

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 21-3



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Fall 2015

www.a4skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

By Bill "Jigger" Egen

THE BOTTLE

It was happening- flying jets! In the pipe, leaving basic in Meridian and heading for VT-4. The syllabus called for air-to-air gunnery before carrier quals in the mighty T-2A – don't wake me up! We jelled as a 4-plane under the watchful eye of our lucky instructor, a Marine fighter pilot who knew his "Sierra." Dave Vest was our mentor and leader in the gun pattern. There was a bottle ridding on this – if either you or your instructor flashed the banner, you owed the winner if he had hits. I had two hits! Now, roll ahead to Vietnam.

This story should start out with "it was a dark and stormy night." It was early November '67 at Chu Lai. The monsoon was raging, and Con Tien was under siege. I drew one of the many Zero-dark-thirty TPQ missions (radar bombing). We had to use flare pots for take-off. It was just me, the jet and a bunch of MK-82s destined for known artillery sites just north of the DMZ. Business as usual, flying on top of a milk shake, just tickling IFR conditions, under radar control and "Stand-by, Stand-by...MARK, MARK, MARK" – the jet got a lot lighter.

The flashes from impacts on both sides of the DMZ and other assorted distractions coming up through the cloud layers were a constant reminder to exit stage right. Mil power, followed by a hard turn starboard out to sea. Then...no visibility out of the cockpit, no airspeed and no communications! A quick cycling of cabin pressurization and pitot heat did remedy most of the problems. I'm sure they were on anyway (CRS?). Joy Ride finally answered and advised that because Chu Lai was closed, I should divert to Da Nang! My first landing at Da Nang was in October in a Continental 707!

After trying many frequencies, I was able to get Da Nang ground and they asked approach to come up their frequency, probably sensing my concern based on the squeal of my voice! After vectors and ID turns, I broke out on GCA final in a monsoon rainstorm, had the runway in sight and took a trap. With a bald spot on

a tire, they towed me in and parked me in a MAG-11 hangar.

What a relief, dry and on the ground! Greeting me was the MAG-11 maintenance officer, Maj. Dave Vest. I immediately offered to buy him a 5th of whatever for the great 0300 reception. I then reminded him that he had flashed the banner as my instructor in VT-4, and he owed me a bottle! He disavowed any knowledge of that and sent me to the BOQ. Unlike Chu Lai, they actually had one! Over the past 48 years, I tried to collect on this leverage several times, but still no bottle!

ANNUAL BOARD MEETING AND LUNCHEON SEPTEMBER 2015

We always hold our required annual members' meeting/luncheon and board meeting at Tailhook. The board meeting went well and somehow we managed to shanghai two additional new board members for approval by the members at the annual luncheon. Ed Jobin, A-4/AV-8 guy and former Skyhawk Association board member, slipped me a small stipend so that I would nominate him – NOT! Fortunately, he agreed to join the board; however, because our bylaws require an odd number of directors, our capture



Skyhawk Association Board of Directors. L-R, standing: Terry Cooney, Pete Cole, Bill Egen, John Gabbard, Ed Jobin, Mark Williams, and Joe Turpen. Kneeling, L-R: Steve Linder, Gene Atwell, Ted Langworthy, Mike Eberhardt, Bill Ravgiala, and Todd Frommelt. All photos via the author.



Bill "Jigger" Egen

team fanned out and recruited Terry Wolf (A-4/A-7 background). We convinced him that his future was on the Skyhawk Association Board. We now have 15 directors, with Atwell, Blosser, Cole and Williams reelected for a new three-year term, plus Jobin and Wolf newly elected. Welcome aboard gents! Other board meeting highlights included a motion to increase our donation to the MCAA Marine Aviation Memorial to \$1000. We also selected Steve Linder to take over as the VP for Marines, with all other officers and staff remaining in place. Our finances, thanks to Treasurer-for-Life Mark "Senator" Williams, are in good shape and the bottom line increases every year. I think he is driving a new car! Recruiting and retention remain high on our goals list. With 847 current members, we are holding our own, but always looking for recruiting opportunities.

continued on page 4...



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2015 •

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THE A-4 EVER

Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman and Editor.

Dave Dollarhide, Mark Williams and Bill "Jigger" Egen - Co-Editors.

Gene Atwell – Webmaster.

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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 Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624. Stephanie Davis, graphics, skyhawk@ncflight.com. Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC.

On the Cover: *Lightning II, Fighting Falcon and Skyhawk* caught by photographer Frank Crébas during a tactics development and evaluation exercise by the Joint Strike Fighter Operational Test Team at Edwards AFB, August 2015. His work can be seen at www.bluelifeaviation.com.

Our annual meeting/luncheon offers a great opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers. This year being the official 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War and 40th anniversary of the end of the conflict, offered us a unique opportunity to invite a former POW as our guest speaker. The luncheon was held on 11 September (with obvious connotations), and it was also Patriots Day. The resulting speeches by Capt. Jim Hickerson, USN (ret), and his wife Carole were fitting tributes to those special dates and to all our veterans.

Jim spent 5 years "in jail" and had a great perspective on the true tests of faith and life. Carole Hickerson's first husband was a Marine CH-46 pilot who was MIA due to enemy action in Laos in '67. She pressed for information about her husband and became involved in the formation of the National League of Families of POWs and MIAs. She was instrumental in designing the letterhead for the League, and that same letterhead was later adapted for the POW/MIA flag. She also helped get the POW/MIA bracelets started. It was our honor to have them both speak with two different perspectives, but one inspiring story!

While all this official stuff was going on, Youthly Pure-some was maintaining the Attack Ready Room- a genteel mixture of A-4, A-7 and A-6 folks, plus anybody else that happened by. To add to our pleasure, the kind folks at Top Aces and Draken International offered their support to the Attack Ready Room again, and the resulting good time was shared by all. Our audio-visual guru Mark "Senator" Williams (also our treasurer) provided non-stop entertainment with his DVD shows of everything attack aviation. He also provided a great recap of a recent visit to Israel by 6 Skyhawk Association members and their wives. During their visit, they attended an Israeli Air Force pilot winging ceremony, which included a fly-by led by an A-4. The senior man present at the winging was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu!

Friday evening we enjoyed a few special TINS tales. TR Schwarz recounted an exciting mission in 1967 (complete



Prez Bill Egen thanks Jim and Carole Hickerson for their great luncheon speech.

with a full audio recording) that involved A-4s, F-8s and the bagging of 3 MIGs!!! Curt Dozo Dose (being politically correct we invited fighter pilots!) followed up TR's pitch with a telling of the infamous "Downwind at Kep" engagement – 300 ft, 600 kts and MIG-21s on the roll. It was a great event in the Ready Room Friday night, and our thanks to out to the Tailhook Association for their investment in time and effort which allows the reunion groups to enjoy a great venue.

The infamous "Attack Ready Room" Hook 15.



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

Graham, Ed • Sarasota, FL
 Levin, Hugh • Oceanside, CA
 Merrihew, Ron • Gig Harbor, WA
 Hawes, Richard • Athens, GA
 Albert J. (Jack) Monger • San Diego, CA

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



USMC SKYHAWKERS REUNION 2015

Just 25 days after the Skyhawk Association annual meeting and luncheon, the Marine contingent from the Skyhawk Association Board supported a reunion of A-4 drivers and wives and anybody that wanted to come along. San Diego on the bay was the venue, and Todd "Hun" Frommelt was the



Col "Animal AI" Ransom regales the audience at the 2015 Marine Skyhawk Reunion held in San Diego, October 8-11, 2015.



Skyhawker Reunion attendees visit Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum and Historical Foundation at MCAS Miramar. Chairman of the Board, MajGen Bob Butcher, USMC (ret) welcomed the group.

rudder, making sure the rest of us did our best to provide a wonderful time for about 250 folks. Todd led a year of planning for this event, supported by Mark Williams (registration and accounting) and yours truly (procurement of hats, shirts and other goodies), and the result was a reunion that will set the standard for years to come. The reunion attendees were all over town: visiting the Flying Leatherneck Museum at Miramar, the Air & Space Museum in Balboa Park, and the USS *Midway*. Various squadrons had dinner or luncheon break-out meetings, and some of the group opted for golf. At the Miramar O'Club (yes, they still have one!), the first F-35 CO of VMFA-121, LtCol. Jeff "Magwa" Scott, USMC (ret), gave a great overview of his time with the F-35 program, and then, of course, constantly reminded us he was flying A-4s for Draken! We wrapped it up with a banquet, enjoying the memories and anecdotes (maybe TINS) of Col AI Ransom, USMC (ret), a great leader who reminded us of our A-4 heritage.

Hun was in-charge and managed to keep the reunion staff fully engaged. The results maxed out the hotel capabilities. Great job guys! 2018 next?

