

AOM set for Reno Sept. 5-8

CNATRA to be guest speaker at Friday luncheon

The Skyhawk Association's AOM (Annual Organizational Meeting) will be held in conjunction with the Tailhook convention at John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel in Sparks (Reno), Nevada, September 5-8, 2002.

RADM John E. Boyington, Jr., USN, Chief of Naval Air Training, and Commander, Navy Region South, will be the guest speaker at the Association's annual membership meeting and luncheon on Friday, September 6.

A native of Pensacola, Fla, RADM. Boyington began his military career as an Army warrant officer flying helicopter gunships in Vietnam. He was commissioned via the Navy's Aviation Officer Candidate School and received his "Wings of Gold" in December 1973.

He earned a Bachelor degree at the University of West Florida, Master of Science in Aeronautical Engineering at Naval Post Graduate School, and a Master of Science in National Resource Management from the Industrial

College of the Armed Forces. He is a graduate of the Defense Systems Management College, Naval Test Pilot School, member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and a designated Acquisition Professional.

RADM Boyington has flown more than 600 armed combat missions in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, and Kosovo. He is rated as a Navy Jet, Helicopter, and Prop Aviator and has 8,000 flight hours in more than 70 types of aircraft.

In October 2000, he assumed command as Chief of Naval Air Training and Commander, Navy Region South.

He and his wife Susan Hice of Pensacola, have a son, a daughter, and one granddaughter.

Advance reservations are required for the luncheon and can be made by sending \$30 per person to: Skyhawk Association, 1482 Corn Crib Ct., Stone Mountain, GA 30088.

The Association will have a booth on the Tailhook exhibit concourse and a Ready Room during the four day convention.

Volunteers are needed to man the exhibit booth and Ready Room. Contact Jack Woodul at puresome@attbi.com about the booth, and Ed Jobin for the Ready Room at Ed.Jobin@goodrich.com

Effort to save Kiwi Skyhawks defeated

Appeal of High Court decision dismissed

The campaign to save the RNZAF Skyhawk squadrons ended on February 25th when a Court of Appeals dismissed the case.

The Save Our Squadrons campaign appealed a High Court ruling that said Defense Minister Mark Burton's decision last May to dismantle the Air Force combat squadrons did not violate the constitution or the 1990 Defense Act.

SOS convener and Auckland attorney Clive Bradbury said it had run out of options. "It's the end of the road. We'll just have to live with it. We tried our very best."

Justice Andrew Tipping said the High Court was correct to dismiss the case and it was in the public interest to end the litigation. He also said SOS had no chance of winning its case.

Bradbury said the group still had some of the \$208,000 it had raised, and



would broaden its effort to fight the Government's sweeping changes to defense policy.

He denied allegations that the campaign received financing from opposition political parties or that they received any large contributions from any organization or individual.

"We're not political. We have a committed group of supporters."

Donations of about \$200 a day were still being received from the more than 4,000 people on the group's database.

Mr Bradbury said he was the largest single contributor, having given slightly less than \$30,000.

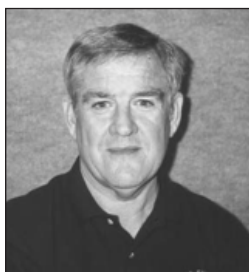
He said he spent so much of his own money because the Government's decision had left New Zealand without contingency plans.

"There's a real need for it ... to make sure this sort of thing never happens again. It's just shortsighted ... a terrible tragedy."

Bradbury said it was important that New Zealanders were given more information about defense.

The Appeals Court decision can be read in its entirety at the SOS web site at: www.soscampaign.co.nz and articles and editorials on the situation can be found in the archives at: www.nzherald.co.nz -Ed.





On the 1MC

President James "Jim-Bob" Moriarty

If you look around carefully, you'll see that change is in the air. New things are happening, and old things are being done a little differently. Hopefully, all this change is for the better. That's where you come in.

