

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL Vol 20-1



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Skyhawk Association Board Meeting

*April 11-13, 2014
Virginia Beach, VA*



THE PREZ SEZ

By Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

HAVING A GOOD TIME?

We are all members of the Skyhawk Association for the same basic reasons. We celebrate our unique airplane and its people. We enjoy touching base with old friends, recalling the look, feel and details of the Scooter, while hearing the stories that surround it.

Of course, you already know this. Otherwise why pay your dues, right? The question is...are you getting your money's worth? If not, we're doing something wrong.

The basic benefits provided by your Association:

- The A4Ever Skyhawk Journal
- Ability to communicate with old friends and organize gatherings
- Website and historic database

Each of us would apply our own order of preference to this short list, but a past survey tells us most members place a very high value on the Skyhawk Journal. Our editor, Bob "Raven" Hickerson, has done an exceptional job over the years, and we can't thank him enough for the many hours he puts into each issue.

We normally publish three paper issues annually. At roughly \$5,000 per issue, that's all our budget can sustain. For the past two years, we have also produced a digital edition, a fourth issue, to provide you with more articles and photos at a fraction of the cost to the Association.

Shortly after the recent digital issue was published, Raven began receiving some feedback expressing concern, with some members threatening to "throw in the towel." It seems there has been a misunderstanding, as most of the folks who wrote us believed we were planning to eliminate the paper version. **WE HAVE NO PLANS TO ELIMINATE THE PAPER JOURNAL!** We understand that many people like to have that "hard copy" sitting next to their reading chair, and some members have saved every issue over the years. The digital issue

is a bonus, so there is no reduction of benefits.

We should have made this clear previously, and now we thank those who took the time to let us know their concerns. Keep us straight, with those comments coming in!

SDO PROGRAM

Since the Skyhawk Association has a wide cross section of members, with varied backgrounds, we should explain the meaning of "SDO." The "Squadron Duty Officer," in US Navy and Marine squadrons, is that officer assigned to man the desk in the ready room. During his twenty-four hour



watch, he represents the Commanding Officer in handling squadron issues. It's his responsibility to respond to questions and communicate as necessary. He also assists squadron pilots as they prepare to fly. SDOs in the Skyhawk Association represent their units, acting mostly as a point of contact.

Our SDO program has languished for many years, but lately we've made



Dave "Hide" Dollarhide

progress in its revival. Step one has been to ensure we have a valid list of SDOs. Pete Cole, VP Navy, and Bill "Jigger" Egen, VP Marines, have been contacting their respective SDOs. After weeding out the folks who have dropped by the wayside for a variety of reasons, the lists are now firming up. Some SDOs had let their memberships expire and are now rejoining, which is a reminder that SDOs...in fact, all volunteer officers, directors and staff must be current members of the Association.

We look to bring our SDOs into the communication loop and make them more of an integral part of the volunteer staff. We're working on a method to allow them to have more input and control of their unit pages on the website. We've designed a guide to assist SDOs in answering questions from both members and non-members alike.

If your former unit is not represented by an SDO, please consider volunteering. It's a simple job that can be meaningful to you and former squadronmates. Meanwhile,

several people have recently stepped forward, so we'd like to applaud them and say welcome to the team!

- Bryan Chrysler becomes the SDO for VC-1.
- Gary Verver takes on NAF China Lake, along with the many other units he currently represents.
- Ralph Eugley has agreed to represent MAG-31/H&MS-31.

continued on page 5...



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Spring 2014 •

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Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman and Editor.
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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 Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624. Stephanie Davis, graphics, skyhawk@ncflight.com. Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC.

On the Cover:

VF-45 A-4Es in vicinity of Key West February 1985. The VA-45 Blackbirds began flying dissimilar air combat training in 1976, moved to Key West, FL, in 1980 and became a dedicated adversary squadron in 1984. The squadron was re-designated VF-45 on Feb 7, 1985, and over the years, operated A-4Es and TA-4Js, providing adversary services to Navy and Marine Corps squadrons. Photo by Bruce Trombecky.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org

■ To the Editor

I read the E-edition on my Mac-bookPro and found it very satisfactory. You've made great progress since the initial attempt... BZ!
Sincerely,
Dave Ayres CDR USN(Ret)
VA-36 1957-1960
Plano, TX
[ayres716@gmail.com]

(Ed. note: thanks for the nice comment, Dave. As you can see by Larry Erwin's letter, our membership is split down the middle on the issue of digital distribution, with strong feelings on both sides. We're considering options to help us serve both groups better, but in the short run, we will continue to publish only one issue per year in digital format.)

■ To the Editor:

In response to the question posed in From the Attic, Fall 2013, "Can anyone identify these stalwart aviators?," here is a partial answer:

L-R: Eric Farrell, Don King, Charlie Dixon, UNK, Harvey Crouch, Jim Shea, Tony McCarthy (later killed at NAS Alameda), and Williamson (forgot first name, not Russ Williamson, who was also in 223).

Bob Beavis
[bbeavis@optonline.net]

(Ed. note: Steve Sanford jumped in to identify dash 8 as Monty Williamson.)



■ Sir,

I had hoped the digital format was a passing thing, but I guess not. I have always enjoyed reading the magazine on my sun porch, in bed at night, on the head or wherever I choose. That is not the case now. I have kept all my old issues for reference, but again that will not be the case now. As much as I have enjoyed the magazine, and it was a great magazine, I won't be renewing my membership for a digital online copy. Thanks for the enjoyment you have provided in the past.

Sincerely,
Larry Erwin
[lnerwin2@gmail.com]

(Ed. note: Larry's was the first of several emails lamenting the fact that we were switching to digital format for all future issues of The A-4Ever. As Dave Dollarhide wrote in his Prez Sez column, we have no intention to change to an all-digital format. For some time, we have been publishing three Journals per year, which is the most we can afford given the high costs of printing and mailing. We intend to continue that practice indefinitely.)

However, last year we decided that we could provide more value to our members if we published a 4th issue each year, in digital format to avoid the costs associated with printing and mailing. The result was Vol. 19, No. 4, which was distributed by email in January.

Obviously, we should have explained this in our email and avoided all the concern expressed by the members who took time to write. We're happy that members value our publication and promise to continue to provide you a hard copy of the Journal three times per year, in March, July and November.)

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

■ To the Editor

I have looked closely at the picture of the 8 Marine Officers/Naval Aviators in the Fall 2013 journal. Unfortunately, I do not know who any of them are. I can tell you that they are at Chu Lai Marine Expeditionary Airfield/Base in 1965 or early 1966. The sign behind these Officers indicates Colonel Les Brown is Commanding Officer. Col Brown was the Marine Air Group-12, Commanding Officer until about June or July 1966. At the end of his tour, he was replaced by Col Jay Herbert (*Ed. note: Col Jay Hubbard*). My spelling of his name may not be correct at this late date.

I would also say that these officers have received a personal award such as an Air Medal or DFC. Each is wearing a medal over their left breast pocket which is not normal while wearing a utility uniform. The picture was taken probably by a Public Affairs type who would write an article for sending to a newspaper at the Officer's home of record. Or, an Officer buddy took the picture.

I also recognize the frame type buildings around the headquarters compound. During this time frame, I was a Sergeant Aviation Ordnance Man with VMA-223. VMA-223 was one of the 4 Squadrons contained in MAG-12. I served several tours in A-4 Squadrons in several jobs. My last tour in an A-4 Squadron was with VMA-331 aboard the USS *Independence* (CVA-62), in 1970-71. We were on a Med cruise. I was the Squadron Personnel Officer and a Second Lieutenant in those days. Hope this info helps you out.

John D. Henry, CWO-4, USMC (ret).
[johnhenry41@graceba.net]

(Ed. note: see Beavis letter to the editor. Still missing one name.)

■ To the Editor:

Check out the A-4 on this site, Aircraft Production Through History.

http://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/aircraft_production_list.asp

Holly
Paul Hollandsworth
[hollynav@aol.com]

■ To the Editor:

Sorry for this mail, but I contribute sometimes with your excellent Web page, and I see a picture of A-4P of reference in that link:

<http://a4skyhawk.org/content/buno-142749-argentina-c-232>

The picture was taken by me, in the "museo santa romana", san luis, argentina, at 2003.