NOTAMS, R&I

A-4 display projects are in process in Tuscon, AZ, Brasher Falls, NY, Floyd Bennett, NY, and Bolingbrook, IL. Look for info on these beauties in future editions of *The A4ever*.

Our next edition, Winter 2015, will be digital as planned- you will be able to access it by going to the Skyhawk Association website and clicking on the announcement. You will not have to log in.

We have added three new SDOs – George Blosser (VA-34), Denny Sapp (Blue Angels) and Randy Wilson (VA-56). Thanks for the help, and remember, we are always looking for additional SDOs.

For those in the southwest (or anywhere else), watch for details of our mid-year board meeting, which should be held in the San Antonio area next March.

SEMPER FI AND A-4s FOREVER, Jigger
[\[zerocep@ec.rr.com\]](mailto:zerocep@ec.rr.com)

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

■ Submitted by anonymous user:
[212.235.98.161]
Hi,

I would like to make a tiny correction to your splendid Skyhawk site. The correct translation of the name "Ayt" of the Israeli A-4s is not Vulture, but Eagle.

The assignment of this name to the A-4 led to a small problem when we got the F-15 Eagle, so it was named Baz, which means Falcon. Then we got the F-16 Fighting Falcon, and called it Netz, which means Hawk....

I hope that at least the enemies were confused.

Sincerely,
Anonymous
[once involved with the Skyhawk]

■ To the Editor

(Ed. note: the Skyhawk community was deeply saddened by the passing of RADM Jack Monger on July 7, 2015. Admiral Monger first flew the A-4 in the early 60s and regularly flew the aircraft during his assignment as CAG-21 in '66 and '67. His awards included three Silver Stars and five DFCs. Following the announcement of his death to lung cancer, dozens of emails circulated with tributes to his memory. The following from Admiral Stan Arthur.)

On 7 June 1973, I had my next to last flight as CO of 164 (and also next to last from HANCOCK) I asked Captain Monger (Ed. note: then CO, USS Hancock) if he would like to take a hop in one of our two T-birds. Of course he said yes. As we were manning up, I told him to get up front, and I'd ride shotgun in the back. He said "Are you sure?" "Yep, I can trap aboard from back here, no problem." (never had tried that). We had a great flight. He practiced some slow flight, and then it was time to come back. I told him his slow flight work looked so good he might as well try to trap. He was a bit hesitant, but said OK. I forget what the LSO's gave him, but it was A GREAT TRAP. The best part, was the great smile he had on his face as he climbed out of

the bird. A top notch carrier CO and great leader. Will never forget that flight.
ADM Stan Arthur.

■ Raven,

Another top notch magazine issue. What a thrill to read each time! Many thanks for all you do for the A-4 community and the Marine Corps!

Have stories ever been published about Dave Eisenbrey's shoot down or Jim 'Waldo' Walsh's POW experience? Just curious.

Great read from Russ Stromberg also. Will certainly look forward to reading the entire story on Ed Harper. I haven't seen Russ in years and would like to send him an email. Is that something you can help with?

Many thanks. Keep up the fantastic work.
Semper Fi,
Ken 'Bruiser' Brust
[kvbrust@cox.net]

■ To the Editor:

This month's issue was interesting for us. Dick (Hoffman) was a member of 225 and is on photo, page 11 in Ed Harper's article about VMA-225 aboard USS Enterprise during Cuban Missile Crisis! We remember that time in history very well.
Nancy Hoffman
[nhoffman7@gmail.com]

■ To Todd "Hun" Frommelt:

Hun:
Had a conversation with Bruiser about your article on P. 20 of the Summer issue (21-2). We cannot figure out who is in the pictures, except maybe you in the red hat?

Can you name the people in the pictures? In the future, could we label each picture with names (for us old farts who can't remember shit)?

Semper Fi,
Steve "Dwarf" Linder
[steve.janet.linder@gmail.com]



Hun replied:

Hey Guys, the article has the names, just not matched with the pics. Clockwise from top right it's Rico Jones in red hat, a guest in the cockpit, Craig Turner, solo shot of Carey Branch, a shot from last year to show the aircraft on the new #2 elevator, hanger deck with Bill Paulsen and his wife on the stand, and a solo shot again of Craig Turner. Shot of Dave Pereira and I didn't make the cut and the other names are Navy boys...and I didn't send Raven any pics of them.
SF,
Hun

■ To the Editor:

Great story about Ed Harper, (Black Sheep call sign, "Harpo"). A part of his career when he flew another fine Douglas aircraft, the AD Skyraider, was not mentioned. I had the pleasure of serving with him in VMA-332 at MCAS Miami, FL, and WestPac, '56-'58. Ed was the XO. As a brand new 2d Lt, I felt blessed to be serving with one of the original Black Sheep. Known as "Easy Ed" Harper, he was a man of few words, never known to ramble. On one of my early flights in the Skyraider, I flew his wing on a two-plane tactics hop. Wanting to impress him I, hung on his right wing like we were Siamese twins. He looked at me, shook his head, and motioned to back off. I waved, but ignored the signal. Suddenly he slammed into a ninety-degree right bank. I pushed over and dove for my life. He missed me by inches. After regaining controlled flight and my composure, I joined his wing in a more comfortable free cruise position. In the debrief he patted me on the shoulder and said, "Save the cute stuff for the Blue Angels. Section tactics means section maneuvering, and you don't maneuver in parade! Huh?" For Easy Ed Harper, that was an oration.

While playing handball one afternoon, I noticed the quarter-sized scar below his right shoulder blade. I asked what happened. Bouncing the ball, he

smiled and said, "Jap Zero. Always check your six."

In the spring of '57 we deployed to Iwakuni, Japan. The next fifteen months were filled with turmoil starting with two fatal accidents and a change in squadron COs. Led by our new, rather flamboyant CO, at the last minute we replaced an A-4B squadron that had to back out of a SEATO exercise in the Philippines, Strongback.57. Before the exercise ended our squadron was ordered to board the USS Princeton at NAS Cubi Pt. US citizens were threatened by the Indonesian Revolution, and helo evac might be required. We would provide escort. The squadron had not completed carrier qualifications, so the Skyraiders were hoisted aboard by crane along with a Marine helo squadron. The plan was for us to launch, escort the helos and recover at a UK base at Singapore. After a quiet couple of months the Princeton was due to go home. We returned to Cubi Pt, carqualled on the USS Philippine Sea and redeployed to Indonesian waters (no helo evac). Then it was back to the Philippines for an exercise with the Philippine Air Force. Ed Harper was our buffer and continuity through all of that.

The next time we met was in 1982 at MCAS Cherry Point. I was C/S, 2d MAW, and he was there concerning his job with McDonnell Douglas as AV-8 Project Officer. We met again when in 2003 he and a few other original Black Sheep were at the annual symposium at the National Museum of Naval Aviation, NAS Pensacola, where I am a volunteer. We reminisced briefly while he signed my copy of the book, *Black Sheep One*, by Bruce Gamble. We kept in touch until he passed away in 2014. Ed Harper was a superb pilot and a great Marine. I am fortunate to have served with him.
Richard L. Upchurch
Skyraiders and Skyhawks forever.
[RPUSMC@att.net]



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

SKYHAWK NEWS



October 2, 2015
(Defensa.com). A sergeant of the Air Force Argentina died and five other soldiers were injured in an accident involving an A-4AR fighter jet in the V Brigade Villa Reynolds of San Luis, according to confirmed military sources. A Fightinghawk plane's engine was being testing when the plane crashed into a hangar. The Argentine Air Force and the Federal Court of the Province of San Luis reported that the Accident Investigation Board was immediately appointed so that the reasons for the incident can be determined.

Skyhawk Association  Channel

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youtube.com/a4skyhawkassociation

ED HARPER, MARINE

By Russ Stromberg with Bob Hickerson

Ed. Note: this article was excerpted from an unpublished, 35,000-word manuscript written by Russ Stromberg for the family of Col Harper, who passed away on February 14, 2014. This is Part 2 of two sections of the manuscript which should be of particular interest to the Skyhawk community. The complete manuscript (which details the entirety of Col Harper's life) will most certainly be of value to anyone interested in the development of Marine Aviation in the years after WW II. If the complete manuscript becomes available, Skyhawk Association will inform its members.

Quotations are from the oral history of Col Harper, taken by Russ Stromberg, and presented in italics.

PART 2 THE A-4M

In the summer of 1966, Ed received orders to NAVAIR as the A-4 Program Manager. Although no one recognized it at the time, Ed was to become a pivotal player in the future of Marine Corps attack aviation.

