

My Life Around Airplanes

by

Matthew A. Nelson

2003



1947 Stinson 108-1 Voyager, owned by Tom Jenkins and Matt Nelson

This story is dedicated to:

The crews of Apollo 1, Challenger STS-51L, and Columbia STS-107

The men and women who fly and have flown military missions, especially those whom gave the ultimate sacrifice in defending our liberty and freedoms,

The victims of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and those who died in Pennsylvania on that fateful day in September,

The bush and / or float plane pilots, the helicopter pilots, commercial airline pilots, and the private pilots, and anyone else who likes flying,

The memory of my sister Cathy and father John Nelson,
and Karoline's sister Marge,

My mother Margie, my sister Karen, my wife Karoline, my daughter Michelle, my daughter Cheri and her husband John Larson, and my new granddaughter, Camyrn Dawn Larson



"USA" formation, Randolph AFB, San Antonio, Texas

My Life Around Airplanes

by

Matthew A. Nelson

Written January - May, 2003



**Wright Flyer, copy of original First flight, and
in the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum**

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the first airplane flight by the Wright Brothers. Last year has been the Year of the Airplane for me. I piloted 105 hours in twenty-five separate aircraft, including the two WWII Stearman's as part of the nine taildraggers, eight float planes, and a variety of eight Cessna's that I flew, plus I bought a 1947 Stinson Voyager 108-1 (See front cover). I started off 2002 with 189.6 hours in my logbook. When my flying time totaled 285 hours on December 7th. I had flown one third of my total hours since I started flying in March, 1983. While much of this story will be dedicated to my flying adventures of this past year, I have also decided to write about the other airplanes that I have been associated with during my life, such as the Navy jet that I flew in when I was in the army, and the planes I came to know while at Edwards AFB, and some of the aircraft that I have seen while working for Lockheed Martin under contract to NASA. In some of my other stories I have written a few paragraphs about flying in one type of airplane or another. I am going to take the liberty of

including some of the flying stories in this particular story, even though previous readers will recognize that they have read these before. Some of the stories will be from the prospective of a passenger rather than as a pilot, as I have thousands of hours flying commercial (or so it seems).

I realize that a person with only 300-plus hours is considered a low-time pilot. There are military, airline, and bush pilots that accumulated more hours within one or two months of flying, and during their careers, have flown through adverse weather and over hazardous terrain hundreds of times, often under combat conditions. There is no way, nor is it my intent, to match my experiences with these people. I have taken the philosophy that at one time any person with 301 hours or more of flying passed through the 300-hour mark. It is just that my rate took longer than theirs.

When I write personal stories, it is with the idea of passing events of my life to my yet unborn grandchildren (although that is due to change in April when Cheri has her baby!). I would like my descendants to know more about this Matt Nelson guy than just some old man in a photograph. It is OK that my flight time is less than others. Flying is one of those many things I did during my life, to fill in the dashed line between "April 4, 1946 – 2???" that someday will appear on my gravestone.



World Trade Center (left), and Statue of Liberty, (on right, but dim)

We all remember the carnage and images of airplanes hijacked by terrorists flying into the World Trade Center Towers, and into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. That day, things changed forever in America, including aviation. For me to say that 2002 is the Year of the Airplane may seem strange after what occurred last year. But I refuse to let the terrorists stop me from flying. In fact, in retrospect, I have to wonder if the threat of the FAA shutting down general aviation actually spurred me on. I can't change the lack of flight hours in my logbook, but I can make those numbers climb. Now, I hope to fly as many airplanes and obtain possibly ten times my total flight time in the time I have left on Earth. Now, I am looking forward to flying in Africa, South America, Australia, and up to Alaska over the next several years.

Common to other kids of my day, my first flight was in a J-3 Cub. Mr. Jones, one of my teachers, took up students one at a time around the city of Casper, Wyoming. I was twelve years old. I knew then that someday I would learn to fly. While in high school, I joined the Civil Air Patrol with the hope of learning to fly. It did not happen then, but one summer I did go to Cheyenne with the CAP for a two-week camp, and we all traveled in a C-47. Enroute to Cheyenne, I was given the opportunity to sit in the left seat of the C-47. The pilot told me to keep this horizontal bar centered. Well, when the bar went down, I was told to pull back on the yoke, and when the bar was high, I was told to push the yoke forward. Simple enough. But the passengers in the back weren't too thrilled with the roller-coaster ride that I gave them, even though I didn't feel that sensation. On the return flight I had to sit in the back.

My first commercial flight was on Western or Frontier Airlines, on a round trip between Casper and Billings, Montana, once again, while I was in high school. Frontier flew the Convair 580's, and Western used DC-6 airplanes. By the time I enlisted in the army in February, 1965, I had several commercial flights under my belt. Just before I joined the army, I flew to Denver on a morning Western Airlines flight, had an interview at the recruiter's office, and was back in Casper for a 1 PM class at Casper College. It gave me bragging rights to my classmates.

The army had a way of letting me know I was not as sophisticated as I thought. I flew to Denver to enlist on February 16, 1965, rode a train to Kansas City, and was bussed to Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. There, the sergeants had methods of stripping me of all my dignity. They always asked someone else: "Shape up soldier; do you want to be like Nelson?" Finally, I graduated from Basic Training, and ended up at Tulsa airport on a Braniff Airlines flight on my way home to Casper, where I met Rev. George Gilmour and his wife Sarah. The Gilmours are long time friends from Casper, and my friend Roger and I had visited them the previous year when we drove a Volkswagen to New York, via Alabama. Twenty-five years later, I passed through Tulsa airport, and showed my daughters Michelle and Cheri a section of airport terminal where I saw the Gilmours. They still wonder how I can remember an airport terminal after twenty-five years but not remember everyday things. Just the power of aviation, I guess.

I spent the next couple of weeks in Casper, after which I left on a TWA wonderful flight from Denver to Boston, to attend an Army Security Agency school at Ft. Devens, which is about 40 miles from Boston. I think the TWA flight stopped in Chicago; it doesn't matter. What did matter is that there were about 50 new stewardesses on board heading to their assignments in Boston and New York. I was young, single, and in uniform, and they were young and single, and they smiled a lot, and I didn't leave with any names nor phone numbers, but that was OK, because at the time I had a girl friend in Casper. But it sure beat being on a flight filled with a bunch of bald-headed old guys!

Four months later, my mom and dad scraped together enough money to buy me a \$100 ticket home, so they could see me before I went to Turkey for almost a year. That is the only airline ticket my parent's bought me, and I am forever grateful for that one, because I didn't have enough money to go home on my own. What I remember most about that trip is that my sister Cathy was crying when I was at the Casper airport waiting to go back to Boston, and that was next to the last time that I saw her alive.

