



The Skyhawk Association Quarterly



Eight Stored Ahit Ns page 12

THE A-4 EVER

Summer 2006

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 12 • NUMBER 3

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Slow-Breaking News • Taps • Puresome Unplugged • Restoration Review • TINS
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Size Does Matter

ANNUAL MEETING
27 OCTOBER
WASHINGTON, DC



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •

By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting October 27, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Planning is well advanced for the **Annual Meeting which will be held at the Udvar-Hazy Center of the National Air & Space Museum at Dulles Airport, VA.** We're excited to be holding this year's meeting in conjunction with MCAA, and we hope all of our East Coast members will appreciate the opportunity to attend a meeting without traveling to the West Coast. The new Air & Space Museum is a fabulous facility, and Director, MajGen Joe Anderson, USMC(ret), promises to give us a special look at this very popular attraction.

The schedule for the events on October 27th is provided elsewhere in this issue, but our board meeting will be held at the Udvar-Hazy Center in the morning, followed by a luncheon at the nearby Dulles Marriott. We've got two great speakers scheduled: **LtGen Tom Miller, USMC(ret), and RADM Whitey Feightner, USN(ret).** General Miller is well known to Marines as the champion of the AV-8 *Harrier*, but many are unaware that he was the first Marine to fly the A-4 and was USMC rep to the A-4 OPEVAL. In fact, he delivered the first A-4 to VMA-224. Admiral Feightner is well known as a 9-kill Ace from WWII, a test pilot and a Blue Angel. For our meeting, his experience as the CAG who took the first A-4 squadrons aboard ship will be the drawing card. Both guests will speak on the early days of A-4 operations in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Following lunch, we'll head back to the Udvar-Hazy at Dulles, receive a welcoming brief from the Director and enjoy a special tour by well-trained docents, some of whom are *Skyhawk* Association members. We can stay until the facility closes at 5:30 p.m., but we'll complete the official activities in time to let members enjoy the Friday night Flight Jacket Happy Hour at MCAA.

Be sure to get your reservation for the luncheon meeting in early, and remember spouses are welcome. In fact, invite someone who isn't a member of *Skyhawk* Association but should be.

Collection of NATOPS Pubs

Previously in this column, I've mentioned the work being done by member Jim Walthers to solicit hard-copy NATOPS manuals and checklists. Jim got tired of hearing us talk about a program to collect the history of the A-4 and just started *doing it*. He has had a strong response, and some members are asking what we plan to do with the pubs we assemble. That's a good question, and the best we can tell you right now is that we're working on it. Based on the early response (don't stop contributing now), we believe we will be able to collect two or three complete sets of pubs (at least for the U.S. variants). We're thinking that it would be nice to have a collection on each coast, and perhaps a third in Pensacola. That would allow members the greatest access, and a complete library on line would be valuable for future research. Many possible locations have been suggested, such as the Flying Leatherneck Museum or Midway Museum in San Diego, the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, and the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C. If you have ideas, please let us know (Jim at casedcaddis@peoplepc.com), and check out the list of early contributors.

Thanks to the following who have contributed NATOPS manuals and checklists:

Robert "Pappy" Chapin, LTCOL, USMC (Ret)
Mike "Buick" Eberardt, LCDR, USN
Michael Farmer
Gerit "Snake" Fenenga, COL, USMC (Ret)
Bill Gilchrist
Mark "Lobo" Morgan, LT, USN
B. J. Palmer, COL, USMC (Ret)
Cliff Ruthrauff, CDR, USN (Ret)
Albert "Shoes" Schaufelberger, Jr., CAPT, USN (Ret)
Ronald Schmidt
Phillip "Serg" Thompson, LT, Royal Australian Navy
Bill White
Mark "Senator" Williams, MAJ, USMC (Ret)
All donations will be acknowledged with book plates naming the contributor.

Welcome to the Team

I'm very grateful to association member Peter Mersky for his strong support of this publication. Peter is a well-known author and former editor of *Approach* – most recently he has been a dedicated volunteer helping to obtain the excellent articles covering *Skyhawk* operations in Israel found in this issue, as well as a member of the planning team for the Annual Meeting this coming October. Peter joins an outstanding and growing team of regular contributors, including Jack Woodul (Youthly Puresome), Boom Powell, David Weber, Gary Verver, Joe Turpen, Mark Williams, and Ed Jobin, who with our editor Margaret Bone, are producing a publication which is rapidly gaining recognition for its quality. These volunteers are only paid in appreciation, so I hope the membership will thank them at every opportunity.

Speaking of Israel

Many thanks to Major General Giora Romm, IAF (ret) for his fascinating original article about his first flight in the *Skyhawk*. I doubt many of us had his experience of taking our first flight in an A-4 on a combat strike, much less with no checkout whatsoever (if you did, write us a story). Also in this issue, Shlomo Aloni graciously provides us a glimpse at the operational future of the *Skyhawk*. According to Sholomo's research, the A-4 could be operational in the Flying Tiger Squadron until 2015 or beyond, perhaps reaching the milestone of operating in that squadron for 50 continuous years (2017). It's good to know the final "retirement" ceremony is years in the future.

Vote!

Finally, it's time to provide input to the nominating slate for *Skyhawk* Association directors. Four terms expire in 2006 (Hickerson, Powell, Weber and Williams) and nominations may be sent to Nominating Committee co-chairs Woodul rancho@bacavalley.com or Jobin ed.jobin@goodrich.com. A new slate of officers will be presented at the Annual Meeting as well, so be sure to attend to cast your vote.

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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)
rancho@bacavalley.com

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

Terry Cooney
Secretary and Director (FY 07)
skyhawkasn@woh.rr.com

Steve Richmond
Treasurer
serichmond@aol.com

Dan Brannon
Director (FY 08)
mjbrannon@attglobal.net

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 06)
readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

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!

• Summer 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: Ed "Viking" Jobin, Peter Mersky, Joe Turpen,
Gary Verver, David "Twidget" Weber, and Jack "Puresome" Woodul.

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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: Eight stored Ahit Ns not allocated to the AhitM programme, in this view are clockwise: 368, 367, 385, 365, 399, 377 and 337, with 364 in the centre. (Photo courtesy Shlomo Aloni)

THE PREZ SAYS MORE...

Gone, But Not Forgotten

Unless you've been on extended vacation off-planet, you're probably aware of the "reefing" of the USS Oriskany on May 17th 23 miles SSE of Pensacola Pass. The Mighty O went down in 212 feet of water to become the world's largest artificial reef. She settled semi-upright and is already hosting divers qualified to those depths. As of press time, this website had excellent pictures of the 37 minute sequence between detonation of the charges and sinking: www.irishmansoftware.com/Oriskany.htm.

Vice Admiral Jack Fetterman was instrumental in obtaining the *Oriskany* for this purpose, but unfortunately passed away at the end of March before seeing his project come to fruition. Admiral Fetterman was well known in the A-4 community, and according to Whizzer White, one of *Skyhawk* Association's first members and strongest supporters. He was also President and CEO of the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation from 1993 until 2006.

A-4s Forever. Raven.

BOLD NEW CONTEST

Duhhh...



Just when you thought the worst was over (*The Dumbest Contest*), your editorial staff in a rare burst of enlightenment was inspired yet again to come up with a single-minded kind of contest for a single-seat kind of guy, when in a simple-minded moment in the *Scooter*, he screwed up monumentally. And has lived into his dotage to share it with those (our readers) who would fully appreciate such circumstances and *totally* understand.

It's called *True Cockpit Confessions*, and besides being amusing reading material, it might be cathartic as well, and oh yeah, there are prizes.

Send your confessions to newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org with "Confessions" in the subject line. And no need to sweat grammar, punctuation and spelling because we certainly don't...



Long-Range Schedule of Events

Mark Your Long-Range Calendar

The Board of Directors has approved:

- Skyhawk Association Booth: September 8 - 10, 2006, Reno, NV, in conjunction with Tailhook '06. Skyhawk Association will join the Intruder Association to sponsor the ATTACK HOSPITALITY SUITE.
- 2006 Symposium and Annual Meeting of Members: October 27, 2006, Udvar-Hazy Center, Washington, DC, in conjunction with MCAA Symposium 2006. See information in this issue or check www.skyhawk.org.
- Skyhawk Association Mid-winter Board Meeting and Mini-symposium: February 2007 – TBA
- All-Marine Skyhawk Reunion, sponsored by Skyhawk Association: April 2007, Beaufort/Hilton Head, SC. This event is back on for next year. Stay tuned for more information (www.skyhawk.org).

SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •

Skyhawk Association

2006 Annual Meeting and Symposium October 27, 2006, Washington, D.C.

The 2006 Annual Meeting of *Skyhawk* Association will be held in conjunction with the Marine Corps Aviation Association (MCAA) Symposium, 26-29 October 2006, at the Sheraton Premiere in Tysons Corner, Virginia. All *Skyhawk* Association members are urged to make plans to attend.

Skyhawk Association events have been planned to fit into the MCAA schedule on Friday, October 27th: For MCAA Symposium information, see www.flymcaa.org.

Time	Event
8:30 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.	Skyhawk Association Board Meeting (all members invited to attend). Meeting will be held at the National Air & Space Museum, Udvar-Hazy Center (Dulles International Airport).
11:30 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.	Skyhawk Association Luncheon, Washington -Dulles Marriott. Guest Speakers: LtGen Tom Miller, USMC(Ret) and RADM Whitey Feightner, USN(Ret).
1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Special tour of NASM Udvar-Hazy Center.
5:00 p.m. - ???	Flight Jacket Happy Hour at MCAA (Sheraton, Tysons Corner).

NATIONAL AIR & SPACE MUSEUM – UDVAR-HAZY CENTER

The Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center near Washington Dulles International Airport is the companion facility to the museum on the National Mall. The building opened in December, 2003, and provides enough space for the Smithsonian to display the thousands of aviation and space artifacts that cannot be exhibited on the National Mall.

As of February 1, 2006, there were 123 aircraft and 141 large space artifacts, along with more than 1,500 smaller objects, on display in the center in Virginia. Artifacts at the center are displayed in open hangar settings rather than exhibition galleries. Space history artifacts include armament missiles and rockets used in earth atmosphere. See www.nasm.si.edu/museum/udvarhazy/ for details.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •

newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org



To the SDO, VMA-223:

Sir,

Found this site while surfing the web. I was wondering if you had any stories or information about Maj R.L. Snyder. He was with VMA-223, MAG-12, when he was killed on May 10th, 1967.

If you know of anyone that knew him or flew with him, I would be greatly interested in speaking with them. I am his son. Thank you for your assistance.

GySgt M.R. Snyder, USMC (Ret)



Follow-on letter:

Here is a picture of dad with 3 buddies taken in Chui Lai in late '66 or early '67. Their names are: Jack Fennel, Vic Steele, Ken Langford. I have no idea which is which in the pic. My dad is lower right.

