

FIRST LANDING

In late 1961 Air Group One, then training ashore at NAS Cecil Field Florida, was assigned temporarily to newly commissioned USS Enterprise. USS F. D. Roosevelt, Air Group One's parent carrier was undergoing overhaul. I was CAG-One, and promptly after being given this assignment, I reported to CAPT Vince DePoix, Enterprise's Commanding Officer. He gave me a brief preview of our operating schedule for the next several months. After stating that initial air operations for Enterprise were anticipated to begin in January, CAPT DePoix immediately got my attention with an exciting question: Would I like to make the first arrested landing aboard the world's first nuclear powered aircraft carrier? Would I !!! He had my answer practically before he finished the question!

We worked for a few minutes on the details. CAPT DePoix indicated a preference for the first plane aboard to be an F-4; however, since my Air Group's current fighter complement was F8U-1s (Crusaders), he decided that an F-8 would be quite acceptable.

Even though the Air Group had a busy flying schedule during the next several weeks, it seemed that January would never come. On January 15, 1962, I flew F8U-1 Bu. No. 145375 to NAS Oceana, Virginia. This was a Fighter Squadron Sixty-Two aircraft carrying the CAG's side number (200). Two other Crusaders arrived with me, flown by CDR Joe Moorner, CO of VF-62, and LCDR Jesse Taylor, VF-62 Maintenance Officer. On the 16th, we shot a few field carrier landings, then secured the planes and made arrangements for a pre-dawn start.

On the morning of January 17, a 0430 reveille was required in order to have breakfast, don exposure suits, pre-flight planes, and start engines on time. The weather was cold and clear. It required several extra minutes to scrape all the frost off the windscreens and cockpit canopies. Shortly after sunrise, we were airborne and climbing out to the east. Enterprise was about a hundred miles out in the Atlantic with a strong TACAN signal showing us the way. Radio traffic on the assigned frequency indicated that several other carrier aircraft of various types were also inbound to the ship to participate in the

first day's deck operations. Among them (I was previously advised) would be CDR George Watkins, CAG of the USS Constellation Air Group. George, a classmate of mine, was notoriously hungry regarding carrier landings in general, and special carrier landings in particular. On many occasions when a carrier was coming up on a "thousandth" landing George always seemed to know about it and just happened to be in the recovery pattern to compete for such a prestigious event. On this occasion he had dealt himself into the day's operations flying an AD (A-1) from his own Air Group. To make the Enterprise's scheduled "Charlie" time, George and his AD flight must have launched before dawn.

Shortly after take-off, I encountered a minor problem with my aircraft -- the variable incidence wing would not lock in the down (high speed) position. I informed Joe Moorer of the problem, along with my intention to proceed. We would simply have to fly out at a much lower airspeed. Joe was a highly experienced F-8 pilot; he suggested that I leave the wing down in the high-speed position, even though unlocked, and we could safely fly at 200 knots in that configuration. Although this delayed our arrival over the carrier, the Enterprise tower simply rogered for the information and directed me to call when I had visual contact.

About 20 minutes later, we broke over the ship and entered the landing pattern. There were several various types of aircraft in the immediate vicinity, but my focus was on the largest, cleanest flight deck I had ever seen!!

I turned downwind, performed the landing check-off, and made a normal daytime approach. Above all I wanted to make a good pass and get aboard with no bolter. As I called the "ball" and started down the glide slope, my scan must have been twice the normal speed, because it seemed to take forever to reach touchdown. The longest time interval of all seemed to be that segment from the ramp to crossing over the first arresting gear cable. (I'm almost sure that this distance on Enterprise is greater than the space between the ramp and No. 4 wire on the FDR!) Believe me it was a welcome sensation, after touchdown, to feel the sharp, but smooth, deceleration which meant I had made the landing without a bolter. I would have considered that highly embarrassing for this particular landing!

After I taxied out of the arresting gear, and was parked near the island, CDR Max Harnish, the XO, welcomed me aboard. About this time some flight deck crewmen came up and

showed me a huge sign painted on canvas that had been prepared just in case I failed to engage a cross-deck pendant. It said, "You boltered!" I was genuinely thankful I could wave that sign away with a laugh!

They put me in a Bosun's Chair and gave me a stately transport down to the hanger deck where a giant ceremonial cake had been prepared to commemorate the Big E's first landing. I officiated by slicing the first few pieces, and there were plenty of crewmembers on hand to eat the cake.

After all planes were trapped aboard I had yet another big treat in store -- the first nuclear powered carrier catapult shot. This was followed by about another hour or so of arrested landings and launches for the different types of aircraft in order to get crew and pilot training. I was able to make five cat shots and five more landings during this deck cycle.

At dinner in the wardroom that evening, my good friend George Watkins informed me, with a smile, that he was right behind me in the groove on that first carrier approach. George said, "Talley, if you had boltered, guess who would have made the first landing?" I didn't say anything, but I knew full well that if he had tried that he would have been at high risk of being run over by CDR (later VADM) Joe Moorer, who made the second landing.

I have always considered it a real privilege to have made that first arrested landing on, and catapult takeoff from, Enterprise. I felt equally privileged to have been a shipmate, even for a few short weeks, with that elite crew of hand-picked officers and men who were plankowners.

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