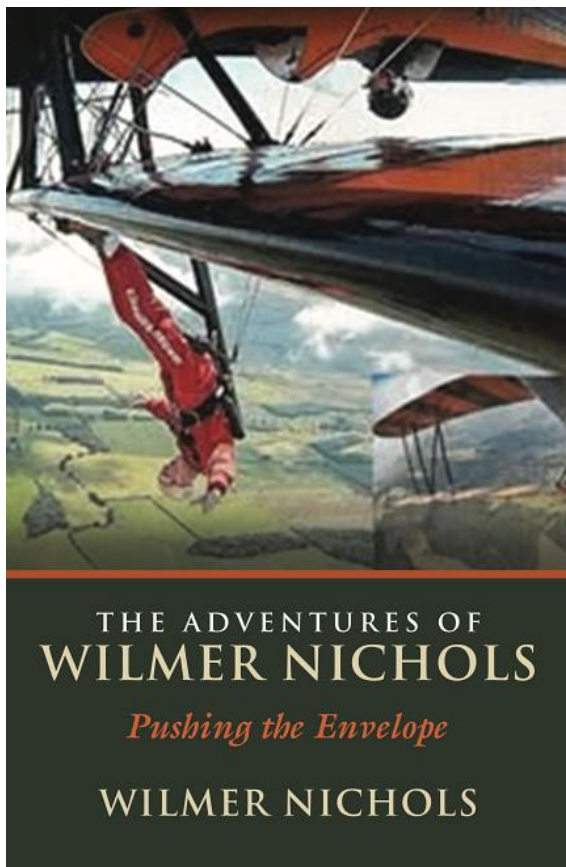




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THE ADVENTURES OF
WILMER NICHOLS

Pushing the Envelope

WILMER NICHOLS

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Chapter 1: Adventures in the Sky

A. Flying (and Obtaining My Private Pilot's License)

Ever since my first flight in an airplane when I was a very young boy, I had wanted to fly an airplane and obtain my pilot's license. So, in 1960 when I was working at Cape Canaveral and teaching mathematics part time at Brevard Engineering College (which would become the Florida Institute of Technology in 1966), I had a little time before I had to start teaching so I started taking flying lessons at the airport in Melbourne, Florida. The first airplane I flew was a Piper J-3 Cub, it was a tail dragger with tandem seating and stick (often referred to as a joystick) controls. It was also the first type of airplane I ever flew in as a passenger when I was little back in Mississippi. It was so much fun to fly the Cub; it was like flying a glider with an engine. The next lesson I took was in a Cessna 150; it had side by side seating, yoke controls and a tricycle landing gear. My instructor recommended a Private Pilot handbook for me to read. I was really enjoying the lessons; I was trying to take as many lessons as I could afford before school started. I had logged six hours into my logbook on August 12 and was taking my seventh flight. When I mentioned to my instructor it was my birthday, he told me to land and let him out and take the plane up solo. I was a little bit nervous, but I took off and landed fine and after that I could go out to the airport when I felt like it and take the plane up alone. I flew occasionally when I was not working or preparing lectures or studying over the next few weeks. My last flight was August 28, 1960; activities at the Cape were booming and I was working and teaching too many hours to schedule time for flying.

After about a four year hiatus, I started flying as a student again. In 1964, when I got settled into my new job at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas, I enrolled in a Federal Aviation Association

(FFA) approved flight school at Houston International Airport. The course included both ground school and flight training in a Cessna 150 airplane which was designed especially for flight instruction. Although I had already soloed a few years back when I lived in Florida, I started from the beginning when I enrolled in the Houston flight school. My first flight was February 2, 1964 and I was thrilled to be back in the cockpit again. I loved the school and every spare hour I had, I was either attending the ground school or flying the airplane. I soloed again in a couple weeks and then I could schedule an airplane whenever I had the time and the money. On occasion, after I had worked a 12-hour shift, I would schedule a plane and fly for two or three hours. For a private pilot's license, a person must have between 40 and 50 hours flying time including planning and executing a three-legged cross-country flight. The first cross-country flight is with an instructor and the next one is solo. The cross-country flight with my instructor was from Houston to Victoria, Texas then to San Antonio and back to Houston. Everything went as planned and I learned a lot about communication between the pilot and the control tower. I planned my solo cross-country flight to follow the same route about two weeks later. I was very meticulous in planning the trip and preparing a checklist. I had a checkpoint every 10 to 15 miles and the radio frequencies of all three airports where I would be landing and taking off from. I double checked all the headings, distances and times for the entire trip. I had Saturday off (5/9/1964), so I scheduled a plane for four hours in the afternoon. Before I took off, I checked the weather for each leg of the flight, and everything was a go. So, I filed a flight plan with the flight service station and took off on a heading of 190 degrees for Victoria which is 125 miles southwest of Houston. Flights above 3000 feet mean sea level (MSL) with headings from 180 to 359 degrees must fly at altitudes of even 1000s + 500 feet; those flying headings 360 to 179 degrees must fly odd 1000s + 500 feet. The leg from Houston to Victoria went great and when I had the airport

in sight, I radioed the tower for landing instructions. “Victoria tower this is Cessna 1432 Papa about 15 miles northeast of the airport inbound to land”. The response came back “Cessna 1432 Papa continue inbound and report on left downwind for runway 12”. I acknowledged and when I was close enough, I entered the right-hand side of runway 12 at a 45-degree angle and then paralleled the runway to my left and reported my location to the tower. The traffic controller instructed me to continued flying and he cleared me to land. I turned left on base and then left again on final. I came in a bit high and I could see tons of runway in front of me. The runway was over 9,000 feet long, which is more than a mile and a half. The airport was used previously by the Air Force for take-offs and landings of F-86 Sabre and F-100 Super Sabre Jets. A word about runway numbering that the general public is not aware of; the runway number is the magnetic direction of the runway (e.g., the runway with magnetic direction 120 degrees is designated as runway 12). When I am flying, and I am on final, I always look at the number of the runway which is printed in big white letters on the end of the runway and then I look at the magnetic compass to make sure they correspond. After I took off from Victoria, I headed northwest for San Antonio which was 114 miles. I landed with no problem and since the cruising range of the Cessna 150 was only 350 miles, I had to fuel-up before heading back to Houston. The 197-mile leg to Houston was a breeze and I logged my solo cross-country flight into my logbook. Two months later I took my check ride with an FAA examiner and passed with flying colors. I had logged a total of 56 hours flying time and I was now a licensed private pilot and certified to carry passengers. My first passenger was my wife, Arlene.

The private pilot license, or PPL, reigns supreme among all types of pilot licenses for a long time. As a private pilot, you can fly virtually any aircraft, operate in visual flight rules (VFR) conditions, and add

additional ratings in the future such as the multiengine or instrument ratings.

In 1971 we moved to The Netherlands for two years and then to Baltimore, Maryland for two years, so I didn't fly during that four year period. But when we moved to Gainesville, Florida, in 1974 I started flying again. For Thanksgiving 1976 we planned to visit Arlene's parents in Poplarville, Mississippi and I decided to fly us up there, which is about 500 miles "as the crow flies". A couple of weeks before we were due to leave Gainesville, I got checked out in a Cessna 177RG Cardinal. The airplane had retractable landing gear and was a lot faster than the Cessna 172 I had been flying. It could cruise around 168 mph at 75% power.

I scheduled the checkout ride in the Cardinal for November 7th with the local flight school in Gainesville. When I arrived at the school, I was greeted by a petit young girl about five feet tall and who looked to be about 15 years old and she said come on let's goand I said where? Then she said I'm going to check you out in the Cardinal. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and what I was doing, but never-the-less I walked with her out to the airplane. I asked her where she learned to fly, and she told me her father taught her. Her name was Windy Wheeler and she said her father also taught her how to fly a glider, which was something I had wanted to do for a long time. It turns out that her father taught flying lessons in both airplanes and gliders at the Flying Ten airport which is located between Gainesville and Newberry, Florida. The small airport has a grass runway which makes it ideal for glider flying and landing. She had to sit on a couple of cushions to see out of the Cardinal, but she was an excellent pilot. Windy took about one and a half hours to check me out and then I went back out to the airport and logged another hour before we left on the flight. I filed a flight plan and we left Gainesville, November 25th about 10:00 AM in route to

Poplarville, Mississippi. Me and Arlene sat in the two front seats and Cami and Cory sat in the two back seats. Poplarville is a very small town with a population of about 2,500 people, but it had a decent airport. Poplarville is known as the home of the former Governor and US Senator of Mississippi, Theodore G. Bilbo. The airport was built for his private airplane when he lived in Poplarville. We arrived in Poplarville at about four o'clock after a couple of pit stops. The Cardinal was a dream to fly.

1. Flying the Pitts Aerobatic Biplane

The Pitts Special, a famous aerobatic biplane, was originally designed by Curtis Pitts, but its modern production and support are primarily handled by Aviat Aircraft, Inc. in Afton, Wyoming.

On August 12, 2014, I turned 80 years old and, for my birthday, my wife, Arlene gave me a flight in a biplane for my birthday present. She knew I had always wanted to fly in a biplane and she could not have given me a better gift, so I started looking for a place that gave biplane rides. I finally found a place in Leesburg, Florida airport and I scheduled the flight. Me and Arlene drove down to Leesburg and found the hanger we had been instructed to travel to. When we arrived at the office the airplane was out on a scheduled flight, so we had to wait until it returned. In the meantime, the pilot who was going to take me up, handed me a parachute and said you will need this. Arlene asked him why I needed a parachute and he said this is an aerobatic flight and it's required by the FAA. Well, that really pissed her off and she said if you get yourself killed I will not be here to watch, so she left. I asked her if she was going to pick me up after the flight and she said, maybe, but I knew she would. The pilot was about 70 years old with a little grey creeping into his hair. He was a slim man like me and he was very interesting to chat with. He was a former stunt pilot who used to fly in airshows and he told me all about the Pitts biplane. After Arlene left we

went into the hanger and put on our parachutes and headsets. The airplane we would be flying was the Pitts Model 12; a high performance aerobatic biplane designed around the 360 hp Vedeneyev M14P/PF engine. He asked me all sorts of questions while we were waiting for the airplane to return. He asked me if there were any certain maneuvers I would like to do and I said why don't you just try to scare the hell out me and he said he would perform his airshow stunts.

