



A4D-1 delivers nuclear weapon. By R.G. Smith

THE A-4 EVER

Winter 2006

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 12 • NUMBER 1

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Feb 3-4, 2006
Skyhawk Meeting
San Diego

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www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Well, 2006 has arrived, and this year your association is planning to try a few new ideas to help add value to your membership and reach out to *Skyhawk* enthusiasts who have not yet decided to join us.

The Mid-winter Board Meeting and mini-symposium is scheduled for February 3-4, 2006, (about the time you will be receiving this issue). We've selected San Diego as the venue for our meeting, primarily because of the opportunities to visit the USS *Midway* Museum and the Flying Leatherneck Museum at Miramar. We're hoping that many members will avail themselves of the opportunity for special tours of these first class facilities. If there's still time for you to make plans to join us, email me at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org for details.

In a major departure from our standard practice of holding our annual meeting in conjunction with Tailhook, this year **the Skyhawk Association will join the MCAA Symposium in Washington, D.C., 26-29 October 2006**. We're confident that moving the 2006 meeting to the East Coast will encourage many members who haven't been able to participate in West Coast events to join us. We're also hoping to have a special event at the new Udvar-Hazy Center of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum near Dulles (<http://www.nasm.si.edu/museum/udvarhazy/>). If you haven't

had a chance to see that premier aviation museum, a visit to that alone is enough to justify the trip to D.C. Of course, Skyhawk Association won't abandon Tailhook 06 altogether. We'll still schedule a luncheon and program, as well as man a booth and share a hospitality suite.

As I mentioned in my column in the Fall 2005 issue, Skyhawk Association is partnering with the Marine Skyhawkers (who are merging their informal group with us) and had planned a major reunion in 2006. We were going to meet in Hilton Head, S.C., and attend the Beaufort Air Show. Well, that air show has now been cancelled, so the planning committee is looking at options ranging from continuing with the present plan to rescheduling the reunion at a later date. Check the website at www.a4skyhawk.org for the latest information.

Finally, I've harped on membership in every column, and this one won't be different. We're making progress and growing slowly, but we've just begun to tap the reservoir of potential members. Just this week, while reading Christmas cards from old friends, I decided to make a list of everyone I heard from who isn't a current member of Skyhawk Association, but should be. I was surprised at how many of my friends with strong connections to the A-4 haven't elected to join with us, and I resolved to spend some time in 2006 to convince them

that they're missing a good deal. If bugging them incessantly doesn't convince them, I'm going to buy them a gift membership as a last resort (see offer elsewhere in this issue).

Why don't you make a list of your friends who should be members of the Skyhawk Association? Drop them a note or email with instructions on how to access our web site, and suggest that they check us out. If you would like to have a complimentary issue of the *A-4Ever* mailed to a friend who might consider membership, just drop me an email at bob.hickerson@ttu.edu, and I will be happy to ensure he or she receives a copy.

Meanwhile, best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year.

A-4s forever.

Raven

Long-Range Schedule of Events

Mark Your Long-Range Calendar

The Board of Directors has approved:

- * Skyhawk Association Regional Symposium and regular meeting of the Board of Directors – February 3-4, 2006, San Diego, CA.
- * Skyhawk Association Luncheon – September 8, 2006, Reno, NV, in conjunction with Hook 06.
- * 2006 Symposium and Annual Meeting of Members – October 2006, Washington, DC, in conjunction with MCAA Symposium 2006.



Next Issue: The Collings Foundation Air Show A-4.



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) and Director (FY 07)
Puresome@comcast.net

Ed Jobin
Vice President (Marines) and Director (FY 08)
ed.jobin@goodrich.com

Terry Cooney
Secretary
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

Steve Richmond
Treasurer
serichmond@aol.com

Dan Brannon
Director (FY 08)
dnbrannon@firstcommand.com

John Gabbard
Director (FY 07)
john.gabbard@domsoftware.com

Mike Green
Director (FY 08)
agreen@crcwnet.com

Ted Langworthy
Director (FY 07)
flybear@peoplepc.net

R.R. "Boom" Powell
Director (FY 06)
vigihawk@cox.net

A.D. "Bud" Southworth
Director (FY 08)
buds@walkerscl.com

Joe Turpen
Director (FY 08)
forrestal@fewpb.net

David Weber
Webmaster and Director (FY 06)
darweber@verizon.net

Mark Williams
Director (FY 08)
readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

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 2006 •



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NEWSLETTER STAFF



Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman and Editor.
Margaret "Warrior Princess" Bone – Managing Editor, mbone@ec.rr.com.
Boom Powell and Mark Williams - Co-Editors.
David "Twidget" Weber – Technology and Website.
Feature Contributors: David "Twidget" Weber, Ed "Viking" Jobin,
Jack "Puresome" Woodul, Bud Southworth, and Gary Verver.

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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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Cover: Untitled work by R.G. Smith, depicting a nuclear drop. In the *Skyhawk* vernacular, "one's off."

TRAINING FOR THE A-4 NUCLEAR DELIVERY MISSION

By Jim Walthers



In the early days, the A4D nuclear mission was fundamentally a dead reckoning time and distance, seat of the pants task.

Training consisted of hours and hours gliding along above the tree tops with a topographical map on your lap (several more in the map case), checking the horizon for hills, valleys or other prominent land marks (abandoned mines, dry wells, dry river beds, etc.) depicted on the map to see if you were somewhere close to the red line you had drawn on the map. Every now and then, one might increase power, diverge somewhat from the prescribed flight path, ease the stick forward and scare the bejeebers out of something or someone, then ease back on track. One had to pick these diversions from the prescribed flight path carefully so as to not have the C.O. standing with arms akimbo, a nasty stare and asking very pointed questions as you walked into the ready room. In addition to the tedious task of becoming proficient at low level navigation, there were many passes on the bombing range perfecting 4G idiot loops, low angle lofts, lay down and high dive maneuvers to become proficient in laying the big one on target.

After leaving Hawaii for WestPac, each pilot was assigned two targets. This was done on an individual basis and you

were not officially notified of other pilot's assignments. When targets were assigned, the pilots would go to the intelligence office (IO) and plan the mission. Since several pilots were in the IO planning their

mission, you would pick up some idea of what some of the other targets were. I don't recall for certain, but I believe there were duplicate assignments.

The flight profile was launch, climb to and maintain altitude until approaching the defensive radar range of the target area, then descend at an angle that kept you below the defensive radar's capabilities until you reached the deck. Minimum altitude depended on the coastal profile, time of day (higher at night), weather and what you thought you could get away with as far as what the radar capabilities were reported to be.

In general, the A4 targets were relatively near the coast, so the first thing was to get the latest map of the target area and draw an arc for the maximum range of the

A4. The pilot would then draw an arc to define the descent point based on the defensive radar pattern. The defensive radar patterns could vary based on your launch position and heading to landfall initial point (IP). The next step was to determine what landmarks would be most visible while skipping along the tops of the swells and perhaps whitecaps. These could be geographical points found on the maps or photographs taken by we never knew who. Our guess was a submarine or an A3D. The A3D's were always

skulking around at odd times of the day. This land mark was crucial to the completion of a successful mission since it would be the IP for the run to the target. I always tried to choose something that was not too prominent because I assumed that the defenders expecting a low level attack would want to make sure that prominent land marks had adequate defenses. Also, it was a good idea to have at least three landmarks just in case. Also, choosing several IP markers could save precious minutes and fuel depending on the launch point. After you had selected your coastal IP locations, you had to choose a second IP for the final run to the target. If the

"In addition to the tedious task of becoming proficient at low level navigation, there were many passes on the bombing range perfecting 4G idiot loops, low angle lofts, lay down and high dive maneuvers to become proficient in laying the big one on target."

target was close to the coast, the coastal IP could be used for that purpose. The second IP which was inland was somewhat more difficult to choose because most targets were near populated areas, and the IP was more than likely going to be a structure of some kind. Recent photographs and intelligence information, if they were available, were most helpful for this selection. The ideal IP selection was some type of natural landmark.

Another important consideration in target planning was weather requirements to use an over the shoulder (idiot loop) or a loft maneuver. Terrain around the target was the main determining factor. The idiot loop required a relatively open area around the target since the pilot had to be on top of the target at 100' above ground and 500 knots to start the maneuver. The loft maneuver did not require flying directly over but required a prominent point at a known distance from the target which was just about impossible to find, given the limited availability of up-to-date photographs. No satellites in those days. The decision on the type of delivery had to be made during the planning phase since the Low Altitude Bombing System (LABS) settings could not be changed in flight. Once you had finished, the plan was reviewed by the intelligence officers and a senior squadron member (LCDR or above). Intelligence data and photographs were not updated very often, but a weekly



Here, an A-4B carrying a practice nuclear shape refuels from his wingman's buddy store during a training mission, April 1959.

visit to the IO was a good idea if nothing more than to refresh your memory and rethink your mission strategy. From time to time, you would be called into the IO and questioned on your reasoning for your proposed mission plan and to review the latest intelligence information to see if changes in the flight path were required.

Another option for delivery was the Hi-Dive maneuver which required flying to the target at altitude. Just before the target, the pilot would throttle back and initiate a split-S. When the aircraft's nose was pointing straight down, the pilot would roll 180° so the aircraft would track over the target. At weapon release, the pilot would increase power (100%+), pull up, turn and head home. We practiced this maneuver at night, which gave us good night time capability.

We also had what was called a "Lay Down" weapon. It was a nuclear weapon somewhat smaller (in the kiloton range), and had a saw-tooth pattern around the circumference of the nose. This was to destroy airfield runways. The delivery required flying over the target at a low altitude to release the weapon. The saw tooth pattern was supposed to dig into the runway to retard the forward momentum after release. There was a delay time before it went BOOM! I do not remember what the timing was. There was a key to arm and disarm the weapon. Before you got into the aircraft, you inserted the key and gave it a turn. When you landed

If you came over the target at 300 kts you were going to have a big problem!

Escape after delivery was an unknown quantity, and this was a source of some concern among the pilots. Would the flash blind you on the way out? Pilots were told to lower their dark helmet-visor and close one eye? The visor was easy enough, but even under ideal (training) conditions, the one-eyed thing was not ideal. Would another nuclear detonation in the area cause difficulties? Would the shock wave damage the aircraft or force you into the ground? Or damage the aircraft? Would the radiation dosage be fatal? During the training phase, we were given cardboard shields with an aluminum coating. The idea was that after you came over the top in the delivery maneuver nose down and made your roll, heading back to 100 ft., you would pull this contraption out from between the seat and the map case. The pilot was then supposed to open it, slide it back and up behind the ejection seat so it covered the top, rear and sides of the canopy (the front of the canopy was not



A4D-1 bureau number 137816 carries a practice nuclear shape, in this Harry Gann photo from 1955-56.

on the hangar deck which was fueled, pre-flighted and ready to launch with a one-megaton weapon. These two aircraft were assigned to what were considered the prime targets in range of the current carrier position. In most cases, these were large industrial or military targets. The pilots assigned those targets remained onboard as long as that target was within range. These prime targets changed almost daily based on the carrier's position. If the launch command was received, the two ready aircraft were to be launched immediately to insure a strike even if an enemy nuclear weapon was headed toward the carrier. From time to time, we would observe a Russian "fishing boat" in the area, so we knew that they had a fair idea of our location.

