

THE A4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 22-2



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*September 9, 2016
Sparks, NV*

Summer 2016

www.a4skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

By Bill "Jigger" Egen

LAST HOP

This being my last Prez Sez, with the passing of the stick to our new President Pete Cole at the Annual Meeting in September, I thought it was appropriate to use a picture of my wife Patsy as she congratulated me after my last hop in 1986. You probably can't see the remnants of the duct tape, which was used to keep me in an office chair while Patsy sat atop a P-19



crash truck and proceeded to run me all over the flight line with the water cannon. She had an eerie look on her face as she did her best to put me in the corner pocket so to speak. It was as if she could have been saying this is for all of us for all the cross countries, the TADs, the deployments, the WestPac cruises, the PCSs, not to



Bill "Jigger" Egen

mention the Happy Hours. She always has been a candidate for sainthood. We're still practicing to get it right after 49 years!

SPRING 2016 BOARD MEETING/TEXAS RDZ

As usual, we held the mid-year board meeting at a location of interest. This time the choice was San Antonio with Bob and Judy Hickerson and Bear and Colleen Langworthy doing the front work. A side trip to start the visit was set up by Bob and Judy, and we enjoyed a visit to the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg (a must see), followed by lunch at the Hangar Hotel's Airport Diner. While in San Antonio, we enjoyed the Texas hospitality with gatherings at La Focaccia, Mi Tierra and Boudro's restaurants. Our crowd of board members and wives were favored by the attendance of several of our emeritus seniors who provided adult supervision, i.e. Jack "YP" and Carolyn Woodul and Bud Southworth.



National Museum of the Pacific War



SA Board with auditors



La Focaccia Thurs night



Mi Tierra Friday night
(so much for adult supervision)



Boudro's Saturday night

Additionally, attendance by Texas Skyhawk Association members Dave Groepler, Chip and Linda Brown, Bob Jenney with Liz, Charles and Mary Jane Howard and Bob "Snackbar" Schneider made the event a Texas RDZ. Jack Ashmore was planning to fly his current A-4 in (an RV?), but got weathered out of Fredericksburg. Somehow, we missed Rylen Rudy at the Ready Room on Thursday. We also had opportunities for local sight-seeing and a visit to the Texas Air Museum honchoed by Chip Brown. Several folks were able to visit artist Sketch Eddy at his digs to view great aviation art work. After 4 days, many road miles, several margaritas and frontal assaults on several eateries, we closed out and left town without being on the police blotter!

continued on page 4...



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2016 •

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THE A-4 EVER

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Dave Dollarhide – Co-Editor.

Gene "Blade" Atwell – Webmaster.

Feature Contributors: Bill "Jigger" Egen, Todd "Hun" Frommelt, Peter Mersky, Boom Powell, Joe Turpen, Gary Verver, Mark "Senator" Williams, Jack "Puresome" Woodul.

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Contributions

We actively seek contributions from members, including news, photos, historical documents, anecdotes and other items of interest. Submissions may be edited due to space limitations in the newsletter. Contributions may be emailed to the Journal Editor at sa-journal-editor@darw.it 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: Discovery Air Defence Skyhawk C-FGZO/532 on joint training mission. First published in Aviation News incorporating Classic Aircraft, April 2016. Used with permission. Photo by Dr. (LtCol) Stefan Petersen, German Air Force Reserve. All rights reserved.

BOARD MEETING

The board meeting was held on 2 April at the Holiday Inn Downtown Market Square in our Ready Room. Secretary Cooney reported that membership is holding steady with 861, and Hun Frommelt reported on his continuous efforts at recruitment. The membership committee has been reinforced with the addition of our two new Directors, Ed Jobin and Terry Wolf. Of note, we have members in all states except North Dakota and Utah, and we have members in 17 countries. Treasurer Williams has kept our budget in the black and even executed this board meeting according to plan, despite maintaining a Ready Room for 4 days and providing refreshments during the board meeting. We tried to throw in our travel costs, but that didn't fly. As I have said before, cheapmarine is one word!

The web guys have been busy with a transition to a new host site, and things have been a little frustrating as we had to change providers during the transition. In the future you will probably see a new format for the squadron pages, which will make them more user friendly. At the top of our data management list are 45,998 records for bureau number history and 12,022 Skyhawk photos – there is always something new popping up as the database expands, even for the seasoned users.

Editor for Life, Bob Hickerson, reported positive feedback on the journal content and format from whoever editors talk to, so that is obviously a positive. Dave "Hide" Dollarhide has agreed to assist Bob with journal duties. Using the journal to circulate requests for missing data on accidents is also proving beneficial.

Hun continues to crunch the numbers and track who is flying Skyhawks these days. With the stand-down of the Israeli A-4s, there are now 35 single-seaters flying (11 military, 2 private and 22 contractor birds) and 12 two-seaters (3 military, 3 private and 6 contractor birds).

The A-4 is still popular with the modeling community. Director Joe Turpen keeps track of the modeling scene for the Association, and under his watchful eye, the Whizzer White Skyhawk Association trophy will be awarded to the best 1/48th scale Navy/Marine attack aircraft at the International Plastic Modelers Society Nationals this summer.

Looking forward, we have chosen Dave "Hide" Dollarhide as our guest speaker at the 2016 Annual Meeting, to be held in conjunction with Tailhook 2016 on 9 September in Reno. Dave will share with us some of his experiences flying the A-4 on the airshow circuit, 40 years after his Navy tour! It should be an enjoyable experience for all the well-seasoned A-4 wanna-bes! Business to be conducted at that meeting will include an election of directors for the Association. Directors Eberhardt, Egen, Langworthy, Ravgiala and Turpen are seeking reelection.

DISPLAYS

TA-4J 153526 is located at the Navy Operating Support Center (NOSC), Tucson. This was the last Skyhawk in the bone yard, and it was delivered by Skyhawk Association Director "Buick" Eberhardt (*Ed. note: see From the Attic this issue*). This bird needs a refresh paint job, and Col. Don "Hoot" Duffer, USMC (ret) has championed the volunteer effort to refurbish this display. He just recently informed us of plans to complete the task under the direction of the local NOSC commander.

Up in Brasher Falls, NY, TA-4J 153505 is being reassembled and painted and will soon be mounted for display. James Kelly is keeping us apprised of the ongoing efforts, and Board members Pete Cole and William "Gunny" Ravgiala will attend the Saturday, 9 July dedication.

We still have a standing commitment to support the Marine Aviation Memorial at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico. A donation of \$1000 has been pledged, and another \$300 is destined for a commemorative brick in the area of the display. We have made similar donations in Virginia Beach, Pensacola and Lemoore.

STILL NEED YOUR HELP

Below is a list of Skyhawk losses with details that are still unknown. Similar listings in prior journals have prompted feedback which has helped us to fill in missing data. For instance, Capt Doug Selby was identified as the VMA-211 pilot of A-4E, 151998, which was lost 27 Jan 66 due to JATO failure; Maj Vince Hart was identified as the pilot who had to eject from a VMA-211 A-4E, 151029, on 26 Dec 67, during a test hop; and we got a lot of feedback on the 6 May 68 midair between a VMA-223 A-4C, 145096, piloted by Capt Manual Guzman, and a VMA-311 A-4E, 151198, piloted by Maj Norm Pridgen. (*Ed. note: see the article by Norm Pridgen in this issue.*)

We are making progress and any assistance will be greatly appreciated. Please email us at sa-a4-research@darw.it with any details you may have.

