

The Mid-Air Collision Story of David DeMeyer

Dear Fellow Naval Officers and Tailhook Members –

It is great to be alive. This is my story.

I have been asked many times over the years why I haven't written down my recollection of the crash. Maybe my procrastination is due the frequent reminder that I have been so blessed by having an extra 40 years of life, and/or, the thought of the two pilots in the plane that hit me whose lives were snuffed out so quickly on that hot, humid Florida afternoon. I don't recall ever being told their names, but I think of them often and the pain their families must have endured then and still do.



At the encouragement of my lifelong good friend, Bud Orr, who attained the rank of Captain, USN, with a very successful 30 year career in Naval Aviation in the Attack community. His career was highlighted by being CAG of Carrier Air Wing 14 during Desert Shield aboard the USS Constellation (CVA 64). It was at his encouragement that I am recounting my story.

Mid-Air Collision Story – June 16, 1966

Naval flight training in 1966 was a very exciting and busy time. The Navy was pushing hard to get as many pilots trained as possible as the Viet Nam war was really heating up. In those days every flight student carrier qualified, even the Marines and Navy pilots that were destined to go into the helicopter pipeline, got the opportunity to “hit the boat,” in the T-2 Buckeye or the T-28 Trojan.

NAS Whiting Field was approximately 40 miles east of NAS Pensacola, and all the flight students that were in the prop pipe-line were sent there, before carrier qualifying. It was a very busy base with two airfields. I was attached to Training Squadron Two (VT 2) at North Field. VT 3 was at South Field. I suppose there were around 250-300 hundred flight students going through various phases of training at any one time at both fields. Training flights were launched daily from 0500 hours into the wee hours of the night.

The morning of June 16, 1966 started early for me, as I was on the flight schedule board for a P-8 check ride with a Marine Corps Captain at 0600 hours in the morning, followed by a P-9 solo in the afternoon. I recall “acing” the check ride as I worked through the endless testing of emergency procedures, and performing my aerobatics with precision. I was very upbeat with my success and anxious to go out solo in the afternoon by myself.

I recall flying over to Santa Rosa Island to fine tune my loops and barrel rolls as the island was over 25 miles long and set up East to West. It was my favorite place to practice. I could easily check out my plane’s set-up, attitude and line-up over this island to see if the plane was falling off on one wing or another while inverted while performing all the required aerobatics and spins.



The landing pattern at Whiting Field was fairly straight forward compared to enduring the complicated three tiered pattern at NAS Saufley Field during Primary training in the T-34. We were landing to the West that afternoon, so I entered the pattern at 1,500’ over the center of the dual runway below. As I broke right in Fairdale #229, I reduced my power, pulled the speed break, and lowered the gear.

Before getting to the 180°, the tower announced that a plane somewhere back in the pattern had called in with an unsafe gear indication, and that a check pilot was being sent up to verify it. Also the “daily thunderstorms” were approaching, so everyone who was already in the pattern was instructed to clear the runway as soon as they landed. In the Whiting Field pattern the planes landed on alternate sides of the double-wide runway. Looking down over the situation; that meant the plane (Fairdale #236) that was a good distance ahead of me on the down-wind leg would be landing on the port side, and I would alternate and follow on the starboard side.

At the 180° I pulled back my power further to reduce air speed and started a right

turn descent to line up on the right side for landing. My coordination and concentration was right on target to “grease it in.” [My regular instructor and I would always make bets on who could get the most imaginary 3rd wire landings. I was thinking I would win a bet with this landing, if I only had someone in the back seat].

Then, “BAM! I experienced a sudden jolt and the plane’s nose pitched up violently. I thought, “Christ, something has hit me!” Then in a flash I saw the inverted canopy of another T-28 with two white helmets in it, as if doing a barrel roll over me. It was estimated that we hit at about 200’ and going around 140 -150 MPH. My next recollection was being snapped into a spin attitude and seeing the ground coming up. ...I yelled out, “It’s been a good life, Dave.” There is no ejection seat in a T-28.