When his target became the prime target, a pilot would be notified and would go to the intelligence office to pick up the packet for his target and review it with the intelligence officer (IO) and a senior squadron member (LCDR or above). The pilot would check the ship's position and PIM to determine heading and distance to the land fall IP. The IO would brief him on any new activity at the target area, such as changes in defensive installations or possible new defenses which might require a change in the attack approach.

In the event of actual war, after the initial launch of the two ready A4's, the remainder of the strike plan would go into effect. No one knew, for sure, what that would be. Supposedly there was to be a coordinated timed attack by Air Force and Navy units. Each target *continued...*

"Escape after delivery was an unknown quantity, and this was a source of some concern among the pilots. Would the flash blind you on the way out? Pilots were told to lower their dark helmet-visor and close one eye?"

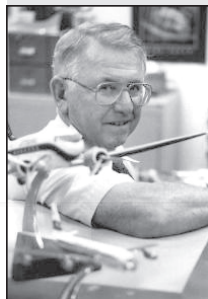
you took the key out of your pocket and disarmed the weapon. The standing joke was that when the weapon was dropped, the pilot should drop the key and a note with instructions on how to disarm the weapon. This weapon wasn't intended for use on an initial strike, but later on after the initial phase had been accomplished. We did not spend much time practicing this maneuver for obvious reasons. The main reason was that the trajectory (bounce) characteristics were unknown. Who knew how far or HIGH that hummer would bounce when dropped at 500 kts!

to be covered, thank goodness). This trick was to be done with one eye closed (no depth perception) while heading downhill at a jaunty angle, accelerating to 500 kts and leveling off at 100 ft. (*Ed. Note: they were serious about this!*) Trying to do this around 1500 hrs in July at either MCAS Yuma or NAS China Lake in the afternoon turbulence was basically an impossible task. Under ideal conditions we thought our chances were good. (*Ed. Note: optimism springs eternal.*)

While the carrier was on station, each A4 squadron had one aircraft under guard

HARRY GANN'S GALLERY

• Three-Point Landing •



"I cannot believe that this photograph was taken in 1971, 28 years ago. How time does fly. We are depicting a nugget making a three-point landing. The three points are nose gear, wing tank and the tailhook. I presume that off-center landings might produce this phenomenon.

The boat is the training carrier, *USS Lexington*. I was able to spend a week on the boat in mid-summer. I was fortunate that they turned me loose, and I was able to get some interesting angles. TA-4Js from VT-7 and 21 were aboard.

I had most of my photo gear with me; however I should have had an ice chest to crawl into. It doesn't get that hot and humid on the Southern California beaches."

Harry S. Gann. 1999



Skyhawk Association Board Meeting and Mini-Symposium to be held in San Diego, February 3-4, 2006

All Skyhawk Association members are invited to attend the mid-winter mini-symposium and board of directors meeting of Skyhawk Association aboard *USS Midway*, San Diego, CA, Feb. 3-4, 2006.

The board meeting will be held on Saturday, Feb. 4, at 8:30 a.m., in the VA/VMA Ready Room on *Midway* and will be followed by a lunch and VIP tour of the very successful *USS Midway* Museum. Association member Bill Gilchrist will be our host. *Midway* is moored at the Embarcadero in downtown San Diego.

Prior to the board meeting, on Friday, Feb. 3, the Association will sponsor a tour of the Flying Leatherneck

Museum at MCAS Miramar, led by MajGen Bob Butcher, Pres. of the FLN Aviation Foundation. Among other exhibits, the FLN Museum displays A-4M 160264, the last A-4 built by McDonnell Douglas. Other tours of active duty facilities will be scheduled, followed by happy hour at Miramar.

The conference hotel will be the Holiday Inn on the Bay, 1355 North Harbor Drive, San Diego, CA 92101 (619-358-6013). For more information, contact Association Director Ted "Bear" Langworthy at flybear@peoplepc.com. Information will be posted on the Skyhawk Association website at www.skyhawk.org under the Plan of the Day.

A-4 DELIVERY

Continued...



Over China Lake in 1959, a VX-5 A-4B bureau number 145041 carries a practice nuclear shape.

had an assigned time over target (TOT). This was supposedly to help prevent an A4 dropping on a target as a high-altitude aircraft heading inland flew over head, or worse yet, a high-altitude attacker dropping one near a low-level aircraft. While enroute to the target, the pilot was to maintain radio silence and monitor a pre-set frequency. This was in case of a recall and also to help the pilot determine the status of the overall attack. If things were going badly, the pilot would have to make the decision to go for the industrial or military target as planned, or to go for maximum human casualties in the area. The human casualty drop was a "we are getting

our butts whipped so let's demoralize the masses" decision. A Tall order for a 23-year old LTJG.

If the pilot had to eject over China, his instructions were to head for the hills! The theory was that if you could make it to some remote, isolated village, the older people would be more accepting of Americans because of their WWII experiences and might even give you some assistance. We had maps with supposedly friendly villages marked. The terrain was so rugged it would have taken a Herculean effort to get to one. If you had to eject over Russia, too bad!

(Ed. Note: this is a period of A-4 history that is not well documented, but must be loaded with great stories. Take Jim's lead and put some of them on paper for us to share.)



BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •



Answers:



With a head like a Rubik's Cube--no, make that a brain like a Rubik's Cube--the Boomster intricately comes up with questionable aviation-related questions to keep the membership puzzled, since they no longer have A-4s to fix and fly. Try these from the Master of A4Factoidmania....



Question 1: The first and only enemy aircraft shot down during the Vietnam war by a pilot flying an A-4 was a:

- a. MIG-15
- b. MIG-21
- c. MIG-17
- d. Boeing MD-80

Question 2: True or False. Ed Heinemann, the Douglas Aircraft designer of the A-4, thought of the Skyhawk as his favorite aircraft and flew in it often.

Question 3: Which squadron was the first Marine unit to operate the Skyhawk?

- a. VMA-214
- b. VMA-224
- c. VMA-311
- d. H&MS-31.



Question 2: False. Heinemann was very fond of the A-4 and considered it one of his best designs, but he only flew in it once. On May 6, 1974, he went for a backseat ride with LT Bill Moccock of VF-126 (TA-4F 152855) out of NAS Miramar into the off-shore operating areas off San Clemente Island. Read his account on the association website at <http://www.skyhawk.org/5E/G152846/html/152855a.htm>.

Question 3: b, VMA-224. The first A-4 delivered to an operational unit was transferred to the VMA-224 Bengals on September 13, 1956 at MCAS El Toro. The aircraft was bureau number 139920 (WK-1). More information and a picture of A4D-1 139920 is available on the association website at <http://www.skyhawk.org/4E/vma224/vma224p.htm>.



Ed Heinemann with A-4

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

THE WORLD'S WORST AIRCRAFT

From Pioneering Failures to Multimillion Dollar Disasters.

By Jim Winchester. Barnes & Noble.
ISBN 0-7607-6742-4

When is the last time you found an entertaining and informative book for under \$7.00 ? (Barnes & Noble big store bargain table?) *World's Worst Aircraft* is one. Winchester has collected over 300 examples and added text and notes that are as amusing as they are educational. "The prop control (on A2D Skyshark) was 25 vacuum tubes in a box as big as a suitcase. Three of five Douglas test

aircraft lost gearboxes or props in flight." The cancelled A-12 was nicknamed the "Flying Taco".

All eras of aviation and most nationalities rate entries, our US Navy having a fair—and deserved—share. From obscure (XLRA, SO3C *Seamew*) to well know (*Cutlass*, *Demon*, *Devastator*) some "interesting" aircraft are included. Each entry has text, specifications and a photo on one page and a profile drawing or photo, with pointed comments on the facing page.

Winchester sorted the choices into sections called "Behind The Times," "Bogus Concepts," "Power Problems," "Con-



struction Disasters" and "Unintentionally Unstable." Brief, cogent introductions precede each. Winchester is familiar to A4 aficionados as the author of *Fighters of the 20th Century*, *Combat Legends: A-4 Skyhawk*.

Airplanes and fun in the same book. And at a reasonable price, *The World's Worst Aircraft* is on my gift giving list this year

Cdr R.R. "Boom" Powell, USN (ret).

THE SAINTS OF VA-163

— Part Two —

By CAPT Wynn F. Foster, USN(ret)



(This article is reprinted with permission from *The Hook*, Winter 1990.)

Attack Squadron 163 had a short but lively eight-and-one-half year existence, with a Vietnam War combat half-life.

Wynn Foster, who succeeded to command of the *Saints* following Jenkins' shoot-down, was commissioned under the Holloway Program in 1949 and designated a Naval Aviator in 1950. He had flown the F9F-2 with VF-111 and VF-721 in the Korean War, the F3D-3M and A4D-5/A-4E before becoming Jenkins' exec.

The squadron returned to Lemoore 15 December 1965. After a 30-day stand down, the *Saints* began a hectic workup period that included receipt of new A-4Es, a significant turnover of pilots and enlisted men and a full training agenda, including CarQual and ORE deployments in *Oriskany*.

With a May WestPac deployment date a scant four months off, Skipper Foster hunted for ways of maintaining *Saints*' morale. Engaging support of CDR Jack Shaw, CO of VA-164, CAG Bob Spruit and Lemoore CO CAPT Howie Boydstun, Foster proposed a radical departure from the standard VA squadron training cycle. The problem was a weapons training deployment to Fallon, NV, that would require additional family separations in the midst of an already abbreviated stay at home base. Foster and Shaw convinced COMNAVAIRPAC that a master jet air station should be able to provide the

required weapons training support. Approval was forthcoming for a Lemoore weapons training plan drawn up by the two skippers. The experiment was a success, and VA-163 along with -164 personnel had maximum allowable time at home

with their families while accomplishing necessary pre-deployment weapons training. However, because of the politics of the situation, including high-level worry over the precedent of having Fallon "cut out of the pattern," the practice of Lemoore-based weapons training was short-lived and not implemented to a significant degree during the balance of the Vietnam War.

On 26 May 1966, the *Saints* and other CVW-16 squadrons were again headed west embarked in *Oriskany*. After an ORI in Hawaiian waters, CVA-34's new CO, CAPT John Iarrobino, followed the example of his predecessor and had the air wing conduct flight ops enroute to WestPac. The operations were marred by an unusual aircraft accident when LCDR John Miles of VA-163 made a routine plug in to a buddy store-equipped A-4. When he backed out on completion, the metering valve of the refueling drogue stuck in the open position. Miles' *Skyhawk* was showered with gallons of JP-5, most of it being sucked up by the engine air intakes. The J52 engine exploded. When everything in the cockpit glowed red and his wingman reported flames eating through the side of the fuselage, Miles ejected and made a "nylon approach" to a landing in the broad Pacific. Uninjured, he was picked up by helo and returned to the ship.

