Excerpts from the Memoirs of Charlie J. Clarkson, Jr.

Account of flight training in Oklahoma and the GI Bill

Finally, on the 11th of January 1945, I reported to the Naval Auxiliary Airfield at Norman, Oklahoma. This station was clearly the most fun of all. It was here that I was introduced to the N2S Stearman, a yellow biplane with fore and aft open cockpits. Every aspect of this plane was fun, the sounds of the wind through the steel struts between the wings, the hum of the engine, the sensitivity of the control surfaces in response to the touch and especially the take offs and landings. My instructor was Lt. Ketcham. For the next four months he taught me how to strap the Stearman to me and fly it. We did slow rolls, snap rolls, inside loops, outside loops, stalls and normal spins and inverted spins; any and all types of aerobatics one can imagine. It was especially fun to test your skill at shooting "S" turns to a circle. In this landing technique you would approach the landing field and whenever you or your instructor were ready reduce the throttle to idle. From that point you glided in a "S" pattern approach to the field, descending all the time and causing the airplane to either skid or slip, or both, so as to lose altitude and airspeed and landing in a three point attitude on a pre designated spot. Then on the other hand perhaps the aerobatics were more fun . . . really, it was all fun!

There were five different stages in this training phase including formation flying, aerobatics, navigation tips and cross-country trips. There was no gunnery or night flying or serious instrument work. Of course we learned the basic flight instruments and how to interpret them and control the aircraft in instrument weather, with needle, ball and airspeed, if needed. For cross-country they could even put a canopy over the two cockpits which made the trip a little quieter and somewhat warmer in the winter. Communication between the two cockpits was usually a one way 'gosport' which provided an air tube for the instructor to the student. There was no need for the student to respond orally since he was always in the front seat and head nods could easily be seen. My total flight time in the Stearman over the four months there was 100.4 hours, 45.8 dual and 54.6 solo,

After this phase of training the cadets were separated into two distinct groups, one was assigned to multi engine training, such as long-range patrol planes, and the other assigned to advanced fighter training, which meant carrier aviation. So, in mid May 1945, I was sent to NAS Corpus Christi again, only this time I was an Aviation Cadet instead of a Seaman pulling Tarmac duty. There I learned to fly the SNJ, a more advanced airplane. It had a constant speed propeller and retractable landing gear, and was an excellent trainer for all types of flying including formation, aerobatics, instruments, and live gunnery. This phase was not quite as exciting or fun; it was more serious and technical. Here I logged a little over another 150 hours of flight time. As fate would have it though the world was approaching peace with the surrender of the Japanese and subsequently the Germans, and decisions were being made to back out of our military posture. About the same time I was transferred to NAAS Kingsville, in Kingsville, Texas, for more advanced flight training the training effort was completely halted and students were put on hold. After a couple weeks I was informed I could either stay in the Navy to get my wings and serve two more years, or, I could get out now and go back to civilian life. After much thought I decided to get out and go back to Kansas City and complete my college education. So, on October 5, 1945, after two years of Navy life I was released into the Inactive Navy Reserve and sent home. That left me available to the Navy if needed but with no active requirements on my part.

While I had never fired a shot in anger I was now a veteran of WW11 and was eligible for the GI Bill.

Account of flight training incident while training students

I vividly remember an incident that occurred to me that really ticked me off, that involved an Instrument Flight check for a student. Such a flight involved a very careful briefing as to where we were going and details of the entire flight. The student is in the back seat and as soon as we leave the flight line he pulls a hood over the entire back seat glass, so he cannot see outside. I would taxi the plane to the runway while reading to him a simulated flight clearance as if it had come through Flight Departure Control. When he read the flight plan back accurately I would take the runway position, run the power up to 98% and ask him to overpower my brake control. I then would verbally yield control of the plane to

him and sit back and monitor. While using his gyro compass only for direction control he would take off. When airborne and climbing he retracts the landing gear, raises the flaps and continues on his flight plan as if he was solo and in the soup. All along the route he made his position reports to me and responded to any deviations I (as radar control) would direct. Eventually he would arrive at his destination, make a jet penetration from over 20,000 feet down to the standard approach procedure and enter the GCA (ground controlled approach) pattern. The flight would be over at a simulated minimum ceiling of 100 feet, where I would take over and land. We would then retire to the ready room where the flight would be discussed in detail and in writing. At that point he would be informed of whether or not he has passed the test.

