

## Lagniappe - A Lookback on Mickey's 50 Years of Aviation

Born and raised in south Louisiana, Mickey graduated from Gonzales High School as valedictorian before heading off to Louisiana State University (“LSU”) to earn a degree in electrical engineering. He wasn’t born with a passion for flying, but got his first taste during a cross-country flight in the third grade when the Delta pilot let him sit in the cockpit and help maintain course during the flight on their way to Disneyland. Still, he grew up like many boys his age, preferring to see how far he could kick a field goal barefoot (50-yards!), becoming an Eagle Scout by age 15, slalom skiing with friends on the Amite River, and playing the sax and tuba. Aviation wouldn’t be on Mickey’s radar till he was in mandatory ROTC during his undergraduate studies, while the Vietnam War loomed in the background.

Upon graduation from LSU, he was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the US Air Force and was sent to the “gateway to romantic Mexico!” – Del Rio, Texas. Not many people can say their first “real” flying lesson was how not to enter a spin following a stall in the T-37 when trying to outclimb a towering thunderstorm in the Southwest Texas skies on a solo training flight – but he can. His first assignment following pilot training was remaining in Del Rio and becoming a T-37 Cessna Jet Instructor Pilot. He quickly learned the importance of



“not introducing yaw” in a stall with the rudders as he had tried - but failed - to outclimb the clouds, tumbling and falling through a towering cumulonimbus cloud with rudders locked neutral.



But after popping out of the bottom of the storm, he was sold on flying. He immediately checked out as a T-37 Spin Instructor and didn’t slow down until he was the most skilled spin pilot on Laughlin AFB. With a parachute strapped to his back, he and a fellow IP completed 18 fully developed spin rotations starting from just over 18,000’ AGL and recovering at 10,000’ AGL. Turning at a rate of 360 degrees in 3 seconds, losing 500’ per turn made his passion for flying that much greater. But that is not what made him a candidate for the IP of the Year award, it was the vigor he showed in organizing the largest ever Boy Scout District Camporee in SW Texas – approx. 300 scouts - at Laughlin AFB. He was honored to be presented the award by his fellow Eagle Scout Wing Commander, Col Harry Falls.

In 1974, following his assignment in Texas, Mickey was selected as an initial cadre instructor for a new T-37 Navigator Flight Program at Mather AFB in Sacramento, CA. The course was intended to introduce to navigator students the rigors of flying in a T-37 jet trainer while wearing a helmet, oxygen mask, and G-suit all while performing navigator skills and pulling Gs in preparation of flying in the rear seat of an F-4 in Vietnam or the Philippines.

After completing this program, he accepted the opportunity to obtain his Master’s Degree in Electrical Engineering, specializing in Navigation and Digital Flight Control Systems at the Air

Force Institute of Technology (“AFIT”) at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton, OH. Mickey took advantage of AFIT’s cutting edge research opportunities and developed computer models for integrating digital flight control systems and aircraft weapon sensors on the General Dynamics F-16 – the Air Force’s first “Fly-by-Wire” and newest fighter aircraft. Utilizing the amazing flight simulator capability of the Wright Patterson Flight Dynamics lab, Mickey was able to personally “fly” his thesis developed flight control configuration in a mock dogfight with five enemy aircraft attacking his single F-16 aircraft. This unique simulation and experience solidified Mickey’s passion for flying and his new goal: becoming a fighter pilot.

By 1978, as he embarked on the long road to fighters, he took the assignment to be a flight test engineer at Eglin AFB, near Destin, FL. His job at the Tactical Air Warfare Center was to develop test scenarios and brief test pilots prior to their test flights to validate newly developed digital control avionics capabilities of the F-4 and F-111 aircraft on the Eglin bombing ranges. Results were classified, but F-4 pilots could allow its flight computer to initiate bomb release and “toss” a 500lb bomb from five nautical miles away and “hit” the target. Leading a team of engineers and instrument technicians to Korea to resolve tactical long-range navigation (“LORAN”) reception issues led to Mickey being named as one of the youngest Test Division’s Detachment Commanders on record and opened the door for a test pilot or fighter pilot assignment.

His hard work paid off and in 1981 Mickey was classified as a world-wide combat capable warrior in the A-10 Thunderbolt II “Warthog” stationed at Bentwaters/Woodbridge airfield in Suffolk England, U.K. Assigned to the 78th Tactical Fighter Squadron - the “Snakes” who had their own live 14’ long boa constrictor snake as a squadron mascot - was charged with protecting the American sector of the Central European theatre. Lots of practice bombing and strafing ensued daily. The amazing GAU-8, 30-mm 7-barrel gatling gun could carry up to 1150 rounds of armor piercing incendiary, firing 1.5-pound projectiles at 3000 per second, up to 70 rounds per second.





