

The Skyhawk



Association Quarterly



ATSI pilot soars in A-4 over Arizona.

THE A-4 EVER

WINTER 2005

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 1

Feature:

Who Were Those Guys?
The Playboys in Vietnam.

*Membership Drive
2005*

Attic Attacks • Puresome Unplugged • USS Forrestal Fire & VA-46 • Harken Back
Twidget Goes Cyber • A Nugget & VMA-324 • Boom-Boom Room • Size Does Matter • TINS
USS Midway RR 3 Fund • Gann's Gallery
Membership Survey • The Crown's Off



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Drive to Recruit New Members Association's Top Priority!

Beginning its second decade, the *Skyhawk* Association's **job one** is to build our membership roster. In spite of relying on volunteers for 100% of our management, the *Skyhawk* Association will wither and die unless we can convince other enthusiasts to join us as members. Maintaining a minimum of 1,500 members in our ranks will ensure that we have the creative and financial resources to build upon our past successes to offer improved and expanded services in the future.

As a challenge to our members, *Skyhawk* Association is launching a membership drive contest this January, offering significant incentives for current members and active squadrons to recruit old squadron or shipmates into the association. If one-half of our current members heed the call and recruit one other person, we'll exceed our goal for this effort. If you believe in our purpose of celebrating and preserving the memory of the greatest airplane in history, recruiting one other member will be a simple task. *Skyhawk* Association should be (and can be) the largest of the aircraft affinity groups. Take up the challenge: *Join us in this task and help us grow.*

With this issue, the association is issuing a special invitation to join to former

Marine *Skyhawk* enthusiasts who have been loosely organized under the name *USMC Skyhawkers*. We met with some of this group in San Diego in September and all agreed that their organization and *Skyhawk* Association have common goals. Together our two organizations will be better positioned to sponsor and promote reunions; provide information resources to support historical and technical research; provide print and electronic communications channels to help our members maintain contact, and support the preservation of *Skyhawk* aircraft in museums and other displays.

In this issue (*Scheduling Stuff*) you will find information on our Winter Board meeting to be held in Dayton, OH, February 4-5, 2005 (*Y'all come*), and our 2005 Annual Meeting of members to be held in Reno on 9 September. The association is going all out this year to promote squadron reunions that coincide with our Annual Meeting (as well as Tailhook 05), so get busy with your squadron-mates to plan something special for next Fall. More details to follow.

Finally, in the coming year, the association will begin a planning process to determine if we're focused on the things that are important to you, the members,

and if not, how should we adjust our focus in the second decade. We'll be asking you for input, and I hope you'll respond. The association will only be as good as the support it receives from its members. If you want to see something new, let us know and even better, volunteer to help.

When you receive this journal, you'll be well into the New Year. Your association officers and directors wish you all the best in 2005. *A-4s Forever!*

Bob Hickerson
hickers@beecreek.net

Treasurer Ernie Laib Retires

Ernie Laib, hard-working Director and Treasurer of *Skyhawk* Association, is reluctantly retiring from his duties. Ernie has been a staunch supporter of the association for many years and has contributed significantly to its success. We'll sorely miss Ernie's management of our finances, but there's no question that he's done more than his share in building our organization into what it is today. We'll find someone to shoulder his duties, but we'll never replace his camaraderie and friendship. Well done, Ernie.

USS Midway

Great News and You Can Help: RR-3

USS Midway

The Light Attack Community Ready Room in *USS Midway* is one step closer to reality because of a \$5,000 pledge by former VA-23 Skipper, Capt Mo Peelle. This ready room will be dedicated to all USN/USMC light attack squadrons, past and present, and will provide a place to display squadron plaques and memorabilia, in addition to providing a place for squadron reunions or other ceremonies.

With this pledge, Mo Peelle's generosity will permit us to sign a ten-year lease with the *Midway* Carrier Museum for **Ready Room Three**.

However, the total lease cost is \$10,000 so we must raise another \$5,000 within the next year to finalize the lease.

The VA/VMA Ready Room Restoration Committee is asking for pledges from all squadrons to complete this most worthwhile project and ensure the VA/VMA community has a place to call its own in *USS Midway*.

Respects to all,
Bill Gilchrist,
VA-23 Black Knight.

Right now, just do it.

Make your check to:
San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum
with a notation for
VA/VMA RR Three Fund,
and mail to:

Bill Gilchrist
15150 Andorra Way
San Diego, CA 92129

Support the Skyhawk RR



Skyhawk Association, Inc.

Officers and Directors

Founded by M. Davis White

A4pilot@aol.com

Bob Hickerson

President and Director (FY 06)

hickers@beecreek.net

Jack Woodul

Vice President (Navy)

Puresome@comcast.net

Ed Jobin

Vice President (Marines) and

Director (FY 05)

ed.jobin@goodrich.com

Terry Cooney

Secretary

skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

Ernie Laib

Treasurer and Director (FY 07)

ernielalib1@cs.com

John Gabbard

Director (FY 07)

john.gabbard@domsoftware.com

Ted Langworthy

Director (FY 07)

flybear@peoplepc.net

R.R. "Boom" Powell

Director (FY 06)

vighawk@cox.net

A.D. "Bud" Southworth

Director (FY 05)

buds@walkerscl.com

David Weber

Webmaster and Director (FY 06)

darweber@verizon.net

Chuck Wolf

Director (FY 07)

wolfsindoorsoccer@earthlink.net

Skyhawk Association, Inc.

2421 Clubside Drive

Beavercreek, OH 45431

skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

Website: www.skyhawk.org or

www.a4skyhawk.org

David Weber, Webmaster

darweber@verizon.net

BOMBS AWAY!

• Winter 2005 •

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NEWSLETTER STAFF



Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman and Editor.

Margaret "Warrior Princess" Bone – Managing Editor, mbone@ec.rr.com.

David "Twidget" Weber – Technology and Website.

Feature Contributors: Boom Powell, Jack "Puresome" Woodul, Davis "Whizzer" White, Joe Turpen, Ed "Viking" Jobin, Bud Southworth.

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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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WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?

The Playboys

By Larry Adkinson

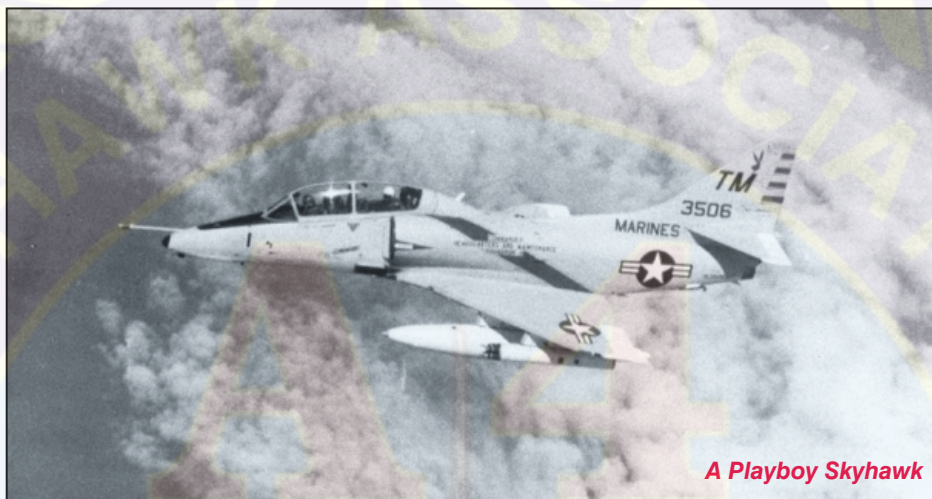
They were fighter pilots, scooter drivers, RIOs and RSOs. They were Marines doing their jobs as best they could.

In August 1967, the 1st Marine Air Wing introduced the two-seat TA-4F Skyhawks to the three fixed-wing air groups in South Vietnam. With its good low-level fuel specs, FM radio and excellent rear seat visibility, the aircraft proved a superb vehicle for Visual Reconnaissance /Tactical Air Coordination (Airborne) (VR/TACA)—commonly called *FastFAC*—operations. As shown in Figure 1, the TA-4Fs were armed with two pods of 5-inch Zuni rockets - half smoke and half high explosive - and full 20mm ammunition for the guns. Aviators from the Marine Aircraft Groups (MAGs) at Danang (MAG 11), Chu Lai East (MAG 12) and Chu Lai West (MAG 13) flew daily *FastFAC* missions in 1967-68. These included such demanding missions as coordinating the dozens of aircraft stacked up overhead the besieged garrison at Khe Sanh, finding truck convoys on the North Vietnam and Laotian trails and adjusting fire for the 16-inch guns of the USS *New Jersey* (BB 61) in North Vietnam's lower route packages.

When President Lyndon Johnson halted the bombing of North Vietnam on 1 November 1968, our mud-Marines in I Corps had to face an increasingly large and better-equipped enemy force supplied from North Vietnam through Laos. To help fix this, in January 1969, Marines consolidated the *FastFAC* effort and all of the TA-4Fs in MAG-11's Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 11 (H&MS-11) aboard Danang AB.

This article is a brief history of the

operations of that consolidated effort from Danang using the official call sign "Playboy." Pilots from MAG 12—Larry Adkinson, Jim Buffington, Bob Clapp, Doug Isaly, Dutch McCleskey, Roy



A Playboy Skyhawk

Moore, Steve Sewell and Bob Miecznikowski—joined the small group of A-4 pilots in MAG 11. This group quickly expanded to include several pilots from MAG 11's VMFA-542, including their CO, LtCol Keith Smith, as well as two of his key staff, Fritz Menning and Duane Wills. They flew almost daily TA-4F missions in addition to their F-4B sorties.

An immediate result of the centralization of effort at Danang was the increase in deep air support to the 9th Marine Regiment, which was heavily engaged with North Vietnamese regulars in Operation DEWEY CANYON along the Laotian border. Working in close coordination with Air Force F-100F "Misty" *FastFAC*s, the TA-4F aviators helped identify and destroy enemy supply areas and heavy mortar and rocket positions in Laos. We also provided a badly needed communications link because we could mix UHF and via FM radio traffic to maintain common situation awareness for both the ground forces and jet aircraft.

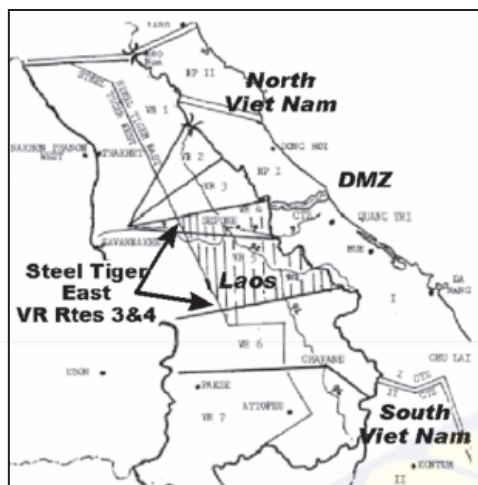
By the spring of 1969, the TA-4F

operations had a routine of 200 sorties monthly in order to provide continuous daylight coverage of the "Steel Tiger East" area in Laos (see map). In June 1969, LtCol Dick Hebert, took over the TA-4F mission and changed the unit callsign to *Playboy*, after the F-4U *Corsair* *FastFAC*s in the Korean War. With a streamlined operation and solid liaison lines with other air units operating in the Steel Tiger area, *Playboy* began an "in-country" exchange program with the "Misty" *FastFAC*s to swap a pilot for 5-7 days between Phu Cat and Danang. This provided a minimum of five flights for Marines in the F-100F and a comparable

exchange in the TA-4F for F-100F pilots. The exchange, which continued through the summer of 1969, improved the performance of both services "on the trail." And, as a relevant footnote, all of the USAF aviators seemed to prefer the TA-4F for the mission.

