

Looking back at my flying career there were about a million fun, interesting and scary things that happened in the air, at the club or while off on some deployment or other. Where to start...? I have a sneaking suspicion that this essay will just be a stream of consciousness or just a string of interesting (at least to me) anecdotes. ☺ Hopefully my memory will sync-up relatively well with reality.

1. To start off I'd like to relate a story told by my uncle Bob Yelton who flew the T-33, F-102 and F-106 at Fresno. But first, a little background. Up in the Sierras a little to the east of Shaver Lake lies a small community named Dinkey Creek. My Grandfather worked at the lumber mill there for years. My dad and his brother Bob also worked up there seasonally when they were young men. Granddad lumbered out the valleys that are now Courtright and Wishon reservoirs.

Bob was flying with Ed Aguiar one day when they decided to swing by the mill just to say "Hi" to everyone. Most folks knew that he was a pilot with the ANG. They made a nice low pass right over the mill and kicked in the afterburners right overhead. A resounding "boom" was heard all over the area. Lumberjacks that were working miles away came rushing back to the mill to fight the fire. They had heard the boom and thought the boiler that powered the mill had exploded and a fire at a lumber mill would have been catastrophic. Most of a day's work was lost as everyone converged on the mill.

For quite some time afterwards, Bob wasn't really welcome up at the mill. ☺

2. Before going to Pilot Training I had to take a couple of trips up to Castle AFB for my flight physical. Initially you had to have 20/20 eyeballs to pass. I went up to Castle for my first attempt with Jack Bolt and Mary Kellogg. They went shopping at the BX after dropping me off at the clinic. I thought all had gone well when, a couple of days later I get a call at work (Me-n-Eds in the Tower District) from MSgt Haro in our clinic. He said he was 'happy' to report that I had failed the eye exam portion (20/25 in one eye). Both he and SMSgt Conti had, years before, tested for UPT and didn't get very far. The two of them got great job satisfaction from making things as difficult as possible for UPT candidates (just ask Willie how many times his physical "disappeared"). I had to wait 3 months to retake the physical, but got through it with flying colors on the second go-around.

3. O.K., here are a couple of pilot training stories. They both happened to two other guys (not me). Remember spin training in the Tweet?

- Throttles- Idle
- Controls-Neutral
- Stick- Abruptly Full Forward

(Or something like that)

One of my buddies was out learning to do spin recoveries one day when, as he snapped the stick forward, he caught his sleeve on the seatbelt release lever and suddenly found himself stuffed between the canopy and dash with his head yanked back at some impossible angle while still attached to his oxygen hose. Just as the IP took the jet he heard, "Sir, you have the airplane." They had been pounding it into us to always have a positive exchange of control. The IP laughed his ass off

all the way home. And every time the student was almost strapped in he would unload a bit and laugh some more.

One fellow on his Boom Ride in the T-38 asked his IP just before they broke mach, "Sir, will I still be able to hear you in the back when we're supersonic?"

These two guys got the weekly "Doofer" award.

4. My first squadron function after returning from F-106 School was John Dawson's retirement party. It was held at the Outpost (down around Peach and Olive). Sadly, it's long gone now, but John is still kickin'. ☺

5. My Uncle Bob was already out of the cockpit when I got back from RTU, but I was around for his retirement party down at the club one Friday evening. It was one hell of a party! Bob was very well liked on base so there was a huge turnout. The place was packed! Bob's retirement gift was an F-102 ejection seat that was converted into a rocking chair. How cool would that be in the living room? They even got him to dance on the pool table. ☺

6. My first Christmas Party in the F-106 (1982) did not go as well as I hoped. One morning earlier in the year we did our morning brief and then went up to the diner in the hanger for some breakfast. About an hour later, just as we crossed the coast my lower tract started to rumble. After my first intercept I decided to RTB due to severe intestinal discomfort. Just after passing Kite and checking in with OAK it became a choice between trying to stay clenched or flying the jet. I chose to fly the jet. I then gave Ops a call and had them tell Life Support that I would need another flight suit upon landing. Ernie Tibbet was nice enough to meet me at the jet and I got all fixed up. Once I got back to Ops I found that I was already in the Toilet Seat but nobody ever teased me about the incident. So far this was all working out to stay low key. Then, at the Christmas Party I was directed to stand and come forward. I had no idea what was up. I was then presented with a helmet. Instead of an oxygen mask, this helmet had a wire clothes hanger fastened on both sides with a roll of toilet paper hanging in the middle. That night I learned that when there's blood in the water, eventually the sharks will feed. It was all in good fun, though. I figured that being the new guy once they started teasing me I was in. ☺ But ya gotta give as good as ya get to keep the heat off.

