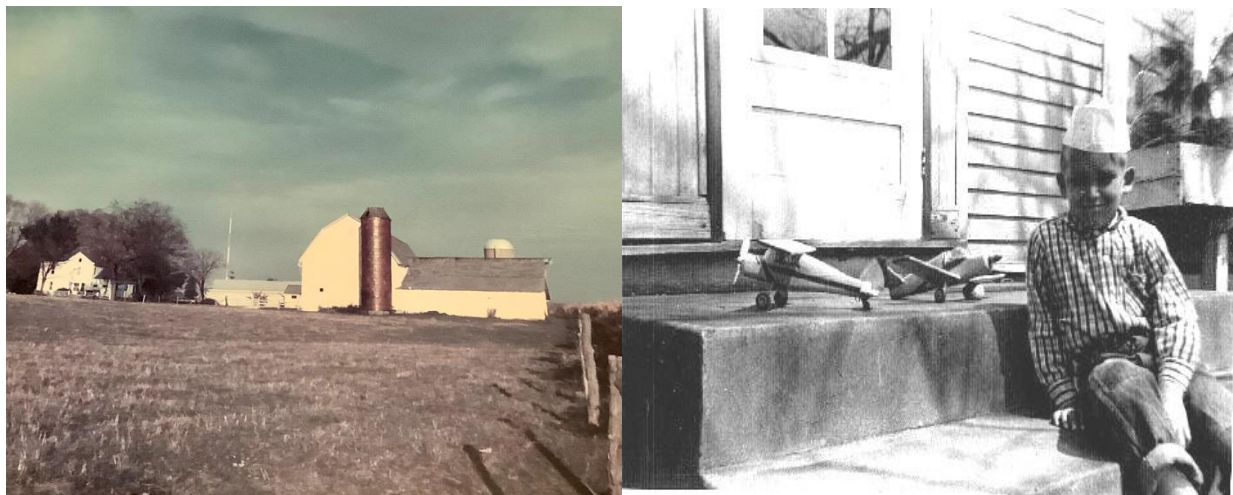


Don Wolfe

I was professional pilot for 45 years. My aviation career included General Aviation, FAR 135 Charter, Corporate, Military and Airline flying. Bankruptcy of my employer United Airlines and pension losses brought my wife Lori and me to Auburn from Napa, Ca. This was one of the best moves of our lives. My daughter Kendall still lives in Napa, stepson Kevin is in San Diego and stepdaughter Stacy lives in South Africa.

Lori and I have found warm and wonderful friends in Auburn. We enjoy hiking and biking in the local parks and frequently go boating in the summer. I've also discovered the local Auburn airport to be one of the most user friendly airports in the nation. The comradery and friendships I've experienced at KAUN are second to none. All things considered, I cannot imagine a better place to live.

My lifelong journey to Auburn began in Coshocton, Ohio on September 18, 1953. My parents Raymond and Delphine owned and operated a small 90 acre dairy farm which supported 25 dairy cows. The land was situated in a river valley once inhabited by the Delaware Indians. This valley is about 1 mile across with our farm located in the middle next to the village of Canal Lewisville. There was plenty of hard work to go around for me and my sisters Emily and Janet. Grandfather Jacob Wolfe built the house and barn. It was a beautiful setting in which to grow up and my sister Emily still lives there today.



The dream of flight began for me at about age 5. The farm west of ours used Piper Super Cubs to sow rye on the fields. I would stand in our pasture watching the planes fly over at low altitude, speed across the field and do steep climbing turns to reverse course. The planes were so close I could see the pilots inside when they went by. My father built 2 wooden toy airplanes for me, one of which was a Super Cub. I ran around the farm holding that airplane at arms-length "flying and patrolling the farm". I have honestly thought about airplanes and flying every day thereafter. My first flight occurred at age 6 at a local farmers fly In.

