



THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION *Journal*



*Israeli A-4N prepares
for takeoff at sunset.*

THE A-4 EVER

Spring 2009

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 1

Contents:

Stolen Skyhawk • Boom-Boom Room • The Oley Chronicles • Take No Prisoners
Prez Sez • More on Flight Testing • Puresome Unplugged • Board Meeting Report
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★ *Central Texas
Gathering of Skyhawks* ★
28 March, 2009
Fredericksburg, TX



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •



By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

SA Board Meeting

Once again, your *Skyhawk* Board is just back from the mid-Winter board meeting, held this time in Alameda aboard *Hornet*. With the addition of four new board members, John Bloore of Little Rock, AR; Bill Egen of Havelock, NC; Dave Dollarhide of Orange Park, FL, and Todd Frommelt of Carlsbad, CA, I feel a new sense of purpose and have high hopes for the association in 2009. The board discussed goals, focusing primarily on building membership, creating more (and new) opportunities for members to get together, getting more organized to implement our history program and taking our journal/website to the next level.

Central to achieving these goals will be a successful effort to build membership and get more members involved in association activities. The board thinks that both of these are achievable.

First, anyone who has read this column in the past knows that I think increasing our membership is crucial to having a viable association. It takes resources, both monetary and human, to publish *The A-4Ever* and maintain a quality website. We have plenty of information to publish in the Journal, and there is an intimidating backlog of information we want to post on the website. If we could increase our membership by 200 members to break the 1000 mark, we could publish four full-color Journals per year, rather than three as is now the case. If we could increase our membership by 50% to 1,200, we would have the necessary resources to look at new technology needed to implement an advanced electronic communication program and updated web architecture.



The board has committed to working hard on building membership, and we need your help! The new Membership Committee is headed by "Buick," Mike Eberhardt, and board

members Todd Frommelt and Dave Dollarhide have agreed to spearhead new membership initiatives for the Marine Corps and Navy, respectively. One strategy they intend to implement is to make a special effort to reach the Marine Reserve units who last operated the A-4. They are looking for a volunteer or volunteers from each of the reserve units/sites that were the last custodians of the aircraft: Jacksonville/VMA-142; South Weymouth/VMA-322; Willow Grove/VMA-131; Alameda/VMA-133, El Toro/VMA-134 and Memphis/VMA-124. They'll ask that volunteer to help us connect with squadron mates who aren't members of *Skyhawk* Association but should be. They think that a personal email or note from the volunteer, followed by a complimentary copy of *The A-4Ever*, will convince many to join. IF YOU ARE WILLING TO HELP WITH THIS EFFORT, email Buick at TheBuick@aol.com (info me at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org), and we'll work with you to get the ball rolling.

The board is also looking for volunteers to help us work more closely with museums in order to find appropriate homes for donated artifacts. If you live near an aircraft museum that might be interested in displaying *Skyhawk*-related artifacts and would consider working with the Historical Committee in this way, please contact me at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org. We are particularly interested in finding someone who can connect with the Naval Historical Foundation in Washington, D.C.

The *Skyhawk* Association board realizes that members place a high-priority on creating opportunities to get together to renew old friendships and create new acquaintances around our experiences with the *Skyhawk* and the units which operated the aircraft. Over the years, the association has helped to sponsor reunions (such as the All-Marine *Skyhawk* reunions in 2005 and 2007) and has discussed the establishment of regional "squadrons" or "dets," as well as the scheduling of one-day meetings of members around the country. The 2009 board of directors is looking into all of these options, but ultimately the success or failure of this effort will rest with the members themselves. All such efforts require volunteers to help plan and conduct the events.

Kudos

After visiting the USS *Hornet* Museum for our board meeting and subsequent tour, I high-

ly recommend that you plan a visit to the ship if your travel takes you to the East Bay area of San Francisco. Moored to the same Alameda pier she once used in active service, the *Hornet* has morphed into an outstanding showcase for the U.S. Navy, manned by knowledgeable and enthusiastic employees and volunteers. We're very grateful to the *Hornet* staff in general, and to Stephanie Prothero in particular, for hosting our meeting.

Former director and Treasurer Steve Richmond coordinated plans for our meeting in Oakland/Alameda, and proved to be an outstanding host/tour guide. Steve introduced us to the Warehouse Bar and Grill in Oakland (4th and Webster, downtown – www.warehousebar.net). If you're looking for the most patriotic eating establishment imaginable (that also serves outstanding food and drinks), the Warehouse is your kind of place. Most of the customers are police officers or active/retired/reserve military (or both), so our members will feel right at home. Tell them you're a member of *Skyhawk* Association and look for the SA clock on the wall.

At the February meeting, the board realized that we're long overdue in recognizing the sustained performance of Margaret Bone and Jack Woodul. Margaret engineered the birth of the "modern" *Skyhawk* Journal in the summer of 2004, and Jack, writing as "Youthly Puresome" has continuously contributed our most popular feature since that date.

The design and layout for *The A-4Ever*, developed by and implemented each issue by Margaret, has garnered universal praise and significantly enhanced the reputation of *Skyhawk* Association. Her efforts to produce a professional journal have contributed significantly to an increase in the membership of *Skyhawk* Association over the last four years.

The Journal's Youthly Puresome feature has been, without question, the most popular edition to the *Skyhawk* journal. Famous throughout the Navy for his writing and unique style, Youthly Puresome's stories are consistently the first read by members, who are unanimous in their praise for his efforts. The staff of *The A-4Ever* takes great pleasure in naming Jack Woodul our first "Distinguished Author."

Reno – September 11, 2009

Finally, make your plans to attend the annual meeting on September 11, 2009, in Reno. Buick will bring us a distinguished program as we conduct the first annual "Whizzer" White Memorial *Skyhawk* Luncheon. We're making plans to have Whizzer's lovely wife Becky on hand to launch the luncheon series with great aplomb. Don't miss it. Until then,

A-4s Forever. Raven



IN MEMORY OF
M. DAVIS "WHIZZER" WHITE, D.D.S
(1939-2007)
FOUNDER OF THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Spring 2009 •



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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 sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

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Cover: Israeli A-4N prepares for takeoff at sunset. (Photo via ATSI)

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION BOARD MEETING SUMMARY: FEB 2009

The Board of Directors met on February 7, 2009, in the CPO Lounge, USS *Hornet*, Alameda, CA. The meeting was called to order at 0920. Directors present were: Cooney (director and secretary), Eberhardt (director and VP – USN), Egen, Dollarhide, Frommelt, and Langworthy, constituting a quorum. Officer present was Hickerson (president). Directors and officers absent were Bloore, Jobin (director and VP – USMC), Powell, Weber, Williams (director and treasurer), and Turpen. Member Gil Borgardt was in attendance.

Communications and Reports

Secretary Cooney presented the membership report. As of January 2009, Association membership was approximately 835, a level just slightly below last year. Member attrition for 2008 was essentially unchanged since the previous year at approximately 20%.

Treasurer Williams could not make the meeting, but a complete financial report was sent. He reported that *Skyhawk* Association budget execution for 2008 was very close to planned, with a net gain of \$348.74 posted for the year after \$27,500 in expenditures. Planned revenue from membership dues was essentially right on

target, and association net assets on 12/31/2008 were \$45,910.

New Assistant Webmaster, Gene Atwell, presented the webmaster's report in the absence of David Weber. Gene recently volunteered to assist David Weber in maintenance of the SA website, and he reported that the site is getting back to normal after the association was forced to move to a new host. Now that David has help in maintaining the site, the web team is beginning to plan changes needed to modernize the site as we move forward. The team has analyzed site usage and is ready to recommend changes to features which are not utilized. The membership will see more about this in upcoming issues of the Journal.

Hickerson reported that *The A-4Ever* Journal remains popular and that sufficient material is available to publish a 24-page journal quarterly, rather than 3 times per year as currently programmed. Plans will be developed to combine the journal and website programs to create a more advanced electronic communications effort. A goal for 2009/2010 will be to augment the printed Journal (3X/year) with one electronic publication, as well as to provide expanded content on the website keyed to each printed Journal.

Old Business

Conducting old business, the board:

- directed Bear Langworthy to auction off a brand-new A-4 tailhook on EBay;
- discussed the design and purchase of *Skyhawk* Association shirts;
- approved the purchase of a banner to be used at the annual luncheon, which will be named in honor of SA founder Davis "Whizzer" White;
- approved the continuation of the presentation of a "Best *Skyhawk*" award at the International Plastic Modelers' Society national convention, to be held this year in Columbus, OH (directors Cooney and Turpen will attend)

New Business

Conducting new business, the board:

- discussed the feasibility of terminating the option for members to call an 800 number to pay their dues by credit card. This service is considerably more expensive than other means of paying dues; however, a substantial number of members use this method to pay their dues. Accordingly, the board will take steps to make sure all members are informed before the service is discontinued;



Where do we get such men? Here is your SA Board and assorted volunteers about to be hard at work in the bowels of USS *Hornet* in the CPO Lounge, and once again, Bear has converted his fanny pack into a tummy pack. (R-L) Hickerson, Cooney, Egen, Frommelt, Gil Borgardt, Gabbard, Eberhardt, Dollarhide, Gene Atwell and Bear Langworthy.



Hey, they're all still on their feet, preparing for yet another hard day of SA Board meetings at the Oakland Marriott. Is it any wonder we're such a well-organized group, with all these meetings? (L-R) Steve Richmond, Gene Atwell, Bear Langworthy not girded with his fanny pack, Terry Cooney, Bob Hickerson, Dave Dollarhide, John Gabbard, and Buick Eberhardt.



- discussed the sale of ads and sponsorships for both the Journal and website;
- discussed potential uses of YouTube to generate interest in the association;
- approved a donation of \$500 to the Hornet Foundation;
- approved a 2009 contract for services with Editor Margaret Bone;
- approved recognition of meritorious service by Margaret Bone for her work in editing and producing *The A-4Ever* since 2004, and by Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul for his outstanding contribution of stories to each issue;
- discussed committee assignments for 2009, appointing Egen to the

Financial Committee; Eberhardt (chair), Dollarhide, Frommelt and Turpen to the Membership Committee; and Gene Atwell as Assistant Webmaster and member of the Historical Committee;

- discussed development of a succession plan for directors and officers (Hickerson lead)

Future Meetings

The annual meeting for 2009 will be held in Reno, NV, September 11, 2009, in conjunction with Tailhook 2009. The board meeting will convene at 0830, followed by the annual meeting of members/luncheon at 11:30 a.m. The board appointed Mark Williams and Jack Woodul to provide pre-event coordi-

nation with the hotel and Tailhook Association, as well as coordination with the *Intruder* Association to arrange for the Attack Hospitality Suite; Mike Eberhardt and Mark Williams to coordinate the luncheon with the hotel (Eberhardt to develop options for the luncheon program); and Terry Cooney to coordinate booth operations.

The board briefly discussed the possibility of having a board meeting in conjunction with the Marine Corps Aviation Association Symposium in the spring of 2010 and noted that the 100th anniversary of Naval Aviation will take place in 2011.

The meeting was adjourned at 12 p.m.



Permission to come aboard: Skyhawk Board members lining up: (L-R) Egen, Gabbard, Atwell, Dollarhide, Eberhardt and Frommelt, showing some fancy footwork.



