THE A-4 EVER

Skyhawk Association Journal Vol 24-2

Contents:

Skyhawk Association Annual Meeting
September 7, 2018
Sparks, NV

Summer 2018
http://a4skyhawk.info

THE PREZ SEZ

By Pete Cole

In this Summer 2018 edition of *The Prez Sez*, I report on the Skyhawk Association Board of Directors midyear meeting held on 15–18 March 2018 in Monterey, CA. In addition, I call for a new journal article publication initiative focused on publishing more technical/maintenance related articles in the Skyhawk Association Journal, *The A-4Ever*. I'm hoping to see more articles written by Skyhawk maintainers themselves.

I, once again, call your attention to new content on the Skyhawk association video page and will close by putting the word out on upcoming Association events and dates of note, including important Hook '18 registration information.

Midyear Board of Directors Meeting 2018

The Association held the Midyear Board of Directors Meeting in Monterey, CA, on 15–18 March. We were joined by local member Gary Roser from Carmel, CA. Discussions during the board meeting included the usual Association business: membership status (holding just under 800 members), the Treasurer's report, website upgrades, the journal report, Skyhawks still flying (unchanged), and the SDO program. The membership drive I called for this spring appears to have produced some successful results in new/returning membership. The Association remains in good financial condition. The SDO program is still in good shape, but there have been no additional volunteers since my last report. Please look at the openings on the web page and see if you can help the Association. There were no new requests for donations from the Association for A-4 displays or restorations. Also discussed was the Association participation at Hook '18: Attack Ready Room and the Annual Skyhawk Luncheon. Once published and ratified, the official meeting minutes will be available to the general membership.

Skyhawk Association Directors at Midyear Meeting. (L-R) Mark Williams, Bill Egen, Terry Wolf, Terry Cooney, Bill Ravgiala, Ted Langworthy, Steve Linder, Todd Frommelt, Dave Dollarhide, Pete Cole, Gary Roser (local member), Gene Atwell.

The Prez Pete Cole

The weekend was not all work and no play, as we did visit the highlights of the Monterey and Carmel area: Cannery Row, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Fisherman's Wharf, 17 Mile Drive, Point Lobos State Park, and Carmel. We even celebrated St. Patrick's Day in the Crown & Anchor "British" Pub in Monterey.

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day at the Crown & Anchor Pub

Technical/Maintenance Journal Article Initiative

The Skyhawk Association Journal editor, Bob Hickerson, and I would like to solicit for publication in *The A-4Ever* more journal articles focusing on technical/maintenance themes, written by members who were Skyhawk maintainers. We hope to acknowledge the invaluable work accomplished by the support personnel, which enabled the Scooter to be the great attack aircraft it was. By publication of these articles the Skyhawk Association can express well deserved gratitude to the enlisted support personnel: mechanics, electricians, avionics technicians, metal smiths, ordnance men, and plane-captains – in fact, all squadron personnel that contributed to an A-4 squadron's successful accomplishment of the attack mission.

There have been several good articles published in the past which were written by maintainers, but there has not been a lot of recent input. For an example of a very good article, check out one written by my friend Helmut "Moose" Umbley (PR-3, VA-216 '64-'67), "Who Packed Your Parachute?" in the Summer 2013 *The A-4Ever*, Vol. 19-2, about two of his chute's that were jumped by the same pilot. Moose concludes, "After 46 years I think the Baldwin/Umbley record of a pilot jumping the same rigger's chute twice still stands." Check out the article and the rest of you please start writing. *continued page 4...*

BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2018 •

REGULAR FEATURES:

IRREGULAR FEATURES:

JOURNAL STAFF

THE A-4EVER

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.

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: In the vicinity of Driggs, ID, Dr. Rich Sugden flies his FJ Fury, in company with his TA-4J piloted by Dave "Cujo" Malcaluso, with former Israeli A-4 pilot, Yossi Sarig, in the back seat. Photo taken by Jack "YP" Woodul in the back seat of Sugden's T-2 Buckeye, piloted by Pete Kline. See inside article, *Operation Yossi: The Further Adventures of Yossi Sarig (and Youthly Puresome).*

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net

To the Editor:

Enjoyed the issue, as always (*Ed. Note: Spring 2018*). I need to make a correction to Skipper Fenzl's recollection on our strike on Vinh. It was not I who took a hit in the C/L drop tank but LT Rob Barber, one of our young guys. He looked like a rocket headed to the moon. Stayed with the bird and did a magnificent job handling a very dangerous emergency. As the Skipper mentioned, each squadron took hits that day, and VA-212 lost their CO. A sad day.

Stan Arthur

To the Editor:

Any USN Skyhawk pilots,

I am a retired fighter guy and to make a long story short, I am speaking to an alumni audience about a JJ Connell who was shot down in 1966 while on an iron hand mission in VA-55. The speech is for an induction to the high school "Hall of Fame" where both of us attended -though 7 years apart.

Anyway, I need specifics about the delivery tactics and restrictions the Shrike missile brought to SAM suppression circa 1966 - early models. James Connell did not survive captivity and anyone who can fill me in with pertinent details regarding "Iron Hand" would be appreciated.

Thank you and best regards.

Bill 301-481-8083 (cell)

[Bill.Coll@outlook.com]

(*Ed. Note: Skyhawk Association Director Terry Wolf offered this narrative for Bill. Terry was assigned to VA-55 in 1972, when VA-55 was the CVW-21 squadron that specialized in the Iron Hand mission.*)

(*Denny*) Sapp is probably the expert. I'm sure he flew more IH missions than I. I dug around and found the VA-127 Shrike syllabus which detailed boresight and launch angles. Denny Carroll was right, VA-55 did have the TIAS (Target Identification Acquisition System), one of the reasons I've seen offered for the bent probe.

As has been previously stated, we usually flew it as a two-plane, pushing out ahead of the strike group to place ourselves between the known SAM site and the strike group, where we waited for a strobe to appear on the TIAS scope pointing the way to the site. Before TIAS, the radar scope had a Shrike mode that would show you the position of the site. The ID-811 needles on the AJB-3 and the SIDS (Shrike Improved Display System) on the radar scope would display the site if it was emitting. You then dove the aircraft to center the needles on the scope display, and then based on the dive angle you would have an idea of how far away the site was. The steeper the dive angle the closer the site. The rules of thumb were <15 degree dive and the site was too far away for the missile to effectively reach it. At 15 degrees, and 15,000' you pulled 15 degrees nose up to launch. Those are the only figures I had committed to memory. It was better to pull more than less as the missile would fall into the 60-degree cone more easily from too high a pull than too low.

The reference to EAS bypass I believe refers to those missiles modified to have a shorter delay between launch and the guidance activating. These missiles would react better to a short range down-the-throat shot but run out of guidance time for a long-range shot.

The mission I best remember was the one Mike Plattis and I flew as the IH section covering Stan Arthur's strike on the Thanh Hoa Bridge. We launched all four Shrikes on the longest, strongest strobes I had ever seen and then did the high dive, dropping our Rockeye on the flack sites on the way out. The advantage of the TIAS was that it was more sensitive to the emissions of the radar sites. With it, you could locate a site even if it wasn't targeting you. On this day I think I could have seen the strobes out the window.

To the Editor:

Bob

I just wanted to let you guys know how much I enjoyed your Spring issue of the Skyhawk Journal. I could personally relate to each of your "Irregular Features" articles. First off, I also participated in Operation Nickel Grass and delivered a trusty old ex-Marine A-4 to Israel in 1973. My memories of the delivery to Tel Nof were similar to those of Bubba Segars... Although I had a list of minor gripes on the bird, all they were really interested in was if the engine was OK and that the flight controls worked. They began loading it up as we left the flight line... I have kicked myself for not going back to Israel on one of the Skyhawk Association trips. Count me in next time !

I got to know Zip Rausa when I went through the A-1 Skyraider RAG at Lemoore in 1966. He was a great guy and always had a lot of good stories. Your article "Remembering Zip Rausa" was a fitting tribute to a fine Naval Aviator and an outstanding Naval Officer. After my adventures with the Spad, I transitioned to the A-4 and was assigned to VA-15. Although Thorny Thornhill was not in the squadron when I got there, I heard many stories about his rescue. Thanks for the good article about the well-coordinated operation that plucked him from the sea and returned him to the *Intrepid*.

Keep up the good work!