Oriskany and CVW-16 entered combat for a second time 30 June 1966. Little

had changed and Yankee Station cyclic ops again became the norm. Whatever prior optimism there may have been for an early end to the war had evaporated, and a new problem surfaced. In mid-1966, with the "official" war only 18 months old, the A-4 combat loss rate already was catching up with the planned procurement under the Navy's peacetime budget. At the time, A-4 combat losses were averaging about six per month, with a July 1965 high of 14. Department of Defense procurement contracts provided for only 10 *Skyhawks* a month for delivery to Navy and Marine Corps in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets.

"A-4 combat losses were averaging about six per month, with a July 1965 high of 14. Department of Defense procurement contracts provided for only 10 Skyhawks a month for delivery to Navy and Marine Corps in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets."

On 23 July, while he was flying a mission near Vinh, North Vietnam, Foster's aircraft joined the attrition parade. *Old Salt 301* (BuNo 152100) was struck by 57mm flak and Foster's right arm was blown off. Bleeding profusely and experiencing a progressively increasing state of shock, he managed to fly his A-4E to the Gulf where he ejected and was rescued (*The Hook*, Winter 1987). By coincidence, Foster's episode marked the symbolic end of the "Echo" version of the *Skyhawk*. BuNo 152100 was the last A-4E delivered to the fleet.

CDR Ronald Caldwell fleeted-up to lead the *Saints*, relieving Wynn Foster during a change of command ceremony on board *Oriskany* at Cubi Point 30 July 1966. Caldwell, who joined the squadron in December 1965, was designated a Naval Aviator in November 1949. He was one of that elite anomaly in the history of Naval Aviation, a Flying Midshipman (*The Hook*, Summer 1987). Caldwell had flown the F9F with VF-31 and had a couple of pages full of operational flight time when commissioned in 1950. Subsequently he flew the F8U-1P, had a VX-5 tour and joined the A-4E via VA-125 and CVW-15 staff.

In early October, *Oriskany* played host to a Yankee Station visit by Secretary of Defense Robert Strange McNamara, ADM U.S.G. Sharp (CinCPac), GEN Earle Wheeler (Chairman, JCS), VADM John



Sixth Saint Commanding Officer CDR Wynn Foster (author) aboard *Oriskany* 1966.

Hyland (*Com7thFleet*), and an assortment of Army and Air Force generals. When the *Saints* ready room was the scene for one briefing for McNamara and six flag officers, sporting a total of 42 stars on their collars, one VA-163 pilot quipped: "Who's the flight leader of this group?"

Foster's July shootdown was VA-163's only combat casualty in 1966, but tragedy later visited the squadron when a major fire struck *Oriskany* 26 October (**The Hook**, Winter 1988). Of the 24 pilots who died in the fire, four were *Saints*: LCDR Clement J. Morrisette, LT Clarence D. Miller, and LTJGs Thomas E. Spitzer and Ronald E. Tardio. The latter, although a Bolivian citizen, was born in the United States.

Oriskany returned to ConUS for repair and again deployed with CVW-16, departing 16 June 1967. CDR (RADM) Bryan W. Compton became the *Saints* skipper, relieving Caldwell 10 July. Compton received his wings in 1953 and, before serving with VA-163, previously flew the AF *Guardian* and AD *Skyraider* before the *Skyhawk*.

Oriskany's 1967-68 cruise involved CVW-16 in some of the heaviest flying and most concentrated offensive air operations of the war. In the 122 days on the line, VA-163 pilots flew 2,700 combat missions and participated in 126 Alfa strikes.

History has shown that in the conduct of the air war over North Vietnam, the U.S. government was its own worst enemy in the establishment of its rules of engagement (ROE). Among other things, in the first two-plus years of the war absolute bans were placed on offensive operations within a ten-mile radius of Hanoi and four-mile radius of the port city of Haiphong, and any operation within 30 miles of Hanoi or ten miles of Haiphong required advance approval of Washington. However, in 1967 the self-imposed restrictions temporarily were relaxed. Forty percent of the Alfas from *Oriskany* that year were into the Hanoi (26 strikes) and Haiphong (32) areas. Among other targets, Phuc Yen airfield, the principal MiG base ten miles north of Hanoi, was struck four times, and the thermal power plant five miles east of the capital city was hit twice. Most of the 126 Alfa strikes were concentrated in the last three weeks of October at a rate of two and three per day.

The cost to VA-163 during the 1967-68 deployment was heavy. Ten aircraft and nine pilots were lost, all but two occurring in the Hanoi-Haiphong areas. LT Rus-



First row left to right: LT. R. H. Weldman, LCDR. D. L. Martin, LCDR. R. H. Bowling, CDR. H. T. Jenkins, CDR. W. F. Foster, LCDR. C. G. Wack, LCDR. W. C. Smith. Second row: LTJG. J. E. Taylor, LT. F. G. Mitchell, LTJG. D. B. Small, LTJG. E. L. Desha, LT. M. A. Avore, LTJG. C. F. Stender, LT. C. R. Tulley, ENS. F. M. Oakes, LT. S. L. Spear, LTJG. R. A. Pennington, LTJG. J. G. Tyler, LT. R. F. Hofford, LTJG. J. H. Shore, LTJG. J. B. Sloan.

sell Kuhl was seriously injured when his A-4E was struck by AA fire northeast of Haiphong 20 July. Kuhl flew *Old Salt 312* to the Gulf where he ejected and was recovered by a SAR helo. LCDR Donald V. Davis in *Old Salt 304*, hit by automatic

Ret) David Carey, were victims of a single SAM during a 31 August strike. Both ejected near Haiphong, Stafford receiving major injuries, and they remained POWs until early 1973.

A five-day period in late October 1967

"The next day, 25 October, LTJG J. M. Krommenhoek in Old Salt 315 was killed by a SAM near Phuc Yen, and LCDR John S. McCain (now a U.S. Senator from Arizona) was shot down and captured during a Hanoi thermal power plant strike on the 26th."

weapons fire on a 25 July night truck hunt, was killed in action. LTJG Ralph Bisz, a survivor of the *Oriskany* fire nine months before, flying *Old Salt 313*, was lost 4 August to a SAM near Haiphong. LCDR Al Stafford and his wingman, LTJG (CAPT,



Saints hold awaiting "Charlie" time over USS Hancock, 1968.

proved particularly costly. LTJG Jim Dooley was KIA near Haiphong when *Old Salt 306* was hit by AA fire on the 22nd. Two days later, LTJG R. A. "Skip" Foulks in *Old Salt 311* was shot down. Uninjured, Foulks parachuted into the Song Duong River mouth five miles east of Haiphong, and in a dramatic rescue, was snatched by helicopter from under the enemy's nose. The next day, 25 October, LTJG J. M. Krommenhoek in *Old Salt 315* was killed by a SAM near Phuc Yen, and LCDR John S. McCain (now a U.S. Senator from Arizona) was shot down and captured during a Hanoi thermal power plant strike on the 26th.

The luck of Skip Foulks ran out on 5 January 1968. He was killed on a night recce in the "hourglass" area between Haiphong and Thanh Hoa, the squadron's final loss of the cruise. *continued...*

VA-163 SAINTS

Continued...



VA-163

More fortunate was *Saint* LTJG Dennis Earl who escaped with serious injuries when his *Skyhawk* was struck by automatic weapons fire during a 21 November armed recon mission. One bullet entered the cockpit shattering Earl's tibia as it passed through his left leg, then lodging in his right leg. In spite of his injuries, Earl made a bombing run on a highway to get rid of his ordnance load, then bleeding, in pain and unable to use rudder or brakes, flew back to *Oriskany* where he was trapped into the barricade.

Frustrations of the air war were rife in the cockpits of the aircraft daily penetrating North Vietnam airspace. From the beginning in early 1965, the heavy hand of tactical dictation by higher authority was evident to those in the ready rooms, both in target selection and the progressively more stringent ROE that provided outright tactical advantages to the enemy. The frustrations of many an attack pilot were typified in poignant comments written in a letter by *Saints* LCDR John Miles:

"Max effort, of course, but within 'guidelines' prescribed — no body punching, no uppercuts to the chin; only thrust and parry. Keep dancing, boys. When we were in the thick of it and losing Jim Dooley and Ralph Bisz and the rest, I could only think of some faceless policy-maker saying 'Gentlemen, we must accept two facts in this war: limited objectives and unlimited losses.' It was a time filled with excitement and personal pride - and



Saint A-4 launches from USS Hancock, 1968.

filled with sadness. Thrills and pride fade with time, but the sadness lives on — missing squadron mates, killed or captured. Fate. Luck. Providence. Timing."

Actions in the Vietnam War brought seven Navy Crosses to *Skyhawk* pilots. Four of these went to *Air Wing 16* aviators during the 1967 deployment — one to CDR Burt Shepherd, the air wing commander, and three to VA-163. LCDR Marvin Reynolds earned the Navy Cross for leading and coordinating a highly dangerous and complex SAR mission 17 July. It involved two separate incursions over enemy territory, fierce AAA opposition, and aerial refueling, but it resulted in the successful recovery of a pilot downed in mountainous terrain 32 miles southwest of Hanoi.

"In the combat debut of the Walleye TV guided missiles, the 21 August strike group used the new weapon to destroy the power plant in the face of intense AAA fire and 28 SAMs fired at the attack group."



Hancock, 1968.

Skipper Bryan Compton and LCDR (VADM) James Busey of the *Saints* earned Navy Crosses on the same mission, a 21 August Alfa strike against the Hanoi thermal power plant. In the combat debut of the *Walleye* TV guided missiles, the 21 August strike group used the new weapon to destroy the power plant in the face of intense AAA fire and 28 SAMs fired at the attack group. Compton was a major planner and flight leader of the mission. Busey, ignoring severe damage to his own aircraft, led a contingent of six aircraft that inflicted extensive damage to the target.



Saints enroute strike from Hancock, 1968.

A historical footnote to the 21 August mission was that VA-163 was the only *Walleye*-configured squadron in *Oriskany*. To provide weapons in numbers considered necessary for optimum effec-

tiveness, four additional *Walleye*-capable A-4Es were borrowed from the VA-153 *Blue Tail Flies* in *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) and cross-decked to O-boat for two weeks' TAD.

Oriskany's return to NAS Alameda 31 January 1968 ended the six-year operational romance of CVA-34 and CVG-16. Shortly after their arrival at Lemoore, VA-163 and -164 we reassigned to *Air Wing 21*, led by CDR Harold Terry. On 10 July, CDR E.D. "Ed" Lighter relieved Compton to become the ninth and last skipper of the *Saints*. A former NavCad, Lighter received his wings in October 1951, then gaining experience in TBMs, AFs, A-4Bs and F-8s. Additionally, he served three tours as an LSO prior to joining VA-163 in July 1967.



Saint aircraft damaged during USS Oriskany fire, 26 Oct 1966.