The A-4 was designed by the Douglas Aircraft Company in the early 1960s, at the height of the nuclear era, when tensions between the US and the USSR were at their greatest. Designed by Ed Heinemann, the A-4 was a simple and yet elegant aircraft design. The prototype weighed half of that called for in the Navy's specification and the

design was so compact that it did not require folding wings, as did most Navy aircraft. Initially designed as a low-cost nuclear "disposa-bomber," the A-4 proved to be one of the most versatile combat aircraft in the Navy/Marine Corps inventory. Various models of the A-4 served in Marine Corps active and reserve squadrons for more than 40 years and are projected to be in use by foreign military services well into the 21st century. Later models of the A-4 are flown today by the Brazilian and Argentinean Navy, and by US contractors in various support roles.

At the time Ed took over responsibilities as the A-4 Program Manager (PMA), all active Marine Corps light attack squadrons were equipped with A-4E aircraft. Ed decided his first order of business was to see what Headquarters Marine Corps' plans were for the A-4. As an air group commander, Ed had seen firsthand

that the combat operation tempo in Vietnam was wearing out the Marine Corps A-4Es, and he recognized that newer aircraft would be needed in order for the Marine Corps to maintain its light attack force structure. Ed quickly found out that Headquarters was focused on the war and had not given much thought to the future. Even worse, he found out there was no money to do anything about the problem:

I knew the Marines were flying the hell out of the A-4s in Vietnam and I knew that a lot of them were going to [be] worn out when the war was over. I asked Headquarters Marine Corps what their plan was for the A-4. They didn't have one. They hadn't thought about it. So I started talking to Headquarters Marine Corps about some options, including an updated airplane that ended up being the A-4M. The Marine Corps wanted to do the A-4M, but they didn't have any money for the program.

Ed decided to take on the challenge of updating the A-4. His first actions were to figure out how to solve both the programmatic and fiscal problems. He recognized that both the A-4 airframe



Lt. Ed Harper, VMF-214, somewhere in the South Pacific.



Black Sheep A-4M over the Sierra Nevada circa 1980.
Photo by Harry Gann.

and engine needed to be updated and improved. He needed money to do this, and the Marine Corps had none. So Ed, on his own initiative, started the A-4M development program. As far as anyone knows, it is the only Marine Corps aircraft development program that was done without Marine Corps aviation funding and without a written Marine Corps requirement.

Ed found most of the money for airframe upgrades and modifications from funded Navy and Marine Corps A-4 modification programs:

I knew the NAVPRO [Navy Program Office] out at Douglas. I knew we had production contracts out there and that money had been sent out there for ECPs [engineering change proposals]. I didn't think it was all spent. So I asked the NAVPRO to shake the bushes and see how much money was still lying around out there going back about five years. He found bits here and there and he came up with at least 15 million.

Once Ed had found the money to update the airframe, he started looking around NAVAIR to find money to upgrade the J-52 engine. His previous experience at BuAer served him well:

I talked to the head of the production division at NAVAIR—a Navy Captain. I talked him into looking around for some money. He found some engine money that I could give to Pratt [and Whitney] to upgrade the engine. I figured I had just about enough money to upgrade the airframe and the engine.

Ed recognized that, while he had the money, he couldn't spend it. In order to move forward, he had to have an approved development program and

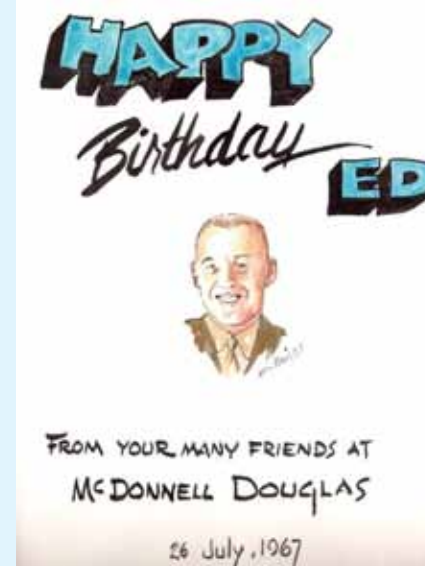
authorization to spend the money. He needed to get the Marine Corps, the contractor, and NAVAIR on board. The first order of business was to get a written requirement out of the Marine Corps. It was not simple. Headquarters kept getting hung up on the fact that they did not have any money for the program:

They kept saying 'We need the program but we don't have any money for it'. I kept saying, 'I have the money, I just need a requirement so I can spend it.' In the end, I conned the Marine Corps into sending over a request for the A-4E to be updated.

Once Ed received an A-4M requirement document from Headquarters Marine Corps, he was able to get the authorization needed to send out requests for ECPs to update the aircraft. The next challenge was to get Douglas to come up with a package of ECPs that met his requirements and fit within his budget:

I got all the cards lined up—sort of. I had authority to send out a request for ECPs. So I sent out a request for the ECP to update the airplane. [Douglas] came back with [a request for] too much money. I said, 'You got to make it 15 million because that's all I got right now.' So they re-wrote everything to give me the numbers I wanted. The post-production division went ahead and worked on the engine and, in good time, we had a program.

In the late 1960s, naval aviation was beginning the transition to more reliable digital avionics, and on-board electronic countermeasures (ECM) for tactical aircraft were becoming available. Ed and Douglas Aircraft revised the A-4M program to accommodate these changes and improvements, but incorporating them would exceed available funding. So Ed came up with an innovative way to cover the additional costs. He decided to recoup money sent to ASO [the Aviation Supply Office] Philadelphia for A-4 parts that were never ordered.



McDonnell Douglas surprise birthday lunch for Col. Ed Harper, A-4 Program Manager, Naval Air Systems Command

Getting money back from ASO had not been done before.

I had sent some money to ASO for spare parts that didn't get ordered. I went to the bookkeepers at NAVAIR and said, 'I want that money returned.' They said, 'Nobody ever has asked for money back from ASO. Nobody gets money back from ASO.' I said, 'I want money back from ASO.' Damned if they didn't go ahead and ask and I got it back. That also went into the A-4M. I remember we strengthened the fuselage a little bit. We had some extra ECM [electronic countermeasure] equipment we didn't have any space for in the airplane, so we put a humpback on the airplane and put it there.

Once the A-4M development was underway, the next challenge was to get a procurement program in place. Ed worked closely with Headquarters Marine Corps Aviation to shape the A-4M into a congressionally funded program. Congress approved the

continued...



VMAT-102 A-4M firing Zuni rockets at a target in the Chocolate Mountains range. Photo by Bruce Trombecky.

ED HARPER, MARINE CONTINUED...



VMA-324 A-4M. 324 was the first Marine squadron equipped with the A-4M Skyhawk.
(USN photo by Harry Gann)



VMA-214 A-4Ms. 214 was the last active duty A-4M squadron to transition to the AV-8B.
(USN photo by Harry Gann)

A-4M procurement program and initial procurement of long-lead items was approved in the 1969 defense budget. The first production A-4M was delivered to VMA-324 in the spring of 1971. The A-4M was a highly capable and versatile aircraft and represented a significant step forward in capability over previous models of the A-4. The combination of the higher thrust J52-P408 engine, internal drag chute, and self-contained engine start capability allowed the A-4M to conduct high-tempo,¹ close air support missions from Marine Corps expeditionary airfields without the use of catapults, arresting gear, or ground support equipment.

The A-4M became the backbone of Marine attack throughout the 1970s and much of the 80s. In 1980, the aircraft was modified with the angle rate bombing system (ARBS). This system provided the A-4M with a highly accurate unguided weapons delivery capability that is on par with any of the sophisti-

cated systems in service in today's AV-8B, F/A-18, and F-16 aircraft.

In all, six active duty Marine attack squadrons and two training squadrons were equipped with the A-4M.² During the 1980s, five Marine Reserve squadrons flew the A-4M.³ Foreign governments also recognized the combat capability of the A-4M. Variants of the plane were sold to the services of several other countries, including the Israeli and Kuwaiti Air Forces. Variations of the A-4M continue to be used into the 21st century. Lockheed Martin did an extensive upgrade of the Kuwaiti variant of the A-4M, and the Brazilian Navy commenced operational flights in 2001.

During this same period, Ed and the A-4 Program Office worked closely with McDonnell Douglas to develop the TA-4J, to modernize the Navy's advanced jet training program and replace the TF-9 used for advanced jet training. The TA-4J was a two-seat jet

trainer, and a modification of the TA-4F used in Vietnam for forward air control missions. The TA-4J was introduced into the Navy training command in the summer of 1969, as Ed was ending his tour as the A-4 Program Manager. The TA-4J Skyhawk served as the Navy's advanced jet training aircraft for more than 20 years, until it was replaced by the T-45. ✈️

(Ed. Note: Russ Stromberg is a Marine aviator who has over 1000 hours in the A-4. He participated in the delivery of the first A-4Ms to the Fleet Marine Force as a member of VMA-324, and, in Vietnam flew 145 combat sorties in the A-4E with VMA-311. Upon returning from RVN, he transitioned to Harriers with VMA-231. After graduating from test pilot school, he worked closely with Ed Harper's McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Development Team, first as a developmental test pilot and later as the Test Director for the AV-8B Operational Evaluation at VX-5 (now VX-9). After a tour in HQMC Aviation, Stromberg served as the commanding officer of VMA-513 and VMA-214.)

