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I am taking the liberty of cobbling together some stories from the early days of helo operations. These are from letters I have written, by request, to several people who asked about the "old days". All of these have appeared in the Class of '45's 60 Years After book. You are free to use what you want or cast the whole in the fires. I hope they are of interest.

After graduation on 7 June 1944, I served in USS LOUISVILLE (CA-28) as part of MacArthur's Navy (7th Fleet) for the invasions of Leyte, Battle of Surigao Straits, Luzon, and Okinawa. Due to suicide plane damage, the ship was in Pearl Harbor for repairs when my orders to flight training came through so that I was able to leave immediately. I reported to NAS Dallas for Flight Training in August 1945.

After flight training at Dallas, Corpus, Pensacola (where we CarQualed in SNJ's), Jax (for Op Training in SB2C's), then back to Pensacola for final CarQual, I went to AirLant for assignment.

Thus, from April '47 to April '49 I was an SB2C-5 & AD-1 dive bomber pilot in VA-5B (changed name to VA-64 in 48) operating from CORAL SEA, MIDWAY, & FDR. On last MIDWAY cruise, we had one of the first helo's aboard, flown by an Academy friend, Chuck Meshier from '44. He made 4 hairy rescues in a 2 month trip to the Med. Got me all fired up for helo's. So, instead of going to scheduled shore duty, I put in for them. All training was done at HU-2 in Lakehurst at that time. I reported in April 1949 and was designated Helicopter Pilot #153 on 31 May 1949. Several of our '45 classmates were there; Jim Braun, John Mullen, Bill Pledger, and Bromo Schmeltzer (killed July '60, supposedly in front of his family on a fly-in from an ASW cruise). Little bow-legged Al Dunn was in Blimp Admin on the Station.

There are many sea stories from my cruises to many places and on many ships - Norfolk, Key West, the Med, Norway, France, Gitmo, MISSOURI, MIDWAY, PALAU, etc. My experiences were very routine for the time and stage of helo development. We were all volunteers. Most times we were the first helo on the ship or to visit a town or country. As very junior officers and detachment O-in-C's, we were the "experts" and were proud of never missing a flight and always being willing to see just how far we could push the machines. Our helos had no control boosts, no ASE (automatic stabilization gear), only a turn-and-bank indicator (useless), no artificial horizon one VHF radio (good for about 15 miles at our usual overwater altitude of 100 feet), no directional gyro - just an automobile-like magnetic compass sitting on top of the dash swishing back & forth some 30 degrees. There are many hairy stories from those days - some almost disastrous, some funny, and all interesting but not told due to lack of space.

HELICOPTERS in the early days, or, The Joys of being an Idiot Machine Driver:

Because our "cruising" helicopter, the Sikorsky HO3S-1 (Horse), had very limited Center-of-Gravity movement capability, as a matter of routine, detachments went aboard ship with two iron-bar weights - each in a canvas case - one of 25 lbs & one of 50. Flying with no passengers -

both weights went forward alongside the pilot. With three passengers, both weights went into the baggage compartment unless it was so hot that you couldn't get airborne (not an unusual occurrence), in which case you dumped the weights on the ground. If you couldn't recover the weights, that meant in the future if you carried three passengers ashore and left them, you had to shut down and find rocks or something to put alongside you for the trip back - or flutter along at 25 kts.

My first cruise was with a 2-helo, 3-pilot, 8-crew detachment in USS MISSOURI, CAPT H. Page Smith commanding. This was a Midshipman Summer Cruise to Oslo Norway, Cherbourg France and Gitmo. The admiral was RADM Allen E. Smith, a runty little bantam rooster of a man. At the end of the cruise, 22 Sept 1949, the Big MO dropped anchor in Annapolis Roads to off-load the several hundred midshipmen by motor launch. Our O-in-C picked up RADM Sponagle at the Academy and brought him aboard. Then he took one helo and bailed out for Lakehurst. That afternoon - a typical 97 degree, humid, absolutely dead-still-air Annapolis day - I was told to take Admirals Smith and Sponagle in to the Naval Academy. I warned them in fairly strong terms that in current conditions, carrying two passengers made for a chancy take-off, but I thought I could make it. Since this was an official visits' exchange, we were all in dress whites.

