

THE A4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 22-3



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*Winter Board Meeting
March 9-12, 2017
Jacksonville, FL*

Fall 2016

www.a4skyhawk.org



THE PREZ SEZ

By Pete Cole

Change of Command

The change of the Skyhawk Association presidency took place at this year's annual meeting at Hook '16 when I took over from Bill "Jigger" Egen. Little did we know while defending the skies over Beeville in the summer of 1969 in the Grumman "Iron Works" F-9, while Jigger was teaching **this** student Naval Aviator the finer points of Naval Aviation, that we would be passing the stick once again 47 years later. "You Got It...I Got It!"

I would like to recognize Jigger for his outstanding leadership of the association during the last two years: a steady hand at the helm! For his effort and leadership, the Board of Directors presented him a R. G. Smith print entitled *Marine Tradition*, celebrating Marine Aviation, as a remembrance for his outstanding tenure.

The Skyhawk Association began with an idea and a clipboard at Tailhook in 1993 in San Diego. Officially chartered in September 1995, it has been going strong ever since. Today we have over 800 members in 17 countries. Jigger has kept the tradition alive and well over the past two years...steady as she goes!

BZ, Jigger!



Incoming president Pete Cole presents R.G. Smith print to outgoing president, Bill Egen. All images via the author.

Annual Board Meeting and Luncheon September 2016



The Prez Pete Cole

The Association holds the required annual members' meeting/luncheon and board meeting at Tailhook every year. The board meeting went well with no significant issues raised. The following slate of Officers was elected for the coming year: President – Pete Cole; VP (Navy) - George Blosser (1yr.); VP (Marine) – Steve Linder; Treasurer – Mark Williams; and Secretary – Terry Cooney. In addition, directors Bill Egen, Ted Langworthy, Bill Ravgiala, Joe Turpen, and Mike Eberhardt were recommended by the board for re-election and were subsequently elected by the general membership for another three-year term at the annual luncheon meeting.

Our finances, thanks to Treasurer for Life Mark "Senator" Williams, are in good shape, and the bottom line increases every year – a very good thing! Recruiting and retention remain high on our list of goals. We are holding our own on membership, but we're always looking for recruiting opportunities.

Our annual meeting/luncheon offers a great opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers. This year we had the wonderful chance to hear Dave "Hide" Dollarhide tell us what it was like to be a "Scooter Pilot..."

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Skyhawk Association current and former directors. L-R, standing: Mark Williams, Terry Cooney, Ed Jobin, Pete Cole, Terry Wolf, Bill Ravgiala, Bill Egen, John Gabbard, Bud Southworth, Joe Turpen and Todd Frommelt. L-R, kneeling: Steve Linder, Dave Dollarhide, Gene Atwell, and Ted Langworthy. Not shown, George Blosser and Mike Eberhardt.



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Fall 2016 •

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JOURNAL STAFF

THE A4 EVER

Bob "Raven" Hickerson – Chairman/Co-Editor.

Dave Dollarhide – Co-Editor.

Gene "Blade" Atwell – Webmaster.

Feature Contributors: George Blosser, 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@a4skyhawk.net 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: This scanned historic photo was taken by Gene Corsini, during a 1967 Vietnam combat cruise while assigned to VA-153, aboard the USS *Coral Sea*. Flying their A-4Es, Gene was on the wing of his Skipper, CDR Tom Woolcock, while enroute to be overhead their assigned North Vietnam target at the precise end of a cease fire.

Again!” Dave shared with us some of his experiences flying the A-4 on the air show circuit, some 40 years after his Navy tour! It was an enjoyable experience for all the 70 well-seasoned A-4 drivers and friends in the audience.

Dave first checked out in the A-4 in the summer of 1966, and his last Navy flight was in 1973. He started flying the Scooter again in 2012 at age 70. During his presentation, he showed the movie, “Flying the Scooter 39 Years Later.” He has also posted a movie called “Hide’s Last Ride” on his YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/yFNZW6PKYi8>. It summarizes Dave’s last flights in the A-4 in the TiCo Warbird Air Show last March at the Titusville Space Coast Regional Airport.

Attack Ready Room at Hook ‘16

While all the official business was happening, Youthly Puresome (aka, Jack Woodul) ran the Attack Ready Room like a tight ship. The usual gaggle of A-4, A-7 and A-6 old-folks visited, plus anybody else that happened by. Our audio-visual guru Mark “Senator” Williams again provided non-stop entertainment with his DVD shows of everything attack aviation. TINS Tales were once again regaled over the occasional adult beverage. The stories get even better every year, as does our flying!

Once again, YP was successful in getting TOP ACES (Discovery Air) and Draken International to support the Attack Ready Room. TOP ACES, led by Lonny “Eagle” McClung, gave a healthy donation to the Ready Room kitty (big smile) and attended the luncheon as well. Draken again hosted drinks and pupu’s after the Hook Bug Roach Happy Hour on Friday night, and the Attack Ready Room was again crowded with A-4, A-7 and A-6 old fokkers.

Our thanks go out to the Tailhook Association for their investment in time and effort which allows the reunion groups to enjoy a great venue every year at Tailhook.

SDOs, Membership, and Association Business

We are constantly looking for volunteers. Our Squadron Duty Officers (SDOs) are a key factor in keeping us connected and helping to get the word out when required. Recently Jerry Greer, already SDO for VA-64, VSF-76, and FAGU, stepped up and volunteered for two additional billets, VA-22 and VA-72. Also, Ed Copher our VA-163 SDO has agreed to also be the SDO for VA-125. Way to go Jerry and Ed!

The official list of squadron SDOs is posted on the Skyhawk website (FAQ → Research → Contact page), and while the majority of these slots are filled, there are some units that need an SDO. Several of our SDOs have agreed to host more than one unit. Please review the list on the website and see if there are any open units that you would consider adding to your SDO responsibility. For Navy units please contact George Blosser, VP (Navy), and for Marine and foreign service units contact Steve Linder, VP (Marines).

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 that transition. However, thanks to webmaster Gene Atwell and his assistant Dave Weber, the transition has been a positive experience overall. According to Gene, the current website research database records contents are:

- A-4 Bureau Number History (45999)
- Casualty Entry (1199)
- Complete Skyhawk Losses (3091)
- Crewmember Deaths (34)
- Journal PDF (72)
- Modeling Photo (30)
- NATOPS Manual (8)
- Newspaper Display (514)
- Non-Aircraft JPG File (561)
- Skyhawk Photo (12175)
- Vietnam Skyhawk Losses (144)

There have been no significant changes on the membership front. As stated, we are holding at 800+ members. We continue to promote new and continued membership by word of mouth, solicitations at major aviation events attended by Board members, as well as local functions of Navy and Marine Skyhawkers.

You can help. We’re getting older and the pool of potential members isn’t getting larger...PLEASE, milk your email lists for nonmembers and send them a solicitation. We CAN find some more of our squadron mates out there that just need a prod to join! It’s your Association, so let’s keep it vibrant, alive and well.

A reminder: our database is constantly changing, and it is not unusual to have a few kickbacks when we attempt to notify the membership by email about pertinent items, such as the release of the annual digital journal. The message is:

PLEASE let us know if you have a change in your email, physical address, phone number, squadrons assigned, etc., so we can keep our records up-to-date. Send changes to our Secretary at skyhawkasn@gmail.com.

A-4s Still Flying

Todd “Hun” Frommelt continues to crunch the numbers and track who is flying Skyhawks these days. With the stand-down of the Israeli A-4s in December 2015, at the beginning of 2016 Hun reported there were 35 single-seaters flying (11 military, 2 private and 22 contractor birds) and 12 two-seaters (3 military, 3 private and 6 contractor birds).

That report remains good, except for 2 A-4 losses since July. We’re now down to 45 flyers and don’t expect much recovery. There is some talk about buys from the Israeli retirement pool, but Hun expects that for expansion, most outfits will hold out for newer airframes (F-16s). Our two A-4 losses were a Brazilian Navy AF-1 (reworked Kuwaiti A-4KU) midair during their Olympics security preparation and an August Draken TA-4K (New Zealand) engine failure mishap during his return from a Red Flag support mission at Nellis AFB. There were no pilot fatalities in either mishap.

Memorials and Restorations

Two long standing, continuing Scooter T-A4J restoration sagas have finally come to a successful conclusion: the Brasher Falls, NY, A-4 Skyhawk monument and the Navy Operating Support Center (NOSC) Tucson, AZ, Skyhawk display (See Duffer article this issue).