- VA-22, A-4F, 155068, 22 Jan 70, Lemoore; unk pilot/crashed 35 miles east of Fallon.
- VA-125, TA-4F, 154320, 12 Mar 70, Lemoore; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VA-12, A-4C, 145105, 27 Jan 71, Cecil; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VA-125, TA-4F, 153687, 20 Sep 73, Lemoore; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VA-125, A-4F, 155019, 17 May 75, Lemoore; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VMAT-203, TA-4J, 153493, 18 Feb 69, Cherry Point; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VMA-211, A-4E, 152002, 15 Sep 70, Naha; pilot/circumstances unknown.
- VMA-311, A-4E, 151176, 3 Nov 71, Iwakuni; a/c crashed into the ocean 15 miles NW of Naha; unk pilot ejected/rescued.
- VMA-331, A-4M, 158190, 26 Apr 72, Beaufort; Unk pilot ejected after engine failure.
- VMA-223, A-4M, 160041, 18 Feb 83, El Toro; unk pilot OK after short landing and nose gear struck arresting cable. A/C caught fire at 29 Palms.

TAPS



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

Dennis Brandstetter • Germantown, TN
 John Ely • Alvin, TX
 Henry Harrison • Scarborough, ME
 Francis Magee • Lemon Grove, CA
 Stan Martin • Tucson AZ
 B.J. Palmer • Virginia Beach, VA
 William F. Sallada • Charlottesville, VA

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

NOTAMS, R&I

- Tailhook 2016, September 8-11 at the Nugget in Reno. Get your reservation early: the toll free number is (800) 648-1177, and the main reservation code is GTAIL16.
- Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting/Luncheon 9 September at the Nugget in conjunction with Tailhook. Check the SA web page and the Hook and Skyhawk journals for details.
- VMA-121, A-4 and prior heritage, will hold a reunion 17-19 November at the Quechon Casino and Resort, Winterhaven, CA. There will be a combined Marine Corps Ball 19 November with F-35 squadron VMFA-121. POC is Dale Creek, 805-961-8170 or cell 805-451-0228. [drcreek48@yahoo.com]

THE END



All good things must come to an end, and as I said before, Pete Cole will take the stick in September as part of our policy to cycle the presidency between Navy and Marine board members every two years.

Pete and I shared some F-9 time together defending South Texas from something back in the "let's go" days. I think he was in the front seat most of the time because he claims there was a lot screaming from the back seat!

Working with the directors and staff of the Skyhawk Association has been a real pleasure. All volunteers, of course, but exercising due diligence and accepting fiduciary responsibility in clear weather or storm clouds, as situations occur. The web, research and support staffs are always there to bail you out and improve on things as required. With our secretary, treasurer and editor in a more or less permanent role, you can't go wrong, but if you do somebody will square you away!

SEMPER FI,

Jigger

zerocep@ec.rr.com

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@darw.it

■ To the Editor,

My father, Maj. John C. Ely (USMC) of Alvin, TX passed away on March 19th of this year, and I know that he greatly enjoyed reading articles in your journal, so I wanted to give honor to him and your organization for what you have done to bring others joy and a sense of kinship.

The opportunity to fly the A-4 Skyhawk was one of his proudest achievements, so much so that even some 46 years afterward, he still had dreams of flying it, and the excitement that it brought. I'm sure he's strapped in and enjoying the scenery roll by again.

Mitch Ely

[Ed. Note: the family would enjoy hearing from friends and squadron-mates. john.nancy.ely@gmail.com)]

■ To the Editor:

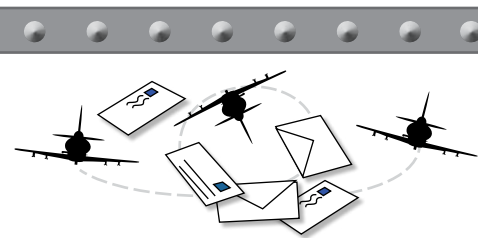
In March of 1987, I was in the last few months of my flying job with the Marines in Beaufort. Our squadron had returned from the final deployment in the F-4, and the last of those jets had been ferried to Davis-Monathan AFB for storage, or handed over to one of our sister squadrons for its last days. Our guys were rotating through F-18 training at Cecil Field, and the new Hornet squadrons were standing up. Flight time for me was quite scarce, so I was flying whenever I could in the A-4s at the Headquarters Squadron.

For better than a week, I had been planning/ preparing to fly an adversary hop against a pair of Hornets, and I was particularly eager to have the opportunity to pit my meager flying skills against my squadron mates. Who cares if you are outnumbered and outclassed? Fights on! It was going to be glorious.

The morning of the hop, I went to the morning AOM and was told by my Department Head that he would be taking my hop because he needed the flight hours, or he would lose flight pay for the month. There was no talking him out of it. Not only was he taking the hop I had so carefully prepared for, he was enjoying the added personal boost of pulling rank on me. He would fly, and I would run sick-call. I was seething with anger.

Later that morning, the crash alarm sounded in sick bay. Inflight emergency in the NBC warning area. Engine failure....jet in the water.....two good chutes....SAR Helo en-route. Both crew were plucked out of the water by a fishing boat that was cruising around out there 40 miles off the coast. The helo hoisted them off and brought them to the Naval Hospital. It was my jet. My boss had punched out safely, but because I was the sick-call doc, by protocol that made me the Investigating Officer in the Mishap Investigation. I now owned him.

This all happened on St. Patrick's Day. Coincidence? I think not!



Three weeks later, I saved his life. He started showing some peculiar neurological signs that everyone was writing off as stress. He had a condition called anomic aphasia, which meant an evolving focal neurologic process in the left side of his brain. I packed him up and sent him off to Charleston Naval Hospital where the neurosurgeon opened up his skull and evacuated an epidural hematoma. Because of that surgery, he could never fly again.

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY!

Patrick W. Lappert, MD
Madison, Alabama
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Send your letters to
sa-journal-editor@darw.it



MEMBER'S MOVIES

Skyhawk Association YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/A4SkyhawkAssociation>

Association Website Video Page <http://a4skyhawk.org/content/association-videos>

UNDER THE EYE OF THE WALLEYE

By CAPT Ray Alcorn, USN (Ret)

I read with great interest Steve Grays' informative articles "The First Combat Use of The Walleye Weapon" (Skyhawk Association Journal, Vol 20-3, Fall 2014 and Vol. 21-1, Spring 2015). With the advent of Walleye, the arsenal of weapons available to the combat air arm was significantly improved since I had last participated in a strike.

As Steve noted, dropping the very accurate Snakeye bomb in a 10 to 20 degree dive angle or even in a level 50 foot 450 knot delivery had drawbacks for the mission pilot. This is what I was doing almost two years prior to the timeframe for Steve's article. On 22 December 1965, CVW-9 air wing aboard *Enterprise*, in their first alpha strike bombed the Uong Bi power plant under a 400 foot overcast with 500-pound Snakeyes. Two pilots died that day, and two of us began our 2609 days as a guest of the Hanoi Hilton, observing the air war from beneath.