I appreciate if you correct the author of that fotografhie.

Thanks a lot and excuse me about my very poor English!

Congrats!
Hernan Longoni
[hernanlongoni@gmail.com]

■ To the Editor:

Recently my oldest daughter was shopping at Costco in Santa Barbara, California. She was wearing her USMC sweatshirt I had given her. While in the checkout line she was approached by a gentleman who addressed her asking if she was a Marine or if she had a son who was a Marine. She replied that her father was a retired Marine Colonel. He asked my age. She said I was 71, and he replied that he was 72 and continued the

discussion by asked what I had done in the Corps. She replied that I was an A4 pilot...he hesitated for a moment and said, "my life was saved by an A4!"

50 years have passed and "Hellborne" is still remembered. Thanks to all the Marine scooter drivers that laid it on the line to save the life of a brother in arms, and thanks to all the scooter drivers that wore brown shoes and flew down the chute over Hanoi...God bless you all.
Col Michael Sandlin
VMA 311 RVN 1968-69
[mikes53chevy@centurylink.net]

(Ed. note: Hellborne was the MAG-12 call sign.)

■ To the editor:

I've been exchanging information with Ron Milan (HC-7 historian) who was with HC-7 Det. 108 & 113 from Jan '69 to June '70.

Attached is a photo of a painting commissioned by one of the HC-7 officers depicting a rescue of four pilots (USS Kitty Hawk VF-114 F-4B's 153002 NH-202 and 153043 NH-214) just off the coast of N. Vietnam on 15 April 1968 by an HC-7 helo from the USS Halsey. The A-4s provided



RESCAP to silence the shore batteries which were zeroing in on the helos. Tail code on the Skyhawk is NG which, if accurate, would be VA-56 and/or VA-113 from the Enterprise. The two F-4s were jinking to avoid SAMs leaving North Vietnam and had a mid-air collision.



Ron [hc7helomech@msn.com] would like to hear from anyone that has any information about the Skyhawks involved and/or any other HC-7 rescues.
Gary Verver
[gp@verx2.org]

THE PREZ SEZ continued...

The Tucson Navy/Marine Reserve Center has commenced its project to restore their TA-4 Skyhawk monument and is soliciting donations for the effort. Donations, however, have slowed to a stop short of their needs, and they could sure use some more help! Your donations are tax deductible and can be sent to the USS Tucson 770 Club, Attn: Joel Rohlik, Treasurer, PO Box 42015, Tucson, AZ 85733. This is BUNO 153526, the last Skyhawk the Navy delivered to the Boneyard and one of the last two flown (VC-8 Redtails) by either the Navy or USMC! The aircraft is shown here during installation at the Reserve Center in 2010.

Overall POC for the project is Colonel, USMC (ret) Don Duffer, exa4jock@aol.com.



The *Skyhawks* Final Resting Place(s)

This article originally appeared in *Pacific Wings* magazine.
Reprinted with permission.

Article by Don Simms

It has been over 12 years since Helen Clark announced the end of the RNZAF Air Combat Force in May 2001. By December of that year, Numbers 2, 14 and 75 Squadrons had been disbanded and hundreds of Air Force personnel had been made redundant. The 17 Skyhawks and 17 Macchis were put up for sale in the expectation of making a quick profit for the Government... Eleven years later, the once proud RNZAF Air Combat fleet has finally been disposed of, but at a significant financial loss to the NZ taxpayer.

In late 2010, when we were putting the finishing touches to our book on the history of the Skyhawk in RNZAF service (*Skyhawks* by Don Simms and Nick Lee-Frampton, Willsonscott Publishing, 2011), there seemed little hope that any Skyhawks would remain in New Zealand, let alone ever fly again. At the time, all 17 Skyhawks were for sale as a “job lot” and the alternative if they didn’t sell soon was not a pretty one—they would proably be cut up for scrap. Such are the “rules” of the US State Department who have the final say on the disposal of surplus US-sourced military equipment. By 2011, the cost of storing the combined Skyhawk and Macchi fleets was soaring, approaching NZ\$38M by the government’s own admission. The likelihood of returning a profit on any sale had long since passed.

Left: Air to air view of three Number 75 Squadron (or Number 2 Squadron) Skyhawks in formation. Believed to be flying from Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Ohakea. Image courtesy: RNZAF Official, Air Force Museum of New Zealand.



Above, left to right: Air to air view of 2 Squadron Skyhawk NZ6202 banking away, showing the underside and full weapons load of rocket pods and bomb load, to illustrate the underneath camouflage. Flying from Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Ohakea; Air to air view of Number 75 Squadron Skyhawk NZ6210, with smoke trailing, performing a 'plugged' barrel roll with the camera aircraft. Flying over Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Ohakea; Air to air view of a Number 75 Squadron Skyhawk NZ6203, banking over a lake shore; Air to air view of a formation of six Number 75 Squadron Skyhawks in formation. Right: Line up of Number 75 Squadron Skyhawks on the tarmac at Royal New Zealand Air Force Base Ohakea. Images all courtesy: RNZAF Official, Air Force Museum of New Zealand.

In early 2011, the government gave up trying to sell all 34 Skyhawks and Macchis as a package and, with the US State Department's blessing, several Skyhawks were authorised to go to museums (arguably where they should have gone 10 years earlier!). Happily, we now have eight Skyhawks preserved in museums in NZ and one in Australia, as well as eight Macchis in the hands of museums and collectors in NZ.

A US State Department condition for the Skyhawks to go to museums was that they had to be demilitarised and made unflyable. In addition, the RNZAF had to retain ownership so they would only ever be "on loan" to the organisations allocated one. The Air Force Museum has taken over the custody of the aircraft on behalf of the RNZAF, and maintains and inspects the aircraft regularly, as per US State Department requirements. Each recipient museum is required to insure the aircraft and was also required to pay \$30,000 towards the cost of demilitarisation, dismantling, shipping and reassembly. Safe Air Ltd. carried out this work.

Demilitarisation included removing all of the sensitive military equipment and disabling the ability to fire/drop weapons. The ejection seats and stores jettison systems had to be made safe and other potentially hazardous materials (including the elevator control system's depleted uranium bob weight) were removed.

I'm told there was much "discussion" with the US State Department about how to satisfy their requirement that the aircraft be made "unflyable". The US initially wanted the wing spars cut, but RNZAF personnel weren't keen on that idea. Fortunately, a compromise was found, and removing the engines, elevator bob weight and all of the sensitive Kahu avionics satisfied the US requirements.

In late May 2011, the two-seater NZ6254 was the first Skyhawk to be prepared for museum display. Allocated to the RNZAF Museum at Wigram, it was chosen because it was the first RNZAF Skyhawk

to fly in NZ (on 21 May 1970) and was also one of the prototypes of the highly successful Project Kahu avionics upgrade of the late 1980s. Being allocated to the RNZAF Museum also meant that a little more leeway was allowed in terms of the items that had to be removed and it is the only Skyhawk allocated to a museum that still has its J52 engine and most of its cockpit avionics in place. It is also displayed with a pair of original (but deactivated) Colt 20-mm cannons and other dummy weapons fitted. It was handed over to the RNZAF Museum in June 2011.

The process of preparing each Skyhawk for display started with the removal of the latex protective covering that had been applied when the aircraft were put into outdoor storage at Woodbourne in late 2007. In some areas, the latex had hardened and stuck to the paintwork like glue, and removing it has proven to be very difficult, with patches of paint coming off in the process. The paintwork on many aircraft has also faded from exposure to the sun; hence many of the aircraft initially looked quite tatty when delivered to their new homes. However, lots of elbow grease and a bit of touching up by the keen volunteers at Wigram, Ashburton, Ardmore, Omaka, MOTAT and Tauranga has seen most looking sharp again.