Mike "Buick" Eberhardt discusses the TA-4 with a Hornet crewmember while Colleen Langworthy and Pat Gabbard discuss the whereabouts of their husbands and what they're going to do about it. Buick delivered this aircraft to the Hornet while still on active duty.

SCHEDULING STUFF

- Reunions & Requests •



PLAN AHEAD

- ★ **VMA-311 Reunion:** March 6, 2009. Las Vegas, NV. Contact Brett "Clam" Laser, brettnlena2@aol.com.
- ★ **Central Texas Gathering of Skyhawks:** Saturday, 28 March, at 10:30 a.m., Fredericksburg, in the Texas Hill Country. Contact Bob Hickerson at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or Bear Langworthy at flybear@peoplepc.com.
- ★ **Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting and Luncheon:** September 11, 2009, 1130 a.m., Tailhook Symposium, Reno, NV.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •



sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Share the wisdom:
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Please note email address!

To the Editor

I'd like to share a most memorable story about the Blue Angels. It was fall of 1976, and I was working as a line boy at Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland, Ohio. Aspiring to be a future "aviator," you can imagine the thrill when Blue Angel TA-4J Number 7 came taxiing on to our ramp one very, very hot day. I can't remember the names of the crew, but they apparently were the "advance team" preparing for the Cleveland National Airshow over the upcoming Labor Day weekend. Now at the time, I thought Blue Angels were "gods." To actually meet two in person for the first time and actually have them shake my hand was most humbling. I remember the creases in their flight suits being so sharp, I swear they whistled when they walked.

Anyway, they finished their business and were preparing to depart. The pilot asked me for a ride to the departure end of runway 6 Left. *What? A Blue Angel asking me for a ride!* I called Operations for permission and they approved a "runway check." As I radioed the tower for instructions, this "god" sitting next to me was making small talk, and was actually treating me like I was the most important person to him at that moment. He asked me how long 6 Left was (as if he didn't know), and I immediately replied, "6220 feet, sir." He asked if I was a pilot, and I told him I had soloed and had a meager 18 hours logged towards my private license. He seemed very proud of that fact and encouraged me to think about Naval aviation (recruiting, to the nth degree!). Then he asked if I knew what "density altitude" was, and I told him that I sure did. He then asked me if it was always "this hot" in Cleveland during the fall. I told him that this particular day was the hottest we had seen practically all year, and he just shook his head with a very concerned look on his face.

At the end of the runway, he got out of the car and walked through the grass at the end for a couple of hundred yards. As he walked, he was kicking up rocks

and just generally "toeing around" in the weeds. He took note of the "end of runway" lights, looked down the runway, and looked way out into the distance down the departure end. He then asked what the height of "them smokestacks over there" was. Those "stacks" were positioned off the end of runway 6 Right at about 3/4 of a mile and were always a concern for pilots making approaches to runways 24. I told him they were about 300 feet high. He nodded and said, "All righty, let's go back."

Now, I was pretty astute for a young whipper-snapper, and I realized he was thinking maybe he didn't have enough room to get that little A-4 into the air. They had ordered the aircraft "topped off," drop tanks and all, plus they had a "huffer" on the center line rack. The field elevation at Lakefront is 580 feet, give or take. The density altitude that day might as well have been 6000 feet! It was hot and very humid.

After giving me a quick checkout on running and stowing their "huffer," the crew mounted up and taxied out. Of course, I had by then alerted the whole airport what had just taken place, and we all knew that we were in for a little show--hopefully not a disaster. They got to the end of the runway and wound that little *Scooter* up for what seemed a long time.

She was definitely smoking in true A-4 fashion when he released the brakes and started a slow, laborious, excruciatingly slow take-off roll. He burned off about 3000 feet, and someone said "My God, he's gonna have to abort!" At that point, I swear, the flaps came down a bit and he kept going! We were all painfully thinking "Oh S####!" when he reached the end of the runway and still didn't appear to be airborne.

Then all of a sudden, there's a big cloud of dust, and we thought that's it--he crashed! And then, by some miracle, this little A-4 appears from behind that cloud of dust and he's just a 'smokin' out at about 50 feet high and climbing! "Oh-my-gosh," we all cried out--"He friggin' made it!" The tower called him

and asked his intentions. He said in that typical "Chuck Yeagerly" cool voice, "How about a fly-by?" *Ohhh, boy! Now we're gonna get a high speed fly-by.* Well, of course, in due time he comes smoking back into the pattern and does the prettiest low pass you'd ever wanna see. Upon pulling out, the tower tells him to contact Cleveland Departure. He "rogered" back, and then announced for the whole world to hear, "And tell Lee I'll see him in a couple of weeks." Well, I was so proud that I actually cried. I had helped a Blue Angel. He knew that I knew, and just for a moment, I was one of them.

I never made into the Navy. My eyesight just wasn't up to snuff, so I pursued a career in corporate aviation. I was fortunate enough to restore an old T-28C. My partner and I banged around in her for about 600 hours and did the air show thing as well. I eventually became the vice president of an FBO at Lakefront and was proud to work with the Blues every time they came to town. But I will never forget my time as a snot-nosed, little fledgling aviator, when I helped those "gods" of Naval aviation. Most humbly yours,
Lee "Splat" Ainsworth
Wadsworth Ohio
[aeronaut6232@aol.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

I can shed some light on the Black-sheep 4 photo inside the back cover (*The A-4Ever, Fall 2008*).

I was the squadron executive officer at the time (late 1976) and was flying lead in the photo. The plan was for Harry (Gann) to ride in the back of a H&MS T-bird and shoot us above Catalina Island for a picture to be used as cover for the McDonald/Douglas Stockholders Report.

As you can see, cloud cover prevented sight of Catalina, but that's where we were. McDonald/Douglas gave me several copies of the picture including one, 2 ft x 3 ft. which is hanging in my office today.

Dennis Fitzgerald was CO at the time. I remember he raised hell when he

saw the picture and realized that all the birds were not painted exactly the same.

I am sorry that I am not sure of the other pilots, but I believe they included Al Lamb and Tom White. Harvey Crouch, Col., USMC (Ret.) [HCROUCH1@Stx.rr.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

I got my Fall issue, very good as usual. Page 21 photo of VMA-214 information, see Publication of Naval Fighter No. 55 by Steve Ginter (2002). Shows same photo and photo info says taken either at El Toro or on deployment (I would guess Iwakuni in May 1977. Nose numbers do not correspond to photo; however, a second deployment was made in December of 1980 with the nose numbers as shown. Maybe the publisher might know.

Other photos show 214's aircraft with single or double digits. In 1973 when they got the A-4Ms, nose numbers were in the 400 series, so there is some confusion. Does not indicate when they switched.

Well, something else to ponder.

Semper Fi,
Jake Jacoppo
[QR00@aol.com]

P.S. Pass on best wishes to Bill Egen (an old CO).

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

This note is in reference to the picture of the VA-55 pilots checking out a *Skyhawk*. I was a member of VA-55 starting in early 1958 until June 1960. When I was assigned to VA-55 in early 1958, the squadron had FJ4-B aircraft, and we were home based at NAS Miramar and a part of Carrier Air Group 5. Sometime in the later part of 1958, VA-55 made a cruise to the Far East onboard the USS *Bennington* with the FJ4-B aircraft.

When VA-55 returned from the Far East, the squadron transitioned to A4D-2 aircraft. It was happy days when we received the *Skyhawks*. Availability went from 25% with the FJ4-Bs to 95% with the *Skyhawks*.

Some time in early 1960, VA-55 made its next cruise to the Far East on board the USS *Ticonderoga*. I do not remember the name of our skipper on this cruise, but Commander Voss, the Blue Angel, was the C.O. of CAG-5. I think

VA-55 was the first squadron to make a cruise to the Far East with *Skyhawks*.

As you get older, you get wiser. I am sorry to say that for a 17-21 year old kiddy-cruiser, I did not understand how good I had it while serving in the Navy. I want to say that the Navy probably did not make a man out of me, but the Navy was the springboard to a much better person.

Hardly a day goes by that an experience in the Navy and VA-55 doesn't pop into my mind.

I enjoy reading the *Skyhawk* Association Journal. It was an honor to serve in the Navy and be a member of VA-55. Sincerely,
Ron Puckett
[rpuck9973@bellsouth.net]

◆ ◆ ◆

Hello Bob,

I just recently joined the *Skyhawk* Association with an alternate goal in mind. I spent 8 years, June 1954-June 1962 in reserve squadron VF-879, later changed to VA-879. We originally operated out of NAS Oakland with Korean War left over F4U *Corsairs* and then F2H *Banshees*. We moved to NAS Alameda with the A-4.

The goal I referenced was to locate any group that has been organized from VF-879 or VA-879 members. Chances are slim, as we are all getting old.

Any help or direction will be appreciated.

Thank you,
David Kibbe
[Easyfour1@sbcglobal.net]

(Ed. Note: Anyone out there from -879?)

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Bob, I was looking at the A-4 on a pedestal at the North Island Naval Air Station which is a C model. Shouldn't the star be under the cockpit? I didn't know if there are any Cs with the star aft. Also, I can't tell when my membership comes up for renewal. It doesn't say on the mailing label and I sure don't want to be late. I will try to make some of these meetings.

Thanks,
"Fat" Tom Lannom, ex VA-12 Clincher.
[tom.lannom@delong-sportswear.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

To the Editor:

Page 20 (*The A-4Ever* -Fall 2008) shows a holdback and wonders why they were painted.

In fact, all holdbacks were painted – each paint scheme identified the aircraft for which it was to be used.

Dutch Rauch
[svwindmills@erols.com]

◆ ◆ ◆

Dear Sir or Madam,

I had the honor of doing the *Skyhawk* "Chu Lai" diorama for The National Museum of the Marine Corp, showcasing two *Skyhawks* and the SATS airfield (including the AM-2 matting, M-21 arresting gear, and JATO unit.) I would like to know if I could be added to your mailing list. Thank you for your attention.

Ken Wilson
High Springs, FL
[kcdoubleu@hotmail.com]

p.s. I have photos of the display prior to its installation if anyone is interested.

(Ed. note: see images of Ken's amazing models.)



continued...

LETTERS

Continued...

Send your letters to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org
Please note email address!



To the Editor:

My name is Jim Rothwell. A few years ago, I found your website while checking out Vietnam era A-4 squadrons to see if anyone might remember my father (Captain Jack D. Rothwell) who was a Marine aviator that died while on maneuvers in the Philippines. He had been stationed in Da Nang for one year and was sent to Cubi Point for some refresher training prior to returning to Vietnam to lead a squadron. He had been a flight instructor in Meridian, Ms. Senator John McCain was even a fellow instructor there at the same time.

Anyway, I sent the request to someone in your contact list to see if anyone would respond. This was in October, 2005. Three months passed with no response and I had forgotten about the inquiry. On Christmas Eve of that year, not one, but three men replied to my email with letters detailing their knowledge and experiences with my father. You can only imagine what an incredible Christmas gift this was. The three men from your association told me of a man that they said was an excellent Marine and mentor. One even said they had a nickname for him that was Captain "Black Jack" Rothwell. He went on to say that is was a term of respect.

The reason this is so late in coming is because one of you (whom I really hope does not mind my revealing his anonymity) went so far above and beyond the call of duty, I felt all of you would be proud to know what he has done for our family.

