



THE SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION

Journal



*RNZAF Skyhawks
of Kiwi Red, 1988.*

THE A-4 EVER

Summer 2012

Skyhawk Association

VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 2

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Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting

September 7, 2012

Sparks, NV



www.a4skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

• From the Hun •



By Todd Frommelt

Good Day Skyhawkers!

Hope your summers are going well, and you're being careful with the sunscreen! As usual, your Board has kept busy with a Lakeland mid-year meeting, a Marine A-4 Reunion and the exchanges of numerous pieces of paper, web site edits and, my perception, about 6 trillion emails. But it's enjoyable. A good time to mention that we're talking two-year terms for President and, though time has flown by, it's looking to be time to pass the baton to the Navy come September. Your next 'Prez Sez' should be coming from our present VP Navy, Dave "Hide" Dollarhide, stud Navy Skyhawker, prolific private flyer and legendary leader of men and ladies!

But for now, you deal with the Hun...

Old Business

Regrettably, Stan Martin, our SDO Coordinator, has health issues that preclude him from performing his duties. We have already added those duties to those of our VPs, and they'll each handle their respective service SDO activities. The President will handle the international folks. Just work with the SDO-Coordinator email addresses on the web site, and our tech experts will handle the routing of your communications. Best wishes, of course, to Stan for a full recovery. If you're in the Tucson area, he'd love a call or visit! (check with Hun for cell number or address).

Skyhawks Still Flying correction! Hey, I blundered in the last Journal's update on our still flying Skyhawks. Gomen! Despite rumors and some evidence to the contrary, the New Zealand A-4Ks are NOT headed to the Black Diamond Jet Team. They are instead going to another company owned by the same gentleman, called Draken International, and are slated for military contract work, much like ATSI. They, BTW, are already flying some of Bob "Snakbar" Schneider's A-4Ls. See the correction article in this issue. Since I've touched on the Black Diamonds, I'll have to say I was impressed by their L-39s and MiG-17s at Lakeland...beautifully maintained, great looking show birds!

OK, now I've touched on Lakeland. Our BOD meeting was super! It was a distinct pleasure to meet Porter Spangler and Dan Carr while gathering under the wings of their beautiful A-4C! They and their crew have done a super job! See the Sun 'n Fun article in this issue for more information.

We have Caruso caricature prints of the A-4 for sale on our web site! Check it out! While you're there, check out the entire "ships store" area. Remember this is the end of the centennial years, and there's still room on your 'I love me' wall! While we're talking web site, PLEASE take a new look. Blade and his crew continue to amaze me with all the info they keep adding. And, give us your constructive comments! Feedback is always welcome!

Membership is always on the Prez's mind, of course, and I need to report that we're stuck again, this time at around 930

members. Not bad, but we can still do better! Remember 1000 by two 100's? A few months to go to reach that goal! Two extra avenues for recruitment have come to my attention. First, many of you are familiar with Ancestry.com (thanks Gabby), a web site for ancestral research. Well, did you know that there's now a section where you can research many cruise books? Give it a try, look up some long lost brothers/sisters, and give them a dose of light attack camaraderie! And the DFC Society and Skyhawk Association are swapping journal articles hoping to build some synergy between us. Got a DFC? Give the DFC Society a strong look for membership as it's a fine organization. And I've got to make one more plug for local gatherings! Work on that guys and gals! You'll thank me once you get it going! Here's yet another SoCal Marine A-4 boys at play photo!



Todd "The Hun" Frommelt



SoCal Boys at Play

New Business

The Skyhawkers Marine Centennial Reunion took place in mid-May in Washington, D.C., and a great time was had by all! I'm hoping we'll have a great turnout of Marines at Tailhook as well. Other than the thrill of seeing old comrades, my highlight was seeing Skyhawker Dave 'Tater' Peeler (and his wife Maureen) looking much improved and well on the way to a full recovery. Those feelings are what camaraderie is all about...

And while we were there, we not only showed off our new Association banner, we corralled a super Guest of Honor and Speaker for this coming Tailhook SA annual meeting... MajGen (ret) Jon "Goose" Gallinetti! Goose has over 5300 hours of tactical aircraft time (OK, lots of Hornet, as well as Skyhawk time) and spent some of his final career time as Commander of the Joint Warfighting Center. He is well versed on the global war on terror.

continued on page 5...



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2012 •



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————— Published by the Skyhawk Association © 2012 —————

Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Newsletter Editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

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Cover: RNZAF Skyhawks of Kiwi Red demonstration team practicing near Ohakea in 1988.
Official RNZAF photo via Don Simms.

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION BOD MEETING

Lakeland Florida

Your Board had its mid-year meeting at the Sun 'n Fun Airshow in Lakeland, Florida, this past March. It was a super event with, of course, our business meeting and the airshows, but especially with all our gatherings under the wings of the Porter-Spangler A-4C! Add to that the special treat of having one of our favorite Israeli A-4 pilot members in attendance, and you've got a recipe for serious "fun in the sun!"

The Venue: Some super airshow activity and static displays made for a very apropos background to the Association's get-togethers. Although the FAA makes



things tough for excitement, and we were dealing with the **very SAFE** work of the Thunderbirds (my what great "cruise" formation work those guys do!), we were very impressed with the nighttime show! The pyrotechnics they attach to their aircraft are just amazing!

And if you're ever in downtown Lakeland, your representatives highly recommend Harry's Seafood Bar and Grill! Great meal and good fun.

We also enjoyed the company of member LtCol (Reserve) Rami Lothan of



the Israeli Air Force. A combat veteran, including a successful recovery after taking a Strela missile hit (before the tail extenders), he has over 3,600 A-4 hours and also flies Stearmen and Harvards. Rami flew his last A-4 flight on 15 June at age 60, but will continue flying for the IAF Museum. In addition, he has an offer to fly for fire fighters.

The Skyhawk Ventures A-4 was, of course, the hit of our trip. Dan Carr, Porter Spangler and their crew have turned this Charlie into a new, factory-delivered beauty. It participated in the show each



day, and just being at its side during start-up gave most of us a good thrill. Congrats to the Ventures team!

Oh, we did some business too! While I've touched on our business activities back in Prez Sez, let me say here that we always hit membership promotion hard. We also discussed our new Pratt and Whitney sponsorship; purchase of a portable free standing Association banner; and presentation of website public versus private/members only information. We also started work on selection of a speaker for Tailhook (Marine emphasis) and gave the Marines a starter fund for their all Marine A-4 Reunion. Good meeting! Oh, and you'll all be happy to know that Board member 'Buick' Eberhardt, flying with the Black Diamonds, happened to buzz by in one of these MIG-17's. Thanks Buick...



THE PREZ SEZ MORE...

Continued from page 2...



Jigger, Goose and Hun at Reunion

He's now with the Rolls Royce folks. Should be a super luncheon!

The Easter Egg A4 renovation project led by the Flying Leatherneck Museum at Miramar has almost reached its fundraising goal. They're looking for just a few more of your dollars! **Please donate!** This is the LAST A-4 off the production line, and it will really look

special in that original livery! Donate at <http://www.flyingleathernecks.org/>. That topic is down here under new business because I'm prepping you on another project coming online soon at the Navy/Marine Corps Reserve Center, Tucson, AZ. This one is a 'TA-4 on a stick' being set up for renovation in the fall. Requests for fund raising help will be coming shortly. This bird was pulled out of the boneyard by CO "Rusty" Orvik, and the restoration crew nucleus will come from the USMC I&I staff of Marine Captain Sheridan Conklin. It's one of the very last TA-4s to have flown for the Navy with VC-8, so it's also a heritage bird. If you're in the Tucson area, they'd love to have you volunteer to help clean it up! POC's

are Col. Don R. "HOOT" Duffer, USMC (ret) at exa4jock@aol.com and CDR Ross "Rusty" Orvik, USN at Ross.Orvik@Navy.mil.

Pratt and Whitney Sponsorship! Due to the diligence of friends (OK, Skyhawk/Harrier comrade) in high places, we were recently honored with a nice sponsorship check from Pratt and Whitney. (See our attribution note on the web site's home page). This is a no strings gift that we'll be using to help A-4 renovations efforts around the country. We're hoping it'll be renewed yearly, but no promises there. When you get a chance, please thank the P&W boys at Reno.

It's been my pleasure working for you guys and gals and a special honor meeting and talking/emailing with so many of you. Peace and good will, and stay aggressively safe out there.

Hun sends

TAKE NO PRISONERS

• Letters to the Editor •



sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

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

Please note email address!

To the Editor

I loved the essay about the beloved A4C. J.J. McBride did a beautiful job. I want to correct a tiny error in the story. LCDR Ray (ROGE) Lodge was a valued friend, member, and Cubi Point 'O' club stalwart of the VA-86 Sidewinders vs. the VA-72 Blue Hawks.

Gary Aaron

[aphanavy@msn.com]

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To the Editor:

I just posted a video of the (Skyhawk Ventures A-4C) J-65 starting. Turn up the volume and go down memory lane when it starts honking. Gene.... link for the Skyhawk Assn. YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBvEQIW3Pz4&feature=g-upl&context=G2b36a9cAUAAAAAAA>

Dave Dollarhide

[davedollarhide@msn.com]

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To the Editor:

Hi Skyhawkers! I am webmaster of skyraider.org. I have been scanning some images from a fellow Skyraider pilot's collection and came upon a picture of Ltjg Grant Townsend following his rescue on 28 July 1965. I note the story you have on your website (by Peter Arnett, no less). I am wondering whether anyone knows the whereabouts of Townsend.

The USAF Skyraider pilot who took the picture would like to get in contact with him. Have cc: ed the VA-23 POC also.

Regards,

Byron Hukee

SpadGuy

[spaddrvr@gmail.com]

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To the Editor:

Tadpole rudder -

In the Summer 2008 issue, in Heine-mann's Hot Rod, part 1, Bob Rahn discusses rudder oscillations that were corrected by changing the A-4 prototype rudder to the tadpole rudder, which is the only type I've ever seen. I don't think I've ever seen an A-4A, so I assumed that all A-4As had the tadpole rudder. In the

Summer 2011 issue the Naval Academy's A-4A clearly shows the non-tadpole rudder. So apparently my assumption that all A-4As had tadpole rudders is wrong. Does that also mean that all A-4As had the potential for a high speed induced violent rudder oscillations?

