

FORTY YEARS IN MY BATH CHAIR BY PADDY WARING

A much curtailed account of how 79 year old Lieutenant Paddy Waring RN crash landed in Singapore in 1963 which led to the onset of paraplegia 12 years later and after a subsequent career as a commercial VC10 pilot. Quite a story....in Paddy's own unique style!



"Longevity" has a usage much used and abused these days. So here, as a near-80 year old with near-40 years in a wheelchair, is my 'take' on this subject. There is no un-pompous way of saying it. Paraplegia is 'no picnic'. My advice to all is that you are where you are, so get on with the future and stop dwelling wistfully in whatever past you had. Also, this will ease the burden of anyone who sticks by you if you show willing to share problems as well as pleasures. Good luck! Life goes on and this is no 'practice' session.

For the cognoscenti, I have a T4/T5 level lesion. I still use a manual wheelchair. I fend for myself but - and this 'but' is a big one - for the last 5 years Carers come in four times each day to operate a ceiling-hoist and help dress me during the first Call. These people then put me on my wheelchair, for two 3 hour periods with 2 hours off my bum in between. I de-manure myself (intermittent catheterisation every 4-6 hours, 24/7, and a colostomy, since 1995.) I feed myself, but have previously tried out - for several months - the home delivered goodies from a specialist provider. However, supermarket single meals and deliveries are entirely adequate. There you are; the grisly details of much of my existence.



On the day, I had four drop-tanks

Solely for your amusement, here is how my present wheelchair existence came about for me. Basically, I was flying a big and interesting Royal Naval fighter, on and off an aircraft carrier. The seas had sharks in them and the 'deck' was somewhat small. Much of the time one was cruising at double the speed of an F1 driver with 'welly to the metal'. At full chat a gallon of fuel could disappear in 7 seconds.

There were no verges or 'lay-bys' to pull in to. It was probably a good thing to be a bit bonkers. The aircraft was the size of a 40' petrol tanker - with wings. It could accelerate at over 100 mph every 10 seconds for well over a minute. We were a serious lot in Naval Aviation I'll have you know. However, the squadron's 'Armourers' - a wicked bunch of ne'er-do-wells - had seized my failure to launch as an opportunity for changing my ejector-seat and they whacked in a Mk5 in place of the Mk4. This throne-change was on the face of it a piece of hugely opportunistic brilliance, but, the old FOUR-pin 'holder' was left in situ when there were in fact FIVE pins for the explosive devices on the new seat. Oooooops! From then on, this was an accident looking for a place to happen. It did.

I was first off and the aircraft was configured 'clean' - no external accoutrements, like drop-tanks (200 gallons) or bomb racks. So, the machine made



like a 'homesick angel', reaching 40,000ft in under 4 minutes from launch. Wow, gee, golly, gosh! Then I got down to the serious test stuff. Engine acceleration parameters first. I started with the starboard engine (the RIGHT-hand one, you 'landlubbers'.) However, the port engine (t'other side) then failed to relight, so I dropped down 10,000 ft, but it still stayed dead.

As a single-engined arrival on board requires a higher speed than normal and is quite hairy in windless conditions, I was sent off to the nearest airfield, RAF Changi, a mere 50 miles away. Thinking cosy thoughts of an unexpected stop-over even the radar controller's request that a 'newbie' guide me down the GCA (Ground Controlled Approach) was fine by me. In his jittery state this poor unfortunate left me 'high' and to the right of the centreline of the long runway. Waring with aplomb, sangfroid, and the inbred skill of a carrier-jockey put the nose down, turning to port (the left, you landlubbers), to land. It was then that it all turned pear-shaped. The 'joystick' went solid. There was no manual reversion. I was at over 100 feet but with no control.

And so the fun began!