



THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION *Journal*



*Restored A-4B flying to Warbird
Heritage Foundation,
Waukegan, IL.*

THE A-4 EVER

Spring 2010

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 16 • NUMBER 1

Contents:

A Trip to the Suburbs • Puresome Unplugged

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★ *All Marine
A-4 Skyhawkers Reunion* ★
20-22 May, 2010
Fort Worth, TX



www.skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• Raven's Report •



By Bob "Raven" Hickerson

Annapolis A-4 Still Needs Our Help

The response to our call for help to restore the A-4A which is on display at the north gate of the Naval Academy in Annapolis has been fantastic, but we need a last push to put us over our goal of \$20,000. Working in conjunction with the Association of Naval Aviation, *Skyhawk* Association has helped to raise \$17,500. In addition to the cash, which will fund extensive airframe repairs as well as new paint, United Aeronautical Corporation of North Hollywood has pledged to provide airframe parts at no cost to aid in the restoration (see Ron Guy letter to the editor this issue). That corporation deals in spare parts for *Skyhawks* worldwide, and their pledge to provide parts (including free shipping) is significant and greatly appreciated.



We can easily reach this goal if everyone pitches in to help. If you were considering a small gift and decided your contribution wouldn't be enough to really make a difference, now is the time to respond. We're at the point in this fund-raising effort where a lot of \$25--\$50 gifts can put us over the top, so don't hold back. We can reach this goal and have 139968 looking like it should in no time. Thanks to those who have already stepped up, as well as those who will help us make this project a resounding success.

Make your checks payable to the Association of Naval Aviation (FBO *Skyhawk* Restoration Project) and send them to:

Association of Naval Aviation
1446 Waggaman Circle
McLean, VA 22101

All-Marine Skyhawk Reunion Fort Worth, May 20 - 22, 2010

You've probably picked up on the fact that *Skyhawk* Association is helping to sponsor a Marine *Skyhawk* Reunion in conjunction with the May 2010 Marine Corps Aviation Association Symposium in Fort Worth, TX. Planning is well underway, and those who have not made a decision should check the schedule and registration information at [www/skyhawk.org](http://www.skyhawk.org) ASAP.

Reunion headquarters will be at the Sheraton Fort Worth Hotel and Spa (look for us in the Driftwood Room on the 2nd floor), and we have a number of activities planned for the *Skyhawk* reunion. In addition, attendees are encouraged to participate in MCAA activities, such as the Flight Jacket Happy Hour on Friday night.

A number of Marine *Skyhawk* squadrons are planning mini-reunions in conjunction with this event (see website for more information), and *Skyhawk* Association will hold its Mid-year board meeting there as well. That meeting is scheduled for 0830, May 21st, in the Driftwood Room at the Sheraton Fort Worth. The Board of Directors encourages members to join us for meetings so make plans to attend if you are in the area.

Finally, if you are even considering the possibility of attending the reunion, make a room reservation at the Sheraton



as soon as possible to obtain the reunion rate. Just like Tailhook, the room block will sell out before all of our attendees are accommodated. Don't be left out due to procrastination. To make your reservation, go to <http://www.starwood-meeting.com/StarGroupsWeb/res?id=0912186153&key=EB7E8>.

Membership – Again!

If anyone out there actually reads this column, you've heard me rant about membership in the past. Well, I'm afraid we're still trying to break the code on how to reach and retain potential members. The association has done pretty well since 2004, reversing a trend of inexorable decline to grow and stabilize at around 800 members. Each year we lose 18 – 20% of our members through attrition, but take in roughly the same number in new accessions. We don't know why those who elect not to renew do so, but we can assume that we're just not meeting their needs, they have lost interest, or other things are successfully competing for their membership dollars.

The current Board of Directors is interested in taking a fresh look at our association and how it serves its membership. Some of the things we may look at are:

- 1) The services we provide our membership – what is valued and what is not?
- 2) What new services might we offer given the limitations of resources (both fiscal and human)?
- 3) Who are the potential members and how we reach them?
- 4) To what extent can we serve our members with electronic media?
- 5) What strategic alliances might help us to grow and serve our membership better?

We're going to need a lot of input from members, and as a first step, we'd like to ask you to take a short survey. You can either access it online by going to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/98WR7DV>, or send me an email indicating your interest in participating. I can return your email with the survey link, and with your concurrence, sign you up for a follow-on focus group which will help us formulate new initiatives.

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 2010 •



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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.

Stephanie Davis, graphics, stephanie@ncflight.com. Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC.

Cover: Recently restored A-4B 142112 returned to the air on 1 Dec 2009 at Whitman Field, Oshkosh, WI. Shown here enroute to permanent home at Warbird Heritage Foundation, Waukegan, IL, piloted by LtCol Sid Snedeker, USMC (Ret). L-39 chase flown by Paul Wood and David Staffeldt.

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:

Hi, I'm Erik Adrian, and I was wondering if you could help learn about my grandfather. From what I know he was a fighter pilot during Vietnam, and I think he flew the A-4 *Skyhawk*. I don't know too much about him, but since I am following his footsteps and joined the Marines at seventeen, I was wondering if you could help me out. His name was Billy Max Adrian, Col.(Ret)
Erik Adrian
[jarheadsniper@live.com]

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To the Editor:

Hi, Joe. (SA Director Joe Turpen),

I just received my copy of the last *A-4 Ever* earlier this week and wanted to thank you guys for the great job you did of showcasing my AF-1. It's both an honour and a privilege to have my work shown in such an outstanding publication as yours, and it's always gratifying to know that my work is appreciated by others.

Thanks once again, and I wish you and all of the staff at the association a Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous 2010.

Cheers (from snowy Canada)

Wayne Bowman

[wayne.bowman@aero.bombardier.com]

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To the Editor:

The Journal arrived today, and I enjoyed it very much. The picture of the TA-4J (pg 14) is from VT-22, my neighbors in Kingsville. It stimulated this remembrance.

I discovered the *Skyhawk* Association by accident a few months ago. I am also a member of the 1st MAR Div Association, where I spent some quality time in 1969. There were some links to other organizations and reunions, specifically the All Marine A-4 *Skyhawkers* Reunion. I wish I'd known 10 years sooner!

I was in the right--or wrong--place several times, and could write a few *Skyhawk* driver stories. If these sound useful, let me know. I probably can't give precise dates or BuNos, but most of the stuff would be believable.

1) I reported to VMT-103 in Yuma

out of Kingsville, with my new wings for A4E transition, Jan 1967. My first orientation flight, and first training flight in the Marine Corps as a Naval aviator lasted (0.1/ inc). I'm sure I was the first to ever survive the ejection from a TA4F as that was the first one crashed. It was the 4th delivered. That ejection was the first ever using the new 'rocket' seat. It rescued me at what I still think was the lowest survived ejection ever. It was at about 15 feet, AGL, but some -200 feet MSL. Yuma is below sea level. My wife asked me if I'd heard that a jet crashed, when I got home at about the regular time that evening.

2) I was the pilot that landed dead stick at MCAS Khe Sanh (2,200 ft of Marston matting), RVN, in a fully loaded A4E, from Chu Lai, VMA-211. This was in the last weeks of the siege (1969). Complicated but never published story. The pilot and a fine bird returned to Chu Lai, undamaged. It was on Huntley/Brinkley. Cause: total electrical failure during suppression pass as part of the resupply operations. A long story with unusual postscript. (Ed. note: see *The A-4Ever, Fall 2006*, for a story on this incident written by then-Major Jerry "Cobra" Ellis.)

3) During a TransPAC of six TA4Fs in 1968, I experienced loss of oil pressure (ring failed) at 30,000 over a storm, about 300 miles east of Cubi Point. I was able to roll out at Sangley Point, the first field (abandoned) enroute. That was another dead stick, as the motor finally quit at about 3,000 ft as I made the longest cruise descent possible.

4) **A third dead stick occurred at Danang.** On a short trip to provide close-air support, it was necessary to dump fuel only a minute or two after take-off from Chu Lai. Three passes dropping D2As (Mk. 82 Snakeye 500# bombs) occurred, and we pulled off and joined up. Wingman pointed out that I was still dumping fuel. The dump was stuck, and I was looking at about 10 minutes of fuel, but it was still dumping. I climbed and headed to Da Nang. The flame out occurred over the bay, but I had maintained 250 knots. Gear and flaps on short final, and I made

a reasonably normal decelerating touch down, and was able to coast into the hot refueling pits. The corporal there took some time to explain to me that it was not necessary to shut-down in the hot fuel pit. Three may be the military jet record for dead stick landings.

5) Capt Ken Cook and I made two 30' passes straight across the outer trenches with one napalm each time on a clear day in the DMZ. These trenches were temporarily occupied by several hundred NVA troops, which were about to overrun the Army(101st) company, that had pulled back to the inner ring. Cook caught the 2nd and 4th passes, and they finally filled the air with enough bullets to hit him. He came off on fire and trailing smoke. The A4E (VMA-211) kept on flying and had not lost power or control. I joined up, didn't think we could expect it to fly home, and in formation, had him eject at about 4,000 over water, just north of Da Nang. Great view of the ejection.

I called in help, and he was picked up by a helo that was 'practicing' water rescues right below us, before he could climb into the raft. The helo took him all the way to Chu Lai, while I strafed away the interested fishermen. I had to refuel in Da Nang, so he easily beat me to happy hour. He got a Purple Heart, so he must have been very wet.

6) I was the Asst Air Officer, 1st Div, Da Nang for the last six months of my tour, after 273 opportunities for very interesting *Skyhawk* work. I had the entire HQ group of four TA4Fs available every third day. Including the one I had flown from California via Hawaii, Midway, Guam, Sangley Pt, Cubi Pt, and Da Nang. They let me schedule myself to perform 'road recce' out of Da Nang, with rockets and a centerline mini-gun, solo, unaccompanied. I'm still worried that I shouldn't be reported where I went, and what I did, but it was a lot of fun to follow roads through the Ashua Valley, at 100' and 400kts. Always surprising to everyone when you pop over a hill and see hundreds of ants running in all directions. I got another 27 missions, to make an even 300 before getting sent to instructor duty.

7) I reported to Kingsville (VT-21) just as the new TA4Js arrived to become the standard trainer. I was the only experienced TA4F pilot in the squadron. The emergency procedures on their kneeboards were the old ones for the *Cougar*, with TF9F carefully inked out, and TA4F printed in. They were shocked when I pointed out that there was NO BATTERY to be inspected on pre-flight, or in the event of electrical failure at night.

I had the very first TA4J student to complete and get his wings. He was a fine young Naval LTJG, named Jeffery Punches. It was long thought that I had overrated his flying, but he did even better after completion of his basic transition with me, and going through the rest of the syllabus with dozens of instructors. I had been teaching him to fly an A4, not an F9.

Please let me know if one of these would amuse your readers. There are others. Everybody has stories they should, and some they can't, tell.
Bruce Corbett (Scooter)
Capt, USMC
[a4e@comcast.net]

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To the Editor:

Dear Terry (Cooney),

I was recently honored with a membership to your fine organization by Bill Gilchrist and noticed the call for help on the Naval Academy A-4A restoration project in your Journal. I am the V.P. of a company that has supported the A-4 *Skyhawk* aircraft since the 1960's. We have built a very substantial inventory of spare parts for all models A-4, and continue to supply spares for the A-4s still in operation worldwide.

We will be happy to supply some of the items required for the project at no cost to the association, excluding cost of freight. For starters I can see from the photos in your Journal that left hand aileron and wing tips would help.