The numerous times I was on a Crusader's six heading very steeply downhill going faster than a Scooter is supposed to go, I'm glad my A-4B had a tadpole rudder.

Steve Pollock

Ex A-4B driver

[Steve.Pollock@myfuelmaster.com]

(Ed. Note: A little research on the tadpole rudder indicates that perhaps the only A-4A to have that rudder was 137820, which was the aircraft that Gordo Gray used to set the speed record on 15 October 1955. According to Bob Rahn (*Tempting Fate*), the tadpole rudder was installed on that aircraft due to rudder damage sustained by Rahn on a practice lap of the record course. It was faster and simpler to change out the rudder than to repair the damage to the original. The new rudder did the trick, and after the record-breaking flight, an original rudder was re-installed on 137820 before it returned to the test program.

I asked Jim Winchester, author of the excellent work *Douglas A-4 Skyhawk, Attack and Close-Support Fighter Bomber*, if he knew of any retrofits of the tadpole to A-4A aircraft. He replied:

"The story about swapping the smooth rudder for the 'tadpole' and then back again for Gray's flight is true. It seems that no other A-4As had the tadpole rudder retrofitted, which makes you wonder how serious the problem was. They made 168 or so A-4As and operated some into the 1970s without serious rudder-related problems. Maybe there was a note in NATOPS about different handling? The diagram in my book (page 30) showing the various things they tried to fix the rudder 'buzz' with, shows things I've never seen in photographs. I don't know how much these

were flown on development aircraft.

As for other improvements back-dated to A-4As, I can't think of any ones with external differences. There were some A-4Bs without refueling probes (but with tadpole rudders) which could be mistaken for As if the BuNo wasn't visible."

I checked the A-4A NATOPS manual to see if there was an operational limitation imposed due to the likelihood of rudder flutter, but found that in those days Flight Characteristics and Operating Limitations were only given in the confidential supplement. If any of our readers can provide input on this subject, let me know at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org. For an excellent discussion of the early rudder issues, check out the discussion on pages 22 and 23 of Jim's book.)

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(Ed. Note: in his letter to the editor published in the spring 2012 issue (commenting on J.J. McBride's article *The Last Combat Cruise of the A-4 Charlies*), Steve Pollock urged our readers to "show a little more respect for the Shang" (USS *Shangri-La*). Subsequently, Steve wrote a follow-up letter with more stories about the venerable Shang.)

To the Editor:

I was an A-4 pilot with the VA-72 BlueHawks on the Shang's '69 Med cruise. The '69 Med cruise was the last A-4 cruise for the Bluehawks. They transitioned to A-7Bs upon returning. Our sister squadrons, VA-12 and VA-172, continued on with the Shang for the WestPac cruise in their A-4Cs. We had the even older A-4B Skyhawks. A-4Cs would have been a step up for us.

Taking the Shang into tight places must have been a characteristic the Captain inherited from the Shang herself. Our Captain took the Shang into the Straits of Messina while recovering aircraft. For this recovery there was only one aircraft launched, 'Twas me. I was doing a maintenance test hop so I had only the recovery time to run all tests, return and be 30 seconds behind the last recovering aircraft. The recovery went very quickly,

a lot quicker than my maintenance test hop went. I caught a bunch of grief from the Air Boss, and the Shang was in the narrowest part of the straits when I called the ball. She came hard a'starboard when my hook caught the number 3 wire. The Straits of Messina is not a straight line transit.

I'll relate what I remember of the time during the 1969 cruise when we almost set the ship on fire while conducting an air-power demonstration. The Shang would put on an air power demonstration for dignitaries and the crew towards the end of each at sea period. We had the usual stuff, F-8s with missiles and A-4s with a variety of bombs. I was scheduled to do a nuc over-the-shoulder delivery with a MK-84 (minus the fuse, but with a bunch of smoke flares so the bomb could be visually seen from the flight deck). The Shang being small and with only 2 cats, all aircraft were positioned aft with their tails hanging over the side. The target for the exercise was a bunch of scrap and wood fastened together for the express purpose of being blown up. In order for the dignitaries and the crew to better see the target it was equipped with some water activated flares. We were only a few minutes from manning aircraft. The Shang was not yet making any headway, just rocking gently with the waves. The crew had finished the target. It was sitting on the aft starboard elevator which was down. Some spray came over the elevator and set off one of the water activated flares, so the crew pushed the target with the burning flare off the elevator – good head work on their part. The problem was that the Shang was venting Av-Gas. The Shang still had E-1s and C-1s, which used Av-Gas, versus the much less volatile JP-5 which the jets used. So as a safety measure all Av-Gas lines were vented after each use, and the vent point was below the water line pretty much abeam the aft elevator. Av-Gas floats on water, and the ship wasn't moving; i.e. we were sitting in a pool of Av-Gas when the crew threw a flare into the pool.

We saw the effect of dropping the flare into the pool of Av-Gas on the PLAT; it was frightening. I'm sure everyone's mind immediately flashed to the images of the Forrestal fire, which we'd been shown multiple times over the past few months. I'm equally sure the effect on the flight crews was even more frightening.

Flames shooting up 1,500 feet, smoke to 5,000 feet, and everything from amidships back seemed to be on fire. There was actually no fire on the deck, but everywhere around the ship was on fire, and the tails of the F-8s and A-4s loaded with munitions were all extended out into the fire. If the problem had been instantly recognized, we could have turned off the flow of Av-Gas and moved the Shang out of the pool of Av-Gas. Nothing happened instantly so the crew set out to fight the fire.

VA-72's skipper, Cdr. Sam Latimer had previously lost much of his squadron (VA-106) in the Forrestal fire, so he was very familiar with flight deck fires. His tour as skipper of VA-106 was shortened, and he was finishing his time as skipper as the CO of VA-72. An unusual arrangement I think, but we were very glad to have him; he was a fine leader and real super skipper. Upon seeing the fire on the PLAT Cdr. Latimer shot out of the ready room in a flash heading for the flight deck. We were at GQ and my station was in the ready room, so there I stayed. In hind sight, I should have followed

him; it is every sailor's job to go to a fire and fight the fire. Cdr. Latimer got tugs hooked to aircraft, pulled the fire crews back and pulled the aircraft out of the fire. The Shang did get moving, the Av-Gas did get shut off, no one was seriously injured, and no aircraft were damaged beyond a few sooty tails; however, the Shang sure was black.

The Shang then lay dead in the water for 3-days while 2,000 sailors hanging in cargo nets worked around the clock, completely chipping everything from the island aft and repainting it. Upon getting into port, the 2,000 sailors got to do it again, completely chipping everything from the island aft and repainting it again. So much for that liberty, but we were gray again.

For more information on the Shang's last cruise, see Cdr. Jim Reid's post at <http://www.uss-shangri-la.com/lastcruise.html>. Cdr. Reid was the Shang's last handler.

Steve Pollock
ex-Bluehawk and A-4B driver
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A-4S FOR MALAYSIA

• Part I •

by Gene Atwell

In December of 1982 Grumman Aircraft Corporation signed a contract to provide forty A-4 Skyhawks to the Royal Malaysian Air Force, and thus was born another version of the venerable Skyhawk, the A-4PTM (Peculiar to Malaysia). Grumman personnel went to Davis Monthan AFB, Arizona; found eighty-eight A-4C's and A-4L's; disassembled them into the engine, wing, tail and fuselage components; and shipped the kit and caboodle overland to St. Augustine, Florida. In St. Augustine, they refurbished these eighty-eight aircraft into the forty jets that were delivered to Malaysia in the mid 1980s. Thirty-four of the aircraft were single seat, but six were used to create two-seat TA-4PTMs by enlarging the intakes and using as much currently-available hardware as possible, such as the long, large TA-4 canopy (unlike the decision years earlier to use refurbished A-4Bs to build two separate cockpits for the Singapore TA-4S). The engines were sent to be overhauled at a Malaysian shop that was subsequently used for overhaul after the jets were delivered.

I was preparing to leave active duty in 1983 and thought my flying days were over. In order to entice me to accept an employment offer, Intermetrics' (the company I eventually went to work for) referred me to the Marine Reserves at NAS Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. I subsequently joined VMA-131 to fly their A-4E's. Once in the unit, I met the airline pilots in the squadron, including a couple that were furloughed at the time. One of the furloughed pilots, Rich Bandlow, made a very big impression when he told me "You can work for the rest of your life or you can become an airline pilot." After more than a year of unpleasant office politics at Intermetrics', including deployments onboard the USS *Constellation* doing GPS testing, I quit my desk job to chase the airlines. Becoming an airline pilot meant filling out numerous applications (none

of which were online) while doing everything possible to increase my flight hours (the airlines were not hiring single seat, single engine pilots with about 1000 hours). VMA-131 offered me plenty of opportunities to fly, and during this period, I learned about the upcoming delivery of Skyhawks to Malaysia. I contacted Charlie Quilter, who was a

pilot at Western Airlines and owner of Skyways, a California company that ferried all types of aircraft around the world. I received a call from Skyways late one night, and the next day I was on a British Airways 747 from Philadelphia to London, where I was to pick up one of two aircraft that had been left behind on the Malaysian ferry operation due to maintenance issues.