In seventh grade my music teacher noticed the airplane sketches on my notebook. He was also a fan of aviation and invited me to go to the USAF museum in Dayton, Ohio. This teacher would become the first of many aviation mentors in my life. We drove to Dayton and enjoyed looking at all of the airplanes and displays. On the way home I shared my favorite part of the day. It was a movie with USAF fighter planes. I liked the F-100 in the movie because of the loud boom of the afterburner and the rocket type flames coming out of the tail on takeoff. At 14 years of age I could only imagine how exciting it would be to fly an airplane like that. A mere 7 years later I would find out. Meanwhile, the old Allis Chalmers tractor and my bicycle would serve as imaginary airplanes.



I was in High School when my first cousin Larry Parrish joined the Ohio Air National Guard and began flying the F-100 out of Toledo Express Airport. Larry grew up across the street from me so I knew that he liked airplanes too. I couldn't believe he was flying one of my dream airplanes! Larry flew the Super Sabre over our farm a couple of times while I was driving the tractor in the fields. This inspired me even more. One Sunday morning while attending the church service at the Canal Lewisville Methodist I heard the sound of an approaching jet at low altitude. I wanted to run outside but my Mother dug her hand in to my leg securing me to the seat. Larry flew over his family's house, pulled up and ignited the afterburner. There was a gigantic boom overhead the church and the roar of thunder as Larry climbed to altitude. This frightened many of the attendees but it was a "religious experience" for me! As the noise subsided Reverend Hoy remarked; "Nice of your son to join us this morning Irene. Maybe he can attend in person next time."

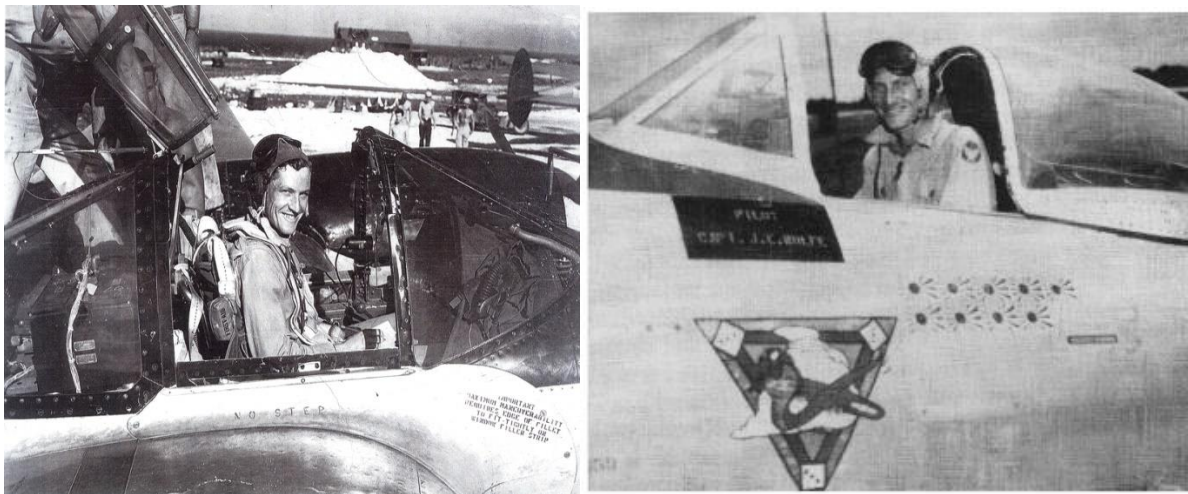
Following graduation from High School in 1971 I attended Bowling Green State University where I would eventually earn a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree with a minor in Aviation Education. The second year I was out of money so I applied for and received a government education loan for \$2500. After college expenses were paid I had enough money remaining to fund a Private Pilot License. I was age 19. My father was very displeased that I spent "borrowed money" on something that he considered to be a recreational venture. Interestingly enough, that Private Pilot License was the final part of the "launch code" for my aviation career.