The airplane had a cockpit with two tandem seats and stick control with a rate of climb of about 3000 ft/min. I was thrilled when I was seated in the front seat of the cockpit. I told him I was a licensed pilot and he said I could take the plane through some of the planned maneuvers. After strapping in and checking our intercom, the pilot started the engine and as the engine caught, the sound quickly built into a deep, low-frequency rumble, that could be described as having a "suppressed meanness" or "lurking, yet undisguised power". The overall sound is often compared to that of a powerful performance vehicle, such as a top fuel drag racer, a reflection of its high horsepower-to-weight ratio. The rumbling sound and the vibration sent chills through my entire body. I keep thinking get this mother in the air. After a brief warm up, we taxied out to the runway and after taking off and climbing out to about 4000 ft, we did a chandelle, which is a 180-degree climbing turn and the pilot asked how I was doing, and I said just fine. The next maneuver was a barrel roll to the left and then one to the right and then he asked me if I wanted to try one and I said absolutely. Just before initiating the roll, you bring the nose up slightly and then push the stick in the direction you want the plane to roll. If you do the maneuver quickly it's called a snap roll. This was so much fun and exciting and not that difficult to perform. I then did a few rolls going straight up and then when the airplane stalled and started falling backwards in a tail slide, we went into a spin; this was so much fun. All pilots have to learn how to stall an airplane and then recover. This maneuver is the most difficult to

learn for beginning pilots. (note: an airplane stall is when the wings lose lift because the airflow becomes too turbulent, usually from pitching the nose up too steeply or flying too slowly, exceeding the wing's "critical angle of attack"). To prevent a spin after a stall, a pilot must immediately reduce the "Angle of Attack" by pushing the yoke/stick forward, apply power and level the wings using rudder and ailerons to break the stall and regain lift, while staying ahead of the aircraft with good situational awareness to avoid uncoordinated inputs that lead to spins, especially in turns at low speeds; all airplanes can be stalled, even the most powerful jet fighters and large commercial airplanes. The Golden Rule of flying is "you fly the airplane, don't let the airplane fly you". All beginning pilots have to deal with this. To switch back and forth between me and the pilot was done through the intercom. This was discussed before we took off. When it was my turn to fly, the pilot would say "you have the controls" and when he took over, he would say "I have the controls", this is the standard procedure. After the pilot let me fly for a while, he took the controls and I had an idea what was coming. He first did an inside loop and then an outside loop and this started my heart beating a bit faster. But this was just a sample of what was coming. He started by doing a single hammerhead [a hammerhead maneuver (or stall turn) involves pulling the aircraft totally vertical, stopping at zero airspeed, pivoting 180 degrees using the rudder and aileron to swing around the wingtip, and then diving straight back down]. This maneuver really started my heart to racing and pounding and my breathing quickened from the adrenaline surge. After recovering from this maneuver, he did a tail-slide which is similar to a hammerhead but instead of turning when the airplane stops climbing you don't turn and the airplane starts to slide down backwards. After falling three to five fuselage lengths, the pilot pitches the nose forward into a vertical dive, which I survived. Then he did a double hammerhead and I thought OMG he's gonna kill us both, but

what a thrill. This maneuver was followed by several others that I had no idea what they were called but some were upside down and freefalling. At one time I thought he might have had a heart attack, because the aircraft started to tumble and I thought he had lost control, but after we fell about 1000 feet he leveled off and said, “you have the controls” and boy was I relieved (I found out later that this was a maneuver called the Lomcovak Tumble). He let me fly the plane back to the airport and I did a few more barrel rolls and loops on the way. What an awesome birthday gift and I was still alive. Arlene did come back and pick me up.



Fig 1. Me and the awesome Pitts aerobatic biplane



Fig 2. Me recovering from a stall

If you are a licensed pilot like me, once in flight, you will be invited to do the majority of the flying yourself – from basic maneuvering to high performance aerobatics, including loops, rolls, stalls, hammerheads and etc. You are in control except for take-offs and landings. Following the flight, a debrief occurs where you will log your flight time and review videos of your flight from a state-of-the-art, on-board camera system.

2. Flying the P-51 North American Aviation Mustang

During my Navy career in the Korean War (August 12, 1951 to May 5, 1955), I flew in several different types of airplanes in the States, and Japan and the Philippines. I flew in both sea planes and land based airplanes. My two favorite airplanes that I observed during my military career were the Navy F4U Corsair and the Air Force P-51 Mustang. I really like the looks of both of these warbirds and my desire was to fly either one or both of these airplanes if possible. So, a few years ago, I

started surfing the internet looking for a place where I could fly in either one of these beauties. Although both of these airplanes were manufactured as single seaters, a two-seater version of the P-51 Mustang, known as the TP-51 and TF-51, were produced, primarily for training and VIP transport. These two-seater Mustangs were modified by adding a second seat with similar controls as the front.

While the original F4U Corsair was designed as a single-seater aircraft, modified two-seater versions do exist. However, opportunities to experience a ride in one may be limited, especially in the United States due to legal restrictions on paid rides.

Therefore, I gave up trying to find a two-seated F4U and focused all my attention on finding a two-seated P-51 that offered rides. Lo and behold, lady luck was with me that day. I found a place in Kissimmee, Florida that had four... “Stallion 51 Corporation” is only about two hours drive south of where I live in Gainesville, Florida. So, I booked a flight for March 22, 2022 and boy was I excited. I couldn’t wait to get my hands on the controls of one of these babies.

The P (pursuit)-51 Mustang is an iconic World War II fighter aircraft known for its sleek design and remarkable performance. It has a single liquid-cooled Rolls-Royce (or Packard) Merlin V-12 inline piston engine with a supercharger that produces about 1,500 hp. The body of the aircraft is designed for minimal drag, contributing to its high speed of 441 mph. This engine drives a four-blade Hamilton Standard propeller that propels the aircraft to a climb rate of about 4,000 ft/min.

The P-51D, features a distinctive "bubble-top" canopy that provides the pilot with improved visibility. This canopy was designed to slide rearward for easy access to the cockpit for both pilot and student pilot or passenger.

The liquid cooling system of the P-51 is crucial for optimal engine performance and efficiency, especially during high-altitude operations and combat maneuvers.

The P-51 was made by North American Aviation and was equipped with several 0.50 caliber machine guns mounted in the wings. The later P-51D increased the number of these guns to six. The aircraft was well made with the ability to fly long distances and it became one of the world's most successful and recognizable aircraft. During WWII, the bombing missions over the skies of Europe were taking very heavy losses from the German Luftwaffe fighters like the Messerschmitt Bf 109 and the Focke-Wulf Fw 190. The allied aircrews desperately needed an escort fighter that could stay with the bombers deep into enemy territory and fly back to the base on every mission. The P-51 Mustang was the immediate choice. Within a very short period of time, the P-51 was affectionately nicknamed by the bomber crews as their "Little Friend." The P-51B and C were the first fighters to escort the allied bombers all the way to Germany and back to Britain. The P-51 Mustang and the pilots who flew them saved countless lives in the skies and on the ground, and perhaps turned the tide of WWII. Most people think the P-51 Mustang and the British Spitfire, another beautiful airplane, are the same, but they are not. Although they are similar in some respects they were designed for different roles and had distinct characteristics. The Spitfire was primarily an interceptor, while the P-51 Mustang was designed as a long-range escort fighter. If anyone is interested, they can take a flight in a Spitfire airplane at Duxford Airfield in England, which is home to the Imperial War Museum Duxford. Several companies offer this experience, including Aerial Collective and Classic Wings. The Duxford Airfield is only 9.2 miles south of Cambridge.

There were dogfights between the Spitfire and the Focke-Wulf Fw 190A during World War II. The Fw 190A, nicknamed the "Würger" (Butcher Bird), was a formidable German fighter aircraft, and the Spitfire was a highly maneuverable British fighter. Both airplanes engaged in aerial combat, with the Fw 190A often being considered a more powerful and robust opponent, especially at lower altitudes.

Also, during WWII, there were many dogfights between the P-51 Mustang and the German Focke-Wulf Fw 190A. Both airplanes were primary fighters in their respective armies and were frequently involved in aerial combat. While the P-51 Mustang often had the advantage at higher altitudes, the Fw 190A, especially its later variants, could be a formidable opponent in dogfights, particularly at lower altitudes.

The "Red Tails" were a squadron of African American pilots trained to fly the P-51 at the Tuskegee Institute (now a University) in Tuskegee, Alabama. During WWII, the Red Tails were deployed to various locations including North Africa and Italy. In Italy, they were stationed at Ramitelli Air Field on the Adriatic coast. The Red Tails earned a reputation for skill and valor, particularly in escorting B-17 bombers to their targets.

After WWII, the USAAF consolidated much of its fighter aircraft. Most piston powered fighters served substantially reduced roles as more advanced jet powered aircraft emerged. The Mustang still proved useful serving in the Korean War and state-side in the Air Force Reserves and National Air Guard. TF-51D Mustangs (two-seated trainers) like I would flew in Kissimmee, were used to train fighter pilots until the jet-trainers such as the T-33 Shooting Star were fully utilized. This fighter was painted in its original markings as a West Virginia Air Guard, 167th Fighter Squadron P-51 called "Toulouse Nuts".

Many experts agree that the North American P-51 Mustang is the world's finest fighter plane in its class. Most air races around closed circuits include a large percentage of Mustangs and lots of national air shows show them off in the air and on the ground. Although the Mustang went out of production in 1946, it is still in service in some places in the world. By civilian aircraft standards, the Mustang is a difficult plane to fly; it is considered especially tricky on takeoffs when the engine torque requires expert pilot handling. There are several models of the Mustang, but the F-51D was the first version to feature the trimmed-down rear fuselage and bubble canopy. Earlier Mustangs looked similar to the Spitfire. Today many Mustangs have been modified to handle engines with an output of over 2,000 hp. The actor, Tom Cruise (Maverick) owns and flies a P-51 Mustang. It's currently on display at the "Planes of Fame" Air Museum in Chino, California 36 miles east of LA.

