

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number LH 1 .O6S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.

Don Emrick

For a Top Gun Grad

THE SKY'S

THE LIMIT

They said he was too old to become a fighter pilot. Lucky Wallace didn't think so.

By BEN FENWICK



Continued



Friends and colleagues know OU alumnus Clarence Leroy Wallace simply as "Lucky." His body is spare, corded and hardened from his job. Yet, he is quick to flash a smile from a deeply tanned face faintly reminiscent of a James Dean mixed with space-age whiz kid. He walks with an easy gait.

On a normal day, Wallace's body bears seven times its own weight, so much that he almost blacks out. Even exercising daily to maintain optimum conditioning, he still occasionally suffers pulled muscles and neck strain from being thrown around a cockpit. Even his helmet increases in weight from four to 28 pounds.

Throughout all this physical punishment, he must make tactical decisions that were discussed perhaps only in a briefing, maybe never performed before in real life. His judgment may be a matter of life and death.

He loves it.

"Lucky" Wallace is a Top Gun graduate who flies the F-18, the hottest plane in the world. Ask the Marine pilot on any day, and he can tell you what luck is.

"To become a pilot takes good eyes and aggressiveness," Wallace says. "You have to use those assets with skill — and work your tail off."

Fighter pilots give each other short, quick names to use as code identifiers over the radio. Lucky earned his years ago after some fellow pilots met a couple of his girlfriends. They commented, "Man, you're lucky!" The name stuck.

According to one definition, luck is a case of preparation-meets-opportunity. If so, Wallace's nickname is apt.

Born in 1948, Wallace grew up in Oklahoma and can't remember a time he didn't want to fly. He just didn't know how to go about doing it. After graduating from Moore High School in 1967, he went to OU, where he first majored in psycho-linguistics. Among other things, he taught chimpanzees sign language. Ultimately he received two bachelor's degrees — one in psychology and the other in environmental design architecture.

As an undergraduate, he joined Sigma Nu fraternity for the better living accommodations and to "learn something of the social graces." He also learned to "party."

"It was great," he jokes. "Like being a fighter pilot — you never have to grow up." But beneath the joke-and-party exterior was a steely determination. He soon lost touch with his college friends.

"The drive consumes you," he explains.

He joined the 205th Air National Guard and took the first steps toward a private pilot's license, which he eventually received from the OU aviation department at Max Westheimer Field.

Then came opportunity. He met a former Marine colonel, then OU administrator, John Dean. Dean convinced Wallace to become one of the proud and the few — and to become a pilot.

"I didn't even know the Marines had airplanes," Wallace admits.

By this time, however, Wallace rapidly was approaching the cutoff age for pilots. At 27, he was just finishing his degree in environmental design architecture. Meanwhile, Dean made some phone calls and wrote letters of support to the right people. Wallace made it to pilot school.

He began flying for the military in 1977. By 1978 he had his wings and was stationed in Hawaii, flying the F-4 Phantom. Wallace also piloted the Phantom in Japan, Korea and the Philippines. He logged more than 1,000 hours of flying time.

In 1979 he went to Top Gun.

The U.S. Navy created Top Gun school shortly after the Vietnam conflict. During that war, many young, inexperienced pilots were sent into battle with little or no combat training, resulting in many losses. Top Gun was the first school designed to teach Navy and Marine pilots the skills needed to make the split-second decisions. Such skills are required not only to survive contact with an aggressor, but also to carry out the mission once the contact is established.

While at Top Gun, Wallace met and

married a Braniff Airlines flight attendant named Teresa Edmonds. His flying career was taking off as well. Wallace demonstrated many qualities at Top Gun that only months later landed him in the Marines' Weapons and Tactics Instructor school.

Opportunity came again in 1983. Wallace was chosen to fly the new F-18, and true to his name, he had the luck to get the fourth Marine plane out of the factory.

Looking back on his days at the OU hangar when he was learning to fly private planes, Wallace confesses, "I had no idea I'd be flying the keenest thing on the block someday. You get a big smile on your face because you know you're flying the best plane in the world."