False Start

Skyways provided me an orange flight suit with four-stripe epaulets to be worn in certain parts of the world, \$4,000 dollars in cash in case it was "needed", and the necessary charts and approach plates along with some canned

WEIGHT AND BALANCE CLEARANCE FORM F										FOR USE IN T. O. 1-18-40 & AN 01-18-40	
TACTICAL (USE REVERSE FOR TRANSPORT MISSIONS)											
DATE	5/25/85		AIRPLANE TYPE	A-4PTM		FROM	GSAC		HOME STATION		
MISSION/TRIP/FLIGHT NO.	Ferry/Delivery		SERIAL NO.	M32-29		TO			PILOT		
REMARKS			REF	ITEM		WEIGHT		PERMISSIBLE MOM/1000			
Fuel is Jet A at 6.75 lb/gal *14,500 lb for arrested landing Configuration: •Full internal fuel •Full drop tanks at S.S. 214			1	BASIC AIRPLANE (From Chart C)		111130		21352			
			2	DIL (4 Gals)		30		7.0			
			DISTRIBUTION OF LOAD								
			COMPT.	CREW	BAGGAGE	CARGO AND EQUIP.					
			B	1 180 Pilot			180		19.6		
				2 398 Drop tanks			398		98.7		
			1	3			3		4.3		
			2	28			28		4.6		
			3	2			2		1.4		
			4	72			72		16.9		
5	30			30		7.9					
6	40			40		15.4					
7	66			66		21.6					
8	32			32		6.2					
COMPUTER PLATE NO. (If used)											
Pertinent instructions to the pilot for shifting load and crew during takeoff and landing should be noted above.											
CORRECTIONS (Ref. 11)											
COMPT.	ITEM	WEIGHT	PERMISSIBLE MOM/1000								
	G Guns & defectors	178	32.8								
	G Reed mechanisms	30	5.6								
4 OPERATING WEIGHT										12011 2933.8	
5 COMPT. ROUNDS CALIBER											
6 FORWARD											
7 BUILT IN (800 Gals)										5400 1245.3	
EXTERNAL (S.S. 214,600 Gals)										4050 965.1	
8 WATER IN FLUID (Gals)											
9 JATO OR RATO											
10 TAKEOFF CONDITION (Unreheated)										21461 5144.4	
11 CORRECTIONS (If required)										-1208 -338.4	
12 TAKEOFF CONDITION (Corrected)										21253 5106.0	
13 TAKEOFF C. G. IN % M. A. C. OR IN										210.3 IN = 28.4% MAC	
14 JATO OR RATO											
15 BOWSE											
16 FUEL External										4050 965.1	
Internal (all, but 600*)										4800 1154.5	
17 ESTIMATED LANDING CONDITION										12103 2186.7	
18 ESTIMATED LANDING C. G. IN % M. A. C. OR IN										210.8 IN = 27.8% MAC	
COMPUTED BY (Signature) James T. Rome											
WEIGHT AND BALANCE AUTHORITY (Signature) James T. Rome											
PILOT (Signature)											
DD FORM 1365F											
1 SEPT 54											
										GPO 1982-507-992	

Weight and Balance sheet for A-4PTM deliveries.

flight plans that allowed us to cross specified international boundaries with diplomatic clearance within narrowly specified period of time.

My first destination was Upper Heyford, United Kingdom, to pick up the broken jet and hopefully receive a clearance from the French government to transit their airspace. I first flew the jet, MS 32-09, on February 17, 1984, and although the plane flew oddly, I figured it was just nerves. While at Upper Heyford, I spent the down time renewing my acquaintance with a college buddy who was then a F-111 WSO (Weapons Systems Officer) and his family, along with my first gun squadron skipper and his wife, Bill and Jeanine Wehrung. They were living in England and in the process of furnishing a 3-story base residence during Col Wehrung's hardship tour with the Air Force.

Obtaining clearance from the French proved difficult, and I was eventually sent back to the States to wait until the next approved diplomatic window, which was not available until the following month.

Meanwhile, there was another flight of four A-4s ready to leave St. Augustine, and I was soon sent back to London where I was tasked to fly both of the stranded jets (MS 32-12 being the second) sitting on the ramp at Upper Heyford. My mission was simply to exercise the jets, and what a great experience that was. The London controllers have not forgotten the history of the Blitz, and in a military aircraft I was free to fly when and where I wanted. I'm not sure that I even filed a flight plan. I flew both jets randomly around the area for a couple of hours. As I alluded to earlier, one characteristic of the Malaysian A-4s that stood out from my previous experience with Echos and Mikes was how squirrely the airplane handled. I felt like I was balancing on the tip of a pencil, and no matter how much I tried, the jet would not allow itself to be trimmed hands off. I'm not sure if that was characteristic of the Chucks and Limas or a symptom of combining different airframes into a single jet.

My wingman, Walt, showed up, and we relocated the jets to RAF Alconbury on the 15th of March because Upper Heyford was going to be closed over the

weekend for runway repairs. We were going to meet the four jets that were transiting the Atlantic there. The local Zoomies noticed the orange flight suits we wore with nametags that displayed our Naval Aviator wings, callsigns but no rank. They elicited more than one question. How could they miss us when we were already planted at the bar when Happy Hour arrived? At that time, Alconbury was home to RF-4's, TR-1's and an aggressor squadron of F-5's. The F-5 Sticks sallied forth, engaged in high-g hand turns and eventually invited us to a squadron party in town. Taking advantage of the security mindset of the TR-1 pilots, we answered their questions very cryptically with not-so-little white lies. Our origin was "USS Boat," and our destination was "South."

Alconbury to Sigonella

The next morning, 16 March, the other four jets showed up. Walt and I introduced ourselves to Birdie, Bear, Gene (yeah, there exists more than one of us) and Bummer, helped them refuel their jets and flew off to Sigonella, Sicily, to spend the night. The flight was an introduction to the fact that French, Italian and Spanish controllers did not speak English to the local pilots. Not a huge problem, but still a nuisance since they usually called out our position to the locals in their native language, but did not reciprocate to us in English.

Upon our arrival at Sigonella, Bummer found out what happened when the overboard oil system was refilled, but the cap was not securely fastened... after 3.3 hours of flight time almost no oil was left in the oil system, but he had an extra slick port wing. After landing, we were off to the Orion Bar "Flytrap" (named after the P-3 Orion aviators who suffered through their version of an unaccompanied tour there). They had stocked and manned the bar to make sure we were well taken care of before we launched towards foreign military refueling stops where we would lose

the benefit of \$4/night BOQs. While at Sigonella, the aircraft humps were filled with beer bought at the Flytrap to be used later to help grease the skids at the remaining refueling stops.

Sigonella to Luxor

Our next destination was Luxor, Egypt, "The Valley of the Kings," and the forward visibility consisted of impenetrable dust haze. I'm still not sure how Birdie found the end of the runway with all six aircraft still smartly lined up for the break. Chomping on a wing in right-echelon formation, all six of us eventually broke, stayed in close in order to not lose sight of the field and after landing taxied to the ramp past refueling stops populated by Egyptian MiGs.

At Luxor, we employed a technique for ensuring the quick arrival of the fueling truck that was based upon corporate knowledge accumulated before I joined the operation. Supposedly, there were multiple ways to pay for ground services.... hourly, half a day or a full day. Knowing that a Skyhawk could be turned faster than a bladder could be emptied, one could assume that an hourly plan was the way to go. However, the Seabee attitude of "Can-Do" didn't come with the hourly plan. Knowing this, we bought the whole-day plan and received service that was Can-Do quick instead of the rolling shift changes that would otherwise have occurred had we opted for the supposedly smaller landing fees. The stash in the humps that we brought from the Flytrap also helped.

We always refueled the jets *continued...*



Atwell is welcomed by Egyptian guard upon arrival at Luxor.

Photo via author.

A-4S FOR MALAYSIA

Continued...

over-wing and added Prist at each refueling stop from Luxor until we reached Malaysia in order to prevent icing at altitude. We were not sure whether the fuel had anti-ice capabilities, and we did not want to find out at altitude. It wasn't long before the fueler showed up, and we realized we were parked too far from the subterranean fueling receptacles. Not wanting to haul out the huffers and starter probes (taking a chance of shearing a starter), we opted to push the jets the necessary distance. There was no such things as a tug or tow bar for a Skyhawk, except those in neighboring Israel. Considering the problems we had flying through France, we didn't attempt to bridge that diplomatic minefield.

Luxor to Dubai

Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, was our bed-down stop for the night. The "quick" turn at Luxor meant we would be flying through Saudi airspace at night. Approximately every 10 feet of forward motion (I exaggerate slightly), we were asked for our reservation number by the Saudi controller. He spoke flawless English, as long as the English was ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) related. Any non-standard queries had to be repeated multiple times with the controller seldom understanding what we were saying. At the time, had no idea why we were being peppered with the same question so frequently, but we found out the next morning in Dubai.

Landing at Dubai was uneventful, but it was the first time I saw buses that were as wide as a C-5. At that time in Dubai commercial airline traffic required a bus to bridge the distance between the jet and terminal, and they provided those monsters to move the passengers. After refueling the planes, we were off to the hotel for a few drinks and then to bed. By then, the trip was starting to wear us down because as we proceeded further east, our day was cut short by a couple of hours. We were squeezing in 24 hours of flying and sleeping into a 20-22 hour day.



Pilots push planes to fuel pits during Luxor turnaround. Photo via author.

Upon opening the morning newspapers the next day, we learned why the Saudi controller was peppering us with never-ending questions the previous night. While we were airborne in Saudi airspace, the Iraqi's had launched their first airstrike on the city of Tehran during the protracted Iran-Iraq war of the early eighties. We shared a laugh while thinking about the RAF Alconbury crowd who probably thought that the evasive strangers, with the odd-colored jets and flight suits, that had passed through England just a couple of days earlier had done the deed. No, it wasn't us.

Dubai to Bombay (now Mumbai)

Our next destination was Bombay (now Mumbai), India. Take off and cruise were uneventful, but the explanation proffered by Bummer while airborne cleared up why we only did one leg per day going through India instead of the usual two. The jet had VHF and UHF radios, so we were able to chatter on UHF freely while checking in on VHF with the necessary controllers. Bummer set the stage by asking us to reset our clocks to local standard time by turning said clocks back 100 years. He also warned us that the paper work upon arrival would be incredible. Further, he said that the reason there were few trees left in India was because of the administrative burdens imposed by the British Raj those many years ago had caused the place to run out of trees to make paper (a joke, but just barely).