An interesting mutation of the P-51 was the F-82 "Twin Mustang." Essentially, it was two Mustang fuselages joined by a constant-chord center section and a rectangular tailplane. It was designed and built to be used as a two-seat long-range escort fighter and had a maximum speed of over 475 mph. However, the pacific war ended before it could be deployed; it was used in the Korean War. Only five of the F-82s still exist.

While primarily known for its role in Europe, the P-51 eventually saw extensive action in the Pacific, including long-range escort and low-level fighter-bomber missions. It also served with the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and other allied air forces.

The P-51 named Crazy Horse is known as one of the most recognizable P-51s in the world. It is now a part of Stallion 51, the company in Kissimmee, Florida that restores, maintains, and offers flight training in P-51D Mustangs. The instrument panel is essentially the same in the

front and back cockpits of the P-51D. Therefore, the airplane can be flown from either cockpit.



Fig 3. Me and “Crazy Horse”. I was ready to fly

After I checked in at Stallion 51 headquarters (03/22/2022) at the Kissimmee Gateway Airport (3951 Merlin Drive), I was directed to the pilot’s office where I met the pilot who would be with me on the flight.

When a person schedules a flight experience in a P-51 Mustang at Stallion 51, the procedure typically involves several steps to prepare them for the unique nature of the aircraft and the flight itself. While the exact process may vary slightly depending on the provider, here's a general overview: Reviewing the information below will enhance your understanding and preparation for the flight of a lifetime.

Before the flight day, the pilot will gather necessary information from the individual, such as weight and height, to ensure proper fitting and aircraft balance. They may also request any relevant medical information to ensure the participant is fit for the flight. I didn't mention the fact that I had been diagnosed with congestive heart failure. A thorough safety briefing is a crucial part of the process. This will cover essential safety procedures, emergency procedures, and what to expect during the flight. It's likely to include guidance on understanding the layout and basic functions of the P-51 cockpit. Yes, a parachute is required for flights in a P-51 Mustang at Stallion 51. The seat in the P-51 Mustang is designed to accommodate a seat-pack parachute, and it's a standard practice to wear a parachute while flying the aircraft. The parachute is a safety measure for emergency bailouts and is part of the standard safety briefing before each flight. Procedures for safely exiting the aircraft in an emergency, including canopy release. You will also be checked out on how to communicate with the pilot during the flight.

Participants will likely be advised on appropriate attire for the flight. Comfortable, non-restrictive clothing is generally recommended. While some vintage flight gear may be available for photos, it's not typically required for the flight itself.

The individual may be advised on what personal items, if any, they can bring on board. This might include cameras or video equipment, although limitations on carrying these items in the cockpit are likely to be in place.

On the flight day a detailed pre-flight briefing with the pilot will cover the specific flight plan, maneuvers, and expectations for the flight. This is a chance to ask questions and discuss any preferences the individual might have. I told the pilot that I would like to do every aerobatic maneuver possible. He told me we could do right and left rolls, loops,

stalls, and hammerheads. He told me he would take me through each maneuver first and then I could repeat each one of them.

Before the flight, me and the pilot conducted a pre-flight inspection of the aircraft, beginning at the front of the right wing and inspecting the various components of the aircraft to make sure everything appeared airworthy. After the pre-flight inspection, the pilot assisted me entering the cockpit and helped me with the harnesses and the helmet with a microphone. After the pilot was secured in the front seat cockpit, he contacted me via audio to make sure the intercom system was working properly. The next step was to go through the pilot's operating handbook (POH) "before" flight checklist.

The FAA's practical test standards clearly state that pilots must use appropriate written checklists. Before starting the engine, several instruments should be checked and set, especially the altimeter, you need to obtain the current altimeter setting and adjust the barometric pressure scale on your altimeter to match it. This ensures your altimeter reads accurate altitude above mean sea level (AMSL) during flight.

Before starting the engine, a private pilot will typically say "clear" or "clear prop" to ensure the area around the propeller is clear of anyone or anything. This is a safety precaution to prevent injuries during engine start up.

To start the P-51 Mustang's engine, the pilot first primes the engine with the primer switch, holding it up for 1 second if the engine is warm or 3-4 seconds if the engine is cold. Then, they lift the starter cover and press and hold the starter button. While holding the starter button, they move the mixture control to the "auto rich" or "run" position. Starting a P-51 Mustang engine, especially the renowned Packard-built Rolls-Royce Merlin V12, is an experience that evoked a range of powerful feelings and sensations within my body. The pilot then contacted the

airport control tower saying Gateway Tower this is Crazy Horse at Stallion 51 requesting taxi instructions to the active runway. The reply came back “Crazy Horse, this is the tower, taxi to runway 15 and hold short”. The pilot is supposed to repeat every response from the tower. We taxied to the run-up area of runway 15 and the pilot immediately set the brake and checked all instruments. He then increased the engine’s rpm to 2500 and rechecked everything. When he was assured that everything was working properly, he reduced the rpm to idle and then contacted the tower and said, ‘tower this is Crazy Horse, ready for takeoff on runway 15”. The tower response was Crazy Horse taxi into position and hold; then in about 30 sec the tower operator said Crazy Horse cleared for takeoff runway 15. Without hesitation, the pilot locked the tailwheel (the P-51 is a tail dragger) and smoothly advanced the hand throttle and aimed at 3000 rpm. My heart rate began to increase and when the pilot increased the rpm and the plane started to vibrate, I didn’t know if it was caused by my pounding heart or the vibration from that mighty engine. At about 75 mph, the pilot carefully releases back pressure on the stick, allowing the tail to lift up off the runway. This is a critical stage, as the aircraft can become directionally unstable if the tail is raised too soon. Skilled rudder control is crucial to maintain alignment with the runway. At approximately 95 mph (83 knots), the pilot pulls back on the stick, raising the nose for takeoff. The aircraft quickly becomes airborne, and the pilot immediately retracts the landing gear. And then you are really hauling ass. The initial climb rate is impressive, potentially reaching close to 4,000 feet per minute at takeoff power. At 5000 ft, the pilot did the first aerobatic maneuver, which was a right-hand roll. The roll is initiated with full aileron input (left or right) while maintaining a slight nose-up attitude. Then, use rudder input in the opposite direction to compensate for the engine torque and prevent the nose from dropping.

Then on the intercom, the pilot said; do you think you can do that and I replied enthusiastically, heck yeah. “You take the controls” he said and I repeated the right-handed roll and then we did the same maneuver to the left. The pilot said, “what do you want to do now”? And, without hesitation, I said an inside loop...after you. To execute an inside loop in the P-51 Mustang, you need to start with at least 300 mph indicated air speed (IAS). The key is to avoid applying too much back pressure on the “joystick” (i.e elevator), as this can lead to snap-rolling or even a torque-roll. Instead, pull back on the stick gradually to initiate the loop,



Fig 4. The roll

keeping the nose from dropping under the horizon. I was super excited about doing the loop again. The pilot said, now this time when you get to the top of the loop, just relax some of the pressure on the stick and you will hang there for a while and then you can complete the loop.

Oh my, what a thrill it was. Now the next maneuvers were the stall and the hammerhead and I was ready. Every licensed pilot must master the

“power off and power on” stall maneuver, so I had performed tons of stalls during my training and practice. The first time I performed a stall solo; it spooked the hell out of me. What happened to me happens to many student pilots. I tried to recover too soon and the airplane stalled a second time and this time it went into a spin and I was terrified. But I kept my cool and did not panic. That was the only time in my adult life that I was really scared. In aviation, an aerodynamic stall occurs when the smooth airflow over an airplane's wings is disrupted, leading to a sudden loss of lift. This is crucial to understand because it means the wings are no longer generating enough lift to support the aircraft's weight. It's important to note that this is a separate phenomenon from an engine failure; a stall can even happen with the engine is operating normally.

Following a stall you have absolutely no control of the airplane for a few seconds and then it starts to fall. I remembered how to recover from the stall, but I was not totally recovered when I thought I was. To recover from a stall, you need to advance the stick (or yoke) to lower the nose and give the airplane time to recover. Once the stall is broken, you should add power, level the wings, and climb to regain normal flight. If the stall occurs at full power all you can do is lower the nose. If the airplane goes into a tailspin like it did with me, just apply full opposite rudder to stop the spin first and then recover from the stall. I had no problem with the stall in the P-51. The next maneuver was the hammerhead which is also known as a stall turn and involves flying the aircraft nearly straight up, performing a tight, pivoting turn at the top, and then flying back down, essentially creating an upside down U-shape path in the sky. In order to perform this maneuver, you need a very powerful airplane that can fly straight up. A well-executed hammerhead demonstrates proficiency in managing airspeed, controlling attitude, and timing. The hammerhead maneuver in the P-

51 was relatively easy and the pilot gave me a thumbs up for my execution of the stunt.

The P-51 Mustang is a powerful aircraft: The V-12 Rolls-Royce Merlin engine provides significant power and torque, requiring careful handling, particularly during takeoff. Due to its historical significance and performance characteristics, the P-51 requires respect and adherence to established procedures. For these flight experiences, it is vital to choose operators like Stallion 51, who have experience and expertise in operating and maintaining P-51s and offer professional and comprehensive flight programs. By following these procedures, individuals can enjoy a safe and memorable flight experience in a truly legendary aircraft.

Flying the P-51 Mustang is a unique experience, characterized by its powerful engine, excellent maneuverability, and demanding controls. The Mustang is known for its rapid acceleration and high speeds, especially at altitude, making it a formidable fighter. It also requires constant attention and coordination from the pilot, especially when maneuvering at high speed. The Mustang accelerates rapidly on the runway, and the pilot needs to be prepared for the powerful engine and the aircraft's tendency to climb quickly. With the landing gear retracted, the climb is exhilarating, potentially reaching 4,000 feet per minute. The Merlin engine, while powerful, can be relatively smooth and responsive at cruise speed, though the cockpit noise is considerable. The Mustang's controls require constant adjustment, with rudder and elevator trim needed even for small changes in power or airspeed.