The normal missions had a two-cycle sortie, with

one tanker refueling in the middle, for an average sortie length of about three hours. Time available for strike control and reconnaissance normally ran about 45-50 minutes per cycle. The bulk of the missions were VR that developed information and passed it to the airborne command post (Hillsboro). If we found fleeting, lucrative targets, Hillsboro would divert ordnance flights to us in the target area. When a strike fighter was shot down anywhere in the area, the fast FAC with the most fuel would take charge of the RESCAP until the arrival of an A-1 Hobo or Sandy aircraft. Slow FACs, such as Nail or Raven, would often participate by operating at a higher altitude to observe and act as a radio relay while strike aircraft provided ordnance delivery as required. Two Playboys benefited from this in July 1969, when Capt Jim Buffington and Maj Bob Miecznikowski had to eject in Laos. A Jolly Green from Thailand successfully rescued them after nearly six hours on the ground. Jolly Greens would rescue two more *Playboy* crews during the next year.



Playboy's standard operating procedure (SOP) entailed flying at whatever altitude was necessary to accomplish the mission. Contrary to some earlier beliefs that flying at very low altitude was foolhardy, the Playboys demonstrated its prudence. Aircrews studied their maps and operated in the same area every day so they were able to effectively navigate at 200-500 feet and 380-400 knots. And, since the environment was characterized by non-radar, visually acquired, manually tracked anti-aircraft weapons fire, moving at nearly 400 knots while smoothly maneuvering in three dimensions almost completely negated visual tracking solutions by enemy gunners. Our *Skyhawks* were in and out of a gunner's envelope almost before he could react, so we were seldom fired on with any accuracy—and almost never hit. This low altitude energy maneuvering was made easier in August 1969, as J-52P-8 engines with an additional 700 pounds of thrust were installed in all the TA-4Fs.

We divided the crew duties so that the rear-seater observed the road while the front-seater navigated and avoided terrain or weather. Although the enemy threat dictated most of our low altitude maneuvers, we did our best to maintain the field of vision for the rear-seater. These low altitude tactics were effective, safely manageable, and produced results. For example, on 7 July 1969, operating at very low altitudes, Playboy spotted/adjusted for a flight of A-6As flying radar offset-aim-point delivery tactics in overcast (600-foot ceiling) conditions. This resulted in destruction of an enemy truck convoy that was moving under concealment of the low cloud cover, a fact clearly demonstrated by the 35mm photos

taken by the Playboys. This tactic became commonplace as the heavily loaded A-6s orbited above the clouds while the Playboys would penetrate through a hole in the cover and, using knowledge of the local terrain to navigate at very low altitude, locate targets for destruction.

In the summer of 1969, several 7th Fleet carrier pilots came into Danang and flew missions with us. This program paid off as Navy pilots, A-4 and A-7 alike, returned to their carriers with a better understanding of the intelligence behind their "tree-busting" missions. Ironically, these orientation flights helped us man the TA-4Fs during a critical pilot shortage when some Playboys flew three missions and logged 100-flight-hour months in July and August of 1969. In order to fill the ranks of Playboy, we got volunteers from A-4, F-4, and A-6 communities in MAG-12 and MAG-13, including Naval Flight Officers (NFOs) from the Danang squadrons. Once designated by the wing, each Playboy—pilot and NFO alike—had a unique number assigned (see table 1). Egos and traditional roles disappeared. Everyone focused on efficient VR and effective strike control that required two people working at peak efficiency.

During September 1969, Playboy developed a night deep air support (DAS) tactical package in response to an enemy situation. We positively established that enemy gunfire was most intense at sunset in areas where active nightly road repair and heavy supply movement was going to occur. Under these twilight conditions, enemy gunners could silhouette aircraft against the sky while the ground was already darkened, thus complicating exact identification of the source of gunfire. Also, enemy road repair crews could work almost unobserved in the twilight and supply trucks could be on

the move before the arrival of the nightly swarm of aircraft specifically configured for night detections and attack.

To counter this, we put together the "hammer" package. This involved sending the TA-4Fs to an area where such activity was predicted. The Playboy would come through the target area at maximum speed, minimum altitude, using his knowledge of the terrain to locate the exact spot and achieve surprise. When gunfire erupted behind the TA-4F, he would pull up, reverse course and drop a series of flares while continuing to climb up to a "perch" from which he could locate the target. He then pulled over the top, put marks on/near the target with 5-inch "Zuni" smoke rockets. A flight of two F-4B strike aircraft escorting the TA-4F at a much higher, undetected altitude would then roll-in on the flared and marked target with gun

continued...

Table 1 Designated Playboy FastFACs

Name	PB #	Name	PB #
Adkinson, J.L.	32	Moore, E.R.	39
Buckley, J.E.	27	Mills, W.W.	13
Buffington, J.C.	30	Miecznikowski, R.S.	71
Chapman, P.W.	37	Nelson, T.S.	90
Clapp, R.G.	77	Ostermann, G.A.	50
Connolly, R.P.	22	Page, D.D.	35
Crouch, K.L.	09	Pospisil, D.L.	99
DeFries, C.F.	20	Rasmussen, R.T.	45
Gagen, J.A.	08	Richardson, M.L.	21
Garske, E.W.	88	Reid, R.D.	26
Gering, M.S.	05	Robinson, L.W.	70
Griggs III, T.W.	48	Schwab, W.F.	34
Green, M.P.	65	Seder, T.D.	33
Grissom, E.D.	75	Sewell, S.J.	61
Hanle, R.L.	04	Shea, S.F.	15
Hauptfuher, H.B.	43	Smith, J.T.	Unk
Hickerson, R.	26	Smith, K.A.	03
Higgins, D.G.	17	Smith, W.R.	41
Heamey, R.D.	57	Spindler, D.D.	79
Henrich, C.R.	44	Stowers, R.M.	69
Hebert, R.F.	01	Swaby, D.R.	24
Isaly, D.K.	66	Van Esselstyn, N.K.	37
Jones, P.J.	62	Ward, G.W.	12
Jupp, W.A.	02	Weber, D.J.	06
Kane, J.J.	15	Wilson, W.B.	77
Light, B.R.	25	Wilmarth, J.M.	55
Lewis, F.E.	61	Wills, D.A.	23
McCleskey, W.R.	58	Wood, L.A.	68

WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?

CONT...

killing cluster ordnance and heavier high explosive bombs to destroy trucks and crater the road.

The fourth member of this hammer flight was a photo aircraft (RF-4B) that made a high-speed photo pass within a couple of minutes after the ordnance exploded. This photography was often startling in terms of confirmed bomb damage assessment, and most important to the FACs, reduced the number of guns and gunners in the operating area. The hammer tactic remained in the inventory and was used during different periods as need dictated.

The dry season in central Laos lasts from October to April. In 1969-70, this resulted in massive enemy efforts to move supplies over dry Laotian roads. Playboy flew nearly 700 combat missions during October, November, and December, including control of some 350 strikes and participation in 25 rescue operations. Some Playboy aircraft sustained hits, yet all but one returned safely to base.

On 27 December, Maj Rick Lewis and 1st Lt Paul Phillips were forced to eject in central Laos, just south of Sepone. They were recovered 23 hours later after an intensive antiaircraft artillery suppression effort enabled Jolly Greens to make a successful pickup. On 5 January 1970, Maj Larry Robinson was killed in action while escorting a Playboy TA-4F on a modified (daylight) hammer tactic. "Robbie" was flying an F-4B and was rolling in on an active gun position that 1st Lt Bud Garske had marked. He took barrage fire from multiple 37mm antiaircraft guns in the area, sustaining a direct hit in the cockpit area. Apparently neither he nor his backseater attempted ejection. In nearly one year of sustained operations in Laos, which included hundreds of enemy fire incidents, the loss of Larry Robinson (Playboy 70) was the first—and he was not flying the TA-4F.

Operation GRAND CANYON was another Playboy interdiction operation. Beginning on 2 February 1970, it targeted Marine Corps strike aircraft to interdict enemy infiltration routes west of Hue City along the Laotian border. Playboys provided dawn-to-dusk strike control of

1st MAW A-4, F-4, and A-6 aircraft, totaling 150 sorties. The operation was an unqualified success as they completely closed chokepoints and facilitated heavy BDA by B-52 strikes on the vehicles stopped behind these interdiction points.

In early March 1970, while on a VR/TAC(A) mission, LtCol George Ward was killed by a single enemy bullet that entered the front cockpit. 1st Lt Duncan Higgins, an A-4 pilot in the rear seat, flew the aircraft back to Da-nang. LtCol Ward was designated to relieve Dick Hebert as H&MS-11 CO. He and Larry Robinson were the only Playboys killed in action, although two others were wounded on missions. Maj Dorsie Page was forced to land his TA-4F with bullet wounds in both legs. He had an NFO in the rear seat. Capt Don Swaby had a 19.2mm round pierce his windscreen and the resulting shrapnel severed his oxygen hose, shattered his visor, and sent Plexiglas into his eyes. Several fragments penetrated his mask and shattered his microphone, but he was able to clear his eyes, spit out the fragments, and safely return to Da-nang - thus becoming a Marine who REALLY spits bullets.

In April, Dick Hebert was relieved as commanding officer of H&MS-11 by LtCol Speed Shea. During his tenure as CO, Dick Hebert grew the Playboys into a highly effective operational unit. His enthusiasm and intrinsic leadership qualities engendered great personal loyalty from his aviators and men. They would always know him as "Playboy One."

The Playboy effort transitioned from deep support missions in Laos to a more traditional Marine Corps role in close support of the ground forces engaged in I Corps. This period also saw the loss of the third (and last) aircraft as Capt R.T. Rasmussen and 1stLt Chip Mills ejected from their TA-4F in the A Shau Valley in the summer of 1970. A Jolly Green helicopter crew, sustaining some 15 hits,



At left, author Larry Adkinson poses with CG 1st MAW, MajGen "Smoke" Spanjer and Playboy One, LtCol Dick Hebert. Picture was taken following Adkinson's 500th combat mission, flew with Gen Spanjer.

picked them up in a heroic rescue action. Their six-hour effort was punctuated by a running gun battle between the enemy, the Sandy A-1 RESCAP aircraft, and the Jolly Green door gunners.

The end came on 14 September 1970, when the Playboy mission was canceled. The crews experienced the bittersweet emotions of pride in a job well done, while retaining the ache of a job they were not allowed to finish.

Who were those guys? They were Marines (see Table 1) doing their jobs as best they could. Little has been said or written of them, but many of the dedicated TA-4F crewmen who passed through the Playboy rolls went on to become squadron commanders and more. Others returned to pursue civilian careers after their tours in Vietnam. Regardless of what they went on to do, all counted their experiences on the trail in Laos as second to none.