Hope this helps,

**Thanks again,
Mark R Snyder**

**USMC Emeritus
madmark3@hotmail.com**

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

In the VA-113 photo album section there is reference made that LTJG Jay Green was shot down and never heard from again. I was on the 66-67 cruise on the *Enterprise* when we lost LT Naughton and LTJG Graham, I don't remember LTJG Green getting shot down on that cruise. Also, why isn't he listed on the Wall? I cannot find anything about him any where.

**Phillip Blum, PR-1 U.S. Navy Retired.
prblum@comcast.net**

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Just one-hour ago, with spouse, I entered the local HEB supermarket (a Texas icon) to grab a few commissary items. As I made a hard-turn to starboard (reflecting on the old days), I immediately locked on a dude wearing an A4 *Skyhawk*, with tailhook, T-shirt.

Assuming the dude would have a sense of humor - as only any tailhooker might have - I made the wise-ass comment, "...and just who would be wearing a Scooter T-shirt in such a respectable establishment..." or words to that effect. Neither of us looking familiar to each other (still a bogie in my mind) I immediately stated, "...also A7 *Corsairs* in my former life..." The still-unknown dude responded to my query of which coast with, "Lemoore, Miramar," and before he could say much more, a voice from my six-o'clock says quietly, "I used to be at Lemoore, too."

The dude and I quickly lock-on this stranger to the gaggle, no less than a 2V1; I take a quick scan and notice he has two tattoos on his forearms (being a former enlisted sailor with the same configuration myself, I made a bad assumption). I inquired what squadrons he served in; he quickly listed just about every damned squadron ever known at NLC. When he mentioned VA-25, I began to list my squadrons and introduced myself. He responded with, "Ed Greathouse here, I commanded..." and before he could finish, I smiled and said, "Ed Greathouse, only the true light-attack legend on the west coast."

For some reason he remembered my name. In summary, when would you expect three light-attack pukes, not recognizing each other, to coincidentally bump heads in a Texas supermarket? Just about a 1000-to-1 shot. So now, Ed Greathouse, Pete Hammes and I intend to muster in the not-too-distant future and try to get a gang together and tell lies. Neither knew Bob Hickerson lived in Fredericksburg, nor Ted Langworthy up the road in Kingsland. I'm in Lakeway, and it seems Pete is just new to the area. Ed lives down the road in Westlake, all in the Austin/central Texas area.

Any other central Texas 'hookers' or 'hawkers' desiring to marshall with us, please let me know soonest. We have a former *Midway Whale* driver who's in Lakeway as well - Bruce Harris. I see some kind of ready-room forming.

Check-six, you never know who's back there.

Mike Boston

[twobostons1@sbcglobal.net]

(Ed. Note: this encounter has sparked planning for an Austin-San Antonio-Fredericksburg-Highland Lakes area Skyhawk Association beer-drinking event in the near future, probably at T82 airport in Fredericksburg. Anyone living in Central Texas and past

the stage of life where he worries about the company he's seen with, is welcome to join. Email Mike or me (hickers@beecreek.net).)

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To the Editor:

Jon Hunter, former pilot with VA-95 1967-1970 is trying to locate Jon Bromberg and Otis Tolbert, Sr., roommates from those cruises. Anyone with information please reply to him at jhunter@cvm.tamu.edu. He would appreciate hearing from any squadronmates from those years.

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To the Editor:

Bob, let me suggest that since you have a lot of info on your web site (I ran across the whole history of VA-94), it would be good to put out the word to ex-Scooter personnel to submit a photograph and a short comment about it. Have a folder on each squadron and put it in there for the time that squadron comes up to be put in the magazine, with some of the photos which show their markings. They might also send pictures of patches along with photos. I have one from when I was an ordnanceman and worked part-time on the line. We had a patch made in Japan in 1961. I thought I would make this suggestion to help.

Jerry Stafford

Jerryrkay803@aol.com

(Ed. Note: see Webmaster David Weber's column - Twidget - in this issue for similar thoughts. Great minds think alike!)

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Bob,

Pilot firing the Zunis when we were in VMA-324 deployed to Yuma was 1Lt Kit Wells.

Duke Lind

[achim.lind@ngc.com]

(Ed. Note: reference Spring 2006 A-4Ever, p. 20, Gann's Gallery. Photo was taken by Harry Gann on VMA-324's first deployment to MCAS Yuma in A-4Ms.)

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To the Editor:

Bob,

Could you ask the *Skyhawk* membership if anyone has a photo of one or both of the TA-4s assigned to VA-164 in CVW-21 aboard USS *Hancock* on the 1972 cruise? I'm writing a book about the A-4 employment in Vietnam, and the uniqueness of the assignment begs to have at least one photo and one of the profiles included in the book. The TA-4s were used as a laser-designator platform for employment of laser guided bombs by squadron aircraft.

If anyone has a photo or a lead, I'd appreciate them contacting me.

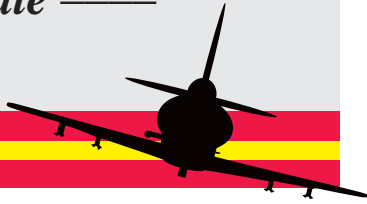
Peter Mersky [air_writer@msn.com]

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SKYHAWKS & SUBMARINES

— Part Two, the *finale* —

By Boom Powell



Vee Ess Eff Skyhawks Part II

After a dozen deployments of A-4s as fighters (VSF) aboard ASW carriers (CVS) by Navy VA and Marine VMA and H&MS detachments, a specialized and dedicated VSF squadron had been formed and was based at NAS Alameda. By 1966, the first VSF-1 detachment was within days of deploying in *Yorktown* when the all-stop message arrived. The war in Southeast Asia was intensifying and more *Skyhawks* as attack aircraft were needed. An Atlantic Fleet VA squadron would go to WestPac in a swap for VSF-1 deploying to the Med in November, 1966, as a normal attack squadron. With a large number of pilots and aircraft in the pipeline for VSF-1, a second attack squadron would also be formed, although both would keep the VSF designation.

The shift to becoming an attack squadron began immediately with a weapons Det to NAS Fallon and bombing and rocket practice at NALF Crows Landing, just across the mountains in the San Joaquin Valley. VSF-1 also used Crows Landing for FCLP before heading east to join CVW-8 at NAS Cecil Field, FL.

Four pilots including ex-NavCad Al Cartwright went to Billy Phillip's Airwing 19 to replace pilots he was less than happy with. Cartwright said leaving VSF-

1 was hard; not because he was headed to WestPac, but Waring was so good to work for. Several "combat limited", ie, combat deployment veterans, arrived to fill the vacant slots.

VSF-1 in the Med

After six weeks of workups on the East Coast, *Shangri La* departed Norfolk on 29 September 1966. On board were the 'War Eagles' of VSF-1 with fourteen A-4B *Skyhawks*. The tail code was now the AJ of Airwing 8 and nose numbers began with 570-- this did cut down on repainting, at least on the port side. The sister light attack squadron was the Sunliners of VA-81 with A-4Es.

The maintenance department had a one-legged warrant officer. Griff Hudson had been struck by a broken wire while working the flight deck on *Constellation* and had worked to pass the physical tests necessary to return to sea duty.

Other than a junior pilot landing hard enough to break the wing of an A-4 during a dive-for-deck at night, the time in the Med was typical in support of 6th Fleet operations. All the pilots became *Shang* centurions. Cdr Donald K. Wilson assumed command while in Palermo, Sicily, 14 April, 1967. Soon after, CVA-38 returned to Norfolk, and VSF-1 flew back to NAS Alameda.

VSF-3 is Formed

While VSF-1 was at sea half-a-world away, VSF-1 Det Alameda had grown larger than its parent organization. The result was administrative mayhem. The problem was solved in March, 1967, when VSF-3 was established, and Cdr Leslie C. Hofto went from XO of VSF-1, to OinC of Det Alameda, to CO of VSF-3.

Les Hofto began his flying career in AD *Skyriders* and was assigned to CVG-7 staff as LSO. He made a Med deployment before going to combat in Korea in *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31). He then extended for three months to assist CVG-15/*Princeton* (CVA-37) LSOs who were unfamiliar with jets. Hofto later was senior LSO in *Bennington* for the legendary recovery of three carriers' aircraft with no divert and lousy weather in the North Atlantic during Operation Mariner. He first flew A-4s in VA-22. After a DC tour he found himself in the doldrums, but with a fun assignment as the director of the Navy/Marine Corps Exhibit at the 1964 New York World's Fair. His detailer's call with assignment to VSF-1 was as confusing as it was for most. (As a red-hot jet pilot with shiny new wings, the author's heart stopped in the pause between hearing "Vee Ess" and "Eff One" for my first squadron.)

VSF-3 was on the TV news and made headlines, "Navy Bombs Oakland!" after a Mk-76 practice bomb fell into one of the few vacant lots in the city. A flight of four had taken off from NAS Alameda and as 3# closed in, he asked, "Two, how many bombs did you have when you took off?"

"Six." Pause, "Why?"

"Well, you only have five now."



VSF-1 deployed to the Mediterranean on *Shangri La* from November 1966 to May, 1967 as an attack squadron with sixteen A-4B *Skyhawks*. Side numbers at first began with 570 and were later changed to a conventional 500 series; the squadron color remained green.



VSF-1 division overflies *Shangri La* in 1966



Red-tailed VSF-3 and VA-34 and VA-15 Skyhawks on the bow of *Intrepid* during CVS-11's second deployment as an attack carrier to the Tonkin Gulf.

Additional proof of VSF standing for "Very Screwy Fellas" was assignment to CVW-10 and *Intrepid* (CVS(A)-11). Airwing Ten, the "Valions" of VA-15 and VA-34 "Blue Blazers"—A-4C squadrons—were at NAS Cecil Field. *Intrepid* was in Norfolk.

Lessons learned in Vietnam dictated increased ECM capabilities and the "Shoehorn" installation had been developed for the A-4. Aptly named for the difficulty of finding space for the magic black boxes (The hump was added to later A-4s to make room for the avionics), the modification took out the port cannon and left the other only 40 rounds. BuNo 154002 was among the *Skyhawks* reworked at NARF Alameda. It came out as a standard A-4B and "Rudolf" was no more.

With the parent squadron now deployed, VSF-1 Det made two ten day visits to Fallon for weapons practice and had a CarQual session in *Bon Homme Richard*. After becoming VSF-3, there was a CQ in *Kearsarge* before joining *Intrepid* in Norfolk. Work-ups continued for the next two months with little chance for time in Alameda. Finally, the squadron airplanes were taxied down roads from NAS Norfolk to the naval base and hoisted aboard *Intrepid* for the voyage to war—the long way.

VSF-3 Deployed

Middle East tensions were high, and Jordan had signed a treaty with Egypt while *Intrepid* was in the Eastern Mediterranean. Aircraft were armed and crews put on alert. After several days of uncertainty, CVS(A)-11 entered the Suez Canal. All hands were restricted from the weather decks for the transit. Although there were overflights by Egyptian fight-

ers and troops were seen, the worst the Egyptians did was display banners and shake their shoes at the ship. The Arab-Israeli Six Day War began two days later. *Intrepid* became the last warship to go through the canal until it was reopened in 1975.