The Skyhawk Association needs to grow to survive. There's nothing unusual about that, of course. No organization, no matter how good, no matter how strong, can flourish by remaining static. But for the Association to move forward, for it

to expand and improve, we need help your help. It's true that the web site is good and is getting better, but the only way to guarantee continues to improve is to get more people involved. We need more minds, more bodies, more energy, more input. We need more of you. Want to spend some time communicating with your former mates? Want to help save memories of the past while passing along information about the present? Then, boy, have we got a job for you! We need volunteers to help support and organize the web site. We need Squadron Duty Officers (SDOs). We need folks who will actively recruit and bring in new members.

Ever think that you ought to write an article about something interesting that happened on that flight? About your first time

in the drink? Your last time in the drink? The way things were in the olden days? All of those really great ideas of yours that you keep thinking ought to be published somewhere. Well, we would be happy to print them in the newsletter or put them on line. Jim Ritchie, editor of Skyhawk News, would love to work with some new writers, and all of our readers would like to hear your story even if some of them have already heard it ten times.

Last but not least, the Skyhawk Association can always use some new blood. If you have strong thoughts on how things could be done better, why not share those thoughts with us rather than simply complaining in an e-mail to a friend? At any given time we have real needs for new leadership; why not step up to the plate? Captain Hook has decided that just because he's given hundreds (if not thousands) of hours keeping the Skyhook Association flying in the right direction, he's earned some time off to spend with his family. After putting in ten years or so, He feels that it's time to use up the last of his leave before he loses it, so we need a new corporate secretary, and we need him right now!! It's the perfect time for someone else with Capt. Hook's dedication, vision, and commitment to volunteer to serve in his place.

Don't be shy; we have room for as many folks as are willing to serve. And on membership, why not ask the buddies that you used to fly with if they are members, and sign up as many of them as you can? If each of us signed up just one new person, our membership would double overnight. I hope to see each of you stepping up to the plate!

Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting 23 February 2002

Directors Present: James Moriarty (President), Ernie Laib (Treasurer), Ted Langworthy, Boom Powell, J.C. Ritchie, Bud Southworth, and Chuck Wolf. Directors Absent: Tom Wondergem. Also present: Wynn Foster (Secretary), SA members Bill Cline, Ed Jobin and Jack Woodul, and guest Tom Donahoe.

President Moriarty called the meeting to order at 0830 at the Country Inn Suites Hotel, Mesa, AZ.

The minutes of the 17 August 2001 meeting were approved as distributed.

Communications and Reports. Secretary Foster reported the paid membership as of 20 February 2002 was 805, plus four honorary and one complimentary, for a total of 810. Treasurer Laib presented a financial report showing the Association net worth to date of \$34,065.38.

Old Business. None.

New Business. After discussion, it was agreed to continue insurance coverage at the current level (\$500,000 D&O and \$1,000,000 liability).

Motion adopted approving the calendar 2002 budget, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. Motion adopted appointing Ed Jobin to serve the unexpired portion of the director term of John Caldas, resigned. After discussion, the following AOM 2002 assignments were agreed: Ready Room — Jack Woodul; Luncheon — Chuck Wolf; Booth — Ed Jobin. President Moriarty appointed a Nominating Committee consisting of Director Powell (Chairman), Jack Woodul, and J. C. Ritchie, to nominate candidates for election to three director terms expiring in 2005. By consensus, it was agreed that the next mid-winter Board meeting will be held in February 2003 in San Antonio, Texas. Director Langworthy agreed to make necessary arrangements. Motion adopted authorizing a donation to the Tailhook Educational Foundation, in the amount of \$3,500, for one or more scholarships in the name of the Skyhawk Association.

NEXT MEETING. By consensus, it was agreed that the next Board meeting will be held at the Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, at 0830 on Friday, 6 September 2002.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1042.

Wynn F. Foster
Secretary

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Back Issues

A limited number of copies of Skyhawk News are available by mail for \$3.00 each (\$4.00 foreign), post paid. Make checks payable to Skyhawk Association.

Write to us

We actively seek members' contributions of news, photos, historical data, anecdotes, and other items of interest. Content may be edited to accommodate space limitations.

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Candidates sought for Association Secretary

By Jim-Bob Moriarty
President, Skyhawk Association

Wynn "Capt. Hook" Foster, the founding Secretary of the Skyhawk Association, will retire from his position this September and we're looking for a volunteer to take his place.

