

Yager (autobiography of Chuck Yager) (1985)

He was born 13Feb1923 in West Virginia. When his brother was 6, he was playing around with a shotgun & accidentally killed their 2 yr old sister. They were poor when the Great Depression hit. His dad drilled for natural gas & was a good mechanic. The bank offered his dad a foreclosed home for \$1800. He was raised that your word is your bond & finish what you start.

1941 he enlisted to be an airplane mechanic. He had 20/10 vision (great) & a good hunter. He was offered a flying program which he did to keep him out of KP & guard duty. At first, he got sick, but soon loved it & was picked for fighter pilot training in a P-39 (later a P-47). He met Glennis Dickman before he was sent overseas, but they wrote & fell in love.

He was shot down behind enemy lines on 5Mar44. He hid out in the woods until he found the French sympathizers that hid him from the Germans until he could walk over the Pyrenees to Spain (neutral). The rule was to send home these MIA pilots to protect the underground if they were ever captured. But he appealed up the line until Gen Eisenhower allowed him to stay.

In WWII he flew P-51 mustang (propeller – 400 mph) & on 12Oct44 he shot down 5 Germans (1st Ace in a day). Dog fighting was exhausting due to the g-force & it was 60 below zero at 28,000'. At the end of the war he re-enlisted to become a test pilot (new jets @ \$52/mo) & staged dog-fights in air shows. As the maintenance officer (at what is now Edwards AFB) he got to fly a jet after repairs before others. The P-80 would fly at 550 mph. He married in Feb '45.

The speed of sound at sea level is 760 mph, but only 660 mph at 40,000'. The dry lakebeds were a natural 8-mile runway. The X-1 was the loudest man-made noise at the time & Chuck was chose to take it past mach 1. Bob Hoover was his backup pilot & Jack Ridley was his flight engineer. Liquid nitrogen (-296 d) was the jet fuel & was extremely flammable.

X-1 was strapped to the belly of a B-29 & dropped from the bomb bay (he had to climb down into it). Each test flight worked out bugs & went faster. 14Oct47 flight was rough at mach .94, but smoothed out at .98, and then he hit 1.05 with a sonic boom. He said most pilots back off when it gets turbulent & never make it past that (life lesson... **we don't realize how close we are to our goals; push through the rough spot**).

27Oct47 was the next flight after breaking the sound barrier, the X-1 was released from the belly of the B-29, but when he hit the ignition switch nothing happened. The backup switch was the same. He had no electrical system. Jan '48 they did some testing at higher altitudes (less air resistance) with the new pressure suit. They put the X-1 in the Smithsonian next to the Wright brothers' plane. He had to get over his fear of public speaking.

During the 50's a test pilot diving at mach 2 actually outran his canons & shot himself out of the sky. In the 50's they started refueling bombers in midair. Unqualified & arrogant pilots were more dangerous than unproven equipment. Nov '53 Scotty Crossfield hit mach 2 in a Douglas Skyrocket. 12Dec53 CY took an X-1A to 80,000' to hit mach 2.3 (1650 mph), then went into an uncontrollable dive (dropping 51,000' in 51 sec) before gaining enough control to land safely.

In the late 50's he hit mach 3 in an X-2, but knew his luck was running out. He quit being a test pilot, but not before testing a Russian Mig-15. It would not recover from a spin, but had an ejection seat. The US Sabre had better weapons & equipment, but the Mig had a faster rate of climb & ceiling. He took it to mach .98, when the Russians wouldn't go past .94.

'54-57 he took over a squadron in Germany (beautiful). He showed pilots when an enemy came up from behind to pull up & hit the speed brakes to let him fly past. The Sabre needed an electrical cart to start it, but in a pinch another jet (T-33) could park in front so the exhaust would spin the turbine to crank it up.

'57 returned to the Mojave to head a squadron with the first air-to-air sidewinder missiles (\$15,000 each). The new F-100 could refuel in air. Over the years, pilots drank too much & in '59 they damaged government property & were headed for a court marshal (end of career). He was removed from his duty & spared.

He met Jackie Cochran in '47. She was in charge of WASP (Women's Air Force Service Pilots) in WWII & very active in aviation with big political connections. In '53 she was the first woman to fly faster than the speed of sound. Her husband owned General Dynamics. He helped some pilots start a uranium mine that made money. They became family friends for life.

In '59 Jackie was president of the Fed Aeronautique International & took Chuck with her to the annual meeting that was in Moscow that year. They tried to land her private plane in an AFB in ME to refuel, but the base commander refused until she called the Chief of Staff. Obviously, he was away from home a lot. His wife started playing golf, but he loved hiking, hunting & fishing.

12Dec63 he reached 108,000' in the F-104, and then went into 14 flat spins before ejecting. But his seat caught on fire & crashed back into his face shield erupting the oxygen inside. His head was severely burned, but the doctors kept him from scars with a new technique.

They were big budgets for testing aviation during the cold war, but by '66 monies were needed in NASA & Vietnam. In '66 he became a wing commander in Vietnam. It was the first war with smart bombs. They also had infrared detectors & people sniffers (detected sweat & urine). Over the years he was promoted from private to brigadier general (one star). He went back to Germany & then from '71-73 he was in Pakistan. Russia backed India while China & US backed Pakistan. '73 he was back in CA as safety director.

Over the years he flew 10,000 hours in 180 different planes. A man can only be a 1-star general for 5 years (get promoted or retire). A 2-star general is only for 7 years and he usually serves at the pentagon. He retired in '75 and moved to Grass Valley, CA. The plane manufacturers, NASA & USAF allowed him to be a consultant to keep flying.

Awards: Bronze Star, Silver Star, Purple Heart, Distinguished Flying Cross, Collier Trophy, Congressional Medal of Honor (peacetime); Harmon Trophy, & others.

Yager Quotes: "Teenagers blot out the past when the present seems appealing." "It was always better to be the hammer than the nail." (in combat...kill or be killed). "The person I am

is the sum total of all the life I've lived." "You do what you can for as long as you can, & when you finally can't, you do the next best thing."

Quotes: "Never compromise your integrity." (Gen Boyd)

Movie: "The Right Stuff" (Tom Cruise); "Jet Pilot" (John Wayne)