

THE A-4 EVER

SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION JOURNAL VOL 25-2



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Improving HobbyBoss' Skyhawk

Deaf, Dumb and Blind

Supersonic Scooter

56 Hours During Yankee Station's Summer of '67

Annual Skyhawk Member Meeting

*Tailhook Convention • Sparks, NV
September 6, 2019*

Summer 2019

<http://skyhawk.org>



THE PREZ SEZ

By Steve "Dwarf" Linder

Greetings Skyhawk Association Members

Please thank our editorial staff lead by Bob "Raven" Hickerson for their diligent efforts in putting this issue of the A4Ever together. Dave "Hide" Dollarhide is Co-Editor, and Gene "Blade" Atwell is the Webmaster. It takes a lot of work, so let them know how much you appreciate their time. You can see the other Feature Contributors under the banner "Journal Staff" to the right.

President Hard at Work



As you can see in the photo at left, your President is working just as hard as the Journal Staff. This picture was taken at a board dinner last year.

Skyhawk Featured in FineScale Modeler

A beautiful model of an A-4E (BuNo 151148 from VA-192 on board USS *Ticonderoga*) was featured on the cover and in an article in the March 2019 issue of FineScale Modeler. We have secured permission from Kalmbach Publishing to reprint the article, so you can see it in full in this issue of the A4Ever.

Recent Association Board Meeting

Your board of directors met on 29 March 2019 in Tucson, AZ. Here are some highlights of the meeting:

Membership is holding steady in the area of 790-800 thanks in part to 20 new members courtesy of the Marines who attended their Skyhawk reunion in Pensacola last November.

Todd Frommelt (AKA "the Hun") presented an update on the A-4s that are still in service. Argentina and Brazil still have their Skyhawks in military service.

Contractors flying Skyhawks are Draken International, Top Aces, Teton Aviation Services, and Sky Resources. Private Collections flying A-4s are the Collings Foundation, Warbird Heritage Foundation, Pacific Aero Ventures, Classic Fighters, and Fred Machado. Also, Aero Mark in Idaho Falls is looking for a buyer or investor for their well-preserved A-4L (contact Hun for more information). In all, there are 35 single-seaters and 9 two-seaters still flying for a total of 44 airframes (65 years after the first flight).

We are always looking for new members. There is an application on the back cover of this magazine for your use in bringing your friends into the membership fold.

Thanks to Treasurer Mark Williams who keeps a watchful eye on the association finances, we enter 2019 in a solid financial position.

George Blosser was selected to head the nominating committee for board elections to be held at the annual meeting on September 6, 2019, at Hook '19.

On March 27, 2019, we reached a milestone by filling all the Navy Squadron SDO slots thanks to Skyhawk member Craig Bechtel. Craig accepted the last remaining open slot which was VA-95. If you are interested in becoming an SDO for open slots in Training Command squadrons, please contact George Blosser. If you are interested in becoming an SDO for open Marine Corps squadrons, please contact Bill Egen (Director contact info at right).

Our Skyhawk Journal editor Bob Hickerson is always looking for articles for the A-4 Journal. If you have an interest in submitting an article, please contact Bob.

Annual Skyhawk Luncheon

The annual Skyhawk luncheon will be held at the 2019 Tailhook Convention in Reno, NV, on Friday, September 6, at 12:00 Noon in the Poolside Chalet Ter-



Steve "Dwarf" Linder

race. Our speaker is LtCol Waldo Walsh, the last POW captured in Vietnam. Price is \$35 – plan to attend!

Next Association Board Meeting

The next meeting of the Skyhawk Association board will be Friday, September 6, 2019 in Reno, NV, at the Tailhook Convention (Nugget Hotel). Remember: Board meetings are open to any member of the Skyhawk Association. I will report on the outcome of this meeting in the next issue.

Reduced Registration Fee for Tailhook 2019, September 5-8

Our immediate Past President, Pete Cole, has secured a \$20 registration fee from the Executive Director of The Tailhook Association (\$25 after July 31). **Registration is open NOW. Go to www.tailhook.net and enter Skyhawk Association Reunion Group on the form.** Effective immediately, you may book a room in Reno at www.tailhook.net.

Event

**VMA-131 / MAG-49 Marines
All Hands Gathering:
Sunday & Monday, Sept. 8-9, 2019**

From: Robert Beavis
[bbeavis@optonline.net]

What: VMA-131 All Hands Meeting and Social Gathering. Please pass this around to your fellow Marines. Request an RSVP if interested in attending in order to contract dinner arrangements. *cont. page 5...*



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

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BOMBS AWAY!

• Summer 2019 •

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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 © 2019

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@skyhawk.org or mailed to Bob Hickerson, 1222 Balcones Drive, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Stephanie Davis, graphics, skyhawk@ncflight.com. Printed by NCCOAST Communications, Morehead City, NC

On the Cover: Fred Machado's A-4C 149606, with its newly fitted "Bravo" nose, performs a "touch-and-go" at Marana, AZ, with Scott Roth at the controls. The airplane, now in historic Argentine Navy colors, has undergone significant changes by Mike McDougall's "Fighting Classics Aircraft Restorations." Photo by Keith Charlot Aerial Photography.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Letters to the Editor

sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

■ To the Editor,
Colonel John R. Powers, USMCR (ret)
[jrpowers@us.net]

I read with considerable interest the exceptional article by Commander James Kidd, Jr, "Prepare to Launch the QRA." It showed the right way to prep for the nuclear attack mission and was in stark contrast with our woeful prep in 1956. I was one of six special weapons qualified pilots in the A-1 (AD-4B) TAD to Cherry Point when the Suez Crisis broke out. I was hastily ordered to return to MCALF Edenton NC, pick up my stuff and proceed post haste to Mayport. By the time I arrived, the *Tarawa* (CV-40) was enroute to the Med so I had to fly aboard.

We had zero idea what our role would be and it was only 10 years later with a chance encounter with our then XO that I was told that we had 6 Soviet targets in the Ukraine. I could never verify this but it made sense as we were pretty good at 15-20 foot low-level ops known then as Sandblower flights. A problem was that the A-1 could only carry about 11 hours of fuel with a

20KT weapon on the centerline station. The targets, reportedly, were about 8 hours from where we might launch in the eastern Med. As Kidd points out, it probably wouldn't matter if we executed our Mission and, anyway, eastern Turkey would not be a bad place to hang out in this circumstance. Fortunately, the "Crisis" ended, and we returned to Mayport.

The reason that I am writing, however, is less about this and more about hoping that someone in our membership can carry the message that we need to take the nuclear threat seriously. In the 80s under Reagan, three Continuity of Government (COG) teams were created for the purpose of assuring Constitutional Government and making sure the Soviets understood that a decapitating strike would not work. I had the privilege of serving on the four-person executive element of one of those teams headed by a former and future Secretary of Defense. It took us three years to figure out what we were doing thru quarterly table tops and annual three-day deployments. This is the key issue

here. In the case of a terrorist weapon, we need people who know what they are doing at the helm.

When the Wall came down, the teams were abolished and our capability along with them. Despite our code word classification, I was allowed to publish an article opposing this action in Strategic Review (Volume XXIII, Number 4, Fall 1995). We need this capability today; not so much for a war with the Chinese or Russians but for a terrorist weapon. My experience in multiple exercises involving this scenario has convinced me that we would do super dumb things following a single nuclear weapon in NYC, DC, LA or Chicago. The following may shed a light on this subject:

[http://present.knowledgevision.com/account/divbusiness/link/John_Powers_WCDM2011]

■ To the Editor:
George Blosser
[george.blosser1@gmail.com]

In February 2019 members of VA-155 gathered in Destin, Florida, for a reunion. The squadron was embarked on Coral Sea (CVA 43) in 1965 for a Westpac Cruise as part of Air Wing 15 flying A-4Es. Of the original pilot group of 20, 8 officers and their guests were in attendance. The commanding officer

RADM Jim Morin, USN (Ret) was not able to attend, but thanks to modern technology the group was able to connect with their former skipper via a video conference. The group has gathered for these reunions multiple times since their original cruise and have vowed to continue this tradition as long as possible. Front row L-R; Chris Mores, Jerry Chasko, Dick Floreani. Back row L-R; Ken Holthaus, George Blosser, Bill Kish, Jim Mattly, and Ed Hiebert. Further information regarding VA-155 can be found on the Skyhawk Association web site. [<http://a4skyhawk.info/>]



THE PREZ SEZ continued. from page 2..

When: Sunday night dinner September 8th at 6:00 PM. Private room reserved 5:00-9:00 PM. Cash bar. Welcome to come early as the Legion and bar will be open. Wings of Freedom Aviation Museum (DVHAA) will be open Sunday, September 8th 10:30 AM - 4:00 PM.

Monday, September 9, 2019: Our Willow Grove Wings of Freedom Museum fund-raiser golf outing will be once again held at the prestigious Blue Bell Country Club's 18-Hole Arnold Palmer Signature Designed Course. The course offers golfers a tremendously gratifying and memorable golf experience with 18 holes of golf incorporating a challenging layout with rolling hills, water hazards and strategically positioned, recently installed bunkers. **Where:** American Legion 308, 2305 Computer Ave, Willow Grove, PA.

