



# Atkron 12 Newsletter



Volume II, Issue 4

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## Ubangi

### Newsletter

Renew your subscription. Yes, it's that Time. I hate asking for money, but it seems like I do that a lot. I have been very pleased with the number of old Ubangi's that have signed up for this Newsletter. It has been a great thing for me, and I hope you have enjoyed it also. Now we have to decide if it is worth continuing. I will let the treasury decide. If you would like to see this effort go on, please renew your subscription by mailing me a check for \$10.00. I know, I know, it was only 5 for the first year and a half. As it turns out, I can no longer print the Newsletter myself and have found a local printer to do it almost as cheap. Some of you contributed more than the minimum, I am keeping track of that.

### Sea Stories

#### Point 4 the hard way

It was late Friday afternoon June 22, 1956. I was the duty officer, and we had just sent out the final flight of four F7U - 3 Cutlass's. It looked for sure we would reach our goal - 100 flight hours in one week.

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## Ubetcha

### In Memorial

For those of you that may not have heard, Neal Russo passed away on Sept 18<sup>th</sup> at his home in West Virginia. Our Sympathy goes out to his wife Darlene, son Neal jr., and daughter Dina. Neal was a great guy and everyone that knew him from the 66-68 era would agree. Several of us were lucky enough to visit with him and his son in Bethesda, MD in August of this year. Mike Landers and Frank Giccone from FL, Bob Kaplan and Bill Heck from TN, Ed Thomas and Jerry Schwartz from PA, Eric Harvie from NJ and myself from MI. Below is photo of the guy as a plane captain.

On the last page is a picture of our little reunion



The whole squadron had been galvanized to reach the goal – maintenance, and the line crew had done a great job in keeping the Cutlass flying.

I looked out the hanger window and saw one of the planes was returning to the line in a down status, meaning we might now miss our goal by 20 minutes (.4)

I went to the VA- 12 Skipper - CDR. Paul Durand, “Skipper, a plane just came out of check. I can take it for a quick 20 minute flight and we can get our 100 hours. “ I added “Why not line up the squadron and I ‘ll make a pass over the field and we will break the 100 hours in style.”

A few minutes later I was airborne and heading for the acrobatic area to practice for my pass over the field. After a few barrel rolls and loops, I decided after one more loop to head for NAS Cecil Field.

As I was coming out of the loop at 5,000 feet, I was startled to see what every pilot totally fears – fire warning lights. I had 2 afterburner fire warning lights on. The Cutlass had 2 engines and 2 afterburners all with individual fire warning lights.

I couldn’t believe it! A pilot’s worst nightmare – fire - was happening to me.

My first impulse was to put my hand over the lights in the hope they would go out. Resisting that, I went through the process of checking for fire. Reduced power to idle, tailpipe temperature was normal, no engine rumble, checked the mirrors no trailing smoke.

Since I was up without a wingman I could not have the aircraft checked. I did not really want to leave the comfortable womb of the cockpit, but I also knew I could not fool around much longer.

Suddenly the decision was made for me – the 3<sup>rd</sup> fire warning light came on. I immediately cut the left engine; two of the three lights were on the left engine and afterburner.

In that charged moment what calmed me down was that I did not want to come on the air and in a high pitched squeal screaming “Mayday”. So envisioning my self back at the BOQ bar I composed my speech to be broadcast calmly

“ Cecil Tower Mayday, Mayday Navy jet 9645 in the vicinity of Stark Florida on fire, I am ejecting”. “

As I started to press the mike button to broadcast the Mayday I checked altitude 700 feet (a problem for the then critical ejection altitude was 1,000 ft) and checked one more time in the mirrors and to my horror saw a huge ball of flames just behind the canopy.

I yanked back on the stick to get altitude and without a word of warning to anyone I reached up and pulled the face curtain and ejected.