A couple of days after arriving back at Ft. Devens, on August 25, 1965, I boarded Pan Am Flight 1, a Boeing 707 jet that went from New York to New York on a round-the-world trip that left daily. One of my regrets in life is that I never had the opportunity to fly that complete route, but even so, I was on a flying carpet ride to places only imagined before: London, Paris, Rome, Istanbul, and Ankara, Turkey. I never left the airports, but it was still fun knowing I had landed in England, France, Italy, and Turkey. The flight to Ankara may have been on a Turkish Airlines plane, but I don't remember.





This photo and the six previous ones are of Sinop Turkey, about 1970, taken by Buck Buchanan

From Ankara, I flew to Sinop, on Turkey's northern Black Sea coast, in a twin-engine Beechcraft that was piloted by an army officer. The pilot buzzed the army buildings, letting everyone know that we had mail with us. One of my future plans is to write more details about army life and that year in Sinop, but at the rate I do things, that may not happen for many more years. There, I met lifelong friends like Jerry Capps and John Brandenburg. Sinop was considered an isolated duty station, so it was always a treat to leave. I managed two trips while there, once to Ankara on R & R, and the other to the Holy Lands with a tour arranged by the chapel people in Sinop. When I went to the Holy Lands, three or four of us hired a taxi for \$10 to go to Adana from Ankara, a distance of about 150 miles or so. At the time, the Air Force had a base at Adana. I was able to ride a C-130 for the first time, on a flight going to Beirut. Beirut had not been decimated by war then, and it was a very beautiful city, and it was enjoyable walking along the beaches lined with palm trees. British Eastern Airlines took me from Beirut to Damascus on a VC-10 jet, where I started the Holy Land tour.

One day in Sinop two US Navy jets flew low over the army base, heading to their home base at Adana (I think, but they may have been based at Rota, Spain). Somebody told me that army guys were flying in the back end of the jets, and that those guys had the same Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) that I had. That made my heart pound and gave me an inspiration to become a crewmember on one of those planes. It didn't happen right away, nor did it happen there, but eventually, before I left the army, I was a crewmember on an EA-3B, at Atsugi, Japan.

However, it took another couple of years before I started flying on the EA-3B. My next duty station after Sinop was in Chitose, Japan, which is located on the northern island of Hokkaido. I don't know the military designation, but the civilian version of the planes that flew from Tokyo (Tachikawa and Yakota AFB) to Chitose is the DC-4. I had several flights on these planes during the sixteen

months that I was stationed in Chitose. One trip was to Korea for four days. I wish I could find the photograph that I took on board that flight, because it was near sunset, and the red glow around the rear of the two starboard engines closely matched the color of the sunset. About a year into my tour at Chitose, two friends from Ft. Devens and Sinop knocked on my door one day. Jim Pierce and Carl Jarvis were in Chitose for training, but were stationed at the Atsugi Naval Air Station, as crewmembers on the EA-3B. They were assigned to the 1st Special Activities Detachment (SAD), attached to naval squadron VQ-1.

I found out what I needed to do to be assigned to the 1st SAD, put in an official transfer request, met all the required qualifications after a trip to Okinawa for a high-altitude chamber ride and ejection seat training conducted by the Air Force, and on January 7, 1968 departed Chitose for Atsugi. That began the best year of the four that I spent in the army.

But it wasn't all good. Shortly after joining the 1st SAD, the North Koreans captured the USS Pueblo. And my sister Cathy was killed as a result of a car wreck. Major Loe, the commanding officer of the 1st SAD, loaned me \$50.00 to help me go home on emergency leave, and Jim Pierce drove me to Tachikawa AFB for a flight home. As a side note, I had orders to report to McCord AFB, which is near Tacoma, for the return flight to Japan, a couple of weeks later. I was born in Tacoma, and my parents named me after Dr. Matthew Havalina, the physician that delivered me. On the way back to Japan I looked him up, and finally met the man whose name I carry. I like to say that I was named after the person who gave me my first spanking!



Matthew A. Nelson, crewmember on EA-3B, 1968

Within a few days of arriving back at Atsugi, I had the distinct pleasure and memory of going on my first flight of PR-9, the EA-3B, Navy Bureau number 146449. The Douglas Aircraft Company built this aircraft, and the Air Force equivalent was called the B-66. Normally, the plane was called an A-3, which was initially designed as a bomber, but the bomb bay was modified and an electronics compartment substituted in its place, hence, the first letter, "E". PR-9 had a crew of seven, which consisted of the Pilot, Navigator-Bombardier, a Navy enlisted man who was the plane captain, and four army guys who flew in the back manning the electronics equipment. One of these guys is Joe Hodder,

another friend of many, many years.



The EA-3B aircraft that I flew on with the 1st SAD, Navy Squadron VQ-1. Provided by Gil Boufford

Commander Scott Beat piloted the plane on my first flight. Near the end of our four-hour mission, CDR Beat called me to the cockpit and gave me a briefing. Then he performed a barrel roll over Mt. Fuji. He timed it so that I was standing upside down looking directly into the crater of Mt. Fuji. That was one of the best plane rides of my life! Thanks, Commander Beat.

Most of the time our missions were classified, but one Sunday CDR Beat told us to bring our cameras, as we were going to go to Hokkaido to find out the squawks of the plane, since it was due to go back to the States for scheduled maintenance. Somebody loaned me an 8 MM movie camera, and for part of the mission I was able to be in the Navigator's seat, which was actually a co-pilot's seat. Hokkaido is about an hour's flight from Atsugi, so we made it a fun day, at least from my standpoint. The U.S military has a camp near Lake Shikoshku, which we flew over. Our plane didn't have any markings except for the Stars and Bars. Some Air Force guy reported that a F-4 flew low over the lake, obviously a man whom did not know much about airplanes. After that, I asked CDR Beat if we could fly over the site that I used to work at in Chitose. He told me to spot it, which I finally did. While I was sitting in the right seat, we flew very low and fast over the site. Now, that jet plane had two J-57 engines on it, and we were probably thundering along at about 450 miles an hour. After the low pass, we went back to Atsugi.

My nickname is Butch, and that's what CDR Beat called me. The next day, he came up to me and said, quite unhappily I might add, "Butch, don't you ever ask me to fly over that place again!" Afterwards, I managed to find out bits and pieces. The Air Force reported seeing the F-4 at the lake; when we did our pass over the site, an army MP was going to shoot it down with his .45 pistol; he told a

sergeant who came running out of the building that an unidentified Russian MiG with no markings had flown over. I met one of the MP's I knew from Chitose a few weeks later, and he asked me if I had been on that flight. When I said yes, he told me that he had never done so much typing in all his life. Our site had a direct teletype link (this was 1968, remember) to a particular Department of Defense facility in Washington, D. C., and for three hours the wires burned with questions about the MiG. Finally, someone had the sense to ask the Japanese Self Defense Forces if they had any intrusions of their air space. They said the only aircraft flying at the time in question was the Navy A-3 from Atsugi. In 2001, CDR Beat was at the second reunion of the 1st SAD. I asked him what he had been told by the powers-to-be, and he said, "No comment". I wish he had not been chewed out, but I don't think there was a person at the reunion that would not fly with him in another A-3 or any other aircraft at a moment's notice. As far as I am concerned, CDR Scott Beat is one of the best aviators that the Navy ever produced.

