

What's a Girl Gotta do?



We picked up Charlie at his hotel to ride with us to the Navy base and true to his reputation; he was accompanied by a spectacularly stunning young companion. I believe she was a Miss something or other, with long blonde hair and all of nineteen or twenty. Congressman Wilson stood tall, looked great and was exceptionally gregarious, apparently with good reason. Charlie greeted us warmly, immediately asking Brent how his good buddy Dusty was. Charlie briefly reminisced that Dusty took great care of him and after enjoying the three girls in Vienna; he was going to go pay Foggo a visit no matter where he became posted in the future. That was now the third time I heard that story, but to hear it from Charlie made it all the more authentic and enviable. I had never been to Vienna, but it was starting to sound like a great place.

After introductions, Charlie winked and asked us if we liked the look of his companion's breasts. Uniformly uttering a guttural yes, he proudly informed us that they were the best that money could buy, and nothing was too good for his little honey. She smiled appreciatively. You had to hand it to the guy; he was divorced, dynamic and definitely living life to its fullest. We loaded their luggage, made the short drive over the Coronado Bridge and were soon green lighted into the terminal at North Island. We met up there with Charlie's other guests, a collection of businessmen, some of whom I think were from his district. Looming large on the tarmac was Air Force 1. President Clinton was in town and his new 747 was impressive and fitting for the head of the world's only superpower. Its presence gave Charlie a prop

for him to entertain and impress us with his living large lifestyle while we waited for our transportation to the carrier to arrive.

Although I had heard some of the stories before meeting Charlie, there is no substitute for the man himself to speak about loving women while living in Washington. He hysterically set the tone by describing his office staff, known on the Hill as “Charlie’s Angels”. Tall, shapely, and beautiful, he related that they were hand selected based upon their looks, because “...you can teach anyone to type, but not everyone could grow tits.” With his girlfriend giggling in approval, Charlie then segued into how he loved to take his girls, office staff or otherwise onto Air Force 1. As a senior member of the democratic congress, President Clinton afforded him every privilege and courtesy, but one. Clinton refused to be included in a photograph with Charlie and his Angels, for fear that everyone would assume that they were the President’s mistresses.

He had us rolling on the ground with laughter as our transportation to the carrier arrived. It is permissible to assume that if you are going to land on a carrier that you would be transported on some kind of sleek jet, best case a fighter, but nevertheless something with a Tailhook that looked cool. Worst case they carried you out on a helicopter, which wouldn’t be bad either, as I loved flying in choppers. Unfortunately, there was a third choice as unglamorous as its name – COD, for Carrier On-board Delivery aircraft. Essentially a little, stubby cargo prop-plane, the COD was used to shuttle supplies to the Kitty Hawk, or in our case, the congressman, and his guests. As if that was not bad enough, the interior was very much that of a cargo plane and the seats faced backwards or were along the sides facing inward. That would have been more of an inconvenience if there were windows, but in true freight fashion, the only windows were in the doors to make sure no one was standing in front of them when they were opened. Oh yes, we were also given helmets, goggles, and vests to wear.

It was not fast and especially not comfortable, but it did get us there after a surprisingly long flight. The carrier group was farther offshore than I had expected and I had almost fallen asleep during the trip. The wakeup call was a brief announcement to prepare for landing and then a dramatic, combat style cork-screw turn and dive maneuver that culminated with a sharp touchdown and an abrupt stop as our Tailhook caught onto the carrier’s cable. That landing was a thrill and it caused me to excitedly contemplate the blast we were going to have getting launched off the following day.

Upon disembarking, we were immediately met at the door by the carrier's second officer; a Commander who we had been advised was slated to assume control of a new-generation destroyer that was nearing completion at San Diego's NASCO shipyard. He was polished and personable, traits that immediately set us at ease. Traveling with a ranking member of Defense Appropriations was definitely a good way to go. We were to be given first class treatment and the entire ship was open to us. Given its massive size, we appreciatively took the Commander up on his offer to personally take us around on an orientation tour.

With few exceptions, the five thousand sailors and marines on board were all young males. The Navy took great pride in stating that the average age on board was about 24 years old. Their ability at such a young age to be responsible for the precision and professionalism of their jobs was extraordinarily impressive. Not only was the ship large and intricate, but everything on it was also sophisticated and very expensive. Few consignments match the complexity of an aircraft carrier at sea. The service personnel sacrificed a lot to measure up and they seemed to thrive on proving their capabilities.