I knew I was dead. It was 1611 hours CDT.

The next thing I recall was two crash crew members in silver asbestos suits were shouting, “Cut his straps, cut his straps” (the parachute straps holding me into the seat). I looked down and saw my right flight boot turned totally backwards. It was then (I learned weeks later from the Airmen who pulled me out of the cockpit) that I screamed, “my legs, my back.” The crewmen said I basically ejected myself out of the cockpit in the shock at



seeing my foot backward. As a result, I have horrible scares in my lower right leg from the sharp sheet metal that cut out huge sections of flesh, and muscle. There was no time to waste. The other aircraft had exploded upon impact. They were afraid my plane was next...It never did. It was determined that although both of my fuel tanks ruptured upon impact with the ground, the fuel did not get to the hot engine and explode.

I recall them laying me on the wing and saying, “he’s so broken up, he is like a jelly fish.” Every time they moved me, the pain would be so intense that I would pass out. I learned that day, that God must put in a little switch in a person’s body, that when the pain gets so bad it becomes intolerable, he’ll just put a person into an unconscious state to make it possible for one to continue on somehow.

Another recollection I have is lying on my stomach on a canvas stretcher in the hot and humid Florida sun with heavy grass cutting at my face and seeing #236 aflame

and burning a short distance away. It was difficult to see well, as I had so much blood running down into my eyes and face. They cut open my flight suit, gave me a shot into my thigh and shouted, "write a quarter gram of morphine."

The two pilots in #236 were pulled from their burning aircraft, and flown via helicopter to the NAS Pensacola at Mainside, about a 40 mile trip. They both had 3rd degree burns over their entire body. One officer lived for around 90 minutes, while another lived for a day and half before passing.

Because I was so broken up, they decided to take me to NAS Mainside via an ambulance. They felt that I could not endure the vibration of a helicopter trip. Instead they took me over to the NAS Whiting Field Infirmary for some preliminary x-rays. That was a story in itself as they got my foot wedged into a 200 pound swinging hospital door in their rush to get me medical attention and nearly tore off what remained of my right foot off. God shut me down at this point and I was unconscious for a period after that. The doctors and nurses discovered numerous problems. My right femur was broken, as was my right tibia and fibula. I had entire pieces of leg mass and muscle missing from my lower leg; the right ankle was so mangled that it looked like spaghetti, my back was broken, as was my right arm. My face was smashed in (I had 234 stitches in my face alone), but found out later, I was lucky to have it. My left knee saved my life. It seems the left knee was nearly severed in two from the impact of the 300 pound instrument panel flying out of the cockpit upon impact with the ground. But, by taking the brunt of the blow, it partially deflected the impact to my head. Otherwise, I would have been decapitated.

I awoke again inside the ambulance as we drove in the darkening evening along Hwy 98 to NAS Pensacola Hospital. I remember listening to the two Corpsmen in front arguing over how much to sound the siren. After an hour of that one gets a headache!!

The ambulance pulled into the hospital around 10 PM. All I remember was chaos. The day of our crash brought 3 extremely injured Navy pilots into the emergency rooms on the very evening that the CO of the Hospital, Capt. Sam Houston, was hosting his going-away party at his stately quarters adjacent to the hospital. The hospital in those days was located on a slight hill above the Mustin Beach Officers Club, shaded by the 300 year old Spanish Oak trees (The hospital in later years was converted and is now used as the headquarters for the Chief of Naval Training, a Vice Admiral). Capt. Houston was being re-assigned as the CO to the Naval Hospital at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. With the planned festivities, all the officers, surgeons and nurses were dressed in their finest Hawaiian garb. However, instead of having a nice time imbibing in drinks with umbrellas in them, they were feverously trying to save 3 lives. I recall looking up and seeing a LCDR Nurse picking nuts and bolts out of my left knee, while another doctor was attempting to sew my forehead back on - both dressed in the latest "Don Ho" shirts. Another team of surgeons were trying to save my lower right leg, ankle and foot.

