

# **1970s Navy Air Traffic Control**

**or**

## **Adventures of a Navy Air Traffic Controller**

In 1974, Naval Air Station Miramar was the busiest airport in the free world. Known as Fightertown, it was home to the Pacific Fleet fighter squadrons, several training and support squadrons, and the Naval Fighter Weapons School, aka Top Gun. Imagine being a young person, new to the military, trying to learn a complex new job in a hectic, challenging environment. Exciting, exhilarating, occasionally boring or terrifying – it was quite a gig. And I have some great stories to share...

Below is the course outline as I submit the proposal. If it changes a lot (or I think of more stories!) I will update it before classes start. Questions will always be welcome!

### Session 1: How to Become an Air Traffic Controller

I enlisted in the Navy in the fall of 1973 under a program where you could pick 5 training options and they would guarantee you would get one of them. I wanted to be a Hospital Corpsman. The Navy decided I should be an AC, or Air Controlman. I will describe the training program, which was intense and included FAA regulations as well as Navy procedures. But it was a lot of fun compared to boot camp!

### Session 2: Welcome to Miramar: Working in the Dark

After a brief orientation, I was assigned to the radar room where we provided precision approaches, sometimes hundreds per shift, for practice and actual poor weather conditions. We had 3 very different types of precision radar equipment in addition to a state-of-the-art FAA radar we used to monitor the incoming traffic. Arguably not as glamorous as the tower, it was an important part of the mission, and we had our share of exciting times.

### Session 3: I go to the Tower!

The glamor didn't start right away. Ever wonder how those tower windows got cleaned? I had to master new positions (clearance delivery and ground control) prior getting any real time on "local" where you worked the aircraft in flight. Teamwork was very important

but every controller worked the pattern a little bit differently, so it was interesting to observe the various techniques to get the job done.

#### Session 4: Local

Miramar had 2 parallel runways (24R and 24L) which were almost constantly busy. We'll discuss normal operations, some exceptions, and some really exciting operations. We also had a diagonal runway, 28, that was used almost exclusively for arrested landings, where planes used their tail hook to engage the arresting gear like they do on aircraft carriers. 24L also had a painted and lighted "carrier deck" which was used for field carrier landing practice or FCLPs. Pilots had to be FCLP qualified before they could even practice on a carrier.

#### Session 5: Some of our Adventures

Many of you really want to hear about Top Gun. Each class had a final exercise they had to pass to graduate. Top Gun exercises were a real test for the tower, too. We would launch as many as many as 30 or 40 aircraft, do their exercise and come back all at once with not much fuel left so they couldn't be delayed. We also had fun with mixing aircraft with very different approach speeds, juggling runways with FCLPs in progress, and welcoming AirEvac (medical flights), C-5s, Harriers, and other aircraft not used to high volume operations.