There was another flight involving MiG's that wasn't near as funny. Once, we had a couple MiG's intercept and fly near us. CDR Beat told us not to even look at them, and not to wave or anything. Since we were unarmed, he asked, "What can I do, throw my cigar at them?" What made it a more tense situation for us is that on a previous mission, before I joined the 1st SAD, there was another intercept, and it was said that the Russian pilots were begging their ground control people for permission to shoot down our plane.

As previously mentioned, the mission was highly classified, which means that the Pentagon knew about Project Seabrine, the code name. The year before I joined the unit, the plane and aircrew deployed to Shemya, Alaska. As I understand it, the Air Force sent a C-141 to carry the maintenance vans and other associated equipment of the 1st SAD and personnel to Shemya. Almost all the 1st SAD personnel were qualified aircrew, used to wearing flight suits and survival vests and sometimes not being very comfortable. The Air Force loadmaster insisted that the 1st SAD gang would have to wait until a "Comfort Pallet" could be located so all the deploying personnel could have a kitchen and airline seats. Lt. Mercer, the navigator, used a phone to call somebody at Pacific Headquarters in Hawaii about the problem. Within a few minutes, a message came out of the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saying that all the men and equipment of the 1st SAD would be on the C-141, even if the Air Force had to dump the C-141 pilot!



VQ-1 C-121 "Willie Victor", of VQ-1. This may have been the plane that the North Koreans shot down, April, 1969. Photo taken off Navy website.

I was fortunate not to have gone to Viet Nam, while other men my age did go and over 50,000 came home in body bags. Their mothers did not want them going to war and my mother did not want me to go to war. But sometimes military men died without going to Viet Nam, as there were other places hostilities existed. As I mentioned earlier, the North Koreans captured the USS Pueblo in 1968. Then, in April, 1969, they shot down an EC-121 plane, killing all on board. That plane was in VQ-1, the same squadron that the 1st SAD was attached to. I knew some of those people – they lived in the same barracks that I did. Although I was discharged from the army in February, 1969, I stayed in Japan for a couple of months, and then worked my way back to the States on a cargo ship. The very first newspaper I saw after docking in San Francisco had headlines of the shooting down of the EC-121. On April 1, 2001, there were more headlines involving a VQ-1 aircraft: The Chinese rammed one of their fighters into an EP-3, causing severe damage to the EP-3, and death to the Chinese pilot.



VQ-2 photo of three EA-3B's and EP-3E, contributed by Sandie Bright

While I did not go to Viet Nam, I feel proud that I was able to serve my country as a member of the US Army Security Agency, and especially honored that I was chosen to fly with the 1st SAD, attached to Navy Squadron VQ-1. The details of our work are still classified as far as I am concerned, but I would like to include an e-mail from Bill Crane, another army person who flew with the 1st SAD:

"1 Nov 2002

Carolyn and I attended the A3D Skywarrior Association's reenactment of the 50th anniversary of the first flight of an A3D last weekend in Van Nuys, California. It was a very special occasion for me and the other 540 people who attended.

I wanted to report to you some comments made at the formal dinner by the guest speaker. The speaker was Rich Haver who is Special Asst. to the Sec. of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) for Intelligence. He was on a very tight schedule and arrived from Washington 10

minutes before his address and left to return to Washington 10 minutes after his address. He spoke for about 20-30 minutes about the importance and impact that the A3D Skywarrior and those who flew it have had on American history. At the end, the Skywarrior Association president, Mr. Al Rankin presented him with a beautiful model of an A3D Skywarrior. The model selected was one with the phased array antennas. Mr. Haver had been a VQ-1 pilot in the early 60's and recognized it for what it was.

In accepting the model, Mr. Haver commented that this was particularly representative of cooperation between the Army and the Navy. He then went of to tell the Navy about the Army's work and it's impact on national defense. He had been Navel attaché' to Germany and also was involved with disarmament negotiations with the Soviet Union. He said as a result of the Army's intelligence gathered by their VQ-1 and VQ-2 projects, he as a negotiator had more information on Russian ICBM capability than the Russian negotiators.

There were only three Army (men) present. Needless to say, we let them know that we were there with a loud yelp. It was the first time that anyone had formally recognized our work. By far, most of the Navy had no idea what we were doing. After the dinner, we were treated with real respect by all."

I ended my army career in Japan on February 15, 1969 with my honorable discharge papers signed by Major Loe. The reason I stayed in Japan after the army was to work my way to Australia on a ship. I ran out of money while waiting for a ship, even though I could have sailed from Yokohoma to Darwin on a commercial ship for \$275, and then I had the money to do so. But the cargo ships were heavily unionized, and it was difficult to find a job. So I traveled around Japan for a while, until my visa nearly expired. For some reason, I could not renew my visa unless I left the country and reapplied. The closest place to go was Okinawa (at the time it was still a U. S. Possession), but I was down to \$65.00. The army had agreed to give me transportation home for a year after my discharge, so on a Thursday I called up them up and had a flight booked for the States for the following Saturday. However, I had to clear Japanese immigration in Yokohoma. I took a train to Yokohoma, but it was on a holiday, and the office was closed. Somewhere along the way I had a U. S. Coast Guard waiver so I could work my way back to the States on a U. S. ship without normal seaman's papers. In Yokohoma, I walked past the office of the Waterman Steamship Company, home base San Francisco. On a whim, I went in and asked if they had any ships going back to the States. The man there told me the following Thursday the U. S. S. Fred Morris was sailing, and asked if I had any papers. I showed him the Coast Guard waiver, and was hired on the spot. So, I did something I seldom do: I cancelled my flight home. Eighteen days later, I sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge at midnight.

Three or four years ago, I was driving with Karoline through Corpus Christi and saw the aircraft carrier USS Lexington on display. There, on the flight deck, dwarfing other planes, sat an A-3 "Whale", old but proud, retired but not forgotten. This particular A-3 had been built as a tanker; while doing research for this story I came across a photo of this same plane in flight giving gas to a thirsty A-6 and an A-7. If the plane could talk of its youth, it would talk of cat shots and traps, and performing its duty of keeping other Navy planes in the air while they flew their own missions, all in the name of Freedom.



