

# WINDSOCK

The Valley Soaring Association Journal

Editor: Tom Jue

VSA web site: <http://www.valleysoaring.net/>

November 2006



## FUN FOLLOWS FLYING AT WILLIAMS SOARING!

Oktoberfest 2006 was a huge success. Over 100 attended. It was a complete day of activities for everyone. Glider pilots soared the skies. Friends gathered to hang out and catch up. Composite photo by Tom Jue. For more pictures, visit our web site at: [www.valleysoaring.net/gallery.htm](http://www.valleysoaring.net/gallery.htm)

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



### VSA VP and President

VP Peter Beecher (left) and President Luke Ashcraft (right) are enjoying the June 10, 2006 Crazy Creek Welcome bash at Williams Soaring. Photo by Tom Jue

This issue of *Windssock* nearly coincides with the conclusion of the 2006 soaring season in the Sacramento Valley and surrounding area. Moreover, 2006 marks the revival of the Valley Soaring Association! Currently, we stand at approximately 20 paid members, and our goal for 2007 is to double our membership. A list of paid members for 2007 is included in this issue of *Windssock*, so if you have any doubt about whether you are a paid member, please consult this list. And remember, the benefits of VSA membership include an annual subscription to *Windssock*, participation in the VSA race series, and a ton of camaraderie amongst fellow soaring pilots.

The 2006 soaring season was outstanding! In the month of May, the annual Doc Mayes contest at Williams Soaring Center was held. This year, the winner of the Lee Peterson trophy for longest flight was Ray Gimmy with a 241 SM flight. The contest for the Doc Mayes trophy for the most miles flown in the best two out of three days was very close. On day three, Peter Kelly missed a turn point due to a technical malfunction and thereby allowed Ray Gimmy to also win the Doc Mayes trophy for 2006. Ray flew 449 statute miles over two days. Nice job!

Most memorable for the month of July was an intense heat wave that overwhelmed the

Sacramento Valley and Mendocino Mountains. Thermals above Snow Mountain reached 14,500 feet, and cross-country flights to Hayfork and return were accomplished with average speeds greater than 70 mph and altitudes between 14,000 and 16,500 feet. Oxygen sales at Williams Soaring Center were reported to have reached an all-time high.

In August, a group of pilots made a safari to Lovelock, Nevada for four days of soaring in the Great Basin. The soaring weather in Lovelock was typical for August, with altitudes ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 feet and cross-country flights between 100 and 350 miles. Flights were made in blue-thermal conditions from Lovelock to Winnemucca, Battle Mountain, and Austin. Ramy Yanetz and Dean Aldinger flew extended routes from Truckee to Lovelock on Saturday and then made 500 kilometer return flights to Truckee on Sunday. Jim Indrebo made an immaculate off field landing in his ASW-29 on a remote patch of high desert road outside of Austin, Nevada. Although the retrieve was an eight hour ordeal, a great time was reportedly had by all.

The soaring season concluded with Octoberfest at Williams Soaring Center. The participation this year was huge! Approximately 27 pilots flew, and throngs of people arrived throughout the day. The VSA's Tom Jue professionally photographed the entire event and provided a slide show during the day. Although no courses were completed, it was a fine fall day in the Sacramento Valley. And remarkably, no land-outs were reported. After dinner, Jim Darke, the precision scorer for the VSA, announced the 2006 race series winners. Peter Kelly won the 2006 series with 10,152 points and in second and thirds places were Rich Parker and the venerable Bob Ireland with 8096 and 6890 points, respectively. Congratulations, and thank you to everyone who helped make Octoberfest and the VSA race series a great success this year.

VSA president,

Luke Ashcraft

## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Friends,

Firstly, our magnificent editor, along with our most estimable treasurer and noble President, have insisted that I put in a plug for the VSA and get you to join and pay your dues, and that means pay your dues now; we don't mean tomorrow, or next week, perhaps in the Spring, we, mean now. The Valley Soaring Association is you, and it is there for you and to serve you as you wish. Pony up now!

On with my column: Now, with the 2006 soaring season at an end, we step toward the grim and gloom of winter, and begin to endure and suffer the dismal void of life sustaining, thermal producing sunshine. But sometime in spring, joyous spring, when the sun rises high enough for surface temps to warm sufficiently for the resumption of flight sustaining convective activity, we will once again smile and converge as a flock together in the buoyant ether above and look to the verdant valleys and mountains below. But alas, now, with darkness and chill besetting us, we are left with nearly 4 to 5 months of few opportunities to fly high or far, but that a serendipitous confluence of favorable wind and meteorological conditions arise offering us stable, but not too moist air, with a sufficiently strong westerly component to create our Mendocino wave. Only woe to us for the rarity of this occurrence, and especially woe to those who are unavailable to come out and fly when the conditions for wave don't occur on the 2 of the 7 days of the week that our plebian friends are free to play.