In order to transport the aircraft from Woodbourne to their new homes, each aircraft was split into three pieces – wing, front fuselage and rear fuselage (except NZ6216, which was transported the short distance from Woodbourne to Omaka in one piece). Two flat-deck trucks carried the disassembled aircraft, tooling and support equipment needed for the reassembly. The reassembly was completed in around three days by the Safe Air team. NZ6255 was flown in a disassembled state to its new (old) home at HMAS Albatross Nowra, Australia, in a RAAF C-17 and was, appropriately, handed over to the RAN Museum on ANZAC Day in 2012. It has now been repainted back in its original 1980s era RAN colour scheme.



The following is the final allocation of Skyhawks to museums (all now delivered):

NZ6254 (TA-4K)	RNZAF Museum Wigram, Christchurch
NZ6204 (A-4K)	Ashburton Aviation Museum
NZ6202 (A-4K)	Wings and Wheels Museum, Wanaka
NZ6216 (A-4G)	Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre, Blenheim
NZ6206 (A-4K)	MOTAT, Auckland
NZ6255 (TA-4G)	RAN Museum, HMAS Albatross, Nowra, Australia
NZ6209 (A-4K)	NZ Warbirds Association, Ardmore, Auckland
NZ6201 (A-4K)	Classic Flyers Museum, Tauranga
NZ6205 (A-4K)	RNZAF Museum Wigram, Christchurch

Many people ask if we will ever see a former RNZAF Skyhawk flying again in NZ. Sadly, the answer is probably no. There are privately owned Skyhawks flying in the US and Europe, but these either made it into private hands prior to the rules changing after 9/11, or they operate on military contracts (as some of our former jets are now doing). A condition of the Skyhawks going to the museums in NZ and Australia was that they never fly again. The Macchis, however, are a different matter. There are no end-user restrictions on their use and they have been gifted to the museums and organisations who have acquired them. It is quite likely that we will see one flying again in NZ in the future.

The remaining Skyhawks (serial numbers below), which were not allocated to museums, were put up for open tender in early 2011:

NZ6251 (TA-4K)
NZ6252 (TA-4K)
NZ6212 (A-4G)
NZ6213 (A-4G)
NZ6214 (A-4G)
NZ6215 (A-4G)
NZ6217 (A-4G)
NZ6218 (A-4G)

Observers will note that all of the single-seaters put up for tender are ex-RAN A-4Gs (all of which had their first flights in mid-1967). This is due to them having lower airframe hours and conversely more remaining fatigue life than NZ's original A-4Ks, some of which have flown over 8,000 airframe hours. The failure of the storage regime at Woodbourne, which allowed water into the cockpits of some aircraft, was another factor in determining which airframes went to museums.

The tender for the eight Skyhawks and a huge warehouse full of the spare parts and support equipment was won by an American company that was heavily involved in restoring Skyhawks and other jet warbirds for civilian operators. But like all of the earlier

Below: Now in control of Draken International, 5 of the Skyhawks look as good as ever lined up on the flightline. Photograph by Jose Ramos.



Above: The sleek lines of the Skyhawk are no doubt the secret of its success, and this "head-on" view shows why it is a favourite of many. Photograph by Jose Ramos.

failed sales, they couldn't come up with the money. By October 2011, the NZ Ministry of Defence had had enough of this now familiar story and began making plans to cut the aircraft up for scrap. Meanwhile, the second place unsuccessful bidder, another US company, Draken International, got wind of this turn of events and began urgent discussions with the Ministry of Defence to try to resurrect the sale and save the aircraft from the scrap man. Draken were given just 2 weeks to inspect the aircraft, sign a contract and pay the deposit. Draken's founder and CEO, Jared Isaacman, was on his honeymoon at the time and had to cut it short to come to NZ to seal the deal! The final sale price for the eight aircraft, spares and support equipment was NZ\$7.9M.

In early 2012, nine Macchis and all their associated spares and support equipment, and a flight simulator were also put up for open tender. Draken was the successful bidder, picking the whole package up for just NZ\$800,000.

Draken's founder and CEO, Jared Isaacman, is a highly qualified civilian pilot, with over 1,500 hours flying former military jets, including over 100 hours on the A-4. He provides some background on his company and their plans for the former NZ Skyhawks and Aermacchis.

"Draken International was an evolution of the Black Diamond Jet Team. We formed our precision jet formation team back in late 2010. The organisation was originally flying four Aero Vodochody L-39s and a single Canadair T-33. This grew to five Aero Vodochody L-39s and two Mig-17s. As an air-show team, we really became a family. We were flying four days a week together almost all year round, going from city to city performing in air-shows. We had a great time and raised a lot of awareness for our featured charity—the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"During that time period, we all became very interested in

getting into the commercial air services industry. To provide some background, the commercial air services industry involves utilising ex-military aircraft for a variety of threat simulation services on behalf of the government. Some examples include ship services, research and development flights, and air-to-air threats also called 'Red Air'. This has been done for nearly two decades in the United States by one primary company called ATAC. It is a service not limited to just the United States; commercial air service companies exist in Canada, UK, France and Germany, as well as many other countries.

"As an A-4 pilot at the time and being aware of the New Zealand A-4K Skyhawks, I knew this was the ideal aircraft to help us break into an industry with pretty high barriers to entry. The Skyhawk is the optimal platform for adversary work, as is illustrated by the fact that the US Navy used A-4s for over four decades in that role. They are inexpensive to operate, highly manoeuvrable and have excellent endurance. When you add the incredible avionics, radar and other upgrades New Zealand performed under Project Kahu, you have the best commercial air services aircraft in the world. We can simulate actual 'fourth generation threats' while keeping costs to a minimum with a Generation-3 subsonic aircraft. Our facility in Lakeland, Florida, is over four acres in size. It was the former manufacturing plant for Piper Aircraft and is well suited to our needs for a variety of reasons including the size of the facility, the great support team on site and the proximity to important military airspace ranges.

"Our organisation is presently assembling or operating the eight Douglas A-4K Skyhawks, four Douglas A-4L Skyhawks, nine Aermacchi MB-339CB, five Aero Vodochody L-39s, two Mikoyan Mig-17s, one Canadair CT-133, and over 25 Mikoyan Mig-21bis and Mig-21UM models. Our long-term plans include taking the



Above: N141EM returning from a flight.

Opposite page, above: N141EM formally NZ6252 showing its clean lines as it turns away from the camera. Opposite page, below: As we as acquiring the A-4's, Draken International also acquired several of the MB-339 Macchi's from the RNZAF.

Photographs by Jose Ramos.

commercial air services industry to the next level in terms of a large, credible and capable adversary force. When you look at the quantity of aircraft, 4th generation capabilities, and, most importantly, supportability, there really was no better option than the A-4K Skyhawks. While there are occasionally some surplus Mig-29s and Mirages available on the market, these lack key capabilities or the means to sustain operations in a cost-effective manner. From our perspective, Draken International could never have been formed without the New Zealand A-4K Skyhawks.”

The sale of the Skyhawks and Macchis to Draken has returned just NZ\$8.7M to the NZ taxpayer (a NZ\$30M loss on the storage and disposal costs since 2001). While this appears on the face of it to be “the bargain of the century”, Isaacman says:

“I don’t think I would use the word bargain to describe the purchase of these aircraft. The New Zealand A-4K Skyhawks are the finest aircraft of their type ever built, but they had little military value left. The Macchis have the Rolls Royce Viper-680 engine that is not supported by the manufacturer. New Zealand was the only country that operated that version of the Viper and Rolls Royce decided it was not economical to continue to support it. We do have quite a few engines, but they have less than 50% of their life remaining. Anyone who purchased the Macchis had to be prepared to spend potentially €15,000,000 to re-engine with the earlier Viper-632 engine. The NZ government ran a competitive tender on this and it is likely all those that bid, in addition to Draken, knew about the engine scenario. That stated, Draken is a huge supporter of these aircraft and intends to keep them going for many years to come. It will just be with quite a bit of expense to take care of the engines. Another thing to

keep in mind with both types is that these jets are no longer front-line combat aircraft. They are aircraft from another generation. To give you a point of comparison, when the Canadian government sold off their CF-5 Freedom Fighters, the price was US\$175,000 each, including numerous spare parts and engines. Keep in mind that an F-5 is an aircraft that is still in combat service in numerous militaries around the world. Most other surplus military aircraft are sold around the same price. I mention this only to give some comfort in what the New Zealand government was able to obtain for these aircraft. The A-4s are likely the highest price paid by a private company for surplus military aircraft anywhere in the world and the Macchi’s had a unique engine situation that reduced their value. I would say, overall, it was a fair deal for all parties involved.”