I look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Best regards,
Ron Guy

United Aeronautical Corp.
7360 Laurel Cyn. Blvd.
North Hollywood, Ca. 91605
818-764-2102

(Ed Note: Ron, this is a great and generous gesture from you--A-4s Forever! Raven)

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To the Editor:

I enjoy the *Skyhawk Journal* and am a proud member of the association. My connection to the *Skyhawk* is limited to the TA-4 variant. My first flights were in 1977 while stashed in VF-43 awaiting flight school. At the time, the VF-43 "Challengers" were a dual mission squadron providing instrument training and adversary services at NAS Oceana. The association's own Boom Powell was in the squadron, and I remember listening to him tell his tales of Naval aviation. I vaguely remember going on a two plane cross country with two squadron instructors and another stash ensign but that's another story.

My next exposure to the TA-4 was in Advanced in VT-7 at NAS Meridian. At the end of the syllabus, it was great to carqual on *Ike* and fly back solo into NAS Key West, knowing how to use every button and knob in the cockpit as opposed to when I had been a stash ensign just 20 months before.

My career had me flying S-3s over 4000 hours, but I still managed to snare a few TA-4 hops over the years; a few hops with fellow JOs in VC-5 while stationed at NAS Cubi Point (low level hops that were awe-inspiring!) and an ACM hop during some DCM training with VA-45 out of NAS Key West in 1986 or so.

The main reason to send you this note is that from 2002-03 while I was CO of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility of NAVSTA Roosevelt Roads, VC-8 was under my cognizance. I had arranged a return to flight status as I headed down to Roosey so as to fly the station C-12s, but quickly figured that VC-5 might let a nostalgic O-6 in their chain-of-command fly with them. The entire squadron led by CDR Vince Douillard and then Tom McDonough treated me like a king. I tried not to wear out my welcome but managed to fly with them a number of times. I'm 6' 3+" so the *Skyhawk* cockpit was a tight fit for me in 1979, and although it hadn't changed in 24 years, I sure had. I managed.

The most memorable flights I had with the Red Tails involved the delivery of the squadron's last two flyable aircraft to air museums in the States. This was as good a deal as I ever had. Despite first dibs going to the squadron officers, there was an open seat in one of the jets. The skipper and XO took one jet while I was

in another with LT Dave Brown as we headed to an RON in NAS Key West. We suffered an electrical failure and deployed the RAT so as to land uneventfully in Florida. After liberty that night on Duval Street, the other jet headed to Baltimore while Dave and I awaited a repair crew. We then flew to Houston and RONed at a civilian FBO, rising the next morning to fly into Davis Monthan AFB. (I remember going into the break and seeing row upon row of retired *Skyhawks* below us.). So it was on 3 MAY 2003, we had the honor of flying the last official flight of a U. S. Navy-owned/operated *Skyhawk* (TA-4 Buno 154649) as a combined instrument and low-level hop into Palm Springs Int'l. Airport. A host of dignitaries, including the mayor, were waiting to greet us as we delivered the aircraft to the Palm Springs Air Museum. We were featured in the newspaper and had the chance to personally climb into all their old war birds. It was a pleasure and an honor to have a minor connection to the *Skyhawk* starting with flights in 1977 and ending in being personally involved in its last U. S. Navy flight in 2003.

Respectfully,
Greg Cooper
[GCooper@CanfieldSchools.net]

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To the Editor:

Terry,

Sorry for the late reply. I'm a Brazilian Navy Officer, and I fly the A-4 for the VF-1 Squadron here in Brazil. I would like to know if we can join the association as a squadron. In order to do that, I'm gathering the information about flight hours and traps to fill out the profile form. The address of the squadron is:
Rua Comandante Ituriel, s/nº -
Bairro Fluminense, São Pedro da Aldeia
- RJ
ZIP 28.940-000
Brazil

Thank you, Terry.
Lt Igor Bastos
VF-1 Sqdn
[igorsb_wp@hotmail.com]

(Ed. note: As a result of this email to Secretary Terry Cooney, VF-1 is now a squadron member of Skyhawk Association.)

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continued...

LETTERS

Continued...

To the Editor :

The *Skyhawk Journal* continues to revive memories of my privileged association with it and the aviators who flew them. At age 16oops, 17, a high school dropout who read an article in *Time* magazine on Naval aviation, I was hooked at once.

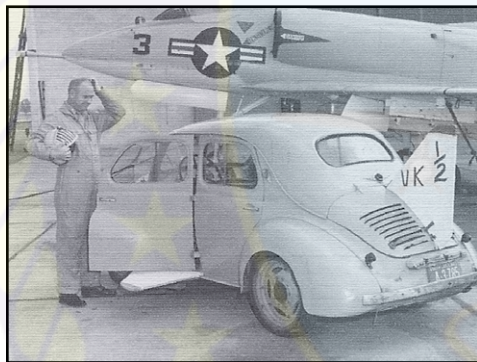
As a plane captain on the A4D-2 from 1958-62, I never had a bad day, even on three carrier deployments and a long, lonely boat ride, USNS *Breton*, with *Skyhawks* aboard bound for Iwakuni.

All our maintainers found this bird to be incredibly easy to maintain and we got a lot of enjoyment watching our squadron pilots be the first to qualify utilizing the LABS syllabus. The *Skyhawks* with Naval aviators and Marines from our VMA-121 came up winners in the first U.S. Navy Marine Team Flying Brothers 1960 at Subic Bay.

My hopes are that the *Skyhawk* remains with us all.

Semper Fi,
William D. Ravgiala, Jr.
GySgt, USMC (Ret)

P.S. Photo below is our first CO, LtCol T.J. Saxon, the best of the best.



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To the Editor:

In response to Duke's (Stanton) article regarding the VMA-214 paint scheme originating in '62... A couple of decades later, I was the AAMO as a captain, getting us ready to go to Japan for UDP. The company grade cadre of pilots were admiring the good looking paint job on the Scooter as seen in photos on the O' Club wall at NZJ (MCAS El Toro). As all great ideas are conceived in O' clubs with a little help from "thinking fluid"), we

figured we should spruce up our fleet of drab, low-vis *Skyhawks* for the upcoming deployment.

Asking the CO (Nick "Greek" Kirby) or the XO (Todd "Hun" Frommelt) was pretty much out of the question, so we started painting the ram's head and stars on the rudder in low-vis paint. Not good--the answer was clearly dark black paint against the gray airframe, which of course was not authorized at the time. I jumped on the advance party to Iwakuni to accept our airplanes from our -311 brothers, and had the gang pretty much replicate the Stanton/Gardner original, stars and all. Looked great. We brought that paint scheme back to the states, and as AMO of -214 in Yuma, flew several to the bone yard dressed that way. Goes to show ya, that good ideas never go out of style-- Thanks, Duke!!!

PS- I have some decent pics of ours in the 80's, but am currently mobilized and not at home- Pretty sure the Hun's got some archived.

SF,
Col Digger Rotelli, USMCR
VMA-214, 1986-1989
[diggerrotelli@sbcglobal.net]

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To the Editor:

Just got the latest issue. It is great as usual. The *Skyhawk* Association puts out by far the best publication of its kind.

Just thought I'd point out that the caption under the picture on page 8 incorrectly identifies the pilot on the left as Dick Powers. It is really Lt Jim Burton.

Keep up the good work.

Charlie Stender
VA-163 '64-'65
[cfstender@verizon.net]

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To the Editor:

The picture with the caption of "LCDR Trent Powers and Lt Wayne Steward" is actually of LCDR Jim Burton and Wayne (Ed note: reference is to Fall 2009 Journal, page 8 - Peter Mersky letter). I can't immediately put my hands on my 1965 Cruise Book, but if that's the way the picture is captioned, it is wrong. BTW, LCDR Powers went by Dick and not Trent.

Dick Hamon
Capt USN (Ret)
VA-164 (1962-65)
[djhamon@earthlink.net]

(Ed. note: author Peter Mersky replied:)

To the Editor:

I was looking at the cruise book for *Oriskany's* 1965 deployment, and I was especially trying to find a photo of Powers to go with the story I was working into my book for Osprey on the A-4 in Vietnam. Somehow--and I can't for the life of me remember *how*--I came to believe that one of the two guys hand-flying as being him. It even came out pretty well in the book, having been reprinted from a photocopy.

One thing about writing history, there's usually someone who knows individual points of the story better than the writer. Thanks to Dick Hamon for bringing it to my attention, and I hope to have a better true photo of Dick Powers in my files. Now, if I can just convince the publisher to make the correction in future printings...

Peter Mersky
[airwriter@comcast.net]



Record corrected: LCDR Jim Burton (L) indulges in traditional pilot-to-pilot conversation with LT Wayne Seward in VA-164s ready room aboard *Oriskany*.

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To the Editor:

Didn't realize the scope of the BIS trials, until now. Apparently LCOL Russell's innards passed the testing at the Navel Air Test Center.

Just a nit-picking about the Douglas flak-meister referring to the "Navel" vice "Naval" Test Center on page 22.

Shoes
CAPT A.A. Schaufelberger, USN (Ret)
[schauf@islc.net]
(Ed. note: CAPT Schaufelberger's sharp eyes caught a typo missed by the Douglas PR department in their press release of November 3, 1970, concerning the first A-4M delivery. See page 22, *The A-4Ever*, Fall 2009.)

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To the Editor:

I am Marine veteran Bert Springstead, 1957 to 1960. Presently I am a volunteer aboard the USS *Intrepid* Air and Sea Museum. On board is an A-4 *Skyhawk*. It sits on the hangar deck, and it is a featured aircraft.

I will attach a picture of it.



Intrepid hangar deck houses A-4B 142833.
(Photo via Bert Springstead).

Bert Springstead

bspringstead@si.rr.com

(Ed. note: *Intrepid* display is A-4B 142833. See *Skyhawks on Display*, *Skyhawk Association* website at <http://www.skyhawk.org/2c/museum.htm>)

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To the Editor:

Greetings,

I was a plane captain in VMA-212, MAG 13, Kaneohe MCAS from 1961 to 1963. I was on duty the night of November 20, 1961, when two of our A4s had a mid-air over Kailua while returning from a run at the target island (Kahoolawe). One plane made it back with vertical stabilizer and rudder damage; the other plane went down in Kailua taking out two houses, killing a six-year old boy and the pilot. The pilot was Second Lieutenant William Wright. In reconstructing the pieces of the plane in a base hangar, it was evident that Lt. Wright survived the initial impact and could have ejected, but chose to stay with his airplane and tried to dead stick it over the town and into Kailua Bay. Unfortunately, it wasn't successful despite the heroic efforts of Lt. Wright. Please add this incident to your website.

Norm Spilleth

Cpl-E4 1960-1964

[mailto:nspilleth@yahoo.com]

(Ed. Note: We'll do that, Norm. Thanks for the input. I'd like to print your letter in our next *Skyhawk Journal*, if that is ok. Thanks, Bob)



Please do, Bob.

There isn't much mention of VMA-212, the old "Devil Cats" when we flew A4s from 1961-63. When I checked into the squadron, -212 was still flying FJ4Bs. We transitioned to the A4s a month or two later. We were part of MAG-13 at the time (early 60s) which also included VMA-214, VMF-232 (F8s) and HMM-161. Our tail letters were WD. Sometime after 1963, -212 turned into VMF-212 and acquired the *Phantoms*. They also changed their name to "The Lancers", which us "old guys" think sounds more like a high school marching band. We had a pretty cool logo, a tiger with a green snake in its mouth. A plaque with that logo and green lights for the tiger's eyes hung in back of the bar at "Andy's Ebb Tide" in Kailua, our squadron bar. Good old days.

Semper Fi,
Norm Spilleth

Spilleth follow-up letter

(Ed. Note: Norm Spilleth provided this in response to a request for more information to update the VMA-212 website.)

OK, Bob.