The Skyhawk Secretary has a number of responsibilities, but the position is not overly demanding. To a large degree, it's a 'write-your-own-ticket' undertaking that can be easily accomplished in relatively few hours per week. Basically, the job requires that you:

- Have your own computer and Internet access; and are proficient with the computer and comfortable on the Internet.
- Maintain the membership database using Microsoft Excel (or compatible spreadsheet software).
- Handle the periodic mailing of membership-related materials.
- Attend and take minutes of the semi-annual Board of Directors meetings.
- Function as an administrative officer of the association (to keep the president out of trouble).

If you are interested in volunteering for the Secretary's position or want to learn more about it, please let me know ASAP at: jim@moriarty.com



Welcome Aboard 16 Feb - 20 May 2002

Bruce B. Cheever -- Memphis, TN
Robert W. Driscoll -- Plymouth Meeting, PA
Everett E. Fairley -- Jackson, TN
Patricia Harmon -- Lauderdale, MS
Richard M. Harris -- Pearland, TX
Terry W. Howick -- St. George, UT
Dennis V. Hughes -- St. Petersburg, FL
Everett Keech -- West Conshohocken, PA
Richard Lelen -- Springfield, PA
John F. Margie, Jr. -- E. Bridgewater, MA
William J. McDonald -- Maynard, MA
Robert D. Miller -- Hanford, CA
Seabie P. Rucker -- Lake Butler, FL
Max Tollens -- Greene, NY
Maurice L. Tompkins -- Orlando, FL
Richard S. Wood -- Mesquite, NV

Reunions scheduled

Marines from the Chu Lai, MAG-12, MABS-12 "Launch & Recovery" Section are holding a reunion at the Eldorado Hotel Casino, Reno, Nevada September 18 through 22, 2002. Featured will be a display of photographs and documents from Chu Lai. For more info email David Prendergast at dprendergast@foggy.net or call 707-443-4463, 9-3 PST Monday through Friday.

The VA-72 Blue Hawks will meet in Fort Worth October 11 at 3:00pm to the 13th at 1:00pm. This will be the fourth reunion for this group -- mostly those who served in the squadron from 1965 to 1968. Hosts are John Lamers, Bob Hoch, and Johnny Bittick. Contact the VA-72 SDO John Lamers at lamers@flash.net for more details.

Is your squadron, ship or unit having a reunion? Send info to A4News@aol.com for publication in Skyhawk News, and to Dave Weber at darweber@gte.net for inclusion in the Skyhawk Bulletin Board on the Skyhawk Association web site (www.skyhawk.org) - Ed.

NZ naval defense exercise - Training or science fiction?

New Zealand has been completely air defense-less since December of 2001 when it dismantled all its combat squadrons.

As a result, its recent naval defense training exercise resembled something similar to the science fiction movie "The Final Countdown" where a ship is thrust back in time and attacked by aircraft not seen in decades.

In February, two Kiwi ships, the HMNZS Canterbury and HMNZS Te Kaha, participated in combat training exercises in the Bay of Plenty. But instead of facing A-4 Skyhawks flown by highly skilled pilots from RNZAF No. 75 Squadron, they "battled" against three antique aircraft flown by members of the Warbirds Association - a Hawker Hunter which first flew with the Singapore air force in 1957, a Fouga Magister which entered service with the French military in 1960, and a Cessna A37B built in 1972 and used in Vietnam.

Military experts, including those commissioned by Prime Minister Helen Clark's own left-wing party, were opposed to dismantling the RNZAF combat squadrons. New Zealand's regional and global allies alike, have also been critical of the decision.

Nevertheless, Clark forged ahead. New Zealand's air defense ceased last December, costing several hundred jobs.

The civilian action group Save Our Squadrons maintained that disbanding the air combat forces was in violation of the 1990 Defense Act and was therefore unconstitutional. SOS took its case to the High Court, which was denied. Their appeal was also dismissed.

New Zealand



Helen Clark

Logged in each of these little books are hundreds of hours, launches and traps, but they don't begin to tell the real stories behind the data.

