

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 24-3



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Skyhawk Association Board Meeting
March 29-31, 2019
Tucson, AZ

Fall 2018

<http://a4skyhawk.info>



THE PREZ SEZ

By Pete Cole

Annual Board Meeting and Luncheon September 2018

The Association holds the required annual members’ meeting/luncheon and board meeting at Tailhook each year. The board meeting went well with no significant issues raised. The following slate of Officers was elected for the coming year: President – Steve Linder, VP (Navy) – Terry Wolf, VP (Marine) – Bill Ravgiala, Treasurer – Mark Williams, and Secretary – Terry Cooney. In addition, board members Gene Atwell, George Blosser, Peter Cole, Ed Jobin, Mark Williams, and Terry Wolf were recommended for re-election and new board member Denny Sapp was recommended and subsequently elected by the general membership at the annual luncheon meeting.



Skyhawk Association Board of Directors at Hook ’18. (left – right): Mark Williams, Terry Cooney, Todd Frommelt, Joe Turpen, Bill Egen, Terry Wolf, Denny Sapp, Ed Jobin, Gene Atwell, Pete Cole, William Ravgiala, George Blosser, Ted Langworthy, and Dave Dollarhide. Photo via author.



Skyhawk Association Annual Luncheon Speaker CAPT Dale “Snort” Snodgrass, USN (Ret). Photo via author.



The Prez Pete Cole

Discussions relevant to the general membership during the board meeting included membership status, the Treasurer’s report, website upgrades, the journal report, Skyhawks still flying report, SDO issues/concerns, the nomination of the directors and proposed officer slate, and planning of the mid-year board meeting scheduled for 29 – 31 March 2019 in Tucson, AZ. The subsequent Skyhawk Association Business sub-section summarizes the Association business discussions relevant to the general membership. Once published and ratified, the official meeting minutes will be available to any member.

As always, our annual meeting/luncheon offers a great opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers. This year’s speaker was no exception. We heard a great presentation from CAPT Dale “Snort” Snodgrass, USN (Ret), Chief Pilot of Draken International, who spoke on the subject of “Contract Tactical Aviation – A Training Solution.” Snort, a high time F-14 guy, flies the A-4 Skyhawk in an adversary role for Draken. It was an enjoyable, informative presentation on the status of contract tactical aviation for fleet training and well received by all the well-seasoned A-4 drivers and friends in the audience.

While all this official Association business was happening, the A-4, A-6 and A-7 Associations once again hosted the Attack Ready Room at Hook ’18, which was visited by all important guests, plus anybody else

continued page 4...



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Fall 2018 •

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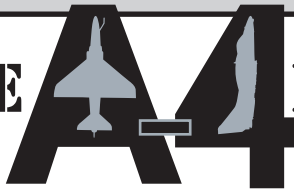
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JOURNAL STAFF

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.

————— Published by the Skyhawk Association © 2018 —————



THE A4 EVER

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: VA-23 Black Knights A-4E Skyhawk BuNo 152017, NE-336, piloted by Cdr. Robert R. King of Pomona, CA, (VA-23 CO), fires 2.75-inch rockets at Viet Cong targets in Vietnam, 28 October 1965. Official U.S. Navy photo 1113918.

that happened by. Our audio-visuals were run this year by our AV guru Director Mark "Senator" Williams. The merry revelers were provided non-stop entertainment with DVD shows of everything attack aviation, and TINS Tales were once again regaled over the occasional adult beverage. The Ready Room stories still get better every year, as do our flying memories!

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.

Skyhawk Association Business

The complete minutes of the business meeting will be available to members on the web site. Some highlights are:

Membership: The membership is holding at 780 with about a 75% retention rate. There has been a steady flow of new or returning members which is encouraging. Recruiting and retention remain high on our goals list, and we are always looking for recruiting opportunities.

Once again from my "soap box," **you** can help! Find your squadron mates out there that need the cattle prod or at least the reminder! It's your Association, let's keep it vibrant, alive and well. And, another reminder to PLEASE let us know if you have a change in your email, address, and phone number, so we can keep our records up-to-date. Send changes to our Secretary at skyhawkasn@gmail.com.

Website: Webmaster Gene Atwell, his assistant Dave Weber, and their volunteer web team have been working tirelessly. However, more volunteers are needed to assist with simple updates. If you would like to help, contact Dave Weber, twidget55@darw.com. Also, we ask you to once again look at your squadron's web page. If you can add or correct information, that would be greatly appreciated.

SDOs: We have had no new SDO volunteers since our last appeal. Our Squadron Duty Officers (SDOs) are key people in keeping us connected and helping to get the word out when required. The official list of squadron SDOs is posted on the Skyhawk website 'FAQ - Research - Contact' page, <http://a4skyhawk.info/page/faq-research-contact>, and while the majority of these are filled, there are still some units that need an SDO. Once again, I ask all members to please review the list on the website and see if there are any open units for which you would consider accepting the SDO responsibility. Several of our SDOs have agreed to host more than one unit, and we greatly appreciate their additional efforts. For Navy units please contact George Blosser, SDO coordinator, george.blosser1@gmail.com.

Events, NOTAMS, and R&I

The next Winter 2018 - 2019 edition of *The A-4ever* will be distributed only in digital format. As is our custom, access will be through the unrestricted, public access side of the website. Check for the announcement on the website around the scheduled posting date of 15 January 2019.

Now Hear This! The word on upcoming events and dates of note:

The Skyhawk Association Winter Board Meeting is being planned for 29 - 31 March 2019 in Tucson, AZ. The POC is Director Terry Wolf, tairwolf@comcast.net. As they become available, more details will be posted in the POD on the web page or contact Terry. Join us!

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. The **Grand and Sole Hotels are now full**, however, there may be some rooms available this next month owing to attrition (there is a "Waiting List"). **Registration** closed on 27 September. 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 (sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net) 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.

Welcome Aboard



Steve "Dwarf" Linder

Welcome aboard! I've passed the gavel to my relief Steve 'Dwarf' Linder, our new Prez. Best of luck, Dwarf. *A-4s Forever!*

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.net

■ To the Editor:

Hi Dave,

I just heard you on the Savage Nation and it was great to hear someone clear up some of the B.S. surrounding McCain. The only problem is when you talk to Savage he tries to walk all over your conversation and you can't complete what you wanted to say. But all in all, he agreed with what you got out so that was a plus.

I get the A-4ever magazine and enjoy all the work you and the guys do on it.

I was a Mustang from the enlisted ranks and went into the NAVCAD program at P'cola in '65. I went to VT-7 in Meridian and Lt. McCain was my formation instructor and I learned how complex a personality he was as you so gingerly put it. I would have just broken it down in enlisted language and referred to him as a rip-roaring Ass.

I got to Yankee Station in February of '68, assigned to VA-94 on *Bon Homme Richard* so we missed most of the action you guys saw on Alpha Strikes to Hanoi and Haiphong. LBJ's bombing halt was in effect and we thought the war up North would end soon. We had a couple of strikes to the NVN AA school in Vinh. That was the only time I saw 85mm at 14,000 ft. Most of our flights were along the Ho Chi Minh trail and we did help the Marines at Khe Sanh. Got to see a lot of Thailand and the Plain of Jars and some Cambodia.

The Navy had a manpower reduction in '69 and I got out 2 years early on my commitment and finished college at Fresno State. Six months later I got a letter from the Navy saying that they made a mistake and asked 500 JOs to come back if we wanted. I chose to finish school and by the time I graduated it was all over.

Keep up the good work,
Dean Kwarta, Combat Ensign

...

Dave replied:

Hey, Dean,

Glad you dropped me a note. My wife was in the car and called to say that callers to Savage were saying McCain killed everybody on the FID, so I looked up the show number and they put me on so fast I didn't even know where they were in the conversation and got a little confused. When he said something about the A-4 didn't have an afterburner and couldn't have caused the fire, I got sidetracked on that, but eventually, we communicated. My intention in calling was to protect the facts.

Thanks for the compliments on the Journal, but most of that goes to Bob "Raven" Hickerson.

I appreciate your membership. So many of our buds are passing, we're a dying breed for sure and it reflects in our Assn. numbers.

Dave "Hide"

■ To the Editor:

Bob,

The A4 *Skyhawk* on display at the California Aerospace Museum in Sacramento is the first aircraft that visitors see when they walk out of the museum building into the air park. It has weathered heat, rain, cold and fog in its ten plus years in public view and is showing it.

One of the museum volunteers, a former PO2 *Skyhawk* maintainer, is spearheading a fund-raising campaign to repaint the aircraft to bring it back to its original glory. It is painted in Blue Angel livery and will remain that way.

If you can see your way to spending a couple of bucks to help get her looking good again, here is the address.

Aerospace Museum of California
3200 Freedom Park Drive
McClellan, CA 95652
Marked: A4D restoration only



If you could put out the above info to the members, it would be appreciated. I was a volunteer at the museum until I moved to SoCal a year ago.

R. D. Miller

■ To the Editor:



The Summer 2018 Journal points out that 149551 and MS32-29 are the same airframe and my logbook shows I was able to get that refurbished A-4PTM from St. Augustine as far as Sondrestrom (now called Kangerlussuaq and no longer Danish) in 1985. I had noises (other than the usual night noises from the J-65 in the daytime) and accompanying vibrations on descent into Sondy, and I left the jet there for somebody else to fly to Malaysia.

continued...

