

A Bit of Nostalgia . . .

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Douglas A4D-1 Skyhawk, BuNo 137820

by Harry Gann, Skyhawk Association Historian

Like human beings, aircraft sometimes have their 15 minutes of fame.

One of twelve *Skyhawks* selected for a 1955 flight test program that would speed deliveries of A4D-1 aircraft to the fleet, BuNo 137820 received wide acclaim when it set a world's speed record on 15 October 1955. Then, after its moment of fame, 137820 went back into the pack and finished its career as a test hack.

The dozen test aircraft underwent 1544 grueling flights by Douglas test pilots to help prove A4D capabilities, and to uncover any deficiencies before "Scooters" were delivered to fleet squadrons. After being pushed out the door of the Douglas El Segundo factory in October of 1954, the eighth in the A4D-1 series, 137820 was equipped by the Douglas Flight Test Group with various devices to record ability-proving data needed by the engineers for demonstration to the Navy. "820," as the aircraft was referred to then, made its first flight in May of 1955 and was declared ready to begin a series of test missions, initially flown by Douglas pilots and later by Navy test pilots.

Douglas aerodynamics and flight test engineers reviewed the listings of the FAI (Federation Aeronautique Internationale), the international aviation records sanctioning group, to see which ones might be broken by the *Skyhawk*. The Douglas-Navy team had earlier set two records with the F4D *Skyray*, and it was suggested to the Navy that the "PR" resulting from any *Skyhawk* record would be beneficial in the continual battle for funding from the Congress. The team selected the 500-kilometer closed course mark, which was held at the time by a USAF fighter aircraft, the F-86H *Sabre*. If a Navy *attack* aircraft could break an Air Force *fighter* speed record, there would be added recognition. The Navy agreed and Pax River test pilot LT Gordon Gray was assigned to make the flight. Nine of the 12 test aircraft were flying at the time and it appeared that 820 would be the best airframe to use in making a run at the record without disruption of the other elements of the ongoing flight test program.

A 500-kilometer circular, 12-pylon course was set up at Rosamond Dry Lake, north of Lancaster, California. Since the flight was to be made "on the deck," test crew members were assigned to each pylon, equipped with mirrors to reflect light at the test pilot, to aid in spotting pylons as he made a counterclockwise flight around the course. Additionally, the main pylon was marked with smoke grenades and a smoke-producing fire fueled with old automobile tires.

(Continued, see *WHERE ARE THEY NOW?*, page 6)



AFTER OCTOBER 1955 RECORD-BREAKING FLIGHT, Douglas-Navy test crew members gather around A4D-1 BuNo 137820 and LT Gordon Gray (in cockpit). Note temporary "inside-out" A4D-2 rudder, specially installed for the flight to prevent skin cracking. (Photo by Douglas Aircraft Company.)

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**SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION 1999 AOM and CNATRA
SKYHAWK RETIREMENT WEEKEND Update — SEE PAGE 3**



FROM THE PRESIDENT

T.F. "Tom" Brown, III
(tfbiii@webtv.net)

Our big ticket item of interest this quarter is the forthcoming CNATRA A-4 *Skyhawk* retirement ceremony and related activities. Details are featured on page 3. But our little lady is not going down without a fight! Consideration was being given by Naval Aviation decision makers in DC to extending the A-4s for another year. But it was recently decided not to proceed with that plan and it's on with the retirement show! There are a few other A-4s still flying in the USN inventory. Some are with VC-8 at Roosevelt Roads, and we've heard that possibly one or more may still be in use for special projects. Reminds one of the "last" Spad deployment out of Lemoore back in the late sixties!

The Skyhawk rooms we had guaranteed at the Pensacola Grand Hotel have all been booked, but there are other options (see page 3). Also, you'll need to sign up with Les Jackson (and send in a check for \$18.50) for the Skyhawk Association AOM/luncheon on Saturday, 26 June. Also, respond to the invitation for the Friday night mixer and the Saturday afternoon retirement ceremony, which hopefully each member has received from CNATRA by the time you read this. Looking forward to seeing you in Pensacola! Be sure to thank Planning Chairman Whizzer White, Les Jackson, and all the good folks assisting them, when you see them during the 25-27 June weekend.