One of the funniest and most repeated occurrences on board was the crew's reaction to Charlie's girlfriend. I have noticed from personal experience that young beautiful women, especially those with new breast implants, love to show them off. Charlie's Angel was no exception. She had elected to wear t-shirts on the ship and her shapely tits, as Charlie liked to call them, went unrestrained by a bra. It has been said that men do not look women in the eye because breasts have no eyes, and that is a fairly true statement. An even more accurate observation would be that a man's entire focus is magnetically drawn to tits, especially when they are capped with protruding nipples. That could not have been proven truer than on board the Kitty Hawk during our trip.

Having spent six months at sea on their current deployment and being one war game away from docking in their home port, it was understandable that the sailors had gotten into a relatively mechanical mode. As you move along the interior length of any large ship and especially aircraft carriers, the hallways are sectioned into what seems to be an endless series of compartments. The idea is that areas of the ship can be sealed off to prevent sinking when damaged by closing the appropriate hatches. Hatches are

somewhat small oval doors hung in the middle of a steel wall. As you navigate your way down a long hall you soon begin to know how a circus dog feels jumping through hoops. It quickly becomes part of your natural motion when moving down the hallways and climbing through the hatches to maintain a stooped posture, keeping your eyes focused on the bottom edge of the wall framing the hatch so that you do not stupidly trip when moving through it. The mechanics of the process are such that you start to establish a rhythm in your stride much like how an equestrian guides a horse over a series of gates. Military procedure requires, however, that you do notice who is oncoming in order to present officers with the requisite salute. So as to not needlessly interrupt your pace, almost everyone falls into the habit of looking up only at the last minute.

It happened every time and just the anticipation would make you laugh. Charlie's Angel would be transiting down the hall, small enough to be walking virtually upright, when at the last minute the unsuspecting sailors would look up. In what could be called a three-step maneuver, they would first lock in on her impressive tits and protruding nipples, and instinctively stiffen straight up as if hit by a stun gun. The second slightly delayed reflex was to look up into her eyes and realize how beautiful she was. At this point they were literally frozen like a deer in her headlights, invariably losing their rhythm, but not the momentum that would carry them crashing into the compartment's wall. The last part of the process hysterically occurred when they would look beyond her and suddenly notice amid all of their embarrassment that she was being accompanied by some tall VIP. It was a realization that immediately invoked from them a bug-eyed, gap mouthed look that unmistakably marked them guilty-as-charged. No need to worry. Charlie loved it, and he greeted each sailor with a big hello and a huge, eat your heart out, grin on his face. Charlie's smile seemed to widen as slight variants to the same stunned scenario continued to play over and over.

She almost stopped the food lines when we had lunch in the enlisted personnel's mess hall. It takes a lot to do that, these being a bunch of young and hungry sailors whose daily highlights were often dished out at mealtimes, but she had all the equipment necessary for the job. You could see the ripple effect as the guys began to notice that an Angel had entered the room. Sailors stopped lifting their plates to provide landing to the next scoop and servers stood with thongs held empty as she got into line. Charlie broke the freeze by shouting out if there were any Texans in the room that would honor him by making a place for him and his girl to join them. There

were a lot of takers, and some sounded suspiciously not from Texas. The overwhelming response made everyone laugh and it succeeded in jerking them back into their mealtime routine. All the sailors knew they would have to restrict themselves, so they settled for sneaking peeks at her peaks whenever they could.

We went everywhere, from meeting the two-star Rear Admiral in charge of the fleet, to the ship's engineer in the engine room. Captain Pickavance was the Commanding Officer, and he was an absolute gentlemen warrior. We first made his acquaintance on the navigation bridge. After everyone was introduced, he graciously surrendered his commander's chair to anyone who was interested in the view from the big seat. Of course, we all wanted to take its measure, so we took turns sitting in it and attempting to look worthy of the privilege. It was still mid-afternoon, and the carrier was conducting relatively light surveillance operations in preparation for the evenings all night missions. The commander's chair sits by the window above the flight deck, and it is the perfect place to watch it all go on. Impressively fast for such a big ship, carriers sail into the wind when launching aircraft and I was surprised to be able to feel the ship quiver as it aggressively cut through the ocean's chop. Looking down, the choreography of the flight deck became readily apparent as each aircraft was positioned and then launched.

