

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU'D SEEN IT ALL



THE VERSATILE SKYHAWK WAS SO POPULAR that variations on the theme were almost endless. In the late 1970s, an Advanced Design Group at Douglas Aircraft Company conducted a study aimed at prolonged life for the *Skyhawk* in a dual attack-fighter role. In addition to the obvious visual features in the above sketch – stretched fuselage, canard winglets for greater stability, and wing-tip missile mounts, the A-4X was envisioned as being equipped with a turbo-fan engine and state-of-the-art avionics and weapons systems. Coming along at the time of the corporate merger of the McDonnell and Douglas Aircraft Companies, however, the A-4X project was in competition with the FA-18 *Hornet* and did not progress beyond the concept stage. (*Sketch from the Harry Gann Collection*)

The U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Army considered procurement of the *Skyhawk* but eventually elected to channel available funding toward other equipment. Elsewhere outside the Soviet bloc, however, numerous free world nations seriously consider the "Bantam Bomber" as a prime candidate for their military aviation arsenals. The *Skyhawk* has seen (or is still in) service with the armed forces of Argentina, Australia, Indonesia, Israel, Kuwait, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore; and, it received serious consideration from Denmark, Greece, India, Lebanon, Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland. Recently, Brazil boarded the *Skyhawk* band wagon with the purchase of the A-4 assets of the Kuwaiti Air Force (see separate article).

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

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I'm constantly being surprised by A-4 people who have never heard of *Skyhawk Association*! It's hard to believe, isn't it? But regrettably true, however, and simply reinforces the need for everyone to spread the word and bring new people on board. Similarly, we continue to hear from folks in the ex-enlisted community who have the impression that the organization is just for pilots and officers. Not so, we have many enlisted guys, and we want more. There aren't any rates or ranks in *Skyhawk Association*.

While on the subject of members, our 1998 goal is 600 members, and it's attainable! The good news is we're at 488 now, and growing, albeit more slowly than hoped for. The bad news is that we seem to lose about one name for every two new ones. Lapses from overlooked dues are often the problem. After sixty days unpaid beyond the date shown on our membership cards, Captain Hook moves the name to his suspense file and we have lost a member. And there are a lot of names in suspense!

To make it easier, and to help avoid losing folks through lapses in memory, the Board approved a multi-year membership option. Why not take advantage of it? Forget writing checks for awhile, and sleep well knowing your dues are paid in advance.

A couple of other admin notes. We will be electing three people to the Board of Directors in September. The terms of Foster, White and Ritchie expire this year, and a nominating committee will be appointed to present a slate of nominees. More on this in the summer newsletter. And while on the topic of communications, which we were not, for all those of you who are "wired," please send your e-mail address, if you have one, to Captain Hook (skyhawkasn@aol.com). We need to include it in the roster so we can do a better job of talking to one another.

September's meeting in Reno ought to be a dandy! This year's arrangements, being chaired by Puresome, and the luncheon program being generated by Whizzer White, make it one you won't want to miss.

We've all paid honor to the guys who were the unlucky ones, our POWs, and rightly so. Not as well hailed, however, are the people who helped a lot of others from becoming POWs! The helo drivers, the para-rescue folks, the Jolly Greens . . . these are the ones we are planning to recognize. And they will be putting on the program at the Friday luncheon. It will be a great one, count on it!

Now for some other thoughts. As I pondered what to write for this portion of the Newsletter, I was struck by a recent convergence of several things. They are the sort of items and events that, for me, make our Association a very personal one, and I'm sure do so for many of you as well.

The first, a treasured, but aging, photo; good enough to be picked up and published years ago by a number of magazines and publications, and long hanging on my wall. It shows a flight of *Skyhawks* from VA-106, directly over Shangri-La in the eastern Med in early 1960. I happened to be leading the flight, which included a great chap – Jack Peace – whose name can today be found on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC.

The second, a log book entry, brought to light during a bit of unrelated research, recalled a mission in April 1966, over North Vietnam when I was joined by "Whizzer" White and a bunch of other great Scooter drivers on a successful mission.

And the third, preparing letters of congratulation to the most recent grads from VT-7. The letters accompany certificates for our Association program of complimentary, one-year memberships in the *Skyhawk Association* – on the occasion of pinning on their golden wings . . . and also on being privileged to have become Scooter Drivers in the process.

