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A Naval Aviator In the Cold War

1945-1975

How it all started:

During the last half of my senior year in high school something happened that determined the path of my future life. Although the World War II fighting had ended in August 1945, the Navy still needed officers to replace the war veterans who were being rapidly demobilized. One of the most critical shortages was in the ranks of pilots to man the Navy's aircraft carriers. It was the Navy's long-standing policy that all officers should be college graduates. However, late in the war the pool of qualified male college graduates just wasn't large enough to meet Navy pilot needs. Deciding that the 4-year college pipeline took too long to fill, the Navy dealt with this problem through an innovative program designed to recruit qualified young men to become career officers and pilots in the peacetime Navy.

I heard about it one day in December 1945, when all the senior boys in my class were summoned to my Detroit Central High School auditorium for a special meeting. The Navy officer speaking to us that day looked like a Commander or maybe an Admiral to me, but he was probably just an Ensign. He came to tell us about the new Navy V-5 program and encourage us to volunteer for it. The program offered two years of college education at Navy expense, followed by Navy flight training and an opportunity to make a career as a Naval Officer. I attended the meeting with my friends George Beckman and Allen Sweet, and we all agreed that we liked the idea. George and I went downtown to the Office of Naval Officer Procurement in Detroit to take two days of physical exams and tests to determine our eligibility. There were 26 applicants taking the physical exams that day, and the requirement for uncorrected 20/20 vision eliminated about 20 of them. The second day was devoted to written exams and aptitude tests. By the end of that day only three of us remained, George & I and another fellow. A Navy yeoman told George that the three of us had the highest scores he had seen for one group. Al Sweet followed us a few days later and he passed everything too. Central High School had given us a good start for our future lives.

Since I was under the age of 18 I also had to have parental permission to sign up. That was no problem because my parents, who had lived through the Great Depression, correctly perceived that this was a way they could afford to launch me into adulthood with some education and a paying job. On 14 December 1945 I was sworn in as an Apprentice Seaman, V5, USNR, and was told to expect Navy orders to active duty after I graduated from high school in January 1946. For me, this turn of events was a great relief. It meant I would not be drafted into the Army, and that I had the opportunity to get some free college education and learn to fly airplanes. In March 1946 my family took me to the Detroit train station and saw me off on my new adventure. I was 17 years old and had never been out of the state of Michigan except for occasional visits across the Detroit River to Windsor, Ontario. Now I was boarding a military troop train on my way to the University of California at Berkeley to start college. Thus I left the ranks of children and started on my life's journey as (almost) an adult

Harley D. Wilbur
7 August 2012

The Navy Career of Harley D. Wilbur

(Note: For a list of terminology and acronyms peculiar to the Navy see the last page.)

Harley D. Wilbur enlisted the Navy V-5 Program as an Apprentice Seaman in December 1945 at age 17. He was appointed Midshipman USN in 1948, achieved his wings as Naval Aviator in 1949, and then joined US Atlantic Fleet Patrol Squadron 49 (VP-49) as a “Flying Midshipman”. During his 30 years in the Navy he served tours of duty in four different Navy aircraft squadrons. He also served as a flight instructor at NAS Corpus Christi TX; as Aide and Flag Secretary to the US Admiral in charge of the NATO Iceland Defense Force (at Keflavik, Iceland); and as Director for Naval Matters at the Center for Naval Analyses, the Navy’s civilian “think tank” in Arlington VA. He completed his active duty service as Professor of Naval Science and Commanding Officer, NROTC Unit, at the University of Rochester NY, in 1975.

He holds degrees of BS, Mathematics, from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey CA and MS, Applied Mathematics, from the University of Michigan. He is also a member of the national scholastic honor society Phi Beta Kappa. He now resides with his wife of 61 years, Althea L. Wilbur, in Kensington MD.



Midshipman Harley D. Wilbur was commissioned as Ensign USN in May 1950

What is a “Flying Midshipman?”

The term “Flying Midshipman” owes its origin to Vice Admiral James L. Holloway USN, who was Chief of Naval Personnel shortly after World War II.

All the services discharged personnel rapidly after the shooting stopped, and the number of people in uniform quickly declined. Leaders in Washington could see that the postwar Navy was going to need more career officers than the U.S. Naval Academy could supply. VADM Holloway’s solution to this problem was to modify the existing Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (the NROTC) so that it could be a source of Regular Navy officers who would serve on an equal career basis with Academy graduates. This was a successful program that still exists today (2002).

However, there was an immediate shortage of pilots to man squadrons and air wings in the postwar Fleet. NROTC students had to complete 4 years of undergraduate education before being commissioned and only then could they be sent to flight training. This was going to cause a gap in the pilot training pipeline. VADM Holloway's solution to this was Navy-sponsored legislation officially called the Naval Aviation College Program, but popularly known as the Holloway Program. It offered promising high school youngsters both a college education and flight training. To get them to the fleet quickly, they would start flight training after their first two years of college, serve one tour in the fleet after receiving their wings, and only then return to college to complete work for their baccalaureate degrees. The incentive for the students was a Navy-funded education and a subsequent career in the Regular Navy. To emphasize the fact that this route to a Navy career was intended to be equivalent to that of the Naval Academy, these students were appointed Midshipmen USN upon reporting for flight training after their initial two years of college. They were required to serve a full two years as Midshipmen before being commissioned as Ensigns in the Navy. Since most of them completed flight training in about 18 months, they reported to their first squadrons as Midshipmen who were fully qualified as Naval Aviators ... hence the term "*Flying* Midshipmen". Input to the program was terminated in 1950 after the NROTC pipeline filled up.

There were 2906 Flying Midshipmen in the U.S. Navy. They received their appointments as Midshipmen, USN, and underwent flight training at the "Annapolis of the Air", U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, between the years 1946 and 1950. The last one received his designation as Naval Aviator in May 1951. Some of them flew airplanes off Navy carriers in the Korean War while they were still Midshipmen. It was the first time that Midshipmen had served in combat since the battle at Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1914. The former Flying Midshipmen served their nation well through more than 3 decades of cold war and hot wars. One of them, Admiral Gus Kinnear, achieved four star rank. Another one, Neil Armstrong, was the first human to set foot on the moon. Another one, Jesse Brown, was the first black Naval Aviator. He died in combat in Korea. The last former Flying Midshipman to be on active duty as an aviator retired from the Navy active duty in 1984. (See www.flyingmidshipmen.org/history for more information.)



Fledgling aviator: MIDN 3/C Wilbur and his SNJ training plane, October 1948



Squadron skipper: CDR Wilbur at VP-45 change of command, October 1968

1st Squadron: VP-49 (1949-1952) Homeport Norfolk VA, later NavSta Bermuda



VP-49 PBM-5S “Mariner” seaplanes over the Western Atlantic, 1952. By the early 1950s PBM squadrons were being trained to increase their emphasis on the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) mission in addition to reconnaissance and bombing.



Seaplanes could land and takeoff only on water. To move them off the water after flight required either a big seaplane tender or a ramp with a buoy for the seaplane to moor while a beaching crew attached removable wheels. Three tractors were required in order to bring a PBM up a ramp. This was a very labor intensive process. Shown here is a seaplane ramp at US Naval Station Bermuda in 1952.



VP-49 PBMs - Caribbean ports of call, 1950-1951 (Often with a seaplane tender)



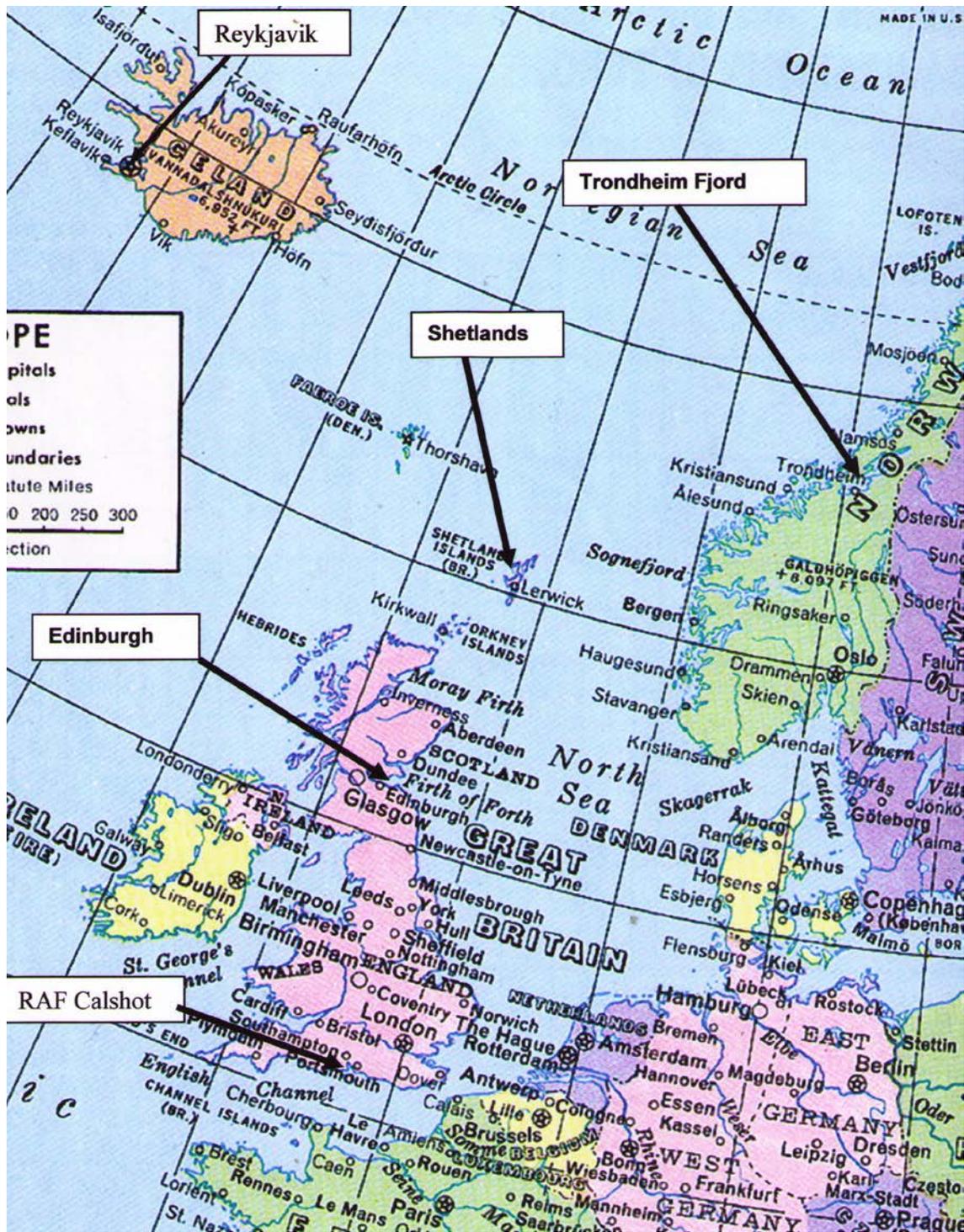
VP-49 PBM refueling from the seaplane tender USS Timbalier, Bermuda, 1950
The ship's public announcement system sounded this warning to all hands: "NOW HEAR THIS: The smoking lamp is OUT aft of frame 75 while refueling aircraft"



VP-49 PBM cockpit view of NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, 1950



ENS Wilbur qualified as PPC in PBM-5S aircraft in Sept 1951 and was promoted to LTJG in June 1952. Shortly thereafter he was deployed in a 3 PBM detachment to NAVSTA Argentia, Newfoundland. On his first operational patrol, after 11 hours of flying, he returned to find the Argentia seadrome closed by dense fog. His alternate airport was Gander Lake, shown here. After posting a buoy watch he and the rest of his crew spent the night in a Gander Airport hotel, returning to Argentia the next day. This was the only time LTJG Wilbur ever landed a PBM on fresh water.



