



THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION *Journal*



ATSI TA-4 Training Mission.

THE A-4 EVER

Summer 2009

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 2

Contents:

A Bad Day • Take No Prisoners • Skyhawk Mini-Reunion • Boom-Boom Room
Besides, It's Fun to Fly • Prez Sez • 8 Thuds and a Scooter • Puresome Unplugged
Size Does Matter Attic Attacks

Skyhawk Association
★ Annual Meeting & Luncheon ★
11 September, 2009
Tailhook ~ Reno, NV



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •



By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Annual Meeting 2009

This year's annual meeting is shaping up nicely and promises to be one of our best. It will be held at the 53rd Annual Tailhook Convention in Reno, NV, on Friday, September 11, 2009. The theme of Hook 09 is "Operating at the Edge of the Envelope," and one of the programs which will be featured in the symposia is the Blue Angels.

Skyhawk Association is participating in that theme by featuring Captain Gil Rud, USN(ret), a former Blues CO, as our guest speaker at our luncheon AOM. Captain Rud is a great speaker and will surely deliver an entertaining and enlightening message. The luncheon will be held at the Nugget at noon on Friday, September 11th. We don't have a room assignment as yet, so check our webpage (www.skyhawk.org) for details, or check in at the *Skyhawk* Association booth at Tailhook (booth number 714).

This year will feature the inaugural "Whizzer" White Memorial *Skyhawk* Luncheon, and Mrs. Becky White will be our guest of honor. Let's be sure to have a great turn-out in order to honor Whizzer's memory.



Membership Drive



In the last issue, I issued a plea for members that would be willing to serve as coordinators for a membership drive centered on the Marine reserve units which last operated the A-4. We had a good response to that challenge and are in the process of following up. However, we're still looking for key volunteers to help us connect with potential members that were connected with the A-4 sites at Jacksonville, FL (Cecil Field and VMA-142); South Weymouth (VMA-322) and Memphis (VMA-124). If you'd like to help us keep the *Skyhawk* Association active and vibrant, drop me an email at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

All-Marine Skyhawk Reunion - Redux

The organizers of the Marine *Skyhawk* reunions in 2005 (San Diego) and 2007 (Beaufort/Hilton Head) are at it again. A

reunion is being planned to coincide with the Marine Corps Aviation Association (MCAA) Symposium which will be held at the Omni Hotel in Fort Worth, TX, May 20 - 23, 2010. This meeting promises to be bigger and better than ever, so mark your calendars and plan to attend. The planning committee is encouraging A-4 squadrons to plan reunions in conjunction with this event, and plenty of time for squadron meetings and social gatherings will be reserved in the schedule. We've already heard that the Blacksheep are talking up a gathering of members who served with VMA-214 in the '70s and '80s.

Keep an eye on the *Skyhawk* Association homepage (www.skyhawk.org), where there will be continually updated notices on reunion planning and sign-up procedures. The central point of contact for information will be Mark Williams (roger.wilco@verizon.net), 400 Howell Way, #102, Edmonds, WA 98020-4190, 425-771-2030.

A regional Skyhawk Association event may be included!

If there is enough interest, we will plan a regional *Skyhawk* Association gathering during the same period (May 20-22). Similar to the event held in the Austin-San Antonio area in March 2009, the event would be a one-day affair and provide an opportunity for members to assemble for a meal and sea stories, with a short program on a *Skyhawk* theme. If you would like to be on a mailing list for such an event, drop me an email at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

The Great Central Texas Gathering of Skyhawks!

Well, the title may be overdoing it a little, but the members who gathered in Fredericksburg, TX, on March 28, 2009, certainly thought the event was great! As I mention elsewhere in this issue, *Skyhawk* Association stands ready to support any member or group of members who desire(s) to plan a similar event. Let us know if you are interested, and we will work with you to make your gathering a success.

Honoring the Work of Harry Gann

With this issue, we're beginning a continuing project to republish the work of *Skyhawk* Association historian Harry Gann, a Douglas Aircraft Company engineer, communications specialist, historian and aerial photographer extraordinaire. Harry, who passed away in October 2000, was a legend in the *Skyhawk* community, and his body of work chronicling the history of the A-4 from start to finish remains as one of our greatest resources. By reprinting some of his major articles in the "new" Journal format, we hope to help preserve that work for future generations. This project will also serve to provide our members with a comprehensive reference on all matters *Skyhawk*.

I'm sure that everyone of us who spent much time in the *Skyhawk* community has at least one favorite Harry Gann story. We'd like to collect those for publication and archiving on the website, so send them to me at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

Missing Issues of the Skyhawk Association Journal

Finally, the more astute observers among us may have noticed that our webmaster, David Weber, is making steady progress in archiving past editions of the *Skyhawk* Journal in the Ready Room section of the website. We're attempting to archive every edition of the early newsletters and journals, but have discovered that we're missing copies of some of the early publications. The missing pubs are:

- Volume 1, no. 4 (issued in late 1995, if published).
- Volume 2, no. 4 (late 1996, if published).
- Volume 4, no. 2, probably published in spring 1998.
- Volume 8, any issues after numbers 1 and 2, fall or winter 2002 (we're not sure they were published).

If you have any of these editions and would be willing to let us scan them for archiving on the website, we would really appreciate the help. If you would like them returned, we'll be happy to do so. Again, contact me at sa-editor-journal@a4skyhawk.org to allow us to coordinate sending of issues. We certainly don't want several of our members to mail in the same publication. See you in Reno. *Until then, A-4s Forever!*
Raven



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2009 •



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Contributions

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

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THE PREZ SEZ MORE...

Skyhawk Association Central Texas Mini-Reunion March 28, 2009

Nineteen *Skyhawk* Association members and copilots gathered at the Hangar Hotel, Fredericksburg, Texas, on March 28, 2009. The day-long get-together was hosted by Bear Langworthy and

Bob Hickerson at the T-82 Airport Diner, part of the Fredericksburg Hangar Hotel complex. The Hangar Hotel at Gillespie County airport in Fredericksburg (www.hangarhotel.com) is a reproduction of a WWII fighter base, complete with BOQ, Officers' Club



Shown attending the Central Texas SA Mini-Reunion in Fredericksburg were: (L-R) Harv Crouch, John Ely, Charles Howard, Mike Abajian (red hat), Mary Jane Howard, Donna Abajian, K.C. Spayde (cammie hat), David Reed, Judy Hickerson, Bob Hickerson (yellow hat), George Haley (blue hat), Bill McVey, Beverly Parks, John Parks, Colleen Langworthy, Bear Langworthy (no hat), R.B. Rudy (green hat), Sandi Boston and Mike Boston.

and diner. It's become a very popular fly-in destination for Central Texas and provided the perfect setting for a day of good food, camaraderie and hangar flying.

The CenTex Mini-Reunion started in the morning with coffee and sea stories, then progressed to lunch and sea stories. After lunch, the guys toured the Nimitz - National Museum of the Pacific War while the wives sampled the Fredericksburg shopping scene. At the end of the day, the group rendezvoused at the Fredericksburg Brewery to sample the Admiral Nimitz Pale Ale and plan another mini-reunion in Corpus Christi this fall.

Many other association members in Central Texas expressed interest in attending the event but had conflicting plans. Because of that, we're confident that the fall event will attract even more members. If you'd like to be informed of future Central Texas events and are not on the email list, email me at sajournal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

If you would like to organize a similar event in your region, *Skyhawk* Association can help. Contact me at the email address indicated above.
Raven.

SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •



PLAN AHEAD

- ★ **Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting and Luncheon:** 1130 a.m., September 11, 2009, Tailhook Symposium, Reno, NV.
- ★ **VMA-211 Reunion** (all years), Sep 28 - Oct 3, 2009, Quantico, VA. Contact Gerry Mulligan, 687 Vaughn Ave, Toms River, NJ 08753, (gemull@msn.com), 732-270-2265 (Eastern time).
- ★ **VA-163 "Saints" Reunion**, Oct 30 - Nov 1, 2009, Pensacola, FL. Contact Bill Tomko (tomkowj@aol.com), 503-759-4682 (Pacific time).
- ★ **All Marine A-4 Skyhawk Reunion** in conjunction with MCAA, May 20-22, 2010, Ft. Worth, TX. Contact is Mark Williams (roger.wilco@verizon.net), 400 Howell Way, #102, Edmonds, WA 98020-4190, 425-771-2030 (Pacific time) or see www.skyhawk.org.
- ★ **VA-23 Reunion** (all years), August 2010, Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, McMinnville, OR. Contact is Jim Cameron (jc3sher@fastmail.fm), 1301 NE Hwy 99W, #185, McMinnville, OR 97128, 503-780-2191 (Pacific time).



TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •



sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Share the wisdom:
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Please note email address!

To the Editor:

Dear Bob:

I read with some interest the article in your Spring 2009 edition by Bill Graham, about LCpl Howard Foote and his joyride in an A-4M in July, 1986. Since my name was mentioned in the article, permit me to add some additional perspective to the excellent recap of this event by former Marine MP Cpl Bill Graham.

I knew LCpl Howard Foote very well. He was already an experienced glider pilot when I first met him at Tehachapi, CA, at the Fantasy Haven Glider Port. When I was stationed at El Toro from 1983-1986, first as the Assistant Wing Commander of the Third Marine Air Wing and then as the Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases, Western Area, I frequently went to Tehachapi on the weekends to tow gliders and also instruct in gliders since I was a Certified Flight Instructor in Gliders (CFIG). LCpl Foote had set an altitude record as the youngest pilot ever, under the age of 21, to fly higher than 30,000 feet in an unpressurized glider. He was honored for this achievement at an event at NAS Los Alamitos, as I recall, where a USAF general was quoted as saying that you don't ever want to challenge a Marine. This had made the local papers, so I was aware of his glider flying exploits before I met him.

After meeting him at Tehachapi, we flew together a couple of times in a Grob G203, which is a high performance fiberglass glider with tandem seats, and I soon saw that he was an exceptional pilot. He told me of his desire to set the all time altitude record in gliders and that he was applying for the enlisted commissioning program, hoping to become an F-18 pilot.

When I returned to El Toro after that first meeting, I asked Col Noel Keller, my G-4 at COMCABWEST, who was also an experienced glider pilot and a CFIG, if he would look into getting a pressure suit for LCpl Foote. We both knew that to break the world

altitude record in gliders he would have to make it above 49,000 feet. We also knew that some test pilots at Edwards AFB, just a few miles east of Tehachapi, were already embarked on this goal and they had access to USAF pressure suits.

