



Skyhawk Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 2

"A-4s Forever!"

June 1996

ARMY? SKYHAWK

The Skyhawk is renown for its versatility. Even the U.S. Army — that's right, the ARMY — considered use of the A-4 at one point in history.

Back in the 1961, an Army project was created to evaluate a crop of then-current jet aircraft, the Douglas A4D-2N (A-4C), the Northrop N-156 (predecessor of the F-5), and the Italian Fiat G-91, as possible candidates for filling a close air support role that the AUS envisioned for itself. The underlying idea was an old one — large paved airfields were not usually available near the front lines, so a quick, mortar-like close air support response vehicle, that could operate from unimproved fields, was needed.



Noted aviation artist R.G. Smith's rendition of the Douglas Model 840 Skyhawk modification proposed for U.S. Army operations from front-line, unimproved fields. (Douglas Aircraft Co., courtesy Harry Gann.)

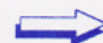
The Douglas Aircraft Company (DAC) approach was to modify two A4Ds (BuNos 148490 and 148483) borrowed from the Navy. The modifications, including installation of large dual wheels on beefed-up main mounts, a heavier wing to

house the larger landing gear, and installation of a drag chute borrowed from an A3D Skywarrior, were accomplished within one month's time. Much of the subsequent evaluation work was conducted at NAS Jacksonville, but the sod field landing and take-off phase was conducted at Site 8A, an unpaved satellite of Pensacola's NAAS Saufley Field. The project roster included Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and civilian personnel. The DAC A4D entry was flown by test pilot Drury Wood.



Army Skyhawk candidate, A4D-2N BuNo 148483, borrowed from the Navy for dirt field testing in 1961, had dual wheels, a beefed-up wing, and an A3D Skywarrior drag chute. The dimple on the starboard wheel housing was a gun camera port. (Photo by Douglas Aircraft Co., courtesy Harry Gann.)

Site 8A was a 3,000 foot strip with, as Dru Wood phrased it, nary a square foot of concrete anywhere. His assessment was that the short field landing would be similar to a trap on an old straight deck carrier. Once the throttle went to idle, the flight became a commitment! Wood "dragged" his approach in low and slow, took a





cut short of the intended touch-down spot, and popped the drag chute as soon as the wheels contacted the ground.

Everything worked like a charm and the *Skyhawk* was the clear winner in the landing competition. The drag chute, designed to slow down the 70,000 pound *Skywarrior*, helped to jerk the *Skyhawk* to a stop in less than 500 feet. The Italian aircraft, with only a small drag chute, and the N-156, with none, used considerably more "runway." There was no clear edge for any aircraft in the take-off phase, even though the N-156 was after-burner equipped.

DAC, in anticipation of an order for customized *Skyhawks* for the Army, began preparations for its Model 840 to meet the challenge. Alas, the order never came. The USAF convinced the powers that be that it

could fill Army's close air support needs. Or, perhaps funds were short and the Army needed its available bucks for helicopters. In any case, the Model 840 program was retired to a dusty vault and the Army pilots, poor souls, lost the opportunity to join the elite and enviable ranks of Scooter pilots. [Thanks to Skyhawk Association Historian, Harry Gann, for help in preparation of this article.]

M.D. "Whizzer" White

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Editor's Note. President Whizzer's regular report to the membership is missing from this issue because he returned home from the Pensacola trip to the news that he was a candidate for prompt prostate surgery, which will have been completed by the time you read this. The good news is that the problem was localized and the biopsy was negative. So, although the experience doesn't exactly fall into the fun-and-games category, the prognosis is good. The Whizzer is up-beat and optimistic about the whole thing. "Most of us will get there sooner or later," says he. "It's just Whizzer's time in the barrel." And, the Pres says his recoup period (six weeks +/-) will give him a lot of otherwise idle time to think up ways to harass the membership in his next newsletter column.

PENSACOLA MEETING

Ye Editor was unable to attend the May gathering in Pensacola but, from all reports, the proverbial good time was had by all.

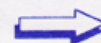
The Skyhawk Association "admin ashore" suite was at the Pensacola Grand Hotel. However, people accommodations and the NMNA-ANA activities were pretty well scattered all over the south forty. It was tough to hold quarters for muster and get a true head count report of Skyhawk Association membership attendees. But, from all reports, we were well represented and most, if not all, in attendance managed to drop by the suite at one time or another.

President Whizzer reports that, through some miracle not of his own making, the luncheon arrangements (TV personality David Hartman was our guest), the suite management, the raffle operations, the "there I was" story-telling, and other Skyhawk Association member urges and activities managed to fall into place without undue concern or complexity.

Treasurer Boom Powell reports that the Association is still solvent and that, so far, the income and out-go columns for our segment of the Pensacola bash are in balance.