Even doing a rotor-overspeed modified jump takeoff, I couldn't get translational lift fast enough to compensate for lost ground cushion going over the edge of the deck. Rotor rpm fell off quickly and the engine was popping. With no choice, I flared the machine into the water until the water was just below the door sill. This relieved enough weight so I could milk the rpm back up. I was able to get enough over-speed to pull out of the water, coast along on ground cushion, get into translational lift and finally up to flying speed and get into the Academy successfully. When they left the helo, neither admiral said a word - I think their vocal cords were frozen. The cap to the story was, a month later, my CO at HU-2, CDR (later VADM) Francis Foley, called me into his office and shoved a letter at me. Allen E. Smith had written a formal letter from ComCruDiv FOUR, to CO HU-2, accusing me of stealing his 50 cent pair of white cotton gloves on that flight. Francis asked "What the hell is this?". When I related the almost-dunking, he burst out laughing and said not to worry, he'd take care of it. No repercussions and nothing in my record. I assume Allen E. had left his gloves in the machine and that the crew, in cleaning out, had thrown them away. It was just Allen E.'s way of thanking me for scaring the bejesus out of him.

One another Midshipman Cruise in the MO two years later, I was O-in-C of the one-plane detachment. One day, the Mid'n pushed a dolly of stacked motor launches into a helo main rotor and crushed about 15 inches worth of wooden ribs flat against the metal spar - and since this was during those great days of the Military-hating SecDef Louis Johnson, there were insufficient spare sets of blades for all ships having helos. Naturally, the MO didn't have a set. So we used our hands to smooth the busted ribs and fabric back into reasonable aerodynamic shape and bandaged the wound with masking tape. A test flight indicated it worked well enough, except the vibration made it hard to read the instruments. Had to change the bandage after each flight since the blade would go increasingly out of track as the flight progressed. Flew that way for two weeks until we met up with WISCONSIN and made an at-sea transfer of their spare set of blades.

One cruise of special interest was a 6 month Med cruise starting in Jan 1950 in the (then) straight-deck carrier MIDWAY, CAPT Wallace Beakley commanding, RADM J.J. (Jocko/Indian Joe) Clark Task Group Commander. John Cole was O-in-C of our one plane helo detachment. In mid

Feb, John had been put in sick bay with a raging case of flu, so I got to do all the flying for a couple of weeks.

On a visit to Sfax, the ship had to anchor a long way out due, I guess due to shallow water. I had flown Jocko Clark, his C/S, CAPT Henry, and CAPT Beakley, into the beach. For some reason, the landing area was a camel yard. Jocko sent me solo back to the ship (20 miles out in the Bay), told me to return at a certain hour and that only the 2 Captains would be going back - he was staying ashore. Back on the ship, I gassed up for two passengers, and returned to the camel yard at the appointed time. Naturally, Jocko had decided not to stay ashore. I explained that I was too heavy for 3 passengers but would be happy to make two trips. He waved the other two into the machine, climbed in himself, punched me in the left shoulder as he always did and growled "GO!". I tried 3 times to get airborne by overspeeding the rotors and all the other little tricks we used, but no go. They all got out and climbed into the official sedan to wait - I flew the machine over the walls out of the yard into the sand - shut down, crawled under, and drained gas out the petcock for 20 minutes, cranked up (expecting a nice big boom from the gasoline-soaked sand). Anyway, I jumped over the wall into the camel yard, they all climbed aboard, and we made it back to the ship. Elapsed time about the same as if I'd made 2 trips, but, as Jocko said "When I tell you to take 3 people, you'll take 3 people." Great fun.