Ed. Note: The author, Col Larry Adkinson retired from the Marine Corps in 1988 after serving in several A-4 and F-8 squadrons, including two combat tours in Vietnam and a tour as CO, VMA-331 in 1981-83. A longer version of this article won the prestigious Geiger Award in 1986 for its significant contribution to USMC aviation history. Col Adkinson is currently employed as Director of the Synthesis Center, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Quantico, VA, killing

WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?

ADM Stan Arthur Remembers

1972: The TA-4F Saw Combat With VA-164 on *USS Hancock*

While the Marine use of the TA-4 as a visual reconnaissance and airborne forward air controller platform has been called the most extensive combat use of the two-seat *Skyhawk*, during the 1972 western Pacific combat cruise of CVW-21 aboard *USS Hancock*, pilots of VA-164 logged some serious combat time in the two-seat A-4. On that cruise, the A-4 squadrons in Airwing 21 were assigned responsibility for developing expertise in unique types of missions - an example being VA-55's specialization in the Iron Hand mission. VA-164 deployed on that cruise with their aircraft wired for equipment to facilitate the delivery of laser-guided bombs, and worked on developing tactics for delivery and control of those weapons in a high-threat environment.

Then Commander Stan Arthur was Commanding Officer of VA-164 in the summer-fall of 1972 when VA-164 flew a number of missions to deliver laser-guided bombs in North Vietnam. We asked Admiral Arthur to provide his recollections on that period, and he replied:

"We deployed with part of our VA-164 aircraft (A-4Fs) with a Laser Spot Tracker (LST) in the nose cone. The



The Sweet Two-Seat.

other piece of equipment that came with the LST was a new gun sight - Ferranti - which could display the spot where the laser energy was directed. When we got to combat, we were tied to either an airborne or ground FAC (forward air controller) to put a laser spot on the target. China Lake had been working on building a hand-held laser for our use to allow us to do our own lasing. Needless-to-say, this wouldn't work in a single-seat aircraft. We initially deployed these prototype hand-held designators to an F-4 squadron on one of the other carriers deployed to Westpac. Johnny Bittick (who now lives in the Dallas area) was our Operations Officer, and he ran this project. This was not a good solution as the carriers worked different line schedules.

"In August 1972, we were able to get two combat configured TA-4Fs transferred to us from the USMC (BuNo 154325 and 153491). Since we were pilot limited in the squadron, with every pilot doing three man-ups per day (two actual flights maximum), we trained other CVW-21 folks to do the lasing from the back seat of the TA-4. We had some of our RF-8 and E-2 folks qualified to do the lasing. The designator box was very cumbersome, and both people in the aircraft had to wear

laser protective glasses. It was almost impossible to hold a steady spot under any 'G' load, so the TA-4 had to do a 1 to 0 'G' arc around the target, or knife-edge pass over the target, to allow the back-seater to see the target and have a chance at holding the laser steady. We had good success with the tactic, but the folks flying the TA-4 were not happy to be in such steady-state flight (in the target area), especially up North!"



ADM Stan Arthur

CDR Johnny Bittick Remembers: Operations Officer of VA-164

"As I remember it, all of our (VA-164) Super Foxes had the Ferranti gunsight and Laser Spot Tracker. It was a system that was vital to the success of the LGB (laser-guided bomb) project because the designator would often quit lasing, and the only way to know was that the small circle in the gunsight would start searching again. The gunsight picture was the same as a regular A-4, with the addition of a "donut" that scanned back and forth like a radar sweep. When the LST locked on the laser energy, the donut would settle over the spot. All the pilot had to do was put the cross hairs on the donut.

"The hand-held designator (we were told that a couple of China Lake engineers dreamed it up on weekends in their garage) was powered from a 24 volt DC plug in the cockpit. It was about the size of a cigar box. The early models would overheat easily and quit working. We had a tech rep that would debrief the designator pilot after every flight, and suggestions

were quickly incorporated. Later models had a self-contained cooling system and a gyro stabilized anti-jitter reticle.

"As far as I know, there was no R&D program on the designator. China Lake built it and sent it to us. VA-164 was the logical choice to use it since we were the only unit in the Navy with the LST and Ferranti gunsight. We had a short training course at the bombing range near Cubi, and the rest was combat testing!

"Another pilot and I went to MCAS Iwakuni to get the two TA-4Fs from the Marines. They had armor plate and ECM gear. Since it was my project, I wound up flying a lot of the designator hops. As ADM Arthur said, we used anyone we could find that was willing and had wings in the back-seat! The ship's company ATC (air traffic control) guy flew A-7s on his first tour, and he flew my backseat quite often. We would load a dumb MK-83 on the

continued...



WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?

CONT...



VA-164

centerline of the T-bird, and when everyone else was Winchester (out of ammunition), I'd get a turn.

"We worked up our own tactics, and late in the cruise we were asked to submit them to NATOPS. Lt Lochmiller was my assistant operations officer and did the artwork, and I did the writing. I don't know if it ever found its way into the NATOPS manual. We used the designator often in road recce, and the tactics were to position the designator aircraft about two miles in front of a division of bombers. The designator was around 5 -7,000' and the bombers were at 16,000'. The T-bird was low enough to see under trees and such and high enough to stay out of ground fire. When a target was spotted, the designator aircraft would pitch up to around 10,000' and circle. The bombers could determine the general area of the target from the circle, and would push over enough to get the area in their gunsights. The designator would lase the target and the bombers would get a lock on and release the LGBs 'in the basket'. It worked very well.

"This delivery method wasn't just for bombs with laser terminal guidance, but worked for 'dumb' bombs as well. In fact, the laser-guided bombs had just become operational and were in very short supply. We saved them for the high-value targets. The tactics we used with 'dumb' bombs were similar to those described above. The TA-4 designator aircraft acted as a FAC and led the bomber pilots to the general target area. The TA-4 designator operator then lased the target as the bombers rolled in, and the bombers identified the target by reference to the LST reticle which was locked onto the laser spot. As I recall, we used the TA-4 on a daily basis for missions such as this."

A Couple of Memorable Missions.

"ADM Arthur and I were out one day on a two-plane road recce. We were pretty far up North when I spotted a truck under a large tree. Stan couldn't see it, but I circled, designated, and he got a lock. He bombed on his gunsight donut and got a direct hit, having never seen the truck.

"On another mission, we found a number of pontoons along a canal. As you may remember, they would use the pontoons for a bridge at night, and disassemble it during the day, leaving the pontoons scattered along the bank. Using dumb bombs you could use a lot of them trying to hit something as small as a pontoon. We had a division with four LGBs per aircraft. With the designator we walked the bombs along - one bomb, one pontoon. Really neat!

"As we neared the end of our 10-month cruise, I started trying to train other air wings to use the system. There were four other carriers on Yankee Station, and I took one other guy (Rob Barber) and went to all four. The F-4 RIOs had the designator, and the A-7s had the LGBs. We flew combat hops with all of them. The results were spotty due to the unreliability of the designators. Because the F-4/A-7 team didn't have the laser spot trackers, if the designator went tits up, nobody knew until the LGBs all went dumb."

◆ ◆ ◆
(Ed. Note: VA-164 was pioneering a new era in air-to-ground tactics on that 1972 cruise. Much later, all A-4Ms were outfitted with a heads-up display incorporating the laser spot tracker reticle. The tactics developed by VA-164 indeed made their way into the NATOPS tactics manual and were later refined by a new generation of Skyhawk pilots and Marine ground/airborne forward air controllers.)



Does Anyone Know Why?

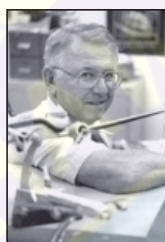
In this photo, A-4M 158148 displays an unusual black and white paint scheme, with a mirror-image on the other side. The picture was taken in the mid-1970s when the aircraft was assigned to the Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility at Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was later assigned to NATC Patuxent River. We'd like to know the purpose of this paint scheme and would appreciate information from anyone who can provide it. Contact us at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org, and we'll share your insight with other members.

HARRY GANN'S GALLERY

Blues Over U.S.S. Arizona

The subject for today shows the Blue Angels A-4 delta over the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. It was taken during the 1982 show season. Leading the pack was Dave Carroll with Kevin Miller left wing and Tim Dineen the right wing. Slot was Bob Stephens. Soloists were Jim Ross and Randy Clark. Flying me was Scott Anderson.

I thought that this shot would be the 1983 lithograph, but they chose another photo taken on the same flight which showed the delta flying by Diamond Head.



Harry Gann



BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •

Oh sure, you might think these are elementary questions, Watson, but be advised they come from none other than Boom Powell, who sits up at night thinking about how to challenge, yet not insult, our distinguished readers with his puzzlers. Try these.



Question 1: What was the EA-4F?



Question 2: What model Skyhawk is this?

Question 3: What Navy or Marine Corps squadron:

- flew the Skyhawk the longest?
- flew the most combat hours in the Skyhawk?
- flew the most models of the Skyhawk?

Answers:

Question 1: The EA-4F was a TA-4 modified for electronic warfare training. Only four EA-4Fs were manufactured, and they all served with VAQ-33, the electronic countermeasures (ECM) "adversary" squadron.

Question 2: The A-4L. 100 A-4Ls were modified from A-4Cs. The smooth intakes, nose shape and insignia and dirty-oil streak along the side all indicate a "Charlie" model, while the avionics hump was originally added only to "Foxtrot" and "M" models.

Question 3: We have no idea, but we'd like our members to help us answer these questions. In preparation for the Fall 2006 50th Anniversary of the introduction of the Skyhawk into operational Navy and Marine Corps squadrons, help us research a detailed article on the operational achievements of sea service squadrons that operated the A-4. If you think you know the answers to one or more of these questions, email us at: newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org



To the Editor:

October 18, 2004

Hello:

I am Carla Sofia, and I am 11 years old. I live at a small island that has an international airport, I like a lot to see the airplanes and collect postal, models of airplanes, key holders, pins, pens and bonnets. I have a friend that helped me to write this letter and another that gave me these emails for me to send in my father's computer. I am writing to you to know if you could help me in my collection and if you could send some postcards, models of airplanes, key-holder, pins, pens and bonnets.

A kiss and thank you very much for your attention. My address is:

Carla Sofia Sousa
Lugar das covas
Freguesia de Almagreira
Ilha de Santa Maria
Portugal
9580-019 Almagreira VPT
carlasofia011@sapo.pt

(Ed. Note: The Board was so pleased with Carla's letter that we approved a new category of membership for her. She received the first "Associate" member card compliments of the Skyhawk Association, and we hope members will help her with her collection of memorabilia. Her home, Santa Maria Island, figured prominently in one of the most amazing stories in Skyhawk lore, the mid-1980's

trans-Atlantic flight of VMA-223. Association member Mike Larson was squadron commander of the Bulldogs during that adventure and will relate the personal side of his story in an upcoming issue. Watch for it – it's a story for the ages.)

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

Raven ,

Truly enjoyed your article regarding a half century of A-4s. Lots of effort and research -- thanks for doing it. Like you, when we were flying with Harry Gann, I had little idea of his incredible contributions -- contributions to historic preservation, by the way, that he continued as the curator of our museum when it was at El Toro. That brings me to the second subject:

When Whizzer White and his Historical Committee meet, I'd appreciate it if they would consider the *Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum*. As you may remember, I chair the 501(c)(3) foundation (the Flying Leatherneck Historical Foundation) that provides volunteer and financial support to the museum.