7. On a deployment down to Tyndall some of the boys got into a bit of trouble one evening. Word came down that the Base CC wanted to see the Deployment Commander, sooooo, Instead of telling Guido that he was to report to the Base CC, they tell him that the Base CC was pissed that Guido didn't invite him to go to Rotary with him the day before. Guido goes over to see the Base CC and the story just goes downhill from there. You see where this is going ☺

8. Remember when the alert jets were the first two spots in the center row, surrounded by a single, red rope? Two Security Police guys sat in a truck by the radar docks (Post One). They would just wave you over the ropes when you came out to set up or get something out of the jet.
9. Remember the canvas "bag" in the back seat of the F-106B for instrument checks? The thing had a bunch of holes in it so that whenever you made a turn the light rays would move around the cockpit and try to give you the whirlies. I was getting my instrument check from Howdy. Once we got done in the area Snort joined up with us and I took him home while under the bag. We were coming down the ILS and at about 3 nm out tower tells us to do a 360 so he can slip an airliner in ahead of us. We did as directed and when we finally landed and were in debriefing one of the Maint. guys asks Chris what type of mission he was on. Snort replied with, "A hi-gee mission - at least it was on final." Good answer, but it was actually only a moderate gee ILS ☺
10. Back in the 80s there was a lot of concern about "Nukes." There had been an article in the paper about our F-106s having the capability of carrying nuclear tipped rockets and soon a demonstration was planned at the base. I was on alert with Ray Clack on the Saturday morning that the demonstration occurred. Ray and I were watching TV when LtCol Arthur came into the Alert Room to let us know that the demonstration had started and we needed to scramble the jets. Ray asked how many folks had showed up and Jim said that there were about ten nuns just outside the rotating gate in the main parking lot. Ray set him straight on who would scramble the jets and when. The nuns stayed for about 15 minutes, got bored and then went home.
11. Paul Carroll (our Squadron Commander) and I were scheduled to fly together one day and all was well until Last Chance. Paul developed some sort of problem and had to go back to the ramp for a quick fix. He told me to go ahead and take off and he would meet me out in the area shortly. I got out to Kite and checked in with "Pete." The controller told me to turn right to some heading and as I nudged the stick over to the right the plane gave me thirty degrees left instead. I tried a couple more turns and got more uncommanded inputs. I turned back for home and declared an emergency. Not far from home Paul, who had since got airborne, joined up with me. We discussed what was going on and planned to do a controllability check out over some fields. All went well with that and we set up for the approach. As we were coming down final Paul urged me not to hesitate about jumping out if it got too squirrely. He said we could always get another airplane but not another Aileron. ☺ I appreciated getting permission from the boss to bail out. That meant there wouldn't be any second-guessing afterward if I did eject. The landing was uneventful and they towed me back in. The guys from the Pneudraulices Shop called me over to the hangar later that day to show me something. When I got over there one of the guys took me over to a bucket full of fluid, shined a flashlight into it and stirred it up with a stick. It glowed with all sorts of sparkly stuff. It seems that the Primary Hydraulic Pump had failed internally. The copper impellers ground themselves into little shavings and contaminated the whole system. They said I had about 5 minutes of flying time left before the actuators seized up completely. Whew!!!

12. Rod Serling started each episode of *The Twilight Zone* with the words, "Imagine, if you will..." So, imagine if you will, a beachfront house in 1982 Mexico Beach, FL. It's a beautiful, sunny day. Three-foot waves lapping gently at the sandy shore. Moving inside we make our way through the throng of inebriated guests to the deck overlooking the ocean. We approach a man, not just any ordinary man, but a fighter pilot. A tough, steely-eyed killer of tequila shooters. His name - "Two Dogs," and he's surrounded by a cheering throng. Just as we shoulder our way to the front of the crowd he lifts a wriggling 3-inch lizard above his head, tilts his head back and down it goes. You have just entered *The Deployed Party Zone!*

13. One scary experience for a new F-106 pilot happened while flying with Col. John Kaser. We were RTB on the South Recovery direct Bumpi (SW of NLC) when we were going to go IFR in a few miles. I guess John wasn't too sure of the new guy on his wing in the weather so he got us a flight breakup with me 10 nm behind. He popped into the clouds and a couple minutes later I went in at the exact same spot that he did. About 30 sec. later I got hit with some severe turbulence and found myself upside down. Just then ATC warns us about embedded thunderstorms in the vicinity. Good call... Got right-side up again and told ATC he was right about the thunderstorms.

