

CNO's First Hydrofoil Ride

by [Bob Johnston](#)

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It was the Fall of 1953, and a small group of hydrofoilers were trying to convince the US Navy that military hydrofoils should be seriously considered for future application. The program had started as an appeasement to Dr. Vannevar Bush. Dr. Bush was scientific advisor to President Truman with considerable influence on the Navy's overall research and development (R&D) program. Dr. Bush was convinced at that time that hydrofoils of World War II destroyer size could be used for rapid transport from the U.S. to Europe. Actually, this conclusion was based on data that would prove to be considerably optimistic. Nevertheless, the Navy did not want to cross Dr. Bush and developed a program of hydrofoil research. The program was administered by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) with technical support from the Bureau of Ships, the Bureau of Aeronautics, and the David Taylor Model Basin. A group of universities and contractors also supported the program. Interestingly the program was mostly classified, not because it was full of military secrets, but because of the desire to limit the dissemination of how the Navy was spending its R&D dollars. It was into this climate that I became the Navy's Hydrofoil Project Officer.

Among the Navy's small test craft was a vehicle built by the Baker Manufacturing Company (a windmill manufacturer) called *HIGH POCKETS*. This craft was a run-about with four shaped, surface piercing hydrofoils. The open cockpit seated eight people and was powered by an inboard gasoline engine, driving a propeller through a right angle drive. The four foils were controlled in a turn to create inboard banking. As a result the craft was quite maneuverable.

HIGH POCKETS had been evaluated by the Navy at the Patuxent Naval Air Test Center and had demonstrated good rough water characteristics and lower power, high speed performance. After a series of instrumented trials at the Air Station, the decision was made to transit the craft to the Washington, DC Naval Shipyard for show and tell purposes. A non-stop flight was made from Patuxent to DC which at that time set a record for speed and distance for U.S. hydrofoils. At that time across the Anacostia River from the Washington Shipyard, or Gun Factory as it was sometimes called, was the Navy's Anacostia Naval Air Station. The Air Station accommodated naval aircraft for senior naval officers and VIPs including the Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO's) plane.

Admiral Robert Carney, CNO, was approached to take a demonstration ride on *HIGH POCKETS*. He countered by requesting that *HIGH POCKETS* provide him with transportation from the Pentagon to Anacostia for an upcoming air trip he was making. The hydrofoil group was only too happy to accommodate, and firm arrangements were made to fulfill his request.

CDR Jim Stillwell of the Bureau of Ships (BUSHIPS), who was to retire as a rear admiral, volunteered to be the coxswain. LT Bob Apple, who worked with me in ONR and myself, then a LCDR, were to be the crew for this trip. At the appropriate time we had *HIGH POCKETS* on-the-ready at the Pentagon boat landing.

As the CNO and his party, consisting of a couple of Admirals and some staff, approached the boat landing, Bob Apple swung the boat hook he was holding around knocking my Navy cap into the water. Quickly retrieving the cap, we all came to attention and saluted, but unfortunately there was a trickle of

water down my cheek as we met Admiral Carney.

The trip to Anacostia was mostly uneventful. We made some sharp turns, drove through boat wakes to show some rough water characteristics and proceeded at a high and a low speed. About half way to Anacostia at the running water level of the starboard forward foil a condom impinged. This caused the craft to roll slightly to starboard then recover lift as the condom submerged. Surely we thought the impinged article would wash off, but no, it stayed on all the way to Anacostia. While the Boat crew was well aware of the problem and resulting motion, none of the passengers were aware or noticed the slight rolling motion. Admiral Carney's remarks were that he had made the fastest trip ever from the Pentagon to Anacostia and would we please transport him back to the Pentagon when he returned later in the day. We, of course, were delighted to oblige.

We now had several hours to stand by and we decided to use that time to give rides to various members of our offices who had requested a chance to ride a hydrofoil. So for the next few hours officers and civilians from our offices and staffs were given rides and demonstrations of *HIGH POCKETS*. Our riders included several interested women.

Upon Admiral Carney's return, we were at the dockside ready to return him to the Pentagon. The trip back was timely and uneventful. Since it was during rush hour traffic in DC, the Admiral was grateful for the quick return trip. As Admiral Carney's group disembarked, one of the accompanying Admirals handed me a bobby pin he had picked up off the rear seat. With a twinkle in his eye, he remarked that he hoped we had had an enjoyable time waiting for the Admiral's return. And so ended the CNO's first trip on a Navy hydrofoil.

Did the venture do anything for the program? Directly we never saw any significant accomplishment. However, indirectly, from that time on, money and support increased, ultimately leading to the construction of the Navy's two full-scale R&D ships the *HIGH POINT* and [*PLAINVIEW*](#).

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