KA-3 tanker now on USS Lexington



"Last Hop", by same KA-3 on left, submitted by Joe Hawkins to A3 Skywarrior web page



VQ-1 Cat shot, submitted by Brian Cervenak to A3 Skywarrior web page



PR-10 refueling, photo taken from PR-9 by Bill Crane



Passing over the Golden Gate, by Harry Gann



VA-3B over Wash. D. C., submitted by Mike Glenn to A3 Skywarrior web page



VAQ-33 aircraft compliment by Tom Yount



VQ-2 landing on carrier, by Mike Sparks

NOTE: This page was written as a stand-alone story, over a year after the rest of the story had been written, but I figured that it belongs in this one, and this is a good place to insert it.

Tuesday, July 13, 2004

On Monday, July 12th, I flew to Baltimore on a Southwest Airlines flight to attend the dedication ceremony of an EA-3B Skywarrior aircraft at Ft. Meade. This dedication was held at the National Vigilance Park, in front of the National Security Agency, to honor the men and women who served in VQ-1 and VQ-2 for their special and unique roles and service to the NSA, and therefore, the United States of America, during the Cold War. The plane that I flew on when I was stationed with the VQ-1 Squadron at Atsugi, Japan had been issued Navy Bureau Number (BuNo) 146449 and was called "*PR-9*"; the one dedicated on this date of July 13th flew out of Rota Spain with the VQ-2 Squadron, and its BuNo is 146448. It was painted like BuNo 146450, a VQ-2 plane named "*Ranger 12*" lost in an accident on the USS Nimitz in 1987, killing all seven crewmembers on board. Families of the crewmembers of Ranger 12 were at the dedication.



EA-3B at the National Security Agency's National Vigilance Park in Ft. Meade, Maryland

My friend Hawks Abbott had called to tell me about the ceremony and something stirred within me that I knew I would be disappointed if I did not attend. As I heard the various speakers talk during the ceremony, I had a feeling of pride surge through me for being one of the people who served the good old USA flying as crewmembers on the A-3s. My contribution to end the Cold War may have been small, but I feel like I still made a difference. The year I spent with VQ-1 certainly made a difference in my life. In late June of this year, I was in California, where I visited CDR Scott Beat, who had been the first pilot I flew with on PR-9. He was working on a book about the Pueblo Incident in 1968. At Ft. Meade, I met two of the army people with whom I had served, Major (then Lt. Col. and now Mr.) E. C. Loe, and SFC Jack Clodfelter. All of these three people have been positive influences on my life. Thank you.

After the army, I started working near Elizabeth, Colorado as a roughneck on an oil-drilling rig. My work shift was from 3 to 11 PM. After about nine weeks

on the job, I went into Denver on a Friday night, spent all my money, and then realized I probably didn't have enough gas in the car to go back to Elizabeth. I had a checkbook, but no credit card. No gas station would accept the check from the Elizabeth bank. So finally, around 7 AM, I thought that I might be able to cash a check at Stapleton Airport. The desk clerk at Western Airlines told me that they would only take a check for flights. This was in the days before airline deregulation. There was a flight leaving to Casper within a few minutes, and the roundtrip fare was \$50.00. I bought a ticket with the return flight scheduled for 11:30 AM. The plane stopped in Cheyenne, so I stepped off for a few minutes and called Mom, and asked her to pick me up in Casper in about an hour. She was sort of surprised when I stepped off the plane, but took me downtown where I cashed a check. I went home for a couple hours of sleep, and then Mom took me back to the airport. Back in Denver, I immediately bought my car a liquid lunch, and drove directly out to the jobsite. That night, after just spending \$50.00 to cash a check, the driller called me aside and said he had to lay me off, since two of his friends from Texas were out of work, and they were more experienced than me.

For the next couple of years I didn't do much flying, except for a few domestic flights. For Thanksgiving of either 1969 or 1970, I flew to Miami to see my friend Dennis Mirabella, and was mildly disappointed that the plane was not hijacked to Cuba. Hijackings were occurring in those days, which led to the installation of metal detectors at all airports. I did not want to have the fear of being hijacked, and I very much detest the Communists, but I thought it would be kind of neat to land in Cuba for a couple of hours or days, just for the experience of going there. After all, it would have been a new country for me!

In the Fall of 1970 I was flunking another class in Casper College again, and the restlessness in my soul yearned to wander. One morning at 2 AM I asked myself what was I doing hanging around Casper, and told myself that it was time to start looking into going to Australia again. The next day I applied for a visa and new passport. On Christmas night, 1970, I met Karoline at KTWO-TV, the local TV station where I worked as a cameraman. We started dating in January, but I told her of my plans for Australia. That Spring, I dropped out of college, and worked at Hogadon, the Casper Mountain ski company, where I ran the tow rope on the bunny slope without knowing how to ski. Once, I met an older lady on the ski slopes who told me I ought to think about going to New Zealand as well as Australia. She wrote a letter to a friend in Palmerston North, NZ, asking him if he would give me a job.

In May, 1971, I flew to San Francisco to go to the New Zealand Consulate for an immigration visa. I wanted this type of visa so I could legally work. The day before I left, I received a letter saying that my application for employment was approved for a cement company in Palmerston North. The man at the Consulate asked me if I had a job in NZ, so I showed him the letter and he immediately stamped my passport with the visa. We talked awhile, and he said he had a brother who used to do communications work while he was in the New Zealand

Air Force.

Karoline didn't want me to go, but didn't want to be blamed for holding me back, either. With a heavy heart, I left her in July, departing the States from Los Angeles. I walked up to an UTA (French Airlines) counter and bought a one-way ticket to Auckland, NZ, for \$500 just prior to departure. The plane stopped in Pepetee, Tahiti, so I stopped there for a few days. One of my regrets is that I could have sailed as a crewmember on a small yacht to New Zealand, but decided not to, as I am prone to seasickness. (But then, that might have been a good decision!). On July 11th, I flew to New Zealand, where I traveled and lived for six months, working in a hotel bar and at a construction job in Auckland.

One day, I hitched a ride on a train maintenance car called a jigger, and was let out in the middle of the South Island. The next driver that picked me up talked very slow: "I have a brother in the United States." A minute later, he said, "He works in California". Another minute goes by, and he said that his brother worked in San Francisco. Then he told me his brother worked at the Consulate. After a while, he mentioned that he used to be in the New Zealand Air Force. Finally, he told me that he used to be in communications. It dawned on me that I had met his brother, and asked him if that was his brother's signature on my visa. Just another "small world" story.

Just prior to Christmas, I decided I wanted to marry Karoline. I had seen an advertisement on a bus from a company saying that jewelry did not have to be expensive to be beautiful. I stopped in, and had them make an engagement ring, with a small diamond in the middle of a rose. I mailed it on December 21st, and Karoline received it on Christmas Eve. At the time, she was in Nursing School. I wanted us to be married and live in Australia. Well, things didn't work out that way, but I sailed from New Zealand for Sydney on a cruise ship on New Year's Eve for 1972. Talk about a party! Karoline's birthday is in January, and I called her from Sydney. For the first time, we talked about marriage. That particular day was 65° F. in Sydney, and there was a cool wind on the beach. I told her that I was chilled, and she told me not to say how cold it was, since Casper had a temperature of -40° F. and the heat was off in her apartment. Then she started crying and asked me when I was coming home. It was time.