Here's a little more info: My first CO in -212 was LtCol John Lowman in 1961. He was followed by LtCol Ed LeFaivre in '62. Col LeFaivre had the distinction of being the first Marine aviator to shoot down a Jap *Betty* at night with the "new" night radar in WWII.

Another thing I remember from those days is that for a short period, our A4s and I believe -214 A4s were flying (at the time) top secret missions with spray tanks. Each A/C had what looked like 300 gallon drop tanks mounted on the wing racks, but the fins had spray nozzles along their trailing edges. Missions were always at night, and we were told (as plane captains) to not touch the planes or let the pilots out when they returned until after they were washed down on special wash racks. Supposedly they were testing live bacterial agent that was loaded from freezers in the -232 hangar. I have recently become aware of what was

really going on. Very interesting -- read about it here.

<http://fhpc.osd.mil/CBexposures/shad.jsp>

Regards,

Norm Spilleth

[nspilleth@yahoo.com]

(Ed. Note: we'd be very interested in receiving input from someone who flew one of these missions.)

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To the Editor:

Dear Warrior Princess:

I just received the subject (*Fall 2009 Journal*) and thoroughly enjoyed it, just like I did with the previous ones. One observation or two:

1. Size Does Matter, p. 10, line 3. Add "Navy" after Brazilian as many international A-4 operators used them in their Air Forces.

2. Size Does Matter, p. 10, line 4: Not Fujimi A-4Ms, but A-4KU.

The BN (*Brazilian Navy*) procured 20 bombers and 3 trainers from the KAF (see p.15) in 1999. I worked in Brazil from 1999-2000 as the Engine Manager. The best liberty in the world.

To wit, the BN had two CVs, but no A/C and now are operating A-4s on the Minal Gerais (A-11) (former Royal Navy) and Sao Paulo (A-12), (former French Navy Marshall Foch). The A-4s were the first fixed wing and first jet as before they only had helicopters. I was the Pratt and Whitney tech rep in Kuwait from 1982-82 and it was quite a bang supporting the program again.

Perv sends

LCDR William B. Walker, USNR-Ret/1525, SA Member

[billrace@yahoo.com]

(Dear Perv--and I won't even ask how you got THAT callsign--but in my defense, I'm not an international Warrior Princess but rather a CONUS domesticated one, and obviously not up to speed on little foreign aircraft models. My bad. WP sends.)

(Ed. note: we wrote to Lcdr Walker requesting that he write about his experiences in South America. This was his follow-up email.)

Dear Raven,

First congratulations on becoming CO of the SA. I am glad the Princess forwarded my email about the Brazilian Navy A-4s. I was

continued...

LETTERS

Continued...

impressed to get your note today, and I'll start laying pipe. I'll try to fit the story in, but as you know, we achievers are busier than ever when retired.

I have been back nine years, so my remembrance is a little faded. I sent two emails today. One to a retired BN WO who was a great help to us there. At our time he was the QA chief in HS-1 (*Sikorsky* SH-3Ds). The other mail went to one of the team who knows where most of the team is now, as I need help in remembering details.

The BN sent out bid invitations for firms for flight training, maintenance training and shop advisors. Kay and Associates, Arlington Heights, Illinois, was the winner of all three. The team

was about 35 men, mostly retired USN/USMC. More Marines as you know they had the Ms until early 1990s. We had two IPs, a Lt. Col Jim. ????? who was found teaching at U of Idaho. Stick #2 was a young USN Lt. Craig Ziemba, who just got out after flying A-6Es in VA-75, then 3 years in Texas as a TA-4J IP.

My A-4 background: worked for Pratt and Whitney over 20 years, 10 years as an Experimental Engineering Assistant (AS degree) and 10 years in Field Service. J52 assignments were MATWING One at Oceana (A-6E) and Kuwait. Later I was the P/P engineer at Grumman St. Augustine Corporation and supported the conversion of 40 A-4Ls to A-4PTMs. Other jobs led me to be the Civil Service J52 rep at MAG-14, Cherry Point, supporting the 4 EA-6B squadrons. That is where Kay found me in 1999.

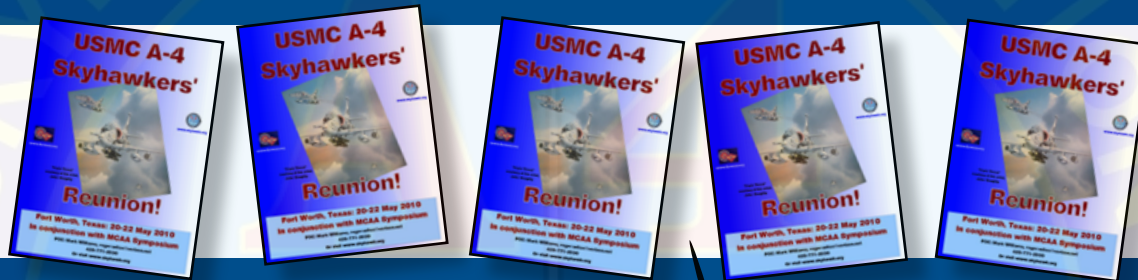
Better yet, I got out of the USN as

an AE2 in 1961. I joined the reserves at NAS Willow Grove in 1963 while going to PSU. Had so much fun the first drill weekend I stayed 32 years. In 1974 I was an AEC selectee, finished my BS degree, and applied for a reserve Direct Commission. Shocked when selected for a Lt(jg). Next 19 years I was in 4 great squadrons as an AMO, VF-202, NAS Dallas; VC-12 (TA-4J), NAS Oceana; VP-62 at Jax; and VFA-203 at Cecil. At VA-203 parties and changes of command, I met Hide (*Dave Dollarhide, SA director*). Piped over the side in 1993 at 35 years.

Perv sends.

Send your letters to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

Please note email address!



SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •



PLAN AHEAD

- ★ **2010 Red River Valley Association (River Rats) Reunion**, Orlando, FL, April 2010. Information at <http://www.river-rats.org/index.php>.
- ★ **All Marine A-4 Skyhawk Reunion** at Sheraton Fort Worth in conjunction with MCAA, May 20-22, 2010, Ft. Worth, TX. Contact is Mark Williams (roger.wilco@verizon.net), 400 Howell Way, #102, Edmonds, WA 98020-4190, 425-771-2030 (Pacific time) or see www.skyhawk.org. Reunion HQ will be in Driftwood Room.
- ★ **Skyhawk Association Board Meeting**, May 21, 2010, Sheraton Fort Worth (Driftwood Room), Fort Worth, TX. See www.skyhawk.org for more information.
- ★ **VA-23 West Coast (All Invited) Reunion**, August 13-15, 2010, in McMinnville, OR, at Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum. Contact Jim Cameron (jc3sher@fastmail.fm), 1301 NE Hwy 99W, #185, McMinnville, OR 97128; (503) 780-2191.
- ★ **Skyhawk Association 2010 Annual Meeting and Luncheon**: 11:30 a.m., September 10, 2010, Tailhook Symposium, Reno, NV.



A TRIP TO THE SUBURBS

• Downtown •

By Bob Arnold



It was late July 1967, Gulf of Tonkin-hot, humid, no showers and three ALFA strikes a day. USS *Oriskany* (CVA-34) and Air Wing 16 had been on the line just a little over two weeks. Our indoctrination had been five days of milk runs in the south and then three ALFAs a day up north. The welcome we'd received was bloody. Our squadron alone--VA-164--lost four A-4Es in a week's time. In addition, we had an unsuccessful rescue attempt where we lost the rescue helicopter with everyone on board. Later we found out our stranded pilot, the object of the rescue attempt, had been killed the next day.

The entire air wing was in a state of mild shock. Even the seasoned veterans from the prior cruise couldn't recall anything like the intensity of air defenses we were running into. Some of the pilot comments were: "Jesus, there were so many gun flashes at the target it looked like Los Angeles at night--except it was daytime," and "Where the hell do they get all those missiles? They've got to be exhausted just pulling the trigger so often."

The ALFA targets we were going after ranged from bridges to railroad yards and truck parks to power plants. For the most part, they were all "downtown," right in the middle of Haiphong, Hanoi or some other four-letter flak trap. There wasn't an easy target anywhere in the north.

One particular target, the Van Nhue headquarters area, was located in the suburbs six miles southeast of downtown Hanoi. It was a series of barracks and associated auxiliary buildings that was supposed to be a headquarters for the big mugga-muggas. To some of us, it looked like it could be a POW camp, but we were assured that wasn't the case.

There was no easy way to get there, so it was decided to take a straight shot: coast in at "the crotch," head straight for downtown and roll in six miles short

where the headquarters was located. Maybe, just maybe, the bad guys would hold their fire thinking we were headed downtown. That way, we could be on and off target before they brought in the big stuff. It didn't work. As one of the strike pilots said afterwards, "We caught them with their pants up!"

I was strike lead for my 15th combat mission. Shortly after we went feet dry, we started picking up flak and missiles. The strike group was hosed down all the way into the target area. As we approached the target, the weather went sour. The initial report from the weather recon aircraft was low scattered clouds. By the time we arrived, the weather had worsened to low broken to overcast. When you could see through the clouds, every village looked the same. All the time, missiles were flying, and black and white puffs of flak were appearing everywhere. The strike was aborted and we broke for home looking for targets of opportunity along the way. One F-8 fighter escort was lost to a SAM.

A few days later, the same target popped up on our hit list. Since I had the strike lead on the first go when we didn't make it, I asked for it again. Looking back in the comfort of time 23 years later, I can see that wasn't too smart a decision, but smart and right are the preserve of armchair warriors. All any of us knew at that time was that it was hot, humid and terrifying.

Everyone dreaded those ALFA strikes. Death was waiting over the beach. That sounds melodramatic, but it was the reality of the situation. No one talked about it that way, at least not in the ready rooms. There was very little, if any, joking about it--just a quiet, matter-of-fact attitude of "let's get on with it." Yet everyone knew that the moment he went feet dry, he was over a death pit that would lash out with flak, missiles and MiGs, the sole purpose of which was to kill you.

We figured we had to do something different the second time. Lord knows anything would be better than our last effort. So, we picked a different route and ordnance mix. It was decided to go in the "back door," coast in north of Haiphong, run west over the mountain range, head south toward the target, roll in left and pull out headed east.

The big change was the strike composition and ordnance load. We took eight A-4s without external tanks and put ten Mk 82s on each bird. That way we could put 80 500-pounders on target with eight birds versus the 14 bombers it would normally take to put 84 bombs on target. A half-dozen fewer airplanes made a less cumbersome, more maneuverable strike force with fewer people exposed. Of course it also meant fewer targets for the enemy gunners, less diversion and more concentration of firepower.

The last minute planning went on until late that evening. I managed about four hours sleep (par for the course) before the briefings started. If there was one light moment it came when the air intelligence people pulled out the flak map, an enlargement of the target area. Where there were known flak sites they had put in colored pins - different colors for different caliber weapons and SAM sites. The map looked like someone had spattered several cans of different colored paint on it--the pins covered the entire target area. Somebody said "Oh, shit," and that broke the tension. What the hell, it didn't cost any more to laugh.

The preparations and briefings seemed to drain away my courage. It took that kick-in-the-ass off the cat to get the adrenalin going, like a racehorse with the bit between its teeth. Once airborne, there was no way that any of us weren't going to give it our best shot. In the meantime, it seemed that it took forever to go through the strike group briefings and squadron ready room briefings. Finally, the call came to man aircraft and it was a relief to be doing something other than sitting and waiting.

Going from the air conditioned ready room to the flight deck, the first thing that hit you was the heat. It wasn't even mid-morning yet, but it was already hot and sticky. With all the flight gear we wore, it took only a minute before the sweat started running

continued...