The two week transit was filled with All Pilot Meetings for training and briefings. Two a day was the norm and for VSF-3, usually ended the same way. The new squadron needed an insignia and sketches of half a dozen would be presented and discussed. The selection would be whittled down to two with a final choice to be made the next day. By the next day, the choices were back up to five or six. The final compromise was a knight chess-piece on a checkered field with red jags to match the airplane tails. The agreed on name was "Chessmen." The callsign had been "Nevada City" from the beginning and was used by both VSF-1 and VSF-3. There is a Nevada City in the Sierra foothills, and pilots from both squadrons would fly low levels to check out the namesake.

After a brief stop in Cubi Point, VSF-3 entered combat for the first time on 21 June, 1967. The veterans of VA-15 who had been in *Intrepid* the previous year for her first Vietnam deployment (she would make three), assumed operations would again begin on Dixie Station and eventually work north. They were wrong. The air war the summer of 1967 had VSF-3 over North Vietnam for their first missions, over the Haiphong suburbs by the end of the first line period and over the Big Hs (Hanoi and Haiphong) themselves by the second line period.

Many aircraft came back with battle damage, but only two aircraft were lost. LTJG Fred Kasch was also the squadron's only fatality. In early July, he was hit by AAA over Hai Duong and crashed while trying to glide his flamed-out *Skyhawk* to the safety of the Tonkin Gulf. His wingman, ex-NavCad Dick Harriss, heard him call, "I'm at 500 feet," and told him to get out, but there was no apparent ejection. The Navy listed him as MIA until

his remains were returned in 1989. Kasch was flying 145002, the A-4B that was once "Rudolf".

In October, LTJG Al Perkins was hit by AAA while on a flak suppression mission over Haiphong. Perkins was wounded in the leg and could barely control his airplane. He jettisoned his canopy in an attempt to clear the dense smoke which was keeping him from seeing his instruments and was either hit again or his engine exploded. He ejected and landed in Haiphong Harbor. An HU-2K helicopter from HC-1 picked him up yards away from an enemy ship. At the time, it was the deepest rescue from the harbor.

Once in WestPac, although *Intrepid* picked up a VFP-63 Photo-Crusader detachment and VF-111 provided three F-8Cs and pilots to fly photo escort, VSF-3 was considered the resident fighter squadron. The squadron color was red, Ready Room 1# (nearest the flight deck) was assigned—to be shared with the 'Sader pilots—and flight deck alerts during ship transits were stood by an A-4B with a centerline fuel tank and a pair of AIM-9 Sidewinders.

On 5 October, 1967, the *Skyhawks* of CVW-10 encountered MiGs in force. A 27 plane Alfa strike had launched against a target near the airfield of Kien An. During egress half the strike group ran into MiGs. Dick Harriss was first aware of the MiGs when he saw tracers coming down at him. He fired at the overshooting MiG, but saw no hits and out of ammo, headed for the water. The official account of the action is typically confused, but at least six different MiG-17s were involved.

CDR Georges LeBlanc, XO of VSF-3, maneuvered close behind a MiG and squeezed the trigger. His one cannon fired once and jammed. He called for his wingman, LTJG Dan Swinford, to close in, but Swinford had no radio. They broke off and cleared the area.

The Airwing 10 operations officer, Ed Gilreath, was flying VSF-3's AK107 and when he heard the MiG warnings he held the rockets he had for flak suppression and headed for Kien An. His wingman, LTJG D. 'Huey' L'Herault in AK105, had fired all his rockets



continued...

HAWKS 'N SUBS

Continued...

at the assigned target and describes what followed:

As we circled behind the strike group of Intrepid A4s to follow them "feet wet", I made the initial visual of a single MiG 17 at about 10:00 low....we were at about 300 kts. and 5-6000 ft. As I was in trail on Ed at full power he called to arm up our guns and he turned hard left and initiated a dive toward the MiG. It then turned hard right and as we made a reversal to follow I glanced behind me and there were 3 MiG 17s, flying a loose formation, directly behind me firing tracer cannon fire directly at me. I called Ed to break hard right and from there I ended up in a one v. three for three reversals, somehow avoiding their bullets. In the midst of this engagement I saw Ed only one time and it was to see a stream of 2.75" rockets fill the air (AK107 had fired eight Zuni 5" rockets and 20mm cannon earlier) as he made an almost head-on pass at the three guys concentrating on me. When the MiGs split with 2 guys going high and one going low Ed called to jettison all externals (fuel tanks, racks and rocket packs) and we headed directly out to sea. At full speed with about 1500# of gas left we went right down on the deck and I remember seeing an airspeed of over 550 knots.

Last missions were flown the end of November, 1967. Most of the flight crews would fly home on a "Magic Carpet" airliner from Clark AFB. A few unlucky officers and most of the men would remain onboard for the month-long voyage across the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope, across the South and North Atlantic to Norfolk. Due to a jurisdictional quirk, those pilots due to airlift back could not depart until *Intrepid* chopped back to the Atlantic Fleet somewhere in the Indian Ocean. They spent a boring week at Cubi playing touch-football early in the morning before it got too hot, followed by swimming and afternoon naps. At least, they could go to the club for a legal drink and... they were not getting shot at.

1968

The decision to stand-down VSF-3 was made while the squadron was in the



VSF-3

Pilots of VSF-86 during carquals on Tico. L-R: John "Monster" Parks, Ed Moir, Dave Griggs (later astronaut and Rear Admiral), Dale Sisely.



Tonkin Gulf, and all the pilots guessed that they would be sent to A-4 or A-7 fleet squadrons since they had only the one combat deployment. However, BuPers considered all the time in VSF, including time at Alameda for those who were VSF-1 or the Det, as sea duty and distribution was varied with about half going to sea-going squadrons. Alameda-based VA-152 had returned from WestPac in *Oriskany* (CVA-34) and was transitioning from A-1 Skyraiders to A-4 Skyhawks. A cadre of pilots transferred from VSF-3, and at one point, VA-152 owned a dozen Spads and a mix of fourteen Bravo and Charlie Skyhawks. Other ex-VSF-3 A-4Bs went to the Navy Reserves, and many were reworked and sent to Argentina where they flew in the Falklands War.

VSF-1 Med Deploy II & III

CDR Donald K. Wilson assumed command of VSF-1 on 14 April, 1967, while in Palermo, Sicily. Soon after, CVA-38 returned to Norfolk, and VSF-1 flew back to NAS Alameda.

By August, VSF-1 was transitioning to the A-4C. The second cruise began in April 1968 with CDR Marty Asbacher as the new CO. The "War Eagles" spent their second Christmas deployed--in Athens this time--but still were consistently the flying-est squadron aboard *Independence*.

In late 1968, *Wasp* was operating in the Mediterranean, and VSF-1, as well as VA-76, provided a temporary detachment which was never very far from the parent squadrons. One wonders what the pilots used to *Independence* thought when they went to the much smaller *Hornet* with hydraulic catapults.

Blair Stewart became the next--and last--CO of VSF-1. Back in Alameda early in 1969, there was a 50% percent turnover of pilots and a batch of new Skyhawks. The training situation was complicated because VSF-1 was to revert to its original mission in January, as well as remaining committed to CVW-7 in a contingency status. During work-ups with *Independence* the squadron received extra



VA-45 Det-1 Humpbacked A-4C Echo on final approach. 1972.[USN/Alvarez]

personnel to accommodate the *Yorktown* detachment. *Independence* and *Yorktown* left together for NATO exercise “Operation Peacekeeper” in the North Atlantic. The VSF-1 Det intercepted a Soviet *Bear* two days before the actual exercise, and the only deployment of VSF in its intended role was underway.

During the subsequent visit to Portsmouth, England, in September, word of VSF-1’s disestablishment arrived. The Det stayed out until 11 December. With VSF-3 stood down two years before, by the first day of 1970, no ASWFitRon existed as a frontline unit.

Reserves as VSF

VSF-11X1 and -11X2 were created on paper in July, 1968, at NAS New Orleans as part of the reorganization of the Naval Reserve. Flying A-4B Skyhawks, these squadrons were to be full-sized, but then were cut to only four pilots. They went through another shake-up of the Reserves and another set of designations before settling on VSF-76 and VSF-86, to be fully manned with A-4C/L “Scooters.” While no full deployments were made, the “Flying Saints” and the “Gators” did two-week AcDuTra cruises in *Wasp*, *Ticonderoga* (recently designated CVS-14) and *Randolph* in 1971.

Ed Moir was in that group:

Our squadron was stood up as VSF-86, part of NAS North Island-based CAG 80 (CDR Tom Stanley). Our “fighters” were A-4Cs, with high-temperature J-65 engines. We flew with centerline tanks only or sometimes “slick”. Not bad performance for a Scooter, but it weren’t no fighter. Anyway, we had fun and the mission was super; hassling and more hassling. The flight deck on Tico, despite no recent jet experience, did a great job.

We held our change of command ceremony in Ticonderoga at sea in the San Diego operating area. Sierra Hotel! The first Navy Reserve change-of-command held at sea. Incidentally, the incoming CO, Tammy Etheridge, later made rear-admiral, as did a squadron member, Dave Griggs.

The embarrassment of a Cuban airliner landing unannounced at New Orleans Airport, prompted the local congressman to get both reserve VSF squadrons six F-8H *Crusaders*—the first fighter in the VSF role since VF-92 *Banshees* in 1959. The powers that be decided not to CarQual the reserves in the F8, and with ap-

proximately one pilot for each *Crusader*, it was a flying club of the first order. The fun lasted a little over a year, but with the CV concept in effect and no CVS left, VSF-76 and VSF-86 were disestablished in 1973. Personnel and aircraft became the core for today’s VC-13.

Blackbirds as ASWFitRon

Unlike most pilots, LT Larry “Worm” Elmore was not confused by orders to “VSF” (a simple term and easy to use) duty. After cruising with the notorious Youthly Puresome as a “Snake” (VA-86), he had left active duty, tried the airlines in the hire-to-fast-furlough era, joined the reserves where he, “...was flying my buns off in A4Cs from Los Al and Point Mugu,” when he got a call from CDR John Paganelli, his OpsO in VA-86 and then the skipper of VA-45. He asked Worm to come back on active duty to be the LSO and Ops O of the A-4C Det that was going to deploy in *Intrepid*. The original OinC cancelled and Elmore had the job. As he says, “It turned out to be the best deal I had in 20 years in the Navy.”

Intrepid and VA-45 Det-11 left Norfolk in April and returned mid-October, 1971. She made only one run into the Mediterranean. Most operations were in the North Atlantic, including “Blue Nose” forays above the Arctic Circle—stomping grounds for the Soviet Northern Fleet. Ports of call were Lisbon, Kiel, Naples, Cannes, Barcelona, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Greenock, Rosyth, Portsmouth and Bergen. Det-11 made over 125 intercepts on Russian *Bears*, *Badgers*, *Blinders*, several Soviet fighters and bagged more hours and traps than a typical pilot on a Med deployment. A best deal indeed.