Bear Hildebrandt

[thehildebrandtfamily@gmail.com]

David *(Reply to Trivia)*,

How goes things. The weather has turned here, and we are now into spring. Sunshine is predicted for the whole of the Bank Holiday weekend, which in the UK is a rarity! I received the Journal this morning and read it through in the garden in the sunshine and a cup of tea. Admittedly not being a *Skyhawk* pilot or maintainer, I submit the following with some trepidation. The 'eye' in the middle is the tracker head for the Angle Rate Bombing System (ARBS) with left and right the antenna for the mid-band frequencies and below to the left, the single low band antenna of the AN/ALQ-126 electronic counter-measurers (ECM) system. Not sure about the one below and on the right. How's that for a civilian and a Brit?

Best wishes as ever,

Ian

[ian.g.white@btinternet.com]

To the Editor,

I came across an A-4 at Blossom Point, Liberia, while researching online. I can't find any other information on it. Surely it is ex-USN, and it looks to be in decent shape (on Google Earth.) I've looked through your display page and other possible sources, with no luck. Any ideas? Location is: 38.41175, -77.10546

Great site, and I'll join soon. I have a group on Facebook called The International Aviation Museum Guide, and we have a map with museums and gate guards, etc. I'll add any A-4 displays that we don't already have.

Thanks,

Mark Moxley-Knapp

[m.e.knapp@sbcglobal.net]

To the Editor:

Due to the temporary closure of the MCAS Iwakuni front gate, we relocated the OA-4M (154638) on 6 September 2017. We did it in the middle of the night to avoid any issues on the roadways during the day. It was a successful endeavor and without incident. It's a tough old bird!! One of the pictures attached is from the night we moved it.

During the 2018 MCAS Iwakuni Friendship Day, nearly every Japanese National that came on to the base was enamored by the OA-4M.

(Ed. note: Bill Egen believes that MALS-12 (formerly H&MS-12) was the last active unit in the Marine Corps to operate the A-4.)

Photo courtesy of LtCol John Fallon, CO MALS - 12

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

THE PREZ SEZ continued. from page 2..

Another idea is for support personnel to submit letters to the editor referring their experiences. Bob once started a special effort to have maintenance guys report the dumbest thing they ever saw a pilot do. That got a good bit of response and a few good stories; we can all use a good chuckle!

Events, NOTAMS, and R&I

New links available on the Skyhawk Association video page: some great, new content has recently been uploaded to our website video page by Director Dave Dollarhide (http://a4skyhawk.info/page/skyhawk-videos). He has posted three movies from John Nicholson about his involvement with the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and the shoot down of his wingman, Everett Alvarez. To check it out, scroll down to the bottom of the Navy/Marine links. In fact, check out all the video content available!

***Now Hear This*!**

The word on upcoming events and dates of note:

Hook '18 is 6-9 September 2018. The Tailhook Reunion reservation (see **special registration information** below) and Nugget Casino Resort reservations information is on the Tailhook Association website. The Annual Luncheon and Members Meeting will be held Friday, 7 September, at noon at the Poolside Chalet Terrace (see ad this issue). **Dale "Snort" Snodgrass**, Chief Pilot, Draken International, will be our A-4 Skyhawk Association Luncheon speaker. Snort will speak on "Contract Tactical Aviation – A Training Solution." Reservations for the luncheon are $30; mail to Mark Williams, 400 Howell Way #102, Edmonds, WA 98020. The Attack Ready Room will be fully operation throughout Hook '18.

Very Important Hook '18 Special Registration Information from Greg "Chaser" Keithley, Executive Director, The Tailhook Association:

"Hook 18 will **require everyone to register and carry a name tag**…This year, anyone who is not carrying a name tag will not be allowed to attend any events – no exceptions."

In addition, Chaser will "allow reunion groups to **register at the Active Duty rate of $20** instead of the normal $65 that retired/civilians pay. Please have your members register on the website and select the active duty rate and type in their respective reunion group in the rank/title box so the front office knows it is a reunion group registration. Folks can also just call the office and register over the phone." Use "**The A-4 Skyhawk Association Reunion Group**" when you register online or call.

The **Marine Skyhawkers** are having a 2018 reunion in Pensacola, FL, 1–4 November 2018 for the Blues Homecoming and the Florida Arts Festival weekend. The Pensacola Grand Hotel is the base of operations, but its rooms are now sold out with overflow going to the nearby Sole Inn. **Registration is now open**: https://www.afr-reg.com/SKYHAWK-ERS18/. POCs are Directors Todd "Hun" Frommelt and Mark "Senator" Williams. See the SA website POD for more information.

Reminder: If you have an upcoming reunion planned, please send me or the Journal editor an announcement to be included in this segment. Also, if you hold a reunion, send us a short debrief to immortalize the event in *The A-4Ever* Journal.

A-4s Forever!

Read? you think we *read?*

Famous Russian Aircraft: Mikoyan MiG-17

Gordon, Yefim and Komissarov, Dmitriy
Crecy Publications, UK, and Specialty Press.
Forest Lake, MN 55025. 2016.
480 pp. Ill. $64.95.
Reviewed by Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR(Ret.)

Anyone familiar with mid-to-late 20th century military aviation should be well-acquainted with the long line of Russian fighters, the premier series being that fostered by the MiG design bureau.* "MiG" is, of course, a colorful acronym created by joining the initials of the two last names of the two designers Artyom L. Mikoyan and Michail I. Gurevich. The warning cry of "MiGs! MiGs!" was as much a part of early jet warfare as was "Achtung, Spitfires!" in European skies during World War II. And with just as much reason and fear.

Although MiG fighters did not play a major role in WWII—the only truly operational MiG was the early, rather elegant little MiG-3 that had largely been replaced by 1943—the MiG bureau quickly took its place after the war as the Soviet Union entered the jet age with the MiG-9 as well as other designs from other bureaus. The world-beater MiG-15 followed and proved itself the equal of most of the West's fighters, including the American F-86, which formed the major opposition the high-tailed MiG faced during the three-year Korean War. Flown by a competent pilot, the MiG-15 could take the measure of the Sabre, its speed and heavy 3-cannon armament giving it advantages that U.S. Air Force pilots definitely had to respect.

It was only natural that the MiG-15 would be improved on and would soon give way to its near-big brother, the MiG-17, mid-way through the war, although the MiG-17 did not enter large-scale service until after the armistice that brought the war to an uncertain halt.

With that introduction, we consider this latest offering from Crecy and Specialty Press. At 8 ½ x 11 ½ inches, this is not a small book, and with nearly 500 coated-stock pages, it is particularly weighty. But nevertheless, it contains everything you ever wanted to know about the MiG-17. There is an all-encompassing collection of black-and-white and color photos, performance charts, pages of comparison tables discussing every MiG-17 produced, and every country for which it served. There is also a great number of color profiles that show every color scheme and marking the fighter ever carried as well as brief but informative synopsis of whatever combat missions each country's MiG-17 might have seen. Those who flew against the MiG in Vietnam will find this section of special interest.

I don't know how many scale models of the MiG are available. Even those of its predecessor, the MiG-15, are rather small in number. But if you can find a model of the MiG-17, this veritable encyclopedia will show you all the interior and exterior detail you need to make it one of a kind.

There are a few errors or typos or missing letters, probably because of the need to produce the book in English, but these are quickly negotiated. One that really sticks is the constant reference to American back-seaters as "WSOs" or weapons-systems officers. While this term is correct for the back-seat position of a Boeing F/A-18D or F/A-18F, as well as USAF F-4s, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps used the term Radar Interception Officers, or RIOs, for the men in the rear cockpits of the F-4 Phantom and the F-14 Tomcat.

In general, however, the text is well and enthusiastically written. If you can get past the pricey fee, I highly recommend this unusually well-done book.