PARTS WANTED

Skyhawk Association member Brad Hayes is looking for help. He's a worker at the Hawaii Historical Aircraft Foundation at Dillingham Airfield. The museum has A-4E 152061 on display, procured from VC-1 when that squadron went out of business in 1991. Brad needs a drop tank or two, the associated wing mounting pylons, and new (or, at least, improved) tires for the main and nose gear mounts. Anyone who might be of help, please call Brad at (808) 373-5143 or write to him at 2133 Aluka Loop, Pearl City, HI 96782.





DOWN ARGENTINE WAY

"Gaucho One," the first *Skyhawk* (an A-4M) for the Argentine Air Force in more than thirteen years, is shown (right) at touch-down at the Ontario, California airport on 1 August 1995 after a flight from the "boneyard" at Arizona's Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.

Under a \$208 million contract finalized in December 1994, the Lockheed Martin Aircraft Service (LMAS) Company is modifying thirty-six A-4M model *Skyhawks*, purchased from the U.S. Navy for the Argentine Air Force. In 1993 the U.S. government lifted the arms embargo imposed after the 1982 South Atlantic Falklands War between Argentina and Great Britain.

The newer *Skyhawks*, which will replace the A-4B and C models lost from the Argentine inventory during the Falklands War, are receiving extensive avionics upgrades and engine refurbishments. Included in the contract are depot level inspections, pilot and mechanic training, spare parts, and documentation.

Much of the avionics upgrading is being done in kit form under sub-contract by Allied-Signal Aerospace and Westinghouse Electric.

The first 18 Argentine A-4s are being modified at the LMAS facilities at Ontario and Chino, California. The remaining 18 will be modified by the newly-created LAAS (Lockheed Aircraft Argentina, South America) facility based at the Cordoba air base northwest of Buenos Aires.



(Photo courtesy Lockheed Martin Aircraft Service)

MiG ENGAGEMENT?

Member **Mike O'Connor of Wausau, WI**, is doing research on U.S. Navy Vietnam War A-4 engagements with MiGs.

Mike would like to make contact with anyone formerly with VA-212 who might be able to shed light on such an engagement by pilots of that squadron. Write or call Mike:

702 S. Fifth Ave., Wausau, WI 64401.
Telephone (715) 848-0160.

LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

Member **Bob Hodson of Thousand Oaks, CA**, claims a "record." He says he got his first *Skyhawk* trap after logging only 61 hours in the bird. A Reserve, Bob logged 18 hours in the TA-4 while going through the instrument RAG in 1969. Then, he returned to his squadron, VA-305, and logged another 40+ hours in the A-4C. In August 1971, Bob and his squadron mates flew their A-4s to USS *Coral Sea* (CVA-43), where Hodson logged 10 traps. According to his log book, the last trap was registered at the exact moment that he accounted for having the *Skyhawk* strapped to his butt for a total of 61 hours.

Sounds like a pretty good "record." Any challengers?



SKYHAWK POTPOURRI

From member **Bob Belter** of Carmel, CA, comes a quotable quote: "I flew the A-4 only at Pax River. It took about three guys to close the canopy over me and I only got five hours total flight time in the bird; but once in the air, my first thought was 'They've built a Porsche that flies!'"

From **Jim Barnes** (Saratoga, CA): "The 'City of Porterville (state unknown)' reported in the November newsletter is Porterville, Calif., 53 miles southeast of Lemoore." There, A-4C BuNo 147727 is displayed on a pedestal, says Jim. "I went to high school there and...felt the urge to set the record straight."

Spotted at the Pima Air & Space Museum, Tucson, AZ: In addition to A-4B BuNo 142928 reported in the November newsletter, a second Skyhawk, A-4C BuNo 148751.

From the other side of the country, Boom Powell, who earns a living flying in and out of a lot of places, reports: "An A-4, believed to be an 'Alfa,' is on display near the Miami airport, close to the George T. Baker Aviation School." (Can any of you Floridians help with verification and BuNo?)

Remember When... ? Political correctness is not necessarily a product of the '90s. In 1965, the first full year of the 8+ year Vietnam War, Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara, apparently concerned about a too war-like public image associated with the SEAsia conflict, issued an edict. Henceforth, said he, official communiques from air combat units reporting the loss of U.S. aircraft to enemy action would cease using the term "shot down." The approved substitute euphemism



***MORE ALIVE AND KICKING.** Fleet Composite Squadron Eight (VC-8), based at NAS Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico still actively employs six Skyhawks, TA-4Js (converted TA-4Fs) BuNos 153486, 153525, 153526, 154312, 154616, and 156649. Bureau number 154312 was already at the Arizona "boneyard" when it was resurrected for duty with VC-8, as evidenced by the graffiti that adorned the rear cockpit instrument panel when the aircraft was delivered to Rosey Roads. Earlier this year, VC-8 Skyhawks participated in a Joint Force exercise with VFA-204 out of NAS New Orleans and Air Force F-15s and F-16s. (Photo courtesy LT Mark Standage, VC-8)*

was "lost in combat." The war went right on and a lot of our aircraft continued to be... er, well, aah... shot down.