The museum was started at El Toro by Jay Hubbard in 1989 and moved to Miramar in 1999 -- when El Toro was BRAC'd. It's the only museum in the world dedicated to the principal purpose of preserving the history of Marine Corps aviation and is one of only four HQMC officially certified "Command Museums."

We have an impressive inventory of 40

aircraft -- including BuNo 160264 -- the last of 2960 A-4s built.

You can find us on the web at: www.flyingleathernecks.org.

Thanks in advance, *Semper Fi* and a belated happy birthday, Thunder.

(Ed. Note: MajGen Bobby "Thunder" Butcher, USMC (Ret) is a member of our association.)

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

I don't think so....

The Fall 2004 edition of the Association Quarterly, on page 5, discusses an R.G. Smith painting...incorrectly, I believe. The painting first came out, I think, on the cover of *Approach* magazine sometime in the late '60s or early '70s. Although the reproduction in the newsletter is not clear, the original clearly shows the distinctive Blue Bolt of VA-172 on the fuselages and drop tanks of the A-4Cs. I left -172 in March 1968. We had flown from the *FDR* in Airwing One for many years. Sometime thereafter, 172 began flying off the *Shang*, and that is when the painting made its appearance. I noted it with a mixture of pride (good painting of my old squadron) and regret (wrong carrier), and wrote to Douglas and received a nice 9"x12" print...and the Blue Bolts are loud and clear.

Sorry, 106...

Signed,
Tim Cook
TAILHOOK63@aol.com

(Ed. Note: Sorry we can't provide a higher-resolution image of this R.G. Smith painting. Thanks for the input, Tim. Anyone out there wish to comment further?)

♦ ♦ ♦

UPDATE UPDATED

Restoration of TA-4 153524

by Collings Foundation of Stow, Massachusetts.



THE COLLINGS FOUNDATION
STOW, MASSACHUSETTS

The Summer 2004 issue of the *A4Ever* reported that the Collings Foundation of Stow, Massachusetts, was restoring TA-4 153524 to flying condition to allow it to participate in air shows around the country. A recent update from the foundation relates that the aircraft was moved to a restoration facility in Myrtle Beach,

South Carolina, in September 2004. The final restoration is underway, and the engine has undergone high-power testing. With luck, flight testing will begin in the coming weeks, and *Skyhawk* Association members may see the TA-4 in Headquarters and Maintenance Eleven Playboy markings at air shows next summer.

As previously noted, the Collings Foundation relies on tax-deductible donations to finance projects such as this. Members interested in supporting their work should contact the foundation at P.O. Box 248, Stow, MA 01775. More information can be found on the website at www.collingsfoundation.org.

THE CROWN'S OFF

• Attempt at Editorial •

By the Warrior Princess



Oh sure, you may ask what's a nice civilian girl like me doin' in a place like this, editorially speaking, especially with a background of absolutely *no* time in the A-4; just over an hour in the *Hornet*; days (even weeks) in the *Herc*; and lots of passenger time in assorted choppers, CODs, C-9s, C-12s and you could throw in some time spent floating on LHAs and CVNs, but who cares....

Yet while hanging around various military flightlines and ready-rooms here and abroad, even a disinterested observer would begin to pick up on the obvious: there are deviant personality traits and certain immutable twitches that more times than not, tell you what a guy flies. And the interesting thing is, these traits and twitches remain only *slightly* modified as the said guy is eventually forced from the cockpit to a desk job, then ages, retires, ages some more, and becomes a scuzzy civilian like the rest of us.

Because of having led a relatively pure life in spite of the stats cited above, I had never even seen an A-4 'til late in life, my loss. Eventually, I had the pleasure of observing a Marine Reserve A-4 driver up close. And he was on good behavior because I was his ride to the nearest commercial airport (New Bern), after he delivered

the last USMC Reserve *Scooter* to Cherry Point, in the early mid-nineties. It was an airbrushed, gleaming, great-looking jet. When he climbed out, the guys promptly soused him with a barrel of water right in the face. Cool, huh?

Anyhow, he changed into some dry togs for the return to NAS Willow Grove. Not wanting to intimidate him with my *Harrier* factoids that can, in a New York minute, hermetically glaze the eyeballs of everyone but *Harrier* drivers, I graciously inquired about his A-4 during the drive. "It's a hot rod. The *Scooter* is great, too bad they decided to retire it." (*For a single-seat cockpit guy, this wasn't too shabby, I thought. Clear statement of fact with no embellishment; no pent-up rage or visible, frothing disgust with the command authority; he was not drowning his sorrows from a hip flask or wearing his wet flight suit as a final badge of courage; had not told me to speed up over the 15 over we were already doing-all in all, he was pretty much breaking the single-seat mold as I knew it...*)

And it was only while getting out of the car and resqueezing the soggy flight suit before resacking it, that he mentioned casually in an aside, that the *Scooter* was a **nuke platform**. (*Be still my tactical little heart! What manner of man-pilot is this?*

Was Lindy like this? Doolittle? I bet Chuck Yeager wasn't. Is this what *Skyhawkhood* is all about?)

I had suddenly, finally met a *Scooter* driver, and life would never be the same. While I would ever admire, oh, say the *Prowler* driver who deals with more ECMOs that a grown man should have to; while I would continue to believe that *Harrier* drivers eat their young; while I would ever maintain that *Hornet* drivers (with or without a back seat) can't get past wanting to be a Blue Angel in spite of that dorky 70s-looking ridiculous blue spandex flight suit with an *ascot* for goodness sake; while *Tomcat* drivers may be big and bad their days are numbered and their wings don't always swing; while these thoughts were rushing through my mind which trust me, ain't a very long trip, I knew TacAir for me was suddenly altered.

As sunlight streamed through the sunroof and I pulled away from the terminal, I instinctively knew that one day, yes, I would Google the venerable *Skyhawk*. But I never thought that Destiny would slam-dunk me down in the middle of the newsletter of the association of these single-seat former wonders, even though they got no plane, no more. But attitude is not about altitude, and while you can take the man outta the cockpit, you can't take the cockpit outta the man. Or words to that effect.... You read it here.

WP

Warrior Princess
sends.

TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• www.skyhawk.org •

By David "Twidget" Weber

The Silicon Chip: Possibly Man's Greatest Invention

Today's computer user is a mix varying from those who think the CD player tray is for holding a cup of coffee, to the pro who enjoys custom building his own desktop. Regardless of the user's level of understanding of what goes on under the cover, the common thread that binds all users together is the periodical over-riding urge to launch that user interface, commonly called a keyboard, into the next county (quite a feat considering the poor flight characteris-

tics of a keyboard). Although the sense of accomplishment derived may be temporally satisfying, this act creates a problem in that the processing unit left alone on the desk becomes a useless consumer of electricity.

Better to spend a little time reminding yourself that the computer is the simplest and dumbest machine we have ever invented. Basically, it can only add zero and one. Now how hard is that? The computer's saving grace is that it can add a whole

bunch of zeros and ones very fast. Its speed is its only real attribute, as those little silicon chips depend solely upon the input they receive from humans. The operating system, the application and the keyboard input are the results of human thought and those digits at the end of what we call hands.

So the next time that computer doesn't respond to your commands, don't get upset with the machine. Remember that it is solely dependent upon what we humans have instructed it to do. Educate yourself, and make the most of that keyboard. It's not a mystery, it's just another tool.

David "Twidget" Weber:

www.darw.com.

P.S. Please keep your email address up to date with the association secretary and in the Ready Room!

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

Bouncing the Spider

Screaming out of the sky, Puresome the Pitiless, Terror of the Air and ex-Yankee Air Pirate, searched for victims.

The test hop on the mighty A-4B, dredged out of the Arizona desert and made ready to do battle with the wily

easily whupped the *Charlie* in aircraft-bending contests.

The Florida air around NAS Cecil Field was a target-rich environment. Puresome had honed his test-hop routine into a 30-minute thing of compact beauty,

"The Florida air around NAS Cecil Field was a target-rich environment. Puresome had honed his test-hop routine into a 30-minute thing of compact beauty, leaving some 30 minutes available to teach unwary aircraft to beware of the Puresome in the sun."

Gomer, was complete. The more important business of jumping unsuspecting Florida ANG F-102s or the unwary A-4 separated from the herd was at hand.

Puresome had raised the test hop on aircraft coming out of maintenance to a high art. When his old squadron had decided to step up to brand-new A-7As, he had cheerfully declined and walked across the hangar to be an instructor in the Tinker Toy RAG. This had proved to be a bagger's paradise, because even if he was not scheduled to fly, he could often hang around the duty officer's desk and snivel a couple of hops. Being assigned to the maintenance department, Puresome could often pick up a couple of test hops as well. Despite the considerable number of clicks on his body's counting accelerometer and corresponding dent in his supply of Med Cruise skorch at the end of the day, Puresome was sprinting for the flight time gold ahead of fellow bagger Worm, who had been temporarily stymied by unreasonable A-7 RAG types.

The cruel war was raging and ancient A-4Bs were filling breaches in the ranks of the more modern A-4Cs and Es. "Where are the *Echoes* of yesteryear?" Puresome wondered as more and more of the runty-nosed *Scooters* showed up.

But flying the prehistoric bird wasn't all bad. The needle-ball-airspeed usually worked, and below 2,000 lbs of gas, the *Bravo* compared well with the *Echo* and

leaving some 30 minutes available to teach unwary aircraft to beware of the Puresome in the sun.

But today had been ratty. Other than the one square turn he was able to get out of an F-102 and an Atoll pass through a four-plane formation headed for Pin-eastle, which had dutifully broken left and resumed after Puresome whoostled by, the morning had not been all that interesting. Since he didn't have gas enough to lurk around Cedar Key, another well-known choke point, Puresome reluctantly headed back to home plate.

But things started looking up shortly after he switched to tower frequency. Sidewinder 404 called for takeoff on 27 Right, and Puresome recognized the voice as belonging to his pal Spider who was flying one of his old squadron's brand-new A-7As.

"Yee...haw!"

Puresome immediately leveled off and headed west toward the field. High, the sun at his back and at perfect fighting weight, his eyes went all squinty.

Spider was an ex-squad-

ronmate who had made the transition to *Slufs* and, in spite of being a LCDR, was a long-time particular pal. He had shown up as a replacement at the beginning of the second line period on Yankee Station, then a bull LT coming back to sea duty. Spider blustered his way into the ready room, hoping to divert attention from his FNG status with noise. Spider waved his hands and carried on in front of a small group about how they used to do stuff back when he was a Fighting Redcock.

Prematurely salty LTJG Puresome was having none of it. Mindful of the rules of ascendancy of sea duty over shore duty pukes, he was especially offended that Spider didn't know enough to be humble in the presence of mighty warriors who had already fit the forces of evil. Puresome's mouth autoloading, cocked and fired.

"Yaaa, right! You boot!" he said with a sneer.

"Boot? ...Boot?" Spider sputtered in disbelief, his hands going unsynchronized and out of control. "I've got more time at high station that you've got in the NAVY!"