On 9 July 2016, a four-year effort to establish a veterans’ memorial in Brasher Falls concluded with the dedication of the TA-4J 153505 exhibit at the Veterans’ Memorial Park on the banks of the St. Regis River. This was the culmination of the work of the “Bring the A-4 Home” committee of the town of Brasher Falls. A monument placed at the base of the A-4 exhibit reads, “In memory and honor of all who have served.”



Brasher Falls, NY, A-4 Skyhawk monument. Photo via Pete Cole.

We Still Need Your Help

As you know, Bill Egen has been posting a list of accidents/incidents in the last few journals, and using the journal to circulate requests for missing data on accidents is proving beneficial. One of our volunteer researchers, Gary Verver [gp@verx2.org], is the keeper of the “List of Unknowns,” i.e., the Who, What, When, and Why of accidents which are not always completely documented. So, we continue to fill the gaps.

Here are some unknown USN losses from 1959-1960 that Gary is focusing on:

- VF-21 Oceana A4D-1 139968 12-Jun-59
- VA-153 Moffett A4D-2 142884 21-Jun-59
- VA-55 Miramar A4D-2 142951 10-Sep-59
- VA-34 USS Saratoga A4D-2 142731 16-Jun-60 (not deployed on the Saratoga on this date, deck log not on-line)
- VA-76 USS Intrepid A4D-2 142755 27-Jun-60 (nothing in the deck log for 27 June.)
- VA-36 Cecil Field A4D-2 142681 29-Jun-60
- VA-76 USS Intrepid A4D-2 145005 30-Jun-60 (nothing in the deck log for either 30 Jan. 1960 or 30 Jun. 1960)

If you have any information regarding these losses, please contact Gary or the research team sa-a4-research@darw.it. We need your help!

Events, NOTAMS, and R&I

The next edition of *The A-4ever* (Winter 2017) will be digital. Access will be through the website, as were previous digital editions. Check for the announcement on the website.

VMA-121, A-4 and prior heritage, will hold a reunion 17-19 November 2016 at the Quechon Casino and Resort, Winterhaven, CA. There will be a combined Marine Corps Ball on 19 November with F-35 squadron VMFA-121. POC is Dale Creek, 805-961-8170 or cell 805-451-0228, drcreek48@yahoo.com.

Skyhawk Association Winter Board Meeting is set for 9-12 March 2017 in the Jacksonville, FL, area at the World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort. POC is Director Dave Dollarhide, davedollarhide@msn.com. Contact Dave for the link to hotel reservations at the Skyhawk Association rate. In addition to the board meeting, side trips and a Light Attack reunion with A-4/A-7 bubbas are being planned. More details will be in the POD on the web page. Join us!

VA-163 and VA-164 have scheduled a Saints/Ghost Rider reunion at the Nugget Casino in Sparks, NV, for 3-5 May 2017. POC for VA-163 is Richard (Ode) Odegaard, 775-626-0898, richard.odegaard@gmail.com. The POC for VA-164 is Jim Waldron, 410-409-1987. Further information can be obtained from Ed Copher, ecopher@satx.rr.com, VA-163 SDO.

Skyhawk Association trip to Israel 2017: the *second* trip-of-a-lifetime is in the initial planning stages. As in 2015, we will attend the Flight Academy Pilot Graduation ceremony and air show at Hatzerim Air Base near Beersheba, which is scheduled on 29 June 2017. The POC is Director Terry Wolf, tairwolf@comcast.net. If you did not see his outstanding article on our 2015 visit to Israel, “A Week with Israel’s Last Skyhawk Pilots,” in last Fall’s edition of *The A-4Ever*, Vol. 21-3, p.11, please check it out. The basic tour package will extend from Saturday evening 24 June to departure on Sunday 2 July. We are planning to have at least one evening get-together with our friends and retired counterparts from the Israel Air Force.

A-4s Forever! 

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net

(Ed. note: Skyhawk Association director Dave Dollarhide was recently trying to run down a sea story about A-4 deck run takeoffs. Here's what he found out.)

■ To Dale Lewey,
Recently, I learned that you have a story to tell about A-4 deck-run take offs. I'm an assistant editor with the A-4 Skyhawk Association and would love to publish in our magazine whatever you have to tell us about this event. The deck run event must certainly be a one of a kind.

Dave Dollarhide

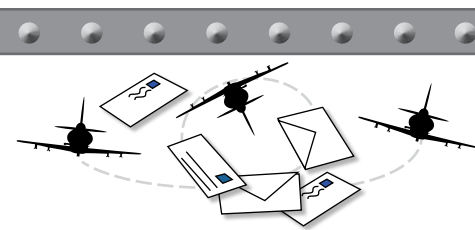
■ Dave Lewey replied:
I'm afraid the Deck Run story was a great sea story that went around and was absolutely true up to the point of launch. We were requalifying for the '59 cruise on Sara (USS *Saratoga*); but Sara was in restricted availability, so we were on *Forestal* in Dec 59. An ALNAV came out concerning A-4 holdback fittings (two had broken prematurely and two A-4s were lost on the West Coast), so no A-4 cat shots were allowed until the holdback fitting issue was resolved. Our Ops O was a Pax River guy, and he figured out it was no sweat for a full deck run takeoff since it was cold as hell with plenty of WOD (*wind over the deck*), main bag fuel (1200#) and 30 miles to Mayport. These were A4D-1s, with very great thrust to weight. There was no NATOPS! He showed the numbers to the Air Boss and Captain. It was a GO until next morning. I guess the Captain slept on it, then nixed it. But the Sea Story survived and grew!

Dale
.....
■ To the Editor
Excellent web site. Here is a correction to your listing of fatal accidents:
"Lt. James G. Cowart, A4D-2 crash in December 1957."
Jim actually survived the accident with only minor injuries.
I was a pilot in his squadron and saw the accident. It was a VMA-211 A4D-2. Jim aborted takeoff when he was Num-

ber 2 in a section takeoff from Edenton MCAAF, North Carolina. He went off the end of the runway at about 100 knots, went into the trees and exploded in a ball of fire. When the fire truck got there the plane was still burning and was pretty much melted down.
They found Jim hiding behind a pine tree, peering at the fire, and in shock. He had amnesia and could not remember how he got out of the aircraft. Jim said the reason he aborted was that the lead pilot, Captain Warfield, had become airborne and was climbing while Jim was still runway bound. So he thought he had something wrong with the J-65 engine and made a last minute decision to abort the takeoff.
The accident investigation indicated that the aircraft had a low nose wheel oleo, causing a low angle of attack while on the ground. That, in combination with too much nose down trim, kept him glued to the deck longer than usual.

Best regards,
Larry Holdridge, former Capt., USMC
[larryholdridge@gmail.com]

.....
■ To some old squadron mates and pilot friends.
On Apr 2 I had a real aviation treat – a back seat flight in a meticulously restored TA-4F Skyhawk. It's owned by a retired Northwest captain, Don Keating, and hangared at Boeing Field. This plane was created from three different A-4s. Interestingly, the wings and tail sections were from an A-4C (Buno 149540) which was assigned to my first squadron (VA-22) and which I flew a number of times in 1964. Equipped with a more powerful J-52 P8-B engine (than a stock TA-4) it is a very good performer. The ejection seats are not operational, but the plane is so well maintained, I'm not concerned about going aloft on 50+ year-old wings and tail feathers w/o a bang seat.
After the flight, Don gave me a brand new A-4 tail hook as a memento. He had acquired a few and doesn't use 'em much. ;-)
Pics below.



Turns out the TA-4 adventure is not over. Don invited me to fly with him again in the Boeing Centennial celebration this month and again during the Seafair air shows in August. Can hardly believe I'll again be in an A-4 over Lake Washington during Seafair...37 years later.

Some nice pics of this plane and the restoration at this web site:
<http://fightingclassics.com/ta-4-n518ta>



Bill Newman
[Bilsunewman@aol.com]

(Ed. note: Skyhawk Association director Dave Dollarhide forwards this request from a veteran he met while flying his RV in the Idaho back-country).

