



(Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)

HON. A. JAY CRISTOL

AT HOME ON THE BENCH AND IN THE SKIES

by Rich Babl

A federal judge in Miami has navigated two careers well. He has a distinguished record on the bench and his logbooks lend evidence to a passion for flying. He has a firm rule—“I never get into a cockpit with anyone more brave than I am.” That still leaves room for a lot of pilots.

One doesn't enter the offices of A. Jay Cristol, Chief Judge Emeritus of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Miami, without pausing to scan walls full of mementoes from service to the U.S. Navy, the Naval Reserve, Eastern Air Lines, Angel Flight, the University of Miami School of Law and several bankrupt airlines. Many other organizations likely have seen the spirit, fairness and generosity of this man.

Cristol was an early multi-tasker. He chose a legal career and methodically established a record of distinction in the justice system, but he also was lured by aviation into a pursuit of adventure and skills he could not deny. There are Kodak moments galore in the nerve center of this busy man, with museum-quality evidence of aviation memories proudly propped on tables and lovingly hung on walls. Few judges have been framed as often, or as carefully. There is order in this court.

A. Jay Cristol has flown left seat in nearly two dozen aircraft types and has operated just slightly fewer in simulators. He has grabbed yokes and sticks of fixed wing, rotor and lighter-than-air machines used in recreational, military,

commercial and aerobatic flight. Over all his years in the sky he has experienced two engine failures, and he once even shot his own aircraft over Arizona!

When getting seated near the judge's desk, one chooses between two chairs bisected by a shiny, chromed tail hook. The stout device leans against his busy desk and reminds one of Cristol's service to the U.S. Navy. He earned his wings in 1953 and deployed with an anti-sub squadron to the western Pacific where he flew Grumman AFs from the U.S.S. Princeton near Korea in the South China Sea, both as a hunter and a killer. He later was a flight instructor at San Diego and, as a civilian, qualified as commander on four-engine Naval Reserve aircraft.

Reaching for the Skies...

Cristol's urge to fly began at age 15 when the Eagle Scout was camping with buddies on Watson Island, between Miami and Miami Beach. It was a stone's throw from where the amphibians of Pappy Chalk's airline lifted off the tropical waters of Biscayne Bay to fly people between Miami and The Bahamas. For years, the venerable airline operated round-engine Grummans—

later converted to turboprops—from the channel between the Port of Miami and MacArthur Causeway.

One of Cristol's pals bought a ride on a Luscombe floatplane operated by the flying school Chalks also ran. The judge doesn't say whether he saw that as a teenage challenge or dare, but the adventure certainly had merit. So Cristol walked over to the opposite shore of the island, fished \$2.50 from his pocket and bought a 15-minute ride in a Piper J-3 Cub with floats. The high Gee! forces sealed his resolve. Whenever he could scrape together ten dollars, he would sneak down to the island and buy an hour of instruction in that yellow dream machine.

“The owner got eight bucks and the instructor pilot got two,” said Cristol. His mother applied slaps on the wrist to delay further instruction, but years later one of his sons and he went to Bunnell, Florida and both got ratings in a Super Cub float plane. His other amphibious adventures include piloting a Grumman Goose and a Consolidated PBY Catalina.

That first thrill of flying floats over Biscayne Bay as a kid compelled many decisions as an adult; for example, the

Following a re-organized Pan American Airways in July of 1998, the airline named its first newly-painted B-727-200 after Judge Cristol. (Joshua Prezant/Miami Herald)



Judge Cristol flew Ford Tri Motor N7584 from the co-pilot's seat during a visit to Kendall Tamiami Airport (Miami) by its Ohio owner. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)

urge to develop a career in law but pursue the indelible and enduring lure of flight. They went together. Cristol's service in the halls of justice included special duty for the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations, and lecturer on law in naval warfare for senior foreign officers in Italy. The judge also would achieve a special reputation for fairness and resolve in aviation-related legal proceedings.

In the days when Eddie Rickenbacker was running Eastern Air Lines, the young Cristol flew Martin 404s out of New York-LaGuardia airport. He had a bachelor apartment across the expressway from the field. "I would fly runs to Rutland, Vermont," he relates. "Then to Boston, back to New York, then I'd catch a Carey Coach to Newark for \$1.75 and fly other legs to finish off the day."

...While Seated on the Bench

An early law partner in his 25-year civilian practice was Phil Smith. They met at law school at the University of Miami and discovered each had the urge to fly. Smith flew for Delta and became one of few pilots to accumulate 36,000 hours. Cristol's civil law practice included service as Special Assistant Attorney General of Florida throughout the 1960s. When appointed to the federal bench in 1985, he left the firm he had founded.

"I wanted to practice law on week-

days but fly on weekends," added Cristol. Throughout his early life, he found ways to do that, in Florida with the Naval Reserve and later when he flew volunteer airlifts to Vietnam for the Navy. In his spare time he lectured at the Naval War College and served the JAG corps in Newport, Rhode Island. Those ties with naval aviation got deeper over the years and now are a legacy of Judge Cristol because of his support of the huge, popular and famous Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola, Fla., where he is a founding member. He also is a founding member of the Wings Over Miami museum at the Kendall-Tamiami airport near Miami, where the last F-14D Tomcat recently settled in for retirement.

