Speaking of FLYING

Personal Tales of Heroism, Humor, Talent and Terror from 44 Unique Aviators

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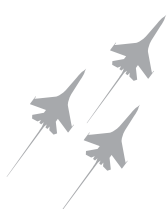

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Dedication

To the pilots who flew these tales
and shared them.

To the designers, builders and mechanics
who give us the gift of flight.

Preface

Diane Titterington

Hangar flying soars to new heights in this book.

The writers are professional speakers whose aviation tales have dazzled and delighted audiences around the world for decades.

After hearing hundreds of fascinating anecdotes and stories, I've gathered some of the funniest, most thrilling, scariest, daring, and revealing of these tales. Here you will find the history and mystery, the excitement and the challenges of aviation's greatest moments, as told by the pilots.

You will also discover real heroes in these stories. Some have tiptoed around death's door and danced with lady luck more than once. And these high-spirited pilots are full of shenanigans too. Amazingly, these tall tales are true!

Each chapter is presented in the unique style of its author. You will see the very human side of aviation, and the men and women who have devoted their lives to flying. If you wish to read the stories with the writer's voice in mind, audio for each author can be heard at www.aviationspeakers.com.

Though you may read it all the way through, this is not a book you will finish any time soon. You will most likely find yourself reading it again. With each reading you will find new meaning, new emotion, and new insights.

It is my great pleasure to bring you *Speaking of Flying*.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBIN OLDS USAF (RET.)

FIRST TRAIN - MID MAY, 1944

Hell! We wanted to kill something!

At least that's what we lieutenants wanted. But no, for the past two weeks we had just sailed along at 10 to 15 thousand feet as though all the Germans were on leave in Russia. It got so we welcomed the occasional bursts of flak. At least the Jerries knew we were there and the black puffs off to the sides made us feel a little bit important.

I'd get so damned mad and frustrated I'd take off my oxygen mask to get the cuss words out. We'd been told to observe radio discipline. What the bosses meant was, "Shut up. Don't say anything." No matter what we saw sitting or moving around down below. We passed trucks barreling down tree-lined roads, trains stopped in patches of woods, wisps of steam giving them away. We saw deserted-looking airfields given away by small buildings backed up against the surrounding forests. Large and small marshaling yards with goods wagons sitting still, just waiting to be pounced on. All sorts of lucrative and tempting targets. But *Highway* kept sailing along as though we were still over England.

Our squadron CO, Major Miller Herren, was a good guy, though I wasn't quite sure we brand-new first lieutenants were in any position to judge. But our naïve impressions were all positive. Major Herren worked long hours getting us organized to ship out. He trained us hard, and we liked that. His manner with all of us was direct and to the point. He didn't tolerate slackness and he inspired us to do our best. We weren't afraid of him, meaning we judged him to be fair, not like some of the men we had already experienced in our short careers. Best of all, he flew the P-38 with us and more than once had proved his skill and guts in the wild blue yonder.

But now we had a problem. It wasn't the major losing face by not leading us into battle the way we thought he should and wanted him to do. It wasn't thinking he was showing a timid streak by not getting at the enemy. It was something different. We thought the boss was under some kind of pressure not to expose us to the wily Hun. Maybe he was getting the word from Group or higher.

The situation was downright embarrassing. What were the old time Groups over here thinking about this brand-new 479th? Our daily ops reports must have them snickering. I'd already started reading all of theirs and those guys were shooting up everything in sight, even getting into an occasional aerial fight with the Germans. It was a creeping awful feeling, like we'd be judged to be pantywaists afraid to join the big boys.

Our frustration and sense of outrage kept growing. We had to shoot at something! We had to get into the scrap before we were permanently branded. I could just see it coming.

"Daddy, what did you do in the war?"

Or...

"You say you were in the 479th back in '44? Wasn't that the chicken outfit that never fired its guns? Oh, yeah, now I remember. 'Scuse me pal, I see a friendly face down at the end of the bar." And he walks away not even bothering to hide his laughter.

Not for me, and not for the last time in my life the old devil got behind me and gave me a shove.

"Newcross Lead, this is Newcross Blue 3. I've got a train at eight o'clock. I'm going down. Will you cover me?"

"Roger Blue 3," came the response.

I was already on my way, fangs out and trigger finger curled. A quick check of the armament switches, a fast look around for other aircraft, and a full powered shallow drive toward that blessed train... the train that was going to get me in this damned war or get me court martialed, probably both.

A hard bank to the right, pull the pipper through the length of the goods wagons, put it a bit above the aim point to allow for range, roll wings level as the sight stops dead on the engine's boiler. Squeeze off a burst and see the HEI (high explosive incendiary) sparkling all over that old engine. Watch a fountain of smoke and steam burst out of the stack and jink away to set up for another pass, this time on the goods wagons.

Coming around to line up I thought about the train crew and was glad I hadn't aimed at the engineer's cab. In all likelihood the trainmen were Frenchmen. It sure wouldn't be nice to shoot up some guy forced to drive old Hitler's freight around France in broad daylight as these guys were doing.

On the next pass I raked my .50 caliber bullets along a part of the stalled train. It was great seeing the sparkles light up the wagons, but disappointing to see nothing blow up. For more than a year, Pathé news had featured film clips of trains blowing up during strafing passes. Spectacular stuff and heady impressions for a 21 year-old novice.

