



NEW ZEALAND SKYHAWK HISTORY

As of this year (1998), the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) is into its 28th year of operating the A-4K and TA-4K model *Skyhawks*.

The oldest aircraft in the RNZAF inventory are even older however. Procured "used" from Australia in 1984, NZ6215 (ex-A-4F BuNo 155052), launched into its 31st operational year on 26 June 1997, and NZ6218 (A-4F BuNo 155069) passed that milestone three days later. By the end of August 1997, more than half of the still operational RNZAF *Skyhawks* had entered

their fourth decade of service.

The second oldest *Skyhawk* now in service with the RNZAF, NZ6218 (155069), has an interesting history. It was the last A-4F produced and, in addition to surviving a 30-year active operational life in three countries, it survived two aircraft accidents. In July 1969, while a USN asset assigned to VA-155, 155069 managed to tangle with some power lines. The pilot was able to land the aircraft safely, but it was extensively damaged. Both leading-edge slats and the nose gear door were torn from the airframe and the flaps, spoilers, both main landing gear

doors, and other sections of the wing and fuselage were heavily torn and scarred.

The damage was repaired and 155069 continued to fly operationally. In a post-repair flight, however, the test pilot reported the fuselage was "bent" and it was recommended that an alignment jig be used during the next major airframe rework. Subsequently, 155069 was transferred to VA-44 at NAS Cecil Field, Florida, and later sold to Australia before the fuselage could be straightened. When it was converted to an A-4G for transfer to the RAN in May 1971, the USN *Skyhawk* driver who performed the post-conversion test flight characterized 155069 – "bent" frame notwithstanding – as "...beautiful...a real hummer!" Then, in 1984, the aircraft went to the RNZAF where it suffered a second accident in 1985, aquaplaning on a wet runway and rolling over. Later, in testimony to the rugged durability of the *Skyhawk*, 155069 was repaired and returned to service.

In 1969, New Zealand contracted for purchase of 10 A-4F (re-designated A-4K) and four TA-4F (TA-4K) *Skyhawks* from the United States. The single seat "K" model modifications included an aft avionics package, a 14-foot drag chute, and new IFF equipment. The first A-4K/TA-4K flights were logged in late 1969 and delivery of the 14



TRAVELOGUE. The pilot of an initial version of the RNZAF A-4K *Skyhawk* takes in the scenery over Cook Strait with Wellington Harbor as background. New Zealand purchased 10 A-4K (A-4F) *Skyhawks* from the U.S. in 1969, and an additional eight (A-4G) from Australia in 1984. The avionics "hump," typical of the A-4F, was removed from Kiwi A-4Ks in a 1984-89 upgrade program. (McDonnell-Douglas photo from the collection of Harry Gann)



Skyhawks took place in 1970. The aircraft were transported from San Diego, California, to Auckland, New Zealand, on board the helicopter assault ship USS *Okinawa* (LPH-3). From there, the aircraft were individually towed overland to the RNZAF's base at Whenuapai in the northern outskirts of Auckland and subsequently flown to Ohakea base, about 90 miles NNE of Wellington. There, they were assigned to RNZAF 75 Squadron.

Meanwhile, RNZAF personnel underwent *Skyhawk* familiarization training with VA-44 at NAS Cecil Field, Florida, from July 1969 until April 1970. By coincidence, RNZAF pilots or maintenance personnel may have flown or worked on A-4F 155069 while at VA-44, but no one could have predicted that particular aircraft would become a New Zealand asset 14-15 years later, much less imagined that the bird would still be operational 27+ years later.

In 1984, New Zealand purchased an additional ten *Skyhawks* (eight A-4G and two TA-4G) from Australia after the latter country retired its aircraft carrier, HMAS *Melbourne*. Four of the aircraft purchased from Australia had seen prior active operational service, not only with the RAN but earlier in the U.S. Navy with VA-44, VA-55, VA-155, and VA-212.