Late in LTJG Wilbur's tour VP-49 deployed from its Bermuda base to Trondheim, Norway for a month to participate in MAINBRACE, a major NATO operation in the North Sea. Two seaplane tenders supported this: USS Currituck, a large tender, was the primary base in Trondheim Fjord. USS Timbalier, a smaller tender, moved to Reykjavik, Iceland, to refuel the PBMs during the trip. Timbalier then set up a secondary base in the Shetland Islands.



Seaplane Tender USS Currituck (right) with VP-49 seaplanes (at anchor on left), in Trondheim Fjord near the village of Skogn, Norway. To get there from the VP49 base at Bermuda took 3 long days, with overnight stops at Argentia, Newfoundland and Reykjavik. When at anchor a pilot, a flight engineer and 3 crew members lived aboard the aircraft in order to start engines and get underway if the aircraft anchor malfunctioned. This “buoy watch” was the duty of junior pilots. PBMs had 4 bunks for sleeping overnight. One person stayed awake and watchful at all times. It was sometimes very cold at night on the seaplanes as the autumn days grew shorter.



VP-49 aircraft being hoisted aboard USS Currituck for routine maintenance. This was a complex operation using lots of manpower and a large crane.

VP-49’s mission during Mainbrace was to locate and track an “enemy” force moving south from the Norwegian Sea into the North Sea. We were assisted by 3 RAF “Sunderland” flying boats also based with USS Currituck. Weather in the operating area was mostly terrible, with high winds, clouds and lots of turbulence. It was very challenging flying.

After Mainbrace the VP-49 PBMs moved to RAF Calshot, near Portsmouth, England to await seaplane tender repositioning for the return flight home.



While at RAF Calshot there was no seaplane ramp, so the VP-49 aircraft had to be moored at anchor in Southampton Water. Early one morning on buoy watch LTJG Wilbur took this picture of the US ocean liner SS America leaving Southampton for New York City. Quite a sight! (Note other VP-49 PBMs at anchor in the distance.)



Admiral Lord Nelson's famous Flagship, HMS Victory, at Portsmouth Naval Base

Waiting at RAF Calshot the VP-49 crews had some opportunity for sightseeing in London, just a short train ride away.



Picadilly Circus, London, 23 September 1952



Changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, September 1952



Big Ben, London, September 1952



The Houses of Parliament on Thames River



London neighborhood with WWII Nazi bombing damage still visible in 1952



Statue honoring President Franklin Roosevelt, Grosvenor Square, London 1952. Roosevelt was revered in Britain for his part in the defeat of Hitler during WWII.

Next stop on the way home was Edinburgh, Scotland. After USS Currituck set up a seadrome at Firth of the Fourth, VP-49 aircraft moved there from RAF Calshot. As shown in the pictures below, Edinburgh was a grim city in 1952, cloudy, hazy, smoky and chilly. USS Currituck was anchored near the downtown area. VP-49 crews lived aboard ship (except for those on buoy watch) and had opportunity to visit ashore while waiting for favorable weather in Iceland, where USS Timbalier set up a base at Reykjavik for VP-49's next refueling stop. Attempting a rough-water takeoff at Edinburgh one VP-49 PBM was so badly damaged it could no longer fly. It was hoisted aboard the ship for its long, sad ride home for repairs in the USA.



Edinburgh, Scotland, 28 Sept 1952. Currituck anchorage (top) obscured by smoke.



Edinburgh Castle, a popular Scotland landmark. Gloomy in the smoky haze. The spots in the foreground are the white hats of visiting VP-49 sightseers.



Reykjavik, Iceland, as seen from the PBM cockpit during landing approach on return trip from Scotland. The seaplane tender USS Timbalier is at anchor in the harbor, a white spot just to the right of the windshield wiper in this photo.



Reykjavik storm! Seen from the seaplane tender USS Timbalier. The PBMs rode out 60 knot winds with engines turning to ease the strain on buoy anchors. During refueling after the storm one VP-49 aircraft sank because of an unfortunate water accident. No personnel were hurt, but the aircraft was a total loss. What was left of the squadron returned to Bermuda via NAVSTA Argentia, Newfoundland on 8 Oct 1952. LTJG Wilbur departed the next day to rejoin his wife in Detroit and move on to his next Navy assignment, flight instructor duty at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas.

2nd Squadron: VR-3 (1955-1958). Homeport NAS Moffett Field, California. The squadron later moved to McGuire AFB, New Jersey, in 1957.



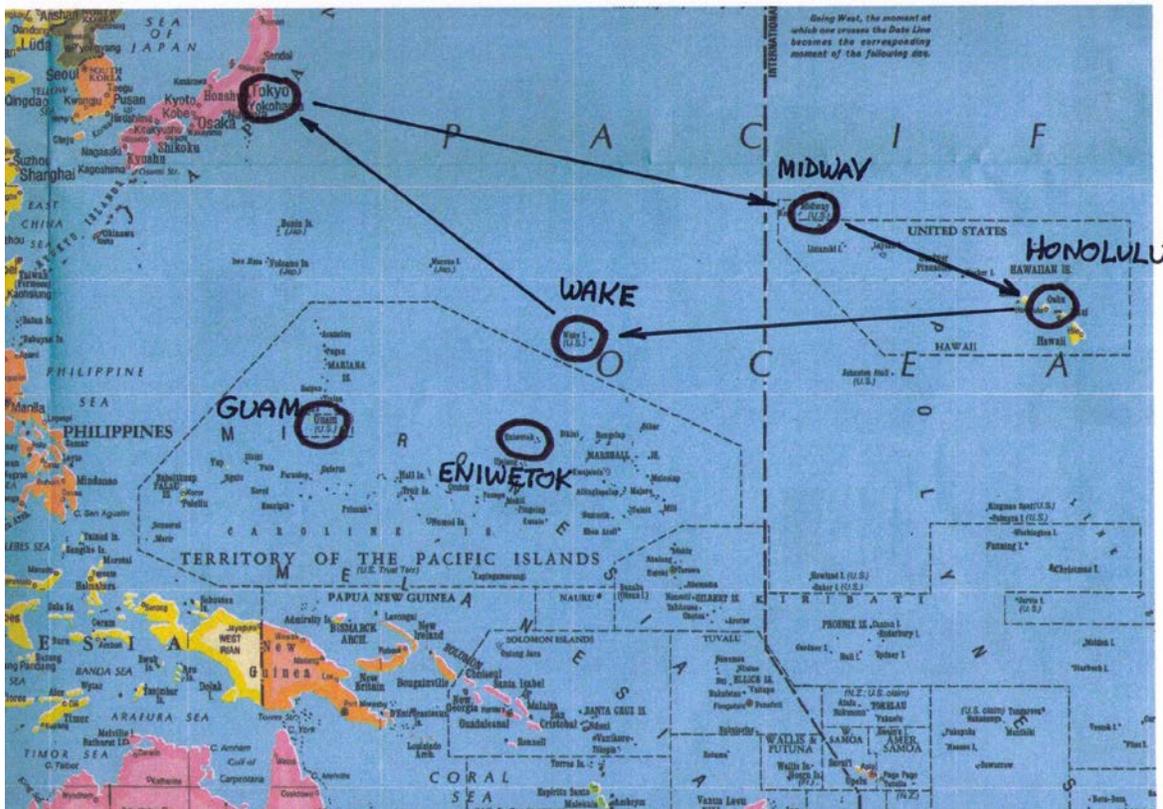
This squadron was a giant ... 120 officers and about 750 enlisted personnel. Many of the officers were pre-WWII airline captains whose only Navy duties were that of "Line Pilot". LT Wilbur was 6th from the bottom in seniority when he joined VR-3. Its spaces were in this giant former airship hangar at NAS Moffett Field. VR-3 was one of the few Navy components of the Military Air Transport Service (MATS).



1957 View of NAS Moffett from the cockpit of a VR-3 aircraft on final approach to landing from the southeast. Moffett was about 40 miles south of San Francisco at the lower end of the bay near the town of Mountain View (shown here on the right).



While at Moffett VR-3's principal mission was to transport passengers between USA and Japan. The aircraft (shown here at Honolulu) was the Navy R6D (USAF C-118, civilian DC-6). The normal crew was 3 officers (pilot, copilot, navigator) plus a flight engineer, radioman and two Navy WAVE passenger attendants. It normally carried 65 passengers. Crew changes were made at Honolulu, Wake Island, Tokyo, and Honolulu (returning). LT Wilbur became qualified as a MATS aircraft commander and later as a flight instructor. Since he was USN (not USNR) he also had an administrative job as squadron Assistant Personnel Officer.



In the 1950s, before the advent of jet-powered transport aircraft, flying across the Pacific was a long trip. The westbound route from Honolulu to Tokyo faced strong headwinds that required both refueling and a crew change at Wake Island. The trip back from Tokyo to Honolulu usually had tailwinds, could be made without a crew change, but required refueling at Midway Island. There were no satellite aids to air navigation then and Loran coverage was sparse. All VR-3 pilots had to be qualified as MATS air navigators, skilled in sextant use for overwater celestial navigation.