At various times and in various forums, as well as many of the publications we subscribe to, the topic of currency and proficiency is mentioned or discussed. Now, with the "soaring" season pretty well concluded, we need not believe that all is lost; it is not necessary to pass the entire winter before the TV watching over-sized neanderthals pounding the hell out of one another over a lousy little pigskin ball, all the while vicariously reliving youthful dreams and becoming oversized to boot. Get off the couch! This time should and

can be put to good use...and using it just may save your life. The thesis is simple; without some flying on a regular basis, e.g., practicing take-offs, flying irregular patterns to landings, circling, exercising unusual attitude recoveries, and the like, comes spring, it is likely that the pilot's skill levels will be deteriorated to some degree, thereby raising the level of risk of safety to one's self and others. Instead of bad reviews for failing to practice for a concert, badly written obituaries may be penned for those who performed poorly when flying, or even worse, serious injury or maiming. So I suggest that you seriously consider heeding the recommendations of the wise and come out to WSC and do a little flying once or twice a month. Even taking an hour and a half of Kenny's time and being put through the drill of a mini BFR in the early spring, especially if you cannot make it out during the winter, would be of great benefit to improving and quickening one's skills for the coming season. And don't forget, one tow a month reduces you storage costs. Now that's a deal.

For me, as a relatively newer pilot, I plan to come out and fly on some regular basis and take further instruction time with Kenny, with special emphasis on unusual attitude recovery, landing patterns, and a little aerobatics. Hopefully, this will aid me to be a more confident, qualified, and safer pilot next year.

My best thoughts to all of you.

pb



**Vice President Peter Beecher**

Peter Beecher (left) greeting Nirakar (right) at the June 10, 2006 Crazy Creek Welcome bash at Williams Soaring. Photo by Tom Jue

## THIS YEAR VSA MEMBERSHIP DRIVE 2007 WE WANT YOU!

We are off to a great start! We wish to thank the members below for their 2007 membership.  
**If you do not see your name on the list below, join or renew your membership now by US Mail or PAYPAL!**

DIANA BISHEY  
 HAL CHOUINARD  
 WNFIELD CURTIS  
 JIM DARKE  
 DAVID L. DAWSON  
 ROBERT K. DISMUKES

SCOTT DOCKTER  
 GINNY FARNSWORTH  
 H. RAY GIMMEY  
 JAMES HERD  
 MATT HERRON  
 ANDY HOGBEN

ROBERT IRELAND  
 THOMAS JUE  
 GARY KEMP  
 RICHARD OGDEN  
 LARRY OSTHEIMER  
 RICH PARKER

MICHAEL PAULSON  
 FRANK PEALE  
 LARRY ROBERTS  
 JOHN S. SINCLAIR  
 CINDI TITZER

## LAST YEAR VSA MEMBERSHIP ROSTER 2006

PETE ALEXANDER  
 PETER ANDERSON  
 JOHN A APPS  
 LUKE ASHCRAFT  
 PETER BEECHER  
 DIANA BISHEY  
 ERNET BROCK  
 RICHARD W. CARTER  
 HAL CHOUINARD  
 WNFIELD CURTIS  
 JIM DARKE  
 DAVID L. DAWSON  
 ROBERT K. DISMUKES

SCOTT DOCKTER  
 CYNTHIA DONOVAN  
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 H. RAY GIMMEY  
 MIKE GREEN  
 RICHARD HANSCHU  
 JACK HARKIN  
 JAMES HERD  
 MATT HERRON  
 ANDY HOGBEN  
 LARRY R. HOOD

ROBERT IRELAND  
 GREG D. JOHNSON  
 THOMAS JUE  
 PETER J. KELLY  
 GARY KEMP  
 CHRISTOPHER LERMA  
 WILLIS R. LUDLOW  
 NOELLE C. MAYES  
 WILLIAM MC CLELLAN  
 MARVIN MC CORMICK  
 MICHAEL MC CORMICK  
 MARK A. MILLER  
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Mail to: **VSA, c/o Williams Soaring, 2668 Husted Rd, Williams, CA 95987**

To contain costs, our preference is to distribute via email. If email doesn't work for you, please contact the editor to make other arrangements. Donations are appreciated to cover additional costs.

