

IAC 38 NEWSLETTER

June 2011

Darren Pleasance aboard the USS Reagan. The story begins on page 3.



Prez Post

Now we're officially well into contest season. A good group of Chapter 38 members made it to Apple Valley to brave the usual hot weather and howling winds. Sadly the results haven't been posted online just yet so I can't give you the full rundown but we definitely had a good showing. Chapter VP Dave Watson brought home second place in Advanced and the Team Trophy for the Evil Empire, and I was slightly surprised (but very pleased) to win Intermediate.

(continued next page)



Martin Price
President, Ch 38

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The rest of the story, and it seems to be a long-running story this year, was all about the cloudy, windy weather. A couple of us elected to drive home and return a few days later for our airplanes, but a number of others managed to sneak out over the Tehachapi pass and get home on the Sunday.

Now we're in the final stages of planning for the Paso contest. The California contests so far this year have shown a marked drop in turnout compared to prior years so we're currently planning for a slightly smaller turnout at Paso as well. As a reminder, please do pre-register even if it's the weekend right before the contest. It gives us a chance to get the registration

paperwork in order ahead of time and will speed your registration process, thus expediting your trip to the practice box. A big thanks in advance to all those who are already helping or are planning on coming down on Wednesday to help set up.

Once Paso is done we'll be turning our mind to other matters, including wrapping up the work on the Tracy box (fingers crossed!) and hopefully planning one or two non-competition events over the summer. If anybody has any great ideas, or better yet would like to take an idea and run with it, then please let me know. We'll also resume our Chapter Meeting schedule in July.

-Martin

WESTERN 2011 CONTEST SCHEDULE

March 18-19	Redlands Minifest
April 14-16	Borrego (5 category contest)
May 5-7	Apple Valley
June 9-11	Paso (of course)
June 23-25	Ephrata, WA
July 22-23	Cut Bank, MT
Aug 11-13	Pendleton, OR
Sept 2-4	Delano
Aug 25-27	Ephrata, WA (Nor-Am Team Championship)
Oct 13-15	Borrego
Nov 3-5	Marana, AZ

Please Note:

No Chapter meeting in June, See You at Paso Robles

USS Ronald Reagan

by Darren Pleasance

HERE WE GO, HERE WE GO, HERE WE GO! With arms pumping in the air, the crew of the Navy C-2 Greyhound or COD (Carrier Onboard Delivery), announced our imminent arrival onboard the USS Ronald Reagan. About 5 seconds later, we "arrived". Having never "trapped" before, I was unsure of what to expect, but it was everything you'd expect it to be when you take a 40,000+ pound airplane and plant it on a moving runway while traveling at 120 MPH and get slowed to a stop in 2 seconds, while simultaneously applying full power to the engines. Words like "violent", "crash", and "OMG" are certainly appropriate, but they still don't do justice to the actual experience of arriving aboard a nuclear powered aircraft carrier at sea.

This was the first of many life-altering experiences that I, and the 15 other lucky members of the U.S. Navy Distinguished Visitor program, got to experience on our 30 hour carrier-immersion experience. The whole adventure started with a phone call from Tom Poberezny, Chairman of the EAA - "Darren, we have one seat left to join our trip out to the USS Ronald Reagan on February 4th from San Diego. Would you like to go? I need to know within 10 minutes." I

immediately called my Assistant to see what my calendar looked like for February 4th. She told me that I had 5 important client meetings that she'd spent hours setting up for that day. "Move them" was my quick response. I assured her that in 30 years from now, I would not remember any of the meetings I had on that Friday whereas I'd remember living on an aircraft carrier for a lifetime. She rescheduled the meetings.

The day of our departure, we had breakfast as a group, then boarded a bus for the North Island Naval Air Station. We were treated to an introduction and safety briefing describing the adventure we were about to embark on, and we were then whisked



off to the terminal building where we were fitted with our lifevests and "craniums", a combination of crash helmet and hearing protection. Shortly thereafter, our 1960's era C-2 chariot arrived, shut down the left engine, and the flight crew rapidly moved us onto the tarmac, out to the plane, through the loading ramp in the back of the plane, and into our backward facing seats where we were instructed to "cinch your 4 point harnesses down tight, and make sure you have nothing loose in your hands". 10 minutes later we were airborne, heading out to sea.