The Skyhawks and Macchis left NZ for their new home (shipped by sea) at the end of 2012 and are being progressively returned to the air. Draken hope to have all of them flying again by the end of 2013. The first Skyhawk to return to the air was NZ6252 (now N141EM on the US Civil Register) on 6 April 2013. A number of current and former RNZAF personnel are assisting Draken get the aircraft back into the air. Draken has also formed strategic partnerships with Safe Air Ltd. at Woodbourne, who will continue to overhaul the Skyhawks’ J52 engines, and Fieldair Ltd. of Palmerston North, who will maintain the Skyhawk’s Kahu avionics. Of the ongoing support from NZ, Isaacman says:

“We would not have had a single A-4 or Macchi flying if it had not been for our friends from New Zealand. We have had a rotating team of former RNZAF personnel that have come over to lend their expertise. This includes experts on airframes, engines, avionics and ejection





Far left: "Hot to Trot" a pair of Scooters" hurtling along in a sight that once seen, is never forgotten. Probably flying a bit higher than they would have in the RNZAF.

Left: Ex RNZAF Macchi and A4 formatting once again.

Photographs by Jose Ramos.

seats. We are very fortunate, as these are the same guys that worked on the jets prior to the combat wing's disbandment. We are hopeful to continue to have former NZ personnel involved with Draken operations well into the future. Going back to the date that we first signed the contract to purchase the A-4K Skyhawks, we engaged with Fieldair for avionics regeneration work and Safe Air for engine regeneration work. The relationship has been excellent and we expect it to continue that way well in to the future. We are looking at both of those vendors as long-term partners."

On some of the challenges of supporting and flying 46+-year-old aircraft, Isaacman says:

"The aircraft do have a 'date of birth' over four decades ago, but they are still very young in many respects. Project Kahu in the early 1990s regenerated the wiring, wings, and avionics/navigation and attack systems on these planes. In many ways, Project Kahu turned the Skyhawk into the equivalent of an early block F-16. Even though we only purchased eight aircraft, we have a spares pool that was designed for a much larger force of Skyhawks. We do not see any issue, given all the spare parts and excellent condition of the aircraft, operating them safely for literally decades to come. From a pure airworthiness perspective, the Douglas A-4K Skyhawks have decades of life left in them. They are very supportable including the airframe, engines and nav/attack system. I believe that RNZAF could have continued to operate the aircraft safely and economically for many more years. That stated, I think the RNZAF Skyhawks' were reaching the end of their life as a modern multi-role tactical aircraft. They certainly could have continued for many years in a maritime strike or single mission role, but the planned RNZAF transition to F-16s made the most sense in order to maintain a modern fleet of multi-role fighters."

Draken's pilots have found the former Kiwi Skyhawks to be not only in great condition, but also extremely capable:

"I can't really speak about our operational missions, but I can say that every US military aviator who has seen the A-4K Skyhawk up close has been extremely impressed. Many of our own pilots have hundreds if not thousands of hours in USN Skyhawks. They immediately appreciate the A-4K for how clean and tight (no leaks) they are, as well as their impressive avionics suite. They also respect the work of the New Zealand contractors who have come over and assisted in the assembly efforts, especially the quality of the 'slat' rigging. Apparently the workhorse USN A-4s were not as tight and did not have the same quality of slat rigging as the A-4Ks. Additionally, there is obviously no comparison between the avionics on the RNZAF A-4K Skyhawks and any other Skyhawks in the world. All of our pilots and our entire organisation are extremely impressed with the quality of engineering and maintaining that the RNZAF did with A-4 Skyhawks."

In April, Draken hosted the "Royal New Zealand Air Force Heritage Day" as a tribute to the former RNZAF Air Combat Force. Isaacman explains:

"The Royal New Zealand Air Force Heritage Day was our way of honouring the proud history of these aircraft, thanking those who helped make that historic occasion possible and to introduce the aircraft to their new home. The event was held at the Lakeland Linder Regional Airport during the Sun N Fun International Airshow and Fly-in. We had nearly 200 guests including employees of Draken, contractors, friends, family, former RNZAF pilots and maintainers, local civic leaders and members of the armed services. Our guest of honour was Vice Air Marshall Lintott, and our guest

speakers included Air Commodore Jim Barclay RNZAF (Ret), Wing Commander Barry 'Patch' Nelson RNZAF and Wing Commander Chris Calvert RNZAF (Ret.)"

In another nice touch, the Skyhawks will continue to wear their Kiwi roundels and 2 and 75 Squadron markings as a tribute to their previous lives.

Former RNZAF Skyhawk US Civil Registration Numbers:

N142EM ex NZ6212	N146EM ex NZ6217
N143EM ex NZ6213	N147EM ex NZ6218
N144EM ex NZ6214	N140EM ex NZ6251
N145EM ex NZ6215	N141EM ex NZ6252

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Draken International's CEO, Jared Isaacman, in the preparation of this article.



The hard working and no doubt thrilled team of Draken International. All smiles, for obvious reasons. Photograph by Jose Ramos.



TA-4G TRAINER JOINS THE AUSTRALIAN FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

By Fred Lane

19 September 2013

In mint condition, the McDonnell-Douglas Skyhawk Trainer TA-4G 880 (BUNO 154911, RAN N13-154911) is safely back home in Australia. Temporarily badged 911 on 13 December 1967, this was the first Australian Skyhawk to fly from its native soil. Re-badged as 880 in 1968, this was also the last Australian Skyhawk to fly, on 30 June 1984. After a sojourn with the Royal New Zealand Air Force as NZ6255 from 1984 to 2003, 880 stands proudly alongside a reworked A-4B in Australia's Fleet Air Arm (FAA) Museum near HMAS *Albatross*, RANAS Nowra.

Incidentally, the RAN never flew a B model Skyhawk, but the museum's A-4B (BUNO 142871, on loan from the USN), is in spotless RAN livery rebadged as 882 (the RAN's A-4G BUNO 154903). After RAN service as N13-154903, that specific A-4G flew with the Royal New Zealand Air Force as NZ4602 from 1984 until written off in a spectacular fatal crash (air display rehearsal low-level barrel roll while hooked up to another Skyhawk's buddy store) from RANAS Nowra, 16 February 2001.

What was a New Zealand Air Force Skyhawk doing rehearsing for an air display from the RAN's air station in Australia? Thereby hangs a tale related to the star-crossed history of Australia's only jet-fighter capable aircraft carrier, HMAS *Melbourne*, together with political and other machinations that typified the sometime stuttering progress of Australia's fixed wing naval aviation.

The RAN took a keen interest in naval aviation right from the start. Many Australians flew with the Royal Naval Air Service in WW I. Australian ships, such as the battlecruiser *Australia* and the light cruisers *Sydney* and *Melbourne*, were among the first in the world to trial new aircraft launch techniques, including turret-mounted launch platforms in 1917 and 1918. In perhaps the first fleet CAP action ever, both *Sydney* and *Melbourne* launched their Sopwith Camel fighters to intercept two German bombers menacing the fleet on 1 June 1918.

Australian naval aviation interest waned after the formation of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in 1918 and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in 1921, but a 5,000-ton seaplane tender, HMAS *Albatross*, was built in Australia and commissioned in 1929. Unfortunately, during her short life, the RAAF could supply, at best, only obsolescent aircraft that could squeeze into the tender's tiny lift and hangar.