14. While sitting out at Last Chance in the F-106 while the ground crew did their thing, all of a sudden I got this god-awful loud squeal in my helmet. It was so high and loud that it hurt. I quickly tried to turn the radio volume down, but that had no effect, so I yanked my helmet off. About that time I saw my crew chief gesturing to me to look aft. I looked back over my shoulder and saw the vari-ramps cycling in and out. I taxied back in. Later I found out that a transformer somewhere in the avionics had failed, melted and started dripping all over the rest of the electronics, shorting out all sorts of systems. Man, was I glad that that transformer failed at Last Chance and not during take-off!!!

15. At Fighter Lead-in School at Tyndall we flew the T-33. That jet didn't have nose wheel steering, just brakes to nudge the wheel around. I cocked the nose gear so many times that they used to call my taxi-out *Yelton's Taxi Circus*.

16. I had been back from F-106 school for about a year when I received a summons from Col Corey. I didn't know him that well but I could tell that he ran a pretty tight ship. The kind of guy that when he called for you, you reported in a military manner. I found him down at the SOF desk. Once the formalities were dispensed with he slid a piece of paper over to me and asked me what I thought. There were about 10-12 names on the sheet but I didn't know what they were for. Turns out they were the guys that were applying for the next UPT slot. He said that he would be retiring soon and us young guys would have to fly with whoever was selected for the next twenty years. I knew two of the guys and told him that I liked them and thought they would fit in nicely. They did end up selecting one of them. I always appreciated Col. Corey making me part of the process. I know he was not the favorite of many in the unit, but I thought that that showed an insightful type of leadership. I always liked him after that.

17. One really strange thing happened right after I got back from F-106 School. We were starting to prepare for William Tell 1982 and everyone that was interested in trying out for the team could designate his training sorties as tryout sorties. After the tryouts were over Nelson cornered me in the hallway and told me that I had scored in the top six. Six guys would be going to Tyndall so I was initially seriously stoked. Then he goes on to tell me that the team would be made up of more senior pilots. Why he would get me all excited and then shoot me all full of holes is beyond me. I guess either just stir the pot in the squadron or maybe just to fuck with the new guy. Who knows? After that I never trusted that guy and was always very careful about what I said when he was in the vicinity.

18. Doing a FOD Walk with everyone from Ops on the first evening of my first F-106 ORI looking for a lost "Cookie." It was found in the flight suit leg pocket of the pilot in question while he was down at the club. (Wasn't me 😊)

19. Watching all the black smoke from the B-57 Canberras starting up that came to fly target for us. The F-106 had start cartridges, too, but I don't recall them being nearly as smoky.

20. On 12 Aug 82, I got to be in a 4-ship fly-by at night over the Fresno State football stadium for the annual City/County. Ed Aguiar led with me, Bill Lucido and Paul Carroll on the wing. All I remember of the fly-by was flying along in the fog (at night) and then all of a sudden the stadium lights go by - just about level. The fly-by was VERY well received. Bill and I jumped in his car and drove over to the stadium just in time for the half-time show. We were really popular that night! I understand that the FAA was very interested in that fly-by but nothing ever became of it.

21. Doc. Hadden bought a place a couple doors down from where I live here at the beach and he wanted me to relay a couple of flying tips.

- When starting the T-bird, it's turn... then burn. 😊 Not the other way 'round.
- In the F-106 if you accidentally take the throttle to Off at Last Chance - don't throw it back to idle. The engine doesn't like that and will spit fire out through the intakes at you 😊

22. One afternoon in 1983 Ray Bluhm and I were having lunch in the diner upstairs in the hangar when all of a sudden the whole building started swaying back and forth. It was the Coalinga Earthquake. We just looked at each other for a sec. and high tailed it out to the grass just as fast as we could. The hangar walls are something like four feet thick of reinforced, poured concrete and we could see the whole building flex. Farmers over near Coalinga said that there were six-foot waves of earth moving along. Yahoo!

