

The Official Newsletter of the USAF Pilot Training Class 55-I Association



2007 Reunion-Albuquerque

War stories flew on golden wings at the 55-I reunion in Albuquerque. Nice thing about our age is that we can tell the same stories at the next reunion and no one remembers. We are old enough that we can hide our own Easter eggs.

There were 58 members in attendance with a total of 92 attendees. Three widows (Suzie Nelson, Betty Dean and Carol Hamm) were in attendance. They enjoyed themselves and we hope to see them and others at future reunions. The weather cooperated for most part (It rained at night and the top of Sandia Peak was in the clouds)... And Ken Gero did an extremely good job of putting the reunion together. That was obvious to everyone- what was not apparent was the effort that Ken Gero (with Jim Hicks help) put in finding lost members and in updating the address of others.

were down to about 200 and a half. We did have a fine meal at the restaurant one top of the peak. That night we bussed to the Los Amigos Roundup ranch for barbeque dinner and entertainment by a Tex-Mex variety band and an Indian Dance troupe. Afterwards it was back to the hospitality for more war stories. (the difference between a war story and a fairy tale – a fairy begins with once upon a time and a war story starts with “now this ain’t no s---“)

On Friday, we bussed to Kirkland to view some of the special ops aircraft (including the V-22 Osprey) and talk to the crew. The new equipment for navigation and counter measures is truly amazing. Ron Weinert called a business meeting after lunch. The results are in the attached minutes. The special dinner speaker was Herb Kalan who flew a helicopter on the attempted prisoner rescue during the Vietnam War. Fascinating presentation (after Bob Klimek learned how to use his laptop to show the slides).

For those that stayed over on Saturday it was a good time to get reacquainted and tell more flying stories in the hospitality suite.



Ken Gero & Jim Monk

Ken started Thursday morning with a trip to the Sandia Mountain. We rode on the world’s longest cable tram to the 11,000 feet peak. I understand that there is a great view from the top, but we were in a cloud and



Ron Weinert



Lucia Klimek, guest speaker Herb Kalan and daughter, Bob Klimek



Bull Session

At the business meeting the group decided to retain the current officers with the addition of the past reunion chairman, Ken Gero and the next chairman, Pete Zuras. They also decided to hold the next reunion in 2009 in Washington D C. Pete Zuras volunteered to chair the event with the kelp of Bob and Lucia Klimek.

Jerry Larsen proposed to the group that we collect our pilot training experiences into a book. The group approved and appointed Jerry to head the group to collect and edit the inputs. Ed Unser will also help. Write about the flight training (preflight through basic flight training) experience and describe the significant events that affected you – good, bad, humorous & not so humorous, successes and failures – those events that individually affected our flight training lives and probably our follow on lives. You may want to preface your summary with how you arrived at flight training and end your story with the post cadet accomplishments. Try to bring the personal issues into the chronical – your personal response to the flight training environment. Any length is OK. Handwritten and e mail is OK. Send to

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Note: See Dick Arnold's story in this newsletter as the first example.

Class roster maintenance

Ken Gero did a great job of updating the roster and has agreed to keep it up-to-date. Darrell Schmidt maintains the web site and updates the member info. Bob Willis publishes (now and then) and sends sympathy cards to deceased members family. All have the need to have updated info on members. So please keep one of us advised as to happenings such as address changes, health issues or other items you think the other members would like to know. Only need to let one of us know, since we share any info with each other.

Suzie Nelson, widow of Stan Nelson—one of the 3 widows at the reunion





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Aviation Cadet Training: Malden & Williams

MILITARY CAREER

Feb. 1955 – Aug. 1955: F-86D Combat Crew Training
Aug. 1955 – July 1957 F86D 13th Fighter Interceptor Squadron Sioux City AB, Iowa
July 1957 – Apr. 1957 F86D 513th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, RAF Station Manston, UK
Apr. 1958 – Jun. 1960 F86D 513th Fighter Interceptor Squadron Phalsbourg Air Base, France
Jun. 1960 – Aug. 1962 T33 683rd AC&W SQ Sweetwater Air Force Station, TX
Aug. 1962 – Nov. 1962 F102 Combat Crew Training, Perrin AFB, TX
Nov. 1962 – Jun. 1965 F102 482nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Seymour Johnson AFB, NC
July 1965 – Oct. 1965 OIE Forward Air Controller Training Hurlburt AFB, FL
Oct. 1965 – Nov. 1966 T33 4th DASF Osan AB, Korea
Nov. 1966 – Sep. 1968 T33, T39 HQ ADC Ent AFB, CO
Sep. 1968 – Feb. 1969 F4C, D Combat Crew Training, Davis Monthan AFB, AZ
Feb. 1969 – July 1970 F4D 417th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Mountain Home AFB, ID
Aug. 1970 – Sep. 1971 F4D 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron Udorn RTAFB (148 Combat missions 43 North), Thailand
Sep. 1971 – July 1973 T33 24th Air Division/NORAD Region, Malmstrom AFB, MT

