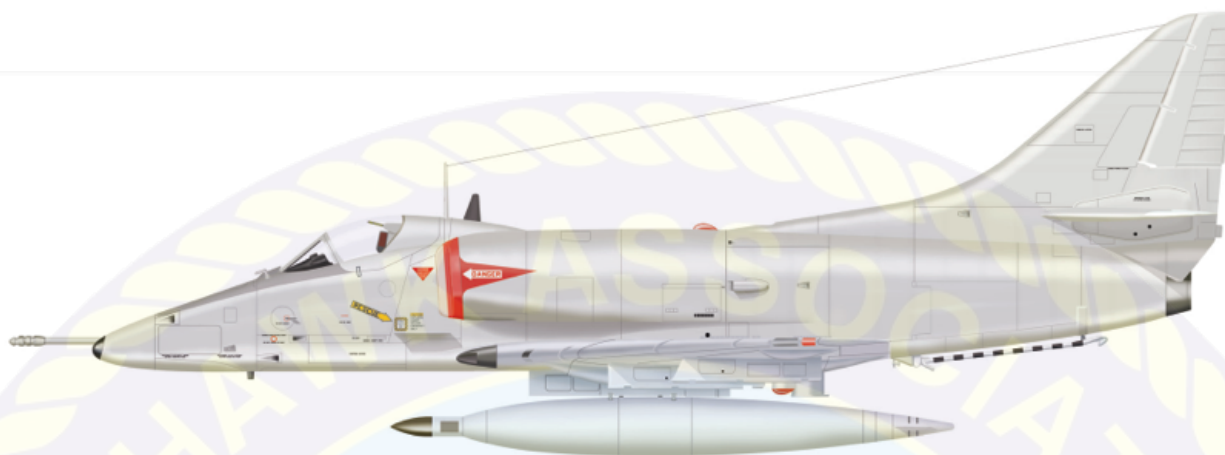




THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

Journal



Original art by Rich Dann depicts A-4E 149969 as configured for Project Rainhat mission, with all identifying markings removed. Note Shrike receiver imbedded in fuel tank and single side-band wire antenna rigged from fuselage to vertical stabilizer.

THE A-4 EVER

Fall 2007

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 13 • NUMBER 3

Contents:

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Mid-Winter Board Meeting ★
1-2 February '08
Pensacola, FL

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The Ghostriders' Smiling Giant
You Think We Read? • Attic Attacks



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Following our Annual Meeting in Reno, your board of directors has embraced an ambitious agenda for 2008. As in previous years, recruiting and retention of members remains our number one priority. In 2007 we continued to recruit members at the pace we've seen the last few years; and we started to notice a slight improvement in the percentage of members who elect to renew their membership each year. For that reason, we're hopeful that we've turned the corner and are poised for growth.

Growing the roster of paid members is important if the association is to fulfill its promise of being the premier resource for the history of the Skyhawk and those who operated it. Production of a first-rate publication like the *A-4Ever* and maintenance of a superb website are critical to our success, and both of those efforts require resources, both human and financial. Adding as few as 200 members to our roster will make a world of difference, and our 2008 Board of Directors and officers are committed to making that happen. Our vice presidents – Ed "Viking" Jobin for the Marines, Mike "Buick" Eberhardt for the Navy – will be looking for key volunteers who will help spread the word about Skyhawk Association. We've found that most people who had a significant association with the A-4

during their service career are eager to join us when they learn about Skyhawk Association.

Please help us network to your squadron mates by providing us with an email or physical address. If you will email me the name and address of a potential member at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org, I will send your contact a complimentary copy of *The A-4Ever*, as well as an invitation to join.

WWW.SKYHAWK.ORG

Another priority adopted by the board includes a **renewed emphasis on development and maintenance of our website**. Anyone with a discernible pulse knows the world is rapidly shifting to a digital, interconnected information exchange. Our status as a historical repository will depend on developing information that can be accessed 24-7 by people around the globe. To a large extent, we are already there. Already a premier resource for aviation enthusiasts around the world, the Skyhawk Association website experiences over 350,000 hits per month; and we now offer options for online registration and payment of dues. Moreover, we offer a special category of international membership for which *The A-4Ever* is provided only in digital form online.



Obviously "dressed for success," your Board of Directors is shown after their marathon meeting in Reno, about to enter the Drogueria Ardana Pescados Arraiak in the Nugget, which loosely translated means "Place to toast Puresome's Arraiak," honoring his years of service to the Skyhawk Association. Back (L-R) Turpen, Southworth, Woodul-Puresome, Hickerson, Jobin, Langworthy, Cooney. On bended knee: (L-R) Eberhardt, Gabbard.

Your Association Needs You!

ANNUAL MEETING & Say It Ain't So, YP.

At Tailhook (September 7, 2007) another successful meeting was held. Besides the usual business, such as electing directors for the coming year (see page 4), your association board bid farewell to a member who has shouldered more than his fair share of the burden of building Skyhawk Association over the last 14 years. Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul stepped down from the board of directors and his job as vice president of the association. As everyone knows, Jack has given wise counsel, considerable sweat and more than a little humor to the operation for a long time. His outstanding articles have been a regular highlight of *The A-4Ever* since its rebirth in 2003, and Jack has organized the hospitality suite at the annual meeting in Reno for the last few years. That operation had fallen on hard times, but Youthly took on the task and organized an effort in coordination with the *Intruder* Association which has been a real success the last few meetings. We will miss Jack's regular presence at our meetings, but we're confident that he isn't abandoning the association. You'll continue to enjoy his pieces in *The A-4Ever*, and we're hoping you'll still see him in the hospitality suite at Tailhook next year.

HELP WANTED

However, for some time now, support and maintenance of the website has rested on the shoulders of one unbelievably committed volunteer, director and webmaster David Weber. David has achieved the near impossible; but I'm sure he often feels like the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike. We have literally thousands and thousands of items waiting to be scanned and organized on the website. We are prepared to offer incentives to people willing to work on the website with him. Some general computer knowledge and experience will be very helpful, but training will be provided. We are particularly looking for a modeling enthusiast to help build the Modeler's Hangar on our website. **If you are willing to join the Skyhawk Association Web Team, please email me** (sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org), or David (webmaster@a4skyhawk.org) ASAP.

THE PREZ SEZ MORE...

MANUALS & MEMORABILIA

Another area for emphasis for the coming year is developing a means of caring for donated items. The Association is beginning to receive donated items, such as manuals, flight gear, models, paintings and other memorabilia. We know that this trend is only going to accelerate, and our Historical Committee must develop collaborations with appropriate organizations, such as museums, to place this material. One success story has been our collection of NATOPS manuals. Member Jim Walthers has collected one complete set of manuals for U.S. variants of the *Skyhawk*, and those publications are available in Ready Room 3 on USS *Midway*. Jim is continuing to collect until he finishes a second set of manuals, and we will seek a home for that collection somewhere on the East Coast. He has a long way to go on the second set since only the A-4E/F and TA-4F/J manuals have been obtained so far. If you can help with this effort, contact Jim at casedcaddis@peoplepc.com.

SNAKBAR FOR LUNCH

At our annual luncheon, an excellent program was provided by Bob "Snakbar" Schneider of Hawkins, Texas. Bob is heading up an effort to restore eight A-4Ls, with the considerable help of Sabreliner Corporation at Perryville, MO, and Accurate Aviation. Everyone who saw the program was fascinated with the modern changes that are being incorporated into the aircraft during the restoration. Bob provided a multimedia show and even brought some unusual door prizes: a radar and an AJB-3 which dates back to Bureau Number 147836, in October 1960. Fortunately, some attendees at the luncheon were restoring an A-4 cockpit to use as a recruiting display and were eager to obtain the parts. Otherwise, some lucky member would have had quite an experience going through security at the airport! Many thanks to Bob and his team for an excellent presentation.

Remember, A-4s Forever!
Raven



The *Skyhawk* Association actively seeks contributions and feedback.

Please note that the email address for the editor has changed to:

[SA-Journal-Editor@
a4skyhawk.org](mailto:SA-Journal-Editor@a4skyhawk.org)

Send all letters to the editor to this address.



Some of the luncheon crowd at the 2007 Annual Meeting, listening intently to speaker Bob "Snakbar" Schneider, and hoping to win the door prize, a snazzy A-4 radar unit.



Speaker "Snakbar" Schneider pauses during his presentation at the annual meeting to consider a bribe from an unnamed member who felt the radar unit should be his.

Long-Range Schedule of Events

Mark your calendars!



Skyhawk Association Mid-Winter Board Meeting: Feb 1-2, 2008 – Pensacola, FL
Location TBA – Check www.skyhawk.org for information.

THE FALL 2007 SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION BOARD MEETING

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 0830 on 7 September in Reno, Nevada. Present were Directors Woodul, Eberhardt, Gabbard, Jobin, Southworth, Cooney, Langworthy and Turpen as well as President Hickerson. Unable to attend were Directors Green, Gilchrist, Weber, Williams and Powell.

The minutes of the Winter Meeting in Dallas were approved, and the following motions that were approved by electronic vote were reviewed.

- ★ Approved new contract for M. Bone
- ★ Approved Association 2007 budget
- ★ Approved location for winter meeting
- ★ Approved Motion to use LAIB funds for hospitality suite

COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS

(copies available online and by request)

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

Report by Secretary Cooney indicates that membership is holding steady, with new joins exceeding drops by 2:1. Recruiting new members and retaining present members remains the number one priority for the association.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Report provided by Secretary Mark Williams indicated that budget execution was on track to finish 2007 with a balanced budget. With significant funds in low yielding bank accounts, the board discussed various ways to achieve a better return on our investments. A motion was made by Director Langworthy and seconded by Director Turpen to request that the treasurer look into the various options and present his recommendations for investment of the fund balance to the board at the winter meeting.

WEBSITE REPORT

The website continues to receive a significant number of hits each month (in excess of 350,000/month). Information and requests keep pouring in and are overwhelming the current staff. Efforts will be made in *The A-4Ever* to recruit help for our Webmaster Dave Weber.

JOURNAL REPORT

The A-4Ever continues to be well received. Costs are remaining within budget and a good backlog of articles is being maintained.

MARINE SKYHAWK REUNION WRAPUP

The reunion was well attended, but most of those attending were already members of the association so recruitment opportunities were limited.

