

AIRSHOW ATTACK

August 2001

by LtCol. Peyton DeHart, USMCR



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Airshow season is our chance to show the American public the great machines they have bought for us. It is an even better opportunity to show them what great people we, who fly those machines, are. Though the Cobra usually doesn't perform flying demonstrations, I remember one particular airshow when the reins had been loosened, allowing a simulated assault to take place.

Imagine my giddy response when it became known there would be pyrotechnics on the ground to simulate the awesome destruction the Snake can inflict! A hundred yards of blasting caps, strung together with det cord, approximating the cyclic rate of fire of the 20mm gun mounted on our nose. Oh joy! Oh noise!

The Cobra chosen to fly to the show was pristine, with a new paint job and a recently changed engine. Since rework, it had flown only a test hop and the hour-long ferry flight to the show.

It was a balmy Spring day. Nice older ladies working the concession stands wore T-shirts that read "GRITS" on the front (the explanation "Girls Raised In The South" was printed on the back). I was sure they would be impressed by my performance.

Flight brief, pyro brief, safety brief, wing walkers, biplane acts... we endured all sorts of waiting until the appointed hour when we could spin up and rule the skies in front of the awestruck crowd. At last, it was show time. A Huey carrying troops cranked and launched, we cranked and launched. They flew to their holding spot, we flew to ours. The narrator explained the scenario to the crowd before getting on the radio to say, "You're on!"

Our script had the Cobra lead the way by swooping from a lofty perch, in a high-angle dive, down to

a spot off to the side of the demolition pit. When the helo roared past, the det cord would light off the string of explosions. It was the only pyro at the show, and I would get it all! I rolled the Cobra on its side and then let the nose fall through the horizon until we were diving at 30 degrees nose down. The Cobra built up speed and started to rattle and shake. More speed, the ground rushing upwards, tracking, tracking...

You remember we had a new engine? Halfway down the chute, mere seconds before blasting the target to smithereens, the engine chip light lit up. Son of a... well, getting a chip light was not altogether unexpected. We all know that chip lights are common to new engines, just the bearings wearing in. It would just be some fuzz on the chip detector that could be wiped off. Glory or chip detector? Glory or chip detector?

They always say, "The show must go on!"

Wait... air *show*. This wasn't real. I raised the nose slightly to break the rate of descent and turned away from the crowd, flaring to land on a taxiway outside of eyesight and earshot. The swift-thinking narrator ad libbed that "stiff resistance on the ground" had shot down the Cobra, and the Huey was inbound to save the day. The Huey dove into view and flared to land in order to disgorge the ground guys. The door gunner "fired" his M-60, and the string of blasting caps erupted in front of the gasping crowd. Much applause, much adulation. Oh, the shame, the inhumanity!

After shutdown, the chip detector was pulled, cleaned (it had some metal fuzz from new bearings getting worn in), and reinstalled. The engine was good to go and has run fine since then.

Hey, it was only a show.

LtCol. DeHart is with the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, FMF.