There were so many intercepts that some of the snoopers became familiar. Worm joined on a *Bear* (Tu-95) whose tail

gunner was friendly and would wave and hold up the box lunch he was eating (yes, Elmore was that close). He once held up a sign in English that said, “How do you do?” A few days later, Elmore held up a sign in Russian that said, “Come on back with me.” The Russian had a good laugh.

Det-11 was doing so well that in August, 1971, VA-45 Det-1 was established with A-4Es for a follow-on *Intrepid* deployment. LCDR Raoul Alvarez was the OinC. Det-11 returned in November, turned in their seven A-4 Charlies and disbanded the following month. At the start of 1972 an increase in size was authorized with the intention of splitting off Det-2 for deployment on the remaining PacFlt CVS, *Ticonderoga*. This did not happen.

After a CarQual session on CVT-16 *Lexington*, Det-1 took five A-4Es to sea in *Intrepid* in March and April of 1972 for an exercise with the Spanish and Portuguese navies. At Cecil, command of the mother-squadron went from Paganelli to Joe Gilmore. The Det left 9 July as part of CVSG-56 with three S-2 “Stoof” and a helo squadron.

While some pilots worried about “missing the war”, Al Alvarez had flown *Skyraiders* in combat as a VA-145 *Swordsman* in *Intrepid*. Interestingly, considering his assignment to the VA-45 VSF Detachment, VSF-3 was also onboard *Intrepid* as part of CVW-10. He then instructed in VT-21 as it transitioned to the TA-4 before joining the *Blackbirds*.

A major change came in August, 1972. During October and November of the previous year, on the way home after a Med cruise, *Saratoga* continued...



VA-45 DET ONE



VSF-3 A-4B on fighter alert with two Sidewinders during *Intrepid* transit to or from Yankee Station in 1967.

HAWKS 'N SUBS

Continued...

added VS-28 and HS-7 to Airwing 3 and operated in the vicinity of Bermuda. The combined airwing was tasked with anti-submarine duty, convoy escort and short and long range strikes against sea and land targets. Although *Saratoga* was designated CV-60 on 30 June, 1972, the practical transition from CVA to CV was interrupted by final efforts in Vietnam. To support *Linebacker II*, LantFlt carriers *Saratoga* and *America* (CVA-66) made emergency deployments to the Tonkin Gulf. In order to meet the requirement for two carriers with attack squadrons in the Mediterranean, ComNavAirLant, ADM Michaelis, boosted VA-45 Det-1 to a sixteen airplane unit with the missions of conventional and nuclear attack, all while continuing task group air defense. The Chief of Naval Personnel authorized new CDR Alvarez, who had screened for an A-7 squadron, to wear the Command-at-Sea insignia since his position was the equivalent of a squadron command. And a difficult one at that.

Intrepid's North Atlantic deployment was cut short and Det-1 was back at Cecil on October 19. As CDR Alvarez later wrote:

The unique situation under which this unit made its transformation from a 7-officer, 65-man, 5-plane VSF Detachment to a 27-officer, 210-man, 16-plane multi-purpose command in 10 weeks shows

again that the Navy still "Can Do". Again, it was the American Bluejacket, with his bitching and swearing about 18-hour days and 7-day work weeks, that got the job done. To say that this command is unique is only saying that not since WWII has one unit been asked to build up so fast and take on the full bag of missions in such a short time.

The commanding officer of parent-squadron VA-45, Paganelli and his successor, Joe Gilmore, also deserve credit for the transition. At NAS Cecil, VA-45 began training pilots and acquiring A-4Es for the build up while the small Det was still at sea; all while continuing instrument and transition training with sixteen TA-4F/J's. Remarkably, by June 1973, the squadron had achieved 34,000 accident-free flying hours. The expanded

Det-1 was ready when *Intrepid* deployed again November 29, 1972. VA-45 Det-1 returned in May, 1973, from Sixth Fleet operations on what was the swan song of VSF.

The *Kittyhawk* (CV-63) went to a peacetime WestPac cruise in 1975 with the last two fleet squadrons of S-2s. From then on S-3 *Vikings* were an integral part of all airwings. Two VF squadrons with F-4s or F-14s would defend the task force. VSF was no more.

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Ed. Note: Part I of this article was included in the Spring 2006 issue of the A-4Ever. To order a copy of that issue (\$5 shipping and handling), email the editor at hickers@beecreek.net. Members have access to electronic copies of the journals through the Ready Room Private Pages (www.skyhawk.org).



Sidebar: VA-45 Fly-off

Al Alvarez, who had led VA-45 Det-1 on a three month deployment with a small detachment and again as a full size squadron to the Med for six months in *Intrepid*, wrote this about the fly-off and return to Cecil Field in May 1973:

The picture was taken 10 miles west of NAS Cecil Field by the number 15 man who dropped into the open slot after photo was taken.

It was a very rewarding day. The USS *Intrepid* fly-off destination was NAS Quonset PT. Admiral Cassell, our former CARGRU commander, had every fuel truck on the field waiting for us. We fueled and filed and were on our way in

less than an hour. The flight south was uneventful and Jax approach joined up the divisions west of Cecil for the fly-over. We broke from the wedge on the fly-over pass and landed sequentially in order by aircraft side number. Then we taxied in, fifteen aircraft, in column, and turned into our parking spots "Blue Angels" style.

I was especially proud of Det 1 that day and will always keep it in my memories.

On the launch we lost the 16th aircraft due to a catapult malfunction. Halfway down the starboard cat track, the bridle dropped off the aircraft. The A-4 veered left and went overboard at the corner of the port bow. Unfortunately,

ly, the aircraft carried overboard one of the flight deck bridle-runners and he was lost at sea.

The pilot ejected as the aircraft was about to go over the side and landed on the flight deck with a fully deployed parachute. Thank God for explosive spreaders [to open the parachute giving the Escapac seat a better than zero-zero ejection capability —Ed]. The next problem was that he was being dragged down the flight deck at thirty knots. Fortunately, AE1 Gary Gardner (our flight deck troubleshooter) had the presence of mind to race into the blossomed parachute and collapse it three-quarters of the way down the flight deck.

ATTIC ATTACKS

• Mailbag •

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



This picture of four SPIRITS was taken off the coast of Greece during a 1967 Med cruise aboard the USS Independence (CVA-62.) This was the last cruise of VA-76, as the squadron was decommissioned in 1968. It was a sorry ending for a squadron that had such a great history. The SPIRITS will live forever in the

hearts of those who had the opportunity to wear the three cornered hat. (Received from Tom Taylor, (tpt6621@hotmail.com).)



A VW Beetle and some A4Gs from VF 805 photographed at an airshow held in 1978 at the Royal Australian Naval Air Station at Nowra, NSW. At the time, the A4s from VF 805 operated from the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne. (Received from Steve McDonald.)

GANN'S GALLERY

• A-4M •

Harry Gann took this photo enroute to the Superbaties Airshow, Topeka, KS, in the fall of 1979. The Blacksheep A-4M was accompanied by a TA-4F of H&MS-13 and was approaching Topeka when the F-4U joined up, un-briefed and unannounced. The pilots were not on the same frequency, but recognized a good photo op when they saw one. Shortly after this photo was taken, an oil line broke, and the Corsair's canopy was covered with oil, forcing an expeditious landing.



R.G.'s ART

• A4 Kuwait •



A section of Israeli A-4Hs with combat loads pictured over their homeland.

R. G. Smith, (1914-2001)
Named Honorary Naval Aviator Number 10.

Remember!
Annual Meeting in DC area
27 October '06

THE A-4 AHIT TODAY AND THE RADA AHIT-M

By Shlomo Aloni, reprinted with permission from *AirForces Monthly*.



Upgrade may not guarantee the longevity of a combat aircraft but it is surely a positive indication. In response to budget cuts the Israel Air and Space Force (IASF) did prematurely retire upgraded combat aircraft originally set for a service life of at least twenty years, after only an average service career half as long. Yet not only is the Israeli McDonnell Douglas A-4 *Skyhawk* fleet set to undergo an upgrade with RADA Electronic Industries as the prime contractor, it is also serving in a classic bottleneck mission. It is a lot easier to withdraw from service a frontline combat aircraft type to adjust the ORder of BATtle (ORBAT) to budgetary constraints. It is impossible to prematurely retire a combat aircraft type serving in the advanced training and in the Lead-In Fighter Trainer (LIFT) mission as does the IASF A-4 Ahit (Eagle).

Attack and Train

Israel purchased the *Skyhawk* to fulfill a mid-1960s requirement for a light attack aircraft, a successor to the Dassault Mystere IVA. The *Skyhawk* indeed proved to be a capable attack platform and five IASF attack squadrons transitioned to the Ahit between 1967 and 1971. Yet had the *Skyhawk* remained an IASF attack aircraft it would have been history by now rather than outliving three combat aircraft types that entered IASF service after the Ahit.

The mission that ensured the Ahit longevity was in fact training. The IASF

transition from French hardware to US equipment reflected on training as well and the economical Ahit emerged as a perfect training platform to prepare fighter pilots for frontline service. IASF training of future fighter pilots covers both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. During the 1960s air cadets selected to train as fighter pilots were streamed to the Flying School's Advance Fighter Training Squadron (AFTS) while fighter pilot graduates attended as a group a three months Operational Training Unit (OTU) prior to assignment to frontline squadrons. At the time the AFTS trainer was the Fouga Magister while the OTU platform was the Dassault Ouragan.

To evaluate the Ahit's suitability to the OTU mission an experimental course was organized by the A-4H equipped Valley Squadron (VS) at Ramat David air base from April 1970, Fiscal Year (FY) 1970 Term 1 as at the time the Israeli FY was from April 1 to March 31 and the IASF divided the FY into three Terms: Term 1 from April to July, Term 2 from August to November and Term 3 from December to March. Once the Ahit was validated as an OTU platform the transition process lasted almost three years, the last Ouragan OTU was in FY1972T3. Then the Golden Eagle Squadron (GES) was formed at Etszion air base in August 1973 as a dedicated OTU outfit flying the A-4E and the last VS OTU was run in FY1974T2.

During the OTU transition process the Ahit also assumed responsibility for the training of undergraduate fighter pilots when the AFTS was converted to the TA-4 in 1972. The standardization of fighter pilots' undergraduate and postgraduate training paid a nice dividend as the OTU's type conversion elements were dismissed and the whole OTU Term could have been devoted to the transformation of Flying School (FS) graduates into fighter pilots.