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



The previous logbook page shows I exercised two of the jets in England (MS32-09 and MS32-12) before we set off for Kuantan, and we were able to get MS32-09 there in one piece, albeit with a rough runner which was eventually diagnosed as two turbine blades having gone MIA on the last leg from Phuket to Kuantan. Each Blade (yuk, yuk) announced its departure with a thunk and follow-on surge on the nickel sized oil gauge tucked up under the glare shield. I had no intentions of ejecting over the jungle where the insurgents were being bombed with our previously delivered jets, so I set the power at 82 percent with the second thunk and passed up an opportunity to do a well briefed airshow upon arrival in exchange for a PA. At any rate, the paranoia I had from this jet is why I downed -29 in Soudy and Toby Griggs was able to figure out the noises and vibrations emanating from the hump, but I was committed to AA for a job and was unable to continue once the problem was fixed.

However, my time in Soudy was educational (there's frequently a moral to the story and it's proof that even a Marine can be taught) as the two Danish line personnel who adopted me each individually believed Kronenberg (French) or Carlsberg (Danish) beer was the best, and they kept me extremely well fed that first night with a liquid diet until we left the joint at 0400. Even though the sun had "gone down" to the north due to the cumulo-granite in that direction (Soudy was in a fjord), it was still broad daylight outside. My assertion that we needed to return to the bar was ignored. A few hours later

the troops in the barracks provided me with a concoction called "North Sea Oil" and while it went down warmly and smoothly, I did notice some leftover sediment and permanent staining of the white paper cup from which it was served.

I stayed for a few days because SAS only flew to Greenland twice a week, and I made it back to Philly via Copenhagen and JFK to begin the current job at AA. For some reason, I don't recall much else about Sondrestrom.

Blade

■ To the Editor:

Dear Sir

I am currently restoring an A-4C *Skyhawk* cockpit/fuselage. I am wondering if Item #138 Altimeter part number AAU19A is still available. If so, how much is it??

Don

Dave replied:

Don,

As you may know, we're an all volunteer fraternal non-profit focused on A-4 history. You obviously found a parts list buried in our website, but even though there is a note about contacting the webmaster, no one remembers any details, or who might have had these parts. We don't actually possess any physical artifacts or parts, so the list is of little use, except for obtaining a part number, as you may have done.

The altimeter in the *Skyhawk* wasn't unique to the airplane and would've been installed in other military aircraft of the time. Even other models of altimeters would look similar for the most part and may serve your purpose.

I was flying an A-4C up until 2.5 years ago and have provided you an inflight photo of the cockpit with a good view of the altimeter below. Even though there are some modern cockpit updates the altimeter/airspeed and most other gauges are most likely original. The AeroAntique cut-n-past provided is a variation, found by one of our staff. Another also found the part number at this

site: <https://www.asap-amspares.com/manufacture/mcdonnell-douglas-co/>

I hope this helps. We're interested in your project. How far along are you in completing your restoration? Where is it located? Do you have any photos?

Thanks,

Dave Dollarhide

Board Member and general flunky

Don replied:

Dear Dave

Thanks for your prompt reply!!

I am just getting started on my project. I will replace a few fuselage panels, reconstruct the nose, and give it a good coat of paint with decals. The improvement of the interior of the cockpit will be an adventure for several years (as parts become available), but I am TOTALLY satisfied that I have saved this piece of naval aviation history. I have researched the A-4 for several months now, and it is a fascinating and incredible old warbird!

I am forwarding you some pictures. It is located in eastern North Carolina.

Don



■ To the Editor:

Sending this as inquiry about possible loss of A-4 during tet offensive in Vietnam 1968. can't recall specific dates. I can however give exact location as city of Vinh Long, Vinh long province. I built the A-4 as a kid and no mistake in the ID could not see markings as to Navy or Marines. I did see the plane in a crossfire which shot the rudder completely out. Saw this from rooftop in the city. Plane was giving air support to ground forces. Smoke was coming from behind cockpit and was last seen heading back out to sea. There were no bases south of us to support the plane. I estimate maybe 35-40 miles to coast. Always wanted to know name of pilot as he saved our bacon on that day.

Like to buy him a drink and also give credit for the way he flew out with no rudder. Any info you might be able to give would be appreciated. as I said no mistaking the *Skyhawk*.

Freddie I webb
viet vet 1967 68

Hate to bother you again on the *Skyhawk* incident but I just came across something I did not know. According to a website about "dixie station," there were no aircraft carriers off the southern coast of Vietnam in 1968. I do know the plane was heading S-SW from Vinh Long and know of no bases on land that direction could support the *Skyhawk*. So with the rudder missing and smoke from behind the cockpit the pilot might have ditched at sea near another boat. It seems a long way from Vinh Long to "Yankee Station" to fly the plane in that condition. Also I guess I never thought of the plane perhaps being land based. All I know is there were no color marks on the plane just the standard Navy gray, and as I said, the plane must have been directed by the Troop Operation Center in Vinh Long or the MACV team 52 people.

Freddie,

Dave replied:

We appreciate your inquiry, as many of us at the Skyhawk Association flew A-4s in Vietnam. As I'm sure you realize, the answer to your question is a needle in a haystack, but we do have an extensive list of A-4 losses, a list that had been in continual work for many years. I searched the data by using the key words "Vinh Long" and found no *Skyhawk* losses listed in that vicinity (and none of us are aware of any *Skyhawk* operations in 1968 as far south as Vinh Long).

A search on the key word "Vinh" revealed numerous losses, but as you know, Vinh was a major enemy stronghold in then-North Vietnam.

We have no other resources to use, so it looks as though this will remain a mystery. Thank you for your inquiry and let us know if you have further comments or questions.

Dave Dollarhide

(Ed. note: Members take note that Gary Verver's extensive documentation of losses can be found on our website. To view these records, sign in, click on the *Ready Room*, then select *Verver's Losses Project*.)

■ To the Editor:

Dave,

I have restored the LSO platform on the USS *Hornet* Sea Air and Space museum. The only thing left to do is get a picture of an A-4 landing with a PLAT view looking up the glide slope (with the cross hairs). I have not been able to find one. I'm sure they're out there but my computer skills are limited.

If you have one with the plane fairly close in would you please send it. As well as the platform monitor I will put one in PriFly, the Captain's Bridge, and our restored ready room.

Thank you,

Allan Cartwright

VA-195 Dam Busters (1966-1968)

ok1wire@aol.com

Dave replied:

Very cool, Allan! That's gonna be a tall order. A cursory search on our site only turned up shots from the island and elsewhere, but none in the PLAT crosshairs. I do have a picture I took of the photo displayed on the Hornet PLAT when we had our board meeting out your way...number of years back. I've attached the raw photo, which has some of the box included, but I've also done a quick edit that may or may not work. They are both pretty crude, but so was the PLAT view from our day. You probably have this photo already. I'll let you know if I find something better.

Dave

■ To the Editor:

Currently on a trip with one of the sons of POW Jim Mulligan, Sean Mulligan.

Any stories I can share with Sean about his old man? 92 and still kicking.

Blade

Bear replied:

Blade,

Jim was my XO and we all absolutely loved him. When you had a problem or a question, you went to XO. My roommate, Bull Turner, was really getting psyched about flying over the North and was seriously considering DOR'ing. We both went down to XO's stateroom and after a long discussion, Jim made him my permanent wingman for all hops over the beach. I tutored him on the Shrike and he finished out the cruise on my wing. Talk about a Blue Angel! When I looked down my wingline, Bull was tucked in tight with 2 big eyeballs staring at me!! When we had liberty in Hong Kong, the XO spent the whole in-port period going to embassies trying to find out if Ray Alcorn was a POW or KIA. Unfortunately, he made a personal visit to Hanoi! I was airborne the day Jim got bagged! You are fortunate to know Sean. An awesome family and as you know, Jim's wife Louise was instrumental in bringing focus about our POWs. I asked her permission to have his name put on a POW bracelet and have the first one. Can't imagine how many coats of clear nail polish I applied.

Bear

Blade replied:

Bear,

Sean will read your response tomorrow on our way from Rome to Philly. Paul's remembrance was well received today as we cruised the city and I'll fill you all in once we make it to Philly.

Thanks,

Blade

Bear replied:

Sean is not easily excited nor impressed, but I could see the excitement and pride in his facial expression as I told him Paul Galanti's recollection at the dinner table in Portsmouth and he quickly followed up with "That's definitely my dad!"

While waiting to depart yesterday, I began an introduction to Bear's story by describing how the Med cruise in which Jim ejected from another A-4 also earned another *Skyhawk* pilot his

continued...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR continued.

callsign. Barely a sentence into the Fox-trot Corpen reversal story, Sean looked at me and asked whether I was talking about Bear. We both laughed.

Sean did say the smartest thing he ever did in life was to get a haircut before the old man showed up after his 7 year vacation. While holding for a gate yesterday in Philly, Sean put Jim on the phone and we talked about 5 minutes until we had to hang up and taxi to the gate. The conversation would have gone on longer had we not needed to get 280 folks to the gate. Sean says Jim will fall asleep in the middle of any conversation except those relating to the Scooter. I now have his number and will be talking with him again before Hook.

