



# THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

## Journal



*Collings Foundation TA-4 joins  
F-4U Corsair "Marine's Dream."*

# THE A-4 EVER

Summer 2007

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 13 • NUMBER 2

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[www.skyhawk.org](http://www.skyhawk.org)



# THE PREZ SEZ

## • Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

*Despite what I reported in the Winter 2007 issue, May 2007 finds me still serving as president of your association. Due to a very full agenda for the February 2007 Board meeting held in Dallas at the Frontiers of Flight Museum, officer elections were deferred to the annual meeting to be held at Tailhook '07 in Reno, September 7, 2007. More on that later.*

### Mid-Winter Board Meeting

Without question, the highlight of our mid-winter board meeting held in Dallas, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, was discovering the wonderful Frontiers of Flight Museum. Museum Curator Chris Woodul (yes, son of the erstwhile Youthly Puresome), served as our host and introduced us to an amazing collection of aircraft and artifacts. Many one of a kind exhibits are on display, and the only real complaint we had was that the museum's collection lacked an A-4. If you haven't had the pleasure of exploring Frontiers of Flight, be sure to schedule it for your next trip to Dallas. The museum is conveniently located adjacent to Love Field, and more information can be found on their website at <http://www.flightmuseum.com/>.

We did get around to conducting business, and some hard decisions had to be made. Discussion of the annual operating budget focused on a shortfall of almost \$10,000 in CY 2006. The shortfall was due to the high cost of producing and mailing four full-color, 24-page Journals to the membership. With our current membership of 800, printing and mailing the newsletter four times

per year consumes 90% of our annual dues income of approximately \$22,000. The Board discussed several options to return to a balanced budget, including a shift to electronic delivery of some of the Journal issues, raising dues at least \$5.00 per year and reducing the number of Journals to three per year rather than the current four.

In the end, the Board decided that implementing a deficit budget would not be fiscally responsible and adopted the only solution which would return us to a balanced budget in CY 2007. The number of Journal issues to be printed and mailed each year has been reduced to three: a Winter issue mailed in February; a Spring/Summer issue mailed in June; and a Fall issue mailed in October. We are exploring methods of delivering some of the Journal content electronically, and we have implemented a special international membership rate which includes the Journal subscription only in electronic form.

### Skyhawk Treasurer Change of Command

Due to greatly increased job responsibilities, Skyhawk Treasurer Steve Richmond asked to be relieved of his duties as treasurer. Steve served the association well above and beyond reasonable expectations when he assumed responsibility for our finances in 2005 during a difficult long-distance transition caused by the deteriorating health of former treasurer Ernie Laib. Steve created a new account structure and moved our finances online to facilitate review by finance committee members spread



*Your association board hard at work in Dallas, looking for money wherever they can find it. Seated: L-R: Steve Richmond (outgoing treasurer); Secretary Terry Cooney; Jack "YP" Woodul; Webmaster and Director David Weber; Skyhawk Association Founder and Past-president Wizzer White; Director John Gabbard; Director and Treasurer Mark Williams; and barely pictured, Director Joe Turpen's nose.*

across the country. We'll miss Steve's expertise and wish him all the best in his future endeavors at Rolls-Royce.

Considering the importance of the treasurer position, the association was fortunate to have a willing volunteer readily available. Director Mark Williams of Seattle assumed the treasurer duties and executed a turnover with Steve at the Dallas meeting. Mark has come up to speed quickly, and the board is grateful for his willingness to serve in this critical role.

### Kudos to Secretary Terry Cooney

At the Dallas meeting, the Board presented a plaque to Secretary Terry Cooney in recognition of his dedicated service as secretary since 1994. Without question, the secretary and treasurer have the most demanding duties of the association officers, and Terry has willingly served our membership with great distinction. Please extend your appreciation to Terry the next time you send in your membership renewal.



Reunion organizer Mike Green (L); MajGen Ken Glueck, CG 2d MAW (center); and Ted Herman, Boeing, display the model commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of the A-4 into USMC service. Gen Glueck presented an excellent after-dinner speech, relating details about Marine aviation in general and operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular.

### Comings and Goings

We're sad to acknowledge the resignation of Dan Brannon from the Board of Directors. Like Steve Richmond, Dan's job responsibilities preclude his active participation, and the Board appointed Mike "Buick" Eberhardt to fill the remainder of Dan's term. Buick brings a fresh outlook to the Board, partly because of his youth and partly because he was among the very last pilots to fly the Skyhawk in naval service. We're grateful to Dan for the significant role he played in planning and conducting our annual meeting in DC last October, and we're looking forward to gaining Buick's expertise.

# THE PREZ SEZ MORE...

## Marine Skyhawk Reunion – Beaufort/Hilton Head, April 2007

Association members who attended the reunion in Hilton Head were treated to a first-class event, and most connected to friends they hadn't seen in years. Association Director Mike Green organized the event, and all who attended are in his debt. Mike was assisted by Director Mark Williams and others, but it's safe to say that the reunion would never have happened without Mike's extraordinary effort. *Mike, we're in your debt once again, and this time we promise to be more help in planning the next reunion.*

For several years, Mike has been maintaining a list of Marines who were associated with the A-4 during their service. This list, known as *USMC Skyhawkers*, has been used primarily for distribution of information about reunions. It is now being merged with the *Skyhawk* Association database, and those whose names are on the list are being urged to join *Skyhawk* Association in order to receive information about future reunions, as well as to enjoy the other benefits of membership.

One highlight of the event was attending the MCAS Beaufort Airshow

and associated activities. Most of us elected to attend the airshow rehearsal on Friday, thus missing the Saturday show which was marred by the loss of Blue Angel 6. After the rehearsal, we were hosted by the C.O. of VMFA-115 for a squadron tour and briefing, followed by happy hour at the Beaufort Officers Club with local officers and airshow pilots. We all left with the impression that the future of Marine Aviation is in good hands. In spite of serious challenges presented by insane optempo and over-used aircraft and other equipment, morale is high and unit cohesion is strong. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that at Beaufort at least, the Officers Club is still a place where squadrons can go to blow off some steam and recharge morale. Most of us were somewhat amazed to learn that Beaufort squadrons have squadron bars in their ready rooms (for use after the close of flight ops, of course).

To see a photo album of the reunion, check out the private pages at [www.skyhawk.org](http://www.skyhawk.org). If you can't access the private pages in the ready room, contact the Ready Room Coordinator as indicated on the home page.

## Annual Meeting of Members Reno, September 7, 2007

Make your plans now to attend our annual meeting at Tailhook this September. See the detailed information elsewhere in this issue, but you won't want to miss this event. The Hospitality Suite managed by Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul gets better every year, and our program for the luncheon on September 7 will be something special. Member Bob "Snakbar" Schneider will present a multi-media program on the very successful restoration of eight A-4Ls at the Sabreliner Corporation facility at Perryville, MO. As you can see by the pictures, they are bringing these aircraft back to "as-new" condition.

*See you in Reno – until then,  
Remember: A-4s Forever!  
Raven*



*Still a dangerous business. Blue Angel 6 on rehearsal day, MCAS Beaufort, May 2007. LCDR Kevin Davis died in a crash at the conclusion of Saturday's show.*

## Commemorative Model of First A-4 Delivered to the Marine Corps



*A closer look at the commemorative A-4A model built by Joe Turpen and Randy Fuller.*

A highlight of the Marine *Skyhawk* Reunion was the unveiling of a display model which commemorates the delivery of A4D-1 139920 to VMA-224 in September, 1956. Ferried by then Maj Tom Miller (later LtGen Tom Miller, DC/S for Aviation), 139920 was the first operational *Skyhawk* in Marine service. To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction, *Skyhawk* Director and modeling guru Joe Turpen, ably assisted by friend Randy Fuller, built a beautiful 1/48<sup>th</sup> scale display model. Former A-4 driver and Boeing representative Ted Herman coordinated a donation by Boeing which provided a display case, aircraft data plate for the original aircraft and brass inscription plate. Reunion attendees signed the back of the display case, and the model will be presented to either the National Museum of the Marine Corps at Quantico, VA, or the Flying Leatherneck Museum at Miramar. We're grateful for the support by Joe and Randy, as well as the donation of time and effort by Boeing.



*Maj Michael Sobkowski, XO of the VMFA-115 Silver Eagles, briefs our reunion group on squadron operations.*



*Andy Novickis, in full reunion regalia, explains to a Silver Eagle pilot how we did it in the "old days."*

## Long-Range Schedule of Events

Make Plans to Attend the Annual Meeting in Reno!!!!

### ☐ **Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting:**

**Sept 6-9, 2007 – Tailhook 07, John Ascuaga's Nugget Casino Resort, Reno, NV.**

- Skyhawk Association Booth: open Sept 6-8, Tailhook Exhibit Area (#714)
- Attack Hospitality Suite: open Sept 6-8
- Board Meeting: 0830 until 1130, Sept 7
- Annual Meeting: 1200 until 1400, Sept 7

★ Annual Meeting Luncheon Program: Bob "Snakbar" Schneider and Sabreliner Corporation will present a multi-media program on their project to restore eight A-4Ls to "better-than-new" condition. Learn the ins and outs of restoration from the experts.

Information on room reservations and registration for Tailhook can be found at [www.tailhook.org/](http://www.tailhook.org/).

Make your room reservations early!

Information on registration for Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting and Luncheon will be posted on the Skyhawk Association homepage by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Check [www.skyhawk.org](http://www.skyhawk.org) for details.

Contact [sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org) with questions.

### ☐ **Skyhawk Association Mid-Winter Board Meeting: Feb 2, 2008 – Pensacola, FL**



A-4L 148581 undergoes restoration at Sabreliner Corporation facility in Perryville, MO.

Member Bob "Snakbar" Schneider, Project Officer, seems amazed that he still fits in the cockpit. The group hopes to conduct the first test flights in June/July.



## R.G.'s ART

• A-4s in Flight •



R. G. Smith, (1914-2001)  
Named Honorary Naval  
Aviator Number 10.

With majestic Mount Fuji looming in the background, a section of A4Ds attached to VMA-224 circle the peak.

This R.G. Smith painting is circa 1957.





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# BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2007 •



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### Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Newsletter Editor at [newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org) or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Stephanie Davis, graphics, [stephanie@ncflight.com](mailto:stephanie@ncflight.com). Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC.

Cover: Collings Foundation TA-4 joins F-4U Corsair "Marine's Dream" flown by Tom Duffy in heritage flight performed at Thunder Over Michigan Air Show in 2006. (Photo courtesy of Dave Cheeseman [www.OntarioWarbirds.ca](http://www.OntarioWarbirds.ca))

# TAKE NO PRISONERS

## • Letters to the Editor •

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

### To the Editor:

When I was sent to Cherry Point, NC in 1979 to fly A-6s, it became quickly apparent that I was a square peg being smashed into a round hole. Through a very good friend, Capt Gordon Harper, I was introduced to Col Gerald Ellis, who at the time was the CO of MAG 32, and Col Ellis told me that if I needed any help to give him a call.

Armed with that information, I went back to VMAT-202, submitted my Administrative Action (AA) form and was immediately banished to Bogue Field (near Cherry Point) for a career-enhancing tour as the legal officer working for LtCol T. P. Connell. LtCol Connell had seen guys like me time and again, and he welcomed me aboard and let me know I should keep my A-6 NATOPS.

About two months into my exile, the MAG 14 skipper entered my office, stared me down and said only one thing: "I forwarded your AA form to wing yesterday and I didn't do you any favors." He then turned on his heel and I never saw him again.

