

“The Admiral’s Visit”

This particular day the USS Camden AOE-2 was “steaming as before” an element of the USS Constellation CV-64 Battle Group on the Indian Ocean with the weather clear and hot. The seas were a beautiful deep ocean blue, clear and calm.

Earlier one of the Camden’s assigned helicopters from Helicopter Support Squadron ELEVEN Detachment 5 had been dispatched to transport the Admiral and his staff around to other ships of the Battle Group for the Admiral’s visit. The Camden was assigned as the last element on the Admiral’s visit.



Being the Command and Deck Department Master Chief I was with the First Lieutenant, the Ship’s Bos’n and Master Chief Master-at-Arms. We were on the Flight Deck discussing the eminent arrival of the Battle Group Commander. The Side Boys for the Admiral’s arrival were assembled and their preparations included an extensive briefing regarding their positions, duties and responsibilities. The Third Division Flight Deck crew was conducting their Foreign Object Damage (FOD) flight deck walk-down and inspections plus making all necessary preparations for the afternoon’s Flight Quarters and Admiral’s arrival.

The Camden, on schedule, turned into the wind and up at the yardarm of the main mast the “Foxtrot” flag was hauled close-up signaling the ship was at Fight Quarters. The ship’s Sea Knight helicopter was inbound with the Admiral and his staff. At that same instant the Boatswains Mate of the Watch, over the 1MC General Announcing System was calling for personnel to man their Flight Quarter Stations.

Hearing the familiar whoppety-whop of the Sea Knight helicopter approaching the Landing Signals Enlisted (LSE) signaled the helicopter to continue its inbound approach; then hover; touch-down and land; then for the handling crew to set the chocks and tie-down chains.



After landing and after a safe interval the helicopter's crew chief opened the side door of his Sea Knight and first the Admiral then his staff disembarked the aircraft. The Admiral proceeded through the two lines of Side Boys with the Boatswains Mate of the Watch "Piping the Sides" where salutes were exchanged. The Captain and Admiral exchanged salutes and shook hands. The Admiral's Flag Lieutenant then assisted the Admiral with the removal of his flight deck helmet with ear protection and preserver. I couldn't help but notice the Admiral's brand new, fresh out of the shipping package, Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I. For some reason, like crows, bright shiny things attract Boatswains Mates.



Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I

Something was going on in the scene before me and I couldn't put my finger on exactly what sparked my now concentrated attention. Was it the Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I? Or was it the Flag Lieutenant's personal attention to the flight gear the Admiral was wearing? What was it that seemed to be out of the ordinary to me?

Just then for reasons unknown, what flashed through my head seeing the display before me, plus being a "Black Shoe" around "Brown Shoes" [Naval Aviators] were Naval Customs and Traditions. In addition to "normal" Naval Customs and Traditions, Naval Aviators have their own additional tried 'n true traditions.

As the thought of Naval Traditions was cycling through my brain the Admiral's Flag Lieutenant with a gold braided cord aiguillette around his left arm made direct eye contact with me for reasons unknown. Then he approached me directly and handed me the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I.

The Flag Lieutenant's direct purposeful action caught me somewhat off guard. Plus his direct eye contact, posture and general demeanor struck me as what a [British Naval Officer prig](#) might represent. The whole scene and overt actions struck me as out of the ordinary.

For me, being an on deck in-the-rig-hands-on Boatswains Mate I'd really never experienced many official officer functions. I guess I wouldn't do well in the Wardroom.

The eye contact with the Admiral's Flag Lieutenant, which was somewhat similar to an exchange of lightning bolts indicated on my part, "What the hell! I'm not a Bell Hop!" Which in that unguarded moment was proof positive I wouldn't do well in that setting.