Also in 1984, the future mission requirements of the RNZAF were evaluated and purchase of new aircraft was considered. However, a retro-fit program that would make the



TRAINERS – New Zealand purchased four new TA-4F (redesignated TA-4G) *Skyhawks* from the U.S. in 1969 and, later (1984), two more "used" TA-4Gs from Australia. NA6251 (BuNo 157914) is shown above flying past Yosemite National Park's scenic "Half Dome" during a pre-delivery test flight. (McDonnell-Douglas photo from the collection of Harry Gann)

Skyhawk comparable in capability to that of the General Dynamic F-16 *Fighting Falcon*, was found to be possible at one-sixteenth the cost of procuring an all new aircraft inventory. The five-year *Skyhawk* retro-fit program, completed in 1989, involved major modifications to the wing, including trailing edge spoilers; a complete re-wiring; installation of "glass" cockpits, HUDs (Head Up Displays), and HOTAS (Hands On Throttle And Stick) control systems; new acquisition-tracking radar and navigation systems; removal of the avionics "hump" and weapons systems improvements, including capability to carry the AIM-9L *Sidewinder*, the GBU-16 laser-guided bomb, and the *Maverick* air-to-surface missile.

Today, the RNZAF

Skyhawks are organized into two squadrons. The parent, 75 Squadron, is based at Ohakea north of Wellington, while a smaller 2 Squadron operates from the Royal Australian Naval Air Station at Nowra, New South Wales, 75 miles south of Sydney, the former home base of Australian *Skyhawks*. Ironically, under a bi-national agreement, the RNZAF *Skyhawks* of 2 Squadron provide training support for the Australia military.

As an interesting sidelight, the only hostile (non-training) use of the *Skyhawk* by the RNZAF occurred in March 1975 when a Taiwanese trawler was discovered fishing illegally in New Zealand territorial waters. The pilot flying NZ6201 fired 20mm cannon shots across the bow and the trawler got the message.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Otto Krueger

Good news! We're growing! In my first letter last fall, I stressed membership as the number one goal for the year, and asked current members to contact people they know whose names should be on Skyhawk Association's roster, but aren't. How many have done so isn't known, but something is working! Skyhawk Association added 147 new members in 1997, and in the period from September to December alone, 41 new names were added. Unfortunately, 20 failed to renew during the year. Thus, at year's end, there were 469 members in your Association. The trend line is up and we need to make it even more so.

With this Newsletter, you have received your new Skyhawk Association membership card. A big "Attaboy" goes to Director Jim Ritchie, who was responsible for the design and artwork for the card. Another Attaboy goes to Director Bud Southworth, our webmaster! Bud's on-going efforts-to continually improve the Skyhawk web site (www.skyhawk.org) are resulting in the site's increasing popularity. Averaging about 2,000 "hits" per month, the site has recorded over 8,400 visitors since August 28, 1997. It's not only an outstanding web site, but is a significant factor in attracting new members! If you haven't visited the web site, do so!

At the recent winter Skyhawk Association Board meeting in Dallas, several initiatives were adopted that should also positively impact membership, and I think they will be welcomed. One, a multi-year membership option of either one, three, or five years is now available and may ease the bother of annual renewals, and make it easier for those among us who sometimes forget little details.

One of the biggest and best sources of members comes, as it does for most organizations, from the names of people who were previous members, who may believe they are members but whose memberships have been suspended for non-payment of dues, or who may have inquired or been referred. I refer to those folks as our "Lost Sheep." All told, we have about 800 names in the Association data base "suspense" list. Starting with this Newsletter, names of several from the suspense list (including addresses and phone numbers, where available) will be published in each issue of the Newsletter. I'm asking that each Skyhawk member carefully comb the names for anyone they know and help entice them to join,

rejoin, or whatever. I'm asking every member to become a salesman for the Skyhawk Association. There is no profit for anyone, but you'll be doing a favor for somebody you know, and the benefit will be theirs!

It might surprise some to know that an increasing number of people are contacting the Skyhawk Association requesting help in finding an old squadron mate, asking for information about a Scooter Driver relative no longer living, or wanting assistance with some technical question such as "... what were the color of the parachutes in the A-4E...?", or "...what was the paint scheme for the inside of the speed brakes, and the undersides of the slats...?" Such questions usually engender a good number of interesting answers - some actually correct, and often good for a laugh. There have been some from overseas, even from Holland where A-4s were never operated. But the personal ones are taken very seriously and it is a great feeling to watch your Association go into action to help provide information that brings people together once again or may help flesh out the picture of what happened to someone. And many more questions are coming from young folks who are seeking answers to questions about the Skyhawk and the guys who flew it well before those youngsters were born! That's part of the fun and benefit of Skyhawk Association, and the more people there are, the better we can answer the questions or affect those situations.