.....
■ To the Editor
I'm with my RV buds flying in the Idaho mountains. We left our tents and the backcountry today for a steak and one night in a soft bed at the West Fork Lodge, MT. Over a beer this afternoon, I was talking to Phillip Marks, a local, who expressed a lifetime desire to meet any of

★TAPS★

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



CDR Charles E. Laskey, USN (Ret.) • Burke, VA
CAPT John R. Dewenter, USN (Ret.) • Midlothian, VA
LCDR Joseph A. Keiler, USN (Ret.) • Lady Lake, FL
RADM William H. Harris, USN (Ret.) • San Diego, CA

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

MEMBER'S MOVIES

Skyhawk Association YouTube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/user/A4SkyhawkAssociation>

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



LETTERS continued...

the pilots who saved the lives of him and his men during the Vietnam War.

It was Feb. 13 or 14, 1966, when Phil's Army unit was on a special ops mission in Cambodia near an area called "Fishhook." They were about to be overrun with disastrous consequences, and when there seemed to be no hope, a flight of Navy A-4s showed up overhead. Phil, call sign "Striker Six," called for them to bomb their position in desperation. They ran through the exploding bombs and managed to escape with only minor shrapnel injuries to a few.

Phil's desire is to contact the pilots, or have any information about those who saved their lives. If you have any knowledge of this event, please let me know.

Hide
[davedollarhide@msn.com]

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

NEW MEMBERS

Barter, Robert • Lafayette, CA
Chesterman, Alan • Santa Rosa, CA
Harper, Jules • Boynton Beach, FL
Moffat, David • Bideford, Devon
Newman, Willaim • Kirkland, WA
Schoewe, William • Montrose, CO
Segars, Roy • Galveston, TX
Smythe, Murray • Leguna, NSW

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





1 A-4N 411 of 102 Squadron, at Tel Nof in May 2000 loaded with dummy bombs and underwing fuel tanks. *Riccardo Niccoli* 2 Two TA-4J AhitMs lining up on the runway at Hatzetim, for a training mission, in May 2012. *Riccardo Niccoli* 3 The distinctive 'flying tiger' tail art of 102 Squadron's aircraft was introduced in 1997. This unit was the last to operate the Skyhawk in Israeli service. *Nir Ben-Yosef* 4 A close-up on the front fuselage of TA-4J 730, taxiing at Hatzetim. Right of the Israeli markings is the word Meshopar, which means Improved, signifying that this was one of the aircraft that received the AhitM upgrade in the 2000s. *Riccardo Niccoli*



2 3

This article originally appeared in AIR International, the February 2016 issue. Used with permission of the author and Mark Ayton, Editor. See <http://www.airinternational.com/> for information on subscribing or ordering back issues.

Riccardo Niccoli recounts the service career of the Israeli Air and Space Force's recently retired A-4 Ahit Skyhawks



ISRAELI A-4 AHIT MILITARY

Last Flight of the Eagle

In December 2015, the Israeli Air and Space Force celebrated the retirement of the last of its legendary A-4 Skyhawk fighter aircraft, locally called Ahit (Eagle). The Ahit's service spanned nearly 50 years, and saw the participation in some of the most important combat operations in the history of Israel, including the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In addition, generations of Israeli combat pilots earned their wings and learned to fight on this aircraft, as it was used for the advanced training until its very end.

Replacing French Aircraft

The origins of this programme date back to the mid-1960s, when the then Israeli Defence Force/Air Force (IDF/AF) started to look for a new light fighter-bomber jet to replace the old French aircraft in service, the Ouragan, Mystère IV and Super Mystère. After a complex process, in June 1966 the US and

Israeli administrations signed a \$70 million contract for the acquisition of 48 Douglas A-4F Skyhawks. However, the version for Israel had to be slightly downgraded and the final product, the A-4H, lacked some capabilities, such as loft bombing, a radar warning receiver and some weapons. In December 1966, the first Israeli personnel began training in the United States, an activity that was interrupted by the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967.

Two squadrons were destined to equip with the new aircraft, the first being 109 Squadron at Ramat David, plus a new unit, 102 Squadron, to be activated at Hatzetim. The first A-4H (US Navy BuNo 155242, Israeli serial 5301) took off from Palmdale on October 27, 1967, while the first shipment to Israel of four aircraft reached the port at Haifa on December 29. With the wider geopolitical backdrop, the new aircraft were welcomed by the Israelis and were used for

the first time in combat as early as February 15, 1968, in a bombing mission against Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) terrorist camps in Jordan.

Deliveries of aircraft in the first contract were completed by late 1968, but the Israeli Government had already concluded a second contract, for another 42 aircraft plus ten two-seaters TA-4H. A third unit, 115 Squadron at Tel Nof, started to receive the Ahit in early 1969. During the War of Attrition, between March 1969 and August 1970, the Ahits were heavily involved in various types of missions, such as close air support (CAS), interdiction and suppression of enemy air defences. In total, they flew some 6,000 sorties, with the loss of only three aircraft. Another batch of Skyhawks, formed by 60 A-4Es picked up from US Navy surplus, were delivered to the IDF/AF from 1971 to re-equip two more squadrons, 116 at Tel Nof, and 110 at Ramat David.

Skyhawk II

The A-4Es were a stopgap as the IDF/AF awaited deliveries of the aircraft specifically designed for Israeli needs: the A-4N Skyhawk II. This type, derived from the A-4M, was ordered in 1971, and featured a more powerful engine, a Crystal avionics set, an Elliot heads-up display (EHUD) and 30mm DEFA guns. The order comprised 110 aircraft, and the first of these flew on June 8, 1972. The first two units to receive the A-4N were 115 and 116 Squadrons, starting in January 1973. In the meantime, the new Crystal avionics suite, the 30mm guns, and the engine were retrofitted to all the A-4Hs and Es. In 1972, the Flying School Advanced Training Squadron (FSATS) at Hatzetim started to receive the Ahit, while 140 Squadron 'Golden Eagle' was activated at Etzion Air Base in 1973, becoming the first Operational Training Unit (OTU) for the type.



MILITARY ISRAELI A-4 AHIT

Yom Kippur War

In October 1973, the IDF was involved in a major conflict that threatened the very existence of Israel: the Yom Kippur War, when Egypt and Syria launched a double attack on Israel on Saturday October 6, the day of the Jewish Day of Atonement holiday. After initial difficulties, the IDF was able to recover from a very critical position, and the IDF/AF counterattacked the enemy, thanks to improved tactics.

However, the toll was high: between October 6 and 22, the Skyhawk force lost 53 aircraft, more than half of the total aircraft lost by the IDF/AF. During this war, the US Government launched an emergency Military Aid Program to help Israel, which included 46 A-4E/A-4Fs from the US Navy and US Marine Corps inventories. Seven A-4Ns lost in combat were replaced by increasing the production order to 117 aircraft. After the conflict, some modifications were introduced to the Ahit fleet, the most important being the elongated tailpipe to improve survivability against infrared-guided missiles, such as the SA-7 *Grail* man-portable system.

Further Combat Operations

Deliveries of the new A-4N to 109, 140 and 149 Squadrons continued after the war. So,

too, did combat operations, mainly against PLO terrorist targets in Lebanon. This activity escalated until the launch of Operation Litani, on March 15, 1978, when Israeli troops entered Southern Lebanon. During this campaign, the Skyhawk force flew CAS and target illumination missions. In August 1978, a new A-4 unit was activated: 147 Squadron 'Flying Ibex' at Hatzetim, equipped with a mix of A-4E, F and N-models.

Anti-terrorism operations in Lebanon led the IDF/AF to request the introduction of precision-guided munitions, and this led to the acquisition of laser-guided bombs. The first A-4 unit to gain this capability was 116 Squadron 'The Flying Wing', in 1980, with US-made Paveway and IAI-made Griffin kits, both fitted to the standard Mk80 series bombs.

In the same period, the Skyhawk force started to be reduced. In 1980, 110 Squadron 'Knights of the North' converted to the F-16A, while 149 Squadron 'Shattering Parrot' traded its A-4s for Kfir. Further changes came with the peace treaty signed with Egypt in March 1979. The return of Sinai to Egypt meant the airbases at Eitham, Etzion and Refidim had to be abandoned. As compensation, the United States financed

the construction of two new airbases in the Negev desert, Ovda and Ramon, while a third, Nevatim, was built by Israel. In November 1981, the Golden Eagle squadron moved to Ramon, and in 1983-1984 the Flying Dragon and the Flying Wing squadrons relocated to Nevatim.

In 1982, a new war broke out, following the PLO's attempt to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London. Air operations over Lebanon started on June 4, 1982, followed two days later by the ground offensive, Operation Peace for Galilee. The A-4s undertook CAS missions, but also flew leaflet drop and smokescreening missions. The war officially ended on June 12, 1982, but operations in Lebanon continued until the final retirement of the Israeli forces from Lebanon in 2000.