His name is Tom Kane, and he was a trainee under my father in Meridian. He went on to say in his initial letter to me that he had heard of my father's crash and was saddened at the loss. He also said that he felt my father was largely responsible for his surviving his tour in Vietnam because of the training he received from him.

We became "email friends" and communicated semi-regularly. Tom found out that my father had been denied inclusion on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. and made it a personal mission of his to see if he

could correct that for our family. Tom is a very successful businessman today and is on several boards of directors (including the new Marine Corps Museum of History) and very active with the Marine Corps.

Tom has spent the last three years working to get my father's name on the wall. Only last month, we finally got an answer from the Marine Corps and unfortunately, it was not in our favor. It went to the highest levels of the Corps and the letter of explanation was very detailed.

There are very specific conditions that must be met in order to be considered to be on the memorial and the main reason was that death must have occurred while either to or from a combat zone in-country. Since my father died while training in the Philippines and not en route to or from a battle zone in Vietnam, he could not be included. LtGen Coleman went on to say that this in NO WAY diminishes the sacrifice my father made for our country and that there were other options to honor those who gave their lives prematurely while in service in Vietnam.

I want every one of your members to know what Tom Kane did for us and to honor each and every one of you as well. We are SO PROUD of our father and of the United States Marine Corps. We can finally close this chapter on what has been a four-decade quest for resolution.

During the investigation, Tom found out that we never received a couple of medals due my father (the Purple Heart and Vietnam Service Medals) and has requested the Marine Corps send them to him. He has further told my mother that he would be honored to present them to our family in the near future. I will finally get the chance to meet Tom face-to-face and shake his hand.

I get the impression that this is something each one of you would do for a fellow Marine, and it amazes me. You have all earned the title of "The Few, The Proud, The Marines." I now fully

understand the motto of *Semper Fidelis*.

May you all enjoy the upcoming holidays with family and friends, and know that the Rothwell family includes all of you in our prayers.

Utmost respect,
James Rothwell and family
[jdrothwell@embarqmail.com]

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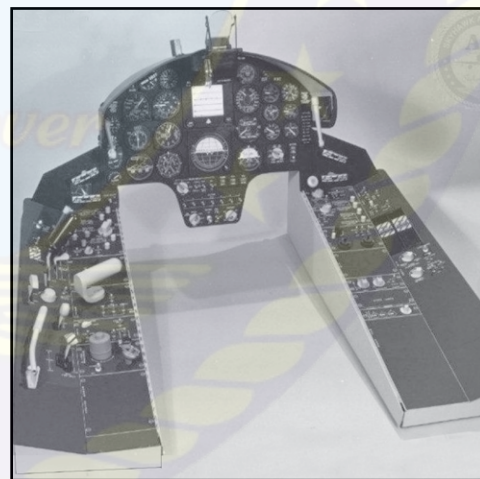
Hello,

Friends of the Douglas A-4 *Skyhawk*:

I know I'm not at the correct address, but maybe you can help me. I was a modeler, but now changed to building simulators. All instruments work properly as in reality. Now I plan to make a 1:1 copy of the cockpit section of the A-4M. I take the *Skyhawk* because it's tiny and will fit into my hobby room. I'm now searching for an instrument panel in which I can insert a second VOR. My simulator program has no TACAN, only VORs. So, I found now the mock-up of the Douglas ES 172761 A-4D 910 5-17-58 and this would suit very well. My question: has there been a *Skyhawk* equipped with the mock-up-instrument panel and flying with it or not? I think it looks great.

I wish you nice work in your hobby shops for the next season in 2009. And always happy landings.

With greetings from Germany, Baltic Sea,
Klaus Voigt
[Ostseefloh@freenet.de]



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READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

KEROSENE COWBOYS:

Manning the Spare

By Randy Arrington.

iUniverse, Inc. 447 pages.

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across Naval Reserve Air

Since **Kerosene Cowboys** is destined to be made into a movie and is chock full of references to movie stars and producers, it is fitting to make reference to a 1984 movie, *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension*. For those lucky enough to have missed this flick, the lead character--Buckaroo himself--is a Renaissance man, top neurosurgeon, particle physicist, race car driver, rock star and comic book hero, and last hope of the human race. This glosses over his other talents; but a cadre of experts in various scientific fields are drawn to him. They form the hard rocking bar band, the *Hong Kong Cavaliers*, for gigs in between saving the universe as they know it.

Well, Ol' Buckaroo is a piker, compared with the lead character of **Kerosene Cowboys**, Brad "Teen Angel" Ackerman. While the book is ostensibly about Reserve Attack Squadron 204 getting called up to replace an A-7E active duty squadron on CVN-65, the *Enterprise*, for a last-ever A-7 cruise, the book is really a love affair with the arrogant yet humble, six-foot two-inch, baby-faced Teen Angel. Brad is a *summa cum laude* graduate of Stanford with an IQ of 188—real Mensa material, golfer extraordinaire, with a "fabulous civilian job in Hollywood flying for the motion picture studios." He is buds with Stephen Spielberg, George Roy Hill, and a host of actors and actresses. As a member of the motion picture industry in Hollywood, Teen Angel liked to keep up with the latest trend, like untied tennis shoes. He also "had a women in every airport, all five to seven years younger than him." They were "his personal love garden, and he watered them as often as possible." We are told that Teen Angel had "suddenly pouting shoulders," and that "he took a final glance at his baby face in

the de-fogged mirror and winked at his smiling reflection, as if to flirt with himself." Also, "he was looking oh so cool that morning and he knew it." *Real good.*

But we also learn that "Ackerman's smiles were always warm and sincere, therefore they were usually appreciated by the recipient." And "Ackerman's resonant baritone voice always had a calming effect on anybody who heard it," and that "effective, persuasive communication was Brad's God-given talent." A commander in his squadron "was curious to know where all Brad's charm, confidence, and charisma emanated from." Enough of that.

There is some good flying stuff involving low levels, ACM, dropping snake-eyes on a spar; and out at Fallon, there is some CARQUAL activity, which is fine except the night work deserves only one comment. There is an excellent summary of the HOOK '91 debacle and how most Navy brass scrambled for the nearest camouflaged location. The author manages to work in lots of accurate attitude and stock aviator sayings. This reviewer spent ten years in a Reserve Fighter Squadron up the road at NAS Dallas in VF-201 participating in CVWR-20, so the disdain between the various flying communities and sociable insults at the bar ring true. This author also spent eight years having New Orleans as an airline base. Author Arrington knows New Orleans well-- his description of the squadron crawfish boil would make a non-believer hungry. His description of the N'Awlins drawl as "a combination of French, Southern, and New York all rolled into one annoying dialect" is bang on. And Naval aviators universally view flight surgeons as the enemy.

This reviewer does not agree with the author's contention that "first and second class petty officers were the backbone of the Navy," though he does allow that "the A-7 community did have a cadre of outstanding enlisted men that wore khakis as well." While not to diminish the important role of first and second class petty officers, this reviewer is absolutely convinced that the chief petty officers are the backbone of the Navy. In fact, the principle enlisted

men emphasized in the book were both chief petty officers.

The author must have been in another Navy than this reviewer was, when it comes to lieutenants overtly being able to pimp commanders. Irreverence is one thing, but bulldozing a supposed CDR into a urinal from behind is pushing it. Teen Angel is an unmerciful wise-ass with senior officers. He has "a characteristically sarcastic voice." The operative words throughout the book are "sarcasm," "smirk," "sneer," "caustic" and "cynical." This reviewer will admit being unable to keep his big mouth shut with authority figures of elevated rank several times with generally disastrous results, but most junior officers, Reservista or no, understand that past a certain boundary, commanders can kill you until you are dead.

I also have a quibble with the editors of this book, who allowed the convention of omitting lots of commas, particularly in conversations. This reviewer found the practice very distracting and quickly grew tired of inking in the missing punctuation. This reviewer will not quibble with several operational errors.

This book was written for Hollywood; the author was successful in getting it published and reputedly, it will be made into a movie. I congratulate him on both points and wish him well. But the emphasis on Hollywood values, name dropping, and fashion accessories ruin the book for this reviewer, who has never read a book where the author lavishes so many superlatives on his main character. And the final bar scene, where our hero picks up the microphone and serenades the Harvard-trained lawyer superwoman, who will end Teen Angel's interior pain, is straight out of the movie "High Anxiety," with Mel Brooks doing his best lounge lizard crooning to a worshipful Madeline Kahn. Only the author is serious.

Finally, Mr. Arrington, the A-4 is the *Skyhawk*, not *Sky Hawk*. And yes, Cannon Air Force Base "is a dump out in the middle of Nowhere, New Mexico." *Real good.* Just don't ask the Portales Gunslinger to write a review of your book.

--so sez Puresome



STOLEN SKYHAWK!

• A Lance Corporal Launches in 1986 •

By Bill Graham



**“We’ve lost a Black Sheep;
say again, we’ve lost a Black Sheep!”**

At 0200 on a warm, quiet, nearly full-moon night, those words crackled across the air waves at MCAS El Toro.

I was a military policeman for H&HS (Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron) and assigned as Corporal of the Guard for Flight Line Security on 03 July 1986, working the 1800-0600 shift. My post was situated in the old tower on the west side of the airfield. Corporal of the Guard was an overseer position and field supervisor for up to 14 military police acting as flight line sentries for all of the squadrons on the base.

Probably because it was the beginning of a holiday weekend, we were short-handed that night and had only half the number of sentries we were supposed to have for a normal shift. This meant that Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG-13), which would normally have four sentries, was covered by only one. Additionally, we had no roving relief sentry to provide breaks for the sentries working the flight line. This was not SOP, and as it turned out, completely inadequate for the mission at hand.

So, with 19-year old PFC Brenda Mueller as the sole military police sentry assigned to the entire MAG-13 area, our unit went to work for what should have been a quiet evening. The flight line was closed, runway lights were turned off and no flight ops were scheduled for any of the squadrons on the base for the entire shift.

At approximately 0130 hours, I saw a flight line “follow me” maintenance truck enter the airfield from an access point near my post. The driver utilized taxiway Echo as the vehicle traversed southeast across the taxiways and runways from the main side of the base toward the MAG squadrons on the opposite side of the airfield. It was commonplace for these flight line

vehicles to be out and about at all times of the day and night, with or without flight ops in progress. The MAG crews were authorized to use these vehicles and would oftentimes drive across the airfield when it was closed, as a shortcut to go to main side for chow or to the barracks. I noted the vehicle and visually confirmed it was authorized to be on the airfield.

A few minutes later, PFC Mueller radioed me asking for the relief sentry so she could use the head. I reminded her we had no relief that night, so she

“I asked PFC Mueller her range from the Skyhawk and she replied, “300 yards and pulling away.” I told her to stand down. Her distance was too great, and it was likely that the aircraft had live ordinance. We were talking a head shot through the canopy of a moving aircraft at extreme range in the dark.”

was cleared to leave her post. PFC Mueller radioed me again approximately 10 minutes later. I chuckled at the background noise which gave away that she was calling me while still using the head. “Are there any flight ops scheduled tonight?” she asked. I was irritated by this stupid question because my earlier briefing had informed all the sentries that the entire field, which had been dark and quiet all night, was closed. “No squadrons are testing or flying tonight,” I indignantly informed her. After a brief pause she radioed back with a tremble in her voice, “I think I hear a turbine starting up...”