The canopy blasted off and as I saw the plane sliding under me, I opened the lap belt and kicked out of the seat. I was surprised as I had no sensation of falling – it was a feeling of floating. I had been trained to see the ground through my feet when I pulled the ripcord. As I tumbled what I had forgotten in my looking for the ground was that I had ejected very low. All of sudden I could see trees and pulled the ripcord. The ripcord was longer than I had expected and as I waited for the chute to open I remember thinking “ My God what if my arms are not long enough “. Then the chute opened, I was right over some trees and quickly hit the ground.

I was in the middle of nowhere with trees all around me. All of a sudden I could hear a plane and thought –“ My God they are coming for me already “. But the sound was going away from me; I pulled out my flare and ignited it. Then I saw a private plane turning toward me and indicating that I should go in a certain direction.

I was soon on a dirt road heading in the direction the pilot indicated. As I came around a bend in the road I ran into an older black woman who hugged me and crying said “ White boy, white boy I was praying for you. I am so happy to see you are all right. “ She explained that she had seen me eject but because I was so low never saw the chute open. I followed her to a farm and to my surprise saw that the private plane had landed in a field.

With no phone at the farm the pilot suggested he take me to Navy Sanford. I agreed and sat on the lap of the passenger only to encounter another problem - they could not close the door of the cockpit. Fate was kind again and we landed at

Navy Sanford without incident. I called Cecil Field to report I was OK and where the aircraft was headed – Turned out they already had the report of the plane crashing in Stark (no one on the ground was hurt since it was forest) On the Navy transport plane taking me back to Cecil Field the pilot asked if there would be someone waiting for me. I replied, “ the Chief who temporarily took the duty will not be too happy “, since it was now about 9 PM. As we taxied in front of the Tower at Cecil Field I could see all the pilots from the squadron waiting for me. “ Did you get point 4 “ they shouted in unison. We logged the flight as point 4 and did indeed reach our goal of 100 hours. **Bill Doody 56-58**

## Treasury Report

Our current balance is \$374.57, of which \$270 is earmarked for Reunion Deposits. Total funds collected to date \$1293.64

### Expenses

Stamps	\$313.72	Cartridges	252.29
Paper	47.93	Seals	6.35
Envelopes	16.35	Decals	21.18
Hotel Deposit	250.00	Postcards	11.25
Total	\$919.07		

## VA12 Association Members

Here are names of those that have joined our ranks since the last newsletter.

Lonnie Guyton	72, 76
James Renfroe	57, 58
John O'Conner	68, 70
Eugene Wyrick	64, 67
Russell Wise	56, 60

## Bio

Here's a brief history of my career.

1955 joined Navy  
 1956-1959 VF102 F2H banshee and F4D Skyray  
 1959-1960 civilian  
 1960-1964 VA44 A4's and F9 cougars  
 1964-1967 VA12 A4's  
 1967-1968 Vt24 f9 cougars  
 1968-1971 VA146 A7E's  
 1971-1975 namtra 1033 Taught all versions A4 and taught A7E's  
 Retired 1975 Worked for Wix Air and Oil Filters 18 yrs.  
 Retired and been goofing off ever since. That's about it.

Eugene Wyrick 64-67

## VA12 2004 REUNION

I have received a message from the contact person at Mayport. If there is a Carrier inport on April 24, we will be able to get a tour, if not then we are out of luck. They will not know for a few months, but hopefully by the next Newsletter printing. If you have suggestions or ideas of things you'd like to do or see as a group while we are in Jacksonville, please drop me a line and let me know. As time gets closer we will need to make some decisions regarding our Banquet, but I will let you know about that later on. Remember you may arrive a day early and stay a day late for the same reduced rate. The Agenda is still in draft form at this stage. To reserve your room call **1-800-590-4767**

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### REUNION BEGINS APRIL 23, 2004

PLACE: **SunSpree Holiday Inn Resort  
 Jacksonville Beach, FL**

TIME: **4 P.M. Check in/Registration**

I expect to have a table set up in the lobby area for you to pick up name tags and materials.