Having been stashed at HQMC before I was sent to flight school, I waited another month before I phoned Capt Paul Hanover who was now my monitor, and I asked him for the sitrep of my AA form. He told me to get my A-6 NATOPS dusted off, since the endorsements at every level were negative and DCS Air was due back the following day, and my fate would be sealed. BOHICA. I took Col Ellis up on his offer and phoned him. The very next day, I received a call from Capt Hanover, and he was incredulous because the general had signed my AA form to allow me to join MAG 32! Dud BOHICA!

When I checked into MAG 32, Col Ellis gave me a choice of *Harriers* or *Skyhawks*, and I told him I wanted to join the squadron that would deploy the soonest. It turned out to be VMA-331 which was flying "Mikes" at the time under LtCol Malcom Wehrung. It was not until a couple of years ago that I found out from Col Ellis that after we hung up that winter day in 1980, he phoned DCS Air, MajGen Hal Vincent, personally and interceded on my behalf. Since both of those gentlemen wrote articles in the Fall 2006 newsletter, I thought I would add another story about

how they affected some unknown first lieutenant in a very positive manner.

If I may, in this public forum, also express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to both Gen Vincent and Col Ellis.

Semper Fi,  
Gene Atwell [geneatwell@gmail.com]  
(Ed. Note: *Gene, nothing like a happy ending!*)

♦ ♦ ♦

### To the Editor:

I am USS *HANCOCK* CVA 19 Association President. We are having a reunion in May 2008, in San Diego, and I would like to contact all the A4 squadrons that were on board at one time or another. I can probably come up with a complete list, as we have any number of guys from a few of the VA squadrons who are members.

I remember that a group from VA-164 came to our last reunion in SF in '04, and had a ball. (I had to throw them out of the hospitality suite at 0100 several times.) Don't think they ever slept.

So bottom line is, how do I contact all the squadrons, and invite them to come to the reunion? Is there a newsletter that I can put the info in?

Any help would be appreciated.  
Smooth sailing, shipmates.

Wayne Erven,  
Pleasanton, CA (925) 462-6877  
[mailto:oldsalt2@comcast.net]

(Ed. Note: *Wayne, don't blame the messenger if the guys from -164 show up again, you asked for it!*)

♦ ♦ ♦

### To the Editor:

Bob and Mark:

As an intro, "Max" was one of my A-4 instructors at VMT-103 in Yuma in 1970. I am currently a director of the OV-10 Bronco Assoc. [www.ov-10bronco.net/](http://www.ov-10bronco.net/)). It has a new offshoot, the Forward Air Controller's Museum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FACMuseum/>), both based at Meacham Field in Ft. Worth, TX. Our mission is to preserve the FAC heritage and history since the days of hot-air balloons. We are obtaining various aircraft that either served as FAC platforms or were controlled by FACs. Currently, we have an O-1; O-2 (both restored and flying); two OV-10s (1 USAF & 1 USMC); an F-5E; a QF-4S and an F-14D (all these

planes have seen combat).

Among the planes we are working on getting "inbound" are a TF-102; a *Tornado*; an F-100; an A-4C (from Pensacola) and a TA-4 ("gate guard" from Carswell).

As with most startup outfits, we rely heavily on donated support (dollars and sweat equity). So, if you gents have any interest in helping us with the A-4s, please let me know.

Thanks and Semper Fi,  
Gordy "Hostage Bear" Evans  
707-253-7775

[evanspartners@starband.net]

(Ed. Note: *Gordy, keep up the good work, hopefully you'll hear from some A-4 guys.*)

♦ ♦ ♦

### To the Editor:

Bob,

Great article by Birdie. I was Tomcat #16 and had my picture along with my brother in same. Would absolutely love 10 copies or whatever you can send. Will pay. See you @ Tailhook in Sept.

Semper Fi,  
Bob Polhamus  
[rpolhamus@adelphia.net]

♦ ♦ ♦

### To the Editor:

On page 6 of the Winter 2007 issue, there was a letter to the editor, subject: Air Barons story concerning Buno 148446 (A4-L). Yes, he has the correct aircraft. My log book confirms at least three flights out of Glenview Naval Air Station: (1) July 26, 1970 a test flight for .7 hours. (2) Aug 1, 1970 an air show practice for 1.3 hours. (3) Dec 20, 1970, a test flight for .5.

I would like to hear from Bob Schneider and the A-4 LLLC group.

I further have a photo of 148446 as a tanker (photo taken by Harry Gann, McDonnell Douglas). At the time, I was the flight leader for the team.

Phil Lockard  
[cavu2@cox.net]

P.S. I have a request from my mother, (now 91 years old and you got to believe this one!) for four copies of the Quarterly, Fall 2006. She loves her son, even though she tried her best to keep me out of the AOC program. Now years later, she loves to tell her friends about her sleepless nights during those years.

(Ed. Note: *Phil, thanks for the feedback. We love to hear from our readers. We certainly don't want to get on your mother's bad side, so I'll get the copies in the mail to you later this week.*)

♦ ♦ ♦

### **To the Editor:**

David:

I just received Volume 13, Number 1. I love the cover photo and I look forward to reading all the articles. I'm looking forward to the A-4 reunion in April at MCAS Beaufort. I hope to meet you and several of the association officers at the reunion - should be fun!!!

Steve

[steve.janet.linder@gmail.com](mailto:steve.janet.linder@gmail.com)

P.S. The black frontal silhouette of the A-4 (used on the cover and at the beginning of each article) shows the bent refueling probe, the step/deflector below the port intake and the five stations, but is missing the bulges for the main landing gear (and the fuel dump mast) on the bottom of the wing between stations 2 & 3 and 3 & 4. Just thought you'd like to know!!

*(Ed. Note: Steve, hope you made the reunion, it was great, see Raven's review. As for the missing bulges and dump mast, remember this is only 30 bucks a year...)*

◆ ◆ ◆

### **To the Editor:**

After reading Al "C+9" Chesterman's account of translating an A-4 to Israel, I remembered an incident on our nugget cruise that he might wish to describe for

*The A-4Ever*. Al had a night launch where his airspeed indicator read zero at the end of the cat stroke (due to a mechanical problem with the pitot system). Al stayed with the plane and eventually made a safe landing (onshore, I think). I don't recall any other details but I'm sure that he does!! This story should make good reading ... and make us all glad that we no longer take night cat shots.

Mike Farmer

[\[mailto:sactogriz@yahoo.com\]](mailto:[mailto:sactogriz@yahoo.com])

*(Ed. Note: Al, we'll look for your article, but I bet most of us are already glad we don't take night cat shots anymore!)*

◆ ◆ ◆

### **To the Editor:**

Dear Ms. Bone,

I got your name from Warren Thompson, who said that you might be able to help me find out some information about my uncle, Lt. Charles (Chuck) Nelson, who flew A-4 *Skyhawks* during the 1960's. Chuck grew up near Cincinnati, Ohio, and was killed when his A-4 crashed, apparently in Nevada.

I say apparently because I recently learned that he may have flown numerous combat missions, but our family always believed that he was killed while in train-

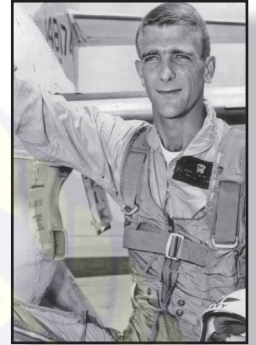
ing, and the family has no knowledge of any combat experience.

Chuck's service is really a mystery to his family (he had no wife or kids, and both my grandparents (his parents) have passed away. I have taken up an interest and would really like to correspond or speak with anyone who flew with Chuck or knew him. He apparently took quite a lot of photos while flying also.

My email address [mmulligan01@yahoo.com](mailto:mmulligan01@yahoo.com), and my phone numbers are 505-660-1672 and 505-474-3423.

Thanks for your help. If your association ever has a meeting, I might like to attend. Thanks again. Mike Mulligan Santa Fe, NM

*(Ed. Note: Did anyone serve with Chuck Nelson, shown here, during the 1960s?)*



◆ ◆ ◆

**Send your letter to  
[newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org)**

## **Responses to the Carrier Callsigns Contest**

### **To the Editor:**

Boom, *Saratoga's* call sign was "Fairfield" and she was also known as "60 from Dixie."

The "Bonnie Dick," during the sixties was not "Ocean Wave," but for the life of me, I can't remember her call sign.

Holly

[\[HollyNav@aol.com\]](mailto:[HollyNav@aol.com])

*(Ed. Note: Holly, welcome to the can't remember club...)*

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

I was a pilot in VA-94 during 1968 WESTPAC Cruise. *Bonnie Dick* call sign was "Rocket," not "Ocean Wave".

Best Wishes,

John Kuchinski

[\[mailto:Kuchinski16@msn.com\]](mailto:[mailto:Kuchinski16@msn.com])

*(Ed. Note: Okay, seems like we're two for two that Ocean Wave won't float.)*

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

In 1957, I was in Gitmo while the *Forrestal* was on her sea trials just south

of Leeward point. At that time her call sign was "Bullhorn"--same thing when I deployed in her with VF-103 (F-8As) in 1958/59.

During those years, the *FDR* was known as the "Foo Dee Roo."

Woody Cater

[\[mailto:wcater2@comcast.net\]](mailto:[mailto:wcater2@comcast.net])

*(Ed. Note: Woody, more info for Boom! Thanks.)*

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

If my memory is correct, CVA-60 *Saratoga* was "Fairfield."

Thanks....

George Blosser

[\[mailto:george.blosser@b2xonline.com\]](mailto:[mailto:george.blosser@b2xonline.com])

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

*Saratoga* call sign was "Fairfield". Also, *Ranger* was "Gray Eagle" (not Top Gun) when I was on her in 1967.

Dick Pottratz

[\[mailto:pottratz@sbcglobal.net\]](mailto:[mailto:pottratz@sbcglobal.net])

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

One of the nicknames for the *Lexington* when I was aboard and Captain Hilton was the ship's CO, was The "LEXINGTON HILTON".

Captain Bill Span USN (ret)

[\[mailto:wspan@cox.net\]](mailto:[mailto:wspan@cox.net])

*(Ed. Note: Okay, this is my personal favorite so far--Lexington Hilton. Great!)*

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

One of the carriers I flew off was the USS *Lake Champlain* (CVS 39). Call sign "Night Hawk," nickname "Champ." Flew Guppies off this straight deck. Very interesting.

Tom Taylor

[\[mailto:tpt6621@hotmail.com\]](mailto:[mailto:tpt6621@hotmail.com])

*(Ed. Note: Tom, how interesting? Tell us more.)*

\*\*\*

### **To the Editor:**

Add USS *Princeton* (CV-37), call sign "Passbook," nickname "Sweet Pea." Plus, I queried Bill McClendon,

## LETTERS

Continued...

CO of *Bon Homme Richard* in 1965. He stated the call sign was "Rocket," and this is what I recall.

Plus, plus: USS *Boxer* CV-21, call sign "Passbook." Don't know of a nickname.

Gene Tissot

[mailto:genet2@comcast.net]

\*\*\*

### To the Editor:

Attn: Boom/Bob

In 1953, I joined VS-21, flying AFs at North Island as a nugget. Our tail letters were BS. Needless to say, when calling for taxi there were predictable anonymous transmissions on ground control. In the early 1960s, in VA-112 flying A4D-2Ns on the maiden *Kitty Hawk* WestPac deployment, her call sign was "Crossfire," and *Ranger's* was "Spitfire."

Well done mag. Power on at the ramp.

Sam Latimer

[mailto:gryhound@cox.net]

(Ed. Note: Sam, thanks!)

\*\*\*

Send your letter to

[newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org).



## BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •



Try these on for size, and if you have an answer that fits, have a *real* feel-good day!



**Question 1:** What is hanging out the cockpit of this VA-192 A-4C in 1965?



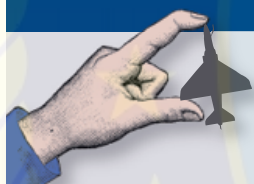
**Question 2:** What is the view "window" (small round Plexiglas port at the upper rear corner of the access plate above the center hinge) on the rudder for? (Contributed by SA researcher Gary Verver)



**Question 3:** How many AIM-9B Sidewinders could the Royal Australian Navy A-4G Skyhawk carry? (Contributed by Phil Thompson)



See Answers on Page 17.



## SIZE DOES MATTER

• Great New Skyhawk Models •

By Joe Turpen



This collection of U.S. Navy and Marine Skyhawks are by Randy Fuller of White Dog Productions.

Artist/modeler Carlos Garcia shared his scratch-built 1:17 scale model OA-4AR. Samples of his work can be found at <http://www.aviationart.com.ar>.

# READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

## Roger Ball!

By Donald E. Auten

New York Lincoln Shanghai: Universe, Inc. 2006  
414 pp

Reviewed by Mark Williams.

"*Roger Ball!*" To the naval aviator those words are like a comforting welcome home. Well, almost home. CONCENTRATE OR DIE might be another meaning, as he still has to work the ball to a successful controlled crash aboard the boat. Hearing them, as a former naval aviator, one begins to remember when....

The book "*Roger Ball!*" by Donald E. "Duck" Auten, is the story of John Monroe "Hawk" Smith, Navy fighter pilot. "Oh, no, not a fighter pilot," you say. But wait, there's more. He was also a RIO turned pilot, CAG LSO, VX-4 F-14 project officer, and CO of Top Gun.

The author, a VA-27 A-7 driver turned VFA/VFC adversary pilot and now retired, says he wanted to tell a true story about naval aviation, especially modern naval fighter aviation and its evolution. He also wanted to show "the exhilaration, feeling of accomplishment, and the rollicking fun of carrier aviation," as well as "the terror, anguish, and personal sacrifices of everyday heroes working in one of the world's most unforgiving and lethal environments." Finally, he hoped "to interest and motivate young adults to consider a career in the Navy."

Hawk's service had him in some way involved in determining the lessons of

the Vietnam air war, the introduction of the F-14 *Tomcat*, the largest and most expensive air combat evaluation in history (ACE-VAL/AIM-VAL); the initial trials of the FA-18; the evaluation of the AV-8A *Harrier* for an air-to-air role; an overhaul of fleet tactics training, and a renaissance in Navy TACAIR. The author concluded that telling Hawk's story was the way to achieve all of his objectives.

The book starts with a thrilling description of Hawk confronting an out-of-the-blue airborne emergency in an F-14 and his effort to get back aboard the boat, then resets to the formative years of his youth and how they led him to join the Navy in 1963.

The story follows him through the naval air training pipeline twice: first to become a RIO; then a pilot, with a fleet tour in *Phantoms* and a Med cruise at the end of each. There are dramatic descriptions of events and carrier aviation, complete with many anecdotes from Hawk about what happened and the people involved. He dives into the role of LSO, a critical one on the boat. As Hawk's experience grows, so does his dissatisfaction with ACM training and tactics. He is finally ordered to VX-4, the operational test and evaluation squadron for Navy fighters where he may get a chance to change things.

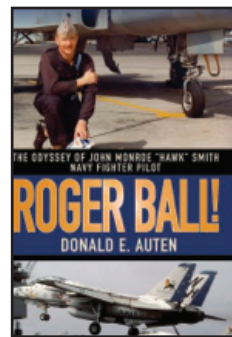
Assignments as CAG LSO and CO of Naval Fighter Weapons School (Top Gun) follow. The book states, "Hawk was one of many TOPGUN commanding

officers, but during TOPGUN's most tumultuous and epochal period, he was precisely the right man for the job." It was during this period that Naval TACAIR began to train as they would fight.

Complete with chapter notes, glossary, bibliography and a comprehensive index, "*Roger Ball!*" can serve as a primer on life as a naval aviator for any young person even remotely interested in naval aviation as an adventure or career. For the old salt, it's a good reference for reverie, or a way to show someone the way it was. For the *Scooter* driver, it's a splendid description of an A-4 Mongoose under the deft touch of Hawk (with slats unbolted) having its way with two F-14s.

The author succeeds in telling an exciting story of naval aviation, and Hawk's life and career certainly permitted covering a lot of bases. The book covers a lot of ground, thus limiting the depth of coverage of many things about which one might want to hear more. Similarly, being a biography that also attempts to tell the story of the development of modern fighter aviation, one doesn't get the depth of attachment to the main character one finds in a historical novel.

None-the-less, this is a story which will appeal to most naval aviators. Like the movie "Top Gun," this book will further convince the world that naval aviators don't have names, only call-signs. If you have a young son, better give him a great nickname now before the Navy gets a shot at it later.



## TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• [www.skyhawk.org](http://www.skyhawk.org) •

By David "Twidget" Weber, Skyhawk Association Webmaster

A new section has been added to the association's web site. A Vietnam War page is under construction, and can be accessed via the home page linked pages of "Navy Skyhawk Units," the "Marine Skyhawks Units," and "Skyhawks Around the World".

This new area will endeavor to provide an overview of the Skyhawk's role in that conflict and supplement the unit-specific data covering 1965-1972.

The pages involved are under construction, and will see continuous additions as the *A-4Ever* goes to print.

Twidget invites comments on how to format and utilize this area of the web site, and welcomes any information appropriate to the documentation of the Skyhawk's participation in Southeast Asia. AND of course that includes the drivers, and all those that made it possible for them to "light the fire," and carry the war to the enemy.

David Weber  
[webmaster@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:webmaster@a4skyhawk.org)

# THE TOMCATS OF MARINE ATTACK SQUADRON 311

1964 – 1966

By Col J.T. "Birdie" Bertrand



## Part 2 – The Tomcats Go to War

As you will remember: *When the VMA-311 Tomcats began to stabilize in September 1963, no one realized that they would be the last Marine A-4 squadron stabilized for deployment to Japan to be dedicated to the Single Integrated Operation Plan (SIOP). Nor did they realize this deployment would quickly lead to the expeditionary airfield in Chu Lai in response to the widening conflict in Vietnam. This is the Part II. Part I was published in The A-4Ever, Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 2007.*

Some 50 miles south of Da Nang, Chu Lai was just inland from a long bay on the South China Sea. The runway was about 500 meters from, and parallel to the beach, and was located in a long, flat dry lake bed – which turned into a shallow lake during the monsoons of October through December. The airfield was planned to be 8,000 feet long and 102 feet wide – constructed of aluminum planks, called M2 Matting. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 10 and engineers from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing labored to build the runway from May until mid-June; however,

only 3,700 feet of runway and one short taxiway had been completed by June 1. An arresting gear (MOREST) was installed to facilitate arrested landings. The final installation was properly called an expeditionary airfield.

VMA-311's advance party (which arrived by ship) pitched in and assisted MABS-12 in erecting tents on the sand for housing, as well as working areas for the two squadrons. Chu Lai living was rather primitive, at least in the beginning; but it was on the beach with cool breezes and damn few mosquitoes. Because it was not close to a large population, there wasn't much danger of attack. Plus, Marines had established good security around a wide perimeter (TAOR) of the base.

On June 1, four aircraft from VMA-225, led by Col Noble, CO of MAG-12, landed at Chu Lai. A four-plane element from VMA-311, led by LtCol Stender, was delayed one day at Cubi Point and landed at Chu Lai on June 2. The four aircraft were immediately refueled, armed and equipped with two Jet Assisted Take Off (JATO) bottles. Shortly thereafter, a flight of four aircraft, led

by Maj Parchen and consisting of three other pilots who had traveled to Chu Lai in the advance party (1<sup>st</sup> Lt Roy Stocking, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Dick Norris and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Gerry Madison), launched to strike Viet Cong forces attacking the city of Quang Ngai, 20 miles south of Chu Lai.

From the very beginning of flight operations at Chu Lai, there was a shortage of JP-5 on base. The solution was to make a JATO takeoff with ordnance, fly to a KC-130 airborne tanker, load up with fuel, go to the target, return to the tanker, and then land. The next flight would do it all over again. Within a few weeks the fuel "crisis" was over and more normal operations prevailed (especially after the runway was lengthened to 8000 feet).

JATO takeoffs became routine. So routine in fact, that when Chu Lai received a large batch of JATO bottles, no one thought to look at what kind of JATO bottles MAG-12 had received. The JATO bottles came in two types: 15 degree bottles and 30 degree bottles – the 30 degree bottles were designed for KC-130 aircraft.

Late one afternoon at dusk, an aircraft was loaded with one 15 degree bottle and one 30 degree bottle. When the bottles were fired during the takeoff roll, a sideways moment was created, sending 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Dick Jarrell's aircraft almost completely off the runway before getting airborne. The pilot radioed the tower and told them that something was terribly wrong, but the word never got passed to the squadrons.

Later that evening when it was completely dark, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Monty Doyel had the same thing happen; but that



The BOQ.



Be it ever so humble – Chu Lai from the air.

time, the aircraft did go off the runway, plowed through the dirt, hit the landing mirror, clipped off parts of the crash truck and ripped a drop tank to pieces, miraculously becoming airborne while dripping fuel all over the area. The difference in the two takeoffs was literally night and day – the pilot during the day could see and “caught” the relative motion. The pilot at night couldn’t see, and therefore could not react fast enough.

After flying around for 15 minutes and almost running out of JP, Lt Doyel was told he had to eject. His words were a discouraged, almost tearful, “Oh no!” He ejected in the dark at sea and was picked up by a helicopter. (The aircraft engine was left running at idle, because there had been a case in which an ejection seat had not fired and a power-on controlled crash landing is a better alternative than an uncontrolled one without an engine.) After his ejection, the *Skyhawk* continued to fly around aimlessly, and it was quite a dangerous air show for those watching from the beach at Chu Lai. The airplane had everyone looking up and ducking. Maj Speed Shea was airborne at the time and attempted to no avail to shoot the meandering plane down. The A-4 flew for 12-15 minutes after the ejection, eventually running out of fuel (or stalling) before it crashed in the South China Sea. Needless to say, flight operations ceased that evening until the problem with JATO bottles was figured out.

Throughout June, MAG-12 aircraft

continued to arrive at Chu Lai as revetment parking spaces and taxiways were developed on the airfield. The rear guard personnel of VMA-311 arrived from Cubi Point on 17 June. Elements of VMA-214 (Blacksheep) started arriving at Chu Lai on June 22. By that time, most of the full 8,000 feet of runway was available for takeoffs, and JATO was no longer necessary; however, almost all landings made use of the arresting gear (MOR-EST), requiring an LSO for every landing. With the Blacksheep in town, 60 aircraft were aboard Chu Lai.

The 8,000 foot runway didn’t last long because the ground on which the M2 matting had been laid was mostly sand. Within 90 days, the runway was cut in half, and the old section was torn up to allow backfill with a new sub-surface using red clay from the nearby hills. After that was accomplished, the runway was resurfaced with matting. Throughout the first 4-5 months at Chu Lai, the runway was a work in progress with sections being torn up and replaced or repaired on a continuing basis. Consequently, JATO takeoffs and arrested landings remained commonplace.

On August 10, four VMA-311 aircraft conducted a special strike in the



1<sup>st</sup> Tomcat combat mission after arriving from Cubi Point.  
L-R: Roy Stocking, Jack Parchen, Dick Norris, Gerry Madison.

