



THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

Journal



*Flight of VMA-133 Dragon A-4Ms
December 1991*

THE A-4 EVER

Summer 2008

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 14 • NUMBER 2

Contents:

A Simple Fix • Boom-Boom Room • Flame-Out Stories • Puresome Unplugged
Prez Sez • Heinemann's Hotrod, Part I • R.G.'s Art • TINS • Take No Prisoners
Attic Attacks • Size Does Matter



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

SA Annual Meeting, 2008

The annual meeting of the association will again be held in conjunction with the Tailhook Association Symposium, this year on Friday, September 5, 2008, at 11:30 a.m. As always, the luncheon and annual meeting of members will take place at the Nugget, and we will post the location on the *Skyhawk* Association website as soon as it is designated.

We don't have details on the luncheon program as yet, but Youthly Puresome will once again serve as *Skyhawk* honcho for the joint hospitality suite, and Mike "Buick" Eberhardt and Treasurer Mark Williams will team up to ensure a fantastic luncheon. Terry and Pat Cooney will repeat as landlords for the *Skyhawk* Association booth in the exhibit area, and Pat will certainly be the preeminent source of information on where to find the best giveaways in the exhibit hall (ably assisted by Joe Turpen, of course).

If you are attending Tailhook, please plan to join us for the luncheon and program, including the short business meeting at which directors will be elected.

Director Terms Expiring

This year, the terms of four directors are ending. They are Ed Jobin, Terry Cooney, Mike Green and Bud Southworth. A nominating committee will be appointed in accordance with the bylaws, so if you desire to nominate someone for a director position, please email me at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

Another Tribute to Skyhawk Association Founder Whizzer White

The *Skyhawk* Association annually presents an award at the International Plastic Modelers' Society USA National Convention for the best rendition of a *Skyhawk* model. Beginning with the award this summer, the IPMS Best *Skyhawk* Award will be known as the Whizzer White Memorial Best *Skyhawk* Award.

Trans-Oceanic Movements

We're working on an article on trans-oceanic squadron movements for a future issue of the Journal and would like to hear your stories on that subject. The flight of an entire squadron (or more) across the Atlantic or Pacific is a complex operation under any circumstance--it was even more so back in the heyday of A-4 ferry flights before we began to avail ourselves of the assistance of USAF tankers. I doubt that we'll top the story of "VMA-223's TRANSLANT from Hell," related by Mike Larson in the Fall 2007 *A-4Ever* issue, but I'm equally sure there are some great stories yet to be told. Send them to me at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org, and don't be too concerned about the style and format. We'll dress up your submission and make you look good--we guarantee it!

Assistance with the Skyhawk Association Website

In the last two issues, we've issued an urgent plea for volunteers to step forward and assist our hard-working webmaster, David Weber. So far, no one has come forward.

We're well aware that electronic communication means are the future, and that we're seriously missing the boat today in not extending our print media to link with expanded online information. We've got lots of ideas for offering expanded content to our members who are technically inclined, but the association doesn't have the budget to employ IT specialists or digital communications experts.

Beyond that, the legacy that will be left by our association will be the gold

mine of information contained within our website; but today, that site is riddled with gaps in squadron and aircraft histories because of the huge backlog of information waiting in the queue to be posted. I know that we have members capable of joining David's team as assistant webmasters and helping to post images and written content. Please consider volunteering for this important effort. If you are computer literate but not experienced in editing websites, David can provide the necessary training. Contact him at webmaster@a4skyhawk.org.

Change of Command

My four-year tour as president of *Skyhawk* Association will end at the annual meeting this year (...I really mean it this time). The board will consider the officer slate for calendar year 2009 at their meeting at 0830 on Friday morning, September 5th. The meeting will be held at the Nugget, and we would love to have members join us to take part in the business of the association. Check at the association booth in the exhibit area to find out where the meeting will be held.

It's been a privilege for me to serve as your president, and I look forward to remaining involved with the board and helping to edit the journal, *The A-4 Ever*. See you in Reno!

A-4s Forever
Raven



The Whizzer White Memorial Best Skyhawk Award plaque, to be presented annually at the International Plastic Modelers' Society USA National Convention.



IN MEMORY OF
M. DAVIS "WHIZZER" WHITE, D.D.S
 (1939-2007)
 FOUNDER OF THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION, INC.

Officers and Directors

Bob Hickerson
 President and Director (FY 10)
hickers@beecreek.net

Mike "Buick" Eberhardt
 Vice President (Navy) and Director (FY 10)
TheBuick@aol.com

Ed Jobin
 Vice President (Marines) and Director (FY 08)
ed.jobin@goodrich.com

Terry Cooney
 Secretary and Director (FY 08)
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

Mark Williams
 Treasurer and Director (FY 09)
readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

Bill Gilchrist
 Director (FY 09)
a4driver@san.rr.com

John Gabbard
 Director (FY 10)
john.gabbard@domsoftware.com

Mike Green
 Director (FY 08)
agreen@crcwnet.com

Ted Langworthy
 Director (FY 10)
flybear@peoplepc.net

R.R. "Boom" Powell
 Director (FY 09)
vigihawk@cox.net

A.D. "Bud" Southworth
 Director (FY 08)
buds@walkerscl.com

Joe Turpen
 Director (FY 10)
forrestal@fewpb.net

David Weber
 Webmaster and Director (FY 09)
darweber@verizon.net

Skyhawk Association, Inc.
 2421 Clubside Drive
 Beavercreek, OH 45431
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com
 Website: www.skyhawk.org or
www.a4skyhawk.org
 David Weber, Webmaster
darweber@verizon.net

BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2008 •



The Prez Sez	2
Take No Prisoners: <i>Letters to the Editor</i>	4-7
R.G.'s Art	7
The Boom-Boom Room	14
Size Does Matter: <i>Modeling News</i>	15
Read? You Think We Read? <i>Book Review</i>	20
TINS X 2	21
Attic Attacks	22
New Paying Member\$	23
TAPS	23
Long-Range Scheduling Box	23



Flame-out Stories, Part II.	
By Pat Patrick	8-11
A Simple Fix.	
By Anthony Tambini, II	12-13
An Old Friend.	
By Dave Dollarhide	13-14
High Country.	
By Jack <i>Youthly Puresome</i> Woodul	16-17
Heinemann's Hotrod, Part I.	
By Bob Rahn	18-19

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.

Published by the Skyhawk Association © 2008

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: Flight of VMA-133 Dragon A-4Ms over Golden Gate Bridge on return to NAS Alameda.
 Photo © Joe Cupido, December 1991.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org



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

Please note email address!

Letters to the Editor

To *Skyhawk* Association:

Do you remember any data on the placement of the star on the A-4s?

I have seen graphics that place the star on the Es up front at the cockpit area like I remember, and have seen on all A4-A through C models.

I recently purchased the "US Navy & Marine Corps A-4 Skyhawk Units of The Vietnam War," and they show an A4-E BuNo 151105 of VA-93 in the Artists Colour Plates, pages 65-72 with the star forward.

I thought that when the E model came out, with the engine change, along with the added length to the nose of the aircraft, they moved the star to the rear at the speed brake area. Following upgrades kept the star in the rear area.

Evergreen's E model replica of John McCain's #416 from VA-46 is with the star forward, but pictures of VA-46 E models show it to the rear.

I have been sharing this discussion topic for some time with Pawel Mankowski, at the Vietnam Museum in Orlando, FL. We both have not been able to validate our findings. Can you lend any insight? This might be a question for "The A-4Ever" *Skyhawk* Association Journal.

Thanks everyone!

Jim Cameron

VA-23 1964-1967

[jc3sher@fastmail.fm]

(Ed. note: this email started a long and interesting chain of responses, the following one from Dave Dollarhide)

Jim,

The Evergreen replica is correct. The only A-4E in VA-46 on the '67 WEST-PAC cruise to have the stars and bars on the tail just happened to be the airplane I was in during the *Forrestal* fire, 150129. The paint scheme change for the Echo was taking place that year, and as the airplanes got new paint at O&R, the stars and bars moved to the rear. Around the same time, new airplanes coming from Douglas started showing

the new paint scheme.

In the photos below, from our '67 cruise, you can see the change. In VA-46 paint, it caused us to paint only one plaid strip on the tail, as "NAVY" and the BUNO was in the way.

Hope this helps,

Dave Dollarhide

[davedollarhide@msn.com]



Letter to the Editor

I read an article within the past year and can't remember whether it was in *The A-4Ever*, or the MCAA publication, *The Yellow Sheet*. I'm pretty sure it was not in *Tailhook*.

The article was about a four plane USMC A4 detachment from H&MS-15 on the USS *Hornet* late '65 to mid-'66. A good friend, Lennart R. "Jake" Jacobson was the CAG LSO on that cruise, and is interested in reading the article if I can run it down.

I flew out of Chu Lai, but was at Cubi for survival school while the *Hornet* was there, and attended the Marine Corps Birthday Ball put on by the station pukes. I met some of the pilots from the *Hornet* detachment at the celebration, but the festivities of the evening precludes my having any lasting memories, other than of another world class headache on November 11, 1965.

Jake professes amazement that all of the Marines in the detachment managed to live through the cruise, especially one of the group who always caught the "one" wire. I accused him of the inclination of USN types to believe that Marines are not "naturals" at the art of catching wires with hooks, as well as being jealous of their pretty uniforms.

The A-4Ever is a great publication. I look forward to each issue and appreciate the efforts of people like you who go above and beyond.

Thanks,

Vic Britt

[vicbritt@verizon.net]

(Ed. Note: Vic remembers Boom Powell's two-part series, *Skyhawks and Submarines*, which ran in *The A-4Ever*, Spring 2006 and Summer 2006. Copies of these issues are available upon request – see notice elsewhere in this issue.)

Your editors are working on a comprehensive index of major articles run in the *Skyhawk* Association publications since inception. We'll make that available on the website to help answer questions like this.

Letter to the Editor

Raven, when I read your account of LtGen Tom Miller delivering A4D-1 139930 to VMA-224 on 13 September 1956, I had to get out my log book to see when I had flown it. I had just joined the squadron, so I guess I was pretty low on the totem pole 'cause I didn't get to fly it till 8 October, then again on 9 October. We must have had only the one airplane for some time because I didn't get to fly it again till 28 December. Things started getting better in March '57, when I had nine A4 flights in four different airplanes, then nothing but A4s in April.

I wound up being the operations officer, and we deployed to Iwakuni, Japan, for a 15-month tour – my best tour in 31 years in the Corps.

Warmest regards,

BGen Tracy Gentry, USMC (Ret)

P.S. You guys are doing a great job!

Letter to the Editor

(Ed. Note: I responded to Larry Hudson's TINS tale by asking if he had a picture of the canopy embedded in the vertical stabilizer of the Skyhawk (see TINS this issue). He replied below.)

Hey, Bob.

