



The



VIGILANTE



Points of Interest!

- The Gear is Here!

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- Finding Shipmates
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Coming next month

- Enlisted Aviators
- Spotlight on a Shipmate / Then and Now
- VA Helpful Hints from Mr. Wickey

Did You Know?

The term "the whole 9 yards" came from W.W.II fighter pilots in the South Pacific. When arming their airplanes on the ground, the .50 caliber machine gun ammo belts measured exactly 27 feet, before being loaded into the fuselage. If the pilots fired all their ammo at a target, it got "**the whole 9 yards.**"

by Alvis Didway

On March 20th I received an email from a young man named Jerry from Albany Georgia. It was a moving and exciting email. Jerry had found something in the woods near his home that he did not understand. Jerry had done a little research and found the RVAH website. He chose me to contact as I was the last reunion coordinator and he figured that I would know a lot of the guys and maybe I could answer his questions. I was intrigued by Jerry's questions but I didn't have any answers for him. I was never stationed at NAS Albany so I contacted some former RVAH shipmates that were stationed there. They weren't able to provide any information either. Not sure exactly how to proceed I decided to go to the RVAHNAVY forum and search under the "Albany Shipmates". I was able to contact several former Albany guys on the forum.

The Canopy from BUNO 147850 comes home!



PAYDIRT! Some of them replied "Yes...I do recall an RVAH-12 plane crash in that area in the early seventies." Specifically, Moe Ryan pointed me in the right direction. I

learned that the RAN's name was LTJG C.H. (Harry) Hawken. I contacted Harry and he confirmed that he and the pilot Cdr Sterne Bolte was the flight crew on the ill-fated

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flight. Harry filled in a lot of the blanks and I was able to contact Jerry Moore and answer his questions.

By now Jerry had sent me some photos of what he had found in the Georgia swamps near his home. I was now able to confirm that it was the canopy from the front cockpit of aircraft BUNO 147850.

Jerry's original email really got to me. If that email does not make all the work and effort we expended in our youth worth it I don't know what will.

There was just no way I could leave that canopy sitting in a remote Georgia field. I got on the phone with Jerry and planned a road trip to Georgia. It was a nice ride. I stopped in Cordele and checked into a hotel room and then headed out for Albany. Some of my former shipmates

who were stationed in Albany wanted some photos of the area. On the way down Highway 300 a Turf Farm truck passed me and I called Jerry. It was him alright. I followed him to

Dear Mr. Didway,

Let me start by thanking you for your service to our country. I am Jerry Moore I manage a sod farm in Worth County Georgia just a few miles from the site where Turner Field Naval Air Station was located in Albany Georgia. I am trying to find some information about a plane crash that I believe happened in the Early 70's. I was scouting some new hunting property when I came across a plane canopy. I talked to the owner of the property and he said he remembered his father talking of a crash on their property in the 70's.

I got some help from a friend of mine that is a retired Marine and found all that I could on my own. We took photos and he sent them to someone he knew in the Navy in an effort to discern what type plane it came from and that is what has lead me to your web site (one of the best I've seen since my search began). I found the name Tom Brown on your websites Roster but unfortunately there was no contact information or when he served with the group. A lot of the information fits that I have gathered but I still haven't put the puzzle together completely.

The plane canopy has the name LCDR Tom Brown still intact on the side. The person in the Navy sent a reply and picture showing an A-5 Vigilante with the same markings and stated that he believed it was from a plane with the RVAH-12 that was actually stationed at NAS Albany, Ga. at the time that I believe the crash may have occurred. He stated that there was two aircraft lost out of Albany but neither were flown by LCDR Tom Brown and also stated that it was not uncommon for pilots to fly planes with other names on them. He mentioned he was going to try and contact Rear Admiral Tom Brown (retired) on the chance this may be the same man as he believed also that the time frame was close enough that it could be him. This canopy is the front canopy of that plane with the glass all around the top. I have learned so much in this quest that I never knew, as I am too young to remember there was ever an Air Base in Albany Georgia and I grew up only 40 miles from the site. There is now a Miller Brewing Plant on the site. I never even heard it mentioned in conversations. I am 40 years old now and the history surrounding this find is awe-inspiring to me. I grew up farming with my dad and brothers and never served in the military. I don't know if Dad just needed help or Mom just didn't want to think of us serving since she had two brothers killed in action, but for whatever reason my life was never steered in that direction. I have never been a history buff by no means and now I know more about this canopy than my own history (ha-ha).