The passengers in the C-2 have no windows, except for two near the far aft section of the cabin, and these are too small to be of much use. As such, the passengers are left free to imagine what must be happening outside, and where they are in their flight. After 40 minutes of flying, I could tell we'd started a decent, and had also entered a holding pattern. Several minutes later, I felt us descend some more then enter another holding

pattern to the left. After several of these, I suddenly heard the engines power up and felt the airplane accelerate. A look at my watch also showed that it was 11:57, three minutes before our

scheduled arrival time. I was enjoying trying to imagine what the plane was doing. As we accelerated, I assumed we were heading for the ship for an overhead arrival. My imagination was confirmed when I felt us enter a sharp bank to the left and felt a 2-G pull as the plane turned to downwind. I could hear the flaps coming down, and then felt the tell-tale sound of the landing gear coming down. Our "arrival" was imminent. From the moment the gear dropped, we knew we'd be touching down soon, but none of us knew exactly when. Then the crew came to life. HERE WE GO, HERE WE GO, HERE WE GO!

Immediately following our abrupt stop, the plane was pulled backwards a few feet and then we made a hard right turn off the landing area. The ramp at the back of the plane began to open, immediately displacing the stale smell of hydraulic fluid and sweat we'd been breathing for the prior hour, with a cool Pacific breeze along with the smell of burnt Jet A and the crackle of full afterburners from the F-18 that was doing

a touch and go 45 seconds after our touchdown.

We were quickly escorted off the COD, into a door at the base of the "island", and through a maze of passage ways and stairways

that eventually culminated at the Captain's receiving area, where we met the ship's Captain, the Airwing Commander, as well as the Admiral leading the overall strikeforce and another Admiral in charge of the entire Pacific fleet. We were treated to a very warm welcome, along with pictures for all of us. At that point, the next phase of the adventure began, where for the next 30 hours we were escorted for miles of tours up and down, back and forth, to experience all the carrier had to offer us. While the tour was amazing in its entirety, there were certainly a handful of experiences that stand out:



Tom Poberezny and Darren



- Arresting cable room
- Officer's mess
- Air traffic control
- Catapult deck
- LSO Platform
- Bridge
- Vultures row
- Hanger deck
- Engine overhaul room
- Stateroom

And of these amazing experiences, the catapult deck, vulture's row, hanger deck, and stateroom stand apart from the rest.

Catapult deck: At the front of the ship lie two massive, steam-driven catapults. These complement the other two catapults embedded in the landing area (the waste cats). After getting our lifevest introduction, and man overboard training, we were led up to the bow of the ship to watch

launches. The experience is unlike anything I've ever had before. As we're approaching the door to the short stairway up to the flight deck, the noise and vibration gets louder and louder, and the murkiness of the inner passageways gives way to the smell of fresh air and the glare of sunlight. You round the corner at the end of the hallway, climb up about 10 stair steps, and WHAM, you're standing right next to an F-18, wing tips folded, taxiing past you 10 feet away. A couple of additional steps and your standing on the flight deck, wind blowing at about 30 knots, with people and aircraft moving everywhere. Our guide (Oscar), pointed intently at a red and white checkered line on the deck. "This is the deadline", he said, "your cross this, we shut down flight ops – you don't want us to do that, do you?" The message was clear.

Carrier decks are by necessity packed to their maximum capacity, and everything works with a degree of precision that is truly remarkable. Along the edges of the catapult are aircraft parked just behind the red and white deadline. Given the precision that everyone operates within, this is only a few feet away from the wing tips of the aircraft departing. As such, our group of 16 spectators was also just a few feet away from these massive aircraft. For about 30 minutes we sat on the deck watching plane after plane line up on the catapult, go to full power with afterburner, salute and launch. The sound of an F-18 with afterburner, from ~15 feet away, combined with the sound of the catapult accelerating the plane to 150 MPH is 3 seconds, is UNREAL. It's truly more of a feeling, than a noise. The low frequency sound of the afterburner goes through your

body, and what starts as a bone vibrating crackle as the pilot comes up to full afterburner, quickly becomes a high volume, low frequency rumble as the plane launches past you and heads down the flight deck. For me, this was the highlight of the tour, with only one exception – our own launch off the catapult the next day (more on this later).