Some other news: We now have Skyhawk Association patches available for sale. See details elsewhere in this newsletter re how to purchase them from Tom "Auggie" Wondergem. The patches will be also be available for purchase at the Grand Hotel during the retirement ceremony weekend. Thanks, Auggie!

Equipment to process new memberships and renewals, by phone and credit card, is now hooked up at Tailhook Headquarters in San Diego. We hope you will find this convenient. Many thanks again to Wynn, Boom, Bud, JR, Rosie, and Denyse for making this all possible.

In the Membership department, we added 69 new members in the first quarter of calendar 1999. Unfortunately, 14 members failed to renew but as of 31 March we had 613 paid members and 662 total

members. Thanks to Otto, the Membership Committee Chairman, and to all of you who brought in new members, for your support. Keep it up!

Finally, the 1998 Summary Financial Report appears below. Thanks, Boom and Wynn.

I regret to announce that Jack "Puresome" Woodul had to resign from the Board a couple of months ago due to a combination of health difficulties which members of his immediate family were experiencing. We miss him a lot! Please keep him and his family in your prayers. John Caldas, whom I introduced to you in the last newsletter, is filling in for Puresome until our AOM when we will get approval for the oncoming Board members. (Details on Page 4.)

In case you haven't heard, a VA-1 25/VFA-1 25 "Hardcore" Reunion will be held later on in the summer after the A-4 Retirement ceremony. It will be held in conjunction with the Tailhook Convention-Symposium at Reno (Sparks actually) at the Nugget Hotel, 19-22 August. Our own Mac Gleim is heading up the Planning Committee and assisting him are fellow Skyhawker Paul Barrish, and Bob Taylor and Jerry Palmer. Should be fun! If you are interested in attending the "Hardcore" affair, contact me by E-mail and I'll forward additional details.

That's it for now. I look forward to seeing many of you in Pensacola at the end of June. Naturally, you are all invited to visit our Skyhawk Association hospitality suite at the Grand Hotel. It will be great to see former squadron/ship mates and friends, and to meet new ones. Preliminary indications are we may have members/guests attending from as far away as New Zealand and Australia!

God bless and A-4s Forever!

Tom

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Year ending 31 December 1998

Beginning Cash Balance	\$ 7,460
In-Flow	14,061
Out-Flow	9,503
Ending Cash Balance	\$12,018

The Skyhawk Association is incorporated in the State of Nevada. Names and addresses of Association members are on file with the Secretary, Skyhawk Association, P.O. Box 182166, Coronado, CA 92178-2166



PENSACOLA UP-DATE – SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

CNATRA SKYHAWK RETIREMENT WEEKEND, 25-27 JUNE 1999

FRIDAY, 25 JUNE

- Skyhawk Association Hospitality Suite, Pensacola Grand Hotel. Hours posted in lobby.
- 1300 CNATRA Skyhawk Retirement Registration Desk open, Mustin Beach Club, NAS Pensacola.
- 1600 No-Host Flight Suit Mixer, Mustin Beach Club. Dress: Casual.

SATURDAY, 26 JUNE

- 0730 Shotgun Start Golf Tournament, NAS Pensacola.
- 0830 Skyhawk Association Board Meeting, Skyhawk Suite, Grand Hotel.
- 1230 Skyhawk Association AOM Luncheon*, New World Inn, Pensacola.
- 1500 CNATRA Skyhawk Retirement Ceremony*, Blue Angel Atrium, Naval Aviation Museum.
Dress: Coat & Tie.
- 1830 CNATRA Skyhawk Retirement Reception*, Naval Aviation Museum. Dress: Coat and Tie.

SUNDAY, 27 JUNE

- ???? - "Eye-Opener" Socializing, Mustin Beach Club, NAS Pensacola.
- 0900-1200 - CNATRA Skyhawk Retirement Brunch*, Mustin Beach Club, NAS Pensacola.
- Fond Good-byes.

