

**CDR ROBERT A. CLOSE USN(RET)**  
**Navy Helicopter Pilot #153**  
**12/6/04**

I have taken the liberty of cobbling together some stories from the early days, primarily of helo operations. These are from letters I have written, by request, to several people who asked about the "old days". Some of these have appeared in my Naval Academy Class' 60Yrs-After Book.

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After being commissioned an Ensign on 7 June 1944, I spent a year in the heavy cruise USS LOUISVILLE (CA-28), one of the five "Graceful Sisters" built in early '30's. During that year we were part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet (MacArthur's Navy) for the invasion of the Philippines, including being Flagship for Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf for what was probably the last great surface ship battle – The Battle of Suragio Straits. Later, during invasion of Luzon, we took two suicide planes killing some 50, including our new flag (RADM A.B. Chandler and most of his staff), This sent us back to the States for re-gluing so that we missed Iwo Jima. Got back out to help during invasion of Okinawa. Were there providing shore bombardment for 18 days when we took another suicider. Lost half of our engineering spaces since the plane hit the aft part of the bridge and its bomb went down the forward smoke stack and blew. This time, we only went as far as Pearl Harbor for repairs. Since my orders flight training had come in and it was obvious that the ship was "down" for awhile, the Captain released me to have at it.

After arriving back in the States in July 1945, the War ended while I was on leave in Cincinnati. I reported to NAS Dallas for Flight Training in August 1945.

Thus, from April '47 to April '49 I was an SB2C-5 Helldiver & AD-1 Skyraider 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. All were of Marine pilots flying cast-off Navy F4U Corsairs. 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.

There are many sea stories from my cruises to many places and on many ships - Norfolk, Key West, the Med, Norway, France, Gitmo, in MISSOURI, MIDWAY, PALAU, etc. The point I want to make first is that 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. The pilots who manned the machines on the Icebreakers for 7 months in the Antarctic for the annual International Geophysical Year Expeditions, or the 5 months in the Arctic, or to Africa and South America on the hydrographic survey ships like TANNER - they are the ones with the most hairy survival stories. You must remember, our helos had no control boosts, no ASE (automatic stabilization gear), only a turn-and-bank indicator (useless), no artificial horizon (useless in a helo since body attitude is no indicator of flight attitude), one VHF radio (good for about 15 miles at

our usual over water 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.

So, with that introduction here is my version of:

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

In June of '49, with a total of 24 helo pilot hours, I was riding in the back seat (no controls) in the Sikorsky HO3S-1, being checked out to take over an electronic position locator project the Army was running from a lab in Asbury Park NJ. The object was to fly about 4 or 5 miles around the lab while they pinpointed position through interrogation of special electronic gear in the helo baggage compartment. The pilot, Terry Drinkwater, had maybe 20 more hrs. than I. In turning his head to holler something at me, he let the helo's nose drop. I pointed, he turned back around, jerked the nose up. The nose popped through the horizontal and kept going up in spite of full forward stick. We were well into an Immelman when the machine rolled off to the left and into a dive. I released my seat belt and jammed my weight forward over the left rudder pedal so as the nose started coming up, the extra weight forward plus full forward stick stopped the machine level. We had started at 800 feet (our assigned altitude for the test) and ended up at 200 feet. There had been a great popping and rending and twisting of the blades so Terry immediately set us down. He was so shaken he wouldn't fly. After inspecting the machine, I decided "what the hell, I didn't lose anything in Asbury Park" so I flew us back to Lakehurst (very slowly & gingerly).

Needless to say, the squadron was disturbed over this "unknown" loss of control. Finally, after a few days, Sikorsky reps discovered that the 50 lbs of special electronic gear in the baggage compartment moved the center of gravity back beyond the design limits (only 1.1 inches of cg travel was allowable to maintain full controllability) so in that machine, controllability was limited to a speed of about 55 knots (normal speed was 55 to 60, with max about 80 kts if you had another person squat over the right rudder pedal in the nose). We had exceeded that speed in our little dive. Anyway, after that, we were very much aware of the need of loading to insure adequate stick travel. 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 (HO3S-1's), 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 (Guantanamo Bay Cuba). The admiral was RADM Allen E. Smith, a runty little bantam rooster of a man. When entering or leaving the helo, he always stood alone on the rear step of the machine, facing outward, sternly surveying the sky while all official photographers on the ship ground away with their cameras. Once pictures were taken, he would duck into the helo and a crewman could approach to strap him in. At the end of the cruise, 22 Sept 1949, the MO dropped anchor in Annapolis Roads to off-load the several hundred midshipmen by motor launch. LCDR Chris Fink, O-in-C of our detachment, flew ashore in the morning and picked up a RADM Sponagle at the Academy and brought him aboard. Chris then took one helo

and headed back to his wife at 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. Smith, a blackshoe (non-aviator), wasn't happy about a LTJG bus driver telling him what he could or couldn't do but he did ask if I thought I could make it. I said yes, figuring "Oh well", at worst we would get wet. Incidentally, 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 Francis Foley, called me into his office and shoved a letter at me. Allen E. Smith had written a formal letter from ComBatt/CruDiv Atlantic, 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.