**A design bureau—Opytno-Konstruktorskoye Byuro* (OKB) meaning experimental design bureau-- is mainly responsible for creating a *particular aircraft (or other military hardware). The actual aircraft is built by various individual factories. As with most Soviet aircraft, the MiG-17 was built under license in other countries such as China and Czechoslovakia.*

MEMBER'S MOVIES

Association Website Video Page
http://a4skyhawk.info/page/skyhawk-videos

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

★TAPS★

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

William E. Ramsey , Pensacola FL , 2 May 2018
Bernard E. Fipp, San Diego, CA , 20 March 2018
Wade C. Straw, Vero Beach, FL, 27 May 2018
Lyle F. Bull, Oak Harbor, WA, 4 May 2018
Ken Crist, Pleasanton, CA
Paul F. Hollandsworth, Virginia Beach, VA, 27 July 2017
Marvin T. Garrison, Irvine, CA, 14 Feb 2018

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

Skyhawk Association Reunion

Hook 18 - Nugget Hotel - Sep 6 thru 9

LUNCHEON
Friday, 7 Sep. 1200
Poolside Chalet Terrace

SPEAKER
CAPT Dale "Snort" Snodgrass
"Contract Tactical Aviation - A Training Solution"

RESERVATIONS
Mail $30
Mark Williams
400 Howell Way #102
Edmonds, WA 98020

ATTACK READY ROOM
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Exhibit Booth 722 - a4skyhawk.info

CANCELLED MISSION TALE WIND

By AWS1 Jerry Feola, USN (Ret.)

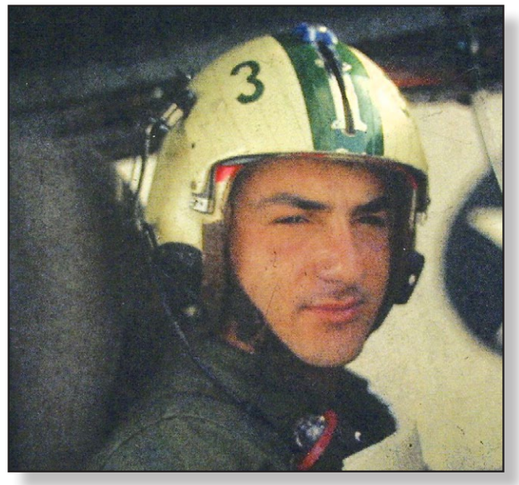
On 17 November 1967 I had one month to go on my deployment aboard USS *Intrepid* (CV-11), operating on Yankee Station off the coast of North Vietnam. I was an AWS3 aircrewman in VAW-33 and flew in the seat behind the navigator in the four-man cockpit of our EA-1F Skyraider, as an Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) operator. We also worked on maintaining the planes when on the ground. I had logged 46 combat missions on the deployment and was anxious to get home to my wife-to-be, Arlene. We had exchanged about 100 letters while on this cruise, letters that ultimately led to our marriage. We're happily together today. Following is a summary of an incident that I described to Arlene in one of the letters, an event which has stuck in my mind for all of these 48 years.

I had been summoned to the ready room aboard *Intrepid*, thinking I would be on a flight in one of our *Skyraiders* to provide ECM coverage for two *Skyhawks*. The A-4s were to go after a new SA-2 site, and time was critical.

The CO of the Nighthawks was CDR Ed Darville. He entered the ready room and tapped me on the shoulder as he passed by, and said, "Feola, you are not on this mission." There were aircrewmen more experienced than me, so I wasn't surprised about this. I stayed for the briefing anyway, but my job had changed from flying on the hop to performing a maintenance safety check on the EA-1F on the flight deck, and I hustled up to the bow to check out the aircraft.

A short time later, the CO and his crew had manned up, and the *Skyraider* was moving into position to be connected to the catapult. While that was happening, I moved along with it, checking for hydraulic leaks or other issues as the wing were unfolding (spreading). I was positioned under the left wing when it was nearly spread when I spotted a hydraulic line getting pinched at the juncture of the descending outer portion of the wing and the fixed section, just as the wing locked into position. I expected to see hydraulic fluid spurt from the area where the wing sections joined. But that didn't happen.

I immediately thought that the pinched line might lead to trouble for the crew. I just wasn't sure. I was a 20-year old sailor who had to make a critical decision quickly. I opted to play it safe.



Feola in cockpit of a VAW-33 EA-1F. Photo via author.

I looked at the catapult officer who was waiting for my thumbs-up to shoot the EA-1F off and signaled him to cancel the launch. I remember him leaning toward me somewhat confused. So I signaled hm again by sweeping my hand across my throat to cancel the launch. This time he understood, established eye contact with the pilot and signaled him to fold the wings. Along with others in our crew, we got the *Skyraider* onto the forward elevator. Just before the aircraft was being lowered I got onto the elevator to stay with the aircraft. I hoped that my decision was correct.

After we reached the hangar bay level we pushed the aircraft off to the side. I waited nervously for a senior mechanic to check to see if my decision was correct. He arrived with a small step ladder, climbed up two steps and began his inspection.

Specifically, I was concerned about two things: I had just stopped the CO from flying the mission. More importantly, without the EA-1F, the two *Skyhawks* would not have ECM protection. While the mechanic was doing his inspection in the hangar, I heard the A-4s power up and roar off above us. After a few minutes, the mech who had examined the hydraulic lines looked down at me and said, "Kid, you made a good call. The line was pinched." Then he said, "It probably would have survived the mission, but it was a good call."

Relieved, I went to the ready room where we could listen to the radio transmission of the *Skyhawks* executing their attack. After a few minutes, we heard that one of the A-4s had been hit by enemy fire. Nervously, I listened intently, then word came that the A-4 had gone down. The fate of the pilot was unknown, but the transmissions seemed to indicate he had gone down with the jet.

I was devastated. I was convinced it was my fault because the EA-1F was unable to support the A-4s with ECM protection. My decision regarding the pinched hydraulic line prevented our *Skyraider* from doing its job.

A few minutes passed and the senior mechanic who checked the pinched hydraulic line came looking for me in the ready room. He came right up to me, grabbed my shirt and pulled me close and said, "Remember kid, it was a good call."

I remember saying "But…" He interrupted me. "I could have killed four crew members in the *Skyraider* if I had let them fly. This is what happens in war."

For 48 years I lived with the decision I made that day on Yankee Station. In a letter to Arlene I said, "I only pray to God he is alive as a captive of the enemy."

Fast forward to a social event on the *Intrepid* in May 2016 where I serve as a docent. That night my wife, Arlene (yes, I didn't let her get away) and I decided to give the summarizing letter of the long-ago incident I had written about to Eric Boehm, the *Intrepid's* Curator of Aircraft and Aircraft Restoration, seated at another table. He read it, and after a time he told me the museum was interested in the story dated 17 November 1967, especially as it was in good condition despite its age.

At one point, Eric took out his smart phone, and I sensed he was talking to someone about the letter. A moment later Eric looked at me, and with an expression of urgency, he signaled me to join him.

Eric moved the smart phone close to my face and the voice on the other end stated, "He is not dead. I interviewed that pilot two years ago. He was a POW and survived."

I was stunned, of course. I asked Eric how he knew all this. He said he and a cameraman had flown to Florida two years ago to interview the pilot, Wilson Denver Key, at his home. Key had been doing an oral history as part of his experiences aboard *Intrepid*. It turns out Key was able to eject from the A-4 before it crashed and fell into the hands of the North Vietnamese. Key was a POW for six years.

If I didn't volunteer as a docent on this great ship, if I didn't save the letter, if we didn't decide to give the letter to Eric, I would go to my grave thinking my decision may have cost a man his life. I plan to meet with Key one of these days soon.

(Ed. note: this piece was first published in Wings of Gold, the quarterly publication of the Association of Naval Aviation. More information can be found at www.anahq.org.)

LCDR Wilson Denver Key, a 1963 graduate of the Naval Academy, was shot down by an SA-2 surface to air missile in A-4C 149546 on 17 November 1967, while flying an Iron Hand strike in the Hanoi area. It was his 90th mission. He was captured by the enemy and repatriated on 14 March 1973. He was awarded the Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry while interned as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam.

Feola as a USS *Intrepid* docent being interviewed by personnel from the History Channel. Photo via author.

The Vinh Mini-Alpha Strike

By Rob Barber

Here are my thoughts from inside the cockpit over Vinh (prompted by CDR Fenzl's TINS! published in The A-4Ever, Spring 2018, and Admiral Arthur's letter to the editor contained in this issue).

We were a 12-plane Mini-Alpha Strike making our way to Hanoi when we were diverted because of weather and directed to our secondary target. My first thought was "Holy S..T, Holy S.. T we're going to Vinh." I was the wingman with Johnny Bittick, and our mission was flak suppression. We instantly found out what 57mm looked like. There was no problem seeing our aim point because there were l00s of fiery baseballs coming straight up at us. We must have hit the target because with so many AAA guns available, how could we miss?

