

SPECIAL EDITION

The

Vigilante

RVAHNAVY Newsletter

**A Tribute to Captain James "Pirate" Pirotte**

Submitted by Dockrammer

This issue of the RVAHNAVY Newsletter is dedicated to very special man named Captain James Henry Pirotte AKA "The Pirate". Mr. Pirotte has been very ill for some time now and a few months ago some of the Pirate's close friends, family and fellow aviators decided to gather up the old photos and re-tell those "classic Pirate stories" and pay tribute to the Captain while he can still enjoy them with us. So the All Hands call went out to RVAHNAVY. The following 16 pages contain the feedback that was received. This newsletter is by far the largest we've published. As an editor I was faced with the task of what to leave in and what to leave out. While I poured over the responses I laughed and cried and I knew I could not leave anything out. The Pirate's United States Naval Aviation career made me swell with pride to have served in the same Navy. Captain Pirotte was a Warfighter; A highly-skilled, fearless and valiant Navy Pilot who was revered by his fellow aviators and completely respected by his fellow Naval Officers and Men. The Pirate served on 7 different aircraft carriers, logged more than 700 carrier landings and more than 2500 flight hours.

So grab a cold one or cup of joe and relax in your favorite chair and enjoy the ride as we "salute", with enormous respect, one of our own. Captain Pirotte... your friends have spoken. The stories are now told. The men you unknowingly influenced and mentored have spoken. The RANs and BNs that you piloted at twice the speed of sound have expressed their interminable trust and gratitude. The aircraft maintainers that rallied long hours in harsh conditions to get you and to the mission thank you for being a natural Leader of Men. It was easy to serve with you. You taught us how to work hard and play hard. We were proud to call you Skipper.



I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy. Let's face it, friends make life a lot more fun. Charles R. Swindoll



My time spent with Capt Pirotte is a permanent memory of the good and uneasy times assigned to RVAH-12. He was and is a leader of men who instilled the pride within one to do the same. I was assigned as a plane captain while Capt Pirotte was XO and CO. I pre-flighted and launched him and his aircraft a great number of times. There are a lot of memories of these times and the most important memory was at the RVAH-12 reunion in Pensacola in June 2002. There were so many guys and their families there from the early 70's. When it came time to meet at the Naval Aviation Museum for dinner and walking into the museum and seeing Master Chief Bowen and Capt Pirotte at a table was exciting as these two men were mentors that led to my decisions to remain on active duty. I had just walked up to say hello and the first thing Capt Pirotte said was "Hey Nobby! How's it going?" He had a whiskey water and cigarette in hand and placed his arm around my shoulders and while we talked about what had gone on over the past years, and as people walked by he would tell them "this was my plane captain". The pride I felt that day was enormous. Capt Pirotte is a fine man and has influenced many to

reach for their goals in life. He was a special and wonderful man.

Matt Noblick

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Lt. Jim Pirotte originally flew A-3D Douglas Skywarrior A/C. I think he began with VAH-11 stationed at Sanford, Fla. He was single then and I think he drove a 1960 white Ford Thunderbird. He came over to VAH-3 (replacement squadron) in Sanford in approximately April 1963. I believe he got married while in H-3. He was always pleasant, but more importantly he always had time to help the enlisted men with mutual investments and the value and theory behind investing. As a 3rd crewman, I flew a lot of training missions with him in the A-3D-2T. These missions were ABS (Mark 12 equip.) training flights for BN training for the sister squadrons at NAS Sanford. It was probably May of 1964 and we were doing a RON training flight to both Minneapolis (my home) on Friday and then on to Salina, KS, LT Pirotte's home town. His dad and uncle came out to watch us depart from the flat land of Kansas. He introduced everyone to his father and uncle with true pride. He was just a down-to-earth man and a considerate Naval Officer. I believe in either 1965 or early 1966 during Carrier quals on a very hard landing he punched out of an A-3J which was the forerunner to the RA5C.

Mike Crever, A02 VAH-3 and RVAH-9 NAS Sanford (NRJ)

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My favorite story about Pirate is when he decided to leave the bar at the Cubi Point O'Club to go to the toilet. The bar was so crowded he decided to go outside and do his business there. So he snuck over to the wall of the building, whipped it out, and let it fly. I doubt that he ever realized he was peeing on the huge plate glass window of the dining room where all the diners were treated to this awful sight!

Gene Oatley

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My memory of him was he always had something to say to you even if it was just to say hi if you passed him in the hallway or in the hangar. He seemed generally interested in you and how you're doing.

Bill Faun AME-3RVAH-12; 73-76

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I relieved Pirate as Air OPs on the USS Enterprise. We had two days before the Pirate moved up to OPs of the Enterprise---CO-Capt. C.C. Smith. The first night the wx was bad, no Bingo and planes were running out of gas. Pirate was doing great, but the reps from the squadrons were all yelling that their guys needed gas. Finally Pirate slammed his fist

on the desk and said, "Now wait a GD minute and quiet down! The one thing great about our profession is we kill our weak ones."

After that you could hear a pin drop. All the planes made it safely aboard and I logged a possible Air OPs technique that may come in handy in the future.

Dick Hopper USN

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My husband, George Mallek and I, Ruth (Angelo) Mallek, met Jim Pirotte and Anne (Samuels) Pirotte in 1961 in Sanford, Florida. We were all so young and foolish then, and quickly became friends.

Our time in Sanford was memorable in many ways, and of course "Jimbo" was always providing us with many good laughs. Jim, as we know had two speeds, Slow and Stop and his manner of speech would testify to that. Can't you hear him now? We still can hear his stories. Jim enjoyed telling stories and would help bring the stories to life by laughing as he went on with details. As many of you will remember the drinking water in Sanford was loaded with sulfur and



Jim said, "Taking a shower in sulfur water is like showering in a barrel full of FARTS!"

Jim, George Mallek and Bill Derryberry had their favorite hang out in Sanford.... Jim Spencer's Bar and Grill.. It was the only "O" Club in those days,, and when Happy Hours were over, they would decide to race each other to the Snake Ranch on 17-92. Jim drove a white T-Bird, George an Austin-Healy and Derry his 60 MGA. No matter how they drove, Jimbo would ALWAYS over-shoot the drive way and have to turn around to get home.

When George and I were stationed in San Diego, and The Pirotte's in Walnut Creek, Ca. we would often get together for a weekend of fun. Anne and I had been discussing how young wives used the "F-word" was being used to describe just about any situation. Being "sweet things", we felt it was over-used. George was driving down a very hilly spot, when our brakes failed. Jim was sitting quietly in the back seat, and in his very slow manner said, "Oh!!! F", we're going to die!" We all broke out howling.

That same weekend, we decided to leave the kids and head for Tijuana, Mexico. Over the years George and I had commented on the stupid tourist who after a few Margie's would end up sitting in a donkey cart having their pictures taken. We vowed NEVER to be caught in such a situation, but after a few Margie's and Jim who was eating Rocky Mountain Oysters, the four of us joined the ranks of the stupid. I still have that picture!

Did Jim ever tell you about the night we decided to go out to dinner in San Francisco? We did not want to go to a tourist place, so we found a restaurant, Pier 54. In the dark of night, we drove on the docks and finally located this new restaurant. When we arrived, Anne and I were hesitant to go in, so George and Jim checked out the place. They came back and told us that we would enjoy the decor, so we decide to give it a try. Everything in the restaurant was "topsy-turvy" and it turned out that we were the only straight couples in the place. Jim's comment to George was, "You realize that we are on the menu tonight, don't you?" The dessert was another cause of shock.

Jimbo always had difficulty in remembering trash day and would invariably get the days mixed up. Instead of bringing in the trash, he would just hang the black bags in the trees to wait for the next trash day. The stories about Jim are priceless, and of course we could all write a book on the life and antics of our dear friend, Jimbo "The Pirate", Pirotte.

We love you Jimbo!

Ruth and George Mallek, Virginia Beach, VA
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Captain Pirate Pirotte was my CO of Heavy 12 on the USS Enterprise in '74 & '75. He was one cool dude under pressure. I remember one day we were at Yankee Station and we were in flight ops launching aircraft. As soon as Captain Pirotte cleared the flight deck, fuel began pouring out of his vigi. We were ordered to immediately get the flight deck ready for landing. He circled off our port side until he was ok'd to come in. He landed his plane, got out acting as if nothing had happened. I remember the plane captain telling us he had only a few minutes left before he would have had to ditch. On that day Captain Pirotte's coolness under pressure made a lasting impression on this young man and it has been a measuring stick "for bravery under stress" for me ever since. My kids and grandkids have heard this story and they know about Captain "Pirate".

