

BIO FOR CONSIDERATION OF 'MARK STARR' HELO PIONEER AWARD

CDR ROBERT A CLOSE USN(RET)

Navy Helo Pilot #153

BASICS

Born 10 June 1923 San Francisco CA.

Father Benjamin Franklin Close (Coffee Broker); Mother Helen Carie Sayre Close

Father an Ensign USNR® in WWI, served as CO of 110' wooden Sub chaser SC-282

Mother was granddaughter Of George C. Pendleton, LtGov of TX post Civil War

Moved to Cincinnati OH in 1924; attended Kilgour Grade School and Withrow High School, graduating in June 1941

US NAVY 1941 – 1965

Entered US Naval Academy on Congressional Appoint July 1941 with class of 1945 and graduated in 1944 in war-accelerated program.

Spent obligated sea service time in heavy cruiser USS LOUISVILLE (CA-28) which was part of the 7th Fleet proving fire support for invasion of Leyte and Linguyan Gulf in the Philippines. The LOU was flagship at the Surigao Straits surface battle part of the Battle for Leyte Gulf. I was Turret Officer of #3 8" gun turret and stood JOOD watches. At Linguyan Gulf, LOU was hit by 2 suicide planes, returned to States for repairs. We arrived at Okinawa in time to be hit by a 3rd suicide. On way back to States, I received orders to flight training.

September 1945 – April 1947: Flight Training at Dallas (Stearman N2S's), Corpus Christi and Pensacola (North American SNJ's). I was winged at Pensacola on 27 September 1946 as aviator #P24769 after required 6 landings on CVL USS SAIPAN. Received Operational Training at NAS Jacksonville in SB2C-4E Curtiss Dive Bombers, including 6 landings on CVL USS WRIGHT.

April 1947 – April 49: Assigned to VA-5B (re-designated as VA-64) flying SB2C-5 and Douglas AD-1's on CORAL SEA, MIDWAY, and FDR. At end of that tour, rather than go to some boring shore duty, I applied for helo training.

HELICOPTERS Designated Helo Pilot # 153 on 29 May 1949

First tour – April 1949 – July 1951, HU-2 NAS Lakehurst NJ

All of my cruising with HU-2 was in the Sikorsky HO3S-1 helo. In addition, when not cruising, I flew and instructed in the HO3S-1, Bell's HTL's 1-7 (H-13) and the Piasecki HRP-1.

CRUISES:

Aug – Sep 1949: USS MISSOURI (BB-63), Mid'n Cruise to Cherbourg FR and Gitmo

Jan – Jun 1950: USS MIDWAY (CVB-41), Routine Med Cruise with SIXTH FLEET

Jun - Aug 1950: NAS Key West FL, Set up Original Air/Sea Rescue Unit in the Keys

Dec 50 - Mar 51: USS ORISKANY (CV-34), Post Yard Shake down, Jax and Gitmo

Jun - Aug 1951: USS MISSOURI (BB-63), Mid'n Cruise Oslo Norway and Gitmo

When not cruising, I was Power Plant Officer, then Personnel Officer

SPECIAL FLIGHTS:

22 Jun 1949: Flew Lakehurst BOQ Officer to Asbury Park NJ to pick up giant

Ice Sculpture for Commo (now called RADM Lower Half) Mills'
31 July: retirement party (he was then senior Blimper on duty)
8 Jul 1949: At Allentown PA; Put on Flt Demo in HO3S-1 for Govt Bond Drive
9 Oct 1949: At Mitchell Field NY; Put on Flt Demo in HO3S-1 for Navy Day Show
Oct 1949: One of 3 pilots assigned to 'fly under the hood' in a specially rigged dual-control HO3S-1 to test first blind-flying autopilot. Test unsuccessful because the AP registered fuselage attitude, not rotor path attitude.
4 Jun 1950: At Floyd Bennett Field NY to be target for radar calibration
Mid-Nov 1950: Cherry Point, New River NC, & USS PALAU (CVE-122); First demo of ship-to-shore landing using helo (an HRP-1 flown by LCDR Haaken Bach). I flew an HO3S-1, dropping a simulated A-bomb on landing beach.
Apr 1951: Checked out in both the Piasecki HUP-1 helo and the twin Beechcraft SNB's aircraft, flying admin flights for squadron.

