

Miss America

It was Germany in the late 70's during one of our unit's annual aerial gunnery training exercises when the Division Commanding General shows up in his aircraft with the current Miss. America and her entourage. Our Combat Aviation Battalion was part of the 3rd Infantry Division (ID) that once heralded Audie Murphy, war hero, and Hollywood actor, on their roles during WW-II. During these training deployments, it was not unusual for us to have various entertainment programs visit us, but Miss. America was a first for me!

At the time of my assignment to this unit, we were flying AH-1S Cobra Helicopter Gunships along with the venerable UH-1 Huey's and OH-58 Kiowas. On the day that the CG showed up with his traveling road show, I had been flying front seat of a Cobra that was now parked not far from where the general had landed. As several of the beauties began climbing out of the CG's aircraft, they attracted much attention with their mid-thigh mini-skirts (remember, it's the 70's!) so pilots and crewmembers began gravitating their way to see what was going on. Just then another Huey lands with 6 more mini-skirted beauties hopping out and headed our way! In the next few minutes, we were introduced to Miss. America, Miss. Ohio, Miss. Wisconsin, etc., etc.- 12 in all.

Well, the CG walks over to my aircraft with Miss. America and says that he is authorizing a Cobra ride for her right now. I knew that approval for a civilian to fly aboard our aircraft required someone at the 2-star level and since the CG was a 2-star, I sharply saluted and said, "YES SIR"!

For those of you not familiar with the Cobra helicopter, it is a two-place, 10,000 lb. armed helicopter with a pilot and copilot/gunner sitting in tandem (one behind the other) with the pilot in the back seat and copilot/gunner in the front. Since I was flying in the front seat that day, it fell on me to get Miss. America boarded, strapped in, and helmeted in my seat (poor me...). Because of the large sighting system occupying much of the front seat, you must be somewhat of a contortionist to get into the seat and buckled up. Well, despite this and wearing her mini-skirt, Miss. America did a great job of crawling up into the cockpit without so much as a flash of her unmentionables showing (dang it – that could have been another story!).

I then began the enviable task of reaching around and under her to free up all the seat belts and shoulder harnesses and get her securely buckled up. Since my head was not as large back then as it is now, my flight helmet fit her just fine and I proceeded to show her how to work the floor button to talk on the intercom. Because the intercom control box was mounted on the front of her seat between her legs, I had already set the control box to the "Intercom" position before she boarded so that she just had to step on the floor button to talk to my good friend Eric who was the pilot in the back seat preparing the aircraft for flight. She and Eric did a good commo check and Eric gave me a

thumbs-up that they were ready to go. So, I closed and locked her canopy, climbed down, and backed away from the aircraft.

Just before Eric started the engine, our Unit Commander ran over to ensure everything was good to go. He asked if I put her intercom control on the “Private” position so that she could talk freely without having to press the floor button. I explained to him that she was on intercom and had been talking to Eric just fine using the floor button. The commander explained that he was concerned that after takeoff she would not be able to find the floor button as the aircraft maneuvered through the air and she was jostled around in the cockpit becoming disoriented. Since it was obvious that I could not change his mind, I gave Eric a signal to hold while I walked back toward the aircraft. Lifting the canopy with my right arm and reaching down between her legs with my left while saying that I needed to “flip her Private switch”! The next thing I recall was laying on the ground and slightly dazed from Miss. America’s left elbow having just smashed into my face! Her scowling expression made me realize that I should have thought this through a little better...

Picking myself up off the ground, I sheepishly approached her again and pointed to the intercom control box between her knees and motioned for her to turn on the Private switch. After changing the switch, and while being somewhat relieved and maybe a little embarrassed, she gave me a weak smile and nodded her head. Once again, I closed the canopy and backed away from the aircraft while giving Eric the thumbs-up that she was ready – again. Unfortunately, Eric was still laughing hysterically from the entire event. He would later share with me about how cool it would be to have my resumé include being punched out by Miss. America...