

# Whippoorwill E-Comment

Number 55,

September, 2007



---

An Electronic-Journal published for the AAPA

---

*For some years, I had encouraged my long-time friend, Glenn L. Simpson, to write memoirs — specifically about his experiences flying in the Navy. I had written my account of adventures in Fighter Squadron VF-22, which was stationed at NAS Jacksonville, Florida, and shared them with him, asking if I had been accurate in my remembering. I had. He had been in the squadron two years before I joined it in late November, 1955. I asked him to write an account of his memories of the years, 1953-1955, and he agreed to do so and gathered his notes to begin writing, in 2001. Two years later, he sent me a draft of this manuscript describing the early part of his basic flight training. He intended to expand it and write much more but apparently never got around to it. I publish here his manuscript, to make it part of Glenn's record and legacy. He was a remarkable man and best friend.*

---

*Navy Memoirs of Glenn L. Simpson  
Draft 6/18/2001*

## Advanced Training

By the end of April 1953, I had completed Basic Training. With 188 hours in the SNJ I felt that I was ready for anything. Basic had run us through all the main aerial maneuvers, formation flying, instruments, night flying, gunnery, and carrier landing qualifications (CVL Monterey). Pretty hot stuff. But I had to survive Advanced Training before I could get my Wings and become a Naval Aviator.

I was assigned to the training unit at Kingsville, Texas (South field) and, somewhat to my disappointment, to the section that was flying F6F Hellcats. I really wanted to fly the F8F Bearcat, the most advanced radial-engined fighter ever designed. The F8 was the successor to the F6 but WWII was over before it got into combat. The F8 was

lighter than the F6, had 500 more horsepower and, at one time, held the record of from standing start to 10,000 feet — 60 seconds. Really HOT. So anyway, I got F6's. The F6 was the Navy's air superiority fighter in the Pacific theater in the last two years of the war and racked up more kills than any other U.S. fighter of the war.



It wasn't a pretty airplane; rather, it exhibited what it had - brute force. Its

Pratt and Whitney R-2800 engine put out 2000 HP, had a top speed in level flight of over 350 knots., could dive and still be a good gun platform at 450 knots, could pull 9+ G's (you couldn't break it), had awesome firepower of 8/50Cal. machine guns, yet could return to the ship and land aboard at 75 to 80 knots. I had no idea at the time how lucky I was in my assignment because it turned out to be an amazingly forgiving and safe airplane with no squirrely tendencies at all.

The month of May was devoted to leave and the usual thorough ground school the Navy insisted on before they let you fly anything. There was no second seat for an instructor in the F6, so you had to know how to do it right the first time. We learned the correct procedures, flight characteristics, the intricacies of the engine, the hydraulic and electrical systems and what to do if anything broke or went wrong. At last we were ready to fly. I had been assigned to a training flight of 8 students and an instructor. We called ourselves Cobra Flight, painted our helmets white, wore G suits instead of the old flight coveralls. As was common in Navy fighter flights, training mimicked fleet squadron standards and was done in groups, flying in formation. The elements of a formation consisted of sections (two airplanes, a section leader and a wingman; divisions, four airplanes, two sections with the leader of the lead section called the division leader; and any number of divisions or combinations of sections.) We usually took off in briefed order, rather closely, one after the other (seldom in sections) and then joined up in formation in a climbing turn. A great deal of emphasis was placed in basic

training on learning how to do this smoothly and expertly. It was essential to learn how to do everything while flying in close proximity to your leader. Although we had radio communications, we relied heavily on communication by hand signals to signal movement of elements of the flight from one side to the other, notify the flight leader of problems like electrical or radio failure, low fuel state, etc. The correct close formation position for a wingman was lateral clearance between the wingman's prop and the tail of the leader and clearance between wingtips with the wingman stepped down somewhat. The second section in a formation flew on the opposite side of the leader's wingman in a figure four formation. In rough air or when busy looking for traffic or navigating we usually took a wider position. But we did like to fly very closely. After all, we were young, aggressive and highly skilled. One memory I cherish was when our instructor was leading the flight, I was section leader on the right, one of the other guys was his wingman on the left. We put our wingtips about 6" under his elevator, the slipstream of the wingtip effectively removing control from him. At the same time, our props were so close to his ailerons that they caused them to flutter. Needless to say, he was quite pissed, preferring to fly his own airplane and motioned us away very vigorously. Later, on the ground, we were admonished not to do that again. Nothing came of it - he was a very good, tolerant instructor.

Then the time came for our first flight. The F6's were lined up on the flight line, wings folded close to the fuselage. The plane captain helped me strap in. When everything was in order,

the cockpit checked, everything was set to pre-start position. The kneeboard was consulted as to starting sequence. I can't remember the details now but it was something like this:

Prime engine (?) pumps; battery switch on; mixture full rich; throttle to start position. The plane captain signals that the props area is clear, the starter engages and the prop starts turning, I count six prop blades pass the windshield, ignition switch on. Then all hell breaks loose. The 18 cylinders start to fire off. First the ones that were primed, then as the fuel mixture gets to the engine a few more go, then several, and then all of them going at once. The noise is deafening. The shaking made me wonder whether if the 13 ft. prop or the airplane was going to turn over. This was nothing like the old 550 HP SNJ or like anything in my experience. But there I was. I had got the damn thing going. I signal to pull the chocks, the lineman motions me to start forward. I release the brakes, move into the middle of the narrow area between the lines of planes. He points to my right brake which I apply to turn 90 degrees and he indicates for me to stop. (In a tight parking situation, especially on board ship where planes may be parked within inches of one another, you always follow the directions of the line personnel. You learn to trust them completely. This is the only time when you are in control of an airplane that if you hit something it is someone else's fault. He indicates that I should spread my wings, so I pull the release. A lineman grabs each wingtip and shoves it downward and then forward and upward so that the momentum of the wings rotates them into locked position. Then I very carefully engage the wing

lock so that the red wing-lock indicator tab disappears. (I lost a very good friend who, in a hurry to catch up with his flight, forgot to lock his wings. They folded on takeoff.) The lineman motions me out and I do so joining the other guys in no particular order - we will sort it out later. We taxi out to the runway weaving from one side to the other for forward visibility. You can't see a damned thing straight ahead because of the huge engine cowlings. Eventually, we get to the warm up area on the taxiway at the end of the runway and do our run-up and takeoff checklists.

#### First Flight.

*Glenn's manuscript ends here.*

---

I dearly wish I had been more persistent in urging Glenn to write his memoirs. It is proper that I publish his final manuscript as an E-Journal because he gave me constant and strong encouragement for such a publication vehicle.

Glenn had strong feelings about the F6F-Hellcat although nearly all of his active fleet duty flying was done in jet fighter aircraft, chiefly in McDonnell Douglas F2H-2 and F2H-4 Banshees. The planes were aptly named because of the eerie wailing sound they made at high speeds. The scream of a Banshee could be heard for probably 50 miles if it was above 30,000 feet altitude.

Whippoorwill E-Comment is created by J. Hill Hamon, who lives in central Kentucky. [KyHamon@AOL.COM](mailto:KyHamon@AOL.COM)