Arresting Cable Room: Directly below the landing deck are four rooms that contain the massive cables that catch and stop the aircraft as they land. The cables are over 2,000 feet long and wrap back and forth over a series of pulleys that allow the full length of the cable to be packaged in one room. As we were being led to the this part of the ship, we all jumped when out of nowhere a massive "BANG" occurred that sounded like someone had fired a



shotgun in front of us, followed by a several second WHOOSH sound. As we rounded the corner into a small room, it became clear that the sound had been that of an F-18 touching down a few feet above our heads and catching the cable that then reeled out at a rate of 220 feet per second. Our tour allowed us to see that on the Ronald Reagan, the hydro-pneumatic arresting system is all fairly automated, where the landing weight of the aircraft is fed into the system and it automatically sets the right valve settings to allow the aircraft to catch the cable and come to a stop within a few hundred feet. During the briefing from the sailor who ran this part of the ship, there were several instances of him pausing, yelling "PLUG YOUR EARS", and then seconds later hearing the massive BANG of the aircraft touching down and the cable spooling out. One of the more interesting factoids on this part of the tour was the that the arresting cable is replaced after every 100 traps. Not the entire cable, but the ~100 feet of it that spans the deck and where the hook catches it. We had the opportunity to watch them replace one while we were there.

Vultures Row: After dinner, and well after dark, we were escorted up to the room just below the bridge. This room and catwalk are known as "vultures row", which, as the name implies, is where gawkers come to watch pilots try their hand at landing. The night was a clear night, but with no moonlight and a touch of haze in the air. The Admiral sitting with us described it as a "1% illumination" night, which in laymen's terms mean it's DARK. Really dark. Like hard to see anything below the dim illumination of the deck directly below

the island. As you might imagine, this, combined with the fact that the pilots flying that evening were doing their night quals, made for an exciting show. The show starts with a couple of blinking lights at the bow of the ship bathed in the roar of two giant jet engines. Shortly thereafter, the night lights up with two afterburners accelerating down the deck, into the night. Once the after-burners go out, you're left looking at two little blinking lights on the tail. Looking toward the back of the ship amidst the slate black sky, a scan of the blackness exposes another set of blinking lights appearing to hover in space. Then the lights begin to climb, then shortly later they decent rapidly, only to be followed by a climb back up. Just as we were beginning to feel superior about our own abilities to stay on glidepath far more accurately than these young navy pilots, it dawned on us that the inbound jets were locked squarely on the glidepatch, and it was the ship that was pitching up and down, creating the illusion of the pilot chasing the glideslope. As we watched the small blinking lights drift up and down, there appeared to be no progress in getting closer to the ship, but then all of sudden, out of the darkness hurled a massive F-18 traveling at 135 kts right in front of us, followed by a massive "WHOMP" as it impacted the deck, followed immediately by a monster tail of flame and a bone jarring roar as the jet came to full afterburner in case it missed the wire. In some cases, the wire was missed and the subsequent "bolter" gave us an exciting show of sparks as the hook was dragged across the deck before the plane became airborne again. We stayed for several hours watching landing after landing. Quite the thrill.

Stateroom: After dinner and our stint on Vultures Row, it was time to head to bed. We were escorted back down into the ship, and led to the officers section of the ship. Our staterooms were small, but quite functional with nice bunkbeds, a sink, two desks, and storage. What was most memorable, however, about our lovely stateroom, was that it was situated directly below the #2 catapult, a mere 10 feet above our heads. That, combined with the fact that night carrier quals were scheduled to run well past midnight, meant for a comical several hours of laying in bed, hearing a distance

whine of turbine engines moving a plane around the deck a few feet above our heads, followed by a deafening roar for about 45 seconds as the plane came up to full afterburner, and culminated with a WHOOSH, and then a massive “THUNK and shudder as the plane launched, and then the catapult piston slowed from 140 kts down to zero in a matter of a couple of feet by smashing into a giant water brake. I found it fascinating that with all the mass of the aircraft impacting the deck over and over, you really couldn’t feel any response from the ship itself as planes landed. However, no matter where you were on the ship, every time the catapult launched, and the piston hit the water brake, the shudder was felt

throughout. Thinking about the forces at work as that catapult accelerated and decelerated over and over, combined with the every-3-minute roar of an F-18 taking to the sky, along with the rocking of the ship and the shudder of the piston was enough to finally lull me to sleep at about 2:00 a.m.