The part that really ticked me occurred about halfway through the flight. We were flying over Brownsville, TX, when I noticed a Horned Toad in my cockpit, bloated all out of shape from the reduced pressure to the point his feet would not touch the aluminum deck. I was furious as to why some lineman would do this to an animal and made my emotions known (in spades) when we were back. After the flight debriefing I returned to the line and found the Toad was gone. Obviously someone had caught it and had released it back into the wild. I never found out who was behind it.

Account of being shot down in Korea while on flight mission 1953

On April 21, 1953, our flight (of four) was assigned an armed reconnaissance flight on one of the known and more infamous transportation routes in North Korea; roadways through the mountains on which troops and materials were sporadically moved. Our normal formation and search technique was to have the lead plane fly low (around 500 ft if the terrain allowed) in a weaving pattern from side to side across the route. The second plane would be a little higher and weaving out of phase so he could observe the lead plane at all times. Third and fourth planes would be still higher (about 2,000 feet above terrain) and trailing about ½ mile. All four planes would constantly weave across the route while keeping an eye out for those in front, on the look out primarily for ground to air fire directed toward any of them. We were armed with six 100-pound fragmentation bombs with nose and tail fuses each, plus our standard 20-mm

cannon ammo. The first part of the search was quiet but circumstances changed as we came around a sharp bend in the route where the terrain was a little less precipitous. From my position as number three I could see flashes of enemy fire from under the cover of a small group of trees, off to one side. I confirmed later that nobody else saw them at that time. I immediately announced my intent and turned into the threat, diving in a strafing run. I could see the 20-mm shells detonating around the area and just as I was starting to pull out of the run my plane was hit with something heavy. The windscreen shattered, I felt the rapid pressure change in the cockpit, and while the plane responded to the flight controls to pull up I knew I had been hit. As my nose pointed above the horizon I took a rapid inventory of the damage. I was bleeding a little from some facial wounds caused by windshield shards, my flight instruments were all screwy, the nose section in from of the windscreen was gone including the battery, and about three feet of my right wing tip including the tip tank was gone. About that time I noticed Bob Chaney moving into position on my right wing. Through hand signals he informed me I was losing fuel and signaled me to punch out. I let him know I wanted to get to the water if possible, and noticed the safety wires on my six bombs were gone. I could see the bombs but had no way of knowing if they were in fact armed, or not. The other two pilots headed for the ship while Bob and I headed for the Wonsan Bay. In the bay, a few miles offshore from Wonsan, North Korea, a small hospital ship with a helicopter aboard was anchored for just such emergencies. As soon as we reached the Bay I attempted to punch out, but the pre-ejection mechanism was broken and would not respond. It finally occurred to me that I had a serious problem. I could bail out except for the fact the airplane would not trim for anything close to level flight. Since so much of the wingtip was gone and with no hydraulic aileron boost I couldn't hold the plane level with just one hand. I feared the aerodynamics of the situation would cause the plane to twist around the longitudinal axis, and if I bailed out the tail section could hit me as it turned. Bottom line, even though I was uncertain if the bombs were or were not armed, they most likely were not, so I decided to land wheels up in the water. I signaled my intentions to Bob and he relayed them to two search and rescue helicopters already airborne. Having made my decision I unfastened my safety harnesses and slipped out of my parachute, reattached the safety harness, and started a right hand spiral designed to set up a landing into a light breeze, fairly near the hospital ship.