1. "High-tempo" military operations are those which are conducted at both a high frequency and in a highly intense manner.
2. These squadrons, in order of transition, were VMA-324, VMA-331, VMA-214, VMAT-203, VMA-311, VMAT-102, VMA-223, and VMA-211.
3. VMA-322, VMA-124, VMA-142, VMA-133, and VMA-134.

A Week with Israel's Last Skyhawk Pilots

By Terry Wolf



Tour group on the flight line at Hatzerim.

L-R
Terry Cooney
Todd Frommelt
Terry Wolf
Rami Lothan
Pete Cole
Jack Woodul
Mark Williams

Photo by Todd Frommelt



I first heard of the possibility of this trip while in Reno at the 2014 Tailhook convention. The Board of Directors of the Skyhawk Association had been invited by Israel's most accomplished A-4 driver, Rami Lothan, to come for a visit and attend the Israeli Air Force's pilot graduation on June 25, 2015. Sensing how good this might well be, I soon began my intensive efforts to plead and snivel my way aboard this outing. I owe a great debt of thanks to Bob (Raven) Hickerson, Todd (Hun) Frommelt and the whole gang at the A-4 Skyhawk Association who were magnanimous enough to include me in what was truly a once-in-a-lifetime event that they would have had every right to exclude me from...had they been lesser beings.

After a truly Davidic amount of effort and patience by everyone involved, we met at the David Citadel Hotel in Jerusalem on the afternoon of June 21, 2015. That evening's dinner at the roof-top restaurant next door to the hotel was as fabulous as it should have been given it was the kick-off event of the best vacation any old A-4 aviator could have imagined.

There I got to know the half of my tour group that I hadn't previously met and some of the players with Giant Leaps, our tour company, all of whom were wonderful. The real treat for me though, was getting to know Rami Lothan and his wife Etty. Rami is larger than life. By hook and crook, he did what every A-4 aviator would like to have done, he flew the aircraft for 40 years. This is not a typo. He entertained us with 40 years worth of stories, savvy and fun spilling out of him. Being with Rami is to be swept up in a constant adventure.

Rami has a story about, and an opinion on, everything related to the A-4 or Israel. He managed to have the tail of his aircraft blown off by a SAM in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and he told us about the tailpipe extension that helped fix that problem. I've always wondered why no one else copied that simple modification on their Skyhawks; aside from the fact that it looks a little odd.

Rami's expertise extends to other areas too. While breaking for lunch at the Israeli Air Force Museum, Rami opined that Israel contains more attractive females per square meter than any other country. After touring the museum with Amit as our guide, no one challenged him.

The first few days of our trip were spent touring Jerusalem, Masada and the Dead Sea. The ride from Jerusalem to Masada took longer than I expected, and the temperature at the Dead Sea that day was 104F. The bus was very comfortable, and the sight of Israeli F-15s operating around us made the trip bearable.

Day three saw us in the Golan Heights. Our tour guide, Gadi, had been in the Army in 1973, in a bunker in the Golan. He told us how confident the Army had been in those days because of their quick victories in 1967 and 1969, and how no one had any second thoughts as they went home that October for the Yom Kippur holiday. When some 1300 Syrian tanks approached *continued...*

the border there was but one lone Israeli tank battalion in the Golan. Had the Syrian tanks broken through that battalion, nothing would have stopped them until they reached the sea.

That fact is sobering if all you are considering is territory lost. We can look at similar gains made by the Nazis at Bastogne in December 1944, as well as what it took to win that territory back. It is different situation when you consider that the families of every Israeli soldier and airman lived in the 100 odd miles of territory between the Golan and the sea, or between Jerusalem and the Sinai where another 1300 Egyptian tanks were massed. However, that tank battalion did hold off the Syrians long enough for the Israeli Air Force A-4s to get in the game.

That same day we visited with Tsvika Rubinstein and his family. Recently retired from the Air Force, with some A-4 time, Tsvika now works for an Israeli high-tech company. Tsvika explained to us that over 50% of the pilots in all active Israeli Air Force squadrons are reservists. In spite of the holiday and the confusion in the early days of the 1973 war, those reservists made their way to their squadrons to launch their counterattack.



Tsvika Rubinstein and family.
Photo by author.



BGen Shmulik Benrom and wife.
Photo by author.

Leaving the Rubinstein family, we drove on to Caesarea and had yet another wonderful dinner. This one was especially memorable as we were joined by BGen Shmulik Benrom and his wife. The General, another very successful business man after his retirement, was an A-4 squadron commander during the war in 1973. He received that assignment on one day's notice after the previous commander was killed on the third day of the war. Benrom had flown the A-4 only briefly during his instrument training many years before. All his tactical time had been in the Mirage and F-4 Phantom. He had one re-familiarization flight and then led his first combat mission.

Had the trip ended Wednesday evening, upon our arrival in Tel Aviv, it would still have ranked as the best ever. But the next day, by itself, would have surpassed it. Thursday started with an audience with His Excellency, the United States Ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro.

Ambassador Shapiro spent the better part of an hour with us. We were all taken aback by the grace and honor he showed us. He explained that

the sale of the A-4 marked the first real military cooperation between the US and Israel, and he thanked us all for our visit, and especially for our part in that cooperation. He then asked us to go around the table and share our experiences related to this cooperation with Israel. Happily, Jack Woodul was seated closest to the Ambassador, and we all listened with pride as he told of his time as an instructor pilot in VA-44 when the first four Israeli pilots to fly the A-4 came to be trained.

As I listened to Jack, I was thankful that I would be last to speak. I wasn't sure I'd have anything to add to the conversation. Pete Cole spoke next. He and I had been on cruise with Air Wing 21 aboard the USS *Hancock* when the Yom Kippur war started. I remember watching the news coverage of the fighting on my TV in Hong Kong during our port call. I remember watching Israeli A-4s being shot down by SA-6 and SA-7 missiles that we had not yet faced in combat. Pete reminded me of all that, and that the *Hancock* had left Hong Kong to steam nonstop to the Persian Gulf to render whatever assistance we could to Israel. Meanwhile, our fellow A-4 pilots back home began delivering replacement aircraft to Israel, using inflight refueling and strategically placed carriers, to make up for the 50 odd aircraft they had lost in that war. Both Terry Cooney and Mark Williams added their stories, and by the time we made it around the room, I realized that we all had a story to tell of our very real support for Israel. They hadn't needed



First four Israeli pilots to fly the A-4. L-R Hagai Ronen, Yossi Sarig, Nissim Ashkenazi, and Ohad Shadmi. Photo via Jack Woodul.

the *Hancock* that time. The Israeli Army and Air Force had the war won by the time we got to the Persian Gulf in October 1973. Rami added to my story of the SA-6 and SA-7 by mentioning that he had the tail of his A-4 blown off by just such a missile. Perhaps it was he who I had watched on TV that day in Hong Kong, while wishing I could help.

The photo to the right is our souvenir of that day. Old warriors, happy to be in Israel, standing to represent so many others who were perhaps more deserving of the honors we were shown; others who we wished were still able to stand with us. As we left and said our goodbyes to Ambassador Shapiro, he surprised us by saying he would see us at the pilot graduation that evening. How nice, I thought, but why would he bother to go to a pilot graduation? Was it that big a deal for anyone but the likes of us? Oh my, was it!

From Tel Aviv we drove south to the Hatzerim Air Base near Be'er Sheva. Our first stop was at the F-15 squadron which had the alert duty. As we spoke to the executive officer, I was thinking it a little odd that he was wearing both a flight suit and G-suit. Then an alarm sounded, and he excused himself to man the alert F-15I. The alert was sounded because someone was attempting to fly a drone from Gaza to Israel. They asked us not to take pictures of the alert



Tour group with Ambassador Daniel Shapiro (fifth from left). Air Attaché COL Edwin Offutt, USAF at far right. Photo via COL Offutt.



F-15I. Photo by author.



IAF A-4 at the museum. Photo by author.

F-15. It was a beautiful aircraft with an impressive array of weapons. We could tell that they truly loved it. They claimed that the way they had modified the F-15I made it worth 2 ½ F-16's. I have no doubt they were right. Later we saw one as a static display near the graduation ceremony. It was not as impressive but still worth a look.