The Phantom is still Wallace's favorite plane, still the "best lookin'," but he admits it isn't even comparable to the F-18. "Technology is the key," he

says. "The plane has three computers and is designed around the pilot."

At times the F-18 may prove to be too maneuverable. The plane can accelerate so fast that the pilot possibly can lose consciousness from pulling too many "G's," the measure of centrifugal force or gravity.

When a pilot pulls the plane into a tight turn, he may increase to seven times his normal weight. The pilot's oxygen-carrying blood is forced into his legs. The heart begins to pump harder, but it can't bring the circulation back to the pilot's brain. The pilot may faint or "black out."

The problem is especially acute in the F-18, Wallace explains. Because it was built to be responsive, the plane often pulls many G's when maneuvering. F-18 pilots have to practice special exhaling exercises to enable them to withstand greater G-forces.

In Top Gun school and in his subsequent training, Wallace learned a maneuver called "connect-the-dots." While chasing a target plane, Wallace causes his plane to pull up sharply and "decelerate," or slow down quickly. He then exhales so he doesn't quite pass out and pulls his plane into a turn that bisects the path of the other plane.

While in this near-black-out state, a pilot experiences tunnel vision. His peripheral vision fades to grey, and he sees only in the direct line of sight, a narrow "tunnel."

With only this limited vision, Wallace estimates where the target plane will be along certain points of its trajectory. Then, when the target reaches one of these points, he sights it, "connecting the dots."

No wonder the pilots must stay physically fit. Violent maneuvering banging the pilot around in the cockpit and the havoc caused by G-forces push the competitive spirit of the pilot to the limit.

Wallace's skills were put to the test during the Libyan conflict in the spring of 1986, when the United States clashed with the North African country over U.S. policy in the Mediterranean. Wallace was serving a four-year tour with Squadron VMFA 314 on the

USS Coral Sea when the super carrier was ordered to begin exercises in the Gulf of Sidra. Wallace flew exercises off the coast for a couple of months, playing feint-and-grin tactics with Libyan pilots.

When the tensions were high, missions were flown every day. The Libyans sometimes sent their Soviet-made planes, MiG-23 Floggers and MiG-25 Foxbats, into the area until they became a threat to the carrier.

"You never knew if they were going to do something stupid," Wallace says.

Wallace and his wingmen would maneuver into a "stern intercept," flying in under the Libyan planes on their blind side, then popping up beside them. When the Libyan pilots

suddenly realized the F-18s were there, Wallace would pull out a camera and take their pictures.

"It would scare them," Wallace says. "After that they were afraid of losing their planes."

When the United States mounted a bombing raid against Libya on April 15, 1986, Wallace and other Navy pilots stood by on alert in case Libyan planes took off to intercept the Air Force bombers flying the raid. Wallace says the Libyan pilots never left the ground.

During the Mediterranean engagement, the Soviets appeared on the scene.

"Anywhere we operated, we were shadowed by the Soviets," he says. "(Soviet trawlers) just pulled right up next to the ship."

He describes these meetings as "not hostile, pretty congenial."

Wallace says the American sailors would just wave at one of the trawlers next to the Coral Sea; Soviet sailors would wave back.