* TICKET REQUIRED.

A registration form for CNATRA *Skyhawk* Retirement events is available on-line in the "CNATRA Weekend" page of the Skyhawk Association web site (www.skyhawk.org). For further information about events, including the golf tourney, e-mail Cdr.Richardson@smtp.cnet.navy.mil (preferred) or call (601) 679-2800.

PENSACOLA ACCOMMODATIONS

Grand Hotel. The Pensacola Grand Hotel will be the location of the *Skyhawk Association Headquarters & Hospitality Suite*. At this writing, a Skyhawk guaranteed block of rooms at the Grand is already fully booked, but some additional rooms may be available. Reservations: (800) 348-3336.

OTHER POSSIBILITIES: **New World Inn** (Downtown) – (850) 432-4111; **Best Western Perdido Key** – (800) 528-1234; **Holiday Inn Bayside** (Gulf Breeze) – (800) 465-4329; **Holiday Inn University Mall** – (800) 465-4329; **Ramada Bay View** (Scenic Hwy & I-100) – (800) 282-1212; **Comfort Inn-Navy Corry** (Warrington) – (800) 228-5150.

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

The New World Inn on South Palafox Avenue in downtown Pensacola will be the site of the **Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting-Membership Luncheon at 1230 on Saturday, 26 June 1999**. The Inn is located across the street and a bit south of Trader Jon's (a site familiar to most of the Naval Aviation persuasion).

The luncheon cost is \$18.50 per person and advance reservations are necessary. Your reservations check, *payable to Skyhawk Association*, along with your name, address, and telephone number, should be sent to reach **Les Jackson, 9 Arapaho Drive, Pensacola, FL 32507-8736**, no later than Friday, 18 June 1999.

In addition to the annual luncheon camaraderie, a brief program will feature the annual election of Skyhawk Association directors (see next page) and a formal presentation to the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation of a lithograph print of Roy Grinnell's "Skyhawk Tribute." The luncheon will terminate in time to allow attendance at the 1500 CNATRA Skyhawk retirement ceremony at the National Museum of Naval Aviation.

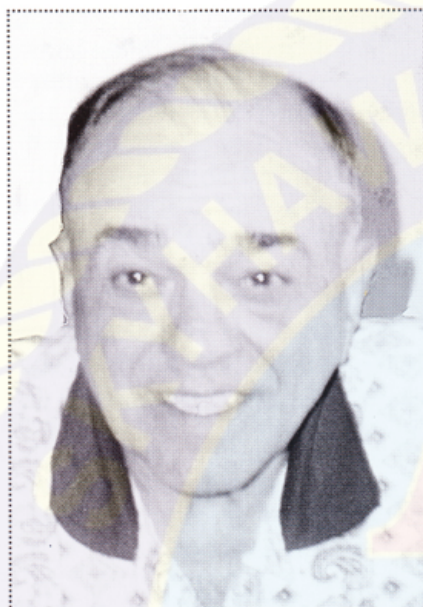


ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

The Skyhawk Association annual membership meeting will take place at a noon luncheon at the New Landings Hotel, Pensacola, Florida, on Saturday, 26 June 1999 for the purpose of election of directors and such other business as is determined by the Board of Directors. The Association Board consists of nine Directors, one third of whom are elected annually for three year terms. The terms of incumbent Board members Tom Brown, Otto Ktueger, and Tom Wondergem expire in 1999. Tom Brown and Otto Krueger have chosen not to run for re-election.

A Nominating Committee, appointed in accordance with the Association bylaws, has nominated Association members John Caldas, Joel Knapp, and Tom Wondergem for election to three year Director terms ending in 2002. Additionally, as provided in the bylaws, nominations from the floor will be accepted at the annual meeting luncheon.

