

U.S. Naval Enlisted Bombardier/Navigator Memorial Plaque Dedication

**RA5C Vigilante site
Sanford FL International Airport
10 November 2007**

**CDR Don Tise (USN Retired)
Guest Speaker**

We are here today to honor and recognize a very unique group of men who served their country with distinction – **The Naval Enlisted Bombardier/Navigator**.

Until the early 1950's, there were basically only two types of Officers in Naval Aviation Carrier Squadrons – Naval Aviators and Aircraft Maintenance Officers. There were also a few Naval Aviation Observers (NAO), however, this position was used primarily for Aerographers.

With the development of Carrier-Based Aircraft (i.e. AJ Savage, followed by the A3 Skywarrior and the A5 Vigilante) that had the capability to deliver a nuclear weapon, this suddenly created the need to develop and train crews for this task.

Of all the initial options studied and tested, which included various Officer Programs, the use of well-motivated and skilled Enlisted Men to team with the Pilot and fill the billet of Bombardier/Navigator was by far the most successful from its earliest days.

The Enlisted B/N Training Program was relatively short-lived (10 years), but filled a critical need extremely well during its existence. It began in late 1954 when a notice went out to the fleet for volunteers. The first Enlisted B/N was AMH-1 Abe Fennel, who graduated from Heavy Attack Training Unit Atlantic (HATWING-1) in September 1954. The program ended in 1964 with the graduation of ATC Cal Getz and AD-1 Al Hutto. It should be noted that the training classes included both Officer and Enlisted Men. The Enlisted B/Ns competed very favorably in this situation. Almost all of the Enlisted B/Ns were on the East Coast. The West Coast did not really endorse this concept. A total of 123 Enlisted Men graduated from this program and served with distinction.

This program had some major incentives for an Enlisted Man. First, it provided an opportunity to fly in Navy Jets, second, to draw flight pay in a time of tight budgets and salaries and third, if desired, and opportunity to advance into the Limited Duty Officer (LDO) Program. About 65% took the LDO path. CDR "Rotten" Ralph Feeback, (USN Retired) is one example of where this program could lead.

The competence and performance of the Enlisted B/Ns was so good, that they were welcomed into every squadron. Since they were in effect occupying an Officer's billet, they frequently performed duties normally done by Officers. For example, as a First Class Petty Officer, Ralph Feeback was the Squadron NATOPS Officer.

Do you remember the "Totem Pole" that was in front of the Navy Exchange at NAS Sanford in the early/mid 1960's? It listed the current ranking of the top crews in Bombing Derby Competition. The Enlisted B/Ns usually dominated the rankings, although there were only about 25% or less of the B/Ns in an A3 Squadron.

The Enlisted B/N Program ended when the Navy fully developed and implemented the Naval Flight Officer (NFO) Program, which provided a full career path for flying Officers who were not Pilots.

The Enlisted B/N Program played an important part in Naval Aviation history, was the "God Father" of the current NFO Program and played an important role in the Navy's development of nuclear weapons delivery procedures.

On a personal note, I have first hand experience regarding the professionalism of Enlisted B/Ns. During my 1963 cruise on the USS Saratoga, flying the A3 Skywarrior, I was privileged to serve with three Enlisted (or former Enlisted) B/Ns, George Beers, Pat Kear and Denny Noto. During my 1963-1964 Transition Training in RVAH-3 to the RA5C Vigilante, I received much of my training from men like Chick Winship and Al Hutto, who did a superb job! Denny Noto also served with me in RVAH-9 on the USS Saratoga during the first med cruise deployment of the RA5C in 1964-1965.

The only known Enlisted B/N to fly in combat in Vietnam in the RA5C was ATC Cal Getz. Others who had become LDOs and some were tragically lost in combat and we honor them for making the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

To all those who were Naval Enlisted Bombardier/Navigators, I salute you for a Job Well Done. **BRAVO ZULU!**

CDR Don Tise (USN Retired)