CIVILIAN CAREER

July 1973 – July 1974 Var. Manager, Holman Aviation, Great Falls, MT
July 1974 – Jun. 1975 Var. Charter Pilot, Phoenix Air Transport, Phoenix, AZ
June 1975 – Mar. 1977 Var. Chief Pilot, Chief Flight instructor, Nashua Aviation, Nashua NH
Mar. 1977 – Oct. 1977 N265 Simulator/Flight Instructor, FlightSafety International., St. Louis, MO
Oct. 1977 – Jun. 1981 N265 Chief Pilot, Lone Star Steel Corp., Dallas, TX
Jun. 1981 – Sep. 1984 N265, Ce500 Pilot services, Colorado Springs, CO
Sept. 1984 – Sept. 1988 Ce500, 650 Simulator/Fight Instructor, FlightSafety International Wichita, KS
Sept. 1988 – Jun. 1990 N265, Ce500, Ce650 Pilot Services Colorado Springs, CO
Jun. 1990 – Aug. 1996 Ce650, Ce750 Chief Pilot Arnold Palmer Aviation, Latrobe, PA and Orlando Lt. FL

What I Learned in Pilot Training

By Dick Arnold

May 29, 2007

John Bartley (God rest his soul), Ted Beresford, Ronny Knaus and I were primary flight training tablemates at Graham Air Base in Marianna, Florida in 1954. Beresford and Bartley played in a rather good Dixieland band that performed in a couple of saloons in Tallahassee. Bartley played tailgate trombone ala Kid Ory, Beresford played washboard along with three or four other guys in the band from our class. They played dixieland jazz and I fell in with a coed named Charlaine and we sat and listened to the band when I could pick her up at FSU. At that time Florida State University had just converted to coed from an all girls school. The ratio there was eight girls to one boy. Naturally every chance we got we charged off to Tallahassee.

We had a great flight instructor in the person of one Larry Sims; a steely eyed veteran C-46 pilot who flew the hump in W.W.II. He was calm and quiet and as opposed to most other instructors didn't scream at the four of us too much. Ronny is a Texan through and through. His favorite expression was "I'd just as leave as leaver" to express willingness to do something. He sometimes needed a translator for his Texas hill talk. He is a smart and very funny guy and a good pilot.

Bartley's trombone playing typified the outgoing personality of an inquisitive and active guy with a ready smile who had a good time with life. I believe he led the band. He was not risk averse as is hinted at later. Beresford was a little more conservative notwithstanding his caressing a washboard with a thimble while the rest of the band played real music. A guy named Rich played the trumpet. I can't remember his first name but he drove a 1942 Ford coupe. There is a Dave Rich on our missing list. That may be him. The band lost him to their great detriment halfway through the tour at Marianna when he washed out in the T-6. Harry Hughes another relaxed and affable guy played a pretty mean jazz piano. I never knew what happened to him. He is also on our missing list. Not missing in action we just can't find him or Rich today.

What did the band have to do with all of this. Well, there is an over used phrase these days called bonding. We centered around that band for our social life at Marianna. We drank with each other, chased FSU girls together and just generally acquired skills in relating with each other that were obviously still very much in tact at Albuquerque 52 years later. Trust me when I say this as I have had extensive exposure to the other side. I have never been as comfortable with my colleagues outside the military.

We all got on pretty well, and as I recall none of the four of us had much difficulty with the flying program mainly due to Mr. Sims who had a lot of T-6 time and had seen a lot of students like us. We all really respected him.

Anyway, fairly early in our training we were scheduled for our first solo night cross country flights: Marianna to Dothan, Dothan to DeFuniak Springs and back home. We were supposed to use pilotage. That means read maps as opposed to tune in radios. I was so excited about flying airplanes that sometimes I could hardly sleep because I wanted to get in an airplane so bad. It was just pure joy. I particularly loved flying solo.