In 1984, 115 Squadron relocated to Nevatim. Then in November 1985, the OTU role was passed from 140 Squadron 'Golden Eagle' to 116 Squadron 'Flying Wing', as

the former converted from the A-4 to the F-16A. In 1986, the Flying Ibex squadron, reduced since 1981 to a reserve unit, was disbanded. In 1990, the FSATS and 102 Squadron 'Flying Tiger' merged into a single unit comprising one operational section and one training section. Budget cuts led to the July 21, 1994 disbandment of 115 Squadron, but in the same year 102 Squadron was reactivated to provide advanced training for future fighter pilots and navigators, and operational readiness.

In 1995, the IDF/AF launched an experimental OTU course with the F-16A/B. Positive results led to the decision to split the OTU course in two: one in the Skyhawks for pilots destined for older types, and one in the F-16A for the future F-16 pilots. This new pipelines started in 1999. Four years later, when 116 Squadron converted to the F-16A, the Skyhawk Advanced OTU passed to 102 Squadron. Operations of the remaining Skyhawk squadrons continued.

Upgrade Programme

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was clear the A-4 would have to fly for many more years because of its training mission, so an upgrade programme was necessary. The first steps in the modernisation were an ACMI-type data recorder introduced for training purposes in 1999, followed in 2002 by the integration of the RADA Electronic Industries ACE-II (Autonomous Combat Evaluation) system to replace the EHUD pod. On January 21, 2003 a \$2 million contract for an Ahit prototype upgrade was announced, followed by a full-scale contract awarded on January 5, 2004. This time the modification, called Ahit Meshopar (AhitM, or Improved Ahit), still provided by RADA but installed by IAI, would replace the obsolete Crystal system. The AhitM introduced a ring laser gyro navigation

system, and a mission and fire control unit. In the cockpit, a Nir-Or colour multifunction display and an improved Vectop HUD were installed. The AhitM prototype (aircraft 342) flew in December 2004, and the modification of the whole fleet (about 50 aircraft, half being two-seaters) was completed in about one year. At the same time, IAI was awarded a ten-year contract covering all the maintenance activity on the fleet, under a power-by-the-hour scheme. At that time, the idea was to keep the A-4 in service until 2015-2020, as an advanced trainer.

Final Years

In July 2006, a second Lebanon War broke out and this too saw the participation of the Skyhawks, even if for the secondary roles of night-time illumination, leaflet drops and electronic support. These tasks were assigned to TA-4s equipped with AN/ALQ-101(V)10 jamming pods.

The advanced training activities of 102 Squadron continued in the following years,

but in 2008-2009 the IDF/AF started the search for a new lead-in fighter trainer to replace both the A-4 and the F-16A in the OTU role. The tender was competed between a US-Korean product, the KAI TA-50, and an Italian product, the Alenia Aermacchi M-346. After many in-depth evaluations, the latter was selected on February 16, 2012. In the same year, the IDF/AF celebrated 45 years of Skyhawk operations. A formal contract for 30 M-346Is was signed on July 19, 2012, and the first (serial 102) was rolled out on March 20, 2014, at Alenia Aermacchi's Venegono plant. Deliveries started on July 10 of the same year, when the first two M-346I (locally designated Lavi, or Lion cub) landed at Hatzetim, destined for 102 Squadron.

In 2015, the Israeli Skyhawks, now reduced to fewer than 30 aircraft, recorded their last year of operations. On May 15, the type was formally retired from operational duty, while 102 Squadron continued to operate them just to complete the last OTU course. The venerable Ahit was finally retired from service at Hatzetim air base on December 13, 2015.



1 A line of 102 Squadron TA-4Js and an A-4N. Generations of Israeli combat pilots earned their wings and learned to fight on this aircraft, as it was used for the advanced training until its very end. Nir Ben-Yosef 2 Israeli A-4s were deployed in combat on numerous times during their service career, ranging from the Yom Kippur War in 1973 to the second Lebanon War in 2006. Nir Ben-Yosef

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“Do You Know You Have a Hole in Your Head?” The Adventure Begins.

By Dennis Carroll

At age 19, I was asked this question by a captain who was interviewing me for acceptance into Naval Aviation. The flight surgeon had earlier informed the captain of this inconvenient fact. When I answered “yes,” adding that the hole would finish closing up in a matter of months, his response was that I should return and re-apply then, bringing x-rays with me to demonstrate that the entire skull was indeed firmly in place. Some 6 years earlier (1959), while I was riding a young mare at a very good speed, she went right and I continued straight on to meet Mother Earth. This led to many weeks in the hospital with three surgeries to look for and eventually find a blood clot. Its removal left four different holes—the largest in the back had a scar 7-inches long—that would all eventually grow together.

A month later, I got my acceptance into the AVROC program and that following summer began my training by Marine drill sergeants in Pensacola.

Why they accepted me will never be known, but I believe that with a war going on, a recruiter needed to fill his quota

for pilots. In flight training they started doing EEG exams. Concerned that an examination of my brain waves would bounce me out, I asked my roommate to use my ID and take the exam for me, which he did successfully.

After finishing college and then flight training, the war had slowed down, and I was stashed in NAS Kingsville. I got a call one day saying that if I could get to NAS Lemoore in a week, they would send me orders to an A-4 squadron on the USS *Hancock*. Forty-eight hours later, I was in the car driving with all my worldly goods on board. Some six months later, having finished training, I arrived in the Gulf of Tonkin where I was dropped on the USS *Hancock* to join the Ghost Riders of VA-164 (radio call sign Magic Stone). The *Hancock* and VA-164 had been going at this war for seven years and are the reason I am here today. No ship or squadron was more capable and better trained than these. Being assigned to an experienced and successful combat unit

is the ultimate requirement for surviving a war. I had always been lucky, and once again this proved true.

VA-164 flew over 4,000 sorties in 1972, countering the Easter invasion of South Vietnam by the Communist North. Our XO (later CO) had logged over 500 combat missions, and I would fly 168. (I went back and counted them in my log book to be sure.) The *Hancock* had been maintaining, arming, launching, and recovering aircraft for three decades, and they knew what they were doing.

Toward the end of our Vietnam (VN) cruise there was one event that will continue to replay in my mind till the day I die. We went up north in an Alpha Strike of some 30-plus aircraft, and since I was now experienced, I was at the end of the formation—the last to roll into my dive bomb run. One useful thing to note: the last guy in a large formation was usually the first to be attacked. Enemy fighters would come from behind the last guy, staying

in a position hidden from his view. So, if the enemy was successful, a burning aircraft would inform the formation that

“Not knowing what is going on when someone is trying to kill you is always disconcerting”

they were under attack. This was the reason that we were really good at keeping our eyes focused out of the cockpit.

For the bomb run, we dove from 10,000 feet at a 45-degree dive angle, accelerating to 450 knots (over 500 mph). With the gunsight pipper tracking to the target to 5,000 feet, we then hit the bomb pickle to release 3,000 pounds of bombs. The AAA was heavy as usual in North Vietnam (NVN), so much so that until we passed through the bursts of shells between 6 to 8 thousand feet, it was hard to pick out the target. Immediately after bomb release, we made a 5 to 6-g pull-up to get out of the dive as quickly as possible, as the earth was approaching very fast (and was ever so unforgiving). Once the nose of the aircraft was above the horizon, we made an immediate jink to the left to spot our hits. (This whole process lasted less than 20-seconds.)

Since I was tail-end Charlie, my most urgent task after pulling-off the target was to rejoin the formation for an exit toward the Gulf of Tonkin. We were flying below a broken cloud layer to maintain visual contact while especially looking for surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). The formation lead was making wide turns to spoil the AAA fire-control solution and also to allow

the formation to close up. So, as they maneuvered port (left) I pulled harder to move inside the formation, flying a shorter distance and closing-up the formation even though we were all at full throttle moving over 500 knots. So far, a good day: no one had taken any hits, no fighters or SAMs had appeared close to the formation, and we were only 20 minutes from safety of the ocean.

Then a “Magic turn right” call came over the radio. I really didn’t want to go right, away from the formation. It took me deeper into NVN where steep karst ridges reached the clouds, limiting my maneuvering room. But most importantly, if I was going to be shot down, having a witness to verify the parachute and call in rescue forces was critical to any hope of escape, or to confirm for my family that I was alive. A NVN prison was NOT an experience I wanted in my life. However, the call would not have been made without an urgent reason. I complied immediately, pulling a hard 4-g turn to starboard (right), followed by a quick leveling of the wings to look for the threat.