It was at this point, they nearly lost me. I was awake enough to know that the entire hospital was abuzz with activity, and the emergency room next to mine had a lot of going on too. Suddenly, it went silent, and I heard someone shout out, “where do I get a ‘morg’ report?” It was with that news that I went into severe shock and they had to put electric shock paddles on me to get my heart going again and revive me.

The next thing I recall was coming awake sometime around 4 AM in my room with two doctors and two nurses drilling holes into my leg bones, installing pins and stirrups in them, stringing cords through a variety of pulleys and weights and attaching them all to a scaffolding system above my bed; plus, placing a cast over my right arm, and IV tubes and bandages on my left. I already had my “hockey goalie” mask on to cover my facial wounds. Everyone had been working under an adrenaline rush for over 12 hours – trying to save lives. By now, it was 5:30 AM and I was in a complete daze watching all that was going on. The four person medical team had a pizza delivered to the room, and only needed to place the 75 pounds of “Morris Scale” truck weights above my femur to pull the broken leg bone apart (that was Orthopedics in 1966). As they were preparing to finish their report and their pizza, the 75 pounds of weights came crashing down directly on my femur break. I learned later my scream was so loud that I awoke the entire hospital, putting them all in shock. They all had gone through a lot that night and everyone had been on “edge” from all the frantic activity - but my scream was the “topper”.

Dr. Harvey, LT, USN, Medical Corps, was a great Orthopedics specialist and was so good to me in my many months to follow, had a great response – “Oops, slip knot!” You had to have been there. We all cried with laughter, even me (once I came to)!

After that night, I would be either in the hospital or attached to the hospital for the next 26 months before being discharged from the Navy. Many memorable things happened to me during those many months. What follows are some highlight and lowlights of that experience:

The very next night was probably was the worse. The remaining alive pilot from FD #236 was in terrible pain in the room adjacent to me and his cries of pain still haunts me to this day. His room and mine were the only two that had direct oxygen hook-ups in the SOQ (Sick Officers Quarters). For the first 18 hours I had my room to myself. However, there was an emergency with a retired Army LTCOL who was brought into the ER and was dying of emphysema and needed to be placed into an oxygen tent. He arrived in my room about 11 PM and the staff had settled him in by around midnight. Not more that an hour later, he began thrashing violently from the lack of air. He threw off the oxygen mask and tent and climbed up the Venetian blinds. He then fell back from the window pulling down the blinds with him. His head hit my legs weights, the bed and then a dull thud when his head hit the hard linoleum floor below. ...Dead.

It was a full moon that night, his open eyes peering through the blinds he was clutching. My weights were still swing above my legs. I couldn’t believe what I had

just experienced! My arms, one being in a cast, while the other was all bandaged up to cover my wounds and hold my IV lines in place, were held captive with all the cables and ropes that were attached to the bed's scaffolding as I tried frantically to hit the red "panic" button to alert the nurses in desperation. It was an awful sight... It is still the eeriest night of my life.

But there were many positive and fun highlights too. I remember after lying in my bed for over six weeks, I was absolutely thrilled the day the Navy Corpsman volunteered to push my bed out into the visitor's room area to watch the weekly movie being shown by the Red Cross. To me, it was as good as getting my first liberty pass after being at OCS in Newport for two months. The Red Cross volunteers were terrific people who also wrote many letters for me to my family and friends until my broken arm healed.

Also, I was very lucky to have many members of my squadron stop by and visit on a frequent basis. Prior to my crash, I was also fortunate to have met some really nice girls from Pensacola JC. Generally, their fathers would not let their daughters out of the house to be around "those flyboys". However, I tricked them by going to the PJC library on Sunday evenings and had met some very cute young ladies prior to my crash. When they learned I was in the hospital, they convinced their parents that it was OK to go to a hospital and thus, were "allowed" to visit "that poor Ensign who survived the mid-air."