I might have taken a picture of the A/C, but over the years, with time and moving around in life, I am sorry to say I do not have a picture. Cecil Field, being a RAG base at the time, had a lot of emergencies.

I saw another A-4 land on its belly tank and catch fire after forgetting to put the gear down. Then an F-8 *Crusader* lost his hydraulics on takeoff, and the pilot had to eject 200 feet above the runway. The jet blew up when it crashed on 36 Left, and the pilot made it out A-OK. One of the big and sad mishaps was when two *Skyhawks* had a midair, one landing and the other taking off. TA-4Fs. Three airmen died in that one, though one airman was able to eject OK.

Boomer Hudson

[hudsonboomer@netzero.net]

◆ ◆ ◆

Letter to the Editor

The Fall 2007 issue of *The A-4ever* newsletter article, "The Ghostriders' Smiling Giant," brought back fond memories of Captain Dennie Weichman.

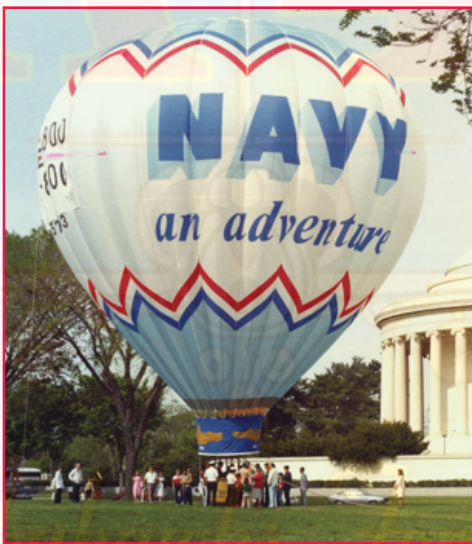
Not mentioned in the short article was his tour of duty as commanding officer at the Navy Weapons Evaluation Facility (NWEF) on Kirtland AFB, Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was assigned to NWEF during Dennie's tour, 1979-1982, and was a pilot on the Navy Balloon Team. I quote from the write-up I wrote, as team leader, about the team members. "Capt. Denis R. Weichman, USN, is the commanding officer of NAVWPNEVALFAC and has added ballooning to the long list of aircraft he has flown in his 26 years of Naval service. His strong support of the team and devotion of time to balloon training and crewing provides the central driving force for the team. He comes from Illinois, but has friends throughout the States."

I enclose two photos. The black and white photo shows the team in 1980.



Captain Weichman is second from the left in the back standing row and I am fourth. Note Dennie never wore his captain rank on his balloon team uniform. He was just one of the team and always allowed me to act as the team leader. This was unique, as many career Navy will know. He worked as hard as any of us and always had his famous warm, friendly smile. The officer pilots of the team were a close knit group, and I got to know Dennie as a good friend.

The color photo was taken at the Jefferson Memorial for the first inflation of



the new Raven balloon, which replaced the first, original balloon. Dennie helped me tremendously in convincing the recruiting command to finance the new balloon. I was sad to read of Dennie's untimely death.

I wrote SHANG LOG about my experiences with VA-12 during the 1970 USS *Shangri-La* CVS-38 WestPac deployment. I am currently writing an autobiography of my 24-years in the Navy. When I get to the NWEF tour,

I hope to write a comprehensive history of the Navy Hot Air Balloon team, which will include stories about Captain Denis R. Weichman, our smiling giant on the team.

CDR J. J. McBride, USN(Ret)
jimmcbride@qwest.net

(Ed. Note: CDR McBride's letter is a good opportunity to highlight a fact which was inadvertently left out of the article about Dennis Weichman, published in the Fall 2007 issue of *The A-4Ever*. Considering all of his missions, including those flown during his advisor tour, CAPT Weichman flew 625 missions in Vietnam, more than any other naval aviator.)

◆ ◆ ◆

Letter to the Editor

I'm trying to contact officers of VMA-225 who were on board USS *Essex* (CVA-9) Med Cruise, fall of 1959. Tentatively planning 50th year reunion in Summer, 2009. Any info appreciated.

Contact:

Bill Nelson (Capt, USMC, on the cruise, A-4 driver)
[br3131@aol.com]

(Ed. note: follow-up letter from Bill)

Hello and Thanks to all:

To David, Webmaster, thanks for forwarding my message to the Ready Room Coordinator and for placing my Want Ad on the internet site; Bob Hickerson, for getting things set up to run my request as a letter to the editor in the Summer 2008 Journal and on the "Scheduling Calendar" rather than an ad; Mark for requesting my desired username and password; Terry Cooney, for his nice Welcome Aboard letter and my New Member Number; and finally to Dr. Bob, who was very helpful in getting me started with the *Skyhawk* Association and on the road, I hope for a 50-year gathering of VMA-225, circa fall of 1959.

WOW, what team work!!
Respectfully, Bill Nelson

◆ ◆ ◆

Letter to the Editor

Tony [Tambini] once again writes a very entertaining piece of history. China Lake during that period of time was a wonderful place to live, continued...

LETTERS

Continued...

never a dull moment. I can remember standing in my back yard and watching my father fly low (when I say low, I mean *loooow*) over the house and tipping the wings of his A-4 as he did. On 7 June 1963, President Kennedy came to the Test Station and a weapons demonstration was put on for him (Project 1-63). Tambini flew A-4E 149969 in the Shrike demonstration for that show. One month later Sickel and Tambini were off to Cuba for Rainhat. In your editor's note to Cdr. Tambini's *Armed Forces Day* story you note that he flew 149969 during Project Rainhat. Not so, Cdr. Sickel flew 969 and (then) Lt. Tambini flew A-4C 147680.

In typical Navy (and Marine) fashion, the boss always gets the new toy. John Sickel
[sickeljohn@aol.com]



Letter to the Editor

Bob, excellent newsletter. I'm already looking forward to the next issue.

I'm writing a book on the development of U.S. Navy carrier-based attack aircraft to go along with the one I wrote on the development of carrier-based jet fighters. (Ed. Note: *U.S. Naval Air Superiority, Development of Shipborne Jet Fighters 1943 – 1962; Specialty Press, 276 pp. ISBN 10:1580071104*).

Naturally, the A-4 Skyhawk plays a major role. I need a copy of the Winter

2006 Quarterly that has an article by Jim Walters on "Training for the A-4 Nuclear Delivery Mission." I would also very much like to have a picture of the white anti-flash suit described by Jack Woodul, among others. Please let me know if there is any cost involved.

Thanks for your help - and maybe somebody can tell me what kind of Bullpup is under the wing of 227 in the attached picture, and why there is a different load on each Skyhawk...

(Ed. Note: see attached photo).

Tommy H. Thomason

[tommythomason@sbcglobal.net]



WFF, Attack Squadron (VA) 76, 1960-62

Wynn "Capt. Hook" Foster models white anti-flash flight suit. Picture from Capt. Foster via Boom Powell.



Letter to the Editor

Hello - I wonder if you can help me place a servicemember in VMF-533. The man's name is Pat "Poosa" (not sure of spelling), we believe he was from Puerto Rico, and was in the unit sometime in 1955-1956. Is there any way you could tell me the correct spelling of his name and when he was in the unit?

Thanks for any help you can give me. This information is needed in support of another veteran's claim.

Susie Venters

304.399.9292

susann.venters@va.gov



Letter to the Editor

Hi, Raven - I first met Whizzer at the '03 Hook, when I signed up on his yellow legal pad. Great tribute by Pure-some in the Spring issue. Where can I send a contribution for the "luncheon banner" mentioned in the board meeting summary?

Thanks, LtCol T.R. "Smoke" White
[trandmaryjo@aol.com]

Contributions may be sent to Mark Williams, 400 Howell Way, #102, Edmonds, WA 98020.



Letter to the Editor

Bob, I saw the letter that Peter Mer-sky wrote in the latest volume of *The A-4Ever*. Since initiating the search, I have found out more about the incident. I talked with Preston Reynolds, who according to R.G.'s notes, was the A-3 pilot. He sent me a long letter explain-

What the heck is going on here?

This has got to be--not that there's anything wrong with that--one of the more interesting Skyhawk stories, and we're having a contest to see who can write the best caption for this photo from Boom Powell.

Send your submissions to sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org, and we'll publish them in the Fall 2008 issue. If you know what was actually going on, we'll take that too! And remember, the editorial staff of the A-4Ever has limited editorial skills, so don't push your luck, people other than Marines read this, you know....



ing that while he had saved a wing-damaged A-4 during the '69-'70 cruise on the *Connie*, he didn't think it ever happened with the A-3 Det on the *Hancock*. He believes that Bob Jackson, former CO of VAQ-135 influenced R.G. to use the *Hancock* as the setting for the painting.

R.G.'s daughter, Sharlyn Marsh, has had several A-4 pilots come up to her at Tailhook saying that they were the pilot of the A-4 pictured. Since it probably happened more than once, I'm sure they were all correct.

The good news is, that thanks to Sharlyn, I now have a great big giclee print of the painting hanging in my man-cave in the basement, where my hat is always on the bar. I hope some others respond so I can learn the full story of the painting.

Regards,

Terry Wolf

[tairwolf@comcast.net]

◆ ◆ ◆

Letter to the Editor

I am an historical researcher for the Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum in New York, and am interested in information not only on the A-4C (BuNo 142833) in the museum's collection, but on hearing from any association member who served aboard the *Intrepid*. I will be delighted to share any information I have with you, and would be quite interested in joining your research team.

Frank Kalesnik, Ph.D.

Major, USMCR (Ret.)

[frank.kalesnik@gmail.com]

(Ed. note: John "Gabby" Gabbard, Skyhawk Association Director and member of the research team provided this information.)

JOHN GABBARD WROTE:

Frank,

Here is the assignment history for BuNo 142833:

142833 c/n 11895

30 Jul 1958 - BAR FA El Segundo, CA

05 Aug 1958 - VMA-331 MCAS Miami, FL

01 Jun 1959 - H&MS-24 MCAS Cherry Point, NC

08 Sep 1959 - H&MS-32 MCAS Cherry Point, NC

26 Oct 1959 - VMA-331 MCAS Beaufort, SC

31 May 1960 - VMA-331 NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

31 Nov 1960 - VMA-331 MCAS Beaufort, SC

09 Mar 1961 - VMA-331 NAS Roosevelt Roads, PR

04 Apr 1961 - VMA-331 MCAS Beaufort, SC

31 May 1961 - Storage NAF Litchfield Park, AZ

29 Nov 1961 - MCAS AES-12 MCAS Quantico, VA

18 Feb 1964 - Storage NAF Litchfield Park, AZ

18 Aug 1965 - O&R BUWEPS FR NAS Quonset Point, RI

30 Dec 1965 - VA-95 NAS Lemoore, CA

14 Jan 1966 - VA-95 USS *Intrepid*

14 Jan 1966 - VA-95 NAS Lemoore, CA

30 Jun 1967 - VA-95 USS *Shangri La*

17 Jun 1968 - VA-95 USS *John F. Kennedy*

08 Oct 1968 - NAS NAS Twin Cities, MN

09 Oct 1968 - NAS Twin Cities Convert to TA-4B

23 Jan 1970 - NAF NAF Detroit, MI

01 Sep 1970 - NAS NAS New York, NY

02 Sep 1970 - Stricken 4S

On Display ----- Intrepid Sea-Air Museum, New York City, NY

◆ ◆ ◆

R.G.'s ART

• "A Moment of Truth" •



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

A moment that all
naval aviators
can relate to,
coming aboard a
carrier with the
tailhook down
looking for
the 3 wire:
R.G. Smith's
"A Moment of Truth."