TRIP TO SUBURBS

Continued...

down my forehead and back of my neck. By the time I finished preflight and manned, my flight suit was soaked through. There was still a lot of activity on the flight deck - planes were being towed and tied down and ordnance crews were still loading bombs. When I got to my bird, the squadron ordnance officer was putting the fuse in the nose of the last bomb. The aircraft looked different with all those bombs and no centerline fuel tank.

After I got strapped in and waited my turn for the starter huffer, it seemed like the whole process was a series of sweating and waiting. It was a relief to get the engine cranking, close the canopy and turn up the air conditioning full blast.

All the engine checks were good. I gave a thumbs-up to the yellow shirt taxi director, chocks were pulled and I started moving up the flight deck toward the catapults. Then it began--my turn on the cat, full power, salute, the cat shot, off the bow, nose up, gear up, flaps up, left hand climbing turn. For some strange reason, I couldn't help but notice how blue the water was.

The launch took forever. Because of the strike configuration, all the A-4s had to be in-flight refueled along with the F-8 fighter escorts. That meant more tankers had to be launched. In the middle of the whole process, the ship's starboard catapult went down and by the time the last aircraft was airborne, we were 20 minutes behind schedule.

Overhead the ship at 10,000 ft., I joined the rendezvous circle. The A-3 tankers' were the first airborne and the fighters next, so they established the orbit. By the time the bombers arrived, the fighters were being refueled--like piglets after mama sow--a bit more orderly but the same principle.

As soon as the last aircraft was airborne, I announced we were departing and instructed the rest of the flight to rendezvous en route. I slid up on the wing of the lead tanker, took the lead and headed the strike group north. It was a clear bright day over the Gulf of Tonkin.

Proceeding at tanker-fueling speed,

considerably slower than otherwise, allowed everyone to catch up. Still, it took much longer to refuel the fighters and bombers than we had calculated, and as we approached our coast-in point, I noted we were then 40 minutes behind schedule. By the time we reached coast-in, everyone had refueled except my wingman and me. I decided we could gas up on the way out if needed, so I dropped off the tankers and turned west.

We had climbed to 12,500 and as I turned west, I added full power and backed off two percent. Crossing the beach in a weaving S-turn, my indicated airspeed was 410. In a shallow descent I figured we could hold pretty close to that speed into the target area. I took a look around and everyone was there: eight A-4 bombers with ten Mk 82s apiece; four A-4 Iron Hands (flak suppressors) with two Shrikes each; four F-8 Iron Hand escorts and four



VA-164/CVW-16 A-4E AH 406 (151194) with AGM-12 Bullpup, circa 1967.

(Skyhawk Association photo).

F-8 fighter escorts weaving overhead. We were "feet dry" on our way in. The run into the target area was uneventful. There were no MiGs around, and since we were going in the "back door" over an uninhabited mountain range, there were no missiles or flak. There was a lot of radar activity and the long distance search gear had painted us just about the whole way on our northbound leg over the Gulf.

When we turned west and crossed the beach, the height finding radar started up and about a minute later, the gun control radar came on line. Halfway through our inbound leg we started picking up Singer Low--missile acquisition radar. Still nobody had shot anything yet. It was a cloudless, bright day--clear all the way into the target.

The west-bound leg lasted 22 minutes, from the coast into the target roll-in point. About six minutes from time-over-target

(TOT), the Singer High missile guidance radar came on line. Still, nobody was shooting. I could see my navigation checkpoint ahead: TOT minus two, crossing a river, but I couldn't find the target. Every damned village in the whole area looked the same. There was no distinguishing landmark in the target vicinity to key on. Nothing to do but press on. Still no flak, no missiles, no MiGs--just that cacophony of radar noise over the headset that sounded like a Chinese orchestra tuning up.

I eased the nose down slightly and increased the S-turn maneuvering. The fighters and Iron Hands were way ahead of me on that. Approaching my checkpoint, TOT minus two, I still hadn't acquired the target and all I could think of was "Oh, shit!" I crossed the river as the sweep second hand on the cockpit clock passed 12 and at that moment someone called out: "85 out of Bac Giang!" (i.e., 85mm anti-aircraft gunfire). I looked down at two o'clock and saw gun flashes. Within seconds, black puffs appeared at 12 o'clock directly above us and what happened from that point on was chaotic.

Someone radioed, "Missile, one o'clock." No sooner had he finished broadcasting than the missile went over the strike group--long, brown and going like hell. Other transmissions filled the air. "Two missiles 11 o'clock." "Come left, break left." "Go down, go down." "Two missiles three o'clock." "Missile 12 o'clock." By that time, I was nose down in a tight left hand spiraling dive. Two missiles went over me, I rolled right and pulled hard as another missile went by my left wing. I saw two more at 12 o'clock. When they went by, I pulled my nose up and rolled left--the target was out there somewhere to my left.

Nobody knew for sure how many missiles were fired at us in that two minute period. The low estimate was 30, the high 44. They were everywhere and kept on coming. The result was a melee, but fortunately not a disaster.



The entire strike group was forced to a lower altitude. Two of the bombers found themselves in the weeds, dumped their ordnance and headed for home. Another section of bombers dropped on the wrong target - a village next to the headquarters area. One A-4 was hit by a SAM but managed to jettison his load and head toward the Gulf with his wingman. That left two of us--me and my wingie.

At the time the missiles stopped flying, I found myself about 3,500 ft., churning along at 400 kts, still twisting and turning. I had no idea where anyone else was. I looked out at 11 o'clock and saw some bombs going off about two miles away. My wingman had found the target and dropped, but unfortunately, he missed. I pointed my nose toward the bomb smoke and pulled up. There it was, the target dead ahead, just like the pictures I had seen at the briefing. I was low and slow. I pulled up to 5,500 ft. and my airspeed dropped to 220 kts. My bombsight pipper was set for a 450 kts, 45 degree dive, with a 3,500 ft. release. I eased the pipper to 50 mils at 12 o'clock.

My airspeed was passing 350 in an estimated 30-35 degree glide. I pressed on until those barracks filled the entire windscreen. One flak site was blazing away at 11 o'clock and another was getting into the act at two o'clock. I pickled.

The ordnance manual said that the bombs would ripple off in milliseconds. Nonetheless, I swore I could hear everyone kick off and it seemed like an eternity. When the last bomb left, the aircraft shot ahead, rapidly gaining- 50 kts of airspeed. In about two seconds I had dumped 30 percent of the gross weight and a hell of a lot of frontal drag. Also, I was down to 1,500 lbs of fuel. Pulling the nose up to the horizon and wrapping in to a 90-degree bank to the right, I pulled back on the stick. I was doing 450 kts with an excess of five Gs on the aircraft in a level turn at 1,500 ft. I was literally standing the Scooter on its wing, and oh my, how beautifully it did respond! About 60 degrees through the turn, I looked over my right shoulder and watched my last four bombs go off. The whole string had been directly on target. The feeling at that moment was one of the biggest highs I have every ex-

perienced--a combination of satisfaction, justification, vengeance and accomplishment all wrapped up in danger, and it came out as sheer joy. Then it was time to get the hell out of there!

I had completed about 120 degrees of turn from my original roll-in heading. Easing off the Gs I did a roll reversal to the left, still at about 1,500 ft. and the nose started to come back toward my original roll-in heading. Ahead was a flak umbrella. My best guess is that eight or more flak sites were all concentrating their fire at a point about 3,000 ft. along the roll-in, pullout heading. The tracers were all coming together at that one point to form a canopy. They couldn't stop me on the way in so they planned to get me on the way out.

I pushed the nose down and headed for a point directly underneath the flak trap. Flat out on the deck and passing 500 kts, I went directly over the last flak site. I know it was my imagination, but I swore I there was a SAM coming after me from somewhere through the weeds. I covered the next 50 miles or so in a series of violent S-turns at a maximum altitude of 50 ft., most of the time blowing water out of the rice paddies. Five very long, agonizing minutes flipping that A-4 from wing tip to wing tip, going from one six-G turn to another. When I didn't spot anything chasing me, I thought maybe my gear was over-reacting. (We really didn't know how good it was in those days.) I was getting worn out with all the low-level, high-G maneuvering, but about then the missile warning went off. Just the same, I stayed on the deck and made a straight run for the coast.

When I felt I was out of the danger area, I pulled the nose up into a 450-kt. climb and how that thing climbed! I kept it going to 20,000 ft. until I could see the beach ahead. As soon as I cleared land, I throttled back and headed for the ship. I was "feet wet" with 1,100 lbs. of fuel. It was a beautiful day in the Gulf of Tonkin.

I set up my glide for the ship, idle descent with the fuel gauge hovering around 1,000 lbs. Strike control got a little excited about my fuel state and started to scramble a tanker but I told them to forget it. All things considered, low state and the landing were going to be the easy part of the mission. I called the ball with 600 lbs. and had a hard

time getting on speed.

With that low fuel state and slick configuration, I was at 75 percent power and still high and fast, but I got aboard. Everyone else had returned OK. One bird was shot up but the pilot wasn't hit.

We never went back to Van Nhue. The bomb damage assessment was 50-percent destruction of the target, and I guess the big mugga-muggas must have figured that was enough considering how tough it was to get there. Besides, nobody I knew really wanted to go back there anyway.

Our cruise lasted another six months. We continued to go downtown and I had several more close encounters with SAMs. We had other losses, but none as bad as those first few weeks on the line. The A-4 served us well. Its maneuverability and responsiveness provided the edge that meant survival. But never so much as on that day I took a trip to the suburbs.

*(Ed. Note: This article was first published in **The Hook**, Winter 1990. Used with permission.)*

CAPT Bob Arnold's story narrates only two of Air Wing 16's combat missions during its 1967 *Oriskany* deployment. CVW-16 aviators paid a terrible toll in men and aircraft. During 14-31 July alone, CVW-16 lost ten aircraft--56 percent of 18 CTF 77 fixed wing combat losses for the month. Fourteen of those aircraft were A-4s, six from CVW-16, four from VA-164.

Three CVW-16 aviators were KIA during July and two became POWs, one of whom died in captivity--all in the wing's first two weeks of Vietnam combat operations. The courage and determination of such men can never be adequately described.

Bob Arnold made three Vietnam War deployments, one in A-4s and two in A-7s, flying 336 combat missions. He was awarded the Silver Star, four Distinguished Flying Crosses and several Air Medals. Following CNO staff duty and an XO/CO tour with VA-94, Bob retired in 1979. During his 26-year career, he accumulated 5,400 hours of light time and made 1,265 carrier arrested landings.



ATSI

• A-4 Skyhawks for Hire •



(This article is reprinted from the December 2008 issue of *Air International* with permission of the publisher, author and ATSI. It cannot be reused without permission of *Air International*.)

Dino Carrara reports on the work of Advanced Training Systems International (ATSI), which offers its fleet of McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawks for a wide range of tasks, including acting as aggressors, test-beds for new equipment and fighter pilot training

The A-4 Skyhawk was designed as a ground-attack aircraft, though such were its attributes that it was also used for other roles including as an aggressor and even for lead-in fighter pilot training. This versatility, along with the type's robust design, made it an ideal choice for the many services that Advanced Training Systems International (ATSI) expected to offer its customers. As a result, this US company, based at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, Arizona, bought 13 ex-Israeli Air Force aircraft in 2000.

ATSI was founded in 1994 by former US Navy pilots Jon McBride (who is still on the Board of Directors) and Larry Pearson, who had the idea of offering military pilot training. They believed they could pick up work as a result of government cutbacks which had left the US Navy unable to offer as many places in its flight training school to overseas air arms as it had previously done. The US military in general was also cutting back its electronic warfare and aggressor squadrons, and the pair felt this could be another source of potential revenue. Initially, ATSI leased in aircraft as required to fulfill contracts, but a private investment firm recognized the venture's potential and provided the funds to buy the Skyhawks.