I was in the process of joining USAF ROTC in hope of becoming a military pilot and to receive financial aid during the last 2 years of college. In the spring of 1973 I successfully passed the USAF officer and pilot entrance exams as well as the pilot physical. In April of that year the Ohio Air National Guard placed an ad in our College paper stating: "If you can pass the USAF entrance exams, flight physical and have 2 years of college, you can fly our F-100 Super Sabre." I ran immediately to the nearest pay phone and dialed the 800 number to find out more. I was invited to an interview with the Base Commander

and discovered that he had flown with my cousin Larry. Lt. Col Bell liked the fact I'd earned my pilot license and he liked Larry. I was age 20 and I was in!

At this point I will note that my father's brother, Major Judge Wolfe was a fighter pilot in WW2 and had grown up in the same farm house as me. Uncle Judge achieved the recognition of "Ace" for shooting down 9 airplanes in the Pacific theatre. He flew the P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning. His P-47 was named "Ssanori", a word spelled backwards reflecting the long missions escorting B-29's in to Japan. Following the war Judge was selected to be a Squadron Commander of a new F-80 Shooting Star jet squadron at Langley AFB, VA. While checking out in the F-80 jet at Williams AFB in Chandler AZ his aircraft caught on fire during takeoff and went out of control at low altitude. Sadly he did not survive the incident. The event was so painful for my family that it was never discussed while I was growing up. I discovered the details of the accident later with the creation of the internet.



Strangely enough I was ordered to Williams AFB in 1974 for USAF UPT jet training. I've often wondered if this was a coincidence or divine intervention. Little did I know I was flying over Uncle Judge's accident site at Rittenhouse AZ every day in the T-37. I also flew the supersonic T-38 trainer and was one of the distinguished graduates in my class of 60. I received "The Flight Training Award" for the highest scores on flight check rides. Jet school was 1 year long and one of the most rewarding years of my life.





Next I attended 7 months of F-100 training in Tucson AZ, soloing the jet at age 21. Upon graduation I returned to Toledo as an Air National Guard Fighter Pilot. I was also a distinguished graduate in F-100 school and was granted the "Ohio Junior Officer of the Year Award" in 1976. I flew the F-100 nearly every morning and attended college in the afternoon. Graduating from BGSU in 1977, I returned to Coshocton and flew twin engine airplanes for Commercial Air Transport, a flight charter company created and owned by Don Fischer. I flew the Piper Aztec, Cessna 402 and a King Air 100 adding nearly 1000 hours to my log book in just over a year. I earned my ATP and CFII single, multi in the spring of 1978.

Don Fischer, Don Emslie, Jon Mosier, Forest Hothem, I.A. "Andy" Anderson and many of the Air Guard pilots were my Ohio "Buckeye" mentors. They helped me climb the ladder of my professional career by offering their wisdom and advice. I am grateful for everything they did for me.

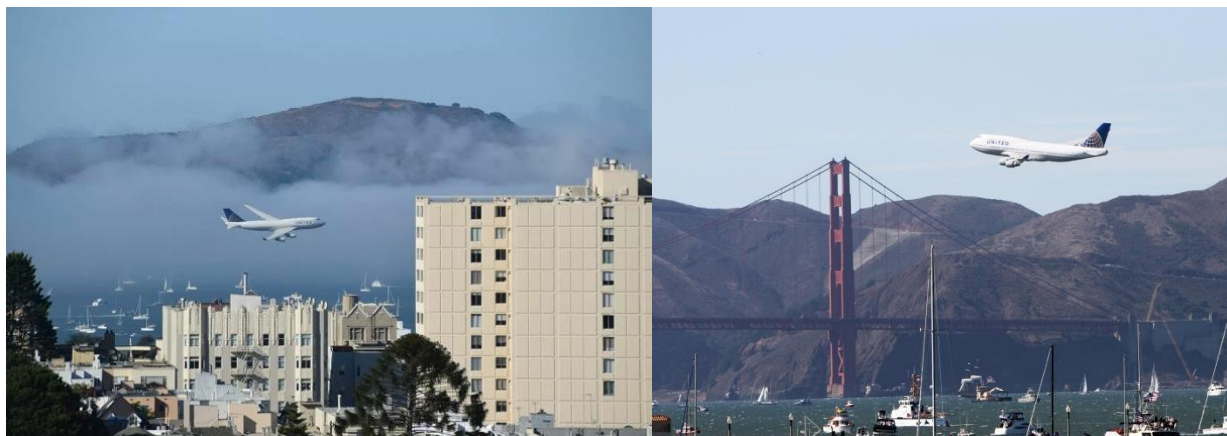
In 1979 I flew one of the last F-100's to the Davis Monthan AFB boneyard. I transitioned to the A-7D Corsair II in 1980 and flew it until 1984. My callsign was "Wolfman", a nickname that remains with me to this day.