Pat Patrick recounts a tale from his . . .

Skyhawk Log Book

21 February 1959

By Meredith W. "Pat" Patrick

February 21, 1959 was one of the coldest days that NAS Jacksonville, Florida, had experienced in several years. While I was briefing the instructor pilot (IP) on my navigation and weapon delivery plan, it was 27 degrees. It had climbed only to 29 just before noon. I was scheduled, on a Saturday morning, for a high-low navigation flight with a simulated nuclear weapon delivery at Stephens Lake target, near the end of the flight. The target was just south of NAS Cecil Field, Florida. I had two 150-gallon drop tanks on the wing weapon stations and a 1,200-pound, concrete filled, "shape" of a Mk-12 nuclear weapon on the centerline bomb rack. With me in the lead and the IP flying wing, we took off and climbed to 41,000 feet. The A-4A weighed only 8100 pounds dry and had 7,800 pounds of thrust, so at light weights it climbed like a rocket. Even with the extra fuel and shape it took us very few minutes to level off at 41,000 feet. (It was really impressive when you climbed out after flying a loft maneuver and then zooming back up. I have timed the climb out from the escape maneuver at less than six minutes from 100 feet to over 40,000 with a clean A-4A.) The climb schedule was 370 knots indicated to .80 indicated Mach number (IMN).

We flew down the East Coast of Florida to just south of Homestead AFB, turned and crossed the Everglades, then returned up the West Coast of Florida to Deadman's Bay. I then descended to 100 feet at 420 knots, and flew in to the target. It was an incredibly beautiful day with crystal-clear visibility and a few puffy cumulus clouds. As we cruise climbed from 41,000 to just over 47,000 feet during the high altitude portion of the flight, I could see the entire peninsula of Florida and I thought, "man this is the life for me."

I led our two-plane formation on the final run in to the target at 100 feet and 500 knots. I delivered the weapon with a 45-degree medium-angle-loft maneuver and went over the top, inverted, while completing the half-Cuban-eight escape maneuver. We ran out away from the target at the planned 1,100-foot burst height and 570 knots indicated air speed. When clear of the simulated safe overpressure ring, we climbed to 5,500 feet, turned across the Orange River bridge, and

headed north up the St. Johns River to enter the traffic pattern for runway 5 at NAS Jacksonville. Soon after crossing the bridge and near the East bank of the St. Johns River, I felt that awful deceleration again. I was involuntarily leaning forward in the shoulder straps. I glanced to my right to pick up the instructor pilot who was sliding by on my right side with full speed breaks extended. I shook my head as he went by and deployed the emergency ram air turbine (RAT) to keep electric power and hydraulic pressure while I set up for another relight attempt.

I had read everything I could find about flying since I was about eight years old, and one consistent bit of advice from all of the old aviators had been to always have a place to go when you are in trouble. They counseled that when you change operating areas you should always look around and find the safest place to go when the engine quits. I had selected the two-mile-wide section of the St. Johns River just northeast of NAS Jacksonville. My fallback plan was to fly to the middle of the river, line up with the long axis of the river, stall the airplane, and eject. That would allow the aircraft to fall into the river and do no harm to the people and houses on either side of the river. The shallow river was also a good parachute landing spot close to both helicopter and boat rescue facilities. It was also close to the hospital at NAS Jacksonville if I needed medical treatment quickly.

For now, however, runway 27 looked like a good option for a flame-out approach and, again, I really didn't want to eject—especially since I now knew how much it hurt. I traded airspeed for altitude while turning in toward runway 27, broadcast the Mayday, and told the tower what my intentions were. The tower and the instructor pilot both "rogered" and the tower cleared me and gave me priority for the landing. As I turned through about 45 degrees of turn to go, I was now descending again through about 5,200 feet with a little excess airspeed, but not enough to make the runway. My landing gear and flaps were still up, and drop tanks still on. I could soon tell I wasn't going to make it. The velocity vector that I drew with my mind's eye ended in the water about 50 feet short of the

concrete seawall. The flame-out approach was no longer a good plan.