Hanger Deck: I awoke from my short sleep at about 5:00 in the morning, excited about the remaining part of our adventure that lay before us. I got out of bed, grabbed a quick shower, and was wandering toward the



officer’s mess (dining room), when I bumped into Tom Poberezny. He told me he’d been up since about 3:00 a.m. giving himself a self-guided tour of the ship. This was clearly one of those “better to ask forgiveness than to ask for permission” moments. I asked him what he’d seen that he liked, and he suggested I go tour the hanger deck. Moments later and a few stairwells behind me, I opened a door and stepped out into the monstrous hanger deck. The place was buzzing with activity, with about 30 F-18s stacked nose to nose, squeezed in between several E-3s, and and a handful of EA6s, Many of the planes were opened up with technicians testing this and that, and at the end of

the hanger bay was the engine shop, inside of which were a stack of F-18 engines, and a couple of test stands that could be used to push a new engine to the back of the ship, fire it up, and test it out before re-mounting it in a plane. One of the more memorable parts of my exploration of the hanger deck was the elevators. These are the massive platforms used to raise and lower aircraft to the flight deck. The elevators were up, when I was walking around so I had a perfect view of the Pacific ocean a few feet below me zipping by the ship, while watching a gorgeous sunrise on the distant horizon. Quite an inspiring sight.



Getting ready to go: Following breakfast with the ship's Captain, and an introduction to many of the key leaders on the ship, including the officer in charge of "ordnance" who introduced himself as the "re-landscaping engineer", we proceeded to have a full day of tours throughout many of the other places on the ship that we hadn't yet seen, including the Ronald Reagan museum, the aft deck of the ship, the

engine repair shop, and a host of other nooks and crannies somewhere in the bowels of the ship. At about 3:00 that afternoon, we were informed it was time to go, and we went for our one final briefing. In a small room just below the deck, we re-donned our craniums and life vests, and were given a briefing to prepare us for the catapult shot,

Although slightly longer than described in this story, it essentially netted out to "strap in tight, and keep everything out of your hands, or it will end up in the tailcone of the airplane, or in the skull of the person behind you". At that point we were off to our COD...

Catapult shot: I was the last of our group to board the COD so I was privileged to have the furthest aft seat, looking out the loading ramp, and sitting next to the cabin crew members who we relied on to make sure we knew what was happening. No sooner had I gotten buckled into my seat than the engines spooled up and we started to move out into the flow of planes on the flight deck.

As we started to taxi the short 100 feet to the catapult, I caught a final glimpse of the deep blue Pacific as the ramp slowly closed and the cabin crew ran up and down the aisle doing the checks of all of our seat belts. I was using my imagination at this point to guess where we were on the flight deck, and was surprised to see the cabin crew still out of their seats checking things. We made a sharp left turn, and I could imagine exactly where we were, facing into the wind and slowly creeping up to the catapult. Still, the cabin guys were running around doing stuff. I heard one of the guys yell to the other to get into his seat, and he yelled back that he still needed to check something. The first guy yelled back "get in your \$#!#! seat, NOW!"

That guy got into his seat while the other guy continued to run around. To help himself, he handed the fellow next to me a large metal clip board, which I immediately recognized as a giant projectile if it wasn't secured in time. Finally the one remaining crew member still standing came running back to the back of the cabin just as the engines went to full throttle. At this point, I knew the launch was imminent, and this guy was just beginning to get into his seat. He grabbed his seatbelts and got one shoulder harness on, while the plane roared and vibrated. 5 seconds later he had the second shoulder harness on and was putting on his helmet when I pointed to the clipboard/projectile being held by the

fellow next to me. The crewman reached over and no sooner had grabbed it with both hands when WHAAMMM! we were on our way. The acceleration was unreal. Facing backwards, we were slammed against our shoulder harnesses and it was this smooth, but unbelievably strong, acceleration that felt like it went on forever. However, having seen a bunch of cat shots the day before, I knew it wasn't more than about 2-3

seconds. Next thing I new the acceleration stopped and I felt the rapid pitch to climb attitude while the listening to the landing gear retract. At that point, we all cheered, and then settled in to our 30 minute flight home, all relishing the life experience we'd all just had, while all trying to keep our lunches down as we inhaled the