BUREAU OF AERONAUTICS REPRESENTATIVE office at PIASECKI HELICOPTER CORP Morton PA

Served as Industrial Security Officer, Engineering Officer, and handled the Air Force contracts for the YH-21 series helo's. Was designated by the AF Air Material Cmd, Wright-Patterson Field OH as the Acceptance Test Pilot for the H-21's. I did the tests on the first 18 machines. In addition, flew the HUP helos bailed (signed over for testing) to the company. One of these was the HUP's first test helo, the XHJP-1. It had an experimental Sperry autopilot. I was one of several to declare it unsuitable – because it did not read rotor path. I flew the twin Beechcraft out of NAS Mustin Field for admin flights. In July 1952 was sent on TAD to Patuxant River for an indoctrination course at the Test Center. Was pulled out after one day and sent to Service Test to fill in for a pilot killed in a crash. Did Service Tests daily on the Sikorsky HRS-1 (H-19) and Sikorsky HO5S-1 Marine observation helo. Duty lasted 1 month until permanent replacement found

TACTICAL AIR SQUADRON 3 – NAS Coronado CA December 1953 – June 1955

Assigned as Helicopter Operations Officer. After a special 6 week course, was designated as a Nuclear Weapons Employment Officer. I served in both capacities during period from Sept 1954 through April 1955 while was assigned to AmphibGroup aboard USS ESTES which was flagship during the 'Passage to Freedom' operation of moving people from North to South Vietnam. When possible, I got my flight time in the Marine H-19 assigned to the ship. Got carted off to Yokosuka Japan naval hospital with a case of Asian lung crud. After this tour, I spent 2 years at the USNPG School for the Nuclear Eng (Effects) course from 1955 to 1957. I had TAD as standby pilot for the Monterey air station's rescue HUP-1. Next was assignment to Atomic Energy Commission in Washington in the Aircraft Reactor Branch, Division of Reactor Development, 1957 -1959. No helo time. In June 1958 I was ordered by the AEC, at the request of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, to join the BuAer team heading to the Saunders-Roe A/C Co on the Isle of Wight, England. Our job was to evaluate the giant, 10-engined SR Princess flying boat as a possible test bed for an airborne reactor power plant. Only one had been completed and flown just after WWII. It was in mothballs at the SR plant. The Brits cracked the sealant for us to enable inspection. Corrosion was so extensive it was obvious the aircraft was unsuitable. It was a delightful week in England.

HELICOPTER ANTISUBMARINE SQUADRON THREE (HS-3) – 23 Jan 1959 -16 Jan 1961

There were 3 ASW Task Forces, Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie, alternating duty 250 miles off Cape Hatteras NC. Each TF had one WWII ESSEX-class carrier with one HS squadron flying the Sikorsky HSS-1, one VS squadron in the twin Grumman S2F, 6-8 DD's, one submarine. HS-3 was in TF Charlie out of Norfolk. Our carrier, the TARAWA was based in Quonset RI.

The duty was basically 2 weeks on barrier duty, 2 to 4 weeks in port. This schedule seldom held due to storm damage, special cruises, maintenance problems. During my time, we actually filled in on all 3 carriers, the TARAWA, VALLEY FORGE, and LAKE CHAMPLAIN. In the squadron, I served first as Maintenance Officer, then Admin Officer, then Operations Officer.

Special Duty during this tour:

March 1959: Sent to Chicago as Fleet Rep for Provisioning Conference on blade tracker.

Nov 1959: Attended Canadian ASW School in Halifax Nova Scotia

12 Jan – 12 Feb 1960: Aboard VALLEY FORGE for Operation SKYHOOK off Puerto Rico. This was inflating and launching giant balloon to 120,000 feet to record radiation in connection with MERCURY space program. The carrier was needed to ensure zero wind for inflation and launching.

15 Jun – 25 Aug 1960: Mid'n cruise in VALLEY FORGE to the Mediterranean and Spain.

8 Dec - 27 Dec 1960: Aboard VALLEY FORGE as 'capsule recovery ship' for 12/19/60 launching of the MR-1A Mercury program shoot.

