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An Interview with Col. Walter J. Boyne, USAF (Ret.)

Boyne's career in flight, in print, and with the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum has been an ode to joy



Written by: [Jan Tegler](#) on June 7, 2012

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When did you first go aloft?

Eventually, I was able to get into Aviation Cadets [the USAF's training program for pilots, navigators, bombardiers, etc., prior to the advent of the [Air Force Academy](#), Officer Training School and Reserve Officer Training Corps]. You had to have two years of college to get in. [Boyne attended [Washington University](#) for two years.] Like most people, I was apprehensive about being airsick, so I scraped up enough money to go and pay for a ride at Parks in a [Piper] Cub. It was just 15 or 20 minutes, probably around the pattern a few times. That was my first experience being airborne.

“*I liked airplanes so much that I guess I had a kind of delusion. Compared to other people that I knew, I knew so much about them that rather naively, I thought I should be a natural. I thought I'd get in an airplane, and someone would show me how to start it and that would be it – I'd be a natural pilot. I was terribly disappointed to find out in flying school that that was not the case.*”

I didn't know until much later how relatively few natural pilots there are. I didn't come away from the experience with a soaring sense that, “this was for me.”

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First F-35C Night Flight



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Boeing B-47B rocket-assisted take off on April 15, 1954. U.S. Air Force photo

What did you think the first time you saw the B-47 Stratojet?

I was overwhelmed with its physical beauty. I looked at that thing and thought, "What an airplane!" It appealed to me in every way – the way it sat on the ground, the way the wings drooped. You have to remember that it was the only thing close to being a fighter that bomber guys could fly in the Air Force.

I remember very well the first takeoff I made in it. The instructor warned me not to worry about the fire-alarm lights, they just come on during takeoff. Sure enough, all six of them did. The airplanes were old, beat-up B-47Ds. But it was so powerful. The

acceleration and the climb speeds were higher than the B-50 cruise speeds. It was quite remarkable. Most days, if you saw a contrail, it was probably another B-47, because you were really the only people up there at those altitudes.

How did you develop an interest in writing?

I'd always had a facility for writing that stood me in good stead in school, but I hadn't attempted to publish anything until about 1962. That was the first time that I had actually sent an article off. I sent it to *Royal Air Force Flying Review* [currently *Flying Review International*], which at the time was not well known in America but was better than most American aviation magazines.

Most of the American magazines were pretty poorly done. They were repetitive and not very well written. They had relied on a stable of writers that had done pulp magazines of all sorts. Some of them, who had no interest in aviation whatsoever, moved over and started writing for these magazines anyway.

“There were a few guys like Arch Whitehouse who actually had some experience, and Donald Keyhoe, but most of them were half-bit, penny-a-word writers. You’d be surprised at the paucity of aviation books up until maybe 1960, when Martin Caidin was among the first writers. Beyond that, you could buy virtually every aviation book that came out, because there weren’t that many of them.

There were a few classics, but the idea of somebody writing about a single type of aircraft and publishing a book on it – that didn’t happen, at least not in the U.S. In England that came a bit earlier, as the U.K. has always been a great well for aficionados. It was rather barren here, but in some respects that turned out to be an advantage for me because I was writing about things that had not been covered for the most part. My subjects were rarely seen aircraft and little-known designers. There really was an unending market for those topics. I never had a problem peddling them.

Strategic Air Command (SAC) has been both celebrated and vilified in hindsight. What was your opinion of SAC?

I had a fortunate introduction to SAC. I came into the command in January 1953 to the 330th Bomb Squadron. The day I arrived they had lost a B-50 and you can’t imagine how uninterested they were in a new B-50 pilot joining the squadron. This was at a time when the Air Force was really a flying club. I was assigned to a crew and we’d go out and brief at 7 o’clock in the morning. The squadron would assign two or three aircraft to fly and then everybody else played Hearts all day. Immediately when the briefing was over the guys not flying would turn around and sit down and play cards.

I was very deferential because I was just a greenhorn copilot. On my first flight, I went out and watched the crew load .50-caliber ammunition into the bomb bay. There was an older chief gunnery sergeant – he was probably 25 but he seemed old to me – and I said, “Look

sergeant, won't it be difficult to load that ammunition into the .50s? We'll have to depressurize to get it and then load it. Wouldn't it be better to just load it into a pressurized area?" He said, "Don't you worry about it lieutenant." He put a twist on the way he said "lieutenant" that put you right in your place.

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Laurie Nichols

7:41 PM June 11, 2012

In 1961 as i went into the Navy,i also got a flat hat[[1961],never had it on,well just this last week and a half i found out that i was picked to make the turn around cruse on old Ironsides July 4th of 2012.

So,i still have my flat hat and my whites,so i will be wearing the whites and the flat hat.,i was told the flat had could only be put on in the Boston area..

Laurie Nichols OM3

Troy Maine 04987



Chuck Oldham (Editor)

8:35 PM June 11, 2012

Congratulations! What a great honor and truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. It will be a privilege just to see the Constitution under sail.

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