Northern I Corps area, marking the first use of CBU munitions (cluster bomb units) by Marine forces.

From August 18-24, 1965, MAG-12 aircraft participated in Operation STARLIGHT, in support of a 7th Marines amphibious-heliborne search and destroy operation south of Chu Lai. This very successful operation was recognized by a Presidential Unit Citation for MAG-12 squadrons.

On September 19, 1965, Col Leslie E. Brown took command of MAG-12, replacing Col John Noble.

During October, VMA-225 pilots assigned to the SIOP mission at Iwakuni reached their milestone of one year of overseas time and returned on individual orders to CONUS. Newly arrived pilots of VMA-224 took over their airplanes. On October 15, the first elements of VMA-211 began arriving at Chu Lai. When that movement was complete, four squadrons and eighty airplanes were on the base: VMA-311, VMA-214, VMA-211 and VMA-224.

In the early hours of October 28, ten to twelve Viet Cong penetrated the TAOR and attacked the flight line at Chu Lai, where they were engaged by members of the crash crew and MAG-12 security forces. Eight VC were killed. The VC attackers managed to totally destroy three MAG-12 aircraft and damage several others. VMA-311 suffered only minor damage.

Monsoon rains – totaling 30 inches per month – settled in at Chu Lai from October through December. The rains contributed heavily to the

*continued...*



Lyle Prouse in his suite. Officers lived eight to a tent.

# TOMCATS

Continued...

rapid erosion of the red clay foundation that the aluminum runway was laid upon. Runway conditions became very poor, and everything on or near the runway was covered with an ugly coating of brownish red mud.

In November, the Tomcats began participating in both day and night "classified" operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. The heavily fortified positions of radar-controlled anti-aircraft artillery – the "Guns of Tchepone" – made that location a foreboding, unpopular and dangerous target

area. From November through February, the squadron started receiving Mk. 4 gun pods, which greatly helped MAG-12 execute close air support (CAS) missions.

On November 25, 1965, LtCol Jack Harris replaced LtCol Bernard Stender as CO of VMA-311. The XO, Major Jack Parchen (The Black Tortilla), left the squadron to become the CO of MABS-12.

During this period, all the squadrons at Chu Lai went through personnel reassignments (especially pilots) from top to bottom, in order to facilitate smoother transitions for aircrews when their rotation date came up (based on one year in combat). The intent was to spread the combat experience level in each squadron, to facilitate the assignment of replacement pilots when they began to arrive.

During December 1965, VMA-311 rotated out of country to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, for a planned thirty days of refitting and a well-deserved rest and recuperation (R&R) period. The period stretched to sixty days total. For the rotation, the squadron traded their A-4E aircraft for A-4Cs, because the more capable "E" model was needed in country. When the squadron left Chu Lai for Japan, the "frozen" squadron concept in the Marine Corps, as VMA-311 had experienced it, came to an end.

VMA-223 replaced VMA-311 at Chu Lai when the Tomcats departed for Iwakuni –leaving MAG-12 with a full complement of eighty airplanes and four squadrons. That rotation set up the future R&R schedule for all A4 squadrons assigned to MAG-12.

During the personnel reassignments, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Lyle Prouse, an original member of VMA-311 who had been transferred to VMA-223, was tapped by BGen Marion Carl to be his *aide-de-camp*. Lyle and the general eventually became life-long friends.

While at Iwakuni, the squadron took advantage of the Japanese culture and planned a skiing trip to Miho (Mt. Daisen). Led by the new squadron CO



*Who can ever forget? The smell of s . . t burning in the morning!*

LtCol Jack Harris, 25 Tomcats conned an MCAS Iwakuni C-47 pilot to fly the squadron to Miho and pick them up three days later. The squadron went BIG, and rented TWO rooms at the mountain-top lodge. People slept on futons, thirteen to a room, with a couple of guys sleeping in hall closets. The trip was planned as an opportunity to break a leg, arm or whatever, in order to stay in Japan and not return to Vietnam. The maintenance officer, Maj Don "Digger" Rowe, actually broke his leg and spent the duration of his overseas tour at Iwakuni. He visited the New Manhattan and Sorrento Bars in Iwakuni every night – just to show off his cast and make everyone think he was some kind of war hero!

During the time VMA-311 was in Iwakuni, VMA-211 suffered its first combat casualty when 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Tom Eldridge was killed on December 29, 1965. Eldridge had transferred to VMA-211 from VMA-311 during the aircrew reassignments and was still in country. He was hit by .50 cal. ground fire while on a strike south of Chu Lai. Severely wounded, he attempted to return to the airfield but crashed about 12 miles south of Chu Lai.

Following 60 days rest, LtCol Jack Harris led the squadron back to Chu Lai on February 15, 1966, and VMA-214 flew off to Iwakuni for their R&R. Two hours after LtCol Harris landed, he and his wingman were refueled, rearmed and launched on a mission. The Tomcats were back!

For the rest of 1966, it was business as usual: two hops a day. Slowly, more replacement pilots started to appear;

## The Tomcats in 1964-66:

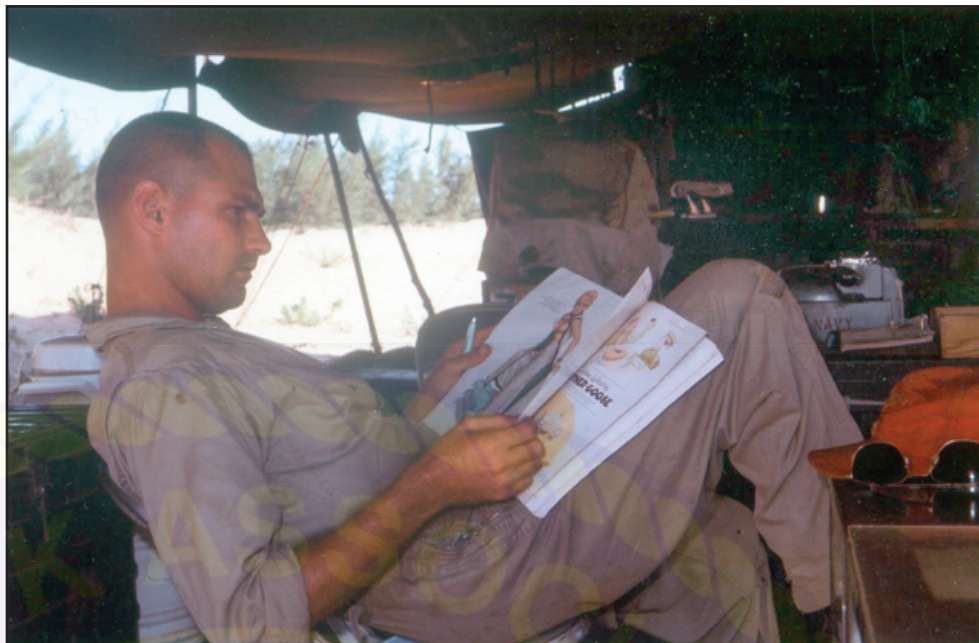
1. LtCol Bernard E. Stender (CO)
2. Maj Jack Parchen (XO)
3. Maj Speed F. Shea (OpsO)
4. Maj Donald L. Rowe (MaintO)
5. Capt Leonard T. Preston (ASO)
6. Capt George C. Psaros (Logistics)
7. Capt Cary Watkins (Admin)
8. Capt Miles Mixson
9. Capt Anthony Capozza
10. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Rod Daley
11. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Richard L. Norris
12. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Gerald Madison
13. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Brendan McKay Greeley
14. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Thomas K. Griffith
15. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Roy Stocking
16. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Robert Polhamus
17. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Monty Doyel
18. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Lyle Prouse
19. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Kirby Schnell
20. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Steve Sewell
21. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Eugene J. Shea
22. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Thomas Eldridge
23. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Richard L. Johnson
24. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Bill Burg
25. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Augusto Maria Xavier
26. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Thomas Hampton
27. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Jerome T. Bertrand
28. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Ellard B. Jarrell

### Ground Officers:

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Don Stone
2. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Robert Nieuman
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Aram Najarian
4. CWO-3 William Wenglare
- Flight Surgeon: Navy Lt Lowell T. "Zeke" Niebaum
- Sgt Major: SgtMaj Adam

new living quarters (hard-back tents) went up; several new hangars capable of holding 1-2 airplanes were erected; hard-back working spaces with plywood floors were constructed; the runway was permanently extended to 8000 ft. (shortened only occasionally); the chow hall was going good and so was the food; a barber shop was established; and facilities and creature comforts, in general, were getting better. The war was becoming more routine. There was a rumor that construction was planned for a new 12,000 foot concrete runway about 1 mile west of Chu Lai; however, the members of the “frozen” VMA-311 would never see that construction begin.

On March 10, 1966, the original contingent of VMA-311 suffered another combat loss when 1st Lt Gus Xavier was killed about 80 miles west of Da Nang. He was on a mission in support of an outpost of U.S. Special Forces and ARVN troops in the A Shau Valley which was under heavy attack. According to his citation: “Xavier, the leader of a two-plane flight from Chu Lai, arrived over the camp in predawn darkness and ordered his wingman to orbit above the cloud cover. Xavier descended through the overcast under the glow of parachute flares dropped by an Air Force C-130. He maneuvered his Skyhawk around the mountains and made a low-level bombing pass on the enemy positions. In the face of heavy



Cary Watkins, studying his NATOPS prior to ready room quiz. NATOPS?

ground fire, he made a second pass, this time strafing the NVA with 20 mm. cannon fire. Xavier failed to pull out and crashed into the side of a mountain. For his actions, Lieutenant Xavier was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.”

Up until that time, (considering “unit” integrity), VMA-311 had not lost a single pilot. Most every pilot in MAG-12 considered the Chu Lai runway to be the greatest hazard to aviation they had ever seen, or were likely to ever see again.

By late April 1966, the Marines who had deployed with VMA-311 to Japan, and then to Vietnam, were beginning to find their way home. The last original VMA-311 pilot left Chu Lai for CONUS on April 25, 1966.

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(Ed. Note: The Vietnam War was far from over for the Tomcats. The squadron left country for the last time on 27 January 1973, having flown a total of 54,625 combat sorties, dropping 105,000 tons of ordnance during the conflict. CO LtCol John Caldas dropped the last -311 bomb in country.)

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Note: About the author: following flight school, Col J. T. “Birdie” Bertrand joined VMA 311 as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. After his tour at Chu Lai, he returned to civilian life and became a pilot for Continental Airlines. Birdie stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve and retired with 31 years service, having flown almost every model of the A4. With BGen Jay Hubbard, Col Bertrand helped organize the MCAS El Toro Historical Foundation which gave birth to the Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum, now located at MCAS Miramar. Col Bertrand wrote this piece in February 2005. Bill Burg, Tony Capozza, Jack Harris, Dick Jarrell, Jack Parchen, Lyle Prouse, Don Rowe, Kirby Schnell, Steve Sewell, Speed Shea, Roy Stocking, and Cary Watkins contributed.



Speed Shea in the Operations tent – scratching his head and trying to figure out why he joined the Marine Corps.

# PURESOME UNPLUGGED

## • YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

### Way Up North

All Puresome knew was that the Cao Nung bridge was way up North.

"Way up North" meant lots of feet dry time, stooging around at low altitude over North Viet Nam, and lots of opportunity for Ol' Gomer to fling SAMs and Flaks and MiGs at Happy Alpha Strikers trying to blow up their bridge. At this stage of the game, Puresome understood it involved a certain amount of peril to the sanctity of his beautocks.