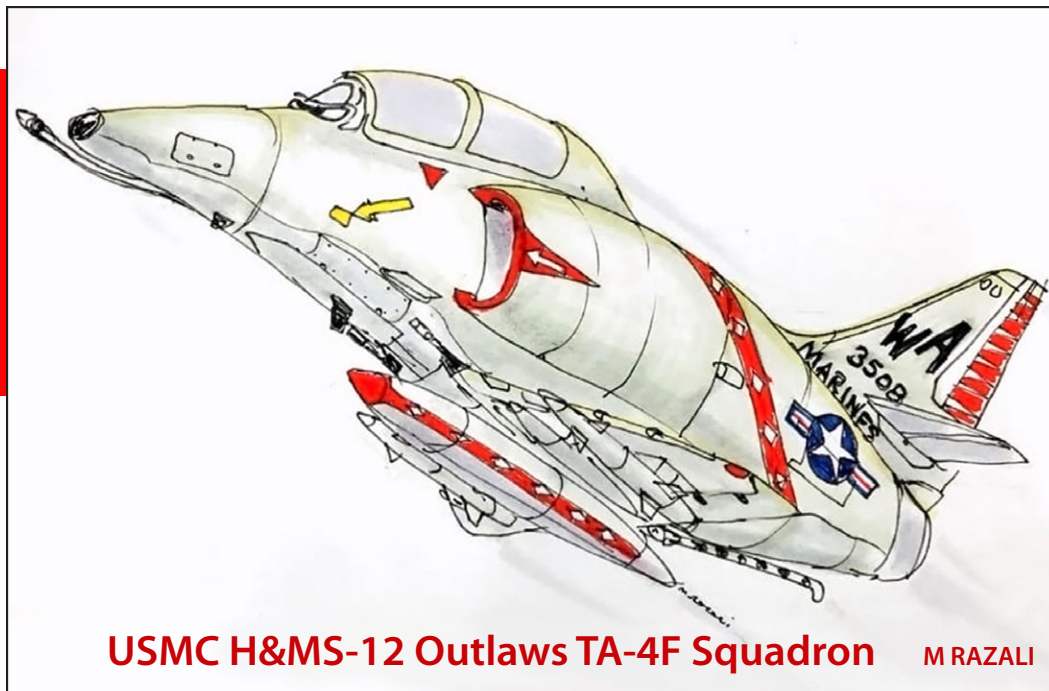
Accommodations: Hampton Inn, Willow Grove, PA **Address:** 1500 Easton Rd, Willow Grove, PA 19090 **Phone:** (215) 659-3535 Hampton Inn Sept 8th (and 9th) group rate: \$99.00/night which includes taxes. (have blocked 30 doubles and 30 king size rooms) Breakfast included.

Please Call the Hampton Inn to make your own reservation; request USMC VMA131 group rate (available until August 11th) **Dwarf sends!**

Send your letters to sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

Skyhawk Art

Drawing courtesy of artist M. Razali, via Thomas Dunne. Used with permission.



USMC H&MS-12 Outlaws TA-4F Squadron M RAZALI

A-4 Skyhawk Association Reunion

Hook 19 - Nugget Hotel - Sep 5 thru 8

LUNCHEON
Friday, 6 Sep, Noon
Poolside Chalet Terrace

SPEAKER
LtCol Waldo Walsh
"Lost on the MIA list"

RESERVATIONS
Mail \$35
Mark Williams
10432 Button Willow Dr.
Las Vegas NV 89134

ATTACK READY ROOM
Open Every Day

Exhibit Booth 302 - a4skyhawk.info



Read?

you think
we *read*?

DOUGLAS A-4C/L SKYHAWK IN NAVY SERVICE

Steve Ginter.
Simi Valley, CA. 2019. 193 pages. Ill. \$39.95.
Reviewed by CDR Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret)

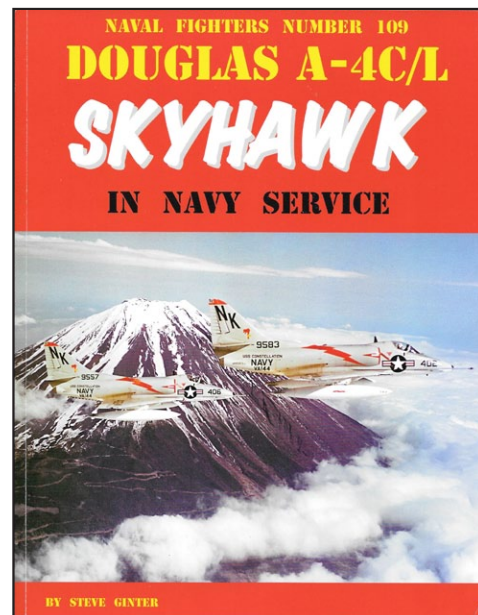
Right down our alley, Number 109 in the successful, open-ended Naval Fighter series, and the sixth covering the various models of the Douglas/McDonnell Douglas Skyhawk, this is the long-awaited volume on the A-4 Charlie that so many of our members flew in Vietnam. One more book remains, that of A-4Cs in Marine Corps service, which the author-publisher assures will be coming at a future date.

Following the long-established format of basic design and discussion of the Skyhawk, there are many photos of the A-4's individual areas such as armament stations, cockpit details, landing gear, and other points of interest. A lengthy section of squadron biographies that contain photos of their markings, squadron patches, as

well as synopses of each squadron's service. These squadron capsules include fleet and reserve squadrons that flew the A-4L, an upgrade of the A-4C that flew so many Vietnam sorties. Besides the black-and-white photos, a nice collection of photos follows, as well as the traditional discussion of scale model kits of the A-4C/L.

As our specific group knows, the A-4C bore the brunt the first years of Rolling Thunder, flying daily Alpha Strikes against targets in South Vietnam and North Vietnam, and shouldering a major portion of losses of aircraft and their pilots, who quickly filled the enemy prisons. While certainly a few squadrons flew the A-4B and the A-4E, it was the Charlies and their pilots that took the war to the North Vietnamese and faced the growing assemblies of anti-aircraft guns and SAMs, not to mention the early appearances of MiGs over Hanoi and Haiphong and other enemy cities.

The Charlies flew from every Navy flight deck, large and small,



and for a time were clad in some of the most colorful markings of the period. A few of them even sported the experimental olive drab green in the mid-war period. The JOs who would become captains and admirals, skippers and CAGs, honed their teeth on these dangerous missions.

While we may have become familiar with the Ginter style and format, spending time browsing through this book will bring back many memories.

DRAGON'S JAW

AN EPIC STORY OF COURAGE
AND TENACITY IN VIET NAM

Stephen Coonts and Barrett Tillman
Published by Da Capo Press
Reviewed by CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR-RET

The Thanh Hoa Bridge, or Cao Ham Rong, the Dragon's Jaw Bridge over the Ma River, was dedicated on Ho Chi Minh's birthday in May 1964. It endured as a symbol of North Vietnam's pride with legendary defenses that absorbed all attempts by the United States Air Force and Navy to drop it into the muddy river waters until precision munitions from both services did just that seven years after their first attacks. This book is an excellent account of the determination in the face of great losses by all the participants.

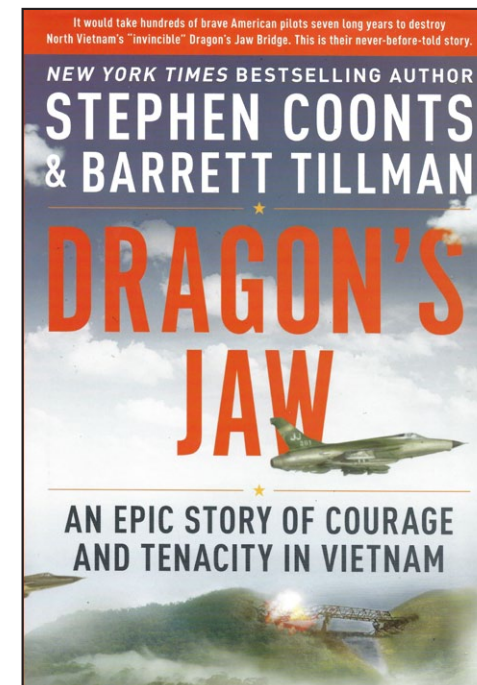
The authors' purpose was not to write a history of the Vietnam War, but to focus on the efforts to attack and defend just one bridge. They include enough politics and history of the era to provide context. It is sufficient to make those readers who lived through the events to set their teeth grinding anew, but fools

are named, both civilian and some military, and they were not suffered nicely.

As a former Naval Aviator who participated in some of the Tonkin Gulf War Games described in this book, and as an avid fan of authors Stephen Coonts and Barrett Tillman, I anticipated exciting action with a great deal of meticulous research and personal detail. Certainly, the attacks on the Bridge through the intense flak, the sound effects and maneuvering in Surface to Air Missile avoidance still raised my heart rate.

But the details of the massive USAF raids were mostly new to me, although the "Duty Downed Thud (F-105)" was quite the usual thing. The two "Carolina Moon" C-130 missions, which tried unsuccessfully to destroy the bridge by dropping massive mines in the river at night, certainly required many parts of cold rolled carbon steel.