In August 1978 I was hired by United Airlines at age 24. I flew almost all of the Boeing airliners throughout my career. I retired in September 2018 as a Captain on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. My favorite large jet was the Jumbo Boeing 747-400. The 747 was fast with a top speed of .92 Mach and big with a takeoff weight of #875,000 pounds. I was a Line Check Airman and Training Captain on the Boeing 727, 747-2 and 747-4. I enjoyed the good fortune of being selected to represent United Airlines and the 12,000 United Airlines pilots by flying a 10 minute low altitude demonstration in at the Fleet week Air Show. I flew the Boeing 747-4 in the show for 5 years from 2010-2015. The 2014 flight demonstration was featured in the Airways and [Air & Space magazines](#) and [can be viewed here.](#)





I had a short chapter with Beechcraft Corp. from 1981-1984 during a furlough from United. I was the demonstration pilot on the King Air line of Propjets for the sales department at Ohio Aviation Corp. OAC consisted of 3 company stores owned by Beechcraft. I also ran the flight department and was an FAA DPE for the Baron 55 & 58 and King Air 90 & 200 in the company's FAR 135 operation. We managed 4 lease back King Air's, one of which belonged to Jim Davis the creator of the Garfield Comic Character. I had the pleasure of flying nearly all of Mr. Davis's corporate trips. We remain friends today.



In retirement I fly my Cessna 180 around the western states exploring the backwoods airports and I mentor young pilots in an aerobatic Citabria. I am currently the President of the Retired United Pilots Association and I am the Director of the flight scholarship program for Auburn Aviation Association where our primary Scholarship is named after the famous local WW2 Ace, Col. C.E. Bud Anderson. I have enjoyed the good fortune of sharing time with Col. Anderson, who at 99 years old in 2021 is as sharp as ever. I feel very fortunate to have an occasional visit with a fellow fighter pilot and QB from my Uncle Judge's generation.



One of the most rewarding aspects in the final chapter of my career is watching the youth of Auburn, Ca. climb the ladder of success in aviation. Our scholarship recipients set and achieve goals. They seek out knowledgeable mentors and follow their advice. I am proud to have played a part in developing the Scholarship and Mentoring programs with my fellow members of the Auburn Aviation Association. Together we have created programs that will pay it forward for generations to come. Our scholarship and grant recipients are taught the value of honesty, integrity, mentorship, education and paying it forward to their next generation.





Aviation has brought many good things in to my life. I have a long list of highly credible and energetic friends and I still find pleasure in flying an airplane. Having a dream of flight at age 5 and experiencing almost every form of aviation makes me a very fortunate person.

If given the chance, I do it all over again!







Captain Don Wolfe and First Officer Steve Silver

Christmas Fantasy Flight in 747 for Disadvantaged and Terminally Ill Children 2015



Santa ALWAYS gets the Captain's Seat



United Airlines Family Day 2018 San Francisco KSFO



SAN FRANCISCO'S FLEET WEEK AIR SHOW

IS YOUR 747 CAPTAIN AN ADRENALINE JUNKIE?