ATSI's A-4s are classed as 'public use' aircraft by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which means they are not

allowed to fly private individuals. Although the company is often approached by people who would pay handsomely to fly in their aircraft, this particular area, like displaying at airshows, is not one in which it wishes to get involved, due to the potential legal liabilities. Instead, it prefers to focus on work for military customers and defense contractors, all of which has to be approved by a branch of the US Army, which acts as the oversight authority on behalf of the Department of Defense. Several of the A-4s have 'Experimental' painted on them, this being the category aircraft have to be certificated under FAA rules when ATSI secures work flying for civilian aerospace companies.

Ten A-4Ns and three two-seat TA-4Js were selected for purchase and refurbished in Israel, during which time they were also demilitarized. The company upgraded their avionics and made some alterations for their new life in the civilian world. A Garmin GNS-530 integrated GPS/communication/navigation system was installed. Among the features of this equipment is a VHF radio, adding to the existing UHF sets. An LCR-92 attitude and heading reference system was also fitted. A laptop computer can be connected to it to help find faults on the aircraft. A Northern Airborne Technology N301A audio controller panel was also installed in each cockpit. The back seats of the TA-4Js were equipped with a KTR-905 VHF radio as a back-up to the GNS-530. To cater for the type of work ATSI had in mind for the A-4s, new wiring was put in to connect the outboard wing pylons, allowing the pilot to interface with stores, such as jamming pods, on these stations. The aircraft were delivered by air from Israel to Arizona mostly in pairs, the first examples arriving at their new base in April 2001. The last three completed the trans-Atlantic crossing in June 2002.

To fly its new fleet of potent combat aircraft, ATSI hired experienced former military pilots with thousands of flight

hours in fast jets. Many are graduates of the US Navy Fighter Weapons School (better known as 'Topgun') or the USAF Weapons School.

Tactical air services

Over the years that followed, the company secured a significant amount of work, most particularly to act as aggressors (often referred to as 'red air'). It was familiar territory for the Skyhawk as the US Navy had used it in this role until as recently as 2003.

The A-4 is cleared for +6.5g/-2.0g, which although may be less than current front-line fighters, is still more than adequate for this type of training. Indeed, during its career as a US military aggressor, which included flying for Topgun, it was particularly noted for its ability to simulate tight-turning Soviet fighters. ATSI's Director of Flight Operations at the time of *Air International*'s visit was LCDR Eric 'Vinny' Newstrom (Ret.) a former US Navy Skyhawk instructor.

He described some of the aircraft's other dogfighting attributes. "The A-4Ns we fly have the 11,200lb (49.8kN)-thrust Pratt & Whitney J52-P-408, which is the most powerful engine fitted to any Skyhawk. At lighter fuel weights, it almost has a 1:1 thrust-to-weight ratio. It can climb with the best fighters when in the vertical. It's not quite 1:1, so it does run out of energy at some point, but it will hold its own given enough energy at the bottom of the climb."

He added: "Its other advantages are that it's small, nose-on it is extremely difficult to see in the air, and from that angle it also has a very small radar cross-section. To a student pilot it presents a very good challenge to work their radar and get a visual on the aircraft. The engine produces very little smoke, even at military power settings. It does not have an afterburner, but the A-4 can still get into and out of a fight pretty quickly."

The TA-4Js have the less powerful J52-P-8B and C engines which generate 9,300lb st (41.4kN) and also have a heavier airframe due to the extra cockpit.

As the A-4 was designed for the ground-attack aircraft role, the ATSI examples, like most Skyhawks, do not have radars. Eric Newstrom, however, feels this has not greatly affected the marketability of the company's A-4s, saying: "The US Air Force is keen on training

A formation of five ATSI A-4Ns. The company's Skyhawks, which were built between 1966-74, have proved to be very reliable



with aircraft that have radar and they wanted that from us too, but we proved we could adequately do the aggressor work they wanted without it. If we did feel we needed to add radars, we could go out and get an existing system and modify that to fit in the A-4. If we did do that, though, it would push up the price we charge per hour due to the extra costs of maintaining the radar.”

ATSI subsequently secured a project to act as ‘red air’ for USAF Weapons School courses. It has also undertaken a significant amount of work for the US Navy, working as aggressor for Topgun (now officially called the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center) and playing this same part in 15 US Navy exercises involving aircraft carriers and their air wings off the west coast of America. This also involved the A-4s flying profiles to simulate anti-ship missiles.

The company’s last threat simulation work for the US military was in 2005 when it was asked by the USAF’s Air Education and Training Command (AETC) to assist with fighter evasion training for Lockheed Martin C-130 *Hercules* aircrew. Despite ATSI’s impressive track record in this discipline, the US campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have swallowed up increasingly large amounts of the defense budget, meaning that less money has been available for training contracts. The company is keen to resume such work with the US military, though at present the preference seems to be for this training to be kept in-house. ATSI believes it can offer a viable alternative, according to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Charles P Stanford Jr. “Why use up valuable airframe hours on front-line fighters when

we can offer an A-4 on a per-hour basis at probably half the cost of an F-16 and a third of that for an F/A-18, with the added benefit of giving students a dissimilar aircraft type to fly against?”

He added: “If, as part of a training syllabus, a student needs to fly in a four-aircraft sortie, it takes three aircraft and instructor-qualified pilots to fulfil that requirement. By using ATSI, those assets and personnel could be used elsewhere. For example, it could free up more aircraft and experienced pilots for operational duties, making better use of limited resources.”

From the middle of 2003, ATSI was also heavily committed to providing ‘red air’ to the Canadian Forces, mainly for McDonnell Douglas CF-188 *Hornet* squadrons. It was also asked to take part in that year’s Exercise Maple Flag at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Cold Lake, Alberta. As part of the Canadian contract, the A-4s were also used as electronic warfare jammers and given the necessary pods for the role. This Canadian work continued very successfully until March 2005, when a change in the law decreed that only indigenous companies could undertake such contracts.

Some of the more recent aggressor work has been of a slightly different nature, and has involved Homeland Security exercises in which ground controllers practise tracking hostile aircraft. An A-4 will often play the part of a slower jet.

The company has also been contracted to fly in the air-to-ground role for the US military, as well as the Canadians: during Maple Flag its aircraft helped to train forward air controllers (FACs), requiring them to simulate attacking ground targets under direction from these specialized

soldiers. In a variation on this, the USAF used the A-4s to train General Atomics Predator unmanned air vehicle (UAV) operators by acting as the strike aircraft and being directed onto a target identified by using the drone’s sensors.

ATSI also offers maintenance and fast-jet pilot training. To date, its biggest contract in the latter category has been for the United Arab Emirates Air Force & Air Defence (UAE AF & AD), providing lead-in fighter training of pilots destined to fly the country’s Block 60 Lockheed Martin F-16E/F *Desert Falcons*. ‘Some courses were run, and 22 students passed through. Each trainee pilot received at least 100 hours of flight time over the year-long courses, and the company gained special approval from the US government to re-activate the *Skyhawk*’s ability to drop bombs. However, only practice munitions were released on nearby bombing ranges. In addition to receiving lectures and flying in the A-4s, students used the company’s *Skyhawk* simulators. On graduation, the UAE AF&AD pilots headed for F-16 conversion training with the USAF’s 162nd Fighter Wing of the Arizona Air National Guard at Tucson, Arizona. The UAE AF & AD has since had a change of policy and has decided to undertake lead-in fighter training for its future F-16E/F pilots in-country.

ATSI also provides A-4 conversion pilot training for BAE Systems Flight Systems, which flies *Skyhawks* from Wittmund Air Base in Germany, towing aerial gunnery targets for that country’s air force. It also has contracted with the National Test Pilot School for training on the A-4 and use of the aircraft, as its syllabus can include problem-solving or evaluation flights in a *Skyhawk*.

continued...

ATSI

Continued...

Test and evaluation

Currently, the company's *Skyhawks* are mostly hired to undertake research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E) work for defence contractors. One example of this was when ATSI was asked by Omega Aerial Refueling Services to use an A-4 to trial a new air refuelling basket fitted to one of its Boeing 707 tankers. Often RDT&E work involves carrying a piece of equipment, weapon or jamming pod for air testing. Eric Newstrom gave an example of a recent sortie of this nature:

"We modified one of our aircraft for a customer and flew one of their engineers in the back seat of a TA-4J. He was able to operate the test equipment, monitor it in real-time using a laptop computer and record all the parameters they wanted."

Most defence companies have contracts with the US Government that allow them to use front-line fast jets. However, ATSI believes it can offer customers a number of advantages. Charles Stanford, Jr., said: "We can be more economical than using US military front-line fast-jets. ATSI is also very flexible when it comes to modifying aircraft, and a little more customer-focused in that we can work to the contractor's timetable, whereas the US military has other priorities that may delay a customer's project. The A-4 is ideal for

this type of work and can accommodate most test equipment within the aircraft or on one of the hardpoints."

ATSI's current active fleet consists of five A-4Ns and two TA-4Js, with three further examples (two Ns and a J) held in reserve for potential work in the future. Of the original 13, two were sold in 2006 to BAE Systems Flight Systems, and another was lost in a crash in 2003. ATSI also leases out aircraft to other operators and did so to French company AVdef from 2003-2006. The latter used a single A-4N, flying from Nimes in the south of France, for a French Navy contract to simulate fighter-bomber and missile attacks on its ships.



ATSI offers customers its fleet of A-4 Skyhawks for a wide variety of roles. Pictured are three of its single-seat A-4Ns. All photos ATSI, unless otherwise stated

The company is proud of the serviceability rate it has achieved with its A-4s. According to Charles Stanford, Jr.: "We have achieved a 99% success rate of being on station at the required time. We've never had a significant technical failure that has stopped an aircraft from flying." The aircraft are supported by an in-house maintenance team based at the double hangar, office and training facility ATSI opened in October 2007.

The A-4 has proved to be ideal for the tactical air services, flight test and pilot training that ATSI offers. Matching it with the company's experienced former military pilots has shown that it is a winning combination.

R.G.'s ART

• TA-4Js •



U.S. Navy
Training Command
TA-4s run before
a dark, threatening
South Texas storm.

R. G. Smith,
(1914-2001)
Named Honorary Naval
Aviator Number 11.



SKYHAWK STUDY GROUP

• Email Exchange •

skyhawkstudygroup@yahoogroups.com



Phil Thompson provided this release from the Warbird Heritage Foundation's website:

"WHF A-4B Skyhawk takes to the air!

On Tuesday, December 1, 2009, shortly after 1:00pm, the Foundation Douglas A-4B Skyhawk made its first post-restoration flight at Whitman Regional Airport in Oshkosh. The aircraft had last flown on May 4, 1992, more than seventeen and a half years ago. Not having encountered any serious problems during this test flight, the aircraft continued home to Waukegan Regional Airport, escorted by the Foundation L-39 Albatros later that same day. This marks the end of an extended restoration project that began two and a half years ago.

The pilot for the Skyhawk test flight and the flight to Waukegan was LtCol Munson (Sid) Snedeker, USMC (Ret.). Flying chase in the L-39 were Paul R. Wood and David Staffeldt. (See photo).

The Warbird Heritage Foundation would like to thank David Staffeldt, Sean Roarty, and all of the people involved in the restoration effort for their outstanding work. We hope to begin regularly flying the Skyhawk during the 2010 Airshow season."

