

His crowning achievement came in 1952 when he and three other flight instructors began performing tricky aerial maneuvers in their T-28 trainer.

"The kids coming in were reticent to fly in tight formation," Myers, 67, of Vacaville said. "So we formed a formation demonstration team."

With Myers flying the lead plane, the seminal squad put on exhibitions at Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas, over the course of the year.

With the team and the concept gaining in popularity, Myers claims the Air Force absconded with the group's insignia and formations and moved the Thunderbirds to Williams Air Force Base in Arizona.

"When the Air Force got wind of what was going on," Myers said, "they liked it and took it away from us."

Staff Sgt. Frank Paris of the Thunderbirds public affairs office said he knows nothing of a forerunner to the Thunderbirds. He said the team, formerly called the Stardusters, didn't get the Thunderbirds label until six weeks in the 1953 season.

Although not officially recognized by the Air Force, that first group of pilots pioneered a number of maneuvers, including the "bomb burst," which is still being performed today, Myers said.

"The big difference between then and now is performance characteristics, the difference between 250 (mph) and 600 mph."

Myers' team flew the T-28, a single-prop plane with the "flying characteristics of a jet."

"It's (the T-28) a very easy airplane to fly," Myers said.

In 1953, the Thunderbirds went to jet fighters.

Myers sees his year on the team as the culmination of his career. As for his more than 10 years in the Air Force, he offered, "It was a nice experience but I wouldn't want to live through it again."

Although he is no longer a pilot, the wiry Myers still enjoys the sensation of getting up in the air once in awhile in an airplane or glider.

Myers and his wife Juanita moved here from Torrance in April.

The End

Dear Bud:

In browsing through my 461st & 484th file I happened to stumble across the Winter 1984 edition of the Torretta Flyer. Reminded me of two things. On April 11, 1944, ten of us crews were transferred from the 484th in Djedeida, Africa to the 461st in Italy. Upon arriving in the vague vicinity, our pilot, Jack Baker, kept calling for landing instructions from Torretta tower. After what seemed an hour, and a half, we finally got a disgruntled reply from the tower which advised us

not to use the name "Torretta". We were supposed to use a code name, that no one had bothered to tell us about, which was supposed to prevent the Luftwaffe from pinpointing the location of the 461st base, and I suppose to mount a massive bombing retaliation on their part.

Secondly, I suppose you are aware of this, the cover photo absolutely has to be the photograph from which the painting "Raid on Ploesti" (no 3 in the "Pride of the Service series") Armed Service information poster DA21-34, was modeled. Our crew was on the mission which took place on May 31, 1944. Our bombardier, Norm Zollinger had a copy of this poster at our 25th crew reunion in Chicago and insisted that he could pick out our "One Eyed Jack" in the picture.

Now, "One Eyed Jack" got its name as follows. During our training in Harvard, Nebraska, the crew, officers and enlisted men would meet surreptitiously for sessions of poker. High on the list of favorites was Fours, Whores, and One Eyed Jacks. On the flight from Belim, Brazil to Dakar, Africa, being the most responsible as the navigator, I was scanning the night sky for my most likely next star fix through the astro dome, when I realized to my horror, the flight deck was completely devoid of pilots.

"The sons of bitches have bailed out and didn't bother to tell me," was my first reaction. The tortured and lengthy scramble past the nose wheel revealed the entire crew on the floor engaged in their favorite pastime, "Fours, Whores, and One Eyed Jacks".



My rather hysterical objections were met with a pacifying, "Oh! it's OK, we've got her on automatic pilot."

Because our pilot was Jack and the crew's romantic endeavors were legendary, it wasn't hard to combine it all and paint a "One Eyed Jack" of hearts on the nose of number 2 when we got to Torretta. Our only poetic license was to have Jack facing to the front.

Another aside, which I am willing to be corrected on, is the fact (I have been so advised) that our crew left Torretta on August 7, 1944, as the first totally intact 461st crew to