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### High Desert Hangar Stories



The Best of Bob

### High Desert Hangar Stories

# One wrong number sparks a holiday tradition

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

In today's world with so much information, we can lose track of the large and small traditions that meant so much to us as kids.

Looking at the media offerings, it's no wonder our kids today struggle to appreciate the spirituality of the holiday season, and why it seems many want to crush belief in that jolly old man we call Santa Claus.

When asked whether I believe in Santa Claus many roll their eyes when I say "Well of course I do, since I have seen his good works in my almost 70 years of life here on earth."

Being an Air Force veteran, I have the added joy of knowing that my beloved branch of the service has been carrying on the legacy of Santa Claus since a misdialed phone call in 1955 to NORAD Central Command started a program that grew into a most cherished tradition that still carries on today.

Col. Harry Shoup feared the



Air Force photograph

#### Col. Harry Shoup.

worst when his red phone rang on his desk. It was 1955, the height of the Cold War, and Shoup was in the operations center of the Continental Air Defense Command in Colorado. CONAD, as it was known then, stood as the early warning system for a Soviet attack. So, the ringing of the red telephone never meant anything good.

What happened next launched the now-named North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, into a decades-long tradition to track Santa and bring joy to children around the world. And it started with a simple act of kindness, a Cold War scare, and a youngster hoping to tap into a little Christmas magic.

The colonel picked up the phone and said, "Can I help you, sir? Hello? Can you read me all right? This is Colonel Shoup." A little girl's voice came on the phone and said, "Are you really Santa Claus?"

A very gruff Colonel Shoup replied, "What? Is this a joke? Just what do you think you're doing calling us here and how did you get this number?"

"Well Santa I got this number from an ad in our Sears and Roebuck advertisement, and it said call any time after December 15."

The quick-witted officer realized that it was no joke, but a mistake. And a good-hearted child on the other end of one of the most important telephones in history thought she was calling Santa. So, to the surprise of his staff, Colonel Shoup, who was a father himself, did what any good dad would do when presented with the opportunity to bring a little Christmas joy.

"Of course, I'm Santa Claus. We have this phone set up just to talk to you. Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Have you been very good this year?"

"Yes. I want to tell you what I want for Christmas. And can you bring something for my mommy too?"

"Well, I'd love to hear what you'd like for Christmas. And of course, I will try to bring something nice for your mom. Would it be all right if I talk to her now?"

Shoup heard the kid pass the phone to her mother. She explained that her child dialed a number listed in a Sears Roebuck ad in a Colorado Springs newspaper, so the legend goes. It featured a picture of old Saint Nick and an invitation to call him on his private phone at any time. But the phone number was apparently one digit off, and suddenly, Colonel Shoup, a stern, no-nonsense Air Force officer, found himself playing the jolly fellow.

The Santa Colonel, as he became known as over the decades, ordered his staff to answer the phone for any child wanting to know the location of Santa as he delivered toys around the world. And through that act of kindness, a Cold War scare, and a youngster hoping to tap into a little Christmas magic, a decades-long tradition was born.

Reading this recollection of how that phone call played out over the years can get me pretty emotional because as a baby boomer of the early 1950s I know how important it was for our parents to keep the spirit of Christmas alive for their children and pass off those same magical moments in kids' dreams for future generations.

Growing up in a world under the threat of nuclear annihilation, we held on to these beliefs and, for many of us, we believed that maybe



Courtesy image

The original Sears & Roebuck ad that started the NORAD tracks Santa phenomenon.

Santa had a peaceful resolution in his bag all along and we only had to believe.

Does Santa really exist? All I can say is that for my entire life he shows up in December and has never let me down. Some will say Santa is not a physical being and it's hard to not see his presence in our lives this time of the year as we travel around and watch the many entertainment outlets. But really, the Santa Claus I know is that jolly old spirit who pulls at our hearts and wants us to bring good into the world and keep our children's Christmas spirts alive and well.

Many times, we who served in the military far from home understand how the appearance of a gray-haired old man in a makeshift red costume made us smile and think of our family around the Christmas tree and even shedding a couple tears of joy. Does Santa Claus exist?

I guess that question comes down to how you look at the world — this old airman hopes that whatever you do or don't believe in that you still find the peace and happiness you search for. And for those like me who do believe in that spirit, may you always find the peace that comes with good friends, family and neighbors during the times of Christmas.

Oh, and by the way, let's give a shout out to all those volunteers who man those phones on Christmas Eve.

You may wonder about ser-

vice members and volunteers behind the tradition. You know, who are these people and where do they come from?

It is service members from NORAD, who are very familiar with the tradi-

tion and volunteered their time on Christmas Eve. But also, it's made up of volunteers around Colorado Springs, who you know, work in the military, who are veterans, as well as some civic leaders and just people who are connected to the military community in some way ... spouses, kids ... who volunteer to answer these phone calls.