THE CANDIDATES



JOHN CALDAS. USMC, Private to Colonel. Resides in Harahan, LA. Skyhawk tours: VMA-331, VMA-211, CO VMA-311. Association member since March 1995. Instrumental in luring many Marine A-4 types into Skyhawk Association membership. E-Mail: JJ caldas2@aol.com



JOEL KNAPP. Resides in Beverly Hills, CA. PhD, Columbia University. Pres./CEO of four businesses. Skyhawk Association member since February 1996. Primary mode of transportation: flying own restored T-28 Trojan. E-Mail: T28pilot@aol.com



TOM "AUGGIE" WONDERGEM. Resides in Oldsmar, FL. Skyhawk tours: VA-93 (193 Vietnam War combat missions) and VT-4. Skyhawk Association member since February 1995. Northwest Airlines captain. E-Mail: auggie@tampabay.rr.com

BOARD APPOINTS WHITE

In a recent message to President Tom Brown, Association Director and Vice President Jack "Puresome" Woodul regretfully announced his resignation from those positions because of personal reasons.

"Puresome" was one of the founding Directors of the Skyhawk Association and served as Vice President since that time. During his tenure in office, he provided loyal, wise, incisive, and dedicated service to the Association, and that service will be sorely missed. Our best wishes go with him.

In accepting Puresome's resignation, President Tom announced that Skyhawk Association founder and Past-President Dave "Whizzer" White has agreed to serve the unexpired portion of Jack Woodul's term as Director, which expires in 2000, and the Board has unanimously approved that appointment.



David "Whizzer" White



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CREDIT CARD DUES PAYMENT. For convenience in new member enrollment, and for current membership renewal, the Skyhawk Association has established a toll-free telephone service for payment of Association dues via VISA, MASTERCARD, or AMERICAN EXPRESS credit card. The toll-free number is **1-877-944-HAWK** (877-944-4295). An alternate number is (619) 693-1067. The service is available from 8:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m., Pacific Time, Monday through Friday, except holidays. Please note that the toll-free system is intended only for recording of membership information and credit card payment of dues (both new membership applications and current membership renewals). It is not available for general information queries about the Association, leaving of messages, or other Skyhawk Association business. Skyhawk Association member dues (\$20.00, U.S. currency, per year) may be paid in advance for as many as five years.

VC-8 IS ALIVE AND WELL. In the Winter '99 issue, we made it sound as though all USN A-4 *Skyhawk* operations would cease this year, with the announced ceremonial retirement of the CNATRA (VT-7) *Skyhawks* on 26 June at the National Museum of Naval Aviation. Close, but no cigar. For one thing, we forgot another Navy entity still flying the *Skyhawk* – VC-8 at NAS Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico. VC-8 provides "aggressor" signature training service to the fleet. Our apologies to our island friends for the unintentional oversight. Of the 45 *Skyhawks* remaining on active duty – TA-4Js all – 39 are with VT-7 at NAS Meridian, MS, and six are assigned to VC-8. All 45 USN *Skyhawks* are presently scheduled for retirement in September as fiscal year 1999 winds down, but there remains an outside chance that funding may be identified to keep the VC-8 TA-4Js in the fleet training business into the first year of the new millennium.

THE ALOHA SCENE. SA member Tim Cislo is a honcho with the Hawaii Museum of Flying, a non-profit organization formed about one year ago. The museum will be located at the "new" Hawaii State Airport on Oahu (former NAS Barbers Point) and will display three A-4Es. One *Skyhawk* will be painted in standard Navy gray-white and the other two will be in the color scheme of the former Barbers Point "aggressor" squadron, VC-1. Also, the HMofF has an ambitious plan for a display (patches, photos, brief histories, etc.) commemorating A-4 squadrons world-wide and donations are welcome. Contact Tim by e-mail at thmoflying@hotmail.com, or telephone 808-373-5743.

BIRDDOG-CATKILLERS. England-based SA member Jim Hooper, a Journalist for *Jane's Defence Weekly*, wishes to contact pilots who flew the DMZ, Laos, and North Vietnam between January 1968 and September 1969, and remember working with the *Catkillers* of the 220th Reconnaissance Company. The *Catkillers* operated under the control of the 3rd MarDiv and flew with Marine AOs in their back seats. Anyone who can help is encouraged to contact Jim via e-mail (113362.1417@compuserve.com). If not yet e-mail qualified, send input to Skyhawk Association (address on back page) and we'll pass it on.