We stayed on the navigation bridge while operations reversed themselves and aircraft began returning to the carrier. In keeping with the reversal theme, the last aircraft launched were the fuel hungry fighters and they of necessity became the first to return. Last in were the Hawkeyes, whose aerial "eye-in-the-sky" was essential to keeping their field of flight surveillance current. Above the navigation bridge was the flight control area. It is the classic flight operations area incorporating large translucent, luminescent screens that display all of the information from the radar, sonar, Hawkeyes, ground stations and satellites. They cover such a wide swath of area that we could even see private planes flying above the Grand Canyon! In fact, the emissions from the carrier's radar were so intense that I had to wrap my video camera with tinfoil to prevent streaking of the cassette tape's ferrous surface.

We were in the middle of war gaming and that was brought home while we were touring the aircraft hangar. Right in the middle of examining the cockpit of an F-18, a Navy SEAL runs past us in a black wet suit, carrying his flippers and with a small automatic weapon strapped to his back. Without hesitation

he proceeds to dive out the hanger opening, right into the Pacific while the carrier is under full steam. It was shocking to see and right behind him, but obviously too late, was a detachment of marines, exhausted from chasing him full tilt through the length of the ship!

Wow, that was impressive, not only because the main hanger deck is still far above the surface of the ocean, making for a very long jump, but also in consideration of the fact that a couple of gigantic propellers are right below the surface, pushing the carrier forward at something close to 35 knots. Just the cavitations from the propellers could send you spinning, not to mention the shock of hitting the water when jumping from a moving object. The marines just walked away shaking their heads at the amazing display of bravado. The SEAL also proved that the carrier was not impregnable at sea. He boarded while the Kitty Hawk was moving under battle conditions and then ran its entire length unimpeded. Crazy stuff. It also was a reminder that part of the battle group was the newly introduced USS Sea Shadow, an experimental stealth ship that we saw leaving San Diego Harbor earlier in the morning. The Sea Shadow was carrying the SEAL Group and was obviously proving its effectiveness.

All of that excitement, however, was just a precursor to the nighttime flight operations. After a nice meal in the officer's mess, we had the pleasure of another stare session as all the fighter jocks came in for dinner before commencing the pyrotechnics. Charlie had his usual smile and eat your heart out demeanor as all the young flyboys entered the dining hall and made visual contact with his Angel. Unlike the enlisted men, these guys all thought they deserved to enjoy her companionship, if only they could figure out how to maneuver into the right position. Fat chance of that happening. Charlie was the carrier's reigning VIP, and rank had its privileges.

I did take a moment, however, when Miss Angel stepped out of the room, to flatter Charlie and garner some of his wealth of experience. I started out by complementing him on his stature and success with the ladies, all earned and well deserved, but with the caveat that with all due respect, he was no spring chicken, and she was a barely legal beauty and in a nutshell, how did he do it? "Tom", he replied, "it is all about power. I have it and they love to be around it." It is when I asked, "how so?" that I gathered an insight that I would have preferred not to have been told. Charlie then described how he does things and takes the Angels places they have never had the opportunity to experience. Trips, meeting famous and powerful people and the like all

have a profound impact on young, ambitious women and he had learned to use his position to impress and impassion. Take our trip on the carrier for instance. It was a dynamic display of his power as a ranking member of defense appropriations and she loved it. In fact, he went on to explain, women are so impressed by government and military authority that he takes his girls everywhere he can. Like flying on Air Force 1 back to Texas or sailing on this carrier off San Diego. Even the smallest things like taking a ride on a military helicopter around Washington DC would wrap them around his little finger.