We were followed down the chute by three more divisions of *Skyhawks*. After bomb release, I heard Skipper Stan Arthur say, "Rob you're hit and on fire - head for the beach." After jinking off target and getting "feet-wet," I went for altitude expecting to eject. As I was climbing, I went through the ejection checklist in my head and the first thing I thought was "I wonder where you put your knee board." About this time someone said, "your fire is out," so I went to plan B. I had remembered someone saying "you never step out of a perfectly good airplane" (well define good), so I planned to stay with it. I had indications of fluctuating hydraulics and was worried about the gear, flaps, and hook when I realized that I was sucking on fuel due to the wing damage. I only had my fuselage fuel remaining.

Rob Barber inspects damage to his A-4 following the strike on Vinh. Photo via author.

After asking for "tanker posit," I immediately heard my roommate, Hal Lawson, saying "tallyho." He said he had no problem seeing me because of the "torch" I was flying. We must have had at least 1000 knots of closure, and he did a great job of not pulling all the rivets out of the wing in his rendezvous turn. Hal violated all the rules and went "Feet Dry" to get to me sooner. (Coincidentally, a few weeks prior, I was flying the tanker when Hal was hit by a direct hit through the wing, and I took him home.)

As we tanked all the way back to the ship, fuel was coming out of the wing holes as fast as he would pump it in. Fortunately, the gear, flaps, and hook all came down as advertised, and Hal dropped me off in the groove. My landing was definitely not an "OK - No Comment," but in this case I really didn't want to bolter. Afterwards, we inspected the plane and counted over 200 shrapnel holes besides those in the drop tank. What a great plane to have the honor to fly.

Coincidently, I'm not normally superstitious, well maybe except for golf, but I think everyone on this mission that was hit was flying the plane with his name on it. So, Magic 413 was off my list. It really didn't matter because I think it was later off-loaded in Japan where someone said they thought it would cost too much to fix it, and we should have just pushed it over the side.

I flew 256 combat missions and only got hit twice. I would say that is a combination of a great plane and great luck. There were a lot of heroics on this mission by a lot of great pilots, but regrettably, there were no awards submitted for this flight and everybody knew that a JO wanted a DFC more than anything.

I often think about our fallen brothers we left behind. On the upside, it's Memorial Day, it's sunny at the beach, and I'm sitting here telling this story to my four beautiful, smiling grandkids – 46 years later.

How the A-4 Skyhawk Ruled the Skies. This was one tough jet.

By Sebastien Roblin

Modern jet fighters continue to grow ever more complicated and more fantastically expensive. But some of the most influential aircraft in history succeeded instead because they could do their job pretty well at a very reasonable cost. Such was the case of the agile A-4 *Skyhawk*, a small but heavy-lifting attack jet that would carve out a major place for itself in American history—and also that of Israel and Argentina.

In 1952, Douglas aviation engineer Ed Heinemann sought to create a replacement for the Navy's AD-1 Skyraider attack planes. He proposed to replace one of the largest single-engine fighter-bombers ever built with one of the smallest, lightest attack jets ever. At every turn, Heinemann engineered the *Skyhawk* to reduce weight and complexity, resulting in a combat jet that measured only twelve meters long and weighed only five tons empty. Even the delta wings on the "Tinkertoy Jet" were so small—little over eight meters from one wingtip to wingtip—that they did not need to fold for stowage inside a carrier. This feature, combined with short-takeoff-and-landing performance, made the *Skyhawk* particularly useful when it entered service in 1956, as the Navy still operated numerous smaller conventionally powered carriers with limited deck space.

Powered by a single J65 turbojet engine with two side-mounted air intakes, the *Skyhawk* proved agile but not especially fast, with a maximum speed of around 670 miles per hour—just below the speed of sound. The early-model *Skyhawks* lacked a radar for detecting and engaging enemy fighters, but at short range could employ heat-seeking Sidewinder missiles and two twenty-millimeter cannons for self-defense. But that was just as well: the *Skyhawk's* job was to pound enemy ground targets, and its three hardpoints could lug a hefty maximum bombload of eight to ten thousand pounds, which could include nuclear weapons.

The *Skyhawk* was cheap, reliable and effective, so the Navy and Marines ordered hundreds of them, with production eventually totaling at 2,500 in a wide variety of models. In the early 1960s, every U.S. Navy carrier had at least two attack squadrons of *Skyhawks*; the first nuclear supercarrier had four. The *Skyhawk* was swiftly improved in the A-4B variant with improved avionics and the capability for air-to-air refueling—not just with tanker aircraft, but even from one *Skyhawk* to another. Though the technique eventually fell out of favor as dedicated tankers became available, the tankers were retired at the turn of the century, and so fighter-to-fighter refueling was recently brought back in the Navy's Super Hornet fighters. The radar-equipped A-4C followed, giving the aircraft bad-weather and night-flying capability.

First and Last in the Fight for Vietnam

On August 2, 1964, the destroyer USS *Maddox* fought a skirmish with North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam. Two days later, shipboard radar seemed to detect a second attack. In fact, the second attack was later revealed to be a technical glitch—a glitch with historic consequences, as President Johnson promptly ordered the first American air strike of North Vietnam, targeting the boat bases and an oil depot in Vinh. Of course, the Navy dispatched its *Skyhawks* to do the job, and they dropped the first of what would be more than 7.6 million tons of U.S. bombs in Vietnam.

These days, U.S. warplanes mostly attack their targets from high altitude using precision-guided weapons, to avoid having to swoop down within range of machine guns and shoulder-fired missiles. But guided air-to-ground weapons were in their infancy in the age of the *Skyhawk*. Instead, attack planes hit enemy targets by swooping down upon them and releasing old-fashioned gravity bombs above the target, or strafing the target with cannon fire. Getting that close necessarily put them within reach of abundant and inexpensive automatic flak cannons, which could be quite effective.

In the initial strikes at Vinh, flak shot down two A-4s, killing Lt. Richard Sather, while Lieutenant Junior Grade Everett Alvarez Jr. managed to eject from his plane—and became the first of hundreds of American pilots to endure years of captivity and torture in North Vietnam. Another participant in the initial raid, future Vice Admiral James Stockdale, who in 1992 ran for the vice presidency alongside Ross Perot, was shot down and captured a year later in 1965.

The *Skyhawk* remained the workhorse of the Navy as Washington escalated its involvement in Vietnam, flying thousands of ground attack sorties and participating in key engagements such as the the battles of Hue and An Loc. New marks of the *Skyhawk* also showed up: the A-4E and F boasted two additional hardpoints for carrying weapons, more powerful J52 engines, a doppler navigation radar and a targeting computer. The F model in particular also introduced a pronounced "hump" behind the cockpit, packed full of avionics. The *Skyhawk* also began to use greater quantities of guided weapons, including AGM-12 Bullpup missiles and AGM-45 Shrike antiradar missiles for knocking out Hanoi's surface-to-air missile defenses.

Though introduction of A-7 *Corsairs* gradually supplanted the A-4 complement on larger carriers, the *Skyhawk's* shorter takeoff and landing distance guaranteed its continued service on smaller carriers as well as in Marine aviation units, which deployed the A-4s to forward air bases.

continued...

A-4 Skyhawk Ruled cont...

Image: U.S. Navy Photo

Earlier in the war, A-4s even bumped into North Vietnamese MiG-17s highly maneuverable cannon-armed fighters that were only slightly faster than the *Skyhawk*. In a clash on April 25, 1967, a MiG-17 dispatched a *Skyhawk*. But in a bizarre twist, the next month Lt. Cdr. Theodore Swartz managed to down a MiG-17 using an unguided folding-fin Zuni rocket intended for air-to-ground targets.

However, the five-inch rockets were involved in one of the worst carrier accidents in U.S. history, when on July 29, 1967, an electrical surge triggered a Zuni rocket carried onboard an F-4 *Phantom* that was queued for take-off on the USS *Forrestal*. The rocket blasted open the external fuel tanks of a *Skyhawk* in front of it, spraying jet fuel and debris across the carrier deck, which immediately ignited. A minute later, the fire detonated the thousand-pound bombs carried on the unfortunate *Skyhawk*, killing most of the trained firefighting crew sent to quell the flames. More than 134 sailors died in the ensuing conflagration and damage-control effort, resulting in an entire squadron's worth of *Skyhawks* being burnt to a crisp.