Our aircraft carried radar warn-

ing receivers that displayed different types of strobes on a small scope on the lower right instrument panel to allow us to identify threat radars. The equipment also displayed flashing lights when things got really critical, such as when a surface-to-air missile was launched. The same devices also provided audio signals in our helmets, which were extremely valuable, and after a few combat sorties, we could easily identify the types of radar and weapons that were tracking us. With this equipment, we could tell if a missile had been launched; however, this day nothing but some intermittent AAA noises were heard. A quick scan of the display showed the same information. Not knowing what is going on when someone is trying to kill you is always disconcerting.

Turning hard back to rejoin the formation which had separated even more, I heard the same voice order “**Magic Hard Right,**” which I acknowledged with a 4 to 5-g turn. After 120-degrees of turn, I leveled my wings and looked hard for the yet-unseen threat. Still no missile warnings in the headset. If the threat had been a fighter, there would have been much more chatter on the

radio as our fighter escort would be coming in hot for the kill. Turning back to join the formation which was still a few miles



VA-164 Ghost Riders aboard USS *Hancock* circa 1972, posing with Lady Jesse, perhaps the most famous Skyhawk of them all. Author is kneeling fourth from the right. Then-CDR Stan Arthur (CO) is kneeling sixth from the right. Photo via author.



Ghost Rider in the groove. USS *Hancock* in the Tonkin Gulf 1972, with plane-guard destroyer on station. Photo via the author.

“Time was up. There was nothing I could do except meet my fate.”

ahead of me, I was even closer to the karst ridges and clouds. As I was finally starting to gain on the formation, the final call came: “**Magic Break Right.**” That meant a maximum-g turn (which is around 7 g’s). In other words, pull as hard as the plane has airspeed to sustain the additional drag. At 500+ knots there were more than 7 g’s available, and I used them. That is, I used them until my vision narrowed to a very small hole, and I started to pass out. At this point, the g-suit was pressing so hard that it was painful, and my stomach and leg muscles tightened to help keep the blood up in my brain, instead of flowing into the lower body. Once the blood flow could no longer provide sufficient oxygen to the brain, our vision would narrow and we would black-out, thereby releasing the stick. That would cause the g-load to drop, and we would quickly regain consciousness. I turned for nearly 180 degrees, released the g-load, leveled my wings, and then looked out to port to see an SA-2 SAM about 1 second away.

The SA-2 is a 27-foot long, fat telephone pole which flies at about 2,000 mph. This day the booster had detached, but the main rocket motor was still burning. Time was up. There was nothing I could do except meet my fate. However, my brain was moving at the speed of light. I can clearly remember the fusing antennas, the light-green peeling paint, and the control fins moving on the SAM. I had three thoughts enter my head as the SA-2 passed about 6 feet under my cockpit: First, this is really going to hurt! Second, my mom is really going to be angry because she told me to be careful. And third, I had better get ahold

of the ejection handle quickly. Then I felt a very hard thump!

The missile and its 400-pound warhead had passed under me, dragging along a supersonic Mach wave of compressed air that hit like I had just run over a speed bump in a car going 100 mph. But there was no explosion. . . a Soviet worker built a bad fuse that day, and (lucky for me) put it in the one SAM that I never saw until it was too late. However, upon regaining normal body functions, I discovered that my right hand was not wrapped around the lower ejection handle, but was gripping my family jewels. Nothing is perfect in life, and one has to be lucky to survive mistakes.

Eventually, I caught the formation, returned to the *Hancock*, trapped, and gave the maintenance guys a thumbs up, letting them know the plane was ready to be fueled, rearmed, and put back into combat once again. A few hours later, I manned up again, taxied to the catapult, and again enjoyed a good cat shot, going from zero to 200 mph in 2 seconds. What a great ride!

I never had the time to find out who was making those calls. Later, intelligence informed us that the Russian & NVN military had begun to use optics vice radar to provide fire control for the SAM, so maybe that explains the lack of oral warning.

After leaving the *Hancock*, I flew off several much bigger carriers that

had 4 catapults instead of 2, but they never matched the *Hancock*’s skill and speed of getting aircraft launched in the correct order of their formations. That skill came from tens of thousands of launches over the decades, with great leadership, a wonderful ship and great air wing crews.

Today, when people say, “Thanks for your service,” my response from the heart is, “It was my honor!” Your first aircraft and ship are never forgotten. Over the next couple of decades, I lost shipmates. Why them and not me I will never understand. However, I do understand what they and their families gave up: the chance to live, marry, have families, and experience so many adventures that are provided to us in our lives.

P.S. Twenty-five years later, I met and worked with the head of the Russian missile design bureaus. In one of our discussions, I found out that the SA-2 was the first system he helped develop after leaving the university. When he asked how I knew about the SA-2, I told him that several had been shot at me during the Vietnam war. He quite correctly pointed out that he was sorry to hear that, but that we were all just doing what we had to do for our countries. I told him that I agreed, and that it was not a problem, as all of them had missed. At that point—like any good engineer—he expressed his disappointment and shock at such poor performance. I comforted him by saying

we feared the weapon, but learned its capabilities well. Therefore, we knew how to avoid it. I added that I had had good luck with the fusing.

Life has a way of bringing us back to the beginning in surprising ways. ✈️



SA-2 Guideline Surface-to-Air missile just after launch.

AIR COMBAT IN THE F-35

AN UPDATE

(Ed. Note: This article was first posted in *Kampflybloggen* 10 July 2016. Used with permission.)

By Morten Hanche

In this post I’m giving a brief overview of my impressions after having flown several sorties over the past few weeks against A-4 Skyhawks. This post is intended as a supplement to my previous posts on [modern air combat](#) and [stealth](#).

First things first – is it relevant to train air combat against an old A-4? Can we draw any relevant lessons from this at all? After all, this is an aircraft that served during the Vietnam War!

I believe this kind of training is relevant for several reasons:

The F-35’s sensors and “fusion” provide me as a pilot with good situational awareness. For an F-35 to simulate an opponent against another F-35, we have to restrict both the individual sensors and fusion. Even then it is difficult to “dumb down” the aircraft enough. As a «red pilot» in the F-35 I could «cheat» and utilize information a genuine opponent wouldn’t have available. Resisting the temptation requires discipline.

The A-4s we faced in these exercises had sensor performance along the lines of our own upgraded F-16s. They also carried jammers intended to disturb our radar.

The pilots we faced were very experienced. We are talking 2000 hours plus in aircraft like the F-16, F-15E, F-15C and the F-22, with detailed knowledge of “fifth generation” tactics and weapons. When also cooperating closely with intercept controllers on the ground (GCI), they could adapt the training and offer us a reactive and challenging opponent. Note the word “reactive.”

The A-4 is a small aircraft with a corresponding signature. Many potential opponents in the air are bigger and easier to find than the tiny A-4.

So what did I experience in my encounters with the A-4? I got to try out several different



Morten Hanche returning from F-35 hop. Photo courtesy of *Kampflybloggen*.

sets. Everything from one-on-one “Basic Fighter Maneuvers” to one F-35 against two A-4s, two F-35s against two A-4s, two F-35s against four A-4s and three F-35s against four A-4s. I am left with some main impressions.

The individual sensors of the F-35, one for one, are good. I flew one sortie alone against two A-4s, and limited myself to using only the radar during these sets (no support from ground controllers, no Link-16, no data sharing from other formation members, no support from passive radar warning systems or IFF – Identification Friend or Foe). Nonetheless my radar detected the targets in time for me to optimize my intercept, deliver weapons at range, and if necessary, arrive undetected to the visual arena.

“Fusion” means both automatic



F-35s and A-4s near Edwards AFB. USAF photo.

control of the various sensors, and the combination of all different sensor data into one unified tactical picture. I believe “fusion” to be one of the most important aspects of the F-35. “Fusion” allows me to focus on the tactics, rather than detailed management of my sensors. In my encounters with the A-4s, “fusion” worked better than I have seen it before. It was reassuring to see how well it worked. The good situational picture that I saw provides us with several advantages; we can make smarter tactical decisions, and it takes less time before we can gain full “tactical value” from fresh pilots. (I had to smile a little when two of us in the F-35s effortlessly kept tabs on four opponents. That is no trivial thing in the F-16.)