FLAME-OUT STORIES

Part II

By Meredith W. "Pat" Patrick, CAPT, USN (Ret)



*Ed. Note: Ensign Pat Patrick suffered two catastrophic engine flameouts in A-4B aircraft in just over two months – surely a world record of some sort (especially considering that he survived to finish a long and productive Navy career). Part I of this saga was published in **The A-4Ever** Volume 14, Number 1 (Spring 2008).*

Not Again!

I ditched A4D-1 bureau number 142176 (side number Baker Boy 326) on 21 Feb, 1959. That was one of the coldest days that Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida, had experienced in several years. While I was briefing the instructor pilot (IP) on my navigation and weapon delivery plan, it was 27 degrees. The temperature had climbed only to 29 when I hit the water just before noon.

I was scheduled that Saturday morning for a high-low navigation flight with a simulated nuclear weapon delivery at Stephens Lake target near the end of the flight. The target was just south of NAS Cecil Field, Florida. I had two 150-gallon droppable fuel tanks on the wing weapon stations and a 1,200-pound, concrete filled "shape" simulating a Mk-12 nuclear weapon on the centerline bomb rack.

After takeoff, the instructor pilot flying chase and I climbed to 41,000 feet. The A-4A weighed only 8100 pounds dry and had 7800 pounds of thrust, so at light weights it climbed like a rocket. Even with the extra fuel and shape, it took us very few minutes to level off at 41,000 feet. In fact, I have timed the climb out from the weapons release escape maneuver in a clean A-4A at less than six minutes from 100 feet to over 40,000. (The climb schedule was 370 knots indicated to .80 indicated *Mach* number).

We flew down the East Coast of Florida to just south of Homestead AFB, turned and crossed the Everglades, then returned up the West Coast of Florida

to Deadman's Bay. It was an incredibly beautiful day with crystal-clear visibility and a few puffy cumulous clouds. As we cruise climbed from 41,000 to just over 47,000 feet during the high altitude portion of the flight, I could see the entire peninsula of Florida and I thought, "Man, this is the life for me."

I then descended to 100 feet at 420 knots and flew in to the target. I led our two-plane formation on the final run in to the target at 100 feet and 500 knots. I

delivered the weapon with a 45-degree medium-angle-loft maneuver and went over the top, inverted, while executing the half-Cuban-eight escape maneuver. We ran out away from the target at the planned 1,100-foot burst height and 570 knots indicated air speed. When clear of the simulated safe overpressure ring, we climbed to 5,500 feet, turned across the Orange River Bridge, and headed north up the St. Johns River to enter the traffic pattern for runway 5 at NAS Jacksonville.

Soon after crossing the bridge and near the east bank of the St. Johns River, I felt that awful deceleration again. I was involuntarily leaning forward in the shoulder straps. I glanced to my right to pick up the instructor pilot who was sliding by on my right side with full speed breaks extended. I shook my head as he went by and deployed the emergency ram air turbine (RAT) to keep electric power and hydraulic pressure while I set up for another relight attempt.

I had read everything I could find about flying since I was about eight years old, and one consistent bit of advice from all of the old aviators had been to

always have a place to go when you are in trouble. They counseled that when you change operating areas you should always look around and find the safest place to go when the engine quits. I had selected the two-mile-wide section of the St. Johns River just northeast of NAS Jacksonville. My fallback plan was to fly to the middle of the river, line up with the long axis of the river, stall the airplane, and eject. That would allow the aircraft to fall into the river and do no harm to the people and houses on either side of the river. The shallow river was also a good parachute landing spot close to both helicopter and boat rescue facilities. It was also close to the hospital at NAS Jacksonville if I needed medical treatment quickly.

At that time, however, runway 27 looked like a good option for a flame-out approach. I really didn't want to eject,

"My fallback plan was to fly to the middle of the river, line up with the long axis of the river, stall the airplane, and eject. That would allow the aircraft to fall into the river and do no harm to the people and houses on either side of the river."

especially since from recent experience I knew how much it hurt. I traded airspeed for altitude while turning in toward runway 27, broadcast the *Mayday*, and told the tower my intentions. The tower and the instructor pilot both "rogered" and the tower cleared me and gave me priority for the landing. As I turned through about 45 degrees position, I was descending again through about 5,200 feet with a little excess airspeed, but not enough to make the runway. My landing gear and flaps were still up, and drop tanks still on. I could soon tell I wasn't going to make it. The velocity vector that I drew with my mind's eye ended in the water about 50 feet short of the concrete seawall. The flame-out approach was no longer a good plan.

I immediately shifted back to the original plan and headed for the center of the wide section of river. I still had electric power from the RAT and told the IP what I was up to. He "rogered" and kept position by doing a weave back and forth over the top of me as I headed the few thousand yards up the river. I kept bleeding off airspeed so as to reach a stall as high off the river as I could manage.

When I arrived over the center of the river headed north, I pulled the nose up into the stall. I was at 2,800 feet and 112 knots. The aircraft shuttered and banged as it entered the stall, and I pulled hard on the face curtain with both hands. I pulled hard three times against a hard metal stop and it didn't budge. I knew immediately that I was dead because never before (or since) was I able to recover an A-4 from a full stall in less than 3,200 feet. (Of course, I have never practiced one starting in the very dense air at 3,200 feet, either.) My next thought after, "You are dead," was, "At least you can look good."

What I meant was that I wanted to show my squadron mates that I never gave up and was fighting it all the way. So, in order to "look good," I released the face curtain and noticed that the aircraft nose had already fallen through the horizontal and was nosing over toward the river while I had been pulling on the face curtain. I grabbed the stick and shoved it further forward to increase airspeed as rapidly as possible. During the stall, the left wing had rocked down into a near 90-degree angle of bank, so as I shoved the stick forward, I was now aligned 90 degrees to the long axis of the river, headed almost due west, instead of paralleling the long axis. While pushing the stick forward with my right hand, I reached down to the emergency release handle, pulled it, and blew the drop tanks off the wings. I had wanted to land on them if I could have shot the flame-out approach, but now I needed them gone for two reasons: to get airspeed as quickly as I could to recover from the stall; and to have the flat undersurface of the wing and fuselage available to ditch on without having a drop tank dig in and cartwheel me at impact.

I also locked my shoulder harness with my left hand, just in case. I still didn't really believe that I could pull this off, but that was a part of looking good. They would find me properly set up when they fished my body out of the water. When the drop tanks blew off, the airspeed needle zoomed up immediately to 155 knots and I started trying to pull the nose up to round out the descent.

During the stall, I had no electric power and therefore no radio, but when the airspeed came up the RAT began to function. Consequently, I again had

electric power and better hydraulic boost for the controls. I pulled back on the stick until I felt the airflow just begin to separate from the wings, then began to ease off and pull again to the edge of separation. I kept it, by feel, at or near the optimum angle of attack until I rounded it off about 10 to 15 feet clear of the water. When I had stopped the descent and still had not hit the water, I thought, "Hey, maybe!"

I could hear the IP's voice on the radio. His voice was very deliberate; he was enunciating every word carefully, because he knew he did not have time to say it twice. He said, "You had better put it on, you are running out of river." I had planned to hold it off the water until I reached 125 knots then ease it onto the river very flat. His call was just in time because as I glanced up, I could see very large trees, very close.

I glanced at the airspeed indicator, saw 135 knots, and thought, "That's close enough." I then eased off on the back-pressure against the stick to put the belly of the aircraft onto the water as flat as I could. Because my eyeballs were now less than seven feet off the water, I could see that I was drifting very slightly to the right with a quartering tail wind. There were very small ripples on the water, which gave me good depth perception but not enough wave height to catch a wing tip. The conditions were near perfect for impact.

When the aircraft hit the water, I can remember starting forward and to the right and then it was lights out. There was no pressure and no pain of any kind. I just entered a very deep sleep instantaneously. The next awareness I had was waking up with my head hanging down on my chest and the helmet feeling very heavy. I could not believe it. I was still alive.

No one had ever survived a ditching in an A-4 or F-8, the two newest aircraft in the fleet at the time. I could see translucent light straight up and thought I was resting on the bottom of the shallow river. I thought, "Okay let's get out of here." Emergency procedures say pull the ditching handle and it will blow the canopy off and cut you loose from the seat with your parachute and para-raft still attached. So, I pulled the ditching handle on the right side of the seat and stood up. I banged into the canopy,



which was still locked and closed. I sat back down and thought, "You have got to be s---'ing me. What else can go wrong?" My next thought was, "I have survived this ditching and I am not going to die in this airplane." I reached for my survival knife, which was strapped to my right calf and started to pull it out to scribe an X in the Plexiglas and bash my way out. We had been taught this for a last-ditch escape effort.

Before I got the knife all the way out of the scabbard, I thought, "Wait a minute, dummy, you haven't tried the manual open handle." So I slid the knife back into the scabbard and reached over with my left hand with a backhand motion and pulled the canopy handle aft. Boom! The canopy blew aft and up a few feet, but it was still attached behind the seat. I stood up, put my right foot onto the seat, and pushed the canopy further out of the way with my helmet. I was very surprised to learn that I was still on the surface and the river was just beginning to flow over the canopy rail and into the cockpit as the aircraft settled toward the bottom.

I learned later from the air controllers in the tower, who could see all of this plainly, and from the IP who was also a close-in witness, that it was only about 12 seconds from when the splash went up until I crawled out of the cockpit. The reason I thought I was on the bottom was that the huge splash was still subsiding while I was going through all of the emergency procedures and made it look like I was under water.

The IP said he could not believe what he saw. The little A4 left a small rooster tail in the water *continued...*

EARLY SKYHAWK FLAME-OUTS

Continued...

just before impact, but when it hit the water it did not plane or skip across the water as he thought it would. It dug in, stopped within the length of the aircraft, and turned almost 90 degrees to the right while stopping instantly. It then was totally obscured as the huge splash went up and covered the aircraft completely for the next several seconds. When the splash subsided, the IP was very surprised to see that the aircraft looked essentially intact and was still afloat.