Despite many tons of conventional bombs that merely dented the Bridge, it took the development of precision munitions, the Laser Guided Bomb for the Air Force and the 2,000 pound warhead, television guided Walleye Missile for the Navy, finally to drop a span into the Song Ma. But (contrary to the cartoon) North Vietnam was not



held together by the bridge, and the country did not fly apart. The war did not end, but it was a good start.

Barrett Tillman has remarked that "No war is truly over as long as people live who remember it." There are many participants still alive who will never forget the Thanh Hoa Bridge. I suspect that readers of this book will not forget it, either.



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

Edwin Moir, 9/2016, Tallahassee, FL
Speed Shea, 7/15/2018, Surprise, AZ
Douglas Isaly, 3/10/2019, Yuma, AZ
Paul Reyes, 3/27/2019, Eagan, MN
John Langlinais, 4/16/2019, Lafayette, LA
Ernest Tissot, 5/3/2019, Monterey, CA
Richard V. Jordan, 5/7/2019, Sanger, CA
Gary Aaron, 11/21/2018, Bella Vista, AR
Keith Spayde Jr., 4/29/2019, Houston, TX
Stephen Carey, 6/5/2019, Salt Lake City, UT



TAPS notices may be Emailed to:
Bob Hickerson, Journal Editor at
sa-journal-editor@skyhawk.org

Or mailed to: Bob Hickerson,
1222 Balcones Drive
Fredericksburg, TX 78624

NEW MEMBERS

Carsey, Michael • Rancho Cordoba, CA
Fenzl, George • Kailua, HI
Gumbert, Charles • Goddard, KS
Hinton, Allyn • Corpus Christi, TX
Martin, Craig • Whitefish Bay, WI

Pechiney, John • Orlando, FL
Razali, Ahmad M. • Singapore
Russ, Howard • Crystal River, FL



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

Improving HobbyBoss' Skyhawk

The Skyhawk was the most fun aircraft I ever flew — simple yet extremely quick and agile.

— John Cheshire, quora.com

Monogram flaps and slats properly ground an A-4E

BY DARREN ROBERTS

**This article was first published by Fine Scale Modeler magazine, the March 2019 edition. Used with permission. Our thanks to Mark Savage, Editor.*



If ever there was an example of an aircraft design that perfectly fit its role, Douglas' A-4 Skyhawk would invariably be considered for the top of the list. Designed by the master himself, Ed Heinemann, the Skyhawk was a compact light-attack aircraft that met or surpassed every criterion the Navy asked for. It was so small that it didn't require folding wings, which saved considerable weight. Yet it could carry more than 10,000 pounds of ordnance, delivering a mighty wallop from as many as five hard points on later models.

The A-4 is a favorite among modelers and it shows. It has been released in a wide range of scales by every major model manufacturer.

The latest to hit the market is the 1/48 scale offering from HobbyBoss. There was some buzz about this kit when it was first announced and it was surmised that it would be similar to its big brother, Trumpeter's 1/32 scale kit, which would make it an attractive option. I picked one up as soon as it was released and started working. It is a nice kit overall, but there

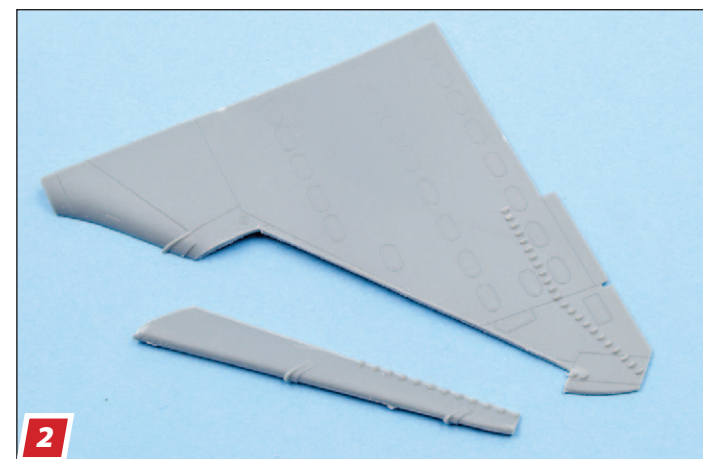
are a couple of areas that need improvement.

The most obvious fix is the wing: When parked, A-4 leading-edge slats drop — they actually retract on their own when the aircraft hits a certain airspeed. The flaps also drop when parked. The HobbyBoss kit comes with both of these control surfaces molded to the wing, which is not necessarily a bad thing if you like to build in-flight models.

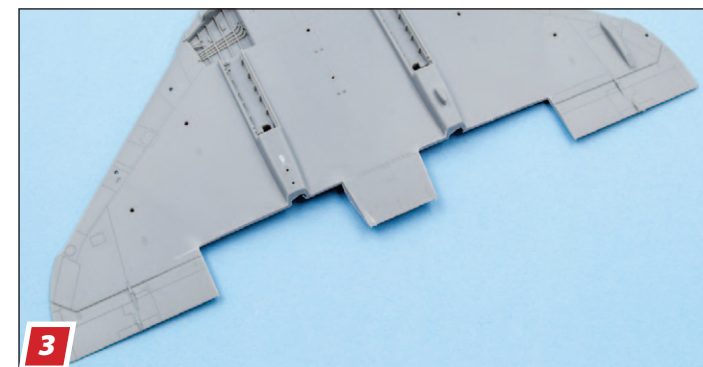
However, I wanted mine parked, which meant some surgery was at hand.



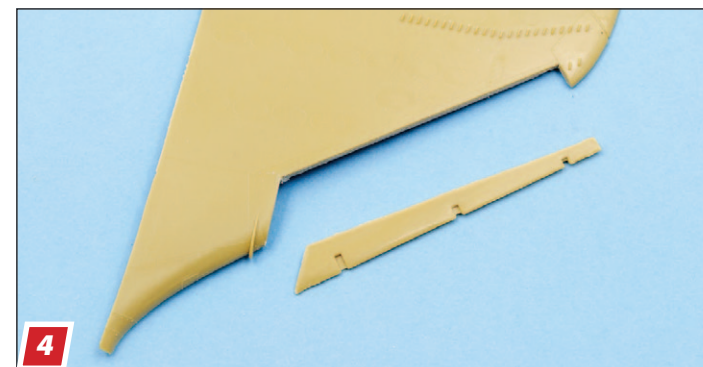
1 It started with the slats. Drawing a scribe repeatedly along the scribed outline thinned the plastic ...



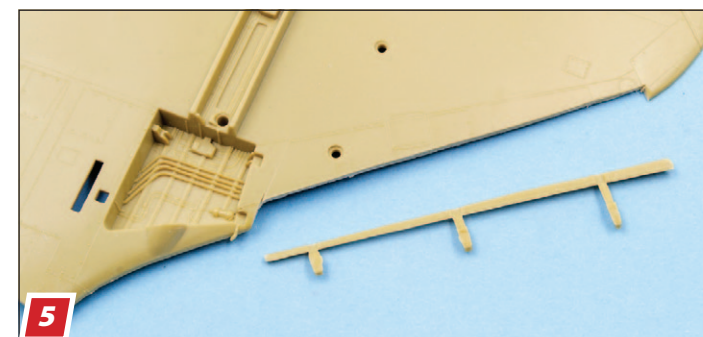
2 ... I separated the slats from the wings. I set them aside to be reattached later in the build.



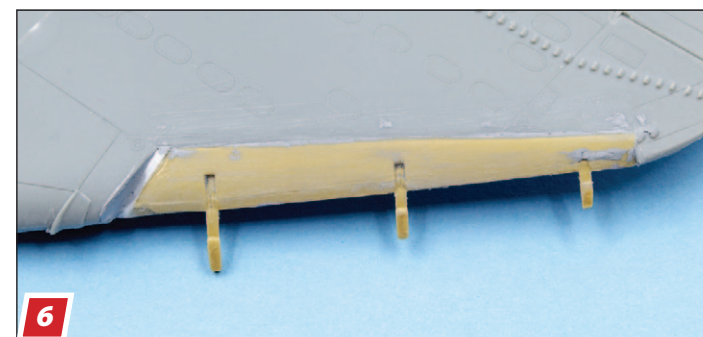
3 I did the same for the underwing flaps.



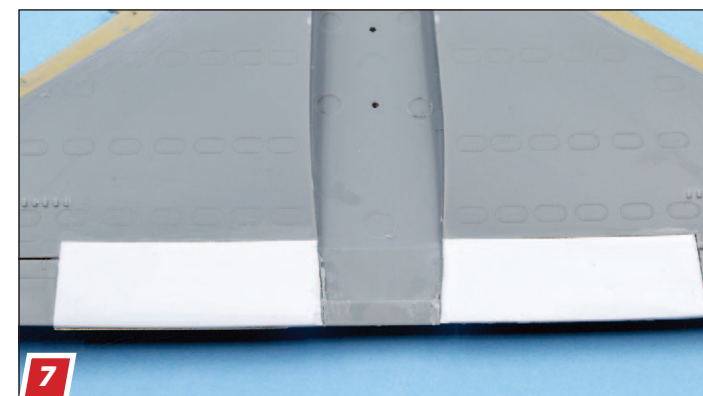
4 Pulling an old Monogram Skyhawk out of my stash, I cut the slat wells ...