#### Nouc Maum Supply Line

Located between Hanoi and commie China, the bridge was part of the Nouc Maum supply pipeline, vital to the North Vietnamese war effort. Word had come to the airwing from the highest levels for "Brave Amurican Boys" to disassemble the bridge with extreme prejudice. Piles of computer printouts, staff studies, and frag orders distilled into a squadron flight schedule with Puresome's name on it.

The big picture was a maximum air wing effort laid on to place an obscene number of big bombs in close enough vicinity of the target to mathematically insure that the bridge and its approaches would be severely cratered, thus interrupting the flow of fish sauce to the enemy. The small picture was Puresome having an extreme attack of the chickenshits.

The reason was the new guy in the game called Mr. SAM. While the airwing was off in Hong Kong buying out the China Fleet Club and comporting itself with zest, all those SAM sites that MacNamara's minions had watched so carefully had gotten built and Surprise! Surprise! Started shooting down Yankee Air Pirates with abandon. The thing was, they were a new, unknown, James Bond infallible space-age threat, and Puresome was blinded by science. He did not yet know if he could out jink some electronic genius robot telephone pole with his name on it. Looking at all the red, twenty-five mile SAM range circles that his Alpha Strike would pass through on the threats briefing chart in the Integrated Operational Intelligence Center, he knew he would probably get to see the Elephant and its

long, yellow teeth.

The air wing briefing in the I.O.I.C. filled the space with a seeming cast of a thousand Big Hats, briefers of all sorts, grim-faced aircrew, and intelligence pogues. Complex, multi-colored diagrams

**"The thing was, they were a new, unknown, James Bond infallible space-age threat, and Puresome was blinded by science. He did not yet know if he could out jink some electronic genius robot telephone pole with his name on it."**

on butcher paper were displayed on easels, and computer banks whirled and gleeped in the background. The Alpha Strike was being led by a division of Sunday Punchers A-6s, carrying five mk-84 2,000 pound bombs; two divisions of A-4Es from the Sidewinders and Blue Hawks, carrying a 2,000 pounder on the centerline station; two 300 gallon drop tanks, and two 500 pound bombs on the outboard stations. The Black Aces would provide four Fox Fours for flak suppression, and the Jolly Rogers would provide TARCAP MiG protection. Because the distance was so great, two A-3 Whales would in-flight refuel the A-4s as well as the Phantoms enroute to the target. Then there were the usual RESCAP and wet-wing A-4s, BARCAP Phantoms, Fudds, ECM A-3s, and the RA-5C to swoop by and take commemorative eight-by-ten glossy pictures of the whole post-strike mess.

#### Mr. SA-2's Envelope

Puresome listened intently as the Intruder leader described the navigation to the target. After refueling and transiting the Gulf at 22,000 feet, a descent would be started for the strike group to go feet dry just north of Haiphong at an altitude of 3500 feet above ground level, which would be maintained until pop-up at the target. After Mr. SA-2 the SAM had recently started shooting down U.S. aircraft with some regularity, Alpha Strike tactics had changed from steaming in at altitude and sixty degree bomb runs to a 3500

foot above ground ingress, which would theoretically keep the aircraft above most of the rocks and small-arms ground fire directed at them from below, and situate the aircraft theoretically just below the SAM envelope.

Puresome was happy enough to be down in the weeds, which was the Scooter's natural habitat; what he didn't care for particularly was popping a heavily loaded A-4 up to around twelve thousand feet in SAM country for a low-speed roll-in over the top to get into a forty-five degree dive bomb run on the target. Phantom flak-suppressors could stroke the burners to zoom to altitude; Intruders had two engines and

a big, fat wing to get them to roll-in; high and slow was A-4 grape city. And Youthly was definitely anti-grape.

On the other hand, there was a really nice bridge to blow up.

#### Flight Deck

As always, Puresome was glad when all the briefing and sitting around trussed up in flight gear was finally interrupted by the chatter of the teleprompter ordering the pilots for the 1100 launch to man their planes. Waddling out of Ready Room Four-Starboard and up the long escalator that took him from below the hangar deck in the constricted, fluorescent-lit innards of the ship to the flight deck, he was grateful to step out into the catwalk and the real world of sunlight, sky, wind, steam, and the particular excitement of flags snapping on their halyards, the movement of men and machines on the flight deck, and the slow heave of the dark sea around him.

The aircraft on the crowded flight deck came to life in their turns; aircraft and ordnance checks were completed, and squadron personnel scurried out of the way with their gear and aircraft tie-down chains. Puresome held his brakes and watched the yellow-shirted taxi director as the Foxtrot flag ran up its halyard and the great flight deck healed over as the captain turned the carrier into the wind, and the first aircraft whoshed off the waist and forward catapults. The yellow shirt finally started giving hand signals, and

Puresome carefully followed his directions, joining the elephant parade to the forward catapults.

### Launch: Ready!

After being successively passed through several other yellow shirts, Puresome was positioned just behind the jet blast deflector for the number two catapult, which was the starboard twin of two shuttle tracks that ran from just forward of the antennae-bristling, office-building superstructure of the "Island" on up to the bow of the ship. As the aircraft in front of him was being positioned on the catapult, a sailor in goggles and Mickey Mouse helmet came up to the port side of his cockpit and held up a chalk board with his airplane's expected gross weight written on it. As part of his preflight planning, Puresome had tallied up the weight of the basic airplane, fuel, tanks, bombs, 20mm ammunitions, and minus the weight of his perspiration and nervous last pees. This was important, because the gross weight was cranked into the steam catapults so they would fire the aircraft into the air with enough speed to make it fly. The chalkboard figure was some three hundred pounds too low, and Puresome made upward gestures with the palm of his left hand. The sailor erased the first figure and added an automatic increment of five hundred pounds and scribbled it on the chalkboard. Puresome gave him a thumbs-up in agreement, figuring the extra thump the few extra pounds would make to the catapult setting would not rip the attachment points off his aircraft, and, after all, as the Child Bride maintained, more was always better. Other flight deck handlers attached a long, metal tiller bar to the nose wheel of the A-4 to position the airplane for the last tricky few feet critical to proper catapult alignment.

The aircraft in front of him whooshed down the catapult track in a roar of noise and steam. As the great metal barrier of the jet blast deflector lowered in front of him, Puresome locked onto the signals of the flight director and carefully used his throttle to slowly move the aircraft forward, foot by careful foot, the yellow shirt talking to him with tiny hand signals, holding brakes evenly while a crew of sailors underneath the aircraft attached the bridle that connected the catapult shuttle to the wing root and a dogbone-shaped holdback fitting back by the arresting hook that was made to hold back the A4, straining at takeoff power, until the force of the catapult stroke broke the weak

middle of the fitting, and allowed the aircraft to hurtle down the catapult track at the designed pressure.

### Aim!

Very, very slowly, Puresome added power for his nosewheel to go up and over the catapult shuttle, careful not to come down the front side fast enough to jerk the holdback fitting and possibly weakening or breaking it, which would be poor form, since the whole procedure would have to be repeated, causing a delay in the launch and much yelling by the Captain of the

**"Puresome was squarely against bugging things up, especially if it involved possible accusations of Wuss-dom. Figuring that it might be close, but he'd deal with it later, Puresome decided he would press on. But his gas gage was never far from his mind."**

Boat, who was watching the launch from his glass office high in the island.

The tow-bar was disconnected and a squadron quality control final checker in a black and white jersey rapidly moved around the airplane in a last look at anything wrong with the airplane. Sidewinder 411 looked good, and the checker gave a thumbs-up to the catapult officer and hustled out of the way.

The catapult officer pointed his finger at Puresome with his left hand and made a two-finger twirling gesture above his head with his right hand, which was the signal for the pilot to run his throttle to full power. Puresome shoved the throttle forward with his left hand and checked his engine instruments. Satisfied, he made a final control check with the stick; then, he looked at the catapult officer, who was still pointing at him and twirling two fingers. Puresome saluted him, put his head back against the headrest. He locked his left elbow to keep the throttle pushed to full throttle with his left hand, and he dropped his right hand to his crotch, his fingers spread toward the stick. He braced himself, looking straight ahead while the aircraft roared and shook at full power, awaiting the pleasure of the catapult officer.

The catapult officer returned Youthly's salute, and still whirling his right hand above his head, pointed his left finger to clear in succession the aircraft area and the catapult track, before pointing to the sailor who would actually punch the catapult firing button and had both hands in

the air as a signal that all was still well in that department, and then pointing finally, back to the aircraft itself.

### Fire!

Satisfied, he knelt and swept his right hand forward and down, as a signal to fire the catapult. The sailor manning the catapult launch station dropped his hands and punched the firing button. Sidewinder 411 squatted under the huge pull of the catapult shuttle; the holdback fitting broke, and the A-4 roared down the catapult track in a cloud of steam.

"Unhhhhhhh!" Puresome grunted under the force of the stroke. His vision blurred, and he grabbed the control stick as it moved aft to his waiting hand, and he held the stick in this position. Suddenly, the force released him and Puresome found himself flying.

### Options

Once again, the system had worked, and he had not heard the warning tone that his squadron had wired into the altitude bug on the radar altimeter and that Youthly routinely set at thirty feet for launch. If that tone came on while he was still more or less blind from the force of the catapult, he had the choice of cleaning off his external stores with the emergency T-handle and hoping that he would then fly; or holding the stick with his right hand and pulling the secondary ejection handle between his legs and shelling out of the airplane. A successful catapult launch always made Puresome remember the old saying, "Being catapulted off a carrier was the next best thing to actual sex, provided the launchee had not been circumcised..."

Puresome rolled into a starboard clearing turn as he retracted his landing gear; then, he rolled back to the Foxtrot Corpen, the ship's launch heading, and let the aircraft accelerate. Approaching two hundred knots, he retracted the flaps and continued to accelerate out in front of the ship. Finally, at ten miles, he turned port and started his climb to the squadron rendezvous altitude. *continued...*

# PURESOME

Continued...

## Gas 'n Go

The ship completed the launch; the aircraft assembled into squadrons, and the squadrons took their places in the strike formation. Following the A-6s, the Alpha Strike headed north up the Gulf of Tonkin. Almost immediately, the F-4s started refueling from the port A-3 *Whale* tanker, and the A-4s began tanking from the starboard *Whale*.

Since the *Intruders* didn't need any gas and Youthly's division was next in formation behind the A-6s, they were the first A-4s to tank. The four Snake aircraft lined up in left echelon on the *Whale's* port side and abeam the refueling drogue. Youthly watched Skip Lead slide over behind the drogue, sneak up and stab his refueling probe into the basket and begin to take on fuel. When he had received his fuel, he backed out and moved over to a station on the starboard side of the *Whale*.

Puresome was next, so he slid over below and behind the basket. Looking up through the top of his windscreen, he stabilized his position momentarily, then added a little bit of power and started moving up and in toward the basket. As his refueling probe got close, the airflow around the nose of the A-4 moved the basket out to the right; but Youthly had expected the movement and guided the probe into the middle of the basket, where it coupled with the refueling fitting. Slowly, he pushed about three ring-marks on the hose back into the belly of the *Whale* and awaited the amber standby light at the base of the hose to go out, and the green light, indicating transfer, to go on.