BY CHRISTINE NEGRONI

PHOTOS BY PATRICK CARNEY & AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED

"Next year you
will fly a United
aircraft and we
will be a corporate
sponsor for Fleet
Week."



AMONG THE MILITARY PLANES AND SOUPED-UP acrobatic aircraft performing at public airshows, it is rare to see commercial passenger jets. At United Airlines, however, a few pilots are encouraged to strut their stuff at the three-day San Francisco Fleet Week Air Show. The fancy flying takes lots of planning and preparation, but, as I learned while attending the 2014 event, with all the complications that go into participating in an air show while running a global airline, sometimes, piloting the plane is the easiest part.

Chicago-based United features a logo-embazoned jetliner roaring past spectators in a variety of showgirl-like poses. The airline tries to make one of its 23 Boeing 747-400s available, so that more than one million people can see it in all its awe-inspiring glory.

The first appearance by a United plane at Fleet Week, in 2008, consisted largely of "straight passes" at low altitude, Steve Henderson, manager for the air demonstration program, told me. Over the years, flourishes have been added so that, in 2014, the audience saw ten minutes of steep turns and quick altitude changes that displayed the plane from many angles.

"HE WAS VACATIONING IN THE CITY AND SAW THIS A320 DOING FLY-BYS AND HE SAID, 'WHAT'S GOING ON?'"

"Having that big airplane fly around is a marketing tool," said Don Wolfe, a 747 captain at United and member of the demonstration team. United recognizes "the power of marketing with an airplane."

In this, United is not alone. For 20 years, American Airlines has supported Chicago's 55-year-old Air and Water Show, sometimes by sending an aircraft to fly 1,000 feet parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan. This past summer, it put two planes in the air: its 1937 Flagship Detroit DC-3 and a Boeing 737 in the airline's new livery. It was "a juxtaposition of the old and the new," according to company spokeswoman Leslie Scott, who described the event as simple, no aerobatics involved. "It went beautifully on day one," she said, but, as Saturday rolled into Sunday, so did the fog, obscuring the view on the show's second day.



SFFW FACT
San Francisco Fleet Week (SFFW) began in 1981 to celebrate America's sea services. Taking place every October, SFFW's air show, parade of ships and many community events have become a significant and integral part of the city's local culture and economy.

It just doesn't seem right that, for all the effort, something as ethereal as fog should interfere. At least, that's what I thought before I spent two days in San Francisco, tagging along with the United crew as it readied itself for its fifth Fleet Week performance. Now I've learned that the course is fraught with obstacles, from the weather to the White House—but I'm getting ahead of myself.

The bid to fly an airliner in an airshow begins with overcoming the objections of risk-adverse executives, who must consider the reality of something that retired United captain Clay Lacy told me: "People go to air shows to have fun and be scared." The now octogenarian pilot recalled a stunt he performed repeatedly in the 1970s, when a performer named Rick Rojatt walked on top of the DC-8 Lacy was piloting. "People like to get a little bit of a thrill," he said of the act.

The distinction between thrilling and frightening can be razor thin. Few risk managers encourage airlines to approach that line.

So give credit to United for ignoring worry warts and credit Virgin America too, because, had United's then-chief operating officer Joe Kolshak not seen a Virgin America plane flying at the 2007 Fleet Week air show, United might not be performing in it today.

"He was vacationing in the city and saw this A320 doing fly-bys, and he said, 'What's going on?'" according to United test pilot George Silverman, who was with Kolshak. Silverman said he was

given an order: "Next year, you will fly a United aircraft and we will be a corporate sponsor for Fleet Week." "That is how it started," said Silverman.

Seven years later, participation in the show remains challenging on many levels, from getting the required sign off from the FAA to getting one's hands on a plane—specifically the Boeing 747, the most durable symbol of modern air travel.