FROM THE EDITOR

• Write It Down! •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

We're starting to get more journal stories from members, but over and over I hear the same excuse for not submitting. Members like to tell their sea stories, but they're very hesitant to write them down for publication because they think they can't remember all the details. *Guess what?* With the possible exception of Youthly Puresome who started writing down his stories when he was a flight student, no one can remember all the details. The answer is to write them down anyway and depend on your squadron-mates to help fill in the details.

We've had some good examples of this collaborative technique. First example: Member Larry Adkinson has been writing about the Playboys of H&MS-11 since the mid-1980s and has published accounts in several magazines. His work was based on exhaustive research in official histories and many interviews. However, after publishing his story in

last year's Winter edition of the *A-4Ever*, readers came forward to point out an error in a major Playboy event he related. You can read his correction in *Who Were Those Guys? – Setting the Record Straight*, in this issue. Larry's intro mentions viewing the past through "the gray-ing lens of time" – a phenomenon we're all experiencing.

"Get together with your old friends and get those sea stories down on paper."

The second example is "Toad" Homer's account of VMA-332's trans-Atlantic flight using A-4 buddy tankers published in the Fall 2005 issue. He ran his story by a good friend, Col Herb Fix, who was along for that ride. Col Fix pointed out a couple of errors, and together they got the story right.

Third, Director Ed "Viking" Jobin and I collaborated last year to tell the story of an A-20-R flight from MCAS Beaufort to Roosevelt Road, Puerto Rico, in 1971 (see "A Nugget and That Brand New Jet" – *A4Ever*, Fall 2005). Ed wrote the story and emailed me about some of the details, most of which I couldn't remember (I could barely remember what squadron I was in back in 1971). However, after emailing back and forth, and finally reading Viking's final draft, I remembered enough details to contribute a sidebar on my participation in that exercise. The result was a pretty accurate account of an interesting period.

So, if as an organization we want to chronicle the stories of the A-4 and the men and women who flew and fixed them, it's up to all of us to contribute to the pot. We can't just leave it up to "someone else" to take care of. Get together with your old friends and get those sea stories down on paper. Send them to me at the editor's email address shown below. We'll help you polish them up, and you'll be amazed at how good you look in print.

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

VA-163 SAINTS cont...

➡ ➡ The *Saints* sixth and last deployment was in *Hancock* (CVA-19), another veteran of the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club, from July 18, 1968, to March 3, 1969. The squadron's Yankee Station experience was less traumatic than in the 1967-68 deployment, but still there was a fair share of Alfa strikes. Only one pilot loss occurred when LCDR William Rankin flew into the water after a night cat shot early in the cruise. Although there were no combat losses, CDR E.D. Shropshire, the *Saints* exec, provided unique excitement when his *Skyhawk* was hit and badly damaged by 37mm AA fire during a mission north of Vinh. Shropshire was injured when a projectile entered the port side of his cockpit and ricocheted off the throttle quadrant. Fortunately, the high-explosive shell failed to detonate, but it severed Shropshire's oxygen mask hose and microphone cord as it passed under his chin and grazed his right shoulder before imbedding itself in the starboard canopy rail. When the shell impacted the throttle quadrant, tiny steel fragments showered



In the groove, USS Hancock, 1968.

the cockpit and Shropshire received 60 minor wounds in his arms and chest. By sheer chance, the largest splinter lodged in Shropshire's waist-mounted Mk C-3 life vest, its energy spent a fraction of an inch short of disemboweling the pilot. Both the electrical and hydraulic systems of Shropshire's A-4 were damaged; he had no trim and his flaps were stuck in the half-down position. With no radio and struggling to maintain control, Shropshire made a skillful "hot, roller coaster approach" to a successful trap on *Hancock*.

VA-163 returned to Lemoore for the last time early in March 1969, and shortly thereafter was relegated to an inauspicious end. Without ceremony, the squadron was placed in standdown status. Its remaining aircraft were reassigned to other squadrons and its personnel, save one yeoman, were transferred to other units. The yeoman, with *Saints* records and memorabilia, was transferred to VA-125, the A-4 training squadron at Lemoore. There, with no aircraft or personnel, the squadron existed on paper for another two years, as an imaginary filling for a "readiness" slot on some obscure DOD force-level chart.

Attack Squadron 163 passed into history with 1 July 1971 as its official disestablishment date. It now is forgotten by almost all except those several hundred individuals who, during a brief eight-plus years, had the pride and privilege of calling themselves Saints. In July 1990, more than 80 former Saints assembled in Grapevine, Texas, for a nostalgic reunion and swapping of memories.

THE BENT PROBE

By John Lamers



Something that happened while I was flying A-4s in VA-72 still intrigues and puzzles me many years later. It happened over the Gulf of Tonkin in 1966 during a dogfight with my good friend Dave Griggs. VA-72, then commanded by Cdr. Harry B. Southworth, was based aboard USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* at the time.

The idea in a dogfight, of course, is to fly to where you've got the other guy in your gunsight while the other guy is attempting to do likewise to you. It's not only useful to be able to do this well; it's also just about the most fun you can have in an airplane. As we all know, today's Navy maintains fleet adversary squadrons and holds competitions with awards for the fastest kills. However, things were different back in the '60s when most of our leaders viewed dogfights as dangerous and undisciplined behavior.

Not only wasn't dogfighting part of the attack mission back then, it didn't seem to be part of the fighter mission, either. F-4s were supposed to be the Navy's fighters in those days, but you could roll in on them, and most times you couldn't make them fight. So a sizeable minority of the A-4 community fought each other whenever we could. In those days we had the stick-and-rudder skills and the irrational exuberance dogfighting required. Furthermore, our tough, agile, spin-proof *Skyhawks* were perfectly suited to the task.

One late afternoon during the '66 WestPac cruise, Dave Griggs and I launched from the FDR as a flight of two. Dave was a '62 boat school graduate, a good friend and an aggressive pilot. He loved a dogfight, and like the rest of us, hated to lose. The sun had just set by the time we were through with our briefed mission and back over the ship; but there was some twilight remaining and we had a few minutes to spare before our recovery time. So we split, flew on opposite headings for about thirty seconds, and reversed to engage head-on.

We spotted each other at about the same moment, and the fight was on. As I remember, neither of us had an advantage at first, but after a minute I began to close on him. (While airplanes may look the same, there are usually small performance differences between them, and on that day I had the better one.) We got into a climbing low-speed scissors during which I was able to roll into position at Dave's six. To rub it in, I keyed my mike and transmitted a few rounds of UHF "gunfire." Dave was not a happy man. Just then the ship called to give me my approach clearance. We immediately abandoned the fight.

As I was copying my clearance, Dave decided to relieve his frustrations by flying beneath my aircraft and abruptly pulling up in front of it. Even if done carefully, this is a bad idea, but Dave misjudged it. I was reading back my clearance and paying no attention to him when, approaching from behind and beneath me, his aircraft suddenly appeared nose-up directly in front of me. The metallic bang and violent jolt led me to believe we'd collided. I lost sight of him for a moment and feared the worst. I called him: "Dave, are you OK?" After what seemed like a long pause I was relieved to hear him say, "I think so," but I could tell from the way he said it that, like me, he believed our

aircraft had made contact. He joined on me. We swapped the lead back and forth, examining each other's aircraft. His aircraft appeared undamaged, but my refueling probe was bent sharply nose-up. We separated and flew to our marshal points for individual approaches to the ship.

Back on deck, Dave and I, our plane captains and our flight deck maintenance troops thoroughly examined each of our aircraft by flashlight. I had no doubt that some part of his plane, most likely his vertical stabilizer, had hit my refueling probe. But to my surprise, there wasn't a scratch on his plane, not even the slightest blemish on its paint. Furthermore, there wasn't a scratch on mine. There was absolutely nothing damaged, broken, scratched or leaking on either aircraft except that my refueling probe was pointing up at a 40-degree angle.

Engineers will say: "you give me the data and I'll give you the theory." Well, in this case I've yet to hear a plausible theory. How does a refueling probe that's strong enough to stand on get bent 40 degrees without being touched? Could airloads have done that, or was the probe whiplashed into that shape by the motion of my aircraft as it encountered the wake of Dave's during our near miss? In either case, how could my probe get pranged while the rest of my aircraft remained unscathed, and how could Dave's A-4, having damaged mine, remain undamaged? You tell me.

I walked below to the ready room to tell the skipper what had happened. The room was dark. Harry Southworth was watching a movie with some of the pilots. I crouched beside his chair and said: "Skipper, Dave and I were, uh, you know, dogfighting and we had, well . . . sort of a *midair* and the refueling probe on my aircraft is bent." Such news would have sent most commanding officers straight through the overhead, but Cdr. Southworth, in the middle of his second combat cruise in two years, had obviously heard worse. Without taking his eyes off the screen, he quietly replied, "See me after the movie."

The bent probe was removed and replaced that night. Both aircraft ➡ ➡



PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

Oral Tradition #406

(The Oral Tradition being the retelling of hoary stories passed from barstool to barstool, from gray-bearded commanders down to the young, manly men who populate the back rows of ready rooms....)

There wasn't a commander's moon out. No commanders, either. But Puresome was. It was real dark. And Puresome wasn't having a good night.

"Power...Power...Don't climb!" hollered Paddles, as Puresome once again sunk into the mysterious black suck-hole behind the ship, crammed on too much power, and sailed over the top of all four arresting wires, his tailhook leaving nothing but sparks on the flight deck.

"Puresome grasped ahold of himself for one more shot at the deck before he had to try and find the tanker, which he really did not want to do in the bumpy darkness."

"Bolter! Bolter!" radioed a disgusted Paddles as the position lights of Puresome's A-4 disappeared into the darkness off the angle deck.

"Young Puresome's got a bit of wind up tonight, if you don't mind me saying so, sir," yelled an assistant LSO, who had just written a highly lyrical, thirty-line description of Puresome's last pass at the blunt end of the boat, as seen by the grizzled senior LSO holding the pickle. "Yes...but, then, don't we all?" yelled Paddles back at the little group huddled on the platform against the wind, rain and clouds of stack gas the boat's engineer had conveniently blown in time for Puresome's approach. "Or do we?" he

added cryptically. His assistant dutifully added these comments to Puresome's pass in the LSO book.

"Yaaaaaaa!" Puresome screamed into his oxygen mask, "this can't be happening to me--I'm too good...had to be a hook skip...pitching deck...Paddles suckered me into it...vertigos were in my eyes...hole in my glove, and I had a headache...."

Puresome's search for a convenient rationalization for temporarily looking bad was interrupted by the necessity of recovering from the unusual attitude the twitchy little A-4 had managed while the driver was absent without leave from flying instruments.

"Yaaaaaaa!" Puresome screamed into his oxygen mask with the true knowledge

that 600 feet over the ocean at night was not the time to lose your instrument scan. It had almost led to the dreaded "bust your hiney" syndrome. Puresome locked onto the ABBA JABBA gyro horizon and concentrated on keeping the shiny side up as a starter.

