

Guide to the
Gordon Charles Cornell Papers
1934-1996

Inclusive Dates: 1934-1989
Bulk Dates: 1970-1975

7.75 Linear Feet

Accession Number: 17-04
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Biographical Sketch

Gordon Charles Cornell was born 30 March 1934 in Penn Yan, New York. Located at the northern tip of the east fork of Lake Keuka in the Finger Lakes region of New York State, this area was a major influence in Cornell's decision to become a naval aviator. Lake Keuka played a major role in early aviation development. It was at Hammondsport, located on the southern tip of the lake, where Glenn Curtis built and flew his famous flying boats. In fact, on one of his military records, Cornell states that spending his boyhood on the lake played a major influence in his decision to become a naval aviator; wanting to become a pilot since World War II.

Cornell enrolled in the New York State Institution of Applied Arts and Science in Binghamton, New York where he took courses in Mechanical Physics, Mathematics, Geometry, Trigonometry, Analytical Geometry, and Calculus. He also participated in sports such as volley ball, basketball, and varsity baseball.

In his senior year he enlisted in the U.S. Navy Reserve on 9 May 1953 as an aviation cadet, requesting that he not be ordered to active duty until after graduation. After graduation he reported for duty; completing basic training 9 September 1954, then was sent to Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas for advanced training. By March 1955 Cornell was appointed to the rank of Ensign, and in April 1957 he applied for transfer into the regular Navy.

Cornell's naval career was exemplary. According the latest awards documents dated 13 April 1973, he received the following medals and commendations: Distinguished Flying Cross, 17 Air Medals (S/F), 2 Navy Commendation Medals, Purple Heart, and 8 Air Medals (S/M). It further shows he earned the following but was not yet approved as of the date of this document: Bronze Star, 2 Navy Commendation Medals, 2 Air Medals, and a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Lt. Commander Cornell earned his Purple Heart while flying a mission over North Vietnam on 28 September 1966. Assigned to Fighter Squadron 161 (VF-161) operating from the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Constellation (CVA-64)*, LCDR Cornell's F-4 Phantom II was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire while attacking the Yen Xa railroad bridge in North Vietnam. The damage to the aircraft and the wound suffered by Cornell were not serious enough to prevent him from returning to his ship.

Cornell's citations testify to his dedication and bravery. He continually went in low to take out designated targets or, when flying flak suppression for the strike package, many times rendered the enemy's anti aircraft batteries around the target ineffective.

As a naval aviator, Cornell flew a variety of aircraft starting with the Grumman F-9F Cougar, F-3H Demon, A-4E Skyhawk, F-8B Crusader, and finally, the McDonald-Douglas F-4 Phantom II.

Cornell attained the rank of Executive Officer and then Commanding Officer of VF-143 and also served as the Executive Officer of the *U.S.S. Coral Sea (CVA-43)*.

Perhaps one of the saddest moments in his career was as Commanding Officer of VF-143 based on the *U.S.S. Enterprise (CVAN-65)*. On 27 January 1973, the last day of the United States' military involvement in the Vietnam War, Commander Harley Hall took off from the *Enterprise* on a late afternoon mission to bomb targets in South Vietnam about 15 miles northwest of Quang Tri. On Hall's third bombing run on an enemy supply convoy, Hall's F-4 was hit by anti aircraft fire. He and his RIO ejected

from their damaged aircraft safely over water, but the wind blew them back over land. The RIO, Al Kientzler, was captured and eventually released after hostilities ceased. Hall was never seen again making him the last Navy pilot, and possibly the last American, lost in the Vietnam War.

Gordon Charles Cornell passed away 6 February 1996 and is buried in Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, California.

Sources

Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. *Surnames*. San Diego County, California.
<http://www.internet.net/data/us/ca/sandiego/rosocrans/c/rosecrans_c10.htm>
(21 June 2005).

Gordon Charles Cornell Papers, The History of Aviation Collection, Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

National Museum of Naval Aviation. *National Flight Log*.
<<https://naval-air.org/flightlog/moreinfo.asp?UID=2613>> (21 June 2005).

Scope and Content Note

The Gordon Charles Cornell Papers are composed of naval documents relating to training, fitness reports, change of command, promotions, awards, citations, and accident reports. Also included are pilot log books, photographs, memorabilia, cold weather jacket, and leather jacket. Of special note are two audio cassettes containing the pilot debriefing of the shooting down and attempted rescue of Harley Hall and the radio transmissions of the mission on which Hall was shot down.

Series Description

Series I. Documents, 1934-1989. 1.25 linear feet (3 legal size manuscript boxes).

Arranged by document type and chronological order within each type. Documents include orders, medals, citations, enlistment papers, fitness reports, and an accident report. Also included are newspaper clippings about the loss of Harley Hall.

Series II. Photographs and Negatives. 1.8 Linear feet (2 flat boxes)

Photographs and negatives are arranged by subject. Box 1 contains one rolled certificate.

Series III. Memorabilia. 4.7 linear feet (2 flat boxes and 1 over-sized box).

Contains a leather flyer's jacket, a flyer's cold weather jacket, uniform pins, name plates, lighters, playing cards, and patches.

Provenance Statement

This manuscript collection was donated by Gordon C. Cornell's wife, Shirley Cornell on 13 February 2004.

Literary Rights Statement

Permission to publish material from this collection in any form, current or future, must be obtained from the Special Collections Department, McDermott Library, The University of Texas at Dallas.