PAYPAL INITIATIVE STATUS

The PayPal initiative has been fully implemented as of April, and we are receiving around six new members a month from this source. It is hoped that as more people view the website that this will become an even more important source of new members, especially those who live overseas.

INTERNATIONAL ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER STATUS

There has been limited early response to this initiative, but we are hopeful that more will take advantage of this opportunity.

OLD BUSINESS

NOMINATION OF DIRECTORS

The board accepted the recommendation of the nominating committee and voted to present the following members - Langworthy, Turpen, Eberhardt, Gabbard and Hickerson -- to the membership at the annual meeting of members. (Note: the membership elected the slate as presented by acclamation at the annual meeting.)

PROPOSED OFFICER SLATE

The board also accepted the recommendations of the nominating committee regarding the slate of association officers for 2008. Elections will be held by the newly elected board at the conclusion of the annual membership meeting. Slate of officers for CY 2008: Hickerson (President); Jobin (VP/Marines); Eberhardt (VP/Navy); Cooney (Secretary) and Williams (Treasurer). The board appointed Director Mike Green as Assistant Treasurer.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

The proposed financial procedures for the association were reviewed by the board. A motion to approve the procedures was made by Director Langworthy and

seconded by Director Cooney. The motion passed (available online or by request).

DISPOSITION OF TAILHOOKS

The association possesses two A-4 tailhooks in excellent condition. It was decided to have Director Langworthy offer them for sale on E-Bay. The funds generated would become part of the association operating funds.

NEW BUSINESS

RECOGNITION AWARDS

Historical Committee member Jim Walthers was honored for his role in the collection and distribution of the A-4 NATOPS manuals. Departing Director Jack Woodul received a plaque recognizing his long service to the *Skyhawk* Association.

GOOD OF THE ASSOCIATION

Director Gabbard discussed the progress he is making with the aircraft histories. Data has been retrieved up thru 1971. President Hickerson initiated a discussion regarding A-4 related material given to the association. People who donate want to be assured that the material will be put to good use. Since the association doesn't have its own facility, we need to be looking for places that would benefit from a donation on our part. Jim Walthers, who is heading up this effort, indicated that he is close to having two complete sets of NATOPS Manuals for all US versions of the aircraft. This item will require some additional thought and will be part of the Winter meeting in Pensacola.

President Hickerson laid out four focus areas for the board for the coming year:

- Retain present members and recruit new members.
- Put more resources toward developing the website and supporting the webmaster.
- Strengthen the historical committee and its activities.
- Plan for succession of key officers and committee chairs.

FUTURE MEETINGS

2008 Winter Board Meeting:
2 February, 2008, Pensacola, FL.
ADJOURN



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BOMBS AWAY!

• Fall 2007 •



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NEWSLETTER STAFF



Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman and Editor.
Margaret "Warrior Princess" Bone – Managing Editor, mbone@ec.rr.com.
Boom Powell and Mark Williams - Co-Editors.
David "Twidget" Weber – Technology and Website.
Feature Contributors: Ed "Viking" Jobin, Peter Mersky, Joe Turpen,
Gary Verver, David "Twidget" Weber, and Jack "Puresome" Woodul.

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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 sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Stephanie Davis, graphics, stephanie@ncflight.com. Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC.

Cover: Original art by Rich Dann depicts A-4E 149969 as configured for Project Rainhat, with all identifying markings removed.
More examples of Rich Dann's work may be seen at: <http://webpages.charter.net/ldann/index.htm>.

R.G.'s ART

• A-4s in Flight •



R. G. Smith, (1914-2001)
Named Honorary Naval
Aviator Number 11.

A 4 Ds

This untitled R.G. Smith painting depicts four A4Ds approaching the coast-in point, and suggests some of the atmosphere another group of A-4s found, see "Bad Luck & Trouble, the Translant from Hell," in this issue placed on unlucky page 13.



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Great New Skyhawk Models •

By Joe Turpen



Shown here are some highly detailed, beautifully assembled Skyhawk models done by the very talented Andrew Abshier. These beauties show that good modeling is an art form as well as a hobby, and work such as this helps maintain and promulgate the A-4 legacy.



Visit
www.a4model.a4skyhawk.org

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

To the Editor:

I just purchased a used Browning A-5 shotgun and engraved on its receiver is VF 126 Officers 1967. The gun has a serial number from 1938 and was restocked at some point. I am wondering if anyone from the squadron would be able to tell me any thing about it, (what it was used for, where it came from, or even who it belonged to). I am very interested in finding out the history of this gun.

Thank you for any help.

Rick Gilman, [rgilmanjr@optonline.net]

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

Dear Editor,

As suggested by Mr. Tony Cooney (A4 Association Secretary), I would like to ask you if you would consider publishing a small article in your newsletter, that I would like to send to you, for the purpose of possibly locating any USS *Intrepid* (CV, CVA, CVS-11) former crewmembers who are members of your association, be they were officers or enlisted personnel.

I would appreciate that you consider my request.

Thank you,

John Simonetti, Past President, USS *Intrepid* Association, Inc.

[Cv11njrep@aol.com]

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

I noticed Powell's Puzzler in the Winter 2007 issue about CV callsigns. As I flew with VA-22 on Bonnie Dick during 1969 and 1970 WestPac cruises, I can affirm that BHR's callsign was "Rocket," not "Ocean Wave" as published. Most pilots from Air Wing 5 ought to concur (VA-22, -94, -144 were the Scooter guys; the Sadlers were VF- 51, -53, and VFP-63, I think.)

Bryan Remer

[bryan@remmer.com]

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

Hi there – I was perusing the internet looking also to find pictures of the world famous Cubi O' Club when I came across your site. We just started to build the site today as a digital preservation of the club in time and hope to add lots of video, pictures and stuff like that....If you have any pictures of the club you would like to share, please feel free to visit the site or tell

anyone about it.....

Much thanks for your time!

Lisa Vale [lvdbkk@gmail.com]

www.cubioclub.org

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

During the early 60s, carriers' callsigns were changed to ones the bad guys weren't supposed to be able to pronounce. The new callsigns were ones that we couldn't pronounce. Bonnie Dick (VA-192, A4C) went from "Rocket" to "Wired Vender." Ever try to say Wired Vender against 2 lbs pressure? Thankfully, it didn't last more than a couple years, if that.

Don Gerrish

dag321@earthlink.net

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

Recently, I wrote about a three year history (1964-1966) and events of VMA-311 during that period. As the first Vice Chairman of the MCAS El Toro Historical Foundation - now the Flying Leatherneck Historical Foundation located at MCAS Miramar, I know that early time in the history of Chu Lai is not at all adequately recorded. Chu Lai was the final outcome of the expeditionary airfield concept. It was unique and probably remains so today. That airfield was also the greatest hazard to aviation and the greatest test of aviation skills in the lives of those who were stationed there - especially in the beginning.

When I wrote the article, I was hopeful that it would encourage others (members of VMA- 214, -211, -223) who were there at the beginning or shortly thereafter, to offer similar accounts of their getting to the war--as well as follow-on stories about that place in the sand called Chu Lai.

I remember two or three Navy A-4 pilots

Send your letters to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Please note new email address!

who came to Chu Lai to do a couple of hops with a couple of squadrons. Two or three Marines went to the ship, kind of a 2-3 day exchange. The runway at Chu Lai was cut in half for repairs, 3000 ft for JATO takeoffs and at the other end, 2500 ft for arrested (MOREST) landings. The weather was real crummy while they were there.

One of the Navy guys, over a beer, asked me how do you keep the mud from getting all over the windscreen on take-off. In other words, how do you see on take-off? I said, for the most part...you don't.... just keep it on the runway until you can't see anymore, then use your AJB-3 for heading. Light the JATO when called for, and you damn sure are going to get airborne. Then find a cloud or some rain and clean off the mud. His response was... "You guys are f---g nuts." I think he got it right.

Regards, Birdie

J. T. Bertrand

[jtbertrand@roadrunner.com]

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

An old Douglas ad.

No. 10 in a new series:

Compact carrier-based A-bomber proves jet mechanic's dream



Ask Navy fliers what they think of the Douglas A4D Skyhawk and you'll hear about its ease of handling, its speed, its high lift and low drag.

But carrier flying is a team operation, and the men who keep A4D in the air have an equally interesting point of view. Most compact aircraft of its kind, Skyhawk's design emphasizes a combination of strength and speed with extreme simplicity (no need to fold its wings, for instance). Result: jet mechanics call A4D a maintenance man's dream.

Douglas A4D Skyhawk tops 650 m.p.h.

Development of the A4D Skyhawk by Douglas gave the Navy part of what it needs to keep a strong guard over vast ocean frontiers, but the Navy also needs young men to fly and service its aircraft. If you agree that defense is everybody's business, investigate a Navy career. Write Nav. Cad., Wash. 25, D.C.

Depend on **DOUGLAS** First in Aviation

PROJECT RAINHAT

This article was written for the 50th Anniversary
Reunion of AOC 10-56 in 2006.

By Anthony L. Tambini, II



Ed. Note: In the early 1960s Tony Tambini was assigned shore duty as a Projects Officer at the Naval Ordnance Test Station China Lake, an assignment he considered "as close to heaven as an aviator can get." The duty involved testing new weapons for use in naval and air warfare, and it was more like a college campus than a military base. Scientists and engineers outnumbered naval personnel by a factor of more than 10 to 1. This narrative is taken from a longer article written by Commander Tambini for an anthology compiled by NAVCAD Class 10-56. His entire account can be found on the Skyhawk Association website at www.skyhawk.org. Editor notes interspersed within this article were derived from emails provided by CDR Tambini and John Sickel, Jr., son of CDR Jack Sickel (now deceased), who was a senior Project Officer and Tony's boss at China Lake.

When I arrived at China Lake in the early 1960s, emphasis was on lessons learned from the Korean War and the problems presented to weaponeers that appeared with the introduction of jet aircraft in ground-support combat roles. At that time, the predominant thought was to deliver weapons low and fast to escape detection by enemy radar.

The Projects Department of the naval air facility was born during those years. Commander Larry Walker, a graduate of the first class of the Navy's Test Pilot School and formerly my commanding officer, was asked to form the department; select the pilots who would be assigned to testing; write the job descriptions, and develop a program to ensure logical and safe progression of airborne test. A close coordination between laboratory, engineering, the civilian Aviation Ordnance Department, and the Projects Office of the naval air facility was developed.