The most important lesson for me personally was to see just how hard it was for the A-4s to find us, even with GCI support. We deliberately made high-risk tactical decisions to see just how far we could stretch our luck, and still remain undetected. At least for my part, this reinforced my confidence in the effectiveness of our tactics. I hope all my colleagues in the F-35 get to have the same experience as I have.

(BFM – F-35 against A-4, might not be fair. Still, the A-4 started as the offensive party every time. At the end of each set, I was pointing at the A-4. Every time.)

About Morten Hanche:

In November 2015, Morten “Dolby” Hanche was the first Norwegian to fly the F-35. He is currently based at Luke AFB in the USA. He has flown over 2,200 hours in the F-16, and was also educated at the US Navy Test Pilot School. ✈️

(Ed. Note: the link to the original post is: <http://nettsteder.regjeringen.no/kampfly/2016/07/10/luftkamp-med-f-35-en-oppdatering-air-combat-in-the-f-35-an-update/#more-1833>)

Walleye Revisited



Skyhawk BuNo 142085 with Walleye shape (no innards), China Lake, 24 May 1962.
Image via Gary Verver.

By CDR Mike Cater, USN (Ret.)

I enjoyed Ray Alcorn's article in the Summer issue (Vol 22-2) as it brought back a lot of memories. I was a member of VA-212, and after the 1966 cruise we were told that we had been selected for the combat introduction of the Walleye weapon. At this point the Walleye was still under evaluation at China Lake, and there were no live weapons available. We did receive two dummy weapons for training and set out to promulgate our own tactics, as there was no established doctrine at that time. We selected six pilots for training and named them the "succulent six." We did most of our captive training over the mountains and the Owens Valley, and I recall that the trains running through the valley were a favorite target. We never got any live weapons before we deployed, so had no actual drop experience.

We deployed on USS *Bon Homme Richard* and began live training during our first line period. The targets we were assigned were mostly in Route Package Two in the Vinh area and consisted of small bridges and military barracks facilities. During this period, we noted that there was a problem with the TV monitor installed in the aircraft. In another exam-

ple of military over engineering, we had what was called a dual mode indicator. This was a combination radar scope and monitor which had a high rate of failure, cost \$38,000 and gave us a green picture with very low resolution. During our first in-port period, we sent a couple of guys to the exchange to purchase several 8-inch Sony monitors and had our electronics types convert them to work in the aircraft. These gave us a high resolution black and white picture and cost \$70 each.

We were gaining proficiency when some staff genius decided that we were ready to drop the Thanh Hoa bridge to prove the Walleye was a weapon of consequence. At that point at least a thousand 500 and 1000-pound bombs had not brought down the bridge, but we would do it with Walleye. We went out with six weapons and set up a pattern with individual attacks spaced about 60 seconds apart. My weapon would not drop so I was relegated to taking pictures. We made about 5 passes on the bridge, which was always considered a one-pass target because of its defenses, and by the second pass we were totally boresighted by the gunners. We put five weapons within a 10-foot area of the bridge and

made a big black mark, but saw no apparent damage beyond that. All of the birds got back unscathed, which I considered a total miracle.

In mid-May of 1967 we were assigned a strike on the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant. This was the first Navy strike authorized in the downtown area and was extremely sensitive from a political standpoint because there were several foreign embassies in close proximity to the target. We asked for four attack planes but were only authorized two. The strike took place on 19 May 67 and consisted of Homer Smith, VA-212 CO, and me as the attack force, with 12 F-8's providing flak suppression and MiG Cap. In addition, a diversionary strike was scheduled to the south of town. In an attempt to effect surprise, Homer led the strike in at low level, far south of the city. This did not work, as the first SAM went over our heads as we pulled up to cross the karst ridges entering the city. The weather had turned marginal, and as we approached the roll in point, which was the lake in downtown Hanoi, we saw that there was a large cloud covering it. We were also seeing multiple SAM launches coming from all directions, and the estimates

were that between 40 and 80 were fired at us. In addition to the SAM activity, a flight of about 12 MiGs showed up to add to the festivities. Homer and I pulled up to roll in and entered the cloud at about 2200 feet. I lost him and waited about 20 seconds before rolling in. I came out of the cloud going very fast and close to the target, got a lock on a window in the generator hall and was about to pickle when it broke lock. I was so close to the target that I just pulled the pipper back over the window and released the weapon. I saw Homer's Walleye hit over the target in an administrative building, and then saw a MiG behind me. I broke in front of my F-8 escort, and he picked up the MiG and shot it down as I was heading back to the water. Our F-8 crew shot down four that day, but lost two of their own, one to ground fire and one to MiG action. We didn't learn the results of the raid until the next day when a recce plane went over. It showed that my weapon had hit in the boiler house and had blown the side of the building out, but left the plant still operating.

The next day a strike consisting of four planes, again led by Homer Smith, was flown against another power plant to

ask for. The weather was great, the SAM allotment must have been used up two days earlier as no more than 8 or 10 were fired, and there was no MiG activity. We put two weapons through the windows of the generator hall and two through the doors of the boiler house. This time the plant was shut down, as confirmed by foreign press in Hanoi, who said that the city was without power or water service for a period of several weeks following the attack.

After it was confirmed that the plant had been put back into operation, another strike was approved in late June or early July. I would guess that this is the one that Ray Alcorn observed while in the facility (*Ed. - Summer 2016, page 7*). This strike had the same success as the one on 21 May and again shut down the plant. One of the pilots on that strike was my roommate Bill Greene. He was severely hit coming off the target and had several problems including a fire warning light. We had discussed tailpipe hits after the loss of Homer and decided that if you got a fire warning you had to throttle back to at least 85% to see if you could kill the light. He did that and the light went out, so he climbed to altitude on the way to

the water. Passing about 20,000 feet his wingman told him that "all the fires are out." This was the first he had known that he had three separate fires going during his climb out. Bill landed safely, and the bird was stricken from service. He later returned as CO of an A-6 squadron and became one of the most decorated Navy pilots of the war, earning three Silver Stars, a Legion of Merit, nine DFC's, forty-two Air Medals, two Bronze Stars and six Navy

Commendation Medals.

Our cruise on *Bonnie Dick* ended on a sad note as well. We were headed out to Cubi Point and were manning up for the last strike of the cruise when the ship started turning and all pilots were told to return to the ready rooms. As the ship rolled out on a new heading, I saw a large column of smoke come into view. An announcement was made that the *Forrestal* had had a casualty, and we were proceeding to her assistance. When we got to the area and saw the devastation, we were



Mike Cater circa 1967. Photo via the author.

sure that we would remain in the Gulf for quite some time. As it turned out, we were extended for less than two weeks, and were then able to start for home. I had several friends on the *Forrestal* and went over to the ship when we reached Cubi Point. The results of the accident were overwhelming and showed once again how close to disaster we lived on a carrier.

We were debriefed on the Walleye experience when we returned to the states and made several recommendations that were later implemented. The major one was to provide telemetry in the weapon that would allow the pilot a view of the weapons flight to the target while departing the area. This was done and later improved to allow the pilot to change the target after release. In addition, a rocket booster was installed in some models to give greater standoff during delivery. All in all, Walleye was a vast improvement over iron bombs, allowing one aircraft to destroy a target that would require a much larger force using conventional ordnance.

In 2009 the Naval Weapons Center produced a documentary titled "The Pursuit of Precision...Walleye: The TV Guided Glide Bomb." This program is a definitive history of the development and implementation of the Walleye. Several members of VA-212 were interviewed for this project while attending a reunion of the Lemoore Vietnam Aviators reunion and provided insight into the process and procedures implemented during the combat introduction. —



Results of the first Walleye test, China Lake, 22 May 1963. Pilot was Jack Sickel flying A4D-2 142085.

Photo via Gary Verver.

the southeast of Hanoi. This attack was performed flawlessly, and the plant was shut down. Unfortunately, Homer was hit and had to eject at low altitude and high speed. He was seen walking on the ground, but was later reported killed in action.