As I pulled around for a third pass and checked over my shoulders for flak, what did I see but the entire train light up from end to end. Then I saw the whole dammed squadron had come down on the target. My initiative had been too much for the rest of the

troops. I hadn't heard anything on the radio so this was pure reflex on their part. Talk about mass relief! No frustrations left in that bunch. They all banged away at what must have been the most shot-up train in the entire war.

"Newcross Blue, this is Newcross Lead. Pull up! Pull up and regroup." Major Herren's voice felt like slivers of ice.

The guilt set in as the squadron formed up. We returned to base in silence, cold silence. We were left to stew and wonder... and I guess I did most of the stewing and wondering. Hell, he couldn't fire all of us—or could he? Certainly I would be fair game. No doubt about that. But there was still the satisfaction of having finally fired my guns. I thought of the happy look I would soon see on my armorer's face when he saw the powder marks on my P-38's nose.

I was right. The armament corporal was one happy troop. But that joy was short-lived. By the time I shut down my engines I was in the depths thinking my career as a great fighter pilot was about to end within the week. The ride back around the perimeter track to the debriefing was not exactly marked with exuberance. Someone tried to talk about our great contribution to Hitler's demise, but his remarks were less than half-hearted and no one else was in a talking mood.

It crossed my mind I might jump off the jeep and head for the woods, but that was out of the question. Music was music and the sooner faced the better.

Debriefing was grim. S-2, old Mother Horton, kept at us and stretched the whole procedure beyond belief. Finally it ended and in the hush my name was spoken softly... quietly... with menace.

"Olds, come over here."

I got up and stood at attention in front of the Boss.

"You broke formation. You disobeyed regulations. You defied my authority. You exposed the squadron to unwarranted risk, and for all I know, you attacked an unauthorized target."

The Major was really mad, angrier than any of us had ever seen him. His voice was low and steely and his eyes blazed as they stared into mine. I had visions of steel bars and rock piles.

Major Herren went on. Things grew darker. The room shrank, the ceiling came down over my head. All I could see were those steely blues boring into mine. Thank God for plebe year. I stood at attention and tried to bore right back. I heard the Major's words, but I concentrated on keeping my eyes locked on his.

Finally, "Well, what do you have to say for yourself? Give me one good reason not to draw up court martial charges right this minute!"

A small ray of light broke into the dark, a chink of hope in the wall of despair. He actually wanted me to say something. From plebe days I knew that was no small mistake on the Boss's part. He had given me an opening, right in front of the whole squadron.

On the football field I had learned aggressiveness often made up for size and sometimes a blind side block carried the play.

"Sir," I said, "I called you. I said, 'Newcross Lead, this is Newcross Blue 3. There is a train at eight o'clock. I'm going down. Will you cover me?' and you said 'Roger, Blue 3.' So I went down and attacked the train."

Major Herren glared at me. He clenched his fists and his face turned red. He looked as though he was about to explode. Now it was his turn to feel frustration. He opened his mouth to speak and nothing came out. He tried again and only sputtered. Finally he managed, "God damn you, Olds, I wasn't the one who said 'Roger!'"

It was chilly around the Mess for a while, but the Major was a fair man and though he didn't say so, he knew he had been outmaneuvered. Of course, I never told anyone it was impossible not to recognize my wingman's voice when he said, "Roger." An Okie twang is an Okie twang, even over France.

Sadly, Major Herren was killed later that summer. We respected him and we knew we had lost something and somebody important in our lives.

MIXING IT UP IN WORLD WAR II

My father served as a pilot in France in World War I, so I grew up with combat aviation in my blood. He was responsible as much as anything else for my burning desire to be a pilot. He was always a strong advocate of air power and, among many other achievements, had been the commander of the 2nd Bomb Group, the first unit to operate the B-17. I graduated from West Point in June 1943, receiving my wings and started operational training almost right away on the Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter. This experience seemed to take forever. In May 1944, however, I was assigned to England as a member of the 479th Fighter Group (434th Fighter Squadron). We were stationed at RAF Wattisham. We quickly worked up to combat status, carrying out a lot of interdiction type flying over France and Germany prior to D-Day. June 5th was a day never to forget. We were sent out to cover the armada headed for Normandy and were back the following day to provide escort for the invasion itself.

I had still to experience my first actual aerial combat, an event that took place early on the morning of August 13, somewhere close to Montmirail in France. This involved a surprise attack I pulled off, jumping two FW-190s down at ground level. After a brief but hectic fight I was able to down both of them. Things moved faster after that. Just a couple of weeks later my wingman and I attacked a group of Messerschmitt 109s. There were between 55 and 60 of them and we had a heck of a fight. The MEs were headed for the bomber stream. The engagement began at 28,000 feet over Muritz Zee, and, in the usual fashion for such affairs, finished on the deck. By then, we were close to Rostock on the Baltic. During the battle, I was able to bag three MEs while my wingman was responsible for two destroyed. But what I remember most was the trip home. It was long, slow and cold, my canopy having departed during a high G, high speed pullout. Things worked out, however, this being only my second combat, it resulted in the award of the Silver Star.

That fall we converted to P-51s and I continued on to fly a total of two combat tours, many of them characterized by engagements

every bit as colorful. Many of the operations were long range escort missions for bombers on deep penetration missions. We also had engagements with the ME 262 jet, frequently the missions involved strafing runs on German facilities and airfields.