Sean will be upgrading to a 320 Captain slot based in Philly beginning

in September and it looks like Sean's son and Jim's grandson, Shane, will be working here shortly. So if you ever fly anywhere on an AA Airbus 319/320/321 after October, stick your head in the cockpit and see if Sean's there. Louise did a great job with the 6 boys while Jim was away!

Blade

■ To the Editor:

Re "How the A-4 *Skyhawk* Ruled the Skies. This was one tough jet" by Sebastien Roblin in your Summer 2018 issue. Only 1 A-4 was lost in the attacks on Vinh on August 5, 1964. Lt(jg) Dick Sather was flying an A-1H Skyraider when he was shot down and killed.

Cheers,
Doug Clarke
CAPT, USN (Ret)

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



Bob replied:

Doug, thanks for the correction. I guess it was inevitable that there would be some corrections in such a comprehensive scan of the subject.

Bob

■ To the Editor:

Sirs:

The current CO of MALS-12, Col. John Fallon, USMC sent me this picture of his daughters and friends standing in front of OA-4M (154638) at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan.

Semper Fi!

Sgt. Thomas M. Dunne, USMC
H&MS-12, MAG-12, 1st MAW
Chu Lai, South Vietnam and
Iwakuni, Japan
July '69-July '70



NEW MEMBERS

Barber, Robert • Manhaten Beach, CA
Barry, John • Liverpool, NY
Beede, William • Fayetteville, GA
Brown, Cooper • Whitehorse, TN
Dunham, James • Gentry, AR
Greene, Michael • Nocona, TX
Hartman, James • Olive Branch, MS
Hastings, E.E. • Bozeman, MT
Johns, Joseph • Katy, TX
Jones, Sam • Delta, AL
Lacy, Flip • Frederick, MD
Leonard, Michael • Clayton, GA

McCarthy, Thomas • Collierville, TN
McClellan, Robert • Bedford, TX
Mitchell, Delbert • Las Vegas, NV
Newell, Tom • Richmond, TX
Niemi, Mark • Kaukauna, WI
Oetting, Doug • Pensacola, FL
Oetting, Robert • Bethesda, MD
Oppenhuizen, John • Yorktown, VA
Platz, George • Kennett Square, PA
Ricci, Donald • Santa Rosa, CA
Rogers, Keith • Doylestown, PA
Ryan, Edward • Atlanta, GA

Schumacher, Duane • Ocala, FL
Short, Benjamin • Santa Barbara, CA
Spreier, Richard • Freeport, FL
Stephens, Brian • Satellite Beach, FL
Stephens, Grayson • Hermitage, TN
Tschan, Christopher • Colorado Springs, CO
Williams, Spotswood • Flint Hill, VA
Wilson, Donald • Bloomington, IL
Winners, Donald • Tiburon, CA



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

Read?

you think
we read?

US NAVY F-4 PHANTOM II UNITS OF THE VIETNAM WAR 1969-1973

Peter E. Davies,
Osprey Publishing, UK. 2018.
96 pages. Ill. \$23.

Reviewed by Cdr. Peter B. Mersky,
USNR(Ret.)

Peter Davies has written many Osprey books, including quite a few dealing with the F-4 in Vietnam. This new book, no. 125 in Osprey's Combat Aircraft series, continues the story from No. 116 that describes the F-4 and its crews in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968 (published in 2016), might be one of his best. Its appearance more than two years after the first volume, shows how much work is required to write these great little books,

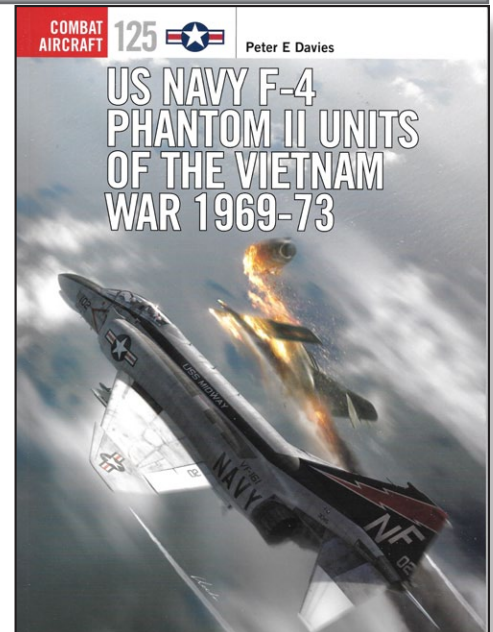
Beginning with an excellent description of the early war years, Davies moves into the development of how

U.S. Navy Phantom crews dealt with the North Vietnamese MiG force, a deceptively simple but complicated setup involving what were outdated but still potent MiG-17s paired with more sophisticated MiG-21s, especially the latest MF model, beginning to appear by 1972.

The details in this book are among the most technical I have seen when writing about the operation of the F-4's missile and radar systems and the complicated application of maneuvers and missile and radar capabilities when fighting MiGs during the war. This description gives new respect and understanding for the teamwork between pilot and radar intercept officer (RIO).

I have also never seen the highly complicated train of events of May 10, 1972, described in such detail. This is new history to be used as a reference by historians and enthusiasts alike.

Scottish artist Gareth Hector's usual stunning cover illustration was of particular interest to this reviewer



as it shows the last MiG kill of the war when on January 12, 1973, a VF-161 Phantom crew shot down a MiG-17. The pilot of the F-4 was a fellow member of the Navy's Aviation Officer Candidate School class 10-68. Hector's piece almost puts the viewer right on Kovaleski's port wing, at about the high seven o'clock position.

Jim Laurier's traditionally fine profile work is also on full display with the folio of side drawings.

MEMBER MOVIES

By Dave Dollarhide

Several years ago, the *Skyhawk Association* established a YouTube channel to preserve "home movies" of the A-4 and the people who flew and worked on them. Naturally, most of the movies have come from 8mm movie film that has been converted to digital, but video movies from modern day flying have also been preserved. So far, the

effort has been a total success, with forty five movies posted and a couple more in work. The *Association's* website *Video Page* can link you to the YouTube channel and also lists links to Skyhawk movies on the web.

Usually, there is someone close by who can convert your 8mm film to a digital format. If you have difficulty, one

of the people we've worked with is Gary Schreffler, who is a former Navy rescue swimmer, works for Homeland Security and on the side, collects and sells carrier aviation films. Gary will convert your film for free, with your permission to make copies for his use. He's got state of the art equipment and converted mine and several others. A cool guy!

We're still looking for your movies, so if you have them buried, dig'em out before they wind up in an estate sale. Contact me at davedollarhide@msn.com.



On Your Wing

By CDR John B. Nichols III, USN (Ret) and Barrett Tillman

I flew an “Iron Hand” mission from USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) on 26 April 1967, escorting an A-4E *Skyhawk* on a defense-suppression sortie near Haiphong, North Vietnam. I was a LCDR flying F-8E *Crusaders* in VF-191. My section leader on the mission was LCDR Michael Estocin, an attack pilot in VA-192. He was a smart, aggressive aviator—one of only a half-dozen Iron Hands in Air Wing 19 qualified to counter enemy surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) with AGM-45 Shrike anti-radiation missiles.

Mike was one of the few who enjoyed dueling with SAMs. He was not content merely to suppress the enemy batteries—he wanted to shoot them with Shrikes—to go for the “hard kill” instead of a “mission kill.” Only six days before, he had stretched his luck almost to the breaking point. He had attacked three sites, took severe damage to his jet, and returned to the task force only by flying hooked up to a KA-3B tanker. Even when he disconnected, he landed with his A-4 afire and streaming fuel through holes in the wings.

continued...

Ed. Note: This article first appeared in the September 1994 issue of the Naval Institute Proceedings and was later reprinted in The Hook, Spring 1995. Used with permission.

Ticonderoga with CVW-19 embarked, 10 Dec '67, immediately prior to Tico's departure for WestPac on 28 December. On deck are VA-192 A-4Es and VA-195 A-4Cs, VF-191 and VF-194 F-8Es and a VAH-4 KA-3B. A VRC-30 C-1A is spotted alongside the island. All images via Tailhook Association.

Objective—Haiphong

Our section was to launch ahead of an Alpha strike—a deck load of attack, fighter, and support aircraft. The strike's objective was to destroy a priority target: the Haiphong thermal power plant. I briefed with the other pilots in the strike group, then huddled with Mike to determine our particular tactics. His mission was to destroy or suppress specific SAM sites that might threaten the strike group. My job was three-fold: to augment Mike's eyes, looking for SAMs; to protect him against attacks from enemy MiG fighter aircraft; and to attack any site he hit with a Shrike, using my four 20mm canon. I also carried two AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles for aerial combat.