Firing the A-10 gatling gun was a “Brrrrttt” blast, but flying at 350 knots within 100’ of the ground was just as exhilarating. “Chasing a student in a single-seat cockpit at 100ft at 350 knots was the most challenging thing I have ever done, because you have no room for error,” said Mickey. It even beat meeting a 4-ship of Russian Mig-21 fighters head-on enroute to the bombing range in central Turkey with the Migs at 400’ and A-10s at 500’ AGL - passing each other silently, but with guns armed, waiting to be provoked. “We realized we almost made the history books had either side pulled the trigger,” he recalled.

In order to make his way back home to Louisiana, Mickey agreed to add a new twist to his military career. He took an assignment working with the US Army as an Air Liaison Officer (“ALO”) in Germany. While he wasn’t flying the A-10s there, he did get to fly the US Black Hawk helicopter and routinely landed with a simulated engine out auto-rotation. With his team of Forward Air Controllers, Mickey traveled around the German countryside in a AN/MRC-108 communications systems jeep directing mock A-10 attacks in close air support of US Army ground objectives. He had the opportunity to work with US NATO teams to develop and later fly Joint Air Attack Tactics (“JAAT”) with a combined team of US Army 105 Howitzer units, Apache Air Attack helicopters, and A-10 aircraft. It was quite a demonstration of continuous firepower on a single target!



Finally, back in Louisiana, more flying with A-10 flying was in store. As Chief of Standardization and Evaluation, Mickey said his days consisted of “flying check rides sometimes twice a day, with racquetball competition at the gym for lunch! It was by far the best job in the world.” Never satisfied, Mickey took the opportunity to learn more about the Warthog than any other pilot in the wing and became a Functional Check Flight Pilot (“FCF pilot”) in the A-10. An



FCF pilot is the first to fly an aircraft following the completion of major maintenance to an engine, flight controls, or the airframe. One of Mickey’s most challenging portions of an FCF flight was the in-flight engine shutdowns and restarts in flight that required rolling inverted, shutting down one engine, then rolling upright and restarting. In 1984, Mickey’s squadron was then called for a NATO deployment to Germany and Turkey. As

Asst Director of Operations for the 75th “Tiger Shark” Squadron at England AFB, in Louisiana, Mickey organized a major deployment of a full squadron of A-10 aircraft, along with pilots, maintenance, and ground support personnel of approximately 250 individuals across the Atlantic to Germany, and then to Incirlik, Turkey. While in Turkey, Mickey was the “bagman” and was escorted by a host of squadron mates as he walked and shopped the streets of Incirlik buying souvenirs of raw gold, brass lanterns, and

Persian hand-made rugs for squadron family members with wads of cash – over \$10k (\$25k present value) - stuffed in the pockets of his flight suit! Mickey recalled fondly that “the scenery of Turkey was great, flying over nomadic villagers living on the sides of massive plateaus and flying through historical sites like Alexander the Great’s passage in a 4-ship of A-10s at 500’ AGL over some of the most beautiful scenery in the world!” One harrowing experience of this deployment was the 12-hour Atlantic Ocean crossing from Myrtle Beach, SC, to the Portuguese Azores. This route normally requires six air refueling hook-ups from KC-10 tankers. But because Mickey was asked to fly a “Hangar Queen” A-10 with non-working fuel gauges, he completed 12 air refueling hookups, just as a precaution on one sortie. To ensure his plane had more fuel than his squadron mates, Mickey was the first plane of the 4-ship formation onto the tanker for refueling, and then the last of 4 aircraft to ‘hook up’ again. “Arriving at day break and seeing the white shores of the Azores and the super wide, ten-thousand-foot runway of the Lajes Air Base was a most welcomed sight to behold after the thunderous and stormy 12-hour night flight,” Mickey recalled.

Mickey is extremely proud to be a member of Lt. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault’s *Flying Tigers*. The *Flying Tigers* are the legendary American Volunteer Group (AVG) of the Republic of China Air Force, formed and led by Lt. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault in 1939 to oppose the Japanese



invasion of China. In order to carry on the traditions and honor the history of the AVG, the USAF’s 23rd Fighter Group carry the same “Shark Teeth” nose art that the AVG’s Curtiss P-40 “Warhawks” had along with the “FT” (Flying Tiger) tail markings. They are currently the only USAF aircraft authorized to carry this distinctive and historical aircraft insignia. Since Lt. Gen Chennault grew up in Louisiana, it was a special event for

the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing (“TFW”) to host the annual *Flying Tiger* reunion at England AFB in 1986. As Asst Operations Officer of the 75<sup>th</sup> Squadron (Tiger Sharks), Mickey was the wing project coordinator.