MIXING IT UP IN VIETNAM

On May 3, 1967, we were penetrating from the Gulf of Tonkin to a target that lay alongside the railroad northeast of Hanoi. Our eight F-4Cs were providing escort coverage for a force of F-105s that were in action striking a marshalling yard. Just short of the target we were hit by a group of some 16 MiG 17s. A swirling battle ensued, with a member of my flight immediately taking hits and being forced to bail out. I managed to bag one of the MiG 17s early on in the fight, which turned out to be the longest aerial battle I have experienced. The enemy was most aggressive and well disciplined. However, low fuel ("bingo") finally forced us to disengage, but halfway to the coast I turned back by myself to engage the MiG pilot who had seemed to be directing traffic from a vantage point on the deck below the general melee. I caught him and downed him with one Sidewinder heat-seeking missile, then turned for the Gulf and that desperately-needed aerial tanker.

Biography

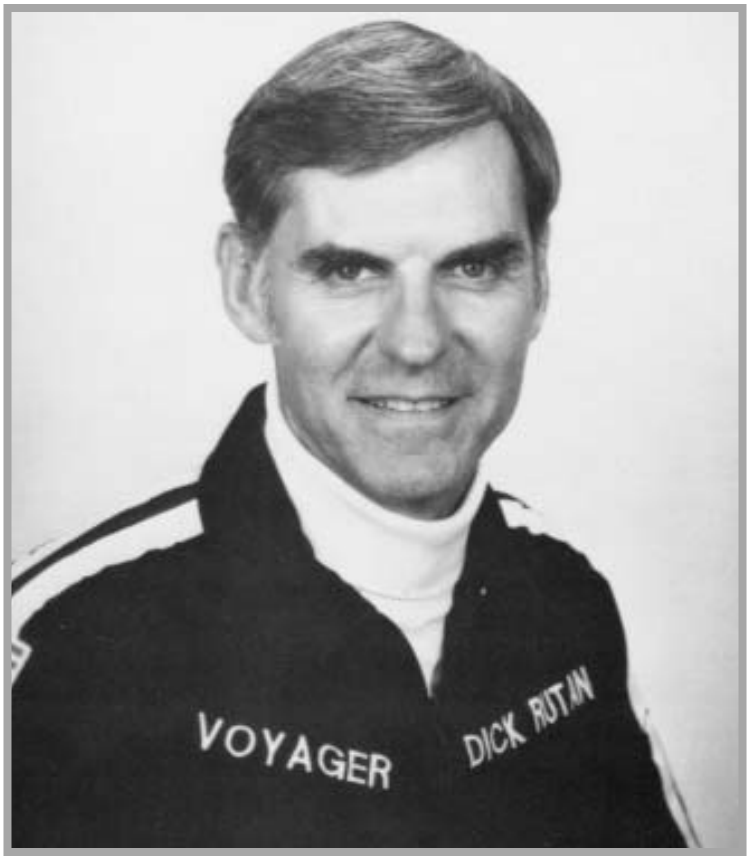
BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBIN OLDS USAF (RET.)

Brigadier General Robin Olds is rated a triple ace, having a World War II tally of 13 aerials, 11.5 during airfield strafing runs and, in North Vietnam, four confirmed aerials destroying two MiG 17s and two MiG 21s. In his 30 years of U.S. Air Force service, he flew some 65 different aircraft, including the Spitfire and Typhoon, the P-51, P-80, F-86, Gloster Meteor, F-101C, P-38, F-4 and many other aircraft. Combat missions included 107 in two tours during World War II and 152 in Vietnam, of which 115 were over North Vietnam. He earned his second oak leaf cluster to the Silver Star on January 2, 1967 during his famous "MiG Sweep." His third oak leaf cluster to the Silver Star was for "exemplary airmanship, extraordinary heroism and indomitable aggressiveness" in a low-level bombing run against the Thai Ngyen steel mill blast furnaces. He was awarded the Air Force Cross for his part in the famous Paul Doumier Bridge Raid. "General Olds is one of the top Air Force leaders in American history," states General Steve Ritchie. He is one of our best-loved military leaders. Robin is a powerful, charismatic and witty speaker.

GENERAL OLDS' MANY DECORATIONS INCLUDE:

Air Force Cross
Distinguished Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster
Silver Star with three oak leaf clusters
Distinguished Flying Cross with five oak leaf clusters
Air Medal with 40 oak leaf clusters
Distinguished Flying Cross (RAF)
Croix de Guerre (France)
Distinguished Service Order (South Vietnam Air Force)
Air Gallantry Medal with Gold Wings (South Vietnam)

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBIN OLDS USAF (RET.)



DICK RUTAN

PERMISSION TO FLY BY?

In 1967-68, I flew aerial combat missions in an F-100, the North American Super Saber, in the Republic of North Vietnam and the Republic of South Vietnam. The F-100 became the Air Force's first operational supersonic airplane back in the 1950s and it was used extensively in Vietnam.

Our missions over North Vietnam lasted from four to six hours and required multiple aerial refuelings. We refueled from a tanker circling off the coast of North Vietnam over the Gulf of Tonkin. The drill was simple: run strike reconnaissance, refuel, run back in. We saw a lot of ground fire, MiGs, surface to air missiles, and a lot of excitement.