“You’d better find which aircraft that is and shut them down. Nobody is supposed to be out tonight. My ops sheet is clean,” I responded. “Affirmative, Corporal,” she breathlessly replied, and I could tell she was running. I got on the landline with my Watch Commander, Sgt. Martinez at his post in the Provost

Marshall’s Office adjacent to the main gate. He had been monitoring our radio traffic and quickly confirmed that his flight ops sheet was clean as well. No aircraft activity was scheduled.

As I was processing the fact that none of this made any sense, PFC Mueller requested, “Do I have permission to fire?”

PFC Mueller interrupted my call with a near hysterical transmission, “He’s taxiing out. He took a *Skyhawk!*” I was in total disbelief. Obviously there was a mistake. I was certain there was a paper work foul-up and someone forgot to notify us that some mechanic was out testing the brakes or something. As I was processing the fact that none of this made any sense, PFC Mueller requested, “Do I have permission to fire?”

MP flight line sentries of the day were armed with M-16s and Colt .45s, along with a full compliment of ammu-

nition for both. The flight line was designated a “Deadly Force Authorized” zone. This was an unauthorized movement of an A-4M *Skyhawk* and deadly force was authorized by the standing orders.

I asked PFC Mueller her range from the *Skyhawk* and she replied, “300 yards and pulling away.” I told her to stand down. Her distance was too great, and it was likely that the aircraft had live ordinance. We were talking a head shot through the canopy of a moving aircraft at extreme range in the dark. Not likely. In disbelief, I still held onto the hope that this was just a mistake. It had to be.

Knowing PFC Mueller was at MAG-13 and the *Skyhawk* belonged to Marine Attack Squadron-214 (VMA-214), I focused my night vision goggles in that direction across the airfield. I heard it before I could see it, and then the port-side navigation light of the *Skyhawk* came into view. I had a sinking feeling

in the pit of my stomach as the pilot lined up on runway 34R and spooled up the engine despite the pitch black airfield.

“Tell me I didn’t just hear an aircraft take off.”

He was airborne within seconds, and as I followed his near vertical departure with my night vision goggles, I caught myself exclaiming “Oh, my God.” I transmitted on the radio to no one in particular, “We’ve lost a Black Sheep; say again, we’ve lost a Black Sheep!” There was dead silence on the radio, but the landline soon began ringing. Sgt. Martinez calmly inquired, “Tell me I didn’t just hear an aircraft take off.”

I could still see the glow of the Pratt & Whitney engine’s exhaust as I uttered in disbelief, “Someone just stole a *Skyhawk*.” “Let’s start notifications,” Sgt. Martinez replied. I notified the Officer of the Day while Sgt. Martinez contacted the commanding officer of VMA-214. Everyone confirmed this was an unauthorized flight, and the decision was made to scramble two F/A-18s to go up after it.

We had been trying to locate someone who had access to the main control tower to turn on the runway lights for both the F/A-18s that were being scrambled and hopefully for the return of the *Skyhawk*. Approximately 40 minutes later the now-eerie silence was broken by the sound of a turbojet aircraft returning. A sense of relief washed over me as I desperately scanned the skies for my *Skyhawk*. I was Corporal of the Guard, this was my flight line and that was my aircraft. I was responsible for its theft.

Before we could get the airfield lights activated, the A-4M roared over the darkened runways at about 400 feet and approximately 250 knots. At mid-field, the nose rotated upward and the throttle was advanced as the *Skyhawk* climbed hundreds of feet in a matter of seconds. Then dead silence. About two minutes later, the plane was back, this time at normal approach speed and altitude. It appeared that the pilot was attempting to line up with the approach end of runway 34L, but in the darkness was unable to see the runway. He came within 50 feet of the ground on that approach, maneuvered from side to side

and suddenly pitched up at full power, climbing again straight up into the night sky.

As I watched my own private air show through the night vision goggles, I prayed that we would get the runway lights on before that guy killed himself. The pilot repeated the same approach and full power vertical departure three more times in identical fashion. Then as if night became day, all runway and taxiway lights came on at once with full intensity. The pilot returned for his fifth or sixth pass and touched down on runway 34L.

“Open the canopy and step out of the aircraft with your hands up,” played out over the PA system.

As he coasted down the runway, two military police cars followed in hot pursuit with emergency lights flashing and sirens wailing. That was the oddest thing I had ever seen, police cars attempting to pull over a jet. The *Skyhawk* came to a stop near the middle of the 10,000 foot runway and powered down. The military police who had been in pursuit, conducted a felony car/plane stop with guns drawn. I recall talking to the MPs afterwards, and they were somewhat flabbergasted at how to conduct a felony stop on a jet. Something like, “Open the canopy and step out of the aircraft with your hands up,” played out over the PA system.

The pilot was completely cooperative, sober and talkative as he was taken into custody. He was transported to the base dispensary for a pre-booking exam

and alcohol/drug screen. He was clean - no drugs or alcohol in his system. While at the dispensary, we learned the pilot was an active duty lance corporal assigned to the base. He was asked, “Do you realize what you have done and how much trouble you are in?” His response was, “Yes I do...and I would do it again in a heartbeat.” After being interviewed by CID, he was transported and booked into the Camp Pendleton brig.

He said, “I just had to fly a jet one time.”

We had no idea how interesting the back story on this mechanic/pilot would be. When Howard A. Foote, Jr. was a kid, he decided he wanted to be a fighter pilot. He began flying at the age of 15, and by the time he enlisted in the Marines in 1984, he had broken several world glider records. (*Ed. note: we attempted to access junior soaring records of that period, but were unable to do so.*) At the time of the incident, Foote was a 21-year old lance corporal and an A-6E *Intruder* mechanic and plane captain stationed at MCAS El Toro. He had hopes of being accepted into the Marine Corps Enlisted Commissioning Program with the ultimate goal of being accepted into flight school.

Foote had met the then-El Toro Base Commander, Brigadier General William “Art” Bloomer in the summer of 1985 at Tehachapi, a Mojave Desert gliderport where Foote stored his glider and General Bloomer

continued...



Black Sheep flightline.

STOLEN SKYHAWK

Continued...

was a glider instructor. The two became friends, and when the general learned that Foote was a Marine stationed at El Toro with aspirations of becoming a Marine pilot, he arranged for Foote to receive training in the base flight simulators. Subsequently, LCpl Foote acquired between 50-60 hours of training in the A-4 simulator. At Foote's court marshal, Capt. Robert Deloach, one of the A-4 sim instructors, stated that Foote's flight training experience and competence in the simulator showed that he had the skills necessary to fly the A-4.

In February 1986, Foote attempted to break the world altitude record in a glider. He attained an altitude of 42,500 feet, but had no pressure suit. (*Ed. note: interestingly, the current world record for maximum altitude attained in a single-place glider, 49,009 ft., was set that very month, February 1986, by another Californian.*) In the attempt, Foote suffered an aerial embolism, similar to the "bends" suffered by divers, and as a result was subsequently advised by flight surgeons that this medical condition had disqualified him for military flight school. He had hoped to obtain a medical waiver for flight school with General Bloomer's assistance, but that never happened. General Bloomer retired on 30 June 1986, four days before Foote stole the *Skyhawk*.

When interviewed after the incident, Foote stated that on the evening of 3 July, 1986, he had just finished mid-terms at the college he was attending in San Bernardino. As he was driving back to the base at El Toro, he felt that all of his work was for nothing. General Bloomer had retired, and without a waiver, he would be medically disqualified for acceptance to military flight school. He went to bed and slept until around midnight. He was lying in bed and at the spur-of-the-moment decided, "That's it, I'm going to do it." He said, "I just had to fly a jet one time. I knew that if I didn't do it now, I'd never get to."

Being a mechanic on the base he knew where to find the keys to the flight-line trucks, and he also knew he

flyable aircraft. He said that the aileron rigging on the plane was out of alignment, and that the nose wheel steering mechanism was not working properly. Foote later disagreed with that, saying that they didn't find the aileron problem until after he flew the aircraft. According to him, at the time it was fully fueled and scheduled for a flight the same day.

The official claims of the base spokesman to the media were that this *Skyhawk* was unarmed. I was informed after the incident that it had been loaded with two Mk. 82-500 lb bombs and a full load of 20mm ammunition. From a public relations standpoint, disclosing that this kid stole and flew around a fully loaded jet might have caused some problems for the Marines. It was also

"When he got back to the base, he was still fat with fuel and didn't want to risk landing overweight. He decided to fly a few carrier landing approaches to burn off fuel instead of dumping it. That was the private air show he had provided me."

wouldn't be challenged driving that vehicle on the flight line. So he donned a flight suit, retrieved the keys and stole a flight-line truck. He then drove it to where the Black Sheep A-4Ms were parked perfectly aligned on the tarmac. He said that he pre-flighted three planes before he chose the one he wanted. According to the squadron maintenance officer, Major Frank Kennedy, the *Skyhawk* which Foote stole had been grounded for a maintenance gripe and was not a

speculated that Foote's aerobatics with the bomb-laden jet overstressed it, causing the aileron problem and damaging some panels.

(*Ed. note: it seems highly unlikely that the squadron would have left an aircraft loaded with H.E. bombs and ammunition on the flight line over a long holiday weekend, but it's possible that two 500# inert bombs were loaded.*)

Foote stated that, "As soon as I pushed the throttle to go down the runway, my head snapped back against the ejection seat and I was happy. It was natural. That was my home." After he took off from the base, he flew the standard departure route and headed out over the ocean toward San Clemente Island which was a restricted warning area. He said he did this to avoid any civilian aircraft since he wasn't on radar. About 35 minutes into the flight, he said the generator that powers the lighting and nav systems shut down. He couldn't get it reset so he switched to a backup and decided to head back to the base. When he got back to the base, he was still fat with fuel and didn't want to risk landing overweight. He decided to fly a few carrier landing approaches to burn off fuel instead of dumping it. That was the private air show he had provided me.



MCAS El Toro, CA

Foote was held at Camp Pendleton for nearly 4 ½ months pending a general courts-martial. He was charged with wrongful appropriation of a government aircraft and maintenance truck; willful damage to government property for damaging the *Skyhawk*; disobeying regulations; and unlawfully entering a base military shop. The prosecution had contemplated charging him with Hazing a Vessel, by flying without proper training or approval and recklessly disregarding the aircraft's mechanical condition. Under a centuries' old maritime law, conviction on that charge could technically have resulted in the death penalty! His attorney argued that an aircraft was not a vessel for the purposes of that regulation.

The new MCAS El Toro Base Commander, Brigadier General D.E.P. Miller eventually dismissed the Hazing a Vessel charge. LCpl Foote's trial on the remaining charges, which carried a maximum sentence of Dishonorable Discharge, forfeiture of all pay, reduction to Private, and 9 years confinement at hard labor, was set for 29 September, 1986. During his time in the Camp Pendleton brig, he was initially placed in "close custody," a procedure where prisoners accused of a capital offense were shackled when outside of their cell.