Upon leaving Sfax on 24 Feb 1950, John Cole was still in Sick Bay with the flu so I was to do all flights again. The ship was anxious to get the air group flying even though the weather was marginal. There was 25-30 kt wind from the west. For those old helos without flap restrainers on the blades, 30 kts of smooth air was the absolute limit for engaging blades. If higher, on engagement, the 1st advancing blade would cone up about 45 degrees (before centripetal force could overcome lift), then when the blade rotated forward, it would dive down, possibly hit the deck, and cut off the tail cone. On this day, the ship was heading north, wind burbling badly up the port side and over the flight deck, helo pointed into the wind. Pri-Fly ordered "start the helo". I radioed back, "Wind too gusty to engage, request ship turn down wind.". Word came back, "We record only 25 kts. Start the helo.". I sent back, "Wind burbling up under the blades, please turn downwind.". In the meantime, of course, 96 aircraft were sitting just aft of me with their props churning. The word came down, "The Captain orders you to start the helo!".

Our SOP orders from our squadron were to try 2 refusals, then obey a direct order from the Captain, even if it trashed the machine. I started the engine. The crew, expecting a turn downwind, removed the tiedowns in preparation for pushing the helo around as the ship turned for the start. However, CAPT Beakley apparently was so pissed at my delaying the launch that he threw the ship into a full rudder port turn to get into the wind. The ship heeled over to starboard and the helo, chocks, brakes and all started sliding backwards towards the starboard catwalk. I had a choice - fall over backwards into the drink upside down or try to get airborne. I whipped my right hand to the crew chief on deck to jerk off the blade boots (each of the 3 blades had a tip boot with a line to a man on the deck to restrain the blades until engagement). I slammed full throttle as the boots were pulled, and, as expected the 1st advancing blade coned, then slammed down to the deck but unlike normal, hit so hard it bounced over the tail cone. The other blades had enough centripetal force to hold them out. Of course, the machine was still skidding towards the catwalk and everyone was running like blazes - away. Just as the wheels hit the metal ridge at the edge of the flight deck, the blade rpm wound up to the lower red line so I two-blocked the

collective pitch to get airborne. The burble took control and flipped me 90 degrees on my side to the left and spun the machine end for end so I was being blown to starboard. As I passed just barely above and to the front of the bridge (if I hadn't been vertical, my blades would have shredded on the bridge), I had the pleasure of looking straight down through my left side window and seeing the whole bridge crew, including CAPT B., hit the deck.

Once blown clear of the ship and just before hitting the water, I got the machine straightened out, ran a control check, found everything working pretty well except for some unnatural vibrations, so eased on back to my plane guard station and watched the launch of the airgroup. It had all happened so fast I wasn't particularly bother by the near miss.

However, once the launch was over, the ship returned to its original heading and the word came up, "Charlie the helo." I politely, I think, advised that it should be obvious that that course was not safe for starting and stopping the helo and would they please turn downwind. The word came up, "Captain says, land!" I guess I lost it a little then because my answer was, "If the ship is not downwind in 5 minutes, I will land in the water.". The ship gently turned downwind for my landing & shutdown, not only for that flight, but for each flight that day, and with not a word. BUT, when I touched down after the last flight that evening, the flight deck bullhorn was blasting in its nastiest tone, "Helicopter Pilot report to the bridge!".

I think it was the tone, not the expected order, that made me blow. I went steaming up the island and past Pri-Fly. The air boss, Fitz Palmer, saw the look on my face and tried to grab me as I went by to cool me down but I shook him off and stormed to the bridge. CAPT Beakley, an outstanding gentleman later a ViceAdmiral and the Grey Eagle [longest designated aviator on active duty], and I started hollering at each other until we both started running out of breath. I finally asked him if he knew how many people he had almost killed with that dumb turn. He answered, "You're paid to take that risk.". I looked him in the eye and said, "Its not the helo pilot that gets killed but the people on deck and in this case I would have wiped out the bridge.". There was a quiet pause while everyone held their breath. His answer was a calm, and most surprising, "You all are worth your weight in gold to us (we had pulled four people from the water by then) and just let me know what you want.". What a man!. I know if I had been him, I would have court martialed the snotty-nosed JG (me) for shouting at him the way I did. Amazing! and at the end of that 6 month Med cruise, both Wallace and Jocko wrote not only beautiful concurrent fitness reports on John and me but most unexpectedly, each wrote separate letters of commendation on each of us.