"Ya, and I've got more in the Phuc Yen GCA pattern than you've got in post-grad school!" Puresome interrupted. The



An A-4B that may or may not have been flown by Puresome.
(Courtesy of Roger Summers.)

potential game of smack 'em in the mouth was narrowly averted by the intervention of Captain Zoderly, boy SDO, and other less smarty types.

But Spider was a kindred spirit — he loved to fly — and it showed. Puresome came to really envy Worm for having Spider as his section lead. He was a good stick, a good leader and was not just a little batshit. So it wasn't too long before Puresome assigned Spider a place among the very elder gods and they became pals.

But now Puresome hung on the perch, watching Spider's A-7, fat with a full bag of gas, waddle down the runway and get airborne.

"Must have called for a low-performance takeoff," Puresome mused as he dropped the nose and crammed on the throttle.

The lightly loaded *Scooter* picked up megawarp in the dive and Puresome rapidly overtook Spider from six o'clock low. Timing it just right, Puresome zoomed up from below and passed just in front of Spider's aircraft. *Whoomp!* Spider's life flashed before his eyes and his head whanged upside the windows as his plane passed through Puresome's jet wash.

"Etai!" Puresome sang out as he zoomed straight vertical and, keeping the Gs on, barrel-rolled around for a classic gunnery pass of great beauty. Spider, recovering, had dumped the nose of his *thunder pig* in an attempt to gain some smash.

But it was a slow thing, and Puresome relentlessly smoked in.

"Budda, budda, budda!" Puresome squeeze the trigger as the A-7 filled his gunsight.

Once again, Puresome pulled vertical. But just before rolling over the top, he realized something was a bit wrong. The cockpit had mysteriously filled with smoke.

"Whut?" Puresome stuck his head inside and cleverly noted that the fire light was on.

"Whut?" thought Puresome again, closing the throttle. "This can't happen to me."

With his nose pointed straight up and his airspeed rapidly dwindling back toward the lower peg, the next order of business was to recover from the unusual attitude. Puresome eased the stick over and the nose fell through.

Foom! Spider's airplane swooshed



Looking better in flight than they have a right to, a section of A-7s shown over Florida, and YP's nowhere in sight. (Courtesy of Gary Verver.)

by! After Puresome's initial attack, he had madly started dumping a great deal of gas over the Florida countryside and had pitched back into the fight with a vengeance. By now Puresome, somewhat distracted, was the grape and Spider was the plucker. As Puresome started regaining some airspeed and his nose started to come out of the dive, Spider scorched by again. Puresome was too preoccupied to notice that he was drinking simulated leaden death.

Puresome had leveled off and was trying to figure out where exactly he was. All the electrical instruments were dead and the wet compass was still madly wobbling around. Knowing he was west of the field somewhere, Puresome scientifically figured that he had to go "E" and, since it was still morning, that was where the sun was. As he started turning in that direction, Spider roared by, having Puresome's ass and loving it.

"*Jerbis Flinderbars! HEFOE! HE-FOE!*" Puresome yelled into his mask, holding his forearm across his helmet.

The good news was that the motor did not seem to be melting and ran OK with the power set at 88 percent. Cecil had to be out there somewhere through the cockpit smoke and haze.

But the better news was that Spider had finally figured out that something was

a bit wrong, and he joined on Puresome's left wing. Puresome whanged the glare shield with his open palm several times, then held his forearm across his helmet and held up five fingers, the signal for engine troubles. Spider nodded his head, understanding perfectly, and Puresome passed him the lead.

The wind had died down. Spider led Puresome to a straight-in approach to 9-Right at Cecil. After visually checking Puresome's gear, Spider broke off and Puresome put 110 mils on the gunsight to get a good hit on the runway. He taxied off the active and shut down among the flashing lights of fire trucks and the meat wagon before leaving the quietly smoking turd wagon as quickly and with as much style as possible.

Of course, the problem was a ratgnawed bundle someplace that had caught fire and burned stuff up, not an expertly fired golden BB as Spider maintained later when he wandered over to (a) collect a souvenir piece of wreckage for his "I love me" room, (b) drink a small, silver goblet of Puresome's blood and (c) generally jerk Puresome's chain.

"Years from now, when you speak of this...and you will...be kind," Puresome axed.

But he really didn't care.

Puresome the Pitiless would be back.

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

RA-5C Vigilante Units in Combat

This is the latest in the Osprey Combat Aircraft series. *RA-5C Vigilante Units in Combat* (ISBN 1-84176-749-2) is by Skyhawk Association member R.R. "Boom"

Powell. Although a history of the A-5, the *Recce RAG* had TA-4s (and for a while, several *Echoes*) to support training in the *Vigilante* and many *Vigi* pilots began in VA squadrons.



RVAH-3 RA-5C and TA-4 out of NAS Key West, circa 1978.

Everyone who shared deck space with the large RA-5C will enjoy these tales of action over Vietnam and other spots of reconnaissance interest. Several of the photographs were taken by a youthly "Youthly" while deployed in *Independence*.

How big was the *Vigi*? The A-4 wing planform matches exactly the horizontal tail of the A-5. The book provides a good look at the mission and life of the largest and fastest airplane to operate from an aircraft carrier.

Boom

BORN FIGHTING HOW THE SCOTS-IRISH SHAPED AMERICA

James Webb
Broadway Books
343 pages

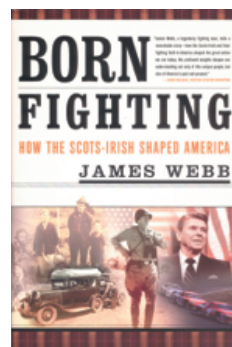
Let it be said from the get-go that James Webb, ace writer, SECNAV for President Reagan, and former Mud Marine, who fought well in the Late Unpleasantness in Southeast Asia, is preaching to the MacPuresome choir in this book. Up to 400,000 Scots-Irish migrated to America in the eighteenth century, and what a lot of hard-headed, contentious, ex-Roman-jabbing, Brit-potting, Rebel-yelling individuals they turned out to be.

Centuries of warfare fueled a culture where physical courage, honor, self-reliance, equality, and unbending individualism were paramount. They were unafraid of higher authority and had an ingrained hatred of aristocracy. They responded to good leadership but would never allow themselves to be dominated by arbitrary authority if it conflicted with their beliefs. Their religion was bottom-up democratic, and no man was better than another. They were intensely religious but unapologetically wild.

In short, they were perfect for the American frontier, and they formed an early buffer against the Indians, away from the theocrats that again wanted to dictate their religious practices. When war with England came, the Scots-Irish formed a third to a half of the Revolutionary Army. They formed the bulk of the Confederate Army, coming out from their hard-scrabble farms to fight what they considered yet another aggressor. Military service is part of an unwritten code for males of this culture to prove themselves worthy of "Celtic kinship," and the Scots-Irish have provided generation after generation of fine soldiers.

Jacksonian populist democracy is pure Scots-Irish, and American country music came out of their old Celtic lyrical and instrumental traditions, melded with a deep religiosity. Scots-Irish attitudes have defined the non-elitist, heartland attitudes of America. We are not culturally talking of *pancreas a' la orange* creators, nor writers of blithe spirited bird verse, nor designers of snazzy shoes, but of the salt seasoning the democratic stew. We plain people rejoice.

So sez Puresome



SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •

Winter 2005 Board Meeting of the Skyhawk Association

The regular winter board meeting of the *Skyhawk* Association will be held February 4-5, 2005, in Dayton, OH. All association members are invited to attend these activities:

Friday, February 4, 2005

Time to be announced.....Museum tours for early arrivers
2:00 – 5:00 PM.....Strategic planning (for those arriving early)
6:30 PM.....Board dinner

Saturday, February 5, 2005

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM.....Board meeting
1:30 PM.....Museum tours

Information on accommodations can be obtained by contacting the secretary at a4skyhawk@woh.rr.com.

2005 Annual Meeting of the Skyhawk Association

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!!

The annual meeting and luncheon of the *Skyhawk* Association will be held in conjunction with Tailhook 05 on September 9, 2005, at the Nugget, Reno, NV.

...

Marine Corps Aviation Association

2005 Convention: 14-17 October at the Reno Hilton, Reno NV. www.flymcaa.org

...

Rampagers Reunion (VFA-83, VA-83, VF-916, VF-83, VBF-83) will be held April 15-16, 2005, at NAS Oceana, Virginia. You are cordially invited to join fellow Rampagers for our 55th anniversary weekend. For more information, click on www.nol.navy.mil/homepages/vfa83 or call (757) 433-9703.

...

USS FORRESTAL FIRE & VA-46 A-4E DEDICATION

Veterans Day, November 11, 2004

By Dave Dollarhide



The Evergreen Aviation Museum (www.sprucegoose.org), McMinnville, Oregon, has recently reconditioned A-4E *Skyhawk*, BuNo 152070. The aircraft is painted in the colors of the VA-46 Clansmen from the USS *Forrestal* WESTPAC cruise of 1967. The MODEX used on the airplane is that of AA 416, BuNo 149996, which was lost in the fire aboard *Forrestal* that year. The display, dedicated to those who lost their lives in the fire, was unveiled in a Veterans Day ceremony at the museum.

from the perspective of my experiences in the A-4 and as a *Forrestal* fire survivor.

The A-4E is a beautiful restoration, and along with many other historic airplanes, is nestled under the wings of Howard Hugh's famous *Spruce Goose* seaplane. Glass display cases offer information on the airplane, as well as the USS *Forrestal* Fire. Future plans call for expanding the historical data and artifacts from the shipboard accident.

Shortly after arriving at the museum, I had the pleasure of meeting Mike Mc-

"It was both gratifying to know that my research had contributed to the accuracy of the restoration and ... indicative of the value of the Skyhawk Association's work to preserve the heritage of the A-4."

The USS *Forrestal* Association (www.lancehatfield.com/cv59.htm) Historian, Ken Killmeyer, put me in touch with the museum's curator, Ben Kristy, with whom I corresponded concerning facts surrounding the 1967 accident. During those discussions, I decided to travel to Oregon to attend the event. Later, Ben honored me with an invitation to speak to the audience

Dougall and Mike Searle, the men who restored the *Skyhawk* at the Evergreen facility in Phoenix, Arizona. It was fun to note that the first commanding officer of the Clansmen happened also to be a "McDougall," who used his family tartan for the squadron patch and airplane paint scheme. Expressing my gratitude for such an accurate restoration, especially

the detail in the tartan from those years, I discovered that the primary source for the 1967 paint scheme was the *Skyhawk* Association's web site.

Last year, as the VA-46 "SDO" for the *Skyhawk* site, I had posted historical information, including graphics of the trademark tartan, as seen on the squadron's airplanes. It was both gratifying to know that my research had contributed to the accuracy of the restoration and ironic that I was also a guest speaker for the event. It is also indicative

The Fixer Uppers

Mike McDougal is a true A-4 buff. He was the driving force on this project, as I could surmise, and told me he found the paint details, including the very accurate Clansman tartan, on the *Skyhawk* website. According to Mike, 152070 was a "basket case," and the team had to manufacture many parts, including the tail-hook which they cast from a real one. The MK-12 guns are wood, but have the correct blast deflectionors attached. There is no engine installed, but they took a photo of the front of a J-52, blew it up and installed the picture in the intake. It looks real. Mick Simmons is a Delta pilot who does some work with Evergreen. He found the airplane in the bone yard at Tucson and arranged for its delivery. Mike Searle, a British gentleman, spent many hours taping and painting the tartan stripes on the fuselage and tail.

