
SCENE

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PRIMARY FLIGHT TRAINING—1943 NAAS MEMPHIS

My orders directed me to report to the Commanding Officer of the Naval Auxiliary Air Station by a given date in the middle of June. That was some climate change from the chilly and frozen Greenland to the hot and sweaty Deep South!

NAAS Memphis was established to make aviators out of Navy aviation cadets. The Commanding Officer was a high school principal given a wartime Naval Reserve commission with a rank of Lieutenant Commander. The cadets would be eighteen to nineteen years old, an age with which he was used to dealing. I was twenty-seven turning twenty-eight and at the upper limit for entering flight training.

In my class were officers reporting directly from sea duty in war zones. They had four years at the Coast Guard Academy and three years as Ensigns. Some had been promoted to full Lieutenant. Some were accompanied by wives. I don't recall any children.

The married ones received rental allowances and lived ashore. We single ones were billeted in Bachelor Officers' Quarters. The rank of full Lieutenant entitled me to a private room with a portable electric fan!! (There was no air conditioning. I stacked two chairs and positioned the fan to oscillate up and down my spine all night long.)

The first order of business was another physical exam. This one was called a "flight physical." The only test different was a "Snyder." The testee is put in a chair with face down and spun around several times, and then told to stand and walk a straight line. Our fear of this test was that we would get dizzy and flunk out of flight training. Well, we all got dizzy...and later learned that one would flunk the test if he did NOT get dizzy.

Next, we were tested for stamina on the obstacle course. (You know—where you stomp through a line of truck tires, squeeze under the barbed wire fence, scale the six-foot fence, and run to the finish line, if you can.) A Chief was there with stop watch. We asked what that was for. He said we had to beat a certain time. *TIME?* Our question was whether or not we could *make it* from start to finish. Never mind the time.

The next test measured your fighting spirit—boxing. They pitted me against a nice young lad ten years my junior. Fortunately, boxing was taught at the Academy and I had learned how to cover-up for three minutes.

There was one test of bravery or “guts.” It was to step off the high-dive platform at the gym pool feet first. Through the clear pool water the tile pool bottom appeared to be at surface level. Yes, it took “guts.” It took some several trips up that ladder. I knew that if I hesitated I would freeze. I walked right up and stepped off that platform without looking!

To the **Flight Line** at last. There we met our flight instructors. They were all Ensigns just out of flight training themselves. But now they were the elite and in charge, regardless of rank. And they deserved a little **R.H.I.P.** too. This was performed by the tradition of the student carrying the instructor’s parachute out to the plane.

Our **Primary Flight Training** was in the “Yellow Peril,” as the **N2S biplane** was affectionately called. The first flight was to acquaint us with the aircraft and the surrounding area. But before we could go flying, we had **Ground School** where we learned the parts of the aircraft and their controls and had to pass a blindfold cockpit test. That was easy, as about all there was were a few instruments like needle/ball, airspeed, and altitude. And control stick, rudder pedals, and throttle.

The plane had tandem controls, with the instructor in the front cockpit and the student to the rear (with limited vision). The instructor could talk and send commands to the student through a voice tube called a gosport. The student could not “talk back.” There was no radio. The communication with the control tower was one-way. When in the landing pattern, a green light from the tower was clearance to land. A red light meant to go around for another approach to land.

This “**orientation flight**” was to demonstrate some of the maneuvers we would learn to perform. My instructor took me up to three thousand feet above the ground. It was a thrill, but not scary, to look down at the fields below. It was like hanging from a sky-hook.

Then the fun began. Nice easy wing-overs. A stall and recovery (with the instructor observing my reaction). Now to pep it up—a snap roll. (Was I still smiling?) A loop (and I didn’t heave). And the finale—inverted flight hanging from the seat harness. The engine wouldn’t run inverted more than about five seconds. When it stopped, the instructor righted the plane, it sputtered back to life, and we completed the flight.

Now I believe the flight was to check on the student adaptability for flying. Did I enjoy the maneuvers or was I pale with fright? Did I quickly recover from vertigo? Did I freeze on the controls? Did I get airsick? etc. I passed!

The flight syllabus eventually led us to perform the maneuvers we had experienced on the “orientation flight” and also included night takeoffs and landings with the only light from a line of pot lights.



We flew our first training flights to and including our first solo flight in this lightweight biplane. These trainers were painted bright yellow to lessen airborne collisions and were affectionately known as the “Yellow Perils”!

The emphasis was on **spot landings**. This is where the Navy Wings differ from Air Force Wings. Long, wide, well lighted runways are always available to Air Force cadets. Their flight technique is to fly the aircraft down an imaginary glide path until just a few feet above and in line with the runway. Then use all the runway needed to “squeak” it on.

The Navy must have been thinking about aircraft carrier landings of the future. The chosen landing spot was near the start of the runway. With the Yellow Peril, we slipped or made s-turns to shorten or stretch the approach, and when over the spot we would chop the throttle and drop onto the runway.

With heavier aircraft, including the seaplanes, a “power” approach was made. When all was ready for touchdown, the plane was held in a nose-high attitude. The rate of decent was controlled by the engine power. The higher the power the flatter the glide path. Reduce the power and the glide path was made steeper, but the nose attitude remained constant. When over the desired touchdown point, removing power settled the aircraft onto the runway in a three-point landing. It was bump more than squeak, but you were down and not going to bounce back into the air.

The one flight every pilot remembers is his **first solo flight!** Mine was uneventful, but full of apprehensions. Did I have the *right stuff*? An instructor had always been “riding the controls.” Now I was alone, and very lonesome looking at that empty cockpit in front of me. Yellow Perils were swarming about like butterflies. I had to get into the correct flight pattern and stay in it and at the same time fly the plane. I was just starting to feel comfortable when there was the *green light*. My turn to land. The landing was a little wobbly, but I did it ! I passed Primary!

Next, it was off to **NAS Pensacola** for Advanced Flight Training. That is where I earned my **Naval Aviator Wings** and met **Corpsman Mary Evelyn Bond**.