I recall there being a tremendous public outcry in favor of leniency for Foote in the editorial section of the area newspapers. The public opinion supported the view that the Marines went way overboard in charging a kid who didn't hurt anybody and just wanted to fly for his country. He apparently was an exemplary Marine prior to this incident as well. As a result of lengthy negotiations

between the Marine Corps authorities and Foote's attorneys, all charges were completely dropped in early November 1986. As part of the agreement to drop charges, Foote wrote a letter of apology to General Miller, was sentenced to time already served and given an Other-Than-Honorable discharge. General Miller stated that these terms, "will adequately serve justice in this case."

After being released, members of VMA - 214 gave Foote a T-shirt with the Black Sheep logo. He said that he had nothing against the Marine Corps and already had offers for some civilian flying jobs. He was soon hired by a charter airline in Los Angeles. Several months after his discharge he applied to the Israeli Air Force to be a combat pilot... flying *Skyhawks*. Foote stated, "I can fly the plane. I know that now. But combat is still the name of the game. Until I get those wings on my chest, I know I'll never fulfill my potential."

As for what happened to the author of this article, I was cleared of any negligence or wrongdoing in this incident, as was PFC Mueller. A review carried out by the base's Provost Marshal's Office showed that "Airfield security measures are adequate. However, there is an increased awareness among security personnel." That was the official statement. However, I heard later that some heads rolled among those responsible for my crew being undermanned that night.

Interestingly, I owe a great deal to LCpl. Foote. Prior to this incident, I had received orders for transfer in September 1986, to Okinawa for the last year of my four-year tour. I had also just been hired on to serve in my off-duty time as a reserve police officer for the city of Newport Beach, CA. I had hoped to stay at El Toro to finish my active duty, and transition my reserve police officer position to full time, once I was discharged. The Marine Corps turned down this request, so I was packing my bags for Japan. However, after LCpl Foote stole the A-4M, I was put on legal hold for his courts-martial; and by the time he was discharged, my Okinawa orders were cancelled. I never did get a chance to thank Foote for causing my orders to be cancelled, which in turn virtually guaranteed my full time civilian police officer position upon my discharge.

A note from Bill Graham:

The latest information I have on Howard A. Foote was in a document dated 17 October 2007, that I found on the internet while researching this article. Foote apparently had/has plans for creating a "Space Port Resort" in China. Something of a space/flight related type of Disneyland, and this document appeared to be a business plan and feasibility study. In it, he identified himself as the President and Founder of Space Flight Industries, Inc. His resume indicates that he still holds four glider records and is qualified as a pilot in 25 different types of aircraft including Russian and RAF military aircraft. He claims to have worked with the JPL division of NASA and is one of the most progressive aeronautical engineers today.



About the Author: After discharge from the Marines in 1987, Bill Graham served as a police officer for the city of Newport Beach for nearly 15 years before being medically retired in 2001 for injuries suffered in the line of duty. After that career, he earned his commercial pilot's license, with CFI privileges, which he still exercises on a part-time basis. He and his wife now own a medical-billing business and live with ten miles of the old base at El Toro. The base was closed in 1999 and has been converted to various uses, including storage for nearly 5,000 privately owned RVs, boats and other vehicles. Bill Graham stores his RV on the tarmac just off runway 34R. When he picks up or drops off his RV, Bill looks down that runway and vividly remembers that crazy night nearly 23 years ago when some kid stole a Skyhawk and flew into the midnight sky for a wild joyride.



THE OLEY CHRONICLES

• Cecil Field, Florida 1969 •

By Ken Olsen, LCDR, USN (Ret)



Ed. Note: In Boomer Hudson's letter to the editor (Summer 2008), he told how he witnessed a mid-air collision between two TA-4s right at the end of the runway at Cecil Field. Subsequently, Ken Olsen, the only survivor of that mid-air wrote to tell us about that accident, as well as an incredible string of mishaps that occurred in squadrons assigned to Cecil Field in 1969. What follows is Ken's email to Boomer, and more specific examples of early Skyhawk mishaps.

Hi Boomer, your letter to the editor brought back memories of that incident.

I was the survivor of that accident, and for the A4 Skyhawk editor, I have been negligent in not contributing to the A4 Journal. I will write up the accident and send you the info.

There was another mention of Cecil field A-4 antics mentioned in this latest *A-4Ever Journal*; and it is an understatement to say that they "had a lot of emergencies." It was total chaos, and a lot of replacement pilots were about ready to DOR (drop on request).

The midair occurred on 21 August 1969, in TA4F, Bu# 152866.

v/r,
Ken

Here is what I recollect from almost 40 years ago, when I was an IP (Instructor Pilot) and the weapons officer at VA-44. I remember that Holly Hollandsworth was the ops officer, Tom Brown was the XO and the skipper was Capt Wynn. These incidents all occurred at Cecil Field in 1969.

• **VA-44.** An Air Force exchange pilot, his handle was *Indian*, (an actual American Indian, Cherokee, I believe). IP in the back seat of a TA-4; his RP (Replacement Pilot) failed to positively lock the canopy (warning light did not illuminate) and during the takeoff at

about 220 knots with gear and flaps up, the canopy warning light came on and the canopy blew. The wind stream caught Indian's primary ejection face curtain and ejected him from the rear seat, setting off the sequence for the front seat RP to go (Command ejection seat mechanism was set to eject both pilots if either one initiated an ejection). Both pilots suffered no injuries, but the a/c was a strike and a command decision was made to reset all the TA-4 aircraft ejection sequences to the individual setting for VA-44 (rather than command ejection where either pilot can initiate ejection causing both to go). I believe VA-43, the instrument RAG squadron, did likewise.

• **VA-??** After a six-month Med cruise and having not made any land takeoffs, a young LTJG over-rotates an A-4C with a 9400# double-bubble fuel load right off the end of the runway at approximately 100 ft. He ejects from the A-4C with the ballistic spreader parachute system. This system is designed to fire off a shotgun spreader shell after the seat is up 70 ft or so (initiated by a nylon lanyard attached to the parachute and to the deck of the cockpit). The chute was a partial streamer, and the shotgun shell did not perform as advertised. The pilot suffered minor injuries because heavy rain showers had permeated the turf around the overruns and created a muddy mess. We were told that he landed in the muck, and sunk up to his armpits. The aircraft was a strike, but the pilot survived (*absolutely fantastic!*). Hmmm? "What happened to that ballistic spreader system," we wondered?

• **VA-??** A flight of three young LTJGs took off in A-4Cs (I think). After a running rendezvous, they joined up under a 1000-ft overcast with four miles visibility. They proceeded toward the Pinecastle target range. As the weather deteriorated en-route, the flight leader

found himself going lower and lower; and I am sure (as I recall) he/they experienced vertigo. The result was that the lead shed both wingmen into the pine trees as he pulled back on the stick. Two Alfa-damaged aircraft, and two pilots killed.

• **VA-44.** LCDR Ken McMillan took an RP out on a night familiarization flight, and during the last portion of the flight at about 20,000 feet, right about over Whitehouse Outlying Field (I think it was a nuclear weapons and ammo storage facility as well), told the RP that he was simulating a generator failure. He instructed the RP to go through the pre-briefed emergency procedures. The RP reached for the emergency generator handle (which would deploy the ram-air turbine or RAT and deliver emergency electrical power), but unfortunately pulled the canopy ejection handle instead, jettisoning the canopy. Remember, the two handles were in close proximity to one another. LCDR McMillan was ejected and gracefully descended to land in the swamps surrounding Whitehouse Field, ultimately spending a black-ass night dodging the snakes and gators. The RP returned to land at NAS Cecil Field. The aircraft got a new canopy and a repaired ejection system. The RP got a down for headwork, and Ken McMillan got some liniment for his back.

• **VA-44.** LCDR Ross Donaldson, Royal New Zealand IP, was in the back seat of a TA-4 instructing his student RP on a low-level sandblower (50 feet off the deck @ 360 kts) near Tallahassee when the a/c took a bird strike right behind the front seat. This caused Ross to take a Florida vulture in the head as the canopy imploded. Ross could see nothing but BLACK, and thinking that the aircraft had blown up or something, instinctively pulled back on the stick and ejected. His student knew that there was a problem, but he stayed with the aircraft and recovered from the unusual attitude, subsequently landing at a small civilian field near Tallahassee. *Good job, RP.* We finally got the word from the Florida Highway Patrol that the aircraft had landed at the civilian airport, but didn't hear about Ross until a few hours later. Ross ejected successfully, but he had to put his eye back in its socket and take off his boot so he could

use his sock to stem the fluids running from his eye. The Highway Patrol finally found Ross, and after a short stint in the NAS Jacksonville hospital, he was sent to the Bethesda Naval Hospital where he got a beautiful blue glass eye. The aircraft got a new canopy and a repaired ejection system. The RP got an *Atta-Boy*.

• **VA-36.** My old squadron, still flying A-4Cs, has a pilot eject after he has a flameout. The chute does not open, the ballistic spreader does not work and the pilot is killed.

• **VA-44.** A young RP attempted to land his A-4C on runway 18 at Cecil in the afternoon after a bombing training mission at Pinecastle. The thunder bumpers arrived at the same time with shifting, high winds. The pilot put his A-4C down at the end of the runway, but the winds picked up his right wing. He ejected on the deck at over 120 knots as his aircraft headed off the left side of the runway, bore-sighting the mirror landing system. He was killed because the ballistic spreader did not function as advertised (see above). I was selected to be the senior member of the Aircraft Accident Board. After an intensive investigation and meetings with an experienced warrant officer (a so-called "parachute expert from AirLant"), meetings with the Indian Head ejection seat experts and the Douglas A-4 reps, our board concluded that:

1. The pilot erred by landing in a severe crosswind instead of taking it around;
2. The IP who had landed seconds earlier erred in that he told the RP to keep it fast;
3. The ballistic spreader system for the A-4C a/c needed to be reevaluated as it was not functioning as advertised;
4. The parachute had bands that were too tight to allow the risers to be released properly during a low-altitude, low-speed ejection, and that the fix should be to replace the nylon bands with rubber bands (that's what the AirLant expert recommended);
5. Weather was a factor; and
6. AirLant should ground all A-4Cs until improvements could be made to the ejection and survival sub-systems. This did not go over well *at all* with COMFAIRJAX and AIRLANT.

Then, after all of the above, AIRLANT decided all A-4 squadrons should have a stand-down day and go through maintenance, flight, ejection and safety procedures.

• **VA-??** All A-4 squadrons complied with the stand-down, but the next day when the first aircraft launched, the pilot thought he had an engine failure and ejected at about 100 feet AGL. Happily, he survived because everything worked properly. However, tests conducted on the broken A-4 revealed nothing wrong with the aircraft's engine. So much for the AirLant Safety Stand-down!

Capt Jack Wynn, skipper of VA-44 at the time, asks me to brief the IPs and RPs on my investigation, which I do. I go through the above stuff and a few RPs get concerned. I start getting questions from them, such as "what would you do if you had to eject?" My response was quite simplistic: "You do what you have to do to survive - use the system and eject." Now, on to my story.

I awoke about 4:30 a.m. and got myself ready for an early morning takeoff at Cecil Field, Florida. I left my home in Avondale near the St. Johns River and took the new interstate, letting our brand-new 1969 Tornado (Oldsmobile) shake out a few bits of carbon. I hit 3 figures before I eased off the peddle (this was my present to me for NVA survival skills 101). It sure was nice being back from Vietnam and out of the real danger, even though we had had a good cruise aboard *Intrepid*. Our squadron (VA-36) had lost no one, although we had a mid-air collision and lost the bird, an A-4C Super Charlie with the J-65-W20 engine.