See:

http://warbirdheritagefoundation.org/WHF_3250_0000_Formations.html

From Gary Rezeau:

Great to see the photos from that event, Phil. The restoration team did a really great job and Sid is one lucky guy. Just one thing to add, BuNo 148609 is an A-4C. The first thing that struck me when I viewed the photo was the nose was a C or later nose. And when I looked at the Buno, I knew any 148xxx was not a B. The last B was Buno 145061. Zoo

From Phil Thompson:

Gary, a long thread about getting the WHF A-4 ready here:

<http://www.warbirdinformation-exchange.org/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=19011>

I must admit I'm used to seeing only the 'boot black' on the nose F/G model, so the grey paint makes it look unusual in first instance. Attached is an old photo of BuNo 148609 in flight, as described from the Skyhawk Association archives.

Phil

From Gary Rezeau:

Thanks, Phil. After reading the thread from the web link you sent me, I can only conclude that the WHF purchased a B and painted it as TR's C, which included painting on the A-4C Buno. TR did not fly A-4Bs in VA-76 when he killed a MiG 17 on 1 May 1967. <http://www.skyhawk.org/2k/join.htm#swartz>

This would not be the first time a restored aircraft "impersonates" another aircraft.

Cheers,

Zoo

From Rick Harris:

This aircraft is not a new restoration. It was originally restored about 20 years ago by Jim Robinson, founder of Combat Jets Museum, in Houston. Jim had the B model aircraft painted up as T.R.'s aircraft at that time. It was operated with the rest of the collection until Jim donated the whole collection to the EAA. It was flown to Oshkosh and parked. EAA kept some of the aircraft in flyable condition until, one by one, they were allowed to go into a static condition. The A-4 did not fly after delivery. Slowly, the EAA began to sell off the jet collection. The Skyhawk is the last aircraft of the collection sold, to date. There are only a couple left. Fortunately most have been sold to new owners who

are flying them.

At the time of the sale, the A-4 hadn't flown in 17 years, only being rolled out for the Air Venture gatherings each year.

WHF went through and freshened up the aircraft, recertifying and inspecting as needed. The canopy and nose had been damaged during the years with EAA so they were replaced with C model units.

Hope this answers some questions about this aircraft.

Rick H

(Ed. note: this email from Sid Snedeker amplifies:)

Bob:

For info, I did the test and acceptance flight of A4B BuNo: 142112 at Whitman Field in Oshkosh, WI, on 1 Dec 2009.

This aircraft was painted in the colors for recognition of LCDR Ted R. Swartz who shot down a Mig-17 in 1967. The aircraft flew great, and after the test flight I delivered the aircraft to the new owner, Paul Wood, founder and CEO of the American Heritage Museum in Waukegan, IL.

I am still doing the testing on the newly restored A4Ls at Sabreliner in Perryville, MO. After the test flight they are then flown to Grayson Co. Airport where the IG3 (hot) seat is installed. These aircraft have an upgraded avionics package and a self start capability.

Semper Fi

M.R. (Sid) Snedeker
[a4marine@yahoo.com]
www.gnswarbirds.com

(Ed. note: there are lots of interesting email exchanges on the Skyhawk Study Group listserv which any Skyhawk enthusiast will enjoy. Check them out on Yahoo Groups at <http://groups.yahoo.com/search?query=skyhawk+study+group>. And yes, Zoo, Sid is one really lucky guy!)



LtCol Sid Snedeker, USMC (ret) pilots A-4B 142112 from Whitman Field, Oshkosh, WI, to Waukegan, IL. L-39 chase was flown by Paul Wood and David Staffeldt.

TOWING THE TDU

• The Mission No One Wanted •

by Richard Shipman



As I watched TV coverage of professional football players beginning pre-season training camp in 95 degree weather, a truism occurred to me: every job, no matter how glamorous or well paying, has its downside. This certainly applies to naval aviation as well--except for the well-paying part!

After flying the A-4 for over 3000 hours, I can honestly say that 95% of the *Skyhawk* peace-time missions were really good. Low levels, air-to-ground, dissimilar ACM, over-the-shoulder nuclear delivery, carrier landings--all a blast. The other 5%? Well, that's another story.

A few candidates for that "other 5%" came quickly to mind: night tanker missions off the carrier, training students in the initial stages of formation flying, and AIC (air intercept control) training for ground controllers. But one mission stands out above all others as one to be avoided like boat officer duty: towing the TDU for ship gunnery practice.

This was a mission that most naval aviators never had the chance to experience (lucky them!). My "good luck" came with my affiliation in 1976 with

VC-12, a reserve squadron flying A-4s out of Oceana, Virginia. After leaving active duty, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to fly A-4s once again (after tours in A-4Cs, A-7Es and TA-4Js). Not so thrilling was the utility mission of the squadron at that time. Included in this category was the aforementioned TDU target towing.

The TDU-34A was a missile-shaped, radar-reflective target that attached to a reeling machine hung on the centerline station of the *Skyhawk*. It weighed about 75 pounds and was almost 10 feet long. The target was attached to the reeling machine by steel cable that could (and needed to be) extended out to 22,000 feet. The target was used to simulate low-flying threats, such as cruise missiles which would be countered by the ship's gun/missile defenses. The reeling machine had a variable pitch propeller operated from the cockpit to control reel-out/reel-in speeds. If memory serves me correctly, we would reel out the target at least three miles (18,000 feet) to give the ship's guns/missiles maximum tracking time (and our planes maximum separation!). We would then

approach the ship at a 90-degree angle, pass directly overhead and give the ship clearance to commence firing. We would make multiple runs, hoping we wouldn't be shot down by overzealous ship gunners or struck by lightning. Unfortunately, both

of these threats proved to be more than theoretical!

In July of 1982, one of VC-12's aircraft was towing the TDU to simulate a cruise missile attack on a carrier. For some reason, probably a mix-up in communications, the ship launched its Sea Sparrow missile as the A-4 commenced its inbound run but before it was overhead the ship. The result was a near miss and an extremely startled pilot who hadn't expected to be doing defensive jinxing maneuvers on a training run!

Another incident (experienced by yours truly) occurred in the Jacksonville, FL, operating area, during a typical summer afternoon with the ubiquitous afternoon thunderstorms popping up everywhere. With 18,000 feet of steel cable extended, I was getting ready to commence the training runs when a flash of lightning in the distance caught my attention. The next thing I felt was a loud BANG as the lightning worked its way up my "lightning rod," across the rivets on the right side of the aircraft and out the refueling probe. Needless to say, the mission was aborted and the cable/target jettisoned without further thought (or guilt!). The burned and popped rivets discovered on the post-flight provided ample evidence to justify the jettisoning.

But even when these catastrophes didn't occur, many challenges still remained because you had to recover the target. There were several potential problems with the reeling-in process. First of all, you had no way of knowing whether or not the target had been shot off, so you had to assume it was still on. This was a reasonable assumption, since I never experienced or knew of a single time that the ship actually shot off the target--except when they were using the CIWS (close in weapon system). In that case the target was ALWAYS shot off. Unfortunately, the CIWS system was not widely installed at that time.

So, for the majority of missions you operated on the assumption that the target was still attached. Since you were invariably short of fuel by the time you completed your runs, it was necessary to reel in the target expeditiously. With the variable pitch propeller, you could reel in the cable at the relatively rapid rate of 3500 feet per minute, BUT you



VC-12 ground crew readies TDU 34/A for loading. (Photo via Peter Mersky).

had to slow the cable to a mere crawl in the final stages to enable the target to be recaptured safely and successfully. There was a counter on the control panel that showed the number of feet of cable deployed, so theoretically, recapture should have been easy: just slow the cable for the last 100 feet of reel-in and wait for the light to come on, which indicated that the target was latched back in the saddle.

Unfortunately, either because of cable stretch or the inherent inaccuracies of the system, the counter was plus or minus several thousand feet. One hapless pilot found out about this the hard way as he was recovering the target with a high reel-in speed with the counter still showing cable extended. Not so! The 75 pound target struck the saddle of the reeling machine hard and bounced off, striking the underside of the wing and inflicting minor damage to the aircraft.

This forced the tow pilots to reel in the target at a much slower rate once it got even close to the aircraft, while simultaneously monitoring fuel and navigating to stay within the restricted area. The next problem came when the "target seated" light never came on even after reeling in, to minus numbers on the counter. It could be because the target was shot off, because of the notoriously unreliable light, or because the cable hadn't been reeled in far enough. Eventually, fuel became critical and the pilot had to make a decision: (a) assume the target had been shot off; (b) assume the target was seated but the light was malfunctioning; or (c) cut the cable. Cutting the cable was discouraged (at least initially) because the stainless steel cable and target were expensive and hard to come by. Plus, cutting the cable indicated a failure of sorts, something most naval aviators try to avoid at all costs.

So, most of the target towers opted for assumptions (a) or (b) and proceeded back to NAS Oceana, anxious to get to the bar and put this thankless mission behind them. For the most part, their assumptions were correct, and the aircraft recovered uneventfully. But, just as the TDU pilots were thinking they had "broken the code" for recovery techniques, the lights went out all over Virginia Beach.

It seems that one intrepid pilot had made assumption (a) or (b) when in fact he still had the TDU attached AND still had about 1500 feet of cable trailing behind his aircraft. The standard arrival for TDU aircraft was a straight-in approach, so the pilot set up for runway 23 at NAS Oceana. For those of you not familiar with Virginia Beach, runway 23 is preceded by a busy road with city power lines alongside. So here came a *Skyhawk* on a straight-in approach, dragging a 75 pound orange target behind which bounced along the ground and eventually snagged the power lines like a giant grappling hook.

Fortunately, nobody was hurt, but the negative potential was obvious and power blackouts are never good for Navy public relations. At first, the incident was attributed to "pilot error," and the offending aviator suffered the inevitable barbs and ribbing that come from the merciless environment that is the naval aviation ready room. However, when a very similar incident occurred at NAS Jacksonville while one of the VC-12 aircraft was operating on deployment, it became clear that the squadron needed new strategies for flying the TDU.

Using a chase plane to monitor the status of the TDU was an obvious solution. We tried this for a while, but the expense of another aircraft plus issues with pilot availability made this solution impracticable for the long run. (Pilot availability was a problem as the SELRES (non-active duty) pilots quickly realized the disproportionate upside/downside potential of these missions and atypically became unavailable!) Besides, if you thought an AIC flight was boring, try chasing a TDU mission.

The second solution was mandatory cutting of the cable. This did work, but as mentioned earlier, the cable was expensive and scarce. So obviously this was not a viable long-term solution either.

While the squadron struggled to find a long range solution, fate intervened. Back in the early '80s, the need for



VC-12 TA-4 taxis at home base, NAS Oceana. (Photo via Peter Mersky).

adversary services was increasing in conjunction with a reduction in active duty assets. This, along with a restructuring of the reserve force, resulted in VC-12 assuming a share of the adversary services and changing its designation to VFC-12. The hated TDU mission, along with other no-glory missions such as AIC and aerial banner towing, were assumed by Flight International, a civilian contractor flying Lear jets. Unfortunately, there were still occasions when tasking demanded that VFC-12 fly the TDU mission, and disaster struck once again.

In 1990, a VFC-12 TA-4 was towing the TDU for an exercise against a carrier, and apparently the target was shot off, probably by the CIWS system. (This was after I left the squadron, so all the details are not clear.) Unfortunately, for reasons not known, the cable was neither reeled in nor jettisoned. The pilot commenced his straight in approach to runway 23 at Oceana with over 4 miles of cable streaming behind him. The cable came whipping in over beaches, residences, roads, backyard BBQs and of course, power lines. Miraculously, no one was injured, but 5,000 homes were without power.

In subsequent years, VFC-12 became the preeminent provider of adversary services on the East Coast, eventually transitioning to F/A-18s and completely exiting the utility services business. Meanwhile, the ships enjoyed the longer on-station times provided by the Lear jets, and the city of Virginia Beach was no doubt happy to see the threat to their power grid removed (the Lears flew out of Newport News). But no one was happier than the pilots of VFC-12 who traded in their "cleared to fire" command for a "fight's on!"