The one takeaway to volunteering is the excitement. Everybody has this desire to give back, to play a part in this long tradition that's gone on for decades. There is eagerness to deliver some Christmas magic and cheer to folks. The volunteers described the reasons why people volunteer their time to go work in the call center.

People are waiting for months to sign up. And they're just so excited to be a part of the NORAD Tracks Santa program. So, it's a lot of fun. Volunteerism has a little bit of selfishness to it, if you will, because it makes you feel good doing something for other people. And I think the NORAD Tracks Santa for us—and for a lot of members—it's the same thing, it makes us feel so good that we're able to give back to



DOD photograph by Chuck Marsh

Nearly 1,000 volunteers cycled through the NORAD Tracks Santa Operations Center on Peterson Space Force Base, Colo., between 4 a.m. and 10 p.m. Dec. 24, 2022. Volunteers providing updated information on Santa's location and gifts delivered worked in two-hour shifts answering phone calls from children and adults located around the globe.



Air Force photograph by Master Sgt. Charles Marsh Everyone gets into the holiday spirit at the NORAD Tracks Santa Operations Center on Peterson Space Force Base, Colo.

our communities in this way. And so, it's something we gladly do. And we're happy to parallel with existing missions.

By the way, don't forget to have your kids become part of the magic this year by going online or calling. It takes a village of 1,500 volunteers to field emails and the 140,000 or so telephone calls to 1-877-HI-NORAD (1-877-446-6723). They staff phone banks equipped with monitors inside a building at Peterson Space Force Base, Colo., which offers a view of snow-capped Pikes Peak to the west.

Merry Christmas from this old believer Bob, and may we never let the spirit of old Saint Nick fade from our children's lives as we see the smiles and happiness in the faces of our children who also believe!

Until next time, Bob out — Happy New Year!

Editor's note: The official NORAD Tracks Santa website goes live on Dec. 1, with live satellite tracking on Dec 24 and can be reached at www. noradsanta.org.

### High Desert Hangar Stories

# The Empty Shell: A look back at a cherished old hangar

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

It's been some time since I brought up the grand old lady War Eagle Field, out on Avenue I and 60th West, but the other night I was reading an old World War II issue of BULAERO, the base newspaper that covered all the Cal Aero fields in Southern California, including our very own Polaris Flight Academy at War Eagle Field.

The stories shared were the up-and-coming entertainment of USO shows making their way to the airfields, and on that list was War Eagle. Being in proximity to Hollywood and the entertainment industry, there were many famous people who could take time to perform at local venues and still make first call in Hollywood on workdays.

My love for the old field out on that corner is well documented and two of my favorite old haunts there are Hangars One and Two which during the life of the field, were beehives of activity 24-hoursa-day. Aircraft upkeep was constant for the hundreds of cadets who needed aircraft to train in every day, and the constant sound of engines and air tools gave a concert that the everyday ground personnel took for granted. But there were times when those sounds were replaced with others



Courtesy photograph

just as important to the war effort for keeping up morale in such trying times.

The Antelope Valley has seen many famous people come here and entertain over the years but during those years of World War II those old hangars at War Eagle were the stage for more celebrities than our valley has seen since World War II.

On many special occasions the hangars were emptied of aircraft and filled with portable stages. Sound systems filled the facility as hundreds of airmen crowded in to hear the very best of Hollywood and the music industry, along with stand-up comedians who today we consider legendary.

Young airmen and old alike who kept the field buzzing could escape the world and its problems for a while at these shows, and ease the pain of separation from their families, and fear of the unknown. On those special days and nights, one could listen and laugh while drifting away to the sounds of a Hollywood starlet singing like her song was personally to every soldier in attendance.

Bob Hope, Joe E Brown, Mickey Rooney, Clark Gable, John Wayne, Jack Benny, and Bing Crosby were always big draws, but it was those shapely girls with soft voices, talented troupes like the Andrew Sisters, and a mixture of Big Bands that prompted thoughts of home, good times, friends, and family.

Starlets like Veronica Lake, Carole Landis, Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Jane Russell, Ginger Rogers, and Lauren Bacall all made appearances out at that old hangar that is now filled with dust-covered storage from years

We also must not overlook entertainers who were not famous but had skills, like the amateurs



Courtesy photograph

Veronica Lake is helped out of a plane by Army Air Corp airmen. Many celebrities were flown to War Eagle Field to entertain troops during World War II.

who would fill the bill in between the big names with dancing and unique talents. For many of these entertainers the USO shows were their start in the entertainment industry.