Not disengaging eye contact with the Flag Lieutenant and again before eye contact was broken I flashed the unmistakable silent message; "...you'll think Bell Hop!" This, of course, resulted in the Flag Lieutenant doing a double take and boring his stern look into my eyes. With a "[Jack-Nastyface](#)" look he pointed his finger like a dagger to the Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I he had foisted on me. By the Flag Lieutenant's look and gesture there was no doubt in my mind I was now the "official" keeper of the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I. The Flag Lieutenant broke eye contact. At that exact moment and most fortunate for me the Commanding Officer had not seen the Officer - Enlisted staring contest and "dagger thrust," turned to me and ordered that both the Master Chief Master-at-Arms and I were not required to accompany him and the Admiral's entourage. "Be back on the Flight Deck in two hours," he said. "Aye, aye sir," and the entourage headed forward to the Officer's Wardroom for their soiree.

Once the entire entourage was quite a distance forward into the cargo handling room the Master Chief Master-at-Arms started giving me all sorts of grief over having the flight deck preserver foisted on me in that fashion. What could I say except, "the Flag Lieutenant wants a Bell Hop, I'll be a Bell Hop!" "What are you going to do?," he said. "Just be back up here on time and I'll show you." At which point he says, "Okay. See you later" and heads off towards his office shaking his head.

Since the Admiral, Camden's Captain, the Flag Lieutenant, the Camden's Helicopter Detachment 5 pilots, plus some of the Admiral's staff officers present all are Naval Aviators with Gold Wings above their ribbons, I was thinking Naval Aviation Traditions.

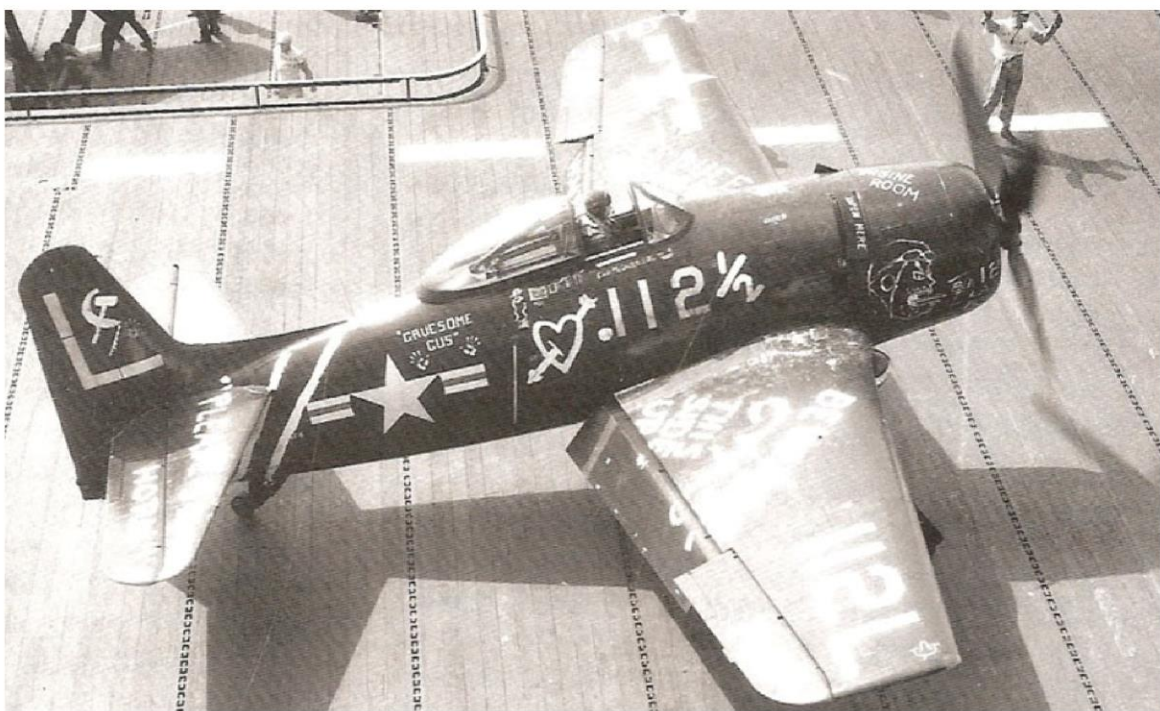
Regarding Naval Aviators and me being a "Black Shoe" I'm formulating a plan since I'm now the "official" keeper of the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I. The plans sparking my memory are stories I read regarding the history of Naval Aviation where incidents of aircraft from one aircraft carrier mistakenly land on another aircraft carrier. I remember some of those events occurred during the Second World War. Aircraft returning from their missions found that their assigned aircraft carrier was either damaged or sunk and had to land on any available aircraft carrier out of necessity.