The Quonset Air Museum, located at Quonset State Airport (formerly NAS Quonset Point) North Kingston, RI, owns three Skyhawks — A4D-2N (A-4C) BuNo 147790, A-4F 155027, and A-4M 158148 (the first of that series). Association member **Larry Thomas of Charlestown, RI**, a volunteer worker at the QAM says two of the birds, two are "back on their feet" and the third is still under restoration. The QAM is looking for photos of the three aircraft suitable for display, and leads on possible A-4 parts procurement sources. Anyone willing to help is invited to call Larry at (401)294-9540, or write to him at P.O. Box 637, Charlestown, RI 02813-0637.

Another restoration project is A-4C 147733, underway at the Arkansas Air Museum in Fayette-

ville. Historian-Researcher Mike Eckels says the museum needs a center hard point for the belly drop tank, a four minute turn indicator, and a radar scope. Volunteers are also needed for help with the restoration. Anyone who can be of assistance, please call or FAX Mike at (501) 521-4947, or write: P.O. Box, Fayetteville, AR 72702.

From Active Duty member **Mark "Strange" Standage, VC-8**, Roosevelt Roads, PR, comes a report that, back in the 1989-90 time frame, VC-10 at Guantanamo Bay had TA-4Js that were modified to carry the *Sidewinder* missile. As best it could should the need arise, VC-10's mission was to "hold back a Cuban attack until the A-team made it down from Mac-Dill AFB." Standage adds that VC-10 pilots got more than a fair share of bombs to drop and training flight hours, and that every JO got to shoot an AIM-9 during his tour.



(U.S. Navy photo, courtesy Tailhook Association)



(U.S. Navy photo, courtesy Tailhook Association)



(U.S. Navy photo, courtesy Tailhook Association)

FROM THE ARCHIVES, or, GO AHEAD... MAKE MY DAY!

On 5 February 1958, flying A4D-2 BuNo 142130 from the deck of USS Essex (CVA-9), at sea, pilot W.E. Scarborough of VA-83 had a problem. His *Skyhawk* lost its starboard wheel assembly (contributing cause unknown) and the ship was out of range of a "bingo" field. Rugged and frequently forgiving, even the venerable Scooter was not designed for a two-wheel landing (top photo). The solution: Allow Scarborough to log an unconventional arrested landing (middle) in the spaghetti.

ALIVE AND WELL

The original "stretch" (2' 6" longer) *Skyhawk* was the TA-4E, which first flew on 30 June 1965. Except for the obvious two-seat configuration and 700 pounds less fuel in the tank, the TA-4E, powered by the 8,500 lb. thrust J-52-P-6A engine, differed little from its single seat predecessor. Only two were built, but 238 more powerful (9,300 lb. thrust J-52-P-8A engine) successor TA-4Fs came off the Douglas production line, equipped with steerable nose wheels, and wing spoilers. Most TA-4Fs were later modified as TA-4Js. A few were converted to become EA-4M "electronic aggressors," and 23 became USMC OA-4Ms. A total of 293 TA-4Js were produced with the lesser thrust J-52-P-6A engine but were lighter weight without armament and certain tactical-use electronic equipment. The "J" first flew in June 1969. Today, 27 years later, the TA-4J is still flying in the U.S. Navy. Most (69) are assigned to VT-7 (bottom photo), the training squadron at NAS Meridian, MS. Six others are with VC-8 in Puerto Rico (see page 4). In varying configurations, other "T" versions have been produced or modified for Argentina (see page 3), Australia, Israel, Kuwait, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore.



SEEN ON THE READY ROOM BULLETIN BOARD

In March 1970, I was assigned to ferry an A-4C from NAS Norfolk to the "boneyard" at Davis-Monthan AFB in Arizona. The plane, in damaged condition, had been off-loaded from a carrier some weeks earlier. The aircraft was subsequently repaired, given a brief (0.4 hour) test flight, and reported "ready for ferry."

A paperwork foul-up and a hunt to find the plane's drop tanks burned up the morning and early afternoon of my intended departure day. Ferry rules required day VFR flight and I had a couple of concerns. Even with the earliest possible take-off time that afternoon, I would in fact be making a night flight with my arrival at the intended fueling stop, NAS Dallas, after dark. Second, a frontal system was advancing on Norfolk. If I left promptly, I'd be able to climb VFR over the front en route to Dallas. But, if I delayed departure very much, I'd either have to violate the VFR requirement or find myself stuck in Norfolk for a predicted several days while the weather passed through. I elected to go.

