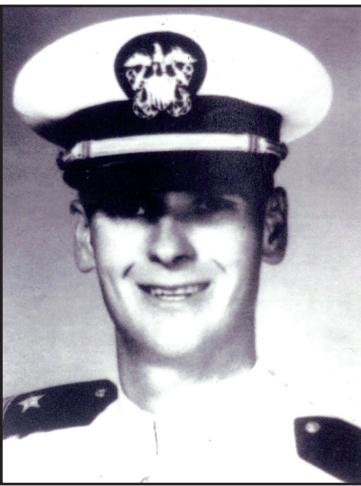


# June 16 marks 50 years since Gulf Shores resident survived mid-air collision

## Flight student David DeMeyer was only survivor of crash at NAS Whiting Field



*Editor's Note: David DeMeyer, a Gulf Shores resident, survived a mid-air collision and crash at NAS Whiting Field in Milton, Florida, on June 16, 1966.*

*The crash's sole survivor, David is very appreciative for the extra life and time he has been given. As a Navy Ensign, David was half way through flight school when this horrific accident occurred.*

### By David DeMeyer

It was a hot humid afternoon on June 16, 1966 along the Florida Panhandle when I started back towards NAS Whiting Field, after completing a 90 minute solo training flight over Santa Rosa Island.

I was having a very successful day. I aced a P-8 check ride with

a Marine Corp Captain earlier in the morning and was feeling quite confident in handling the big and powerful T-28C while practicing my aerobatics over that beautiful and narrow 40 mile desolate white sanded island below me.

I entered the landing pattern at 1,500' and 170 MPH over the North field dual runway, home of VT-2, my training squadron. The pattern at Whiting was much easier than the complicated three-tier pattern we had to endure earlier in our basic flight training when flying the T-34 at NAS Saufley Field.

As I broke right in my Fairdale 229, I reduced power, pulled the speed brake handle and lowered my gear.

On the downwind leg, the control tower announced that a

plane somewhere back in the pattern had called in with an unsafe gear indication. A check pilot was being sent up to verify that.

In addition, thunderstorms, a daily occurrence, were approaching. Everyone in the pattern was instructed to clear the runway as soon as they landed.

Lucky for me, the crash crew was rushing out to the landing area, possibly to foam the runway. It was potentially a serious event, but just another day in the training to become a

naval aviator.

In the Whiting Field landing pattern, planes landed on alternate sides of the double-wide runway. That meant the plane ahead of me would be landing on the port side and I would alternate and land on the starboard side.

Starting my turn at the 180° I pulled back my power further to reduce air-speed and commence a right turn descent to line up on the right side for landing.

My coordination and concentration was right on target to grease it in. (My regular instructor and I would always make bets on who could get the most imaginary 3rd wire landings. I remember thinking I would win a bet on this one, if only I had someone in the back seat.)

Then bam. A sudden and powerful jolt. The plane below me was set up on the wrong runway and suddenly pulled up into me. My plane's nose pitched up violently. Something has hit me! In a flash, I saw the inverted canopy of another T-28 with two white helmets in it, as if doing a barrel roll over me. It was estimated that we collided at about 300' and traveling around 140 - 150 MPH.

My next recollection was being snapped into a nose low spin attitude and the ground coming up - and fast! I yelled out, "It's been a good life, Dave!"

There is not an ejection seat in a T-28. I knew I was dead. The time was 1611 hours CDT.

The next thing I remember was two crash crew members in silver asbestos suits shouting "cut his straps, cut his straps. (the parachute and harness straps holding me in the cockpit)."

I looked down and saw my right flight boot now turned completely backwards. I learned weeks later from the Airmen that I screamed, "my legs, my back." The crewmen said I basically ejected myself out of the cockpit at the shock of seeing my foot backwards.

There was no time to waste. The other plane (Fairdale #236) had exploded on impact. There was a good chance my airplane was next.

Fortunately, it never ignited. It was determined that al-



though both of my fuel tanks ruptured upon impact with the ground, the fuel did not get to the hot engine and explode.

I recall the crash crewmen laying me on the wing and saying, "He's so broken up; he is like a jellyfish." Because my body was so traumatized (back and all four limbs broken) and my face

nearly ripped off (234 stitches - from being hit by the dislodged and flying instrument panel), I was taken via ambulance to the hospital at NAS Pensacola.

The two pilots in the other plane were immediately taken by helicopter once they were pulled from the burning plane. They were badly injured with 3rd degree burns and needed urgent care. Sadly, one lived for only 90 minutes and the other less than two days.

I feel so blessed with the extra years God gave me and the wonderful life I have been given. Yet, I am so saddened by the deaths of the two Naval Officers, and how painful the loss must have been to their families.

After spending 26 months lying in or attached to the Navy hospital recovering, I was medically retired as a Lieutenant (JG) in August of 1968.

*David and his wife, Andrea are active in Gulf Coast activities. David is the membership chairman of the Gulf Coast Athletic Club and the secretary for his Knights of Columbus Council. Andrea*

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*is a past President of the South Baldwin Newcomers Club. The DeMeyers moved to Gulf Shores after living most of their corporate life in the San Francisco and Atlanta areas.*

*For a more comprehensive story of David's crash and recovery, visit [tailhook.net](http://tailhook.net) and click on Sea Stories - DeMeyer T-28 Crash.*

**Pictured:** Black & white pictures of the crash scene; young David DeMeyer as a flight student at NAS Pensacola; DeMeyer with fellow Retired Naval Officers Capt. Gene Cernan and Capt. Neil Armstrong, at the 100 Year Anniversary of Naval Aviation Banquet onboard NAS Pensacola on May 5, 2011. It was also DeMeyer's 68th birthday. Cernan and Armstrong were two of the 17 former Naval Aviators who became Astronauts attending the banquet.