On another Midshipman cruise, two summers later, also on the Mighty MO, I was O-in-C of a one helo detachment. On this cruise: Midshipmen, being kids and overly enthusiastic, tended to overdo things. First of all, in grab-assing around the fantail, one of them invariably would run into the tail rotor of the parked helo. Because of the rubber cushion blade stops, the blade would rebound and knock the Middy flat. I didn't care about the Middies getting hurt, but those tail rotors were relatively fragile. Finally had to put a crewman on blocking duty whenever the middies were horsing around. Anyway, one day at anchor, the ship was using a flock of Mids to move a dolly stacked three high with 50 foot motor launches. As usual, the dolly was resisting and the Bosun was cursing the Mids. Finally, with one big heave they got the mass moving and with great enthusiasm pushed the stack into the trailing edge of one on my helo's main rotor blades. I let out a roar. I never saw so many bodies disappear into so many holes since WWII when a typhoon flooded my JO bunkroom at 2:00 am and 20 Ensigns went through a 30" scuttle hatch, all at once.

The rotor blades consisted of a round metal, tapered steel spar with wooden ribs every couple of inches to give the necessary wing shape. From the spar to the leading edge was covered with thin plywood. The pointy trailing edge was a thin steel cable. Then the whole blade was covered with canvas. The stacked motor launches had 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. The other battleship in the Mid cruise force, the WISCONSIN, had a spare set of blades, but no helo - and she was off somewhere else. Solution (remember, we prided ourselves on never missing a flight) - we used our hands to smooth the busted ribs and fabric back into reasonable aerodynamic shape and bandaged the wound with masking tape (no Duct Tape in

those days). 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.

That flight occurred during a very interesting 6 month Med cruise on the (then) straight-deck MIDWAY, CAPT Wallace Beakley commanding, starting in Jan 1950. LT John Cole (killed 2 yrs later in Super Constellation AWACS plane enroute to the Azores to join a new squadron) was O-in-C of our one plane HO3S-1 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.

On 24 Feb 1950 after a visit to Sfax, Tunisia, John Cole was still in Sick Bay 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 bothered 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 Mountbatten 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 ready to go when her secret service 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.

Following is a brief account 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 by or 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 Marine 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).

LCDR Haacken(?) (Hawk) Bach flew the Harp banana, I flew the A-Bomber Horse, and there was one other HO3S to stay with the PALAU for plane guard and utility. Now, going from Lakehurst to New River required fuel stops at Chincoteague, and Norfolk. Enroute to Norfolk, we had to land twice because pieces of the Harp's canvas skin tore and was in danger of flapping 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. Hawk honked the Harp handily (euphonious, ain't it) 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 ROned at Norfolk and flew down to New River next day. Hawk 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. Poor Hawk. 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 Hawk 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. Since my part of the program was successfully over, I was circling the ship waiting for the ok to land. The deck was pretty foul so the ship told me to return to New River. Figuring Hawk, a LCDR to my LT, would want to take my Horse away from me after the chaos cleared so he could get home, I headed to land and passed over the New River tower and hauled tail north, reporting my departure to New River rather than the ship so by the time the ship knew I was gone, it was too late to recall me. No repercussions - guess the ship was too embarrassed by the goof to bother. By the time Hawk got back to Lakehurst, he had orders for transfer.

After a tour with the Bureau OfAeronautics Rep at the old Piasecki Helo Corp (later called Vertol then absorbed by Boeing), a tour with a Tactical Air Control Squadron, two years at the Naval PG School, a tour with the old Atomic Energy Commission, and a tour in Helo Antisub Squadron 3, I became, 1961, XO then CO of HU-4. During this great tour I was paid back in spades for my early shenaigans by having to fend off the Brass from the shenanigans my young pilots pulled on their cruises.

**Again, those were great days and everyone went and did the job with enthusiasm and élan and we were all proud of our role in pushing the helo forward.**

**CDR Robert A. Close USN(RET)**