Climbing to the west toward the threatening clouds and eventual evening darkness, things went well until my TACAN DME unlocked and started to roll. I tried several local TACAN stations and finally reported loss of that part of my navigation aid to Norfolk Center. In response, Center advised me that my transponder signal was fading and, shortly thereafter, that the signal completely disappeared. I asked if Dallas Center would accept me as a "basic target," a favor that sometimes was granted, but the answer that evening was "No."

Then, my TACAN needle began to unlock periodically, wander, re-lock, and unlock. Finally, it gave up the ghost altogether and I had no alternative except to request a vectored return to Norfolk which, by that time, was reporting a 600-800 foot ceiling with light rain.

Without a transponder signal, Norfolk Center was having a hard time seeing me as a basic target

and I often made turns to enable them to pick up my radar echo. Finally, I was handed off to Norfolk GCA, who gave me the routine "In case of missed approach..." instruction. I reminded the GCA controller that I had no navigation gear and that there would be no missed approach. As I lined up for a long, straight-in approach, a new problem surfaced. My UHF radio became scratchy and I was concerned about the possibility of total loss of radio. That would leave me no alternative except bail-out time.

With zilch visibility ahead but catching glimpses of ship lights below, I dropped down to below the 500-foot overcast where I could see the blessed NAS Norfolk runway lights. The GCA controller said something scratchy, probably telling me I was well below glide slope and should wave off. I ignored his advice and switched to tower frequency and requested landing clearance. The response was completely unintelligible. I had run out of other options, so I landed.

After-the-excitement inspection and analysis showed the problem to be a failed seal on the pressurized "can" that contained all the radio gear. Moisture in the system and arcing due to lack of pressurization had caused the progressive loss of the radio gear. Had the plane been given a decent test hop prior to the scheduling of my ferry flight, the problem might have been discovered. And, of course, I didn't help things by electing to ignore the rules to try a night, IFR ferry flight.

(Submitted by CDR John W. Bradford,
USN(Ret), Wetmore, Colorado)

Have a *Skyhawk* story to tell? Contributions are welcome. Just address them to Captain Hook, 770 F Avenue, Coronado, CA 92118-2130. Be sure to include your name, address, and telephone number. Photos for illustration are also welcome and will be returned.



SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

CALL FOR MEMBERSHIP

If you have any time in the Scooter, **YOU** should be a member of the

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION.

The ♥A-4♥, like a fondly remembered ♥high school sweetheart♥,
represents to all who have flown her the *energy to get there*

and a **FUN** response.

(That may not be the politically correct way of phrasing things, but it's true!)

"SCOOTER" means FUN!

(Even if you're just a *Skyhawk* aficionado, your invited to join.)

Interested? Membership in the *Skyhawk Association* entitles you to receive the periodic Association newsletter, announcements of Association activities (such as our annual get-together-reunion), a current membership roster, and whatever other goodies seem important from time to time.

Give it a try. You've nothing to gain but **FUN** and *camaraderie*.

Dues are **\$20** per calendar year or major portion thereof.

Your check, payable to **Skyhawk Association**, will put you on the active list.

Mail to

**Secretary, Skyhawk Association,
770 "F" Avenue, Coronado, CA 92119-2130**

Optionally, with your check, please include the ID of A-4 squadrons with which you served (or are presently serving), your A-4 flight time, number of A-4 traps, call sign or nickname, and the names (and addresses) of any other souls whom you think should be invited to join.



YOU CAN HELP!

**CLIP THIS PAGE AND HAND IT (OR MAIL IT) TO
SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE A MEMBER.**

DELIVERY BOYS

Association member Jack Hinds of Garden Grove, CA, wrote to share a bit of *Skyhawk* history. When delivery of the A4D-1 to the fleet began in late 1956 (the first was to VA-72 at NAS Quonset Pt., RI, on 26 September), ferry squadron pilots got into the act.

Nine pilots from VR-32 went to the Douglas Aircraft Company plant in El Segundo, CA, in late October 1956 for ground training in *Skyhawk* systems.

Back at San Diego, they checked out in production models on 1 and 5 November, each pilot logging about 10 takeoffs and landing and two hours of flight time. Then it was time to hit the road to begin deliveries. On 5 November, Hinds made his way north to El Segundo and flew A4D-1 BuNo 139932 to NAS Quonset Point, RI, with fueling stops at NAS Olathe, KS, and NAS Columbus, OH.



Shown with A4D-1 BuNo 139935 are the VR-32 Skyhawk drivers (standing, L to R) LT J.S. Campbell, LT J.R. Harrison, LCDR W.E. Sagor, LT M. Morton, LTJG G.R. Stewart, LCDR J. Brown, and ---- Hunter, DAC Field Rep.; (front row) LCDR C.E. Hendry, LT O.J. Durey, and LT Jack Hinds. (U.S. Navy, courtesy J.G. Hinds)

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