5 ... and tracks from the wings. These parts will be grafted onto the HobbyBoss wings.



6 The Monogram parts fit with a small shim of styrene. When I installed the slat well, I blended the top of the well into the wing. This detail is missed on most Skyhawk models: The trailing edge of the slat actually sits on top of the wing, there is no step between the wing and slat well.

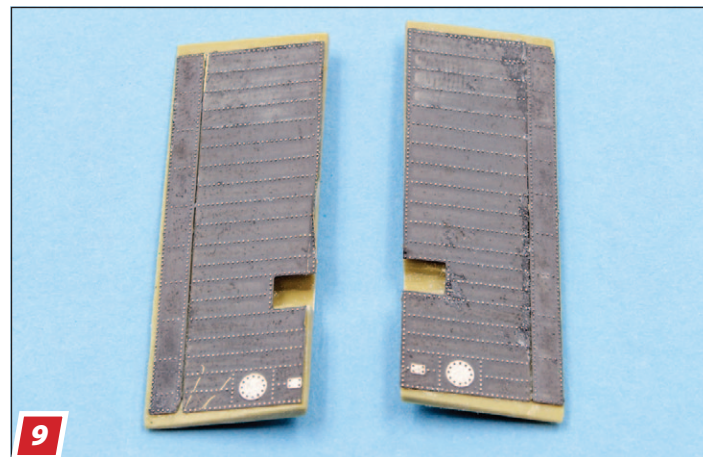


7 Removing the flaps left two large rectangular voids in the upper wing. I carefully measured the areas and filled them with sheet styrene to complete the wing.



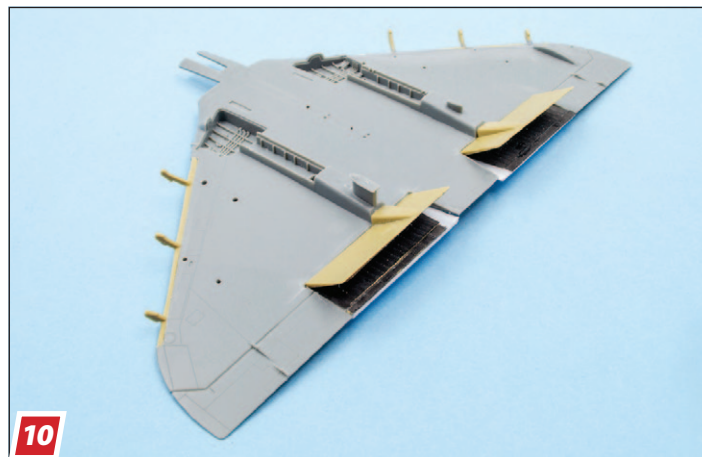
8 The underside of the sheet styrene looked pretty vanilla, so I spiced it up with some photo-etched (PE) metal from Eduard. Although it was meant for the Hasegawa Skyhawk, it fit nicely.

continued...



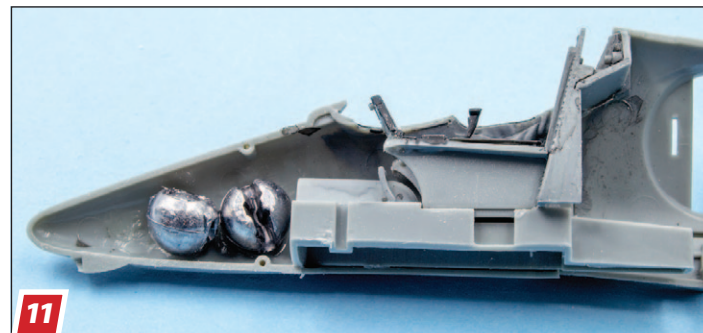
9

I used the flaps from the Monogram kit, but they didn't have much detail either. Eduard's set came to the rescue again.



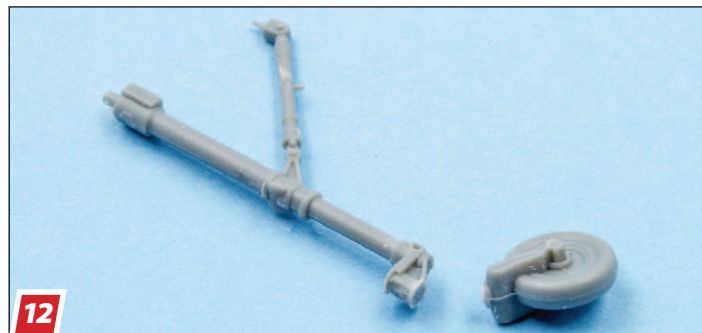
10

After attaching the PE parts, I glued the flaps in place. I continued the build following the kit instructions.



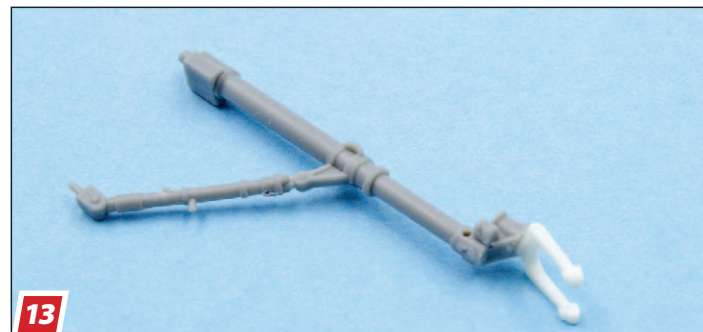
11

The kit fits nicely and there were no major hiccups. I added fishing weights to the nose to keep the nose gear on the ground.



12

The detail on the wheels was a bit soft and the front wheel was molded to the fork. Eduard Brassin makes resin wheels that include a separate resin fork. I cut away the wheel ...



13

... and glued in the resin replacement. It was a definite improvement.



14

Before spraying the main colors — light gull gray and white — I sprayed Mr. Color insignia red in the slat wells and flaps.



15

Using Tamiya tape, I masked these areas in preparation for the camouflage. I sprayed Alclad white primer on the underside and on all the movable flying surfaces, then Mr. Color light gull gray topside.



16

When the paint was dry, I applied a wash of lamp black and burnt umber to highlight surface detail. The paint applied to Navy aircraft during this time was durable and showed little dirt and grime.



17

With construction, painting, and decaling complete, I took care of the last house-keeping items. The seat doesn't include an ejection-pull ring above the head rest or the safety "head-knocker" lever between the head cushions. I replicated these with plastic.



18

The HobbyBoss kit doesn't include clear parts for the wingtip lights, carrier landing lights in the wing root, anti-collision lights, or landing lights. I used a Molatow chrome silver paint pen to simulate the glass. With that, my colorful Skyhawk took its place on the shelf next to all of my other Navy models.



This side view demonstrates the squadron markings for VA-192 Golden Dragons. The first two digits of the squadron designation show that they are attached to Carrier Air Wing 19 (tail code NM) while the third digit shows they are the second squadron in the air wing with a 2XX series modex and yellow trim. The colorful stripes on the tail and on the fuselage represent each of the trim colors in the air wing. The commander of the air wing, or CAG, has his name on the aircraft. Another identifying feature to show this is the CAG's aircraft is the *double zeros* or the *double nuts* as they're affectionately called. I mean the kind in the hardware store. What were you thinking? **FSM**

DEAF, DUMB AND BLIND (REALLY)

HIT BY FLAK

By Gene Tissot

A cardinal rule in aerial attack warfare is that “repeated runs” should never be made – even in lightly defended areas. Doing this allows the enemy to prepare for the second attack and be more effective with his anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire. Such was the case with me on the night of 18 November 1965. Flying my A-4C *Skyhawk* from USS *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31), I was on a routine night mission that became anything but routine!

My aircraft was loaded with two Bullpup-A missiles and my wingman, “Pappy” Morton, was equipped with paraflares. As we left the carrier for some night work over the port of Quang Khe, south of Vinh, we spotted a storage supply pier in the Song Giang River, a mile or so inland from the Tonkin Gulf. I had “Pappy” drop a paraflare to the south of the target while I made a 30-degree run from the north, firing a Bullpup in the reflected light of the paraflare which silhouetted the pier very well. Recovery from the attack run was made to seaward, so in the worst case if my plane was hit during the attack it would be quite easy for me to get out over the Tonkin Gulf and to relative safety.

I believe I hit the pier with the first Bullpup, but decided to make a second run just to make sure. Mistake. Coming in again, I was surprised by a burst of anti-aircraft fire, which was the first resistance we had encountered. There was a big pop and an explosion, which did a lot of damage to the nose of my A-4. The electrical wiring and radar were hit, and I lost all my external and internal lights, my altimeter, angle-of-attack indicator, airspeed indicator and practically all of the cockpit instruments. My fuel gauge was spinning, so I didn’t know how much fuel I had – or whether I had a fuel leak.

I immediately headed out to sea. Since my radio had also been knocked out, I was also unable to contact

“Pappy,” who did not know what had happened. All I could do was head in the direction of the carrier and once in the general vicinity orbit in a left-hand triangular circuit, which was the proper distress pattern to indicate to other pilots that I was lost and had no radio communications.