The span of these events in time and distance encompasses a lot of miles and years. Faces have changed, the scenarios are different. But the enduring tie that binds these unrelated "items" from distant past to immediate present is the *Skyhawk*. Nearly three generations of Naval and Marine aviators, friends from overseas, the young and the not-so-young, can pause, remember, and think of a panoply of events – each personally experienced – which have one primary thing as their unifying factor, our little Scooter, the *Skyhawk*!

A-4s Forever!

Otto



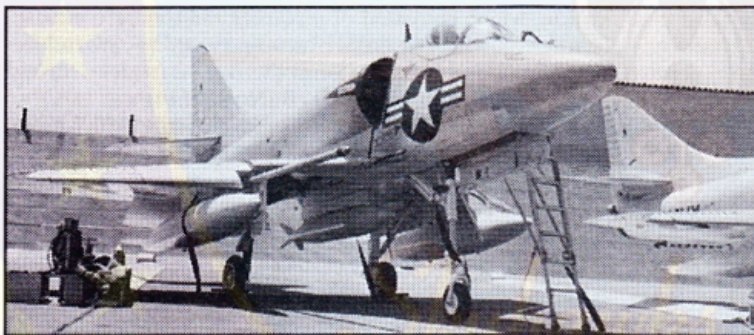
ARMY VARIANT

Two A4D-2Ns, borrowed from the Navy, were modified by DAC in 1961 for testing in operations under unimproved, forward area landing field conditions. Modifications for the Army test included dual wheels on beefed-up main mounts, heavier wing structures to house the larger landing gear, and "borrowed" A-3 *Skywarrior* drag chutes. In tests conducted near Pensacola, Florida, the versatile *Skyhawk* "won" the landing and take-off competition against the Italian Fiat G-91 (center in photo) and the Northrop N-156 (predecessor of the F-5). However, the Army decided to use available funding for purchase of helicopters rather than fixed wing aircraft.



BLUE ANGEL VARIANT

One hundred forty-six A-4F *Skyhawks* were manufactured, 100 of which were equipped with the 11,200-lb. thrust Pratt-Whitney J52-P-408 engine. Several of the F models were specially configured for use by the *Blue Angels*, who flew the bird in their 1974-1987 seasons. Modifications for the Blues included bolted-shut wing slats, removal of avionics equipment and outboard bomb racks, and addition of smoke systems and drag chutes. Also peculiar to the Blues A-4s were carry-along, folding boarding ladders that were transported in a special tubes (pointed projection on the leading edge of the port wing).



FUEL PROBE VARIANT

The A4D-1 design didn't provide for aerial fueling, so DAC experimented by installing a fueling probe on the leading edge of the starboard wing of BuNo 137814, the second production model *Skyhawk* (top photo, left). Although the wing-mounted fueling probe was intentionally made extra long, the location proved unwieldy (bottom photo) because the tip of the probe was outside of the peripheral vision of the pilot.

For the A4D-2 and subsequent models, the fueling probe was mounted on the starboard side of the fuselage, with the probe tip within the pilot's field of vision. On the F and M models, the forward end of the fuel probe was angled outboard for greater clearance from sensors installed in the aircraft nose section.

(Photos from the Harry Gann Collection)



BRAZIL BUYS KUWAITI SKYHAWKS

With the Boeing company (formerly McDonnell-Douglas) acting as intermediary, the government of Brazil recently contracted to purchase 23 surplus A-4KU *Skyhawks* from Kuwaiti. The *Skyhawks*, to be used by the Brazilian Navy from the deck of that country's only aircraft carrier, *Minas Gerais* (A-11), were selected because of low aircraft flight time, excellent physical condition, and a favorable price tag.

Minas Gerais, the former HMS *Vengeance*, a Royal Navy *Colossus* class CV, was purchased from Great Britain in 1956. Apparent political maneuvering by the Brazilian Air Force leadership, however, was successful in limiting Navy carrier operations to helicopters only. In 1961, the Air Force convinced the government to purchase 16 S-2E *Trackers* from the United States for use in anti-submarine operations. The intent was that the S-2s, flown by Air Force aviators, would operate from *Minas Gerais*. But it was then the Brazilian Navy's turn at political foot-dragging and, for various reasons over the next four years, the Navy denied use of its carrier for S-2 operations. By 1965 intra-service politics had developed a system whereby Air Force pilots were permitted to fly the S-2s from *Minas Gerais*, under Navy supervision. Tense at first, the relationship between the two services eventually improved, at least at the working level, and *Minas Gerais* was a successful contributor to joint South Atlantic operations with the USN and other allied nations. Between 1979 and 1985, the Brazilian Navy leadership developed an updated concept of naval operations, centered around control of a limited ocean area and fleet defense.