I was astounded to find this canopy and find that no one knew it was even there all this time. I don't know why it means so much to me find this man or if I even will. I figure that maybe he may want it or a family member will want it, I don't really know. I just think that it would have to hold a special memory for someone as it has certainly been interesting for me.

I would greatly appreciate any information that you may have or if you know someone else I maybe could contact. Please respond to me at jlm_jerry@yahoo.com. I hope you can help me but if not then thanks again for your service to our country and the freedoms you and everyone in our Armed Services have helped to uphold that my family has so richly enjoyed.

**God bless you,
Jerry Moore**

the meeting site. Jerry is a real class act and a fine man. I went ahead and did the Albany tour and then headed back to Cordele. Now I am pretty

observant and in the photos Jerry had sent I noticed what he was calling woods looked like swamp to me. So, off to Wally-World I went to get a

pair of waders. The next morning we met at his shop. Jerry Moore, Charles Mckissack (Retired Marine), Charley Jolmon his grandson and myself headed out down some dirt road headed toward Albany. We went about three or four miles and turned back toward Highway 300 and after several hundred yards we turned and headed off along the edges of some fields. We parked the trucks and unloaded the 4-wheeler and took off around another field and then off into the woods (swamp). After several hundred yards Jerry told me “look over there”. I was moved beyond words. It was sitting right side up in about 4-6 inches of water. We got over to it and I stopped and thanked God for watching out over the flight crew and having all their equipment work. It was in great shape for something that had fallen 13,000 feet. The mirrors are still intact and the little check list on the left and right hand sides for landing and takeoff are still there. We loaded it on the 4-wheeler and carried it to my truck.

The plan is to clean it up as best we can but not fully restore the canopy. It would take away from it's history. This canopy



sat in a swamp for 36 years. We'll find a way to display it and make sure it is at the 2009 reunion. We might even offer it to the museum for display. I got out of the Navy in 1978, almost 30 years to the day. This was the first time I have ever had anyone thank me for himself and his family for what

I did. When I read his email it made all the trips up and



down those ladders with a tool box on my shoulder worth it, it made the 0400 to 0800 watches worth it, it made the being away from my loved ones worth it.



This article would not be complete without the Aviators version of the story. A special thanks to Harry Hawken for telling his side of the story on the following page.



by Harry Hawken

CDR Sterne Bolte, the Commanding Officer of RVAH-12 was the pilot and I was the RAN on a training mission. We were a team and we flew together nearly all of the time. Frankly, we liked each other so much and were a great crew.

To my knowledge, this was the first and only RA-5C dual hydraulic system failure. As I recall, the aircraft hydraulic system was two “separate” systems but somehow both failed and we lost all of the hydraulic fluid. I can remember madly searching the checklist for emergency procedures but they only dealt with the loss of one system, not both. The J-79 engines were performing perfectly but the Skipper had no flight controls.

We declared an emergency and the Air Force scrambled a jet from Warner Robbins that joined up and visually confirmed that we were pumping out fluid. We headed back towards NAS Albany and started descending. We were hopeful that we would have enough fluid left to maintain control for a safe landing. The Skipper discussed our situation with experts in the tower and it was decided to see what would happen when we lowered the landing gear. The plane really reacted violently.

We rolled several times and it was only lucky and skill that Sterne regained control. I distinctly remember him telling me that if it rolled again we were punching out. He had no sooner gotten those words out of his mouth when we again rolled violently. I immediately initiated the ejection sequence and away I went.

It was the \$10 carnival ride for sure! We were about 13,000 feet so I free-fell for what seemed forever. I remember being rolled out of the seat. I pulled the D-ring violently and sure enough the chute deployed. (Incidentally...I still have a plaque given to me by the parachute riggers with that D-ring on it) My first recollection was falling through clouds and how quiet and peaceful it was. I spotted the Skipper's chute below me. I ejected at about a 45 degree angle and Sterne ejected when the plane was inverted. The other interesting (and humorous) fact was that I got lots of extra gear when I opened the chute; a fully inflated life raft and solar still all swinging wildly below me

I was enjoying the ride when suddenly I looked down and realized that I was going to live through the ejection but now I was certain that I was going to land in the Georgia swamps and would probably be eaten alive by the alligators or wild boar or bit by a water moccasin. So I started pulling with all my might on the chute cords. This was supposed to give me directional control but it wasn't working. Then I thought I was going to miss the swamps and land in the barb wire fence that I saw racing toward me. I pulled again and still NO DIRECTIONAL CHANGE! About then I crashed to the ground. I do remember rolling on the ground just as I had been taught. When I came to rest I was sitting in the rubber life raft!