A small number of RAN officers trained as aircrew and flew with the Royal Navy before and during WW II, but the RAAF typically owned, flew and maintained the Supermarine Walrus biplane amphibians that our cruisers carried in the early stages of WWII. However, strong naval aviation interest was reawakened in Australia by the shocks of Pearl Harbour, Japanese carrier aircraft bombing Australian mainland cities, and the Battle of the Coral Sea, Midway and similar actions on our Pacific doorstep. This contributed to decisions in 1946-47 to purchase two British light fleet carriers (18,000-20,000 tons), ultimately named HMAS *Sydney* and *Melbourne*. Commissioned on 16 December 1948, HMAS *Sydney* was soon hard at work, back and forth, transporting aircraft and spares to Australia and working up the squadrons. Then, between October 1951 and February 1952, with RAN 805 and 808 (*Sea Fury*) and 817 (*Firefly*) Squadrons

embarked, *Sydney* and her CAG served with distinction in Korea with the U.S. Seventh Fleet.

HMAS *Melbourne* commissioned later, on 28 October 1955, with jet-age De Havilland Sea Venoms and Fairey Gannets. At that time *Melbourne* was the only commissioned operational carrier in the world to carry all three of the new-fangled jet-age upgrades: angled deck, mirror and steam catapult. She trained hard, but the fates decreed that she would never launch an aircraft in anger or aim a gun at an enemy.

Australian Skyhawk history is intimately interconnected with HMAS *Melbourne*. Her first contact with Australian Skyhawks was in November 1967 when she transported eight A-4Gs and



Eight Skyhawks, six Trackers and four Wessex head for the tropics aboard HMAS *Melbourne*. (RAN photo)



TA4G 880, with a Macchi MB326 in the foreground. The Skyhawk A-4B and S-2E Tracker are behind, along with ex-RAN choppers in the FAA Museum, Nowra. (F. Lane photo)

two TA-4Gs, along with 14 S-2E *Trackers*, from California to HMAS *Albatross*, the main Australian naval air station. Another eight single-seaters and two Skyhawk trainers were brought out by HMAS *Sydney*, by now converted to a troop carrier and transport, in July 1971.

Importantly, Australian Skyhawks came with two buddy stores. At that time, and for many years afterwards, RAN Skyhawks were the only Australian aircraft to possess this

very important aerial refuelling capability. They also came with a very wide assortment of conventional armament, including new varieties of bombs, rockets and flares.

Contrary to some opinion, *Melbourne* was a very lucky ship, despite two very serious and almost identical plane-guard accidents (HMAS *Voyager*, 10 February 1964, and USS *Charles E. Evans*, 3 June 1969). Instead of the destroyers being rammed and sunk by *Melbourne*, had either ship applied the same evasive helm and engine commands a few seconds later they would almost certainly have rammed *Melbourne* amidships with much greater loss of life and almost certain loss of both the destroyer and carrier. No *Melbourne* crewmember was injured in either of these collisions, and the carrier's 40-ton, heavily-damaged bow sections were swiftly fabricated and replaced by the Australian Cockatoo Island Dockyard. On the other hand, in a more subtle but perhaps more lethal manner, *Melbourne* and her air group were the frequent targets of ever more damaging threats from anti-carrier political factions and inter- and intra-Service rivalry, especially during major upgrade, new aircraft or new carrier discussions.

continued...



Royal Australian Navy TA-4G N-13 (154911) photographed by Captain John Bartels, Qantas. Used with permission.

TA-4G TRAINER JOINS THE AUSTRALIAN FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM continued...

The Skyhawks transported by *Melbourne* and *Sydney* were welcomed by the RAN even though they were initially designed as a carrier-capable nuclear bomber. Never mind the nuclear bomb; they were so versatile that the RAN purchased them primarily to protect the Fleet from enemy aircraft. These basic USN A-4F models mounted twin 20 mm cannon, but unlike their USN counterparts, they could carry four AIM-9B Sidewinders instead of two, one on each of the four wing hardpoints. This layout gave it a marginally better anti-aircraft ability; however, the RAN typically followed USN peacetime practice by mounting drop tanks on the two inboard hardpoints. This sensible precaution limited damage should the aircraft topple sideways on landing or during deck handling. It was much cheaper and quicker to replace a damaged drop tank than to write off an entire, virtually one-piece wing. In the event of undercarriage damage, it was also possible to land on these tanks with the wheels retracted, as described below with the famous TA-4G 880.

Australian Skyhawks took to *Melbourne* like proverbial ducks to water. Both the Carrier Air Group (CAG) and Landing Signals Officer (LSO) systems had been discarded for the RN-related Sea Venoms and Gannets, but were reintroduced for Skyhawks and Trackers. There were one or two minor hiccups, like a nasty catapult bridle slap, but these were quickly solved and easily corrected. Importantly, it was confirmed that unlike Sea Venoms, *Melbourne* could launch usefully-laden Skyhawks even in hot, tropical, calm-wind conditions. There were no serious Skyhawk accidents in the first five and a half years of Australian operations, but half of all Australian Skyhawks were lost suddenly in the seven years between 1973 and 1980. Engine failures claimed four aircraft, and one very unusual accident included a Skyhawk (together with the ship's main LWO4 radar aerial) lost overboard when *Melbourne* suddenly heeled 20 degrees or so as a rogue Tasman Sea wave belted her on 24 September 1979. Two other Skyhawks were lost following catapult-related problems, and one arrester



Alongside the new exhibit, TA4G 880, is this original A4B BUNO 142871, on loan from the USN, rebadged as N-13 154903b/882. (F. Lane photo)

wire parted (incidentally with USN pilot LCDR K. Finan enjoying the subsequent Escapac egress).

In April 1982, after a virtual lifetime of political level argy-bargy, it was finally decided that the 27-years old *Melbourne* would not be replaced or upgraded, and the RAN's fixed-wing component would become redundant. The ten remaining ex-Australian Skyhawks were withdrawn from RAN service in 1983, sold at fire sale prices and ferried to New Zealand 12-26 July 1984. All were ultimately modified to the New Zealand "KAHU" standard, including much improved avionics and gunsight systems, an "all-glass" cockpit display, squared-off fin, gaseous oxygen, braking parachute and (wait for it) a real parking brake. TA-4G 880 was one of those modified, but before returning home for museum duty, she was restored to her pre-1983 configuration.

What were Royal New Zealand Air Force Skyhawks doing in Australia? After the ex-RAN Skyhawks crossed the Tasman in 1984, it was found that despite assurances at the time, our ships required more fixed-wing effort than combined RAAF and civilian aircraft could comfortably supply for Fleet Requirement Unit (FRU) duties (avionics calibration, ship anti-aircraft training, etc.). Ironically, the RNZAF was invited, on a cost-share basis, to bring a Skyhawk detachment back to Australia to perform these and other duties, including limited participation in local flying displays. The RNZAF flew Skyhawks, some ex-RAN, from HMAS *Albatross* for nearly 11 years, from February 1991 to January 2002. From time to time, this included TA-4G 880, re-badged as NZ6255.

New Zealand stopped flying Skyhawks in 2003. Since then, eight have been



CAPT David Michael RANR, Director Naval Heritage Collection, accepts TA4G 880 on behalf of the FAA Museum, Nowra. (F. Lane photo)

★TAPS★

For TAPS lists, members may access these links:
www.a4skyhawk.org/2D/KIA.htm
www.a4skyhawk.org/2E/ops_losses.htm

TAPS notices may be sent to Bob Hickerson, Newsletter Editor
at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org or mail to
Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624



SCHEDULING

Reunions & Requests



PLAN AHEAD

- **Skyhawk Association Mid-Year Board Meeting:** Virginia Beach, Holiday Inn Oceanside, April 10-13, 2014, see www.a4skyhawk.org for more information.
- **USS Hancock/CVA-19 Association reunion:** April 23-27, 2014, Hyatt Regency Riverfront, Jacksonville, FL. For more information, see http://www.uss Hancockassociation.org/reunion_page-2.php.
- **VA-55 Cruise Reunion:** Initial planning for a 3-day cruise to Mexico in spring 2014. For information, contact Curt Lewin, a747drv@comcast.net.
- **2nd BN, 4th Marines Association reunion,** all assigned or attached Marines, Navy chaplains and corpsmen – all years. 13-17 August 2014, Portland, OR. Contact John Schassen (jnschassen@aol.com); (541) 536-5863. For more information, see www.2-4association.org.
- **Skyhawk Association 2014 Annual Meeting and Luncheon at Tailhook:** 12:00 noon, September 5, 2014, Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, see www.a4skyhawk.org for more information.
- **Tailhook Association Reunion & Symposium 2014,** Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, September 4-7, 2014, see www.tailhook.net for more information.