We tried for over a year but couldn't find any enthusiasm in the Navy or the Marine Corps to lend us a pressure suit for him to make the altitude attempt. Our plan was to put him in a high performance glider, maybe a single seat glider similar to the Grob G102, if we could somehow get all the additional equipment to support the pressure suit in the bird. An alternative was the Grob G203, leaving the backseat open for the pressure suit support equipment, oxygen and a transponder. The attempt would require coordination with Los Angeles Center and the restricted airspace controlled by Edwards AFB.

A key factor in deciding to make an altitude record attempt was the weather. We needed to have a cold front passage over the Sierras that would produce the strong topographic flow creating wave lift as opposed to thermal lift experienced when flying in summer weather conditions. Had we been able to get a pressure suit, and had LCpl Foote made a successful altitude record attempt, I thought this would have been terrific publicity for the Corps and for a young enlisted man who wanted to go to flight training and become an F-18 pilot.

Unfortunately for LCpl Foote, his dreams came to an end in the spring of 1986 when the right weather conditions did occur and he soared above 40,000 feet unpressurized, suffering an attack of the "bends." As I recall, that very same day, the unpressurized world altitude record in a glider was broken at over 49,000 feet. Subsequently, Steve Fossett broke the altitude record at 50,699 feet over the Andes, but he and his co-pilot had pressure suits. I believe the unpressurized record set that fateful day still stands. When I found out about LCpl Foote getting the bends, I imme-

diately made arrangements to get him to the submarine pressure chamber in San Diego. He spent a week or so down there recovering from the bends.

As I remember, LCpl Foote was assigned to H&MS-13 in MAG-13 where he was basically an A-6 mechanic. But, he was able to get close to the folks running the A-4 simulator, and I understood at times they even used him as an instructor in the simulator. With his great interest in aviation, he found this an excellent opportunity to "snivel" plenty of simulator time. I heard that he had accumulated over 60 hours of simulator time in the A-4 simulator.

In the meantime, following his episode of the bends, the flight surgeons said he could never be medically qualified for flight training. This destroyed his morale, and in my opinion, probably led to his high-jacking of the A-4. Sometime after midnight on 5 July, during the 4th of July weekend, LCpl Foote went to the A-4 flightline in MAG-13, got in an A-4, started it up, taxied to runway 34R and took off for a flight that lasted about 45 minutes.

The A-4M had a self-contained starter so no Ground Support Equipment (GSE) was required to start the engine. My wife and I were in the BOQ that night, since I was now retired and had vacated the CG's quarters for a week before moving into the home we had purchased in Irvine. I remember being awakened about 1:30 am by the sound of an A-4 flying right over the BOQ at a very low altitude and wondering who in the devil was flying at this time of night. This had to have been one of the touch and go's he made, or a wave-off low pass to burn down on fuel before landing.

He knew the airplane's limitations and did not want to land at a higher than recommended gross weight. I was later told that he even filed a VFR flight plan with Los Angeles center after he took off, but I have never verified this! It is also my understanding that he had a generator failure while *continued...*

LETTERS

Continued...

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

Please note email address!



airborne and probably would have extended his flight had this not occurred. He deployed the RAT and eventually made a perfect landing at El Toro on 34R. After his immediate apprehension he spent the next eight months or so in the brig at Camp Pendleton before being discharged. I thought he got a BCD, but Bill Graham says it was an Other-than-Honorable which I'm sure was the case.

I suspect that LCpl Foote purposely waited until I retired before stealing the *Skyhawk*. I also believe it never would have occurred had he not been medically rejected for the enlisted commissioning program as a pilot. It was very unfortunate because he really had some flying skills and would have made an excellent F-18 pilot.

Later on, there was an article in the LA Times quoting his father blaming me for all the difficulties his son had in the Marine Corps with his court martial and subsequent discharge. Too bad, because I thought he was a splendid young Marine and I wanted to help him in any way I could. I just regret that he was never able to realize his dreams of breaking the altitude record in gliders and being an F-18 pilot in the Marine Corps.

Semper Fidelis,
William A "Art" Bloomer
Brigadier General, USMC(Ret)

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Bob,

I thought you'd enjoy seeing George Blosser's (VA-34) nice comments about the association and the A-4Forever...reinforces the value of the great magazine you write.
Dave Dollarhide

Hide,

I have been catching up on my reading and finally got around to the spring issue of the *Skyhawk* Association A-4ever.

Apologies in advance for not realizing you are a director.somehow I missed that. Glad you are onboard as

this is an excellent organization.

I was rather taken back after reading Ken Olsen's article on page 14. I had no idea there were so many accidents in the A-4 community at Cecil in 1969. Of course, I had been with National for a couple years by then, but nevertheless, I sure didn't realize what was going on in those squadrons. Ken's writing style is quite entertaining, but serious at the same time. Boy, was he lucky.

Overall the magazine is a treasure trove of A-4 history which is much improved and a great reading source for me.

Kind regards to all....George
[george.blosser@b2xonline.com]

(Ed. Note: Skyhawk Association Director Dave Dollarhide forwarded this letter from George Blosser.)

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To the Editor:

Raven, just saw the new issue, great job--it always makes me smile. Have just run across John Campbell, he was at Alameda and El Toro in reserves, he stayed in and was an XO of two *Hornet* squadrons. I will give him my copy so he might be able to find some guys.

The praise for Puresome is well deserved. Most guys, almost all of us, would be concerned about the statute of limitations on fun, dumb-sh!! behavior. He is *Fearless!*

Regards,
Randall Claybourn [raviat@cox.net]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

To Boom Powell:

For someone with a moniker such as yours, I'm astounded that you did not recognize the black and yellow stripes on the A-4's "Boom" as the distinctive markings on a male zebra to distinguish it from a female.

Keep the quizzes coming!

Red "Snake" Fenenga
[gerit7@msn.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Sir, just a note to let you know that when LCDR Swartz shot down the

MiG, the plane captain whose name (along with his second mech's) was noted on the wheel well door (P/C James E Gudenkauf and 2/mc Stanley Bostwick). I should know for I be him and remember spending 18 hours a day cleaning and sleeping on the wings of this mighty bird, always making sure she was flight worthy. I just happened to run across this website and thought I would add to your record keeping.

AE3 J.Gudenkauf
[ragman1259@msn.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Hey guys....Could you please post an announcement of a squadron reunion in the next *Skyhawk* magazine for us? We are getting together members of the VA-215 Barnowls for a reunion in October. The Barnowls flew A-1 *Skyraiders* and A-7 *Corsairs*. I know a lot of the guys in the squadron also flew A-4s at one time or another....The reunion is October 20-22 in Annapolis, MD. Contact is Nori Endo at 2005 Woodland Rd, Annapolis, MD, 21409, [410] 757 4305, NORIBENDO@AOL.COM. There is a good website about the reunion at NORIENDO.COM

Thanks for your help with this request. Keep up the good work. I really appreciate the great work you all do in keeping the organization going. I keep saying to myself that I am going to sit down one of these days and write you about some of my exploits in the mighty *Skyhawk*.

Cheers,
Bear Hildebrandt
thehildebrandtfamily@gmail.com

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To the Editor:

I am not sure if this is the correct answer or not. (Ed. - to Powell's *Puzzler question #2 Spring 2009*). When I was training to be a plane captain in VT-25 in 1976, I noticed that one of the plane's air refueling probe was painted in a similar way. I ask my trainer about it, and he said that it was painted to resemble the gold bars from the sleeves of the officer's dress blue uniform. The

plane was 500, or more well known as double-nuts. It carried the name of the commander of Training Air Wing Three on it. Thus, the bars resembled those of the captain's dress blue uniform.

Mark Kreeger
[mark.kreeger.ctr@nellis.af.mil]
VT-25

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Thanks for a great mag. The Spring issue inside back-flap picture of Jim Stegman in Buno 148447 brought back a flood of wonderful memories.

I turned from my computer and there on the bulkhead was a beautiful picture of a flight of VA-112 Bombin' Bronco A-4Cs over Sequoia National Park led by Montana 201, Buno 148447, circa April, 1961. (confirmed by my tattered logbooks!)



If Jim had the best flying job in the world, I was #2. As maintenance officer of -112, I got to go up to the hallowed ground at Palmdale, rub elbows with test pilots and engineers, test fly, and pick up our brand, spankin' new birds and bring them back to Miramar. Can you imagine the thrill for a fleet maintenance officer to receive these fantastic A-4s? We flew them into check without a gripe. Our maintenance chief was as happy as the Maytag repair man!

For the record, we deployed with CAG-11 and made the maiden WestPac cruise in *Kitty Hawk*. We had a superior CAG, Don Engen, and great COs Tom Parady and Jim Kirklighter. The Bombin' Broncos were a talented, happy squadron with JOs like Ron "Shadow" Artim, "Smoky" Dundon, Don "Meter" Metteer, DK Law and Dick Twilde. Hold your nose up at the ramp! A4ever!

Sam Latimer [gryhound@cox.net]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

I read Ken Olsen's article about the numerous A-4 and TA-4 accidents at NAS Cecil Field, and I was there during most of this period of time. I reported to VA-44 A-4 RAG from instructor duty at NAS Pensacola, where I learned to fly jets, T-2Bs. I was tickled to receive orders to VA-12, an A-4C light attack squadron. I reported to VA-44 in May and finished in September 1969. I was sitting in the de-arming area with two other A-4Cs after a Pinecastle bombing mission, landing just prior to the thunderstorm hitting the field.

Steve was number four man who waved off his first landing attempt due to wild winds. He was cleared for another approach to landing. We could see he was having trouble as he touched down at the approach end, and his A-4C came heading right toward us. The aircraft left the runway, and we saw the ejection. I knew something went wrong when I did not see a parachute. The aircraft broke its nose gear and came to a stop about 1,000 feet from us.

When we got to the hangar and learned Steve had died, we all wondered why he wasn't told to take the arresting gear at the start of the runway. There were arresting gears at the end of the runways, too. Yes, we did have the full day safety stand-down the following day. We did all the gear checks, parachute harness hangs and lectures. None of us could believe the very next day we had another accident, as Ken pointed out. I must have already finished VA-44 and reported to VA-12, when Ken had his near-death accident. I had a cockpit-seat series of commands for 13 straight years with almost 5,000 flight hours without having to eject or lose an aircraft. Very lucky, indeed, I was.

However, I did know of many accidents, saves and death. Great article by Ken!