While I don't wish to emphasize this cruise over others, it is interesting from the standpoint of the number of interesting people who risked their lives in those somewhat primitive machines - both John & I flew Admiral Lord Louis Montbatten from the MIDWAY to Valetta Malta and back. The then Princess Elizabeth (Prince Philip was XO of a destroyer in the area) wanted a ride and actually was in the helo with John ready to go when her security people decided 'No'. We flew both Rita Hayworth and her husband Ali Khan from the ship to their place on the Riviera. Jocko Clark's wife was staying at their house. In addition there were the usual number of Ambassadors, etc. In those days, many of the places we went had not seen a helo before so it was always wise to fly into the local town square or airfield and give rides to the senior military and civil officials. That way, as very junior officers, we always received invitations to the very swanky official & non-official functions.

Going back to Jocko and his wife, she flew out from the states near the beginning of the cruise. When the ship went to Naples, she was to be flown by an Embassy Beechcraft into the commercial airport on a plateau back of town. Jocko had me fly him up to the field from the ship. We landed as scheduled but the Beechcraft had not arrived so Jocko had me shut down to wait since he needed a ride back to the ship after his wife arrived. He went over and sat in an Embassy car to wait. I was sitting in the helo half asleep when the plane arrived. Jocko jumped out the car, gave his wife a big smooch, said a few words and the next thing I knew he had climbed into the helo and was punching me in the shoulder grunting "GO! GO!, I'm late". I jerked alive, pumped the throttle, turned on the mags, and hit the starter. The engine fired, and with one smooth, professional, motion I engaged the rotors and pulled the helo into a hover, ready to do a hot-dog transition into forward flight and scream across the field to really impress the natives. Unfortunately, I had failed to turn on the gas. Fortunately, I was barely in forward flight when the carburetor ran dry and a sudden silence fell. I gently dead-sticked to the ground, reached down, turned the gas on, fired the engine and departed - this time with no hot-dogging in mind. Jocko never said a word.

One final incident with Jocko. When the ship pulled into Cyprus (north side), only one flight was supposed to be authorized and that was to take Jocko and CAPT Beakley on their official calls into Nicosia, the capital. John Cole made the flight. We then got permission for the two of us to make liberty at the same time - as usually only occurred when in a place where we couldn't fly. An Air Force Captain Ghormley, the air intelligence attaché on Cyprus, drove us the 50 or so miles from the coast into Nicosia. We arrived back at the ship (I don't remember how) about 2 in the morning rather smashed. At 0500 we were awakened by a loudly pounding Quartermaster who informed John that Admiral Clark and two others needed to leave the ship at 0600 to fly to Nicosia. John merely pointed up to my bunk and said, "Get him". The poor Quartermaster literally dragged me out of the top bunk and stood me up until I got both eyes open. I sent him off to wake up the helo crew while I tried to get myself going. I put on the same set of blues that I'd worn into town the night before (we always flew "official" in blues or whites - no flight suits). I was almost up to the helo when I remembered I didn't know where Nicosia was from the ship and we had no maps. I went below and shook John awake enough to ask him where it was. He said head south until a highway and railroad converge. That's Nicosia. Then he went out again with a groan.

When Jocko and his C/S plus one got in the helo, I was having trouble keeping my head from flopping from side to side and my breathing was very shallow to hide the booze fumes. Anyway, we got airborne, I found South and headed inland. I had no idea of how far it was to town or how long it should take to get there. I eased up to 1000 feet - usually we never got above 500 because we didn't carry 'chutes - in order to see better. I was getting sober and panicky at the same time since I couldn't see a road or railroad. Finally a road came easing in from the right out of the morning haze and eventually a railroad from the left. Sure enough, when they met I was over a town. I let back down to 500 feet and then realized I had no idea where the airfield was, so I just kept flying across and out of town. All of a sudden, Jocko punched me in the shoulder and hollered, "Aren't you going to land?" and pointed straight down. I was right over the middle of the airfield!. I stammered something about "Yessir, just checking wind direction", and honked the machine around and landed next to an official car. Jocko and the C/S left saying to be back to pick them up at noon.

