



Highway 395 Low Pass
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It was dang early on Friday the 9th of September 1977, when a large group of Intruder and Prowler bubbas manned up a VR-55 DC-9 for flight to a VX-5 Ops briefing at NWC China Lake. That was the approved mission to schedule the DC-9. The uniform of the day was Tropical Whites. Most of the attendees packed a parachute bag with additional clothes for other events. For adult supervision of the trip, COMMATVAQWINGPAC himself, RADM Arnold, was aboard.

VR-55 did a great job transporting us all to China Lake. They dropped the rear stairwell, we grabbed our stuff and shuffled into the VX-5 hangar. All the VX-5 A-6 bubbas were very happy to see us, and the A-7 guys even acknowledged we were there. After a quick welcome by the VX-5 CO, CDR Len Giuliani, we settled in for the briefing. Admiral Arnold disappeared with the Skipper. About 30 minutes or so later, the briefing was finished as there weren't any questions from the attendees. We were then directed to a small locker room to perform a quick change into our civvies.

Now the group manned up a charter bus paid for by the attendees. Destination, Las Vegas/Tailhook 77'. The bus ride was a scheduled 3.9 hop to the Hilton, so off we went at approximately 1000. The attendees were somewhat excited about the trip as we drove slowly through downtown Ridgecrest on Business 395. As if a higher calling came upon us, a sharp-eyed participant pointed out to the whole bus that we needed to stop immediately at the Red Rock package store and grab road pops for the trip. With such group enthusiasm, Admiral Arnold quickly approved the endeavor. It must be noted that the charter bus did have a stinky head at the rear of the bus.

With that mission accomplished, we all returned to the bus and settled in for the long desert drive. All was Ops normal for about 30 minutes, when all of a sudden, Prowler bubba LTJG Don Marcotte, stood up in the aisle pointing forward and said very loudly, "There's an A-6 coming up the road!" The attendees all stood up to confirm the sighting of the jinking A-6 as it became obvious the flight crew made just made positive ID on our bus. The pass was low and fast with both J52 engines screaming. The attendees then became even more excited as they tracked going past the bus and making a hard 180 degree turn for pass #2. At that point, we were approaching a railroad crossing with a large empty area on the south side. We convinced the bus driver to pull off the road and egressed quickly. The A-6 again made a low pass from the south to north as we all waved to the crew. Since it was likely another low pass was in the works, someone in the group yelled out, "Let's moon them!" And so it was, the A-6 was mooned by about 40 attendees. Great, great fun, until we all discovered that Admiral Arnold and his aide were still on the bus along with the driver. The Admiral didn't say anything to us, but his facial expression had that really PO'd look. As we traveled further down the road, there were a few automobiles pulled off the side of the road looking for the A-6. The remainder of the Tailhook trip was as expected, and it was a pretty quiet bus ride back to China Lake.

Meanwhile, back in the A-6, there was likely some discussion between the 2 about how much fun that was, but maybe it really wasn't such a great idea. I'm not telling any names, but many years later I did mention to the B/N that I was on the bus. As he was in a coveted leadership position and had my full respect, we decided not to share that with others in the air wing.

Fortunately, cell phones weren't invented yet, so the Admiral had ample time to ponder what his next move. Disciplinary action was obviously required in order to set a higher safety standard than had been on display at the railroad crossing. I've attached some screen shots of the China Lake sectional charts where you can see Highway 395 south out of Ridgecrest traversing R-2515 and the Buckhorn MOA. At the center of the screen shot you can see the railroad crossing just east of the Boron airstrip crossing the highway. Then a better shot of the "mooning" location.

Evidently there was a board convened for the crew, however no one could say for certain they had descended below the floor of the MOA, which as you may recall is 200'. The B/N screened for A-6 command and had a fabulous tour. So, lesson re-learned, verify Master Arm is on, pull the commit trigger, and only make ONE pass over the target.