Well, as soon as my squadron mates realized that DeMeyer had some "hot chicks" visiting him, the attendance really picked up. To my count, I believe two couples later got married as a result of meeting in my room. I always thought that was pretty neat.

A very dark day occurred, however, about 6 weeks after the crash when two JAG officers from the Navy Legal Department came to my room and informed me that due to the pending Crash Report, that I would be up for a court martial and a charge of manslaughter once I recovered. I was shocked at the news. I said, "I was in the right runway, the others guys were not and were in my space. How can this be?"..."Those are the charges, sir."

Over the next three months I developed a bleeding ulcer over the constant worry of my fate. Unbeknownst to me, a lot was going on behind the scenes over the Crash Report during that period. It seems that RADM John Lynch, who was CNABATRA (Chief of Naval Basic Training), at the time of the crash, had the required final sign-off on the safety report. Well, not too long after the crash, RADM Lynch was promoted to Commander of the Third Fleet, based in Naples, Italy. I later learned that he sent the report back, unsigned, and supposedly stated, "You are not going to pin this crash on some poor flight student. You get me the facts on what REALLY happened and then I will sign it. I will not sign a 'white wash'".

After about three months had passed the same JAG officers return for another visit

and informed me that all charges against me had been dropped. They explained that when the revised Safety Report was submitted, the true facts came out. The charges were as follow: 1. The Tower got “Supervisory Error” for clearing us to land then forgetting about watching the planes on final. 2. The two pilots in FD #236 got “Pilot Error” for making an extra long tear drop turn and attempting a landing on the wrong runway. 3. I got “Pilot Error” for being in the pattern in FD #229 and not realizing that the plane ahead of me was not to be seen landing on the alternate side of the runway. And, 4. The Runway Duty Officer got charged with “Primary Cause” of the accident for admitting to observing seeing our safe interval decreasing but not “waving us off.” The RDO is always an experienced Instructor-Pilot with three flight students to assist him on the “wheels watch” in the touchdown area of the runway. They were equipped with a radio truck capable to communicate any instruction to the planes, plus the use of visual wave-off paddles, and a flare gun. None were used, nor did anyone call out, “Planes on final, wave off,” ever issued. If that action would have been taken, the mid-air collision would have quite possibly been avoided. I do not know what happened to that Officer, but heard he was transferred out of Whiting Field right after the Final Crash Report was released.

Over the years, I have heard from other Naval Aviators that are familiar with the crash that they heard FD #236 was a Pilot-Instructor and a student pilot, who was on an instrument hop with the student “under the bag”. I don’t know if this is true or not, as I clearly saw two white helmets doing a canopy roll over me after hitting me and there was not a bag to be seen from my quick view.

Those that actually saw the accident happened were interviewed and supposedly quoted as saying that FD #226, which was below and behind me was adding power to make the landing. [For those that were stationed at NAS Whiting, they might recall there was the Navy Golf Course to the NE end of the runway. Observers said we actually collided over the golf course and that the momentum carried us forward crashing onto the grassy area just short of the runway]. It is speculated that one of the pilots must have seen me (FD #229) above and panicked. Suddenly, it appeared as though one of them must have pulled back on the “stick”, as their plane pulled up sharply in a 45° angle of attack and rammed the front of my plane (the engine area). One can see from the official crash photos that the prop of my plane severed the empennage section (vertical and horizontal stabilizer) from the fuselage on #226.

After 4-5 months of “traction,” my hockey goalie mask came off and I had only few scares showing. The cast came off my arm, and my left knee wound healed. However, the hole created from the missing flesh and muscle in my leg had not closed-in yet (at one time one could see both the tibia and fibula bones exposed when the bandages were changed). Not a pretty sight. Also, I had no feeling in my right foot or ankle for a long period. Dr. Harvey and Dr. Sinclair would come in on their daily morning rounds and stick pins in my foot and ankle and ask, “Feel this?” For six months I would say, “No”. Fortunately, the feeling did eventually come back. It was then that the doctors later confided in me they thought they might not be able to save my foot and it might have to be amputated. Thank God, eventually my leg

responded. Now, the main problem was to fix the broken femur just above the right knee. It was not mending.