BOOK SHELF. A recent publication that may appeal to the *Skyhawk* aficionados is *The Man and His Art: R.G. Smith*, an autobiography written with Rosario "Zip" Rausa (editor of *Wings of Gold* magazine). R.G. Smith was the Configuration Engineer for the *Skyhawk* and several other aircraft manufactured by the Douglas Aircraft Company, but later became better known for his artistic talents. R.G.'s paintings and sketches are on display at major aviation museums around the world. *The Man and his Art* contains 140 of R.G.'s notable paintings, drawings, and sketches, including many of the *Skyhawk*.

ARBS. In the Winter '99 newsletter, a question was raised regarding the ARBS (Angle Rate Bombing System). Our spies report that the ARBS was installed experimentally in several Navy A-4Fs and later became the primary weapon control system of the Marine A-4M *Skyhawks*. The ARBS was also integrated into the AV-8B *Harrier*. Approximately 250 USN-USMC *Skyhawks*, and a like number of *Harriers*, were ARBS equipped.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

(Continued from page 1)

Beginning on 13 October, four preliminary flights around the course were made to determine what problems might be encountered with the low-level, high-speed flight. During one preliminary flight, Douglas pilot Bob Rahn pegged the air speed indicator at an unofficial 703 mph and, in the process, the top of 820's rudder failed. A quick decision was made to temporarily switch to the "tadpole" rudder, which was slated for installation on the A4D-2 production model. The tadpole rudder was built "inside out" with the ribs showing, in the same manner North American had used on the F-100, to overcome the problem of skin cracking from buffeting.

On the fifth flight, on 15 October, Gray established a new official speed record of 695.163 mph in 137820 during a 42-minute flight. The 500-kilometer closed-course record brought glory for Gordo Gray and the *Skyhawk* test team but, then, it was back-to-work time for 820. The standard, smooth skin A4D-1 rudder was reinstalled and Douglas completed its proving flights. Thereafter, 820 was assigned to the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River, MD from December 1956 to July

1957 for verification of DAC test findings. After a short stint with the Naval Air Special Weapons Facility, 820 was returned to Pax River for additional R & D evaluations. The aircraft's last duty station, from January 1959 to February 1963, was the Naval Air Torpedo Unit at NAS Quonset Point, RI. Thereafter, the venerable old *Skyhawk* was placed in storage at Litchfield Park, AZ, west of Phoenix, and was finally stricken from Navy records in mid-1969.

Alas, A4D-1 *Skyhawk*, BuNo 137820, did not have a decent end to its career. It was not mounted "on a stick" near a playground or to commemorate revered ground somewhere. It wasn't displayed at an aviation museum or sent to a foreign country. Like an old soldier, it just faded away; but sometimes I like to think that the aluminum pot that my wife cooks with was once part of old "820."



BURNING AUTOMOBILE TIRES marked the main pylon for the world speed record attempt by A4D-1 BuNo 137820 on 15 October 1955. (Photo by Douglas Aircraft Company)

A SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION PATCH has been created and is now available for mail order purchase. The patch, illustrated below, has an outer ring background of Navy blue with gold lettering and decor. The center section is a lighter "sky" blue background with Navy blue and gold detail, and prominent "A-4" letters of Marine Corps red and gold.

Skyhawk Association patches are available to Association members at \$5.00 each (\$6.00 for non-member), postage and handling included, with a limit of four patches per order. To purchase patches, send a check or money order (sorry, no credit card orders at the present time), payable to **Skyhawk Association**, along with name, postal mailing address, and *member number* to



Tom "Auggie" Wondergem
4903 Turtle Creek Trail
Oldsmar, FL 34677-1966.

Please **DO NOT** send patch orders to the Skyhawk Association Coronado, California address, as it will only serve to delay order processing and shipping. Questions regarding patches? Contact Auggie: Tel: (727) 787-0888, Fax (727) 771-9303, or E-Mail (auggie@tampabay.rr.com).