Also, after the war there were other "Colorful" events when an aircraft operating in close proximity with other aircraft carriers and squadrons while returning from an assigned sortie or mission would line up and commence their approach on the "wrong" aircraft carrier. Once the mistake was made all involved would encourage the wayward aircraft to land on the "wrong" aircraft carrier. As far as "Sea Stories" went, the aircraft trapped then taxied to a prominent spot on deck. The pilot and if additional crewmembers were on board were ordered up to Pri-Fly and promptly chewed out up one side and down the other by the Air Boss. If conditions permitted, the wayward pilot and crew were escorted to the Navigation Bridge to be chewed out up one side and down the other by that carrier's Commanding Officer. As I was told and understand there was a twofold purpose for the lengthy chewing out. One was to highlight the mistaken identity and the insult of thinking this carrier was "that scum-bucket you came from." The other purpose was to give the carrier's assigned squadrons' sufficient time to "Quick Stencil" the wayward aircraft.

Naval Aviation Tradition examples of landing on the wrong aircraft carrier:



F9F-5 PANTHER OF VF-111.
THE STRANGE LIVERY WAS A "TRIBUTE TO PAY"
WHEN THE AIRCRAFT LANDED ON THE WRONG CARRIER. (US NAVY)





Then after all the “chewing out” and the “Quick Stencils” emblazoned on the wayward aircraft, the aircraft was properly prepared for immediate return to whence it came.

Finally arriving “home,” now the pilot has to explain to his Crew Chief what happened to the Crew Chief’s aircraft. Not to mention next the long trip to the Squadron Commander, Air Boss, Commanding Officer and if warranted the embarked Admiral to explain in no uncertain terms why the pilot chose to make an unauthorized “visit with the neighbors.” One can only imagine the ribbing in the Wardroom afterwards.



“Well Chief, I was flying along and ...”



With these thoughts in mind I immediately headed down to the Third Division Aviation Space with the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I in hand. There was a large lay-out table, quite a number of stencils and nearly every color of spray paint available. So many stencils, plus so many colors, with so little time. However, all the while keeping in mind that the preserver IS the Admiral's so I decided that Tradition be best served with Good-Taste. I picked out three Camden stencils which would be clean and neat yet be an appropriate souvenir of the Admiral's trip and soiree on board the **"Awesome Pachyderm of the Pacific – Proud Purveyor of Pastries, Peanuts, Pretzels, Popcorn, Produce, Projectiles, Powder and Petroleum."**

I smoothed out the Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I on the layout table face down and placed the largest of the chosen stencils centered on the back. Using heavy butcher paper I cut lengths for all four sides of the stencil to completely cover the white preserver material. Using flat black spray paint and using long quick strokes while holding the stencil pattern as flat as possible I commenced the "Quick Stencil" project. In all, the back stencil had three colors but was very easy to do in that the other two colors, yellow and red only involved very small areas and did not run into the flat black. The flat black was chosen because it was faster drying than gloss colors. After spraying and removing the butcher paper I carefully lifted the stencil. The design was crisp and clean with, as Crylon advertised, "...no runs, drips or errors..." Leaving the preserver flat on the layout table I aimed the circulating fans directly on the preserver to hopefully speed up the drying time.

After a short period of time I tested the central area of the fresh stencil with my finger and was glad to see no paint smear. I then laid out a fresh sheet of clean heavy butcher paper and carefully laid the preserver face up.

Using the same procedures I applied the other two stencils, one to each side on the front of the preserver. Removing the covering butcher paper, then the stencil and carefully lifting the preserver up I placed the preserver on an available wooden coat hanger. I hung the preserver from a wire-way-hanger in the air stream from the circulating fans. Seeing how fast the flat black had dried I wasn't too worried about the whole "Quick-Stencil" drying in time. I wouldn't want to be late for the *much* anticipated rendezvous with the Flag Lieutenant.