## VALLEY SOARING ASSOCIATION – OFFICERS, ADMINISTRATION and STAFF

### VSA Officers



**President**  
 Luke Ashcraft



**Vice President**  
 Peter Beecher



**Treasurer**  
 Cindy Donovan

### VSA Administrators & Staff



**Williams Soaring Center**  
 Noelle & Rex Mayes



**Web Master**  
 Peter Kelly



**Newsletter Editor**  
 Tom Jue



**Newsletter Editor II**  
 Ginny Farnsworth



**Mascot**  
 Brutus

# WILLIAMS SOARING CENTER

## 2006-7 Calendar of Events at Williams, CA

### 2006

Nov 23 Thur	Thanksgiving. Open! Special Hours: 9AM to 3PM
Nov 24 Fri	Open
Nov 25-26 Sat & Sun	Open during Thanksgiving weekend
Dec 24 Sun	Special Hours 9am-noon
Dec 25 Mon	Christmas. Closed! Happy Holidays!

### 2007

Feb 6-11 Tue – Sun	Closed for SSA Convention in Memphis, TN (Actual convention dates are Feb 8-10)
May	Doc Mayes Memorial (actual date to be announced)
Oct 13 Sat	Oktoberfest

## FROM THE EDITORS

### In Memory of Owen Jones

By Ginny Farnsworth

Owen Jones, recent owner and pilot of the ASW 24 OJ, passed away peacefully on Saturday night, November 11, 2006.

There were two things that really stood out about Owen, even to those who didn't know him well. The first was his sense of integrity, which permeated everything he did, from architectural work to soaring. The second was the joy he took and gave everyday on his way through life.

Owen was a sailplane pilot for about 6 years, and a power pilot, flying a Grumman Chita, for about 2 years. He believed in proficiency and precision in flying, and some of his best times were playing up there in the skies.

Together, we flew thermals, wave, convergence, and his favorite - miles of cloud streets - at Crazy Creek Gliderport, in Middletown, CA. He was one of the regular "Monday Fliers", and his comment on landing, once he stopped smiling, was consistent, "Oh! Wasn't that great"?

Owen knew how to relish the joy of soaring. Along with flying, he highly valued the time he spent with his family. He has taken 3 generations of family members flying over the years. He is greatly missed, but I sense his presence will be with us on those days when cloud streets stretch to the horizons.

### In Memory of Joe Rasymas

Joe Rasymas, Soar Minden's chief instructor for many years passed away recently as a result of injuries suffered in a glider accident at MEV (Minden, NV) on 12 September. He will be sorely missed by our community. We wish to express our deepest condolences to his family.

### Richard Hanchu Is Leaving Us

Richard Hanchu is leaving for New Zealand. Over the years, he has hosted the Williams Soaring and Valley Soaring Association web sites. He has devoted an inordinate amount of time and effort to support our soaring community. Richard will be sorely missed at WSC. Hopefully he'll keep us updated from New Zealand!

### Great Articles from Members

We continue to receive great articles from VSA members. Is there someone you would like for us to profile? Take matters into your own hands, contribute your own article! Contact us at tkjesq-VSA@yahoo.com

### Next Issue

The next quarterly issue is scheduled to be released in February 2007. Don't miss it!

# My First Solo

BY GEOFFREY SNOW



## Geoffrey Getting a Splash of Tradition

Geoffrey solos on August 21, 2006. Kenny Price (left) congratulates Geoffrey (center) as his father (right) does the tradition! Photo provided by Noelle Mayes

Monday August 21, 2006 is a day I will never forget because it was the day that I soloed for the first time in an ASK-21 in Williams, CA. My dad is one of the biggest inspirations in my life and the reason I got the opportunity to start gliding about a year ago.

On the Sunday before my solo flight he told me that "you will solo many times, and there will be other milestones in your flying journey, but there is nothing like the first time." Everyone who has soloed knows that this is a very true statement and my solo was probably one of the biggest achievements of my life.

On Monday morning I had gotten up and had breakfast and when I arrived with my Dad in Williams it was about 8:15 in the morning and a beautiful day to fly.

Kenny Price, my instructor, and I did two flights together and before I knew it Kenny asked me if I thought I was ready to solo. I said yes and I knew that I was, but my stomach was a ball of knots.

At that point I realized that the rest of my family was there including my Mom, my brother Jeremy, my grandma, my grandpa, my uncle Greg, and my grandma's caretaker Leticia.

As I did my preflight checklist, Kenny hooked me up to the tow plane and my Dad and my Grandpa were taking photos, I felt like I was going to hurl! My brother was ready as my wing runner and the tow pilot was putting up his windows. I thought that I was going to have a heart attack, but I gave my brother a thumbs-up and gave the pedals full deflection. The tow plane revved the engine and I was off.