At Chicago's Air and Water Show, American's airliner flies a straight course at a level altitude. To do the things United wanted to do, throwing the jumbo jet around in the sky, first at 1,000 feet, seconds later at 300 feet, achieving maximum allowable angles of bank, required the approval of Rick Mayfield, the FAA's inspector in charge. From an observer's seat in the airline's United 747 simulator, Mayfield has watched the United program evolve.



"WE ADVERTISE TO EVERYBODY IN THE WORLD WE ARE GOING TO FLY A 747. THERE'S NO COMPARISON THE 757 TO THE 747."

"It's technically difficult because of all the changes that are taking place. They're flying the airplane in non-standard configurations. They're flying at non-standard altitudes and they're changing these configurations and altitudes constantly."

Checked out by Mayfield, Wolfe, Silverman and fellow test pilot Joe Sobczak presented their credentials on the first day of the air show at the morning meeting that preceded each day's flying.

Here, Donna Flynn earned her title of Air Show Boss, addressing a room full of hotshot acrobatic pilots with a no-nonsense, no-hacktalk demeanor. Sean Tucker, Dave Mathieson, Steve Hinton and representatives of the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels were among those in attendance. Flynn explained the precise timetable for each entrance and exit to the performance box, the emergency procedures for loss of radio or hot brakes and other essential information. Then she dropped the news—on Saturday, President Obama and Air Force One would be in town and a special temporary flight restriction would be in place around San Francisco International Airport. Obama was scheduled to leave the city hours before the show, so no one was unduly worried, but Flynn warned, in what would turn out to be prophetic tones, "The Commander in Chief runs this show."

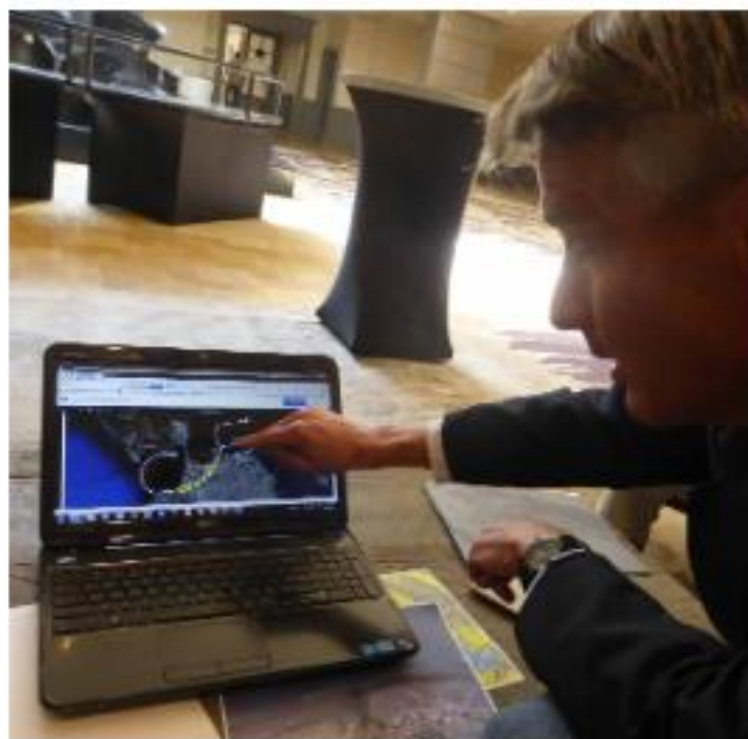
Saturday dawned bright and clear. The United pilots were positively giddy with the difference a day made. On Friday's practice day, thick fog made a low ceiling over the bay and the airline's operations staff was only able to provide a Boeing 757. So they were thrilled with the news that a Boeing 747 was waiting for them at SFO and the forecast was for hours of continued clear skies.

Silverman, Sobczak and Wolfe began the 25-minute drive to SFO, only to get a call en route with bad news. The 747 assigned to the show was being taken to fill in for another wide-body with a maintenance issue. They should plan on flying the Boeing 757 again. The pilots were disheartened, none more than Wolfe, the only one of the three whose full-time job was flying the 747 with real, live, fare-paying passengers, and whose love for the model was unequivocal. Flying the 747 "is our number one goal. Period. Because that's what the crowd wants to see," Wolfe told me.