### ICE BREAKER (CRUSHER)

PLACE: **Hotel Hospitality Suite**

TIME: **6 p.m.**

A time to get together, reacquaint, meet other era Ubangi's and stretch the truth as always.

### DAY TWO APRIL 24, 2004

#### SPECIAL EVENT T.B.A.

PLACE: MAYPORT

TIME: A.M.

Maybe a Carrier Tour.

#### SPECIAL EVENT T.B.A.

PLACE: CECIL FIELD

TIME: P.M.

Maybe a Tour of Cecil Field, or what used to be Cecil Field.

#### SQUADRON BANQUET

PLACE: **Hotel Dining Room**

TIME: **P.M. TBA**

Dinner, and DJ

### DAY THREE APRIL 25, 2004

#### SPECIAL EVENT T.B.A.

PLACE: TBA

TIME: A.M.

MAYBE A GOLF SCRABBLE

## **The Word From The West Resurrection of the Rusted**

One of my closest long-time friends at work is a guy named Ben. We started on the job at the same location, same year, Ben in June and myself in September. Geez, 24 years ago!

One thing we have always had in common was that Ben is also a Navy veteran and served in the Surface Fleet as an Electronic Warfare Specialist (EW). So while he never had the pleasure of serving with a squadron like VA-12, he did make a couple West-Pacs.on-board CV-41 Midway. His Navy career was cut short by a moderate-to-severe back injury.

Well, we knew that the Midway had been Home-ported at Yokosuka towards the end of it's career and then was finally decommissioned in 1992. The same sequence came around for CV-62 Independence until it's decommissioning in 1998. Years ago we learned that both vessels are mothballed at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, in Bremerton, Washington.

So about 18 months ago, word filtered around to us mossy-skull backwater hicks here in the Oregon woods that Midway was possibly being sold to the City of San Diego, as the home of a future museum, similar to CV-11 Intrepid today in New York City. This has finally come to pass and shipmate Ben tells me that the city fathers in San Diego are going to be arranging for an ocean-going tug or two to haul the hulk down there. Ben has heard that they will pause going south along the West Coast, at Astoria, Oregon. This is a small town at the mouth of the Columbia River and the scene of lots of shipping activity for vessels coming from and going in to Portland. It's a good place to stop.

We are now trying to figure out when and for how long they might be heaving to at Astoria. Ben even wonders if any civilians are going to be allowed to ride on the boat, for any portion of the remainder of the voyage.

Arrrg! Hearby hangs a tale, shipmates!

### **TWO SAILORS NEEDING A RIDE**

So, we're going to just petition the tug boat captain for permission to float along on the old rusty hulk. Hell of a deal, huh! The idea is to get our butts on-board for a few days while the tug meanders on down towards San Diego. How's that gonna work, you might ask. . .

Being pro-active thinkers, we feel that he might not agree to this (in advance, if he knew the [whole] story). His "Yes Indeed, Gents! Capitol Idea!" may come couched in some dialect that sounds a whole lot like No with a lot of bo'suns bellyachin' and other overwrought silly talk about insurance, liability, damages, "Danger Forewarned", and other addled rantings tossed in. This has got us busy trying to figure out what kind of a scheme, con(fidence) game, play, act, ruse, artful deception, artifice or suble confusion to arrange. A relatively convincing escapade, a gag, a precocious prank, a juvenile joke, just some mischief, a put-on, youthful shenanigan, crazy stunt, tomfoolery, bamboozlement, flimflam, fraud, lark, pure hokum, pretense, cunning treachery, trick or other assorted caper that we can run. Quick. Cheap. Simple and Stupid. Ben's got simple worked out and I am supplying the stupid!

Here are some of the various lies we are trying to tell to get that ride.

John: I served in a squadron, only I can tell you if the flight deck is going to peel off in the wind.

Ben: I lost my wallet in compartment 3-112-3-L back in 1976. I lost \$26, it's true! I want my money back.

Ben: Let me go check the sea-worthiness of the Fo'csle. I'll be right back.