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Puresome" Woodul

~ DOGGUS DELECTI ~

"Yaaaaaa..Hoo! exploded Puresome as he unlatched the Sierra fittings on his oxygen mask and dropped it in his lap. Having just screamed into the break and landed after being safety-wired in burner for .5 hours (maybe) airborne, Puresome was still going *machedy-mach* as he cleared the runway at NAS Fallon.

He and Virgil Viper had just done battle with the wily A-4 adversary, and this time, he had cheated and won! The normally agile Scooter had been souped up with a big engine and everything but a radio taken out--they could turn and fly up their own hineys. Painted in the camouflage *du jour*, ie, morning desert, afternoon desert, semi-cloudy, hung-over invisible, the Tinks were flown by good sticks who practiced Migging every day and wore only gold-lame' breech-clouts and head-bands with Gomerisms written on them to humiliate their prey. Even though the *Crusader* was a manly machine, Puresome had noticed that after some of his mightiest zooms to the moon, the little bastard was trapped at his eight o'clock low.

The lie was that there were no egos involved in this two-v-one dissimilar combat maneuvering--the adversaries were like clinical test pilots, who calmly described the on-going fight on voice recorders while making drawings that would shame Michelangelo, clearly depicting how the Atoll got shoved up your tender tailpipe.

In reality, they were slobbering, red-eyed, blood-lusted maniacs like everybody else. Their spokesman, call sign "Doggus," set the tone and flang down his gauntlet when he addressed the Airwing fighters at the beginning of the cruise. Turning his back on the assembled group, Doggus said "*Take a look at this. This is the last time you're going to see my six o'clock for two weeks. You are going to be so busy picking Plexiglas out of your necks while*

looking over your shoulders at me while I'm gunning you that you'll never have time to look out the pointy ends of your temporarily flying static displays."

The fact that Doggus made it out of the briefing alive was testimony to the basic gentle nature of fighter pilots.

But the truth was one found out by lots of fighter pilots in Sierra Hotel machines: one had to be careful and smart not to get bagged one's ownself by the splitarse little machines. If you kept your hair on fire and didn't get bogged down in HIS fight, you could whup him, especially with good section tactics. Which was exactly the point of the whole deal.

It didn't make things any nicer that the *Crusader* pilots didn't get to paint little Scooter kills on the sides of their aircraft like Doggus and his pals...

So the fighter pilots in the Airwing slavvered to make simulated fireballs out of the bastids. The standard fight had the A-4 anchored at the far end of the ACM range on a Tacan radial at twenty thousand feet; the fighter section would launch and burner into the area and down the designated radial with the bogey coming at them from the other direction. Talley-ho would be somewhere in the middle of the area, and the fight would be on!

Today, Puresome and Virgil Viper had decided to "cheat and win" by displacing to the sun side of the radial and possibly a bit higher than the standard twenty thousand feet. Like, maybe...another ten thousand or so. They blasted off into the area and whoostled down the radial up-sun.

"*Ralph Lead, radar contact, twenty right at ten miles!*" Puresome lied like a sports car salesman to a NAVCAD, since getting radar contact on the bogey gave additional points on a Compex, and he wanted Doggus to be looking away from the fighters in the sun. But there was no way he would stick his

head inside a radar boot--he wanted his eyeball pupils about the size of pencil points and able to see mosquito scrotes or A-4s at great distance.

So he squinted out the windows, and Virgil squinted at him and down at the radial from his starboard side combat spread position. Sure enough, there was Doggus, ten o'clock low and down-sun. "*Ralph flight, talleyho!*" Puresome called.

"Doggus, roger."

Dropping his nose, Puresome barrelled out of the sun, with Viper cutting across the circle. He had already briefed "no gates" on the tally-ho call, since the *Crusaders* would leave after burner puffs to clue an already nervous Doggus to their position. Puresome dropped through Doggus's seven o'clock low and lit the burner, as he put his gunsight pippet on the A4 and his Sidewinder missile started to growl. Punching his radar ARO button, the range-only needle quickly showed just less than a mile. With the Sidewinder sucking up the heat signature of the Scooter's exhaust and howling for release, Puresome held down the firing pickle on the stick and transmitted, "*Fox two on the A4, one mile deep six!*"

Doggus hacked his watch to mark the shot and reefed on an eye-watering nose high port turn.

Puresome, megamach and in burner, cut to inside of his turn and projected his nose in front of the turning A-4, heading him off at the pass for a possible gun shot.

"*Ralph's engaged!*"

"*Vipe's free,*" called Virgil, cutting across the circle behind them.

But Puresome, closing fast on Doggus, knew he couldn't hack the A-4's turn, but kept pressing to keep him turning until the last second; then, he leveled his wings and zoomed.

"*Ralph's free,*" he called.

Doggus would have loved to reverse, drop half flaps to try and get his nose at Puresome and pickle off an Atoll, but Virgil Viper was now smoking up his wing-line, and he had to drop his nose to gain energy to sustain his turn.

"*Vipe's engaged!*" Virgil grunted, honking on the g's as the A-4 started out-turning the rapidly closing F-8.

But Puresome had ruddered over in his vertical climb as soon as he

saw Doggus drop his nose, and as the A-4 reefed hard to force Virgil into an overshoot, Puresome was pointed down as his wingie leveled his wings and zoomed.

"Vipe's free."

Doggus saw Puresome coming down at him over his left shoulder and had to keep turning, keeping his nose down as long as he could for energy. But Puresome had sliced down inside his turn, forcing the Tink to keep the g's on, bleeding his energy level down.

Once again, Puresome pulled up inside Doggus's turn and pressed him. Again, Doggus was able to turn the corner, and Puresome had to level his wings and zoom.

But now, Doggus had bled his energy down, and as Puresome ruddered over from his zoom, he watched Virgil come across the tight circle and close the A-4, his nose pointed in front of the out-of-poop Doggus.

"Guns, guns, guns!" called Virgil, as he worked his gunsight gyro piper through the A-4, which, though out of energy, was not out of ideas and was frantically trying to activate his cloaking device and go invisible. The Viper rolled his wings level and zoomed.

"Vipe's free."

By this time Puresome was scorching back down the hill listening to the happy growl of his unfortunately inert Sidewinder missile.

"Ralph's engaged, and Fox two for you, Doggie Lu, Doggie Sue!" Puresome transmitted in his most professional manner.

"Roger, knock it off, good fight, guys," Doggus called, *"see you back at the patch."*

"Roger, see ya, Doggus."

Puresome pulled around to the south, more or less, since his RMI compass was hopelessly Tango Uniform, but he knew if he pointed away from the mountains surrounding the desert floor of the ACM area, NAS Fallon was down there someplace. Knowing exactly where you were was an unusual, and possibly unmanly luxury anyhow. Puresome stuck his wing up in a gentle turn and throttled back to 90%, watching the Viper sliding up his wing, rendezvousing with him.

"Ralphs, button one zero."

The Viper clicked his mike twice.

When his wingie was close aboard in parade formation, Puresome used the "drinking" signal with his right hand to ax about his pardner's fuel state. Virgil held his left hand horizontal and stuck out three fingers, signifying eight hundred pounds.

"Etai, Japanese word for pain!"

thought Puresome, who had a thousand pounds of gas himself, which was not a bag-full for a swept-wing, supersonic jet some thirty miles from the green spot in the distance that marked home plate. Once again, he crossed fingers, burned sacrifices, and swore-and-be-dammed to be nice if only the runway didn't get clobbered by some weak-dick in the airwing until his flight landed.

But the moon was in the Seventh House, and Jupiter was aligned with Mars, as the intriguingly nasty looking hippie girls sang in "Hair." Puresome just figured it meant everything

the build-up of mayonnaise and bread-crumbs under his nose, which Puresome would not be able to face on some early morning, hung-over trip to his mirror and terminate with extreme prejudice. But now, looking good, Puresome switched over to base radio to report the status of his aircraft.

Instead, an irresistible, preverted inspiration seized control of Puresome. *"The duty officer's a NANCY BOY! The duty officer's a FAGGIT! Skreeek! Squawwwwk! Skreeek!"* transmitted over the radio in Puresome's best parrot imitation.

"Uh, calling Scarf base, say again?" came the response.

Puresome was wise enough not to answer. The only problem, Puresome found out back at the ready room, was that he and Virgil Viper were the only two Scarfs airborne, and there was an AOM in progress when the parrot called

"...the adversaries were like clinical test pilots, who calmly described the on-going fight on voice recorders while making drawings that would shame Michelangelo, clearly depicting how the Atoll got shoved up your tender tailpipe."

was super Sierra Hotel, which it was. Puresome kept the nose down and the speed up, and nobody even thought about getting in their way and slowing them down. They scorched along until Puresome and Viper rolled together into a fan-brake over the numbers, easing to idle, speedbrakes, and lots of g's, finally dropping the gear down and raising the wing up passing through the ninety, and getting on-speed and working the ball for long enough on final not to look like an Air Force puke with fifteen thousand feet of runway in front of him.

Puresome was still hyper as they taxied back to the line. He had popped the canopy open, and the wind felt good on his sweat-soaked flight suit. He opened the zippered pocket on his left arm and took out a small comb, which he used to separate and straighten two halves of the world's most obnoxious handle-bar mustache, which the oxygen mask had smushed. Puresome was on the moustache side of a cycle, which alternated between it being part of obnoxious fighter pilot image, and total disgust at

in. Loudly. While the skipper was addressing the assembled officers. Since Virgil Viper only opened his mouth to complain about mess bills, by process of elimination, that left....Puresome as the prospective corpus delecti.

But the moon was still in the Seventh House. Puresome was convincingly offended when accused, and stoutly maintained it must have been the work of some terrorist attack puke, and *"I waddent there! Nobody saw me! And you can't prove a thing!"*

Wild Fredman, who had been SDO, knew that without an admission of "I done it," the best he could hope for was a hung jury. Besides, the rest of the squadron had boogied off for the BOQ, enroute the bar and Mom's Gamblin' Establishment, so there weren't enough folks around for a firing squad anyway.

Of course, Skipper Razor knew. And all the Scarfs knew. But Puresome knew that on such rare, perfect, high mach days when he had kicked some serious fanny, he was as immortal as any Fighter Pilot had a right to be.

READ?

YOU THINK WE READ?

Israeli A-4 Skyhawk Units in Combat.

By Shlomo Aloni
Osprey Publishing,
Oxford OX2 0PH, England and
443 Park Avenue South, New York.
2009. 95 pages. Ill. \$22.95.

Reviewed by Peter Mersky.

Number 81 in Osprey's highly successful Combat Aircraft series, this latest book from Israeli author Aloni delves into a little-known (at least over here) aspect of the Scooter's career, namely, service with the Chel Av'ir, the Israel Air Force (IAF). This title is Aloni's fifth for Osprey and like the previous four, opens an important window into the IDF/IAF.

Obtained when the Israelis were severing the ties with the French for military aircraft, because of rather "rude" Gaulic treatment in 1967, the A-4 became a major part of the IAF's lineup almost from its arrival in late December 1967. The Israelis had been using a mix of French types like the *Ouagons*, *Mystere* and *Super Mystere*, and occasionally, the big, twin-engined *Vautour*, for ground attack. But as these aircraft were aging and French support was waning, the IDF wanted to update and consolidate their capabilities with a more modern type.

Although the A-4 was heavily engaged in Vietnam, the Navy was changing over to A-7s, thereby releasing a number of Scooters, which eventually found their way over to the Middle East. Aloni describes in detail preliminary discussions and ultimate agreements that led to the A-4's arrival and absorption into the Israeli ranks.