The next day I wrote a letter to the Casper credit union and borrowed enough money for a plane ticket home. My dad had to co-sign, so he knew I was coming, but didn't say anything to my mom. It took a couple of weeks for me to receive the check, so I traveled up to Brisbane. I finally left Australia on a 747 to Hawaii, with only 30 people on the entire flight. When I arrived in Casper, I called Mom from the airport, and she marveled how clear of a phone connection we had. Then I asked her if she had been able to start her car. When she said, "Yes", I asked her to come to the airport and pick me up. I think that she just about dropped the phone. She called Karoline at work, and said that I had sent a package, and she need help putting it into the car. So, I surprised them both. Mom drove me up to Casper College, where I registered for the Spring

Semester. Karoline and I married on July 31st of the same year.

Karoline's first plane ride was in the back seat of a Cessna 172. Our car was on the fritz, and she needed to go to Cheyenne to take her nursing test. So, I called up Duane, a man I worked with at KTWO-TV, and asked if he could fly us there. We paid \$7.00 an hour for gas, and the entire trip for Duane took three hours. I pointed out how close the trees were as we flew over Casper Mountain, and Karoline was very much aware how close the trees were. We paid \$8.00 an hour to ride snowmobiles on our first date. Before I left for New Zealand, Duane took me flying in a tandem two-seater that he owned, and kept in a barn away from the airport. I remember that we buzzed some antelope. He offered to sell me the plane (I forget the make) for \$1500. I could have bought it, but decided not to buy it since I didn't know how to fly at the time, and I needed the money to go to New Zealand and Australia. As I write this paragraph, I remember how hindsight is 20/20.

I graduated from Casper College with an Associate Degree in Electronics Engineering Technology in 1973, and took a job as an electronics technician with Kentron Hawaii at Edwards AFB, in Southern California. My daughter Michelle was about six weeks old when we moved to Lancaster. The Air Force Flight Test Center is located at Edwards AFB, and Kentron had a contract to track the planes during their flight tests. My job was to operate and maintain the antennas and telemetry receiving and processing equipment. Karoline, Michelle, and I lived at Lancaster and Palmdale from 1973 until 1976. During the three years that I was there, the McDonnell Douglas F-15, General Dynamics F-16, Rockwell B-1, and Fairchild Republic A-10 aircraft were undergoing their initial flight-testing. Now, Boeing has bought out McDonnell Douglas and Rockwell, and General Dynamics was acquired by Lockheed, prior to the latter's merger with Martin Marietta and name change to Lockheed Martin. Corporate Pac-Man!



**X-1, piloted by Gen. Chuck Yeager
USAF photo**



**Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis, and the X-1,
first aircraft to break the sound barrier.**

Edwards AFB has long been a center of aviation history. It is in the Mojave Desert, and the surrounding towns of Mojave, Lancaster, and Palmdale are located in what is called the Antelope Valley. At the Mojave airport, Burt and Dick Rutan built their Voyager II aircraft that Dick and Jeanna Yeager flew non-stop

around the world in 1986. General Chuck Yeager (no relation to Jeanna Yeager) broke the speed of sound in 1947, and during the 50's and 60's the X-15 was tested at Edwards. I remember seeing the X-15 on TV when I was in high school, and building models of the F100 series of planes as a kid. One of the X-15 pilots was Neil Armstrong, and we all know what he did to become famous. Major General Joe Engle, whom later commanded STS-2 and STS-51I space shuttle flights, was another of the X-15 pilots. I later met him when I was attached to the Naval Space Command in Houston.



NASA Dryden Flight Research Center Photo Collection
http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/gallery/photo/index.html
NASA Photo # 2002 Date 1967

F-100 series, early 1960's – USAF photo



NASA Dryden Flight Research Center Photo Collection
http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/gallery/photo/index.html
NASA Photo # 2008 1388 Date 1988 Photo by NASA photo

H-10 Lifting Body and X-15 – NASA photo



X-15 – NASA photo



NASA Dryden Flight Research Center Photo Collection
http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/gallery/photo/index.html
NASA Photo # 2007 000704 Date 20 Jan 1986 Photo by NASA photo

Voyager after non-stop round the world flight, 1988. NASA photo.



McDonnell Douglas F-15A, "Faye"
USAF Museum Photo Archives

F-15A. I tracked this actual plane via telemetry in mid-Seventies. USAF photo.



F-15s over pyramids. USAF photo.



F-15 over Denali. USAF photo



F-15 over St. Louis Arch. USAF photo

The Air Force Plant 42 lies about halfway between Palmdale and Lancaster. This is a huge complex, where several aircraft manufacturers have some of their facilities. At the time we were there, Lockheed was building the L-1011, Rockwell started making the B-1 and the space shuttle, and Northrop was there, but I don't remember what planes they were building at the time. However, later, they produced the B-2 in Palmdale, and Lockheed moved the Skunk Works there from Burbank. One of the most famous planes that the Skunk Works ever produced, the SR-71, could often be seen flying around the Antelope Valley. As far as I am concerned, this is one of the most beautiful aircraft ever built. In 1985, I was fortunate to go to Plant 42 to see the roll out of the space shuttle Atlantis. While riding on a bus within the facility, we passed by an old fuselage of an YF-12 or an SR-71 – it is hard to tell the difference. One lady told a story that her son's little league coach was a SR-71 pilot, and was late to practice one day. The other parents started giving him a bad time about being late, and he responded, "Give me a break – an hour ago I was over Kansas!"

Below – SR-71 and / or YF-12 photos, either by NASA or USAF



Another famous airplane that the Skunk Works produced is the U-2. This first became known to the public when the Russians shot down Francis Gary Powers on May 1, 1960. I never had anything to do with a U-2 or an SR-71, but I like the planes so much I just wanted to include photos of them in this story.



Photo Tony Landis, via David Allison

SR-71 and U-2, NASA photo



U-2 over Golden Gate Bridge. Either NASA or USAF photo.

The F-15 was already flying by the time I arrived at Edwards. I missed the first flight of the B-1A bomber because I had gone to Casper for Christmas, and it flew on Christmas Eve of 1974. The B-1 has a swept-wing design, as does the F-111. On the next page is a photo that shows the F-111 flying as chase aircraft for the B-1, and both planes have their wings swept forward.



B1-A, with F111 flying chase at Edwards AFB



Top to bottom: B-52, B-1, B-2 USAF photo



Top: A-10 and F-16; AF photo

Left: B-2 followed by two F-117s; USAF photo

I was operating a tracking antenna for the high speed taxi test of the F-16, prior to its first scheduled flight, and remember telling my supervisor, "He's going airborne", to which he replied, "You ain't wrong!" I had long thought the test pilot just wanted to have the first ride, so he went airborne, but it turns out that there was some kind of instability and the pilot saved the airplane by taking off. Many years later, in 1995, I saw this same aircraft (shown below) in a museum at Langley AFB in Virginia. I almost went to work for General Dynamics on the F-16 at Edwards.