Our intelligence officers reported a well-known site north-northwest of Haiphong to be active, having fired SA-2 missiles at previous sorties. As I recall it was called VN-109, the 109th SAM site identified in North Vietnam. Knowing the location of the site, Mike and I determined our approach course, altitude, and run-in headings. I would fly in a 30-degree cone, aft about 600 feet and stepped down about 100 feet from his A-4 *Skyhawk*, July 208. This formation was called “the SAM box.” We had been told that a radar beam guided a missile to the electronic center of a

target blip, so a 600- to 700-ft. separation theoretically allowed a SAM to pass between two planes without striking either one. If two planes moved much beyond that spread, however, the aircraft “painted” individually on a radar scope. In previous months Air Wing 19 had found that the SAM box worked well; it became standard procedure.

In the event we were intercepted by MiGs, I would take the lead, move out to “loose deuce” (line abreast) formation and engage the bandits. Depending on the tactical situation, either I would tackle the MiGs alone or direct Mike in the fight until we either had the bandits, they disengaged, or help arrived. An air-to-air engagement was a distinct possibility as we would be operating within sight of two enemy airfields.

A Tough Pilot Takes Tough Missions

The major threat, however, was antiaircraft artillery and SAMs. Since November, Air Wing 19 had lost 12 aircraft and 4 pilots in combat, with 3 more planes and 2 pilots killed in accidents. In two days, we would complete our final line period, and most pilots were apprehensive. But Mike Estocin, the pure warrior, still volunteered for the tough missions.



LCDR Michael J. Estocin, USN, took on the tough jobs during the Air Wing 19 1966–'67 WestPac cruise. He was particularly adept at Iron Hand missions, using the Shrike anti-radiation missile to attack SAM sites in North Vietnam, and was on such a mission when downed by a SA-2 near Haiphong, 26 April 1967. All images via Tailhook Association.

The role that Tonkin Gulf weather played in the conduct of the air war would be difficult to overstate. That April day was clear, with unlimited visibility from just west of the coastline—“CAVU (ceiling and visibility unlimited) to the moon,” we said. An overcast extended the length of Vietnam, however, from just inland and out to sea. The cloud deck was about 1,000 feet thick with tops about 1,500 and the base at 500 or so. Visibility below the deck was almost zero—a murky, milk-bowl atmosphere obscuring both sea and sky. Intelligent aviators flew instruments below the deck if they had any choice.

Taking position west-northwest of Haiphong, Mike and I awaited the attack group's progress. We monitored strike frequency, following the progress of the attack on the power plant, and listened as the strikers egressed. During all that time—perhaps no more than ten minutes—enemy air defenses were quiet. They fired no SAMs, and Mike gave no indication that his electronics showed search or track radar.

We had plenty of fuel, so I was not unduly concerned until the *Ticonderoga's* strike control called: “Jury 208, the strike is all feet wet. Are you feet wet yet?” I could hear the concern in the controller's voice.

Enemy SAMs Become Active

We were heading almost due north at 21,000 ft., indicating about 350 knots. At that point Mike called excitedly, “Site 109 is up!”

I was on his starboard side, looking through his aircraft toward the SAM site. He lowered his nose and accelerated while calling, “Liftoff!”

I answered, “Roger.” I clearly saw this one. It was beautiful, about 20 miles almost dead ahead. After booster separation, the SAM shot above us, then began slanting down. The smoke of its sustainer motor was a fine line, ordinarily hard to spot, but we were in bright sunlight. I never saw an SA-2 so clearly.

At that moment I expected us to turn right to the east to offset the missile and give us a better closing perspective. That was standard procedure, as timing was crucial in defeating a SAM. Viewed head-on, both perspective and range were extremely difficult to judge.

I believe Mike was starting a right-hand break turn, but he was too late. The SAM was near the end of its range going “warp five.” It exploded off the A-4's port nose, about even with the jet intake.

The blast threw the *Skyhawk* into a half-right barrel roll, inverted almost 90 degrees of turn from its original heading, and nose down. Smoke, fire, and debris clogged the air. I followed, closing on Mike. He rolled upright, reaching wings level in about a 30-degree dive, heading off to the east.

Fire burned under the belly and from the wingroots, but the A-4 remained intact. Mike was slowing, however, in a descent below 5,000 feet. I called him but received no answer. Therefore, I passed all relevant information to the ship and asked for a helicopter and Rescue Combat Air Patrol (ResCAP) circling offshore. I knew A-1H Skyraiders would be ready to “get it on” with the defenses while covering the rescue attempt.

I flew close alongside Jury 208 and saw Mike's head lowered slightly, facing forward. He neither turned or seemed to move. I switched to guard channel but again received no reply. Then I crossed over to the port side. The damage was total—I saw large holes all along the nose and cockpit, and the port engine intake was nearly gone.

Still decelerating, I swerved back and up, my eyes locked on the other cockpit. I could discern no movement at all inside.

Slowing past 160 knots, I raised the wing to stay in formation, but we continued descending toward the cloud deck. I could see the water a few miles ahead. Then we were in the crud.

As we passed 1,000 feet an electronic warbling indicated my radar-warning gear had detected a SAM lock-on. I actually felt the missile as it rocketed beneath me and exploded nearby.

continued...



A division of VA-192 World-Famous Golden Dragon A-4E Skyhawks, with CDR A.E. “Boot” Hill in the lead, fly tight parade formation over NAS Lemoore, CA, 1967. VA-192 was based with Air Wing 19 on board USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) for the fateful 1966–'67 cruise in which LCDR Mike Estocin was lost. All images via Tailhook Association.

Visibility was bad as we passed beneath the overcast. The change from bright sunlight to afternoon gloom was dramatic—all the more so against the contrast of small flames growing along Mike's wing root. Finally, about 600 feet above the ground and still slowing, the A-4 started a slow left roll. Instinctively, I followed to almost the 90-degree position before realizing that Mike would not recover. I leveled my wings as his aircraft hung inverted for a second. Then, as the wiring burned through, both of his Shrikes fired and his centerline fuel tank punched off.

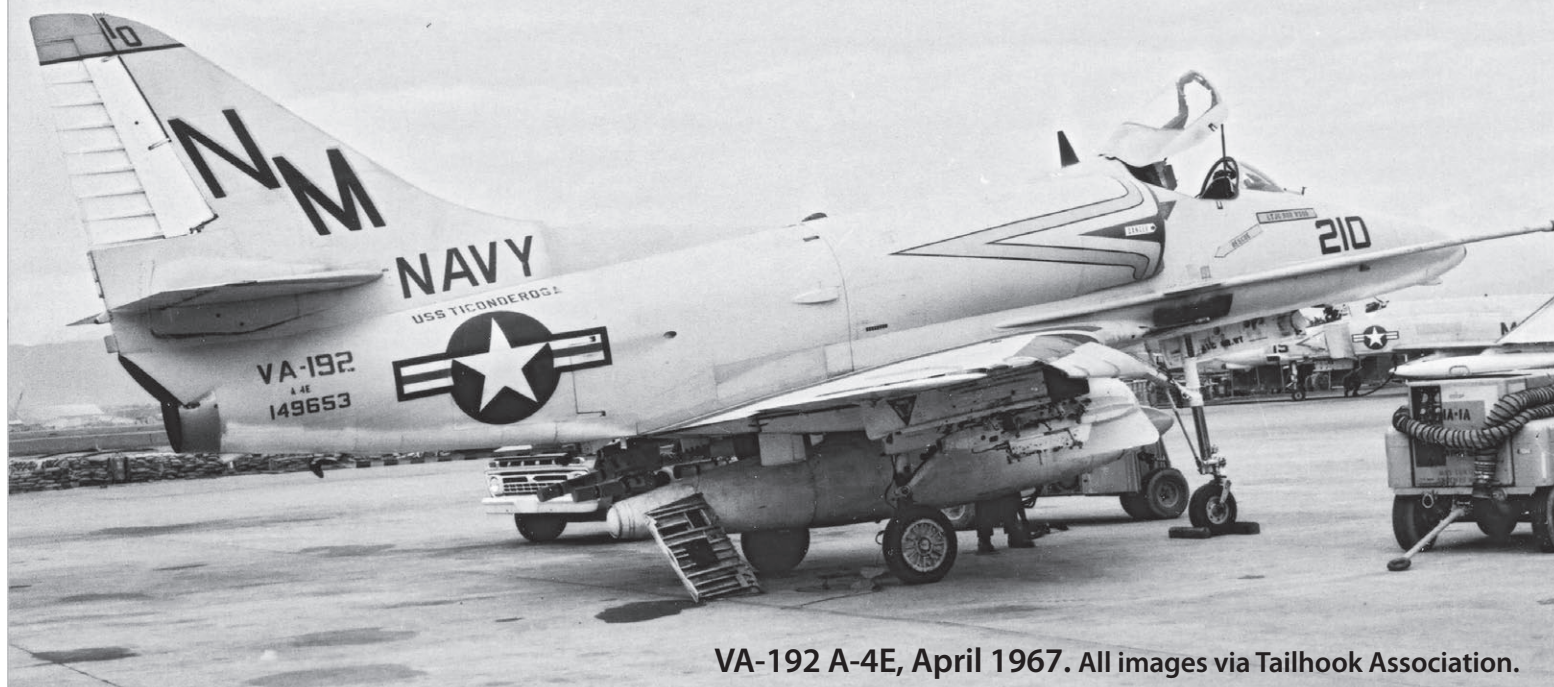
The A-4 was dying.