Undergraduate Training

Thus over the last thirty years or so, since the Ahit assumed the role of IASF fighter pilots' training, the number of frontline Ahit squadrons dwindled but the requirement for IASF fighter pilots remained constant. Moreover investment in training assets has always been at a lower priority than an investment in the modernization of the frontline units. The clear winner from this situation was the Ahit that continues to train IASF fighter pilots and will continue to do so, perhaps until 2015 and beyond. *Skyhawk* fans are allowed to fantasize a December 2017 ceremony celebrating 50 years of IASF Ahit service!

If this fantasy will ever turn into reality, the celebration will not only mark the Ahit's golden anniversary but may also indicate an amazing fifty years of A-4 operations by the Flying Tiger Squadron (FTS). Even today the FTS probably holds the world record of continuous *Skyhawk* operations and the outfit is currently the largest IASF combat aircraft unit. The FTS's size and volume of operations are derived from the unit's three primary missions:

- Supply of Ahit flight hours to the AFTS and to the Fighter Navigators Training Squadron (FNTS).
- OTU for future Boeing F-15A/B/C/D/I pilots.
- Operational readiness.



More than 300 Skyhawks (A-4B, A-4E, A-4F, A-4H, A-4N, A-4M, TA-4H and TA-4J) entered IASF service and only the F-16 is set to surpass this figure (125 F-16A/B, 135 F-16C/D and 102 F-16I). Ahit attrition was quite high with more than 150 lost in accidents and in combat. Only the A-4N and the TA-4 models remain in IASF service. (Shlomo Aloni)



The cockpit of the prototype RADA AhitM N 342 is dominated by the Nir-Or MFD and the Vectop HUD while all of the old Crystal panels were removed. (via Shlomo Aloni)

Following a Grob G-120A-I Snunit (Swallow) screening and IAI Tsukit (Thrush) training during the Primary Term (Term 3 of the current six half-a-year Terms Flying Course syllabus), fighter pilot air cadets fly the Ahit during the Flying Course's sixth and finale Term. The AFTS cadets convert to the Ahit and then practice formation, navigation and night flying. Limited exposure to combat flying tactics includes attack missions and basic air combat maneuvers. During the six months Term the AFTS cadets average 130 Ahit sorties or roughly one sortie per 'working' day.

Also utilizing the Ahit as their advanced training platform are the FNTS's air cadets though they also experience a few F-16B Netz (Sparrowhawk) rides during the finale Flying Course Term. By the end of this decade most of the IASF's combat aircraft will be two-seaters so the FNTS's output almost equals that of the AFTS. The consequences are a requirement for a lot of TA-4 flight hours and busy Ahit traffic at Hatzherim air base, home of the IASF Academy and the FTS.

Postgraduate Training

LIFT became fashionable during the 1990s and the IASF joined the fast jet training options exploration trend. An F-16A/B Advance OTU (AOTU) course was introduced in 1990 to prepare experienced fighter pilots previously flying the McDonnell Douglas F-4, the IAI Kfir and the A-4, to fly the F-15 and the F-16. The driving force was the fact that the IASF mix of combat aircraft constantly shifted in favour of combat aircraft then termed in-house as 'advance', namely the F-15 and F-16.

Table 1 – IASF Combat Aircraft Mix

Year	Advance (F-15 & F-16)	Others (A-4, F-4 & Kfir)
1990	44%	56%
1999	73%	27%

Simple extrapolation yielded that no more previous generation combat aircraft will fly with the David Shield badge by 2008 or 2009. To prepare for this trend an experimental F-16A/B OTU course was organized in 1995 to evaluate the suitability of the F-16A/B as an OTU platform for young and inexperienced fighter pilots whom had just earned their wings. The positive results of these 1995 OTU courses encouraged the IASF to introduce the F-16A/B as an OTU platform alongside the Ahit.



Owing to the training commitment a high percentage of the IASF Ahit fleet consists of two-seaters, both TA-4H like 719 and TA-4J models. Ahit two-seaters are combat capable and a few were lost in action in October 1973 but the type also doubles as an Electronic Warfare (EW) platform with an EW operator in the back-seat while TA-4s were also used operationally in the Forward Air Control (FAC) mission with an observer in the back-seat. (Shlomo Aloni)



Flying Tiger Squadron's AhitM T 708 taxis to the last chance point as a mixed fourship formation of two AhitM Ns and two AhitM Ts prepare to take-off from Hatzherim, the busiest IASF air base. (Shlomo Aloni)



AhitM T 720 taxis to the Last Chance apron at Hatzherim air base to join fellow AhitMs that are already waiting to take-off. The nozzle extension is unique to Israeli Skyhawks and was introduced in 1973 to counter MAN Portable Air Defence System (MANPADS) threats. (Shlomo Aloni)

From 1999 fighter pilot graduates were split into two groups:

- Pilots assigned to fly the A-4, the F-4 and the F-15.
- Pilots assigned to fly the F-16.

The former attended an Ahit OTU and the latter a Netz OTU. However Netz OTU postgraduate training actually involved two Terms, an OTU Term followed by an AOTU Term. This was required because the Netz OTU had to cover conversion while the Ahit OTU could focus on advance training since the postgraduate students already flew the Ahit as undergraduate cadets and needed no type conversion training.

Ahit OTU has also evolved over the years. The Nevatim based Flying Wing Squadron (FWS) took over the OTU mission from the GES in 1985 but handed-over the responsibility to the FTS in 2003.

continued...

A4 AHIT

Continued...



AhitM T 725 alights on the Hatzirim runway at the end of a Flying Tiger Squadron training sortie unrelated to the Flight School's undergraduate training nor to the postgraduate OTU training activity, the two activities that contribute most of the Flying Tigers' flight hours. (Shlomo Aloni)



The new 18lbs (8kg) AhitM RADA avionics on the right compared with the 66lbs (30kg) Ahit's Crystal WDNS on the left. From maintenance point of view the AhitM is a major improvement not only because of a higher Mean Time Before Failure (MTBF) but also because in the past Ahit maintainers had to examine the status of six Crystal 'black boxes' to pin down a malfunction. Quite interestingly the IASF decided against the removal of the old system, as this would have resulted in a Centre of Gravity (CG) shift with a corresponding costly and lengthy flight test process. As a matter of fact the whole Ahit N 'hump' avionics bay that house the Crystal became redundant and could have been removed. (via Shlomo Aloni)

FACE LIFT

Throughout the 1990s the IASF's official view was that the Ahit would be retired by 2005. With the F-16A/B emerging as the Ahit OTU successor, the IASF issued in 1994 a requirement for an Autonomous Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation (AACMI) system to be installed in the Netz LIFT. Selection of the RADA Electronic Industries Autonomous Combat Evaluation (ACE) system

was announced in August 1994 and both the GES and the Negev Squadron (NS) – taking half-a-year turns in F-16A/B AOTU courses – equipped with the new system from 1997. When the Netz OTU was launched in 1999 the AACMI attributes resulted in a requirement for similar equipment to enhance the Ahit OTU. Yet at the time the Ahit was still slated for retirement by 2005 so a stopgap solution was embraced.

IASF lease of BVR EHUD AACMI pods was announced in November 1999. Yet by 2002 it became clear that the Ahit would not be retired in 2005. Funding limitations coupled with uncertainties re the future shape of fast jet training, drove the IASF to conclude that the Ahit was here to stay until 2010 at least. To prepare for the extended service life and as a reflection from satisfaction of Netz ACE performances, the RADA ACE-II was installed in the IASF Ahit fleet from 2002. RADA in fact modified the ACE system that required inputs from the aircraft's on-board Global Positioning System (GPS) or Inertial Navigation System (INS) to produce ACE-II for aircraft that lack GPS or INS.

RADA Upgrade and IAI Maintenance Privatization

IASF satisfaction from the Ahit ACE-II led to a broader avionics upgrade project with RADA as the prime contractor. RADA announced a \$2 million contract on January 21, 2003 that covered the first validation phase of the upgrade with the second full-scale phase contract announced on January 5, 2004. The upgrade focuses around the RADA ACE-II AACMI system. At the heart of the upgrade are two 'black boxes', the Mission and Fire-control Unit (MFU) and the RLG (Ring Laser Gyro) Navigation System (RNS). The IASF preferred the RNS as a cheaper alternative to Embedded GPS INS (EGI) and essentially the RNS generates a 6-axis position of the aircraft in space while the MFU uses this data to control the mission through navigation and weapons delivery.

Cockpit displays have been modernized with the insertion of a Multi Function Display (MFD). RADA integrated the 5" (12.5cm) Nir-Or colour MFD with a Control Data Unit (CDU) to improve the man-machine interface inside the Ahit's cockpit. The Ahit N's Head Up Display (HUD) has been retained but the display was improved following a definition phase by a team of A-4 and F-16 pilots. ACE-II generates data files that are synchronized with the output of a RADA Vectop EyeWitness colour HUD camera. A RADA Ground Debrief Station (GDS) enables the aircrew to completely replay a mission using the synchronized ACE-II and HUD outputs. RADA offered the IASF to add a virtual radar capability but the IASF rejected this offer to minimize

the project's cost yet virtual radar remains an option that can be easily added through RADA software updates and the installation of a Rafael data link.

Almost half of the Ahit aircraft to be upgraded are two seaters and these lack both the HUD and INS so the achievement of common avionics standard is an integral part of the AhitM - M stands for Meshopar (Improved) - programme. RADA subcontracted Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) Lahav as the AhitM workshop and flight test qualification centre. The AhitM prototype took to the air for the first time in December 2004. Once the three months qualification phase will be accomplished successfully, it is planned to complete the upgrade of the whole IASF Ahit fleet before the end of 2005.

The RADA AhitM project is aimed at the extension of the Ahit's viable life until 2015 to 2020, both as a combat aircraft and as a trainer. To complement this upgrade the IASF contracted Ahit maintenance. The Israeli Ministry of Defence (MoD) announced in December 2004 the selection of IAI Bedek Group to supply Ahit A-Level, B-Level and D-Level maintenance services to the FTS under a Power By The Hour (PBTH) contract. Most of the work will be performed at Hatzerim except for J52 deep maintenance that will be performed at IAI Bedek's facilities. The ten years PBTH contract may generate to IAI more than \$150 million, payments will depend upon outputs (flight hours) rather than inputs. It is the first time that a commercial contractor will assume A-Level maintenance responsibility for an IASF frontline combat squadron and IAI is to assume responsibility in June 2005.

Golden Jubilee Thoughts

When the Ahit retirement date was set at 2005, Boeing's T-45 was the forefront contender for an IASF LIFT requirement. However the relaxed 2010 retirement date was viewed as a bless to the Lockheed Martin T-50 as well as to the recently announced IAI/ATJ Javelin Advance Jet Trainer (AJT) and both were expected to offer stiff competition to the T-45. The RADA AhitM project and the ten years IAI PBTH contract indicate that the IASF is set to operate the Ahit in the advance training and LIFT missions until 2015 at least. IASF service Golden Jubilee in late 2017 is indeed within the Ahit's reach!