"Sidewinder 411, say your state," queried someone safe in CATC with a cigar and a cup of coffee.

Puresome had time for a stick, a rudder, a throttle and no time for any instrument as peripheral as a fuel gage. Especially no time for dumb shit questions, like "say your state."

"Ax me something in the middle," squeaked 411.

Annoying things like "say your state," or "say your gross" involved totaling up tank quantities or bombs and stuff hanging under wings. Even in better moments, it took all Puresome's willpower not to say "West Texas," or, "You're gross," instead of doing the figgerin. Puresome held to holistic views like "a whole bunch," or "not enough!"

Naturally, management took a dim view of this kind of thing, and once his skipper and the air boss had invited Puresome in for a little senior citizen vivisection of a J.O. after the ship had asked him, "say your position," and Puresome had replied, "Doggy!"

But, finally, Puresome was able to take one eyeball off the ABBA JABBA and slew it over for a quick peek at the fuel gage, which indicated a tad more than not enough. Buoyed by this information, Puresome grasped ahold of himself for one more shot at the deck before he had to try and find the tanker, which he really did not want to do in the bumpy darkness.

So Puresome settled down, stooged around the CCA pattern, fought the suck hole to a draw, and impacted the deck acceptably.

"Yes! Are we not men?" exulted Puresome, as the two-wire dragged him to a halt.

Safely back in the ready room, Puresome was greeted by a bunch of touching, caring, sharing, feeling, nurturing, supportive sixties kind of guys, who had decorated the black board with witty sayings and cartoons and were very helpful with his self-image.

Since Bolter Harassment Coordinator was one of Puresome's collateral duties, he expected no less when it was his time in the barrel. However, their mindless critiques were as the babble of fishwives.

"I may have bolted some, but it wasn't because I'm not good," Puresome explained to Weed on the way up to the Dirty Shirt Wardroom for double cheeseburgers mit egg and jolly green bug juice.

Weed just nodded. It was absolutely, without doubt, the only thing to say.

BENT PROBE cont...

➡ ➡ flew the next morning. I was never again scheduled to fly with Dave. He went on to become a test pilot, an astronaut, and a rear admiral. We saw each other a few times in later years, and we kidded each other about the bent

probe. He claimed the way he bent it was evidence of his superior airmanship. He invited me to Cape Canaveral to watch his April 12, 1985, launch in shuttle Discovery, but I couldn't make it. His life was tragically cut short when he touched a

wing to the ground the morning of June 17, 1989, while slow-rolling a 1940s-vintage T-6 near Earle, Arkansas. He's buried at Arlington. Rest in peace, Dave.

(Ed. Note: this article was written for the VA-72 2002 Reunion Book.)

TINS

By Boom Powell

GREMLINS 1977

By LCDR R.R.Powell, VF-43.
(Reprinted from the July 1977 issue of *Approach* with permission.)

GREMLINS still exist. My dad was in *Liberators* in Big Bang Two, and he told me about them. For awhile, the little green critters who make it their profession to hassle, taunt and tease fliers seemed to have disappeared. Well, they haven't. They are still around, and the Gremlins, like the aircraft of today, have become sophisticated and very up to date. The worst part is, I found out they're still around—at least in air wing strength—on April 1st.

Now, I enjoy an April Fool's prank as much as the next guy. But these particular Gremlins worked so subtly and planned their strategy so well that neither I nor the other instructor was aware of their sneaky moves until it was too late.



To start at the beginning: Individual instrument training missions had been approved for the weekend. Our students were a pair of genuine ensigns (poor innocent babes then, now experienced beyond their years). The first hint of Gremlins at work came when the only *Skyhawks* available were configured with single center-line fuel tanks. The “double-bubble” birds were all mysteriously down.

As the AAR would have said, “Pre-flight, takeoff and climb-out were normal.” Aircraft 303 was off first, with ENS Stick under the hood. I followed in 305 a few minutes later with ENS Scope.

At altitude, we met Weather Gremlin

“Talk to me, back seat. I know it’s your first flight in the fleet, and you haven’t done this yet, but keep giving me our angle-of-bank! I’ve got vertigo, and this is no drill.”

for the first—but not the last—time. Seems headwinds were 40,50 knots above forecast. (Not bad for a Gremlin. Years ago, all they had to do was tear Mrs. Murphy’s overalls off the clothesline to fake a pilot on the wind. Today they have to forge radiosondes, Mb prog charts, and some pretty scientific forecasting.) Well, that little bit of wind can’t hurt, said I. I’ve flown this route lots of times. A quick re-compute of the fuel figures (that’s what ensigns are for) showed it would still be no sweat. However, just to be safe, I had my ensign re-file to eliminate a dogleg; and while he was getting items on his syllabus flight checked off, had him make the duty check with Metro.

The weather-forecasting Gremlins must have been in the duty section. Destination weather was not panning out as forecast (2500 scattered). This was no real surprise, as the surface prog during the brief looked like a giant red and blue octopus had sprawled across the central U.S. Still, going from 2500 scattered to 700 broken was a step in the wrong direction.

“Center, 303 would like to go company frequency for one.”

“Roger, 303, call back up.”

“305 copies and switching.”

“Five. Three. I’ve lost my TACAN and would like to have you join, in case I have any problems.”

There was still a fair distance between the two aircraft, so 305 motored on,

and 303 started getting vectors toward destination. The Gremlin that made 303’s TACAN go “Tango-Uniform” must have held enroute, because a few minutes later, the azimuth and DME in 305 also failed!

Tell Center. Tell 303. Get serious about getting joined up as soon as possible. Start looking for someplace else to land. Can’t find any place! They are all either too far, or the weather isn’t any better than at destination. A check on the only field within range equipped with ADF/UHF revealed that it was down to GCA minimums. By now, the Gremlins are starting to chortle with unsuppressed glee.

Center does a good job of joining the flight. ..well, at least of getting them close together. Because now, that Gremlin so familiar to fighter pilots takes over—the one which enables you to spot ATC-called traffic at 20 miles, but prevents you from finding your wingman at one mile. It was embarrassing how long it took four sets of eyeballs to find each other, but finally we joined, with me as the wingie.

The flow of info from Center is really high. Vectors for enroute penetration to precision final; latest weather is worse than before, but still above circling minimums. So, I as wingman will land; leader (poor fellow) will go around visually. Tell Center we’ll continue to our Navy destination. Air Force base weather to the north isn’t any better. We’ll stay with our own kind, thank you. The magic word still hasn’t been said. It will be --soon.

The flight descends into the goo, and some obtuse Gremlin goes to work in ATC. Center passes on that due to a full pattern, there will be a delay getting a radar approach. Let’s see, two TACAN-less aircraft joined in miserable weather, less fuel than expected, and no place else to go. “Center, this is 303. We are declaring an emergency!”

The weather continues to deteriorate. Ceilings bounce between 100 and 500 feet, rain showers, turbulence. Can’t go anywhere else. No nav aids. Only our radios. Radios!

Why has there been so much silence? Call leader. Nothing. Much frantic hand signaling and retuning. Nothing. Try tactical. Take radio control into front cockpit. "Five, how do ya' read?" "Loud and clear." Whew! Back to assigned frequency, and the radio stays good, except for some Gremlin sitting in the rear cockpit control box, making the gent in front do all the work.

It gets dark and gloomy as the flight descends. Speed brakes out, then in. Gears and flaps came down. So far, so good. That the duty Gremlins can't allow. So, one checked out in physiology (probably the same one that deflects needles to miss veins during flight physicals) reaches in and grabs a handful of stapes, semicircular canals, otoliths, etc., and gives 'em a twist. Instant 60-degree angle-of-bank, and getting steeper by the second! Talk to me, back seat. I know it's your first flight in the fleet, and you haven't done this yet, but keep giving me our angle-of-bank! I've got vertigo, and this is no drill.

The controller is good. Easy, steady voice. The pattern is ours. The field is ready. Arresting gear info, other runways, wingy to land, lead cleared visual downwind. Now, all we have to do is find the field.

The time between words starts to stretch. "303 is on glide slope." My fuel is good. "On centerline." Winds gusty, but down the runway. "303 is on glide slope approaching." Where is the runway? "Decision height." The ground! I saw the

ground! "You are at decision height. If runway or ..." There -off to the left -the approach lights! Runway environment.

Lead levels and starts to climb as I lock on to the runway, turn to centerline, level the wings, and touch down. Easy on the brakes. Couple of tentative slides-easily controlled. Only then does what is happening to the, lead aircraft sink in. The ceiling and visibility are so low that 303 couldn't stay visual and has to go around for another GCA.

The field looks like a movie set for a Bela Lugosi flick. Fog and mist everywhere. I cleared the runway and just sat there. Didn't switch radio frequencies either. Our two aircraft had identical fuel

states when we had started down. I read my gage and wished 303 a lot of luck.

The controllers were superb. After some thrashing, determining that a visual landing really wasn't possible, they started giving instructions. Of course, being controllers, once 303 was established downwind, they stopped talking for the allotted 1-minute coffee sip.

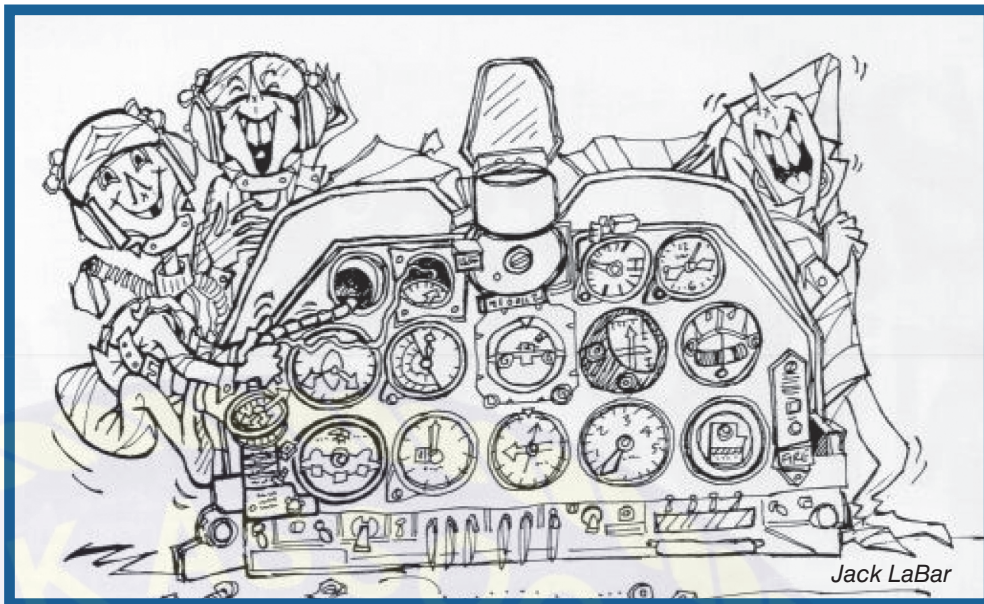
"Radar, 303, you keep on talking! I want to know you're still down there."