Dave Dollarhide

of the value of the *Skyhawk* Association's web site and their work to preserve the heritage of the A-4.

A number of USS *Forrestal* veterans attended the ceremony, some of whom had been aboard during the fire. It was a special day to have this homage paid to them and their former shipmates. Before an audience of more than two hundred, I was humbled to speak for so many who suffered and those who died.

It was also with mixed emotions that I spoke. The A-4 was such a great airplane to fly, and I spent so many thrilling hours yanking it around the sky. However, it was a somber moment as I stood in front of this replica from my combat cruise, abruptly halted by the tragic accident of July 29, 1967. I spoke to both issues and was overwhelmed by a standing ovation and positive response from the audience. Their applause, of course, was in response to the *Forrestal* story and a tribute to all who suffered in the *Forrestal* accident. We *Forrestal* veterans later joined in a group around the base of the airplane and cut the unveiling ribbon. The Evergreen Museum has become a very special place for Naval Aviation and the men of USS *Forrestal*.



Forrestal veterans gather at A-4 dedication ceremony: (from left) Mike McDougall, Mick Simmons, unk, unk, Mike Searle, Dave Dollarhide, 3 unks.

A NUGGET AND THAT BRAND NEW JET

By LtCol Edward "Viking" Jobin, USMC(Ret)



This is a story of "how lucky can you get?" In April 1971, VMA-324 had just taken delivery of our first five A-4M aircraft, at MCAS Beaufort SC. We were the first Marine attack squadron to operate the new jet. They were so new, they smelled like new cars. Everything worked: the motor put out 11,300 pounds of thrust; the bubble canopy and roomier cockpit were nice if you didn't mind having to set some switches before you strapped in, or the feeling of your shoulders bumping on the canopy rails. The jet even had a drag chute, which was cool, because now we could not only kick an F-4's butt airborne, but we could litter the runway with the chute after landing, if we wanted to. In reality, the jet was so good on short fields that you seldom needed the chute.

Nuggets & Nukes

That's when I arrived on the scene, freshly anointed with Wings of Gold, and current in the TA-4J, courtesy of VT-23 in NAS Kingsville, Texas. I soon found



Flying over mountains somewhere, a section of VMA-324 jets try to get somewhere fast.

out that my new status in the squadron was one of *nugget*, *FNG*, *newbie*--- you get the idea. There were many nuggets, all first lieutenants of Marines, and we outnumbered the captains at least two to one. We had many duties. So many in fact, that we needed to protect ourselves and organized the *LPA*, or Lieutenants' Protective Association. The good news

was that though the captains might screw with us, the payback from the LPA was a mother.....well, *you get the idea*.

We had LtCol George Ertlmeier, the greatest first CO that a junior officer could ever serve with. The first time you flew with the skipper it was a section takeoff; parade formation for the entire sortie; all the overhead acrobatics practiced in fixed-wing jets, and it finished with a section landing. You felt like a Blue Angel. The first time I flew with the boss, I didn't key the mike the entire sortie. Every time he looked out to his left or right, there was my smiling face, tight aboard.

All the nuggets were engaged in becoming fully combat ready, and that was a good thing, because after the Easter Offensive of Spring 1972 (see Summer '04 issue of *A-4Ever*), many of us headed to WESTPAC and a combat tour. For the time being, however, we were in pursuit of the 7592 MOS, which qualified us to carry the more exotic weapons that produce large mushroom clouds.

As a new A-4 driver reached the end of his 7592 syllabus training, he was required to fly the A-20-R sortie, a precisely flown high/low altitude route into a scored range carrying a 2000 pound water/sand-filled bomb that simulated the real thing. This sortie was chased by an instructor pilot from the Marine Air Weapons Training Unit – Atlantic (MAWTU-LANT), and hopefully resulted in minimal deviation from planned route and arrival time at the target, and a qualifying hit. (I often wondered how close you had to get with that kind of weapon to achieve the desired amount of devastation.)

Raven's Revenge

Rather than just a simple garden-variety hop down to Pinecastle Target in Florida, we planned something different for qualification of three of our new 7592s. The targets would be off NAS

Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. The boys would takeoff from Beaufort, fly at cruise altitude down the coast and take on fuel from KC-130s on the way to Puerto Rico. The flights would drop down to low level for the last hundred miles or so, and bomb Twin Rocks Target. Roosevelt Roads then became the final destination, and a day or two of *fun and sun* was the reward.

Then Bob "Raven" Hickerson, our NATOPS/training officer, had a great idea. Since we could carry the Aerial Refueling Buddy Store, which gave us a total of over 11,000 pounds of gas and a tanker capability, why not support one section with our own jets? The tanker-configured A-4Ms could refuel a section of attack jets and then tank off the same KC-130s that the other two sections would use, and continue to Roosevelt Roads for some good liberty. The plan was blessed, and three Buddy Store-configured aircraft would be launched, to provide refueling for one section of attackers. As one who had just begun the 7592 syllabus, I was blessedly chosen to fly one of the three tanker aircraft.

I had the squadron duty officer assignment the night before the launch, so I got to watch the three section leaders, who were to be evaluated, fervently plan their sortie routes, times, fuel figures and attacks on Twin Rocks. There was not much sleep for any of us that night in the Ready Room. The KC-130s got off ahead of us from Cherry Point the next morning, and all looked good for on-time arrival at our destination in Puerto Rico around lunchtime. The five-plane formation, two attackers and three tankers, would fly together to the refueling point, at which time the attackers would take our fuel and then proceed to the target. The tanker aircraft would find the big tankers and replenish for the rest of the trip.

Leak and Learn

Right after takeoff, the wheels started to come off the bus. With wheels in the well and good transfer pressure in all externals, my buddy store began leaking badly from around the standpipe leading into the centerline station. We made a decision to keep me aboard and see how the fuel numbers looked, maybe the leak would fix itself. What did I care? The other tanker guys were senior captains, one with many hours in *Scooters*, the other with a couple of tours in combat

in helicopters and OV-10's. There was no whining from me. Well, as you might expect, the leak didn't fix itself. As we left the coast of Florida, I started continuous fuel figuring, and had myself landing at Roosevelt Roads with ZERO fuel.

When the refueling track was reached, we slowed down and the other two TTT (Tanker Tinker Toy) jets extended their hoses for refueling. The attackers got into position in preparation for refueling.

Sgt Fletcher's Flak

Note: A little about the Sergeant Fletcher Aerial Refueling System is probably in order here. The store is a 300 gallon tank carried on the centerline station of the A-4. It has a propeller on the nose and a hose and basket which extends out the back end. The propeller is allowed to spin when un-feathered by the pilot, and provides hydraulic power to extend and retract the hose/basket so fuel can be transferred to the receiver aircraft, making him happy. Fuel can be transferred from the aircraft to the store, or (thankfully) from the store to the aircraft, for his own consumption. The store also has a take-up reel--*this is important*--so that when the receiver engages the basket with his aerial refueling probe, a huge sine wave doesn't develop that shakes his aircraft like a rag doll. The receiver must push the hose in a few feet to make fuel flow into his jet.

Reel Problems

At this point, we discover that the lead tanker, piloted by Capt Dave (Tomato) Tomasko, has a malfunctioning take-up reel. With a bad take-up reel, fuel will not flow to the receiver. (Bad news for the receiver aircraft). The number two tanker, piloted by Capt Bob (Stoney) Morgan, will not transfer fuel to the receiver aircraft, for reasons unknown and not rectifiable while airborne. (Mysteries of Marine Air).



The Zuni coming off the rails of the VMA-324 jet is obviously not Viking's, as he was busy doing math and was never good at multi-tasking anyway.



A superb example of tight formation flying that the Blues would envy, by VMA-324 pilots in their new, shiny bright A4-Ms.

Again, bad news for the receiver aircraft.

Remember that yours truly is still dumping large quantities of JP-5 out over the Caribbean, and is very worried at this point about the ZERO fuel remaining upon landing at NAS Roosevelt Roads. Tomato briefly considers having me extend my hose and basket and see if the boys can refuel off my aircraft without ingesting fuel into their engines. But wisely, all concur that this would be unwise. Note: I wonder in retrospect if I could have been induced to give up more fuel than I was already contributing to the atmosphere, without first converting it to noise, speed and smoke. *Naw, probably not...*

A Miracle Revealed!

Time to review the bidding: We are somewhere between Patrick AFB, Florida, and the Grand Bahamas, heading southeast with two chicks who need gas to complete their mission. The three tankers took off with 11,000 pounds, and due to malfunctioning buddy stores, lead and Dash-2 are only minus what they have burned to this point in the flight. (11,000 pounds is more than enough to get from Beaufort to Roosevelt Roads, so they are fat.) There are KC-130 tankers still down there somewhere in front of us, tanking the other two attack sections, and waiting for three thirsty buddy store jets to come for a drink.

Easy decision, right? Send the attackers to the KC-130s in our place and continue to sunny Puerto Rico. Attackers detach! Except, Dash-3 has been polluting the atmosphere for the past hour or so. Now a discussion ensues where repeated reference to "I'm gonna land with ZERO fuel" is made. (No hill for a stepper, continue to press.) For the rest of the hop, I did fuel flow vs. fuel remaining vs. distance to

go computations about every 45 seconds, and damned if the numbers didn't start to get better by about 50 pounds every 20 minutes. So now I'm going to land with 150 pounds, big deal.

Looking Back: the Lessons Learned

- The idle descent is a wonderful thing, the jet literally makes gas. Tomato knew that, and wasn't too worried about me flaming out.
- I had the layout of Ramey AFB on the west end of Puerto Rico memorized, just in case.
- You can get from Beaufort to Roosevelt Roads starting with 11,000 pounds of gas, dump fuel all the way from a bad store, and still land with 800 pounds.
- A leaking standpipe doesn't become a problem if the O-ring is installed when the buddy store is mounted.
- The buddy store is an unreliable piece of ---, you get the idea.
- The waitresses at the Black Angus Steak House Entertainment Emporium and Bordello in San Juan speak some English, but prefer to talk about prospective clients (I mean diners,) in Spanish.
- A red-headed Marine doesn't look like he can speak Spanish, but he does try.
- Much nervous laughter and embarrassment results.
- Four cases of Puerto Rican rum will fit into the hump back on an A-4, where the LABS gear normally goes.
- If you park the jets back at Beaufort and go home, then return later to retrieve the rum, Customs is none the wiser.
- You can have a hell of a squadron party with 12 cases of rum.

After 16 months and 11 deployments in VMA-324, flying brand new A-4Ms, it was my turn to go to WESTPAC and Bien Hoa, forget my 7592 training, and drop live ordnance on our little black pajama-clad friends on the ground. It doesn't get any better than being a nugget in a squadron with brand new A-4Ms with a CO who wants you to be the best and kick everyone's butt, but "be humble, you mothers..." Skipper, if you're out there, this one's for you.

continued...

...THAT BRAND NEW JET

CONT...

Or, Sometimes the Gods Smile on You

(Raven's Version...)

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Viking's story about his nugget days in VMA-324 brought back many memories, all good. While he was drying the condensation behind his ears, I was a second-tour captain in the squadron, about 18 months north of my first combat tour in Vietnam. As fortunate as he was to luck into brand new aircraft in his first squadron, I was even luckier.