Mike's nose dropped through to the vertical, and the plane crashed into the earth. I pulled up, started a hard-left turn and went to full military power. I made one 360-degree orbit and looked for a parachute. At that moment I knew the real meaning of frustration—I was alone, within five miles of two MiG fields, overlapped by several missile batteries. With profound sadness I keyed my microphone and sternly told the ResCAP: "No chance. Do not come in."

Reconstructing the Loss of Jury 2018

Back on board the *Tico*, still wearing my sweaty flight suit, I joined in a debrief held in the flag quarters. Participating were ship and air wing intelligence officers, the other flight leaders, our air wing commander and most squadron commanders. Also present were representatives of "Red Crown"—callsign of the radar picket ship that had tracked the entire mission—as well as the North SAR destroyer.

Though sick over Mike's loss, I was confident of the data we'd developed. Everything was plotted—the SAM site, our track outbound, even the spot of Mike's crash. But, I knew there was no point in going back into that high-threat area to conduct a search. Mike Estocin—a cheerful, determined, crewcut young man from Beaver Falls, Pa., and graduate of Slippery Rock State College—was gone.



VA-192 A-4E, April 1967. All images via Tailhook Association.

Is Estocin Alive?

During Air Wing 19's next combat deployment, in early 1968, I was walking down a passageway when our new air wing commander—a good friend named Phil Craven, who had gone out of his way to help me as a junior officer—stopped me in the aisle. "John, good news," he said. "Mike Estocin is confirmed as a POW."

All the wind went out of me. I could almost feel a huge weight fall upon my shoulders, as I contemplated the meaning of this thunderbolt. If Mike were alive in Hanoi, obviously I had missed something. Somehow I had neither seen him eject from his doomed aircraft nor noted his parachute on the enemy's turf.

When I waved off the rescue helicopter, apparently I had committed Mike Estocin to an unfathomable fate as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese. I told myself that I had done everything one man could have done. I had stayed low and slow, looking for some sign of Mike. In the most agonizing decision I would ever make, I had weighed the near certainty of one man's death against the prospect of losing several other lives looking for him.

And because aviators are imbued with greater egos than other humans, I began to wonder what Mike's other friends—to say nothing of his relatives—would think of John B. Nichols. I began to doubt that I could ever compensate for my decisions south of Haiphong that day.

When the POWs came home in 1973, Mike Estocin was not among them. Presumably he had died in prison camp, and I felt that I was at least partially responsible. The burden on my conscience grew proportionately—I thought of Mike every day for the next quarter-century.



VF-191 F-8J NM 101 in marshal with hook down for landing on USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14), Oct 1966. All images via Tailhook Association.

Confusion and Frustration

In the summer of 1993 I received the first of many calls from representatives of the Joint Casualty Resolution Committee in Washington, D.C., Hawaii, and Vietnam. I was stunned. The investigators had by then concluded that I was right—Mike had never gotten out of his airplane. Task Force Full Accounting wanted me to help locate the wreckage of the downed A-4.

Eventually, I learned most of the story. A member of the task force had read my book, *On Yankee Station* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Md. 1987), which described the 26 April mission. The diligent young man phoned repeatedly, asking for more and more details. Gradually it dawned on me—neither the Navy nor the U.S. Government knew who had flown with Mike that day.

Finally, I asked outright: "What happened to all the debriefing data we had on the ship in '67?"

Nobody knew then, and apparently nobody knows about it today.

Therefore, I began trying to dredge up geographic checkpoints from one day in 1967. At first, I was optimistic, stating that I could pinpoint the crash site within two miles. But, the more I scanned maps of the general area, the less certain I became. Originally, I felt that Mike had gone down about three miles inland, five miles north of Cat Bai airfield. But as I spoke with more of the casualty committee personnel, I became aware of several decades-old fallacies.

For instance, I assumed that we had been heading roughly 090 true while headed outbound, because the coast was straight ahead. Looking at the maps, I saw again that the North Vietnamese coast ran northeast to southwest. Consequently, we were headed more like 120 or 130 on the egress. Thus, I revised my estimate about four and a half miles farther west—closer to Kien An airfield than Cat Bi. The causeway in that area was prominent in my memory, and, eventually the committee people and I decided that the most likely spot was near a place call Ben Thon. And that, I was told, was where the U.S. – Vietnamese search teams began digging.

Many More Questions Than Answers

The deeper I got into the project, the more questions arose. Many simply had no answers. Had the debriefing data not been preserved? Nobody knew. Where might it be stored? Nobody knew. Why have the air wing reports not been declassified after a quarter-century? Too few declassification officers. Why not a blanket declassification? It takes an executive order. The list went on and on.

But more immediate questions also cropped up. I had to wonder how Mike was reported alive, when it became apparent during the war that he was a "no-show" in the Hanoi Hilton. I failed to understand how anyone could have made so fundamental a mistake.

At that point I confronted the final horror. In 1968, through covert sources in Hanoi, Mike was reported "alive in the camps." Word had come from a POW who was able to pass information to members of his family and from them on to the Navy.

When Mike failed to reappear in 1973, my gut ached. I learned 20 years later, as the pilot who made the report was freed with other prisoners of war in Operation Homecoming, he explained his seeming reference to Mike Estocin. **(Evidently the report referred to another Mike.)** I then wondered why the Navy neglected to inform me of that development. After all, I was a squadron commander with a Top Secret clearance, flying from the USS *Hancock* (CVA-19) in the Tonkin Gulf. But I was never told.

While researching *On Yankee Station*, I finally got to read Mike's Medal of Honor citation. I had not known that he was the only carrier aviator awarded the decoration for direct combat in the Vietnam War, until a ship was named for him in 1978 (USS *Estocin*, FFG-15). The award citation contained errors, which was not unusual. I also learned, however, that the VA-192 history stated—and members of the squadron still thought—that Mike had gone down in the Tonkin Gulf. I simply could not believe it.

continued...

If members of the Estocin family were also frustrated or confused, I understood why. Original reports indicated Mike missing in action far at sea. Next we heard he was a prisoner in Hanoi. Then he failed to return from prison camp. And finally—as we had known from the first day—he was reported shot down over land.

In retrospect, I wonder if the error over Mike's crashing at sea was the result of confusion. His squadron lost another *Skyhawk* that same day—the Golden Dragons' eighth aircraft loss of the cruise—but the pilot, LTJG John W. Cain of Somerset, Mass., was snatched by a search and rescue helicopter crew from under enemy guns as he floated just off the beach, virtually in Haiphong Harbor.

Following original publication of this article, I received about 150 phone calls, some of which answered lingering questions. For instance, it turned out that the Air Force had *Blackbird* photos of Mike's crash site before *Tico* left the Gulf—material which today would be most invaluable to searchers in Vietnam. Even more maddening, however, was confirmation that in 1970 the Navy knew that Mike was not alive in Hanoi. Yet his shipmates and family were never, at any time, granted the courtesy of being informed.

Most dramatic of all was Marie Estocin's explanation of the mysterious 1968 report that her husband was a prisoner. The case officers had jumped to the conclusion that the covert letter from the Hanoi Hilton indicated that Mike was being held in or near a school. In fact, the message referred to the POW's young son, also named Michael, who would shortly be starting school in the States. Apparently, it was bureaucratic logic—two and two equals three.

On the other hand, I was pleased to learn from Barrett Tillman that the pilot of the heroic chopper crew that rescued VA-192's LTJG Cain that day is none other than CAPT Steve Millikin, USN (Ret)—currently editor of *The Hook*.

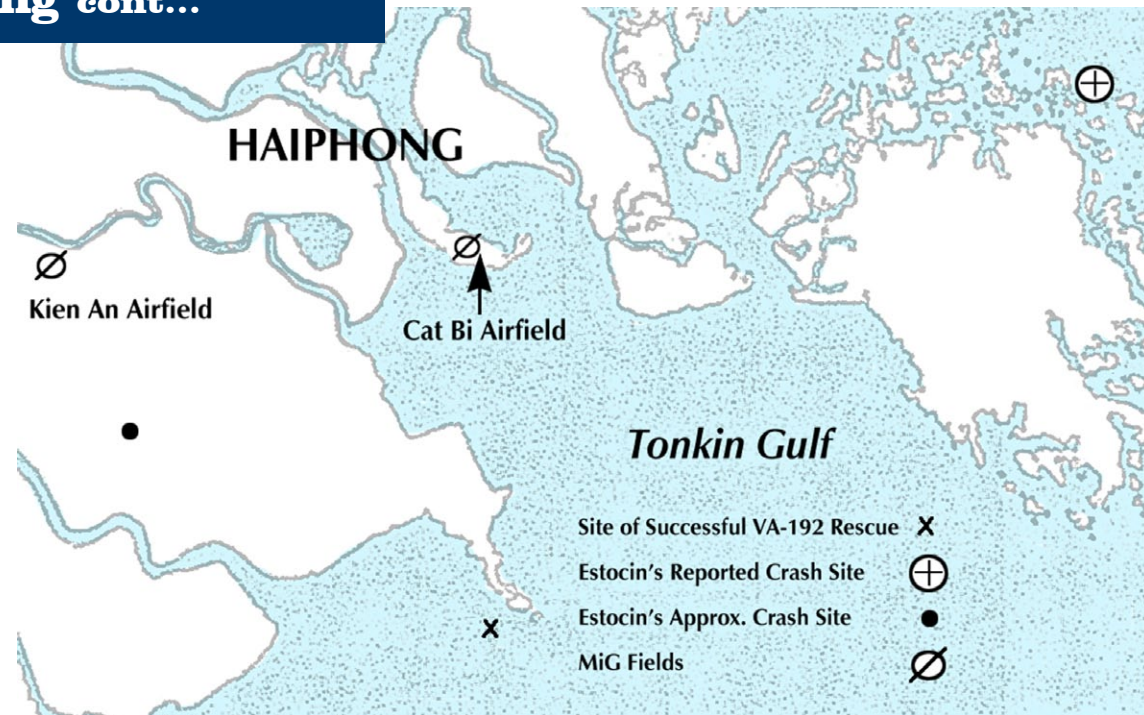
If nothing else, Mike Estocin's case highlights the urgent reason for the Navy and the government to improve their records policies. There is no valid reason for tactical information to remain classified 20-plus years after the end of the Vietnam War.