The thing I found very comforting was that once I was moving and had to be in control of the sailplane I was very relaxed and I was strangely calm and focused on my goal; have a great time and not kill myself doing it.

I released at 3000ft and it was one of the most peaceful feelings to be soaring alone with only the Red tail hawk and the sound of rushing wind to keep you company. I remember looking out the canopy and just thinking "Wow, I am really up here alone." I closed all the vents for a few minutes and it was just utter silence. Peace.

I flew around for about ten minutes until I had to be at 1500ft to prepare to enter the pattern and do my pre-landing checklist. I circled and headed to pattern entry at 1200ft. I made my radio call at 1100ft which is, "Williams traffic, this is glider Kilo-Papa downwind 1 6."

At this point I was at 1000ft and parallel to the runway and when I turned base I was around 800ft and pulled out half spoilers at about 750ft. When I turned final I realized I was a little low so I put the spoilers in for about seven seconds and then pulled them back out to half.

I flared and I landed, just short of the white lines and rolled down the runway to the staging area. As I stopped I smiled and told myself that I just had a great flight and I will never be able to do that again so remember it, cherish it and live it in future flights.

As I opened the canopy my grandpa was the first one to greet me and he told me, "I am so proud of you." This meant a great deal to me especially coming from my grandpa who flew for Pan Am for almost 30 years, and who has flown every thing from 747s to gliders.

As I got out, my instructor, Kenny, was coming over and I said, "I got a little slow on final didn't I?" and all he said was, "You had a great flight."



## Gift from Dad

Geoffrey's grandfather (right) looks on as Geoffrey (left) holds the special coin presented by his father. Photo provided by Noelle Mayes

After that the rest of my family came over and my dad presented me with a coin that read:

He rode upon a cherub and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. On this date August 21, 2006 Geoffrey D. Snow did shed the bonds of gravity and return safely to earth.

All I could do was to give my dad a big hug and say thank you. Then everyone wanted to take pictures with me, but there was one picture that is special.

I was shaking hands with my instructor and my dad couldn't resist, but to throw a bucket of water over my head. Some of you may ask how I didn't see this coming, well just look at the picture.

Yep that was pulled off pretty well. I had no clue in the world. A while later Kenny cut the back off my shirt to hang up on the ceiling (yes that is right not my shirt tail, but the entire back) and we wrote in my log book.

A little while later Kenny took my grandpa up for a ride. That was the first time my grandpa had been in an airplane of any kind in nearly ten years. When they landed I thought that my grandpa had just died and gone to heaven because he was more excited then, than any other time I have ever seen him. After that I said thank you to Kenny and we all went to lunch as a family. We all had a great lunch and then headed back home. As if the day hadn't been good enough already, as a bonus I got my braces off the same day.

That night I lay in bed with slippery teeth dreaming about the glorious flight I had that day and all the people who made it happen for me such as my dad, my grandpa, Dave Dawson, who introduced me to soaring, and Kenny Price, the best instructor in the world, thank you all. My first solo flight is under my belt with many more to come, but there will be no others like it because it was the first and only First Solo.

## *Tips From Your Tow Pilot*

BY MARK HAFFER

It is the usual tremendous day at Williams Soaring Center. The time is 11:00 a.m. and most everybody has launched already. You are in a hurry to join your comrades in the air. Slap a few wings on, do a quick control check, roll out and wag your rudder. As you are rolling for taking off you finish your pre takeoff check list while preoccupied with confirming in your mind that you hooked everything up properly. Everything seems fine, until you notice the tow plane is climbing quite a bit faster than you are.

Hmm, must be lots of lift out there; can't wait to get off and play. The tow plane is wagging his rudder. Something is wrong with the tow plane, I better get off. O schucks, I'm only 400 feet agl. No problem, I have landed many times like this before with Kenny. What the f\*\*\*, I am sinking like a lead weight. There must be lots of sink.

Or, my mind might not be as focused on flying as it should be. Maybe the tow pilot wagging his rudder might mean that my spoilers are open. Wagging the rudder to signal that the spoilers are open on the glider is a somewhat new signal. The first time I had a chance to use this signal as a tow pilot I hesitated to use the signal. We were low, but climbing alright. My fear was that the glider pilot would panic, thinking something was wrong with me, and get off tow at a low altitude with spoilers inadvertently open. So I continued climbing and turned towards the IP. When I was plenty high over the IP I wagged my rudder and sure enough the glider released immediately.