About a year earlier, I landed the squadron NATOPS job and had been spending extended periods in sunny Long Beach helping to write the new NATOPS manual for the A-4M. I was part of the flight that accepted the first five jets while on deployment to Yuma, and along with our Maintenance Officer Ron Hellbusch, was fortunate to fly some of the first acceptance checks on the new birds. The first test hop in a brand-new A-4M was a definite highlight of my flying career, and while not completely legal, was extremely exciting. (I may tell that story one day when the statute of limitations has run its course.)

So while Viking was winging his way to Puerto Rico and stepping in dog doo every few minutes, I was flying chase for a nuke weapons delivery refresher mission flown by Randy "Banana" Balara. We were one of the other two attack sections mentioned by Viking, and while things were going bad for him, we were having the time of our lives. Our jets were working perfectly, the weather was good enough to make any chamber of commerce proud, and the tanker was right where we expected it to be (a somewhat rare occurrence). We eased down to the tanker track south of Jacksonville at max range cruise, topped off and headed for the land of rum and honey.

I prepared for the planned four hour hop (put a 3.8 in my log book that day) by fixing a large lunch to carry along. I remembered listening to sea stories by



A-4 Buddy Store tanker readies for transfer of fuel to a receiver. The drogue has been extended to the ready position, indicated by the yellow light at left. When a receiver aircraft engages and pushes the hose a few feet into the store, the light changes to green indicating flow of fuel.

old *Spad* drivers who claimed to fly low level nav routes for many hours. One had told me about how he lined up his lunch items on the glare shield and kept himself entertained for hours, by carefully selecting from the lunch menu from time to time. That sounded good to an impressionable young Marine, so I tried it. With the exception of spilling Coke all over the cockpit, the scheme actually worked and helped pass the time. (This technique came in handy on several transpac flights as well.)

I'm older than Viking (and killed more brain cells while on subsequent deployments to Rosey Roads), so I don't remember all the details of that hop the way he does. I'm impressed that he actually learned something and remembers those lessons to this day. I do remember coming off the tanker and staying high until we passed the Bahamas. I don't remember how far out from the destination we were when Randy took us down on the deck, but do know we spent at least an hour over clear, blue sea at or below 500 ft. The navigation wasn't too difficult. While on the deck, we had no idea where we were and no way of finding out until we happened on a check point. Those check points were impossible to miss: the Dominican Republic, the northwest corner of Puerto Rico, etc.

After a half hour on the deck, eating sandwiches and thinking things couldn't get much better than this, we noticed a speck forming on the horizon above the wide expanse of blue. We were both thinking the same thing: if that speck becomes an island, we're totally lost! The first island was supposed to be many

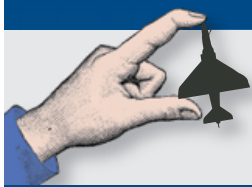
minutes ahead. As we strained to determine what the bogey on the horizon was, a super tanker began to form dead on the nose of the airplane.

Without any discussion at all, I closed up to parade formation, and we "rigged" the ship well below and just in front of the bridge. We were close enough to measure the diameter of the pupils in the eyes of the deck hands and had already mentally worked out our story to tell the CO: "You know, skipper, we couldn't alter course because the navigation was so difficult we had to stay on that chart line to make sure we didn't get lost out there, *yadda., yadda., yadda.*" Of course, as Viking related, the skipper was too smart to believe a word of that, but too cool to have forgotten he would have done the same thing when he was a captain.

Well, Randy found Puerto Rico just fine, arrived on target well within his window and got an admirable hit on Twin Rocks. We landed and headed for the bar and a well-deserved two RON (this boondoggle wasn't planned by dummies), thinking that we had had an amazing day. I think I knew then that I wouldn't have many flights so perfect in my career, and you know, when I flew that last *Scooter* hop twenty-three years later, I realized I was right. November 22, 1971: that was a day I'll never forget.



New, better looking Peking Dog.



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modeling News •

By Joe Turpen

50 Years of Skyhawk Models: Part Two

The *Skyhawk* has seen vast improvements in both the quality and quantity of kits produced over the years. Almost as soon as the *Skyhawk* took to the air, the model industry began to produce models of this aircraft. Due to the large number of *Skyhawk* kits that have been available, I'm just going to do a quick review of some more kits that were not covered in the first installment (Fall 2004 *A-4 Ever*). More information about these kits can be found on the *Skyhawk* Association website, including information concerning the various decal sheets and conversion kits (see www.skyhawk.org).



TA-4 (photo 7)

The two-seat *Skyhawks* have not been neglected since both the TA-4s and the OA-4M have been released as kits. Hasegawa has issued a 1/72nd kit that could be built as either a single or two-seat *Skyhawk*, but the TA-4J was shorter than the single seat version! Hasegawa later released a more accurate kit. In 1987, the kit was again released as the OA-4M, with markings for H&MS-16 and H&MS-32*. Fujimi's 1/72nd series of *Skyhawks* included the TA-4F/J and OA-4M. It has markings for all eight two-seat aircraft from H&MS-12.

*Testers/Italeri entered this field with an OA-4M kit that was essentially their A-4M kit with fuselage halves replaced.

Italeri also issued a 1/72nd scale OA-4M. Not to be left out, Monogram produced an OA-4M in 1/48th scale. This kit was reboxed twice by Hasegawa. Based on personal experience building this kit, I believe that it was rather good. If you can find it, it's a very nice build right out of the box. However, the markings seem to be contradictory. The aircraft is marked "Outlaws" on its fuselage side, indicating H&MS-12, while the tail letters YU indicate H&MS-13. I was told that "Outlaws" has appeared on aircraft in 3 different squadrons: tail letters DA (H&MS-32), YU (H&MS-13) and WA (H&MS-12). (Ed. Note: this sounds like an interesting topic for input from our members. Can anyone help clear up this confusion over the call sign "Outlaws"?)



TA-4J (photo 8)

The two seaters have infrequently appeared in 1/32nd scale. It appeared as a Minicraft Hasegawa model of a VT-24 aircraft with markings for Commander Training Wing 3. This kit was released in a Bi-centennial paint scheme from VF-126, and one of its last appearances was in the 75th anniversary of naval aviation markings displayed by VA-24 and VT-25. These kits could be built as a TA-4F with the use of a 1/32nd A-4E/F kit. Hasegawa has also issued a 1/32nd OA-4M kit that was based on their earlier TA-4J.



A-4K KAHU (photo 9)

Two kits that have not been mentioned but were produced by Hasegawa in 2002 are the A-4K and A-4SU, both in 1/48th scale. The A-4K can be built as an early version of the RNZAF Skyhawk, or as the KAHU version. (Photo 9) The squadrons represented are No. 2 and No.75.

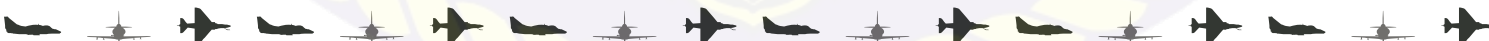


A-4SU (photo 10)

This kit contains the markings for the Black Knights, the aerobatic team of the Singapore Air Force.

For the collectors out there: Some kits that have not reached full release status have very little information available. Sanko released an A4D kit in 1960 in 1/150th scale, but that is basically all that is known about it. Probably only kit collectors will be interested in this kit. Starfax has issued a 1/72nd scale A-4 kit (no.105) which might be an A4D-1, but I'm not totally sure. They may have also issued a 1/48th scale A-4 kit (no.107), but that kit cannot be found today and is a kit strictly for collectors (if it exists at all). Allyn produced an A4D kit in 1954 that is sought by collectors, but not appropriate for serious modelers. Seminar also issued two Skyhawk kits, an A-4E and a TA-4F. These kits are rare, but have been available on eBay.

Again, thanks to Jim Winchester for sharing his list of kits.



HARKEN BACK

• The Way We Were •

Flying Final on Fujiyama by CDR Michael Trout

(Ed. Note: Mike's first article appeared in the Fall '04 issue and included a short biography of his remarkable life and contributions to the Skyhawk Assoc. before ALS claimed him in October 2001. He was an extraordinary example to all.)

This occurred 40 years ago before the density of population and air traffic made such things impossible. This was a time when the Secretary of State carried a big stick rather than a big purse. It was a time when nuclear war was thinkable. It was a time when VA-125 at NAS Moffett Field turned out A-4 pilots trained to deliver just one bomb in a loft maneuver. If called upon, we would fly our mission alone; one pilot, one Skyhawk and one hellacious nuclear bomb.

In preparation, we often flew alone on navigation flights. So it was not unusual that one February day after the squadron off-loaded for ten days at Yokota, I was at 15,000 feet over Fujiyama in a Dambuster A-4B. Fujiyama resembles Mount Shasta, which we saw on a few of our navigation routes out of Moffett. Both stand alone dominating the landscape, but Shasta's slopes are concave, leaving a steep angle toward the peak. I had flown over Fujiyama before, and the first time I did, I rolled up on a wing and looked directly down into the crater. The mountain was so symmetrical that it appeared to have no elevation. It seemed to be level with the floor of the Kofu Basin.

How gentle a slope, like a low angle climb on the one side and low angle descent on the other, I thought that day. As in a cartoon, the little light bulb went

off over my head. "Why the h_ _ _ not?" I said to myself. "There isn't a person anywhere on the mountain. It's cold out and the people are indoors. I can get a straight run-in line here without passing over any villages. OK. I know what it takes to get up to 500 knots on a loft-bombing run-in line, so I'll start my dive to the deck about there."

I had the 500 knots, as I knew I would. I had the mountain bore-sighted as I shot across the basin at 200 feet altitude. I knew just where I was going to start my pull-up. After all, this was just like another low-angle loft maneuver. *This is IT! Going up—paralleling the slope—about 100 feet above the mountainside—approaching the snowcap—there's the crater! A little nose up, a half roll—a glance into the crater—pull nose down, another half roll—just like an over-the-shoulder loft maneuver—keep the nose down—parallel the slope again—down the mountainside—easy pull-up here at the base. Really haulin' the mail outta here! Damn, that was fun! I'm goin' do it again.*

Several days later, having flown this invigorating maneuver several times, I became complacent. Yes, that bane of aviators -- complacency. What harangue of a safety officer is complete without this word? *But I was just going to visit Fujiyama one last time.* How prophetic that thought nearly was.

This time I started a little lower, a little closer, and a little heavier. As the base of the mountain approached, I realized I only had 440 knots. (Well, that should be



Commander
Michael D. Trout,
United States Navy



enough, I thought, and up I went.) With the snowcap still well ahead, I saw the airspeed indicator rapidly bleeding down toward 200 knots. I suddenly realized I wasn't going to make it to the top, let alone over the top. There was only one way out.

I banked starboard, tentatively, using about ten degrees angle of bank. With the airspeed bleeding off and the slats coming out, I went to half-flaps. The aircraft was starting to shudder a little. I was concentrating on keeping the ball centered in the turn-and-bank indicator. Having made it through 90 degrees of turn, aircraft still shuddering, it still looked like I was going to be a permanent blemish on the mountainside. I was trying to keep the nose up enough to keep from pranging and down enough to keep from stalling. (There was no angle-of-attack indicator in the Bravo.) I can't say how far above ground I was, (There was no radar altimeter either.) but I was glad there were no trees. After an eternity the airspeed started to increase. I had finally gotten the *Skyhawk* pointed downhill and completed the hairiest, strangest wingover imaginable.