Not exactly out of the book, but under the circumstances...

The GCA was relatively routine except for the blast of adrenalin each "above glide slope" call brought forth. Somehow, glide slope, aircraft, and clouds were all in the right place at the right time. A strange feeling to be on a parallel taxiway, knowing an aircraft was in the arresting gear on the adjacent runway yards away, and not be able to see him.

Historically, Gremlins have not been dangerous -just troublesome. On this April Fool's Day, it took a lot of ability and talent to keep their pranks from accumulating in a disaster. They did get the last word in, though. The rest of the week-end was routine and a lot more enjoyable. However, this is being written while SIQ with what is politely called a gastrointestinal disorder. A dozen oysters on the half-shell tasted delicious, but never give a Gremlin a chance.

(Ed.Note: Art work by Jack LaBar, Staff Illustrator, **APPROACH** Magazine)



VF-43 in the soup.

WHO WERE THOSE GUYS?

Setting the Record Straight

By Col Larry Adkinson, USMC(Ret), Playboy 32



The fog of battle looms large, especially when viewed through the graying lens of time. The author of "Who Were Those Guys?" – The Playboys in Vietnam (A-4Ever, Winter 2005) provides clarification on an important aerial confrontation in the Vietnam War.

Since 1977, I have written several versions of "Who Were Those Guys" about a Marine Corps TA-4F Fast FAC unit flying over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, in 1969-70. In every version, I have erred when recording the name of the back seat pilot who flew a mortally wounded LtCol George Ward back to Danang Air

and deadly day—19 March 1970—when LtCol George Ward was killed by an AK-47 bullet while firing rockets at trucks towing Surface-to-air Missiles (SAMs) in Laos.

"We had just gotten into the low level portion of the VR mission (Mission #0824 in aircraft Bureau Number 154622) when I spotted what appeared to be an enemy convoy of at least 2 large trucks with SAMs (2 each) on the trailers. I was able to use our maps to detail the location of the trucks so we quickly came back at low level to take a picture (hand-held Nikon) of them. With that done, we should have

"I missed an opportunity to laud PJ on his actions that were made a little more challenging because—as an F-4B/J pilot—he had never been checked out as a qualified front seater or pilot in command in any version of the A-4."

Base. Through two old friends, I recently learned that it was 1stLt Paul (PJ) Lowery that brought the airplane home. Aside from getting an important fact wrong, I missed an opportunity to laud PJ on his actions that were made a little more challenging because—as an F-4B/J pilot—he had never been checked out as a qualified front seater or pilot in command in any version of the A-4. He was a "part-time" Playboy when he could get away from his assignment as an Air Director in the Danang Direct Air Support Center (DASC).

I tracked down PJ and coaxed from him the following narrative of the fateful

left the target area and reported what we found to "Hillsboro," the 7th Air Force Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) for Laos. However, LtCol Ward chose to make a second pass to fire our 5-inch Zuni rockets in an attempt to destroy or halt the movement of the trucks.

"As the rockets were impacting, I distinctly remember seeing a large group of troops with small arms aimed at us—almost as if in formation—and I heard pings hitting aircraft and canopy. Then I saw blood and bullet holes in the canopy and realized that LtCol Ward was slumped over in the front seat and we were not

pulling up. In fact, we were rolling and about to run into the terrain. My unusual attitude training kicked in, and I used the A-4's rapid roll rate to salvage the situation and climb to a safe altitude. As I climbed, I used the still functioning radio to report our situation and position to ABCCC. I also requested assistance from any other FAC in the area in hopes of getting an air strike on the enemy trucks.

"Hillsboro responded well and handed me off to DANANG Approach Control about 22 minutes later for a GCA into the runway, where I made an arrested landing from the back seat. It felt like an eternity trying to get LtCol Ward back to medical assistance, but his wounds were terminal. To the best of my memory, Major Jupp (H&MS 11) Maintenance Officer and Captain Del Weber met the aircraft and helped remove LtCol Ward's body from the aircraft. I felt like a basket case in the backseat. I was debriefed by 1stMAW and the squadron in person that day (I think) and later received a call at work with other questions the next day. Fortunately for me, I was scheduled for R&R with my wife in Hawaii a week later. I did fly with H&MS 11 a few more times before I rotated back to the states.

"...My respect for LtCol Ward's courage and commitment and likewise my respect for the Marines of H&MS 11 and MASS 3 will always be strong. I regret that I never contacted LtCol Ward's family to express those sentiments."

So, thanks to PJ, we know exactly what happened and who was involved that day. I assure you that PJ would never have "come up on the air" if I did ask him directly about it. And thanks to Randy Crew and Larry Taylor for vectoring me to PJ.

(Ed Note: PJ Lowery returned to flying the F-4 on completion of his tour in Viet Nam in 1970. He was in the group of pilots selected to form the first operational AV-8A Harrier squadron in the early 1970s. He retired as a lieutenant colonel and is now a pilot in commercial aviation.)

AIRSPEED - Speed of an airplane. (Deduct 25% when listening to a retired Marine pilot.)

CARBURETOR ICING - A phenomenon reported to the FAA by pilots immediately after they run out of gas.

NANOSECOND - Time delay between the Low Fuel Warning light and the onset of carburetor icing.

DEAD RECKONING - You reckon correctly, or you are.

DESTINATION - Geographical location 30 minutes beyond the pilot's bladder saturation point.

FIREWALL - Section of the aircraft specifically designed to funnel heat and smoke into the cockpit.

FLIGHT FOLLOWING - Formation flying.

GLIDE DISTANCE - Half the distance from an airplane to the nearest emergency landing field.

HYDROPLANE - An airplane designed to land long on a short and wet runway.

LEAN MIXTURE - Nonalcoholic beer.

A-4 NIGHTMARE

A vivid reminder of how very dangerous the flight deck can be.

By Kit Sanders



(This is from the Able Dogs website, www.abledogs.com.)

It was mid-March 1967, *AMERICA* and our *AIRWING 6* were back at sea after a port call in Barcelona. It was late morning, and the launch was proceeding normally. My A-4C tanker was spotted for launch on the outboard waist catapult, and as the *Phantom* ahead was launched, the jet blast deflector was dropped, I began my roll to the catapult. A-4C's had no nose-wheel steering, we were "led" around by a tiller bar in the nose wheel, and a young sailor.

For some reason, the F-4 on the catapult seemed slow, then I saw the nose pitch down, as the shuttle hit the nose wheel, and the nose banged on the flight deck. The catapult bridle had shed the aircraft, and the big jet was rolling down the catapult track in burner, nose firmly planted on the flight deck. As the aircraft crossed the deck edge, I saw the fuel

tanks rupture, and the fuel ignite from the flaming afterburner.

My tiller bar man, looked over his shoulder at the fire and froze in place. In seconds, the flames enveloped my aircraft. Vainly I tried to eject, using the alternate handle between my legs, but I had not armed the RAPEC seat, habit being to only arm the seat when crossing the shuttle. For what seemed like an eternity, I was inside the fireball, the canopy was closed, and now the flames blackened it, and lack of oxygen caused my engine to flame-out. I knew I was dead. Being burned alive in a fire, no place to go, sitting in an A-4C tanker with 10,800 pounds of jet fuel, and unable to eject!

After a terrifying length of time, I could hear activity outside the aircraft. Something was being sprayed on my aircraft, but I could not see due to the blackened and deformed canopy. Finally, after all hope was gone, the canopy popped open, and my plane captain

appeared. The launch was cancelled, my bird was burned up. As I exited the aircraft, I saw my tiller-bar man lying on the flight deck, burned horribly, only his helmet, belt and boots left on the body. My aircraft tires were burned and blown out, the radome was burned off and the canopy deformed and blackened; but the two drop tanks and the buddy store still were intact, and had not exploded or burned. Rubber legs propelled me across the flight deck. Numbly, I transited the knee knockers and passageways back to the safety of my Ready Room.

Upon reaching the Ready Room, I was met by the skipper. Words may have been exchanged, I don't recall saying much, just weakly sat down in a chair and surveyed the damage from the PLAT TV. The tape was running of the accident. The pilot of the *Phantom* was lost, but the PLAT TV plainly showed the RIO ejecting, the flames enveloping the deck edge operator, the tiller-bar man and my aircraft. I could not watch the rest, and barely made it to the head where I emptied my stomach.

After a brief meeting with the skipper, he asked if I felt good enough to try it again, and we mutually agreed to schedule me for the next launch. That one I made!



TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• www.skyhawk.org •

By David "Twidget" Weber

Ever hear of "Open Source"? It's a generic term for software that is built by contributors to an open source project without regard for compensation. The software is built by programmers contributing from around the world, and is generally distributed for free. You can buy "packages" that are sold by vendors, but if you go directly to the project's internet web sites you can always download the "Open Source" software for free.

Why do you care? Well, if you use a word processor and/or a spreadsheet, and spent some serious dollars for packages

such as Microsoft Office, then you should consider this. You can have a comparable software suite for a lot less than Microsoft Office, and still be able to read and save in Word and Excel formats. (See my open source links at the bottom of the *Skyhawk* website.)

Don't even own a computer? Well you're missing out on the greatest source of information yet created by man. Not to mention a fantastic *Skyhawk* website and Ready Room. A computer and the internet are NOT hard to use. Consider the internet one huge catalog, international in

scope, with an easy to use search engine serving as its index.

Cost has become very reasonable, both for the computer and the internet access. And protecting your computer from viruses and such is very easy and takes very little effort. Don't let horror stories from your friends scare you off. If a friend has a computer, ask them to access my site, and there you can see everything you need to know about getting started. See www.darw.com.

If you don't have access to a computer, mail me a note and I will respond with a document outlining the basics. You will be amazed at the world that opens up to you with a click of a mouse.

David A. Weber
1517 Lindby Drive
Flower Mound, TX 75028-3624

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

(Ed. note: This email is in reply to Jim Rothwell's request for information on his father printed in the Fall 2005 A-4Ever.)

Jim -

My name is Tom Kane, USMC, Captain, 1961-66. I read your note in the SkyHawk Association magazine. Your father was my flight instructor in the second half of 1962. Unfortunately, my flight log book was stolen ten years ago, so I do not have the specific dates for you that he entered after our training flights. At the time, he was a captain. I am pretty sure it was Meridian - it might have been Beeville - it was almost 45 years ago. In any event, I remember him very well and he was a role model Marine for me at the time. I had been at the Basic School and we had twins at Meridian and I think being somewhat older/senior, made your dad more understanding of my faults.

I also remember hearing that he had died in an accident in the Philippines. I was in VMA-225 at Chu Lai from June-October 1965 and had staged thru Subic on our way from Iwakuni in early 1965. I believe he was practicing the pop-up maneuver in a small inlet just north of Subic Bay.