A pair of Flying Tiger Squadron's AhitM Ns 342 and 311 taxi to take-off at Hatzerim as a Flight School Zukit (Thrush) trainer comes in to land. IASF Flight School students fly the Zukit during basic training and the Ahit during advance training. The IASF has issued a RFI for a Zukit replacement for introduction circa 2010 so it is fair to assume that the Ahit replacement will be the next in line for introduction circa 2015. (Shlomo Aloni)

FLYING TIGER SQUADRON – A BRIEF HISTORY

Formed as the second IASF Ahit outfit on December 29, 1967 the FTS commenced A-4H operations in June 1968 and has been flying Ed Heinemann's Hotrod ever since. The FTS flew 1,700 operational sorties during the 1969/1970 Attrition War, losing in action one A-4H in 1969 and another in 1970. The October 1973 Yom Kippur War (YKW) cost the FTS dearly. The squadron flew 992 sorties during the 19 days conflict but lost a staggering 17 Ahits for a miserable sorties-to-loss ratio of 58-to-1. The lost A-4Hs were replaced by hastily supplied ex-US Navy A-4Fs and in 1976 the FTS standardized upon the A-4E/F. Conversion to the A-4N followed in 1986 while in 1990 the FTS was amalgamated with the Flying School AFTS to become an emergency activated outfit. In 1994 the FTS was separated from the AFTS and restored as an active operational squadron, doubling as Ahit flight hours supplier to the AFTS. From 2003 the FTS also runs the Ahit OTU and the unit is generally accepted as the largest and most active IASF fighter squadron.



The BVR Systems/IAI MLM EHUD pod is a self-contained AACMI pod while the RADA ACE is an internal system that interfaces with the aircraft's avionics. The IASF leased EHUD pods to equip the Flying Wing Squadron's Ahit jets, as the unit was responsible to the Ahit OTU until 2002. The reassignment of the Ahit OTU mission to the Flying Tiger Squadron coincided with IASF decision to install ACE-II in the Ahit. The illustrated EHUD pod was photographed attached to Ahit N 357 during the Flying Wing Squadron's finale Ahit OTU course in late 2002. (Shlomo Aloni)

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR AND MY FIRST SKYHAWK FLIGHT

By Major General Giora Romm, IAF (Ret)



Foreword by Peter Mersky: *A-4s first arrived in Israel in late 1967, finally overcoming a U.S. embargo following the June 1967 war with the Arabs. The A-4H and TA-4H models supplied were similar to the A-4F and TA-4F used by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. The Skyhawks joined operations almost immediately, and over the years several shipments made the A-4 numerically the most important type in the IAF inventory in the early 1970s. The Hotel had several changes from its U.S. counterpart, including two 30mm cannon in place of the original 20mm weapons, a drag chute, extended tailpipe and upgraded avionics, most of which were added in Israel.*

In May 1970, an A-4H destroyed two Syrian MiG-17s, one with 2.75-inch rockets and the other with 30mm cannon.

The A-4N was an A-4M, modified for Israeli use. The Mike was the last U.S. production model and was made for the Marines. Named the Skyhawk II, the A-4N featured new avionics and a head-up display. First flown in June 1972, the A-4N began reaching Israel before the outbreak of the 1973 war. During the Yom Kippur War—so named because it began on the most important day of the Hebrew calendar, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—the IAF's Skyhawk squadrons saw considerable action, akin to the Vietnam War's Rolling Thunder, and suffered drastic losses in aircraft and pilots, flying into the teeth of Arab flak and SAM defenses.

The Skyhawk (it is called "Ahit," meaning "Vulture" in the IAF) still serves, although in reduced numbers, mainly as an advanced trainer and reserve attack bomber.

I am holding, number 4, for takeoff on Tel Nof's Runway 33. I am in an A-4N Skyhawk with two external fuel tanks and eight Mk. 82 bombs. It is 3 pm, Saturday, October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur. The target is Egyptian forces attacking the "Budapest" outpost on the northern edge of the Suez Canal, toward Port Said.

Sound normal for a fighter pilot? It seems so, except that even though I am number 4, I am the squadron commander, and when I take off, it will be my first flight in a Skyhawk, a plane that I have never flown before. Very few pilots in the history of aerial combat have flown their first sortie in a new aircraft (to them) on an operational flight. I'm going to be one of them.

Three days earlier, Lieutenant Colonel Ami Goldstein, "Goldy," the commander of No. 115 Squadron, was killed in an accident. When I returned that night to my home at Hatzor AFB, there was a message from the Israel Air Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Benny Peled. He wanted me to be at his office the next morning at 7:30 and to assume command of the squadron.

That night I drove to see Brig. Gen. Ron Ronen, the commander of Tel Nof AFB, where 115 was stationed. [Ron Ronen commanded No. 119 Squadron in 1967. Besides being one of the first Mirage III pilots in the IAF, he was also an ace.—Ed.]

"Ron, you know I have never flown a Skyhawk," I told him. He replied, "I want you in this position. I don't want anyone else. The squadron is in a state of shock. Do whatever it takes tomorrow and on Friday, and next week you will take an A-4 conversion course."

Two days of assuming command, the funeral, my first meetings with the pilots, with the maintenance group, first visit with Nechama, now Goldy's widow. Friday night, I stayed overnight at the base because of the heightened alerts.

Saturday. The siren screams at 7 am. We are moving to Alert Status 3. Briefings. Instructions for "Ramming," the plan to attack the Syrian Air Force. Zero hour is 1130. I am still in my dress uniform. Lt. Ram Yosef drives to my house in Hatzor to bring me my flight suit and flight boots. Lt. Mickey Schneider, who, as my number 2, will be shot down by a Syrian SA-6 missile five days later and become a POW in Syria, brings my G-suit and torso harness from wherever they keep this stuff.

There is no approval for "Ramming." President Nixon does not support Prime Minister Golda Meir. I try desperately to make a fam flight in my new aircraft so I'll know what the Skyhawk is all about. A plane in Shelter 10 is stripped of all external loads so I can fly it should something develop. Lt. Avraham Yakir accompanies me to the plane and helps me strap in. He explains the layout of the cockpit to me, the HUD system, the INS alignment process and how to start the engine. I do it step by step and finally taxi to the takeoff



With its "boards" still out, an A-4H taxis in after a mission. (IDF)

position.

But I can't close the canopy. You have to pull hard, something you never do in the elegant Mirage, so I'm hesitant. Yakir jumps on the wing and helps me close the canopy. I move to Runway 33 and request permission for takeoff. It is exactly 2 pm.

"Peach, return to your line," the tower calls. "Egyptian planes are en route to attack the base." Yakir waits for me with a car in the shelter. I am back at the squadron building. Pilots in full gear are on the balcony with maps and aerial photos. I take the papers from one of them and ask, "Who is your leader?"

"Yachin," he answers. Yachin was my first student in the pilot training course. "Yachin, I am your number 4. If I have any questions, we'll talk on the red radio." Each aircraft had two UHF radios, designated as red and green.

After takeoff, it'll take 20 minutes to reach Nahal-Yam, the kibbutz on the north shore of the Sinai Peninsula that

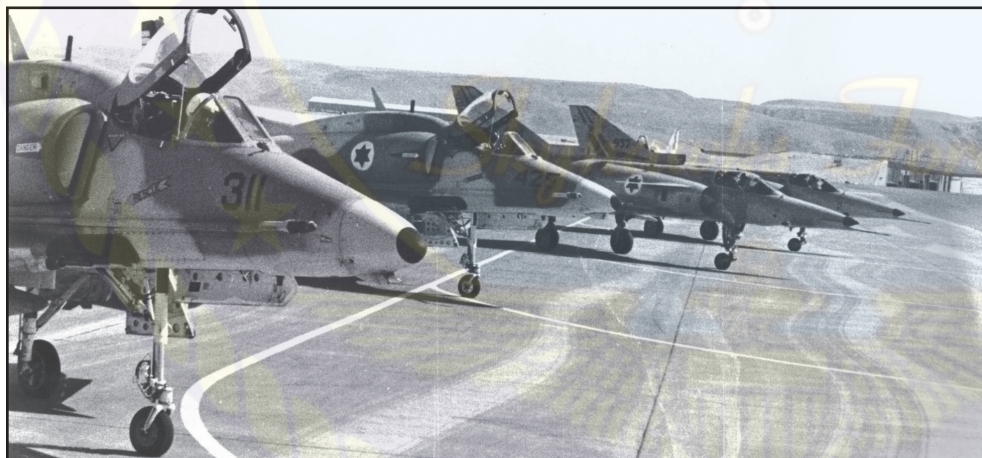
will serve as the point from which we begin our high-speed, low level run-in toward the pop-up maneuver. This is the time I'll learn to fly the *Skyhawk*. Yachin requests permission for takeoff. I ask him what speeds we use in our configuration. "Raise the nose at 125 and take off at 150," he tells me. We are airborne, veering from Palmahim, a kibbutz on the coast, heading south. The plane responds to my command, and I try to position myself in the cockpit. Yachin helps me with the ammunition switches, and explains how to make a dive-toss attack. At Nahal-Yam we descend to prepare for the attack on "Budapest."

Capt. Uri Bina is the section leader. "Three pulls," he says, and I pull with him to a pop-up for the first time in my life in a *Skyhawk*. I roll on my back at 6,000 feet and dive toward "Budapest." The yellow glow of an SA-2 missile comes from Port Said toward me. Is the whole world against me today?

I try to execute the attack and rejoin Uri Bina. "Four, your bombs didn't release," Uri calls. I get to Nahal-Yam, and turn back once more toward "Budapest," this time alone. The rest of the flight waits for me over Nahal-Yam. This is now my second pop-up attack in a *Skyhawk*. This time I make a CCIP *continued...*



A-4N 270 now shares a display area with other aircraft at the IAF museum at Hatzerim near Beer Sheba, loaded with inert blue Mk 81s. (Peter Mersky)



A-4Ns and Kfirs prepare to take off for an ACM training mission some time in the 1980s. The Kfir was developed from the Mirage V, serving a moderately successful career with the IAF, along with a few third-world air forces. (IDF)



Some time after the 1973 war, and now a colonel, Romm prepares for a flight in a TA-4H. He is now the base commander of Ramon. (Giora Romm)

YOM KIPPER WAR

Continued...

(continuous computing impact point) run and feel, for the first time in my life, eight bombs drop from the plane toward the amphibious armored vehicles that can be seen clearly between the coast and the “Budapest” outpost.

Fuel check on the way back. One, two, and three have 4,500 pounds. I look for the fuel gauge. It should be here somewhere. I find it in the lower right-hand corner of the front panel. It shows only 1,800 pounds. I realize immediately that I did not activate the fuel transfer from the reserve tanks. (On the Mirage, fuel transfer is automatic. No switches have to be moved.) I report 4,500. I am, after all, the squadron leader, and I don’t intend for any one to catch me in any weakness. Where is the bloody switch for the fuel tanks? I can’t find any fuel panel. I extend my hand backwards left and start systematically to turn all the switches in the cockpit to “on.” The fuel gauge continues to drop to 1,600, but over El Arish, at 20,000 feet, it starts to climb slowly. I make myself a note that after landing I must find out which switch did the trick.