Later the glider pilot acknowledged that he thought something was wrong with the tow plane. Subsequently, the few times the glider pilot failed to lock his spoilers, I would climb high over the IP before giving the wagging signal. More often than not, the glider pilot would release instead of closing the spoilers.

The moral of this story is "know your tow signals" and if you don't know them, review them. Officially, the signal is for the tow pilot to rock their wings if they are signaling you to release because something is wrong with the tow plane. Focused minds plus focused lift equals good soaring.



**Mark Haffer**

Mark Haffer at Williams Soaring on April 26, 2005  
Photo taken by Noelle Mayes

*About the author:* Mark Haffer started soaring in Vacaville circa 1990, and began towing at Vaca-Dixon in 1992-93. He is an accomplished aerobatics pilot (when not towing gliders) and a CFIH. Mark's knowledge of the lift patterns near WSC are appreciated by all.

# Kenny Price at USAF

INTERVIEW BY GINNY FARNSWORTH



## Air Force Academy Glider Cadets

Photo taken Feb. 28, 2006 at Colorado Springs, CO.

Have you ever wondered how Air Force pilots are trained for the rigors of flight? Mastery of the skills required to pilot jet fighters begins with impeccable sensitivity to the aircraft's flight characteristics, and a decisive, precise pilot response. What better way to fine tune these skills than by learning to fly a state of the art sailplane?

History tells us that gliders have been part of the USAF fleet for years. Many people are aware of the gliders that were flown in WWII to deliver troops and supplies behind enemy lines. These ships were big and cumbersome, but airworthy, and most importantly, they were silent.

More recently, the Air Force Academy has used gliders such as the Blanik L-13 and L-23 to hone sensitivity in stick and rudder skills. Blaniks are durable, all metal gliders, well suited for learning basic skills and initial soaring expertise.

In the past year, the USAF acquired several high performance gliders for their sailplane fleet. They purchased three Schempp-Hirth single place Discus 2B's and two Duo Discus ships for dual flying.

With the high performance gliders available in the fleet, a new question emerged. Who would train the pilots to fly, and ultimately soar, in these competition grade ships?



## L23 Super Blanik Trainers

All metal L23 Super Blanik Trainer on the flight line. Photo taken Feb. 28, 2006 at Colorado Springs, CO.



## Single Seat Discus 2B

Cadets observing new single place Discus 2B. Photo taken Feb. 28, 2006 at Williams, CA.

Solution!!! In January, 2006, the USAF contacted Williams Soaring Center to inquire about the qualification process for their pilots transitioning from the Blaniks to the Schempp-Hirth gliders.

They were impressed by the operation at WSC. Their fleet included both the Discus and the Duo Discus models, and they had a flight training program in place utilizing these aircraft.

Kenny Price, recipient of the SSA "Top-producing CFIG" award for both Region II and the nation, was recruited to be flight instructor for the Air Force Academy's glider instructors' program.



## Training at Williams Soaring

Kenny Price (rear seat) was the top producing CFIG for Region II and the nation in 2005. Photo taken Feb. 17, 2006 at Williams, CA.

The Academy's goal was for the new Discus ships to be used for collegiate competitions around the US during the spring and summer months.





**Discus 2B**

From left to right: USAF Capt. Matt Davis, Capt. Rob Williamson and Kenny Price. Photo taken Feb. 28, 2006 at Colorado Springs, CO.

The privilege of flying the higher performance sailplanes is an incentive for the officers and cadets to master the skills needed to compete among the best glider pilots in the world. After thorough consideration, Kenny accepted the challenge.

In January, 2006, Captain Matt Davis, Captain Rob Williamson, and Major Mark Matticola arrived at Williams Soaring Center to begin training. They were all proficient USAF instructor pilots in the Blanik L-13 and L-23. They found adjusting to the new, high performance ships to be a big jump in their learning curve, and they were soon engrossed in learning new skills. With his usual finesse as an instructor, Kenny guided them through the process, and before long, they were flying very well.

Kenny made the trip to the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs. The task seemed straight-forward enough in theory. The pilots had to transition from the Duo Discus to the single-seated Discus and get checked out. However, Colorado presented its own set of problems.

There was adverse weather, bad weather, and some really terrible weather! In addition there was all the paperwork involved to complete the sorties, foreign object detection checks on the runways, and, well, more bad weather...

The initial one-week commitment that had seemed realistic in California conditions now became a major challenge. Again, everyone was willing to work hard to make it happen.

The daily glider operations were conducted like a finely tuned watch. The discipline on the flight line compared to that on an aircraft carrier. The rules were strict and straightforward.