Regards,

Norm Abbott

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My memory of him was he always had something to say to you even if it was just to say hi if you passed him in the hallway or in the hangar. He seemed generally interested in you and how you're doing.

Bill Faun, AME-3 RVAH-12; 73-76
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Captain Pirotte was not my first skipper or my last but he is the most memorable. First of all I never heard his first name until these emails about him started recently. He was always Pirate or Skipper. The thing I remember most about him is he was always calm, no matter what happened I never saw him lose that calmness. Of course I was a second class so I probably missed a lot of contact with him. A couple of weeks after I joined Heavy 12 I applied for leave to go home and get married. He told me I was too young to get married and de-

nied the leave. He let me dangle for a few of hours before he hunted me down and let me know he was joking. By the way, I'm still married to the same lady.

Regards,
Rube Ross
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Best Skipper...ever! Good pilot, even bringing in a lame duck with a busted bomb bay can back to the ship without freaking out and punching out. It was a pleasure to be in his presence.

Mr. Wickey
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GONADS OF STEEL (A true story of guts)

Imagine, you are the pilot of a RA-5C Vigilante and have just launched from the flight deck of the Aircraft Carrier USS Enterprise (CVAN-65) somewhere in the south china sea.

As you climb out, about 6 miles from the ship you feel and hear a horrible loud bang within your aircraft? You quickly scan your cockpit ladder lights for fire warnings and then recheck your instruments. You immediately notice that your fuel quantity indicators are dropping off quickly. As you look to the rear of your aircraft in the cockpit mirrors, you see what appears to be a hazy contrail streaming behind your fuselage. You immediately voice your concerns to your RAN and other aircraft flying in your area. Other aircraft converge on you to inspect your aircraft as best they can from their cockpits. They confirm your worst suspicion, fuel leak! Big time fuel leak, center fuselage. Again you look at your instruments, still no fire warning, GREAT! But the fuel gauges dropping much quicker now. Thank GOD you were not in afterburner when the leak started or you would be history by now.

You declare an emergency and slowly bank your Vigi and turn for home. You manually cycle through all the fuel tank selections and calculate your total fuel on board. Bomb bay cans empty, saddle tank empty, wing tank running down fast! What do you do? Not enough fuel remaining to make it home, flame out imminent, followed by ejection! NATOPS says, put your aircraft in optimum ejection configuration, relay your position and punch out. Is this your course of action? Most pilots would do the safe thing. Not so with the "Pirate", he opts for a very tricky and risky recovery on board mother ship Enterprise. Working closely and quickly with the ship controllers and other aircraft he is fortunate to be able to plug into the already airborne A-6 Intruder tanker assigned to this strike force. Refueling as fast as he is dumping he limps his wounded Vigi back to long final at Enterprise.

He knows that the he has one shot on a successful recovery. A bolter is out of the question, the throttles must not go around the horn. To do so would mean instant fire ball on deck. As the plane lumbers back behind the ship searching for the meatball, streaming twin black smoke trails and an enormous fuel vapor cloud the tensions for everyone on deck are at a peak! Fire fighters ready! Crash crew ready! Stand by for general quarters! The aircraft, with the Pirate at the controls, nursing his broken Vigilante home, drops from the sky and snatches the number 3 wire at the office for the "Pirate".

William ART Arthur ASCS Retired, RVAH-12 1973-1975 (ADJ2)
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Commander James Pirotte

Commander James H. Pirotte, an 18-year veteran of Naval Aviation, is Commanding Officer of Reconnaissance Attack Squadron 12. His colorful career has taken him on seven deployments in as many different aircraft carriers. In 1973 he passed the 500 mark in Vigilante carrier landings.

Commander James H. Pirotte was born in Downs January 8, 1935. In 1956 he entered flight training as a Naval Aviation Cadet and received his wings and commission as an Ensign in September, 1957.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pirotte of Downs.

Commander Pirotte was initially assigned to Heavy Attack Squadron One at NAS Jacksonville, Fla.; he served for two years as an A3D Skywarrior Bombardier/Navigator during which time he completed a 4 month cruise in USS Independence in the Caribbean.

Upon completion of that cruise he received pilot refresher training in the Skywarrior in Heavy Attack Squadron Three at NAS Sanford, Fla., and deployed in USS Roosevelt to the Mediterranean with Heavy Attack Squadron Eleven.

His first shore assignment was instructor duty which commenced in May, 1962 in Heavy Attack Squadron Three, the replacement training squadron, with the newly assigned ASA Vigilantes. During that period,

Commander Pirotte attended night school at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla., and received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in December, 1963.

The following November he was assigned to the first RA-5C Vigilante Squadron, Reconnaissance Attack Squadron Five then deployed in USS Ranger in Southeast Asia.

After two subsequent cruises in USS America to the Mediterranean he returned to Reconnaissance Attack Squadron Three at NAS Sanford, Fla., for a second instructor tour; then back to sea in June, 1969 for two Mediterranean cruises in USS Forrestal and USS America with Reconnaissance Attack Squadron Thirteen serving as squadron Administrative Officer and Maintenance Officer. Following that assignment, Commander Pirotte was ordered to the Staff of Commander Reconnaissance Attack Wing One at NAS Albany, Ga., as Material Officer and served in that billet until reporting to Reconnaissance Attack Squadron Twelve as Executive Officer in December, 1972.

In January, 1973, the squadron deployed to Southeast Asia for a 10-month cruise in USS Constellation (CVA-64). During the cruise Commander Pirotte passed the "500 Vigilante Carrier Landing" mark and completed more than 1700 flight hours in the aircraft.

Jim and I roomed together when we were bachelors in VAH-1 and later when I was in VAH-3 and he was in VAH-11. He was the best man in my wedding and I was in his wedding to Anne. Unfortunately, through the years, I lost contact with him. I could tell a lot of tales about Jim's and my bachelor days, especially at the old "Snake Ranch" on Lake Minnie, across from Sunland Estates. Jim

always had a way to put any situation in to a common sense phrase. One of the sayings he used was, "We don't have much money, but we sure have a rotten time."

Occasionally, when we would leave Jim Spencer's restaurant/bar, Jim, myself and another roommate named George, would decide to race our cars back to the Snake Ranch (the name we called our bachelor pad). Jim had a big 1960 Thunderbird and George and I had smaller sports cars. George and I could get our cars cranked up pretty fast and get out ahead of Jimbo. We would turn in to the Snake Ranch about the time Jim was really getting the T-Bird cranked up. Inevitably, Jim would go sailing past the turn and all George and I could see were his brake lights blinking as he was stopping at the next cut through on the highway. Five minutes or so later he would come in.

One time, Jim and I flew a T-33 trainer to Memphis. I was not a pilot. Jim was to drop me off at Memphis and then go to Olathe, Kansas which was near his home. We only made it to NAS Memphis and there was some type of hydraulic failure on the aircraft. We headed back to Sanford after a weekend in Memphis. It was a night flight and all of the nav aids on the aircraft went out and we could not contact any flight control center on the radio. Jim DR'd the aircraft until he thought we were close to Jacksonville. Jim flew triangles until Jax air control contacted us and gave us a steer to NAS Sanford. We landed at NAS Sanford with 20 minutes of fuel remaining. Jim was a great pilot.



Bill "Derry" Derryberry, Locust Grove, Virginia
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I served with Jim in VAH-11 on the Aircraft Carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1962. While we were on a cruise in the Mediterranean Jim took a cat shot and the port cat hook came out of the A/C. The shuttle went through the front tire and blew it out, the bridle came whipping under the A/C and cut into the starboard wing at the root. Jim had the presence of mind to flip the hydro control off and hit the binders, locking up the main mounts and brought the aircraft to a halt on the port cat shuttle track about 8 feet from the bow of the ship. He was a wonderful pilot and extremely proficient.

Had he not had the quickness required the aircraft would have dribbled off the deck to be run over by the ship. I am a past trustee of the Naval Aviation Museum and I have had the pleasure of seeing him before he and his wife moved to the community where they now lives in Pensacola. I was a 3rd crew member and flew with Jim several times and I can't recall anything except a great guy and great Naval Aviator.

Wayne Musgrove
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Captain Jim Pirotte (Pirate) was my CO in Heavy 12 when I was a AK2. Of course being the lead storekeeper there were some decisions that I had to make, which at times, did not sit well with the CO. I can recall such a time. I was told by the MO that the CO wanted me to order something and charge it to our OPTAR that was totally against the rules. I informed the MO that I could not do so. After all, one of my jobs was to keep the CO out of trouble. I never heard anything more about it until one day awhile later I was asked if I wanted to take a ride in one of our aircraft. OMG this was a dream come true!