I had landed in the middle of a farmer's tomato patch about 100 feet from his front porch! The life raft and solar still had wiped out the stakes holding the fragile plants and ruined about 50 of his tomato crop. As I sat in my raft trying to get my bearings, the farmer came out from his front door with his shot gun! Here I was...sitting in the life raft, my helmet and oxygen mask still in place and the visor lowered....He stared at me for some time and then asked if this was some sort of drill. Then he yelled at me and said that I had ruined 1/2 of his tomatoes and that I owed him 50 cents per plant. The farmer turned around and went back inside never even offering to help.

So, as I had been taught, I pulled out my survival radio and it worked. I made contact and was told the helicopter was on its way but that the Skipper had been injured and they were going to pick him up first. I remember being really thirsty and I drank the whole water bottle in one shot. About then I heard the roar of the chopper and fired off a flare....and it worked too! I still can't believe all this stuff actually worked! The down wash of the rotors leveled the other 1/2 of the farmer's tomatoes as it descended to rescue me. A couple of guys hopped out and helped me into the chopper. It was the first time I had stood up and realized I had not been hurt at all. The Skipper had pulled a muscle in his leg when he landed but otherwise was in OK shape.

On the ride back to the base, Sterne and I were not allowed to talk to each other and once we landed we were immediately separated and rushed to the infirmary. After a quick check-up, the flight surgeon pulled a bottle of booze out of his bottom drawer and had me drink a couple of swigs. Once I was “relaxed” we did a complete debrief about the accident. I learned later that the Skipper's and my stories were identical and that we had followed all the procedures correctly. I also remember that the next day, the accident team found the plane and immediately discovered the source of the hydraulic leak.

The XO of the Squadron had called our wives when he had gotten word that our plane was in trouble. Kathy, my wife, recalls him saying, “if you are not too busy you might want to come down to the base. The Skipper and Harry's plane just crashed.” She called the neighbor to watch our baby, and sped through the base gate without even a hint of slowing down. After the debriefing, we were allowed to see our wives who were very glad to see us. Rather than heading to our homes, the Skipper insisted that we all go to the O Club to have a drink and to show the base that RVAH-12 had true survivors. He also told me that we HAD to go to the squadron's picnic the next day to carry the flag and to thank everyone who had prepared our plane and all of our gear.

As an aside...I was in good shape except that the next day I wore shorts and was black and blue from head to toe. Apparently the violence of the ejection had broken a lot of capillaries causing all the bruising. I was quite a site.

Finally my wife Kathy got me home that night and I slept soundly (after several gin and tonics.) It was late and she had not had time to call my or her parents. The next morning my Dad called her frantically! He had read about the accident, complete with names, in the St. Louis Post Dispatch that morning. He had called the hospital and all they would say was that I was not there anymore. News really travels fast.

As I now look back on this episode, I remain so very thankful for all of the people I worked with who did their job to insure that all the equipment worked. Had they not been true professionals the outcome would have been very different. My sincere thanks to all!