So John Bartley and I, never having flown formation or solo at night, decided that we would try to join up over Dothan, Alabama and fly together for a while. We picked an unused radio frequency to talk to each other when we got to Dothan but did not go into a lot of other detail as we must have assumed that it would be easy. Duh.

Well, we got to Dothan and John circled and waited for me over the town at about five or six thousand feet. I distinctly remember the blue flash of his exhaust as I bore down in a descent on the right side of his airplane. That was really all I saw until the last minute out of the dark I found I was coming at John broadside. I shoved my nose down and went under him by about thirty or so feet. Well, you'd think we'd have had brains enough to stop then but we made three similar passes at each other with resulting near misses finally scaring the hell out of each other before we jointly decided over the radio that maybe we better stop and go home. We never talked about it again.

The flight was not over for me, however. I returned to Marianna and joined the pattern remembering Larry Sims' admonitions about flying a tight base leg and a fairly steep final at night as it was a good way to avoid trees on short final. I turned final and headed for the runway when the runway controller transmitted "number two, go around". I didn't see anyone else so I righteously assumed someone had gotten too close behind me and I continued down final. "NUMBER TWO GO AROUND"! Wasn't me so I kept a coming as Ronny would say. Once more, "NUMBER TWO GO AROUND"! I thought that guy better do something because the controller is really getting pissed at him. "Goddamit both of you go around". Shortly thereafter, at close to touchdown this other T-6 starts to slide out from under my nose just beginning a climb. He was close and I felt a light bump. I pushed my throttle past the Sea Level stop and instinctively raised the nose of my T-6 almost high enough to stall. As I was doing this the airplane under me flew out ahead of me. All of this seems now as if it were in slow motion. I was climbing steeper than he was so he was cleared into the pattern before me and I leveled off at pattern altitude and followed him. We both landed without incident. One of my landing gear, I don't know which had brushed his canopy according to ground accounts. The airplane under me was earlier ahead of me in the pattern but had turned a very wide base and flown a much shallower approach than me and our paths vertically intersected on short final. I had turned inside him as he was making his way toward the runway and we were literally flying with me above him proceeding down final. This is what confused the instructor in runway control.

As we taxied in there must have been a hundred cadets lined up in front of the ops building. As someone told me later, they all ran out of the building to watch the two of us die. We had come pretty close.

I felt nothing as I got out of the airplane. It was only when I sat down at Larry Sims' table that I started to shake as the magnitude of the night's activities settled in my youthful, slow witted, callow brain.

What was the lesson I learned? *That if I kept doing stupid things like this in an airplane I would probably kill myself and others. That flying was a serious and sometimes deadly business and that I had better get serious about it.* It was a lesson that I had to continue learn throughout my career and this set the stage for my subsequent activities in aircraft accident investigation. After you have done some dumb things in an airplane it is easier to understand how others do it also. These were by no means the last times I screwed up in an airplane.

I came into the Air Force in July 1952 one step ahead of the draft. I had lost my college deferment as I spent more time drag racing in Southern California than attending class. I enlisted and went to Parks Air Force Base where I went through twelve weeks of basic training. Upon completion of that I was withheld from shipment to go to General Instructors School and become a Tactical drill) Instructor. I had put several Flights of basic trainees through their training when one day the First Sergeant called me to the squadron orderly room. Master Sergeant Kermit Ball was a World War II veteran and was still wearing his Army uniform. No one liked the new AF uniform which then was a lighter blue than the current one and looked like a bus driver's uniform. So Sgt. Ball still chose to wear army brown, puttees, and a campaign hat as he was still in the grace period following the Air Force becoming independent service. He was pretty damn imposing. I did what the hell he told me to do. My only answer was "yes sergeant". He did not pass the time of day with junior airmen. All he said to me when I reported was that there were Aviation Cadet tests the next day and I was to go take them. That was it.

I followed orders and took the tests and was one of two out of a large number that day that passed. I was not looking to be a pilot. What I really wanted to do was get out and try and finish my screwed up college career. However, I got a cadet class assignment and the pull of learning to fly excited the same nerves as drag racing did. I could not resist it.

When I arrived at Lackland for preflight training I knew two things; how to teach close order drill and how to give loud commands. Well maybe a few more, like how to make a bed, shoot a carbine, clean a toilet and to march myself. However, my racing really set me up to buy into the speed and power of a T-6 going down the runway and once that happened I was hooked for life. It was a bigger thrill than I ever got on the drag strip.

One of the first things I learned is not to get in a pissin' contest with a skunk. That skunk being in the person of a Capt. Collie, our tactical officer. After going through underclass, because I knew how march and to yell, I was made Cadet Squadron Commander. My squadron schedule said that we were to undergo physical training, shower and go to lunch.