RAM ONE



For almost twenty years a forlorn A4D-1 in obscure markings was parked on the grass alongside Decatur Road, a main thoroughfare on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. In 1997, John Sheehan, Chairman of the Naval Academy Alumni Association and a former *Skyhawk* driver, proposed that the shabby aircraft be spruced up to honor a one-time Midshipman, A-4 squadron commanding officer, and former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral J. L. Holloway, III.

The project was approved and the Academy *Skyhawk* received a cleaning and a fresh paint job. The truth had to be stretched a bit because the aircraft was an A4D-1, while the 1958 Rampagers flew the A4D-2. Nonetheless, the refurbishment added the 1958 markings and insignia of the VA-83 "Rampagers" when Holloway was the skipper. Special attention was

paid to the decal on the fuselage, which was produced by a commercial artist who worked from a photograph of a flight jacket patch.

In February 1958, under then-Commander Holloway's leadership, VA-83, as part of Air Task Group 201, embarked in USS *Essex* (CVA-9) out of Jacksonville for what normally would have been a six month deployment with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. A Middle East crisis centered around Lebanon erupted that summer, however, followed closely by further Cold War tensions in the Far East, where Communist China was threatening to invade the Nationalist China off-shore islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

Essex and her air wing were transferred from the Sixth Fleet to the Seventh Fleet and the ship transited the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean to rendezvous with Task Force 77 in the Formosa Straits. When detached from TF-77 in November 1958, *Essex* and ATG-201 made the long voyage home, across the Indian Ocean again and around the Cape of Good Hope into the Atlantic Ocean. As the carrier neared Jacksonville, Holloway's *Rampagers* flew off to their home port at NAS Oceana, Virginia, arriving just before Christmas day 1958. The "normal" six-month deployment had stretched into nearly 11 months.

Today, a fresh "new" monument is on display for potential carrier aviators in the Brigade of Midshipmen to see – serving both as an honor to a notable Naval Aviator and Skyhawk Association member, and as a historical reminder both of an era of Naval Aviation and of a widely used Navy-Marine Corps work horse, the *Skyhawk*.

WELCOME ABOARD!

(New members since 20 January 1999)

Olen S. Akers
Hugh Albritton
Ben Alls
Arthur W. Anthony
Gerald E. Bishop
Molly J. Boron
Hawley Brooks
Carl E. Bruntlett
Marcio Jansen Cavalcanti
Tom Chaffin
Tim Cislo
Jacque W. Cohen
David B. Collier
Thomas M. D'Andrea
Russell Dudley

Joel W. Febel
Michael E. Ford
Rene J. Francillon
Richard F. Garvey
Robert L. Grappi
Brian Greaves
Herbert J. (Jr) Harkey
Dennis J. Harris
John D. Henry
John H. Hulse
Charles W. Kavanaugh
Arnaut Lacote
Ron Lapp
Bertrand LePoutre
F. M. Luckie

Jacques Mallard
Sean P. McDonald
Daniel B. McKendry
Robert A. Mihocik
Meredith W. "Pat" Patrick
George A. (Jr) Ralston
William G. Ramsey
Kevin G. Reece
Jody Richardson
Rylen B. Rudy
Gerald L. Sagehorn
Gary A. Scoffield
Darrell S. Shelor
J. Paul Smoot
Richard C. Snyder

David J. Sperling
T. R. Swartz
Jack G. Thomas
Timothy C. Tidwell
William L. Traynor
William O. VanBuskirk
David VanSciver
Daniel T. Ventre
Eric C. Wahlstedt
John M. Waples
A. Fred Wells
Hal Widener
Tim A. Wilson



NAVY COMPOSITE SQUADRON EIGHT (VC-8), based at NAS Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, operates six TA-4J Skyhawks in service to fleet units. A while back, with 100% availability, all six Skyhawks were launched for a photo-op gaggle. (USN photo)

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION, Inc.

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