Although the rather small group of "Yankee Air Pirates" had very limited communication with anything outside the prison walls, we did pick up some intel from the new shoot downs. From the level of air activity, it was obvious that the air campaign was picking up. The wail of the air raid sirens, the acrid smell of the smoke screen pumped out of smoke generators, along with the blast of SAMs being fired, intense anti-aircraft fire and the overpressure of nearby bombs going off was an almost daily event. We crouched in our cells, hoping the pilots knew where we were, and prayed for their safety.

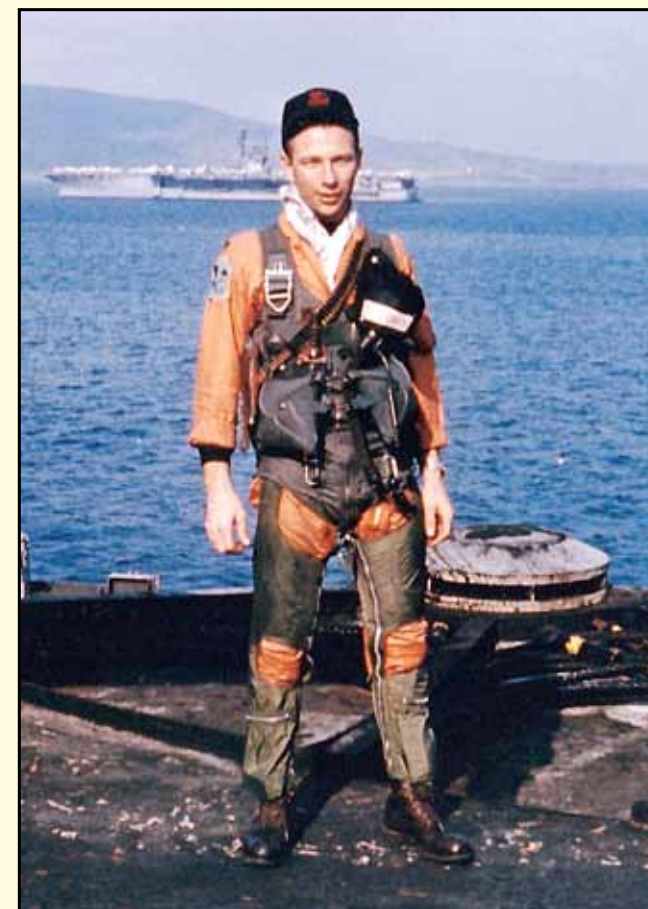
During the summer of 1967, the Vietnamese moved about 50 of us from the big Hoa Lo prison in downtown Hanoi into a new prison we did not know existed. Actually the new site had not existed as a prison, but rather as a large coal-fired power plant in downtown Hanoi about two blocks off the south end of the Doumer Bridge. There were a series of low, barracks-like buildings surrounding the plant which had been converted into makeshift cells. We dubbed our new home

"Dirty Bird" in honor of the layer of pulverized coal dust that covered everything. Up to this point, the Vietnamese Army had kept us secluded from the eyes of the general population. At Dirty Bird, we would sometimes be taken out onto the street and walked around the long block that encompassed the power plant. We were obviously serving as human shields for the plant.

One day while at Dirty Bird all hell broke loose. The normal sirens and smoke lit-off, but the bomb blasts were closer with much greater intensity than any we had previously experienced. The heavy wooden doors of several cells, along with the shutters covering the barred windows, went airborne. The three-quarter-inch plaster covering the ceilings came down in large slabs on top of us. We caught a quick glimpse of an F-105 whipping by and later learned the USAF had taken down the Doumer bridge with 750 pound bombs. Although we were ecstatic that our enemy was getting hammered, we would just as soon have had it done at a little greater distance from us.

About two weeks later, the same scenario cranked up again. This time the bomb blasts seemed closer and with even greater intensity than the previous strike. The overpressure on our eardrums was extreme (what did you say?). The remaining ceiling came down, and the newly-installed window shutters again disappeared. I peeked over the window sill and saw an A-4 go by. I reported to my three USAF cell mates, "No sweat guys. It's the Navy today." We did not know what happened, but we were moved out of Dirty Bird that night back to Hoa Lo.

Later we learned that the Navy had sent Walleyes through the windows of that power plant, destroying the interior with hardly any indication of an attack from the exterior. I still give thanks for the strong wall ten feet from me that contained the blast, for the dedicated engineers who developed such an effective weapon and for the A-4 jocks who did a magnificent job under the most extreme conditions. BRAVO ZULU!!



LTJG Ray Alcorn aboard USS *Saratoga*, anchored at Gibraltar. Photo via author.

IN THE RED CORNER

Discovery Air Defence provides adversary support for the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) with six A-4Ns helping take the pressure off the Luftwaffe's fleet of Eurofighters, as **Dr Stefan Petersen** explains.

One of the roles carried out by the A-4Ns is 'Red Air' sorties against the Luftwaffe's Eurofighters. All photos author

This article originally appeared in the April 2016 issue of Aviation News incorporating Classic Aircraft. The magazine is renowned for providing the best coverage of every branch of aviation and is available from leading newsagents. To order current or back issues, or for the latest subscription deals visit www.aviation-news.co.uk.

Flight hours are expensive, especially those of highly sophisticated combat jets such as the Eurofighter. So it is important to ensure that every flight hour is used as effectively as possible. But when pilots practise aerial combat against each other using the same aircraft type, the results are split: whereas the 'Blue Air' is deploying the jet as it would do in a real scenario, the opponent performing the role of 'Red Air' has to simulate the tactics of the opposing side. As a result the training benefit for the latter is substantially reduced.

"That's where we come in," said Elmar Besold. The 53-year-old is lead fighter pilot at the German branch of Discovery Air Defence (DA Defence). The Canadian company offers 'Red Air' adversary services with six A-4N Skyhawks at Wittmund Air Base for one-sixth of the cost of a

Eurofighter hour. But there are other benefits as well.

Besold explained: "We tow DO-SK6 targets for air-to-air gunnery practice, drop DM-18 and DM-38 practice bombs at military exercise areas to train Forward Air Controllers and serve as radar targets for training fighter controllers as well as targets for naval ship air-defence crews."

The lead pilot has notched up 2,000 flying hours on the Skyhawk over the past 11 years. Before that, the former Luftwaffe instructor pilot and weapons instructor spent 3,500 hours in the cockpit of the McDonnell Douglas F-4F Phantom. "That was in Wittmund, too – so for me it is, as it were, a home match."

DA Defence is a fully owned subsidiary of the Canadian company Discovery Air, which has a total workforce of 900 and a fleet of 150 aircraft and offers flying as well as air ►

Skyhawk C-FGZH/534 lands at Wittmund after a mission.



logistic services.

Under the terms of the contract with the Bundeswehr, 1,200 flying hours are to be provided per year for a period of five years, at a total cost of around €44m. In return DA Defence has to fly two rounds a day, each with up to six aircraft, from Wittmund, the home base of the Taktische Luftwaffengruppe 'Richthofen', which will regain full wing status in mid-2016, or from other operational bases.

"When it is more cost-effective, we relocate as well, either within Germany

or abroad," said Besold. The jets of DA Defence visited Decimomannu in Sardinia for the first time in June 2015, to support the Eurofighter deployment of Taktisches Luftwaffengeschwader 73 'Steinhoff' to the Mediterranean island.