From the squadron we made our way to the museum. There we saw many aircraft we were really unfamiliar with, and one very familiar. Until the A-4 purchase, Israel relied mostly on French aircraft, flying the Mystere, the Super Mystere and the early Mirage. There were also a number of examples of the French Vautour, an attack aircraft similar to our A-3 Skywarrior that was much liked in its day for its long range.

The museum is the brainchild of BGEN (RET) Jacob Tern-er, pictured with us, who after many careers has made it his remaining life's work to preserve the history of the Israeli Air Force. The collection included such aircraft as the infamous F-16A 107 which was credited with 6 ½ kills against enemy MIGs and this familiar looking old friend.

continued...

Amit did a wonderful job of showing us around, in spite of her not having been born when most of these aircraft last flew. We were honored to be shown into General Turner's office and to hear his stories of trying to pull this collection together. He had little help and little funding, as is often the case with such ventures; however, his efforts have paid off, and the collection includes just about every aircraft Israel has flown, from the Spitfire to the F-15, or fought against.

From the museum we proceeded to the graduation ceremony. As we wandered along the rows of static display aircraft, we came to the A-4 and to its right the aircraft that has replaced it as an advanced tactical trainer, the Italian-designed Aermacchi. Standing in front of the A-4 was a young, perhaps bored, Israeli pilot who perked right up as we introduced ourselves. He was happy to see us and talk with us. He had graduated in last year's class, the last class to fly the A-4. He was a little disappointed that he did not get to fly the Aermacchi. He was just the guy I had been looking for to bestow my last, jealously guarded, US Navy, A-4 Skyhawk challenge coin. He seemed genuinely happy to get it. I also let him in on a secret from my past. When the A-4 was being introduced as the new advanced trainer in the Navy, we all wanted to fly it. Instead I received orders to fly the ancient TF-9J, which was based on the Korean War-era F-9 Cougar. I was seriously bummed at the time, but as it turned out, I ended up with lots of A-4 time, and I remain thrilled to this day that I got to fly a real piece of history like the F-9.



Aermacchi 345 and A-4 static display at graduation ceremony. Photo by author.



Tour group with BGen Jacob Turner, father of IAF museum (4th from left), Rami Lothan (5th from left) and tour guide Amit (6th from left). Photo via author.

We continued down the flight line and enjoyed the display, which included the entire Israeli anti-missile battery: Iron Dome, Patriot and Arrow systems. From here we took our seats in the grandstand at what looked to me like a cross between an airshow and a NASCAR race. The fact this was a grand event in the Israeli calendar was beginning to dawn on me. Shortly after we arrived, the stands in front of us were filled by the various ambassadors and all their military attachés. We were given headsets to wear so we could hear the simultaneous translation of all remarks. As I surveyed the crowd, I noticed clusters of people dressed in identical T-shirts. Each cluster had its own color and own design. These were the families of the graduates, many twenty or more strong. Rami and Etty arrived, and he began to explain that there is only one main pilot graduation a year. They sometimes have a smaller class graduate around January, but for the most part this was it. The training course is three years long. Hundreds of candidates started the training, and that day very few were graduating. Some were winnowed out as recently as a few months before the ceremony, though those and others are diverted to less demanding pilot jobs so as not to waste their very real expertise. In the end, only the very, very best

become fighter pilots and back-seaters.

This class included three women, one of whom was ultra-orthodox and wore a long skirt for the ceremony. She had to have her family's and her Rabbi's permission to enter the training. She was one of the few that graduated.

As we watched, a long row of black limos pulled up, and out climbed both the President and Prime Minister of Israel, along with all the defense and military heads. I was then fully convinced that this was a very big deal. My graduation ceremony consisted of eight of us gathering at the O'club in Beeville, Texas, having a beer and a congratulatory handshake while our wings were pinned on. I don't remember Nixon being there.

The speeches were grand, as was the airshow. The moderator took the time to acknowledge the attendance of representatives of the A-4 Skyhawk Association and spoke of our place in the history of US military support of Israel. We had been told not to expect to see the A-4 fly, so when this formation opened the airshow I, for one, was brought to tears. Mark Williams managed this brilliant photo.



Flyover of two M-345s led by A-4. Photo by Mark Williams.

The ceremony ended with the announcement of each graduate's name and the awarding of their wings to the cheers of his or her family.

In the aftermath, Rami took us down to the ramp among the cluster of families and their newly-minted fighter pilots. He introduced us to Major General Amir Eshel, Head of IAF. We had seen him featured in the movie "One Flight for Us" where, as Commander of the Israeli F-15



New pilot graduates addressed by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Photo by Mark Williams.

Wing in 2003, he led the historic flight of Israeli F-15's over Auschwitz. The movie is available on YouTube.

On the way to the ramp the Spanish Air Attaché caught up with us to say that he had flown the A-4 during a stint at the Navy's Test Pilot School at Patuxent River, Maryland. It just kept getting better. Rami motioned to us and began to point out everything that was going on. Netanyahu was smiling, surrounded by all the graduates, some of whom were starting to move toward their families in those color-coordinated t-shirts. Then Rami grabbed Jack Woodul and said someone wanted to meet him.

This group of ladies approached Jack. They were the daughter, granddaughter and wife of one of those first four Israeli A-4 pilots (pictured earlier) who were trained at VA-44. He was one of the two pilots in the picture who were later killed in action. The daughter, said she was seven when they went to Florida, but she still remembered it well. They talked with Jack for a long time. It didn't seem they wanted it to end, and why should they have? It was a chance to renew a connection to their fighter pilot husband, father and unknown grandfather lost long ago flying the airplane they had just watched fly overhead for the very last time. It was the chance to talk with the man who taught him to fly that airplane – the airplane and pilots that saved the nation in 1973. It was a lot to take in. I thought for a moment, what if we hadn't come? What if we had given in to convenience and inertia? We, and they, all would have missed so much.

To our right was a group in the white t-shirts of a graduate's family. Rami said

quickly, "This is the family I told you about." I understood. Rami's commanding officer in 1973 was shot down and killed in the first days of the Yom Kippur War. The family included the widow's two sons, both fighter pilots, and her grandson, her latest fighter pilot, who graduated that day.

There were stories like this going on all around us. It was emotionally overwhelming, but I didn't want to miss any of it. Rami was standing next to me repeating, "Only in Israel, only

in Israel," and I would have to agree with him. But then Israel is a unique country. It has existed in its present form for only sixty-six years, while fighting and winning several wars of pure survival. To accomplish all that this country and its people have accomplished in that short time period is a testimony in itself.

Just prior to the start of the trip, Jack managed to get in touch with Nissim Ashkenazi, one of the only remaining A-4 pilots from that old VA-44 photo. You see him here with his son and daughter-in-law. We spent Friday morning with him. He was a wonderful host, a great story teller and in his own words, "A very funny guy."

Nissim was shot down after leading a strike against an Egyptian SAM site in 1969. He was a POW for a short time in Egypt before being repatriated. The story he told us that day is available here: https://youtu.be/_oTV_0S46wI



Nissim Ashkenazi, son and daughter-in-law. Photo by author.

As we talked that week, with Rami, Tsvika, Nissim and others, we heard the familiar story of the A-4's reliability, low flight hour cost and high performance that kept it operating for so many years as Israel's tactical trainer. Rami reminded us that Israel parked it's fleet of F-16A's long ago because they were too expensive to operate as a trainer.

Only now, with the Aermacchi 345 did they find an aircraft that could match the performance of the A-4 and include a modern cockpit to better prepare their pilots for the F-15 and F-16. Forty seven years is a long time to operate a tactical aircraft. Our friend Rami may well be the man with the most A-4 experience ever. He is certainly a character befitting the title.

When I first started my efforts to be included on the trip, I expected it would be a real treat to be there and to, perhaps, once again see the A-4 fly operationally. What I hadn't expected was how much our visit would be appreciated by everyone we met. I am occasionally asked if I miss flying. I usually reply that I do miss flying attack aircraft, but what I miss most is the squadron environment. I miss being with great friends who share the rare experience of flying and fighting. For this one week in June, we got to spend time with true brothers in arms, to hang out with them at the squadron, breathe in the jet exhaust and run our hands along an AMRAAM; pilots, young and old, whose experiences stretched from our day to this day. It was a joy to see that they are still casting young men and women from that mold.

(Ed. note: Terry Wolf is a naval aviator who flew A-4Fs with VA-55 aboard USS Hancock. He joined the squadron in May 1972, in time to see action over North Vietnam. Following his initial USN service, he worked for Western and Delta Airlines and flew A-7s with the Navy reserves. He later transferred to the Air Force flying the A-7D with the South Dakota Air National Guard and the C-5 with the 301st MAS at Travis, but eventually returned to the Navy to serve as a TAR at Alameda. He finished his naval service flying C-9s. Having flown an incredible number of different aircraft with the airlines and the reserves, he considers the A-4 to be his favorite.)