The pattern was to run into the enclosed bay from seaside at 100 ft and then pull-up the nose 30 degrees to 2500 ft and invert. You then pulled the nose thru into a 30 degree dive and acquired the target for a firing run. The valley (fiord) was surrounded by hills that formed a box canyon into which you were flying. After firing, it was essential to pull-up immediately and slide over the hills on the southeast side of the bay for another run. Oftentimes the hilltops were shrouded in clouds which made the exit tricky to say the least, and errors were often fatal.

I did not read the accident report but remember thinking about his loss at the time. I was back at Cherry Point at that time and recalled the time we had spent together three years earlier.

I wish that I could provide you with more specific information but perhaps my comments will help in some small way.

Regards,

Tom Kane

[TFKadare@aol.com]

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To the Editor:

I was a member of VMA-324 from 1970 to 1974 when her colors were retired and the squadron became VMA-311, assuming those colors returning from Viet Nam. I am in possession of some interesting photos if anyone is interested. I'd love to make contact with anyone who may have been a member during that era. I was an AMH in the Air Frame division serving under SSgt Robert Ortiz and GySgt Massey.

David Rosowski

david.rosowski@navy.mil

CIV TRIREFAC

◆ ◆ ◆

ATTIC ATTACKS

• Sent in by Members •



Photo by Qantas Captain John Bartels captured Australian A-4G near Bateman's Bay, Australia. (Used with permission)

Image provided by Gary Verver shows China Lake A-4B BuNo 144947 refueling through a modified drop tank. Gary relates:

"The photo is dated August 1967, one year after I left China Lake. While I was there the refueling probe was removed from the primary Shrike test A-4's (TIAS installation) as the probe head was in front of the nose and interfered with the Shrike missile electronics in the nose cone. Not a viable alternative for the fleet unless refueling capability could be maintained which led to this series of tests. Ultimately, the cranked probe proved to be a better solution and was introduced on the F models which were the primary Iron Hand Shrike aircraft in Vietnam, as I recall."

*Dig out those
saved photos,
artifacts and
articles that are
gathering dust
in your attic, and
send them in to
the A-4Ever.*



Photo taken by Frank Baracossa, circa 1980, depicts VMA-214 Blacksheep A-4M loaded with practice bombs and enroute to targets near the Salton Sea.



SLOW BREAKING NEWS

A Fast-Paced Feature



New Old Skyhawk Reborn

The Virginia Aviation Museum, a division of the Science Museum in Richmond, is expecting to receive a Navy A-4C Skyhawk by the first of the year. The airplane, BuNo 148543, will be on long-term loan from the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida. When displayed, the plane will be painted in the Black Diamond colors of VA-216 as flown by Commander Paul E. Galanti, U.S. Navy (Ret.), before he was shot down in 1966 and became a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Paul Galanti is a recent inductee into the Virginia Aviation Hall of Fame.

The aircraft will honor not only people such as Commander Galanti, the late Vice Admiral James Stockdale, U.S. Navy (Ret.), and the many others who flew

Skyhawks, but also will anchor future exhibitions illustrating naval aviation's long history in Virginia and the science behind that history.

The Virginia Aeronautical Historical Society and private donors are funding the project. The Skyhawk will be disassembled at Pensacola, transported to Virginia, and reassembled at Richmond International Airport by Worldwide Aircraft Recovery. Volunteer members of the Attack Fighter Squadron 106 (VFA-106) Corrosion Control Shop will paint the aircraft.

(Ed. Note: reprinted from *Naval History* with permission; Copyright © 2006 U.S. Naval Institute/www.usni.org.)



The Virginia Aviation Museum's A-4C will be painted in the markings of the Skyhawk that then-Lieutenant (junior grade) Paul Galanti flew from the USS Hancock (CV-19) as a member of Attack Squadron 216 (VA-216) from November 1964 to June 1966.

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NEW MEMBERS\$

• Welcome •

Backs, Paul - Leavenworth, KS
Caldwell, Ben - Asheville, NC
Hardin, Jon David - Southern Shores, NC
Highbanks, Douglas - Oceanside, CA
Mudge, Daniel - Fairborn, OH
Shaffer, Frederick - East Brunswick, NJ



Join or renew at
\$30 or \$75, and give a
one-year gift membership
to someone for \$20
at the same time.
Contact Terry Cooney at
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com
for your gift membership(s),
or at
2421 Clubside Dr.,
Beavercreek, OH 45431.

TAPS

No News is Good News.



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

THE GREAT GOATSBY

Part One of Various Parts



By Youthly Puresome

From way up yonder in the land of Deep Thoughts and Dealing in Concepts, the word came down to the Reserve Air Wing that this year's annual ACTDUTRA would be held at NAS Rosenfelt Roads, Puerto Rico. The O-in-C TAR's of the individual squadrons clicked their heels, "jawohl'ed," and set about the complicated arrangements necessary to ensure that aircraft, equipment, and the gypsies that constituted the bulk of squadron personnel rendezvoused in a manner that, hopefully, would at least not be personally embarrassing.

At the Big Red Fighter Squadron, Crazy Horse, (whose flight jacket name-tag said "Ex-Fighter Pilot--TAR Puke Now") had set his able assistant, Supertar, into feverishly getting all his ducks in a row. When Puresome wandered in for what he hoped would be "a bunch of yucks and a couple of bucks" day of drilling, all the activity and stomping and saluting made D-Day look simple.

"*Etai!* Japanese word for pain! Frabb me in the heart!" reacted Puresome on getting the word.

The words "NAS Rosenfelt Roads" sent him into the mother of all flashbacks to his very first reserve cruise, when the pre-RESFORON flying club rained pieces of F8A's across the USA and Caribbean; attack squadrons of lethal insects had set up a Duck Target pattern over Puresome's rack; and Demon Rum had actually caused him to address his flight glove in an unseemly manner.

But, on the other hand, Puresome remembered, he had once put fifty cents into a Rosy BOQ beer machine, which had promptly gone mad and pumped out thirteen beers. Puresome had never been the same around vending machines again, hoping for a rematch. Besides, things had gotten a bit more organized, and his pals from the rest of the Air Wing would be there for disgusting happy hours.....

"Are we not men?" Puresome steeled himself.

Came the June and all was in readiness. SAR sailors, cruise boxes, and deployment kits got stuffed into Reserve R5D many-motor prop jobs. Chiefs yelled. Majors slapped their foreheads and rued the day they made department head. Flexibility reigned. Puresome, who had recently been made Safety Officer, blessed the whole operation, told everyone to buckle up, and thankfully snuck into his flight gear and an airplane. Against all odds, Puresome and Tank fired up and roared away from a ramp that looked like a rocket attack at Da Nang.....

Tank had the lead, since he had the superior napkin number. Puresome had always considered this very like purity among harlots, but since he didn't have to navigate and could be just same-day, same-way wing person at altitude, he could relax and look out the window. After a goatburger and fuel stop at Homestead AFB, the sightseeing down the islands in Victor Foxtrot Romero conditions mellowed out the fact that Puresome's Crusader was NORDO and no TACAN. Tank had no trouble interpreting some of his more unusual non-NATOPS hand signals.

The flight whoostled into the break at Rosy Roads at some 500 knots with oil cooler doors open. As Puresome followed Tank in a fan break of incredible purity, his neck hackles rose up as he imagined the awe of mere earth pigs at the spectacle...

The advance maintenance party accepted the shower of downing gripes with their usual resignation. The section found the space assigned as squadron ready room and dumped off their sweaty flight gear, which acknowledged the warm, moist climate by happily starting two weeks' growth of fungus.

"*Ay yi yi yi!* This place already smells like the elephant house at the zoo!"

remarked Puresome, who was not known for fussy upkeep of flight suits his ownself.

"You ought to check out the Splinterville where they have the troops," countered Warrant Officer Deek, who, as O-in-C of the advance party, had the bad luck to be Squadron Duty Officer lightning rod for this sort of crap, "It's God's gift to Gekkodom."

Since arrival day was a functional twilight zone, Puresome and Tank collected their personal gear, which the line crew had decanted from the empty ammo can compartments on their F-8s, and caught a ride to the BOQ.

It was all as Puresome remembered: lush, green vegetation, mango trees, salt sea breezes, and the hint of rum goodies in the air. As he entered the cheery, battleship grey decor of his BOQ room, tree frogs sang, a gekko grinned knowingly, and an Jagdgeschwader of wee critters on the ceiling went into strike planning.

All this took its toll on Puresome's psyche. Somewhere between emerging from the shower and slipping on his red, white and blue patent leather stacked heel parrot shoes, Puresome entered his Cubi mode. Little tendrils of flame appeared at the ends of his hair and his throttle inched toward min burner.



The realization that practically nobody but he and Tank were about helped the transition. Not Skipper Razor, not Crazy Horse, not Supertar, not Wild Fredman. Nary a heavy lurked to write damning FITREP notes in little green books. This fact was not lost on Tank either, a known troublemaker. "Hey, Puresome!" he hollered through the screen door, "let's go to the Crub!"

There they were big. Rather more Tink drivers from the attack squadrons had made it down, and insults were happily exchanged about each other's manhood, aircraft, and airlines. Puresome, in full burner now, contributed many happy songs, including "Anielda, Queen of all the Acrobats," and a couple of interesting chants learned from Dork, who had actu-

ally been an Air Force puke in a previous incarnation.

Of course, it all ended too soon. Anxious club officers turned up the lights and shooed their happily obnoxious guests out. Puresome, still a long way from bingo, was unsteadily trying to count change for a replay on the beer machine when Tank sidled up with a conspiratorial whisper.

"Hey, Puresome, I found out the SEALs have a club out in the boondocks that nobody has canugies enough to close-wanna go?"

Puresome allowed it was filthy work, but it must be done, and, since the ever resourceful Tank had obtained a jeep, they putted off through the thick tropical night.

Tank accomplished a successful low-level across the immense base and screeched to a halt in front of a low, hooch-like building nestled in the jungle, barely missing numerous goats wandering about the clearing that served as a parking lot.

Though Puresome considered himself a manly man, he carefully checked his six as he and Tank strolled into the SEAL club with studied, alcoholic cool. He could almost hear the sound track drums going "*bonga bunga! bonga boonga!*" in the background as possible father-rapers and rat-stabbers considered them through slitted eyes.

In reality, the few knotted-muscle, tattooed types barely acknowledged the two very quiet fighter pilots, and quickly went back to eating raw iguana with their steely knives.

Cold beers were had, and the Great Truths Society was convened. Finally, the world's problems again solved, enough was enough and the two eased out the same way they came. But Tank wasn't through quite yet. Considering the goats wandering about the parking lot, a hundred-watt inspiration lit up his turret.

"See them goats? That girl goat sure got pretty brown eyes. I betcha Crazy Horse bound to be heap plenty lonesome after flying all day and could stand some company."

In spite of the fact that Puresome's semi-aggie background enabled him to discern that the animal Tank was pointing to wasn't a girl, it sounded like a good idea at the time; and, working as a section, they captured the animal and eventually hoisted it into the back of the

jeep. Laughing maniacally, Tank gunned the jeep out of the lot while Puresome, turned around in his seat and restrained the reluctant animal by its horns.