Operation Redwing (1956)

The normal mission of VR-3, as a MATS Squadron, was to carry people and cargo on scheduled MATS routes, much like a commercial airline. The routes and aircraft procedures were standardized and well known to all involved. Squadron personnel, especially pilots, navigators and other crew members, attended formal training classes to enable all of them to know their jobs, know their aircraft, and to perform in a safe and standardized manner. There were centrally published MATS Manuals that provided official guidance “from on high” for almost everything, and periodic on-site inspections were made by teams from higher authority to be certain that the squadrons were performing properly. All this was safe and efficient, but sometimes stifled initiative when non-standard things came up.

One such non-standard mission, Operation Redwing, was assigned to VR-3 in May 1956. This required aircraft to fly to Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands (see map on previous page) to provide logistic support for H-Bomb tests at Bikini. Eniwetok is about 700 miles southwest of Wake and is even smaller than Wake. This was a Top Secret operation. The squadron’s job was to carry air samples back to the USA as fast as possible for analysis by government laboratories in California. The VR-3 skipper, Captain Ike Dew USN, accompanied the two aircraft detachment on this mission. He was not a MATS-qualified pilot, but was curious about the mission. Visitors were not allowed to carry personal cameras, so there are no pictures. LT Wilbur’s personal diary for Sunday, 27 May 1956, has this account:

“At 0556 this morning on our walk to the mess hall we suddenly saw about 5 seconds of bright daylight where there had been only complete darkness as an H-Bomb went off at Bikini, 180 miles away. About 15 minutes later, during breakfast, the shock wave hit us like a mild clap of thunder. I am thoroughly impressed. I sincerely hope one of these bombs is never set off over a city, for that would be the worst kind of tragedy. Later in the day we saw a much smaller version of the bomb set off 14 miles across the lagoon. Not at all spectacular --- “just a little firecracker”, they tell us. The cargo that our crew and the Captain’s were supposed to take to Hawaii today were doubled up into one airplane, so we wait here another day.

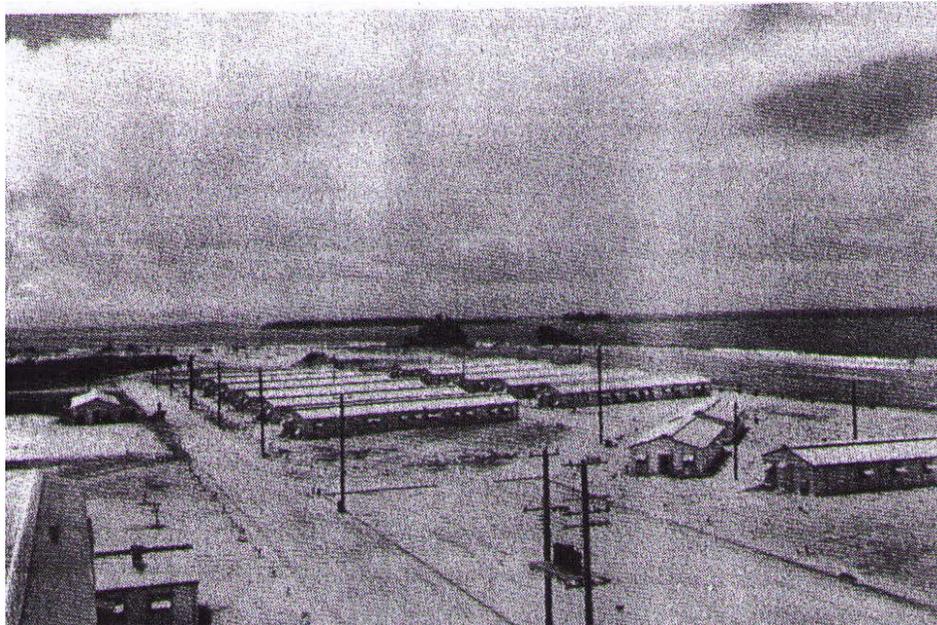
“Monday 28 May 1956. We were alerted at 1230 and after a nervous wait for our cargo finally left for Hickam AFB (Honolulu) at 1800. I was glad to leave that hot little Eniwetok Atoll.” Our cargo was several large boxes, carried in the cabin. They were evidently not very heavy so our big R6D airplane had an easy trip back to Honolulu. My pilot’s logbook says the trip took 10 hours. I believe the boxes just contained radioactive air, well insulated of course. Later in 1956 I made another trip to Eniwetok, arriving on July 10th and leaving on July 13th. My diary says little about that trip except that it was very hot and muggy, and that I spent most of the two days of free time there reading the novel “1919” by author John Dos Passos, which I liked very much. (I always carried books with me on those Pacific trips, knowing that there were often unexpected delays in obscure places.)

Fast forward about 25 years: I was long retired from active duty in the US Navy when I received a many-page official letter from the Defense Department discussing H-bomb

tests and asking me to check my pilot's flight logbook to report the exact dates when I visited Eniwetok in 1956. DOD was investigating the possibility of dangerous radiation received by service members during Operation Redwing. I complied. About 4 months later I received another official letter with a report that I was not at risk for excessive radiation and I should not worry about it.

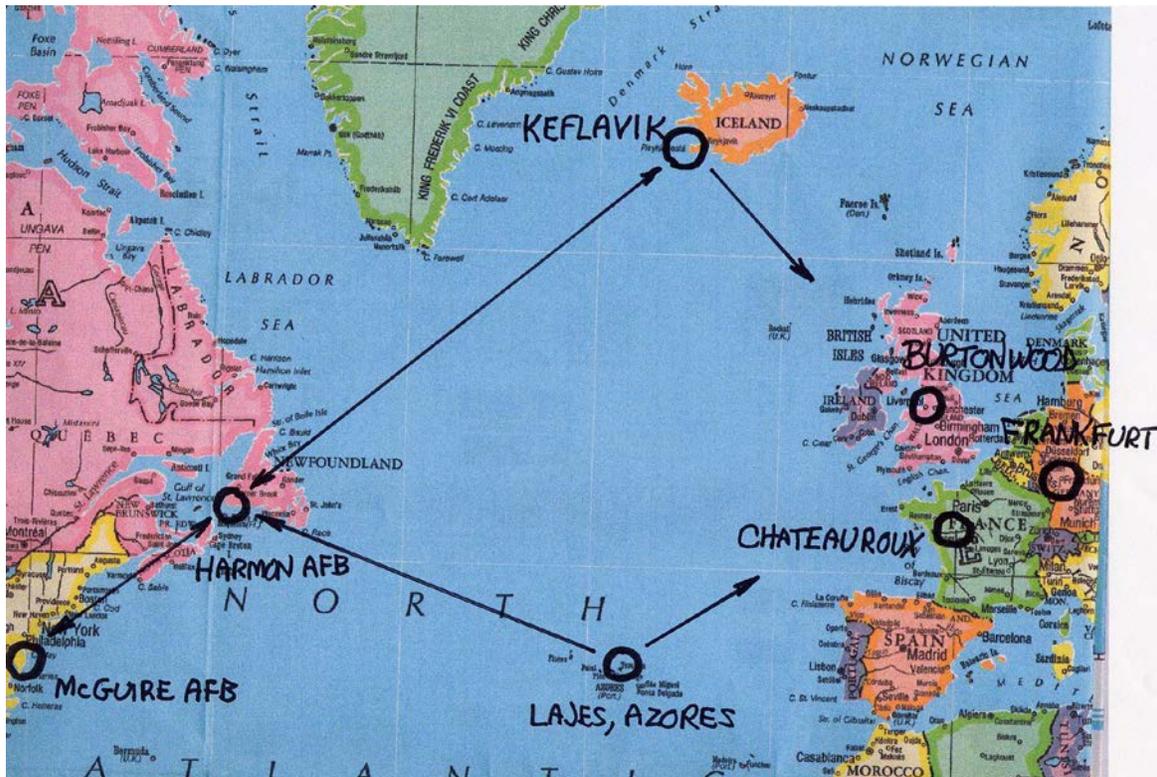
While I was writing this memoir in year 2012 I decided to use that wonderful free Internet service, Google, to see what I could find out about Operation Redwing. The results were sobering.

The Wikipedia report says there were 17 atmospheric test explosions done during the period May-July 1956, with some yields as high as 5 megatons of TNT. In particular, the test explosion named Tewa, which occurred at Bikini on 21 July 1956, was a 5 megaton blast described as "the dirtiest shot ever" and resulted in Eniwetok being hit with "very heavy" radiation fallout that lasted for days. This was reported in the book "Atomic Times: My H-Bomb Year at the Pacific Proving Ground" (Random House, 2005), written by Michael Harris, a former CBS public relations executive who had served as a draftee in the US Army on Eniwetok during most of Operation Redwing. My correspondence with the Department of Defense was evidently the result of an investigation undertaken years after Redwing because of health concerns for the personnel who were at Eniwetok in late July 1956. I am thankful (and lucky) that I was not subject to that radiation danger.



Eniwetok, 1956. The Redwing Base was on this small island with an airfield at the south end of Eniwetok Atoll. Little vegetation. It's obviously not a "garden spot".

As part of a high-level decision to change the overall organization of MATS in June 1957 VR-3's homeport was changed from NAS Moffett Field to McGuire AFB, New Jersey. This was a major evolution which involved the moving of about 900 personnel and their families across the country from California to new homes on the East Coast. It could have been an administrative nightmare for the Personnel Officer and his assistant (LT Wilbur), but actually worked out quite smoothly. By mid-August the move was complete and the squadron was operating scheduled flights across the Atlantic Ocean from its new base.



The standard route across the Atlantic for VR-3 was to refuel at Harmon AFB in Newfoundland, then on to Lajes in the Azores to refuel again. The final destination was usually Burtonwood (England), Frankfurt (West Germany), or Chateauroux (France), as shown in the chart above. However, the airfield at Lajes was occasionally closed for days because of unfavorable weather. (It was laughingly said to be the only airfield in the world located in a natural wind tunnel.) In such instances the alternate route “across the pond” was via Keflavik, Iceland, as shown on this chart. This weather uncertainty made crew changes enroute impossible to plan, so all aircraft had to fly with “augmented” crews (i.e. extra pilots) in order to conform to MATS safety rules about maximum crew duty time. VR-3 carried cargo only (no passengers) on these European routes.

For flight crews this augmented crew arrangement was not desirable. They usually arrived at their destination quite exhausted after a 24+ hour trip, and had only 24 hours on the ground before going back. So you arrive exhausted, sleep 6 or 8 hours, and then go out for sight-seeing or other fun in the destination city. When it's time fly back home you are tired before you even start. The Pacific schedules with stage crews along the routes to Tokyo and back were longer total trips but less exhausting along the way.