I was told to go to the paraloft to get suited up. The rigger, after fitting me in the torso harness and helmet handed me not one but two barf bags. I remember asking why two? He chuckled and said better safe than sorry. As I walked out to the aircraft I was greeted by "the Pirate". He asked if I was ready. My reply was "HELL YES SIR!" (I was so excited). After being strapped in by the plane captain I heard the Pirate say "here we go, hold on" my thoughts were hold on to what?

I really don't remember too much about the flight except when we landed and I got my bearings I noticed what a mess I made of myself and the cockpit, but both barf bags were empty. I can also remember how mad the plane captain was as he unstrapped me. He turned out to be one of my best



HI DAD—Lt. Cmdr. Gary Long, RVAH Operations officer, is greeted by daughter Kimberly

and his wife Judy as Cmdr. Jim Pirotte, former commanding officer of RVAH-12 looks on. Official U.S. Navy photo

friends during my tour. After climbing out of the cockpit and standing by the aircraft, the Pirate walked up to me and said something I will never forget....

"Next time I tell you to do something, "DO IT"

Ed Hardy

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I served under CDR (at the time) Pirotte when he was Skipper of RVAH-12 on the '74-'75 Westpac cruise aboard USS Enterprise. I was an AT-1 when I checked into RVAH-12 at Key West, having come from RVAH-14 fresh off a Med cruise. As I recall, I was assigned as LPO of the Recon shop and as such (as part of check-in) I got to meet the Skipper.

I remember being somewhat up-tight because it had been a very hectic past few months, what with returning from the Med cruise in January, moving the family down from Albany in February and getting them set up in housing, schools, etc., involved in the dis-establishment of RVAH-14 in March/April, and then checking into RVAH-12 right after that and getting ready to start work ups for

the WestPac cruise. When I checked in with Skipper Pirotte, he put me very much at ease telling me if there is anything I needed to make the transition smoother, not to hesitate to ask. From that time on he referred to me as "Bish" and that made me feel very comfortable. A lot of the home town folks called my father, brothers, and myself "Bish," but no one else had until I met CDR Pirotte. He was very personable, and the kind of guy you wanted to work the extra hours for to make look good. In a word he was a real gentleman.

I remember when our XO (CDR Jim Caveness) was suddenly relieved by CDR "Iron Vic" Karcher during the "TransPac" on the USS Enterprise WestPac cruise. Rumors were flying all over the ship, and CDR Pirotte called the squadron to quarters in the aft hangar bay (in front of the jet shop). He talked about "medical" issues regarding CDR Caveness without going into detail,

and reinforced to all of us that "there but for the grace of God go any of us."

I was on the squadron's Captain's Cup golf team teamed up with the skipper. We played at Binictican golf course at Cubi Point and I didn't distinguish myself very well that day. But CDR Pirotte was very patient with me. He said to me "take your time Bish...eye on the target," I actually relaxed and had a decent round.

That was the cruise that the F-14 went operational and we blew their socks off during an air show off east Africa because they had restrictions on them due to engine problems. That was a real source of pride for us! The Tomcat went on to be a very successful fighter for the Navy, but I'm sure (at that time) the Skipper was feeling pretty proud himself. That was also the cruise that the ship got extended and took the CH-53s aboard for evacuation of the embassy in Saigon.

Suffice it to say that although I only knew him for about one year he was by far my favorite CO. He was just a real cool guy! He is living proof that you can be successful, and at the same time a good person. I can easily say that Pirate Pirotte was one of the most decent and unforgettable people I have met in my lifetime.

Sincerely,

Neil Bishop ATC Retired, Hollywood, MD

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CDR J.C. Gehrig, left, and CDR Jim Pirotte.

RVAH-12's XO makes 500th landing

Commander Jim "Pirate" Pirotte, Executive Officer, Reconnaissance Attack Squadron Twelve, recently made his 500th arrested landing in the North American Rockwell A5 Vigilante. CDR Pirotte has accumulated over sixteen hundred hours in the A-5 while pursuing this goal. He shared the cake with CDR J.C. Gehrig, CO. RVAH-12 is currently deployed in USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64) in South East Asia.

The Pirate and I go back 44 years. I met him in 1964 and we flew together as a crew in RVAH-5 aboard the USS Ranger. We were both Lieutenants and the new kids on the block when we joined the already deployed world famous Savage Sons of Sanford who were then staging out of Atsugi Japan as the boat had to have its engineering plant repaired.

We finally got to go to sea and after a short period. A fire occurred in the arresting gear room and the word went out that there would be no flying for a couple of days. Here is the Rest of the Story...

At 0630 the squadron duty officer calls each of the flight crews and tells us to be in IOIC at 0700 hours, the Skipper wants to see us. All of us had been partying until 0500, No flight Ops the next day, wrong, the arresting gear was down but the catapults were

working fine. A request from 7th fleet came in and tasked the RA5C to map the perimeter of a Da Nang Airfield to see where the Viet Cong were holed up and lobbing mortars onto the airfield. The two new kids on the block were tasked to plan the mission and fly the film into Cubi point for developing. The mission was almost 4 hours long and included tanking from the A-3 before and after the mapping runs. On the way to Cubi, and being unsuccessful in contacting the Air Force, Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) gurus and having a terrible headache, I suggested to the Pirate that we turn off our IFF transponder and go into after burner and try to out run any interceptors that may come after us. He agreed and we reached 0.95 Mach before slowing down and asking "Cubi tower, this is Old Kentucky 605, request VFR entry to land on runway 030" The tower came back and said "Old Kentucky 605 permission granted, but who is that F-101 on your right wing?" We looked over and saw the Philippine Air force F-101 and thought we were in deep trouble. We didn't say a thing, got the film developed and never heard a word about our successful evasion of the



Philippine Air Defense Zone.

The second sea story...

Nine years later it is 1973 and the Pirate and I are now CDRs and I am the CO and the Pirate is the XO. He is the best stick in the air wing and has mastered the Vigi APC (Automatic Pilot Control). With APC engaged and you pull back on the stick, engine power is increased, when you push forward, power is decreased. We had six pilots with four aircraft and the Pirate schooled each of them on the use of APC. You are only on the glide slope for 25 seconds he told them and if you can't concentrate on keeping the meat ball in the center of the franel-lense than you are not fit to be a Vigi pilot. With his tutelage we won the Air wing coveted "Golden Hook" award for being the squadron with the best LSO scoring statistics, more OK 3 wires than any other squadron. I was the only CO who was a back-seater and how proud I was of my squadron to get this award, all thanks to the flying abilities of the Pirate.

CAPT Jerry Gehrig, USN Retired
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the "The Pirate" in RVAH-5. We were aboard the USS America (CVA-66) doing a med cruise in 66/67. Back then Jim was LCDR Pirotte. Jim was one of the best pilots that flew the Vigilante and was well liked by the men. I remember when I lost my leg while on board the ship and Jim would come and visit me in sick bay. We would have great conversations about all sorts of things that would be encouraging for me. I last saw Jim at the reunion in Sanford on May 29, 2003. He was beginning to have some trouble remembering then. My father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's several years ago. Each day can be a new adventure.

Please give my best to Jim.

James R. "Woody" Morris Sr. 345 Moose Lodge Rd, Griffin, GA
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Jim's wife, Anne, and my wife, Nancy (who passed away last February), were traveling together throughout the Mediterranean and



meeting the USS America when we pulled into port. When we were docked in Naples, Italy (c. 1967), Jim and I were going ashore to meet our wives at a local hotel. We decided to dispose of many empty beer cans that had accumulated from some "admin aboard" meetings (whiskey bottles went over the side easily, but empty beer cans tended to fly around). We filled two suitcases with empty beer cans and left the ship. As we approached the guard post we noticed that they were checking everyone's luggage, so we decided to find a restroom and dispose of them there rather than have the guards see all the empty beer cans. We found a restroom, but there was a lady attendant and she wanted 100 or 200 lira for admittance.

Neither Jim nor myself had any lira, so we decided to find a taxi, thinking that the taxi would drive through the check point without looking at our bags. Wrong, the taxi took us to a customs office saying that our bags must be inspected before we could leave the dock. So we said "what the hell" and went inside the customs office with our bags. When the customs agent opened our bags a number of empty beer cans fell out and onto the floor, clanking as they fell and rolled around. The customs agent had a strange look on his face and then he looked at us and shrugged his shoulders. He put the beer cans back in the bags, closed them up and sent us on our way. I don't think he understood why crazy Americans were carrying around empty beer cans.

Larry Hall, Captain USNR, 1209 Stepp Bend, Cedar Park, TX
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I have not thought of Jim in years until I received your mail. I was in Sanford seven years (VAH-9, VAH-3 and the Wing) from 1957 to 1964. I remember he lived in a place affectionately called the "Snake Ranch" with Bill Derryberry and one or two others on the south side of Sanford after the BOQ was condemned. We had some great parties there.