A half hour or so later, at the time all the other planes were heading back to the ship for recovery, I was approached by an F-8 Crusader from a sister squadron. I joined on his wing, and the F-8 pilot, not knowing I had any problem other than a radio failure, obligingly brought me down into the landing pattern.

So, there I was with few operable instruments, no lights and no radio. It was a clear, moonless night and I could see the ship all right, although I had a bit of trouble vectoring around the landing pattern. But I could see the ship from downwind and sensed they knew I had some sort of emergency condition and therefore were accommodating me in the pattern.

With no angle-of-attack or airspeed indicators, I soon found out how difficult it was to achieve the proper approach speed. All pilots develop a feel for what the proper airspeed is by virtue of all the previous carrier landings they have made in a particular airplane, and I had certainly flown the *Skyhawk* off and on a carrier enough to have this feel. But without any of the critical instruments, I soon found out just how difficult it was to get the speed right on the mark. As it turned out, I was about 15 or 20 knots too fast – and I wasn’t about to get too slow! Consequently, I was close to the maximum speed allowed to engage the arresting gear.

On my first attempt at landing, I “boltered” (missed the arresting gear) and continued around for another pass. I was high and fast and boltered the next time as well. As best I could tell, I was slowing the plane down on each succes-

sive pass, but on the third attempt, I was waved off for still being too fast.

On the fourth pass, I knew I didn’t have much fuel remaining. My fuel gauge was still spinning, but I knew that if I had a fuel leak I would long ago have run out of fuel. So, knowing how long I had been airborne and what I’d been doing, I mentally calculated I had about 1,000 pounds of fuel, which is getting to be a low fuel state for the A-4. I came around again on what I thought was a pretty good pass and again got the flashing red lights indicating a wave-off.

I later learned that this pass was good, and I probably would have gotten aboard OK. However, it seems that someone in the large crowd of spectators that had assembled in “Pri-Fly” (the Air Officer’s flight station in the island superstructure, from which all flight operations are controlled) to watch the show had inadvertently put his hand on the wave-off button as I was coming in on my final approach!

As I pulled up again, an A-4 tanker appeared, nicely positioned in front of me. I got the message and took advantage of this opportunity to refuel the airplane. I had trouble getting the landing gear up but finally did it by pressing the override switch in the landing gear handle. That trouble was an electrical problem due to the damage sustained by the AAA fire.

Just as I was able to retract the gear and was almost certain my fuel state was so low that I’d “flame out” any second – just then – the nose cone of the airplane blew back. It was hinged at the top – which allowed maintenance personnel access to the radar – and it just flipped up 180 degrees and stayed right on top of the nose of the airplane, like a big air scoop. Of course, I couldn’t radio the tanker pilot about my difficulty and he couldn’t see me because he was ahead of me. Even using full power and much more of my precious fuel, I wouldn’t have been able to plug into him with all that extra drag on the nose.



Ernest Eugene Tissot

All I could do was to lower my seat, add full power and put my plane in a shallow dive. I went whistling past the tanker and he had enough sense to keep me in sight. In my dive from about 5,000 feet – going about 400 knots – the radome blew off, leaving me with a blunt nose, but a lot less drag. After three or four attempts I was able to get plugged into the tanker’s refueling probe and breathed a great sigh of relief when fuel started transferring into my airplane.

The tanker pilot, Ole Olson from VA-195, our sister squadron, led me to our divert field at Da Nang, where I successfully concluded one of the longest, and certainly the most exciting and tiring flight I’d ever had.

After I had parked my *Skyhawk* on the parking apron I quickly got out of my airplane and was waiting as the crash truck drove up. I had placed my helmet on the ground in front of my plane and a front tire of the truck neatly rolled over my helmet, crushing it flat. I could always get another helmet – that part was no problem – but I had placed the 8 millimeter movie camera that I always carried inside my helmet! There went the camera. But I considered that incident a small price to pay for the night’s events.

The next morning I was flown back to the carrier in the ship’s twin-engine logistics aircraft, and I told my story to my puzzled wingman, the Air Wing Commander and the Captain.

That night, with a new helmet and no camera, I flew a similar mission over Laos. But I made no repeated runs!

[Ed. note: This story was reprinted from *The Brown Shoes Project* (the-brownshoes.org) with permission to Boom Powell. Regrettably, the author, RADM Eugene Tissot, passed away on May 3, 2019.]



CDR Gene Tissot’s damaged A-4 Skyhawk on deck at Da Nang. Image from John Rawls via Gary Verver.



Close-up of nose damage to CDR Gene Tissot’s A-4 Skyhawk at Da Nang. Image from John Rawls via Gary Verver.

INCREDIBLE FIND!

By Dave Dollarhide

The Skyhawk Association recently received the following email from Robert Dews.

"I located what I believe may be the wing off of a Skyhawk in a heavy swamp a couple of miles south of NAS Cecil Field. I cannot swear the wing I have found is off of an A-4 however if it is I suspect it is BuNo 142213 or possibly BuNo 142738. Both of these aircraft were reported to have crashed not far from Cecil Field..."

I quickly realized that Robert must live close to my home in Orange Park, FL, and we arranged to meet for breakfast one morning. Robert is a local Sheriff's Environmental Investigator and his hobby is tracking down historic military airplane wrecks. This location had been suggested to him by a local Forest Ranger.

The wreck site is two miles south of the former NAS Cecil Field and located in a swamp with knee deep water, but moccasins and alligators don't seem to deter Robert. Most of the many small pieces of wreckage are underwater and unseen, but for the medium size piece of wing and attached portion of a main gear. I could tell from the photos it was from a Skyhawk, but only the Bureau Number would tell the story, so either the data plate or the correct piece of the empennage would need to be found. Robert decided on a return visit to the swamp.



Forty seven years later, the Piece of wing...

1972 A-4 Crash Near NAS Cecil Field

The Crash Story

So, how'd A-4C 148609 meet its end in the swamp? Thanks to Gary Verver, who's spent many years building our A-4 losses list, the ending story is there to read.

The A-4C, piloted by Kenneth Reed, was assigned to VC-2, based at NAS Oceana, but temporarily operating in the Warning Area off the coast of Jacksonville. During his return to NAS Cecil, he encountered a mid-air collision with a VA-12 A-7E. The Corsair pilot ejected just before his airplane hit the water, but was found deceased when picked up by a German destroyer, operating in the area. Reed managed to return to the Cecil area, but due to control problems, was forced to eject.

But, there's more!

Since Robert Dews has a knack for investigating, he managed to contact Kenneth Reed and received the following revealing reply in great detail.

"I was on a detachment from my home base at NAS Oceana, providing radar tracking services to a German destroyer off the coast of Florida. It was a cloudless day, great for flying, and I was working in a Warning area off Jacksonville from 50' to 50,000'. That part of the flight went perfectly normally, and I was starting to return to Cecil Field

I was in contact with JAX center and under radar control, starting to think about the upcoming approach and landing when something made me look down and slightly behind the left wing where I saw 3 A-7's in fingertip formation about halfway through a loop. They were so close that I had a split second to roll, but before I could pull into a turn, the lead A-7 and I collided.

After the shock of the collision, the airplane pretty much flew itself while I was digesting the warning lights in the cockpit. I then realized that the aircraft could still fly, not well, but well enough.

A few days later, Robert sent me an email with unexpected news. *"I returned to the swamp this morning to search the area around the wing. The swamp was unrelenting; however, after about an hour or two out there we managed to find what I believe to be the rest of the airplane. It's strewn over about 50 yards and much of it is just mangled rubble - much below water & muck. I believe I've located the fuselage as well and other miscellaneous sheet-metal and parts. A real gruesome scene....*

It's an A-4C with Bureau number 148609"

He and a friend had been at the site, groping around under the water and found the crumpled piece of the left empennage, showing five of the six BUNO digits. Eureka! I really didn't expect this news. He was planning to come to my hangar for an RV-4 ride so a couple of days later he proudly displayed the piece from the back of his truck. I had to look closely, between the crevices of the bent aluminum. The "1" is missing, but 48609 can easily be seen.



Robert Dews with the key find

continued...

1972 A-4 Crash *continued...*



Paul Wood's present day replica of 148609

I could not see the damage, but I determined I could only turn right, and control the nose with engine power. I asked Cecil tower to find me a Landing Signal Officer (LSO) to try and assess the damage and help me get the aircraft safely on the ground.

The ultimate goal was to keep the aircraft out of populated areas. As I started my approach, I took off to much power and the nose started to drop. My intent was to land on the wing tanks as drop-

ping the landing gear would pull the nose down sharply. I was at full power and the bottom of my approach was about 10 ft off the runway. As I was climbing out, the LSO wanted me to turn left to avoid a small airfield East of Cecil. I climbed over that pattern and tower and found an A-7 that could look me over. He told me that part of the left wing tank was missing, part of the left wing was damaged in the flap area, the left stabilizer was missing and the rudder was damaged and jammed hard to the

right. The decision was made to not attempt another landing, but to leave the airplane in an undeveloped area south of Cecil.