My first Projects Office assignment would prove to be the defining program of my entire tour. I was the "Shrike" missile program pilot. Still in its infancy, the Shrike program had been without a pilot for a while. The pilot previously assigned, Wally Schirra, had been detached early so that he could report for duty in the Mercury Astronaut Program. There had yet to be an actual launch of a Shrike. An FJ-4 *Fury* assigned to the program was retired, and

a newly assigned A-4 *Skyhawk* aircraft underwent a reconfiguration which would convert it to a YA-4 prototype designation. Program-specific wiring, instrumentation, and provisions for recording and telemetry equipment were crammed into the limited space available in the small aircraft.

The Shrike missile was designed to home in on and kill the enemy's radar. Built especially to meet the threat of the Soviet surface-to-air missile systems, or SAMs, as they were popularly called in the Vietnam War, the Shrike homed on the Fan Song radar signal that guided the SAM-II missiles. In operation, the pilot was alerted to an enemy's radar by an aural tone in his headset as well as a visual indicator on the instrument panel. The missile could then be launched ballistically toward the target radar indicated on the instrument panel. After an unguided flight, missile guidance would take over and steer the missile down the main beam of the target radar.

The warhead was composed of a high-explosive charge

"A last-minute summons to the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis; unauthorized low-level flights over Castro's Cuba – inverted; *Skyhawks* deployed with all identifying markings removed; and Top-Secret missile warheads concealed in modified fuel tanks? A plot for a new Tom Cruse movie? No, Project Rainhat!"

around which were stacked thousands of three-sixteenth-inch steel cubes. When the warhead was detonated by the target detecting device, the steel cubes were distributed such that at least one cube would penetrate every square foot within the target effective range. It was a relatively small warhead. There was no great big boom, but inspection of a target afterwards revealed that the target radar had been thoroughly penetrated by little steel cubes, cutting virtually every wire and cable in the target radar system, rendering it useless and unrepairable.

One Monday afternoon in October 1962, after flying the late Shrike test flight on Charlie Range, I walked into the wardroom for a cup of coffee before getting out of my flight gear and into the working uniform. The wardroom television was turned on, a rare oc-



LT Tony Tambini poses with a Shrike missile in March 1964. A-4 148613 is in the background. (Courtesy of Gary Verver)

casion on a working day. A group of officers had gathered and were watching. As I got closer, I realized that the President was speaking. I found a chair, dropped my gear, got a cup of coffee and began to watch. This was national television, and there seemed to be a full-scale briefing going on. We were being told that the Russians were putting long-range, ballistic missiles into Cuba, and that they were beefing up Cuban air defenses with surface-to-air missiles.

This looked like serious stuff. Almost as soon as I sat down, the squawk box by the steward's head came on. It was the commanding officer's voice. He asked the steward if I was in the wardroom. Oh, God. What did I do this time? He was telling the steward to let me finish watching the President speak, but as soon as the briefing was over, I was to report directly to his office.

The rest of the televised briefing didn't exactly hold my attention; I wondered what I might have done that would command my presence at just this time. After changing into my uniform, I nervously walked the hallway to the captain's office. When I entered, his civilian secretary ushered me in without delay. The captain sat behind his desk in his great big office. He looked more serious and worried than I had seen him in a while. I didn't have to wait long to find out what he wanted me for. His opening words were, "The President wants you in Washington—now."

My travel had already been arranged. The secretary brought in my tickets and handed them to me. I was booked on the TWA "Redeye Special" out of Los Angeles that very night to Baltimore-Washington International Airport. There was a commuter flight from Inyokern Airport just a few miles from the test station that would connect with the TWA flight. I had about two hours to pack and catch the plane.

I arrived in Baltimore-Washington Airport the next morning at about 0630. A car was waiting to take me into D.C. The Naval Air Systems Command project officer for the Shrike Missile Program met me at the old Main Navy building on Constitution Avenue, and we rode over to the Pentagon. There, we went to the office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Deputy

Director, Research & Engineering (ATSD DDR&E), a position then held by Dr. Harold Brown. Apparently, in the course of the events of the previous day, the President had expressed a thought that it might be a good idea to have me close at hand should the need arise to take out one of Castro's SAM sites.

The President's thought became an urgent need, followed by the rush to get me to Washington. The Cubans had already shot down one of the Air Force U2 reconnaissance airplanes as it made a photo pass over the island, and President Kennedy had warned Castro that, if he should attempt to shoot down another of our airplanes, we would take out the SAM site that did the shooting.

"President Kennedy had warned Castro that, if he should attempt to shoot down another of our airplanes, we would take out the SAM site that did the shooting . . . The President wished to be very precise because of the heavy Russian presence in the form of military advisors to the Cuban military."

We could have launched a large-scale air strike, but that would result in a lot of collateral damage to the surrounding countryside. The President wished to be very precise because of the heavy Russian presence in the form of military advisors to the Cuban military.

At the time, there was only one Shrike-qualified pilot in the world, and I was he. So, here I sat, cooling my heels in the Pentagon, "Ground Zero" for those Russian missiles in Cuba. When I realized why I had been summoned, I decided that some logical and rational thinking was appropriate. In order for me to be able to do as the President might wish, I would first have to fly back to California and get a Shrike-configured airplane—which didn't exist except for a couple of A-4 prototypes, and only one of these had a complete system. Furthermore, the missiles were hand-built in the laboratories at the Ordnance Test Station for specific tests, so a full-up warhead round would have to be assembled and loaded on the airplane.

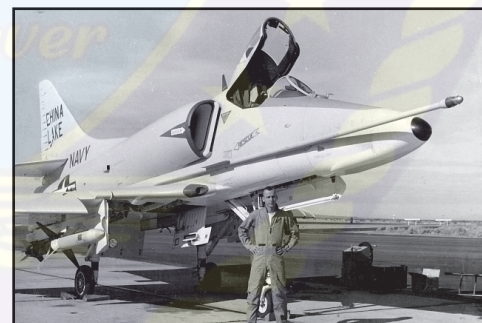
All in all, my presence in Washington could delay any effort to do as the President might wish until I could get back to California. Better I should be at China Lake waiting for the order to

go, than in Washington. I argued my case, and cooler heads prevailed. I was allowed to return to China Lake that evening.

There was no way for me to know of events taking place at China Lake that day while I was gone. Rumors were flying, and war fever had broken out all over the base. You would have thought that World War III was beginning.

Meanwhile, I just made the late flight from Baltimore-Washington

Airport to Los Angeles. Arriving about midnight in Los Angeles, I found that the late-night flight to Inyokern had been cancelled because of high winds in the desert. Dog-tired, I rented a car for the three-hour drive to China Lake. There was no rental car return in the desert at this time of the night, so I parked in front of the house and quietly let myself in. I tiptoed through the house and checked on our young son before going into our bedroom. It was dark, and I left the lights off as I undressed for bed. When I dropped my trousers, I heard the unmistakable sound of the hammer going back on my gun. Angie swears that *continued...*



Tony Tambini poses with A-4E 149969 at China Lake on June 7, 1963, prior to performing a missile demo shot (Shrike GM28) for President Kennedy. (Courtesy of Gary Verver)



RAINHAT

Continued...

when she saw me without my trousers, she recognized me, and that's why she didn't shoot. I still count that night as one of my narrowest escapes.

By the time I was back at work the following day, the telephone lines between the base and Washington were humming. Soon our newest A-4E Skyhawk was being configured for Shrike and the Cuban mission.

Ed. Note: While LT Tambini was in Washington, CDR Jack Sickel had begun working the Shrike tests on a daily basis, quickly coming up to speed in case they had to deploy the weapon system over Cuba in support of anticipated air operations over the island.

As it turned out, it was impractical to configure a second Shrike aircraft and deploy to Key West before the extraordinary thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, elapsed. The immediate crisis in Cuba ended, but the imperative to develop an anti-radiation missile capability to counter the Russian/Cuban surface-to-air missile threat remained. Work at China Lake to configure another Skyhawk with Shrike delivery capability continued unabated, and by Spring of 1963, bureau numbers 147680 and 149969 were ready for deployment.

Permission was granted to deploy a R&D detachment of two Skyhawks to NAS Key West to gather information on SAM missile radars and test the Shrike. Tony Tambini and Jack Sickel were to be the two pilots. CDR Tambini continues:

If we were going to have to go to Cuba, we were going to have to have a single-side-band radio installed for reliable communications with the Joint Air Reconnaissance Communications Center in Key West. Finding a spot big enough to put one of these radios into an A-4 was no small task. We finally squeezed it into the forward engine access bay. Now, the antenna was another

matter. Larger airplanes had enough room to string out an antenna in the skin of the airplane. We ended up having to install a mast behind the cockpit and string an antenna wire from the cockpit to the top of the vertical stabilizer. What a strange "1930s" look that gave the airplane. Everyone who saw this new antenna wondered what it was for, and everywhere we took it, people would ask.

The A-4E, and the A-4C that was already my primary Shrike aircraft, were outfitted with as much instrumentation as would fit inside, and Shrikes were buried inside three-hundred gallon external fuel tanks along with more instrumentation. All identification and insignia were painted out to keep anyone from knowing where we were from, or the purpose of our mission. A small, carefully selected crew of Navy and civilian personnel



A-4E 149969 fresh out of the factory prior to being configured for Shrike in support of Project Rainhat. (Courtesy of Gary Verver)

in Tennessee. After an overnight stay, we woke up to a dense fog blanketing the area. In one of those "I can't believe that I actually did it" situations, we made a formation takeoff in zero-zero visibility. The fog layer wasn't very thick, and soon we were climbing out into a bright sunlit morning bound for NAS Pensacola, our next refueling stop.

"All identification and insignia were painted out to keep anyone from knowing where we were from, or the purpose of our mission. A small, carefully selected crew of Navy and civilian personnel were given secret orders..."

were given secret orders, and I began training my boss, the Projects Officer, to fly the Shrike mission. Before very long, we were on our way to Key West Naval Air Station at Boca Chica.

The cross-country trip had its high points. Everywhere we stopped for fuel, we got strange looks. What were these two different-looking airplanes with absolutely no identifying markings? The A-4E, with its more powerful engine, had a distinct advantage over the fully loaded A-4C.

At Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico (altitude five thousand feet above sea level), the A-4C took every bit of the runway and staggered into the thin air, barely able to gain altitude. We were at its very limits for altitude and temperature. From New Mexico, we went east to NAS Memphis

When we arrived (7 July 1963), Key West looked like a war zone. There were Hawk missile batteries on the beaches, and there were tents and military uniforms from every service. Security was strict. Our two aircraft were parked on the far side of the field inside a restricted area with a twenty-four-hour armed guard for protection. The only other aircraft within our perimeter was an intelligence-gathering A-3 Skywarrior.

Our enlisted men were instructed not to tell anyone where they were stationed, or why they were in Key West. The very first day after we arrived, we sent one of our young sailors to pick up a mule, a towing vehicle that was used to tow the airplanes around while on the ground. He got the mule all right, but, being unfamiliar with the station

layout, he wandered onto a taxiway on his return trip. A big, burley chief petty officer in a security vehicle stopped our sailor and demanded to know what he was doing on the taxiway and the name of his unit.

When the sailor told the chief that he couldn't tell him, the chief got a bit insistent. The young sailor became so distraught that he hyperventilated and passed out. This scared the hell out of the chief who thought that he had killed the sailor. He scooped the sailor up in his arms and rushed him to sickbay. When the sailor awoke, he asked the corpsman to call me, and I had to go over and retrieve our first casualty of the Cuban conflict.

In a vivid reminder of my past experience with Marine aviation, one day a Marine A-4 landed at Key West because he was streaming fuel from his fuselage. It turned out that he had lost the fuel cap to his fuselage fuel tank, and fuel was being siphoned out as he flew. There were no A-4 fuel caps in the supply system at Key West, so he appeared to be stuck until a new fuel cap could be ordered and delivered to Key West.

As we drove onto the air station the next morning, we saw the Marine A-4 taking off from the airstrip. It looked like he had found a fuel cap on the base after all. When I preflighted my aircraft before the day's operations, I discovered that my main fuel tank cap was missing. Somehow, the Marine had managed to get past the twenty-four-hour guard and into the restricted area,



CDR Jack Sickel poses with A-4C 147680 loaded with a Shrike missile in August 1963.
(Courtesy of Gary Verver)

had stolen my fuel cap, and had flown away without getting caught.
(Ed. Note: *I'm shocked and dismayed to learn of this travesty perpetrated by a Marine.*)

We would eventually fly fourteen missions over Cuba. The intelligence that we gathered through the onboard instrumentation was a real boon to our engineers and scientists who excitedly listened each night to the tapes that we made during our passes over Cuba that day. We were able to provoke the Cubans into turning on their surface-to-air missile guidance radars, but they didn't fire at us.

"It wasn't long before I was able to make out the unmistakable shape of the MiG-21 Russian fighter. Slowly and carefully, he approached us as we flew our planned track toward Havana. The pilot never pointed the nose of his aircraft at us, but he kept closing the distance between us..."

The first day, the Joint Air Reconnaissance Command Center (JARCC) duty officer almost had a heart attack as he watched the progress of our flight over Cuba. He had been under the impression that we wouldn't fly over Cuba unless provoked. Actually, we were the provokers. We wanted actual SAM-2 radar signatures to be sure that we had the right info to feed the Shrike missile, so it would home in properly. He was quick to inform us that we had created "an international incident." We told him to talk to the President if he had a problem. That was the last we heard of our "international incident."

CDR Jack Sickel, the Projects Officer and my immediate boss, was an exceptional pilot. He was a graduate of the Navy's Test Pilot School and had combat experience. I couldn't have asked for a better companion on my first flight over hostile territory. Our little *Skyhawks* had no defensive armament. Every nook was taken up with recording devices and various types of instrumentation.

On each of our Cuban flights, we had fighter air cover stationed five miles out and five thousand feet above our altitude. Should we need help, all we had to do was call. We flew eastward along the northern coast of the island,

flying over each of the surface-to-air missile sites as we came to them along our course. The SAM sites along the Cuban coast were easy to spot. They were laid out with six missile launchers and a radar van in the middle, and they looked like a six-pointed star. Every site looked like all the others.

On about the third day, I saw a glint on the horizon to the south just as we started our track from the west end of the island, and I began watching it. It was on what seemed to be an easterly

course like we were, and it held position right off our starboard beam, but it slowly grew larger. It wasn't long before I was able to make out the unmistakable shape of the MiG-21 Russian fighter. Slowly and carefully, he approached us as we flew our planned track toward Havana. The pilot never pointed the nose of his aircraft at us, but he kept closing the distance between us until he was practically in parade formation with us.

What a beautiful airplane. It was silver and sleek, about the same size as the *Skyhawk*, and probably as maneuverable, but it was a helluva lot faster. As he came along side, the pilot waved. I waved back with a single finger. I would swear that he laughed. He didn't look like any Cuban I had ever seen; I'd be willing to bet that he was Russian. We flew along together for about twenty minutes. Then, with another wave, he peeled off and headed downward until he was out of sight. From what I know of MiG-21 endurance, he must have been getting pretty low on fuel to stay with us for as long as he did.

For several weeks, the photo-reconnaissance birds ran their photo missions, and we flew our tracks, all without incident. Then it was time to go home.

continued...



RAINHAT

Continued...

Tony Tambini reflects: I don't remember what altitudes we were flying during Rainhat. I know that we began our early tracks at about twenty thousand feet because we could see all the way across the island when we were over the western tip and continued along the northern coast looking for the SAM sites. Even at that altitude, some of them were definitely visible. Later, we varied the altitude to compare the results. At first, we had almost deafening silence. The as we flew along, we got more and more signals. Sometimes, we would drop our noses and point them at the SAM sites that we could see and try to wake them up. The more often we flew, the more signals we were able to record. At times, our earphones were a jumble of sounds as we listened through the missile receivers. We did go a little bit lower while sightseeing, but I wouldn't want to go on record as to how low we flew.

Ed. Note: according to Gary Verver, who was stationed at China Lake at this time and provided the pictures and additional information for this piece, China Lake legend had the pilots sightseeing at low altitude over Havana at least once, including performing an inverted maneuver while over the city.



A-4C 147680 in September 1963, shortly after returning from NAS Key West and Project Rainhat. (Courtesy of Gary Verver)

Project Rainhat remained highly classified for years. John Sickel, Jr. has tried to obtain official information about the mission through FOIA requests to the U.S. Navy. However, nothing has been located so far, save pilots logbooks and official USN letters of commendation for the pilots (void of any operational information whatsoever). One can only image the dark, dusty archives where any such information might be found.

Readers interested in the many extraordinary events associated with China Lake should visit the China Lake Alumni website maintained by Gary Verver (<http://www.chinalakealumni.org/>).

About the author:

Cdr Tony Tambini entered the Navy through the NavCad program in 1956 and flew the F-9F *Cougar* and FJ-4 *Fury* prior to transitioning to A4D-2s in VA-56. He deployed in *Skyhawks* on *Ticonderoga* and later on *Coral Sea* with VA-153 before assignment to NAF China Lake. Following the tour described in this article, he served with the ship's company on *Coral Sea*, flew A-7s with VA-37, and completed Naval Command and Staff at Newport, R.I. His final assignments were in nuclear weapons readiness and safety with NAV-AIRLANT and later OPNAV.

TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• www.skyhawk.org •

By David "Twidget" Weber, Skyhawk Association Webmaster

Attention: the Skyhawk Association is looking for a few good men (or women) to help with the website. The association website is growing by leaps and bounds, and we've reached the point where a single webmaster cannot keep up with the tremendous volume of new material.

Consider being an Associate Webmaster in charge of maintaining one section or function of the website. We are in dire need of some enthusiasts who can:

- Serve as Associate Webmaster for our modeling section (<http://www.a4model.a4skyhawk.org/>). The ideal person would be a *Skyhawk* modeler with solid computer skills who could assume responsibility for maintaining and expanding our modeling section of the public website. Duties would involve searching for and selecting content, uploading images and text, updating the modeling bulletin board and working with Director Joe Turpen to expand our outreach to modeling enthusiasts.

- Scan photos, manipulate images and upload images and text to the photo gallery and squadron history sections of the website. This work would be performed in collaboration with the squadron duty officer for the squadron.

These associates would work under the overall direction of Webmaster David Weber and have full access to edit and update the sections for which they are given responsibility. Training will be provided.

If you are interested in helping with this important aspect of the association's business, please email David at webmaster@a4skyhawk.org.

BAD LUCK & TROUBLE:

The TRANSLANT from Hell

By Mike Larson



Ed. Note: Think you had some bad days in a Skyhawk cockpit? Read on!

As I departed Cherry Point well before dawn on 5 March 1986, I didn't realize that I was embarking on "the TRANSLANT from Hell." I was commanding officer of the VMA-223 Bulldogs, and we were deploying the squadron to Bodo, Norway, for participation in Exercise Northern Wedding, a recurring exercise for contingency reinforcement of NATO's northern flank.

This was our third try to move our A-4M *Skyhawks* to Norway. The previous two attempts had been unsuccessful due to poorly maintained and serviced hose/drogue assemblies on the Air Force KC-135 tankers assigned to the mission. For this third attempt, the USAF 2nd Air Delivery Group, headquartered at Langley AFB, Virginia, had assigned Air Force KC-10 tankers (the Cadillac of tankers). The KC-10 was built with a refueling hose/drogue assembly similar to Navy/Marine Corps tanking assets, and the air refueling would be much less fatiguing for the pilots wearing winter exposure suits in the confines of the small A-4 cockpit on the 6.5 hour flight legs. The KC-10 was a far better option than dealing with the 8 foot, jury-rigged hose/drogue attached to the KC-135's refueling boom, a system most pilots found very difficult to use.

The Best Laid Plans Weren't

The scenario for the movement of the 15 A-4Ms was assignment of a flight of five A-4s with each of the three tankers. The callsigns assigned for the movement were: Gold 11, 12, & 13 for the KC-10s, and Retro 61-65, Retro 71-75 and Retro 81-85 for the A-4s. The movement was planned to depart MCAS Cherry Point for Lajes, Azores, followed by a second leg to Bodo, Norway. The A-4 was constrained from longer flight legs due to the limitations of the aircraft liquid

oxygen system and engine oil system capacities.