We parked the jets on the flight line, and Bear was able to snap a few photos of an IL-76 Candid from the security of his cockpit. Photography was not allowed in Indian airports at that time, and cameras were confiscated if that protocol was breached. We walked over to see if we could get a tour of the plane, and the answer was "Yes" until we boarded the ladder and they saw the English writing on our "Raven Flight" patches, as well as the US Flag on our left arm. We almost made it onboard, but not quite. As we were receiving our "nyet," we saw their flight engineer exit the same ladder with a portable aircraft coffee maker full of water which he used to douse the brakes and cool them down. I guess Russian metallurgy is more advanced than ours. Also surprising was the conversation we had with the fuelers. There were two supervisors on the truck that rode herd on the actual worker bee who operated the refueling truck. Each of the supervisors had chosen to live in India after they had earned engineering degrees in the United States, and the best jobs they could find in India were as fueling supervisors.

(Ed. Note: Gene Atwell survived his Malaysian adventures to fly again. He is currently serving as a captain for American Airlines, qualified on the Boeing 757 and 767, and flying international routes. He is a director and serves as webmaster of Skyhawk Association. Watch for Part II of this story in the Fall 2012 issue.)

NO SURPRISE AT BAI THUONG

By CDR Hugh Magee, USN (Ret)



It was March 1966 in the early days of "Rolling Thunder." My squadron VA-146, embarked in USS RANGER (CVA-61) as part of Air Wing 14, had recently finished our "spring training" at Dixie Station. After a rocky first two days (our CO, CDR Hugh Loheed, was lost 1 February, our first day on the line at Yankee Station), then several weeks of road recce in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam, we had finally been cleared to participate in our first Alfa Strike.

The target was the Bai Thuong airfield in the vicinity of Thanh Hoa. VA-146's skipper was CDR (later CAPT) Al Schaufelberger, and CDR (later VADM) Bob Dunn had just reported aboard as our new XO.

As was typical for us in the early stages of the air war up north, VA-146's pilots were highly trained, well-motivated and eager, but very naive regarding NVN air defense capabilities.

I had seen Bai Thuong airfield from a distance while on a recce some days earlier. It was far from operational, still under construction. The runways were not paved, buildings were ramshackle, construction equipment littered the site, there were no aircraft based there, and defenses were not visible.

For our first Alfa Strike, a 30-plane gaggle of our A-4Cs, VA-55 A-4Es, VF-142 and -143 F-4Bs, as well as three VAH-2 Det F A-3Bs, planning and briefings were elaborate. We were going to really surprise them with an initial feint, a deceptive circuitous route, and max low-level to avoid radar detection. Because of the routing, a three-plus hour double-cycle was required with all strike aircraft to be topped off enroute.

The weather for the strike was great. We launched, rendezvoused and headed

southwest, descending and tanking from our trusty Whales. The A-4 "Charlie" was a real dog at this point; full fuel and full load of 500-pounders. Tanking completed, we turned to the east descending to 500 ft. AGL and coasted in south of the DMZ, confident that as we disappeared off the enemy radar scopes, they would dismiss us as another mass gaggle headed for close air support south of the DMZ. About 40 miles inland the strike group wheeled north, hugging the



deck up through southern and central Laos circumnavigating the "hot" Plain of Jars. A piece of cake, no flak, no missile warnings, no nothin'! I remember the feeling well, "just like a low-level out of Lemoore with a drop at Fallon. Nothing to this attack business if you use your head."

Bai Thuong was masked by the Annam mountains to the west, and well north of the Mu Gia Pass, we turned to the east and clawed our way upward to the top of the ridges while remaining as low as possible. The strike continued on, fast closing the relatively short distance to the pull-up point. The first indication that something was amiss was the bright twinkling flashes all around the airfield just prior to pull-up. The climb to roll-in altitude was a real struggle for our Charlies, made worse by the white, gray and black flak puffs which now blanketed the area.

We were lucky on that first Alfa. Some planned runs were altered somewhat by the cluttered roll-in point, but the bombs hit all over the non-operational MIG base. The earthen runways were cratered, construction equipment was rearranged and none of the strike group was hit. I am sure Bai Thuong was back in gear in two days or less. It was only Bai Thuong, but to us at that time, it was Phuc Yen or Kep!

During the short, scattered escape to "feet wet" over the friendly confines of the Gulf, I wondered again: Did they really know we were coming? How did they react so fast? Later I realized that the enemy had an excellent air defense system, and there followed an admiration for a smart and perhaps a well trained and equipped foe. Our opponents probably had been laughing and scratching and rolling on their dirt floors as they tracked us throughout our supposed deception.

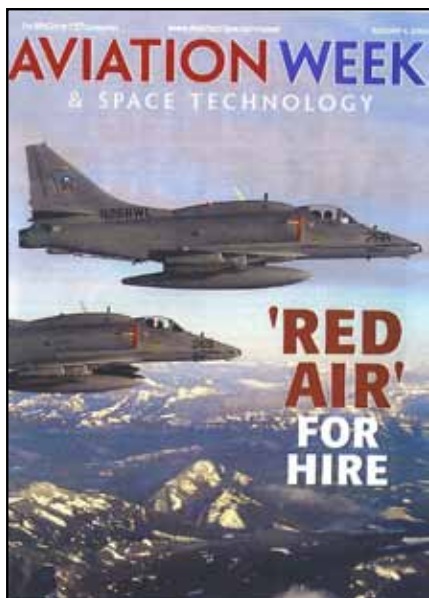
Most of us learned a valuable lesson that day at Bai Thuong, one that would stand us in good stead during the rest of the 1966 cruise and the even tougher one that followed in '67: Better to overestimate the enemy and receive a pleasant surprise than to underestimate and be terrified - or perhaps dead!

(Ed. Note: this article was first published in THE HOOK, Winter 1990. Used with permission.)

FLYING THE A-4 SKYHAWK

• A great retirement job! •

By Don Duffer



Most airline pilots read Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine for a valuable source of current industry information. Given that, who would have thought that the front page of the August 4, 2003, edition titled “RED AIR” FOR HIRE would picture a flight of fully-operational Advanced Training Systems International, Inc. (ATSI), A-4N Skyhawks with a retired Continental Airlines pilot as the flight leader. The AW&ST magazine front cover portrayed my flight over the Rocky Mountains while returning to WGA (Williams Gateway Airport, Mesa, AZ, - the former Williams AFB) from the Canadian Fighter Base Cold Lake near Alberta, Canada.

I learned about ATSI when my son Mark, then a flight student at Meridian, MS, and now a Marine F/A-18 pilot, called to let me know that a former Navy pilot was attempting to purchase some A-4 aircraft from Israel. At the time, he was searching for someone to assist in the planning and implementation of the startup company. ATSI was to be based at Williams Gateway Airport and would employ the A-4 in the air-to air, air-to-ground and electronic warfare roles, assuming other support roles as required.

The concept of providing “RED AIR” to the military services utilizing A-4N Skyhawks manned by civilian pilots was then untested and not universally accepted. I made the call, had an interview and was immediately employed as a pilot. I was also asked to serve as the recruiter of pilots to fly our Skyhawks.

With advice from some of his old Navy friends, the CEO of ATSI determined that the U.S. military was experiencing a tremendous shortfall in Red Air sorties and felt that the nimble and dependable A-4 was a viable platform to fill that requirement. However, the only method of obtaining any operational A-4 aircraft was an outright purchase from a foreign government. For that reason, ATSI purchased 9 A-4Ns (single-seat) and 3 TA-4Js (two-seat trainers) from Israel. The aircraft were surplused from the Israeli Air Force (IAF), overhauled in Israel by technicians from New Zealand and flown to Williams Gateway Airport. The A-4Ns flew nonstop across the north Atlantic via the Azores and Canada. Due to their lower fuel capacity, the TA-4Js were flown via the UK, island-hopping across the North Atlantic.

As a civilian company, ATSI operates under FAA rules that require pilots to be qualified and current in the A-4 prior to flying any missions. I had no problem with the qualification portion of the FARs, having flown for 17 years almost every model of the A-4 possessed by the Marine Corps Reserve; however, the currency requirement to have 3 landings in the past year posed a serious problem because my last A-4 flight was in 1983. To overcome the currency issue, I traveled to Hazerim air base in Southern Israel in time for the first ATSI TA-4J to complete the overhaul process. After a short briefing by my check pilot (a former IAF fighter pilot who had several MiG kills to his credit), I taxied out to the active duty runway for my first takeoff in an A-4 in over 18 years. During those 18 years, I had flown



Flight brief at Hazerim AFB, Israel. Flight is with Menn, an Israeli fighter pilot with several MiG kills to his credit. Photo via Don Duffer.

the B727, B737 and B777 for Continental Airlines and had thought many times about how much fun I had during my USMC career flying the F-8 Crusader and the A-4 Skyhawk. I often thought about how much fun it would be to continue to fly either of those wonderful flying machines again, but never dreamed that my wishes would come true at a stark fighter base in Israel.



ATSI A4-Ns at NAS Pt Mugu, Jan. 2002. Photo via Don Duffer.

When I pushed the throttle forward for that first takeoff in 18 years my adrenaline was pumping; however, it was comforting to know that the instructor was in the back seat of the TA-4J - just in case. The little bird was as docile as ever as I broke ground, retracted the gear and flaps and accelerated to a comfortable speed. After reaching 15,000 feet or so, I was astounded that three of the border areas of Southern Israel could be easily seen. I quickly understood why the Israeli fighter pilots normally logged less than one hour of flight time during each of their combat flights.

Climbing to a comfortable altitude brought back lots of old memories of flying the “Scooter” with the likes of Neal Dyer, Birdie Bertrand, George Fox, Dave Lynn, Bill Vaughn, John Richter just to name a few of the Continental pilots that I served with while in the Marine Corps

Reserve. At altitude, I completed a comfort check that included a couple of gear extensions and retractions, some acceleration and deceleration exercises and some moderately hard turns. After completing the comfort check, I descended back to Hazerim AFB to complete the three landings required to fulfill the currency requirement.