Henderson shared that opinion. Coordinating the ground activity from his hotel room in Fisherman's Wharf, he had an idea. The other 747's maintenance issue couldn't be deferred for a revenue flight but, whatever was wrong with the plane, it was not a problem for the air show. He called the folks at United's operations desk in Chicago and turned on the charm. If they gave the team the 747, it would be back with the mechanics an hour later, he promised.

With assent from Chicago, things were back on track—but only briefly. Parked at the United Airlines hangar, dubbed the Super Bay, was Air Force One. Mr. Obama was late leaving town. While his plane was there, all movement in or out of the Super Bay was frozen. The airshow 747 needed towing and fueling but that was not going to happen until the President was gone. The Air Boss's comment about the Commander in Chief running the show was proving to be accurate.

The minutes ticked by until, finally, President Obama was airborne, leaving United to restore its flight schedule.



"PRE-CHECK COMPLETE, THEY WAIT FOR THE MAINTENANCE RELEASE REQUIRED FOR THEM TO TAKE OFF BUT IT DOES NOT COME."

CLAY LACY



Clay Lacy is an airline captain, military aviator, experimental test pilot and business aviation entrepreneur. He has flown over 300 aircraft types, logged more than 50,000 flight hours and accumulated more hours flying turbine powered aircraft than any other pilot.

"The airplanes were backed up and fueling was backlogged," Sobczak told me. It wasn't just the 747. Every plane in need of service or fuel at the Super Bay was now awaiting attention. The 747 needed just 48,000 pounds of fuel and was already loaded with about half that. Ten minutes was all it would have taken to have a truck add the required amount.

At 13:00, the three pilots still standing by the parked 757 were delighted to see the 747 beginning to move off the gate.

"We could see the plane being pushed back. And then it stopped," Silverman recalled. The tug had broken. Thirty minutes passed before the plane was back in motion. By the time it was fueled, it was 13:45. With their performance scheduled for 14:35, the pilots calculated they would have to start engines by 14:15 to taxi out and make their slot.

Finally on the flight deck, Wolfe took the left seat and Silverman the right. Sobczak would fly as safety officer. Pre-check completed, they waited for the maintenance release required for them to take off, but it did not come. In his hotel room, Henderson was fighting a new battle. The airline had reneged on the use of the plane.

"Everybody's intentions were good, but everybody has a different risk tolerance," Henderson told me, notably magnanimous, weeks later. "One person says, 'That's very acceptable; we can do it and maintain the schedule integrity,' and the next person looks at the same set of circumstances and says, 'No.'"

Henderson called the crew to tell them to make their way back to the Boeing 757. Only now, they would have to hurry to make the performance window.

But Henderson couldn't let it go. "I looked in the mirror and said, 'Okay, are we willing to resign ourselves to the fact that we flew a 757 yesterday and we will fly one today, or are there any other options?'"

The idea that occurred to him, as a former U.S. Air Force Thunderbird, was nothing short of blasphemy. Henderson knew that the Thunderbirds and US Navy Blue Angels were the big finish at any air show. But, if he could convince the Blue Angels to allow United to fly after them, he might have enough time to convince his airline to reinstate the 747. He put the request to the FAA's Mayfield and Air Boss Flynn, who agreed to ask on United's behalf.

"He calls back and says it's a go," Henderson said of the call from Mayfield. "You can show up with a 747 and come on after the Blues. That's a go go go."

Wolfe, Silverman and Sobczak were just about to walk off the 747 when Henderson explained he had slain that dragon. But, now, Silverman had a new worry. Fog was seeping in on the bay, high but dense over the Golden Gate Bridge.

"I was concerned that we were going to lose the show altogether," Silverman explained. "It would have been the lesser of two evils to get in the 757 and still have a show to put on."