Fig 5. Autographed copy from the pilot

In-flight visibility is excellent in all directions, though the downsloping cowling can initially make the nose appear too low. The Mustang's controls are easy to trim, but it's a constant process when maneuvering.

3. Flying the Areo Vodochody L-39 Albatros Jet Fighter

The next airplane I wanted to fly after the P-51 was a jet fighter, but I really didn't know if that would be possible. But never-the-less, I started surfing the web and found several places in the USA and abroad that offered rides. I was really surprised to find there are several different brands and models of jet fighters a person can take a ride in. These include the Areo L-39 Albatros, the Mig-39 Fulcrum, the Hawker Hunter and the T-33. All of these rides are very expensive; the cost, of course, depends on the length of time you are in the air and the brand and class of the airplane. Another thing you must consider is the

location of the airport and the type of ride you are interested in taking...straight and level or aerobatic. After about a week of searching, I was surprised to find an airport in Tampa, Florida that offered a ride in the Aero L-39 Albatros. You can choose a flight of 30 minutes, 45 minutes or 1 hour. You also have a choice of the aerobatic maneuvers you would like included in the flight. The longer you fly the more the cost \$4,950.00-\$7,750.00. I thought, what the hell, I might as well splurge and stay in the air as long as possible, since this is a once in a lifetime adventure. For the next week or so, I checked the weather forecast and finally settled on a day with a forecast of 80% sunshine (09/20/2022).

I scheduled the one hour flight which included the following maneuvers: Aileron Roll, Barrel Roll, Loop, Slow Roll, Inverted Flight, Hammerhead, Snap Roll, Tail Slide, Immelmann, Split-S, Cuban 8 and High-G sustained turns. Most of these I had done before in the Pitts and/or the P-51. So, I Googled the three that I had not performed before, so when my turn came in the airplane I would try to perform them.

The Immelmann is a classic aerobatic maneuver combining a half-loop (climbing up) with a half-roll at the top, bringing the aircraft back to level flight but facing the opposite direction, effectively gaining altitude and reversing course, named after WWI German flying ace Max Immelmann; it's also seen in roller coasters as a diving loop.

The Split-S is an aerobatic maneuver where an aircraft performs a half roll inverted, then pulls into a descending half-loop, ending in level flight in the opposite direction at a lower altitude, essentially reversing course while trading altitude for speed, making it great for energy management or disengaging in air combat. It's the reverse of an Immelmann turn, requiring smooth control inputs to manage significant G-forces and rapidly building airspeed from the dive, often done with reduced power to prevent over speeding.

The Cuban 8 is an aerobatic maneuver creating a figure-eight pattern in the vertical plane, consisting of two connected loops with half rolls on the descending 45-degree lines, allowing the aircraft to transition from level flight through an inverted position and back to level flight in the opposite direction, effectively changing heading and altitude.

Because of its advantages regarding maintenance, safety, and performance, the L-39 Albatros was used by East Germany's NVA and countless other air forces. In the United States, you can experience what distinguishes this aircraft in a real mission: Impressive maneuverability at every speed and in every situation. It is for this reason that the L-39 Albatros is still used for training and combat missions by many Air Forces. You can fly one of these babies yourself – with real professionals as your instructor.

Being able to analyze a situation in a split second, to pull the controls and react at the highest speed – a flight in a jet fighter follows its own rules. It is for this reason fighter pilots only call themselves professionals after many thousands of flight hours. You can rely on the pilots on your flight with the L-39 Albatros in Florida. Experience with your own body the massive G-forces created by maneuvers such as Immelmann turns, barrel rolls, or Cuban eights.

You feel honored when the pilots divert the controls of the L-39 Albatros over to you if you are a licensed pilot. And you can see for yourself the total concentration it requires to tame the forces of the jet. In this moment you'll know exactly what you are capable of. And you can even log the flight in your pilot logbook! Reach for the skies in a real jet fighter and see if you're made of the right stuff to become a true 'Top Gun'.

You'll be carving through the air at the controls of a lightning fast L-39 Albatros -as used in space training by Russian cosmonauts - and pulling

an incredible 8 G's as you loop, roll and dive across the skies. This amazing jet fighter ride in Florida includes a pre-flight briefing, under the guidance of seasoned instructors who'll prepare you for the exhilarating experience ahead. Imagine the total thrill as, in full flying gear, your heart skips a beat as you blast down the runway and take off into the wide blue yonder. This is not a simulator - it's the real deal. Push your nerves and adrenaline to the limit as you fly a military jet fighter for the ultimate aerial adventure.

The two-seated L-39 Albatros was designed in the late 1960's for primary and advanced training. There is an estimated 2800 L-39 Albatroses produced, having served in over 30 air forces around the world, being the most widely produced and safest jet trainer in the world. The aircraft's slick body design and engine pushes it to a top speed of 485-600 mph: almost the speed of sound.

Flying the L-39 Albatros involves ground instruction on its cockpit and systems (like ejection seats), followed by hands-on performance of basic maneuvers, aerobatics (loops, rolls, etc), emphasizing smooth throttle control, especially during landing, for a thrilling experience in a capable jet trainer. After cockpit review we taxied to the runway for takeoff. I was really pumped up anticipating the acceleration and takeoff. The powerful acceleration pushes you back in your seat and it's only a minute or two before you are flying vertical.

I couldn't wait to slip the surly bonds of earth and dance the shies on laughter-silver wings. OMG what an awesome thrill; it was mind blowing. It was so smooth and quiet compared to the P-51 Mustang. Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue, I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace, where never lark nor ever eagle flew. With its impressive rate of climb of about 4,000 ft/min, the L-39 Albatros was at 5000 ft in less than two minutes. I thought this is incredible. It

seemed like I had only taken a few breaths after we were in the air and there we were at 5000 ft. and ready to start our aerobatic program.



Fig 6. All dressed up and ready to fly



Fig 7. I couldn't believe I was finally flying a jet fighter

The pilot let me try my hand at performing the Aileron Roll, Barrel Roll, Inside Loop, Slow Roll, Inverted Flight, Hammerhead, Snap Roll, Tail Slide, and High-G sustained turns. The only ones I had doubts about was the Hammerhead and the Tail Slide. I was able to complete both but I was a bit sloppy in my recovery.

After a few seconds for me to recover, the pilot announced, "I have the controls" and he performed the Immelmann, the Split-S and the Cuban 8 a couple of times and then said, "you have the controls". Even though I knew this was coming it still pumped me up a bit. The Immelmann was a piece of cake, but the other two were a bit difficult, so the pilot gave me another chance. I reminded him that we had already been in the air over an hour, but he said, no problem.

As you can see I have borrowed several lines from the awesome poem “High Flight” written by the jet pilot, John Gillespie Magee Jr. The poem brings tears to my eyes every time I read it or listen to it.

In summary, the L-39 Albatros was relatively easy to fly even when performing aggressive maneuvers, including pulling significant G-forces, rapid aileron rolls (which can feel intense due to quick starts/stops), loops, and swift direction changes. The cockpit offers panoramic views, letting you weave through clouds and experience the ground rushing up during dives. It delivers the thrill of jet power, yet many pilots report a smooth, neutral feel during transitions, unlike the constant forces in racing cars. It's a true flying experience, with no autopilot, allowing you to manage complex systems and feel connected to the aircraft.

It's was a "blast" and a "dream come true" for me and many others, offering an intense, unforgettable adventure that's both thrilling and surprisingly manageable, making you feel like a real jet pilot. I guarantee this is an adventure you will certainly never forget in your lifetime.

4. Wing Walking

My last Ejection Fraction in the fall of 2023 was obtained via echocardiogram and found to be 25% (normal 50-65%), indicating sever congestive heart failure (CHF) which was due to the long-standing aortic stenosis (AS) and left bundle branch block (LBBB) resulting in mild cardiomegaly (enlarged heart) and reduced left ventricular contractile function and a reduction of stroke volume. In addition to CHF, I was also diagnosed with anemia reflecting a low red blood cell (RBC) count which is associated with a reduced hematocrit (Hct) and abnormal hemoglobin. This scenario causes reduced oxygen carrying capacity of the blood and this exacerbates the CHF. I was

scheduled to have my aortic valve replaced August 27, 2024 and I wanted to wingwalk in England before the procedure. The CHF begin affecting my activity during my trip to Tanzania with my great, great niece Autum, in the summer of 2022.

The flight from Gainesville to Atlanta and on to England for the wing walking adventure was scheduled to depart that evening because my son, Cory, had planned a surprise 90th birthday party for me that afternoon. The birthday party was awesome and lots of my family and friends attended.

My traveling companion, and lady friend Janie Chambers would accompany me on this trip. She arrived in Gainesville a couple of days before our scheduled departure. During the last two days before our departure, we double checked our bags to make sure we packed everything we would need for the trip, including our passports. We usually carry one suitcase each (as small as possible) and a backpack or travel bag. After celebrating my birthday, I drove us to the airport and parked my car in the long term parking lot. After parking the car, I had to slow my pace somewhat walking to the terminal. This is done by decreasing your stride and reducing your pace (or gait). Always remember when you have CHF your objective is to limit the amount of energy you use when moving from one place to another. Always avoid walking up inclines and steps if possible. Sit down and rest every chance you get. Our Delta flight left Gainesville at 8:12 PM July 21 and after changing planes in Atlanta, we arrived at Heathrow airport in London at 1:15 PM the next day (July 22). When you fly overnight, try to sleep as much as possible on the plane and always check your luggage. I always fly a step or two up from economy, because the seating is more comfortable, the meals are better, alcoholic beverages are free, and you have more legroom. Premium economy is usually in its own cabin on most airplanes.

After arriving at the airport, we stopped and had coffee and a snack at Starbucks before continuing on to our hotel. The best way to get from Heathrow airport to downtown London is on the Heathrow express train that terminates at Paddington subway (Underground or Tube) Station. Be sure to download “The Tube Map” app before leaving the US.