3rd Squadron: VP-26 (1962-1964). Homeport NAS Brunswick, Maine. This was an anti-submarine patrol squadron assigned to Atlantic Fleet Air Wing Three. It operated 9 P2V-5F “Neptune” antisubmarine aircraft.



The P2V was a complicated bird. It had two propeller engines and two jet engines with lots of sophisticated sensors for its primary mission, tracking (and attacking if necessary) enemy submarines. (The Trident on the tail was the VP-26 symbol.)

The USSR was estimated to have about 275 active submarines during the Cold War, some equipped with nuclear power and guided missiles that could even threaten the continental USA. In the early 1960s these submarines often operated in the Atlantic and Mediterranean areas. The primary mission of Navy VP squadrons was to locate and track them and to be prepared to deal with them if they engaged in hostile activity. VP aircraft tactics included wide area search at high altitude as well as some maneuvering in complicated patterns at altitudes as low as 200 feet above the ocean. It was a “cat and mouse” kind of game. Operating aircraft in this mode was quite a change for a pilot that had just come off two peaceful years of graduate school on shore duty at the University of Michigan!

During the Cold War the Navy’s Atlantic Fleet VP squadrons normally operated from their homeport Naval Air Stations at Brunswick ME; Norfolk VA; Jacksonville FL; and Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. Daily patrols were made from these bases to all parts of the Western Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, on the watch for Soviet submarines. The squadrons also took turns making extended deployments (without families) to overseas bases such as Argentia, Newfoundland; Keflavik, Iceland; and Sigonella, Sicily in the Mediterranean.

An unfortunate tragedy occurred in early April, 1963. The US nuclear submarine USS Thresher was missing and presumed lost. It happened to be the day when VP-26 was just finishing its annual Administrative & Material Inspection by the staff of Commander, Fleet Air Wing THREE at NAS Brunswick. LCDR Wilbur reported the circumstances in his personal diary (see the next page). His crew had the “ready duty” that day.

Wednesday, April 10, 1963

100th day - 265 days follow

Brunswick, ME.

I was excused from the Personnel Inspection because of my sore ankle. ADMAT Insp critique this afternoon. The squadron did fairly well, although my department fell down in the area of security clearances. The inspection was no sooner over than we were launched on the USS Thresher SAR mission:

WASHINGTON, Thursday (UPI) — The U.S. nuclear submarine Thresher was missing and presumed sunk in the Atlantic. The Navy early today feared it carried 129 persons to death in the worst submarine disaster in history and the first of the atomic age.

The waters where the Thresher was last heard from are a mile and a half deep. At the Defense Department, hope all but flickered out Wednesday night that the ship might be safe.

At midnight, the Defense Department began making public the names of the 16 officers, 96 enlisted men and 17 civilians who were aboard the \$45 million nuclear-powered craft.

This meant that next of kin had been notified that the Thresher was "overdue and presumed missing."

Adm. George W. Anderson, chief of naval operations, tensely announced the \$45 million ship "appears to be lost."

The three-year-old whale-shaped Thresher was last heard from at 9:17 a.m. EST Wednesday while submerged 220 miles east of Boston.

The ocean floor in this area is 8,400 feet down. Anderson said if the Thresher sank in this sector there was "no possibility the men could be alive." Water pressure at such a depth would have crumpled the hull of the sub like walnut shell.

Thursday, April 11, 1963

101st day - 264 days follow

Brunswick, ME.

Maundy Thursday



Atlantic Ocean
Where Sub Disappeared

Cross locates approximate spot in the Atlantic, about 220 miles east of Boston, where the atomic submarine Thresher disappeared.

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The Navy Thursday night officially declared all 129 men aboard the sunken nuclear submarine Thresher were lost after white and yellow gloves and other debris were picked up by search vessels in the Atlantic.

Navy Secretary Fred Korsh made the official death declaration after finishing a flying trip to the scene of the search for the hull of the Thresher about 275 miles east of Boston.

His statement confirmed the sinking of the sub Wednesday while making deep diving tests as the worst single-ship peacetime disaster in U.S. Navy history.

I was launched in LK-8 at 1445 the afternoon as part of the SAR effort took 3 UP/AP newsmen along.

The weather at the site was terrible: Tumultuous seas, high winds, turbulent air, and low visibility as a late winter storm buffeted the entire ocean. We searched the area for debris as best we could, but it was a bumpy ride. We allowed each of the 3 newspaper reporters riding with us to have a few minutes in the bow observer's station to see the ocean up close while we were flying at about 300 feet altitude. (For a picture showing the P2V bow nose station see page 20 above.) The bow station was a plastic bubble in the aircraft nose, below and forward of the pilots' seats in the aircraft cockpit. Sitting there a person could see the ocean clearly, but couldn't see any part of the aircraft behind him. It was an eerie experience, like floating over the ocean all by yourself. Later that night we dropped off the reporters at Boston's Logan Airport on our way home to NAS Brunswick. As they thanked us for the ride one of them told me he never, ever, wanted to sit in that bow observer's seat again! He said it was a frightening experience for him. We smiled. As crew members it was a routine ASW experience for us.

A month after the loss of USS Thresher, as Navy ships were still at sea investigating the site where the submarine went down, VP-26 was tasked to assist by dropping sensitive camera equipment to the Navy destroyer USS SAUFLEY, on the scene where the Thresher's remains had been located 8400 feet down on the turbulent ocean's bottom. LCDR Wilbur's crew happened to be on ready duty again. His diary (below) had a brief note and a newspaper clipping of the trip. It was Mother's Day.

Sunday, May 12, 1963

132nd day - 233 days follow

Brunswick, ME

Mother's Day
Fourth Sunday after Easter

Ready duty relieved at 1000.
At 1500 we were called out
to go drop a package at
the Thresher site. Home
about 2100. Happy Mother's Day

VP-26 Gives Assist In Search For Lost Thresher, Makes Drop At Sea

NAS Brunswick aircraft were once more involved, if but briefly, with the continuing search for the USS THRESHER when Patrol Squadron TWENTY - SIX was assigned the task of dropping a Polaroid camera and film to the search vessels over the site where the lost submarine is believed to lie.

The initial date of the drop, Saturday, May 11, had to be changed because of unfavorable weather and seas in the drop zone, but the following afternoon, Sunday, proved to be ideal.

Monday, May 13

133rd day - 232 days follow

The delicate package was carefully wrapped and padded by Fleet Air Wing THREE personnel, and given to VP-26 for delivery. The cylindrical package, measuring two feet high and eighteen inches in diameter, was then rigged ingeniously with a mae west, an improvised parachute harness and small parachute, a smoke light, and a dye marker! Nothing was to be left to chance.

About six o'clock Sunday evening, May 12, the VP-26 SP-2E, piloted by Lt. Cmdr Harley D. Wilbur, rendezvoused with the USS SAUFLEY, (DE 465), the recovery ship. After several practice runs the drop was made, and within five minutes from the time the package left the aircraft it was aboard the destroyer, the contents intact.

This is but another example of the versatility of U. S. Navy patrol squadrons and their willingness to get the job done successfully no matter how unusual the task.

During LCDR Wilbur's tour of duty with VP-26 the squadron was assigned to a five month deployment to the NATO base at NAF Sigonella, Sicily in 1964. Squadron leadership hierarchy during the deployment was CDR Bob Miller, Skipper; CDR Jim Cullen, Exec; and LCDR Harley Wilbur, OPS Officer.



Ports of Call during the VP-26 MED Deployment April-Sept 1964



NAF Sigonella HQ with US, Italian and NATO flags flying (1964)



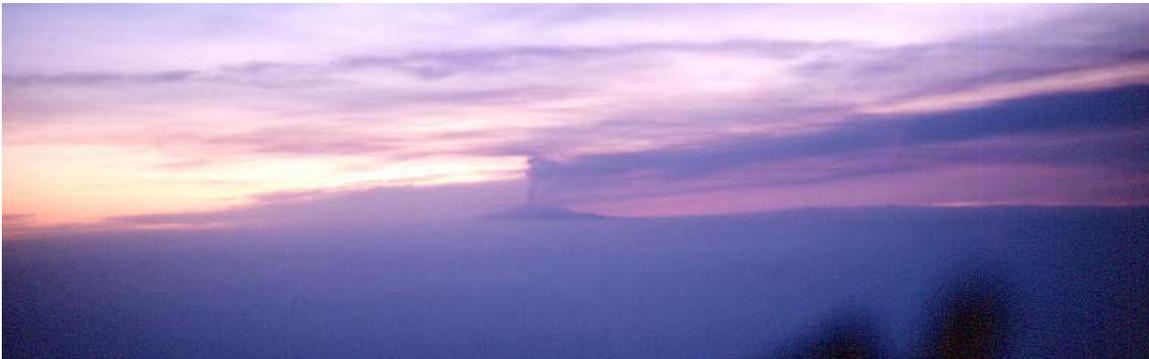
There was a narrow 6 mile road between the quarters at the Navy's Sigonella base and the airfield where the squadron offices, hangers and aircraft were. The drive back and forth between those two sites presented some interesting contrasts. We sometimes had to share the road with Italian farmers' livestock.



Some buildings along the route had evidently been abandoned for years.



Sicily's Mt Etna was an ever-present reminder of Sigonella. Above: Etna viewed from BOQ quarters on base. Below: Etna at sunset seen by a returning P2V aircraft 50 miles away. Etna is 11,122 feet high and smoked or burned day and night.



Catania, the Sicilian city nearest to NAF Sigonella, seen from a VP-26 aircraft.



