

# REMEMBER BARRY GOLDWATER?

EXTREMISM IN THE LOVE OF AIRPLANES IS NO VICE



In addition to being an active pilot all his life, 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was garrulous, prolix and also very talkative.

"I went out in 1928 or '29 and I started taking flying lessons for \$10 an hour, and when I had 10 hours, I soloed, and so it cost me a hundred dollars. Had no ground school. About all I knew is one wing had a red light on it and the other one had a green light, and nothing at all about weather. They didn't tell us a thing about it. They never taught us spins, and the first goddamn time I went up with a passenger, I said, 'Well, I'll give her a tight circle over her house.' I did, it flipped over and started to spin, and I said, 'Jesus Christ!' So I let go of everything, and by God, it just came right out. I put both hands on that stick, shaking like a dog, flew it back to the airport, and went home and got drunk."

Too old for combat, he became a "service pilot" in World War II.

"I was in the ferrying command. That was heaven. I flew every goddamn thing we had then. We had the P-47; I learned to fly that. I was on the first flight that ever flew across the North Atlantic to England. I got current in the B-17, the B-24, the B-35 [sic], the B-26 that they called the widow-maker. That was the Martin. And the wings were about that long. The average person that got hurt in it took off without enough airspeed. It just flipped in. But once you got used to it, it was a hell of an airplane.

"Of course, I don't think I've ever flown an airplane I really didn't like. As I look back on my flying, I'm just goddamn lucky. I was talking to Jimmy Doolittle, who's an old friend of mine. I said, 'Jimmy, you gave up flying! You're only 90!' 'Well,' he said, 'there's an old saying about old pilots and bold pilots. But there are no old bold pilots. So,' he said, 'I quit.' And now I fly — oh, I maybe get at the controls two or three times a month, and I fly helicopters as much as I can."

Many of Goldwater's flying yarns included a female pas-

In 1989 I interviewed Barry Goldwater, the former Arizona senator famously trounced by Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential election. Goldwater held many opinions that would scandalize Republicans today: He supported gays in the military, socialized medicine, reduced military spending and a guaranteed minimum income for all Americans.

Goldwater was a lifelong pilot and a lover of aviation. He also liked to talk. He was the man for whom they coined the expression "Ready, fire, aim!"

PHOTO BY ALAMY



By Peter Garrison

senger, always shadowy and often reluctant. Irrespective of age, they were all "girls." Once he and author William F. Buckley were flying together in Goldwater's Excalibur, a Swearingen-modified Twin Bonanza.

"We took off from here and we were flying up to the Grand Canyon. And I had this little girl, she's dead now, she was five years older than I am, and my insurance company told me when I passed 50, if I didn't fly with a copilot, they'd triple my insurance. So I got old Ruth. We were about, oh, I don't know, 12 miles out of Grand Canyon Airport, and Bill said, 'When are we gonna get there?' I said, 'In seven minutes,' just guessing. And I'll be goddamned if we touched down in seven minutes. He's never gotten over that. Just dumb luck."

The Excalibur reminded him of a favorite vexation.

"The cost of flying in this country! Now, I'm not a poor man, but I didn't have a job other than the Senate, and

"Old [General] Ira Eaker was head of the program. And I used to go over and sit and talk to him and beg him for a ride, but he'd say, 'Hell no.' But then they all disappeared. [Secretary of Defense Stuart] Symington was working for the Navy. And the Navy didn't want any part of that flying wing. They wanted the B-36, a great big bastard, and so did the Air Force. I have no idea why. All his life, and I knew Ira very well, I could never get him to tell me. And I remember night after night, Jimmy Doolittle and I would sit there and say, 'Ira, goddamn it, what happened to that airplane? We're not gonna tell anybody.' He says, 'I can't remember.'"

Despite campaign propaganda, Goldwater's enthusiasm for expensive military hardware was tempered by his aversion to government spending. Although he was hostile to communism, he waxed sentimental about Russia.

"I've been trying to get to Russia ever since World War II. I taught a lot of Russian pilots how to fly in Abadan,

### Despite campaign propaganda, Goldwater's enthusiasm for expensive military hardware was tempered by his aversion to government spending.

when I was asked \$1,900 for one brake, I just figured what the hell." He sold the airplane but got a smaller one.

Goldwater was a well-known tinkerer. I wondered if he'd ever thought about building a homebuilt. Turned out he had; he'd ordered a BD-5J. "I sent [Jim Bede] some money, but I never heard from him," he chuckled. Then he added, perhaps thinking about his flag-raising experiments, "I don't think I'd ever have the guts to build an airplane and then me fly it. I'd get somebody else to test it."

We talked about the government's conduct in the Patco strike and the levels of spending on things like the hypersonic National Aero-Space Plane and the B-2 bomber. Goldwater thought the B-2's flying wing configuration was a great idea, but that \$500 million apiece was a bit steep. (The program cost would eventually swell to over \$1 billion per plane.) He recalled that an earlier Northrop flying wing, the B-49, was canceled and scrapped in what has become a controversial episode in procurement history and a hobbyhorse of conspiracy theorists.

Iran. But because I was so vehement against communism, their newspapers and cartoonists did me more dirt than anything in the United States. Consequently, I've never been able to get a visa. Now I'm using private approaches to Gorbachev to see if I can't. ... I just want to fly over there, walk up, shake his hand, look him in the eye, talk a few minutes, and I'll get the hell out of the country. I have a really strong feeling that this Russian means business. Now, Gorbachev has one big problem, naturally. You have an old, old bunch of people, in their 80s, who are the heads of government. And if he can overcome their disquiet, I think he's going to get away with having a new government. And when that happens, the United States and Russia will be just flying wing to wing. There's no reason for them not to. I look at television. I look at the Russians. They don't look any different than we do. I think we'll see. ... I hope I'm alive, and I think I will be, when the Soviet Union and the United States go down the road together." ●