I immediately shifted back to the original plan and headed for the center of the wide section of river. I still had electric power from the RAT and told the IP what I was up to. He "rogered" and I could see him doing a weave back and forth over the top of me as I headed the few thousand yards up the river. I kept bleeding off airspeed so as to reach a stall as high off the river as I could manage. When I arrived over the center of the river headed north, I pulled the nose up into the stall. I was at 2,800 feet and 112 knots. The aircraft shuddered and banged as it entered the stall and I pulled hard on the face curtain with both hands. I pulled hard three times against a hard metal stop and it didn't budge. I knew immediately that I was dead because never before (or since) was I able to recover an A-4 from a full stall in less than 3,200 feet. (Of course, I have never practiced one starting in the very dense air at 3200 feet either.) I liked my reaction to the circumstances because my next thought after, "You are dead," was, "At least you can look good."

What I meant was that I wanted to show my squadron mates that I never gave up and was fighting it all the way. So, in order to "look good," I released the face curtain and noticed that the aircraft nose had already fallen through the horizontal and was nosing over toward the river while I had been pulling on the face curtain. I grabbed the stick and shoved it further forward to increase airspeed as rapidly as possible. During the stall, the left wing had rocked down in about a near 90 degree angle of bank, so as I shoved the stick forward I was now aligned 90 degrees to the long axis of the river, headed almost due West, instead of paralleling the long axis. While pushing the stick forward with my right hand, I reached down to the emergency release handle, pulled it, and blew the drop tanks off the wings. I had wanted to land on them if I could have shot the flame-out approach, but now I needed them gone so I could quickly get airspeed to recover from the stall. Another reason was to have the flat undersurface of the wing and fuselage available to ditch on without having a drop tank dig in and cartwheel me at impact.

I also locked my shoulder harness with my left hand, just in case. I still didn't really believe that I could pull this off, but that was a part of looking good. They would find me properly set up when they fished my body out of the water. When the drop tanks blew off, the airspeed needle zoomed up immediately to 155 knots and I started trying to pull the nose up to round out the descent. During the stall I had no electric power and therefore no radio, but when the airspeed came up the RAT began to function. Consequently, I again had electric power and better hydraulic boost for the controls. I pulled back on the stick until I felt the airflow just begin to separate from the wings, then I would ease off and pull again to the edge of separation. I kept it, by feel, at or near the optimum angle of attack until I rounded it off about 10 to 15 feet clear of the water. When I had stopped the descent and still had not hit the water, I thought, "Hey, maybe!"

I pulled hard on the face curtain with both hands. ...it didn't budge.

Then Ens. Patrick received this "Well Done" on the back cover of APPROACH magazine:

ENSIGN MEREDITH W. PATRICK, for your masterful handling of an emergency situation.

While attached to VA-44 undergoing A4D training, Ens. Patrick experienced a flameout in the NAS Jacksonville landing pattern. He extended his emergency generator and guided his aircraft away from the populated area, while zooming his excess airspeed into additional altitude. He then pulled the aircraft into a near stall of the St. Johns River so that it would fall into the river when he ejected. Three attempts to pull the curtain were ineffective. Ens. Patrick there upon recovered from the stall and set up a course

I could hear the IP's voice on the radio. He was very deliberate; enunciating every word carefully, because he knew there wasn't time to say it twice. He said, "You had better put it on, you are running out of river." I had planned to hold it off the water until I reached 125 knots then ease it onto the river very flat. His call was just in time because as I glanced up I could see very large trees, very close. I glanced at the airspeed indicator, saw 135 knots, and thought, "that's close enough." I then

eased off on the back-pressure against the stick to put the belly of the aircraft onto the water as flat as I could. Because my eyeballs were now less than seven feet off the water, I could see that I was drifting very slightly to the right with a quartering tail wind. There were very small ripples on the water, which gave me good depth perception but not enough wave height to catch a wing tip. The conditions were near perfect for impact.