This is the point where I should say "I Learned About Flying From That," and that I never did that again. But I can't. Because I went down that mountain, back across that basin, climbing to altitude, and then with a split-S got my airspeed. *And for one last time, I flew the slopes of Fujiyama.*

TAPS

Fred B. Bromley
Robert W. Driscoll
Ernest J. Thabet

TAPS notices may be sent to
Bob Hickerson, Newsletter Editor at
newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

or mail to

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

For TAPS lists,
members may

access these links:

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

TINS

By Boom Powell

CHUTE SHOTS

In 1964, Lt Ed Dickson ejected from an A-4 Skyhawk while on a training flight over the High Sierras in California. The rocket fired normally and he had a good separation from his seat, but his parachute did not open. He landed in a deep snowdrift on a steep slope and had only minor injuries. His rescuers tossed his parachute in the back of their truck. Driving down the mountain trail, the chute opened by itself.

The automatic opener had worked correctly and popped the parachute passing 10,000 feet altitude. The barostatic sensors in all aircraft were all immediately reprogrammed to open at 14,000 feet; higher than any mountain peaks.



Shown streaking over the snow-covered Sierras is one of VA-127's finest, BuNo 154173.
(courtesy of Gary Verver)

Ironically, on 7 February 1965, Lt Dickson was killed on the Navy's first strike into North Vietnam since the previous August. Flying an A-4E in VA-155 off Coral Sea, he was hit by AAA and ejected a half mile off shore. The ejection was observed, but his parachute apparently did not deploy.



ATTIC ATTACKS

Playboy 11 Down!

Shown is kneeboard card which is a copy of the actual log kept by the crews of Air Force helicopters Jolly Green 79/76 who rescued the pilots of Playboy 11 shot down in Laos in April 1969. The pilots were Skyhawk member Maj Bob Miecznikowski (Ski - Playboy 71) and co-pilot Jim Buffington (Playboy 30). The log summary submitted by the rescue mission commander stated:

"9. JG (Jolly Green) 79, 76 made rescue of 2 Marine pilots 036/34/72 and took them into Ch 77 (DaNang). On return home received 100-150 rounds of 57/37/23 or ZPU at 025/40/72. One of JG up north chopped probe off with blades as disconnected from tanker."

(Ed. Note: Watch future issues for a two-part article chronicling the loss of Playboy 11 and subsequent rescue of its pilots.)

UNCLASSIFIED 09 Apr 69 SECRET

09/0749/70 Playboy 11- CR. 3. JG 79 HAS "A" IN SIGHT.

09/0749/70 Playboy 11- CR. 3. PENALTY ON WAY DOWN.

09/0749/70 Playboy 11- CR. 3. "A" MAN ON WAY UP.

09/0745/70 Playboy 11- CR. 3. "X" MAN ON BOARD JG 79

09/0747/70 Playboy 11- CR. 3. BOTH SURVIVORS IN GOOD SHAPE. WILL GO TO CH 77

09/0749/70 Playboy 11- ETA FOR JG'S F252 CH 77.

09/0750/70 Playboy 11- CR 6 ESCORTING JG'S TO CH. 103.

09/0751/70 Playboy 11- JG'S 32+29 LANDED CH. 103 ATT.

09/0751/70 MSAT BUCKLES 45ST CLAY ON DUTY. TGT LACEY OFF DUTY. PLAYBOY 11 OPEN MISSION.

09/0804/70 Playboy 11- CR 3 ETA FOR CH. 70 0850Z.

09/0804/70 MAJ WHITE OFF DUTY. CAPT REED ON DUTY. PLAYBOY 11 OPEN MISSION.

09/0805/70 Playboy 11- JG'S 76+79 ETA CH. 77 0845Z.

09/0823/70 Playboy 11- SP 11+12 LANDED CH. 77 ATT.

09/0834/70 Playboy 11- JG'S 76+79 LANDED CH. 77 ATT.

CLOSED

09/0835/70 MIDAIR- CR 2 REPORTED THAT SG 69 HAD BROKEN HIS REGULING PROBE W/ NOW IN DISCONNECTED FROM AIR WITH HMM. SG BROKE DOWN CAUSING THE DROGE ON CROWN TO STICK IN THE EXTENDED POSITION.

09/0845/70 MIDAIR- SG 69 ARRIVED BACK L-48. AT LEAST 4 BLADE TIPS BROKEN. THE BASKET FROM DROGE WENT THROUGH THE ROTOR.

CR 2 WILL RTB TO UDORN.

SECRET

09/0904/70 MIDAIR- CROWN 2 ATA AT CH 70

NEW PAYING MEMBER \$

• Welcome •

Michael Farmer
Richard Fellows
Robert Gandt
Warren Harms
William Isenhour
Gerald James
Matthew McCarthy
George Meyer
Billy Putnam

Robert Sherman
Robert White
John Whitmore
Paul Danner
Dale Evens
G. J. Kiel
A.M. McGregor
Robert Shields
William Turlay

RETURNING MEMBER \$

• Welcome Back •

Mark Morgan
John Mudgett
Samuel Newman
Douglas O'Connell
Edward Phillips
John Powers
Jim Ritchie
Gillman Rud
Robert Schneider
Robert Shields

Lloyd Showman
Marvin Stoner
James Stuvee
Tom Sweeney
Ernest Tissot
William Turlay
Christopher Welty
John Wentworth
David Wolf

Spread Some **A4** EVER After Christmas Cheer! Give a Gift Membership for 2005!

A gift card will be sent in your name to the lucky recipient ~ 4 issues of **THE A-4 EVER**
For more information refer to the website www.skyhawk.org or
email the Skyhawk Association at skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com. For credit cards, call toll-free 877-944-4295.

Join or renew at \$30 and give a gift membership to someone for \$20 at the same time.

WE WILL CARD YOU

Visualize your business card here

Share contact information for supplies, services and socializing with other businessmen in the Skyhawk Association.

Send two business cards and a check for \$100.00 made out to "Skyhawk Association" and send to:

Your card will run in the next two issues of the A-4 Ever.

M. Bone
216 Carefree Lane,
Morehead City, NC 28557



*For corporations and businesses interested in advertising, contact mbone@ec.rr.com for rates and schedules.



SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION SURVEY

Please help us plan for the future of the *Skyhawk* Association by completing and returning this survey. Members who respond will be entered into a drawing to win a three-year membership renewal. See www.skyhawk.org for a longer version.



1. How long have you been a member of the Skyhawk Association?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1 – 5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

2. The most important functions of the Skyhawk Association are (check all that apply):

- ☐ To publish an informative journal (newsletter)
- ☐ To plan reunions/meetings of Skyhawk enthusiasts
- ☐ To maintain an informative, dynamic website
- ☐ To sell Skyhawk-related merchandise
- ☐ To document the history of the A-4 and A-4 squadrons
- ☐ To provide a means of finding former squadron-mates and ship-mates
- ☐ Other _____

3. I would like to see the following in future issues of the journal (newsletter) (check all that apply):

- ☐ More articles on maintenance/ordnance subjects
- ☐ More articles on technical aspects of the A-4 and associated equipment
- ☐ More first-hand historical accounts of Skyhawk-related subjects
- ☐ More pictures
- ☐ More information on Skyhawk modeling
- ☐ More book reviews
- ☐ More articles about reunions/gatherings
- ☐ Other (fill in) _____

4. Would you read an electronic version of the journal (newsletter) if we sent you an email with a link to the online version?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. How often do you visit the Skyhawk Association website (www.skyhawk.org)?

- ☐ Once or more per week
- ☐ Once per month
- ☐ Less than once per month
- ☐ Never

6. What website features do you find valuable?

- ☐ Photo gallery
- ☐ Technical data on the A-4 models
- ☐ History of the A-4 and squadrons
- ☐ Links to commercial businesses and their products
- ☐ Private web pages data on specific A-4 bureau numbers
- ☐ Association Ready Room Contributions section
- ☐ Association Ready Room Discussion section
- ☐ Association Ready Room Chat feature
- ☐ I never use the web site

7. If the Skyhawk Association organized chapters at various locations around the country, would you:

Attend social gatherings if they were within 100 miles of your home? (circle one) Yes No

Volunteer to help organize chapter events? (circle one) Yes No

8. Concerning the Skyhawk Association's annual meeting, should it be held in conjunction with (check only one response):

- ☐ Tailhook Association annual symposium?
- ☐ The Marine Corps Aviation Association annual symposium?
- ☐ Alternating between these two events each year (Tailhook one year, MCAA the next?)
- ☐ Not held in conjunction with any other event.

Clip Survey and return to: **Bob Hickerson**
1222 Balcones Drive
Fredericksburg, TX 78624

Or fax to 325-446-4011. To register for the drawing, please provide:

Name _____ Email _____



More is Better—the Membership Contest.

In a startling burst of brilliance, your Board has come up with a win-win scheme to increase our membership by offering certain inducements calculated to get members-in-good-standing, motivated. Here are the rules, and remember, *real men* will step up...

Membership Contest - January to July 2005

Any member that recruits **5** new members gets a **one-year** renewal free.

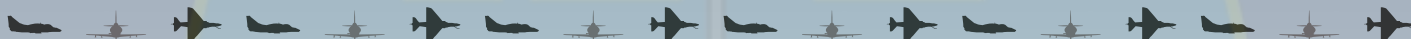
Any member that recruits **10** new members gets a **three-year** renewal free.

Any member that recruits **30** new members gets a **life** renewal free.

(Are you getting the drift here?)

The member that recruits the most new members over 30 (we're talking numbers here as well as age, I suppose...) wins—are you sitting down?—*not only* the R.G. Smith print *and* a coveted **Life Membership** in the Skyhawk Association, but also--a free lunch at the Fall AOM in Reno! (Is this a class group or what?)
Note: All members who recruit more than 5 new members will receive public recognition in the A-4 Ever, suitable for framing...

And the Powerball: (Attention, SDOs) The squadron whose members recruit the most new members (over 100 total) wins a free two-night admin suite at the Reno Nugget for the Fall 2005 Skyhawk Association AOM! Organize and Strategize!



Order additional patches

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:

Skyhawk Patch
6213 Glen Abbey Ln
Bradenton, FL 34202-9265

Join the Skyhawk Association and get a free patch

One of these outstanding patches will be included with each **new** membership. Want more than one patch? (Who doesn't?) See ordering info at left.

Memberships are **1 year - \$30** (\$35 Foreign)

3 Years - \$75 (\$90 Foreign) in US funds.

☐ New _____ Years

☐ Renewal \$ _____ Total Enclosed

YES, Sign me up! Send my patch and membership materials to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Call sign/nickname _____ A-4 hours _____ A-4 Traps _____

Skyhawk Squadrons: _____

Referred By _____

Credit Card Payments may be made by calling toll-free **877-944-4295** from 8 am to 4 pm Pacific time. (This number is for dues payments only and cannot accept patch orders or other Association messages.)

Join by mail: Send payment in US funds to:
Skyhawk Association
2421 Clubside Dr.
Beavercreek, OH 45431-2503