



William H. Fitch, Lt. General, USMC (Ret.)

Date of Designation: 1 April 1952

Dates of Active Duty: September 1950 - 1 September 1984

Total Flight Hours: 6,895

Carrier/Ship Landings: Fixed wing: 300+ Rotary: 30

Approximate Flight Hours:

Jet: 4,000 Prop: 2,000 Helo: 600 VF/VA: 5,000

Combat Tours:

Vietnam: VMA(AW)-533, Jul. 1967 - Sep. 1968 .Chu Lai
MAG Operations and XO

Total 310 combat missions (200+ A-6, 100 A-4)

Aviation Commands:

CO, VMA(AW)-225 (A6A).

CO, VMA(AW)-533 (A6A), Chu Lai, Vietnam.

Commander, MAG-14.

Commander, 32d Marine Expeditionary Unit.

CG, 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

CG, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

Combat Awards:

Silver Star

Distinguished Flying Cross

29 Air Medals (4 individual and 25 strike/flight)

Legion of Merit with Combat "V"

Summary of Significant Career Events

Bill Fitch grew up in Fort Meade, Florida, graduated from the University of Florida in June 1950, and enlisted as a NavCad in September 1950. He began flight training at Pensacola in November 1950, and flew the SNJ and F6F Hellcat.



On April 1, 1952, he received his naval aviator wings and was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant.

His first year out of flight school was spent flying F4U-5N Corsairs (VMF-114) from the aircraft carriers, *Wright*, *Coral Sea* and *Tarawa*. Aboard *Tarawa* he made a two month Caribbean cruise and a seven month Med cruise. He logged over 100 CV landings in the Corsair. One of those arrested landings aboard *Tarawa* was with the left landing gear full up and the right landing gear full down. After a normal carrier approach, his hook caught #7 wire (of 11 wires) with minor damage to the aircraft. Three days after the incident, and after an engine, prop, left wing tip and left flap change, he flew the aircraft off of *Tarawa* on a maintenance test flight. During the following 31 years he would fly accident free for over 6,500 hours.

His second year out of Pensacola was spent flying the AD-4B Skyraider from USS *Saipan*. *Saipan* operated in the Yellow Sea and Sea of Japan, with the squadron (VMA-324) flying in support of the Korean War armistice.

On Easter Sunday 1954, he launched from *Saipan* flying an AU-1 Corsair into a small French airfield in Vietnam. That short pierced steel matting airfield would later become DaNang, RVN. The Corsairs (20 AU-1s) were given to the French to fly combat at Dien Bien Phu and against Viet Minh guerrillas. This eight month cruise with VMA-324 aboard culminated in Saipan transiting both the Panama and Suez canals, and completing an around-the-world cruise. He logged over 100 CV landings in the AD-4B.

He checked out in the F9F-5 Panther jet in 1954, and had over a thousand hours in jets when he completed test pilot training in Class 19 at Patuxent River (February 1958).

After Patuxent he was assigned as a project pilot in VX-5, China Lake. At VX-5 he flew the A-4C and FJ-4B on developmental flights for conventional and nuclear weapons tactics, and flew the FJ-4B aboard several carriers. During

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that tour he invented and flight tested the multiple carriage bomb rack. This rack enabled the A-4 to carry 16 MK-81s and evolved into the multiple ejector and triple ejector racks, which were used on most jet attack and fighter aircraft for the next 35 years. He received US Patent 3,122,056 and was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for his invention of the Multiple Carriage Bomb Rack and for his flying the first 13 test flights of the MCBR on the A-4 Skyhawk. He initiated and planned the first conventional weapons project ever undertaken by VX-5.

He deployed with an A-4B Skyhawk squadron (VMA-311) to Japan in 1961 for a one year overseas assignment with the squadron. During that tour he flew the A-4B Skyhawk from USS *Coral Sea*, *Midway* and *Bon Homme Richard*, and made his 300th arrested carrier landing.

In 1963, after a brief tour on the A-4 Desk at BuWeps, he served for 30 months as a staff officer in SecNav R&D. During this R&D tour in the Pentagon he checked out in the F-4 Phantom and the A6 Intruder.

