

## CAG Speaks

A speech by Commander "Bear" Taylor, Commander, Carrier Air Group Three to  
Attack Squadron 75 in January 1977

I remember the first CAG I ever saw. He was talking to the Captain on the bridge of Michener's fictitious carrier in the movie version of *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*. The Hollywood version of the CAG was the usual grizzled, square-jawed hero type dressed in wrinkled khakis and a well patched leather flying jacket. But it wasn't so much what the CAG looked like as it was what he said that stand out in that early memory. At that point in the movie, the air group had had a full share of bad luck both in operations against the enemy in Korea and around the deck of the carrier. Michener's golden pen gave Hollywood all it needed to make the tailhook profession come across as one of the most hazardous and demanding, as well as glamorous, occupations a man could pursue. So, it was easy to understand the CAG when he asked an unanswered question of the Captain. "Where do we get such Men?" It is a question that predates my Navy career, now at 22 years, and one for which I have been molding an answer since I heard it in 1955.

"Where do we get such men?" I have asked myself the question repeatedly as I watched squadron mates and shipmates hit the ramp, fail to survive cold cat shots and run the gauntlet of flak, SAMs and MiGs to hit targets in the heartland of North Vietnam, some never to return, others to survive six or seven years of incarceration. I have also asked the question whenever I have observed the countless other tests of human desire and ability to survive in the face of danger inherent in the occupation and of the depths of courage required to press on where other men would shy away or turn back. It is the question I have asked whenever I have seen men refuse to fear as they pushed on.

I remember most vividly one evening on *Enterprise* at Yankee Station 10 years ago this month. I passed through IOIC, or CVIC as we know it today, at about 8 p.m. to pick up some charts of the Ninh Binh area in Route Package 6. I was to lead a division to that fairly well defended area at dawn the next day. I knew the weather was rotten and I'd for sure be going on another milky radar drop south of the DMZ, but IOIC was chock full of VA-35 A-6 crews. I intruded on the *Intruders* and got a rubberneck look at a briefing chart CDR. Glenn Kollman (the X.O.) was preparing in order to show the on-board Admiral where the night's 12 A-6s strikers were going. Twelve strips of narrow colored tape were laid out to show the different routes planned to take the 12 aircraft across the night's targets and back to *Enterprise*. I was awed by the directness of the routes and by the destination targets. All but a few were aimed straight at the heartland of North Vietnam -- Hanoi, Hai Duong and Haiphong. These brave A-6 shipmates were preparing for a task more demanding and more hazardous than any I'd ever seen. I was going on a milky and these guys were going to the heartland, again and again, every night. I stepped clear of the *Intruder* chart makers and in total awe and admiration asked again, "Where do we get such men?"

For years the Naval Aviation prima donnas were the fighter pilots. I remember the signs in the F-8 era that said "Gangway, Fighter Pilot." But the courage, skill and success of the *Intruder* crews who penetrated the toughest gauntlet of opposition in the history of aerial warfare every night, who made two combat cruises and flew the hundreds of missions, who carried the war when all others were grounded by weather, and who met and killed the enemy, changed all that. The *Intruder* crews became the prima donnas, and when the shooting begins again they will be in the van and they will once again be the ones that will have to muster the courage, skill and determination to press on and defeat the enemy. Gone are the "Gangway, Fighter Pilot" signs and if they ever hang new ones, they must say "Gangway, Intruder Crews." For they are the men who will go first, endure more and suffer most greatly when we are called to do our duty. They, more than any others, must therefore develop and maintain a reservoir of courage that will sustain them in the execution of their vital duty. It will be the kind of courage that General George Patton held came largely out of habit and self-confidence.

My study of military history has led me to the conclusion that every military effort in the past has been spearheaded by an elite force of courageous, skilled, disciplined and loyal fighters imbued with the spirit of attack. *Intruder* crews are the elite among the elite. That's you, *Sunday Punchers*. You will ride *Saratoga* into harm's way, and she could very well be the first on the scene. You will be the elite that will spearhead *Saratoga's* effort. You can count on it, and you will have to be able to dig down in your brave hearts and find the courage, the skill, the discipline and loyalty to fight with the spirit of attack. I have no doubt that you will find in your hearts these vital qualities and that you will succeed. Just as the *Intruder* crews did in Vietnam.

You are "such men" and I know where you come from. You're the cream of the nation's manhood, men who have combined a career and service to your country. Men who have elected to participate, of your own choice, in a death-defying profession. Men who can at any time say, "That is enough" and leave the service, to do well at some other profession I have no doubt. Men who along with me suffer the fantastic disease of the pounding heart, who know the exhilaration of running on pure adrenalin. Men who willingly trade the freedoms of a democratic society for the restrictions of a military order knowing that in the exchange comes an equalizing ticket to the unequalled freedom of the skies.

And you -- you have a tradition to uphold. One the Cdr. Kollman and Lt. John Griffith typify. Cdr. Kollman died at the controls of his A-6 toward the end of his second combat deployment a few days after he said, "To me, my duty here is as natural and normal as accepting the responsibility for caring for my wife and children. It is my job and I'm going to do it. I would not ask someone else to do my job." And the bravest of the brave, John Griffith who died with Skipper Kollman, "This is my job. I believe in what I am doing. I can do it well and I will." (NANews, August 1968, page 9)

Where do we get such men? Out there in our society. Where are such men? Right here: among the *Sunday Punchers*.