As I descended I reduced the airspeed to test for signs of a stall and found it started to fall off at about 200 mph, primarily because of the loss of so much of the wing. I had no battery power or hydraulic power so I could not lower the landing flaps to further reduce landing airspeed. I decided to lower the arresting hook to let it drag in the water to work in conjunction with the air cushion effect of the wings as we neared the water surface to reduce airspeed as much as possible before touchdown. With the power still at about 85% I touched down at about 185 mph throwing up a rooster tail spray for about a mile (I was told later) while I held the plane out of the water as the hook tried to drag it in. When the plane finally stopped it tilted up on it's nose to almost vertical and immediately sank. I released my safety harness and since the parachute was already off stepped from the seat to the windscreen frame and right into the water. It was very cold, but I had earlier decided to not wear the cumbersome exposure suit. I was in the water only about two minutes when a helicopter was over me and dropping its rescue harness for me to put over my shoulders. Within seconds I was in the helicopter and a few minutes later was aboard the hospital ship enjoying a brandy and receiving first aid treatment for minor scratches on the face and right leg. As was customary under these circumstances I gave my .38 revolver to the helicopter pilot and he gave me his .45 caliber automatic. The Princeton was rather far away to the north involved in flight operations so I stayed on the hospital ship overnight and was transferred to a Cruiser the next day. I was on the Cruiser for two days while she pursued her mission of shoreline bombardment, then a helicopter ride back to the Princeton. On April 27, I was back in the air for a CAP flight. During my stay on the hospital ship the helicopter crew took me over to Yodo Island (in the bay) and introduced me to the CO of the South Korean Marines that manned the island and regularly shelled the North Korean coastline. A fascinating island honeycombed with caves and tunnels, and a few howitzers. They also had a short dirt runway with an arresting cable across it for emergency use by prop planes such as the F4U's, when needed.

Account of additional stories of active flight pilots in Korea 1953

Not all experiences that are exciting end as well. One early morning both jet squadrons were scheduled to participate in a large coordinated strike effort in

conjunction with numerous A1 prop planes with their much heavier load capabilities. Our jets were loaded with six 250-lb. bombs in addition to our normal 20-mm ammo load. The A1's were all deck launched first and on the way before the jets. When I located my plane it was in position for the second catapult launch. The first launch was one of our new Ensigns, "Punky" Quiel. When he was launched his plane staggered off the deck and fluttered into the water. The ship altered course slightly to ensure the plane was not run over, and while the plane guard helicopter looked for Punky the Operations Officer checked the ships anemometer to verify it was correctly reporting the force of the wind over the deck. The Operations Officer came on the air shortly and said the wind over the deck was sufficient for launch, to launch number 2. Meantime I took measures to ensure that I would not be number 2 in the water because to me the water surface appeared too smooth to indicates sufficient wind for continued launch with this much weight aboard. I selected my bomb arming switches to drop all six bombs when I touched the control stick pickle switch. The bombs themselves were not armed and could not detonate when they hit the water. Sure enough, as I cleared the catapult shuttle I could feel the plane staggering as I started losing altitude and I dropped all six bombs in the water. Flight operations were immediately stopped and the anemometer examined more thoroughly. It was determined this time that the instrument was indeed defective and all bombs were downloaded from the jets before the launch continued. Needless to say the mission of the flight was rapidly changed from strike support (requiring bombs) to flak support which required only 20-mm ammo. Sadly, Ensign Quiel's body was never recovered.

On another occasion one of my peer group, LTJG Dick Clinite was lost at sea. Dick was a tall, strong Naval Academy graduate reputed for his swimming abilities. His plane was hit while on a strike mission and he got back over water where he punched out. One of the pilots with him flew nearby and watched him all the way into the water. Dick displayed his parachute ripcord and waved that all was OK as he floated down. However he was unable to free one leg from the parachute harness before entering the water and the wind was so strong that he was dragged a mile or two and was drowned. His body was recovered but too late. His widow and two very young daughters were good friends of ours. All in all we lost 25% of our pilots to either operational loss or enemy fire that tour.

The Korean Armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, and all aggressive flight activities halted. Plans were immediately initiated toward returning the military to a peacetime posture. During this time frame Captain Hollingsworth, The CO of the Enterprise, presented me with the Purple Heart for the wounds I had received in May.

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