WWII American Cemetery near Catania. Many US military personnel died during the bloody Allied invasion of Sicily during WWII,



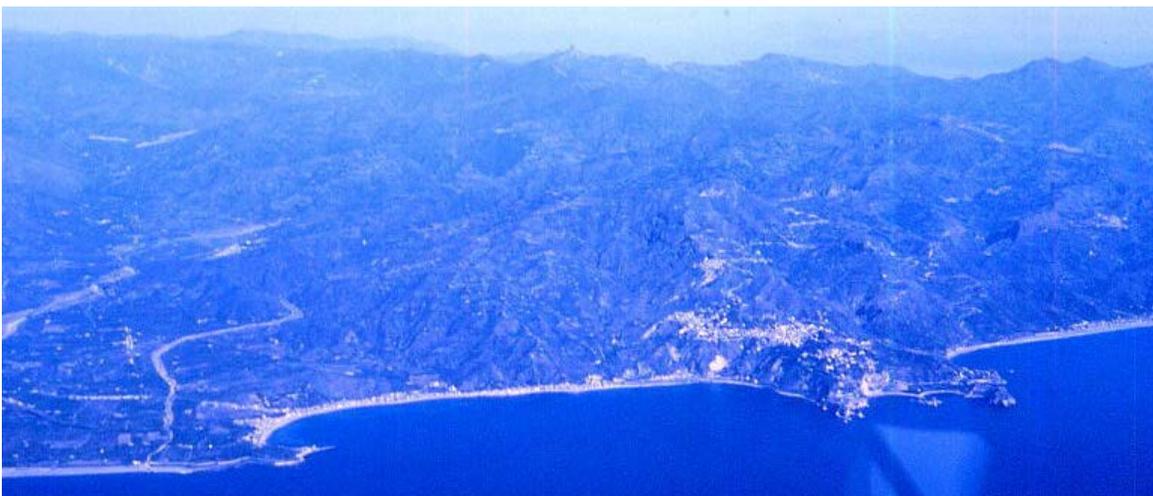
Straits of Messina between Sicily and Italy. This was the site of intense WWII fighting when Allied forces first invaded Italy.



NATO Air Base at Decimomanno, Sardinia. It was ironic to see German military aircraft based there alongside other NATO aircraft in 1964. (How soon we forget.)



Harbor at Cagliari, main city on the island of Sardinia (1964)



Taormina, popular seaside community on Northeast Sicily south of Messina



VP-26 CO CDR Miller and OPS Officer LCDR Wilbur visited the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal to confer with higher authorities prior to NATO exercises involving many fleet units. VP-26 aircraft provided ASW support services for various ships.



LCDR Wilbur on patrol in his P2V aircraft during the deployment.



LTJG Tom Husband at the P2V navigator's station. Note the crowded conditions. The P2V airframe was designed at the end of WWII. The Cold War antisubmarine equipment added later did not fit well in the small P2V interior space.



LCDR Wilbur's aircrew officers dress-up after returning from a mission to the US Wheelus AB in Libya. (A little harmless fun after a long day of work.)



VP-26 Skipper CDR Miller dispenses drinks during a party at the Officers' Club, NAF Sigonella. VP-26 called itself "The Trident Squadron" A big Trident was displayed on the tail of all VP-26 aircraft.



Friday evening dancing at the NAF Sigonella Officers' Club for officers not on duty. Some young officers' wives "followed the ship" to visit their husbands during the deployment. This was allowed, but discouraged. Few senior officers' wives did it.



LTJG Tom Husband at breakfast in a pension accommodation by Lake Lucerne, Switzerland. Mount Pilatus is seen across the lake in the background.

During deployment all VP-26 flight crews (both officers and enlisted crew members) were allowed one week of leave for sightseeing in Europe. Everyone appreciated this break from the demanding flight schedule. LCDR Wilbur and copilot LTJG Husband chose to visit Switzerland. Because of the isolation of Sigonella, VP-26 provided air transportation by “training flights” in Italy to assist when it could. In this case the route was by VP-26 to Milan, then by train to Zurich and rental car to Lucerne. Return was by train to Pisa for VP-26 pick-up.



Downtown scene, Lucerne Switzerland. A colorful city with lots of flowers.



Route to the top of Mt Pilatus by cable car. A different way to fly!



LCDR Wilbur at refreshment stop half way up Mt Pilatus



Scene near the top of Mt Pilatus. We liked Switzerland!



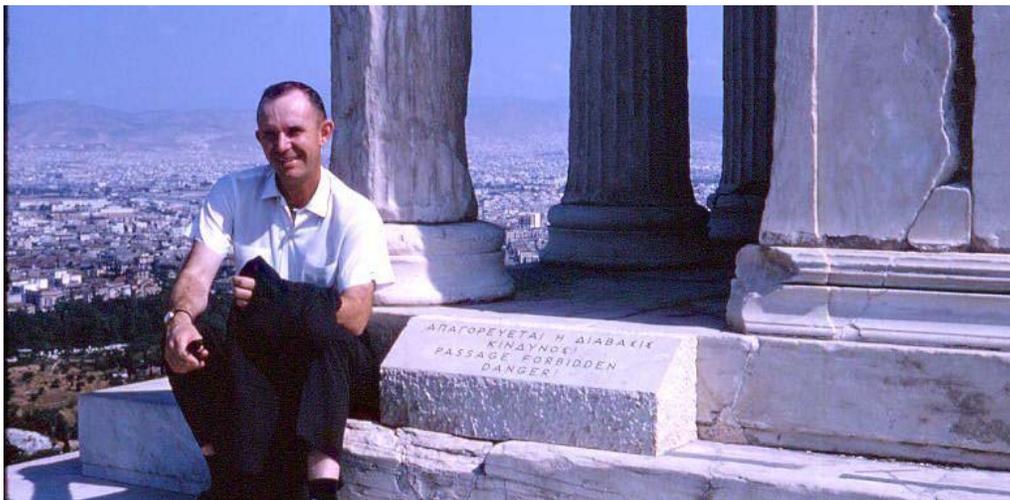
Florence, Italy (on the train ride to Pisa). It was a hot day.



The famous “Leaning Tower of Pisa” (On way back to Sigonella after leave)



The deployment offered other occasional special pleasures. LCDR Wilbur enjoyed a visit to the Acropolis in Athens after NATO exercises with the Greek Navy.



Wilbur takes a moment's rest on the stones of the Parthenon after a long climb up.



LCDR Wilbur's VP-26 P2V passing Gibraltar on the way home to NAS Brunswick, Maine at the end of the deployment in early September 1964. The trip took 3 days, with a refueling stop in Rota, Spain and overnight stops at NAF Lajes (Azores) and Naval Station Argentia (Newfoundland).



Tarmac scene at US AFB Rota, Spain, on return trip from VP-26 Med deployment

Following the VP-26 duty tour the Wilbur family moved to Iceland for 17 months where CDR Wilbur was assigned as Flag Secretary to the US Admiral in charge of the NATO Iceland Defense Force. Shortly after that family move old Navy friend Russ Day sent this cartoon. Russ was flying TWA passenger jets back and forth from the United States to Europe at the time.



Although this was shore duty in an administrative job, CDR Wilbur was still required to do some flying each month to maintain his proficiency as a pilot. Flying in Iceland was unique, as shown in the following photos.



Keflavik Airport seen from an aircraft on landing approach. The US Naval Station was located on the grounds of the airport, which it shared with civilian airlines and other NATO military activities. The Wilbur family arrived in early December 1964 at 10:30 in the morning, which was just after local sunrise on a cold wintery day.



Keflavik is at the southwestern corner of Iceland on a desolate peninsula about 30 miles from the capital, Reykjavik. This picture, looking north, shows the town and environs as it existed in the 1960s.



Here is one of Naval Station Keflavik's utility aircraft, old C-47 transports designed in the 1930s as the Douglas DC-3. They were used by many prewar airlines and built in large numbers for the US military forces during WWII.

These aircraft were used to deliver mail, supplies and people to Keflavik's outlying sites in remote parts of Iceland, and to perform various other utility functions. Staff aviators like CDR Wilbur were assigned to fly them, thus meeting their required proficiency flight hours while also doing useful work. Visited regularly were Site H2, a small installation on the Langanes peninsula in northeastern Iceland near the tiny village of Thorshofn (not shown on the map) and Site H3 near Hofn in southeast Iceland. Site H2 was close to the Arctic Circle in an area where there are few roads and few people. The route of flight crossed northwestern Iceland and passed over Akureyri, the Iceland's 2nd largest town. The trip from Keflavik to Site H2 took about 2 hours by air or about 2 days by truck! Roads in Iceland were sparse and often difficult to use because of ice or mud.



Map of Iceland, 1967. Site H2 on Langanes Peninsula is in the upper right corner.



Site H2's Thorshofn airfield is in the lower center of this photo. Don't you see it? It was a 1000 meter dirt strip, small for a C-47. Landings were possible only in daylight hours. No control tower, no crash truck, no voice radio and only one weak radio beacon. The aircraft instrument approach procedure in bad weather was to turn north from the radio beacon and descend to 500 feet altitude over the ocean. If still in the clouds then, return to Keflavik and wait for a better day.



Terminal building at Thorshofn. The little outbuilding behind it housed a small diesel generator, the only source of power for the building and the radio beacon.



Keflavik C-47 on the tarmac at Thorshofn airfield, February 1965. The airplanes sometimes had to share the field with free-range Icelandic horses such as the one shown here. (Be careful not to hit the horses when landing!)



Arctic pack ice sometimes came right up to the shoreline at Thorshofn airfield in winter. Site H2 is on the mountain in the upper right corner, about 10 miles away.



Aircraft crews laughingly called this the “Thorshofn International Airport”. The unloading crew came by truck from Site H2 when notified by telephone from Keflavik that an aircraft was on its way. The crew usually brought a pot of delicious hot soup to feed the aircrew while the airplane and passengers were being unloaded.



Aerial photo of Site H2, viewed from the southwest

The photo above, taken from a C-47 cockpit looking northeast towards the Norwegian Sea, shows Site H2. It was a little group of buildings (whose Cold War mission was Top Secret) situated on a mountaintop overlooking the ocean about 10 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Because the weather there was so harsh it was dangerous to walk outside during a storm, so all the buildings at the site were interconnected by a system of tunnels and covered walkways. Since life at H2 was lonely and severe, personnel (male only) were assigned there for periods of only 6 months and were occasionally allowed brief liberty trips to Keflavik (which itself was not such a great liberty port). During my tour there was one case of a sailor who requested an extension of his duty at H2. He was returned to Keflavik for psychiatric evaluation before his request was considered.

The scene below shows Site H2 viewed looking north from over the water by the tip of the Langanes Peninsula. The few buildings look lonely atop their desolate mountain.



The H2 buildings were at the very top of the mountain.

The other installation serviced by Keflavik's little airline was Site H3, a radar station on the remote southeast coast overlooking the airspace between Iceland and Scotland. It was a 2-hour flight along the south coast from Keflavik by C-47. To get there by truck or auto required a 4-day journey around the north side of Iceland on bad roads. This was because Vatnajokull glacier blocked the southern land route.



Vatnajokull, Iceland's largest glacier. In the 1960s no road passed east along the shoreline here because of the glacier.



