



Robair Mohrhardt, Captain, USN
"Robair"

Date of Designation: 15 December 1950 NA # T-1253

Dates of Active Duty: November 1943 - October 1977.

Total Flight Hours: 5,500

Carrier/Ship Landings: Fixed wing: 692

Approximate Flight Hours:

Jet: 4,500 Prop: 1,000 VF/VA: 4,000
VR/VP: 150 VU/VFP: 500 VT: 850

Combat Tours:

Korea: VF-112, Jan. 1952 - Aug. 1952,
USS *Philippine Sea* (CVA-47). 95 combat missions
Vietnam: XO VF-53, 28 Jul. 64 - 5 Aug. 64, USS *Ticonderoga*
(CVA-14). VF escort for photo flights of Plain des
Jars, Laos; attacks on PT boats near USS *Maddox*
(DD-731), attacks on PT boats at Quang Khe.
6 combat missions. Total: 101 combat missions.

Aviation Commands:

OinC, VFP-62 Det., Dec. 61-Aug. 62. Gitmo Pad with NJP
authority and USS *Forrestal* (CVA-59) Med cruise.
CO, VF-53, May 65-May 66.
ComFairWestPacDet. Cubi Point (CTU 77.3.1), Jul. 72-
Dec. 72, OinC with NJP authority.

Combat Awards:

2 Distinguished Flying Crosses (Vietnam)
Bronze Star Medal with combat "V"
6 Air Medals (2 Individual & 4 Strike/Flight - Korea)
29 Air Medals (3 Individual & 26 Strike/Flight - Vietnam)
2 NCM with combat "V" - (1 Korea & 1 Vietnam)
Purple Heart (Vietnam)

NOTE: CAPT Mohrhardt was nominated and selected for the Golden Eagles, but died before induction. The following excerpts were obtained from his Nomination Form and obit.



Summary of Career Events

(as described by CAPT Wynn Foster, USN (Ret.))

Robair and I were two of five fleet pilots flying F9F-5 aircraft on about 15 flights at the Fleet Air Gunnery Unit, El Centro in late 1952. Fleet average for fixed gunnery in that aircraft was about three percent at the time. At an angle off starting at 20 degrees, opening fire at 1,500 and breaking off at 1,000 feet, Robair consistently put 20 percent of his rounds in a 5' x 40' vertical banner being towed at 15,000 feet. The rest of us averaged about 10 percent. IMHO, scoring 20 percent in fixed gunnery is a mark of an individual with superlative pilot skills.

(as described by CAPT Roger Carlquist, USN (Ret.))

Robair was leader of a section of VF-53 F-8E aircraft engaged in a group exercise overhead CVA-14 with a section of VF-51 aircraft led by Jim Stockdale when an order was received to provide support for USS *Maddox* (DD-731) that was engaged in special communications monitoring near Hainan Island. The two sections flew the 300 miles at high transonic speed. Jim and his wing-man made one pass on the PT boat closest to *Maddox*. Jim's wing-man reported being hit. Jim escorted his wing-man to DaNang when it was learned that the AA "hit" was really the result of the wing-man failing to retract the wing droop prior to the high-speed transit from CVA-14 to Hainan. Robair sank one boat with 20mm gunfire. He and his wing-man damaged the other two and landed aboard CVA-14 after refueling in-flight. He was awarded the DFC.

He was awarded a second DFC for leading a flight of seven F-8Es off CVA-14 that struck PT boats at Quang Khe NVN on 5 August 1964. Robair sank one boat with a direct hit by a Zuni rocket. The flight inflicted severe damage on six other boats while being subjected to heavy 37mm and 57mm AAA. All aircraft recovered safely aboard CVA-14.

He was CO of the first F-8E squadron to fly more than 1,000 combat hours in a month (Mar 66.) He expanded the F-8E's interdiction capability to include two MF 84 bombs, fuzed

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with daisy cutters to maximize flak suppression; carry MK 24 flares on night interdiction missions over NVN; and carry napalm for use on targets in SVN. Robair was the "go-to" guy on VADM Tom Connolly's core OP-5W staff from 1966 to 1968. He coordinated the successful effort to not require the Navy to buy the F-111B; the Navy Fighter Study that led to procurement of the F-14A; and was CNO member of the joint USAF/USN group that developed flight profiles to be flown by a captured Mig 21 and determine the order in which the flights would be flown. He was leader of a select group of USN pilots who flew simulated air-to-air combat in F-8, F-4 and A-4 aircraft in Area 51 North of Nellis AFB. A report on best tactics to use in a NVN environment was prepared with copies sent to all fleet squadrons that were at or going to Yankee Station.