At Cecil, I suited up and briefed the young RP, covering the usual emergency procedures, etc. This was his second or third flight in the TA-4, and it was basically the aerobatics stuff, followed by the simulation of a low oil pressure warning light and accompanying procedures to the high speed approach. The precautionary and landing would be followed by a series of touch and goes. After the brief, we took off on runway 36L as the sun was just beginning to come up in the east (this is significant - not because the reader may not believe the sun comes up from the east [well..... maybe there are a few out there that still have a problem], but...you'll find out

later as I weave the tale).

The RP did his aerobatics, and after that I simulated the low-oil pressure problem. He set the throttle at 82% (I believe that's about the right setting) and got himself into position to make the emergency approach. As he maneuvered the A-4 into position, we set up for runway 36R at about 200 knots with gear down and flaps up. I called the tower when we were 10 miles out for 36R, which was the 12,000 ft runway, on a simulated oil-pressure failure approach.

We were given directions to proceed inbound for 36R, and as I scanned the area for other aircraft, I noticed the shadow of our aircraft moving along the ground to our left as the sun was rising and we continued descending. Then the tower cleared an a/c to takeoff on 36L (the 8,000 ft runway) and simultaneously, told us to switch to 36L. As the RP started to set up for the left runway, we heard a series of garbled and unintelligible radio transmissions as we progressed inbound.

At about 200 feet on the altimeter (remember, Cecil Field was/is 80 MSL, unless Florida is still sinking), my eye caught our shadow again to the left. However, there was an identical aircraft shadow rapidly superimposing itself upon our shadow. I immediately swiveled from left to right, and at about the same time I heard a sickening thud and felt something slamming our aircraft's right wing up. It was another TA-4 passing us with at least 40 to 60 knots overtaking speed.

I immediately slammed the throttle forward and jerked the stick back into my lap to get the nose up as the aircraft rolled initially left after the impact but then started a steady, consistent roll to the right even as I applied full left aileron and rudder with no response. I was way out of position and knew it would take too long to get to the normal ejection face curtain behind and above my head, so I just moved my right hand from the stick to the secondary ejection handle between my legs and pulled.... we had now rolled a full 90-degrees right from the horizontal as the ejection sequence commenced.

All of this took less than two seconds. I blacked out from the *G* forces, and contrary to popular *continued...*

OLEY CHRONICLES

Continued...

belief, my life did not pass before me. However, I was thinking, "I'm a goner!" As I waited to hit the deck/runway somewhere on 36R, I thought that it was not going to hurt, but this was the end! The nitrogen bladders in the seat and back combination inflated as advertised and popped me clear of the seat. Then the chute opened, and as the nylon parachute risers reacted, I swung down from 90 degrees to the horizon and immediately landed. Now, most of us remember going through ejection-seat training and being told that the parachute landing would be somewhat like jumping off a six or eight foot fence. This was more like jumping off a six inch curb, the result of the chute popping me up just as I touched down. One TA-4 exploded behind me and the other in front of me. I could not believe what had happened, and I just sat down between the runways.

When the meat wagon got to me, I told them that I was OK and to check on the others. After a short interval, the ambulance returned and took me to the dispensary. The duty flight surgeon checked me out, and then they took me back to the VA-44 ready room. My student RP perished without ejecting. In the other aircraft (VA-43 instrument RAG), the rear-seat student ejected into the ground when they went inverted and the IP pilot (Lt Burns, ex-VA-106) perished with the aircraft.

Capt Wynn asked me the question, "Ken, if the command ejection sequence had been armed for both pilots, do you think your RP would have survived?" As I recall, I answered, "Captain, I just looked at the nomogram of the RAPEC ejection system and discussed the probabilities with the Douglas reps extensively. The conclusion was that I should not have made it as I was out of the envelope, so who knows?" Check the Escapac 1C-3 Terrain Clearance for Safe Ejection chart and Ejection Sequence diagrams at www.skyhawk.org.

The investigation revealed that the VA-43 aircraft which hit us had departed the pattern after conducting a GCA approach, then re-entered at a high

speed to make a high-G break toward landing. The RP was in the back seat under the hood, and the IP in the front seat had taken control of the aircraft for the reentry. In the process, he struck us from below and behind, and we never saw him coming. I guess that was because he was deep and fast.

I drove back to our residence on Edgewood Circle that afternoon in the Tornado, somewhat subdued to say the least. Marilyn and her parents were waiting for me to head south with them to Daytona Beach, where we were to visit my mother. We did not go, and Marilyn called Mom and tried to tell the story of why we could not get there. Mom did not understand what an ejection was! That night the shock wave took hold as I tried to get to sleep. The nightmares hit me hard....I must have ejected about a zillion times, and when I awoke the next morning, I had drenched the bed with sweat.

The Jacksonville newspaper carried the story, reiterating an eyewitness account by a chief petty officer who saw the collision and said there could be no survivors. A few days later, we took another TA-4 so I could re-create the sequence of events. The senior member of the new AAR board (investigating my accident) was in the front seat, and we duplicated the incident a few times. We were both astonished with the timing and sequence of events. I felt super-blessed to be alive.

The AAR's conclusion was that the tower supervisors were at fault for not fully supervising a novice tower operator during a period of heavy traffic. Additionally, the pilot of the VA-43 aircraft was found at fault for failure to keep us in sight.

I have gone through this story many times in my mind and have concluded that what saved me is what Walt Zebrowski (when he was ops officer of VA-34 aboard *Saratoga*) drilled into me when I was a nugget: "Anybody can kill you, even your best friend or best wing leader - Be Aware."

Therefore, I used to sit on the flight deck before launch and think of the most awful things that could befall me. Because of that, I was always looking for that way out. And, as most of us realize, sometimes there is no way out. I sat there one great, clear morning aft of

the island behind Elevator 3 on a winter Med cruise on the *Saratoga* in 1961 (we never got to the Med in the summer time---always the damned winter). We had out-chopped up into the North Atlantic on a NATO operation to do some cross deck ops with the Brits--the *Arc Royal*, I believe. The ship suddenly healed starboard while turning into the wind, as the elevator was getting ready to come up with an FH3 *Demon* on it. Suddenly, an F-8 *Crusader* came hurtling from inside the hangar deck and struck the *Demon* with the plane captain aboard. They both plunged off the elevator into the cold Atlantic. About that time, the OOD came over the IMC to announce, "Standby for a heel to starboard and turn to port," or whatever the verbiage was (*Hey gang, NavCad here, no boat talk spoken*). The helo promptly recovered the plane captain from his early Navy shower and deposited him on deck. The next day, the Air Boss & OOD left via COD flight.

What is interesting to me is that the series of ejections that preceded mine in 1969 may have ultimately determined the fate of the other pilots involved with the mid-air I was involved in. Also, this narrative is from memory so there might be a few items out of order; however, the thrust is that we had a series of very bad incidents that killed some fine aviators, and we lost quite a few birds.

There were many more incidents over the years, to which I'm sure your readers can testify. I feel privileged to have served with some of the best aviators in the world.

Keep your eye on the ball!



About the Author: During his Navy career, Ken Olsen logged approximately 3,500 hours and 500 carrier landings, the majority of which was A-4 time, though about 1100 hours was in the F-11F as an IP instructing ACM (Air Combat Maneuvering). After retiring from the USN, he was involved with a series of Fortune 500 companies, managing or consulting in the maintenance and safety/hazardous materials functions. Finally retired, he and his wife Marilyn split their time between residences in San Francisco and Mendocino, California.

MORE ON FLIGHT TESTING

• The Early A-4D Prototypes •

From Hal Vincent and Drury Wood



“The article by my good friend, Bob Rahn, is not the way we in Flight Test saw the early plane. As you can read why, with PIO (pilot-induced oscillation), cracked speed brakes in dive, metal on tail peeling off, low “g” available, etc. Ed Heinemann had built so close on structural margin that in many cases it was lacking (in strength).”

Ed. Note: We received an email from MajGen Hal Vincent, USMC (ret), author of an A-4Ever feature article on testing the first A-4s (Testing the X and YA-4D, Fall 2006). Gen Vincent was responding to Bob Rahn's article (Heinemann's Hotrod, Parts I and II, Summer and Fall 2008) to make the point that the A-4 prototypes had lots of problems that were identified and fixed (mostly) before we flew the Skyhawks in the fleet. His main point is that the company test pilots (like Rahn) saw a prototype aircraft through a different lens when compared to the active duty test pilots who evaluated the aircraft to determine suitability for service use.

He shared his thoughts via email with Maj Drury Wood, who contributed to the A-4Ever in Spring 2005, relating his experiences testing a prototype version of the A4D-2 modified for use by the Army!

Both Vincent and Wood are members of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and during their careers logged years of experience flying experimental aircraft. MajGen Vincent, though never assigned to an A-4 squadron, flew the A-4 for over 25 years, beginning with the YA4D-1 and ending with the last production A-4M (160264). He logged 33 combat missions in the A-4 while flying with VMA-311 at Chu Lai.

We thought these experiences recorded by two of our most experienced aviators should be shared. Excerpts from their exchange of emails follow (editor notes in italics.)

Vincent (11/27/2008):

Just reread your great Fall '08 journal. A first class, pro job. The article by my good friend, Bob Rahn, is not the way we in Flight Test saw the early plane. As you can read why, with PIO (pilot-induced oscillation), cracked speed brakes in dive, metal on tail peeling off, low “g” available, etc. Ed Heinemann had built so close on structural margin that in many cases it was lacking (*in strength*). Initially they (Douglas) would overnight repair parts, and we Navy and Marine pilots would evaluate the plane, but would not get the company test pilot's (i.e., Bob's) salary. *Ha!* But then, nice old Ed Heinemann thought he had it made, so he didn't do much (*to fix the aircraft*). We complained, but he thought he was in charge.

They then sent me and Lt Hank Hancock up to NAA (North American Aviation), to evaluate their FJ4 (*as an alternative to the A-4*) with a MK7 on the wing. Had to fly to 156 knots before enough aileron to control wing; speed brakes so ineffective that we went supersonic in a dive; and stick force per “g” only 4 versus 8 for attack use. They (NAA) really responded with additional speed brakes, higher stick force/“g” and spoilers, which gave us 40 deg/sec at 560 knots with store on right wing. *BOY*, this sure got Ed Heinemann's attention, and he really started to listen.

The YA4D-2 that arrived later was more like it. From there on, all the way in flight test, and then on to VX-5, the A-4 did things right. Bob Rahn, bless him, did not cover the bad parts. Drury Wood, former Marine and test pilot with Bob at same time, can fill you in!!!

Wood (12/4/2008):

A-4D stories: I was not primary in the A-4. I moved up to Edwards after it had started, and Rahn was doing the major moves, while (Cal) Shoemaker was doing pickup. I was still down at El Segundo when Jim Verdin was killed. He and I were at TPT the same time and became good friends. The story was on the front page of the LA Times. I doubt that it would make it now.