Noticing that it was a little awkward when we were getting our carrier berth assignments and following up on the comments Clinton made to him about flying his Angels around, I asked if the military got a little uptight with some of his requests. He said they rarely challenged him, especially after the incident when the Marine Corps refused to allow one of his girlfriends to fly in the V-22 Osprey. The Osprey, as everyone knows, is the Marine Corps intended replacement for the helicopter. Part helicopter, part prop-plane, the V-22 is the most advanced vertical take-off and landing aircraft ever designed. Although the Harrier jet aircraft has enjoyed long service and has similar attributes, the Harrier is a bomber/fighter, while the V-22 is intended to enter service as a bread-and-butter troop carrier. Unfortunately, however, the V-22 had a lot of difficulty with reliability and a series of test crashes with fatalities left the Marine Corps with no choice but to restrict their flight operations until a greater measure of safety could be assured. Congress was aggressively funding the continued refinement of the program, but until it was safe, which at this time it was not, virtually no one was allowed to fly on it and certainly no civilians. That is until Charlie wanted to prove his power by taking his girlfriend for a ride.

The Marines turned down his request to give his girl a ride and held their ground as he described to me how he vehemently protested. He got so pissed, he told me, he went back to congress and pulled the program's funding for a year. I was shocked to hear what he was saying. "Come on Charlie" I replied, "everyone knows how unsafe the aircraft is and how much the Marines are counting on its continued development and ultimate deployment. How could you ever justify canceling the funding just because they wouldn't give your girlfriend a ride?" His response was chilling. "Tom, it had nothing to do with their not giving my girlfriend a ride. By turning her down, they were turning me down. When they turned me down, they disrespected me. By disrespecting me they showed a lack of respect for

congress and our position as an appropriator for their program. You cannot let the military disrespect congress and get away with it. Respect is essential to our role as legislators and the Constitution has empowered us to equip the military. By cancelling their funding for the program V-22 that year, I showed them who held power and therefore who deserved respect when they asked for it. I have never been turned down since.”

I was shocked, but I could tell that he was absolutely serious. It was scary to think that a responsible act by the Marines in protecting the safety of a civilian from a known threat could be so convoluted that he would construe it to be a challenge to his congressional authority. It was bullshit, and he was harming the national interest by slowing down the essential development of the Marine Corps premier new weapon system. As if it was not enough that they had to be the “first to fight” they had to do so with less than they might have had, just because they pissed off some Congressman who wanted to impress a bimbo so he could get laid. It was scary, and I immediately lost all respect for a man that I had come to admire in many ways. I had heard and read accounts of Charlie’s booze-guzzling, coke snorting, check-kiting, spa-diving, headboard-handcuffing, and skirt-chasing, but that is his private affair and I never held any of it against him so long as he was doing his job in the best interests of his constituents and the country. And it was well known that he had done a lot, especially in Afghanistan, to make things better for a lot of needy people. It was another thing entirely, however, when that conduct manifests itself into a deliberate act of punishing the military because they would not concede to one of his capricious escapades. It was selfish, scary, and totally vindictive, in the worst sense of the word. I decided at that moment that I did not want to have anything to do with Charlie Wilson any more than I had to.

I went off by myself onto the flight deck to recover as night operations were just commencing. It is quite a surreal environment as the steam catapult hisses and belches out large clouds that envelop the aircraft as they prepare to be launched. In a very efficient choreography, the flight technicians use colored flashlights to wave into position the next plane, carefully checking that all is in the ready before green lighting the launch. One by one the aircraft line up and leave the deck in a fog of steam and with the roar of their engines. The F-18 may have taken over as the premier on-board fighter, but we were fortunate that during this mission, the F-14 still ruled the airways and without a doubt, they certainly dominated the launch platform. After each aircraft is hooked onto the steam catapult’s cable, there is a momentary

pause as a blast shield is raised behind the plane and the engines are brought up to full power. With the F-14, this process is like no other as its twin engine's afterburners light up like a blow torch, throwing two jets of flames back against the shield. Upon launch, the F-14 not only departs the deck in a cloud of steam and to the deafening thunder of its engines, but its afterburners also light up the deck and then the sky as the fighter rapidly gains altitude. Long after the F-18s and other aircraft are no longer visible, the F-14 continues to blaze its way through the night sky. It is an extremely impressive sight, and it foretells its formidable capabilities when engaged in aerial combat.