Lots of memories came flooding back as I recalled entering many, many military traffic patterns with some of the above guys on my wing, or vice versa. Prior to that currency flight, someone had told me that flying the Scooter again would be just like riding a bicycle - you never forget. In fact, it was much easier that I had initially thought, but I had already spent lots of time "in the books" and several hours in the cockpit of the TA-4J as it was being prepared for acceptance. After exiting the aircraft, I thought that I was one of the luckiest guys around to be able to fly A-4s again after my airline career.

Returning to WGA, I found myself immediately scheduled to fly the first revenue-generating mission for ATSI in the A-4N Skyhawk. The mission profile was an intercept mission in the W-291 area off southern California that overlays the islands of San Clemente and Catalina. I was to be the blocking force for a flight of USN F/A-18 Hornets operating from an aircraft carrier located west of San Diego that was attacking NAS Pt. Mugu. The flight went as briefed except for the double take as the US Navy F/A-18 Hornets passed close abeam. I feel certain they were very surprised to see a flight of camouflaged A-4s in the exercise.

The flight was my first in a single-seat A-4 since March of 1983. The A-4N, as configured by ATSI, developed over 11,000 pounds of thrust at an empty weight of approximately 10,000 pounds. A takeoff in that aircraft did not use much runway! I have to admit that my first take-off was - well, the word interesting comes to mind. By the end of the flight, however, I was feeling much more comfortable with the Scooter and had no problem with the return to WGA and final landing. Navigation had changed a great deal in the 18 years, since ATSI used a GARMIN 530/GPS navigation system, much like what I used on the B737/B777.

After establishing a reputation for performance, ATSI was requested by the Canadian Air Force to provide Red



ATSI flight line at Cold lake CFB in February 2003.

Photo via Don Duffer.

Air sorties for their F/A-18 fighters, as well as close air support for their ground forces. During 2002 and 2003, I spent many weeks at Canadian Fighter bases in Comox, Cold Lake and Bagotville providing Red Air for the Canadian training squadrons, their fighter weapons instructor courses and their ground forward air controller training school. Operating in all seasons of the year posed some very real challenges for the A-4, as well as for the pilots and crew chiefs. With many days of temperatures well below zero, lots of care was taken to prevent any type of accident due to the cold weather. The A-4 operates well in all temperature extremes but, without anti-skid, care must be taken on slick runways and taxiways.

I also participated in an annual Maple Flag Exercise held at CFB Cold Lake, Canada. Fighters, transports and electronic warfare aircraft from the USA, Canada and several foreign countries also participated in the exercise. On one memorable Red Air flight during Maple Flag, I was the flight lead for a 2-plane section of tasked to provide radar jamming for 4 F-16s. After the radar jamming phase of the flight was complete, we joined the F-16s as they attempted to defeat the F-15s providing fighter cover for the strike aircraft. We also sought to engage the French, Belgian, Canadian and Australian aircraft involved in the strike and paratroop drop flights. Although the flights are flown with some very specific safety rules, every where I looked I saw fighters in mock

combat. Flying in the same flights with F-15s, F-16s, F-18s, Mirage 2000s and others will certainly keep you young at heart -- even if your body is screaming for you to stop!

During the course of my 35-year career with Continental Airlines, I participated for 27 years in the Marine Corps Reserve, flying almost every model of the A-4 that was built for the US Marines. The Continental Airlines Flight Operations division was always very supportive during the 17 years that I flew the A-4 as a US Marine Reservist - for which I will always be grateful. The FAA Age 60 rule closed one door in my flying career - but another door opened. No matter, I was delighted to be back flying the A-4 Skyhawk. It wasn't a B777, but it was a terrific way to spend my retirement years (and occasionally get out of the house).

(Ed. Note: a version of this article was published in the Golden Contrails, a publication of Continental Airlines. For more information on ATSI, see articles in the Summer 2004 and Spring 2010 editions of The A-4Ever.)



ATSI pilots pose with A-4N at Cold Lake CFB in April 2003. Don Duffer at far right. Photo via Don Duffer.

CORRECTION!

• From the Hun •

By Todd Frommelt

Air show circuit buzz, newspaper articles, 2+2=?, and the like aside, I was mistaken in attributing the New Zealand A-4s to the Heavy Metal Jet Team in the last updated “*Skyhawks Still Slipping the Surly Bonds*” in the last Journal (Spring 2012, p. 8). As it turns out, one very lucky guy, who also happens to love A-4’s, operates as the CEO of several aviation related companies, including JDI Holding Corpo-

ration, Draken International, Harbortouch and the Black Diamond Jet Team (formerly Heavy Metal). Mr. Jared Isaacman shared with me that he has acquired eight New Zealand A-4Ks. They will be brought to the U.S., restored to flying condition and serve with Draken International as a military contract service

operation, similar to ATSI, ATAC and BAE. Also, it should be noted that while ATAC has stopped using their A-4Ls, A-4L LLC’s Bob Schneider has now leased 3 A-4Ls to Draken International. My apologies to Mr. Isaacman. We wish him good luck in getting those A-4Ks back to the US and flying again!



SHARING SOME SKYHAWK HERITAGE!

• Special Ladies •

By Todd Frommelt

You, know, this President “stuff” can be time consuming. Thank heavens there are so many goodies that come with the job that it’s all worth doing! My wife and I had the distinct pleasure back in early June to deliver some



Marine A-4 Reunion mementos and to enjoy some delightful conversations with two very special ladies.

First was Shar Marsh. You all know that Shar is the daughter of our favorite artist, R.G. Smith and is conservator of his art (which can be viewed on the www.rgsmithart.com website). What you may not know, however, is how charming and knowledgeable she is concerning the work, experiences and lives of not only RG, but all those at Douglas, the Navy and the Marine Corps who were a part of that era in Skyhawk history. And she is a super storyteller! Next time you see her (she’s a Tailhook Symposium regular), strike up what will surely turn out to be a super conversation! And as a bonus, she has a life partner, Harvey, who’s got a history worthy of a Tom Brokaw chapter as he was a tanker in the major armored campaigns of WWII! And...he still hears better than Hun, although I guess that’s really not so hard to believe.

And then we hit Sun City, home of

the energetic, effervescent and delightful “Ms. Daisy,” perhaps better known as Joanie Heinemann, daughter of our beloved Skyhawk designer, Ed. It was our first meeting with Joanie, and we’re all sorry it took us so long to make it happen! She’s right out of a great movie...blond, attractive, 80-ish, drives a hot yellow Camaro, loves to talk, and, like Shar, is not only a **great** storyteller, but knows LOTS of them! She was very close to her Dad, and the stories are all fresh in her mind, very interesting and MOST enjoyable. We’ll be trying for another session soon! If you’ve got some time, let me know if you’d like to contact her, and I’ll try and get you in touch. Believe me, it will be time well spent! We’ll try to get her to Hook too.

Anyhow, I hope you enjoyed my rambling, but I had to relate these encounters to the membership. These are some fine ladies, and they are part of us and our Skyhawk heritage...

Hun proudly sends



DO YOU HAVE A DFC?

• DFC Society •

By Chuck Sweeney

The Distinguished Flying Cross is the highest aviation medal, the fourth highest combat medal and is awarded for heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight. The DFC is awarded to pilots and air crew in all five services (U.S. Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy), all rates/ranks, and both genders. It also covers all wars and campaigns from WWI forward.

The Distinguished Flying Cross was established by Congress on July 2, 1926 to recognize the gallantry of World War I pilots. The first Distinguished Flying Cross award citations were presented to the Pan American Flight crews on 2 May, 1927 by President Coolidge, for their five ship, 22,000 mile flight. President Coolidge presented the first Distinguished Flying Cross medal, on 11 June, 1927, to Captain Charles A. Lindbergh of the Army Air Corps Reserve for his solo flight of 33 ½ hours spanning 3600 miles across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. Lindbergh is also a member of The Distinguished Flying Cross Society.

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society (DFCS), founded in 1994 is a 501(c) (19) nonprofit organization and is made up of men and women who have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and relatives of those recipients. The Society currently has 5,700 plus members but seems to have a shortage of A-4 recipients. You should consider joining for the sake of your families even if you aren't personally interested in joining. Families derive great satisfaction in seeing the recipient's name on the DFCS Honor Roll on the internet for all to view. There are local chapters and conventions every two years with the 2012 convention in Seattle August 19-23.

The DFC Society is headquartered in San Diego, and just published a coffee table size book (8½ x 11) on the DFC entitled "*On Heroic Wings: Stories*

of the Distinguished Flying Cross".

The Foreword was written by President Bush (41) and the Introduction was written by Jim Lovell; both are members of the DFC Society. The book is based on oral history accounts, Distinguished Flying Cross citations and associated primary source documentation. Visual images gathered from personal collections and archives illuminate the comprehensive content of this volume. While acquiring the factual data was essential, capturing the personal feelings and perspectives of American aviation heroes was also significant.

The Society educates the general public and enhances public records by documenting, publishing, and presenting the history of the DFC and its recipients. DFCS fosters fellowship among its members and takes great pride in aviation and space exploration. It supports this vision by sponsoring scholar-

Distinguished
Flying Cross



ships for descendents of its members. The DFC Society also actively solicits new members to ensure its message is delivered to the general public.

If you are a DFC recipient or know someone who is, check out the DFCS website (www.dfcsociety.org/) for information on the requirements for joining, an application form and memorabilia. For additional information, call their toll-free number at 1- 866-332-6332.

(Ed. Note: watch for a review of "*On Heroic Wings: Stories of the Distinguished Flying Cross*" in the Fall 2012 edition of *The A-4Ever*. Skyhawk Association member Chuck Sweeney is the President of the DFC Society.)