## Or not...

But it didn't happen. Flying close formation underneath the *Whale's* aluminum overcast belly, Puresome pushed the hose in further, then backed out some and pushed again. No fuel. He cycled his aircraft switches and again, no fuel. Finally, with the rest of the world waiting behind him, he backed out and joined Skip lead on the *Whale's* starboard side. The next aircraft slid into position, and took fuel! Puresome acknowledged that the problem was with his aircraft and decided to hell with it. Since the air wing was Ziplip, he couldn't yack about it on the radio; while he could probably use hand signals to

indicate his problem more or less to Skip lead, it would bugger things up. Puresome was squarely against buggering things up, especially if it involved possible accusations of Wuss-dom. Figuring that it might be close, but he'd deal with it later, Puresome decided he would press on. But his gas gage was never far from his mind.

## Feet Dry

With tanking finished, the two *Whales* and the TARCAP fighters departed, and the A-6s led a great arrowhead of aircraft north above the junk fleet fishing in the Gulf of Tonkin. A RESCAP helicopter pilot on the North SAR destroyer watched the strike pass the sky overhead and wondered what the afternoon would bring.

The karst islands north of Haiphong loomed up in the distance, and the *Intruder* leader started a slow descent from altitude, heading toward the land. Puresome turned on his gunsight and set up his ordnance switches.

**"Puresome didn't bust his ass pulling the heavily-loaded A-4 out of his dive, but there were airplanes everywhere racing around in different directions, trying to avoid SAMs, the ground, mid-air, and now, flak! Gomer was shooting and there were tracers and angry flak bursts everywhere."**

The formation divisions loosened up, and the two flak suppresser *Phantoms* on either side checked ahead with their radars. As the strike went feet dry over lava-like limestone karst hills at thirty-five hundred feet, funny gawps and gleeps from enemy radars painting them were sounding in Puresome's headset, joining the usual gabble from various Guard channel warnings. Youthly had hacked his stop clock crossing the coast for timing to the target, but he had decided to let the *Intruders* do the close navigation and mostly concentrated on moving his airplane around, watching everywhere for threats, and not running into anyone. The country turned flat and brown and green for anyone who had time to care.

## Bogeys! ...not

Youthly's first reaction to the two specks fast approaching the strike group from three o'clock slightly high was "Holy Shit! Here come the MiGs!" He just managed to stuff his heart back down in his chest to make the bogey call when he recognized the familiar, shark shape of the

airplanes; and two *Oriskany* F-8s sliced by above, trolling for MiGs and checking them out. Puresome always felt like a fat sheep in formation, and he envied the fighters their freedom.

## Dirty Orange Clouds

"Strike group from *Puncher One*, push 'em up!" the *Intruder* lead called for the group to accelerate to 450 knots for the run-in to the target. Puresome clobbered his throttle and maneuvered to maintain his formation position as Skip lead moved the division of A-4s in loose trail of the *Intruders*; and the Blue Hawk division eased in trail of the Snakes.

Puresome was bouncing along at 450 knots with the ground whipping by and the initial point for the bomb run approaching, when a great, dirty orange cloud appeared between his division of A-4s and the leading A-6s. "Damn!" he thought perplexedly, "that must be at least a 150 millimeter flak gun to make an

explosion that big!"

He was still thinking about that when he saw four contrails streaking toward aircraft high at twelve o'clock. Someone called "Guntrain TARCAP! SAMs! SAMs! BREAK! BREAK!" And immediately, more dirty, orange clouds appeared in the middle of the strike group, and its cohesion fell apart completely as airplanes frantically dove to the deck. As Puresome rolled inverted and dived, a streak the size of a telephone pole whizzed through his peripheral vision.

Puresome didn't bust his ass pulling the heavily-loaded A-4 out of his dive, but



SA-2 launch: telephone pole-sized missiles

there were airplanes everywhere racing around in different directions, trying to avoid SAMs, the ground, mid-air, and now, flak! Gomer was shooting and there were tracers and angry flak bursts everywhere.

### Pipper & Pickle

Things began to sort themselves out. Puresome realized that the dam and little lake he and other aircraft were racing around was the Initial Point to bomb the bridge. He knew where he was and where the target was, and strike aircraft were at least beginning to circulate in the

had just put his pipper on the bridge when it disappeared in the explosion of at least five 2000 pound bombs. Puresome pressed on and pickled, bombing the smoke.

### Water Buffalo Level

But the 2000 pounder on his center-line station had not thunked off with the other two bombs, and Puresome mused through his customary seven-G pull-out. YAAAAA! Leaving the throttle clobbered, he headed for the Gulf as fast and as low as he could go.

The rest of the strike group was bombing and streaking for the Gulf, too,

cause, at least scaring the crap out of a gomer or two. Puresome popped up to five hundred feet, spied a ville up ahead that had a couple of trucks in it. He stuck his nose down in a ten degree napalm run and jettisoned the bomb with his emergency T-handle in what he hoped was their immediate vicinity.

### Gas Fumes

A Blue Hawk had punched out somewhere behind him, but Puresome was in no condition to help. The downed pilot's beeper wailed dejectedly in his headset. And above him, SAM was still searching.

Approaching the coast, Puresome joined another Blue Hawk A-4, and they egressed in combat spread formation, heads swiveling, not being real sure of how close to Haiphong their mad dash had taken them. They were well out over the water before they felt safe enough to climb and check each other out for unwanted holes in their aircraft.

And Puresome climbed as high as he could and poked along at maximum range airspeed until he could make an idle descent to a straight-in approach and trap to Guntrain. His A4 was too light to fly, but he fluttered along and trapped anyway. He shut the aircraft down up on the port side forward, indicating a fume in his gas tank.

*Later, over medicinal brandy in his stateroom, Puresome pondered the lessons of the day: SAMs didn't necessarily kill you. And it's all right to be scared shitless if you can regroup. And if you are scared shitless long enough, your voice isn't even falsetto when you call the ball with gas fumes.*

**"Although he now realized that you didn't necessarily automatically die when SAMs came after you, he figured that was enough for one day and he'd take his chances and stay below the SAM envelope, thank you."**

same direction. Puresome had the throttle safety-wired in the 100 per cent position, and he built up as much speed as he could. When Puresome saw a couple of A-6s start to zoom climb, popping up to make their attack, he pulled the nose up and zoomed to follow them back up into the SAM envelope.

Sure enough, the bridge was where it was supposed to be; and as Puresome slowly rolled inverted at the top of his climb and began his dive, in the instant before the preceding A-6s bombs struck, he had a crystal clear, frozen-in-time picture of a man on a bicycle in the middle of the bridge. But then he was diving and

individually and in little groups. Puresome was alone, going at the speed of stink at water buffalo level--he would take his chances with rocks and arrows. Although he now realized that you didn't necessarily automatically die when SAMs came after you, he figured that was enough for one day and he'd take his chances and stay below the SAM envelope, thank you.

But all that stooging around at low altitude and full throttle had put a dent in his already meager gas supply, and Puresome still had a long way to go. And there was that pesky 2000 bomb on his centerline, which certainly didn't help his drag count any. So he decided to donate it to a good

## Puzzle Answers:

**Answer 1:** To keep the canopy from banging against the stops and damaging the hinges when open, a nylon strap was rigged in the squadron with a loop that fit over the hook on the edge of the canopy and held it down an inch or two.



**Answer 2:** It allowed the rudder snubber/damper to be checked, and checking it was part of the pre-flight. How many plane captains or pilots actually walked back there straddling the vertical fin and hopped onto one of the elevators to check it? Damn few plane captains and fewer pilots would be my guess.



**Answer 3:** Four, one on each under-wing pylon. The A-4G was specifically modified (compared to the F model on which it was based) to carry the extra Sidewinders to be able to fulfill the role of "poor man's" fleet defence. Hence, the embarked squadron of A-4Gs on HMAS Melbourne carried the designation VF-805.

## Puzzle Questions:

*If you have forgotten the questions, return to page 8 and look for these photos.*

# A-4 GLIDER

**Disclaimer: the names of the guilty participants are changed for obvious reasons.**

By Denny West.



Mid-winter of 1984, I was a Marine Reserve pilot flying an oldie but goodie, the A-4F Superfox *Skyhawk*. With the turtle-back hump empty, and stripped down, the Superfox was a hotrod. The VMA-142 (Gators – Cecil Field, FL) were on an ACM Det at Eglin AFB, working with the F-15 school to allow the Eagle Instructors to practice DACM (Dis-similar Air Combat Maneuvering) on the air combat maneuvering range (ACMR) out over the Gulf of Mexico. The deal was that the USAF would provide the gas (JP4) for free if the Marines would bring their A4s. It was a wonderful det. The jets were mostly up, the weather typical North Florida winter (cool and clear); and with two challenging ACM flights a day against the F-15 instructors, it was sweet!

My “glider” event started off innocently enough. Since I was a PMCF pilot (Post Maintenance Check Flight), I was stuck with running a broken A-4F back to Cecil Field and swapping it for another. OK, can do easy. At least I had an afternoon ACM flight.

Ordinarily this wouldn't have been much of a problem. It isn't far from Eglin AFB to Cecil in Jacksonville, FL. But as of late, the Florida Gators were getting beat up in the air by the F-15s. The Air Force had finally started to use the F-15 to its full advantage, although at this time they still liked to slow down for a fur-ball knife fight. Don't get me wrong. The A4F Superfox was a hot rod, and the Gators were all high time reservists. We were not used to hearing the ACMR range controller say: “Red Two, you're dead” (the F-15s were Blue)...we were used to winning. So, one of our nameless flight leads came up with a “PLAN to WIN.”

The strategy worked like this: we would brief a 2V2 with the Air Force and show up with three A-4s. Or, we would brief a 2V1 and bring four A-4s. We did this more than once. Dave and Bill briefed an early 2V2 with the F-15 instructors, while I planned to take off with the “broken” A-4 on a DD175 to Cecil with a delay enroute. I took off and

hung around off the end of the runway and watched as the two F-15s climbed out to the range. Next came the A-4s, and I joined up with Dave and Bill as they climbed out. The Air Force didn't know it yet, but we now had a 2V3 going. Hey, anything goes as long as you win - right?

The A-4 flight split to combat spread, and I stayed tucked in close to lead so the *Eagles* couldn't break us out on radar. Their radar only “saw” two A-4s. The plan worked like a charm. On the engaging pass, the *Eagles* went over us about 6k high and saw that there were three of us instead of the briefed two. As the Red flight A-4s pitched back into the engagement, I rolled on my back and split S'ed out of the fight reaching Mach 1 + (clean ship) in the dive as I bugged out over the water to the northeast and Cecil Field. The F-15s in the nose high pitch back didn't see me leave. Later Dave told me it was pretty funny. The F-15s never would commit, since they had SEEN the third A-4 and just knew that trailer A-4 was on their six. So the A4s chased the F-15s all

80 miles out, JAX Center said, “Mike Bravo 12, you are cleared to descend and switch to Cecil Tower.” Wow. I thought there must not be any traffic, as I pulled power to about 76-78%

and pointed the nose at Cecil. With about 1800# fuel remaining, I had just enough to land with +1100#. In a decent like this, I was in the habit of pulling power back, not all the way to idle, but just far enough back so that as the air density increased in the decent, the engine would wind back up to about 95%. With a good bit of speed, I wouldn't have to touch the throttle until the break.

It was early Sunday morning, before 8 a.m. Cecil Tower hadn't talked to anyone since late Friday afternoon when the cross country flock had left. A single A-4 inbound asking for a carrier break wasn't too exciting (the Sunday paper sports section was not yet finished). I was smoking (680 + comes to mind, but the numbers get crowded up that end of the dial), a clean, empty A-4 right at *Mach*, as I approached the break, a little low, but who was checking?