Cdr. J. J. McBride, USN (Ret)
James McBride [jimmcbride@qwest.net], author of SHANG LOG, VA-12's 1970 WestPac cruise on board USS *Shangri-La* (CVS-38.)

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Ed. Note: what follows is an excerpt from a letter sent by Steve Richmond, Skyhawk Association member and

former treasurer. Steve wrote to let us know that two of the Oakland Police officers killed in the disastrous shootout during March 21, 2009, were connected to the A-4 community and Skyhawk Association.

From Steve Richmond:

...Police Sgt. Erv Romans, as Coyote explained to the MAG-42 email group, was not only a Marine, but one of ours, a reservist after his active duty time in MAG-42 (*Alameda*), and that is the direct link to MAG-42. The fact that he worked on A-4s is the link to Tailhook, and the *Skyhawk* Association.

Another direct link to the *Skyhawk* Association was forged during the last *Skyhawk* Association Board meeting. We had the meeting in the San Francisco Bay area and one of the dinners was held at the Warehouse (Ed. - *a popular cop-bar in downtown Oakland*). We had a table by the bar with I think about 14 onboard. Right next to our table, the OPD SWAT Entry team was throwing down a little (a lot?) of beer. The guy that was still in his SWAT suit was, I'm pretty sure, Erv Romans. Dan Sakia was immediately to his left. (Ed. - *Steve was referencing a photo taken at the Warehouse that night*). I'm pretty positive that a couple of you board members talked to them. They thought you old A-4 drivers were "cool."

.....Additionally, there are families that need supporting. Any monetary gift-- large or small--helps these folks with the necessities and to get back on their feet as the insurance and all runs out.

If anyone can help out with a memorial gift, contact Renee Hassna of Oakland Police Officers Association at 555 5th Street, Oakland, CA 94607 (510-834-9670).

Nasty

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Ref: "The Oley Chronicles," Spring 09, Ken Olsen's memory is a darn site better than mine, but the instrument RAG squadron at Cecil at the time was VA-45, not VA-43.

VA-43 was the inst. RAG up at Oceana. I know this is true, 'cuz I can look up on my mantel and see my plaque, which sez VA-45. *continued...*

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

The Rescue of Streetcar 304

A Navy Pilot's Forty Hours
on the Run in Laos.

By Kenny Wayne Fields.
Naval Institute Press, 2007. 352 pages

As the publicity folks say (and I have never said it until now), strap in and get ready for the ride of your life! This book puts you right in the cockpit, and then on the ground with a desperate young naval aviator as he fights to evade capture by the Pathet Lao troops hunting him. And he has to cut through the incredibly frustrating bureaucracy that seems to pit one service against another or against one service's many layers of control.

Injured in the ejection on his first combat mission, and then wounded by shrapnel from bombs dropped by the people trying to help him, Kenny Fields of VA-82 has to call on his own strengths and beliefs to ultimately get him through this most difficult of human challenges.

Fields' descriptions of flying from a carrier during the Vietnam War are excellent, giving details to the more mundane aspects of the operation.

Launch sequences are particularly well done and give a very good impression of the pilot's view of the pre-launch activity on the deck.

He describes his mission and shoot-down in great detail and emotion. A Sandy A-1 is damaged, another downed in the fading light of the first day. Communist troops are already making their presence known, and they are determined to find the American Navy pilot as well as the Air Force A-1 pilot.

As he tries to keep his freedom in the jungle, Fields encounters monkeys and a tiger. The human enemy is also all around him. He worries about the downed Air Force *Spad* driver. (As it turns out, the blue-suiter was captured and spent the next five years in prison.)

There is heart-stopping action throughout the narrative. At times it seems that the Air Force is just about ready to get him, but one thing or another contrives to halt the rescue, much to everyone's frustration. The Navy is pushing the Air Force, and the embarrassed Air Force brass is pushing the line pilots to get the young A-7 pilot, no matter the cost.

Fields alternates his narrative between his own story and those of his

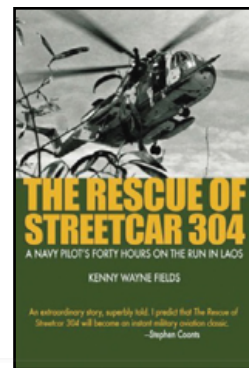
family waiting to hear any news about him, and the Air Force crews doing their utmost to retrieve him, often amidst withering enemy fire.

The final pages are worthy of any top military fiction writer, but...it's not fiction. It happened, and Kenny Fields returned to fly another 138 missions over Southeast Asia. What a film prospect! "Bat 21" and "Behind Enemy Lines" would certainly have to take back seats to "Streetcar 304," the motion picture.

There are a few errors: the cover photo is an HH-3, not an HH-53, and on page xviii, I have never heard of a Spad with two props! But these and a couple of others never detract from the intensity of the story, which tells not only the experience of the author, but of the people trying to find and retrieve him and his family dealing with the fact that he is down in enemy territory and might not return. It might also serve as something like a primer to current flight crews fighting on two fronts in a hostile terrain.

The Rescue of Streetcar 304 is one of the best Vietnam books I have seen, in at least 10 years.

Reviewed by Peter Mersky



LETTERS

Continued...

P.S. After the bird strike where Ross Donaldson lost an eye, he had a glass eye with the star and bar insignia of U.S. aircraft on it. This made him a big hit at cocktail parties.

I enjoyed Ken's article and the latest copy of A4EVER.

V/R,
Cliff Ruthrauff [cliffusn@msn.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Greetings;

I just received my new member envelope with all the goodies in it. I

must say that the patch and sticker are both very well done. It is obvious much thought went into both.

My big surprise was the journal. I received the Fall 2008 edition with the Blue Angels on the cover. I read it cover to cover and am very impressed with its design and content. This is a professional quality piece.

I joined your association recently after finding your website, while looking for information on the Blue Angels and the A-4s.

I am a volunteer at the Quonset Air Museum in North Kingston, Rhode Island (www.theqam.org). Our museum is adjacent to the Air National Guard base.

I am currently in charge of turning our A-4F (BN155027) into a Blue

Angel. We plan on having this aircraft completed in early June, in time for displaying at the annual Rhode Island National Guard Airshow. This year, the Blue Angels will be flying both days (June 27 & 28). The museum displays its aircraft collection on the flight line and our "new addition Blue Angel #6" will be the centerpiece of our display.

This is a great looking plane, even when stripped of its paint.

We also have an A-4M(BN158148) model that is scheduled for a sprucing up in the very near future.

I am looking forward to your next journal.

Regards,
Rick St Pierre
[stpierre12@cox.net]



R.G.'s ART

• A-4 MiG Victory •

In honor of Plane Captain AE3 James Gudenkauf, R.G. Smith's interpretation of LCDR T.R. Swartz' victory over a MiG-17 on May 1, 1967. LCDR Swartz was flying A-4C 148609 of VA-76 from USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31). See Gudenkauf letter to the editor in this issue.



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



ATTIC ATTACKS

• Mailbag •



Before they fade and crumple,
share your photos.

email to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org



Noticed in Keller, Texas (near Ft. Worth) and worthy of regard by all SA members, we think.

This photo is of a TA-4J BuNo 158136 likeness currently adorning **Manny G's**, a new restaurant in Keller, TX. The name on cockpit rail is Lt. Gurule (Manny), who is a retired airline pilot and now a brand new restaurateur.

For reviews of Manny's food, ranging from "good place for breakfast" to "the food is horrible," go to www.urbanspoon.com/r/13/182341/restaurant/Manny-Gs-Keller. Skyhawk Association Director Gabby Gabbard likes the restaurant, which is probably explained by one patron's description of the restaurant: "low-class." Sounds like just the place for Skyhawk Association members!



A-4s
Forever

LCDR Hugh Magee, VA-146, is shown preflighting 2,000# AGM-12C "Bullpup C" missile prior to launch from USS *Constellation* (CVA-64) on 6 October 1967. This missile dropped the center span of the Chieng Chang RR & highway bridge into the deep gorge below. The main supply route bridge was located 12 miles southwest of the Chinese border. This event was witnessed by the strike leader CDR Bob Holt, CO VA-55.



8 THUDS AND A SCOOTER

By Frank Tullo



During “Rolling Thunder,” (the bombing campaign over North Vietnam), the only USAF types that *Skyhawk* pilots would talk to without sneering were the F-105 *Thunderchief* “Thud” drivers. Frank Tullo was one who wrote up his memories, (presented here slightly abridged and edited by Boom Powell), of a joint Navy/Air Force hunter-killer mission to knock out SAM sites near Hanoi on October 31, 1965. The two services flew several such combined operations in an attempt to deal with the burgeoning SAM threat. The Navy *Skyhawks* had ECM equipment the Air Force did not have--yet.

One day our base commander, a colonel who did not fly combat missions, bravely announced: “We” are going after the SAMs. Capt Mike Cooper, showing more guts than tact, called out from the back of the room, “What’s this ‘we’ crap, Colonel, are you going along in the F105F two-seater?” Getting shot at everyday tends to loosen up one’s military decorum.

Navy LtCdr Powers landed his A4E at Takhli carrying his own 500 lb bombs. Powers was the XO of the USS *Oriskany*’s VA-164 squadron. (Ed: Trent Powers was the OpsO.) The Navy had sent their very best. Powers knew this was a big time White House directed mission and dangerous.

Takhli scheduled two outstanding flight commanders for the flight of eight F-105s. Each Thud would carry 8x750 lb. bombs. This was in the days before “smart” and “dumb” bombs.

This joint Navy/Air Force mission briefing was more like a focus group. Powers wanted to fly across the target

level at 50 feet and skip bomb it. We preferred to dive bomb, using a pop-up from the deck to create a dive bomb run. No sweat, since Powers would be first across

“My turn. I lit the burner and popped up to about 7500 feet, Power’s emergency locator beacon screeching in my headset. As the nose came up, I clearly remember saying aloud to myself, ‘Oh crap, I don’t want to do this.’”

the target and out of the way, his flat pass would not conflict with our dive-bombing.

These were called “Doom’s Day missions,” because invariably someone got shot down from the heavy defenses around Hanoi. Did guys shy away from these missions? Are you kidding? Your best friend would lie, cheat and screw you to get your slot on a Doom’s Day mission.

Powers’ plane had a magic black box, well, what passed for magic, *circa* 1965. Actually, it was similar to the old coffee grinder ADF (Direction Finder). A needle would point in the general direction of a SAM site, when and if the SAM was in the SEARCH mode. Operator skill was required.