In the immediate future, a new regional organization structure will come into being. Its purpose and function will be to help build a stronger Skyhawk Association through local and/or regional groupings. The Association thereby can be brought geographically closer to many members who may find it difficult to attend national meetings. Furthermore, it's hoped that this may increase not only the enjoyment of Skyhawk membership, but act to stimulate membership as well. I'll be asking for help, and naming Regional Vice Presidents in the very near future.

From the "get 'em young and bring 'em up right" department: Presently, in connection with each winging ceremony at VT-7 at NAS Meridian, Skyhawk Association "Student of the Month" plaques are awarded. In the future, all members of each VT- 7 graduating class will receive a complimentary one-year memberships in Skyhawk Association along with appropriate certificates attesting to their having flown the Skyhawk.

A reminder: The annual meeting will again be in Reno in September. Start planning now to join in the fun and camaraderie. For 1999 and beyond, we are exploring meeting sites that may bring your Association's annual meeting to a location near you. Stay tuned!

A-4s Forever

Otto



SKYHAWK TRIBUTE

That's the title of the painting (right) showing three Skyhawks in Napalm runs during the Vietnam War. The painting by noted aviation artist Roy Grinnell of Tucson, Arizona, was commissioned by Michigan "Skyhawk aficionado" businessmen, Rick Turner and Dennis Korenchuk. Turner heads a Jackson, Michigan, aviation risk management firm and Korenchuk, who resides in nearby Pinckney, is a custom home builder. Neither gentleman had the pleasure of flying or riding in the A-4, but both are "proud Skyhawk fans" (and members of the SA) and sponsored the project in order to "honor of the brave men who did."



In two marathon signature sessions, one on 15 November in San Diego and another on 6 December in Washington, DC, the lithographs were personally autographed by 22 former Skyhawk drivers, most of who are Skyhawk Association members. The lithographs, which sell for \$250 each, are being displayed at and

marketed by three aviation art outlets – Military Air Gallery in Mt. Pleasant, MI, Aces High in Gettysburg, PA, and Stenberg Aviation Art in Hartford, CT. The Skyhawk Association Board of Directors has recommended to the Turner-Korenchuk team that the after-cost proceeds from sales of the lithos be donated in equal shares to the Tailhook Educational Foundation, the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, and the Naval History Foundation.

Present at the November west coast signing (top photo at left, standing L to R) were Harry Gann (Skyhawk photographer-chronicler and Honorary Naval Aviator #24), Pete Conrad; T.R. Swartz; Jay Hubbard; Wynn Foster; Bob Rahn (#1 Skyhawk driver), Zeke Cormier; and Jack Lousma. Kneeling are painting sponsors Dennis Korenchuk (L) and Rick Turner.

At the follow-on signing party held in December (bottom photo, L to R) were Paul Gallanti, Rich Hearney, Stan Arthur, Wes MacDonald, Jim Holloway, Tom Miller, Jack Woodul, Otto Krueger, and Al Crebo. Kneeling are Tony Less and Dave "Whizzer" White. Litho signers not pictured were Everett Alvarez, Bob Lutz, and Congressman Randy Cunningham.





LABOR OF LOVE

In 1995, CDR Joseph Kleefisch, then Skipper of VFA-25 at NAS Lemoore, was killed in a New Mexico crash of his FA-18 *Hornet*. His Executive Officer, CDR Rodger Welch, assumed command of the squadron and, shortly thereafter, searched for a project that would honor the memory of the former VFA-25 Skipper.

