YF-16 Vs. YF-17

I really enjoyed your article on the 16/17 fly-off, but there are a couple of things you may not know about [“Legacy of the Lightweight Fighter Competition,” February, p. 59]:

The fighter mafia was led by Col. John Boyd, who originated the whole concept of energy maneuverability focusing fighter design concepts to higher thrust and greater wing area to assure they could take on all comers and not have to face the issues F-4 drivers faced in Vietnam. Harry [Hilliker] was a dues-paying member—but a contractor (General Dynamics).

It was not originally a fly-off. It was originally intended to be a technology demonstration. It was called the Lightweight Fighter (LWF) program without necessarily having an ending. It was called the Light-weight Fighter (LWF) program without necessarily having an ending. It was only during the actual flying that the powers that be suggested the high/low mix—and that the LWF winner would be the low and get a full-scale development contract.

The evaluation team included a Tactical Air Command (TAC) contingent assigned to the 4486th Test Squadron (part of the Fighter Weapons Center at Nellis). Included on this team were Lt. Col. Duke Johnston, Capt. Dean Stickell (YF-16 pilot), Capt. Joe Bill Dryden (YF-17 pilot), and Capt. Hugo Heyns (aircraft maintenance officer), along with three aircraft specialists (avionics, engine, and crew chief).

At the end, the competition was not close. The YF-16 outperformed the YF-17 in just about every measure. I’ve got a bunch of stories behind that comment. It was really interesting. Everyone (operations, maintenance, logistics, finance, and politics) all agreed: The YF-16 was the right aircraft at the right time.

Following the January 1975 announcement, we conducted another test program (the beyond visual range evaluation) using a variety of aircraft from around the Air Force—all assigned TDY to Edwards. Ultimately this program was directed to define the specs for the F-16 radar—which was not considered as part of the LWF, because it was John Boyd’s thought that we needed something that could dogfight during daylight—ultimately to be a day VFR fighter (if it ever went into production).

In January-February 1975, the Navy sent a team to help it define its next aircraft. The commander in charge came to my office and told me he was there to evaluate the two aircraft and make a recommendation to his bosses. He then asked me to show him where the aircraft with two engines was. He had been told which to pick, clearly knowing that the Navy had made up its mind and was not going to be confused by facts.

You noted the YF-16XL and its competition with what became the F-15E, but you did not address the F-16/79 where General Dynamics installed a J79 engine in a YF-16 in order to have something with two engines. He had been told which to pick, clearly knowing that the Navy had made up its mind and was not going to be confused by facts.

C&C and Pearl Harbor

Your article “Command and Control Evolution“ [February 2016, p. 64] was a very interesting read. It really hit the nail on the head, so to speak. I was a ground radio operator for most of my 26 years of Active Duty, primarily working long-range communication by either being in SAC or supporting SAC when in AFCS/AFCC. This would include several assignments to the old Alpha/Bravo net, later called Giant Talk. We also broadcast SAC EAMs when at the RAF Croughton aeronautical station. Then there was the PACAF Commando Escort network, when I was based in the Philippines.

I was a small part of the command and control evolution. Something I always told the “new guys” was that without comm, we would just be a bunch of folks running around bumping into each other.

I [also] thoroughly enjoyed the article “Pearl Harbor Rides” again [November/December 2016, p. 22]. It mentions there were 10 reviews after the attack, even as late as 1995. In 2015 the Navy turned down yet another appeal. However, Admiral Kimmel and General Short were never truly absolved of their alleged negligence prior to the attack.

And then there is the Philippines. General MacArthur who had about eight hours’ warning still had most of his aircraft on the ground when the Japanese attacked. This effectively eliminated his air force. So what was his punishment? He was praised for his defense of the islands, given the Medal of Honor, and sent lands, given the Medal of Honor, and sent

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—The Editors

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

Bradford Exchange ........................................... 71
DRS ............................................................. 3
Gulfstream .................................................. Cover II
MASA .......................................................... 43
Mercer .......................................................... 75
Northrop Grumman ........................................ Cover IV
Rolls Royce ................................................... 5
USAA ........................................................... Cover III

AFA Air, Space & Cyber Conference ........ 23
AFA Air Warfare Symposium ...................... 43
AFA Hangar Store ......................................... 74
AFA Monthly Giving ..................................... 56
to Australia to raise an army to retake the Philippines, among other locations. So I guess in 1941-42, what America needed was a new hero and two scape-goats. It appears we got both.

SMSgt. David R. Caron,
USAF (Ret.)
Las Vegas

Helicopter Evolution
The UH-1N replaced the HH-1H, not UH-1H for missile site support service. ["Gallery of Weapons," June, p. 95]. The HH-1H replaced the UH-1F. The TH-1H is a modified single-engine variant, not twin engine, used for flight training.

MSGt. Hank Wiswell,
USAF (Ret.)
Spokane, Wash.

Retired Master Sergeant Wiswell’s point about the single engine is correct, and the legacy variant can accurately be referred to as HH-1H (reflecting its original search and rescue role). SAR variants of the N model were similarly designated, though the UH-1N designation more accurately highlights its missile field utility role. We will modify the “Gallery of Weapons” UH-1 Huey/Iroquois entry.

—Aaron M. U. Church

I’ve Seen This Movie Before ...

Colonel Damm’s letter ["Nukes Not for Everyone," June, p. 6] is another example of why I have the greatest respect for missiles. There are no truer patriots. For the record, I was never a member of that elite group.

However, I did spend 38 years acquiring and sustaining military systems, including eight years as the senior industry manager for the integrated sustainment of Minuteman. Thus I have some relevant but pessimistic experience regarding the prospects for a follow-on ICBM and what is likely to be happening to Minuteman today.

I’ve seen this acquisition scenario play out too many times. In this case, it is about the Minuteman system, an engineering marvel that can continue for decades to be a ready, reliable, and capable deterrent, with overwhelming destructive force. However, like all aging systems it needs

CHANGES:

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• Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.
• Support the Total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

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Changes:

Clearing Up Taranto

In the June issue a critical line was left out of my response to Ray Panko about the British attack on the Italian battleships at Taranto. After citing the numerous operational accounts that report the average depth of the harbor at 39 to 49 feet, I further said that “Mr. Panko’s data calls this into doubt, particularly in the area where the battleships were moored,” acknowledging the new information he had provided. Other factors—such as the two battleships left with their decks awash but not completely submerged after the attack—complicate the question, but Mr. Panko’s depth chart of the harbor has to be recognized and considered as well.

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Annandale, Va.

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