs, that would take most of the day. We flew in sections, made our simulated nuclear strike on the lava fields on the eastern shore of the island and then had about an hour to kill. We used a lot of fuel climbing around the volcano before heading back to the ship.

One small little detail was overlooked. The ship's point of intended movement (PIM) was for the next jet recovery – not the SPAD's recovery scheduled late in the afternoon.

We went feet-wet and headed for the *MIDWAY* PIM. When we arrived there were no ships anywhere on the horizon. We found out later the wind had shifted after our launch and *MIDWAY* had been steaming away from that PIM in light winds for several hours. The one certainty about carrier aviation is the ship has to follow the wind, so we changed course based on the wave pattern and flew a loose scouting-line formation.

When we got to Bingo fuel there was still no TACAN signal or radio communications. We didn't expect to get TACAN because this was also an EMCON exercise (radio silence), but our plotting-board navigation should have brought us within sight of some ships.

I used hand signals to tell my wingman that I would be off on another channel for a while. I tried my little ECM trick to find the Midway's radar – no luck. I tuned to various *MIDWAY* frequencies – only silence. Finally, I tuned in the squadron common frequencies for each of the other squadrons. On my third try, I heard a couple of A-4 pilots in idle conversation – like they were over the ship waiting for recovery.

Not wanting to spook them about using the radio during EMCON, I just listened and took bearings. After 15-minutes or so my plotting board had a string of bearings that converged neatly at one position in the ocean, still nearly 150-miles away.

Switching back to 325.0 MHz, I called the Skipper and he turned the flight towards that position. On we droned until *MIDWAY* appeared on the horizon. Our fuel state was down to 600-lbs – enough for another hour or so, but with no place but *MIDWAY* to land after 8.6 hours. At least it wasn't yet dark.

After we landed, the Skipper was called to the Bridge. Later, I asked him what happened. He said, "The Captain was unhappy we were late for recovery, but I've been chewed out before." I wondered why the Captain thought the Air Plan was more important than getting the wrong PIM and nearly having eight SPADs about to become seaplanes.

Anyway, the squadron received an overall grade of 93.51 for the ORI, better than the ship and other squadrons. I don't know how missing that recovery affected our grade.



## **TROUBLE IN FALLON CITY**

By Scott Smith

During the squadron's first A-7 weapons deployment in November 1968, one of our enlisted men became interested in a young lady at one of the local gambling establishments. This is not unusual, except one of Fallon's finest thought he and this particular young lady were an item.

Our young sailor was having good time until the policeman came through the front door and headed for the pair with fire in his eyes. The young lady screamed and our sailor ran. Apparently, the glass door wasn't designed for the two track stars, one slim and fast and the other cubby and slow. It is uncertain which track star actually damaged the glass door.

Once outside, our young sailor took off cross-town, through the back yards, taking the fences like high hurdles. The upset policeman followed, but was not up to the hurdles. His uniform was torn. He was battered and bruised as he tripped on various objects in the darkened yards. Somehow, our young sailor made it back to the base – easily the winner.

The next morning was the squadron's last day at Fallon. We had one simulated Alpha strike to fly and then back to Lemoore for Thanksgiving. I learned of the previous evening's adventure at morning muster. It was hard to keep from laughing. Word was the battered police officer was coming out to the base to identify the culprit – what might have happened next is left to the imagination.

After a brief huddle with the Leading Chief, our young sailor was stuffed into a car that promptly departed for Lemoore. A few minutes later the policeman arrived and everyone forced a serious face as he marched up and down the ranks. Surprise, surprise, the culprit was not found. It would be several months before the squadron returned to Fallon. Maybe the scratches and bruises healed by then.



## **Hovering the SPAD**

By Scott Smith

It was winter and *MIDWAY* was operating west of Sasebo, Japan. It was a clear night and I was leading a flight of four trying to get some practical night training without many options. We practiced night rendezvous for a while, and then started climbing. While heading west at about 20,000 feet I noticed the DME (Distance Measuring Equipment) was slowing down. We climbed a little higher and the Distance Measuring Equipment (DME) stopped, which indicated the wind velocity at that altitude was equal to our speed relative to the ship. Normally, the changing distance on the DME indicated about 3-miles per minute with respect to the ship's movement.

I called attention to the DME to the rest of the flight, while continuing to hold a westerly heading, but with zero progress. Then we made a 180° turn and the distance started increasing rapidly. SPAD Drivers seldom saw the DME change that fast, although the SPAD could easily do 4-miles per minute if you didn't care about fuel consumption. We were making close to six miles per minute with no change in power. Then we made another 180° turn to the west and the DME stopped again. Finally, the CIC controller monitoring our flight asked what we were doing. I explained we had found the Jet Stream.

During WW-2, the B-29s bombing Japan often flew in or through the Jet Stream, which was poorly understood in those days. The winds blew them off-course, made their bombing accuracy much worse than usual, and finally forced them to switch to low altitude night bombing.

Later in the war, the Japanese launched hundreds of balloons into the Jet Stream in hopes their load of incendiary bombs would start forest fires on the West Coast of the United States. One landed in Oregon and managed to kill some school children on a picnic. To my knowledge, these were the only people in CONUS that were killed by the Japanese during the entire war.



## **PISTOL PRACTICE at FALLON**

By Scott Smith

Did you know every pilot at Lemoore is allowed 50-rounds of pistol ammunition every year? Probably not, since Lemoore didn't have a pistol range, the ammunition just kept piling up.

It all changed during the squadron's Fallon deployment in January 1963. Our skipper, John Overn, announced something different was planned for the weekend. Saturday morning, most of us piled into cars and headed out toward the B-17 target. We stopped at the Frenchman Flat Café for some essential refreshment and breakfast. The management eyed us cautiously since we were all armed and looked like we were intent on doing battle somewhere in the desert. An hour later we pulled into a little ghost-town, explored the buildings and tunnels, while practicing firing our .38 revolvers.

Fast-forward a couple years. Yours truly was the VA-122 Training Officer and also Officer-in-Charge of the weapons deployments. During the remainder of my tour with VA-122, I introduced John Overn's weekend adventure to any instructors or replacement pilots willing to squeeze into my International Travelall. To make things more interesting, we managed to relieve NAS Lemoore of a good chunk of their surplus .38 ball and tracer ammunition for each deployment.

Fast-forward to November 1968. Yours truly was the CO of VA-25 during the first weapons deployment in the A-7, and my last. This time some of the wives came along and we were all armed to the teeth. We stopped on an isolated section of road for some target practice.

As we clamored out of the car and lined up along the road, someone spotted a small rabbit and everybody started shooting. Before anyone could get proper lead on the target, the bunny hopped behind some sage-brush. We all blasted away at the bush until everyone was out of ammunition. As the echo of the last shot faded, the bunny hopped away unharmed. We got better as the day wore on.

[Back to Home Page](#)