When an aircraft was up, all other aircraft movement stopped. There were strictly enforced lines that only the tow pilots could cross, and others that no one was permitted to cross. To quote CFIG Kenny Price, "This was the safest, most well managed flight line I have ever had the privilege of observing or being part of."

The tow pilots were all Air Force veterans of various campaigns, including Viet Nam, Desert Storm, and others. They now live on the base and tow five days a week for 6-8 hours each day. The cadets and tow pilots start flying at sunrise each day. At 1300 hours, there is a shift change. The five morning pilots park the aircraft and are greeted by five fresh pilots who tow until sundown.

The tower personnel are monitoring a very busy area, nicknamed "The Zoo" for its diversity and pace. The traffic is organized with power traffic to the east, glider traffic to the west, and the skydivers in the middle.

During the training, the loudspeaker system issued constant downwind aircraft warnings. When the crosswind increased to over 10 knots, or the headwind increased to over 17 knots, all aircraft operations were ordered to shut down, much to the dismay of the cadets. When conditions calmed down and operations were cleared to continue, a big cheer could be heard from the cadets, who were always eager to return to flying.

From Kenny's perspective, one of the greatest pleasures of the mission was working with the enthusiastic Air Force cadets. He felt honored to work with young people who were doing exactly what they wanted to do with an abundance of motivation and spirit. "We should be proud of these youth who are immersing themselves in the pursuit of excellence, fueled by their love of flight," is his resounding praise. "Working with these officers and cadets has given me a feeling of real pride."

As the training drew to a close at the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, CPT Matt Davis, CPT Rob Williamson, and MAJ Mark Matticola received their endorsement from CFIG Kenny Price in the Duo Discus and the Discus 2B. They are now training qualified Air Force officers to fly these magnificent sailplanes. This coming season, you may meet them in regional competitions around the United States.



**Veteran Tow Plane Pilots**

These tow plane pilots served in various campaigns from Viet Nam to Desert Storm. Composite photo taken Feb. 28, 2006 at Colorado Springs, CO.

# Google Maps Me Back to Viet Nam

BY PAT and JJ SINCLAIR



## F-111 Tactical Fighter Bomber

This F-111 isn't really on fire. The crew is just screwing around dumping fuel and igniting it by selecting after-burner. Photo provided by JJ Sinclair.

I would like to go flying, but It's winter and there's no lift, besides, right now it's raining like hell !!!

What to do? Bored stiff, I hit Google Maps, selected satellite, then typed in Vietnam.

Up came a beautiful photo of the whole country. I dropped the scale down to 1-inch equals 20 miles and started working my way up the coast. Lush green jungle came right down to the edge of a dark blue sea. Here and there little islands dotted the seascape. Beautiful, just beautiful, how could such a gut-wrenching conflict have gone on here for more than 10,000 days? Unusual sentiment for an old Cold-Worrier, you ask? This is the new JJ. I'm going to be down right warm & fuzzy from now on, sensitive, considerate, non-confrontational, well, maybe I should stop with warm & fuzzy. Anyway, this is kind of fun, winter flying, via Google.

Slowly I worked my way north (I'm on a dial-up) as I dragged the satellite image along, I passed Da Nang then flew by the DMZ As I waited for each new image to appear, I started remembering missions I had flown back in 1968. Our squadron was tasked to make a run up the coast, every month to get side-looking radar images of everything from the DMZ to Hai Phong. We would launch from Ton Son Nhute Air Base located on the outskirts of Saigon, then hit a tanker a little south of the DMZ. These missions would start late in the afternoon, so that we could get gassed up while it was still daylight. With our tanks topped off, we would head north with the setting sun on our left and darkness ahead. The last rays of sunlight silhouetted Mu Gia Pass. Let me tell you, we spent some fun nights over there. Mu Gia is the first choke-point on the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail as it winds its way

south from the small town of Vinh. We would bomb the hell out of the place by day and Uncle Ho and his band of boys & girls would put it back together each night. Our job in the RF-4 was to document the nightly reconstruction. We would come screamin' in low and fast, poppin' photo flash cartridges with all cameras running. The gunners would shoot at the flashes and by doing so, miss us (usually). Mu Gia was strictly, one pass & haul-ass, territory. After we had turned the place into a gigantic gravel pit, We started everything all over again about 30 miles south at a place called Ban Karai Pass.