One of those starlets who entertained at our old field in those hangars was Lancaster's own Judy Garland. One day when I was being given a tour, the silence that is that old hangars' daily routine gave way to my imagination as that space was filled with the sounds of a very young Judy singing her signature song "Somewhere over the Rainbow" to many of those cadets with mist in their eyes hearing it in a setting that we can only imagine. I wonder how many of those young pilots went off to war, never to return, with that song in their hearts, and memories of that special night.

The Antelope Valley has many places that over the years became the stage for performances of famous people and acts. Who would have ever thought that two old hangars wasting away at a forgotten location would become our Hollywood Bowl? For a brief time, the top celebrities who set the standards for American entertainment entertained what would become our Greatest Generation.

I sure hope when the powersthat-be decide those old hangars must come to an end that Judy's words are not forgotten:

Someday I'll wish upon a star, and wake up where the clouds are far behind me

Where troubles melt like lemon drops, away above the chimney tops That's where you'll find me.

I sure hope those two old hangars and the thousands of cadets found that magical place, if only for a brief time, when Hollywood came to Lancaster and wrote their history in the hearts of those far from home, in buildings training them for war in far-off lands.

Until next time, peace my friends, and Bob out ...



Photograph by Bob Alvis

One of the hangars at World War II-era War Eagle Field, located at Avenue I and 60th West in Lancaster, Calif.



Courtesy photograph

Bob Alvis inside the hangar at the former War Eagle Field in Lancaster, Calif.



Alvis, with copies of the BULAERO, the base newspaper that covered all the Cal Aero fields in Southern California including our very own Polaris Flight Academy at War Eagle Field during World War II.

LEFT: The writer, Bob

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### High Desert Hangar Stories

# Willie the Whale

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

Many aircraft over the years made their way out to Muroc/Edwards AFB for flight testing, and the Douglas Aircraft Company was a constant presence out at the lake as their inventory of aircraft and test flight programs grew over the years.

One such aircraft that today is pretty much in the shadows was the F3D Skyknight.

The Skyknight was not intended to be a typical sleek and nimble dogfighter, but as a standoff night fighter, packing a powerful radar system and a second crew member. It originated in 1945 with a U.S. Navy requirement for a jet-powered, radar-equipped, carrier-based night fighter.

Pictures of my dad at the base from back then show one of the prototypes behind the flight-test crew and pilots, back when the trips to the base from Clover Field, Long Beach and El Segundo required temporary housing and long trips back and forth on the old two-lane road out to the base.

The first flight of the XF3D-1 was on March 23, 1948, at the Douglas El Segundo,

Calif., facility with test pilot Russell Thaw at the controls. Further flight testing followed at El Segundo until October 1948.

Three prototypes were then taken to Muroc Air Force Base for service trials. These units were powered by two Westinghouse J34-WE-24 turbojets of 3,000 lbf thrust, mounted under the roots of then-standard straight wings of the early jet era. A production contract for 28 F3D-1 J34-WE-32 powered production aircraft was issued in



The Skynight in flight at South Base Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.



Courtesy photographs

My dad and the flight test crew at Edwards with the Skyknight.

June 1948 with the first production aircraft flying on Feb. 13, 1950.

The F3D-1 had a very successful test program and with another war brewing over in Korea, the design started to get some real

hard looks from the Navy and Marines. The changing landscape of aerial warfare was taking a new direction and a jet night-

-See **WILLIE**, on Page 5









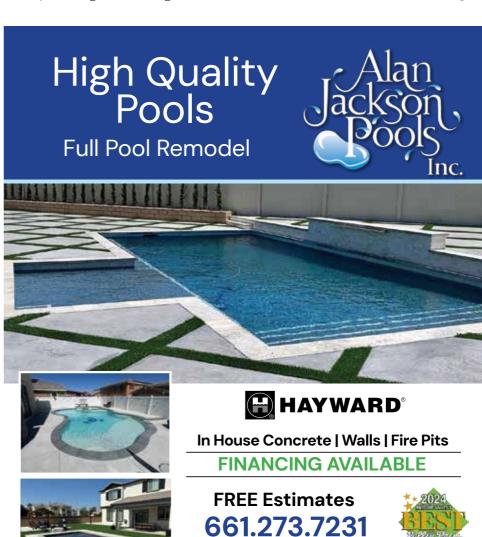
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#### **WILLIE**, from Page 4 —

fighter was needed to offset the development of next-generation jet fighters from foreign nations.

At the time, the Skyknight and those developing it probably didn't realize their creation would play a part in over two decades of American combat involvement.

The Douglas F3D Skyknight entered its first combat service during the Korean War, where it served extensively. The aircraft was mostly pitted against the propeller-driven fighters as well as normal jet-power fighters of the era. When it was not used for nighttime patrols or striking missions, it was used as an escort for the Boeing B-29 Superfortress.

