



Ronald E. McKeown, Captain USN (Ret.)
“Mugs”

Captain McKeown is a Native of Ysleta, Texas where he was an outstanding student and athlete. Upon graduation, he was selected as an undergraduate at Harvard, Princeton, and Dartmouth. He opted, instead, to attend the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. While at the Academy, he excelled in football and boxing. Playing alongside Heisman Trophy winner, Joe Bellino, he was “The other running back,” on the 1960 Navy team that played in the Orange Bowl, beat Army, Air Force, Notre Dame, and the then number one ranked team in the country, the University of Washington. The 1960 Midshipmen were ranked #3 in the nation. McKeown also was the recipient the “Spike Webb Award,” emblematic of the outstanding boxer in the Naval Academy; where he was the undefeated light-heavyweight Champion of the Brigade of Midshipmen for three consecutive years.

Following graduation from the Academy, Ensign McKeown attended Navy Flight Training and received his wings as a Naval Aviator in November of 1962. He was then assigned to Fighter Squadron 154 flying F8U Crusaders. He participated in the first raids against North Vietnam in 1964. Prior to his second cruise to Southeast Asia, the squadron transitioned to the F4B Phantom. During that cruise McKeown was selected to attend the U.S. Air Force Aerospace Research Pilot School for test pilot and astronaut training. While there, he flew a specially modified F104 to an altitude of 127,000 feet. He then reported to Air Test and Evaluation Squadron FOUR. In his role as Chief Test Pilot, he was in charge of all engineering changes to the SPARROW air-to-air missile. As the F4

Tactics Manager he was charged with developing Navy tactical doctrine for the F4 Phantom and had the opportunity to fly the Soviet built MIG-17 and MIG 21 aircraft.

In 1969, he was assigned to Fighter Squadron 161 as Operations Officer. In early 1972, with only 48 hours notice he embarked aboard USS Midway for his fourth combat deployment to Southeast Asia. On May 23rd, while leading a section of F4s on a Combat Air Patrol North of Hanoi near the enemy airbase at Kep, McKeown and his RIO, LT Jack Ensich, along with their wingmen were attacked by six North Vietnamese MIG aircraft. In what has been described as one of the longest and most exciting dogfights of the war, fighting often at tree-level height, McKeown and Ensich actually tumbled their F4 end-over-end during the engagement. When it was over McKeown had shot down two MIG-17s, including one off his wingmen’s tail and then chasing the remaining enemy aircraft into China. For this action, McKeown and Ensich were awarded the Navy Cross.

Following this action. Lieutenant Commander McKeown received orders to become the first Commanding Officer of TOPGUN, the Navy Fighter Weapons School. Thirteen days after McKeown departed Midway, his friend and companion was shot down and taken prisoner. During Jack’s incarceration McKeown steadfastly refused to accept the Navy Cross, stating that he and Jack had won them together and would wear them the first time together. After his repatriation, McKeown was also able to work the Navy personnel system and have Jack assigned to TOPGUN as an instructor where they would, once again, fly together. McKeown would serve as TOPGUN Commanding Officer for three years. During that period he set the foundation to make TOPGUN the premiere Air-to-Air tactics training school in the world. The squadron lost all of its aircraft to the Israelis in 1973 during the Yom Kippur war. In spite of post Vietnam budgetary constraints, McKeown was able to replace the original 8 A4Ms with 10 new A4Ms. as well as 10 T38s and then procure 12 brand new F5Es.

After a brief tour in the Pentagon, McKeown assumed command of Fighter Squadron ONE and as fate would have it, Lieutenant Commander Ensich reported aboard as the Maintenance Officer. The “Dynamic Duo” was back and ready for Prime Time! From Fighter Squadron ONE, McKeown went on to become the F14 Tomcat Project Officer. He then went on to be Chief of Staff for Operations, Commander Carrier Group Eight. During his tenure in COMCARGRU staff working for RADM Jim Service and RADM Jerry Tuttle, the battlegroup developed electronic warfare tactics and procedures that bore fruit in the Gulf of Sidra, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom. His final tour was as Chief of Staff and Executive Assistant to the Chief of Naval Material.

Captain McKeown’s personal awards include the Navy Cross, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross (5), Air Medal (27), Navy Achievement Medal (14). He flew 440 combat missions in Southeast Asia and amassed 997 carrier landings.