There is also no excuse for the way POW-MIA files have been held and organized. When field researchers are unable to find the documents they need to locate crash sites, something is woefully wrong with the system.

For a quarter-century I wondered if I had consigned Mike Estocin to a lingering death in some Southeast Asian pest hole. I visualized him dying alone in a filthy cell, beyond succor or sympathy of any of his countrymen.

Now, thankfully, I know that he died a hero's death, in the air, doing his duty above and beyond. He did not die alone on that day in 1967.

For me at least, the Vietnam War finally is over.



May 2016 update from the MIA Office via author Barrett Tillman:

We have conducted an investigation at the site of the aircraft. During the investigation we didn't find any evidence to support that his (Mike Estocin) remains were at that location. As of right now, we are trying to find leads as to the whereabouts of his remains. Please let me know if I can help you with anything else.

Ed. Note: CDR Nichols was a career fighter pilot who logged more than 3,000 hours in F-8 Crusaders. He commanded VF-24 before retiring in 1975 and, with Barrett Tillman, co-wrote On Yankee Station, published in 1987 by the Naval Institute Press. Tillman has written more than forty books, including six novels, and in 1994 received the CAPT Emile Louis Bonnot Award and the ADM Arthur Radford Award, both for naval history and literature. CDR Nichols passed away in 2004.

NOSE LANDING GEAR ACTUATING CYLINDER

Painted Latches Extinct; It Could Affect Spares

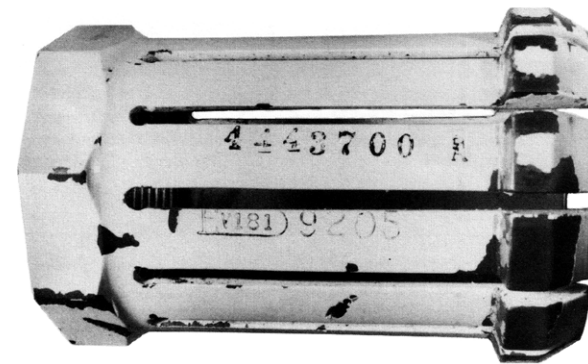
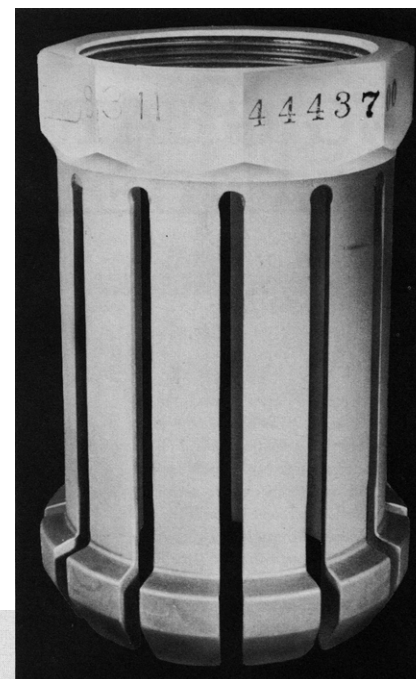


Fig. 1, Photo showing chipped (painted) latch.

Fig. 2, Photo showing painted latch.



NLG retracting cylinder latch 4443700 was squawked because latch paint chips (see figure 1) were contaminating the hydraulic system and filters. A background briefing follows.

The squawked latch was installed during overhaul. It was drawn from supply as a spare and installed "as received." (Seven of ten other spare latches drawn from supply were noted to be painted and stamped as shown in figure 2.)

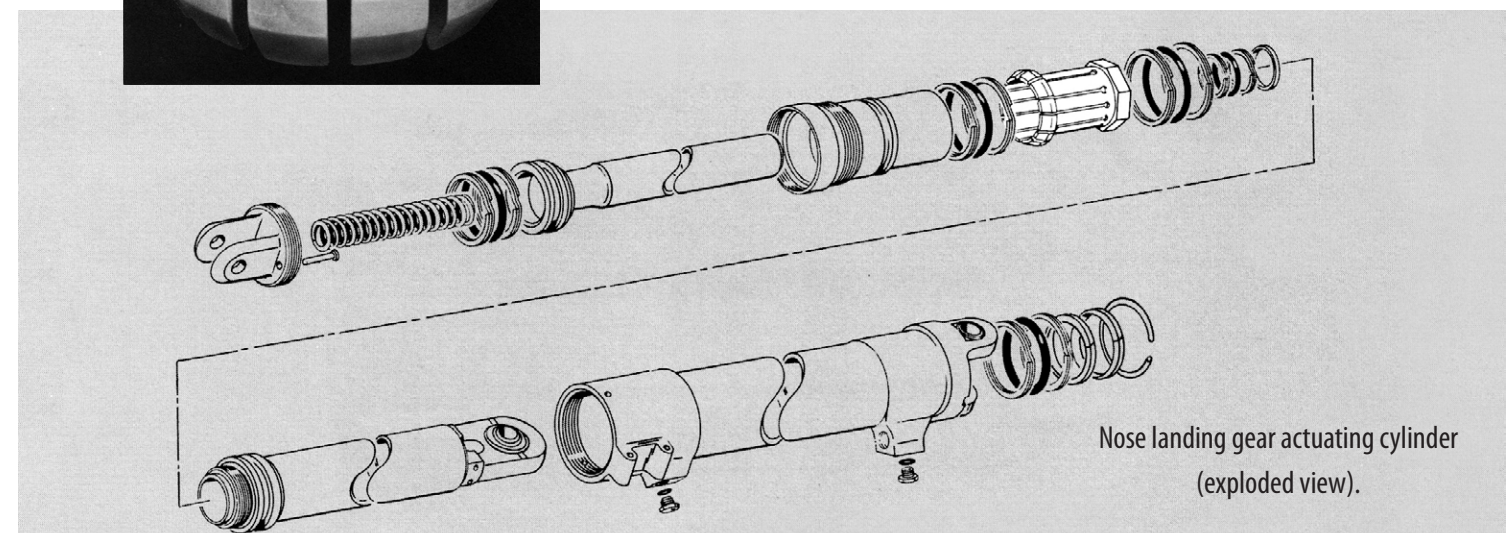
At least part of the answer is the date-stamp shown in figure 1. That date (9 205) indicates the latch was made on the 205th day (July 24) of 59; figure 2 (8 311) the 311th day (Nov 7) of 58. *Now check this crucial qualification:* before 10 Aug 59, all Spare Parts Delivery Order Forms for spare latches called for painting; after that date that order was dropped and hasn't been used since. (It was believed all earlier parts had been removed from stock.)

The only corrosion preventive now used is "immersion in fingerprint neutralizer oil."

Don't use painted latches! Figure 3 shows latch 4443700 as it should look for installation in cylinder 5547429-501.



Fig. 3, Photo showing unpainted latch.



Nose landing gear actuating cylinder (exploded view).

Skyhawk Losses

~ You Be the Judge ~

by Gary Verver

A 22-year old junior aviator with 28 hours in the Skyhawk departed in an A4D-1 for his 2nd single aircraft familiarization low altitude bombing flight. He arrived at the duty office at 0600, had breakfast with the CO and was briefed by the CO and safety officer. He preflighted his aircraft and was airborne at 0720. There were no further contacts with the pilot and SAR facilities were alerted after his ETR expired. At 0900 the duty officer was contacted by the Trona, CA, Constable who reported an aircraft down in the Panamint Valley 35 miles NE of NAF China Lake. The station doctor and squadron safety officer were launched by helicopter at 0930, arrived on scene at 1100 and confirmed it was their overdue aircraft and that the pilot was deceased.

The pilot completed flight training with an over-all grade of 40.1, 41.5 being average, and had been designated a deputy flight leader by his previous squadron. He received his wings 11 months prior to the accident, joined his current squadron two months prior and completed A4D-1 fam six weeks prior. He graduated from Special Weapons Delivery School two weeks prior. He attended an all pilots meeting the afternoon before at which all pilots were instructed on the safety features of the following days LABS maneuvers conducted by the CO and XO. The XO also cautioned all pilots on the effects of drinking prior to a scheduled flight and the effects of staying out late. Both officers covered the minimum altitudes for this maneuver. He was known by his friends to be a somewhat daring aviator but this wasn't generally known by the squadron officers. He was also known by one of his friends to enjoy "flat hatting" and "booming" towns. The pilot went to Bakersfield the night before, consumed alcoholic beverages and had four to four and a half hours of sleep on the night prior to the accident.