I pushed away from the aircraft as it settled and inflated one side of my Mk-3C flotation gear. I then started working on getting rid of my parachute and para-raft and realized that I was tangled up with the para-raft lanyard and a couple of shroud lines from the partially opened parachute. I couldn't get the shoulder harness fittings released with my flight gloves on. They were very slick when wet. So I took off the gloves, released the fittings, and once again reached for my knife. It was still there. I pulled it out, cut the para-raft lanyard and shroud lines, then put it back in the scabbard.

Those cuts freed me from the para-chute and life raft, but it was all I could do with my hands. When I pulled them out of the water I couldn't believe what I saw- my hands were so cold they just stopped functioning. It looked like my fingers were locked in a partially curled position. I wanted to inflate the other half

of my flotation gear, but the hands just didn't work.

I could hear a helicopter approaching, and when I looked toward the sound there were two HS-3s with Marine markings just crossing the riverbank headed for me. I thought, "Well, at least one thing is going right; that is a very fast response." As luck would have it, the two Marine helicopters were departing on a cross-country flight, returning to New River, North Carolina, and just happened to time their departure right for me. One of them had an old "horse collar" rescue device and lowered it to me from a hover. My hands didn't work, but I managed to work my right elbow through the horse collar, roll through to my right, and hook it with my left elbow too. They reeled me up and delivered me, once again, directly to the hospital at NAS Jacksonville.

The flight surgeons only kept me long enough to fill out some forms and reassure themselves that I was uninjured. I had a dark bruise under my right eye from having stretched the shoulder harness far enough to make contact with the glare shield. I also had a minor cut on my left thumb from cutting it while freeing myself from the entanglement. Other than that I was just sore all over. Every muscle and bone seemed to hurt, but all body parts were intact.

The aircraft that I ejected from two months earlier in December 1958, was Baker Boy 325, and the one that I ditched in February was Baker Boy 326. The Operations Officer, Commander Homyak, announced to the ready room that I would never, ever, be allowed to fly 327.

This accident prompted several important changes to the A-4A and A-4B and subsequently to all modern jets. Because I could not eject and was able to ditch the aircraft pretty much intact, the long-running problem with the engine was finally diagnosed con-

clusively. We had lost many A-4As over the previous three months. (I believe we lost nine aircraft and four pilots, but my memory is not clear on the exact numbers.) The engines had quit with no advance warning of any kind. Except in this case, the evidence was destroyed when the aircraft crashed and burned. Included among the destroyed aircraft was the A-4A I had ejected from following a flameout on 16 December 1958.

From Dave Dollarhide

This is said to be the first successful A-4 ditchingI never heard of a successful ditching in a Scooter before reading this. This was Pat Patrick's second engine failure in just a few weeks. I got it from Skip Wood, who watched the event from the seawall.

It also takes me back to another A-4 ditching in the St. Johns River, just before I joined the reserves in 1970. Chuck (Spanky) Kellahan lost his engine turning final for RW 27 at NAS JAX, but didn't punch out. As I recall, he blew the canopy, then hit the water just short of the runway. For some reason, he didn't have his shoulder straps connected and was killed when his head hit the top of the windscreen. There was speculation that he had removed the harness to allow him to twist around in the cockpit during the dogfight just prior to returning to NAS JAX.

Then there was Dan Condon, who punched out at the other end of the runway around 1973. I was flying his wing and watched the fire from his ejection seat. The airplane pan-caked into the Ortega River, followed by a good chute and just half a swing before hitting the water. I called out the helo, while circling at a few hundred feet over his head. It was the weekend and boats were all over the place. One pulled up to Dan, filled with drunken A-7 pilots from Cecil on a ski trip. They were applauding the impromptu air show and wanted to know if he wanted a "pull" around the river. I took this photo the next day.



Lessons Learned, and Fixes

This ditching revealed the reason for the numerous flameouts. The spline that connected the high-pressure fuel pump to the engine's accessory gear drive was failing after only 20 to 100 hours of operation. Instead of being mounted on a firm track to keep the spline normal to the plane of rotation, the pump was mounted on four bolts. When any bolt loosened, the pump would lose its alignment normal to the plane of rotation and the spline (which operated at extremely high RPM) and would grind itself to a nub immediately. This instantly shut off all fuel flow to the engine and an abrupt flame-out resulted with no warning and no chance for a relight.

As soon as the cause was determined, all A-4A and B aircraft were grounded for inspection and replacement of the pump mounting. The extent of the problem was apparent when all remaining A-4As and Bs on the VA-44 ramp (about 60 aircraft) were inspected and about 30 percent of them were found to be on the verge of failure. Fixing this problem alone certainly reduced the A-4 accident rate by a very large factor.

Additionally, the failure of the ejection seat resulted in the addition of the alternate ejection handle between the pilot's legs to back up the face curtain which was at the top of the ejection seat behind the pilot's head. Prior to this accident, Navy jets had had only a face curtain with no alternate handle. Many crewmen were later saved because under high-g loads they could not reach the face curtain, but could eject by pulling the alternate handle. Also, in the event of a problem immediately after catapult launch, the alternate handle can be activated faster than the face curtain. Clearly, the addition of the alternate handle proved to be useful beyond the original intent of providing a backup in the event of face curtain failure.

Seven years later, in October 1966, the Chief Petty Officer who had supervised the ejection seat shop at VA-44 when I had the accident had a confession for me on the day of his retirement from VA-125 in Lemoore, California. At the time, he told me that the problem with the ejection seat was a bad design. According to his story, the routing of the cable between the face curtain and the actuators was faulty. According to him, they had figured out a fix so it wouldn't happen again. His con-

fession was that they had lied about the design problem. The riggers had just installed the cable wrong, and it was pulling in the wrong direction when I yanked on the face curtain. A change was made so that the cable could only be routed in the correct direction.

Also, because I had demonstrated that a pilot could survive a downwind ditching at 135 knots, a pressure relief valve was installed in the side of the cockpit to equalize pressure and allow the pilot to get the canopy open and exit more easily under water. Before that time, there had been no survivors of ditchings in A-4 or F-8 aircraft, so there had been no incentive to be concerned about underwater escape.

Because I had trouble releasing the parachute connections with wet gloves in the water after escape, new "Koch fittings" were also designed with serrated edges to allow actuation with slick, wet gloves.

Many lessons were learned from this experience, and the key fixes were made quickly, before A-4s were allowed to fly again. In addition to all of the necessary mechanical fixes that this accident brought about, the biggest lesson learned was, "Don't ever give up. Keep fighting it all the way, even if it is just to look good."

USN History – A-4B 142176

21 Mar 1957 - BAR FA - El Segundo, CA
25 Apr 1957 - VA-83 - NAS Oceana, VA
25 Dec 1957 - VA-172 - Aboard USS Saratoga
28 Feb 1958 - VA-172 - NAS Cecil Field, FL
23 Jul 1958 - VA-44 - NAS Jacksonville, FL
21 Feb 1959 - Accident - NAS Jacksonville, FL
28 Feb 1959 - Striken - 1AA1
21 Feb 1959 - (VA-44 AD-326) engine flamed out and ditched in St John's River, FL - Ens. Pat Patrick rescued

Scooter's Forever!

THEN AND NOW

From Pat Patrick: I can't remember if I told you guys that when I did a study at the Center for Naval Analyses a few years ago, I uncovered the accident statistics for the A4 in 1958 and the same data for the F/A-18C an equivalent strike fighter for the year 2001. The accident rate for the A4 was 80 per 100,000 flight hours (actually in those days the number was related to 10,000 flight hours so it was 8 per 10,000 flight hours). The same number for the F/A-18C was 1.77! It is 44 times safer to fly strike fighters today than it was in 1958. Now that is real progress. And, a lot of us worked very hard for many years through several careers to make that happen. An interesting pun is that "that was no accident."



NS. PATRICK (R) CONFERS WITH INSTRUCTOR BEFORE MAKING PRACTICE BOMB DRO

A SIMPLE FIX

By Anthony L. Tambini, II, CDR USN(Ret)



It was a simple flight to test a Zuni rocket pod modification, the kind of test that you give to the new guy; take a couple of pods of Zuni rockets up and shoot them. Nothing to it. The Zuni 5-inch folding fin rocket was originally developed for air-to-air, as well as air-to-ground use. In the early days of jet aircraft, it was commonly believed that fighter aircraft and aerial combat would soon become a thing of the past. The best defense against high speed bombers was thought to be interceptor airplanes that would race to a point in the sky and fire salvos of unguided rockets at the oncoming enemy airplanes. The Zuni seemed ideally suited for this mission. Carried in a pod of four rockets with frangible aerodynamic fairings fore and aft to reduce drag, rockets could be fired in single, ripple, or salvo modes.

Reports coming back from the fleet complained of high dud rates. At high altitudes, the salvo mode worked, but only the first rocket in the pod was firing successfully in ripple or single fire mode. After investigation, it was discovered that the aerodynamic fairings which were supposed to shatter when the rockets were fired didn't break away easily at high altitude. When the first rocket fired, the pressure buildup

necessary to break the aft fairing was sufficient to rupture the motor seals of the remaining three rockets in the pod, rendering them useless.

An Aviation Ordnance Department engineer reasoned logically that if high gas pressure was the problem, a simple fix was in order. Reduce the pressure. A two-inch hole was cut into the center of the aft fairing on two "test pods". Without further thought, an A4-A and range time were scheduled for a flight test of the alteration. Enter the new guy: with one pod under each wing, I was instructed to climb to thirty-five thousand feet altitude and fire one rocket from each pod. The remaining three rockets would be brought back for inspection to determine the effectiveness of the modification.

Startup and taxi out were routine. After stopping at the end of the runway for final arming of my two Zuni pods, I took off and climbed to altitude on the test range. Upon reaching the assigned altitude over the range and receiving clearance from "range control," I fired the first rocket from the pod on the left wing. I saw a flash and heard the *swoosh* of the first rocket as it left the pod. It was immediately followed by a second flash. This flash was followed by a *swoosh* and a very loud thump.

The aircraft immediately began to buck and vibrate heavily. I relayed my observations and flight conditions to the ground controller while fighting the aircraft and its suddenly difficult controls. My first thought was that a panel had come

off the bird, or maybe something was hanging out that shouldn't be. The controller on the ground radioed back that everything looked normal from down there, and that I should fire the rocket from the second pod and complete the test as long as I was up there.

With some apprehension, I set up to fire the second pod, all the while wrestling the airplane which seemed to want to fly sideways. I pulled the trigger, and again a flash, a *swoosh*, and again, another flash, *swoosh*, and a very loud bang, as I saw the second Zuni impact the aircraft just beneath where I was sitting.