SCHEDULING STUFF

• Reunions & Requests •



- ★ **Skyhawk Association 2012 Annual Meeting and Luncheon at Tailhook:** 12:00 noon, September 7, 2012, Nugget Hotel.
- ★ **Tailhook Association Reunion & Symposium 2012,** Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, September 6-9. This year's reunion celebrates the Centennial of Marine Aviation with Commandant General James Amos as guest of honor. Check out the Skyhawk Association booth in the exhibit area and the Light Attack Admin.
- ★ **VME/VMA-311 Tomcats Reunion:** Sept 5-9, Quantico, VA. See www.vmf-vma-311reunion.org for more information.
- ★ **VA-34 Blue Blasters Reunion:** Oct 19-21, Jacksonville, FL. Contact Ed Ohlert at ohlert@aol.com (703-860-5976) for information.
- ★ **VA-164 Ghost Riders Reunion:** Nov 1-4, Pensacola, FL. Contact Dennis Carroll at denniscarroll33@netscape.net for information.
- ★ **VMA-322 Fighting Gamecocks Reunion:** Nov 1-4, Pensacola, FL. Contact Dan Ventre at dtventre@comcast.net for information.

TINS!*

by Roy Stafford (Shadow)

Blues Photo Shoot (almost wipeout)

I can't look at a photo of the Blues without thinking of Harry Gann. He was one of my closest and dearest friends. I got the initial waiver for Harry to fly in Navy and Marine Corps aircraft (legally). I flew him in my backseat many times.

I shared with Harry some ideas about the "different looks" that various types of aircraft had from different angles and sun direction. His perception was incredible – tell him what to look for and he'd nail the picture every time.

I have a great story about how I almost got him killed trying to get a photo of the Blues that I thought would be neat. He got the pictures, but it was so close I saw his life and my career

going up in smoke. The sad part is that the sequence of pictures was incredible, but they were never published because it involved a major brain fart on the part of the solo pilot. I'll tell you about it sometime. What the hell – I'll tell you now!

The Blues were coming to El Toro after transitioning to the A-4. Harry had been down at El Centro for winter training and told me that one of the solos was doing a "dirty roll" on takeoff. I put that in my memory bank, and when Harry came out for the practice show, I convinced him that a head-on shot of the dirty roll with the foothills of Laguna and the runway in the photo would make a great composition. Moreover, it was bound to get a cover (seemed like a shit-hot idea at the time). One of my Buds had the Command Duty that day, and I convinced him to have Harry taken out to the opposite end of the runway (actually around the 2 board) and drop him off. Of course we explained this was going to be an "Official Photo" session. I climbed up on top of the Base Ops building to get a "birds-eye view" of the whole thing.

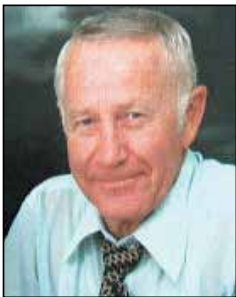
As the solo pulled on the runway, I told my squadron buds who were with me: "Y'all watch this!" This was before the famous redneck joke about y'all watch this, but the results were almost the same! As the solo rolled, we heard a terse "smokes on" over the radio. The Scooter, as the Blues flew it (an "F" model fuselage with the P-408 engine) was a real hotrod that accelerated like a bat out of hell. I watched intently and couldn't believe our luck. Everything was perfect... the sun, the background which was clear, and the "Angel" Blue of the airplane stood out against the white smoke like a sapphire against a sea of diamonds. It was awesome!

Right about the six board, the solo sharply rotated to about 25 to 30 degrees nose up and started the roll. Cheers went up. "Shit Hot!" "A dirty roll" was heard all over the roof of the Ops Building! As he came over the top of the roll, the nose came down, and even though it looked smooth, I started to get that tightness in my sphincter that told me something wasn't quite right – Marine intuition! 



R.G.'s ART

• High Flight •



R. G. Smith,
(1914-2001)

Named Honorary Naval
Aviator Number 11.

Royal
Australian
Navy A-4Gs
overhead
HMAS
Melbourne.

Image courtesy of
Sharlyn Marsh.
[rgsmithart.com]



TINS continued...

➔ I looked out to my left and there was Harry about a quarter of the way out on the runway with his trusty motorized Nikon up. I knew the gears were running. As the nose came down, we could finally hear the roar of the engine. Combined with the smoke, it caused the testosterone level to go to max crit up on the roof. All of a sudden, I realized that the nose was not coming back up as soon as it should. It was at this point, as my good friend and idol Corkey Meyer is fond of saying, "The genies of fate urinated all over the best intentions of man."

My supposition is that our solo got a little slow over the top, and he dished out the roll. The mind works in nano seconds at times like these, both for those in the cockpit and those on the ground observing (who realize what is about to happen). The solo pulled gun just a little to let the nose go as low as possible to gain some precious speed. My heart started thumping as I realized that Harry and the solo were about to merge.

Someone next to me yelled out, "Holy shit! He's gonna do a dirty roll to a touch and go!" My brain was screaming... "Run Harry, dammit, run!" At absolutely the very last second, Harry realized that he was not

on zoom. The lens was all the way back, and all he could see was a gold visor and a canopy frame. His head popped up, and he immediately pivoted and moved toward the edge of the runway at human warp speed. From my vantage, it looked like he was about to become a grape. Harry was running, and the A-4 hit the runway (tires first) about 20 feet in front of him. As the two of them appeared to merge, Harry disappeared from view. I couldn't tell if he was hit or just ducked. As the Scooter touched down, the pilot snapped the nose back up and smartly rolled to the left, with the wing tip about four feet off the ground. Gotta hand it to him—he made it look as planned as could be. Great recovery!

Everyone around me was going nuts. Even though we were all certified fighter pilots, there was still a lot of little boy and Walter Mitty in all of us. They thought it was awesome and part of the act. The smoke and noise just added to the moment to make it seem surreal. As the airplane moved off to our left, everyone turned to the left as one to watch the plane go by—like penguins watching a spotlight. I, however, was looking for Harry. The smoke was hugging the ground like a fog machine. Then faintly I saw a shadow, and Harry emerged from the white fog, apparently still intact with

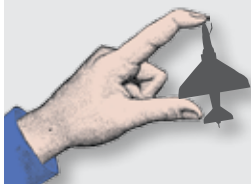
smoke leaking out of his clothes. Damn it was close! Immediately, I wondered if he got the photographs.

The fighter pilot mind—danger's over, get on with it. Over the years, we'd reminisce and laugh about it. I told Harry that my emotions were somewhat like during the near midair I had in a rolling scissors with an A-4. We split vertical fins (overlap), and for a nano-second we both thought we were dead. A nano-second later, both of us realized we'd not hit, even though we had a hell of a bump from the jet wash, and immediately the fight was back on. We continued at each other with blood in our eyes—I won of course. Harry would laugh and say he hadn't run that fast since high school—amazing when you consider he'd stepped on a mine during the Battle of the Bulge.

Harry got the pictures, and they were spectacular, but never published. Perhaps the kids will release them someday. Sometimes the best intentions....

All the best, Shadow

TINS! (This Is No Sht!) – TINS tales are "sea stories," completely unverified. I'm sure that all the TINS stories that we publish are absolutely true; however, the only hard requirement is that they be interesting.*



SIZE DOES MATTER

• Modelers' Corner •

By Joe Turpen

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

Skyhawks in Styrene (Part II)

An overview of Scooter kits, from A4D-1 to A-4KU

By Joe Turpen (Director, Skyhawk Association)
(Ed. Note: this article was originally published in the International Plastic Modelers' Society IPMS Journal. Part I appeared in The A-4Ever Spring 2102 and provided an overview of Hasegawa Scooter kits in 1:32 and 1:48 scale. Used with permission.)

A Continuing Survey of Scooter kits

Lindberg's 1:48 Skyhawks

Some of the earlier, late '50s, kits were issued by Lindberg and later re-released by UPC. The kit was based on provisional drawings of the Skyhawk and is not accurate because of this. For example, it used a preliminary design for the wing. Lindberg even released the kit in Blue Angels markings. These and the UPC kit are really for collectors only. Another Lindberg kit was the XA4D-1 (A-4A) released in 1962, and it should also be left for collectors.

Revell's 1:48 Skyhawks

In 1956, Revell issued an A4D-1 kit, which it then reissued several times



The AMT/ERTL 1:48 A-4E/F kit number 8862. It has the markings for VA-192 NM-207 USS Ticonderoga BuNo. 151054; VF-43 AD-320 BuNo. 151118; and A-4G 887 N13 155069. The model is a re-release of the ESCI/ScaleCraft SC 4021 kit.

with different box art and sometimes different markings, but details such as the wheel wells were always missing. To the best of my knowledge, there is no good kit of the A4D-1 available. However, the A4D-2 (A-4B) and A4D-2N (A-4C) can be reconfigured as A4D-1's (A-4A)

HobbyCraft's 1:48 Skyhawks

Released almost simultaneously with Hasegawa's A-4s were HobbyCraft's Skyhawks, which started with an A-4B kit with markings for several Skyhawks from Argentina in a "Falklands Fighter" kit. The HobbyCraft A4D-2N (A-4C) kit depicts aircraft from VA-76, Argentina and Malaysia. Hasegawa's kit has been issued twice, once with markings for VA-15 and VA-106 and again with markings for VA-76.

HobbyCraft not only issued an A-4N for the Israeli Air Force but also an A-4B that can be built as either an Argentinean or Singapore Air Force aircraft.

HobbyCraft has also produced a couple of A-4E/Fs, including an A-4E/H, which is an Israeli version of the aircraft. This particular kit includes the exhaust extension that Israel put on their aircraft. This exhaust extension was added to the aircraft once they had arrived in Israel. HobbyCraft has also produced the final version of the Skyhawk, the A-4M, in this scale.

Fujimi's 1:48 Skyhawks

Fujimi has issued the A-4E three times, once with Testors, and had four squadrons VA-155, VMA-211, VA-212 and one unidentified squadron from the USS Enterprise as marking options. The kit issued with Mokei had three squadrons' markings: VC-1, COM-FIT Wing Two and the Navy Fighter

Weapons School. Fujimi's other kit had markings for VC-5 and was issued in 1968. This kit, No. FJ-1, has also been re-released as the Fujimi/Mokei kit 5A6.