Understand in the early '70s there was a lot of open area South of Cecil. I clearly remember the kick in the butt the rocket seat gave me, and the way the g-forces mess up your ears. The parachute opened and I remember seeing the aircraft in almost a vertical nose down attitude as it hit the swamp with a tremendous splash." (Reed landed safely and was unharmed-Ed)

And now...the Rest of the Story

It just so happens, A-4C 148609 was assigned to VA-76 in 1967 and flown by T. R. Swartz when he shot down a MIG-17 in Vietnam. He did it with an unguided Zuni rocket, the only known MiG kill by a U.S. Skyhawk! This is one of the most famous Skyhawks to ever fly! The empennage piece will be donated to the new POW/MIA Memorial, located at the former NAS Cecil in Jacksonville, FL.

56 Hours During Yankee Station's Summer of '67



VF-111 Sundowners F8C Crusader. Photo courtesy of Dick Schaffert.

By Richard Schaffert

During the summer of '67 on Yankee Station, we were shuttling old F-8C replacement aircraft we'd received to a maintenance facility at NAS Cubi Point, for installation of the latest in electronic warfare equipment, code name "Shoe Horn." On 22 October, it was my turn, and I caught the daily *Oriskany* C-1A mail-run to Cubi. All the carriers were on Yankee and the Club was almost empty. Early next morning, I took a base taxi to the flight line. The friendly Filipino taxi driver asked me if I'd be taking part in the raid on Phuc Yen. Somewhat surprised, I asked him when that would be. He assured me it would happen in the next few days.

An uneventful flight back to Yankee, followed by a shoulder harness restraint system failure on arrested landing, which resulted in my attempt to take-out the radar scope with my head. Shattered my helmet; and, as revealed by CT scans

years later, a compression fracture of the T-1 vertebra and herniation of 4 discs in my cervical spine. Also, an apparent concussion, with occasional, very distracting, double-vision which persisted for two days. At the Air Wing Alpha Strike planning meeting that evening, the taxi driver's prediction came true! Beginning at 10:00 the next morning, I flew 4 missions "downtown" over the following 56 hours.

I've never walked out on the field to play in the Rose Bowl, but it could not have made me as proud as I was to rendezvous overhead *Oriskany* with 40 other Air Wing Sixteen pilots, and roll out on a heading straight up the Red River for Hanoi; and I got to do that 4 times in 56 hours! During one of those run-ins, someone came up on strike frequency with a few bars from a recording of Petula Clark's hit rendition "*Downtown*." Some 35 years later, at

a post-concert audience-participation event at a theater in San Diego, I had the privilege of telling the story to that gracious and caring Brit lady. I was rewarded with a hug and a sweet kiss . . . in front of my wife and 400 people!

My first two missions were Iron Hand, and the last two were MIGCAP. I had the honor and self-ordained privilege (as squadron Operations Officer) of flying the Iron Hands with VA-164's incredible Warrior, Denny Weichman. Denny began flying combat over and around all of Vietnam when President JFK first said, "We have to do something about that mess over there!" He already had over 400 missions when I enjoyed watching him in action. During the first strike on Phuc Yen, I recall (with aging memory) that our primary assignment was the major SAM complex located west of Hanoi and south of Phuc Yen. The weather over the Red River (for 3 days) was broken clouds and heavy haze

below 10,000 ft. with brilliant blue sky above. Perfect for our "Supreme Commander" to watch over us, to see if we performed our duty to our Country, and to Him, in an honorable manner; and, thankfully, to lend His hand when appropriate. I'm living proof of that!

Suppressing SAMs "downtown" was a mathematical impossibility, but Denny was no mathematician, and we "tore them a new one!" Thinking back, *Charge of the Light Brigade* comes to mind. We evidently got the job done, as our Air Wing suffered no losses to SAMs on that first strike. When we were finally "Winchester," with two SAM sites destroyed and only my two remaining Sidewinders for weapons, we covered the strike group's withdrawal; but the MiGs that hadn't fled to China or been destroyed on the ground weren't having any more of us! Unfortunately, 85mm sites had locked on us several times, and Denny had been hit twice. With some of that "Help" from above, we made it back to the "O" boat. His crew counted 140 holes in his Skyhawk. 18 hours later we did it all again. Same targets, same assignment, but this time

Denny and I must not have been so effective. We lost an A4E to a SAM and VA-163 nugget pilot LTJG Krommenhoek was missing. When Denny finished with his Shrike deliveries, we both still had full loads of 20mm, and I had two Zuni rockets. Phuc Yen was smoldering, but the Hoa Lac airfield was open for business, and we closed them down with several very accurate attacks.

It was a "target rich" environment for our Iron Hand missions. During the first 4 raids on Phuc Yen, 117 SAM launches were recorded, 36 against our Air Wing. A few hours later, my third trip downtown was a comparatively easy TARCAP, but the fourth on 26 October was a nightmare as we lost both John McCain and Chuck Rice. There was absolutely no chance of a rescue for either one. It was a bitter pill to swallow. My official Navy pilot's Log Book shows I flew a fifth Alpha Strike Iron Hand to Hanoi on 27 October, but I can't recall the details, and I have no notes about that. Hey, I'm 83! During those 56 hours of strikes on Phuc Yen and "downtown," our Air Wing had 8

aircraft hit and 4 shot down; with one KIA, two POW, and one rescue.

Thirty years later, my Hungarian bride and I flew over "downtown" again. This time in a chartered brand-new Boeing 777, with British pilots and a Chinese crew, enroute to Bangkok. From 37,000 feet, the Hanoi mid-afternoon weather looked much the same, broken clouds and haze. However, there was a high cirrus layer, and as I stared out the first-class cabin window, I saw the faces of KIA roommates Norm Levy and Ed Van Orden, and there was wingman Bill McWilliams; 3 of the 58 we left behind on Yankee. Gone and totally forgotten by the America they died for, but not by those of us who led them into the fight or fought on their wings, and certainly not by the loving God who called them to His paradise. Tears were running down my cheeks and the cute Chinese Stew with the bottle in her hand was apologizing, "Sorry, Sir, is our champagne that bad?"

Respectfully Submitted,
Captain Dick Schaffert, USN (retired and very tired) aka Brown Bear
[brownbearlead@gmail.com]

Supersonic Scooter

By Johnny Bittick

Reading about the trim tab for manual reversion (hydraulic disconnect) article in the winter edition reminded me of a memory that I wonder how many other Skyhawk drivers have shared.

It was July 1973, and I was the O-In-C of the CAG-21 beach det. in Cubi Point. The maintenance troops were struggling with a VA-164 plane that had already failed two disconnect tests. As you may remember, the pilot trimmed up the aircraft hands-off as much as that was possible, then pulled the disconnect handle and measured the rate of roll afterward. The troops had already removed the centerline drop tank and TERs on the wing racks, and it still failed the roll test. When I showed up for the third try, I observed that the chief had removed the wing racks as well. I was looking at a clean-wing A-4 Super Fox!! I had been driving Skyhawks for seven years and had never even seen one before. I wiped the drool from my chin and manned up.

Since I had full internal fuel, I elected to burn down the wing fuel to take that variable out of the equation. (That's my story and I'm sticking to it). I did a standard

takeoff and followed the NATOPS climb schedule to 40,000'. My first clue to what a difference a clean wing (no racks) makes was when the rate of climb indicator needle came off the 6000 ft/min peg for the first time going through 24,000'. I began a 1,500 fpm descent to about 37,000'. The Scooter accelerated during the descent and leveled-off to just under 1.1 IMN and held that speed. A supersonic Skyhawk! As best I remember it still had the combat package installed (ECM & armor plate) which added quite a bit of weight.

On the way back to the landing pattern I decided to do some acceleration tests as well. Level at 10,000' and 250 knots, I timed the acceleration out to 500 knots. Later I had the opportunity to do those same tests in an F-8H and an F-4N, using burner in both. Initially the Scooter jumped out to a substantial lead, and the other two didn't start to close the gap until about 380 knots. Another reason not to get into a slow speed scissors with an A-4F!

I know Chip Brown is a supersonic Scooter driver, and I wonder if there are others?

BTW, the plane passed the disconnect test that time!!



Attack on Phuc Yen Airfield, bombs on runway courtesy of VA-163 Saints and VA-164 Magic Stones (aka Ghost Riders). Photo courtesy of Dick Schaffert (aka Brown Bear Lead)

Skyhawk Losses

~ You Be the Judge ~

by Gary Verver

From: Ron Picciani

In the article by Gary Verver (Kodakids *spring 2019, p.21*), there was a question as to the A-4B that was lost at sea. I have attached my photo of A-4B 144904 at Davis-Monthan AFB, taken in March of 1974. You have my permission to use the photos if you like.

As also can be seen in Ron's photo AMARC 3A153 is not 144909 as reported in some online AMARC records, but is 144999 and an apparent typo in the online records. As Bryan's son Chris noted, "the case is solved." Couldn't have done it without the pix from Ron. Thank you so much. At least now we know with higher certainty where 144909 is.



Re: This Pettibone:

We've received a number of responses to the losses article in the 2018 Fall *A-4EVER* Issue about the A-4C (A4D-2N) wingman who unsuccessfully attempted to liftoff, decreased power to keep from over-running the lead plane, and successfully ejected, planting himself in the soft marshy ground almost to his hips.