A-4 Skyhawks Support F-35 Operational Testing



Pictured from top down are a F-35 Lightning II, a F-16 Fighting Falcon and an A-4 Skyhawk. In support of an operational test exercise for their F-35s, the Royal Netherlands Air Force contingent at Edwards brought in six A-4s from Draken International, six F-16s from the 162nd Fighter Wing, Arizona Air National Guard,

and a KDC-10 Air Refueling tanker from the RNLAf 334th Transport Squadron at Eindhoven Airport, Netherlands. The Joint Strike Fighter Operational Test Team contracted Draken International to provide the small fleet of A-4s that were employed as adversary aircraft with a variety of types of mission sets.

By Rebecca Amber

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CA

A-4 Skyhawks have taken to the skies over Edwards in support of the operational test of the F-35A for the Royal Netherlands Air Force. They are part of a tactics development and evaluation exercise initiated by the 323rd Test and Evaluation Squadron and supported by the Joint Strike Fighter Operational Test Team from Aug. 17-28.

"Each service and each country has their own specific test events that they want to test for themselves, for their own service and their own country requirements," said Rich Radvanyi, JOTT Planning Cell chief.

The JOTT has five operational test

squadrons composed of the 31st Test and Evaluation Squadron, the Marines' VMX-22 squadron, the United Kingdom squadron 17(R), the Dutch 323rd Test and Evaluation Squadron and Navy squadron VX-9.

In support of the exercise, the Royal Netherlands Air Force also brought in six F-16s from the 162nd Fighter Wing, Arizona Air National Guard, to serve as either allied or adversary aircraft, along with a KDC-10 Air Refueling tanker from the Royal Netherlands Air Force 334th Transport Squadron at Eindhoven Airport, Netherlands. The JOTT contracted Draken International to provide the small fleet of A-4s that were employed as adversary aircraft with a variety of types of mission sets.

For instance, if the test plan required the F-35 pilot to fly against Russian tactics, the Draken pilots would present the same tactics that a Russian fighter pilot would present.

"A lot of the Draken pilots are former military or some are even current guard or reserve pilots. A lot of them had been adversary air pilots before, so they replicate the tactics of different adversary countries," said Radvanyi.

Draken International pilot Jeff Scott, who retired as a lieutenant colonel after 27 years in the Marine Corps, has been flying for 17 years and received his wings in an A-4.

"I flew F-35s before I retired and now I'm on the other side flying against them," said Scott.

TINS!*



A Rose is a Rose is a Rose...



The Marine captain was on a routine close air support mission in his A-4E *Skyhawk*. He had been airborne about 25 minutes in a scheduled one-hour mission that afternoon and had rolled in on one of his last bombing runs. Just prior to the pickle point, there was a sudden thump and the airplane jerked violently. He immediately attempted to drop his ordnance and pull out, but felt no control response whatever. The plane continued the run and bounced off the ground, then started a roll to the left.

His wingman and the forward air controller (airborne) saw the aircraft on the pull-off from the target, and the FAC called, "Eject! Eject!" The pilot initiated ejection while the *Skyhawk* was inverted. The seat left the aircraft after it had completed its roll and was upright. The plane continued to roll and hit the ground. The lucky pilot landed nearby with only minor injuries.

Grandpaw Pettibone says: *You talk about smellin' like a rose! This lad sure must'a been thinkin' pure thoughts all week. Don't know what he did right, but it was probably everything. I've seen many an outstanding aviator meet his maker in just such a situation. It's gratifyin' to see one make it back to tell about it.*

(Ed. note: this excerpt was taken from the January 1971 Naval Aviation News. Mark Williams of our research team searched for details on this accident. The following narrative is what he found.)

Assuming this occurred in 1970 in South East Asia, the most likely match is VMA-311 Capt. Frederick Palka in A-4E 150062. A google search for VMA-311 Palka yielded a link to a pdf (<http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/Pages/Publications/Publication%20PDFs/A%20History%20of%20Marine%20Attack%20Squadron%20311%20%20PCN%2019000308000.pdf>) which is the history of Marine Attack Squadron 311 by Major William Sambito. This narrative is on page 51:

"What began as a routine mission for Captain Fred Palka on 7 June 1970, ended in near disaster for the Tomcat. While flying near Dak To, 120 miles southwest of Chu Lai in II Corps, his aircraft was hit by ground fire. Captain Palka stated:

"I heard a cracking noise, then the plane became uncontrollable. I remember flying upside down and, by some miracle, the plane straightened out, and I bailed out as soon as I saw sky. I spent nearly 40 minutes on the ground in the middle of a firefight before an Army helicopter picked me up."

(Note 16, 1st MAF Command Chronology, June 1970, Appendix 6.)

The pilot suffered minor injuries and was taken to Pleiku. The next day he returned to Chu Lai where he was happily greeted by other Tomcats."

The test event will enable an initial assessment of 4th and 5th generation fighter integration, including Link-16 interoperability aspects.

The lessons learned will lay the ground work for future cooperation between 4th and 5th generation fighters and will help shape F-35A tactics for the RNLAf.

"There's really nothing better than actually going out there and flying and putting the actual aircraft against an actual threat and seeing how it works," Radvanyi said, "This has been very, very beneficial."

During the two-week test event, the JOTT organized one large force engagement each day with as many as 12 aircraft flying at a time. While only four Skyhawks flew at a time, there were up to six on the ramp at times.

"It's been a unique opportunity to see a type of adversary aircraft that you wouldn't normally see," said Radvanyi.

The A-4 Skyhawk is not in service with the U.S. military anymore so it's something that would not normally be seen by the crews that are flying here now.

According to Scott, Draken International purchased their A-4s from the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Their fleet differs from the A-4s that were once used by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps because they have been upgraded with F-16A avionics like APG-66 radars, radar warning receivers, heads-up displays and a digital data bus.

They also have electronic attack pods that can be used to simulate special presentation requirements for test events.

"It's a very reliable airplane," said Scott, adding that "the team at Edwards has been excellent, everyone has been very supportive."

Skyhawks were mainly flown by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration squadron flew the A-4 Skyhawk II

from 1974 to 1986. Skyhawks were also used by the armed forces of Argentina, Australia, Israel, Kuwait, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and New Zealand, and they remained active with several air services into the 2000s.

(Ed. note; Photo courtesy of Frank Crébas, a part-time professional aerial photographer from the Netherlands. He started to become interested in military aviation in the late 1980's and started as a spotter/ photographer. Since 2005 he has been a frequent contributor to aviation magazines. In 2010 Frank published and co-authored the book "Airpower" a book about the Royal Netherlands Air Force while he continued to contribute to other media outlets. Aerial photography and video work became his specialty over the years, and he has flown numerous missions to date from WW II bombers to F-16 fighter jets. See his work at www.bluelifeaviation.com.)

Read?

you think
we *read*?

Ghosts of Atonement: Israeli F-4 Phantom Operations During the Yom Kippur War

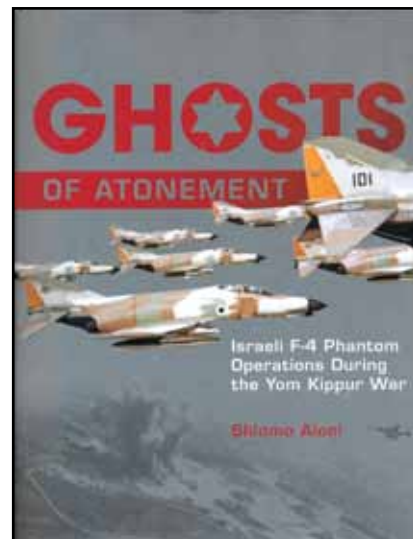
Shlomo Aloni
Schiffer Publishing Ltd, Atglen, PA. 2015.
224 pp. Ill. \$59.99 (now \$40 on Amazon).
Reviewed by CDR Peter B. Mersky, USNR (ret)

Although its rather odd title references the Arab-Israeli War that began on October 6, 1973, the start of Yom Kippur, the holiest holiday on the Jewish calendar, the use of the word "Ghosts" is without any real meaning. That said, this medium-format book, a typical Schiffer presentation, is a great window into the Israel Air Force's (IAF's) F-4 fleet's story fighting for its life and for the very life of its small but vital nation. This conflict is about as close as the Arabs have come in attaining their constantly stated goal of destroying the Jewish state. Anyone with a historian's interest in the F-4 or any former crewmen, flight or ground, will find this latest account of McDonnell-Douglas' masterpiece very appealing.