Consequently, they decided to put me in a full “Spika” body cast, that went from my arm pits to my toes (with the exception of a “little trap door” (to take care of the body functions). Hopefully this would facilitate the femur to heal. This actually made my days so much better for me. Each morning after breakfast and being washed, shaved and freshened up for the day, the corpsmen would wheel in a gurney for me to roll over onto from my bed. It was like being a turtle, as they shortened two crutches for me so that I could push off and away and direct the gurney to wherever I wanted to go. It was so exciting to be able to leave the confines of my room after so many months surrounded by four walls. Each morning I looked forward to my daily adventures and travel around the hospital. It was great fun. Some days, I would be gone all day. My favorite place was the sun porch just outside the “geedunk” where I could visit with all of the other ambulatory patients and visitors. On occasion, I would need someone chase after the towel covering my “trap door” after a stiff breeze. I also had the best tan from my shoulders on up!

During my entire stay, I was fortunate to have some terrific room mates. I can’t say enough on how these great men helped me keep my morale and spirits up. LT Vel McDaniel, Capt. Ken McCoy, 2nd Lt. Don Dutton, Capt. Fred Craig (a Blue Angel), Ensign Dave Close, Capt. Larry Charbonneau, and LT John Cuttita, were some of the special guys that were with me.

After being in the body cast for over 4 months, the doctors decided to cut it off to see if the femur had healed. Boy, after all that time - the smell. Wow, you talk about “ripe”! When the entire cast was sawed in half and they opened it up like a clam shell, I just had to look and know things were not right. My right thigh had shrunk to a size so small that it was not larger than my wrist. And where the femur break was broken was a bulging knot, about the size of a tennis ball. I only had to look up and see the two doctor’s face of disappointment, and their eyes misting. I just laid there not making a sound, but had a steady stream of tears running quietly down my face. I was so devastated.

However, by the next day I had bounced back and suggested “I had a plan” to the doctors on their morning round. Now that is something. A broken-up Ensign had a plan for his orthopedic doctors. But I really did. Over the months of concern over the femur break, I had learned what the German’s did to downed Army Air Corps pilots during WW II. They experimented by installing stainless steel rods into their bones to promote a quicker recovery.

When sharing my plan they were not as enthusiastic as me. The reason they said was the high chance for a very dangerous staphylococcus infection taking this approach. I begged, stating that I had been in the hospital for nearly a year now, and I was willing to take the chance. They finally agreed, and not only put in a “kutchner intermedullary nail” down into my femur through my hip, but also did an

extensive bone graph around the break with graphs from my ileum bone.

So what happens? Sure enough I get a major “staph” infection and had 105 degree temperature for over 8 days. The nurses and corpsmen kept me from going over the “edge” by constantly giving me alcohol baths in their attempt to keep the temperature down. It was awful to be so terribly sick but finally the high temperature broke. It was just like seeing one of those old cowboy characters in a western movie who is found delirious in the desert. He is given water and the fever breaks. Within a half hour I was back to 98.7. The doctors estimated I lost over 30 pounds in those 8 days. Heck of a diet!

Also I remember how attentive the Catholic Chaplain’s were to me. They visited me a couple of times a week, and once I was in my body cast, would arrange to have me wheeled to the hospital chapel for Sunday Mass. For Christmas Mass, Father Fallon (CDR USN) arranged for me to be taken via ambulance to the beautiful large Chapel on the base for services. It was truly special.