Now I really had my hands full. Vibrating and shaking violently, the airplane was taking all that I had to maintain control. I radioed my situation to the ground controller and told him that I would try to make it back to the Naval Air Facility. The airplane really didn't want to fly. I felt like I was attached to a giant, violent bronco. My main concern was that the airplane would shake itself to pieces before I could get it on the ground. I could see the Air Facility from my position on the range and set up for a fast, steep, straight in approach to the long runway. The thought of ejection never crossed my mind. As long as I was able to control this beast, I wanted to get it on the ground to see just what I had done to myself.

My next problem was the landing gear. They seemed to take forever coming down, grinding, thumping and finally jerking into a down and locked indication on short final. Amazingly, the airplane seemed to settle down a bit after the landing gears were

continued...



Left Zuni pod after tearing loose from the aft attach points and pointing at the cockpit.



Close up of aft lug torn from Zuni pod.

AN OLD FRIEND

By Dave Dollarhide



We'd just experienced the USS *Forrestal* fire in the summer of '67, where one hundred thirty-four shipmates were lost that tragic day off the coast of Vietnam. My squadron, the VA-46 Clansmen, lost all but five of our fourteen A-4E *Skyhawks* in the fire and explosions. Those five aircraft were flown to Japan to sit in the "pool" as combat replacements. After the four week return cruise to the U.S., we reported to NAS Cecil in Jacksonville, Florida, where ten older A-4B Scooters awaited us on the ramp next to Hangar 14.

We would fly the "Bravo" for the next nine months before transition to the A-7, and it didn't mater to us that our aging birds had been around the block a few times. We were anxious to return to normal squadron life, and flying our new steeds would be just the ticket.

The Bravo may have been lacking in fancy equipment, but it was much lighter than the newer models and flew like a dream . . . like a *Skyhawk* was supposed to fly. Who needs autopilots, radars and such when your machine could zip around the sky with such ease? With an empty weight of just over

9,000 lbs, the J-65 engine provided nice climb performance in most configurations, and without the weight of a radar in the tin nose, the Bravo could out turn most adversaries. Couple that with the famous *Skyhawk* 720-degree per second roll rate, and we were set for a fun nine months.

Most of the time, our airplanes were flown clean, or with only a centerline drop tank. They were lean machines, and we took advantage of their ability to win the local dogfights. The higher thrust Super Echo had just come to Cecil, but they were no match for our tight turning Bravos.

We even posted a morning and afternoon "Zapper of the Day" (ZOD) on the daily flight schedule. His sole responsibility was to bounce other Clansmen flights as the duty MiG. These were still the days of VFR flying, and on a typical flight to drop a few blue racer practice bombs on Pinecastle Target, we were in combat spread both coming and going, with

everyone rubbernecking to catch a first look at the attacking ZOD.

If the ZOD didn't show, we'd circle a local lake, known as Ocean Pond. A good fight could usually be found there, and on one occasion, I found myself in a furball with 12 airplanes of various types from Cecil. It gave new meaning to *one versus many*.

Oh, sure, one of the J-65 engines seized along the way, giving me a good reason to try out that rocket strapped to the back of the seat, but you take the good with the bad. Despite that experience, flying the old Bravo those few months was truly the highlight of my Navy flying.

Leap forward just a tad--like 37 years. I had recently volunteered to be the SDO (point of contact) for my old squadron on the *Skyhawk* Association website. I'd posted a number of photos from my collection, done some research on the squadron's Clansman *continued...*



New friend: Dave Dollarhide poses with Pawel Mankowski of the Vietnam War Museum in Orlando. Dave is the one with the gray hair.

A SIMPLE FIX *continued*

down, and I landed safely.

Back on the flightline, the airplane attracted quite a crowd. A large, black X was etched in the fuselage right under where I had been sitting as the two rockets crossed under me. The rocket pods had physically torn themselves out of the aft attach points and lodged outside the after sway braces, leaving their lugs in the hooks of the bomb racks. The rocket tubes were pointed directly at the cockpit of the airplane. In this position the pods interfered with the landing gear operation, jammed against the main landing gear doors.

It's a wonder the landing gear came down at all. Both wings and the fuselage were extensively damaged where the second rocket from each pod had torn through the fuselage and debris had trailed along the underside of the wings and generally made a mess. The only reason that the remaining two rockets in each pod didn't fire was that the electrical connection was physically ripped out before the impulse reached the last two rockets. The ordnanceman at the end of the runway had mistakenly set the pods on ripple instead of single fire.

The easy fix of the two-inch hole

turned out to be a very effective jet nozzle directing the rocket exhaust upward and inward with such force that the lugs and electrical connections were physically ripped out of the metal pods. The aft end of each pod had been forced down and outboard of the bomb rack sway braces with the rocket tubes pointing directly at the fuselage just below the cockpit. Had the electrical connection not been broken by the violent wrenching of the pod out of its mount, two more rockets would have followed, and I might not be sitting here typing my account of the "simple test".

AN OLD FRIEND

Continued...

tartan and was answering occasional inquiries from the link to my email address.

Pawel Mankowski, with the Vietnam War Museum in Orlando, FL, dropped me a note in 2005 asking about an A-4B in their possession. Bureau number 142741 happened to be one of those cool machines we'd flown back in '67 and '68 at Cecil. Over a period of weeks, Pawel and I went back and forth over how they were painted then and the history from that time frame in VA-46. Of course, I'd flown this particular bird and was excited about seeing it refurbished.



Cockpit before restoration.

A few months later, Pawel reported that he'd been scratching some paint off the right side of the airplane and found my name under several layers: LTJG DAVE DOLLARHIDE! During our previous discussions, I hadn't realized that this was the airplane with my name on the side. Now, I was really interested.

I went back to my old photos and sure enough, found myself as a young man in the cockpit of then AC 403. Pawel advised they planned to restore the airplane in VA-46 colors, with my name on the side. I told him that LCDR John Donahue was the operations officer in those days and his name should be on the left side of the jet. We had a plan.

At one point, I jumped in my Experimental RV-4 and flew to Orlando, where Pawel picked me up at the nearby airport. Arriving at the museum, I found my old Bravo looking rather sad, with the nose strut collapsed, peeling paint and generally dilapidated.

Pawel slid the unattached canopy back on the fuselage, and with the help of a ladder, I crawled back in the cockpit for the first time in 38 years. The seat had been removed and the panel had been stripped long ago; but none the less, a wave of nostalgia came over me as I surveyed the remaining switches and levers.

Only aging aviators really know what I mean--that airplanes we've flown are more than just a hunk of metal. That stick and throttle had been in my hands during some incredible experiences, moments that many can only dream of. That day, as I squatted on the floor of that gutted and dirty cockpit, it was a familiar place. I was visiting an old friend.

142741 is well on its way to a completed restoration, and I'm amazed at the work that's been done. The cockpit looks brand new, and before long, the Clansman tartan stripes will adorn the old Bravo. A ceremony is planned and you can bet that John Donahue and I will be there. I'll be sure to take a snapshot so you can see what a VA-46 jet looked like in 1968.



Cockpit after restoration.

? BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Puzzlers from Boom Powell •



Here are some puzzlin' yet probin' photos and questions from the Boomster, see if you can go 3-for-3 with him. This is the honor system, of course...

Question 1. What are (were?) the nonsensical names for the five target complexes at MCAS Yuma? Extra credit if you write in to tell us the numerical designation for each target; tell us which targets were designed for nuclear weapons delivery practice; and describe the visual cue for finding the start of the run-in line for the nuclear targets. Send your answers to sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.



Question 2. From Dave Dollarhide: what does the lower-case "s" after the bureau number on 152046 mean?



Question 3. Other than the pilot's expression, how can you tell this is a posed photo-op with no intention to fly?

See Answers on Page 17.



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Sneak Preview •

Classic Airframes 1/48 TA-4J *Skyhawk*

By Fotios Rouch

Background

The *Skyhawk* was the first jet aircraft to succeed the *Skyraider* in the close air support and interdiction role in the early 1950's. The *Skyhawk* was intentionally kept light and simple in its design, earning cool nicknames like "Scooter" or Bantam-bomber (small domestic chicken)! In all, 2960 *Skyhawks* were built, of which 555 were two-seat variants.

The TA-4F first saw active duty in 1966 to train Navy and Marine pilots for the war in Vietnam. The TA-4J was the advanced flight trainer and was introduced in 1970 to replace the TA-9J two-seat *Cougar* that was getting long in the tooth. In 1998, the TA-4J was retired from the Navy at NAS Pensacola; however the TA-4J continued flying for the US as an adversary/aggressor and for launching aerial target drones. Forty years later, the *Skyhawk* officially retired from the inventory in April of 2003. The *Skyhawk's* replacement is the T-45 *Goshawk*.

The Kit

The *Skyhawk* has been a popular subject in all scales and in all its guises—well, almost all. In 1/48th scale nobody has ever made a TA-4. There was the 1/50th scale (or so) Fujimi effort, but that was all. Some modelers tried to hack the Monogram OA-4M and convert it to a TA-4J with varying degrees of success. C&H made a conversion in resin, but it was never widely available. Hasegawa was the logical choice for the maker most likely to make a two-seat *Skyhawk*, but their single seat *Skyhawk* variants were regurgitated for ever and there never was an announcement for a TA-4J to the displeasure of all of the modelers that enjoy the family models, present company included.

Well, Classic Airframes steps in and announces the aggressor variant of the TA-4J in a surprise release that is

supposed to hit the shores sometime in June. This is great news, and what is even greater is that the specific supplier to Classic that created the TA-4J has a soft spot for US Navy subjects. If Jules ever sees potential in doing US Navy subjects, we will be in hog heaven!

I just received an early production copy of the TA-4J, courtesy of Classic Airframes, for the little help I could offer for the project. So what is in the box? We get two sprues of gray plastic, one bag of resin parts and one sprue of clear parts (I do not have the clear parts yet because they are just being produced).

The parts look very nice and very much like what we have come to expect from the high end, low pressure injection molding companies. The plastic is shiny, the details crisp and panel lines consistent and of equal depth. Very little flash is present and it looks like it would clean up easily and fast.

Two things came to mind when I got the kit in my hands. How does it compare with the Fujimi kit? No comparison there, and thank goodness for that. This is true 1/48th scale kit.

How does it compare to Hasegawa's kit then? I can say that the two kits are very compatible, and that the modeler can mix and match some of the Japanese and even aftermarket parts if they so choose.

The resin parts are very nicely molded with no imperfections other than the exhaust tube in my sample which I am sure was an early production fluke. I like the resin cockpit tubs and the ejection seats. The instrument panels are

done in plastic, and maybe they could have been done in resin for consistency. Yet with nice painting and some dry brushing, they will look the part.

I'd like to note that there is an ACMI pod included together with its pylon. Very important as the aggressor *Skyhawks* carried various tank combos for ferry flights, but always had the ACMI pod on when playing the adversary role during exercises on the training ranges.

Conclusion

So what do we have here? We have the first true TA-4J (or TA-4F if you like). Can you imagine the possibilities with all the schemes that can be done in aggressor or straight Navy trainer/support colors?