The Arab attack on Yom Kippur was a shock to Israel, even though, contrary to established histories, there had been sufficient warning for the IDF to be somewhat prepared. However, the strength of Egyptian and Syrian

defenses was strong enough for the IAF to incur major losses in its F-4 and A-4 squadrons. The U.S. offered replacement aircraft, and by the second and third week of the war, several Phantoms and Skyhawks were on their way to Israel by way of ferry flights that usually ended at IAF bases where, as soon as their American crews landed, the planes were loaded with bombs, their star-and-bar insignia repainted with the Israeli Star of David, and they were sent off on their first missions still in their Navy gray or Air Force Vietnam camouflage paint schemes.

I highly recommend *Loud and Clear*, IAF ace Iftach Spector's memoir published by Zenith Press in 2007. Spector was the CO of 107 Squadron, one of four IAF Phantom squadrons in the war. His book gives a first-person account of the desperate days suffered by the Israeli Phantoms and their crews. He has also written *A Dream in Blue and Black*, a somewhat mystical and semi-autobiographical but extremely well done novel concerning those weeks. It's a shame



no American publisher has been able to see the value of bringing this work, which has garnered praise in Israel, out for the enjoyment of readers in the U.S.

Ghosts of Atonement is an unusual book. Aloni has written quite a lot of material, books and articles, on the history of the IAF but his new book is not just another history of planes and pilots. It is also an account of the overall air war during the 1973 war in the Middle East. That's an important distinction

that may be hard to understand. He gives us a true window into the daily operations that brought the IAF back from the brink and probably helped save Israel from destruction.

While photographs compliment the detailed narrative, several appendixes list F-4 losses and MiG kills, as well as individual

squadron details. One of the most interesting sections is the glossary that includes Israeli names for such well-known aircraft as the Mirage III and, of course, the Phantom and A-4. American missiles and weapons also received their own IAF names. The reader needs to get used to these names in place of Sidewinder, Sparrow and Shrike, but the renaming of these weapons is a uniquely Israeli affectation.

SIZE DOES MATTER

Modelers' Corner

Modeler Darren Roberts wrote to Joe Turpen, Skyhawk Associations modeling editor:

Hey Joe! I thought you might like to see this. I'm building one of every manufacturer's Skyhawk kits in 1/48 scale. The Lindberg kit isn't much, but it does kind of represent the airframe (142083) that was used as a -2 test

airframe. I've also attached pictures of the Monogram and Fujimi kits. I'm building them completely out of the box, including any ordnance that's provided. When they are all done, I'd like to do a write up of the pros and cons of each.

(Ed. note: stay tuned for more of Darren's work in future issues.)



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

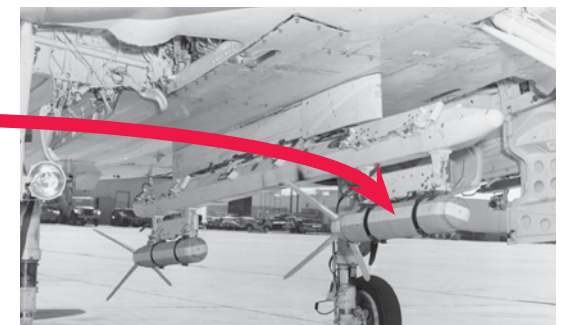
TRIVIA ANYONE ?

from Gary Verver

Send your answers to:
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

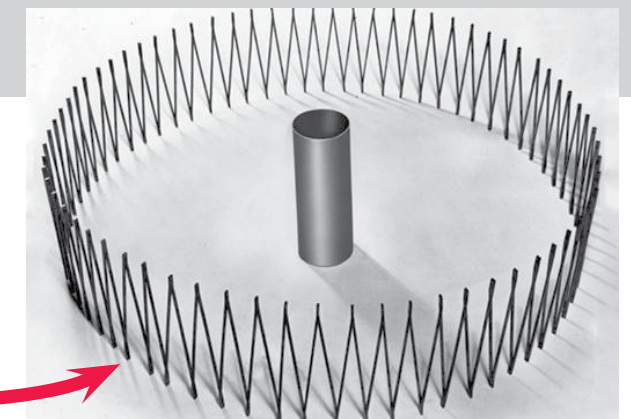
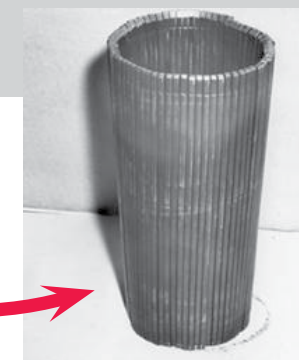
Answer to What was this?

We had no takers on the Summer 2015 trivia question. The answer was: Deneye antitank mine-dispenser system, China Lake, 05 June 1962. Loaded on NAF China Lake A4D-2 Skyhawk BuNo 14289. Official U.S. Navy photo.



Next Question:

Here are two images
of the same thing.
What is it?



NEW MEMBERS

Carver, Fred – El Dorado, KS
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Cruikshank, Bruce – Castro Valley, CA
Kwarta, Dean – San Jose, CA
Lacroix, Etienne – Paris, France
Lederle, Tim – Mica, WA

Lemen, David – Cape Girardeau, MO
O'Shaughnessy, William – Spring Hill, FL
Parker, Clyde – Spokane, WA
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Warde, Michael – Plantation, FL
Womack, Jack – Pensacola, FL

FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag



DECLASSIFIED

The buildup of forces in Vietnam included an 8,000' aluminum runway at Chu Lai, RVN. With 4000' complete, the first A-4 landed 1 June, 1965. Traps and JATO were the routine, and it was just a few hours until the first mission by VMA-225 hit VC targets just to the west of the new runway.

Using the local marshes as an infiltration route, a VC sapper attack 28 Oct resulted in many VC killed but the loss of 1 A-4. The MAG-12 commander, Col Leslie E. Brown, asked for resources to reinforce the defenses against the VC. On Nov 10, 1965, the 190th birthday of the Corps, he modified his request as shown in this message:

DECLASSIFIED

NOJTIME
R 100201Z
FROM: MARAIBRU ONE TWO
TO: CG FMW

UNCLAS EPTC
SECURITY REQUIREMENTS, REVISION OF
1. REQUEST PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED REQUIREMENT FOR PLATOON
SEVENTY DOGS BE MODIFIED AS FOLLOWS.

A. REDUCE NUMBER DOGS FROM 30 TO 15

B. ENSURE DOGS ARE WATER SPANIELS OR LANDRADOR
RETRIEVERS. OTHER BREEDS CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE FOR
EXISTING CONDITIONS (SUBMERGED) OF TERRAIN.

2. IN LIEU OF 15 DOGS DERIVED FROM ORIGINAL REQUIREMENT
REQUEST SUBSTITUTE CROCODILES. ENDLESS LAGOONS EXISTING
BOTH SIDES AND UNDER TAXIWAY AND RUNWAY CONSIDERED IDEAL
AREA FOR HUNGRY AMPHIBIANS. WOULD GREATLY ENHANCE
DEFENSES AGAINST VC INFILTRATION. IF NECESSARY TO COMPLY
WITH SPIRIT OF "BUY AMERICA" CAMPAIGN FLORIDA ALLIGATORS
CONSIDERED SUITABLE SUBSTITUTE CROCODILES.

3. NO ADDITIONAL LOGISTIC SUPPORT ENVISIONED NECESSARY
FOR CROCODILES. CATFISH IN LAGOON PLUS TRANSIENT VC
ADEQUATE CLASS I SUPPORT IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

DIST: S-1; MARS-12
GENERAL

/s/ L. E. Brown
L. E. BROWN
COLONEL, USMC
RELEASED

100201Z NOV 65

ANNEX Q
VI-0-1

DECLASSIFIED



Rami Lothan's Last Flight

Skyhawk Association member Rami Lothan's being kissed by wife Etty before his last Scooter flight. Rami first flew the A-4 on 4/21/1972. This last flight took place on 6/15/2012, forty years later. During his three years of active service and thirty-seven years as a reserve pilot, Rami logged approximately 2,050 hours and 2650 sorties in the A-4. Photo via Jack Woodul.



Photo by Bob Lawson shows a flight of VFC-13 Fighting Saints A-4F Skyhawks BuNo 155047, UX-23; BuNo 155013, UX-24; and BuNo 154976, UX-20, all carrying Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation (ACMI) pods, at NAS Fallon on 19 July 1989. Note false canopy painted on the lower forward fuselage of UX-23. Photo via Gary Verver.