First missions and the set piece, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, form the focus of the book. More than 50 A-4s were lost during that bloody war as the A-4s, along with F-4s, struggled mightily to halt the Egyptian advance. Squadrons were decimated, losing pilots and planes in far greater numbers than we were experiencing in Vietnam. (Hard

to believe, I know.) Yet the result was, indeed, a halt of the enemy advance and an ultimate ceasefire that restored the Israeli territories lost as well as the IDF/IAF's status as a fully functioning force.

The A-4 even managed to tally two kills over Syrian MiG-17s in 1970. The book's beautiful cover illustration by Gareth Hector depicts the kills by squadron commander Ezra Dotan. These two kills made him an ace combined with three he had previously scored as a *Mirage* III pilot. Jim Laurier's color profiles, now a firm fixture of Osprey's aviation publications, are certainly up to standard and add to the book's overall appeal.

The photos are also a source of interest and show several different A-4s in IAF service, focusing on the incredible damage caused by enemy defenses that still failed to keep the A-4 from returning to its base.

The IAF five squadrons that flew in the 1973 war are described in detail, along with other squadrons that barely missed involvement. Yet, these also participated in post-war actions, espe-



cially over Lebanon in June 1982 and subsequent missions in the late 1990s. It's incredible that the A-4 continues to serve, often as a front-line aircraft, and although its days as a primary attack aircraft are numbered, it is still expected to fly for another five or six years as an advanced trainer and readily available FMC reserve light bomber.

A great book about our special aircraft.

(Ed. Note: See *The A-4Ever* Vol 12/No 3 (Summer 2006) for Shlomo Aloni's Story *The A-4 Ahit Today and the Rada Ahit-M.*)



MiG killer A-4.

IDF/AF A-4 Skyhawk MiG-17 Shootdown

by Shlomo Aloni

(Excerpt taken from Osprey Combat Aircraft 81 – Israeli A-4 Skyhawk Units in Combat by Peter Mersky)

Thanks to series editor Tony Holmes for coordinating this look at a new book about the Skyhawk.

Offensive operations by the Israel Air Force Defence Force (IDF/AF) against the infrastructure of the PLO spread from Jordan to Syria and Lebanon in early 1970. *Skyhawks* attacked targets in Syria from 2 February 1970, and were tasked to support Operation *Cauldron 2* (an Israeli armoured assault into Lebanon) on 12 May 1970. The objective of the latter offensive was to eradicate the PLO in a sector west of the Lebanese-Syrian border. IDF/AF air strikes of nearby Syrian border posts and artillery positions were planned to safeguard the right flank of the Israeli ground forces.

Skyhawk participation began early on the morning of 12 May when leaflets were dropped over Lebanese towns and villages within the *Cauldron 2* sector. Once the operation was launched, Numbers 109 and 115 squadrons were tasked with providing CAS. Armed with rockets, pairs of A-4s orbited over the *Cauldron 2* sector and waited for a call from a forward air controller (FAC). Simultaneously, and high above the *Skyhawks*, IDF/AF interceptors flew combat air patrol (CAP), waiting for word from their air-to-air controller to engage enemy aircraft.

Shortly after Ezra Dotan (CO of No 109 Sqdn) and his wingman, Giora Ben-Dov arrived on station, the latter spotted four unidentified aircraft flying at low altitude. Dotan ordered his wingman to keep the jets in his sight while he tried to determine the identity of these aircraft. Radio calls for identification were not answered, but evoked a response from the IDF/AF fighter controller who reported that the formation was Israeli. He ordered Dotan to focus on his CAS mission. This conflicted with Ben-Dov's next report that he had positively identified four MiG-17s.

Ezra Dotan was a former *Mirage* III pilot with three aerial kills to his name, so instead of clearing the area

and returning to his original mission, he ordered his wingman to lead in pursuit of the MiG-17s. Radio chatter quickly attracted the attention of two *Mirage* IIIs flying a CAP, whose leader asked Ben-Dov for a vector towards the MiG-17s. Dotan abruptly told them that the MiGs were 'his,' and that they should look for other prey! Unperturbed, the fighter pilots dove in search of the MiG-17s, and *Mirage* III ace Asher Snir eventually claimed one shot down.

The *Skyhawks* were ahead of the fighters, and they closed on the Syrian jets until Dotan finally saw them and ordered his wingman to open fire. Ben-Dov just missed the trailing MiG-17 with two bursts from his cannon, so Dotan followed up with a rocket attack. He fired 38 projectiles from two of his five pods, but his aim was off and the heavy air-to-ground weapons fell well behind their intended target. The *Skyhawk* was equipped with a simple air-to-ground gunsight, and this was useless for air-to-air rocket attacks. Having seen his first rockets fall short, Dotan aimed well above the MiG-17 and launched a second salvo from two more pods. This time the projectiles found their mark and the MiG literally vanished within a huge explosion.

Moments later Dotan came under attack from a second MiG-17, its pilot having just opened fire when Ben-Dov told his leader to break away. Dotan threw his jet into a hard left turn, spoiling the Syrian pilot's aim. Just as he was about to complete his turn in order to attack his assailant from the rear, Dotan spotted another MiG-17 flying some 600 metres behind him in a perfect firing position.

The melee continued, with Dotan breaking to the left once again and diving so as to evade this new threat. Yet another MiG-17 overtook the diving *Skyhawk*, and the Israeli pilot attempted to follow it, but his *Skyhawk* would not recover from its dive. Realising that he was in trouble, Dotan jettisoned his external stores, including the four empty rocket pods. This did the trick, allowing him to recover at very low altitude. Fortunately, Dotan levelled out right behind the aforementioned MiG-17! He opened fire from a distance of 500 metres but missed.

As so often happens in multi-bogey



Smiling ground crewmen at Ramat David, including the base's Wing Maintenance Squadron commander Norik Harel (centre), greet No 109 Sqdn CO Ezra Dotan upon his return from his historic MiG-killing mission over Lebanon on 12 May 1970. Flying A-4H Skyhawk tail number 03, Dotan had successfully engaged Syrian MiG-17s, shooting two of them down. These victories made him an ace (he had claimed three kills whilst flying the Mirage III in 1967), and they were the only air-to-air victories ever credited to Israeli Skyhawks (via Shlomo Aloni)

engagements, the air combat scene suddenly changed from a sprawling dogfight to a two-aircraft duel. The lone *Skyhawk* in pursuit of a MiG-17 flying very low over mountainous terrain attracted light arms fire from unidentified troops below them. Ben-Dov watched the pursuit from above, keeping an eye out for additional MiGs. Dotan accelerated to 520 knots and closed the distance between him and his target. The MiG-17 pilot, meanwhile, continuously weaved, fully aware of the A-4 right behind him.

Suddenly, the MiG-17 disappeared from Dotan's view. As the latter scanned the landscape ahead of him, the Syrian jet zoomed upwards out of a canyon, still ahead of the *Skyhawk* but now flying at a much slower speed than the pursuing jet. In haste, Dotan also slowed his A-4 by throttling back its engine and extending its air brakes and flaps. Although he had managed to avoid overtaking the MiG-17, Dotan was now too close to safely open fire with his

continued...



cannon. Forced to slow down even more in order to open up the distance between him and his foe, the Israeli pilot nevertheless stuck with the MiG-17 as it attempted to break away by turning right, reversing to the left and turning right again. This slalom finally placed the *Skyhawk* in a perfect firing position behind the MiG. Dotan squeezed the trigger and fired a long burst into the jet's right wing root. The wing was quickly ripped away and the jet rolled right and crashed.

Ezra Dotan was flying *Skyhawk* 5303 during the historic engagement, this aircraft just happening to be the first locally equipped A-4 fitted with French-designed and Israeli-manufactured 30 mm DEFA cannon. The IDF/AF had used strafing to great effect during the Six Day War, when most of its attack aircraft had been armed with two or four 30 mm cannon. The Israelis, who were accustomed to cannon with a heavy punch, had quickly identified the *Skyhawk*'s internal armament of two Colt Mk 12 20 mm cannon as not being up to the job.

The IDF/AF duly told Douglas that it wanted 30 mm DEFA weapons installed in place of the Colts, and the company designed a structural modification (with the help of Israeli engineers) that allowed them to be fitted. The first examples of the 'upgunned' A-4H were not ready until late 1969, however, when *Skyhawks* 03 and 34 were handed over to No 109 Sqdn. No 22 Air Maintenance Unit at Tel Nof modified those jets already in service, its pilots having flown some 2000 hours during testing of the cannon fit prior to it being cleared for frontline use.

Whether the whole re-gunning effort was worthwhile is questionable, however, for although strafing was important for the Israelis during the Six Day War, it was no longer relevant by the late 1960s. Arab aircraft were now housed inside HASs protected by integrated air defence systems that incorporated both AAA and SAM sites, rather than parked in the open as had been the case in 1967. This in turn meant that A-4 pilots did far less strafing than had been anticipated when the IDF/AF chose to rearm the *Skyhawk*.



On 12 May 1970, Ezra 'Baban' Dotan, veteran Mirage III pilot and CO of No 109 Sqdn, achieved a unique feat for an Israeli Skyhawk pilot when he claimed two Syrian MiG-17s shot down over the mountains of southern Lebanon. A vastly experienced combat pilot who had been in action with the Israeli Defence Force Air Force (IDF/AF) since his conversion onto the Mystere in 1958, Dotan had switched to the Mirage III five years later. Serving with No 117 Sqdn, he had claimed two Syrian MiG-21s and an Iraqi Hunter destroyed in 1967 (one of the MiGs and the Hunter had been downed during the Seven Day War).

Like a number of fighter pilots, Dotan was transferred to the light attack community when the A-4 Skyhawk entered service with the IDF/AF in 1968. Indeed, he was made commanding officer of No 109 Sqdn, which he duly led until 1971.

On the morning of 12 May 1970, Dotan's unit was flying strikes in support of IDF Operation Cauldron 2, which saw Skyhawk units supporting Israeli soldiers and armour in their efforts to mop up Palestinian Liberation Organisation strongholds in the eastern areas of south Lebanon. This offensive quickly triggered a response from neighbouring Syrian,

whose air force scrambled a number of MiG-17 fighter-bombers tasked with attacking IDF assets on the ground.

Flying low over the mountainous terrain that was a feature of this part of Lebanon, Dotan and his wingman Giora Ben-Dov literally ran into a similar number of MiG-17s. A-4 pilots usually ignored enemy attack aircraft when these encounters occurred, preferring to press on with their briefed mission so as to avoid an engagement between roughly equal platforms. IDF/AF fighters were usually on hand to engage Arab attack aircraft in any case. However, with three kills to his name, and anxious to attain ace status like many of his contemporaries from the Mirage III community, Dotan was certainly not your usual light attack pilot! He quickly changed course and hunted down the Syrian MiG-17s, whose pilots had indeed chosen to avoid engaging the Skyhawks. Dotan despatched his first victim with air-to-ground rockets, and then followed this up with a second MiG destroyed with 30 mm cannon fire. These success made Dotan the only IAF pilot to be credited with air-to-air kills while flying the A-4 Skyhawk. Ezra Dotan passed away on 16 May 1981, following a short illness. He was just 44 years old. (Artwork by Gareth Hector)



- ★ James McGee, Grand Junction, CO
- ★ J.B. McKamey, Pensacola, FL



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SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modelers' Corner •

By Joe Turpen

This year's International Plastic Modelers Society National Convention will be held in Phoenix, Arizona, 4-7 August. Hopefully, as usual there will be plenty of *Skyhawks* in the competition. I promise lots of pictures from this year's competition for the Whizzer White Best *Skyhawk* Award, which is presented by *Skyhawk* Association. Here are examples of some outstanding models exhibited at past national conventions.

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





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