List your reunion or event with Skyhawk Association, both print journal and website. Contact the editor at sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org.



donated to various New Zealand museums. TA-4G 880 returned to Australia, and the remaining flyable eight, together with two flight simulators, 20 Pratt and Whitney J52 engines and container loads of other spares, were sold to Draken International (Florida) for about USD\$6.55 million.

New Zealander Air Commodore Steve Moore, MNZM, formally handed over 880 to the museum on 19 September 2013. He was the first CO of RNZAF 2 Squadron when that unit started its Nowra operations. His records suggest that 880 was one of four Skyhawks in the first delivery flight to New Zealand, 12 July 1984. Flying 6,900 hours in a life of 36 years, 880's last flight, this time in New Zealand, was on 11 August 2003.

Citing an RNZAF museum curator, ACDRE Moore emphasised that museum

exhibits such as this Skyhawk trainer were not just about the hardware on display but the "commitment, the bravery, the tragedies, and the lighter moments—not only of those who flew the aircraft, but those who maintained and supported them. Each exhibit has a thousand stories." For instance, he told of one accident involving 880 that also demonstrated the Skyhawk's legendary ruggedness. A pilot touched down short of a runway at Ohakea, New Zealand, and broke off 880's right main landing gear oleo, just above the wheel. He waved off, retracted the remnants of the undercarriage and landed safely on his underwing tanks, with minimal additional damage.

Present at the 19 September 2013 handover ceremony at Nowra was Air Marshal Mark Binskin AO. He fondly

recalled his first Skyhawk flight, coincidentally in TA-4G 880, as Midshipman Binskin, RAN, straight after qualifying as a pilot. He went on to complete his Skyhawk Operational Flying School, but coincident with the wind-down of the RAN's fixed-wing element, he was loaned as a Sub Lieutenant to the RAAF in 1983. Converting to the RAAF's Dassault *Mirage*, he transferred to the RAAF in 1984 and rose to Air Marshal, Chief of the Air Force in 2008 and Vice Chief of the Defence Force in 2011. Many marvel at his unique and stellar career path, from a midshipman learning to fly a Skyhawk to a three-star Air Marshal in 26 years.

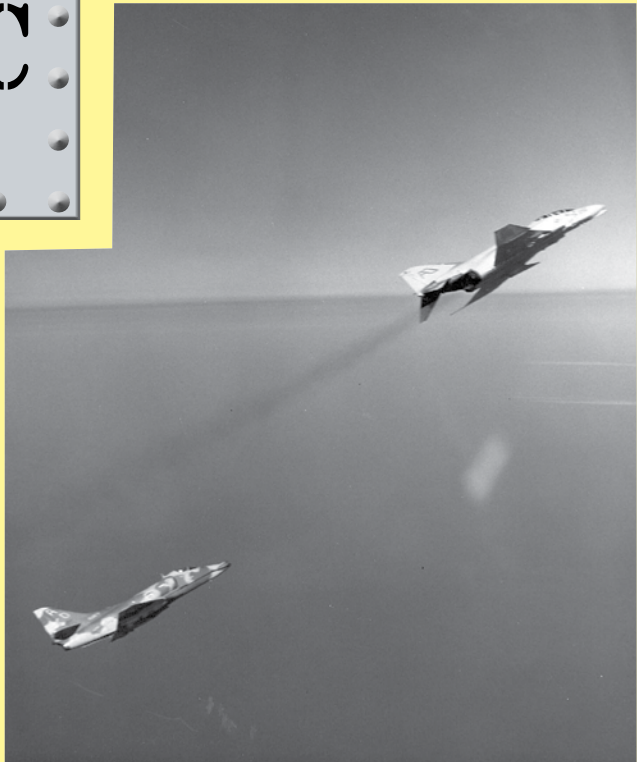
On the other hand, as the late-great A-4 advocate CAPT Wynn Foster, USN (Captain Hook) might have said, "After all, he was a Skyhawk pilot, wasn't he?"

FROM THE ATTIC

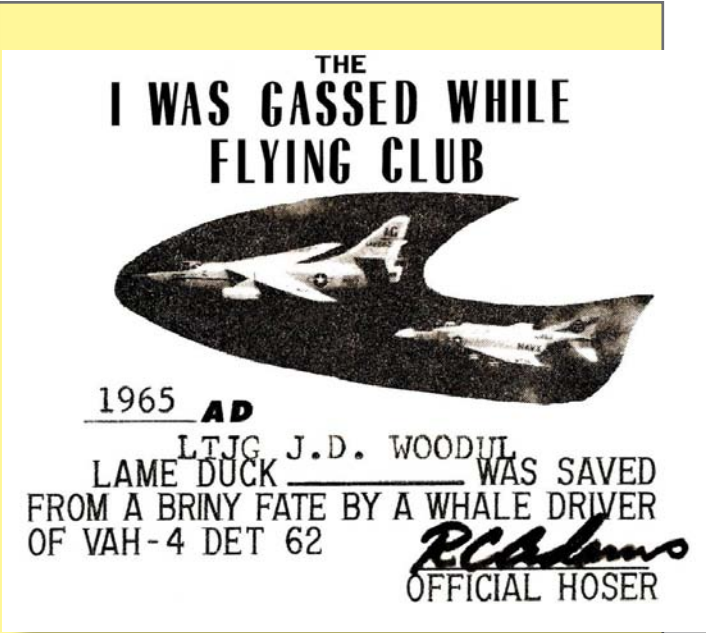
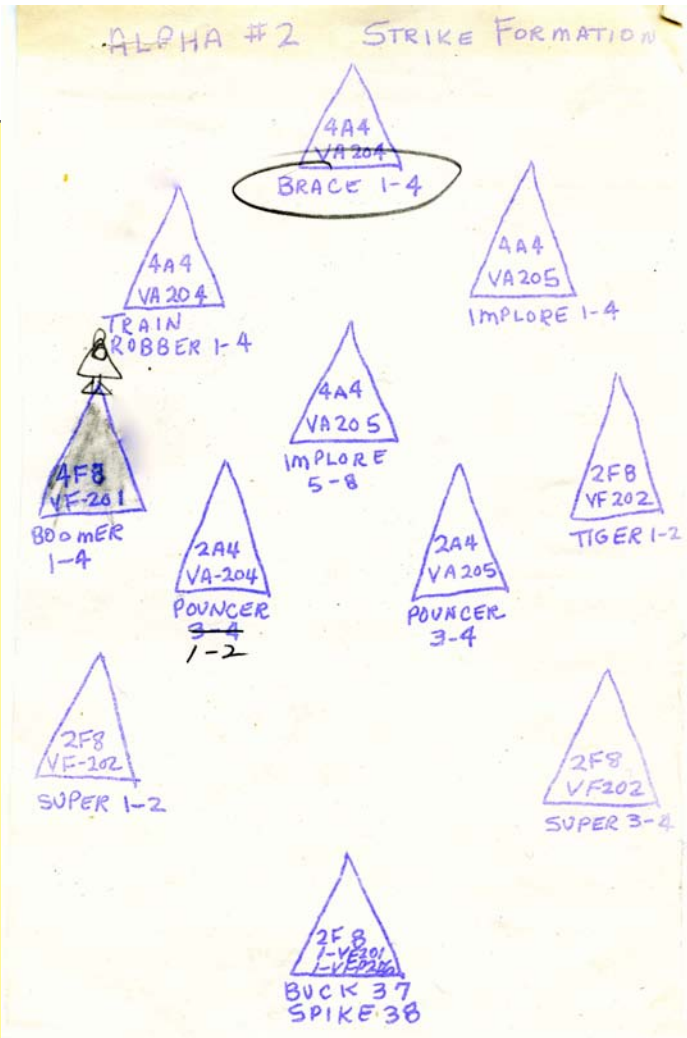
Mailbag



A bad day! A-4C 148589 of VA-83 on 17 May 1963. The Skyhawk was susceptible to tipping up on a wing. U.S. Navy photo.



