

Adventures of a Navy Ensign

By [Roger W. Ek](#), Seawolf 25

I was a Navy Ensign and looked like I was about 17 years old. I took a crewman and went from Lakehurst to Jacksonville to pick an overhauled VH-34D. That was a VIP helicopter and has been a Presidential helicopter. I flew up to some Air Force base in South Carolina and stopped for fuel. I went in to Operations to file a flight plan to Norfolk. The Major in Operations asked where the aircraft commander was. I told him I was it. My crewman was amused. The Major called Lakehurst to verify that I was allowed to fly that beautiful bird all by myself. We flew up the beach for a while waving at the girls, then followed a railroad toward Norfolk at about 500 feet.

There were thunderstorms ahead and the visibility got pretty bad. I called Norfolk and told them I was making a precautionary landing and would call when airborne after the storm passed. I landed on a baseball field. The little town seemed to be 100% black people and a lady came out to ask if we would like a glass of water. I said we would and she came back with a tray, a large glass pitcher of ice water and two glasses. A whole bunch of old grey haired black people gathered around just to watch. I asked if there was anything I could do for her and she said, "Please say hello to the President for us." I assured her we would.

On another flight up the same route I had an H-19. It had an MDF navigation radio. (Manual Direction Finding) That was a loop antenna on the roof over the pilot's seat and you turned a crank to line up the loop with the station. The Virginia weather turned bad and I called Norfolk again and they told me to climb. I got about 15 miles out and they lost their radar. Just great. I flew an MDF approach to Norfolk and sure was glad to break out at about 600 feet. That kind of stuff is why it took 18 months to make a Navy pilot. IFR in turbulence in an H-19, no ASE or autopilot of any kind, no copilot and cranking a handle overhead to listen for the null on a radio beacon. All this with probably 250 flight hours total flight time. Piece of cake, but it does concentrate the mind.