Up to the end of 2014 this role had been performed by Skyhawks of BAE Systems, which had also been based at Wittmund and had largely operated with the same personnel. After the contract expired, their employment with BAE ceased and they were taken on by DA Defence.

"All the Germans and one American were taken on by the Canadians, pilots and technicians," said Besold. However, it had not been a simple takeover; every one of them had to go through the full job application process. However, recruitment of the team brought massive benefits to the new contractor.

"There was no real transition period," explained Besold. "Discovery Air had to wait until BAE Systems had vacated the infrastructure and could only then move in. That created problems, but we were able to

The A-4Ns also tow DO-SK6 targets for air-to-air gunnery practice, plus drop DM-18 and DM-38 practice bombs at military exercise areas to train Forward Air Controllers. Additionally, they can serve as radar targets for training fighter controllers as well as targets for naval ship air-defence crews.



DA Defence Skyhawk C-FGZO/532 and Eurofighter 31+01 of Taktische Luftwaffengruppe 'Richthofen' fly in formation during a joint training flight.

solve them thanks to our experience."

The DA Defence team in Germany numbers 26, 19 of whom are ground staff. Most of them are Germans, but three Canadians also work on a permanent basis in Wittmund.

"And we regularly get personnel over from North America, to help with the inspections, for example," said Besold.

All seven pilots – five Germans and two Canadians – can, like him, look back on a long military career. As a former Tornado Weapons System Officer with more than 2,000 flight hours, Rolf Brandt also knows his métier inside out. The 50-year-old has

been head of German Operations since September 2015 and is in charge of an important outpost of DA Defence that is to be expanded further in the future.

The provision of adversary jets for air combat training by civil contractors is a growing market, and now that the Montréal-based company has its feet on the ground in Europe, expansion is on the cards. DA Defence celebrated its 50,000th accident-free flying hour a few months ago.

Brandt said: "For the future we are also planning to operate the F-16A/B Fighting Falcon. That would bring our capabilities a lot closer to that of current high-performance

jets, such as the Eurofighter and F-35."

DA Defence's A-4Ns are already a lot more modern than their predecessors from BAE Systems.

Besold explained: "We have the latest avionics on board in the form of the Garmin GTN 750. They also feature GPS, a radar warning receiver, VHF/UHF radios, TACAN [tactical aid to navigation], TCAS [traffic alert and collision-avoidance system] and a Head-Up Display. With all the various screens, it is nearly a glass cockpit."

The CBLS (carrier, bomb, light store) pods on the two outboard stations can accommodate up to eight practice bombs. ►

Skyhawk C-FGZE/495 is readied for a target-towing sortie.



Ground crew attend to Skyhawk C-FGZS/337 following its return from a sortie.



The third external tank on the centreline station is replaced by the SK6 pod on target-towing sorties. The flight profile recorders provided by the Luftwaffe are identical to the Eurofighter systems.

Besold continued: "The data from each mission is immediately transmitted via a secure military line, so that it is available in the wing for the debriefing."

All the A-4Ns are former Israeli Air Force aircraft and originally belonged to Advanced Training Systems International (ATSI) in Mesa, Arizona,

which was taken over by Discovery Air in December 2013. Their J52-P408 engines from Pratt & Whitney produce 110.5kN of thrust and give the 10,472lb (4,750kg) jet a top speed of almost 777mph (1,250km/h).

DA Defence's A-4Ns are ex-Israeli Air Force examples and have the visual distinction of infrared-suppressing tailpipe extensions.

"The acceleration is so powerful that we have to pull up steeply after take-off to keep the speed below 225kts so that the front gear can be retracted," said Besold.

The A-4Ns have the visual distinction of having been fitted with infrared-suppressing

frequently to check up on us," added the lead fighter pilot. "But that brings benefits both to us and the customer, as it makes us feel we are in good hands in the system."

To satisfy the stringent requirements, DA Defence's pilots undergo additional internal training programmes.

The contract with the Bundeswehr includes pure training flights with simulated weapons deployment on the range.

Besold recalled: "There used to be similar work-ups with BAE."

It also helps that the pilots have practised the required capabilities while in active service – and during their time with BAE Systems. "So we really are only doing work that we know inside out from our former lives." **AN**

"For the future we are also planning to operate the F-16A/B Fighting Falcon. That would bring our capabilities a lot closer to that of current high-performance jets such as the Eurofighter and F-35."

tailpipe extensions in Israel.

The Skyhawks are registered in Canada and are thus subject to the regulations of Transport Canada.

"They maintain tight oversight and visit us



SP AIR Skyhawk DiscAir 2015, photo via author.

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION REUNION

Hook '16 - Nugget Hotel - Sep 8 thru 11



Exhibit Booth 722 - a4skyhawk.org



LUNCHEON
Friday, 9 Sep Noon
Poolside Terrace

SPEAKER
Dave Dollarhide
CAPT USNR (Ret)
Scooter Pilot
...Again!

RESERVATIONS
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**ATTACK
READY ROOM**
Open Every Day

Midair Over the Target!

By LtCol Norm Pridgen, USMC (ret)

As I recall, VMA 311 was standing the hot pad on 6 May 68 when I got a call to launch. I took off from Chu Lai with a flight of 2 A-4Es, into a cloudless, Carolina blue sky, headed for the Ashau Valley. When we arrived over the Ashau Valley, I checked in with the FAC and was being briefed on the target when a flight of 2 A-4Cs checked in saying they were low on fuel. The FAC asked me if I had enough fuel to wait while he worked the flight of Charlies. I responded that I had plenty of fuel and would wait west of the target. As I turned the flight (my wingman was in a trail position on my right), I experienced what felt like a hard impact to my aircraft. Being around 8,000 feet AGL, I couldn't imagine any kind of ground fire reaching me. Right after this thought, my wingman called and said that a flight of 2 A-4s had let down between the two of us and that the lead aircraft had struck the tail of my aircraft. He then said that the other pilot had ejected. My A/C was in a slight right turn, so I continued the turn to see if I could observe anything. When I was about half way through the 360, the controls began to feel sluggish and unresponsive, so I went to manual control. I managed to roll out of the turn headed toward the coast in a slight climb. I tried to trim the nose down since I was having little luck with the stick, but that was not successful. The engine instruments still looked good, but I felt a slight vibration in the A/C.

I still had a full load of 250 lb. Snakeyes, and I was thinking about

dropping them as soon as I crossed the coast to lighten the load in case I got a chance to land somewhere. I was still climbing slightly as I crossed the coast.



Major Darold L. Guttormson, left, and Captain Norman E. Pridgen, Jr., both A-4E Skyhawk pilots of VMA-311, exchange congratulations after flying back-to-back close air support attacks near Khe Sanh on 3 Mar 68. Both returned to Chu Lai with enemy 30-mm cannon rounds lodged in their aircraft. Official USMC photo by Lance Corporal W.E. Davis. From the Jonathan Abel Collection (COLL/3611), Marine Corps Archives & Special Collections, via Gary Verver.

My plan was to get a couple of miles off shore, have my wingman check the surface below, and if all clear, jettison everything off the aircraft before turning south toward Da Nang or Chu Lai. By that time, I was a little over

10,000 ft. and in a slight climb. I was thinking of a way to get the nose down without completely losing control when the decision was made for me. The nose pitched up, and I had no control as I added full power trying to keep flying, but the aircraft started to fall off on the right wing. I broadcast to my wingman that I was losing it, and I heard "eject, eject." Without any further thought, I reached up, grabbed the face curtain and pulled hard.