As the outboard runway (36) came into sight, I was just thinking about pulling the throttle to idle when the engine

“‘Mayday, Mayday, MB-12 flame out.’ Later, I imagined the tower folks with the Sunday papers flying, coffee cups upsetting as they hit the crash alarm. Talk about a Sunday morning wake-up call.”

over the range - never quite able to corner the *Eagles*, until they ran out of gas and “bingoed.” During the debrief, the Blue flight was crushed to hear the third A4 had left in the engaging turn. We had been briefing 2V2 and showing up with three or four, and the *Eagle* guys had gotten wise to that program. The extra A-4 leaving was a new twist.

Once clear of the ACMR range, I activated my DD-175 and was cruising east at FL 250 on a glorious Sunday morning. Early February, cold and clear, the air was absolutely dead still. It was right after a cold front had swept through north Florida. It was like skating on clear ice. *Smoooooth*. At flight level cruise about

started to unwind. It unwound **All the Way**. I thought:

1. It is amazing how quiet it is in the cockpit when the engine isn't running (except for the crying and screaming, of course).

2. With those big intakes just behind your shoulders, it is amazing how fast the A-4 decelerates when the engine isn't running.

“*Cripes*,” I thought, as I was hanging in the straps as MB-12 decelerated, “*What's wrong with this XZDXW thing?*” I started a low *G* pull, up and out to the left of the traffic landing pattern. “*Damn*,” I thought as I watched the rpm run down

to about 10%. *I can't believe what I'm seeing: Flame out.* As the engine ran down below 42%, the electrical generator had dropped off the main bus. I extended the RAT (ram air turbine) and up came the emergency power.

I gingerly pulled the throttle back to idle and then to cutoff. I shifted the fuel control from auto to manual, hit the igniters and came around the horn to idle. It was so quiet I could hear the igniters popping and the low whumph as the engine lit off and started to spin up. I breathed a sigh of relief as the engine spun up through 42% and the main generator came on line automatically as the RAT dropped off line. Then the engine audibly wound down and flamed out again.

*"XWZSX, what's wrong with this thing?"* The tower asked: "MB12, are you in the break?" I replied: "**Mayday, Mayday, MB-12 flame out.**" Later, I imagined the tower folks with the Sunday papers flying, coffee cups upsetting as they hit the crash alarm. Talk about a Sunday morning wake-up call.

Again, as the engine wound down below 42%, the generator dropped off and the rat took over electrical power. I pulled the throttle to cut off and thought: "Below 5000 ft. and below 250 knots, eject."

Well, looking at the sea of pine trees around Cecil - bummer that idea. Besides, I was well over 250 knots (about 380+ knots) or so. I tried again. Idle cutoff, fuel control to manual; hit the igniters and around the horn. I watched the fuel flow jump up to 800 #/hr, which is about right for the PW J52-P408 at start, so I knew I didn't have an engine-driven fuel pump failure. "*Whummph*," she fired up again, wound up and the rat dropped off as the main generator came online. "*Thank God*," I thought, just as it flamed out yet again.

*"What the XWZWX Hell is wrong with this thing?"* "It wants to run," I thought. As the electrical power cycled through yet another flame out, I was at the 180 position, a little high, still doing over 250 knots. Cripes, looking at those trees I chickened out, I did NOT want to eject into those trees. So I started making excuses: "I can make the runway." "The airplane won't get torn up too bad." "They can salvage parts off the airframe." Visions of the green tablecloth and court-martial filled my mind. I was still above 250 knots, so I tried a third (or was it the fourth?) relight. Anything to avoid stepping out. I was afraid to eject. Try again: throttle cutoff, throttle up around

the horn hitting the igniters, "*whumph*" as the engine fired up, fuel flow up about 800# with the power cycling as the main generator came on line. Then "*wheeeee*," as the engine flamed out for the last time.

*"WXZX Sh...t."* I was rolling out in the grove for 36L as the speed dropped thru 200 knots. Gear down (engine windmilling at 8+% gives enough hydraulic power). As the mains locked down, I pulled the nose up, running out of air-speed, altitude and ideas as I crossed the threshold. The mains touched down - the nose gear locked in place as the nose wheel hit the runway. As I approached the wire, I slapped the hook handle down to engage the wire and stop. It was dead silent with the engine not running. "Phew." I popped the hood, unstrapped, safed the seat and swung down from the refueling probe. I walked over to the yellow runway gear arrow sign and sat down. My legs were getting weak on me as I watched the fire truck roar up. Glider training over, I rode the fire truck back to maintenance control. I wrote up MB-12: "Engine flamed out on landing." I then signed out a/c MB-08 and flew back to Eglin to get to the ACM flight.

### Post Script:

**Complacency.** When I nosed over to Cecil I had just gotten or already had a stuck fuselage tank float valve. I just didn't know it. Within the A-4 wet wing, a pneumatic driven fuel pump constantly transfers fuel to the smaller fuselage tank which feeds the engine. Through a fuselage tank float valve.....which on a rare occasion, sticks closed with sand or grit. To unstick this fuselage tank float valve, you shake the plane about a bit. The still air and smooth maneuvers I used approaching the runway did not unstick the valve.

With 1800# pounds of fuel aboard, I had more than enough fuel, plus some, to get home. But not with a stuck float valve. When I nosed over, I probably already had the stuck float valve. I had 1,000 pounds of fuel in the wing and 800 pounds in the fuselage tank.

I never looked at the fuel gage during this approach. The single seat A-4 fuel gage system totalizes fuel, adding up wing and fuselage tank fuel. The fuel gage doesn't shift to indicate "only" fuselage fuel until the fuselage fuel tank drops below 600 pounds. Had I looked at the fuel gage anytime during the flame-out, the fuel gage would have indicated only fuselage fuel. In this case, Zero. I

only looked at fuel flow which, with what was sloshing around in the bottom of the tank, was approximately the required 800 pph. Sure I had 1000#+ in the wing. But the engine runs off the fuselage tank, which as I approached the runway, ran out of fuel. Had I once looked at the fuel gage, I would have been forced to eject. Of course the J52 wanted to run; it just wouldn't run without fuel. The crash site would have burned as the A-4 still had over 1000# in the wing.

While working the gripe, maintenance control put some fuel in the fuselage tank, and she ran fine. The thump on the runway had dislodged the stuck float valve. "A/C ground checks ok", returned to flight status....."

### Another postscript:

As I was going through my relight procedures and glider training at Cecil, over at Pensacola the Paint and Return facility (PAR) or SDLM folks were taking a A-4F out on an "acceptance flight." The a/c didn't make it back. The J-52-P408 engine stopped for some reason, and the acceptance pilot tried to eject. However, the seat didn't work, and the results were fatal. The wrecked A-4 was salvaged, and they found the pilot still in the seat with the canopy gone. Seems the steel tube that runs from the seat initiator to the rocket motor wasn't a hollow tube. The middle section was blocked - not drilled out. For that test pilot, the canopy fired, but the seat didn't. Ouch.

NavAirSysCom checked the rest of the A-4 fleet and found five more A-4s with the blocked seat rocket initiator tubes. Yep, you guessed it. MB-12 was one. Had I once looked at the fuel gage and seen zero, I would have ejected. The canopy would have come off, and the seat would have stayed in the aircraft. I wouldn't have made the end of the runway and the wreckage would have burned.

### MORAL:

**Complacency kills and it's better to be lucky than good.**

### LESSON:

**Speed is life, or you can't have too much speed in the break.**



# ATTIC ATTACKS

## • Mailbag •

### Betting on a Record:

### Tom Mayberry and the A4D World Speed Record

by John Mayberry

We received a letter in October 2006 (excerpted below) from the son of Tom Mayberry, who worked for Douglas in the early years of A-4 development and served as the lead crew chief for the aircraft flown by Navy Lt. Gordon Gray (137820) to set the world speed record for the 500-kilometer closed circuit course on October 15, 1955. Included were photos and a copy of the Douglas in-house newspaper which reported the event.

John Mayberry wrote:

"About a year ago, my Dad and I went to the Air and Space Museum in Balboa Park, San Diego. When we saw the A4D *Skyhawk* hanging from the ceiling, he stared at it for the longest time and then started to tell me about when he was the crew chief for it when it broke the world speed record. I wanted to know more, so he showed me the *Douglas Airview News* that he had saved from 1955, with the headline "**A4D Breaks World Speed Mark.**" It was fascinating to know that he was involved in something like that. He also told me he won \$117 for guessing the closest speed to the actual world record. \$117 was a lot of money in 1955. I found out just recently that when my Dad came home that night, he took us all out to the drive-in to see a movie.

Some background on my Dad: During WWII, he was stationed on the island of Tinian and was a radar specialist. He was on the island when the Enola Gay left there to bomb Japan. After getting back from the service, Dad started working at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica and was eventually transferred to Edwards Air Force Base in Lancaster. Eventually he was transferred back to Huntington Beach, retiring as a Quality Assurance Manager for Douglas.

When Dad was showing me the pictures, he told me that the plane was always having problems with its landing gear, as you can see by the one picture where it is sitting on its nose. It had just come in from a test flight, and the landing gear failed.

The article in *Douglas Airview News* stated that "It was obvious that the record dash required steeled nerves and a razor-sharp sense of reaction, as the World War II and Korean combat flier (Gray) later described to the press the air turbulence encountered during the race. 'It was like driving over a cobblestone road at times,' he said with a gesture of his hand as he referred to the northeast quarter of the course where the terrain is ridged with scrub-covered, 300-400 foot hills. Because rules of the race required him to remain under an altitude of 100 meters (328 ft.), he often was flying lower than the peaks of adjacent hills. Lt. Gray modestly credited ideal temperature and general wind conditions with aiding him in his all-out effort."



Tom Mayberry receives pool money from Gordon Gray.



Key Douglas officials contemplate record attempt. Senior Test Pilot Bob Rahn at left of Lt. Gray.

### TOM MAYBERRY DOUBLY HAPPY OVER A4D MARK

Next to Pilot Gordon Gray, the fellow happiest over outcome of the A4D's record-setting performance in the 500-kilometer run probably was the airplane's crew chief, Tom Mayberry.

Tom not only had the honor of heading the on-duty ground crew (day shift) of Skyhawk No. 820, he also won \$117 for predicting the speed closest to the actual time announced.

Competing against 116 other men and women who joined in a guessing pool, the bespectacled top mechanic backed up his faith in the airplane and his crew by forecasting a record mark of 695.300 miles per hour. The actual mark was 695.163.

Good-natured Tom also was awarded a big red paper star which he wore tied to a red braided string around his neck the rest of the day. Crudely printed on the star was the inscription, "HERO, Project Leadman, Type ZIP."



Pilot Gray signs photo for Tom Mayberry, second from left.



"Landing gear problems were common."

Sidebar from *Douglas Airview News* relates winning of pool.

## MORE ATTIC/A

### Speed Record

By Jim Winchester

In 1955, it was decided that Douglas should mount a bid on the 500-kilometre closed-circuit speed record. The Douglas-Navy test team had already broken two speed records during testing of the F4D *Skyray* in 1953, and the low-level 500-km circuit record, then held by the Air Force, seemed the most appropriate one for the A4D to attempt. The chosen airframe was BuNo 137820, the ninth *Skyhawk* built and which was fitted with an instrumentation probe on the nose and wired to record various performance parameters.

In October, a 100-km long test circuit was marked on the Rosamond Dry Lake near Palmdale, with a series of twelve pylons erected and fitted with mirrors to help the pilot visually acquire the turn points. Douglas Test Team personnel set off smoke grenades to aid pylon recognition by the speeding pilot. To make doubly sure, a pile of tyres was set alight at the main pylon, generating an unmistakable column of black smoke.