Despite our objections, the Air Force refused to carry contingency fuel for the A-4s should the movement encounter unexpected adverse weather at Lajes (hauling extra fuel costs more fuel – therefore costing money). As was the case in our previous two attempts, the 2nd ADG believed that the advanced communications available in the KC-10s would prevent proceeding beyond the point of no return enroute to the first

"It soon became apparent that I was using fuel faster than I could transfer it from the drop tanks, and my wingman could not transfer from one of his drop tanks. Because of that, all four of us diverted to Pease AFB, as it seem futile to send only a section of two A-4s with the first KC-10."

destination, should the weather deteriorate. In the event of weather problems at Lajes, the flights would divert to Gander, Newfoundland. The best laid plans.....!

I was leading the first cell as we departed Cherry Point, and we had our first glitch immediately. My number five man lost his UHF transmitter after takeoff and procedures required that he not proceed with the cell. He was able to communicate with the Cherry Point tower with his FM radio and returned to base uneventfully. He got his radio repaired and joined the third cell as their sixth aircraft. My remaining four *Skyhawks* of the first cell pressed on for our rendezvous with our tanker, Gold 11, off Cape Cod. It soon became apparent that I was using fuel faster than I could transfer it from the drop tanks, and my wingman could not transfer from one of his drop tanks. Because of that, all four of us diverted to Pease AFB, as it seemed futile to send only a section of two A-4s with the first KC-10.

The second cell of A-4s departed from Cherry Point as scheduled. After reaching altitude, the second cell leader, my executive officer, lost both radios and oxygen. A quick descent to 10,000 feet and a return to Cherry Point was accomplished in section in accordance with the movement protocol. The remaining three A-4s pressed on, rendezvoused with the first cell's KC-10 (Gold 11) off Cape Cod and proceeded toward Lajes. The third cell launched as scheduled, but with the sixth aircraft that was originally part of the first cell.

Beyond Socked-In

The first cell was approaching Lajes looking at blues skies above and the white caps of the northern Atlantic Ocean below. The weather forecast for arrival at Lajes had been 3500 scattered and 8 miles visibility. Initial contact with Lajes approach (about 200nm

out) was an eye-opening event for all. Weather was reported as 200 and a half mile. Either an incredibly quick turn of weather had occurred or the vaunted Air Force communications had not worked as advertised to prevent our proceeding beyond the point of no return! The 2nd ADG planning had called for the A-4s to be overhead Lajes with 2000 pounds. Not a critical fuel state for VFR weather, but IFR.....?

The A-4 division leader shot the PAR (precision approach radar) approach to Lajes. He managed to spot a section of runway and runway lights and get the aircraft on the ground. (The pilot later confessed that he had drunk too much coffee that morning, and desperate to land, he had altered his personal minimums to get the aircraft on the ground!). Neither Lajes tower personnel, nor anyone else, saw him land or taxi in. A civilian airliner sequenced behind the first A-4 went missed approach because of the weather. The other two *continued...*

MORE BAD LUCK

Continued...

A-4s flew PAR approaches to minimums, saw nothing and went missed approach. They both rejoined with Gold 11 and received "comfort" fuel. Gold 11 then took the two A-4s and diverted to Santa Maria Island and its airport about 195 miles beyond Lajes.

With an A-4 on each wing and having gotten the ILS frequency and course from another aircraft, the Gold 11 KC-10 planned to shoot the ILS approach and drop off the A-4s for a section landing, before coming around for another approach and landing at Santa Maria. However, when they broke out of the cloud cover, the A-4 section leader realized that there was a wet runway and a 90-degree cross wind. Deeming a section landing ill advised, he elected to let his wing man land and went missed approach. He then rejoined with Gold 11 for another approach on his wing.

The second approach got him safely on the ground, and Gold 11 went around for a third approach and landing. The reader should appreciate that the A-4s had no direct communication with the civilian Santa Maria airport as it had only VHF tower and approach communications, and only an ILS approach, no PAR. The A-4s only had UHF/FM radios for communication and TACAN for navigation and approach; the A-4s were deaf and mute without the KC-10 to lead them.

No really, what's the weather?

In the mean time, the third cell of six A-4s was well on its way to Lajes with KC-10 Gold 12 in the lead. Once again, the absence of communication through the KC-10s resulted in the flight proceeding beyond the point of no return in spite of the weather problems encountered by the 2nd cell. As the third cell was 200 miles from Lajes, Gold 12 informed the A-4s that Lajes was "zero/zero," and he did not have the fuel to take them anywhere else. His announcement sounded so cavalier that Retro 81 thought Gold 12 was kidding – after all, there was not a cloud in the sky where they were. He replied, "No really, what's the weather?" When it became appar-

ent that Gold 12 wasn't kidding, the whole cell climbed to higher altitude to conserve fuel.

Otis to the Rescue

On the ground at Lajes, they were scrambling for a solution. There was an USAF KC-135 airborne command post (which could pass fuel) on the ground at Lajes; but they declined to offer assistance. The A-4 advanced maintenance crew had arrived at Lajes earlier via Marine KC-130 aircraft. The KC-130 crew was scrambled from the transient quarters and base gymnasium. Because of the fog, most of the aircrew had a difficult time locating the KC-130 on the ramp and had to follow the sound of the aircraft's APU. The KC-130, callsign Otis 75, got airborne in short order (I recall it being about a 30-minute time frame). Otis 75 climbed to 20,000 feet in between cloud layers and six very thirsty A-4s descended to the two trailing fuel drogues. Everyone quickly got some "comfort" fuel. The word had been passed to the A-4s and the Gold 11 crew (on the ground at Santa Maria) that the KC-130 (Otis 75) would provide enough fuel to "drag" the six A-4s the 1000 additional miles to Rota, Spain, bypassing the socked-in Lajes.

Based on that, Gold 12 decided to leave his A-4s chicks with Otis 75 and depart toward Rota while monitoring the radios. When the A-4 flight lead of the third cell said "Let's get this lash up pointed toward Rota," the aircraft commander of Gold 12 was taken aback by the announcement from Otis 75 they did not have the "give away fuel" to drag the A-4s to Rota. Hearing this bad news, Gold 12 turned back to assist his A-4 charges. The decision was made to put three A-4s on the wing of Gold 12 and three A-4s on the wing of Otis 75 and head to Santa Maria. Otis 75 would shoot the first approach with a section of A-4s on one wing and a single A-4 on the other. When the flight broke out of the cloud, the two aircraft on one wing would execute a section landing, and



Aerial view of the airfield at Santa Maria Island, scene of the VMA-223 accident during the strenuous 1986 TRANS-LANT.

the third aircraft would gain separation beneath the clouds and land behind the section.

Did What?

Santa Maria Airport is located on the edge of the island with 300 foot cliffs adjacent to the sea side of the airport. Otis 75 broke out of the clouds with the overcast lower than anticipated. The A-4 section was not far above the surface level of the runway and touched down on the end of the runway, while Dash-3 was S-turning and struggling for separation. Dash 3 touched down in a crab on a wet runway with a 90-degree crosswind. The result was that the aircraft slid off the runway and sheared its right main gear on the concrete VASI stanchion. This accident effectively closed Santa Maria's only runway; but the visibility at Santa Maria was so poor that the tower didn't realize there had been an accident. They had cleared another civilian aircraft for landing behind the A-4s; but fortunately Gold 11's co-pilot on the ground had the situational awareness to inform the tower of the accident and to wave off the civilian aircraft. That was how the airport learned of the accident and closed the runway. Remember, the A-4s only had UHF radios, while Santa Maria was VHF radios only. Gold 11 carried both UHF & VHF radios.

The runway closure at Santa Maria did not mean a whole lot to Gold 12 and the remaining flight of three A-4s, as the

weather at Santa Maria was now near zero/zero conditions. Otis 75 having exhausted its available fuel had to return to his only option, a still weathered-in Lajes for an exciting, white-knuckle approach and landing for the young pilot on his first mission as a brand-new plane commander. Gold 11, the KC-10 from the first cell that had previously landed at Santa Maria, had had the foresight to take on fuel immediately after landing. While their fuel tanks were no where close to full, they had enough on board to buy time for Gold 12 and his three A-4s. They quickly buttoned up the aircraft (leaving two of their crew on the ground), made their way onto the runway in front of the disabled A-4, and used the remaining 7000 feet of the "closed" runway for takeoff.

Uh, Got the Ditching List Handy?

Gold 12 was now down to about 8000 pounds of fuel remaining and was running the ditching checklist. Utilizing air-to-air, TACAN Gold 11 and Gold 12 affected an expeditious rendezvous; and Gold 11 refueled Gold 12 first, followed by the three A-4s. Even though everyone now had some comfort fuel, none of them had sufficient fuel to make it to NAS Rota. They continued eastbound into the darkness, awaiting the arrival of an emergency KC-10 then enroute from Zaragosa, Spain.

That tanker eventually arrived, and Retro 81 recalls, "It was a pretty sight watching the rendezvous with all lights blazing, and the three KC-10s swapping fuel—even a better feeling having your own personal KC-10 with plenty of 'give' to lead you to Rota." The three KC-10s and three A-4s all landed at Rota, bringing an end to an adventurous day for the Bulldogs of VMA-223.



USAF KC-10 tanker refueling A-4.

Nearly for Naught

The flight for the last three A-4s set a single flight record for the A-4, having lasted 10 hours. Unbelievably, the whole fiasco was for naught. The weather in Norway that year made for one of their worst winters ever. An avalanche in the northern training area killed a number of Norwegian soldiers; and the entire exercise was cancelled within a day or two of our completing the TRANSLANT. As an aside, a friend flying the C-12 in a logistics role told me that had we had the misfortune to reach Bodo, he believed we would have found the airfield's surface conditions unacceptable for A-4 operations.

As I was debriefing the commanding general (CG) of the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (2nd MAW) on this fiasco, he said "You must have felt like s—t with your squadron spread across the Atlantic." I remember thinking at the time that I was glad there was a bunch of young, innovative and daring aviators to salvage this screw-up without loss of life.