After the infection was cured, I started to make a good recovery. I went through many stages of physical therapy at the hospital and eventually was strong enough to be taken down to the Training Tank (home of the Dilbert Dunker) and swim when it was not in use. After awhile, the corpsmen would just wheel me up to the pool edge and dump me in and off I’d go. I loved it and in a very short time I was swimming strong and my leg muscles were coming back.

I don’t recall how it happened, but later on I was offered a half day job on the CNABATRA staff as Assistant Public Affairs Officer, working under CDR Jerry Novak, a terrific man and officer. My routine was to go to PT and swim in the morning, then go down to CNABATRA HQ building in the afternoon. It was located directly across the street from the USS Lexington (CV-16), the training carrier. By that time I had progressed from a wheel chair to crutches and could get around pretty good. It was a great experience, as I was involved in setting up tours for the Congressmen, VIP’s, and Navy League groups that wanted to view the Naval Flight Training program up close. Later, when I graduated to a walking cane, I was able to be the Escort Officer for the Naval Aviation Command Choir, when they took a tour or gave a weekend performance, e.g. Johnny Carson Show, Memorial Service for the Apollo Three Astronauts, etc. The choir was under the direction of LT Butch Engwell, USN, a RIO/Navigator in heavy attack and made up of 40 flight school students in various stages of their training. It was great fun. I helped arrange for the sleeping facilities, coordinate the buses, meals etc. on their trips. I also had the experience of accompanying the NAS Pensacola Goshawk’s Football team on their trip to play Mexico University in Mexico City. Very few people probably know that the Goshawks’ quarterback in those days was no other than Roger Staubach, a LT Supply Officer on the CNABATRA staff, who is now in the NFL Hall of Fame.

On August 1, 1968 I was medically retired as a LT(jg). If I would have waited another month, I could have been retired as a full LT. However, I had landed a job

with Polaroid Corporation and did not want to miss the opportunity. Since that time I have maintained a fairly disciplined exercise routine. It has kept me out of a wheel chair, although I have had seven leg and ankle operations over the years since being retired.

Over the last 13 years, my legs, knees and ankle pain has increased a great deal. I have tried to stay mobile by working out religiously three times a week by doing a half hour of leg weights, followed by a half hour of a stationary bicycle, then finishing with a mile swim. This routine has helped me qualify for a total right and left knee replacement in the past two years. The result has been wonderful as I have been in constant pain for over 39 years, and the new knees have helped so much.

For many years I only went to Navy hospitals, but because of cutbacks and a lack of locations I switched my medical care to the Veteran Administration Hospitals. This has turned out to be a good decision, as I have been treated so well by the VA and they have been very professional fulfilling all my medical needs as my need for care has increased over the years.

Overall, I have really been blessed. I think daily of how lucky I was to live through this ordeal. Every June 16th, wherever I am, I stop and reflect on my good fortune and feel deeply saddened for the two pilots that were killed and think of their families and the pain they still must have at their loss. If possible, I will go to Mass on the 16th. In remembering that fateful day, I can't help but get emotional and teary-eyed.

Here I have been given an extra 40 years of life, when I should have been dead too. I have been given a wonderful life with a terrific wife and four great boys who are now young men and graduated from college. I get overwhelmed with having that life, and yet, so saddened by the death of two men I never knew.

Often, when on one of my long swims, I think about and even fantasize about what my life might have been if the crash had never happened. I would like to think I would have been a career Naval Officer and Aviator. I absolutely loved the Navy, and all my experiences and friendships. However, who knows?

Maybe the mid-air collision saved my life? As most of you who went through flight training in the 60's know, there were many who did not make it. Training accidents, car crashes in fast cars, pilots being shot down by missiles – either being killed or missing in action, even a “cold cat shot” has taken many. Two of my close flight school friends were killed in their duty of serving their country. 1st Lt. Lloyd Knudson, of Southern Cal, and LT. Jim Merrick, U. of Iowa, were two who I recall clearly and often. Maybe, I too would have “bought the farm” somewhere along the way and not be alive today. Who knows?