On 21 May 67 we were once again fragged on the Hanoi plant. This attack, consisting of four planes and twelve escorts, was led by the new CO, Marv Quaid, with me as section lead. This attack was as close to perfect as you could

LAST SKYHAWK IN THE BONEYARD

By Col Don R. Duffer, Sr, USMC (ret)

On 25 April, 2003, a lonely TA-4J Skyhawk painted in the Soviet style aggressor colors arrived at the AMARC ramp in Tucson, AZ. Flown by two of the last members of the Naval Station Roosevelt Roads VC-8 "Redtails" aggressor squadron, this old warrior was the last active duty A-4 series aircraft to be inducted into the "Boneyard." Off the assembly line on 22 June 1954, the Douglas TA-4J Skyhawk served with the US Navy and Marines for almost 50 years before making the last flight. Arriving at the "Boneyard," the aircraft flight log indicated that the old warrior was still in an "UP" status.

On 16 December 2010, the Commanding Officer of the Tucson NOSC arranged to have the aircraft removed from the AMARC and placed on display in front of the building housing the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Center located on South Wilmot Drive, Tucson, AZ. Seven years in the Arizona sun had taken its toll and some assistance was required to keep the old warrior looking good.

In May of 2012, during a casual conversation with the Commanding Officer of the Tucson NOSC, I was asked if I would be interested in assisting with a new paint scheme for the TA-4J Skyhawk. Since I had flown the A-4 series aircraft from 1967 - 2005, with all of my take-offs equaling all of my landings, I thought perhaps it was only proper that I could assist in providing this old warrior a new paint scheme. After 4 years of working toward this end, I would remind everyone of one of the first things we all learned after joining the military - never volunteer for anything.

Many friends and former Marines contributed financially to the project over the 4 years that I attempted to encourage, cajole and offer financial assistance to anyone who could assist in painting the Skyhawk. I had no luck and was considering the return of the donated funds. But in late 2015, I welcomed a new Commanding Officer to the Tucson NOSC, and the true Navy and Marine Corps team concept became a reality. A Naval Aviator, he embraced the project and took great pains to ensure the project would be completed. The results can be seen in the before and after photographs:



I would be remiss if I did not describe how the painting of the old warrior was finally accomplished. It seems that one of the senior enlisted sailors at the Tucson NOSC had previously worked with some Marines from MALS-13 at MCAS Yuma, AZ. Contact was made via the MALS-13 Commanding Officer, who then allowed three of his Marines to travel to Tucson on personal time to paint "The Last Skyhawk in the Boneyard." She is a real beauty and will serve the Sailors and Marines of Tucson as a focus of their pride in the military for many years.

Today, if you should be in Tucson, AZ, drive to the Tucson NOSC and take a look at this beautifully painted TA-4J Skyhawk. My sincere thanks to the current Commanding Officer of the Tucson NOSC and his staff, the Commanding Officer of MALS-13 at MCAS Yuma and his Marines, and most importantly to those who contributed financially to the project. A heartfelt thanks to all of you!

Semper Fi! 



FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag



Reunion of No 75 Squadron, Royal New Zealand Air Force

Over the weekend of 30 September – 2 October 2016, a reunion was held in Tauranga, New Zealand, for former members of No 75 Squadron, Royal New Zealand Air Force.

It was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Squadron being formed in WWI as part of the then Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in 1918. For 31 of those 100 years the Squadron operated the Douglas A-4K (1970-2001).

Over 250 people attended the reunion, including 65 former RNZAF A-4 pilots and 26 ground crew, the largest-ever gathering of former A-4 pilots in NZ. These included three ex-USN/USAF exchange pilots who flew the A-4 in NZ in the 1970s and one current Draken International pilot, who just happened to be in NZ on his honeymoon at the time and so was invited along as our special guest.

We held the reunion in the presence of a beautifully preserved and presented A-4K, NZ6201 – the first of the RNZAF's Skyhawks to fly (December 1969). NZ6201 is preserved in the Classic Flyers Museum at Tauranga and is displayed with a complete cockpit and selection of weapons, including an inert 1,000 lb, Mk 83, GBU-16 laser guided bomb!

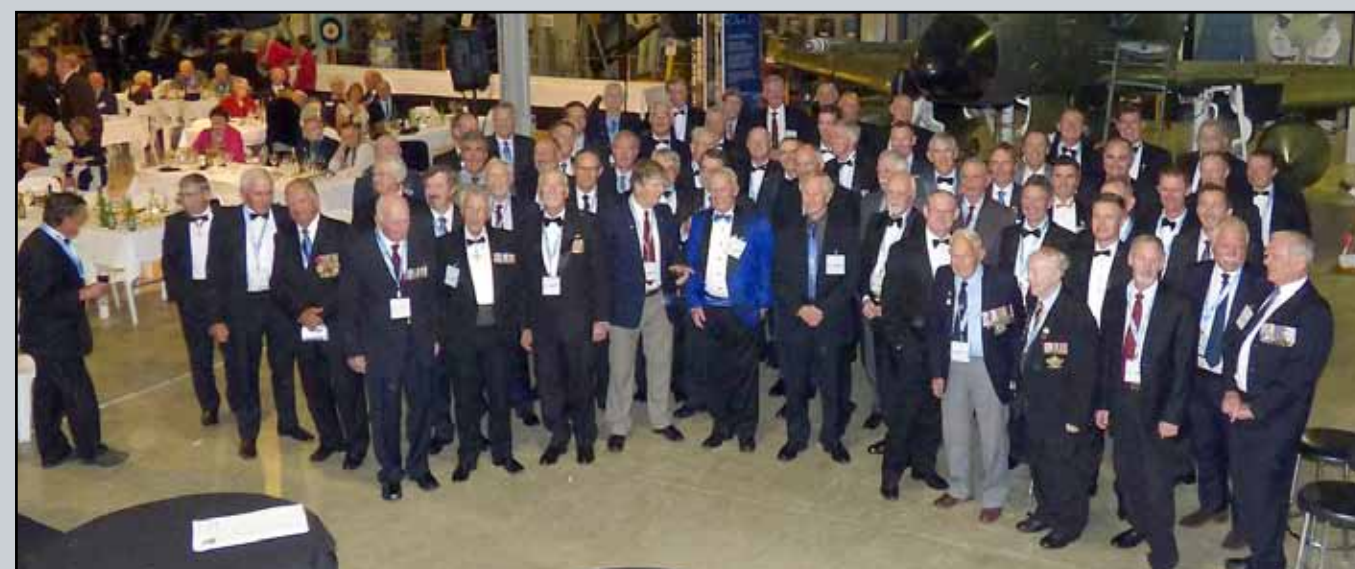
Don Simms

[Don & Sharee <don.simms@xtra.co.nz>]



NZ exchange pilots attending: Fred Myers, USN; Ed Carter, USAF; and Tim Brady, USAF.

Photos via Don Simms.



Read?

you think
we *read*?

THE LAST BLACK SHEEP, THE STORY OF ED HARPER.

Stromberg, Russ
Lulu.com. Paperback, October 3, 2016.
111 pages. \$19.94 (Amazon).
Reviewed by Bob Hickerson

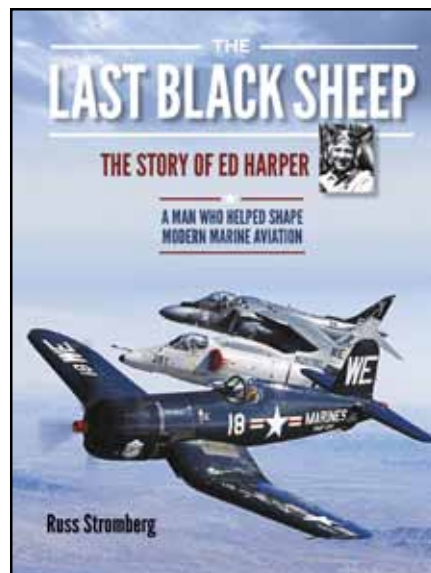
This book is the story of Colonel Ed Harper, USMC (Ret.), arguably the most important Marine of whom you've never heard. As the author states, "he was an extraordinary man who made legendary, but largely unsung contributions to WWII and Marine aviation." This realization prompted the author to commence a five-year project in which he attempted to capture the quiet, yet incredible impact Harper had on Marine tactical aviation over a fifty-year career.

Members of the Skyhawk Association will remember that two excerpts from the then-draft manuscript were published in *The A-4Ever* last year, one in the Summer 2015 edition (Vol 21-2) and one in the Fall 2015 edition (21-3). These excerpts chronicled two important periods in Harper's distinguished career: first his tour as Commanding Officer of VMA-225, an early A-4 squadron that deployed on very short notice aboard USS *Enterprise* in

response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and second, the period of his service as A-4 Program Manager in NAVAIR, during which he was primarily responsible for marshalling the resources and will to upgrade the Marine A-4 fleet to the A-4M model. The results of his efforts produced an aircraft which "became the backbone of Marine attack aviation throughout the 1970s and much of the 80s."