“Four, 150,” says Yachin in the frugal language of aerial communication, and I circle the plane around Tel Nof, stabilize it at 150 knots for my final approach. I put *Skyhawk* 417 gently down on runway 33, then taxi back to Shelter 10. I am in a rush. I have a squadron to command. I don’t yet know all the pilots. I don’t remember the maintenance officer’s name. I have only one *Skyhawk* sortie in my logbook, and there is a war out there.

In the course of gaining absolute command over 115 Squadron I will learn how to fly the *Skyhawk*. I will start to lead pairs and then flights of fours. I’ll lead attacks on three Egyptian air-bases, Mansure, Zalahia and Kutamia. I’ll make sure that I fly more sorties than any other pilot in the squadron and fight in what will be the most difficult war in which I have ever participated.

At times, I thought the entire country of Israel was like me, as if it stood on a runway 33 of its own and learned the hard way to fly and fight from a situation that combined inferiority and determination, the likes of which we had never known.



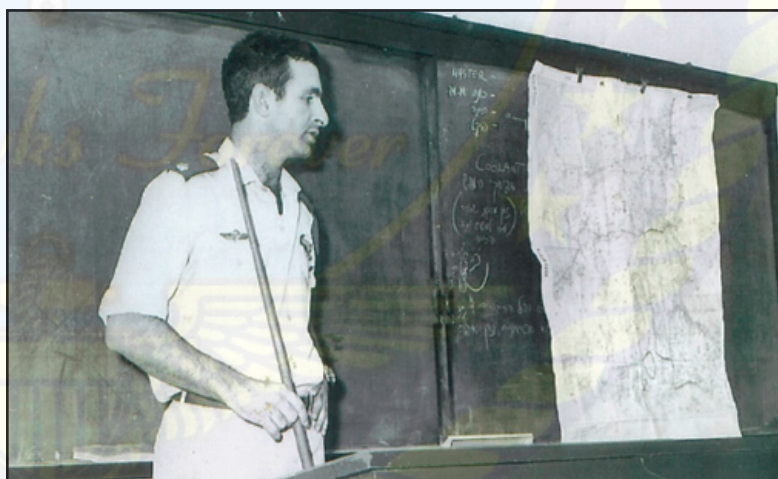
A-4Ns 891 and 611 at the IAF museum at Hatzirim, Beer Sheba. The museum is a surprising collection and well worth the one-hour bus ride from Jerusalem, if you’re touring Israel. (Peter Mersky)

Ed. Note: Major General Romm was a 22-year-old Mirage pilot when he became Israel’s first ace. Flying with No. 119 Squadron, the Bats, he shot down five Arab MiGs during the 1967 Six Day War. Later, the Tel Aviv native fought in the so-called War of Attrition and was shot down in September 1969, becoming a POW in Egypt for four months. Badly injured when he ejected from his Mirage, he received only basic care from his captors. When he returned to Israel he spent several months recuperating. He was back on flight status just in time to take command of the Dragon Squadron, No. 115, an A-4N squadron during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 as a 28-year-old major. Six months later, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel.

After the war, he served in various assignments, eventually commanding Tel Nof AFB. He was promoted to brigadier general, and subsequently flew one of the F-15s during the long-distance raid on PLO headquarters in Tunis in 1985. He then served as the deputy commander of the IAF. Receiving his second star, he became the IDF’s Defense Attache in Washington from 1991 to 1995. He is married with three children, and three grandchildren.



Capt Romm sits in a Mirage IIICJ of No. 119 Squadron around 1967. As a Mirage pilot, he shot down five Arab MiGs to become the first ace (of eventually some 40 aces) of the Israeli Air Force. (Giora Romm)



Now a young major in command of a squadron during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Romm briefs his pilots for a mission into Syria. (Giora Romm)

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

Crubfoot Active

In a shower of plaster and sheetrock fragments, the Naval Aviator's mighty foot, followed by leg, once again penetrated the ceiling. "Gloddam defective overhead," came the muffled roar from the attic. "Oh, honey! Three more and you're an ace," was the sweet wife's comment. Mighty Crubfoot had struck again...

In the merciless manner of fleet squadrons, Crubfoot had earned his nickname the easy way. A highly intelligent Boat-

Whenever the unfortunate lad showed up in the ready room, it became fashionable to make simulated warning radio calls like Red Crown or Big Look used for MiGs or SAMs: "Warning! Warning! Crubfoot active, Delta Sierra all quads!" All this was born with the weary resignation of the frabbee who has righteously been caught and joyously not been allowed to forget about it. Naturally, it was Puresome who pushed it too far.

"It seems that, after parking his aircraft port side forward, he decided it would be too far a journey to the nearest ladder to get off the flight deck, so he lightly leapt into the catwalk, promptly breaking his ankle."

Schooler, he was a relentless pursuer of justice as the squadron's Perry Mason legal officer. A competent aviator, he was still suspect to the Reserve Junior Officer's Association because of his general sobriety, and because he wore his pisscuter with the back turned down, somewhat resembling posterior cow parts.

While the ceiling attacks story had surfaced somehow at a squadron party, his eventual squadron nickname was truly earned while on a U.S.S. Boat deployment. It seems that, after parking his aircraft port side forward, he decided it would be too far a journey to the nearest ladder to get off the flight deck, so he lightly leapt into the catwalk, promptly breaking his ankle.

The results of his non-acrobatics were four-fold: he was off the flight schedule; a large, conspicuous cast appeared on his left foot, which resulted in even further loss of grace; SDO duty for the foreseeable future, thereby becoming highly visible and available for needling; and, lastly, his enduring, literal nickname of "Clubfoot," which underwent the inevitable WESTPAC Japanese transmutation to "Crubfoot." Puresome figured it was better than some of the Crusader pilots' nicknames, like "The Bald-Headed Chicken Frabber," or "Limpy."

For some unexplained reason, Puresome had abandoned the dirty shirt wardroom and had decided on doing supper at prestigious Wardroom One among the Black Shoes, senior citizens and simple refugees from the unwashed splendor of Gator Chow. He selected a wild card napkin, intricately stuffed in its silver ring, and wandered over to join some of his squadron mates, one of whom was Crubfoot.

"...and if you had gone anywhere tonier than Sorghum State Agricultural and Mechanics College, you would realize that linen napkins, properly folded and tucked into silver rings, separate man from Marines and other beasts," rejoined Crubfoot.

"Hey, Crubfoot," said Puresome as he shook out his napkin, "I bet they teach you at Boat School how to put these things back right."

"Yes, actually, they do, and if you had gone anywhere tonier than Sorghum State Agricultural and Mechanics College, you would realize that linen napkins, properly folded and tucked into silver rings, separate man from Marines and other beasts," rejoined Crubfoot.

The Sorghum State part and the beast part weren't as telling as the jibe at Puresome's napkin folding technique, the results of which always looked like busted out bales of cotton. Fortunately, Puresome was as sensitive as two train wrecks. "Your prattle is as the buzzing of dung flies in my ears," said Puresome as soup was served by Filipino waiters in white jackets.

Impeccably dressed officers ate from fine china with gleaming silver cutlery atop starched white table linen. Clever wardroom chitchat avoided politics, women, and shop. Then, from lip level, Crubfoot dropped his spoon, *kerplash!* into his soup. A shocked silence overcame the table. As the eaters assessed damage to their uniforms, Puresome was the first to recover.

"Well, Crubfoot, if you can't be good, be colorful." That was too much. In front of God, CAG, and an assortment of commanders and slightly lesser sorts, Crubfoot rose himself up, black eyes flashing and soup-stained breast heaving.

"Puresome, I've had enough of your crap, let's go settle this on the flight deck right now!" Puresome was on his way to his feet when forceful intervention by LCDR Spider's large hands sat both he and Crubfoot back down. Speaking through his teeth, Spider invited them to cool it and join him in his palatial stateroom later for a mini-A.O.M. Puresome felt it prudent to chill out and accept.

Later in Spider's stateroom, junior officer counseling was in full flower. Crubfoot was persuaded to de-miff and

un-huff, and Puresome was yet again advised to be nice. Finally, the two shook hands and were dismissed. But as they negotiated the knee-knockers down the passageway, Puresome couldn't resist.

"Say, Crubfoot, now that we're buddies, when you trip and bust your butt, can I have your Akai tape recorder?"

It was a good thing Puresome was a nimble wise-ass.

TWIDGET GOES CYBER

• www.skyhawk.org •

By David "Twidget" Weber, *Skyhawk* Association Webmaster

The *Skyhawk* Association Web Site receives significant traffic, and that is good news. The Association Ready Room currently has more than one hundred Association Members with login ids. That is also good news. However - there is always a "but" isn't there - participation in the two sites is almost exclusively passive. That is, the visitor comes to look, not to contribute.

I would like to see that change, and in a big way. I know that there is a vast amount of unique and historical information residing within our membership concerning their experiences surrounding the *Skyhawk*. Unfortunately, it only rarely surfaces, and then usually only to a small audience. In addition, experience has shown that many members have large amounts of photos and other *Skyhawk* memorabilia stored in closets and attics which are in danger of never being appreciated, and will likely be lost to history if left there.

If you do not have Internet access, you're missing out on some great photos and information which can only be found on the Association's web site. And even more importantly, accessing the Members' Only Ready Room will allow you to view images and information the public does not see. Don't want to bear the cost of a computer and Internet access? Well, that doesn't mean your photos and stories have to remain a family legacy only.

Pack up those *Skyhawk*-related photos, include some notes on their history and is

yours, and ship them to us. We will scan them, and then return them to you. Some members may tell you that "I did that, and my photos are still not on the site after six months". And they would be right. I readily admit that I have a large backlog. However, if we have your photos, they will eventually get onto the site and will be preserved.

If you have Internet access, then hopefully you are very familiar with the Association's web site. Since this is a public web site, it is by default a "read-only" experience.

If you have joined the Association's Ready Room, then you do have the opportunity to actively contribute and record your experiences and photos. Here is a list of ways you can move beyond just being a "browser" by utilizing the Ready Room.

1. There are "forums". One can start and contribute to discussion threads. Our Ready Room Coordinator, Mark Williams, can assist with any questions.

2. There is a special photo gallery link in the RR where you can upload photos and view the contributions of others.

3. A new feature in the "Private Pages," linked from the Ready Room, is a "Members Maintained Personal Data List". No, this is not your "shirt size" type personal data. This is data about your *Skyhawk* experiences that you enter and edit yourself. It is viewable only by members, and provides a history of our membership and their experiences. It was built from the 15 December 2005 membership roster and is

updated only by the individual.

4. Another "do it yourself" data capture is specifically for the guys who started this Association - our *Skyhawk* aviators. Drivers can enter their *Skyhawk* flight records into two lists, one cataloged by name, the other by *Skyhawk* BuNo.