Prior to his assignment as CO of VFA-25, CDR Kleefisch had logged more than 1,000 *Skyhawk* hours while assigned to VFA-127 flying in the "adversary" role. CDR Welch knew of the "A-4 on a stick" on display in Hickey Park in the nearby city of Lemoore, California. In earlier days, the Hickey Park *Skyhawk* had been used to display public recognition of the instructor pilot of the year at the NAS Lemoore "RAG" training squadron when it flew the *Skyhawk*. That use had been abandoned, however, and upkeep of the display had been neglected. CDR Welch discussed the matter with CDR Carlton Simmons, the CO of VFA-125, the present Lemoore training squadron, and proposed that the Hickey Park *Skyhawk* be refurbished in a "good neighbor" gesture and the bird be dedicated as a memorial to Kleefisch. Simmons, who earlier had been Kleefisch's CO in VFA-25, endorsed the idea and the project was subsequently approved by the Lemoore City Council and the California State Parks Commission.

All materials and labor for the refurbishment project were donated by squadron personnel at no cost to the government. The Hickey Park *Skyhawk* restoration project was completed in May 1996 and, at a VFA-25 picnic prior to an up-coming WestPac deployment, the aircraft memorial was dedicated. In attendance at the dedication were CDR Kleefisch's widow, Nancy, and numerous Navy and civilian dignitaries from the air station and the city. Subsequently, CDR Barry Brocato, Welch's successor as Skipper of VFA-25, established a program of annual inspection and upkeep to ensure the dignity of the appearance of the display and, today, Hickey Park in city of Lemoore, California, boasts an attractive A-4-on-a-stick display, dedicated to a former *Skyhawk* driver and proudly bearing VFA-25 "Fist of the Fleet" markings.



VOLUNTEER WORKERS from VFA-25, the "Fist of the Fleet," refurbished the A4D-1/A-4A on display in Lemoore, California's Hickey Park. The Bureau Number of the Hickey Park Skyhawk was not recorded and has not been discovered. (Photos courtesy of VFA-25 PAO.)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Skyhawk Association Board of Directors met at the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport Hyatt Regency Hotel on Saturday, 10 January 1998. Actions taken at the Board meeting included: ● Adoption of a \$15,080 budget for 1998; ● Establishment of one, three, and five year dues payment options; ● Issuance of complementary one-year Skyhawk Association memberships to graduates of Navy flight training at NAS Meridian's VT-7 (the sole remaining Skyhawk squadron in the USN); ● Approval of planning factors for the 1998 AOM in Reno (Sparks), Nevada (details TBA in Spring and Summer newsletters); ● Establishment of a committee to investigate and study location, timing, affordability, etc. of future AOMs (1999 and beyond); ● Establishment of up to five Regional Vice Presidents for Membership; and ● Recommendation that the profit proceeds from sales of the "Skyhawk Tribute" lithographs (see page 4) be donated in equal shares to the Tailhook Educational Foundation, the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, and the Naval History Foundation.



BITS AND PIECES

DATABASE DATA. Among other entries, the Skyhawk Association membership data base includes fields reserved for recording your A-4 hours and traps, A-4 squadrons served, and e-mail address. If you haven't already reported your data, or are not sure, please feel free to do so. Send data to Captain Hook by e-mail (skyhawkasn@aol.com), snail-mail (Skyhawk Association, P.O. Box 182166, Coronado, CA 92178-2166), or telephone (619-435-2335).

HAVE YOU VISITED THE SKYHAWK WEB SITE (www.skyhawk.org) **LATELY?** Association Board member Bud Southworth of Mt. Vernon, WA, has done an outstanding job of creating and maintaining the Association web site. The site contains loads of information about the *Skyhawk*, our organization, and people associated therewith, and is updated regularly. The web site has been a good advertisement to the world of our existence and has resulted in lots of *Skyhawk* queries and requests for membership information from all corners of the globe – Argentina, Australia, Israel, Kuwait, New Zealand, and Singapore, as well as the U.S. One of the SA web site features is the histories of Navy and Marine Corps squadrons that flew the *Skyhawk*. Bud is looking for color computer graphics of squadron patches to illustrate the squadron history pages. Graphics should be in *.JPG format, with minimum dimensions of 200x200 pixels. If you have a scanner, or access to one, zap your squadron patch into *.JPG format and e-mail the file to Bud (Skyhawk@cnw.com). No access to a scanner? Or, maybe the patch is sewed on a jacket that won't quite fit the scanner bed? No problem. Just snail-mail a color photo of the patch to Skyhawk Association, P.O. Box 182166, Coronado, CA 92178-2166 and we'll scan it and ensure its forwarded to Bud. If you desire, we'll return the photo to you. Please ensure a *squadron designation and your name* accompany the *.JPGs and/or photos.