For the standard armament configuration, the Douglas F3D Skyknight was fitted with four of the 20 mm Hispano-Suiza M2 Cannons that were fitted in its lower fuselage's forward section.

The world's very first jet-powered nighttime fighter kill was recorded on Nov. 3, 1952, by a U.S. Marine Corps Douglas F3D Skyknight. The aircraft went on to destroy four of the Soviet-built MiG-15 Fagot jet fighters.

Douglas produced 268 Skyknights, including several conversions to special-duty variants. One Marine Corps night fighter squadron went on to rack up the best nightfighter record of the Korean conflict.

After 1953, Skyknights were converted as trainers for radar intercept officers and for use as electronic reconnaissance and countermeasure aircraft during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War. The Skyknight was the only Navy/Marine fighter to fly combat missions in both Korea and Vietnam, and the last was retired in 1978.

Being a Navy Marine aircraft for its operational life towards the end of its career, I bet it never thought it would end up flying the colors of another branch of the military, but it did.

In 1968, three Skyknights were transferred to the U.S. Army. These aircraft were operated by the Raytheon Corporation at Holloman AFB, N.M., where they were used for testing at the White Sands Missile Range into the 1980s; they were the last flyable Skyknights.

Looking back at the old bird, the sleek lines of evolving aircraft after World War II made this design gain the nickname Willie the Whale. But its design proved to be the correct one as it met all the requirements the Navy was looking for in one package. It would never win a beauty pageant, but it sure won a lot of air-to-air victories and had an outstanding record of bringing its crews home safe.

The Edwards Flight Test Museum has tucked away one of the few survivors of the Skyknight program to someday become part of their new museum complex. Willie the Whale didn't have sexy lines like many of those futuristic looking craft at the base. But this old survivor that never really got much press, became one of the most successful aircraft designs ever to fly in defense of our country.

The production of the Douglas



A very tough old bird showing a lot of wear on its airframe.



A glamour artist's rendition of the proven night fighter from the Korean war.

F3D Skyknight started back in 1949, and the day it retired there were only a total of 265 of these manufactured in all their variant forms. The reason for developing the Douglas Skyknight in such low numbers was that it was not exported outside of the United States, and truly became an American-only champion of the sky and another part of our local history at Edwards that flew in our skies as it stretched its wings.

Until next time, Bob out ...

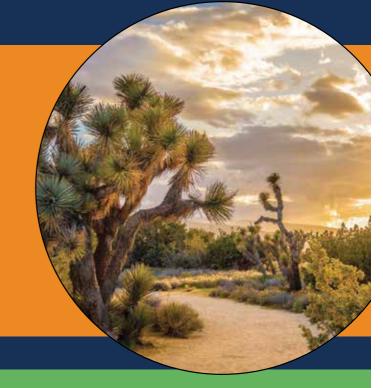
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### High Desert Hangar Stories

### The day Baby Ruth candy bars rained down from heaven

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

When World War I came to an end, one thing the GI's from America brought back from the battlefields of Europe was the love of chocolate.

Before the war chocolate was not as popular as many would think, but several aspects came together to make the early 1920s the launching platform for the candy industry to literally "take off" in America.

One of the major players early on was the Curtiss Candy Company in Chicago, Ill., which was looking to overtake Hershey's stranglehold on the candy bar market. As always, it comes down to promotion and how to get national attention for launching a new candy bar set to become the number one candy bar in the country.

Combining the name of a famous baseball player and the love of America's new passion of flying, a nationwide promotion was hatched that would definitely get the new candy much-needed front page coverage that would have people buzzing from coast to coast.

One of the early air show daredevil outfits, the Doug Davis Flying Circus, merged and formed the Baby Ruth Flying Circus in 1924, sponsored by Otto Schnering. Schnering was the founder of the Curtiss Candy Company, which manufactured the Baby Ruth candy bar. Davis had previously worked for Schnering, and between the two of them the idea of bombing big cities with Baby Ruth candy bars from three WACO bi-planes was born.

Manufacturers of the candy bar Curtiss/Baby Ruth announced their specially decorated biplane would fling out hundreds of candy bars and chewing gum to groups of kids in cities from Riverside, Calif., to Pasadena, Calif., and beyond.

One writer called it the Baby Ruth Fly-



Courtesy photo

Doug Davies with his very first Baby Ruth Bomber, an old surplus World War I Jenny . Not long after he purchased three WACO biplanes to create his Flying Circus.

ing Circus, a massive publicity stunt over six years that promoted Curtiss Candy Co. products. Touring cities all over the country, Curtiss would announce the time and day for its scheduled candy drop and encourage kids to gather in open areas, each hopeful of collecting their own "manna from heaven."