After these excerpts were published, we received feedback from readers anxious to learn more about this important, yet humble Marine who accomplished so much in both his service and civilian careers. Because of that, we urged author Stromberg to make his manuscript available to a wider audience. We're extraordinarily pleased to announce the complete work is now available on Amazon, and that the author has earmarked all net proceeds for the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation.

In his **Personal Reflections** section of the book, the author mentions his "marginal skills as an author." He could have fooled me. This work is carefully researched and effectively written, in a clear, coherent, and concise style largely free of the technical



jargon one might expect. I particularly like the way he wove into the narrative quotes from an oral history he did with Harper not long before his death. For those of us who never knew Harper, these quotes give us a hint of his sharp, no-nonsense style.

Stromberg has more than a passing knowledge of this book's subject and background. He flew A-4s with VMA-324 and 311 and, as a graduate of the U.S. Navy Test Pilot School, was intimately associated with the development of the AV-8B. He served as Commanding Officer of both VMA-513 and VMA-214 during his career.

This work is highly-recommended for anyone with an interest in Marine tactical aviation since WWII. It is a fast, enjoyable, yet highly informative read that is well worth your time.

A-3 tanker received a signal "Charlie," and the crew entered the landing pattern. The first pass was solid as a rock but a little high at the ramp, and they bolted. No problem. They turned downwind to try again. However, on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th passes the same tendency occurred at the ramp, resulting in a series of bolters.

By this time the ship was steaming in a direction the Captain of the ship didn't want to go. From primary came the following to the LSO platform..... "Hey Paddles, the Captain of the ship just called and said to get the Heavy 2 LSO up there on the platform to work that aircraft."

After some delay the following reply came from the duty LSO, "Sorry sir we can't do that. He's flying the aircraft." No further conversation was heard from the squawk box. Pass number 5 was an OK-3.

TINS!*

By George Blosser

During the latter part of an 11-month cruise with Air Wing 15 onboard USS *Coral Sea* a rather interesting event occurred. The ship was operating off the coast of North Vietnam for extended line periods.

Early one morning after flying all night, the duty

TRIVIA ANYONE ?

from Dave Dollarhide

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Answer:

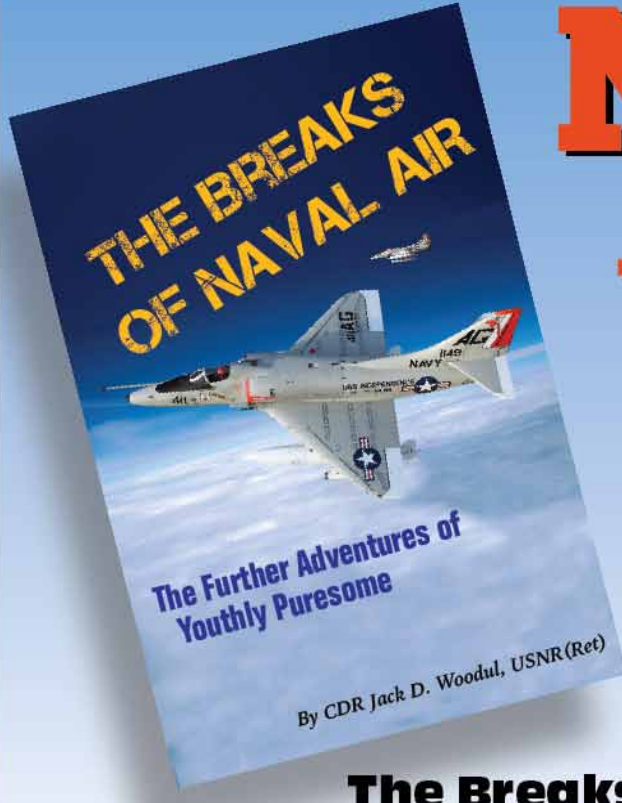
Four fingers is the gauge.

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From the A-4ever, Winter 2013 (Digital)

The Early “Worm” A Personal Recollection

by Jack “Youthly Puresome” Woodul

Hardly anyone actually knew who Lawrence Leroy Elmore might be, but at least a couple of generations of tactical Naval Aviators and insane formation skydivers include “Worm” Elmore in their oral tradition of legends. Worm flew west in May of 2013 while doing one of the things he loved doing, which was leaping out of perfectly good airplanes for fun.

Why, Worm? He earned this enduring call sign early on with the Snakes of VA-86, when he availed himself of Thanksgiving Dinner at both Napkin Ring Wardroom One with the Big Dogs and Dirty Shirt Wardroom Two with us great unwashed. This might have gone unnoticed but for the fact that he was astounded not to have any fellow takers. So Worm, short for “Tapeworm,” it was.

As a powerless FNG LT(JG) in my first fleet squadron, I watched and learned from slightly senior Worm as he consistently managed to bag good deal flights. Since I occupied numerous SLDO positions, the first thing I learned from him was to get into the Maintenance Department and the test hop business. I couldn't do anything about not being a fellow hyperthyroid, but I did learn to camp around the Squadron Duty Officer as much as possible for pop up bagging possibilities. Still, I always seemed to camp at Worm's six in the flight time and trap races, which were the only times he would admit to seeing me there. Since he ended up in the Grand Club of thousand trap aviators, I concede defeat.

But just being around Worm was good for bagging. When I insulted a VF-41 LCDR Double Demon fighter pilot at a cocktail party, Worm arranged a special two versus two ACM hop off the ship that included the insulter and

himself. And when VA-86 turned in our perfectly good A-4E's and went across the hall to attend A-7A NAMO, I stayed in VA-44 as an instructor. Since the Snakes were without airplanes and void for this period, I transported Worm and fellow Snakes around in the TA-4. When their new A-7As showed up, I bounced them unmercifully. When I was offered the chance to fly with them, it was Worm, naturally, that I flew with.

Worm was a legendary Landing Signal Officer. Besides flying two full cruises with Worm, I spent many hours back on the platform with him and fellow squadron LSO, Weed, watching them wave. Later on, when I would pop into NAS Cecil on cross countries in my Reserve Crusader, I got to bag time in VA-145's TA-4s with Worm. On one occasion, we popped into the pattern at Whitehouse, Cecil's outlying bounce field. After four passes, I was on final when Worm shook the stick and took the airplane. Down the glide path we went until we were in close. Then, Worm dropped the left wing and headed directly at the LSO cart. At the last moment, he clobbered the power, and we proceeded to clean up and leave the pattern. After a very long minute, the LSO's squeaky voice came up and axed if we knew what heart tasted like...

No matter what Worm seemed to do, he managed to bounce into cockpits. He left the Navy for a stint with TWA, where he managed to get furloughed. Somehow, he found a job as OINC of a VSF detachment back in the Navy, where he stayed until TWA had the good graces to call him back to driving many motors.

And so it went. Others can better tell about flying Marchetti two-seaters for fighter pilot wannabees at Air Combat



Jack “Youthly Puresome” Woodul

USA. And Worm naturally ended up being the main pilot for the A-4C immaculately restored by a fellow Snake's company.

Worm did everything with a maximum of joy and enthusiasm. At airshows with the A-4C, he was known as the Eternal Teenager. I am quite sure that his fellow insane skydiving pals remain in awe of his some 7000 parachute jumps, which included 72 jumps on his 70th birthday.

Worm was also the glue that held us VA-86 squadron mates together through the years. He was always in the middle

of organizing our frequent reunions. He did special things like bringing us all together for a surprise birthday party for a squadron wife who was dying of cancer. He made sure that the squadron widows and many of their children were included in the squadron. Worm was always just a phone call away from anyone he felt needed it. We Snake vets will miss him.

Worm's memorial service would have suited him. His friends from every venue got to tell Worm stories. There was a spot parachutist and a missing man flyover by the Dreamland Squad-

ron. Near teetotaler Worm wouldn't have minded the bottle that got passed around the circle. And, for the record, Tunita and I tossed our nickels on the grass.

Worm will always be around as long as people tell Worm stories. I think that will be a long time. Certainly as long as we have Blue Skies.

YP



(Ed. note: this remembrance of Larry Elmore was first published in The A-4Ever, Vol 19-4, Winter 2013.)

Worm loved his A-4!

Photo via Dave Dollarhide.





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