The comment on his death is at odds in some respect with what I remember, and was told. At the time, there was no other story. He was doing max yaw at some point of the envelope, and one would expect there to have been a chase plane if it had been scheduled as a structural point, but there was none. At the time, I was not as knowledgeable about the X models as Rahn and Shoe, and was told that A-4 did not have baffles in the wing tanks, but was free to slosh all the way across. The yaw put all of the fuel in the left wing, and it stayed there, making the airplane uncontrollable. His ejection was therefore as broadside to the airstream as full rudder and unsymmetrical flight would make it. The bottom left corner of the canopy definitely hit him in the eye and was the fatal blow, because we had a full time pathologist who matched the tissue. A full time pathologist? *Ja*, we did, and we called him Digger Odell. I never saw the official accident report, but it is surely in some ancient Navy file somewhere.

We lost a lot of flight test folks at Douglas in those days. There was an interesting development from his ejection and death. Because he did not have a chase plane, he just disappeared. The flight card that he was working from could not have been classified as a risk flight. It had to be approved and signed by the lead engineer of that project, the pilot, and the manager of flight test ops, (later me.) If it was a risk, it had to have a chase and that's what EAFB (Edwards Air Force Base) OPS did for a living.

The airplane was found easily enough, but his body was not. He was separated from the seat and fell down face first and flat. He was also wearing the brown flight suit that we wore at the time, and was only found because the searchers were walking close together. He blended right in with the desert. So we had this clever personal equipment guy at Santa Monica and *Voila!* The orange flight suit! We actually put dummies out in the area and had our Aero Commander (with observers, of course) look for them.

continued...

FLIGHT TESTING

Continued...

It worked. No one else had them at the time except Douglas, because the company ordered and paid for them. USAF test guys started clamoring for them, and our EAFB personal equipment had an inventory of dozens of orange suits with only 23 pilots. But I diverge.

I did some odd flights that turned out to be pretty interesting. There was the flight from El Segundo in the electronics tester (routine, huh?) I was headed out on a radial when I began to feel queasy. This queasy feeling increased to a point where I wanted to upchuck (in an oxygen mask?), so I aborted and returned to 25L at LAX. Control of my four appendages was weakening when I chopped the throttle and sat there. The crew chief climbed up to help me, and together we got me out of the gear and cockpit. The clinic doc came, and I was dragged to the first aid station where after some preliminaries, I began to improve. The investigation as to why I was so ill began. Turns out that there was a leak in one of the engine bearings, and that delightful synthetic oil was being pumped into the cockpit. Against my earnest protests, they sent me home in the company ambulance, and it took me several days to convince my wife that I should continue in that line of work.

Hal, I got started on this thing and then began to write a book. I had better ask if this is what is wanted and if I should continue. I have several more items like a bit more about the PIO, the engine quitting with negative "g", waking up in a 60-degree dive from 35 thousand, doing flame-out approaches, and flying the version (A-4D) with double wheels and an A3D drag chute on a dirt strip. Actually, the A3D, "all three dead" was my main event.

Vincent (12/5/2008):

Drury, would love it if you wrote a book, but send info to Bob and Margaret, and they will put it in their great magazine. Let me know if there are any questions that I might answer. Sure interested in how you passed the back door info on the PIO in the A-4 during our evaluation at Edwards. No one else could find it, but with your description, we did. Then Ed Heinemann had to fix. *Ha!*

Wood (12/10/2008):

Hal, roger your last. Glad to. The PIO: Checking for flutter was pretty primitive in those times. It consisted of pulsing the stick with a fist, hands off, and waiting to see what happened. I did it almost unconsciously, and randomly, at times when I was in a part of the envelope that we hadn't checked before. I had just finished something routine and was coming back into the pattern at Edwards. Pretty fast, as I remember - 400 knots? The instrumentation was still on, and I gave the stick a punch forward. I was slammed up against the canopy and a few cycles continued that rattled my cage. I knew the procedure, having had some previous experience, and kept my hand off the stick.

I reported it to the project engineer at Edwards and called the flight controls engineer at El Segundo. What surprised me a bit was how calmly he took the news, and (with data)

said "We thought that there might be a possibility but we can fix it with a bob-weight." *They knew the possibility, but we had no plans to check it?* Just to make sure that they did, I rattled them out and told you guys who I knew were coming for the NPE (*Navy Preliminary Evaluation*). PIO did get some chaps that didn't know what to do. Charlie Richbourg from my class at TPT was killed over San Diego Bay that way in the Sea Dart. I also found flutter (deliberately) in the A3D-2. A 13-cps movement laterally made a dishrag out of the horizontal stabilizer.

I was doing a flight card for some routine data on the dash one (*A4D-1*). Routine flight, no chase. The test altitudes were 35, 25 and 15 thousand at different CGs. I climbed to 35K and checking the fuel, had the right CG and airspeed. I decided to take a nap. I woke up in a 70-degree dive and straightened out into the 25 K test because I was now out of CG and thought that I could save some data. I stabilized, and then decided to take another nap. I woke up in a steep dive and repeated the effort for 15K. Then I said, "To hell with it, I've blown the flight, I might as well go home." I did all the right things and landed.

Turning off the runway, I raised the canopy, and suddenly it was as if someone had just turned on the lights in a dark room. I was suddenly not sleepy. In the post flight, I related the sequence of events and the search for an answer focused on the oxygen system. The ship was an early test model with an old diluter-demand system that was put together to save time. I made the entire flight without enough oxygen to keep me alert, but just alive.

I had other adventures with the new LOX system in the A3. Last A-4 fun flights: BuAer (nonexistent now, I hear) laid on the requirement that they would accept no deliveries of the A-4D or the good old AD without a flame-out (dead engine) procedure for getting on the ground or runway. Again with no chase, I started at some safe and high altitude that I don't remember, dropped the gear and flaps and idled. After doing a lot of approaches, I found a minimum altitude that an A-4D would need to make a controlled landing on an airfield with a dead engine. And I did it for a finale.

From the handbook: "To make a safe landing on a runway with gear and flaps down and no engine power, the approach should be started at NO LESS THAN 8000 feet above the terrain when beginning over the center of the



A4D-1 137812 returning to Edwards AFB after the first flight on June 22, 1954. Douglas test pilot Robert Rahn was at the controls.

airfield.” Translated, that says that it takes 8000 feet to make a 360 (*degree turn*) in a dirty configuration with no power. I also did a bunch of dead sticks in the AD and it was a glider compared to the *Scooter*. If you could see the airfield, you could probably make it. Well that’s about all I have, hope that some of it is useful and maybe even interesting. Drury

Vincent (12/11/2008):

Here is the last on the testing of the X and YA4. You have the long article on the testing from my standpoint and know that DAC (*Douglas Aircraft Company*) was slow to fix anything. DAC was holding close the fact that the A-4 had a PIO problem, until we went out to Edwards to further evaluate the plane. Drury gave us a heads-up on it, and we found it also and reported it.

Drury makes an important point that one needed 8000 feet (I felt 9000 feet) to make a safe FOA. If you decide you wish to make an article on the testing and have any questions, then we will all try to help. I was just going to write a letter to the editor that my friend Bob Rahn was much too optimistic on his write-up on the A-4. It had lots of problems, and it took a kick in the rear for DAC to get with it.

I also forgot to mention that we considered that the “g” available was too low, so DAC built two prototype wings, and we went out to evaluate them at EDW. First was a

“potato chip” or washed out wing which had a wave at the end of the wings, and the other was a CLE, cambered leading edge-type wing. Both gave us only .5 more “g” so neither was bought. Someplace in the world, there should be a picture of these. For some reason in test, I felt it was bad luck to have any pictures taken, and darn, now I don’t have any, Period!

Ed. Note: Responding to a question about the acronym EDW, Gen Vincent replied: “EDW is Edwards Air Force Base. We did most of our experimental flying out of there on what they called Navy Preliminary Evaluations, or NPEs, and did just a couple out of PMD, Palmdale. As an aside, one of our greatest coups was to come back to Flight Test (*in Patuxent River*) from one of those trips, with NEW ORANGE HI-VIS FLIGHT SUITS. Boy, were the others jealous! DAC fitted us for them, as they bought them for their pilots after Jimmy Verdin was killed and could not be located. But we still gave them hell about their weak airplane!

ALL THE BEST---CHEERS !”

(Ed.: Copies of the A-4Ever issues referenced may be ordered for \$5/issue by emailing the editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.)

BEST GUESS TEST

• Who’s this? •

Can anyone identify this VMAT-102 pilot? The photo was taken on a 1979 deployment to Fallon. Send your Best Guess to Raven Hickerson at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org and if you’re guessing correctly, and beat the hundreds of others who will undoubtedly submit a guess as well, there’s a good chance that as a reward, your name will appear in print in the next issue... because not only do we not have prizes, but we also need some occasional filler.



Puzzle

Answers: Boom-Boom Room

Answer 1. The panel is from an A-4F. Among other things, the CP-741 switches denote a late model A-4, and this panel is clearly not from an A-4M.

Answer 2. We’re hoping that you have the answer. If you know, send it to us at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.

Answer 3. A. MK 82 was D-2; MK 81 SE was D-1A; 5.0” Zuni rocket pod was D-7. From Charlie Robinson’s Chu Lai “brain book.”

(See page 22 for questions)

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

The Night Thing

Certainly, the demon that used to live out there at *Mach One* was dead. By the time Puresome hit the tactics phase of the Naval Aviation Advanced Training Command, it was ordained that the student's first hop in the F-11 *Tigerjet* would include stroking the afterburner, stuffing the nose over, and no-big-dealing through the "sound barrier." But the Thing that lived at night around aircraft carriers, the Thing with yellow eyes and long teeth that could curdle the righteous stuff of the most steely-eyed Naval aviator, was alive and out there, waiting.

Even Air Force pukers knew about "night noises," mysterious moans and glicking sounds made by one's aircraft that were ominously amplified at night. Patrol pukers knew that night air sucked lift off the wings, and that night over the ocean sea was darker than forty feet up the gastrointestinal tract of the largest dinosaur. But carrier aviators knew the Night Thing was all of that, and on any given night could manipulate the vertigos, the sea, and both ends of the boat to make you look bad, or dead, or both.

Back at university, Puresome's dreams of Wings of Gold were occasionally troubled by sea stories from the fleet that percolated down to his NROTC unit. Night carrier qualifications involved haphazardly hurling an aircraft with a slow-to-spool-up engine at a heaving spot of iron in the ocean; and many who tried were found wanting, and sent off in humiliation to be chaplains' assistants in remote corners of the empire. And there were the dark images of the "Know when, then go!" poster of horrific Crusader prangs that seemed to regularly happen at night. But Puresome knew that there were many rungs of the ladder to hack before he had to face that particular malevolence, and he stuffed his nascent awareness of the Thing into a box and put it on a far shelf in the back of his mind. But it growled and quivered and waited its time, never very far away.

By and by, Ensign Puresome found himself with Golden Wings, having climbed to the top of the training command pile, only to start over at the bottom of another pile as a "Firp," a Fleet Replacement Pilot, with the Tinker Toy RAG (Replacement Air Group) at NAS Oceana. The "Fist of the Fleet" Squadron would teach him all things *Scooter*; and deliver him to his fleet squadron as a fully qualified frabbing New Guy Nugget who didn't know squat and would be told, "Forget all that stuff you learned in the RAG, because this is how we do it in the fleet!"