John: Are you sure there is no Av-Gas left in tank number 2?

John: Hey, I think I just saw a dog over there. Damn fool thing, Come Back, Spot! Here Boy! Here Spot!

John: Skipper, it's the darndest thing, the deck is so greasy I can't get to the Starboard ladder.

John: It's OK, pal, the Skipper wants this cup of coffee on the double!

Ben: I'll go check the LOX farm for any old tanks. Back in an hour.

Ben: These river mouth waters are treacherous, Cap'n! Better let me help guide'er on through!

John: This deck metal is now corroded with 10% Sodium Upseedaisyum Hydroxide, someone has to stand in Hanger 2 to help keep 'er stable and see-worthy. Only I know the right spots. I volunteer.

Ben: This old bucket had the worst infestation of sea-bats you ever saw. I'll corral 'em all for ya!

John: Some friends gave me money to go away. Here I am.

John: I'll go stand by at the AFFF dispenser in Hanger 3.

Ben: Somebody needs to go tell Cdr. McBragg in CIC that the Alpha strike was cancelled.

John: It's the Smithsonian on the phone! They called First-Dibbies on the Officer's Wardroom silver service. I'm off.

John: So, Cap't, will we have steam up for a launch at first light? Good God, don't tell me no! Hell's Bells, my work is cut out for me now!

Listed here are the in-service years and fate of every large-deck aircraft carrier in the US Navy fleet.

Sort of surprising at first to note the fate of so many to have been at the scrap-yard.

This data is from the web-site at:

[www.history.navy.mil/photos/shusn-no/cv-no.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/shusn-no/cv-no.htm) and as you may surmise there are a

number of photos for almost every vessel there.

This history site has a large number of links to other vessels and events and is really a treasure of information. It's awesome.

So all you millionaires out there, you can still possibly get your hands on CV-59 Forrestal, CV-60 Saratoga, CV-61 Ranger, CV-62

Independence, and CV-66 America and benefit us all by turning one of them into another museum.

We need one in Portland

HULL	NAME	YEARS	FATE
1	Langley	1922-1942	Scuttled after war damage
2	Lexington	1927-1942	Scuttled after war damage
3	Saratoga	1927-1946	Sunk in A-Bomb test
4	Ranger	1934-1947	Sold for scrap
5	Yorktown	1937-1942	Sunk by war damage
6	Enterprise	1938-1958	Sold for scrap
7	Wasp	1940-1942	Sunk by war damage
8	Hornet	1941-1942	Sunk by war damage
9	Essex	1942-1975	Sold for scrap
10	Yorktown	1943-1975	Museum-Memorial in Charleston, SC
11	Intrepid	1943-1982	Museum-Memorial in New York, NY
12	Hornet	1943-1998	Memorial exhibit in Alameda, CA
13	Franklin	1944-1966	Sold for scrap
14	Ticonderoga	1944-1974	Sold for scrap
15	Randolph	1944-1975	Sold for scrap
16	Lexington	1943-1992	Museum in Corpus Christi, TX
17	Bunker Hill	1943-1973	Sold for scrap
18	Wasp	1943-1973	Sold for scrap
19	Hancock	1944-1976	Sold for scrap
20	Bennington	1944-1993	Sold for scrap
21	Boxer	1945-1971	Sold for scrap
22	Independence	1943-1951	Sunk in A-Bomb test
23	Princeton	1943-1944	Sunk by war damage
24	Belleau Wood	1943-1960	Sold for scrap
25	Cowpens	1943-1960	Sold for scrap
26	Monterey	1943-1971	Sold for scrap
27	Langley	1943-1964	Sold for scrap
28	Cabot	1943-1967	Sold for scrap
29	Bataan	1943-1961	Sold for scrap
30	San Jacinto	1943-1971	Sold for scrap
31	Bon Homme Richard	1944-1992	Sold for scrap