The A4D-1 he was flying was the newest aircraft in the unit (10 hours total time) and was considered to be in excel-

lent condition. No evidence of material failure was found at the accident scene, and he did not attempt to eject. Using a standard deceleration graph the airspeed on impact was estimated to be 480-550 knots. The wreckage path was over 1.5 miles long with pieces of the turbine at the outer limits. The aircraft was demolished and the controls and cockpit components disintegrated to the extent of being unusable for evaluation. It was concluded that it was a complete aircraft upon contact with the ground. There is a diagram of his first, second and final pass in the area from three witness showing the final pass by them at 10-30 feet. Impact followed while making a port turn to a heading running parallel to a string of telephone poles.

Given the above, the disintegration and fragmentation of the aircraft and pilot, lack of radio transmissions and lack of witnesses to the accident, what did the accident investigation conclude was the cause of the accident? What would you conclude?

And for your quarterly dose of Pettibone from September 1961 ... The pilots of two A4D-2Ns started their engines for a night instrument training hop, ran through the pre-taxi check lists and took position on the runway for a section take-off. The wingman found everything checked okay and placed his lights on bright and flashing, signaling he was ready to roll. Both pilots released brakes and at about 130 knots the leader lifted his nose off, and the wingman attempted to do the same. He received no response from the back stick despite heavy control movements. Thinking his nose strut had deflated he put in a good amount of forward stick and then full back stick. No response. He had to decrease power to keep from over-running the lead plane.

Please e-Mail Gary Verver (gp@verx2.org), or sa-journal-editor@a4skyhawk.org if you can help.

At that point he had used up about 2/3 of the runway, the arresting gear was still ahead of him, and he decided to abort. Speed brakes were extended, power cut to idle, maximum braking and hook down. He now saw some colored lights to the side of the runway and got off the brakes since thinking they marked the arresting gear. After an endless wait and no arrestment he realized he was going off the end. Checking his airspeed with ejection in mind he saw he was slightly below 100 knots with about 1,500 feet of runway left. He quickly decided on ejection, pushed full throttle, retracted the speed brakes and alternated between watching his airspeed and the airfield boundary fence. As he passed through 110 knots he ejected. Almost instantly the parachute began streaming out between his legs gleaming sort of pink from the reflected glow of the burning plane.

He felt no opening shock and hit the ground with what seemed a tremendous impact and remained conscious, although the wind was knocked out of him for 10-15 seconds. At that point he realized he had driven his legs in soft marshy ground almost to his hips. As heat waves from the burning A4 washed over him he was motivated to get away before it blew. He managed to unstrap, unzip and climb out of his torso harness leaving the whole works in the mud as he crawled away from the fire and met the crash crew about 50 feet further away. No booze for the Riggers as the chute had been packed incorrectly.

I have nothing more than the above for this accident and need the date, BuNo, squadron, pilots name etc. Unknown A4D-2N losses preceding September 1961 include VA-112, Miramar, 22 July 1961 and VMA-332, Cherry Point, 5 November 1960.



★ TAPS ★

Charles E. "Chappy" Laskey, Burke, VA, July 5, 2016
Robert Bennett, San Diego, CA, July 1, 2017
Joseph B. Gatewood, Hattiesburg, MS, October 19, 2016

For lists of A-4 KIA and operational losses, members can sign into <http://a4skyhawk.info> and go to the "Ready Room."



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

SIZE DOES MATTER

Modelers' Corner

By Joe Turpen

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

The International Plastic Modelers Society (IPMS) held its annual convention in Phoenix, AZ, from August 1st to 4th. I am happy to say there were 11 Skyhawks models present this year, including models of Skyhawks from New Zealand and Singapore. This was up from the past couple of years and hopefully there will be as many or more next year. One of the modelers who brought a Skyhawk was actually from New Zealand.

Here are some examples of this bumper crop.





Tricky and Hide - Jumping Jehoshaphat! (A TALE GRAMPAW PETTIBONE NEVER GOT TO WRITE ABOUT)

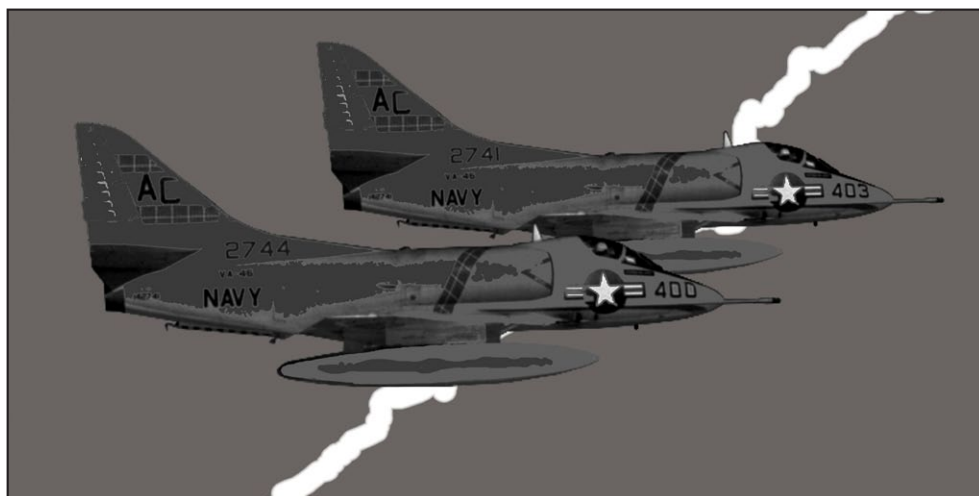
Recently returned from a '67 "Yankee Air Pirate" cruise, LTJGs Tricky and Hide decided they deserved a cross country to the west coast in two of the squadron's newly-issued A-4 Bravos. No autopilot? No radar? No problem! Flight planning? On the fly will do! Headwork???

Hide suggested NAS Los Alamitos in LA, as his brother's place nearby was rent free. Late in the day, with 1,800 miles to fly, the two Bravos rolled down the runway at Cecil with overlapping wings. The adventure began! Navy Dallas seemed like a logical place to take on gas, so with Tricky in the lead and little thought of weather, the course was set.

Over Louisiana, Tricky checked in on a meteorology frequency to discover that the NAS Dallas weather was WOXOF. Crap! Not going to Dallas. Flying along in the clouds, Tricky said, "Hide, what say we land here at Barksdale AFB for gas? Yup!

Still in the "clag" as they let down, Tricky's radio reception started breaking up. He looked over at Hide tucked in tight on the right side, tapped his helmet and pointed. Hide tapped his helmet, then his chest to assume the lead. Then for the first time in a while, he looked at his instrument panel. The boys were on a radar vector, so all he had to do was keep the wings level and continue the descent. However, the damn compass was giving him a problem and seemed to be wandering.

It took a few minutes till he realized his compass was fine, but the ole "Lear Liar" gyro was 20 degrees off in bank. Fighting the tendency to correct the bank to fly straight, they were suddenly given a turn towards final for the...? "What kind of approach is this and say again the ceiling?" The Barksdale controller came back with "PAR, and



the ceiling is 400 ft." After some hand signals to Tricky, the gear and flaps were extended, and a few minutes later the runway came into view through the ragged bottoms. The boys took some interval and circled to land at the Air Force base. Whew!

Over a Coke and peanut butter crackers in the "Ops" building, they decided to give up going to Los Angeles, and MCAS Yuma became the new "garden spot" for an overnight. Back out on the ramp, refueling was completed, night had fallen, and it was starting to rain. But undeterred, they briefed the civilian ground crew on how to stow the J-65 starting probe in the aft "hell hole" of Tricky's jet after both airplanes were started. The "rampers" weren't too sure about that, but nodded their heads

and went about starting Hide's engine. Hide then watched as they "cranked up" Tricky and began trying to stow the probe in the "hole," with its mass of hydraulic lines and control cables, with the engine running and a hot tailpipe 18" over their heads. Suddenly the tailhook dropped to the concrete right behind their backs. The probe must've tangled with the hook control cable! Tricky cycled the handle to get the hook retracted and another problem was solved.

With Hide in the lead, they both taxied out and were cleared for takeoff. It was raining hard by then, with lightning off the end of the runway in the darkness. In position on the runway, Hide was ready to go. He looked over at Tricky, realizing they had never briefed any of this. They had briefed the ground crew, but not themselves. "How will I signal Tricky when it's time to begin the takeoff?" Hand signals were useless, as they couldn't see each other in the cockpits... just momentary flashes on their helmets as the rotating beacons

oscillated back and forth. With the power up to 80% or so, Hide brilliantly decides he'll just release his brakes and see if Tricky will follow. The airplane lurched down the runway, but Tricky didn't move, so Hide slammed the throttle to idle and began to brake. Tricky looked up, saw him rolling and applied full power. In the blink of an eye, Tricky was looking back at Hide. There was some swapping the lead back and forth, but they continued and just before it was time to lift off the soaked runway, both airplanes were back together.