Thanks

A young SAC tanker pilot once commented to me: "In SAC the reward for a job well done is no punishment." With this in mind, I asked the CG if he would be inclined to have the Marines send a laudatory message to SAC (Strategic Air Command) concerning the efforts of the KC-10 crews who risked it all to save some Marines from a cold dip in the Atlantic. The Commandant of the Marine Corps subsequently sent SAC such a message; and I later learned it turned around the fortunes of the KC-10 crews "reversing a letter of reprimand into a commendation." I like to think it was my suggestion of the message that prevented harm to the careers of some young and heroic aviators.

Ironically, it was my executive officer who inserted the A-4s of VMA-223 into the mix of the air wing forces supporting Northern Wedding (although at the time he did not know he would be sent to the squadron before the exercise). I never thanked him for that, and I hope he forgives me that *faux pas*.



KC-10 tanker refuels another KC-10.

Author's note: The recollections of retired Colonels C.J. Turner and Joe Jones contributed immeasurably to this account. I believe, after these 21 years, this article is a complete and accurate recounting of this memorable event in Marine Aviation history.

About the author: LtCol Larson's active Marine Corps career spanned 21 years, seven years of which were spent in VMA-223, culminating in his assuming command of the squadron in 1985. He served in combat in Chu Lai in 1969/1970 and logged 3,150 hours in various models of the A-4. His second career was with Northwest Airlines from 1988 to 2004.

Ed. note: VMA-223 was one of the first Navy/Marine Corps squadrons to use USAF tanker assets for a trans-oceanic movement. As a result, LtCol Larson encountered many obstacles in operational planning for the movement with the Air Force. The lessons learned by his squadron undoubtedly made it easier for future squadrons to influence route and fuel planning for movements with USAF tankers. Many of the operational details of this exercise are contained in a longer version of this article which can be found on the Skyhawk Association webpage www.skyhawk.org.



A Bulldog A-4 shown launching from MCAS Cherry Point, NC.

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

US Navy and Marine Corps A-4 Units of the Vietnam War Osprey Combat Aircraft #69

By Peter Mersky
ISBN 13:978 1 84603 181 6
112 pages

There were high hopes for the latest in the Osprey Combat Aircraft series (#69). High enough that our board of directors allowed the official seal of the *Skyhawk* Association to be used on the front cover. The hopes were met. Peter Mersky wrote an outstanding book that will be on the must-have list of all A-4 fans. While longish, *US Navy and Marine Corps A-4 Units of the Vietnam War*, the title accurately describes the contents.

As Mersky says in the introduction, "Although other books on the A-4 have appeared over the years, they usually

describe the *Skyhawk*'s overall career. I wanted to focus on the jet's most intense period of action." He succeeded brilliantly. Any veteran of the skies over SE Asia will get the chills reading the descriptions of that air war.

Interviews and reports from many Scooter pilots form the meat of the book. This reader noted twenty-seven men he knew personally. Most members of the *Skyhawk* Association will be able to do the same. Every A-4 squadron that went to WestPac or in-country is covered. (Find one that's not and YHS will buy the next round.) Mersky has succinct descriptions of the phases of the war at appropriate places.

The book is profusely illustrated with black and white photos throughout, a section of color pictures, and Osprey's *forte*, color profiles. In this case, thirty-two *Skyhawks* from dif-

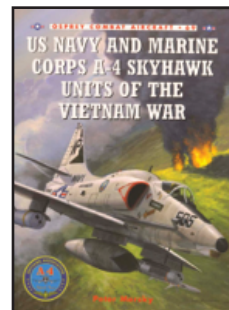
ferent squadrons and various years are superbly—and accurately—drawn by Jim Laurier. The cover painting by Mark Postlewaithe artfully catches the raw thrill of ground attack.

(Note: Amazon.com, still shows a preliminary cover as an example.)

No book is perfect, but all this reviewer can find to complain about (other than the crack about, "...the equally [as the A-1] *elderly* A-4B.") is the separation of captions from the color section and the profiles. However, that's the way it is in all the Combat Aircraft series, and if it keeps the price down...

Writing of MiG encounters, Mersky writes, "'*Scooter*' pilots were, after all, attack aviators, earth movers, breakers of dykes(sic)." He knows the *Skyhawk* spirit and it shows.

Reviewed by Boom Powell



BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •

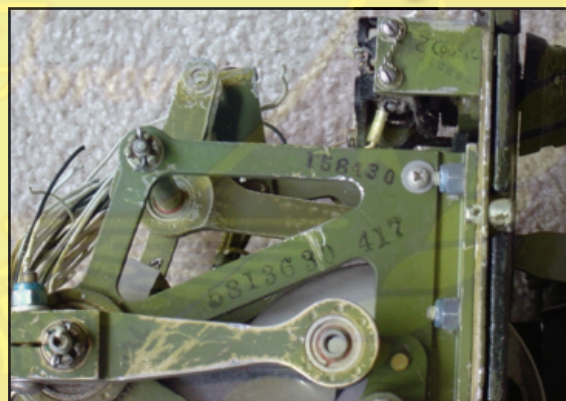
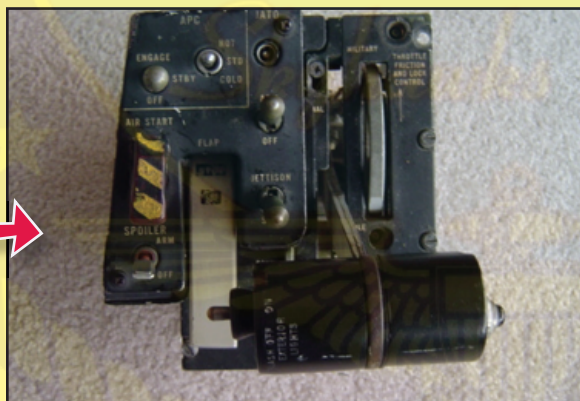
Dear Sir,

My name is Tony Jaeger. I have been collecting Army Air Corp items, and I came across this throttle quadrant. I think it is from an A-4 *Skyhawk* (Maybe an A-4B or A-4M). I was wondering if you could please help me find which variant that this part was from.

Also, if the Repair Facility would have stamped the tail number, 158430, on the part or if that is a number for something else.

Thank you.
Best Regards,
Tony Jaeger

Which
Skyhawk?



As a change of pace from previous Powell's Puzzlers, here are some puzzling photos and a letter from Tony Jaeger. This temporary change in format should in no way suggest that our regular supplier of puzzles, Boom Powell, has stopped being puzzling, but who knows?

If you think you know the answer to Tony's question, email the editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org. Let us know your reasoning behind the answer. We'll post the correct answers in the Winter 2008 edition.

THE GHOSTRIDERS' SMILING GIANT

By Peter B. Mersky

An A-4E (151152) from VA-164 was lost on January 11, 1968. LtCdr Denis R. Weichman had attacked a bridge in Laos and was hit by small arms fire as he pulled up from his run. With his engine vibrating and the temperature gauge rising, he headed for the water, some distance away. Finally over the South China Sea, but still several miles from USS *Oriskany*, he ejected after the plane started to burn. Weichman was picked up by a helicopter. He later told his wife that it seemed "forever" before he was rescued. Enemy boats were coming for him, but they were kept at bay by members of his flight who dived and strafed the on-coming Vietnamese. When she asked him if he wasn't afraid of sharks, he replied he was more concerned with the highly venomous sea snakes that swam in those waters.

Born in Chicago in 1935, Denny Weichman had gotten his wings in March 1957 and had flown *Skyriders* with VA-25. After a tour as a flight instructor, he went to Vietnam in 1964 as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Air Force at Nha Trang. He flew missions in A-1s and C-123 transports obtained from the U.S. Air Force.

Standing nearly 6 feet, 6 inches tall, he towered over his pupils, but Weichman's easy smile and piloting skills quickly helped him establish himself. During this time, he began flying night combat missions in C-123s, dropping and resupplying saboteurs in North Vietnam. Thus, when he returned to the Navy and moved to the A-4, he had already seen some action. Weichman made two combat cruises with VA-164, from 1966 to 1968. In fact, he had just launched from *Oriskany* when the disastrous fire broke out on October 26, 1966. "My room was destroyed," he remembered, "It was very demoralizing and very sad."

He participated in strikes throughout the deployment, hitting the northeast sector of the Hanoi-Haiphong area, including the major MiG base at Phuc Yen. He received the Silver Star for a mission on 24 October, when he led eight planes tasked



LtCdr Weichman perches on ladder of his VA-164 A-4E in August 1966, after making the 112,000th landing aboard *Oriskany*.

with missile suppression ahead of a major strike against Phuc Yen. He began a low-level run for a loft delivery of one of his Shrike anti-radar missiles. His target was an occupied missile battery. During his successful attack, which took out the site, his A-4 (151194) sustained many hits from flak as well as from several SAM launches.



VA-164 Ghost Rider lineup: Weichman stands out, third from right in rear row.



Now XO of VA-153, Denny is all smiles after completing his 501st combat mission in September 1972. Blue Tail CO Cdr Paul Stephenson welcomes his XO back.

The determined aviator headed for one of the missile launch areas, this time dealing with heavy 85mm flak. SAMs were also passing him from nearly every direction, their explosions occasionally sending shrapnel into his jet, knocking out the radio and navigational equipment. Finally, with his A-4 threatening to shake itself apart, he headed back toward the water, all the while threading his way through flak. He recovered aboard *Oriskany*, his *Skyhawk* showing more than 140 holes.

After stateside assignments, now-Cdr Weichman moved to the A-7B and joined VA-153 as the XO, assuming command in July 1973. He had his final combat mission on February 22, 1973, having flown combat in four different types of aircraft.

Following that 15-month tour, he served on the staff of Carrier Strike Force Seventh Fleet and was aboard the *Coral Sea* in 1975, during the fall of Saigon. He served in various assignments, including a "bonus" command tour with VA-125, the west coast A-7 training squadron. During this tour, he reached another milestone, accomplishing his 1,000th carrier landing, eventually making 1,040 traps. He retired in June 1987.

Along with the Silver Star, Denny Weichman received five DFCs, the Purple Heart, several Navy Commendation Medals, and a combined 50 individual and strike Air Medals. Besides his 1,040 carrier landings, he accumulated more than 8,200 flight hours. Well-liked and respected throughout the air Navy, he unfortunately died on his sixtieth birthday of medical complications on March 11, 1995.