A-4E 151064 in its natural element – camped at six on a VF-171 F-4. Photo via Gary Verver.



Whales were useful when you needed them! Courtesy of Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul.

Alpha Strike kneeboard card. Courtesy of Youthly Puresome.

Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

(Ed. note: When you're out of Puresome, you're just out! I knew that someday we would run out of Youthly Puresome Skyhawk stories, and after ten years of continuous publication, that day has arrived. Unless Jack starts writing them again, we'll have to do without. We may see an occasional "Best of Puresome" to help us recall the Skyhawk glory days, but in the interim, we're reprinting his Training Command series, reprinted from The Hook, with permission. Enjoy!)



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

From The Hook magazine, Spring 2005

The Further Adventures of YOUTHLY PURESOME

by CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR(Ret), artwork by Carl Snow



The only thing that stood between Puresome and oysters and friedup red snapper in Pensacola was the highway south out of Milton. It was time to forget the tedious pleasures of basic instrument instruction at North Whiting Field, and he and Tunita were humming along at maximum rev's of his ancient Volkswagen's engine, though their groundspeed was significantly reduced by the interaction of tires and the sticky asphalt of summer. In those ancient days before air conditioning, the car windows were wide open, and a wondrous world of smells was there for one's entertainment.

Puresome had made it past the dead tuna aromas of the paper mill and was actually enjoying the salty tang of the ocean when a flight of four round-motored Spads roared above the road just in front of him. The churning of all those pistons made such a manly roar that the palmettos by the side of the road quivered and the short hairs tried to stand up on the back of Youthly's closecropped, Student Naval Aviator neck.

Yeeehaw! For a chap who had a sufficiency of being under the bag in the back seat of the T-28, climbing and turning at precise bank angles and airspeed while changing from low blower to high blower, this was tactical! Those guys looked like they were out hunting, and Youthly knew he wanted to do that when he grew up and got his Golden Wings.

He stuck his head out the side window and waved and hollered some. This affected his precise track down the

highway, which was duly noted and commented upon by the Child Bride who remembered the stories from survival training about the slithery creatures that lurked off-road. But small swerves were nothing to the skilled, thousand-mile-an-hour hands of the future terror of the skies. One had to expect some shrieks in an operation like this, and Puresome was lost in fantasy as he watched the Spads disappear in the distance.

There was still a long row to hoe in the Basic Training Command before Youthly even had a shot at being a tactical sort. But the air above northern Florida was full of noisy T-28s, and he studied up and tried to make his instructors happy enough not to hurl kneeboards or do damage to their vocal cords. He did his best not to get dripped on too much by the bodily fluids that drained or oozed from the big radial engines.

He avoided overboosting and underboosting and the deadly sump light, which caused taking to parachute or messing up some farmer's cotton field.

He watched the interesting ground antics of the twin engine "Secret Navy Bomber" (SNB) being flown by helicopter-bound chaps getting their instrument ratings. Puresome was hacking the program and having a real good time pretending he was flying a blue Hellcat in search of the Wily Nipper instead of an orange-and-white two-seater. Every day was one more brick in the wall, and eventually he moved away from the FNGs at North Whiting Field down to the more advanced flying from the South Whiting complex.

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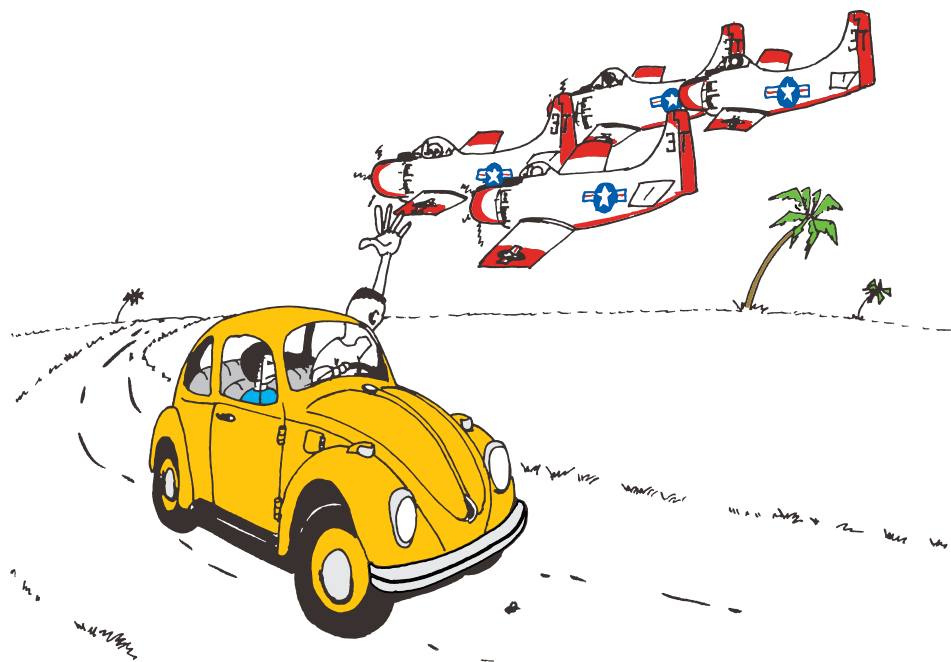
READYING FOR THE REALLY BIG MISSION

Making the move with him were famishedeyed NavCads, MarCads and assorted officer types. An exotic element was added with a large number of South Vietnamese that had come to the Land of the Big PX for flight training. They were an interesting lot, who clearly had the gauge on academics but tended toward a leisurely attitude about completion of the program, since that would involve going home and the War Thing.

Finally, the all-highest instructor persons felt that their charges were ready for a Really Big Mission. While it wasn't exactly bombing Schweinfurt, a gaggle of students were to fly a semi-low-level cross country, herded by an instructor, who hoped they could look out their windows to find obscure checkpoints like Mobile Bay and New Orleans, and then successfully return to base. The icing on the cake was to be a touch-and-go landing at Sherman Field, in front of God, Mainside Pensacola and maybe some Blue Angels. It was a righteous opportunity to look studly, but Puresome quietly petitioned the Big Guy for no frabberies.

So lines got drawn on sectional charts and some figgering got done. The instructor carefully briefed the three Vietnamese, Puresome and his pal, NavCad Glen, that their en route formation should be like the Air Force — same day, same way — so they not smite one another while navigating. But anyone not flying perfect close formation anywhere near a naval air station would find himself, right quickly, chipping paint on some water-logged coastal freighter. As they drew their parachutes and waddled out to the aircraft, Puresome knew he hated paint-chipping, and he vowed to formate admirably and “beware the Hun in the Sun,” especially if that Hun was Vietnamese or NavCad-ish.

All the big parts of Youthly's T-28 seemed to be where they were supposed to be, but he carefully counted the drips



from tubes in the nose wheel well and was wary of other a la carte secretions. He pried open dzus-buttoned covers to discover interior secrets. Everything seemed tickedy-boo, so he tugged his parachute straps tight and climbed up his steed to do battle.

After a little priming and coaxing, his engine started with a couple of coughs, shaking for a moment and evening out to idle with the marvelous, clattery sound peculiar to round motors. Eventually, the rest of the flight was ready, and the first test was to successfully navigate Whiting's torturous taxiways to the run-up pad adjacent the duty runway. Nobody got lost, and the flight went about checking engines. Puresome stood hard on the brakes, ran the throttle up to 30 inches of manifold pressure and checked for proper instrument readings. He throttled back, checked his magnetos and exercised his propeller controls. Satisfied, he throttled back to idle and ran through his Before Takeoff Checklist.

“I betcha the belch-fire boys don't have this much fun getting those jet engines started!” Puresome thought as he gave the thumbs up ready signal to the plane next to him. “On the other hand, they do have air conditioning!” The instructor called for takeoff, and, at decent intervals, the T-28s roared down the runway, slipping the surly bonds of earth amid a great deal of noise and right rudder.