TA-4's aren't well represented in this particular scale, with only three kits. One of these kits, by Fujimi, is not a particularly good kit and scales out to 1:50 scale. The box art for the Bachmann/Fujimi TA-4F shows two BuNos on the same aircraft. The buzz number on the tail indicates one aircraft while the BuNo on the aircraft is actually different.

Monogram's 1:48 Skyhawks

Monogram has also issued some A-4E kits covering several Navy and Marine squadrons. They even issued one kit for an A-4E with photo-etched parts. One release had aircraft assigned to the Naval Fighter Weapons School, but it used an Air Force term "aggressor" on its box art. The Navy uses the term "adversary" for this mission. Monogram also released the kit as an A-4F with Blue Angels and "Lady Jessie" markings, but these are F kits and the Blue Angels flew the Super Foxtrot, so you need an intake conversion kit.



The Monogram 1:48 OA-4M released in 1985 as kit number 5436. It has markings for 154307 of H&MS-13.

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Ward, Richard - Waianae, HI
Wells, Christopher - Phoenix, AZ
Young, Kurt - Auburn, ME
Young, Grant - Lanark, IL

Size Does Matter continued...

➔ Monogram/Promodeler produced an A-4F, which offered the option for either a Blue Angels or Marine aircraft. It appears that this kit uses the 1978 (CDR Bill Newman) team.

Monogram has also provided an OA-4M in 1:48. It has appeared twice with different box art; one kit had markings for H&MS squadrons while the other kit also contained markings from the Naval Air Test Center.

Academy/Minicraft's 1:48 Skyhawks

When Academy/Minicraft issued their A-4E/F kit, the box art showed a VA-22 aircraft, but there is a notice in the kit stating a mistake was made and the decals in the kit were for VA-12.

ESCI's 1:48 Skyhawks

ESCI and ESCI/ScaleCraft issued two kits of the A-4E/F, one of which, SC-4021, would be reissued by AMT/ERTL as kit #8862. The decal sheets are the same, so there is no difference in aircraft choices. The interesting thing with these two kits is the fact that #8862 shows the installation of a drag chute on the kit, even though none of the planes on the decals had a drag chute. The only possibility for this is if the adversary aircraft depicted had been assigned to the Blue Angels prior to it being an adversary aircraft. It would take a check of the BuNo to determine this. And it did actually happen that a former Blue Angels aircraft appeared later as an adversary bird. BuNo 154172, which had

been both the #2 (1986) and #6 (1984) aircraft, was later assigned to the Naval Fighter Weapons School in 1992. In the picture I have of her, you can see the drag chute container, though at that time it was probably inactive. To no one's surprise Hasegawa has produced several A-4E/F kits in the past few years. They have not only produced the aircraft for both the Navy and Marines but they also issued an A-4E/H kit for the Israeli Air Force. However unlike Hobby Craft they did not include the exhaust extension.

The ESCI/ScaleCraft kit was released again, as a Marine A-4M or as an Israeli A-4N. This is actually a reissue of their A-4E/F kit with modifications for the more advanced aircraft.

Classic Airframe's 1:48 Skyhawks

Finally a prayer has been answered concerning the two-seat Skyhawks. Once Hasegawa began issuing Skyhawk kits many, including me, wanted the two-seaters to be included. As of this writing, Hasegawa has done nothing, but thanks to Classic Airframes we now have them. The aircraft are both TA-4Js and are very nicely done. Kit 4147 was the first to be issued and was marketed with decals for adversary aircraft, including one from the last A-4 Squadron, VC-8. The second kit, 4148, has other units represented that operated the TA-4J, including the Blue Angels and Israel. The VC-1 aircraft illustrated in the box art has the correct BuNo But

sadly the decal sheet has a BuNo for a T-28C – a correctable problem, to say the least. Both kits have resin parts including the ejection seats. Sadly, neither kit has markings for training command aircraft, but the aftermarket guys have taken care of that. It really wouldn't take much to convert one of these to a TA-4F, so maybe the after market guys will take care of that next.

Airfix's 1:72 Skyhawks

The Airfix A4D-1, which was reissued by MPC, is actually something only collectors would be interested in, since it is inaccurate and unfixable. This kit has been reissued several times with a change of box art. The even issued it as "Jester's" aircraft from the movie "Topgun," though the movie plane was an A-4F. The MPC reissue of this kit showed an aircraft from VA-153.

Starfix's 1:72 Skyhawks

Starfix introduced a kit in 1:72 scale, which it called an A-4F. However, except for the refuelling probe and possibly the nose section, it isn't close to being an F model. It has the rudder of an A4D-1 and the intakes don't have the splitter, which exists on the F-model Skyhawk.

Part III of this article will be printed in *The A-4Ever*, Fall 2012.





FROM THE ATTIC

• Mailbag •

Before they fade and crumple,
share your photos.

email to
sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org



Sunrise at the Stumps. An early-morning view of that favorite Marine vacation spot: the SATS strip at 29 Palms. Photo by SSGT Mike Abajian (VMA-124) via CWO-5 Al Rome.



Jugged up T-Bird! 1976 photo of New Zealand TA-4K 157915 with an unusual load. Photo from Gary Verver collection.



New coffee mess board in USS Midway RR 3. Photo courtesy of Bill Gilchrist.



A sad ending. The first Marine Skyhawk was A-4A 139920, delivered to VMA-224 in September 1956 by then-Major Tom Miller. (Shown here in front of MCAS El Toro base operations). 139920 last flew with VA-125 in Lemoore before being stricken



from the roles of active aircraft in January 1964. The second image shows its final resting place – as a target on the Nellis AFB ranges. Photos from Skyhawk Association website.

READ? YOU THINK WE READ?

Skyhawks:

The History of the RNZAF Skyhawk

Don Simms and Nick Lee-Frampton
WillsonScott Publishing International
Ltd. Christchurch 8442, NZ
2011, 376 pp, \$85NZD (currently \$60 US)
ISBN: 9781877427367
<http://www.willsonscott.biz/catalogue/military/skyhawks-the-history-of-the-rnzaf-skyhawk/>

Reviewed by Bob Hickerson

This work is unlike any other Skyhawk book on the market. To start with, it's among the slickest, most visually appealing aircraft books I've ever seen. The publisher's website claims that the book is in brilliant color, with many photographs. That's an understatement on both counts, especially concerning the photographs. This may just be a collection of every photo ever taken of a Royal New Zealand Air Force A-4!

I'm in awe of the authors because I can guess how much work went into this publication. The original leader

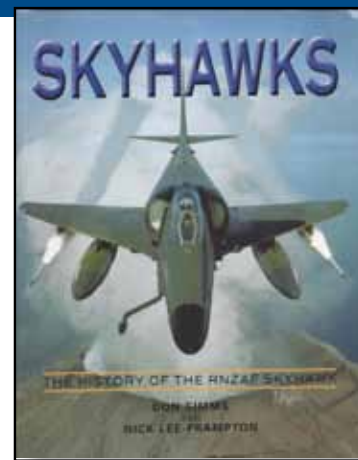
of the project intended to publish in 1995, to coincide with the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the Skyhawk's service with the RNZAF; however, he passed away in 1995 before he could bring the work to completion. The project languished until 2000, when the authors resurrected the effort, initially to commemorate the replacement of RNZAF A-4s with F-16s. At that time, they intended the book to be a tribute to the Skyhawks and the squadrons which operated them, but later found out that it would rather

"The story of the Skyhawk in RNZAF service reads like a modern-day morality play, and it's not hard to tell the good guys from the bad."

serve as an obituary for the entire RNZAF Air Combat Force. That was fitting, I believe, because the A-4 served the ACF faithfully for 31 years.

The story of the Skyhawk in RNZAF service reads like a modern-day morality play, and it's not hard to tell the good guys from the bad. The narrative of this work starts with the political maneuvering involved in the decision to replace the aging Canberra. The decision was controversial, with many pilots initially thinking that the Skyhawk was a poor choice to replace a multi-engine, two-seat attack aircraft with much better self-deployment capability. In the final analysis, cost became a major factor, and the Skyhawk beat out the competition, primarily the F-4 Phantom.

In some respects, *Skyhawks* reads like a high-quality command chronology. From the initial training of RNZAF pilots and maintenance personnel at NAS Cecil Field in early 1970, to the disestablishment



of the Air Combat Force (including the Skyhawks) in December 2001, every deployment and exercise of the Skyhawk squadrons, plus every incident and accident, is covered in detail, supported by numerous photographs and drawings.



Skyhawk enthusiasts will find a lot to like in this work. I was particularly interested in the exhaustive discussion of the Project Kahu upgrade. Faced with the choice of replacing or upgrading their Skyhawk fleet in the late 70s (primarily to improve the navigation and weapons delivery systems), the RNZAF chose to upgrade the A-4K to the Kahu mod, perhaps the most capable A-4 ever. Although the conversion was not without challenges, any Skyhawk pilot would have been thrilled with the capability it provided.

This book is admittedly pricey, but it's worth it. I gave it a solid "two-thumbs up" and set it aside after reading, wishing that I could have done an exchange tour with one of the NZ squadrons. From what I read, they employed the A-4 to its absolute limits and seemed to have a very good time along the way. This book is a fitting tribute to a professional flying force that was, in the final analysis, sacrificed to political expediency.

I would love to see works similar to this which document the U.S. experience with the A-4.

PURESOME UNPLUGGED

• YP's Excellent Adventures •

By Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

~ Buffalo Bill ~

If Puresome's first Skipper was the remote, olympian Charles Degaulle of Tinker Terror Naval Aviation, his XO was its absolutely straight-shooting, no bullshit Fred Astaire.

Puresome had first noticed his future XO while learning the attack trade at the A-4 RAG at NAS Oceana. As one of several commanders going through training on the way back to the fleet after shore duty tours, the XO had blown a couple of mindless junior officers clean out of the water for not tendering proper respect due an elder. Pondering their effectively scorched beautocks, Puresome, a mindless J.O. himself, took note and resolved to be wary and squared-away and possibly avoid their fate. "You mess with the butcher, you get the cleaver!" was the clear message.