Preliminary flights began on 13 October. On one low-level run flown by Bob Rahn, an unofficial straight-line speed of 703 mph (1131 km/h) was recorded, but in the process the top part of the rudder came away. It was decided to switch rudders for one of the “tadpole” type, which had already been selected for the A4D-2. *Skyhawk* ‘820’ was also fitted with the later-type windscreen with a flat central panel and the sugar scoop tail fitting. The original J65-W-2

engine was used rather than the slightly higher-thrust W-16 version. The airframe was highly polished for the attempt and wore only the basic markings of national insignias and “Navy” titles.

On 15 October 1955, everything was in place for the record attempt proper. Navy Lieutenant Gordon ‘Gordo’ Gray was the junior of two pilots assigned to the A4D programme from the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River for the official naval acceptance and approval tests. To this day, he does not know why he was chosen to be the one to make the record flight. Although an experienced pilot, he had only about eighteen hours in the A4D by this date.



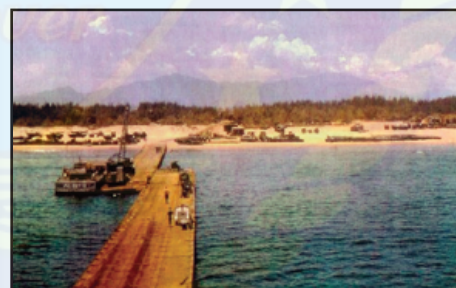
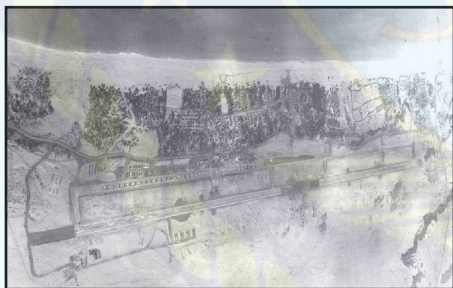
Record-setting A4D in flight.

Gray took off from nearby Edwards Air Force Base just after sunrise in order to take advantage of the cooler temperatures that would improve engine performance and reduce turbulence at low level. The Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) and the National Aeronautic Association (NAA) specified that this record be awarded for a flight of 500km (310.68 miles) distance at an altitude no greater than 100 metres (328 ft.) above ground level. In fact, most of the flight was made at 100 – 150 ft (30-50m) above the desert floor in order to ensure the height limit was not busted.

With smoke billowing from the turn points and the mirrored pylons flashing in the early morning sun, Gray lowered *Skyhawk* 820 towards the Joshua trees and sagebrush on the desert floor and accelerated towards the starting point. As he passed the first marker the clocks were started, and the little silver jet raced towards the first turn and pulled into a thirty-degree bank. By the third corner, the A4D was up to its average speed and banking at seventy degrees in order to stay on course. After five circuits of the course in 26.8 minutes and a total flying time of less than 45 minutes, it was all over. The A4D returned to land at Edwards and the scientists made their calculations – the 500km distance had been flown at an average speed of 695.163mph (118.517km/h), and the record belonged to Gray, Douglas and the Navy. Previously held by an Air Force F-86H *Sabre*, this marked the first time the record was held by an attack aircraft.

*Skyhawk* 820 was returned to test duties and the smooth rudder was re-installed. After service with several test units, including the Naval Torpedo Unit, the record-breaking A4D-1 was retired to the Navy’s desert storage centre at Litchfield Park, Arizona. In 1969 it was stricken from the inventory, which probably means that it passed to one of the scrap yards near the base and eventually to the smelter.

(Ed. Note: This account was excerpted from **Douglas A-4 SKYHAWK, Attack and Close-support Fighter Bomber** by Jim Winchester (Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2005, p. 32). Used with permission of the author.)



## CHU LAI — 1966~67

Homesick anyone? Three pictures of MAG-12 area in Chu Lai, Jan 66 to May 67. From Dick Hawes via Joe “Toad” Homer.

# TINS

By LtCol Don Cathcart, USMC (Ret)

## Mofak TINS 49

Greg Sloan, the VMA-214 squadron scheduling officer, started a fiasco by popping his head into my office and asking, "Major Mofak! Do you want to fly a post-maintenance test hop? The *Skyhawk* is ready and there are no other test pilots available."

"Sure Greg. We need every possible aircraft op-ready to meet your tough flight schedule. Tell the wrench benders that I'll be at the line shack as soon as I change into my zoom bag." As the Black Sheep Operations Officer, I was glad to oblige maintenance. The troops were busting their buns to provide planes to train our replacement pilots for Vietnam. Up to four young pilots were transferred each month to combat squadrons in Vietnam. Peaceniks called replacement pilots *cannon fodder*. Many pilots would not return home.

The maintenance history of the Douglas A4C was laid out in the line shack for my perusal prior to accepting the bird for test. I found nothing unusual in the yellow sheets. One pilot had commented, "Engine makes night noises in the daytime." Quality Control had signed off on the plane. The *Skyhawk* was also signed off by Cpl Barbeau, Plane Captain. The Aircraft Maintenance Officer, Maj Darrell Shelor, had initialed all entries and thereby approved the test flight.

Normally, pilots were famous for "kick the tire and light the fire" on the aircraft they were to fly. A test hop required a closer examination of the aircraft since the fuselage had been taken apart and the engine replaced. Engine removal entailed disconnecting hydraulics, electrics, fuel, and other systems from the old engine and then reconnecting all systems to the new engine. The *Skyhawk* took about 10 minutes for pre-flight inspection. All systems appeared to be "Go." I climbed up the eight foot ladder and checked the ejection seat for discrepancies. Finding none, I dropped into the seat which housed the raft and

survival gear. The plane captain strapped me into the seat and removed the safety pins from the ejection seat firing mechanism. After climbing down, he carried the ladder to the start cart. The plane captain got me started and completed the taxi checks. He pulled the chocks, then saluted, and I taxied toward the runway.

El Toro tower personnel cleared the aircraft for takeoff and departure to Whiskey 291 for completion of the test flight. I shoved the throttle forward on the J-65 engine and watched the RPM and EGT rise to takeoff power. With all gauges indicating normal, I released the brakes and felt the surge of thrust as the *Skyhawk* accelerated down the runway. The exhilaration of becoming airborne in the sleek little jet thrilled me just like it did the very first time. "OooooooooRaaaah!"

W-291 was the military training area south of Catalina Island. Except for Navy and Marine fighter aircraft rolling, looping and tumbling after each other while dog-fighting, the warning area was a safe place to operate without worry of commercial or private aircraft interference. I finished most of the test card above 25M and descended to 15,000 feet to perform the flight controls disconnect. The radio became quiet. I called departing W-291 but received no response. Checking other frequencies, I discovered the radio had failed. I decided not to disconnect the controls and extend the stick without a radio. Another quick test hop would be required for that test item.

The El Toro weather was VFR with no clouds and 10 miles visibility. I flew up the entry channel and entered the break at 1500 feet. I rocked my wings repeatedly to alert tower personnel that the aircraft had no radio and required a green light for landing. I rolled rapidly into a 60 degree bank and pulled the *Skyhawk* around 180 degrees to the downwind. I moved the landing gear handle to the down position. The main gear indicators flipped from 'up' to barberpole and then to down and locked. The nose gear position indicator flipped to barberpole and stayed. The tower was shining a green light. The unsafe nose landing gear position indication, the wheels warning light and the red warning light in the gear handle meant no landing for a while. The fuel gauge indicated 2200 pounds. *Kiss a fighter pilot's ass!* Some days a pilot

# TINS TOO!

## Most Miraculous Ejection Award

This one goes to an Israeli pilot flying an A4 *Skyhawk* at low level, approximately 350 knots. The pilot reports he was flying straight and level, then he was lying on his back on the valley floor with a massive headache. Israeli analysis of his damaged helmet and the debris of the aircraft detected traces of bird blood and a single feather, as well as fragments of HUD glass in his face. Apparently he was the victim of a bird strike directly to the front wind screen. The bird continued thru the canopy, demolished the HUD and smashed the visor on the pilot's helmet, knocking him unconscious.

How did he eject? Answer: enough of the bird's corpse deflected upward off his helmet to strike the upper ejection handles and fire the seat!!!

shouldn't don his zoom bag! I executed a wav-off and departed the traffic pattern.

I climbed above 10,000 feet and began trouble-shooting the landing gear system. Recycling the gear up and back down did not provide a nose gear down indication. I put the gear handle down and applied positive G forces to lock the gear. No joy! I increased the airspeed up to 350 knots which was the limit for forcing the nose gear aft into the locked position. When that attempt failed, I pulled the Emergency Gear.

The landing gear problem created an urgent need for the radio. Turning switches on and off, resetting circuit breakers and re-plugging connections produced no joy. I dumped cockpit pressurization. The earphones crackled! Aha! The radio operated intermittently with no pressurization. I transmitted my dilemma to the control tower. Using the sporadic radio, I arranged for Black Sheep maintenance personnel to be at the approach end of the runway to inspect my

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No TAPS reported

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★ [newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org](mailto:newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org)  
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For TAPS lists,  
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access these links:

[www.a4skyhawk.org/2D/KIA.htm](http://www.a4skyhawk.org/2D/KIA.htm)  
[www.a4skyhawk.org/2E/ops\\_losses.htm](http://www.a4skyhawk.org/2E/ops_losses.htm)

## TINS MOFAK CONT...

→ nose gear as I made a low pass. I also advised the tower that my fuel was below 1000 pounds. A KC-130 was awaiting takeoff. The crew called, "We can takeoff and give you fuel from a drogue. We can visually check your nose gear while you are taking fuel." "Click! Click!" I replied, "Let's do it!"

The KC-130 took off to the south and within a minute I joined on his left wing. I reported, "Stabilized port side. Fuel 800 pounds." The KC-130 crew extended the port drogue and cleared me to take fuel. The refueling crew chief called, "The nose strut looks vertical and normal for landing."

I plugged the *Skyhawk* probe into the refueling drogue. The radio receiver went dead. The green receiving fuel

light on the refueling pod did not illuminate even though the hose had been pushed up to 15 feet from the pod. Just what I needed--another SNAFU! I flew the hose in and out of the pod trying for the refueling light. Suddenly, the hose rapidly unreeled completely out of the refueling pod. Whipping violently, it wrapped around the nose of the *Skyhawk*. I chopped power to get away from the drogue, but it remained connected to the probe while the hose stayed coiled around the refueling probe, my canopy and the forward fuselage. The end of the flapping hose trailed behind my aircraft. The routine test hop had really become a can of worms!

I broke away from the tanker toward El Toro. My fuel state was only 500 pounds, and now I was carrying a drogue with about 80 feet of refueling hose flailing the sky. I pointed the nose of the plane at the touch down point on

the runway from my position at 1200 feet and 5 miles on final approach. I dropped the tailhook. The tower showed me a green light. They obviously recognized a regurgitating fecal sandwich in progress. I touched down on the main gear and held the nose off the runway until crossing and engaging the arresting gear.

The troops ran out and inserted the gear safety pins. I shut down the engine with about 10 minutes of fuel remaining. The troops began unwrapping the hose from the fuselage and disconnecting the drogue from the refueling probe. They hooked a TUD-80 to the *Skyhawk*. It looked like they wanted to ready the plane for another test hop. But first they had to work off the serious gripes that I entered on the yellow sheet.

Maybe I would skip the next test hop on A4C Buno 147755.

See <http://mofak.com/> for more from MOFAK.

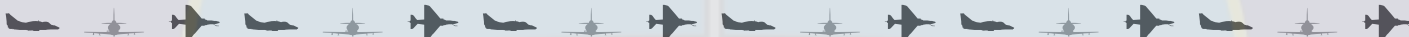


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