One of those lucky to escape alive was a young John McCain, today the sitting senator from Arizona, who had been in the A-4E next in line to the one that detonated. He managed to jump off the nose of his plane as it caught fire and was blasted across the deck by the detonation of the bomb. Four months later, on October 26, 1967, McCain was dropping bombs on a power plant in Hanoi when an SA-2 surface-to-air missile sheared off a wing from his A-4E. The Navy pilot bailed out into Truc Bach Lake in northern Hanoi, whereupon he was captured and went on to endure six years of torture and captivity.

By the end of the war, Navy and Marine *Skyhawks* had flown tens of thousands of combat missions, including 195 destroyed by enemy fire. An air strike delivered by Marine *Skyhawks* in 1973 is reputed to have been one of the last delivered by U.S. combat aircraft in the Vietnam War.

The *Skyhawk* lingered several more decades in U.S. military service. The Marine Corps was reluctant to part with the reliable ground-support plane. It acquired an advanced A-4M model capable with more powerful engines, extra cannon ammunition, and the hardware to sling early Maverick missiles and laser-guided bombs. These remained active until they were replaced by *Harrier* jump jets in the 1980s. The Blue Angels acrobatics team also flew the agile aircraft from 1974 to 1986, replacing much faster but clumsier F-4 *Phantoms*.

The *Skyhawk* also remained a favorite "aggressor" plane in U.S. Navy training exercises because it ironically boasted similar speed and agility to its chief historical foe, the MiG-17. As such, it became a valuable training foil at the Top Gun school, teaching *Phantom* and *Tomcat* pilots how to deal with slower but more maneuverable opponents. Combined with its reliability, simplicity and low operating costs—only $3,000 per flight hour compared to $42,000 for an F-15—the *Skyhawk* remained popular as a trainer well into the 1990s. Several *Skyhawks* continue to be flown by private firms in the role of military trainers today.

Eagle of the Middle East

As the Vietnam War raged, so did the Arab-Israeli conflicts. The *Skyhawk*, as usual, was at the forefront of the action. Ninety A-4s—known in Hebrew as the "*Ayit*" or Eagle—entered the service of the Israeli Air Force in 1967. These were modified into the A-4H variant, which can be distinguished by their a longer-tail pipes—a measure designed to lower the *Skyhawk's* infrared signature in the face of heat-seeking missiles. The A-4H also had uprated J52 engines and much harder-hitting thirty-millimeter ADEN cannons, as the Israelis placed greater value in strafing runs. In 1973 superior A-4Ms were also purchased and reconfigured to Israeli standards as the A-4N.

The *Skyhawks* served as the IAF's primary dedicated attack plane during the incessant border skirmishes of the War of Attrition with Egypt. Five of them fell prey to much faster Egyptian MiG-21 jets. However, in May 1970, one Israeli *Skyhawk* pilot managed to turn the tables on a slower MiG-17 over Lebanon in a decidedly unconventional manner, as recalled by Col. Ezra Dotan:

"I completed the descent to the MiGs' altitude and sat on the tail of one of them. I decided to use the fire power of the air-to-ground rocket pod in order to hit the MiG. I shot off a first salvo from both pods, at a range of 50 meters. The rockets went very low and passed under the MiG without the pilot even noticing them. I raised the sights, shot off another salvo, and the MiG disappeared in a great explosion."

Dotan went on to bump into another flight of four MiG-17s and chased one of them down to low altitude:

"I found him exiting one of the wadis with a sharp bank. I was going at about 570 knots, and in order not to pass by him, I turned off everything I could turn off to slow the plane down. I would have spread my ears out to the sides, too, if that could have slowed the plane some more."

"I pulled up so close to him that I couldn't even point the nose down at him. He got some distance between us and we started playing cat and mouse: He banks right, I turn to follow. He banks hard to the left - I do the same. At a certain point, I shot a burst at him. The bullets ripped off the left wing and the MiG rolled right and rammed into the ground.

However, the *Skyhawk* force suffered in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as the relatively slow jets were called upon to hammer advancing Egyptian tanks covered by patrolling MiG-21s and long-range SA-6 surface-to-air missile batteries deployed along the Suez Canal. Until Israeli ground forces knocked them out, the SAM batteries reaped a fearsome toll. Israel lost fifty-three of its roughly two hundred *Skyhawks* in the conflict.

continued...

Yet despite this rough handling, the old attack jet remained a fixture in the Israeli Air Force for decades to come, and would see further action during the war in Lebanon, where a *Skyhawk* shot down another MiG-17. The last Israeli *Skyhawks*, serving largely in a training capacity, were not retired until 2015.

Bane of the Royal Navy

In April 1982, Argentine troops seized the Falkland Islands, known as the Malvinas by Buenos Aires. In response, the United Kingdom dispatched an amphibious task force to take them back. Lacking the naval power to confront the fleet, Buenos Aires flung its land-based fighters at the British warships instead.

Argentine Etendard fighters famously sank two ships in the conflict using Exocet anti-ship missiles with a range of forty-three miles. But Argentina had only four air-launched Exocets available, and so the brunt of the anti-ship raids had to be performed the old-fashioned way, with its forty-eight *Skyhawks*, which included a mixture of A-4Bs and Cs, as well A-4Qs operated by the Argentine Navy. These had defective ejection seats due to a U.S. arms embargo, had little in the way of defensive countermeasures and required multiple refuelings via KC-130 Hercules tankers to even make it to the combat zone.

Upon arriving, they would have to brave the firepower of a British fleet bristling with high-altitude Sea Dart surface-to-air missiles and avoid the combat air patrols of Sea *Harrier* jump jets, then dodge shorter-range Sea Wolf and Sea Cat point-defense missiles in order to drop iron bombs directly on top of warships still equipped with old-fashioned flak cannons and even huge 4.5-inch dual-purpose guns with air bursting shells. Even worse for the Argentine pilots, their bombs were notorious for their faulty fuses, and many failed to detonate even after scoring a direct hit.

Despite the long odds, when British troops began landing on the Falklands, the Argentine pilots gave it their all in the Battle of San Carlos starting on May 21. After five days of intense air-sea warfare, nearly half of the *Skyhawk* force—twenty-two planes—had been picked off while running the deadly gauntlet. Sea *Harriers* shot down eight, flak blasted two more, and missiles and accidents claimed the rest.

But the A-4s that got through managed to sink the destroyers *Coventry* and the frigates *Antelope* and *Ardent,* as well as crippling the Landing Support Ship *Galahad* and badly damaging several more destroyers and frigates. The other Argentine aircraft—*Dagger* fighters and *Pucará* attack planes—suffered similar losses but inflicted less damage.

The *Skyhawk* had one more crazy battle ahead, as twenty-nine were in service in the Kuwait Air Force. When Saddam Hussein's troops stormed the small country on August 2, 1990, the Kuwaiti A-4KUs shot down three helicopters full of Iraqi commandos and strafed the advancing tanks of the Medina Armored division. By the second day of hostilities, the Kuwaiti pilots were taking off from desert roads, as their air bases were damaged by Iraqi bombing. As Kuwait succumbed to invasion, nearly the entire A-4 force then fled to neighboring Saudi Arabia. When an American-led coalition embarked on Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait in 1991, the Kuwaiti *Skyhawks* flew more than a thousand combat missions in support, losing one jet to a radar-guided missile, though the pilot successfully ejected. One Kuwaiti *Skyhawk* pilot even had the rare pleasure of blowing up his old office at an air base with a five-hundred-pound bomb.

There were several other operators of this kind. Indonesia flew the A-4 into combat against insurgents and East Timorese separatists. The *Skyhawk* also saw more peaceful service with the air forces of Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, the last three of which flew their own unique variants designated the A-4S, G and K respectively.

The Skyhawk's Legacy

Argentina and Brazil both continue to operate *Skyhawk* combat squadrons today. The Brazilian *Skyhawks* were purchased from the Kuwait Air Force and extensively modernized. For years they served as South America's last carrier-borne fighters until the decommissioning of the carrier *São Paulo* (formerly the *Foch)* in February of 2017. However, the Brazilian *Skyhawks* (known as AF-1s) have not been retired, nor the upgraded A-4R *Fightinghawks* serving with the Argentine Air Force.

The A-4 exemplified virtues of simplicity and cost-efficiency that have seemingly been forgotten in modern warplane design. It was light and easy to handle, and could deliver a nasty punch at its targets, without being weighed down with capabilities unnecessary for its primary mission.