During one mission, I flew into North Vietnam and one of my drop tanks would not feed. I couldn't use the fuel in the tank and I didn't want to carry the extra weight, so I flew over a suspected truck park and jettisoned the tanks. The empty tank probably didn't do any damage, but the full one might have found a target of opportunity. I completed my mission with double the refuelings.

Most of the pilots flying combat missions in Vietnam were barely 20 years of age. We saw death on every mission and most of us didn't know if we were going to make it back ourselves. We were pretty blasé, devil-may-care, go get 'em types, and we didn't pay a lot of attention to regulations. So if we saw an opportunity to do something rowdy, we'd do it.

On the way back to our base in South Vietnam, I got an idea. The F-100 is a supersonic fighter, but it's only supersonic without the drop tanks. What an opportunity! Wouldn't it be interesting to fly over the base supersonic? Wouldn't it be interesting to just lay a good supersonic boom across the base? After all, reasoned my 20-year-old brain, what could it hurt? The Viet Cong shelled the base every day. Charges and mortars exploded inside the base every night. What harm could another couple of boom-booms do?

Preparations are being made on an F-100 before Dick's flight from Phu Cat air base in South Vietnam

I flew across the base at about 20,000 feet, kicked in the afterburner and got the F-100 supersonic. I turned and made my pass, rolling my wings back and forth to make sure I went directly over the complex. Then I looked back and noticed that the airplane had slipped subsonic. I didn't know if this happened over the base or after passing it. I didn't know if I boomed the base or not. So I came around again and repeated the entire pass, this time a little bit lower. I made sure that I had a good solid supersonic shock wave established and drilled right across the base.

I thought to myself, "Boy, this will really boom them. Really get their attention. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Some good prank."

I came around and landed, then taxied the plane to the ramp. I, the crusty combat veteran, sat in the cockpit basking in the euphoria of the fly-by. Yeah, me, the 20-year-old captain, wearing my "Go To Hell" fighter pilot hat, twisting my big long handlebar mustache.

Up walked a full colonel. I don't remember whether he was the wing commander or somebody more important, but he was one of the big colonels on the base. He stood there with a frown on his

face and looked at me as I got out of the airplane. "Rutan," he says, "I'm going to assume that since you are the only person who's been flying without drop tanks that you are the one responsible for booming our base. I want you to report to your squadron commander immediately upon your debriefing."

That's all he said, so as I walked up to my commander's station, the military professional thought, "Oh, boy, am I going to get chewed out now." But then the 20-year-old pilot retorted, "Who cares? What are they going to do with me? Send me to North Vietnam and let me get shot?"

My squadron commander's name was Col. Stanley Manlock. He was such a crazy guy. We all called him Col. Stopcock. When I walked into his office, he looked at me and said, "Rutan, you boomed the base. They aren't mad that you did that. But when you boomed the base, all the Vietnamese personnel got scared so bad, they all dove into the bunkers. It took us all afternoon to talk them into getting out of the bunkers. But by the time we got them back out, it was too late to put them back to work. So we put them back on the bus and drove them off the base. So from now on, we would appreciate it if you didn't come back and drill the base."

WHAT LOST PROP OVER TEXAS?

Denial: when you find yourself in an impossible situation, you look around and see no other alternative, your mind shuts down and tells you this horrible thing is *not* happening.

Early one Sunday morning in mid-Texas, I took off in my little Long EZ (a single engine airplane with a wood propeller in the back) on my way to Venezuela to film a commercial at Angel Falls. We started out very early, climbed through the thick summer fog at ground level, and then leveled off at 10,000 feet and headed towards Brownsville to clear Customs. It was calm and nice that morning, until I started feeling a vibration, very slight at first. When I reduced the power, the vibration went away. Then I'd restore power, and after maybe half a minute or so, the vibration returned. Then I reduced the power again and the vibration went away.

Something was definitely wrong. I called Air Traffic Control to request the weather at the different fields around me. At Austin, the closest recovery base, the fog was so thick the birds were walking. About this time the vibration started to get really noticeable. As the airplane started shaking more, I'd pull back the power more. Finally the power was almost back to idle. I trimmed up the airplane for best glide speed. ATC told me the nearest airport where I could possibly make an instrument approach was San Antonio, Texas, 60 miles away.

I turned towards San Antonio. The airplane shook and vibrated horribly. It got worse with every passing second. The power was all the way back at idle. We were on top of a thick, solid fog layer that went all the way to the ground. I realized we were in deep trouble.

POP! I turned over my right shoulder and watched the propeller and spinner tumble end over end and drop into the solid layer below.

I knew what this meant: a total engine failure, on top of a solid fog layer, no hope of making a safe landing in any kind of field. There were absolutely no choices. We had major problems.

Since the horrible problem, the severe vibration, was gone, my mind went into denial. The vibration is gone, therefore every-

Long EZ

thing should be okay. So I turned around and looked south toward Brownsville. Even though I had just seen the prop tumble away from the back of the airplane, I relaxed, took a deep breath and said, "Boy, sure glad that's over with."

