

From Fighter Pilot to Quill Driver

By Dale Kuska

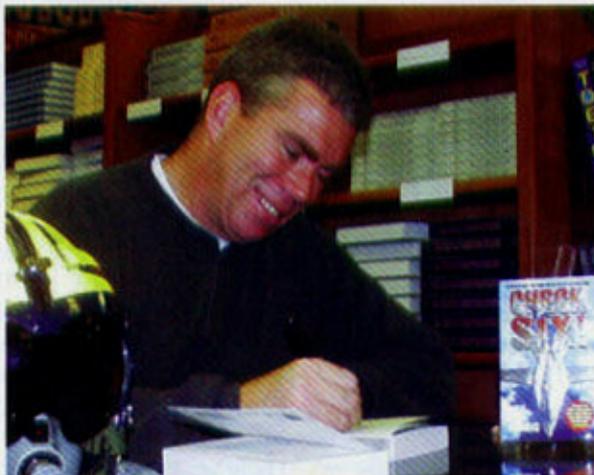
When a female fighter pilot is killed in a flight deck launch, a veteran newspaper reporter smells a rat: a commander whose avowed mission is to keep women from flying the Navy's front-line aircraft. There's a conspiracy for sure, but can the culprit be nailed to the wall in time to save a woman pilot who has just been ordered into combat?

Sound like the plot of a provocative novel? Well, it is.

A new paperback, *CHECK SIX!*, recently hit the shelves. The author, Bob Norris, is a former Navy fighter pilot with 20 years of experience in the cockpits of the military's most advanced tactical aircraft: the F/A-18 *Hornet*, F-14D *Tomcat* and F-15 *Eagle*. Norris didn't plan on becoming a writer. He was set to command his own *Hornet* squadron when a twist of fate changed his course forever.

"A couple of years ago I was diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder that required a craniotomy," he explained. "There were some post-op complications which for several days kept me constantly awake. Falling back on the prisoner-of-war training we receive as combat pilots, I undertook an 'impossible' task to keep my mind occupied: I composed a book in my head, sentence by sentence. A few months later, when I could use a keyboard again, I was surprised at how much of the story I retained. It was as vivid as a real memory."

Norris says there is no need for pity in the world of Naval Aviation. He admits that he does miss flying,



Bob Norris applied the skills he learned as a Naval Aviator to his new vocation as an author.

but a pilot needs to be prepared for all possibilities, and he's found satisfaction in his new career.

"Writing is my new passion. When I flew in air shows, I was amazed by how many people sincerely wanted to capture the essence of what it feels like to fly high-performance fighters," Norris said. "Writing gives me the chance to re-experience some of the thousands of hours I spent in cockpits, and share those feelings with others. Please don't get me wrong; I knew when I started in [Naval Aviation] that it could end in a flash. The bottom line is that after all those years, any aviator will tell you that to walk away with the same number of landings as takeoffs is as good as it gets."

CHECK SIX! covers a controversial topic which has earned headlines in the news: women in the military. But can this novel be considered a realistic portrayal of today's Navy?

"Make no mistake, the story is

pure fiction," Norris emphasized. "However, I think it's important to understand that there's a small group that passionately believes warfighting must be kept purely male. These aren't two-dimensional bad guys. But in the book, just like in the real Navy, the service is made up of good-hearted people who faithfully obey orders and do their best to carry them out."

Norris wanted to keep his heroine equally as real. "Lieutenant Randi Cole is simply a fighter pilot who happens to be a woman. She is willing to play by the same rules as

her peers and doesn't want or expect special treatment, just a fair shot. When these two forces interact, things get interesting," he said.

"I take the reader through the process that gives the lead character a firm grasp of the fundamentals of air combat. It was extremely important to me to make Cole's performance believable. She's not a prodigy or a superwoman; her skills are the product of experience and hard work. As she matures as a fighter pilot, she adds her own innovations," Norris explained.

As this aviator-turned-author proved, the skills acquired as a Navy pilot have applications beyond the cockpit. When a personal crisis tested his mettle, Bob Norris used his training to overcome the odds. ✈

Mr. Kuska works in the Alumni Relations Office of the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif.

For more information about *CHECK SIX!* or Bob Norris, visit the author's web site: www.bobnorris.com.