

Navy Air Reserve Training Summer 1960

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In the 1960s the comic strip Buzz Sawyer, Washington's Navy hero comic, was on a "classified" assignment off California, chasing Russian submarines. Seems that the group Buzz was a part of, learned that, for training purposes, pesky Russians submarines seemed constantly patrolling the Pacific Ocean off-shore near Los Angeles, any season. A really long way to go for training, but then they would be testing our defense systems, at least in Sawyers' world.

Roy Crane Sawyer's creator, originator had control of the strip during its life 1943 to 1989. He was imaginative, well read, had contacts with Active Duty personnel. From these bits and pieces, and his imagination, he had Buzz in constant realistic adventure.

As unreal as it might seem, that strip had Navy Divers painting embarrassing slogans on the side of the submerged spying submarines. Done by stealth, the sub Commander would be unaware until he sailed home to be greeted with derision by all the fleet in Vladivostok, or wherever that crew called home.

About this same time The Naval Air Reserve Command authorized the commissioning of a new Reserve Patrol Squadron at NAS Dallas Texas. Reservists from Denver and Albuquerque were to man the Squadron; men who had served together until the Navy closed NAS Denver Colorado in June 1959. It was a novel thought.

The Squadron Commander had been instructed, get this Squadron fully operational quickly or the experiment would be cancelled.

The Commander, a WWII B-24 veteran, set a rigid schedule for his flight crews.

This 14 consecutive-day Training, mid-summer season 1960, at NAS Alamos California, near Long Beach. The skipper would become known as a task-master, crew averaged seventy hours of flight training, almost as many in ground training. Night flights ending at midnight not uncommon. There is always griping when you can't go ashore for a beer at nights;

that was overcome those two weeks by this sense of skill, teamwork, accomplishment, radiated by the OLDMAN, most pilots, and veterans.

And would you guess, these patrol crews got to train with equipment that located, followed, the Russian submarines Buzz Sayers mentioned, but never the

News. P2V Sonar operators turned out to be unusually skilled and after a pass or two, state with conviction.; "Sub here", be exact. These Russian "spies" were never bombed or staffed, but they may have been annoyed. For some crews were provided with a tracking device, that dropped into the Sea near a sub, would attract to the metal of the sub, cling, then initiate loud hammering against that metal, providing those submariners a very headachy, annoying and exclusive, welcome to Hollywood's noise parade.

Of course, the skipper kept everything to excess. Including the softball ballgame end of cruise, where after flying until two pm, clothes are changed, Enlisted vs Officers. Those crewmen were sure to whip pilots and ground officer, most in their thirties. Both sides gave the game full attention, to the expected result. Aches, bandages and pains for the Officers; laughter and ribbings from crewmen; then all flew home together that night.

Later Seasoned Officers who approved this experiment were pleased by what could be done.

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The softball game was an All Hands event. Liquids and food were provided. Both sides scored frequently. The game out of reach for the Officers late innings, a rally, One after another Officer hit safely.

The popular Squadron Operations Officer was on second base when the Skipper hit a ball that eluded an outfielder, allowing Jack to score easily. To emphasize his feat to all, he leapt into the sir, landed on home plate both feet slamming it. Something wasn't right for he slumped to the ground.

Laughter all around, until a careful check disclosed that Jack had been injured in the fall.

Jack, the skipper and Executive officer were driven to the Officers Club for a drink. At Jack's urging it was decided that Jack would be flown to Dallas with his P2V aircraft.. That was done. Personnel at Los Alamitos were kept in the dark of the accident.

Unknown to all but Jack's crew Jack was be helped off the aircraft in Dallas, laid on the ground. Then the Medics on duty that night were be notified that Jack had fallen, needed help.

They would confirm what was guessed. There was a break of a bone in his right leg. Taken to the hospital there, the break was confirmed and Jack spent three weeks on extended Active Duty as a patient, enjoyed the hospitality of all the Texans.

Jack knew he would be hospitalized many days while the fracture mended. He had not wanted to be alone in Los Alamitos where he knew few. And Jack asked that full details never be discussed openly. Bad enough to be a 36 year old fool at a ball game played for morale.

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Some background, Dicta

The decommissioning of Naval Air Station Denver in 1959 was unexpected. The year before, as guest before an All Hands celebration, Colorado Governor Ed Johnson had denounced the military obliquely. Still none thought this Mile High link would be abandoned by the Navy too. But they did. When formal closure ceremony was completed, the whole facility was give to the Air Force (saving no money for the country). Reservists drilling there had to decide, continue in the Reserve or not , and if so, how. This involved Reservist from Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Nebraska and Kansas

An Air Lift to NAS Olathe outside Kansas City was provided for Denver vicinity enlisted personnel.

