

LIVING AROUND AND WORKING ON THE US NAVY'S F4 "PHANTOM II" – AKA "SPOOK"® by Dan Pemble – Kissimmee, Florida – September 19, 2022

My memories of a short stint on active duty in the US Navy during 1962-1965 will never leave me. In particular, after the Navy had invested about 22 weeks in training me as an Aviation Electrician, in Jacksonville, Florida, I "marched on" with my orders to check-in on site at Miramar Naval Air Station on the outskirts of San Diego. Miramar was the TOP GUN site for training the Navy's elite pilots and supporting activities. I was assigned to a training squadron called VF-121, the "Pacemakers" where we trained pilots and maintenance crews to support the McDonnell F4A, F4B, and F4C "Phantom II" aircraft!



The McDonnell Aircraft Company-built Phantom II was an extremely impressive aircraft and at the time set many world performance records for its speed and rate-of-climb, amongst other achievements. Many times while working on the ramp at Miramar Naval Air Station, a Phantom could be observed doing a high-performance takeoff during which it "blasted" down the runway with its twin General Electric J-79 engines in afterburner, rotated and assumed an almost 90-degree climb, and was basically out of sight within one minute total elapsed time! This was simply "astonishing" to watch and such spectacle occurred almost every day – more than once! Of course, as a fully-trained-and qualified Navy Aviation Electrician who contributed to the overall maintenance of these aircraft, witnessing these high-performance takeoffs instilled a sense of pride in me, as it did for all other Naval Aviation maintenance professionals!

All the Navy enlisted personnel from the VF-121 permanently-based training squadron, and those of other squadrons who were in transit at Miramar Naval Air Station for training, were housed in quarters that were within an easy walking distance to the VF-121 hangars and the Miramar flight line. Amongst many other diverse activities, the Phantom II pilot training included conducting a number of dark late night/early morning "touch-and-go" approaches to Miramar's runway. As many of us enlisted personnel slept in the noted quarters, during this pilot training, the aircraft made constant high-angle of-attack approaches at low airspeeds to hit a touchdown target; this required constant "jockeying" of the throttle levers for the powerful J-79 engines and resulted in the engines making a medium-pitched-variable "howling" sound; thus, the nickname "SPOOK", was applied to this remarkable aircraft!

I could not have been any happier being a part of all of this activity and would certainly do it all over again! This experience is precisely what led to me being accepted for my 40.5-year's of employment in commercial aviation!