But there is a flipside to the *Skyhawk* story: its American, Israeli and Argentine combat pilots flew in an era when attack pilots had to dive into the teeth of fearsome enemy air defenses to deliver their payloads—and it was simply accepted that many would pay a terrible price for their bravery, which did in fact occur.

Skyhawks cost around $750,000 to produce each, equivalent to roughly $6 or $7 million in inflation-adjusted dollars. Today, the Pentagon may spend thirteen times that price to purchase a single F-35 stealth fighter, with the expectation that said airplane will remain nearly immune to enemy fire in any war not involving a peer opponent.

The costs and benefits of that tradeoff bear consideration, but if nothing else, that reality should inspire renewed respect for the combat pilots of aircraft like the *Skyhawk*, who routinely undertook dangerous missions and suffered heavy losses that today would be deemed unacceptable.

Sébastien Roblin holds a master's degree in conflict resolution from Georgetown University and served as a university instructor for the Peace Corps in China. He has also worked in education, editing and refugee resettlement in France and the United States. He currently writes on security and military history for War Is Boring.

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LANDING FLAP HINGE ATTACHMENT

Back in June of 1959, the single hinge pin that attached the landing flap to the underside of the wing was changed to a two-pin configuration. The NARF's subsequently issued Local Engineering Specifications to modify aircraft and spare flaps that did not have the two-pin installation incorporated during production.

In addition to providing flap-to-wing attachment, the inboard pin mates the hinge lobes of the flap operating tube support with the lobes of the flap inboard hinge fitting. Failure of the flap fitting hinge lobes can result if the inboard pin is too short or is not installed completely through the lobes. Figure 1 shows a typical failure of a flap inboard hinge fitting caused by an improperly installed or short hinge pin. The NARF's have recently reported an increased failure rate of these hinge fittings.

Figure 2 illustrates the proper two-pin installation. As shown in views A and C, the hinge pins must extend through the hinge lobes to expose the tapered end of the pins. View B shows how the looped ends of the hinge pins lock over the end of the hinges when properly installed.

To preclude the possibility of failure as discussed above, we recommend that you check to see if you have the two pin configuration, and also verify that the pins are installed correctly.

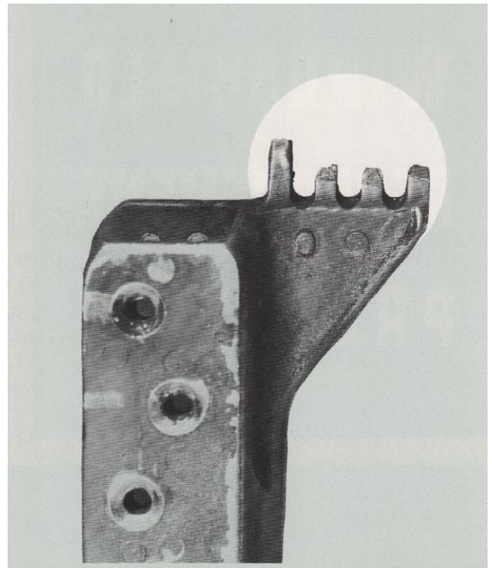


Figure 1. Damaged Flap Inboard Hinge Fitting

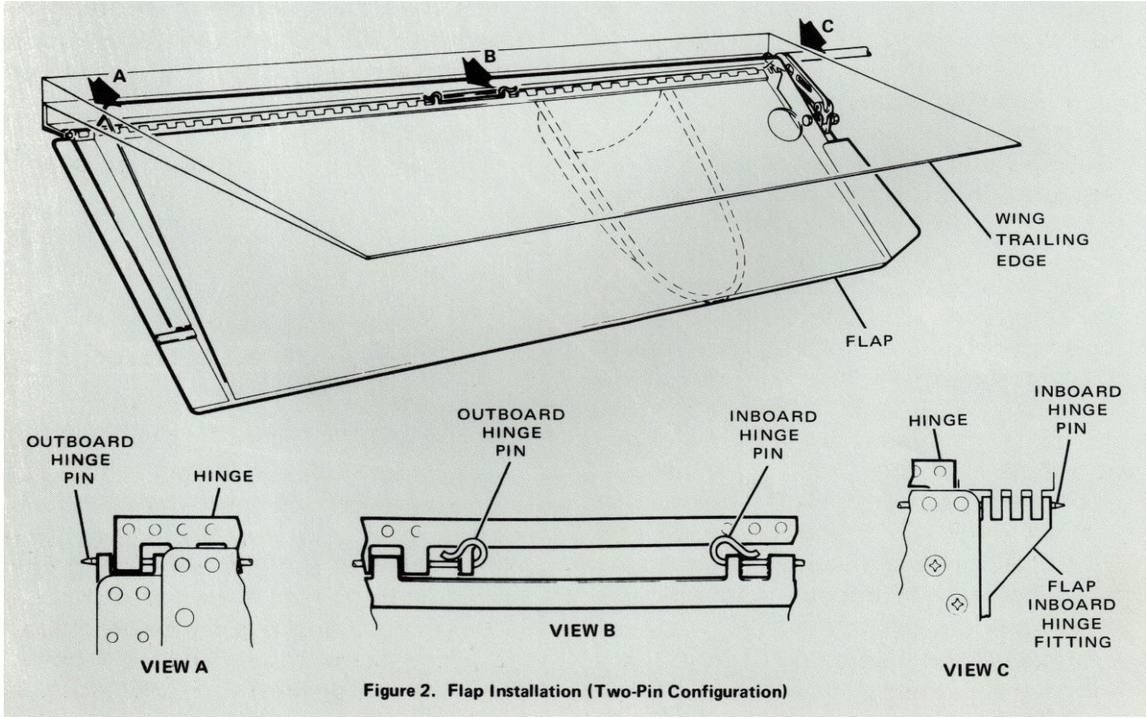


Figure 2. Flap Installation (Two-Pin Configuration)

“A Simple Fix”

By Anthony L. Tambini II, CDR, USN (Ret.)

It was a simple flight to test a Zuni rocket pod modification, the kind of test that you give to the new guy; take a couple of pods of Zuni rockets up and shoot them. Nothing to it. The Zuni 5-inch folding fin rocket was originally developed for air to air, as well as air to ground use. In the early days of jet aircraft, it was commonly believed that fighter aircraft and aerial combat would soon become a thing of the past. The best defense against high-speed bombers was thought to be interceptor airplanes that would race to a point in the sky and fire salvos of unguided rockets at the oncoming enemy airplanes. The Zuni seemed ideally suited for this mission. Carried in a pod of four rockets, with frangible aerodynamic fairings fore and aft to reduce drag, rockets could be fired in single, ripple, or salvo modes.

However, reports coming back from the fleet complained of high dud rates. At high altitudes, the salvo mode worked, but only the first rocket in the pod was firing successfully in ripple or single fire mode. After investigation, it was discovered that the aerodynamic fairings which were supposed to shatter when the rockets were fired didn’t break away easily at high altitude. When the first rocket fired, the pressure buildup necessary to break the aft fairing was sufficient to rupture the motor seals of the remaining three rockets in the pod, rendering them useless.

An Aviation Ordnance Department engineer reasoned logically that if high-gas pressure was the problem, a simple fix was in order. Reduce the pressure. A two-inch hole was cut into the center of the aft fairing on two “test pods.” Without further thought, an A-4A and range time were scheduled for a flight test of the alteration. Enter the new guy. With one pod under each wing, I was instructed to climb to thirty-five thousand feet altitude and fire one rocket from each pod. The remaining three rockets would be brought back for inspection to determine the effectiveness of the modification.

Startup and taxi out were routine. After stopping at the end of the runway for final arming of my two Zuni pods, I took off and climbed to altitude on the test range. Upon reaching the assigned altitude over the range and receiving clearance from “range control,” I fired the first rocket from the pod on the left wing. I saw a flash and heard the swoosh of the first rocket as it left the pod. It was immediately followed by a second flash. This flash was followed by a swoosh, and a very loud thump. The aircraft immediately began to buck and vibrate heavily. I relayed my observations and flight conditions to the ground controller while fighting the aircraft and its suddenly difficult controls. My first thought was that a panel had come off the bird or maybe something was hanging out that shouldn’t be. The controller on the ground radioed back that everything looked normal from down there, and that I should fire the rocket from the second pod and complete the test, as long, as I was up there. With some apprehension, I set up to fire the second pod, all the while wrestling the airplane which seemed to want to fly sideways. I pulled the trigger, and again a flash, a whoosh, and again, another flash, whoosh, and a very loud bang as I saw the second Zuni impact the aircraft just beneath where I was sitting. Now I really had my hands full. Vibrating and shaking violently, the airplane was taking all that I had to maintain control. I radioed my situation to the ground controller and told him that I would try to make it back to the Naval Air Facility.

