

## **Three Days to Remember**

by Lee Cargill  
USNA Class of 1963

It was during Spring Break, 1961 that Jim Patterson and I completed our project of building a glider. We both came to the academy with the specific goal of becoming Navy pilots after graduation.

Our glider had a wingspan of about 5 feet and was constructed using balsa wood, fabric and coated with something called dope. Jim was the project leader and took the initiative, obtaining a kit from a source I cannot recall; I was his helper/sidekick. It was pleasantly quiet in Bancroft Hall as we worked. Most of the Brigade had left Annapolis to be with family or friends. It took us the better part of two days to complete its fabrication, finishing late on Saturday afternoon. We gave it time for the glue and dope to dry & set for the remainder of the evening and the following Sunday morning. It looked great! We felt good and anticipated a long life with many successful flights.

Then came Sunday. Weather was perfect, what Naval Aviators would call CAVU – Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited – with calm wind and pleasant temperature. After some short flights a few feet above ground, making minor adjustments in the location of the center of gravity by the positioning weights, we felt confident she was ready to show her true colors and decided to launch from a terrace toward a grassy athletic field where she could come down softly, ready for a repeat. It was going to be a really fun afternoon. However – it was not to be. Shortly after launch, our bird had a problem and took a nose dive. In Navy terms the accident would have been categorized as having “Alpha” damage (aircraft not repairable/strike damage and/or loss of life).

As I recall, she displayed very poor lateral stability, rolling off to one side and impacting the ground with a wingtip hitting first, ripping the wing off, with damage to the fuselage and tail sections immediately following. Damage assessment led to the obvious conclusion that repair would be futile. There was no memorial service, having never given her a name, and we unceremoniously dumped her remains in a trash can.

I don't know if there were any “lessons learned” from this affair, except that maybe we had a lot to learn about aerodynamics, especially stability and control. We would learn about these things later when both of us became Naval Aviators – me a pilot and Jim an A-6 B/N. Jim never returned from his Vietnam deployment aboard USS Enterprise, having been shot down on 19

May 1967. He was a wonderful classmate and friend and Spring Break 1961 was always a pleasant memory for both of us.