

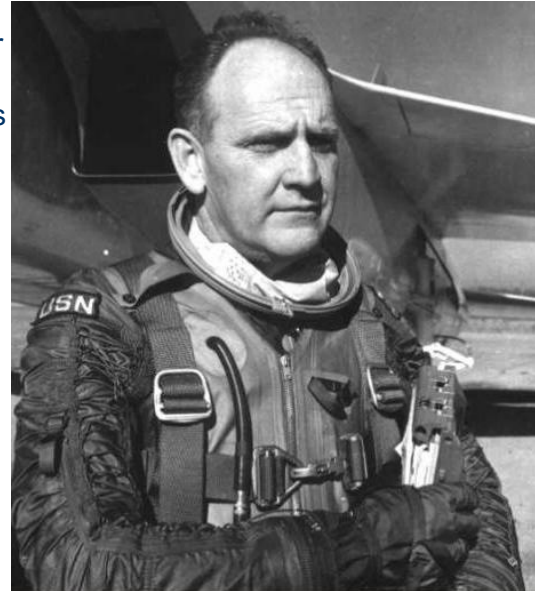


Spotlight on a Shipmate: LCDR Henry L. (Larry) Monroe

Spotlight on a Shipmate

This month's spotlight is focused on a former A-5A Vigilante Bombardier / Navigator named Lieutenant Commander Henry L. (Larry) Monroe. LCDR Monroe's daughter, Mary Monroe contacted us via the RVAHNAVY.COM forum in hopes that some of us might have remembered her father during his years in the Vigilante community. Mary and her brother Mark are gathering memorabilia and information so they can learn more about their father and pass the information onto LCDR Monroe's grandchildren.

Larry graduated from high school in 1941 and enlisted in the Navy on 3 June 1941. His Naval service began as a Torpedo-man aboard the USS Marcus Island. As a young Seaman Apprentice, Larry participated in numerous WWII invasions and battles. By 1947 Larry had become a First Class Petty Officer and applied to change his rate to Aviation Electronics. When 1950 rolled around Larry was a Chief Petty Officer and in 1954 he became a Warrant Officer serving on board the carriers USS Coral Sea, Midway and Roosevelt. In 1955 Warrant Officer Monroe was accepted to OCS and graduated with distinction. Ensign Monroe immediately reported to Air Composite Squadron 6 (later to be called VAH-6) in San Diego CA. Early in 1959 Lieutenant Monroe was assigned as the A3J Project Bombardier in Patuxent River Test Center MD. And all of this set the stage for an amazing event which occurred in 1960.



The Navy's new A3J aircraft was being tested and evaluated at Patuxent River Test Center MD. LT Larry Monroe and fellow naval aviator CDR Leroy Heath pushed the experimental A3J to incredible new limits. On December 13th 1960 they piloted the Vigilante to a new world altitude record of 91,450 feet (approximately 17 miles) with a 1000 kilogram payload. Does it sound easy? It wasn't. There were some harrowing flights which led to the establishment of this record. CDR Heath and LT Monroe were close friends, which made a big difference when testing a new aircraft, not knowing what they might come up against, but knowing someone you trusted was with you all the way. The aviators did three test flights at Pax River prior to the record attempts at Edwards AFB. On this particular test flight, they climbed to 80,000 feet over the Atlantic, which meant they had (unofficially) broken the previous record (69,000 ft.). However, at peak altitude, CDR Heath made an adjustment of the nose and wing, which sent them into inertial coupling -- because the air was so thin at that altitude, there was no resistance and they started tumbling end-over-end on all three axis'. Legend has it that the cockpit recording was pretty colorful! They finally got control at 12,000 feet. Fortunately, that experience prepared them for the record flight, where everything was going great until the fire warning lights came on. They decided to come out of afterburner, shutting down both engines, to cruise climb from there. When they reached the record altitude (91,450.8 feet), the plane nosed over and they again tumbled on all axis'. This time, though, they made no adjustments so that the aircraft could eventually right itself when they reached denser air and they could relight the engines ... but it also meant a 70,000 foot free fall! Some ride!

LCDR Monroe was stationed at NAS Sanford from 1961-67, with early 60s cruises on USS Enterprise (CVAN-65). He was praised by many who referred to him as the sharpest guy you could have in the backseat and very cool under pressure. Like many pioneers, LCDR Monroe received many other firsts as a naval aviator:

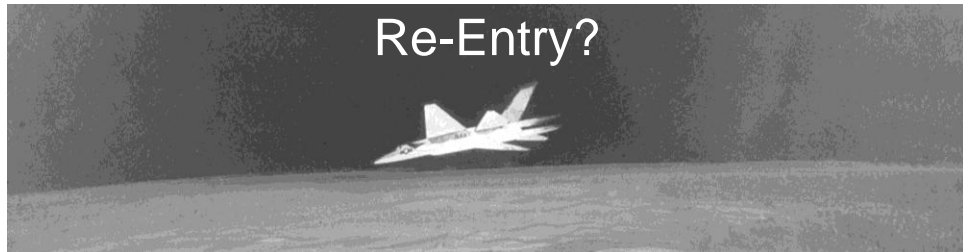
- First Navy VAH Bombardier / Navigator to fly the ASB-12 System in the A3J
- First to drop a bomb using the ASB-12 System
- First Bombardier / Navigator to fly at Mach two plus
- First Bombardier / Navigator to be nominated for Harmon Trophy Aviator Award

LCDR Monroe retired from the Navy in 1967. As a civilian he worked in research & development for an electro-optical systems company in CA. He then formed a 'think tank' with scientists, engineers and ex-military specialists, located in the Washington D.C. area. The US Navy was one of the company's first clients. In 1972, he returned to Central Florida, enjoying his family, friends and a place he considered home. On March 2, 1976 Larry passed away.

Larry was a devoted father and friend. His daughter created a website that is dedicated to her father and all who have had a loved one in military service. The website is www.anavydad.com. I hope you will visit the site and leave a comment there in the guestbook. If you knew LCDR Monroe I hope you will mention that.

RVAHNAVY Association and Store

Remember to join the RVAHNAVY Association. Very soon we will be offering an RVAHNAVY store with lots of neat merchandise. Access to the store will be via the Association membership log-in. Click on the "Sign Up" link at RVAHNAVY.COM Your dues will provide full access to the RVAHNAVY site, allow you to send messages to shipmates, and upload pictures to your personal profile page, and much more. Website expense for hosting our site is one of the costs we will offset by your dues payment. Thanks for joining!



I found this photo surfing the net. There has been some efforts to confirm its authenticity. So far nothing conclusive to prove it is real. I contacted the website and was told the photo was scanned from a 1950's Air Force recognition slide. The big question is who or what took the photo? Is that afterburner? If so why? Could it just be exhaust gases that look like the AB was cooking? Anyone of you shipmates that wants to work on this contact Alvis at alvdid45@yahoo.com

Trivia: (from Stick) The RA-5C A/C featured several firsts...one of which was the flight control system.....which is known as?