H17-04 Gordon Charles Cornell Papers: Container List

Series I. Documents, 1934-1989

Box 1

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
1	Birth Certificate, 30 March 1934
2	Aviator and Natops Training, 1953-1970 Includes enlistment papers, flight questionnaires, pilot examinations, pilot check-out examination for F-9F Cougar, and flying time reports.
3	Aviator and Natops Training, 1970-1974 Includes procedure evaluations, exams, evaluation reports, and flight activity survey reports.
4	Official Orders, 9 May 1953-9 January 1959 Includes change of station orders, travel orders, and temporary attachment orders.
5	Official Orders, 1959-1975 Includes change of station orders, travel orders, change of duty orders, and temporary attachment orders.
6	Service Record, 1959-1972 Includes dependency certificates, loyalty certificate, aircraft readiness reports for VF-143, officer data cards, and fighter cruise reports.
7	Fitness Reports, 1955-1980 Annual qualifications questionnaires and fitness reports.
8	Medals, Awards, and Certificates, 1962-1974 Recommendations for medals, medal certificates, and citations.

Box 2

1	Designations, Certifications, Appointments, 1953-1973 Academic certification, appointment in Naval Reserves, safety record commendation, and the Centurion Certificate for 100 arrested landings aboard the <i>U.S.S. Enterprise (CVAN-65)</i> .
2	Change of Command Programs, 1971-1972 Includes change of command programs from VF-143.

H17-05 Gordon Charles Cornell Papers: Container List

Series I. Documents, 1934-1989

Box 2

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
3	Aviator Flight Logbooks, 1954-1963
4	Aviator Flight Logbooks, 1963-1980
5	Aviator Flight Logbooks, 1980-1989
6	Calendar Entries, August 1967-February 1968
7	Memo Book, 1972-1974
8	Naval Post Graduate School, 1967-1970 Includes research papers on various subjects.

Box 3

1	Miscellaneous Naval Messages, 1966-1973 Flash priority messages regarding engagement with a North Vietnamese Mig, daily aircraft situation summaries, and safety surveys.
2	Accident Investigation, 1958 (See Box 4, Folder 1 for Photographs). Includes an aircraft accident report regarding an F-3H-2M Demon, narrative of the accident, and pilot's statement (LTJG Gordon C. Cornell).
3	Medals and Awards: Others, 1971-1974 Includes medals and awards to pilots serving in VF-143 (Pukin Dogs) under Cornell operating from the <i>U.S.S. Enterprise (CVAN 65)</i> , and lists of VF-143 personnel who have received medals.
4	Fighter Squadron VF-143 Social Rosters, 1971-1972
5	Unofficial Humorous Naval Documents, 1971-1972
6	Items Related to CDR Harley Hall, 1989 Includes newspaper clippings, a clearance notice, and a letter to Cornell.
7	VF-143 Newsletters, <i>The Scuttle Bone</i> , 1971-1974
8	<i>U.S.S. Essex (CVA-9)</i> Second Korean War Cruise Book

H17-05 Gordon Charles Cornell Papers: Container List

Series II. Photographs and Negatives

Box 1

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
0	Award presented to Cornell by the South Vietnamese Government, 1974
1	Accident Investigation Photographs, 1958 (See Box 3, Folder 2 for documents).
2	Photographs: Cornell
3	Photographs: Ships and Planes
4	Photographs: People

Box 2

1	Negatives: Portraits of Cornell
2	Negatives: Aircraft in Flight

Series III. Memorabilia

Box 1

Item

1	Pins 5 "Pukin Dog" pins and 1 <i>U.S.S. Coral (CVA-43)</i> Sea pin
2	Cigarette Lighter Pukin Dog insignia inscribed with "Fighting 143"
3	Cigarette Lighter Inscribed CDR G.C. Cornell and <i>U.S.S. Coral Sea (CVA-43)</i>
4	Tie Clasp
5	Electrical Cable from Flight Suit
6	Military Uniform Button

H17-05 Gordon Charles Cornell Papers: Container List

Series III. Memorabilia

Box 1

<u>Item</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
7	Marble Paper Weight
8	Golf Tee
9	Buttons for Formal Uniform
10	Magnifying Stand for Viewing Maps and Aerial Photographs
11	Two Metal Belt Buckles Engraved Naval Wings inscribed Cornell G.C.
12	Two Audio Cassette Tapes One tape contains radio transmissions of the Harley Hall incident, the other tape contains the pilot's debriefing of the Hall incident.
13	Brass Belt Buckle Engraved Naval Wings inscribed Cornell G.C.
14	Boxed Medal presented to Cornell by the COMDR ROK Forces-Vietnam ACE Dogfight Simulation Card Game Gauge Dial Multiple Unit Patches Large, Brass Fighting 143 plaque Large, metal Emblem <i>CVA-43 Coral Sea</i> McDonnell Phantom II Decal

Box 2

1	Wooden Plaque Includes decal of Chargers-Fighter Squadron 161 and a brass plate inscribed LCDR G.C. Cornell June 1966-Feb. 1968
2	American Red Cross Pinochle Cards 1984 AOPA Decal
3	Uniform Name Pins
4	5 Cent Military Payment Certificate
5	Uniform Patches

H17-05 Gordon Charles Cornell Papers: Container List

Series III. Memorabilia

Box 2

<u>Item</u>	<u>Title, Dates, and Description</u>
6	Brass Tie Clasps
7	Brass Pin
8	Business Cards
9	Button Pin “ <i>CVA-43</i> , San Francisco’s Own, <i>U.S.S. Coral Sea</i> ”
10	Uniform Pins
11	Uniform Pins
12	Brass Pins from McDonnell-Douglas (F-4)
13	Uniform Patch

Box 3

1	Two Baseball Caps
2	One Pair of Leather Gloves
3	One Head Pad
4	Two Cummerbunds
5	One G-1 Leather Jacket
6	One Flyer’s Cold Weather Jacket.