The new concept came to fruition in 1997 when the aging Air Force S-2 *Trackers* were retired from service and the Navy was authorized to create its own fixed-wing air arm. A search was begun for aircraft suitable for operation from the 20,000 ton aircraft carrier and the choice soon narrowed down to the British *Sea Harrier* or the venerable old *Skyhawk*. The latter aircraft was selected and a \$70 million contract was negotiated with the Kuwaiti government for the purchase of 23 *Skyhawks* (20 A-4KU and three TA-4KU). There were a few in Brazil who were critical of the purchase of "obsolete" aircraft, but the nay-sayer arguments were muted by several successful counter points: The *Skyhawk* was the ultimate in simplicity in training, operation, and maintenance; it had an uncontested history of successful performance; and it was still in use in several countries around the world, including Argentina, Brazil's immediate neighbor to the south. Further, although dated, the KU variants were essentially A-4Ms, the most recent generation of *Skyhawks*, and were in an excellent state of preservation. And, finally, the *Skyhawk* purchase would provide a cost-effective means of preparing the Brazilian Navy air arm for an eventual transition to a newer generation of jet aircraft.

Boeing has been selected to transport the aircraft to Brazil and delivery is targeted for mid-1998. Some initial pilot training is presently being conducted in a joint effort with the Argentine Air Force, which is still operates the A-4P (modified A-4B) and is in the process of acquiring additional *Skyhawks* (see box). There is a possibility that some follow-on training of Brazilian pilots will be conducted under contract by the U.S. Navy.

(Sources: Brazilian newspaper "Folha de Sao Paulo" and magazine "Veja," via Roberto Moraes; Skyhawk Association member Barry Dougherty, Boeing Corp.)

ARGENTINE HAWKS

Under a \$200 million contract signed in 1994, Lockheed Martin Aircraft Service Company (LMAS) is modifying and refurbishing the first 18 of 36 A-4M *Skyhawks* for service in a fighter-attack role with the Argentine Air Force. The first of the birds, re-designated A-4AR and renamed "*Fighting Hawk*," flew in mid-July 1997. Conversion work at the LMAS Ontario, California, facility was scheduled for winding down at the end of 1997, with follow-on flight testing being conducted at the LMAS facility at Palmdale, California, prior to delivery to Argentina.

The A-4AR *Fighting Hawk* project includes new wiring, engine refurbishment, and upgraded avionics and radar. The contract also provides for pilot and mechanic maintenance and inspections training, spare parts production, and technical documentation. The second batch of 18 *Fighting Hawks* will be reworked at and placed in service from a new facility operated by LMAS in Cordoba, Argentina, 400 miles northwest of Buenos Aires.



MISCELLANY

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUEST: Dues checks in our all-volunteer Skyhawk Association are mailed to and processed first by the Association Secretary (Captain Hook in California), who maintains the database. Thence, they are forwarded in bunches to the Treasurer (Boom Powell in Virginia), who keeps the books and maintains the bank account. Boom is one of those individuals who still (shudder) *works* for a living, flying big, multi-fan equipment hither and yon about the world. Frequently he's away from home base and there may be occasional delays in depositing dues checks. No major problems as yet but, if you're concerned about a check that hasn't cleared, please query Captain Hook by telephone (619-435-2335) or e-mail (skyhawkasn@aol.com) before stopping payment.

LONGEVITY: Only one aircraft, the C-130 *Hercules*, which is still in production, tops the active duty tenure of the *Skyhawk*. The A-4 first flew in June 1954 and joined the fleet in September 1956. Today, the *Skyhawk* has been on active duty around the world for more than 41 years. It is still actively utilized in the USN and by the armed forces of six other countries, piloted mostly by "youngsters" who weren't even born when the *Skyhawk* began flying. The USN *Skyhawk* presence is at VT-7 NAS Meridian, MS, where the TA-4J is still employed in the training of Student Naval Aviators (aka SNAs or Studs). If present guesstimates hold true, the venerable *Skyhawk* will still be around to hit its 46 year active duty mark in the USN service in the year 2002.