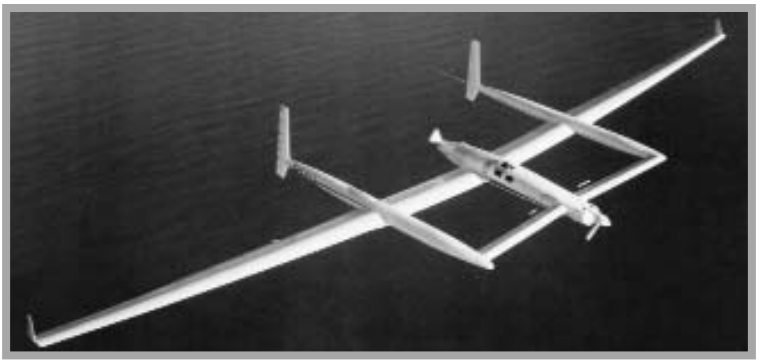
I reached down and pushed the throttle in to continue our way to Brownsville. Without a prop, the engine screamed to life. The terrible noise obliterated the denial. I shut off the mags, the fuel, the engine, and began to deal with the emergency.

I pressed on and was just able to see the barest outline of a tiny airfield below us. With a little piece of airmanship, a little bit of luck and a smile from above, I was able to land on that little airport in terrible weather without any further damage to the airplane.

A GODDESS OVER THE INDIAN OCEAN

Everyone knows the Voyager around-the-world flight was a nine day nonstop record, but not everyone knows just how grueling it was to be locked up in that small cabin for those nine days. Even with all the training and preparation, years and thousands of hours flown, the best of us can be taken by surprise—or fatigue.

Voyager had just crossed the Malay Peninsula, just south of Thailand. When the sun went down, I could see the southern tip of India way off in the distance. It was a long, dark, moonless night. We were flying out across the Indian Ocean in the early morning hours just off the coast of Somalia, around day four,



Voyager

about an hour before sunrise. It was Jeana, my copilot's turn to sleep. While I flew the plane in that dark void, I began to think how ominous the African continent appeared. What would it hold for us? I've visited most parts of the world, seen Asia and Europe many times, but I had never been to Africa.

As we sat off the coast of Somalia it was very black. The air was crystal clear. We were cruising between 10,000 and 12,000 feet—just about the same conditions when I was shot down in my fighter plane in Vietnam. I began to imagine being attacked by a renegade African fighter pilot, someone who might want to make a name for himself at the expense of the very fragile and very vulnerable Voyager. I looked up and down the coast of Somalia and wondered why there were no lights. Why was it so very dark and forbidding that morning? At that moment I saw something flash across the canard. It sounded and looked just like a missile that had been fired at us and missed. Maybe it was my imagination. As I saw the missile go by, I turned around. Right behind us was the brightest aircraft landing light I had ever seen.

I thought we were being tracked by an enemy fighter. My first reaction was to grab the stick, turn off the autopilot, go into afterburner, pull up sharply, roll to the left, and get into the vertical rolling scissors. Reverse. Reverse. Get them in gun range and blow my adversary out of the sky.

Then I remembered where I was. The Voyager couldn't turn at all. Well, it could just barely turn, much less manage a vertical aerial engagement. So I sat there, tensing up, waiting for the next

missile to fire and hit us. Then I called mission control. I told them we were being shot at and tracked by an unknown aircraft at our six o'clock position. It didn't dawn on me to ask why would somebody shoot at us and display a large landing light. Nor did I realize any airplane that had the capability of firing missiles certainly couldn't fly with us at such a slow speed. This logic never occurred to me. Of course, I had slept only one or two hours in the last four days. Maybe it was fatigue.

Maybe it was my imagination. I kept turning around and making shallow "S" turns to try to maneuver to see what the tracking airplane would do. Each time I moved it pretty much stayed in the same spot. It didn't fire again. It didn't do anything. It just sat there with its brilliant landing light shining on the back of Voyager.

Enough of this, I thought. I put Voyager into a full left 90-degree left turn away from Somalia. As I rolled out of the steep turn, the bright light was now off my left wing tip. That seemed strange. It couldn't sit there off the wing tip. I started to look at it more carefully. Finally, I recognized the *fighter plane* that had just shot a missile at us.

My adversary was the morning star, the planet Venus.

How embarrassing. Guess it can happen to anyone—even Voyager.

CAN ANYONE GIVE US A LIFT BACK TO MOJAVE?

The Voyager project was a very intense volunteer effort. We were only a month away from the close of our weather window and everyone on the project had been working around the clock to get the mission in the air. Everyone was so immersed in the operation of the airplane, getting it ready and fueled, getting the food and provisions on board, making sure all the equipment worked, no one had any time to think about the outside world. No one knew if the press would cover our flight. We didn't have the time to contact them.

Fortunately, some folks outside our mission group informed the press and we received overwhelming media coverage. But during the flight I was not aware of the tremendous media interest in the Voyager flight. Neither Jeana nor I knew that CNN was broadcasting hourly reports all over the world. We were entirely focused on flying Voyager.

On the ninth day, we crossed from night into the early dawn light just over Los Angeles. As we watched the lights of Los Angeles slip underneath our nose, we finally realized we had made it around the world.

We came across Long Beach, El Monte and Mt. Wilson. When we reached Edwards Air Force Base, Palmdale and Lancaster, the high desert was covered with a moderately high overcast and another cloud bank with tops of about 8,000 feet. That cloud bank extended all the way over to the edge of Edwards Air Force Base, blocking our view of the usual traffic. Upon seeing Edwards I knew we were home. I started to think of all the aviation activities located at Edwards, the test pilot training school, supersonic development and training, contractor operations, NASA operations, the space shuttle recovery—it's a very, very busy place.