The airplane really didn’t want to fly. I felt like I was attached to a giant, violent bronco. My main concern was that the airplane would shake itself to pieces before I could get it on the ground. I could see the Air Facility from my position on the range and set up for a fast, steep, straight in approach to the long runway. The thought of ejection never crossed my mind. As long as I was able to control this beast, I wanted to get it on the ground to see just what I had done to myself. My next problem was the landing gear, they seemed to take forever coming down, grinding, thumping and finally jerking into a down and locked indication on short final. Amazingly, the airplane seemed to settle down a bit after the landing gear were down.

Back on the flight line the airplane attracted quite a crowd. A large, black X was etched in the fuselage right under where I had been sitting as the two rockets crossed under me. The rocket pods had physically torn themselves out of the aft attach points and lodged outside the after-sway braces, leaving their lugs in the hooks of the bomb racks. The rocket tubes were pointed directly at the cockpit of the airplane. In this position the pods interfered with the landing gear operation, jammed against the main landing gear doors. It’s a wonder the landing gear came down at all. Both wings and the fuselage were extensively damaged where the second rocket from each pod had torn through the fuselage and debris had trailed along the underside of the wings, which generally made a mess. The only reason that the remaining two rockets in each pod didn’t fire was that the electrical connection was physically ripped out before the impulse reached the last two rockets. The ordnance man at the end of the runway had mistakenly set the pods on ripple instead of single fire.

The easy fix of the two-inch hole turned out to be a very effective jet nozzle directing the rocket exhaust upward and inward with such force that the lugs and electrical connections were physically ripped out of the metal pods. The aft end of each pod had been forced down and outboard of the bomb rack sway braces with the rocket tubes pointing directly at the fuselage just below the cockpit. Had the electrical connection not been broken by the violent wrenching of the pod out of its mount, two more rockets would have followed, and I might not be sitting here typing my account of the “simple test.”

Photos by Tony Tambini via Gary Verver.

FROM THE ATTIC

Mailbag

skyhawkstudygroup@yahoogroups.com
Posted by: Jeff Rankin-Lowe
siriusproductions@sympatico.ca
Used with permission.

"Blue Diamonds" A-4C *Skyhawks*

Two Douglas A-4C *Skyhawks* from the "Blue Diamonds" of VA-146 fly past the anti-submarine aircraft carrier USS *Kearsarge* (CVS-33). VA-146 was deployed as part of CVW-14 aboard USS *Constellation* (CVA 64) to the Western Pacific and Vietnam from 5 May 1964 to 1 February 1965. Aircraft from CVW-14 took part in the August 1964 strikes against North Vietnamese PT-boat bases following the Tonkin Gulf Incident. USS *Kearsarge* with CVSG-53 was deployed to the Western Pacific and Vietnam from 19 June to 16 December 1964.

Photo date: 12 August 1964
Source: Official U.S. Navy photograph (USN 1107965) from Naval History and Heritage Command.

Douglas A-4C Skyhawk (redesignated from A4D-2N)
BuNo 149551 c/n 12876
Later converted to A-4L; to MASDC as 3A0490, 29 May 1976; sold to Malaysia as A-4PTM, s/n M32-29, 1982; was in TUDM museum, but since its closure, stored at the now-closed Simpang air base.

Douglas A-4C Skyhawk (redesignated from A4D-2N)
BuNo 149570
Collided in midair with RF-8A Crusader BuNo 146879 over South China Sea off Lap An (northwest of Da Nang), 13 November 1964; A-4C pilot ejected safely and was rescued by helicopter, but RF-8A pilot was killed.

Taken by Peter Mersky in the mid-1990s, flying with VFC-12 against a VF-101 *Tomcat*. The pictured A-4 was flown by Vreeze, first name unknown.

SIZE DOES MATTER

Modelers' Corner

By Joe Turpen

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

Like many of the International Plastic Modelers Society (IPMS) clubs, the Military Modelers Club of Louisville (MMCL) has an annual contest and display. The contest occurs annually on the third Saturday of May. This year the contest was on May 19th and was very well attended. We were lucky and had three Skyhawk models present. They represented VA-95, VA-55 and VMA-223. Other contests are held at the regional and National level each year. This year the IPMS Nationals will be in Phoenix, AZ, from August 1st to 4th, and the 2019 Nationals will be in Chattanooga, TN, but the dates have not been confirmed as of yet.

Model VMA-223 *Skyhawk*.

Model VA-55 *Skyhawk*.

TINS!*

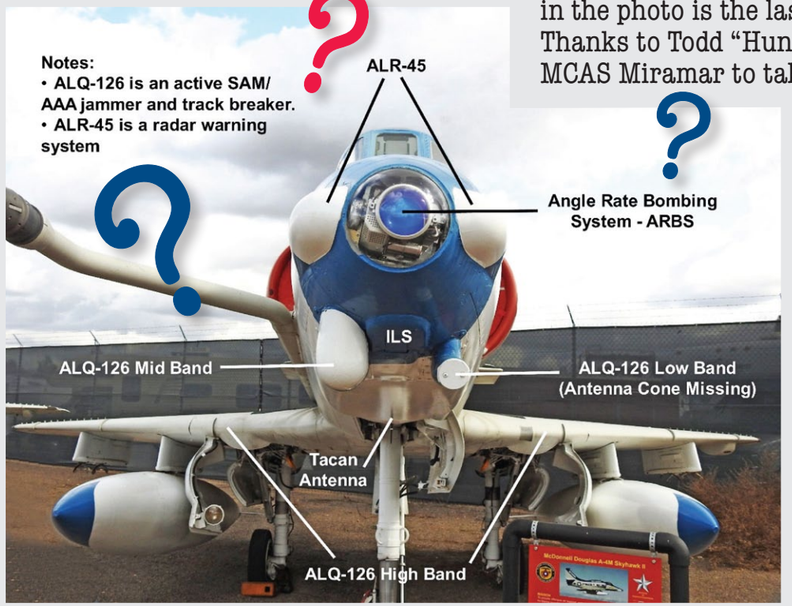
I remember a good friend of mine telling me about a 1970 TA-4 accident at China Lake that occurred during a Practice Precautionary Approach. A LT at the time, Bill "Willy" Weiler was in the back seat, watching a CDR as he practiced the 4,000 feet per minute simulated flameout approach. As the runway rushed up, the sink rate was not in control, and they smacked the runway really hard, but bounced back in the air still flying. Bill then saw his hands go for the face curtain up front, "No" was the cry, but it was too late. They were both ejected in sequence. The CDR got a good chute, but Bill didn't and was slammed into the dirt by the runway, breaking him up really bad. As he laid there assessing the damage, he realized his sun glasses were still intact on his face and carefully laid them to his side. The CDR ran up to see if Bill was OK and promptly smashed his shades.

Hide

Bill Weiler TA-4.

TRIVIA ANYONE

from Dave Dollarhide



Question? A-4M Warts

Answer: In the last issue, we asked, "What are the warts"? The A-4M in the photo is the last Skyhawk to be built, 2960. Thanks to Todd "Hun" Frommelt for going over to MCAS Miramar to take the shot.

Thanks also for the good email replies from Ian White in the UK, who has recently completed an A-4 book and Marco Renella, CAPT USN Ret and former China Lake ARBS Project Pilot, 1969-72.

We believe the captions are correct, but if you have other thoughts, drop me an email at davedollarhide@msn.com.

NEW MEMBERS

Barber, Rob • Manhattan Beach, CA
Dunham, James • Gentry, AR
Hastings, E.E. • Bozeman, MT
Johns, Joseph • Katy, TX
Lacy, Flip • Frederick, MD
McCarthy, Thomas • Collierville, TN
McClellan, Robert • Bedford, TX
Niemi, Marl • Kaukauna, WI
Oetting, Robert • Bethesda, MD
Rogers, Keith • Doylestown, PA
Ryan, Edward • Atlanta, GA
Schumacher, Duane • Ocala, FL
Tschan, Christopher • Colorado Springs, CO
Wilson, David • Bloomington, IL

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

Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

By Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

OPERATION YOSSI: THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF YOSSI SARIG (AND YOUTHLY PURESOME)

The usual suspects who read **A-4Ever** were introduced to Israeli A-4 pilot extraordinaire Yossi Sarig in President Pete Cole's excellent account of the Skyhawk Association 2017 visit to Israel. Yossi was one of the four veteran Israeli pilots sent to Cecil Field in 1967 to get checked out in the Skyhawk, where Puresome was an instructor in VA-44. Two of those pilots survived both Puresome's instruction and several wars. Both were from 102 Squadron, the first entirely Skyhawk squadron, which was organized from the start by Yossi and his Deputy, Nissim Ashkenazi, who followed Yossi as skipper.