The trip across the base made Puresome happy that the jeep's speed was generating a breeze. "Goshdam, Tank, you smell like goat stuff!"

Tank allowed that Puresome, having participated in hoisting the struggling goat into the back of the jeep, also smelled particularly ripe. The goat commented with a pile of pellets in the back of the jeep.

The pair eventually reached the BOQ, hoisted the goat out of the jeep, and together pulled the struggling animal by the horns to Crazy Horse's room. Unfortunately, Crazy Horse hadn't arrived yet, so Puresome and Tank left the animal in the room as a surprise.

One more beer was decided on to celebrate completion of the mission. Puresome and Tank sat outside under the tropical stars listening to an a cappella tree frog chorus.

Puresome grew thoughtful. "Tank, we're way out of line here. We are jumping chain-of-command by donating the goat to Rocket Two instead of starting with the skipper. Anybody who would decorate his house in red velvet and bedroom ceiling mirrors is bound to appreciate the subtle appeal of a good goat. A happy skipper is a happy squadron."

Tank, ever sensitive to military protocol, readily agreed; and so they ambled to Crazy Horse's room to retrieve the goat, which, they found, had added to the ambience by covering the floor with pellets and everything else with *eau-de-goat*.

"Skipper's gonna love this," thought Puresome as they dragged the still struggling goat by the horns to Razor's room.

This accomplished, a productive day ended and the two hit the rack.

The next morning, Puresome gingerly opened one eye and surveyed his room. Since the little man with the ice pick had visited during the night and let him have it between the eyes, it took a while for clues like the slow moving fan overhead and grey steel furniture to register where he was.

Gradually, the will to live returned. After a visit to the head, Puresome put on a t-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops, grabbed some change, and headed out the screen door for the mandatory first part of the coke-puke-smoke ritual.



Outside in the parking lot, Puresome immediately saw a strange sight: it was a Filipino goat-robe. Six Filipino stewards had an angry goat surrounded, but were anxiously keeping their distance, not wanting any goat fu to happen. It was a goat vs. steward standoff with a great deal of charging, retreating, and excited chattering in Tagalog.

Puresome was watching, fascinated, when the shore patrol roared up, assessed the situation, massed, and overwhelmed the goat in a frontal assault. The defiant animal was man-handled, kicking and bleating into a van. Puresome and the relieved stewards watched the vehicle disappear down the hill like a World War II Gestapo vehicle. When the stewards went back to the rooms they had started to clean, the goat's largess at redecorating made their dark eyes flash and their teeth gnash.

When the skipper and Crazy Horse appeared shortly thereafter in their sweaty flight suits, ready for a shower and a clean uniform, Puresome felt it prudent to bugger off and allow the heavies to savor the moment.

The two conspirators agreed it best to remain anonymous benefactors. But Puresome felt sure that between Razor's pitiless scientific inquiries and Crazy Horse's sacred lamb bones, it was entirely possible that he and Tank were high on the suspect list for a retaliatory strike.

Time was to prove him right.

(Stay tuned for Part Deux in the Spring issue of the A-4Ever, as Puresome and Tank dare to return to where SEALs drink and goat capers continue.)



Dumbest Contest Continues: Keep those cards, letters and stories coming in--the dumber the better. In addition to being cathartic, these confessions will amuse your pals and buddies who can read... Send your version of the truth to the editor, you may see it in print and qualify for a prize or two!

Dumbest - It's not just for pilots!

By Nick Colletto, former A-4 non-pilot.

My name is Nick Colletto, and I just joined your organization. I wrote this about some of my experience working on the A-4. It's always great reading about the exploits of the guys that drive the A-4, and the tight spots they manage to get themselves into. Well, the guys on the ground have interesting tales to tell also, and here are two of them.

My friend Tom and I were in Chu Lai toiling for VMA-211 in the Ordnance Shop. We were working the night shift in the summer of 1967, when an A-4 driver complained that the left hand gun had failed to fire. Pilots, whose egos make closing the canopy difficult, are like that some times. Tom was assigned to look into the matter. He unloaded the offending gun, applied external power to the aircraft and inserted a test cartridge into the gun's breech. He then climbed into the cockpit, set the switches and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. He should have heard the primer of the test cartridge pop. When he ejected the shell, he heard it hit the deck and some other sound that

he couldn't identify. He went through this procedure twice more. Each time he heard the unknown sound. It was then that he looked down at the deck and saw three live rounds along with the test cartridges.

He had neglected to unload the right hand gun!! Fortunately for him, the Gods of Ordnance had chosen that time to make the right hand gun malfunction. The Mk 12 aircraft cannon fires at 1000 rounds per minute, so Tom would have fired off at least 4 or 5 rounds before he could have released the trigger. Few people have heard the blast that a Mk 12 makes when firing on the ground. But ordnance men do, during training. I'm not sure what pilots hear when airborne. With flight operations secured for the evening, the flight line was quiet. The roar of the cannon would have gotten everyone's attention. The aircraft at Chu Lai were facing the ocean, so with the A-4's nose-up attitude, the projectiles would have landed harmlessly in the sea. However, between the flight line and the sea was a hill where the squadron office and officers' billets were located. It would have been very interesting...

The second tale involves me, and again, it was the summer of '67. Our CO had a thing for tonnage. If the mission called for ten Mk 81 250 pound bombs, he wanted 12. If it called for six Mk 82 500 pounders, he wanted eight. The wizards on the aforementioned hill would schedule the missions for the maximum tonnage, and we would load them as far before takeoff time as possible.

The load carrying capability of a jet aircraft goes down as the temperature goes up. So most afternoons in the warm (hot) summer, we would have to remove bombs loaded in the cooler morning. One afternoon I got the call to unload two 250's from each of two A-4s. When



Tom Keller works the pump to raise the bomb while Fred Silva guides it.

I got there, the pilots were in the cockpits and engines were turning. The pilots were waiting on me to remove the excess bombs so they could take off. Perhaps some grunts in the boonies were waiting on me also! To be safe, you remove the fuses first, then unload the bombs. But I was in a hurry. I dropped the bombs on the forks of the SATS loader and headed to the bomb dump to unload them.

Again, being in a hurry, I put the forks of the loader over a trailer and lowered the tips of the forks so the bombs would roll off and fall to the trailer. My first mistake was that I had the forks too high, and the bombs bounced up off of the trailer. My second mistake was not to have the forks over the center line of the trailer. After bouncing, the bombs came down and hit the trailer off-center. They both fell to the deck, fuse first.

The Mk 904 fuse is a remarkable device. To be armed, the propeller on the front of the fuse must spin for a pre-set number of seconds. The propeller is held in place by arming wires until the bomb is dropped. The spinning propeller turns a mechanism inside of the fuse that rotates a disc to align a column of explosives with the firing pin in the nose. With the explosives in the disc aligned with the firing pin, an impact on the nose will set off the explosive in the fuse. This, in turn, detonates the bomb.

It seemed to take an hour for those two bombs to fall the three feet to the deck. I recalled past times, got acquainted with God, said goodbye to my Mom, and rued a life wasted on wine, women and song. Needless to say, they didn't explode. *They would have needed a spoon to recover me if they had.* Life was good again, except for a needed change of skivvies.



Nick Coletto putting a MK-82 500 pounder onto a MK 7 loader.

HOW TO JOIN YOUR SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION READY ROOM

One of the great benefits of membership is being able to access the members only features found in the Skyhawk Association Ready Room. If you will follow the steps below to gain initial access, using the Ready Room will be straightforward after that. You will be able to participate in discussions, visit the extensive gallery of A-4 images in the gallery, research the history of aircraft by bureau number and view the membership roster.

TAKE TIME TO JOIN TODAY!!!

Follow these easy steps:

1. Go to <http://www.a4skyhawk.org/> (Association Public Home Page)
2. Click on **MEMBERS ONLY** _Association Ready Room link!
3. Click on _Association Members Ready Room Link_ in the next page.
4. Click on "Register" and fill out form. (Note "public viewable" info section)
5. Administrator will receive an email generated by your registration.
6. Wait for your Ready Room approval e-mail and then you may log in.
7. If you are having difficulty, email the Ready Room Coordinator at readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org.



Click on these

Skyhawk Websites

<http://sashare.a4skyhawk.org/phpBB2/index.php>

www.skyhawk.org

webmaster@a4skyhawk.org

<http://www.a4skyhawk.org/2G/ready.htm>

readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

SKYHAWK

Contacts & Information Resources



Need

Skyhawk Association Website

For General Information

(Check this page first)

Membership Information

Newsletter Submissions

Research Skyhawk Information

To Locate a Squadron SDO
(complete list of SDOs)

To Access the Ready Room
(Members Only)

Information on Corporate Affiliations
And Memberships

Information on Advertising in the Journal
Skyhawk Modeling Contact

Financial Information

Order Skyhawk Association Patches

Contact

www.skyhawk.org

webmaster@a4skyhawk.org

www.a4skyhawk.org/2F/research.htm

skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

sa-research@a4skyhawk.org

sdo-coordinator@a4skyhawk.org

<http://www.a4skyhawk.org/2A/sdo.htm>

readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

mjbrannon@attglobal.net

mbone@ec.rr.com

forrestal@fewpb.net

serichmond@sbcglobal.net

sa-patch@a4skyhawk.org

Name

David "Twidget" Weber, Association Webmaster

David "Twidget" Weber

Terry Cooney, Skyhawk Association Secretary

R.R. "Boom" Powell/Bob Hickerson

David "Twidget" Weber + SA research team
Stan Martin

Mark Williams, Skyhawk Association Director

Dan Brannon, Skyhawk Association Director

Margaret Bone, Managing Editor

Joe Turpin

Steve Richmond, Skyhawk Association Treasurer

Tom "Auggie" Wondergem

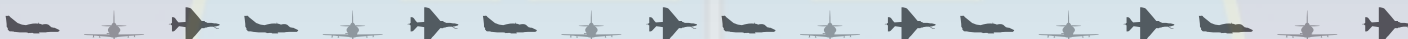


Go Ahead, Give A Guy A Gift

Got a buddy who tries to leave with your copy of the A-4Ever? Got a pal who flew the Scooter but never reads about its illustrious history? Got women around you that think you're making up all those war stories and flying tales? Got kids who ask what you did in the war, daddy?

Well, help is at hand--it's called the Gift Membership Subscription for the Skyhawk Association's favorite publication, the A-4Ever. For less than half a tank of gas, you get a full year's worth of Skyhawkabilia in print and not only that, it has become a collector's item as well. Four times a year our members rejoice when finding the A-4Ever in the mailbox, and you can share in that love by giving a gift membership to those in need. A card will be sent to the lucky recipient naming you as the donor, or not.

Join or renew at \$30 or \$75, and give a one-year gift membership to someone for \$20 at the same time. Contact Terry Cooney at skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com for your gift membership(s), or at 2421 Clubside Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45431.



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
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Bradenton, FL 34202-9265

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

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

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Beavercreek, OH 45431-2503