Note: Thanks to Mrs. Wanda Weichman for letting us tell her husband's story.

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

HOSING SANTINI

Times were jolly, jolly good for the VMF(AW)-333 "Trip Treys." There they were in the tropical paradise of Puerto Rico's NAS Rosenfelt Roads, whoostling about in their *Crusaders*, doing gunneries, rat racing and corking off the occasional *Sidewinder* missile at hapless targets. Come 1600, they would repair to their tents beneath the tall palm trees and have Happiness Hours before they munched C-rations and the occasional snake, just for drill. Tender songs about "Nelly, Darlin'" were sung while time-honored Marine rituals involving Brasso and Kiwi polish spiffed things up.

However meanwhile...

But far off in Commie Russia, sinister plots were hatching. It was devised to ship ballistic missiles off to Commie Cuba so that the Beardy Revolutionary Government could better defend their cigarro factories and rum goody distilleries from the Evil Yankees. Ships snuck SAM batteries and ballistic missiles across the sea, and technicians started digging launch pads. The Premier and his Commissars grinned evil grins that showed stainless steel dental work.

All this did not go unnoticed by Brave American Boys. Sneaky Air Force U-2s took pictures of the goings-on, which turned into eight-by-ten glossies of great clarity that Pentagonians passed on to the Best and the Brightest manning the White House. Doing without cigars and daiquiris was bad enough, but ballistic missiles 90 miles offshore just wouldn't do! But before the Balloon went up, it was decided to send in photo *Crusaders* for some really good close up shots of Beards and SAMs and missiles, oh my!

So the *Crusaders* of the Trip Treys down at Rosey were tasked with flying combat air patrol (CAP) for the photo birds in case the Rat Eating Commies decided to send out the MiGs. Naturally, the Trip Treys were thrilled. In their off

time under the palms, they sharpened their steely knives.

Send in the (other) Marines!

But the Trip Treys weren't going to get to have all the fun. All around CONUS, airplanes, ships and troops positioned and got ready. At MCAS Beaufort, it was decided to send a *Skyhawk* outfit down to join the Trip Treys, just in case the odd bomb needed to be dropped. The *Skyhawk* outfit picked for the job was VMA-331, whose skipper was none other than The Great Santini, who was expected to provide a great disturbance in the Force.

Santini had not yet been immortalized in book and film, but he had been colorful enough in a career that spanned World War II and Korea to get himself passed over for colonel a couple of times. VMA-331 was a good deal designed to boost Santini past colorful into colonelcy. Though he didn't give up omnipresent black cigars and a flight suit unzipped to below his navel, the word to his squadron was, "*You people will not frabb up none!*"

Santini's *Skyhawk* squadron humped down to Gitmo without frabbing up none, and they parked their planes on a seldom-used taxiway below the Trip Treys' tent city in the palms, due to other units crowding the main ramp. But while the Trip Treys were living in tents and eating snakes and C-rats, Santini and his boys had scored the air-conditioned BOQ, their meals served by white-coated waiters. And they were getting per diem payments! This did not go unnoticed by the Trip Treys junior officers.

Abrah-Ka-Dabrah!

It must have been Demon Rum that pushed them into Payback Mode. Lit only by that fluid and the tropical stars, they snuck down to the Scooter flight line, selected the plane on the end, pushed it back into the jungle palms and up a slight rise, and covered it with cammo canvas!

Morning found some burbling down around the *Skyhawk* line, with lots of

high-and-tight scratching and shoulder shrugging and forehead slapping. But nobody was saying squat, because it might mean *Frabb Up!* Which, of course, would never do. So the Trip Treys watched while Scooter troops looked everywhere. Divers swam and searched off the pier; the tower was questioned about possible stealth takeoffs; and the troops were assembled and semi strip-searched for bruising from an unreported ejection! Santini was kicking arses and taking names, but he wasn't gonna report losing an airplane!

Frabbed.

It was one of them days for Santini. Completely frustrated, he wandered up to the Trip Treys Happiness Hour, which started early without the constraints of having to fly at night. He gnashed his teeth and chawed his cigar. As the tropical sun set, Santini noticed a peculiarly shaped canvas silhouette just downhill. Closer scrutiny revealed that it was ... the missing *Skyhawk*! Yaaaaaaa! Santini turned red from his unzipped navel to the top of his crew cut — he had done been frabbed!

He stormed down the hill to get his troops to return the baby to the fold. Even though the frabbing was unofficial and would not bugger his chances at promotion, The Great Santini noted names and blames in his daybook, and stashed it in a secure place. The Balloon did not go up. The Commies blinked, then took out their missiles and went on to figger out how to cause more trouble for a bunch of years. Santini did make colonel and became celebrated in novel and film.

Forgiveness.

Some 20 years later, both Santini and the alleged ringleader of the *Skyhawk*-napping met at a reunion of Marine aviators. Dressed in a white suit with a full white beard and cane, Santini looked like a skinnier Colonel Harlan Chicken. But not having frabbed up, making Full Bird, and being a certified character must have mellowed him. No sword got pulled from the cane, and Santini even autographed a copy of the novel bearing his name. And the autograph did not mention a missing *Skyhawk*.

Note: A big YP salute goes to Col Mel "Topper" Sautter, USMC(Ret), who no longer runs these successful Skyhawk Kidnapin' Operations but still shares his intel.

TINSx2

By David Weber: Uno TINS

A thought crossed my mind the other day (yes, it happens), that reminded me of an incident back in 1968 that involved a *Skyhawk* maintenance task.

The A-4F *Skyhawk* had an avionics bay along its back that held several black boxes, including a very heavy ECM (electronics countermeasures) transmitter. Pulling it for maintenance was not a pleasant chore, nor one to take lightly. (Yes, pun intended). Removing it from the avionics hump entailed pulling it out of its rack while standing on the wing, and then muscling it off the wing to the deck. Dropping it on the wing would surely punch a hole in the fuel-laden wing, and that thought was always on one's mind. The usual presence of a thin film of oil on the wing didn't make the task any easier.

This particularly memorable incident was back in '68 aboard *Hancock* and involved a VA-55 Warhorse A-4F. I was in the act of removing the heavy ECM black box while standing on the port wing, when a squadron ordnance team started to do electrical checks on the wing ordnance stations. While one "red shirt" was in the cockpit working the station switches and hitting the "pickle"

switch, another was using his trusty meter to check for electrical current at the appropriate station. As I man-handled the large, awkward box onto my knee, I could hear the "ordies" going through the stations working port to starboard. They had just checked station two and were preparing to check station four. (Station three had a centerline fuel tank on it.)

When the ordie with the meter called for his buddy in the cockpit to activate the next station, that quiet Gulf of Tonkin night was interrupted with a very loud "BANG". The aircraft rocked none too gently, hearts stopped; and I almost lost control over the very heavy black box. YEP! The cockpit switch-idiot had not skipped over station three to station four, and had "pickled" the full external fuel tank from station three. The bottom of the fuel store became as flat as the deck it was now on, fuel was running everywhere (but not as fast as some "red shirts"). I was stuck doing a slow slide on the port wing of the *Skyhawk*, trying to keep the black box from going through the wing. Fortunately, a fellow tech, despite standing next to a gushing fuel store, was waiting on the deck by the back wing edge and brought both of us to a stop.

The NAVAIR ANGELS were smiling on us that night: no black box embedded in a wing, no fire, no heart attacks--just a lot of fuel to clean up. Oh, and I suppose the ordnance department had an in-depth review of their test procedures within the hour.

By Boom Powell: Duo TINS

King Lambert (of the St. Louis Lamberts, as in Lambert Field), was notorious for lengthy and detailed preflight briefs, but after manning up, almost never looked at his wingmen to see what was going on. For example, he once called for takeoff for four when there were only two aircraft.

One day, King was leader of a flight of four A4D-2Ns out of Cecil Field for a practice bombing mission at Pinecastle target complex, and his wingies decided to teach him a lesson. By the time King was on his last roll-in, the other three had fallen into a step-down, tight trail formation, within 50 yards and matching every move the leader made. King called for the flight to join up, but after several minutes, there was no one on his wing. He called again, and all three wingies reported they didn't have him in sight.

King then started a lengthy series of turns and calls over various landmarks. Ever so often, one of the wingmen would report he thought he had the leader in sight and would ask King to drop his gear momentarily for positive ID. King complied and the wingman reported the aircraft in sight was the wrong one. The game continued...

Finally, when King's frustration factor was sufficiently high, the other three pilots reported they had the leader in sight. Moments later they flew past--*inverted*.

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TINS:

If you are willing to help with scanning and/or posting of images and information contact webmaster David Weber at webmaster@a4skyhawk.org

FLYING WITH THE BLUE ANGELS IN '75

By Budd Davisson, with permission.



Ed: The most frequently asked question is, what was the Skyhawk like to fly? Words are usually inadequate for an answer. However, Budd Davisson used his considerable writing talent to describe a flight with the Blue Angels in Air Progress, way back in March, 1975.

Yes sir, sports fans, there I was, blasting along over the beach, indicating 500 knots. I tweaked back on the stick, the VSI zipped past 6000 fpm and the needle buried itself in the peg. In seconds, seconds mind you, we were rocketing through 10,000 ft, my hand quivering and my mind suitably boggled.

The blowtorch that turned my head inside out was the Angels' TA-4J Skyhawk, a spidery-legged arrowhead of aluminum and fire that today, 20 years after its first flight, is still the most widely used tactical aircraft in the world. It's a tiny thing, with the sort-of-ugly, pugnacious look that says it's built for business, not looks.

Getting the Blues...

It was through the Blues that I got to live out those fantasies that used to flash on the screen of my mind's eye. Since I'm color blind, I never had a chance at being a jet pilot simply because grass looks red and stop lights have funny



colors. So, I had completely given up any idea of flashing through the skies as the lord of my very own fireball. But, through a weird combination of timing,

"For just an instant we sat poised there, surrounded by a muted roar, hardly moving at all. Then, with incredible smoothness the airspeed indicator leaped up to 80 knots, then 120. At 120, the stick came hard back into my lap, which surprised me so much I jumped."

people and pure luck, I found myself looking at *mach* meters and EPR gauges in the back seat of the Blue Angels' 2-seat TA-4J.