23. Ludwig driving his old 280z.

24. Drop tanks in the dirt at Lemoore.

Drop tanks in an intersection out by Fresno State

- After this one I actually watched Bernie climb up the ladder to both the front and back seats (hands out of sight in the cockpits) after the jet was impounded. The subsequent investigation stated that the safety film for the drop tank jettison buttons in both cockpits was broken. Go figure!

25. My next door neighbor, Spam buys and restores an old Maule, sells it to Mulch who flies Me, Ludwig and Larry to SJC for a union meeting. Thanks Mulch!

26. I was flying out over the water in W-283/5 with JAD one morning in our F-4s. Mork and his flight were up in the north end. We were doing low sterns with a B-1 as target. The B-1s had just come out of the development closet and it was a blast to get to play with a new type of target other than ourselves and every other fighter that turned circles around us. The trick, we found out, was to plan for a zero mile rollout. Any further astern and the missiles would never catch him.

Once we were about done for the day the B-1 asked if we wanted to do an acceleration check. I could just about see JAD grinning as he said "Absolutely." As we climbed up to 10,000' I told JAD that I would be Mil Power only as I was a little short on gas. We got to 10,000' and the B-1 said we would unload and go Gate on the count of three. As his burners lit off we could both feel and hear the hard light-offs. This guy took off on us like the proverbial scalded-ass ape. In less than a minute JAD was 2 ½ miles ahead and the B-1 was about 5 miles ahead.

Up north, Mork was doing his own acceleration check with his B-1. Then, over the radio we hear from him, "Son of a fucking bitch, look at him go!" Mork always hit the nail right on the head. ☺

27. Getting an F-4 Instrument Check with "Bo" - I gave him my best briefing ever. Just as I'm finishing up he says, "Let's do an ADF approach at Lemoore while we're over there." I thought for a sec. and replied that there was a warning in the Dash-1 not to do them. The antenna was located on the nose gear door so when the gear was down the antenna was vertical instead of horizontal and the signals got all mucked up. So he says, "Let's just see how it works." O.K., then, he knew it was going to be messed up and this would be a "Just for the hell of it approach."

We got all of the mandatory approaches and instrument work done and started the ADF approach at Lemoore. I had the needle pegged right on course when eventually the controller said, "You're too far East for a safe approach. Climb to xxx and turn to heading xxx."

About a week later Grinder, our Stan-Eval guy, hands me my Form 5 to sign. I had busted my Instrument Check for my ADF approach! I was mighty confused to say the least. I told Grinder about the briefing and he said he would take care of it. A couple of days later I got a form that I could sign. I think Grinder just did his own fix on the eval.

28. On 13 Jan 88, I had the honor of being in a 4-ship missing man fly-by for Pappy Boyington over Chandler Airport. It was led by Sean Bautista with Jim McNab, me and Mark Taylor on the wing. There was a ton of civilian traffic in the area so we had to make a couple of attempts to complete the fly-by. After we got back we all jumped in a car and headed downtown to attend the memorial service. Pappy's old Marine squadron also did a fly-by for him. That was a special day!

29. Spanky and Ryan over at Lemoore and the Great Stick Wrestling Contest?

30. When we had the F-4s they stuck the Alert Trailer alongside the hanger on the main road to the flight line where the covered picnic area is now. We used the Pilots Fund to purchase a giant satellite dish for the television in the Alert Trailer. The cable ran from the trailer and over the road to the dish which was mounted on the grass across the street. Then of course a cherry picker came along on its way to the flight line and snagged the cable like a tail hook. The TV crashes back up against the wall and all the cables and wires get ripped right out. That took care of our experiment in satellite dish technology.

31. At a Christmas Party somewhere in the distant past - "Lightning, I'll take stupid things done in airplanes for \$200."

32. Brand new in the Viper, Mork and I were out over the water doing our thing. We headed up to tap a tanker when Mork says on Victor, "Hey Aileron, every time you key your mike I hear Layla." I just told him I'd get the radios checked out when we got back. I had the Comm. Shop guys make me an adaptor for our trip to Goose Bay a few years before. I guess Mork was getting some bleed through. Still, Derek and the Dominoes is just the right stuff for flying in the Viper.