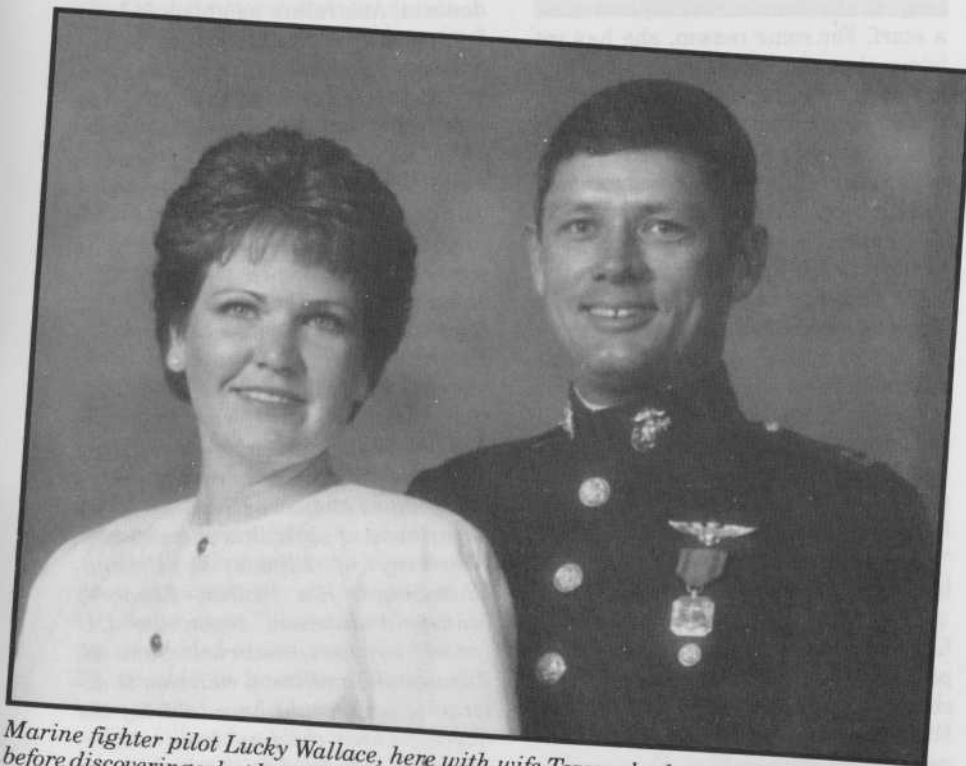
Wallace feels that the Soviets have planes and pilots that are probably as good as their U.S. counterparts, but their training is much different from Top Gun.

"They have a lot of ground control," Wallace says. "Too much. They have good pilots, but their system is very structured."

This structured, chain-of-command setup contrasts strongly with Top Gun and its goals.

A typical day-at-the-office for Wallace begins at 7:30 a.m., after he has bicycled six miles to work. He gets a lunch break but sometimes exercises then, too. The rest of the day is spent getting ready to fly and then flying.

A flight begins with a briefing, which lasts from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. ("I wonder why they call them 'briefs,'" Wallace says.) The pilots discuss with their wingmen the mission for the day. Next comes a 45-minute preflight check, during which the pilot and a maintenance "plane captain" go over the plane in a step-by-step procedure to ready it for flight. The flight itself usually lasts from one to two hours.



Marine fighter pilot Lucky Wallace, here with wife Teresa, had earned two OU degrees before discovering what he really wanted to do in life — only to be told he was too old.

Continued

After the landing, refueling takes another 30 minutes. Maintenance and staff debriefings occupy an additional two hours. Then Wallace bicycles home. He relaxes by flying his small private plane called a "Mooney."

"It's kind of funny, but when I want to relax from flying, I fly to relax," Wallace says.

He also runs, exercises, swims and skis — hard. All of his play goes into keeping him in shape.

Wallace is now a resident of Irvine, California, and a tactics instructor at the Light Attack Weapons school. He returned last summer to perform at an airshow at Oklahoma City's Will Rogers World Airport. He also returned to his alma mater for a visit.

In Norman, he went to the OU hangar where he first learned to fly, recalling drills like touch-and-go landings, in which the plane touches the ground but immediately takes off again.

"It was fun remembering all that," he says. "Looking back makes you realize the respect you have learned (for flying). The mistakes you've made can remind you of the true level of your incompetence."

He views his time at the University of Oklahoma as invaluable — not so much for the technical skills he gained as for the skills he acquired in relating to others.

"The ability to relate and interact is something a university gives you that you wouldn't get if you skipped that route," Wallace contends. "Those skills are necessary to be a leader."

Wallace's goal is to keep flying. He is now a flight instructor at an advanced tactics school, which focuses on strike fighter tactics.