AND, SPEAKING OF STUDENT NAVAL AVIATORS: The Skyhawk Association has a program of representation at each VT-7 "winging" ceremony at NAS Meridian – to present our complimentary, one-year Association memberships to each new Naval/Marine Corps Aviator, and Student of the Month awards. The wingings occur every couple of months (depending on the deck availabilities for carquals) and, so far, all Skyhawk Association members who have attended say it's an up-beat experience that re-charges the battery and starts the old juices flowing again. Members who have the time and inclination to participate in the program should make their druthers known to Boom Powell (Tel: 757-523-6648; Fax: 757-523-9139; or E-mail: RRBoom@compuserve.com;).

WRITING RESEARCH: SA member Mike O'Connor of Wausau, WI, doing research on an Alfa Strike conducted on 1 May 1967 against Kep, Nvn, is anxious to make contact with Skyhawk drivers of VA-76 and VA-212 during the 1967 Bonnie Dick cruise who may have participated in or have knowledge of that event. Particularly, he'd like to contact John Donis, Terry Reider, and John Kirkpatrick. Anyone who can help is invited to contact Mike at 702 S. Fifth Ave., Wausau, WI, 54401; Tel: 715-848-0160.

AN A-4C WITH FIVE WING STATIONS? Conventional wisdom suggests a "No way, not the Charlie" response. But our trivia expert discovered that there was one such bird – A-4C BuNo 145063. Douglas Aircraft Company modified the aircraft with five wing stations in early 1960 for use as a test vehicle for the subsequent A-4E/A-4F configurations.

PARTS & PIECES: In October of 1996, McDonnell Douglas licensed two companies, Derco Aerospace, Inc. of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Kitco, Inc. of Springville, Utah, to provide spare parts to users around the world still operating the A-4 *Skyhawk*. Complete sets of drawings and other manufacturing process data were provided to those companies and, in effect, the licensing replaced McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) as the source for many *Skyhawk* components.

PARABLE: "Son," said the father, "never ask a man if he flew the *Skyhawk*. If he did, he'll tell you without your asking and, if he didn't, why embarrass him?"



SINGAPORE MODEL "T" VARIANT

In 1972, the Republic of Singapore purchased 47 refurbished *Skyhawks* (40 A-4B, 7 TA-4) from the U.S. The aircraft were designated A-4S and TA-4S. The "T" version of the RSAF Skyhawk was unique in that, rather than the single "clam shell" canopy typical of other TA-4 models, each TA-4S cockpit had a separate standard canopy. The dual canopy configuration, allowing canopy interchangeability between models, was primarily a cost-saving option. In the 1980s, the RSAF conducted a *Skyhawk* service life extension program. The 8,400-lb-thrust J65 engines were replaced with 11,000lb-thrust F404-GE-100D turbofans. Other upgrades included modified engine air intakes; new structural mounts to accommodate the F404 engines; installation of new refrigeration, hydraulic pumps, air turbine starters, and oil coolers; new sensors, cockpit instrumentation, and state-of-the-art avionics; engine and environmental control systems; higher-output electrical generators; and improved air-to-air and air-to-ground ordnance carrying and control capability. The upgraded RSAF A-4s, re-designated A-4SU "Super Skyhawks," became operational in 1988. The TA-4SU pictured above was on display at the at "Aerospace Asia '98," held at Changi Exhibition Centre, near Singapore International Airport, 24 February-1 March 1998. (Photo courtesy Mike Yeo, Unofficial RSAF Homepage)



LOST SHEEP

The following individuals, former members all, have drifted away from the Association nest. You can help. If you recognize the names and know the whereabouts of any on the list who are old buds, former squadron mates, or Skyhawk community acquaintances, give them a jingle or drop them a line to con them into rejoining our group. Or, if you prefer, provide the locator info to us (see address, back page) and we'll do the re-enlistment propaganda number on them.

Rob Caceres
Allen Carter
Larry Comstock
Roy L. Crane
Robert Crippen
Michael Crowder
Larry E. Decker
Larry H. Derby
Roy J. Edwards

Norio Endo
Michael H Erskine
Fred P. Euler
George I. Felt, Jr.
Robert B. Fuller
Chuck George
Richard Gomes
Gary P. Grise
Jay A. Halstead

Robert L. Harbin
Albert G. Harrison
Ervin Heald
Jerry M. Hendricks
Charles W. Henry
Keith Humphrey
John Hunt
D. W. Jewell
Phillip E. Johnson

James W. Johnson
Tim Keuvelaar
Robert R. King, Jr.
Jerry Kirk
Robert G. Kraatz
Ron Lalli
Alfred C. Larson
Robert N. Lawrence
Jason Leaver

SKYHAWK MEMBERS: KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF OTHER FORMER or PRESENT SCOOTER TYPES? (Drivers or workers – prospective members all.) Feel free to duplicate this page and pass it along. Or, if you're the minimum work load sort of person, please write their NAMES AND ADDRESSES (or full names and cities of residence) on a piece of foolscap and fire it off to us at the below snail mail address, or by E-Mail (skyhawkasn@aol.com), and we'll do the recruiting number.