Both the train (tram) and “underground, tube, subway” accept credit cards. All you have to do is swipe your card at both the entrance and exit. Although you can buy train tickets at the station, I prefer purchasing them before leaving the USA. There are several different websites you can use to purchase tickets; I buy my train tickets on Rail Europe; you can also buy Eurail passes here, but they are a bit difficult to use. Also, you can buy an Oyster Smartcard for use on public transportation in London, but I prefer to use my credit card.

For people like me with severe CHF and low levels of energy take your time getting through the airport and Underground. Never take the stairs. Usually, you can find a lift or escalator. Some of the stairs are pretty steep in most European cities, so take your time if you have to climb them. I usually take 10 steps, then take a short break before ascending the next ten.

Our hotel, the Mercure, was just outside Paddington Station and we arrived there about 4:00 PM and checked in. There is a Hilton Hotel that is connected directly to the station but it is more expensive. I usually budget enough money for a four-star hotel, which runs \$150-\$200 a night. I book hotels through Booking.com and day tours through Viator.com. The Mercure Hotel was just fine but the rooms were a bit small. Also, the hotel’s breakfast was just OK. The next time, I will stay at the Hilton. I like to include breakfast when booking the hotel. We had dinner that first evening at a nearby Korean Restaurant; of course, we didn’t know what to order so Janie asked a couple of Korean ladies

sitting at a nearby table. We both enjoy meeting and talking to people when we travel. There is a wide range of places to eat in London. Pub dining is real popular and usually the food is pretty good. After dinner, we strolled back to the hotel and went to bed, because the next day was going to be a long one. I had two wing walking experiences scheduled for the next day, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The first one was a straight and level flight, which is mandatory before taking the aerobatic flight. We arose early the next morning, had breakfast and headed to Paddington Station. As we were walking to the train departure platform, we spotted a coffee shop and stopped for coffee and a pastry. The coffee was pretty good but not as good as Starbucks. We hopped on the train for Kemble at 7:30 AM and arrived at 8:40 AM, which was about an hour and 15 minutes due west of London. Not far out from London, the train went through Reading. Reading has a prison known as “Reading Gaol”. The prison gained notoriety for housing the famous author, poet and playwright Oscar Wilde from 1895 to 1897 after his conviction for gross indecency (homosexuality). After spending two years in prison there, he fled to France and there he wrote his only ballad. It was appropriately named “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” and it is beautiful. Oscar Wilde died of meningitis on November 30, 1900 in the Saint-Germain Neighborhood of Paris at the age of 46. That’s the neighborhood where I stay when I visit the city.

My first wing walking flight was scheduled for 11:30 AM that morning. So, we arrived in plenty of time to hang out in Kemble before journeying on to the venue. The town (or village) of Kemble was very small, less than 1000 permanent residents. So, it was easy to explore. Also, Uber was not available so, an attendant at the station called us a taxi, but he was busy and said he would pick us up at 10:00 o’clock.

The only pub in town was not far away from the station so we walked there and had another cup of coffee. The taxi picked us up right on time and had us at “Go Wing walking” at 10:30 AM; he said he would pick us up that afternoon.

I had already checked on wing walking here in the United States and found a place in Sequim, Washington. It’s the Mason Wing Walking Academy; however, the academy has age limits. The full day course was a bit expensive; and it involved developing wing walking skills by repetitive climbs from the cockpit to the upper wing rack of the Stearman biplane. Before they ever start the engine, every step, move, and handhold is supposed to be loaded into your muscle memory.

I really didn’t know for sure if I had the strength to climb from the cockpit to the top of the wing in flight. This is the part of the school I didn’t like, but I was ready to give it a try. So, I called the academy to register for a flight and when I told them my age, I was told that I was a bit too old. I think their cutoff age was 82. The last time I checked, the academy had been shut down by the FAA.

I was not going to give up on wing walking, however. So, I started looking for places in Europe where a person could wingwalk without having to climb out on the wing in flight. I wanted to find a place where I could be standing on top of the airplane when it took off. I was surprised to find several places in the United Kingdom where this was possible. I checked out numerous places and found one in England that I liked. The name of the site was “Go Wing Walking with Aerobatics”. It was located just outside Cirencester in the Cotswold District of Gloucestershire, England. Cirencester lies on the lower dip slopes of the Cotswold Hills, an outcrop of oolitic limestone. Natural drainage is into the River Churn, which flows roughly north to south through the eastern side of the town and joins the River Thames near Cricklade, a

little to the south. The Thames River itself rises just a few miles west of Cirencester.

Before I booked the wing walking adventure, I checked to see the dates of “Tattoo” in Edinburgh, Scotland; that year it was August 2-24, so I made reservations and purchased tickets online for Saturday, August 03.

“Go Wing Walking with Aerobatics” had been in business for 40 years and they were advertised as being unique and the best. The biplanes had 450 hp engines, and they promised to guarantee the most dramatic, thrilling and powerful ride available in the UK and probably the rest of the world.

Since 1984, Aero Superbatics Ltd had been operators of famous air show teams including the Crunchie Flying Circus, The Utterly Butterly’s, Guinot Wing walkers and the Breitling Wing walkers, displaying breath-taking performances across the world. They were Guinness World Record holders and have been featured in numerous TV shows wing walking with world renowned athletes and celebrities.

AeroSuperBatic Wing walkers are experts in wing walking and have performed across the country and worldwide in Airshow displays. Two young ladies (Katie and Anna) briefed us on all safety aspects and training to fulfil a person’s wing walking experience. They also assisted me in climbing on top of the biplane and then strapped me to a pole and placed goggles over my eyes.

The “first” wing walking experience.

Standing on top of an airplane flying through the air (wing walking) even in straight and level flight is an experience that triggers the release of adrenaline that causes a potent combination of sensations and

emotions, leading to a profound sense of exhilaration and accomplishment, particularly for a first timer.



Fig 8. After safety instructions

After an introduction and safety precaution, I was cleared to go. I was very careful not to tell them I was in heart failure, because I was afraid they wouldn't let me go. After I was securely strapped in and left all alone on top of the airplane, I kept thinking, what the hell am I doing. Then the powerful radial engine came alive like a fire breathing dragon and the vibration sent chills up my spine.



Fig 9. I am ready to meet the Wendigo

When we started taxiing out to the grassy runway for takeoff, I had no idea what to expect. The airplane with me on top bounced around a bit on the way to the runway and then the pilot advanced the throttle and we picked up speed to about 60 mph and then it lifted off and we were in the air and the feeling I got was indescribable. After that, I just cleared my mind and absorbed the unfamiliar thrill and the forceful wind in my face with the breathtaking panoramic views below added to the overall enjoyment. The flight was relatively short but the airplane reached speeds up to 140 mph. The pilot made a couple of fly-bys so the spectators could get a good view of the person on top of the airplane.

When we returned and I dismounted, I had a difficult time walking. I thought I was going to fall down but I made it to one of the fence posts and grabbed on. I had second thoughts about the afternoon aerobatic flight, but I had already paid the non-refundable fee, so I thought “what the hell”, I might as well go ahead and do the flight but they may have to lift me to the top of the airplane.

The mornings are usually devoted to straight and level flight, with only a few shallow banking turns and the afternoons are reserved for the aerobatic flights.

This schedule gives people like me the opportunity to do both in the same day. My first flight was scheduled so we would have time between flights to relax and have a light lunch and watch a few other flights. I was surprised at the number of people there; some to watch and others to wingwalk. One old woman was there and I thought what the hell is she doing here. I thought she must be there to watch, but I was wrong, she was there to wingwalk! I almost asked her how old she was, but I never ask a woman how old she is.

The “second” Aerosuperbatic Experience

Before we took off, I was asked what aerobatic maneuvers I wanted the pilot to do and I asked...what maneuvers can he do and I was told, the aerobatic flights included rolls, loops, stalls and the “granddaddy” of them all, the breathtaking “Hammerhead”. I said have the pilot do them all...just tell him to try and scare me, and that got a weird laugh from the girls. After a safety briefing in the headquarters shack, I was escorted by the girls out to the airplane and one secured me to the pole on top of the airplane while the other one talked to the pilot...I heard him laugh a bit, also.

We took off that afternoon about 1:00 PM and the airplane begin to climb to 3500 feet to commence the aerobatic maneuvers. The pilot had told me he would ask me if I was ready by doing a side-to-side rocking motion of the wings and if I was ready give him a thumbs up. At 3500 feet he gave me the rocking motion and I gave him thumbs up. Then all hell broke loose. He did a quick roll to the right and then one to the left. The earth seemingly spun around me as the plane gently rolled, pausing inverted for a moment of zero-G. I hadn't even recovered from the last roll when the airplane went straight up into an inside loop...During the second loop instead of continuing and going back down, he had the airplane hang there inverted for several seconds. Then he leveled off so I could get my breath, and then he pulled all the way back on the throttle to slow the plane and then gradually pulled back on the "joystick" (also called the elevator) and the plane went up until it completely stalled. Initiating the stall was not that bad, but during the recovery, when the nose of the plane went straight down and this almost took my breath away. If any of you pilots (and passengers) out there think stalls are a bit nerve-racking inside the cockpit, try doing one on top of the airplane.

I knew the next maneuver was going to be the dreaded "hammerhead" so I started to tense-up a bit. The maneuver begins from straight and



Fig 10. The first inside loop

level flight, requiring the pilot to gain sufficient airspeed (often about 20 mph above cruise speed or higher, like 155-165 mph) before initiating the vertical climb. The pilot smoothly pulls back on the joystick, initiating a quarter-loop to establish a vertical climb, typically aiming for approximately 4 Gs. As the aircraft climbs vertically, the pilot focuses on maintaining a precise straight-up vertical line. Slight right rudder pressure is applied to counteract the left yaw tendency caused by the engine's torque.

As the aircraft climbs vertically and its air speed decreases, the pilot closely monitors the wingtip, anticipating the moment when the aircraft's momentum is almost exhausted. At this critical point, the pilot applies full left rudder and a small amount of right aileron to initiate a rapid pivot around the yaw axis. The pivot must be executed precisely,

aiming to turn the aircraft 180 degrees, orienting it for a vertical descent.