When the aircraft hit the water I can remember starting forward and to the right and then it was lights out. There was no pressure and no pain of any kind. I just entered a very deep sleep instantaneously. The next awareness I had was waking up with my head hanging down on my chest and the helmet feeling very heavy. I could not believe it. I was still alive. No one had ever

survived a ditching in an A-4 or F-8, the two newest aircraft in the fleet at the time. I could see translucent light straight up and thought I was resting on the bottom of the shallow river. I thought, "Okay let's get out of here." Emergency procedures say pull

the ditching handle and it will blow the canopy off and cut you loose from the seat with your parachute and para-raft still attached. So, I pulled the ditching handle on the right side of the seat and stood up. I banged into the canopy, which was still locked and closed. I sat back down and thought, "You have got to be s _ _ _ ing me. What else can go wrong?" My next thought was, "I have survived this ditching and I am not going to die in this airplane." I reached for my survival knife, which was strapped to my right calf and started to pull it out to scribe an X in the Plexiglas and bash my way out. We had been taught this for a last-ditch escape effort.

Before I got the knife all the way out of the scabbard, I thought, "Wait a minute, dummy, you haven't tried the manual open handle." So I slid the knife back into the scabbard and reached over with my left hand with a backhand motion and pulled the canopy handle aft. Boom! The canopy blew aft and up a few feet, but it was still attached behind the seat. I stood up, put my right foot onto the seat, and pushed the canopy further out of the way with my helmet. I was very surprised to learn that I was still on the surface and the river was just beginning to flow

See Flameout on page 6

for ditching the aircraft in the river. He jettisoned his external stores and ditched successfully, but could not fire the canopy. He then actuated the manual canopy handle and bungee fired the canopy free. Ens. Patrick vacated the aircraft and was picked up by helicopter very shortly. Commander, Carrier Air Group FOUR commended Ens. Patrick for his actions, said, "...reacted correctly to each of the emergency situations that confronted him... displayed exceptional skill in executing a stall recovery and ditching.. his actions were thoroughly professional."

To Ens. M. W. Patrick, now attached to VA-172, APPROACH extends a hearty WELL DONE!



Flameout (Continued from page 5)

over the canopy rail and into the cockpit as the aircraft settled toward the bottom.

I learned later from the air controllers in the tower, who could see all of this plainly, and from the IP who was also a close-in witness, that it was only about 12 seconds from when the splash went up until I crawled out of the cockpit. The reason I thought I was on the bottom was that the huge splash was still subsiding while I was going through all of the emergency procedures and made it look like I was under water. The IP said that he could not believe what he saw. The little A-4 left a small rooster tail in the water just before impact, but when it hit the water it did not plane or skip across the water as he thought it would. It dug in, stopped within the length of the aircraft, and turned almost 90 degrees to the right while stopping instantly. It then was totally obscured as the huge splash went up and covered the aircraft completely for the next several seconds. When the splash subsided, the IP was very surprised to see that the aircraft looked essentially intact and was still afloat.

I pushed away from the aircraft as it settled and inflated one side of my Mk-3C flotation gear. I then started working on getting rid of my parachute and para-raft and realized that I was tangled up with the para-raft lanyard and a couple of shroud lines from the partially opened parachute. I couldn't get the shoulder harness fittings released with my flight gloves on. They were very slick when wet. So I took off the gloves, released the fittings, and once again reached for my knife. It was still there. I pulled it out, cut the para-raft lanyard and shroud lines, then put it back in the scabbard. Those cuts freed me from the parachute and life raft, but it was all I could do with my hands. When I pulled them out of the water I couldn't believe what I saw- my hands were so cold they just stopped functioning. It looked like my fingers were locked in a partially curled position. I wanted to inflate the other half of my flotation gear, but the hands just didn't work.

I could hear a helicopter approaching, and when I looked toward the sound there were two HS-3s with Marine markings just crossing the riverbank headed for me. I thought, "Well, at least one thing is going right; that is a very fast response." As luck would have it, the two Marine helicopters were departing on a cross-country flight, returning to New River, North Carolina and just happened to time their departure right for me. One of them had an old "horse collar" rescue device and lowered it to me from a hover. My hands didn't work, but I managed to work my right elbow through the horse collar, roll through to my right, and hook it with my left elbow too. They reeled me up and delivered me, once again, directly to the hospital at NAS Jacksonville.

The flight surgeons only kept me long enough to fill out some forms and reassure themselves that I was uninjured. I had a dark bruise under my right eye from having stretched the shoulder harness far enough to make contact with the glare shield. I also had a minor cut on my left thumb from cutting myself free from the entanglement. Other than that I was just sore all over. Every muscle and bone seemed to hurt but all body parts were intact.

The aircraft that I ejected from in December was side number 325 and the one I ditched in February was 326. CDR Homyak announced to the ready room that I would never, ever, be allowed to fly 327.

This accident produced several important changes to the A-4A and B and subsequently to all modern jets. Because I could not eject and was able to ditch the aircraft pretty much intact, the long-running problem with the engine could finally be conclusively diagnosed. We had lost many A-4As over the previous three months. (I believe we lost nine aircraft and four pilots, but my memory is not clear on the exact numbers.) The engines had quit with no warning or symptom of any kind. The evidence was destroyed when the aircraft crashed and

burned, including the A-4A I had ejected from following the flameout on 16 December 1958. [See *Skyhawk News*, Vol. 7, No. 4. -Ed.]

Lessons learned, and fixes

This ditching revealed the reason for the numerous flameouts. The high-pressure fuel pump spline that connected the fuel pump to the engine's accessory gear drive was failing after only 20 to 100 hours of operation. Instead of being mounted on a firm track to keep the spline normal to the plane of rotation, the pump was mounted on four bolts. When any bolt loosened, the pump would lose its alignment normal to the plane of rotation and the spline, (which operated at extremely high RPM), and would grind itself to a nub immediately. This shut off all fuel flow to the engine instantly causing a no-symptom flame-out, with no chance for a relight.

All A-4A and B aircraft were grounded for inspection and replacement of the pump mounting as soon as the cause was determined. The seriousness of the problem was apparent when all remaining A-4As and Bs on the VA-44 ramp (about 60 aircraft) were inspected and about 30 percent of them were found to be on the verge of failure. Fixing this problem alone probably reduced the A-4 accident rate by a very large factor.

The failure of the ejection seat resulted in the addition of the alternate ejection handle between the pilot's legs to back up the face curtain, which was at the top of the ejection seat behind his head. Prior to this accident, Navy jets had only the face curtain with no alternate handle. It was later discovered that many crews were saved because under high-G loads they could not reach the face curtain but could grab the alternate handle and eject. Also, immediately after catapult launch the alternate handle can be activated faster than the face curtain and that has also saved some lives. So, the addition of the alternate handle proved to be useful beyond the original intent of providing a backup in the event of face curtain failure.

Seven years later, in October 1966, the Chief Petty Officer who had run the ejection seat shop at VA-44, had a confession for me on the day of his retirement from VA-125 in Lemoore, California. As the shop supervisor, he had told me at the time, that the problem with the ejection seat was a bad design. That the way the cable, between the face curtain and the actuators, was placed was faulty, but they had figured out a fix and it wouldn't happen again. The later confession was that they had lied about the design problem. The riggers had just installed the cable wrong and it was pulling in the wrong direction when I yanked on the face curtain. A change was made that allowed the cable to be routed only in the correct direction.

Also, because I demonstrated that a pilot could survive a ditching at 135 knots, downwind, a pressure relief valve was installed in the side of the cockpit to equalize pressures and allow the pilot to open the canopy and exit more easily under water. There had been no survivors of ditchings in A-4 or F-8 aircraft up to this time, so there had been no incentive, before this crash, to be concerned about underwater escape.

Because I had trouble releasing the parachute connections with wet gloves in the water after escape, new "Koch fittings" were also designed with serrated edges to allow actuation with slick, wet gloves.

Many lessons were learned from this experience and the key fixes were made quickly, before A-4s were allowed to fly again. In addition to all of the necessary mechanical fixes that this accident brought about, the biggest lesson learned was, "Don't ever give up. Keep fighting it all the way, even if it is just to look good."

Meredith W. "Pat" Patrick retired from the U. S. Navy in 1985 after 28 years of service. He continues to work part time as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analysis in Washington, D. C. . -Ed.



"Skyhawk Tribute" by Roy Grinnell

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