32	Leyte	1946-1970	Sold for scrap
33	Kearsarge	1946-1974	Sold for scrap
34	Oriskany	1950-1994	Mothball storage at Beaumont, TX
35	Reprisal	1945	Cancelled
36	Antietam	1945-1974	Sold for scrap
37	Princeton	1945-1971	Sold for scrap
38	Shangri-La	1944-1988	Sold for scrap
39	Lake Champlain	1945-1970	Sold for scrap
40	Tarawa	1945-1968	Sold for scrap
41	Midway	1945-1992	Future Museum-Memorial in San Diego, CA
42	Franklin D. Roosevelt	1945-1978	Sold for scrap
43	Coral Sea	1947-1993	Sold for scrap
44	Unnamed	1943	Cancelled
45	Valley Forge	1946-1971	Sold for scrap
46	Iwo Jima	1945	Cancelled
47	Philippine Sea	1946-1971	Sold for scrap
48	Saipan	1946-1976	Sold for scrap
49	Wright	1947-1980	Sold for scrap
50	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
51	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
52	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
53	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
54	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
55	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
56	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
57	Unnamed	1945	Cancelled
58	United States	1949	Cancelled
59	Forrestal	1955-1993	Mothball storage at Newport, RI
60	Saratoga	1956-1994	Mothball storage at Newport, RI
61	Ranger	1957-1993	Mothball storage at Bremerton, WA
62	Independence	1959-1998	Mothball storage at Bremerton, WA
63	Kitty Hawk	1961-	Active Duty, Yokosuka, Japan
64	Constellation	1961-2003	Decommissioned at San Deigo, CA
65	Enterprise	1961-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA
66	America	1965-1996	Decommissioned at Philadelphia, PA
67	John F. Kennedy	1968-	Active Duty, Mayport, FL
68	Nimitz	1975-	Active Duty, San Diego, CA
69	Dwight D.Eisenhower	1977-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA
70	Carl Vinson	1982-	Active Duty, Bremerton, WA
71	Theodore Roosevelt	1986-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA
72	Abraham Lincoln	1989-	Active Duty, Everett, WA
73	George Washington	1992-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA
74	John C. Stennis	1995-	Active Duty, San Diego, CA
75	Harry S. Truman	1998-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA
76	Ronald Reagan	2003-	Active Duty, Norfolk, VA (San Diego, CA after 7-1-04)
77	George H.W. Bush		

Submitted by John Larch

## October 21, 2003

### A day of reflection

I woke at 5:00 AM my usual time on a normal workday but today was not a normal day. I showered (no water hours); I shaved (clean mirror) and selected my clothes (no blues or whites). I got dressed paying attention to detail. My shoes were shined, my slacks were pressed, and my shirt was starched. I selected a sports jacket and a tie, which I haven't worn lately as casual, dress the order of the day.

My wife awoke and went over her checklist (do you have your coat, umbrella, etc etc), I responded with a series of yes or nos. I reviewed my driving instructions, gave my wife a kiss, said, "I love you" and headed to my car.

I began my drive to pick up Ed Thomas, about an hour and a half down the road. My thoughts during the drive drifted back to my Navy days. I remembered the 12 to 14 hour days of working on the flight deck. The faces of my shipmates entered my mind: Heck on the ladder polishing the canopy, Ed checking the fuel in the drop tanks, B.J. standing in the aft hellhole looking for leaks.

I remember when we lost control of our laughter as Neal Russo mimicked the Yellow Shirt CPO walking from the #3 elevator across the deck towards me. We tried to hold back the laughter but Chief or no chief we couldn't take it anymore. It was moments like this, that made our days a little easier, and it is moments like these that will make Neal live on forever.

My memories subsided as I approached Ed's house. He stepped into my car and for the next 3 hours we shared our thoughts about Neal.

"Neal is now free from all his pain, in fact he is with the angels and probably imitating God," Ed said. "Can you see him walking around waving his hands and saying LET THERE BE LIGHT." I chuckled in agreement.

