

About Thomas A. Dwelle. The following foreword to Tom's 2023 personal memoir Life In The Fast Lane provides a summary of Tom's flying career so far.

FOREWORD BY MAJOR GENERAL
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From the cockpit of Air Force aircraft to the boardroom, with a detour for air racing, Tom Dwelle personifies the traits that were passed to the family from his grandfather: dependability, trustworthiness, and hard work - traits that foster success in most any endeavor. Like his grandfather, he has been a dreamer and innovator, and found his calling in and around aircraft. In his own words, he was "meant to fly!"

I have flown with Tom. I was his IP when he checked out in the North American F-86L All weather Fighter Interceptor. He is a natural Pilot. I knew it right away. We went on to fly combat together in Vietnam in 1965. This book is about courage, determination, and success in a number of Air Force assignments, the business world, and the highly competitive Reno Air Races. It describes in detail the transition from flying the Mach 2-capable F-106 during the Cuban missile crisis to combat operations in the low and slow A-1E Skyraider in Vietnam. The narrative takes you into the cockpit and you feel the anxiety yet focus required during combat operations - and the exhilaration when a mission is successful, and you know that you have saved some brave American lives. It also reveals the pain that is felt when others do not survive - some Special Forces troops as well as other airmen. His vivid descriptions are documented with a substantial number of photographs that add realism to the narrative. Not content to accept things "as they are" but to look for more effective operations, he presented concepts at the highest Air Force levels that paved the way for current Search and Rescue operations as well as defining requirements for a dedicated Search and Rescue aircraft. The A-10 had been defined.

His successful 23-year Air Force career included an exchange tour with the Royal Air Force and assignments in the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) where he designed live exercises to test and improve United States air defenses. He also served as the Air Defense Chief in Thailand during the final closure of the Vietnam war. In addition to his outstanding Air Force accomplishments, Tom became equally adept at managing a highly successful business - Nella Oil company (named for his grandfather Allen, spelled in reverse). The company was founded by the four Dwelle brothers and initially focused on service stations and convenience stores, but soon transitioned into transportation of refined products in fuel tankers and refining yellow corn into anhydrous ethanol. He describes in detail the challenges and successes that the company faced in the early stages, and how ingenuity and determination overcame obstacles to growth.

Two of the brothers also were military pilots - Walt flew in the Navy and Steve was an Air Force fighter pilot and flew as a member of the Air Force Thunderbirds. They were a flying family, and soon changed the name of their company from Nella Oil to Flyers Energy, in recognition

of their backgrounds and special interests in aviation. Tom declares that "flying is my life," and it may well be in the family's blood. His father, his brothers, all of his children fly, and a daughter was an Airbus 320 Captain at the age of 30! After retiring from the Air Force, while serving as crew chief for his wife's red Pitts Special biplane at the Reno Air Races, he got the itch to race himself. He considered purchasing a Douglas Skyraider (aircraft that he flew in Vietnam) but settled on an AT-6 at the advice of his father. He named his aircraft Tinkertoy. Tom describes the strategy and pilot skill that is required to qualify and ultimately win in this highly competitive arena. He was a two-time winner in this aircraft class. A serious ground accident sidelined him for a while. He suffered the loss of four fingers on his right hand, and underwent surgery to transplant two of his toes onto his damaged hand (in fact, 14 surgeries over a three-year period). The surgeries were successful and he learned how to fly again by alternating between managing the throttle and the control stick using only his one good hand. His grit and determination enabled him to fly once again in the Air Races in Reno some 18 months after the accident, placing second and third in the Unlimited Championships in 2000 and 2003 in his Hawker Sea Fury Critical Mass. He quit racing when he was 71 years old.

In 2022, the Dwelle brothers sold Flyers Energy and started a new company called Nella Holdings. This company invests in office buildings, hotels, car washes, and mobile home parks. The headquarters is still in the original 1985 office/hangar at Auburn Municipal Airport. Tom states that he doesn't plan to slow down. He followed his dream and became the pilot that he always wanted to be. In 2018, he flew an A-1 Skyraider again at the Cavanaugh Air Museum in Addison, Texas. During the flight a large buzzard hit the aircraft. That was his last in-flight emergency and the only air-to-air kill in his career! An amazing account of one man's desire to fly and to be the best in the air! Enjoy!

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