We launched, joined up, refueled and headed North only to find a solid overcast at the let down point. It was a No-Go. Or was it? Powers pulled the Thuds into a tight nine-ship Vee formation and

descended into cloud. No one would have criticized him one bit if he canceled for weather and returned to base. He pressed on.

Nearing the target, we finally broke out of cloud and went to the deck. No longer a formation now, just a gaggle of bomb-laden Thuds strung out in loose single file. At one point, there were hills on both sides and overcast above, making a sort of tunnel. I got slung into clouds during a turn and immediately punched the nose down desperately hoping for valley beneath and not hillside. I remember thinking; I’m *not* going to miss this mission for anything. I flew so low over a guy driving a farm tractor that he leapt to the ground. He was doin’ about two knots, we were doin’ 550. When they are shooting at you: Low is good...Fast is good.

My plane was hit by small arms fire causing some yellow caution lights to glow, as we screamed low level towards the target.

The Thud was well built. Once, when all the 105s were grounded due to several inexplicably blowing up, someone suggested giving them to the Army for use as tank crushers. Taxi a Thud over a tank and collapse the gear...crushing the tank. Another joke was Republic was going to make the Thud out of cement, but they found out steel was heavier.

We didn’t know the SAM’s exact location, but hoped the Navy’s magic black box could point the way. We were the goats, tethered to lure the lion out into the open for the kill. Until that day, it was a big deal when just one or two SAMs were launched. Now they were firing SAMs like artillery. Fifteen is the number I remember. (Ed: 27 overall)

Powers calmly transmitted, “I’ve got ‘em on my nose...starting my run.” He flew directly over the target at tree-top level and was literally disintegrated by withering ground fire.

My turn. I lit the burner and popped up to about 7500 feet, Power’s emergency locator beacon screeching in my head-



F-105 *Thunderchief*, commonly known as a *Thud*.



set. As the nose came up, I clearly remember saying aloud to myself, "Oh crap, I don't want to do this."

The anti-aircraft hits caused multiple red and yellow emergency lights to blink incessantly. I transmitted my intention to get to the water off Haiphong before ejecting.

Alone and doing 810 knots on the deck (that's right, Buddy, 810 knots) I slowly overtook a Navy F-8 *Crusader* as if passing a car on the freeway. We exchanged gentle pathetic waves as if to say: "Oh, Hi there, don't know you, but hope you're having a nice day?" I swear it was the most surreal moment of my life.

Still on the deck, but now over the safety of Gulf of Tonkin water, a sort of euphoric invincibility set in. If I ejected over the water, the Navy would surely pick me up.

Decided there was no reason to jump out if this bird was still running. Did that last month and it scared the crap out of me. On the radio now, with precious little fuel remaining, I was begging for a tanker. Made radio contact with a KC-135 somewhere in cyberspace. Following a

terse debate challenging *his* priorities, we got together with barely any fuel reading on my gauge.

Back at Takhli, I pleaded with the base commander to award Powers the Air Force Cross. He didn't like the idea. Reminded me that the Navy had their own Navy Cross and handled their own decorations. I pushed my point as if we were equals. Don't you get it--the USS *Oriskany* lost their top guy while USAF gets a big headline back home. Powers' brilliant leadership was why the mission succeeded! Give the NAVY guy the AIR FORCE CROSS! The colonel wasn't a fighter pilot. He didn't get it.

Gen George Simler flew in from headquarters to have a beer with the guys on the mission. Sitting at the sorry-no-ice-today, O'Club bar, Simler and I were hangar flying like two young cadets. He was that kind of general.

I passionately pitched Simler on awarding the Air Force Cross to Powers.



VA-164 A-4s from USS Oriskany

He loved it... instantly. He turned and said dismissively to the base commander, "Take care of that, Colonel."

Trent Richard Powers was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation is on www.skyhawk.org. He survived the ejection and was captured. His death while a POW was under mysterious circumstances.

The strike was a total of 65 aircraft on a bridge five miles from the Kep MiG base. Powers was flying A-4E 151173 AH466 of VA-164 when he was shot down.

? BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Puzzlers from Boom Powell •



Here are some puzzlin' yet probin' photos and questions from the Boomster, see if you can go 2-for-2 with him. This is the honor system, of course...

Question 1. Boom wonders if those who stayed awake in geometry can figure out how low this A-4 was flying when the photo was taken. (Photo from Dave Dollarhide via Youthly Puresome.) This is a VA-203 A-4L flown by Bob Sturgeon (deceased).



Dave took the photo in the early '70s on a Fallon det. Dave's probably glad his CO couldn't do that when he was a nugget.



Question 2. This picture depicts NA-4F 152101 at the Paxuxent River Open House in 1974. What does the prefix letter "N" mean in the designation? Photo courtesy of Steve Miller (*Skyhawk Study Group*).

➔ See Answers on Page 23 ➔

BESIDES, IT'S FUN TO FLY

• Part I •

By Harry Gann



"I have great confidence in its ability to stay up there in combat; besides, it's fun to fly."

- Navy Vietnam aviator in reference to the McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawk.

Introduction

The characteristics of the carrier-based, light-attack aircraft that merited the above comment were the result of separate occurrences that arose in the early part of the 1950s. Military exercises showed that many missions of the first-line prop-driven attack aircraft of that day required 8 to 12 hours in the air. Because of fatigue, some returning pilots were not capable of coping with marginal weather or other emergency conditions if encountered. Letters at the squadron level filtering up through channels indicated problems and suggested solutions. The consensus of the opinions recommended that faster, turbine powered aircraft be deployed for the mission.

Quite apart from the operational needs of the fleet, engineering management at the Douglas Aircraft Company was looking at a dual problem as old as powered

aircraft: weight growth and complexity. The lives of many new aircraft are terminated because of this problem. Every company that has developed any number of aircraft has been caught in this trap.

" A 1952 Douglas report noted that one pound of weight added in the design of a typical small subsonic jet aircraft increased the gross weight of the airplane ten lbs. With aircraft costs then at \$40 per lb., this addition meant that pound increased the cost of the aircraft \$400..."

A general research program was undertaken by Douglas to investigate all aspects of weight reduction and elimination of unnecessary complexities for future design programs. A 1952 Douglas report noted that one pound of weight added in the design of a typical small subsonic jet

aircraft increased the gross weight of the airplane ten lbs. With aircraft costs then at \$40 per lb., this addition meant that pound increased the cost of the aircraft \$400 if performance and strength were unchanged.

Prior to publication of this report, an unsolicited fighter proposal using lightweight design concepts and principles was submitted to the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer) in early 1952. In view of the operational requirement being generated as a result of fleet suggestions on attack aircraft, the fighter design was revamped to that of a lightweight attack bomber with the capability of running 400 miles to a target, deliver a 1,000-lb. bomb and return.

The means of financing the construction of a prototype aircraft became avail-

able when BuAer decided to cancel the Douglas XA2D *Skyshark* turboprop-powered attack aircraft. This promising design had bogged down because of seemingly insoluble problems arising from the engine design. The problem of gearbox and engine control systems could not be economically solved with the existing state-of-the-art. Funds in the amount of \$41 million from the A2D program were transferred to the new lightweight attack aircraft to be designated XA4D-1.

A contract was let 12 June 1952, and the specification written for a "lightweight, single engine, single place, high performance, carrier-based, day attack land plane, capable of performing dive-bombing interdiction and close support missions. The airplane shall be capable of delivery of conventional or special weapons, and it is intended to be capable of striking sea and land targets with or without fighter escort where control of the air has not been established. (Inherent simplicity of design, high producibility, ease of maintenance and low cost of production are prime objectives.)"

The specified empty weight was 8,136lbs. By comparison, the FJ-4B



A4D-1 of VA-72, the first Navy squadron to operate the Skyhawk, circa 1956.

(Photo via Boom Powell.)

Fury, a comparable airplane of the same era, with the same engine and internal fuel weighed 13,790 lbs. or 70 percent more than the A4D. The airplane is best described in the mockup inspection report: "Basically it is a delta-wing configuration with a normal tail, a conventional control system, carries a crew of one, powered by a single J65-W-2 axial flow jet engine. A large variety of weapons can be carried externally on three bomb racks, the centerline station being capable of carrying stores up to 3,575 lbs., and the wing racks being stressed for 1,000 lbs. each. Design gross weight with one Mk 12 weapon is 14,250 lbs., and the combat radius with this weapon and internal fuel only (900 gals.) is 400 miles. The maximum design catapult weight is 19,760 lbs. Maximum speed in the clean condition at sea level is 596 kts. (M-0.90) and the combat ceiling at combat weight is 50,000 ft."

As a result of the first mockup board that met in October 1952, 19 aircraft were ordered. Rather than the usual procedure of ordering two experimental aircraft, it was decided to build all aircraft with production tooling and deliver them to test and evaluation units, as well as the fleet. By January 1953, fabrication of tooling was complete and the production of components began to flow. A year later, during February 1954, the first aircraft, designated XA4D-1, BuNo 137812, was rolled out for engine run-up. Subsequently, the aircraft was trucked from Douglas EI Segundo plant to Edwards AFB. After extensive ground and taxi tests, it was flown 22 June 1954, by Douglas test pilot Bob Rahn, just two years after the go-ahead was given.

Pre-Operational Development

After the exhilaration of the initial flight, the serious flight test work began. All phases of aircraft design, performance and capabilities had to be proven to the satisfaction of the customer. The work-horse of the flight test program was the second aircraft, BuNo 137813. It flew 319 hours in the test program demonstrating several aerodynamic characteristics and aircraft systems. At the completion of testing, the aircraft was assigned to the Naval Parachute Facility at NAAS EI Centro, where it was finally retired from service in 1969 and placed on display at the Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola



XA4D-1 mockup shows early design configuration of the Skyhawk. (DAC photo.)

in the markings of VA-93.

During two years of exhaustive flight test, it was decided the best way to introduce the A4D's capability to the world was to officially break one of the international airspeed records. Chosen was the 500-km closed-course record of 649.46 mph held by a USAF North American F-86H Sabre. Navy test pilot LT Gordon Gray was selected to pilot A4D-1 BuNo 137820 for the record attempt. A 12-pylon course of 100 km circumference was set up on the California desert near Edwards and on 15 October 1955, Gray flew five laps at an altitude of 100 meters at a certified speed of 695.163 mph. Thus, the *Skyhawk* became the first attack aircraft to hold this record.