Fig 11. Descending in the “Hammerhead”

Pilots must manage torque and gyroscopic effects from the propeller during the pivot. The propeller's rotation can cause unwanted pitching or rolling, requiring adjustments using the joystick to maintain control and prevent an inverted spin entry. After the pivot, the aircraft descends vertically. The pilot looks at the ground for a reference point and may use right rudder to stop the rotation as the aircraft approaches a perfectly vertical downline. I thought I was going to die. That's when I thought I heard the Wendigo call my name, but it was probably just the wind. The pilot neutralizes the ailerons and rudder, allowing the aircraft to accelerate in the vertical dive. Once sufficient airspeed is regained,

the pilot recovers to level flight, completing the maneuver. After landing, we taxied back to the headquarters shack with me still a bit disoriented, but this time I wasn't dizzy like I was after the "first flight" when I exited the plane. Janie was waiting for me and we walked to the headquarters shack where the girls were. The first question Katie asked me was, "Were you scared" and I said, no.

Ultimately, the thrill of wing walking for the first time comes from a mixture of sensory overload, a sense of danger overcome, the physical sensations of flight and aerobatics, and the immense satisfaction of achieving something truly remarkable that only a few people experience. It was truly a mind blowing adventure and I avoided the Wendigo, this time.



Fig 12. Here I am with Janie and still alive

That afternoon when the fun was over, our taxi man, was waiting to drive us back to the Kemble train station and we boarded the train

back to London. When the train stopped, we headed directly for the hotel and relaxed for a while before going out to dinner. We would spend the next nine days in London Town with day trips to Manchester and Cambridge to visit some of our friends.

5. Soaring

Not long after we returned from our flight to Poplarville, I started taking glider flying lessons with Windy's father at Flying Ten Airport. The cockpit of the trainer glider had two tandem seats and the instructor sat in the back seat and I sat in the front seat. During the introductory flight we were towed up by an airplane to 2000 feet and released. The active pilot is the one who releases the glider from the tow plane. The primary objective of the introductory flight is to cover the take-off and towing procedures, followed by release from the towing plane and the landing. Over the next couple of months, I flew several times with my instructor. Sometime two or three in one day. We practiced thermalling, turns, stalls and spins and then landing. Landing can be a pain in the ass sometimes, especially if there is a crosswind.

After flight number 10, I was allowed to "solo" and what a thrill that was, even though I was a bit apprehensive. I kept thinking, I had better keep the airport in site at all times because I am going to have to land this thing and I don't have any power. I gave a lot of extra thought to the techniques of landing. During my second solo flight, I practiced stalls and recover. I sure was happy I had practiced power off stalls a lot in an airplane. Every time I flew, I knew precisely what maneuvers I would practice during the flight because the night before I would make a list and study each maneuver. Gliders have air brakes (or spoilers), which are essential for controlling their descent rate and landing precisely, acting like a throttle to manage altitude rather than speed, unlike powered aircraft. Pilots use the spoilers to increase drag, steepen the glide path, and land accurately in a designated spot,

preventing them from overshooting the runway. In case the spoilers don't decrease your altitude enough for a safe landing an experienced pilot can slide the glider in, a technique I learned flying an airplane. A forward slip (for altitude loss) is a fundamental skill for glider pilots to use to lose altitude quickly and manage descent without increasing airspeed, crucial for landing precisely, especially when you are too high or without enough circling room, using a combination of aileron and opposite rudder to increase drag and descent rate.

One day when I was out flying, it must have been on my third or fourth solo flight, I was towed up and released at 3,000 feet (AGL)(above ground level) and it was a perfect day for gliding. The thermals were very strong and in about 10 minutes, I looked at the altimeter and I was approaching 5,000 feet and I thought I would try to do a spin. I had practiced stalls before in the glider, but not a spin. My family and friends who know me; know I will not settle for normal limits...I have to go a bit further. I had checked earlier to make sure the glider I was flying was certified for doing spins. Performing a spin in a glider involves creating an asymmetric stall (one wing more stalled than the other) with yaw (a side-to-side twisting motion), causing the glider to autorotate in a steep, corkscrew descent, characterized by high sink rate and lack of control response until recovery. Recovery involves applying full opposite rudder, neutralizing ailerons, and gently pushing the stick forward to break the stall, then easing out of the dive. OMG what fun; I had lost about 500 feet on a 360 degree spin and I was still at 4,500 feet. I thought this is a really good maneuver to lose altitude and stay in the same spot. So, the next time I initiated the spin, I did two revolutions and sure enough, I was at about 3,500 feet. I was aloft for about 1.0 hour and when I landed, I was so happy with my accomplishments that day. "I really felt it". I told my instructor all about the flight.

Flying a glider is often described as the closest a human can get to soaring like a bird. It is a peaceful, intellectually stimulating, and exhilarating experience where you harness natural air currents to stay aloft without an engine. Without an engine, the flight is largely silent, apart from the rush of wind passing over the sleek fuselage. This quietness makes the experience feel incredibly smooth like floating. Glider pilots constantly observe the environment, using weather clues like cloud formations and circling birds to find rising currents of air (thermals, ridge lift, and wave lift). It is a mental challenge, like a game of "chess with Mother Nature," to work the air and stay aloft for hours. Gliders typically have large, clear bubble canopies that offer spectacular, unobstructed panoramic views. While it can be calm, finding and flying in strong thermals can be a bumpy, roller-coaster-like ride with significant G-forces during tight turns as the pilot works to stay within the column of rising air. Gliders require constant, hands-on control and an excellent feel for the aircraft's response to the air, which many pilots find deeply satisfying and an excellent way to improve core flying skills. In essence, flying a glider is less about getting from A to B and more about the art and challenge of the flight itself, leveraging



Fig 13. Arlene was my first passenger

gravity and atmospheric energy to achieve silent, graceful motion through the sky. After 27 flights I took my check ride with an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner and passed with flying colors. The next couple of weeks I practiced flying the glider from the back seat and then I scheduled three straight flights and took Arlene, Cami and Cory for flights with me flying the glider from the back seat and them sitting in the front seat. They loved the panoramic views from the front seat. The remainder of that summer I took several people for glider rides.

6. Hang Gliding



Fig 14. Here I am ready to go

Many, many years ago me and Arlene took a trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina to visit Kitty Hawk. Kitty Hawk is famous for being the site where the Wright brothers achieved the first successful powered airplane flight on December 17, 1903. While the actual flights took place a few miles south at Kill Devil Hills, the town of Kitty Hawk is credited because the Wrights sent a telegram announcing their success from its Weather Bureau office, as it was the closest established settlement at the time. The Wright Brothers flew gliders at Kill Devils Hill before they attempted powered flight. They were not, however, the first human to successfully fly a glider, that was Otto Litienthal. His accomplishments, however, did inspire the Wright brothers to pursue powered flight.

After visiting the Wright Brothers Museum and Kill Devil's Hill, we made our way to the world's largest hang gliding school, Kitty Hawk

Kites. The school operates at Jockey's Ridge State Park in Nags Head, NC and it offers beginner and advanced lessons for all experience levels.

Located on the dunes of Jockey's Ridge, they provide a variety of lesson packages and they have taught thousands of people to hang glide. We hung around for a while that afternoon and watched the students learning to hang glide so, I signed up for the school the next day and it was a blast, but I wanted to go higher.

Several years after my wife passed away, I renewed my conquest to continue eliminating items on my Bucket List. In the fall of 2020, I found a place where I could take a flight on a custom designed motorless tandem hang glider. It was the Florida Ridge Hang Gliding facility which is located on 50 acres of land in Southern Florida midway between Fort Myers and West Palm Beach, where the Atlantic and Gulf coast winds converge to create the most favorable soaring conditions in the country. With unrestricted air space and wide-open fields stretching 100 miles in every direction, the Ridge gives pilots of all abilities unlimited opportunity to test their soaring skills, thermal to cloud base, fly cross-country, and indulge in their love of free flight. The nearest town to the venue is Clewiston, which is just south of Lake Okeechobee and 4.5 hours from Gainesville. The European Conference that I usually attend annually in the fall was cancelled in 2020 because of the COVID pandemic, so I booked a flight in mid Oct of that year. I booked the flight for 11:00 PM that Saturday morning. I left Gainesville about noon on Friday and drove to Clewiston and checked in to the Holiday Inn and Suites and got a good night's rest before the flight the next day.

It was very easy to find the venue, so when I arrived and checked in, I was all set to go. After minor instruction, we were connected to an ultralight tow plane for the flight. When we reached our preset altitude

of about 3000 ft we released from the tow plane and we were flying on our own - just like a bird. It was super quiet and as close to a magic carpet ride as you can get. The weather was incredible, 70 degrees Fahrenheit with clear blues skies and a few puffy white clouds. Once aloft, you can extend your arms and become practically weightless, every move you make is as graceful as a dove's, flying over patchwork fields and mirrored lakes.



Fig 15. It was super quiet and a little windy

Soaring in a hang glider is like being a bird—a quiet, peaceful experience of freedom where you control your flight by shifting your body weight. The sensation is serene, with the only sound being the rush of the wind, and you can feel a sense of accomplishment mixed with the exhilaration of the flight as you ride thermal updrafts. I highly

recommend hang gliding, especially for people not quite ready for “extreme adventures.”

7. Motorized Hang Gliding

A few years ago, me and some friends were enjoying the Cours d'Elegance vintage automobile show at Amilia Island. I heard what sounded like a small ultralight airplane overheard and when I looked up I saw a weird looking motorized hang glider fly over. There was only one person in the contraption and he was moving along just fine. I saw three wheels underneath the machine and that led me to believe that he probably took off from the nearby Fernandina Airport. So when I returned home that night, I Googled Fernandina Airport motorized hang glider and saw the following: you can find motorized hang gliding (also called powered hang gliding or trike flying) at the Fernandina Beach Airport (Fernandina Beach, Florida) through operators like Hang Glide USA and Florida Adventure Sports, offering tandem flights for incredible aerial views of Amelia Island and the coastline. These experiences use powered trikes that provide a unique, open-air feeling for sightseeing and adventure. So, I contacted Florida Adventure Sports and scheduled a ride.