Robair was OinC of ConFairWestPacDet Cubi Point tasked by CTF 77 to insure that a 15 aircraft MH-53 squadron would relocate from Norfolk to Cubi Point in late 1972. and be ready to load aboard a carrier when the order to carry out minesweeping of Haiphong harbor was received. His task was complicated by the fact that he did not have operational control of any of the units and much of the voluminous communications traffic was highly classified, since time lines were dependent on negotiations between Henry Kissinger and NVN reps in Paris. It was necessary to move a P-3 squadron and a USMC EA-6 Det away from Cubi Pt. to provide room for operations the helos and the 10 C-5 aircraft required to move the aircraft with the huge amount of support equipment needed by the squadron.

My association with nominee was/is: We received our wings on the same day and flew together at FAGU where, as has been described, I saw first hand that he was a terrific pilot. Being on opposite coasts, our paths didn't cross until a few years ago and I then learned of Robair's distinguished career.

(as described by RADM Paul Gillcrist, USN (Ret.))

In 1965 (approximately) I was detailed to VF-53 as a temporary extra by Merle Gorder (CO VF-124) to fleet up to be Bill Gureck's PCO after Bill relieved Robair while deployed. It worked out fine although we had to double up in bunking for a few weeks. We were on Dixie Station at the time and flying was relatively low risk. One day Robair selected me to fly as his wingman on an alpha strike to what he called "Indian Country". We transited up the Gulf to a turn-in point north east of Haiphong and just east of the karst ridge as fighter cover for a strike group headed for the Haiphong Highway Bridge. Bruce Miller was strike leader. We coasted in low and fast but passed directly over a an NVN motorized junk which apparently alerted the NVN authorities that we were inbound and on our way. Nonetheless we stayed behind the karst ridge until pop-up point after which all hell broke loose. As soon as we popped up Robair's airplane took a direct hit (probably an 85 mm round) in the right ring fold area and damaged the wing-fold hinge pin causing the outer wing panel to flop up and down about 45 degrees Robair's airplane rolled inverted and should have gone in right then but for Robair's remarkably quick reflexes. He somehow got his airplane rolled back up right without hitting the ground,

lit burner and headed directly for the coast. I temporarily lost sight of him because of the dense cloud of black smoke he was trailing but managed to keep position. Every few seconds his plane would start rolling to the right and he would rudder it around to the level position while we flew over a fairly dense concentration of surface-to-air weaponry. Despite the flapping right wing panel we managed to get up to about 600 knots before we finally coasted out. Robair had lost his transmitter but apparently could hear me transmitting to CTF 77 Headquarters with details. We then headed south down the Gulf, now at a more moderate speed. Our course was going to take us fairly close to USS *Kitty Hawk* who graciously offered to make us a ready deck. Unfortunately Robair's airplane was not controllable enough for any kind of carrier recovery. I moved in to a position from which I could look down into Robair's cockpit and saw that he was re-arranging things preparatory to ejecting. I moved back away a few feet just as I saw him reach up grab the ejection seat handle and pull down on it. I circled his parachute until he entered the water. He was picked up shortly thereafter and returned to *Ticonderoga*.

Robair passed away peacefully on August 12, 2011

Born April 18, 1925 in Brooklyn, NY, to Emil and Loretta Ferris Mohrhardt, Robair entered Naval Service as an apprentice seaman at the age of 18 during World War II. He became an aviation cadet and later received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy, graduating with the Class of 1949. He entered flight training and received his wings as a Naval Aviator in 1950.

Robair served tours of duty with fighter squadrons in both the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets; these included VF-112, VF-62, VF-174 and VF-53. A veteran fighter pilot, he flew over 100 combat missions during the Korean and Viet Nam Wars, and was Commanding Officer of VF-53 during the latter. Other assignments included Commander Carrier Division TWO, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Air, and Naval Aviation Training Command. Robair also served as: Executive Officer of the USS *Bon Homme Richard*; Director, of College of Command and Staff at The Naval War College; Commander, Fleet Air Western Pacific Detachment at NAS Cubi Point, Republic of Philippines; Force Readiness Officer, staff of Commander Naval Air Force Pacific; and Commanding Officer, Recruit Training Command, San Diego, CA. (NAVCRUITRACOM SAN DIEGO).

In addition to his Naval Academy Bachelor of Science degree, he holds a Master's degree from George Washington University and is a graduate of Naval Intelligence School, and Naval War College Staff and Command courses.

Following his retirement in 1977, Robair worked in commercial real estate. He was courageous and strong, loved his country that he served, and treasured both family and friends. He lived life to the fullest and made every day count. He will be remembered truly as an officer and a gentleman.