Southeast Iceland. The small town of Hofn is the cluster of buildings left of the center of this photo. Site H3 was located on the point of shoreline at the far right, beyond the inlet to the harbor.



The Hofn landing strip was on the black sand of the barrier island. This photo was taken from the cockpit of a C-47 at about 500 feet altitude getting ready to turn left for its final approach to a landing. In the far distance are two fingers of Vatnajokull glacier reaching for the water.



Like Thorshofn, the airfield at Hofn was primitive and normally unoccupied. No lights, no radio, no crash truck, no services. When a Keflavik C-47 was reported by telephone (to Site H2) to be on its way, an unloading crew came by truck to the town and then by boat to the airfield. The abandoned building on the right in this picture was a leftover from the British occupation of Iceland during World War II.



Hofn, one of Iceland's smaller towns (population less than 2000) is viewed here from the airfield dock. In the 1960s it was isolated from the city of Reykjavik and the larger towns in the west by the Vatnajokull glacier. The mountains protected the little town from encroachment by the huge glacier.



Cargo from the C-47 had to be carried by hand to the boat. It was a labor-intensive task. Site H3 itself was located on the coastline beyond the mountains to the right in this picture. In late 1965 a new airfield was built across the water by the town itself, eliminating the need for the tedious shuttle of cargo by boat.



CDR Wilbur, Naval Aviator and bush pilot, on the tarmac at the old Hofn airfield.



When a new airfield at opened at Hofn in late 1965, unloading the airplanes for H3 became much easier. It was then no longer necessary to haul cargo by boat.



But proximity to the mountains made flying seem less safe. This was the cockpit view just before takeoff. The mountains at the end of the runway did NOT give pilots a warm fuzzy feeling. Engine malfunction on takeoff could cause a crash.

At the end of the Iceland tour CDR Wilbur was invited to fly on an antisubmarine patrol in the Norwegian Sea with a P3A Orion aircrew from VP-10, which was then on deployment at Keflavik. This was appropriate because at that time Wilbur was under orders to leave Iceland soon for assignment to a P3A squadron tour of duty with VP-45.



First stop on that patrol was the NATO Norwegian Air Base on grim-looking Andoya Island, near the North Cape of Norway.



Andoya Airfield in May 1966. It is about 130 miles above the Arctic Circle. Brrrrr!



Next stop on the patrol was the Norwegian Air Base at Bodo, Norway, about 120 miles south of Andoya but still well above the Arctic Circle. Very cold there, too.



Another overnight stop for the patrol mission was Stavanger, on the North Sea coast in Southern Norway. This is a lovely place to visit. Stavanger is at the same latitude as northern Labrador but much warmer because of the influence of the Atlantic Ocean Gulf Stream.



Stavanger, Norway, market scene, May 1966



While in Stavanger CDR Wilbur bought some teakwood furniture which remained in the Wilbur household almost 50 years later. The store owner and his young son helped load it for its flight to Iceland. The boy was very interested in our airplane!



VP-10 provided CDR Wilbur with this “Blue Nose” certificate acknowledging his trip above the Arctic Circle in the VP-10 P3A Orion aircraft.



At a Keflavik “Bless” (farewell) party CDR Wilbur received this certificate for serving in the Icelandic Domain. Although addressed to him, it belonged to the entire Wilbur family in recognition of their 17 months of living in Iceland.

4th Squadron: VP-45 (1966-1968). Homeport was NAS Jacksonville, Florida. CDR Wilbur joined VP-45 as Executive Officer after the tour with his family in Iceland, and became Commanding Officer of the squadron in November 1967.



VP-45 had 55 commissioned officers, about 250 enlisted personnel, and operated nine P3A “Orion” aircraft, one of which is shown here in flight over Bermuda in 1967. The P-3 joined the fleet in the early 1960s and became the mainstay US Navy antisubmarine patrol aircraft for the remainder of the Cold War. It had four turboprop engines, plenty of interior room and lift capability for its crew and equipment, an altitude ceiling of over 28000 ft, cruising speed in excess of 300 knots and “long legs” for missions to faraway places. It was a joy to fly. The squadron’s primary mission was antisubmarine warfare, but it had many other capabilities.



Example of the potential enemy --- a Soviet Foxtrot Class submarine sighted by a VP-45 aircraft somewhere in the North Atlantic in 1967.

Here is a typical example of what Navy Patrol Squadrons did during the Cold War:

One quiet Sunday in May 1967 the VP-45 Squadron Duty Officer in Jacksonville FL received a surprise telephone call from Atlantic Fleet HQ in Norfolk VA. Intelligence had determined that several Soviet warships had just ventured into the South Atlantic Ocean, something they had never done before. VP-45, the “ready duty squadron” that weekend, was directed to send aircraft to that area as soon as possible to see what the Russians were doing down there. Arrangements were quickly made with British authorities to use the airfield at Ascension Island as a temporary base for the investigation. Two days later 3 VP-45 P3As with crews, spare parts and maintenance personnel, left Jacksonville to carry out the mission. CDR Wilbur was in charge. The aircraft refueled at Barbados Airport in the eastern Caribbean. The distance from there to Ascension is 3300 miles, with nothing but water along the route and no weather advisories or radio aids to navigation except one short range low frequency radio beacon on Ascension itself. The trip was purposely made at night so the aircrew navigators could use celestial star sights to keep their aircraft on track. (Primitive navigation by today’s standards.)

Ascension Island is a desolate 34 square mile rock located about 500 miles below the equator half way between Brazil and Africa. Its population was 400 humans, thousands of exotic birds, and numerous sea turtles. It is a British possession, first settled in 1815 after Napoleon was exiled to St. Helena, 700 miles south, in order to preclude any rescue attempt by Napoleon’s followers. An airstrip was built on Ascension during World War II to facilitate the ferrying of aircraft from the USA to its European allies.



A VP-45 P3A lifts off the Ascension runway to visit the contact area 600 miles away. The first VP-45 patrol made a sighting of the Soviet ships of interest.



VP-45 P3A (with one engine shut down to conserve fuel) sights Soviet ships somewhere near the earth's equator.



There was a Soviet missile support ship on the left, and on the right a submarine tender with an Echo class missile submarine and an oiler alongside. Many Soviet sailors were seen on the fantail of the tender, apparently enjoying the warm equatorial sunshine. Some of them waved as the VP-45 aircraft passed by. This photo later appeared in Time Magazine with an article reporting on the new Soviet initiative in the South Atlantic. A few days later contact was also made with a Soviet November class attack submarine in the same area.



A VP-45 P3A being relieved on station makes one last pass over the Soviet ships before returning to its Ascension Island Base.



Map showing the location of the tiny dot that is Ascension Island.

Surveillance of the Soviet Navy's South Atlantic initiative continued, but VP-45 was soon relieved at Ascension by another squadron because of its impending scheduled full squadron deployment, a split between Bermuda and Argentia, Newfoundland. (Flexibility was "the name of the game" for VP squadrons in those days.)

The squadron left NAS Jacksonville on 27 June 1967. The skipper, CDR Townes, deployed with six P3As to Kindley AFB, Bermuda. The XO, CDR Wilbur, took three P3As to NavSta Argentina.

Three days later CDR Wilbur's crew headed north on the ice patrol, an annual VP operation to assist U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers in clearing a path for summer resupply ships to Thule Air Base in northern Greenland.



Ice Patrol scene. Note pack ice in the distance.



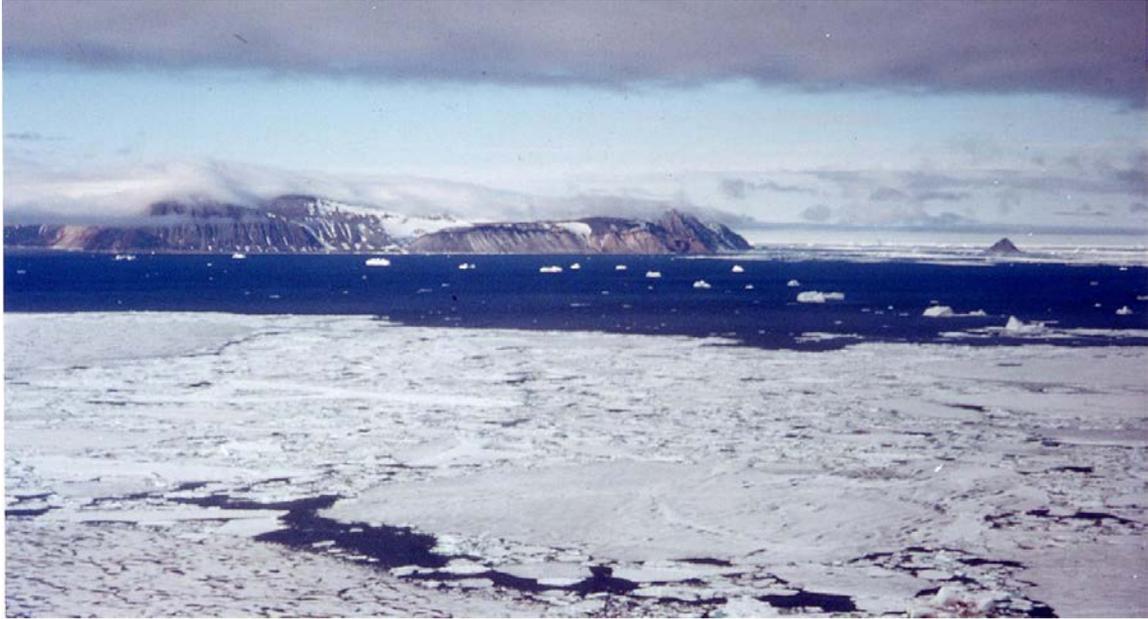
Here the ice patrol aircraft makes a visual rendezvous with the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Southwind, plowing its way through the ice and fog in Baffin Bay. Skilled ice observers on the aircraft maintained radio contact with Southwind to assist it in finding a safe way through the ice pack. The pilot's job was to cooperate with the ice observers while trying to stay clear of clouds and avoid flying into icebergs.



There was no shortage of icebergs in Baffin Bay, where this one was sighted.



Shadow of CDR Wilbur's P3A low over the ice somewhere in the Davis Strait.



There is a stark beauty to Arctic waters, best appreciated from inside a warm, comfortable airplane. This shows the cliffs of western Greenland, near Thule Air Base. An unexpected hazard to air navigation was thousands of curious sea birds airborne near the shoreline. They acted as if they thought the P3A was one of them.



