

The Job Interview

As Related by Joseph Belotti, CDR USNR-R

I was affiliated with VP-92 between 1976 and 1986. Like many SELRES pilots in the Naval Air Reserve, in civilian life I am a commercial airline pilot. One of my favorite memories from my time with VP-92 involved a cross-country “training” flight that I flew in a P-3A from NAS South Weymouth to NAS Dallas, TX during 1977 in the hopes of visiting nearby Love Field to wrangle a job interview with Braniff Airlines.

What none of the rest of the crew knew was that I had orchestrated the trip with the intention of canceling my flight plan en-route to NAS Dallas, proceed VFR (visual flight rules) to Love Field, and then taxi right up to the Braniff Airlines hangar and flight operations building there. My copilot on this flight was Pete Haynesworth, who ironically had been my flight instructor at Pensacola, FL when I was learning to fly on the T-34 Mentor. Since I was a former VP-30 instructor and the VP-92 NATOPS officer, I was assigned the task of helping Pete transition to the Orion since his background was OV-10 Mohawks.

Pete was a very polite and proper (i.e. straight-laced) gentleman who was a banker in civilian life. He became extremely agitated during our descent into NAS Dallas when I cancelled our IFR (instrument flight rules) flight plan and then proceeded VFR to Love Field. Pete was the kind of person who never used profanity. About the closest he came to cursing was the phrase “good grief”, which I heard repeatedly as we headed towards Love Field. Pete was convinced that we were all going to be severely disciplined for my irrational action! Pete was sitting in the left seat, which is in charge of the nosewheel steering, and it was very amusing to see his stunned reaction when I announced that I was leaving the cockpit to change into my business suit upon arrival at Love Field while the aircraft was still taxiing.

It is worth noting that Braniff Airlines’ headquarters at Love Field was impenetrable from the street side. It was like Fort Knox and nobody entered without an invitation from Herman Rumsey, the retired Air Force General who was the airline’s Director of Flight Operations and responsible for hiring pilots. The General was like the Wizard of Oz in the sense that “nobody sees the Great Oz”.

However, on the airfield side of the building the terrific roar of the P-3’s four turboprops was echoing off the building. The sound was very different from the sound that the normal passenger jets made and heads started popping out of doors and windows to see what was causing all the noise and commotion. When the Orion’s engines stopped and the ladder came down, I stepped off the aircraft looking very official, wearing my best civilian business suit and carrying a

briefcase. The Braniff Airlines ground personnel must have thought that I was a top government official with the Department of Defense. They all greeted me with open arms and asked what they could do for me. Of course, I said that I wanted to see General Rumsey. They all quickly directed me to a freight elevator, told me to take it up to the third floor, and then go into the first office suite on the left. No questions asked!

When I got to the top of the “ivory tower”, I found the General’s office suite, walked right in, and was met by his secretary. She asked, “Can I help you?” I responded, “I’m here to see General Rumsey.” She then asked me if I had an appointment. I told her that I did, even though I really didn’t. She looked through the General’s appointment schedule and couldn’t find my name. Looking up at me with a puzzled look on her face, she asked who I was with, meaning what business or company I was with. I told her that I was with my Navy Reserve crew and had just flown my P-3 Orion in from South Weymouth to get an interview for a pilot’s position with the airline. She then asked me to wait for a few minutes and went in to the General’s private office. I heard the sound of talking followed by a very loud boisterous laugh and then heard the General say something to the effect about this being the funniest thing that he had ever heard. Then I heard the General say to the secretary, “Send that young man in.”

When I met General Rumsey, he told me that I had a “lot of balls” to do what I did, but that he thought it was great and it showed that I really wanted to work for Braniff Airlines. Incidentally, the General’s office had very large floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the airfield and my P-3 was right below him parked behind the building. The General sent me for an immediate physical examination and hired me on the spot.

This story ended up being told in every class for newly hired Braniff Airlines flight crewmembers for many years after the event. Over time, as often happens in such cases, the original story was embellished in many ways and eventually changed completely. In the end, the P-3 Orion patrol aircraft that disgorged me in my business suit became an F-4 Phantom pilot that taxied his jet fighter right up to the hangar and walked in to ask General Rumsey for a job while still clad in his G-suit!

Another amusing part of all this was that my P-3 ended up being in the way of some Boeing 727s that were taxiing to the Braniff Airlines hangar for maintenance. Half the crew was crawling around the office building in their green flight suits looking for me to tell me that the Braniff Airlines people wanted to tow the P-3 away, which they eventually did.

One final note. When I returned from my physical and tried to get back into the Braniff Airlines headquarters building, the guard would not believe me when I told him that I had an aircraft parked behind the building. He refused to allow me through the gate until he called General Rumsey’s office to confirm my story!

Needless to say, we departed Love Field that day and then proceeded to NAS Dallas for an RON (overnight stay) and a “debriefing” about my shenanigans. As a postscript, we were never disciplined or even asked by anyone in the squadron about my diversion to Love Field. My Braniff Airlines class date was on my 29th birthday on October 3, 1977. It was a great birthday present.



Lieutenant Joe Belotti - 1977

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"The Minutemen of VP-92: The Story of New England's Naval Air Patrol Squadron"

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