The next thing I remember, I was looking up and saw the chute above me. Daring to look down, I saw a lot of blue, and it was a long way down. I looked at the two fittings on my shoulder harness and thought about how easy they were to lock and unlock. I didn't think about that again!

I hadn't been in the chute very long when I saw a C-130 at about my altitude headed south. He looked to be about one mile from me, and I hoped he would see me and not get any closer. As he passed by, my survival training kicked in, and I inflated my vest and raft, prior to dropping it on its lanyard below me.

I remembered from water survival being told not to disconnect from the chute when you thought you were about to go into the water, as you would probably be higher than you thought and you could be injured. I was looking at the surface below, and I saw only blue and no whitecaps, which

indicated no wind and that the chute might come down on top of me as I entered the water. All of a sudden I realized that I was not descending as slowly as I thought, as the water came rushing up. After entering the water, I came to

the surface, disconnected the chute, pulled the raft toward me and crawled in. The chute was close by, lying on the surface.

My wingman was still circling overhead, but I knew that he would have to head for Chu Lai soon. I had probably been in the water about 30 minutes when I saw a Vietnamese Junk headed my way. I made the decision that I was not going to be picked up by anyone other than U.S. forces. This person may have had good intentions, but that didn't matter. I didn't want him to come any closer.

When they were about 100 yards away, I took one of my 38 pistols which was loaded with tracers and fired two rounds to the right of his bow. My other 38 was loaded with regular ammo, and I had two frag grenades taped to my survival vest. I intended to use both if it came to a bad situation. It looked as if he had stopped, and I didn't hear his engine any longer.

I thought I had accomplished something, until I heard the familiar sound of a Huey. I turned to look behind me, and there was a Huey approaching. He came up behind me and hovered far enough from me that I didn't get the downwash, but not so far that I couldn't see the door gunner. About this time, the Junk must have decided it was time to leave, and he departed. I was thinking about how the Huey was going to pick me up, but he just hovered there and made no move toward me. I guess he had been hovering about 5 minutes when he started to leave, and I thought "what now." As he lifted and flew by, I turned to watch him leave. At that time, I saw that there was a ship coming up and stopping some distance from me. I saw two swimmers climb down a net over the side and swim toward me. As they approached, I slid out of the raft, and I remember one of them asking me if I was bleeding as he pointed to the discoloration of the water around me. I told him that was probably shark chaser, and that I was ok.

We swam over to the ship, climbed



VMA-311 Tomcat pilot Captain Norm Pridgen preflights A-4E circa 1968 at Chu Lai. Photo via author.

up the net and got on deck. The Captain handed me a shot of medicinal spirits and water for a chaser. I realized for

"The next thing I remember, I was looking up and saw the chute above me. Daring to look down, I saw a lot of blue, and it was a long way down."

the first time that it felt like my mouth was full of cotton. The Captain turned out to be an Army warrant officer, and I was told that I was on LCU 1547, which was manned by an Army crew. He said he would have gotten closer to me, but he was afraid he would become entangled in the chute which was still visible in the water. I asked him where he was headed, and he said he was going to Da Nang when he saw the plane hit the water. The crew had looked up and spotted a chute. It would be several hours before we arrived in Da Nang, and that was ok with me. However, as

we talked, the Air Force Jolly Green Giant showed up overhead. I guess it was better late than never. I put my gear back on (which I had removed since everything was wet) and moved to the center of the deck as they lowered the cable. They couldn't get the cable close to me (I think the pilot was concerned about getting the cable hung up on the superstructure). I asked the Captain if he would lower the ramp so I could get back in the water, as it might make the pickup easier. After I entered the water, they lowered the cable, pulled me aboard and dropped me off at Da Nang.

I spent the night at Da Nang, where a former 311 squadron mate (Bobby Downing) loaned me dry clothes until mine were returned the next morning. That morning I hitched a ride on an Army Huey to the Army Americal Division, which was located near Chu Lai, north of the MAG 12 area. I then got on the road and hitched a ride on a passing jeep to the MAG 12 area.

I did not learn until my return to the squadron area that the plane that struck me was piloted by a former student of mine. I had taught him the finer points of formation flying, when I was an instructor in VT 7 at Meridian. ✈

Lieutenant Edward Andrew Dickson, USNR

First A-4 Pilot awarded the Navy Cross (posthumously) for aerial action in Vietnam

By LCDR Ernie Mares, USN (ret)

Flaming Dart I was the first major air strike over North Vietnam in reaction to a Viet Cong attack against an American compound at Pleiku in South Vietnam.

On Sunday, February 7, 1965, planes from USS *CORAL SEA*'s two A-4 attack squadrons (VA-155 and VA-153) struck the North Vietnamese army barracks and port facilities at Dong Hoi. Weather in the target area was a 1,500 thick solid overcast with base at 100 feet and a few miles visibility in rain.

Ed Dickson was flying an A-4E Skyhawk as section leader (#3) in the VA-155 skipper's division. The strike aircraft were armed with MK-81 250 lb. bombs equipped with Snakeye retarding fins. These retarded weapons allowed laydown delivery at extremely low altitude.

The first division's initial run was aborted due to their being too close behind two A-4E flak suppressors armed with CBU-2s. The four aircraft performed a 360-degree turn about five miles south of the target area, and as they approached the final run-in to the Dong Hoi Citadel at 480 knots, Ed reported that his aircraft had been hit by ground fire.



Just prior to reaching the bomb release point, Dickson's left wing burst into flames—but he continued on and dropped his ordnance on target. Upon completing the bombing run, the flight made an immediate turn to head for the sea. As the flight continued to the coastline it was noted that Dickson's aircraft was now completely engulfed in flames. Passing the beach, Ed was told to eject and the canopy and ejection seat were observed to leave the plane just as he pulled up and entered the overcast.

Because of the high rate of speed his aircraft and masking by clouds, no one was sure that his parachute actually deployed. The crippled A-4 crashed into the Gulf of Tonkin approximately one-half mile off-shore. The two flak suppressors remained in the area for roughly 15 minutes and searched the vicinity of the crash site. They were unable to locate their downed comrade and left when ground fire from the beach became too intense. Ed was listed as Missing in Action, presumed dead. However, because of his earlier experience we all wondered if his parachute actually opened.

About three months later, intelligence sources provided our squadron with a copy of a North Vietnamese newspaper (accompanied by a translation). The news article described how Ed's body was trapped in a fisherman's net and pulled ashore. There was a picture of his ID card and another showing his body being dragged onto the beach while still attached to his chute. The article reported that Ed was shot during his parachute descent.

The memory of our fine shipmate, and the gallant service he rendered to his country, will remain in our hearts forever. By his inspiring and courageous devotion to duty—by staying with his burning aircraft to complete the mission—Lieutenant Dickson upheld the finest traditions of the United States Navy and was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. It was the first instance of the award of the Navy Cross for aerial action in Vietnam.



Dickson's loss was indeed symbolic of the deadly business of naval aviation. One year earlier on February 22, 1964, Ed narrowly evaded death after ejecting from an A-4 during a training exercise over the Sierra Nevada range in California. His parachute failed to open, but Dickson landed in a thirty-foot snow-drift and survived...