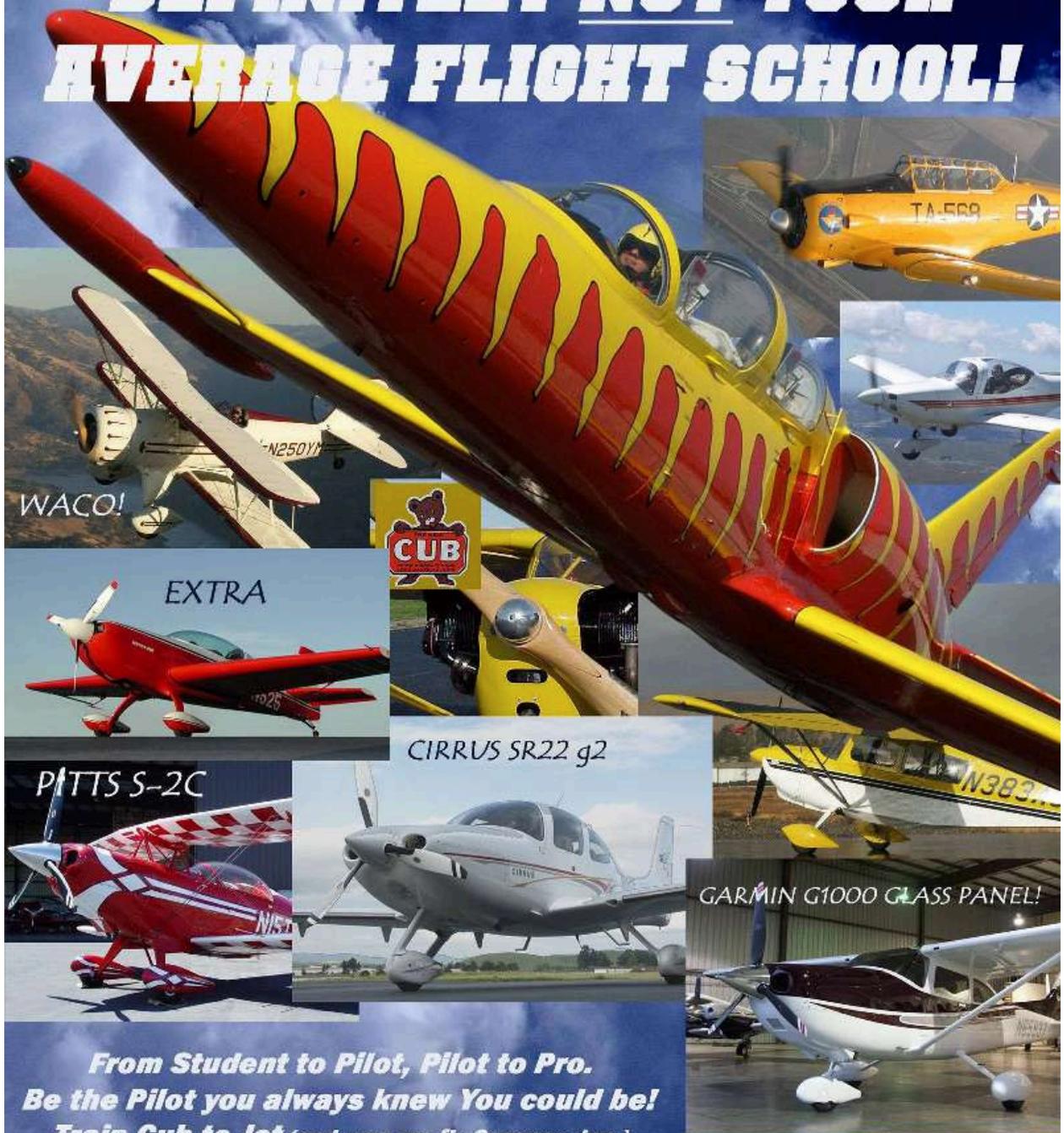
exhaust and hydraulic fluid aroma that permeated the warm cabin.

We landed back at North Island and each had the opportunity to once again exchange contact information and commit to attending a reunion at Airventure in the Summer of 2011. The two-day adventure certainly ranks among the top life experiences I've had. The professionalism of our young men and women operating in such a highly complex environment, combined with the amazing engineering and power that was on display throughout our adventure was truly inspiring. Go USA!

Associated photos courtesy of Darren Pleasance



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LIVERMORE CA WWW.ATTITUDEAVIATION.COM ph 925-456-2276