CDR Wilbur (tallest) with his crew and the ice observers on the ramp at Thule Air Base, Greenland, 30 June 1967. (Note the winter flight gear in midsummer.) Thule's proximity to the North Pole presented some special problems for navigators in the 1960s because earth latitude & longitude lines are so close together up there. Special grid charts had to be used, which complicated the navigators' work.



Sumptuous transient Officers Quarters at Thule's Igloo Inn. The whole base was built on permafrost. No colorful flowers or vegetation here. When dangerous windstorms sometimes came down suddenly from the Greenland ice cap loud warning sirens were sounded over the whole base. All personnel outside were directed to immediately enter the nearest building and stay there for shelter until "all clear" sounded. Such storms were unpredictable and could cause death to anyone staying outside while the storm whistled through the base.



For training, the VP operational commander in Newfoundland directed ice patrol aircraft to return from Thule via Sondrestrom in southern Greenland, the only other US Air Base on the island. To get there in good weather aircraft turn into this fjord and fly 120 miles northeast. Majestic scenery, no sign of humans, very little vegetation. In cloudy weather, of course, aircraft must fly above the mountains and navigate by radar.



Cockpit view on final approach to the Sondrestrom Air Base runway. See it? It is totally desolate countryside. No sign of any human life beyond the Air Base limits.



The Ptarmigan Field Ration Dining Hall – the only place to eat at Sondrestrom.



A sight seen worldwide during the Cold War. A P3A parked in some remote place (Sondrestrom AB in this case) with aircrew ready and waiting for their next mission. It is a symbol of the US Navy's resolve to protect the freedom of the seas.



CDR Wilbur's P3A returning from Sondrestrom Air Base via the scenic route, below the mountaintops. (In clear weather only. U-turns not recommended.)



Another "cool" stop on the crew's return from Thule. Goose Bay, Labrador.



On deployment, VP-45 had aircraft on patrol almost every day. All ships seen on the ocean were observed, photographed and reported. This merchant ship was typical.



Occasionally sighted were US warships such as this submarine “in a hurry”. It was unusual to see a US submarine on the surface like this.



Some contacts were more important than others. Here is the Soviet spy ship “Cosmonaut Vladimir Komoroff”, bristling with sophisticated antennae for snooping on US Navy activity in the North Atlantic.



In the 1960s Navy squadrons used some creative license in decorating their aircraft, as shown here. Although aircrews liked it, this practice was later discontinued.



All squadrons often engaged in training exercises. Here a VP-45 aircraft (with one engine shut down to conserve fuel) provides antisubmarine support for the guided missile cruiser USS Columbus.



Like all Navy patrol squadrons, VP-45 had a secondary mission of aircraft mining. This role was periodically tested. Loading the big 2000-pound mines, which were carried externally, was a major evolution for the VP-45 ordnance crews.



This photo shows a VP-45 aircraft carrying a 12,000-pound load of mines during an operational readiness inspection in 1967. Accurate placement of the mines under simulated combat conditions was an important test of crew teamwork and precision

Leadership touch (by CDR Wilbur). Late in the VP-45 1967 deployment I had to deal with a small “happy hour” fracas in the BOQ where our junior officers lived. I considered using the classic military leadership technique shown in this cartoon:



The “Old School” (drawing by Harley’s friend and TWA Captain Russ Day) However, near the end of a long and tiresome deployment I decided the “light touch” below might be more effective. It was, and we had no further problems.

24 October 1967

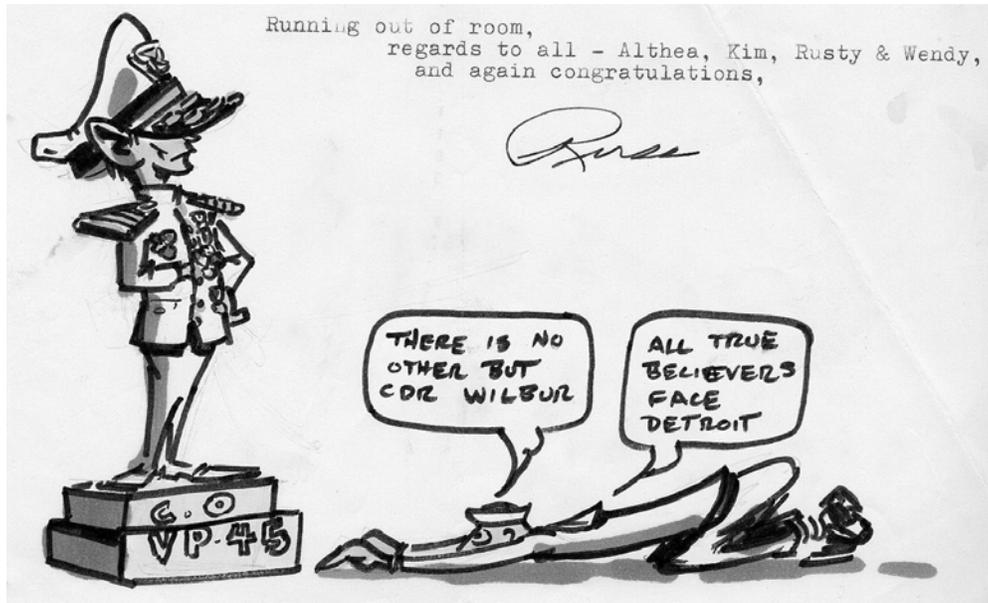
MEMORANDUM

From: Executive Officer
To: All Officers Residing in BOQ 333
Subj: Fire Extinguishers; use of

1. Fire extinguishers are placed at various strategic locations throughout billeting areas for the purpose of fighting fires.
2. The use of fire extinguishers for the purpose of spraying rugs, decks, furniture, TV sets or Naval Officers is not authorized unless the above mentioned items are undergoing valid, bonafide fires verified by the presence of flames, sparks or unusual smoke. Mental elation resulting from over-appreciation of Hiram Walker products does not constitute a valid fire.
3. The above information is provided in the interest of preserving the squadron image and protecting personnel and equipment from possible damage that might result from careless use of fire extinguishers.

Respectfully
H. D. Wilbur
H. D. WILBUR

When CDR Wilbur assumed command of VP-45 in November, 1967, old friend Russ Day, who left the Navy in the 1950s to become a TWA pilot, was ready with his perspective on the matter. (A leader can always use a little humility.)





Sign at NAS Jacksonville, Florida in 1968. Fleet Air Wing ELEVEN had five VP squadrons, four based at NAS Jacksonville and one based at US Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico

Being assigned as squadron CO is the pinnacle of a successful career for a Naval Aviator, embracing much prestige, honor and respect. But for most aviation skippers there is a down side to this: Less time for actual flying.



The reasons: more paperwork, more ceremonies, more meetings and conferences.



Periodic inspections of squadron personnel.



Presentation of Awards to individuals.



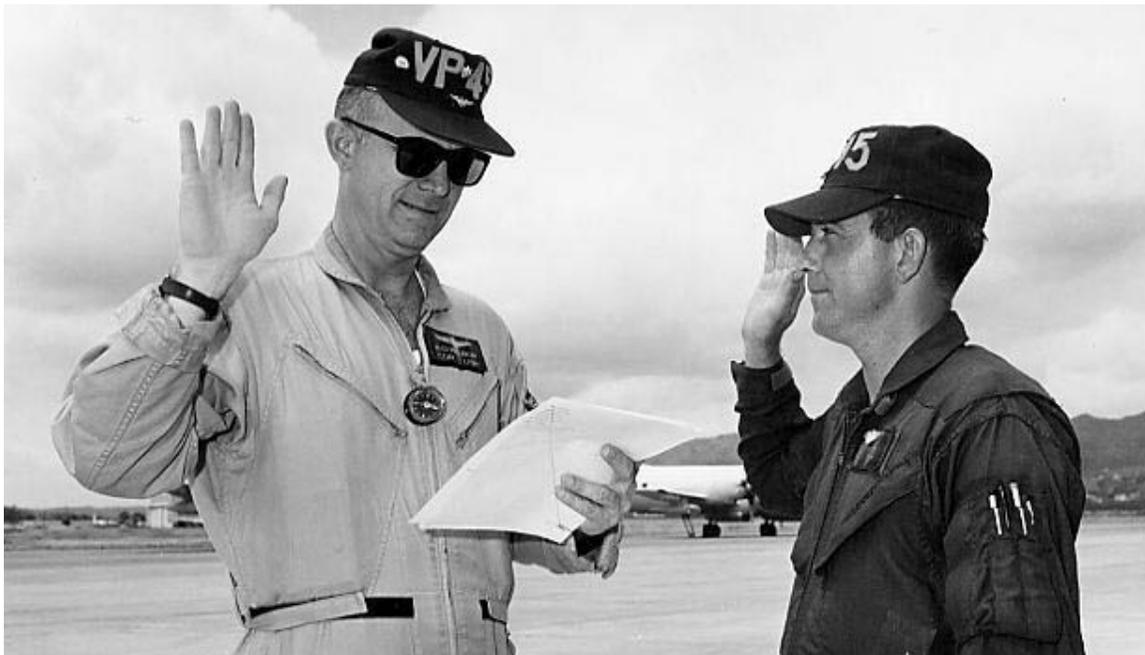
Presiding over squadron "All-hands" social functions. (Cutting the cake).



Presenting trophy to VP-45's winning team in the NAS JAX Softball League, 1968



CDR Wilbur presents check for money raised from VP-45 personnel by RM1 James Springer and his wife for Duval County Juvenile Court Emergency Child Center.



There were occasionally opportunities to combine flying with administrative work. Here the skipper, CDR Wilbur, administers the reenlistment oath to RM2 B.D. Holder before they both depart on their day's scheduled training missions during "Operation Springboard" at US Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, PR, in 1968.



Operation Springboard was an early winter annual two-week training operation for all Atlantic Fleet VP squadrons not currently on foreign deployment. The purpose was to let flight crew members hone their ASW skills with the help of US submarines acting as the enemy. It was a time of intense flying. In this 1968 photo the skipper visits the squadron flight line on the Roosevelt Roads airfield tarmac.

Sometimes interesting special flying missions like this came up:



Captain W. W. Honour, Commander Fleet Air Wing Eleven, represented the U. S. Atlantic Fleet at German-American Friendship Week in Bremen, West Germany, in May 1968. CO VP-45 was ordered to provide transportation. Commodore Honour is shown here (second from left) with other VIPs and his pilot, CDR Wilbur (on the right), at German Naval Air Station Nordholtz, near Bremerhaven, West Germany.

On the return flight from Germany CAPT Honour, CDR Wilbur and his flight crew visited USN commands at Naples, Italy; Rota, Spain; and Lajes, Azores.