YF-16, first F-16 built, and the one I tracked by telemetry at Edwards AFB; USAF photo



Left: F-15, P-51, and F-16. Right: F-16 over Monument Valley. USAF photos



F-15s, F-16, A-10 over German Castle. USAF photo

One of the interesting projects I worked on was called Compass Cope. This was a drone fly-off competition between Ryan Aircraft and Boeing. I think Boeing won, but the plane never went into production. It was built like a glider, or a U-2, and had a jet engine sitting on top of the fuselage. I supported Boeing for many months out on one of the dry lakebeds as a telemetry technician.



Boeing Compass Cope that I provided telemetry support at Edwards, AFB. USAF photo

For a few months I volunteered my time at Rosamond airport to learn about general aviation avionics, in exchange for some flight lessons. At least, that is what I thought. I helped install and remove radios, did some

troubleshooting, all for free. Sam, the owner of the avionics shop was an old man in partnership with the owner of the flight school. Sam had previously been an engineer on the XB-70 program of the Sixties. After about six months, I asked for some flight time, and received the run-around, so decided I had given enough hours. While working at the avionics shop I first heard about the legendary Pancho Barnes, when she died.



XB-70, probably taken at Edwards AFB in late 1960's. USAF photos

Every now and then, one wonders about the “What ifs”. At least I do. Once, I saw an ad for an avionics technician out at Mojave airport. I interviewed in an old dilapidated World War II hangar. The company was telling me that they expected to win an air force contract worth over a million dollars to modify Korean War vintage fighters, such as F-84's and F-86's, to drones. If they won the contract, they were going to build a new hangar, and have a special room for the avionics work. The person hired would be head of the shop. But the only piece of test equipment that I saw was a voltmeter, and it didn't give me a feeling of confidence. After I moved away, I saw a photo of their brand new hangar in Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine.

As mentioned earlier, Rockwell had started building the space shuttle. For two years I tried to hire on with them, and if the phone rang the day I moved away and somebody asked me to go to work on the shuttle I would have taken the job on the spot. During my last week in California, Rockwell rolled out the shuttle Enterprise. This vehicle never flew in space, but was used for drop tests off the 747 prior to transporting the space-qualified shuttles from Palmdale to Florida on the 747. What a glorious flying machine!

During the time we lived in Lancaster and Palmdale, we had a couple of interesting commercial flights. Karoline's sister Marge had never flown before, and she was coming for a visit. Her Western Airlines flight left from Salt Lake City, so Karoline and I decided that she and Michelle would fly to Salt Lake and meet Marge and then fly back to California with her. We found a cheap flight that left on a Saturday, and I drove them to Los Angeles airport. What I didn't tell Karoline is that I had also bought a ticket for myself. I picked up the boarding passes, kissed Karoline and Michelle goodbye, and then just before the plane left, wandered down to the empty seat in their row. Surprise! Surprise! The flight

attendant looked at us on the return flight, and said in astonishment, "You were just on the flight to Salt Lake!"

On another occasion, my cousin Jennifer and her husband Gary and their three young children visited us in late August. They left on a Friday morning to drive back to Casper through the Las Vegas desert area in 118° F. weather in a car without air conditioning. It just so happened that this was the beginning of Labor Day Weekend. I thought I had to work on Labor Day, and was surprised to find that I had the day off. So, on Friday evening, I told Karoline that if she didn't have to work, we could go to Casper for the weekend. We left the next day, enjoyed our impromptu visit, and headed for the Casper airport about noon on Labor Day. Jennifer lived near the airport road, so we thought we would pay her a visit. Not totally unexpected, she wasn't home. So I took out a bank deposit slip with our name and address on it, and wrote her a note, saying, "We would have visited you if you had been home", and put the time and date on the note. I think we were back in California by the time they arrived home. She was flabbergasted! Ah, the speed and wonder of modern airplanes!

In September, 1976, we decided to move back to Wyoming. I had a job offer to work as an avionics technician for Kings Avionics in Casper. At the time we were ready to leave California, and it seemed the right thing to do. The job only lasted for six months, and four days after Cheri was born, I was fired due to a personality conflict with Bob, one of the two owners. Karoline says it is because three weeks earlier I had told him that he had a big bugger hanging off his nose right after a customer left. And the word is fired. Not a lay off, not a reduction in force, etc. It was as if we were two guys in a western movie. He shot the words, "You're fired!" before I could spit out the words, "I quit!" Had that confrontation taken place in Tombstone, I would have been the one buried in Boot Hill. Not a pleasant day with a four-day old baby and neither Karoline nor myself working and I was scheduled for a hernia operation. But we made it. Cheri was born on a Tuesday, and on Wednesday and Thursday of the same week, Bob and I flew to Thermopolis to work on a DC-3 that had once belonged to Howard Hughes. It's strange, but I had never been able to go on an airplane ride during the previous six months. The firing came on Saturday, and I must admit, it caught me by surprise. Bob had been nice to me while we flew, and even let me take controls for a few minutes. Another thing I remember about the flight on Wednesday was that when Casper Tower gave us take-off clearance, they told us to watch for the antelope on the runway.

After working at a couple of jobs that didn't amount to much, I worked for General Electric in Casper for almost a year. I was hired to work on computer printers, but the facility mainly repaired large industrial motors and generators. Most of my work involved the tearing down and reassembly of these motors and generators. In January, 1978, I was told to work in a steam-cleaning booth. The work was hot and sweaty, and I didn't like it, so I complained. If I had kept my mouth shut, I would have only had to stay in the booth for one day, but the more I complained, the longer I had to stay. After a week of that, I knew it was time for

me to look for something else. I went down town to a store that sold national newspapers, to look for work in California. President Carter had just cancelled the B-1 program, and over 5000 people were laid off from Rockwell the preceding week. I had never once seriously thought about working in Texas, but I spotted a Houston Chronicle, and I wondered if anyone might be hiring for the Johnson Space Center. Lockheed Electronics Company had an ad for an electronics technician. It took a few months for everything to come together, but I hired on with Lockheed in May, 1978.

Sometime, I have to write another story about all my years working on the Space Shuttle and Space Station programs. I will leave the details for that story, but for now, I will just say that I work at the Electronic Systems Test Laboratory (ESTL). We test the communications systems for both the Shuttle and the Space Station. I started off as a technician, earned my Bachelor's degree, and then was promoted to a communications engineer. I was ESTL's area engineer for the Shuttle's Ku-Band radar and communications system for twelve years before I wintered-over in Antarctica in 1996, and after I came back to ESTL in 1997, I became the area engineer for the Space Station's antennas.