What would I have liked to see? Maybe flaps and speed brakes. There is a great solution for that, though. Aires has come up with a magnificent upgrade resin set for the Hasegawa *Skyhawk*. All the Aires parts should fit the Classic kit with minor fiddling. I intent to prove that very soon!

This kit is very much recommended to all the boys and girls who have been waiting so long for a two-seat Scooter!

My most sincere thanks to Jules Bringuier from Classic Airframes for the early preview sample.

Ed. Note: Our thanks to Michael Benolkin of Cybermodeler Online

(<http://www.cybermodeler.com/index.shtml>) for permission to reprint this review.



Visit www.a4model.a4skyhawk.org/models/modelers.htm

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

High Country

In the late fall of the year, a deep yearning for high, cold country always took hold of Puresome. Visions of sneaking through aspen groves after great, antlered buck deer, and backstrap frying in the skillet seemed especially poignant, since jolly green jungle surrounded NAS Cecil Field, where he was teaching young, manly men the joys of the *Skyhawk* and the attack trade.

To a resourceful bagger like Puresome, the obvious answer was easy:

sign up for a week-end cross-country "proficiency" flight out to deer country. Then he could grab a bunch of gas chits and launch with the usual Friday afternoon exodus of RAG instructors flying Tinker Toy Airways in pursuit of flight

time and exotic happiness hours. The operations officer just rolled his eyes at his request, but he yielded to Youthly's argument that airplanes get all rusty and break if they are not flown. Puresome made arrangements for a running rendezvous with Col P.A. Puresome at Chamisaville Air Force Base in the high southwest, greased up his shooting iron, and licked his chops.

It turned out that one of Hornet Squadron's bachelor instructors had a "cousin" at Desert Hole Air Force Base in the same state, so he and Puresome arranged to go together in one of the two-seater TA-4s. Puresome would drop him off on the way and pick him back up for the trip home.

And so it was. The weather was hot and dusty, the Scooter was its usual reliable self, and Puresome didn't even have to brief his passenger about keeping his mask on after landing at Desert

Hole Air Force Base. Evidently, he had checked the NOTAMS about the wafting cow lot odors. After the short flight to Albuquerque, Col Puresome was waiting, and all Youthly had to do was secure his airplane.

"Don't fill the drop tanks, just fill the fuselage tank," Puresome told the sargento who ran the transient line, "I just gotta go back to Desert Hole." With the airplane secured, he got his parachute bag out of the centerline blivot, and he

"Like there were certain, fundamental truths that seem self-evident to Puresome, but were like the contents of the mind of a spider to others. He could never explain to weed-and-seed munching Flower Children that if we weren't supposed to eat animals, why were they made of meat? And to non-aviators, that he wasn't paranoid because everybody was trying to kill him."

and the Col disappeared northward in a giant pickup truck full of camping gear.

The Pecos Wilderness smelled of snow and pine instead of sea-level Florida swamp damp, and Puresome found himself continually in high blower trying to mountain goat up big rocks behind his father, who was used to the high altitude. Far below them, the easy country near the roads sounded like World War III, as crowds of hunters threw lead, and Puresome was glad that their camp was far, far away. He was also glad the colonel had convinced him to don a blaze orange vest over his brown flight jacket of many patches, since he did not want to be mistaken for a woolly bear by those in the domain of Rocky Mountain Spring Water.

Eventually, Col Puresome did his Indian work and stealthily snuck up on a suitable buck, and he terminated him with extreme prejudice. It took the two

of them most of the day to field dress and transport the deer back down the mountain to camp. That evening, the hot eyes of the caveman glowed, and the hunters enjoyed whiskey and camp meat. Outside in the frosty darkness, future chops, roasts, and deerburger froze hard enough to be wrapped in a tarp and transported home.

Mission accomplished, it was time to head back to the flatlands. The colonel dropped him off in Albuquerque, and Puresome went into Operations to check the weather and file a flight plan. The weather briefer indicated that, while not exactly hot and dusty, the intermediate, broken clouds enroute should be good enough for a simple piece of cake, blow-and-go Visual Flight Rules flight. So Puresome filed a VFR flight plan and humped his gear out to the flight line.

When Puresome did his preflight inspection, he found that despite his instructions, both his drop tanks were full of gas. When he axed the transient lineman about it, it seemed that another pilot from Hornet Squadron had flown in with a broken airplane; and learning that Puresome

wasn't to RTB until Sunday afternoon, had BORROWED his airplane until his could get fixed. Naturally, the borrower had specified a full bag of gas when he returned the airplane.

"No hill for a stepper," thought Puresome, "you can never have too much gas. I've probably dumped enough JP-5 to run Grand Fenwick for a year, so a little more won't hurt."

So Puresome manned up and blasted off eastward. During the climb-out, he reached over to turn on the dump switch, but queasy memories of full bolter patterns and closed runways made him stop. "Just in case, I can wait till the last minute to dump my extra gas. It won't hurt the cactus, and if I actually fly over a cultivated field, they'll just think I'm crop dusting," he thought.

Sure enough, there were intermediate clouds out there. Since he had been briefed that Desert Hole Air Force Base

weather was tickedy-boo, he eased into a climb to get above the clouds. He kept easing until he was above thirty thousand feet in airliner country, unaccountably above a solid overcast. Since it getting to be time to descend, Puresome turned on his radar in the magical Attack Puke terrain clearance mode and stuck his nose over and slud down toward Mother Earth as depicted on his radar screen. He leveled off at the thousand foot above ground line on his set and looked out the window to gray clag. "Well, maybe I can just scud run on into the clear," he thought. But sneaking down to about the five hundred foot level on his radar altimeter just showed about a mile visibility in SNOW! Yaaaaa! It was time to come to mama, and Puresome crammed on the throttle and climbed.

At about twenty thousand feet, still solidly in the goo, his TACAN locked onto Desert Hole some eighty-six miles away. "Um, Desert Hole Approach Control, Alpha Delta 414 is with you on the two-eighty-five slash eighty-six of Desert Hole Tacan, uh, please say your weather!"

Thankfully, someone answered. "Roger, Alpha Delta 414, Desert Hole weather is two hundred foot overcast, visibility one half mile in blowing snow, and blah--blah-- blah. Puresome suddenly knew what heart tasted like. Although the TA-4 was equipped with spoilers, the crosswind ripping across

the runway was enough to tump the Scooter off its long, skinny legs if not done right. Puresome was beginning to entertain black thoughts of vengeance against the weather briefer safely back in the Metro shack in Albuquerque. But there was some filthy work that had to be done first. And that extra gas he had was turning out to be real handy.

"Roger, Desert Hole Approach, you'd better give me one of them penetrations and GCA's."

Desert Hole Approach Control pointed him down through the clag, and the GCA controller guided him to the runway. Puresome popped out of the clouds flying semi-sideways to the runway, pointing into the crosswind that was blowing snow and tumbleweeds. He plonked the Scooter on the runway, chopped the throttle to extend the spoilers, sucked up his flaps, and stuck the stick into the wind. With some creative braking, Puresome managed to stay on the runway. Taxiing in, he couldn't quite decide whether he was more grateful to be on the ground or pissed at the weather fellow.

Once he was shut down and was safely in Base Operations, being pissed won. Puresome rang up the weather chap, and tenderly suggested that he knew not certain orifices from deep holes in the ground.

"Oh, you left right after we issued the special weather observation," he huffed. He got a lot huffier after Puresome is-

sued his own special observation.

Bye and bye, the weather improved to just nasty, and it was the other pilot's turn to drive, so Puresome just climbed in the back seat and hung on. They were soon out of the weather, and he had time look out the window, enjoy "flying along in flight," and ponder great issues. Like there were certain, fundamental truths that seem self-evident to Puresome, but were like the contents of the mind of a spider to others. He could never explain to weed-and-seed munching Flower Children that if we weren't supposed to eat animals, why were they made of meat? And to non-aviators, that he wasn't paranoid because everybody was trying to kill him. Carrier Controlled Approach controllers tried to put his holding radials in the middle of mountains. Air Bosses tried to run him out of gas and bingo him to divert fields supposedly manned by grinning foreigners who were at home sucking down grappa or saki. And not to mention Uncle Gomer taking real pot shots at him.

You might explain that the best defense against the forces of evil lay in what the Training Command called "headwork," but no feather merchant would understand about the hemorrhoidal sense that often came unbidden to tap aviators on the shoulder and save their ass.

There were just some things you couldn't explain to civilians.

? Puzzle Answers: Boom-Boom Room ?

Answer 1.
Kitty Baggage
Rakish Litter
Inkey Barley
Loom Lobby
Panel Stager.



Answer 2. We don't know. That's why we're asking you. Respond to sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org



Answer 3.
The heavy cover
over the refueling
buddy-store vanes.
The cover was
normally removed
long before flight.

(See page 14 for questions)

HEINEMANN'S HOTROD

Part I

By Bob Rahn, with Zip Rausa.

Reprinted from **Tempting Fate: An Experimental Test Pilot's Story**, with permission of Specialty Press Publishers.



The *Spitfire* I flew in World War II was a great success largely because it was a light aircraft of uncomplicated design with no frills. That experience was the main factor that induced me to become a test pilot. I wanted to help the U.S. develop effective, lightweight fighters of simple design. The A-4 (A4D) *Skyhawk* was not a fighter, but it embodied the fundamental simplicity which was Ed Heinemann's trademark. There was great satisfaction in testing this wonderful flying machine.

In the early 1950s, the Navy specification for a jet propelled attack aircraft to replace the workhorse *Skyraider* called for a design with a maximum gross weight of 30,000 pounds. Heinemann excited, if not shocked, the Navy by asserting he could produce an airplane that would exceed the desired design speed by ninety knots and weigh only half as much!

The original contract, written in June 1952, called for construction of a single prototype aircraft because many officials in the Navy were skeptical that such a "diminutive" warplane could be built. Additionally, the Navy could not pay more than one million dollars for the aircraft, an astonishingly small figure in today's aviation market place.

Because the design concept was comparatively small in size, a full-scale mockup was built to ensure that everything would fit into the compact environment. The cockpit accommodated my six foot, 190 pound frame, but there was little room to spare. The ejection seat apparatus included a parachute built into the system. The pilot restraint, parachute harness, and g-suit were integrated into a single garment. This flying suit was designed specifically for the XA4D and allowed the parachute to remain with the airplane.

The *Skyhawk* was rolled out at a gross weight of 14,600 pounds. Its

empty weight was a remarkable 8,136 pounds. It was powered by the British Sapphire J-65 engine built by Curtiss Wright and capable of producing 7,200 pounds of thrust. Wing span was only twenty-seven and one-half feet, a factor that eliminated the need for wing-folding aboard the carrier. Construction of the wing included three single-piece spars with single sheets of skin from tip to tip.