NAF Lajes, Azores (On the far side of the runway in this picture)



Change of command & All Officers' Party time. (The year passed all too quickly.)



CDR Wilbur greets RADM Ralph Weymouth, guest of honor and speaker at the VP-45 change of command ceremony, NAS Jacksonville, Florida, 1 October 1968



CDR William H. Saunders III (left) relieves CDR Wilbur as CO VP-45

The personal letter (below) from LCDR Dick Steubben, given to me at the end of his tour of duty in VP-45, is a treasured remembrance of my own VP-45 experience. Dick was a competent pilot and for most of my tour as XO and CO he was the squadron Administrative Officer in addition to leading his own ASW aircrew. He was usually 5th in seniority in the squadron hierarchy. Dick was a fine Naval Officer, smart and always dedicated to his job. I depended upon him in many ways. But Dick had one glaring fault. He was, in my view, much too harsh and critical in his treatment of young junior officers in the everyday work of the squadron. My feeling was that most officers responded better to private counseling than to demeaning public criticism. I counseled him privately about this matter of leadership and he slowly responded to my criticism. This letter, handwritten and given to me as he departed, came as a pleasant surprise.

UNITED STATES ATLANTIC FLEET
U. S. NAVAL AIR FORCE
PATROL SQUADRON FORTY-FIVE
FLEET POST OFFICE, NEW YORK 09501

IN REPLY REFER TO:

29 March 1968

(CDR WILBUR
C.O. VP45)

Dear Captain -

As I take my leave from VP-45, I would be remiss if I didn't tell you of my feelings. I part with the Red Starters knowing that they are now the very best in the fleet in all ways; operationally, administratively and personally, and you are the one person that deserves all of the credit. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the leadership and the guidance you personally have given me during the past year and a half. When I've been wrong you have been tactful in restraining me and you've been generous in your support of me in some of my decisions which have been questionable. For me you have been the perfect Commanding Officer and I greatly appreciate the trust, confidence and support you have given me. This has been the best tour of duty I've ever had. Again, thank you.

Very sincerely,

Dick.

(LCDR DICK STEUBBEN)



"THE RED DART SQUADRON"

CDO: LT HEPNER PATROL SQUADRON FORTY FIVE DUTY CREW: 11
 SDO: LTJG R. N. BROWN NAVAL AIR STATION SUNRISE: 0720
 HOURS PROGRAMMED: 1,22 JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA SUNSET: 1917
 HOURS FLOWN SEPT 425 JULIAN DATE: 8276
 HOURS AHEAD: 3 FLIGHT SCHEDULE-WEDNESDAY-2- OCTOBER 1968

A/C	PILOTS	CREW	BRIEF/TAXI	ETE	ETA	FUEL/ORD	MISSION/REMARKS
LN-20	*LT LANG LT WILKINSON LTJG GILDER	23	TBA/TBA	TBA	TBA	3CM/C-1	ASW READY ALERT ONE
151363	LTJG D. L. BROWN						
LN-11	*LCDR HALL LT FOSTER LTJG R. N. BROWN	11	TBA/TBA	TBA	TBA	3CM/C-1	ASW READY ALERT TWO/DUTY CREW
151366	LT HEPNER						
LN- CHRYSLER	*CDR WILBUR	FAMILY	1100/1200	PLE	N.A.	RED DART PUNCH/ HORSD'OEUVRES	BON VOYAGE

CDR Wilbur is listed on the VP-45 Flight Schedule for one last time on Wednesday, 2 October 1968, the day after the Change of Command ceremony. The "Aircraft" is a station wagon, the Pilot is CDR Wilbur, the "Crew" is the Wilbur family, and the "mission" is a move to the Pentagon, Washington DC, for a new duty assignment.

Shore duty in Washington DC was an anti-climax after the satisfaction of sea duty with the Fleet. Even subsequent promotion to Captain USN had a hollow feeling.



Captain Harley D. Wilbur USN – The Pentagon, 1972

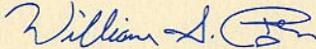
In Washington CAPT Wilbur had the good fortune to avoid the usual Pentagon bureaucracy by being assigned to Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), the Navy's civilian "Think Tank" in Arlington VA. He soon became Director for Naval Matters there and supervised more than 50 young Naval Officers who had varied sea duty experience and advanced college degrees. These bright officers were assigned to work alongside CNA's civilian scientists in studying important technical and administrative issues for the Navy of the future. CNA was managed by the University of Rochester, NY. It followed naturally that after his Washington DC duty CAPT Wilbur's next assignment would be Professor of Naval Science and Commanding Officer of the NROTC Unit at the University of Rochester. There he was responsible for the leadership and training of about 140 young college students preparing to become career officers as part the Navy's next generation of leaders. CAPT Wilbur retired from 30 years of active service in 1975. He then tasted the waters of civilian life as he became president of a small investment corporation in Monterey, California. (The ups and downs of that 2nd career is another story.)



CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

HARLEY D. WILBUR

In recognition of your service during the period of the Cold War (2 September 1945 - 26 December 1991) in promoting peace and stability for this Nation, the people of this Nation are forever grateful.


SECRETARY OF DEFENSE



Navy Aircraft flown by Harley D. Wilbur. His log book shows 6152 total pilot hours.
 (Drawings by Russ Day, 2008)

Wilbur Residences over the years

Dates	Duty Station	Residence
Harley enlisted as Apprentice Seaman V-5 (age 17) Dec 1945		Detroit, Michigan
Mar 1946-Feb 1948	University of California	Berkeley, California
Mar 1948-Apr 1948	Inactive Duty (at home)	Detroit, Michigan
Apr 1948-Jun 1949	Preflight & Basic Pilot Training	Pensacola, Florida
Jun 1949-Sep 1949	PBM Advanced Training Unit	Corpus Christi, Texas
Oct 1949-Jan 1951	Patrol Squadron 49	Norfolk, Virginia
Althea Lucille Neff & Harley Dexter Wilbur married 2 Feb 1951		
Feb 1951-May 1951	Patrol Squadron 49	Virginia Beach, Virginia
May 1951-Jun 1951	Patrol Squadron 49	Norfolk, Virginia
Jul 1951-Sep 1952	Patrol Squadron 49	NavSta Bermuda, BWI
Oct 1952-Feb 1955	Advanced Training Unit 700	Corpus Christi, Texas
Daughter Kimberly Allyn Wilbur born 28 Oct 1953		
Mar 1955-Jul 1957	Air Transport Squadron 3	Santa Clara, California
Son Russell Meade Wilbur born 10 Mar 1956		
Aug 1957-Jun 1958	Air Transport Squadron 3	Trenton, New Jersey
Jul 1958-Jul 1960	US Naval Postgraduate School	Monterey, California
Aug 1960-Jun 1962	University of Michigan	Ypsilanti, Michigan
Jul 1962-Sep 1962	FAETULANT	Norfolk, Virginia
Sep 1962-Nov 1962	Patrol Squadron 30	Jacksonville, Florida
Nov 1962-Nov 1964	Patrol Squadron 26	Brunswick, Maine
Daughter Gwenan Kildare Wilbur born 24 Sept 1964		
Dec 1964-May 1966	ComFair Keflavik	Keflavik, Iceland
Jun 1966-Aug 1966	FAETULANT	Virginia Beach, Virginia
Aug 1966-Nov 1966	Patrol Squadron 30	Patuxent River, Maryland
Nov 1966-Oct 1968	Patrol Squadron 45	Orange Park, Florida
Nov 1968-Jun 1973	Center for Naval Analyses	Arlington, Virginia
Jul 1973-Jun 1975	NROTC Univ of Rochester	Pittsford, New York

FAETULANT = Atlantic Fleet Airborne Electronics Training Unit.

Patrol Squadron 30 = Training Squadron for VP replacement pilots and aircrews.

Note: 17 different residences in the first 24 years of marriage.

Harley retired from the US Navy on 1 July 1975 (with 29 yrs 7 months service)

Jul 1975-Oct 1977

Carmel, California

Nov 1977-May 1978

Gaithersburg, Maryland

Jun 1978-Present (2012)

Kensington, Maryland



The Wilbur Family in Iceland, 1965. Kimberly(12), Althea, Gwenan(1), Russell(9) & Harley



Wilbur Family, 2001. Harley, Gwenan, Miranda (1 Mo), Kimberly, Carly (5), Althea & Russell

Terminology

U.S. Navy Officer Ranks

U.S. Navy Officer Ranks		Army/AirForce Equivalent
ADM	Admiral	General
VADM	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General
RADM	Rear Admiral (Upper Half)	Major General
	Rear Admiral (Lower Half)	Brigadier General
CAPT	Captain	Colonel
CDR	Commander	Lieutenant Colonel
LCDR	Lieutenant Commander	Major
LT	Lieutenant	Captain
LTJG	Lieutenant Junior Grade	1 st Lieutenant
ENS	Ensign	2 nd Lieutenant

Other Abbreviations (As of the 1960s. Some have changed since then.)

AB	Air Base
AFB	US Air Force Base
ASW	Antisubmarine Warfare
BOQ	Bachelor Officers Quarters
CINCLANTFLT	Commander in Chief, US Atlantic Fleet
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations (Senior US Navy Officer)
CO, "The Skipper"	Commanding Officer of a squadron or ship.
XO, "The Exec"	Executive Officer (2 nd in Command, after the CO)
OPS Officer	Operations Officer (3 rd in Command, after the XO)
COMFAIRARGENTIA	Commander Fleet Air Argentina
COMFAIRWING	Commander Fleet Air Wing
ECM	Electronic Countermeasures
GCA	Ground controlled approach (Radar system)
GPS	Global Positioning System (Satellite system)
LORAN	Long Range Radio Navigation System (before GPS)
MAD	Magnetic Anomaly Detection
MED	Mediterranean
NAF	Naval Air Facility
NAS	Naval Air Station
MATS	Military Air Transport Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAVSTA	U.S. Naval Station
OPCON	Operational Control Center
VP/VP-45	Patrol Squadron/Patrol Squadron 45
VR/VR-3	Air Transport Squadron/ Air Transport Squadron 3
PPC	Patrol Plane Commander (pilot in charge of a VP aircraft)
TACCO	Tactical Coordinator (aircraft officer crew member)
VFR/IFR	Visual Flight Rules/Instrument Flight Rules
WWII	World War Two, 1939-1945

Military Time of Day: 24 hour clock, e.g. 6:00 AM is 0600, 6:00 PM is 1800, etc