Always the last off the carrier, the launch of the final F-14 gave me the opportunity to walk around the flight deck and take in the full ambiance of the Kitty Hawk at sea and darkened for war. It is a long way down to the water's surface and yet the speed and mass of the ship cut a large bow wave through the ocean. There is some netting selectively positioned in the front of the ship, but for the most part extreme care must be taken to not only avoid falling overboard, but to also stay out of the way of the huge catapult cable that sprawls across the middle of the deck. As a VIP guest with unrestricted privileges throughout the carrier, I eventually worked my way to the rear signal deck to await the return of the fighters. All the sailors were very polite and allowed me into position alongside them as they prepared to assess each aircraft's landing approach to the deck. Their role is critical, as they give the final approval to land or if necessary, wave off the plane if they are in danger of crashing into the deck or overshooting the runway. All of this is going on, of course, while the deck is heaving up and down in the ocean's swells.

The Kitty Hawk turned into the wind as the F-14s started to appear in the distance behind the carrier. One by one they literally roared over our heads as they touched down on the deck just yards behind us. With their tail hooks grabbing the cable and their engines then thrown into reverse, it was surprising how quickly they stopped. Capture netting was extended up at the far end of the deck as each plane landed, but thankfully on this night it was not needed, as every plane landed successfully. It had been a long night and I found my way to my berth in the officer's quarters and called it a night. I love to lie in bed on ships and feel the rock of the ocean. On this evening, as night operations continued once more after the aircraft were all taken to the hanger deck and refueled, there was the added element of the boom of the catapult as each plane was launched into the sky. Boom after

boom shook the interior of the Kitty Hawk, leaving no doubt that the mission of this ship was to control the air and the sea around the clock.

The following morning after breakfast we were allowed into the captain's quarters to observe his daily briefing with his staff. I was very impressed by the fact that everyone stood around a table for the entire meeting as the captain gave his orders and then allowed each officer a chance to report. It was short and sweet, entirely unlike my company meetings where everyone settles into the soft chairs that circle our conference table. Sometimes our meetings get so comfortable and social, with coffee and donuts, that the sense of urgency that the captain capably conveyed was lost, not to mention that we probably took twice as long to cover half as much. I resolved to try hosting a meeting where everyone stood, but I have to admit that it was too counter to our culture and was seen as almost impolite. That was too bad, because it was obviously a good formula that worked well when everyone had the proper orientation and attitude.

Leaving the carrier was the highlight of the trip. After everyone was secured into their seats and the COD had its engines revved to max, the catapult hurled us from 0 to 180 miles an hour in two seconds. It was fantastic. The funny thing was, however, that the COD had a top airspeed of 170 and we seemed to hang motionless in the air before our velocity would slow to the point where the propellers could catch up and move us forward. Back in San Diego we dropped off Charlie and his Angel, with an agreement that I would touch base with him when I next visited Washington. I thanked him for allowing me the privilege of staying on the Kitty Hawk. It was a truly unique experience and a thrill. It also gave me something to talk to my Uncle Jim Henry about, since he was a retired Navy fighter pilot. Like he always said, any damn fool can land a plane on a stationary airstrip, but it takes a naval aviator to land on a moving carrier's deck at night!

I did speak with Charlie when I was again in Washington, but I could not get his comments regarding the V-22 out of my mind. He made a full court press to get me to go with him to Dusty's poker game, but I was not interested. He even said he had a KGB pen-gun for me that he would give me at the game, but I took a pass. He made arrangements for me to pick up the gun the next day. It was a .32 caliber gun, made to look like a bad knock off of a thick Monte Blanc pen. The pen's tip unscrewed to open up the end of the barrel and the middle unscrewed to load a single cartridge. Once closed securely, the end was pulled to draw back the firing pin and then the pocket clip stem

was pressed down to fire. Made in Darra, Pakistan's old gun making capitol, it would definitely do the job on someone.

Charlie showed me how the usual technique was to casually walk up behind someone, putting the barrel right behind their ear and then fire. The recoil was such that you let the pen gun just drop from your hand onto the ground and then you kept walking like you had nothing to do with anything. Stealthy and lethal, although I must admit I have never tried to fire it. The gun is thick and heavy for its small size, but I would imagine that the kick would be unpleasant, not to mention relatively uncontrollable with it having no real place to grip. I only saw Charlie once more after this occasion, and it was a far less agreeable get together. He tried one more time to invite me to hook up with him and Dusty, added his signature to a letter we needed in the fall, and then gave up. I liked Charlie a lot, but the power game he played was too much for me to stomach and I certainly did not want anything more to do with Foggo.