Ultralight trike powered hang gliding uses a three-wheeled cart (trike) with a hang-glider style fabric wing, powered by a propeller, for easy, wheeled takeoff and flight, controlled intuitively by shifting your body weight on a control bar to steer the wing, offering an accessible way to experience flight without needing a runway or complex licenses. The pilot holds a control bar connected to the wing; pushing forward pitches down, pulling back pitches up, and shifting weight left or right rolls the aircraft left and right. Florida Adventure Sports has an office at the airport, so when I arrived, I chatted with the pilot for a bit about safety, etc, then we suited up and walked out to the trike. There's very little room to sit, so he put me in first, then he crawled aboard in front of me.

An ultralight trike can lift off the pavement in as little as 80 to 250 feet under optimal conditions. This distance is highly variable and depends on several critical factors.



Fig 16. All suited up and ready

After climbing out to about 1000 ft we headed due east toward the beach. When we arrived at the beach, we headed due north toward the town of Fernandina Beach. After flying over the town and Fort Clinch State Park we flew over into Georgia and descended to only about 300 ft and flew along the east side of Cumberland Island. We saw a few people on Stafford Beach and they waved at us. We flew all the way to the north end of the Island and then turned and started back. This time the pilot took us down really, really low; we were only a few feet off

the ground and I thought we may land but we didn't. This time when we flew over the beach people we were only about 40 ft above the ground. Then we went back to the airport.



Fig 17. Flying up the beach

In summary, a motorized hang glider trike ride offers exhilarating, open-cockpit freedom, feeling like a "motorcycle in the sky," as you soar with unobstructed views, controlling direction by shifting weight on a control bar while a pusher propeller provides power. You will experience sensations of flying low over the beach and at times skimming the ocean water, and experiencing incredible freedom, controlled by intuitive weight shifts, providing a thrilling, visceral connection to flight without the enclosed feeling of an airplane.

8. Hot Air Balloon Ride

Me and my wife used to visit California a lot, especially northern California. Sometimes we would drive from LA to San Francisco via Carmel by the Sea and on to Napa Valley. We went there with family and friends and often, just me and Arlene. When we went alone we always stayed at the same B and B in Yountville, one of the small towns in the valley. Napa Valley stretches from the city of Napa on highway 29 in the south up towards to Calistoga on highway 128 in the north, with the Napa River running through its core. Napa Valley is 27 miles long and has over 400 wineries. Most people think that a winery and a vineyard are the same, but they are not. [note: there's a key difference: a vineyard is where grapes are grown, focusing on viticulture (farming vines), while a winery is the facility where grapes are processed into wine (crushed, fermented, aged and bottled). Many places combine both (a winery on a vineyard), but some vineyards sell grapes to other wineries, and some wineries buy grapes from many different vineyards]. Some of our favorite wineries in Napa Valley were Sterling, Beringer, Francis Ford Coppola, Artesa, Castello di Amorosa, V. Sattui and Gratus.

Some of these vineyards have unique characteristics; Sterling is accessible by cable car (or aerial tram), F. Ford Coppola was in the Napa Valley, however, it moved to Sonoma County in 2006. It is really unique with a Tucker automobile displayed in the winery's movie memorabilia museum, often described as being on a turntable in a special room near the tasting patio, offering views of the Oscars, Coppola won for the films *The Godfather* series. Artesa has fantastic views of the sounderings from the hilltop. V. Sattui offers a great lunch on picnic tables under huge Valle Oak Trees. Gratus is owned and operated by one of my former students and associates, Dr Thomas J Wargovich. Tom graduated from our Cardiology Fellowship Program

and practiced Cardiology for several years before becoming a wine maker. The wine he produces is some of the best tasting wine in Napa Valley.

On that trip to Napa Valley, we flew into San Francisco and picked up a rental car at the airport and drove to Napa Valley beginning on highway 101 to Interstate 80 across the Oakland Bay bridge then highway 29 that runs through the Napa Valley.

After checking into the Bed and Breakfast and resting for a bit we went walking around the very small town of Yountville. A couple of blocks north of our B & B was the French Laundry Restaurant which is one of the most expensive restaurants in the world. When we walked by it was not yet opened but the door was open so I struck my head in and the Maitre d' invited us in and showed us around. At that time, dinner was \$250-300 per person. At present, it's the 6th most expensive restaurant in the world with dinners at \$400.00/person.

Founded in 1978, Napa Valley Aloft is one of the original hot air balloon companies to offer agricultural aerial tours over the iconic Napa Valley. They are the only company launching in the charming town of Yountville, situated at the historical Estate Yountville, neighboring award-winning hotels, and restaurants. In addition, they have more hot air balloon launch site options in Napa Valley, and they provide hot air balloon baskets that carry fewer passengers than competitors, giving their passengers a more open atmosphere to enjoy the breathtaking views on their balloon ride. Their FAA-certified hot air balloon pilots have extensive knowledge of ballooning over Napa Valley and are among the most experienced in the world. Their knowledge and passion for hot air ballooning make them the perfect captain to take your balloon adventure to great heights.

After we toured the all impressive French Laundry we walked down the street to one of the local pubs and had a couple of drinks before retiring.

I had booked the hot air balloon ride for early the next morning. We were instructed to be there before daybreak. If I recall correctly, there were three or four balloons being inflated. (note: You inflate a hot air balloon in two stages: first, a large fan blows cold air into the fabric envelope to expand it on the ground; then, propane burners are used to heat that air, making it buoyant and lifting the balloon upright for flight). There must have been two dozen people waiting in line to register. We were close enough to the balloons to hear the blast of the fires from the burners inflating the balloons and everybody was getting really excited. After everybody had registered and the balloons were inflated participants were assigned to their respective balloon. Our captain was awesome and full of energy. He welcomed everyone aboard and told us we were going on a thrilling ride above some of the most beautiful scenery in California. Then he said relax and enjoy the ride. So that's what we did. I thought the world was a nicer place from up there. It's a place where you can chase your dreams across the sky in peace and solitude.

Napa Valley balloon rides don't have a fixed distance, as it depends on the wind, but flights typically last about an hour and cover several miles, drifting over vineyards from 1,000 to 3,000 feet high, offering panoramic views before landing, often followed by a champagne breakfast. The journey is more about the experience and scenery than covering miles, with pilots skillfully navigating varying winds for unique flights.

A hot air balloon ride feels like a serene, dreamlike float rather than a fast flight, characterized by incredible stillness, panoramic views, and a unique sense of floating with the wind, not against it, often described

as peaceful, quiet, and like being on a giant, gentle balcony. You experience the world shrinking below with surprising smoothness,



Fig 18. Here we are ready to hop aboard

feeling weightless as the earth seems to drift away, all accompanied by the occasional whoosh of the burner and the fresh, crisp air. Expect a gentle bump as you touch down, often followed by a brief, thrilling drag



Fig 19. Up, up and away in our beautiful balloon

9. Bungee Jumping

In April 2010, I was invited to speak at the inaugural meeting on Arterial Pulse Research in Sydney, Australia. The meeting was organized by my dear friend and colleague Professor Albert Avolio and was hosted by the Australian School of Advanced Medicine of Macquarie University. The meeting coincided with our daughter Cami's spring break. So, she and her family planned to fly from their home in Okinawa, Japan and meet us in Sydney.

My wife, Arlene and I had never been to the South Island of New Zealand, so we decided to leave Gainesville early for the Sydney meeting and spend a few days in New Zealand on our way. We left Orlando on Air New Zealand and arrived in Christchurch the morning of March 26. After a few days in Christchurch, we rented a car and drove south to Milford Sound which is in the Fiordland National Park. From there, we drove northeast to Queenstown. Queenstown is a skier's paradise in the winter with several excellent ski resorts and in the summer, there are tons of things to do including bungy jumping and paragliding, two extreme sports events that I wanted to try. Arlene wasn't too thrilled about the idea, but she didn't try to stop me. The idea of bungy jumping began with a small group of natives on Pentecost Island, one of the islands that make up the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu between Fiji and Australia. The natives perform the event annually between April and June every year and they call it "land diving". Young men dive headfirst from tall wooden towers with vines tied to their feet, in a ritual believed to ensure a good yam (sweet potato) harvest. The ritual is also used to show acceptance of the young boys into manhood. The ritual inspired the New Zealander, AJ Hackett and a few of his friends to develop large elastic chords to use for the diving event instead of vines and "bungy jumping" was born. We arrived in Queenstown about noon Saturday April 3 and checked into our B & B. The next morning, we headed out to the AJ Hackett Bungy Jumping site on the Kawarau Gorge Suspension Bridge which was just outside the city. The bridge is 141 feet above the Kawarau River. Needless to say, I was the oldest person there by about 40 years but that didn't bother me at all. Somebody told me that if you jump naked the jump is free, but that didn't go over too well with Arlene, so I jumped with my clothes on. But, as I was registering to jump the young lady said if you are older than 65, you can jump free, so I took back my credit card. I was told beforehand not to look down before I jumped. After I was

prepared for the jump with the bungee cord tied to my feet, I stepped out on the small platform and looked down and it looked like 1000 feet down to the water. I thought, what in the hell am I doing, but it was too late to back out, so I spread my arms in a swan dive and lifted off into the thrill of a lifetime and one I will never forget. Arlene was standing there watching



Fig 20. Here I am airborne with my clothes on

the entire jump and was relieved when I was disconnected from the bungee cord and placed into the raft on the river. After the jump, we drove back to the city and had lunch while planning our afternoon.

Bungee jumping is like taking a leap into the abyss, where you forgo solid ground for a few heart-pounding seconds of pure exhilaration.

Before the jump, it's entirely normal to feel a mixture of excitement and nervousness. They say "If you're not scared or nervous, then there's probably something wrong with you. A brave person is not one who does not feel afraid, but one who conquers that fear." Remember, feeling nervous is perfectly normal and jumpers are encouraged to embrace it. However, I didn't have that problem. Picture yourself standing on the edge of a towering platform. Your heart races as you gaze up at the open sky and then down to the water below. The wind blows through your hair, and the world seems both distant and surreal. Your legs feel a bit weak, and your mind is full of excitement. As you leap from the tiny board, that feeling in your stomach is like the big drop on a rollercoaster, but it lasts much longer. It's as if your heart leaps into your throat, and you briefly forget to breathe. The sensation is electrifying, and your body wants to defy gravity as you plummet. At the same time a burst of pure adrenaline surges through you that leaves you breathless, and you can't help but let out a scream (or squirm) from the lump in your throat. During the initial seconds of your jump, you're in freefall. The ground is rushing towards you, and time seems to slow down. The sensation of weightlessness takes over, and you're no longer bound by the laws of gravity. Wind rushes past your ears at what feels like a million miles per hour. It's a feeling of pure freedom; unlike anything you've ever experienced before.