As I write these words, it is less than a month since the tragedy of the Columbia STS-107 shuttle flight. This was Columbia's 28th mission. The past few weeks at NASA sure have been sad. I did not know this particular crew of astronauts, but have met many of the others that have flown or are scheduled to fly. But I am familiar with the shuttle communications equipment that these guys used. Just days before the launch we were testing some of the Spacehab (science lab that was on board) communications equipment. A couple of days after the launch the people in the payload operations center were having some trouble receiving their data, and our lab was brought up to help troubleshoot. One of the men I work with is Jewish; his wife and one of his kids had flown to the Cape to watch the launch, guests of the Israeli astronaut. During the week before the accident, one of the kids of the same astronaut ate dinner in my friend's home. Bob Cabana, one of the astronaut chiefs, told a story about Rick Husband, the commander. Mr. Cabana said that prior to the launch, Mr. Husband gathered the crew together and said a prayer for the safety of the crew that had a mixture of Christians, Jewish, and Hindu religions. Mr. Cabana told a story that Mr. Husband was worried that he might have a problem landing the shuttle on the exact centerline of the landing strip in Florida before coming home. His wife said that he had made a perfect landing and had gone to the perfect home with his Lord. This crew had a lot of faith. In fact, one of the news reporters asked the NASA people the other day if was it usual for astronauts consisting of scientists and engineers to demonstrate a strong faith in God. My friend, Joe Tanner, who was scheduled to go up in May, once gave me a signed photograph taken during one of his previous missions, and wrote on it, "To God be the Glory." Another astronaut friend I have is Bill Readdy, who has been seen on TV often in the past few days, since he is now one of the top managers of the shuttle program. In response to an e-mail that I sent him, he responded, "Together we'll sort all this out and get back to flying safely again. We owe the Columbia crew and their

families that much.” President Bush came here for a memorial service. Since the accident, other people in our lab have been involved with analyzing the data, but I haven't had any involvement.



T-38s at beginning of Missing Man formation, Columbia STS-107 Memorial at JSC, photo by Sima Moramand



Memorial patch for Apollo 1, STS-51L, and STS-107

I have been fortunate to have witnessed 10 shuttle launches, including three Columbia flights. I saw the first launch of STS-1, and went to California and saw the Columbia land there 54 hours after the launch in April, 1981. I took my oldest daughter Michelle to the launch of STS-2 in November, 1981, when she was eight years old. I have missed seeing very few launches and landings on TV in the 22 years of the shuttle program. So, it was with great shock when I realized something bad had happened, 10 minutes before the Columbia was scheduled to land. My heart hurt all that day, just like it did when the Challenger exploded in 1986.

I have hope and faith in God that I will someday launch into space, on mission STS-144. Even though there are nay sayers out there, the manned space flight must continue after we find and fix the problem, and I have every intention of flying into space aboard a space shuttle.

Like I said, I saw Columbia's first two launches. Initially, it was scheduled to launch on April 10th for its maiden flight, but there was a computer glitch, and the flight was rescheduled to April 12, 1981, exactly 20 years to the day that the Russians launched the first person into space, Yuri Gagarin. Because of the two-day delay in the shuttle's launch, I ended up being stuck at Orlando's airport for over twelve hours, almost 25% of the entire flight of STS-1. I finally made it home at 2 AM, and boarded a flight to Los Angeles that left at 9 AM the same morning, from Houston's Intercontinental Airport, which is over an hour's drive from my home. Once in California, I rented a car and drove to Edwards AFB, where I stayed the night in the car. My car was parked in the second row behind the fence on the dry lakebed, and there were a line of dumpsters along the fence line. About 3 AM, I claimed my spot on top of a dumpster with my tripod. At that time, my tripod was the only one on any of the dumpsters; when I awoke again at 7 AM, every dumpster had tripods standing on their flat tops. Over a half million

people at Edwards heard the double sonic booms that Columbia made shortly before it landed. This was the first of many glorious missions performed by five space shuttles in twenty-two years.



Launch of STS-1, photo by Rachael Cash



Landing of STS-1 at Edwards AFB



Columbia on top of the 747, at Ellington AFB



Endeavour on 747, passing by B-17 at Ellington AFB

The photo of the Columbia atop the 747 was taken at Ellington AFB, located about five miles from the Johnson Space Center. In years past, the 747 has landed at Ellington, and I think each of the shuttles have been aboard at one time or another. The Confederate Air Force also keeps a B-17 at Ellington. Once, I was able to photograph the shuttle / 747 taxiing past the B-17. Unfortunately, the tail of the B-17 was cut off in the photo. The reason I took the photo was to give it to a man who was retiring. He flew B-17's in World War II, and ended his career on the shuttle program. I symbolically caught the beginning and ending of his career in one photo.



Shuttle and 747 in flight at Ellington, AFB



Right: Me and Dana Van Burgh Jr., my 9th grade science teacher, holding Wyoming flag at launch of STS-66, Joe Tanner's first flight



My friend Ron Caswell, in front of STS-74



Launch of STS-51, with Bill Readdy on-board

NASA's Earth Resources people fly a RB-57 out of Ellington, and the "NASA Air Force" also keeps the Guppy at Ellington. The Guppy has been used to haul large space station components to the Kennedy Space Center. NASA keeps the T-38s used by the astronauts at Ellington, and the KC-135 that is used to conduct Zero-G training for the astronauts and scientists. Some of the shuttle's communication systems have been flown on the KC-135. This equipment is just like some that ESTL has, but it is operated by personnel from the Goddard Spaceflight Center in Greenbelt, Md. In the early 1980's ESTL had a chance to provide the personnel for this equipment, but NASA politics gave it to Goddard. I would have been on that project given half a chance, because the KC-135 traveled to several parts of the world checking out the old NASA tracking stations. Once, the plane was going to Africa. I convinced my local NASA management to send me at my own expense, because they didn't have enough money in their budget. One of the guys said, "If I know Matthew, he will sleep on board the plane." The aircraft operations manager wouldn't allow it. He said if it was important enough for me to go, it was important enough for me to be on official travel orders. Another time, another guy and I wrote a proposal for NASA's Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) program to multiplex the data that the different KC-135 principal investigators acquire. We were then going to transmit this data to a mobile tracking station that we were going to build. We didn't win an SBIR award, but Honeywell personnel who work in the ESTL are now performing this work. Two or three years ago, NASA retired this particular KC-135 and mounted it near the Ellington front gate, after acquiring another one.



