

Columns

- 4 ANTIQUE ATTIC: GILLES AULIARD
- 11 SAL'S LAW: YOUR LEGAL EAGLE: SAL LAGONIA
- 13 Over The Air Waves: Bob Miller
- 17 THIS AVIATION LIFESTYLE: LACHLAN IVY
- 18 CLOSE CALLS: ANTHONY NALLI
- 19 LSA: DAN JOHNSON
- 24 COMMON CAUSE: MIKE SULLIVAN
- 27 BOOK REVIEW: BRIGIT HARTOP
- 28 AIR TO GROUND: ROSE MARIE KERN
- 32 HOT AIR, WINGS AND FLYING THINGS: JIM ELLIS
- 33 FROM THE LOGBOOK: JIM TRUSTY
- 37 PLANE TALK: HERB HILL

Information & Classifieds

- 20 LEARN TO FLY - FLIGHT SCHOOLS
- 20 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- 23 SUMMER AIR SHOW SCHEDULE
- 29 CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS
- 31 CHECKPOINTS: EVENT LISTINGS

Features

- 8 WOMEN PILOT LEADERS
- 9 COLLINGS FOUNDATION: RACE OF THE CENTURY, PT1
- 15 BUILD YOUR OWN MOTH MAJOR
- 20 AN OASIS FOR YOUR SENSES
- 22 GARY ROWER ENCHANTS THE CROWD
- 23 GAS, WHY WING IT.
- 25 THE QUICK CHEK BALLOON FESTIVAL
- 27 CESSNA T-206 - AN OWNERS PROFILE
- 34 POWER VS GLIDER, NO CONTEST.
- 36 GO FLY
- 38 FLIGHT REVIEW: THE NEW CT LS

Cartoons

- 12 SMILIN' JACK
- 20 CHICKEN WINGS

Air Show Reviews

- 18 FLYING HIGH AT VA HIGHLAND
- 21 THUNDER OVER THE BOARDWALK

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE WATCH



Writing the Kerosene Cowboys Series of Novels

I was extremely privileged in my earlier lifetime to serve the United States as a Naval Aviator, flying numerous tactical jets off the pitching decks of four different aircraft carriers. As such, I was allowed to wear those coveted Wings-of-Gold proudly on the left side of my uniform, be it a pair of creased khakis, overly-starched dress whites or a sweaty green flight suit. During my brief twenty-year career as a Navy pilot, I was occasionally insulated from my own ineptness due to the patient guidance of extremely gifted men in various squadrons located throughout the service. Therefore, my primary motivation for writing the Kerosene Cowboys series of novels is to humbly pay tribute to all of these squadron mates in particular, and to the small fraternity (now including "split tails") of Naval Aviators in general. They are all honorable and courageous Americans, true heroes each and every one of them and they are the pride of this nation.

In my youth, I quickly realized that God had sought fit to endow me with a sliver of writing aptitude. I begrudgingly arrived at this conclusion because of frequent accolades heaped upon me by a bevy of long distance beauties who would gush over my "snail mail" love letters. Little did I know that later in life a few of those early "pen pals" would actually convene to compare some of my long-winded compositions, while guzzling designer Cappuccino and wolfing down pumpkin scones at a trendy coffee shop in the suburbs. These pieces of correspondence from my youth were personal creations supposedly written to my one-and-only soul mate, at the time, for all of eternity. This "boy-meets-and-courts-girl" dynamic worked well for me, if you get my subtle drift, for short periods of time.

The basic premise behind Kerosene Cowboys developed during my tenure as the Landing Signal Officer of Attack Squadron Two Zero Four. The 'River Rattlers' of VA-204 are an elite and superbly talented light attack squadron (now Strike-Fighter) home ported in New Orleans, Louisiana. On my final sortie flying the mighty A-7E Corsair attack jet, I was the flight leader on a 'War-at-Sea' training strike against the battleship New Jersey, steaming 75 miles offshore in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. During the "low fly by" phase of that particular mission, attempting to be a bit more tactful over the UHF airwaves than I really was, I politely informed the skipper of that warship that the 'River Rattlers' would be happy to support his boat and crew any time, any place. While zooming along at 550 knots, 200 feet above the ocean swells, I heard the following radio transmission on the 'Air to Ship' frequency: "You Kerosene Cowboys can come back here any ole time." From that moment on I knew that an appropriate main title had been born for a sequence of books about the valiant, although somewhat arrogant, exploits of America's Naval Aviators. Now I just had to find the time to put my calloused, 'hunt and peck' fingertips to a computer keyboard. That creative opportunity wouldn't arrive until nine years later, just after the turn of the new millennium.

Over a seven year timeframe, while raising five children, working as a full time interceptor pilot for U.S. Customs, earning a Ph.D. in Political Science and "moonlighting" as a Professor at several universities, I wrote "Kerosene Cowboys: Manning the Spare," my first installment in a lineage of "faction" novels about Naval Aviation. Even though I tend to be a perfectionist in my writing, the first twenty chapters were completed in New Orleans without too much difficulty, except for the extended time duration. But in January 2005, when I was transferred to a new management position in San Diego, a sudden case of "writers block" attacked my creative process. I hardly touched the manuscript for the first nine months while living in America's Finest City, struggling to assimilate into a new position as Deputy Director of Air Operations.

Late one afternoon in January 2006, as I was fighting rush hour traffic along I-94 East, I received an "emergency recall" message directing me to return immediately to the Customs Air Branch. As I drove back to Naval Air Station North Island, speeding the entire way, I wondered if America was under terrorist attack or if another wildfire was ravaging the California countryside like it was so much kindling wood. Fifteen minutes later, when I slipped into the Director's office and rudely plopped my butt down onto the available edge of his walnut cabinet, I noticed there was a conference call in progress. Strictly adhering to the "two minute" rule, I kept my mouth shut and just listened as the conversation unfolded. After three or four minutes I suddenly realized what the emergency was all about. One of our young pilots, Steve Freeman, had just died in a tragic aircraft accident in Ketchikan, Alaska. As the recently trained Family Liaison Officer, it would be my responsibility to manage every aspect of this tragedy with Steve's family. This was one mission that I truly didn't want to engage in. But I likewise knew that I would have to perform this role to the best of my ability to properly venerate Steve, and perhaps alleviate the tremendous grief that his family would certainly endure.

Ten days later Steve Freeman's Memorial Service was held onboard the USS Midway, and I had the distinct honor of delivering his eulogy to a standing room only crowd gathered on the Flight Deck to pay tribute to this fallen hero. The speech was entitled "Eulogy for a Hybrid Pilot" and it is included in Chapter 28 of the novel. After the eulogy, I told Steve's widow, Sherry Freeman, that I would dedicate "Kerosene Cowboys: Manning the Spare" to her husband. It wasn't until that moment that my "writer's block" subsided and I enthusiastically devoted myself to completing the final eleven chapters of the book.

By Randy Arrington

The complete list of all entries submitted for

Air Shows, Checkpoints, Meetings

can be found in their entirety on our website and are updated monthly.

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