

## Lieutenant Colonel Leland "Lee" Ritter USMC (Ret)

### His Marine Corps Service in His Own Words

It all started with the draft board in July 1942. With the help of a Navy recruiter, I stalled them because I couldn't make up my mind on the Navy or the Army Air Corps. On August 18<sup>th</sup> I joined the Navy V.5 program because I figured the Army Air Corps couldn't teach me to land on a ship.

My initial training was in the Stearman N2S 'Yellow Peril' and my final squadron in flight training was in PBV's. Do you know any Marine pilots who have 50 hours in a PBV? You do now.



N2S 'Yellow Peril'



PBV 'Catalina'

When I went before the Marine Officers Selection Board out of flight training, I explained that my father had been a DI at Paris Island in WWI and if I had a chance to be a Marine Officer and didn't take it, I shouldn't come home. 'Nough said!

WWII: Marshall Islands Dive Bomber Squadron in SBD, Corsair and SB2C, Air Medal, etc., etc. Even got 2 prisoners.



SBD 'Dauntless'



F4U 'Corsair'



SB2C 'Helldiver'

1946-1947: Training Command at Pensacola. I'm convinced the best way to learn to fly is to teach it.

1948-1949: VMF-323. My only claim to fame was Top Pilot in GUNNERY. All that teaching at Pensacola paid off.



SNJ 'Texan'

August 1949- February 1954: GCA Final Controller at MCAS El Toro, Korea, Japan, Cherry Point. 5 July 1950 packed up GCA Unit at El Toro, put it on the USS Boxer and made a speed run to Japan (7 days). From there to Korea one day after the Inchon landing, set up at Kimpo Airfield until the Chinese got into the fracas. Then back to

Japan until September, then home to Cherry Point in September 1951. Still a GCA Final Controller, I pleaded to go to a Night Fighter Squadron, all to no avail. Away I went to Helicopter Training at Pensacola and back to Cherry Point in a helicopter group.



Bell HTL-4



Sikorsky H03S-1 'Dragonfly'



Piasecki HUP-2 'Retriever'

In March 1954, I had a full autorotation landing when my bird blew a freewheeling unit (this was an old HRS-3). It was an interesting flight because the second lieutenant who was my co-pilot froze on the controls. I got his attention and controlled the bird by hitting him in the face with a map. No damage to the bird or the lieutenant. Didn't even hurt much of the farmer's pasture; no livestock damage.



Sikorsky HRS-3

January 1955: Off to Japan at Yokosuka and MAG 16, HMM-161. Things were going great until someone saw my GCA final Controller MOS. So, in April I was off to Korea again. Had a real thrill when an engine on the SNB I was flying quit on me half way between Japan and Korea at 2 am. With some great help from the Air Force, I put it down in Japan, then back to Korea in three days. When the weather was good at K3 in Korea I didn't have much to do GCA wise, so I hunted pheasants; 122 to the mess halls at K3 in six months.



Beechcraft SNB

April 1956: Back home to MCAF at Santa Ana MAG 36 until March 1957 then for some reason unknown to me to this day I was transferred to the Air Transport Group at El Toro and assigned as the Group Motor Transport Officer. After I got the motor transport section all squared away, I was off to Quantico to Junior School.

September 1957-June 1958: I was at Junior School to learn the ways of the real Marine Corps. It was interesting and very informative. I got more out of it than I expected. The biggest surprise was my next duty station; MCAS Kaneohe, Hawaii.

August 1958-September 1961: At MCAS Kaneohe I was first attached to MCAS Kaneohe as the Air Field Operations Officer/Air Sea Rescue Pilot. What a tour of duty! I got qualified in the R4D; made some wild and wooly rescues and generally had a good

time. My family had a ball! The last year I was at Kaneohe I was XO of HMM-161 flying the Sikorsky HUS-1, a real learning experience.

From Kaneohe I went to MCAF New River across the river from Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. En route from Kaneohe to MAF New River I was selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. My first assignment there was C.O. of MABS-26. What a pleasant surprise! After almost a year (9 Months actually) as C.O. of MABS-26 I was given command of a new squadron, HMM-265. I never had it so good!



Sikorsky UH-34

Seventeen and a half months with HMM-265 then I was off to Cross Training Duty with 3rd Marine Division on Okinawa. I really learned how the other half lived, writing orders, etc. I was there until the Division moved to Vietnam. Then I was sent home. There may have been a message there but I didn't get it.

Instead, I went to the Basic School for new second lieutenants at Quantico. I have often wondered how I got selected for that job. I referred to my job as Social Secretary for the new second lieutenants. My job was to teach them how to be a gentleman in a Marine uniform. We had General Officer Receptions, Parade Mess Nights, Dances, Ladies tours for wives and girlfriends, etc., etc. It was a great experience.

From the Basic School I moved back to airplanes as Station Operations Officer at Marine Corp Air Base, Quantico, Virginia. In July 1967 I was assigned as Commanding Officer of Station Operations and Engineering Squadron; SOES and held that job until September 1967, when I went back to the job as Station Operations Officer. A very unfortunate airplane crash two days before Christmas 1967 killed the Officer who had replaced me as C.O. of SOES so I was reassigned once again as C.O. SOES. I remained at this position until two days before my retirement on 31 July, 1968.

Note: Lee missed out on flying this bird in which his successors spent many hours, the venerable CH-46 Sea Knight. HMM-265 received the first one in 1964.