In March 1956, six aircraft were flown to the Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River, Md., for Bureau of Inspection and Survey Trials (BIS). The BIS team performed such tests as necessary to insure all contractual obligations were met. At the conclusion of this operation, the stage was set for the flight indoctrination program (FIP).

The FIP trials were the final qualifying trials and served to orient and introduce the aircraft for operational duty with fleet squadrons. Attack Squadron 72, flying Grumman

F9F-5 *Panthers* at NAS Quonset Point, R.I., was selected to conduct the trials. On the West Coast, VF(AW)-3, at NAS Moffett Field, a transitional training and FIP unit operating as a precursor to today's replacement training squadrons, also was designated to evaluate the operational characteristics of the *Skyhawk*. The FIP aircraft were delivered to both squadrons in September and tight daily schedules were flown, in some cases 18 hours a day. Maintenance schedules were set up to determine the day-to-day availability of the *Skyhawk*. The A4D proved to have the highest availability of any new design tested under the FIP program - the *Skyhawk* was ready for the fleet.

continued...



LT Gordon Gray poses in front of 137820 with Douglas ground crew following his record-breaking flight of 15 October, 1955. Photo is autographed for crewchief Tom Mayberry (second from left). (Photo via Mayberry family.)

FUN TO FLY

Continued...

Fleet Introduction of the A4D-1

The first factory-to-fleet delivery of the A4D was made in October 1956, to the *Skyhawks* of VA-72. Not only did the squadron introduce the A4D to the fleet, it also relinquished its *Skyhawk* nickname to the new bomber and changed to Blue Hawks to avoid confusion. The Bengals of Marine Corps Attack Squadron 224 transitioned to A4D-1s in 1956 to initiate the new aircraft into the Corps. After receiving its aircraft at MCAS El Toro, the squadron flew the *Skyhawk* in later versions for almost ten years before altering its mission to all-weather attack and switching to Grumman A-6A *Intruders*.

Soon, many other squadrons began receiving the A4D-1. VA-93, the Blue Blazers, became the first fleet tactical unit to operate A4Ds on the West Coast. The squadron deployed to WestPac in USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) 16 September 1957, with CVG-9 for the A4D's initial full deployment.

Eventually, some 18 Navy and Marine attack squadrons operated A4D-1s (re-designated A-4A in October 1962) of which 165 were built. As the "Alfas" were phased out of the fleet operational units, they were assigned to Navy and Marine Reserve squadrons. By 1967, all A-4As were retired except for a few that were retained by test units for non-operational missions.



Appearing much like a scale model next to its "big brother" A3D Skywarrior, the XA4D-1 shows an advantage of designing smaller nuclear weapons. (DAC photo.)

The A4D-2 (A-4B) and the Inside-Out Tail

Before initial deliveries of the A4D-1 were made to the fleet, an improved version had already been ordered into production. Developed to meet more demanding requirements with respect to range and navigational capability, the A4D-2 was first flown 26 March 1956, by Douglas test pilot Drury Wood. Twenty-eight percent of the structure was modified to incorporate desired improvements. The most notable external additions were the in-flight refueling probe added to the right side of the fuselage and stiffening of the rudder by building

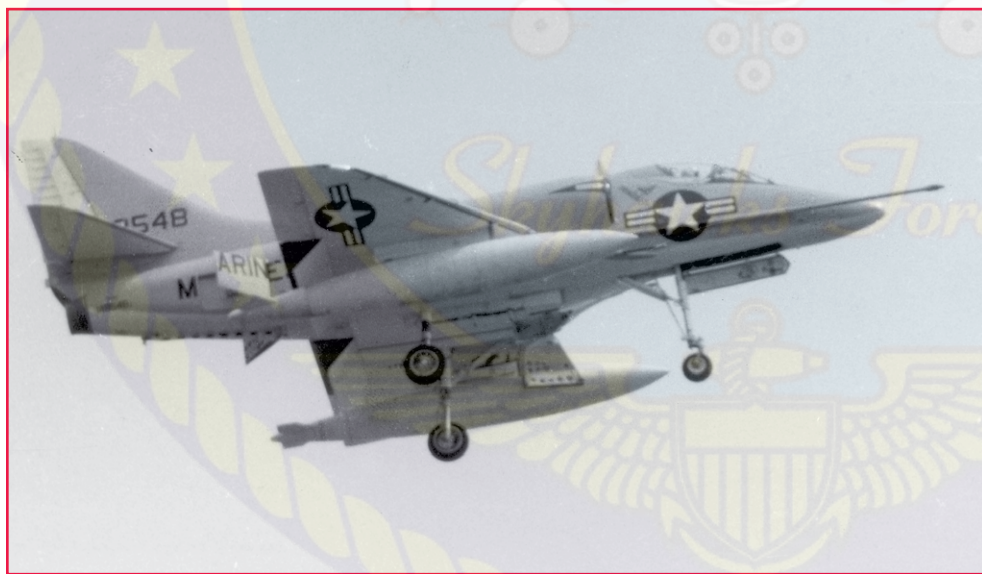
it inside out with the ribs showing and bonding it together rather than riveting. This arrangement, known as a tadpole rudder, reduced the tendency of the trailing edge of the rudder to vibrate like a tuning fork at high speeds, thus creating fatigue cracks.

Additional navigational equipment, coupled with provisions for carrying 300-gal. external tanks and the refueling probe, provided for longer range flights on special weapon and strike missions. The ordnance delivery system was improved by addition of Bullpup air-to-ground guided missile capability in addition to an improved bomb delivery system. Additional improvements were made to the flight control systems. The landing gear was strengthened and a pressure fueling system was added. A4D-2 production totaled 542 aircraft. Fleet introduction of the new *Skyhawk* model began with VMA-211 in September 1957.

By the mid-1960s, the A-4Bs were serving with Reserve units and received a paper designation of TA-4B to remove them from the Navy's combat aircraft inventory.

Development of the A4D-2N (A-4C): The A4D-3 is Cancelled

The Douglas engineering staff worked constantly to improve the performance of the *Skyhawk*. New requirements were being generated by users and passed



A-4C #148548, circa 1966. (Photo by Global Air Images via SA.)



A-4E AH 466 of VA-164 aboard USS Oriskany in 1966. (Photo from Gary Gottschalk via Gary Verver.)

through channels to the Bureau of Weapons (BuWeps, formerly BuAer). A desirable specific addition to the capability of the *Skyhawk* was greater range through foul weather and shrouded terrain. Radar was needed to penetrate beyond mountainous areas and improved instrumentation as well as autopilot were needed for increased instrument flight capability.

"It appeared that the tactic of putting all the eggs in the single 'A-bomb basket' may have been premature. Iron bombs and guns were still necessary in the environment created by perennial world-wide brush fires."

The Navy had developed an all-attitude bombing and navigational system which appeared to be an improvement. Douglas submitted a proposal for the A4D-3 to meet these requirements. It was to be powered with a new engine being developed for the Grumman A2F-1

(A-6A), the Pratt & Whitney J52. The specific fuel consumption of the J52 was less than the Curtiss-Wright J65 of the earlier *Skyhawks*, while maximum thrust generated was increased from 7,700 lbs. to 8,500 lbs. Orders for four aircraft were let on a development contract; however, engine and avionics development costs could not be fitted into the austerity of the

Navy procurement budget and the A4D-3 was cancelled before production was initiated.

To fulfill the requirements for additional aircraft within the framework of budget restrictions, a compromise aircraft was developed. Designated A4D-2N (A-

4C), the new *Skyhawk* retained the J65 engine but added a fairly sophisticated autopilot, a low altitude bombing all attitude indicating gyro system, a terrain clearance radar housed in an extended nose and an angle of attack indicating system. The aircraft was flown 21 August 1958, and became operational in February 1960, with VMA-225. By December 1962, the last of 638 A4D-2Ns were delivered to the fleet.

In 1961, two A4D-2Ns (BuNos 148490 and 148483) were modified for a U.S. Army evaluation along with the Northrop N-156 and an Italian-built Fiat G-91. To enhance performance on a sod field, the *Skyhawk* was equipped with a drag chute and a revised landing gear in which dual main wheels were incorporated. To save time and money for the test, a quick and dirty fairing for the landing gear was installed.

Despite a nine-and-a-half week testing session, no production contracts were let after these Army-sponsored tests. *continued...*

STILL FUN

Continued...

Development of the A4D-5 (A-4E)

Again, even before the A4D-2N flew, new requirements were being generated by the fleet. It appeared that the tactic of putting all the eggs in the single "A-bomb basket" may have been premature. Iron bombs and guns were still necessary in the environment created by perennial world-wide brush fires. The basic A-4 design was flexible enough such that its capability as a conventional weapons carrier could be greatly enhanced. Mutual discussion between Douglas and Navy personnel jelled into specifics and a formal proposal was submitted in February 1959. Authority to proceed was given 30 July, and the existing A4D-2N contract was altered to allow the delivery of the final two aircraft as A4D-5s.

The changes agreed upon consisted of the substitution of the Pratt & Whitney J52 for the Curtiss-Wright J65 as proposed in the cancelled A4D-3. In addition to its 800-lbs. additional thrust, the J52-P-6A was 770 lbs. lighter and used less fuel. More importantly, the J52 was a new design and its growth potential was much greater than the older J65 which was out of production. Installation of the J52 in the *Skyhawk* airframe required a redesign of the center fuselage and inlet ducting.

To increase the armament carrying



A-4B of VA-43 aboard USS Independence in 1961. (Photo via SA.)

capability, two additional external store hard points were added to the existing three stations on the delta wing *Skyhawk*. The airframe structure was beefed up to increase the catapult gross weight to 24,500 lbs. New equipment installed included Tacan, Doppler navigation, Mk 9 toss-bombing system, radar altimeter and the AJB-3A low altitude bombing system.

First flight of the A4D-5 was 12 July 1961. By this time, the order for modification of two A4D-2Ns had been augmented by a production contract. The A-4E (designation after October 1962) entered service with VA-23 in January 1963. When the last aircraft left the factory, 500 A-4E *Skyhawks* had joined the

units of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.

When the Pratt & Whitney J52-P-8A with 9,300 lbs. of thrust became available, some A-4Es were equipped with this engine in place of the J52-P-6A. While no official letter designator was applied to this version, they were unofficially referred to as "Super Echos." Also later installed on the fleet A-4Es was the upper avionics pod developed initially for the A-4F. This modification also did not carry a designation update.

Part II of this article will appear in the Fall 2009 edition of *The A-4Ever*.