Tom Guttery

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I am Ronald W. Hickerson, AMS-1 (Ret). I was stationed with RVAH-12 from 1970 to 1974. I worked as the Corrosion Control Supervisor, Flight Deck Troubleshooter, and Airframes Quality Assurance Inspector. I left RVAH-12 just before they left Key West for the 1974-1975 cruise and just after Captain Pirotte became skipper. I was the person who laid-out and painted the noses of the aircraft in the horns. But my Pirate story occurred to my wife and I during work ups while CDR Pirotte was the XO. My wife and I were expecting our first child during the carrier work-ups. When the squadron deployed

for each work-up the crew member whose wife was due during that time was left behind so he

would be there to help his wife. I was taken on the ORE, when my wife was due, as I was so vital to the maintenance of the aircraft. When it was found out at the Wives' Club meeting during ORE that I had been required to deploy with the Squadron CDR Pirotte's wife and the Command Master Chief's wife moved my wife in with the master chief's family while we were gone. Three days before the Squadron returned my daughter was born.

When it was found out that I was with the Squadron and my wife had given birth CDR Pirotte inquired why I had been required to deploy for ORE and other crewmembers whose wives were due at the same time were not. It was finally found out that the Division Chief Petty Officer was being vindictive for something I was supposedly to have done or not done.

CDR Pirotte made sure that I was scheduled to be on the first airlift back to Key West before he left the Carrier flying one of the Squadron Aircraft. But I was bumped off the first flight and put on the last airlift after we reported to the air terminal. When CDR Pirotte found out that I had been bumped he was upset and stated that things were going to change. When the airlift I was on landed he met us as we were deplaning with his wife and the Command Master Chief's wife and they escorted me into the air terminal where my wife and daughter were. I was not allowed to get my gear and our car was moved to where we could leave easily.

Even after I had been sent TDY to Key West; awaiting further transfer to Corpus Christi, my wife and daughter were required to be at each RVAH-12 Wives' Club meeting. I received a short message after the Squadron left for cruise from Captain Pirotte asking how my daughter was doing. Thank you for the time to remember how much of a people person Captain Pirotte was and here is hoping he will have a good and full life.

Ronald W. Hickerson AMS-1, 4814 Rose Hill Rd, Whitewright, TX
hickerson@texoma.net

US Pilots Keep Viet Cong Installations Under Camera

By John T. Wheeler

ABOARD USS RANGER (AP) — A startled woman caught in a backyard bath looked up as the sleek Navy jet swept low over the Laotian countryside, photographing Communist installations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The photograph and tens of thousands of others taken by Navy reconnaissance jets in Laos and Communist-controlled portions of South Viet Nam are part of a massive intelligence program that could be a prelude to expanding the Vietnamese war.

Aim At Supplies

If such expansion comes, Communist supply bases and key routes in Laos are likely to be the first targets for aerial bombardment.

A major source of information

in the joint Navy-Air Force program is the Navy's RA5C heavy reconnaissance jet. A detachment of the Sanford, Fla.-based squadron operates an intensive flying schedule from the attack carrier Ranger in the South China Sea off South Viet Nam.

The Vigilantes' photo gear is capable of detailed snooping from just above the tree tops to above 40,000 feet.

Cmdr. Paul F. Werner, 40, skipper of the special reconnaissance detachment, and his crews are accompanied by jet-fighter escorts when they fly over the remote mountains and jungle, some of the most rugged country in Southeast Asia.

Through Laos

The twin-engine Vigilantes, capable of twice the speed of

sound, cross the coast over South Viet Nam, turn into Laos through the Laotian panhandle between Thailand and South Viet Nam, then head north and northwest to their target areas.

"For us it's a strange side of the war," Werner said. "So far none of us have been shot at, but we may look up tomorrow and see the MIGs coming in on us."

"It's hard to believe there is a war on the Plaine des Jarres, or in Viet Nam for that matter. The Plaine and the countryside in Laos and Viet Nam look so peaceful from the air."

Since the loss of several U.S. aircraft in the Plaine des Jarres region, the reconnaissance jets fly above the effective range of ground fire from small weapons.



I have been privileged to know both he and Annie-Pannie since about 1960. For starters, I consider Jim to be best Viggie pilot. He and I transitioned into the RA5C in 1964 and traveled together to Japan joining RVAH-5, the Savage Sons and the USS Ranger in November 1964. We car-qual'd in late October on a black night on the USS Saratoga. In accordance with RVAH-3's policy of not using the augmented flight system for carrier work the cat shots were a little scary. Jim said it was very uncomfortable (or words of some kind) pushing the stick forward at the end

of the shot. When we started flying from Ranger with RVAH-5 we never turned the aug flight off. I remember Jim saying after the first night launch that the aug flight took all the "fun" out of the cat shot.

Jim and I flew "space available" from Orlando to Dallas to Los Angeles to San Diego the day after the Nov 1964 election. We were in uniform which was necessary to fly space available with the airlines. The stewardesses (they weren't flight attendants then) seated us in First Class and served us good booze on the Dallas leg. We were the only occupants in FC and there were many open seats in economy. We were "attended" constantly by 3 stewardesses and sometimes by the 4th. Jim "entertained." We were well "oiled" when we landed in Dallas. We looked forward to the flight to LA and on to San Diego. The stewardesses "saved" us seats in 1st class. The lay over was about 45 minutes so we were still feeling no pain when we returned to the plane. The senior stewardess coldly "directed" us to the cabin. Luckily or unluckily there were just two seats available. Jim drew a "grandmother" who traveled among her children by plane. She adopted Jim (a young man from Kansas) The plane was almost empty for the LA to San Diego leg with no one in 1st class. We were in pretty fair shape upon reaching the Amphib Base (no room at North Island). We never did figure out why we were persona non grata with the stewardesses from Dallas onward.

Dave Dearolph
Dapadear@aol.com

Jim Pirotte was my pilot and I was his RAN in 1973. He was a true swashbuckler and a great pilot. He was one of the Navy's best and I loved flying with him. I trusted him on

every cat shot and every carrier landing with my life!

Harry Hawken

harry.hawken@titanmachinery.com

I served with RVAH 12 from 1973 to 1975 as a photographer's mate. I was fortunate enough to serve with both CDR Gehrig (as my first CO of H-12) and CDR Jim Pirotte (first XO under Gehrig, then CO of H-12). I had the opportunity to work on the "Heavy 12 Free Press" (HTFP) a hand-crafted newsletter for the dependents during my time with these two outstanding officers. First as a contributor and later as editor-in-chief under The Pirate. This newsletter is where I got the images that I am forwarding to you. I would like to add two anecdotes about The Pirate, if I may...

"Order of the Roger Ramjet" – After the war ended and we were spending a little more time in Subic Bay, Commander Gehrig (then the CO of RVAH-12), wrangled some "back-seat" time for the enlisted men in the RA-5C. I drew "The Pirate" for my ride. From the moment he kicked in the afterburners on launch at Cubi Point NAS to the VERY interesting final approach (where the flying club Cessna suddenly appeared in our landing pattern, forcing a quick go-around), The Pirate gave me the ride of a life-time! We did it ALL including his version of a SAM evasion maneuver and flying over Mt. Pinatubo. And he kept a running commentary the whole way, like a tour-bus driver! Later, when it was over, and I had a little time to draw (my hobby), the first-ever, "Order of the Roger Ramjet" was created to commemorate the experience and

dropped into his ready-room chair pocket. The Pirate and Commander Gehrig made it "official" and issued one to each of us that made those amazing flights. It is a rare document, indeed.

"Magic Early-Out Chit" – My hobby is cartooning and I made up a bunch of them during my time with the Speartips. I would whip up one to fill in space in the HTFP or to have some fun cartooning what was going around the squadron and post it on my workbench or bulkhead. I was one of those Pan Camera technicians and there weren't a lot of us going around in 1975 when I was coming to the end of my "hitch" with the Navy. I had been accepted to college, but the timing of the start of school was a bit earlier than the one that Uncle Sam had in mind. I put in for a 90 day "Early Out" release to get to school on time, but because of some unusual circumstances, that release did not look good. Regardless, I pushed through up to the last signature needed, the commanding officer's. As usual, I would make my comments via cartoons and the one of Marvel Comic's "Doctor Strange" found its way on my work bench, where the magician would get the final signature of the CO for me. "The Pirate" loved it! He insisted on this one cartoon (as well as several others) be included in the 1974 Christmas edition of the HTFP.