A-7 FOUNDATION – Its hard to keep a good idea down. An A-7 Foundation, patterned after the Skyhawk Association, has been formed to interest A-7 *Corsair II* drivers and enthusiasts. Anyone interested in learning more about the A-7 Foundation should contact Mat "Irish" Garretson in Paso Robles, Calif., (805) 239-1205 (home) or (805) 238-9607 (work), or by e-mail (MrViognier@aol.com).

MAIL BUOY. The following communique was received from retired Royal Australian Navy Commander Jim Firth of Loftus, New South Wales: "I am delighted to become a member of the Skyhawk Association. In late 1967, as one of the few junior RAN Observers (Naval Flight Officers) with jet experience (being about the last of the *Sea Venom* night fighter RIOs), I was posted to the advance party of 805 Squadron, which was to be formed in 1968 (with) A-4s. As the Staff Officer, my duties involved the routine, and not so routine, administrative support activities in the formation of a new squadron. During my twelve months or so in the squadron, I flew around 50 hours in the TA-4G, 'penciling' during test flights, navigation training missions, and so on. It really was a lovely little aircraft. My greatest claim to fame involving the A-4: I was the first RAN non-pilot to go transonic in an RAN aircraft, with John DaCosta at the controls, in a TA-4G over NAS Nowra in January 1968."

A-4B PROJECT. Skyhawk Association member Frank Wright of Naperville, IL, has an on-going "labor of love" project to restore either of two A-4Bs to flying status for representation of the Vietnam era at air shows. Anyone interested in helping is invited to contact Frank by e-mail (afourb@aol.com), by calling (630) 904-1905 (voice, fax) or (815) 532-6210 (pager, voice mail), or by snail-mail at 4763 Clearwater Lane, Naperville, IL. 60564-5389.

REQUEST. The Fred Weisbrod Museum in Pueblo, Colorado has an A4D-2 (BuNo 147702) on display and is searching for anyone who may have flown that bird and might be able to contribute to the museum's oral history program. Any SA member who can help is invited to contact Jason Unwin by e-mail (pwrr59f@prodigy.com), by snail-mail c/o Pueblo Historical Aircraft Society, 31001 Magnuson Ave., Pueblo, CO 81001, or by telephone (719) 948-9219.

AND, NOW, FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. The Scooter driver who thinks he has everything may be interested in a recent discovery – a three-dimension *stained glass* model of the A-4. Details are available through snail-mail correspondence to Stellar Images, 888 Sand Pines Crescent, Comox, BC, Canada V9M 3V2; or check out the "Fighters" section of Stellar's web site (<http://mars.ark.com/~stellar/>).

UNIQUE SKYHAWK VARIANT



Only four EA-4Fs, specially equipped for use in an aggressor ECM role, saw service in the USN. Operated by VAQ-33 out of NAS Key West from 1970 to 1988, the "Firebird" Skyhawks were used to simulate Soviet cruise missiles in training on both east and west coasts. Three TA-4Fs – 152869, 153481 (shown at left taking off from NAS Roosevelt Roads, PR), and 154655 – were converted to EA configuration in 1970 and the fourth, 152852, was converted in 1973. Two of the EA-4Fs were lost in mishaps. BuNo 152869 crashed near Grand Junction, Colorado, in April 1980 after an oil system failure. The pilot, LT Kirk Putnam, ejected successfully. Five years later, BuNo 154655 was lost due to engine failure near NAS North Island, California. The pilot, LT Matt

Hawley, was killed but the NFO, LT Kathy Cullen, was recovered and is believed to have been the first female to eject successfully from a Navy jet. After their VAQ-33 tour, EA-4F BuNos 152852 and 153481 finished their active duty with VC-8 and VC-10, respectively. Both of the latter aircraft were retired from the Navy inventory in October 1990. (Photo and article data by Rick Morgan)