By the time we passed Vinh, it would be bitch black and things started getting spooky. Flying alone and showing no lights we waited for the first sign that somebody knew we were coming to visit, tonight. We had a neat little black box that picked up the SA-2 (surface to air missile) signals and fed the audio into our intercom A little north of Vinh we would get the first indication that we were being observed..... The little black box would start saying something like; vaarrump!----vaarrump!-----vaarrump! That meant a search radar was sweeping us every 15 seconds or so. After this went on for a while the little box would start saying; womp! – womp; womp-womp! This meant that we had become an item of interest and someone had switched the radar to sector scan. This would go on for a while then we would hear; womp-womp---umph-umph; womp-womp; umph-umph. This meant somebody had become VERY interested in us and switched a height-finder radar on. Now, this was very disturbing information to a couple of guys just flying along, minding their own business. To be able to launch a missile, one needs range, track, speed and height; the addition of a height-finder signal meant somebody now had all four!

Drrrrrrrrrrrr, Oh No, the dreaded rattlesnake sound! The SAM site had switched to high pulse and someone was now reading their pre-launch checklist!. In our dark little cockpit, the missile alert light shone like the rising sun! This was not good; Uncle Ho was dusting off a little present for us.

We both knew what to expect next and sure enough, the MISSILE LAUNCH light came on! This meant the site had turned on missile guidance.

We scanned the darkness in the direction of the threat looking for a trail of flame coming from a SA-2 booster rocket. Nothing!

What should we do?----- Absolutely nothing, we just kept cruising north, wings level. Why?

We were feet-wet and just outside missile range. Or, so we thought? You see, a knowledgeable enemy radar operator could give all the indications that a missile had had just been fired, without actually doing so.. By doing this, he might be able to detour us from our assigned task, which was to bring back good side-looking radar images of everything from the DMZ to Hai Phong Harbor.



### JJ Sinclair's 200<sup>th</sup> Combat Mission

This photo was taken right after JJ Sinclair's 200th combat mission in the McDonnell RF-4C Phantom jet fighter in December, 1968 at Ton Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. Photo provided by JJ Sinclair.

But, what if Uncle Ho & the boys had floated a missile out in the South China Sea, on a barge? He didn't and that's why I'm still here, trying to be the best glider pilot at Williams.

*About the author:* JJ Sinclair retired from the Air Force in 1974 after 22 years of service. He flew as crew member on:

- B-29 (left gunner)
- KC-97 (boom operator)
- B-52 (navigator & radar navigator)
- RF-4C (navigator)
- F-111F (navigator)

After retiring, JJ established an FAA Certified Glider Repair Station in Placerville, California, and operated that facility for over 20 years. He has flown 1000K zig-zag in his LS-7 as well as a 1000K triangle in his Nimbus-3, but takes more pride in having flown Silver, Gold and Diamond Badge Flights in the wooden Duster that he constructed in 1973.

## From WWII Bombers to Modern Gliders VSA Member Profile - Windy Curtis BY JIM DARKE



### B-24 Liberator

From 1944-45, Windy Curtis was co-pilot in a B-24 Liberator, similar to the one above. He flew with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in England, flying combat missions over Germany. Photo provided by Jim Darke.

From an instrument training approach into Wink Texas in an AT-17 to daylight bombing runs over Germany in the right seat of a B-24 to learning to fly Gliders in Auburn is a long journey. These are some of the stops that Windy Curtis has taken along his path through aviation. Windy is a long time VSA member who lives in East Sacramento.

It took about 18 months for Windy to progress from a raw aviation cadet to the copilot of a B-24 Liberator. He wanted to fly night fighters because he did well with instrument flying and there was considerable instrument flying involved with night fighters. So of course he received orders to be assigned with bombers.

Since he had no formal training in the B24, he was assigned the copilots seat. His 8 to 10 hour long missions were flown with the 8th Air Force out of England during 1944 - 1945.

Those missions were flown as part of the swarm of bombers that were sent over Germany late in the war. A mission on any given day might consist of several Wings. A 'Wing' was composed of three 'Groups' and three squadrons of 12 aircraft each made up a Group.

All of the aircraft within a squadron flew in close formation to increase defensive firepower. Only the lead aircraft actually aimed the bombs. Because they were in close formation the other planes released when they saw the lead drop his bombs.

The B-24 flew a little bit lower but had greater range and payload capacity than the B-17 Flying Fortress. Cruise was at around 185 knots TAS at 29,000 feet. According to Windy, the 4-engine bomber didn't handle all that well



### **AT-17 Bobcat**

Windy Curtis did instrumentation training Wink, Texas. Circa 1944. Photo provided by Jim Darke.

when fully loaded at that altitude. Of course that was before the large bird got any holes in it.