Next thing I know, "The Pirate" was leaving the squadron before we got home to NAS Key West and the change of command was going to be on the USS Enterprise. I was told that the incoming new skipper wasn't about to make such a bunch of personnel decisions so early in his tour as CO, so it looked bad for me. Although I handled a lot of the official squadron photo duties, the Enterprise photo-mates were tasked with photo documenting this change of command. However, "The Pirate" asked me to document the event as a personal favor to him and because he was going to be leaving immediately after the CoC, all I could do was shoot the CoC, but would not be able to print them, as was my custom. He said that would be OK and just give him the film cans and he would develop them later. I shot the CoC, the Speartips looked great as usual and as I photo-documented the end of my three years working with one of the best pilots and officers I have ever met. After it was over, I found him, saluted smartly and handed Commander Jim Pirrotte the film cans. As he shook my hand, he palmed to me, my fully-completed and authorized "Early Out" release! Thank you, Pirate! Sierra Hotel! The "Pirate Avatar" was created for the 1974 Christmas Edition of the HTFP because we couldn't find a picture of him at press-time and I whipped it up. It stuck for the rest of the cruise. The "napping pirate" is very rare, because the man was always in motion!

PH2 Eric "Rosie" Rosemann, Photo-Recon RVAH-12 1973-1975
eric.rosemann@graywireline.com



I fondly remember he and Annie as a great fun loving couple and both true characters. Jim always had a smile on his face and a mischievous gleam in his eyes. They both could make any gathering a fun success for all. In other words they made the party. Jim was an excellent pilot ready to do and try anything.

Ron Pollard
ronnavalair@comcast.net

I first met Jim when I was Air Boss on the USS Constellation. He was the XO of Heavy 12. He would come to the tower observing flight ops while telling me sea stories. Heavy 12 was a great outfit and their spirit was over the top. One of the innovations they



came up with was the famous ice cream machine that of course made them lots of money. They used most of the cash for a huge ships party in Hong Kong. To say the least it was a show stopper! Heavy 12 in my opinion was the best flying squadron on the ship. Always on time for their Charlie's, very rarely missed a launch, never got hung in the gear and never overstressed a CDP. Professional in every aspect of their operation. Jim was probably the best Vigi driver I have ever had the pleasure to serve with. One day he was bringing a Vigi back from a Cubi maintenance check and he made two or three passes right on the 3 wire but his hook was bouncing over the wires every time he came around--we put rolls of toilet paper under the CDP's to raise the wires but nothing worked (dash pot not

serviced) I launched an A6 tanker to escort him back to Cubi. You could hear the joy in his voice when I told him he was going back for more liberty.

Toward the end of this cruise we were cycling C2's through the deck taking mine sweeping gear up to Haiphong. This meant no flying to speak of for the air wing and everyone was bored to death. Jim came up to the tower one afternoon and said in that slow drawl of his "Jim hopefully the NV will launch a strike and sink us it would be a mercy killing".

There used to be a feature in Readers Digest titled "The most unforgettable character I have ever met." In my book Jim is that character and much much more.

Jim Ryan Capt USN (ret)
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LCOL Don Herring, USAF was one of the pilots here in Pensacola who flew with Jim and I. I think the statement he makes about how Jim was always able to smooth the waters after a sometimes heated battle was just what was needed. I offer the story below as a case in point:

As his Flight Supervisor in Pensacola, I needed to get in touch with Jim early one morning because his flight had been changed to an earlier take-off---this was around 0500 so I called his home to inform him of the change and that he needed to get to the hangar as soon as possible---I tried for 30 minutes but was not able to get in touch with him---we changed everything around someone else took his flight and finally he shows up at his regular brief time---I was fit to be tied and told Jim that when I needed to get in touch with someone that early in the morning then I expected them to answer the phone---I raised my voice a little and said to Jim, do you understand what I am telling you---he then looked at me and said, Doug I am going to step out of the office and when you cool off then I will come back---he was a master at disarming others.

Doug Coleman

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The thing that always impressed me about Jim was how, when the whole ready room would be arguing or discussing something and everyone had had his say, Jim would come up with some one line simple solution. Then everyone just seemed to say, "sure, why didn't I think of that".



There is one story that I do remember and it perfectly reflects Jim. This was told by a student after flying with him. Seems the student was working so hard and trying to do and say everything right that he was talking a mile a minute when Jim put his hand on the students shoulder and said, " S o n, do you hear how fast I talk? Well----- that's about how fast I listen"

I'm sure everyone has heard this but I think its classic.

Don Herring

don_herring8@comcast.net

Jim was an instructor in the RAG when I went through. I always looked at him as one of the most talented aviators in the community. He and Annie were a kick. One time when they went on a trip a group of us took his car, turned it sideways and put it back in his garage with about 3 inches on each end. I also remember talking about sealing his shower door and filling it with water, but I can't remember if we did it. Jim's humor was a great attribute and went a long way.

Don Beatty

pops01@comcast.net

While serving my first tour in the VIGI's (an Ensign) we had six brand new Vigi's. For what ever reason we were operating out of NAS Jacksonville, housed in one of the World War Two metal quonset huts. This was a Wing evolution probably because Sanford was getting an update. Jim Pirrote was the duty officer and I remember sitting in the ready room waiting my turn. The skipper CDR Jim de Gahnahl was airborne with one of our new airplanes when he spotted a tanker and requested some practice plugs, remember this was in the days before pilots knew how to hit the basket with the refueling probe. The harder the skipper tried the more elusive the basket became, at this time a couple of F-8's joined up to watch the show and offer constructive criticism as fighter pilots are wont to do. These comments were not taken lightly by the skipper and by God he was going to show these folks how it was done. At some point in this evolution the skipper's stick inputs could not keep up with the oscillations the nose of the aircraft was going through as a result the drogue and refueling hose wrapped around the refueling probe, the skipper smartly pulled away from the tanker tearing out the probe and hydraulic lines creating quite a mess and having to declare an emergency, all the while the fighters were yelling encouragement as only fighter pilots can. Meanwhile back at the quonset hut we waited with some anxiety. The skipper all 250 lbs +, 6'4" came through the door, he didn't open it he came through it, he threw his helmet bag which caromed off those metal walls and did untold damage plus the noise. He then ranted and raved for untold moments while us newbie's and oldies shrank in fear and horror. The Skipper finally sat down with everyone afraid to say anything except the duty officer LT James Pirotte who plopped his ass on the desk in front of the Skipper and informed the skipper" it could have been worse". "How" yelled the skipper. Jim replied as only he can do,

"you could have had your track shoes on when you stepped on it."

He was a helluva guy and I wish him the best.

Dave Turner

datur4333@earthlink.net



Jim and I got our wings and commission in September 1957 in Beeville Texas. My future wife, Pat, "pinned" us both. I had asked Jim to be in our wedding the following week. Nick Langston had also asked Jim to be in his wedding which occurred 4 hours before ours. Needless to say there was much to celebrate at Nick's wedding and by the time Jim got to ours the celebrating was evident.

He insisted on walking Pat's Mom down the aisle. He managed to do so but when he got to the front of the church Mom turned around and walked Jim back up the aisle and planted him in the back pew with an order to sit and stay. He did just that and when the ceremony was over and Pat and I walked back up the aisle there was Jim, sound "asleep" in the back pew. We were out to lunch with Jim one day at Chet's, one of his favorite places. Making small talk I asked Jim how the food was at the nursing home. Once again, Jim thought for a moment and replied,

NAVSOP 5216/5 (REV. 11-66)
S/N-0104-904-1781

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

02-36-0-L
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

DATE: 12-9-69

FROM : SUPPLY OFFICER
TO :
SUBJECT : Excessive Laundry

23 Shirts is considered excessive for one weeks laundry. We are returning the 8 civ and 4 white shirts and request that you limit your input to a maximum of ten shirts per week. Your cooperation appreciated.

Ry

C. F. Carpenter
C. F. CARPENTER
CDR SC USN

"SOMEWHERE BETWEEN DOG *#%* AND UNSATISFACTORY."

We live on a golf course in Pensacola. We have a pond in our back yard that was inhabited by a 7 ft. alligator. One day in the late '80s Jim came for a visit. While we were surveying the "back 40" I had a shovel in my hand doing the poop patrol for our 80 pound Labrador. I would scoop it up and toss it to the alligator who would then snap it up like a raw juicy steak. Jim watched this action for awhile and finally in his Kansas drawl said, "LESTER, DON'T YOU THINK THAT GATOR MIGHT LIKE TO FIND THE SOURCE.?"