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____ Phone () _____
E-mail Address _____ Nickname/Callsign _____
A-4 Hours _____ A-4 Traps _____ A-4 Squadrons Served _____
Remarks, Sea Stories, Sierra Hotel Accomplishments (or other myths) _____

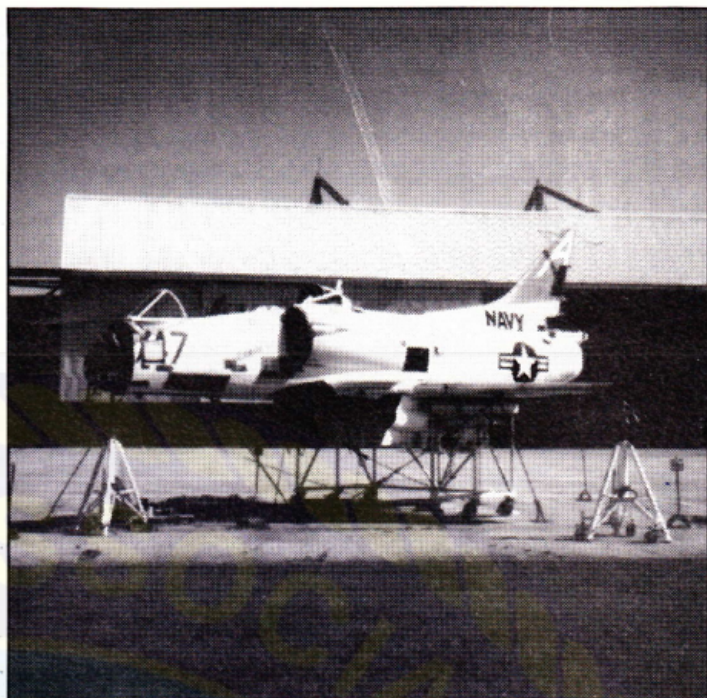
SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION DUES ARE \$20.00 PER CALENDAR YEAR. PLEASE MAIL THIS COMPLETED APPLICATION, ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK FOR FIRST YEAR DUES, TO

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 182166
Coronado, CA 92178-2166

The Skyhawk Association is. . .
... a fraternal, non-political, all-volunteer membership organization composed of (1) those who have flown the venerable A-4 *Skyhawk*, (2) those who wish they'd flown that bird, and (3) those who just like the idea of being identified with an organization built around admiration for the greatest little attack aircraft ever produced. The purpose of the Association is FUN and CAMARADERIE, and the perpetuation of the *Skyhawk* history, legend, and tradition. Your application and dues check will place your name on the mailing list for receipt of the quarterly SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER (articles, photos, announcements, Sierra Hotel tales and accomplishments, etc.), a current MEMBERSHIP ROSTER, discount bar and sea story privileges at our ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING-REUNION, an A-4 BUMPER STICKER, a classy MEMBERSHIP CARD, and whatever other goodies seem important from time to time. Association membership helps support the Skyhawk Association web site (www.skyhawk.org) and provides funding for other Skyhawk projects and activities, such as our Student Naval Aviator awards program at Training Squadron Seven (VT-7), NAS Meridian, MS, the only remaining *Skyhawk* squadron in the U.S. Navy.

GOOD TO THE LAST DROP

Not exactly a PR officer's idea of a dream static display, but still useful. This "Hangar Queen" was parked outside the Navy Training Squadron Seven (VT-7) at NAS Meridian, MS in October 1997. VT-7 flies the TA-4J and will be pumping out highly motivated, *Skyhawk*-trained Naval Aviators until after the turn of the century. It's the last remaining, full-blown *Skyhawk* squadron in the USN. Faced with the TA-4J being out of production, budget constraints, and *Skyhawk* spare parts an expensive commodity in the supply pipeline, innovation was the name of the maintenance game. When this "J" bird was retired from active duty, instead of being shipped off to the Arizona bone-yard it was retained on board as a "spare parts bin" and had been almost picked clean in order to keep other *Skyhawk* trainers up and operational. (Photo by Capt. Hook)



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