22 Dec: Enroute home in very stormy weather, I led the initial rescues of the 28 survivors of the T-2 tanker PINE RIDGE that broke up on 21 Dec.

HELICOPTER UTILITY SQUADRON FOUR (HU-4) - 18 July 1961 – 3 June 1963

After 6 months at the Armed Forces Staff College, I reported to HU-4 as Executive Officer. Squadron was flying somewhat old, worn out Sikorsky H-19's, a couple good H-34's and Bell H-13's. Squadron provided detachments aboard all non-aviation ships of the Atlantic fleet, plus Navy and Coast Guard Icebreakers. Squadron morale was not good due to a weak, low helo flight-time skipper that did not back up his officers and Chiefs. We had a fine group in both categories.

I made two minor cruises as XO.

11Dec – 17 Sept 1961: My one failed mission in helos. Was supposed to take an H-34 to Pensacola to aid in rescues after Hurricane Anna devastated the Gulf Coast. Could not get proper magneto check but headed south anyway. Made it as far as Patuxant River – lost wiring harness. Stayed there 6 days pulling engine, replacing harness, and going home.

4 Nov – 7 Nov 1961: Flew H-34 aboard USS CONSTELLATION for her post-1959 fire Pre-shakedown, shakedown cruise out of Brooklyn Navy Yard. On 6 Nov off the New Jersey, a boiler room explosion and fire terminated that cruise. 6 yard workers and 3 enlisted killed.

COMMANDING OFFICER HU-4 -18 July 1962 – 3 June 1963

I had a great year as skipper because of an excellent group of officers (with two exceptions), an outstanding XO, CDR Claude Coffey. I reverse the wimpyness of my predecessor, backed my department heads and the Chief's. After exerting some harsh discipline at first, the squadron settled down and it was a great year. Because of the hard work of all-hands, our final Admin/Op Inspection by our bosses got us 'Outstanding' marks.

FINAL TOURS:

1 Jul 1963 – 17 Jul 1964: Ops Officer in Amph Helo Carrier USS OKINAWA (LPH-3).

Flew ship's H-34 helo. Turned down job as XO of ship due to retire due to dissatisfaction in the direction I felt the Navy was going.

14 Aug 1964 – 25 Aug 1965: Spent my final obligated tour with the Atomic Energy Commission. Was Chief of Systems Engineering, R&D Branch, Division of Military Applications (nuc weapons).

POST NAVY:

Spent 2 years sailing/cruising in my 42' molded fiberglass ketch-rigged trimaran, cruising the Gulf and the Bahamas. When tired of being a sailing bum, I sold the boat and entered school. Attended NC State Univ, received MS in Mathematics, taught 1 Year at the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen TX. From 1970 to final retirement in 1984, was Ass't Professor of Math and Computer Science at Pan American University in Edinburg TX. Became Department Head in and occasional Acting Dean of Science and Math in 1981, retired finally in 1984.

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Bob Close in pilot seat of Sikorsky HSS-1
Wearing cold-weather 'Poopy Suit'
HS-3 Helo squadron aboard ASW Carrier
1961-1963



CDR Robert A Close
CO of HU-4 & Commander Fleet Air Det
NAS Lakehurst NJ 1963-1964



A typical HU-4 Detachment ready to board
a non-aviation ship for a long cruise
Pilots, Sikorsky H-19, crewmen and 'Cruise Pack'



CO USS OKINAWA, M "D" McDonald
Gen Wallace Greene, Commandant USMC
CDR Bob Close Ons Off. left rear



USS MIDWAY Helo Det Jan to May 1950
Chief Chimarusti, John Cole, Bob Close, Gelder



RADM Grantham RN & Bob Close aboard
HMS GLORY Valleta, Malta



Athens Greece - Piping US Ambassador Grady aboard
MIDWAY. Amb Grady, VADM Ballintine (Com6thFlt),
RADM Jocko Clark (ComCarDivFour),
RADM Carson (ComCruDivFour)



Bob Close's Rescue of AD-1 pilot LTJG
Don Mealy Feb 1950



1950 Aviations Man of the Year Award dinner for Frank Nicholas Piasecki
Frank is second from left, back row. I am third from left