Edwards is also located right in the middle of a restricted area... I panicked. We hadn't made prior arrangements. We didn't have prior permission to land at Edwards Air Force Base!

Then I thought, well, we have to land there. Where else are we going to land? Maybe if I'm very polite and very amenable, maybe... just maybe, they will let me land.

I called the tower, and said, "Edwards Tower, this is Voyager One, we are 25 miles south, inbound, and we would like permis-

sion to enter your restricted area." And then I thought, if I don't bother them too much, maybe I could talk them into letting us come in there and land without permission.

I added, "No problem, I know you're busy. Now I just kinda would like to work my way around your traffic... without bothering anybody. I'll just land on the northern dry lake and I won't get in anybody's way." I crossed my fingers hoping they would allow us to come in.

The tower sounded confused when he answered. "Voyager One, this is Edwards Tower. Sir, we have canceled flying for today. They are all here waiting for your return."

When we were still on top of the cloud bank, just before I called Edwards, I reminded my copilot we had left our cars back at Mojave. We were both hoping someone would be around to give us a ride back to Mojave and our cars. When we flew to the edge of the cloud bank at about 10,000 feet, we looked down for the first time at Edwards' Muroc dry lake and its 15,000-foot runway, the same runway we had just taken off from nine days earlier. There below us, lining the edge of the dry lake runway stood tens of thousands of people! It reminded us of a space shuttle landing.

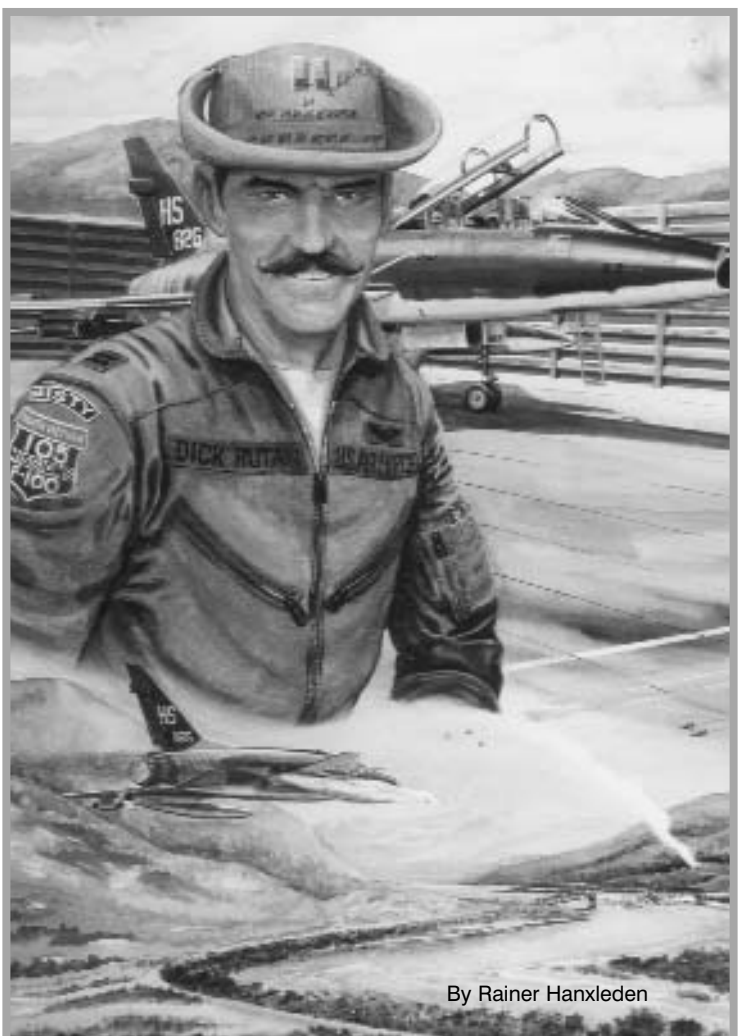
Then I knew that, yes, there was going to be somebody around to give us a ride back to Mojave. We also began to realize that our lives were going to be very different. When we landed we learned of the huge interest in Voyager, not only in the aviation community, but also within the general and international press. Thanks to this great interest and outpouring of affection, we were able to go on a lecture tour and pay off the debts that we incurred. And, yes, we did get a ride back to our cars.

WHAT ARE BEST FRIENDS FOR?

After my Vietnam conflict days, I pulled a tour of duty in England at Lakenheath Air Base, the same airport that sent B-17's into Germany during World War II. One day I pulled an assignment to fly a functional flight test in an F-100 that had received extensive maintenance and a new engine. I took off alone and climbed to above 40,000 feet where I finally broke out on top

of the horrible, typical English winter weather. Somewhere over the North Sea, I began performing some routine engine checks.

During the negative G checks, an oil sample bottle that a crew chief had inadvertently dropped into the oil tank became lodged in the oil pickup line. All oil flow to the engine instantly stopped. I reduced the throttle, called "Pan-Pan-Pan," and began the long descent back to Lakenheath. The Ground Control Approach (GCA)



By Rainer Hanxleden

controller told me the weather was very bad, ceilings 900 feet, about two or three miles visibility and light rain.