While Puresome had been in regular contact with Nissim and visited him in both Israel trips, Yossi Sarig had disappeared off the radar, except for reports of him in active International business at places like the Paris Air Show. But he had not seen Yossi since Cecil Field days until an early morning conspiracy and surprise sprung at a meeting with the US Air Attaché in 2017's Skyhawk Association visit.

Into the meeting walks Yossi Sarig, who had been contacted by our superb Israeli host, Rami Lothan, and brought to this meeting in great secrecy. The poor Air Attaché was completely upstaged.

From this short encounter sprang email correspondence and phone calls. Yossi's Aviation Technology business takes him to the New York area every six weeks, and our regular chats led to an interesting request: was there any way he could get a flight in the USA in a Skyhawk?

June 2018 had been chosen for a fifty-year celebration of the anniversary of IAF 102 "Flying Tiger" Squadron, actually created on 29 December 1967. When their first Skyhawks arrived and the cocoons peeled off, Skipper Yossi made the first flight, but not before the Flying Tiger emblem was painted on the tail. Still leading from the pointy end of the spear, Yossi planned a surprise for the celebration: the original Skipper actually flying a Skyhawk!

Since Puresome's petty cash drawer did not permit his own personal Skyhawk, he started scratching around the various US organizations that offered flights in jet warbirds. MiG's, even Phantoms were available, but no A-4s.

Then Puresome remembered an email friend, Richard Sugden, MD, who had been a flying flight surgeon in the Navy, still practiced medicine, and operated his own stable of flying warbirds thru his Teton Aviation business in Driggs, Idaho. This stable included a pristine TA-4!

This proved to be a true breakthrough. Doc Sugden is a true polymath, Energizer Bunny active aviation enthusiast, who flies all his own planes for fun and legacy flights. He also thought an A-4 flight for Yossi was possible and a good idea. Thus began a year of plotting, coordinating, weather guessing, and hoping for Middle East politics to remain at a mere simmer.

Doc Sugden also seemed to know many people in aviation and government that were way above Puresome's pay grade. This included Joe Clark, of Aviation Partners, Inc, among other things inventor of the winglets used on airliners to improve performance, as well as being a very enthusiastic aviator. It seemed that Joe held an annual Memorial Day festive fly in at his Flying Joseph Ranch and Airport in Idaho, not far away from Teton Aviation's base of Driggs, Idaho. Aviation legends and such people as Harrison Ford often showed up in their own exotic airplanes. There would be nonstop TINS, and certainly the appropriate adult beverages that fueled such tales.

It was decided Yossi and Puresome would show up for Operation Memorial Day as their best shot at getting Yossi airborne in a Skyhawk. Incidentally, Puresome would get airborne in something exotic, too.

Once again, both logistically and operationally, Doc Sugden made everything easy so Puresome could relax and enjoy what turned out to be five days of hospitality and flying.

continued...

Yossi Sarig, Rich Sugden, and Jack Woodul.

Puresome continued...

Idaho is famously lovely country, with big rocks with snow on them and lots of green valleys through deserts. Launch day for Operation Yossi brought Doc Sugden's Air Force together for a planned launch after lunch. Puresome, who was from mountain country himself, knew the air would be a bit lumpy in the afternoon, and there were acceptably mixed clouds and the usual thunderstorms over the really-high rocks, but that was "no hill for a stepper" in Naval Aviator talk.

A mixed flight of four aircraft was briefed, with Doc Sugden leading in his FJ-4B *Fury*, Pete Kline and Puresome in the T-2, and Dave "Cujo" Malacuso and Yossi in the TA-4. They would rendezvous just before landing with a F4U *Corsair* that launched earlier.

The short version of getting the rather creaky Puresome stuffed into the rear seat of the T-2 is that a great deal of


Yossi Sarig.

patience and guidance was involved by his pilot. Puresome's rule for his home FBO personnel was that nobody could laugh watching him get in and out of aircraft. Pete Kline just shoehorned and got on with the business of flight.

Of course, Iron Man Yossi scrambled up his boarding ladder and plopped into the rear TA-4 seat, ready to start driving.

A fair crowd of admirers watched the flight of three taxi out, take off, and assemble in a running rendezvous for the approximately forty-five minute flight to Joe Clark's airfield. After a short time of dodging some clouds on the Fury's wing, Pete said, "you ready to fly?" The only permissible answer was "Hale, yes!"

Puresome had never flown a T-2, having done the T-28 for Navy Basic Training, but after a short acclimation period with its controls, he locked onto an acceptable parade position and stayed there through lots of maneuvering until Pete took over for the formation to land. All those years of formation flying must have imprinted his hemorrhoidal sense, and it was second nature. Puresome assumed Yossi was smiling and doing the same thing, but he was locked on to the *Fury* as Doc maneuvered to tally ho and rendezvous with the *Corsair*, which ultimately chose to go ahead and land first, due to the winds and a case of oily windscreens.

After landing, both Yossi and Puresome were both poster children for the Ultimate Smiley Face poster.

Joe Clark's Flying Joseph Ranch proved to be the ultimate Man Cave on steroids. Not just the huge hangar complex and tower, but a mountain lodge great room that featured a dedicated chef and staff, with hot and cold running food and beverage, but shooting ranges, and an unknown number of housing complexes, roaming buffalo and grass-fed beef. The USN SEALs loved the terrain, and they regularly showed up to train. Yossi, Puresome, and Doc's pilots stayed in what was known as the SEAL house about a mile away from the airport complex.


TA-4.

Puresome knew from the git-go that all this was certainly way above his pay grade, but somebody had to do it and it might as well be he and Yossi.

The experience just got better. Joe Clark proved to be the heart of his operation, and the air was continuously full of arriving guests in various exotic jets and other interesting aircraft. Early morning wakeup was usually to the sound of Joe doing the Dawn Patrol in one aircraft or other, and some kind of helo or exotic STOL aircraft was always taking off, just for fun.

Airshow Day proved to be beautiful, and the *Fury*, T-2, and TA-4 provided formation and single pass excitement. Puresome's job as Yossi's PAO was to fumble with his cameras and try and document as much of the action as possible.

Big Time Action there was. This was non-stop G-pulling and formation and single aircraft passes for Cujo and Yossi's TA-4. Puresome's cameras got hot from clicking and trying to capture close passes that blew wax out of his hairy ears.

It was an extraordinary day, followed by an extraordinary prime rib and fixin's supper and listening to TINS tales from Joe Clark's aviation prime mover friends. To top it all, Yossi gave an hour long talk to the guests, illustrated with slides from his career in the Israeli Air Force. He got a deserved standing ovation. From all the time they'd had to visit with Yossi, he could have told everyone that that wasn't half of it.

The flight back to Driggs provided another formation flight for both Yossi and Puresome, and both the T-2 and TA-4 broke off for a guided tour of the snowy Tetons.

Operation Yossi was mission accomplished. Yossi was blown away by the experience, as was Puresome. Networking was arranged by a number of impressed Yanks, and Yossi made many new friendships.


FJ, T-2, and TA-4.

Since the whole project was made in D-Day like secrecy, and Yossi's surprise will be sprung during the June 14 celebration in Israel, Puresome expects his Israeli friends will be blown away as well.

Youthly expects that tectonic movement will be felt back in the USA, and lots of appreciative Smiley Faces will happen. Again.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

None of this could have happened without Dr. Richard Sugden's active above-and-beyond enthusiasm, participation, and friendliness. This included his Teton Aviation assets and organization. His pilots, Dave "Cujo" Malcaluso, Talon Aviation, and Staff pilot Pete Kline, were patient and instructive. Doc Sugden's friendship and long association with Joe Clark made the Memorial Day fly-in possible. Certainly, Joe's hospitality and facilities were central.

I cannot personally thank them enough for the success of this project, and I know that Yossi feels the same.

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