5. The *Skyhawk* Aircraft History Tables are not just for the Support Team to contribute to. Do you remember a particular BuNo as a Plane Captain, maintenance guy, or a witness to an aircraft event? Well, let's hear about it! If you have BuNo specific information, send it to the Support Team. They will get it into the records.

6. Another source of history is the unsolicited comments that I often receive from former *Skyhawk* unit members. Many are not members, and in the past, I simply stored their comments about personal experiences in my own email archives after passing them along to unit SDOs. However, now their comments will be preserved where the membership can view them, and they will have the opportunity to input their comments directly into the database themselves. See the new http://www.sashare.a4skyhawk.org/buno-unit_pub-com/index.php database tables. SDOs, remember the site where you can do you own unit photos - <http://sashare.a4skyhawk.org/index.html>.

Contacts:

Webmaster David Weber:

webmaster@a4skyhawk.org

Ready Room Coordinator Mark Williams:
readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org

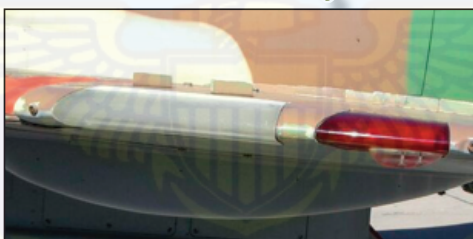
SDO Coordinator Stan Martin:
do-coordinator@a4skyhawk.org

Skyhawk Research Support Team:
sa-research@a4skyhawk.org

BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Powell's Puzzlers •

Question 1: Each wingtip had two types of light (starting with late model A-4Bs); a regular filament and a gas-discharge light. What were the gases in the left and right lights?



See Answers
on Page 21

Question 2: How far did the MLG extend when the Scooter was in the air? How do you know?

Question 3: What was AFC (Air Frame Change) 325?

TINS

FOR ORDIES

By Nick Coletto

One evening after dinner we went to the movies. At Chu Lai the Seabees had made a walk-in open air movie theater on a small hill. You could stroll in with a beach chair or sit on the sand and watch a movie. Sometimes it would be a movie – sometimes it would be an episode of “The FBI,” or “Batman,” from TV.

In a war zone every loud, unusual noise gets your attention real quick. So, we were watching some movie when we heard a series of explosions. Sometime during my tour in Chu Lai, the Army moved in a battery of 175mm artillery

pieces. They were very loud when fired. There must have been a lull in hostilities for some weeks because the big guns had been quiet for a while. We were at the movies with some guys new to Chu Lai when the big guns opened up with a roar. The new guys all ran for cover. After a while they came back feeling kind of foolish and got a lot of ribbing. To them the noise was loud and unusual. To us old hands it was loud, but not unusual.

One other time at the movies, we heard an explosion that while not really loud, was unusual. It got everyone’s attention, but there were no more noises, so we forgot about it until the next morning. It turned out that an A-4 pilot from VMA 211 had tried to drop a napalm bomb on some indigenous personnel, but something went wrong. Instead of falling down and away from the plane, the nose of the napalm tank pitched upward and slammed into the underside of the wing. The fuse and igniter punched a 10-inch diameter hole in the skin of the wing. The pilot made it back to the base, and after a quick

investigation everyone went on with their jobs. The igniter, which contained white phosphorous, must have broken open during the incident, because later that night, the wing blew up. The white phosphorous evidently burned into the fuel cell and set it off. The explosion caused about one third of the upper surface of the left wing to blow off. This could have happened when the plane was airborne with deadly consequences.



Upper surface of the VMA-211 wing is shown after the explosion caused by white phosphorous. (Nick Coletto).



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modeling News •

By Joe Turpen

These great looking models were done by Nick Monopoli, and represent Paul Haglund’s NP 690 and Tex Birdwell’s NP 681. Contact Joe Turpen for more information about models and how you can get started.



New Member? Like to Have Some Back Issues of The A-4Ever?

If you are a new member and would like to extend your collection of *The A-4Ever*, copies are available for the following issues: Winter 2005, Spring 2005, Summer 2005, Fall 2005 (very limited numbers), Winter 2006 and Spring 2006. Extra copies may be purchased for \$5.00 per issue, including shipping and handling (domestic addresses only).

Contact: Bob Hickerson at newsletter-editor@a4skyhawk.org

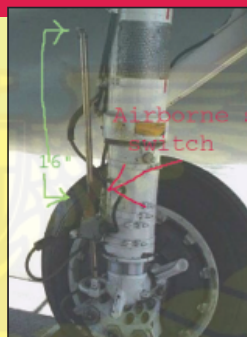
or mail to: **Bob Hickerson**
1222 Balcones Drive,
Fredericksburg, TX 78624.



? Puzzle Answers: ?

Question 1: The left, port, red, was good old Neon. The starboard, right, green, was Xenon.

Question 2: About 16 inches. The rod on the left MLG pulled down as the strut extended and the tab on top (green arrows) contacted the ground-release switch (red arrow) enabling various electric circuits.



Question 3: AFC325 added the hump for avionics allowing full loads of cannon ammo to be carried.



READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

CLASH OF THE CARRIERS: The True Story of the Marianas Turkey Shoot of World War II

By Barrett Tillman

New York: New American Library, 2005.
368 pp.

In spite of taking several courses in naval history as part of NROTC, I've never been very interested in naval history. Before picking up Skyhawk Association member Barrett Tillman's new book, *Clash of the Carriers*, my knowledge of the Battle of the Philippine Sea was limited to what I recalled from reading Morison in college. The basics were easily recalled: largest carrier battle of WWII, colossal armadas assembled by both the Japanese and Americans, gutsy move by Mitscher to light up Task Force 58 for planes returning to the carrier groups after dark, etc. I intended to scan through it to gain enough background to discuss it at happy hour, but after a chapter, I found myself hooked and reading non-stop, cover to cover.

The reason is simple: Tillman writes with an authority and insight that can be best appreciated by those who have been there. Though his writing is serious history, it lets the reader "feel" what it was like to experience the event. He gives us a view from the cockpit, from the bridge and from the deckplates. His graphic depictions of the aerial battle made me wish that

I had been there, but at that same time, glad that I was born too late.

Tillman's account excels in analyzing the personalities of the commanders on both sides; in describing details of naval operations, from flight operations to logistic preparation; and in sorting out the confusing claims of enemy aircraft shot down by both sides. The best part, however, was the vivid account of the recovery of the American planes on the evening of June 20, 1944, following the massive strike against the Japanese fleet.

These days, when my handheld GPS receiver packs more technology than a flagship of WWII, it's hard to fully appreciate the audacious nature of Mitscher's decision to launch 226 planes against the Japanese fleet with typically inexact knowledge of the enemy disposition. It's almost inconceivable that he launched them late in the afternoon, knowing that the pilots would have to find their carriers and recover after dark, should they be fortunate enough to survive the strike. I wonder what those pilots were thinking, with most knowing all too well that they were not current for night operations – they were probably thinking that attacking an enemy carrier was going to be the easiest part of that mission!

They would have been right. Returning to the task force long after sunset (with no moon to speak of), it was every man

for himself. Unable to find their home carriers, many pilots fought for any deck they could identify. The command to "turn on the lights" caused all warships to do so, making it difficult for pilots to sort carriers from escorts. LSOs were presented with the spectacle of multiple planes in the groove at the same time, each refusing to yield the right of way. Simultaneous traps were common, sometimes to the same wire, with predictable results.

It was a long night. When it was all over, 140 of the 226 planes launched had managed to trap aboard a carrier, and 172 pilots and aircrew were strewn over a large portion of the Pacific, waiting for search and rescue. Much of the following day was spent sorting out what was left of the air groups. Yet, in strategic terms, it was worth both the risk and the results. According to Tillman, "The course of the Pacific war was irrevocably set."

I'll leave it to the historians to decide if this work measures up as serious scholarship. I scanned the reviews on Amazon.com and found plenty of self-appointed experts willing to voice their opinion. However, I have no doubt that this work will be judged worthy by the only experts who (in my mind) really count – those who were there. It's a good read, and anyone interested in naval aviation should have a copy on his or her bookshelf.

Bob Hickerson



SKYHAWK

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readyroomcoor@a4skyhawk.org
mjbrannon@attglobal.net
mbone@ec.rr.com
forrestal@fewpb.net
serichmond@sbcglobal.net
sa-patch@a4skyhawk.org

Contacts & Information Resources

Name

David "Twidget" Weber, Association Webmaster
David "Twidget" Weber

Terry Cooney, Skyhawk Association Secretary
R.R. "Boom" Powell/Bob Hickerson
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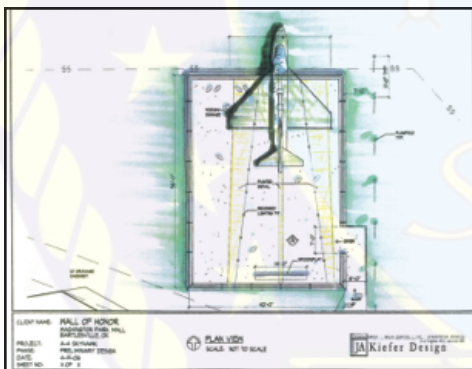
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SLOW BREAKING NEWS

A Fast-Paced Feature



Dedication of A-4 Memorial for Bartlesville, Oklahoma



One of the nicest restorations for display of an A-4 is coming together with the help of Cessna Aircraft. *The Wall of Honor Veterans Memorial* in Bartlesville will dedicate A-4 148485 in late October (on either the 26th or 28th, TBD) to the memory all who served. The aircraft is being restored as a public service by Cessna employees, and will display the markings of the VA-163 aircraft flown by Senator John McCain when he was shot down over Hanoi. The effort is being spearheaded by China Marine Charlie Kittrell who hopes *Skyhawk* veterans, par-



The forward section of a Vietnam-era A-4 Skyhawk jet plane is lifted off a trailer in a hangar at Bartlesville Municipal Airport (OK). The plane is being refurbished by Cessna Aircraft in Independence, KS. Once assembled, the decommissioned plane will eventually be displayed at Washington Park Mall's Wall of Honor Veterans Memorial in Bartlesville.

ticularly Saints, will attend the dedication ceremony. General Charles C. Krulak, former Commandant of the Marine Corps (1995 - 1999), has agreed to attend, and Senator McCain has been invited. Watch the website for final details (www.skyhawk.org).

VA-163 Saints Reunion

The Saints will have a reunion 6-8 October, 2006, Jacksonville, FL. More information will be available soon in the Saints Newsletter.

Organizers: Al "DOC" Adeeb (VA-163) bigaladeeb@aol.com & Penny Schroeder (Fritz, also VA-163) pss@juno.com

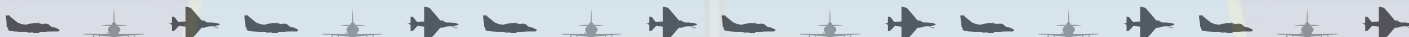


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