The panel does its best to confuse. There are dozens of round foreign dials that assault the eye and prevent understanding. I had to ignore the panel as a whole and look at each dial in turn. "Oh yea, there's the airspeed. And that's a radar altimeter." Engine gauges such as the percent tachometer and EPR (Exhaust Pressure Ratio) gauge were familiar only because I'd read a lot of the right books.

Determined to glom everything I could from this ride, I gently rested my hands on the stick and throttle to follow Patton through. Then, without warning, he banged the throttle forward so hard he literally jerked it out of my hand. If one of my students did that with a *Cherokee*, we'd spend days picking up the pieces.

Whatever you've heard about a jet's slow acceleration, forget it. For just an instant we sat poised there, surrounded by a muted roar, hardly moving at all. Then, with incredible smoothness the airspeed indicator leaped up to 80 knots, then 120. At 120, the stick came hard back into my lap, which surprised me so much I jumped. I hadn't expected such large stick movements. But as the

stick jerked back and the nose bobbed into the air, Patton quickly neutralized it to stabilize the nose attitude, and we were flying. No, we weren't just flying, we were flying! As soon as his left hand slapped the gear lever up, the airspeed ripped through 200 knots. At the end of the runway the needle was touching 300 knots.

The pattern for Pensacola calls for an exit below 500 feet until the beach. By the time we had hit the beach, about three miles down the pike, the air speed had stabilized at 500 knots and it was

time to go upstairs. From beach level we pulled hard up into a high arching right turn, approaching a 90° bank while climbing over 6000 fpm. (It was probably climbing much faster, but 6000 is the biggest number on the VSI.)

Amateur Hour

I can't begin to tell anybody how incredibly stupid I felt when I placed my (so I thought) well-trained hand upon the stick and couldn't even hold level flight! Just the pressure of my hand holding the stick sent the airplane into a three-dimensional gyration that probably had Lt. Patton in gales of laughter. Control pressures? There aren't any. *None. Zero. Zip. Zilch.* And the travel of the stick could be measured in micro-something-or-others. I'm here to tell you that no matter what I've flown that was supposed to be sensitive, nothing, absolutely nothing, holds a candle to this thing. It makes a Pitts (and I'm not kidding a bit) look like you need two hands to make it turn.

After I overcame my initial shock, I settled down to make this thing fly. The controls are hydraulically boosted and there's a very slight dead spot in the middle; so the stick kind of floats between four hydraulic contacts until you move it a bit to touch one. Then the airplane leaps to your command. Noting

that, I relaxed my grip on the stick and just kept a couple of fingers close to it. After five minutes of gentle turns (it's darned hard to fly them gently in this airplane) and Dutch rolls, I began to get a little feel for where center was.

My first roll wasn't much better than my level flight. As I came back level, I wiggled back and forth, trying desperately to find the middle position for the stick. After each roll, I'd do a 180--sixty degrees or more seemed a normal bank angle. Still, I was being timid with the airplane. I'd gently move the throttle when I thought I needed power and tip-toe into rolls using only Pitts-like roll rates. But, as I warmed to the airplane, Lt. Patton kept urging me not to baby it.

So, little by little, I came to know the A-4. Within an hour, the almost impossibly sensitive controls became perfect. The total irresponsibility with which you can treat the airframe and engine leads you deeper and deeper into the airplane's personality. It was fun to finish a maneuver and jerk violently over into a better-than-90° bank and pull hard for a four-g diving turn, all the time watching the airspeed move up to 500 knots indicated (and at 15,000 feet yet!). Then I'd rip back to level flight for an instant before arching up into a blood-sucking loop, holding 4 g's longer than any civilian ship ever will. The rudders came into play only once in a while, and the ailerons are so incredibly light and quick that any measurable movement of your hand produces a syrupy smooth aileron roll, or two, if you don't neutralize quick enough.

I tried to time the roll rate with my watch, but one roll happens so quickly

you can't time it. So, I tried a double roll. Still too fast. Then a triple, and finally we were doing four consecutive full-deflection rolls at a 30° nose-high attitude before I could get a reasonably accurate count. What was the roll rate? Only a sedate 400° per second. To put that in perspective, a Cessna is in the 75-90°-per-second range and a Pitts, the legendary fast-rolling Pitts, is only 180°. Four hundred degrees a second is so fast that your eyeballs take one more take, one more lap, after the airplane has stopped turning.

In flitting around the sky, altitude losses and gains happen so quickly that I found I had to study the altimeter to be sure I read it correctly. One second we'd be bombing along at 18,000 feet; moments later the second altimeter, the radar job, would light up as we screamed down the beach 70 feet above the waves.

Flyin' Fun

While Patton flew the approach, I was all hands and eyeballs. I wasn't going to miss a thing. Wham! Into the break, hands flying around the cockpit getting speed brakes, landing gear, flaps, spoilers and everything else in sight. On-speed opposite the runway, the circle in the angle of attack display glowed, and we showed about 125 knots on the speed gauge. Arching around in an almost constant turn right down to the ground, he started calling out the meat ball for me, showing how it moved up and down and how you controlled it. Then he called the tower "Blue Seven for a touch and go." *Whooee! We aren't done yet!*

The second time around, I sort of muscled my way onto the controls and then suddenly found myself asking, "Did the airplane move when I did? Or was it vice versa? Who's flying this thing?" No matter, I concentrated on that angle display trying to keep the middle circle lit. Was that me? I doubt it. But, maybe . . . ! In the groove, meat ball centered in the mirror, cross-checking A of A, moving nothing. Then *wham!* We smoke the tires onto the runway and the tower clears us for another one.



When we finally taxied in, I found that any splinter of cool I had at the beginning had disappeared in a flourish. My face hurt and I thought at first it was the g's. Then it hit me--I'd been grinning so hard my cheeks were overstressed. I must have looked like I was auditioning for a toothpaste ad. I just couldn't get my lips together.

Note: Budd Davisson is one of the world's premier aviation writers and has written pireps on over 100 types of airplanes he flew. He is currently the editor-in-chief of Flight Journal magazine. When we asked to use this over 30-year old article, he added that he had a second flight, and "Then, right in front of God, Pensacola tower and everyone else, he let me fly it to touchdown, a definite policy no-no. I've had a few high points in my career and that was definitely one." The entire, unexpurgated article and other neat stuff can be seen at www.airbum.com.



Entertainers John Travolta and Olivia Newton John, center, along with enlisted crew of the Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration team pose in front of an A-4F Skyhawk in 1982.

(Photo by PH3 Curt Fargo, USN).



Blue Angel #5, circa 1975.

ATTIC ATTACKS

• Mailbag •

From an unidentified RAN maintainer who served on an A-4G detachment to USS Kearsarge in May 1969: "I was sent with a group of maintainers and two birds (A4Gs) to operate from USS Kearsarge as CAP (Combat Air Patrol). I still retain a ship's mug kindly presented by one of the ship's crew. The captain – having watched our start-up procedure from the bridge, sent a 'Bravo Zulu' for our professionalism. This ship was fitted with hydraulic catapults, so I guess our aircrew may have noticed some difference. Also, Kearsarge had a timber flight deck. Although older than HMAS Melbourne, it had an elaborate cafeteria with a multitude of various cordial machines and a shopping arcade with jeweler, 711 store, tobacconist, hairdresser and also a 24-hour radio and TV station."

Provided by Phil Thompson via Skyhawk Study Group.



USS Kearsarge at sea 12 December 1965

► These photos were found in assorted attics, enjoy! ◄



VMA-324 pilots pose in front of the first A-4M delivered to an operational squadron at MCAS Yuma, April 1971. Skyhawk Association directors Bob Hickerson (rear, 2nd from left) and Mark Williams (rear, 3rd from left) were present.

Skyhawk Association member LtCol. Randy Cheston pilots the last production A-4 (160264 – 00) on its last flight, for delivery to the Flying Leatherneck Museum, then at MCAS El Toro. Wingman was LtCol. Billy Oehl, flying 02.



Two Blacksheep A-4Ms escort USAF F-15 Eagle back to MCAS Yuma following air combat maneuvering training sortie in R-2301, east of MCAS Yuma, in January 1980.
(Photo by Harry Gann.)



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TAPS

CDR Martin Asbacher, USN (Ret),
on May 21, 2007.



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JIM "TACO" POTTER REMEMBERED

Submitted by Denny Sapp



A group of us *Skyhawk* drivers gathered over the week-end for a memorial for Jim "Taco" Potter at Goldthwaithe, Texas. Jim died recently, and his family invited us to a celebration of his life during which his ashes were spread in the pecan grove at his ranch. Jim's association with the *Skyhawk* began in the RAG at VA-44, Cecil Field, in 1969 with orders then to VA-55 onboard USS *Hancock* from 1970-1972. That was followed by orders to VA-127 in Lemoore as an instructor, and thence to XO and commanding officer of VT-4 in Pensacola, from 1974-1976.



CAG 21 participants in the service honoring the life of "Taco" Potter were (L-R) top row: Steve Keibler, Mike Warde, Eric Burns, Lee McTaggart, Jim Loughmiller, Tim Bauer, Andy Haynes. Bottom row: Dan Zuhlke, Bubba Segar, Denny Sapp, and Kip Burton.



Go Ahead, Give A Guy A Gift

Got a buddy who tries to leave with your copy of the A-4Ever? Got a pal who flew the Scooter but never reads about its illustrious history? Got women around you that think you're making up all those war stories and flying tales? Got kids who ask what you did in the war, daddy?

Well, help is at hand--it's called the Gift Membership Subscription for the Skyhawk Association's favorite publication, the A-4Ever. For less than half a tank of gas, you get a full year's worth of Skyhawkabilia in print and not only that, it has become a collector's item as well. Three times a year our members rejoice when finding the A-4Ever in the mailbox, and you can share in that love by giving a gift membership to those in need. A card will be sent to the lucky recipient naming you as the donor, or not.

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Call sign/nickname _____ A-4 hours _____ A-4 Traps _____

Skyhawk Squadrons: _____

Referred By _____

Credit Card Payments may be made by calling toll-free **877-944-4295** from 8 am to 4 pm Pacific time. (This number is for dues payments only and cannot accept patch orders or other Association messages.)

Join by mail: Send payment in US funds to:
Skyhawk Association
2421 Clubside Dr.
Beavercreek, OH 45431-2503