Kicking off in Chicago, Doug Davis started dropping the candy bars, attached to paper parachutes, from his airplanes. In 1923, he created a national uproar by flying low between buildings

See **HEAVEN**, on Page 7





**Courtesy photos** 

#### **HEAVEN**, from Page 6-

in the business district of Pittsburgh distributing candy. On the Fourth of July weekend in 1926, he did the same promotion over Coney Island. In Miami in 1927, a candy distributor got Davis to let his 12-year-old son, Paul Tibbets, drop the candy bars from Davis's Waco 9 to the crowd at the Hialeah Park Race Track. It made a big impression on the boy; he later said, "From that day on, I knew I had to fly." Tibbets would go on to pilot the Boeing B-29 Superfortress that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, in World War II.

The amount of candy that dropped from the skies may never be known, but one thing that will never be disputed is that the good old Baby Ruth candy bar along with the Flying Circus promotion forever tied the two together as one of the greatest aviation advertising programs in history. As the promotion began to wind down, one of the very last drops came to us here in Southern California, and from some folks' reflection who were there, we can get feel of what it was like to be there as a kid.

During the end of February and much of March 1929, the Curtiss candy plane dropped its products to kids from the Inland Empire to Whittier, Pasadena, San Pedro, Ventura and Escondido.

"Pomona Will Witness the Greatest Candy and Gum Party Ever Held in the State!" said a Curtiss advertisement in the Pomona Progress-Bulletin on Feb. 25. Of course, that exaggerated wording



Photo from the authors private collection

was also in newspaper ads in other cities.

"There were kids everywhere in a big open field — we had big fields everywhere then," one young man said, sharing his story about how he and his brother walked the four miles from Norco to Corona for the Feb. 28 candy drop.

The kids impatiently searched for the first signs of the biplane flown by World War I aviator Dallas M. Speer that left the Norconian Air Field for the Corona "bombing run."

"Finally, we heard it first, then it circled and then came in low and parachutes started falling. I don't think they worked too well, but it was a lot of fun scrambling to get the candy!"

In the man's memories, he also shared

that the candy drop was augmented by the arrival of a Curtiss truck that provided even more of the goodies. "We just stuffed our pockets because they were free. I don't think any of them made it home: I mean that was a long walk and kids get hungry."

In Riverside three days later, kids were promised candy would be dropped as well as free tickets to a matinee at the Riverside Theater. But sometimes a little patience was needed.

One young girl on Grand Avenue called the Riverside Daily Press to complain the plane never came to her neighborhood on March 2. "She was further about to declare herself when she cut-off shouting, 'Here he comes,' here he comes.' After the receiver slammed to the ground, it was followed by the sound of tiny feet rushing off to the distance,' according to an article of that day.

The California candy drops were apparently the last for the Baby Ruth Flying Circus, the program likely doomed that year by the arrival of the Great Depression.

Today we can read these stories and shake our heads as we can't even imagine anything like this happening in our lifetime, or what it would have been like chasing Baby Ruth Candy Bars parachuting from the skies but oh man, does that sure sound like a fun thing to do as a kid, and at my age I'm not embarrassed to say I would probably be out there with them chasing a sweet treat as a BIG kid LOL!

To finish up this story I just want to share that tonight as I went into the local convenience store to purchase a couple of those classic old favorite Baby Ruth Bars that I realized I was becoming the part of a candy bar that has been around for over one hundred years and that had its start with the first major aviation promotion in history. I have always liked those Baby Ruths and now that I know the rest of the story, they will be just a little bit sweeter!

Funny of all the articles I have written over the year this is the only one I can eat when I'm done! With that being said, it's Bob out for now, and let me peel back that wrapper!

Baby Ruth the airman's candy bar!





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### High Desert Hangar Stories

# **Fate is the Hunter**

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

Many years ago, there was a movie called "Fate Is the Hunter" and it followed the disastrous flight of an aircraft that had several issues that added up to the plane's eventual demise. When all was said and done, it was a series of unforeseen mishaps that the pilot had no control over, that took down the plane and cost many lives.

Lockheed test pilot Henry C .Bosserman woke up on the morning of Feb. 6, 1958, at his house in Littlerock and got ready for another day of flight test at Lockheed at Palmdale's Plant 42 facility where he was doing acceptance checks of the new Lockheed F-104 Starfighter. As the morning would playout, fate would indeed be the hunter as most all test pilots know that no matter how many times you fly a plane, there is no such thing as a routine flight in a new cutting age fighter plane with a radical new design coming off the production line.



Air Force photograph

Maj. Henry Bosserman, Lockheed test pilot.



Air Force photograph

The Lockheed F-104, tail number, 56-0772.