I was leading that flight of four A-4E strike aircraft plus a buddy store tanker flown by our Marine exchange pilot. We were on a Sandblower and in the process of topping off over the Sierras at angels fifteen. Two of us finished refueling and were flying on the tanker's port wing when Ed plugged in. Almost immediately, fuel began gushing from the drogue into his starboard intake as he began under-running the tanker. He popped speed-brakes and managed to disengage from the buddy store.

Ed later told us his engine experienced compressor stalls, flamed out and he tried for a relight. By that time he was down to about angels ten point five and flying at about 200 knots when he said, "No joy—I'm punching out!" Immediately thereafter the canopy left followed by the seat. Shortly after he separated from the seat we lost sight of him.

His A-4E crashed near the top of June Mountain, and my wingman and I circled the smoking crash site while the tanker and dash four climbed to high CAP at Angels 20 to call the Mayday. Dickson popped the day smoke end of a MK 13 distress signal and was immediately spotted in the snow near a pine tree a couple hundred feet down from the mountain top.

As we circled Ed, who was lying on

his back, he looked up and waved, but did not stand up. About that time we got a radio call from Packsaddle (VA-125's AD-5N) who happened to be enroute from Fallon to Lemoore. I asked them to assume low CAP, and if they could, drop a jacket or blanket since Ed was wearing only a summer flight suit and was probably very cold by then.

A few minutes later the Spad came back with bad news. "Something's wrong, we dropped a flight jacket and it landed less than 20 feet from him—he made no attempt to get it!"



We knew Ed was alive because I definitely saw him wave, but this was the first indication that he was injured.

Apparently, June Mountain Ski Patrol saw us circling and sent their rescue patrol up to check out what happened. We later found out his parachute did not open until they put Ed in the snow mobile and started down the mountain. During the trip down the chute popped of its own accord.

Since the seat separated normally following his ejection, Ed calmly waited for the 15,000 barometric setting to take effect and made no attempt to pull the rip cord. We believed that our barometric openers were set for 15,000 feet.

We later found out that the barometric setting spec was actually 10,000 ± 500 feet. The spot where he landed on

June Mountain was 9,600 feet above sea level. The lesson learned from this was to always try to beat the seat's automatic function.

An Air Force HH-43 helicopter arrived on scene, and he was taken to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland where he underwent treatment for a broken femur and a fractured ankle of the right leg.

Fuel from the tanker drogue was ingested into the starboard intake causing the auto acceleration that produced the under-running situation, even with the throttle lever at idle. The only way

Ed was able to break away from the tanker was by popping the speed boards. In the wreckage they found that compressor blades had melted away, and that's why he couldn't get an air start.

Dickson's moderately broken femur and fractured ankle injuries kept him grounded for nearly eight months, and it was the ankle fracture that kept him on crutches or using a cane. Ed had his

cane painted to resemble a tailhook, and he made a colorful sight hobbling around NAS Lemoore and the 1964 Tailhook Reunion with his pseudo hook.

He finally got an up chit from the flight surgeon in October 1964. This immediately led to a couple of fam hops with VA-125 and a short, single-plane weapons deployment to Fallon. He was able to rejoin the squadron in time for the ship's departure from Alameda on December 7th. Coral Sea's Commanding Officer let him bag a couple extra traps during routine recoveries that occurred enroute and at Yankee Station prior to February 7th.

Remarkably, Ed responded well to his abbreviated training sessions and carquals which reflected favorably upon his positive attitude and ability as a naval aviator.

USS Midway Museum's "Meet the Pilots"

A great way to spend Memorial Day weekend!

By Todd "Hnn" Frommelt

Once again, Marine and Navy Skyhawkers manned the A-4 aboard the USS Midway for two days of "Meet the Pilots" and an up-close look at our A-4F cockpit. Working 4 hour shifts for Sunday and Monday of the Memorial Day program, USN and USMC A-4 aviators manned two stations, one at the foot of the hardstand's ladder and one up next to the cockpit. They helped folks and kids sit in our favorite seat and gave them a quick overview of cockpit controls, switches, gauges and the seat. There was a waiting line all day, both days! Even our old analog array and iron bomb site were impressive to these guys and gals! Speaking of which, there were some fringe benefits to the duty! (see below). Special thanks to Chuck Sweeney, Mike Ranftle, Frank Nolla, Bob Wendt, Darryl Naegeli, and Marines Dave Pereira, Cary Branch and the Hun! The USS Midway has become San Diego's most popular attraction! Come see it soon!



Dave briefing at the hardstand.



Hun giving a cockpit brief.



Flight deck view of Cary and Dave working the Skyhawk.



Hun enjoying a pic with a visitor



Mike Ranftle running his dress-like-a-pilot photo op.

FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag



These photos, first published in Naval Aviation News January – February 2004, document the transfer of the last TA-4J to the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center (AMRC) in Arizona. Skyhawk Association Director LCDR Mike "Buick" Eberhardt was the pilot, accompanied by back-seater LT Chris Castanon.

Photos by Richard Vander Meulen.



Buick autographed the last T-bird with these words:

*"1st Kingsville, then Meridian,
Now Roosey Roads ... Truly the
very last of the Scooter Drivers.
Farewell and thanks for nearly 50 years.
Mike Eberhardt
"Buick"*



TINS!*

NUGGET NIGHT AT THE BOAT

By Dave Dollarhide

It was January, 1967, and it was my first carrier night flight in the "Fleet." Along with my two VA-46 buddies, Max Wike and Andy Malcom, we were the only airplanes airborne from USS *Forrestal*, each flying one of those calibration flights for the ship's RADAR. ... I think it was referred to as a "Zulu Golf Mike," or some such coding. The *Forrestal* was on a shake down cruise off the coast of Norfolk, following a year in the yard.

In the A-4 "RAG," my initial night qualification was aboard the "Lex" with the old "moon glow" red deck lights. I was delighted to now be flying from the big deck of *Forrestal*, which had just been fitted with white flood lights. I'd actually see the flight deck when coming aboard.

Above the clouds the sky was illuminated by the stars, the ride was smooth and life was good. I completed my calibration flight out to a hundred miles or so and back, then found Andy a few miles from the ship. My fuel gauge still showed a comfortable number, and I began making passes by him just goof'n around.

The ship eventually gave us clearances to a low marshal point, and with a lower fuel state, I was put on the bottom of the stack at 5,000 ft. Then, the delays began, with the ship repeatedly pushing back the approach time. By that time, I was "hanging on the turbine blades" to save some of that precious JP-5. They finally cleared me for the approach. The last reported weather at the boat was scattered clouds and five miles visibility, but while tracking inbound on the TACAN radial, I entered the clouds, then heavy rain. I leveled at 1,200' for the Carrier Controlled Approach (CCA).

At three miles or so, I asked the ship when they were going to start me down and an excited voice came up on the radio saying, "What's your altitude?" "Twelve hundred feet" was my reply. The RADAR controller came back with, "This is a Case II recovery, descend immediately to 600." A "high dip" put me quickly down to the correct altitude. Now, I just had to drive in till I could see the ship around two miles out and start down. The windshield wiper was banging back and forth on the narrow windscreen, but I could only hear it. It was nasty black outside.