The Chief of Third Division came down to his compartment and saw my handy work and asked if "that" was what he thought it was. I said, "yes, and just let "it" hang here and dry." He offered up an expletive and started laughing telling me he had to see the outcome of "this one." "When the time comes I'll be up on the Flight Deck watching," he said.

I was pleased with the fact that the Quick Stenciling went very well and the project was completed in record time. I went back up to the Flight Deck and then made a tour of the weather deck areas mostly to take up time. I started up the port side inspecting the rigs making sure each was properly stowed and all secured in their pockets. Then turning around and going through the cargo handling area inspecting the gripes on the fork trucks and closures on the elevator doors. I met up with the Master Chief Master-at-Arms who just came up on deck. He was on his way through the handling area to the Flight Deck to watch the departure as that time was approaching.

The Master Chief Master-at-Arms, being the detective he was, asked me what I had done with the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I. I told him I did what I'd said I'd do and Quick Stenciled the preserver with Camden stencils. He looked at me and made some sort of comment referencing a form of not being in one's right mind. I laughed and a moment later my handheld radio came to life with, "Master Chief, First." "Roger First," I responded. "Admiral's Party is enroute to the Flight Deck." "Roger First."

I passed the word to the Side Boys and Flight Deck crew who all jumped into action getting ready to launch the stand-by Sea Knight. The Side Boys and Boatswains Mate of the Watch took up their positions ready to "Pipe the Sides" and salute the departing Admiral. As that activity was underway I went down and tested the paint on the Admiral's preserve and everything was dry to the touch. Carefully folding the preserver in half lengthwise and smoothing out the wrinkles I went up to the Flight Deck and took up my position to the right of the Master Chief Master-at-Arms. Looking forward up the cargo handling area I could see the entourage heading aft in our direction towards the Flight Deck. They seemed to be in a good mood. "We'll see," I thought to myself.

I was adjusting the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I folded in half the long way and positioning the preserver over my left forearm like a bus-boy in a fancy restaurant. Whereupon the Master Chief Master-at-Arms whispered to me, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "The Admiral's Lieutenant wants a Bell Hop, I'll give him a Bell Hop." He said, "You're insane." A couple of paces later the entourage was at our location still glad handing and joking. I thought that was a good sign that things as far as I could tell went well and the mood seemed light.

The Admiral's Flag Lieutenant approached me with an obvious question on his face as I was standing there at an over emphasized stiff attention with my left forearm across my middle with the Admiral's Brand New Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I neatly draped over my arm. His stare was boring a hole through me. I had adjusted my blank stare to just above his eyebrows looking at him but not making direct eye contact. I learned from a source that when you look above someone's eyes and don't make direct eye contact it tends to drive people crazy. The person knows something is wrong but can't put a finger on what it is. I'm staring at the Flag Lieutenant's forehead but not engaging eye contact.

The Admiral is saying his final farewells.

The Flag Lieutenant who is trying to figure me out is now a few seconds behind, probably wondering what the hell I'm all about so he gruffly yanks the Admiral's preserver from my arm. I let my left arm fall to my side and maintain my stiff attention now staring dead ahead.

The Flag Lieutenant immediately goes over to the Admiral and first hands him his white flight deck helmet with ear protectors and then starts to put the Brand Newly Stenciled Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I on the Admiral and I detected a slight pause as the Flag Lieutenant notices the stencils on the front of the preserver.



Once the Admiral's Newly Stenciled Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I is properly buttoned and the Admiral's flight deck helmet with ear protectors is properly in place and secured the Flag Lieutenant flashes me one of those looks which could kill. Purposely I don't make eye contact and stare off into the wild blue yonder with an "Angelic Who Me" look on my face. I'm secretly hoping there is very little the lieutenant can do right at that

moment as the Sea Knight is winding up and the blades are slowly starting their revolutions and gaining speed. Right at that moment the Admiral turns around and starts up the boarding ladder on his way into the Sea Knight giving his Flag Lieutenant a full-in-your-face view of the back of his Newly Stenciled Pure White Flight Deck Preserver Mark-I.



“... you’ll think Bell Hop!” I thought to myself still staring off into the wild blue yonder.