Bosserman rose to the rank of major and had a stellar career flying combat during World War II in Europe, and then as a pilot in the air defense command in the United States at the beginning of the Cold War. He had hours of flight experience and it carried over to his post military career when he became a test pilot for Lockheed. But as fate would have it, little did he know what was waiting off the west end of the runway at Plant 42 when he lit the afterburner and started his roll towards his test hop that morning. What should have been just another check out of a new jet became much more.

It was eight o'clock as the school kids gathered at the local bus stop over on M-8 and 27th street West and were expecting just another school day as did all those that lived in the area, but as the minutes past they were getting closer to a moment that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Bosserman, at full afterburner, made the crossing of what we now call BJ's corner at Sierra Highway and Avenue N and began his climb to altitude when the gremlins that can follow a pilot in a new plane showed up and had the seasoned pilot suddenly facing warning lights and alarms in his cockpit as his sleek fighter, with a loud bang, suffered a flame out and gave the pilot just seconds to evaluate his craft and make hard decisions.

Witnesses gave many different accounts of what they saw or heard when the roar of the engine suddenly with a loud bang and a ball of fire had them thinking that the plane had blown up, but with all the speed and the intact airframe came out of the smoke it was still a hurtling jet clawing at the sky to still fly.

Back at the bus stop, those kids, and the small community back then that were in what we now call "white fence farms" which was a rural setting of ranches and farms, well spread out where the silence of the morning about to erupt into a calamity that today we would have a hard time imagining.

As Bosserman crossed over 10th Street West, the open field below him and the last second of flight had him pull the levers and eject from the stricken aircraft. Near what would be about 16th West and Avenue N-4

LEFT: The crash of the F-104 that killed Henry Bosserman was reported in newspapers across the country.

which is just desert today, the newspapers reported that he was seen hitting the ground at a high rate of speed. His parachute didn't have time to deploy, killing him when he hit the desert. Fate had caught up with him with conditions that had proven too difficult and too swift to overcome.

The kids waiting for the bus stopped

The kids waiting for the bus stopped doing what kids do, as suddenly the daily routine of going to school became secondary. An unknown came hurtling out of the sky and fate would intervene again. The out-of-control jet aircraft, minus its pilot, managed to punch a hole in the ground and miraculously not injure one person. Several people described hearing materials hit their houses and one woman managed to witness the last moment of the plane out of her living room window.

Over at the bus stop, traumatized kids had no idea what had just happened in front of them. The event happened so fast that few realized it was an airplane that had just barely missed them. As people ran outside and parents rushed to the site and bus stop, it became apparent with hugs and shouts of "Oh my god you're safe," the idea of what could have happened if fate had waivered a bit one way or another had become an event that would be shared with future family members and friends when the story of the day a plane fell from the sky and how by some miracle nobody was killed.

For Henry Bosserman, his wife and young son would suffer when what was just another February day would become a day they would carry in their hearts for the rest of their lives. Many times as a combat pilot over Europe in World War II, Bosserman tempted fate flying dangerous missions that at any moment could have ended in catastrophe. Fate would postpone that till one day on an early morning in peaceful Palmdale, Calif., the hunter found its way into the cockpit of that brand-new Starfighter, rolled the dice that came up snake eyes, and stunned a community and all those who worked with him and called him husband, father and friend.

May we never forget that those we have lost, understand better than anyone that the hunter is and always will be looking over our shoulders in every aspect of our lives

Until next time, Bob out ...

### -Van Nuys (Calif.) NEWS \* Sunday, Feb. 9, 1958

### Pilot Killed in Palmdale Jet Crash

The civilian test pilot of an I Air Force jet fighter plane y was killed Thursday when his parachute failed to open after he ejected at low altitude near Palmdale.

The Lockheed F-104A narrowly missed the home of Charles Toth, of 2714 W. Ave. M-8, near Quartz Hill, when it crashed shortly after 8 a.m.

Pilot Henry C. Bosserman 35, of 7302 E. Ave. U-3, Little Rock, was killed when his body struck the ground.

The supersonic Starfighter took off shortly after 8 a.m. on a test flight prior to turning the aircraft over to the Air Force. The jet apparently "flamed out" and Bosserman ejected from the aircraft.

The dead flyer was chief production fighter test pilot for Lockheed Aircraft Corp., for which he had worked since 1951.

He was a former Air Force

priot.

Bosserman is survived by his widow and a 7-year-old son.

Courtesy photograph





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### High Desert Hangar Stories

### Remembering an Air Force warbird: The F-105G Thunderchief

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

Many years ago, when I was just a wet-behind-the-ears Airman stationed at George Air Force Base in Southern California, little did I know that my everyday chores in the 35thCivil Engineering Squadron and my relationship to the flight line and its operations would have me supporting the mission being carried out by some very long-in-the-tooth Republic Aircraft F-105Gs.