Just inside two miles, with no ship in sight, I started down anyway, again proving that Nuggets are dumb as dirt. 400' and still nothing. I continued to go lower, and as I saw one mile on the DME, I pressed it even further despite a fleeting concern about the height of the masthead on the "Plane Guard" destroyer. I could almost hear my heart pounding above the rain and the banging wiper. With all the rationale my "tunnel-vision" brain could muster, a go around was not even contemplated.

Approaching 200', I finally saw a hazy white light in front of me...something like a flashlight being held up a block away in a heavy fog. Bill Kish, the VA-46 Paddles, says "I've got you Dave, keep it coming. Turn right. Stop your turn. Little high, keep it coming." Still, I could only see the blurred white light, and the meatball was nonexistent, when Bill calmly said, "Now fly it on down." I didn't know this was squadron code for, "You can't hit the ramp, drop your nose to land."

"Bolter, bolter, bolter," and with a vague outline of the island going by on my right, I was back into the black rain with enough gas for one more try. "Jeez," I thought, "They don't screw around out here in the fleet." The second pass was a carbon copy of the first. I never saw the deck or lens. I just had Bill's calm transmissions. This time as I staggered off the angle deck, with only 1,500# on the fuel gauge – it was time to "bingo" to NAS Oceana, 150 miles away. I immediately reached down and yanked the "Emergency Bomb Release" handle and shucked off two drop tanks and a PMBR (Practice Multiple Bomb Rack). I then heard our Ops-O, Gerry Stark, belatedly say, "OK Dave, jettison the tanks, climb to three five oh and pick up max range cruise."

The climb rate was amazing, as I was so light and free of drag. In no time at all, I was level at 35,000 ft., sipping gas at 1,200 pph. I checked my kneeboard "bingo card" for the profile and correct speeds. In what seemed like a very short time, it was time to start down. The needle on the fuel gauge was painfully low, and even though I was very anxious to get my "Scooter" on the ground, I let it idle down at 185kts, finally doing something right.

I MADE IT, landing with just fumes in the tank and sweat dripping off my nose, but with one hell of a new perspective on my LTJG learning curve. Later in the BOQ, as I attempted to wriggle out of the rubber MK-4 "poopy suit," I marveled at the fact my image was in the mirror on the wall.

Oh, the other two guys? As "old salt" lieutenants, when they heard "fly it on down," they tried to tap the instrument panel with the control stick.



VA-46 CLANSARD
26/DAD
8 MARCH 1968

VA-46 A4B BINGO FUEL CARD (10-67)

DIST	ALT	OPT	DN	TAS	DESC	FUEL AT	FUEL	GEAR
						AT QOPT	S.L.	DOWN
10	SL	.51	340		900F	900F	1000F	
20	SL	.53	345		880F	1000F	1005F	1200F
30	10M	.55	350		130M	1100F	1105F	1400F
40	10M	.55	350		130M	1190F	1210F	1600F
50	15M	.57	360		250M	1280F	1310F	1800F
60	20M	.60	370		350M	1370F	1415F	2000F
70	20M	.60	370		350M	1450F	1515F	2200F
80	25M	.62	375		500M	1520F	1620F	2400F
90	30M	.66	390		650M	1590F	1720F	2600F
100	30M	.66	390		650M	1650F	1820F	2800F
110	30M	.66	390		650M	1710F	1920F	3000F
120	35M	.70	405		800M	1770F	2030F	3200F
130	35M	.70	405		800M	1830F	2130F	3400F
140	35M	.70	405		800M	1890F	2230F	3600F
150	35M	.70	405		800M	1920F	2330F	3800F
160	35M	.70	405		800M	1970F	2440F	4000F
170	35M	.70	405		800M	2020F	2540F	4200F
180	35M	.70	405		800M	2070F	2640F	4400F
190	35M	.70	405		800M	2120F	2740F	4600F
200	35M	.70	405		800M	2170F	2840F	4800F

NOTES:
1. Climb 340 KIAS to .74, then slow to OPT DN.
2. Fuel figures include fuel for climb, cruise & idle descent with 800# reserve for landing.
3. Descent at 185 KIAS.
4. Gear down bingo assumes 200 KIAS at 5,000' and 20 pounds per mile.
5. Above figures based on A4B configured with 2-300 gallon drop tanks & center - line rack

TRIVIA ANYONE?

from Dave Dollarhids

Answer to What is this?

Next Question: What is the gouge for checking the



amount of piston showing on the main gear oleo strut??



Send your answers to: sa-journal-editor@darw.it

No one provided an answer to the trivia question in the Spring 2016 Journal. The three canisters contain Gladeye payloads, left to right, Lazy Dogs, leaflets and napalm canisters. The Gladeye Bomb Dispenser Mk 4 Mod 0 and Bomb Dispenser Canister Mk 2 Mod 0 was developed by China Lake in the early 60s to meet the requirement for an all-purpose dispenser of stockpiled ordnance. The weapon had the capability of dispensing a variety of Army and Navy-developed bomblet systems.



NEW MEMBERS

Join or renew, and give someone a one-year gift membership for \$20 more. Contact Terry Cooney at skyhawkasn@gmail.com or at 2421 Clubside Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45431

Donohoe, Thomas – Paradise Valley, AZ
Everill, Peter – McKinney, TX
Gatewood, Ronald – Warrenton, VA

Genat, Robert – Encinitas, CA
Guaty, Juan – Miami, FL
Holland, John – Louisville, CO
Peck, Scott – Tucson, AZ

Richards, Mark – Hanford, CA
Starch, J. – Denton, TX
Taylor, Samuel – Atlantic, NC

SCHEDULING

Reunions & Requests



PLAN AHEAD

- **Skyhawk Association 2016 Annual Meeting and Luncheon at Tailhook:** 12:00 noon, September 09, 2016, Nugget Hotel (www.a4skyhawk.org for details)
- **Tailhook Association Reunion & Marine Aviation Summit 2016,** Nugget Hotel, Sparks, NV, September 08-10, 2016.
- **VMA-121** (A-4 and prior heritage), November 17-19, 2016, Quechon Casino and Resort, Winterhaven, CA. A combined Marine Corps Birthday Ball, with the current F-35 squadron, is planned for November 19, 2016. POC is Dale Creek, 805-961-8170 (h) or 805-451-0228 (c); drcreek48@yahoo.com.

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



Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

From The Hook magazine, Spring 1994

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

The Shrill of the Bagpipes, The Roll of the Drums

In small moments, the War always came back to him. He never remembered his minor triumphs, but frabb-ups were always sneaking up out of his subconscious, tapping him on the shoulder to say, "Remember me?" The ghosts of his flying career also occasionally emerged from their smoking holes in the ground and their fireballs in the sky to visit, though over the years they had largely merged with the spirits that haunted the skies over Schweinfurt, stilled the air over Gettysburg and sounded distant trumpets over the lonely white markers on the hills above the Little Big Horn.

But mostly, the daydreams came to Puresome in disassociated moments while going for a trot in the neighborhood or droning along at 41,000 feet following the magenta line from New York to San Francisco. The bagpipes would begin to keen and the drums would mark the relentless advance to the target. And Puresome would be gone.



Suddenly back in time, Puresome was stooging around a USAF HU-16 *Albatross* as it droned low over the ResCAP station in the Gulf of Tonkin. Far above, Puresome and his wingie on the other side of the circle from him were at max conserve power settings, waiting to cover the amphibian if someone got shot up and had to punch out over the water to land in the middle of a bunch of gomer bounty hunters. Or much more probably and seriously, the jets would be ready to go feet dry and shoot up the bad guys trying to hustle the duty downed F-105 Thud pilot or one of his pals off to the Hanoi Hilton before a helo showed up.