MEMBERSHIP CARD & DUES STUFF. Your Skyhawk Association membership card is enclosed with this newsletter. To the left of your name on the card is your member number. For bragging rights, membership #0001 is assigned to M. David "Whizzer" White, the Skyhawk Association founder, but your member numbers was assigned arbitrarily and represents only an approximate order of membership occurrence. As a reminder, to the right of your name on the membership card is your membership anniversary and "dues-due" month. Like the Scooter we all love, your membership card is good for a l-o-n-g time (as long as your dues are paid, of course) and will serve as your ID for entry at various Association activities. You may want to seal it in plastic. Also, please check the mailing label on this newsletter. The numbers to the right of your name on the label are the month and year through which your dues are currently paid. (And, to keep the dues thing friendly, we'll snail-mail you a reminder post card about a month prior to your dues-due date.) Skyhawk Association annual dues are \$20. If you don't want to be bothered with annual renewal, you may elect a multiple year payment option from two (\$40) to five years (\$100).

LOST SHEEP

Our attempts to correspond with some former members of the Skyhawk Association have resulted in "Address unknown" or "Forwarding order expired" or a similar, frustrating rejections by the Postal Service. If any of the following Scooter types are on your bud list and you have a current snail-mail or e-mail address, please make contact and sweet-talk him into re-joining our happy throng. Or, if you prefer, relay the info to Captain Hook (e-mail: skyhawkasn@aol.com; snail-mail: Skyhawk Association, P.O. Box 182155, Coronado, CA 92178-2166; or telephone: 619-435-2335) and appropriate re-up propaganda will be dispatched. On the "Lost Sheep" list are:

Jim Abbott
Carl Bruntlett
Dick Campbell
Norm Campbell
Randy Clark
Roger M. Clark

Jim Cooper
Mike Cronin
Max Dozier
Maurice L. Edwards
Harold C. Farley

J. Thomas Garner
Lloyd Melvie
George Proudfoot
Van Temple
Richard D. Wagner

WELCOME ABOARD! (Roster additions, 10 October 1997 through 17 January 1998)

Scott R. Anderson	4524 Highway 39 N. #A-17	Meridian	MS	39301-1043
Stan Arthur	9708 Chilcott Manor Way	Vienna	VA	22181-5400
Charles Blum	3738 Green Hollow Dr.	Grand Prairie	TX	75052-6717
Charles F. Carlon	4510 SE 282nd	Gresham	OR	97080-9100
Michael C. Cater	3223 Purer Road	Escondido	CA	92029-7251
Douglas L. Clarke	25812 - 76th Ave. SW	Vashon	WA	98070-8520
Al Crebo	8254 W. 600 N.	Sharpsville	IN	46068-9395
J.R. Davis	4804 Renoyo Way	San Diego	CA	92124-2454
Raymond E. Demming	1781 Waterbury Lane	Orange Park	FL	32073-7748
Ray J. Dermody	328 E. 239th Street	Bronx, New York	NY	10470-1807
Barry L. Dougherty	5 Connemara Court	St. Peters	MO	63376-2343
Roy Grinnell	1615 E. Fort Lowell, #2A	Tucson	AZ	85719-2320
R.D. Hearney	653 Killary Downs	St. Charles	MO	63304-0516
Jim Hooper	2 St. Mary's Cottage, North Lane	Buriton, Hampshire	ENG	GU31 5RS
William R. Kistler	58 Stonewood Place	Catasauqua	PA	18032-1016
Moshe Lehav	c/o 524 N. Palm Drive	Beverly Hills	CA	90210-3413
Robert A. Lutz	3966 Pleasant Lake Rd	Ann Arbor	MI	48103-9628
Walter R. Petersen	1500 E. Gonzales Street	Pensacola	FL	32501-3449
Edward Poplawski	47983 Goldridge Lane	Macomb Township	MI	48044-2422
Steven E. Richmond	P.O. Box 412	West Union	OH	45693-0412
Alfred J. Salkovics	615 Black Ridge Lane	Nipomo	CA	93444-9329
J. C. Smith	1249 Dewing Lane	Walnut Creek	CA	94595-1413
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