(Ed. note: This article was first published in *The Hook*, Winter 1990. Used with permission.)

About the author: *Harry Gann, a legend in the Skyhawk community*

While serving with U.S. Army WWII Armored Forces in Europe, Harry Gann was wounded during the Battle of the Bulge. Following recuperation and discharge at the end of the war, he received a B.E. in Mechanical Engineering in 1950 from the University of Southern California.

After two years with North American Aviation and two more years with small aviation companies, Harry joined Douglas Aircraft Company's El Segundo division. He worked as a designer of mechanical control systems for the F4D *Skyray*, F5D *Skylancer*,

A3D *Skywarrior* and A4D *Skyhawk*.

In 1989, he was transferred to the communications group and became the Douglas Aircraft Company historian. Gann's lifelong hobby of aircraft photography was utilized in specialized air-to-air photography for flight demonstration organizations using McDonnell Douglas aircraft. This function was later expanded to include photography of Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps units. Considered the unofficial Blue Angel photographer, Harry was designated an Honorary Blue Angel in 1979, having already been named an Honorary Naval

and Marine Aviator during his long and distinguished career.

A legend in the *Skyhawk* community, after retirement in 1992 Harry continued to contribute to aviation history as a volunteer for the MCAS El Toro Historical Foundation (later the Flying Leatherneck Museum). He also served as historian of the *Skyhawk* Association.

Harry Gann passed away in October 2000, leaving a void which will never be filled. The Fall 2000 issue of the *Skyhawk Journal* was dedicated to his memory.

MWR UNVEILS THE “KING KAT”

By Jon Gagné



Ed. Note: For those of you who mourn the passing of the Cubi O'Club catapult, read on!

NAS Kingsville Public Affairs: The Morale, Welfare and Recreation Department unveiled their latest “toy” for base personnel Friday, Oct. 31 in the form of a mechanical device designed to simulate catching a wire on an aircraft carrier. The “Kingsville Catapult” or “King Kat” as it is called, was designed and built by VT-21 Training Officer LT Casey Bates.

The project took three months to complete from design to test drive, and included the volunteer efforts of several other aviators, dubbed the King Kat air crew. The design is taken from the famous Cubi Point Catapult, aka Cubi Cat, which became a Naval aviation legend at the old officers’ club at NAS Cubi Point, Philippines, in the 70s and 80s. The Cat made its debut in 1969, the result of some dedicated workers from the Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Depot (AIMD) at Cubi Point.

A friend of mine, former NAS Pensacola Gosport editor and retired Navy Chief Photographer’s Mate Art Giberson, wrote about the legend of the Cubi Cat. Back in the day, according to Giberson, Cubi Point Naval Air Station and the adjoining Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines were a place where war-weary Navy and Marine Corps aviators, Marines and sailors, could let off a little steam after flying combat missions over Vietnam or spending weeks on the gun-line aboard ships on Yankee Station. Club managers were always being tasked with coming up with new and interesting ways to keep personnel entertained, which wasn’t always easy.

Enter CDR John L. Sullivan and the now famous Cubi Point Officers’ Club Catapult. The “Cat” came into existence in 1969, and immediately created a division within naval air among those who had ridden the cat and caught the wire, and those who had ridden the cat and missed the wire and gotten soaked. The escapades of

Navy and Marine pilots at the Cubi Point Club, according to Sullivan, is the stuff of legend.

One of these escapades, Giberson wrote, involved catapulting a squadron mate down a half dozen stairs in a chair from the bar upstairs onto the dance floor below. The practice often ended with disastrous results. Because of the injuries, the NAS Cubi Point Commander, CAPT ‘Red Horse’ Meyers stopped the chair shots and tasked Sullivan, who was the AIMD department head, to come up with something else to entertain the aviators. Heading off to the surplus yard, Sullivan and his band of AIMD scavengers liberated a banged-up refueling tank which was quickly converted by the metal smiths into something resembling an A-7 Corsair II. The Cubi Catapult was born.

The ‘Cat,’ Giberson stated, was 6-feet long and had shoulder straps and a safety belt and was equipped with a stick that, when pulled back sharply, released a hook in the rear of the vehicle to allow arrestment. Propulsion was provided by pressurized nitrogen tanks hooked up to a manifold. “This arrangement provided enough power to propel the vehicle to 15 mph in the first two feet,” said Sullivan. “Acceleration of zero to 15 mph in two feet is the equivalent of the *G* force of World War II hydraulic catapults. The downward curvature of the track had to be precise. The rollers would bind if the curvature were too sharp. Beyond the exit from the club was a pool of water 3 1/2 feet deep, which would stop the Cat, if the pilot were not successful in catching the wire and stopping the Cat.

Sullivan named the vehicle ‘Red Horse One’ in honor of CAPT Meyers. Successful “Cat” pilots were held in high esteem by their peers and their names were inscribed in gold letters on the club’s Wall of Fame. Reaction time was short because the wire was some 14 feet

from the nose of the vehicle. “Since the pool water was the force that stopped the vehicle, we had to get the vehicle as deeply and as quickly into the pool as possible,” Sullivan stated. “Engineers from the Strategic Aircraft Repair Team used their ‘slip sticks’ to solve the problem.”

The vehicle was retrieved from the water by a mechanical winch and cable connected to an eye welded to the back of the A-7.

Word of the Cat quickly spread throughout Southeast Asia and even attracted Air Force F-4 pilots from Clark AFB. They would come swaggering in loudly claiming they were equal to the task. Each and every one of them failed to catch the wire, much to the delight of the Navy onlookers.

Just how successful the King Kat will be here remains to be seen. A good crowd of aviators turned out for the official grand opening, including Training Air Wing TWO Commander CAPT Bill Davis and NAS Kingsville CO CAPT Phil Waddingham. LT Bates and his staff of volunteers helped load and launch the pilots. Those that were successful owned bragging rights and quite possibly their name on a future “Wall of Fame,” while those that hit the water were encouraged to purchase a t-shirt that would remind them of their first attempt at stardom.

LT Bates was all smiles during the official grand opening. Perhaps it was because he had finally witnessed his dream become reality, or, the long weeks of planning, building, and testing the Kat were finally behind him. Whatever the reason, the King Kat has big shoes to fill as far as naval aviation legend is concerned. Fortunately for Bates, and all future King Kat-ers, legends are built one flight at a time.



King Kat crew poses with NAS Kingsville catapult.

A BAD DAY

By Captain Dick Stratton, USN(Ret)



AVIATOR FLIGHT LOG BOOK #3

January 1967.
Day: 5. Model: A-4E.
Serial Number: 151136.
Flight Code: IQ1.
Total Pilot Time: 0.9.
First Pilot: 0.9.
Instrument Time-Actual: 0.3.
Carrier Landings: 0. Catapult: 1.
Remarks:
Shot down over Vietnam.

Did you ever have a bad day? I mean one of those days when you knew as soon as your feet hit the deck that it was going to be a hummer? One of those days when, if you had a choice, you'd crawl back in the rack, assume the fetal position, and suck your thumb until the next reveille?

At oh-dark-thirty I got a call from my best friend Mike Estocin, the ops officer of the World Famous Golden Dragons (VA-192), asking me to take his hop--the dawn patrol (weather recce). Mike had to attend one of CAG Billy Phillips' endless planning meetings. When I was an eager-beaver NavCad, a wise chief took me aside and said "Stratton, if you want to succeed in this man's Navy, remember one thing--

"I ejected and landed in the only tree behind the only house within five miles. Before I had my helmet off I was a prisoner, a status I experienced for the next 2,251 days."

don't volunteer for nothin!" Thereafter, whenever I ignored the chief's advice, I found myself in deep doo-doo. I ignored that advice on January 5th.

The dawn patrol was sort of an anachronism, to put it politely. It made sense in World War I to check out the activity in the trenches; it made sense

in World War II to check ahead of the convoy for surface-running U-boats; but it made little sense in the Tonkin Gulf in 1967. Regardless, if the weather was good (5,000 ft., 5 miles vis.) or bad (normal), we were going anyway. The only benefit, as the recruiter might say, was that after verifying the usual crud, the weather recce pilot could fly down the coast of North Vietnam, trying to catch some cargo-carrying junks that

had run out of wind and luck, unable to reach their daytime hiding places.

I have no recall of the flight briefing; it was pure routine. Madman John (aka "The Animal") Parks was my wingman. Sometimes John was referred to as the Stratton Control Officer, one of the second tour pros assigned to keep us FNKs out of trouble. We hit the flight deck of Tico - USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) waddling, much to the chagrin of WWII/Korean vets who had visions of

yesteryear when unencumbered pilots ran with war whoops to man their aircraft. My aircraft was "Double Nuts" (Modex 400), CAG Billy Phillips' very own bird, painted like a circus wagon with the colors of all the squadrons and detachments. It was a target in itself, worth a couple of bullets.

How we got Double Nuts is a subplot to the story. Around Christmas of 1966, we had a stand-down when our leaders, LBJ and Robert (really) Strange McNamara, gave the commies a holiday so they could replenish. The Golden Dragon skipper, "Big Ed" McKellar, flew to a "conference" at Atsugi, Japan. When it was time to "go back sheep," he couldn't get his bird started. Being an enterprising man, Ed slipped over to the Nippi rework facility and somehow managed to appropriate a replacement--the nicest, newest A-4E that has just completed rework, supposedly for delivery to the Marines. When Ed flew it back to Tico, without logbooks or other paperwork, we dressed it up in Dragon Gold and a few other colors. I was the maintenance officer and had to manufacture the documentation for the new CAG bird. But, back to the story.

"The dawn patrol was sort of an anachronism, to put it politely. It made sense in World War I to check out the activity in the trenches; it made sense in World War II to check ahead of the convoy for surface-running U-boats; but it made little sense in the Tonkin Gulf in 1967."

The flight was normal. The weather was cruddy. Returning along the coastline, John spotted something in a river mouth that I didn't see, so I gave him the lead and we went in for a look-see. I found a junk and unloaded my Zunis. Coming around, I saw some bridge sections along the river bank. The only ordnance I had left were Aero-7D rocket packs, so I unloaded them on the bridge sections and the manure hit the fan. The Aero-7D pod, which held 19 2.75-in. FFARs (folding-fin aerial rockets), had proven to me in about 3,000 hours of light attack work to be a somewhat erratic, if not downright unreliable, weapon. Its primary value, especially without a nose cone, was as an effective speedbrake or aerial mine simulator. The rockets had folding fins. I was a liberal arts major, not an engineer, but even I understood that the rockets would not stabilize if the fins did not pop out.