33. JAD in Panama - lightning hits the top of his canopy and zips right through his helmet. No damage done except for that twitch 😊

34. Sitting at home (Bullard and West) on the morning of September 11, 2001 and the phone rings. It's B.O.B calling to see if I'm O.K. I didn't know what he was talking about and he told me about the World Trade Center. We chatted for a minute while I turned on the T.V. Just as I hung up the phone a single F-16 roared right over the house in burner. He was so low I thought that the windows were going to shatter. It was Spanky getting scrambled to SFO. He later told me he intercepted an airliner that was coming from the Far East or somewhere. The airliner was told to divert to SEA but didn't have the gas so they were going to land at SFO regardless. Spanky followed him in "hot." He was scared to death that he was going to be directed to shoot him down.

A truly terrible day – but it meant so much to me that Jim called to check on me.

35. Stinky landing at VBG with Meat after his life raft inflated under his seat. A definite close call. Glad Pat was alright in the end, even though he spent a couple days in the hospital watching for nerve and other damage to his legs.

36. On my first trip to Panama I came down early with Jack Hower and Mongo as the lead element for the deployment (crew rest). I hadn't had a chance to even look at the local area stuff when Mulch handed me the alert packet and we heard "Viper West" on the phone. Crap!!! I was senior and Lead, but Mongo stepped up and said that he would lead since he had been there before. We got airborne and ID'd a Salvadoran Air Force plane hauling drugs. Go figure. We got recalled shortly after for thunderstorms at Home Base. As we got closer we heard that the PAR folks had bailed out due to lightning, so we did a flight breakup and headed in for individual TACAN approaches. That's all there was.

It was raining so hard that my RPM gage was fluctuating +/- 2%. Gary had the same thing in his jet. It was like we were getting hit by a seriously big fire hose. Shot the approaches - Mongo says "Watch out lots of water on the runway, almost had to use the hook." Landed, just barely stopping by the end. Shot the approach with way lower than legal visibility - just nowhere else to go! Got to the chocks and Ray Barnes brought me in with water up over his ankles. Chocks from other planes were floating away on the ramp. Next day I went out only to see the two hills on either side of the approach end. Glad I kept the Course Indicator centered up. What a hell of a first flight! I've never seen that much water while I was airborne. Great flight with Mongo, though! One of my best memories too, Mongo!!! That was a real bonding experience :)

37. "Please - make it stop!!!" - Pee Wee to the rest of the flight while trying to refuel in severe turbulence on the way to Howard AFB.

38. I only had a couple of scheduled flights left in the Falcon before my fini-flt when Meat gave me a ring at home and asked if I wanted to fly that afternoon. I wasn't doing anything so I said, "Sure." When I got out to the base they just wanted an airplane flown for a couple of hrs after some sort of

maint. work. Talk about a blank check. I took off solo for R-2508 and spent the whole time farting around waaaaay down low. Did a bunch of ridge crossings, checking out the canyon between Owens and Panamint Valleys, and dropped a couple of flares for the folks at the rest stop. Did some acro and basically had a blast! That was probably one of the most fun flights I had in the F-16, excepting of course my first sortie in Panama with Mongo (see above) and my fini-flight with Cal.

39. My last flight was with Cal. Dennis Mast gave me a choice of the guys that were available for flying on the day of my last flight. I thought about it and decided on Larry. Cal is an awesome pilot and I always enjoyed flying with him. He sits quietly through anyone's briefing, goes out and shoots everything that moves, comes back, quietly debriefs and then goes back to Clawson Honda to make a living. A true fighter pilot!

We headed out to R-2508. Did some LOWAT and then up to a tanker for a bit of gas and then some BFM to finish off the area work.

If I remember correctly, we came back to the overhead, did an SFO or two and then did a re-join. Before the flight I had coordinated with the tower to do a low approach to RWY 11R which goes right by the ANG base at the departure end. We came down in a formation approach to a missed, with consecutive closed right in front of the flightline showing our bellies with the burner cooking. I always thought that one of the most exciting things about a fighter is watching it pitch up and slide along before it dig in as the pilot pitches up, rolls and pulls. Cal still swears that he was looking at the light poles at eye level on the low approach. The low approaches were very well received. I already had my "Twenty Year Letter" and Cal is still flying. ☺ "Senator, I have no recollection..." ☺ I've had so many wonderful experiences with all my squadron mates. Lots of laughs and great flying. It was always so satisfying to go out to Nellis and come back after beating up some Eagles, Tomcats, Hornets or even other Vipers. We had some of the best fighter pilots I've ever seen, and it was an honor to be able to be part of that group of guys.