

The night-fighter pilots were a proud group of warriors. Their squadron, CVL(N)-22, was known as the “Shademaids.” Their squadron patch had been designed by Milton Caniff, the popular cartoonist—originator of “Terry and the Pirates,” a favorite comic strip of that time. The patch featured a scantily-clad, long-legged maiden in black mask and black cape, astride a charging black stallion. Pilots and aircrewmembers displayed their insignia proudly on flight jackets and fighter aircraft. I roomed with one of the fighter pilots who—one dark night—made a zero-fuel “wet landing” astern of the *Indy* and was quickly picked up and returned to *Indy* by a plane-guard destroyer. He “surveyed” his wet flight jacket and his always carried 38-caliber revolver and gave them both to me before drawing new ones. Sadly, in my later return to Uncle Sugar, they (in my baggage) were lost, strayed, or stolen, and I returned home with no souvenirs.

Shademaids pilots were immensely proud of their ability to take off from, and land safely aboard, a small, pitching, rolling axial carrier deck that was faintly outlined by hooded lights visible only from the landing-approach path directly astern. Their LSO, (Landing Signals Officer), a performing artist in his own right, would stand on the LSO platform during night landings, fitted out in a special ultra-violet-light (UV)-reflective suit and holding in each hand a UV-reflective “paddle” to signal to the landing aircraft. When an approaching fighter was vectored by the Fighter Director in CIC, to take its position “in the groove” for a landing, the “black lights” were switched on and there stood the LSO in all of his florescent glory imperiously waving his paddles, and with his paddle signals demanding a safe and sane approach, no matter the weather or the blackness of the night. When each black F6F in turn caught a wire with its tailhook, the UV-lights and the hooded deck-edge lights were switched off, and the LSO and the entire ship then retreated into the safety of their cloak of darkness.

The pilots were justifiably proud of their night-time flying abilities and their proficient operations from the narrow decks of a CVL. Those small, fast carriers were hurriedly built in the early days of the war by constructing flight decks atop the hulls of already designed and partially built *Cleveland*-class cruisers. Thus, the resulting carriers were war-ready in a minimum amount of time, when carriers were badly needed to stem the Japanese advance in the Pacific. With their narrow flight decks atop long, narrow hulls, the CVLs were very fast but had a tendency to roll severely, and demanded extra skills from the pilots who operated from their “axial” decks. (The “angle” decks of modern carriers were to come many years later.) In the early days of the Shademaids’ deployment there were operational casualties, both from enemy action and from shipboard accidents. As a result, the squadron suffered the loss of some of its pilots. Rear Admiral Gerald Bogan, Commander of Task Group 38.2, was quick to recognize the growing pains of a new squadron with new operating techniques at night, and sent the following message on October 13, 1944: