



ATSI

Gateway Airport *Chandler, Arizona*

THE A-4 EVER

SUMMER 2004 • QUARTERLY

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 10 • NUMBER 3

Cover

— The HOT ROD SQUAD —
Still Eating Fighters for Breakfast



Puresome Unplugged • Gann's Gallery • VC-8 Decommissioning • Harken Back
Viking Tries to Remember • Size Does Matter • Boom Boom Room • "Bleep" the Fish
Collings Foundation TA-4
Scooter Deck Acrobatics



www.skyhawk.org

THE PREZ SAYS

• What Whiz Finally Thinks •

By Davis "Whizzer" White

A DECADE TOWARD A-4s FOREVER.

Ten years since the 1994 Tailhook Association when I asked, "...you think anybody would be interested if we...?" Our *Skyhawk* Association isn't quite to the point of – and now you know the rest of the story – but we have a good start at it. How do you sum up ten years of *Skyhawk* Association? You don't – the Association has been and will remain a work in progress.

It's 21 June, and I'm putting together this last epistle as President before sending it off to Margaret Bone. Anything significant about June 2004? How about it being the 50th Anniversary of our A-4s first flight? We need to take a minute or so to wish our little lady a Happy 50th. Fifty years ago tomorrow (22 June 1954), she tucked her skinny legs and tiny feet in her wheel wells and made the houses little for the first time. Bob Rahn, super guy and one of the first members of our *Skyhawk* Association, was her pilot. Bob, along with almost all the early *Skyhawk* pioneers – Heinemann, Gann, Hubbard, and Bloom – since that first organizational meeting in San Diego, have been called home. However, their contribution to the design, development, history, testing and lore of the A-4 is recalled every time you see one take off out of ATSI in Mesa, AZ; sitting quietly on a stick off I-20 north of Pensacola; or laying on its side as a derelict hulk in a desert bone yard. Depending on which models you experienced – the conversion of JP to heat and noise with the "Charlie," the restrained speed on takeoff of the Super Fox, or the introduction of high tech in the "T" with nose

wheel steering – one doesn't even need to close one's eyes to recall a memory. It's all there in her profile.

Cal, Jay, Bob, Captain Hook and I were standing around the *Skyhawk* Reproductions booth at the 1993 Tailhook talking about the A-4 when I suggested the idea of a get-together at the 1994 Tailhook meeting of any or all who flew, maintained or had an interest in the A-4. My son, Danny, made up a tablet, set it on the booth table and 136 signed up that day. Cal pitched in a check for \$500.00 to get things started. We had more than a few...we had a beginning!

Cal Shoemaker and Gordo Gray are still around and memories are still fresh enough to share them with us. Part of my new job will be to head up the newly formed NHF Historical Liaison and Program Coordinator. This means I'll be asking Gordo and Cal to be part of a luncheon program within the next couple of years. BTW, the last production model (both Cal and Gordo flew it) is on display in the Museum in PNS. If you're in Pensacola be sure to go by and blow a little dust off her. There are still some 160+ *Skyhawks* on active duty with countries around the globe; however, with the stand-down of VC-8 there are no active duty US squadrons with a *Scooter* on their flight line.

The 2004 luncheon in Reno will be for the most part about Association business, COC and what to do about your 'stuff!' when you're gone or your wife is just getting tired of moving it around to make room for grandbaby stuff.

The Naval Historical Foundation in the Navy Yard has graciously agreed to be the repository for the *Skyhawk* Association. We'll go over the procedures for submitting flight gear, maps, and miscellaneous gear associated with the A-4 and its mission on the website, at Reno and in the next Newsletter. If you're computer literate, or have a grandkid that is, be sure to check the website for latest information (www.a4skyhawk.org).

Well, it had to come to an end sooner or later. Fortunately for me it came later. I met Bob Hickerson for the first time at the mid-year Board Meeting in San Antonio/Fredericksburg. He's one of those dudes you take to immediately. On top of having over 3000 hours in the A-4, he shares the emotion each of us has for the *Scooter*, as well as the aims of the *Skyhawk* Association. With Bob and his slate of incoming candidates for the Board, most if not all of the initial aims of the Association will be a reality. Earlier it was a matter of conditions or lack of equipment, but this crew has the enthusiasm of San Diego 1993. Bob will be the first incoming President with a two-year responsibility, rather than year to year. Kind of like finding a fish who waited too late to try and throw the hook??

It's been a wonderful run, but it's time I try and scratch out another direction for the Association by preserving the items that were a part of *Skyhawk* history. One that will insure longevity for the Association with a degree of 'hands on' access envied by other groups, but expected from those who have experienced A-4's FOR-EVER.

Whiz



PS: Don't say 'no' when Hickerson asks you to serve...

YP Abroad

Chaps:

My erudite writing pal, Barrett Tillman, was asked to come up with some words for a D-Day article and solicited some personal recollections, etc. I supplied the tiny bit below, which he was kind enough to incorporate some of in his fine article. It may provide a bit of perspective in this era of fashionable Frog-bashing. For those of you that may have missed the article, links are provided.

YP

“On the 50th anniversary of D-Day, I was flying a Grits International flight from JFK to Paris with the usual arrival after dawn. The sun had just come up as we came abeam the English Channel, and it was alive with ships. After the usual post landing customs dance, we met the wizened little Frenchman with the large white moustache who drove our crew bus from the airport to town.

He had decorated his dashboard with a little display of crossed American and French flags, and he greeted us with repeated 'Sank you, Americans! Sank you, Americans!' It was very obvious that it was an anniversary he had not forgotten.”

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/viewpoints/articles/0606tillman0606.html>



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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2004 •



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Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Newsletter Editor at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

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SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

• Winter Board Meeting •

More Ramblings by Raven

Mesa, Arizona, February 7, 2004

It could have been any Navy or Marine Corps maintenance control, anytime, anywhere. When I stepped through the door, I felt like I'd stepped through a time-warps.

was a Saturday, the hangar and flight line were active in preparation for a morning launch of three TA-4s. The flight was to be a practice bombing hop for students in an ATSI foreign military training program. I wanted to stay to watch, but the

"Following the Board Meeting, we all went to the flight line to watch the recovery of the training hop. As the three Skyhawks came into the break for landing, everyone was watching and thinking the same thing: I could still do that!"

I was in Maintenance Control of **Aviation Training Systems International** (ATSI) at Williams Gateway Airport (formerly Williams Air Force Base) in Chandler, Arizona. I was looking for the February 2004 Board Meeting of the Skyhawk Association, my first since being elected to the Board in September 2003, and I was late. I was also lost.

ATSI's maintenance control looked like every maintenance office I'd ever seen. Evident were government-issue steel furniture; desks piled high with paper and manuals; large status boards updated with grease pencils; and a long, vinyl-covered counter where pilots reviewed aircraft logs and noted discrepancies – even the familiar day-old brew was burning on the coffee maker in the back.

Through the interior door was a typical hangar scene with *Skyhawks* in various states of disarray from engine changes and scheduled maintenance. Although it

Board meeting called.

When I finally found the room where the Board meeting was being held, it didn't look like a familiar Navy/Marine Corps Ops building, but was unquestionably of Air Force origin. ATSI's training and operations center is a state-of-the-art facility, probably constructed by the Air Force just before Williams Air Force Base was closed. The only familiar scene was the duty desk, unattended and stacked high with litter and used Styrofoam coffee cups. The ready room was luxurious in my experience, and slick company advertising and aerial photos adorned the walls. It was easy to tell that this was a commercial operation, designed to impress clients.

Following the Board Meeting (see summary of minutes), we all went to the flight line to watch the recovery of the training hop. As the three *Skyhawks* came into the break for landing, every-

one was watching and thinking the same thing: I could still do that! We watched the recovery, impressed by the competent professionalism of the ATSI crews, crawled around the A-4s (former Israeli N models) trying to figure out what the different antennas were for and generally admiring the efficiency of the operation. We noted many differences in the aircraft, including the tail-pipe extension to fend off heat-seeking missiles and some commercial grade avionics in the cockpit. We all agreed that the aircraft looked great.

It was a super place to hold a meeting, and everyone left with a good feeling about the new keepers of the *Skyhawk* flame. ATSI is obviously a quality outfit with plans to operate the A-4 for a long time to come (the purchase of even more aircraft is in work). When we coined the phrase "A-4s Forever" back in the 70's, we didn't imagine that her legacy would end up in the corporate world, but it looks like ATSI has given the little lady a new lease on life. As you can tell from our feature article in this issue, under ATSI's care, the A-4 still has plenty of life left in her!

Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Summary of Board Meeting Minutes

Skyhawk Association, February 7, 2004.

The meeting was called to order by President White at 0910 at Williams Gateway Airport, Mesa, AZ. Directors Langworthy, Laib, Powell, Southworth, Jobin and Hickerson were present, as were President White, Vice President Hickerson, Treasurer Laib and Secretary Cooney. Also present were squadron SDOs Jerry Kopff (VA-776); John Gabbard (VA-43) and Stan Thompson (VA-153). A report on membership revealed that the Association membership is holding at approximately 700 and discussion of attracting more members from the ranks of former Marines led to approval of an initiative to establish a *Skyhawk* Association presence at the Marine Corps Aviation Association Symposium in San Diego September 16-19, 2004. Directors Jobin and Hickerson will coordinate. A report by Webmaster David Weber was discussed, and the Board commended David for the outstanding work he's done on maintaining and expanding the website.

Under Old Business, President White reported that Admiral Paul Peck ➡ ➡



Skyhawk Association Board members, surely among the most handsome of men, tour ATSI while at February 2004 Board meeting in Mesa, Arizona. Left to right in front of A-4N 159533 are: Ernie Laib adding some class with a sport coat, Bear Langworthy, Stan Thompson proving suspenders are back, Whizzer White with free floss, Jerry Kopff, Bob Hickerson daring to wear pink, Bud Southworth, Boom Powell in black, Terry Cooney, Ed Jobin prior to workout, Jack Woodul incognito as YP, and John Gabbard. Where do we get such men?

Everyone knows that pilots like to fly their friend. That is why Douglas built the two-place TA-4. That is also how I bagged all of my flights in the 1970 and 1980s. Still, this presented a problem. If the pilot had more than one friend, there was a long line to get the two-place *Skyhawk*. But VF-126, then stationed at NAS Miramar, solved the problem. Their guys in the shop were very adept at solving vexing problems. They installed a second canopy on the rear of a TA-4J so now the pilots could fly more of their friends, wives or girl friends. They could do thrilling rolls, loops and Immelmann turns or other airsick producing gyrations. Now the pilots have many friends. The Douglas A-4 Skyhawk was responsible for this.

◆ ◆ ◆
From Harry Gann, the Pilots' Friend.

HARRY GANN'S GALLERY

• The Fabulous Four Seater •

© Harry Gann



PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

THE PLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER

Back in 1965, the Mighty Sunday Punchers of VA-75 were on board U.S.S. *Independence* (CVA-62) for the *Intruder's* first venture into combat in Southeast Asia. There were more tech reps on board than sailors, and they were truly needed to deal with the electric demons that regularly bugged up all the gee-whiz computers, radars, and gizmos that made for expected warfare magic.

During early work-ups in the Caribbean, Puresome was on the starboard wing of an A-6 that was "leading" a strike

package of A-4Es around a route. Not only was the island checkpoint clearly visible at the *Intruder's* 9 o'clock, but Youthly had early picked it up on Tinker Toy radar and had been gazing at it out of the window for a long time, dreaming of pitchers of banana daiquiris.

Finally, the frustrated bombardier/navigator took his head out of the boot and waved his vertical palm up and down toward what would have been the pointy end of most jets. This gesture was followed by a shrug of the shoulders and

"Few human problems cannot be solved by a well-flown division of A-4s."

*Pirate (CDR John Nichols, USN-Ret),
quoted by Barrett Tillman.*

slapping the front part of his helmet in disgust. Puresome was, of course, moved to help. After consulting the wet compass bobbling around on his canopy bow, he slowly and deliberately turned toward the B/N and transcribed a giant "S" in the air. The B/N's gestured reply, though equally technical, was probably not in the NATOPS manual.

Puresome

(Ed. Note: see page 17 for similar, non-NATOPS gesture.)

Board Meeting cont...

➡ ➡ was advising the Association on a possible change in exempt status for the organization, and the Board directed Vice President Hickerson to establish a nominating committee prior to the Fall AOM in Reno to consider expiring terms of Directors Laib, Langworthy and Ritchie.

New Business involved approval of the budget for 2004; disbursement of funds to the Naval Aviation Museum and

Naval Historical Society (\$3,000 each, contingent upon receiving funds from sale of *Skyhawk* prints); approval of a bid for printing and mailing of the Association roster; giving of recognition awards to John Gabbard and Bud Southworth for their significant contributions to the Association; discussion of options for producing the Association newsletter; and a general discussion of the advisability of

an administrative alliance with an umbrella organization, such as the Tailhook Association, to handle Association administration. Concerning the latter, the Board asked President White to develop options for consideration at future meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1120.

See Association Ready Room at www.skyhawk.org for reports and other details.

THE HOT ROD SQUAD

Cold War-era A-4 Skyhawks are still eating fighters for breakfast

By Graham Chandler



(Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the June/July 2004 issue of Air & Space Smithsonian magazine. The author, Graham Chandler, has kindly given permission to reprint it here for the benefit of Skyhawk Association members in recognition of their outstanding support during the research).

"Every single person I've ever fought in one of these airplanes has died the first time I fought him. Every...single...one." Randy Clark brandishes a model of the A-4 Skyhawk and tells me how the half-century-old design can whup far newer aircraft: F/A-18 Hornets, F-14 Tomcats—maybe someday even F/A-22 Raptors and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters.

I need no convincing. In the 1970s, I'd flown in an A-4 variant, the two-seat TA-4J, at the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School at Maryland's Patuxent River base. As an engineering student learning how to size up a fighter's combat performance, I'd experienced first-hand how this machine could out-hassle pretty well anything in the sky.

Clark and I are talking in the ready room. The chalkboard is scribbled with arrows and altitudes and trajectories. Pilots wander in and out, wearing khaki flying suits with wings and nicknames like "Booger" and "Decoy". Some gather in groups, spreading fingers and tilting hands in mock air combat.

Outside, where the temperature has just exceeded 100 for the umpteenth time this year, seven 30-year-old Skyhawks in green and brown camouflage stand on the flightline. But this is not a military base. The Phoenix facility is the headquarters of Advanced Training Systems International, a private company that sends A-4s and A-4 pilots to military bases to provide "red air"—service as sparring partners for Navy and Air Force pilots.

To train as a lethal force, a military pilot needs to practice coming up against an "enemy" that is as realistic as possible. So a red-air aggressor will, for example,

emulate a North Korean MiG-29 pilot who hides in a valley out of radar detectability, then pops up unexpectedly to attack. This "dissimilar aircraft combat training" is part of the five to eight weeks of air warfare training that all U.S. Navy air crews, no matter which aircraft they're assigned to, must get before each combat deployment.

Traditionally, the Navy has provided its own adversary aircraft: F-5s at Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada, F/A-18s near Key West, Florida, A-4s on Vieques, an island off Puerto Rico. But last year the U.S. government closed the Vieques facility. Consequently the adversary squadron there, VC-8, was decommissioned and the A-4s were retired.

Though the Navy continued to provide most of its own adversary aircraft, the A-4 retirement left the service short. Spotting the void, Larry "Hoss" Pearson, a combat veteran and one-time commander of the Navy's Blue Angels, and Jon "Orbit" McBride, a former space shuttle pilot,

decided to form a company to provide red-air aggressor aircraft and pilots to military bases that needed them.

The two entrepreneurs went shopping for some good used combat airplanes. Sukhoi 27s would have been "bloody perfect for the adversary role," says Clark, but, given the difficulty of getting spare parts, a potential maintenance nightmare. Then, says McBride, he and his partner heard about "some nice, low-time" A-4s for sale in Israel. Two years later—including six months to get the Department of State's blessing—ATSI had 13 A-4s on its apron.

At first glance, A-4s might seem too old to fight younger aircraft. Says Clark,

then the company's director of marketing: "The biggest challenge in going up against newer planes like the Hornet is to get close enough for us to see them, because they usually have the superior radars and missiles" and can see the A-4s and fire on them first.

But if a crafty pilot can use the Skyhawk's famed maneuverability to gain that proximity, "the A-4 is a great opposition platform because it is totally dissimilar to the Tomcat or Hornet; it fights totally different," says Roger "Rock" Pyle, recently retired from the position of adversary instructor at the VFC-13 squadron at Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada. He adds: "If an A-4 gets [them] off their game plan and fights in a way the A-4 prefers—slower, in the phone booth—then the F-14 and F-18 pilots don't often come away happy."

Curious as to how a Hornet driver might react to those comments, I later talk to Captain Brehn Eichel, who directed the latest Exercise Maple Flag, an annual mock war in which pilots from half a dozen countries fly F/A-18s and other combat airplanes against red-air adversaries; Eichel had faced ATSI's A-4s in the early summer of 2002 at Cold Lake, Canada. "No self-respected fighter pilot will say, 'Yeah, they kicked my ass!'" he laughs. "But we expected to be able to out-power, out-climb, and out-turn them, and they kinda humbled a few guys. The

"If an A-4 gets them off their game plan and fights in a way the A-4 prefers — slower, in the phone booth — then the F-14 and F-18 pilots don't often come away happy."

A-4 will get in your shorts if you let it."

Eichel recounts the humbling specifics of the engagement: "With the F-18 you can pull a whole lot of G right away, but the wing gets dirtied up"—at high Gs, the F/A-18's computer deploys the flaps on the wing's leading and trailing edges to avoid stalling; that increases drag, causing the aircraft to lose energy. "It's harder to regain that energy," continues Eichel, "so that's where the A-4 was quite impressive—its energy-sustaining capabilities." He says that a brief moment can make a major difference. "All you need to do is take them for granted or not pick them up on your radar or not see them, because all it takes is one heat-seeking missile,

regardless of how low-tech it is, to wreck your day.”

Red air is the latest of many roles the A-4 has played since it first flew 50 years ago, on June 22, 1954. Designed by the brilliant Douglas Aircraft engineer Ed Heinemann, the aircraft was originally conceived to respond to the Navy’s request for a super-cheap, super-light-weight jet interceptor that could be fielded against the Soviets’ MiG-15s. In January 1952 Heinemann arrived in Washington to sell his design to Navy brass, only to be told that the service had dropped its interceptor requirement. But in the audience for Heinemann’s presentation was legendary naval aviator Admiral Apollo Soucek, and he loved the design’s light weight and great maneuverability.

Since the Navy needed a more efficient jet replacement for its piston-engine Douglas A-1 Skyraiders, Soucek asked Heinemann if he could transform his design into an attack airplane—keeping it under 30,000 pounds and giving it a top speed of at least 500 mph and a combat radius of 345 miles. Scant weeks later Heinemann was back with a new design. It came in at less than half the specified weight, and it exceeded the stipulated combat radius by 115 miles, and the top speed by 100 mph. In six months Douglas had a contract for two prototypes.

The Skyhawk’s design team achieved the bantam weight by shaving pounds, even ounces, wherever they looked—ejection seat, avionics, hydraulics. Their methods were similar to those used in building race cars, and the aircraft picked up the nickname Heinemann’s Hot Rod. (Later, its crisp maneuverability had air crew calling it the Scooter.) A key attraction was the delta-shaped wing: The tiny span of 27 feet made the craft a smaller target. The compactness also did away with the need to make the wings foldable for carrier operations.

Heinemann’s design proved hugely popular: Eventually 2,960 A-4s in 21 models were delivered. The last left the factory in 1979, and by then, the Skyhawk had the longest production run of any U.S. combat aircraft.

One of its early missions was the delivery of nuclear bombs. Retired Marine Major Art Padios, who flew simulated deliveries out of Japan in the early 1960s, recalls: “Once you got into the [enemy’s] radar coverage, you’d go down on the deck. We were so small, and down at 50

“But we expected to be able to out-power, out-climb, and out-turn them, and they kinda humbled a few guys. The A-4 will get in your shorts if you let it.”

feet traveling at 500 knots [575 mph], there wasn’t anybody that was going to find us.” There was one potential problem: “I had several targets [to hit] with 1.1 megatons and wasn’t sure I could outfly the fireball—it’s four miles in diameter!”

Had Nikita Krushchev called JFK’s bluff during the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Padios might have found out. In that show of might, Skyhawks were catapulted off the *Enterprise*, *Independence*, *Essex*, and *Randolph* to show the

Lake to develop maneuvers specifically for flak suppression and how to take out SAM sites,” recalls Padios. “It evolved into the Iron Hand role in Vietnam.”

Iron Hand was one of the A-4’s riskiest missions. “We tried to be just high enough to get the SAM search radar to

spot us but not so high that we couldn’t evade quickly by diving for the deck,” recalls Al Carpenter, veteran of two combat cruises with Navy Attack Squadron 72. The pilots dove to quickly get out of the SAM’s radar “cone” and get a missile off (usually a Shrike). But the Shrike needed to be in that cone to home in on the SAM site, so the A-4 pilots developed a novel delivery technique: “We would aim directly at the site, then pull the nose up about 15 degrees before firing our

missiles,” Carpenter says. “Sort of like shooting baskets.” Once inside the cone, the Shrike picked up on the SAM site’s radar to home in for the kill.

For the Marines in Vietnam, Skyhawks were the backbone of close air support. Operating from Chu Lai, just south of the Demilitarized Zone, the Marines at first used SATS, the Short Airfield Takeoff System, in which JATO (jet-assisted takeoff) bottles launched A-4s loaded with rockets and bombs off temporary

2,800-foot aluminum runways. “We had a variety of targets,” says Padios, though at first the pilots flew “mostly to support troop helicopters. We’d circle them as they went, and suppress [ground] fire with napalm, cannons, and bombs. A FAC [forward air controller] would run with us.”

FACs loved the A-4, says Padios. During strike missions, “they wouldn’t let anyone drop unless they could get them exactly on the run-in line. I’ve been in a stack with [F-8] Crusaders and [F-4] Phantoms, and one after

continued...



ATSI aggressor Skyhawk returns to base.

flag at various locations near the island. Deployed to Cuba to support a potential invasion, Padios flew A-4s from the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay. “They were practice close air support missions, staying on our side of the fence,” he says.

Out of the Cuban experience came a startling wakeup call: The A-4 drivers realized that in the course of taking out the sites of the nuclear missiles that had precipitated the crisis, they would be vulnerable to surface-to-air missiles. “They took us to [the California base] China

THE HOT ROD SQUAD CONT...

the other the FAC would make them do a practice run, and if they couldn't get on the line exactly he would tell them to go away and wait for the A-4s. We were so maneuverable that when we got abeam the target we could roll into 100 or 120 degrees of bank and *zap*, we're on the run-in line. The roll rate on that airplane was 720 degrees a second."

The FAC often flew an A-4 too: the two-seater variant. Former Marine FAC Bob Miecznikowski says a typical mission would start in Da Nang; the FACs would be assigned a particular area, such as the border between North Vietnam and Laos. "We flew initially with naval gunspotters in the rear seat," he says, but later the FAC craft would fly with two pilots. "The front-seat pilot would fly the aircraft while the rear-seater looked for targets and [guided] any aircraft during strike missions," he says. Missions ran up to 2.8 hours. The FACs often had to knock out anti-aircraft sites that were defending against the main force.

As would be expected of an aircraft that has served in so many wars, tales of the A-4's survivability abound. Padios recalls escaping from North Vietnamese anti-aircraft fire that was "all black and white and orange balls bursting over my head." Not wanting to go through it, he "pulled off 8.5 Gs in a roll—and the rolling limit was only 3.5." The stress of the maneuver popped 60 rivets.

(I've also experienced a high-G roll in an A-4, though unintentionally. At the Patuxent River school one afternoon, during a maneuvering stability lesson in a two-place TA-4J trainer, I was doing a hard pullup when one of the leading edge slats deployed—yes, just one—snapping the craft from 5.5 Gs into a totally unexpected 360-degree roll, which banged our heads hard against the canopy. Once the Gs were unloaded, the aircraft recovered nicely.)

After Vietnam, the A-4s flew in the Yom Kippur War, the Falklands War, and the first Gulf War. By the time it retired, the A-4 had equipped 51 frontline Navy and Marine squadrons and eight overseas military services. Its career included more major wars than any other U.S.-made combat aircraft.

Besides red-air service, ATSI provides combat training to foreign air force pilots who have just earned their wings. Unlike red-air, combat training is conducted at ATSI's own headquarters: the decommissioned Williams Road air base outside Phoenix.

At the time of my visit, the students training at the school are from the

a Mach 3 missile, so you're not gonna outrun it."

Clark's eyes narrow. "It's going to get you. "You have to slow down to my speed to get to a really good turning performance," he goes on. "Then you're coming to my fight. At 15,000 feet with a clean airplane, I can pull 6 Gs all day long until I run out of gas.

"And my speed also allows me some vertical penetration that would really get anybody's attention. We can go right up to 50,000 feet with impunity. Up there you're above the cons [contrails] and difficult to see. Your energy is high, so you can do virtually anything you want coming downhill."

And ATSI has heightened its Scooters' maneuverability. Gone are the guns and armor; the school flies the aircraft "clean"—no external bombs, fuel tanks, and rockets to create drag. The changes moved the center of gravity aft, boosting pitch rate, important in air combat.

The director of combat flight training is longtime A-4 vet

John "Decoy" Marksbury. I ask him: Is there any airplane he'd choose over the A-4? "A newer version of it," he says.

Hard use of these 30-year-old aircraft can keep technicians on their toes. Out on ATSI's hangar floor, amid the woodsy smell of hydraulic fluid, workers in overalls climb around three A-4s, minus their engines and tail sections. "Our maintenance program mirrors the U.S. Navy's," says Al Edmonson, a Navy veteran and ATSI's director of maintenance. "We do most everything in house."

I ask him about finding spares. He points. "See that room over there? I've got five guys whose sole purpose is to find parts."

Help may arrive soon: ATSI is negotiating to buy 17 more A-4s and a massive parts package, from New Zealand. The deal includes a bonus: APG-66 radars and head-up cockpit displays—both of which may make the 50-year-old design an even more formidable adversary for honing the skills of pilots preparing for combat.



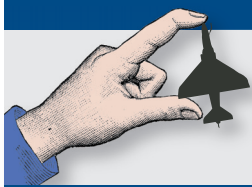
ATSI Scooter is poetry in motion.

United Arab Emirates. They are using the school's A-4s and A-4 simulators to transition to Block 60 F-16s, 80 of which will be delivered to their country by 2008.

As Randy Clark and I stroll out of the ready room, we pass UAE students on the edge of their soft leather chairs, listening to morning flight briefings.

In the simulator room, I slide into the A-4's snug cockpit. "Fits like a sports car," Clark says, then goes on to explain the Skyhawk's unique combat advantages: "She's a high-subsonic airplane, and almost all engagements take place below 0.9 Mach."

I ask what advantage this gives. Clark begins to explain, using his hands to help. In the next simulator, a student glances over. "If you go by my A-4 at 1.2 and I'm doing 0.9, I can turn around faster than you can," Clark says. "At 1.2 your turning radius is gonna be the state of Wyoming. My turning radius is very small. And if you held 1.2 you'd really get killed in a hurry. Because the missile that I launch at you by the time I get turned around is



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modeling News •

By Joe Turpen

The *Skyhawk* Association has committed to do something that possibly no other aviation organization has done--to recognize modelers and their interest in the *Skyhawk* and its history. We are making an effort to recognize and support the modelers of the A-4.

Our association will provide awards for both the International Plastic Modelers Society (IPMS) national meeting in Atlanta in 2005 and the IPMS Region IV contest in Louisville Ky. We also provided both a modeler contact person and dedicated website space for modelers. And each issue of the newsletter will include this column.

There are two objec-

tives for this column: One is to show people who are interested in the *Skyhawk* what has been done with the A-4 in plastic; and secondly, to provide an informational resource for modelers.

Some articles will cover new releases of both kits and after market items. I'll feature squadron markings including

those from VA-195, which still exists as VFA-195. This particular squadron can be traced from *Skyraiders* to *Hornets*. There are others with interesting heritages, as well as foreign *Skyhawks*, that could add to the information in this column.

Remember, this column is not mine, but yours! Please ask questions, submit ideas and make requests for topics or discussions concerning the art and science of modeling. I invite your participation, let me hear from you.

Coming in the next issue: Fifty years of the *Skyhawk*, in models.



Hasegawa 1/48th scale A-4B from VA-106, kit no. 09426.



Hasegawa 1/32nd scale A-4F LADY JESSIE of VA-164, kit no. ST13.



BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •

Powell's Puzzlers are put together by one of the more puzzling minds in the *Skyhawk* Association, and only those with an incisive, encyclopedic knowledge of all things *Skyhawk* should risk brain cells by attempting to solve the puzzlers.



Question 3: The standard drop tank held _____ gallons of fuel and weighed approximately _____ pounds. (*Hint: this is a fill in the blank question.*)

- A. 200 gallons; 1334 pounds.
- B. 300 gallons; 2000 pounds.
- C. 400 gallons; 2700 pounds
- D. Both B. and C.
- E. None of the above.
- F. All the above.

Question 1:

What A-4 squadrons have aircraft represented in this picture?

Question 2:

There was an A-4A, A-4B, A-4C, A-4E, and A-4F. What happened to the A-4D?

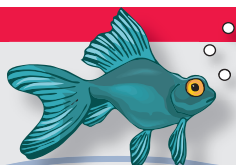
Answers:

Question 1: From RCVW-4 (East Coast RAGs, circa late 1960s) (1) In background, with blue rudder is VA-43. (2) In foreground, with green stripe is VA-45 (both instrument training squadrons). (3) In middle is VA-44 (then the *Skyhawk* RAG). The A-6 is from VA-42; the F-4 is from VF-101 and the A-7 is from VA-174.

Question 2: Before 1962, all A-4s were designated A4D with a trailing numerical designator to identify the lineage. When the U.S. Navy changed its system for designating aircraft in 1962, all A4D models became A-4s, and the designation A-4D was skipped to eliminate confusion with the old system.

Note: Watch for a comprehensive discussion of the USN aircraft numbering convention in an upcoming issue.

Question 3: D. Both the 300 and 400-gallon tanks were commonly carried on *Skyhawks*. The 300-gallon tank could be carried on stations 2, 3 and 4, although it was not normally carried on the centerline. The 400-gallon drop tank could only be carried on the centerline, station #3.



"BLEEP" THE FISH

By Terry Thies, submitted by John Lammers for your reading enjoyment.



In preparation for an October, 2002 VA-72 reunion in Fort Worth, those who flew A-4s in the squadron back in the '60s were invited to write about some of their memorable experiences, with the collected stories to be distributed at the reunion. The following was submitted by then-Lt(jg). Terry Thies. Terry, aka "Nuggs" or "Troll," graduated from Miami of Ohio in 1964 with a degree in physics and joined the Blue Hawks in the Spring of 1966. At the time of his tale, the Hawks, commanded by Cdr. Harrison B. Southworth, were deployed to WestPac/Vietnam aboard USS Franklin D. Roosevelt with Air Wing One.

The years slide by, but somehow there are some memories that stick like peanut butter on a spoon. Just a big old blob of high-calorie brown energy waiting to be tasted again. Maybe those memories make all that salt air and night cat shots worth the price of admission. Hell, I'd give a week's liberty just to see Harry B. leave for the Po again, donned in full trop whites. We truly went where few men have dared to tread, from the skies over Nam to the monkey-meat capital of the world. Never in the history of man has a one group expended so much gunpowder and done so little damage.

Just opening the tattered, navy-blue logbook unlocks a floodgate of nostalgia. Each page, a month in the chronicle of an adventure never to be equaled in the years that followed. Not even close! An old Kansas farmer with a propensity to troll for SAMs who actually believed that was a logical thing to do. An Air Force exchange pilot, the size of a sumo wrestler, dressed in a powder blue jumpsuit. A skipper with a wry sense of humor, a mischievous twinkle in the eye and an understanding of people that would make the best psychologists blush. A group of majors who just failed to understand the gravity of their rank and stature and continued to behave like JGs. It was in

those gray crucibles called staterooms, in the heat of the South China Sea, with the smell of popcorn, that these lasting friendships were formed.

My first introduction to the roommate who would be my constant companion for the next two years was accompanied

"Just close your eyes and picture that cigar smoke-filled ready room with no known ventilation system and the sacred plunger with the beautiful blue handle."

by the familiar sound most charitably described as "clearing one's throat". If I heard that sound at this moment, I would know that the Whoosh was right behind me -- roomie, flight leader, philosopher and fellow traveler in the fields of barley. They just threw away the mold and out came hundreds of pounds of friendship.

As a new JG, right out of the training command, I was assigned to room with the only person ever known to be nicknamed after the sound of a flushing toilet. Of course, that nickname really came because Whoosh was far and away the most prodigious winner of the award that was named after the sound of a flushing toilet. Come to think of it, the Hawks were really into the sound of flushing toilets. Just close your eyes and picture that cigar

"In the true Naval tradition of testosterone-driven bravado, our fearless ship's company had delayed the departure just long enough so we would be sure to take as much punishment as possible, without actually being sunk."

smoke-filled ready room with no known ventilation system and the sacred plunger with the beautiful blue handle.

It wasn't that Whoosh really tried to win all those awards, it just seemed to happen. He just seemed to do the kinds of things that were remembered for their momentary departure from good taste,

intelligence or general competence. It's probably safe to say that drunkenness may have played a part from time to time, but generally, he just won 'em fair and square. No one will ever compile a winning season the likes of Whoosh's 1966 performance. They just don't make ballplayers like that anymore. Money has ruined the game.

As Snoopy would say, *it was a dark and stormy night*. Our gallant gray chariot was again running from an oncoming typhoon. In the true Naval tradition of testosterone-driven bravado, our fearless ship's company had delayed the departure just long enough so we would be sure

to take as much punishment as possible, without actually being sunk. Since there were no flight ops, no movie and no anything else, Harry B decided to convene a short APM just to keep spirits high and probably find out who was popping corn that night. It was within the context of this backdrop that Whoosh jumped at the opportunity to execute one of the most unusual and technically difficult Whoosh Award Performances ever witnessed.

For reasons obvious only to Neptune, God of the Sea, Whoosh had felt the need to set up a full-sized aquarium in our stateroom. This was a particularly nice touch given all the extra space available in JO's quarters. It was not a small aquarium, mind you, but the kind you see in actual homes with extra room to fill. I

think its cubic footage was a significant percentage of our total space.

In any event, we had several happy little fish named after various private body parts. This gave us a great deal of pleasure, just staring at the ambience of beautiful tropical fish swimming in a tastefully done environment with ➡ ➡



FROM THE EDITOR

• Raven's Ramblings •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

I'm sure that readers of the Skyhawk Association newsletter have noticed the year-long gap between this issue and the last published in 2003, and that the "look" of this issue is different. After years of shouldering the burden of publishing our Association's newsletter, Skyhawk Newsletter Editor Jim Ritchie has stepped aside for a well-deserved break from the pressure of never-ending deadlines. As a testimony to the work Jim produced, we have replaced him with a committee and a professional editor – hopefully a more sustainable arrangement that will guarantee regular issues of the highest quality in the future. After working on only one issue, my hat's off to Jim Ritchie for all the hard work he put into the newsletter over the years.

Our big news for this edition is the addition of a professional editor, Margaret Bone, to our Association. Margaret is the editor of the Marine Corps Aviation Association's publications *The Yellow Sheet* and *MCAA Journal*, is a contributing editor at *HOOK Magazine*, and brings a wealth of experience, great skills and a superb attitude to our team. She goes by

many aliases, the most appropriate being "Warrior Princess." Guys, I recommend you don't mess with her!

If you haven't used our website lately, I recommend you get in there and root around a little. Try looking up the bureau number of the first A-4 you maintained or flew in our aircraft history files, and while you're at it, help fill in some of the gaps in that history. You will be amazed at how much valuable and interesting information is now on the web site. Webmaster David



Warrior Princess on the flight line at Cherry Point, writing about what was once her favorite jet until being educated about the Scooter by your Board of Directors.

Weber and his team are doing great work in expanding our information resources, so if you have anything of historical interest, get it to David.

Finally, we're trying to move forward on technology issues and will soon have an electronic version of our newsletter available for distribution. Email is a fantastic tool for communicating in an organization such as ours, but unfortunately less than 1/2 of our members have current email addresses on file with the Association. Check out the new printed roster you recently received. If your email is listed incorrectly, or not listed at all, get an update to Terry Cooney at skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com.

Bob "Raven" Hickerson



"Bleep" cont...

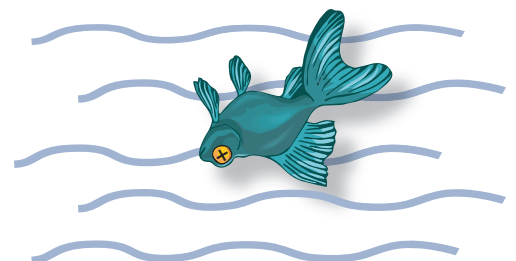
➡ ➡ lovely back lighting. It also gave us to opportunity to test their tolerance to different alcohol levels.

In a bit of incisive thinking, Whoosh realized that the high seas, which were now becoming evident, would probably cause the water in the aquarium to splash out and flood our happy home. Since the APM was about to convene, he had a brilliant idea. Grabbing a piece of surgical tubing, probably stolen from the ship's infirmary, the Whoosher proceeded to stick one end in the aquarium and suck on the other. For you non-scientific types, a siphon was born, and the other end of the tubing went into the sink. He then cleverly checked his watch, which was about the size of a medium pizza, and measured the distance the water level went down over a given period of time. With

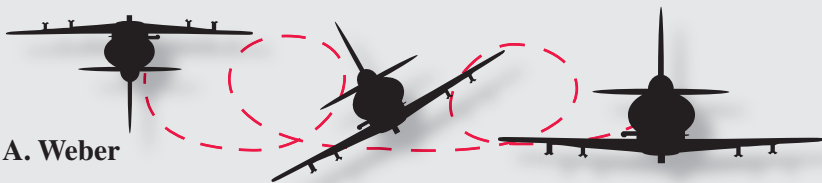
a twinkle of the eye, and a quick nod of the head, the calculation was made. Four years in a good university, and the finest training Uncle Sam could provide, gave HIM the edge. The water would go down to precisely the level he wanted in one hour. That gave us time to go to the APM and come back to a dry home.

So off we went, with that cocky swagger of jet carrier pilots who are masters of their universe. The next hour was quickly consumed with scintillating conversation among the likes of Pink Fink and other great raconteurs of aviation. With a quick check of his megawatch, Whoosh determined it was time to go back to our stateroom and remove the tubing. As we rounded the tastefully decorated bulkhead, much to our surprise and chagrin, we could see water pouring out from un-

der the door. Rushing into the stateroom, we were greeted by general flood condition "alpha". Everything below the level of the aquarium was soaked. Unable to comprehend what could have gone wrong with such a brilliant plan, Whoosh pulled the tubing from the now nearly depleted aquarium. There, lodged halfway in the tubing with his little tail sticking out, was "bleep," the tropical fish. 🐟



SCOOTER DECK ACROBATICS



By David A. Weber

The *Connie* was slicing through the waters of the Tonkin Gulf at a leisurely pace. For any non-Airedales reading this, that's the U.S.S. *Constellation* (CVA-64). It was late in 1967, the day's combat sorties were in full swing, and the *Connie* was between launch/recovery cycles. The flight deck was busy with the "re-spotting" of aircraft. Among the many aircraft being moved were more than a dozen A-4 *Skyhawks*.

One A-4 Charlie, however, was not on the flight deck, having been demoted to the hangar bay earlier due to a maintenance problem. NK501 of the VA-55

removed, it was only the plane captain's application of the aircraft brakes that kept NK501 from moving with every roll of the ship.

In concert with a "release brakes" signal from the yellow shirt, the blue shirts started their leg strengthening exercises that consisted of moving the aircraft using only muscle power. NK501 came out of her hangar deck spot easily during a starboard roll of the ship, but wanted to return to it when the ship rolled to port. The plane captain dutifully applied the aircraft brakes to prevent his aircraft from rolling port and losing the progress obtained by

"This starboard roll was greater than what he expected, and although he was starting to apply the brakes with more gusto, the aircraft's main wheels reached the elevator deck edge quicker than anticipated."

Warhorses had just been cured of her maintenance ills, and was cleared for the next launch. The name painted under the canopy rail was that of the squadron's commanding officer, Cdr. R.E. Kirksey. But at the moment, the person in the cockpit was the plane captain (brown shirt) assigned to NK501. He had just received word from the hanger deck aircraft director (yellow shirt), that his aircraft was destined for the flight deck.

Adjusting the rudder pedals for fit, the plane captain's slim figure filled most of the confines of the small *Scooter* cockpit. Upon signaling the yellow shirt with a clenched fist that he had the brakes applied, the yellow shirt immediately signaled his crew of blue shirts to break down the tie-down chains that kept the aircraft from moving around on the *Connie's* deck. With the tie-down chains

the hard working blue shirts. The port rolls of the ship were steep enough that the blue shirts could not hold the aircraft by muscle alone, and application of the aircraft brakes were necessary to prevent loss of some of the distance gained. And the starboard rolls were sufficient to require some application of brakes to prevent an unsafe speed from building up. Thus it went.

A series of quick gains followed by a complete stop, as the ship rolled on the waters of the Tonkin Gulf. Finally in position to be pushed backwards onto a starboard elevator, the blue shirts took a short break while the elevator made its transition from being part of the flight deck to becoming part of the hangar deck.

NK501's plane captain (brown shirt) was contemplating the life of a blue shirt, and what a struggle it had been for them

to get his *Scooter* this far, when the yellow shirt signaled to release brakes. The blue shirts began their struggle to push his aircraft backwards onto the now ready elevator.

Despite the clear weather, the *Connie* was rolling more than usual. So the cycle of aircraft movement onto the elevator started during a starboard roll and then plane captain applied brakes during a port roll, and caused much straining and grunting by the blue shirts. The plane captain was doing his best to maximize the distance gained on each starboard roll by allowing the aircraft to gather some speed. In the confines of the hangar deck he could not do that safely, but now he was out in the open away from other aircraft.

NK501 was just on the elevator when the *Connie* eased into a port roll. The plane captain locked down on the brakes as the blue shirts started to lose their battle fighting the port roll. He could see them straining, not knowing if they were fighting just the weight of the aircraft attempting to return to the hangar deck, or if that idiot of a plane captain was on the brakes and making their efforts fruitless. The *Connie* leveled out and the plane captain came off the brakes and the blue shirts' straining legs got the *Scooter* moving backwards again.

Hoping to make this starboard roll the final roll needed to get his aircraft all the way onto the elevator, the plane captain allowed the speed to build a little more than he had in the past. After all, he was now on the elevator and away from other aircraft. This starboard roll was greater than what he expected, and although he was starting to apply the brakes with more gusto, the aircraft's main wheels reached the elevator deck edge quicker than anticipated.

The elevator's outboard deck edge is not very high, but the *Skyhawk's* main wheels are relatively small. The aircraft speed was starting to come down with the application of the brakes, and when NK501's tires came up against the elevator deck edge, they stopped.

However, there was still some momentum. The *Connie* was just reaching the end of her starboard roll when the plane captain suddenly discovered that his *Scooter* was attempting to stand on her tail. But with her tail over the

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

By Puresome

Mig Killers of Yankee Station

Michael O'Connor.

New Past Press, Inc.

272 pages.

Since Scooter drivers are astute chaps, they will readily discern from the title of this book that it is primarily about Fighter Pukes. No matter. Remember how long Top Gun and other adversary units used the A-4 to teach lessons to VF types? Even Maverick got hosed by a well-driven *Tink*. Most of us who drove the A-4 for a living lusted for a crack at a Mig, hav-

ing had lots of practice against each other and hapless fighters around the ship.

In this exceptionally well-crafted book, *Spads* and T.R. Swartz's A-4 bag gomers, and other *Scooters* and A-7s get cracks at the wily Mig. Most of the action is by *Crusaders* and *Phantoms*, of course, but those of us that flew off Yankee Station in that ol' crazy Asian war will recognize many familiar names. Author O'Connor uses lots of first person descriptions of each kill, and if that isn't exciting enough, accounts of Migs and missiles and flak-- *oh my!*--encountered during

strikes will make the heart go pitty-pat. There are lots of pictures in this book, which will make it easier for the fighter community to get through it without moving their lips too much.

This book is a classic that deserves to be on the bookshelf of anyone seriously interested in naval air-to-air action during the Vietnam War. For anyone who has ever fanaticized about hosing another airplane out of the sky, it is just plain fun.

Puresome



If you are an Association Member who doesn't use the Internet, now is the time to seriously consider it. Personal computers and Internet access have become very affordable, and much easier to use. If you haven't been to the Association's website or our interactive "Ready Room" on the Internet, you are missing out on a whole lot of good viewing of *Skyhawk* pictures and a wealth of information. For every bad thing you have heard about the Internet, there are thousands of good reasons to get "connected".

To assist any Association member who wants to explore what it would take to get

TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• www.skyhawk.org •

By David "Twidget" Weber

"connected" to the Internet, mail a letter to the Association's Webmaster (that's Twidget, see below), and he will mail you a package that will help you get started.

For all of you current Internet users, it's important to keep the Association secretary updated on your email address. And if you haven't joined the Ready

Room, you are missing out on some great "Members Only" web pages, including an Aircraft Picture Gallery and an Aircraft History Database.

Send your request for the website package to:

David "Twidget" Weber

1517 Lindby Drive

Flower Mound, TX 75028-3624

Scooter Deck cont...

➡ ➡ water, any tail-standing exhibition was going to end with the aircraft flipping over on her back into the water. The aircraft nose came up quickly, and only with the *VERY* hard application of brakes was NK501's tail-standing exhibition put to a stop. Maybe it was just the brakes that stopped her, or a combination of sufficiently lowered speed, applied brakes and the fact that the *Connie* was starting to come out of her starboard roll. One does not question *the breaks of naval air*, especially when they are in one's favor...

There were two big sheepish grins on that elevator, one on the yellow shirt,

and one on the brown shirt, who now wondered if he also had brown pants. The blue shirts were too in awe of NK501 rearing up at them to be anything but dumb-founded.

NK501 and the plane captain almost took a salt-water bath that day. The plane captain gave some thought to the fact that if he *had* gone into the water with NK501, he would have been better off going down with his aircraft than having to explain to the skipper where the heck his airplane was.



Note: On December 5, 1965, a VA-56 A-4E was being run out onto an aircraft elevator aboard the U.S.S. *Ticonderoga*. That aircraft also attempted an elevator edge tail-stand and went into the water. Both pilot and aircraft were lost at sea. If you have any information on this incident, please contact VA-56 SDO Randy Wilson.

SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •

Reunions

VMA-225 Reunion at Cherry Point: 2004. Thursday, 21 October To Sunday, 24 October. Contact: Mr. Cary Pickens @ 812-926-3849. Email hillfarm75@hotmail.com

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Tailhook'04 is September 9 -12, at the Nugget in Reno NV. Friday, Sept 10, 2004 is the Association Board meeting - 0900 with the Association Luncheon following at 1200 hours. Contact Chuck Wolf wolfsindo@earthlink.net or (770) 422-1752 for luncheon reservations.

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NAS Lemoore Vietnam Aviators Reunion is October 14-16, 2004 at the Visalia, CA Convention Center. Contact: Lemoore Vietnam Aviators Reunion, P.O.

Box 745, Lemoore CA. 93245 or email: Bob Taylor exhawkco@comcast.net or Janet Palmer grammyjmp@aol.com Skyhawk Association Members can go to the Association Ready Room for forms and information!

...

The USMC Skyhawks are planning a reunion in connection with the Marine Corps Aviation Association Symposium 2005 16-19 September at the Town and Country Hotel, San Diego, CA. For more information, contact Mike Green at 509-782-3096, or see the website at www.usmcskyhawks.com.

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VA-55 is planning a reunion October 16, in conjunction with the Lemoore

Vietnam Aviators Reunion. Joe Rosenthal is handling local arrangements and has reserved the Hanford Elks Lodge for a VA-55 luncheon on Saturday, Oct 16. He needs to know how many plan to attend, to plan the luncheon and reserve a VA-55 block of rooms and hospitality suite. Later, we will advise attendees of the VA-55 luncheon and hospitality suite cost. All other functions will be arranged by the reunion committee and payments will be made to that committee. Contact Phil Colter at pcolter@bellsouth.net for more information.

Requests

I'm searching for anyone who was with VMA-142 in 1977, in regard to a near-miss civilian plane crash as we came back from our ATD in Yuma AZ. Please email me at: janlascko@yahoo.com if you were there! I served under the name of Janice Lady at that time.

...

HARKEN BACK

• The Way We Were •

A copy of the letter from Whizzer to the commanding officer of VC-8, grab your hankie...

22 August 2003
Re: Skyhawk Retirement
Commander, Thomas J. McDonough, USN
Commanding Officer
Fleet Composite Squadron Eight

Dear Skipper,

Thank you for shouldering the bittersweet task of striking our beloved little lady from the list of active US Navy Aircraft. You won't find a Scooter pilot who doesn't have a story told from the heart about their time in the A-4.

"...she was born in the fertile mind of a singular man. Designed, built and tested by men whose skills, experience and opinions won wars and plotted movements of nations. She was nurtured in the hands of the best the Navy had to offer

and demonstrated her loyalty to those who flew her with a tangible affection carried for a lifetime."

With a smile she has been compared to a high school sweetheart – "Fast" enough to be interesting but slow enough to enjoy the ride...! She was there for many "firsts." For most, she was our first FLEET aircraft. Many pilots logged their first carrier landing in an A-4 which set them apart and above any other form of military aviation. In the 1960's she shared our fear for the unknown of war but when launched from ships into battle, she became both our protector and companion in the transition from observer to warrior. It might have been her first time as well, and like her pilots, not all returned. Who doesn't have a picture standing beside the aircraft with their name painted on the side – another first? Whether a first or a routine task, together we did it well for over fifty years.

She has served with other nations where the language was at first unfamiliar, but would fade as humps and lumps and bumps were added, probes bent and shortened to fit the mission of her new country. Regardless of the dialect a trust soon formed and soon the personalities of the airplane and the pilot would merge, and once more she was effectively carrying out a nation's policy.

Over time a rallying cry emerged that overcomes language barriers and politics. A phrase that ties all members of her team into one family. A simple phrase recognized by all who flew her and best explains the almost mystic feeling between the aircraft and her pilots. Please raise a glass for all of us who couldn't be at the ceremony but who have slipped the surly bonds of earth in an A-4 to dance the skies on laughter-silvered wings and become a part of A-4's FOREVER.

God bless our nation, our Navy and the memory of the A-4 Skyhawk.

A-4's FOREVER,

Whiz



Dave "Whizzer" White, DDS
Founder, Skyhawk Association

THE DECOMMISSIONING OF VC-8

• Over and Done •

From Boom Powell



The Skyhawk is now officially retired from the US Navy. Although the ceremony in Pensacola in 1999 was larger and more elaborate, it had to be renamed the "Last Training Command" A-4s because VC-8 was still actively flying in Puerto Rico. Now the Red Tails have parked theirs as well.

In a ceremony at NAS Oceana on Saturday, 23 August, 2003, VC-8 was disestablished. The usual chain of command was on the rostrum and spoke. Since YHS was there for the A-4 retirement, it was odd to learn most of VC-8's bragging rights were about SAR with helicopters. The guest speaker was VADM John "Totes" Totushek who stole the show with a great summary of the *Skyhawk's* career. Totes has considerable time in the A-4 both as an adversary and RAG instructor and reservist where he commanded several squadrons.

To commemorate the occasion, VC-8 had a Scooter tail appropriately decorated and an imaginative marker for the "grave yard" that has grown depressingly large in front of the Officers Club at Oceana. At first, it looked like an elegant, etched crystal plate. Closer examination showed it to be the wind-screen from a TA-4.

At the reception which followed at the O Club, LT Rob "Woodsy" Woods explained that he "had drawn the high card" and gotten to pilot the last USN *Skyhawk* to the museum at Palm Springs.

He removed some mementoes after he parked. Not wanting to simply present another plaque to "gather dust", he used his "sixth grade shop skills" to make the control stick into a beer spigot handle and presented it to Laurie, the longtime bartender. The stick/beer-pull got a workout.

Among the *Skyhawk* notables pres-

ent were Paul Galanti, Stan Arthur and "Wardog" Lafavour who had honchoed the social side of the event. And just to prove the *Skyhawk's* days aren't over yet, Jon McBride and "Hoss" Pearson were on hand with news of ATSI's continued success and plans for expansion of their fleet. *Skyhawks Forever!*



VC-8 Redtails, 1958. End of an Era.

Please send information about departed association members to Bob Hickerson, Newsletter Editor at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

or mail to

Bob Hickerson,
1222 Balcones Drive,
Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

For information about past members, these links to our website may be helpful.

TAPS

Since this is our first newsletter in many months, we have no current listing.

www.a4skyhawk.org/2D/KIA.htm
www.a4skyhawk.org/2E/ops_losses.htm

VIKING'S VMA-311 MEMORIES

• Bien Hoa in '72-73 •

By LtCol Edward Jobin, USMC Ret.



The History

In late March 1972, the North Vietnamese Army launched *Nguyen-Hue*, a resurgence of operations in South Vietnam that came to be called the *Easter Offensive* by U.S. Forces. On 16 May 1972, two A-4E squadrons from MAG-12, commanded by Col Dean Macho and based in Iwakuni, Japan, deployed to Bien Hoa Air Base, north of Saigon. The squadrons were VMA-211, commanded by LtCol Del Ranney; and VMA-311, eventually commanded by LtCol John Caldas. This was -211's and -311's second deployment to Bien Hoa, the first commenced in May 1971, right after Bien Hoa was reactivated.

The squadrons converged from Iwakuni and Naha, Okinawa, the first flight landing at 0745 on 17 May. The air group's enlisted force included Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 12 (H&MS-12) and Marine Air Base Squadron 12 (MABS-12). They arrived on C-130 aircraft, and combat operations commenced on 19 May, hitting targets in Southern RVN and Cambodia.

Since I hung my flight gear at -311, this account will deal with the adventures of the Tomcats. Any erroneous account of historical events can be attributed to the 31 years that have passed since 27 January 1973, and a few brain cells KIA in the interim.



The last bomb VMA-311 would drop was put on the jet of the squadron C.O., LtCol John Caldas.

The Sorties

During the first month of combat operations, from 19-31 May 1972, VMA-311 flew 203 combat sorties. June saw daily sorties from dawn to dusk, including surge ops on 11 June, when -311 flew forty sorties in a single day. In the days when sortie length was 1.0 to 1.5 hours with a pilot change after each sortie while the aircraft was refueled and rearmed, that was a heavy day. Combat operations continued for the duration of the war, with both -211 and -311 flying about 20 sorties a day, seven days a week. A typical combat sortie started with a situation briefing from the group intelligence shop, followed by the flight leader's brief. Ordnance loads varied, but typically consisted

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of Mk-81s (250 pound bombs); Mk-82s (500 pounds); 5.0-inch Zuni rockets, and the Mk-4 gun pod. Eight Mk-82s or wall-to-wall Zunis were the preferred loads. After take-off, the flight checked in with one of two controlling agencies, and was assigned a Forward Air Controller (FAC). The flight might precede to the south, into IV Corps, the Mekong Delta, or into Southern Cambodia, or to the north into III Corps or Northern Cambodia near Pagoda Mountain, which bristled with AAA.

KELs and TICs

On rare occasions a flight would carry extra fuel and be sent to the central highlands in II Corps, inland from Cam Ranh Bay. In most cases the

FAC was a *Covey* or *Sundog* pilot from the USAF, flying either the O-2 or the OV-10. These aircraft were armed only with 2.75-inch white phosphorus rockets to mark the target, and radios to communicate with a ground commander. The FAC kept track of enemy activity in his area, and set priorities for targets to be attacked. The target might be a Known Enemy Location (KEL) or a Troops In Contact (TIC). The TICs were the preferred targets, because you had a sense of contributing to the safety of friendly forces on the ground, and destroying enemy personnel. The KELs were sometimes caches of weapons and supplies yielding secondary explosions,

but frequently were nothing more than what we referred to as "VC trees".

Things to Avoid

Once the FAC described the target and put the flight's eyes on it with his smoke, the attack would commence. In areas like An Loc and Quan Loi Air Field, where heavy ground fire was to be expected and aircraft had sustained damage in the past, all ordnance might be delivered on a single pass. Small arms ground fire was typically encountered, but in many areas you might be shot at by SA-7 *Strella* missiles, .51 caliber AAA, and heavier rounds from 23mm and 37mm guns. We didn't worry too much about the SA-7, figuring that it couldn't hit a fast-mover, and we made sure that speed was life, but I wouldn't have wanted to be an O-2 or OV-10

driver in a *Strella-rich* environment. The 23mm and 37mm guns even got the attention of lieutenants who believed they were bulletproof.

Quan Loi was the site of two MAG-12 aircraft losses to ground fire. One pilot stayed with his jet till he was back near Bien Hoa and was picked up shortly after ejecting. Capt Jim “Waldo” Walsh ejected over Quan Loi and was captured by NVA. Waldo was released at the end of the war, after spending five months as a POW.

After all ordnance had been delivered, the FAC provided a Bomb Damage Assessment, and the flight returned to base. Many sorties became routine, but just when you got comfortable, you’d

place, or the flight might fly really low down the Mekong River, which caused folks to jump out of their sampans. I’m sure they loved the air show.

Incoming

Bien Hoa was rocketed by the VC and NVA on numerous occasions with 122mm rockets. The first such attack was on 1 August, the second on 31

August. During the second attack, there were injuries to aircraft maintainers working on the flight line, and three aircraft were damaged, but there was no loss of life. The next major attack occurred on 22 October, when more than 56 rounds of 122mm fire struck the base, destroying a billeting structure, but no damage to squadron equipment or personnel was suffered. The occasional attack with 122s continued throughout the deployment.

Midway through the deployment on a Sunday morning, a large ordnance dump operated by the Vietnamese Air Force blew up. The entire base felt the blast and explosions continued for several minutes. The base chapel was nearly destroyed. The incident was blamed on a sapper attack, and an unknown number of VNAF were killed. Pilots returning from sorties said that the mushroom cloud extended up several thousand feet, and most had to divert to Ton Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon.

The Cockpit

However, life at Bien Hoa was not all flying, eating and sleeping. (Reference opening comment about brain cells KIA). The squadron took over a bar once operated by a USAF A-37 squadron, renamed it the “Cockpit”, and made it the social nucleus for *Skyhawk* pilots. Capt Duke Lind became the Cockpit’s manager, and proved that “I don’t drink much, but I have a lot of friends who do,” was not a comment made in jest. On the roof of the Cockpit, Duke supervised the construction of a sundeck where an overall tan

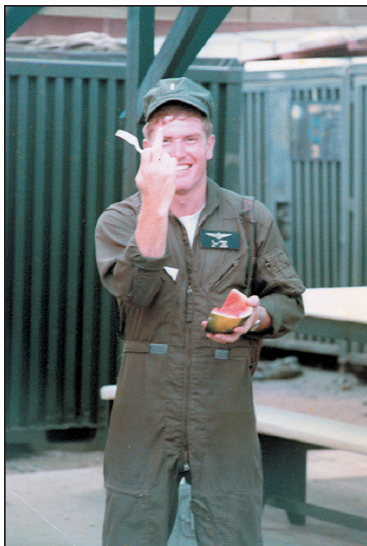


Outside the hangar, a Tomcat Skyhawk waits: ready, willing and able.



The last bomb carried many messages. One of them read: 9,738 tons of ordnance dropped by VMA-311.

draw a hot target with lots of ground fire and maybe adverse weather to complicate matters. The return to base was not boring, sometimes an impromptu ACM engagement with your wingman would take



In Bien Hoa, the author is photographed adjusting the brim of his cover, while enjoying some local watermelon.

could be pursued during daylight hours. At night, AC-119 gunship ops could be observed as they worked the rocket belt North of the field, and the sundeck provided a good vantage point from which to watch the occasional rocket attack. The sundeck was probably a safer place to be during rocket attacks than the rat-infested bunkers that we were supposed to dive into.

Sorties Stop

In January 1973, the Paris Accords finally reached an agreement of sorts, a ceasefire was signed, and VMA-311 flew its last combat sorties of the Vietnam War on 27 January. LtCol. John Caldas, squadron CO, dropped the last bomb on the squadron’s final combat sortie of the war. That bomb was painted up by the ordnance shop, and had appropriate messages from the troops to our little black pajama-clad friends on the ground.

VMA-311 set a number of records during the deployment to Bien Hoa. In mid-deployment, 1stLt Charlie Reed flew the 50,000th combat sortie flown in Vietnam by the squadron. At the conclusion of the deployment, the squadron had amassed a total of 54,625 combat sorties over all years of combat operations in Vietnam. During the Bien Hoa deployment from 17 May 1972 to 27 Jan 1973, the squadron dropped 9,738 tons of ordnance. During VMA-311’s participation throughout the war, 105,000 tons of ordnance was expended.

As stated, I hung my flight gear at -311, so that is the focus of this story. I welcome any who flew with -211 to enter the fray and tell the story of the Wake Island Avengers.

COLLINGS FOUNDATION

• Restoration of TA-4 Progresses •

By Bob Hickerson



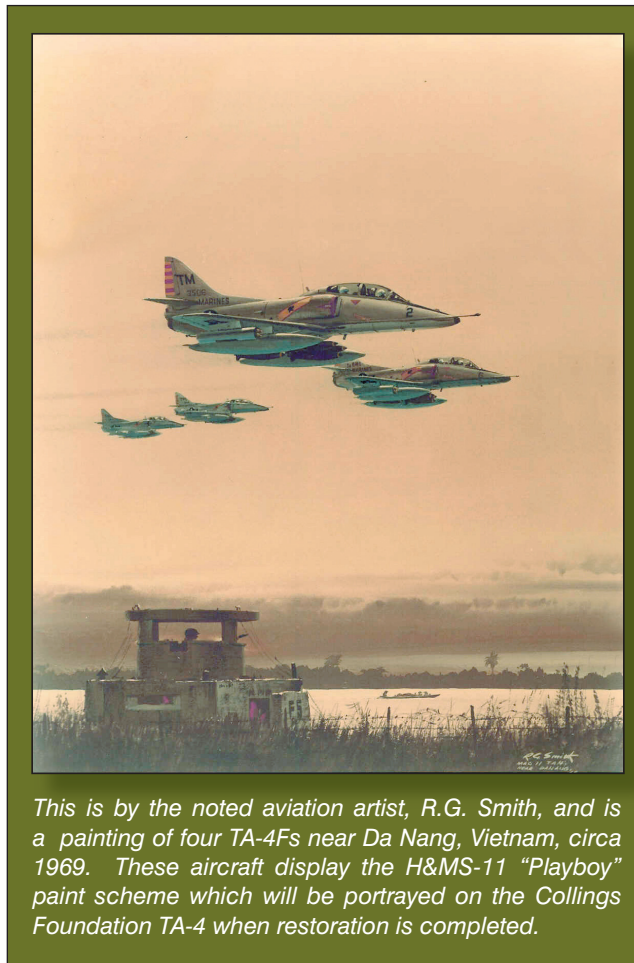
As reported in the *Skyhawk News* (Fall 2000), the U.S. Congress approved in the defense authorization for FY 2001 the transfer of a TA-4 to the Collings Foundation of Stow, Massachusetts. The Foundation completed the aircraft acceptance process in October 2002 and immediately began restoration of the aircraft for eventual use in its "Vietnam Memorial Flight."

◆
The Collings Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was founded in 1979 to educate the public on the heritage and history of transportation. To accomplish that mission in regards to aviation, the Foundation annually conducts its "Wings of Freedom Tour" and "Vietnam Memorial Flight" programs to honor veterans while educating the public about their accomplishments. These tours visit cities and towns throughout the country, and to date have provided more than 4 million people the opportunity to see various historical combat aircraft in action.

◆
The Foundation operates a variety of restored aircraft in these touring exhibits, including an F-4D flown by USAF ACE General Steve Ritchie. When fully operational, the TA-4 will join the F-4D and a UH-1E helicopter in the "Vietnam Memorial Flight," portraying the *Skyhawk* legend to air show crowds nationwide.

Collings Foundation's TA-4 (BuNo 153524) began life as an "F" model, delivered to the Navy in 1968. Its first operational use was with MAG-43 at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania (re-designated as MAG-49 in September 1972). Later in its career, this *Skyhawk* was reassigned to the Naval Test Pilot School at NATC Patuxent River, where it remained for the rest of

its active service. Modified to carry a flight-profile recording package, 153524 was later refitted as a "J" model, a retrofit that involved removal of ordnance systems and an upgrade to the Escapac 1-G-3 ejection seat, while retaining the J-52-P8 engine. Already an unusual configuration for a "J" model, the aircraft went through rework in 1993 at Cherry Point to receive a new "M"



This is by the noted aviation artist, R.G. Smith, and is a painting of four TA-4Fs near Da Nang, Vietnam, circa 1969. These aircraft display the H&MS-11 "Playboy" paint scheme which will be portrayed on the Collings Foundation TA-4 when restoration is completed.

model wing. After rework, the aircraft returned to Patuxent River to complete its career, transferring to AMARC, Tucson, AZ, in August 1994.

Appropriate to the mission of the "Vietnam Memorial Flight," the Collings Foundation TA-4 will proudly

display the Marine paint scheme and markings of the Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 11 (H&MS-11) *Playboys*, one of the squadrons that operated the two-seat TA-4 in combat in Vietnam. The Marine Corps used the TA-4 to perform a visual reconnaissance and fast forward air controller mission in combat areas too risky for the traditional FAC aircraft: the O-1 *Bird Dog*, O-2 *Skymaster* and OV-10 *Bronco*. While other Marine squadrons performed this mission in Vietnam, the H&MS-11 *Playboys* were arguably the most professional practitioners, developing highly standardized and effective operational procedures during 1969 and 1970 while flying from their base in Da Nang.

A recent report from the Collings Foundation indicates that their TA-4 could achieve operational status as early as late this year, depending on the availability of parts. The restoration team is having difficulty obtaining several key components because the Navy is reluctant to release them, and locating alternative suppliers is proving to be difficult. While most of these issues are being resolved, serious complications remain with the ejection system. Once the parts supply issues are resolved, the Foundation will remove the wing to allow shipping of the aircraft to a maintenance facility in Tennessee where the engine and associated components will be replaced and required inspections will be performed prior to flight.

Thanks to the Collings Foundation, *Skyhawk* Association members will one day be able to view the TA-4 in its natural element at air shows around the country.

As a nonprofit organization, the Collings Foundation relies on tax-deductible donations. Individuals desiring to support their work can send contributions to P.O. Box 248, Stow, MA 01775. For more information, visit the Foundation's excellent website at www.collingsfoundation.org.

**Bob Hickerson, Playboy 26
July 1969-1970**

NEW PAYING MEMBER\$

• Welcome & Thanks •

Ron Artim, Arlington, VA
 Kevin Bakas, Clinton, MA
 Richard Barker, Cheyenne, WY
 Robert Bergin, Fresno, CA
 Cary Branch, Mission Viejo, CA
 Jim Brandmueller, Reno, NV
 William Brodie, East Northport, NY
 Duke Brunelli, Hanford, CT
 Jason Burke, New Orleans, LA
 Roy Burns, Milton, FL
 James Busey, Lincoln, CA
 Rich Colby, Rio Hondo, TX
 Peter Cole, Lawrence, MA
 Stephan Crosby, Lihue, HI
 John Davis, Coronado, CA
 John Deeney, Springfield, VA
 William DeJack, White Lake, MI
 John Devaney, Edgewood, NM
 Lou Drendel, Venice, FL

Don Duffer, Sr., Tucson, AZ
 R. Eddy, Oak Harbor, WA
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 Lonny Ferrin, Tucson, AZ
 Doyle Fleming, Smackover, AR
 Dean French, Chicago, IL
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 Harry Hamm, Chesterfield, MO
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 H. Henderson, Jr., Gainesville, GA
 Neal Hinton, Jr., Covington, GA
 David Johnson, LeSueur, MN
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 Jimmy Leeward, Ocala, FL
 Holbrook Maslen, Boise, ID
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Bill McVey, Fair Oaks Ranch, TX
 Rick Morgan, Woodbridge, VA
 James Murphy, Cohasset, MA
 Dallas Nanney, Pahump, NV
 Robert Neely, Fayetteville, GA
 Robert Nole, Pittsburg, PA
 James O'Donnell, Ridgefield, CT
 Mark Olsen, San Diego, CA
 G. O'Neal, Russellville, AR
 Kurt Osterholm, Show Low, AZ
 William Pabst, Loveland, CO
 Art Padios, Lakeland, TN
 Carl Raabe, Durham, CA
 Preston Reynolds, Alameda, CA
 Steve Richmond, Alameda, CA
 Ben Ross, Lafayette, LA
 G. Sander, Bartlett, TN
 Michael Sandlin, Gilbert, AZ
 Rodney Schall, Virginia Beach, VA
 James Smith, San Diego, CA
 Stan Stanley, Oak Harbor, WA
 Christopher Tassio, Churrolltos, TX
 Daniel Titus, Dawsonville, GA
 Robert Walker, Visalia, CA

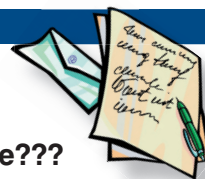
TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

None taken.

Next Issue, maybe???

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org



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No flight suit/jacket should be without one of these outstanding patches. Additional quantities may be purchased for \$5.00 each (\$6 for non-members) plus \$1 postage, by sending your check or money order (no credit cards yet, sorry) payable to Skyhawk Association along with your name address and membership number (found on your card) to:

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 2421 Clubside Dr.
 Beavercreek, OH 45431-2503

Current Squadron Duty Officers

USN

VA-12	Flying Ubangis	Austin O'Brien (aobrien@cfl.rr.com)
VA-22	Fighting Redcocks	Mike Morrison (va22morrison@cs.com)
VA-22	Fighting Redcocks	Bryan Remer (bryan@remmer.com)
VA-23	Black Knights	Chuck Wolf (wolfsindoorsoccer@earthlink.com)
VA-36	Roadrunners	Ted Langworthy (flybear@peoplepc.com)
VA-43	Challengers	John Gabbard (JTGabbard@domsoftware.com)
VA-46	Clansmen	Dave Dollarhide (davedollarhide@msn.com)
VA-55	Warhorses	David A. Weber (darweber@verizon.net)
VA-56	Champions	Randy Bob Wilson (srwilso1@attbi.com)
VA-64	Black Lancers	John Lamers (lamers@flash.net)
VA-66	Waldos	Ray Dermody (rjva66@aol.com)
VA-72	Blue Hawks	John Lamers (lamers@flash.net)
VA-76	Spirits	Bob Lomba (boblomba@flightline.com)
VA-81	Sunliners	Richard (Tricky) Shipman (ship@vnet.net)
VA-93	Blue Blazers	Tom Wondergem (auggie@tampabay.rr.com)
VA-94	Shrikes	Whizzer White (a4pilot@aol.com)
VA-106	Gladiators	Dick Carlberg (dickberg@skyhawk.8m.com)
VA-112	Bombing Broncos	Dick Twilde (rwtwild@compuserve.com)
VA-125	Rough Raiders	Steve MacMillan (stevemacmillan@bellsouth.net)
VA-134	Scorpions	Bob Krall (rkralla4@aol.com)
VA-144	Roadrunners	Bernie White (dotbern@aol.com)
VA-153	Blue Tail Flies	Stan Thompson (stan@shellmonster.com)
VA-163	Saints	Ed Copher (ecopher@satx.rr.com)
VA-164	Ghost Riders	John Nelson (jrnelson@hctc.com)
VA-172	Blue Bolts	Tim Cook (tailhook63@aol.com)
VA-216	Black Diamonds	Paul Galanti (pgalanti@12020.net)
NWEF	Albuquerque, NM	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NAF	China Lake, CA	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NARU	NAS Dallas TX	David A. Weber (darweber@verizon.net)
NAF	El Centro CA	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NATF	Lakehurst	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NFWS	Miramar, CA	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NAS	Patuxent River, MD	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NATC	Patuxent River, MD	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NTPS	Patuxent River, MD	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NAS	Point Mugu, CA	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
NMC/PMTC	Point Mugu, CA	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
VX-4	Evaulators	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)
VX-5	Vampires	Gary Verver (gverver@earthlink.net)

Navy Training

VT-24	Bobcats	Steve Linder (lindersteve@msn.com)
VT-25	Cougars	Thomas Bass (fort1729@charter.net)
VT-86	Saberhawks	Mark Morgan (lobo76mk@aol.com)

Navy Reserve

VA-203	Blue Dolphins	Dave Dollarhide (davedollarhide@msn.com)
VA-305	Lobos	Jerry Kopff (jerry@jklphotography.com)
VA-741	Dave Dollarhide	(davedollarhide@msn.com)
VA-776	Lobos	Jerry Kopff (jerry@jklphotography.com)

USMC

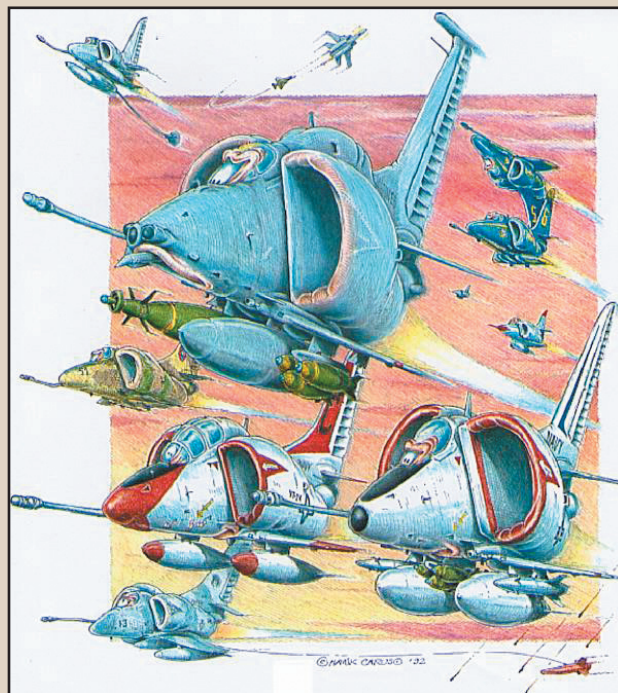
MAG-12	Outlaws	David Prendergast (dprendergast@foggy.net)
VMA-214	Black Sheep	Steve Linder (lindersteve@msn.com)
VMA-225	Vagabonds/Vikings	Bob Paul (vma225@wowway.com)
VMA-322	Fighting Gamecocks	John Margie (jomargie@attbi.com)

READY ROOM RECORDS

• Navy and USMC Squadrons •

We encourage all members to make contact with the Squadron Duty Officer (SDO) assigned to the units in which you served. Each squadron SDO maintains a roster of unit members that is a great resource for planning events and collecting squadron history.

If your unit does not have an SDO, consider volunteering. There are only two prerequisites: to have served in the unit, and to be an association member in good standing. For units without an SDO listed, contact the SDO-Coordinator - David A. Weber at darweber@verizon.net.



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