Like all things in the military, it was easy to take such aircraft for granted as they were a constant in the background of my military years.

The Thunderchief was properly named as anybody familiar with one knew. When going full afterburner, the pounding on your chest let it be known that something very serious was rolling down the runway. Many times, when I was out at the GCA or RSU sites I would get the full effect of the roll out and always take a few moments to enjoy the ultimate Roman candle, especially when night missions were being flown.

Being part of facility maintenance at Cuddeback Gunnery Range northeast of Edwards, I also had the joy of watching the "Thuds" skim the desert and cut loose with those guns — hitting the afterburner for a quick exit as they trained for war

Over time, as we lived out the late 1970s. many of us knew that those Thud crews who flew the Wild Weasel missions were all hard-core Vietnam veterans who flew those old airframes many times in hostile skies over Vietnam.

Each plane, to many of us, was like a national treasure. Even those tasked with keeping them airworthy, who had a lovehate relationship with them, kept them flying as they filled a mission requirement slowly being passed over to another old guardian — the F-4 Phantom.

The stories of bravery and dedication to

RTAFB Thailand



Air Force photograph

Three F-105G's from the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at George Air Force Base, Calif.

missions involving those old G-model Wild Weasels has many of us today thinking back to the unique swagger of the crew members we interacted with at George. They were just hold-over old-school cowboys we loved to be around when they would tell their stories. Many of these guys were not looking to impress; they were just happy to share some stories of times over the targets, and clinched butt cheeks when things got a little intense.

This month a date came and went marking the beginning of the Vietnam War. Many folks have different opinions as to the mission that dealt to the American military. For many of us, we just looked at the men and women influenced by that war

and are thankful for having known such heroes who were more spit than polish and knew how to push the limits of a handlebar mustache

Over in Palmdale, at the Joe Davies Airpark, sits a reminder of my days at George and also the conflicts that took place over the skies of Vietnam. Tail #416 is an airframe that I have seen pictures of, loaded for bear heading to North Vietnam. I also remember that old bird rolling down the runways at George, keeping the



Air Force photograph

F-105G Thunderchief Tail Number 416 in the skies over Vietnam.

To 18th Tactical Fighter Wing (PACAF), Kadena AB (deployments to Osan AB Korea and Kwanju AB Korea) To 355th Tactical Fighter Wing (PACAF), Takhli RTAFB To 18th Tactical Fighter Wing (PACAF), Korat RTAFB To 355th Tactical Fighter Wing (PACAF), Korat RTAFB To 388th Tactical Fighter Wing (PACAF), Korat RTAFB 1970 (deployment to Takhli RTAFB) To 561st Tactical Fighter Squadron (TAC), Korat RTAFB To 35th Tactical Fighter Wing (TAC), Korat RTAFB To 35th Tactical Fighter Wing (TAC), George AFB (deployments to Shaw AFB SC, Eglin AFB and Karup AB Denmark) 1980 Dropped from inventory by transfer to museum status Transferred to Joe Davies Heritage Airpark

To 4525th Fighter Weapons Wing (TAC), Nellis AFB

To 388th Tactical Fighter Wing (Pacific Air Forces), Korat

Photograph by Bob Alvis The journey of the F-105G Thunderchief, tail number 416.

Wild Weasel mission alive as new aircraft would slowly disperse the Thuds to storage facilities and museums. The passing of that torch silenced that mighty afterburner for the last time.

As the generation of men who flew and crewed these old warbirds starts to find their way into the sunset, many of us who spent our time in their world are starting to experience a sadness in our hearts. We really cherished these guys and their old steeds, what they represented to us, and

-See **THUNDERCHIEF**, on Page 11

#### **THUNDERCHIEF**, from Page 10 —

how they helped us to be what we wanted to be.

Someday, if you're ever driving past Joe Davies Airpark in Palmdale, look over to old number 416 and see an old guy walking around it with his hand touching that history making airframe, you need not call security. That guy is just one of many Air Force veterans performing a ritual where those from the past do our very best to pass the history and affection for our generation

and our planes to future generations, and hope they also understand the feelings many of us have for these old warbirds and crews from the past.

It's sad to think I will never hear something that I once took for granted, live again. But multi-generations of Airmen have experienced that same feeling since the beginning of flight, and it sure won't end when current front-line fighters and bombers find their way to boneyards and museums.

Until next time, blue skies and Bob out ...



Photograph courtesy of Bob Alvis



Photograph by Bob Alvis

The F-105G Thunderchief, tail number 416, at the Joe Davis Airpark in Palmdale, Calif.

LEFT: The author with the old F-105G Thud that was a part of the background to his Air Force journey in the 1970s.