The second notice came during a big, dress-blue inspection of all hands — students and instructors. Most of the students, fresh from the training command, were proud enough to have their shiny, new wings on their chests. Some of the instructors and senior students headed back to squadrons wore a shiny trinket or two beneath their wings. And there was a sprinkling of Korean vets with collections of bright medals. But lean CDR Hardass had rows of major gongs that set off his cold, gray warrior eyes under his heavily-braided bridge cover.

"I heard he was in World War II and Korea!" whispered a wide-eyed, brown-bar ensign.

As the stomping and saluting commenced, bagpipe tunes of glory shrilled through Puresome's head. "When I grow up, I wanna be like that!" he thought. It was not to be the last time.

Eventually, Puresome finished the RAG and the eternal scrutiny of instructors. Gratefully sacking up his flight gear, he humped it over to the next hangar for the big adventure of his first fleet squadron. The Snakes were conspicuous by the evil, fanged sidewinder poking out of

their A-4Es' orange rudder and the "E's" with two hash marks on the fuselage. He wasted no time buying an orange ball cap and decorating his helmet in truly obnoxious orange reflective tape with black snakes on the sides. As one of two FNGs to the squadron, Puresome had to temper his wild, happy-puppy enthusiasms around elder god veteran fleet aviators to listen up and respectfully learn.

The very eldest gods, of course, were Rockets One and Two, known as "Skipper" and "XO." Skipper was a remote, fundamental force of nature with the alternating power of sunshine and calm skies or powerful winds and awesome storms in his smallest gesture. When he addressed the assembled officers at AOMs, it was like the Big Guy with the funny hat standing on the balcony addressing the throng in the square below. Puresome had no doubt that Skipper could zorch him with a single glance.

"The secret to getting hits is to get as steep as you can, press it 'til you can't stand it any more, then pickle and pull like a sonuvabitch!"

XO, as it turned out, was CDR Hardass from the RAG. XO, Puresome was to learn, translated Skipper's wishes and dealt directly with the troops to turn wishes into action. From Puresome's junior-junior officer perspective, it became obvious that the XO was happy to be back in the fleet. The squadron was his natural element, and his joy in his job showed in his straight-away, effective manner. XO only shot people, it turned out, that really needed it. And the icing on the cake was that he loved to fly and had more time snagging three-wires and dropping bombs than Puresome had time out of diapers.

"Son," he once told an incredulous Puresome after punching multiple Mk 76 practice bombs through the eyeball of a target, "I've dropped bombs from

Helldivers, F9Fs, and now this A-4. The secret to getting hits is to get as steep as you can, press it 'til you can't stand it any more, then pickle and pull like a sonuvabitch!" The logic of it all certainly appealed to the scientist in Puresome. And the proof was certainly in the pudding'.

What Puresome really admired was XO's no-nonsense headwork. Puresome had once flown as XO's wingman for a long, low-level flight over most of Robert E. Lee country. Whoostling along in the weeds through the Shenandoah Valley at a hundred feet and five miles a minute, they worked hard, thumbs following the minute elapsed-time hack marks on carefully constructed charts made for tiny cockpits as they searched for obscure checkpoints. They were careful of their timing, just like if they were carrying an actual doomsday device. Finally, the section had accelerated past a hysterically-jinking flock of Chesapeake Bay ducks and simulated a lay-down bomb delivery against the unsuspecting commie tobacco farm that ComFAirNorfolk had designated as their target.

"Yaahoo!" Puresome hollered as the pair climbed up for a nice, relaxing VFR stroll in the park back to home plate. The only problem seemed to be that a mass of thunderstorms had Oceana completely

surrounded. When they switched over to Oceana Approach Control for some sort of instrument approach, the frequency was completely clobbered with hysterical, low-fuel-state aircraft demanding to land, now.

In a preview of things to come around the ship, the overburdened air traffic control system had gone tango uniform. Puresome, hanging on to the XO's wing as they dodged through clouds, snuck one-eyeball glances at his rapidly diminishing fuel state.

"The Old Man will get us through," Puresome thought as he remembered Walter Mitty and his huge, hurtling eight-engined hydroplane that was starting to go pocketa-pocketa-gleep. "The Old Man ain't scared of hell!"

XO wasn't. Better than that, he spied Fentris, an auxiliary airfield used by Oceana types for field-mirror landing practice and, figgering enough was enough, led Puresome into the break. There they landed to the surprise of the few sailors that got very little business from aircraft that did little more than touch and go.

XO just rang up the squadron duty officer back at Oceana and told him where they were and to come fetch. FNG Puresome was busy being grateful for being on the ground with an intact airplane, incredulous that you could actually just do something that wasn't standard procedure. But, it really didn't make any sense to drive around until you ran out of gas, waiting on controllers to get their guano together.

"They've got their problems, we've got ours," XO said. "Besides, they are all trying to kill you and you just don't let 'em. You tell them what you are going to do — it's your butt! Aviation is just common sense. If it makes sense, do it. If it doesn't, frabb 'em!" It made perfect sense to Puresome, and he etched it into the hard stone of his attack puke head as Aviation Rule Numero Uno.

When Puresome found out from the Child Bride via the Squadron Wives' Intelligence Network that his squadron was saddling up for Vietnam, he was real glad XO was on the pointy end of the squadron spear.

When USS Independence (CVA-62) finally steamed into Subic Bay, Coral Sea (CVA-43) and her veteran air group, fresh from the Tonkin Gulf, were already there. The new guys wasted no time in looking up old pals to find out how things really were in the Big War.

"You guys take any hits?" Puresome asked an ex-NAVCAD pal from the training command, who was also flying Scooters.

"Yeah," he nodded gravely, "we've taken some hits." Puresome believed him. "Holy merde!" he thought as his pal went through a litany longer than he cared to hear.

XO asked the same thing from a friend of his whom he later described as having the biggest canugies in Naval Aviation. "Yup," he answered. "And of 22 planes hit, 20 of them were below 2,000 feet. Draw your own conclusions!"

He did, and Skipper issued the policy

that nobody went below 3,000 feet when they were up North. Not only that, when some ambitious staff captain showed up aboard ship with a pet theory that the way to win the War was with the peace-time tactic of half-flap, 180-kt., low-and-slow bomb delivery, the squadron pilots were forbidden to talk to him. Puresome didn't realize it then, but Skipper, counseled by XO, saved lots of their young butts by not letting ambitious bastards kill them with stupid schemes designed to further their careers.

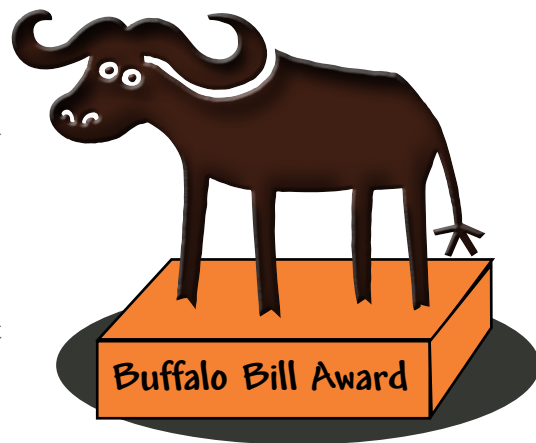
So, XO was fighting his third war. He had been a child ensign in the last part of WWII and had gotten a major gong for dropping a bomb on the battleship Yama-to during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Seemed that everybody knew the war was almost over and nobody much wanted to fly, so...launch the ensign! Later, after they had sunk the ship and the powers that be were draping awards on everybody, the heavies were all asking, "How'd an ensign get in on this?"

"The Navy understands about sinking a ship," XO explained. "You can bomb a land target all day — no big deal. But sink a ship and here come the goodies!"

The intelligence pukes from the ship's Integrated Operational Intelligence Center (IOIC) presented him with a different kind of goodie for performance above and beyond the call of duty during warm-up flights in-country South Vietnam against the deadly water buffalo. According to a forward air controller, the bad guys in the black pajamas were using the beasts to further their evil plans, and would they please hose them with 20-mike mike? XO was happy to oblige, and Puresome got to help. The FAC's damage report included some six WBs KBA (killed by air), which XO dutifully reported to the squadron's air intelligence officer, who passed it along to Mr. Robert Strange MacNamara's computers. This important war effort was acknowledged by IOIC, which awarded XO a small monkeypod water buffalo on a stand with a brass plaque — "The Buffalo Bill Award." XO was, of course, touched.

Nonetheless, his first Alpha Strike on North Vietnam impressed him greatly. Looking down at clusters of radar-guided 57-mm AAA sparkling up at him prompted him to tell Skipper, "I think we'd better dye our flight suits green!"

Attacks Up North also prompted him to try to shake up the awards system. It



had been prescribed before the air wing got in the war zone that medals would be awarded on the basis of rank. COs and XO's, along with the odd division leader, would get the DFC while JOs would get the Air Medal and the Green Weenie (the Navy Commendation Medal) with a Combat "V."

"Hell," XO explained, "I've been there! Flak for me in WWII wasn't anything. In Korea, there was the occasional flak trap, but that wasn't the usual thing. North Vietnam is worse than anything I've seen, and we've got young guys routinely flying up there all the time and not getting squat!"

So, in typical fashion, he wrote a letter and sent it up through the chain of command. It caused quite a stir and even may have helped change things a little. The important thing was that the young guys knew the troops were being looked out for.

Puresome was too young and dumb to really appreciate his squadron leadership at the time. But during the following years of reading accounts of other air wings in Vietnam, he came to understand that the reason his air wing didn't have the nickname "bloody" stuck in front of it was because the squadron leadership stuck their necks out to protect their pilots from themselves, the self-serving and the merely stupid.

At a squadron reunion 25 years later, Puresome stood with a cold beer in his hand and toasted Skipper and XO, thanking them for watching out for them all. The two were embarrassed by the applause. "Ah, hell!" said Buffalo Bill, "we just did the best we could."

Everybody knew it was more than enough.





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