SCHEDULING

Reunions & Requests



PLAN AHEAD

- **Skyhawk Association Mid-Year Board Meeting**, March 2016 (dates TBA), San Antonio. Watch for more details.
- **Possible VA-36 Reunion**, March 2016, San Francisco. Contact is Bear Langworthy (FLYBEAR@peoplepc.com).
- **MCAA Symposium and Reunion**, May 18-20, New Bern, NC.
- **Skyhawk Association 2016 Annual Meeting and Luncheon at Tailhook**: 12:00 noon, September 08, 2016, Nugget Hotel.
- **Tailhook Association Reunion & Marine Aviation Summit 2016**, Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, September 08-10, 2016.

List your reunion or event with Skyhawk Association, both print journal and website. Contact the editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.



A-4C 148500

Before and after pictures of A-4C 148500 chronicle the 4-year restoration of the aircraft, led by Bill Anderson, by the Illinois Aviation Museum at Bolingbrook Clow International Airport. Dressed in the livery of the VA-93 "Blue Blazers" circa 1965, the aircraft was unveiled on October 17th to a crowd including veteran Skyhawk pilots Walt Brand and Robert Wideman. A-4C 148500 was obtained from the Warbird Heritage Foundation of Waukegan, Illinois.



Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

From The Hook magazine, Spring 1997

The Further Adventures of YOUTHLY PURESOME

by CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR(Ref), artwork by Carl Snow



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

As he whanged his empty Lone Star long neck down on the bar and gently petitioned the innkeeper for "a 'other cold beer," Puresome figgered that, technically, his presence at happiness hour at the O' Club was in compliance with current directives.



The Chugalug Champion of Chase Field

His daddy, COL P.A. Puresome, Texas A&M Class of '34, had always maintained that he "could not abide a man who'd run with the cows all week and try to be a bull on the weekend." What the colonel meant to say was that office pinkies and town kids that wore cologne, matched socks and voluntarily hung around females customarily forsook their chores and did not help out around the place. True bullism was a full time job, validated by a week's worth of smelly, hard work.

Matching Socks and Eau d'Juarez

Saturday night, when all the chores were done, was when you got to have a tub bath, shine your boots and chase the girls. Just showing up for manly events on weekends didn't count, and was probably the province of "nancy" boys.

The very Youthly Puresome wasn't an office pinkie, hated chores, actually cared if his socks matched and would have drenched himself in Eau d'Juarez, if he had some, just to cover the feedlot smells wafting up from the back of his daddy's pickup. It took eventually going off to college in the libertine big city to challenge the code of conduct much, but the essential truth was that mujers were fascinating critters from some light-blue planet who thought in Sanscrit and spent an extraordinary amount of time being angry at hombres for doing what hombres do. Like most of COL Puresome's practical sayings, it was easier to do righteous bull stuff most of the time and indulge in wary forays into cow country occasionally. Even after the thunderbolt of the encounter with Signorina Delmundo and subsequent matrimonials, Puresome still knew that a man had to do what a man had to do. And that involved running with bulls some.

Puresome Versus the Marine Corps

Which was what Puresome was doing at happiness hour: drinking cold beers, waving hands with fellow student Naval Aviators and listening respectfully to the salty stories of instructor pilots, most of whom would much rather be back in the fleet hassling each other rather than students. Life in the Advanced Training Command took lots of hard studying for both academic subjects and proper methods of flying the Grumman Ironworks TF-9J and AF-9J Cougars about the Texas skies. Students not being perfect, some strain and yelling was involved. Sometimes, shiny gold wings still seemed a long way off. Happiness hour was a good way to cut yourself some slack before hitting the books again.



"Though ... your ... nostril's ... like a stovepipe, Nellie darlin'," sang a quartet of Marine instructor pilots in a tender rendition of what Puresome was to learn was the real Marine Corps anthem. 1LT Sumo's falsetto rendering was exceptionally poignant as it filtered through the cigar smoke.

Student Naval Aviator Puresome was doing an exceptional job of stress-shedding when someone came up with the idea of a chugalug contest. The technical procedures of the contest were not nearly as difficult as "chop, prop, flop, 110 drop" from the early days at Sauflay Field flying the Maytag Messerschmitt T-34 — all that was involved was opening one's throat to maximum diameter, tossing down a stein of cold beer in absolute minimum time with only minor spillage, and placing the empty mug upside-down on top of one's crewcut to signal a done deal. "I can do that!" thought Puresome, who went squinty-eyed at the possibility of kicking some butt, since he had double-mi-



nored in beer-gulping and jalapeno-chomping during his collegiate days.

It was a piece of cake. But what Puresome had not really reckoned with was the depth of competition. Elimination round followed elimination round of enthusiastic, though less-talented brethren. Though filthy work, it had to be done. Puresome sucked it up and took on all comers. The goose grease in his crewcut fought a losing battle with dregs from near-empty steins.

The Final Round for the Winner

It came down to Puresome and the honor of the Corps. 1LT Sumo had dispatched his opponents with the same ease that he had whooped up on unwary F-11 Tiger drivers from the tactics squadron in his single-seat Cougar. It was this same loud tact that had demolished marks on the left hand side of his fitness reports, establishing him as a large first lieutenant for life.

Guitars strummed and schoolmarms swooned as the Pride of the Corps and the Portales Gonsleenger drew fresh beers and faced off. Spurs chinged and clocks ticked loud tocks as the big hands twitched toward high noon and each snake-eyed opponent waited for the other to make his play.

1LT Sumo roared into action first, but Puresome's right hand, already a registered weapon, went into its thousand-mile-an-hour act, doused the contents of the mug quickly and accurately down his throat. With only a little beer running off the top of his head and from the sides of his sillyassed grin, Puresome checked out how his opponent had done.

1LT-For-Life Sumo was gagging, dancing around like mad and making indelicate noises. Puresome was totally perplexed by his easy victory until the Marine was able to extract a partial dental plate that had come unhinged by the violence of his attack on the beer mug and slud a significant distance down his throat. Puresome didn't give a damn: A kill was a kill.



The Champeen Meets Signorina Delmundo

When he finally made it home to the beautiful, above-garage apartment in downtown Beeville, Puresome could not understand the lack of appreciation for his feat by the child bride, who reminded him that he was yet mortal and had flunked taking out the trash yet again. But Puresome was flushed with victory and cold beer, and knew that there was always another day to excel at trash and good graces.

Besides, Tunita had long ago kind of extended a grim blessing to Friday afternoon male bonding.

"You go ahead and go to happiness hour," Puresome was advised, "but I'm gonna go buy some shoes." Thus, ENS Puresome had taken some serious hits in the checkbook section, and the child bride's closet came close to qualifying as a shoe mine. Dreamtime came in fuzzy confusion of whirling mugs and spinning aircraft on one side of the bed and rows of neatly arranged pumps and cute little flats in colors to match dresses and accessories on the other.

In the middle of the blackest part of the night, Puresome moaned the moan of the high-pressure sump light and rolled out of the sack. But, unexplainably, the vast quantities of cold beer had tumbled his gyros and he was lost and in pain in the dark apartment. With no time to climb, confess and conserve, Puresome stumbled over chairs and shoes in the blackness, confused and in danger, knowing that his moments were numbered. A new verse in the Navy Hymn was being written for "those in peril up the stairs!"

Inspiration born of desperation guided Puresome to the open screened window just as the overpressure valve vented itself.

"Timing is everything!" Puresome thought as his eyes rolled back in his head in relief in avoiding a really troublesome system failure. A fine mist roiled back from the window screen.

A bright light snapped on and the huge face and voice of the Avenging Angel of Reason roared out, "What in the hell are you doing?"

"Shhhhhh!" was as good as Puresome could come up with before he finished, the lights went out, and he did a one-and-a-half-with-a-full-twist into the easy chair. It should be pointed out in his defense that ENS Puresome's aim did not deteriorate during the above distractions.

Hard Lessons Learned

When came the morning, the gentle calling of the mourning dove (or the hooting of local owls, as Tunita proclaimed with an inaccurate certainty designed to drive Puresome crazy), filtered through the booming of the big base drum behind Puresome's eyeballs. He found himself awkwardly draped across the easy chair by the window in a state of careless undress and a certain amount of pain. Somehow, he was not surprised when he was not offered sympathy nor the respect due to his new title, but was spared only through intensive plea-bargaining, involving penance, Lysol and a scrub brush.

It was not pretty. Puresome had taken some definite hits and continued to take sniper fire for a while to come. But, in the after years, he always remembered that if you ran with the bulls, you were bound to take a few horns.

But it was worth it if you got to be Champeen in the process.



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Skyhawk Association

Fall 2015 • Journal

Volume 21 • Number 3



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The Editorial Staff is Cleaning House! Back Issues of The A-4Ever on Sale!

Back issues from Fall 2004 (Vol 10, No. 4) to Spring 2013 (Vol 19, No. 1) are available, except for the following issues (11-4; 14-2; 14-3; 16-1; and 16-2). The stock of some issues is very limited, so act fast.

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