But today was quiet so far. Puresome had his mask in his lap. The sun streamed in through his canopy as he made lazy, low-speed wingovers. He watched the gray HU-16 over the drop tank and *Zuni* rocket pack sticking out from under the port wing of his A-4, the red paint under the leading edge slat starting to show as it crept out during the slow parts of the gyrations. The *Albatross* crew below was probably eating box lunches instead of properly admiring his flying, he figured. This was the attackpuke version of the fighter guys orbiting at their CAP stations, waiting for MiGs that never came. Puresome looked at the waves, the puffy white cumulus clouds and the perfect blue sky. He was amazed that despite all the bang-bang, shoot-shoot going on just down the way, the earth was abiding well and the sun still rose and set with indifferent regularity.

Big Look, the aircraft that kept radar watch of the skies over North Vietnam, came up on guard with the MiG caution and location code words of the day. Puresome snuck out the ONC chart that was folded up in the lower left pocket of his g-suit and noted that the MiGs were up from both Kep and Phuc Yen. The calls kept coming—the changing codes showed that the gomers were flying around like it was their country or something, and business looked like it was going to pick up for some lucky fighter pilot. Puresome didn't go to high PRF, but when *Red Crown*, the ship that watched over gomer airspace from its station in the northern Tonkin Gulf, started making calls and the babble on guard increased, it was obvious that things were heating up. Puresome put on his mask and checked his fuel state.

When the call came that vectored them toward an A-4 pilot who had been unlucky enough to get shot up but lucky enough to make it to the water before he had to punch out, Puresome got real serious. He kicked his Scooter to 350 knots, selected wing stations one and five for his four-shot *Zuni* packs and rotated his weapons selector to "rockets." He next turned his gunsight rheostat to bright and double-checked his mil setting for *Zuni* delivery. All that was left was to turn on the master armament switch to make the trigger on his stick grip ready to fire.

The clouds grew thicker and lower as the HU-16 motored along as fast as its fat props would flail. Puresome was having to work hard to

keep clear of the clouds while keeping his wingie and the *Albatross* in sight. Fortunately, the Scooter was quick and nimble when lightly loaded and its external tanks were dry. Puresome didn't carry the usual cargo of bombs today, only the two four-shot *Zuni* packs hanging under his wings and 150 rounds of 20mm ammunition.

As Puresome and his wingman approached the small bay where the downed pilot bobbed in his raft, the radios went completely crazy with terse conversation from the ResCAP flight. Mixed with those were calls from the downed pilot's wingie who was trying to direct those who were shooting at gomers heading toward the downed pilot. Guard channel was constantly breaking in with various codes, SAM and MiG alerts as well as fragments of tight-throated broadcasts from others in the area getting their asses shot off, screaming for tankers or hollering for help. The unnatural pitch and urgency of the transmissions alone were enough to raise the hair on Puresome's neck. It was understandable that the last part of a transmission from *Big Look* got stepped on.

"Garble, *Shotgun*, red... garble." The MiG code word for the day and the signal for probable attack was all Puresome heard. The rest of the transmission, the location code, was lost. Puresome was too busy to check his chart, but he knew the activity was close.

Suddenly there were fireballs streaking toward the HU-16 from a darkgreen MiG that had popped out of nowhere and was closing at the speed of heat. "*Lifeguard*, break left! Break left! You've got a MiG up your ass!" Puresome screamed as he rammed the throttle to 100 percent and stuffed his nose over toward the *Albatross*, which cranked on a good turn. At its low speed and lower altitude, the amphibian's maneuver caused the fastmoving gomer to lose his firing solution and overshoot his target.

Puresome had just stuffed his nose down when he spotted a MiG closing on him rapidly, its front end lit up as it fired at him. Fireballs floated through the space where he'd just been. "*Ralph* lead, break left, break left! You've got a MiG on your ass and he's gunning!" hollered Puresome's wingman.

"No shitski!" thought Puresome as the rapidly closing MiG's nose pulled lead inside his turn and started hosing again. Puresome yanked on max g's and pulled his nose up to disappear into the clouds. He didn't have time to think. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day." Too busy for anything but surviving, he was by now nose high in the clouds and went on his Abba-Jabba all-attitude indicator to keep the nose coming up, over, around and down in a barrel roll. As the A-4 rapidly picked up speed as it came down through the clouds, Puresome knew the MiG would either be gone or, with luck, out in front of him somewhere.

When he broke out of the clouds, he was nose low and

going like stink. And there below him was the first MiG, re-engaged and trying to set up another pass at the squirming HU-16. Puresome had lots of smash and had flown into the clear almost on top of the MiG. He pulled lead and fired a pair of *Zunis*, which roared out in their impressive manner but were way short. Puresome kept pulling and fired again. And twice again. The fourth pair of *Zunis* either hit the low-flying MiG or he flew through the considerable waterspouts thrown up by the five-inch, supersonic missiles to crash in a tremendous splash of spray.

Ralph Two, his wingman, was hollering on guard for fighters. Puresome was about to ask his posit when he spotted an A-4 under the clouds opposite him and, low and fast, pulled across the circle to join.

Behind his wingie was MiG lead, now closing from deep six o'clock. Puresome reached down and pulled his emergency jettison T-handle to blow off his drop tanks and the empty *Zuni* pods. At the same time, he flipped on his gun-charging switch and felt the breech blocks slam home. His hand continued up to the gunsight to dial in 60 mils, the duty starting point for lead.

"*Ralph Two* from lead, you've got a MiG at your six, but I'm closing on him. I want you to drag him for a minute — I'll call your break." "I don't have him. Ah... OK, tally at seven o'clock low."

The MiG was padlocked on his target and Puresome smoked on in, sliding slightly behind and underneath the two aircraft. With no fancy deflection shooting in mind, Puresome waited until the MiG's tailpipe filled his windscreen before he fired. The combination of tracer, high explosive and ball ammunition allowed him to hose a sparkling stream into the unsuspecting MiG; the short range allowed enough BBs to hit the gomer aircraft hard enough for parts to fly off. It exploded and plunged into the ocean in a bright orange wipe, followed by a dirty cloud of black smoke.

For purposes of the daydream, Puresome captured the fight on eight millimeter film, shot with the camera rigged with the remote release to film through the gunsight. Sometimes the *Albatross* crew caught it on film, too. Puresome was an attack pilot who wanted a MiG in the worst way, who always jumped everything he could as often as he could for the absolute, fierce joy of kicking someone's butt. Fortified with the armor plate of youth and extreme ignorance, there was never any other possibility.

The other daydream was a variation of an attack on Nam Dinh POL tanks. Since "I'm hit, but I'm rolling in anyway" was already taken, Puresome's variation was "shut up and let me bomb."

But reality was a sump of caution, misdirection, waste, abuse and a black wall below ground in Washington, D.C., with lots of names on it. The daydreams were different—a constant loop, a chapter that would not close. So Puresome chose, like his co-religionist Walter Mitty, to refuse the blindfold, place his heels together and flick his cigarette away into the fog, defiant and unafraid to the end.

It was better that way.





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