A customs official in uniform came out get a look at the helo, took one look at my ghastly face, and invited me into the customs shack for tea. He kept me there for about an hour, pouring tea in to me until he decided I was alive enough to fly. About this time, the AF Attaché Ghormley arrived looking pretty bad. He asked if he could ride out to the ship with me since he had business on the carrier, and had never ridden in a helo. Of course I said yes. Once over the town, he asked if I would fly by his apartment so he could wave to his girl friend. Feeling somewhat chipper by this time - although not able to show good judgment. I ease the helo down between the buildings and crept up the street and hovered alongside his apartment. His girl rewarded the show by appearing on the balcony, naked and waving with great abandon. We eventually got back to the ship. By this time I was in agony with a screaming hangover and climbed into the sack and died. Fortunately, John was alive and well so he could go in and pick up Jocko as scheduled. To my knowledge, this is the only time in my life I flew stupid and half drunk. If I had been less numbed, I would have refused to fly. My guardian angel, and Jocko's, were on duty that day.

I was involved in one of the first stumbling baby steps in the development of amphibious ops using helos, and the trial of defensive tactics where a tactical nuclear bomb might be used against our forces. The largest helos the Navy/Marines had in late 1950 were the six Piasecki HRP-1,s - a pipe and canvass covered banana with twin rotors and a carrying capacity of, I think, 9 troops. A real dog but fun to fly if most things worked. Anyway, in November 1950, a major amphibious exercise was planned off New River, NC. Part was the usual ship-to-shore movement of troops by boats. For the first time, a simulated ship-to-shore by helo from the USS PALAU (CVL) was planned, along with a simulated enemy A-bomb drop in the landing area. One HRP-1 (Harp) was to be used and an HO3S-1 (Horse) would drop the A-Bomb simulator (a 75 pound firecracker that puffed out a bang and a mushroom cloud of smoke).

A LCDR flew the Harp banana, I flew the A-Bomber Horse. Going from Lakehurst to New River, we had to land twice because pieces of the Harp's canvas tore and flapped into the rotors. Merely took a knife and cut off the pieces. On additional stop was made necessary because an engine mount on the Harp broke. We set down alongside a country gas station and the mechanic broke out his welding equipment and welded the mount back together - dang lucky it wasn't an aluminum piece or "boom". We over-nighted at Norfolk and flew down to New River next day. The Harp landed on PALAU and I put in to New River to figure out how to attach the fire cracker to my machine. Next day was to be the big day. I was airborne heading off to drop my bomb (this went fine). The Harp was brought topside on the forward elevator, the 6 blades unfolded, and the pilot fired her up ready to engaged. At this point, someone decided to lower the elevator. Of course, the machine barely fit the elevator sitting diagonally, meaning that 4 of the six blades hung over the deck. With a great crunch, the blades went vertical and the machine was badly bent. Thus, the demonstration first helo troop ship-to-shore exercise was dead.

After that tour in HU-2, I was asked to join the Bureau Of Aeronautics Representatives office at Piasecki Helo Corp (BAR Morton PA) to fill a new slot. Of course I was delighted to accept and reported in August 1951 as Contracts Administration and Industrial Security Officer, #3 in a three officer BAR.

Even though my title was Contracts Admin and Industrial Security, specifically I bird-dogged the Air Force contracts for the AF and Army YH-21 and H-21A. As the only helo pilot in the BAR and with no AF presence, Air Material Command, Wright Field, Dayton OH designation me as

the AF Acceptance Test Pilot for their contracts. So, I like to claim I did the acceptance test flights on the first 21, 21 passenger, H-21 helicopters. Actually, my log book shows 21 acceptance test flights on 18 H-21's - reason - I blew the windows out of three machines during full power runs and so did re-tests after repairs.

One little side trip was on TAD to NATC Pax River for an abbreviated Test Pilot School. I spent one day at the school then was pulled over to Service test since they only had one helo pilot to work 4 helos. So for the next month, I did service test on the Sikorsky HRS-1 (H-19) and the Marine Sikorsky HO5S-1 - a real underpowered dog. Then back to BAR Morton.

Later, after duty as Helo Ops & Nuclear Weapons Employment Officer in Tactical Air Control Squadron THREE out of San Diego (Indo-China Passage-to-Freedom flagship - RADM Lorenzo Sabin - evacuation of the Tachen Islands), USNPGS Monterey CA in Nuclear Eng Effects (RZ) course, and a tour with the Aircraft Reactors Branch, Division of Reactor Development USAEC Washington, I got back to sea duty in Helo Antisub Squadron THREE out of Norfolk.