I do know I am a proud American who believes in God, Family, Flag and Country, and was very proud to serve as a Naval Officer. I still go down to Pensacola on a

frequent basis to see a Blue Angels performance (I have attended over 30 shows all over the United States), visit the Naval Aviation Museum, and hit the Mustin Beach O Club, for Friday Night's "Happy Hour."

"Yes, you can go back"!... Seeing all of the young officers - guys and gals - who are now training to fly the latest Navy aircraft who show the same energy, professionalism and commitment we had when we were going through flight school 40 years ago, is a joy to see and experience.

This is the story of Ensign David DeMeyer's mid-air collision on June 16, 1966 at NAS Whiting Field, near Pensacola, Florida.

Some background on David:

Born in Mount Vernon, Washington on May 5, 1943

- Mount Vernon was a small town of 7,000 (at the time, 28,000 today) in the Skagit Valley, an agricultural area some 70 miles north of Seattle, Washington, and 35 south of the Canadian border. The area borders Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands.
- Graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 1961.
- Graduated from Washington State University in 1965.
- Accepted and signed up for Navy Officer Candidate School while at WSU in the Spring of 1965, his senior year.
- His first airplane ride of his life was a flight from Seattle to Boston on his way to Newport, Rhode Island to start Naval OCS on June 18, 1965. As a result, David immediately became interested in aviation and took the aptitude test for flight school while being trained to be on a ship in the "black shoe" Navy. But after that initial flight he was determined to be in the "brown shoe" Navy, and become an "Airdale."
- Received his commission as a US Navy Ensign on October 28, 1965, with orders to report to Naval Flight Training, Pensacola, Florida.
- David soloed in the T-34 at NAS Saufley Field in March, 1966. However, he missed going to basic jets in Meridian, MS by finishing #14th out of 128 students who completed Primary Training that week. This was in a period when only 12 students were selected for the jet pipeline each week.
- David moved on to NAS Whiting Field to start basic training in the T-28 Trojan in April, and was assigned to VT-2 at North Field. David immediately took to the big prop trainer and loved its power and size. .
- David is an Active Member of the Tailhook Association

Sincerely,

David DeMeyer

LT(jg), USN Retired

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- Three Navy officers meet at the ***100 Year Anniversary Banquet Celebrating Naval Aviation*** at NAS Pensacola, May 5, 2011.

(L to R) Astronaut and Navy Capt. Gene Cernan, the last man to walk on the moon (Apollo 17); LT(jg) David DeMeyer, USN Retired; and Astronaut and Navy Capt. Neil



Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon (Apollo 11), pictured at Celebration banquet held at the *National Naval Aviation Museum*.

NAS Whiting Field, Pensacola, Florida 16 June 1966, 1611 hours CDT

Ensign David D. DeMeyer, USNR, survived this mid-air collision over NAS Whiting Field at Training Squadron Two (VT-2), on June 16, 1966, at 1611 hours.

Two T28C Trojan trainers collided approximately at 200' altitude, at 140 - 150 mph, in the landing pattern over North Field. Ensign DeMeyer, of VT-2 was returning from a solo training flight and, having turned from the 180° position, was leveling his wings for his final approach set-up in Fairdale 229 for touchdown, when his aircraft was suddenly hit from below.

Fairdale 236, also from VT-2, should have been landing 100 yards to the left on the port parallel runway. Instead, the student pilot and instructor were attempting to

land on the starboard runway where DeMeyer's aircraft was landing. It was observed that Fairdale 236 must have realized their error, panicked and sharply pulled up into DeMeyer's plane, taking off its nose, rolled inverted, and crashed on the ground below, exploding on contact. DeMeyer's plane was pushed up forcing it into a snap roll, spinning it into the ground. Fairdale 229 did not explode on the ground like Fairdale 236.

Both pilots in 236 were killed. Ensign DeMeyer was in the NAS Pensacola Hospital recovering for over two years, before being medically retired as a LT(jg) in August 1968.