FEELING LIKE A VERY BIG KID

Vulture Flight had made a successful rendezvous, and was motoring along in what was hoped was the right direction for the first checkpoint. The aircraft were comfortably spread out, and Puresome had his engine throttled back and set for cruising rev's and mixture to auto-lean. He had time to look out the window at all sorts of jolly sights below, happy to be away from the constraints of Whiting's usual practice areas.

The flight was separated into a “Vic” of the three Vietnamese and a section, which was Puresome and NavCad Glen, and they were arranged in a loose abeam scouting

line that was, they hoped, an improvement over a herd of cats. The instructor buzzed about and didn't natter too much. Puresome watched the world and the other airplanes, and felt like a very big kid, indeed.

The bridge over Mobile Bay was duly found as was the naval air station south of New Orleans, and Puresome had time to have fantasies about boiled crawfish and cold beer orgies. But when they entered the old T-34 Teenie-Weenie Primary Training operating areas of western Alabama on the return trip, it was time to suck it up, and they closed formation.

The instructor took the lead and called Navy Sherman tower for landing instructions for a flight of six. Tower advised that they were landing east, and to call over the numbers for a left break into the pattern. The instructor rogered the instructions and suggested that the tower might want to issue a warning NOTAM until Vulture Flight had gone far, far away.

When the instructor got squared away for a straight-in approach to the runway, he signaled Puresome's section to move from his port side over to join the Vietnamese trio already on the starboard side, making a sixplane echelon. Puresome got real busy after the crossover, trying to average out the crack-the-whip effect of being at next to the end of the line of airplanes.

The formation didn't look too bad when they crossed over the runway numbers and they were cleared to break for landing. The instructor passed the lead and broke away from the formation. Puresome started counting potatoes as successive flight members passed the lead on and broke away. Finally, the chap Puresome was flying on tapped his helmet and pointed his finger at Puresome, who tapped his own helmet, taking the lead. The other pilot blew an exaggerated kiss and broke away. It was now Puresome's awesome duty to look and fly straight ahead smoothly while he counted up to his 10-potato interval. Then he looked starboard at NavCad Glen, passed the lead, made a kiss-off gesture of great style and arrogance, and broke away.

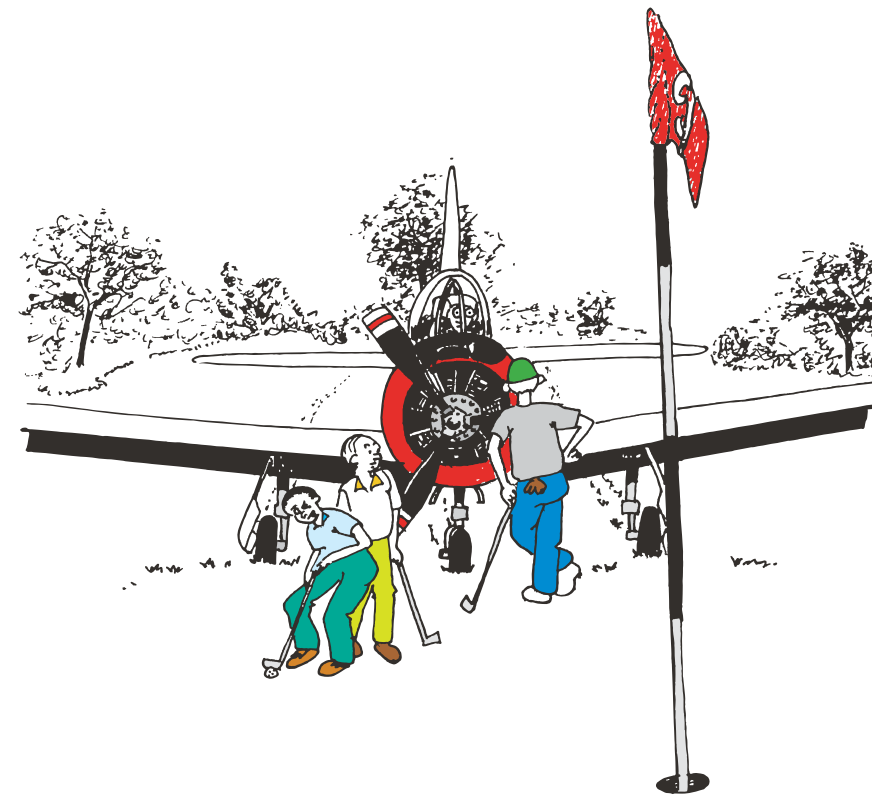
THE ROUND ENGINE GOES SILENT

The plan was for the instructor to make a touch-and-go landing and stay in the traffic pattern to fall in behind the students, who were making a straight-out departure for an en-route rendezvous back to Whiting. Puresome had managed an acceptable landing and was climbing out to join the other aircraft when he heard NavCad Glen call “Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Vulture Five has an engine failure!”

“Straight ahead! Take it straight ahead, Vulture Five!” screamed the instructor, who was watching and afraid that NavCad Glen might make the classic mistake of trying to turn back toward the field and stall, spin, crash, burn, die. NavCad Glen didn't say squat, being rather too busy. “Yaaaaaaaa!” Puresome screamed into his boom mike. “Ah, tower, Vulture Lead, Vulture Five has crashed into the golf course off the east end of the field!”

“Ah, Vulture Lead, which hole?”

Tower frequency then got very busy, with the instructor



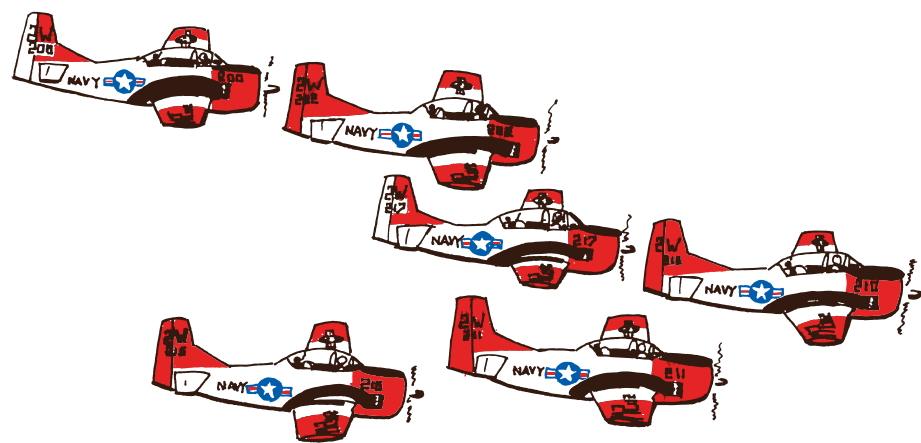
circling the crash site and trying to vector the crash trucks to the right fairway.

Meanwhile, the instructorless remainder of Vulture Flight had formed a loose Lufberry, circling about and waiting. Puresome's already-wide eyeballs got a little wider when his low fuel light started glowing dully. Even though it probably meant a month and a half more flight time in a T-28, it was time to act. “Vulture Lead from Vulture Five, I've got a low fuel light. Are you comin'?” “Vulture Flight, go on home! I'll talk to you later.”

So the Vultures found their way back to Whiting Field, and Puresome wasn't remotely close to the reciprocating version of a flameout. When the instructor showed up, it was with good news. NavCad Glen had done his low-altitude emergency drill perfectly and put his T-28 and himself down, more or less intact, on the Mainside Pensacola golf course. The retired admirals golfing that day were a little annoyed they couldn't play through, but it was just another of those Breaks of Naval Air.

As it turned out, both Puresome and NavCad Glen went on together to advanced training at NAS Chase Field where the big jet engines whined. After winging, they both went east to NAS Oceana, though Puresome went to Skyhawks and former NavCad Glen went to Phantoms. And, as it finally turned out, a short time later, former NavCad Glen flew into the waters of the Chesapeake Bay during a night intercept mission, and Puresome did not.

In the after years, for every squadron reunion held in the birthplace of Naval Aviation, and every visit to its wondrous Museum, Puresome always takes the short drive after the main gate along the manicured borders of the golf course. Tunita always knows what he is going to say. Perhaps former NavCad Glen would like being remembered that way





Skyhawk Association
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Skyhawk Association

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