The windshield was a single piece, lightweight design. The wing slats operated aerodynamically, the rudder was manual, the elevator was boosted, and the ailerons had a single, hydraulically powered system with a manual system back-up. The control stick could be extended to provide mechanical advantage in the event of a hydraulic system failure.

At a private meeting in Ed Heinemann's office I told him I was in full accord with his concept and would not write up any specific deficiency in test reports if it didn't meet the specifications, but would just describe what the airplane did. The exceptions were: (a) safety of flight items and (b) if it could not perform the specified mission. We agreed to keep an open mind and to present the marginal items to the NPE Test Team for their evaluation.

An example of this is a specification that calls for the capability to lift the nose wheel off the ground on take-off at 90 percent stall speed. I couldn't do it even with full aft stick, but it did lift off at stall speed. I found that by holding full forward stick during the take-off roll and then yanking back at 90 percent stall speed, the specification could be met. This was because the long nose wheel strut was fully compressed with the stick forward, and when it was released, the dynamic effect helped to lift the nose wheel off the ground.

Of course, this is a stupid way to fly



Douglas test pilot Bob Rahn with XA4D-1.

an airplane during take-off. On the other hand, it would have been even more stupid to add more weight and complexity by building a larger elevator or allowing more up travel since the present one was satisfactory for all other regions of flight. Thousands of A-4s have been flying for forty years with no one complaining about this deficiency.

"Heinemann's Hot Rod" was dubbed with many other nicknames over the years: Tin Can, Bantam Bomber, Scooter, and Tinker Toy, among them. It looks aerodynamically clean, but this is not necessarily the case. Many protuberances were added to improve its aerodynamic characteristics during the developmental tests of the aircraft.

That first flight ended uneventfully. The only "squawk," or discrepancy, came at the first-flight party in Palm-dale where, after a half dozen martinis, I proclaimed loud and unclear, "Wash we need ish more thrush." A short time later, Wright provided an additional 500 pounds of thrust in the J-65.

While flying through slightly turbulent air at 300 knots during the third flight, there occurred an irregular torsional movement of the empennage which caused a snaking-flight profile. Aft fuselage stiffeners were attached to prevent the empennage from twisting.

I also experienced buffet emitting from the tail at high indicated speed. We experimented with five different tail cone fairings before a simple, inverted sugar scoop cleaned up the airflow

between the tail pipe and the horizontal stabilizer.

The test program progressed smoothly during the first nine months. We had nearly completed Part I of the aerodynamic and structural demonstration, and the flight envelope had been explored up to almost 600 knots. Returning to base after completing a routine test one day, I flew under a cumulus cloud at about 10,000 altitude and 450 knots. All of a sudden, the *Skyhawk* seemed as if it were coming apart. There was a violent rudder flutter, induced by the turbulence from the cloud. I immediately came "back, out, or on" with everything: throttle, elevator, speed brakes, and instrumentation to slow the airplane down and gather data. The *Skyhawk* was shaking so fiercely I had difficulty finding the instrumentation switch to turn it on. After a moment I was out of it and made a normal landing.

There was little damage to the airplane and the rudder and fin were still in one piece. The oscillograph records indicated rudder flutter with a total amplitude of 12 degrees at 14 cycles per second, and the fin tip had a total excursion of 12 inches.

I was reluctant to proceed with the flutter program because I was both physically and mentally shaken by the flutter that had occurred inadvertently at a speed much lower than had been flown before. This was the kind of mystery that put me ill at ease. I could sense the onset of fear. Why had it happened? We had checked for flutter throughout the speed range. We had to go back to the drawing board.

A dashpot, which functioned as a kind of shock absorber, was added to the control linkage to combat the flutter, and telemetry was installed to provide real-time data to pacify my anxiety. I had difficulty duplicating the flutter, however, eventually achieving it by kicking the rudder pedal as sharply as possible at the desired airspeed.

Over the next several months we tried many different configurations to correct the flutter. What finally did the trick was a "tadpole rudder." The tadpole was nothing more than a flat plate of skin with the ribs mounted externally, reducing the vortices around the aft chord of the rudder. It performed magnificently with a damping ratio of better



137812 with F-80 Shooting Star chase plane.

than 3 percent. However, we had to credit North American engineers as the tadpole design was "borrowed" from their FJ-3 *Fury* aircraft.

Bob (R.B.) Smith was at it again. His calculations showed that the *Skyhawk*, with only internal fuel, could break the 500-kilometer Closed Course World Speed Record, so we decided to make some speed runs in the aircraft. I made a number of preliminary circuits around the 500-kilometer course at Edwards AFB to see if the *Skyhawk* would hold together, especially considering the severe turbulence likely to be encountered over the desert floor. I also wanted to determine what speed might be expected, and if there was sufficient internal fuel to make a try at the 500-kilometer closed course record. The development flights were made with trailing edge bulb rudder (a design modification which corrected the flutter problem but resulted in high rudder forces). Flying over 600 knots (695 mph), 100 feet above the ground over the hot desert, is not a comforting experience. Make an error down that low and that fast, and your life could be over in a microsecond.

However, after the first circuit around the course at max speed, I was unaware of any unusual characteristics during the flight, except that it was quite turbulent. As I taxied back to the ramp, though, onlookers were pointing to the tail. Close examination revealed a tear in the aft fuselage skin about the size of

a football, a few wrinkles in the nose cone, and the top aft portion of the rudder (about six inches by six inches) was missing.

Since it was late in the year, the temperature was dropping and the official timers were ready. There was little schedule time left, so we decided to change to the tadpole design instead of repairing the other rudder, which required an additional rib. To eliminate the risk of losing the same piece on the tip of the tadpole, we cut a section out to resemble that portion lost. Then we "sewed" the rudder back up again.

Lt Gordon Gray set a new world record in the *Skyhawk* of 695.163 mph on the very first attempt in 1955, on internal fuel. This eclipsed the mark held by an F-86H which used a drop tank. Not bad for an attack airplane. Incidentally, this was the only time that an attack airplane has held this record.

Before the official flight, anybody who wanted to could estimate what the official speed would be, and put a dollar in the kitty. The crew chief on the aircraft won the pot -- a hundred thirty dollars. That proves that some of the mechanics know more about their airplane than the pilots or the engineers. My estimate was several mph slower than that attained. Gordie did a good flying job for five circuits of the course.

◆ ◆ ◆

Stay Tuned: More of Bob Rahn's article will be in the next issue.

READ?

YOU THINK WE READ?

Rampant Raider: An A-4 Skyhawk Pilot in Vietnam

By Stephen R. Gray.
Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD.
2007. 284 pp. Ill. \$32.50.

Reviewed by Peter Mersky

Soon after my first book, *The Naval Air War in Vietnam* (coauthored with Norman Polmar), was published in 1981, I got a very nice letter from a former A-4 pilot with VA-212. He commented favorably on the book but specifically mentioned the caption of a photo showing a stricken A-4 that had taken a nearly direct hit from a SAM in April 1967. The young jg pilot, Al Crebo, was struggling out toward the Gulf of Tonkin, where he eventually ejected close to his carrier. The writer offered several bits of information about the incident, having been one of Crebo's squadron mates and wingmen that eventful day. I filed the letter away.

Twenty-five years later, I remembered the letter as I organized material for a book on the A-4 in Vietnam. I contacted Steve Gray in Texas, and he quickly responded to my request for help with this new project. During a phone call, he asked about publishing a memoir he had been writing about those times. I get occasional requests like that and usually, the manuscript is disappointing. Nevertheless, I told Steve to send it. To my surprise, his story was well written and gave a good look into his life as a NAVCAD and flight student in the mid-1960s that was both entertaining and informative. The book had to be published. Fortunately, I was not alone in this belief; and now, the Naval Institute Press has produced a highly readable account of one young naval aviator's experiences at the height of Rolling Thunder, the ambitious bombing campaign over North Vietnam.

Of course, VA-212 was known as the Rampant Raiders, although their tactical call sign was "Flying Eagle." The squadron saw a lot of action, and suffered many losses of men and aircraft, eventually making seven combat deployments to Southeast Asia, one of only two A-4 squadrons to make that many. (The other was VA-55, which often cruised with the Rampant Raiders.)

Gray's book should become a classic part of Vietnam aviation literature. It is simply, but strongly written, salted with humor and personal observation that come both from the original young man participating in the events, as well as the older man, who survived and acquired the time to remember and understand what had occurred some 40 years earlier.

Enlisting in the Navy in 1963 and achieving his petty officer 3rd class rating, he soon applied for flight training, including pre-commissioning training at Pensacola. His descriptions of this unforgettable time as well as the flight training, will certainly ring bells with those of us who also experienced it. He encounters the usual range of personalities, good and bad, friends and instructors, and the occasional hiccups in the training sequence; but ultimately, he was designated a naval aviator in 1966, when he also married his Texas sweetheart.

Gray continues the narrative with RAG training where he was being pushed through an abbreviated syllabus at VA-125, the A-4 RAG, because of the increasing needs of the fleet in Southeast Asia. Eventually arriving at VA-212, he was quickly brought into the squadron fold by the CO, Commander Homer Smith, one of the important individuals of the early war period. Smith led several important strikes, including the first Walleye mission in March 1967, before being lost on a strike that May. He died in captivity, receiving a posthumous Navy Cross for his previous work.

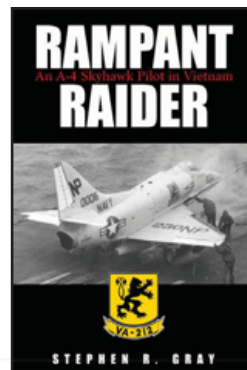
Flying the intense missions of Rolling Thunder through the flak and SAMs fill the last third of this wartime memoir, and it is here that the author's powers of description really come through. Whether writing about a mission against a North Vietnamese facility, again through the flak and missiles, or losing friends as they parachute into captivity, Gray brings us along with him in the cramped cockpit of his A-4.

As Vietnam drifts farther back into history, and our attention is focused on new conflicts, we can expect to see more of these accounts as the writers age and begin to put down their experiences. There are lots of these memoirs appearing from the World War II and Korea generations. We will see a wide range of quality and inter-

est as the markets become crowded. However, Rampant Raider is one of the first Navy/Vietnam books in this category, written by a front line participant, and it generally has the stage to itself. This is good, especially, since the book stands on its own merits.

The A-4 squadrons formed the backbone of the carrier-borne effort in Rolling Thunder, but the little *Skyhawk* did not get the headlines that the more glamorous, MiG-hunting *Phantoms* did. Thus, this book is all the more welcome because it really tells you how it was in 1967 in the skies of North Vietnam.

Peter Mersky



Cockpit Snow

From *Rampant Raider*
Excerpted by Boom Powell.