His Honor's Legacies

When Guilford Transportation Industries acquired Pan Am after its bankruptcy reorganization in 1998, the new owners showed their appreciation for the judge's skills by making sure Cristol's name would fly high. They named a Pan Am Boeing 727-200 after him, in the tradition of Clippers reaching back to 1927. With the new owners and some VIPs on board, Cristol took the left seat of that 727 on a flight over South Florida, including touch-and-goes at Miami-Dade County's Training & Transition airport (TNT) in the Everglades. A few years later, Arrow Air also named an airplane after his honor,

painting *Judge A-Jay-Cristol* on the side of a Douglas DC-8-62 (N8968U) in appreciation for one of two reorganizations he adjudicated for that airline.

Cristol is proud of the respect he gave airline litigation over which he presided. Whenever possible and appropriate, he urged respect from the parties before him. He would use memorabilia of the carriers, or share anecdotes and hangar talk, to remind both sides in conflict that fairness was paramount and expedience would benefit all concerned. In addition to the Pan Am and two Arrow Air proceedings, he handled issues involving Fine Air, Carnival Airlines, Gemini, Falcon and Amerijet.

"I believe Amerijet holds the record for being resolved the fastest," claims Cristol. "We wrapped it up in 88 days in the fall of 2001. Some go on for a long time. Look at the calendars for similar issues at United and Delta." Having once flown for Eastern, the judge had geared up for its dissolution. But the case was moved to New York. "I always consider the failure of that airline a genuine tragedy," said Cristol.

Interest In Law Included Newton's Third On Motion

The judge's logs read like a museum brochure. In addition to the military fighters and transports, he has piloted the Goodyear Blimp, a Ford Tri-Motor, the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star, a MiG-15,



The Goodyear blimp is a familiar sight in South Florida skies. Judge Cristol took the controls of airship *Enterprise* for a short flight in January of 1980. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)



On a visit to Israel, A. Jay Cristol flew a New Zealand Airtrainer, a design being considered by the Israeli Air Force as a primary trainer. It lost the bidding to the German GROB. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)

a Czech L-39 Delphin, a Chinese CJ-6, a French Fouga Magister, the more recreational Aero Commander and Beech Baron, and essentially all the Piper and Cessna singles. He has simulator time on the Blackhawk helicopter and such jet transports as Boeing's 727, 737 and 747, the Douglas MD-80 (now Boeing's 717), Lockheed's L-1011 and the Orion P-3 derivative of its Electra. Ultralights? Sure: the Buckeye and the Italian P-92. He also has parachuted over California and parasailed over the Red Sea.

A few years ago, his two sons figured in another aviation event. Their birthday present to Cristol was getting checked out in the Martin 404 at the popular general aviation airport in Camarillo, California, west of Los Angeles.

What does he think of the new Very Light Jets? "It's important that pilots are properly trained for the VLJs. There needs to be an intense focus on training."

Memorable Experiences

One cannot log the hours Cristol has logged without tempting gremlins. That shiny tail hook suggests at least one source of risky business. While on duty during the Korean conflict he made 86 carrier landings, 26 of which were at night. And that was back when approaches in combat conditions at night required spotting one red light each on a destroyer and the aircraft carrier to safely find the deck and catch a wire. Does he regret not

having the GPS precision that's available today? "I'm not sure I could turn over those critical details to that system. I liked flying it right down to the wire." But he agrees that GPS offers terrific navigation capabilities and options for today's pilot, no matter the equipment.

The judge isn't too proud to suggest that one of his most memorable aviation experiences was shooting himself. How's that again? In practice runs near Yuma one day, he fired a 3.75-inch rocket at a row of old school buses lined up as targets in the western Arizona desert. "One must have hit something pretty solid, like a diesel engine," remembers Cristol. "As I passed over the target, the rocket ricocheted, found the wing on my AF and went right through it."

In 62 years of flying, he has had only two engine failures. Because of his life-long service to country and neighbor, one might have guessed—both events involved volunteer efforts. As pilot in command on a Naval Reserve flight to Jacksonville from Miami, systems reported a fire in the #3 engine on a DC-4 shortly after takeoff. He pulled the fire bottle, contacted Miami Tower and returned safely. More recently, Judge Cristol and fellow pilot Carlos Marco were donating time for Angel Flight America to return a mother and two children to Fort Myers, Fla., following eye cancer treatment on both youngsters in Miami. The engine died and the Piper

Saratoga landed safely on U.S. 27 northwest of Miami. The judge was quoted as saying, "We made sure we were at the speed limit before touch down to avoid getting a ticket."

A Full Schedule

Cristol's active mind and restless spirit encouraged him to audit night courses at the University of Miami. At the urging of a professor, he began a master's program with a review of the Liberty incident of the Six Day War in 1967. Israeli forces had accidentally fired on the neutral United States ship in international waters. Several Americans were killed. Numerous official investigations concluded that it was accidental, but conspiracy theories surfaced. Cristol's independent research—which ultimately earned him a Ph.D—also concluded it was accidental. In 2002 his work became a book, *The Liberty Incident*, which was published by Brassey's Inc.

His Honor is 77 now, but he keeps a full calendar as a bankruptcy judge and he still flies. He still volunteers whenever he can, wherever he can. He and his wife, Elly, help out at the Miami Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged. Then there are those aviation museums, Naval get-togethers, Greater Miami Aviation Association activities; Angel Flight America ... the list goes on. His airframe just never gets old. He never seems to run out of fuel. ✈️



The judge flew the French Fouga Magister twin-engine jet at an air show at Kendall-Tamiami Airport. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)



Judge Cristol mid-flight in a parasail over the Red Sea while visiting Elat, Israel. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)



In Arrow Air's Miami hangar, Judge A. Jay Cristol checks out the "front office" of a DC-8 named for him by the airline. (Judge A. Jay Cristol collection)