A Non-Pay Reserve Composite Company was established for Denver Officer. They meet weekly at the Old Customs House, 18th and California, Tuesday. The leadership, former VR-713 Transport Squadron Officers. CDR Al Butler commanding. Executive Officer CDR Jack Ver Lee. Membership was almost 100.

A year later that Composite Company provided Denver Pilot and Ground Officers for Navy Reserve Patrol Squadron 883, began drilling monthly at NAS Dallas.

How could this come about?

Personalities. During WWII, Navy Pilots were the tip of the small group that carried the war against Japan. Fighter pilots from Carriers; the PBX, long range patrol flights; and the B-24 Bomber pilots, who both spied and bombed at long range before and after the B-29 fire bombing of Japan proper. Even in these

contests, the American pilots were few in number, got to know and respect one another, influenced the Commanders who ordered these missions.

The Admiral commanding all Reserve Aviation Training, Glenview, Illinois in 1960, had become a friend to many Combat Pilots serving that last year of WWII. One, now a United Air Line pilot, visited often when on a Chicago layover. That Reservist suggested the creation of a Patrol Squadron in Dallas, composed of men from the former NAS Denver Squadrons.

In 1960 the Reservist selected to Command the Dallas Patrol Squadron was that friend. He recruited from the Composite Company, personnel he deemed willing to excel in the Patrol Squadron.

The first drill date was the first week end of July 1960.

Transportation to and from Dallas there would be provided by NAS Dallas Transport pilots flying the reliable C-54 of Post War fame. A second airlift that week-end would pick up Albuquerque Officers and men, who formerly were airlifted to Denver for drills.

On the second month, the first Two Week Annual Active Duty for Training was scheduled. This began after those two drill days, sixteen continuous days; as on Active Duty, no days off.

For this training, a small Denver group arranged to travel by train on the Texan Zephyr, Denver to Dallas. Several of the younger men enjoyed their first train ride.

On the train return ride, that cadre managed to sleep as the train departed that Sunday evening. They were that tired, in the evening, little to be seen in the flat land north of Dallas, in the dark. With sunrise, they relived the two week spend together, talk about home, their civilian life, family, other friends. And witness the beauty of Southern Colorado in the early hours, the 'burbs of Trinidad, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, the rugged landscape of the Palmer Divide, the first glimpse of Denver,, then its Santa Fe trail entry from the south, all those unfamiliar back alley views of homes, golf courses, businesses, then resting in Union Station.

Home again, eighteen days later. For one, the trip didn't exactly end with the farewells they exchanged that hour. Unaccustomed to wearing any hat in civilian life, he had left his on the train. It was not missed in the excitement of joining his family, preparing to enter civilian life. He never missed his Navy cap until some

hours later when he could not find the pay check for the fourteen days of ACDUTRA. Recalling where last seen, he called the Rio Grande RR Office; they had his hat in Will Call.

The few Denver enlisted Reservist joining the Patrol Squadron in Dallas began with classroom Training, Flight training. Then through assistance from veteran crewmen, in both rate and type training. Regretfully, none could be sent to the excellent Speciality Schools in Memphis, for which the Navy was renown.

In this newly formed Reserve Squadron, some had never been out of Colorado, nor flew in an airplane.

For many, employers paid those serving in the Reserve for the time they were on ACDUTRA, once a year. That generous bonus provided an income cushion, nothing obligated from that Navy money. Every Reservist had a different use of this "free" money. That year for one, it provided a years subscription for Fortune, Forbes and The New Yorker magazines. While a subscriber, he read every issue.

Reading regularly, he quickly found that Fortune was of no value. The authors were not speaking to or for him. Forbes was another story. The magazine edited by a middle aged Malcolm Forbes was humorous, business dedicated, realistic stories of success or failure in the competitive business jungle. And Malcolm maintained a personal two page Editorial page, directed at businessmen, (one comment, Taxes are one cost of owning a business; pay them) and readers (If you invest, study before you give any businessmen your money). The magazine was renewed yearly until his son became editor, veered sharply from his dads philosophy.

The New Yorker proved always interesting. Renewed the subscription yearly since, even pays for other family members' subscription. The New Yorker has had several Editors in those 55 years, yet the transition is always unnoticeable.