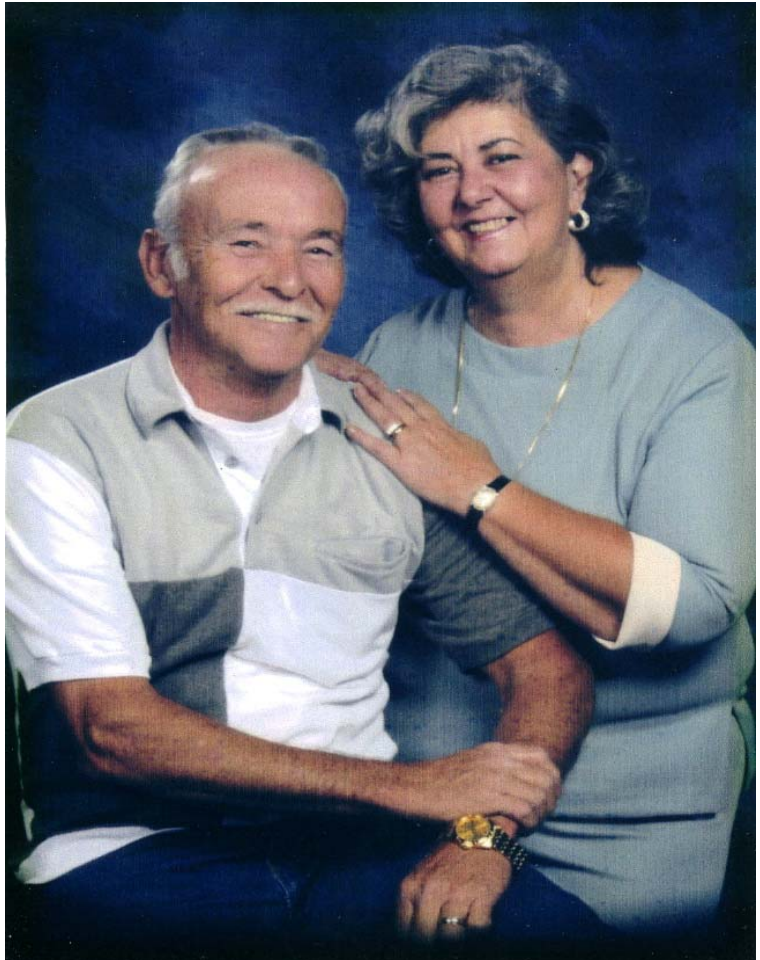


Shipmates Helping Find Shipmates by Joe Phillips

That is one of our primary goals; to build a roster so we can help reconnect Shipmates. There is one person who has contributed to that goal more than anyone else. Her name is Sandra LaPlante of Yulee Florida. Sandy is the wife of Richard LaPlante who served with RVAH-12 back in the late sixties. Several months ago, Sandy volunteered to help us verify and build our roster. She has spent uncountable hours of her personal time, reviewing over 2700 names, making phone calls and using the Internet to verify the information in our roster. Sandy has also added Shipmates that we were not aware of. Since that time, our roster has doubled, with Sandy personally verifying each entry. Because of Sandy's efforts, we have been able to reconnect numerous Shipmates, reuniting old friends. Sandy, thank you for all that you have done. You have made a lot of Shipmates very happy!

Our quest to locate Shipmates and build our roster continues. We currently have almost 3000 names including 1200 email addresses. We want to use this information to reach out to all the Shipmates we can, so everyone knows about upcoming events such as the 2009 reunion and has an opportunity to participate on our forum and the RVAHNAVY Association. Please tell all of your Shipmates about us so we can include them too.

If you would like to make contact with someone you served with, please put a post on the forum under "Lost Shipmates" and we'll forward that post to your shipmate if we have their current email. We'll let them know that you are asking about them and invite them to join the forum so they can make contact with you. We will not provide your contact information unless you ask us to. Also, if you prefer, you can send an email to joe@therafl.com inquiring about your shipmate in private.



2009 RVAHNAVY Reunion



We are planning to have our 2009 reunion next June in Pensacola, FL, the cradle of NAVAL Aviation. We are planning to elect RVAHNAVY Association Officeholders at this gathering. You must be an RVAHNAVY Association member to hold office or place a vote. Joining is easy and it is only \$12 per year. Go to www.RVAHNAVY.com and following the instructions on the home page.

Joe "Roster-Keeper" Phillips and Bob "Webmaster" Marioni at the front gate of NAS Key West 2007 RVAHNAVY reunion. —————>



THE RVAHNAVY STORE IS OPEN!

Shipmates!

Good News! The RVAHNAVY store is now open! We have partnered with 2 fantastic vendors. You can find these vendors on the RVAHNAVY.COM website home page.

We are VERY proud to announce our partnership with NAVYCHIEF.COM! This company is owned and managed by former Navy Chiefs. The quality of their products and the service they provide is the best in the business. NAVYCHIEF has agreed to offer our RVAH shipmates a 15% discount by using a product code. The code is: **RVAHNAVY**. All capital letters and no spaces. You must use this code when placing your order. NAVYCHIEF is offering us the following RVAHNAVY personalized products:

- Mouse Pads
- Coffee Mugs
- Travel Mugs
- Plaques
- Trailer Hitch Covers
- Koozies (Foldable Can Cooler)
- Coasters



We are also VERY proud to announce our partnership with Plane Crazy Enterprises! Carl Altevogt established Plane Crazy in 1985 and has provided quality products and service to tens of thousands of customers. Carl regularly attends RVAH and other military reunions so many of you may already know him. Plane Crazy Enterprises has agreed to provide our RVAHNAVY shipmates with a 20% discount on all RVAH related products. You must use the promo code **RVAH** to get the discount.

These Patches are available to order NOW!!