We were late, through no fault of our own from PT. I called the good Captain and told him we'd be late for lunch because the troops were going to shower. It's hot at Lackland. He told me to get my ass to the chow hall and he would deal with me later. He did--deal with me. I damn near got tossed out of preflight for arguing with him. I was told in no uncertain terms who ran the damn place and it damn sure wasn't me. What I took with me out of that incident is to pick my battles and to have some reasonable assurance that I could come out on top. And, if it all possible fight on my turf, not the other fellow's. Capt. Collie's office was very uncomfortable in a brace in the Texas Heat. His turf and advantage all the way.

Larry Sims taught me to be smooth in an airplane. How good was his instruction? Let me tell you how good he was. I was in Anchorage Alaska in 1995 giving a speech for the FAA when after my speech this guy came up to me and asked me if I would like to fly his T-6. I told him I would do almost anything for the privilege. I didn't quite say it that way. What I said was more emphatic but not printable. We went to Wasilla, Alaska where his T-6 was hanged on a 1600 foot strip that was laid out between a school and a garbage dump. He took off and when we got to altitude he gave the airplane to me. I did some pretty credible lazy eights and did a pretty good 2g or thereabouts chandelle. I then asked him if I could do a slow roll. This is the first time I had flown the T-6 in forty one years but I still could distinctly remember and execute those primary training maneuvers. I was prepared to Split "S" out of the slow roll as I had done trying to learn how to do it all those years before.

I heard Larry Sims in my virtual head set. He told me to Lower the nose and get 180 mph then raise it wings level to ten to fifteen degrees above the horizon. Start a bank, in this case to the right, as you roll to the 45 degree point start to feed in top rudder to keep the nose from falling through. As you get to ninety degrees bank start to feed in forward stick and ease off on top rudder to now keep the airplane from split essing. When you are upside down the stick should be full forward. Now reverse the process as you come through the roll.. To my and the owners amazement I kept the nose on the point, recovered where I should have. He said he was pissed because I did it better than he could after many tries. I cannot stop talking about it to this day. He did not have the benefit of all the repetitions I did with the quiet perfectionist Mr. Sims. That, my friends, is effective training. That's something I learned and retained from pilot training for all those years. I declined to try it again. Quit while you're ahead.

The above are anecdotes about things I learned in pilot training but there is a broader answer to the question of what pilot training did for me. I was, as I said earlier, pretty much of a callow kid who studied little, raced cars and had no real direction when I entered the Air Force. My growing up began when I responded to my first Tactical Instructor and the discipline of basic training. Becoming a Tactical Instructor myself gave me my first real responsibility and I found I could be effective at leading troops. My basic trainee flights (the AF word for platoon) did well. It kind of shocked me when with only one day's notice I passed the Cadet tests and was subsequently selected for pilot training. Being made cadet squadron commander further elevated my confidence. I found I could help troops in their adaptation to life in the Air Force as a lot of our cadets came to preflight directly from civilian life. In later life I became a very effective and trusted public speaker for the Federal Aviation Administration. The roots of this started in preflight. Being enlisted and a cadet never let me forget my humble roots and to carry the habit of defending the troops throughout much of my careers in the military and FAA.

Most important of all is that I learned about aviation. It was my profession for the better part of forty one years. Twenty with the Air Force and twenty one as a civilian retiring as Senior Executive Product Team Leader for Navigation and Landing Systems for the FAA. I represented the FAA in the drafting of the Presidential Decision Directive that opened GPS to civil use and oversaw the initial development in the FAA of the GPS Wide Area Augmentation System that is in use today for aviation navigation and landing. In working in the FAA with a lot of highly technical people, I always thought my real value was bringing a lot of practical aviation experience to those who dealt mostly in theory. After I retired from the FAA I served as an Ad Hoc member of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board and on the Air Force Space Command Requirements Review Committee for GPS. None of this would have been possible without pilot training. Almost my whole working life started with a less than two minute conversation with Master Sergeant Kermit Ball in the 3289th Basic Military Training Squadron orderly room. Thank you Sgt. Ball wherever you are.

This is dedicated to Captain John Bartley, and Colonels Robert Elliot, Sam Maxwell, Paul Johns and Bill Brooks who gave their lives in the Viet Nam conflict. I am humbled, proud and honored to have known each of them if only for a short period as we trained together.

NOTAMS

% Robert E Willis
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