From: Kelvin Huehn

I doubt this could be the Skyhawk loss you were writing about but when going through A4 RAG training in early 60's I remember guys talking about a similar A-4 ejection at Moffett Field before VA 125 moved to Lemoore. It was an ejection on take-off where the pilot landed in the mud of San Francisco Bay north of the runway. The pilot's name I remember was Sandy Falconer, and I believe he was a VA-125 instructor. Don't know what A-4 model he jumped out of, and I believe the feeling at the time was that he might have ejected out-

side the seat envelope. The A-4 ejection seat at that time was not a zero/zero seat, as I remember. Getting harder to recall events of 60 years ago but even if I am off on the details, your article rejuvenated some great memories as do all the articles in *The A-4EVER*.



From: Paul Barrish

Squadron was VA-125 at Moffett, the pilot was Sandy Falconer. Possible cause of accident was right glove between thumb and forefinger pushing coolie hat trim switch nose down. At this point there was not enough elevator authority to override (full?) nose down trim; even though the tailhook was lowered, it failed to engage the field arresting gear because the nose was down so far the hook point went over the wire.

A few years later at Lemoore, another similar incident (*not A-4*) - trim forced nose down when stick was being pulled back. into contact with the Mark 3 life preserver in the landing pattern.



GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Illustration by Ted Wilbur



From: R.W. (Dick) Twilde, Capt.USN (Ret.)

In late June or July of 1961, I was a student in the A-4 Rag (VA-125) at NAS Moffett Field. I was just leaving the Squadron for the day when I passed either Lt. Jim Doolittle or Lt Sandy Falconer on the way out. They were both Rag Instructors and whichever one it was said he was going to brief for a night hop. The next morning when I returned, I found out that there had been an accident the night before and that the pilot had "punched out" at the last second as the nose wheel dropped off the end of the runway. I believe he only suffered a sprained ankle which was miraculous as the chute had streamed and he landed in the mud, which probably saved his life. The "scuttlebutt" around the ready Room was that the "Scooter" had full nose down trim and of course could not fly, hence the landing in the South Bay Mud. I heard that he had sunk up to his chest and couldn't get out. Also, because of the location, the "Crash Crew" couldn't easily get to him and it took a while before his rescue. It has been a while and so my memory may be a little suspect on the details, but I'm certain it was one of the two. Incidentally, on completing the Rag Training, I joined VA-112 (the "Montana Squadron") as they moved from Miramar to Lemoore.

Puresome Unplugged

~ YP's Excellent Adventures ~

By Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

This Puresome article was last published in *The A-4Ever* in the Spring 2013 issue, Volume 19.3.



The thump of the catapult overhead woke him. Normally oblivious to the usual ship's racket, Puresome had fitfully stewed in the 90-degree heat of his palatial stateroom above the boiler for some time. Yellow demons with big mouths, snarling senior officers and sharp-shooting gomers had inhabited his sweaty dreams instead of the usual prancing naked ladies. His frantic jinking to spoil the gomers' tracking solutions had caused him to flop and moan. Grateful to be awake, Puresome stuck his face in the relatively cool air directed toward his top rack by a canvas tube fashioned by the parachute riggers. As he idly listened to the ritual "sweepers, sweepers, man your brooms!" announcement over the ship's 1MC speaker outside in the passageway, Youthly realized with a start that the dreams were not pulp fiction, but the church of what's happening now!

"Ay! Yi! Yi! Yi!" Puresome smacked his forehead, remembering the previous day's total stupidity of his 24-year-old runaway mouth, righteously rolling in on a senior officer, no less a lofty than CAG Earlobe himself. And getting spanked and grounded. And, it seemed, being miraculously redeemed by his skipper! The good part seemed to be that he was on the flight schedule for the noon launch. The quease part was that he had not yet been formally excused from the firing squad by CAG himself and, though thoroughly chastened, Puresome did not trust the small yellow demon responsible for his recent problems. Anything out of his mouth other than "yessir!" or "nosir!" might be construed as another inappropriate attention-getting device and possible high-speed Atoll pass. Besides, the air wing was too small to blame his indiscretions on an evil cousin.

The other quease part was the adrenaline build-up that was really an attack of

nerves preceding the big ball game of his first Alfa strike in the major league Up North. Puresome's first three combat missions, two close-air-support trips Down South and yesterday's ill-fated road-recce fiasco with the NORDO CAG Earlobe had met only small-arms fire. Today's trip was a max air wing effort against the evil POL storage tanks of Nam Dinh, and the gomers were expected to get huffy and shoot back with big guns. While Puresome thought that was unreasonable and knew the stories about guys in other air wings getting bagged, he knew that this was why he came along on cruise. He desperately did not want to get benched. Besides, it was the Fourth of July, and fireworks were expected.

Briefing the Big One

That thought finally got Puresome out of the rack. He cleaned up, put on khakis and tried to get a little admin work done. Since most of the black shoes he had to see were on holiday routine, he finally gave up trying to get any Larry Legal or any SLDO work done and went up for green eggs and ham among the rowdies of Wardroom 1. All too soon, it was time.

Puresome put on his green flight suit, grabbed his nav bag and joined the throng making their way for strike briefing among the spooks in the Integrated Operational Intelligence Center. Passwords and secret signs had to be exchanged before the button would be pressed that unlocked the hatch into the inner sanctum where computer banks buzzed and flashed and digested reels of data from the magic bellies of RA-5Cs, poop from the Pentagonians and cryptic stuff from 007 types. Squads of intelligence types with eyeglasses and pipes rummaged through sheaves of photographs and annotated charts. Puresome hid



Jack "Youthly Puresome" Woodul

himself in the extreme back row of chairs set up facing several easels covered with thick pads of butcher paper well-marked with multicolored diagrams. The room filled up with pilots, scopies, bombardier-navigators, and radar-navigators with their game faces on. Everybody "attention on deck'ed!" as the admiral came in and took his place at the front of the briefing room.

"Holy mierda!" thought Puresome. "This is big!"

At the appointed second, CAG Earlobe strode to the front of the group. "Admiral, gentlemen—today's strike is against the POL storage depot at Nam Dinh, code name Rifle. I will be strike lead. Navigation lead will be CDR Jeremiah from the Punchers. The strike will consist of a division of A-6 bombers, two divisions of A-4 bombers from the Blue Hawks and the Snakes respectively, a division of flak suppressers also from the Snakes and a division of Blue Hawk Bullpup flak suppressers. We will have two Whales to refuel four Ace F-4 BarCAP and four Jolly Roger MiG-screen fighters.

"The North Vietnamese SAM sites are not active yet, but there is a good deal of radar-controlled flak, so ECM birds, code named Cotton Pickers, will be jamming. After launch and when all aircraft are rendezvoused, I will call for a check from the division leaders. We will switch to strike frequency and proceed on course. En route altitude will be 20,000 feet, and we will let down to 15,000 feet, picking the speed up to 450 knots for the attack.

"When we go feet dry, the two sections of Blue Hawk Bullpup shooters will separate, accelerate and position themselves to shoot their Bullpups at their designated flak sites away from the river. The strike group will wagon-wheel attack around a basic roll-in heading of 140 degrees, which will take advantage of sun position and point you toward the water. *continued...*

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

Snake flak suppressers, divide your bombs among the sites close to the target. Strike aircraft, don't bunch up and come down the same chute. Aircraft will rendezvous at 15,000 over the water just off Quat Lam. I want a positive check of all aircraft feet wet by division leads. Everybody needs to be heads up for MiGs. Fighters—remember your Sparrow is a 14-mile bird. When I know the target is clear, the RA-5 will make his bomb-damage-assessment run."

Puresome dutifully took notes on his kneeboard card of the call sign of the SAR destroyer and the MiG code word. He paid special attention to the weather briefing, the details of the attack formation and basic navigation data. Since he was just Skip Lead's punk wingman in the Snakes' bombing division, his main concerns were not running into anyone in the cloud of airplanes involved in the strike and dropping some good bombs.

Final Preparations and Fighting the Quease

Finally, it was all done. CAG Earlobe dismissed them for specific briefings by division leaders. Puresome's heart froze as CAG strode by him, stopped, pointed a finger at his heart and said, "You're ungrounded!" Puresome didn't know how, but it was enough for the moment. He had other things to think about.

Back in the Snakes' ready room, Skip Lead handed out 8x10-in. target photographs to his division. Puresome was happy that the POL tanks were easy to see and situated in the bend of a wide river. Target identification shouldn't be a problem, even if the weather wasn't CAVU to the moon, which it was. What horrified him was the number of ringed flak sites around the target, also easily identifiable. Puresome wrote in big block letters on his navigation card "115 mils," the proper lead for his 60-degree dive bomb run, and "7,000 feet," the proper altitude to pickle off his bombs. Along with the modexes of the other members of his flight, this was the most important information on his nav card.

Finally, everything had been said and resaid, and everyone trooped into the smelly flight gear room adjacent to the ready room to strap into g-suits, torso harnesses and survival vests, grab their

helmets, oxygen masks and nav bags. Next they checked their survival radios and personal firearms. That finished, there was nothing to do except flop into ready room chairs like fat, trussed up teddy bears, each alone with his own thoughts. It was a relief when the squawk box came alive with the announcement, "Pilots and crews concerned, man aircraft for the 1200 launch."