If you had up to 19 unstabilized things flying around in close proximity, bad things could happen. The bottom

line is that on that January day, the fins of some of the rockets did not pop out and bad things happened. Unstabilized rockets collided and the warheads exploded (well, at least something worked right.) The A-4E's J52 engine worked quite well while ingesting air, but not after ingesting rocket debris. Fire was coming out where the air was supposed to go in as I rolled for open water and broadcast my final inspiring words ("Oh, shit!). At 2,200 ft and 220 kts, the engine gave up and exploded. In the process, it blew off the tail and my ever-loving A-4 flying machine had all the flight characteristics of a free-falling safe. It was decision time.

My departure from NAS Lemoore flashed through my mind. My wife, Alice, took me off to the airpatch so I could fly out to join Tico. I was delivered in a broken-down station wagon with three kids--ages one, three, and five-- in the back, fighting, pooping and squalling. I was running from the peace of peace to the peace of war when my wife whistled me back to the car, gave me a peck on the cheek and whispered motivating words that re-echoed in my churning, burning cockpit 10,000 miles away from home. She said "Don't you dare die and leave me with these three little bastards!" That was a commitment.

I ejected and landed in the only tree

behind the only house within five miles. Before I had my helmet off I was a prisoner, a status I experienced for the next 2,251 days. The peasants were not happy and beat the living hell out of me, then staged a mock execution and rolled me into my own grave. Within 24 hours I was at the main prison, Hoa La (Hanoi Hilton).

During interrogation, I thought of the Aero-7D rocket pod and was able to buy a whole day from torture by describing to the enemy a new secret weapon that had 19 independently targeted warheads, which even I didn't know where they were going.

And, remember the stolen Marine A-4E? I was wearing Marine fatigues when I was shot down and my parachute seat pan still had a packing slip signed by a Marine sergeant. The comies thought they had a new situation on their hands--Marines flying A-4s from carriers. I was being tortured to admit I was a U.S. Marine! (Keep cool, my grunt friends. Two of the three "little bastards" in the back of that old station wagon now are Marines, and I also have a daughter-in-law Marine. All three currently are in Saudi Arabia.) My best friend, Mike Estocin, volunteered for an Iron Hand mission just days before chopping for Stateside. He didn't return. Mike was awarded the Medal of Honor and had a ship named after



Captain Dick Stratton, described by Senator John McCain as "being an inspiration to those of us who were not as strong as he was in prison." Captain Stratton resides in Atlantic Beach, FL.

him. Madman John survived his second cruise and was last seen in a TAR billet at Great Lakes. Skipper Ed McKellar retired after serving as CO of NAS Alameda.

To this day when there is a knock on the door, I don't know if it's going to be SecNav with a DFC or the GAO with a bill for one stolen USMC A-4E. The truth of the matter is that I shot myself down.

Ed. Note: This article is reprinted from The Hook, Winter 1990. Used with permission.

HOW TO JOIN YOUR SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION READY ROOM

One of the great benefits of membership is being able to access the **members only** features found in the **Skyhawk Association Ready Room**. Follow the steps below to gain access. You will be able browse the extensive gallery of A-4 images, research the history of aircraft by bureau number, view the membership roster, participate in a private forum and more.

TAKE TIME TO JOIN TODAY!

Existing members contact the RR Coordinator.

Follow these easy steps:

1. Go to <http://www.saprivate.a4skyhawk.org/> (Not advertised to the public)
2. Read the instructions before continuing!
3. Click on one of the "Ready Room Coordinator" links on the page.
4. Your email client will open a window addressed to the Coordinator.
5. In the email send your preferred login name, your full name, and your preferred password to the RR Coordinator.
6. The Coordinator will set up your account and notify you when it is ready. readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org.



PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

The Tip of the Spear

The red tiled roofs of the nest of buildings the spies called "a railroad complex" seemed to glow in the morning sun as they grew in Puresome's gunsight. He had spotted the target from what seemed to be 400 miles away, and the skipper had detached him from the four plane "mini-alpha strike" to deliver his Mk-82 snake-eye bombs as the rest of the flight positioned to follow with conventional high-angle bombing runs. Not a burst of flak or insane "Doodle! Doodle!" warning of Sam guidance radar had sounded in his headset to mar the quiet beauty of the morning. Since he had started his low angle dive out of the sun from some 10,000 feet, Puresome was on the rails, airspeed absolutely nailed, on a predictable, peacetime COMPEX bombing run, the target relentlessly growing under the yellow glow of his gunsight pipper.

Puresome knew he was a grape, and he knew it was coming and readied himself. But it was always possible that the gomers had OD'd on rice wine the night before and were suffering from runaway chopsticks instead of stuffing ratshot into muskets and tracking him with all sorts of missiles and sparkling devices. He made small tracking corrections to keep his pipper exactly on his aiming point of the first building, his thumb on the bomb pickle button on the stick.

The red golf balls started crossing in front of him and puffing around his A-4 at about a thousand feet, and the other members of the flight started yelling *Flak! Flak!* and dodging about the multicolored little clouds that were suddenly filling the sky. *Yaaaaa!* Puresome's scrotes shriveled and his heart filled his throat. But the buildings were rushing up at him at 450 knots with the yellow notch of his pipper dead on his target, and when the needle on his radar altimeter went through the bug set at 300 feet, the headset tone and the light by the gunsight that were wired through

it activated, and Puresome went *Pickle! Pickle! Pickle!* to release three Snake-eyes and started jinking like a madman.

Buildings blew up behind him and flak bursts and red golf balls chased the A-4 as Puresome moved it violently around the sky. Then--as suddenly as it had begun--the storm spit him out into quiet sky. Zooming out of the weeds, Puresome started breathing again. Warily moving the airplane around while looking for the rest of the flight, he was amazed to find that, other than being scared guano-less, there didn't seem to

"But it was always possible that the gomers had OD'd on rice wine the night before and were suffering from runaway chopsticks instead of stuffing ratshot into muskets and tracking him with all sorts of missiles and sparkling devices."

be a ding on his A4E. Puresome could only mark it up to the amazing agility of the Scooter being honked around by the gallons of adrenaline pumping through the veins of the Mad Jinker.

"Snake flight, Snake two is four o'clock low."

"Ah... roge' two, talley-ho, coming around right."

Puresome climbed and cut to the inside of the turn of the flight of three, happy to rejoin the security of the swarm and have three other sets of eyeballs to help watch out. He rendezvoused on the skipper's wing; the formation spread out into a wide finger-four and turned Up North.

Puresome knew it was going to be an interesting day when the flight schedule came out. He always hawked the schedule, hanging around late at night until Norman-the-Fink gave issue of a pile of reeking mimeograph copies of the next day's flight schedule, so he could see if any good deals might be possible for a powerless, sniveling

junior officer and get the jump on his pals-- though sometimes, the advance knowledge just gave him longer to contract a case of the chickenshits.

Today's flight schedule had Puresome flying the skipper's wing in place of Brown Bars, Candy Andy or Weed, instead of with his usual section leader, on a four-plane mini-alpha strike, followed by road reconnaissance. This meant things to shoot at without the gut-ache of an actual major alpha strike, where gomer got really pissed and usually over-reacted. What really interested him was the ordnance load of six 500 pound bombs on a centerline rack, two 4-shot Zuni rocket packs on the outboard stations, and 20 mike-mike cannon, which were enough goodies to terminate lots of gomer artifacts with extreme prejudice.

Ho Chi Minh's boys were not likely to leave much stuff hanging around in

the open during daylight, but a sharp-eyed attack pilot hoped to find something worth shooting. And the five-inch Zuni rocket with explosive heads on them were mighty weapons that went where they were pointed, not like the erratic 2.75 folding-fin rockets that often swooped around trying to nail the shooter.

At the appointed time, the flight members had trooped up to IOIC, the Integrated Operational Intelligence Center, pushed the buzzer, and satisfied the Duty Spook with the secret sign so he unlocked the door and they were admitted into James Bond territory. They were issued black and white photos of their target, which was a railroad junction north of Thanh Hoa that at least had some buildings that were supposed to warehouse riceballs and fortune cookies considered important to the war effort. With the primary target eliminated, the flight was to split up and recce parts of Route Pack IV and blow up barges, cargo-carrying bicycles, and any identifiable bad guys. They marked the target

on their charts and updated the red parts that would be nice to avoid. They listened to the weather brief then left the world of magic for specifics back in Ready Room Four-Starboard.

The skipper went through the complete briefing on the conduct of the flight, with special emphasis on route and approach to the target, with the main axis of attack being wagon-wheeled out of the sun so the little buggers couldn't see well, and nobody would be coming down the same chute in their high-dive bomb attacks. Mil settings for the gunsight and wind corrections were figured and noted on kneeboard cards. The skipper assigned the second section of Skip and Alpha their area to road-recce after the attack on the railroad complex. Everyone wrote launch and recovery data on their kneeboards, as well as codewords for MiG activity, the North Sar, and corridors into Danang.

Puresome always figured that plain English shrieked over the radio beat code words any day, and would probably be all he could remember anyway. The duty officer passed out their aircraft assignments. Puresome snuck out for a last, nervous pass at the head then struggled into his damp, fuming flight gear, flopped into a ready room chair, and waited for the balloon to go up. He idly watched the aircraft from the previous recovery make their videotaped landing passes down the cross-hairs on the PLAT television screen, grading them. Sitting there, trussed up in his g-suit, torso harness, and survival vest always reminded Puresome of sitting around in his football gear waiting to go do or die for Winsocki High—same nervous anticipation, same locker-room smell, and completely silly-assed in its triviality, given the competition and stakes in the current game.

The "Pilots and aircrew, man your planes for the 0800 launch" clunking across the yellow teleprompter screen at the front of the ready room came as a great relief, and Puresome put on his helmet and grabbed his nav bag and stormed out and up the escalator into the sun and wind of the flight deck. All the A-4s involved on the launch were staged on the port side of the flight deck, aft of the angle notch and Puresome quickly found Sidewinder 411.

And a problem. Instead of six slick Mk. 82 bombs on his centerline rack, there were six snake-eye retarded bombs. "Ay! Yi! Yi! Yi," thought Puresome, "not good for Up North!" So he waddled down two airplanes and found the skipper, who rolled his eyes at the news and nodded. Puresome figured they would deal with it, the Old Man wasn't scared of hell....