Les Jackson,

pat_les@cox.net

Pirate, you were The Maintenance Department Head in RVAH-13 in the early 70's at a time when we made a Med cruise together aboard USS America and then to WestPac aboard USS Enterprise. Keeping the RA-5C Vigilante ready for launch was a great challenge as we were always robbing from one plane to get another one off the deck to do a mission. When it comes to pilots during that period you were one of the greatest as you could always figure out the best way to get a job done in getting an airplane ready for launch. You were also one that knew all the systems which made it a lot easier for the troops to get their job accomplished.

The mutual respect by the troops was well deserved during the time we were "on the line". I felt you were one of the rare individuals who was a leader and team player during a time when our country was in a turmoil and managed to keep us all in good spirits to get the job done. You were the ONLY pilot that I trusted enough that arranged for me ride in your RA-5C to a maintenance meeting in Norfolk, VA. That ride I shall always remember and cherish so that I can tell the story for the rest of my life, thanks a lot.

By the way, Kay and I think you and Annie made the best martinis in the vigi community. You both taught us how to use one bottle of Vermouth for at least five years. Here's to you both for all the good memories!

Bob Recknor

kbobal318@bellsouth.net



In 1961 I was living on Stone Island, across the lake from Sanford, where all the east coast VAHers were. I had a ground floor apartment and Jack Salsbury (BN) had the second floor apt. in an old Fla. Spanish stucco house. Buz Husted (Capt. M. E.) lived just down the road. Jack had a Saturday afternoon beer party, and he and Buz killed a LARGE rattlesnake and put it right by the steps going up to his apartment. Once people got over the snake and up the stairs they stood on a deck and watched the rest of the fun. Pirotte didn't see the snake until he almost stepped on it, and he jumped back, at the very least startled (read scared #@\$%\$less) only to look up and see a crowd laughing at him. His response was both standard and classic- "you sons a bitches". Of course the party went on.

I was an ensign BN when I first met Jim in 1960 in VAH-1. He was one of those lucky pilots who were sent to Sanford from flight school and got to go thru BN school and do a tour as a BN before moving to the left seat. They were the ones we full time BNs didn't have to worry too much about.

Wallace Hall

whall25@cfl.rr.com

I was Jim's roommate during a Med cruise aboard the Forrestal in 1970. While anchored in port at Naples, we went ashore & bought a few cases of beer & carried them back to the ship in parachute bags. Our CO (Don Taylor) happened to be on the same liberty launch upon our return & offered to help us by carrying one of our bags up that long ladder to the hangar deck. About half way up, he turned & said: "There's beer in here isn't there". Jim said "Of course and you're carrying it aboard"!

Bear Lawrence

dumolbear@cox.net

Glad to hear the Pirate is still with us! He was a great practical joker, and this, of course, invited his shipmates to "one-up" him. When I lived on Tennessee Dr. (off-base housing), a group of us held several meetings to come up with pranks to do to his house/ car while he was vacationing. I remember him accusing me of being involved. I protested that I was nine months pregnant and couldn't have carried out any of these. I believe the following to be true--a group of guys picked up his MG and turned it sideways in his carport. They sealed up his shower glass door, filled the shower with water and goldfish. It was reported that Jim was so pissed off, he yanked the door open flooding the floors. He brought a 42' sailboat back from the Med on the carrier deck. He had quite a few adventures sailing it down the coast, too. The story was passed on that the XO of the carrier (forgotten the name) told Jim that no two Vigi pilots could congregate in a stateroom, because it constituted a party. I cannot verify details of these passed down stories, but there is some kernel of truth in each. Bob Kuhlke, I know has funny stories. I'm not sure the funniest can be reported in a newsletter!!

Jodi Cook Avery

EagleDream@aol.com

COMMODORE, CAG FURLONG, COMMANDER GEHRIG, HONORED GUESTS,
OFFICERS AND MEN OF RECONNAISSANCE ATTACK SQUADRON TWELVE.

THANK YOU COMMANDER GEHRIG FOR YOUR KIND REMARKS. SERVING AS
YOUR EXEC WAS THE FINEST TOUR OF MY CAREER. I WISH YOU AND GLORIA
THE MOST SUCCESS IN YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVERS.

TO SAY I AM HAPPY TO COMMAND RECONNAISSANCE ATTACK SQUADRON
TWELVE IS A GROSS UNDERSTATEMENT. ANY ABILITIES I MAY HAVE DEVELOPED
MUST BE ATTRIBUTED TO MY PARENTS, ANNE, MY KIDDOS, AND YOU TROOPERS.
SIXTEEN YEARS IN THE COMMUNITY HAS PROVIDED THE NECESSARY VOLUME OF
EXPERIENCE TO REDUCE THE MAGNITUDE OF MY MISTAKES. AS A RESULT, MY
LEVEL OF INCOMPETENCE HAS BEEN RAISED BEYOND MY FONDEST HOPE. SO,
AFTER 8 DEPLOYMENTS, 6 IN THE VIGILANTE ON 6 DIFFERENT CARRIERS IN
THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE WESTERN PACIFIC I CAN NOT BE ACCUSED OF
BEING A RATE GRABBER.

COMMANDING YOU SPEARTIPS IS A PRIVILEGE I SHALL TRY HARD TO EARN.
I WILL PROMISE YOU NOTHING BUT MY PLEDGE TO EXECUTE MY RESPONSIBILITY
TO GOD, OUR COUNTRY AND EACH OF YOU. THE VUPS SHALL HAVE A VERY GOOD
YEAR.

nearly 200 hours as a back-up BN, I had never flown an airplane in my life. With his constant coaching, I managed to execute the loop and, somehow, even pulled out on approximately the same heading that I had started from. I distinctly remember Jim's comment when we were back on the ground: "You would have been a good little pilot."

Of course, neither of us had any clue as to what the future might hold for us but, clearly, the confidence he had in me that day showed a remarkable willingness to believe in as well as trust in other people. That was quite a day.

Andrew Schoerke, Capt. USNR RET

capnandy06@comcast.net

I last saw the Pirate in Pensacola a few years back. One thing comes to mind but I don't have all the details. I recall that in more or less the 1970 or 71 time frame while Jim was deployed on the Independence in the Med, they were in Athens and he and one of

In the late 1950s, I served as an A-3D Skywarrior A/C in VAH-1, based in Sanford, Florida. This was just before arrival of the A-5 Vigilante, thus before the A-3 became a "whale". My Bombardier/ Navigator was a dashing young bachelor named Jim Pirotte. Jim was not only a fine teammate, but he became a good friend as well. I am saddened to hear his health is not what I would wish for him. My wife of 53 years, Helen, and I wish Jim better health - and we wish him happiness, which he richly deserves.

Bill Crawford

bill@bostonmorgans.com

Although I did not know him, please include my best wishes and many thanks for his great service.

Steve Kokkins (civilian on CVAN-65, 1968)

skokkins@foster-miller.com

There I was, upside down in the cockpit, looking like a fetus because I had not fastened my seat-belt harness. "As we went over the top in the TV, with me on the stick." Those were Jimbo's words of assurance as he recounted one of his earlier exploits as a young pilot. Jim was one of the first "nuggets", that is, recently designated Naval Aviators who had the misfortune to receive orders to VAH-1, not as pilots, but as a B/Ns. My Aviators Log Book records it as 11 July, 1959, and Jim had invited me to go along with him when he got some pilot time in the TV. As J.O.s, we had developed a close friendship and I was delighted when he invited me to come along with him; I was even more thrilled when he asked if I would like to fly it. I was the Air Intelligence Officer for VAH-1 and, although I had

the squadron mates bought a sail boat there. I heard they took the boat home on the ship and the story goes that it sank once they had gotten it back to the US. I remember having a couple drinks on the boat with a couple of tourists we invited aboard while it was tied up in Piraeus.

Jim Bennett

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This is one story that I would like to share because it shows Pirate's humor and personality. He was a kind of a James Stewart sort of guy who was generally quite but would sometimes respond with dry, to the point humor. One particularly hot Albany day, LCDR Pirotte had just returned from a routine flight with a navigator (name not important) who was always complaining about something,



even if all the gear worked ok. I and about a dozen crew brought them in and as we were walking to the hangar, the RAN continued bitching about a micro switch not working. Just as we reached the shade of the hangar, LCDR Pirotte stopped, turned around and glared at the RAN and replied, "The only micro switch that works is the one stuck in your ass and goes on every time you sit down in the damn back seat." He then turned and walked away leaving us all laughing, including the RAN.

Bob Swanson

swansonb2@k12tn.net



I was in H-12 from June 72 - June 74 (WC 220) and, if memory serves, Jim was our Skipper. I remember him as a tall lanky man with a most characteristic drawl in his speech. Always had a smile. The last time I saw Capt. Pirotte was in 1976 when he was stationed aboard the USS Enterprise. I was in VF-1 and I ran up to him on the hangar deck to say hi. I was surprised to see him. I asked if he remembered me and he actually called me by my name without hesitation. My last name was on my shirt but he called me by my first name. I was so impressed that he actually remembered a 3rd class AE from 2 years before. I will always remember Capt Pirotte as I last saw him 32 years ago.