Halfway down the GCA glide path, 12 1/2 minutes after the sample bottle became lodged in the oil line, the engine seized. As I broke out of the clouds, barely above the minimum altitude to bail out, I heard a big explosion and a sickening grinding noise. Then fire shot out both ends of the airplane and the huge compressor stalled, blowing my feet off the rudder pedals and dirt up into my face. Then came more fire at the front of the doomed F-100.

I was able to just level off as the airspeed bled down to almost a stall. I reached and grabbed the ejection seat handles and ejected from the dying F-100. My parachute opened. I swung two times and into the trees before I hit. I glanced over my shoulder and saw the F-100 go into the trees ahead of me and blow up.

Meanwhile, the mobile controller on the runway had seen the airplane come out of the clouds with its landing light on and crash in the trees about two or three miles short of the runway. No one saw a parachute. The controller hollered, "No chute, no chute, get out there quick!" Everybody knew if you didn't bail out and the airplane crashed in a fireball, there was no chance of survival.

I came crashing down through the trees and my parachute and I landed right next to a typical English bloke trimming trees in the Queen's forest, literally at his feet. He had heard the explosion, saw the rocket seat go out, and here before him stood this man in a white helmet with a gold visor and oxygen mask on—a spaceman. As I ripped off my helmet, I hollered, "My name is Major Rutan and I am alive!" I grabbed my emergency bailout kit to get to my emergency radio. I pulled the handle and there was a loud hissing noise as the life raft started to inflate. It scared the man so bad he started running. I took off my parachute harness and went running after him. I said, "Come back, come back! I need your help!" He reluctantly came back and helped me get the parachute down out of the trees and the radio out. Then I made a radio call. "This is flight test *Ring Dove Two-one*, I'm down. I'm okay."

At the time, I didn't know that my parachute had not been spotted. My good buddy, who works in helicopter rescue, knew I was coming home with a bad engine. He was airborne in his hel-

icopter at the time and heading for the crash site. Underneath his helicopter is a round pressurized container that holds a lot of fire fighting suppressant. His job was to land that unit right next to the crash site, where the helicopter rotor would blow suppressant into the flames. The firefighter corpsman would don his gear and fight his way through the fire into the cockpit, pull the pilot out, and drag him back out of the flames.

When the mobile controller had said to get out there quick, he inadvertently jettisoned the fire suppression bottle before he went tearing out there. He knew his good friend Dick Rutan, whose wife was two weeks overdue with their second child, was caught in the fireball. As he orbited the burning wreckage, the thought that he had just lost a very good friend was overwhelming. And then he heard my call on the radio, "Hey, come out and get me!" He thought I was inside the fireball calling for him, then he realized that he dropped the fire suppressant container.

All he could do was sit there and watch the crash burn. Then he heard me call again. He called, not believing that I survived the accident. I answered him.

And then in disbelief he called, "Where are you?"

I said, "I bailed out about two miles short."

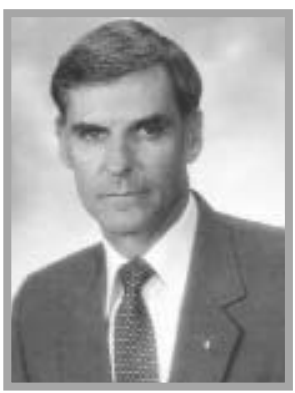
"You bailed out? You're okay, you're out of the fireball?"

And then with a great sigh of relief, we finally rendezvoused. I was picked up and returned to the based unhurt.

Dick's attempt for a third around-the-world record in the Global Hilton balloon.

Biography

DICK RUTAN



Dick Rutan made history in December of 1986 after completing a nine day, three minute and forty-four second round-the-world, non-stop and non-refueled flight, setting an absolute world's record that still holds today. Setting the storm-battered Voyager down on the dry lakebed at Edwards Air Force Base, he successfully completed a six-year quest, doubling the previous world distance record. President Ronald Reagan awarded Dick the Presidential Citizen's Medal of Honor at a special ceremony for the Voyager Team four days after the landing. The Medal of Honor has been presented only sixteen times in the history of the United States. Dick received his student pilot's license, soloed and received his driver's license on his 16th birthday. He flew 325 missions in Vietnam, 105 of them as a member of the Super Sabre FAC, a high-risk operation commonly known as the "MISTYS." Dick was hit by enemy ground fire on his last mission and was forced to eject from his burning F-100, to be later rescued. Before retiring from the Air Force in 1978, Lt. Col. Rutan was awarded the Silver Star, five Distinguished Flying Crosses, 16 Air Medals and a Purple Heart. Dick continued his experimental adventures in aviation. In 1997, his "Around the World in 80 Nights" tour was successfully completed in two small experimental Long EZ aircraft. In 1998, his third attempt at an around-the-world record ended dramatically with an emergency parachute jump from a pressurized capsule suspended under a 110-foot hot air/helium balloon after experiencing a dangerous fabric tear. This was Dick's third life-saving parachute jump.

DR. JERRY COCKRELL

"THE GRADUATE" AS FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

Author's note: This story is true in every detail.

Thinking back on the many aspiring pilots I instructed while working my way through undergraduate school, it now seems a bit odd that I didn't have even *one* female student. Our FBO had many college students and locals who were interested in learning to fly, and had a contract to teach Army, Navy and Air Force Flight Instruction Program students as well, but no females.