So the flight had launched, rendezvoused above the ship and headed up the Gulf of Tonkin with the combat-spread formation shining in the morning sun. Puresome had dug his blue plastic Air Force checklist book out of his nav bag prior to launch and found the weapons delivery data for a twenty-degree snake-eye dive. He had set up the mil-lead on his gunsight and rotated the bug on his radar altimeter to the bomb-release altitude, so he was ready when the flight switched to tactical frequency and skipper had briefed the new plan of attack. Puresome kept his head moving, quickly scanning the sky from his left shoulder around through his right, through the skipper's airplane and up to and behind the second section's aircraft, which were about a mile abeam and 2,000 feet higher. Their "six" was clear of sharp-shooting gomers, and Puresome knew that Skip and Alpha in the second section were clearing his tail. The skipper's head was moving too, but his primary job was navigating.

The blue water up ahead started to

Armament switch "on" as well—the system was ready to drop bombs, and Puresome figured he could keep his thumb off the bomb pickle rather than forget to turn it on and get shot at for nothing. And look bad. The flight checked "feet dry" with Red Crown, switched to strike frequency and whistled over the white breakers washing on a brown beach, headed inland.

Puresome was soaking wet when he joined the other A-4s off the target. The skipper passed him the lead and quickly looked him over for dents, dings, and unwanted holes. Except for collateral damage to his skivvies and a large part of his heart still stuck in this throat, Puresome and Alpha Golf 411 were undamaged. The skipper gave him a thumbs up, and Puresome tapped his helmet and pointed to the skipper, passing the lead back.

Since they had briefed to drop bombs singly rather than on "ripple" on the primary target, so as to save ordnance for road recce, all the A-4s still had bombs left. But the hornet's nest he had stirred up had caused some misses, and there weren't nearly enough holes or dead buildings around to consider the job done.

"Snake flight from lead, we're going to stay together and recce north for a while, then we're going to come back and finish the primary target with our remaining bombs."

"Puresome was soaking wet when he joined the other A-4s off the target. The skipper passed him the lead and quickly looked him over for dents, dings, and unwanted holes. Except for collateral damage to his skivvies and a large part of his heart still stuck in this throat, Puresome and Alpha Golf 411."

turn brown from the muddy discharge of the sluggish rivers emptying into the Gulf, when the skipper turned toward the beach, easing his nose down and picking up speed. Puresome took a last look at the map resting on his kneeboard then stuck it in the left corner of the cockpit. He turned his gunsight on bright, rotated his function select switch to "bombs," and toggled his centerline station selector switch to "on." So he would not forget it, he turned his Master

"Holy Mierda!" thought Puresome, knowing once again that it was filthy work that must be done.

"Two! Three! Four!" The two sections spread out and picked up their speed, maneuvering out of phase with each other, roller-coastering their altitude and constantly weaving, changing their heading, watching for targets on the ground and MiGs, missiles, and flak.

But nothing like Uncle Ho's personal commie-mobile appeared, and the

skipper soon reversed course. Puresome sincerely hoped they had been gone long enough that things had settled down, and it was rat-taco and rice time back at the railroad complex. Snake lead soon clobbered the power and the division started climbing and closing up for the approach to the target. Once again, Puresome could see the red tiled roofs glowing at him from what seemed 400 miles away.

"Snake two, you have the target?"

"Roge", Lead, Snake two has the target."

"Okay, you make your run headed south and we'll roll-in west to east towards the water. Go ahead and detach."

"Two, roge!" Puresome rolled slightly away from the formation and pointed the airplane at the target. The other three airplanes displaced to the west, maneuvering to set up an almost simultaneous attack.

Puresome checked his armament switches again, set his throttle to about 80 percent, and would have burned joss sticks if he had time or really thought it would help. His dive angle looked good, and once again he was sliding down the rails from altitude. Puresome was safety-wired to the jink position and was sucked up as small as he could get, but not a puff-ball filled the air, and he had time to absolutely wire his run and sweat big drops. Time seemed to stop. And when the red golf balls suddenly started floating in front and around him, the red tile roofs were filling his windscreen and lights and tones were going off, he was hitting the pickle button like a madman.

The ground and sky blurred as Puresome furiously maneuvered to avoid the flak and flying himself into the ground. Suddenly spit out of the maelstrom, he saw the skipper's plane pulling off from his bomb run, surrounded by flak bursts. The A-4 simultaneously seemed to blur and start dumping a huge amount of fuel from the right wing--almost immediately the drop-tanks, Zuni pods, and bomb rack separated from the plane and tumbled crazily away.

"Snake lead's hit!"

Puresome didn't have time to celebrate his second miraculous survival, but put another thousand pounds of pressure on the throttle and zoomed toward the stricken Scooter which had emerged from the flak storm magically still flying and climbing and heading

for the healing waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, streaming a cloud of fuel. Puresome made paranoid clearing turns in his climb and saw the other two A-4s climbing away from a cloud of flak bursts, dust, smoke and fire from what was left of the target.

"The ground and sky blurred as Puresome furiously maneuvered to avoid the flak and flying himself into the ground. Suddenly spit out of the maelstrom, he saw the skipper's plane pulling off from his bomb run, surrounded by flak bursts."

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Sidewinder 403 on Guard, 30 north of Thanh Hoa, I'm hit and losing fuel and headed for the water!" the skipper transmitted to the world, then switched back to tactical frequency.

"Snake lead, two's got you, joining from two o'clock low!" Puresome stopped his head swiveling long enough to glance at his kneeboard for the TACAN channel of "Bonecrusher," one of the SAR ships that was stationed in the north part of the Gulf, and he dialed the number into the control panel by his right knee.

"Skipper, three and four have you in sight, we're at seven o'clock and closing, your six is clear and we'll be there in a minute."

The UHF radio had exploded into a garble of transmissions from Guard channel, where the whole world was trying to answer the emergency call. As Puresome joined on the skipper's plane, he briefly saw welcome water slide under them, and his TACAN had locked on to Bonecrusher's signal. There was only a little fuel misting out of giant hole that a 57mm shell had made when it passed through the "canoe" that housed the starboard landing gear and peeled back the top of the wing without exploding.

"Skipper, we're on the two-four-five radial, 36 miles from Bonecrusher."

"Roger, Snakes, I'm down to about 600 pounds and need a tanker bad, let's switch button ten."

The battered *Skyhawk* had lost all its wing fuel and was flying on what remained in the small fuselage tank. The cannon shell had also severed a line from the utility hydraulic system that controlled the operation of the landing gear and little things like wing flaps and speedbrakes, which, along with a prob-

ably crippled right leg, made returning to the ship a bad idea.

The immediate problem was finding a tanker before flaming out from fuel exhaustion. Then it would be a long drive to Danang or finding a nice place to punch out over the water if things

didn't work out. But Ed Heinemann's Hot Rod was still flying with open options when most other tactical aircraft would have already deposited their driver.

So the four aircraft turned down the gulf, toward help and away from Indian Country. The three escorts flying shotgun still had their Zuni rocket packs and 20 mike-mike cannon to discourage gomer fisher persons--just in case--and Bonecrusher had vectored the Air Force HU-16 RESCAP amphibian to poot along behind the flight. But the folks back at GUNTRAIN (CVA-62) had managed to pair a couple of Black Ace Fox-Fours with an A-3 Whale tanker, and they had made a perfect radar intercept on the flight of southbound Scooters. Right before the engine flamed out, the skipper plugged the basket and stayed there, happily sucking gas a little faster than it was leaking out.

All the flailing around had burned lots of A-4 fuel, and the skipper seemed to hold the tanker franchise at least to Danang. So the Scooters had to pass shotgun duties to the *Phantoms*, who had bags of gas, bid the skipper "rotsa ruck," and head on back to GUNTRAIN. After the previous fun and games, Puresome shucked his oxygen mask and directed the cold air from the air-conditioning eyeball outlets at his face. He flew loose cruise formation on skip, relaxing before he had to get spooled up for flying close formation around the boat and making a bee's knees of a pass for the LSO.

Word came to the ready room that the skipper had made it to Danang. By the time Puresome had flown his afternoon hop, the ship's C1A COD had retrieved the C.O. from the clutches of the blue suiters and jarboons, and he was in the ready room, reading *continued...* ➡



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modelers' Corner •

By Joe Turpen



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



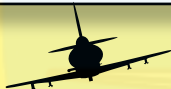
A well done TA-4J 1:32 model by Carlos Garcia of Argentina. According to Carlos, the grey base was painted with airbrush and the camouflage with a brush using Revell Acrylic paint. The decals were made by the builder. This is a fine example of great craftsmanship, and we congratulate Carlos.



Puzzle Answers: Boom-Boom Room



Answer 1. Send us your estimates and elaborate on how you arrived at your answer (guessing is a valid method).



Answer 2. The "N" prefix indicates a permanently-modified test aircraft. They use "J" for temporary mods. Both redesignations allow for the use of non-standard operating and maintenance procedures, and related mods, such as installing test equipment, can be done. Answer by Jeff Rankin-Lowe (Skyhawk Study Group).



→ (See page 11 for questions) ←

PURESOME continued

the message boards and acting like he had just walked in the park.

"Damn, skipper! I'da thought that after all the trouble you went to, you'd spent the night drinking gin and sleeping in a tent!" Puresome grinned, flopping his helmet and nav bag in a ready room chair.

"Well, I might have, except I think I pissed off the grunts at the bar when I asked if I was going to get out before the next mortar attack!"

The skipper then told a gathering audience that he stayed plugged into the *Whale* until it dropped him off upwind of the duty runway at Danang where,

since they were expecting problems with his landing gear, the runway had been foamed. But, in another tribute to the Douglas Aircraft Company, when he had put his gear handle down, all three gears had free-fallen to the down and locked position! So he had dropped his hook and set up his approach to snag the short-field arresting gear. All was going well when an Air Force RB-66 called on short-final, landing downwind with an emergency. Since that would put the two aircraft beak to beak, the tower asked him if he could go around.

"Skipper, I think I know who you pissed off, and you need to go to Sun-

day school more..."

"Well, I made a 360 and came around and caught a wire-- the only problem was that I slipped and fell on my butt from the goo on the runway when I got out of the plane."

Much later, reflecting about the day over scotch juice and cubes of ice, Puresome concluded that, maybe, the skipper HAD been going to Sunday school enough. And, remembering the red tile roofs and red golf balls floating in front of him, as he would the rest of his life, it seemed nice that it looked like some of the skipper's *mojo* just may have rubbed off on him.

THE A-4 EVER

Skyhawk Association

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