Bob Rogers, QA/Test Manager, Blue Ridge Simulation, Inc
bobsnascar2002@yahoo.com

I would say that the Pirate was the best CO I had out of the 3 that I served under. He was the XO when I reported to H-12 and one thing really sticks out in my mind is the day he turned over his command to CDR. Thiemann. We were midway through the WestPac cruise of 74-75 aboard the Enterprise. We had come offline from Vietnam and were in Subic Bay for about a week. The change of command was on the hangar deck of the Big "E" around 0900 one morning. Needless to say, I had been out pretty much all night in Olongapo and still wasn't feeling any pain when we got into formation. My luck wasn't too good that morning when I somehow ended up on the front rank for the change of command inspection. I had always gotten along well with CDR Pirotte since I had a good work ethic. He also knew that I played hard, but never held that against

me. As the Pirate stood in front of me for his final inspection, he had this grin on his face. As he went to my left to inspect the next sailor, he reached out and hit me hard in the stomach. About that time, Thiemann was standing in front of me and I let out and big, nasty belch right in Thiemann face. Needless to say, Thiemann and I didn't get along his entire time as CO. During the Pirate's tenure as CO of RVAH-12, we broke many records of up time and sorties flown. We were the first RA5C to accomplish a ACLS

(Automated Carrier Landing System) aboard a carrier. **I remember him as a tremendous leader and a good and fair** man. I am sorry his health is poor, but I know he is a fighter. I wish the best for him and his family.

Ross Motley
wmotley@sc.rr.com

Back in 2002 we picked up the Pirate and he gave us a personally guided tour of the Naval Aviation Museum. All the docents knew him of course, and when the time came for the bus ride for the static display, the docent told the tour group that we were extremely fortunate to have Captain Jim Piroette aka the Pirate on the bus; and that he had more hours logged in the Vigilante than any other person; and would the Pirate tell the group any interesting antidote that he felt appropriate?

After a couple of long drawn out Kansas drawls he casually mentioned the time when he was in San Diego with a stripped down version of the original A-5; when the call came asking him if he would try and set a new speed record from the West Coast to the East Coast. He reckoned he would give it his best shot! He mentioned that the Air Force refueling over Carswell slowed him down a little but he managed to get to Sanford and set the new record; and he said it made the Navy feel real good. All this in that self-effacing, low key style; like aw shucks; it ain't nothing. I don't recall the exact time; but it seemed to me it was under two hours; but maybe someone has the correct information.

Peter Carrothers RVAH-7 (1965-1968)
Usna1963@aol.com

It was the summer of '69 in Capehart Housing, Albany, GA. We all agreed that Georgia summers were hotter than Sanford, Florida, and one of the ways we cooled off was to move outside for our week-end neighborhood parties.

Jim's house and mine shared a back yard so you either joined the party or listened to it all night! My memory of one hot Georgia night was when Pirate was setting in the middle of a very small plastic wading pool with a can of beer in one hand and a million flies

buzzing around. Like yesterday I remember his memorable remark, **"Now I know how a turd feels."**

CAPT Neil C. Davis, USN-RET
captainneil@cox.net

I assume you know the story of his sailboat purchased during RVAH-13 Med cruise aboard the USS America in the Fall 1971. The sailboat was purchased somewhere during this cruise and lashed to the island for the transit back to Norfolk. There were pictures. At the time, he was a LCDR and just selected for O5.

Best Regards,

Dale Henley
dalehenley@windstream.net

DON'T GO THROUGH A BARRICADE

In mid-September 1968 the Pirate and I were assigned as instructors in RVAH-3. We were both due for refresher carrier landings and the squadron was getting ready to send some students out to Alameda to CARQUAL on the Ranger. So we took the maintenance detachment and got things ready for the students.

The first day out to sea, as the ship prepared to bring the first Vigilante in, they used a tractor to pull out the number one wire to check it. They retracted the wire and with a "clear deck" Wes Wolf and Ken Kirby hit number one, stretched it as far as it could go before it snapped and the plane dribbled off the angle. It went into the water completely intact, popped back out end drifted along the port side of the ship. As we looked down, we could see two empty cockpits, and later found only a helmet. As it turned out, the wire had never been

reset. The CARQUAL started out on a pretty sour note.

It was decided that we would need another plane. So someone brought one out directly from NARF JAX and Jim and I got a COD ride into Alameda so we could bring it out to the ship. According to my log book, it was 149300. We had finished getting our refresher landings



the week before when we had gone out to set everything up with the Ranger, so all we needed was a touch-and-go when we brought the replacement aboard.

The flight from Alameda to the Ranger was uneventful and we had a typical picture perfect Pirate landing. As we lifted and turned downwind I heard what sounded like a compressor stall and asked Jim if he had any engine problems. He said everything looked

fine. We dropped the hook, came around and prepared to trap. Don't remember the LSO's grade but it felt like an OK-3 to me – but we had a hook-skip. This time as we lifted and turned downwind the tower reported something streaming from the top of the aircraft. We made three more passes each resulting in hook-ships. What had happened was a V-band coupling on a hot air line behind my seat had not been properly torqued and had vibrated loose. The escaping hot air ignited the fuel in the top cap fuel tank and blew a hole in the top of the fuselage.

As we were tooling around the pattern we were rapidly losing fuel and had no boundary layer control air, resulting in a flat approach. After it became apparent that we would not be able to get aboard, the ship began to rig the barricade, normally a 30-45 second evolution. It took them two minutes. When we finally arrested into the pliable nylon, we were both relieved, but not very complimentary of the flight deck's performance. I can't remember Jim's exact words, but I know they were "choice".

The plane was torn up but would fly again. Unfortunately the student crew of Wes Wolf and Ken Kirby wouldn't.

David R. Krause, CDR, USN (Ret), NFO in VAH-9/RVAH-9, RVAH-3 and RVAH-1

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Here are 2 quotes from the Great Man: **"It only takes a little more to go first class".**

The Pirate said this to me during a transcon trip on a C-9 to encourage me to forego the box lunches and provide the troops with some real chow for the journey.

"There but for the Grace of God, go I". The quote is from the RVAH-12 all-hands briefing on the Caveness situation.

Both of those statements have remained with me over the years, and speak volumes about the man, and his compassion for his fellow man. Those that served with him were truly blessed.

Noel Briley AQ USN

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It was an honor to serve with Captain Pirotte. He treated each man as an integral part of the team. While we were in port in Cubi Point he allowed squadron enlisted members to fly in the back seat and experience some of the acrobatic flying. He also landed an aircraft on deck with a leaking fuel system getting a perfect trap. Out of all the skippers I served under he was the best.

T.D. Hicks AME2 USN

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I arrived as the infusion of "new blood" into the RA-5C community in about 1969. We were from A-4, F-4 and F-8 backgrounds.

"The Pirate" was one of the good ones when I arrived. I held the Silver Star as the result of two Viet Nam tours, was a LCDR with a special inst. card fresh from TA-4F instrument instructor duty in Lemoore. The Viggie community was a mixed bag of A-5, A-3 and P-2V pilots, some of whom were less than enthusiastic about flying the Viggie (in my opinion and that of BuPers). When I checked in, I noticed the Pirate, Dickie Daum, and a few other old hands who were enthusiastic and helpful. I always admired his attitude, ability, and winning ways personally. He had a quick smile and the attitude of a professional. He would always answer the questions I had about the airplane and he was a flier.