"All of us experienced A-4 pilots had learned at one time or another to turn the temperature control to about half hot when we ran the engine up to full power for takeoff. If this wasn't done and the temperature control was still on full cold, the air-conditioner would produce billowing clouds of thick, white condensation fog that looked like white smoke and would scare the shit out of the pilot, who would think he had a serious electrical fire. VA-76 had received a new pilot replacement during the off-line period, and the young lieutenant (jg) was making his debut launch with VA-76. Fresh out of the A-4 RAG, the new man was understandably nervous about his first launch with his new squadron, and was no doubt frightened because this was also his first combat mission. For these reasons or simply because he didn't know any better, he forgot to turn his temperature control up when he was positioned on the catapult. About halfway down the deck on the cat stroke, thick white clouds billowed up around his legs. As his A-4 clawed for altitude off the catapult, the pilot screamed over the radio, 'Rocket Tower, Sun-glass six-eight-six. I've got cock in the smoke pit.' He never lived it down."

TINSx2

Jumping Jack Rabbits

Edited by Boom Powell

After a four day wait for the weather, the first part of an A-4C test flight had been routine with only one discrepancy concerning power and temperature on manual fuel control. After completing the landing gear check, the pilot added power and pulled up the gear to return to base.

At about 94%, the pilot noted a "violent vibration" in the aircraft and heard a loud "rapping and grinding" noise which appeared to come from behind. He re-set the power at 85-87% and called approach control to inform them of his "emergency." GCA located the A-4 about 20 miles from the field and gave him a steer to base. The pilot noted that the vibration and noise continued spasmodically with the reduced power setting.

At approximately 12 miles out, the distressed driver executed a 360 to lose altitude. He continued communication with GCA, electing to make a high straight in approach vice a normal GCA.

The pilot had difficulty sighting the field but finally picked it up at about two miles in his one o'clock position. At this time, altitude was 2,000 feet and airspeed 150 knots. Intent on getting down ASAP, he elected to land on the nearest available runway (opposite the duty with a 10 knot tail wind) and engage the Morest. The GCA controller informed the pilot that the Morest was rigged but that he was to land long with hook up so as to miss the E-14 gear at his approach end.

Coming over the approach end, he realized he was high and fast, pushed the nose over steeply, and flared before touching down about 2,000 feet down the runway. As he touched down, the pilot brought the throttle back to idle, slapped the hook handle down, only to have it spring back up; and again, slapped it down to stay. The A-4 bounced and missed the Morest.

The pilot felt sure that he would be able to take the E-14 at the far end and transmitted this to his GCA controller.

(The E-14 was not rigged.) As the plane continued down the runway, the pilot applied gentle braking pressure, still assuming the E-14 gear was rigged for him. Passing the gear and onto the overrun, thoughts of taking it around and ejection were contemplated but overruled. He decided to hold on and ride it out.

The plane continued past 622 feet of overrun, skidded over an embankment, and penetrated two chain link fences before coming to rest. The pilot, slightly injured, was helped from the cockpit by the helo crewmen and taken to the dispensary. The engine continued to run at idle for 30 minutes despite attempts to shut it down.

Grampaw Pettibone said:

Jumpin' Jehosophat! How unglorious an end can an A-4 come to?

There's no doubt this lad received a shot of adrenalin right under the shark chaser, but he let panic override sound reasoning and good judgment. "Violent vibrations, rapping and grinding" ain't normal, but there wasn't a gauge on the instrument panel that diagnosed engine troubles.

Heading for the barn under these circumstances is the right decision, but landing downwind from a high and fast approach ain't!

Why this lad committed himself so early is beyond me. The weather wasn't CAVU, but had he maintained his highest VFR altitude under the 4,500 foot overcast and executed a precautionary approach, Old Gramps feels certain this youngster could have fastened that flap-pin' canvas fuze panel cover back up in the nose wheel well after he returned to the line.

(Ed note: Adapted from NavNews APRIL 1966.)

A Convertible A-4

By Larry (Boomer) Hudson

The King Air is in maintenance for the 200 hours event inspection, so I have time to tell you my story of a Scooter driver having some bad luck in May of 1969, while I was stationed at Cecil Field NAS and doing some duties on the flight line.

The sirens started going off. That always meant some aircraft was in trouble and trying to make it back to the base. After watching the action of the A-4 *Skyhawk* approaching runway 36 left, I didn't notice anything amiss until the A-4 landed and was taxiing in with fire trucks close behind.

I believe the A-4 was with VA 44 Hornets, because he taxied over to that ramp. While he taxied in front of my position, I could not believe what all the excitement was about and would not have believed it until I saw it with my own eyes. The canopy of the jet was embedded in the vertical stabilizer, and the pilot was riding in a convertible. It seems that while in flight, the pilot moved his helmet bag from one location to another in the cockpit and somehow, the bag got caught on the canopy release handle. Before long, it was gone.

By a miracle, the canopy made a 180-degree turn at his six o'clock and embedded in the vertical stabilizer without breaking the Plexiglas. The canopy was in the tail approximately 3 feet, sitting there pretty as it pleased - upright, horizontal and intact. The tough *Skyhawk* took the damage and brought the pilot home.

There you have it. This really happened at Cecil Field in May of 1969.

(Ed note: We'd love to have a picture of this one for the website, if anyone has one.)



Membership

✓ Tell a buddy about Skyhawk Association.
Pass your *A-4Ever* to non-members.
Give a gift - see the back cover.

Volunteer

✓ Contact the webmaster and help.
Organize a local Skyhawk Det.
Submit an article for publication.



ATTIC ATTACKS

• Mailbag •

Mystery Photo

This image of SC 04, an A-4M of VMAT-102 shooting two Zuni rockets, is one of the more popular images in Skyhawk lore. Over the years, it has been published in numerous national and international aviation journals, as well as many books (including Brad Elward's *McDonnell Douglas A-4Skyhawk*, coincidentally on page 102). In most publications (including Elward), the photo has been attributed to Harry Gann. However, the photo is actually an official USN photo taken by HM-1 Bruce Trombecky, who at that time was assigned as a yeoman for the Blue Angels. Aspiring to be an aerial photographer, HM-1 Trombecky showed up at VMAT-102, the West Coast USMC A-4 Training Squadron, in early 1977 looking for back-seat rides in the TA-4. He took this photo on a syllabus training sortie to the Chocolate Mountains live ordnance range in R-2507. SC 04 was the lead aircraft of a section and piloted by Skyhawk Association Director Bob Hickerson (then-Major). Both A-4Ms in the attack section were loaded with Zuni 5.0" rocket pods on stations 1 & 5. The TA-4 aircraft from which the photo was taken was piloted by Major Pat Moxley and served as the forward air controller (airborne) for the mission.



Patch commemorating VMA-131 as last Marine Skyhawk squadron. If anyone knows where one of these patches can be obtained, please email the editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.



Picture of Ed Heinemann, Douglas Aircraft chief designer of A-4 Skyhawk, with LtCol Duke Lind, CO, VMA-311 at Dining-in in 1985. Duke found this cleaning out his attic!



A-4G 155069 NZ618 roll-over accident on landing at RAAF Base Townsville on 3 June 1985. Repaired and returned to service 29 March 1990. From Don Simms via Phil Thompson.

NEW MEMBERS\$

• Welcome •



Join or renew, and give someone a one-year gift membership for \$20 more.

Contact Terry Cooney at
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com or at
2421 Clubside Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45431.

John Alger, Charlotte, NC
Raymond Brauer, Melbourne, Australia
Fred Craig, Gulf Breeze, FL
Charlie Farrell, Columbia, SC
Sherwin Greenberg, Fox Lake, IL
Donald Langrock, Williams, CA

Lawrence Lassise, Gig Harbor, WA
Thomas Patt, Waukegan, IL
Robert McVey, Landenberg, PA
Charles Miller, Rockford, IL
John Ryberg, Salina, CA
Charles Sorensen, Redondo Beach, CA

Stephen Thigpen, Mt. Pleasant, SC
Cary Watkins, North Logan, UT
James Weatherly, Jasper, MO
Carl Williams, Gulf Breeze, FL
Clark Wilson, Camarillo, CA

TAPS

For TAPS lists,
members may access these links:
www.a4skyhawk.org/2D/KIA.htm
www.a4skyhawk.org/2E/ops_losses.htm

- ★ Gerald "Cobra" Ellis, San Antonio, TX
- ★ Jesse R. Greer, Starkville, MS
- ★ George B. Rothrock, Pebble Beach, CA



TAPS notices may be sent to Bob Hickerson, Newsletter Editor at
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mail to
Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •



PLAN AHEAD

- ★ **Skyhawk Association:** Annual Meeting and Luncheon: September 5, 2008, 11:30 a.m., Nugget, Reno, NV.
- ★ **Marine Corps Aviation Association Convention/Symposium:** 16-18 October, 2008. Sheraton Myrtle Beach Convention Center Hotel, SC.
- ★ **VMFA(AW)-533 65th Anniversary Reunion** for all current and former members of VMF(N)-533, VMA-533, and VMA(AW)-533: 19-21 November 2008, in Beaufort, SC. Include evening dinners, golf tournament, Parris Island graduation, a squadron change of command and events at the squadron spaces. POC is MajNoah Marquardt at noah.marquardt@usmc.mil. Phone is (843) 228-6440. The squadron is overseas until September 2008, so the phone number will be unanswered until then. Visit <http://www.2maw.usmc.mil/mag31/vmfaaw533/default.asp>

New Member? Like to Have Some Back Issues of The A-4Ever?

If you are a new member and would like to extend your collection of *The A-4Ever*, copies are available for the following issues: Winter 2005, Spring 2005, Summer 2005, Fall 2005 (very limited numbers), Winter 2006 and Spring 2006. Extra copies may be purchased for \$5.00 per issue, including shipping and handling (domestic addresses only).

Contact: Bob Hickerson at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org
or mail to: Bob Hickerson
1222 Balcones Drive,
Fredericksburg, TX 78624.





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.

Join or renew at \$30 or \$75, and give a one-year gift membership to someone for \$20 at the same time. Contact Terry Cooney at skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com for your gift membership(s), or at 2421 Clubside Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45431.



Order additional patches

No flight suit/jacket should be without one of these outstanding patches. Additional quantities may be purchased for \$5.00 each (\$6 for non-members) plus \$1 postage, by sending your check or money order (no credit cards yet, sorry) payable to Skyhawk Association along with your name address and membership number (found on your card) to:

Skyhawk Patch
6213 Glen Abbey Ln
Bradenton, FL 34202-9265

Join the Skyhawk Association and get a free patch

One of these outstanding patches will be included with each **new** membership. Want more than one patch? (Who doesn't?) See ordering info at left.

Memberships are **1 year - \$30** (\$35 Foreign)

3 Years - \$75 (\$90 Foreign) in US funds.

☐ New _____ Years

☐ Renewal \$ _____ Total Enclosed

YES, Sign me up! Send my patch and membership materials to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

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