"Night carrier qualifications involved haphazardly hurling an aircraft with a slow-to-spool-up engine at a heaving spot of iron in the ocean; and many who tried were found wanting, and sent off in humiliation to be chaplains' assistants in remote corners of the empire."

All the while, Youthly was flying FAM (familiarization) hops, formation, doing low-levels, learning the fine art of idiot loop, over-the-shoulder bomb delivery of the Doomsday weapon and other such delights on weapons deployment to MCAS Yuma. Previous classes of Firps progressed to the stage of doing hundreds of field mirror landing practice landings, preparatory to the final exam of day and night carrier landing qualification. Each simulated carrier landing pass was closely graded by RAG LSOs (Landing Signal Officers), and Firps had to pass their cold-eyed scrutiny to earn their trip to the boat and carrier qualifications. Puresome watched and listened to their progress with studied indifference and real attention, knowing his day was coming.

And so it happened that the class in front of Puresome went to the boat and three Firps had done their day traps and then refused to fly their night qualifications! They subsequently had their wings ripped off, their swords broken,

and were hustled off to Vladavostock, all very publicly!

"*Jerbis Flinderbars!*" thought Puresome, "*it's alive!*" as something dark and evil YOUHAHAHA'd its way to his mind's center stage.

This frabb-up at the boat constituted the ultimate Naval aviation sin: *it made people look bad*. Therefore, guano ran down hill until a great heap of it landed on the heads of the RAG LSOs responsible for certifying students as ready for the boat. Naturally, the LSOs passed on their pleasure at this condition to the lucky students of Puresome's class. They would not frabb up, or they would not pass *go*.

So Youthly flew his fanny off, doing six or seven bounces at Fentress, the auxiliary field set aside for this business, then popping back to hot-pit refuel at Oceana, and returning to Fentress for another go. LSOs snarled and their assistants wrote caustic descriptions of each pass. After a week of two-a-days,

there was less yelling; and government issue ball-point pens didn't burst into flame as often, and the students graduated to two-a-nights. Puresome would emerge from these hops with his flight suit soaked and fuming, calooses on his butt, and a real need for half a glass of good Scotch whiskey.

After nearly 200 simulated carrier landings, the hard-eyed LSOs were as satisfied as they were likely to get, and Puresome got his ticket punched for a trip to NAS Cecil Field and the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, CVA-42. He listened with great attention to instructions in etiquette around the ship, so as not to play the complete *Delta Sierra* during his ten day and six night traps. No mention was made of the supernatural attraction of thunderstorms to aircraft carriers or possible poltergeist intervention.

The day traps on the *FDR* were fun. On the second day, four day traps were required before going out for night qualifications, and Puresome felt he handled the substantial sink-hole behind the boat

with some competence. But, hanging around the rest of the day, waiting for his turn in the barrel that night caused an intense attack of what athletes call “adrenaline build-up,” and what Naval aviators call “the chickenshits.” Even watching the antics of the pre-autothrottle RA5Cs from Vulture’s Row failed to divert him much. Somehow, the wild flapping of their huge horizontal stabilizers and their ponderous wave-off performance, like a leviathan stuck in a tar-pit, seemed to prefigure a certain amount of doom. It did not help to have entirely too much imagination.

Which made it too easy to imagine that the red ready room lighting and the red goggles used for night adaptation had turned everything into some naval level of Dante’s inferno. The trip from the ready room up the escalator was red-lit, as was the flight deck, and the waiting A-4s hulked ominously in the gloom. As Puresome shoe-horned himself and his thoughts into the tiny A-4 cockpit, the Night Thing sensed an opportunity and grinned an evil grin.

Puresome’s first frabb-up was conceptual. Even though he had to fly his carrier approaches with his seat in the full up position so as to be able to see over the nose of the *Scooter*, he figured that since he would be flying actual instruments in the black-assed night, he would take the catapult shot and fly the pattern with the seat full down, the better to see his instruments. It was a bad idea. He was not used to the seat position, was profoundly uncomfortable, and never managed to line up the TACAN needle and the boat on his first trip around the pattern. Cleverly raising his seat to the normal position solved his instrument scan problem, and the next pattern found Puresome staring at the dim, white drop-lights on the blunt end of the boat and following the meatball down the glideslope, more or less as advertised. But as he got “in close,” he remembered the sink hole that was there during the day



and squeeze on a little extra power, and was amazed as the ball traveled upward and he sailed over the wires, his tailhook sending out a shower of sparks down the iron deck.

“Bolter! Bolter! Power and go!” hollered the LSO, and Puresome disappeared into the blackness. Something Evil cackled, but nobody really heard it.

His next pass was identical: Youthly

“Does that give me a qual?” Puresome squeaked as he taxied out of the arresting gear in the red deck lighting that wasn’t nearly as ominous as it used to be.

The Air Boss allowed that it was. And the Night Thing would have had a hissy fit, but it was not its nature; and there would always be other nights.

Puresome knew that the Night Thing

“Puresome started thinking about the night trap immediately after the catapult shot on every subsequent night hop, and it was never far from his mind, even while dropping flares and bombs on the godless, rat-eating commies..”

couldn’t help himself, squeeze on a little power against the sink hole that had to be there, sailed over the wires and made more sparks in the night.

“Puresome, you are adding too much power in close and are sailing over the top! Easy on the power and just fly the ball, or you’ll bolter all night!”

“I will be frabbed if I will!” Puresome snarled into his mask. “I will do this!” He realized that there was no place for wailing, doomed dinosaurs or Dante’s gloom, only himself and what he had to do. He fought the Evil Force to a draw, fixed himself on the job, and flew the *Scooter* around the pattern and trapped.

After refueling, he launched and banged out five more traps, even though the vertigos gave him the sensation of doing aileron rolls down final on the last pass.

had not gone away, but was always there, waiting. Before his first night trap in his fleet squadron, he went to bed all afternoon and flew his approach a thousand times in his head, and he was ready when he almost lost it when he descended from a pinkie holding pattern in his Tinker Tanker down into the dark. Puresome started thinking about the night trap immediately after the catapult shot on every subsequent night hop, and it was never far from his mind, even while dropping flares and bombs on the godless, rat-eating commies. Sometimes, a good LSO with a calm voice could bring you aboard--despite all the efforts of thunderstorms and supernatural intervention.

The Night Thing might never be far away from Naval aviators, but Puresome knew the important thing was that you could kick its ass.





SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modelers' Corner •

By Joe Turpen



Andreas Gietz (andreas@composite-arf.com) of CARF Models (www.composite-arf.com) provided this picture of the company's new museum-quality, large-scale model of the Blue Angel A-4F *Skyhawk*. Proving the adage that boy-toys only get more elaborate and expensive as the boys age, this model is almost large enough to carry a pilot! With a wingspan of approximately 6 feet, it weighs in at over 80 lbs with engine. Such perfection doesn't come cheap – the starter kit is \$5,000. The company is aware that the Blue Angel A-4 didn't have working slats, but left the model's slats functional for test flights. See the CARF website for details.

Visit www.a4model.a4skyhawk.org/models/modelers.htm

Steve Longacre of Nashville, TN, is building an extensively detailed TA-4J in 32nd scale. At this point he has not determined if the model will be one from a training squadron or an adversary squadron. In order to obtain the detail you see in his model, he has used a variety of sources, including some Detail and Scale books, the internet and pictures that he has taken over time. This is a remarkable model, and efforts like this help keep the *Skyhawk* in the public eye.



Note the detail in this cockpit photo of the TA-4J model by Steve Longacre.

BOOM-BOOM ROOM

• Puzzlers from Boom Powell •



Question 1. This instrument panel is from which model of the A-4?



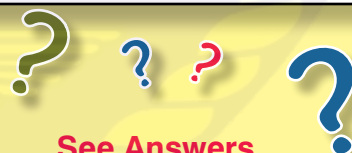
Question 2. What is the purpose of the black and yellow stripes painted on the refueling probe of this aircraft? (Photo by Dave Dollarhide.)



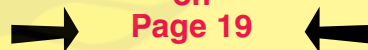
Here are some puzzlin' yet probin' photos and questions from the Boomster, see if you can go 3-for-3 with him. This is the honor system, of course...

Question 3. Pilots used codes to convey ordnance loads when transmitting in the clear. What was the code for:

- A. MK 82 500# FF bombs?
- B. MK 81 250# SE retarded bombs?
- C. Zuni 5" rockets:



See Answers
on
Page 19





ATTIC ATTACKS

• Mailbag •

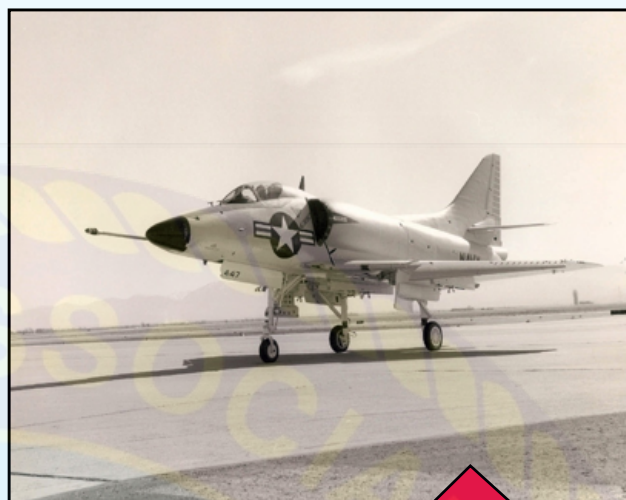
Before they fade and crumple,
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email to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org



Douglas Aircraft Company test pilot Jim Stegman congratulates engineer Doug Garber on the delivery of the 2000th Skyhawk, September 1967. The TA-4 aircraft was first operated by VF-101 at Key West and was later destroyed at NAS Oceana on 29 February, 1972. Then assigned to VA-43, the controls froze on takeoff for a post-maintenance check flight. The crew was LCDR Milner and AM-3 Trask, who both ejected safely

(see SA website at <http://www.a4skyhawk.org/5e/g154287/html/154301.htm>).
(Douglas Aircraft photo from Jim Stegman.)



Clean as a whistle! Douglas test pilot Jim Stegman prepares to test hop A4D-2N (A-4C) 148447 in early 1961. Stegman, of whom Naval Aviation News wrote, "Does this man have the best flying job in the world?" flew production test flights on almost all A-4s produced by Douglas Aircraft Company. He also spear-headed the production of the A-4G and TA-4G, and was recently honored with a complimentary life membership in Skyhawk Association. A-4C 148447 served with attack squadrons -112, -125, -22, -216, -172 and -45 prior to retirement in July 1970. (Douglas Aircraft photo from Jim Stegman.)



The first New Zealand TA-4K (157914) shown in flight near Yosemite Valley, Half Dome.
(Douglas Aircraft photo from Jim Stegman.)



Life magazine photo of Douglas Aircraft Company prototype A4D-1 bureau number 137817, probably taken between Feb 1955 and Sep 1956, when the aircraft was with BAR R&D El Segundo. During that time frame, the aircraft conducted ZUNI rocket tests at China Lake.

(Photo via Rex Barker, Skyhawk Study Group.)
Information from Gary Verver (www.chinalakealumni.org).

THE A-4 EVER

Skyhawk Association

Spring 2009 • Journal

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