

The Navy originally trained me to be piston-engine aircraft mechanic, rather than a jet-engine mechanic. This was my choice, as I wanted to get in on the last vestiges of 'real airplanes', with round engines. When they offered me the chance to become a jet mechanic, along with a one year extension to my enlistment, I said "Thanks but no thanks". So they sent me to Keflavik, probably with the thought "This'll teach 'im". It was the best tour I had in the Navy.

I quickly got checked out as a flying crew chief (the Navy called them plane captains) on the two C-117's we had, and started flying the three-times a week trip to H-3.

Keflavik was one of the last places the Navy still allowed enlisted guys to taxi aircraft. We would push the airplane out of the hangar and I'd jump in by myself, crank it up, and taxi out to the runway to do a run-up. Then I'd head for base operations and shut down. Shortly thereafter, an Air Force truck would back up to the loading door. The extent of our 'weight and balance' was, "If it fits through the door we'll take it, and if it's heavy put it over the wing". After the cargo and passengers were loaded, the pilots would come out and we'd be off for the one hour trip to H-3.

In the winter time, we'd often be flying in icing conditions. The C-117's had propellers deiced by isopropyl alcohol which was fed from a tank in the floor of the cabin back by the tail. When the tank was running low, I would take great pleasure in running back through the cabin, as if in a panic, and quickly start dumping a 5-gallon container of alcohol into this tank. Every guy we were hauling to the site would be straining his neck to see what I was pouring into this hole in the floor. "Extra gas", was my usual answer. The lavatory back in the tail had a 'honey bucket' (fortunately seldom used) and a urinal that required a constant flow of alcohol while being used, otherwise it would freeze up. Despite my briefing, this would usually happen every trip.

There's an old saying in aviation that 'there are old pilots and bold pilots, but no old, bold pilots'. Well, we had an old, bold pilot. A lieutenant commander who had done multiple tours in Iceland and had been flying these resupply missions for years. When the weather was bad at Hofn, he'd let down through the clouds until he saw the ground, even if we were down to 100 feet. As soon as he saw something he recognized, like a large rock or a building, he'd have his bearings and be able to find the gravel runway at Hofn. And it worked every time. The pilots were required to fly a certain number of hours each month, and get a certain number of 'night flying' hours. We also trained some new pilots while I was there. This often required several hours of

droning around the island. I can remember several times flying over the abandoned H-4 site, high on the windswept peaks of the northwest part of the island. Now that looked like a remote site. I would image it's still there, too difficult to be torn down.

I was dating an E-3 admin type from our department while stationed at Keflavik, who would often come along on the trip up to H-3. One weekend, I got permission from the H-3 commander to bring her up for a weekend stay. Well, there's no need for me to tell you guys how popular she was that weekend. We were treated like royalty. I think she danced with everyone stationed there at the club.

As a postscript, after my enlistment was up and I left Keflavik, I was out of the military for about a year. Having seen how much better the Air Force treated their enlisted people, in 1977 I joined the Air Force as a C-141 flight engineer. During my three years as an engineer, I completed my college degree. The Air Force sent me to OTS and then pilot training. I retired in 1994 as a major, having flown the C-141 the whole time.