Guppy, RB-57, and KC-135 at Ellington Field



Guppy at Ellington Field



RB-57s in formation. NASA Photo



KC135 at Ellington Field

For the past fifteen years or so, the Confederate Air Force has put on an annual air show at Ellington. Sometimes the Navy Blue Angels or the Air Force Thunderbirds have performed after the main part of the show, the re-enactment of the aerial battles of World War II. Planes from all over the country participate in the show. Among the many planes flown for these air shows have been Japanese Zeros, German Messerschimits, B-17s, B-24s, B-25s, one B-29, and F4U Corsairs. J. P. Rivers, my friend and former co-worker, flew in a TBM Avenger, similar to the one former President Bush also flew. Another friend, Jack Rivers, no relation to the other guy, flew as a radioman on B-24s, and then after the war, flew on at least one B-36. Jack had also trained at the Casper airport during the early years of the war, and was probably there about the time that my dad was working construction there, and met my mother. I met both the Rivers "boys" at ESTL. We used to joke and say that Jack worked as the radioman at Kitty Hawk! Jack flew on the B-24D, called "Battle Weary", and was in the B-36 when it landed in the snow in England in 1952.



B-24 Liberator that Jack Rivers flew in during WWII



TBM Avenger, like J. P. Rivers flew in WWII

I am almost 57; it is hard to believe that an entire war was fought with these planes before I was even born. More planes of this era may be seen at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston. While I often wish I lived in Wyoming, I couldn't have seen so many different types of planes as I have in the Houston / Galveston area.



B-17 at Ellington Field



Photo courtesy of Alan Tamm, U.S.
PLANE LADIES OF PLANE

B-36 that landed in snow in England. Jack Rivers was on the plane at the time.



B-17 flying at Ellington Field



B-24 flying at Ellington Field



B-25



B-29



P-40



F4U Corsair



Upper: P-38 flying at Ellington Field
Right: 1st Lt. Dick Mischke standing next to the San Antonio Rose, the P-38 that he flew at Bougainville, The Solomon Islands, in 1944



Capt. Dick Mischke standing next to the Republic F-84 Thunderbolt that he flew in 1951 during the Korean War at K-2 Airstrip, Taguis Korea

Had I not moved to Houston, I probably would not have met Colonel Dick Mischke, who retired as a Colonel from the US Air Force. He began his career

flying Stearmans in San Antonio, then flew P-38s in World War II, F-84s during the Korean War, and F-4s during the Viet Nam War. He, Jack Rivers, and J. P. Rivers are some of those thousands of men that dedicated their lives for the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. Thank you.



Captain Dick Mischke exams the battle damage on his F-84 at K-2 Airstrip in Taguis Korea sustained in 1951 during the Korean War.

My job at NASA has provided me opportunities to ride in civilian air cargo DC-8s three times. I have acted as a courier to the shuttles' Ku-Band antenna when it has gone out for repair. Twice, I flew with Emery Air Freight to Los Angeles, and once I went to Orlando on Burlington Air Freight. Each time, I rode on the jump seat in the cockpit. The planes left Houston about 10 PM, and we flew to the hubs of Burlington and Emery in two different cities in Ohio. The first time I went to Dayton, watched the transfer of the antenna to another plane, and then accompanied it to Los Angeles. Airline pilots see the runways at LAX from the air all the time, but it was still a thrill for me to see it from their vantage point. When I landed in Dayton, I accomplished my goal of visiting all fifty states. The pilot told me that his most interesting cargo was transporting Shammu, the Killer Whale, to the Sea World facility in San Antonio (I think). A special tank had to be constructed for the whale. I had never given a thought how whales ended up miles from an ocean. It seems to me that a whale could drastically alter the center of gravity of an airplane if it moved much during the flight.

It has been almost twenty-five years since I first came to Lockheed and NASA. During these years, my airplane flying, riding, and watching activities have been varied, and often, occurring in the same timeframe. Besides doing my normal job and being married and raising a family, I found opportunities to learn to fly, work in Antarctica, spend time in the Naval Reserves, go to college, have my own satellite TV business for a few years, and visit other continents, countries, and states. Airplanes are meant for travel, and travel is what I do, at the government's expense when possible, and at my own when not. I have found

cheap flights to Alaska, Australia, Costa Rica, and London, accepted airline bumps whenever possible, and used the next ticket to Kotzebue, Alaska and other off the wall places, and have taken advantage of frequent flyer miles to Japan, Peru, and Chile.

Often, commercial airlines have taken me to exotic places around the world. Japan Airlines has flown me to Sapporo for the magical ice festival; I flew on UTV Airlines to Tahiti and New Zealand in 1971; in 1984, Quantas Airlines introduced a new route to Carnes, Australia with a fare of \$500 – on that trip I saw Ayers Rock and visited Tasmania, then ran out of money and left Australia with a total of 47 Australian cents in my pocket. Had it not been for airline food, it would have been a hungry 36 hours of flight time from Melbourne to Houston. Speaking of airline food, the old Frontier Airlines once gave me a meal of steak, ice cream, and wine in coach class. In 1986, I flew to London on a \$198 round trip fare from Houston, and spent several days in Scotland and on the Continent. My daughter Cheri was nine years old, and wanted some wooden shoes, so I found some in Amsterdam for her. It was on that trip that I signed up for Continental frequent flyer miles, but my first frequent flyer miles were on Western Airlines on a trip to Alaska in 1983. In 1999, I redeemed those miles on Delta, on another trip to Alaska.

In 1996, when I Wintered-over in Antarctica, I left the United States for New Zealand on United Airlines, and then after I left the ice, traveled to Thailand on Air New Zealand, Druk Airlines to Bhutan and Nepal and India, British Air to London and on back home to Houston. Over the years, many fine airlines have bit the dust, such as Pan Am, Eastern, TWA, and Braniff, as well as Texas Airlines that Continental gobbled up.

There was the impromptu Continental flight in 1988 when I went to Houston Airport to pick up Karoline's car and ended up in Mexico City, and came home via Dallas on American Airlines, and thought the Customs people were going to arrest me for drug smuggling, even though I had no drugs, not then, not ever. Another time, I went to the Southwest ticket counter in Houston to buy tickets for another Texas city, and found myself in Chicago, because I decided to go see my sister Karen. Sort of got in trouble with Karoline then!

In 1998, I spent July 4th at Macho Piccho in Peru. I flew on a free ticket with United to Lima, and then flew to the town near Macho Piccho from Cusco on a Russian helicopter. Other commercial Helo rides that I have taken have been near Disney Land, over Alcatraz, the Kennedy Space Center to see a shuttle on the pad, Denali in Alaska, and across the Grand Canyon.

Some of my travel stories to Antarctica, Russia, Japan, Bhutan, Mexico and Mongolia have already been written; more stories about trips to other places are waiting to be told. As I mentioned at the beginning, I am going to include excerpts of my stories that are relevant to airplanes:



Ayers Rock, Australia



Camel Races at Alice Springs, Australia



Tahitian lady



Snow sculpture in Sapporo, Japan



Milford Sound, New Zealand



Japan's Mt. Fuji



Rainbow in Mongolia



Russian Helicopter in Peru



Machu Picchu in Peru