Hide had forgotten to set his flaps for takeoff and encountered some stall buffet once in the air. He took a glance down at Tricky, who was still on the runway 20 feet below, but quickly

pulled up to a tight wing position as they punched into the bottom of a severe thunderstorm.

The tower said, "Switch to departure." Hide replied with a "Roger," but Tricky couldn't afford to take his eyes off Hide's airplane to change the "freq," so then they couldn't communicate. They encountered heavy rain, moderate turbulence and flashes of lightning though the black clouds. Most of the time, Tricky couldn't even see Hide's airplane, just the wing lights burning faintly though the rain and disorienting clouds flashing by. Hide glanced over and couldn't see his "wingie," but he had more to contend with as he watched his airspeed indicator drop to zero due to icing. The angle of attack gauge saved the day, and they continued to climb to cruise altitude.

Once in the clear on top, with stars above, Hide's airspeed returned, and he used his flashlight to get Tricky over to the right "freq." "That was incredible," Tricky said. "I could barely keep you in sight, and then I lost all of my cockpit lights." "Now I'm using my flashlight." It was just one of many issues so far... and more to follow.

The headwinds were terrible, so Yuma and Mexican food were not in the cards. The boys decided to land short again, this time at Tucson's Davis Monthan AFB. Once at the VOQ (Visitor's Officer's Quarters), they were told

there was "no room in the inn," so a taxi to the scummiest motel in the area was the best they could do. So much for that nice Mexican dinner in Yuma.

The next morning was clear and beautiful. Tricky led the section takeoff, seemingly trying to drag Hide off on the fence at the end of the runway as they climbed out VFR for the *Grand Canyon*, with smiles on their faces. Once again they were "invincible" in their own minds.

Cruising at 10,000 ft. for some sightseeing, Hide was expounding about the upcoming *Grand Canyon*, when Tricky saw a T-37 coming right at his wingie. He screamed warnings at Hide, who was still "jammering" on about nothing on the radio, when the Air Force "Teen Weenie" passed within feet. Hide never saw it, so a miss was a miss.

Approaching the *Grand Canyon* from the east, the intrepid JGs dropped down to 100' over the *Painted Desert*. The canyon wasn't in sight at that altitude, but in a couple of minutes, you could see the far side of the "big ditch," then suddenly, in an instant, the ground below them disappeared as if they just leaped off a cliff. It was thrilling.

Why not make it more exciting? So, they dove for the *Colorado River* a couple of thousand feet below. The south rim towered on their left with its tourists enjoying the day. It was a different view from 200 ft. above the river.



In short order the sides of the canyon began to narrow into sheer walls of granite rising on either side. Looking ahead at an abrupt right turn in the canyon, all they could see was rock. "Could this possibly be a dead end? Of course not, you idiot! It's gotta continue. We're following the river!" With the speed at 350 knots, it was taking three "Gs" to maneuver through the turns, when one of boys said, "You think there are any cables ahead?" Yikes! A pull back on the stick and the canyon quickly got smaller as they set course for LA. It was the only wise decision these two had made in the past twenty-four hours.

The GCA into Los Alamitos with visibility down to half a mile in smog was an anticlimactic end to the trip west. Grandpa Pettybone would've summed it up...

"These two JGs Captured the Market in Poor Headwork!"

TRIVIA ANYONE? from Dave Dollarhide

Question? What is the function of the tab on the A-4's left aileron?

Answers to: davedollarhide@msn.com.



Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

From The Hook magazine

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

BEAVER SINKS THE ROYAL PHILLIPINE NAVY

Screaming through the broken clouds, four Skyhawks rained simulated death on a small rocky island just out of Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. As each aircraft dropped its 25-lb. blue Mk 76 practice bomb, it jinked away from the simulated flak and sped off to rendezvous and do it again. As the last plane disappeared, a flotilla of small wooden boats watched and waited at a safe distance. When they were sure the planes had gone far, far away for good, they would paddle furiously in to collect the bomb guts and feathers to be turned into I-Been-There aviator metal belt buckles back in Olongopo. The trick was patience. These planes with orange snakes on their tails would be back several more times. The paddlers waited, chattering in Tagalog while they carved Monkeypod wood into water buffalo and such to sell to the airplane drivers. Getting bonked by premature paddling might smart some.

The Snakes of VA-86 had come a long way for this practice to become Yankee Air Pirates. They had survived banana daiquiris in the Virgin Islands after doing the ORI thing; they had endured endless All Pilot's Meetings as USS Independence (CVA-62) thrummed across the wine dark sea, and they had dutifully gotten whacked and kissed the hairy belly of the Royal Baby when they crossed the Equator. There were only a few casualties during the stop at the Black Hole of Singapore, but they were definitely Frabbing New Guys amongst the steely-eyed veterans at Cubi Point, and they listened respectfully.

The upper Rocket Numbers had decided that the rust from all that steaming must be chipped off their aviators, so there had been some aviating, like assuring the air wing Paddles persons that the ball could still be flown acceptably in the darkness while witnessed by their peers from the Cubi Point O'Club. While the various pilots got shuttled off to jungle survival school, and the blackshoes did their thing to render the Boat ready, the Snakes were dropping some practice bombs and shooting the guns some.

The peacetime tactics they were practicing would practically guarantee their mighty war eagles would get pierced with any projectiles Uncle Ho's boys cared to toss in the way of the division's low level approach, pitch up, and thirty-degree bomb run. But, wot the hell, it was practice. There would be strafing, also, using the same tactic, and happiness was a warm gun or two.

Beaver came to fly with the Snakes because he was CAG LSO and needed an A-4 to drive. He was an aw shucks, Buddy Ebson sort of calming LSO, and Puresome knew that everything would be all right when he heard Beaver's drawl on the radio during dark and stormy nights.

So, having Beaver along on today's bombing and shooting was Tickedy- Boo with Puresome. Of course, pretty much everything was tickedy boo with Puresome, having escaped Training Command screamers and being graded on by RAG folks. The fleet was a joyous thing.

LCDR Paganuch was leading the flight, and, since they were dry landers, he didn't get to brief that the duty runway

was sixty-two, as he did for every hop at sea. Puresome was number two, and Raypat and Beaver rounded out the division. The mission was simple enough, just drive out low level, find the target rock, go away, come back the same way, individually pop up, do a 30-degree dive, and kill the rock. The usual other stuff was covered, with mil settings and switchology, since it was not considered nice to litter the ocean with drop tanks. The strafing runs would be performed the same way. Bomb, shoot, return to base, look good in the break. Go to Club. Real good, thought Youthly.

The rubber bands powering the four Scooters worked as usual, and launch, rendezvous, and motoring out to the target was a piece of pie. The only problem in otherwise beautiful weather was a layer of broken clouds that would be between the pop up and the target, so the attackers would have to have a timely sucker hole or come through the clouds in the right place to pickle and pull. No hill for a trained professional stepper, Puresome thought.

Since the rock target wasn't exactly as small as a pickle barrel, it didn't really matter if the dives weren't exactly 30 degrees or that some Kentucky windage had to be used for different drop altitudes. The audience of paddlers was happy enough to watch the little puffs of smoke emerge from the splats! on the rock.

With six bombs each dropped, it was time to arm the guns and fire them out in two passes. This was hosing designed to make gomer skeet shooters duck, and Puresome never got to shoot as much as he wanted, so he gave out a "Ratsfan-

nies!" when he went Winchester shortly after he started his second run. He turned off his switches and headed to the rendezvous. He heard Raypat make the same call shortly thereafter, and Beaver's run would complete the exercise.

Time went at least a couple of potatoes. A hostile cloud had inconveniently covered up the target, and Beaver waggled about a bit, looking for a hole. Ahah! Down came Beaver. Unfortunately, the hole he picked was a couple of miles from the rock. He leveled out at a hundred feet or so and steamed into the target. And started shooting.

The first problem was that the Royal Philippine Navy had figured that the planes were gone and had started paddling like mad to be first to the prized bomb guts and feathers. The second problem was that Beaver's hosing from his level strafing run walked big spouts in the water to the target for about a half-mile out. Through the flotilla.

It was unclear if any captains went down with their canoes. Beaver didn't bother to get an accurate count. Since the rest of the flight had formed up and was making a wide orbit beneath the clouds as well, Puresome did not consider it pru-

dent to volunteer being a witness.

Not much was said during the debrief, fog of war and all that. After all, it was time to clean up and go bother the Fantoom and Intruder pukers at the Club. And badmouthing paddles might put you on the ramp some dark and stormy night. Beaver didn't even mind not being put in for an Air Medal.

And even the saltiest paddler, musing over his evening balute, had to wonder whether souvenir belt buckles were worth it.



ON DISPLAY WESTERN MUSEUM OF FLIGHT



By Dave Dollarhide

A4D-1 (A-4A) 142227 was recently refurbished and is now a perfect replication of its past life with VMF-211. After a "What do you think" email from Joe Murphy to the Skyhawk Association, the Museum aired the strut to "tweek" the display and give it that proud Skyhawk stance. Looking good in Torrance, CA!



VMA-211 A-4D1s.



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