"Right now I am going to continue where I am," he says. "My goal is to spend the rest of my service time, the next six years, flying. I would like to be a commanding officer of a fighter squadron. That's not unreasonable."

When he does retire, he plans to sail around the world . . . or something.

"You gotta have dreams," he insists, recalling his late entry into flying. "Sometimes it seems outlandish. I was told that (because of age) I didn't have a chance. But here I am.

"Now I honestly can say, without reservation, that it was the best thing I ever did."

LETTERS *Continued from Page 2*

societies is not a particularly pleasant garment to wear. Imagine going out in 110-degree heat, as the women in Pakistan do, wearing a solid black piece of cloth that covered you from the top of your head to your ankles. A woman wearing a white chador looks like a giant badminton shuttlecock, or Casper the Friendly Ghost, shuffling along the road. On the other hand, the women that are known not to be Muslims and, yet, are required to work around Muslim men, can simply wear a scarf as long as their heads are properly covered. Of course, wearing an outfit like the shalwar kameez with its baggy pants and long shirt that cover the female bottom "twice" is also highly recommended. Lynn appears to have quickly picked up this message (often expatriate women in Islamabad never figure this out), but I suspect she wore a scarf as we see in the picture rather than a veil as she states in the article. My wife (the former Jane Seay, '67 B.A.) has spent a considerable amount of time working in Peshawar as a consultant to the library at the University of Agriculture and has never had any problems as long as she double covered and wore a scarf. For some reason, she has yet to see the value of wearing a veil!

As Lynn states, Dara is a fascinating town. When I first visited in 1976, Dara was a town of gun factory after gun factory interspersed with stores selling hash. The war in Afghanistan has certainly changed the town, yet it is incorrect to characterize it as the black market gun capital of the world. The workers in Dara are proud of their ability to copy any gun made anywhere in the world. They highly prize an original gun as it gives them a model to replicate. Usually, as long as the ammunition is not too powerful, these copies will last at least a few hundred rounds, but more than one "tourist" has been killed when a copy blew up in his face.

While the Afghan refugees and the U.S. experience with them has been positive from a political standpoint, we should not try to glorify the situation. For once the U.S. supported the winner, and we have gained considerable political goodwill in the larger Islamic community with our support of the Af-

ghan freedom fighters. In spite of this, we must not delude ourselves; with Iran on one border and Russia on the other, there are always going to be forces that prevent the U.S. from having very much influence in the country. The British learned a long time ago, and the Russians have recently learned, do not try to control Afghanistan; only learn to live with it.

As the Russians depart, there are going to be tremendous upheavals in the country. The U.S. government does not have a particular political advantage in the country, and we must be very careful not to get pulled into the vacuum created by the departure of the Russian troops. The boy that taught Lynn "assalam-alaikum," as has been demonstrated, can also use a Kalashnikov. People all over the world are unhappy with their poverty, and they will not continue to be content with nothing. Sticks of Big Red cinnamon gum are seen as gestures of kindness; much more will be required to bring peace and prosperity to the people that now reside in the refugee camps.

I hope Lynn enjoys her year in Australia. My family and I just returned to campus after two years in Indonesia, Australia's neighbor. If Lynn has time to travel to Indonesia, she will learn about the fifth largest country in the world with the largest Islamic population. In Indonesia she will find an Islam where women do not wear veils, and they do not practice "purdah." Keep up the good work and maybe you can persuade Lynn to write something from down under. Just because she is on the other side of the world, she does not have to be lost to *Sooner Magazine*.

Sam H. Johnson III, '68 B.S.

Urbana, Illinois

Editor's Note: Industrial engineering alumnus Johnson is associate professor of international agriculture in the department of agricultural economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His mother, Elizabeth Mansfield Johnson, began her OU career in 1944, married Sam H. Johnson Jr. and lost a coin toss to determine who would have to delay the degree. Three children later, she returned to OU, lived in the dormitories and completed her journalism degree in 1980.