All this time, I was sitting in the United hospitality tent at San Francisco's Marina Green Park, oblivious to the turmoil at the airport but as eager as anyone to see the Boeing 747 in the sky. After



all, I'd done nothing but talk about it for the past 36 hours. Henderson explained why it was important to the show team.

"We advertise to everybody in the world that we are going to fly a 747. There's no comparing the 757 to the 747."

Lacy concurred, especially at San Francisco's air show. "United is going to fly a 747, and a 747 is going to be as substantial as the Golden Gate Bridge."

So Henderson told Silverman, "I'm willing to answer to my bosses that we're going to take that risk. Go for the 747."

By now it was 15:00. The new performance time was set for 16:00. The men pre-flighted the jumbo jet again while watching the clock and wondering whether this latest attempt would work. Silverman was antsy, switching to the 757 was still an option in his mind, but, if they waited too long, they could end up not flying in the show at all.

Around 15:15, Silverman recalled telling Henderson, "Okay Spike, we have to make this decision in five to eight minutes. We have to go (in the 747) or we are going in the 757."

TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER THE PLANE APPEARS FROM ABOVE AN 800-FOOT HIGH BANK OF FOG. AT 300 KNOTS IT DESCENDS TO 300 FEET. PEOPLE LINING EVERY SCRAP OF SHORELINE ARE WATCHING IN RAPT ATTENTION.

The crew did not have to wait long. Minutes later, Henderson got another thumbs down from Chicago.

"I guess I felt the worst at that time," Henderson said. "I talked to all the big boys in headquarters and they could not support the 747." Calling the cockpit, he broke the news to Silverman. "It's over; go with the 757. It's the 757. You are flying it and that's a wrap."

To a soundtrack of flipping switches and whirring of seats backing away from instrument panels, the three men extracted themselves from the jumbo jet and started hurrying towards the narrow-body. Henderson had hardly had time to adjust to the disappointing news when he got another call, this one from United's managing director of flight operations, Bryan Quigley.

The executive had trumped all other decision makers, releasing the Boeing 747 to fly in Fleet Week.

"You are going in the 747 now, and it is definitive," Henderson recalled Quigley telling him. Quickly, he redialed Silverman to get the crew back on the airplane. "No this is 100 percent," he practically shouted. "Bryan Quigley has intervened. You are flying the 747 in the show."

The 747 lifted off from Runway 28R at 15:30. Twenty-five minutes later, the plane appeared from above an 800-foot-high bank of fog. At 300 knots, it descended to 300 feet. People lining every scrap of shoreline were watching in rapt attention. The crew had her soaring just above the gravity-bound sailboats, powerboats, kayaks and ferries. This was the start of a 10 minute *pas de trois*; Wolfe, Silverman and Sobczak performing the ballet they had been refining for years.

When Capt. Wolfe took the plane into a climbing left turn and curved back toward the air show area with flaps out and gear down, it was an inimitable "take-a-look-at-me-baby" maneuver. It was a seamless, utterly magnificent sight, as the most highly recognized jetliner ever made flew low enough to offer jaw-dropping views of her massive proportions.

Before they left for the airport on Saturday morning, I asked the pilots whether they ever regretted not being able to see what their flying looked like to the audience below. Sobczak explained that, in the past, as an air show announcer, he'd wanted to be a performer. Now that he was one, he often wished he could view his act from the ground.

Even knowing what to expect, I was captivated by the 747 as it roared by.

Only later, when Henderson arrived at the United tent to join his wife Danette to watch the plane fly, did I learn of how all four men had spent their afternoon. Surely, it must have been frustrating, but no one was complaining. To the contrary, Wolfe described the day as one of the most satisfying in his life.

"On every level, we overcame the challenges and we had a great show, and everything clicked," he told me. "We pulled off some magic."

It occurred to me then that an air show performance is more than pilots managing the physics of flight. The very best can meet the inevitable turbulence with competence and grace. What airline doesn't want to share that message with the public? —CN