Man-Up and Preflight Finding Comfort in the Ritual

The eight Snake pilots waddled out of Ready Room 4 Starboard, merging with the eight Blue Hawk's coming out of Ready Room 4 Port in the long escalator ride to the flight deck. They emerged from the incandescent gloom of the ship's interior, blinking in the bright July sunlight. Puresome walked down the flight deck in the hot sun—he was already sweating when he found his aircraft, Snake 406.

He greeted the plane captain with what he hoped was suitable nonchalance, hung his nav bag on the port 20mm gun barrel by the boarding ladder and started the clockwise preflight around his aircraft. All the major airplane parts seemed to be on, and he carefully checked that the bombs on his centerline station and the outboard wing stations had arming safety pins installed. He checked the arming wires running through the little propellers on the nose of his bombs that kept the fuses safe until the wire pulled out as bomb dropped away.

The electric tail fuse was another matter, and Puresome had to take their readiness on faith and proper cockpit switchology. He finished his preflight inspection by the gun barrel where he had started, grabbed his nav bag and climbed the long ladder to the cockpit. Still standing on the ladder, he inspected his ejection seat and removed all its arming pins, rolled them up and stowed them in the little bag on the side of the ejection seat. Stowing his nav bag in the port corner of the tiny cockpit, he carefully swung his feet into the deck so as not to step on the ejection seat pad and settled himself into the seat.

"Good luck, Mr. Puresome!" the plane captain said as he helped him strap in. "Get some."

"Rightie-O!" Puresome nodded as the plane captain descended and removed the boarding ladder. The young pilot lowered his helmet visor against the unnatural brightness of the sun and sky and checked his cockpit switchology, trying to keep

busy. It was much the same all over the flight deck.

Puresome got his kneeboard out of his nav bag and strapped it to his left thigh. He looked again at the target photograph and re-stowed it in his nav bag. Puresome gazed in wonder at the dance of different colored jerseys on the flight deck and the brightly colored signal flags high on the ship's island snapping in the breeze. The air boss' God-like voice booming over flight deck loudspeakers startled him. It was time for the flight deck troops to roll down sleeves, put on goggles and start the props and the jets.

Aircraft Is Up Ready for Launch

The plane captain plugged in external electrical power and the huffer's air hose. Puresome gave him the one-finger signal to turn on electrical power followed by two fingers to start the air. As the engine spun up, he brought the throttle up to the start detent. The J52's EGT started to rise as the engine wound up and stabilized at idle rpm. Puresome exchanged hand signals with the plane captain, who removed the power and the air. Youthly made a clockwise sweep around his cockpit to turn on systems. Finally, he and the plane captain went through another pantomime as they checked the aircraft controls.

When the red shirts showed up, Puresome again checked his weapons switches safe and put his hands on top of his helmet for the ordnance checker to see while his crew removed the pins that safed the bombs. The ordnance crew soon came out from under his wings holding the red-flagged ordnance safety pins—Puresome counted them and gave the ordies a thumbs up. The plane captain pulled the landing gear safety pins in a similar count/thumbs-up ritual.

Puresome soon finished with his external checks. He listened to other aircraft on UHF radio checking in on deck with their aircraft status and checked in Sidewinder 406 as "up." He next turned the gunsight to bright, unlocked the mil setting drum and rotated the outside hash mark on the bright, yellow gunsight display down until it touched his aircraft's nose, and checked the reading on the drum. It was all right, so Puresome aligned the 115 mark, the mil setting for his bomb drop, with the index and locked the lever down. Above him on the island, the Foxtrot flag ran up its

halyard as the ship heeled into the wind. Puresome could feel the ship thrum beneath him as it picked up speed. A yellow-shirted flight director suddenly appeared and gave him the "hold brakes" signal, followed by the "break down" signal to the brown shirts manning the tie-down chains. He watched the taxi director intently as the first Phantom fired off the waist catapult. The launch and the big adventure was under way.

A Sky Full of Aircraft

The shot from the catapult was a stiff one. When his vision cleared, Puresome was happy to find that his heavily laden A-4 was flying. After a clearing turn to starboard, he retracted his gear and flaps as he accelerated. At 10 miles, Youthly turned port and climbed to his squadron's rendezvous altitude above the ship. There were many aircraft already airborne and, while each squadron had its own altitude for rendezvous, Puresome was wary. A smack-athon would be easy and, with bombs all over the place, the results probably would be a bit sticky. He started a port orbit at the Snake's rendezvous altitude and immediately spotted a section of two aircraft across the circle. Puresome pulled inside their wing line and started to join on them. As he approached the section, he saw that their side numbers didn't belong to his division, so he rolled out and lagged behind them. Another Snake A-4 started to rendezvous on him, saw he was the wrong number, and slid off to join the section in front of Puresome.

Finally, Puresome saw three aircraft across the circle. He screamed over to join them, going to idle and hitting the speedbrakes at the last second to slide neatly into position without smacking anyone or departing the heavily loaded Skyhawk. Skip Division was joined.

When CAG saw that everyone was joined, he called the division leads to check in, and the whole lash-up switched to strike frequency. The two A-3 tankers started off on course, climbing to 25,000 feet. Puresome flew a loose wing on his leader and watched as the Whales streamed their drogues to top off the eight Phantoms. Soon the Whales departed, and Puresome was alone with 17 other aircraft headed North.

The strike was spread out in a diamond formation of four divisions plus the two Blue Hawk Bullpup shooters, with

the A-6s leading. Each of the divisions was in combat spread formation to allow maximum lookout and maneuverability. Puresome kept his head on a swivel in case the wily gomer had some MiG-ing in mind. The large formation of aircraft seemed exactly like the Eighth Air Force B-17s of Puresome's childhood, streaming relentlessly toward Germany. He had an overwhelming feeling of being part of some large, historical process.

The distant mountains and flatlands of Indian country came into view. Down below on the blue waters of the Gulf, hundreds of fishing boats dotted the surface, and Puresome thought how strange it was that he was going to go blow things up and get shot at on such a peaceful, pretty day.

A Trip Into Indian Country

Four Phantoms joined the strike group just as the blue waters of the Gulf were turning brown from the silt of the several wide rivers that emptied into it. As they weaved above the strike group, Puresome took back everything nasty he had ever said about Phantom pukes—a full load of drop tanks and bombs on his Scooter left him at less than his maneuverable best, and the F-4s were a welcome sight.

As they approached the coast line, the formation tightened up and started a slow descent, airspeed building. Puresome turned his gunsight on to full bright, switched his outboard and center wing station selectors to the "on" position, rotated his weapons selector to "bombs," activated his master armament switch and lowered his seat until he could just peek over the glare shield through the gunsight.

He could see the wide, muddy river and the city of Nam Dinh in the distance. The strike group was by now at 15,000 feet and 450 knots. CAG called "shooters, detach!" and the Blue Hawk Bullpup aircraft peeled away. The strike formation had moved into a loose trail, and CAG called "All right now, watch it—here comes the flak!" Black and white puffballs started to appear, and aircraft started jinking. Puresome moved his aircraft around, constantly weaving while keeping Skip Lead and the aircraft in front of them in sight. He was acutely aware of the muddy rice paddies below him, the blue sky with the angry, black flowers in it and the loop in the river that would identify the target.

Puresome clearly heard the Blue Hawks call their Bullpup missiles "bal-

listic!" and happened to see a missile explode 200 yards from a flak site. The circle of flak guns were like Fourth of July sparklers—shooting at them! The two ballistic missile explosions seemed to really piss off the gomer gunners, and the air filled with flak. The aircraft ahead were now diving, and Youthly maneuvered up, down and around the flak as he followed Skip Lead into their own dive. The division rolled inverted and down, pulling up and inverted and down again. Youthly put his pipper on a large tank and watched the altimeter unwind as he pressed the target in a vertical dive. After what seemed the longest time, he pickled his bombs and pulled out hard as the g's grayed things out. Somebody called out, "Orange Two, break! break! break!" Youthly yanked hard left and watched the pop! pop! pop! behind. He reversed just as hard down and right, held it, then reversed hard left. Suddenly, he was clear!

Off the Target and Heading to Feet Wet

With the flak behind him, Puresome headed for the water as fast as he could go, climbing and checking his six, and eventually joining another A-4 doing the same thing. Behind him, a column of black, oily smoke rose some 10,000 feet. When they finally were feet wet, the two A-4s throttled back and checked each other carefully for battle damage as other aircraft showed up.

CAG finally got a good count of his aircraft—some hits were taken, but there were no losses. Things were soon sorted out, and Puresome joined his division for the trip back to the ship. He was surprised that his flight suit was soaking wet. He took off his oxygen mask—the cold air from the air-conditioning vents felt unbelievably good. At that moment, he knew, as only the young know, that the Holy Grail was within reach, and he was quite sure he would live forever.

But, of course, there was no Holy Grail, certainly not in that place. And the long haul certainly proved that forever did not have much application to human beings. And in the later years, he would never again like fireworks displays very much.

But he was young, and he didn't know that at the time.





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