10. Paragliding (New Zealand and Glenwood Springs Colorado)

That afternoon, Arlene was going shopping and I was going paragliding. I took the Skyline Gondola from downtown Queenstown to the G Force Paragliding site above the city. There was not enough wind to launch from the usual site adjacent to the gondola, so we climbed to the top of the mountain to launch. Which was a bite difficult for me and I was exhausted, so I rested a bit before launch. I was

strapped into a harness in front of the experienced pilot. The pilot told me to run as fast as I could down the mountain with him right behind me. When the canopy filled with air we lifted off and the adrenaline started flowing to every cell of my body. Underneath us were spectacular views of Lake Wakatipu, and the surrounding mountains.

Tandem paragliding feels like serene, bird-like flight, a mixture of peaceful gliding and gentle exhilaration, offering unparalleled 360° panoramic views as you float comfortably in a harness, feeling the wind, completely free from the ground, with a smooth, surprisingly gentle takeoff and landing. It's surprisingly calm, like floating in an armchair high above the world, allowing you to soak in stunning landscapes without intense freefall. We circled the city three times during our



Fig 21. Awesome ride and view of the city

twenty-minute flight before landing in a soccer field below. I met Arlene back at the B & B later that afternoon and told her all about my awesome adventure.

A few years ago, me and a traveling companion took a trip to experience the famous Royal Gorge in Colorado. It is a deep canyon carved by the Arkansas River, and is located just west of Cañon City, Colorado in the south-central part of the state. The gorge is known for the Royal Gorge Bridge & Park with thrilling activities and stunning views. It's a major tourist spot with the highest suspension bridge in the U.S., a scenic train ride, ziplines, and more. We really, really enjoyed this part of Colorado; it was fantastic. After leaving Canon City, we drove through the mountain to the small town of Glenwood Springs, Colorado to visit the Glenwood Caverns Adventure park and for me to go paragliding. I really got hooked on paragliding when me and Arlene were in New Zealand.

11. Sky Diving

About three months after my wife of 57 years passed away, I decided I had grieved enough and I would continue on my journey of completing the items on my "Bucket Lists". I was able to start the grieving process several months before her death, because, in my mind, the joyful Arlene I knew and loved had already been taken away and all that was left was an empty physical body. Her spirit had already walked the path of souls to her final resting place. During that period of time, I shed a lot of tears, going through four (denial, anger, bargaining and depression) of the five emotional stages of grief a person works through after the death of a loved one; I went through the fifth one (acceptance) after her death. I was doing as well as could be expected with an ejection fraction (EF) of 20-25% and in severe heart failure.

Skydiving was on the list and since I could drive to Palatka, Florida airport in about 45 minutes, where it was offered, I would complete that one first even though I had been diagnosed with left bundle branch block and severe heart failure a few months earlier.

I contacted “Skydive Palatka”, Florida and scheduled the jump for Saturday April 27, 2019. When I arrived at the Palatka Kay Larkin Municipal Airport that sunny April morning the weather was perfect (80 degrees F) for doing outside activities. When I book an extreme activity, I always dress appropriately and arrive early (0.5-1.0 hour) in case I need to attend a briefing or sign some documents. For skydiving you must wear closed-toe shoes, be at least 18 years old (most activities do have an upper age limit) and meet weight (less than 230lbs) and be in general good health. I didn’t dare tell them I was in severe heart failure otherwise they wouldn’t have let me jump. Most people don’t understand what the term “heart failure” really means. You surely can’t tell by looking at a person if they are in heart failure. After I signed in, I watched a short video and then attended a brief ground school where the tandem instructor covered safety and body positioning. Then he got me harnessed up for the ascent and the freefall, followed by a serene parachute ride, and then we celebrated the jump with potential photos and video services.

Note: make sure you are well hydrated and eat a normal meal, but avoid any alcohol or drugs that could cause impairment. Before you harness up make sure you visit the bathroom.

You board the aircraft for the ascent to an altitude of 13,500 feet, then you will exit the aircraft for your incredible freefall. And OMG what a thrill it was.



Fig 22. Do I really want to do this? Hell yes!

As the plane climbs to the predetermined altitude, your brain's "fight or flight" response is activated, releasing a potent cocktail of dopamine, serotonin, and adrenaline. This chemical rush increases your heart and pumping ability of your heart. This response sends more blood through your body, including your brain and creates a feeling of intense, focused excitement.

During the freefall, the speed you travel depends upon body position and other factors, but it generally begins with accelerating from zero speed and eventually reaches a maximum speed called terminal velocity. A typical tandem skydiver in a belly-to-earth position will reach a terminal velocity of about 120 mph, while a more streamlined, head-down position can reach speeds of 150-180 mph or even

higher. The speed isn't constant; rather, it's a period of increasing acceleration until air resistance, or drag, balances the force of gravity.



Fig 23. Here we are in the belly-to-earth position

A pilot chute is a small auxiliary parachute used to deploy the main or reserve parachute. The pilot chute is connected by a bridle to the deployment bag containing the main parachute. Pilot chutes are a critical component of all modern skydiving. In a tandem skydive, the pilot chute is deployed when the instructor pulls the ripcord, releasing the pilot chute and starting the deployment sequence of the main parachute opening at an altitude of approximately 5,000 feet Above Ground Level (AGL). This is a regulated minimum altitude set by the United States Parachute Association (USPA) for tandem jumps.

As we were descending in the belly-to-earth position I could see the airport and the Saint Johns River. I observed this scene every time I flew to any destination east of Gainesville.

After the freefall, the parachute will be deployed, offering a slower descent and a serene parachute ride down. The landing was a bit weird; instead of landing standing up, you stick both feet straight out and land on your butt.

In summary, the joy of skydiving is a unique and multifaceted experience that combines the thrilling rush of adrenaline with a profound sense of peace, clarity, and personal accomplishment. It extends beyond the jump itself, encompassing the anticipation, the freefall, the serenity of the canopy ride, and the lasting sense of empowerment. The experience of skydiving can make you feel profoundly alive and full of gratitude. By stepping outside of your comfort zone, you can emerge feeling revitalized and inspired to live a more adventurous and purpose-filled life. I guarantee skydiving is an experience you will never forget.

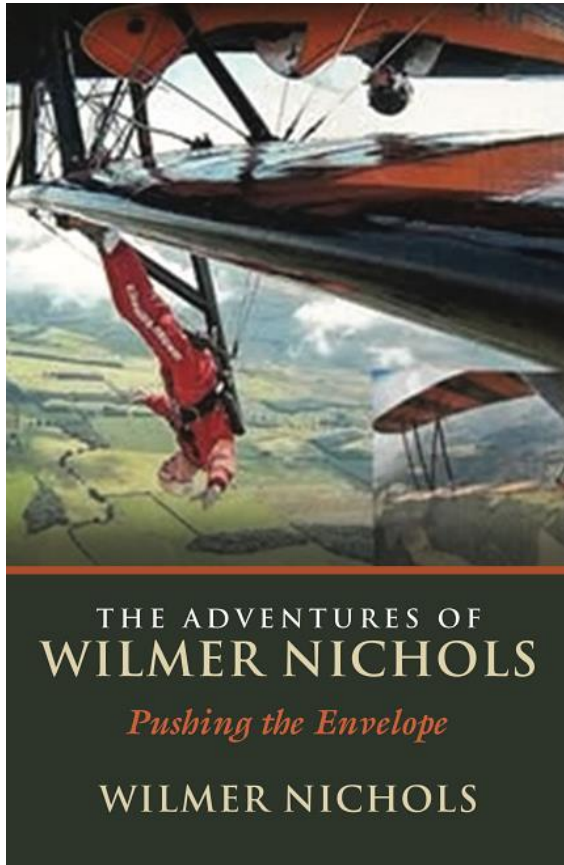
About the Author

Wilmer Nichols was born in Mississippi north of Tupelo and raised by sharecropper parents. He was the youngest of ten children: seven boys and three girls. After completing the 10th grade, at the age of seventeen, Wilmer dropped out of school and joined the US Navy and served four years during the Korean War. After being discharged from the Navy he completed one year at Northeast Mississippi Junior College before transferring to Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi.

After graduating with a BS degree in mathematics and physics, he obtained a position at Cape Canaveral working in missile tracking on Project Mercury, including the spacecraft (Freedom 7) with astronaut Alan Shepard aboard... the first American in space. Wilmer then entered the University of Southern Mississippi and graduated Cum Laude with a master's degree in mathematics, physics and biology and then went to the Manned Space Center (Lyndon B. Johnson Center) in Houston, Texas and worked on the Gemini and Apollo Projects. He completed a summer course in Classical Physiology and Modern Instrumentation at Baylor University School of Medicine and then enrolled at the University of Alabama in Birmingham and graduated Magna Cum Laude with a PhD in physiology and biophysics.

Upon graduation he was invited to The Netherlands to work at the Institute of Medical Physics in Utrecht. After almost two years he was recruited to the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland. While at Hopkins he met Dr Richard Conti, the soon to be Chief of Cardiology at the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville, Florida and he invited Wilmer to join him and his staff. During his tenure at the University, he did Sabbaticals at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, Australia and Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, England. Wilmer has co-authored six medical textbooks,

serving as lead author, and over a hundred scientific articles. Wilmer and his co-authors celebrated the publication of the seventh edition of their textbook in 2022. In his spare time, he is busy enjoying his retirement years traveling the world and completing his lifetime “Bucket List.”



This is an essential guide to some of the world's most extreme adventures. From white-water rafting the mighty Colorado River to wing walking in Southern England and many adventures in between.

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