

My Navy Life,



Ross F. Wood

In the Spring of 1956, after a less than stellar college career at the University of Washington, in Seattle, WA., I faced two choices. Being drafted into the Army, or enlisting in the service of my choice. I applied for, and was accepted as a Navy NavCad (Naval Aviation Cadet) and ordered to report to Class 27-56 at Pensacola, FL.

From the day I arrived at Pensacola, I felt that my life had taken a major change of direction and every day was

a challenge. The Marine drill sergeants, classes, and athletics made me feel a desire to succeed. Pre-flight training lasted 16 weeks and then it was off to primary flight training. I trained in the Beech T-34 at Saufley Field. Intense instruction with tough Marine 1st Lieutenants. At the end of Primary, you were required to choose a single or multi-engine training path. I choose multi-engine, having a dream to fly P5M amphibious patrol planes based at NAS Whidbey Island, north of Seattle.

Basic training in the SNJ at Corry Field was quickly followed by advanced training in the SNB at Barin Field. In the SNJ, I got very good marks in formation flight, which gave me pause about having gone multi-engine. As advanced training neared completion, I started looking at the P5M program at Corpus Christi, TX. To my dismay, this program, as well as the P2V program in Kansas, were backed up 6 months. After being a cadet for a year, you wanted to see the finish line.

My college sweetheart, Ileana, and I wanted to get married and cadets couldn't marry. At that point, a LCDR, whose name I cannot recall, visited Barin, from NAS Glynco, GA. He told a group of cadets about Lighter-Than-Air (LTA). He said we would finish our SNB training and actually gave us the date when we would receive our "wings" and commission. The clincher was a brand new BOQ at Glynco, and that NavCads were given private rooms and maid service, just like other officers. After rooming with 3 other guys, for a year, that made a real impression.

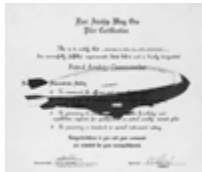
NAS Glynco was everything I hoped it would be. I finished my SNB training, and on Sept 20, 1957, Ileana pinned my Wings on, and we were married, by the Base Chaplain, the same day. Airship training began the next week. I had been a small boat sailor since I was 10 years old. On my first flight, in a "K" ship, I felt a sense of flying and sailing. I never had any regrets. After completing airship training, I was ordered to report to ZW-1 at NAS

Lakehurst, N.J.

Ileana & I drove to Lakehurst in early Jan. 1958. It was one of the worst snowstorms to ever hit the eastern seaboard. Driving a fully loaded VW Bus, it took us three days of hard driving. Arriving at ZW-1, I found total chaos. ZP-3 had lost a ZPG-2 airship inside Hanger 5. Snow, from the storm, had come in through the roof louvers, collected on the ship, turned into ice, and ruptured the envelope. I was advised by the SDO to go find a place to live and return in three days. We rented a home in Toms River. There was nothing about ZW-1 that I didn't like. CDR Charlie Mills was the C.O. I was flying the ZPG-2W. I could fly an SNB as often as I wanted. Both Ileana & I made many friends in the Squadron. We didn't have much money, but life was good. As a LTJG I got my ZPG-2W PAC (Patrol Airship Commander) rating in March of 1959:



followed by my ZPG-3W rating in March of 1960:



I loved flying those ships:



I left active duty in June of 1960, returning to Seattle and the University of Washington, where I actually graduated. I went back to Pensacola for helicopter training and flew in the reserves for 5 years, before resigning my commission. I worked for Merrill Lynch in Spokane, WA for 35 years. Ileana & I have three sons, the oldest of which was born on March 31, at Pt. Pleasant Hospital in N.J. I have flown various single and multi-engine aircraft for the past 53 years. I have always looked back at my Navy career with many fond memories. For me, military service was a very positive experience.

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