At Cherry Point, N.C. in 1966-67, he commanded an A6A Intruder squadron, then he was assigned in July 1967, to Chu Lai, RVN. At Chu Lai he commanded his second A6A squadron, where he flew night low level attack missions against North Vietnamese targets in all route packages. During this combat tour he flew 310 combat missions, of which over 200 were in the A6A and over 100 were in the A-4 Skyhawk. He was awarded the Silver Star medal for a single plane A6A low level night strike against a Hanoi, NVN target.

In 1971, he graduated from National War College and received a MS degree in International Affairs from George Washington University.

From April 1972 to September 1973, he commanded Marine Aircraft Group 14, and during that tour he flew F4B/J, A6A, EA6A, TA4F and RF4B aircraft.

From September 1973 to July 1974, he commanded the 32d Marine Expeditionary Unit in the Mediterranean Sea, and during that tour he flew UH-1N, AH-1J, CH-53D, and CH-46D helicopters from the LPH, USS *Iwo Jima*. He made 30 helicopter landings aboard various amphibious ships in four models of helicopters, in addition to flying from expeditionary sites.

He served as G-3, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing for a year before moving to HQMC to serve as Executive Assistant to LtGen Tom Miller. This was his third Washington tour.

Promoted to brigadier general in April 1976, his flag tours sequentially were as Assistant Wing Commander, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing; CG 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade in Korea; head of Marine R&D for three years at HQMC for his fourth Washington tour; CG, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Japan for two years; and head of Marine Aviation at HQMC for 26 months in his fifth and final Washington tour.

He flew 6,895 flight hours in 121 different models of aircraft. He had over 4,000 jet flight hours in fighters and attack aircraft, over 1,000 hours in propeller fighters and attack aircraft, about 1,000+ hours in various propeller trainers, proficiency and utility aircraft, and he had about 600 hours in helicopters. His first flight piloting an F/A-18 Hornet was in January 1982 and he flew his last F/A-18 flights in January 1983. In February 1983 he flew the F-16.

In December 1983 he flew an RAF Hunter T7 on a night flight out of Farnborough, England using the RAF night attack system. This RAF system consisted of a wide-field-of-view FLIR display in the cockpit HUD and a look-down display, and with the pilot wearing night vision goggles. After his return to Washington, he convinced the then Secretary of the Navy that the RAF night attack system should be incorporated into the F/A-18 Hornet and the AV-8B Harrier. He and his staff initiated the "Cheap Night" program with a TA-7C modified to use the RAF night attack system. This TA-7C was flown out of China Lake in March-June 1984 period, to demonstrate the system to a multitude of Navy Department dignitaries and senior officers. Cheap Night convinced the power players in the SecNav, the Navy and Marine Corps on the value of night attack with Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) and night vision goggles.

Over 1,000 of his flight hours were flown in the A6A/E Intruder and over 1,000 flight hours were flown in the A-4 Skyhawk. He flew his last fighter hop in June 1984, piloting a developmental F-15E at McDonnell Douglas, St. Louis. The day before his retirement parade on August 28, 1984, he flew two hours piloting a UH-1N Huey. His last military flights were to and from Patuxent River.

He retired as a lieutenant general effective September 1, 1984, and was awarded the Navy Distinguished Service Medal at his retirement. He retired with 34 years active duty and just over 32 years as a Marine officer. His decision to retire three years early was prompted by his opposition to development and production of the A6F aircraft. As DC/S Aviation he was an advocate of what later would become the F/A-18D, and he felt that production of the A6F was a mistake. His position of opposition to the A6F presented an untenable situation with the then Secretary of the Navy. The SecNav advocated development and production of the A6F. Several years after Bill Fitch retired, the A6F program was cancelled. It was canceled after the expenditure of several hundred millions of development dollars.

In his eight years as a general officer (1976-1984), he flew over 35 different models of aircraft and flew 1,000 flight hours as pilot.

Since August 7, 1955, he has been married to the former Margaret Marie Williams of Bartow, Florida. Margaret and Bill Fitch live in McLean, Virginia, and he has been a member of the Golden Eagles since 1986.