"He will be making everybody smile up there," I said. We never were able to find a time when Neal was down at the mouth. He was a friend to everyone he knew I couldn't recall him saying an ill word about anybody. I know he helped me laugh off a Dear Eric letter from my girlfriend who had found another back in 1968.

We tried to figure out where and when he had joined us on the USS Roosevelt in West Pac. Was he one of the guy's who almost got dunked on a hi-line from a can, or did he meet the ship in Subic Bay. Well it really didn't matter; he touched our lives and that is something I am thankful for.

Ed started final approach navigation to our destination Arlington National Cemetery. We pulled up to the gate and we told the guard we were here for the Russo internment. We were given instructions and off we went to the parking lot for the Administration building. We were early almost two hours early. We wondered around for a while in the Visitors center, Ed and I were heard our names and turned to meet Jack Yezzi.

For the next forty five minutes we began discussing old times, and new times. We got up to speed on our current family status and career information. It was nice to see old friends again, but the circumstances among this reunion were not all that pleasant. And so one more Ubangi has caught up with our reunion group.

We returned to the administration building and met with Neal's family and friends. The three of us spoke at length with Darlene's (Neal's wife) sister in-law Deanne about Neal's unforgettable jovial personality. When Darlene and Neal Jr. arrived, the mood took a somber turn.

We were led to gathering room D, where we began to meet more of Neal's wonderful family and friends. The director gave us the Plan of the Day for the ceremony. Ed and I saw one of the honor guard sailors, Ed turned to me and said "I hope he's an airdale not some black shoe or an (expletive) snipe."

Darlene's mother and father made us feel right at home, repeatedly thanking us for honoring Neal's passing and for coming out of our way to see him laid to rest. The director then gave us our final instructions and we headed towards the field where the honors were to be preformed.

Neal's ashes were taken out of the car along with American flag with full military pomp and circumstance. Ed and I noticed the two sailors in command both had green aviation stripes on their sleeves. I said "You couldn't trust a snipe or a black shoe to do it right so you need to put an air dale in command." The well-drilled honor guard brought Neal's ashes and placed them on a pedestal. Six sailors upon command began to



unfold Old Glory at all times holding it rigid and following all ceremonial rights.

The chaplain then began to read the rights of passage, and that was when I looked to the creator and saw a red tail hawk circling what seemed to be right over the ceremony. When the chaplain had finished the rights he then blessed the urn containing Neal's ashes. Again the honor guard on command began to fold the flag, and then the sailor presented the Stars and Stripes to the Chaplain with a very sharp and military salute. The chaplain then carried the flag to Darlene and told her "Please accept this as a small token for what Neal had done for his country."

Darlene took hold of the flag as seven sailors fired three volleys (rifles) and the bugler began "Taps." The solemn somber mood persisted, as tears began the swell in the crowd gathered to say our last good-byes.

We were given our orders to return to our cars but Ed went AWOL, retrieving one of the spent brass from the twenty-one gun salute, which we will keep in the VA-12 archives, with a note of its origin. With the cars loaded we proceeded to the internment area, containing ten-foot walls about twenty-five feet long. The walls held cubicles about 12 inches high and eight inches wide and the urn was placed in the proper cubicle. After all this time wouldn't you know it Neal wound up with a bottom rack.

We said our farewells to Neal Jr., Darlene's Mom and Dad and with a hug I told Darlene "He is free and in a far better place". Ed told Darlene we hoped to see her and Neal Jr. at the next reunion and if they needed anything please give us a call.



To: Neal Russo AMS3

May he rest in peace and he will always be part of our Band of Brothers. Eric Harvie AE2, 66-69

## The Banner

This Banner was sent to me by Fat Bob Lannom. Bob served in VA12 in the early 70's as a Lt. I didn't get the full story of how he came by it, and it would better for him to tell anyway. But it will hang at the next reunion, and every one after that. Thanks Bob.



## INFO

A suggestion was made that I include my home address and phone numbers..

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10421 Barbara  
Pinckney, MI 48169

Home Phone 734-878-0556  
Work Phone 517-546-1010  
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