After graduation, I decided to instruct and fly charter at a large FBO in my hometown while waiting for fall and graduate

school. The wife of one of our students expressed great interest in also learning to fly, but she wanted a different instructor in order to minimize comparisons and competition. The duty was assigned to me, and on a bright Saturday morning in June I met my new student, *Mrs. Robinson*. (No kidding!)

When Mrs. R came gliding up to the picnic table/outdoor pilot lounge in front of the office, I totally lost what little composure could be ascribed to a hotshot, 21-year-old instructor. I knew she would be a good pilot—she already knew how to glide. I knocked over three chairs just trying to stand up when she asked where she could find *her* flight instructor, Jerry. The woman was SPECTACULAR! She was the most striking lady I had ever seen in real life! She had looks, figure and style. Although I had never really cared for perfumes, she was followed by just a hint of an essence that complemented her beauty and instantly made me dizzier than jet fuel.

In addition to my own wide eyes and slack jaw, all the other guys had a similar reaction. I fumbled through an introduction, knowing I was the immediate envy of my fellow instructors. I couldn't believe this stroke of luck, and I certainly wasn't about to complain.

I had often wondered what differences I might encounter when instructing a female student, but loss of composure hadn't been on the list. I totally forgot the classroom briefing for lesson one, failed to sign the airplane out, and left the student packet and keys in the office. That was just for openers.

As we walked over to the Cessna 150, all eyes were on us. One thing that never occurred to me, as a professional instructor, was suggesting that Mrs. R dress differently for future lessons. The need for this should have been obvious when two lineboys ran their tugs into each other while watching us cross the ramp. Mrs. R's short, short-shorts and silky "almost" top would have been great for just about any other casual setting. They were a major distraction and potential hazard in the flight training environment.

Other instructors and even students began checking the training schedule to see when Mrs. R was signed up for a lesson so they could observe what she *wasn't* wearing that day. Neither before,

nor since, had I seen so much student interest in the preflight inspection of an aircraft. I must admit, this process took on a totally new meaning for all of us. I'm certain no one who witnessed this daily ritual will ever visually check the fuel quantity in a Cessna 150 without thinking of Mrs.R. It was a sight to behold.

Until meeting Mrs.R, I thought of myself as a pretty darn good instructor, and as professional as three years of experience would allow. However, I have to admit my failings and weaknesses. When Mrs. Robinson showed up, I just lost it. Consider, for a moment, the combination of human factors at work here. Her movie star attractiveness and my 21-year-old naivete; her intoxicating perfume and my testosterone.

In spite of the unbelievable distraction, Mrs. R was actually making some progress as a student pilot. One pilot task that I recognized as a problem area (for me, not her) was in making coordinated turns. It came to my attention when I asked Mrs.R. to make *left* turns. We would dutifully clear the area before the turn

In 1968, I took my dad, Jim Cockrell, flying in my PT-17 Stearman. It had been 25 years since dad's last Stearman flight, during his primary flight training in WWII.

and *every* time she turned the control yoke to the left her "almost" top would pop wide open. I'm somewhat ashamed to admit it, but I looked. The devil made me do it!

I soon learned a lesson about situational awareness. It happened during our postflight discussion following lesson number six. When I asked Mrs. R if she had any questions about anything we had covered thus far in her training, she said she had only one concern. "My husband and I didn't really want to compare our flight training experiences," she said, "but he did tell me that his instructor covered left *and* right turns pretty early in the program. I was just wondering when *we* might be doing right turns."

The humiliating reality was almost as overwhelming as my first meeting with Mrs. R. Aspiring, as I did, to being a top-notch, really professional instructor and having to face this major mistake was devastating.

After thinking the situation through for several days, I decided that the ethical thing to do was to switch Mrs.R to another instructor. I also decided to confide in and seek counsel from our chief instructor, a highly experienced and respected instructor, 55

years of age. He listened thoughtfully to my quandary and concerns and finally agreed with my decision. Since Mrs. R was about due for a phase check, he would fly with her and break the news about a new instructor. I just couldn't face her.

I peered dejectedly out of the flight office window as they crossed the ramp to begin the phase check. I was a failure!

That was the last time I saw either of them. They ran off to Mexico together. They were last seen in a climbing left turn

Biography

DR. JERRY COCKRELL

Dr. Jerry Cockrell is a psychologist, 12,000 hour pilot and one of the funniest speakers in aviation. His qualifications include B-737 Captain, CRM & Check Airman Instructor, B-737 Simulator Instructor, CFI and Advanced Ground Instructor ratings and DC-3 type rating. Dr. Cockrell's Ph.D. is in psychology and education. He gives a hilarious banquet-keynote presentation and uses funny and amazing true stories to teach safety, human factors and awareness. Folks laugh and enjoy themselves, then later realize they have learned a great deal and they remember the lessons. As one of the earliest developers of CRM (crew resource management) in 1977 and one of the foremost educators on the subject, Jerry serves as an expert witness in the area of human factors in numerous aviation accident areas. Dr. Cockrell has traveled to all 50 states, England, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mexico and Canada delivering his insightful and humorous presentations. He toured for the Air Safety Foundation (a division of AOPA) for many years teaching various pilot programs and flight instructor revalidation clinics.