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### High Desert Hangar Stories

### Operation Marine and PFC John Anderson, home town hero

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

When Veterans Day comes around, we start thinking about our families and friends who served and sacrificed in all of America's wars and in peace time.

Always looking for stories of inspiration and a tug at the heart I believe many times God is looking over my shoulder and guides me to the story I need to share. This story I'm about to share is definitely one of those that I came across in an old hometown publication from the 1960s.

The Vietnam War saw its share of soldiers from the Antelope Valley serving over there and we have heard the countless stories of heroism, sacrifice and loss, and the heartbreaking stories of those who would return home but never leave those battlefields behind in their memories. Many times, it's the stories of war that make the heroes stand out but every once and awhile a story comes to light that has nothing to do with guns and bombs and gives us a path into the humanity of the human spirit in a time of war.

When Marine recruit John Anderson left Lancaster, Calif., to put his shoes on the painted feet at the induction center, little did he know his contribution to the war effort would not be so much about the enemy but about the people who ended up as collateral damage.

Never knowing John but reading about him, I can tell he was raised with a moral compass that would guide him to doing the best he could for others that needed help in one way or another. Here in the Antelope Valley, living in his average middle-American home, John was always looking out for his younger brother and the kids in his neighborhood. When John arrived in South Vietnam in the war-torn city of Chu Lai the children who greeted him were anything but an enjoyable sight.

Almost immediately the plight of all the orphans living in the streets came to rest on the shoulders of John. This was an activity which he requested and handled after completing the routine duties of a Marine in a combat zone.

It wasn't long until John's mom, Mrs. Anderson, received a letter from her son outlining the sad situation of these youngsters and requesting that she



Courtesy photograph Pfc. John Anderson.

urge the people of the Antelope Valley to contribute much needed articles to these children, many of whom actually had no clothes at all.

John's mother had recently joined the newly formed Antelope Valley Marine Corps Auxiliary, so it was her own son who set the stage for the first big project of the auxiliary. Mrs. Anderson contacted Marvin Brown, a state officer of the league who resided in Lancaster and soon "Operation Marine Anderson" was well on its way.

Barrels for depositing clothing were placed in locations across the Antelope Valley and local radio stations and newspapers donated time and space to inform the public of the activities and location for people to donate too. General interest was so great that in a very short while 500 pounds of clothing had been collected. The garments were sorted and packaged by the women of the auxiliary and then Brown took the boxes addressed to Pfc. John Anderson to the El Toro Marine Corps Air Wing where they were put on a plane and flown to South Vietnam.

As the program grew, money started to show up and Mrs. Anderson began to add simple things like chewing gum, baby food, stuffed toy animals and candy. But the real hit was the clothing and shoes that really made a difference in the quality of life for those Vietnamese kids.

As Mrs. Anderson was going about the program it gave her great pride by participating in the project "Operation Marine Anderson" knowing as she was sorting and packing boxes that halfway around the world her son would be unpacking them.

What one private first class in Lancaster had started would live on long past John's service and when the time for his deployment to end other Marines stepped up to carry on with Operation Marine Anderson. Over time the operation grew to include other counties all the way up to San Francisco. Amazingly it also grew to include requests for dog food to feed the many dogs left abandoned on the streets.

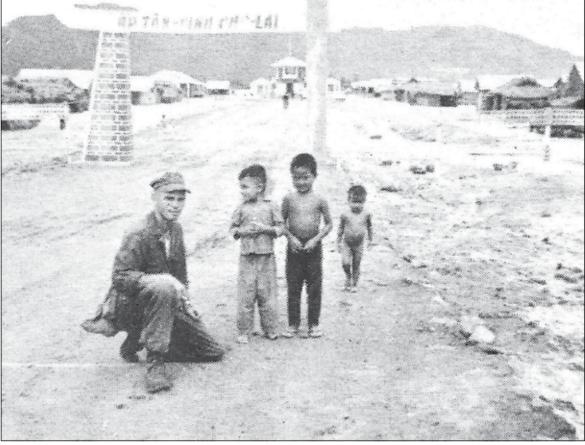
This Veterans Day we always take the time to remember and honor, and many times people do not realize that remember and honor are not always reserved for those who carried weapons, but it's also for those that also carried the heart and soul of a caring soldier like John, who in the middle of a war, saw children suffering and called out to his home town to please help him bring some of his childhood here in America and do for these suffering children as we would for the children in our own hometown

"Operation Marine Andreson:" just a small part of the spirit of the children of the Antelope Valley and all the citizens that stepped up and filled that void with love.



Courtesy photograp

Mrs. Anderson the mother of John in front of Helens toys shop on Lancaster Boulevard .



Courtesy photograph

The orphans of Southern Vietnam, photographs taken by Pfc. John Anderson.

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