Not much to say about this HS-3 tour flying the Sikorsky HSS-1. I was Maintenance, then Admin, then relieved classmate George O'Shea as Ops Officer. This duty was mostly tedium, broken by one trip to the Med, two to the Caribbean, and one well publicized rescue of crewman from the broken tanker, PINE RIDGE. It was one of those things that could have turned really sour. When the RIDGE broke in half off Hatteras, we were off Jax in the VALLEY FORGE starting home. The weather was ghastly - 200 foot ceiling, wind from the south at over 30 knots, sea monstrous. Word of the breakup came in about 1 pm. We were asked if some helos could get up there before dark to look for 7 men (including the Captain) that had been in the forward section when it broke off and sank. Some 28 other were on the still floating after section. We figured if the carrier continued barreling north (going downwind the ship was riding well), we could take off about 1600 and arrive on the scene and have about 30 minutes of search time before dark, and then make it back to the ship. My division was the next scheduled to fly so I got the job. At the last minute, the Admiral decided we needed a couple of S2F planes to help us in the search. Ridiculous decision, because of the low ceilings and visibility. Anyway, to launch the Stoofs, the ship needed to turn into the wind. In making the turn, the ship got caught in the trough of the waves and damn near rolled over. My 4 helos were well secured on deck with double boots on each blade, but the wind tore the boots loose and folded the blades over the top of the machines. By the time the ship struggled out of the trough and headed back down wind, any chance of a launch were done for that day. Of course, with the water temperature, the 7 were certainly dead by then and the others were safe on the stern section.

Next morning, about 0400 I took my division of four machines and headed for the wreck, arriving just at first light. I took a look at the stern section and saw no immediate need to try pickups until after we had searched the waters. About this time a message came from the carrier that the stern section had a man with a badly broken leg and to pick him up. Since I was quite a way from the hulk, I told whoever was closest to do the pickup. Each of the three tried in turn but could not get a sling down on the wildly heaving stern. When I got there, by good fortune, I got the man off neat as a whistle with no further damage. Since the man was in great pain, I headed back to the VALLEY FORGE, telling the rest of the division to try some pickups but not to push it.

I dumped off the injured man and headed back out. The others had not been able to get anyone up so I picked up one more and took the division back to the carrier - gas was low. Once I got back to the ship, I was hustled up to CIC where a conference call had been setup with CNO's office, the Chief of Information, & CINCLANTFLT. I explained how dangerous trying to do pickups was and that the people in the stern section were perfectly safe. After some hemming and hawing, it was explained that the Navy was taking great criticism for the rather devastating fire on the USS CONSTELLATION - the newest CVA - in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. It was hoped that this rescue would take the CONNIE fire off the front pages. Finally, the CNO rep asked if we were willing to try. I looked at my CO (HS-3's skipper). Since he was relatively recent to helos, he said it was up to me. I told the CNO rep that if we used only our few experienced former HU-1&2 pilots and CNO accepted the possible loss of a machine, we would do it. It was okay, so during the day, with the weather and seas easing, we got everyone off with no casualties. The climax was that the last thing we did - and this at the PINE RIDGE owners' insistence - was to put the First Mate and one other BACK aboard the hulk in order to prevent salvage claims by the shipwreck vultures that were heading out. Chinfo really went hog-wild on the publicity and did get the Connie fire off the front pages.

After 6 months at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, I went back to Lakehurst NJ as XO to classmate Searle J. Barry in HU-4. He was 2nd CO after HU-2 had been split. HU-2 provided all the rescue/utility helos to the carriers of the Atlantic Fleet while HU-4, with 30 machines of 4 different types, supplied all the non-aviation ships - cruisers, supply ships, hydrographic survey, Navy & Coast Guard ice-breakers, and most anything else that floated. I took over as CO in June 1962. During this tour, which was really great, got paid-back in spades for the worry I must have caused my CO's when I was a cruising pilot back in '49-51 in HU-2.

Again, helos were great fun in those early days.