A more subtle difference between the B-17 and the B-24 was that because the B-24 had a high wing and the B-17 had a low wing, the B-17 floated longer if it had to land in the water. To that, one day Windy saw the crew of a B-17 standing on the wing of their aircraft in the English channel as they waited for a British Wellington bomber converted for SAR work to come drop them a small boat.

The SAR bird was referred to as a "Blimpy." The Blimpy was then followed up by a visit from a destroyer. This kind of coordinated SAR effort was some comfort in a very uncomfortable environment.

With more than a little bit of an understatement, Windy describes his 35 missions as, "Some that were milk runs and some that were kind of scary."

He explained how one judged the relative closeness of the flak. "If you could simply see it, that wasn't all that close. If you could hear it, it was kind of close. If you could see the distinctive dumbbell shape as the shell detonated, it was really close."

Windy recounts how the trip back to England was even more cold and noisy than usual one day after a burst of flak took out the plexiglas panels over the pilot and copilot seats. A few days later, he asked to have his parachute repacked after it got wet. The rigger found pieces of flak inside the chute pack.

His description of large numbers of aircraft making non-directional beacon (NDB) instrument approaches through the ubiquitous English crumbly weather sounds almost as scary as the flak. As the lead passed directly overhead the station (that was the 'cone of silence'), he would wiggle his wings and break off to start a circling descent.

Each aircraft would follow at a fixed interval. It was basic time, distance, heading flying down through the clouds. The goal was to have three aircraft on the runway at the same time. Ideally, one aircraft would be

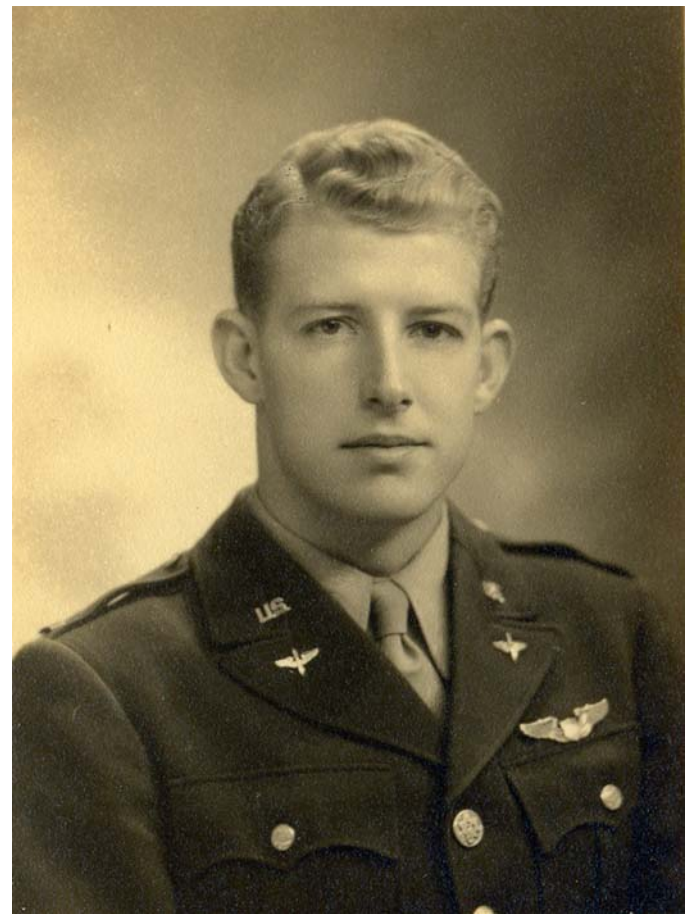
turning off the runway, one aircraft would be at midfield and one aircraft would be touching down.

When he returned home in 1945, the war with Japan was not over. People and aircraft were being redeployed to the Pacific theater. Because he had completed his 35 missions, Windy was given the option of mustering out. He literally flipped a coin and the result was that for him, the war was over.

After the war, Windy took about a ten-year break from flying. Flying is something that is difficult to give up once it gets a hold of someone. So Windy took up power flying.

He holds a current medical and still commits aviation in a Cessna 152 from time to time. When power flying didn't provide enough of a challenge, Windy took glider lessons at Auburn in the mid sixties.

He followed the operation up to Sierraville when it moved and has logged time with Silverado Soaring and Lagoon Valley in Vacaville along the way to his current spot with the VSA in Williams. He is a regular fixture at the Doc Mayes and Oktoberfest events. Let's hope he gets back into the cockpit of an ASK21 or the Duo sometime soon.



### **Lt. Winfield T. Curtis**

A very young Lt. Winfield T. Curtis as he was surviving his combat missions flying over Germany during WWII. Photo provided by Windy Curtis.