Cliff Johns, CAPT USN

RET

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Pirate and I served together in RVAH-13 for the '71 Cruise on America. I took over the Squadron without the benefit of

being an XO, so I had to rely on the opinions of others as to who I should keep for the Cruise. The Wing was convinced that I should not keep Pirate because he had been on 3 straight cruises and probably needed to go to shore duty. I said "quite the opposite;" I knew his reputation as a great officer and an even greater pilot. When I asked Pirate if he wanted to stay for another cruise, he was totally elated. When I told him that with his seniority and experience, I was going to put him as the Operations Officer, Pirate said he would rather be the Maintenance Officer. I should have known right then that this "person is touched in the head," wanting to be the MO of a Vigilante squadron. In any case, he took over Maintenance and things couldn't have been better. I had the experience of two back-to-back combat cruises in the Vigi and I knew what big headaches the Vigi could produce, maintenance-wise. Everyday we had 4 or 5 of the 6 assigned Vigi's up and ready to go WITH FULL SYSTEMS. RVAH-13 was the talk of the Air Wing, and all attributable to Pirate's leadership. There are many stories about Pirate; but the one that is tops in my book involve a flyoff just before the cruise. When the schedule came out, there were 6 aircraft assigned, with Pirate flying the third section (numbers 5 and 6). On the day of the flyoff, the lineup of the board showed Pirate flying my wing as the number 2 aircraft. I didn't think much of it; but Pirate explained it as "pilot X needed the section-lead experience; so be it. We launched six aircraft; joined up quickly; and made a 500 Kt pass over the Ship and headed to Albany, GA. About 100 miles off the coast, we entered a "black wall" of rain and thunderstorms. I noticed Pirate was flying unusually close, even for this weather. We were in the "stuff" for 4 or 5 min-



utes, came out the other side and headed for Albany. On deck I mentioned to Pirate that he was flying too close, especially in that "stuff." He proceeded to tell that his aircraft didn't have a center console!!!! If you know anything about Vigi's, you will know that console has all of the flight instruments!!!!!!!!!!!! attitude gyro, airspeed, altimeter, vertical speed, needle-ball-----GONE. As Pirate was explaining the situation, I remember putting my hands over my ears and telling him I didn't want to hear anymore. I didn't know whether to decorate him or courts-martial him. Pirate was delight to have in the Squadron; he was loyal, dedicated, supportive in every way. I remember some comments I made on my detaching fitness report on him: "every squadron should have a Jim Pirrote," and "I would not hesitate to turn command of this or any squadron to him." All of us who had any association with Pirate are all the better for that experience.

Frank Hamrick

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I am George Clark from RVAH-7. While in Albany, I was preparing to get things together for the on-coming cruise to The Med. My plans for that cruise included taking my wife and 2 children. The kids were young probably 3 1/2 and 8 months. Somehow, I got the word that "Pirate" had made or designed a crib from parachute material and aluminum tubing. He drew up the plans for me and as we crossed the Atlantic, I put my plan into action. I gave the plans to the riggers and in a weeks time my crib was finished. It worked perfectly and I am forever beholden to the Pirate. I forgot to mention that it was collapsible and came apart like a puzzle, very easy to carry around in luggage. It was really a unique item and I think he should have gotten a patent on it.

My Best Regards,

George Clark

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I can't think of Jim Pirrote without smiling. We were jg's in VAH-1 in 1959 and 1960 and lived and partied together in a bunch of snake ranches around Sanford. In those days, he was "Jimbo." No one thought of calling him "Pirate."

I don't know anyone who didn't like him.

Jimbo had a way of cutting through the BS and expressing himself in a way that left no doubt about what he meant. What he said always made us laugh. For instance, an idea that had no chance of succeeding was "a fart in a windstorm." Once, after an evening with a particularly unpleasant couple, Jimbo said: "It's a good thing they got married. There's no point in screwing up two marriages." Jim was always interested in making things better. He and Don McGraw, another B/N in VAH-1 devised a simple navigation/target identification system that combined the radar scope and a map. Using some sheet metal and the help of a machinist in the squadron, they came up with prototype of the "McGrotte System" which cost about \$50 to build. Of course, it worked perfectly, but the people up the line couldn't believe that something that simple and inexpensive was any good and the idea was rejected out of hand. Still, it showed that Jimbo had a bright future ahead of him.

And then there was the night we saw the UFO. Sometime in early 1960, Jimbo and I were driving near the Sanford NAS in my convertible. We rounded a bend, saw some strange lights in the sky and quickly realized these were not A3D's on training flights.

There were either seven or nine lights, (I don't remember which) shaped like an arrow-head, traveling north to south.

The next morning, everyone was buzzing. We had three planes in the air that night, all of which saw whatever it was. At the morning meeting, Dave King, the VAH-1 CO, had a warning for the squadron officers.

"Look," he said. "I saw that thing last night. You saw that thing last night. I'm not going to tell you what to do, but if you say anything, you will never hear the end of it." In other words, he warned us that the UFO conspiracy crowd would be on the case forever. As we left the Ready Room, Jimbo put his arm on my shoulder and summed it up. "It's a good thing we didn't see what we saw last night, isn't it." He was one of a kind.

Sam Roberts, VAH-1 1958-1961

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THE PIRATE'S COMMAND"

I would imagine that most sailors who served in any of the Vigilante squadrons would agree that times were tough and the work load heavy. Maybe that is why the RA-5C squadrons were called the "Heavy" squadrons. More often than not, the aircraft were "down" which meant long hours and little support in the way of repair parts. It did not take me very long to learn, after joining up with RVAH-12 in October of 1973 in Albany Georgia that the "C" designation (RA-5C) denoted cannibalization. Every sortie's success was entirely dependent upon the "donor" hanger queen.

This style of aircraft maintenance management was common among all of the Vigi squadrons and always tripled the man hours required to repair or maintain the "up" status of an aircraft. It also frustrated, aggravated and humiliated the maintenance personnel regardless of rank or rate. Consequently, morale in RVAH-12 was poor most of the time and tensions between the enlisted and officers stayed very high. This friction that existed among squadron personnel was non productive and more over very dangerous. Every commanding officer must understand and deal with it using effective leadership principles and No commanding officer has done so better than the "Pirate". The skipper was and is a natural in people relations and leadership. No one understood better than he that squadron success had nothing to do with ego or status but everything to do about solid genuine relationships among all of his fellow squadron members. To him, rank and position where secondary issues, better left for secondary matters. He focused on the basics, establishing a professional friendship with his fellow officers, his enlisted personnel, and just as importantly their families. He understood the value of just sitting down and sharing a beer with his troops, holding an un-official "captains call" and going beyond his paid position as Commander. He did not need any swashbuckling, sword slinging or musket wielding to capture your attention or respect. Without question, everyone loved and admired "the Skip" because the "Pirate" cared, and he was constantly

inventing ways to prove it! Many of my fondest memories of him and his GOD given abilities to connect with everyone and share his unique personality were demonstrated at it his mandatory VUP parties. He always had something to share and something extra up his sleeve! Sly character that he is, no wonder they labeled him "the ultimate party animal" early on. Don't worry, I ain't gonna tell no secrets, I ain't gonna air any dirty laundry. The new catch phrase popular today "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" applies but back then it was no big secret that if the "Pirate" threw a party, everyone heard about it and everyone had wished that they too had been invited! As a single example, during work ups for our 1974-75 cruise the officers teamed up under "Pirate's" command and purchased a stainless steel ice cream machine and tons of ice cream mix. When we deployed aboard USS Enterprise, an arrangement was made with the skipper of the Enterprise Captain CC Smith (a former Vigi pilot), Commander Pirotte and the ships special services, morale and welfare department to set up and sell ice cream (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) on the star-board side of the hanger deck, tucked away in a small otherwise useless space. The ice cream shop operated 24/7 at sea and there was ALWAYS a huge line on the hanger deck where sailors waited for hours to purchase this somewhat half frozen chocolate mushy slop. It sold like wild fire for many months. In addition to boosting the morale of the entire ship's company of USS Enterprise, profits generated from sales contributed large amounts of funds to the ship's MWR and overstuffed the RVAH-12 squadron party fund. This overstuffing condition brought a gleam to the "Pirate's" eye!, party funds were always paramount in orchestrating successful events to improve morale. As I recall, about mid-way through our West Pac deployment, the skipper called for a VUP party to be organized at a favorite hideaway "The Villa Rovisa" outside of Olongapo. The Villa was ideal because it had hotel lodging, cottages, dining, several well stocked bars and the only swimming pool in the area. The entire Villa was fenced in with a high wall which allowed people to be outside poolside after the "Marcos" curfew hour. The entire event, transportation, food, drink, lodging, and (clearing of the throat) entertainment was provided and paid for out of the VUP party fund. The ultimate party, many dead brains cells, followed by a nude, tequila breakfast / muster poolside the following morning. Now THAT'S THE WAY TO BOOST MORALE. Just one small glimmering example of Jim Pirrote, his wisdom and his management style " take care of your people, and they in turn will take care of you". I spent my entire remaining 20+ year Navy career using the "Pirates" leadership skills and tactical examples as my own, and never once seen them fail. I am both fortunate and proud to have served both for and with such a great "Skipper". Bravo Zulu to the "Pirate" and my other former VUP shipmates!, a job well done.

William (ART) Arthur, ASCS Retired, RVAH-12 1973-75 (ADJ2)

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I still remember Pirate's opening remark at the change of command when he was taking over. It was:

"My being here is proof that the Peter Principal works."

Always giving no slack, always self deprecating, always gracious. A true friend.

Joe Ausley

SAVAGE ONE

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