He met many of the famed *Flying Tiger* originals, mechanics and pilots of this illustrious group, including one of its most famous commanders, David Lee “Tex” Hill. After hosting the *Flying Tigers*, Mickey was asked to lead a 4-ship of A-10s to Langley AFB for a gala reunion of the *Flying Tigers* in Washington DC, hosted by the grand-daughter of the late emperor Chiang Kai-Shek at the Chinese Embassy. It was the perfect closing tribute to his *Flying Tiger* career.

In 1985, Mickey became the Chief of Weapons and Tactics, 7th Air Force Headquarters, on a one-year mandatory remote tour to Seoul, South Korea. His job was to compile the ‘target script’ for the first four days of the anticipated air war plan against North Korea, which included matching friendly aircraft in the region with available weapons to strike the top 100 enemy targets. He was also tasked to prepare a briefing for the office of the US Secretary of Defense as to which aircraft—the USAF F-16 or USN F-18—was best suited for the Korean AF mission, logistics, maintenance capability, and their pilot’s capability. Other than being away from family, the remote tour to Seoul was another dream job. He spent a fortune “saving money” at the Yongsan shopping markets, sending home weekly boxes of off-market designer clothing, brassware, and computer software. Even a baby grand piano made its way home to Louisiana! Mickey’s Olympic “claim-to fame” was running a lap around the Seoul Olympic track to the cheers of hundreds of Asian tourists visiting Seoul. But one memorable aspect of the tour stood out to him. Midway through, Mickey got a free trip home flying commercial while escorting three infants (1-2 months old) for a Catholic orphanage. “It was quite a load, but with help from flight attendants and supportive passengers they made it fun!” he said.

But then came Desert Storm. “We got the call that the A-10s of the 23rd TFW’s ‘Flying Tigers’ were needed to “shoot up some tanks and armored vehicles in Iraq,” he said. Two squadrons were deployed, but as Chief of Stan/Eval, Mickey’s job was to train as many pilots as possible, as quickly as possible. Although Mickey saw no direct combat, he said his claim to fame was that he “trained a new A-10 wingman who, during his first combat battle, he and his A-10 flight leader were credited with 23 tank kills out of 24 Maverick missiles fired in one day of flying. Sweet Success!”



Mickey made the decision to retire from the military as a Lt Colonel in 1991 at the age of 42 to pursue a professional civilian “control systems” engineering career. He found that civilian flying was quite different from that of the military, but adjusted by starting an aerial pipeline patrol business so he could continue his low-level flying. “But now it was ‘low and slow’ in a Cessna 172,” he said. Soon came the creation of Aviation Specialists, Inc. (“ASI”), a flight school of Cessna vintage single engines; with multiple sorties each day, teaching stalls and falls, slow flight, steep turns, unusual attitudes, and patterns. “While spin training was very limited, the incidents where students tried to routinely ‘kill’ the instructor were... unpredictable, but definitely rich in experience!” he laughed.

Then, in the late 2000s, a young doctor walked into ASI's FBO and asked Mickey if he would teach him to fly in a Cirrus. The short answer was "yes" and under the guidance of the then Cirrus guru of training, Pete Carroll, Mickey became a CSIP (Cirrus Standardized Instructor Pilot). For the next 10 years, he flew this doctor on a weekly basis to/from Meridian, MS. Together they learned a lot about instrument and weather flying while sharing numerous "learning " experiences. In the meantime, this doctor earned his private, instrument rating, commercial license, and ultimately his CFI credentials. This doctor is now a fellow ASI instructor, Dr. Victor McCoy.



"Cirrus flying is fun!" said Mickey. "I now get to fly around the skies in very nice Cirrus SR aircrafts (SR20, SR22, & SR22T) that are all high-performance aircraft, very maneuverable, and have the latest and greatest avionics technology." Mickey said he is often introduced to new pilots who just bought a new Cirrus aircraft and are looking for him to teach them through the Cirrus Embark program.



All the while, in airconditioned comfort, with the state-of-the-art avionics, a highly aerodynamic airplane, and yes, after years of relying on the parachute strapped to his back, his butt is now strapped into the PLANE that has its very own parachute.

It doesn't get any better than this!

The Bottom Line: Over his military career, Mickey developed quite a passion for flying. He didn't log thousands of flight hours (almost all with hands and feet on the controls) just thinking about it. He routinely hung out at the flight operations desk volunteering to fly any mission, anywhere, anytime. This passion continued as a civilian in his primary flight training school – always eager to "hop in" and teach. And now he is a CSIP managing a Cirrus Training Center. With his 20-year, active-duty US Air Force career plus his 30-year civilian flying career, Mickey has now flown for more than 50 years. This past year, Mickey was humbled to receive the prestigious FAA's Wright Brothers "Master Pilot" Award for over 50 years of professional aviation!



So, what's on the horizon for Mickey?

Getting a type rating in the Cirrus Vision Jet and continuing his role as a CSIP managing his Cirrus Training Center.

Wow, what a ride!  
Thank you, Lord,